Online Appendix
"Voter Reactions to Incumbent Opportunism"

This Online Appendix (OA) includes information about the surveys (OA.1) question wording (OA.2); randomization, balance, attention and manipulation checks (OA.3), results of additional analyses (OA.4), and corroborating regression results (OA.5).

OA.1: Survey timing, response rates and software

The studies were conducted on the following dates: Study 1, February 22-23, 2015; Study 2, November 3-4, 2015; Study 3, February 14, 2017; and Study 4, March 15, 2017. The total response rate for YouGov surveys is 21%. In Study 1, 1772 of the 1958 (90.5%) panellists who began the survey experiment completed it; the completion rate of Study 2 was 93.8% (1678 of 1788 panellists), for Study 3, it was 96.4% (2109 of 2188), and for Study 4, 99.3% (2118 of 2132). The corresponding final stage completion rates were: Study 1, 19%; Study 2, 19.7%; Study 3, 20.2%; Study 4, 20.9%. YouGov selects panel members via standard advertising and strategic partnerships with a broad range of websites. For nationally representative samples, YouGov employs a random target sampling and matching methodology to select representative samples from non-randomly selected pools of respondents. After a target sample, or random sample is drawn from the target population, each member of the target sample is matched to an individual in the pool of opt-in survey respondents. Matching is based on demographics. The experiments were administered to a sample that is representative of British adults (age 18 and above) in terms of age, gender, newspaper readership and past vote. Respondents who take part in surveys receive a modest cash incentive for doing so. The survey is coded using YouGov's proprietary survey software *Gryphon*.

OA.2: Question wording

OA.2.1: Study 1 (February 2015)

Informational vignette

> "The following paragraph describes the economic and political situation in a country like the UK, but one that is governed by a single party. This scenario does not relate to the current Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition so please do not answer the following questions in relation to any of the UK political parties. Please read the scenario carefully. You will then be asked some questions about that government.
>
> [Insert]"

The insert differs for the experimental groups in the following way:

> Control: "Parliament's term has come to an end and elections must be held this week."
>
> Treatment 1: "Over the past year, the country has come out of recession and the economy is now performing well: the country is experiencing economic growth and the unemployment level is low. Given the strength of the economy, the governing party has decided to dissolve parliament early, one year before the end of parliament's term, and elections are held this week."
>
> Treatment 2: "Over the past year, the country has come out of recession and the economy is now performing well: the country is experiencing economic growth and the unemployment level is low. Given the strength of the economy, the governing party has decided to dissolve parliament early, two years before the end of parliament's term, and elections are held this week."

Post-treatment questions

Vote intention

1. Do the elements of this description make it more or less likely that you would vote for the governing party if an election were held tomorrow?

5 Much more likely
4 A little more likely
3 Neither more nor less likely
2 A little less likely
1 Much less likely
6 Don't know

In addition, this study leaves the experimental setting and asks respondents to rate the importance of election timing and the economic conditions to their vote choice. The question wording and a discussion of the results are available in OA 4.5.

OA.2.2: Study 2 (November 2015) - post-treatment questions

Manipulation check
1. Please indicate whether the following statements about the scenario described above are correct: [Response grid, row-order randomized]

a. The country is experiencing economic growth
b. Unemployment is high
c. The election is held at the end of parliament's term

1 Correct
2 Incorrect
3 Don't know

Vote intention
2. Do the elements of this description make it more or less likely that you would vote for the governing party described in the scenario if an election were held tomorrow?
5 Much more likely
4 A little more likely
3 Neither more nor less likely
2 A little less likely
1 Much less likely
6 Don't know

Competence Evaluation
3. How would you evaluate the competence of the governing party described in this scenario?
5 Strongly positively
4 Quite positively
3 Neither positively nor negatively
2 Quite negatively
1 Strongly negatively
6 Don't know

Future economic performance
4. Over the next 12 months, would you expect the economic conditions in the country described above to be better or worse than in the past year?
5 Much better than in the past year
4 A little better than in the past year
3 Neither better nor worse than in the past year
2 A little worse than in the past year
1 Much worse than in the past year
6 Don't know

In addition to these questions, this study includes: (i) an extension of the direct test of the fairness hypothesis in Study 3. The question wording and a discussion of the results are available in OA.4.3. (ii) The study leaves the experimental setting and asks respondents to rate the importance of election timing and the economic conditions to their vote choice. The question wording and a discussion of the results are available in OA.4.5.

OA.2.3: Study 3 (February 2017)

Informational vignette:

> "The following paragraph describes the economic and political situation in a country that is similar to yours and has a single party government in office. Please read the following information about that government carefully. You will then be asked some questions about it. Please focus only on the features of the scenario described here in answering the questions that follow. [Insert]"

The insert differs for the experimental subgroups in the following way:

> Control 1: "A party that you would normally support is in charge of the government. Under this government, economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections. Parliament's term has come to an end and regular elections are held this week."
>
> Treatment 1: "A party that you would normally support is in charge of the government. Under this government, economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections. Given this, the governing party has decided to dissolve the parliament early and call elections two years ahead of schedule."
>
> Control 2: "A party that you would normally NOT support is in charge of the government. Under this government, economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections. Parliament's term has come to an end and regular elections are held this week."
>
> Treatment 2: "A party that you would normally NOT support is in charge of the government. Under this government, economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections. Given this, the governing party has decided to dissolve the parliament early and call elections two years ahead of schedule."

Post-treatment questions

Manipulation check

1. Please indicate whether the following statements about the scenario described above are correct: [Response grid, row-order randomized]
   a. The country is experiencing economic growth
   b. A party that you would normally support is in charge of the government
   c. The election is held at the end of parliament's term

1 Correct
2 Incorrect
3 Don't know

[Above each of the following questions, the insert is displayed again as follows: "Here is the description of the economic and political situation in that same country again. [Insert]"]

Vote intention

2. Do the elements of this description make it more or less likely that you would vote for the governing party described in the scenario if an election were held tomorrow?
5 Much more likely
4 A little more likely
3 Neither more nor less likely
2 A little less likely
1 Much less likely
6 Don't know

[Question order randomized of competence evaluation, future economic performance and procedural fairness]

Competence Evaluation
3. How would you evaluate the competence of the governing party described in this scenario?
5 Strongly positively
4 Quite positively
3 Neither positively nor negatively
2 Quite negatively
1 Strongly negatively
6 Don't know

Future economic performance
4. Over the next 12 months, would you expect the economic conditions in the country described above to be better or worse than in the past year?
5 Much better than in the past year
4 A little better than in the past year
3 Neither better nor worse than in the past year
2 A little worse than in the past year
1 Much worse than in the past year
6 Don't know

Procedural fairness
5. How fair do you think this election is…
… [Response grid, row-order randomized]
a …to voters
b …to other parties
5 Very fair
4 Quite fair
3 Neither fair nor unfair
2 Quite unfair
1 Very unfair
6 Don't know

Additional manipulation check
Please indicate which statement best characterizes the election described above.

