Expressive vs. Instrumental Partisanship in Multi-Party European Systems

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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.
Abstract

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 US, 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 UK, 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 US helping to explain national differences in the intensity of partisan behavior.
Partisanship remains a powerful influence on mass political behavior within developed and developing democracies (Brader and Tucker 2009; Brader, Tucker and Duell 2013; Dalton and Weldon 2007; Green et al 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 et al 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 (Johnston 2006; Thomassen 1976; Thomassen and Rosema 2009; Dalton and Wattenberg 2000). Nonetheless, there is emerging evidence that the effects of partisanship persist even in complex multi-party European settings (Bankert et al 2017; Bartle and 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 remain central concerns for normative democratic theorists. We refer to partisanship grounded in this type of responsive and informed deliberation as instrumental. As a test of instrumental partisanship, researchers have contrasted its origins in long standing socio-economic cleavages with the effects of contemporary forces such as issue proximity and leader evaluations (Dalton and 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 and colleagues (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 US, 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 and Bankert 2017; Huddy and Willman 2017; Mason 2015). Expressive partisanship motivates a defense of the party in the face of challenging information, leads to the vilification of threatening outparties, 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 and Walden 2007). The expressive approach to partisanship is grounded in social identity theory (Green et al 2002; Huddy et al 2015).

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

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1 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 US (Cohen 2003; Dancey and Goren 2010; Druckman et al 2013; Lenz 2012).
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 outpartisans. But it 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.

In this review, we focus on several European democracies and evaluate evidence for and against an expressive model of partisanship. In so doing, we examine five strands of evidence that provide support for an expressive and against an instrumental approach: (1) the stability of partisan identity and its influence on vote choice, (2) motivated reasoning in defense of the party, (3) the greater role of partisan identity than issues and ideology in shaping vote choice and political behavior, (4) the existence of affective polarization in which partisans hold more positive feelings for their own and more negative feelings towards opposing political parties, (5) and the strong defensive emotions aroused by partisan threats and reassurances inherent within an election. Each facet of partisanship is drawn from social identity theory, an approach that 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 et al., 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; Fowler and Kam 2007; Ethier and Deaux 1994). 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 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 (Huddy 2013; Mackie et al 2000) throughout electoral cycles. 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 US, 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 multi-party systems than the American version because it does not confine the question to a finite list of 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 NY state residents, college students, and opt-in internet panels. This scale better predicted campaign activity and emotional responses than the standard measure. We (Bankert, Huddy, and Rosema 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 et al 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
manuscript, we draw heavily on these studies to evaluate the expressive partisanship model in multi-party 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), an online panel administered by CentERdata, Tilburg University, the Netherlands.\(^2\) 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) at the University of Gothenburg. We utilize data from Panel 8 (11/14/13–12/18/13) and add-on Panel 8-2 (12/10/13–1/7/14) (Martinsson et al, 2013), conducted some 9 to 10 months before the 2014 national election (9/14/2014). 16,130 panelists were invited 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 (09/01/14-09/07/2014), 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%.

\(^2\) 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. Non-computer households are provided with a computer and internet connection and the panel members complete monthly online surveys and receive payment for each completed questionnaire.
Data for the UK were taken from the 2015 British Election Study (BES) 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 2/14 to 12/16) 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 manuscript. In some instances we focus on wave 4, the wave with the largest subset of respondents asked to complete the partisan identity measures and pre-election 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.

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 in order 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 2013 Italian National Election Study (ITANES), an online and phone survey panel that is comprised of five waves. The ITANES online panel study 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 using quotas based on gender, age, education, and region.

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3 We dropped one more respondent who had missing values on more than two items of the partisan identity scale in at least one wave.
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 pre-election Wave 3, conducted between May and June 2012 and with a response rate of 87%, for key dependent variables such as pre-election vote preference.

**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 nation complicating comparisons across nations (Bankert et al 2017). In the Netherlands, respondents in the pre-election 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 UK 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]?” 86% of those in the UK indicated a party preference. In Italy, respondents were asked if there was a political party to which they felt closer than 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.
Partisanship was clearly higher in Sweden (91%) and the UK (86%) than in the Netherlands (61%) and Italy (49%). The partisan identity items were asked of respondents assigned to the identity module who indicated that they had a party. This meant that 9% of Swedes, 14% of those in the UK, 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 only approximately 10% of Dutch, Swedish, and UK residents were not asked the partisan identity scale. As we evaluate the expressive partisan identity model it is important to keep in mind that non-partisans 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 et al 1999; Leach et al 2008). Table 1 provides wording and responses to all 8 partisan identity questions included in pre-election wave 3 of the British Election Study (BES) (all original item wording is listed in Table A1a, A1b in Online Appendix A). The same items – though with different response options – were included in the 2012 LISS in the Netherlands, and the 2013-2014 Swedish Citizen panel. A modified version of these items was also included in the 2013 Italian National Election Study (ITANES). 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.

