

# Happy and glorious? The sometimes-unifying effects of the British monarchy

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## ABSTRACT

Do monarchs unify? This article is the first to test whether monarchs promote unity by increasing national pride and decreasing political animus (affective polarization). Using two waves of an original survey experiment on thousands of British participants, we show that priming respondents to think favorably of the monarchy increased feelings of national pride and indirectly reduced affective polarization. Surprisingly however, this effect is only found when measuring affective polarization using social distance and not feeling thermometer items. This suggests that the monarchy has the capacity to reduce feelings of hostility towards fellow countrymen but may not reduce hostility towards political parties. In exploratory analyses we also found treatment increased respondents' conviction that Scotland and Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK, also mediated by national pride. Our results recommend monarchies in democracies as a promising field for future research by political scientists.

## 1. Introduction

What role do monarchs play in democracies? Despite presiding over many of the world's democracies,<sup>1</sup> constitutional monarchs are remarkably understudied by political scientists. While it is often assumed that monarchs in a democracy serve the role of a unifying figurehead—a national symbol that rallies the people and provides continuity—this proposition has never been empirically verified. Recent events surrounding the British monarchy highlight two possibilities: Does the monarch really unify, as suggested by outpourings of grief, patriotism, and jubilation surrounding the passing of Queen Elizabeth II and the ascension of King Charles III? Or does the monarchy lead to more division, as controversies over the monarchy's imperial legacy and fraught relationship with the press might suggest?

Our research is the first to seek answers to these questions. We present the results of two survey experiments conducted on thousands of British respondents testing whether the British Monarchy unifies, specifically by increasing national pride and reducing feelings of dislike between political opponents (affective polarization). We find that it does. Even with a relatively weak treatment, we find that respondents who were primed to think positively of some aspect of the monarchy were more likely to report being proud to be British. This in turn led to

reduced affective polarization as measured by social distance questions. Interestingly however, we do not find the same effect using measures based on feeling thermometer items. This suggests that the monarchy can positively affect the way everyday citizens feel about each other but likely does not influence the way citizens feel about political parties as a whole. We also include exploratory analyses finding that priming respondents to think positively of the monarchy increased their feelings that both Scotland and Northern Ireland should remain a part of the United Kingdom, and that the effects of our prime on polarization are consistent across demographic and ideological groups.

These results suggest that despite being politically neutered, monarchies in modern democracies can play an important role influencing outcomes that political scientists care about. The fact that monarchies (at least when they are presented in a positive light) can help reduce feelings of disunity between fellow citizens, combined with the decline in public support for these institutions in recent years (Smith, 2023; National Centre for Social Research, 2024), recommends these institutions and the sovereigns who preside over them for future study.

## 2. Do monarchies unify?

There is a surprising lack of research on the effects of monarchy in a

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<sup>1</sup> 25 of the 83 countries Freedom House designated as “free” in 2024 were monarchies (Freedom House, 2024).

democratic state. This is even true in areas where monarchs are known to play a role such as in government formation; any discussion of the institutional role of monarchs is notably absent from the otherwise comprehensive work of Martin and Stevenson (2001). Similarly, monarchs receive essentially no attention in Tavits' (2008) work on the effects of having an elected versus unelected head of state. The one exception to this lack of attention is Hazell and Morris' (2020) excellent volume that explores the limited roles monarchies in 8 European democracies play. While their volume explores the constitutional, political, and symbolic aspects of monarchy, it does not empirically test the assertion that monarchs play a unifying role.

While it is not directly concerned with any effects that monarchs and monarchies may have on political outcomes, there is some research on public opinion towards the British monarchy. Support for the monarchy has historically been high, though it can vary based on factors such as age and ideology (Smith, 2018). Mortimore argues that feelings toward the monarchy are best seen as deeply held personal values and not mercurial political opinions. This is likely why when compared to other European publics, the British public tends to be on the higher end of support for retaining their monarch, and this support tends to be stable over time (Mortimore, 2020, see also Mortimore, 2016). In fact Mortimore argues that apparent fluctuations in support for the monarchy are likely due to differences in certain polling companies' methodological practices and not actually reflective of changes in public opinion. At the same time, more recent polling has suggested a more significant drop in support—down roughly 20 percentage points in the last 10 years (National Centre for Social Research 2024)—and a large gap between younger and older Britons' support for the institution (Smith, 2023). Thus support for the monarchy has historically been strong and unwavering but may be beginning to decline.

