

## Expressive Versus Instrumental Partisanship in Multiparty European Systems

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*Partisanship has a powerful influence on political behavior in the United States, but its influence is less certain in European democracies. Part of the debate concerning the influence of partisanship in Europe centers on its nature. From one perspective, partisanship is seen as grounded in factors such as ratings of government performance and agreement with the party's issue stances. We refer to this as the instrumental model. In the United States, however, a competing model has gained empirical support in which partisanship is defined as an identity that is largely defensive in nature and not especially reactive to ongoing events. We refer to this as an expressive model. In this review, we focus on several European democracies (the United Kingdom, Netherlands, Sweden, and Italy) and evaluate evidence for and against an expressive model of partisanship in which democratic citizens act to defend their party in order to maintain its positive standing. We find evidence that strong partisans in Europe exhibit five characteristics of expressive partisans: stable partisan identity, motivated reasoning in defense of the party, the greater influence of identity than issues and ideology in shaping vote choice and political behavior, affective polarization bias in favor of one's own party, and the existence of strong defensive emotions aroused by partisan threats and reassurances. It appears that partisans in the four European democracies act in similar ways to partisans in the United States. Nonetheless, levels of partisan identification differ across the European nations and between European nations and the United States helping to explain national differences in the intensity of partisan behavior.*

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**KEY WORDS:** partisanship, identity strength, multiparty, political behavior

Partisanship remains a powerful influence on mass political behavior within developed and developing democracies (Brader & Tucker, 2009; Brader, Tucker, & Duell, 2012; Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Green, Palmquist, & Schickler, 2002). In the United States, partisanship has increased in strength in recent years and continues to wield impressive influence on a range of political behavior such as vote choice, voter turnout, and electoral campaign activity (Huddy, Mason, & Aarøe, 2015; Nicholson, 2012). In Europe, there is greater ongoing dispute about the nature and influence of partisanship as levels of partisanship have declined over time (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Johnston, 2006;

Thomassen, 1976; Thomassen & Rosema, 2009). Nonetheless, there is emerging evidence that the effects of partisanship persist even in complex multiparty European settings (Bankert, Huddy, & Rosema, 2017; Bartle & Bellucci, 2009; Holmberg, 2007).

### Instrumental and Expressive Partisanship

A debate over the influence of partisanship on political behavior in European democracies is linked to a lively debate concerning the nature and origins of partisanship. The extent to which partisanship reflects agreement with a party's issue stances moves in response to leader performance and reacts to a party's policy successes and failures and remain central concerns for normative democratic theorists. We refer to partisanship grounded in this type of responsive and informed deliberation as *instrumental*.<sup>1</sup> As a test of instrumental partisanship, researchers have contrasted its origins in long standing socioeconomic cleavages with the effects of contemporary forces such as issue proximity and leader evaluations (Dalton & Weldon, 2007; Garzia, 2013). From an instrumental perspective, partisanship should respond to contemporary forces linked to a party's and its leader's performance. Garzia (2013) provides supportive evidence, reporting that partisanship is linked to both social cleavages and leader evaluations in the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands, but that short-term leader evaluations have eclipsed the importance of long-term social factors in recent decades.

This does not mean that members of the public are paying close attention to issues, however. Adams, Ezrow, and Somer-Topcu (2011) find that the public remains unaware of changes in a party's issue platform when they occur, suggesting that issues and partisanship are not tightly aligned. In a similar vein, Fernandez-Vazquez (2014) report that voters' perceptions of the party's platform change very slightly when its issue positions change but that this shift falls far short of the magnitude of actual party change. Based on this accumulated research, partisanship appears somewhat responsive to certain contemporary forces such as changing leadership but much less responsive to shifting party positions, providing modest support at best to the instrumental model.

In the United States, an alternative *expressive identity* approach to partisanship has gained credence. From this perspective, partisanship is a social identity grounded in component gender, religious, and ethnic identities that remains stable even as leaders and platforms change (Huddy & Bankert, 2017; Huddy & Willmann, 2017; Mason, 2015).<sup>2</sup> Expressive partisanship motivates a defense of the party in the face of challenging information, leads to the vilification of threatening out-parties, and generates action-oriented emotions that result in heightened political activity. Most importantly, and at odds with an instrumental approach, these cumulative processes minimize strong partisans' reactivity to accusations of poor party performance, weak leadership, or an altered platform resulting in a relatively stable political identity (Green et al., 2002). Moreover, partisan identity is likely to strengthen over time as a young voter consistently supports one party over others in successive elections (Dalton & Walden, 2007). The expressive approach to partisanship is grounded in social identity theory (Green et al., 2002; Huddy et al., 2015).<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The model has been referred to in various ways by others including the revisionist (Bartels, 2002) and rational revisionist model (Brader & Tucker, 2012).

<sup>2</sup> This model has also been referred to in various ways including the social identity model (Brader & Tucker, 2012). We refer to it as expressive to better capture its ability to account for political action in addition to vote choice, a common focus of partisanship research.

<sup>3</sup> Instrumental and expressive partisanship are not completely unrelated. Right-left ideology and issue preferences are strongly linked to the direction of partisanship and likely provide an initial impetus to support one party over another. Nonetheless, the stability of partisanship in the face of changing party platforms suggests that issue stance may follow partisanship not vice versa, a proposition at odds with the instrumental model but consistent with numerous studies on elite influence and party cues in the United States (Cohen, 2003; Dancy & Goren, 2010; Druckman, Peterson, & Slothuus, 2013; Lenz, 2012).

The expressive and instrumental approaches to partisanship imply very different democratic citizens. From the instrumental perspective, voters resemble ideal citizens who are capable of (and presumably willing to) competently navigate the political environment and make political decisions based on careful examination of the political choices at hand. In contrast, expressive partisanship regards voters as motivated reasoners, acting to defend their party in order to maintain its positive standing rather than to advance its policy agenda. In support of the expressive model, Miller and Conover (2012) found that a greater number (41%) of American partisans become engaged in politics in order to win an election than to primarily pursue policy or ideological goals (35%).

Evidence for expressive partisanship is accumulating in the American context. But there has been far less research on partisanship in other countries to determine the model's broader applicability. Are Americans alone in defensively supporting their political party, ignoring disagreeable facts, distancing themselves from their partisan opponents, and exonerating their party even when it fails? Are European citizens more likely than Americans to evaluate their party even-handedly, vote against their party if it changes course, and compromise with their opponents? These answers matter. Expressive partisanship generates many negative outcomes, including defensive reasoning and hostility toward out-partisans that are incompatible with the instrumental model. But expressive partisanship also has positive attributes. Partisan identities provide system stability and may protect against the rise of insurgent parties and candidates. Moreover, citizens with an emotional stake in ongoing political events are motivated to follow politics and participate in elections, an obvious democratic plus.

Our major goal in this review is to present empirical evidence in support of the expressive model of partisanship in Europe that is at odds with an instrumental model. We competitively test hypotheses generated by the expressive and instrumental model by contrasting the effects of partisan identity (expressive) and ideological intensity (instrumental) on motivated reasoning, vote choice, affective polarization, and defensive emotions.

We focus on several European democracies and contrast the expressive and instrumental models of partisanship. In so doing, we examine five strands of evidence. First, we consider the stability of partisan identity; greater stability is more consistent with the expressive than instrumental account. Then, we contrast the effects of partisan identity and ideological intensity on four additional political behaviors: motivated reasoning in defense of the party, vote choice and political engagement, affective polarization in which partisans hold more positive feelings for their own and more negative feelings towards opposing political parties, and the strong defensive emotions aroused by partisan threats and reassurances inherent within an election. The inspiration for our choice of outcome variables is social identity theory, which we review in greater detail in the following section.

### **An Expressive Social Identity Model of Partisanship**

The expressive model of partisanship is grounded in social identity theory, a well-established approach to the study of intergroup relations. A social identity is a subjective sense of belonging to a group which is internalized to varying degrees, resulting in individual differences in identity strength, a desire to positively distinguish the group from others, and the development of ingroup bias, a preference for one's own group over others (Tajfel, 1981). Moreover, once identified with a group, or in this instance political party, members are motivated to protect and advance the party's status and electoral dominance as a way to maintain their party's positive distinctiveness (Huddy, 2001). In developing the theory, Tajfel and Turner (1979) placed key emphasis on the need among group members "to differentiate their own groups positively from others to achieve a positive social identity" (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher, & Wetherell, 1987; p. 42).

In contrast to other intergroup research paradigms such as realistic group-conflict theory, social identity theory does not focus on competition over scarce resources as the precursor to identity formation and intergroup conflict. Instead, the motivation to protect and advance the group's status is

a cornerstone of the social identity approach and the psychological foundation for the development of ingroup bias. Defensive motivation increases with identity strength, leading to the prediction that the strongest partisans will work most actively to increase their party's status, including electoral victory (Andreychick et al., 2009; Ethier & Deaux, 1994; Fowler & Kam, 2007). The social identity model of partisan politics is not very different from that advanced to explain the ardor and actions of sports fans. Weakly identified fans may attend games when the team is doing well and skip those where defeat is likely, but strong fans participate even when the team is sure to lose in order to show their solidarity with other fans and perhaps even boost their team's chances of victory.

The motivational underpinnings of social identity theory are *central* to understanding its expressive nature and ability to motivate political action. Partisans take action precisely because they wish to defend or elevate the party's political position. Their internalized sense of partisan identity means that the party's failures and victories become personal. The maintenance of positive distinctiveness is an active process, especially when a party's position or status is threatened, helping to account for the dynamic nature of partisan political activity throughout electoral cycles (Huddy, 2013; Mackie, Devos, & Smith, 2000). Elections pose threats to both a party's power and partisans' collective social standing. Electoral involvement is one way in which partisans can defend their party against such potential losses and ensure electoral gains. In that sense, social identity theory provides a more dynamic account of partisanship than found in previous political behavior research. Partisanship is stable over time but environmental factors, conveyed by a potential party loss or victory, arouse partisans to increase or decrease their level of political activity over the course of an election.

