"Protect the women!" Trans-Exclusionary Feminist Issue Framing and Support for Transgender Rights

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Abstract

An increasingly salient policy innovation pursued by LGBT+ rights groups and socially liberal policy entrepreneurs is the right of trans people to bring their legally recorded sex in line with their lived gender by way of self-identification. In response to these moves towards trans inclusion, a unique coalition of trans-exclusionary (gender critical) feminists and traditionalist conservatives has emerged to challenge these reforms. This coalition of policy opponents, mirroring historical issue frames that present homosexuals as predatory sexual deviants, campaign on a salient issue frame that presents transgender individuals and the expansion of trans rights as an inimical threat to the security, safety, and welfare of (cisgender) women, particularly in single-sex spaces. In this paper we address two questions. Firstly, we ask: do trans-exclusionary "protect women" issue frames over the *alleged* threat of trans persons to (cis) women shape mass public opinion? Secondly, we ask: in a relatively LGBT+ friendly policy environment, who supports the right to self-identification for trans individuals? We answer these questions via an original pre-registered survey experiment embedded within the 2021 Scottish Election Study. We find that trans-exclusionary issue frames appealing to (cis) women's safety significantly depress support for trans rights, particularly among women respondents. Highlighting these concerns is an effective means of increasing already robust opposition to reforms designed to improve the welfare of transgender individuals, which should be of concern for proponents of self-identification policies.

Keywords: experiment, gender self-identification, Gender Recognition Act, issue framing, Scotland, transgender rights, trans-exclusionary feminism

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1 Introduction

In 2016, the Scottish Government announced its intention to begin the process of reforming existing legislation on the legal recognition of sex changes by transgender individuals. The proposals would place Scotland within a small, yet growing, club of territories with liberal transgender rights laws by introducing provisions allowing legal alterations in sex to be enacted by individual self-identification. Such "self-ID" systems are typically designed to replace processes of medical certification which are often time-consuming, stressful and economically challenging (Koch et al., 2020; Scharpe, 2007).

Mirroring prior advances in the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and other sexual and/or gender minority (LGBT+) rights (Campbell & Monson, 2008; Garretson, 2014; Mos, 2020), ambitions to liberalise regulations that directly affect the lived experience of transgender individuals have not been immune to political controversy or widespread, often heated, public debate (Hines, 2020; McLean, 2021). Despite relatively rapid societal advancement in tolerance towards LGBT+ individuals, public debate over trans peoples' right to self-identification has at times reignited arguments reminiscent of the "gay panic" (Fejes, 2008; Wise, 2000). Transgender women are portrayed as threatening to (cisgender) women's safety in public spaces, particularly in the context of single-sex facilities and services (Murib, 2021; Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). Opponents - and proponents - of public policy innovations often rely on leveraging effective issue frames in order to bring persuadable citizens over to support their side of a policy debate. Issue frames that present trans individuals and the expansion of trans rights as threatening to (cisgender) women are commonplace (Murib, 2021; Tadlock, 2014), despite empirical evidence demonstrating they are unsubstantiated (Hasenbush et al., 2019). In this paper we ask: are they effective?

While a growing body of work has assessed the determinants of mass opinion towards transgender individuals, including diffuse support for the group (Flores, 2015; Flores

et al., 2018b; Jones & Bower, 2020) and support for transgender political candidates (Haider-Markel et al., 2017; Jones et al., 2018; Magni & Reynolds, 2021), we still know little about the determinants of support for specific policies that would directly improve trans individuals' lives[1] (Harrison & Michelson, 2017b; Winston et al., 2019). Debates over concrete trans-specific policies, such as the right to self-ID, are similar across many advanced democracies as evidenced in the near-simultaneous emergence of "trans-exclusionary radical feminist" (TERF) or "gender critical" (GC)[2] opposition and grassroots organisation in a number of different countries (McLean, 2021). It remains unclear, however, whether arguments highlighting the expressed concerns of these feminists - who portray liberal gender recognition laws as harmful (Pearce et al., 2020; Schilt & Westbrook, 2015; Worthen, 2022)- are effective at dissuading the public against such reforms. In this paper we answer two questions. First, we leverage a pre-registered issue framing survey experiment to ask: can trans-exclusionary feminists' issue frames over the safety of (cisgender) women influence mass public opinion? Secondly, we use observational survey data to ask: who supports real-world policy proposals on transgender self-identification?

Relying on a case study in Scotland - where public policy reforms around the country's Gender Recognition Act (GRA) to include transgender self-ID are actively being pursued by the country's devolved government - we present original observational and experimental evidence from a unique survey experiment embedded within the May 2021 post-election wave of the nationally representative Scottish Election Study (SES). Our observational findings demonstrate that individuals are more inclined to support provisions for transgender self-identification when they are; female, younger,

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[1]For an empirical exploration of the policy-welfare link, see (NationalAcademiesOfSciences, 2020)

[2]The terminology used to describe factions within modern-day debate on trans issues is highly contested (Pearce et al., 2020). While we believe the trans-exclusionary radical feminist (TERF) term represents an accurate description of the beliefs of most self-described feminists who campaign against gender self-identification and other policies intended to advance transgender rights, many of those opposed to these initiatives have come to regard the "TERF" label as a pejorative. Some prefer the label "gender critical" (GC) and this is often regarded as a more neutral descriptor in public debate. Some scholars (Pearce et al., 2020) regard GC as an attempt to whitewash anti-trans prejudice. Davis and McCready (2020) argue that the term's description refers to an ideological disposition as opposed to an individual's ascriptive characteristics, and as such it does not equate to a slur. Given the lack of consensus, we use the labels interchangeably in this article.

more left-wing, more socially liberal, and partisan supporters of two socially liberal, pro-Scottish independence parties - the Scottish National Party (SNP), in government since 2007, and the post-materialist Scottish Green Party[3] - both of whom have been outspoken advocates of GRA reform.

The results of our original pre-registered[4] experimental test of the influential role of trans-exclusionary feminists' issue frames provide strong empirical evidence that trans-exclusionary feminists' appeals on women's safety - commonplace in cross-national debates on transgender rights (McLean, 2021; Murib, 2021; Tadlock, 2014; Worthen, 2022) - can substantively reduce support for gender self-ID. Empirically, the results of our experiment provide robust causal evidence that gender critical feminists' frames regarding the welfare of (cisgender) women can effectively reduce support for self-ID policy innovations. Moreover, the negative effect of feminist safety frames is substantively greater among women, resulting in an erosion in support for transgender rights among a social stratum that has, conventionally, comprised a core constituent of support for LGBT+ rights. Our results should be of concern for proponents of the expansion of transgender rights: opponents that leverage issue frames that appeal to concerns regarding women's safety are effective at depressing support for trans rights. The findings also serve as a reminder for activists that public policy debates over specific legal rights for trans people are far from settled, even where there is broad diffuse support for the well-being of this small and vulnerable population.

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[3]Following the 2021 election, the Scottish Green Party has joined the SNP administration in a formal confidence and supply arrangement, including two junior ministerial posts, following the 2021 election.

[4]The experimental research design and hypotheses were registered via the *Open Science Framework* (OSF) interface. An anonymised version of the pre-registration is available at: https://osf.io/hdu3m/?view_only=5a17f59e35604fb59ab36caefe67720b

2 Transgender rights & self-identification

2.1 International State of Play

LGBT+ rights are on the rise. At the turn of the twenty-first century, not a single liberal democracy allowed citizens to marry individuals of the same gender. Fast-forward two decades and some thirty-two polities, via a combination of legislative action and judicial decisions, now guarantee access to same gender marriage (SGM)[5]. Whilst the advancement of LGBT+ rights is not necessarily linear nor without backlash (Mos, 2020; Velasco, 2020), expanding institutional provisions that benefit the welfare of sexual and gender minority individuals is normatively desirable given that doing so not only pushes polities towards being more egalitarian in their treatment of their citizens, but doing so is also observed to have concrete positive benefits for the welfare of the primary beneficiaries of these changes (Abou-Chadi & Finnigan, 2019; Chen & Van Ours, 2021).

In the western context[6], transgender citizens have not yet enjoyed the same level of entrepreneurial policy innovations afforded to their LGB peers. To some extent there is a path dependency between the advances of trans rights and those of LGB individuals. A large focus of domestic, as well as transnational, LGBT+ rights campaigns has been decriminalisation, anti-discrimination laws, and on the (de)regulation of marriage laws to allow individuals to marry a partner of the same legal gender. Focusing on this policy, whilst also critiqued by some queer scholars for seeking to replicate heteronormative institutions (Yep et al., 2008), also resulted in the specific policy concerns of trans individuals being placed on the back-burner (Taylor et al., 2018). Following the achievement of same-gender marriage, however, advocacy groups have turned their attention towards ongoing policy struggles that are directly linked to trans indi-

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[5]Same gender marriage - also penned "equal marriage" or "same sex marriage" - allows individuals with the same gender (e.g. two men or two women) to marry. Some trans activists view the term "same sex" marriage as exclusionary and, as a result, we opt for the more inclusionary term.

[6]In South East Asia, legal recognition and protections for transgender individuals surpass those provided to LGB individuals (Sanders, 2020).

viduals' welfare (Haider-Markel & Taylor, 2016).

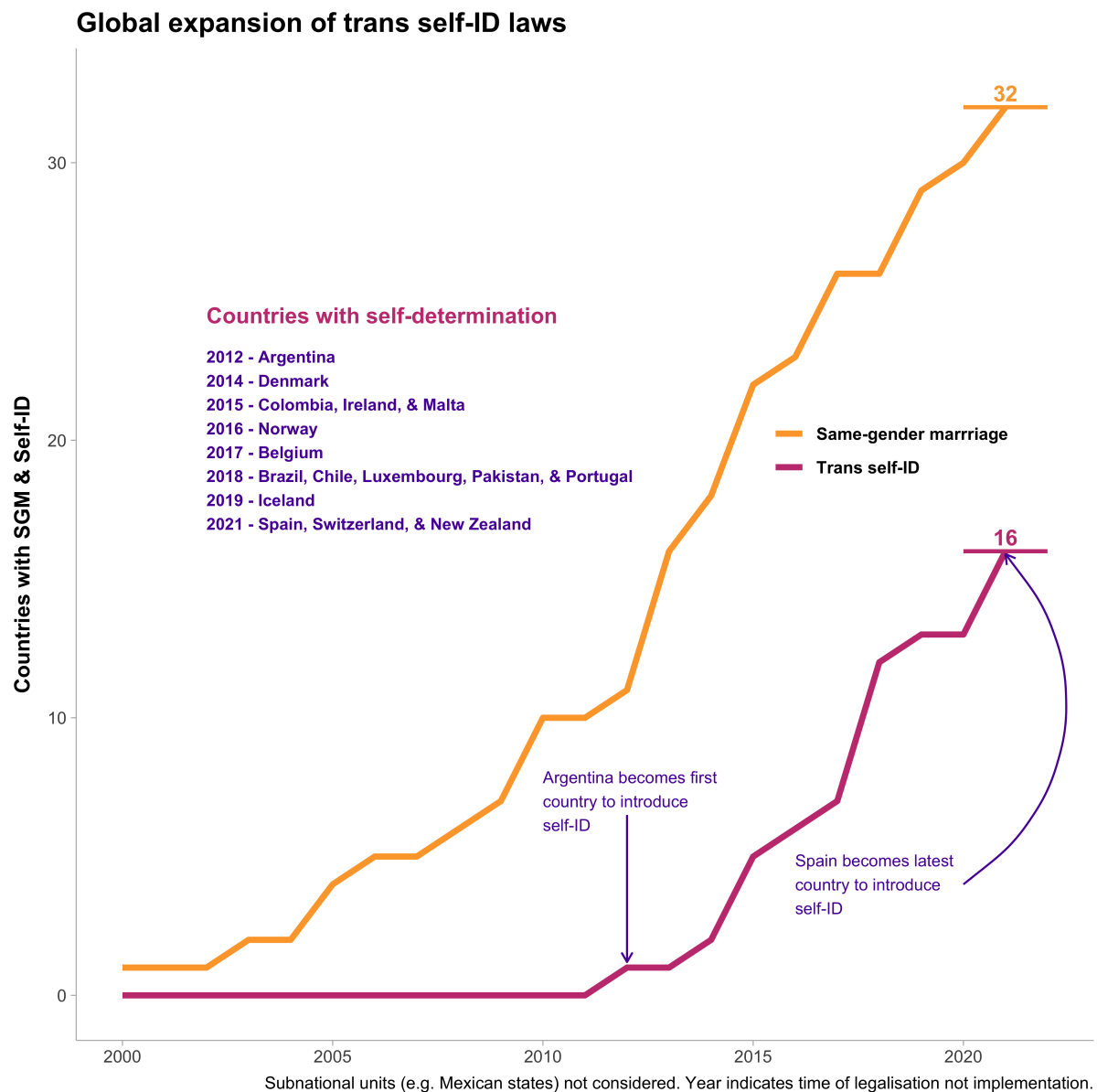**Global expansion of trans self-ID laws**

Figure 1: International rise of same-gender marriage & trans self-ID laws

At present, one of the policy ambitions sought by LGBT+ campaigners and other policy entrepreneurs, is the right to self-ID (Bachmann & Gooch, 2017; Economist, 2021): the right to gain legal recognition of one's lived-in gender without the need to seek medical diagnosis or certification. Just as LGBT+ advocates move their policy ambitions away from a focus on the right to marry towards a focus on trans rights, so too does political conflict. Recent headlines to emerge from the debate over introducing self-ID range from the critical "Women's rights hanging by a thread with changes

to the transgender law."[7] to the more outspokenly transphobic "Children sacrificed to appease trans lobby!"[8]. Despite the contentious debates, the right to self-ID is experiencing a slow, yet progressive, advance amongst the global population of liberal democracies. The first country to facilitate self-identification for trans individuals was Argentina in 2012 just two years after the country legalised same-gender marriage in 2020. Following this entrepreneurial innovation, a number of other countries have sought to liberalise regulations regarding the legal recognition of gender. At the time of writing, sixteen states have enacted policy provisions that allow for self-identification, seven of which are in the European Union, including the most recent addition of Spain which began legalising self-ID, despite notable and vocal opposition from feminist leaders within the government's own ranks (Alvarez, 2021), via the country's *Ley Trans* that was introduced and approved by Spain's left-wing governing coalition in the summer of 2021.