While there is no research directly testing whether the monarchy unifies, there is a robust and growing literature focusing on a host of other explanations for affective polarization, both in the United States (e.g. Iyengar et al., 2012) and cross-nationally (e.g. Gidron et al., 2020). Literature on affective polarization in the UK in particular shows similar patterns to these general findings. Gidron et al. (2020) as well as Wagner (2021) show that the UK has similarly high levels of affective polarization to other western democracies, and Westwood et al. (2018) show that in the UK, partisanship is strongly related to distrust, and that distrust towards outpartisans is significantly higher than distrust over social divides. For example, British respondents were more likely to discriminate against outpartisans than against those of a different religion.

Recent research has begun to explore strategies for defusing polarization. Most relevant to our study is the Common Ingroup Identity Model proposed by Levendusky (2018), which suggests that priming national identity can reduce affective polarization. In his experiment, Americans who were primed to think of their national identity in a positive way reported lower levels of polarization. Although Levendusky refers to his treatment as a “national identity” prime, it arguably goes further by invoking what Gustavson and Stendahl (2020) call “national pride”. Levendusky attributes this effect to shifts in ingroup-outgroup dynamics: when opposing partisans are reminded of the value of their shared identity, this salient commonality reshapes how they perceive one another. National identity, which transcends partisan and ideological divisions (Huddy and Nadia, 2007), thus serves as an ideal superordinate identity. By priming individuals to reflect on their Americanness, Levendusky's treatment encourages them to recategorize political opponents not as hostile outgroups, but as fellow members of a valued ingroup.

Levendusky's logic is supported by findings from Voelkel et al. (2024), who test 25 interventions aimed at reducing partisan animosity. They find that one of the three most effective treatments involves having participants read about how Democrats and Republicans share a common national identity rooted in support for democracy and rejection of political violence. Echoing Levendusky's findings, this intervention

significantly reduced dislike toward outpartisans.

Building on this work in the American context, we argue that the British monarchy serves as a powerful symbol of British national identity. We theorize that priming respondents to reflect positively on the monarchy will elicit greater feelings of national pride. This is because (with the exception of a brief interruption in the 17th century) the monarchy has been the one constant institution and symbol of state since at least the Norman conquest in 1066. Over the Victorian era, the monarchy was increasingly portrayed as the national symbol (Purcell and Courage, 2024). Today, chivalric orders are awarded by the King to those who have provided service to the country. The sovereign participates in important national events ranging from sessions of parliament to patriotic music festivals to Olympic games. Important institutions are portrayed as extensions of the monarchy including “His Majesty's Government,” the “Royal Airforce,” and even the “Royal Mail.” Even the national anthem is a prayer asking God to save the King. Thus, a treatment that primes respondents to view the monarchy positively should heighten their pride in being British.<sup>2</sup>

**H1. (National Pride Hypothesis):** Being treated to think of the monarchy in a positive way will increase respondents' feelings of national pride.

Following Levendusky (2018) and Voelkel et al.'s (2024) logic, we theorize that this increased pride will in turn reduce affective polarization. Specifically, we argue that the monarchy treatment will only decrease polarization via this national pride mediator. That is, there will be no direct effect of treatment on polarization. This is because the British monarchy is explicitly apolitical. The sovereign never wades directly into the muck of partisan politics, seeking to build bridges between opposing groups. Thus, respondents are unlikely to directly associate the monarchy with reduced interparty hostility. Instead, the expected reduction in polarization should arise indirectly through increased national pride. Thus.

