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A large, curved, semi-transparent graphic element containing a photograph of a mountain landscape. The foreground is a field of vibrant orange and red flowers, with green shrubs and trees. In the background, there are layers of misty, blue-toned mountain ranges under a soft, hazy sky.

Views of EU citizens on
economic growth and
implications for climate
policy

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CONTEXT

Large scale survey across European countries on support of various climate policy instruments and their possible predictors

Survey conducted from June 24 to August 27, 2024 and took a median of 22 minutes to complete.

It comprised 19,328 completed responses covering 13 countries: **Austria** (n=1,594), **Czechia** (n=1,726), **Denmark** (n=1,591), **France** (n=1,219), **Germany** (n=1,591), **Greece** (n=1,596), **Hungary** (n=1,593), **Italy** (n=1,210), **Netherlands** (n=1,219), **Poland** (n=1,595), **Slovenia** (n=1,201), **Spain** (n=1,590), and **Sweden** (n=1,597).

Survey instrument

Respondents had to indicate their level of agreement on several statements using a Likert scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree):

GEM statement	Survey statement
Environmental Protection	Economic growth is necessary to finance environmental protection.
Life Satisfaction	Continued economic growth is essential for improving people's life satisfaction.
Public Services	Economic growth is necessary to finance public health and pension systems.
Stability	Without economic growth, the economy will be less stable.

Debate

These statements were taken from Drews et al. (2019) and Savin et al. (2021) to segment people into green growth/agrowth/degrowth perspective.

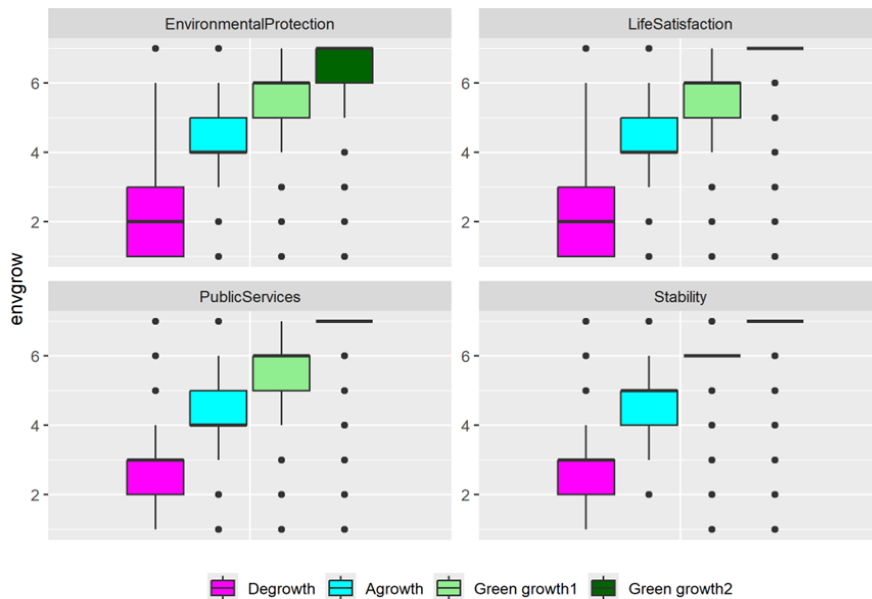
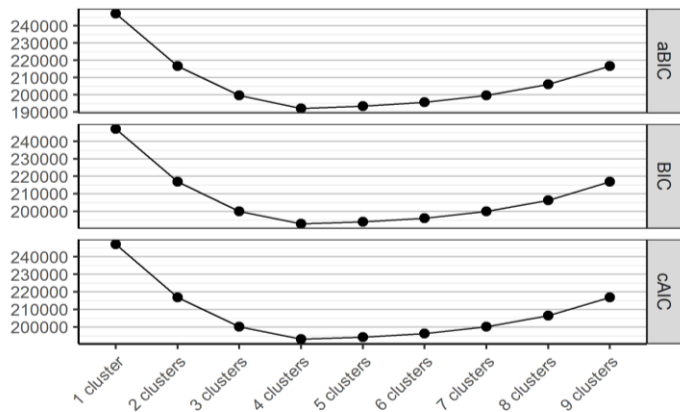
Green growth. Public policy should focus on making economic growth compatible with environmental sustainability.

