

Citizen Vain?

Exposure to the UK Citizenship Test Predicts Milder Demands from Immigrants Across the
Political Spectrum

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Abstract

Passing the *Life in the UK Test* is an essential requirement for those who seek UK citizenship. This citizenship test, attempted around 150,000 times per year, has incurred criticism for its content and difficulty, and for its role in causing psychological distress. We examined, among a representative adult UK population, people's reactions to this important instrument. Results showed that two-thirds (66.4%) of UK residents, most of whom held citizenship, failed their own countries citizenship test. Participants on the right (vs. left) of the political and ideological spectrum were more likely to overestimate their own performance and demand higher performance from immigrants than left-leaning voters, even though these voters' actual performance did not differ. Strikingly, completing the *Life in the UK Test* caused participants to subsequently endorse milder test requirements; a finding that generalized well across political ideology and voter categories. Initial overconfidence in one's own test performance mediated this change in attitudes. Results suggest that support for improving the *Life in the UK Test* can be garnered across the political spectrum by confronting people with the content of this life-changing tool.

Keywords: Immigration, citizenship, political ideology, Life in the UK Test

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How many members does a jury have in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland?

Where is the Eden Project located? If you are a dog owner, which two things should your dog's collar have when you go out for a walk? These are some of the questions that applicants for UK citizenship may be asked as part of their compulsory *Life in the UK Test*. The test is attempted around 150,000 times per year (Home Office 2013), a procedure which "is part of demonstrating that [applicants] are ready to become a permanent migrant to the UK" (Home Office, 2018, p. 7).¹ While the exact aim of the test is debated, its objective may be "to ensure that applicants for naturalization know about the country" or to assess "the ability of an applicant to make a life in this country and to contribute to it" (Tam, 2017). Around 80% of attempts result in a pass (Home Office, 2013). Those who fail may schedule to resit, though each attempt currently incurs a £50 fee (Home Office, 2020).

The *Life in the UK Test* is not alone in its kind. Many countries around the world require passing citizenship tests as part of their requirements for gaining citizenship. However, what perhaps sets the *Life in the UK Test* apart from its many international equivalents is the breadth of criticism that it has received (e.g., Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018). These critiques range from the materials containing factual errors, the inclusion of trivia questions (e.g., "Who started the first curry house and what street was it on"; Brooks, 2013, p. 113), the extensiveness of the learning

¹ All applicants for UK citizenship, both EU-nationals and non-EU nationals, are required to pass the *Life in the UK Test* as a condition for obtaining UK citizenship. In addition, non-EU nationals are required to pass the *Life in the UK Test* to obtain *Indefinite Leave to Remain* in the UK (equivalent to permanent residency). EU nationals are not required to pass this test to obtain *settled status* of the UK (equivalent to permanent residency), only to obtain UK citizenship (Home Office, 2020).

materials (e.g., over 160 pages in the 2018 official handbook; Brooks, 2018; Home Office, 2018), the absence of important practical information (e.g., access services; Bassel, Monforte, Bartram, Kahn, & Misztal, 2017), testing merely for skills in memorizing, and doubts as to whether UK citizens themselves possess the knowledge being assessed (Ryder, cited in Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018).

Psychological Significance of the Life in the UK Test

Whether or not the *Life in the UK Test* is appropriate is not just a matter for legislators and policy makers; it is, indeed, very much a matter for psychologists too. In an extensive report of migrants' experience of the UK citizenship process, Bassel, Montforte, and Khan (2018) documented that applicants report anxiety and stress in response to preparing for and taking the test, with some even describing the process as an intimidating and fearful ordeal. The *Life in the UK Test*, in its present form, thus potentially undermines the psychological well-being of this already vulnerable group (Claassen, Ascoli, Berhe, & Priebe, 2005; Oppedal, Røysamb, & Sam, 2004).

The psychological significance of the *Life in the UK Test* also likely extends beyond its end-users. Ample research in political and social psychology shows that psychological variables such as beliefs about multiculturalism (Verkuyten, 2007), political ideologies (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014), and attitudes towards social hierarchies (Ho et al., 2012) affect behaviour towards immigrants. Modifications to the process of immigration, through policy changes resulting from the democratic process, rests on the attitudes and beliefs that the general public holds about this citizenship test, even if many members of the general public may themselves never take this test.

