(Mis)perception of Party Congruence and Satisfaction with Democracy

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Abstract

This study investigates the implications of perceived ideological incongruence between voters and their supported parties for satisfaction with democracy. Using panel data from the British Election Study, we first demonstrate that greater misperceptions of party positions correspond to higher perceived ideological distance from one's preferred party. We then show that such increased perceived incongruence is associated with reduced satisfaction with democracy, even when accounting for actual incongruence based on expert surveys of party positions. This pattern is also found when using several alternative measures and specifications, as well as in cross-sectional data from Europe. The findings suggest subjective perceptions of representation, potentially distorted by misperceptions, play a role in how ideological congruence relates to citizen attitudes toward the political system. While limitations warrant caution in interpreting the relationship, the results suggest that potentially inaccurate beliefs about parties can distort the link between representation and satisfaction with democracy.

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Introduction

Political parties play a crucial role in representing the preferences of supporters (Downs, 1957; Stokes, 1963). Consequently, many studies have concentrated on the congruence between the ideology of parties and their supporters (Arnold, Sapir and de Vries, 2012; Arnold and Franklin, 2012; Butler and Dynes, 2016; Powell, 2010; Best, 2023; Costello et al., 2020; Werner, 2019; Mattila and Raunio, 2012; Carroll and Kubo, 2018), including the implications for political representation and voters' attitudes toward the political system (Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2020; Wardt and Otjes, 2022; Marchal and Watson, 2022*a*; Noordzij, De Koster and Van Der Waal, 2021). However, the perception of party ideological positions is often flawed (Nasr, 2021; Ahler and Sood, 2018; Levendusky and Malhotra, 2016; Meyer and Wagner, 2020; Dahlberg, 2013) because citizens often misperceive party positions (Ahler and Sood, 2018; Levendusky and Malhotra, 2016; Meyer and Wagner, 2020; Dahlberg, 2013; Carroll and Kubo, 2017; Grand and Tiemann, 2013; Calvo, Chang and Hellwig, 2014) which may influence perceived ideological gaps between parties and their voters. This study focuses on how these potentially inaccurate perceptions of party-supporter ideological congruence influence citizens' satisfaction with democracy.

A substantial amount of research has examined factors shaping citizens' satisfaction with democracy (e.g., Hobolt 2012; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017; Dassonneville and McAllister 2020; Loveless and Binelli 2020; Rohrschneider 2005; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Valgarðsson and Devine 2022)[1]. Several studies specifically investigate the impact of alignment between voters and parties (Marchal and Watson, 2022*b*; Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2020, 2018; Goldberg, van Elsas and de Vreese, 2020; Wardt and Otjes, 2022; Van Egmond, Johns and Brandenburg, 2020; Ibenskas and Polk, 2022), including how party incongruence can influence forms of citizen satisfaction (Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2020; Mayne and Hakhverdian, 2017). While congruence can be objectively measured using expert surveys (Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2020, 2018), it is also shaped by subjective voter perceptions (Wardt and Otjes, 2022; Van Egmond, Johns and Brandenburg, 2020; Best and Seyis, 2021). If voters inaccurately perceive parties' stances due to misperceptions, such misperceptions could distort assessments of the alignment between party positions and their own preferences.

[1] See Singh and Mayne 2023 for a review

This study examines how voters' subjective perceptions of party representation relate to satisfaction with democracy. When voters perceive incongruence between their own positions and those of the parties they support, dissatisfaction with democracy may increase, irrespective of the actual level of representation. Conversely, perceptions that preferred parties are more ideologically aligned may correspond to greater democratic satisfaction, even if the objective degree of congruence is weak. Thus, *mis*perceptions of party stances could distort assessments of party-supporter incongruence, impacting perceived representation and thus satisfaction with democracy, separately from the actual degree of congruence. That is, subjective evaluations may impact democratic attitudes, where inaccurate beliefs potentially distort such evaluations.

Our main analysis uses longitudinal data from the British Election Study (BES) to examine how perceived party incongruence, potentially stemming from misperceptions of party positions, relates to satisfaction with democracy. The panel structure permits examining these within-respondent relationships over time. The UK party system provides a relevant context, where prior research has highlighted perceived gaps between voters' ideological positions and those of British parties (Brandenburg and Johns, 2014). Exploiting this setting, we examine whether misperceptions correspond to greater perceived incongruence between voters and their preferred parties and whether such perceived incongruence is negatively associated with satisfaction with democracy while accounting for objective congruence measures.

We first demonstrate that perceived incongruence – the subjective ideological gap between voters and their preferred party – is associated with greater misperception of party positions, even when accounting for the amount of actual incongruence based on expert assessments of party placements. Our main analysis then investigates how perceived incongruence relates to voters' satisfaction with democracy. Our analysis reveals that greater perceived incongruence between parties and voters corresponds to lower satisfaction with the democratic process. Notably, when perceived incongruence is considered, the effect of actual party-supporter incongruence is not statistically significant. These findings are shown to be robust across several model specifications and alternative measurement approaches.

To assess the generalizability of our findings beyond the UK case, we also conduct a supplementary cross-national analysis utilizing data from European countries a recent module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). The results corroborate the patterns observed in

the panel study.

Taken together, the results underscore the relevance of subjective evaluations, potentially shaped by misperceptions, in how citizens assess democratic performance. While we cannot definitively establish causal mechanisms in the present study, the consistent pattern across analyses suggests subjective perceptions of representation play some role in shaping democratic attitudes, over and above the degree of actual ideological congruence. The paper concludes with a discussion of the limitations and future directions for research, including the need for better identifying the direction of relationships between subjective perceptions, objective congruence, and attitudes toward democracy.

Party incongruence, Satisfaction with Democracy, and the Effects of Misperception

A large literature has investigated the influence of various factors on citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Hobolt, 2012; Mayne and Hakhverdian, 2017; Dassonneville and McAllister, 2020; Loveless and Binelli, 2020; Rohrschneider, 2005; Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Ridge, 2022). Factors contributing to lower satisfaction include disproportionality and government fractionalization (Christmann and Torcal, 2018), voting for losing parties (Singh, Karakoç and Blais, 2012; Blais, Morin-Chassé and Singh, 2017; Nemčok, 2020; Curini, Jou and Memoli, 2012), and the ideological representativeness of government policies (Dahlberg and Holmberg, 2014; Dahlberg, Linde and Holmberg, 2015; Stecker and Tausendpfund, 2016; Blais, Morin-Chassé and Singh, 2017; Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011; Ferland, 2021; Mayne and Hakhverdian, 2017).

Several works have specifically investigated the consequences of the degree of a voter's representation by the parties they support (Marchal and Watson, 2022*b*; Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2020, 2018; Goldberg, van Elsas and de Vreese, 2020; Wardt and Otjes, 2022; Van Egmond, Johns and Brandenburg, 2020). This ideological alignment between the ideological positions of political parties and their supporters is central to the effectiveness of party representation (Werner, 2019; Costello et al., 2020; Costello, 2021; Mattila and Raunio, 2012; Dalton, 2018; Wardt and Otjes, 2022; Carroll and Kubo, 2018; Boonen, Pedersen and Hooghe, 2017). Some consequences found

of incongruence between parties and supporters have included decreasing support (Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2018; Marchal and Watson, 2022*b*), decreasing antipathy toward other parties (Marchal and Watson, 2022*b*), and driving voters to support emerging parties (Wardt and Otjes, 2022).

Bakker, Jolly and Polk (2020) specifically explores the relationship between citizen dissatisfaction and the representation of voters by parties, revealing that party incongruence on issues intensifies citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy, leading to support for anti-establishment parties. Van Egmond, Johns and Brandenburg (2020) meanwhile show that there is a correlation between perceived congruence with the closest party and satisfaction with democracy.

Party congruence with supporters has been conceptualized in terms of both objective party positions and subjective, perceived positions. Some definitions of incongruence involve an objective evaluation of the distance between the parties' and voters' views, as gauged by expert surveys (Bakker, Jolly and Polk, 2020; Marchal and Watson, 2022*a*; Polk et al., 2017; McEvoy, 2012). Perceived congruence, meanwhile, refers to the subjective distance between the positions of parties and supporters, as measured by surveys of party placements and voter surveys (Adams, Ezrow and Wlezien, 2016; Adams et al., 2004; Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011; Ezrow et al., 2011; Green, 2007; Schumacher, De Vries and Vis, 2013; Stiers, 2022; McAllister, Sheppard and Bean, 2015; Mattila and Raunio, 2006, 2012; Boonen, Pedersen and Hooghe, 2017). Actual and perceived congruence can differ because voters may have inaccurate or biased perceptions of party positions.

Citizens' ability to perceive the ideological positions of political parties accurately is influenced by a wide range of factors, such as education levels and political knowledge or a lack of clarity in party labels affects the ability of citizens to acquire or process information related to party positions (e.g., Banducci, Giebler and Kritzinger, 2015; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Meirick, 2013; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Carroll and Kubo, 2017; Busch, 2016; Nasr, 2020; Dahlberg, 2013; Bartels, 1996). In particular, voters with lower education levels or political knowledge tend to place party ideology less accurately because variation in sophistication limits citizens' capacity to acquire and situate partisan information. In addition to such information gaps, other literature has found that partisan identities can shape information processing or result in motivated reasoning influencing voters' understanding of policy issues (e.g., Grand and Tiemann, 2013; Bartels, 2002, 2008; Carsey and Layman, 2006; Evans and Andersen, 2004,

2006; Evans and Pickup, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011; Jerit and Barabas, 2012), which may skew their understanding of party policy positions. Thus, beyond information deficits, partisan-motivated distortions in position estimates can exacerbate gaps between perceived and actual party placements.

These misperceptions of where parties fall on the left-right ideological spectrum can, in turn, distort voters' assessments of how ideologically distant they are from those parties.[2] Importantly, voter misperceptions about party positions can distort assessments of ideological congruence. When voters inaccurately perceive a party as more ideologically distant from their own stance than objective measures indicate, such misperceptions correspond to greater perceived incongruence. Alternatively, when a voter inaccurately perceives a party as closer to their ideology than expert placements suggest, this misperception might increase their subjective sense of ideological alignment with that party (Merrill, Grofman and Adams, 2001; Drummond, 2010).

We argue that the subjective perceptions of representation should be associated with democratic attitudes. The actual ideological mismatch between voters and the parties they support may naturally contribute to perceptions of incongruence, but there may be a distinct impact on perceived incongruence separate from the effects of actual incongruence. That is, potentially inaccurate perception of positions should influence satisfaction with democracy by distorting voters' perceived ideological linkage to parties, distinct from the actual level of policy representation.

In the following analysis, we describe and implement empirical tests to evaluate these questions. The analysis proceeds in two steps, first examining the correlation between misperception of party positions, actual incongruence, and perceived incongruence. Second, we investigate whether respondents' level of satisfaction with democracy decreases with greater perceived incongruence between themselves and the party they support, holding actual congruence constant.

