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**Apathetic Accountability**

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**Apathetic Accountability**

**by**

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## **Abstract**

### **Apathetic Accountability**

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Conventional wisdom suggests that parties adjust their ideological positioning to gain vote share. However, recent findings indicate that voters only alter their perceptions of party policy positions based on information they find credible. I extend these findings by testing whether citizens change their opinions toward a political party in response to information produced during a campaign. Using data from two German Election Panel Studies covering 2002-2013, I demonstrate that partisans change their opinions toward their party based on information produced during the campaign. Moreover, I demonstrate that partisans are more likely to utilize information produced in campaigns than nonpartisans to form their perceptions of a party's ideological positioning. These findings have important implications for party election strategies and for political representation.

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## **Introduction**

Do voters respond to political parties shifting ideological positions? Scholars have long tested the premises of spatial modeling after Down's articulation in *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (Downs 1957). Although initially conceived in a two party context, spatial models applied in multiparty contexts come to similar conclusions that parties have an electoral incentive to shift positions toward the median voter (Lin et al. 1999, Schofield 2007, Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009). Indeed, existing research has confirmed that parties in multiparty systems have a tendency to shift toward the median when responding to rival party policy shifts (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), after it has experienced a reduction in voter support (Adams and Somer-Topcu 2009), and when the electorate's policy preferences shift (Adams et al. 2004).

Implicit in these models of party competition are that citizens perceive the ideological changes of political parties. However, recent findings indicate that citizens adjust their perceptions of party positions differently based on the type of policy information produced by the parties (Adams et al. 2011, Fortunato and Stevenson 2013, Fernandez-Vazquez 2014, Fernandez-Vazquez and Somer-Topcu 2017, Adams et al. 2016). In light of these results, this piece considers whether citizens update their opinions toward political parties based on different indicators for party policy positions. I test this inquiry using data from the German Longitudinal Election Study which tracks the same respondents across three electoral periods. I link the survey data of respondents who identified with the same political party across multiple elections with expert survey placements and manifesto positions of the political parties each respondent identifies with and find that party supporters respond to shifts in ideological information produced by parties during campaigns.

Whether citizens respond to ideological information provided by political parties has important implications for normative conceptualizations of democracy. The lack of citizen response to changes in information provided by parties would undermine the accountability mechanism of democratic institutions. Moreover, determining the type of information voters respond to has important implications for spatial theories of party competition. If voters do not respond to ideological information produced by political campaigns, parties will not have an incentive to alter their ideological positions to gain vote share. Instead, parties would have a greater incentive to highlight the performance of the governing party as well as focus on valence issues.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section reviews the current literature on citizen perceptions of party positioning and considers whether citizens will adjust their positions in response to changes in information on the party's ideological positioning. After providing the theoretical foundation for the type of information citizens use to form their perceptions of a party's ideological position, I discuss the characteristics of the German political system as well as the data and methods that will be utilized in the study. Next, I present results that indicate that partisans adjust their opinions toward their party based on changes in ideological information generated during a campaign. After establishing that partisans respond to policy information generated during a campaign, I explore the impact of partisanship on how citizens form perceptions of political parties and present results that indicate that partisans are more likely to utilize information generated during campaigns than nonpartisans. The final section explores how these findings can be applied to different electoral systems.



## **Do Partisans Respond to Party Campaign Information?**

Theoretical and empirical research explore the type of information citizens use to update their beliefs on party positioning. One strand of research has found that citizens utilize different forms of behavior of the governing party to gauge the party's policy positions. For instance, people are more likely to perceive two parties as ideologically closer to one another when they are in a governing coalition with one another (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013, Adams et al. 2016). Citizens also use actual policy output to determine a parties ideological positioning on an issue (Adams et al. 2019). This body of work suggests that actions taken by political parties in government are utilized by citizens when forming their perceptions of a party's policy positions.

In addition to producing policy information while in government, parties attempt to convey their policy positions during campaigns. While parties produce this information to alter their policy image, the extent that citizens utilize this information to update their beliefs about party positioning varies based on the type of campaign information. In an influential study, Adams, Ezrow and Somer-Topcu (2011) examine the manifesto positions of parties across 12 different political systems and find that citizens do not alter their perceptions of party positions based on the party manifestos. Further evidence comparing the effects of policy produced by the governing party and the positions the party held in its manifesto's finds that citizen's utilize actual policy outputs of the governing party more than information produced from party manifesto's (Adams et al 2019). The evidence above suggests that citizens may discount the positions articulated in manifestos due to a disconnect in the party's behavior and rhetoric.