1 The election has been called by the government for political advantage
2 The election has NOT been called by the government for political advantage
3 Don't know

OA.2.4: Study 4 (March 2017)

Informational vignette:

> "The following paragraph describes the economic and political situation in a country that is similar to yours and has a single party government in office. Please read the following information about that government carefully. You will then be asked some questions about it. Please focus only on the features of the scenario described here in answering the questions that follow. [Insert]"

The insert differs for the experimental subgroups in the following way:

> Control 1: "Under this government, economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections. Parliament's term has come to an end and regular elections are held this week."
>
> Treatment 1: "Under this government, economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections. Given this, the governing party has decided to dissolve the parliament early and call elections two years ahead of schedule."
>
> Control 2: "Under this government, economic performance has been mixed over the past year. The number of people receiving unemployment benefit has risen. At the same time, economic growth, though weak, has been better than official projections. Parliament's term has come to an end and regular elections are held this week."
>
> Treatment 2: "Under this government, economic performance has been mixed over the past year. The number of people receiving unemployment benefit has risen. At the same time, economic growth, though weak, has been better than official projections. Given this, the governing party has decided to dissolve the parliament early and call elections two years ahead of schedule."

Post-treatment questions

Manipulation check control 1 and treatment 1

1. Please indicate whether the following statements about the scenario described above are correct: [Response grid, row-order randomized]
   a. The country is experiencing economic growth
   b. Unemployment is high
   c. The election is held at the end of parliament's term

1 Correct
2 Incorrect
3 Don't know

Manipulation check control 2 and treatment 2

1. Please indicate whether the following statements about the scenario described above are correct: [Response grid, row-order randomized]
   a. The country is experiencing economic growth
   b. The number of people receiving unemployment benefit has fallen
   c. The election is held at the end of parliament's term

1 Correct
2 Incorrect

3 Don't know

[Above each of the following questions, the insert is displayed again as follows: "Here is the description of the economic and political situation in that same country again. [Insert]"]

Vote intention
2. Do the elements of this description make it more or less likely that you would vote for the governing party described in the scenario if an election were held tomorrow?
5 Much more likely
4 A little more likely
3 Neither more nor less likely
2 A little less likely
1 Much less likely
6 Don't know

Additional manipulation check
Please indicate which statement best characterizes the election described above.

1 The election has been called by the government for political advantage
2 The election has NOT been called by the government for political advantage
3 Don't know

OA.3: Randomization, Balance, Attention and Manipulation Checks

Randomization is central to our inferential strategy and is designed to ensure that the treatment is independent of other observed and unobserved influences on the outcomes of interest. If randomization has been successful, the experimental groups in each of the studies should not differ systematically in terms of observable characteristics. We test this expectation in two ways.

OA.3.1: Randomization checks

First, we regress assignment to our experimental groups on observed demographic and other characteristics (gender, age, education (in years), education (level), social group, household and personal income category) using logistic regression analysis in Studies 1 and 2.[1] In Studies 3 and 4 we use multinomial logistic regression analysis, because both of these studies assigned respondents randomly to one of four experimental groups (two control groups and two treatment groups). Tables OA.3.1.1 and OA.3.1.2 report the results. In general, we do not find large and reliable correlations for most of these covariates with treatment assignment, indicating that randomization has been successful. In Study 1, respondents assigned to treatment are very slightly younger (the coefficient for age is -0.013, $p < 0.01$, two-tailed). In Study 4, respondents assigned to treatment group 1 are very slightly older (0.013, $p < 0.05$, two-tailed), while those in control group 1 belonged to a slightly lower social grade group (-0.146, $p < 0.10$, two-tailed). These differences are very small and substantively negligible. In Studies 2 and 3, there are no statistically significant differences in the observable characteristics of the treatment and control groups. In none of the studies does a Wald test reject the hypothesis that all of the coefficients are simultaneously equal to zero, which is consistent with random assignment to experimental groups.

[1] As we note in the main text, respondents were randomly assigned to three groups in Study 1 - two treatment groups and a control group. We conducted further tests to corroborate that randomization was successful across these three groups in Study 1, and that the groups are balanced on observable characteristics (results not shown). Since our analysis in the main paper merges the two treatment groups in Study 1, we also merge them in the randomization and balance tests presented in this section to establish that treated respondents Study1 do not differ systematically from the control group.

Table OA.3.1.1: Randomization check Studies 1 and 2, logistic regression of treatment assignment on observable demographic characteristics

	Study 1	**Study 2**
Gender	-0.013	-0.042
	(0.125)	(0.114)
Age	0.013***	-0.002
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Education (years)	0.054	0.015
	(0.052)	(0.048)
Education (level)	-0.004	-0.003
	(0.015)	(0.013)
Social grade group	0.071	-0.017
	(0.048)	(0.043)
Income (personal)	0.009	0.001
	(0.029)	(0.018)
Income (household)	0.011	0.011
	(0.025)	(0.019)
Constant	-0.383	0.068
	(0.491)	(0.453)
N	1,313	1,311
Wald Test χ^2 (7df)	10.83 (*p*-value = 0.146)	1.77 (*p*-value = 0.972)

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses, ***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. The logistic regression analysis, unlike the balance tests below, includes only the sub-group of respondents with complete data on *all* observed demographic characteristics.

