

# Do Masks on Law Enforcement Affect an Individual's Democratic Satisfaction?

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Sophia Maritato, Ray Eschenbach,  
Maxwell Atwood

Slippery Rock University

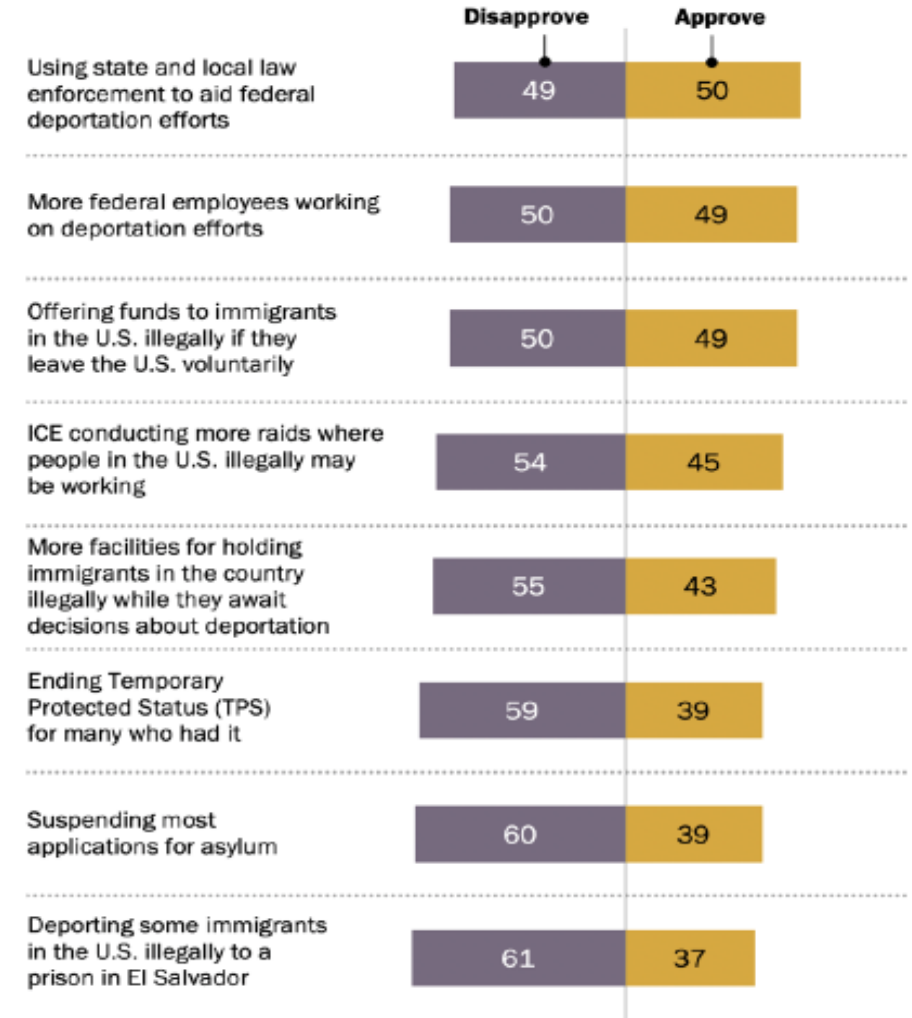
Student Symposium- April 16, 2026

# Background

- Public perception of federal law enforcement agents
- Influence citizens' value of democracy

## Americans offer mixed evaluations of some key Trump administration immigration actions, disapprove of others

% who say they \_\_\_ of each of the following



Note: No answer responses are not shown.

Source: Survey of U.S. adults conducted June 2-8, 2025.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

# Context

- Harmful effects of untransparent, anonymous government
- Survey experiment will richen policing legitimacy and democracy research



IMMIGRATION RAIDS IN SOCAL

NEW PUSH TO BAN AGENTS FROM CONCEALING THEIR IDENTITIES



abc7.com



PUTTING THEM IN HARM'S WAY  
L.A. MAYOR SAYS ICE DOESN'T HAVE RIGHT TO WEAR MASKS


FOX NEWS  
LIVE

THE BIG WEEKEND SHOW

A large orange circle is positioned on the left side of the slide, partially overlapping the white background. The text 'Research Question' is written in white, sans-serif font inside this circle.

# Research Question

How does the portrayal of masked versus unmasked federal law enforcement affect democratic perceptions?

A decorative graphic consisting of four blue, thick, curved dashes arranged in a curved path in the bottom right corner of the slide.