3   Case Study

To empirically assess the effects of trans-exclusionary feminists' issue-framing which seeks to oppose transgender rights expansions as a means to "protect women", we explore and experimentally test the role of these frames within the concrete case of Scotland. Scotland is selected a case study given that the issue of trans rights has become increasingly salient and was a present issue during the country's 2021 election.

Scotland, one of four constituent countries of the UK, has exercised a significant degree of political autonomy via the "devolved" Scottish Parliament at Holyrood since 1999. Since gaining devolved powers from the centralised Westminster policy-making apparatus, the Scottish legislature - and executive - has engaged in public policy provi-

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[7]Article from *Sky News* available at: https://news.sky.com/story/womens-rights-hanging-by-a-thread-with-changes-to-transgender-law-11439448

[8]Article from *the Times* available at: https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/children-sacrificed-to-appease-trans-lobby-bq0m2mm95

sion that deviates substantially from the the rest of the UK, representing a more social democratic model of public provisions (Cairney, 2007; Keating, 2005).

The early years of Scottish devolution also saw some divergence from the rest of the UK on LGBT+ rights, with the Scottish Parliament moving quickly to scrap *Section 28* - a Thatcher-era directive in UK local government legislation prohibiting local authorities from "promoting homosexuality" - in 2000, three years before this was accomplished at Westminster. The significant public, institutional and press backlash to the effort to remove *Section 28* in Scotland has been characterised as a moral panic in which LGB equality was portrayed as a deviant threat to heteronormative social mores (Rahman, 2004). Public opinion on LGBT+ matters quickly liberalised, however, with resistance to subsequent extensions of rights relatively muted outside of religious organisations. Civil partnerships were introduced across the UK in 2005 and marriage equality was achieved both north and south of the border in 2014 with separate legislation for Scotland.

3.1 Gender Recognition in Scotland

The Gender Recognition Act (GRA) is a 2004 UK law which permits people with diagnosed gender dysphoria to change their legal sex. While equalities law governing the rights of demographic and social groups is largely reserved to Westminster, the Scottish Parliament may legislate on matters relating to birth certificates and, therefore, official recognition of individual sex. The devolved body approved a legislative consent motion for the GRA in its original form, accepting changes to law in some devolved areas when the UK Act came into force. Attempts to change the process by which transgender people alter the sex on their birth certificate in Scotland have therefore revolved around amending this legislation.

The provisions of the GRA require those who wish to change their legal sex to engage with a relatively lengthy bureaucratic and medical process. All applications are

handled by the UK-wide Gender Recognition Panel (GRP), a legal tribunal. Most applicants to the panel must provide documentary evidence that they have lived in their "acquired gender" for at least two years and have obtained a recognised diagnosis of gender dysphoria. They must also indicate that they intend to live in their acquired gender for the rest of their life. To evidence this, they submit medical reports detailing psychiatric and physiological treatment history and plans. The fee to obtain a GRC was reduced from £140 to £5 in 2021. Across UK nations, approximately 6,000 GRCs were obtained between 2005 and the end of 2020. Critics of the process claim it is demeaning, intrusive, excessively reliant on medical interventions and leaves applicants at the mercy of clinical and non-clinical gate-keeping (StonewallScotland, 2019).

The governing Scottish Nationalist Party's (SNP) 2016 manifesto promised to "review and reform gender recognition law, so it is in line with international best practice". Accordingly, the Scottish Government launched a consultation on the GRA in 2017. In the consultation paper, they indicated that they would prefer to implement a self-ID system to replace the existing "quasi-judicial" process, placing the decision in the hands of the individual with a process roughly analogous to applying for change of legal name.

The first Scottish Government consultation on the broad principles of GRA reform attracted more than 15,000 responses, with an analysis published in late 2018. Although most organisations and approximately 60% of individual respondents favoured a shift to a self-ID system, submissions were highly polarised. The Scottish Government launched a second consultation in 2019, this time concerning specific legislative proposals for a self-ID process under the draft Gender Recognition Reform (Scotland) Bill. Under the proposed legislation, people would apply to the civil registry (the Registrar General for Scotland) rather than the GRP, medical barriers and requirements for documentation would be removed entirely and applicants would only need to spend three months living in their acquired gender prior to application. This would be followed by an additional three month "reflection period". Additionally, applicants would still

have to declare that the change was permanent and pay a nominal fee, with false declarations remaining a criminal offence.

Work on GRA reform in Scotland was paused at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. Meanwhile, in autumn 2020, similar proposals to reform the GRA for England and Wales were scrapped by the Conservative Westminster government. The Scottish Government eventually published the second consultation analysis several months after the SNP had made renewed promises on reform at the 2021 election, revealing that more than 17,000 responses had been submitted. Most respondents *opposed* the specific proposals, but for very different reasons - pro-reform respondents in support of the general principle of self-ID believed there should be no waiting or reflection period, while anti-reform respondents opposed any move whatsoever away from the existing system.

In the time between the first and second consultations in Scotland, the issue became subject to fierce public debate, particularly on social media. The process attracted significant media coverage and related issues have been the subject of controversial debate amongst senior Scottish academics in the current affairs journal *Scottish Affairs*, with one side arguing that "unregulated" gender self-ID outwith the confines of legal sex was already a feature of Scottish policy implementation and that this represented "policy capture" by established Scottish LGBT+ rights and feminist organisations (Cowan et al., 2021; Hunter Blackburn et al., 2021; Murray & Hunter Blackburn, 2019). These groups, such as *Stonewall Scotland*, the *Equality Network/Scottish Trans Alliance* and *Engender* generally support the move to self-ID. A newer network of opposed TERF/GC feminist organisations, such as *For Women Scotland*, *Fair Play for Women* and the UK-wide *LGB Alliance*, emerged largely in response to the proposed reforms.

redThe case of the *LGB Alliance* charity[9] is of note. The trans exclusionary position of

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[9]The organisation's status as a charitable organisation was not without objection. A number of organisations tabled objections based on claims that the charity pursued ambitions that were detrimental and discriminatory towards transgender individuals. The UK's Charitable Commission ulti-

organisation engendered significant debate amongst the LGBT+ community in Scotland. Historical divisions within the LGBT+ community have, at times, led to the exclusion of trans, non-binary and other gender non-conforming individuals (Fejes, 2000), despite these same individuals being active contributors to the movement's ambitions (Devor & Matte, 2004). An assimilationist wing within the gay rights movement viewed norm-defying quarters within the wider LGBT+ community as undermining their pursuit of persuading the cis-heteronormative masses to accept them (Valentine, 2007). Efforts by *LGB Alliance* and others, such as *Get the L Out*, sought to rekindle these within-group divisions among the queer population. In response, trans-inclusive individuals have sought to vocalise their sense of solidarity with the trans community as recently illustrated by the *#LGBwiththeT* campaign.

While GRA reform has not been subject to extensive inter-party conflict, there are observable differences between the mainstream parties with representation at Holyrood and niche parties. The SNP, Scottish Greens, Scottish Labour and the Scottish Liberal Democrats all endorsed a move to self-ID in one way or another in their 2016 and 2021 manifestos. The Scottish Conservatives signalled support for "review" in 2016 and, at the very least, do not oppose some degree of reform. However, at the 2021 election, both the newly founded pro-independence, Alba Party and the socially conservative Scottish Family Party were outspoken in opposition to the liberalisation of gender recognition. The latter promised to "oppose transgender ideology" and the former published election materials branded with "Say No To Self-ID!" red(see Figure A8 in appendix).

There have also been notable cases of *intra-party* disagreement, particularly within the governing SNP. Scottish First Minister sacked Joanna Cherry, one of the party's most senior and well-known parliamentarians in the House of Commons, from the party's frontbench in response to gender critical statement from Cherry that Sturgeon, amongst others, considered transphobic (Brooks & Carrell, 2021). Former Scottish

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mately decided to uphold *LGB Alliance*'s charitable status. The Commission's decision can be read at https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/lgb-alliance/lgb-alliance-full-decision

Green MSP Andy Wightman left the party in 2020 citing the "intolerant treatment" of those with differing views in gender and sex within the party. Other high-profile figures - such as former Scottish Labour leader Johann Lamont and former SNP MSP Joan McAlpine - have been outspoken in their opposition to the proposed reforms as well as the tenor of public and parliamentary debate. Beyond the political arena, there have also been several salient critiques of self-ID, including opposition - regarded by some as transphobic (Duffy, 2021; Shennan, 2020) - from world-renowned *Harry Potter* author and outspokenly gender critical Edinburgh local resident, JK Rowling.

4   Framing the issue: "Protect the women!"

Rather than conventional arguments that have become commonplace around issues of so-called "morality politics" focusing on concerns over traditional Judeo-Christian principles (Adam et al., 2020; Engeli et al., 2012), public debate over gender recognition reform in Scotland has revolved largely around the question of an apparent clash between trans rights and those of cisgender women. Debate surrounding these topics is highly polarised and, at root, often comes down to differing philosophical and sociological conceptions of sex and gender.

Figure 2 shows some examples of *LGB Alliance* and *For Women Scotland* material. Liberalising policy on trans self-ID is framed as a threat to cisgender women's safety in spaces such as toilets, changing rooms and prisons (Murib, 2021; Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). As detailed by Tadlock (2014)'s analysis of issue frames around trans issues in the US: safety frames are commonplace among trans rights opponents and echo the framing of expanding LGB rights as "threatening" to heterosexuals during the early noughties (Mucciaroni, 2008). Some campaigners focus on the possibility that shifting norms and laws could allow predatory cisgender men to falsely identify as women to gain access to these spaces (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). Trans women themselves are also sometimes portrayed as a threat to women's physical safety and mental well-

being, with their presence alone said to pose a risk due to, for example, prior sexual trauma. Gender critical feminists also believe the "redefinition" of sex and gender represented by Scottish Government policy puts cisgender women's rights in other areas at risk. TERF/GC activists tend to regard trans women as "males" intruding on women's legal and societal protections and focus on the perceived trade-off in group rights. Policy opponents' attempts to create an association between trans individuals and women's security concerns is not new (Hines, 2020; Pearce et al., 2020) and echoes historical frames against homosexuals - mainly gay men - who were framed by opponents of LGB rights as predatory sexual deviants (Fejes, 2008; Rahman, 2004) whose equal treatment under the law represented a threat to society and certain institutions (Mucciaroni, 2008). Despite the dominance of safety frames that seek to persuade impressionable citizens to oppose trans rights by rallying calls to "protect women" against the alleged inimical threat of trans individuals' presence, particularly in single-sex spaces, Hasenbush et al. (2019)'s study of US gender non-discrimination laws that facilitate trans individuals access to single-sex spaces shows *no* empirical link between these reforms and any change in the number of criminal incident reports.

Trans rights campaigners, by contrast, reject the idea that the rights of trans people clash with those of women and accuse their opponents of harbouring "essentialist" views on sex and gender. Activists claim that informal self-ID for the purpose of access to spaces and services is already widespread, dispute the notion that predators are likely to abuse self-ID systems, and reject the argument that trans women pose a widespread threat to cis women in single-sex spaces. Some view gender critical campaigning and commentary on the topic as disproportionate given the relatively small size of the transgender population, regarding the debate as an example of a moral "penis panic" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015). Pro-reform campaigners focus predominantly on the rights of trans people as a vulnerable and "marginalised" minority group.

(a) LGB Alliance advert

(b) FWS election campaign leaflet

(c) FWS "Bin the Bill" campaign leaflet

(d) FWS public consultation leaflet

Figure 2: Trans exclusionary campaign material around GRA reform

Pre-registered experimental hypotheses

The Scottish case that we describe above, which mirrors debates over transgender rights and moves towards introducing self-identification provisions across a number of countries (McLean, 2021), demonstrates the notable historical symmetries between public debates over trans rights and previous concerns over LGB issues. In addition to conservative-led opposition based on questions of Judeo-Christian morality that are part of canonical political conflict over LGB issues (Kettel, 2013), trans-exclusionary frames regarding women's safety from gender critical feminists have come to the forefront of trans debates, echoing safety and threat frames that were central in LGB rights opponents' campaigns (Mucciaroni, 2008). As Hines (2020) points out, whilst these feminist voices may be in the minority, their privileged position and platforming by a transphobic press (Fae, 2018), makes them a particularly vocal collective and, as a result, calls to "protect women" have become the central issue frame among critics of advances in trans rights in the UK (McLean, 2021). We anticipate that exposure to frames that invoke safety concerns and present the policy target group as "dangerous" - observed to be dominant among opponents to trans rights (Tadlock, 2014), particularly among trans-exclusionary feminists (McLean, 2021; Pearce et al., 2020) - are likely to be influential in shaping public opinion on trans rights. This expectation is grounded in empirical evidence on the efficacy of issue frames (Brewer, 2002a, 2002b), as well as both public policy theory around the social constructions of policy target populations (Schneider & Ingram, 1993) political psychology (Pratto & John, 1991).

