Policy or Identity? Real-World Evidence on the Drivers of Party Affect

Semih Çakır[1,2]

[1]University of Ottawa

[2]University of Vienna

Abstract

What drives partisan affect? Do citizens evaluate parties based on substantive policy considerations or partisan identity? Studying this question is difficult because policy preferences and party identification are usually aligned, making their effects observationally equivalent, even in experimental settings. To overcome this challenge, this study leverages a major real-world political event that induced a sudden change in a party position. Following the razor-thin victory of the Leave side in the EU referendum, the Conservative Party shifted its Brexit stance overnight from supporting Remain to supporting Leave. Because Brexit preferences cut across traditional party lines, this change provides unique observational leverage to compare policy-based updating against the partisan identity mechanism. Using an interrupted time series design with data from the British Election Study Internet Panel, I examine citizens' reactions between waves conducted immediately before and after the referendum. The results provide evidence consistent with the policy mechanism: non-partisans, out-partisans and in-partisans updated their feelings towards the Conservative Party based on their own Brexit preferences rather than partisan identity. Across all groups, Leave supporters grew warmer (even among out-partisans), while Remain supporters

grew colder towards the Conservative Party (even among in-partisans). These reactions persisted and even strengthened over the following year. Moreover, changes in affective polarization across groups were also more consistent with policy agreement rather than with partisan identity. Overall, these findings challenge the accounts portraying partisans as motivated mainly by their identities rather than by substantive policy considerations, at least on salient issues on which citizens hold clear preferences.

Introduction

Scholars increasingly warn that affective polarization may be placing democratic systems under serious strain. It has been linked to erosion of regime legitimacy, weakening of democratic norms, and increased dysfunction (Finkel et al., 2020; Kingzette et al., 2021; Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2019; Graham and Svolik, 2020). Affective polarization can also foster a political environment in which citizens perceive their political opponents as threats to the nation (McCoy and Somer, 2019), have stronger partisan bias (Ahler and Sood, 2018), pay less attention to policy outcomes (Druckman, Peterson and Slothuus, 2013), and report lower satisfaction with democracy (Wagner, 2021). Moreover, it also shapes how ordinary citizens interact, increasing dissatisfaction with inter-party marriage (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015) and spilling over into non-political spheres like scholarship attribution (Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Rudolph and Hetherington, 2021). Understanding what drives partisan affect is therefore essential for both diagnosing and potentially mitigating these democratic threats.

Yet consensus on what drives partisan affect remains elusive. Much of existing literature emphasizes the role of group identity, portraying citizens as driven more by partisan affiliation than by ideological commitments (Mason, 2015, 2018; Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015; West and Iyengar, 2022; Redmond, 2022; Achen and Bartels, 2017). This view frames affective polarization as a product of identitarian politics, emerging from in-group versus out-group dynamics (Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012; Iyengar and Westwood, 2015; Reiljan, 2020). More recently, however, schol-

ars have highlighted the ideological foundations of affective polarization, suggesting that partisan affect can stem from substantive policy disagreements rather than identity alone (Banda and Cluverius, 2018; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016; Renström, Bäck and Carroll, 2021; Algara and Zur, 2023; Harteveld, 2021*a*). The difficulty in resolving this debate however stems from a fundamental empirical challenge: policy stance and party identification are deeply intertwined (Orr, Fowler and Huber, 2023; Dias and Lelkes, 2022). Policy cues identity, identity cues policy, and the two typically align, producing observationally equivalent outcomes.

Two key obstacles complicate studying the relationship between policy, identity, and affect. First, party positions change gradually, and both perceived and actual positions are endogenous to citizens' feelings towards parties. This creates causal ambiguity: Do elites simply respond to public opinion, or does elite behavior shape mass affect? Second, policy stances tend to be sorted along party lines, making it difficult to isolate the effect of policy disagreement from partisan identity. Because the two provide equivalent information, observing that partisans dislike an out-party tells us nothing about whether this stems from group identity or policy disagreement.

Experimental designs offer some leverage but face their own limitations. Real-party experiments suffer from pre-treatment bias: respondents have already been exposed to party dynamics, potentially obscuring effects (Slothuus, 2016). Furthermore, manipulating positions on major issues may seem unrealistic, while manipulating minor-issue positions restricts findings to low-stakes domains where voters may care less to oppose their parties' stance, thereby creating the false impression that party identity alone drives affect.

To avoid pre-treatment bias, scholars resort to hypothetical parties. Yet, even in such designs, disentangling the influence of policy stance and party identity on partisan affect remains challenging. First, manipulating party positions in experiments may fail to capture the complexities of real-world political dynamics. Second, since policy is in identity, and identity is in policy, they are informationally equivalent (Dafoe, Zhang and Caughey, 2018). So, manipulating one automatically influences perceptions of the other (Orr, Fowler and Huber, 2023). When individuals are given a hypothetical party's stance on an issue, they often draw parallels to real-world politics and

think of the party—or vice versa. This usually leads to misattributing the influence of policy to the identity. Third, evaluations of non-existent parties may not reflect genuine partisan affect.

Given these challenges, Orr, Fowler and Huber (2023) conclude that "scholars will have to find new research designs if they want to convincingly estimate the effects of identity or loyalty independent of policy substance." This paper takes up this challenge by examining a real-world case in the United Kingdom, where the Conservative Party, following a razor-thin victory of the "leave" side in the 2016 Referendum, changed its position on Brexit overnight. The empirical leverage comes from Brexit preferences cutting across established partisan identities, which creates groups for which policy alignment and partisan loyalty make opposing predictions about changes in party affect. Therefore, this unique case offers a rare opportunity to compare policy-based updating against the partisan identity mechanism: a major political party shifted its position both abruptly and unexpectedly on a salient, cross-cutting issue.

In most political contexts, especially in the United States, policy preferences and partisan identity are highly sorted: Democrats support liberal policies and Republicans support conservative policies. This sorting makes it empirically very difficult to determine whether affect towards parties stems from identity or policy because both mechanisms predict the same patterns. Brexit's cross-cutting nature breaks this sorting in three ways. First, it creates observationally distinct subgroups where the two mechanisms make opposing predictions. For instance, among Conservative Remainers, the identity mechanism predicts increased warmth (due to heightened in-group salience), while the policy mechanism predicts decreased warmth due to disagreement with the party's pro-Brexit shift. Second, even in observationally equivalent cases such as Labour Remainers or Conservative Leavers, where both mechanisms predict changes in the same direction, within-party variation by Brexit preference still provides leverage. For example, if identity dominates, all Labour identifiers should respond uniformly regardless of Brexit stance. If policy dominates, Labour Leavers should show smaller decreases in Conservative warmth (or even increases) compared to Labour Remainers because they agree with the Conservative Party's new position. Third, non-partisans provide a useful test of policy effects since the partisan identity mechanism makes no predictions for those

lacking partisan attachments. By examining whether responses vary within partisan groups by Brexit preference, I can test the mechanisms that are typically impossible to distinguish when policy and identity align.

The findings are more consistent with the policy mechanism than with the identity mechanism. Conservative identifiers who supported Remain became significantly less positive towards their own party, directly contradicting identity predictions, while Labour identifiers who supported Leave became more positive towards the out-party (i.e., the Conservative Party). Non-partisans also updated their affective evaluations based on Brexit stance, confirming that policy considerations operate independently of partisan identity. These patterns persisted and often strengthened over the subsequent year. The findings speak to a broader theoretical question about whether citizens evaluate parties based on policy substance or partisan loyalty. At minimum, the results challenge the identity-centric views that portray partisans as unconditionally loyal to their parties, at least under two conditions. First, Brexit was a highly salient issue on which most citizens held clear preferences, and the effects of position changes on less salient issues may differ. Second, timing matters: policy considerations may outweigh partisan identity when preferences are pre-formed but not yet fully linked to identities. Over time, cross-cutting issues can become identity markers themselves (as Brexit later did), but studying the immediate response to party position changes allows us to examine changes in party affect before Brexit identities became more consolidated.

The paper proceeds as follows. I first develop a theoretical framework distinguishing identity and policy mechanisms and derive testable predictions. I then describe the British case, showing how the Conservative Party's Brexit shift and the cross-cutting structure of Brexit preferences provide empirical leverage to compare the two mechanisms. After presenting results demonstrating that the patterns are more consistent with policy-based updating, I examine implications for affective polarization, provide sensitivity analyses, and discuss what these findings mean for democratic politics more broadly.

Mechanisms of Party Affect

The literature has identified two main mechanisms to explain the feelings towards political parties. The first mechanism relates to identity and draws on social identity theory's core insight that mere categorization into groups triggers in-group favoritism and out-group discrimination (Greene, 1999; Tajfel et al., 1979; Tajfel, 1981). Throughout, the identity mechanism refers to partisan identity, that is, citizens' psychological attachment to a political party. When individuals develop self-identification with a political party, it acts as a social identity (Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015), leading them to categorize themselves into in-groups and out-groups (Greene, 1999; Tajfel et al., 1979; Tajfel, 1981). Furthermore, as group members are motivated to maintain their identities by distinguishing themselves from the out-groups (Leeper and Slothuus, 2014; Petersen et al., 2013; Mason, 2015), they tend to view their own group more favorably and the out-groups less favorably, even when these groups are formed randomly (Tajfel et al., 1979; Tajfel, 1981). This psychological need to maintain social identity naturally leads to liking one's own group, while disliking the other groups (Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015). Naturally, one has a tendency to think more favorably of their in-group while to think less favorably of their out-groups, even in the absence of substantive policy disagreement.

However, this does not mean that any party position change should automatically activate these group biases in affective updating. For a position change to have identity-based consequences, it should be sufficiently visible and concern an issue that is salient enough to increase perceived differentiation between partisan groups. When a party takes a more distinctive position on such an issue, the contrast with other parties grows and makes partisan group boundaries more salient. Importantly, the identity implications of a party position change are relational. For instance, the same shift may increase differentiation from some partisan groups while reducing it from others, depending on where competing parties stand on this issue. I return to these context-specific expectations in the next section. This heightened identity salience should, in turn, strengthen in-group favoritism and out-group negativity, independently of whether citizens personally agree with the party's new position. Therefore, when political conflict intensifies (i.e., when groups clash with

each other), the salience of partisan identity increases, making the feelings towards parties more strongly tied to group identity. Citizens can interpret competition between parties as symbolic competition between groups, which activates defensive reactions. Moreover, when the salience of identities increases, citizens' affective evaluations of parties can become less responsive to policy substance and more tied to group loyalty.

Party identification is a particularly pervasive and relevant group identity when studying party affect. It functions as a social and psychological political identity and provides cues about demographic characteristics and non-political identities among group members, such as religious affiliation, social class, or ethnicity (Orr and Huber, 2020). When non-political identities align with partisan identity, the latter informs the perceived social composition of groups (Harteveld, 2021*b*; Mason, 2016), which in turn influences how individuals feel toward those groups (Ahler and Sood, 2018; Mason and Wronski, 2018). Therefore, the identity mechanism also has an indirect influence on feelings towards groups.

In short, the identity perspective proposes that during times of increased competition or policy disagreement between parties on salient matters, partisan identity becomes more salient, hence leading to an increase in in-party warmth and a decrease in out-party warmth due to the group biases. Crucially, this mechanism predicts uniform responses among in-partisans in that they should respond similarly to their party taking a new position, rallying around their party regardless of whether they agree with the party's new position. This implies a form of partisan loyalty where group attachment supersedes policy evaluation.

H1 When a political party changes its position on a salient issue in a way that increases differentiation between parties, in-partisans will become more positive and out-partisans of increasingly distant parties will become more negative regardless of their policy agreement.

The second mechanism, the policy mechanism, assumes that citizens evaluate parties according to the substantive alignment between their own preferences and the party's policy positions. Drawing on spatial theories of politics (Downs, 1957), this perspective suggests that affect toward

parties reflects policy congruence: citizens feel warmer towards parties that share their preferences and colder towards those that do not. When a party changes its position, citizens should update their affective evaluations depending on whether the new party position aligns or conflicts with their preferences. Unlike the identity mechanism, this framework predicts heterogeneous responses within partisan groups, implying that party affect is contingent on policy agreement rather than partisan loyalty.

As policy differences between parties increase, the stakes of political outcomes increase (APSA, 1950), intensifying both positive and negative affective reactions towards parties (Orr and Huber, 2020; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016). Intense elite conflict clarifies parties' ideological brands (Dassonneville and Çakır, 2021; Lupu, 2013), making distinctions between in- and out-parties more salient. When citizens perceive such ideological divergence, they experience deeper value-based disagreements that heighten affective evaluations (Enders and Lupton, 2021).

Consider the domain of economic policy. The left typically favors redistribution through progressive taxation and social spending, whereas the right prioritizes free markets and limited government intervention, relying on the market to address the negative effects of income inequality (Jost, Federico and Napier, 2009). As elites polarize around these competing principles, citizens interpret the divide as a clash of incompatible worldviews, which amplifies perceived threat from the out-group (Renström, Bäck and Carroll, 2021). As a result, individuals feel warmer towards parties that share their ideological commitments and colder toward those advocating contrary positions.

In contrast to the identity mechanism, the policy mechanism predicts that these affective reactions extend beyond partisans. Individuals without partisan attachments can also adjust their feelings towards parties based on policy alignment. If affect towards parties is primarily policy-driven, both partisans and independents should update their evaluations following party position changes: warmth should decline when a party's stance conflicts with personal preferences and

increases when it aligns.[1]

H2 When a political party changes its position on a salient issue, citizens will update affect based on policy agreement, even when this contradicts identity predictions.

While identity and policy mechanisms are often treated as competing explanations, of which only one can be correct, it is also possible that they are competing considerations whose relative weight depends on the context (Jenke and Huettel, 2016). They may also operate at different stages. Partisan identity establishes baseline levels of party affect, that is the accumulated positivity or negativity reflecting long-term psychological attachments and historical experiences. However, changes in these affect following a shift in party position reveal whether citizens update their evaluations based on policy agreement or maintain identity-based loyalty regardless of disagreement. This distinction resolves a key empirical challenge: decomposing existing partisan affect into identity versus policy components is practically impossible since these drivers co-evolved over decades. But observing how individuals respond to party position changes when policy preferences cut across partisan identities provides leverage to assess whether affective updating is more consistent with policy congruence or established partisan loyalty. If all in-partisans respond uniformly regardless of their policy preferences, this would be more consistent with the partisan identity mechanism; if reactions vary systematically by policy agreement, this would provide evidence for policy-based updating. This framework shifts the question from "what explains current levels of partisan affect?" to "what drives changes in party affect?", while clarifying when elite behavior can reduce or exacerbate affective polarization. Although the focus here is on changes in party affect, such changes may also occur alongside partisan realignment when salient policy conflicts cut across existing partisan attachments. Previous research shows that such conflicts can reshape party identification and electoral support (Fieldhouse et al., 2020; Schonfeld and Winter-Levy, 2021; Hobolt and Tilley, 2026).

[1]The extent of this reaction may vary among supporters of different partisan out-groups, but the theoretical focus here is on the direction of change: whether feelings become warmer or colder as a party's position moves toward or away from their preferences.

Empirical Challenges in Studying the Drivers of Party Affect

Both party identity and policy mechanisms predict similar expectations: changes in party affect are driven by heightened identity salience or the activation of policy differences. Disentangling these effects, however, is notoriously difficult because the two are endogenous: individuals may identify with parties whose positions they share, or adopt their party's positions once identifying with it. When one is manipulated, individuals automatically update the other, even without explicit information. For instance, knowing only a candidate's party identity leads people to infer policy positions, and vice versa (Orr, Fowler and Huber, 2023). This is because party identification and policy considerations are informational and observational equivalents (Dafoe, Zhang and Caughey, 2018; Orr and Huber, 2020). For instance, support for reproductive rights cues a Democratic identity, and vice versa. Even when information on both identity and ideology is provided, they still cue each other, indicating the effect of ideology can still prompt identity which in turn influences affect (Lelkes, 2021).

Without explicit policy information, ideological considerations can be misattributed to party identification, especially when policy preferences align with party labels. Empirical studies highlight this complexity. Orr and Huber (2020) show that when individuals lack policy information, party identification strongly influences candidate evaluations. However, once concrete policy information becomes available, its influence decreases sharply, while policy considerations persists as a major driver of affect. Similarly, Lelkes (2021) finds that when given information on both candidate ideology and partisan affiliation, policy stance influences warmth more than party affiliation. Specifically, the more extreme the policy preference of the candidate is, the more pronounced the affect towards the candidates becomes (Lelkes, 2021).

Because of this informational equivalence, scholars sometimes assume both mechanisms are at work, or default to the view that identity mechanism overshadows the policy mechanism. This is the main challenge in studying the mechanisms of party affect, and the gap that this research aims to contribute to.

Moreover, when policy is sorted along identity, which is usually the case, their independent

effects become observationally equivalent. Even in experimental settings, policy and partisan identity cue each other (Orr, Fowler and Huber, 2023), making it practically impossible to study these mechanisms even in hypothetical cases. Therefore, studying these mechanisms requires a case with a sudden and clearly observable change in party position on a salient issue that is not sorted along partisan lines in the real world and is widely observed by citizens.

To overcome these empirical limitations, a case that allows us to study these mechanisms must meet five criteria. First, we should observe a sudden shift in party position that was not anticipated by citizens. This way, we can examine affective updating around the position change, which was not a response to voter preferences. Second, the issue in question should not be pre-sorted along partisan lines. This ensures that party identity does not automatically cue ideological content, and vice versa. Third, the issue in question should be a salient one, meaning that citizens are attentive and motivated to update their evaluations in response to the party's stance. If citizens do not know or care about the issue, there is little reason to expect affective updating, hence, a lack of change in feelings could then simply reflect limited awareness or weak preferences rather than the absence of either identity or ideology mechanism. Fourth, the change in party position should be clearly perceived by citizens within a short period of time so that we can credibly measure affective responses before the shock is absorbed into broader partisan narratives. Lastly, it should take place in the real world rather than in hypothetical or low-information settings so that any observed responses reflect what citizens genuinely prioritize. This ensures that findings are not experimental artifacts but they are generalizable to actual political behavior. The empirical setting examined in this study meets all five of these conditions, providing a rare and unusual opportunity to compare identity- and policy-based mechanisms of partisan affect in a real-world context where the two are not observationally equivalent by design. In the next section, I present a unique context that satisfies all these criteria.