**H2. (Indirect Polarization Reduction Hypothesis):** Being treated to think of the monarchy will indirectly reduce respondents' affective polarization by increasing feelings of national pride.<sup>3</sup>

### 3. Experimental design and measurement

We test the above hypotheses in two separate survey experiments, both fielded on British respondents through Prolific. Wave 1 included 969 respondents and was fielded on August 18, 2023, only a few months after King Charles' coronation. This wave sought to test the effects of any sort of monarchy treatment, and whether priming respondents to think of Charles, the late Queen Elizabeth, or the monarchy in general had a stronger effect on national pride and affective polarization. Thus it included three treatment conditions corresponding with each person or institution. Table 1 includes the distribution of respondents by treatment condition. Due to space constraints we report only our analyses of the effects of treatment in general. Thus, in the results presented below, each of these three treatment conditions are pooled and the outcomes for all respondents who received any treatment are compared to the respondents who received the control condition. The results of the pre-registered analysis regarding the different effects of Charles, Elizabeth, or the monarchy in general are discussed in our Appendix.

<sup>2</sup> We also acknowledge the potential counterargument that certain identity groups may not associate the monarchy with positive feelings about their British identity for historical or political reasons. This might particularly be true of ethnic minorities, and those who live outside of England. For this reason we test for heterogenous effects based on several demographic variables.

<sup>3</sup> The hypotheses presented here vary somewhat from how they appeared in the preregistration of Wave 1, though their essence remains largely unchanged. Preregistration for Wave 1 available at: [https://aspredicted.org/JTG\\_WK5](https://aspredicted.org/JTG_WK5), and for Wave 2 at: <https://aspredicted.org/6prn-pb4y.pdf>.

**Table 1**

Wave 1 distribution of respondents by treatment.

Treatment	Prompt	N
<b>Charles</b>	Please list three things you like about King Charles	260
<b>Elizabeth</b>	Please list three things you liked about Queen Elizabeth	243
<b>General Monarchy</b>	Please List three things you like about the British Monarchy	264
<b>Control</b>	–	292

To test that our results were consistent across time, and not simply dependent on the survey being conducted shortly after the coronation of King Charles, we conducted a second survey wave. Wave 2 included 1202 respondents and was fielded on April 24, 2025. Because Wave 1 found that the Charles prime had the strongest effect of the three separate treatments (see the Appendix), Wave 2 featured only a Charles treatment and a control condition. Table 2 displays the distribution of respondents in this wave.

In both waves, respondents began by answering a series of demographic and attitudinal questions. Then they were randomly assigned to treatment or control.<sup>4</sup> The treated group was shown a picture of King Charles and asked to list three things they like about him.<sup>5</sup> The goal of the treatment was not to uncover the respondents' actual opinions of Charles, Elizabeth, or the monarchy as a whole but instead to bring the monarch, former monarch, or institution to the front of mind in a positive way by showing a pleasant picture and encouraging the respondent to briefly ponder the person or institution in a positive light.

Respondents then proceeded to the post-treatment questions. These questions include a measure of national pride borrowed from YouGov (2023) ("How proud are you, if at all, to be British?") and two distinct measures of affective polarization. First, feeling thermometer items asked respondents to rate how much they like the Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat, and Scottish National parties<sup>6</sup> on a scale of 1–100. Next, social distance items asked respondents to report how comfortable they would be having a son or daughter-in-law, neighbor, or close personal friend who was a member of each of those parties. We converted responses to the feeling thermometer and the average of responses to the social distance items into measures of affective polarization using Wagner's (2021) method for multi-party systems. This measure is essentially a standard deviation of respondents' affect toward each

**Table 2**

Wave 2 distribution of respondents by treatment.

Treatment	Prompt	N
<b>Charles</b>	Please list three things you like about King Charles	605
<b>Control</b>	–	620

<sup>4</sup> Balance testing indicated that the control groups and treatment groups were not substantively different from each other based on demographics, ideology, or partisan ID. Figs. A11 and A12 in the appendix report the standardized mean differences (SMDs) for several variables. All SMDs fall below 0.1 which is the standard threshold when assessing balance (Griefer, 2025).

<sup>5</sup> The Elizabeth and General Monarchy treatments in Wave 1 were instead shown a picture of the late queen or of Buckingham Palace and asked what they like about Queen Elizabeth or the British monarchy respectively.