Issue frames allow policy actors to strategically coerce the focus of citizens regarding a particular policy proposal onto concrete aspects of the policy that the actors believe will allow them to persuade public opinion and maximise public support for their position (Tversky & Kahnemann, 1986). An effective framing strategy permits policy actors to shape public preferences by inducing citizens to think about policy concerns that they may not particularly care about in terms of another aspect which they do (Nelson, 2004). An individual may not be well-informed about LGB rights or think

the issue of equal marriage is particularly salient, for example, but framing the policy concern as part of a wider question about egalitarian values - which the citizen does care about - is an effective means of shaping the individual's preferences. Relatedly, individuals may not necessarily consider trans individuals' right to self-ID as a pressing issue, but do think safety concerns and the potential threat of violence towards women is and, as such, when trans rights are framed in relation to the latter, individuals' preferences on the former are more inclined to be amenable (Tadlock, 2014).

Issue frames can shape public preferences (Jacoby, 2000), but negative frames tend to be more effective than positive frames. As detailed by Cobb and Kuklinksi (1997, p.91) a single frame that expresses opposition to policy innovations often speak "more loudly" than numerous frames that express support. Part of the explanation for the dominance of opposition comes from the fact that media coverage of campaign dynamics often place a premium on conflict and controversy (Geer, 2012). As a result negative frames that induce fear are far more likely to "cut through" the noise of a policy debate, engender higher individual-level interest and, subsequently, influence individuals' preferences (Gerstle & Nai, 2019). In addition, work in social and political psychology demonstrates that negative issue frames are more likely to enjoy higher recall rates than positive frames (Pratto & John, 1991), can induce feelings of fear and anxiety (Lerner & Keltner, 2001) which, consequently, make individuals less resistant to persuasion when present (Nai et al., 2017).

Related to efficacy of negative frames, is also the issue of group-centrism in identifying and framing policy target populations (Nelson & Kinder, 1996). Schneider and Ingram (1993) argue that policy target populations are identified and framed by policy proponents and opponents, in order to persuade citizens regarding the necessity and deservingness of a proposed policy. Mass public support and opposition for policy innovations, subsequently, "depends heavily on the social constructions of the target populations" (Schneider & Ingram, 2019, p.207). When target populations are socially constructed as deviants - that is, they are as "dangerous", "immoral", "violent" or

"disgusting" - then policies that limit benefits (or add burdens) to the target population are likely to enjoy positive feedback effects from citizens who do not belong to the target population. Trans-exclusionary campaigners, leveraging the "specter of sexual predator" (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015), have clearly framed trans rights expansions as benefiting a socially constructed "deviant" target population and, as such, we would expect the majority (non-trans) population to seek to limit the expansion of the group's rights as, given the group's deviant status, it is less deserving of public policy provisions.

In the concrete case of trans rights, frames that rely on demonizing an out-group as threatening - in line with the deviant social construction (Schneider & Ingram, 1993, 2019) - are likely to be particularly effective given the, on average, low level of interpersonal contact that the average citizen will have with trans individuals who make up a small proportion of the population. In the absence of lived personal experience and contact, which Flores (2015), Flores et al. (2018b), and Jones et al. (2018) find drives social tolerance towards trans individuals (but see Harrison and Michelson (2019) and Skipworth et al. (2010)), frames that consolidate the image of the policy target population as deviant and threatening are more likely to be received as there is no well-informed prior based on lived experience to create resistance to the new information (Brookman & Kalla, 2016; Flores, 2015; Van Laar et al., 2005). Without well-formed priors based on individual and personal experiences, individuals are also more prone to elite-led politicisation and cues (Jones & Bower, 2020) which, as we demonstrate in the description of the 2021 election above, were actively communicated during the campaign period. Finally, it is worth noting that the object of the alleged threat of trans individuals - women and children - is important. Gendered notions of women and children's as fragile and in need of protection are effective as they have long been used as a means of legitimising perceived threats and, subsequently, persuasively highlighting the necessity for actions to protect them. Existing evidence on the efficacy of "safety frames" is inconclusive. Whilst Harrison and Michelson (2017b) present experimental evidence - from a non-representative sample - that these frames can induce sizeable

negative effects, this finding is not supported in replications (Flores et al., 2021).

Our first hypothesis posits that leveraging trans-exclusionary issue frames based on trans individuals' alleged threat to women's welfare will reduce support for self-ID provisions.

H1: Individuals exposed to frames that present GRA reforms as threatening to women's welfare will be less supportive of the policy ("protect women" issue-framing thesis)

In addition to the, on average, effects of our negative issue frames, we also pre-registered a number of conditional effects. These expectations simultaneously build on the work of social identity as well group-based campaign appeals. Zaller (1992)'s theory of opinion formation sets out that a primary prerequisite for individual-level opinion change is the openness and acceptability to new information. Individuals do not accept information randomly, but rather are more inclined to digest information when this comes from familiar and trusted sources. Social psychology demonstrates that individuals are psychologically pre-disposed to be more receptive to information signals from individuals who share membership of the same in-group and reject information from the out-group (Messick & Mackie, 1989; Ostrom et al., 1993; Tafjel, 1981). In the case of gender, the literature establishes the presence of gender-based in-group preferences in politics: women are, for example, significantly more inclined to prefer women candidates (Plutzer & Zipp, 1996; Sanbonmatsu, 2002). In the concrete case of attitudes towards LGBT+ rights, Harrison and Michelson (2017a) convincingly show that in-group prompts are significant, and conditional, causal drivers of preference formation on LGBT+ issues. Building upon the literature on in-group based rationality and information processing (Tafjel, 1981), we hypothesised that feminist-delivered frames would more negatively influence female respondents since the authorship of the frame as feminist serves as a signal of in-group membership.

H2: The negative effect of safety issue frames from feminist organisations will be greater for women than men (gender congruence thesis)

Beyond shared in-group status based on feminism's ties with women (and the female sex), we argue that feminism also serves as a prompt of ideological in-group status. Feminism - defined as the pursuit of the social, economic and political equality of the sexes - shares a number of ideological affinities with the policy ambitions sought by the liberal left (Philips, 1995). Policy ambitions that clearly expand the feminist cause - such as gender-discrimination ordinances, workplace (and political) gender quotas, as well as legalisation (public funding for) abortion services - are often pursued by political parties on the left (Lovenduski & Norris, 1993). Recent cross-national comparisons of legislator behaviour also confirms that left-wing parties remain significantly more active in the pursuit of women's issues in the legislature, and left-wing parliamentarians are rated as more feminist than their right-wing colleagues (Erzeel & Celis, 2016). Socially liberal left-wing parties have, as a result, often been perceived to be more "feminine" as a result of their egalitarian pursuits and issue-ownership of feminist concerns (Philips, 1995). Conversely, whilst left-wing parties have adopted feminist positions, parties on the right have also been perceived as "anti-feminist" promoting traditional gender roles and conservative views on family construction and sexual expression (Freeman, 1993). Consequently, the left's ownership of the feminist space - and the right's penchant for anti-feminist gender traditionalism - has also translated into increased electoral support for right-wing parties among individuals who harbour hostile sexist attitudes (de Geus et al., 2022), and evidence also signals a strong correlation between electoral support for the left and the adoption the feminist label, among both women *and* men (Elder et al., 2021). Given the ideological congruence between the left and feminism (Elder et al., 2021), our pre-registered expectation was that frames from feminists would likely be more influential among individuals who identify on the left. This rationale stems from the assumption that signals of feminism would communicate in-group membership identification. Individuals are more receptive to information when information shortcuts, such as signals of group membership, are congruent with their own in-group (Messick & Mackie, 1989; Ostrom et al., 1993; Tafjel, 1981).

H3a: The negative effect of safety issue frames from feminist organisations will be greater for individuals on the liberal-left (ideological in-group thesis)

Symmetrically, we hypothesised that signals of conservative opposition would be more influential among individuals that identify on the political right. In many ways "conservative" is taken to be synonymous with "right-wing" and, as a result, is a clear and explicit indication of in-group membership among the political right.

H3b: The negative effect of safety issue frames from conservative organisations will be greater for individuals on the conservative-right (ideological in-group thesis)

5 Research Design

5.1 Data & Operationalisation

The data come from a survey experiment administered as part of the 2021 Scottish Election Study (Henderson et al., 2022) panel survey's second wave, fielded shortly after the May 6th ballot. The survey was administered as an online self-completion questionnaire by YouGov, who followed their conventional in-house quota-sampling procedure to produce a sample which is close to representative of Scotland's voting-age population. The GRA experiment was administered to 1,736 respondents, approximately half of the post-election wave's total of 3,442. Respondents were selected to participate in the experiment at random and this group was again randomly assigned to one of three experimental conditions.

Outcome measure & treatment variable

Our outcome measure is support for the primary innovation of the Scottish Government's GRA reform to include provisions for self-ID. The survey instrument to record

these preferences, and the accompanying informational prompts, are replicated in Table 1. Individuals were able to report their responses on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 1 "Strongly disagree" to 5 "Strongly agree".

The experimental research design involves three treatment conditions: two treatment groups and one control group. Individuals assigned to control (N=571) were asked to express their agreement with the new GRA provisions following a brief prompt introducing the overall ambitions of the proposed GRA reform. Individuals assigned to each of the two treatment groups received the frames replicated in Table 1. The issue-frames presented are symmetrical in terms of their substance - they both highlight potential concerns to women's welfare resulting from the reform - with one significant variation in the message. One group was informed that these concerns came from feminist organisations (N=529) and the other signalled conservative organisations as the source of the concern (N=560). SES respondents were randomly assigned to one of these three conditions with equal proportions. Covariate balance tests confirm that individuals randomly assigned to treatment are symmetrical (see Table A3).

Table 1: Treatment text and outcome measurement

	Treatment message
All	The newly elected Holyrood parliament is likely to vote on reforming the Gender Recognition Act - a piece of legislation which aims to make it easier and cheaper for transgender individuals to legally change the sex on their birth certificate without medical approval.
Feminist	**Some feminist organisations have communicated serious concern over the bill, arguing that allowing transgender women to class themselves as female might be detrimental to women's welfare**.
Conservative	**Some conservative organisations have communicated serious concern over the bill, arguing that allowing transgender women to class themselves as female might be detrimental to women's welfare**.
Question	How much do you agree with the following statement?: "Transgender people should be able to change the sex on their birth certificate via statutory declaration, without a medical certificate, after six months of living as the gender they identify with."

Additional variables

To answer our second research question, we model the correlation between a wide catalogue of socio-demographic and political determinants that the literature establishes as important predictors of both diffuse and specific LGBT+ support. Cross-national analysis assessing tolerance towards homosexuality, support for gay rights issues such as same-gender adoption and parenting (Dotti Sani & Quaranto, 2020), ev-

idence from plebiscites and studies of policy-makers' preferences (Siegel et al., 2021), all demonstrate a consistent finding: women are more inclined to sympathise with LGBT+ individuals and support LGBT+ rights over men. In spite of the wave of trans-exclusionary (gender-critical) rhetoric, we expect to observe a similar gender premium on support for the right to self-ID. We measure gender dichotomously, indicating those individuals who identify as a woman (1) or man (0).

Older individuals are, on average, less tolerant of LGBT+ individuals and less supportive of LGBT+ rights. In part this correlation is a result of older individuals being simultaneously more inclined to be religious, and also more likely to be socially conservative (Tilley, 2020). There is also, however, an independent effect of age that results from cohort effects from from generation-specific processes of socialisation (Ekstam, 2022) (but see, Twenge (2021)). We model the effect of age on support for the GRA via a continuous indication (years) ranging from 16 to 94. Note that suffrage in Scotland is provided to those aged sixteen or over, hence sixteen year-old individuals' inclusion in the SES' representative sample of the adult voting population.

Education is measured in our models dichotomously, stratifying respondents based on whether they have a university level education (1) or not (0). On average, higher levels of education tend to be positively associated with overall more liberal ideological preferences (Simon, 2021) including, amongst other issues, an increased propensity to support LGBT+ rights concerns (Dotti Sani & Quaranto, 2020; Flores et al., 2018a; Haider-Markel et al., 2017).

Data shows that Black British voters are more inclined than the average voter to think that steps towards LGBT+ equality have "gone too far" (**Jennings21**). We expect, therefore, that non-white individuals will be less supportive of the GRA. Race is a binary measure capturing white (1) and non-white (0) individuals. The correlation between the income distribution and support for LGBT+ rights is less clear. Whilst evidence points towards a negative correlation, positive correlations have been drawn elsewhere (Flores et al., 2018a). Income in Scotland is positively correlated with more

right-wing preferences (Goodwin & Heath, 2018); as a result we anticipate a negative correlation. Income is an ordinal measure (scaled 1-15) with higher values indicating higher levels of household income. To assess the potential distinction between rural and urban preferences we include a categorical measure indicating those who live in large urban cities (reference category) from those who live in small towns, or more rural areas. Urban areas, as cosmopolitan hubs, tend to be more socially liberal and are empirically found to be more tolerant of LGBT+ populations (Ayoub & Kollman, 2021; Thompson, 2022). We anticipate urban respondents will be more supportive of the GRA reform. Amongst the vector of socio-demographic variables, we also model the correlation between measures of sexual orientation and (trans)gender identity anticipating a positive relationship between sexual and gender minority status and support for the GRA.

In addition to socio-demographic measures, we include three different political variables two of which seek to capture distinct ideological preferences. As is well established in both the wider UK, as well as in many European democracies, political conflict tends to coalesce around two independent political axes. We rely on two ideological measures: left-right and socio-cultural (GAL-TAN) ideological positions. The SES, replicating the British Election Study, records each of these ideological positions via a 10-item question battery (see Table A4) that captures these independent[10] multi-dimensional preferences.