While citizens may discount the party rhetoric expressed in manifestos, they use alternative sources of information that are produced during campaigns. For instance, citizens were found to use similar types of information produced during a campaign as

political experts when forming their opinions about parties (Adams et al. 2014). Moreover, the information that parties produce in the media alters the voters' perceptions of their policy positions (Somer-Topcu and Tavits 2019). These findings indicate that although citizens are confronted with an array of information on party policy positions during a campaign, they apply different weights to the information sources to form their perceptions of each party's positioning.

Findings that address the information citizens use to form their perceptions of party positions during campaigns are only valuable if citizens alter their actions in response to the information produced by political parties. If citizens do not alter their behavior in response to policy information produced during campaigns, parties would find it more advantageous to focus on other tactics such as stressing valance issues or performance dimensions of politics. I test whether citizens alter their behavior in response to policy information produced by parties during campaigns taken by parties by considering whether partisans update their level of support for political parties in response to changes in the policy positions taken in manifesto and the broader campaign.

Empirical evidence demonstrates that partisans are likely to update their attachment toward a party based on their perceptions of a party's ideological positioning. In the American context, perceptions of party policy positions were consistently found to alter partisan opinion toward their own party (Jackson 1975, Franklin and Jackson 1983, Franklin 1984). Moreover, in the European context, British voters were found to base their feelings of attachment to a party off their ideological beliefs (Milazzo et al. 2012). These studies support the notion that if partisans perceive changes in the ideological positioning of their political party, they will alter their opinions of the party itself.

Additional research examining aggregated opinion suggest that citizens update their opinions in response to policy information. Soroka and Wlezien (2010) find that

public opinion in western democracies responds thermostatically to government policy outputs, where increases (decreases) in government spending in a policy domain will lead to decreases (increases) in public preference for spending. Empirical evidence of thermostatic responsiveness has been extended in the realm of defense policy to the UK, France, Germany, and Sweden (Eichenberg and Stoll 2003). Citizens also update their beliefs in response to broader changes in policy. Erikson, Mackuen and Stimson (2002) find that an aggregated measure of the public's ideological beliefs responds to policy outputs, whereby more liberal policy leads to less public support for liberal policies. While these studies do not analyze voter perceptions, their findings imply that citizens update their opinions to reflect changes in policy.

The preceding discussion of citizen responsiveness to policy information at macro and micro levels suggests that partisans will update their level of support for their political party as a response to changes in manifesto and campaign rhetoric.

## **Empirical Analysis**

I evaluate these hypotheses in the context of German politics. Examining the dynamics of party positioning and citizen perceptions in Germany offers theoretical benefits in considering how voters process information provided by parties across Europe. The German party system provides variation in party type with the prominent inclusion of the Green Party in electoral politics. Moreover, Germany's parliamentary and proportional electoral system is the prototypical European political system. Therefore, results from this analysis are more applicable to other European countries than if the study were completed in a single member district plurality electoral system, such as the UK.

I include the five largest German political parties in my analysis of partisan information processing. Table one displays the average vote share of each party as well as the average self placement of the party members over the 4 electoral periods included in the study. The German Party System contains two mainstream parties that, together, account for more than half of the total vote share. The Christian Democrats (CDU/CSU; hereafter CDU) are a mainstream right leaning party who advocate for economic liberalism and upholding national and cultural identity. The average vote share of the party for the four electoral periods included in this study was 37%. Supporters of the CDU were also the most right leaning of party supporters surveyed with an average self placement of 6.3.<sup>1</sup> The Social Democratic Party (SPD) of Germany is the major left leaning mainstream party in Germany with the second highest average vote share (28.86) across the four elections included in the study. Although it has advocated Marxist and socialist platforms in the past, it currently advocates for a social market economy and social justice. The average

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<sup>1</sup> The ideological scale is numbered from 1 to 11, so 6 is the moderate position of the voter.

respondent records a self-placement of 4.52 indicating that the SPD primarily derives its support from the moderate left segment of the population.