Case Study: Sudden and Unexpected Shift in the Conservative Party's Brexit Stance

To test the identity and policy mechanisms to explain affect towards political parties, I focus on a unique case in the United Kingdom. Following the razor-thin victory of the Leave side in the 2016 referendum, the Conservative Party suddenly shifted its position on Brexit, a salient issue, from supporting remaining in the European Union to advocating leaving it. Moreover, this position change was widely perceived by citizens. Importantly, Brexit attitudes cross-cut traditional party lines, which allows for the empirical study of mechanisms of party affect.

David Cameron promised to hold a referendum on whether the United Kingdom should remain in or leave the European Union if the Conservative Party was to form a majority government following the 2015 general elections (Higgins, 2013). He kept this manifesto promise and scheduled the referendum for June 23rd 2016. Both the Conservative and Labour Parties officially campaigned to remain in the European Union during the 2016 referendum. David Cameron was a supporter of the EU and thought that a victory for the remain side would be almost certain. Despite some division within the party, the Conservative Party leadership backed the Remain side with 24 out of 30 cabinet ministers campaigning for remain (Schonfeld and Winter-Levy, 2021).

Leading up to the referendum, polls did not show a clear victory for any side, however, it was leaning towards the remain side (Duncan, 2016). For example, a survey among 600 journalists overwhelmingly predicted (87%) a remain victory two weeks prior to the referendum (Jennings and Fisher, 2016), and a YouGov survey on the day of the referendum predicting a narrow remain victory (YouGov, 2016). Following the narrow victory of the "leave" side (51.9% versus 48.1%) on 23rd of June, David Cameron announced on 24th of June that he would step down so that a new leadership in the Conservative Party should start the formal process of withdrawal from the EU. Therefore, the day after the referendum, the Conservative Party signaled that they would shift its official position in favor of Brexit. However, this shift only materialized with Theresa May replacing David Cameron. Under the new leadership, the Conservative Party adopted a solid pro-

Brexit stance (Hayton, 2022). This increased elite ideological polarization, with the Labour Party as the pro-EU camp and the Conservative Party as the pro-Brexit camp. Tilley and Hobolt (2023) put nicely the unexpected nature of the results: "The decision by a narrow majority of British voters to leave the European Union (EU) in 2016 was a political earthquake that few had seen coming." After the referendum, contentious debate persisted and British politics entered a prolonged period of gridlock as the parties struggled to agree on a Brexit deal. This sudden reversal of Conservative Party's position provides a unique opportunity to examine how feelings toward parties respond to a party's position change.

It is important to note that Brexit stance gradually turned into a social identity (Remainer vs. Leaver). This study does not claim that Brexit never became an identity—it clearly did (Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley, 2021; Tilley and Hobolt, 2023; Sorace and Hobolt, 2021). The key point, however, is timing. Issue stances do not crystallize into social identities overnight. While Sobolewska and Ford (2020) show that the value divides underlying Brexit preferences developed over decades, the question for this study is when these divides became labelled group identities, which Tilley and Hobolt (2023) locate in the referendum itself. The referendum provided a clear binary categorization and an act of political self-expression, while the continuing mobilization, constitutional conflict, and disputes over democratic legitimacy that followed deepened the Leave–Remain divide and contributed to the consolidation of these identities (Brändle, Galpin and Trenz, 2022; Hobolt and Tilley, 2026). Google Trends data are consistent with this interpretation: web searches for identity labels like "Brexiteer" and "Remainer" were minimal during the referendum period, only spiking substantially from 2018 onward during the prolonged withdrawal crisis (see Appendix A for details). This pattern suggests that while the referendum triggered Brexit identity formation, the identities themselves consolidated later. This study therefore captures a window in which Leave and Remain identities were emerging rather than consolidated, and Brexit stances primarily, though not exclusively, reflected substantive preferences over EU membership that cut across partisan lines, which is precisely the condition that makes it possible to compare policy and identity mechanisms. I cannot rule out, however, that part of the updating observed here was reinforced by

these emerging identities. More generally, when a highly salient policy conflict such as Brexit cuts across existing partisan divisions, policy congruence may initially outweigh established partisan identity, while the same substantive division may later become the basis for new political identities.

This shift in the Conservative Party's position is also reflected in citizens' perceptions. Figure 1 illustrates the perceived mean positions of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party on European Integration. For instance, during wave 7 (April/May 2016) and wave 8 (May/June 2016), which are pre-referendum waves, the Conservative Party's position is perceived as pro-EU (4.45 and 4.4, respectively) even though both parties also had MPs that disagreed with their party. However, immediately following the referendum and Cameron's announcement of his intention to resign when a new leader is elected (wave 9, June/July 2016), the Conservative Party's perceived position shifts slightly to a less pro-EU stance (4.8). With Theresa May's appointment as prime minister, the Conservative Party adopts a clear pro-Brexit stance, and by wave 10 (November/December 2016), its perceived position becomes clearly pro-Brexit (6.1), representing approximately a 1.4-point change between wave 9 and wave 10. In contrast, the perceived position of the Labour Party remains stable over time, consistently around 3.5 from wave 6 to 10. As a result, perceived polarization on Brexit increased: the perceived polarization grew from 1 point in wave 7 (pre-referendum) to 2.5-points in wave 10 (post-referendum). This divergence further continues to grow over time as the Conservative Party adopts a more rigid pro-Brexit stance. However, my focus is on the immediate shift that took place during the transition from Cameron to May, triggered by the EU Referendum outcome.

In short, the unexpected results of the 2016 Referendum caused a position change in the Conservative Party that increased elite polarization over the issue of Brexit. This provides a good opportunity to study (1) how in-partisans, out-partisans and non-partisans react to party position change on a salient issue and (2) investigate the policy and identitarian drivers of party affect. Empirically, I adopt an interrupted time series design around a major political event, focusing on two closely spaced waves (8 and 9) of the British Election Study Internet Panel (BESIP): the fieldwork for wave 8 ended on 22 June, the referendum took place on 23 June, Cameron announced

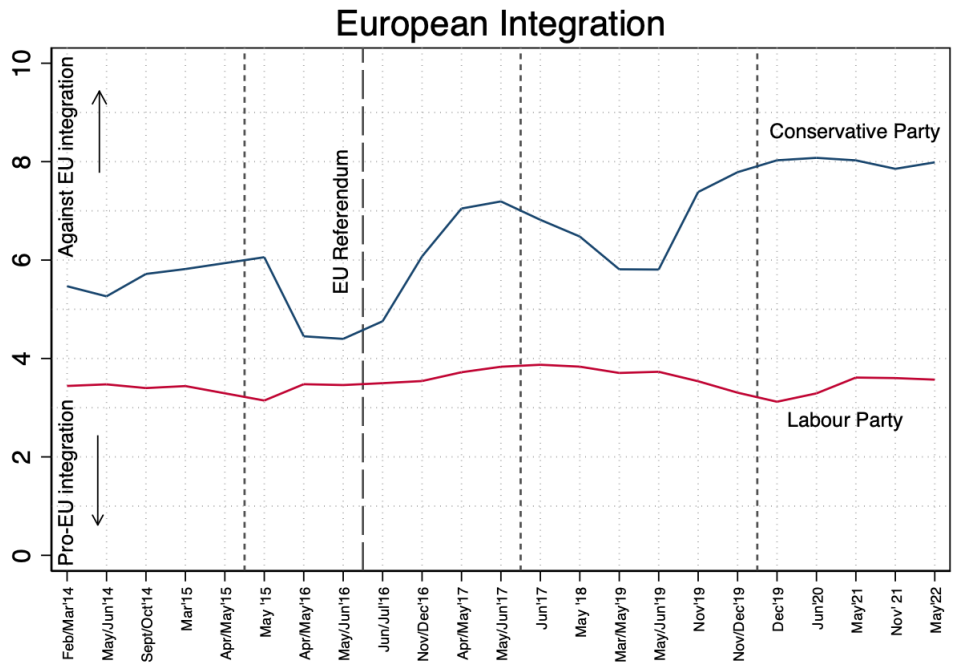
his resignation on 24 June, and the fieldwork for wave 9 started the same day.[2] Given that the Referendum results were uncertain, if anything it was leaning towards a win for the Remain side (Duncan, 2016), the interruption (i.e., change in the Conservative Party's position) is surprising and sudden.[3] Moreover, Appendix C shows no consistent evidence that the public anticipated a change in the Conservative Party's position before the referendum. Moreover, other parties' positions remained the same. Altogether, these allow me to examine whether the change in party affect after the Conservative Party's overnight shift in its Brexit stance was in line with the policy or identity mechanisms.[4]

[2]Respondents who participate in one wave may drop out in subsequent waves but may return in other waves. However, Appendix B shows that attrition does not bias the results.

[3]Conditional on a Leave victory, the Conservative Party's shift towards a pro-Brexit position was predictable; what was uncertain before 23 June was the referendum result, and therefore the direction in which the party's position would move.

[4]Other political reactions to the referendum may also have contributed to the observed patterns of affective updating, although their relative contribution cannot be determined.

Figure 1. Perception Position of the Labour and Conservative Parties on EU Integration



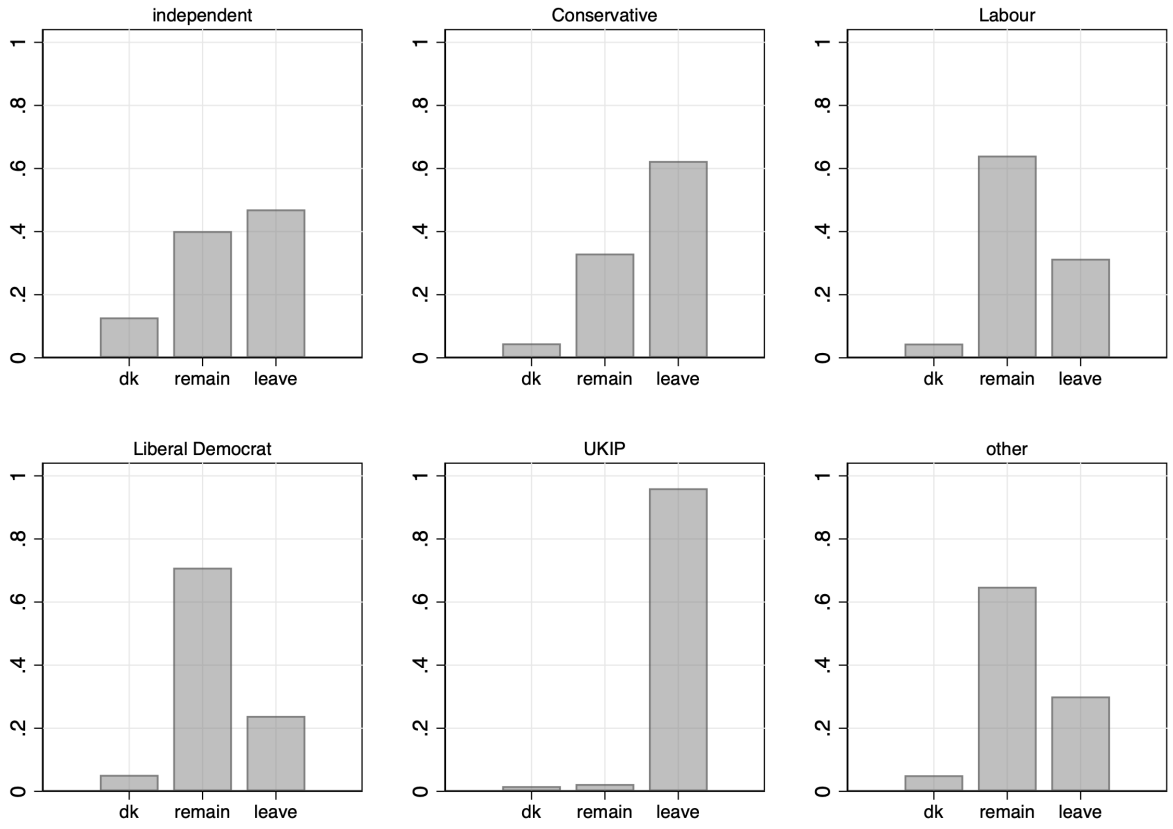
Notes: Lines indicate respondents' mean perceived positions of the Conservative Party (blue) and Labour Party (red) on European integration. Higher values indicate more Eurosceptic positions, while lower values indicate more pro-EU positions. Vertical dashed lines indicate key political events, as labeled in the figure.

To examine affect towards the Conservative Party, I rely on a question that asks panelists to indicate their level of liking or disliking for each party on a scale that ranges from 0 (strongly dislike) to 10 (strongly like).

To define partisan groups, I rely on respondents' party identification prior to the Conservative Party's position change. Panelists are asked to respond to the question "Generally speaking, do you think of yourself as Labour, Conservative, Liberal Democrat or what?" Based on respondents' party identification in the last wave before the change, which is pre-Referendum wave 8 (May/June 2016), individuals are categorized as identifying with the Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats, UKIP, or others (SNP, Plaid Cymru or Green Party).

Figure 2 shows referendum vote intentions among partisan groups based on wave 8 (based

Figure 2. Distribution of Referendum Vote Intention across Partisan Groups

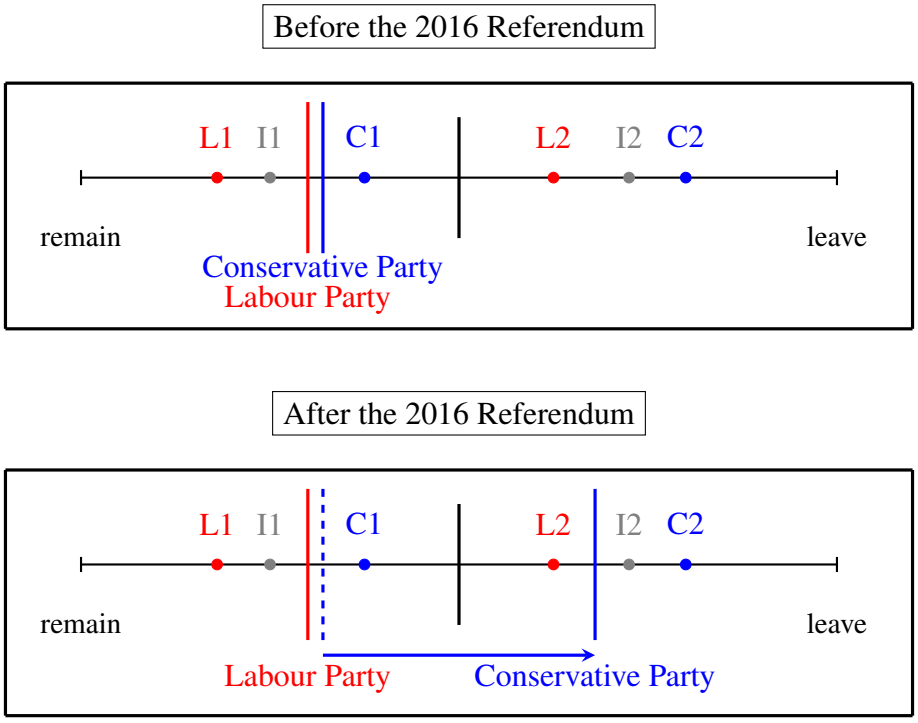


Notes: Bars indicate the proportion of respondents supporting Remain, Leave, or without a referendum preference, separately by partisan group. Party identification and referendum vote intentions are measured in Wave 8 (May/June 2016), before the referendum.

on party identity prior to the Conservative Party's position change). With the exception of UKIP, whose identifiers overwhelmingly favour leaving (roughly 95%), attitudes toward the EU cross-cut most parties. Among non-partisans, around 10% are unsure, 35 % prefer remain, and 50% would vote leave. About 60% of Conservatives say they would vote leave, compared to 35% who would remain. The pattern is reversed among Labour identifiers, with roughly 55% favouring remain and 40% leaning leave. As for Liberal Democrats, around 70% support remain, while identifiers of other parties mirror Labour's leanings at roughly 60% remain and 30% leave.

Figure 3 illustrates the theoretical expectations based on the British case to examine how in-partisans, out-partisans and non-partisans should react to the Conservative Party's change in posi-

Figure 3. Party Position Change and Ideological Agreement Explains Affect toward Parties: the Case of Brexit



Notes: The figure presents six hypothetical individuals and the real positions of the Conservative Party and the Labour Party before the referendum (top panel) and after the referendum (bottom panel). L1 and L2 represent two Labour identifiers; C1 and C2 two Conservative identifiers; I1 and I2 two independents. The dashed blue line indicates the Conservative Party's position before the 2016 referendum. The black vertical line represents the mid-scale. L1, I1, and C1 are pro-remain, while L2, I2, and C2 are pro-leave.

tion on Brexit. For simplicity, the figure focuses on independents, Labour identifiers and Conservative identifiers. Both panels show the Brexit stances of hypothetical Labour partisans (L1 and L2), Conservative partisans (C1 and C2) and non-partisans (I1 and I2), with vertical lines marking the positions of the Labour Party (red) and the Conservative Party (blue). Top panel represents the situation before the 2016 Referendum, where both parties campaigned to remain in the EU, meaning that their positions were similar, as seen in the proximity of vertical lines, indicating low polarization between the two parties on this issue. The bottom panel, however, represents the situation

after the 2016 Referendum, where Conservative Party adopted a pro-Brexit position, increasing the polarization between the two party.

When the Conservative Party adopted a pro-Brexit stance, this meant that the party moved away from L1, C1 and I1, while approached L2, C2 and I2. First, according to identity mechanism, irrespective of their stance on Brexit, Conservative partisans (C1 and C2) should like the Conservative Party more, while Labour partisans (L1 and L2) should dislike it more. This is because the increased polarization between the parties renders the identities more salient. As for independents, identity mechanism does not predict any change, as they lack any identity with either of the parties. Second, according to policy mechanism, in-partisans, out-partisans, and non-partisans should react differently based on their alignment with the party. As L1, C1 and I1 now disagree with the Conservative Party's new pro-Brexit position, they should update their feelings towards the party to like it less. At the same time, the Conservative Party aligns with the preferences of L2, C2 and I2, which means that these hypothetical individuals should like the Conservative Party more.

Table 1 summarizes how identity and policy mechanisms predict changes in partisan affect based on party identification and referendum stance. Certain conditions produce observational equivalence such as Remainer Labour partisans or Leaver Conservative partisans, where both identity and ideology predict the same directional shift in partisan affect, making it impossible to tell which mechanism is driving the change. However, Brexit attitudes cross-cut party lines (See Figure 2), creating observationally distinct conditions (e.g., Leaver Labour partisans or Remainer Conservative partisans), where identity and policy mechanisms predict different outcomes.

