What's Worth Knowing?
Economists' Opinions about Economics

Peter Andre* Armin Falk**

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Abstract: In global surveys with more than 10,000 economists, we study economists' views about what is worth knowing in economics. Researchers' opinions are highly heterogeneous and reveal a discrepancy between what most economists consider to be worth knowing and the research they actually produce. Relative to the status quo, most economists believe that economics should become more policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, disruptive, and pursue more diverse research topics. However, economists strongly underestimate how many of their colleagues endorse these views. Because researchers follow strategic motives and pursue projects that they expect their colleagues to reward, these misperceptions could sustain a miscoordination in the production of research.

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1 Introduction

Science and research matter. They shape how we make sense of the world, how we live together, and how we design policies. What researchers work on, which topics they choose, and how they resolve trade-offs between different research objectives therefore holds central societal importance. However, as famously argued by Max Weber (1919), the question about what is "interesting", "worth studying", or "worth knowing" cannot be answered scientifically. Instead, researchers have to rely on their intuitions and subjective, value-driven assessments. They may also follow strategic considerations and choose research projects that they expect their colleagues to like. The question of what is worth knowing is especially important in economics. Economics research has significant societal impact but has repeatedly been criticized for its choice of topics and objectives (e.g., Akerlof, 2020; Colander, 2011; Oswald and Stern, 2019; Romer, 2015; Shiller and Shiller, 2011).

This paper provides an empirical account of the "problem of problem choice" in economics focusing on three fundamental questions: Do economists agree on what is worth knowing in their discipline? Does their aggregate research output reflect these research preferences? Finally, can strategic motives create a systematic mismatch between economists' preferred and actual research output?

We start by documenting economists' views on the topics and objectives that economics should pursue in a large global survey among approximately 8,000 professional academic economists. To ensure that our sample represents the full spectrum of economic researchers, we identified and invited all researchers who actively contribute to the international economics literature. Using detailed bibliometric background data and post-stratification weights, we show that our weighted sample represents the profession in terms of a wide range of observable characteristics, including gender, years since first publication, number of publications, centrality in the co-author network, number of Top Five publications, h-index, and main field.

The survey focuses on two sets of questions. The first is concerned with ten trade-offs between fundamental research objectives, including policy relevance vs. causal identification, pure vs. applied theory, incremental vs. disruptive research, and the level of multidisciplinarity. We ask respondents to indicate whether they believe that the current state of research in economics is "about right", or whether they would prefer more or less of a specific research objective, respectively. The second set of questions relates to research topics in economics. Using the common JEL taxonomy, respondents indicate what their preferred distribution of topics would look like. We compare these shares with the actual distribution of topics.

Our first main result is substantial heterogeneity in economists' research preferences.

This holds for both research topics and trade-offs concerning fundamental research objectives: Respondents assign strongly varying importance to different JEL topics and support opposing research objectives.

Second, despite the observed variation in preferences, a majority of economists typically agree on a direction of preferred change. In terms of research objectives, most economists express a preference for more policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, as well as risky and disruptive research. The shift towards increasing policy relevance is supported even if it comes at the cost of less causal identification, pure theory, basic research, and intrinsic interest. Economists also favor quality over quantity of publications and would prefer a lower level of specialization among researchers. With respect to research topics, we document a general preference for more diversity. For example, economists assign greater importance to currently less prominent topics such as *H Public Economics* or *N Economic History* and place less weight on the three most popular topics of *D Microeconomics*, *G Financial Economics*, and *L Industrial Organization*. Hence, our second main result is that the discipline's current research output does not reflect the majority view among its researchers.

Third, the apparent mismatch between what economists prefer and work on raises the question about the potential sources of this mismatch. The first candidate that we discuss is the role of lags in the publication process. However, we conclude that this is an unlikely explanation, as recent publication trends are unlikely to noticeably reduce the mismatch anytime soon. Next, we reject the idea that influential economists – reviewers and editors at the discipline's best journals – are satisfied with the status quo. To the contrary, they express largely similar views to those of the discipline at large.

We therefore turn to the role of researchers' strategic motives which we investigate in an additional survey with about 1,100 economists, again representing all ranks and fields of the profession. A mismatch may occur if economists strategically choose to work on projects that they expect their colleagues to like but *under*estimate their colleagues' support for policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive research. In favor of this conjecture, we find that many researchers agree that strategic considerations, such as publishing well or improving one's employment prospects in academia, play a central role in their choice of research projects. Moreover, most economists systematically *under*estimate how many of their colleagues would prefer a shift towards more policy relevance, multidisciplinarity, and disruptive research. Consistent with this misperception, most researchers also believe that it is easier to publish papers in line with the status quo rather than the preferred changes. Hence, our third main result is that researchers follow strategic concerns but think that the incentives they face *oppose* the types of research for which we actually document widespread support among economists. This miscoordination could sustain the observed mismatch between economists' preferred

and actual research output.

Our results have important implications for the process of research production. For example, the finding that researchers display heterogeneous views about what constitutes "interesting" research objectives or topics reflects Max Weber's (1919) fundamental insight that researchers' views about "what is interesting" are valuable and irreplaceable, but also subjective.

Moreover, the fact that economists currently do not appreciate and work on what they collectively prefer suggests that the discipline may be stuck in a "bad equilibrium", consistent with recently-raised criticism about the research and publication process in economics. Critics have argued that economics favors "hard" methods over relevant questions, worships "mathiness", is too specialized, neglects critical topics of our times such as climate change, and submits to a "tyranny" of top journals (e.g., Akerlof, 2020; Heckman and Moktan, 2020; Oswald and Stern, 2019; Romer, 2015; Shiller and Shiller, 2011). Our evidence also provides a more general "proof of concept". There is no guarantee that researchers work on the topics that they collectively prefer. Researchers might not even be aware of their colleagues' views, in line with research documenting inaccurate beliefs about others outside academia (Andre et al., 2024; Bursztyn et al., 2020; Bursztyn and Yang, 2022).

The observed mismatch between preferred and actual research output also has implications for the diversity of scholars in economics (Bayer and Rouse, 2016; Buckles, 2019; Lundberg and Stearns, 2019; Lundberg, ed, 2020). For example, we find that female economists more strongly disagree with economics' current research objectives and topics. This suggests that the current under-representation of particular groups in economics could lead to an under-representation of their research preferences, rendering an academic career even less attractive to them. The findings thus suggest an additional reason why women remain under-represented in economics (Allgood et al., 2019; Avilova and Goldin, 2018; Card et al., 2020; Dupas et al., 2021; Lundberg, ed, 2020; Sarsons et al., 2021).

More generally, our study complements research monitoring the status quo of science, its topics and methods, the peer-review and publication process, as well as citation trajectories of articles, scholars, and entire fields (e.g., Angrist et al., 2020; Bowles and Carlin, 2020; Brodeur et al., 2016, 2020; Card and DellaVigna, 2013, 2020; Card et al., 2020; Charness et al., 2023; Chopra et al., 2023; Currie et al., 2020; Hamermesh, 2018; Heckman and Moktan, 2020). Existing survey studies have documented economists' views on issues such as economic policy, reigning paradigms in the discipline, open science practices, or mental health (e.g., Andre et al., 2022; Bolotnyy et al., 2022; Colander, 2005; Frey et al., 2010; Sapienza and Zingales, 2013; Swanson et al., 2020). By contrast, our project studies economists' opinions about the current research practice

in economics. We focus on the field's research objectives and topics and show that the research output of a scientific discipline does not necessarily match the preferences of its researchers. Moreover, our study is the first to give a voice to and represent the views of such a large and diverse group of economists.

The choice of research questions, topics, and objectives is arguably among the most important choices that researchers face, reflecting both academic freedom and responsibility. Therefore, we hope that the results of our study stimulate and inform a debate about the fundamental question of *what is worth knowing*.[1]

The remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 presents the main survey instrument, and Section 3 describes the main sample and study population. Next, Section 4 presents economists' opinion on economics and documents the mismatch between their preferred and actual research output. Then, Section 5 sheds light on possible explanations, and Section 6 discusses the results.

2 Survey

This study aims to document which research objectives and topics economists think should matter in economics and to compare their views with the current state of economic research. Our main survey is separated into two modules that are tailored to meet these objectives. Each respondent is randomly assigned to one module. The first module explores trade-offs between different research objectives, while the second focuses on research topics. Both modules contain several demographic questions, including career status, gender, and age. Both parts also include a block of questions on job satisfaction and stress. Below, we describe the main questions of each module in turn. Appendix B contains their wording. The full survey is available at https://osf.io/57mgv/. The follow-up survey which measures economists' perceptions of their colleagues' views will be introduced only later in Section 5.

2.1 Research objectives

The research objectives module explores whether economists think that economic research should embrace different research objectives than it does today. The module comprises ten questions that contrast or trade-off commonly-discussed research objectives, such as policy relevance versus researchers' intrinsic interest or more versus less

[1] It would be inconsistent to study what economists consider worth being known without addressing whether this very question is actually worth being asked. Fortunately, we can once again refer to the judgment of thousands of economists. We asked a randomly selected quarter of our respondents whether they think that it is interesting to study how and on which topics economists think they should work. Almost all – 88% – think it is.

specialization. Of course, these trade-offs are sometimes more and sometimes less severe, but in many cases economics can have more of one research goal only at the expense of the other.[2] Respondents indicate whether, compared to the current state of economic research, they think economics should place more weight on one objective versus the other. Panel A of Table 1 provides an overview of all ten questions. The questions can roughly be categorized into four blocks.[3]

Block 1 revolves around the **policy relevance and public importance of research**. Specifically, we ask how the societal relevance of a research project should be traded-off against a researcher's intrinsic interest and curiosity (question 1), against basic research (question 2), and against rigorous causal identification (question 3). The block also includes a question that asks whether economic theory should be "pure" and study general theoretical principles or "evidence-related" and focus on empirically observed, applied phenomena (question 4). The questions, thus, connect to the discussion about the role and importance of policy relevance in economic research. They also relate to George Akerlof's critique that economics often prioritizes "hard" research methods, including causal identification and technically advanced pure theory, over important research questions (Akerlof, 2020).

Block 2 deals with the **scope and breadth of economic research** and asks whether individual researchers should be more or less specialized (question 5) and whether their research should be more or less multidisciplinary (question 6). Here, multidisciplinarity means incorporating insights from other disciplines than economics in order to study economic questions. Both specialization and multidisciplinarity have frequently been discussed in economics (e.g., Fourcade et al., 2015; Shiller and Shiller, 2011).

Block 3 investigates the conflict between **productive tradition and risky innovation** (Foster et al., 2015; Kuhn, 1962). Should economic research be more incremental and connect closely to the existing literature or more disruptive and propose new approaches (question 8)? Likewise, should economic research be less or more risky, where high risks projects have an uncertain impact, but may come with a higher expected impact (question 7)? The final question in this block investigates whether respondents prefer more papers of lower quality or fewer papers of higher quality (question 9).

Block 4 consists of a single question that relates to a longstanding debate about the **goal of theory in economics: prediction or explanation** (question 10). Is its goal

[2]When a trade-off is non-binding – for example, when causal identification and important research questions are feasible at the same time – its solution is trivial. Researchers' preferences matter most when the trade-offs are binding, which often appears to be the case in economics. We stress this to participants. To be on the safe side, in a later robustness survey, we explicitly write: "Please focus on the cases in which causal identification is only possible at the expense of asking less important questions." Doing so, we obtain qualitatively similar and quantitatively even more pronounced results (outlined in Appendix E.3).

[3]The order in which we present the questions here differs from their order in the survey, see Appendix B.

to predict economic outcomes, irrespective of whether its theoretical assumptions and mechanism are empirically plausible (Friedman, 1953)? Or is its goal to understand and explain economic outcomes (Hausman, 2008)?

In each of the ten questions, respondents first read a brief description of the opposing research objectives. *Policy relevance*, for example, is described as "Research informs policy, with an impact on societal well-being." *Basic research* is described as "Research deals with fundamental and basic phenomena, laying the ground for more applied research. It has no immediate policy relevance." Then, participants indicate their view on a seven-point scale. Each scale is centered around the option "Current state is about right". The other response options express disagreement with the status quo and place increasing weight on one research objective versus the other. For instance, the question on *Basic research* versus *Policy relevance* has the response options "Much more", "Moderately more", and "Slightly more" policy relevance, "Current state is about right", as well as "Slightly more", "Moderately more", and "Much more" basic research. The question on specialization comes with the response options "Much less", "Moderately less", and "Slightly less" specialization, "Current state is about right", as well as "Slightly more", "Moderately more", and "Much more" specialization. We test whether participants' assessments differ for the whole discipline of economics and their own field of expertise. Respondents are instructed to provide two answers: one for economics as a whole and one for their own primary JEL field.[4]

2.2 JEL topics

We ask the survey participants which share of papers should be written on which topic. Each respondent can allocate a total of 100 points between different research topics. The points represent all published research articles by economists in a given year so that each point corresponds to 1% of the total research output. Thus, respondents specify their preferred distribution of research topics in economics. For example, if they assign 10 points to a topic, they think that 10% of the work in economics should focus on this topic.

We use the Journal of Economic Literature's (JEL) subject descriptors to categorize research topics in economics (see Cherrier (2017) for a discussion of their history). These so-called JEL codes have three layers and separate economics into 19 primary topics (or fields, 1st layer) with a total of 130 subtopics (2nd layer) and 845 subject codes (3rd layer). Here, our main focus is on the 19 primary topics whose labels mostly align with commonly used field names such as *Public Economics* or *Industrial Organization*.[5]

[4]Participants can assign themselves to one primary JEL field. The list of fields is slightly adjusted to separate *Theoretical Microeconomics* from *Empirical Microeconomics* and to distinguish the sub-fields of JEL category Z.

[5]We ignore the residual JEL category *Y Miscellaneous categories* which is typically not assigned to

Table 1 Overview of research objective questions and JEL topics

Panel A: Research objective questions

Block 1: Policy relevance and public importance of research	
1	Intrinsic interest vs. policy relevance
2	Basic research vs. policy relevance
3	Causal identification vs. importance
4	Pure theory vs. applied theory
Block 2: Scope and breadth of research	
5	Less vs. more specialization
6	Less vs. more multidisciplinarity
Block 3: Productive tradition or risky innovation	
7	Less vs. more risky research
8	Incremental vs. disruptive research
9	Quantity vs. quality
Block 4: Goal of theory: prediction or explanation	
10	Predictive theory vs. explanatory theory

Panel B: JEL topics

A	General Economics and Teaching
B	History of Economic Thought, Methodology, and Heterodox Approaches
C	Mathematical and Quantitative Methods
D	Microeconomics
E	Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics
F	International Economics
G	Financial Economics
H	Public Economics
I	Health, Education, and Welfare
J	Labor and Demographic Economics
K	Law and Economics
L	Industrial Organization
M	Business Administration and Business Economics • Marketing • Accounting • Personnel Economics
N	Economic History
O	Economic Development, Innovation, Technological Change, and Growth
P	Economic Systems
Q	Agricultural and Natural Resource Economics • Environmental and Ecological Economics
R	Urban, Rural, Regional, Real Estate, and Transportation Economics
Z	Other Special Topics

Examples for JEL sub-topics: D6 Welfare Economics, D7 Analysis of Collective Decision Making
Examples for JEL subject codes: D61 Allocative Efficiency • Cost–Benefit Analysis, D62 Externalities

Notes: Panel A summarizes the ten research objective questions. Panel B presents the primary topics of the JEL classification system of the EconLit database (source: www.aeaweb.org/econlit/jelCodes.php).

Panel B of Table 1 lists all primary JEL topics. In the survey, respondents can explore the subtopics and subject codes of each JEL topic to familiarize themselves with its content. The JEL classification system provides a unique opportunity to study topic choice in economics because it covers the whole discipline of economics and it is known to most economic researchers. Moreover, its stringent classification criteria are used to categorize most published research articles (see Section 3.1). This allows us to document the actual distribution of research topics in economics to which we can then compare the preferred distribution that we elicit in the survey.

3 Sample

Numerous researchers contribute to the economic literature and shape economic research objectives and topics. Here, our objective is to represent all strata of the economics profession and, hence, to give a voice to all active economic researchers, that is, all scholars who recently contributed to the international research exchange in economics. To meet this objective, we derive a large publication dataset that contains about 177,000 publications from the top 400 journals in economics, use these data to identify active contributors to the economic literature published in English, and invite all of them to the main survey. Likewise, we invite a random subset of these economists to our follow-up survey. This approach has three critical advantages: First, our study population is defined systematically in a data-driven way and encompasses all economic researchers who publish in English. Second, we are able to match detailed bibliometric background data to the survey responses. Third, we can use these data to quantify and control for selection into the sample. In particular, we can use post-stratification weights which ensure that our sample broadly represents the full spectrum of economic researchers.

In this section, we describe how we compile the publication data (3.1) and identify the study population (3.2). Then, we focus on the main survey and describe how we invite respondents and collect the survey data (3.3) and characterize the sample of researchers that participated in the main survey (3.4). Section 5 provides all additional details for the follow-up survey.

3.1 Publication data

We start from the publication database EconLit. It covers an extensive set of economic journals and, importantly, provides JEL codes for each published article which allows us to also study the actual distribution research topics in economics. The JEL codes are

research articles.

assigned in an independent and systematic review process by trained EconLit staff. This ensures maximal JEL code coverage and a consistent and systematic application of the classification criteria. We restrict our attention to published journal articles from 2009 to early December 2019, the time at which we downloaded the data. We exclude older articles because we are primarily interested in current economic research. We exclude working papers because their coverage is less systematic and JEL code information is often not available. We drop duplicate and non-research publications such as errata or memorials. Moreover, we only consider articles written in English, the lingua franca of economics and the language in which almost all high-impact research is published. Appendix C documents the exact procedure.

EconLit, however, comes with two drawbacks: First, it does not contain information on articles' citations and, therefore, their scientific impact. Second, it includes more than 1,500 journals many of which have only a minuscule scientific impact or belong to neighboring fields such as business and management, statistics, or operations research. To circumvent these concerns, we concentrate on the 400 EconLit-indexed journals with the highest impact factor according to the Scopus 2018 Scimago Journal Ranking in the "Economics, Econometrics, and Finance" category. This restriction helps us to exclude journals that have hardly any influence on economic research at all and to zoom in on *economics* journals. Moreover, we are able to match 97.4% of these EconLit articles to Scopus's bibliometric database which includes information about article citations, journal rankings, and authors' background. We refine our final publication sample to the successfully matched articles, a total of 177,155 publications.

3.2 Study population

We use these publication data to identify the population of active English-publishing economic researchers. In a first step, we locate about 146,000 unique authors and gather further information about them.[6] We observe how many economic articles they published between 2009 and 2019, with whom they co-authored, to which JEL codes their articles are assigned, and how often their work is cited (as of December 2019). We use the co-author information to derive a discipline-wide co-author network from which we can derive how central and connected each author is. Moreover, we complement our data with Scopus's author information, including the authors' h-index, their total number of publications (with journal information and citations), the year of their first publication, and their institutional affiliation (as indicated in their publications).

[6]We use Scopus's unique author identifiers, that are assigned to each article, to construct the author-level database. Scopus derives these identifiers with the help of an algorithm that tends to produce duplicates, that is, different author IDs for the same author. Thus, we combine separate author entries with identical first names, last names, and institutions. Further, we manually disambiguate all authors who have the same first and last name as an author who participated in the main survey.

Finally, we predict the gender of each author from their names, using an algorithm of the commercial company Gender API (see Santamaría and Mihaljević, 2018). Appendix C.3 summarizes and describes all author covariates that will be used throughout the paper.

In a second step, we restrict the set of authors to *active economic* researchers. First, we exclude all scholars who did not publish an article in our publication data since 2015 (restriction 1). Second, we focus on scholars who publish at least 50% of their work in economics journals or have at least three articles in our sample (restriction 2). This step excludes researchers from neighboring fields who have little experience with the economic literature. Next, we exclude authors from non-academic institutions that have a very small publication output (restriction 3).[7] Those excluded are likely to be non-academic contributors or former academics who quit research. Finally, we consider only scholars for whom a valid email address can be found online (restriction 4).[8] Posting an email address online is a criterion for being active in research, but is also a precondition for the study: Only these scholars can be contacted and invited to the survey.

The procedure identifies 53,779 active economic researchers. Table 2 summarizes their characteristics. 26% of the population are female and about 75% work in Europe or Northern America. The average year of the first publication is 2007, which means that, on average, authors are active for 13-14 years at the time of the survey. On average, the authors write 4.8 articles in our publication sample with 5.8 unique co-authors, covering all JEL topics. In total, the average author has about 17.1 publications of which 75.9% fall into Scopus's economics category if we also count publications before 2009 and outside the top 400 EconLit journals. How successful are the authors? 12.1% are affiliated with one of the 50 leading research institutions (Shanghai Ranking), 6.1% published in a Top Five[9] journal since 2009, and the average h-index is 6.5.

Doctoral students A limitation of our author population is that it does not contain junior researchers such as Ph.D. students who did not yet have the opportunity to publish

[7]We consider an institution as non-academic if it contributed less than 20 articles to our publication sample and its name does not contain a keyword such as "school", "university", "research", or their counterparts in other languages. Authors who have at least three articles in our sample are exempted from this rule.

[8]We gather most email addresses using Amazon's crowd-working platform Mechanical Turk. Each email address is collected at least twice by independent crowd-workers. We cross-verify all addresses. Conflicting cases are manually checked by crowd-workers and cross-verified once more. In a few cases, we also rely on corresponding author information from publications. We find an email address for 80% of the scholars who satisfy the other restrictions. Restricting the population to scholars with email address leads only to minor differences in the characteristics of the population (see Appendix Table D.2). In later robustness analyses, we show that all results replicate with survey weights that match the characteristics of a population that also includes the scholars for whom no address could be found.

[9]We consider the following journals as "Top Five": American Economic Review (but not Papers & Proceedings), The Quarterly Journal of Economics, Journal of Political Economy, Review of Economic Studies, and Econometrica. Publishing in these journals is commonly viewed as a primary indicator of academic success, although this practice has been strongly criticized (e.g., Heckman and Moktan, 2020).

Table 2 Characteristics of the study population and the sample

Variable	(1) **Study population**	(2) **Unweighted sample**	(3) **Weighted sample**
Gender, academic age			
Female	26.0%	23.1%	25.8%
Year of first publication (YYYY/MM)	2007/01	2006/01	2006/10
Number of papers			
Number of articles (in pub. sample)	4.8	5.6	4.9
Number of articles (overall)	17.1	18.3	16.2
Share of art. in econ. journals	75.9%	76.2%	76.8%
Co-author network (in pub. sample)			
Degree (number of unique co-authors)	5.8	6.5	5.7
Eigenvector centrality (index)	61.2%	65.8%	62.4%
Number of co-authors with Top Five pub.	0.5	0.8	0.5
Success			
Top 50 institution	12.1%	12.2%	12.5%
Publ. in Top Five Journal (in pub. sample)	6.1%	9.3%	6.1%
Num. of Top Five pub. (in pub. sample)	0.12	0.18	0.11
Average journal rank 1-400 (in pub. sample)	164.2	161.9	165.8
h-index	6.5	6.8	6.1
Continent			
Europe	40.4%	53.6%	40.5%
Northern America	33.9%	24.2%	33.9%
Asia	17.1%	13.4%	17.2%
Australia and New Zealand	4.3%	3.7%	3.3%
Latin America	2.7%	3.4%	3.3%
Africa	1.6%	1.7%	1.8%
Share of publications in JEL fields			
C Mathematical and Quantitative Methods	6.1%	6.3%	5.8%
D Microeconomics	13.1%	16.1%	13.5%
E Macroeconomics and Monetary Econ.	7.3%	7.4%	7.1%
F International Economics	4.4%	4.3%	4.2%
G Financial Economics	18.2%	11.3%	16.9%
H Public Economics	3.6%	4.3%	3.8%
J Labor and Demographic Economics	6.7%	9.8%	7.5%
L Industrial organization	8.3%	7.4%	8%
O Growth and Development Economics	8.5%	8.8%	9.2%
Q Agricultural and Environmental Econ.	7.1%	7.4%	7.4%
Other fields	16.6%	16.9%	16.6%
Sample size	53,779	7,794	7,794

Notes: Overview of covariates. Column 1: The eligible study population. Column 2: Respondents of the main sample, unweighted. Column 3: Weighted main sample (using post-stratification weights, see Section 3.4). For a description of the covariates in the different rows see main text or Appendix C.3.

their work. To offset this restraint, we derive a separate database of doctoral students. Specifically, we identify doctoral students in an economics program at one of the top 400 institutions (ranked according to total citations in our publication sample). We exclude institutions for which we could not find a central directory of student email addresses and students who are already part of the author population. This results in a population of 9,441 students from 219 institutions. 30.8% are female and 96.7% come from Europe or Northern America (see Appendix Table D.1). Clearly, this group of students provides only a selected subset of Ph.D. students across the globe. Thus, we mainly use it to cross-verify the survey results among economic authors in a different population.

3.3 Data collection

The main survey was conducted online with the survey platform Qualtrics. We invited the full study population, 53,779 economic authors and 9,441 Ph.D. students, via email. The invitations were sent in random order from the 23rd of June 2020 to the 8th of July 2020.[10] To encourage participation among those who did not complete the survey, we sent a first reminder two weeks later and a second reminder in September 2020. We closed the survey on October 8th and drop all respondents who did not complete the main questions of their survey module.

9,921 researchers participated, yielding an overall response rate of 15.6%. Of those, 8,156 come from the population of economic *authors* (response rate: 15.2%), and 1,765 come from the *student* population (response rate: 17.8%). The main analyses rely on the data of 7,794 economic *authors* who completed the full survey. This restriction reduces changes in the sample size across different analysis steps due to missing data. Most respondents spent 9 to 25 minutes (25% and 75% percentile) to complete the survey, with a median response duration of 12 minutes.

3.4 Sample characteristics

A unique feature of our study design is that we can observe and correct for selection into the sample on a diverse set of dimensions including gender, year of first publication (a proxy for "academic age"), continent of residence, publication success, research field, and position in the discipline-wide co-author network. This ensures that our main sample broadly represents the study population on a wide range of observable characteristics.

[10] We also ran a small pilot invitation with 578 researchers on the 16th of July. Afterwards, we introduced several small changes to the survey. 33 respondents saw the old survey version. We do not exclude their response data because the changes in the instructions were only minor.

Column 2 of Table 2 displays the characteristics of the unweighted main sample. By and large, it closely follows the characteristics of the study population. But we also observe evidence of selection into the sample. Participating researchers are on average slightly more experienced and successful than the average researcher in the study population. For instance, researchers in our sample have on average 0.8 more articles in our publication sample, 0.06 more Top Five publications, 0.7 more co-authors, and published their first publication 1 year earlier. Also, we observe slightly fewer female researchers in our sample (23% in the sample versus 26% in the population), more European researchers take part in the survey[11], and the participants publish relatively more papers in the JEL field *D Microeconomics* and *J Labor Economics* but less in *G Financial Economics* than the study population.