<sup>6</sup> We asked respondents to only evaluate the four parties with the largest shares of seats in Parliament for the sake of brevity. Kasper et al. (2024) argue that brief AP measurement items such as this are valid surrogates for items that include all major parties.

party, weighted by the vote share that party received in the 2019 (for Wave 1) or 2024 (for Wave 2) parliamentary elections.<sup>7</sup> Higher values indicate larger spread, and thus greater polarization between how respondents feel about the various political parties.

While this weighted spread method of translating feeling thermometers into polarization scores is common, it is less common to do the same with social distance items. However, scholars have shown that these different types of questions capture citizens' affect towards different things (Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Tichelbaecker et al., 2023). In fact, Tichelbaecker et al. found that there was essentially no correlation between feeling thermometer measures and social distance measures. Feeling thermometers capture feelings towards the parties as unitary entities, while social distance measures capture feelings toward members of opposing parties. It is likely social distance items capture in particular respondents' feelings toward everyday partisans as opposed to party elites. Because respondents can have different feelings towards out-parties than they do towards their fellow citizens who happen to support those out-parties (Areal and Harteveld, 2024), we use two distinct measures of affective polarization to check whether the monarchy has a depolarizing effect on both.

#### 4. Respondent demographics

Table 3 reports the demographic attributes of our respondents. In general, the makeup of our two samples approximate the actual characteristics of the British population but with some variation between the

**Table 3**

Respondent demographics compared to national demographics.

	Wave 1	Wave 2	Actual Proportion <sup>a</sup>
<b>Region</b>	England: 827 (85.3 %) Other: 142 (14.7 %)	England: 1047 (87.1 %) Other: 155 (12.9 %)	England: 84.3 % Other: 15.7 %
<b>Ethnicity</b>	White: 828 (85.4 %) Other: 141 (14.6 %)	White: 1008 (83.8 %) Other: 195 (16.2 %)	White: 83 % Other: 17 %
<b>Class</b>	Working Class: 595 (61.3 %) Middle Class: 351 (36.1 %) Other: 23 (2.4 %)	Working Class: 602 (50.1 %) Middle Class: 578 (48.1 %) Other: 22 (1.8 %)	Working Class: 56 % Middle Class: 36 % Other: 7 %
<b>Age</b>	Median: 40 Mean: 42.00 SD: 13.61 Min: 18 Max: 82	Median: 49 Mean: 46.84 SD: 15.79 Min: 18 Max: 80	Median: 40.7
<b>L-R Self Placement</b>	(Higher values are further right) Mean: 5.00 SD: 2.15 Min: 1 Max: 10	(Higher values are further right) Mean: 5.30 SD: 2.17 Min: 1 Max: 10	Mean: 4.83

<sup>a</sup> Information on regional population available from the Office for National Statistics (2024). Information on ethnicity available from the Office for National Statistics (2022). The Median age is from 2022 and comes from Statista (2025). Class information came from YouGov (2024). The value for left-right placement is a rescaling of YouGov (2025) average which is on a scale of –100 to +100 (they report an average of –3).

<sup>7</sup> Wagner gives the formula for party  $j$  and voter  $i$  as  $Spread_i = \sqrt{\sum_{p=1}^P v_p (like_{ip} - \overline{like_i})^2}$  where  $\overline{like_i} = \sum_{p=1}^P (v_p * like_{ip})$ , "like" is the measure of positive affect toward each party, and " $v_p$ " is the vote share of each party, measured as a proportion with a range from 0 to 1" (Wagner, 2021, 4).

waves.<sup>8</sup> Both waves adequately reflected the share of the population that was white and English. There was more variation on socio-economic class with Wave 1 over sampling the working class and Wave 2 under sampling the working class while over sampling the middle class. The median age of Wave 2 respondents was roughly 8 years older than the median age of the overall population, though Wave 1 approximated the overall population.

The composition of our two samples also approximates the political make-up of the country. In both waves the average respondent placed themselves at the center of the left-right scale, which is also true of the general population (YouGov, 2025). Table 4 also shows that our sample's distribution of partisan identity is consistent with the results of the two most recent Parliamentary elections, though Wave 1 oversampled Labour and Green supporters at the expense of Conservative and Liberal Democrat supporters. Wave 2 is more consistent with the 2024 election results, though once again Conservative supporters were under sampled, and Labour is slightly overrepresented.