Finally we include a measure of partisanship based on retrospective vote recall in the most recent election. On the concrete issue of trans rights, and in line with Zaller (1992)'s model of opinion formation, research demonstrates individuals are particularly more inclined to rely on elite-base cues when forming their attitudes and preferences (Jones & Bower, 2020). This is because, given the low prevalence of identifiable of transgender individuals in the population, individuals lack first-hand knowledge of trans issues and/or interpersonal relations with trans individuals, which would

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[10]The correlation between the two ideological measures, whilst significant, is marginal ($\beta = .05$) as reported in Figure A1.

facilitate a more organic formation of preferences. As a result, we anticipate that individuals voting for the incumbent governing parties - the SNP and the Greens - who explicitly advocated for the new GRA bill to be more supportive of the policy.

In the results section, we summarise the pre-registered theorised relationships between these observational variables and support for GRA in Table 2[11]

6 Results

Before engaging in a discussion of the experimental findings, we begin by laying out the top-line level of support for the policy reform.

The Scottish Government's proposed reform, similar to that installed in the countries summarised in Figure 1, would significantly reduce both the economic and personal costs involved in correcting transgender individuals' legal sex to align with their gender expression. Despite these clear benefits for the transgender community, public support for the reform is limited. As reported in Figure 3 only a minority of 23% of Scottish citizens express agreement with the policy, whereas a plurality of 45% are expressly opposed. A large proportion - 31% - express ambivalence, communicating that they neither agree nor disagree with reform. We agree with Siegel et al. (2021), however, who argue that "indifference" towards LGBT+ rights expansion is equitable

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[11]Our pre-analysis plan stipulated that we would also consider the effects of religiosity measured via self-reported levels of religious attendance. Religiosity is a strong predictor of mass (Janssen & Scheepers, 2019) and elite (Siegel et al., 2021) opinion on LGBT+ rights. The SES question on religious attendance was only submitted to a random subsample of respondents and, subsequently, including this variable reduces are overall sample to less than 700 respondents. We opt to not include this control in order to preserve the larger sample required to facilitate enough power to estimate our models. As a sensitivity check, however, do run two tests. First, we show that, as one might expect, there is a strong correlation between religious observations and the outcome measure when to run a simple bivariate comparison. Second, we show that, when including a missing category for the religiosity variable, the primary conclusions of our main model remain largely unchanged. A core determinant of attitudes towards both LGB (Flores, 2015; Lewis, 2011) as well as transgender individuals (Earle et al., 2021; Flores et al., 2018b) (*but* see Flores (2015), Harrison and Michelson (2019), Hoffarth and Hodson (2020), (Skipworth et al., 2010), and Jones et al. (2018)) is interpersonal contact. The data provided by the SES does not, however, does not allow us to test for this as we have no survey instrument that measures levels of contact or kinship with trans or LGB individuals. Our expectation, however, is that the widely established positive relationship between contact with LGBT+ individuals and support for more inclusive LGBT+ policies, would be observed in the case at hand.

to opposition as a lack of explicit support is indicative of an endorsement of the status quo. These top-line fingers demonstrate that, on average, public support for the proposed GRA reform, which includes plans to allow for self-ID, is weaker than public opposition. Do issue frames that portray trans rights as inimical to women's welfare increase this opposition?

Public support for Gender Recognition Act with self-identification
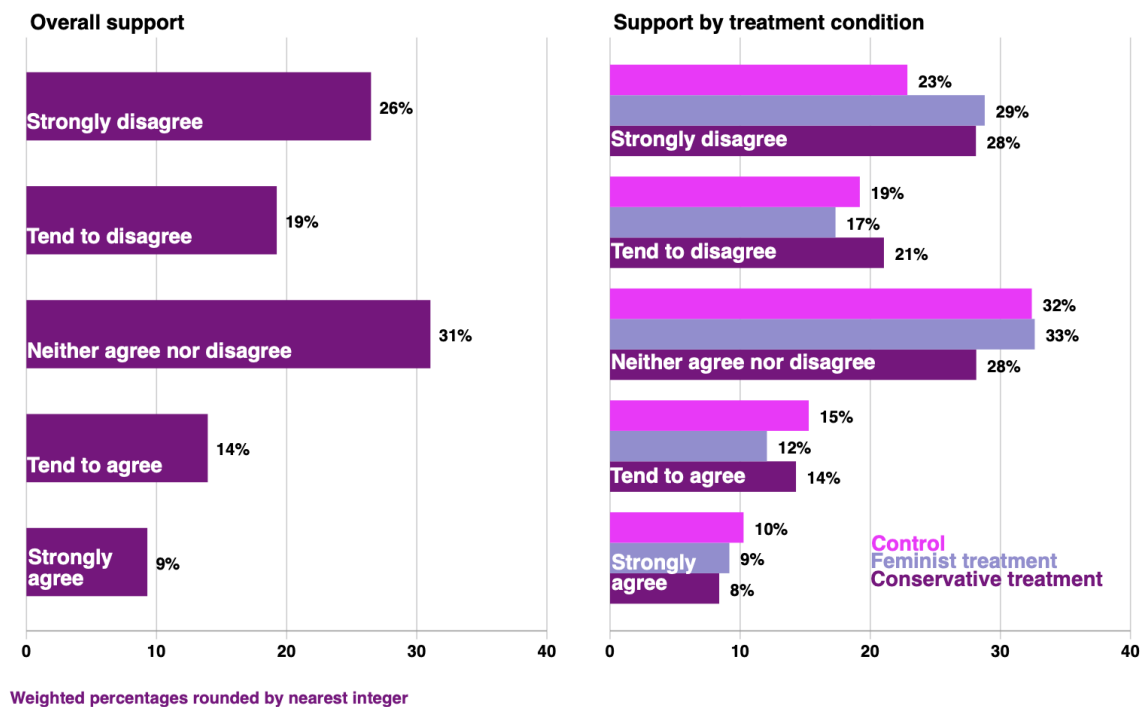
Figure 3: Support for GRA

"Protect the women!": Experimental evidence of the issue frame

We now turn to assess the results of our pre-registered experimental test of the opinion-shaping effects of trans-exclusionary issue frames. In Figure 4 we report predicted means for individuals in control vs those assigned to treatment (top-left panel), the predicted means for individuals in each of the three treatment conditions (top-right panel), and the the average treatment effect (ATE) of i) the feminist , and ii) the conservative frame, vis-à-vis control. As pre-registered, we report the results for the full sample as well as testing for as heterogeneous effects based on gendered subsamples

(H2). Our estimation strategy relies on ordinary least squares (OLS) linear regression. An alternative modelling approach estimating ordinal logistic regression is provided in the appendix for robustness.

On average, we find that cuing individuals to consider "women's welfare" has a significant negative effect on support for the GRA. The overall effect of treatment assignment, vis-à-vis control, is -.16 ($p < .05$). The ATE of assignment to the feminist and conservative treatment group caused, respectively, a significant ($p < .05$) .15 and .17 reduction in popular support for the policy in comparison to those in the control group. Among the full sample, therefore, the two treatment conditions engendered symmetrical results: regardless of the source of the frame, frames that highlight the threat to women significantly reduce support for transgender rights. These results are consistent with the experimental evidence reported by Harrison and Michelson (2017b) who, manipulating a "danger to children" safety frame, find such frames negatively affect support for trans access to public restrooms. Our experiment suggests that framing concerns over women's welfare and safety can also negatively influence support for trans rights more broadly and beyond concrete support for trans access to single-sex spaces.

In line with our expectations of gender-based in-group appeals, the feminist message exhibited a substantively large and influential effect on women (full CATE regression output reported in Table A6). Treatment exposure to the feminist message induced an insignificant effect on men: whilst the point-estimate is negatively signed (indicating lower support), it is statistically indistinguishable from zero. The same is not true for women who, in comparison to women in the control group, experience a .21 ($p < .05$) drop in support; double that observed in men. Given the mean level support for the policy among women in the control group is 2.77 (recall our outcome is scaled 1-5), a .21 decrease equates to a -7.6% change relative to control (16.15% of a standard deviation).

The reverse gender asymmetry is observed in the case of the conservative treatment.

Treatment effect of issue frame

Frame from feminists & conservatives
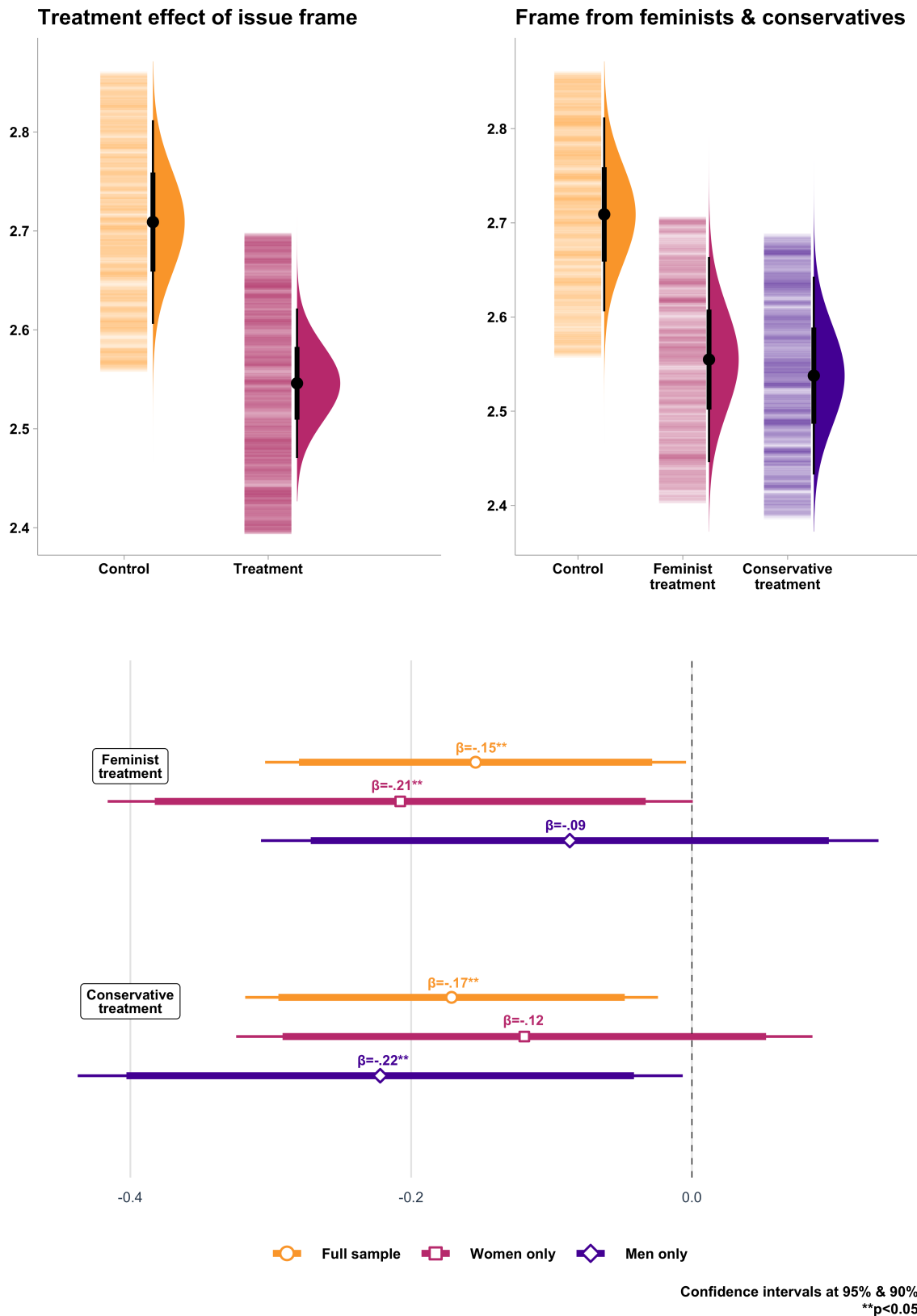
Figure 4: Modelled treatment effects of issue framing

Women in the conservative treatment group have a mean level of support in the outcome measure that is .09 lower than that of women in the control group. The ATE is, however, insignificant. The ATE for men is more than twice as large as that observed amongst women at .22 and is statistically significant. On average, and in comparison to men who reported their preference on the GRA reform without any treatment prompt (control group), men exposed to the conservative treatment condition are 8.37% less supportive. The findings of our experimental manipulation are not conditioned by the linear, as opposed to ordinal, estimation approach applied. Figure A7 reports the ATE from an estimation based on ordinal logistic regression which demonstrates that both the effect among the full sample as well as the gender-moderation effects of the different treatment messages are consistent.

Whilst our test of H2 demonstrates that the efficacy of the feminist and conservative treatment messages are *conditioned* by the gender of the respondent, the *difference* between the gendered effects, as visualised in the lower panel of Figure 4, is not significant (see Table A6). In a robustness test that leverages randomisation inference (Chung & Romano, 2013), we assess to what extent the gendered conditionality of the different treatments is the result spurious effects. As we detail in Figures A4 and A5 in the appendix, the gendered asymmetries of the feminist and conservative treatment are robust to extensive permutations cataloguing possible randomisation allocations.