**Table One: Party Level Data**

Party	Avg Self Placement	Vote
CDU/CSU	6.89	37.05
FDP	5.02	9.86
Grünen	4.08	9.07
LINKE	2.50	10.34
SPD	4.52	28.86

The next three parties included in the study are smaller parties that each garner an average of 8% to 12% of the vote share. The Free Democrats (FDP) are a market liberal party that is more pro business than the CDU but advocates for socially liberal policies and the expansion of political rights. The party has primarily served as the junior coalition partner of the CDU from 1949–1956, 1961–1966, 1982–1998 and 2009–2013, although it served as the junior coalition member to the Social Democratic Party from 1969 to 1982. FDP supporters had an average ideology of 5.02 reflecting the more socially liberal views the party expresses compared to the CDU. Next, the Left Party primarily advocates for the incorporation and expansion of democratic socialism to overcome the externalities of capitalism. The party was founded in 2007 as a result of the merger between The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and the Electoral Alternative for Labour and Social Justice (WASG). Respondents were asked about the ideological positioning of the PDS prior to the merger, and about the positioning of the Left Party after the merger. Its members are the most left-leaning of all party members with an average self-placement of 2.24. Finally, the Alliance 90/Greens (hereafter Greens) are a niche party in Germany that focuses on

environmental issues. The Greens served as junior coalition partners to the SPD from 1998-2002 and from 2002-2005. Green supporters have an average ideological self-placement of 4.02.

I use two different measures of the party's campaign positions. The first measure is the left-right position derived from the party's manifesto. Prior to each election, each party writes a manifesto expressing the policy beliefs it will push while in office. The Comparative Manifesto Project codes each of these expressed positions according to over 70 categories that incorporate both the policy topic and the position on that topic. The left-right positions are calculated through changes in the aggregate number of sentences devoted to each code. The second measure of a party's ideological positioning during a campaign was based on expert surveys. I use the Chapel Hill Expert Surveys as the measure of expert placement, which compile the left-right party positions of all major parties in Germany based on evaluations by predominately political scientists specializing in European politics (Bakker et al. 2015, Polk et al. 2017). After each election, eleven to eighteen experts were asked to locate each party on the ideological spectrum.

While the institutional features of the German party system make it an optimal context for exploring how partisans react to campaign information, it is also the only Western European country where long-term panel survey data is available that includes detailed questions about respondents party identification, left-right self-placement and the left-right placement of each of the major parties in the political system. The incorporation of panel data into the study of party perceptions is necessary in understanding how citizens perceive the ideological positioning of political parties. Measuring how individual perceptions of party positioning and their levels of party attachment change over repeated interviews allows for the control of variation in the individuals being surveyed by holding unit level effects constant across interviews. The theory being tested is also dynamic

whereby changing conditions lead to a change in behavior. Panel data is especially well suited for questions involving change because of its ability to incorporate the temporal order of effect into the model. In addition, studies of citizen perceptions of party positioning have relied on mean survey responses of party placements as measures of citizen party perceptions (Spoon and Klüver (2017) are an exception). The use of mean party placements can lead to biases because studies aggregate different respondents in a uniform manner (Fortunato et al. 2018). For instance, a small subset of inaccurate respondents can be driving the results of the aggregate population with regards to a lack of response to party policy shifts.

The data was taken from the German Longitudinal Election Study given multiple times over the course of three elections. I incorporate survey waves that were administered in the run up to each national election. The first panel consists of waves administered prior to the 2002, 2005 and 2009 elections and the second panel consists of waves administered prior to the 2005, 2009 and 2013 elections.

## Methodology

In the first set of models (equation 1), the dependent variable is the measure of party attachment.<sup>2</sup> I also include a lagged measure of party attachment to control for long term causes of partisan attachment.<sup>3</sup>The variable of interest, is calculated as the absolute distance between the respondent's left-right position and the party's campaign position. Even though, I am utilizing campaign party positions, which are created exogenous of the individual voter, there is still the possibility that strongly attached voters to a political party will shift their ideology in the direction the party is moving, meaning changes to their left-right positioning would be a reflection of changes in the party's left-right positioning. While this is a possibility in the model of party attachment, it would result in strongly attached voters reacting less to ideological position changes, thereby reducing the influence of changes in distance on attachment. Therefore, concerns of partisanship endogeneity would work against my results. As was outlined above, citizens use the behavior of the governing party to derive a party's policy positioning (Bawn et al. 2012). Thus, I include a dummy variable indicating whether the party the respondent identifies with is in government.