Members of the UK general public—through their voting behaviour and potential organized action—thus hold a stake in what this lifechanging test is about. What attitudes might they hold toward the test and its alleged difficulty? Of course, perceptions of the *Life in*

the UK Test are likely to be situated within the broader political and ideological context. Work in the areas of *social categorization theory* (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987) and *social identity theory* (Reicher, Spears, & Haslam, 2010; Tajfel & Turner, 1986), for example, suggests that belonging to specific social groups is enough to give rise to opinions on how others should be treated (Lemyre & Smith, 1985). Members of ethnic majorities who disagree with *multiculturalism*—the “social-intellectual movement that promotes the value of diversity as a core principle and insists that all cultural groups be treated with respect and as equals” (Fowers & Richardson, 1996, p. 609) tend to express more negative opinions of ethnic minority group members (Verkuyten, 2005). In the context of the *Life in the UK Test*, UK citizens who reject multiculturalism might accordingly demand harsher test requirements than those who endorse multiculturalism. Furthermore, political conservatism, relative to political liberalism, is an established predictor of more negative attitudes to immigration (Hainmueller & Hopkins, 2014). Accordingly, those identifying as conservatives or voting for right-leaning political parties may wish for the *Life in the UK Test* to be more difficult to pass than those with politically liberal views. Likewise, research shows that people high in *social dominance orientation*—desiring one’s ingroup to dominate and be superior to outgroups (Pratto, Sidanius, Stallworth, & Malle, 1994)—express more negative attitudes, discrimination, and dehumanization of immigrants (Hodson & Costello, 2007; Thomsen, Green, & Sidanius, 2008). Accordingly, those high in social dominance orientation might be stricter in setting test requirements that immigrants must face when applying for citizenship.

Therefore, it is plausible, based on the above, that attitudes to the *Life in the UK Test* requirements expressed by UK residents will be milder among those who are high in multiculturalism, politically left-leaning, or low in social dominance orientation, relative to those low in multiculturalism, politically right-leaning, or high in social dominance

orientation. However, while the attitudes towards the *Life in the UK Test*, and immigration policy more generally, is likely a partisan issue, we suspect that people's actual *familiarity* with the test is not. Specifically, it is unlikely that a large proportion of the UK population is familiar with the actual content of the *Life in the UK Test*. This raises the question: How do UK residents *actually* respond to the demands set for the *Life in the UK Test* if they are made aware with its content? More specifically, if members of the general public are made to walk in applicants' proverbial shoes and see the actual test content, does this change their attitudes towards the test? In addition, how does political orientation affect these attitudes? Are right-leaning voters more likely to endorse a high level of test difficulty than left-leaning voters before and after seeing what the test contains? Based on reviews by Brooks (2013) and Bassel and colleagues (2017, 2018), it seems plausible that being confronted with the allegedly difficult and occasionally inappropriate nature of the *Life in the UK Test* will soften people's attitudes towards the test's requirements. Whether this occurs for people across the political spectrum is, of course, the key question: if it *does* then this suggests that policy makers need to make voters aware of the content of the *Life in the UK Test* in order to garner support for improving it.

The Current Study

We tested—among UK adults representative of the population in age, gender, and ethnicity—how difficult passing the *Life in the UK Test* should be for those aspiring to be citizens or permanent residents. We then compared these judgements before and after participants answered *Life in the UK Test* questions themselves. We further examined how changes in required test difficulty before and after being confronted with the test corresponded with their own anticipated performance on it. Finally, we examined these changes in the context of participants' political views and ideology. By testing this we hoped to discover if the alleged overly difficult nature of the test is a concern that members of the

general public would share after seeing what is actually being tested, and whether these attitudes vary by political orientation.

Method

Sample

We recruited a sample of 300 UK residents representative of the general population in age (excluding those under 18 years old), gender, and ethnicity, through the online crowdsourcing platform *Prolific*TM—a high-quality online crowdsourcing platform (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017). This was the maximum sample size we could afford with the available research funding. Participants completed the study online in exchange for a remuneration of £4.00. Of these participants, we excluded 19 who admitted to cheating on the *Life in the UK Test*, five who indicated that their data should not be analysed, and three who took more than thrice as long as the median completion time (*Median* = 15.37 minutes).

The final sample comprised 274 participants (140 men, 131 women, 2 transgendered, 1 of undisclosed gender; $M_{\text{age}} = 44.90$, $SD_{\text{age}} = 15.49$, $\text{Range}_{\text{age}} = [18, 76]$). The majority of participants described their ethnicity as British ($n = 210$; 9 African, 7 Indian, 6 Caribbean, 6 Chinese, 3 Irish, 2 Pakistani, 31 other ethnicities). Nearly all participants were UK citizens ($n = 247$, of which 11 held more than one citizenship). Most participants were not religious ($n = 155$, 56.6%), followed by Christians ($N = 98$, 35.8%). The sample also contained small numbers of Muslims ($n = 7$, 2.6%), Buddhists ($n = 4$, 1.5%), and Hindus ($N = 2$, 0.7%), a single Jewish person (0.4%), and six participants (2.2%) who reported adhering to another religion. Household incomes ranged from £0 to £150,000. The median household income was £30,000—comparable to the national average (£29,600; Office for National Statistics, 2019).