We calculate post-stratification weights to correct for these observed imbalances. Specifically, we use a raking algorithm and target the marginal distributions of gender (2 groups), the year of first publication (quartiles), the number of papers in our publication sample (quartiles), the h-index (quartiles), region (Europe, Northern America, Asia, Other), and the main research field (6 groups). The algorithm assigns greater weight to observations from under-represented groups. We follow the guidelines of the American National Election Study Weighting System (Pasek et al., 2014). Appendix D.1 provides further details.

Column 3 of Table 2 shows the characteristics of the weighted sample. The statistics illustrate that the weighting corrects for both targeted and untargeted imbalances. Across all covariates, the remaining differences between the weighted sample and the population are minor. Of course, Table 2 displays only average values for many covariates which could conceal important differences in the variables' underlying distributions. Yet, Figure 1, which contrasts the distributions of all continuous covariates in the population and the weighted sample, dispels this concern. In fact, the distributions overlap almost completely, indicating that our sample broadly represents the full spectrum of economic researchers.

The demographic module of our survey allows us to further characterize our sample (see Appendix Figure D.1). About 90% of respondents engage in academic research (including 4.6% students). 8.5% describe themselves as "non-academic researcher". 33.5% of the active academics are full professors, 28.2% have an associate professorship (or an equivalent position as reader or senior lecturer), and 22% are assistant professors (or lecturers). 88.9% of the respondents indicate that economics, econometrics, or finance is their primary academic discipline.

[11]The timing of the invitations, which were mostly sent between 2 PM and 9 PM CET, could have led to a higher response rate among Europe-based respondents.

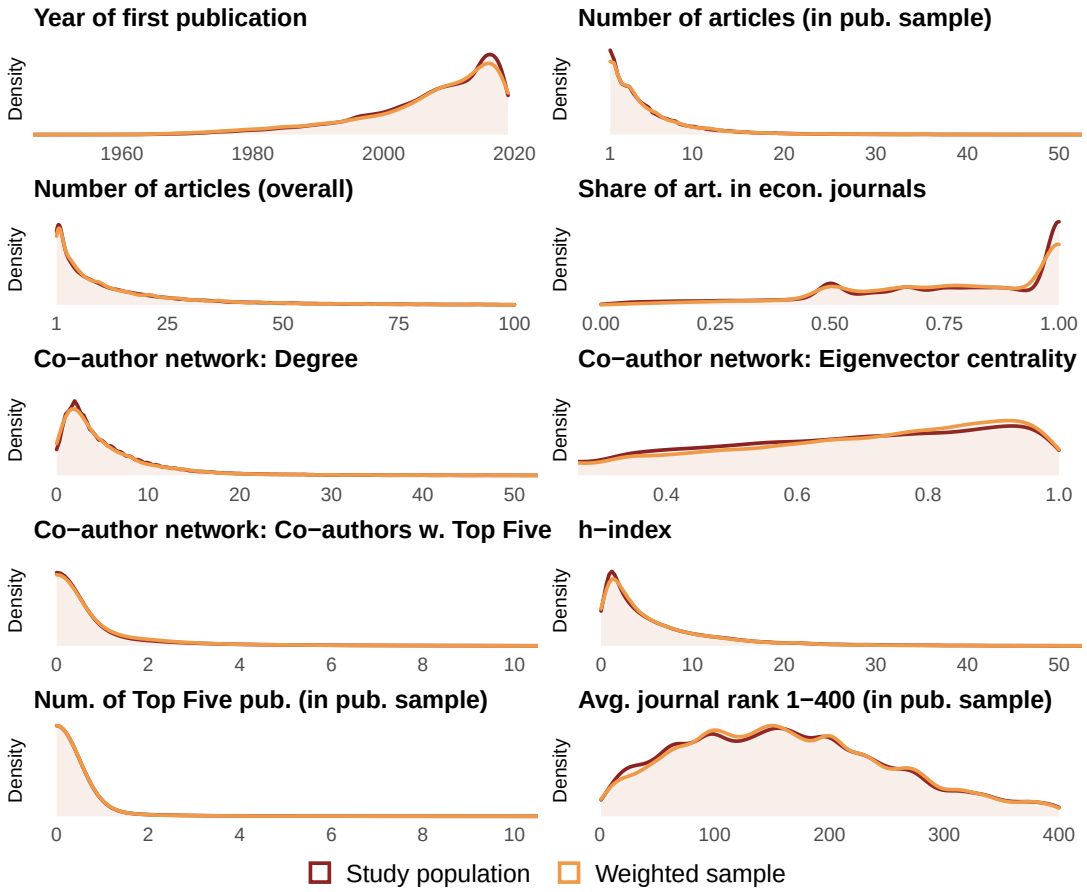

Figure 1 Population and sample distributions of covariates

Notes: Kernel density estimates for the distribution of covariates. Red: The eligible study population (n = 53,779). Yellow: The weighted main sample (n = 7,794). For a description of the covariates in the different sub-plots, see main text or Appendix C.3.

4 Economists' opinions about economics

In presenting the results of the main survey, we first describe our findings with respect to research objectives before turning to the choice of topics. For both, objectives and topics, we discuss the heterogeneity of opinions, the aggregate results, and the predictors of economists' views.

4.1 Research objectives

Heterogeneity of responses Figure 2 displays the distribution of responses to the ten research objective questions. The questions ask respondents to contrast two opposing research objectives and indicate whether they think economic research should place more weight on one objective versus the other. The results reveal that economists' opinions are vastly heterogeneous. Typically, both opposing research objectives as well as the neutral category ("Current state is about right") attract significant support. For in-

stance, 24% of the respondents advocate that intellectual, intrinsic interest should play a greater role in economic research relative to policy relevance than it does today, while 54% endorse the opposite view, and 22% are satisfied with the status quo (question 1). We observe heterogeneity not only in the direction but also in the magnitudes of the desired changes. For instance, 18% of economists believe that "slightly more", 20% that "moderately more", and 16% that "much more" policy relevance (vis-à-vis intrinsic interest) is needed. A similar picture emerges for most of the other questions.

Importantly, this dissent cannot simply be attributed to a generic inability of economic experts to agree on certain issues. Past research shows that economists largely agree on factual issues such as the notion that higher government spending reduces unemployment or that carbon taxes are a more cost-effective environmental policy than mandatory car standards (Andre et al., 2022; Sapienza and Zingales, 2013). In other words, consensus among economic experts is possible, yet the question of which research objectives economics should pursue remains fundamentally disputed.

Aggregate results The aggregate results show that most economists would like to see changes in how research in economics is currently conducted. Across the ten questions, only 13% to 31% (average: 20.6%) of respondents say that the current state of research is "about right". The large majority of economists thus prefer a deviation from the status quo.

Despite the observed heterogeneity, we find that most economists actually agree on the preferred direction of change. In fact, for most objectives, more than half of the respondents agree about the direction in which economics should deviate from the status quo. First, economists favor more policy-relevant research. 54% of the experts advocate a shift towards more policy relevance relative to intrinsic interest (question 1). Likewise, 52% support a shift towards more policy relevance relative to basic research (question 2). For empirical work, 56% of economists favor working on more important research questions even if this comes at the cost of less causal identification (question 3). Moreover, for theoretical work, 61% would prefer more applied, evidence-related theory instead of pure theory (question 4). For each question, the fraction of economists who support more policy-relevant, important, or applied research is significantly larger than 50%.[12] Moreover, the average deviation from the neutral category is sizeable, ranging from 0.5 to 0.9 scale points (or 0.3 to 0.6 standard deviations, $p < 0.001$). The deviations we describe below are even more pronounced. Appendix Table A.1 summarizes these statistical tests.

Second, more than half of the respondents express a preference for a greater scope and breadth of economic research: Research should be less specialized (question 5) and

[12]For the case of greater policy relevance at the cost of less basic research, the p-value is 0.062 and reaches only marginal significance.

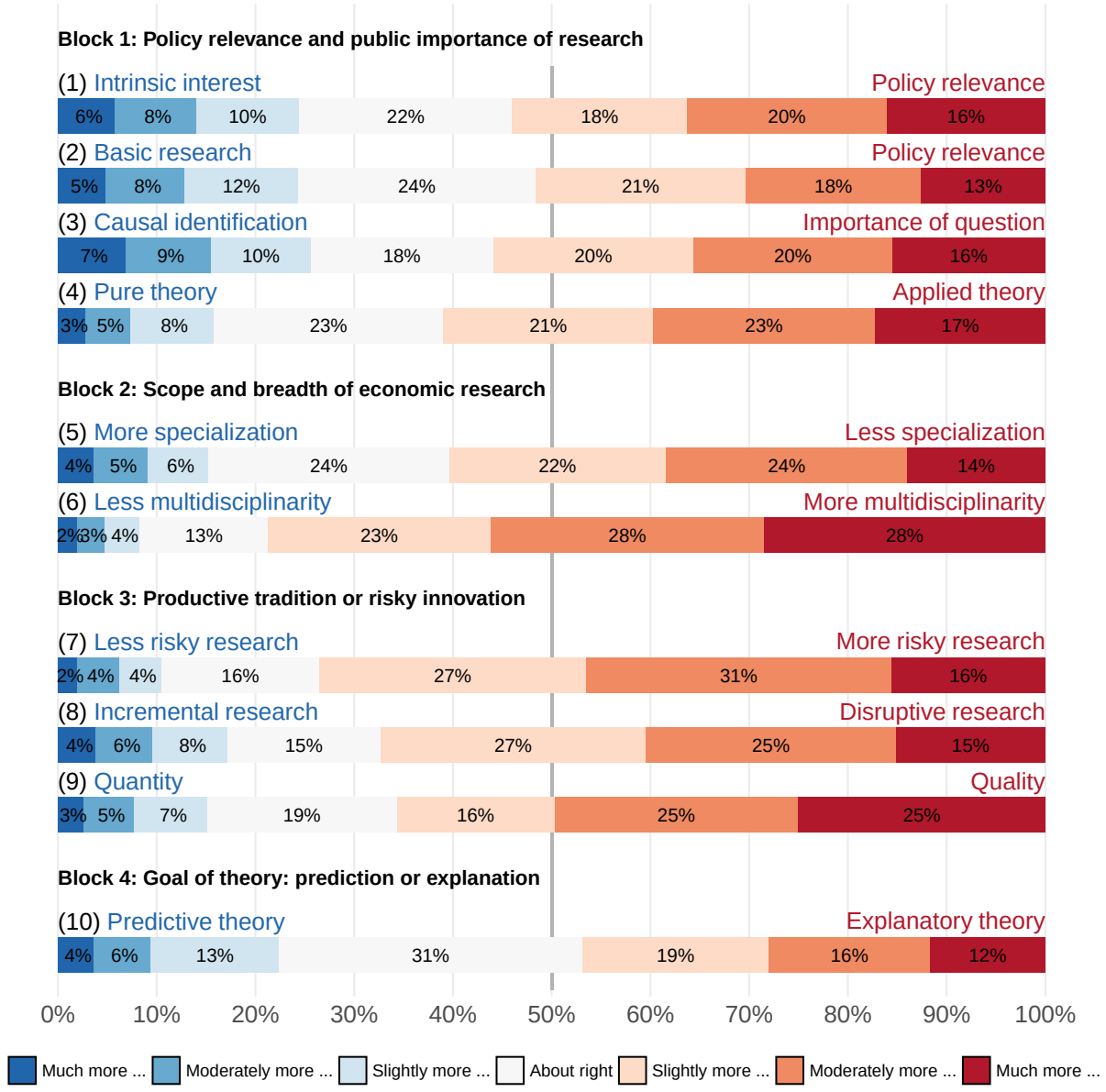

Figure 2 Research objectives: Distribution of survey responses

Notes: Distribution of survey responses to the ten research objective questions (weighted sample, main survey). The overarching question is: "In comparison with how research in economics is currently conducted, how should economists conduct research?" The labels at the top left and top right of each distribution summarize which two research objectives a question contrasts. The legend displays the available response categories. The full wording of the questions is available in Appendix B.

more multidisciplinary (question 6), implying that economics should incorporate more insights from other disciplines to study economic questions. In fact, multidisciplinarity is the issue on which economists reach the most pronounced consensus, with almost 80% of respondents supporting a shift towards increasing multidisciplinarity.

Third, a majority endorses a shift towards more risky innovation instead of incremental, traditional research. Respondents say that economic research should be more risky (question 7), disruptive (question 8) and place a stronger focus on quality versus quantity (question 9).

The final question asks whether economic theory should place greater emphasis on predicting versus explaining outcomes (question 10). Here, the responses are more balanced. 47% of respondents indicate that they prefer a shift towards more explanation, 22% favor a shift towards more prediction, while 31% think that the status quo is about right, reflecting the largest fraction of neutral responses observed across all questions.

In short, the majority of economists agree on the direction of change. They favor a shift towards more policy-relevant and risky research with a broader scope and stronger multidisciplinary orientation.

Predictors of responses Next, we ask whether economists' opinions are systematically related to their characteristics. The rich author data allow us to regress the survey responses on basic demographic characteristics (gender, age, tenure, region), indicators of academic success (affiliation with top 50 institution, Top Five publication, h-index), and the share of theory and methods projects a researcher works on. We also account for the research topics respondents work on: We include (but for the sake of brevity do not report) the researchers' share of publications in each primary JEL topic and their share of publications in economics journals (see Appendix C.3 for details about all covariates). We use the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure to correct all reported coefficients jointly for multiple hypotheses testing (Benjamini and Hochberg, 1995). Appendix Table A.2 summarizes the results.[13]

Individual characteristics prove to be predictive of the views about research objectives. Most characteristics predict a consistent shift either towards or against the majority view (more policy relevance, broader scope, more risky innovation). For instance, female economists show on average greater support for policy relevance (question 1), multidisciplinarity (question 6), and disruptive research (question 8), in line with the majority view. By contrast, economists in Africa, Asia, and Latin America show weaker support of policy relevance (question 1, 3, 4) and disruptive research (question 7, 8), opposite to the majority view. Economists who have published a Top Five paper also tend to place less weight on policy relevance and multidisciplinarity but place more weight on qual-

[13] We obtain very similar results in ordered probit regressions and regressions with different weighting schemes. These analyses are available upon request.

ity. Likewise, theorists and methods researchers show a weaker preference for policy relevance, and the latter also tend to favor specialization and incremental research to a greater extent.

Robustness We confirm the results in multiple sensitivity checks. First, we ask whether economists also prefer different research objectives for their own field of expertise. To answer this question, the main survey elicits respondents' opinions not only for economics as a whole but also for their main field. Appendix Figure A.1 compares the distribution of responses to both question types and documents largely identical results. Hence, economists express similar views about the state of the profession, irrespective of considering economics "as a whole" or their "own field", respectively. Appendix Figure A.2 disaggregates the field-specific responses and reports similar trends in each individual field, with only a few exceptions. For instance, economists who identify either Microeconomic Theory, Economic History, Mathematical Methods, or Economic Thought/Heterodox Economics as their main field place less emphasis on policy relevance.

Next, we double-check whether respondents perceive the changes that they favor also as feasible and desirable, even in light of their potential cost. Although the research objective questions explicitly asked for the "optimal approach to economic research", which should consider any potential costs and constraints, this might not have been sufficiently salient to respondents. To shed light on this issue, we ran a new, pre-registered survey – the "feasibility survey" – in January and February 2022. Following the original sampling procedure, we contacted a small randomly selected subset of the population, resulting in a sample of 259 scholars (for details see Appendix E). Respondents face four selected research objectives questions, namely (i) importance of research question vs. causality, (ii) less/more specialization, (iii) less/more multidisciplinarity, and (iv) incremental vs. disruptive research. Afterwards, we ask respondents whether they perceived the changes they propose in these questions as feasible ("change could – in principle – be realized, even if only at high costs"). Respondents also indicate whether they view them as desirable, even if considering the potential costs of a change in discipline-wide research practices (e.g., time, funding, talent, opportunity costs). Reassuringly, large majorities – across questions, 88% to 97% – confirm that they view their proposed changes as feasible and desirable. The respondents also agree that their proposed changes are jointly feasible and desirable (88% and 95%, respectively).[14]

[14]A related concern is that economists interpret the questions through the lens of the trade-offs and constraints that they experience in their own research. The observed disagreement among economists could then mainly be driven by disagreement about the "production function" of research in economics. To the extent that these research experiences vary across fields, the observation that preferred research objectives are very similar across fields alleviates this concern. In addition, we show in Appendix Figure A.3 that economists' views do not strongly vary with their institutional background and the extent to which they feel constrained by the research budget or their available research time.

Moreover, we obtain virtually identical results with different weighting schemes: (i) weights that target a scholar population that also includes authors for whom no email address could be found, thus correcting for a potential differential availability of email contact data; (ii) identical weights for all authors; (iii) identical weights for all authors who say that economics is their primary academic discipline (89%); and finally, (iv) identical weights that also include the full student sample (see Appendix Figure A.4; Appendix D.1 contains details on the weighting schemes). In particular, the responses of students largely mirror those of the authors (see also Appendix Figure A.5). Thus, there appears to be no divide between the current population of publishing scholars and its next generation.

Finally, a potential concern is the influence of social desirability bias. Respondents may tend to align their answers with what they believe others view as desirable. In this context, it is useful to anticipate our later finding that, on average, economists incorrectly perceive their colleagues' views as *not* being in favor of more policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive work. To the extent that economists are prone to desirability effects and align their responses with what they think others prefer, any social desirability bias likely leads respondents to understate rather than overstate their preferences for more policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive work.

4.2 JEL topics

Aggregate results Figure 3 compares the distribution of JEL topics in our publication sample (in blue) with the average survey response (in red). The former shows which fraction of papers is published in each JEL topic, which is derived from our publication data from the top 400 EconLit-indexed journals from January 2009 to December 2019.[15] It thus describes the state of economic research in the period before our survey was launched. We can directly compare it to the average survey responses, which show economists' average opinion on which share of papers should be written and published in each JEL topic.

Qualitatively, we observe a similar ordinal ranking of JEL topics in the publication data and the average survey responses, as manifested in a sizable rank-order correlation of 0.76 (p <0.001). JEL topics that dominate the research output in economics (such as *D Micro*, *E Macro*, or *G Finance*) also receive large shares in the survey. JEL topics that play a relatively minor role in economics today (such as *A General & Teaching*, *K Law and Economics*, or *N History*) also receive small shares in the survey.

[15] In practice, most papers are assigned to multiple JEL codes. We derive each paper's share in topic j as the share of codes in j. For example, a paper with two codes in *D* and one code in *L* receives a share of $\frac{2}{3}$ for *D* and a share $\frac{1}{3}$ for *L*. Below, we show that the analyses are robust to using three alternative aggregation procedures.

Quantitatively, however, we observe sizable discrepancies between the two distributions. Respondents on average spread the shares across the nineteen JEL categories more uniformly. For instance, the average share that respondents assign to the field with most publications – *G Finance* – is 9.8 percentage points smaller than its actual share of publications (see Figure 4). Respondents also place a much lower share on the second and third most prominent fields, *D Micro* and *L Industrial Organization*. By contrast, respondents on average think that more work should be published in JEL fields that see relatively few publications in practice. In short, economists on average place more weight on minor JEL topics and less weight on the most common JEL topics. In other words, the average economist favors a more diverse and pluralistic distribution of topics in economic research.[16]

How do the survey responses compare to the topic distribution in Top Five journals? After all, these journals are considered "general interest journals" and aspire to publish the best economic research in all fields. Appendix Figures A.7 and A.8 contrasts their topic distribution with the survey responses and the topic distribution in the top 400 journals. First of all, we notice that – compared to the full set of journals – Top Five journals publish more research in the fields *C Mathematical Methods*, *D Microeconomics*, and *J Labor and Demographic Economics*, but less research in the fields of *G Finance*, *O Development*, and *Q Environment and Agricultural Economics*. However, in comparison with economists' average survey responses, we can still conclude that the average economist would prefer a more diverse distribution of research topics. In particular, economists assign a 20.3 percentage points lower share to *D Microeconomics*, the JEL topic that by far dominates Top Five publications (see Appendix Figures A.7 and A.8). It is also noteworthy that economists assign a 4.6 percentage points higher share to *Q Environmental and Agricultural Economics*, mirroring the recent critique that top economic research is rather silent about climate change (Oswald and Stern, 2019).

Heterogeneity The average results conceal considerable heterogeneity in the responses and opinions of economists. Indeed, the small confidence intervals in Figure 3 can be attributed to the large sample size, rather than a small dispersion of responses. Appendix Figure A.9 maps the distribution of responses for each JEL category. The shares assigned to most topics range from 0% to more than 10%, illustrating the wide dispersion in economists' views about the relative importance of research topics in their discipline.

As a consequence, there are two potential explanations for why the average preferred topic distribution is more evenly spread than the observed one. On the one hand, many economists could prefer such a more diverse distribution of research topics. On the other hand, economists could actually favor a more extreme distribution but favor dif-

[16] Appendix A.2 documents a similar phenomenon for the 130 JEL subtopics.

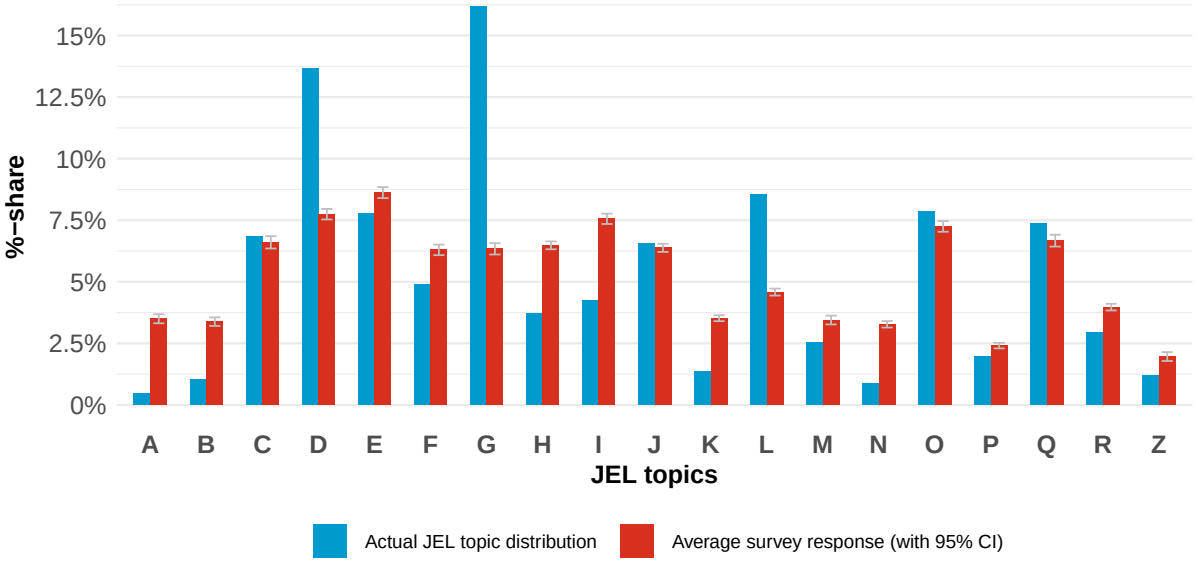

Figure 3 Comparison of JEL topic distributions in econ. journals with survey responses

Notes: Blue bars: Shares of JEL topics in our publication sample (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals, January 2009 - December 2019). Red bars: Weighted average survey responses with 95% confidence intervals (main survey).
JEL topics: **A** General Economics and Teaching, **B** Econ. Thought, Methodology, Heterodox, **C** Mathematical and Quantitative, **D** Microeconomics, **E** Macroeconomics and Monetary, **F** International, **G** Financial, **H** Public, **I** Health, Education, and Welfare, **J** Labor and Demographic, **K** Law and Economics, **L** Industrial Organization, **M** Business, Marketing, Personnel, **N** Economic History, **O** Development, Innovation, **P** Economic Systems, **Q** Agricultural and Environmental, **R** Urban, **Z** Cultural, Sports, Tourism.

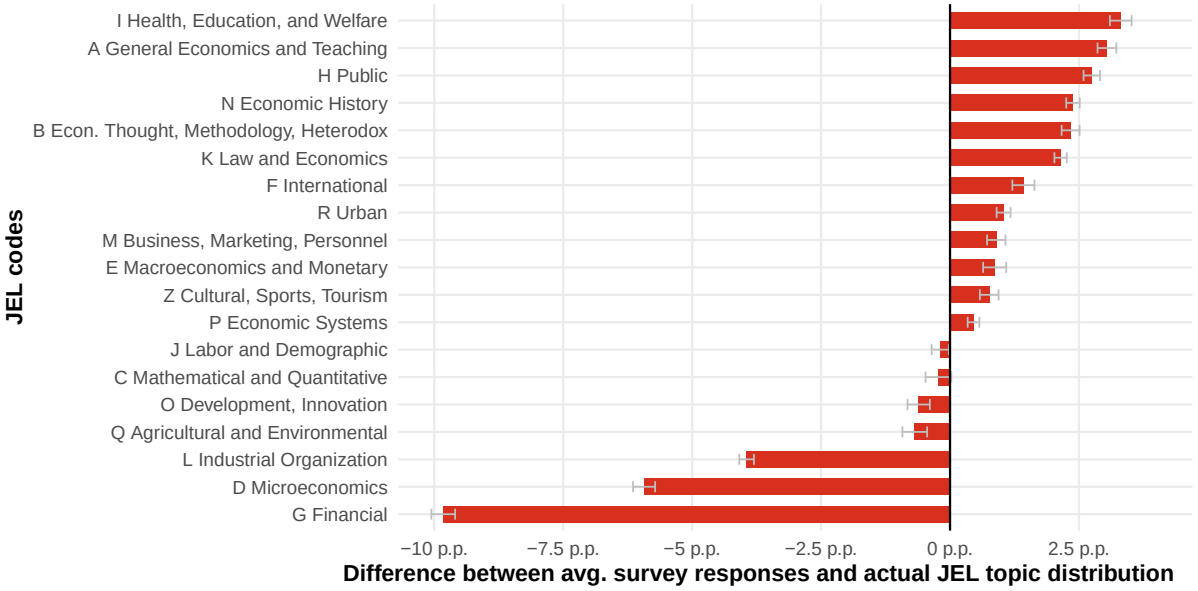

Figure 4 Differences between the avg. preferred and the actual JEL topic distribution

Notes: Differences between the red and blue bars from Figure 3 with 95% confidence intervals.

ferent topics so that their positions on average offset each other. The data suggest that both explanations play a role. We derive the standard deviation of the preferred topic shares for each respondent. The smaller the response variation, the more uniform is the topic distribution that a respondent prefers. We compare the respondents' standard deviation to the standard deviation of the actual distribution of research topics. About 52% of the respondents show a smaller standard deviation, indicating that they would prefer a more evenly spread distribution (see Appendix Figure A.10). The other respondents have a higher standard deviation and thus favor a topic distribution with an even higher variation than observed in practice. However, they disagree about which topics are important so that their extreme positions average out.

