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Kelly J. Liu, Alois Stutzer

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Universität Basel
Peter Merian-Weg 6
4052 Basel, Switzerland
wwz.unibas.ch

Corresponding Author:
Prof. Dr. Alois Stutzer
Tel. +41 61 207 33 61
Mail: alois.stutzer@unibas.ch

Zero-sum beliefs, political views, and life satisfaction in a rich country

April 30, 2025

Kelly J. Liu[a] Alois Stutzer[b*]

Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between zero-sum thinking, political views, and individual well-being in Switzerland. Zero-sum thinking refers to the belief that resources are finite, and that one person's gain must come at the expense of another. Using survey data from over 11,000 individuals, we document that this mindset seems to be widespread and cannot easily be traced to specific demographic groups in the population. It is rather prevalent across the political spectrum, but slightly more so towards the political left. Beyond their political orientation, individuals with a stronger zero-sum belief support capitalism less, believe less in the idea of trickle-down and meritocracy, and at the same time support the idea that inequality is too high in Switzerland, and that there should be more redistribution. Finally, we observe that these individuals report, on average, a lower level of life satisfaction, shedding light on the potential personal and social implications of this mindset.

Keywords: *Mindset, zero-sum, belief formation, political attitudes, life satisfaction*

JEL classification: *D83, I31, P16, Z13*

[a] University of Basel, Faculty of Business and Economics, Peter Merian-Weg 6, 4002 Basel, Switzerland. Phone: +41 61 207 33 03, https://orcid.org/0009-0008-3346-8714, kelly.liu@unibas.ch

[b] University of Basel, Faculty of Business and Economics, Peter Merian-Weg 6, 4002 Basel, Switzerland. Phone: +41 61 207 33 61, https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7410-5513, alois.stutzer@unibas.ch

[*] Corresponding author.

1 Introduction

People hold markedly different political views in Western democracies that cannot easily be explained by individual endowments and self-interest alone. Rather, people may also differ in their mindsets, i.e., their cognitive perspectives that shape how they perceive and approach the world.

In this study, we analyze the role of zero-sum thinking in people's attitudes to politics and evaluation of their life. In a zero-sum game, resources or opportunities exist in a fixed quantity, so that one person's gain is necessarily another person's loss. Zero-sum thinking or zero-sum beliefs are thus a representation of the idea that one party's success must come at the expense of another (see, e.g., Johnson et al., 2022; Różycka-Tran et al., 2015 and Rubin, 2003, or Davidai and Tepper, 2023; Matsunaga et al., 2024 for reviews). So far, little is known as to how the prevalence of such zero-sum thinking relates to people's political views over and above traditional partisan preferences. Research suggests, however, that zero-sum beliefs significantly influence how people interpret social and economic issues, including those that may not inherently involve zero-sum dynamics (e.g., Ali et al., 2025; Bazerman and Neale, 1993; Bazerman et al., 1985; Chinoy et al., 2025; Meegan, 2010; Rubin, 2003). This not only results in adverse outcomes, such as reduced cooperation, but raises the concern that self-interested actors will appeal to people's zero-sum beliefs and try to exploit them for their own benefit. For example, politicians may employ a zero-sum narrative of global trade for the framing of a protectionist trade policy in order to increase the policy's attractiveness. Or they may try to foster an 'us' versus 'them' mentality in order to gain popularity and decrease approval for their opponents. Moreover, people with strong zero-sum beliefs might perceive life as a competition for limited resources, which could further foster a sense of scarcity and fear, all of which might erode their subjective well-being.

For our analysis, we draw on large-scale survey data involving information about people's socio-economic characteristics, political views, party preferences and self-reported satisfaction with life as well as their response to a question about zero-sum thinking in the context of wealth accumulation and distribution. The survey was conducted within a rich Western country,namely Switzerland, which is generally regarded as a liberal market economy.[1] Concretely, we focus on the economic domain as a lens through which zero-sum thinking can be observed and measured. We asked the respondents to place their view on an integer scale from 0 to 10,

[1] According to the latest report, Switzerland is ranked as the world's second freest and Europe's freest economy according to the *Index of Economic Freedom* (Heritage Foundation, 2025). Moreover, Switzerland has ranked first in the world on the *Global Innovation Index* since 2015 (World Intellectual Property Organization, 2024).

where 0 corresponds to the notion that 'Wealth can grow so there's enough for everyone' and 10 represents the belief that 'People can only get rich at the expense of others'.[2]

Based on the unique combination of survey questions, we can relate political views on the market economy and the welfare state to the proxy for zero-sum thinking, statistically separating it from the association with people's socio-economic characteristics. Importantly, we can simultaneously consider people's partisan preferences and thus control for the mindset that is usually alluded to when statistically explaining differences in political views. Finally, we can explore whether a zero-sum mindset is also related to how people evaluate their lives as a whole in reflective judgment.

Our findings reveal notable variation in zero-sum thinking among individuals. We observe that almost 30% of the Swiss population share the belief that acquiring prosperity is largely zero-sum (i.e., they report a value of 7 or higher on the 10-point scale), while 33% reject this idea (i.e., they report a value of 3 or lower). These differences in people's mindset cannot easily be traced to specific groups in the population. In fact, standard socio-economic factors provide limited predictive power. With regard to party preference, we observe that the overall tendency aligns with expected patterns across Switzerland's political landscape. Specifically, supporters of left-leaning parties are more likely to hold strong zero-sum beliefs in the economic domain. Interestingly, however, we find substantial variation in zero-sum thinking even among supporters of the same political party and this across the entire political spectrum.

On the question whether zero-sum thinking is a mindset that is sufficiently distinct from a partisan one, we find that reported zero-sum thinking correlates with political views and policy preferences, even after socio-economic factors such as education and income *as well as* political orientation are controlled for. People with more pronounced zero-sum thinking support capitalism less, believe less in the idea of trickle-down and meritocracy in the context of Swiss society, and simultaneously support the ideas that inequality is too high in Switzerland and that there should be more redistribution.

Finally, we explore whether a zero-sum mindset is also related to how people evaluate their lives as a whole in a reflective judgment.[3] We find that these people's satisfaction with

[2] While the measure of zero-sum beliefs in this analysis is based on a survey question specifically related to wealth accumulation, the findings of Bergeron et al. (2024) indicate that such beliefs can reflect a broader, generalized zero-sum worldview. Bergeron et al. (2024) construct a zero-sum index using a similarly phrased question among others, across various domains including income, power, and happiness. Their principal component analysis reveals that all domains load similarly onto the first component, suggesting that the specific question on wealth accumulation effectively captures a component of an overarching zero-sum belief.

[3] For an introduction to the economic study of subjective well-being, see, e.g., Frey and Stutzer, 2002a,b; Layard, 2005.

life is lower independently of their socio-economic situation. On the one hand, this might be due to a direct effect of their world view on their (emotional) well-being, for example reflecting some scarring effect from past experiences. On the other, this might be due to indirect effects of, on average, adverse outcomes resulting from how they interact with their environment based on their world view.

The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. In Section 2, we offer a simple framework to organize the concepts of mindset, political views and well-being judgment and refer to the related literature. Section 3 presents the data and some descriptive statistics on the measures capturing our key concepts. The results of our empirical analyses are shown and explained in Section 4. Section 5 offers concluding remarks.

2 A zero-sum mindset

We study the relationship between zero-sum thinking, political views and individual well-being within a simple conceptual framework and organize it around the idea of mindsets, i.e., some generalized ideas of how the world works (see Krohn et al., 2024 for a recent taxonomy of mindsets). We start with this conceptualization. We then address specific theoretical arguments linking zero-sum thinking to the attitudes we are studying and provide an overview of existing work to place our own empirical findings in the context of previous research.

2.1 Conceptualization and integration in a simple framework

The concept of mindsets offers a cognitive perspective that complements the traditional focus in economics on motivational forces arising from interests (see, e.g., Andrews Fearon and Götz, 2024; Noble 2015). Accordingly, we emphasize the aspect of generalized beliefs.

The zero-sum mindset is built on the root construct of a belief in a zero-sum game, i.e., the idea that the total amount of a resource is fixed, and that one person's gain is another person's loss. It works as a cognitive framework that shapes how individuals perceive situations, acquire, interpret, process and store information, form judgments and make decisions. While we understand the zero-sum mindset as malleable through both experiential and non-experiential learning, and thus the result of a process 'setting the mind', we consider it 'a set mind' in many situations, i.e., a stable framework, when people's behavior is analyzed, or, as in this study, their political views and their well-being.

This characterization aligns with evolutionary psychology, which suggests that zero-sum beliefs evolved as an adaptive strategy in ancestral small-scale societies, where resources were scarce and competition was often a matter of survival (Boyer and Petersen, 2018; Foster, 1965). As a result, people adopt zero-sum thinking as a default response in situations of

perceived threat or resource scarcity (for an overview, see e.g., Davidai and Tepper, 2023). Thus, even in modern societies where growth is possible, factors that intensify perceptions of scarcity or threat can trigger zero-sum beliefs (see, e.g., Różycka-Tran et al., 2015; Liu and Stutzer, 2024).

Our conceptualization of the zero-sum mindset considers its relevance as rather general, thus the emphasis on generalized beliefs. They broadly shape views on social, economic, and political interactions, in the sense that people see gains as possible only at others' expense. Research shows that people adopt this general 'fixed-pie' mindset across different settings, especially when desirable resources are at stake (e.g., Roczniewska and Wojciszke, 2021; Różycka-Tran et al., 2015). Moreover, people tend to exhibit a so-called 'zero-sum bias', i.e., they maintain a zero-sum view, even when situations are not zero-sum (Bazerman and Neale, 1993; Bazerman et al., 1985; Meegan, 2010). In other words, such a mindset provokes a view of the world as inherently zero-sum. The general applicability, however, does not exclude that the significance of this perspective is individually context-specific. The empirical measure we use in our study relies on a contextual embeddedness in the economic domain.

Related domain-specific zero-sum beliefs refer to perceptions that do not necessarily reflect an overarching worldview, but emerge within specific contexts. Various studies show that people exhibit domain-specific zero-sum thinking in issues surrounding race (Norton and Sommers, 2011), immigration (Louis et al., 2013), international trade (Roberts and Davidai, 2022), educational grades (Meegan, 2010), ethnicity (Smithson et al., 2015), gender (Kuchynka et al., 2018; Ruthig et al., 2017; Sicard and Martinot, 2018), social status (Andrews-Fearon and Davidai, 2023), and even romantic relationships (Burleigh et al., 2017; Cunningham et al., 2022). So far, it remains unclear how these general and domain-specific zero-sum beliefs are related or interact, though perceived threats or resource scarcity may encourage both types of zero-sum beliefs.

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of our understanding of the different concepts and their possible interactions. The bottom encompasses the root constructs that shape motivational forces, such as interests, as well as cognitive perspectives, such as mindsets. While individual endowments and values in combination with other restrictions are key to understanding intrinsic and extrinsic motivation or incentives, values and beliefs constitute people's mindsets. Obviously, interests and mindsets influence each other. While both of these concepts are emphasized as drivers of behavior in economic applications, we consider them also to be drivers of attitudes and judgments. Here, the focus is on political views or policy preferences and subjective well-being, which is depicted on the very top. We add that, of course, context or actual conditions matter for how interests and mindsets translate into attitudes and judgments. However, the two drivers might themselves influence how

these conditions are perceived, adding another intermediary layer, where perceptions of the processes and outcomes in the public, economic or personal domain are formed, which, in turn, may influence attitudes and judgments, as well as behavior.

2.2 Zero-sum and left vs. right mindsets shaping political views

Along with other mindsets, the zero-sum mindset contributes to shaping an individual's worldview. Here, we emphasize and study the zero-sum mindset as being to some extent distinct from a partisan mindset based on a root construct that emphasizes specific norms and values that align with ideological divides such as left vs. right, liberal vs. conservative, or universalism vs. particularism (for the latter, see Cappelen et al., 2025).

Left-leaning partisans' demand for increased social security and redistribution and the corresponding stance of left-wing parties might well reflect differences in the zero-sum mindset within the political community. As Chinoy et al. (2025) argue, people who believe in a zero-sum world are more prone to think that wealth accumulation among the rich comes at the expense of the poor, creating a need for corrective mechanisms due to, for example, fairness considerations. In line with this, studies analyzing the relationship between zero-sum beliefs and political ideology have found a correlation between left-liberal parties and zero-sum thinking in the economic domain (Chinoy et al., 2025; Strang and Schaube, 2025).