Materials and Procedure

After giving informed consent, participants reported demographic information (age, gender, ethnicity, residency status, citizenship status, religion, education, and household

income) using the 2011 UK census format (Office for National Statistics, 2016). They then indicated their political orientation (item 1: 1 = “leaning strongly left wing”, 7 = “leaning strongly right wing”; item 2: 1 = “strongly liberal”, 7 = “strongly conservative”; Van Tilburg & Igou, 2016). We averaged these scores into an overall political ideology score, with higher scores reflecting a more right wing/conservative ideology. Participants then indicated which political party they would vote for if an election were to be held that day. Given the large number of political parties in the UK, we subsequently categorized these parties as either left-leaning (Labour, Scottish National Party, Liberal Democrats, Sinn Féin, Independent Group for Change, Plaid Cymru, Green Party) or right-leaning (Conservative, Democratic Unionist Party, UK Independence Party, Brexit Party; e.g., Clark, 2018)². We assessed attitudes to multiculturalism using the five items by Verkuyten and Masson (1995; Verkuyten, 2005; e.g., “You can learn a lot from other cultural groups.”; 1 = “disagree strongly”, 5 = “agree strongly”; $\alpha = .83$), followed by a measure of social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) in which people rated how they felt about 14 statements (e.g., “Some groups of people are simply not the equals of others.”; 1 = “very negative”, 7 = “very positive”; $\alpha = .93$). Participants then reported how they voted in the UK ‘Brexit’ referendum (leave, remain, blank, not voted).

The next section of the study focused on the *Life in the UK Test*. First, participants were informed that:

Individuals applying for UK citizenship are required to pass a multiple-choice test called the ‘Life in the UK Test’. This test consists of 24 questions that cover topics such as UK values, history, law, society, and others. To study for the test there is an

² We classified the relatively new Independent Group for Change as left-leaning and the Brexit Party as right-leaning, given that their primary issue (remain vs. leave the EU, respectively) aligned them with the other parties on those sides.

official study guide of approximately 160 pages and example tests for practice are available online for free. The Life in the UK Test requires people to achieve a score of 18 out of 24 questions correct to pass the test.

Participants then indicated how many questions, up to 24, they felt that applicants *should* get correct in their opinion in order to pass. Participants also indicated how many questions, up to 24, *they* anticipated being able to answer correctly if they were to take the test themselves. After reporting this, the study instructed them that “The next pages contain questions that one might be asked as part of the *Life in the UK Test*. Please try to answer as many correctly as you can.”, followed by 24 *Life in the UK Test* questions. Specifically, participants were randomly presented with the questions from one of 15 example *Life in the UK Tests* publicly available on the UK Government website (e.g., Question: “What became the symbol of the House of Tudor?” Possible answers: “A red and white rose”, “A pink rose”, “A red rose”, and “A white rose”; Question: “The Civil War in 1642 split the country into which two groups?” Possible answers: “The landowners and the slaves”, “House of York and House of Lancaster”, “The Roundheads and the Cavaliers”, and “House of Commons and House of Lords”; Question: “Which of these is not a valid bank note?” Possible answers: “£5”, “£20”, “£50”, “£100”). Questions within each of the 15 randomly assigned *Life in the UK Tests* were also presented in a random order. After answering the 24 questions, we once again asked participants how many questions they *anticipated* to have answered correctly, and how many, in their opinion, people applying for UK Citizenship *should* answer correctly. Participants also indicated how difficult the test was (1 = *far too difficult*, 2 = *slightly too difficult*, 3 = *appropriate level of difficulty*, 4 = *slightly too easy*, 5 = *far too easy*). Finally, we asked them if they looked up any of the answers while working on the test (*yes, no*) and if we

should use their data for our study (*yes, no*). Participants were then debriefed, thanked, and remunerated.

Results

To facilitate efficient results reporting, we examined if our measures of *political voting intentions, Brexit referendum vote, political orientation, multiculturalism, and social dominance orientation* might be adequately aggregated into an overall index of left to right-wing orientation. Varimax rotated exploratory factor analysis indicated a clear single-factor solution ($\lambda_1 = 3.12, \lambda_2 = 0.74, \lambda_3 = 0.49, \lambda_4 = 0.36, \lambda_5 = 0.29$). Upon extraction, the single factor captured 53.3% of variance ($\lambda = 2.66$) and featured absolute factor loadings of $B = .625$ or higher for all five measures. We extracted individual participant scores accordingly, with higher values reflecting more right-wing orientations. Below, we report results based on this factor index; full analyses specific to each of its five constituents are reported in the Supplement.