We now turn to test hypothesis three regarding the moderating effect of ideological pre-dispositions (Figure 5). Our pre-registered hypothesis is that feminist (conservative) treatment frames will be more influential amongst those who identify on the liberal-left (conservative-right). Estimating a multiplicative interaction between treatment assignment and ideological positions, we observe that the negative effect of the feminist-delivered issue frame is significantly larger among more conservative respondents whereas the effect of the conservative-delivered frame is not conditioned by ideological preferences. The left-hand panel of Figure 5 reports the predicted means for individuals assigned to each treatment group across the full spectrum of values

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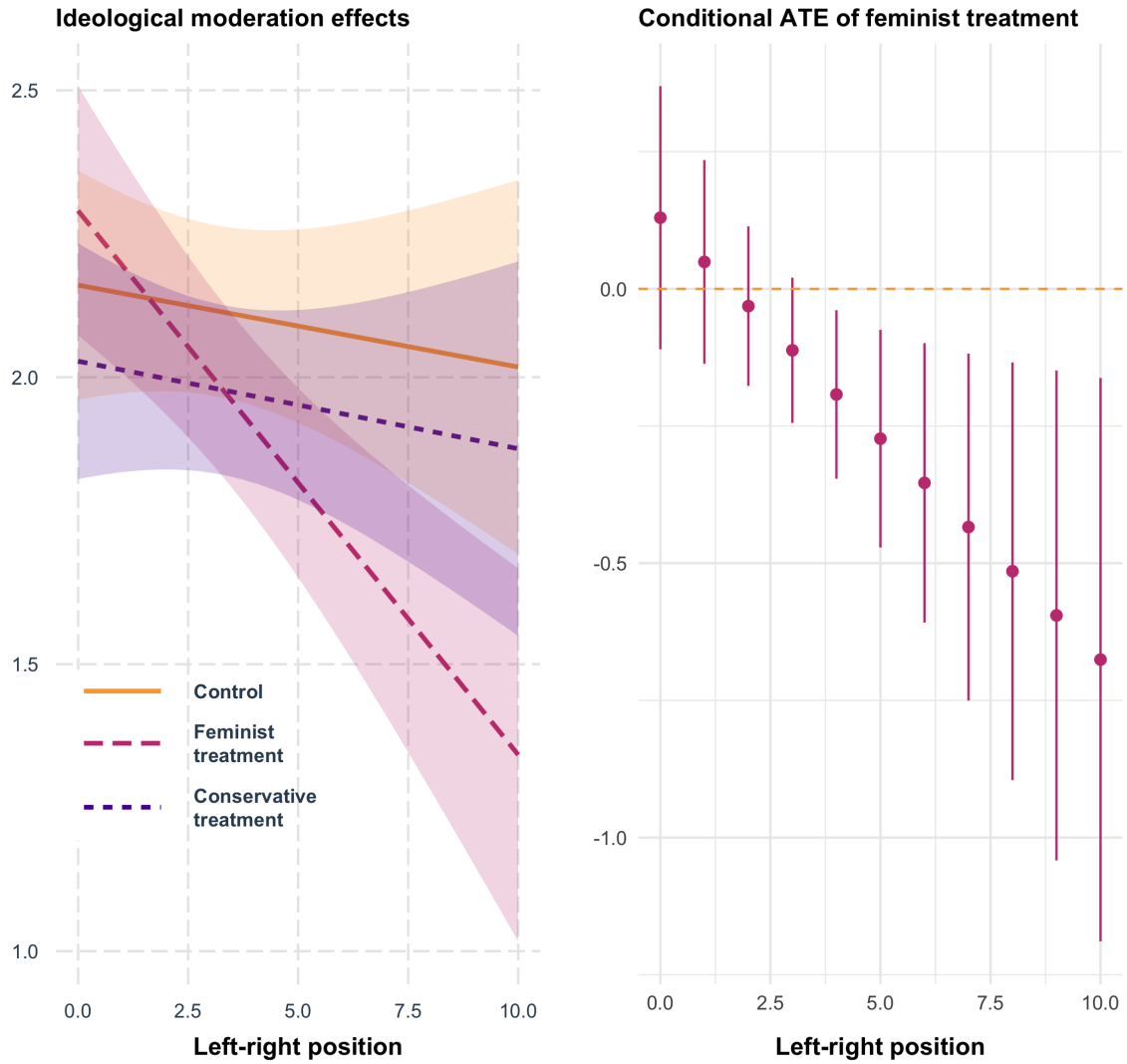
Figure 5: Conditional treatment effects

of the GAL-TAN variable. The right-hand panel reports the average marginal effect of the feminist treatment conditioned by values of the moderator. The increased effect of the feminist frame among more conservative individuals is the reverse of our pre-registered expectation.[12]

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[12]A similar pattern is observed when interacting treatment assignment with ideology as measured by scaled GAL-TAN positions. The significance of the effect is below conventional thresholds, however, and the comparative magnitude is substantively lower. To provide an illustrative example, the conditional ATE of the feminist treatment among respondents with a GAL-TAN position 5 is, on average, -.08 less supportive of the GRA. The conditional ATE among those with a left-right position 5 is three times the magnitude at -.27 ($p < .01$).

Who supports the GRA?: Observational evidence

In Table 2 we summarise the results of the supplementary observational analysis which reports the modelled correlation of the observational determinants and support for the Scottish Government's proposed reform of the GRA. The full regression table is reported in appendix Table A7 and model diagnostics are detailed in Figure A6.

We begin by considering the influence of the socio-demographic determinants. Assessing the correlation between gender and support for transgender self-identification, we find evidence of a significant gender gap. Controlling for our full vector of predictors, women are 0.14 more supportive of the GRA reform to include self-ID than their male counterparts. This positive gender gap is consistent with comparative findings on diffuse and specific support LGBT+ individuals and LGBT+ rights, at least amongst states with a modern, as opposed to a traditional, gender gap.[13] Despite this increased support amongst women, however, it is important to point out that, as suggested by Figure 3, aggregate level opposition remains the plurality position among both men and women: 48.4% of men and 41.5% of women either strongly disagree of disagree with the proposed reform. In other words, whilst the positive correlation of the gender variable indicates lower levels of opposition, it does not signal that women are, on average, sympathetic towards expanding transgender individuals' access to more accessible legal recognition of their legal sex.

Public support for LGBT+ policies, such as equal marriage, as well as general support for transgender rights has been demonstrated to be negatively correlated with age. The observational data from Scotland mirrors this correlation: older respondents are significant more likely to oppose transgender self-ID) than younger respondents. The predicted level of support, when applying the full vector of predictors, for the policy among those individuals with the mean age of the sample (50) is 2.59. Increasing (de-

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[13]The traditional gender gap observed increased conservatism among women compared to men (Inglehart & Norris, 2003). The "modern" gender gap displays the reverse distribution, increasingly more common in the west, with women more liberal than men (Giger, 2009).

Table 2: Observational hypotheses & results

Variable	Pre-registered hypo.	Coefficient	Confidence interval (95%)	Evidence supports hypo.
Gender (Female)	+	.14	.030, .252	Yes
Sexuality (LGB)	+	.57	.364, .783	Yes
Gender identity (trans)	+	.66	.041, 1.358	Yes
Age	-	-.01	.015, .008	Yes
Education (university degree)	+	.01	.130, .135	No
Race (non-white)	-	-.08	.392, .240	No
Income	-	-.01	.025, .011	No
Rurality (lives in country)	-	.02	.120, .154	No
Ideology: Left-Right	-	-.04	.074, .009	Yes
Ideology: GAL-TAN	-	-.14	.164, .110	Yes
Partisanship: SNP	+	.69	.508, .863	Yes
Partisanship: Greens	+	.81	.479, .143	Yes

Detailed regression output reported in appendix Table A7

creasing) age by a standard deviation of ≈ 20 results in a significantly lower (higher) level of support equal to 2.36 (2.83).

Dissimilar to comparative evidence from the US, we do not find any significant correlation between education and policy support once we consider the effect of political determinants (Model 2). The point-estimate for education (degree holders vs. non-degree holders) in our comprehensive model is, in essence, a precisely estimated null. The diminished association between education and the outcome measure suggests that any raw asymmetry between the policy preferences of university educated and the rest of the population is the result of the distinct ideological distribution between the two groups (Simon, 2021).

When it comes to the correlation between race and attitudes towards the transgender self-identification reform, we observe no relationship of significance of substance. Given that the proportion of the non-white sample is small ($\approx 6\%$), these insignificant results may be a function of the low level of statistical power when assessing divergent preferences among this comparatively small strata. Wealthier individuals appear less inclined to support the government's policy reform although the effect is largely marginal. Similar to the (null) associations observed in the case of education, race, and income, there is a (precisely estimated) null effect in the case or rurality. Comparing individuals who live in Scottish urban areas to those living in Scottish rural areas (highest vs lowest categories of the variable), we observe no difference in the propen-

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sity to hold congruent or divergent sympathies with the government's planned reform of the GRA.

Support for GRA by sexual & gender identity
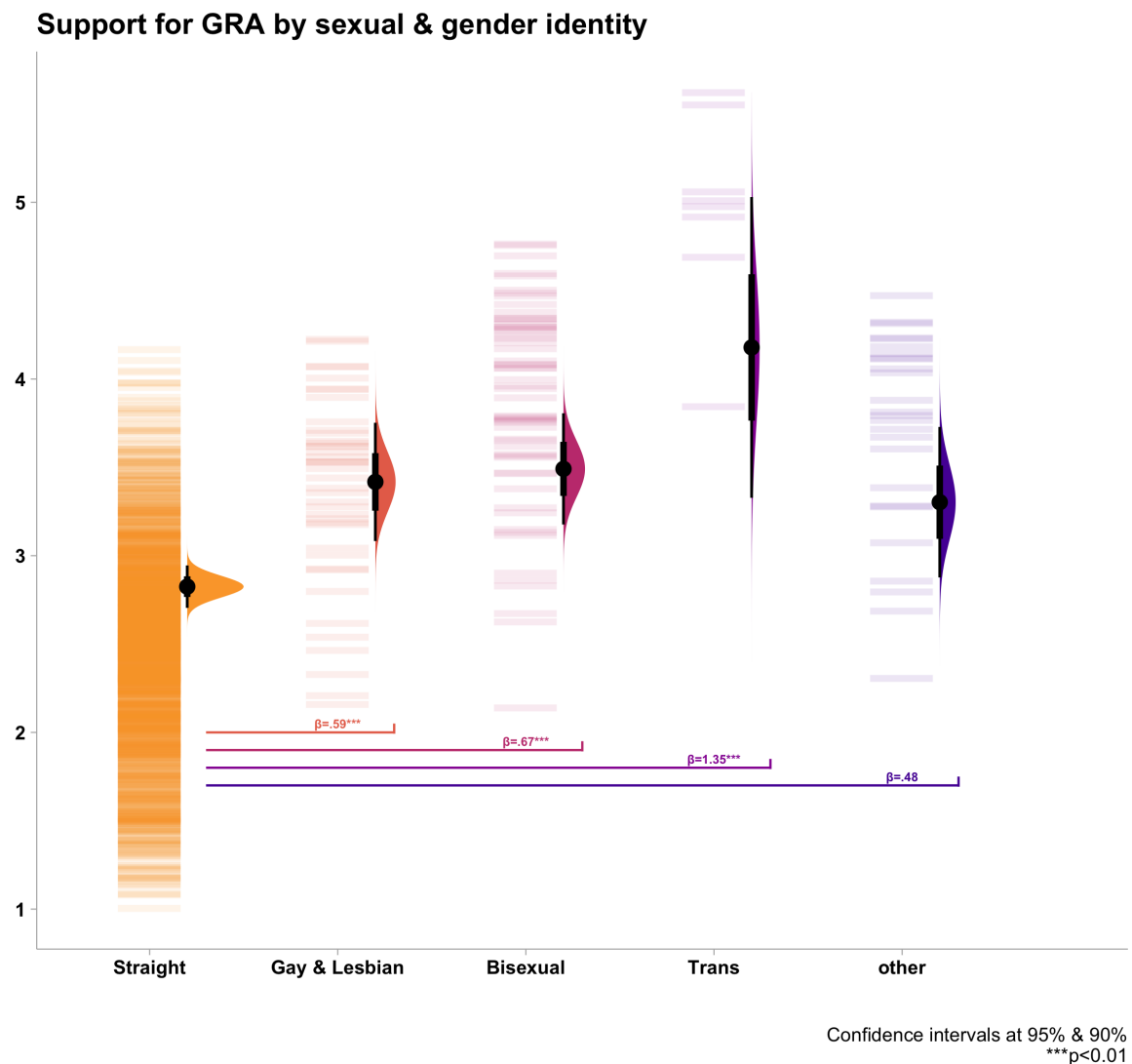
Figure 6: LGB & T support for the GRA

As detailed above, following both the Scottish and UK governments' announcement of the planned reform of their corresponding GRA, a catalogue of lobby groups emerged to oppose the bill, including opposition from the *LGB Alliance* that sought to mobilise opposition among the LGB community. Despite the efforts of LGB Alliance, we find that, on average, LBG individuals are significantly more sympathetic to the provisions of the GRA reform. Modelling the independent association between sexuality/gender identity and support for the GRA whilst controlling for our full vector of additional determinants, we find that the sexuality/gender identity gap remains both significant

and substantive. Leveraging the detailed data on LGB and T+ respondents in the SES, Figure 6 reports the between and within-group levels of support for the GRA demonstrating the divergence between those who identify as LGB, as well as (trans)gender or other, compared to cisgender heterosexuals (descriptive distribution reported in Figure A2). As visualised by the predicted means, and congruent with *#LGBwiththeT* campaign that emerged in response to the expansion of the anti-trans movement, LGB individuals are significantly more supportive of the reform. Those individuals who do not identify as either heterosexual, LGB, or Trans (e.g. "other") are also more inclined to more supportive of the GRA reform than straight respondents ($\beta = .48$) but the difference is indistinguishable from zero. As one might expect, individuals who identify as transgender are significantly more inclined than cisgender individuals to support the right to self-identification ($\beta = 1.35$) reflecting group-based support for a policy that would clearly expand the group members' welfare.