However, consistent with the evolutionary approach emphasizing the role of threat perception as trigger for zero-sum beliefs, Davidai and Ongis (2019) show that zero-sum beliefs and political ideology are not in a fixed relationship, but depend on whichever party feels it is under threat in discussing the issue at hand. The authors argue that conservatives tend to feel more under threat when the status quo is challenged and thus exhibit stronger zero-sum beliefs in discussions around social inequality, where challenging the status quo has been common in the past few decades. On the other hand, liberals are more likely to feel under threat when their ability to instigate change is challenged, which leads them to view the world as more zero-sum when it comes to economic inequality, where the status quo has been more widely accepted. This suggests that zero-sum thinking can be evoked with regard to almost any policy issue across all parties and/or that individuals with this way of thinking are to some extent present across parties.

With regard to our framework here, when evaluating support for a policy that expands redistribution, we would expect a mix of the above-mentioned factors to play a role. Besides motivational forces arising from, for instance, self-interest, which may drive a better-off individual to oppose, but a worse-off individual to support such a policy, we would also want to consider the influence of mindsets. Firstly, and this is rather standard, an individual with a deep-rooted partisan mindset is more likely to follow the party line of the conservatives

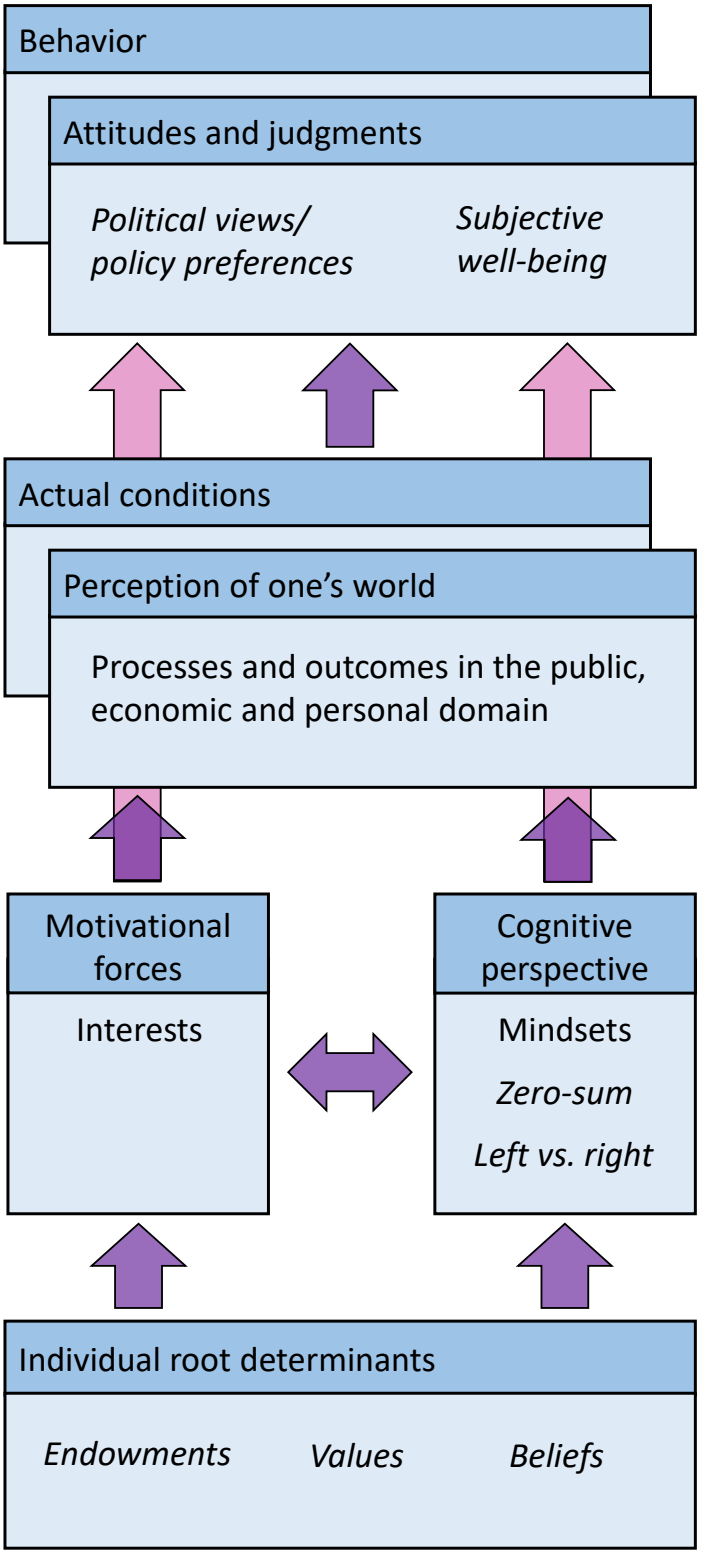

Figure 1 — Zero-sum mindset and individual attitudes and judgments

in opposing, or the liberals in supporting, such a policy, respectively. Secondly, and this is the emphasis here, if the individual does not hold strong zero-sum beliefs and believes in positive-sum mechanisms such as a trickle-down effect, they may be more likely to oppose a redistributive policy, independently of their own wealth or the stance of their party. If, however, the individual views the world as strongly zero-sum, this may lead to more support for the policy even among people who are rich or share a conservative mindset.

In the Swiss context, with a proportional electoral system being used in the first chamber of the federal legislature as well as in the cantonal legislatures, we can study how the prevalence of zero-sum thinking is distributed across parties. According to the evaluation of Swiss party manifestos, political parties cover a broad ideological spectrum (Zollinger and Traber, 2023). This situation provides a useful setting in which to test whether zero-sum thinking can add to the prediction of political views over and above people's party sympathies and thus of whether it can be qualified as a separate mindset.

2.3 Zero-sum mindset and individual well-being

People's mindsets affect their individual well-being basically via two channels: a direct and an indirect one. Directly, because people's emotions are immediately affected. Indirectly, as the mindset moderates behavior determining the outcomes people experience and 'consume'.[4]

Viewing the world through a zero-sum lens fosters a perception of life as a constant competition for limited resources, leading to feelings of scarcity, fear, and stress. This persistent sense of being at risk of losing out can contribute to anxiety and frustration, diminishing emotional well-being and life satisfaction (e.g., Cheng and Wee, 2023; Keshabyan and Day, 2020; Malone and Wachholtz, 2018; Ng and Diener, 2022). Individuals with strong zero-sum beliefs may struggle to find contentment as they focus on comparison and competition rather than cooperation or personal growth. Indeed, research has shown that zero-sum thinking correlates with more negative emotions and lower life satisfaction (Bergeron et al., 2024; Różycka-Tran et al., 2021).

Going beyond the personal level, when people with a strong belief in exchanges being zero-sum shy away from social interactions and are less inclined to engage in cooperative endeavors, they may miss out on beneficial opportunities in the private as well as in the business realm. The empirical literature shows that individuals who endorse zero-sum thinking are more likely to view society as unjust and distrust its institutions (Andrews Fearon and Götz, 2024; Różycka-Tran et al., 2015). Moreover, strong zero-sum beliefs can reduce willingness to help others at work (Chernyak-Hai and Davidai, 2022; Kakkar and Sivanathan, 2022; Sirola and

[4] This is not meant to indicate that the correlations presented later on are to be interpreted causally. For example, past experiences might shape people's mindsets and, separately, how they evaluate their well-being.

Pitesa, 2017), hinder the recognition of mutually beneficial opportunities for cooperation (Davidai et al., 2022), and promote competitive or aggressive behavior in status-related situations (Andrews-Fearon and Davidai, 2023). The potential adverse outcomes of such behaviors include, for example, fewer career opportunities or weaker social networks, which could lead to a worse evaluation of one's life.

These effects also extend to intergroup dynamics, potentially fueling social divisions. For instance, viewing race relations as zero-sum has been associated with a greater likelihood of racism denial among white Americans, which in turn decreases support for equality-promoting measures (Eibach and Keegan, 2006; Wellman et al., 2016). Similarly, holding domain-specific zero-sum beliefs has been linked to marginalizing minority groups and lower support for gender-equity policies (Kuchynka et al., 2018), as well as for increased endorsement of anti-immigration policies (Davidai and Ongis, 2019). Moreover, perceiving politics as zero-sum can lead to avoidance of political discussions with partisans of ideologically opposed parties (Boland and Davidai, 2024).

On a national scale, countries where people hold stronger zero-sum beliefs often allocate more to military spending, limit civil liberties, and show weaker commitment to democratic institutions (Różycka-Tran et al., 2015, 2019). Moreover, conflict resolution could be hindered, as individuals who view national conflicts in zero-sum terms show less willingness to compromise (Maoz and McCauley, 2005).

3 Data description

3.1 Survey 'How are you, Switzerland?' 2024

The analysis uses data from the second wave of the survey 'How are you, Switzerland?' conducted by the polling company gfs.bern on behalf of the Swiss Broadcasting Corporation (SRG and gfs.bern, 2024). The online survey took place from May 22 to June 16, 2024 in Switzerland. A total of 11,352 people resident in Switzerland provided anonymized information on their socio-demographic characteristics, a range of attitudes as well as their partisan stance and zero-sum beliefs. The polling company provided weights to render the sample nationally representative in terms of socio-demographics (age, gender, education, income), political indicators (party preference, trust in government), regional aspects (linguistic region, canton, urbanicity of the municipality) as well as sampling mode.[5] We apply them in all the presented analyses. The following subsections describe the survey questions for the main variables of

[5] Part of the sample was drawn from a representative stratified quota panel, while the other part of the sample was recruited by river sampling mainly via online ads, which can be subject to self-selection.

interest in more detail. The Appendix provides a list of the original survey questions in German.

3.2 Zero-sum beliefs

For the item on zero-sum beliefs, respondents were asked to place their view on an integer scale from 0 to 10 (which we reversed for an intuitive interpretation in the analysis), where 0 shows total agreement with the statement 'Wealth can grow so there's enough for everyone' and 10 signifies total agreement with the statement 'People can only get rich at the expense of others'. The respondent's answer was taken as a measure of their propensity to believe that wealth accumulation is a zero-sum game, with 10 being the most zero-sum. Figure 2 shows the weighted distribution. While many people report that they think wealth can grow for everyone (33.0% indicate a value of 3 or lower on the scale), a substantial share of people in Switzerland believe that wealth accumulation follows a zero-sum logic, with almost a third (29.3%) of respondents expressing rather strong zero-sum beliefs (a value of 7 or higher on the scale). A quarter (25.8%) of the sample reports a score of 5. However, it is unclear whether this score reflects disagreement with both statements, or if these respondents believe that in roughly half of the situations, wealth accumulation is a zero-sum game, while in the other half, it represents a positive-sum game. The corresponding figure for the sample underlying our main estimations (n = 8,762) looks very similar and can be found in the Appendix.

3.3 Partisan stance

The partisan or 'left vs. right', 'liberal vs. conservative' mindset is approximated based on people's stated most favored political parties. The survey included a question that asked respondents which party they would mainly vote for if national council elections were to take place next Sunday. According to the political party landscape in Switzerland, the possible answers from the political left to the right were: 'GPS' (Green Party), 'SP' (Social Democratic Party), 'GLP' (Green Liberal Party), 'Mitte' (Center Party), 'FDP' (The Liberals) and 'SVP' (Swiss People's Party). Additionally, the respondents could choose other smaller parties (coded as 'other parties'[6]), 'no party' (including 'empty list') or 'no intention to vote'.

[6] The category 'other parties' includes the options 'EVP' (Evangelical People's Party), 'Lega dei Ticinesi' (League of Ticinesi), 'CSP' (Christian Social Party), 'Alternative Linke' (Alternative Left), 'EDU' (Federal Democratic Union), 'Piratenpartei' (Pirate Party), 'Mouvement Citoyens Romand' (Romandy Citizens' Movement), 'clearly a different party', 'several parties' and 'undecisive'.