Performance on the *Life in the UK Test*

We were primarily interested in how political and ideological variables might relate to people's judgements of how difficult passing the *Life in the UK Test* should be for applicants, and how well people believed they would perform on the test themselves. Before we examined this, however, we first explored how well people generally performed on the *Life in the UK Test*, and if this varied across the political spectrum.

Participants answered, on average, 15.56 ($SD = 3.67$) questions correctly, significantly less than the required 18, $t(273) = 11.02, p < .001$. Accordingly, adopting the official *Life in the UK Test* threshold of at least 18 correct answer to pass, only 33.6% ($n = 92$) of participants passed (vs. 66.4% failed). Test performance did not significantly correlate with overall left to right-wing orientation index, $r = -.06, p = .411$, or any of its constituent measures (see Supplement, Part A). These results suggest that performance on the UK's

citizenship test does not vary systematically across the political and ideological spectrum. Any potential political and ideological differences in *judgments* of test performance (i.e. one's own expected performance and the performance required of those who seek citizenship) are thus unlikely to reflect differences in participants' own ability to perform well on the *Life in the UK Test*.

Judgements of the *Life in the UK Test*

Each participant produced four judgements of the *Life in the UK Test*. Participants indicated how many questions (out of 24) aspiring citizens should be required to answer correctly to pass the test, and they indicated how many questions (out of 24) they themselves would be able to answer correctly—they reported these both before and after they completed the *Life in the UK Test* themselves. Effectively, test judgements followed a 2 (target: self, other) \times time (before, after) within-subjects structure.

We analysed test performance, anticipated for oneself versus that required of others, and estimated before and after the actual test, in a 2 (target: self, others) \times 2 (time: before, after) within-subjects ANOVA (Figure 1). This analysis produced a significant, and sizable, interaction effect, $F(1, 271) = 13.79, p < .001, \eta_p^2 = 0.202$. Before participants completed the test, they anticipated being able to answer approximately 17 out of the 24 questions correctly ($M = 17.44, SD = 4.76$). They reported that those seeking citizenship should also correctly answer approximately 17 questions correctly to pass ($M = 17.01, SD = 4.24$); these numbers for self and others did not significantly differ, $t(272) = 1.54, p = .125$. After completing the test, however, participants (a) adjusted their own expected test performance significantly downward to approximately 12 out of the 24 questions ($M = 12.03, SD = 5.10$), $t(272) = 16.23, p < .001$; and (b) significantly adjusted the test score requirement downward for those seeking citizenship to approximately 14 out of the 24 questions ($M = 14.47, SD = 4.96$). These numbers for self and others significantly differed, $t(272) = 11.90, p < .001$, indicating

that the drop in anticipated and required performances before and after completing the test was steeper for participants themselves than what they required for those who seek citizenship. Furthermore, participants anticipated that their own performance after taking the test was significantly worse than what they felt should be required from others, $t(272) = 6.70$, $p < .001$.^{3,4}

Moderation by political left to right-wing orientation. We examined next if the above findings generalized across the political spectrum. Specifically, we tested the potential moderating role of the left to right-wing orientation index with a random-intercept multilevel regression (Snijders & Bosker, 2004). Level 1 predictors were the effect-coded target (-1 = self, 1 = other), effect-coded time (-1 = before, 1 = after), and the target \times time interaction. We added left to right wing orientation as a Level 2 predictor, as well as its two-way interactions with target and time, and the political ideology \times target \times time three-way interaction (Figure 2).⁵

The results indicated an overall effect of left to right-wing orientation, $B = 1.88$, $SE = 0.25$, $t(784) = 7.55$, $p < .001$, and a significantly positive left to right-wing orientation \times

³ It is important to keep in mind that participants did not study for the test and were aware that this differed from regular practice. Accordingly, the smaller change in test performance required of those seeking citizenship versus that change in their own perceived performance should not automatically be interpreted as evidence for setting harsher standards for others.

⁴ Participants answered, on average, 15.56 ($SD = 3.67$) questions correctly, which was significantly less than they expected to before the test, $t(272) = 5.43$, $p < .001$, but significantly more than they thought they did after the test, $t(272) = 13.42$, $p < .001$.