Examining individuals without a stance on the referendum helps further isolate the mechanisms at work. If partisans who lack a referendum preference still update their feelings towards the Conservative Party following its position change, this indicates an identity-driven effect. However, if they do not respond, this is lack of evidence for identity mechanism although not necessarily against it. Likewise, if non-partisans only change their affect when they hold a pro- or anti-Brexit stance, that points to an policy basis. Since identity and policy cannot be disentangled in the observationally equivalent subgroups (Remainer Labour partisans, Leaver Conservative partisans),

Table 1. Empirical Expectations to Detect Identity and Ideology Basis of Partisan Affect

		Mechanism	Conservative Party warmth	observational equivalent
Conservative partisans	Remainer	Identity	increase	no
		Policy	decrease	no
	Leaver	Identity	increase	yes
		Policy	increase	yes
	No opinion	Identity	increase	no
		Policy	no change	no
Labour partisans	Remainer	Identity	decrease	yes
		Policy	decrease	yes
	Leaver	Identity	decrease	no
		Policy	increase	no
	No opinion	Identity	decrease	no
		Policy	no change	no
Liberal Democrat partisans	Remainer	Identity	decrease	yes
		Policy	decrease	yes
	Leaver	Identity	decrease	no
		Policy	increase	no
	No opinion	Identity	decrease	no
		Policy	no change	no
non-partisans	Remainer	Policy	decrease	no
	Leaver	Policy	increase	no
	No opinion	Policy	no change	no

the focus will be on the observationally distinct subgroups: Leaver Labour partisans, Remainer Conservative partisans (only the feelings towards the Conservative Party), all non-partisans, and partisans with no referendum stance.

Overall, the theoretical framework suggests that non-partisans can also react to the changing position of the Conservative Party, they cannot serve as a counterfactual group. Consequently, a difference-in-difference design, comparing changes among partisans to independents, is not feasible. Instead, I focus on within-individual changes between the pre- and post-referendum waves within each partisan groups. This design controls for observed and unobserved time-invariant factors, which alleviates concerns about omitted variable bias. Because the estimates represent within-respondent changes, they also do not suffer from differential item functioning (DIF) due to differences in how individuals interpret like-dislike scale (Hare et al., 2015; Bauer et al., 2017).

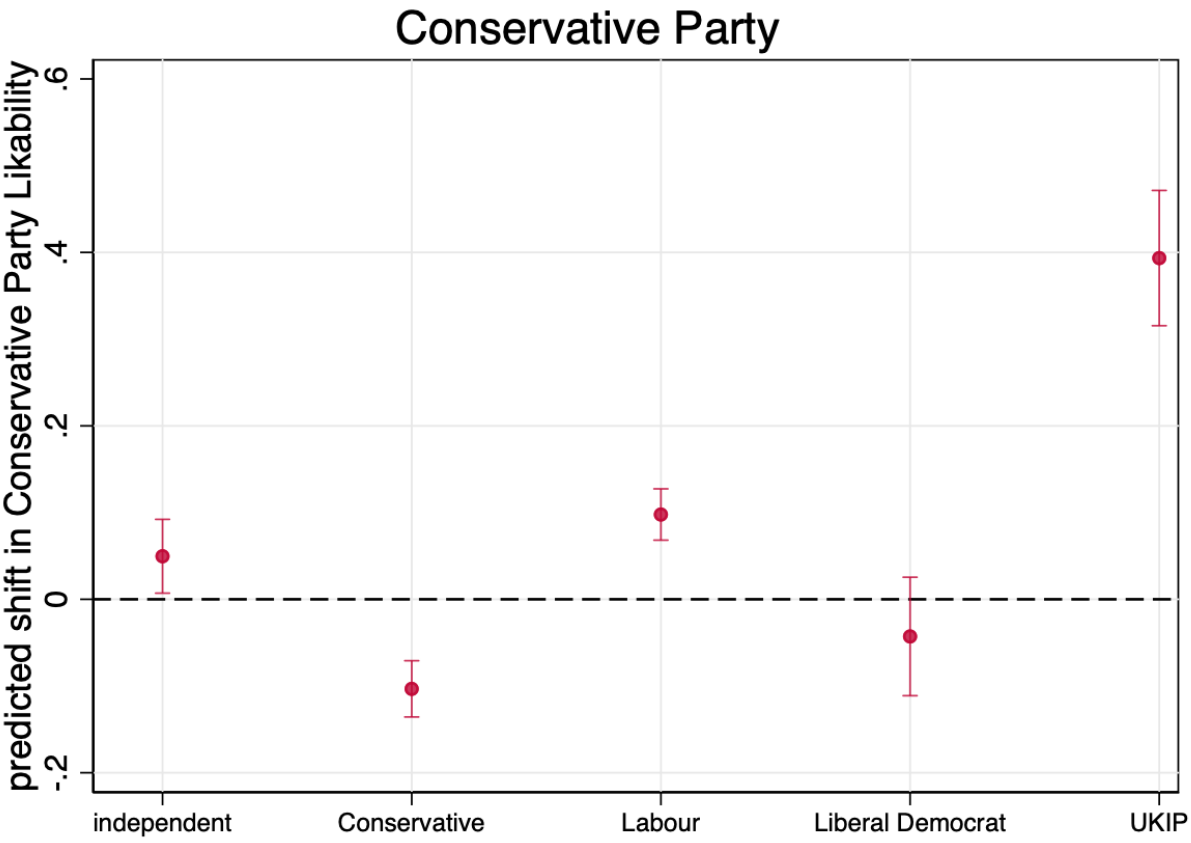
Results

Identity Mechanism

Based on the identitarian basis of party affect, when parties differ more starkly from each other, identities become more salient, hence leading in-partisans to like the party more and out-partisans to dislike the party more. This means that we should observe an increase in warmth towards the Conservative Party among the Conservative identifiers. However, note that this expectation is relational when it comes to feelings towards the Conservative Party among different out-partisan groups. For the partisans of the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, we should observe a decreased like, as their own parties, having campaigned to remain in the EU, now differ more strongly from the Conservative Party. Regarding UKIP partisans, the difference between the Conservative Party and the UKIP is less pronounced, as UKIP campaigned to leave. As for independents, identity mechanism cannot predict any changes because they lack a partisan identity. Average within-individual changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party before and after the position change among partisan groups are visualized in Figure 4.

Inconsistent with the identitarian basis, Conservative identifiers did not grow more positive towards the Conservative Party. Their feelings became slightly less positive by 0.1-point (panel 2). Still inconsistent with the identitarian basis, Labour identifiers' dislike towards the out-party did not intensify: they became less negative towards the Conservative Party by 0.1-points. This suggests that, for both Labour and Conservative partisans, the observed changes are difficult to explain through a uniform partisan identity mechanism. Whether these reactions instead follow policy considerations is examined in the next section. This is also corroborated by non-partisans: even though they lack a partisan attachment, they also updated their feelings by becoming more positive towards the Conservative Party (by 0.05-points). While these changes in feelings are not large, they clearly go against the expectations in hypothesis 1. Moreover, inconsistent with the identity mechanism, Liberal Democrats did not change their feelings towards the Conservative Party, either.

Figure 4. Change in feelings towards the Conservative Party among partisan groups



Notes: Points indicate estimated average within-individual changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party between waves 8 and 9. Positive values indicate increased warmth, while negative values indicate decreased warmth. 95% confidence intervals are indicated.

As for UKIP identifiers, they grew warmer towards the Conservative Party (0.39-points). Both identity and policy mechanisms predict an increase among UKIP partisans because the decreased divergence between the Conservative Party and UKIP made the identity less salient and increased policy agreement at the same time.

Given that out-partisans often adjusted their feelings towards the Conservative Party in the opposite direction to what the identity mechanism predicts (e.g., among Labour and Conservative partisans), and that non-partisans adjusted theirs as well, the identity mechanism itself cannot explain the observed changes. Even though the position change increased the Conservative Party's distinction from the Labour Party and the Liberal Democrats, its own partisans did not rally around

it and out-partisans did not turn against it. This should not, however, be read as evidence that partisan identity is irrelevant for party affect in general. Partisan identity clearly structures the levels of affect: Conservative identifiers remain far warmer towards their party than any other group (Figure 6).

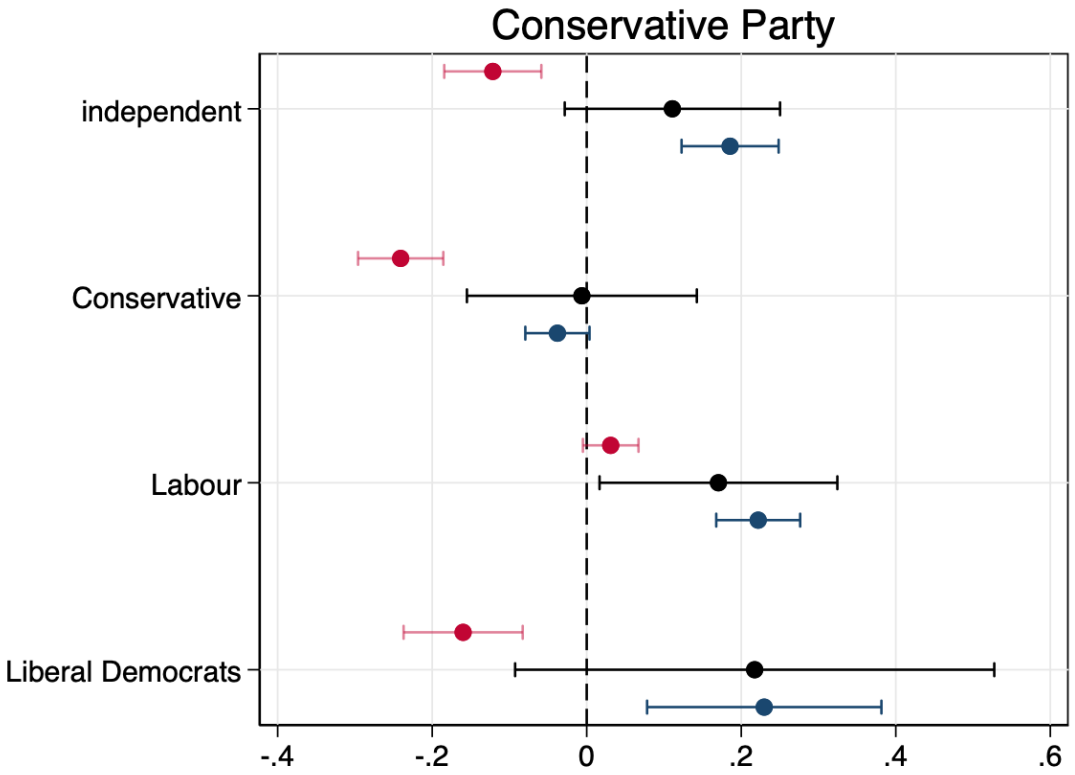
Policy Mechanism

Overall, neither in-partisans nor out-partisans reacted to the increasing polarization in line with the predictions of the identity mechanism. However, identity mechanism should be examined along with individuals' ideological agreement with the parties' policy positions. According to the policy basis of party affect (see Table 1), in-partisans, out-partisans and non-partisans who agree with the Conservative Party's new Brexit position should become warmer towards it, while those who disagree should become colder. For example, if party identity mechanism is the driving force, regardless of their policy agreement with the Conservative Party, we should see an increase in warmth among all Conservative identifiers, which was not the case in Figure 4. However, if Conservative partisans who agree with the party's new position grow to like the party more, but those who disagree with it grow to like the party less, this would indicate that policy mechanism explains the changes rather than the identity mechanism.

Figure 5 examines whether these shifts, measured as average within-individual predicted changes, are moderated by individuals' referendum vote intention (remain or leave) in wave 8 (before the referendum).

Partisans' reactions are consistent with policy considerations. For example, Conservative partisans who supported Remain (around 35% of Conservative identifiers) became less positive toward their party (by 0.24-points), whereas Leave supporters and those without a preference did not change their feelings. This helps explain why, overall, Conservative partisans became less positive about their own party (as observed in Figure 4). Among independents, Remainers grew less positive, while Leavers became more positive, which is a pattern also observed among Liberal Democrats. Likewise, Labour partisans who supported the Leave side (around 30% of Labour

Figure 5. Feelings towards the Conservative Party based on Brexit stance



Notes: Leavers are indicated in blue, Remainers in red, and those without a preference in black. Points indicate estimated average within-individual changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party. 95% confidence intervals are indicated.

identifiers) warmed to the Conservative Party, while Labour Remainers did not shift their feelings of the Conservative Party, leading to a net increase in positivity among Labour partisans as a group. In fact, across nearly all groups, Leavers became warmer toward the Conservative Party except for Conservative partisans themselves, while Remainers became cooler except for Labour partisans.

To connect these findings with the expectations laid out in Table 1, focusing on observationally distinct conditions reveals strong evidence against the identity basis and in favour of the policy basis. Observationally distinct categories (Remainer Conservative partisans, Leaver Labour partisans, Leaver Liberal Democrats, non-partisans and those without a stance on Brexit) all consistently point to the policy basis of party affect with the exception of Labour partisans who did not have a stance. For instance, Leaver Labour and Liberal Democrat partisans grew more positive

towards the Conservative Party, and Remainer Conservative partisans grew less positive towards their party, as the policy mechanism predicts and the identity mechanism does not. Overall, the pattern is striking in its consistency: in every case where party identity and policy considerations predict different outcomes, the findings support the predictions of the policy mechanism over those based on partisan loyalty alone.

How Durable are These Affective Reactions?

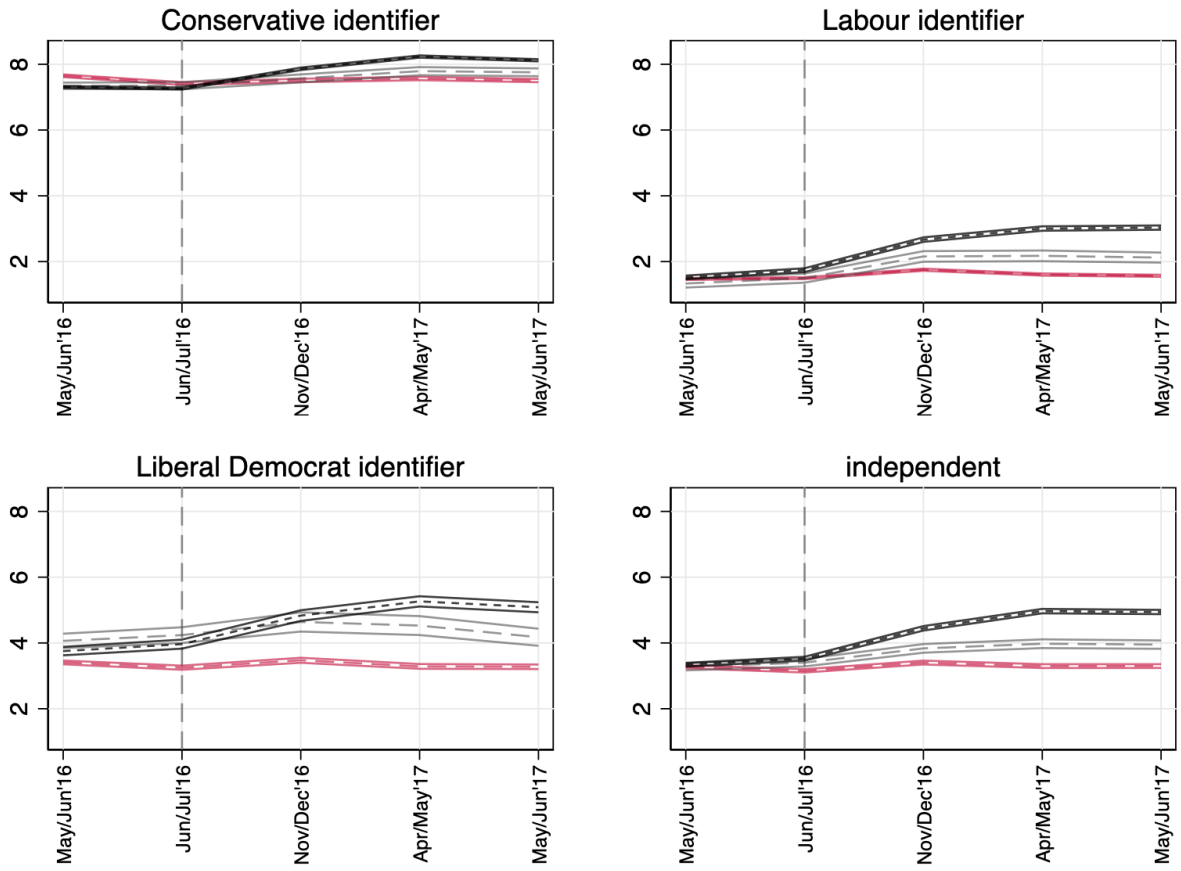
Are the observed changes in citizens' affective reactions short-lived, reverting to their previous levels over time, or do they persist in the long run? To answer this, Figure 6 shows how feelings towards the Conservative Party evolved among different partisan groups by pre-referendum Brexit stance.[5] The partisan groups are defined using party identification measured in wave 8, before the referendum, regardless of whether respondents later changed their party identification. Consistent with the policy basis of affect towards parties, those who already supported the Leave camp prior to the position change started to grow more positive about the Conservative Party. This finding applies to all partisan groups and non-partisans. For instance, among Leaver independents, average feelings increased from 3.34 pre-referendum to 3.52 immediately after, to 4.15 in November/December 2016 and to 4.97 in April/May 2017, which represents a total increase of 1.63 points on a 11-point scale. Similarly, Leaver Labour partisans showed a gradual warming as well: their average feelings rose from 1.52 in May/June 2016 to 1.74 immediately after the referendum (June/July 2016), to 2.67 in November/December 2016, to 3.00 in April/May 2017. Even among Leaver Conservatives, who showed no immediate change, feelings towards their own party increased from 7.30 pre-referendum to 7.86 in November/December 2016, to 8.12 in April/May 2017, which points to a lagged effect. On the contrary, Remainer Conservatives experienced a different trajectory. Their pre-referendum feelings decreased to 7.41 immediately after the ref-

[5]UKIP partisans are not included in the figure because of lack of variation in Brexit stance. However, the increased warmth among the UKIP partisans is noteworthy. The average warmth towards the Conservative Party rose from 3.1 pre-referendum levels to 3.5 immediately after the position change and to 6.0 in less than a year.

erendum from 7.65, then remained stable and recovered only slightly afterward, never reverting to pre-referendum levels. This divergence between Leavers and Remainers within each partisan group, particularly the contrasting patterns among Conservative identifiers themselves, is more consistent with policy-based updating over the partisan identity mechanism.