### A New Measure of Partisan Identity

The expressive approach to partisanship, grounded in social identity theory, generates the need for a more finely differentiated measure of partisanship that taps partisan identity and does so across a greater range of intensity than typical questions. In the United States, partisanship is typically measured with a single standard question: "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as a Democrat, a Republican, or an Independent?" Partisans are then asked if they are strong or not so strong partisans and independents whether they are closer to the Democratic Party or the Republican Party. In Europe, questions on partisanship can differ somewhat across studies, but a standard question is included in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) for inclusion in numerous national election studies. The question is "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular party?" This question captures partisan direction and is followed by a question on how close the person feels to the party. In most countries that participate in the CSES, the question garners a majority of respondents who feel close to a party, although there are a few countries in which this does not occur. Obviously, this question is better suited to multiparty systems than the American version because it does not confine the question to just two major parties.

The standard measure of partisanship does not, however, measure the full range of partisan identity strength. This has necessitated the development of a multi-item partisan identity scale. Huddy and colleagues (2015) developed a four-item scale to assess partisan identity in the United States, assessed in a random sample of New York state residents, college students, and opt-in Internet panels. This scale better predicted campaign activity and emotional responses than the standard measure. We (Bankert et al., 2017) developed a measure of partisan identity for inclusion in election studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Sweden, the Netherlands, and Italy based on the Identification with a Psychological Group (IDPG) scale created by Mael and Tetrick (1992; see also Greene, 1999, 2002, 2004). Following conventional wisdom (Keith, Magleby, Nelson, Orr, & Westlye, 1992), we assessed partisan identity among independent leaners, those who do not initially identify a party but report feeling closer to one party than another. In the current article, we draw heavily on these studies to evaluate the expressive partisanship model in multiparty European political systems. Together, data from the

four nations provides an unusually rich test of the expressive partisanship model. The data are described in the following section.

### Partisan Identity Data Sets

In the Netherlands, the partisan identity scale was included in the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS),<sup>4</sup> an online panel administered by CentERdata, Tilburg University, the Netherlands.<sup>5</sup> Data was collected before and after the 2012 Dutch Parliamentary elections and is drawn from three time points: August 2012 (Elections 2012), after the national election in September 2012 (Dutch Parliamentary Election Study), and again as part of a module in December 2012/January 2013 (Politics and Values: Wave 6) with module-specific response rates of 75.1%, 77.7%, and 85.7% respectively. Analyses are conducted among respondents ( $N = 4,263$ ) who completed surveys at all three time points.

In Sweden, data are drawn from the Swedish Citizen Panel, a largely opt-in online panel run by the Laboratory of Opinion Research (LORE)<sup>6</sup> at the University of Gothenburg. We utilize data from Panel 8 (November 14 to December 18, 2013) and add-on Panel 8-2 (December 10, 2013 to January 7, 2014) (Martinsson, Andreasson, Markstedt, & Riedel, 2013), conducted some nine to 10 months before the 2014 national election (September 14, 2014). We invited 16,130 panelists to take the Panel 8 survey and 9,279 completed it for a completion rate of 64%; 2,000 panelists were invited to complete Panel 8-2 of which 1,496 answered the survey. All panelists in Panel 8.2 and a randomly selected set of 2,000 panelists in Citizen Panel 8 received the identity model. Our analytic sample is confined to those in Panel 8 and Panel 8-2 who completed the identity items ( $N = 2,464$ ). In addition, we utilize data from Wave 5 of the 2014 Internet Campaign panel (September 1–7, 2014), which is a part of the Swedish Citizen Panel and entailed 7,108 respondents of which 5,512 completed the survey for a participation rate of 78%.

Data for the United Kingdom were taken from the 2015 British Election Study (BES)<sup>7</sup> Internet panel study conducted by YouGov (Fieldhouse et al., 2016). The BES is an online panel survey with data collection occurring in up to 10 waves (from February 2014 to December 2016) that occurred before and after the May 2015 election (just prior to wave 5). The overall wave-to-wave retention was 79.4%. The sample size of the BES online panel fluctuates across waves with some additional respondents added to the panel after wave 1.

In waves 1, 3, 4, 7, and 9, a subset of respondents were asked the partisan identity items with sample sizes ranging from a low of 4,558 in wave 1 to a high of 6,914 in wave 4 (individuals were not consistently assigned to these questions in the different waves). We use the BES partisan identity data in different ways in this article. In some instances, we focus on wave 4, the wave with the largest subset of respondents asked to complete the partisan identity measures and preelection vote choice. In other analyses, we create a four-wave panel from respondents who completed data in wave 1 (February to March 2014), wave 3 (September to October 2014), wave 4 (March 2015), and wave 7 (April to May 2016). Waves 1 through 4 occurred before the general election on May 7, 2015, and wave 7 occurred roughly a year after the election. In total, there are 14,563 respondents who participated in waves 1, 3, 4, and 7, but only a subset completed the partisan identity battery in all four waves ( $N = 1,973$ ). We refer to this as the four-wave panel.

<sup>4</sup> See <https://www.lissdata.nl/>.

<sup>5</sup> The LISS contains 5,000 households, entailing 8,000 individuals, drawn as a true probability sample of households in the national population register maintained by *Statistics Netherlands*. Noncomputer households are provided with a computer and Internet connection, and the panel members complete monthly online surveys and receive payment for each completed questionnaire.

<sup>6</sup> See <http://lore.gu.se/surveys/citizen>.

<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.britishelectionstudy.com/>.

We use the four-wave panel to examine the stability and reliability of partisan identity strength over time. We exclude an additional 435 respondents who changed their party identification at least once to examine stability and change in a common identity. This resulted in an effective sample of 1,538 respondents for the stability analyses.

Last, data for Italy were taken from the 2011–13 Italian National Election Study Panel (ITANES),<sup>8</sup> an online and phone survey panel that is comprised of five waves. The ITANES online panel study (CAWI component) was conducted with a representative sample of the adult population with Internet access recruited by the Italian market research company SWG from their online panel. The telephone survey component (CATI) was conducted at the Laps<sup>9</sup> and Lid<sup>10</sup> Laboratories at the University of Milan. Samples in both studies used quotas based on gender, age, education, and region. The survey was administered between 2011 and 2013. In the following analyses, we draw from pre-election wave 1 which was conducted between January and February 2011 (roughly two years before the election which occurred on February 24–25, 2013). This wave entails the partisan identity battery ( $N = 3,317$ ) as well as other key variables that gauge political-issue preferences. Additionally, we utilize preelection Wave 3, conducted between May and June 2012 and with a response rate of 87%, for key dependent variables such as preelection vote preference.

In sum, only data from the Netherlands is based on a true probability sample. Data from the United Kingdom and Sweden are based entirely on opt-in online panels, and in Italy the data involves a mix of quota phone samples and an opt-in online panel. This places limits on the extent to which we can generalize from these data to national levels of partisanship, for example. Our key interest, however, is in documenting the relationship between partisan identity and theoretically chosen outcome variables. On one hand, these links could be misestimated in the different nonprobability samples. On the other hand, the findings we report are robust to the slightly different nature of the data sets in each country, giving us greater confidence in the conclusion that partisan identity is a powerful determinant of political behavior.

### The Partisan Identity Scale

Before asking the partisan identity scale, respondents in all surveys were asked whether they were partisans. Unfortunately, this question was asked differently in each country complicating national comparisons (Bankert et al., 2017). In the Netherlands, respondents in the preelection survey were asked if they thought of themselves as an adherent of a political party, if so which party, and whether they would call themselves a very convinced adherent, convinced adherent, or not so convinced adherent. If they did not think of themselves as an adherent, they were asked if they were more strongly attracted to one party, and if yes, to which party and how strongly (“very strongly,” “fairly strongly,” “not so strongly”). This resulted in 61% who adhered to or were attracted to a political party. In Sweden, respondents were asked if they felt close to a particular political party. If they named a party, they were then asked if they felt “very close,” “rather close,” or “not very close.” In Sweden, 91% indicated that they were close to a party. In the United Kingdom, respondents were asked “Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?” If no party was provided, respondents were asked “Do you generally think of yourself as a little closer to one of the parties than the others? If yes, which party?” Respondents who listed a party in response to either question were then asked “Would you call yourself very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong [partisan]?” Eight-six percent of those in the United Kingdom indicated a party preference. In Italy, respondents were asked if there was a political party to which they felt closer than

<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.itanes.org/>.

<sup>9</sup> Laboratories of Political and Social Analysis at the University of Siena.

<sup>10</sup> Laboratory of Public Opinion at the University of Milan.

**Table 1.** Partisan Identity Items in the United Kingdom (preelection wave 4: March 3–30, 2015)

	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
When I speak about this party, I usually say “we” instead of “they.”	6	21	51	22
I am interested in what other people think about this party.	10	61	23	7
When people criticize this party, it feels like a personal insult.	5	25	49	22
I have a lot in common with other supporters of this party.	9	59	24	8
If this party does badly in opinion polls, my day is ruined.	3	17	53	28
When I meet someone who supports this party, I feel connected with this person.	6	50	34	11
When I speak about this party, I refer to them as “my party.”	5	19	52	24
When people praise this party, it makes me feel good.	7	45	36	13
N	6,710			
Partisan Identity Scale: $\bar{x}$ (SE)	0.44 (0.20)			

*Note.* Entries are percentages. All items were combined to generate the partisan identity scale and recoded from 0 (*low*) to 1 (*high*).

others, and if not whether there was a political party to which they felt a little bit closer. This resulted in 49% of Italians with a party.