## 5. Results

### 5.1. Monarchy and National Pride

We begin by examining whether priming respondents to think positively about the monarchy increases their national pride. Fig. 1 shows the effect of our monarchy treatment relative to the control group across both survey waves and pooled results. The results from both waves support H1. In Wave 1, treated respondents reported a 0.16-point higher average level of national pride on a 5-point scale ( $p = 0.02$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.18$ ). In Wave 2, treated respondents also expressed significantly greater pride in being British, with a 0.10-point increase compared to the control group ( $p = 0.04$ ; Cohen's  $d = 0.12$ ). These effects correspond to 17 % and 12 % of a standard deviation in national pride, respectively.

### 5.2. Indirect effect of monarchy on affective polarization

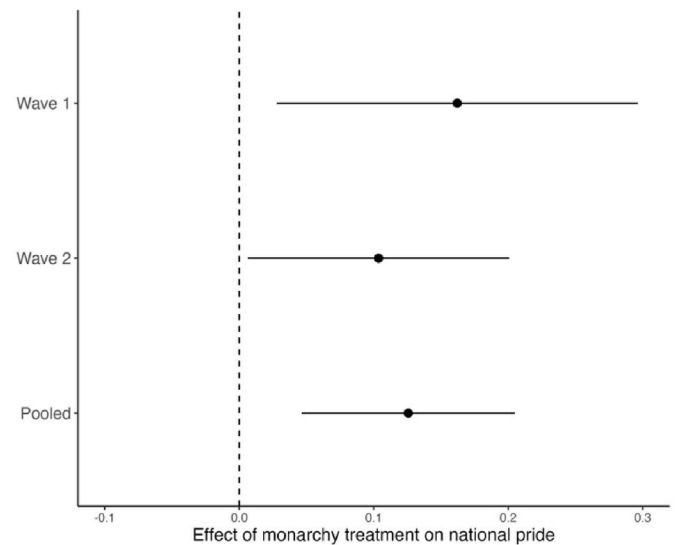
Our theoretical framework centers on a mediation process. We argue

**Table 4**

Distribution of respondents partisanship by survey wave compared to vote share in most recent election.

Party	n Wave 1	2019 Vote %	n Wave 2	2024 Vote %
Conservative	168 (16.70 %)	43.60 %	210 (17.47 %)	23.70 %
Labour	399 (39.66 %)	32.10 %	497 (41.35 %)	33.70 %
Liberal Democrats	65 (6.46 %)	11.60 %	138 (11.48 %)	12.22 %
Reform	–	2.01 % (Brexit Party)	178 (14.81 %)	14.29 %
Green	80 (7.95 %)	2.61 %	110 (9.15 %)	6.39 %
Scottish National Party	38 (3.78 %)	3.90 %	28 (2.33 %)	2.52 %
Plaid Cymru	4 (0.40 %)	0.50 %	4 (0.33 %)	0.68 %
Democratic Unionist	8 (0.80 %)	0.8 %	2 (0.17 %)	0.60 %
Other	26 (2.58 %)	2.88 %	11 (0.92 %)	5.90 %
None	218 (21.67 %)	–	24 (2.00 %)	–

<sup>8</sup> See the Appendix for a full discussion of how each demographic and ideological variable was categorized.



**Fig. 1.** Monarchy and National Pride. Note: Point estimates are surrounded by 95 % confidence intervals. All estimates are derived using ordinary least squares regression. Complete results reported in Tables A1, A4 and A6-1.

that the monarchy can function as a unifying force by increasing national pride, which in turn reduces affective polarization. Thus, the core objective of this study is to estimate the indirect (or mediation) effect of monarch priming on affective polarization via national pride.

We adopt the mediation framework developed by Imai et al. (2010), which proceeds in two stages. First, we model national pride (the mediator) as a function of treatment assignment, the results of which were presented in Fig. 1. Second, we use the predicted values of national pride to estimate affective polarization while holding treatment assignment constant. This allows us to compare each respondent's level of affective polarization under two scenarios: (1) when their national pride is at the level predicted under the monarch treatment, and (2) when it is at the counterfactual level predicted under the control. The average difference between these two predicted outcomes yields the Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME). In other words, the ACME captures how much affective polarization changes as a result of increased national pride induced by the treatment. A statistically significant and negative ACME would suggest that reduced affective polarization can be attributed to higher levels of national pride.