Predictors of responses The documented heterogeneity in preferred research topics is systematically related to respondents' characteristics. The strongest and most consistent predictor is the topic of the authors' own publications. Respondents favor their own fields. They assign an about 1 percentage point stronger weight to a JEL topic if they have a 10 percentage point higher share of publications in this topic (see Appendix Table A.4). This corresponds to an increase of 0.19 standard deviations. Thus, a respondent who writes all publications on a single JEL topic would on average assign an about 10 percentage point (1.9 standard deviations) stronger weight to it.[17]

As before, we also explore a rich battery of other characteristics, including gender, age, region, and academic success. The most predictive characteristics are female gender, having published in a Top Five journal, and the share of one's work in economic theory and methods. For instance, female scholars place comparatively less weight on *E Macro* and *N History*, but more weight on *I Health, Education, Welfare*, *J Labor*, and *Q Environmental/Agricultural*. We refer the interested reader to Appendix Table A.3, which summarizes the results.

Robustness Again, we confirm our results in various robustness checks. One potential concern is that the results are overly sensitive to how we aggregate the survey responses and derive the actual distribution of JEL topics. Therefore, we conduct five additional tests to address these concerns. First, we explore the sensitivity of the survey results to different weighting schemes and include the responses from the student sample. Second, we exclude possibly "careless" participants whose response behavior suggests that they might not have paid sufficient attention to the survey. For instance, we exclude respondents who assign a positive share to only a few topics, spend only little time on the JEL topics question, or show a low standard deviation of preferred topic shares, which indicates a potential uniformity bias in responses. Third, we derive the actual distribution of JEL topics only from papers that were published by an author of our

[17]These results are robust to including controls and using different survey weights (Appendix Table A.4).

study population. Fourth, one may argue that our set of top 400 EconLit journals still contains many outlets with negligibly low impact on economic research. We therefore also derive the JEL topic distribution of the top 200 and top 100 journals. Finally, given that the period 2009-2019 might be considered too long to study the *current* topics of economic research, we also calculate the topic distribution for the 2015-2019 and 2018-2019 periods. We replicate our main conclusions in all of these sensitivity analyses (see Appendix Figures A.11 and A.12 and the discussion in Appendix A.2). Again, we observe virtually identical results in the author and student sample (Appendix Figure A.13).

We also simulate to which extent the "preference for diversity" could be driven by non-standard measurement and response error that biases responses towards a more uniform distribution. Appendix Figures A.14 and A.15 and the corresponding discussion in Appendix A.2 argue that the response error would need to be implausibly large to fully account for the larger uniformity of the average distribution of survey responses.[18]

5 Sources of the mismatch

Our findings reveal a mismatch between economists' preferences and the current practice in economics. Despite the considerable heterogeneity in economists' views, most economists agree that – relative to the status quo – economic research should become more (i) policy-relevant, (ii) multidisciplinary, and (iii) risky and disruptive. Moreover, on average, economists state a preference for more diversity in research topics. This mismatch raises an important question: Why do economists not appreciate and produce the kind of research they collectively prefer?

In this section, we shed light on three possible explanations. First, ongoing research that reflects the reported preferences is in the making but delayed by lags in the publication process ("publication lags"). Second, influential economists – editors and referees at the discipline's best journals – are largely satisfied with the status quo. Third, economists are extrinsically motivated and work on projects that they believe publish well, but do not expect their colleagues to appreciate and reward policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, or disruptive work ("strategic concerns and perceived research incentives"). We use data from the main survey to examine the first two explanations. Then, we present data from a follow-up survey – the "strategic concerns survey" – to investigate the third

[18] Another potential concern is that EconLit staff may interpret and apply the JEL classification differently than our respondents. However, at the broad JEL-field level, the scope for such discrepancies is arguably limited. For example, while Kosnik (2018), who investigates how authors and editors assign JEL codes to articles published in the American Economic Review, finds disagreement at the individual article level, the aggregate frequency of JEL field assignments by authors and editors is found to be roughly similar. Importantly, the observed differences are substantially smaller than the gaps we document in our analysis.

explanation.[19]

5.1 Publication lags

Research projects evolve slowly and take a long time to publish (Ellison, 2002; Hadavand et al., 2024). For example, the median time from first submission to publication is estimated to be roughly three years at top journals, *conditional on acceptance* (Hadavand et al., 2024). However, given the high rejection rates, publishing a paper takes even longer on average. Consequently, the research objectives and topics pursued in published work could lag behind the views and opinions of economists, i.e., the change that many economists desire could already be on its way.

With respect to research objectives, we can easily reject a publication lag story because the research objectives questions do not refer to published work but rather the "*current* way of doing research". The wording is "how economics as a research field should do research *these days*". Given that researchers are aware of what their colleagues are currently working on, their judgment should be immune to lags in the publication process. In addition, previous developments suggest that current trends are unlikely to noticeably reduce the mismatch anytime soon. For example, techniques of causal identification have become increasingly important (Currie et al., 2020). Moreover, while economics has become more multidisciplinary (Angrist et al., 2020; Buyalskaya et al., 2021; Truc et al., 2023), multidisciplinarity is the research objective for which we document the highest level of dissatisfaction, with almost 80% supporting a shift towards more multidisciplinary research.

Turning to research topics in economics, we investigate whether past trends foreshadow a greater diversity of research topics. For this purpose, we derive the distribution of JEL codes for each year from 2009 to 2019. Figure 5 depicts the trends in the publication shares of the six topics for which we documented the largest mismatch. Moreover, its right-most panel shows how the total absolute difference between preferred and actual topics developed over time.[20] We detect no consistent trend that, if extrapolated to the future, would move the distribution of research topics closer to economists' preferences. If anything, the mismatch has slightly increased in recent years. For example, the gap between the preferred and the actual share of publications in *G Finance* has grown on average by 0.07 percentage points each year. Moreover, the cumulative mismatch

[19] This list of potential sources is almost certainly not exhaustive, and other factors are also likely to play a role. For example, the under-provision of risky research in economics could also arise because a higher level of risk-taking is suboptimal for individual researchers. To give another example, policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, or disruptive research could be more difficult to evaluate for editors and referees. If evaluators dislike publishing bad papers more than not publishing good papers, this would create an additional bias against policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, or disruptive research.

[20] Appendix Figure A.16 presents the trends for all JEL topics.

Figure 5 Publication lag unlikely: Past trends in research topics

Notes: This figure analyzes whether the research topics on which economists publish came closer to economists' preferred distribution of research topics from 2009 to 2019. **Smaller plots on the left**: Trends in topic shares (blue bars, based on EconLit publication data, top 400 journals) for the six JEL topics with the largest discrepancy with the preferred topic shares (red bars, data from main survey). **Plot on the right**: The cumulative absolute distance between the average preferred topic distribution and the real topic distributions in 2009 to 2019.

between preferred and actual JEL topics – i.e., the sum of the absolute gaps for each topic – has grown on average by 0.68 pp each year and about 7 pp over the full decade. These findings suggest that lags in the research and publication process are not a major driving force behind the observed mismatch.

5.2 The opinions of influential economists

Relatively successful and reputed scholars have a particularly strong influence on the discipline's research agendas, topics, and objectives (Azoulay et al., 2019; Bourdieu, 1975). In their capacity as editors or referees, their judgments critically affect the publication process. In addition, their research is more visible. Moreover, as research leaders, supervisors, or members of (hiring) committees, they regularly shape academic developments and new generations of researchers (Akerlof and Michaillat, 2018). Here, we explore whether top economists see less need for change. If so, they may promote and reinforce the status quo in their role as "gatekeepers".

To investigate this conjecture, we identify influential economists using three complementary approaches. First, we focus on economists who have published at least one article in a Top Five journal within our publication sample. Second, we locate editors and advisory board members at the top 50 EconLit-indexed economics journals between 2015 and 2020. Third, we identify scholars who repeatedly refereed for Top Five journals between 2015 and 2020. Appendix A.6 describes the details. 6.1% of our weighted sample have published a Top Five paper, 3.2% have served as a member of an editorial or advisory board at a top 50 journal, and 6.1% have repeatedly reviewed papers for Top Five journals.

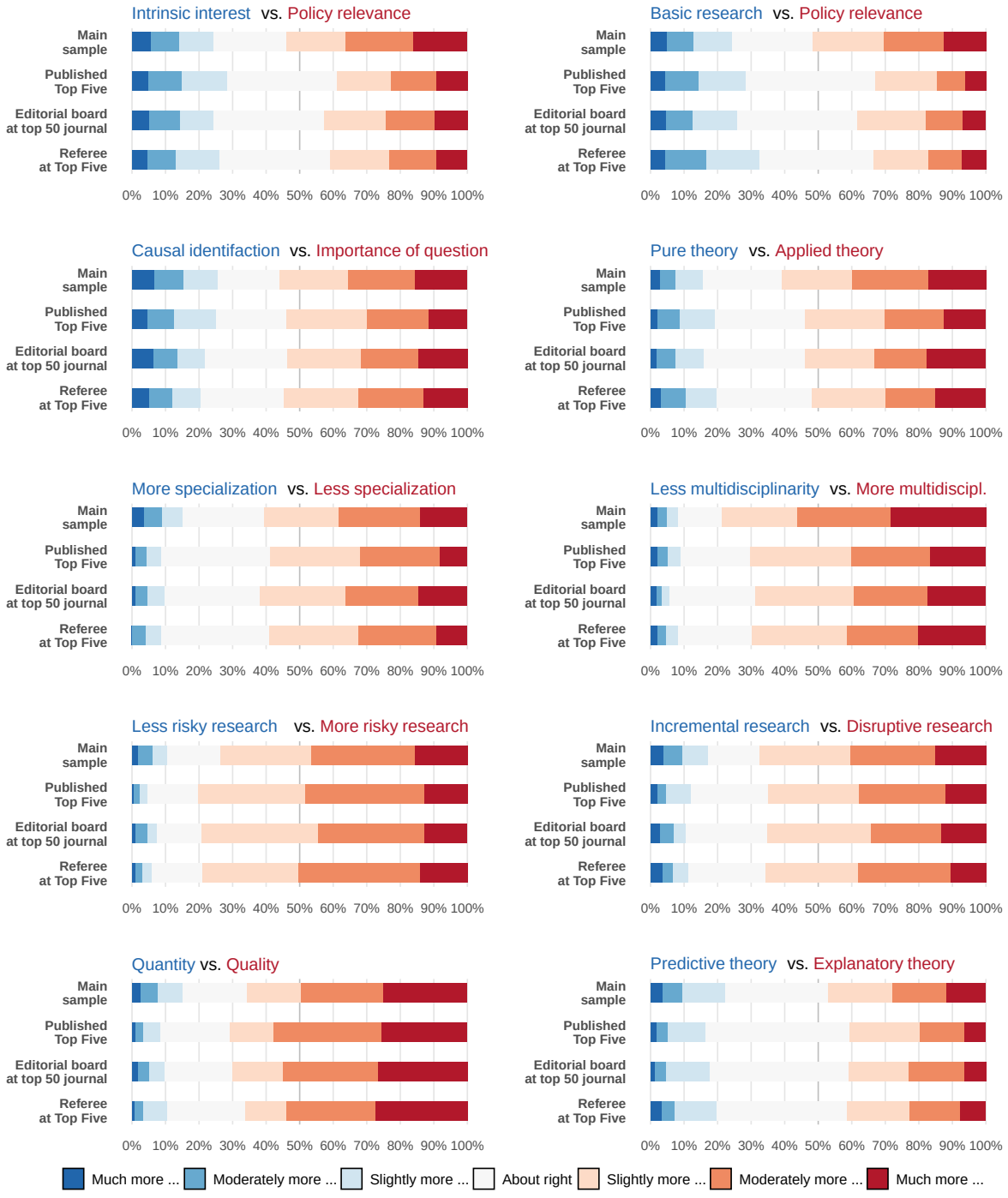

Figure 6 Influential economists share the views of the profession

Notes: Weighted distribution of survey responses to the ten research objective questions, data from main survey. The overarching question is: "In comparison with how research in economics is currently conducted, how should economists conduct research?" The results are displayed for the main sample (n = 4,073) and the (unweighted) subsets of authors with a Top Five publication (in our publication sample; n = 407), editors or advisory board members at top 50 journals (n = 174), and repeated referees at Top Five journals (n = 365).

We start with influential economists' preferences for a change in research objectives. Figure 6 presents the distribution of their preferred research objectives and compares it to the views of the full sample. The data reject the idea that influential economists are satisfied with the status quo. Instead, they widely share the discipline's discomfort with its current research objectives. Aside from a somewhat weaker support for policy relevance vis-à-vis intrinsic interest and basic research, the views of influential economists closely mirror those of the field at large. For example, 54% of the editorial board members at the top 50 journals favor a shift towards more important research questions (at the cost of causal identification), 69% favor a shift towards more multidisciplinary research, and 65% favor a shift towards more disruptive research.

The data on research topics reveal a similar pattern. Appendix Figure A.18 shows that the topic preferences of influential economists are very similar to those of the full discipline.

For robustness, we replicate the analyses with editors at both a more narrow set (top 25) and a wider set of journals (top 100) (see Appendix Figure A.18 and A.19). Moreover, we exclude board members who only have an advisory role and focus on editors who regularly handle submissions. All analyses reproduce the patterns documented above. Put simply, the data are inconsistent with the conjecture that the mismatch arises because influential economists are satisfied with the status quo.

5.3 Strategic concerns and perceived research incentives

The notion that researchers are solely motivated by intellectual curiosity and pursue the research projects that they intrinsically consider as most interesting or relevant has long been disputed (Bourdieu, 1975; Reif, 1961). Recent work shows that scholars adapt their research profiles to funding incentives (Azoulay et al., 2011; Myers, 2020), the influx of new competitors and collaborators (Borjas and Doran, 2015; Moser et al., 2014), or the passing away of powerful incumbents (Azoulay et al., 2019). This raises the question of whether researchers also pursue strategic goals. Do they choose their research topics according to extrinsic motives, such as improving job market prospects, gaining research funds, or attracting their colleagues' recognition? In the presence of extrinsic motives, researchers may strategically favor projects that they believe their colleagues will like and that will publish well. As recruiters, they may favor researchers who they think can successfully publish in the future. And even as reviewers, they may favor research that they think conforms with the standards of their colleagues. Hence, a mismatch between economists' research preferences and the status quo of the discipline could be sustained if economists think that strategic research incentives systematically oppose policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive research.

Exploring this hypothesis requires data on both economists' motives concerning the choice of research projects and perceived research incentives. For this purpose, we conducted a pre-registered follow-up survey, the "strategic concerns survey".

Sample We obtained a sample of 1,136 economic scholars by inviting a randomly selected subset of the full population of economists in January and February 2022 (Appendix F). As before, we derive post-stratification weights to correct for the (mostly mild) imbalances between our sample and the full population of researchers. And we show that the weighted sample reflects the full spectrum of economists on a wide range of characteristics, including gender, age, success, field, continent, and centrality in the discipline-wide co-author network.

Survey The survey elicits which motives matter in scholars' choices of research projects. The survey describes a series of intrinsic and strategic motives to respondents. Intrinsic motives encompass "enjoying research", "intrinsic interest in a topic", "personal meaning", and deeming a project "relevant for society". Strategic motives are "publishing in high-level journals", "being cited", earning "reputation among other scholars", and improving one's "employment prospects in academia". Then, respondents are asked to rate on Likert-scales the extent with which they agree that these motives matter in their own research.

The survey also measures how economists perceive research incentives. We use two complementary measures. The first measure elicits which types of research economists think their colleagues want to see more of, as a proxy for the type of projects economists think their colleagues will like. For this purpose, we draw on the research objective questions from the main survey and measure economists' beliefs about their colleagues' responses. Respondents first learn about our main survey, namely that we had conducted a large survey about "how economic research should be conducted" in the summer of 2020. They are informed about the sampling approach and learn that the final sample represents "all fields and ranks of the profession".[21] Then, participants read about the original research objective questions that we posed in 2020 and are asked to guess which share of 2020-respondents favor a change towards a particular direction. For example, we ask how many respondents favor more multidisciplinarity, less multidisciplinarity, or indicate that the current state is about right.[22] For simplicity, we focus

[21] Specifically, participants learn that we invited economists who had published an article in one of the top 400 economics journals, that overall almost 10,000 economists participated, and that the sample reflects all fields and ranks of the profession. Further details on the sample are available on request by activating a drop-down button. The instructions are presented in Appendix F.

[22] For simplicity, we focus on the direction of desired change and abstract from the desired intensity that 2020-respondents could indicate in the main survey (e.g., much more, moderately more, slightly more). This is known to participants of the "strategic concerns survey". For example, they learn that "more multidisciplinarity" encompasses 2020-respondents who indicate to favor much more, moderately more, or slightly more multidisciplinary research.

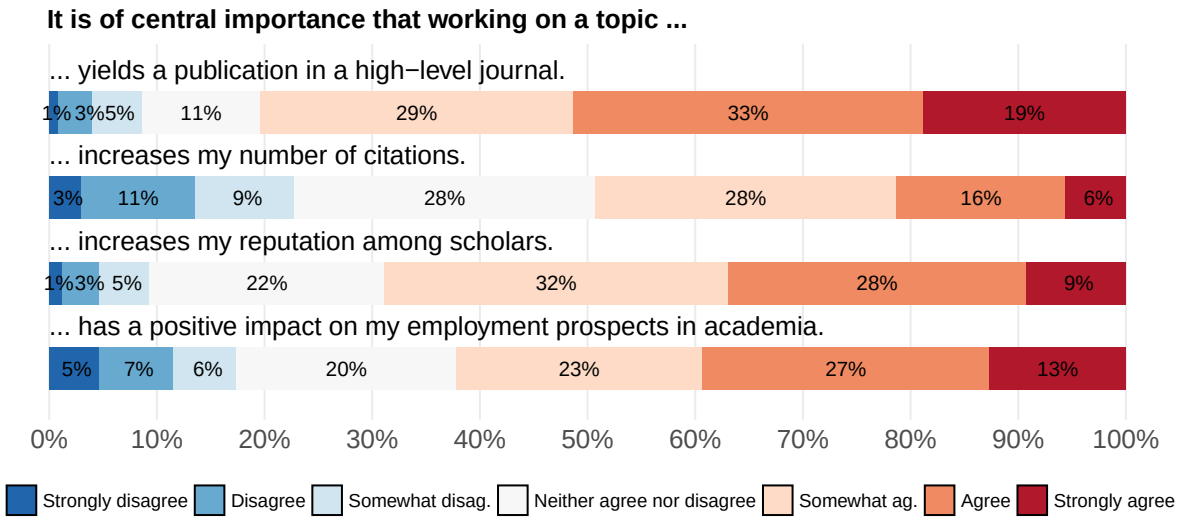

Figure 7 Strategic concerns are important

Notes: Distribution of survey responses to the Likert-type motives questions (weighted sample, strategic concerns survey). The overarching question is: "When I choose a research topic, it is of central importance to me that working on this topic ..."

on three research objective questions: (i) the trade-off between causal identification and the importance of the research question, (ii) multidisciplinarity, and (iii) incremental versus disruptive research. Our approach allows us to compare economists' beliefs to actual responses. We can therefore identify whether economists systematically misperceive their colleagues' preference for policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive research.

Our second measure elicits perceived rewards and incentives in the publication process. In particular, respondents indicate which types of projects they think are easier for them to publish well: (i) empirical papers that prioritize causal identification or empirical papers that prioritize important research questions[23], (ii) papers that build on insights from economics or multidisciplinary papers that use insights also from other disciplines, and finally, (iii) incremental papers that connect closely to the existing literature or disruptive papers that propose new approaches. In all three questions, respondents could also choose that both types of papers are equally difficult for them to publish well. We note that no objective assessment of the actually prevailing incentives is available. Nevertheless, we can investigate whether perceived incentives oppose or support the changes that many economists would favor. The instructions of the strategic concerns survey are available in Appendix F.

Results We begin with researchers' motives, providing the first large-scale, quantitative analysis of relevant motives that guide economists in their choice of research projects. Almost all economists agree that intrinsic motives are important. Figure A.20

[23]In this question, participants could also respond that they do not write empirical papers. We only analyze the responses of participants who conduct empirical work.

in the appendix shows that, e.g., 92% of economists say that enjoying research is among their main considerations when choosing between research projects, and 84% state that they attempt to choose personally meaningful projects. However, our focus is on extrinsic motives and strategic considerations. As Figure 7 shows, many economists indeed acknowledge the importance of strategic motives in their choice of research projects. 80% agree that publishing well is an important motive for them, 49% aim for increasing their number of citations, 69% aim for earning a reputation among other scholars, and 62% indicate that employment prospects matter. Due to potential social desirability concerns, these figures may actually provide only a lower bound for the relevance of strategic motives. Thus, the data show that strategic concerns are a decisive driving force. Among them, building a reputation among scholars and publishing well prove to be particularly important.

Which types of projects do economists perceive as conducive to reach these goals? Figure 8 provides an answer. Panel (a) compares economists' beliefs about what type of research their colleagues would like to see more often to the actual views of economists from our main survey. Panel (b) shows which publication incentives economists perceive to face in practice. Both panels convey the same message: Perceived incentives systematically oppose the changes in research objectives that economists collectively prefer, namely more policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive research.

First, Panel (a) of Figure 8 reveals that economists vastly underestimate how many of their colleagues desire a change in research practices. While 56% of respondents in the main survey indicate that they would prefer a shift towards asking more important research questions even at the cost of causal identification, economists estimate that on average only 32% of their colleagues do so. While 79% of economists would prefer more multidisciplinarity in economics, economists on average think that only 41% of their colleagues endorse this view. Finally, 67% of economists would welcome more disruptive research in their discipline, but on average economists think that only 37% of their colleagues do so. The misperception of other economists' preferences is widespread: For each of the three questions, we find that more than 90% of economists underestimate the preferences for change among their colleagues (see Appendix Table A.5 and Appendix Figure A.21).[24]

Consistent with Panel (a), Panel (b) of Figure 8 shows that perceived publication incentives are in sharp contrast to the changes that the discipline at large would prefer. A majority of economists – 62% – say that it is easier for them to publish papers that prioritize causal identification over the importance of the research question. 59% report

[24]We do not find significant signs of heterogeneity of economists' beliefs in their background characteristics (see Appendix Table A.7). In particular, we see a very similar distribution of beliefs for economists with strategic motives. This means that the scholars who are most responsive to research incentives face similar incentives.

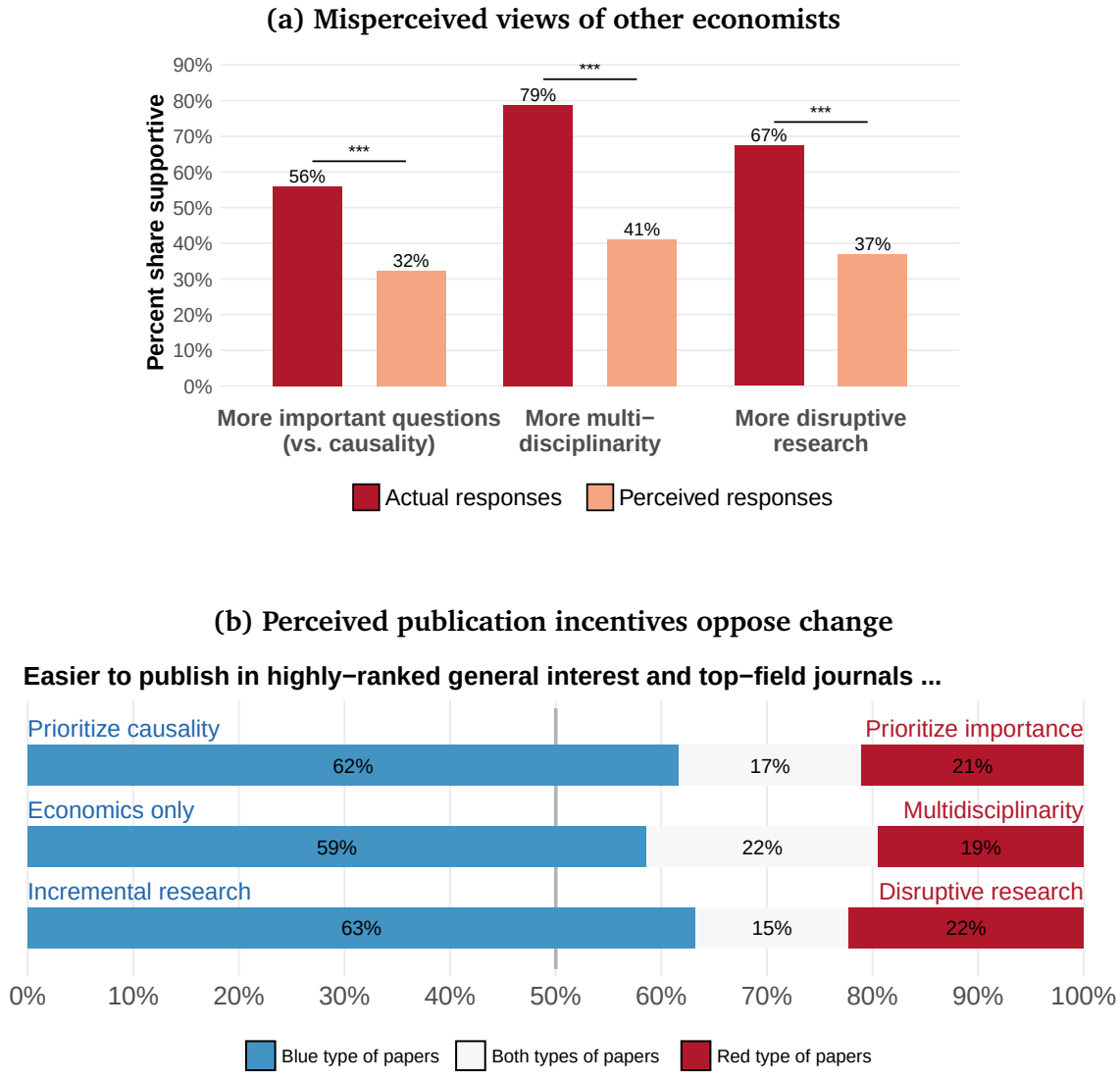

Figure 8 Perceived research incentives favor mismatch

Notes: **Panel (a)** Dark red bars: Share of economists who would prefer a shift towards asking more important research question, more multidisciplinarity, and more disruption, respectively (weighted sample, main survey). Light red bars: Perceived share of economists who would prefer such shifts (weighted sample, strategic concerns survey). p-values result from t-tests (see Appendix Table A.6). $^{*}p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$. **Panel (b)** Distribution of survey responses to the publication incentives questions (weighted sample, strategic concerns survey, n=1,136). The overarching question is: "In your situation, which type of papers do you think are easier for you to publish in highly-ranked general interest and top-field journals?"

that non-multidisciplinary papers have better chances of being published well, and 63% find incremental research easier to publish than disruptive research.[25]

Taken together, our results imply that the interplay of strategic motives and misaligned research incentives likely contributes to the observed mismatch between economists' preferred and actual research output. Put differently, our data suggest that economists do not conduct the type of research that they collectively prefer because they think that such research would neither be appreciated by their colleagues nor rewarded in the publication process.