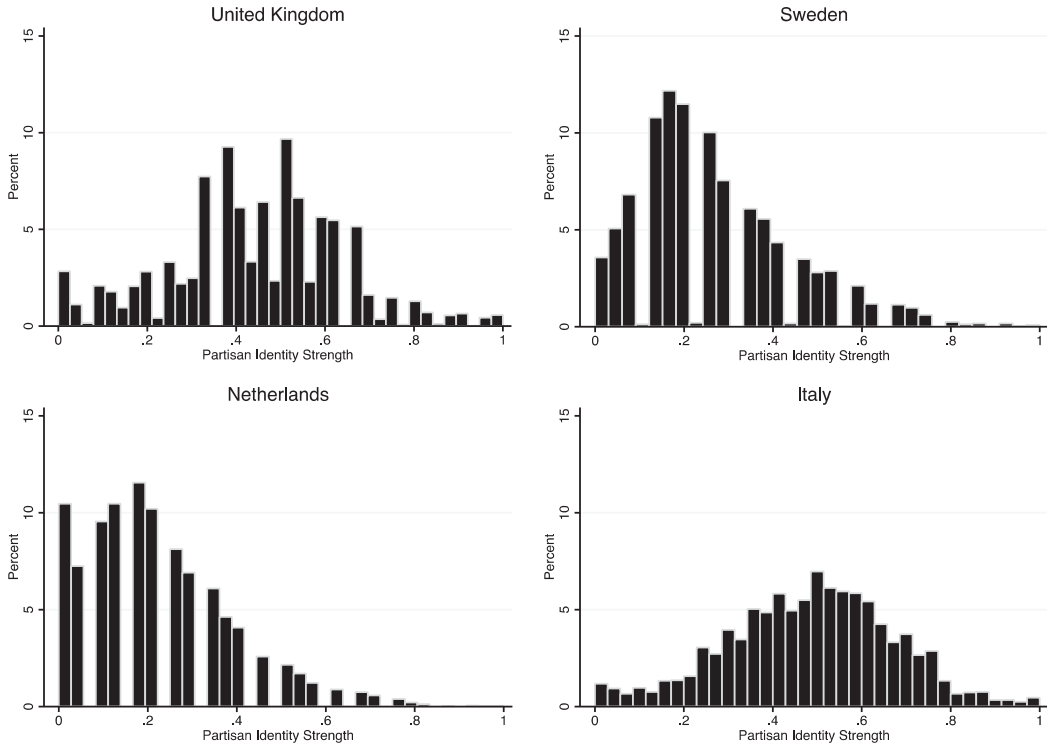
In these data, partisanship was higher in Sweden (91%) and the United Kingdom (86%) than in the Netherlands (61%) and Italy (49%). In recent data from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES, 2015, 2017), the rank ordering of countries is similar, but the percent of those reporting partisanship in the United Kingdom and Sweden is somewhat lower: 85% in Sweden (2014), 74% in the United Kingdom (2015), and 70% in the Netherlands (2010). There is no recent CSES data for Italy, leaving us unable to compare the distribution of partisanship in our Italian sample with CSES data. The partisan identity items were asked of respondents who indicated that they had a party. This meant that 9% of Swedes, 14% of those in the United Kingdom, and 51% of Italians were not asked these questions. In the Netherlands, an additional 29% of respondents who had voted for a party in the last election were asked the identity questions for that party. This meant that approximately 10–15% of Dutch, Swedish, and U.K. residents were not asked the partisan identity scale. As we evaluate the expressive partisan identity model, it is important to keep in mind that nonpartisans are excluded from the analysis. This is obviously a larger problem in Italy than elsewhere.

The partisan identity scale items were designed to capture a subjective sense of group belonging, the affective importance of group membership, and the affective consequences of lowered group status—all of which are crucial ingredients of a social identity (Ellemers, Kortekaas, & Ouwerkerk, 1999; Leach et al., 2008). Table 1 provides wording and responses to all eight partisan identity questions included in preelection wave 3 of the British Election Study (BES) (all original item wording is listed in Tables S1.1a and S1.1b in the online supporting information). The same items—though with different response options—were included in the 2012 LISS in the Netherlands and the 2013–14 Swedish Citizen panel. A modified version of these items was also included in the 2013 Italian National Election Study (ITANES).<sup>11</sup> Despite the differences in item wording and response options, the partisan identity scale remains highly reliable across countries with a reliability coefficient that ranges from 0.85 to 0.94.<sup>12</sup>

The partisan identity questions elicit considerable variance across countries, but that is partly a function of the inclusion of nonpartisans in the Netherlands (29% who were not an adherent nor

<sup>11</sup> All items in their original language can be found in the online supporting information (Tables S1.1a–S1.1b).

<sup>12</sup> The items in the Italian partisan identity scale were altered, making them less comparable to the other three countries. Items 1 through 5 were identical, as seen the appendix (Table S1.1b). But four items were worded completely differently. This resulted in a nine- not an eight-item scale as in other countries. We address potential concerns emerging from this lack of uniformity at a later point in the article.



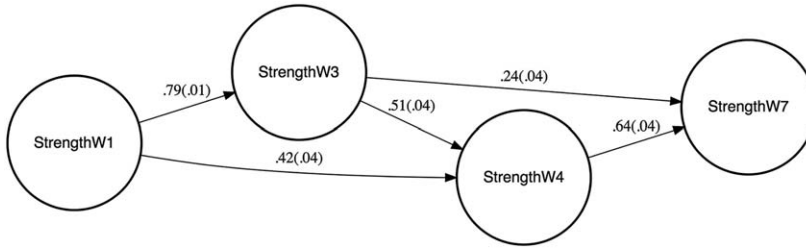
**Figure 1.** Distribution of partisan identity by country. The 2015 British Election Study (Wave 4), the Swedish Citizen Panel (panel 8), the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study (2012), and the 2013 Italian National Election Study (wave 1). Partisan identity strength is scaled to range from 0 to 1.

attracted to the party but had simply voted for one in the last election) where the average score was quite low. Levels of partisan identity are also low in Sweden but higher in the United Kingdom and Italy. For example, when asked if they say “we” rather than “they” when talking about their party, only 16% of Italians, and 25% of those in the United Kingdom strongly disagree whereas 80% of the Dutch and 65% of Swedes say they never feel this way. In each national election study, we created a reliable scale of partisan identity, which was recoded from 0 to 1. Levels of partisan identity in each of the four countries are depicted in Figure 1 (see also Bankert et al., 2017).

Our current goal is to evaluate whether partisan identity has the same characteristics regardless of its level. We thus compare the effects of partisan identity among Italian (49%), British (86%), Dutch (91%), and Swedish respondents (90%) for whom we have a valid measure of partisan identity. We previously conducted an item-response analysis on partisan identity items in the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands to confirm that the scale has similar properties in all three European countries despite differing distributions (Bankert et al., 2017). The scale measures partisan identity well across its range and in contrast to the traditional single item of partisan strength better identified differing levels of partisan identity across its range. The scale also exhibits scalar invariance, indicating that it captures the same level of the latent partisan identity trait in each country.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Bankert et al. (2017) supplemented conventional invariance tests with the computation of the EPC-interest, which is a measure of the expected change in the parameter of interest, partisan identity in this case, when freeing a particular equality constraint. These analyses provided strong evidence for the claim that the partisan identity scale exhibits scalar invariance and, thus, work similarly across the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands. The different wording of items in the Italian scale make it difficult to conduct an IRT analysis on all four countries.





**Figure 2.** Stability of partisan identity (BES). Entries are standardized regression parameters for wave-to-wave changes in latent partisan identity strength (with standard errors in parentheses), based on an auto regressive (AR2) model. *Data:* 2015 British Election Study online panel (Wave 1, 3, 4, and 7).

There has been continued debate, however, on the stability of partisanship in more complex multiparty systems outside the United States. Schickler and Green (1997) analyzed several panel studies in Germany and the United Kingdom and found that partisanship was indeed just as stable in these two European countries as in the United States once measurement error was taken into consideration. But other researchers question the stability of partisanship in Europe and elsewhere, pointing to the erosion of the underlying social factors that anchor partisanship, the occurrence of major events that replace or convert party identifiers, and the emergence of candidate-centered politics that eclipses the importance of parties (Clark & Stewart, 1998; Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000).

As Johnston notes, most research on partisanship has focused on investigating the direction of partisanship and its sources even though “it seems fairly clear . . . that [partisan] intensity varies more than direction does” (Johnston, 2006, p. 335). The lack of a fine-grained measure of partisanship has contributed to this gap in the literature. The introduction of a multi-item partisan identity scale, however, alters that situation and makes it easier to study variation in partisan strength over time and across situations.

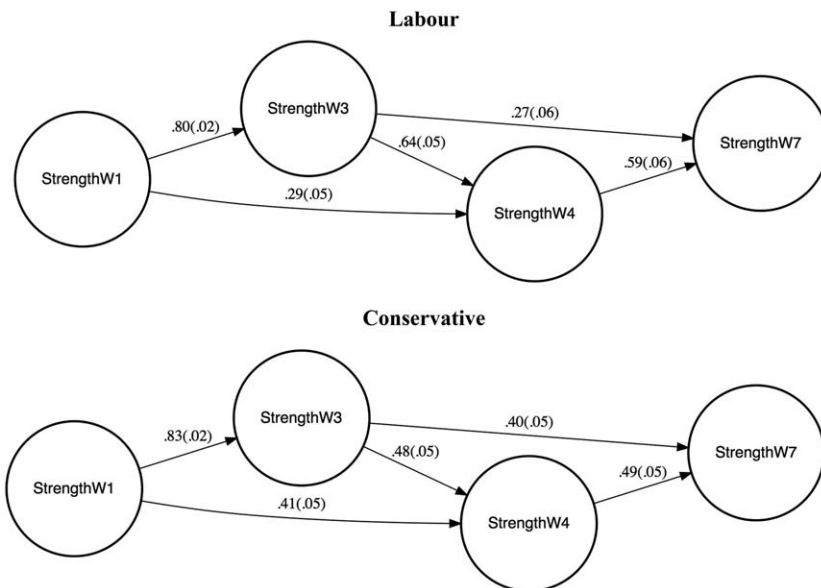
The multiwave 2015 BES online panel provides a unique opportunity to examine the multi-item party identity scale. The stability of the scale is not by itself a conclusive or sufficient test of expressive partisanship, but stability is a necessary feature of the model. To test the stability and reliability of the partisan identity scale in the United Kingdom, we draw on data from the four-wave panel described earlier and assess the fit of a covariance structure model that includes a latent variable for partisan identity strength at each wave and a latent factor for each of the eight questions (i.e., the latent factor contained four indicators, the same question asked at each of the four waves). This latter step is analogous to correlating errors across items in the different waves but provides a more parsimonious solution to their common variance. This model provides an acceptable fit to the data (RMSEA = .064; CFI = .958) and exhibits configural, metric, and scalar invariance across waves (see Table S2.1 in the online supporting information).<sup>14</sup>