Table OA.3.1.2: Randomization check Studies 3 and 4, multinomial logistic regression of experimental group assignment on observable demographic characteristics

	Study 3			Study 4		
	Control 1	Treatment 1	Control 2	Control 1	Treatment 1	Control 2
Gender	-0.011	0.012	0.173	0.171	-0.111	-0.118
	(0.170)	(0.170)	(0.170)	(0.174)	(0.174)	(0.178)
Age	0.004	0.006	0.005	0.004	0.013**	0.010
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Education (years)	0.007	0.120	-0.042	-0.039	0.048	0.051
	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.073)	(0.074)	(0.074)	(0.076)
Education (level)	-0.020	0.014	0.015	-0.002	0.010	0.004
	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.021)	(0.021)
Social grade group	-0.099	0.095	0.023	-0.146*	-0.038	-0.131
	(0.086)	(0.086)	(0.085)	(0.088)	(0.088)	(0.090)
Income (household)	-0.026	-0.028	-0.048	-0.018	-0.033	0.003
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Income (personal)	0.033	0.046	0.057	0.012	0.030	-0.018
	(0.039)	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.039)	(0.041)	(0.040)
Constant	0.315	-1.118*	-0.501	0.191	-0.576	-0.183
	(0.654)	(0.662)	(0.658)	(0.660)	(0.668)	(0.679)
N		1,244			1,200	
Wald Test χ^2 (21df)		22.73 (*p*-value = 0.359)			19.78 (p-value = 0.535)	

Note: The reference category in both analyses is treatment group 2. Table entries are regression coefficients with standard errors in parentheses. ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1. The multinomial logistic regression analysis, unlike the balance tests below, includes only the sub-group of respondents with complete data on *all* observed demographic characteristics.

OA.3.2: Covariate balance checks

Second, we perform covariate balance checks to examine whether the experimental groups are balanced in terms of observable characteristics.[2] Table OA.3.2.1 reports the results for Studies 1 and 2. Only in Study 1 is the result for "age" statistically significant ($p = 0.041$), but the difference is very small (1.6 years). Other covariate distributions display not statistically significant differences across the treatment and control groups. Table OA.3.2.2 reports the covariate balance checks for Studies 3 and 4. In Study 3, control group 1 spent slightly less time in education (difference-of-means = -0.21, $p = 0.038$) and attained a slightly lower education level than treatment group 1 (difference-of-means = -0.60, $p = 0.061$). In Study 4, the average age of respondents in control and treatment group 1 differs by 2.03 years ($p = 0.051$). All other demographic observables are balanced across the treatment and control groups. Given our large samples, and the very small magnitude of the differences uncovered by the balance checks, we conclude that these differences are substantively insignificant and that randomization has been successful.

The observable demographic variables are coded as follows:

Gender: 1 = male; 2 = female;
Political Knowledge: proportion of correct answers (see SI 1), range 0-1;
Education (Years) Group: 1 = 15 or under; 2 = 16; 3 = 17-18; 4 = 19; 5 = 20+; 6 = Full time student;
Education Level (Highest Qualification): 18 categories differentiating different types of qualifications achieved;
Social Grade Group: Chief Income Earner, 6 categories, 1 = A; 2 = B; 3 = C1; 4 = C2; 5 = D; 6 = E.
Personal Income Group: 14 categories ranging from under £5,000 per year to £100,000 and over;
Household Income Group: 15 categories ranging from under £5,000 per year to £150,000 and over.

[2] Throughout, we report the results of t-tests using Welch's approximation to account for unequal variances between groups.

Table OA.3.2.1: Covariate balance checks, Studies 1 and 2

	Mean (Control)	Std. Dev. (Control)	Mean (Treat)	Std. Dev. (Treat)	Diff.-of-Means	p-value
Study 1						
Gender	1.53	0.50	1.51	0.50	0.02	0.453
Age	48.97	15.64	50.60	15.92	-1.63	0.041
Education (years)	3.43	1.51	3.42	1.55	0.01	0.923
Education (level)	12.13	4.90	12.14	5.15	-0.01	0.961
Social grade group	3.12	1.49	3.15	1.52	-0.03	0.661
Income (personal)	4.90	2.97	4.93	2.89	-0.03	0.866
Income (household)	6.89	3.41	6.89	3.55	-0.00	0.995
Study 2						
Gender	1.51	0.50	1.52	0.50	-0.01	0.657
Age	49.84	16.13	49.48	15.77	0.36	0.644
Education (years)	3.35	1.57	3.43	1.54	-0.08	0.284
Education (level)	11.91	5.28	12.10	5.18	-0.19	0.455
Social grade group	3.26	1.52	3.15	1.55	0.11	0.153
Income (personal)	5.27	3.53	5.47	3.74	-0.20	0.309
Income (household)	7.43	4.19	7.64	4.18	-0.21	0.346

Note: †*p*-values are based on two-tailed t-tests using Welch's approximation to account for unequal variances between groups.

Table OA.3.2.2: Covariate balance checks, Studies 3 and 4

	Mean (Control)	Std. Dev. (Control)	Mean (Treat)	Std. Dev. (Treat)	Diff.-of-Means	p-value
Study 3						
Control 1 & Treatment 1						
Gender	1.53	0.50	1.52	0.50	0.01	0.733
Age	49.11	16.72	47.99	16.63	1.12	0.270
Education (years)	3.37	1.51	3.58	1.49	-0.21	0.038
Education (level)	11.53	5.21	12.13	5.06	-0.60	0.061
Social grade group	2.33	1.14	2.32	1.13	0.00	0.979
Income (household)	6.68	3.67	6.68	3.48	-0.01	0.983
Income (personal)	4.74	2.93	4.76	2.85	-0.01	0.953
Control 2 & Treatment 2						
Gender	1.56	0.50	1.55	0.50	0.00	0.939
Age	48.27	17.20	47.69	16.43	0.58	0.581
Education (years)	3.27	1.51	3.42	1.53	-0.15	0.143
Education (level)	11.67	5.21	11.92	4.99	-0.25	0.448
Social grade group	2.39	1.14	2.33	1.13	0.05	0.453
Income (household)	6.41	3.56	6.79	3.50	-0.39	0.149
Income (personal)	4.71	3.05	4.72	2.92	-0.01	0.977
Study 4						
Control 1 & Treatment 1						
Gender	1.56	0.50	1.54	0.50	0.02	0.499
Age	48.42	16.47	50.45	17.63	-2.03	0.051
Education (years)	3.31	1.54	3.33	1.53	-0.02	0.857
Education (level)	11.96	5.01	11.94	5.05	0.01	0.967
Social grade group	2.26	1.17	2.28	1.12	-0.02	0.787
Income (household)	6.89	3.83	6.78	3.58	0.11	0.703
Income (personal)	4.99	3.23	5.05	3.05	-0.05	0.818
Control 2 & Treatment 2						
Gender	1.56	0.50	1.56	0.50	0.00	0.924
Age	49.69	16.72	48.25	16.66	1.45	0.162
Education (years)	3.38	1.52	3.35	1.55	0.03	0.767
Education (level)	11.97	5.21	11.64	5.13	0.33	0.307
Social grade group	2.27	1.12	2.35	1.10	-0.08	0.247
Income (household)	7.05	3.63	6.98	3.63	0.07	0.805
Income (personal)	4.94	3.19	4.94	2.87	0.00	0.991

Note: †*p*-values are based on two-tailed t-tests using Welch's approximation to account for unequal variances between groups.