6 Concluding remarks

In this paper, we document economists' opinions about fundamental research objectives and topics in economics. Overall, more than 10,000 economic researchers from all fields and ranks of the profession participated in our global surveys. Their responses reveal three main insights, which we summarize and discuss in the following.

Our first main finding is that economists' views about how economics should be done are substantially heterogeneous. This rich diversity of opinions serves as a reminder that any statement about "right" or "interesting" research questions, objectives, and topics is inherently subjective. While there are often scientific criteria for what constitutes a good *answer*, there are no objective guidelines for what constitutes a good *question*. The problem of problem choice eludes a clear, objective, scientific solution. In Max Weber's (1919) words:

> *"Science further presupposes that what is yielded by scientific work is important in the sense that it is "worth being known." In this, obviously, are contained all our problems. For this presupposition cannot be proved by scientific means. It can only be interpreted with reference to its ultimate meaning, which we must reject or accept according to our ultimate position towards life."*
> Max Weber, *Science as Vocation*, 1919/1946

We believe that this is an important insight to keep in mind when evaluating other researchers' work, whether as seminar participants, referees, or editors.

Our second main finding is that economists currently do not conduct research in the way that most economists think research should be conducted. Despite the large heterogeneity of views, a majority of economists agree that economic research should become

[25] Appendix Table A.9 explores whether economists' characteristics predict which publication incentives they report facing. We find no evidence of demographic variation. Economists who published in a Top Five journal report that it is easier to publish disruptive research for them. Otherwise, successful researchers (as measured by institution, having published in a Top Five, and h-index) report facing largely similar publication incentives. Again, we find no effect of strategic motives.

more (i) policy-relevant, (ii) multidisciplinary, and (iii) risky and disruptive. Further, on average, economists would prefer a greater diversity of research topics. This view is shared by the discipline's most distinguished and influential scholars.

The mismatch between economists' research preferences and the discipline's research output could also affect who is willing to enter academia. We illustrate this argument in the context of the lack of gender diversity in economics (Avilova and Goldin, 2018; Bayer and Rouse, 2016; Buckles, 2019; Lundberg and Stearns, 2019; Lundberg, ed, 2020). In Appendix A.6, we show that stronger agreement with economics' current research objectives and topics is paralleled by higher job satisfaction and less job-related stress. For instance, a one standard deviation increase in agreement with economic research is associated with a 0.07 standard deviation increase in general job satisfaction and a 0.13 reduction in perceiving academia as being overly competitive, conditional on a rich vector of control variables. We also find that female economists show on average a 0.07 standard deviation lower agreement with the current research objectives and topics in economics (see Appendix Table A.10). These correlational patterns are consistent with the idea that under-represented groups such as women have comparatively less influence on the fields' research agendas, meaning their research preferences remain under-represented. The resulting disagreement with economics' practices is associated with a psychological and mental burden and could adversely affect who is willing to pursue an academic career. In this case, the under-representation of women could be self-reinforcing. Moreover, encouraging a shift towards more diverse, policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, or disruptive research could encourage more women to stay in academia, and vice versa.[26]

Our third main result is that economists follow strategic motives in their choice of research projects but face research incentives that systematically oppose the changes in research objectives that many economists prefer, namely more policy-relevant, multidisciplinary, and disruptive research. Economists systematically underestimate how many of their colleagues would favor such a change in research practices and believe that the publication process would not reward it.

These results suggest that economics could currently be trapped in a "bad equilibrium" in which change is desired by many researchers but, being unaware of this, individual researchers are discouraged to pioneer such change. Because researchers prefer to conduct research that they think their colleagues prefer, miscoordination is possible.

[26] As an important aside, female economists show lower overall satisfaction, even conditional on agreement with the topics and objectives of economic research and a rich battery of controls. Their job satisfaction is 0.07 standard deviations lower, their reported stress is 0.2 standard deviations higher and they perceive academia as being overly competitive to a stronger extent. Taken together, these observations corroborate the concern that economics is a male discipline (Dupas et al., 2021; Lundberg, ed, 2020; Wu, 2020). Male researchers outnumber women (3:1, see Table 2), are more satisfied with their job, less stressed, and agree with the field's research objectives and topics to a stronger extent.

In particular, economics could be in a state of "pluralistic ignorance" in which researchers do not initiate changes because they underestimate the support of their colleagues and thereby confirm each other in their pessimistic beliefs (Allport, 1924; Bursztyn et al., 2020; Miller and McFarland, 1987). Even as reviewers and recruiters, researchers could be hesitant to reward research that they think few of their colleagues will appreciate. Consequently, beliefs about other researchers' views are likely to play a critical role in research. Changes in private opinion (e.g., more multidisciplinarity needed) can remain unnoticed when perceived incentives continue to favor the existing mode of research production. Circumventing this friction requires a continuous, open, and inclusive debate. Since the choice of research questions and research objectives is arguably among the most important choices that researchers make, we hope that our results will contribute to a debate about *what's worth knowing*.

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Appendices *(for online publication)*

Table of Contents

A Supplementary tables and figures

A.1 Research objectives

Aggregate results, statistical tests Table A.1 reports the majority shares of respondents who agree directionally on which research objective economics should place more weight and tests whether these shares differ from 50%. It also reports the average response (in scale points) for each question and tests whether the means differ from the neutral "About right" category.

Predictors of responses Table A.2 regresses economists' responses to the research objectives question on various background characteristics. The results replicate in multiple sensitivity checks which use (i) different survey weights and (ii) ordered probit regressions. These sensitivity analyses are available upon request.

Robustness: Field-specific responses Figure A.1 compares the distribution of responses for economics as a whole and the respondents' own primary JEL field. It documents largely identical results. Figure A.2 disaggregates the field-specific responses and documents similar trends in almost all fields.

Robustness: Individual resources and environment Figure A.3 shows that respondents with different resources and environments (budget constrained, time constrained, top institution) respond similarly to the research objectives questions.

Robustness: Different weighting schemes Figure A.4 shows that we obtain virtually identical results if we recalculate the distribution of survey responses with the different weighting schemes and subsamples that are described in Appendix D.1.

Responses of Ph.D. students Figure A.5 compares the average responses in the main sample with the responses in the sample of Ph.D. students.

Table A.1 Majority shares and average responses to research objectives questions

(A) Share of respondents holding majority opinion, questions 1-5

	Pol. relev. (vs. intrin. interest)	Pol. relev. (vs. basic research)	Importance (vs. causal ident.)	Applied theory (vs. pure)	Less specialization
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Fraction "more"	0.540	0.516	0.559	0.609	0.604
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.009)
p: fraction=0.50	<0.001	0.062	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Observations	4,028	4,018	4,008	4,009	4,030

(B) Share of respondents holding majority opinion, questions 6-10

	More multidisciplinarity	More risky research	Disruptive research (vs. incremental)	Quality (vs. quantity)	Explanation (vs. prediction)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Fraction "more"	0.787	0.735	0.674	0.657	0.469
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.008)	(0.009)
p: fraction=0.50	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Observations	4,034	4,022	4,022	4,022	3,993

(C) Average response (in scale points -3 to 3, mid-point: 0), questions 1-5

	Pol. relev. (vs. intrin. interest)	Pol. relev. (vs. basic research)	Importance (vs. causal ident.)	Applied theory (vs. pure)	Less specialization
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Mean response	0.621	0.526	0.591	0.920	0.848
	(0.030)	(0.028)	(0.031)	(0.027)	(0.027)
p: mean=0	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Observations	4,028	4,018	4,008	4,009	4,030

(D) Average response (in scale points -3 to 3, mid-point: 0), Questions 6-10

	More multidisciplinarity	More risky research	Disruptive research (vs. incremental)	Quality (vs. quantity)	Explanation (vs. prediction)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Mean response	1.484	1.170	0.923	1.150	0.512
	(0.025)	(0.025)	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.027)
p: mean=0	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Observations	4,034	4,022	4,022	4,022	3,993

Notes: Results are based on weighted OLS regressions on a constant (i.e. estimates of averages), robust standard errors in parentheses, data from main survey. The dependent variables are responses to the ten research objective questions. In panels (A) and (B), the independent variable is a binary indicator for endorsing the majority opinion summarized in the column titles ("Slightly more ...", "Moderately more ...", or "Much more ..." of the research objective stated in the column title). Estimates thus report the share of respondents who endorse the majority opinion. Panels (C) and (D) report the average response in scale points (scale ranges from -3 to 3, mid-point: 0). p-values are reported in the second row of each table and adjusted for multiple hypothesis testing within panels (A) and (B) (10 tests) as well as (C) and (D) (10 tests) respectively, using the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure. All tests are two-sided.

Table A.2 Predictors of preferred research objectives

	Response to research objective question (standardized)									
	Pol. relev. (vs. intrin. interest)	Pol. relev. (vs. basic research)	Importance (vs. causal ident.)	Applied theory (vs. pure)	Less specialization	More multidis-ciplinarity	More risky research	Disruptive research (vs. incremental	Quality (vs. quantity)	Explanation (vs. prediction)
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
Demographics										
Female	0.106**	0.076	0.065	0.072	0.018	0.167***	0.004	0.112**	0.034	0.047
	(0.041)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.042)	(0.044)	(0.043)	(0.043)	(0.043)
Age (in 10y)	0.028	0.013	−0.104***	−0.000	0.113***	−0.007	0.036	0.040	0.130***	0.009
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.020)	(0.019)	(0.018)	(0.020)
Tenured	−0.044	−0.029	0.040	−0.038	−0.039	−0.033	−0.048	−0.051	−0.055	0.046
	(0.040)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.041)
Region (vs. NA/AUS/NZL)										
EUR	0.002	−0.053	0.013	−0.054	0.109**	−0.033	0.106**	0.076	0.194***	0.091*
	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.040)	(0.041)	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.041)
AF, AS, LA	−0.221***	−0.101	−0.195***	−0.165**	−0.284***	−0.132*	−0.339***	−0.234***	−0.101	0.030
	(0.058)	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.061)	(0.058)	(0.062)	(0.059)	(0.059)	(0.058)
Success										
Top 50 inst.	0.037	0.001	−0.051	0.050	0.039	0.076	0.127*	0.109	−0.110	−0.082
	(0.053)	(0.052)	(0.057)	(0.050)	(0.054)	(0.052)	(0.055)	(0.054)	(0.059)	(0.056)
Top Five	−0.210***	−0.200***	−0.100	−0.158**	−0.116	−0.182**	0.001	−0.001	0.240***	−0.090
	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.059)	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.062)	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.059)	(0.056)
h-index (in 10)	0.022	−0.001	0.125***	0.095***	0.018	−0.026	0.030	0.050	−0.076*	0.070*
	(0.033)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.030)	(0.032)	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.030)	(0.034)	(0.033)
Project types (vs. empirics)										
Theory (in 10%)	−0.049***	−0.047***	0.008	−0.079***	−0.004	−0.009	−0.005	0.006	0.011	0.018**
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Methods (in 10%)	−0.030**	−0.032**	−0.046***	−0.030**	−0.032**	−0.024*	−0.053***	−0.031**	0.010	0.003
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)	(0.012)	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.012)
JEL topic	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	3,887	3,880	3,871	3,874	3,888	3,891	3,880	3,880	3,882	3,856
R^2	0.060	0.048	0.037	0.079	0.062	0.055	0.050	0.034	0.052	0.036

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, robust standard errors in parentheses, data from main survey. The dependent variables are the *standardized* survey responses to the research objective questions, as indicated by the column labels. The explanatory variables include various author characteristics. Age and h-index are divided by 10, theory and methods are divided by 10%. All regressions control for the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals. p-values are adjusted for multiple hypotheses correction across all coefficients reported in this table, using the Benjamini-Hochberg-procedure. $^*p < 0.10$, $^{**}p < 0.05$, $^{***}p < 0.01$.

Region abbreviations: NA – Northern America, AUS – Australia, NZL – New Zealand, EUR – Europe, AF – Africa, AS – Asia, LA – Latin America.

Figure A.1 Research objectives for (i) economics as a whole and (ii) one's own primary JEL field.

Notes: Weighted distribution of survey responses, data from main survey. The figure compares responses for (i) economics as a whole and (ii) one's own primary JEL field.

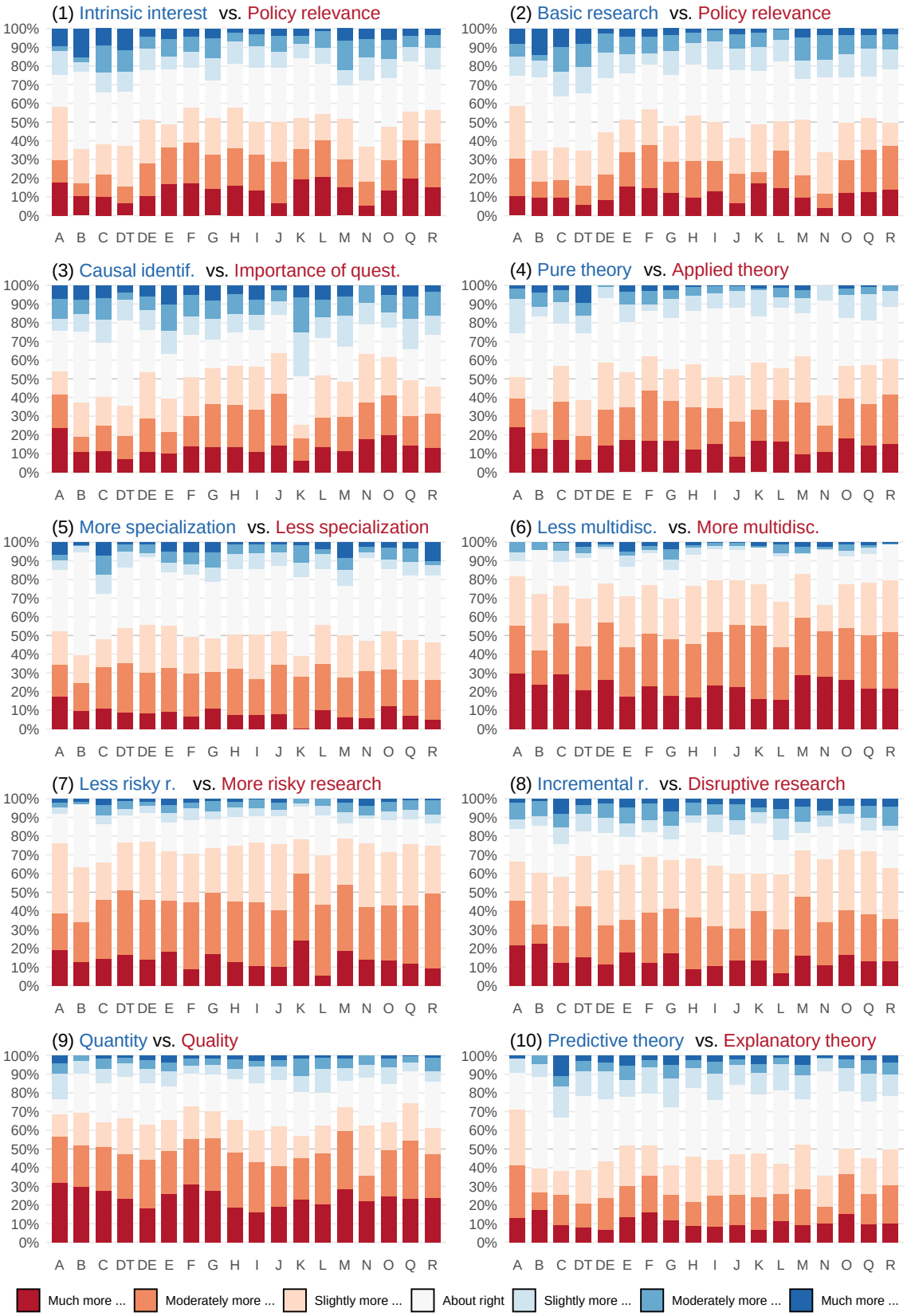

Figure A.2 Research objectives for each primary JEL field

Notes: Weighted distribution of survey responses, data from main survey. The figure compares the responses for respondents' own primary JEL fields. We distinguish between *DT* Theoretical Microeconomics (including Game Theory) and *DE* Empirical Microeconomics. JEL fields with less than 50 respondents are not shown (P, Z).

Figure A.3 Robustness of responses to the research objectives questions: Individual resources and environment

Notes: Survey responses to the ten research objectives questions for different subsamples, data from main survey. Budget: Respondents who indicate that their research budget "very strongly" constrains them in their choice of research topics or those who say that it constrains them "not at all". Time: Respondents who indicate that their available research time "very strongly" constrains them in their choice of research topics or those who say that it constrains them "not at all". Institution rank: Respondents who are affiliated with a research institution that is not represented in the top 100 institutions of the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities in Economics 2020 or those who are affiliated with a top 25 institution.

Figure A.4 Robustness of responses to the research objectives questions: Weighting

Notes: Survey responses to the ten research objectives questions, data from main survey. Different weighting schemes and samples are employed. *Main*: Main weighted survey sample. The other weighting schemes are described in Appendix D.1.

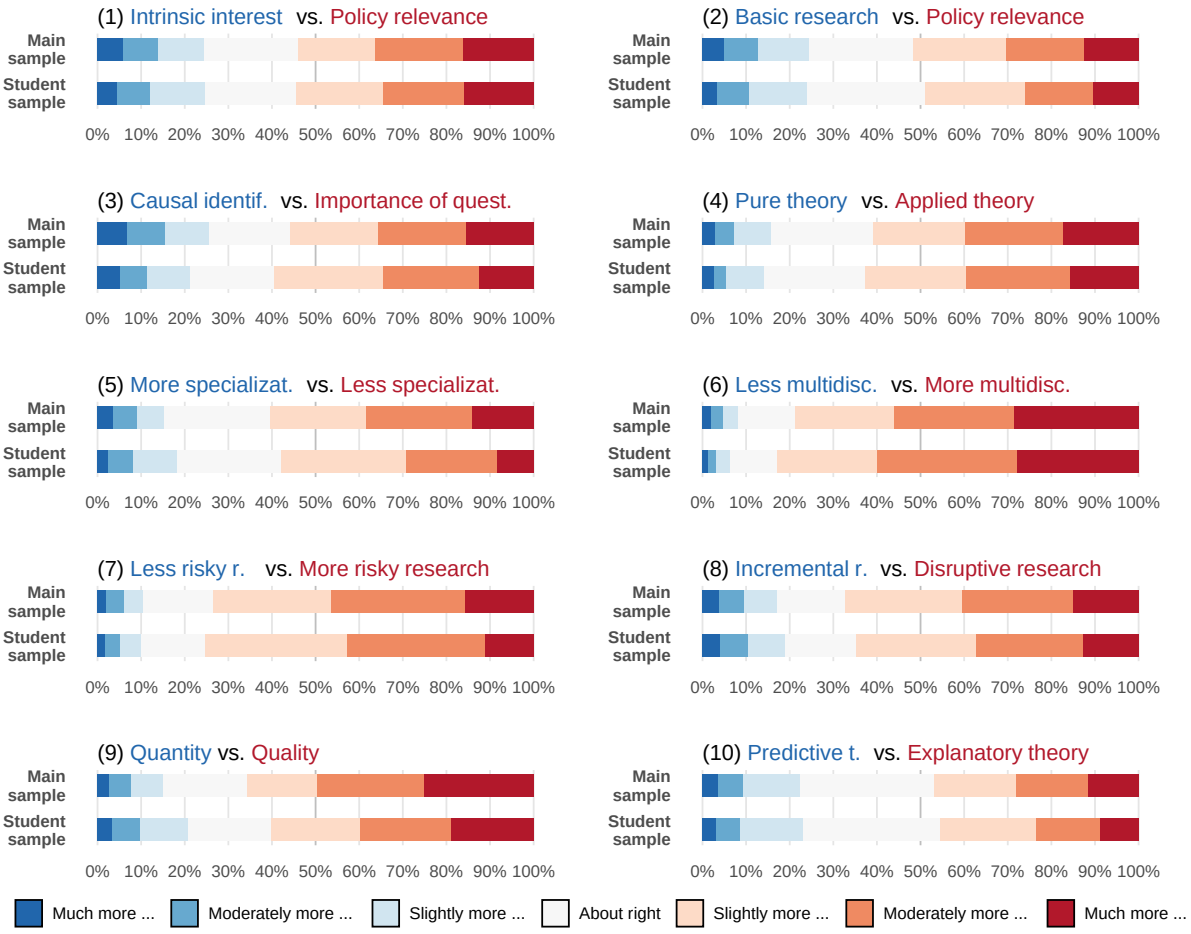

Figure A.5 Responses to the research objectives questions in the main sample and the Ph.D. student sample

Notes: Survey responses to the ten research objectives questions in the (weighted) main sample and the (unweighted) sample of Ph.D. students, data from main survey.

A.2 JEL topics

Subtopics We ask the participants to reconsider three randomly selected topics to which they assigned a positive share and to specify the importance of each of its subtopics. For each JEL topic, respondents can allocate 100 points between its JEL subtopics which represent published research articles within this field. Figure A.6 compares the distribution of JEL subtopics in our publication data (blue bars) with the average survey responses (red bars).[27] On average, respondents prefer a more uniform distribution of subtopics than can be observed in practice.

Comparison to Top Five journals Figure A.7 compares the distribution of JEL topics in the Top Five articles of our publication sample (in blue) with the average survey response (in red). The former shows which fraction of papers was published in each JEL topic in a Top Five journal from January 2009 to December 2019. The latter shows economists' average opinion on which share of papers should be written and published in each JEL topic. Figure A.8 plots the differences between both distributions (average survey response versus actually observed share) for each JEL topic. Again, we can draw the conclusion that the average economist would prefer a more diverse distribution of research topics.

Heterogeneity Figure A.9 plots kernel density estimates of the response distribution for each JEL topic and reveals that economists' opinion about the importance of different JEL topics are very heterogeneous. Figure A.10 plots kernel density estimates of the standard deviation of each respondent's preferred JEL distribution.

Predictors of responses We explore the heterogeneity of the survey responses by regressing the responses on a rich set of variables that cover basic demographic characteristics (gender, age, tenure, region), academic success (affiliation with top 50 institution, Top Five publication, h-index), and the share of theory and methods projects that a researcher is working on. We run a separate regression for each JEL topic. We also account for any effect the researchers' own choice of research topics might have and include (but for the sake of brevity, do not report) the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals (see Appendix C.3 for details). We use the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure to correct all reported coefficients for multiple hypotheses testing. Table A.3 summarizes the results. To facilitate orientation, we report only the statistical significance of the coefficients. $+++/---$ indicates a p-value below 0.01, $++/--$ a p-value below 0.05, and $+/-$ a p-value below

[27] Among the respondents who assign a positive share to a given JEL topic, those who assign positive shares to fewer other topics have a higher chance to be asked about its subtopics. Their views would be overrepresented if we used our standard survey weights. Therefore, we adjust the weights for these differential sampling probabilities.

0.10 for positive and negative coefficients, respectively.

Bias for own research field Table A.4 shows that the topics of an author's own publications strongly predict their perceived importance. We regress the desired share assigned to a JEL topic on the share of an author's publications in the topic. For example, this means that we regress the desired share assigned to *D* on the share of own publications in *D* or the desired share assigned to *E* on the share of own publications in *E*.

The dependent variable is the desired share assigned to a JEL topic j by respondent i. The predictor is the share of own publications of respondent i in JEL topic j. The underlying data has a panel structure with about 3,600 respondents (dimension 1) and 19 JEL topics (dimension 2). All regressions include topic fixed effects. Respondent fixed effects are not necessary because each respondent's topic shares sum up to 1, that is, there are no level differences between the respondents. We show that the results are robust to including controls (Column 2) and using different survey weights (Columns 3-5).

Robustness Figure A.11 and Figure A.12 show that the conclusions from the comparison of the actual JEL topic distribution (blue bars) and average survey responses (red bars) can be replicated in several robustness checks. Specifically, we calculate the **actual JEL topic shares** in the following specifications:

- **Main**: Main estimate as described in the main text.
- **JEL: Indicator**: Uses the *Indicator* metric to aggregate the JEL topics of the publications (see C.2).
- **JEL: Sum**: Uses the *Sum* metric to aggregate the publications' JEL topics (see C.2).
- **JEL: Primary**: Uses the *Primary* metric to aggregate the publications' JEL topics (see C.2).
- **Top 200**: Considers only publications in the set of top 200 journals.
- **Top 100**: Considers only publications in the set of top 100 journals.
- **Since 2015**: Considers only publications since 2015.
- **Since 2018**: Considers only publications since 2018.
- **Authors**: Considers only publications by authors who are part of the author population, as specified in Section 3.2 of the main text.

Moreover, we calculate the **average survey response for each JEL topic** for the following robustness specifications which are tailored to exclude possibly careless respondents:

- **Main**: Main estimate as described in the main text.
- **Wgt. no email**: Weighting scheme *Weighted, including no email*. See Appendix D.1 for details on the weighting schemes.
- **Unwgt.**: Identical weight for all participating authors (weighting scheme: *Unweighted*).
- **Unwgt. econ**: Identical weight for all participating authors who say that their primary academic discipline is economics, econometrics, or finance (weighting scheme: *Unweighted, only economics*).
- **Unwgt. w/ Ph.D.**: Identical weight for all participants, including participants from the Ph.D. student sample (weighting scheme: *Unweighted, with Ph.D.*).
- **Robust 1**: Excludes respondents who assign a positive share only to a few JEL categories, namely the 25% respondents who assign a positive weight to the fewest JEL topics.
- **Robust 2**: Excludes respondents who assign a very large share to one category, namely the 25% respondents with the largest maximum assigned share.
- **Robust 3**: Excludes respondents who frequently assign the same share to different categories, namely the 25% respondents with the most duplicate share values.
- **Robust 4**: Excludes respondents who frequently "round" and assign multiples of 5 to the different JEL topics, namely the 25% respondents who use the most rounded values.
- **Robust 5**: Excludes respondents with low response variation, namely the 25% respondents with the lowest standard deviation of JEL shares.
- **Robust 6**: Excludes respondents with a low response duration for the JEL topics questions, namely the 25% respondents with the lowest response duration.

Responses of Ph.D. students Figure A.13 compares the average responses in the main sample with the average responses in the sample of Ph.D. students.

Robustness: Response error On average, economists report to prefer a more diverse distribution of research topics. We explore to what extent this "preference for diversity" could be driven by non-standard measurement and response error that biases responses toward a more uniform distribution.

Our strategy is to assume that respondents think of the current distribution of research topics in economics as ideal but make noisy responses. We simulate different degrees of noise to explore how large the noise would need to be to single-handedly generate the sizable differences between the reported preferred topic distribution and the actual topic distributions.