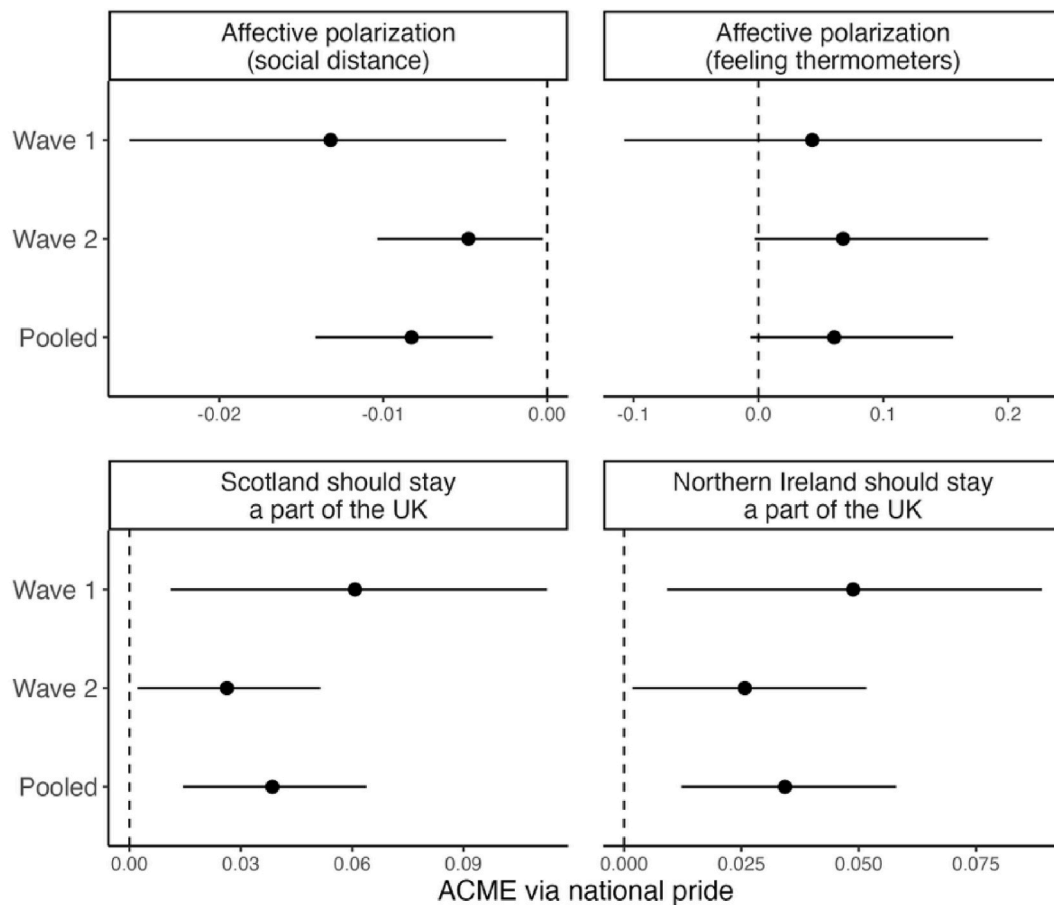
Fig. 2 presents the ACME of national pride on two measures of affective polarization: social distance and feeling thermometers. As shown in the upper-left panel of Fig. 2, we find a statistically significant (Cohen's  $d = 0.03$  in Wave 1, 0.015 in Wave 2) negative ACME for the social distance measure in both waves and pooled results.<sup>9</sup> This supports H2: priming respondents to think positively about the monarchy boosts national pride, which in turn narrows the affective gap between their own partisans and out-partisans. This increased pride appears to make people more open to social connections with political opponents.<sup>10</sup>

In contrast, as shown in the upper-right panel of Fig. 2, we find no significant indirect effect on polarization when using feeling thermometer measures. This measure captures respondents' emotional evaluations of political parties as entities (Druckman and Levendusky, 2019; Tichelbaecker et al., 2023). The lack of a significant ACME here suggests that while national pride can soften interpersonal hostility and

<sup>9</sup> For the pooled results, the two surveys in one analysis that included survey fixed effects.