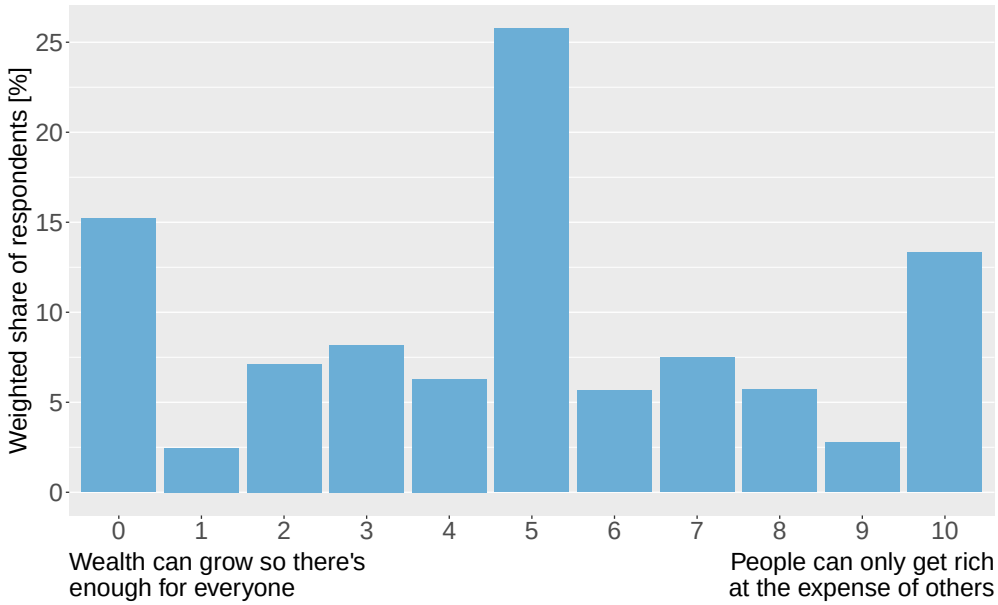

Figure 2 — Zero-sum beliefs in Switzerland in 2024
The distribution is based on 11,352 observations. The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. Original statements describe the zero-sum scale in German from 0 'Wohlstand kann so wachsen, dass genug für alle da ist.' to 10 'Die Menschen können nur auf Kosten ihrer Mitmenschen reich werden.'
Data source: SRG and GfS (2024).

3.4 Political views

To capture political attitudes in terms of concrete views on society, the survey asked respondents to indicate their agreement with various statements by answering either 'strongly agree', 'agree', 'disagree' or 'strongly disagree'.
We use the following five items that we subsume under one term:

- **Capitalism:** 'Capitalism works and should be preserved.'[7]
- **Trickle-down:** 'When Swiss companies earn a lot of money, everyone benefits from it, including the poor.'
- **Meritocracy:** 'In Switzerland, anyone who works hard enough can rise out of poverty.'
- **Inequality:** 'The wealth gap between rich and poor is too large in Switzerland.'
- **Redistribution:** 'Wealth in Switzerland should be taxed more heavily.'

Figure 3 shows the weighted proportion of people agreeing with each statement ('strongly agree' or 'agree') dependent on their party preference. As expected, people favoring parties that are considered rather 'right-conservative' such as the 'SVP' or 'FDP', on average, believe more in meritocracy and a trickle-down mechanism and support capitalism more strongly than people who would vote for more 'left-liberal' parties such as the 'SP' or the 'GPS'. In contrast, the latter group of people tend to believe that inequality in Switzerland is too high and that redistribution should be increased.

3.5 Subjective well-being

People's judgment about their well-being is captured in terms of life satisfaction by the question 'Generally speaking, how satisfied are you with life?', where a score of 0 corresponds to 'not satisfied at all' and 10 to 'completely satisfied'. Figure 4 shows the weighted distribution of answers to this question. In accordance with previous findings on life satisfaction in Switzerland (see, e.g., Frey and Stutzer, 1999), we observe a strongly left-skewed distribution with over half (59.1%) of people reporting a rather high satisfaction of 8 or higher on this scale. The corresponding figure for the sample underlying our main estimations (n = 8,754) looks very similar and can be found in the Appendix.

[7] The original statement in the survey was 'Capitalism does not work and should be abolished.' It was rephrased for this analysis such that increasing agreement corresponds to increasing support for and/or belief in capitalism.

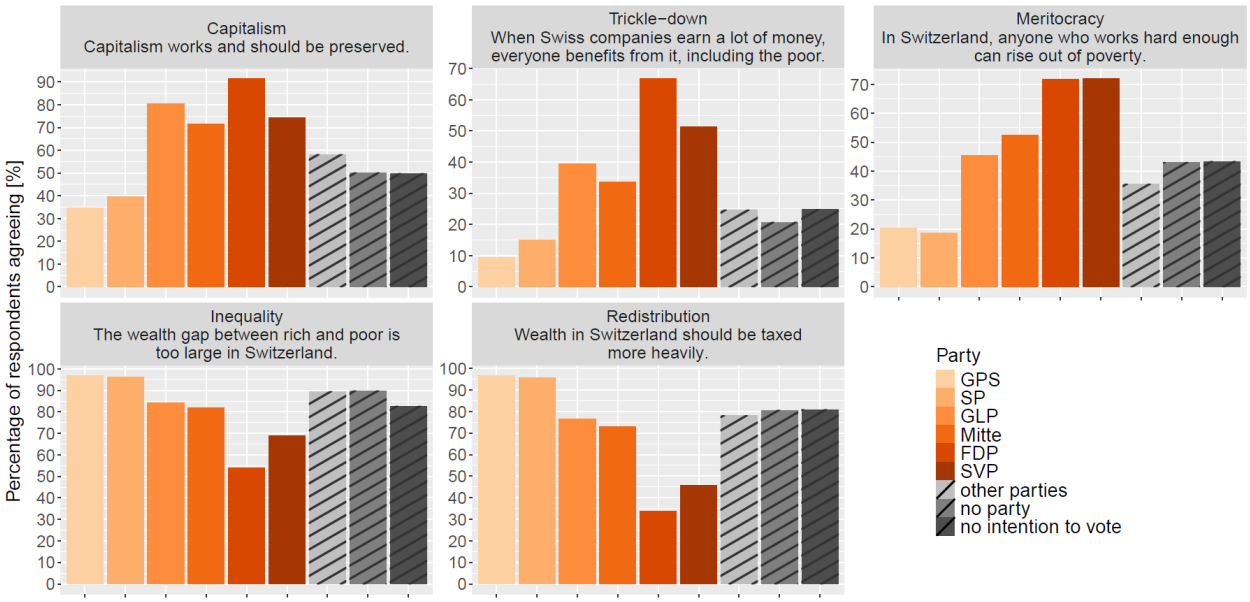

Figure 3 — Political views by preferred party in Switzerland in 2024
The distributions are based on 11,057 observations. The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. 'Agreement' includes both 'strongly agree' and 'agree' responses. *Data source:* SRG and GfS (2024).

3.6 Summary statistics

Table 1 and Table 2 provide summary statistics for the continuous and categorical variables, respectively, considered in our correlational analyses. For continuous variables, (weighted) mean, (weighted) standard deviation as well as minimum and maximum values are shown. For categorical variables, the corresponding (weighted) proportions in the sample are stated.

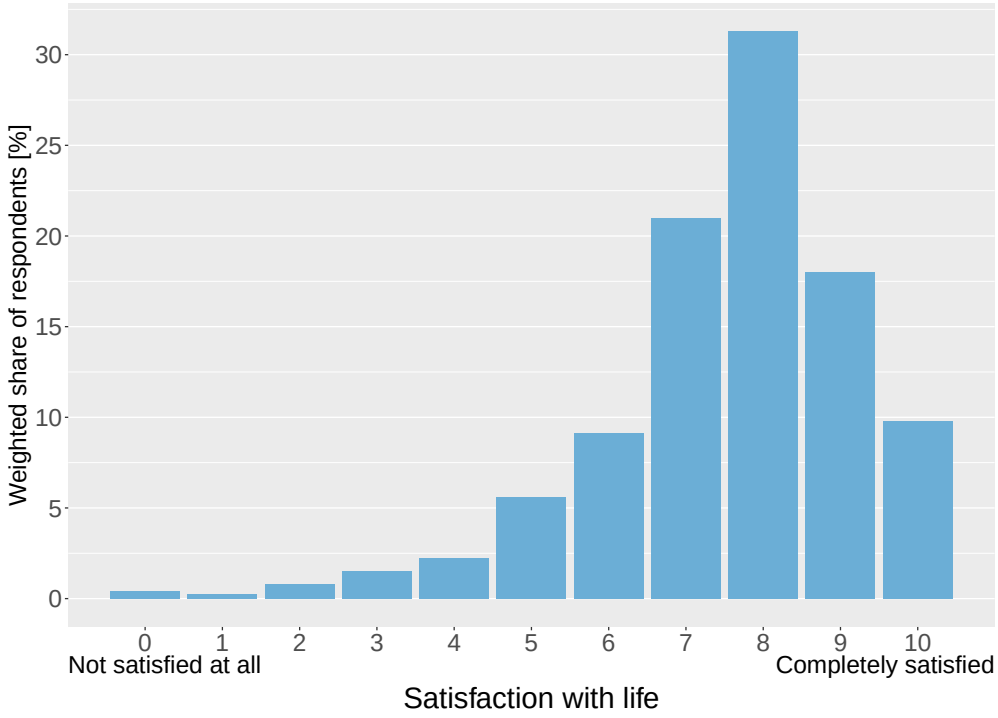

Figure 4 — Life satisfaction in Switzerland in 2024
Distribution of answers to the question 'Generally speaking, how satisfied are you with life?' based on 11,343 observations. The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative.
Data source: SRG and GfS (2024).

Table 1 — Summary statistics for continuous variables

Variable	Mean	W. mean	Sd	W. sd	Min	Max
Zero-sum beliefs	4.83	4.86	3.26	3.15	0	10
Life satisfaction	7.71	7.60	1.61	1.64	0	10
Age	51.83	50.04	16.19	17.00	16	98
Equivalence income	5,572	5,199	2,416	2,306	557	15,000

Notes: Summary statistics for the sample underlying the main analyses (n = 8,762). W. = weighted. Sd = standard deviation. Equivalence income is calculated from household monthly net income reported in eight categories. We take the mean income in the respective intervals (and set the top income category to 15,000 Swiss francs) and divide it by adjusted household size, i.e., 1+0.5*(number of adults-1)+0.3*(number of children under 18 years).

4 Results

4.1 The socio-demographics of zero-sum thinkers

Can people who report pronounced zero-sum beliefs be profiled based on their socio-demographic characteristics? We address this question by first providing a break-down of zero-sum beliefs by age group and by gender. Subsequently, we study a broader set of socio-demographic covariates within a multiple regression framework to analyze their partial correlations with zero-sum beliefs independently of other factors included in the empirical model.

Figure 5 shows the average zero-sum beliefs and share of respondents with strong zero-sum beliefs of 7 or higher for each age group (left panel) and gender (right panel), respectively. There is a slight tendency toward stronger zero-sum beliefs in older age groups, however, the differences are not statistically significant. Relative to the middle age groups, the groups with the youngest (below 30 years) and the oldest (70 years and above) people show lower fractions of people with strong zero-sum beliefs. While the average zero-sum belief seems to be higher for female than for male respondents, relatively fewer women than men in the sample report strong zero-sum beliefs. However, these differences are also not statistically significant.

Table 3a and Table 3b show the results for the partial correlations between basic individual characteristics and the reported zero-sum belief. The column on the left presents the estimates from a weighted least squares (WLS) regression of zero-sum beliefs measured on the 0 to 10

Table 2 — Summary statistics for categorical variables

Variable	Category	Proportion	W. proportion
Strong zero-sum beliefs	0	0.68	0.70
	1	0.32	0.30
Gender (NA: 0.4%)	Male	0.55	0.50
	Female	0.44	0.50
Education	Compulsory school or lower	0.06	0.06
	Basic vocational education or diploma	0.30	0.66
	Higher vocational education	0.16	0.06
	University of applied sciences or university	0.47	0.22
Employment status (NA: 0.4%)	Employed	0.56	0.54
	Self-employed	0.09	0.09
	Unemployed	0.02	0.02
	Homemaker	0.02	0.03
	Retired	0.24	0.23
	Other	0.06	0.09
Civil status (NA: 0.3%)	Married or with partner	0.67	0.63
	Divorced	0.09	0.09
	Single	0.21	0.25
	Widowed	0.02	0.03
Nationality (NA: 0.1%)	Swiss only	0.83	0.87
	Foreign only	0.05	0.04
	Swiss and foreign	0.11	0.09
Religious (NA: 1.8%)	0	0.46	0.43
	1	0.52	0.56
Survey language	German	0.71	0.70
	French	0.24	0.25
	Italian	0.03	0.03
	Rumantch	0.02	0.02
Urbanicity	Urban	0.39	0.36
	Rural	0.22	0.25
	Mixed	0.38	0.39
Capitalism	0	0.37	0.38
	1	0.63	0.62
Trickle-down	0	0.66	0.66
	1	0.34	0.34
Meritocracy	0	0.57	0.54
	1	0.43	0.46
Inequality	0	0.18	0.18
	1	0.83	0.82
Redistribution	0	0.26	0.29
	1	0.74	0.71

Notes: W. = weighted. Missing values (NA) for each variable are stated in percentages, if applicable.