⁵ This analysis partitions variance between two levels: between-participants (Level 2) and within-participants (Level 1). The structure of these regressions, here illustrated with a single Level 1 predictor was: Level 1: $Y_{ij} = \gamma_{0j} + \gamma_1 X_{ij} + e_{ij}$, where $e_{ij} \sim N(0, \sigma^2)$; Level 2: $\gamma_{0j} = \gamma_{00} + u_{0j}$, where $u_{0j} \sim N(0, \tau^2)$. Y_{ij} , represents the observed score for a specific judgement i of participant j , as a function of the participant's random intercept, γ_{0j} , score on predictor variable X , and normally distributed residual error, e_{ij} , with variance σ^2 . The random intercept follows a normal distribution with variance, τ^2 , around grand mean, γ_{00} . Explanatory variables can be inserted at Level 1 (i.e. variables that vary within-participants, such as *target* and *time*) or at Level 2 (i.e. variables that only vary between-participants, such as *left to right-wing political orientation*).

target interaction, $B = 0.58$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(784) = 4.29$, $p < .001$, but not a significant left to right-wing orientation \times time interaction, $B = -0.10$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(784) = 0.71$, $p = .479$.

Specifically, those who expressed a more right-wing (vs left wing) orientation anticipated that their own performance on the *Life in the UK Test* was better, despite no evidence for this actually being the case, and set generally higher test requirements for those seeking citizenship.

The analysis further produced a main effects of target, $B = 0.29$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(784) = 2.29$, $p = .022$, and time, $B = -1.88$, $SE = 0.13$, $t(784) = 15.01$, $p < .001$, and the target \times time interaction, $B = 0.70$, $SE = 0.16$, $t(784) = 5.55$, $p < .001$, that we found in the previous analysis. Specifically, completing the *Life in the UK Test* caused participants to adjust downwards both their own anticipated performance as well as the performance required of others, with the former reduction being greater than the latter one. This target \times time interaction was not significantly moderated by political ideology, $B = 0.23$, $SE = 0.14$, $t(784) = 1.68$, $p = .094$, suggesting that the interactive pattern between target and time occurred across the political spectrum. Analyses using *political voting intentions*, *Brexit referendum vote*, *political orientation*, *multiculturalism*, and *social dominance orientation* as individual moderators produced similar results, with only small differences in how prominent this pattern of results was (e.g., less pronounced, but still present, among right-leaning voters; see Supplement, Part B).

Confrontation with Own Overconfidence Predicts Milder Demands

The previous analyses suggest that being confronted with the *Life in the UK Test* causes people to endorse lower requirements for aspiring citizens to pass this test, alongside anticipating one's own performance to be worse than initially expected. We found this pattern of results across left and right-wing orientations. What causes people to become more lenient in the test performance required from those who seek citizenship?

We examined if the milder requirements for those seeking citizenship that participants set after (relative to before) completing the test might be attributed to participants' own experience of being confronted with a test that was harder than they anticipated. To this end, we examined if the change over time in test performance required of others varied as a function of the change in one's own expected test performance. The corresponding mediation analysis for repeated measures (Montaya & Hayes, 2017, Model 1; Figure 3) confirmed that the reduction in test demands set for citizenship applicants predicted by timepoint (i.e. before vs. after completing the test) was significantly mediated by the change in their own anticipated performance, indirect effect (5,000 bias-corrected bootstraps): $B = 0.89$, $SE = 0.27$, $95\%CI = [0.408, 1.447]$.⁶

These results indicate that participants overestimate how well they will perform on the test before actually completing it. After finding the test more difficult than anticipated, they not only readjust their own expected performance, but also readjust what they believe is reasonable to expect from those who complete the test in order to get citizenship. In sum, taking the *Life in the UK Test* seems to make people milder in their demands towards aspiring citizens.

Discussion

Each year, thousands of people attempt the *Life in the UK Test*, a citizenship exam, the passing of which forms a key requirement for gaining UK citizenship or indefinite leave to remain. For those who apply, it can be a life-changing test on the path to acquiring rights equal to those who hold citizenship already. Given its significance, it probably comes as no surprise that applicants may find the test, and preparing for it, a stressful and intimidating ordeal (Bassel et al., 2018). To some extent this may be unavoidable—after all, much is at

⁶ This interpretation is consistent with participants' responses to the self-report item about difficulty of the test; 66.1% ($n = 181$) rated the test as too difficult, 31.8% ($n = 87$) felt it was just right, and just 2.2% ($n = 6$) found it slightly or far too easy.

stake when attempting the test. Yet, the test might also cause unnecessary distress among applicants and perform a disservice to the goals that the test seeks to serve (e.g., testing for knowledge of the country, readiness to become a permanent migrant, or ability to contribute to the country; Home Office, 2018; Tam, 2017). Critics accuse the test of including irrelevant trivia, containing errors, and failing to assess important practical information, to name a few (e.g., Bassel et al., 2017; Brooks, 2013; Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018). Furthermore, the question has been raised whether even existing UK citizens possess the knowledge required to pass the test (Ryder, cited in Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement, 2018).