## Symbolic- Interactionalist Theory

- Focuses on how visual symbols influence public perceptions
- Impacted Authority and Trust

## Masked vs. Unmasked

- Masked: shows secrecy, reduced transparency, and accountability
- Unmasked: conveys legitimacy and responsibility

# Theory & Framework


Treatment Group 1



Treatment Group 2

# Hypotheses

Individuals exposed to the portrayal of masked federal agents will, on average, report lower satisfaction in democracy and place more importance on living in a democracy (on a 1-10 scale) compared to individuals who are exposed to the unmasked federal agents.



If an individual is exposed to the treatment of an AI-generated photo of unmasked federal agents, they will give higher responses than those who are exposed to the AI-generated photo of masked agents.

Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Valid Percent (%)
<b>Age</b>	18–24	72	52.20%
	25–34	7	5.10%
	35–44	7	5.10%
	45–54	23	16.70%
	55–64	13	9.40%
	65+	15	10.90%
	<i>Missing/Other</i>	2	—
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<b>Gender</b>	Female	85	61.60%
	Male	48	34.80%
	Non-binary/Third gender	3	2.20%
	Prefer not to say/Other	2	1.40%
	<i>Missing</i>	1	—
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<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>	White/Caucasian	133	96.40%
	African American	2	1.40%
	Hispanic/Latino	1	0.70%
	Asian	1	0.70%
	<i>Missing/Other</i>	2	—
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<b>Education</b>	High School Diploma	22	15.90%
	Some college experience	58	42.00%
	Associate's Degree	19	13.80%
	Bachelor's Degree	22	15.90%
	Post-graduate	16	11.60%
	<i>Missing/Other</i>	2	—
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<b>Party ID</b>	Democrat	51	37.00%
	Republican	49	35.50%
	Independent	27	19.60%
	Other	11	8.00%
	<i>Missing</i>	1	—
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<b>Experimental</b>	Masks	46	34.60%
	No masks	45	33.80%
	Control	41	30.80%
	<i>Missing/Other</i>	7	—