To fix ideas, let S_t denote the actual share of topic t. s_{it} is i's preferred share for topic t and $\hat{s}_{it}$ the corresponding survey response. We assume that $s_{it} = S_t$ but $\hat{s}_{it} = s_{it} + \varepsilon_{it}$, where ε_{it} is the response error.

We consider two different versions of response error:

1. Censored normal noise: For each topic t and respondent i, we draw an independent, normally distributed noise term from $N(0, \sigma^2)$. Then, we censor the resulting response and enforce $\hat{s}_{it} \geq 0$ and transform the resulting simulated responses to ensure that $\sum_t \hat{s}_{it} = 1$. Thus, we assume that the measure varies around the true preference level. Due to the zero-lower-bound, responses for small topics will be upward biased, creating a drift towards uniformity.

2. Uniformity noise: With probability $1 - \alpha$ the response is unbiased $\hat{s}_{it} = s_{it}$. With probability α, the response assigns the same share to each topic. Thus, we assume that a share of respondents ignore their true preferences and just report a uniform distribution, creating a drift towards uniformity.

Figures A.14 and A.15 display the preferred topic distributions for various degrees of simulated response error and contrast them to the average distribution from our survey data. We also derive the degree of noise for which the simulated distributions come closest to the actual distribution.

The figures show that the response error would need to be implausibly large to generate the larger uniformity of the average distribution of survey responses, suggesting that the discrepancy between the preferred and actual topic distribution cannot be fully attributed to response error.

For censored normal noise, a σ of 14 percentage points brings the simulated distribution closest to the observed survey distribution. The uniformity bias requires an α of 57%, which means that 57% of the respondents mistakenly respond with the uniform distribution.

Furthermore, neither of the simulations can match the large gaps between the preferred and actual shares of the topics D, G, and L. And neither is in line with the finding that

about half of the respondents report a preferred distribution of research topics with a smaller variance than the actually observed distribution (Figure A.10).

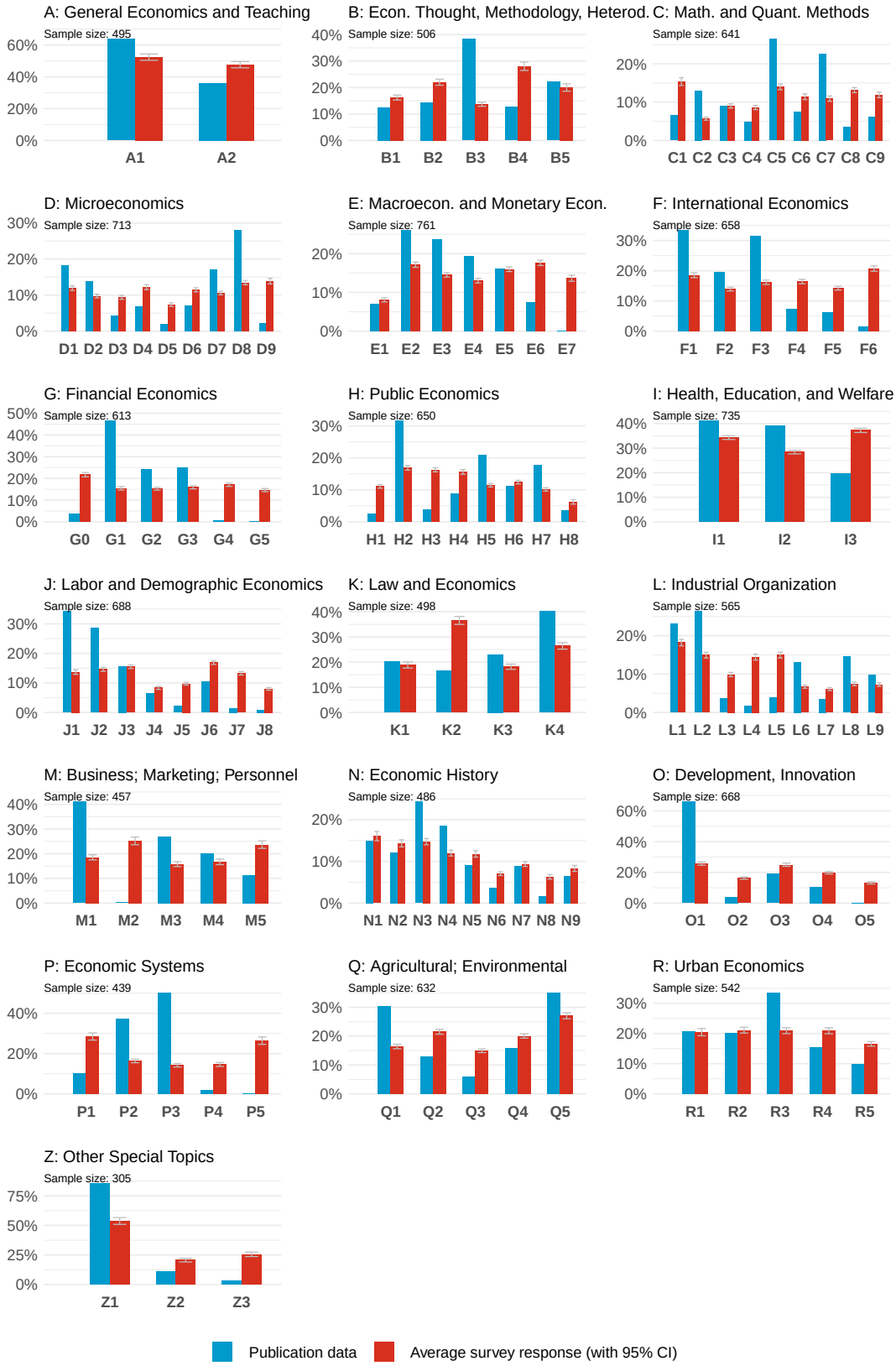

Figure A.6 Comparison of actual JEL topic distribution and average survey responses for JEL subtopics

Notes: Blue bars: Share of JEL subtopics in our publication data (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals, January 2009 - December 2019). Red bars: Weighted average survey response with 95% confidence interval, data from main survey.

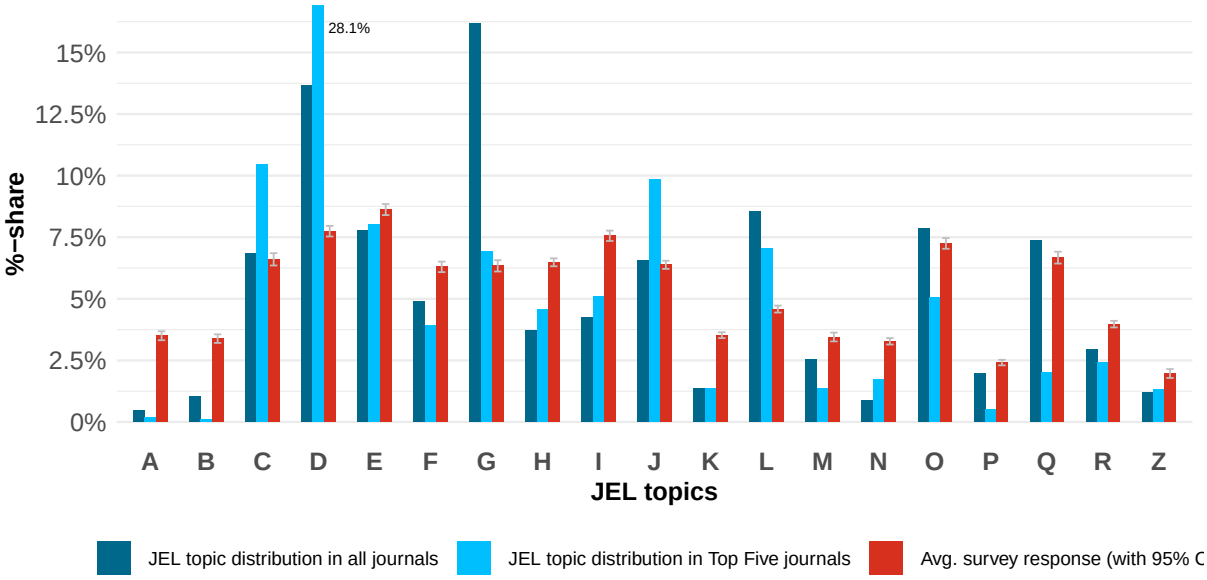

Figure A.7 Comparison of JEL topic distribution in Top Five journals with survey responses

Notes: Dark blue bars: Share of JEL topics in top 400 EconLit-indexed journals. Light blue bars: Share of JEL topics in Top Five articles. EconLit publication data, January 2009 - December 2019. Red bars: Weighted average survey response with 95% confidence interval, data from main survey.

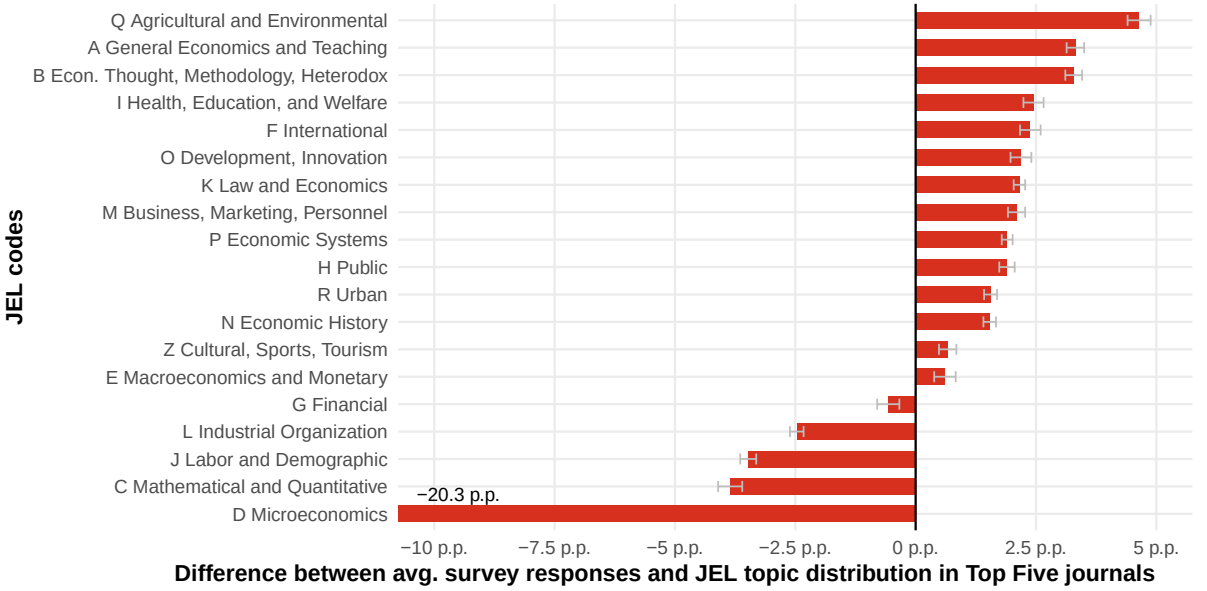

Figure A.8 Differences between the average preferred and the actual JEL topic distribution in Top Five journals

Notes: Differences between red bars and blue bars from the above Figure A.7 with 95% confidence intervals.

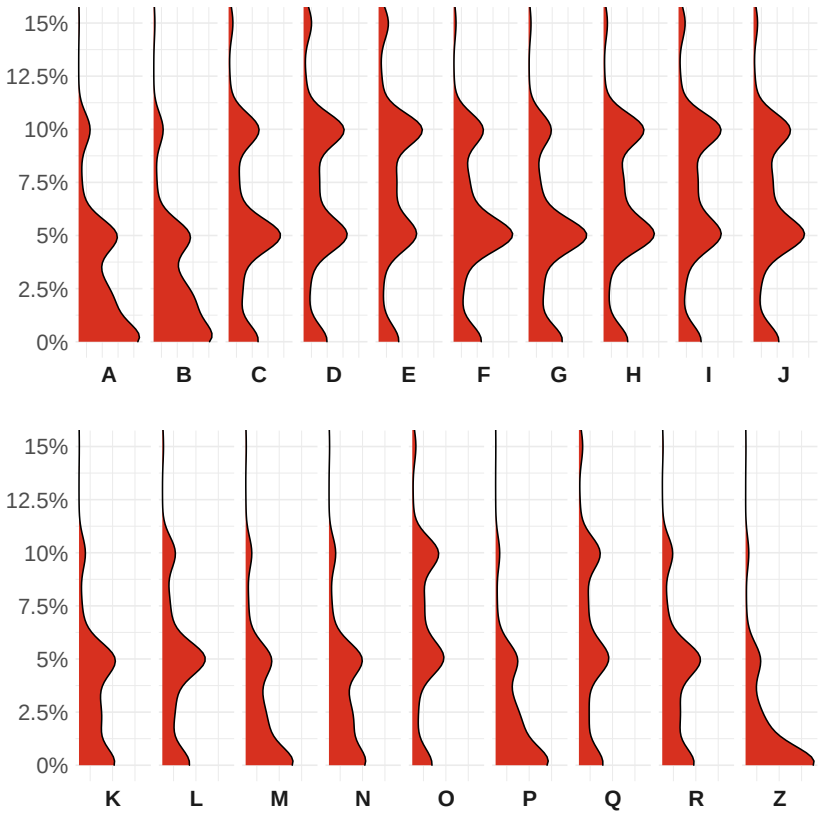

Figure A.9 Distribution of survey responses for each JEL topic

Notes: Weighted kernel density estimates, displayed from 0% to 15%, data from main survey.

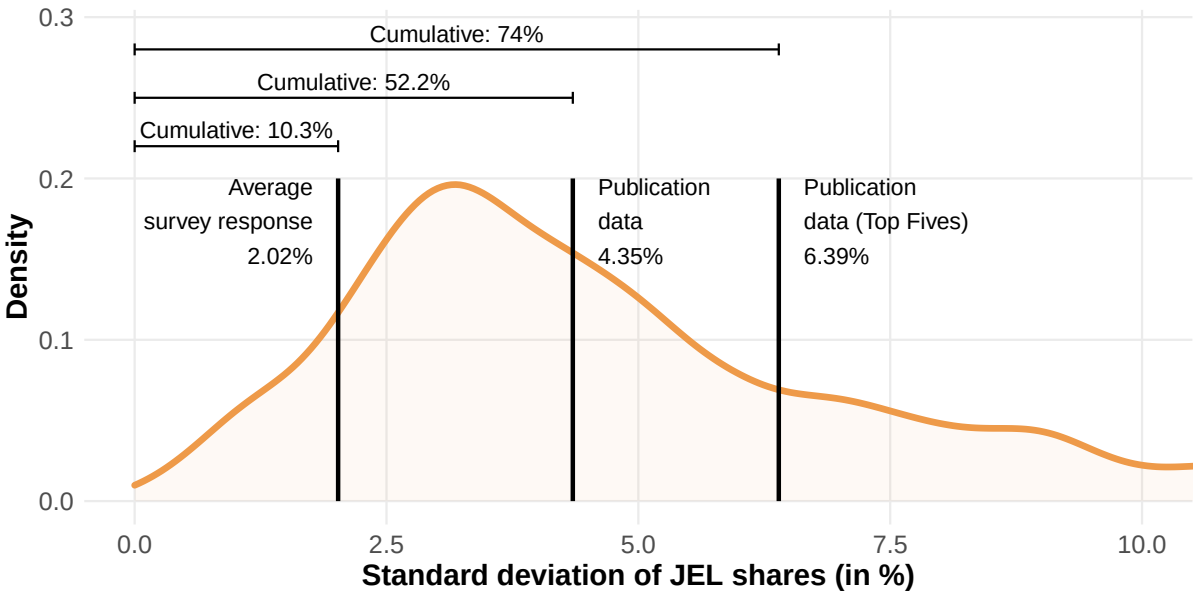

Figure A.10 Distribution of survey responses for each JEL topic

Notes: Weighted kernel density estimates of the standard deviation of each respondent's preferred JEL distribution, displayed from 0% to 10%, data from main survey.

Table A.3 Predictors of preferred JEL topics

	(1) A	(2) B	(3) C	(4) D	(5) E	(6) F	(7) G	(8) H	(9) I	(10) J
Demographics										
Female	.	.	.	−	− − −	.	.	.	+ + +	+ +
Age	.	+	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	−
Tenured	.	.	.	.	.	.	+	.	.	.
Region (vs. NA/AUS/NZL)										
EUR	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
AF, AS, LA	.	.	.	.	.	.	+ + +	.	.	.
Success										
Top 50 institution	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Published Top Five	− − −	− − −	.	.	+ +	.	.	.	.	.
h-index	− −	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.	.
Project types(vs. empirics)										
Theory	.	.	+	+ + +	+ +	.	.	− −	− −	− − −
Methods	.	.	+ + +	.	.	.	.	− − −	.	− −

	(11) K	(12) L	(13) M	(14) N	(15) O	(16) P	(17) Q	(18) R	(19) Z
Demographics									
Female	.	−	.	− − −	+	.	+ + +	.	.
Age	.	−	.	.	.	.	.	− −	.
Tenured	.	.	.	.	.	.	−	.	.
Region (vs. NA/AUS/NZL)									
EUR	−	− −	+	.	.	.	+	.	.
AF, AS, LA	.	− −	+ + +	−	.	.	−	.	.
Success									
Top 50 institution	.	.	.	.	.	− −	− − −	.	.
Published Top Five	.	.	.	.	.	− −	.	.	.
h-index	.	.	.	.	.	−	.	.	.
Project types (vs. empirics)									
Theory	.	+ +	−	.	.	.	−	.	.
Methods	− − −	− − −	.	− −	−	.	.	.	.

Notes: Results from weighted OLS regressions with robust standard errors, data from main survey. The dependent variable is the share assigned to the respective JEL topic of each column. The rows contain the explanatory variables of the regressions. We also control for (but do not report) the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals. We use the Benjamini-Hochberg procedure to correct *all* reported coefficients jointly for multiple hypotheses testing. +++/− − − indicates a p-value below 0.01, ++/− − a p-value below 0.05, and +/− a p-value below 0.10 for positive and negative coefficient respectively. Non-significant results are represented by a dot.

Table A.4 Bias for own research field

	%-weight assigned to JEL topic				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Own share (%)	0.106***	0.098***	0.101***	0.113***	0.112***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Topic FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Controls	–	✓	–	–	–
Weights	Main	Main	Incl. no email	Unwgt.	Unwgt., econ.
Observations	70,699	68,191	70,699	75,639	63,859
R^2	0.149	0.173	0.143	0.151	0.170

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, with standard errors (clustered on respondent level) in parantheses, data from main survey. The dependent variable is the %-share assigned to a JEL topic j by respondent i. The predictor is the %-share of own publications of respondent i in JEL topic j. All regressions include topic fixed effects. Respondent fixed effects are not necessary because each respondent's shares sum up to 1. Column 2 interacts additional control variables with the topic fixed effects, namely gender, age, a tenure dummy, region (EUR and AF, AS, LA), a top-50-institution dummy, a published-Top-Five dummy, h-index, the share of research in theory and methods respectively, and the share of publications in economics. Columns 3-5 use different survey weights. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

Figure A.11 Robustness of JEL topic distributions – part 1

Notes: Black border: Main estimates. Blue bars: Share of JEL topics in our publication data (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals, January 2009 - December 2019). Red bars: Weighted average survey response with 95% confidence interval, data from main survey. Both distributions are calculated in different robustness specifications that are described in the discussion above.

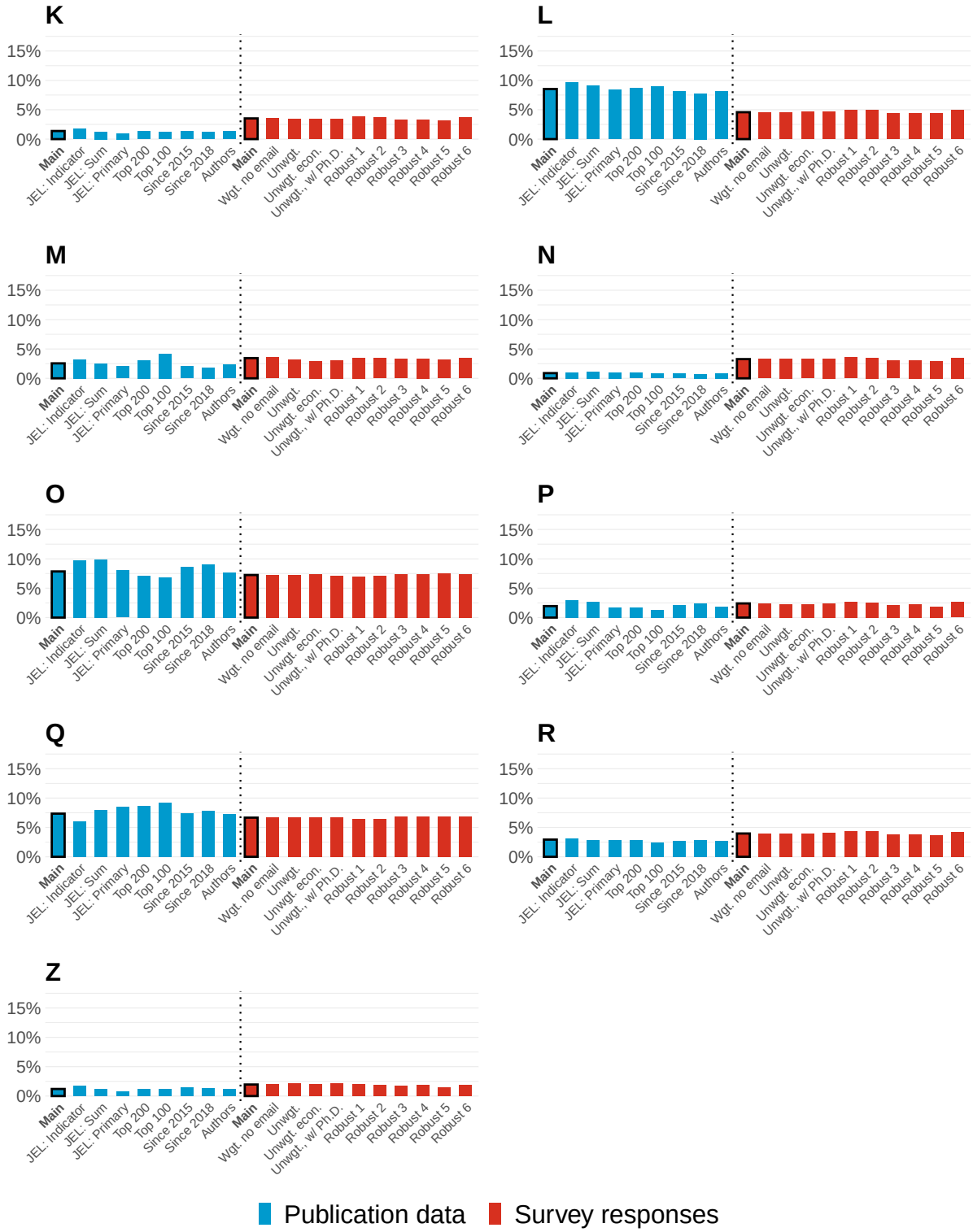

Figure A.12 Robustness of topic distributions – part 2

Notes: Black border: Main estimates. Blue bars: Share of JEL topics in our publication data (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals, January 2009 - December 2019). Red bars: Weighted average survey response with 95% confidence interval, data from main survey. Both distributions are calculated in different robustness specifications that are described in the discussion above.

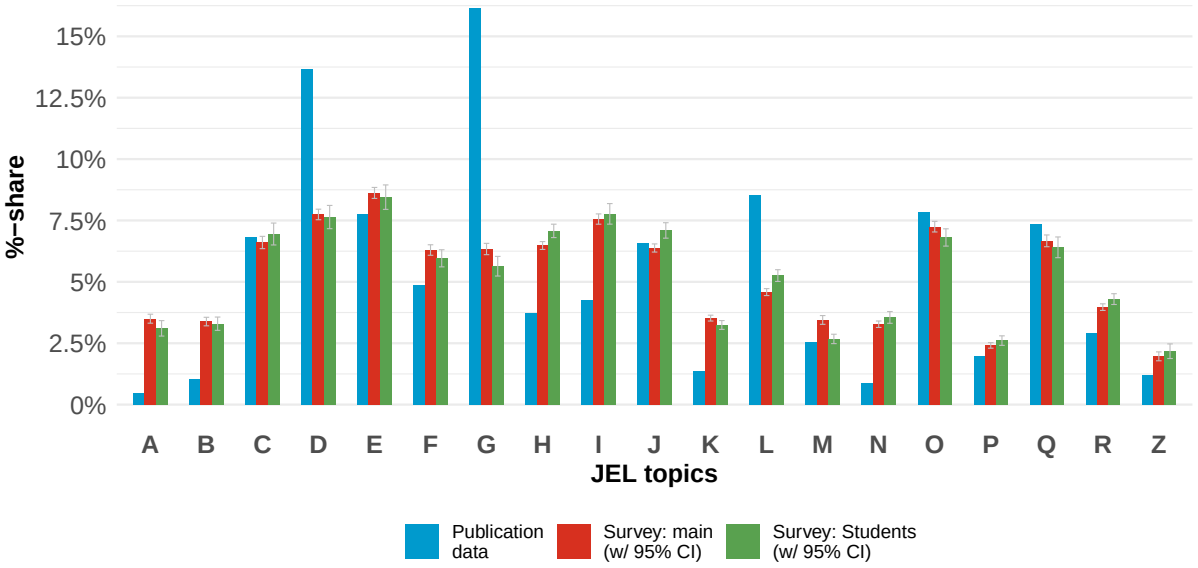

Figure A.13 Preferred JEL topics in the main sample and the Ph.D. student sample

Notes: Blue bars: Share of JEL topics in our publication data (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals). Red bars: Weighted average survey responses in the main sample with 95% confidence intervals, data from main survey. Green bars: (Unweighted) average survey responses in the sample of Ph.D. students with 95% confidence intervals, data from main survey.