Agrowth. Public policy should ignore economic growth and concentrate more on environmental sustainability.

Degrowth. Public policy should aim at reducing production and consumption to achieve environmental sustainability.

Clustering

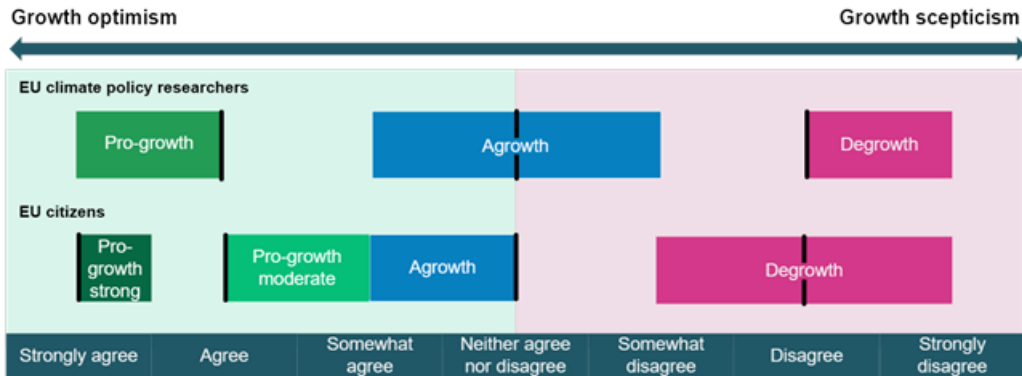
Using Latent Class Analysis, we identify not three but four clusters



What is the level of pro-growth support among EU citizens and how does this compare to the perspectives of climate policy researchers?

a

Distributions of responses on a Likert scale



b

Distributions of respondents across different growth positions

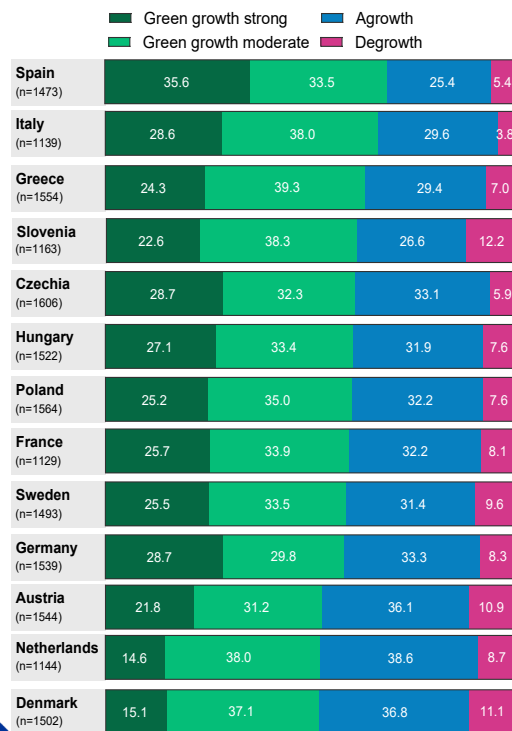
EU Climate policy researchers



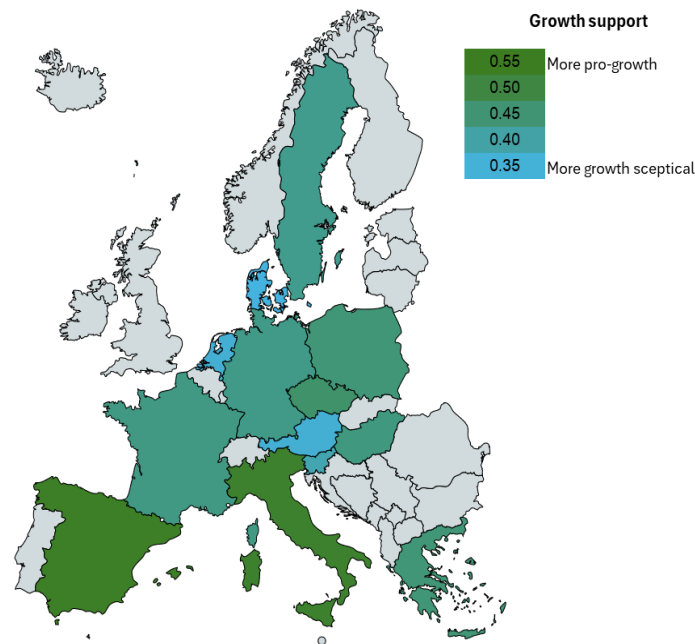
EU citizens



What national factors are associated with differences in growth opinions across countries?