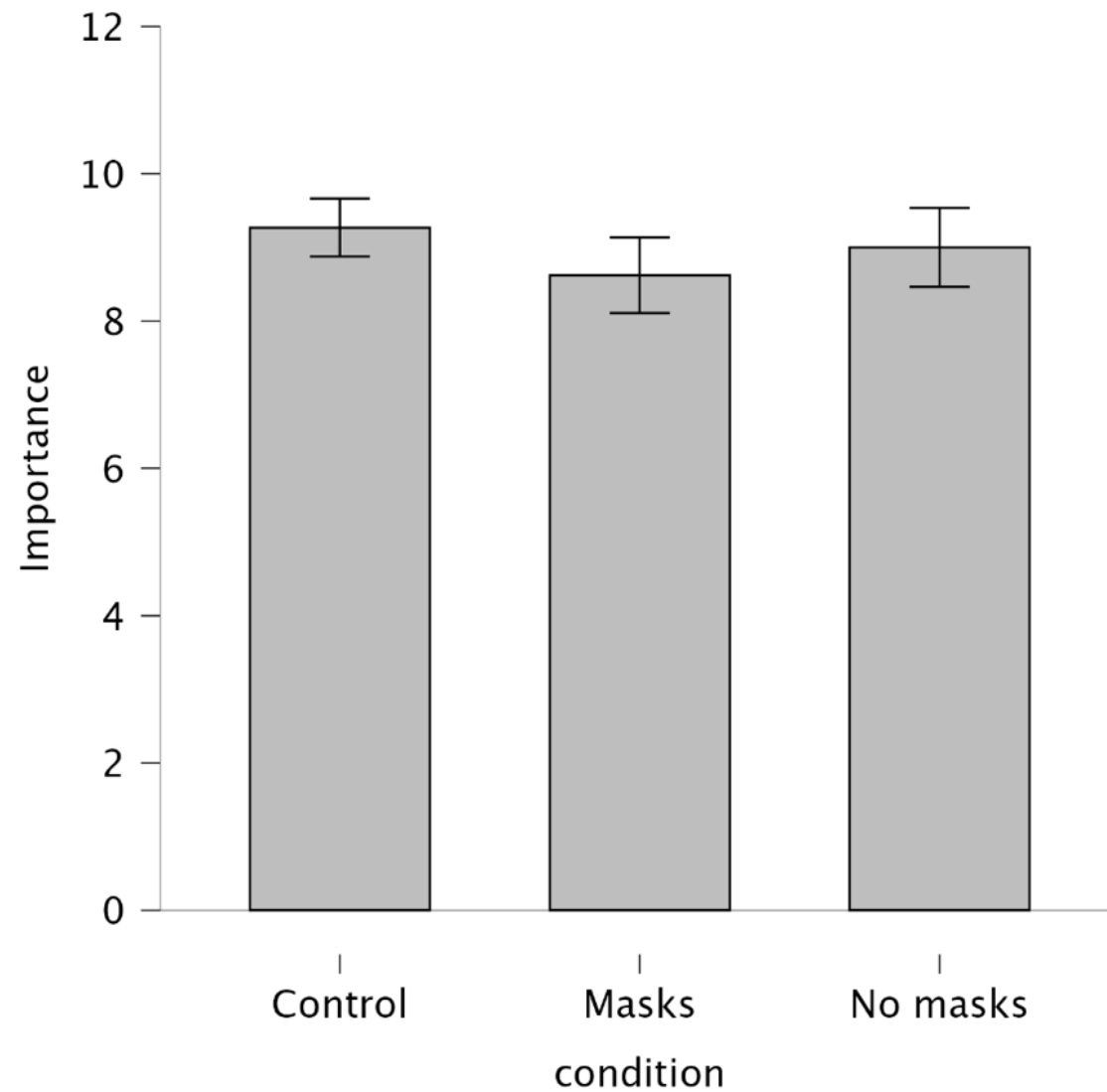
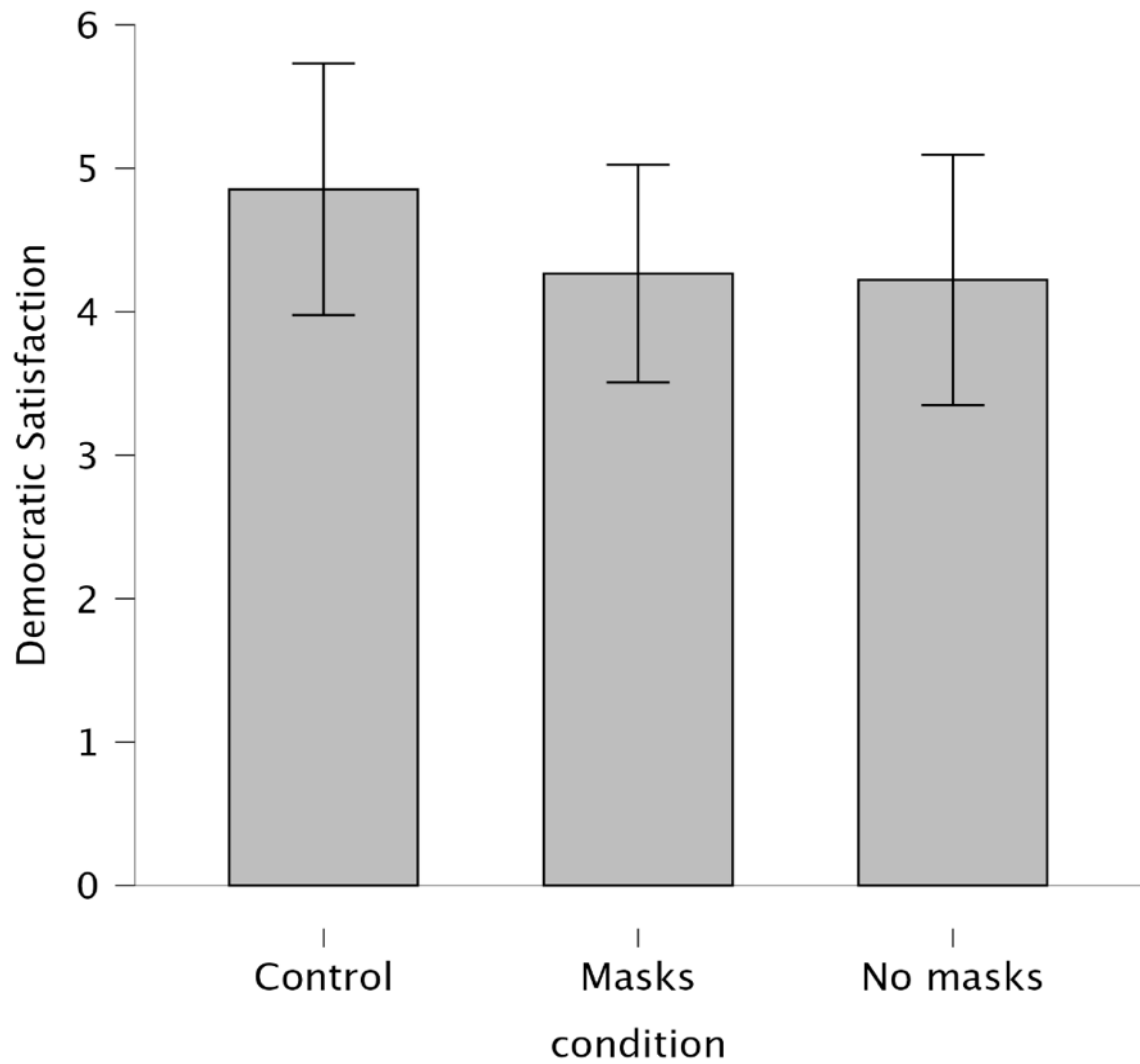


