

Party Misperception, Party-voter Incongruence, and Attitudes towards Democracy

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- Representing voter preferences is crucial to a functioning democratic party system
- Many studies of party representation focus on the relationship between party ideologies and voter self-placements – party-voter congruence
- Recent research has shown that party-voter congruence is a key factor in citizens' attitudes toward democracy – trust and satisfaction with democracy.
- Voters have also been shown to have an inaccurate understanding of party ideologies – "misperception" – which can interfere with their ability to place themselves and parties

- Voter's reliance on imperfect perceptions of party positions can lead to a divergence between the actual level of incongruence and its perception by the voter.
- This in turn can affect attitudes toward democracy itself – democratic satisfaction and trust in parliament.
- **To what extent is incongruence, and by extension democratic satisfaction, a result of misperception?**

UK BES panel data and research design

- We use the panel structure BES data set to isolate the over-time relationships (Waves 4-17, 2015-2019)
- Panel models allow us to isolate effects from (observed and unobserved) individual-level attributes and the effects of time.
- Misperception is measured using the absolute difference between party placements and CHES expert locations.
- **First we examine whether misperception leads to greater incongruence between voters and the parties they support**

Two incongruence concepts

- **Actual incongruence:**
- Due to voting for a party that is not in fact aligned with your preferences.
- the absolute difference between respondent's self-placement and the corresponding CHES expert location of the party they voted for.
- **Perceived incongruence:**
- The absolute difference between a respondent's self-placement and the perceived position of the party they voted for.
- Partly influenced to actual incongruence, but also a direct result of misperceiving the party location

Misperception, Perceived Incongruence and Actual Incongruence

- Effect of misperception on Incongruence
- Perception and consequences of party-voter Incongruence for Democratic Satisfaction and Political Distrust
- Does the level of political trust and satisfaction of the respondents decrease with greater perceived incongruence between the party and voters?

- Using panel data, we show that UK voters who misperceive their party's position perceive greater incongruence
- Partly driven by actual incongruence, but the effect of misperception is present even when controlling actual incongruence.
- Misperception leads to actual and perceived incongruence, but the latter is most consequential.
- The effects on democratic satisfaction and trust are driven by perceived incongruence; actual incongruence has little effect
- These effects are in large part driven by lack of information about the parties.
- Parties that do not accurately reflect their voter's beliefs but maintain the perception of congruence may still lead to greater democratic satisfaction.