<sup>10</sup> One caveat of our analysis is that national pride was measured, not manipulated, leaving room for bias from unobserved pretreatment factors. A sensitivity analysis shows that our mediation results are robust to potential violations of this assumption (see Fig. A12).





**Fig. 2.** Average Causal Mediation Effect via National Pride on the Outcomes. Note: The ACME estimates are surrounded by 95 % confidence intervals based on 1000 resamples with robust standard errors.

encourage cross-partisan social connection, it may not be strong enough to reduce negative evaluations of the parties themselves. These results are robust to alternate measures of affective polarization that include only the two main parties. The Appendix includes a discussion of these results.

### 5.3. Unifying effect of the monarchy beyond partisan divides

In addition to testing the monarchy's unifying effect on partisan divisions, we also explore whether the monarchy treatment influences attitudes toward regional unity, specifically, support for both Scotland and Northern Ireland remaining part of the United Kingdom. These analyses were not preregistered so are only exploratory, without formal hypotheses. Nonetheless, we expect the monarchy prime to foster national unity in these domains as well, through the same mediating mechanism: national pride.

Prior research consistently shows that the relative strength of regional versus national identity, is a critical determinant of support for secession (e.g. Desmet et al., 2025). Thus our treatment's positive effect on national pride is well placed to reduce this support. Unlike in our main analyses focusing on partisan politics, the monarchy has been more of a symbol of unity on these issues. In Northern Ireland the monarchy symbolizes unionism, and in Scotland Queen Elizabeth subtly intervened with a public remark in the lead up to the 2014 independence referendum (Watt et al., 2014). Thus, we expect that priming respondents to feel prouder of being British through positive references to the monarchy should indirectly increase support for keeping Scotland and Northern Ireland within the United Kingdom.

In both waves of our survey experiment, we included two items

asking whether respondents believe Scotland and Northern Ireland should remain part of the UK. Response options included “no,” “don't know,” or “yes” which we coded as 1, 2, and 3, respectively, with higher values indicating greater support for unity. The lower panels of Fig. 2 present the ACME of national pride on support for regional unity. In both waves, we observe statistically significant and positive ACMEs for both outcomes. These results suggest that the monarchy treatment indirectly increases support for keeping Scotland and Northern Ireland in the UK, by boosting national pride.

Taken together, our findings indicate that priming people to think positively about the British monarchy can promote unity not only across partisan lines but also regarding issues of territorial integrity. The symbolic power of the monarchy, channeled through heightened national pride, can help reinforce a shared sense of British identity.

## 6. Heterogenous effects based on demographics

As further exploratory analyses we checked to see if the indirect effect of treatment on affective polarization was moderated by a host of socio-economic and demographic variables, including location within the UK, class, ethnicity, age, and ideology. The Appendix includes a discussion of how each variable was measured, and Figs. A1–A10 summarize the results of the moderated mediation analysis (see Tables A28–A56 for full results on region, class, and ethnicity). Once again, we did not pre-register any formal hypotheses, so these results are only exploratory. It is also not immediately clear what the *ex-ante* expectation should be of which demographic groups, if any, will be most open to having their views changed by the monarchy. While older and more right-leaning voters are more likely to support the monarchy

(Smith, 2018), it is not necessarily the case that having a higher (or lower) baseline opinion will make one's views more or less malleable.<sup>11</sup> Thus this exploratory analysis provides a good baseline for future research into where and amongst whom the monarchy may have the most capacity to promote unity.

We did not find strong differences in the effects of treatment based on these variables. In no case was the indirect effect of treatment significantly different between groups. The only clear pattern that emerged was a relationship between self-placement on the left-right spectrum and the indirect effect of treatment on polarization. In both waves, respondents who placed themselves further to the right saw stronger reductions in social distance polarization, while respondents on the far-left slightly rose in their polarization (though not to a statistically significant extent). Interestingly, the opposite pattern held for the feeling thermometer items. In general, amongst further right respondents' treatment had an indirect positive effect on this measure. Thus except for ideology (though again, even here there is no significant difference between groups) we find no evidence of heterogeneous effects of the British monarchy on affective polarization.