Beyond the direct correlations between socio-demographic characteristics, the results reported in Table 2 also report the extent to which ideological preference and partisan support determine attitudes towards trans individuals' right to self-identification. Congruent with literature on the determinants of support for conventional LGBT+ policy issues such as same-gender marriage, ideological conservatism is significantly and positively (negatively) correlated with increased opposition (support) for the GRA. Within the multi-dimensional ideological space, ideological predispositions on the GAL-TAN (socio-cultural) as opposed to the conventional, left-right (economic), axis are a more substantive predictor. Whilst the point-estimates of both ideological measures are significant, the comparative magnitude (and significance) of the latter dimension is greater (see Figure A3 for a visual demonstration). On average, and conditioning on our full vector of determinants, a one-unit increase in left-right positions correlates with a -.04 decrease in support for the GRA reform. The same one-unit increase in the GAL-TAN space results in an effect more than three times greater ($\beta = -.14$).

When comparing levels of support for the GRA among individuals who express a

Support for GRA among party supporters

Confidence intervals at 95% & 90%
***p<0.01, **p<0.05
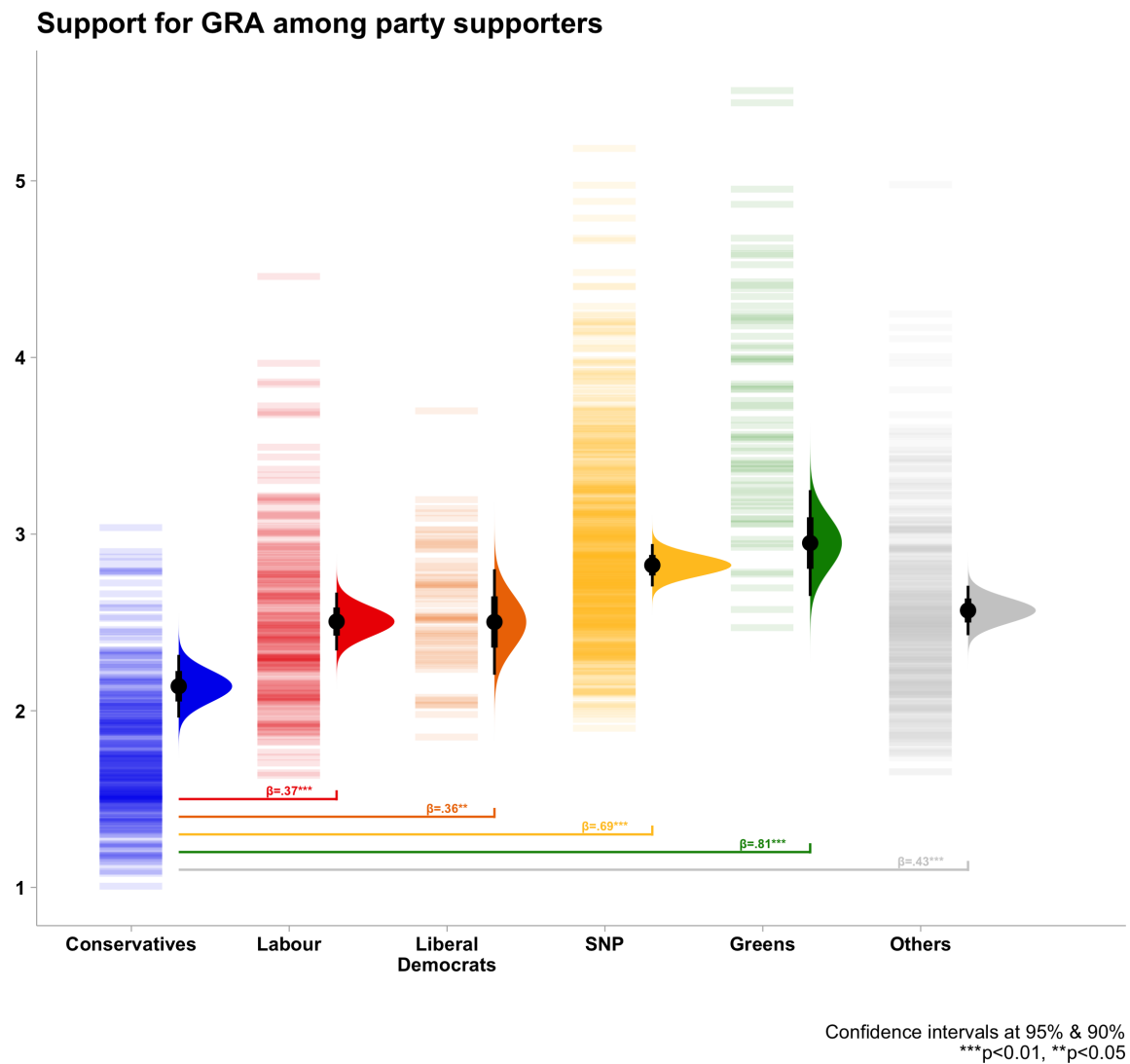
Figure 7: Ideological determinants of support for the GRA

partisan attachment to one of Scotland's main political parties (Figure 7), we observe significantly higher levels of support amongst the partisan supporters of the country's pro-nationalist parties, and outspoken supporters of the GRA reform: the SNP and the Greens. The highest level of support for the policy is observed among supporters of the Green party who have positioned themselves vocal advocates of socially liberal post-materialist policy proposals (Turnbull-Dugarte, Online First).

7 Discussion

In order to persuade impressionable citizens and shape mass opinion, policy actors often strategically leverage salient issue-frames in order to garner support for their position on a policy debate. A rich body of literature demonstrates that issue-frames matter: by framing an policy question that might be abstract for some individuals in terms of a digestible and transferable issue, actors can alter public opinion and individual-level action (Brewer, 2002a; Nelson, 2004; Nelson & Kinder, 1996). In the case of debates of trans rights, opponents of public policy provisions that would remedy imbalances in the egalitarian treatment of trans individuals have frequently been framed in terms of issues related to the security and safety of (cisgender) women. Whilst issue frames against LGB rights have tended to focus on a union of moralistic (Campbell & Monson, 2008) as well security frames (Mucciaroni, 2008), trans-exclusionary activities, particularly trans-exclusionary radical feminists (TERFs) or self-penned "gender critical" individuals have focused on framing their opposition to trans rights as one centred on a need to "protect women" (Murib, 2021; Tadlock, 2014). We theorise that these women's welfare issue-frames, given the effective role of negative issue-framing (Cobb & Kuklinksi, 1997; Pratto & John, 1991), the social construction of the policy target population, by policy *opponents*, as "deviant" (Schneider & Ingram, 1993), as well as the political and social sensitivity towards the *alleged* vulnerability of women and children in particular, are likely to be successful at depressing support for trans rights. Congruent with experimental evidence on the role of safety frames in support for trans access to public restrooms in the US (Harrison & Michelson, 2019), testing this hypothesis via a pre-registered survey experiment fielded in Scotland during the 2021 election confirms this expectation.

The design of our experiment exposed individuals in each of the treatment conditions to a relatively weak treatment (see Table 1) where concerns to women's welfare were cued. The fact that very subtle variations in treatment can induce sizeable shifts in attitudes towards the proposed gender self-ID plans is indicative of the influential

magnitude that issue frames related to women's welfare can engender on preference formation. Consequently, we expect that our results would likely scale up with some of the more explicit and direct frames actively leveraged by policy proponents such ad those replicated in Figure 2.

The results of our experiment should raise concern for proponents of the expansion of transgender rights. Our experiment findings provide causal evidence that issue frames presenting the concerns of trans-exclusionary feminists, who often rely on rhetoric that presents trans individuals (in large part specifically trans women (Schilt & Westbrook, 2015)) as inimical to cisgender women, significantly increases opposition to gender reform bills that seek to facilitate a more equitable and accessible legalistic gender recognition process. The negative effect of these frames is not small and, as hypothesised, is even greater among women when the women's welfare frame is presented by feminists as opposed to conservatives. Given women, on average, have been a core constituent ally of sexual minority rights, the amenability of their policy preferences related to trans rights in response to trans-exclusionary safety frames suggests that LGBT+ rights campaigners' "base" may be under threat, especially when they perceive a trade-off between proposed reforms and their own existing welfare.

Against our pre-registered hypotheses, the results of our experiment also demonstrate that the effects of the feminist issue frame are significantly greater among conservative voters. This finding is surprising. One reason may be that feminist issues from reduce the prevalence of preference falsification (Kuran, 1995). Presented with a more socially acceptable reason to justify their opposition to trans rights, conservatives may feel more comfortable unmasking their "true" preferences which may be consciously masked as a result of social expectation bias. An alternative mechanism may be that conservatives, who tend to hold more traditional views of women as being in need of protection - a form of benevolent sexism (Glick & Fiske, 2001) - are more inclined to experience heightened anxiety for women's welfare when exposed to safety concerns from women themselves. Future work would do well to empirically test assess what

drives this moderation effect that contradicts our pre-registered expectations.

Our findings have implications for our understanding of how policy actors come to focus on certain issue-frames in their campaigns. Frames that invoke societal anxiety around women and children's welfare in the face of a "deviant" threat are not new, and have a historical pedigree of being leveraged to legitimise discriminatory treatment towards different societal groups including, amongst others, racial minorities and LGBT+ individuals (Mucciaroni, 2008). Challenging these frames is not without without difficulty. As Hasenbush et al. (2019) demonstrate, claims of trans rights expansion engendering an uptake in violence against women are largely unfounded yet individuals are frequently exposed to these claims. Regrettably, and despite their unfounded nature, claims of the need to "Protect women!" are effective at making sure that much-needed protections for trans individuals are not supported.

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Appendix

A   Descriptive statistics and variable description

Table A1: Descriptive statistics (continuous variables)

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Support for GRA	1660	2.60	1.28	1.00	5.00
Age	1660	48.98	17.96	16.00	92.00
Income	1660	6.78	3.17	1.00	15.00
Ideology (left-right)	1660	2.84	1.92	0.00	10.00
Ideology (GAL-TAN)	1660	5.97	2.28	0.00	10.00

Table A2: Descriptive statistics (categorical variables)

		N	Percent
Supports GRA	Strongly disagree	469	26.49
	Disagree	321	19.24
	Neither agree/disagree	490	31.05
	Agree	222	13.94
	Strongly agree	158	9.29
Treatment	Control	571	35.05
	Feminist treatment	529	31.26
	Conservative treatment	560	33.69
Sexuality	Hetero.	1518	90.90
	LGB	142	9.10
Gender ID	Cisgender	1646	99.31
	Trans	12	0.61
	Other	2	0.09
Gender	Man	732	45.74
	Woman	890	53.26
	Other	38	1.01
Education	No degree	876	57.83
	Has degree	519	27.93
	Missing	265	14.24
Race	White	1574	95.60
	Non-white	86	4.40
Urbanicity	Urban city	1036	64.91
	Small town/village	204	12.06
	Rural	381	20.15
Party ID	Conservative	330	17.31
	Labour	225	13.34
	Liberal Democrat	67	3.63
	SNP	620	37.12
	Green	67	3.84
	other	351	24.75

Table A3: Treatment balance (Control vs Treatment)

Variable	Control (N=571)		Treatment (N=1089)			
	Mean	Std. Dev.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Diff. in Means	Std. Error
Supports GRA	2.7	1.3	2.5	1.3	-0.2	0.1
LGB	1.1	0.3	1.1	0.3	0.0	0.0
Trans	1.0	0.1	1.0	0.1	0.0	0.0
Gender	1.6	0.5	1.5	0.5	0.0	0.0
Age	48.5	17.0	49.2	16.9	0.8	1.0
Degree	1.6	0.7	1.6	0.7	0.0	0.0
Non-white	1.0	0.2	1.0	0.2	0.0	0.0
Urbanicity	1.5	0.8	1.6	0.8	0.0	0.0
Party ID	3.7	1.7	3.7	1.8	0.0	0.1
Income	6.6	3.0	6.9	3.2	0.2	0.2
Ideology: left-right	2.7	1.9	2.9	1.9	0.2	0.1
Ideology: GAL-TAN	6.0	2.3	6.0	2.2	0.0	0.1