To model the stability of partisan strength across the election cycle, we tested an auto regressive (AR2) model, regressing each estimate on its prior and lagged prior estimate. This model tests the stability of partisan identity strength to a prior time point two steps removed from the current wave. The AR2 model provides a good fit to the data (RMSEA = .06; CFI = .96). Figure 2 depicts the standardized regression parameters for wave-to-wave changes in latent partisan identity strength (with standard errors in parentheses). All paths depicted in the diagram are statistically significant. As seen in Figure 2, there is continuity in identity strength from one wave to the next, with a significant link between identity in each wave, indicated by standardized coefficients that range from .51 to .79 in

<sup>14</sup> When answering the scale, respondents were given the option to select “Don’t Know” as an answer. Not all respondents answered all eight items in all waves. To deal with this problem, missing values were imputed using multiple imputation in MPlus.

Figure 2. These coefficients are clearly well below 1, indicating some wave-to-wave movement in levels of partisan identity strength. There is also a strong pull back to an earlier level of partisan identity strength. For example, the strength of partisan identity in wave 4 (just before the 2015 election) is driven to a similar degree by partisan identity strength at wave 3 and wave 1. The strong influence of identity strength at wave 1 on strength at wave 4 suggests considerable inertia in partisan identity strength. Short-term factors may have altered identity strength between waves 3 and 4 (separated by roughly six months), but identity strength at wave 4 also returns to identity strength measured in wave 1 (almost a full year earlier). A similar, albeit weaker pattern, is observed for wave 7. Partisan identity strength at wave 7 is a function of identity strength at wave 4 (almost a year earlier) and wave 3 (some 18 months earlier). This model provides considerable evidence of the stability of partisan identity strength in the United Kingdom.

This model was repeated separately for supporters of the two major parties—Labour and Conservative—across the same four waves. This analysis was conducted to assess whether similar levels of stability were observed among partisans of the two major parties. Both models resemble the basic model shown in Figure 2 confirming the stability of partisan identity over time. The model was tested as a multigroup model in which all the parameters for the two groups were allowed to vary (e.g., the factor loading of item 1 was constrained to be equal across waves, but the actual loading could vary for Labour and Conservative partisans). This model showed acceptable fit to the data (as seen in Table S2.2 in the online supporting information). When the model was tested for invariance across the two parties, it exhibited both metric and scalar invariance, indicating that the dynamics of partisan identity are much the same regardless of party. As seen in Figure 3, the two groups of partisans exhibit considerable identity strength, although there is somewhat greater inertia in partisan identity among Conservative than Labour Party identifiers. The two-wave lagged identity has greater influence on Conservative identity in both wave 4 and wave 7. In contrast, the strength of identity among Labour supporters seems to fluctuate more over time.



**Figure 3.** Stability of partisan identity among Labour and Conservative identifiers. Entries are standardized regression parameters for wave-to-wave changes in latent partisan identity strength (with standard errors in parentheses), based on an auto regressive (AR2) model.  
 Data: 2015 British Election Study online panel (Wave 1, 3, 4, and 7).

It is important to note that the stability seen in party identity strength in the United Kingdom may be something of an overestimate. To be included in the analysis, a respondent had to participate in all four waves (covering a time span of some two years). It is possible that those with weaker partisan identities were more likely to drop out or participate in fewer waves than those with stronger partisan identities. It is also worth noting that roughly 22% of the initial partisans are excluded from these analyses because they changed party at least once over the course of the four waves. Of these changes, more than half involved consistency in three of the four waves and largely involved movement between a major and minor party (e.g., UKIP, Liberal Democrats). Almost none of these changes involved a change from one major party to the other.

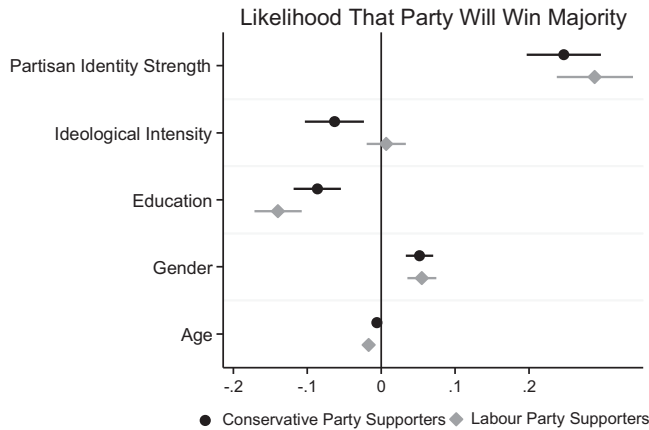
In sum, there is evidence of substantial inertia in partisan identity that is more consistent with an expressive than instrumental model of partisanship. From an expressive perspective, if partisan identity strength is affected by short-term forces, it should revert to prior levels of strength over time consistent with its grounding in stable social factors. This kind of stability is observed for partisanship in the United States. We have been able to document the nature of changes in partisan strength in this study because we have access to the fine-grained BES panel data that included repeat measurement of a multi-item identity scale. These data allowed us to document wave-to-wave and wave-to-lagged wave stability in partisan identity during an election campaign. This pattern of findings is less consistent with an instrumental perspective which would predict that a change in partisan identity strength captures a more permanent shift in identity strength. As someone responds to campaign events and updates their assessment of, and attachment to, the party, the strength of their partisan identity should shift in a more enduring fashion.

### Motivated Reasoning

Analysis of the BES provides clear evidence of stability in partisan identity strength over time, a finding that is more consistent with expressive than instrumental partisanship. Stability, however, is a necessary but not sufficient condition to establish the expressive model of partisanship. A second feature of expressive partisanship is the motivation to defend the party when it faces a potential loss. Prior research in the United States demonstrates that partisans are more likely to accept information that is favorable and argue against information that is unfavorable towards their party (Bolsen, Druckman, & Cook, 2014). Partisans also evaluate factual outcomes, such as economic indicators, in a more positive light when their party is in power (e.g., Lebo & Cassino, 2007). While there is abundant evidence for partisan reasoning among American Democrats and Republicans, evidence of partisan-motivated reasoning in other national contexts has emerged much more recently. Moreover, it is difficult to reconcile motivated reasoning with an instrumental account of partisanship in which voters base their partisanship on a rational assessment of the party's positions and capabilities.

Much of the evidence in support of partisan-motivated reasoning outside the United States has focused on party cues and conformity. In various studies conducted in the United Kingdom, Poland, Hungary, Russia, and Denmark, partisans are more willing to adopt an issue stance when it is experimentally associated with their political party than not (Brader & Tucker, 2009; Brader et al., 2012; Slothus & de Vreese, 2010).<sup>15</sup> This evidence is consistent with motivated reasoning and the notion that partisans are less likely to argue against a policy advocated by their party. But this evidence is not definitive proof of motivated reasoning because partisans may assume that their party's stance on a new issue is ideologically consistent with their general outlook and adopt the position for that reason. Research by Carlson (2016) provides a more exact test of motivated reasoning.

<sup>15</sup> Brader and colleagues (2012) include the additional caveat that the adoption of a policy associated with the party is more likely for parties that are better established, more ideologically consistent, or in the opposition.



**Figure 4.** Electoral confidence and partisan-motivated reasoning in the United Kingdom. Coefficient plot shows OLS regression coefficients (dots) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (lines). All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 for ease of interpretation, except for age, which is measured in decades (see Table S2.3 in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

Data: BES (Wave 4).

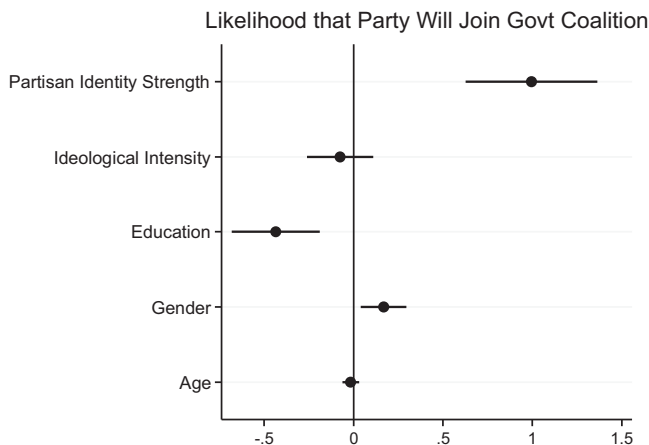
She finds that Ugandans who support the party of the incumbent president overestimate what they have received from the party, defensively distorting their party's record in its favor.

We further examine this kind of defensive reasoning among partisans in the Netherlands, Sweden, and the United Kingdom. These three countries differ in their level of partisan identity strength as discussed earlier, with lower levels of partisan identity in the Netherlands and Sweden than in the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, we expect strong partisans in all three nations to defend their party and view it in a more positive light than weaker partisans regardless of whether the party is a major or minor player within the nation's political system.