OA.3.3: Manipulation checks

To test whether the treatment manipulated the independent variable as intended, Studies 2, 3 and 4 included a manipulation check, which respondents completed immediately after the vignette. The purpose of this check is to examine whether respondents absorbed the information contained in the vignette about election timing (the treatment) as well as the contextual information about the state of the economy and the party in government.

Respondents are asked to indicate whether several statements about the scenario described in the vignette are correct. One of these statements always concerns the timing of the election (i.e., "the election is held at the end of parliament's term"), others concern growth, unemployment or whether the vignette describes a scenario in which the respondent's preferred party is in government (the question order was randomized). In each control and treatment group pair, the statement about the timing of the election is correct only for the control group and incorrect for the treatment group, whereas the other statements are either correct or incorrect for both experimental groups. If treatment was successful, we should see substantively *large and statistically significant* differences in the mean response of the control and treatment groups only in response to the question concerning election timing, and not with respect to the other questions. This is precisely what we observe (difference-of-means$_{\text{election timing}}$ approximately 0.5; *p*-value = 0.000). Table OA.3.3.1 displays the results.

Table OA.3.3.1: Manipulation checks, Studies 2, 3 and 4

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-Means	p-value
Study 2						
Election timing	842	0.79	836	0.29	0.50	0.000
Growth	842	0.79	836	0.78	0.01	0.466
Unemployment	842	0.25	836	0.24	0.00	0.841
Study 3						
Control 1 & Treatment 1						
Election timing	534	0.75	536	0.20	0.55	0.000
Preferred party	534	0.71	533	0.73	-0.01	0.600
Growth	534	0.69	533	0.74	-0.05	0.059
Control 2 & Treatment 2						
Election timing	514	0.77	518	0.19	0.59	0.000
Preferred party	514	0.26	519	0.20	0.06	0.017
Growth	515	0.73	517	0.72	0.00	0.864
Study 4						
Control 1 & Treatment 1						
Election timing	565	0.75	504	0.23	0.52	0.000
Unemployment	560	0.16	506	0.18	-0.02	0.320
Growth	563	0.72	510	0.75	-0.03	0.301
Control 2 & Treatment 2						
Election timing	524	0.74	515	0.22	0.52	0.000
Unemployment	524	0.17	514	0.19	-0.02	0.342
Growth	522	0.70	515	0.70	0.00	0.942

Note: †*p*-values are based on two-tailed t-tests using Welch's approximation to account for unequal variances between groups. The table presents the mean of responses to each statement, which indicated that the statement is "correct."

In addition, Studies 3 and 4 include a final question, in which respondents are asked whether the election described in the vignette is best characterized as called by the government for political advantage (= 1) or as NOT called by the government for political advantage (= 2). This question probes whether treatment manipulated the respondents' understanding of the incumbent government's opportunism as intended. Since this is the last question of the survey, it cannot contaminate participants' responses to other questions. If treatment was successful, we should see that the mean respondent in the treatment group perceived the election as called for partisan advantage, while the mean respondent in the control group should view the election as not called for political advantage. This is exactly what we observe. The mean response of all control groups in these two studies rounds to 2 (i.e., the election is best characterized as NOT called by the government for political advantage), while the mean response of all treatment groups rounds to 1 (i.e., the election is best characterized as called by the government for political advantage). Table OA.3.3.2 displays the results.

Table OA.3.3.2: Additional manipulation check, Studies 3 and 4

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	p-value
Study 3						
Control 1 & Treatment 1						
Election called for political benefit	392	1.73	414	1.09	0.63	0.000
Control 2 & Treatment 2						
Election called for political benefit	384	1.75	416	1.08	0.67	0.000
Study 4						
Control 1 & Treatment 1						
Election called for political benefit	440	1.73	448	1.09	0.64	0.000
Control 2 & Treatment 2						
Election called for political benefit	387	1.77	402	1.17	0.60	0.000

Note: Response options: 1 = election called by the government for political advantage, 2 = election NOT called by the government for political advantage; *p*-values are based on two-tailed t-tests using Welch's approximation to account for unequal variances between groups.

OA.4: Results of Additional Analyses

OA.4.1: Does opportunistic election timing generate negative voter reactions?

Table OA.4.1.1: The effect of opportunistic election timing on vote intention (Studies 1-3)

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	p-value
Vote intention (Study 1)	511	3.76	1,044	3.55	-0.21	0.000
Vote intention (Study 2)	738	3.68	738	3.47	-0.21	0.000
Vote intention (Study 3)	910	3.95	938	3.75	-0.21	0.000

Note: Response scale: 5 = Much more likely, 4 = A little more likely, 3 = Neither more nor less likely, 2 = A little less likely, 1 = Much less likely.

Study 3 disaggregates this treatment effect by government partisanship. Table OA.4.1.2 presents the effect of opportunistic election calling on vote intentions when respondents are told that "a party that you would normally support is in charge of the government" and when respondents are informed that "a party that you would normally NOT support is in charge of the government." The table shows that opportunistic election timing significantly diminishes voter enthusiasm for the government, whether or not the incumbent is a party that the respondent would normally support. It also makes clear that the electoral penalty for opportunistic election calling is *greater* when respondents are otherwise most inclined to support the incumbent. That is, on average, respondents punish the incumbent *more* for opportunistic election timing, when their preferred party governs than when a party they do not normally support is in power ($ATE_{\text{preferred party in government}} = -0.24$, $p < 0.00$; $ATE_{\text{preferred party not in government}} = -0.17$, $p < 0.00$).