Given that the Conservative Party's new pro-Brexit position consolidated over time, increased warmth among Leavers across partisan groups makes sense. However, caution should be exerted to attribute the subsequent changes in feelings to the Conservative Party's position change only, as other factors such as persuasion or motivated reasoning might have influenced these trends. Nevertheless, these results offer two important takeaways. First, the immediate changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party were not short-lived but reinforced over time in most cases. Second, the effect sizes are substantively meaningful: the immediate effects observed in Figure 5, which represent affective reactions to the Conservative Party's initial position-change announcement before it materialized into a hard-Brexit stance, grew larger as the party's commitment became stronger and clearer.

Figure 6. Evolution of feelings towards the Conservative Party among partisan groups by pre-referendum Brexit stance



Note: Estimates are based on panel data OLS regression with individual fixed effects and cluster robust standard errors at the individual level. The models are run separately for each partisan group as measured in wave 8 (May/June 2016). The estimates indicate within-individual averages. Leavers are indicated in blue, Remainers in red, and those without a preference in black. 95 percent confidence intervals are indicated.

Moreover, although Figure 6 tracks the same individuals based on their initial party identification, some of them may have changed their party identification over time. The over-time trends should therefore be interpreted in light of the Brexit-based partisan realignment that followed the referendum, and they also speak to research on this realignment (Fieldhouse et al., 2020; Schonfeld and Winter-Levy, 2021; Hobolt and Tilley, 2026). Additional analyses in Appendix G show that

subsequent changes in party identification differed by pre-referendum Brexit stance and took place alongside changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party.

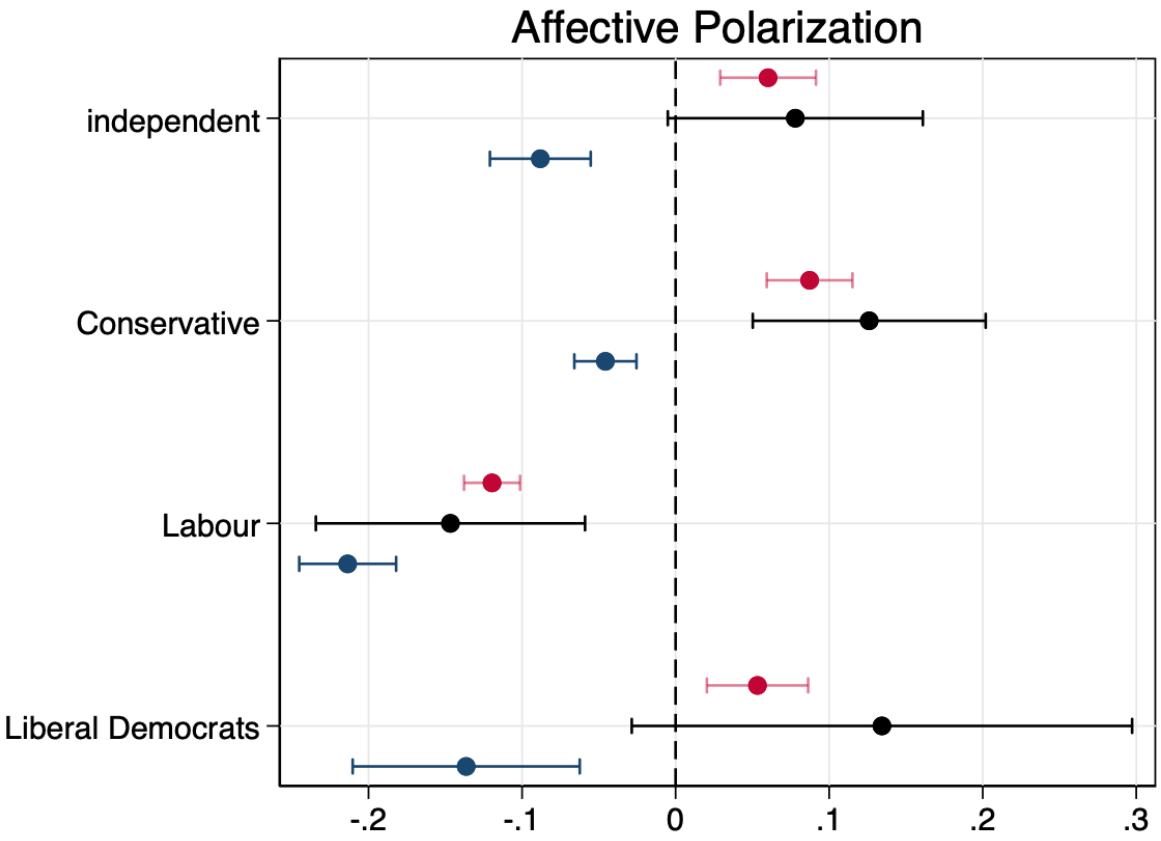
Implications for Affective Polarization

This exploratory section investigates how the Conservative Party's position change relates to changes in affective polarization. Figure 7 plots the changes in affective polarization among partisan groups by their Brexit stance. Following Wagner (2021), affective polarization is measured as the spread of party evaluations, which allows for including independents in the analyses as well.

The patterns are strikingly similar to changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party in that those who grew warmer towards the Conservative Party became less affectively polarized and those who grew colder became more affectively polarized. Overall, Remainers became more affectively polarized, while Leavers became less affectively polarized. For instance, Remainer non-partisans became more affectively polarized, while Leaver non-partisans became less polarized. One might think that affective polarization is necessarily bound to follow policy considerations among independents because they lack a partisan identity, but Conservative identifiers and Liberal Democrat identifiers also follow this same pattern. As for Labour partisans, there is a general tendency towards less polarization, as Remainer, Leaver or those without a Brexit stance all depolarized. This is also consistent with policy basis of affective polarization because even though all depolarized, Remainer Labour identifiers became much less affectively depolarized compared to Leaver Labour identifiers.

In short, these results among non-partisans, out-partisans and in-partisans suggest that changes in affective polarization follow patterns consistent with policy-based updating following the Conservative Party's position change on Brexit.

Figure 7. Policy-Basis of Affective Polarization Among Partisan Groups



Notes: Leavers are indicated in blue, Remainers in red, and those without a preference in black. Points indicate estimated average within-individual changes in affective polarization. 95% confidence intervals are indicated.

Robustness and Further Analyses

Additional checks support these conclusions. Analyses in Appendix B show that attrition between the two waves does not challenge the findings. While attrition was not predicted meaningfully by socio-demographic characteristics and political attitudes (e.g., euroskepticism and political attention), respondents who were weaker partisans, older and more educated were somewhat less likely to drop out by wave 9. Replicating the analyses by controlling for these variables, with inverse probability weights, or with survey weights that make the sample representative of the British

electorate does not meaningfully change the interpretations.

Appendix C examines pre-referendum trends in party affect and the possibility that the public anticipated the Conservative Party's position change on Brexit. First, it examines whether partisan groups followed similar affective trends before the referendum (i.e., pre-position-change). Second, it addresses the possibility that the public may have anticipated Conservative Party's position change. If that were happening, we should observe that Leavers from different parties were warming up to the Conservative Party, while Remainers grew colder towards it. Analyses provide no consistent evidence for this possibility. On the contrary, Remainer Labour partisans warmed up to the Conservative Party, as it was also campaigning to remain in the EU, while Leavers across partisan groups did not change their feelings towards the Conservative Party between waves 7 and 8. Moreover, analyses also show that UKIP partisans, who warmed up to the Conservative Party when the latter changed its position post-referendum, would also have warmed up to the Conservative Party pre-referendum if they had anticipated a potential position change, but they did not. Appendix C also presents analyses exploiting the timing of interviews within each wave, including daily trends before and after the referendum and replications restricting the pre-referendum period to the final 7, 14 and 21 days of the campaign, which yield results similar to the main analyses.

Did Conservative partisans adopt a more euroskeptic position when the party adopted the Leave stance? Analyses in Appendix D provide three important findings. First, all groups became less euroskeptical: non-partisans and Conservative partisans by 0.65 points, Labour partisans by 0.77 points, Liberal Democrats by 0.81 points and UKIP partisans by 0.23 points. However, compared to independents, there was no effect of party cue on Conservative identifiers. Brexit stance moderates this: while Leaver Conservatives did not differ from Leaver independents, Remainer Conservatives indeed became less euroskeptic compared to Remainer independents. This provides clear evidence that Conservative partisans did not follow their party and adjust their opinion on Europe.

One might be concerned that partisanship measured at a single time point may contain measurement error or reflect recent switches in response to the referendum campaign, which would

make it endogenous to the position change. To address these concerns, Appendix E replicates the main analyses restricting the sample to consistent identifiers, those who maintained the same party identification across waves 6, 7 and 8.

Lastly, partisan identification strength did not moderate the findings (See Appendix F).

Discussion

This study examined whether changes in party affect are driven by policy considerations or party loyalty. By leveraging the Conservative Party's sudden shift from supporting Remain to embracing Brexit following the 2016 referendum, I was able to compare the predictions of these two mechanisms, which is typically challenging due to their observational equivalence. The findings are consistent with the view that policy agreement with parties, rather than party loyalty, drives the changes of citizens' affective evaluations of political parties. Remainer in-partisans (i.e., Conservative Remainers) became less positive toward their party following the position change, while Leaver out-partisans grew warmer towards the Conservative Party. Importantly, these reactions were not short-lived but persisted over time (1 year). Moreover, the results show that changes in affective polarization in the British context are also more consistent with policy considerations than with partisan identity. In this sense, these results converge with those of Algara and Zur (2023) in that there is a spatial logic to affective polarization.

These findings do not suggest that partisan identity is irrelevant to affective polarization. Rather, they clarify how identity and policy matter at different stages. Partisan identity establishes a baseline level of party affect: individuals like their own party a lot more than out-parties even in the absence of policy disagreement. This baseline creates the foundation for affective polarization in political systems. However, when parties change positions on salient issues on which citizens hold clear, pre-existing preferences, changes in affect, hence changes in affective polarization, are driven by policy considerations. This distinction between levels and changes reconciles seemingly contradictory findings and clarifies when identity vs. policy mechanisms dominate.

The finding that out-partisan affect responds primarily to policy considerations rather than identity salience carries important implication for affective polarization. If out-party dislike was primarily identity-driven, it would be resistant to change: social identities are sticky, slow to form, and difficult to manipulate (Huddy, Mason and Aarøe, 2015). Political elites would have limited ability to reduce affective polarization except through long-term efforts to reshape group boundaries or reduce identity salience. In contrast, if affective polarization is policy-driven, it is inherently more malleable. Parties can moderate their positions, seek compromise, or emphasize cross-cutting issues to reduce affective divisions. Moreover, the durability of policy-based affective changes observed in this study suggests that such elite moderation could have lasting effects.

One implication is for the recurring debate in the affective polarization literature concerns whether changes are driven primarily by in-party enthusiasm or out-party animosity (Iyengar et al., 2019; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes, 2012; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017; Bassan-Nygate and Weiss, 2022; Lelkes and Westwood, 2017; Algara and Zur, 2023). The results suggest that this question has no single answer: the relative importance of in-party and out-party feelings depends on how party positions shift relative to individuals' own preferences. That is, the question that we ask should not be whether in-party or out-party feelings drive the change in affective polarization because the affect is conditioned by a spatial logic integrating both citizens' and parties' policy positions.

Overall, the results of this study converge with those of Orr and Huber (2020) and Orr, Fowler and Huber (2023) in that policy considerations outweigh partisan identity when it comes to out-group affect. By comparing the two mechanisms in a real-world setting where they make opposing predictions, this study adds to the growing evidence in favour of the policy mechanism in explaining how much citizens like or dislike parties, hence, suggesting that changes in affective polarization are rooted, at least in part, in ideological considerations. This challenges the identity-centric approaches to affective polarization. Moreover, the results are also compatible with the findings that policy polarization drives affective polarization (Webster and Abramowitz, 2017; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016; Lelkes, 2021; Harteveld, 2021*a*; Gidron, Adams and Horne, 2022; Kawecki,

2022; Banda and Cluverius, 2018; Algara and Zur, 2023). The similarity of the results across the US and UK contexts suggests that the importance of policy substance for partisan affect can extend beyond institutional differences, from a presidential two-party system to a parliamentary multiparty system.

Moreover, these findings reveal important limits to partisan motivated reasoning. Given that cognitive dissonance, which arose when the party's new pro-Brexit position went against Remainer Conservatives, should lead partisans to rationalize their party's position or adjust their own preferences to decrease dissonance (Kunda, 1990; Matz and Wood, 2005; Leeper and Slothuus, 2014; Petersen et al., 2013; Achen and Bartels, 2017; Barber and Pope, 2019; Lenz, 2013), Conservative Remainers did neither. Appendix D shows that they did not become more euroskeptic to align with their party's new pro-Brexit stance. Instead, they grew colder toward the Conservative Party, indicating that on salient issues where citizens have already formed clear preferences, partisan identity does not outweigh policy considerations. This finding is consistent with research from the United Kingdom that (1) pro-EU Conservative identifiers disaffiliated from the party, while Eurosceptics became more likely to identify with it (Schonfeld and Winter-Levy, 2021) and (2) when the Labour Party adopted a more left-wing position under Jeremy Corbyn's leadership, Labour partisans did not follow their party (Çakır, 2024). These findings challenge the depictions of partisans as "blind followers" who automatically adopt their party's positions (Achen and Bartels, 2017). Moreover, Leaver out-partisans grew warmer towards the Conservative Party, while Remainer out-partisans grew colder. This demonstrates that partisans incorporate information from opposing parties when evaluating them (Fowler and Howell, 2023; Coppock, 2023), challenging the idea that partisan identity filters away party-inconsistent information.

There is also a limitation that warrants consideration. First, this study examines a single issue (Brexit). While this focus is precisely what provides leverage to compare the policy and partisan identity mechanisms, it raises questions about generalizability to other issues. Brexit was an unusually salient, cross-cutting issue that dominated British politics for years. The effects of party position changes on less salient issues, or on issues that are more sorted along partisan lines, may

differ. Salience should therefore be understood as an important scope condition: salient conflicts can both make policy preferences more accessible and make partisan group boundaries more politically consequential for feelings towards parties. Moreover, in highly sorted systems, policy-based and identity-based accounts make the same predictions and cannot easily be told apart. At the same time, cross-cutting conflicts on salient issues can also weaken partisan loyalty itself (Carsey and Layman, 2006), which may give policy-based reactions more room to appear. In line with the view that policy and identity are competing considerations whose relative weight depends on the context (Jenke and Huettel, 2016), the weight of policy considerations may be smaller in more sorted systems, which remains an open question for future work. The contribution is therefore not that the study provides a general test of the identity mechanism across all political contexts, but that it identifies an important limit to identity-based accounts of party affect. When an issue is highly salient and citizens hold clear prior preferences, policy disagreement can override the usual effect of party identity. The broader theoretical logic underlying the policy mechanism should apply broadly to other issues that are salient, hence extend beyond Brexit, but whether the same pattern emerges under less salient conditions remains an empirical question for future research.

These findings also provide several avenues for future research. First, scholars should seek additional cases of party position changes on cross-cutting issues in other contexts. While such cases are rare, they provide particularly informative evidence on mechanisms. Comparative analyses across multiple cases could establish whether policy considerations consistently dominate or whether identity becomes more important under certain conditions (e.g., on cultural vs. economic issues, or on low-salience issues where citizens lack clear preferences and identity cues may play a larger role). Second, research should investigate the downstream consequences of policy-driven vs. identity-driven affective polarization. If citizens withdraw affective support from parties due to policy disagreement, do they also become less likely to tolerate undemocratic practices? Finally, scholars should develop and test interventions to reduce affective polarization based on these findings. If policy considerations drive affective evaluations, then interventions that clarify party positions, highlight areas of agreement, or emphasize policy trade-offs may be more effective than

those focused on reducing identity salience or promoting contact between partisan groups.

Funding

The research was supported by the Fonds de recherche du Québec - Société et culture (grant: redacted for blind review) and the European Research Council (grant: redacted for blind review).

Conflict of Interest

None.

References

Achen, Christopher H and Larry M Bartels. 2017. *Democracy for Realists*. Princeton University Press.

Ahler, Douglas J and Gaurav Sood. 2018. "The parties in our heads: Misperceptions about party composition and their consequences." *Journal of Politics* 80(3):964–981.

Algara, Carlos and Roi Zur. 2023. "The Downsian roots of affective polarization." *Electoral Studies* 82:102581.

APSA, Committee on Political Parties. 1950. "Toward a More Responsible Two-party System." *American Political Science Review* 44:1–96.

Banda, Kevin K and John Cluverius. 2018. "Elite polarization, party extremity, and affective polarization." *Electoral Studies* 56:90–101.

Barber, Michael and Jeremy C Pope. 2019. "Does party trump ideology? Disentangling party and ideology in America." *American Political Science Review* 113(1):38–54.

Bassan-Nygate, Lotem and Chagai M Weiss. 2022. "Party competition and cooperation shape affective polarization: Evidence from natural and survey experiments in Israel." *Comparative Political Studies* 55(2):287–318.

Bauer, Paul C, Pablo Barberá, Kathrin Ackermann and Aaron Venetz. 2017. "Is the left-right scale a valid measure of ideology? Individual-level variation in associations with "left" and "right" and left-right self-placement." *Political Behavior* 39:553–583.

Brändle, Verena K, Charlotte Galpin and Hans-Jörg Trenz. 2022. "Brexit as 'politics of division': Social media campaigning after the referendum." *Social Movement Studies* 21(1-2):234–253.

Carsey, Thomas M and Geoffrey C Layman. 2006. "Changing sides or changing minds? Party identification and policy preferences in the American electorate." *American Journal of Political Science* 50(2):464–477.

Coppock, Alexander. 2023. *Persuasion in parallel: How information changes minds about politics*. University of Chicago Press.