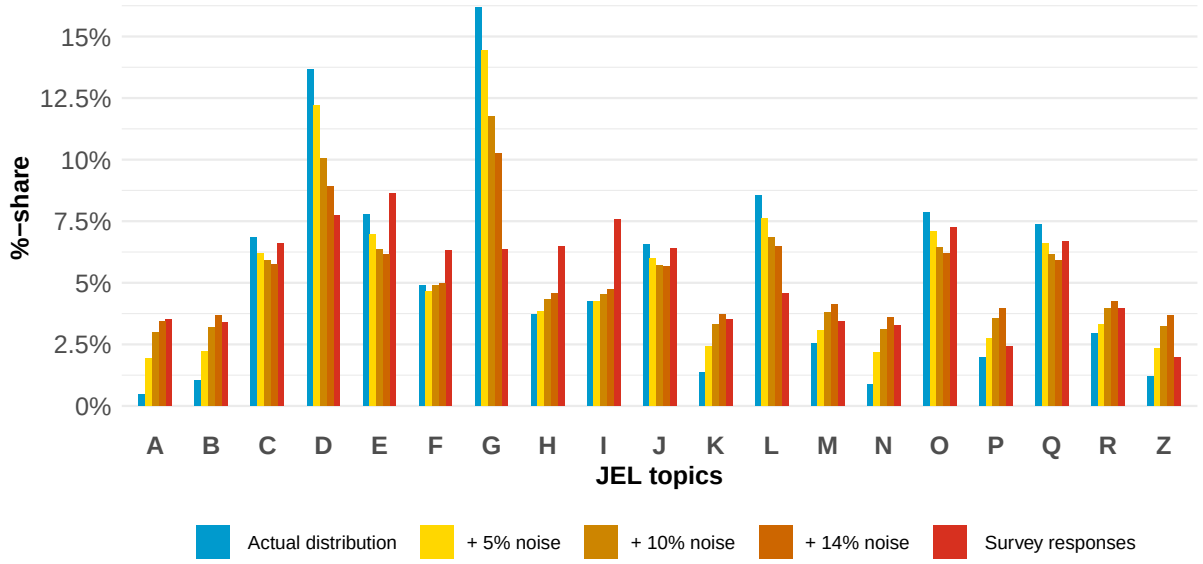

Figure A.14 Simulating the impact of response error on the preferred topic distribution: Censored normal noise

Notes: Blue bars: Share of JEL topics in top 400 EconLit-indexed journals. Red bars: Weighted average survey response, data from main survey. Yellow/orange bars: Average response distribution with simulated "censored normal" response error. For $\sigma = 14\%$, the summed absolute distance between the simulated and the actual response distribution is minimized.

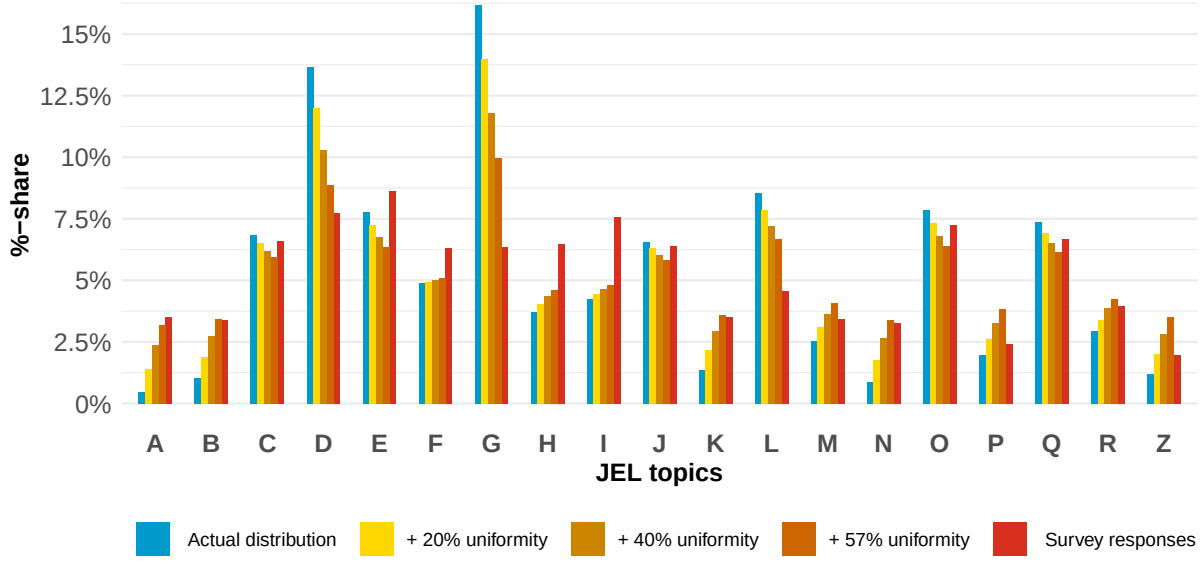

Figure A.15 Simulating the impact of response error on the preferred topic distribution: Uniformity noise

Notes: Blue bars: Share of JEL topics in top 400 EconLit-indexed journals. Red bars: Weighted average survey response, data from main survey. Yellow/orange bars: Average response distribution with simulated "uniformity" response error. For $\alpha = 57\%$, the summed absolute distance between the simulated and the actual response distribution is minimized.

A.3 Publication lags

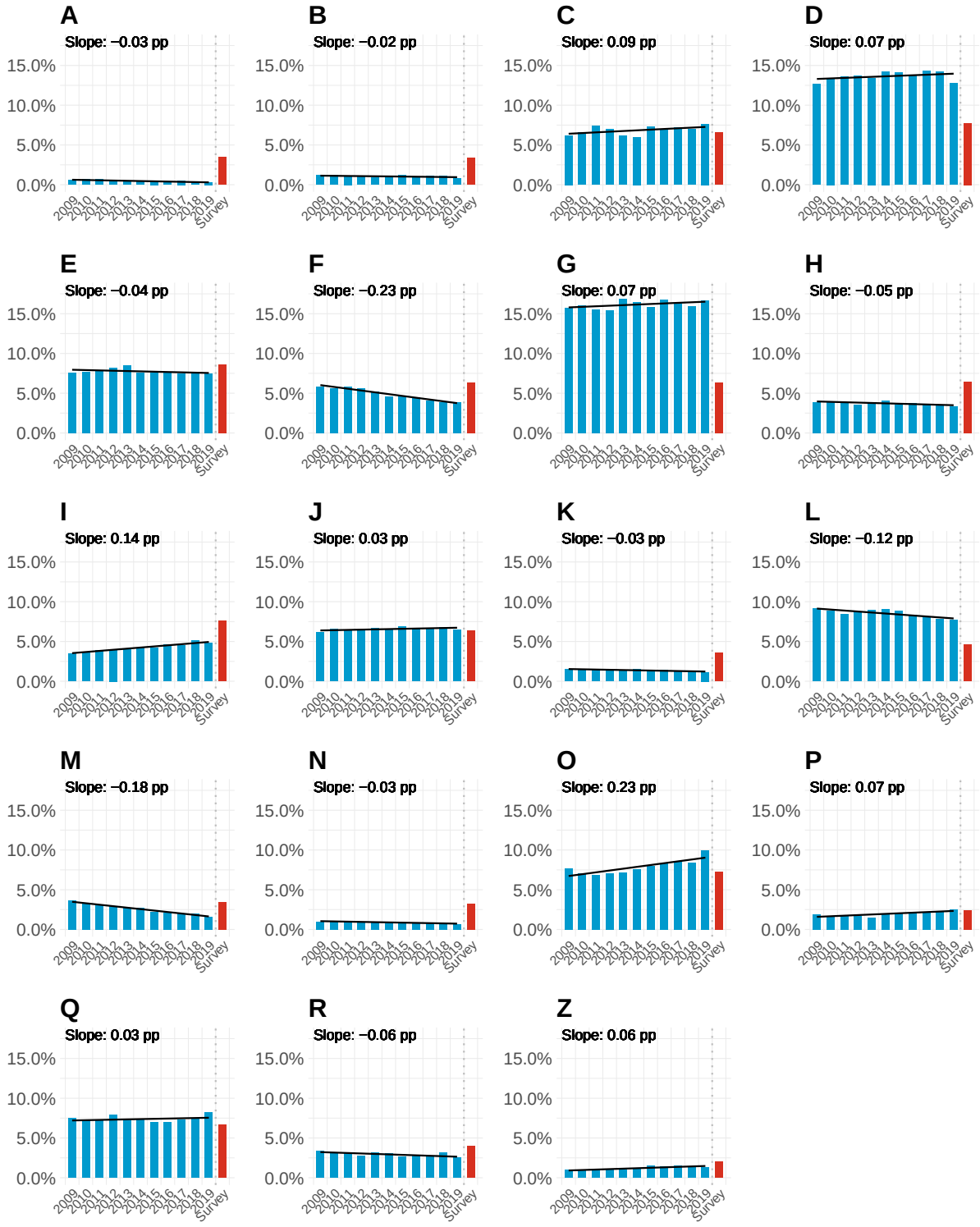

Figure A.16 Time trends in the JEL topic distribution over the last decade

Notes: Blue bars: Share of JEL topics in our publication data (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals) for each year with linear time trend (slope reported). Red bars: Weighted average survey response, data from main survey.

A.4 "Gatekeeping": The opinions of influential economists

Influential economists We derive the following indicators for influential and successful scholars.

- **Top Five**: *Published Top Five* is a binary indicator that takes the value 1 if the author published at least one article in a Top Five journal within our publication sample (top 400 EconLit journals, 2009-2019, see main text Section 3.1). The Top Five journals are the American Economic Review, The Quarterly Journal of Economics, the Journal of Political Economy, the Review of Economic Studies, and Econometrica. Publications in the Papers & Proceedings of the American Economic Review are not counted as Top Five publications.

  The indicator *Published a Top Five* is also used in other heterogeneity analyses of the paper.

- **Editor**: We compile a list of editors and advisory board members of the top 100 journals in economics from the years 2015-2020. We start with all EconLit-indexed journals and focus on the 100 outlets with the highest Scopus 2018 Scimago journal ranking. Most journals list their editors and board members in each printed issue. Since personnel turnovers are rare, we download the first issues of the years 2020, 2018, and 2016 and extract all available editor information. If an issue does not contain editor information, we check an earlier or older issue. Some journals do not announce their editors in print. Here, we derive information on their current editors and advisory board members from the journals' websites.

  Based on the names, we match the editor data to our author database and manually disambiguate all cases in which multiple matches are found. In total, 4,363 (72%) editors or advisory board members can be matched to a scholar in our author data. The matching rate is higher for editors who responsible for handling submissions (86%; i.e., excluding advisory board members). It is also higher for editors or advisory board members at higher-ranked journals (e.g., top 50: 77%, top 10: 90%), presumably because these journals are less likely to be interdisciplinary and their editors and advisory board members hence more likely to be economists.

  For the analysis, we derive several binary indicators that take value 1 if a respondent belongs to the group of current or recent editors or advisory board members. Our main variable indicates whether a respondent is an editor or advisory board member at one of the top 50 journals in economics. We replicate the analysis with editors and advisory board members with both a narrower set (top 25) and a

wider set of journals (top 100). In additional analyses, we exclude board members who have only an advisory role and focus only editors who handle submissions.

- **Referees**: We compile a list of scholars who have repeatedly refereed for Top Five journals in the years 2015-2020. The American Economic Review, the Journal of Political Economy, and Econometrica publish a list of all referees yearly. The Quarterly Journal of Economics published a list of referees who reviewed four or more articles for 2018 and 2019, and the Review of Economic Studies published a list of recipients of an Excellence in Refereeing Award in the years 2016 to 2019. We download these lists and extract the names of the referees. We focus on referees that appear at least twice in the lists, that is, referees that review for at least two Top Five journals or in at least two years. In total, we find 4,242 repeated Top Five referees.

  Based on the names, we match the referee data to our author database. In total, 79% of all referees can be matched to a unique scholar in our author data. The *Top Five referee* dummy takes value 1 for successful matches, i.e. repeated referees at Top Five journals.

6.1% of our weighted sample (population: 6.1%) have published a Top Five paper, 3.2% have served as a member of an editorial or advisory board at a top 50 journal (population: 3.6%), and 6.1% have repeatedly reviewed papers for Top Five journals (population: 4.9%).

Research objectives Figure A.17 presents the preferred research objectives among different groups of editors or advisory board members.

JEL topics Figure A.18 presents the average preferred distribution of research topics among influential economists (published in Top Five, member of editorial board at top 50 journals, refereed for Top Five). Figure A.19 shows more detailed results for different groups of editors or advisory board members.

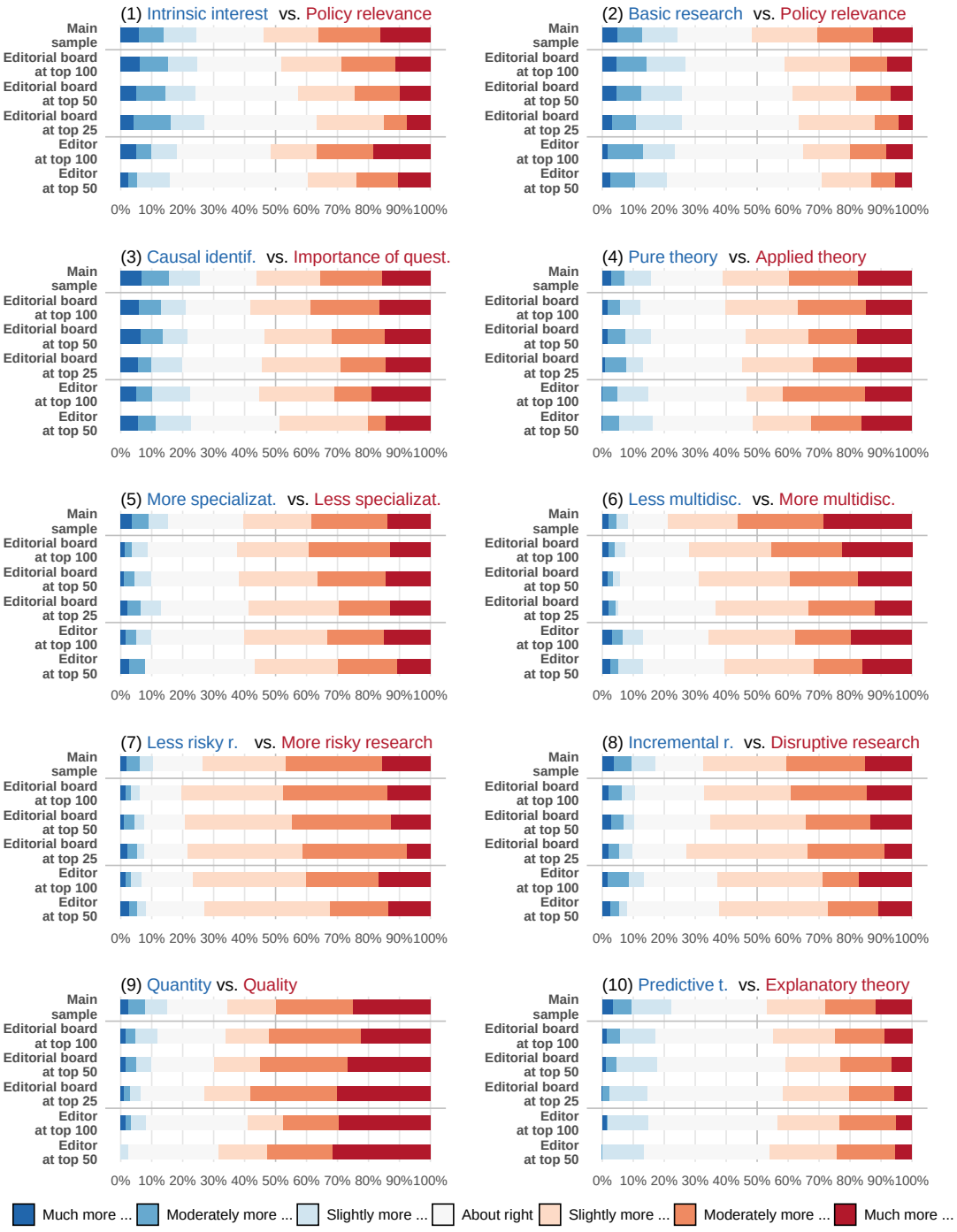

Figure A.17 Responses to the research objective questions in different groups of editors

Notes: Weighted distribution of survey responses to the ten research objective questions, data from main survey. The overarching question is: "In comparison with how research in economics is currently conducted, how should economists conduct research?" The results are displayed for the main sample (n = 4,073) and the (unweighted) subsets of authors who are editorial (incl. advisory) board members at one of the top 100 (n = 334), top 50 (n = 174), or top 25 journals (n = 93), or who are editors (in charge of handling submissions) at one of the top 100 (n = 61) or top 50 journals (n = 38), respectively.

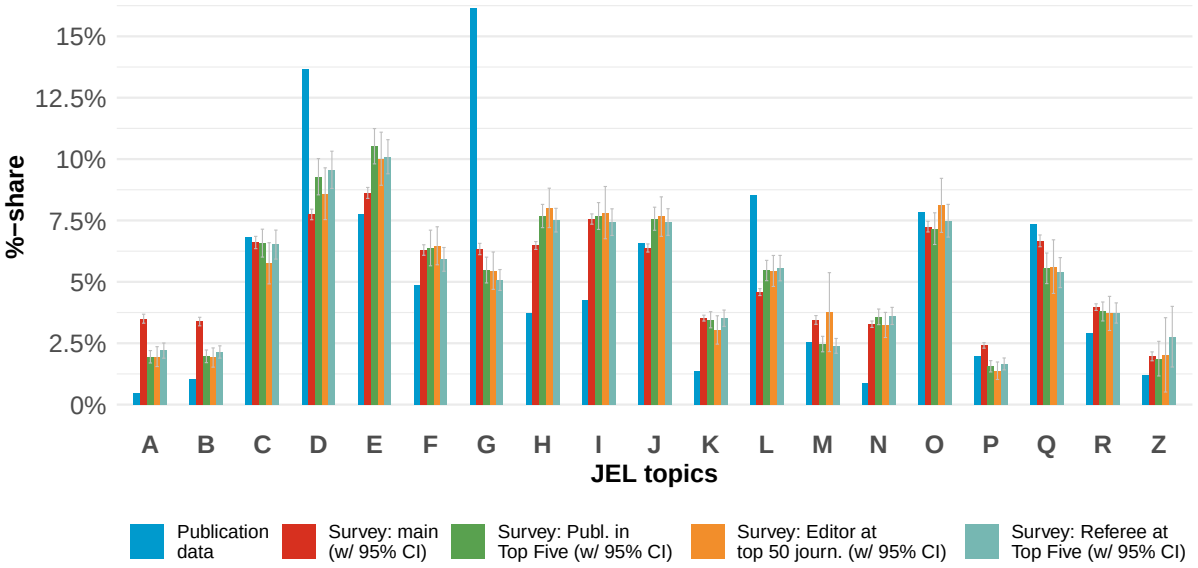

Figure A.18 Comparison of JEL topic distributions in economics journals with survey responses in main sample and among influential economists

Notes: Blue bars: Shares of JEL topics in our publication sample (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals, January 2009 - December 2019). Red bars: Weighted average survey responses with 95% confidence intervals, data from main survey. Other bars: Unweighted average survey responses with 95% confidence intervals for different groups of influential economists, data from main survey.

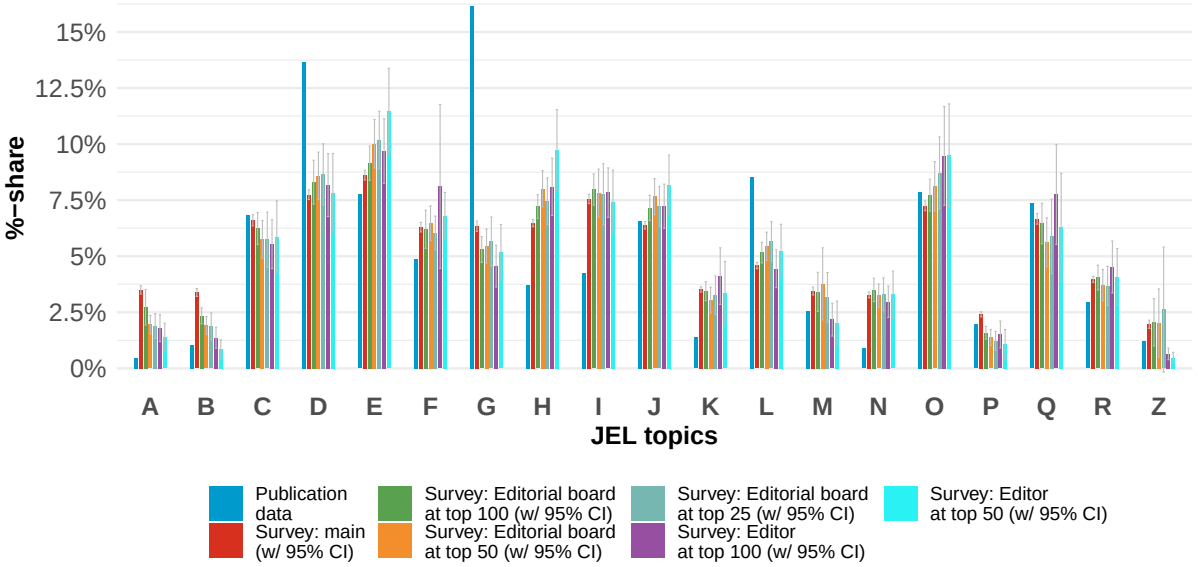

Figure A.19 Comparison of JEL topic distributions in economics journals with survey responses in main sample and among different groups of editors

Notes: Blue bars: Shares of JEL topics in our publication sample (EconLit publication data, top 400 journals, January 2009 - December 2019). Red bars: Weighted average survey responses with 95% confidence intervals, data from main survey. Other bars: Unweighted average survey responses with 95% confidence intervals for different groups of editors (in charge of handling submissions) or editorial board members (including advisory board members), data from main survey.

A.5 Strategic concerns and perceived research incentives

Intrinsic motives Figure A.20 presents the distribution of intrinsic motives among economists.

Beliefs about other economists' views Table A.5 presents the actual and perceived research preferences of economists. It also displays the share of respondents who underestimate and overestimate economists' preference for change.

Table A.6 tests whether respondents' beliefs differ significantly from the actual research preferences of economists.

Figure A.21 presents histograms of the beliefs about how many other economists favor more important research questions, more multidisciplinarity, and more disruptive research, respectively. It visualizes how widespread the underestimation of economists' preference for change is.

Predictors of beliefs Table A.7 explores which characteristics predict respondents' beliefs about economists' research preferences.

A working paper that presented the results of the main paper was already available when we launched the strategic concerns survey, and a few respondents (45) indicate in an additional question that they already heard of the survey's results. Table A.8 shows that economists who have heard of the results of the main survey have smaller misperceptions.

Predictors of publication incentives Table A.9 explores which characteristics predict economists' perceived publication incentives.

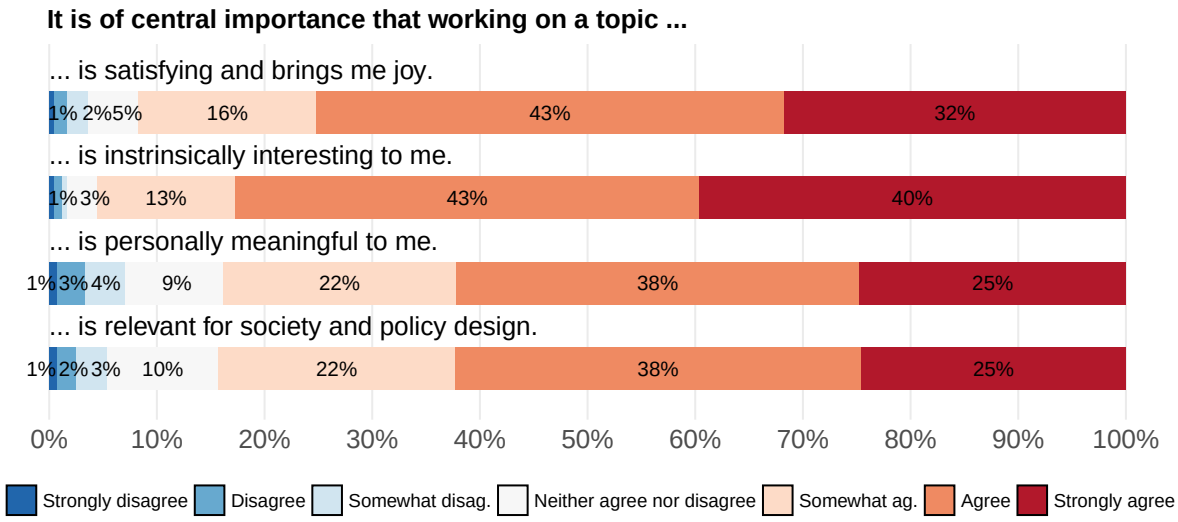

Figure A.20 Distribution of intrinsic motives in economics

Notes: Distribution of survey responses to the Likert-type motives questions (weighted sample, strategic concerns survey). The overarching question is: "When I choose a research topic, it is of central importance to me that working on this topic ..."

Table A.5 Beliefs about other economists' views

	(1) More	(2) About right	(3) Less	(4) Underestimate	(5) Overestimate
Important questions (vs. causality)					
Actual responses	55.9%	18.5%	25.6%		
Perceived responses	32.2%	34.8%	33.0%	91.7%	8.3%
Multidisciplinarity					
Actual responses	78.7%	13%	8.3%		
Perceived responses	41.2%	41.9%	17.0%	95.4%	4.6%
Disruptive research (vs. incremental)					
Actual responses	67.4%	15.5%	17.2%		
Perceived responses	36.9%	37.1%	26.0%	91.2%	8.8%

Notes: Columns 1 to 3 contrast economists' actual research preferences and their belief about economists' research preferences. *Actual responses*: How many economists indicate that they would like to see more or less of a research objective or no change, respectively (main survey). *Perceived responses*: Economists' average perceived share of scholars who would like to see more or less of a research objective or no change, respectively (strategic concerns survey). Columns 4 and 5 summarize which share of economists underestimate or overestimate how many scholars would like to see more of a research objective.

Table A.6 Statistical test: Beliefs differ from actual views

	More important questions (vs. causality)	More multidisciplinarity	More disruption
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Wedge to avg. perceived resp.	-0.237^{***}	-0.376^{***}	-0.305^{***}
	(0.011)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Avg. actual response	0.559^{***}	0.787^{***}	0.674^{***}
	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.008)
Observations			
Actual responses	4008	4034	4022
Perceived responses	1136	1136	1136
R^2	0.047	0.148	0.082

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, robust standard errors in parentheses, pooled data from main survey (actual responses) and strategic concerns survey (perceived responses). The dependent variables range from 0 to 1. For actual responses, they take value 1 if a respondent indicates to prefer more of a research objective (see column title) and 0 otherwise. For perceived responses, they equal the perceived share of economists (between 0 and 1) who would prefer more of a research objective. The explanatory variables include a constant and a dummy that takes value 1 for perceived responses. The constant estimates the average actual response. The dummy coefficient estimates the average "wedge" between actual and perceived responses. The large negative and significant wedges indicate that economists strongly underestimate how many of their colleagues would prefer to see more important research (underestimated by 24pp), more multidisciplinary research (underestimated by 38pp), and more disruptive research (underestimated by 30pp). $*p < 0.10$, $**p < 0.05$, $***p < 0.01$.