I utilize ordered logit models to account for the possibility that the difference between a moderately attached and attached party identifier may be different than the distance between an attached and very attached party identifier. I also drop all respondents

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<sup>2</sup> To assess whether a respondent felt attached to a party, they were first asked the following: "Many people in Germany feel close to a particular political party for a longer period of time even if they occasionally vote for another party. What about you? In general terms, do you feel attached to a particular political party? And if so, which one?" If respondents identified a party they felt attachment towards they were asked a follow-up question to gauge the extent of their attachment: "All in all, how strongly or weakly attached are you to this party?"

<sup>3</sup> Party positions are characterized by a high stability over time where they change very little from one election to the next. The high correlation between current and lagged values of the predictors generates a problem of multicollinearity in first difference models defeating the benefits of including the separate effect of the current and lagged variable (Fernandez-Vazquez 2014). Therefore, I employ lagged dependent variables in all models.



who do not identify with the same party across the three periods they were interviewed.<sup>4</sup> I include a lagged distance variable so that the distant variable measures the short term ideological changes in the distance between the party and its supporter. Lastly, I include a dummy variable to control for whether the party occupied the government prior to the election.

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<sup>4</sup> Three periods of variation in the dependent variable are necessary when using a lagged dependent variable model. The survey only asks respondents about their feelings of attachment for the party that they have the most attachment. If this party changes between periods, it is impossible to measure the extent that their attachment has changed for the party they felt attached to in t-1.

### **Results: Ideological Accountability**

In this section, I examine whether partisans adjust their feelings of attachment toward their party based on the ideological position their party takes during the campaign. Table two contains two sets of models. In the first set, all party identifiers are included. In column one, the distance variable is calculated using the expert campaign positions. The coefficient for ideological distance is  $-.43$  with a standard error of  $.08$ . These results imply that partisans respond to changes in ideological information produced by campaigns by adjusting their level of attachment toward their party. When the campaign indicates that the party is more (less) ideologically distant from the partisan, they will feel less (more) attached to the party. The governing party variable does not reach conventional levels of statistical significance meaning voters do not punish their focal party for holding office.

In column 2, I use the party's manifesto position to calculate the distance variable as opposed to the expert placement. While political experts take all the campaign information (including party manifestos) into account when determining a party's ideological position, the manifesto distance variable is based on the distance of the party manifesto from the supporter. The coefficient is  $-.52$  with a standard error of  $.08$  indicating that distal changes based on party manifestos influence the attachment that partisans feel toward their party in a similar manner to expert placements. The findings that partisans react to the information conveyed in manifestos and information that experts care about runs counter to normal findings on voter perceptions of party positioning.

**Table Two: Level of Party Attachment**

	All Parties		Green Party Excluded	
	(1) Exept	(2) Manifesto	(3) Expert	(4) Manifesto
Expert Distance	-0.430*** (0.0787)		-0.386*** (0.0811)	
Manifesto Distance		-0.516*** (0.0862)		-0.479*** (0.0879)
Expert Distance (t-1)	-0.0909 (0.0739)		-0.0997 (0.0767)	
Manifesto Distance (t-1)		-0.114 (0.0720)		-0.128 (0.0743)
Governing Party	0.197 (0.183)	-0.0115 (0.184)	0.159 (0.198)	-0.107 (0.199)
Attachment (t-1)	0.109 (0.102)	0.130 (0.100)	0.0810 (0.109)	0.0876 (0.107)
/				
cut1	-2.212*** (0.406)	-2.332*** (0.409)	-2.179*** (0.429)	-2.434*** (0.448)
cut2	0.180 (0.387)	0.110 (0.384)	0.117 (0.410)	-0.0822 (0.420)
cut3	3.784*** (0.548)	3.723*** (0.536)	3.641*** (0.565)	3.458*** (0.562)
cut4	5.748*** (1.090)	5.685*** (1.082)	5.606*** (1.101)	5.422*** (1.096)
N	478	478	428	428
aic	1014.9	1004.5	927.8	916.5
bic	1048.3	1037.8	960.3	949.0

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ 

Prior research has shown that Niche parties are punished more for moderation by supporters than mainstream parties (Adams et al. 2006). If niche party supporters are more reactive to the information produced by their party's campaign, the results from the first two models would show a larger effect for this group of supporters than those of the broader electorate. Therefore, in columns 3 and 4, I rerun the results from the first two models without the supporters of The Greens. Although the magnitude of the effect is slightly reduced (.39 as opposed to .43) the coefficient still surpasses all conventional measures of statistical significance. Taken together the results indicate that partisans respond to changes

in the ideological positioning of party manifestos and to similar information that political experts deem relevant in determining a party's ideological positioning.