Dafoe, Allan, Baobao Zhang and Devin Caughey. 2018. "Information equivalence in survey experiments." *Political Analysis* 26(4):399–416.

Dassonneville, Ruth and Semih Çakır. 2021. Party system polarization and electoral behavior. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics*.
URL: *https://doi.org/10.93/Acrefore/9780190228637.013.1979*

Dias, Nicholas and Yphtach Lelkes. 2022. "The nature of affective polarization: Disentangling policy disagreement from partisan identity." *American Journal of Political Science* 66(3):775–790.

Downs, Anthony. 1957. *An Economic Theory of Democracy*.

Druckman, James N, Erik Peterson and Rune Slothuus. 2013. "How elite partisan polarization affects public opinion formation." *American Political Science Review* 107(1):57–79.

Duncan, Pamela. 2016. "How the pollsters got it wrong on the EU referendum." *The Guardian* 24.

Enders, Adam M and Robert N Lupton. 2021. "Value extremity contributes to affective polarization in the US." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(4):857–866.

Fieldhouse, Edward, Jane Green, Geoffrey Evans, Jonathan Mellon, Christopher Prosser, Hermann Schmitt and Cees van der Eijk. 2020. *Electoral shocks: The volatile voter in a turbulent world*. Oxford University Press.

Finkel, Eli J, Christopher A Bail, Mina Cikara, Peter H Ditto, Shanto Iyengar, Samara Klar, Lilliana Mason, Mary C McGrath, Brendan Nyhan, David G Rand et al. 2020. "Political sectarianism in America." *Science* 370(6516):533–536.

Fowler, Anthony and William G Howell. 2023. "Updating amidst Disagreement: New Experimental Evidence on Partisan Cues." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 87(1):24–43.

Gidron, Noam, James Adams and Will Horne. 2022. "Who dislikes whom? Affective polarization between pairs of parties in western democracies." *Comparative Political Studies* .

Graham, Matthew H and Milan W Svolik. 2020. "Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization, and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States." *American Political Science Review* 114(2):392–409.

Greene, Steven. 1999. "Understanding party identification: A social identity approach." *Political Psychology* 20(2):393–403.

Hare, Christopher, David A Armstrong, Ryan Bakker, Royce Carroll and Keith T Poole. 2015. "Using Bayesian Aldrich-McKelvey Scaling to Study Citizens' Ideological Preferences and Perceptions." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3):759–774.

Harteveld, Eelco. 2021*a*. "Fragmented foes: Affective polarization in the multiparty context of the Netherlands." *Electoral Studies* 71:102332.

Harteveld, Eelco. 2021*b*. "Ticking all the boxes? A comparative study of social sorting and affective polarization." *Electoral Studies* 72:102337.

Hayton, Richard. 2022. "Brexit and party change: The Conservatives and Labour at Westminster." *International Political Science Review* 43(3):345–358.

Higgins, Andrew. 2013. "Europe is Edgy as Cameron Seeks to Loosen Ties." *The New York Times* . Accessed December 30, 2024.
URL: *https://www.nytimes.com/2013/01/24/world/europe/cameron-britain-referendum-european-union.html*

Hobolt, Sara B and James Tilley. 2026. *Tribal politics: how Brexit divided Britain*. Oxford University Press.

Hobolt, Sara B, Thomas J Leeper and James Tilley. 2021. "Divided by the vote: Affective polarization in the wake of the Brexit referendum." *British Journal of Political Science* 51(4):1476–1493.

Huddy, Leonie, Lilliana Mason and Lene Aarøe. 2015. "Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion, and partisan identity." *American Political Science Review* 109(1):1–17.

Iyengar, Shanto, Gaurav Sood and Yphtach Lelkes. 2012. "Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 76(3):405–431.

Iyengar, Shanto and Sean J Westwood. 2015. "Fear and loathing across party lines: New evidence on group polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(3):690–707.

Iyengar, Shanto, Yphtach Lelkes, Matthew Levendusky, Neil Malhotra and Sean J Westwood. 2019. "The origins and consequences of affective polarization in the United States." *Annual Review of Political Science* 22(1):129–146.

Jenke, Libby and Scott A Huettel. 2016. "Issues or identity? Cognitive foundations of voter choice." *Trends in Cognitive Sciences* 20(11):794–804.

Jennings, W and S Fisher. 2016. "Expert Predictions of the 2016 EU Referendum: Political Studies Association.".

Jost, John T, Christopher M Federico and Jaime L Napier. 2009. "Political ideology: Its structure, functions, and elective affinities." *Annual review of psychology* 60:307–337.

Kawecki, Daniel. 2022. "End of consensus? Ideology, partisan identity, and affective polarization in Finland 2003–2019." *Scandinavian Political Studies* 45(4):478–503.

Kingzette, Jon, James N Druckman, Samara Klar, Yanna Krupnikov, Matthew Levendusky and John Barry Ryan. 2021. "How affective polarization undermines support for democratic norms." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 85(2):663–677.

Kunda, Ziva. 1990. "The case for motivated reasoning." *Psychological Bulletin* 108(3):480.

Leeper, Thomas J and Rune Slothuus. 2014. "Political parties, motivated reasoning, and public opinion formation." *Political Psychology* 35:129–156.

Lelkes, Yphtach. 2021. "Policy over party: comparing the effects of candidate ideology and party on affective polarization." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(1):189–196.

Lelkes, Yphtach and Sean J Westwood. 2017. "The limits of partisan prejudice." *Journal of Politics* 79(2):485–501.

Lenz, Gabriel S. 2013. *Follow the leader?: how voters respond to politicians' policies and performance*. University of Chicago Press.

Levitsky, Steven and Daniel Ziblatt. 2019. *How Democracies Die*. Crown.

Lupu, Noam. 2013. "Party brands and partisanship: Theory with evidence from a survey experiment in Argentina." *American Journal of Political Science* 57(1):49–64.

Mason, Liliana. 2018. *Uncivil Agreement : How Politics Became Our Identity*. University of chicago press ed. Chicago: .

Mason, Lilliana. 2015. ""I disrespectfully agree": The differential effects of partisan sorting on social and issue polarization." *American Journal of Political Science* 59(1):128–145.

Mason, Lilliana. 2016. "A cross-cutting calm: How social sorting drives affective polarization." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 80(S1):351–377.

Mason, Lilliana and Julie Wronski. 2018. "One tribe to bind them all: How our social group attachments strengthen partisanship." *Political Psychology* 39:257–277.

Matz, David C and Wendy Wood. 2005. "Cognitive dissonance in groups: the consequences of disagreement." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 88(1):22.

McCoy, Jennifer and Murat Somer. 2019. "Toward a theory of pernicious polarization and how it harms democracies: Comparative evidence and possible remedies." *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 681(1):234–271.

Orr, Lilla V, Anthony Fowler and Gregory A Huber. 2023. "Is Affective Polarization Driven by Identity, Loyalty, or Substance?" *American Journal of Political Science* .

Orr, Lilla V and Gregory A Huber. 2020. "The policy basis of measured partisan animosity in the United States." *American Journal of Political Science* 64(3):569–586.

Petersen, Michael Bang, Martin Skov, Søren Serritzlew and Thomas Ramsøy. 2013. "Motivated reasoning and political parties: Evidence for increased processing in the face of party cues." *Political Behavior* 35(4):831–854.

Redmond, Timothy J. 2022. *Political Tribalism in America: How Hyper-Partisanship Dumbs Down Democracy and How to Fix It*. McFarland.

Reiljan, Andres. 2020. "'Fear and loathing across party lines'(also) in Europe: Affective polarisation in European party systems." *European journal of political research* 59(2):376–396.

Renström, Emma A, Hanna Bäck and Royce Carroll. 2021. "Intergroup threat and affective polarization in a multi-party system." *Journal of Social and Political Psychology* 9(2):553–576.

Rogowski, Jon C and Joseph L Sutherland. 2016. "How ideology fuels affective polarization." *Political Behavior* 38(2):485–508.

Rudolph, Thomas J and Marc J Hetherington. 2021. "Affective polarization in political and non-political settings." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 33(3):591–606.

Schonfeld, Bryan and Sam Winter-Levy. 2021. "Policy or partisanship in the United Kingdom? Quasi-experimental evidence from Brexit." *Journal of Politics* 83(4):1450–1461.

Slothuus, Rune. 2016. "Assessing the influence of political parties on public opinion: The challenge from pretreatment effects." *Political Communication* 33(2):302–327.

Sobolewska, Maria and Robert Anthony Ford. 2020. *Brexitland: Identity, diversity and the reshaping of British politics*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Sorace, Miriam and Sara Binzer Hobolt. 2021. "A tale of two peoples: motivated reasoning in the aftermath of the Brexit Vote." *Political Science Research and Methods* 9(4):675–692.

Tajfel, Henri. 1981. *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge university press Cambridge.

Tajfel, Henri, John C Turner, William G Austin and Stephen Worchel. 1979. An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In *Organizational identity: A Reader*. Oxford University Press pp. 56–65.

Tilley, James and Sara B Hobolt. 2023. "Brexit as an identity: Political identities and policy norms." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 56(4):546–552.

Wagner, Markus. 2021. "Affective polarization in multiparty systems." *Electoral Studies* 69:102199.

Webster, Steven W and Alan I Abramowitz. 2017. "The ideological foundations of affective polarization in the US electorate." *American Politics Research* 45(4):621–647.

West, Emily A and Shanto Iyengar. 2022. "Partisanship as a social identity: Implications for polarization." *Political Behavior* 44(2):807–838.

YouGov. 2016. "YouGov on the day poll: Remain 52% , Leave 48%." https://yougov.co.uk/politics/articles/15778-yougov-day-poll. Accessed: 2025-10-23.

Çakır, Semih. 2024. "How do masses react to party polarization? Limited effect of party polarization on mass polarization." *European Journal of Political Research* .

Supplementary Materials

"Policy or Identity? Real-World Evidence on the Drivers of Party Affect."

Appendix A (p. 2): Brexit as a Social Identity

Appendix B (p. 4): Addressing Attrition Concerns

Appendix C (p. 12): Did the Public Anticipate the Position Change?

Appendix D (p. 19): Did Conservative Partisans Follow the Party and Become more Eu-roskeptic?

Appendix E (p. 22): Replicating the Analyses with Consistent Partisans

Appendix F (p. 23): Partisan Strength does not Moderate the Results

Appendix G (p. 24): Partisan Realignment Following the Brexit Referendum

A Brexit as a Social Identity

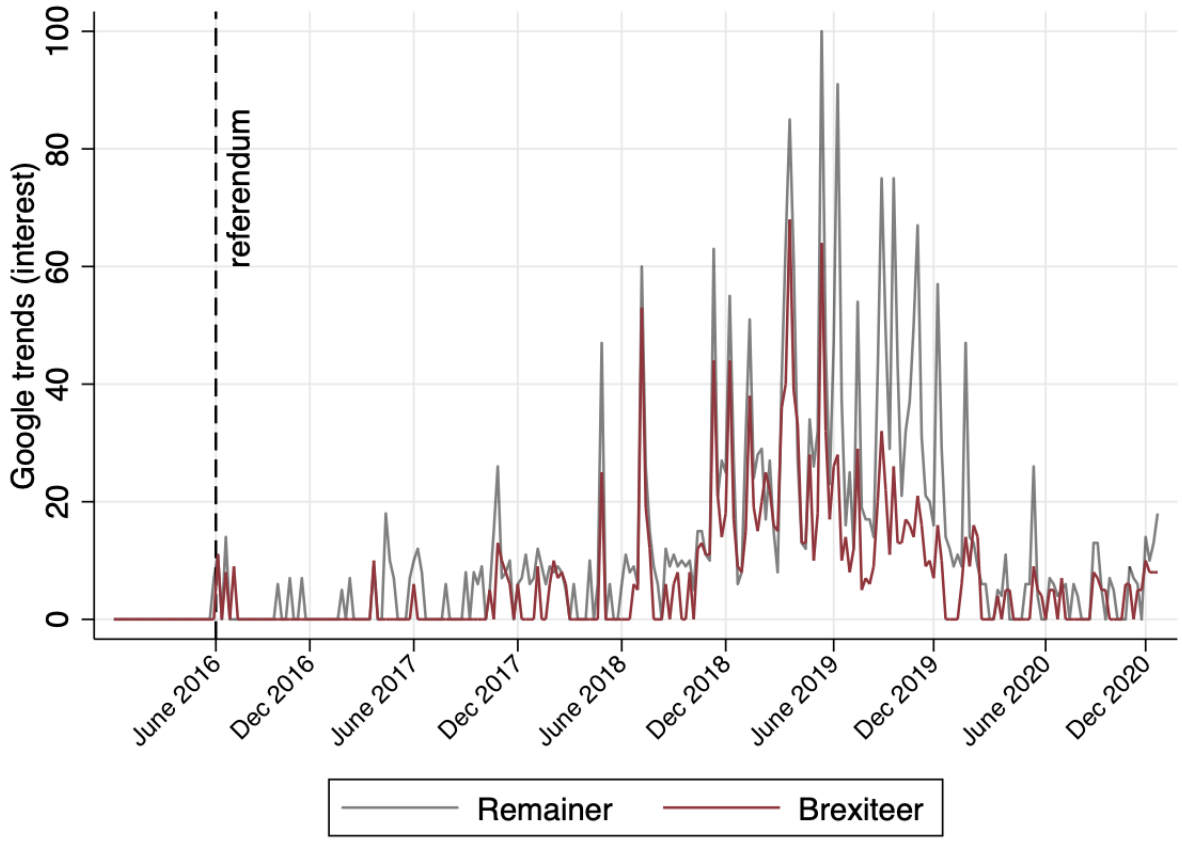
One may be concerned that Brexit stance itself is a social identity, specifically, a Brexit identity as a Remainer or Leaver. If that was the case, this would undermine the argument that Brexit stance captures policy preferences, the findings would reflect the effects of two different social identities (party identity versus Brexit identity) rather than isolating policy mechanism from identity mechanism.

While this concern is valid, it is precisely the timing of the study that makes it valuable for comparing these mechanisms. Issues can crystallize into social identity markers over time. This is a gradual process through prolonged elite mobilization, sustained public attention, and the development of identity labels that allow citizens to categorize themselves and others into in-groups and out-groups. For instance, pro-life vs. pro-choice preferences transformed into a marker for religious identity, or redistribution attitudes transformed into a marker of social class. While Brexit preferences initially captured attitudes towards the European Union, they have crystallized into a social identity marker as Leaver and Remainer that formed a new political cleavage. However, this identity did not emerge overnight.

Critically, Brexit stance consolidated into a social identity after the referendum rather than before it. Over time, Brexit identities generated affective polarization comparable to partisan divides in that Leavers and Remainers developed stereotypical perceptions of each side (Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley, 2021). However, this Brexit identity formation gradually started to emerge during the referendum and consolidated after (Hobolt, Leeper and Tilley, 2021; Sorace and Hobolt, 2021; Tilley and Hobolt, 2023). While Brexit stance was not purely a policy preference devoid of any identity content prior to the referendum, it had not crystallized into a consolidated social identity yet. Instead, it primarily reflected policy preferences that cross-cut existing partisan identities, precisely the condition that makes it possible to compare the two mechanisms. This gives this research leverage: it focuses on a time window where policy stances are not yet consolidated identity markers, as it is only when policies are not yet crystallized into identity markers and aligned with partisan identity that we can study the effect of policy stance and party identity.

Using Google Trends data, Figure A.1 plots the evolution of the web searches for the identity labels "Brexiteer" and "Remainer" from January 2016 to December 2020. It is clear that these terms were minimally used during the referendum period compared to 2018 onward, when web searches of these terms spiked substantially. This is consistent with the Brexit stance consolidating into a social identity during the prolonged political crisis that followed the referendum, rather than during the initial policy debate. At the time of the referendum (June 2016), citizens held policy preferences about EU membership but had not yet adopted these labels as a social identity marker.

Figure A.1. Google Trends of Brexit Identity Labels

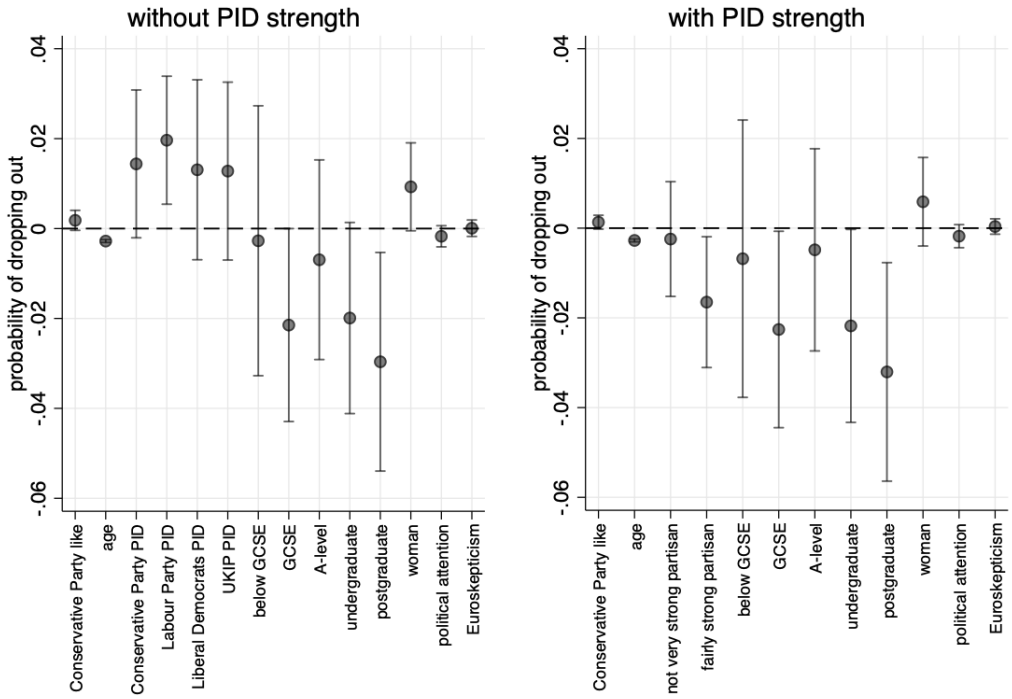


B Addressing Attrition Concerns

In this Appendix, I examine whether attrition between Waves 8 and 9 could pose a problem for the interpretation of the results. Because the main analyses rely on within-individual changes, they are based on respondents who participated in both waves. Between Waves 8 and 9, 17.7% of respondents (5,867 out of 33,158) dropped out. I proceed in four steps. First, I examine which individual characteristics predict dropping out. Second, I examine whether dropping out varies by pre-referendum Brexit stance and by its interaction with party identification. Third, I compare the composition of partisan groups by Brexit stance in the full Wave 8 sample and in the balanced panel. Finally, I replicate the main analyses with controls, with inverse probability weights, and with survey weights that make the sample representative of the British electorate.