b



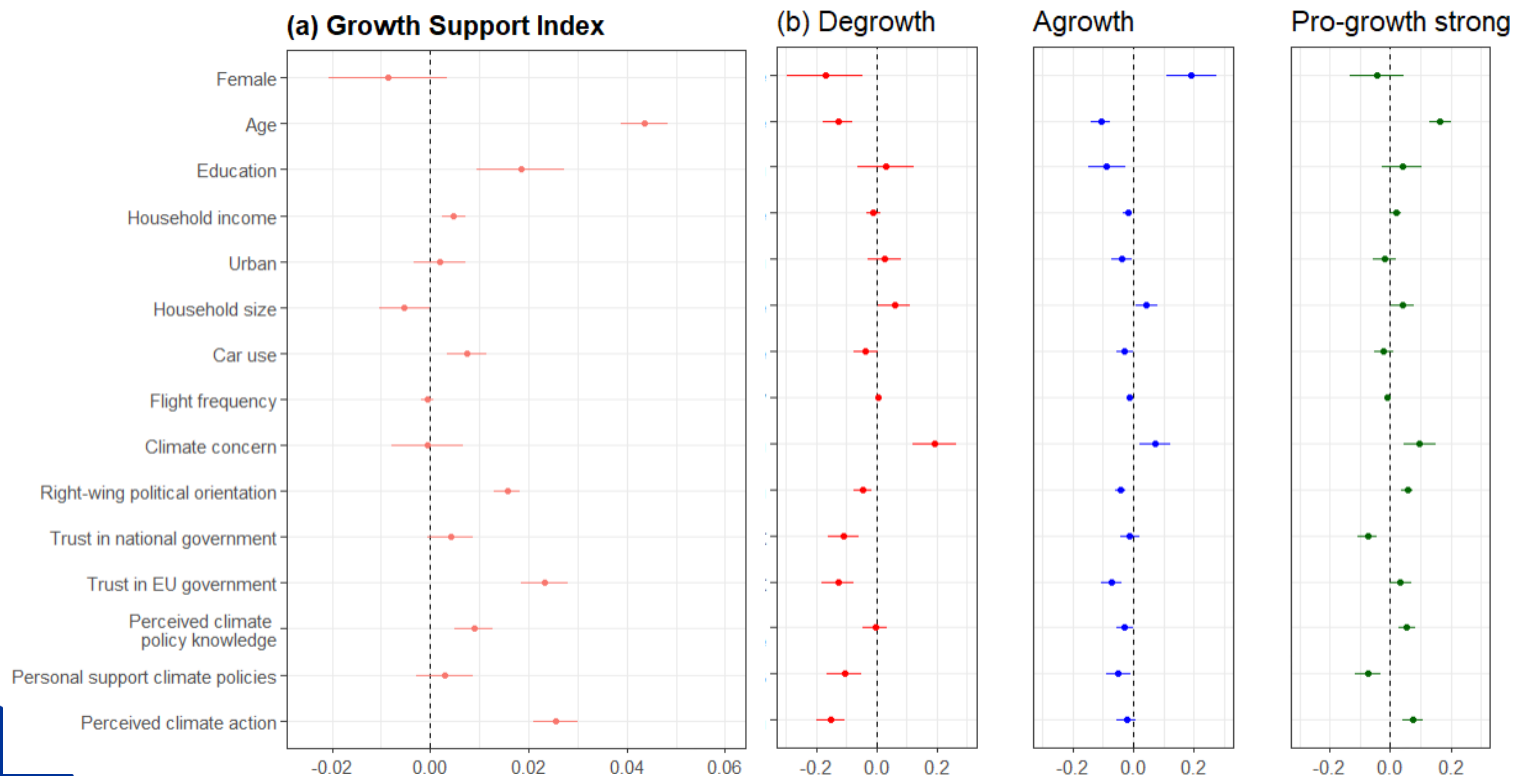
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What national factors are associated with differences in growth opinions across countries?