Table OA.4.1.2: The effect of opportunistic election timing on vote intention by partisanship (Study 3)

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	(p-value)
Party you support governs						
Vote intention	473	4.13	478	3.89	-0.24	0.000
Party you support does not govern						
Vote intention	437	3.76	460	3.60	-0.17	0.007

Note: Response scale: 5 = Much more likely, 4 = A little more likely, 3 = Neither more nor less likely, 2 = A little less likely, 1 = Much less likely.

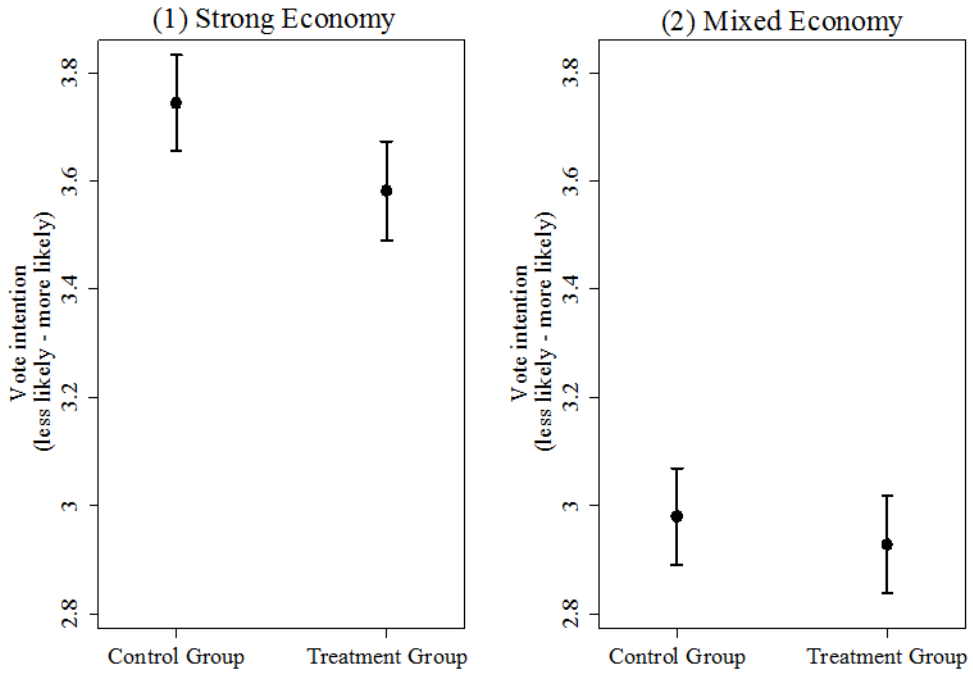
Study 4 explores the scope conditions for the strategic use of opportunistic election timing. According to the political surfing literature, opportunistic election timing is a strategy available to governments only in the context of strong economic performance. This gives rise to the question how the strength of the economy affects voter reactions to opportunistic election timing. Study 4 sheds light on this question by varying the government's economic

performance. In the *strong economy* condition, respondents are informed: "…economic performance has been strong over the past year. Unemployment is at an 11 year low and economic growth has been better than official projections." Respondents in the *mixed economy* condition are told: "… economic performance has been mixed over the past year. The number of people receiving unemployment benefit has risen. At the same time, economic growth, though weak, has been better than official projections."

Figure OA.4.1.1 (and Table OA.4.1.3) display the average vote intentions and treatment effects in the two contexts. The results suggest that opportunistic election timing is a strategy available to incumbents only in the context of strong economic performance, in which the control and treatment groups are on average "a little more likely" to support the government (panel 1, control group average = 3.74, treatment group average = 3.58). In the mixed economy condition (panel 2), by contrast, the average respondent in the control and treatment groups is indifferent between the government and the opposition (panel 2, control group average = 2.98, treatment group average = 2.93, "neither more nor less likely" to vote for the incumbent). These results clarify the scope conditions for the expectations generated by the political surfing literature: Incumbents can benefit from opportunistic election timing when a strong economy generates voter support, but not when mixed economic conditions leave voters indifferent between the incumbent and the opposition.

Turning to the magnitude of the treatment effects, the results indicate that opportunistic election timing always tends to diminish support for the incumbent, but the effect is sizable and statistically significant only in the strong economy condition (panel 1), when the average voter would otherwise have supported the government (ATE = -0.16, $p < 0.05$). This result is consistent with our findings regarding partisanship: the electoral penalty for incumbent opportunism *rises* in voter support for the incumbent. When respondents are supportive of a government that has delivered strong economic performance, they are on the one hand more likely to vote for that government, but on the other hand, they also more likely to re-evaluate their faith in that government and to reduce their support for it, when it engages in opportunism. Respondents who are already sceptical about a government, which has delivered mixed economic performance, not only have a reduced propensity to vote for that government, they also adjust their vote intentions less in light of opportunistic election timing. As a result, the effect of opportunistic election timing in the mixed economy condition is substantively small and statistically not significant (ATE = -0.05, $p = 0.424$, panel 2).

Figure OA.4.1.1: The effect of opportunistic election timing on vote intention, varying economic performance (Study 4)



Note: Points represent control and treatment group means, vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Response scale: 5 = Much more likely, 4 = A little more likely, 3 = Neither more nor less likely, 2 = A little less likely, 1 = Much less likely."

Table OA.4.1.3: The effect of opportunistic election timing on vote intention by economic condition (Study 4)

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	(p-value)
Strong economy						
Vote intention	508	3.74	471	3.58	-0.16	0.013
Mixed economy						
Vote intention	455	2.98	449	2.93	-0.05	0.424

Note: Response scale: 5 = Much more likely, 4 = A little more likely, 3 = Neither more nor less likely, 2 = A little less likely, 1 = Much less likely.

OA.4.2: What produces the negative voter reaction?

Table OA.4.2.1: The effect of opportunistic election timing on competence evaluations and anticipated economic performance

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	(p-value)
Competence evaluations						
Study 2	743	3.70	750	3.55	-0.15	0.003
Study 3	913	3.96	927	3.73	-0.24	0.000
Anticipated economic performance						
Study 2	730	3.67	728	3.53	-0.13	0.005
Study 3	832	3.59	846	3.47	-0.12	0.005

Note: Response scale (competence evaluations): 5 = Strongly positively, 4 = Quite positively, 3 = Neither positively nor negatively, 2 = Quite negatively, 1 = Strongly negatively. Response scale (expected future economic performance): 5 = Much better than in the past year, 4 = A little better than in the past year, 3 = Neither better nor worse than in the past year, 2 = A little worse than in the past year, 1 = Much worse than in the past year.