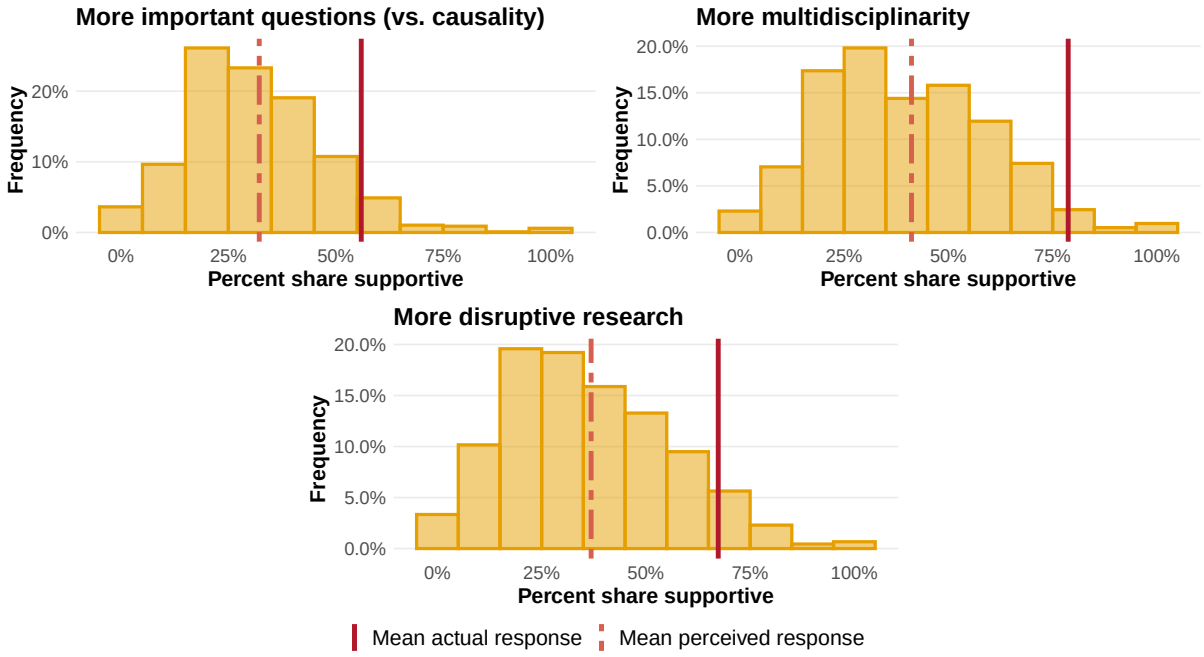

Figure A.21 Distribution of beliefs about other economists' views

Notes: Yellow rectangles: Histogram of the perceived shares of economists who favor more important research questions, more multidisciplinarity, and more disruptive research, respectively (data from strategic concerns survey). Orange, dashed line: Weighted average perceived share. Red line: Actual share (data from main survey).

Table A.7 Predictors of beliefs about other economists' views

	Belief: %-share of economists who support ...		
	More importance (vs. causality)	More multidisciplinarity	More disruptiveness
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Demographics			
Female	2.742	1.473	2.040
	(1.525)	(1.829)	(1.813)
Age (in 10y)	−1.347	−0.708	−1.410
	(0.640)	(0.854)	(0.771)
Tenured	0.062	−1.011	1.660
	(1.327)	(1.671)	(1.632)
Region (vs. NA/AUS/NZL)			
EUR	2.171	2.864	1.544
	(1.468)	(1.770)	(1.724)
AF, AS, LA	2.114	5.511	0.112
	(1.995)	(2.428)	(2.466)
Success			
Top 50 inst.	0.528	2.471	4.864
	(2.353)	(3.004)	(2.784)
Top Five	1.560	−1.018	−2.419
	(2.067)	(2.315)	(2.515)
h-index (in 10)	−1.503	−1.096	0.632
	(1.201)	(1.401)	(1.321)
Motives			
Strat. vs. intr. (std. index)	−0.013	−0.826	0.939
	(0.574)	(0.795)	(0.772)
Constant	27.281	45.198	33.288
	(10.520)	(13.714)	(12.782)
Controls	✓	✓	✓
Weights	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,066	1,066	1,066
R^2	0.050	0.029	0.032

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, robust standard errors in parentheses, data taken from strategic concerns survey. The dependent variables are beliefs about the share (0 to 100) of economists who favor more important research question, more multidisciplinarity, and more disruptive research. The explanatory variables include various author characteristics. Age and h-index are divided by 10. The strategic vs. intrinsic motive score is derived as the standardized difference between the sum of agreement with the strategic motive statements and the sum of agreement with the intrinsic motive statements. All regressions control for the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals. p-values are adjusted for multiple hypotheses correction across all coefficients reported in this table, using the Benjamini-Hochberg-procedure. $*p < 0.10$, $**p < 0.05$, $***p < 0.01$.
Region abbreviations: NA – Northern America, AUS – Australia, NZL – New Zealand, EUR – Europe, AF – Africa, AS – Asia, LA – Latin America.

Table A.8 Economists who have heard of the main survey's results have smaller misperceptions

	Belief: %-share of economists who support ...			
	More importance (vs. causality)	More multidisciplinarity	More disruptiveness	Pooled
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Heard of results (dummy)	7.878**	6.409	7.636**	7.308***
	(3.671)	(4.424)	(3.628)	(2.678)
Constant	27.217***	36.389***	30.652**	31.744***
	(10.335)	(13.960)	(11.928)	(9.058)
Objective FE	–	–	–	✓
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓
Weights	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	1,071	1,071	1,071	3,213
R^2	0.082	0.040	0.050	0.066

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, robust standard errors (Columns 1-3) and respondent-level clustered standard errors (Column 4) in parentheses, data taken from strategic concerns survey. The dependent variables are beliefs about the share (0 to 100) of economists who favor more of the research objectives indicated in the column titles. The explanatory variable is a dummy that takes value 1 if a respondent reports to have already heard of the results of the main survey. Column 4 reports a pooled regression that pools the data from Columns 1 to 3. All regressions control for gender, age, tenure, region, institution rank, a dummy for Top Five publications, h-index, the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals. Column 4 additional includes objective-level fixed effects. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

Table A.9 Predictors of perceived publication incentives

	Binary indicator: Do publication incentives oppose ...?		
	Importance (vs. causality)	Multidisciplinarity	Disruptiveness
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Demographics			
Female	−0.013	−0.063	−0.061
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.044)
Age (in 10y)	−0.039	−0.003	0.009
	(0.020)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Tenured	0.004	0.006	0.015
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.038)
Region (vs. NA/AUS/NZL)			
EUR	−0.024	−0.069	−0.033
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.041)
AF, AS, LA	−0.090	−0.111	−0.030
	(0.058)	(0.056)	(0.054)
Success			
Top 50 inst.	0.105	0.060	0.012
	(0.058)	(0.057)	(0.054)
Top Five	0.002	−0.001	−0.235***
	(0.062)	(0.061)	(0.063)
h-index (in 10)	0.040	0.004	0.036
	(0.034)	(0.033)	(0.031)
Motives			
Strat. vs. intr. (std. index)	−0.010	−0.027	−0.019
	(0.020)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Constant	−0.228	0.830	0.739
	(0.385)	(0.324)	(0.319)
Controls	✓	✓	✓
Weights	✓	✓	✓
Observations	959	1,066	1,066
R^2	0.071	0.041	0.051

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, robust standard errors in parentheses, data taken from strategic concerns survey. The dependent variables are binary indicators that take value 1 if a respondent perceives publication incentives that oppose the research objectives stated in the column titles. The explanatory variables include various author characteristics. Age and h-index are divided by 10. The strategic vs. intrinsic motive score is derived as the standardized difference between the sum of agreement with the strategic motive statements and the sum of agreement with the intrinsic motive statements. All regressions control for the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals. p-values are adjusted for multiple hypotheses correction across all coefficients reported in this table, using the Benjamini-Hochberg-procedure. $*p < 0.10$, $**p < 0.05$, $***p < 0.01$.
Region abbreviations: NA – Northern America, AUS – Australia, NZL – New Zealand, EUR – Europe, AF – Africa, AS – Asia, LA – Latin America.

A.6 Satisfaction

Measures of agreement with research topics and objectives in economics We derive an "agreement with economics" index. The index is a joint measure of economists' agreement with their discipline's research objectives and topics. We pool the samples from both survey modules to maximize statistical power. The index is calculated as follows. In the research objectives module, the index measures how often and how strongly respondents agree with the status quo. We derive the sum of absolute deviations (in scale points) from the "about right" category and take its negative z-score. In the JEL topics module, the index measures how close the distribution that a respondent prefers is to the current topic distribution in economics. Here, we derive the sum of absolute deviations from the actual topic shares and take its negative z-score.

Table A.10, Column 5, shows that female economists are on average 0.07 standard deviations less satisfied with current research objectives and topics in economics.

Measures of general satisfaction The main survey asks all respondents to rate (i) how satisfied they are with their job in general (7-item scale), (ii) with the topics they work on (7-item scale), (iii) how stressful they find their job (5-item scale), and (iv) whether they perceive academia as "overly competitive" (5-item scale).

Analysis Do researchers who agree with the current research objectives and topics show higher job satisfaction? To shed light on this, Columns 1 to 4 of Table A.10 regress the satisfaction measures on the "agreement with economics" index score and a large set of demographic and bibliometric covariates.

The results in Table A.10 show that a higher agreement with the objectives and topics of economic research is paralleled by higher job satisfaction and less job-related stress. For instance, a one standard deviation increase in satisfaction with economic research is associated with a 0.07 standard deviation increase in general job satisfaction and a 0.13 reduction in perceiving academia as being overly competitive. These results hold conditional on a rich vector of control variables. Hence, disagreeing with the current state of economic research is associated with a psychological and mental burden. As an aside, the results also reveal that tenured scholars report significantly higher job satisfaction, as do economists who work for a leading research institution or have published in a Top Five journal.

Table A.10 Predictors of satisfaction

	Satisfaction (std.)				**Agreement** (std.)
	Own job	Own topics	Stress	Overly competitive	Agree. w/ econ.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Agree. w/ econ.	0.072***	0.034**	−0.040***	−0.127***	
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	
Female	−0.072**	0.027	0.216***	0.230***	−0.072**
	(0.032)	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.031)
Age (in 10y)	0.025*	0.053***	−0.151***	−0.066***	−0.069***
	(0.014)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.013)	(0.014)
Tenured	0.153***	0.034	−0.026	−0.075**	0.068**
	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.030)
Region: EUR	0.041	0.042	0.132***	0.114***	−0.096***
	(0.031)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)	(0.030)
Region: AF, AS, LA	−0.036	−0.104**	0.016	−0.024	−0.067
	(0.042)	(0.041)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.042)
Top 50 inst.	0.089**	0.080*	0.041	0.010	0.016
	(0.042)	(0.040)	(0.042)	(0.042)	(0.039)
Published Top Five	0.225***	0.175***	0.020	−0.143***	0.248***
	(0.042)	(0.043)	(0.045)	(0.047)	(0.043)
h-ind. (in 10)	0.113***	0.107***	−0.068***	−0.051**	0.010
	(0.020)	(0.023)	(0.024)	(0.023)	(0.024)
Method controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Topic controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Module FE	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Observations	7,489	7,493	7,487	7,493	7,497
R^2	0.046	0.037	0.076	0.065	0.048

Notes: Weighted OLS regressions, robust standard errors in parentheses, data from main survey. In Columns 1 to 4, the dependent variables are different, standardized survey measures of satisfaction: (1) job satisfaction, (2) satisfaction with own research topics, (3) job-related stress experiences, (4) perception of academia as overly competitive. In Column 5, the dependent variable is the "agreement with economics" index score. Age and h-index are divided by 10. Method controls include the share of projects in theory and methods research respectively. Topic controls include the share of publications in each primary JEL topic as well as the share of publications in economics journals. p-values are adjusted for multiple hypotheses correction within the reported coefficients of each row, using the Benjamini-Hochberg-procedure. *$p < 0.10$, **$p < 0.05$, ***$p < 0.01$.

B Core instructions of main survey

This appendix provides extracts from the two main modules of the survey. The full survey is available at https://osf.io/57mgv/.

B.1 Research objectives

Introductory instructions for a respondent who selected the field D Empirical Microeconomics

How should economists do research?

In the first part of the survey, we would like you to think about how economics as a research field should do research these days.

Please note: This part is *not* about how *you* personally should do research nor about how the field *actually does* research. Instead, we would like you to take a normative perspective and indicate how economic researchers should do research in general.

Please state your normative view about the optimal approach to economic research. You will face ten questions that describe trade-offs between different research strategies or styles. Of course, these trade-offs are sometimes more and sometimes less severe, but in many cases economics can have more of one research style only at the expense of the other.

Your task is to indicate whether you think that the field's current way of doing research is appropriate or whether you think that the field should place more weight on one research style versus the other.

The overarching question is: **In comparison with how research in economics is currently conducted, how *should* economists conduct research?**

Please give separate responses for

1. your primary research field: D Empirical Microeconomics and
2. the discipline of economics as a whole.

Exemplary layout for research objective question "policy relevance vs. intrinsic interest".

Policy relevance versus intrinsic/intellectual interest?

Policy relevance: Research informs policy, with an impact on societal well-being.
Intrinsic and intellectual interest: Research is intrinsically rewarding to the researcher who conducts the project due to his/her own curiosity and interest.

	Your primary JEL field*	Economics as a whole
Much more policy relevance	○	○
Moderately more policy relevance	○	○
Slightly more policy relevance	○	○
Current state is about right	○	○
Slightly more intrinsic/intellectual interest	○	○
Moderately more intrinsic/intellectual interest	○	○
Much more intrinsic/intellectual interest	○	○

*Your primary research field: D Empirical Microeconomics.

Response scale

Participants respond on a seven-point scale. Each scale is centered around the option "Current state is about right". The other response options express dissatisfaction with the status quo and place increasing weight on one research objective versus the other. For instance, the question on *Basic research* versus *Policy relevance* has the response options "Much more", "Moderately more", and "Slightly more" policy relevance, "Current state is about right", as well as "Slightly more", "Moderately more", and "Much more" basic research. The question on specialization comes with the response options "Much less", "Moderately less", and "Slightly less" specialization, 'Current state is about right", as well as "Slightly more", "Moderately more", and "Much more" specialization.

Wording of all research objective questions in original order

Less versus more specialization?

Specialization is defined as the extent to which each individual researcher focuses solely on one specific topic.

Less versus more risky research?

Some research projects are "safe bets" with a very foreseeable impact. Other research projects are of high risk with very uncertain impact. A higher risk may come with a higher expected impact.

More incremental versus more disruptive research?

Incremental: A research project that builds on and connects closely to the existing literature.

Disruptive: A research project that extends considerably beyond the existing literature and proposes new approaches.

Less versus more multidisciplinary research?

Multidisciplinary research incorporates insights from other disciplines than economics to study economic questions.

Quantity of papers versus quality of papers?

More papers of lower quality or fewer papers of higher quality?

Policy relevance versus intrinsic/intellectual interest?

Policy relevance: Research informs policy, with an impact on societal well-being.

Intrinsic and intellectual interest: Research is intrinsically rewarding to the researcher who conducts the project due to his/her own curiosity and interest.

Policy relevance versus basic research?

Policy relevance: Research informs policy, with an impact on societal well-being.

Basic research: Research deals with fundamental and basic phenomena, laying the ground for more applied research. It has no immediate policy relevance.

For empirical work: Causal identification versus importance of research question

Identification: Research identifies the phenomenon of interest credibly and causally,

above and beyond establishing correlational patterns.

Importance: Research question is of general interest and/or has societal relevance.

For theoretical work: More pure theory versus more applied and evidence-related theory?

Pure theory: Studies general theoretical principles.

Applied and evidence-related theory: Studies an empirically-observed phenomenon theoretically. Organizes empirical evidence, matches its facts, and/or provides testable predictions.

For applied theoretical work: More emphasis on prediction versus explanation?

How should economists evaluate applied theoretical models?

- More focus on *predicting* outcomes.
- More focus on *explaining* outcomes (using plausible assumptions and plausible theoretical mechanisms).

B.2 JEL topics

Which topics should economists work on?

From our experience, this question will take you at the very least 1 minute to answer. It is the main question of this survey.

Please state your normative view about the optimal composition of research topics on which economists should be working.

For this matter, suppose you are endowed with **100 points, representing the total number of published research articles** produced by all economists in a given year. Hence, each point corresponds to 1% of the total research output.

Please allocate these 100 points between the nineteen research topic categories defined by the Journal of Economic Literature (JEL) classification system. The more points you allocate to a specific JEL category, the higher the published output concerning topics in this category should be.

For your convenience, you can click on each JEL code for further information on the JEL sub-categories.

Please allocate the 100 points across the categories on which you think economists should work and publish these days.

▸ **A** General Economics and Teaching	0
▸ **B** History of Economic Thought, Methodology, and Heterodox Approaches	0
▸ **C** Mathematical and Quantitative Methods	0
▸ **D** Microeconomics	0
▸ **E** Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics	0

List of JEL topics continues.

C Publication and author data

C.1 Derivation of the publication data

This section documents step-by-step how the publication database is derived. We start from the EconLit publication database, which we downloaded on December 4, 2019. We consider all publications in the 400 EconLit-indexed journals with the highest impact factor according to Scopus's 2018 Scimago Journal Ranking in the "Economics, Econometrics, and Finance" category. We restrict our attention to publications since 2009. Additionally, we impose the following restrictions:

1. Articles have English full text.

2. Information on authors is available.

3. To ensure that only genuine research articles are included in the final sample:

   - We concentrate only on articles that are classified as journal articles by EconLit.
   - We delete articles that have been assigned to the JEL category Y which includes book reviews, memorials, or other ancillary content.
   - Moreover, we exclude publications that contain keywords such as "erratum", "reply to", or "memorial" that were chosen to identify the most common ancillary publications. The full list of keywords is available upon request.
   - Finally, we exclude all articles with titles that appear more than twice in the database – an indicator for multiple comments on another research article, editorials, or other repeated ancillary publications.

4. Non-duplicate articles.

   To exclude duplicates, we keep only the first article with duplicated titles within each journal. If the title has no abstract information (an indicator for ancillary publications), we drop all within-journal duplicated titles.

5. Can be matched to a Scopus article.

   97.4% of all articles that satisfy the above conditions can be matched to a Scopus article.[28] The details of the matching algorithm are available upon request. The Scopus data were downloaded from Scopus API between December 5 and 12, 2019 via http://api.elsevier.com and http://www.scopus.com.

[28] A similar set of restrictions was applied to the Scopus data.

C.2 JEL code metrics

The EconLit data assign each article to one or (typically) more JEL codes. This section explains how we translate the three-digit JEL codes into primary JEL topics. We use four different metrics to describe the JEL topics of a paper. We use the *Share* metric in our main specifications and run robustness checks with the three alternative metrics.

Example: Throughout this subsection, we consider an article with JEL codes E21, E32, F34, and G51. Thus, the article has two codes in field E, one code in field F, and one code in field G.

Share An article's topic share is the share of its JEL codes that belong to this topic. The above example article would be classified as E: 50%, F: 25%, G: 25%, all other fields: 0%. Each article's share sum up to 100%.

Indicator An article's topic indicator is 1 if at least one JEL code belongs to the topic and zero otherwise. The above example article would be classified as E: 1, F: 1, G: 1, all other fields: 0.

Sum An article's topic sum is the number of JEL codes that belong to the topic. The above example article would be classified as E: 2, F: 1, G: 1, all other fields: 0.

Primary An article's primary topic is the JEL topic with the largest count of codes (see "Sum" above). This means that an article with a unique most frequent topic is fully (100%) assigned to this topic. If the maximum is not unique, which happens for about 3 out of 10 articles, we split the shares equally across the most frequent topics (e.g., 50%-50% if there are two most frequent topics). The above example article would be classified as E: 100%, all other fields: 0%.

Thus, the JEL code metrics differ in two respects: Whether they are sensitive to multiple JEL codes in a topic (*Share*, *Sum* are, *Indicator* is not, *Primary* is an intermediate case) and whether each paper has the same total weight (this is only the case for *Share* and *Primary*). In our main analysis, we use the *Share* metric because we want to give equal total weight to each paper and view the occurrence of multiple JEL codes in one field as evidence that this topic is covered more extensively.

C.3 Author data: Covariates

This section summarizes and defines all author covariates that will be used throughout the paper.

Covariates derived from the publication data

Female The gender of an author is estimated from their first and last name, using the commercial Gender API algorithm (see Santamaría and Mihaljević, 2018). The author names are taken from the Scopus publication data. The algorithm produces missing values for 2.4% of the study population. *Female* is a binary indicator that takes the value 1 if a respondent's name is classified as female.

Year of first publication The Scopus author data contains the year of the first publication of the author.

Number of articles (in sample) The number of articles in our publication sample that can be assigned to an author.

Number of articles (overall) The total number of journal publications that Scopus attributes to an author, capped at 200. This includes articles outside our publication sample, in particular articles that were published before 2009 or outside the top 400 EconLit-indexed journals.

Share of publications in economic journals The share of an author's journal publications (see "Number of articles (overall)") that are published in a journal of Scopus's "Economics, Econometrics, or Finance" category.

Co-author network The undirected, unweighted co-author network constructed from all co-author relationships observed in our publication sample. The network includes all authors, even those who are not part of the study population.

Degree (number of co-authors) The number of unique co-authors of an author in our publication sample.

Eigenvector centrality (index) An index of an author's eigenvector centrality in the co-author network. The index measures which share of authors has a lower eigenvector centrality. For instance, an index value of 70% means that the author's eigenvector centrality is larger than the centrality of 70% of all authors in the network.

Number of co-authors with Top Five publication The number of co-authors of the author who have published at least one article in a Top Five journal in our publication sample (also see "Published in Top Five Journal").

Top 50 institution A binary indicator that takes the value 1 if an author is affiliated with a top 50 research institution in economics. We derive the indicator from the Scopus author data which contain information about the institution with which the author was

affiliated in their last publications. We match the institution names to the Shanghai Academic Ranking of World Universities in Economics 2020.

h-index h-index, derived from the Scopus citation data of *all* publications of an author (as of December 2019, see "Number of articles (overall)").

Published in Top Five Journal (in sample) A binary indicator that takes the value 1 if the author published at least one article in a Top Five journal within our publication sample. The Top Five journals are the American Economic Review, The Quarterly Journal of Economics, the Journal of Political Economy, the Review of Economic Studies, and Econometrica. Publications in the Papers & Proceedings of the American Economic Review are not counted as Top Five publications.

Number of Top Five publications (in sample) The number of Top Five publications (see above) that an author published within our publication sample.

Average journal rank 1-400 (in sample) The average journal rank of an author's publications in our publication sample. The journal ranks range from 1-400. The journals are ranked according to the Scopus 2018 Scimago impact factor in the "Economics, Econometrics, and Finance" category. Higher ranked journals (numerically they have a lower rank) have a higher journal impact factor.

Continent The Scopus author data contain information about the institution with which the author was affiliated in their last publications, including the country of the institution, which is available for 99.5% of the authors in the study population. This allows us to deduce the last known continent of residence of a researcher.

Share of publications in JEL topics The average JEL topic share of an author's articles (see Appendix C.2).

Note: The author-average share of publications in a topic may differ from the paper-average share of publications in a topic. The author-average assigns equal weight to each author (irrespective of their number of publications), while the paper-average assigns equal weight to each paper. Therefore, we use author-averages only when we study heterogeneity in authors' survey responses. In contrast, when we analyze the field-wide distribution of JEL topics, we use paper-averages.

Covariates in the Ph.D. student sample

For the population of Ph.D. students, we only have data on their gender (derived as above), their continent of residence (derived as above), and the rank of their institution. An institution's rank is derived from the number of total citations that authors from the institution receive for articles that are in our publication sample.

Covariates derived from the survey data

Female We also measure the gender of respondents in the survey. We use this more accurate measure in the heterogeneity analysis of survey responses.

Age The age of respondents. Continuous.

Ph.D. student An binary indicator that takes the value 1 if the respondent says they are a (doctoral) student.

Tenured We ask respondents who are active in academic research whether they have tenure. *Tenured* is a binary indicator variable that takes the value 1 if the respondent says they have tenure.

Research type: theory/empirics/methods We ask respondents which fraction of their research is predominantly theoretical, predominantly empirical, and predominantly methods research.

D Sample of main survey

D.1 Weighting procedure

We follow Pasek et al. (2014) and use the R package `anesrake` to derive weights for the author sample. We target the following marginal distributions of the study population.

1. Gender: female versus male or missing (2 groups)
2. Year of first publication (quartiles)
3. Number of papers in our publication sample (quartiles)
4. h-index (quartiles)
5. Continent (Europe, Northern America, Asia, Other)
6. Main research field

   The main research topic of an author is the JEL field in which they have the highest share of publications. We consider the following six groups: D Microeconomics, E Macroeconomics, G Financial Economics, J Labor Economics, Other, and Multiple. The group "Multiple" contains authors who have multiple JEL fields with a maximal share of publications (e.g. two fields with a share of 50% each).

87% of the weights are between 0.5 and 2. The minimum weight is 0.3, and the maximum weight is 3.59. This indicates that no extreme weights occur.

Alternative weighting schemes We use the following alternative weighting schemes in robustness checks throughout the paper.

- **Weighted, including no email** The sample is weighted to represent the population of authors which also includes scholars for whom no email address could be found but who meet the other eligibility criteria described in Section 3.2 of the main text. We use the same weighting approach as outlined above.
- **Unweighted** Identical weight (1) for all participating authors. This approach also includes the few respondents who started but did not complete the survey.
- **Unweighted, only economics** Identical weight (1) for all participating authors who say that their primary academic discipline is economics, econometrics, or finance.
- **Unweighted, with Ph.D.** Identical weight (1) for all participants, including participants from the Ph.D. student sample.

D.2 Characteristics of the main sample

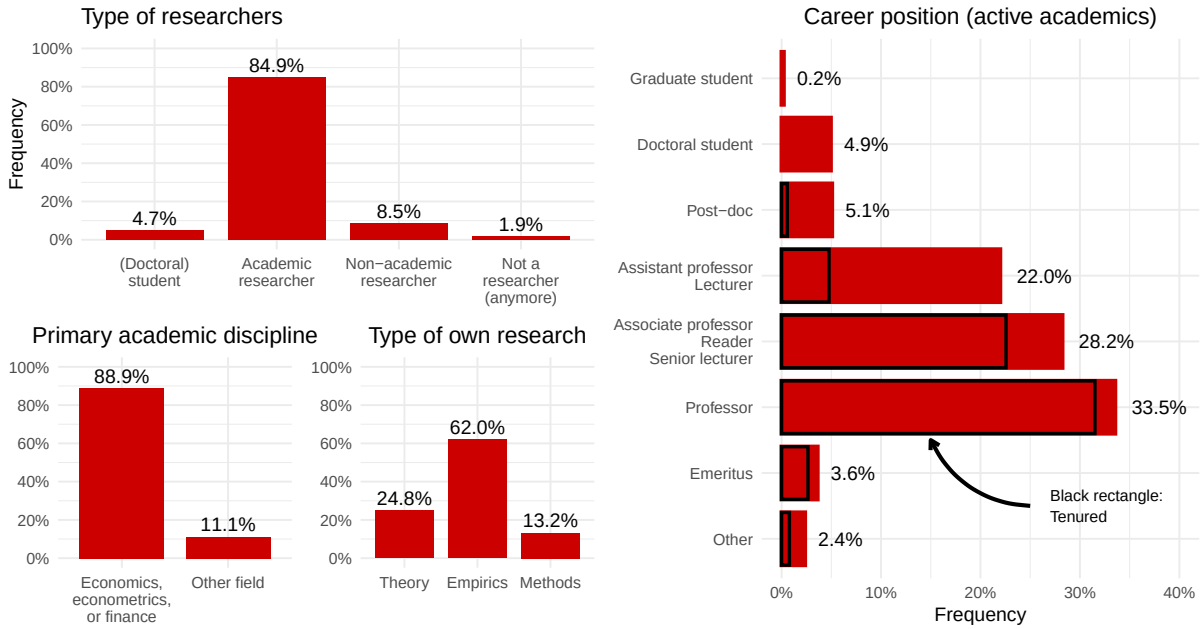

Figure D.1 Demographic characteristics of the weighted sample

Notes: Weighted survey responses, data from main survey.