Table A4: Survey items recording ideological preferences

|	
	Government should redistribute income from the better off to those who are less well off
Left-Right	Big business takes advantage of ordinary people
	Ordinary working people do not get their fair share of the nation's wealth
Mean=2.89	There is one law for the rich and one for the poor
	Management will always try to get the better of employees if it gets the chance
	Young people today don't have enough respect for traditional values
GAL-TAN	People who break the law should be given stiffer sentences
	For some crimes, the death penalty is the most appropriate sentence
Mean=5.89	Schools should teach children to obey authority
	Censorship of films, magazines and the internet is necessary to uphold moral standards
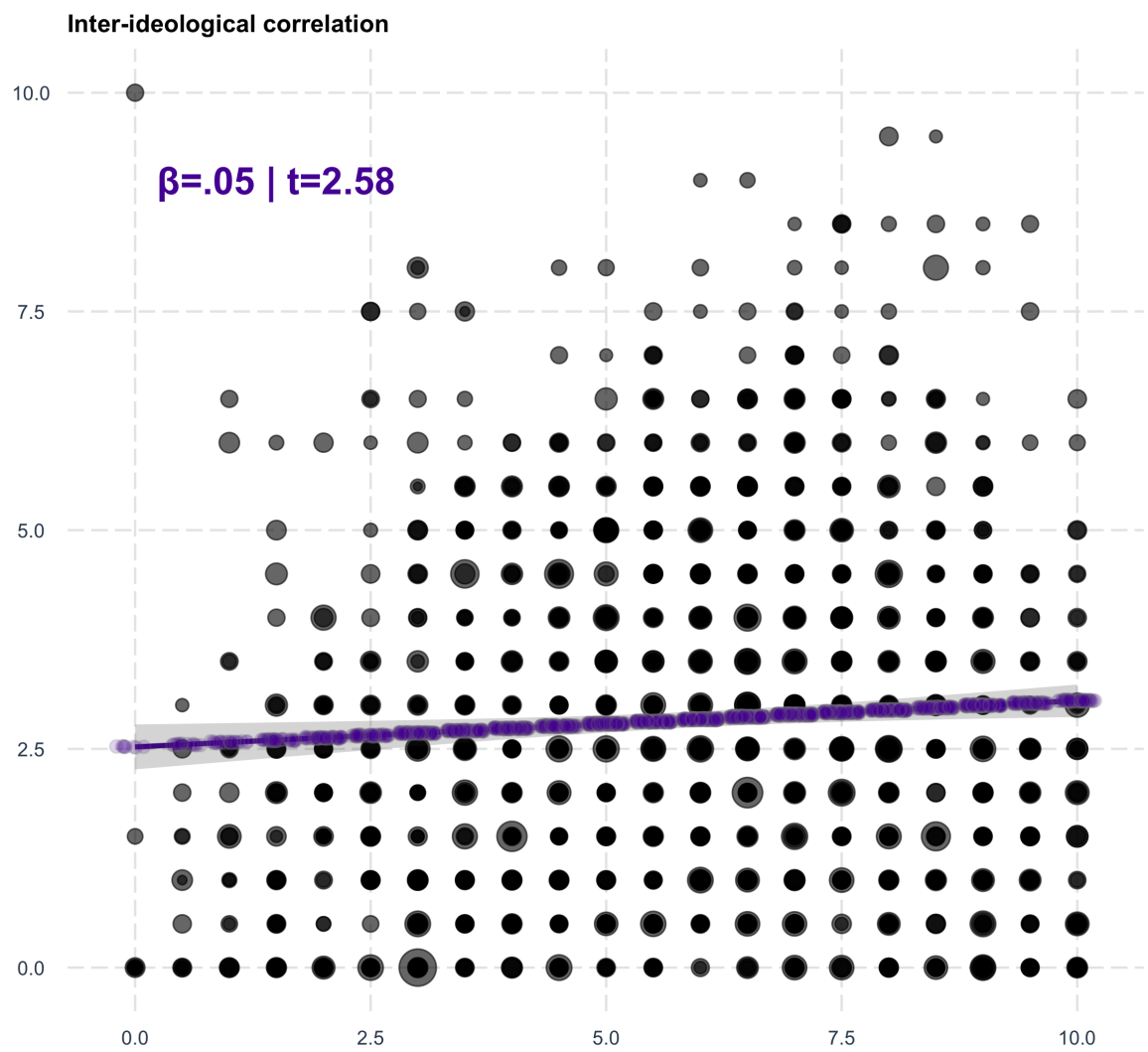
Figure A1: Correlation between ideological measures

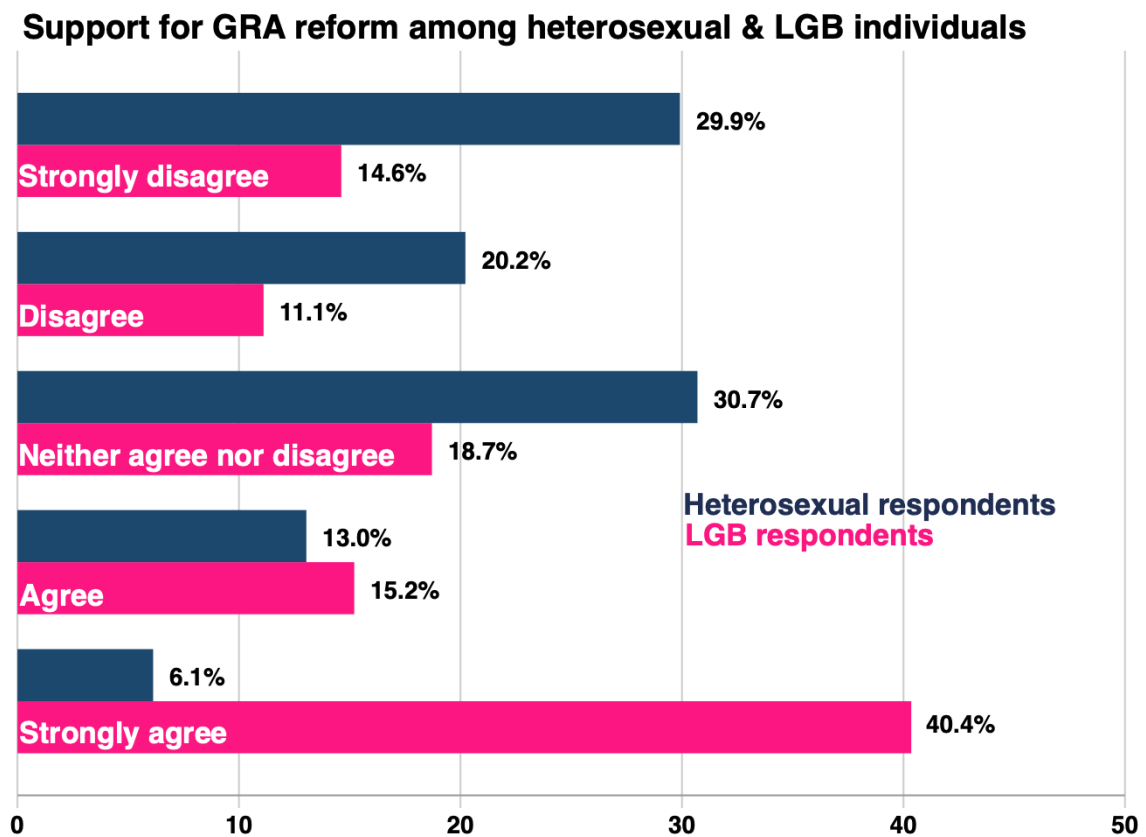The descriptive distribution of preference among heterosexual and LGB individuals is exhibited in Figure A2.

Support for GRA reform among heterosexual & LGB individuals

Figure A2: Percentage (ordinal) support for the GRA by sexuality

B Regression output

Table A5: Average treatment effects

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Feminist treatment	-0.154*	0.150	0.095
	(0.076)	(0.137)	(0.199)
Conservative treatment	-0.171*	-0.164	0.085
	(0.075)	(0.132)	(0.197)
Left-right		-0.091**	
		(0.028)	
Feminist × Left-right		-0.092*	
		(0.040)	
Conservative × Left-right		0.000	
		(0.040)	
GAL-TAN			-0.189***
			(0.021)
Feminist × GAL-TAN			-0.042
			(0.031)
Conservative × GAL-TAN			-0.041
			(0.031)
Constant	2.709***	2.956***	3.836***
	(0.052)	(0.091)	(0.135)
N	1660	1660	1660
R2	0.004	0.040	0.151
R2 Adj.	0.003	0.037	0.149
AIC	5749.4	5694.5	5489.1
BIC	5771.0	5732.4	5527.0
Log.Lik.	-2870.686	-2840.238	-2737.563
F	3.157	13.668	59.028

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A6: Gendered conditional average treatment effects

	Full sample	Women only	Men only	Interaction model
Feminist treatment	-0.154*	-0.208*	-0.087	-0.087
	(0.076)	(0.106)	(0.112)	(0.113)
Conservative treatment	-0.171*	-0.119	-0.222*	-0.222*
	(0.075)	(0.105)	(0.110)	(0.111)
Gender (women)				0.139
				(0.106)
Feminist treatment*Women				-0.121
				(0.154)
Conservative treatment*Women				0.103
				(0.151)
Constant	2.709***	2.771***	2.632***	2.632***
	(0.052)	(0.073)	(0.078)	(0.078)
Observations	1660	890	732	1660
R2	0.004	0.004	0.006	0.008
R2 Adj.	0.003	0.002	0.003	0.003
AIC	5749.4	3098.6	2510.5	5754.6
BIC	5771.0	3117.8	2528.9	5808.7
Log.Lik.	-2870.686	-1545.320	-1251.242	-2867.295
F	3.157	1.944	2.076	1.635

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A7: OLS regression models

	Model 1	Model 2
Gender (woman)	0.085	0.141*
	(0.059)	(0.057)
Age	-0.020***	-0.012***
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Sexuality (LGB)	0.874***	0.574***
	(0.111)	(0.107)
Gender ID (trans)	0.837*	0.658+
	(0.382)	(0.357)
Income	-0.017+	-0.007
	(0.010)	(0.009)
Education (degree)	0.161*	0.002
	(0.070)	(0.068)
Race (nonwhite)	-0.141	-0.076
	(0.172)	(0.161)
Location: small town/village	-0.005	0.045
	(0.090)	(0.085)
Location: rural	-0.051	0.017
	(0.074)	(0.070)
Ideology: Left-right		-0.041*
		(0.016)
Ideology: GAL-TAN		-0.137***
		(0.014)
Party: Labour		0.366***
		(0.107)
Party: Lib Dems		0.364*
		(0.159)
Party: SNP		0.685***
		(0.090)
Party: Greens		0.811***
		(0.169)
Party: Other		0.429***
		(0.091)
Constant	3.555***	3.595***
	(0.133)	(0.181)
N	1621	1621
R2	0.152	0.265
R2 Adj.	0.145	0.256
AIC	5368.1	5149.6
BIC	5443.5	5262.8
Log.Lik.	-2670.030	-2553.808
F	23.955	30.379

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A3 visualises the marginal effect of the two distinct ideological determinants reported in Table 2 and Table A7 on support for the GRA.

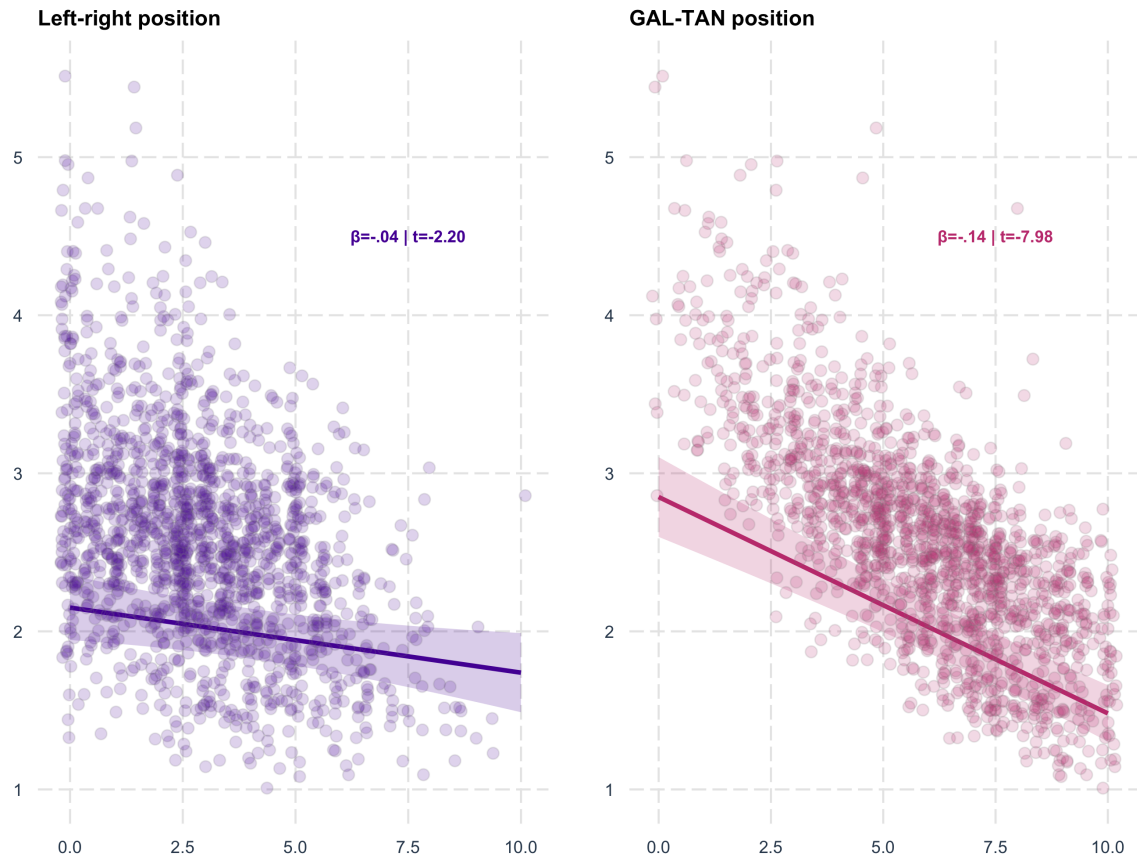**Correlation between ideology measures and support for GRA reform**

Figure A3: Ideological determinants of support for the GRA

B.1 Randomisation inference

In Figure A4 (Feminist treatment) and Figure A5 we report the results of randomisation inference tests (Chung & Romano, 2013) on the conditional average treatment effects we detail in the main manuscript. These randomisation inference tests, permute 2000 iterations where individuals' assignment to the treatment condition is are randomly resampled 2000 times and the effect of this *placebo* treatment condition on the outcome is assessed.