[2] Misperception may be a reason why they would support parties with policies objectively diverging from their own (Hooghe and Stiers, 2016; Voogd and Dassonneville, 2020; Dassonneville, Dejaeghere and Hooghe, 2020; Lesschaeve, 2017; Steiner and Hillen, 2021; Boonen, Pedersen and Hooghe, 2017). Alternatively, when there is a larger real ideological distance between a voter and the party they support, it may be more difficult for that voter to accurately perceive party position, as may be implied by work such as Bartels (2002) and Evans and Andersen (2004).

Data and Measures

Measuring Perceived and Actual Congruence

While cross-sectional designs are often used to study satisfaction with democracy, this approach may not fully account for the effects of individual characteristics. To address this limitation, we use panel data that allows us to measure changes in key variables for the same individuals over multiple surveys, allowing us to gain better insight into the relationships by exploiting the temporal dynamics, holding constant unobserved individual-level factors.

Specifically, we use data from the British Election Study data. The UK is useful for studying party representation because of a lack representativeness in the party system, which is often attributed to the convergence of the two major political parties (Brandenburg and Johns, 2014). However, in a cross-sectional study of British voters, Brandenburg and Johns (2014) have found that democratic satisfaction correlates with the lack of perceived proximity to the nearest identified party and not the lack of choices between the major parties. Thus, UK voters' attitudes toward democracy are known to be sensitive to how well parties accurately represent their views.

The British Election Study provides periodic surveys of political opinions, perceptions, and preferences, which provides a panel structure appropriate for our study. Because of the variation across regional party systems and contexts in the UK, we restrict the sample used in the analysis to England. Because this study focuses on parties and supporters, only respondents who indicate supporting a party are included. The panel sample is tracked in waves between 2014 and 2019 (Schmitt et al., 2021). All respondents in these panels were asked to respond to self-reported perceptions of the parties' left-right positions. Five years of surveys are included in the analysis, from Wave 4 in 2015 to Wave 18 in 2019. Thirteen waves include the required questionnaire about self-reported perceptions of their supported party's left-right position and ten of these waves include the information needed to analyze satisfaction with democracy.

Our first aim is to measure perceived and actual incongruence. To measure the left-right ideological positions of British parties over time, the mean ideological positions obtained from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) in 2014, 2017, and 2019 are used (Jolly et al., 2022), similar to Bakker, Jolly and Polk (2018, 2020). While expert placements are still ultimately subjective

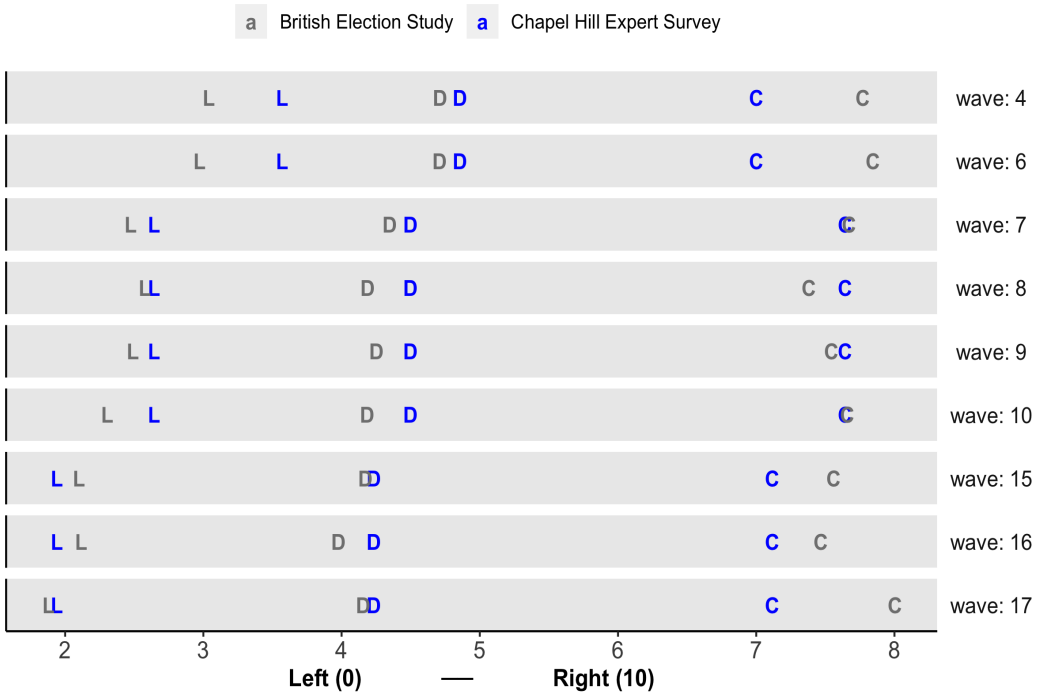


Figure 1: CHES EXPERT PLACEMENTS AND AVERAGE BES RESPONDENT MISPERCEPTIONS (NOTE: C = CONSERVATIVES, L = LABOUR, D = LIBERAL DEMOCRATS.)

judgments of parties' "actual" positions, they are external to voters' own judgments and do reflect experts' deliberate efforts to place parties for analytical purposes.[3]

These CHES positions are then matched with the responses from the British Election Study (BES) for the closest year of the survey wave (see Appendix A, Table A.1 for the exact survey structure).[4] CHES experts were asked the same question as the BES respondents regarding the left-right positions of each party along the ideological spectrum.

Figure 1 presents the average voter's perceived ideological position of the major parties in England on a scale from 0 to 10, where scale 0 represents the "left" in ideology and scale 10 represents the "right". The Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrat parties are denoted by capital letters *C*, *L*, and *D*, respectively. The gray placements correspond to the average perceived positions from BES voters, while the blue placements correspond to the average

[3]An alternative notion of "actual" positions could be based on averages from voter perceptions. We conduct a robustness check using average voter placements and specifically more sophisticated voter placements in Appendix C.9, which produces substantively similar results to those reported below.

[4]Note that the nature of the CHES data means the temporal variation in incongruence across time in the panel fixed-effects analysis is due mainly to the voters' self-placement. However, an additional analysis substituting the average respondent position as the measure of objective congruence enables variation and is discussed after the main analysis below and in the Appendix.

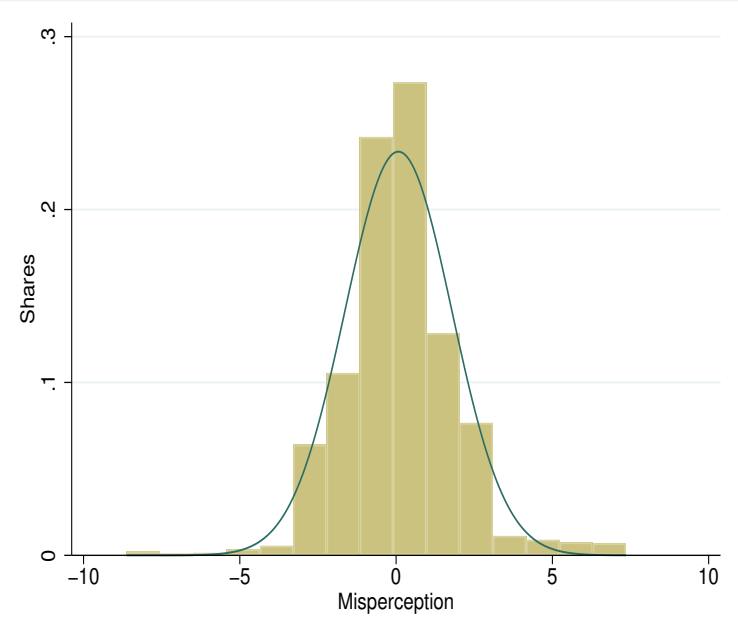


Figure 2: THE DISTRIBUTIONS OF MISPERCEPTION (BES WAVE 7)

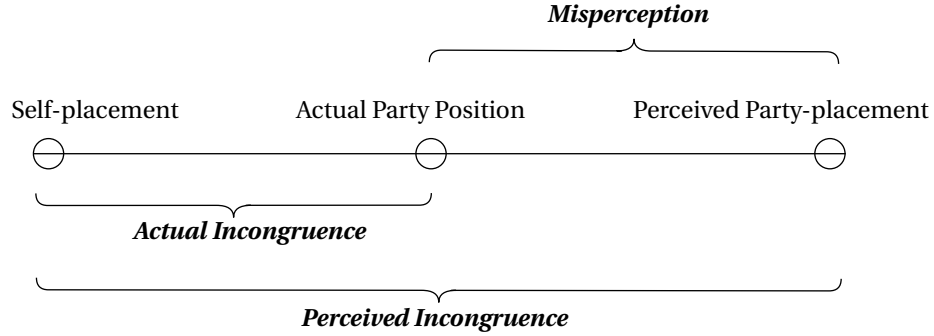
positions measured by Chapel Hill Survey experts. The average voter's perception of each party's position is relatively close to the actual party position measured by experts.

However, there is heterogeneity in citizens' misperceptions of party ideology. Figure 2 shows the distribution of the difference between an individual voter's perception and the corresponding actual position for wave 7, as well as continuous lines indicating the fitted normal distributions. The distribution is dispersed, with noticeable proportions of respondents located away from the center.

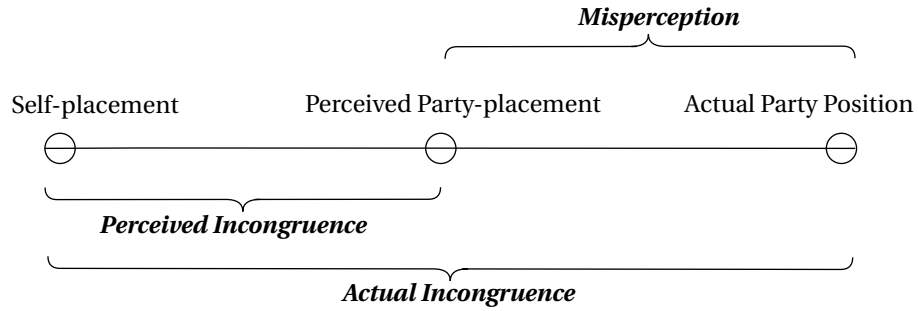
Misperception and Incongruence

In this section, we examine the relationship between perceived incongruence, actual incongruence, and misperceptions. We first illustrate these concepts and how inaccuracies in party placements can distort voters' assessments of representation. Two example scenarios show how voters misplace party positions and how this affects the actual and perceived political incongruence between themselves and the party they support. First, BES respondents may self-perceive their own political ideology to be closer to their perceived party placement than to the actual position assessed by CHES experts, as shown in Figure 3b. Conversely, BES respondents may self-place themselves closer to the actual position than the location they perceive for political

parties, as shown in Figure 3a. In this scenario, misperception leads to an underestimation of the degree of representation.