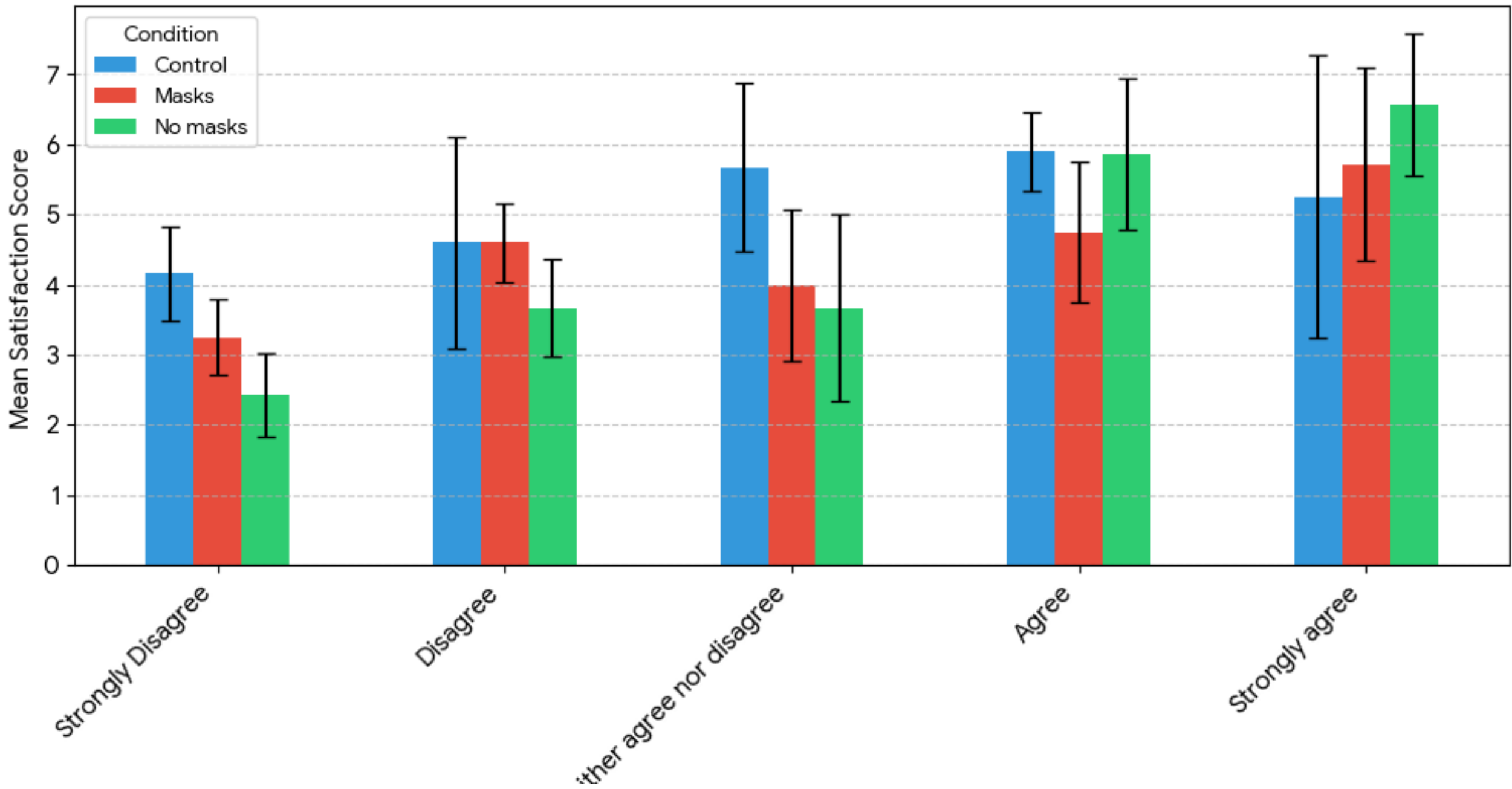
Data Collection: Anonymous Qualtrics Survey, voluntary participation  
N=139

Distribution: Shared via social media (Snapchat, Instagram, Facebook)