Table OA.4.2.2: The effect of opportunistic election timing on competence evaluations and anticipated economic performance, varying partisanship (Study 3)

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	(p-value)
Party you support governs						
Competence evaluation	467	4.09	473	3.83	-0.26	0.000
Anticipated economic performance	422	3.63	430	3.48	-0.15	0.012
Party you support does not govern						
Competence evaluation	446	3.83	454	3.62	-0.21	0.000
Anticipated economic performance	410	3.55	416	3.46	-0.09	0.154

Note: Response scale (competence evaluations): 5 = Strongly positively, 4 = Quite positively, 3 = Neither positively nor negatively, 2 = Quite negatively, 1 = Strongly negatively. Response scale (expected future economic performance): 5 = Much better than in the past year, 4 = A little better than in the past year, 3 = Neither better nor worse than in the past year, 2 = A little worse than in the past year, 1 = Much worse than in the past year.

Table OA.4.2.3: The effect of opportunistic election timing on procedural fairness concerns (Study 3)

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	(p-value)
Fairness to voters	872	3.88	919	3.22	-0.66	0.000
Fairness to other parties	865	3.75	912	2.99	-0.76	0.000

Note: Response scale: 5 = Very fair, 4 = Quite fair, 3 = Neither fair nor unfair, 2 = Fairly unfair, 1 = Very unfair.

Table OA.4.2.4: The effect of opportunistic election timing on procedural fairness concerns, varying partisanship (Study 3)

	N	Mean (Control)	N	Mean (Treatment)	Difference-of-means	(p-value)
Party you support governs						
Fairness to voters	433	3.99	470	3.24	-0.75	0.000
Fairness to other parties	426	3.85	464	3.00	-0.86	0.000
Party you support does not govern						
Fairness to voters	439	3.78	449	3.20	-0.57	0.000
Fairness to other parties	439	3.65	448	2.99	-0.66	0.000

Note: Response scale: 5 = Very fair, 4 = Quite fair, 3 = Neither fair nor unfair, 2 = Fairly unfair, 1 = Very unfair.

OA.4.3: Extension of the test of fairness concerns (Study 2)

Study 2 includes an extension of the direct test of the fairness hypothesis in Study 3. In Study 2, we supplement the vignette with additional information, which states that prior to holding the election described in the scenario, the governing party uses its privileged media access to release a number of positive news stories about the economy. Respondents are then asked to indicate how fair or unfair they think this election is (a) to voters, and (b) to other parties (exact question wording available below).

This question wording confronts respondents in the control and treatment conditions with an incumbent government that violates expectations of fairness by using its privileged media access to release positive news stories about the economy. The experiment therefore identifies the effect of election timing on perceptions of procedural fairness, conditional on the government's additional exploitation of its privileged media access.[3] That is, the experiment measures whether incumbents are punished particularly severely if they *also* call an early election. The results of this experiment indicate that treatment always adversely impacts fairness perceptions, but neither of the effects is statistically significant (ATE_{voters} = -0.07, p = 0.243; $ATE_{parties}$ = -0.02, p = 0.676, see Figure OA.4.3.1 below).

This result is consistent with the findings presented in the main text and elsewhere in the OA (see pp. 20 and 23 in the main text and p. 17 of the OA): Voters are less likely to further punish an incumbent for opportunistic election timing when they have prior reasons not to support and trust that government. This is precisely the effect of our supplement to the vignette in this experiment as the control group means indicate: When respondents are informed that the governing party uses its privileged media access to release positive news stories, the average control group respondent leans toward viewing the election as "fairly unfair." The treatment group, which is additionally informed that the incumbent times the election early, only slightly downward revises its evaluation of the election's fairness.

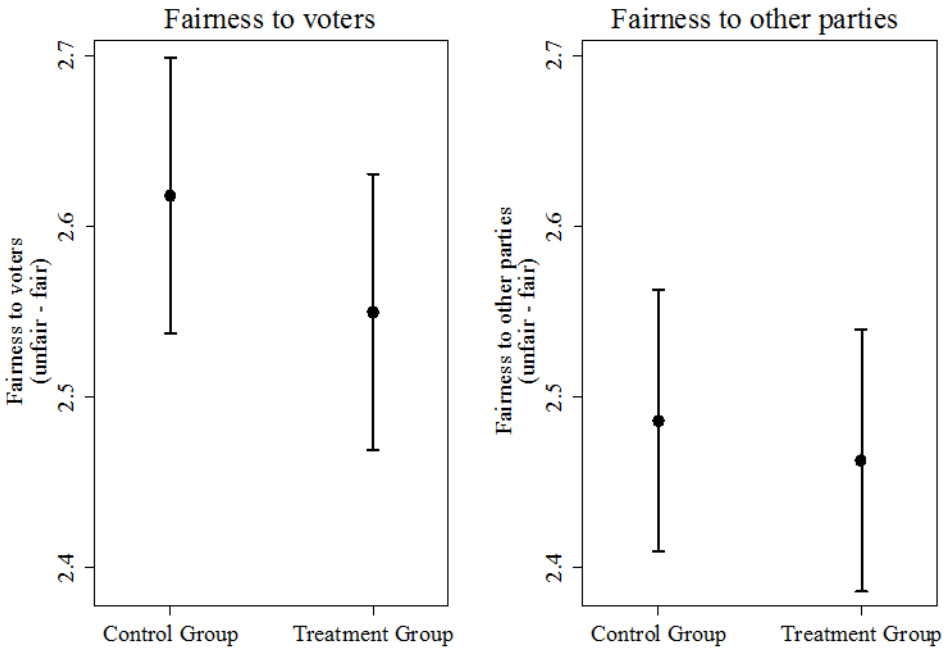
Question wording: *Extension of the test of fairness concerns*
Prior to holding the election described in this scenario, the governing party uses its privileged media access to release a number of good news stories about the economy. How fair do you think this election is… [Response grid, row-order randomized]

a …to voters
b …to other parties

5 Very fair
4 Quite fair
3 Neither fair nor unfair
2 Quite unfair
1 Very unfair
6 Don't know

[3] We are grateful to the editor and the anonymous referees for pointing this out.