We examined if UK citizens do in fact possess this knowledge, and, importantly, how being confronted with the actual test content affects their views of it. Specifically, we proposed that if the flaws in the *Life in the UK Test* are as striking as critics have suggested, then people might endorse its modification after taking the test themselves. This is important to investigate; after all, the majority of those with the voting power to actually change policy are unlikely to have taken the test themselves (indeed, with the exception of Commonwealth citizens, non-UK citizens cannot vote in general elections). What we found was striking: Not only did *two-thirds* of a representative sample of UK adults fail their own countries' citizenship test, but completing the actual test also led them to endorse substantially more lenient test requirements. While some variation existed in the *magnitude* of this reduction in preferred test requirements across the political spectrum (e.g., it was somewhat smaller among right-leaning voters), we witnessed the relaxing of test requirements across the board. Furthermore, this relaxing of test requirements seemed to follow from participants' initial overconfidence in their ability to perform well on the test. These results indicate that support can likely be garnered for adjusting the test requirements simply by showing people what it is about.

Interestingly, in supplementary analyses we found that those voting for right (vs. left) leaning parties, those who identify more with right wing (vs. more left wing) ideology, those who tended to disagree (vs. agree) with multiculturalism, and those who expressed more strongly a social dominance orientation, consistently believed that their test performance to be better than those on the other side of these ideological spectra. Yet, none of these variables related significantly to actual test performance. This intriguing finding may demonstrate a political bias in the interpretation of ambiguous information (e.g., LaMarre, Landreville, & Beam, 2009)—here one's own test performance. Indeed, Bartels (2002) found that Democrats and Republicans in the USA differed in their interpretation of similar events, each more favourable to one's own political views, and potentially resulting in more partisan opinions.

As part of evaluating immigration and citizenship issues in the UK, the Select Committee on Citizenship and Civic Engagement (2018) examined expert reports and opinions on several topics, including the *Life in the UK Test*. One of the questions they raised, in context of concerns surrounding the *Life in the UK Test*, was how existing UK citizens measure up to the knowledge expected from those who join them in citizenship. Our findings give an initial answer to that question. With only a third of UK citizens within a representative adult sample being able to answer enough questions correctly to pass this test, the answer has to be poorly. Moreover, the finding that UK residents attempting the test anticipate doing much better before taking the test than after suggests that the alleged difficulty of the test resonates with people's experiences. While on the surface our findings may seem pessimistic—after all, our results suggest that the *Life in the UK Test* may be flawed in its purpose—we believe that there is in fact reason for optimism: people *agree* that the test is too hard, an attitude we found across the political spectrum. Thus, policy makers can likely advocate and pursue improvement of this test without being too concerned about

negative public opinion; it seems to merely require to be confronted with the test's content in order to support its revision.

Limitations and Future Directions

The critique that the *Life in the UK Test* has received is broad, touching on various aspects of learning content and test questions. Participants in our study evaluated the *Life in the UK Test* more generally--in terms of its difficulty. Content that is difficult to master (e.g., the extensive learning guide) and potentially inappropriate questions (e.g., obscure trivia) likely make the test harder to pass. Participants' judgements of the overall test difficulty thus form a reasonably proxy for its more specific ills. Nonetheless, improvements made to the *Life in the UK Test* may focus on specific issues (e.g., reducing non-essential content from the learning guide; removing problematic questions) instead of, or perhaps in addition to, directly adjusting how many questions need to be answered correctly to pass.

Participants in our study completed the *Life in the UK Test* online and without time limit. Applicants who take the test formally instead have to complete it at a dedicated test centre, under time pressure, and with strict supervision. The difference in these circumstances may of course have some influence on participants' test performance in our study. Plausibly, the comparatively high-stake and formal testing procedure that aspiring citizens undergo is more anxiety-provoking than for our participants. This anxiety, in turn, may frustrate performance (e.g., Eysenck, Derakshan, Santos, & Calvo, 2007). Had participants' testing procedure been matched with that of actual testing, their performance might have been even worse. Furthermore, while we tried to prevent cheating by giving participants the opportunity to admit to it without retaliation (indeed, some did admit to it), it is possible that some nonetheless did cheat and got away with it. Accordingly, the UK residents' 33.6% pass rate on the *Life in the UK Test* may even be an overestimation.

We collected several demographic variables (e.g., gender, age, education, household income) that may be interesting in light of people's performance in, and judgement of, the *Life in the UK Test*. Aside from using these variables to describe our sample, we refrained from further analysing their associations with test performance and judgments as this would slice our sample increasingly thin. We encourage follow-up research to explore these variables further. For example, it seems reasonable to expect some differences in test performance across education levels. While we have no reason to anticipate that such a variable *interacts* with our findings, it ultimately requires further empirical study to examine that possibility.