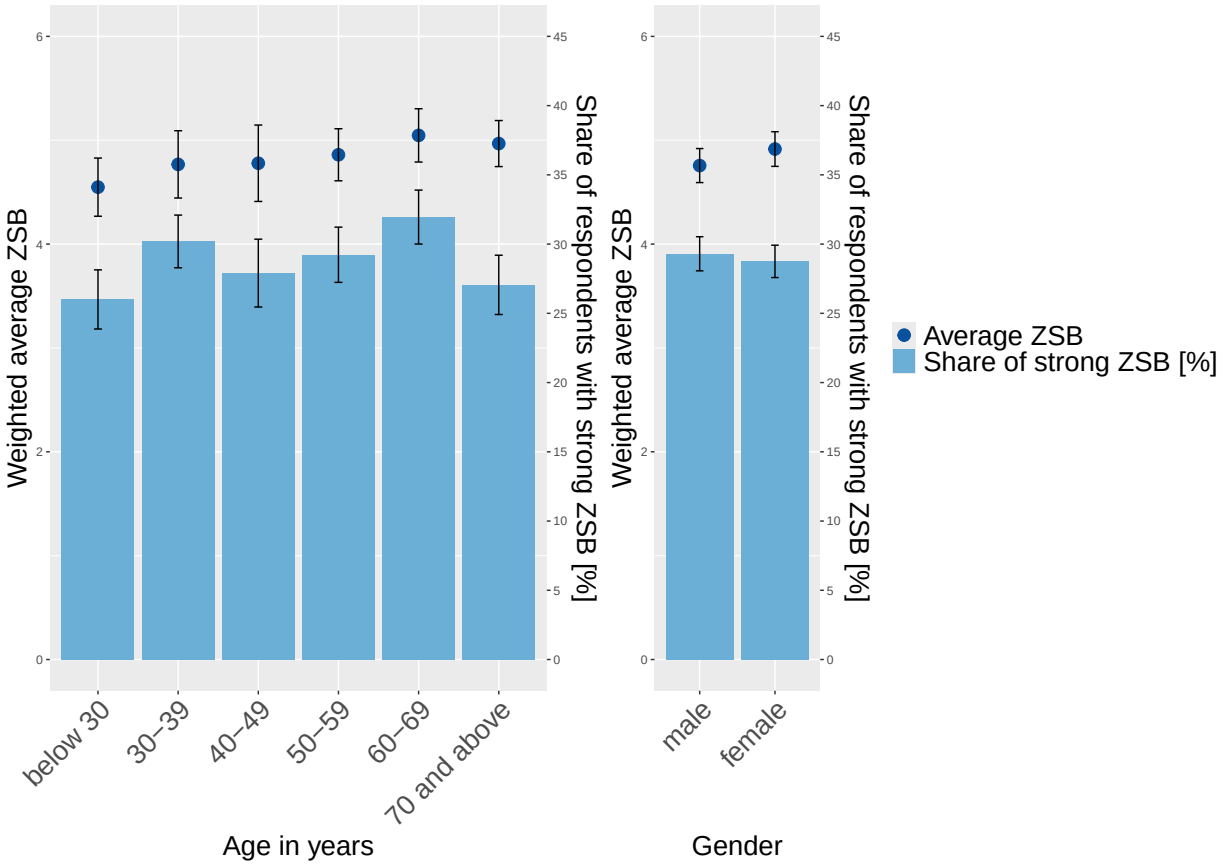

Figure 5 — Age and gender profile in zero-sum beliefs in Switzerland in 2024
Zero-sum beliefs (ZSB) for each age group (left) and gender (right) based on 11,100 observations. The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. Zero-sum beliefs are measured on a scale from 0 to 10, with 10 corresponding to strongest zero-sum beliefs. Left y-axis: Dark blue points indicate the weighted average zero-sum beliefs for each subgroup. Right y-axis: Light blue bars show the weighted share of respondents with strong zero-sum beliefs (7 or higher) in each subgroup. Black error bars show the 95% confidence intervals.

scale. The column to the right shows the corresponding coefficients from a probit regression using maximum likelihood estimation (MLE) and a binary representation of strong zero-sum beliefs that takes on value 1 if the zero-sum beliefs score is 7 or higher. Both specifications include indicator variables for the survey language and the canton of residence as additional controls. The values in the third column show the average marginal effects calculated from the probit regression and can be directly interpreted as differences in the predicted probability to report strong zero-sum beliefs relative to the reference category, ceteris paribus.

For age and gender, in line with the previous descriptive plots, there is no systematic relationship with zero-sum beliefs. When income is controlled for, there is no robust relationship with level of education either. A zero-sum mindset is thus not a simple matter of being more or less educated. However, people with a higher equivalence income think about the world as less zero-sum.[8] This holds at least in the economic domain captured with the survey question at hand. Ceteris paribus, being in the fourth income quartile rather than the first is associated with an 8.9 percentage point lower likelihood of expressing pronounced zero-sum beliefs.

Independently of respondents' income and other characteristics, self-employed people are less likely to think about the world as zero-sum than employed people. The difference in predicted probability amounts to 4.5 percentage points. This fits well with conceptions of an entrepreneurial mindset oriented towards value creation—a mindset likely more prevalent among the self-employed and possibly reinforced by experiences consistent with survivorship bias.[9] The absence of pronounced zero-sum thinking might well be a root determinant of this specific mindset.

Regarding civil status, widowed people report less pronounced zero-sum beliefs than people who are married or have a partner, with respondents' age controlled for. Whether people are of Swiss nationality or reside as foreigners in Switzerland does not make a systematic difference. Similarly, there are no systematic differences between people living in more urban or more rural areas, ceteris paribus. However, there is a statistically significant higher prevalence in zero-sum thinking among people who report not belonging to any denomination. This status holds for almost half of the people in our sample. The correlation may stem from several factors, including the absence of the communal support that religious communities often afford, which could lead individuals to trust others less and perceive society as more

[8] Equivalence income is calculated from household monthly net income reported in eight categories. We take the mean income in the respective intervals (setting the top income category to 15,000 Swiss francs) and divide it by adjusted household size, i.e., 1 + 0.5*(number of adults-1)+0.3*(number of children under 18 years).

[9] In a recent review, Daspit et al. (2023) define the entrepreneurial mindset 'as a cognitive perspective that enables an individual to create value by recognizing and acting on opportunities, making decisions with limited information, and remaining adaptable and resilient in conditions that are often uncertain and complex' (p. 17).

competitive. Additionally, a lack of religious affiliation might be associated with heightened feelings of existential insecurity.

4.2 Party preferences and zero-sum beliefs

Figure 6 shows the distribution of zero-sum beliefs among people preferring the same political party. None of the parties is a catch-all for people with a pronounced zero-sum mindset. In every party there is a certain proportion that fully shares the idea that 'Wealth can grow so there's enough for everyone' and another that agrees with the idea that 'People can only get rich at the expense of others'. This is a strong indication that the zero-sum mindset captures something distinct from party preferences and a political 'left vs. right' mindset.

Nevertheless, there are clear differences between the people who support a particular party. This can be seen in the different mean values of the answers on the scale from 0 to 10 (indicated by the black line). We observe that parties further to the right on the political spectrum attract voters with less of a zero-sum view on wealth accumulation, while the opposite holds for parties on the left. Concretely, the mean score is lowest for people favoring The Liberals (FDP), with an average score of 3.87, and the highest for people favoring the Social Democrats (SP), with a mean score of 5.52. For the full party spectrum, the weighted share reporting a score of 7 or higher, as a measure of strong zero-sum beliefs, is 17.6% for The Liberals (FDP), 21.6% for the Swiss People's Party (SVP), 24.1% for the Green Liberal Party (GLP), 26.7% for the Center Party (Mitte), 40.9% for the Green Party (GPS), and 42.6%, and thus highest, for the Social Democratic Party (SP). The fraction of people reporting strong zero-sum beliefs is similar among those intending to vote for other parties, those with no favored party, and those with no intention to vote, at 32.9%, 33.4% and 35.3%, respectively.

4.3 Zero-sum beliefs and political views

While the distribution of zero-sum beliefs is distinct from people's party stance (as documented above), it is empirically an open question whether the zero-sum mindset has predictive power in people's attitudes about the economy and society over and above their stated party preferences, i.e., their partisan mindset. We study this question based on logistic regression models. For the baseline, we regress attitudes towards capitalism, the idea of trickle-down and meritocracy as well as inequality and redistribution on the reported score regarding zero-sum beliefs. The statistical relationship for the binary dependent variables (agree/disagree) is captured in a log odds ratio. We then add an extensive set of individual socio-demographic characteristics as control variables (see the list discussed in Section 3.6). This allows assessing whether there is a remaining partial correlation for people's zero-sum mindset with political

Table 3a — Covariates of zero-sum beliefs in Switzerland in 2024

	Dependent variable: Zero-sum beliefs (ZSB)			No. of observations
	ZSB [0-10] WLS	Strong ZSB [0,1] MLE from Probit	Marginal effects in probability units	n
Age	−0.008	0.003	0.001	8,762
	(0.023)	(0.010)	(0.002)	
Age squared/100	0.015	0.0003	0.0001	8,762
	(0.024)	(0.011)	(0.002)	
Gender (ref.: Male)				4,854
Female	0.153	−0.010	−0.003	3,838
	(0.125)	(0.046)	(0.010)	
Education (ref.: Compulsory school or lower)				568
Basic vocational education	−0.067	−0.027	−0.008	2,646
or diploma	(0.247)	(0.117)	(0.022)	
Higher vocational education	−0.113	0.030	0.009	1,407
	(0.272)	(0.159)	(0.030)	
University of applied sciences	−0.511*	−0.078	−0.021	4,141
or university	(0.273)	(0.136)	(0.024)	
Equivalence income (ref.: Lowest quartile)				2,120
Second quartile	−0.088	−0.109	−0.030*	2,179
	(0.216)	(0.090)	(0.014)	
Third quartile	−0.386	−0.188	−0.050***	2,237
	(0.336)	(0.140)	(0.015)	
Fourth quartile	−0.646**	−0.360***	−0.089***	2,226
	(0.267)	(0.112)	(0.015)	
Employment status (ref.: Employed)				4,919
Unemployed	−0.297	−0.60	−0.016	131
	(0.538)	(0.213)	(0.040)	
Retired	−0.314	−0.109*	−0.028	2,077
	(0.229)	(0.064)	(0.019)	
Self-employed	−0.550***	−0.186**	−0.045*	823
	(0.200)	(0.087)	(0.018)	

To be continued in Table 3b

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 3b — Covariates of zero-sum beliefs in Switzerland in 2024, continuation

	Dependent variable: Zero-sum beliefs (ZSB)			No. of observations
	ZSB [0-10] WLS	Strong ZSB [0,1] MLE from Probit	Marginal effects in probability units	n
Civil status (ref.: Married or with partner)				5,898
Divorced	0.136	0.071	0.019	792
	(0.145)	(0.071)	(0.018)	
Single	0.005	0.076	0.021	1,830
	(0.233)	(0.104)	(0.014)	
Widowed	−0.309	−0.251**	−0.059*	206
	(0.256)	(0.110)	(0.027)	
Nationality (ref.: Swiss only)				7,299
Swiss and foreign	−0.321	−0.014	−0.004	984
	(0.276	(0.104)	(0.018)	
Foreign only	−0.310∗	−0.142	−0.040	471
	(0.178)	(0.115)	(0.026)	
Denomination (ref.: Any denomination)				4,550
No denomination	0.359*	0.154*	0.043**	4,069
	(0.187)	(0.093)	(0.010)	
Urbanicity (ref.: Urban)				3,427
Mixed	−0.052	−0.050	−0.014	3,366
	(0.091)	(0.062)	(0.016)	
Rural	−0.044	−0.033	−0.009	1,969
	(0.214)	(0.075)	(0.017)	
Survey language	X	X	X	
Canton fixed effects	X	X	X	
Observations	8,762	8,762		
Adjusted R^2	0.031			
Akaike Inf. Crit.		8,924.52		

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Notes: The observations are on the individual level and weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level. We exclude observations with missing values for either income, education or canton; missing ages are replaced by the weighted sample mean. Estimates for employment status 'homemaker' and 'other' as well as estimates for missing value groups are not shown here.