(a) PERCEIVED PARTY POSITION FARTHER THAN ACTUAL PARTY POSITION



(b) PERCEIVED PARTY-PLACEMENT IS CLOSER THAN ACTUAL PARTY POSITION

Figure 3: MISPERCEPTION OF PARTY LOCATIONS: TWO SCENARIOS

Here, *Misperception* ($\hat{\pi}_{i,t}$) is defined as the absolute perceptional gap between an individual respondent's perception of their preferred party's position and the corresponding average perception from the CHES expert placements.[5] Specifically, it is calculated as

$$\hat{\pi}^{p}_{i,t} = |\alpha^{p}_{i,t} - \bar{\alpha}^{p}_{t}|, \tag{1}$$

Where, for respondent i in wave t, $\alpha^{p}_{i,t}$ represents their perception of the party's left-right ideological position and $\bar{\alpha}^{p}_{t}$ is the average position of the same party reported by the expert survey. This produces a distance, $\hat{\pi}_{i,t}$, between the respondent and the experts, which indicates the level of misperception of the respondent i regarding the position of the party p on wave t. Specifically, $\hat{\pi}_{i,t}$ measures the misperception that voter i has about the party they voted for in

[5]Preferred party is coded based on party identity variable in each wave of BES surveys "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?" to determine voters' party identification.

the previous general election.

Actual incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$) is defined as the absolute difference between the individual respondent's self-placement on general left-right positions and the corresponding average expert placement. This is calculated as

$$\gamma^{p}_{i,t} = |\alpha^{s}_{i,t} - \bar{\alpha}^{p}_{t}|, \tag{2}$$

α^{s}_{t} denotes voter i's self-placement in wave t. *Perceived incongruence* ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$) is measured as the absolute gap between a BES respondent's self-placement and the perceived position of the party they support. $\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$ is calculated as

$$\hat{\gamma}^{p}_{i,t} = |\alpha^{s}_{i,t} - \alpha^{p}_{t}|. \tag{3}$$

Finally, we consider the following panel regression model by including both individual-specific fixed effects and dummies for each wave:

$$\hat{\gamma}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \pi_{i,t} + \beta_2 \gamma_{i,t} + \eta C_{i,t} + v_i + m_t + e_{it}, \tag{4}$$

where $\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$ denotes respondent i's perceived incongruence of their own affiliated party in wave t and $\gamma_{t,t}$ denotes the actual incongruence between respondent i and their party in wave t. The misperception of respondents about the ideological position of the party they support at time t is represented by $\pi_{i,t}$. The perceived positions of political parties can be influenced by the context in which they compete (Wagner and Meyer, 2023).

The results of the panel analysis exploring the relationship between perceived incongruence and voters' misperception are presented in Table 1. We first show the bivariate relationships between misperception and both forms of congruence. In column (1) of the table, we first show the relationship between voters' misperception and *actual* party incongruence, which we establish has a positive association. That is, voters who hold misperceptions about their party's ideology also tend to have a larger discrepancy between their own preferences and the positions of the party they support.[6] In column (2), we find a positive correlation between misperception

[6]Although we do not explore the causes of misperception in the present study, additional exploratory analysis of change in misperception using a panel fixed effects model shows that change in actual congruence, change in

Table 1: REGRESSION PARTY MISPERCEPTION ON PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL VOTER-PARTY INCONGRUENCE, BES PANEL

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.199***	0.327***	0.254***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.372***
			(0.009)
Constant	1.007***	0.934***	0.559***
	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.033)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓	✓
N	130305	130305	130305

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

and perceived party incongruence. This indicates that individuals who misperceive their party's position not only have a greater objective gap between their own ideological position and their party's position but also subjectively perceive a larger divide.

The subsequent model (column 3) shows the specification described in 3, examining the relationship between misperception and perceived incongruence while controlling for the level of actual incongruence. Here, we see that both actual incongruence and misperception explain independently significant proportions of variation in the perception of incongruence among voters.

The findings underscore the importance of misperceptions in shaping the perceived incongruence between voters and political parties, with a positive association between the amount of misperception of a party's ideological positions and voters' perceived incongruence. Even when controlling for actual incongruence, the degree of misperception correlates with voters' perception of incongruence. This suggests that misperception plays a distinct role in shaping voters' perception of incongruence, separate from the influence of actual incongruence.[7]

We also performed an analysis using a pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) approach, which

parties' actual positions, and change in voters' self-reported ideological stances over time are all associated with change in misperception levels, suggesting misperceptions themselves can also be shaped by actual movement in the locations of both parties and voters.

[7]While not the focus of the present study, we also present an empirical illustration of the correlates of party position misperceptions in Appendix D, finds that misperceptions are reduced by factors such as education, political interest, media use, and partisan attachment are associated with higher misperception on average. Since some of the same individual factors influence satisfaction with democracy, it is possible they may do so indirectly by influencing misperceptions of representation.

accounted for demographic characteristics such as age, education level, gender, survey year, party affiliation, and the number of information sources reported by each respondent. The results of this analysis, presented in Table C.6 of Appendix C, are consistent with the panel findings in Table 1.

Perceived Incongruence, Actual Incongruence, and Satisfaction

Having established the link between misperceptions and perceived incongruence in the previous analysis, we now turn to our main investigation of how such perceived incongruence relates to satisfaction with democracy, accounting for actual incongruence based on expert surveys. To investigate this relationship, we consider the following panel regression model which again utilizes individual-specific fixed effects to control for individual heterogeneity

$$\hat{y}_{i,t} = \alpha_1 \gamma_{i,t} + \alpha_2 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{5}$$

where $\hat{y}_{i,t}$ denotes the semi-standardized measurement of respondent i's democratic satisfaction.[8] $\gamma_{t,t}$ denotes the actual incongruence between respondent i and their party in wave t and $\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$ denotes the perceived incongruence of the respondent i' of their own affiliated party in wave t. v_i captures the respondent-specific fixed effects, and m_t captures the time (wave) effect.

Columns (1) and (2) in the upper panel of Table 2 report the estimation results using satisfaction with democracy as the dependent variable. Column (1) considers the case where perceived incongruence is not included as a regressor, while column (2) shows the results when both perceived and actual incongruence are included in the model. In column (1), actual incongruence negatively correlates with satisfaction with democracy at the 5% level.

Once perceived incongruence is also included in the model, the association between voters' actual incongruence and satisfaction with democracy is no longer statistically significant, while perceived incongruence has a significantly negative association with voters' satisfaction with

[8] *Satisfaction with Democracy* is normalized as follows. The respondents were asked: "On the whole, how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with how democracy works in the UK?" The interviewee responds on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 4 ranging from "*Very dissatisfied*" to "*Very satisfied*". We normalize so that the response "*Very dissatisfied*" is valued at -1.5 and "*Very satisfied*" is valued at 1.5. Then we divide the distribution by its standard deviation. In this way, the mean response across the population can be interpreted as standard deviations away from a neutral effect.

Table 2: PANEL REGRESSION: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION, BES PANEL

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.007**	-0.001
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.015***
		(0.003)
Constant	-0.469***	-0.455***
	(0.010)	(0.010)
Individual FE	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓
Observations	93213	93026
Adjusted R^2	0.069	0.069

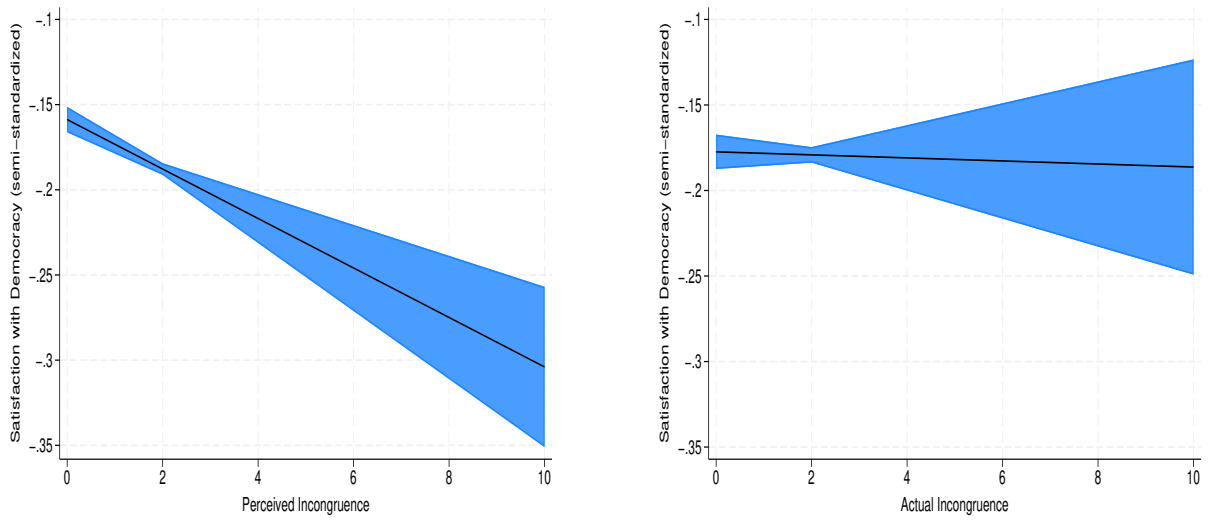
Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

democracy. A one-unit increase in perceived incongruence is associated with a 1.5% decline in standardized satisfaction with democracy. The estimated relationships of perceived and actual voter-party incongruence on satisfaction with democracy are plotted in Figure 4. As shown, a larger perceived incongruence is correlated with a decrease in voters' satisfaction with democracy, while the association of actual incongruence is not statistically significant when both measures are included.

While the association with actual incongruence is not statistically significant when accounting for perceived incongruence, it is important to note that the overall results show that this notion of partisan misalignment still relates to democratic satisfaction. That is, greater objective distances between voters and parties still can contribute to dissatisfaction, but much of this effect likely occurs via the influence on perceived incongruence. Consistent with the notion that subjective perceptions are most important, the overall pattern of results suggests that the remaining components of perceived incongruence exhibit a consistent association with satisfaction across specifications.

To evaluate the robustness of this result, we also conducted several additional analyses shown in the Appendix. First, in column (3) of Appendix Table C.4 we show a model that adds a control for misperception itself to assess its influence alongside perceived and actual



(a) BES: PREDICTED VALUES OF DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION BY PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE

(b) BES: PREDICTED VALUES OF DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION BY ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE

Figure 4: BES: PREDICTED EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL PARTY-SUPPORTER INCONGRUENCE ON DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION

incongruence on satisfaction with democracy. Here we find no statistically significant effect for misperception when actual and perceived incongruence are accounted for and the effects of perceived incongruence remain nearly the same as those presented above. While perceived incongruence is associated with greater misperception, the effects of the former are present separately from the degree of misperception.[9]

Second, we performed an analysis using a pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) approach, which accounted for demographic characteristics such as age, education level, gender, survey year, party affiliation, and the number of information sources reported by each respondent. The results of this analysis, presented in Table C.6 of Appendix C, are consistent with the findings in Table 1.[10]

A third set of additional analyses aims to partially address the potential endogeneity of perceived incongruence, detailed in Appendix C.4. The first of these uses lagged measures of incongruence and democratic satisfaction, which relates the level of satisfaction to perceived

[9] In addition, all findings in the supplementary analyses of satisfaction with democracy presented in the appendix and described below also remain robust to controlling for misperception.