Citizens	Growth support	IHDI	GDP per capita PPP (\$)	Gini	Life satisfaction (0-10)	CO ₂ per capita emissions (t)	Env. policy stringency (0-6)
Spain	0.53	0.796	48,685	32.0	6.4	5.1	2.50
Italy	0.52	0.802	55,908	31.5	6.4	5.6	3.72
Czechia	0.46	0.848	51,702	24.8	6.9	9.4	2.94
Greece	0.45	0.801	38,922	31.4	5.9	5.0	2.89
Poland	0.45	0.797	46,721	27.0	6.3	8.4	3.47
Hungary	0.44	0.800	43,578	27.4	6.0	5.0	2.81
France	0.43	0.820	57,594	29.8	6.7	4.7	4.89
Germany	0.43	0.881	66,616	29.0	6.9	8.0	3.47
Sweden	0.42	0.878	68,088	27.6	7.4	3.5	3.83
Slovenia	0.39	0.882	51,282	23.1	6.7	6.3	3.22
Austria	0.36	0.860	70,976	27.8	7.1	6.9	3.31
Netherlands	0.35	0.885	74,542	26.3	7.4	7.7	3.47
Denmark	0.34	0.898	77,954	27.7	7.6	4.8	3.72
Average	0.43	0.842	57,890	28.1	6.7	6.2	3.40