Figure B.1 plots how individual socio-economic characteristics and certain political attitudes relate to dropping out. As party identification strength leads to the exclusion of non-partisans when introduced to the model alongside party identification, the left panel shows the results from the model without identification strength and the right panel shows those without party identification. Attrition is only modestly related to individual characteristics. Older and more educated respondents were somewhat less likely to drop out. Every 10 years of age is associated with a 3 percentage-point decrease in the likelihood of dropping out by Wave 9. Partisan strength is barely related to dropping out: 17.5% of very strong, 17.8% of fairly strong, and 17.3% of not very strong partisans dropped out between Waves 8 and 9. Once other characteristics are controlled for, respondents whose party identification was not very strong were slightly less likely to drop out (by 1.7 percentage points) than those with a very strong party identification. Importantly, neither political attention nor Euroscepticism predicts dropping out, and feelings towards the Conservative Party are at most weakly related to it.

Figure B.1. Who dropped out from wave 8 to wave 9?



Next, I examine whether dropping out varies by pre-referendum Brexit stance and by its interaction with party identification. Table B.1 presents models predicting dropping out between waves 8 and 9 based on party identification, Brexit stance (Remain as the reference category), and their interaction, with and without controlling for age, education, gender, and political attention. Leave supporters were 1.6 percentage points less likely than Remain supporters to drop out (Model 1), which is no longer statistically significant once socio-demographic characteristics and political attention are controlled for (Model 3). Importantly, none of the interactions between party identification and Leave support is statistically significant, either with or without controls (Models 2 and 4). That is, the difference between Leavers and Remainers in their likelihood of dropping out does not vary across partisan groups. The only significant interactions concern Labour and UKIP identifiers without a referendum preference in Model 2, but these interactions are no longer significant once the controls are included. The UKIP estimate is based on a very small group (only 43 UKIP identifiers without a preference) and is therefore highly imprecise. The Labour estimate is

no longer significant once socio-demographic characteristics and political attention are controlled for (Model 4), which suggests that it reflects the composition of this group rather than its Brexit stance. Importantly, neither concerns the difference between Leavers and Remainers, which is central to the main analyses. Moreover, it is also reassuring that party identification and Brexit stance together explain almost none of the variation in dropping out ($R^2 = 0.001$).

Table B.1. Attrition by Party Identification and Brexit Stance

	Model 1 Baseline	Model 2 Interaction	Model 3 Controls	Model 4 Interaction + Controls
Party identification (ref = independent)				
Conservative Party	-0.001	-0.013	0.028***	0.017
	(0.006)	(0.010)	(0.007)	(0.011)
Labour Party	0.000	-0.007	0.021**	0.019*
	(0.006)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.010)
Liberal Democrats	-0.005	-0.005	0.018	0.021
	(0.009)	(0.012)	(0.010)	(0.013)
UKIP	-0.002	0.024	0.021*	0.007
	(0.009)	(0.053)	(0.010)	(0.054)
Brexit stance (ref = Remain)				
don't know	0.020	-0.010	0.016	-0.008
	(0.010)	(0.016)	(0.011)	(0.017)
leave	-0.016**	-0.020*	-0.003	-0.004
	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.006)	(0.011)
Party identification × Brexit stance				
Conservative Party × don't know		0.038		0.041
		(0.026)		(0.029)
Conservative Party × leave		0.014		0.012
		(0.013)		(0.014)
Labour Party × don't know		0.052*		0.041
		(0.026)		(0.028)
Labour Party × leave		0.005		-0.005
		(0.013)		(0.014)
Liberal Democrats × don't know		0.026		0.023
		(0.042)		(0.044)
Liberal Democrats × leave		-0.019		-0.026
		(0.021)		(0.022)
UKIP × don't know		0.192*		0.161
		(0.092)		(0.101)
UKIP × leave		-0.032		0.010
		(0.054)		(0.055)
Constant	0.183***	0.189***	0.331***	0.334***
	(0.006)	(0.008)	(0.015)	(0.016)
Controls	No	No	Yes	Yes
Observations	29,973	29,973	25,429	25,429
R-squared	0.001	0.001	0.016	0.016

Notes: Entries are coefficients from linear probability models. The dependent variable is dropping out between Waves 8 and 9. Controls include age, education, gender, and political attention. The inverse probability weights are based on a logit model with the same specification as Model 4. Standard errors in parentheses. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Consistent with this, Table B.2 shows that the composition of partisan groups by Brexit stance is virtually identical in the full Wave 8 sample and in the balanced panel. Within every partisan

group, the shares of Remainers, Leavers, and respondents without a preference differ by less than one percentage point between the two samples.

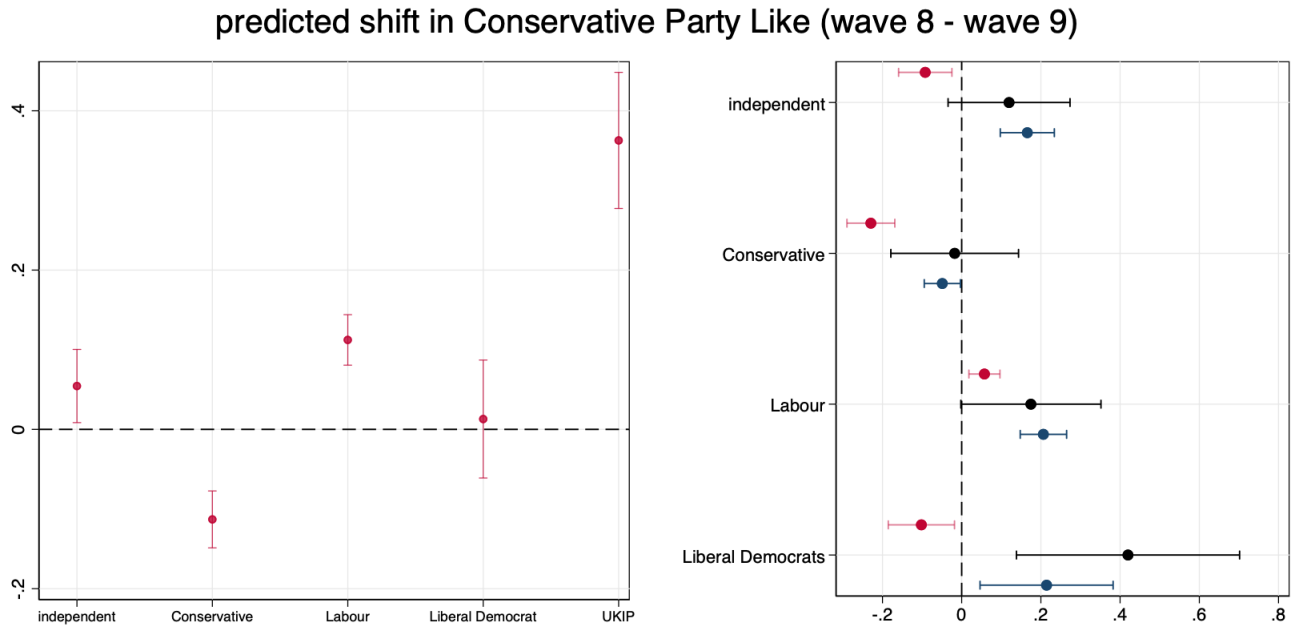
Table B.2. Brexit Stance within Partisan Groups: Full Wave 8 Sample and Balanced Panel

	Full Wave 8 sample			Balanced panel		
Party identification in Wave 8	DK	Remain	Leave	DK	Remain	Leave
Independent	11.78	40.50	47.72	11.76	39.96	48.27
Conservative Party	4.53	33.02	62.45	4.36	32.92	62.72
Labour Party	4.46	64.09	31.44	4.22	63.86	31.92
Liberal Democrats	5.10	70.93	23.97	4.94	70.19	24.87
UKIP	1.61	2.28	96.12	1.16	2.15	96.69
Total	5.91	44.41	49.68	5.72	44.05	50.23

Notes: Entries are row percentages. Party identification and Brexit stance are measured in Wave 8. The balanced panel includes respondents who also participated in Wave 9. Within every partisan group, the distribution of Brexit stance differs by less than one percentage point between the two samples.

Figure B.2 plots the results of the main analyses' replication controlling for age, education, gender, and political attention. The interpretations remain unchanged. The only difference emerges among Liberal Democrats who did not have a Brexit stance prior to the referendum: they warmed up to the Conservative Party, similar to Liberal Democrats who supported the Leave side.

Figure B.2. Replicating the main analyses with controls



Notes: The left panel presents average within-individual changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party by partisan group, and the right panel by partisan group and Brexit stance, controlling for age, education, gender, and political attention. Leavers are indicated in blue, Remainers in red, and those without a preference in black. 95% confidence intervals are indicated.

Finally, I replicate the main analyses using inverse probability weights. Respondents who stayed in the panel are weighted by the inverse of their predicted probability of staying. That is, respondents who resemble those who dropped out, and were therefore less likely to stay, receive more weight, while respondents who were very likely to stay receive less weight. This way, the balanced panel resembles the full Wave 8 sample on the characteristics that predict dropping out. The predicted probabilities come from a logit model with the same specification as Model 4 in Table B.1, that is, party identification, Brexit stance, their interaction, age, education, gender, and political attention. Because these predictions require complete information on all of these variables, the weighted analyses are restricted to respondents with non-missing values. Figure B.3 therefore presents the weighted estimates together with unweighted estimates for the same respondents. Note that the unweighted estimates are based on the same respondents as the weighted estimates, so that any difference between the two reflects the weighting rather than the sample.

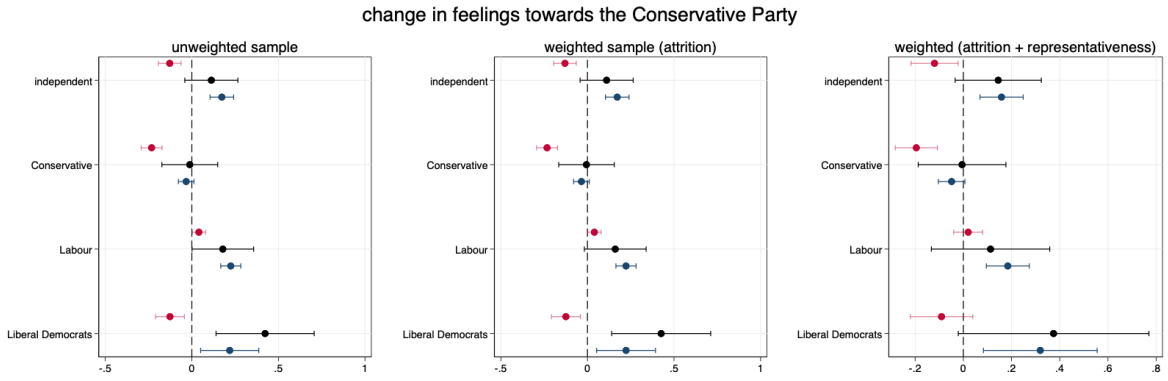
The results remain substantively unchanged (Figure B.3, middle panel). Conservative Remainers still became less positive towards their own party, Labour Leavers still became more positive towards the Conservative Party, and independents still updated their feelings based on their Brexit stance. The only notable difference compared to the main analyses (Figure 5 in the manuscript) concerns Liberal Democrat identifiers without a referendum preference. However, this difference appears in both the weighted and unweighted estimates, which means that it stems from restricting the sample to respondents with complete information on the control variables, as in Figure B.3, rather than from the weighting itself. Of course, this approach only accounts for attrition related to the variables included in the model.

I also examined whether the results hold when the sample is made representative of the British electorate. The BES provides survey weights that make each wave's sample resemble the British population, for instance by correcting for the oversampling of respondents in Scotland and Wales. To do so, I combined the BES Wave 8 survey weight with the inverse probability weights described above. That is, the survey weight makes the Wave 8 sample resemble the British electorate, while the inverse probability weight makes respondents who stayed in the panel resemble the full Wave 8 sample. Combining the two, the panel resembles the British electorate before the referendum, while also accounting for attrition. The inverse probability weights themselves are not extreme (ranging from 1.07 to 1.91). However, the BES survey weights include a small number of very large values, which also produce very large combined weights (up to 27). To prevent a handful of respondents from driving the results, I truncate the combined weights at the 99th percentile.

The right panel of B.3 shows that the results remain substantively unchanged. Conservative Remainers still became less positive towards their own party, while Conservative Leavers did not change their feelings. Labour Leavers still became more positive towards the Conservative Party, while Labour Remainers did not. Independent Leavers became warmer and independent Remainers colder towards the Conservative Party. The only difference is that the cooling of Liberal Democrat Remainers is no longer statistically significant, although the estimate is in the same direction, and Liberal Democrat Leavers still became clearly warmer towards the Conservative Party than

Liberal Democrat Remainers did. As expected, the estimates are somewhat less precise, because combining the two weights increases their variability.

Figure B.3. Replicating the Main Analyses with Inverse Probability and Survey Weights



Notes: Leavers are indicated in blue, Remainers in red, and those without a preference in black. Point estimates indicate average within-individual changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party between Waves 8 and 9. The left panel presents unweighted estimates. The middle panel presents estimates weighted by the inverse of the predicted probability of remaining in the panel. The right panel presents estimates weighted by the product of the BES Wave 8 survey weight and the inverse probability weight, truncated at the 99th percentile. All panels are based on the same respondents. 95% confidence intervals are indicated.

Taken together, these analyses show that, although attrition is not entirely random, it is not related to the combination of party identification and Brexit stance on which the main analyses rely, and accounting for it does not change the results. The results also hold when the sample is weighted to resemble the British electorate. Note that the within-individual estimates apply to respondents observed in both waves.

C Did the Public Anticipate the Position Change?

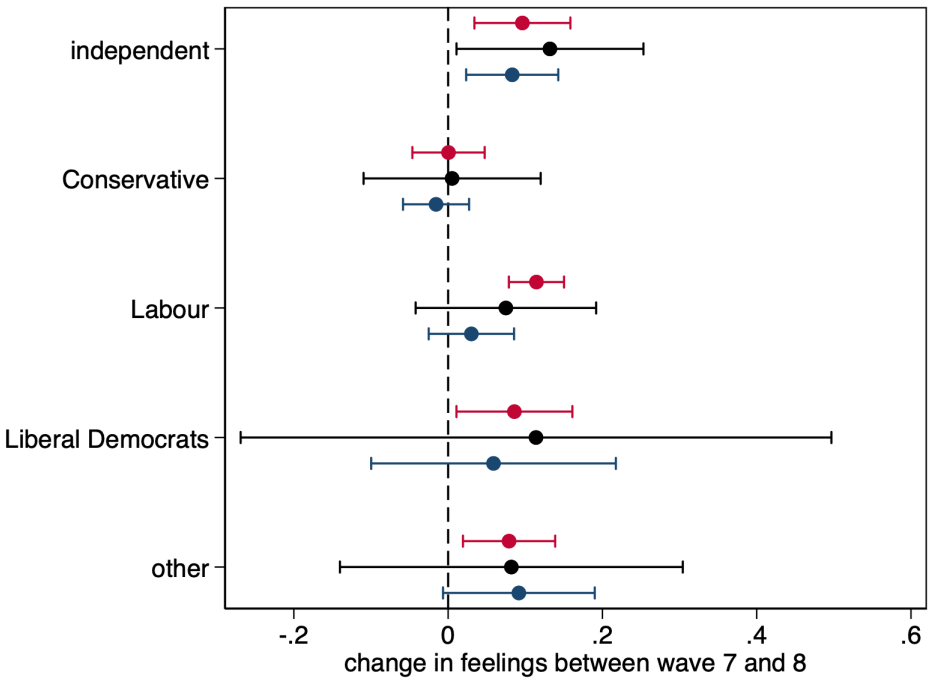
In this Appendix, I address a concern that the Conservative Party's position change might have been anticipated by the public. If that was the case, we would expect to see that Leavers from different parties were warming up to the Conservative Party and Remainers growing colder towards the Conservative Party. I examine this in two ways. First, I compare feelings towards the Conservative Party across the two pre-referendum waves. Second, I use the interview dates within each wave to examine whether the changes are concentrated around the referendum.

C.1 Pre-referendum Trends across Waves

To test this, I check how feelings towards the Conservative Party changed before the referendum results, focusing on wave 7 (14 April - 4 May) and wave 8 (6 May - 22 June).

Figure C.1 shows these within-respondent changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party between Wave 7 and Wave 8 among Remainers (in red), Leavers (in blue) and those without a preference (in black). The pattern is inconsistent with an anticipation story. If voters had expected an imminent pro-Brexit pivot and adjusted affect in advance, Leave supporters should have warmed to the Conservatives while Remain supporters cooled. Instead, Leave voters among partisans of the Conservative Party, Labour Party, Liberal Democrats and other parties do not show evidence of warming towards the Conservative Party. Only non-partisans became slightly more positive towards the Conservative Party, but this effect is not distinguishable from that among Remainers. Moreover, there is no evidence of cooling among remainers. On the contrary, there is evidence that partisans of the Labour Party, Liberal Democrats and other parties became slightly more positive towards the Conservative Party—a pattern that contradicts the anticipation concern. Overall, the changes in feelings among Leavers and Remainers largely overlap, indicating no clear pre-referendum divergence by EU stance.

Figure C.1. Change in Feelings Towards the Conservative Party



Note: Estimates are within-individual average changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party between wave 7 and wave 8. Positive (negative) values indicate that feelings become more positive (negative). Partisan groups and referendum vote intentions are defined based on wave 7.

Another possibility is that if the Conservative Party's post-referendum position change was anticipated, we would expect UKIP partisans to already start warming up to the Conservative Party before the referendum results. Note that UKIP partisans warmed up substantially following the position change announcement by Cameron (See Figure 4 in the manuscript). As UKIP partisans are pro-Brexit (2579 against 39 who are pro-EU and 28 who have no preference), they are not included in Figure C.1, but the results in Table C.1 show that UKIP partisans did not anticipate the Conservative Party's shift on Brexit.