Figure OA.4.3.1: The effect of opportunistic election timing on perceived procedural fairness (Study 2)



Note: Points represent control and treatment group means, vertical bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Results based on Study 2 (November 2015). Response scale: 5 = Very fair, 4 = Quite fair, 3 = Neither fair nor unfair, 2 = Fairly unfair, 1 = Very unfair.

OA.4.4: How important is election timing relative to economic performance?

Table OA.4.4.1: The effect of economic performance and opportunistic election timing on vote intention (Study 4)

	N	Mean (Control = Strong economy)	N	Mean (Treatment = Mixed economy)	Difference-of-means	p-value
Vote intention	979	3.67	904	2.95	-0.71	0.000
	N	Mean (Control = Regular election)	N	Mean (Treatment = Opportunistic Election)	Difference-of-means	p-value
Vote intention	963	3.38	920	3.26	-0.12	0.013

Note: Response scale: 1 = Much more likely, 2 = A little more likely, 3 = Neither more nor less likely, 4 = A little less likely, 5 = Much less likely.

OA.4.5: The relative importance of election timing in shaping vote choice, observational data

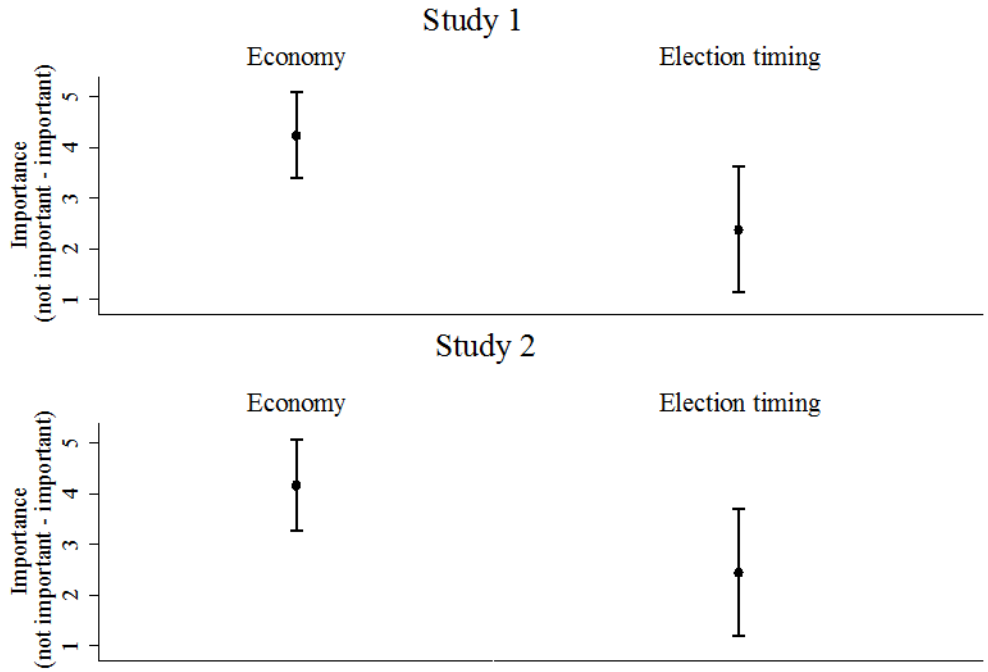
Studies 1 and 2 corroborate the experimental result that economic conditions trump opportunistic election timing in shaping vote intentions with observational evidence. Both studies include a final post-treatment question that moves away from the experimental setting. It asks respondents to rate the importance to their vote choice of election timing and economic conditions and offers a straightforward and parsimonious way of comparing the mean level of importance that voters assign to the timing of the election and the economic situation.[4] Recall, that both of our surveys include a representative sample of the voting-age population in the UK. This allows us to draw generalizable inferences about voter preferences (precise question wording available below).

According to H1c, the state of the economy is expected to trump election timing in its importance to vote choice. Figure OA.4.5.1 compares the mean importance of the economy and election timing to the vote choice of respondents in both studies. It shows that, on average, participants view election timing as significantly less important than retrospective economic performance. On a scale that ranges from 5 (very important) to 1 (not important), the economic situation is rated as important, leaning toward very important (mean = 4.25 in Study 1, 4.17 in Study 2), whereas election timing is regarded as much less salient (mean = 2.38 in Study 1, 2.44 in Study 2).[5] The difference in mean importance is substantively very large. On our 5-point scale it amounts to 37 per cent in Study 1 and 34 per cent in Study 2 (differences-of means are -1.87, $p < 0.000$ in Study 1, -1.72, $p < 0.000$ in Study 2). This suggests that, as anticipated by hypothesis 1c, economic performance strongly dominates any concern about opportunism in structuring vote choice, not just in the experimental evidence, but also in our observational data.

[4] While we view the importance attributed to these two items as part of the causal mechanism that accounts for the effect of opportunistic election timing, this question was administered after the other outcome variables in the survey. We made this choice to avoid priming, which could potentially make any effect of opportunism on vote choice, incumbent evaluation, and affective disapproval an artefact of question ordering.

[5] The results do not change when two treatment groups in Study 1 are disaggregated. In both groups the mean importance of the economy outstrips that of election timing significantly and by a nearly identical margin of 1.87 and 1.85 respectively, $p < 0.000$.

Figure OA.4.5.1: The importance of election timing and economic performance to vote choice



Note: The points represent means, vertical bars represent standard deviations. Response scale: 5 = Very important, to 1 = Not important at all. Results of difference-of-means test available in Table OA.5.1.

To obscure our specific interest in the relative importance that voters attribute to election timing and the economy in shaping their vote choice, the question also asks respondents to rank the importance of a range of other considerations that may influence electoral choice including party policy, the party leader, the level of immigration and the state of health care. As Table OA.4.5.1 shows, across both studies, election timing is consistently rated as a significantly less important factor in shaping vote choice than any of the alternative considerations. The state of the economy has an importance that is similar to other electoral concerns, notably party policy and health care.