## **Do Partisans Utilize Campaign Information Differently from Nonpartisans?**

The previous results indicate that partisans change their opinions toward a party in light of new information produced in the party's manifestos (model 2) and wider campaign activities (model 1). These results run counter to existing studies which find that voters do not utilize the information in manifestos when updating their perceptions of a party's ideological positioning (Adams et al. 2011, Adams et al. 2016, Fernandez-Vazquez 2017). However, existing models of party perceptions make the implicit assumption that all citizens weigh the information produced by political parties in a similar fashion. In this section, I argue that partisans weigh the information produced by political campaigns differently than nonpartisans.

It is perhaps not overly demanding to expect party supporters to respond to the policy positions expressed by their party more than other parties during political campaigns. Work on motivated reasoning has demonstrated that citizens are likely to seek out information that confirms their prior beliefs, suggesting that partisans are more likely to seek out information from their political party (Redlawsk 2002). In addition to partisans seeking out information produced by their political party, party elites are also more likely to interact with their partisans more than nonpartisans (Janda and Colman 1998, Tavits 2012). Finally, experimental work has demonstrated that partisans are more likely to find the information produced by their party as credible (Boudreau and Mackenzie 2014, Carsey and Layman 2006}. In combination, empirical evidence demonstrates that partisans are both more likely to receive information from their party and are more likely to find that information as an accurate representation of the party's ideological position.

In addition to experimental evidence supporting that partisans will utilize campaign information more than nonpartisans, partisans weight the information produced by campaigns in a similar manner to political experts. Adams, Ezrow and Somer-Topcu

(2014) examine partisan perceptions of political parties across 12 countries on the issue of European integration. They find that partisans are more likely to weigh party information produced during campaigns in a more similar manner to political experts than nonpartisans. Building on these findings, this section explores the type of information partisans use to update their perceptions of party positions on the broader ideological spectrum.

To test whether partisans are more likely to utilize information produced during the campaign than nonpartisans I construct a dependent variable that measures the difference between a respondents perception of the party and the campaigns left-right position of the party. I utilize the same procedure as Spoon and Klüver (2017) by calculating the absolute distance between the left-right policy position of a political party and the respondents perception of the party's position. The individual perception measures are retrieved from the German Election Panel Study. Each participant was asked prior to the election to locate each party on the ideological spectrum.<sup>5</sup> Higher values of the dependent variable indicate a greater degree of misperception. I also include a lagged measure of misperception in each model to account for the effect of past levels of misperception on current levels of misperception.

The party identifier variable is specified in separate models as a binary measure for whether the survey respondent identifies with the party and as a count variable based off the respondent's response to the question "All in all, how strongly or weakly attached are you to this party?." Both independent variables are expected to have a negative relationship with misperception meaning feelings of attachment toward a party are expected to reduce the extent of ideological misperception. In addition to the governing party control variable that was included in the first set of models, I also control for the left-right distance of the

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<sup>5</sup> The question was worded as follows: "In politics people often talk about "left" and "right". How would you describe the following parties?"

respondent from each party to account for the distinct effect of ideological proximity on voter perceptions of party positioning.

The results in Table 3 encompass 4 party shifts across 2,600 respondents. The mean magnitudes of party shifts were .4 to .5 units on the 1-11 policy scales. The parameter estimates of the first set of models treat partisanship as a binary measure. The coefficient estimate of the party member dummy variable is -.13 with a standard error of .03. These results imply that party membership has a negative impact on the extent of disagreement between the information produced during a campaign and the respondent's perception of the party. Substantively, these results mean that if a party produces information during the campaign that indicates that it is shifting one unit to the right (left) on the ideological spectrum, partisans will shift their perceptions of the party's positioning .13 units more to the right (left) than nonpartisans.

The lagged dependent variable is positive and statistically significant meaning a substantial portion of misperception is caused by misperceptions carried over from previous elections. These results suggest that misperceptions are not just caused by short term changes in a party's ideological positioning. The dummy variable for whether the party was serving in government was positive and statistically significant indicating that citizens weigh ideological considerations of governing parties differently than experts. These results are supportive of the notion that voters will utilize campaign information less if the party was in government.