Lastly, Figure C.2 shows the evolution of feelings towards the Conservative Party before and after the referendum (indicated by dashed vertical line). The trends are parallel leading up to the

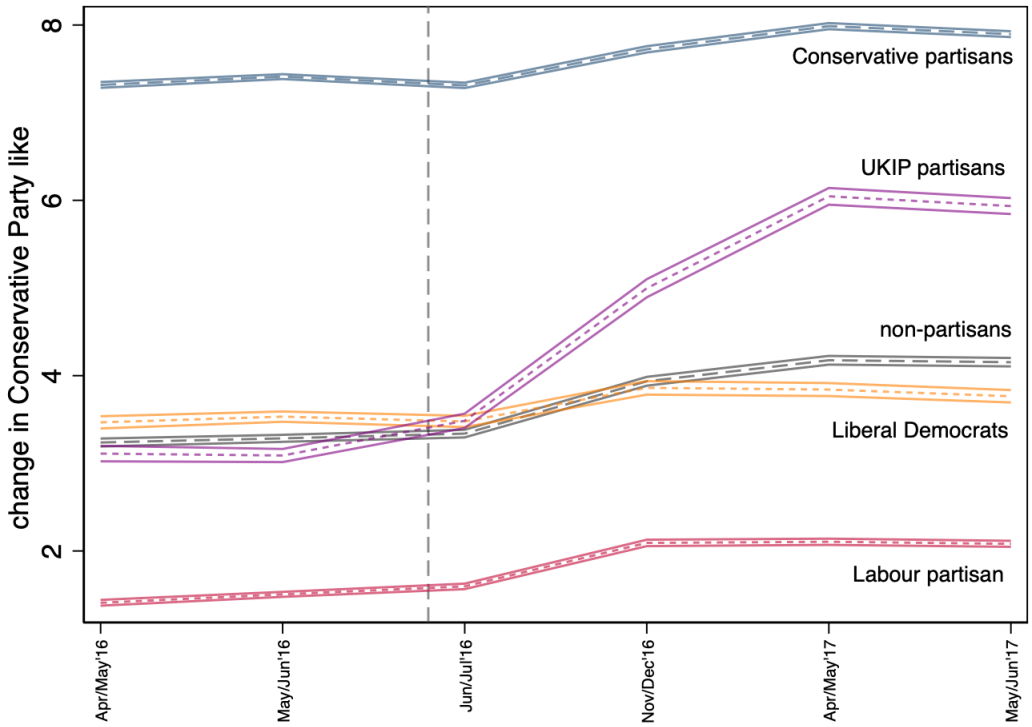
Table C.1. UKIP Partisans did not warm up to the Conservative Party with the anticipation of the post-referendum position change

	Model 1 change in Conservative Party feelings
Partisanship in wave 7 (ref = independents)	
Conservative Party	-0.104***
	(0.026)
Labour Party	-0.005
	(0.025)
Liberal Democrats	-0.014
	(0.040)
UKIP	-0.019
	(0.045)
other parties	-0.010
	(0.033)
intercept	0.095***
	(0.021)
N	23005

Standard errors in parentheses
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

referendum across partisan groups, but there is a slight difference in the wave immediately following the position change announcement, and this change becomes even starker in the following waves.

Figure C.2. Change in Feelings Towards the Conservative Party



Note: Estimates are within-individual average changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party. Positive (negative) values indicate that feelings become more positive (negative). Partisan groups and referendum vote intentions are defined based on wave 7.

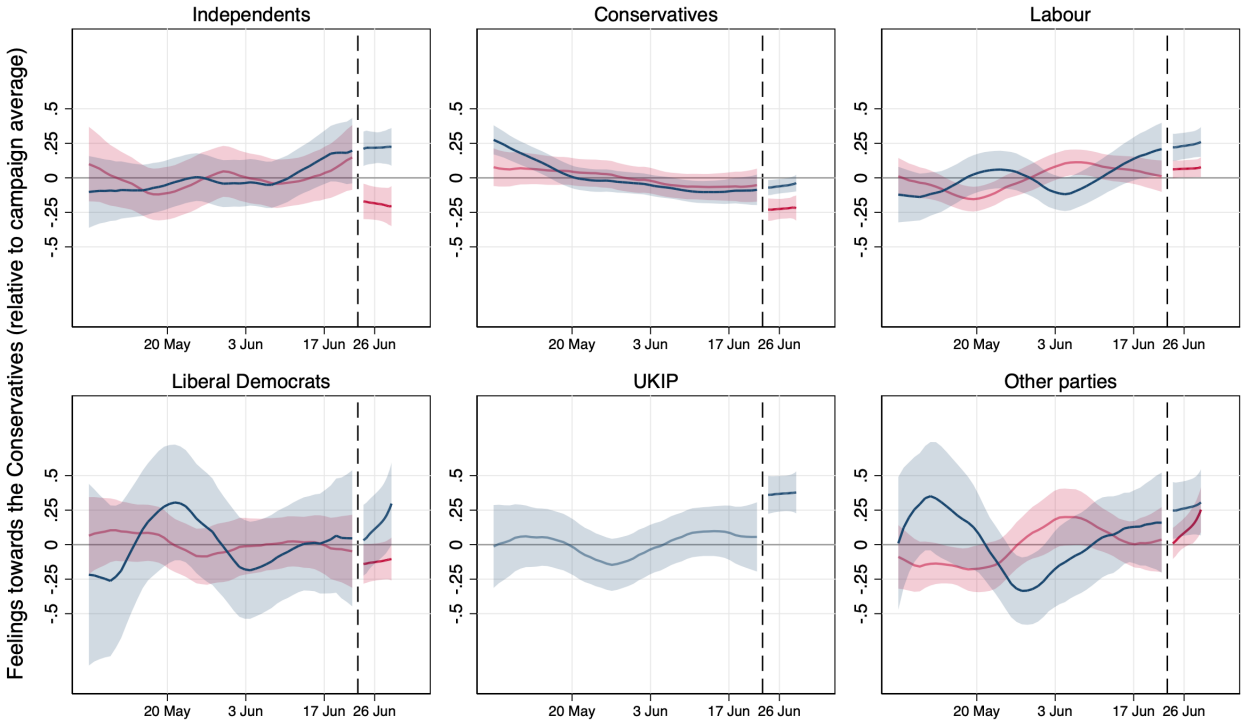
C.2 Interview Timing within Waves

The analyses above compare waves. Because Waves 8 and 9 were both fielded over several days or weeks, I also use the interview dates directly in two ways.

First, Wave 8 was conducted as a rolling daily survey, with a subsample of respondents invited to complete the survey on each day of the referendum campaign, so the timing of pre-referendum interviews was largely determined by the survey design. Figure C.3 plots feelings towards the Conservative Party by interview day, separately for Leavers and Remainers within each partisan group, relative to each group's campaign average. It draws on respondents with valid Conservative

Party feeling scores in both waves, uses the BES daily campaign weights for Wave 8, and covers the first six days of the post-referendum wave (24–29 June), which is before Boris Johnson withdrew and Theresa May launched her leadership campaign on 30 June. Note that the figure presents daily trends across respondents interviewed on different days, while the main analyses examine within-individual changes. Moreover, as Wave 9 was not fielded as a rolling survey, post-referendum interview timing partly reflects how quickly respondents took part, so I present the daily trends as descriptive evidence.

Figure C.3. Feelings towards the Conservative Party by interview day before and after the referendum, by partisanship and Brexit stance



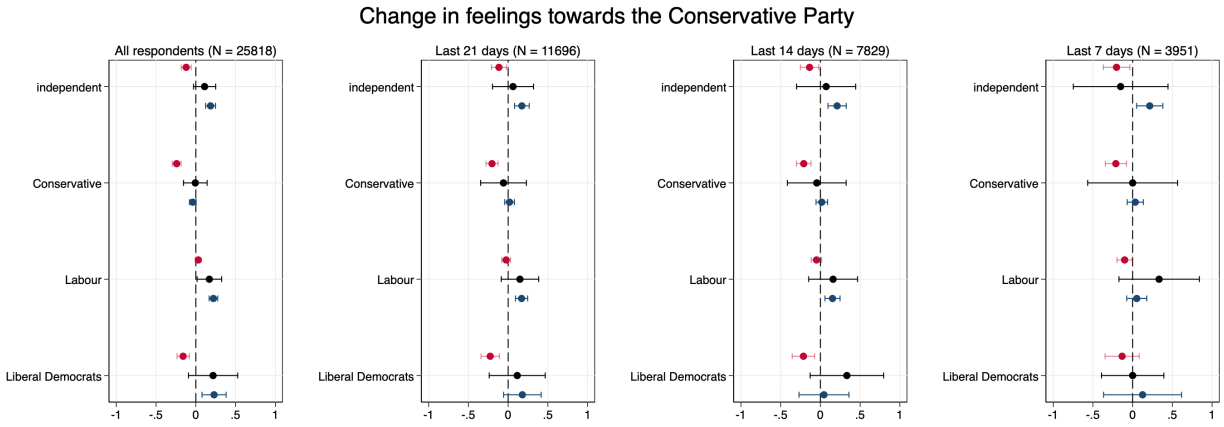
Notes: Lines show smoothed daily feelings towards the Conservative Party, relative to each group's weighted Wave 8 campaign average. Leavers are in blue and Remainers in red. Kernel bandwidths are 5 days before and 2 days after the referendum. Shaded areas indicate 95% confidence intervals. The dashed line marks the referendum on 23 June. Wave 8 trends include respondents with valid observations in both waves, while Wave 9 trends include only interviews from 24–29 June. Estimates use Wave 8 daily campaign weights. UKIP identifiers are shown for Leavers only.

Figure C.3 shows three things. To begin with, during the campaign, there is no consistent

pattern of growing divergence between Leavers and Remainers across partisan groups, although some fluctuations are visible. Among Conservative identifiers, for instance, feelings towards the party declined slightly among both Leavers and Remainers before the referendum. Moreover, clear differences emerge immediately after the referendum, particularly among Conservative identifiers. Conservative Remainers reported substantially lower feelings towards their party, whereas Conservative Leavers' evaluations remained relatively stable. Among UKIP Leavers, feelings towards the Conservative Party also increased considerably immediately after the referendum. Among independents, both Leavers and Remainers became slightly warmer in the final days of the campaign. Remainers did not become colder towards the Conservatives before the referendum, but their feelings declined immediately afterward. Finally, among Labour identifiers, Leavers' feelings towards the Conservative Party fluctuated during the campaign and were already increasing in its final weeks, so part of their change between Waves 8 and 9 may reflect this trend. However, their warming did not fade but continued to grow as the Conservative Party's pro-Brexit position consolidated: their average feelings rose from 1.52 before the referendum to 1.74 immediately after and to 2.67 by November/December 2016 (Figure 6 in the manuscript).

Second, I replicate the main analyses by restricting pre-referendum observations to respondents interviewed in the final 7, 14 and 21 days before the referendum (Figure C.4). These restrictions bring the pre- and post-referendum interviews closer together in time. In the narrowest window, the two interviews are at most 18 days apart. Because Wave 8 was a rolling daily survey, these restricted samples are largely determined by the survey design rather than by respondents' own choices about when to participate. The restricted analyses produce estimates similar in direction to the main results: Remainers tend to become less positive towards the Conservative Party, while Leavers tend to become more positive. As expected given the smaller samples, the estimates are less precise in the narrowest window, and not every subgroup effect remains statistically significant. Among Labour Leavers, the estimated change is smaller in the narrowest window, consistent with the increase in their warmth during the final weeks of the campaign shown in Figure C.3. The gap between Labour Leavers and Remainers, however, remains similar across windows.

Figure C.4. Changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party, by length of the pre-referendum window



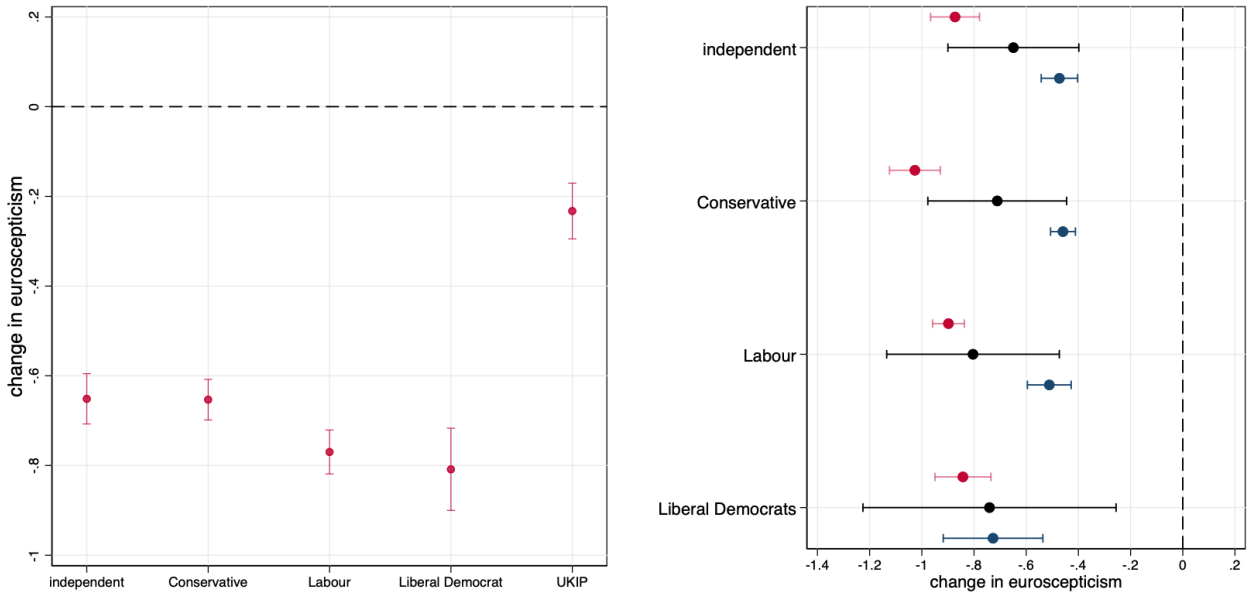
Notes: Leavers are in blue, Remainers in red, and those without a preference in black. Points indicate estimated average within-individual changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party between Waves 8 and 9. The first panel uses the full Wave 8 period. The other panels restrict Wave 8 interviews to the final 21, 14 and 7 days before the referendum (from 2, 9 and 16 June, respectively). UKIP and other party identifiers are included in the models but not shown. 95% confidence intervals are indicated.

Overall, these analyses show that the main patterns are not simply a continuation of a systematic divergence during the campaign. The changes are visible in the first days after the referendum, and the results are similar when the pre-referendum period is restricted to narrower windows.

D Did Conservative Partisans Follow the Party and Become more Euroskeptic?

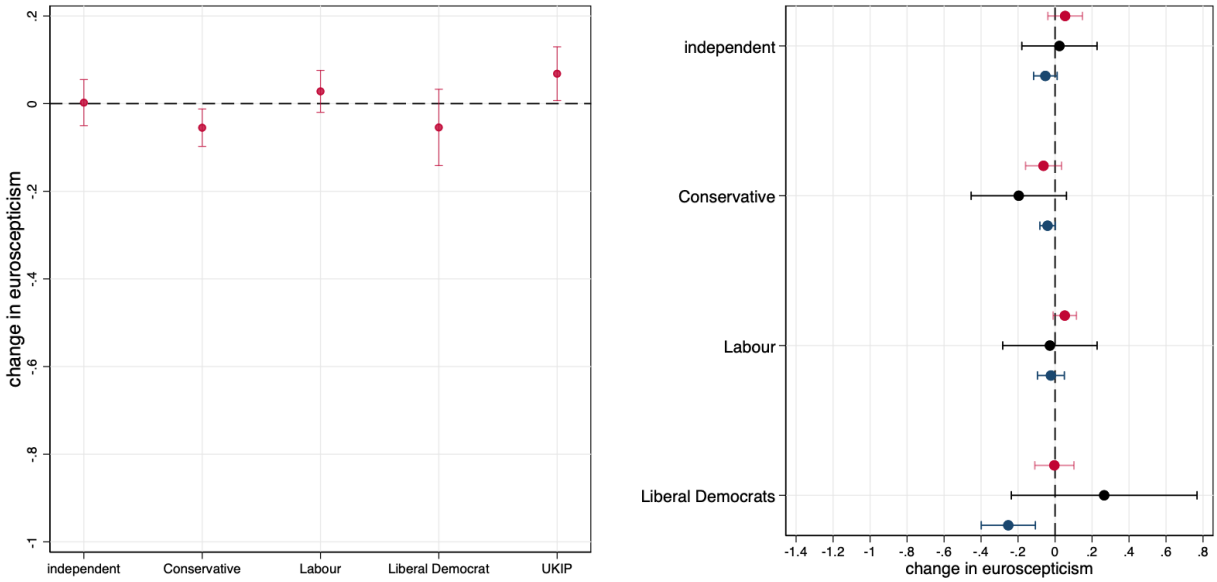
In this Appendix, I check whether Conservative partisans adopted the Conservative Party's new pro-Brexit position. In order to test this, I focus on attitudes on European Integration. Left panel of Figure D.1 shows that all partisan groups became less euroskeptic following the referendum. While testing whether Conservative partisans followed their party and adjusted their views (i.e., to test party cue effects), we need to compare it independents who lack an identification with a party. Doing so reveals that Conservative identifiers did not react differently than independents. This means that, overall, Conservative partisans did not follow their party and became more euroskeptic. The right panel in Figure D.1 focuses on whether their pre-referendum Brexit stance moderates this effect. Did Conservative partisans, who supported the remain side, became more Euroskeptic compared to independents? The answer is no, on the contrary, there is a backlash effect in that they became even less Euroskeptic, while Conservative partisans who supported leaving the EU did not significantly differ from independents. This is clear evidence that partisans did not follow the Conservative Party and adopt its new position to better match their party.

Figure D.1. Did Conservative Partisans Follow their Party's New Position? (wave 8 - wave 9)



Importantly, Figure D.2 shows that these patterns are not general trends and are specific to the period of study under examination (i.e., wave 8 and wave 9). For instance, looking at the changes between wave 7 and wave 8, independents did not change their opinions on Europe, Conservative partisans became slightly less euroskeptical, UKIP partisans became more euroskeptical while Labour and Liberal Democrat partisans did not change their attitudes on Europe. The right panel of Figure D.2 shows that, overall, remainers across partisan groups became more positive towards the EU, while leavers became more negative towards the EU. However, there is no partisan trend, as leavers across partisan groups did not differ from independents. But, Conservative partisans who supported the remain side significantly differed from other remainers in that they became more positive towards the EU. This means that, despite the division within the Conservative Party, the leadership's campaign to remain in the EU succeeded in consolidating the positive attitudes. However, Conservative partisans who already supported the leave side was not convinced by the Conservative Party's campaign to remain in the EU. This shows constraint party cue effects, limited to reinforcement of pre-existing congruence rather than persuasion.