We start with the United Kingdom. Wave 4 of the BES (conducted some two months before the May 2015 general election) includes questions on the likelihood that the Conservative and Labour Party will win a majority of votes in the general election. We test whether strong partisans are more confident than weak partisans that they will win the election as a measure of defensive motivated reasoning, consistent with an expressive model of partisanship. The effect of partisan identity strength on electoral confidence is examined separately among Conservative ( $N = 2,028$ ) and Labour Party identifiers ( $N = 2,168$ ). In addition to party identity strength, the analysis also includes controls for several demographic factors and respondents' ideological intensity.<sup>16</sup> The latter is treated as a measure of instrumental concerns and ranges from 0 (weakest ideological position or at odds with party ideology) to 1 (fully consistent and strongest ideologically consistent stance on all issues). The results of this OLS regression are displayed in Figure 4 separately for Labour and Conservative identifiers.

Partisan identity strength is the strongest predictor of partisan-motivated reasoning in Figure 4, which compares the size of regression coefficients for various predictors of electoral confidence (for the complete analysis, see Table S2.3 in the online supporting information). Strong partisans are far more likely than weaker partisans to believe their party will win an electoral majority in the general election. Moreover, the magnitude of this effect is roughly comparable among Labour and

<sup>16</sup> Ideological intensity in the United Kingdom is a composite measure of five left-right values such as the redistribution of income and the proper compensation of ordinary workers (see Table A2a in the online supporting information for item wording). Respondents received a high score on this scale if they were strongly ideological, and their right-left position was consistent with that of their party. Note that other measures of ideology such as a simple folded measure of ideological left-right self-placement and the intensity of support for each value on its own yield similar results.



**Figure 5.** Electoral confidence and partisan-motivated reasoning in Sweden. Coefficient plot shows ordered probit regression coefficients (dots) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (lines). All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 for better comparison, except for age, which is measured in decades (see Table S2.4 in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

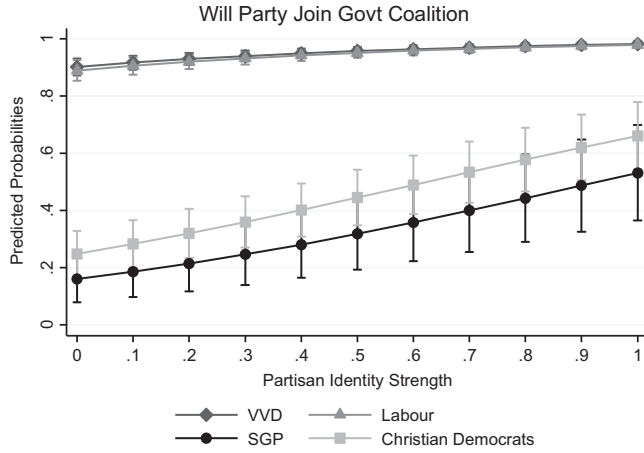
*Data:* Swedish Citizen Panel (Panel 8, Panel 8-2).

Conservative supporters. The election was expected to be close, and this might explain why the effect is fairly symmetrical between partisans of the two parties. Nonetheless, it is also clear that the more strongly identified a partisan is with their party the greater their confidence in electoral victory. Partisan identity might increase in strength in response to the party's electoral chances but given the stability in inertia in partisan identity, the causal order is more likely to go in the other direction: from identity to confidence in electoral victory. In contrast, ideological intensity has a slight negative influence on electoral confidence among Conservatives and no influence among Labour supporters. Thus, strongly identified partisans hold a more positive perception of their party's electoral chances than weak identifiers, but strong ideologues do not. Interestingly, education has a negative effect in the model, indicating a more sober assessment of a party's fortune among the best educated.

Levels of partisan identity are somewhat lower in Sweden (with numerous political parties) than the United Kingdom. Nonetheless, we expect strong partisans in Sweden to exhibit similar levels of defensive reasoning as those in the United Kingdom. Respondents in the Swedish Citizen Panel 8, conducted roughly nine months before the national election, who identified with a political party, were asked the likelihood that their party would be part of the governing coalition. To test the existence of defensive reasoning, electoral confidence was regressed onto partisan identity strength; several other variables were included as controls, including issue intensity (analogous to the ideological intensity measure in the United Kingdom) and dummy variables for each party.<sup>17</sup> We examine the determinants of motivated reasoning among all partisans in the Swedish Citizen Panel.

The results of this analysis are shown in a regression coefficient plot (Figure 5; for the complete analysis, see Table S2.4 in the online supporting information). Partisan identity boosts confidence that one's party will be included in the government coalition. In contrast, ideological intensity has no effect on motivated reasoning. The analysis also contains dummy variables for each party. The survey was conducted some nine months before the election when the outcome was quite uncertain. Perhaps

<sup>17</sup> Ideological intensity in the Swedish Citizen Panel 8 & Panel 8-2 is a combined measure of agreement or disagreement with 5 ideological policy proposals on topics such as increasing reducing societal income taxes and lowering taxes (see Table A2b in the online supporting information for item wording). Respondents received a high score on this scale if they were strongly ideological and their right-left position was consistent with that of their party.



**Figure 6.** Electoral confidence and motivated reasoning in the Netherlands. Graph depicts the predicted probability that someone believes their party will be part of the governing coalition based on logistic regression analyses shown in Table S2.5 in the online supporting information. The dependent variable is dichotomous.

*Data:* LISS: 2012 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study.

not surprisingly, members of the two largest parties (Social Democrats on the left and Moderates on the right) along with Christina Democrats (part of the existing coalition) were the most confident that they would be part of a future government. In actuality, the existing right coalition lost to a left coalition made up of the Social Democrats, Greens, and the Left party. Consistent with political reality, the Sweden Democrats, an anti-immigration party shunned by parties on both the left and right, were least confident that they would form part of a new government.

Consistent with results from the United Kingdom, more highly educated partisans in Sweden are less prone to biased reasoning in favor of their party. And women were more confident than men that their party would join a governing coalition. All told, confidence in electoral victory is driven by both political reality and motivated reasoning grounded in a strong partisan identity.

Last, we examine the Netherlands, a country with relatively low levels of partisanship. Respondents in the Dutch Parliamentary Election Study, which was conducted just after the 2012 election, were asked whether they thought their party would be included in the government. At that point in time, the vote count was known but the makeup of the governing coalition was still being negotiated. The People’s Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) had received a plurality of the votes, followed by the Labour Party (PvdA). The major question hanging over parliamentary negotiations was whether or not any of the minor parties would join the governing coalition. We ran a logistic regression model, regressing the dichotomous electoral confidence measure on dummies for parties, partisan identity, ideological intensity, age, education, gender, class, and union membership (see Table S2.5 in the online supporting information). The predicted probabilities for electoral confidence are plotted across the range of partisan identity strength in Figure 6. Predicted probabilities are plotted for the two leading parties (VVD and Labour) and two minor parties, the Christian Democrats and the Reformed Political Party (SGP). Ultimately, a VVD-Labour centrist government was formed in November minus the inclusion of any of the minor parties.

Not surprisingly, Figure 6 demonstrates the overriding confidence of VVD and Labour Party supporters, the two parties that won the most votes in the election. Of greater note, strong and weakly identified Christian Democrat and SGP partisans varied considerably in their electoral confidence. As partisan identity increases, the probability that partisans of these minor parties believed they would be

part of the governing coalition increased from 0.24 to 0.65 among the Christian Democrats and from 0.16 to 0.53 among SGP partisans. These effects are much larger than the slight increase in confidence of Labour Party (0.88 to 0.97) or VVD identifiers (0.90 to 0.98) across the range of partisan identity strength. Among supporters of these larger parties, electoral success was evident and less subject to motivated reasoning. In contrast to Sweden, ideological intensity is also a positive predictor of motivated reasoning significantly boosting electoral confidence in the Netherlands (see Table S2.5 in the online supporting information).<sup>18</sup>

In sum, a strong partisan identity enhances defensive reasoning and boosts confidence in an electoral victory under conditions of uncertainty. This conclusion holds for the United Kingdom, Sweden, and the Netherlands, countries with differing levels of partisanship and differing numbers of major and minor political parties. It is also evident when conditions remain uncertain before (United Kingdom, Sweden) and after (Netherlands) election results are known. Partisan identity strength thus seems especially powerful in shaping perceptions of political reality when that reality is at least somewhat ambiguous. This finding is potentially at odds with an instrumental model of partisanship in which citizens are expected to hold a more clear-sighted view of the electoral landscape. It is difficult to explain why strong partisan identifiers overestimate their electoral chances in the absence of a defensive motivation to view the party in a positive light.

### **Political Behavior: Contrasting the Effects of Identity Strength and Issue Reliance**

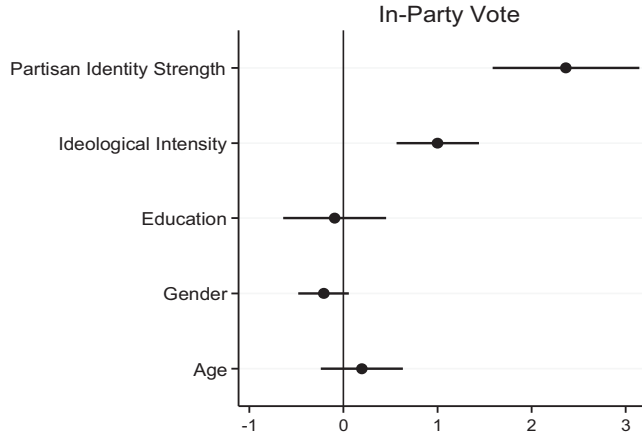
Partisanship is linked to heightened support for the party and campaign-related political action. In the United States, strong partisans vote more frequently for their party, vote at higher rates than political independents, care more about politics, and participate more actively (Abramson & Aldrich, 1982; Brady, Verba, & Schlozman, 1995; Campbell Converse, Miller, & Stokes, 1960; Rosenstone & Hansen, 1993). The link between strong partisanship, vote choice, and political action is a well-established fact that is consistent with both the instrumental and expressive approaches.