Our research focused on a specific citizenship test. As such, some readers may question what merits a focus on the *Life in the UK Test* in particular. Of course, our findings may serve as point of inspiration for examining citizenship tests more broadly, or how social and political psychology can contribute to policy change. However, as a final point, we wish to simply re-emphasize just how important the *Life in the UK Test* is. Each year, performance on this test determines whether or not around 150,000 people progress to their acquisition of the right to live and work with equal rights as those already in possession of UK citizenship. Furthermore, based on the £50 fee incurred for attempting the test, this group of people in the UK collectively pay an estimated £7,500,000 pounds every year. The significance of these numbers, and the individual lives that they represent, underscores how critical it is to develop a test that people agree is fit for purpose through a research-informed approach.

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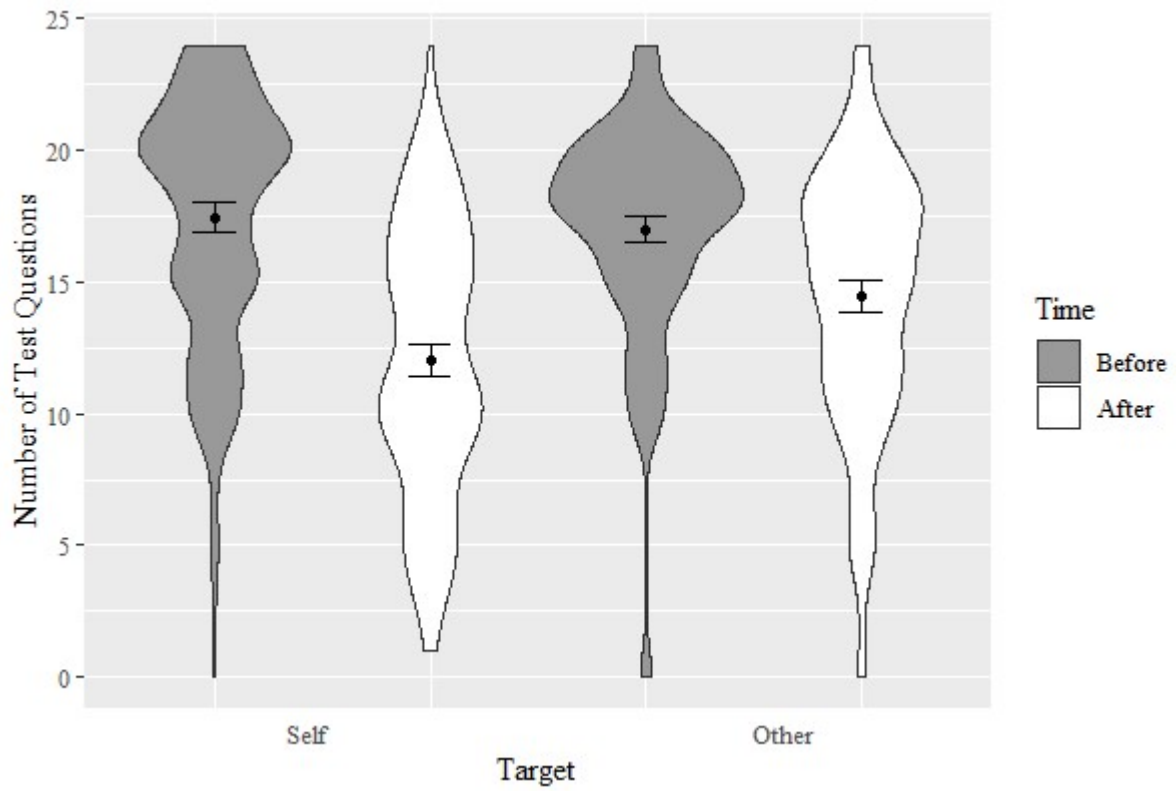
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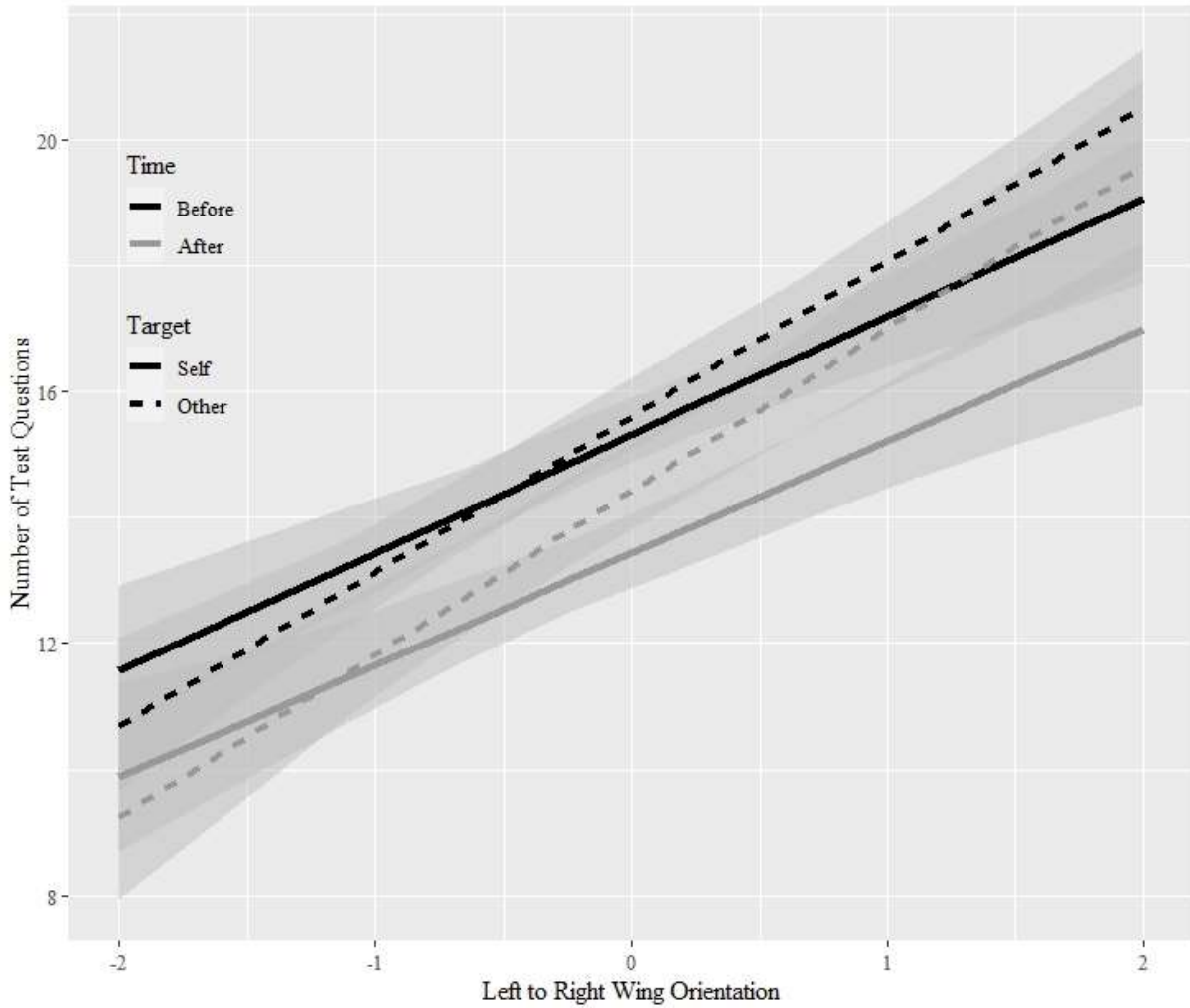
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Figure 1: *Anticipated and required performance before and after completing the Life in the UK Test.*