The partisan identity questions elicit considerable variance across countries, but that is partly a function of the inclusion of non-partisans in the Netherlands (29% who were not an adherent nor 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 UK 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 UK strongly disagree whereas 80% of the Dutch and 65% of Swedes say they never feel this

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4 All items in their original language can be found in the Online Appendix (Tables A1a-A1b).
way. In each national election study, we created a reliable scale of partisan identity, which was recoded from 0-1. Levels of partisan identity in each of the four countries are depicted in Figure 1 (see also Bankert et al 2017).

**Table 1: Partisan Identity Items in the United Kingdom (Pre-Election Wave 4: March 3-30, 2015)**

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

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

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. In earlier work, we conducted an item response analysis on items in the UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands to confirm that the scale has similar properties in all three European countries despite differing distributions. 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 (Bankert et al 2017).
**Figure 1: Distribution of Partisan Identity by Country**

![Histograms showing distribution of partisan identity strength by country](chart)

*Data:* 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).

*Note:* Partisan identity strength is scaled to range from 0 to 1.

**Partisan Stability**

As a first test of the expressive partisanship model, we examine the stability of partisan identity over time. It is expected to be somewhat immune to the short-term events that occur during an election campaign. As noted, this prediction differs from that of the instrumental model in which partisan strength should exhibit greater reactivity to contemporary events and “remember” those changes going forward (Fiorina 1981). Green and colleagues (2002) document the considerable stability of partisanship in the
United States, arguing that it is kept in place by stable underlying affiliations with gender, religious, ethnic, and racial groups. They argue that the social origins of partisanship promote an emotional attachment to the party, generate stability over time in partisan identification and vote choice, and diminish the political influence of short-term events.

There has been continued debate, however, on the stability of partisanship in more complex multi-party systems outside the US. Schickler and Green (1997) analyzed several panel studies in Germany and the UK 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 and Stewart 1998; Dalton and 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). 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 multi-wave 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 UK, we 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). We draw on data from the four-wave panel described earlier. This latter step is analogous to correlating errors across items at each time point but provides a more parsimonious solution to their common variance. This
model provides a good fit to the data (RMSEA=.058; CFI=.995) and exhibits configural, metric, and scalar invariance over time (see Table B1; Online Appendix).  

**Figure 2: Stability of Partisan Identity (BES)**

![Diagram of stability of partisan identity](image)

*Data: 2015 British Election Study online panel (Wave 1, 3, 4, and 7)*  
*Note: 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.*

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 thus 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=.993). 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 some wave-to-wave movement in levels of partisan strength as demonstrated by a significant link between identity at each wave and its prior wave. But 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 equally 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

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5 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 from the mean of all other scale items for respondents who had no more than two missing values. Only one respondent had a missing value following this step and was subsequently excluded from the analyses.
strength. Short-term factors may have altered identity strength between waves 3 and 4 (separated by roughly 6 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 UK.

This model was repeated separately for supporters of the two major parties – Labour and Conservative – across the same 4 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 multi-group 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 a good fit to the data (as seen in Table B2, Online Appendix). 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 seems to be 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.

It is important to note that the stability seen in party identity strength in the UK 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.

**Figure 3: Stability of Partisan Identity among Labour and Conservative Identifiers**

*Data: 2015 British Election Study online panel (Wave 1, 3, 4, and 7)*

*Note:* 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.

**Motivated Reasoning**

Analysis of the BES provides clear evidence of stability in partisan identity strength over time, 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 US demonstrates that partisans are more likely to accept information that is favorable and argue against information that is unfavorable towards their party (Bolsen et al 2014). Partisans also evaluate factual outcomes, such as economic indicators, in a more positive light when their party is in
power (e.g. Lebo and 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.

Much of this evidence in support of partisan motivated reasoning outside the US has focused on party cues and conformity. In various studies conducted in the UK, Poland, Hungary, Russia, and Denmark, partisans are more willing to adopt an issue stance when it is experimentally associated with their political party than without this link (Brader and Tucker 2009; Brader et al 2013; Slothuus and de Vreese 2010). 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. 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 likely than weak partisans to overestimate their chances of success as a measure of defensive motivated reasoning.