The vertical dashed line in each plot indicates the reported coefficient of the main analysis whilst the distribution plot visualises the effect of the placebo treatment permutations. In the case of the conditional effect of the feminist treatment, Figure A4 demonstrates that the modelled effect among women is significant distinct from those of the permutated placebo effects. The same is not true of the effect among men: our modelled effect, insignificant in the main analysis, is likely reflective of a true null. The point-estimate of 0.87 is spurious and indistinguishable from the distribution reported from the 2000 permutations produced by our randomisation inference tests.

The gendered conditionality of treatment is reversed in the case of the conservative treatment (Figure A5). The significant effect among men is significantly distinct from the distribution reported among our 2000 permutations, whereas the same is not true of the conservative effect among women.

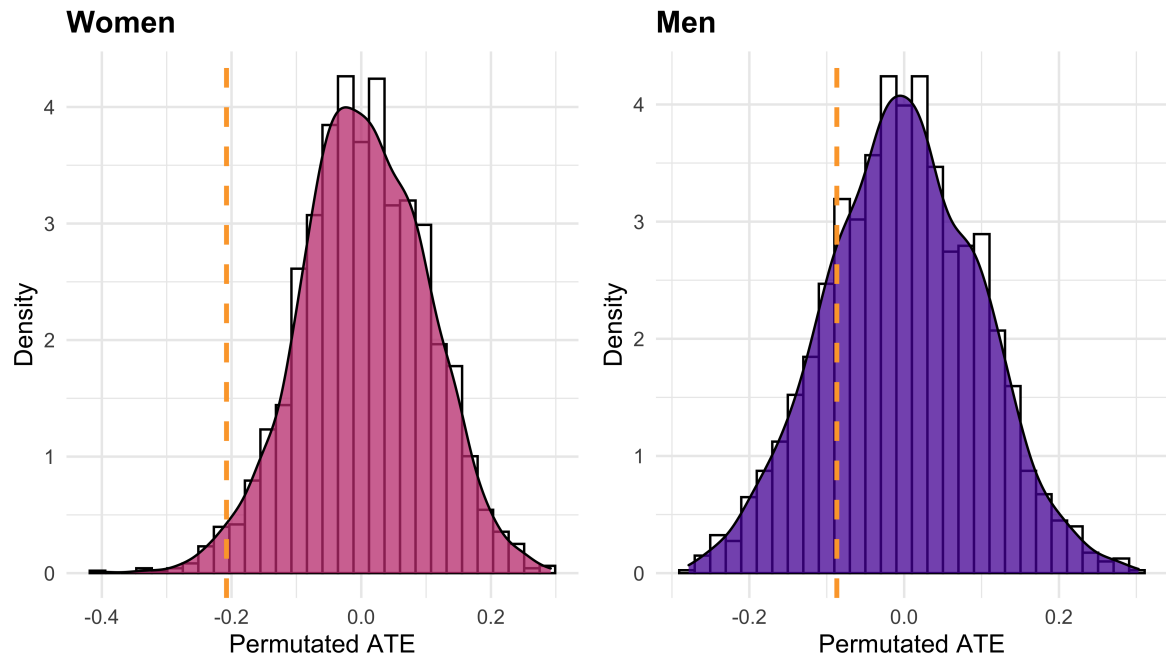**Randomisation inference of Feminist treatment (2000 permutations**

Women   **Men**

Figure A4: Randomisation inference: Feminist treatment

Randomisation inference of Conservative treatment (2000 permutations

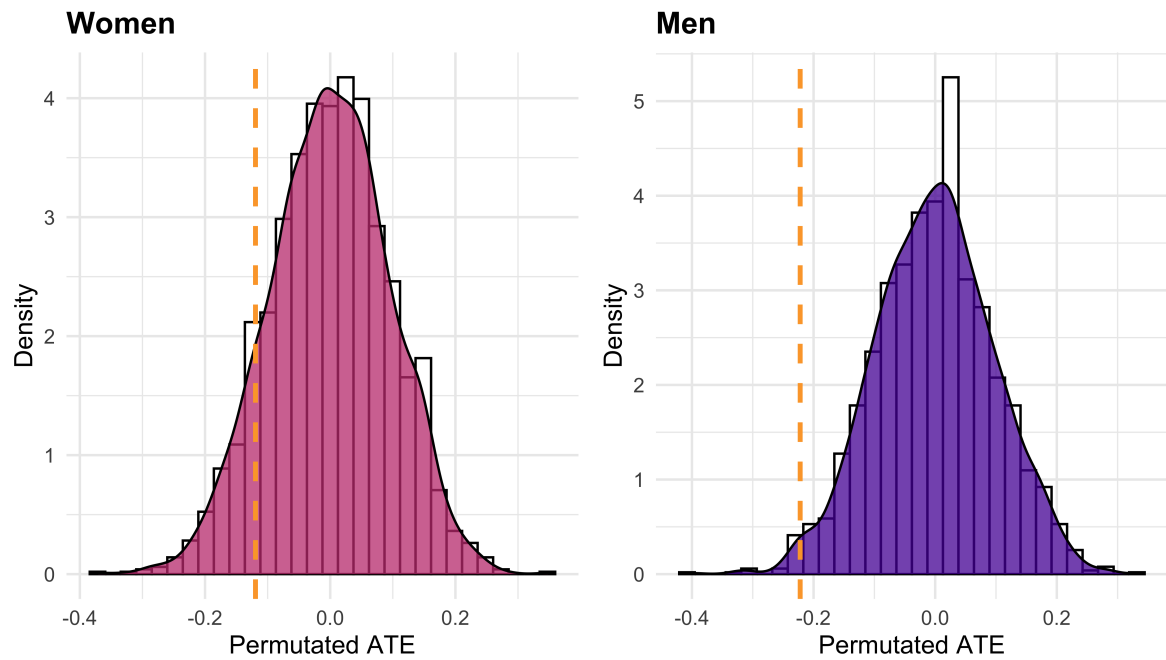**Women**   **Men**

Figure A5: Randomisation inference: Conservative treatment

B.2 Observational analysis regression diagnostics

Figure A6 reports standard regression diagnostic tests for the observational OLS regression models reported in Table A7. The left-hand panel of the figure reports diagnostics for Model 1 and the right-hand panel reports diagnostics for Model 2.
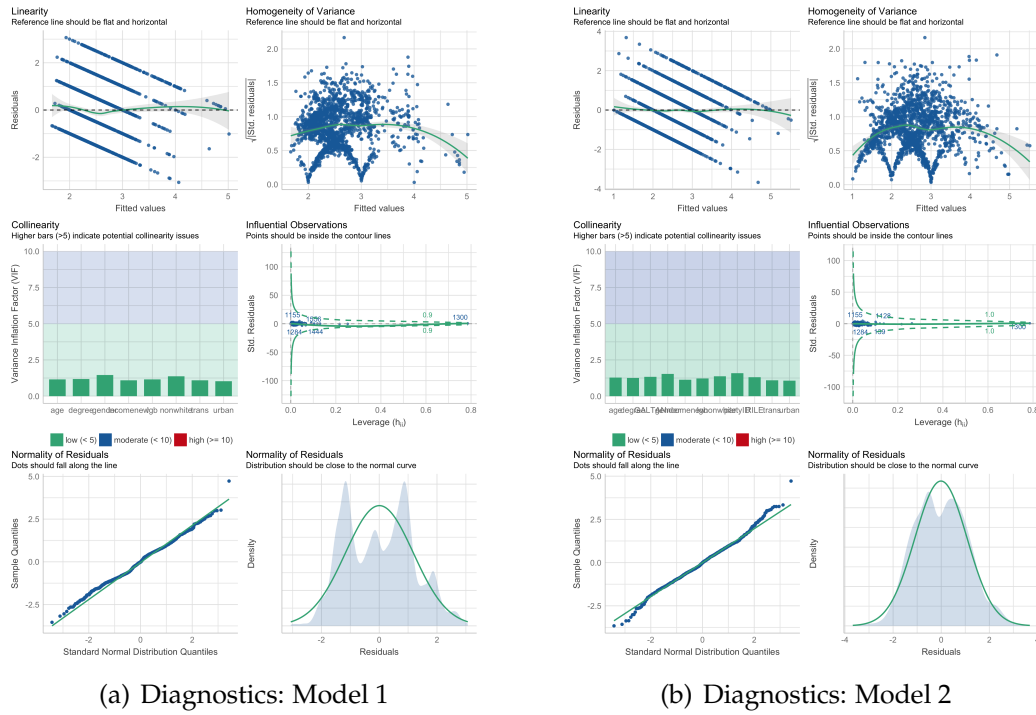

(a) Diagnostics: Model 1   (b) Diagnostics: Model 2

Figure A6: Regression diagnostics check: Table A7

C   Alternative specification: ordinal regression

Given the dependent variable is bound (1-5), we report estimations from an alternative modelling approach that treats the steps in the outcome measure as ordinal as opposed linear. The regression coefficients in Table A8 report the estimated correlations from an ordinal regression model. The output from this alternative specification does not alter our conclusions.

Table A8: Ordinal logistic regression models

X	(1) Supports GRA	(2) Supports GRA
Gender(female)	0.11	0.27**
	(0.11)	(0.12)
Age	-0.03***	-0.02***
	(0.00)	(0.00)
Sexuality (LGB)	1.47***	1.09***
	(0.27)	(0.25)
Gender ID (Trans)	1.52**	1.54***
	(0.65)	(0.53)
Income	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.02)	(0.02)
Education (degree)	0.25**	-0.00
	(0.12)	(0.12)
Race (non-white)	-0.20	-0.12
	(0.32)	(0.38)
Location: small town/village	-0.01	0.04
	(0.18)	(0.18)
Location: rural	-0.05	0.04
	(0.12)	(0.13)
Ideology: Left-right		-0.08**
		(0.03)
Ideology: GAL-TAN		-0.25***
		(0.03)
Party: Labour		0.69***
		(0.21)
Party: Lib Dems		0.72**
		(0.29)
Party: SNP		1.25***
		(0.18)
Party: Greens		1.43***
		(0.34)
Party: other		0.86***
		(0.19)
/cut1	-2.59***	-2.90***
	(0.28)	(0.39)
/cut2	-1.68***	-1.88***
	(0.28)	(0.39)
/cut3	-0.16	-0.20
	(0.28)	(0.39)
/cut4	1.09***	1.15***
	(0.28)	(0.39)
N	1,621	1,621

Robust standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1
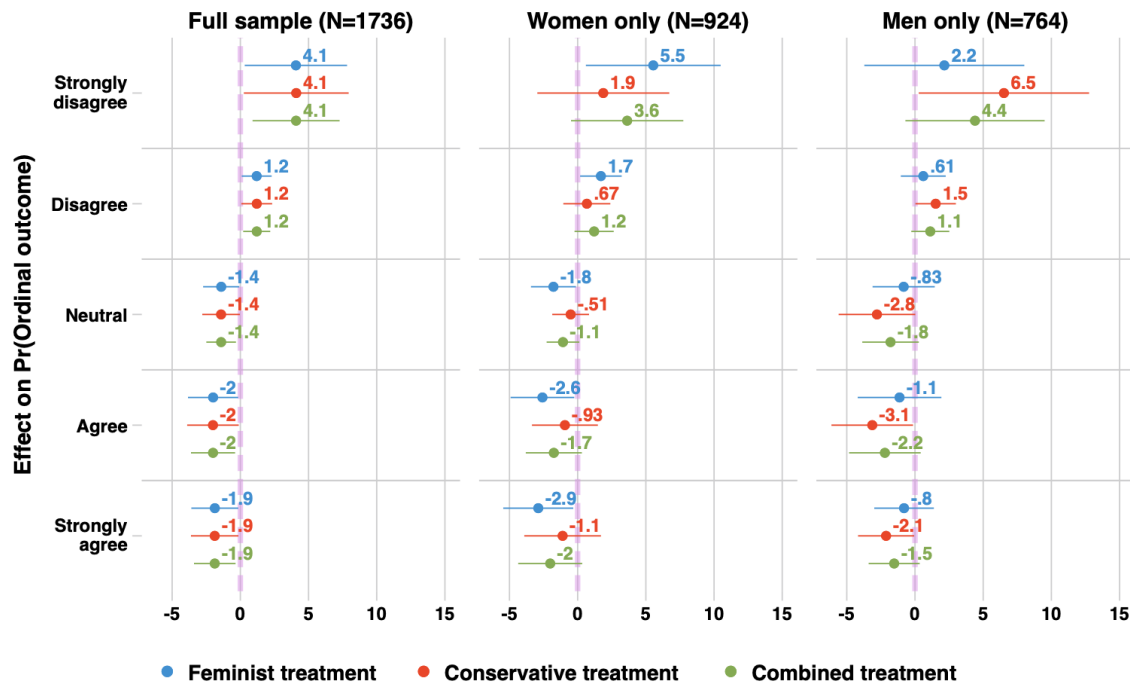
Average treatment effect on support for GRA reform

Figure A7: Treatment effects from ordinal logistic regression

D   Alba leaflet

SAY NO TO SELF-ID

The Scottish Government is planning to change the law to allow any man to simply declare he is a woman without making any other change. This will give males access to female spaces and services.

ALBA BELIEVES

Women have the right to discuss all policies which affect them, without being abused and silenced.

Women have the right to maintain their sex-based protections as set out in the Equality Act 2010.

Women have the right to refuse consent to males in single sex spaces or males delivering intimate services to females.

Women have the right to single sex sports.

Women have the right to organise according to their sex.

The ALBA Party acknowledges and promotes all of the protected characteristics of the Equality Act 2010: age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religion or belief, sexual orientation and sex.

We're all equal in ALBA's vision of an independent Scotland.

#ALBAWomen #ALBA*for*Independence

www.albaparty.org

ALBA

Figure A8: Alba party election campaign leaflet