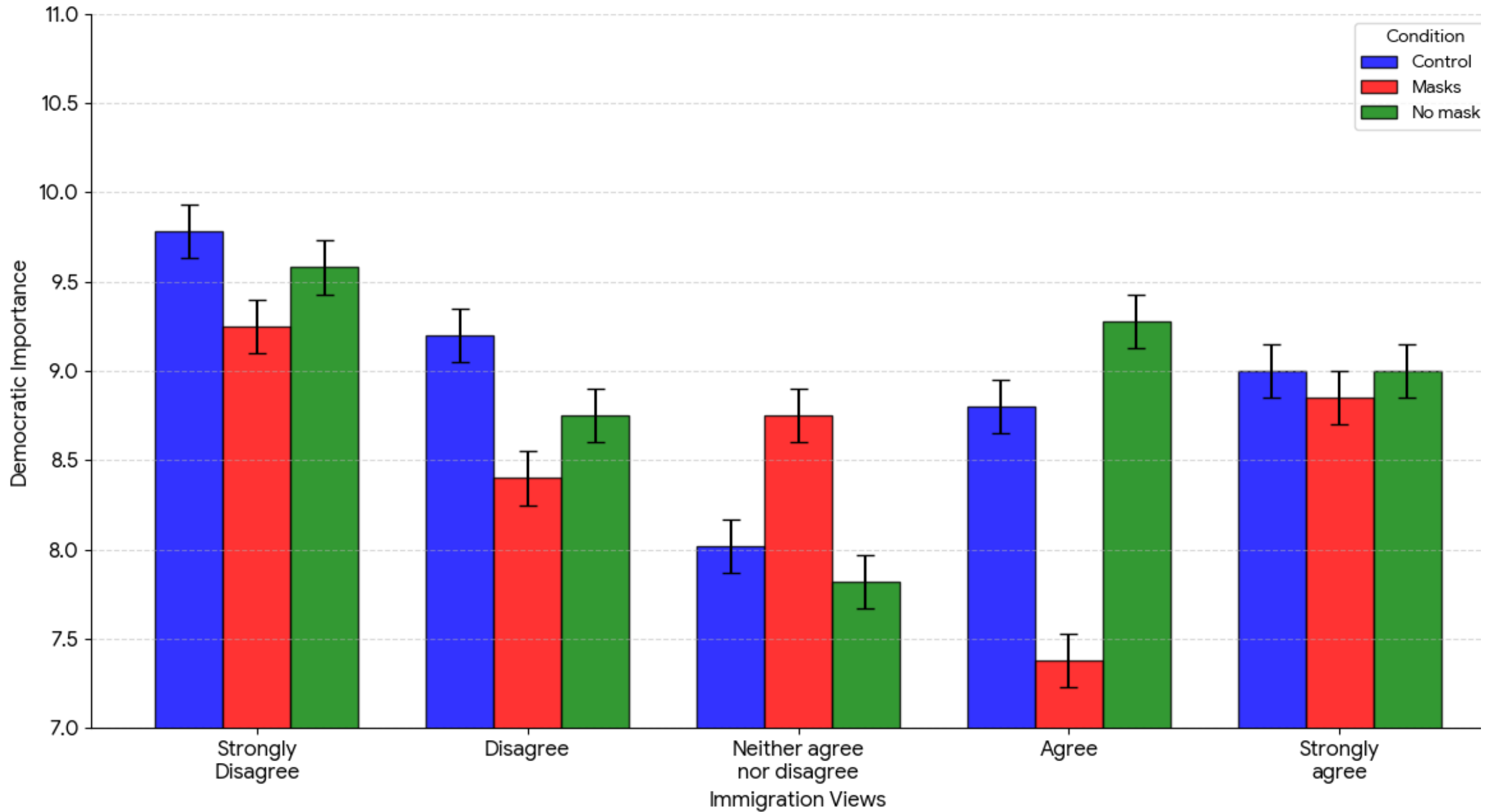
Data Analysis: Used JASP for statistical tests and visualizations

# Findings





Impact of Experimental Conditions on Democratic Importance



A photograph showing a person in a dark balaclava and tactical gear, including a cap and a vest with a holstered handgun, standing next to a man whose hands are behind his back. They are positioned against a grey, textured wall. The scene suggests a law enforcement or military operation.

# Implications & Conclusions

FAILED TO REJECT  
THE NULL HYPOTHESIS

- Depiction of Federal law enforcement decreased satisfaction in democracy, regardless of presence of a mask
- An anonymous and untransparent government can have serious effects on democracy and the government's relationship with the people
- Do we truly live in a democracy if our government lacks transparency, accountability, and prioritizes anonymous federal law enforcement efforts?