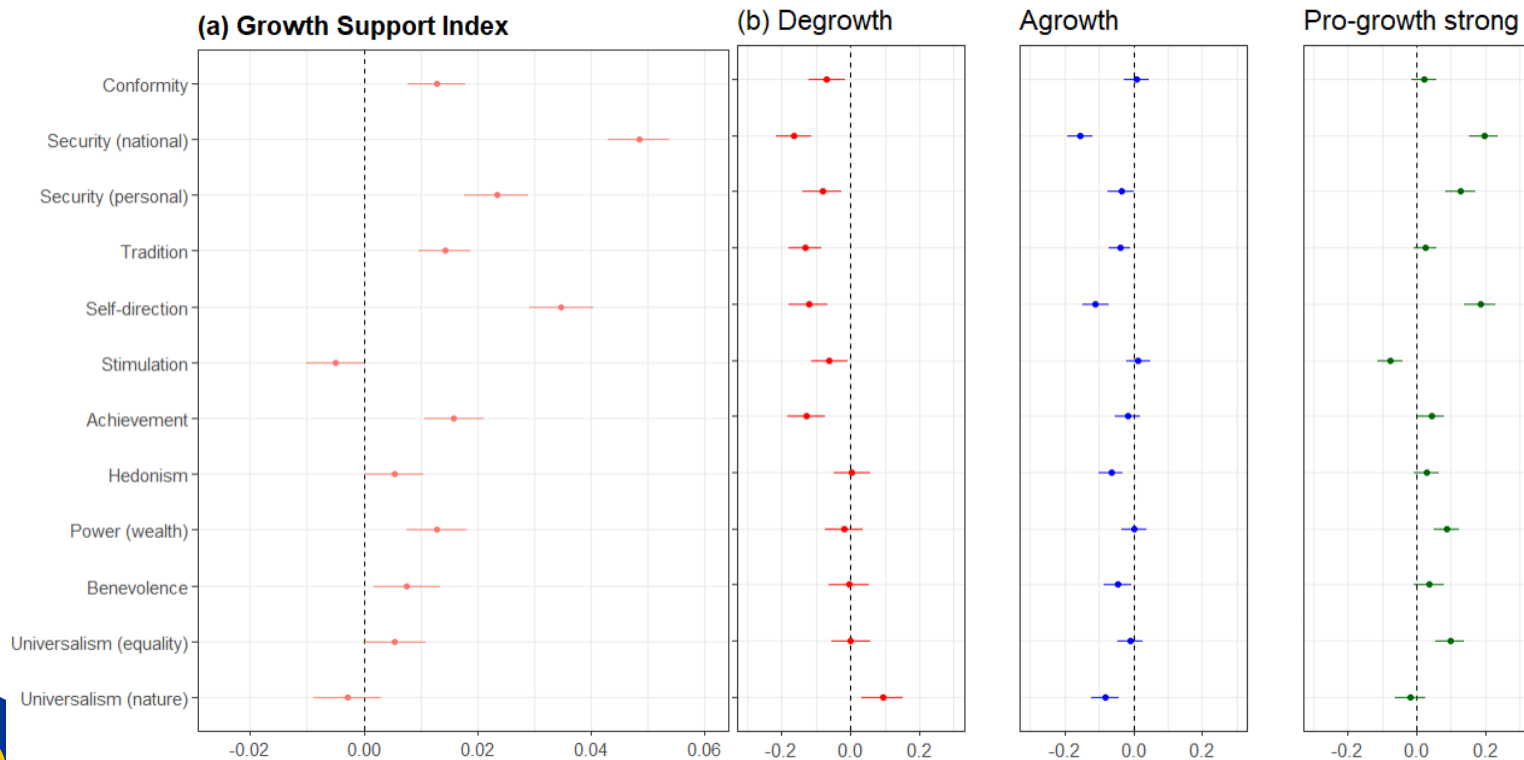


Role of socio-demographics and political views

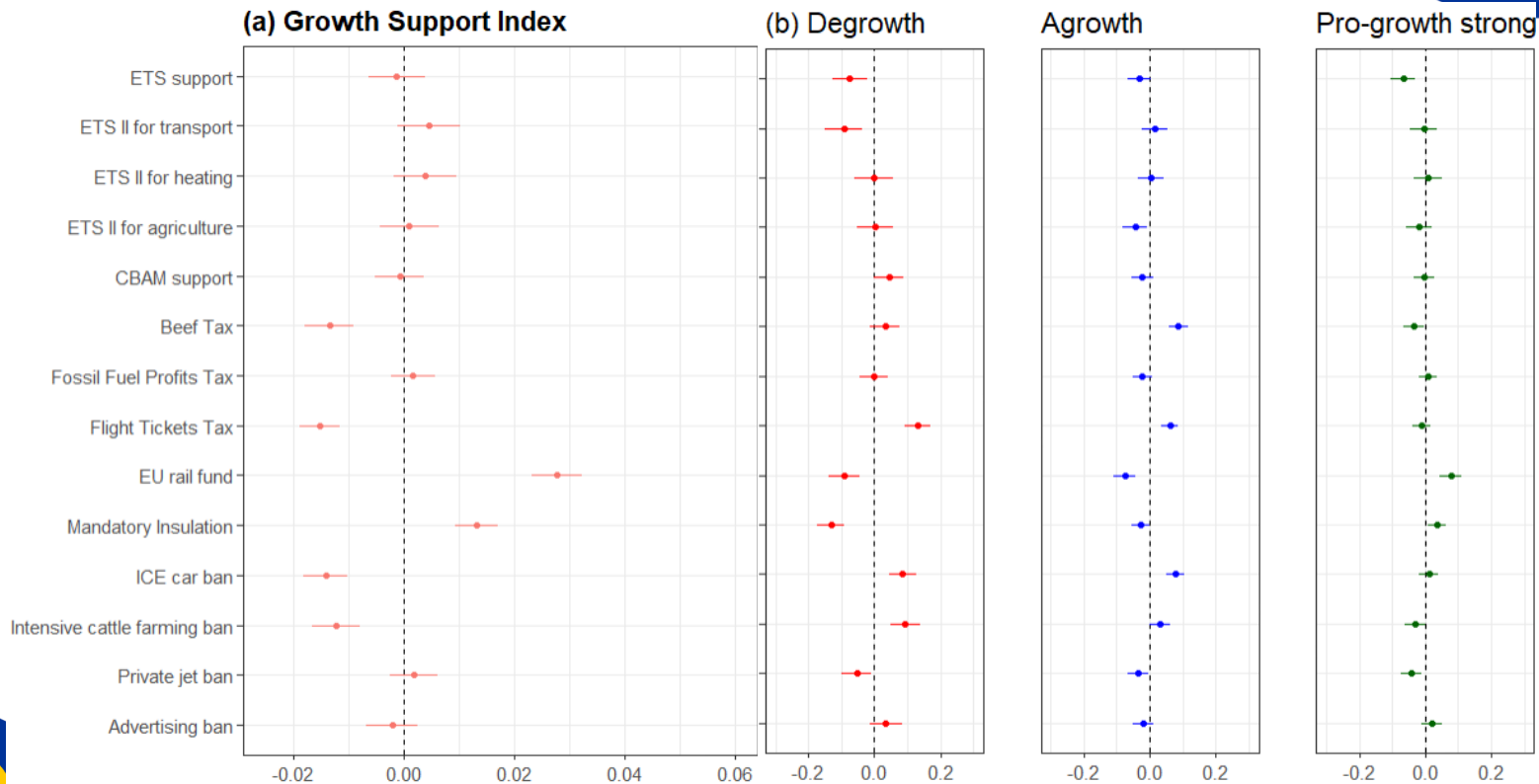


Motivational group	Value	Interview statement
Conservation + with GS	Conformity	It is important for this person to always behave properly. They want to avoid doing anything people would say is wrong.
	Security (national)	It is important to this person that the government ensures their safety against all threats. They want the state to be strong so it can defend its citizens.
	Security (personal)	It is important to this person to live in secure surroundings. They avoid anything that might endanger their safety.
	Tradition	Tradition is important to this person. They try to follow the customs handed down by their religion or their family.
Openness to change - with GS	Self-direction	It is important to this person to make their own decisions about what they do. They like to be free and not depend on others.
	Stimulation	This person looks for adventures and likes to take risks. They want to have an exciting life.
Self-enhancement + with GS	Achievement	Being very successful is important to this person. They hope people will recognize their achievements.
	Hedonism	Having a good time is important to this person. They like to "spoil" themselves.
	Power (wealth)	It is important to this person to be rich. They want to have a lot of money and expensive things.
Self-transcendence - with GS	Benevolence	It's very important to this person to help the people around them. They want to care for their well-being.
	Universalism (equality)	This person thinks it is important that every person in the world be treated equally. They believe everyone should have equal opportunities in life.
	Universalism (nature)	It is important to this person to respect nature. They want to be connected to nature.

Role of human values



Growth opinions versus climate policy preferences