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6 Brader and colleagues (2013) 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.
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. 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 B3). 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 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 with their party the greater their 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 biased perception of their party’s electoral chances but strong ideologues do not. Interestingly, education has a negative effect in the model, indicating more realistic assessments of a party’s fortune among the best educated.

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7 Ideological intensity in the UK 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 Appendix 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 values on its own yield similar results.
Levels of partisan identity are somewhat lower in Sweden (with numerous political parties) than the UK. Nonetheless, we expect strong partisans in Sweden to exhibit similar levels of defensive reasoning as those in the UK. Respondents in the Swedish Citizen Panel 8, conducted roughly 9 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 UK).  

We examine the determinants of motivated reasoning among all partisans in the Swedish Citizen Panel.

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8 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 Appendix 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.
The results of this analysis are shown in a regression coefficient plot (Figure 5; for the complete analysis see Table B4). Partisan identity boosts confidence that one’s party will be included in the government coalition. In contrast, issue intensity has no effect on motivated reasoning. Consistent with results from the UK, more highly educated partisans 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, the findings demonstrate that strongly identified partisans in Sweden overestimate their chances of joining a government.

Figure 5: Electoral Confidence and Partisan Motivated Reasoning in Sweden

Data: Swedish Citizen Panel (Panel 8, Panel 8-2)
Note: 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 B4 for complete analyses).

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 B5). 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 believe they will be part of the governing coalition rises 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 increased 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 although its effects are smaller in size (see Table B5, Online Appendix). In addition, ideological intensity significantly boosted electoral confidence in the Netherlands. ⁹

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⁹ 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 6: Electoral Confidence and Motivated Reasoning in the Netherlands

Data: 2012 Dutch Parliamentary Election Study

Note: 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 B5, Online Appendix. The dependent variable is dichotomous.

In sum, a strong partisan identity enhances defensive reasoning and boosts confidence in an electoral victory. This conclusion holds for the UK, Sweden, and the Netherlands, countries with differing levels of partisanship and differing numbers of major and minor political parties. It is also evident both before (UK, Sweden) and after (Netherlands) election results are known. Partisan identity strength 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 US, strong partisans vote more frequently for their party, vote at higher rates than political independents, care more about politics, and participate more actively (Abramson and Aldrich 1982; Brady, Verba and Schlozman 1995; Campbell et al 1960; Rosenstone and 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 US, showing that strong partisan identities are far more likely to motivate campaign-related political action than strong and consistent ideological stances. More specifically, in US 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).

InParty 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 2016). Drawing on the UK, Dutch, and Swedish (Citizen Panel 8, 8.2) data discussed in this manuscript 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 U.K. at the lowest levels of partisan identity to a high of .9 for those at the highest levels. Ideological intensity also boosted inparty voting, 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 inparty voting in Italy using the ITANES data (see Table B6). Despite the considerable instability in political parties and governments during data collection for the ITANES (2011-2013), partisan identity measured in early 2011 had a substantial effect on expected inparty vote in Italy obtained from wave 4 (just prior to the 2013 election). The predicted probability of voting for the inparty (based on analyses in Table B6) 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 boosts inparty voting but its effects are much smaller than that of partisan identity. 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.

**Figure 7: Inparty Voting in Italy**

![Graph showing inparty voting in Italy](image)

**Data:** 2013 Italian National Election Study

**Note:** 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 B6 for complete analyses).

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10 Ideological intensity is measured by 5 questions on social and economic matters. For item wording, see Table A2c.
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, merging into new ones, 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 Grillos’ 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 and 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 also 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.

**Political Engagement**

In our past research, we have documented the effects of partisan identity on political action (Huddy et al 2015; Bankert et al 2017). In the US, 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 multi-party context, Bankert, Huddy, and Rosema (2017) replicate the US results, showing that political engagement among partisans in Sweden, the Netherlands, and the UK 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 US, scholars have provided abundant evidence of affective polarization manifested as increasing hostility between Democrats and Republicans (Mason 2015; Iyengar and Westwood 2015). Affective polarization is not just confined to the US 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 US (Lee 2016). We might also expect this kind of animosity to be heightened in two-party systems or a multi-party 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 outparty. We first examine this possibility in the UK, 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 inparty ratings from outparty 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 B7, Online Appendix). 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 outparty. 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.