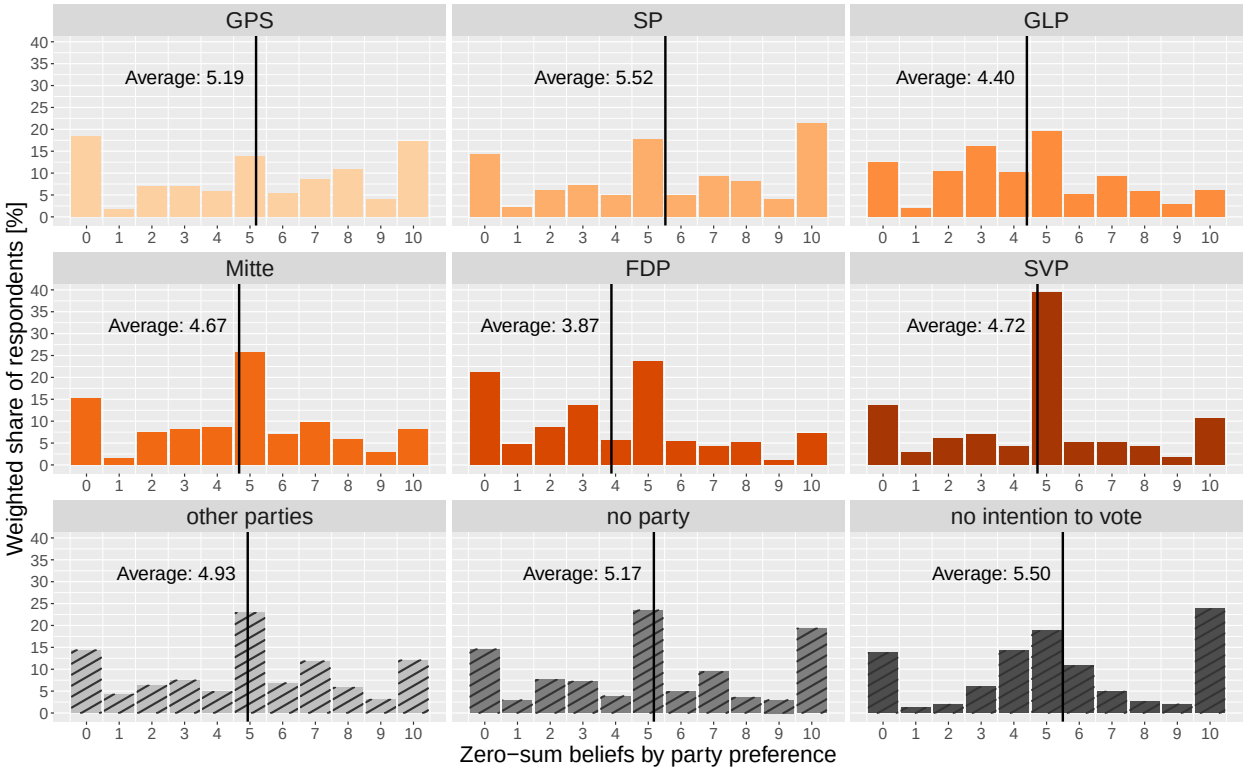

Figure 6 — Distribution of zero-sum beliefs by party preference
The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. The distributions draw on the following sample sizes: 'GPS' (Green Party) 1,013, 'SP' (Social Democratic Party) 2,038, 'GLP' (Green Liberal Party) 946, 'Mitte' (Center Party) 1,004, 'FDP' (The Liberals) 881, 'SVP' (Swiss People's Party) 800, 'other parties' 1,399, 'no party' 469, 'no intention to vote' 212.

views beyond their, for example, socio-economic standing. Finally, we additionally include information about people's most favored party. This reveals whether knowing about a person's zero-sum mindset, given their political stance, still adds to the statistical prediction of political views.[10]

Figure 7 summarizes the empirical results from fifteen regressions in total. The circles in light blue show the results for the estimates without control variables (and the vertical lines indicate the two-tailed 95% confidence intervals). The results marked by the blue triangles consider socio-demographic controls, and the ones displayed with diamonds include respondents' most favored party. The overall picture reveals that people with more pronounced zero-sum beliefs hold systematically different political attitudes from those who do not share this idea, but tend to view the world as positive-sum. A stronger zero-sum mindset is related to generally weaker support of capitalism and the ideas of trickle-down and meritocracy, but stronger support for the political view that inequality is too high and the rich should be taxed more. Importantly, this pattern is robust for the specifications (in dark blue) that include respondents' policy stance. Given that there is some partisan sorting of people with strong zero-sum beliefs, the log odds are smaller though (in absolute values) when party preferences are considered. For example, when taking zero-sum beliefs and socio-demographic characteristics into account, the log odds ratio for support of capitalism is -0.096 for people who express a one unit more pronounced zero-sum belief on the scale from zero to ten. For those reporting a ten rather than a zero, the odds of agreeing rather than disagreeing with the statement that 'capitalism works and should be preserved' is reduced by about 50%, or at the sample mean by 23.6 percentage points from 63.1% to 39.5%. When party stance is considered, the log odds for a one unit change in zero-sum beliefs is -0.070, and for people reporting a ten rather than a zero on the zero-sum beliefs scale, the share of people supporting capitalism is reduced by 16.7 percentage points. Regarding the support for more redistribution, the log odds ratio is 0.120 with socio-demographic controls only and 0.111 when party preferences are included as controls. At the sample mean, the probability of agreement is increased by 16.2 percentage points and by 15.4 percentage points when also including party preferences. Table A2 in the Appendix lists all estimates underlying the graphical presentation in Figure 7.

Figure A3 and Table A3 in the Appendix present the estimation results when a binary indicator for zero-sum beliefs is used (instead of the score on the scale from 0 to 10). We find the same pattern for the correlations with the five political views as in Figure 7. In addition, we provide separate Figures A5 – A9 in the Appendix for each political view and

[10] In a simpler, though technically less appropriate, analysis, we use weighted least squares regressions as linear probability models for the dichotomous outcome of agreement/disagreement. The corresponding results are similar and presented in the Appendix.

each of people's most favored parties showing the mean score for the stated zero-sum beliefs for people disagreeing and agreeing with the five different political views. The patterns show that generally the correlations between individual zero-sum beliefs and political attitudes also hold between people sympathizing with the same political party.

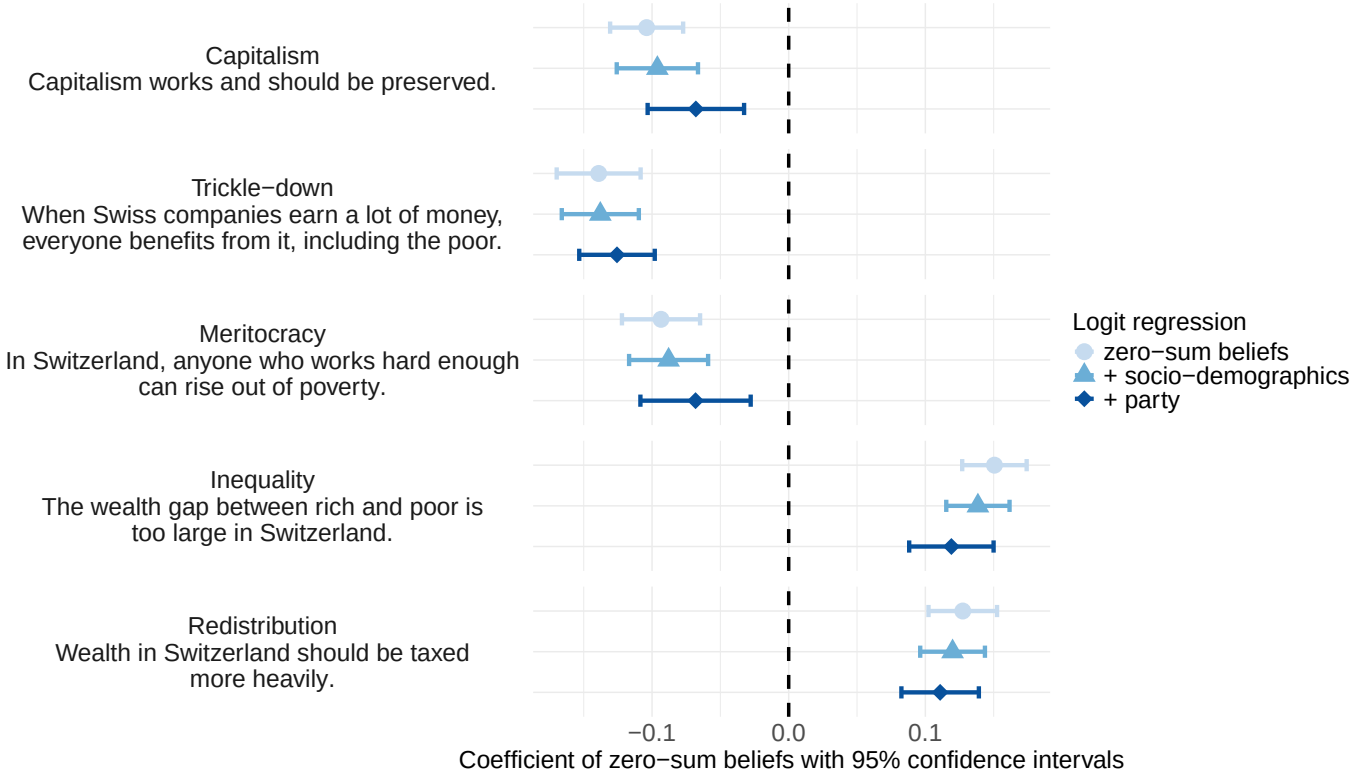

Figure 7 — Zero-sum beliefs and political views
Representation of the log odds coefficients from logit regressions of political views on zero-sum beliefs. The five political views are coded as binary variables, i.e., agree=1 and disagree=0. Scores for zero-sum beliefs are between 0 and 10. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level. Horizontal lines mark the 95% confidence intervals.

4.4 Zero-sum beliefs and life satisfaction

We test whether a zero-sum mindset is a separate determinant of people's attitude and judgment about their life over and above standard covariates of subjective well-being. We proceed by extending a standard regression on reported life satisfaction with an additional variable for people's zero-sum beliefs. Complementing the analysis separating the zero-sum mindset from the partisan mindset in people's political views, we also integrate information about respondents' most favored party as additional control variables. We estimate weighted

least squares regressions considering the same socio-demographic covariates as before, as well as indicator variables for the survey language and the canton of residence as additional controls.

Table 4a and Table 4b show in column (1) the results for the baseline estimation with the standard covariates only. The relationship between age and satisfaction with life follows a u-form with a minimum at age 33. There is no difference in average reported satisfaction with life between women and men ceteris paribus. However, people with a higher level of education as well as a higher equivalence income report higher life satisfaction. For people in the fourth income quartile, the average score on the scale from 0 to 10 is more than half a unit higher than for those in the bottom quartile. Compared to employed people, self-employed as well as retired people are more satisfied with life. However, unemployed people, on average, are about one unit less satisfied. Regarding people's civil status, people who are married or living with a partner report, on average, half a unit higher satisfaction with life than people who are either single or divorced. Compared to people with Swiss nationality, foreigners do not report systematically lower or higher life satisfaction. The same holds for people who do not belong to any religious denomination relative to the ones who do. Finally, there is no systematic difference between people who live in more urban or rural municipalities ceteris paribus. Similar results were found for people living in Switzerland two decades ago (Frey and Stutzer, 1999), with unemployed people suffering from strong work norms (Stutzer and Lalive, 2004). However, a systematically lower satisfaction with life no longer seems to be reported by foreigners in Switzerland.

In column (2), stated zero-sum beliefs are included as a further determinant. The partial correlations for the other covariates remain similar to the ones in column (1). Importantly, the measure for a zero-sum mindset shows an independent and sizable link with life satisfaction. People reporting most pronounced zero-sum beliefs, i.e., a score of ten rather than a score of zero, on average, state a 0.59 unit lower satisfaction with life on the ten point scale. This difference is as sizable as the difference between people in the bottom rather than in the top income quartile. The partial correlation for the zero-sum mindset remains similar in size when the proxy variables for people's partisan mindset are additionally considered, i.e., their most favored party in column (3). The estimated coefficient is only slightly reduced from -0.059 to -0.054 and remains highly statistically significant. The results in column (3) also show that there are systematic differences in satisfaction with life between people favoring different political parties, with Liberals (FDP) and Green Liberals (GLP) reporting higher satisfaction compared to people voting for the Center Party (Mitte).