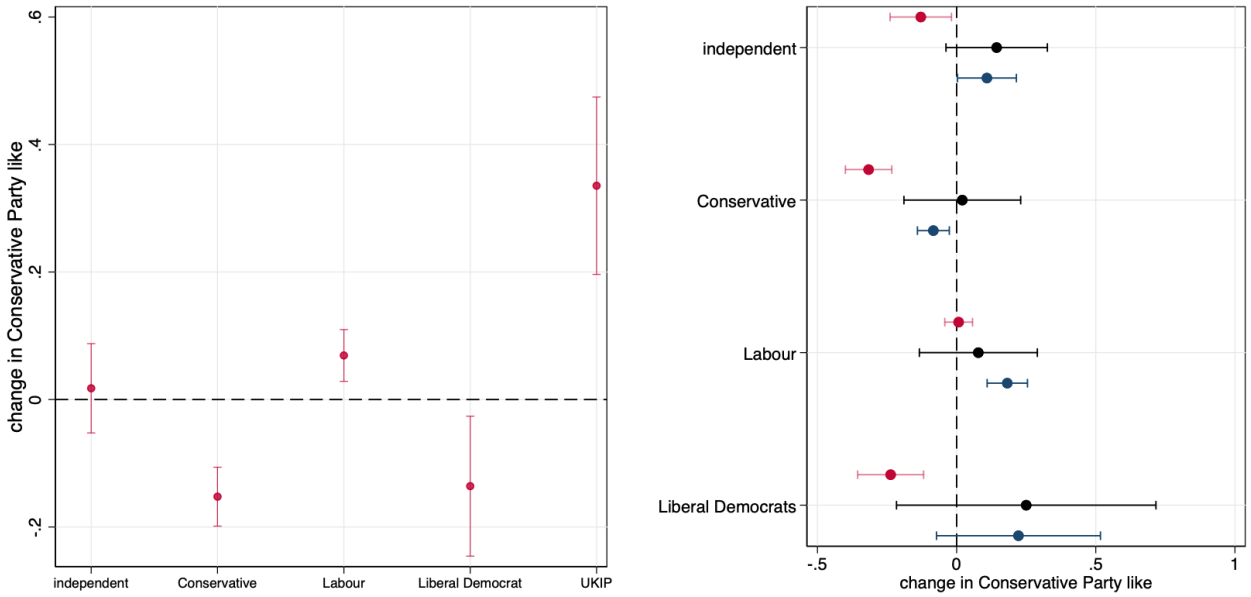
Figure D.2. Did Conservative Partisans Follow their Party's Campaign Position during the Campaign Period? (wave 7 - wave 8)



E Replicating the Analyses with Consistent Partisans

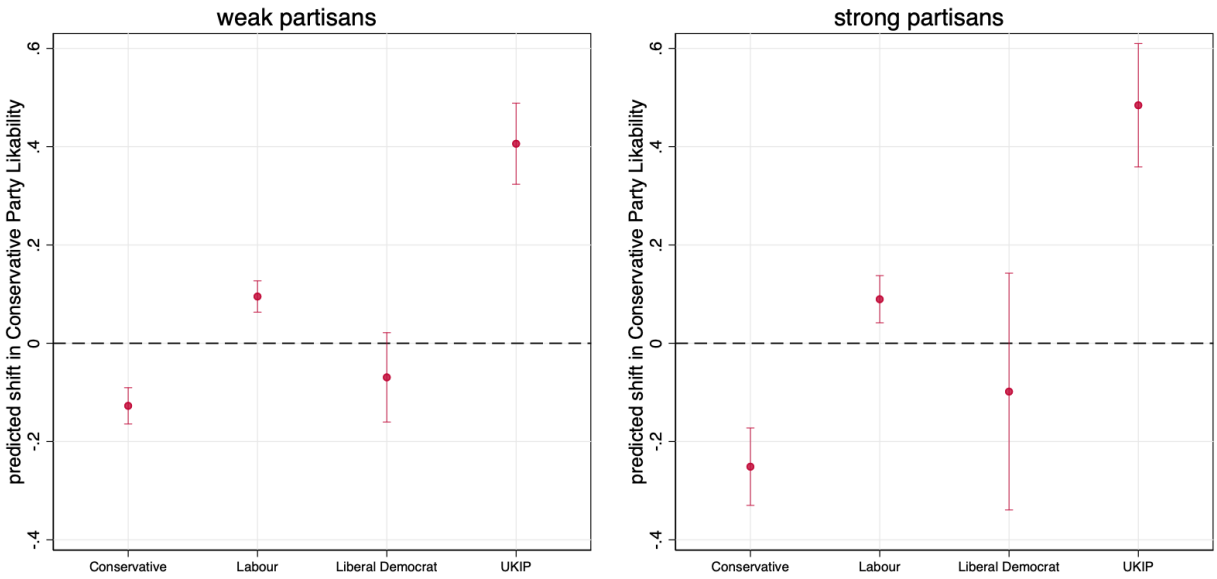
In this Appendix, I replicate the results by limiting the sample to those who consistently identified with the same party or as independent in wave 6, 7 and 8. Even though this leads to a substantive loss of observations (from 25,990 to 10,799), it is still informative because it restricts the analysis to respondents with stable prior party identification and tests whether the results hold in this subgroup. The results show broadly similar patterns and remain supportive of the interpretations.

Figure E.1. Feelings towards the Conservative Party



F Partisan Strength does not Moderate the Results

Figure F.1. Feelings towards the Conservative Party



G Partisan Realignment Following the Brexit Referendum

In this Appendix, I connect the results with previous research documenting partisan realignment around the Brexit divide (Fieldhouse et al., 2020; Schonfeld and Winter-Levy, 2021; Hobolt and Tilley, 2026). In the main analyses of the manuscript (Figure 6), respondents are grouped based on their party identification in wave 8, before the referendum. This allows for examining how the same partisan groups changed their feelings towards the Conservative Party over time. However, it is possible that some respondents also changed their party identification during this period. For example, Labour Leavers who became warmer towards the Conservatives might have subsequently started identifying with the party. Similarly, Conservative Remainers who became colder towards the Conservatives might have stopped identifying with the party. Therefore, in this Appendix, I first examine how party identification changed after the referendum and whether these changes differed by pre-referendum Brexit stance. I then examine whether changes in Conservative Party affect are associated with subsequent party identification.

First, Table G.1 presents descriptive patterns on the party identification of respondents in waves 10 and 12, separately for Labour and Conservative Remainers and Leavers identified in wave 8. The results show that the majority of respondents maintained their initial party identification, although there are some differences by Brexit stance. Among initial Labour identifiers, Leavers were less likely than Remainers to remain with Labour and more likely to become independent or identify with the Conservative Party. Among initial Conservative identifiers, Remainers were more likely to move to Labour or the Liberal Democrats, while Leavers were more likely to move to UKIP. These patterns are similar across waves 10 and 12, suggesting that Brexit preferences were associated with subsequent changes in partisan alignment.

Table G.1. Changes in Party Identification by Pre-Referendum Brexit Stance

	Wave 10		Wave 12	
Party identification in wave 10 or 12	Remain	Leave	Remain	Leave
Panel A: only among Labour identifiers in Wave 8				
Independent	5.90	10.98	5.83	8.78
Conservative Party	0.97	2.29	0.76	2.65
Labour Party	89.22	81.54	88.72	84.94
Liberal Democrats	2.25	0.87	2.67	1.12
UKIP	0.06	2.79	0.05	1.53
Other parties	1.60	1.53	1.97	0.97
N	3,506	1,831	3,964	1,959
Panel B: only among Conservative identifiers in Wave 8				
Independent	6.90	4.69	8.10	6.43
Conservative Party	89.97	91.53	86.98	88.88
Labour Party	1.13	0.38	1.49	0.85
Liberal Democrats	1.51	0.35	2.83	0.45
UKIP	0.11	2.58	0.10	2.83
Other parties	0.38	0.47	0.50	0.55
N	1,854	3,413	2,013	3,994

Notes: Entries are column percentages. Party groups are defined according to respondents' party identification in Wave 8. Brexit stance is measured in Wave 8. Wave 10 and Wave 12 percentages are calculated using respondents with available party identification in the respective wave. Sample sizes therefore differ across waves. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Next, I examine whether pre-referendum Brexit preferences predict subsequent changes in party identification post-referendum. I focus on respondents who identified with Labour or the Conservative Party in wave 8 and examine their party identification in waves 10 and 12. I distinguish between respondents who moved to another party and those who became independent, since individuals may stop identifying with their initial party without immediately identifying with another party. I estimate linear probability models with robust standard errors, controlling for age, gender, and education measured in wave 8. Table G.2 presents the results.

Among respondents who identified with Labour in wave 8, Leavers in wave 8 were more likely than Remainers to subsequently identify with the Conservative Party. The difference is 1.0 percentage point in wave 10 and 1.5 percentage points in wave 12. However, the difference is larger when focusing on becoming independent. Labour Leavers were 5.0 percentage points more likely to become independent in wave 10 and 3.0 percentage points more likely in wave 12. These findings suggest that changes in partisan alignment among Labour Leavers did not necessarily involve

immediately identifying with the Conservatives. Some instead stopped identifying with Labour without identifying with another party.

Among wave 8 Conservative identifiers, the results are somewhat different. I do not find significant differences between Remainers and Leavers in the overall likelihood of leaving the Conservative Party or becoming independent. However, Conservative Remainers were significantly more likely to move to Labour or the Liberal Democrats. The difference is 1.5 percentage points in wave 10 and 2.9 percentage points in wave 12. These findings are consistent with previous research showing that the Brexit divide was associated with changes in partisan alignment (Fieldhouse et al., 2020; Hobolt and Tilley, 2026).

Table G.2. Brexit Stance and Subsequent Partisan Alignment

Panel A: Party identification in Wave 10	Labour → Conservative	Labour → Independent	Conservative → Non-Conservative	Conservative → Independent	Conservative → Labour/Lib Dem
Leave	0.010*	0.050***	-0.006	-0.012	-0.015***
	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,669	4,669	4,344	4,344	4,344
Panel B: Party identification in Wave 12	Labour → Conservative	Labour → Independent	Conservative → Non-Conservative	Conservative → Independent	Conservative → Labour/Lib Dem
Leave	0.015***	0.030***	-0.008	-0.003	-0.029***
	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.010)	(0.008)	(0.005)
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	5,156	5,156	4,905	4,905	4,905

Notes: Entries are coefficients from linear probability models with robust standard errors in parentheses. Party identification and Brexit stance are measured in wave 8. Panel A predicts party identification in wave 10, while Panel B predicts party identification in wave 12. Remain is the reference category. The first two outcomes focus on initial Labour identifiers, while the remaining outcomes focus on initial Conservative identifiers. Conservative → Non-Conservative includes respondents who became independent or identified with another party. All models control for age, gender, and education measured in wave 8. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

Next, I examine whether changes in feelings toward the Conservative Party are associated with subsequent changes in party identification among all initial Labour and Conservative identifiers. For the shorter-term analysis, I use changes in feelings towards the Conservative Party between waves 8 and 9 to predict party identification in wave 10. For the longer-term analysis, I use changes in feelings between waves 8 and 11 to predict party identification in wave 12. I estimate linear probability models with robust standard errors, controlling for pre-referendum Brexit stance, initial

feelings towards the Conservative Party, age, gender, and education. Table G.3 presents the results.

Among respondents who identified with Labour in wave 8, becoming one-unit warmer towards the Conservative Party on an 11-point scale between waves 8 and 9 is associated with a 0.9 percentage-point higher probability of identifying with the Conservatives in wave 10. The relationship remains similar over the longer period. I do not find a significant association between change in feelings and becoming independent in wave 10. However, becoming warmer towards the Conservatives between waves 8 and 11 is associated with a 1.4 percentage-point higher probability of becoming independent in wave 12.

Among wave 8 Conservative identifiers, becoming one-unit warmer towards the Conservative Party between waves 8 and 9 is associated with a 2.7 percentage-point lower probability of leaving the party in wave 10. More specifically, it is associated with a 1.8 percentage-point lower probability of becoming independent and a 0.6 percentage-point lower probability of identifying with Labour or the Liberal Democrats. The relationships are also present over the longer period. A one-point increase in Conservative Party affect between waves 8 and 11 is associated with a 5.2 percentage-point lower probability of leaving the party in wave 12, including a 3.2 percentage-point lower probability of becoming independent and a 2.0 percentage-point lower probability of moving to Labour or the Liberal Democrats.

The results also show some differences between Remainers and Leavers after controlling for changes in Conservative Party affect. Among initial Labour identifiers, Leavers are 4.6 percentage points more likely to become independent in wave 10, although the difference is not statistically significant in wave 12. Among initial Conservative identifiers, Leavers are 1.9 percentage points less likely to leave the party in wave 10 and 1.9 percentage points less likely to move to Labour or the Liberal Democrats in both waves. These results should be interpreted as associations rather than evidence that changes in party affect explain the relationship between Brexit stance and subsequent party identification.

Finally, I focus specifically on Labour Leavers and Conservative Remainers, the two groups for which Brexit preferences conflicted with their initial party identification. I examine whether

Table G.3. Change in Feelings Toward the Conservative Party and Subsequent Partisan Alignment

Panel A: Party identification in Wave 10 (affect change W8–W9)					
	Labour → Conservative	Labour → Independent	Conservative → Non-Conservative	Conservative → Independent	Conservative → Labour/Lib Dem
Change in Conservative affect	0.009***	0.002	-0.027***	-0.018***	-0.006**
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)	(0.002)
Leave (ref. Remain)	0.008	0.046***	-0.019*	-0.018*	-0.019***
	(0.004)	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.008)	(0.005)
Baseline Conservative affect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,166	4,166	3,885	3,885	3,885
Panel B: Party identification in Wave 12 (affect change W8–W11)					
	Labour → Conservative	Labour → Independent	Conservative → Non-Conservative	Conservative → Independent	Conservative → Labour/Lib Dem
Change in Conservative affect	0.010***	0.014***	-0.052***	-0.032***	-0.020***
	(0.002)	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.003)
Leave (ref. Remain)	0.003	0.010	0.008	0.008	-0.019***
	(0.005)	(0.009)	(0.011)	(0.009)	(0.006)
Baseline Conservative affect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	4,083	4,083	3,859	3,859	3,859

Notes: Entries are coefficients from linear probability models with robust standard errors in parentheses. The first two outcomes focus on all initial Labour identifiers, while the remaining outcomes focus on all initial Conservative identifiers. All models additionally control for pre-referendum Brexit stance (Remain as the reference category). Party identification and Brexit stance are measured in wave 8. In Panel A, changes in Conservative Party affect between waves 8 and 9 predict party identification in wave 10. In Panel B, changes in affect between waves 8 and 11 predict party identification in wave 12. All models control for initial feelings towards the Conservative Party, age, gender, and education measured in wave 8. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

changes in Conservative Party affect are associated with subsequent partisan alignment within these two groups. The models control for initial feelings towards the Conservative Party, age, gender, and education. Table G.4 presents the results.

Among Labour Leavers, becoming warmer towards the Conservative Party is associated with a higher likelihood of subsequently identifying with the party. A one-point increase in Conservative Party affect is associated with a 1.0 percentage-point higher probability of Conservative identification in wave 10 and 1.1 percentage points in wave 12. Over the longer period, warming towards the Conservatives is also associated with a higher likelihood of becoming independent. Among Conservative Remainers, becoming colder towards the Conservative Party is associated with a higher likelihood of leaving the party, including becoming independent or moving to Labour or the Liberal Democrats. A one-point decrease in Conservative Party affect is associated with a 3.6 percentage-point higher probability of leaving the party in wave 10 and 6.7 percentage points in wave 12.

Table G.4. Change in Feelings Toward the Conservative Party Among Labour Leavers and Conservative Remainers

Panel A: Party identification in Wave 10 (affect change W8–W9)	Labour → Conservative	Labour → Independent	Conservative → Non-Conservative	Conservative → Independent	Conservative → Labour/Lib Dem
Change in Conservative affect	0.010*	-0.002	-0.036***	-0.025***	-0.010*
	(0.005)	(0.006)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.005)
Baseline Conservative affect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,453	1,453	1,363	1,363	1,363
Panel B: Party identification in Wave 12 (affect change W8–W11)	Labour → Conservative	Labour → Independent	Conservative → Non-Conservative	Conservative → Independent	Conservative → Labour/Lib Dem
Change in Conservative affect	0.011***	0.014***	-0.067***	-0.030***	-0.037***
	(0.003)	(0.004)	(0.007)	(0.006)	(0.007)
Baseline Conservative affect	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Demographic controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	1,387	1,387	1,268	1,268	1,268

Notes: Entries are coefficients from linear probability models with robust standard errors in parentheses. The first two outcomes focus on Labour Leavers, while the remaining outcomes focus on Conservative Remainers. Party identification and Brexit stance are measured in wave 8. In Panel A, changes in Conservative Party affect between waves 8 and 9 predict party identification in wave 10. In Panel B, changes in affect between waves 8 and 11 predict party identification in wave 12. All models control for initial feelings towards the Conservative Party, age, gender, and education measured in wave 8. $^{*}p < 0.05$, $^{**}p < 0.01$, $^{***}p < 0.001$.

It is important to note that these results should not be interpreted causally. Although changes in party affect are measured before party identification in the subsequent wave, affect and party identification may have evolved together during the period covered by the analyses. This is particularly relevant for the longer-term analyses, since party identification may have changed before the final measurement of affective change. Therefore, these analyses do not establish that changes in party affect caused changes in party identification. In addition, the models including affective change require observations for party affect in multiple waves and therefore have different sample sizes from the models examining Brexit stance alone. For this reason, changes in the coefficients for Brexit stance across specifications should not be interpreted as evidence of mediation. Rather, they indicate that the changes in Conservative Party affect documented in the main analyses are closely associated with subsequent changes in partisan alignment.