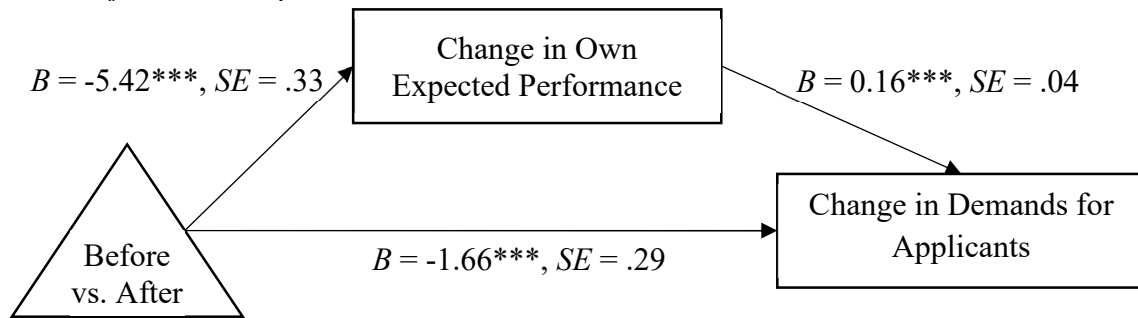
Note: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2: *Own anticipated performance and performance required of others before and after completing the Life in the UK Test, as a function of left to right-wing orientation.*



Note: Grey areas represent 95% confidence regions.

Figure 3: *Change in anticipated performance before and after test mediates setting of milder demands for citizenship seekers.*



Note: *** $p < .001$. Indirect association estimated with 5,000 bias-corrected bootstraps estimated at, $B = -0.89, SE = 0.27, 95\%CI = [0.408, 1.447]$. Total association estimated at, $B = -2.55, SE = 0.21, t(271) = 11.91, p < .001$.