[10] We further investigate in this Appendix an alternate approach using ordered logit regression with individual respondent random effects, where the dependent variable is the ordered categorical level of satisfaction with democracy. The results are consistent with the main results in the linear fixed effects model.

incongruence in the prior survey wave. Similar to our main analyses, the lagged measure of perceived incongruence retains a significant association with lowered democratic satisfaction when including current perceived incongruence and lagged satisfaction with democracy. Second, another analysis examining changes in satisfaction with democracy over time as the dependent variable is detailed in Appendix C.5, which further corroborates the main findings. Third, we also explored an instrumental variable approach, described in Appendix C.6, which also corroborates the main results. While it is not possible to fully eliminate potential endogeneity issues with these data, these supplemental analyses provide some additional evidence consistent with satisfaction with democracy being at least partially influenced by perceived incongruence.

A fourth set of additional analyses considers a series of alternative measures. First, while expert surveys provide a useful measure to capture parties' "actual" positions separately from the survey respondents, an alternative approach is to utilize average placements from voters to serve as a consensus estimate that varies with each wave. We conduct an analysis, shown in Appendix C.9, that substitutes the expert left-right party placements used in the main analysis with the mean positions from BES respondents – both the overall set of respondents and a subset of respondents likely to be more informed in their placements – for calculating measures of actual incongruence. To identify a relatively more sophisticated set of respondents, we used respondents having post-graduate degrees or above. The results using this voter-based measure of parties' positions remain substantively similar to those presented, whether using the measure based on all respondents or on the more sophisticated subset. This provides further reassurance that findings do not depend solely on the nature of the expert data.

To complement the analysis using the left-right ideology measures, we also examined an alternative approach to estimate a latent measure of ideological position based on responses to multiple issue scales using Blackbox scaling (Poole, 1998; Poole et al., 2016). This facilitates measuring expert and respondent locations based on latent policy preferences rather than interpretations of abstract left-right semantics. For self-placements, basing the measure on several specific issue positions may also be less sensitive to endogeneity than left-right placements. For this analysis, we utilized the BES expert ratings, which have positions for party positions on multiple issues but are limited only to waves 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 in 2019, allowing only a cross-sectional approach. We applied this method to BES waves with expert and respondent

ratings on four available issues: immigration, redistribution, environment, EU integration. The results using the latent ideological measures mirrored the main findings for left-right placements. The details are provided in Appendix C.7.

Finally, we also conducted supplementary analyses examining the roles of congruence in each of these specific policy issues. While our theoretical focus is on congruence in overall ideological orientation, domain-specific measures provide an opportunity for examining the consistency of this pattern. Using the same BES data just described, we replicated our models using separate policy scales for immigration, redistribution, environment, and EU integration. The issue-specific results exhibit patterns similar to the main findings using the left-right scale, with greater perceived incongruence predicting reduced satisfaction across issues. Details on the separate issue scale models are described in Appendix C.8. Though exploring the differences across these issues due to variability in salience and knowledge across domains is beyond the scope of the present study, the consistency across the issue-specific analyses lends additional support to the conclusions from the approaches using the left-right measure.

Cross-National Sample of European Democracies

As our main panel analysis focuses on a single country context, examining whether similar relationships between misperceptions, incongruence, and satisfaction emerge in other contexts. To explore this, we use a cross-national sample from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) across 14 European countries in Module 5 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems from 2015 to 2021. Examining this broader set of political systems helps assess if perception-driven gaps in ideological representation generally correlate with lower democratic satisfaction when accounting for actual policy incongruence. We utilize CSES data on voters' perceptions of party positions, self-placements, and satisfaction to estimate cross-sectional models analogous to the main results.

We estimate the following specification:

$$\hat{y}_i = a_1\gamma_i + a_2\hat{\gamma}_i + \theta\tilde{C}_i + \eta X_t + \phi Y_i + \epsilon_i, \quad (6)$$

where $\tilde{C}_i$ is a set of demographic characteristics of the respondents, including household income (binned), gender, highest education, marriage status, employment status, and household size. We also control for survey years and the country of respondent i by including X_t and Y_i, respectively. The rest of the notation remains the same a Equation (5).

Table 3: REGRESSION: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION, EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES (CSES)

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.026***	-0.012
	(0.008)	(0.009)
Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)		-0.041***
		(0.009)
Constant	-1.043***	-1.031***
	(0.210)	(0.219)
Year dummies	✓	✓
Country dummies	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓
Observations	9327	8664
Adjusted R^2	0.229	0.227

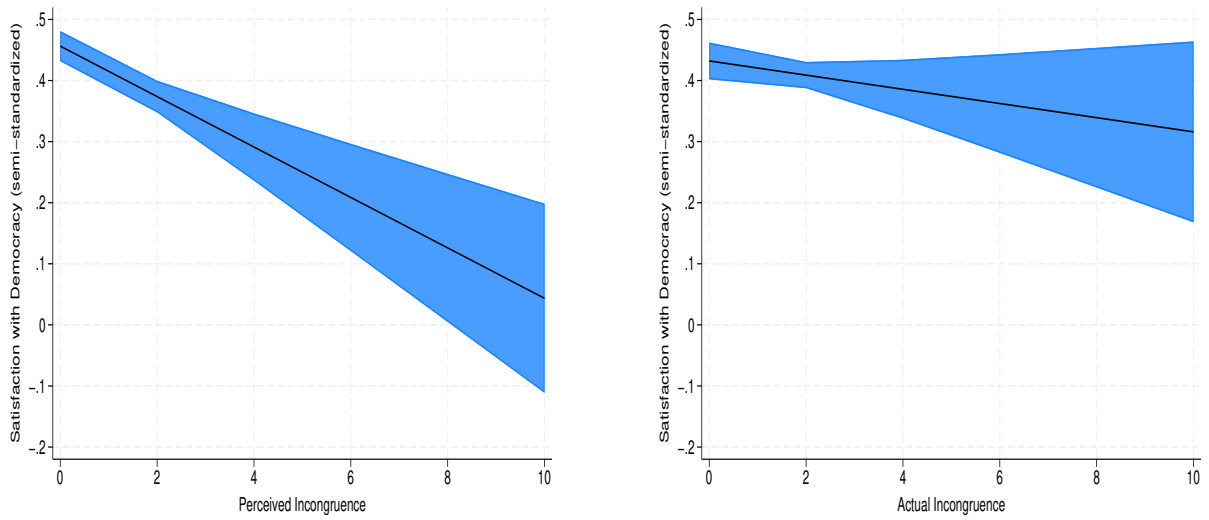
Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 3 reports our findings using pooled cross-sectional samples. Column (1) illustrates that actual incongruence has a statistically significant negative association with respondents' satisfaction with democracy in the model that does not include perceived incongruence. However, when perceived incongruence is included in columns (2), the correlation between actual incongruence and satisfaction with democracy is no longer statistically significant. Instead, perceived incongruence is statistically significantly associated with voters' satisfaction with democracy.

This association again supports the notion that voters' perception of the mismatch between themselves and the party they support is more important to the relationship with satisfaction with the political system than actual incongruence, which may only have an indirect effect.[11]

[11] We also find cross-national evidence using the CSES cross-sectional sample from Europe for the earlier study regarding the correlation between party misperception and perceived and actual voter-party incongruence. The results are reported in Appendix C.3.



(a) CSES: PREDICTED VALUES OF DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION BY PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE

(b) CSES: PREDICTED VALUES OF DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION BY ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE

Figure 5: CSES: PREDICTED EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL PARTY-SUPPORTER INCONGRUENCE ON DEMOCRATIC SATISFACTION

Although not able to isolate the with-respondent relationships between variables as in the panel design above, this cross-national correlation suggests there is some generalizability of the correlations reported above using the BES data.

Conclusions

Effective representation of voter preferences lies at the heart of a well-functioning democracy. A critical factor in this representational linkage is the degree of alignment between a political party's issue positions and the preferences of its supporters. When party incongruence exists, it signifies a misalignment between the positions parties adopt and the policy expectations of those who support them, which can fuel political dissatisfaction. To what extent do voters' potentially inaccurate perceptions of party positions, rather than the actual positioning of parties, shape the relationship between incongruence and dissatisfaction?

To address this question, we differentiate between actual and perceived party incongruence. Perceived incongruence refers to the subjective gap that voters perceive between their own political views and the positions of the parties they support. Actual incongruence, in contrast, captures the gap between voters' views and more objective assessments of party positions, repre-

sented by expert assessments. Perceived incongruence hinges on how accurately party policy stances are understood, as misperceptions can distort assessments of ideological alignment. Thus, voters may subjectively perceive (in)congruence with their preferred parties even when such (mis)alignment is inconsistent with more impartial evaluations of party positions.

Our empirical analysis investigates the role of potentially inaccurate perceptions of party positions in shaping democratic satisfaction using a panel regression design with longitudinal data on voters in England. We first establish that perceived incongruence is correlated with misperception of the position of the supported party. Then, our main analysis shows that greater perceived party incongruence is associated with lower satisfaction with democracy among voters, while actual incongruence has no effect when both variables are considered. That is, we find that greater perceived incongruence between the party and voters is associated with a lower level of satisfaction with democracy for respondents, separately from the actual degree of congruence with the positions of the parties they support. The findings indicate that subjective perceptions of party incongruence, which are partly a function of misperceptions of party positions, can contribute to lower satisfaction with democracy. A series of alternative measures and specifications using the panel data and a cross-sectional analysis of European countries corroborates these findings.

The findings suggest that voters who feel they are not well represented by the parties they support are associated with less satisfaction toward democracy, separate from their actual degree of representation by those parties. Although objective representation influences perception, the pathway from objective representation to satisfaction is mediated through citizens' perceptions. This implies that the degree of actual representation by parties of their voters will have limited direct impact on citizens' attitudes toward democracy, while potentially inaccurate perceptions could play a decisive role.

Our study builds on recent work on the consequences of party congruence, such as Bakker, Jolly and Polk (2020), suggesting that subjective perceptions contribute to democratic satisfaction. The results reinforce existing findings that a lack of perceived ideological congruence undermines satisfaction with the party system (Wardt and Otjes, 2022) and the democratic system overall (Brandenburg and Johns, 2014; Stecker and Tausendpfund, 2016; Van Egmond, Johns and Brandenburg, 2020) by highlighting the perceived congruence as an important con-

tributing factor. In particular, our findings extend the work of Brandenburg and Johns (2014), who previously demonstrated that reduced democratic satisfaction in the UK is associated with policy distance from parties. These findings also relate to work on US institutions that shows perceptions of ideological proximity to representatives driving positive attitudes toward legislative institutions (Kirkland and Banda, 2019). Further, the results complement those of Ridge (2022) on the importance of voters' subjective perceptions for citizens' satisfaction with the democratic process.