The two approaches diverge, however, in their explanation for the link between partisanship and in-party voting or political action. The instrumental model views heightened party loyalty and action as due to a positive assessment of the party's past performance and ideological concordance between the individual and the party. The expressive model focuses instead on the power of identity to drive political behavior in defense of the party independently of ideology and partisan issue alignment. We find initial confirmation of this process in the United States, showing that strong partisan identities are far more likely to motivate campaign-related political action than strong and consistent ideological stances. More specifically, in U.S. data, the partisan identity scale better accounts for campaign activity than a strong stance on subjectively important policy issues, strength of ideological self-placement, or a measure of ideological identity (Huddy et al., 2015).

#### *In-Party Vote*

In our past research, we have extended the study of partisan identity to several European democracies and find evidence that partisan identity increases in-party voting (Bankert et al., 2017). Drawing on the United Kingdom, Dutch, and Swedish (Citizen Panel 8, 8.2) data discussed in this article, we found that the partisan identity scale predicts voting for one's party in all three countries. Despite differences in the three political systems, partisan identity has a positive effect on in-party vote choice in all three countries. In this research, the probability of voting for one's party ranged from a low of roughly .45 in the Netherlands and .5 in the United Kingdom at the lowest levels of partisan identity to a high of .9 for those at the highest levels. Ideological intensity also boosted in-party voting,

<sup>18</sup> The Dutch survey excluded a multi-item ideological scale, and ideological intensity was measured by the respondent's self-placement on a left-right dimension. Those whose left-right placement conflicted with that of their party received a score of 0.



**Figure 7.** In-party voting in Italy. Coefficient plot shows ordered probit regression coefficients (dots) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (lines). All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 for better comparison, except for age, which is measured in decades (see Table S2.6 in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

*Data:* 2013 Italian National Election Study.

although its effects were somewhat weaker than that of partisan identity. The probability of in-party voting changed from .75 (0.01) to .78 (0.01) across the range of ideological intensity, although this range was higher in the Netherlands (.47 to .7). These effects are far weaker than those observed for partisan identity strength.

We extend these findings by running comparable analyses on in-party voting in Italy using the ITANES data (Figure 7, see Table S2.6 in the online supporting information). Despite the considerable instability in political parties and governments during data collection for the ITANES (2011–13), partisan identity measured in early 2011 had a substantial effect on expected in-party vote in Italy obtained from wave 4 (just prior to the 2013 election). The predicted probability of voting for the in-party (based on analyses in Table S2.6) ranged from a low of 0.23 to a high of 0.78 as partisan identity increased from its lowest to highest value. Ideological intensity also boosted in-party voting but its effects are much smaller than that of partisan identity.<sup>19</sup> This analysis makes clear that weak partisans cannot be counted on to vote for the party. But as partisan identity increases in strength, their electoral loyalty increases dramatically.

These findings for Italy are especially important given the volatility of its electoral system. In recent decades, the Italian political system has been characterized by frequent partisan change with parties disappearing, morphing into new parties, and ousting their leadership. Despite this institutional instability, partisan identity continues to provide an anchor for vote choice and engagement. In analysis of the 2013 national Italian election in which comedian Beppe Grillo's Five Star Movement won a quarter of the vote, supporters of the two major left-right parties (Democratic Party on the left and People of Freedom on the right) served as ballast against his insurgent campaign (Bellucci & Maraffi, 2014). Our findings support this conclusion. Admittedly, fully 50% of Italians lacked a partisan identity in the ITANES data set as noted earlier. But among those who had a partisan identity, a strong identity helped to preserve the party vote. The decline of partisanship in Europe deserves careful examination, but strong partisan identities still have the ability to hold voters in place and maintain political stability.

<sup>19</sup> Ideological intensity is measured by five questions on social and economic matters. For item wording, see Table S1.2c. in the online supporting information.



### *Political Engagement*

In our past research, we have documented the effects of partisan identity on political action (Bankert et al., 2017; Huddy et al., 2015). In the United States, Huddy and colleagues (2015) demonstrated that partisan identity is a more powerful predictor of political engagement than ideological intensity or political issue importance. In the European multiparty context, Bankert et al. (2017) replicate the U.S. results, showing that political engagement among partisans in Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom is driven to a much larger extent by partisan identity than more instrumental concerns such as ideological intensity. In that analysis, participation was measured somewhat differently in each of the three countries. Nonetheless, partisan identity was a significant predictor of political engagement, although it had greater influence on participation in Sweden and lesser influence in the Netherlands. Ideological intensity had a significant but smaller effect on political participation, providing limited additional support for the instrumental model.

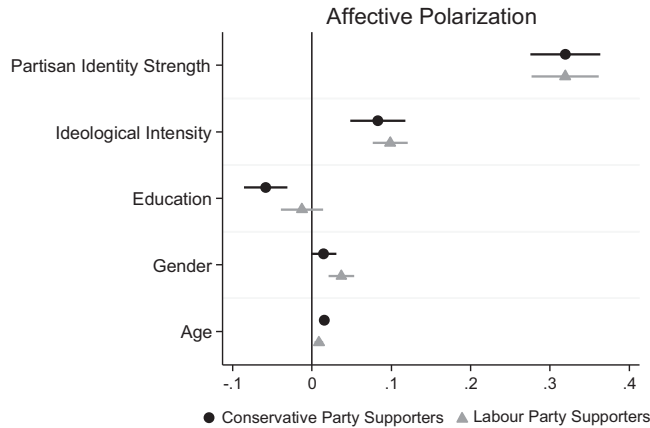
### **Affective Polarization**

In the United States, scholars have provided abundant evidence of affective polarization manifested as increasing hostility between Democrats and Republicans (Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2015). Affective polarization is not just confined to the U.S. two-party system, however. The expressive model of partisanship predicts such defensive animosity across party lines when the party is under competitive threat. Obviously, electoral threat is a common occurrence within a democratic political system, and it should be heightened when parties are highly competitive and equally likely to win or lose an election, as has characterized recent presidential politics in the United States (Lee, 2016). We might also expect this kind of animosity to be heightened in two-party systems or a multiparty system characterized by a strong left-right dimension on which parties are arrayed and compete.

In essence, partisan identity is likely to increase antipathy towards an out-party. We first examine this possibility in the United Kingdom, where two major parties—Labour and Conservative—dominate the electoral landscape and have alternated in government over the last few decades. We examine the existence of animosity between Conservative and Labour Party supporters by subtracting in-party ratings from out-party ratings (respondents rated how much they liked or disliked each party on a 0–10 scale). There is no question that Labour and Conservative party identifiers like their own party and dislike the other. On the 0–10 scale, Labour supporters rated their party at 7.3 and Conservatives at 1.7 on average. Similar affective polarization is observed among Conservatives who rated their own party at 7.5 and Labour at 2.1.

This measure of affective polarization is regressed onto partisan identity, ideological intensity, and a set of control variables including age and education. Analyses are conducted among those who identify with one of the two major political parties (Labour and Conservative) in wave 4 of the BES (see Table S2.7 in the online supporting information). The determinants of affective polarization are shown in Figure 8. Partisan identity has a sizeable effect on affective polarization. More strongly identified partisans rate their own party more favorably than the out-party. Ideological intensity also predicts affective polarization, but its coefficient is only a quarter of the size of that for partisan identity. This suggests that partisan identity plays a more powerful role than ideological intensity in shaping animosity towards one's political opponents. To corroborate this point, we generated predicted values of affective polarization for the strongly identified partisans among Conservative and Labour Party supporters: On a scale from 0 to 1 whereby 1 indicates the highest level of affective polarization, these two groups of partisans reach a value of 0.98 and 0.97, respectively. In contrast, at the highest level of ideological intensity, affective polarization is evident but less intense at 0.85 among Conservative and Labour Party supporters.

Critics might argue that the British political system is similar to the United States because it is dominated by two major parties and that these findings will not generalize to other more complex



**Figure 8.** Determinants of affective polarization in the United Kingdom. Coefficient plot shows OLS regression coefficients (dots) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (lines). The dependent variable is constructed by subtracting the out-party rating from the in-party rating. The analysis is confined to supporters of the Conservative and Labour Party. All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 for ease of comparison, except for age, which is measured in decades (see Table S2.7 in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

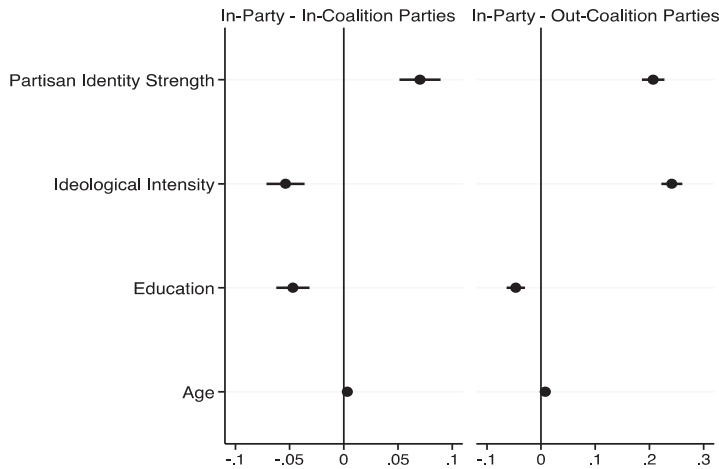
*Data:* British Election Study (Wave 4).

European multiparty systems. We extend our analysis to Sweden, a multiparty system characterized by coalitional governments aligned along an ideological left-right dimension. The existence of multiple parties and coalitions may blur loyalty to a single party, challenging the importance of partisan identity (Gonzalez et al., 2008; Hagevi, 2015; Meffert, Huber, Gschwend, & Pappi, 2011). This complexity allows us to examine the role of partisan identity in shaping affect towards parties of the in- and opposing coalition (i.e., out-coalition). For this purpose, we analyze data from the 2014 Internet Campaign, which is part of the Swedish Election Panel, in which respondents were asked to rate each of the Swedish political parties. Respondents rated parties on a  $-5$  to  $+5$  scale. In-party identifiers rated their own party at a very positive 3.8, rated other parties in their left or right coalition at a somewhat less positive 1.8, and rated the right or left out-coalition parties at a negative  $-2.9$ . There is ample evidence here of affective polarization across the left-right divide in Sweden.