**Figure 8: Determinants of Affective Polarization in the UK**

Data: British Election Study (Wave 4)
Note: Coefficient plot shows OLS regression coefficients (dots) and their respective 95% confidence intervals (lines). The dependent variable is constructed by subtracting the outparty rating from the inparty 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 B7 for complete analyses).

Critics might argue that the British political system is similar to the US because it is dominated by two major parties and that these findings will not generalize to other more complex European multi-party systems. We extend our analysis to Sweden, a multi-party 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 (Hagevi 2015; Meffert et al. 2011; Gonzalez et al. 2008). This complexity allows us to examine the role of partisan identity in shaping affect towards parties of the in and opposing coalition (i.e. outcoalition). 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. Inparty 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 outcoalition 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 inparty bias within the coalition, in addition to polarization between coalitions, because ingroup bias is a staple feature of all social identities and should be evident in these data. 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.\textsuperscript{11} 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. Inparty 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 aligned

\textsuperscript{11} Analyses include a new measure of ideological intensity that was created in the 2014 Swedish election panel based on ten items concerning economic matters (see Table A2d).
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 inparty 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 findings 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 incorporating the coalitional nature of government that is predominant in many multi-party systems.

**Figure 8: Affective Polarization in Sweden**

*Data: 2014 Sweden Internet Campaign Panel*

*Note: 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 inparty and parties from the incoalition (excluding the inparty). The dependent variable in the model on the right is constructed as the difference between the inparty and ratings of the out coalitional*
parties. All variables are scaled to range from 0 to 1 for better comparison, except for age, which is measured in decades (see Table B8 for complete analyses).

**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 and Banks 2014; Marcus et al 2000; Smith et al 2008; van Zomeren, Spears, and Leach 2008; Valentino et al 2011). 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 fare more effective in arousing strong emotions.

To assess defensive emotion in the US, we exposed respondents to an experimental blog message embedded in a survey. Respondents typically 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 blog entry, reassurance was worded as if written by an inparty member whereas threat came from someone in a member of the outparty. The Swedish design involved a basic 2 X 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 X 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 X 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 X Reassurance condition, the blog entry highlights the promising future of the Social Democrats (and the declining status of the Moderates) while in the Issue X 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 importance rating of each issue was combined to create for that party’s identifiers to create a measure of issue importance (see Table A3).

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 Table B9a and B9b). 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.

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. 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. We had not expected issue threat to arouse equal levels of anger among partisans but Sweden’s political parties fall on a strong left-right dimension and a threat to a party’s key issues may implicitly convey electoral threat to the party’s status. The interaction between issue threat and issue importance, on the other hand, did not yield any significant results suggesting that threatening the party’s policies did not affect anger even among partisans who rate the issues as personally important.
Figure 10: Anger in Response to Status and Issue Threat

Predicted Levels of Anger

Data: Swedish Citizen Panel 8 and 8-2
Note: 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 B9a in Online Appendix for complete analyses).

Similar effects emerge for enthusiasm among Swedish partisans (Figure 11; see Table B9b for complete analysis): Status and issue reassurance both interact with partisan identity to boost enthusiasm among the strongest partisans. 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 same generate the same level of emotion when the issue is threatened or reassured.
Figures 11: Enthusiasm in Response to Status and Issue Reassurance

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**Data:** Swedish Citizen Panel 8 and 8-2  
**Note:** 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 B9b in Online Appendix for complete analyses).

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**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 inparty at higher rates than weak partisans, like their own party more than similar parties and display animosity towards the outparty, and exhibit defensive emotions when their party is threatened and positive emotions when it is reassured. Moreover, we have demonstrated that partisanship in the UK is relatively stable over the course of a volatile election cycle. Given these findings, we conclude that the major difference between the US and Europe does not lie in the nature of partisanship but instead in the levels of partisanship, which vary widely across countries.

As noted, levels of partisanship were low in the Netherlands and Italy and 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 and 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 and Wattenberg 2000; Kayser and Wlezien 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 and Maraffi 2013) shaped political system dominated by the older left-right cleavage and a newer anti-politics 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 5 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 party status is less likely to be affected by a single legislative victory or defeat because it does not alter the formal balance of partisan power and status. At these times, between elections, other identities and political considerations may drive political involvement and action, based on concerns about a specific issue or event. Third, and perhaps most importantly, what factors influences 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, and 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 outpartisans, 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 anti-politics 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 anti-politics parties such as the 5 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 anti-politics forces that have the ability to destabilize Western democracies.
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