D.3 Characteristics of the student sample

Table D.1 presents the distribution of demographic characteristics in the population of invited Ph.D. students and the sample of participating students (main survey). See Appendix C.3 for a description of the covariates.

Table D.1 Characteristics of the population and the sample of Ph.D. students

Variable	Population	Sample
Female	30.8%	28.8%
Region: Europe	34.2%	50.3%
Region: Northern America	62.5%	46.5%
Region: Asia	2.1%	2.5%
Region: Australia and New Zealand	1.2%	0.7%
Rank of institution	124.8	126.0
Sample size	9441	1765

D.4 Selection into invitation and selection into completion

Table D.2 summarizes and compares the characteristics of five different groups.

1. **Incl. no email**: The population of active economic researchers plus those for whom no email address could be found.
2. **Population**: The main study population.
3. **Participated**: The unweighted sample of participating authors, including those who do not complete the survey.
4. **Unweighted sample**: The unweighted main sample.
5. **Weighted sample**: The weighted main sample.

Columns 2, 4, and 5 equal Columns 1 to 3 in Table 2. Table D.2 reveals that there are only a few differences between the main study population (Column 2) and the population that also includes authors without email data (Column 1). It also shows that the differences between the sample of participating authors (Column 3) and the sample of authors who complete the survey (Column 4) are negligible.

Table D.2 Characteristics of economic researchers: From the email address collection to study completion

Variable	(1) Incl. no email	(2) Study population	(3) Partici-pated	(4) Unwgt. sample	(5) Weighted sample
Gender, academic age					
Female	27%	26%	23.3%	23.1%	25.8%
Year of first publication (YYYY/MM)	2008/01	2007/01	2006/01	2006/01	2006/10
Number of papers					
Number of articles (in pub. sample)	4.4	4.8	5.7	5.6	4.9
Number of articles (overall)	15.3	17.1	18.4	18.3	16.2
Share of art. in econ. journals	77.6%	75.9%	76%	76.2%	76.8%
Co-author network (in pub. sample)					
Degree (number of unique co-authors)	5.4	5.8	6.5	6.5	5.7
Eigenvector centrality (index)	59.4%	61.2%	65.8%	65.8%	62.4%
Number of co-authors with Top Five pub.	0.4	0.5	0.8	0.8	0.5
Success					
Top 50 institution	11.2%	12.1%	12.3%	12.2%	12.5%
Published in Top Five Journal (in pub. sample)	5.1%	6.1%	9.2%	9.3%	6.1%
Number of Top Five publications (in pub. sample)	0.10	0.12	0.17	0.18	0.11
Average journal rank 1-400 (in pub. sample)	170.8	164.2	161.6	161.9	165.8
h-index	5.8	6.5	6.8	6.8	6.1
Continent					
Europe	38.8%	40.4%	53.3%	53.6%	40.5%
Northern America	31.6%	33.9%	24.6%	24.2%	33.9%
Asia	20.6%	17.1%	13.4%	13.4%	17.2%
Australia and New Zealand	4.2%	4.3%	3.6%	3.7%	3.3%
Latin America	3%	2.7%	3.4%	3.4%	3.3%
Africa	1.9%	1.6%	1.7%	1.7%	1.8%
Share of publications in JEL fields					
C Mathematical and Quantitative Methods	6.1%	6.1%	6.4%	6.3%	5.8%
D Microeconomics	12.6%	13.1%	16%	16.1%	13.5%
E Macroeconomics and Monetary Economics	7.3%	7.3%	7.4%	7.4%	7.1%
F International Economics	4.4%	4.4%	4.3%	4.3%	4.2%
G Financial Economics	18.4%	18.2%	11.5%	11.3%	16.9%
H Public Economics	3.5%	3.6%	4.3%	4.3%	3.8%
J Labor and Demographic Economics	6.3%	6.7%	9.7%	9.8%	7.5%
L Industrial organization	8.4%	8.3%	7.4%	7.4%	8%
O Growth and Development Economics	9.1%	8.5%	8.8%	8.8%	9.2%
Q Agricultural and Environmental Economics	7.4%	7.1%	7.4%	7.4%	7.4%
Other fields	16.5%	16.6%	16.9%	16.9%	16.6%
Sample size	67,546	53,777	8,156	7,794	7,794

Notes: Overview of covariates. Column 1: The population of researchers before authors are excluded for whom no email address could be found. That is, all authors who satisfy restrictions 1 to 3 (see main text, Section 3.2. Column 2: The eligible study population. Column 3: All respondents who participated in the main survey, including those who did not complete it. Column 4: Respondents of the main survey, unweighted. Column 5: Weighted main sample. For a description of the covariates in the different rows see main text or Appendix C.3.

E Feasibility survey: Sample and core instructions

E.1 Key instructions

This section provides the main instructions of the feasibility survey. The full survey is available at https://osf.io/57mgv/.

At the beginning of the survey, respondents face four selected research objectives questions, namely (i) importance of research question vs. causality, (ii) less/more specialization, (iii) less/more multidisciplinarity, and (iv) incremental vs. disruptive research. Afterward, we ask the respondents whether they perceived the changes they proposed in these questions as feasible and desirable. The wording of these follow-up questions is displayed below. The response options are customized to reflect the previous answers of the respondents.

How should economists conduct research?

Please consider once again the responses you gave to the questions about how economics should be conducted. Here are the changes in economics that you would favor.

> Less vs. more specialization: **Moderately less specialization**
> Incremental vs. disruptive research: **Current state is about right**
> Less vs. more multidisciplinarity: **Moderately more multidisciplinary research**
> Causal identification vs. importance of question: **Moderately more importance**

Below, we want to know whether you think that these changes are feasible and desirable for economics even when you consider their potential costs. You might have already considered these factors in your earlier responses, in which case you can affirm these responses below.

Feasibility

By "feasible", we mean that a discipline-wide change could – in principle – be realized, even if only at high costs.

All things considered, would you say that the changes you propose are *feasible*?

	Yes	No
Moderately less specialization	○	○
Moderately more multidisciplinary research	○	○
Moderately more importance	○	○

All things considered, would you say that the changes you propose are *jointly feasible*?

In other words, is it possible to have

Moderately less specialization
Moderately more multidisciplinary research
Moderately more importance

at the same time?

Yes	No
○	○

Desirability

Now, please also consider the potential costs of a change in discipline-wide research practices. For instance, changes may require resources such as time, funding, or talent, and could have opportunity costs. In light of these costs, would you still say that the changes you propose are desirable changes for research in economics?

All things considered, would you say that the changes you propose are *desirable*?

	Yes	No
Moderately less specialization	○	○
Moderately more multidisciplinary research	○	○
Moderately more importance	○	○

All things considered, would you say that the changes you propose are *jointly desirable*?

In other words, is it desirable to have

- Moderately less specialization
- Moderately more multidisciplinary research
- Moderately more importance

at the same time?

Yes	No
○	○

E.2 Sample

The "feasibility survey" follows the sampling approach of the main survey. Specifically, we invited a randomly selected subset (n = 3,964) of the full population of economic researchers via email to participate in an online survey. We only invited economists who had not participated in the main survey. Invitation emails were sent in late January 2022, and one wave of reminders was sent in early February. 259 economists completed the survey, resulting in a response rate of 7%. We derive weights for these participants, following the approach outlined in Appendix D.1.[29]

In addition, we invited a randomly selected subset (n = 635) from the group of Ph.D. students who had not participated in the main survey. 50 students completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 8%.

Table E.1 and Figure E.1 illustrate that the characteristics of the weighted sample from the feasibility survey closely follow those of the full population of economic researchers and the weighted sample of the main survey.

[29] We planned and pre-registered reaching a sample of 200 respondents. We slightly overshot this target.

Table E.1 Feasibility survey: Characteristics of the study population and the sample

Variable	(1) **Study population**	(2) **Weighted main sample**	(3) **Unweighted feasibility sample**	(4) **Weighted feasibility sample**
Gender, academic age				
Female	26.0%	25.8%	19.5%	25.7%
Year of first publication (YYYY/MM)	2007/01	2006/10	2005/04	2007/01
Number of papers				
Number of articles (in pub. sample)	4.8	4.9	6	5
Number of articles (overall)	17.1	16.2	20.4	16.7
Share of art. in econ. journals	75.9%	76.8%	76.1%	77.7%
Co-author network (in pub. sample)				
Degree (number of unique co-authors)	5.8	5.7	6.9	5.7
Eigenvector centrality (index)	61.2%	62.4%	68.5%	64.9%
Number of co-authors with Top Five pub.	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.6
Success				
Top 50 institution	12.1%	12.5%	13.1%	13.2%
Publ. in Top Five Journal (in pub. sample)	6.1%	6.1%	8.9%	6.1%
Num. of Top Five pub. (in pub. sample)	0.12	0.11	0.18	0.12
Average journal rank 1-400 (in pub. sample)	164.2	165.8	157.1	162.1
h-index	6.5	6.1	7.5	6.2
Continent				
Europe	40.4%	40.5%	49%	40.4%
Northern America	33.9%	33.9%	31.1%	33.9%
Asia	17.1%	17.2%	8.9%	17.1%
Australia and New Zealand	4.3%	3.3%	4.3%	3.4%
Latin America	2.7%	3.3%	3.5%	2.7%
Africa	1.6%	1.8%	3.1%	2.4%
Share of publications in JEL fields				
C Mathematical and Quantitative Methods	6.1%	5.8%	5.2%	5.3%
D Microeconomics	13.1%	13.5%	14.8%	13.9%
E Macroeconomics and Monetary Econ.	7.3%	7.1%	8.5%	7.5%
F International Economics	4.4%	4.2%	5%	5.3%
G Financial Economics	18.2%	16.9%	11.4%	16.8%
H Public Economics	3.6%	3.8%	4.2%	3.7%
J Labor and Demographic Economics	6.7%	7.5%	9.7%	8%
L Industrial organization	8.3%	8%	7.4%	7.5%
O Growth and Development Economics	8.5%	9.2%	8.5%	8.2%
Q Agricultural and Environmental Econ.	7.1%	7.4%	7.8%	6.5%
Other fields	16.6%	16.6%	17.5%	17.3%
Sample size	53,779	7,794	259	259

Notes: Overview of covariates. Column 1: The eligible study population. Column 2: Weighted sample of the main survey. Column 3: Unweighted sample of the feasibility survey. Column 3: Weighted sample of the feasibility survey. For a description of the covariates in the different rows see Appendix C.3.

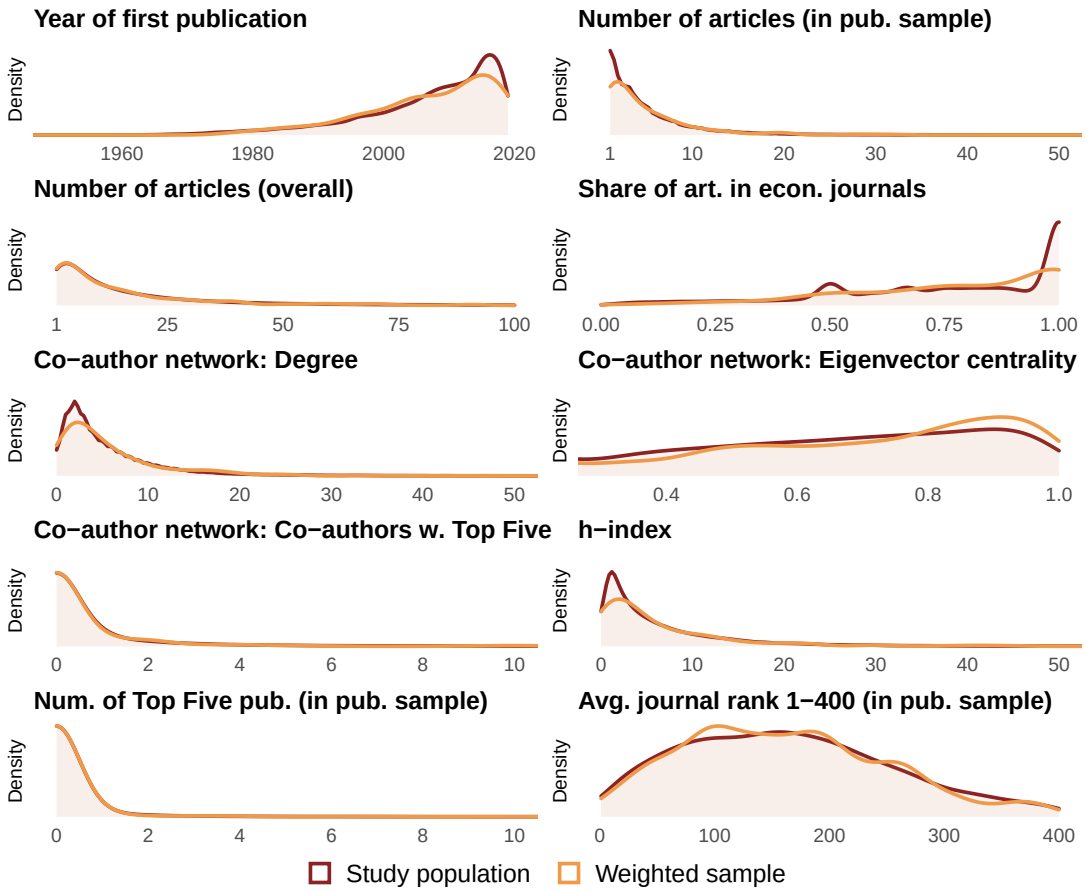

Figure E.1 Feasibility survey: Population and sample distributions of covariates

Notes: Kernel density estimates for the distribution of covariates. Red: The population of economics researchers (n = 53,779). Yellow: The weighted sample of the feasibility survey (n = 259). For a description of the covariates in the different sub-plots, see Appendix C.3.

E.3 Non-binding trade-offs

Some of the trade-offs described in the research objectives module might not be binding in all cases. For example, causal identification and asking important research questions are sometimes feasible at the same time. The instructions of the main survey explicitly acknowledge this: "Of course, these trade-offs are sometimes more and sometimes less severe, but in many cases economics can have more of one research style only at the expense of the other."

One potential concern is that some respondents are still irritated by contrasts between two research objectives that they do not interpret as relevant trade-off.

Hence, we go one step further in the feasibility survey. For the research objective question that contrasts causal identification and importance of research question, we add the following note: "Please focus on the cases in which causal identification is only possible at the expense of asking less important questions."

Doing so, we find qualitatively similar and quantitatively even more pronounced. 68% of the respondents report that they prefer a shift toward more important research questions at the cost of causal identification (much more: 23%, moderately more: 26%, slightly more: 19%) compared to 56% in the main survey (much more: 16%, moderately more: 20%, slightly more 20%). The results make us confident that our conclusions in the paper are not driven by confusion about irrelevant trade-offs.

Finally, please note that the "trade-offs" are binding by construction for most of the other research objectives questions – e.g., more versus less multidisciplinarity or incremental versus disruptive research – so that the concern discussed here does not apply to these questions.

F Strategic concerns survey: Sample and core instructions

F.1 Key instructions

This section provides the main instructions of the strategic concerns survey. The full survey is available at https://osf.io/57mgv/.

F.1.1 Beliefs about other economists' views

Introductory instructions

What do economists think?

Which views and opinions do you think economists have about how economic research should be conducted?

In the summer of 2020, we conducted a large global survey among economists. We invited economic researchers who had published an article in one of the top 400 economics journals. Almost 10,000 economists participated, representing all fields and ranks of the profession.
▸ Click here for more details on the sample.

On the following pages, we ask you to estimate how these economists responded to three specific questions. These questions concern the role of multidisciplinarity, causal identification, and incremental versus disruptive research in economics.

Details (extendable)

To ensure that the sample of economists is representative of the discipline, we identified and invited all researchers who have actively contributed to the international economics literature in recent years (more than 50,000 scholars). Crucially, this approach allows us to document and correct for the possibility of selection bias: Some groups of scholars might have been more likely to participate in the survey in which case their views and opinions would be overrepresented in the sample. Fortunately, we can compare our sample with the full community of economists along dimensions such as gender, year of first publication (a proxy for academic age), continent of residence, publication success, research field, and position in the discipline-wide co-author network. To address the (mostly small) observed imbalances, we use post-stratification weights. Indeed, our data confirm that the weighted sample broadly represents the population of academic economists.

Exemplary layout of belief question for "policy relevance vs. intrinsic interest".

What do economists think?

Related to empirical work: Causal identification versus importance of research question

Respondents were provided with the following description.

> Identification: Research identifies the phenomenon of interest credibly and causally, above and beyond establishing correlational patterns.
> Importance: Research question is of general interest and/or has societal relevance.

Then we asked: In comparison with how research in economics is currently conducted, how should economists conduct research?

More causal identification versus more importance of research question?

What share of economists do you think responded with ...?

More causal identification *(includes much, moderately, or slightly more)*	0 %
Current state is about right	0 %
More importance *(includes much, moderately, or slightly more)*	0 %
Total	0 %

The two other belief questions were structured and worded analogously.

F.1.2 Publication incentives

Which type of papers are easier for you to publish well?

Publications in peer-reviewed journals play an important role in academia. Some papers are easier to publish, others are difficult to publish.

In your situation, which type of papers do you think are easier for you to publish in highly-ranked general interest and top-field journals?

(1) Multidisciplinarity

- ○ Papers that use **insights from economics** to study economic questions.
- ○ Papers that use **insights from other disciplines than economics** to study economic questions.
- ○ I find both types of papers equally easy/difficult to publish.

(2) When causal identification is only possible at the expense of asking less important questions. (Only applies to empirical work.)

- ○ Papers that **prioritize causal identification but ask a less important research question**.
- ○ Papers that **ask a more important research question without clean causal identification**.
- ○ I find both types of papers equally easy/difficult to publish.
- ○ *I don't write empirical papers.*

(3) Incremental or disruptive research.

- ○ Papers that **build on and connect closely to the existing literature**.
- ○ Papers that **extend considerably beyond the existing literature and propose new approaches**.
- ○ I find both types of papers equally easy/difficult to publish.

F.1.3 Motives

Your choice of research topics

Please think about how you, as a researcher, choose the research projects on which you work. What are the motives and goals that determine your choices?

Please note: This question is *not* about how you think these decisions *should* be made or how you would *like* to make them in an ideal world. Instead, your responses should reflect the motives that *actually* shape your decisions.

Please state the extent to which you agree or disagree with the following statements.

When I choose a research topic, it is of central importance to me that working on this topic ...

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
... is satisfying and brings me joy.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... yields a publication in a high-level journal.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... is intrinsically interesting to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... increases my number of citations.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Somewhat disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Somewhat agree	Agree	Strongly agree
... is personally meaningful to me.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... increases my reputation among scholars.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... is relevant for society and policy design.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
... has a positive impact on my employment prospects in academia.	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

F.2 Sample

The "strategic concerns survey" follows the sampling approach of the main survey. Specifically, we invited a randomly selected subset (n = 14,720) of the entire population of economic researchers via email to participate in an online survey. Invitation emails were sent in late January 2022, and one wave of reminders was sent in early February. The survey was carried out in parallel to the feasibility survey (see Appendix E). No scholar was invited to both surveys.[30]

1,136 economists completed the survey, including 697 scholars who had already participated in the main survey, producing a response rate of 8%. We derive weights for these participants, following the approach outlined in Appendix D.1.

In addition, we invited a randomly selected subset (n = 2,489) from the group of Ph.D. students who had not participated in the main survey. 201 students completed the survey, yielding a response rate of 8%.

Table F.1 and Figure F.1 illustrate that the characteristics of the weighted sample of the strategic concerns survey closely follow those of the full population of economic researchers and the weighted sample of the main survey.

[30] We planned and pre-registered reaching a sample of 1,000 respondents. We slightly overshot this target.

Table F.1 Career concern survey: Characteristics of the study population and the sample

Variable	(1) Study population	(2) Weighted main sample	(3) Unweighted career concerns sample	(4) Weighted career concerns sample
Gender, academic age				
Female	26.0%	25.8%	22.2%	25.7%
Year of first publication (YYYY/MM)	2007/01	2006/10	2004/11	2006/01
Number of papers				
Number of articles (in pub. sample)	4.8	4.9	6	4.8
Number of articles (overall)	17.1	16.2	20	16.3
Share of art. in econ. journals	75.9%	76.8%	75.3%	77%
Co-author network (in pub. sample)				
Degree (number of unique co-authors)	5.8	5.7	6.9	5.7
Eigenvector centrality (index)	61.2%	62.4%	67.1%	61.9%
Number of co-authors with Top Five pub.	0.5	0.5	0.8	0.5
Success				
Top 50 institution	12.1%	12.5%	11.8%	10.3%
Publ. in Top Five Journal (in pub. sample)	6.1%	6.1%	11%	6.1%
Num. of Top Five pub. (in pub. sample)	0.12	0.11	0.21	0.12
Average journal rank 1-400 (in pub. sample)	164.2	165.8	161.1	168.9
h-index	6.5	6.1	7.4	6.1
Continent				
Europe	40.4%	40.5%	55.8%	40.7%
Northern America	33.9%	33.9%	25.9%	34.1%
Asia	17.1%	17.2%	11.5%	17.3%
Australia and New Zealand	4.3%	3.3%	2.8%	2.5%
Latin America	2.7%	3.3%	2.8%	3.5%
Africa	1.6%	1.8%	1.2%	1.9%
Share of publications in JEL fields				
C Mathematical and Quantitative Methods	6.1%	5.8%	6.6%	6%
D Microeconomics	13.1%	13.5%	17.5%	14.6%
E Macroeconomics and Monetary Econ.	7.3%	7.1%	6.7%	6.4%
F International Economics	4.4%	4.2%	4.1%	4.1%
G Financial Economics	18.2%	16.9%	10.2%	16.8%
H Public Economics	3.6%	3.8%	4.5%	4.2%
J Labor and Demographic Economics	6.7%	7.5%	10.9%	7.5%
L Industrial organization	8.3%	8%	7.4%	7.9%
O Growth and Development Economics	8.5%	9.2%	8.5%	9.5%
Q Agricultural and Environmental Econ.	7.1%	7.4%	6.7%	6.7%
Other fields	16.6%	16.6%	16.9%	16.2%
Sample size	53,779	7,794	1,136	1,136

Notes: Overview of covariates. Column 1: The eligible study population. Column 2: Weighted sample of the main survey. Column 3: Unweighted sample of the strategic concerns survey. Column 3: Weighted sample of the strategic concerns survey. For a description of the covariates in the different rows see Appendix C.3.

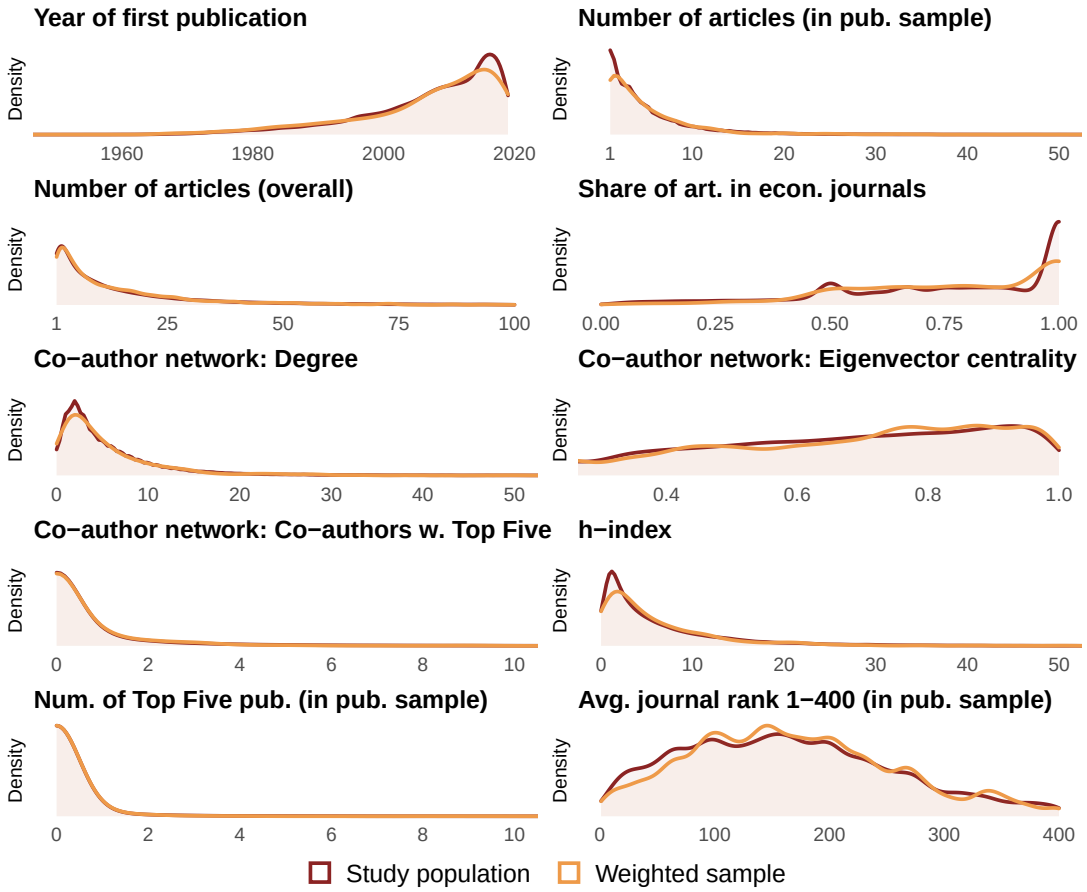

Figure F.1 Strategic concerns survey: Population and sample distributions of covariates

Notes: Kernel density estimates for the distribution of covariates. Red: The population of economics researchers (n = 53,779). Yellow: The weighted sample (n = 1,136). For a description of the covariates in the different sub-plots, see Appendix C.3.