Table 4a — Zero-sum beliefs and reported satisfaction with life in Switzerland in 2024

	Dependent variable: Satisfaction with life [0-10]		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Zero-sum beliefs		−0.059***	−0.054***
		(0.012)	(0.012)
Party preference (ref.: Mitte)			
GPS			0.064
			(0.130)
SP			−0.084
			(0.087)
GLP			0.241***
			(0.086)
FDP			0.361***
			(0.119)
SVP			−0.064
			(0.102)
Age	−0.018	−0.018	−0.018
	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Age squared/100	0.027**	0.028**	0.028**
	(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Gender (ref.: Male)			
Female	−0.040	−0.031	−0.009
	(0.075)	(0.077)	(0.076)
Education (ref.: Compulsory school or lower)			
Basic vocational education or diploma	0.180	0.176	0.169
	(0.113)	(0.111)	(0.110)
Higher vocational education	0.206	0.200	0.169
	(0.128)	(0.127)	(0.124)
University of applied sciences or university	0.367**	0.337**	0.292**
	(0.156)	(0.152)	(0.143)
Equivalence income (ref.: Lowest quartile)			
Second quartile	0.332***	0.327***	0.303***
	(0.079)	(0.076)	(0.074)
Third quartile	0.485***	0.462***	0.410***
	(0.085)	(0.083)	(0.086)
Fourth quartile	0.613***	0.574***	0.516***
	(0.110)	(0.107)	(0.109)

To be continued in Table 4b

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Table 4b — Zero-sum beliefs and reported satisfaction with life in Switzerland in 2024

	Dependent variable: Satisfaction with life [0-10]		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Employment status (ref.: Working)			
Unemployed	−1.056***	−1.074***	−1.052***
	(0.355)	(0.342)	(0.347)
Retired	0.191**	0.172*	0.141*
	(0.090)	(0.088)	(0.083)
Self-employed	0.280*	0.247*	0.232*
	(0.143)	(0.146)	(0.141)
Civil status (ref.: Married or with partner)			
Divorced	−0.572***	−0.564***	−0.551***
	(0.145)	(0.143)	(0.141)
Single	−0.570***	−0.569***	−0.552***
	(0.078)	(0.077)	(0.078)
Widowed	0.013	−0.005	−0.016
	(0.206)	(0.205)	(0.203)
Nationality (ref.: Swiss only)			
Swiss and foreign	0.060	0.041	0.042
	(0.080)	(0.086)	(0.084)
Foreign only	−0.057	−0.075	−0.012
	(0.134)	(0.132)	(0.150)
Denomination (ref.: Any denomination)			
No denomination	−0.139	−0.117	−0.111
	(0.093)	(0.089)	(0.083)
Urbanicity (ref.: Urban)			
Mixed	−0.078	−0.082	−0.088
	(0.094)	(0.094)	(0.086)
Rural	0.021	0.018	0.016
	(0.092)	(0.095)	(0.094)
Survey language	X	X	X
Canton fixed effects	X	X	X
Observations	8,754	8,754	8,754
Adjusted R^2	0.121	0.134	0.143

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Notes: The observations are on the individual level and weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level. We exclude observations with missing values in either income, education or canton; missing ages are replaced by the weighted sample mean. Estimates for employment status 'homemaker' and 'other' as well as estimates for missing value groups are not shown here.

5 Concluding remarks

The way individuals perceive and approach the world has consequences for their attitudes, judgments and behavior. Here, we focus on the cognitive perspective of a zero-sum mindset. We argue and provide empirical evidence that a zero-sum mindset is a candidate of a generalized belief that helps to predict differences in people's political views and even their subjective well-being. In fact, we observe in newly compiled survey data for Switzerland that people with pronounced zero-sum beliefs are much less likely to support capitalism and to agree with the idea of a trickle-down economy and of meritocracy. Instead, they see the wealth gap between the rich and the poor as too large and are in favor of wealth being more heavily taxed. Regarding their subjective well-being, these same people with strong zero-sum beliefs report much lower satisfaction with life ceteris paribus. These differences in attitudes and judgments are observed even when people's partisan mindset in terms of their most favored party is statistically considered.

While this study provides evidence for the role of a zero-sum mindset with regard to political views and subjective well-being, several open questions remain. First, it would be valuable to explore the causal direction between zero-sum beliefs and political views. We conceptually argue for a causal link between people's mindset (as an underlying basic concept) and their attitudes (as derived in the current politico-economic process). However, empirically we are bound to demonstrate a strong association. Future research could further investigate whether a zero-sum mindset drives certain political views based on empirical strategies that get closer to a causal design. The endogeneity of a zero-sum mindset could similarly be studied further and related to economic/political context and experiences. It is likely this combination shaping individuals' perceptions of social and economic competition and cooperation that also contributes to the formation of zero-sum beliefs. In our study, all the respondents live and act under the same general institutional conditions. A general context effect thus cannot explain the individual-level correlation between a zero-sum mindset and political attitudes.

Second, we have focused on a national context (Switzerland), which may influence the generalizability of our findings. It remains an open question whether the observed patterns hold in different cultural and political environments. Comparative studies across countries with varying levels of market orientation, more or less developed social security nets, and more or less inclusive political institutions could help assess whether these relationships are universally applicable or context-dependent.

Third, our design does not allow assessing whether the observed strong correlation between a zero-sum mindset and satisfaction with life is due to differences in experienced affect, as people perceive their environment as more threatening, or due to differences in life

outcomes not captured by the control variables in the empirical model. This, for example, could refer to the quality of relationships in people's professional as well as personal life. A broader survey capturing the state variables that potentially link zero-sum beliefs and people's well-being could shed light on this aspect.

With a better understanding of these basic aspects, we then could, and perhaps should, approach the thorny question of how to address a generalized zero-sum belief that does not align with the actual context of a specific situation.

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Appendix

A.1 Original survey questions

This section lists the original survey questions for our main variables of interest in German.

Zero-sum beliefs

Frage: Bitte schätzen Sie Ihre Meinung auf dieser Skala ein: Wenn Sie voll und ganz die erste Meinung vertreten, geben Sie bitte die 0 an; vertreten Sie voll und ganz die zweite Meinung, wählen Sie die 10. Mit den Werten dazwischen können Sie Ihre Angabe abstufen.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Weiss nicht/Keine Antwort*

Die Menschen können nur auf Kosten ihrer Mitmenschen reich werden.	Wohlstand kann so wachsen, dass genug für alle da ist.

Partisan stance

Frage: Wenn am nächsten Sonntag schon Nationalratswahlen wären, welcher Partei würden Sie heute Ihre Stimme hauptsächlich geben?

Original categories	**Recoded categories for analyses**
GPS – Grüne Partei der Schweiz	GPS
SP – Sozialdemokratische Partei der Schweiz	SP
GLP – Grünliberale Partei	GLP
Die Mitte (ehemals CVP/BDP)	Mitte
FDP – FDP.Die Liberalen	FDP
SVP – Schweizerische Volkspartei	SVP
EVP – Evangelische Volkspartei	Other
Lega dei Ticinesi	Other
CSP – Christlich-soziale Partei	Other
Alternative Linke / Alternative Liste / Partei der Arbeit / solidaritéS	Other
EDU – Eidgenössisch-Demokratische Union	Other

Piratenpartei	Other
Mouvement Citoyens Romand	Other
Eindeutig andere Partei	Other
Mehrere Parteien gleich	Other
Kann mich nicht entscheiden	Other
Keine Partei	No party
Leere Liste	No party
Würde nicht teilnehmen	No intention to vote

Political views

Frage: Sie sehen in der Folge einige Aussagen rund um das Thema Schweizer Wirtschaft. Geben Sie bitte zu jeder Aussage an, inwiefern Sie mit ihr einverstanden sind. Antwortmöglichkeiten:

Voll einverstanden
Eher einverstanden
Eher nicht einverstanden
Gar nicht einverstanden
Weiss nicht/Keine Antwort

- **(Capitalism)** 'Kapitalismus funktioniert nicht und muss abgeschafft werden.'[11]
- **(Trickle-down)** 'Wenn Schweizer Unternehmen viel Geld verdienen, profitieren alle davon, auch die Armen.'
- **(Meritocracy)** 'In der Schweiz kann jede, die und jeder, der hart genug arbeitet, aus der Armut herauskommen.'
- **(Inequality)** 'Das Wohlstandsgefälle zwischen Reich und Arm ist in der Schweiz zu gross.'
- **(Redistribution)** 'Reichtum sollte in der Schweiz stärker versteuert werden.'

[11] This statement was rephrased for the analyses such that increasing agreement corresponds to increasing support for and/or belief in capitalism.

Subjective well-being

Frage: Ganz allgemein gefragt – wie zufrieden sind Sie mit Ihrem Leben? 0 bedeutet 'gar nicht zufrieden' und 10 'vollumfänglich zufrieden'.

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 *Weiss nicht/Keine Antwort*

A.2 Zero-sum beliefs distribution in analysis sample

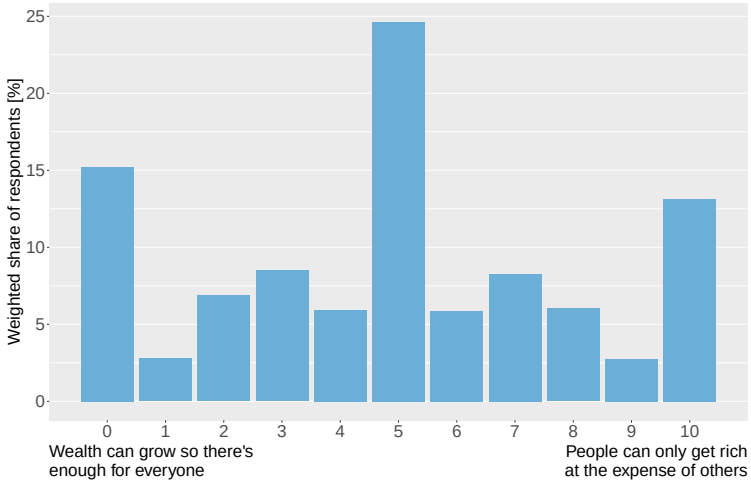

Figure A1 — Zero-sum beliefs in Switzerland in 2024 - analysis sample
The distribution is based on 8,762 observations that are used in the main analyses. The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative. Original statements describe the zero-sum scale in German from 0 'Wohlstand kann so wachsen, dass genug für alle da ist.' to 10 'Die Menschen können nur auf Kosten ihrer Mitmenschen reich werden.'
Data source: SRG and GfS (2024).

A.3 Life satisfaction distribution in analysis sample

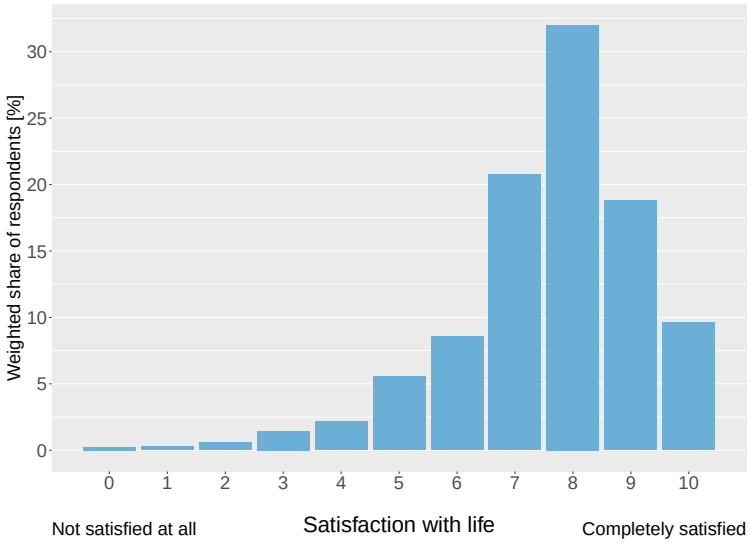

Figure A2 — Life satisfaction in Switzerland in 2024 - analysis sample
Distribution of answers to the question 'Generally speaking, how satisfied are you with life?' based on 8,754 observations used in the main analyses. The observations are weighted such that the sample is nationally representative.
Data source: SRG and GfS (2024).