We create two measures of affective polarization by subtracting ratings of all parties in the in-coalition from one's own party and all parties in the out-coalition from one's own coalition. We refer to the first measure as in-coalition bias and the second as out-coalition polarization. We test the existence of in-party bias within the coalition, in addition to polarization between coalitions. Social identity theory predicts that group identifiers will always feel somewhat more positively towards their own group than others, even when the comparison group constitutes "friends." We can also contrast the effects of partisan identity and ideological intensity on bias and polarization, providing a strong test of expressive partisanship because Swedish parties are divided into left-right blocs of parties.<sup>20</sup> The key is whether or not partisan identity contributes to bias and polarization over and above the effects of ideological intensity.

We regress these affective differences on partisan identity, ideological intensity, age, and education. The results, shown in Figure 9, are consistent with our theoretical expectations. Partisan identity has powerful influence on a preference for one's own over other parties within one's left-right coalition. In-party bias is a key feature of the expressive, social identity model of partisanship and confirms the importance of party loyalties in shaping judgments about other parties, even those closely

<sup>20</sup> Analyses include a new measure of ideological intensity that was created in the 2014 Swedish election panel based on 10 items concerning economic matters (see Table S1.2d in the online supporting information).



**Figure 9.** Affective polarization in Sweden. Coefficient plot shows OLS regression coefficients (dots) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (lines). Dependent variable in model on the left is constructed as the difference between the ratings of in-party and parties from the in-coalition (excluding the in-party). The dependent variable in the model on the right is constructed as the difference between the in-party and ratings of the out-coalition parties. All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 for better comparison, except for age, which is measured in decades (see Table S2.8 in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

*Data:* Swedish Citizen Panel: 2014 Sweden Internet Campaign Panel.

aligned ideologically. The stronger differentiation in ratings of one's own than in-coalition parties among the strongest partisan identifiers underscores the primacy of a party identity even in Sweden which is characterized by powerful left-right party coalitions. In contrast, a strong ideological stance consistent with that of one's party decreases the distance between liking of one's own and other left-right coalition party members in synch with the ideological nature of Swedish party coalitions.

Partisan identity is also a significant driver of affective polarization between the in-party and out-coalition parties. Strong partisan identifiers like their own party more than parties in the opposing coalition. A strong ideological stance is even more powerful than partisan identity in shaping polarization. This is an interesting finding which suggests that affective polarization in Sweden has both expressive and instrumental components. Overall, these analyses provide a novel aspect to the study of partisanship by examining affective polarization in the context of coalitional governments that are common in multiparty systems.

### Defensive Emotions

Emotions are a central component of the expressive partisanship model and are the vehicle by which defensive partisan motivations are translated into political loyalty and action. Anger and enthusiasm comprise two of the most important emotions within the model. Anger is likely to be aroused when partisans are challenged, motivating political engagement and protest activity. In contrast, partisans are likely to feel positive enthusiasm when they are given good news about the party, arousing loyalty and enhancing political engagement (Groenendyk & Banks, 2014; Marcus, Neuman, & MacKeun, 2000; Smith, Cronin, & Kessler, 2008; Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, & Hutching, 2011; van Zomeren, Spears, & Leach, 2008). Typically, defensive group emotions are felt most intensely by the strongest group identifiers (Mackie et al., 2000; Rydell et al., 2008; van Zomeren et al., 2008).

In theory, strong emotions such as anger can arise in response to a blocked policy goal or defeated legislation. There is growing experimental evidence, however, that a threat to a party's

political status is more likely to generate strong emotional reactions than a threat to specific policies. Huddy et al. (2015) experimentally threatened or reassured a respondent's party's position on health care and gay marriage. Anger did not increase among those who held the party's position most strongly and cared most about gay marriage or health care. Likewise, those with a strong position on gay marriage or health care that was consistent with their party did not feel more enthusiastic when the party's position was bolstered by the experimental blog message. In contrast, messages linked to winning or losing the election were far more effective in arousing strong emotions.

To assess defensive emotion in the United States, we exposed respondents to an experimental blog message embedded in a survey. Respondents read several paragraphs that were ostensibly written by someone from their own or another political party. These comments promised either electoral victory or threatened defeat, conditions we refer to as threat and reassurance respectively (see Huddy et al., 2015 for greater detail). We adopted this blog paradigm for inclusion in Panel 8 and 8-2 of the Swedish Citizen Panel. In the Swedish study, reassurance was worded as if written by an in-party member whereas threat came from a member of the out-party. The Swedish design involved a basic  $2 \times 2$  experiment in which threat or reassurance was fully crossed with threat or reassurance to the party or to its key issues and platform. Blog entries are modified for each party to make the blog entry appear as realistic as possible. Thus, threats typically came from the main party in the opposing left-right coalition (Moderates on the right or Social Democrats on the left). Reassurance for minor parties included a reference to their likely role as a coalition partner. In contrast, issue threats and reassurance focus on the implementation or failure to enact specific policies after the election. We adjusted these blog entries to reflect policy issues that were particularly important to each party.

To better illustrate the logic underlying the experiment, we included the wording of blog entries for Social Democrats in Table 2. In the Party Status  $\times$  Threat condition, supporters read a blog entry praising the electoral chances of the Moderate Party, the main party in the opposing center-right coalition. In the Issue  $\times$  Threat condition, on the other hand, the blog entry emphasizes that the election will threaten key policies in the Social Democrats' political platform but does not specifically mention the electoral chances of the Social Democrats. We used a similar approach to construct the reassurance conditions: In the Party Status  $\times$  Reassurance condition, the blog entry highlights the promising future of the Social Democrats (and the declining status of the Moderates) while in the Issue  $\times$  Reassurance condition, the blog promises a bright future for "sensible political ideas" that are associated with the Social Democrats without mentioning the party itself. This setup allows us to disentangle the status of the party from the status of the political issues associated with the party, directly pitting the expressive model of partisanship against its instrumental alternative.

In the analysis, we contrast the influence of issue-based and party-status threat and reassurance on feelings of anger and enthusiasm. Each condition is interacted with partisan identity strength to determine whether strong partisan identifiers react most emotionally to status threat and reassurance, as predicted by an expressive partisan approach. We also interact each condition with a measure of issue importance to test whether those who are most concerned about an issue react most emotionally when the issue is threatened or reassured in the blog entry, consistent with an instrumental approach to partisanship. Two key issues were identified for each party and the rated importance of each issue was combined for that party's identifiers to create a measure of issue importance (see Table S1.3 in the online supporting information).

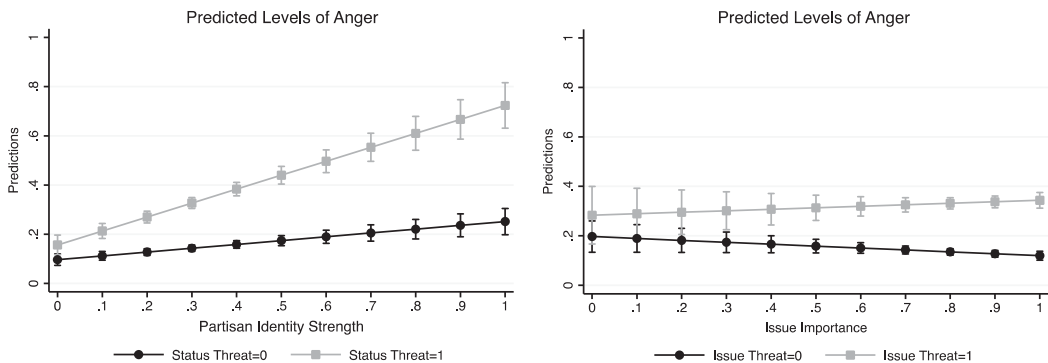
We examine the effect of an interaction between partisan identity and status threat on anger as a test of the expressive partisanship model (analyses shown in Tables S2.9a and S2.9b in the online supporting information). We had expected strongly identified partisans to react most emotionally to status threats, and this prediction was confirmed. Partisan identity interacted with status threat to arouse anger and partisan identity. The effects of status threat are depicted across the range of partisan identity in the left panel in Figure 10.

**Table 2.** Blog Experiment Worded for Partisans Identified With the Social Democrats

	Party Status	Issue
Threat	“2014 is going to be an important election for the Moderates. We are doing better in the polls than the Social Democrats and we have stronger leadership. We will form a successful coalition with the Liberal People’s Party, the Centre Party and the Christian Democrats, and maybe even the Greens will join us. Whatever happens, the elections will bring renewed power to the Alliance. I am glad that the Swedish people remain true to their past decisions. The Social Democrats and the rest of the Swedish Left should get used to the thought of remaining in the opposition for the foreseeable future. The Moderate Party and the Right- Centre coalition will hold our central place in the leadership of the country.”	“2014 is going to be a bad election for sensible political ideas. After this election there will be enough votes available in parliament to reduce social welfare benefits and weaken the taxation system even more, turning Sweden into a country of inequality. The elections will provide a super-majority in the parliament that will mean less power for women, more hostility towards new immigrants, and no respect for the disadvantaged. Sadly, the day is arriving when these ideas will hold a central place in the leadership of the country.”
Reassurance	“2014 is going to be an important election for the Social Democrats. We are doing better in the polls than the Alliance parties and we have new and stronger leadership. We will form a successful coalition whether it’s with the Greens, the Left Party, or the Liberal People’s Party and the Centre Party. One way or another, the elections will mark a resurgence of Social Democrats and Sweden’s Left. I am glad that the Swedish people have finally returned to their senses. The Moderate Party, other members of the Alliance, and the rest of the right wing should get used to being in the opposition for the foreseeable future. The Social Democrats will return to hold our central place in the leadership of the country.”	“2014 is going to be an important election for sensible political ideas. After this election there will finally be enough votes available in parliament to increase social welfare benefits and strengthen the taxation system to ensure Sweden remains an equal country. The elections will provide a super-majority in the parliament that will mean more power for women, dignity for new immigrants, and respect for the disadvantaged. Finally, the day is arriving when these ideas will once again hold a central place in the leadership of the country.”