Several limitations are important to note. Literature on political system support and democratic satisfaction suggests that such attitudes are endogenous to a variety of features of the political system and perceived representation may be similarly capable of influencing these attitudes. Yet, it is also likely that some part of the relationship is determined by a mechanism whereby placements result from a type of motivated reasoning, as seen in other contexts (Tiemann, 2022; Lenz, 2012). Our data and research design cannot fully resolve the direction of causality between perceived incongruence and satisfaction with democracy. That is, voters who become more dissatisfied with the democratic system may be motivated to report a greater ideological distance from parties. While alternative measures and research designs presented in the supplementary analyses offer some evidence that these findings are consistent with changes in perceived incongruence influencing shifts in satisfaction with democracy, definitively confirming which causal direction predominates is limited in this study, and the possibility that dissatisfaction with democracy also distorts perceptions of supported parties remains an important area to investigate.

In addition, while not central to the study, we also note that the positive correlation between misperceptions and actual party incongruence can be interpreted in several ways. While this relationship may emerge due to how misperception affects which parties are supported, it may be that larger actual ideological distances make it more challenging for voters to accurately locate a party's position relative to their own or otherwise influence their distortions in perception.

Further research using experimental designs could help establish the causal relationships at hand and identify circumstances under which reverse relationships may exist. Directly manipulating information about party positions or satisfaction levels in a controlled setting can elucidate how each factor influences the other. Survey experiments could also measure how

misperceptions influence satisfaction with democracy and whether voters adjust their behavior when presented with accurate information. Such studies could also precisely test how providing accurate party placement information affects satisfaction levels. Experimental extensions of this type will complement the observational findings presented here.

Finally, while we demonstrate misperception of party positions is related to greater perceived incongruence, we do not directly address the origins of those misperceptions. Misperceptions reflect a variety of factors (Nasr, 2021), such as information gaps due to political knowledge and sophistication (Bartels, 1996), elite messaging (Jerit and Barabas, 2012), and partisan biases (Bartels, 2002). For example, high levels of actual incongruence may lead to greater misperceptions – if, for example, voters seek to minimize cognitive dissonance. While much research has investigated the reasons for subjective perceptions of party positions and self-placements using survey data, experimental manipulations will also help clarify causal relationships with the political information environment in illuminating why the misperceptions emerge that can translate into perceived representation gaps and, potentially, disaffection. Future work could evaluate more precisely how motivational biases and informational gaps play a role in misperceptions, particularly in light of the potential impact on attitudes toward democracy.

Overall, the findings underscore the importance of considering subjective perceptions of parties in evaluations of attitudes toward democratic systems and an important linkage between the literatures on perceptions of party positions and voter-party incongruence. As many voters inaccurately perceive party stances, and as parties can manipulate perceptions, the study highlights deepening our understanding of how misperceptions affect, and are affected by, attitudes toward democratic institutions.

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Appendices and Supplemental Material:

(Mis)perception of Party Congruence and Satisfaction with Democracy

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A Data Structure

In our main analysis presented in the main text, we have included 13 waves of the panel for analysis in Table 1, comprising 289,157 respondents, and 10 waves of the panel are used in Table 2. Individual analyses are restricted to waves including the required variables. The data structure for this and the associated CHES data is detailed in Table A.1.

Table A.1: DATA STRUCTURE OF BRITISH ELECTION SURVEY AND CHAPEL HILL EXPERT SURVEY

	BES Respondents	Administered in	CHES Experts	Administered in
Waves 4 - 6	92,080	2015	7	Dec 2014 – Feb 2015
Waves 7 - 10	124,752	2016	7	Dec 2014 – Feb 2015
Waves 15	30,842	2019	14	2017
Waves 16 - 19	72,325	2019	17	Feb – May 2020
	289,157			

Source: British Election Study (Schmitt et al., 2021) and Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Jolly et al., 2022).

Table A.2: DATA STRUCTURE OF BRITISH ELECTION SURVEY RESPONDENTS AND BRITISH ELECTION SURVEY EXPERTS

	BES Respondents	Administered in	BES Experts	Administered in
Waves 15	30,842	11 Mar - 29 Mar 2019	74	Dec 2019
Waves 16	37,959	24 May - 18 Jun 2019	74	Dec 2019
Waves 17	34,366	1 Nov - 13 Nov 2019	74	Dec 2019
Waves 18	37,825	13 Nov - 11 Dec 2019	74	Dec 2019
Waves 19	32,177	13 Dec - 23 Dec 2019	74	Dec 2019
	173,169			

Source: British Election Study (Schmitt et al., 2021) and BES Expert Survey (Schmitt et al., 2020).

Table A.3: DATA STRUCTURE OF COMPARATIVE STUDY OF ELECTORAL SYSTEMS - MODULE 5 2016-2020, EU COUNTRIES

Year	Total Respondents	Countries
2016	1,188	Greece, Ireland, Lithuania
2017	3,753	Austria, France, Germany, Netherlands
2018	3,615	Italy, Sweden
2019	3,369	Belgium, Denmark, Finland, Portugal
2020	379	Slovakia
	12,304	

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2023)

In addition, Table A.2 presents the data set used for our jointly scaled estimation in Appendix C.3, along with the data set for performing robustness analyses on four issues (redistribution, immigration, EU integration, and environmental growth) from BES waves 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19

in Appendix C.8, all from 2019. The table also includes the BES expert data structure from the 2019 structure, corresponding to a total sample size of 173,167.

Table A.3 shows the data structure of Module 5 in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. In our sample, we utilize the sample of responses during 2016-2020 across 14 European countries (Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, 2023).

B Survey Questions and Wording

B.1 Misperception

Misperception is measured by the difference between BES respondent placements on general left-right positions and CHES expert placements of political party positions.

- *CHES experts' general placements of political party positions:* position of the party in 2014 (2017 and 2019) in terms of its overall ideological stance (from 0 extreme left, 5 center, to 10 extreme right) (Bakker et al., 2015, 2018, 2020, pp14, Chapel Hill Expert Survey).
- *BES respondent's general placements about party positions:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place the following parties on this scale (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al., 2021, 161, British Election Study)?

B.2 Actual Incongruence

Actual incongruence is measured by the difference between BES respondents' self-placement on general left-right positions and CHES expert placements of political party positions.

- *CHES experts' general placements of political party positions:* position of the party in 2014 (2017 and 2019) in terms of its overall ideological stance (from 0 extreme left, 5 center, to 10 extreme right) (Bakker et al., 2015, 2018, 2020, pp14, Chapel Hill Expert Survey).
- *BES respondents' self-placement on general left-right positions:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the following scale? (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al., 2021, 160, British Election Study)?

B.3 Perceived Incongruence

Perceived incongruence is measured as the distance between a BES respondent's self-placement on the left–right scale and the respondent's general placement about party position.

- *BES Respondent's general placement about party position:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place the following parties on this scale? (from 0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al., 2021, p161, British Election Study).
- *BES respondent's self-placement on the left–right scale* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the following scale? (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al., 2021, p160, British Election Study).

B.4 Control Variables (BES)

- *Self-placement Deviation:* Self-placement deviation is measured by the absolute value of BES respondents' self-placement on general left-right value -5.

- *Perceived Polarization:* Perceived polarization is measured by the difference of BES respondents' placement on general left-right on Conservative Party and Labour Party, respectively.

- *Party Affiliation:* And if there were a UK General Election tomorrow, which party would you vote for? (I would not vote; Conservative; Labour; Liberal Democrat; Scottish National Party SNP; Plaid Cymru; United Kingdom Independence Party UKIP; Green Party; British National Party BNP; Change UK – The Independent Group; Brexit Party; Other; Don't know) (Schmitt et al., 2021, p18, British Election Study).

- *Income Level:* Gross household income is the combined income of all those earners in a household from all sources, including wages, salaries, or rents and before tax deductions. What is your gross household income? (Respondents are then provided with a scale of 1 to 15 ranging from *"under £5,000 per year"* to *"£150,000 and over per year"* in an ascending order. We re-categorize each respondent into either the top, or the middle or the low income group based on the percentile along the self-reported income distribution in the survey: we recode the top one-thirds as *"Top"*, the middle one-thirds as *"Middle"* and the bottom one-thirds as *"Bottom"*.)(Schmitt et al., 2021, p34, British Election Study)

- *Gender:* Are you...? (Female or Male) (Schmitt et al., 2021, p450, British Election Study)?

- *Attention to Politics:* How much attention do you generally pay to politics? (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al., 2021, 160, British Election Study)?

- *News Sources:* During the last seven days, on average how much time (if any) have you spent per day following news about politics or current affairs from each of these sources? (Television; Newspaper including online; Radio; Internet Talking to other people) (Schmitt et al., 2021, p160, British Election Study)?

- *Job Occupation:* National Statistics Socio-economic classification analytic classes based on Standard Occupational Classifications 2010 (Employers in large organisations and higher managerial; Higher professional occupations; Lower professional and managerial and higher supervisory; Intermediate occupations; Employers in small organisations and own account workers; Lower supervisory and technical occupations; Semi-routine occupations; Routine occupations) (Schmitt et al., 2021, p160,British Election Study)?

B.5 Four Issues: BES Survey Respondents and Experts

Regarding the selection of four issue questions, we aim to match questions from both the BES and BES expert surveys that share similar concepts. These questions include topics such as Immigration, Redistribution, EU Integration, and the Environment. In evaluating party placement among BES survey respondents and BES experts, our focus is only on the Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, and Green parties across these five waves in 2019. It is noteworthy that we reverse the immigration scale to align with the responses of BES survey respondents, ensuring that the responses are consistent in the same direction.

- **Immigration**
  - BES Respondents (*immigGrid*): Some people think that the UK should allow many more immigrants to come to the UK to live and others think that the UK should allow many fewer immigrants. Where would you place yourself and the parties on this scale? (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, Green) 0 = Many fewer and 10 = Many more.
  - BES Experts (*immigecon*): Please place the following parties on a scale where: (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, Green) 1 = Immigration is bad for the economy, and 7 = Immigration is good for the economy.
- **Redistribution**
  - BES Respondents (*redistSelf*): Some people feel that government should make much greater efforts to make people's incomes more equal. Other people feel that government should be much less concerned about how equal people's incomes are. Where would you place yourself and the political parties on this scale? (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, Green) 0 Government should try to make incomes equal, and 10 Government should be less concerned about equal incomes
  - BES Experts (*redist*): Please place the following parties on a scale where (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Green): 0 = Government should try to make people's incomes more equal, and 10=Government should be less concerned about equal incomes.
- **EU Integration**
  - BES Respondents (*EUIntegration)*: Some people feel that Britain should do all it can to unite fully with the European Union. Other people feel that Britain should do all it can to protect its independence from the European Union. Where would you place

yourself and the political parties on this scale? (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, Green) 0 = Unite fully with the European Union, and 10 = Protect our independence

  - BES Experts (*EUindependence)*: Please place the following parties on a scale where: (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Green): 0 = Unite fully with the European Union, and 10 = Protect our independence from the European Union.