In the second model, the misperception of campaign position dependent variable was calculated using the party manifesto ideological positions instead of the expert positioning. The party supporter dummy variable had a similar coefficient as the expert model of .12 with a standard error of .03. Taken together with the first model, the coefficients suggest that partisans are more likely to utilize campaign information when

forming their perceptions of a party's ideological positioning than nonpartisans. Although the effects of partisanship remain similar across models, the results of whether the political party occupied the parliament are opposite in the manifesto based model. These results indicate that voters' perceptions of party positioning were closer to the manifesto positions when the party was in government, but further from the experts. The opposite effects might be the result of governing parties utilizing their manifestos in a different manner than opposition parties. For instance, parties in government may be incentivized to discuss their future plans when speaking to the public but highlight their past accomplishments in their manifestos. This means that voter perceptions of party behavior while in government would more closely align with the information produced in the party's manifestos.

The second set of models run attachment as a count variable as opposed to a binary indicator. In column 3, the degree of member attachment variable is positive and statistically significant indicating that more attached members utilize campaign information more than less attached members. Substantively, these results indicate that if a party produces information during the campaign that indicates that it is shifting one unit to the right (left) on the ideological spectrum, a party supporter who feels very attached to the political party will shift their perceptions of the party's ideological position .18 units more to the right (left) than partisans who are moderately attached to the party and .36 units more the right (left) than nonpartisans. The control variables have similar effects as they did in the model where party attachment was measured as a binary variable.



**Table Three: Misperception of Campaign Positions**

	Binary Member		Levels of Attachment	
	(1) Expert	(2) CMP	(3) Expert	(4) CMP
Party Supporter	-0.130*** (0.0381)	-0.117*** (0.0346)		
Degree of Member Attachment			-0.0692*** (0.0155)	-0.0653*** (0.0141)
Expert Distance	0.00114 (0.00195)		0.00123 (0.00193)	
Manifesto Distance		0.00100 (0.00155)		0.00107 (0.00154)
Expert Misperception (t-1)	0.179*** (0.0134)		0.179*** (0.0134)	
Manifesto Misperception (t-1)		0.180*** (0.0123)		0.179*** (0.0123)
Governing Party	0.318*** (0.0293)	-0.106*** (0.0281)	0.320*** (0.0293)	-0.104*** (0.0281)
_cons	1.489*** (0.0344)	1.575*** (0.0339)	1.493*** (0.0344)	1.580*** (0.0339)
N	8622	8622	8622	8622

Standard errors in parentheses

\*  $p < 0.05$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$

## **Conclusion**

This paper has two central conclusions. The first is that partisans change their opinions of parties based on information provided during the campaigns. These findings are good news for normative conceptions of democracy that rely on accountability. Parties must consider the electoral repercussions of ideological movements, suggesting that legislators concerned with reelection are constrained in the extent of ideological drift that can occur between elections.

Second, partisans weigh the information presented from their party during a campaign in a different manner than nonpartisans. These findings are good news for theories of democratic accountability and have implications for theories of party behavior. For example, spatial theories of party competition often assume that political parties shift their ideological information in response to the median voter. The findings that partisans weigh information presented during campaigns more heavily than nonpartisans would suggest that parties should consider their audience when thinking of campaign tactics. For instance, instead of parties moderating their manifesto positions, they may experience greater levels of electoral success by appealing to their base during the campaign. Ideologically appealing to their base may also carry indirect electoral benefits such as more dedicated partisans being more willing to canvas and volunteer for the party (Clarke et al. 2004, Heath 2007, Finkel and Opp 1991).

Future studies should further incorporate partisanship into their models of party competition and explore whether any party member characteristics influence the extent to which partisans react to changes in ideological proximity. Moreover, although the findings from this study can be applied to other proportional parliamentary systems, future studies should test whether these effects hold in different party systems and in countries with varying levels of development.

This study also opens questions to the institutional features that determine whether short term changes in partisanship are influenced by ideological factors or performance factors. Structural features such as the electoral rules could have a significant impact on the threshold voters have for ideological drift. Another possible institutional feature is whether citizens are more responsive to ideological proximity changes for parties ruling in coalition with other parties due to the reduction in the clarity of the ideology of their respective party.

More broadly, this study is part of a growing body of scholarship that is utilizing panel data to understand the determinants of partisanship in a European context. While this study only included data from the German Longitudinal Election Study, panel studies in other countries such as Denmark, the United Kingdom, and Sweden should be incorporated into cross national studies of partisanship across Europe. Exploring the dynamics of partisanship across different contexts will provide further clarity into the role of partisanship in the political process.

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