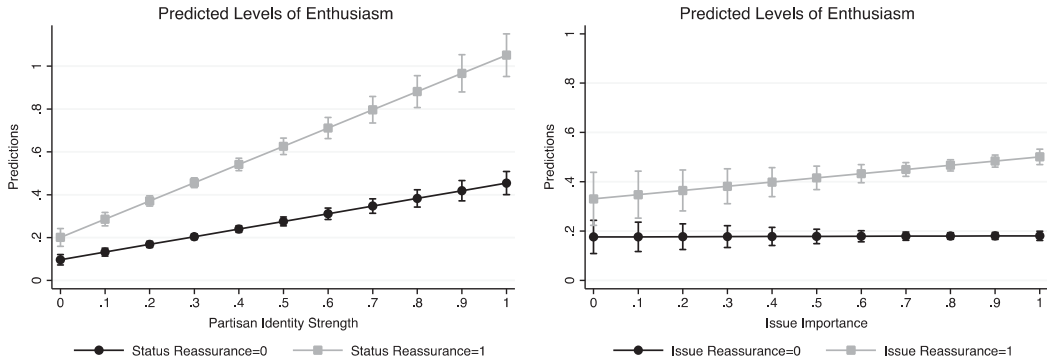
*Note.* Table shows the wording of blog entries for respondents who identify with the Social Democrats. Partisans are randomly assigned to one of the four conditions worded specifically for their party.

*Data:* Swedish Citizen Panel 8 and 8-2.



**Figure 10.** Anger in response to status and issue threat. Predicted levels are calculated while holding issue importance (left) and partisan identity (right) constant. All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 (see Table S2.9a in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

*Data:* Swedish Citizen Panel 8 and 8-2.



**Figure 11.** Enthusiasm in response to status and issue reassurance. Predicted levels are calculated while holding issue importance (left) and partisan identity (right) constant. All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 (see Table S2.9b in the online supporting information for complete analyses).

*Data:* Swedish Citizen Panel 8 and 8-2.

We also test the effect of the interaction between partisan identity and issue threat on anger. Somewhat unexpectedly, strong partisans also felt angry when their key issues were threatened, providing support to the instrumental model. This suggests that a threat to both party status and the implementation of party-relevant policies generates higher levels of anger as partisan identity strength increases in Sweden. Sweden's political parties fall on a strong left-right dimension and it appears that a threat to a party's key issues is just as effective as a threat to status in elevating feelings of anger among strong partisans. The interaction between issue threat and issue importance, on the other hand, did not yield any significant results. Overall, these analyses provide support for both an expressive and instrumental model of partisanship in Sweden.

Similar effects emerge for enthusiasm among Swedish partisans (Figure 11; see Table S2.9b in the online supporting information for complete analysis): Status and issue reassurance both interact with partisan identity to boost enthusiasm among the strongest partisans, supporting both the expressive and instrumental models. In contrast to our prior analysis, respondents who rated the issues as important also reported significantly higher levels of enthusiasm in the issue reassurance condition. These results suggest that both the success of important political issues and party victory increase enthusiasm among partisans. At the same time, however, the effect of status reassurance on partisans' enthusiasm is much larger than that of issue reassurance: As partisan identity increases in strength from 0 to 1, enthusiasm rises from 0.09 to 1.05—a drastic change in its predicted levels—whereas there is a far more modest change in enthusiasm from 0.17 to 0.50 as issue importance increases. Overall, these analyses demonstrate that strong partisans react more emotionally to threats and reassurances to both the party's status and key issues. In contrast, rating an issue as important does not generate the same level of emotion when the issue is threatened or reassured.

## Conclusion

We began this review with an understanding that partisanship matters beyond American shores but noted that its nature and degree of political influence in Europe remains a subject of debate. In reviewing past research and analyzing several national election data sets, it is clear that partisans in Europe exhibit many of the expressive attitudes and behaviors observed among American partisans, despite differing levels of partisanship and partisan identity across the four European nations. Strong partisans in Europe engage in motivated reasoning, vote for their in-party at higher rates than weak partisans, like their own party more than similar parties and display animosity towards the out-party, and exhibit defensive emotions when their party is threatened and positive emotions when it is

reassured. Moreover, we have demonstrated that partisanship in the United Kingdom is relatively stable over the course of an election cycle. Given these findings, we conclude that the major difference between the United States and Europe does not lie in the nature of partisanship but instead in the levels of partisanship, which vary widely across countries.

As noted, the level of partisanship was low in Italy, and levels of partisan identity were low in the Netherlands. Indeed, partisan identity was not especially strong in any of the four nations that we examined, underscoring potential instability in partisan identity in European democracies. In Europe, declining levels of partisanship hint at the potential for destabilized politics as weak identifiers abandon their parties (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000). As current political events in the Netherlands, France, and Italy suggest, the decline in partisanship has led to greater electoral volatility, an increase in personality-centered elections, and heightened economic voting (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2000; Kayser & Wlezién, 2011). In the absence of strong partisanship, voters are more susceptible to new political parties that defy the traditional left-right cleavages and produce—as in the case of Italy—a “tri-polar” (Bellucci & Maraffi, 2013) shaped political system dominated by the older left-right cleavage and a newer antipolitics dimension. In the 2013 ITANES data, more than 50% of Italian respondents reported no party identification, hinting at the power of novice political parties such as Grillo’s Five Star Movement to recruit supporters.

Going forward, there are a number of unanswered questions that are worthy of future research. First, the interplay of instrumental and expressive aspects of partisanship requires closer attention. What opportunities do partisans have to learn about their party’s issue and ideological positions? To what extent do politicians muddy the waters by espousing vague issue positions or stressing emotionally laden values and attitudes? Second, does expressive partisanship always trump instrumental considerations? Not surprisingly, someone with a strong partisan identity will feel elated after an election victory and depressed after defeat. But partisans in Sweden also felt this way when key party issues were threatened or bolstered. This raises questions about whether this occurs in other polities. In a system strongly aligned on a left-right axis party status and issues may be more strongly coupled than in a system with a multidimensional party space. In addition, there are stages in the political cycle when party status and issues are more and less closely tied together. For example, between elections a battle over a specific piece of legislation may not threaten the party’s status. That allows strong partisans the freedom to break with the party support or oppose the issue on the basis of other identities and political considerations. But during a national election campaign, issues and party status become more tightly aligned. Opposition to one of the party’s key issues conveys disloyalty in the midst of a heated partisan battle. Third, and perhaps most importantly, what factors influence the strength of partisan identity? There are numerous possibilities at both the individual, group, and societal level worthy of investigation including party instability, pervasive corruption that erodes trust in parties, individual differences in the ability and desire to affiliate with groups, and finding a party that closely matches one’s political and social attributes.

Ultimately, weak partisanship in Europe and elsewhere is a cause for concern. There are clear problems with intense partisanship as current American politics so amply reveals. Partisans practice motivated reasoning, ignore well-grounded arguments, exhibit hostility and intolerance of out-partisans, and focus on winning or losing elections at the expense of pursuing a well-thought-out policy agenda. Nonetheless, partisan identity also generates enthusiasm for politics, maintains system stability, and motivates political engagement. In the absence of partisan identities, cynicism and disengagement are likely to proliferate, and new political forces including antipolitics groups can gain ground against more traditional parties sowing instability and extremism. Countries such as Italy with volatile and unstable parties provide ripe ground for the emergence of neo-nationalist, antipolitics parties such as the Five Star Movement. In the past, this type of marginal political party was held in check by voters’ stable attachments to established parties. The absence of stable and enduring partisan

identities creates an opening for antipolitics forces that have the ability to destabilize Western democracies.

### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Martin Rosema for providing the initial impetus for this research and the PIs of the British Election Studies, the Swedish Citizen Panel, the Italian National Election Study, and the LISS for providing space on their surveys for questions on partisan identity. The LISS panel data were collected by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands) through its MESS project funded by the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research. Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Leonie Huddy, Department of Political Science, Stony Brook University, 100 Nicolls Rd, Stony Brook, NY 11790. E-mail: Leonie.Huddy@stonybrook.edu

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## Supporting Information

Additional supporting information may be found in the online version of this article at the publisher's website

### Appendix S1: Item Wording

**Table S1.1a.** Partisan Identity Items in the Original Language of Each Country

**Table S1.1b.** Partisan Identity Items in Italian and Their English Translation

**Table S1.2a.** Ideological Intensity Scale – United Kingdom

**Table S1.2b.** Ideological Intensity Scale – Sweden Citizen Panel 8

**Table S1.2c.** Issue Intensity Scales – Italy.

**Table S1.2d.** Ideological Intensity Scale (Economic Issues) for Sweden

**Table S1.3.** Table Issue Importance Scale

**Appendix S2:** Analysis

**Table S2.1** Fit Statistics for 4-Wave Measurement Invariance (across waves) Model (BES Data)

**Table S2.2.** Fit Statistics for 4-Wave Multigroup Measurement Model (BES Data)

**Table S2.3.** Motivated Reasoning in the United Kingdom Among Labour and Conservative Party Supporters (corresponding to Figure 4)

**Table S2.4.** Motivated Reasoning in Sweden (corresponding to Figure 5)

**Table S2.5.** Motivated Reasoning in the Netherlands (corresponding to Figure 6)

**Table S2.6.** In-Party Vote in Italy (corresponding to Figure 7)

**Table S2.7.** Affective Polarization in the United Kingdom Among Conservative and Labour Party Supporters (corresponding to Figure 8)

**Table S2.8.** Affective Polarization in Sweden (Coalition) (corresponding to Figure 9)

**Table S2.9a.** Emotions in Sweden – Anger (corresponding to Figure 10)

**Table S2.9b.** Emotions in Sweden – Enthusiasm (corresponding to Figure 11)