CONCLUSION

- high level of scepticism towards economic growth observed among climate policy researchers has not spread to the general public to the same extent
- Arguably the most unexpected findings are little association between climate concern and overall growth support.
- The respondents in the pro-growth cluster showed least climate concern but expressed the highest overall support for climate policies.
- This suggests the prioritisation of economic growth should not be interpreted as being motivated by self-interest but rather as a means for achieving societal wellbeing and sustainability.



Questions and Comments



	Opposer	Indifferent	Conditional middle	Supporters
Strong pro-growth	25	3.1	33.8	38.1
Moderate pro-growth	18.2	5.5	34.7	41.6
Agrowth	18.6	19	31.2	31.1
Degrowth	33	7.3	29	30.7

	Opposer	Indifferent	Conditional	Supporters
Strong pro-growth	29.5	8.2	25.8	26.2
Moderate pro-growth	29.6	20.3	36.6	39.6
Agrowth	28.1	65.2	30.4	27.4
Degrowth	12.7	6.4	7.2	6.9

References

- Savin, I., King, L., van den Bergh, J., Bouman, T., Ščasný, M., & Smith, E. K. (2025). Views of EU citizens on economic growth and implications for climate policy. Research Square Company.
<https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-6592953/v1>
- Savin I., Drews S. and J. van den Bergh, 2021, GEM: A short “Growth-vs-Environment” Module for survey research, Ecological Economics 187: 107092 <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2021.107092>
- Drews S., I. Savin and J. van den Bergh, 2019, Opinion Clusters in Academic and Public Debates on Growth-vs-Environment, Ecological Economics 157:141-155, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ecolecon.2018.11.012>



	Min	Med	Mean	Max
Degrowth	-1.00	-0.42	-0.50	0.25
Agrowth	-0.25	0.17	0.13	0.50
Pro-growth moderate	0.00	0.58	0.58	0.83
Pro-growth strong	-0.08	0.92	0.89	1.00

Comparison of the distributions of responses