A.4 Zero-sum beliefs and political views

Table A2 — Logit regression results (log odds) for zero-sum beliefs and political views

Political view	Model	Coef	SE
Capitalism	zero-sum beliefs	-0.104	0.014
	+ socio-demographics	-0.096	0.015
	+ party	-0.068	0.018
Trickle-down	zero-sum beliefs	-0.139	0.016
	+ socio-demographics	-0.138	0.014
	+ party	-0.126	0.014
Meritocracy	zero-sum beliefs	-0.093	0.015
	+ socio-demographics	-0.088	0.015
	+ party	-0.068	0.021
Inequality	zero-sum beliefs	0.151	0.012
	+ socio-demographics	0.138	0.012
	+ party	0.119	0.016
Redistribution	zero-sum beliefs	0.127	0.013
	+ socio-demographics	0.120	0.012
	+ party	0.111	0.014

Notes: Coef = Coefficient. SE = Standard error. Log odds coefficients from logit regressions of political views on zero-sum beliefs, controlling for socio-demographics (+ socio-demographics) and party preference (+ party). The five political views are coded as binary variables, i.e., agree=1 and disagree=0. Scores for zero-sum beliefs are between 0 and 1. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level.

Table A3 — Logit regression results (log odds) for strong zero-sum beliefs and political views

Political view	**Model**	**Coef**	**SE**
Capitalism	zero-sum beliefs	-0.829	0.077
	+ socio-demographics	-0.759	0.081
	+ party	-0.513	0.115
Trickle-down	zero-sum beliefs	-1.133	0.097
	+ socio-demographics	-1.134	0.099
	+ party	-0.943	0.116
Meritocracy	zero-sum beliefs	-0.759	0.113
	+ socio-demographics	-0.734	0.111
	+ party	-0.493	0.143
Inequality	zero-sum beliefs	1.291	0.137
	+ socio-demographics	1.202	0.109
	+ party	0.915	0.105
Redistribution	zero-sum beliefs	1.132	0.080
	+ socio-demographics	1.092	0.086
	+ party	0.863	0.132

Notes: Coef = Coefficient. SE = Standard error. Log odds coefficients from logit regressions of political views on strong zero-sum beliefs, controlling for socio-demographics (+ socio-demographics) and party preference (+ party). The five political views are coded as binary variables, i.e., agree=1 and disagree=0. Scores for strong zero-sum beliefs are binary 0 or 1. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level.

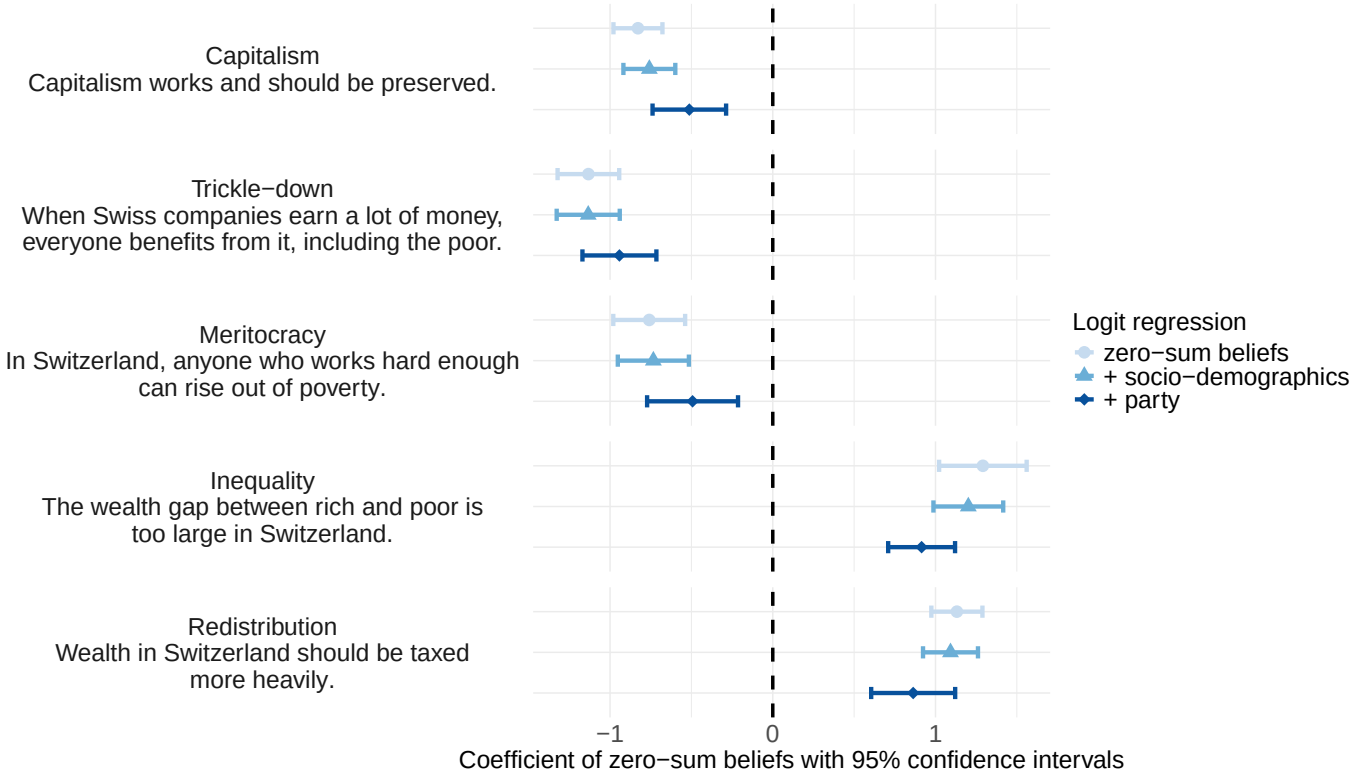

Figure A3 — Strong zero-sum beliefs and political views
Representation of the log odds coefficients of strong zero-sum beliefs from logit regressions. The five political views are coded as binary variables, i.e., agree=1 and disagree=0. Scores for strong zero-sum beliefs are binary 0 or 1. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level. Horizontal lines mark the 95% confidence intervals.

Table A4 — Weighted least squares regression results for zero-sum beliefs and political views

Political view	**Model**	**Coef**	**SE**
Capitalism	zero-sum beliefs	-0.023	0.003
	+ socio-demographics	-0.020	0.003
	+ party	-0.013	0.004
Trickle-down	zero-sum beliefs	-0.030	0.003
	+ socio-demographics	-0.027	0.003
	+ party	-0.021	0.002
Meritocracy	zero-sum beliefs	-0.022	0.003
	+ socio-demographics	-0.019	0.003
	+ party	-0.012	0.004
Inequality	zero-sum beliefs	0.020	0.003
	+ socio-demographics	0.017	0.002
	+ party	0.013	0.002
Redistribution	zero-sum beliefs	0.025	0.002
	+ socio-demographics	0.021	0.002
	+ party	0.014	0.002

Notes: Coef = Coefficient. SE = Standard error. Coefficients from weighted least squares regressions of political views on zero-sum beliefs, controlling for socio-demographics (+ socio-demographics) and party preference (+ party). The political views are coded as binary variables, i.e., agree=1 and disagree=0. Scores for zero-sum beliefs are between 0 and 10. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level.

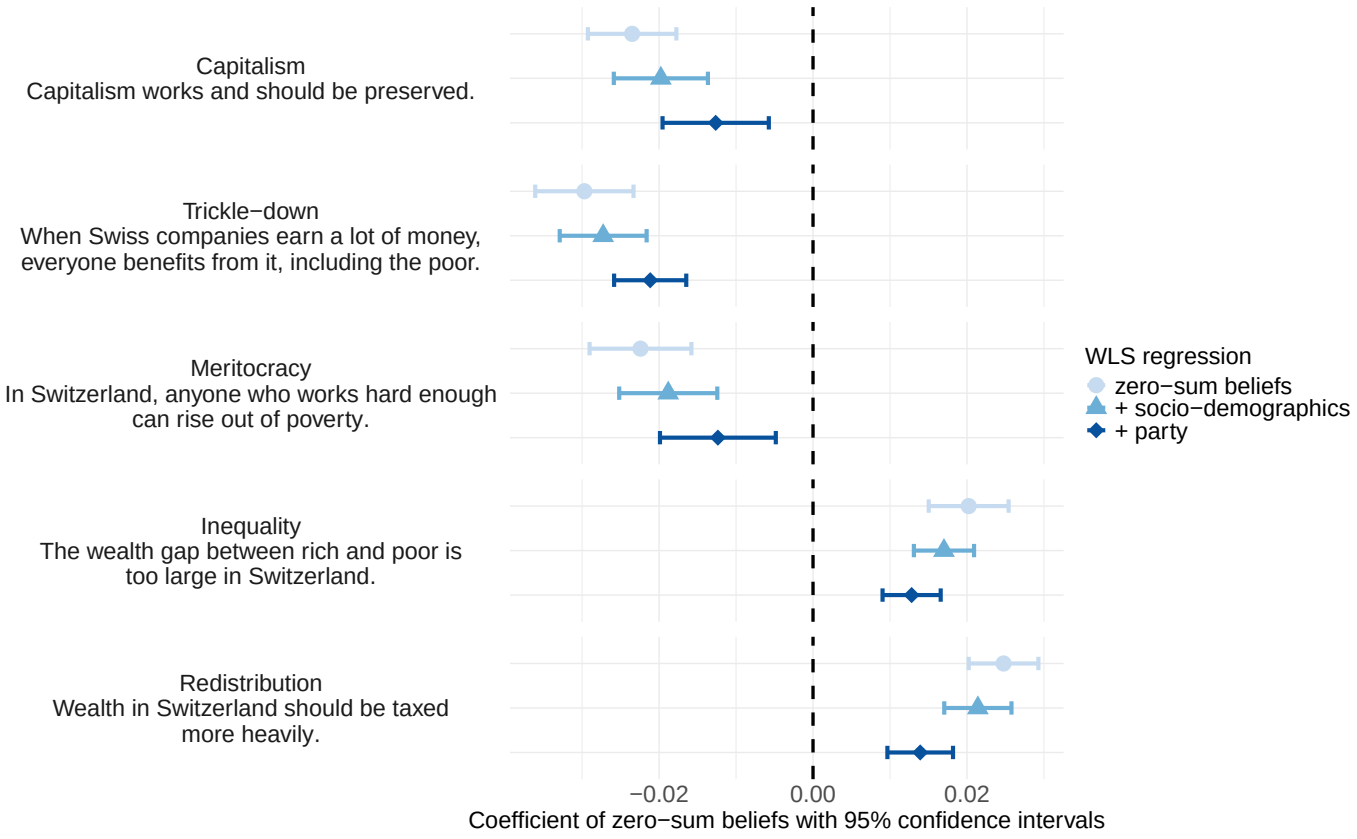

Figure A4 — Zero-sum beliefs and political views using WLS
Representation of the coefficients of zero-sum beliefs from weighted least squares (WLS) regressions. The five political views are coded as binary variables, i.e., agree=1 and disagree=0. Scores for zero-sum beliefs are between 0 and 10. Standard errors are clustered at the canton level. Horizontal lines mark the 95% confidence intervals.