## 7. Discussion and conclusion

Overall, our findings suggest that the monarchy can serve as a unifying force. We find strong evidence that priming individuals to think positively about the monarchy increases national pride, which in turn reduces affective polarization, particularly as measured by social distance.

The fact that Wave 2 featured substantively similar results to Wave 1 suggests that our results are externally valid, at least in the British context. Wave 1 was conducted only a few months after King Charles' coronation, a major televised celebration of the monarchy (which may explain why the effect sizes were slightly larger in this wave). Yet, even two years after the coronation, Wave 2 still found significant effects of the monarchy treatment: increase in national pride, reduction in social-distance affective polarization, and greater support for Scotland and Northern Ireland staying within the UK. These consistent patterns suggest that the unifying influence of the monarchy is not merely a short-term reaction to a ceremonial moment.<sup>12</sup>

And yet, one important question remains regarding our most surprising result: why did the treatment significantly affect social distance measures of polarization but not feeling thermometer measures? The likely explanation lies in what these two measures capture. Druckman and Levendusky (2019) and Tichelbaecker et al. (2023) argue that social distance measures capture feelings towards members of political parties, while feeling thermometer items reflect warmth toward parties as collective entities. Thus, it is plausible that reminding Britons of the patriotic symbol of the monarchy can enhance interpersonal warmth among citizens, even across partisan lines. However, this symbolic reminder does not appear to shift how people feel about political parties themselves. This pattern is consistent with the nature of the monarchy: a strictly apolitical institution that unites people not through policy or partisanship, but through a shared sense of national identity.

Our results are of course limited in scope. The UK is just one of 25 democratic monarchies in the world. These are diverse in their history and constitutional arrangement. Future research should try to replicate these results in other contexts, especially contexts where the theoretical link between monarchy and polarization may be weaker. This could include other members of the British Commonwealth that claim the British monarch as their head of state but in which the monarch does not live or regularly participate in political ceremony. Within this group there is a salient divide between former white-settler colonies such as Canada or New Zealand, and countries populated mostly by the descendants of enslaved people such as Jamaica or Grenada. It would also be wise to test our theory in monarchies that have a more tumultuous modern history than the British case, such as in Spain, where the monarchy has spent time abolished or under the thumb of a fascist dictatorship.

While questions persist, this is largely the point. Monarchies in democracies have gone understudied and deserve greater attention. This research note suggests that monarchies in democracies do play a meaningful role. It is the first to empirically show that monarchs do unify, if only in certain ways. At the same time, it suggests areas for future study including whether the results are replicable outside of the United Kingdom. The combination of this initial finding and these remaining questions recommends monarchies and monarchs as fruitful areas for future research by political scientists.

## CRedit authorship contribution statement

**Braeden Davis:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Visualization, Software, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Yu-Shiuan Huang:** Writing – review & editing, Visualization, Resources, Methodology, Funding acquisition, Data curation.

## Ethics approval

This research was determined to be exempt by the Institutional Review Board of the University of California Davis (IRB ID: 2066892-1)

## Declaration of generative AI and AI-assisted technologies in the writing process

During the preparation of this work the authors used Chat GPT in order to assist in writing R code for the analyses and figures. After using this tool/service, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the publication.

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## Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

## Appendix A. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102961>.

## Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

<sup>11</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out.

<sup>12</sup> While our estimated effects are modest, they should be interpreted in light of the minimal nature of the treatment. Respondents were simply shown an image and asked to list three positive attributes, an exercise that took roughly 1 min. In contrast, Levendusky's (2018) intervention was considerably more intensive: participants read a patriotic article and then wrote a paragraph explaining why they felt proud to be American. Similarly, de Jong (2024) conducted a 10-min cross-partisan discussion on immigration or redistribution in the UK and reported an effect size of Cohen's  $d = 0.17$ . That our brief intervention produced 18 % (Wave 1) and 9 % (Wave 2) of that effect is striking. These findings suggest that the indirect effects we observe are likely conservative estimates, given the brevity and simplicity of the treatment.

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