- **Environment**

  - BES Respondents (*enviroGrowth*): Some believe that protecting the environment should have priority even if that reduces economic growth. Others believe that economic growth should have priority even if that hinders protecting the environment. What is your opinion? (Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, Green) 0 = Economic growth should have priority, and 10 = Protecting the environment change should have priority
  - BES Experts (*econvenvir*): Question: Some believe that protecting the environment should have priority even if that reduces economic growth.(Party: Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrats, Brexit, Green) 0 = Economic growth should always have priority over the environment, and 10 = The environment should always have priority over economic growth.

C Robustness Estimation

C.1 Models Controlling for Misperception

In this Appendix, we examine the robustness of the analysis of BES data presented in Table C.4 by additionally including the misperception of respondents' corresponding party's position as a control variable to establish the robustness of the effect of perceived incongruence. We estimate the following fixed effects model:

$$\hat{y}_{i,t} = \alpha_1 \gamma_{i,t} + \alpha_2 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \alpha_3 \pi_{i,t} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{C.1}$$

where $\pi_{i,t}$ represents the misperception. The rest of notation is identical to that used in Table 2. The results in Column (3) show that our results are robust after controlling the misperception and the misperception is not a significant determinant of voters' satisfaction with democracy when the congruence measures are accounted for. This suggests that the effects of perceived incongruence are separate from any direct effect of inaccuracy.

Table C.4: PANEL REGRESSION: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION, BES PANEL

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Actual Incongruence	-0.007**	-0.001	-0.000
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.015***	-0.014***
		(0.003)	(0.003)
Misperception			-0.003
			(0.003)
Constant	-0.469***	-0.455***	-0.453***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓	✓
Observations	93213	93026	93026
Adjusted R^2	0.069	0.069	0.069

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

We also check the robustness of our analysis using the CSES in presented in Table 3 by similarly including the control for misperception. We estimate the following model using pooled

OLS:

$$\hat{y}_i = a_1\gamma_i + a_2\hat{\gamma}_i + a_3\pi_i + \theta\tilde{C}_i + \eta X_t + \phi Y_i + \epsilon_i, \tag{C.2}$$

where $\pi_{i,t}$ represents the misperception. The rest of the notation is identical to Table 3. This analysis shows the effects of perceived incongruence are almost unchanged and there is no significant effect of misperception, beyond that accounted for in perceived incongruence.

Table C.5: REGRESSION: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION, EUROPEAN DEMOCRACIES (CSES)

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Actual Incongruence	-0.026***	-0.012	-0.016
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.010)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.041***	-0.042***
		(0.009)	(0.009)
Mispercetion			0.008
			(0.010)
Constant	-1.043***	-1.031***	-1.035***
	(0.210)	(0.219)	(0.219)
Year dummies	✓	✓	✓
Country dummies	✓	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	9327	8664	8664
Adjusted R^2	0.221	0.220	0.220

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

C.2 Cross-sectional Analysis of BES

In this appendix, we conduct additional analyses to test the robustness of our main findings by employing cross-sectional models with the same BES data used in the main analysis. This allows us to examine the sensitivity of the results to a different model specification.

First, we present cross-sectional regression results in Table C.6 that focus on party misperception, investigating both perceived and actual incongruence while controlling for relevant demographic variables. The reference group used in the analysis consists of female respondents from high-income groups possessing postgraduate and higher education degrees.

Furthermore, we provide regression results in Table C.7 that examine the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and perceived and actual incongruence, while also controlling for the same set of demographic variables. Each of the cross-sectional results is consistent with the findings obtained from the panel regression models presented in the main text.

Table C.6: REGRESSION ON PARTY MISPERCEPTION FOR PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL VOTER-PARTY INCONGRUENCE WITH CONTROLS, POOLED

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)	Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception	0.391***	0.349***	0.208***
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.007)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.361***
			(0.007)
Self-placement deviation	0.049***	-0.107***	-0.125***
	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.004)
Perceived Polarization	-0.044***	0.044***	0.060***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Income: Middle	-0.058***	-0.016	0.006
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Top	-0.094***	-0.025**	0.009
	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Age	0.002	0.005**	0.004**
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age^2	-0.000**	-0.000**	-0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: A-level	-0.109***	-0.028**	0.012
	(0.010)	(0.013)	(0.012)
Undergraduate	-0.136***	-0.008	0.041***
	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.011)
Postgrad	-0.144***	0.023	0.075***
	(0.013)	(0.016)	(0.015)
Election Vote: Conservative	-0.174***	-0.315***	-0.252***
	(0.015)	(0.018)	(0.017)
Labour	-0.047***	-0.225***	-0.208***
	(0.015)	(0.019)	(0.018)
Liberal Democrat	-0.058***	-0.371***	-0.349***
	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.019)
UKIP	0.229***	-0.146***	-0.228***
	(0.021)	(0.025)	(0.025)
Green Party	-0.056**	-0.081***	-0.060**
	(0.024)	(0.030)	(0.028)
BNP	0.142	-0.552**	-0.604**
	(0.358)	(0.245)	(0.304)
Brexit Party	-0.020	0.147***	0.155***
	(0.033)	(0.043)	(0.040)
An Independent Candidate	-0.100	-0.101	-0.065
	(0.094)	(0.152)	(0.147)
Change UK	0.297**	0.127	0.020
	(0.135)	(0.159)	(0.138)
Would / Did Not Vote	0.031	0.026	0.015
	(0.036)	(0.046)	(0.044)
Other	-0.115***	-0.009	0.033
	(0.040)	(0.052)	(0.048)
Gender: Male	0.047***	0.078***	0.061***
	(0.007)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Attention to Politics	0.014***	0.012***	0.007***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
News Sources	-0.007	0.003	0.005
	(0.004)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Job industry	✓	✓	✓
Wave	✓	✓	✓
Constant	1.121***	0.976***	0.571***
	(0.057)	(0.071)	(0.069)
Adjusted R^2	0.200	0.115	0.188
N	95751	95751	95751

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table C.7: REGRESSION ON PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE FOR SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY WITH CONTROLS

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized	Semi-standarized
Actual Incongruence	-0.026***	-0.005	-0.012***	-0.002
	(0.009)	(0.010)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.062***		-0.029***
		(0.007)		(0.004)
Misperception	-0.002	0.012	-0.000	0.006
	(0.008)	(0.009)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Income: Middle	0.125***	0.125***	0.060***	0.060***
	(0.027)	(0.027)	(0.013)	(0.013)
Top	0.144***	0.145***	0.071***	0.071***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Age	-0.008	-0.007	-0.004*	-0.004*
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age^2	0.000*	0.000	0.000*	0.000*
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: A-level	-0.022	-0.021	-0.011	-0.011
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Undergraduate	-0.112***	-0.109***	-0.054***	-0.053***
	(0.031)	(0.031)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Postgrad	-0.311***	-0.307***	-0.153***	-0.151***
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Party Affiliation: Conservative	1.021***	1.003***	0.493***	0.483***
	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Labour	-0.273***	-0.290***	-0.136***	-0.144***
	(0.035)	(0.035)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Liberal Democrat	-0.069*	-0.089**	-0.037*	-0.047**
	(0.039)	(0.040)	(0.020)	(0.020)
UKIP	-0.498***	-0.516***	-0.249***	-0.257***
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.022)	(0.022)
Green Party	-0.783***	-0.792***	-0.397***	-0.402***
	(0.056)	(0.056)	(0.028)	(0.028)
BNP	-0.371	-0.416	-0.178	-0.198
	(0.425)	(0.417)	(0.225)	(0.221)
Change UK	0.328*	0.335*	0.165	0.166
	(0.194)	(0.196)	(0.101)	(0.102)
Brexit Party	-0.549***	-0.542***	-0.272***	-0.268***
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.030)	(0.030)
An Independent Candidate	-0.115	-0.109	-0.088	-0.085
	(0.381)	(0.373)	(0.194)	(0.191)
I Would/Did Not Vote	-0.370***	-0.367***	-0.174***	-0.173***
	(0.094)	(0.094)	(0.046)	(0.046)
Other	-0.640***	-0.638***	-0.323***	-0.323***
	(0.084)	(0.084)	(0.042)	(0.042)
Gender: Male	-0.084***	-0.080***	-0.040***	-0.038***
	(0.024)	(0.024)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Perceived Polarization	0.007*	0.010**	0.002	0.004*
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Attention to Politics	-0.097***	-0.097***	-0.047***	-0.047***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.003)
News Sources	0.054***	0.054***	0.028***	0.028***
	(0.011)	(0.011)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wave	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant			-0.188***	-0.153***
			(0.058)	(0.058)
N	68042	67927	68042	67927
Adjusted R^2			0.153	0.154

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

C.3 Party Misperception on Perceived and Actual Voter-party Incongruence: Cross-national Evidence from Europe

In this section, we assess the generalizability of our findings on the relationship between misperception and congruence. To achieve this, we use the same cross-national sample of EU countries from the CSES survey previously described to estimate regressions of party misperception on perceived and actual voter-party incongruence, as shown in Table 1. In this analysis, we account for income, gender, education, marital status, employment, household size, year, country, age of the regime, and religious attributes. Our results are consistent with the BES panel regression analysis presented in the main text. This cross-national pattern indicates that the patterns observed in our panel study are likely not limited to the context of England.

Table C.8: REGRESSION PARTY MISPERCEPTION ON PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL VOTER-PARTY INCONGRUENCE, CSES

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)	Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.549***	0.213***	0.113***
	(0.016)	(0.020)	(0.032)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.183***
			(0.031)
Constant	0.587*	0.785*	0.677
	(0.323)	(0.465)	(0.468)
Year dummies	✓	✓	✓
Country dummies	✓	✓	✓
Individual demographic controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	8721	8721	8721

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

C.4 Supplementary Analysis with Lagged Measures

Although the analysis thus far has used the panel structure to isolate the individual-level correlation between incongruence and satisfaction, it is possible that the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and incongruence (actual and perceived) can run both ways for voters, with voter perceptions of parties following their attitudes toward democracy. In this appendix, we further make use of the structure of our BES panel survey data set to try to address the dynamics of the relationship by introducing legged variables. First we add lags for perceived and actual incongruence. We estimate the following regression:

$$\hat{y}_{i,t} = \alpha_1 \gamma_{i,t-1} + \alpha_2 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t-1} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{C.3}$$

where $\hat{\gamma}_{i,t-1}$ and $\gamma_{i,t-1}$ are the lagged perceived incongruence and lagged actual incongruence of voter i in wave t, respectively. The rest of the notation follows that in the main text. We lagged behind both key independent variables so that the current satisfaction with democracy does not directly influence past incongruence. For comparability with the main results, the CHES expert placement of parties used for actual congruence is based on the closest year to the dependent variable, democratic satisfaction. Estimated coefficients are reported in columns (1) and (2) of Table C.9.

We find that under these circumstances, the estimated coefficient of the lagged actual incongruence is no longer significant in column (1). However, the coefficient of the lagged perceived incongruence remains significant in column (2). While not definitive, this result corroborates the interpretation that the relationship between perceived incongruence and satisfaction is such that the latter is at least partly a function of the former.