A.5 Zero-sum beliefs and political views within parties

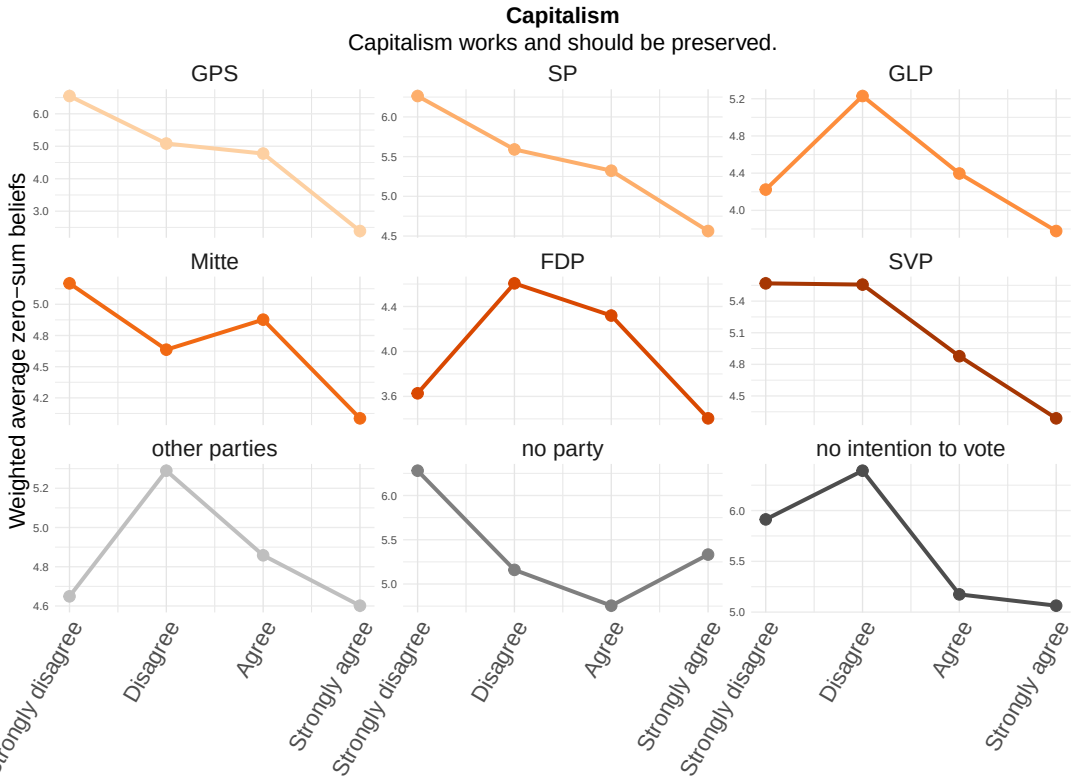

Figure A5 — Zero-sum beliefs variation with regard to capitalism by party

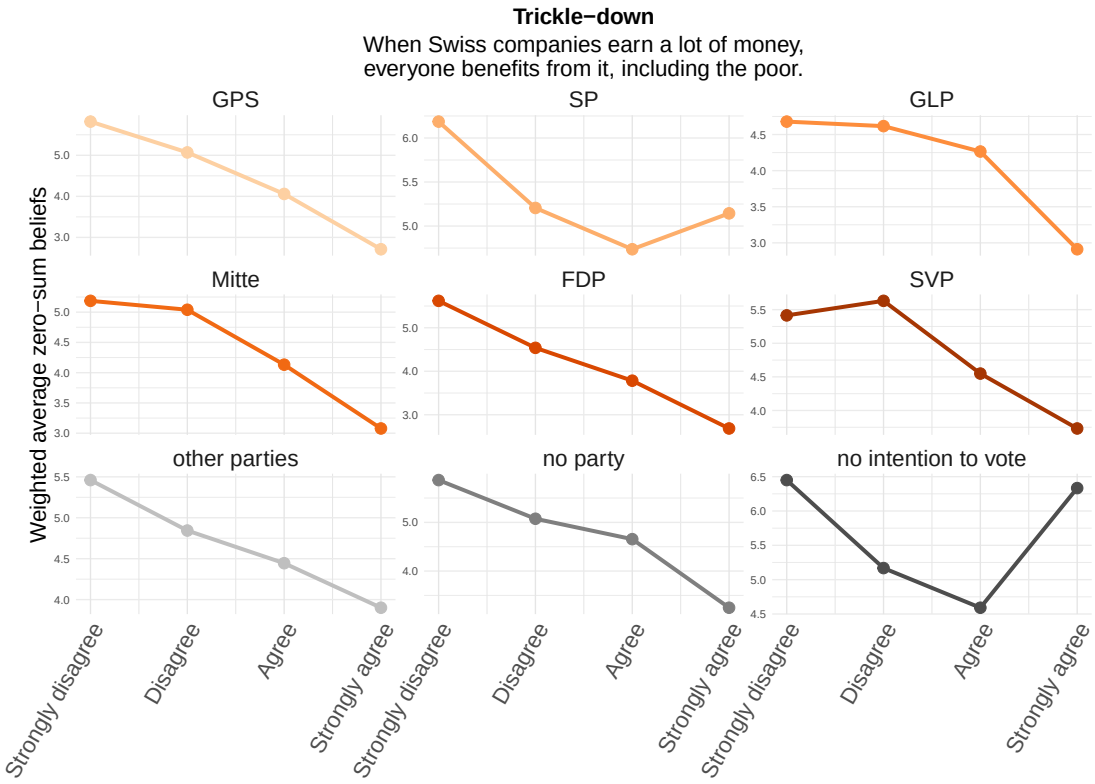

Figure A6 — Zero-sum beliefs variation with regard to trickle-down by party

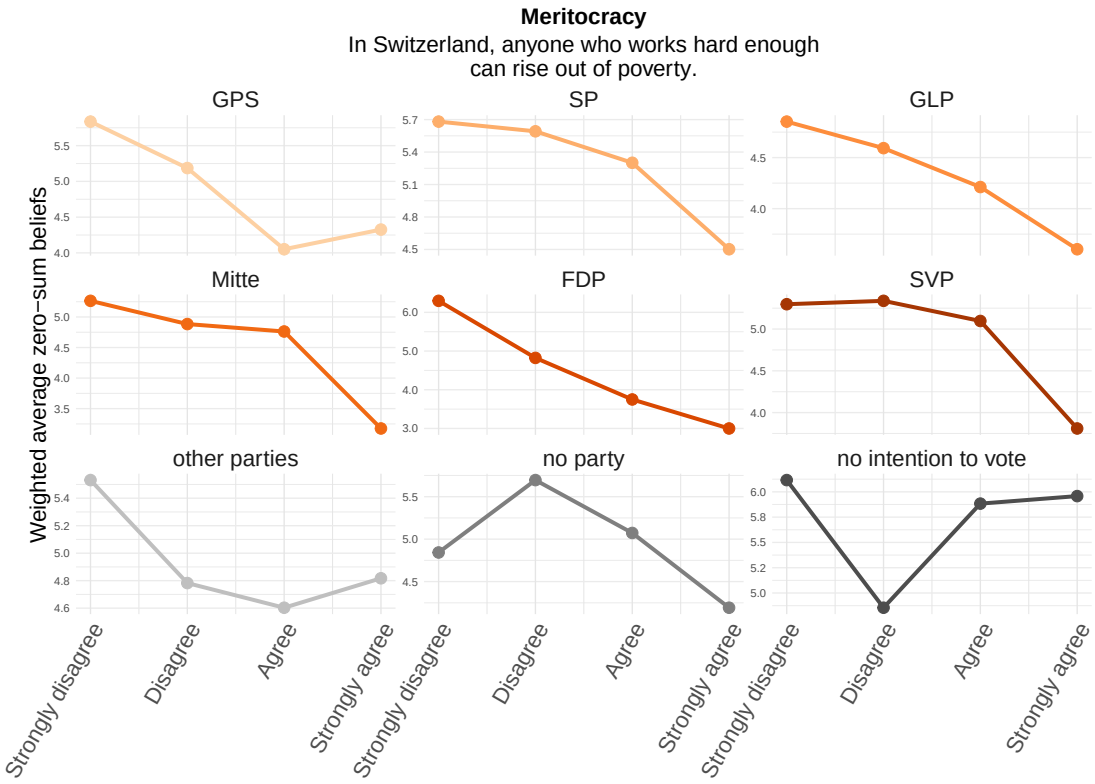

Figure A7 — Zero-sum beliefs variation with regard to meritocracy by party

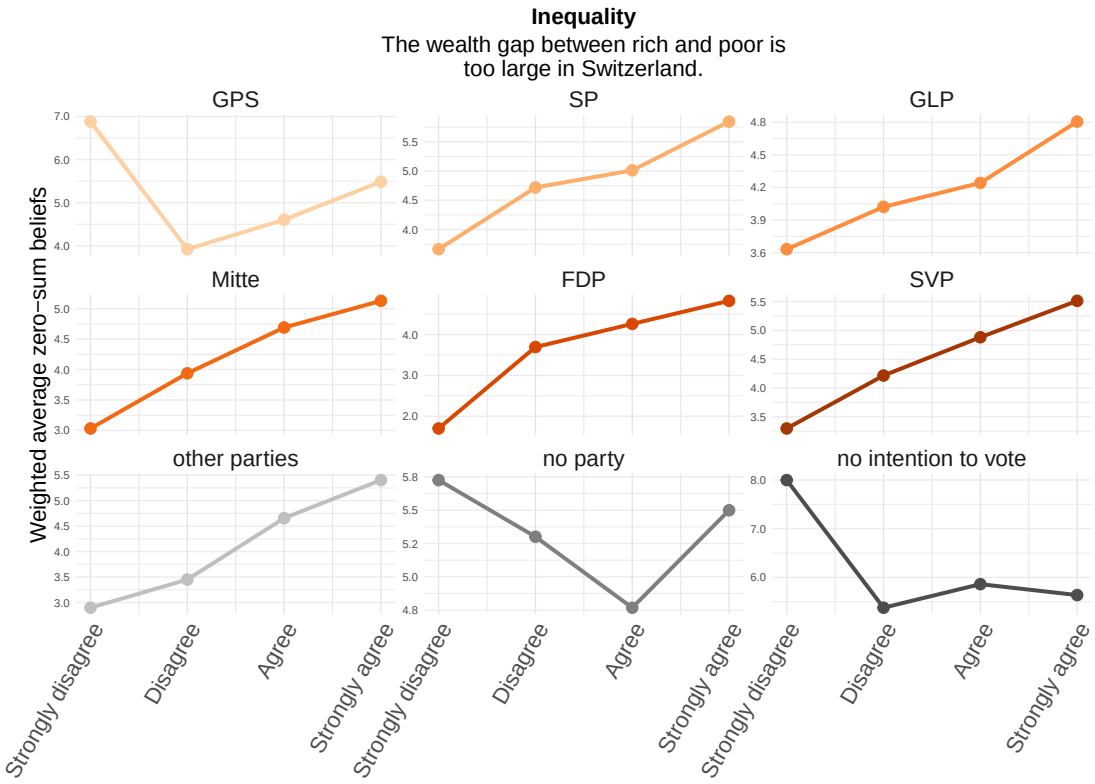

Figure A8 — Zero-sum beliefs variation with regard to inequality by party

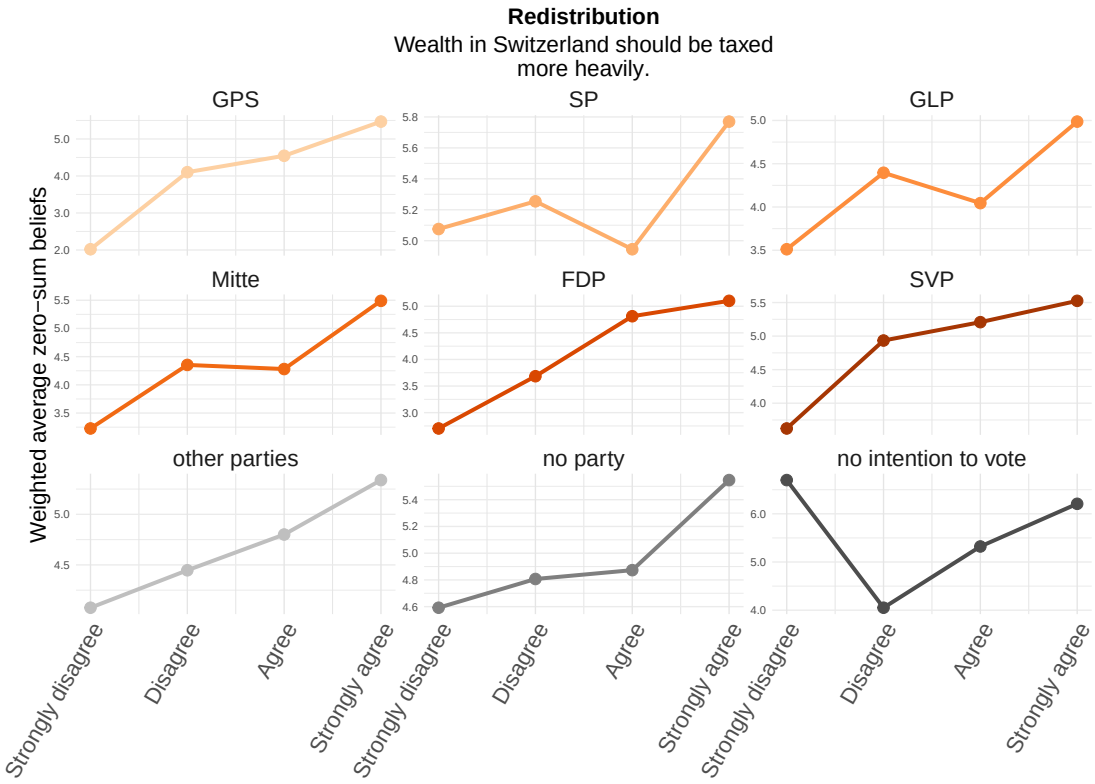

Figure A9 — Zero-sum beliefs variation with regard to redistribution by party