Table OA.4.5.1: The relative importance of election timing in shaping vote choice (difference-of-means tests)

	N	Mean (Election timing)	Mean (Alternative issue)	Difference-of-means	*p*-value
Study 1					
Economy	1,654	2.38	4.25	-1.87	0.000
Party policy	1,658	2.38	4.21	-1.83	0.000
Party leader	1,652	2.38	3.56	-1.18	0.000
Health care	1,659	2.38	4.34	-1.96	0.000
Immigration	1,651	2.38	3.52	-1.14	0.000
Study 2					
Economy	1,532	2.44	4.17	-1.72	0.000
Party policy	1,535	2.44	4.19	-1.74	0.000
Party leader	1,537	2.44	3.73	-1.29	0.000
Health care	1,540	2.44	4.30	-1.86	0.000
Immigration	1,533	2.44	3.69	-1.25	0.000

Note: Response scale: 5 = Very important, to 1 = Not important at all.

Question wording (identical in Studies 1 and 2): The importance of election timing; the importance of the economic situation

2. How important would the following things be to your vote choice? [Response grid, row-order randomized]

a. Party policy
b. The party leader
c. The economic situation
d. The level of immigration
e. The state of health care
f. The timing of the election (i.e., whether it is regular or called early)

5 - Very important
4
3
2
1 - Not important
6 Don't know

OA.5: Corroborating regression analyses

The analyses presented in this section corroborate the treatment effects reported in the main body of the paper using OLS and ordered logistic regression analysis.

Table OA.5.1: Study 1, the effect of opportunistic election timing on vote intention (OLS regression analysis)

	Vote intention
Opportunistic election timing	-0.214***
	(0.053)
Constant	3.763***
	(0.043)
Observations	1,555
R-squared	0.010

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, *** $p<0.01$, ** $p<0.05$, * $p<0.1$.

Table OA.5.2: Study 1, the effect of opportunistic election timing on vote intention (ordinal logistic regression analysis)

	Vote Intention
Opportunistic election timing	-0.425***
	(0.100)
Constant cut 1	-3.452***
	(0.147)
Constant cut 2	-2.981***
	(0.126)
Constant cut 3	-0.303***
	(0.084)
Constant cut 4	0.988***
	(0.088)
Controls	No
Observations	1,555

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***$p<0.01$, **$p<0.05$, *$p<0.1$. †

Table OA.5.3: Study 2, the effect of opportunistic election timing on various outcomes (OLS regression analysis)

	Vote intention	Competence evaluation	Anticipated economic performance
Opportunistic election timing	-0.206***	-0.147***	-0.131***
	(0.054)	(0.049)	(0.046)
Constant	3.676***	3.700***	3.666***
	(0.038)	(0.034)	(0.033)
Observations	1,476	1,493	1,458
R-squared	0.010	0.006	0.005

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

Table OA.5.4: Study 2, the effect of opportunistic election timing on various outcomes (ordinal logistic regression analysis)

	Vote intention	Competence evaluation	Anticipated economic performance
Opportunistic election timing	-0.354***	-0.294***	-0.273***
	(0.096)	(0.097)	(0.100)
Constant cut1	-2.912***	-3.231***	-3.615***
	(0.120)	(0.137)	(0.163)
Constant cut2	-2.560***	-2.385***	-2.242***
	(0.107)	(0.102)	(0.100)
Constant cut3	-0.207***	-0.668***	-0.691***
	(0.070)	(0.073)	(0.074)
Constant cut4	1.146***	1.671***	2.033***
	(0.078)	(0.087)	(0.097)
Observations	1,476	1,493	1,458

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

Table OA.5.5: Study 3, the effect of opportunistic election timing on various outcomes (OLS regression analysis)

	Vote intention	Competence evaluation	Anticipated economic performance	Fairness (voters)	Fairness (parties)
Opportunistic election timing	-0.209***	-0.236***	-0.119***	-0.661***	-0.758***
	(0.044)	(0.040)	(0.043)	(0.049)	(0.049)
Constant	3.954***	3.963***	3.590***	3.883***	3.750***
	(0.031)	(0.028)	(0.030)	(0.035)	(0.035)
Observations	1,848	1,840	1,678	1,791	1,777
R-squared	0.012	0.019	0.005	0.092	0.117

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

Table OA.5.6: Study 3, the effect of opportunistic election timing on various outcomes (ordinal logistic regression analysis)

	Vote intention	Competence evaluation	Anticipated economic performance	Fairness (voters)	Fairness (parties)
Opportunistic election timing	-0.431***	-0.516***	-0.243***	-1.132***	-1.297***
	(0.085)	(0.089)	(0.091)	(0.089)	(0.090)
Constant cut 1	-4.003***	-4.463***	-3.868***	-3.824***	-3.777***
	(0.164)	(0.198)	(0.170)	(0.132)	(0.126)
Constant cut 2	-3.112***	-2.880***	-2.167***	-2.368***	-2.115***
	(0.115)	(0.105)	(0.091)	(0.087)	(0.083)
Constant cut 3	-0.791***	-1.259***	-0.418***	-0.658***	-0.372***
	(0.067)	(0.072)	(0.067)	(0.067)	(0.066)
Constant cut 4	0.700***	1.149***	2.142***	0.719***	0.929***
	(0.066)	(0.071)	(0.094)	(0.069)	(0.071)
Observations	1,848	1,840	1,678	1,791	1,777

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

Table OA.5.7: Study 4, the effect of opportunistic election timing and economic conditions on vote intention (OLS regression analysis)

	Vote intention	Vote intention
Opportunistic election timing	-0.120**	
	(0.049)	
Mixed economic performance		-0.711***
		(0.046)
Constant	3.383***	3.666***
	(0.034)	(0.032)
Observations	1,883	1,883
R-squared	0.003	0.114

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.

Table OA.5.8: Study 4, the effect of opportunistic election timing and economic conditions on vote intention (ordinal logistic regression analysis)

	Vote intention	Vote intention
Opportunistic election timing	-0.229***	
	(0.085)	
Mixed economic performance		-1.428***
		(0.093)
Constant cut 1	-2.761***	-3.552***
	(0.103)	(0.114)
Constant cut 2	-1.861***	-2.618***
	(0.079)	(0.091)
Constant cut 3	0.404***	-0.106*
	(0.063)	(0.062)
Constant cut 4	1.514***	1.102***
	(0.073)	(0.070)
Observations	1,883	1,883

Note: Table entries are regression coefficients, standard errors in parentheses, ***p<0.01, **p<0.05, *p<0.1.