When the lagged measure of perceived incongruence is used, its coefficient remains negative and statistically significant in predicting current satisfaction levels. However, the coefficient on lagged actual policy incongruence is not statistically significant. This pattern may indicate that while objective representation gaps could shape perceived incongruence over time, their direct influence on present satisfaction judgments is more limited and indirect, operating chiefly through the more proximal effects of perceived incongruence.

Considering endogeneity concerns primarily arise for perceived incongruence, the main results focusing on the contemporaneous effects of actual incongruence may be the most appropriate for isolating the impact of this variable. In models combining current perceived incongruence with actual incongruence measured concurrently rather than lagged, actual incongruence is not statistically significant. The coefficient on current perceived incongruence remains negative and significant at the 5% level, mirroring the main findings.

Table C.9: PANEL REGRESSION: DYNAMICS BETWEEN SATISFACTION AND (ACTUAL AND PERCEIVED) INCONGRUENCES, BES PANEL

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Lagged Perceived Incongruence		-0.010**	-0.030***
		(0.005)	(0.007)
Perceived Incongruence			-0.033***
			(0.007)
Lagged Actual Incongruence	0.005	0.010	0.014
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.009)
Actual Incongruence			0.003
			(0.010)
Lagged Satisfaction			0.029**
			(0.012)
Constant	-0.033***	-0.026*	-0.070***
	(0.014)	(0.014)	(0.021)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓	✓
Observations	38911	38897	28465
Adjusted R^2	0.068	0.069	0.005

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

To further study the dynamics of the relationship between party congruence and satisfaction with democracy, we next include a lagged dependent variable together with lagged and current actual and perceived distances as independent variables. By controlling for lagged satisfaction, this model accounts for the effects of previous satisfaction levels on those in the present due to enduring personal attitudes or external circumstances not captured in the model. Here we can only include those waves where the dependent variable exists in the preceding wave. We estimate the following regression:

$$\hat{y}_{i,t} = \beta_1 \hat{y}_{i,t-1} + \beta_2 \gamma_{i,t} + \beta_3 \gamma_{i,t-1} + \beta_4 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \beta_5 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t-1} + \phi C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it},$$

where $\hat{y}_{i,t-1}$ is the lagged satisfaction with democracy of voter i. The rest of the notation follows that in the previous regression model. The results are reported in column (3) of Table C.9.

The coefficients for contemporary and lagged perceived incongruence are statistically significant and the coefficients corresponding to both current and lagged actual incongruence lack statistical significance, corroborating findings from previous analyses.

We also examined a model of satisfaction with democracy as a function of lagged satisfaction, current and lagged perceived incongruence, and current and lagged actual incongruence employing the ML-SEM approach (Allison, Williams and Moral-Benito, 2017), which treats the intercept a latent variable. With this approach, the results are similar to those above, with lagged perceived incongruence again associated with reduced satisfaction and lagged actual incongruence not correlated at statistically significant levels when included in the same model.

Although these additional findings do not rule out the potential effects of dissatisfaction on perceptions, the results add some support to the interpretation that subjective perceptions of congruence are in part driving satisfaction,

C.5 Supplementary Analysis with Changes in Satisfaction with Democracy

Further we construct a variable that corresponds to changes in respondents' satisfaction with democracy over time, $\Delta\hat{y}_{i,t} = \hat{y}_{i,t} - \hat{y}_{i,t-1}$. Then we estimate the following regression using changes in satisfaction as the dependent variable:

$$\Delta\hat{y}_{i,t} = \kappa_1\gamma_{i,t} + \kappa_2\hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \kappa_4\hat{y}_{i,t-1} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{C.4}$$

where the rest of the notation follows that in the main text. The estimated results are reported in column (1) of Table C.10. Consistent with our analysis in the main text, a higher level of perceived incongruence reduces respondents' satisfaction with democracy, while the impact of actual incongruence remains insignificant. Additionally, we also run a lagged version of the regression C.4 with lagged independent variables (lagged perceived and actual incongruence, and lagged misperception), and report the results in column (2) of Table C.10. The results are robust under the lagged specification.

Table C.10: PANEL REGRESSION: CHANGE IN SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY AND (PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL) INCONGRUENCE, BES PANEL

Dependent Variable:	ΔSatisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Perceived Incongruence	-0.020***	
	(0.006)	
Actual Incongruence	0.002	
	(0.009)	
Lagged Perceived Incongruence		-0.014**
		(0.006)
Lagged Actual Incongruence		0.005
		(0.009)
Constant	-0.460***	-0.479***
	(0.019)	(0.018)
Individual FE	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓
Lagged Satisfaction	✓	✓
Observations	29565	29738
Adjusted R^2	0.516	0.513

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

C.6 Supplementary Analysis Using An Instrumental Variable Approach

The wave 10 BES questionnaire includes a series of questions to capture respondents' knowledge about politics. The series of questions asks respondents about the political role held by international political figures. We construct a factor score that corresponds to the standardized number of questions that each respondent answers correctly. Since this factor score is closely related to respondents' knowledge, attention, and sophistication, it is relevant to respondents' ideological placements. However, it is likely to be exogenous to respondents' future democratic satisfaction. Then, we treat this factor score as the baseline measurement of respondents' political knowledge (collected in Wave 10) and analyze the sample of survey responses from Wave 10 onward. We estimate the following equation using two-stage least squares (2SLS) regression:

$$\begin{aligned} \text{First stage:} \quad & \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} = a_0 + a_1 \text{score}_i^{baseline} + a_2 \gamma_{i,t} + \theta C_{i,t} + z_{i,t} \\ \text{Second stage:} \quad & \hat{y}_{i,t} = b_0 + b_1 \gamma_{i,t} + b_2 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \phi C_{i,t} + v_{i,t}, \end{aligned}$$

where $\text{score}_i^{baseline}$ represents the baseline score of political knowledge of respondents i. The rest of the notation remains identical to the main-text analysis. Under this setup, we instrument respondents' perceived incongruence with $\text{score}_i^{baseline}$. Table C.11 reports the estimation results.

Table C.11: PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY: AN INSTRUMENTAL VARIABLE APPROACH

	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Second stage	OLS	o-logit
Actual Incongruence	0.129	0.267
	(0.081)	(0.172)
Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)	-0.391*	-0.824**
	(0.193)	(0.409)
Constant	0.560*	
	(0.244)	
Controls	✓	✓
First-stage χ^2	12.90***	12.90***
Observations	6845	6845

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Columns (1) and (2) of Table C.11 show the estimation results when the second stage is esti-

mated using OLS and ordered logit, respectively. The first-stage χ^2 strongly suggests that voters' political knowledge is a strong predictor of their perceived incongruence and misperception. Both columns indicate that a higher level of perceived incongruence leads to a significantly lower satisfaction with democracy of voters, while the coefficients of the actual incongruence are not statistically significant. This result is consistent with the findings in the main analysis.

C.7 Jointly Scaled Estimates from Issue Scales Using BES Experts

As our theoretical framework centers on the concept of general orientation mismatch, our main analysis utilizes left-right self-placement as it provides a parsimonious and widely-used means to capture respondents' overall ideological positions that is widely used in existing literature on representation. This approach operationalizes the notion that dissatisfaction stems primarily from a perceived broad ideological disconnect.

As an alternative to left-right self-placement that retains this conceptual approach, we also estimate a latent ideological position based on responses to multiple issue scales which provides an alternative means to achieve comparability between experts' and citizens' perceptions. To do this, we employ the blackbox scaling procedure (Poole, 1998; Poole et al., 2016) to derive an alternative measure that does not rely on the placement of the left-right. The blackbox scaling method uses survey response data to estimate ideological positions based on responses to multiple issue scales and allows the estimation of respondent positions on a single continuous scale reflecting latent ideological structure underpinning responses to the BES issue questions. This technique estimates the ideological locations underlying positions on specific issues, allowing us to place the expert ratings of parties, respondent ratings of parties, and respondent self-placements within the same scale.

We make use of the BES expert ratings for party positions, which provide the multiple common issues necessary for this approach. This approach is possible only for waves 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 of BES, which include four issues with the same survey responses from both respondents and BES experts from 2019. These issues are immigration, redistribution, environmental protection, and EU integration.

The issue scales perform well in capturing an overarching latent dimension to distinguishing respondents in terms of ideology. The first dimension explains 64.4% of the variation, with a substantial drop off to 18.9% for the next dimension. The model fit statistics show that the issue scales perform well in separating respondents on the primary latent ideological dimension. The R-squared values, representing the proportion of variance in each issue scale explained by the model, range from 0.438 to 0.796 across the issues. Consistent with the salience of cultural issues in the UK, EU integration and Immigration loads strongly on the latent dimension, with an R-squared of 0.796 and 0.722, respectively. Meanwhile, redistribution and environment still have substantial R-squared values of 0.505 and 0.447, respectively.

The use of these estimates for the expert and respondent locations from this jointly common scale has some advantage over left-right placements because these are based on more concrete questions than the left-right scale and can be aggregated into a single overarching latent dimension of policy preferences to capture party and voter positions from which we can measure

incongruence.

As shown in the table below, the regression analysis based on this approach yields results consistent with the analysis in the main text and the cross-sectional results using the left-right measure. Although available only for a small cross-section of the BES panel data, the supplementary use of these data can improve our confidence in the comparability of party placements across survey respondents. In this robustness analysis, the control variables are not depicted in the table but remain the same as the cross-sectional analysis presented earlier, including income, party affiliation, gender, age, education level, number of news sources, political attention, and a dummy for each wave included.

Table C.12: PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY: LATENT IDEOLOGICAL MEASURE

	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.349*	-0.365
	(0.206)	(0.257)
Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)		-0.400**
		(0.173)
Constant	-0.504***	-0.522***
	(0.036)	(0.043)
Controls	✓	✓
Observations	59355	45788
Adjusted R^2	0.005	0.003

Standard errors in parentheses.

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

C.8 Additional Analyses of Specific Policy Areas

To further supplement our analysis of how democratic satisfaction is influenced by perceived incongruence on policy issues, we replicate our analyses utilizing four issues separately. We separately examine actual and perceived incongruence in four issues for which the necessary placement scale data are available – immigration, redistribution, the environment, and EU integration. In the regression analysis below, we independently analyze models for perceived incongruence and democratic satisfaction for each policy issue.[12]

Across all four issues, the results confirm the patterns seen in the main results. That is, greater misperception of party positions predicts higher perceived incongruence, and higher perceived incongruence correlates with lower democratic satisfaction. While the magnitude of the effects varies by issue – with incongruence on EU integration having the largest effect on reducing democratic satisfaction – the direction and statistical significance remain consistent across all policy issues.

These additional analyses reinforce the main conclusions and provide evidence that the relationships between misperception, perceived incongruence, and democratic satisfaction extend beyond left-right ideology to domain-specific policy areas. Although exploring differences across issues is outside the scope here, the robustness across multiple policy domains underscores the broad relevance of the theorized linkages beyond general ideological orientations.

[12] For the questionnaire wordings related to the four issues, please see Appendix B.5.

