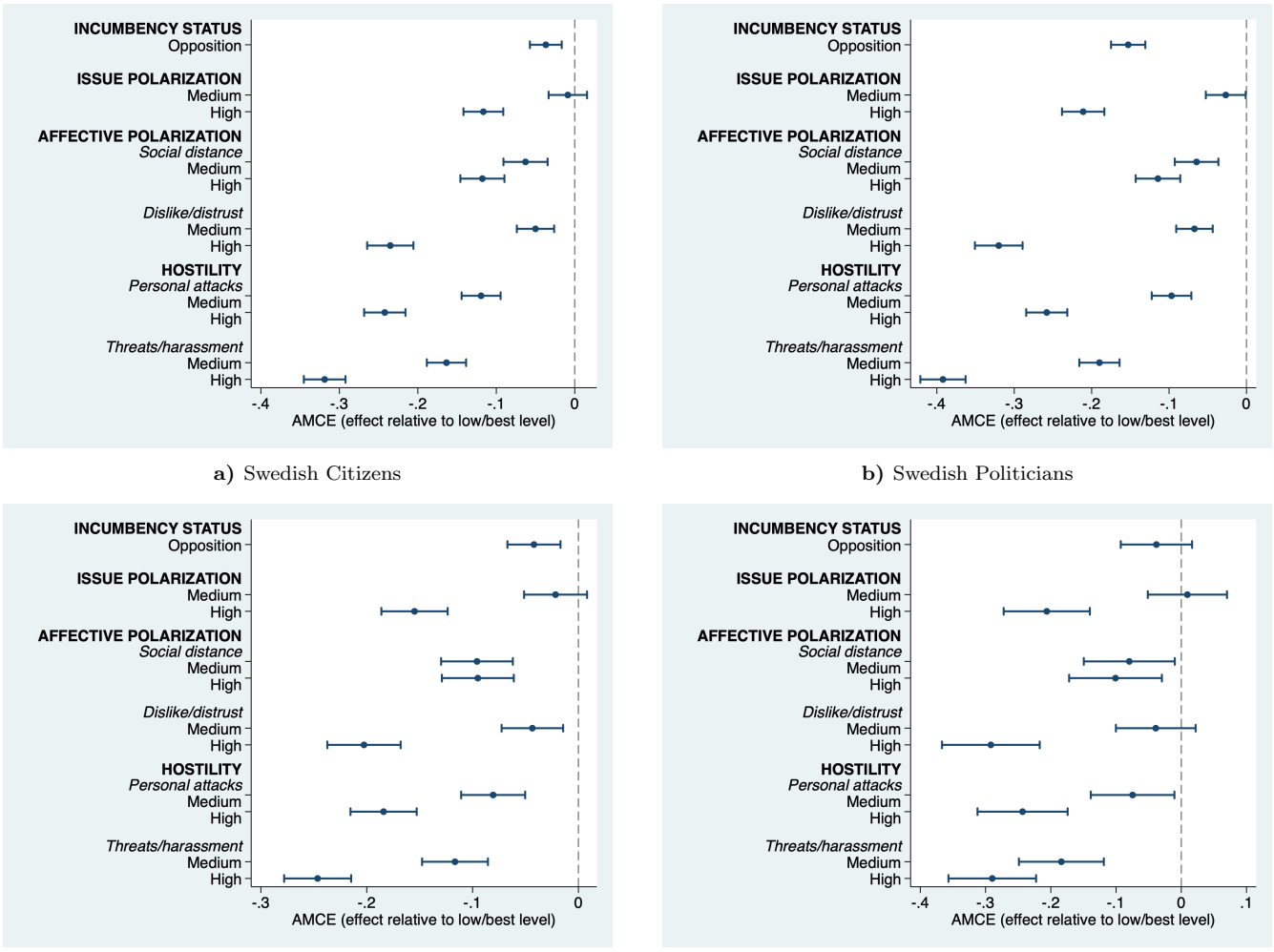
Affective polarization and hostility lower willingness to serve among citizens and politicians alike

Work in progress, October 2026.



a) Swedish Citizens

b) Swedish Politicians

c) US Citizens

d) US Politicians

Figure 1: A polarized and hostile political climate lowers willingness to serve. Results from parallel conjoint experiments in Sweden and the United States. Respondents saw pairs of hypothetical political assemblies whose working climates varied at random. For each assembly, they rated on a four-point scale whether they would consider serving in a political position there, if offered the opportunity, to further the issues they care about most. The randomized attributes capture three dimensions of a polarized and hostile political climate, namely issue polarization, affective polarization, and hostility toward politicians, together with an incumbency benchmark. Dots show average marginal component effects on the willingness rating, relative to the most benign level of each attribute. Whiskers show 95% confidence intervals; standard errors are clustered by respondent. US citizen estimates are weighted to the US adult population; the remaining samples are unweighted.

Sample sizes: **a**: n = 3,426 respondents, 27,086 observations. **b**: n = 3,103 respondents, 24,075 observations. **c**: n = 2,715 respondents, 21,720 observations. **d**: n = 503 respondents, 4,024 observations.