Table C.13: INCONGRUENCE - REDISTRIBUTION

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.116^{***}	0.079^{***}	0.026^{***}
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.005)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.107^{***}
			(0.004)
Constant	1.667^{***}	1.565^{***}	1.408^{***}
	(0.075)	(0.090)	(0.091)
Wave dummies	✓	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	65281	65983	65634
Adjusted R^2	0.052	0.028	0.041

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.14: INCONGRUENCE - IMMIGRATION

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.096^{***}	0.171^{***}	0.146^{***}
	(0.004)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.079^{***}
			(0.005)
Constant	1.898^{***}	1.560^{***}	1.418^{***}
	(0.092)	(0.106)	(0.106)
Wave dummies	✓	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	45224	46105	45904
Adjusted R^2	0.040	0.053	0.060

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.15: INCONGRUENCE - EU INTEGRATION

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.006***	0.030***	0.012***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.052***
			(0.003)
Constant	1.982***	1.913***	2.065***
	(0.047)	(0.090)	(0.090)
Wave dummies	✓	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	96373	69749	69264
Adjusted R^2	0.029	0.024	0.030

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.16: INCONGRUENCE - ENVIRONMENTAL GROWTH

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.081***	0.058***	0.047***
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.032***
			(0.012)
Constant	2.197***	1.493***	1.377***
	(0.278)	(0.281)	(0.282)
Wave dummies	✓	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓	✓
Observations	6936	6868	6764
Adjusted R^2	0.038	0.019	0.020

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.17: SATISFACTION - IMMIGRATION

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.011***	0.005
	(0.003)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.031***
		(0.002)
Constant	-0.224***	-0.173***
	(0.068)	(0.072)
Wave dummies	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓
Observations	50788	44754
Adjusted R^2	0.140	0.148

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.18: SATISFACTION - REDISTRIBUTION

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.013***	-0.002
	(0.002)	(0.002)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.012***
		(0.002)
Constant	-0.208***	-0.216***
	(0.059)	(0.040)
Wave dummies	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓
Observations	64379	55859
Adjusted R^2	0.151	0.155

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.19: SATISFACTION - EU INTEGRATION

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.012***	-0.002
	(0.001)	(0.001)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.036***
		(0.002)
Constant	-0.150***	-0.085***
	(0.007)	(0.080)
Wave dummies	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓
Observations	84456	74802
Adjusted R^2	0.147	0.156

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table C.20: SATISFACTION - ENVIRONMENTAL GROWTH

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.018***	0.010
	(0.003)	(0.007)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.020***
		(0.006)
Constant	-0.208**	-0.358***
	(0.081)	(0.108)
Wave dummies	✓	✓
Individual-level controls	✓	✓
Observations	32422	10628
Adjusted R^2	0.132	0.026

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

C.9 Using Respondents' Average Perceived Positions to Measure 'Actual' Positions

While expert surveys provide a useful reference point for parties' positions, an alternative approach is to use average placements from voters themselves to capture parties' "actual" stances. As a further robustness check on this measurement choice, we substitute the expert left-right party placements with the mean perceived positions from BES respondents. This allows us to construct a measure of actual incongruence based on average voter perceptions rather than expert judgments.

We calculate each party's mean left-right position in a given wave based on the average placement from all BES respondents. We then use this mean perceived position as the benchmark for the party's actual stance when calculating incongruence measures. If a voter's individual placement diverges from the mean perceived position, this represents misperception of the party's actual position under this approach.

We replicate our main democratic satisfaction models using this voter-average based measure of actual incongruence rather than the expert survey positions. This provides a test of whether the findings hold when relying purely on respondents' overall perceptions to capture parties' objective positions, rather than expert judgments.

Since the respondent sample can be seen as potentially reflecting the overall views of the electorate, we first use the average placement of parties as an alternative measure of actual locations. As shown in the tables below, the regression analysis employing the average BES respondent placement as actual placement yields results that are consistent with those shown in the main text using the left-right measure.

Table C.21: Regression Party Misperception on Perceived and Actual Voter-party Incongruence, BES Panel Using Average Perceived Positions

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.176***	0.339***	0.269***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.009)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.398***
			(0.009)
Constant	1.310***	0.774***	0.252***
	(0.023)	(0.031)	(0.036)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓	✓
N	130305	130305	130305

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

The overall voter mean provides one estimate of parties' "actual" positions, this measure may

Table C.22: PANEL REGRESSION: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION, BES PANEL USING AVERAGE PERCEIVED POSITIONS

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.009**	-0.002
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.014***
		(0.003)
Constant	-0.496***	-0.480***
	(0.013)	(0.014)
Individual FE	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓
Observations	94684	94485
Adjusted R^2	0.067	0.067

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

still contain noise from respondents with less political knowledge. As an additional check, we construct an alternate measure of actual positions using the average placements only among more politically sophisticated respondents.

Specifically, we calculate each party's mean left-right position using only respondents with a postgraduate degree or above. The assumption is that these highly educated respondents have greater capacity to place parties accurately (Alvarez and Franklin, 1994; Alvarez and Nagler, 2004; Golder and Stramski, 2010; Carroll and Kubo, 2017). Their mean perceived placements should reflect a more informed estimate of the "true" party positions.

We then utilize this sophisticated respondent average as the benchmark for actual party positions when calculating our incongruence measures and use these in the models predicting incongruence and democratic satisfaction. This allows us to test if results are consistent when relying on arguably more informed perceptions of party stances, rather than the overall voter mean.

In both Table C.23 and Table C.24, we observe that the models for satisfaction with democracy yield substantively similar results to the main analysis for perceived and actual incongruence using the mean placements of voters. As in the main results, perceived incongruence reduces democratic satisfaction, while actual incongruence is insignificant when accounting for perceived incongruence.

This lends further support that the key relationships remain robust to alternative measurements of actual party positions based on mean voter perceptions rather than expert surveys. It again highlights that perceived representation gaps are most associated with democratic

satisfaction regardless of actual positions.

Table C.23: REGRESSION PARTY MISPERCEPTION ON PERCEIVED AND ACTUAL VOTER-PARTY INCONGRUENCE, BES PANEL USING AVERAGE PERCEIVED POSITIONS BY HIGHER EDUCATED VOTERS

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence	Perceived Incongruence	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.187***	0.315***	0.244***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.382***
			(0.009)
Constant	1.353***	0.820***	0.304***
	(0.024)	(0.031)	(0.036)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓	✓
N	130305	130305	130305

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

Table C.24: PANEL REGRESSION: EFFECTS OF PERCEIVED INCONGRUENCE AND ACTUAL INCONGRUENCE ON SATISFACTION, BES PANEL USING AVERAGE PERCEIVED POSITIONS BY HIGHER EDUCATED VOTERS

Dependent Variable:	Satisfaction with Democracy	
	(1)	(2)
Actual Incongruence	-0.012***	-0.006
	(0.004)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.013***
		(0.003)
Constant	-0.490***	-0.476***
	(0.013)	(0.014)
Individual FE	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓
Observations	94684	94485
Adjusted R^2	0.067	0.067

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

D Correlates of Misperception

While the primary analysis examines the effects of misperceptions on perceived incongruence and democratic satisfaction, here we report some individual correlates of inaccurate party placements themselves. In this appendix, we conduct a basic analysis of individual-level factors correlated with party position misperceptions among voters. We again use the BES data to examine which individual-level factors correlate with misperception among voters. Existing literature provides expectations regarding influences on citizens' political knowledge and sophistication more broadly (e.g., Banducci, Giebler and Kritzinger, 2015; Delli Carpini and Keeter, 1996; Luskin, 1990; Meirick, 2013; Palfrey and Poole, 1987; Carroll and Kubo, 2017; Busch, 2016; Nasr, 2020; Dahlberg, 2013; Bartels, 1996). If voters with lower education levels or political knowledge would tend to place party ideology less accurately we may thus expect misperceptions to be lower among those with greater political interest, more education, and more resources for acquiring information. In addition, partisan identities can influence information processing, resulting in motivated reasoning influencing voters understanding of policy issues (Bartels, 2002, 2008; Carsey and Layman, 2006; Evans and Andersen, 2004, 2006; Evans and Pickup, 2010; Tilley and Hobolt, 2011; Jerit and Barabas, 2012) which may skew their understanding of party policy positions. Partisan biases could thus potentially color perceptions of affiliated parties' positions.

In the following analysis, we examine correlates of party position misperceptions among BES respondents, relying on several proxies for political sophistication and partisan attachment. The variable "Party Identity Strength" gauges the level of attachment a voter has to their own political party.[13] Respondents indicate their strength of affiliation by selecting "Not very strong," "Fairly strong," or "Very strong," with these choices recoded as 1, 2, and 3, respectively. "Attention to Politics" measures the respondents' general attention to politics on a scale ranging from 0 (pay no attention) to 10 (pay a great deal of attention), as derived from the question, "How much attention do you generally pay to politics?" The variable "Number of Information Sources" measures the amount of media outlets from which voters gather information.[14]

In Table D.25, we observe a positive association between strong partisanship and the extent of misperception about one's own affiliated party, indicating higher misperception levels among stronger partisans who may exhibit bias. Meanwhile, various factors associated with capacity or sophistication are associated with less misperception. Respondents who exhibit greater attention to politics and access information from multiple sources tend to have lower misperceptions about their own party. Additionally, voters with higher income and education levels report

[13] Respondents are asked "Would you call yourself very strong, fairly strong, or not very strong *respondent's own party*?" in the survey.

[14] Respondents are asked if they obtain information and news from newspaper, radio, TV and internet, respectively in the survey.

significantly smaller misperceptions about the party they support.

The results correspond to findings in the literature that various attributes related to sophistication are correlated with lower misperceptions, including greater political interest, more comprehensive media consumption, higher education, and higher income. Stronger partisanship shows a positive association, suggesting the potential for partisan-motivated reasoning (Grand and Tiemann, 2013; Tiemann, 2022; Lenz, 2012). While not intended to be definitive or comprehensive, these exploratory findings illuminate some individual-level correlates of inaccurate party placements that may inform our theoretical understanding of the pathway through which the factors behind misperceptions influence the downstream consequences.

Table D.25: CORRELATES OF VOTERS' MISPERCEPTION OF OWN PARTIES

Dependent Variable:	Misperception	
	(1)	(2)
Party Identity Strength	0.088***	0.070***
	(0.006)	(0.007)
Attention to Politics	-0.050***	-0.036***
	(0.002)	(0.003)
Number of Information Sources	-0.012**	-0.021***
	(0.005)	(0.005)
Income		
Middle	-0.135***	-0.111***
	(0.009)	(0.011)
High	-0.246***	-0.172***
	(0.009)	(0.010)
Education		
A-level	-0.229***	-0.162***
	(0.011)	(0.013)
Undergraduate	-0.330***	-0.290***
	(0.009)	(0.011)
Postgrad and above	-0.390***	-0.330***
	(0.012)	(0.015)
Constant	2.009***	1.986***
	(0.027)	(0.053)
Wave dummies		✓
Individual-level controls		✓
Observations	120365	87403
Adjusted R^2	0.037	0.056

Standard errors in parentheses

* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$