Party Misperception, Party-voter Incongruence and Political Distrust*

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Abstract

This paper investigates how citizens' misperception of political party positions influences the voter-party congruence, trust and satisfaction. We use voter-level longitudinal data from the British Election Study in conjunction with data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) to examine how voters' misperceptions of party positions contribute to subjectively perceived incongruence, and the effect of perceived and actual incongruence on trust and satisfaction with democracy. Our analysis reveals that misperception about UK parties increases both perceived and actual incongruence between voters and the parties they support, with those with higher perceptual gaps demonstrating higher levels of party-voter incongruence. We then find that perceived incongruence is the primary correlate with voters' political distrust in the political system and dissatisfaction with democracy.

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1 Introduction

Party politics play a central role in aggregating the interests of voters and representing their preferences in government. A representative democracy requires that political parties reflect citizens' and voters' preferences (Downs 1957; Stokes 1963). Discrepancies between voters' preferences and the ideology and policies of political parties can influence voters' trust in politics and satisfaction with how democracy functions (Esaiasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2017; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015; Hobolt 2012; Davies et al. 2021).

Most studies of party representation focus on the relationship between the ideological positions of parties and citizens' self-placements on the left-right dimension (Arnold, Sapir, and Vries 2012; Arnold and Franklin 2012; Butler and Dynes 2016; Powell 2010) and the consequences of party-voter incongruence for political representation (e.g., Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020; Wardt and Otjes 2022; Marchal and Watson 2022; Noordzij, De Koster, and Van Der Waal 2021). One mechanism behind these effects requires that perceived incongruence would depend on the voters' knowledge of party positions. Yet, it is widely understood that voters cannot perfectly estimate parties' ideology positions (e.g., Ahler and Sood 2018; Levendusky and Malhotra 2016).[1] This distance between the voters' subjectively perceived party positions and "actual" party positions along the ideological spectrum —the ideological "misperception" —interferes with voters' judgement and ability to predict party placement. As a consequence, party-voter incongruence and its implications–including satisfaction with and trust in democratic institutions–may be influenced by an inaccurate understanding of party positions.

Recent years have seen a growing research interest in the relationship between the ideological alignment between parties and voters and the degree of satisfaction with democracy (Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020). In this literature, the cross-sectional discrepancy in the alignment of the voter and the party has been shown to be a key factor in citizens' satisfaction with democracy and trust in their political systems (Hobolt and Rodon 2020; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Mattila and Raunio 2006, 2012; Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020). Although

[1] In addition, misperception leads to an inability for voters to locate their peers' positions as well, for example, by rating opponents as more extreme than in reality (Ahler 2014).

a variety of research has focused on the congruence between voters and parties (Belchior 2013; Dolný and Baboš 2015; Bischof 2018; Carroll and Kubo 2018; Mattila and Raunio 2006), little work has taken into account the misperception of parties' positions by voters. Subjective misperception of party-vote incongruence could potentially lead to a divergence between the actual level of incongruence and its perception by the voter, which could have significant implications for citizens' satisfaction with political systems and regime performance. If a voter believes that there exists a significant disparity between themselves and their party, they may experience the same level of dissatisfaction as if an actual divergence were present. On the other hand, parties that do not accurately reflect their voters' beliefs yet manage to maintain the perception of congruence may still lead to greater democratic satisfaction among the electorate.

In this paper, we focus squarely on the concept of party position misperception and how it influences party-voter incongruence and its effects. Drawing on the literature on left-right voter perceptions and the causes and consequences of political incongruence, we argue that voters rely on imperfect perceptions of party positions to subjectively judge and react to the incongruence between themselves and parties. We document the evidence of persistent voter misperception about their preferred party's position using the voter-level longitudinal data in the British Election Study that tracks the same panel of respondents across time.

We take advantage of the panel structure of our data set to disentangle the relationship between misperception, incongruence, and political trust. Using panel regression models, we test two hypotheses relating to voters' misperception, subjectively perceived incongruence, and their trust in or satisfaction with political institutions. Panel models allow us to isolate effects from (observed and unobserved) individual-level attributes and the effects of time.

We first investigate the relationship between misperception and perceived incongruence. Misperception and actual incongruence are shown to be the two important determinants of voters' perceived incongruence. Then, we examine the implication of perceived incongruence on voters' political trust and satisfaction. We found that perceived incongruence has a much larger decisive effect on influencing voters' political trust and satisfaction-large perceived incongruence deteriorates citizens' satisfaction

with democracy.

This paper further advances our understanding of the misperception between the party-voter linkage and democratic satisfaction with regime performance. Several studies have drawn attention to the cause of misperception and its adverse impacts on democratic accountability (e.g., Ahler 2014; Ahler and Sood 2018; Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). In practice, citizens are more likely to express dismay toward the government when the parties they support do not adequately represent their concerns. However, we know less about how these harmful effects are derived from the link between voters and parties, potentially threatening the quality democratic systems.

To this end, we investigate these research questions using the case of British parties and data from the British Election Survey (BES) and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). This paper proceeds as follows. First, we document how voters' misperception of party placement is associated with incongruence between parties and voters. Second, we present an overview of our data and approach to measure party misperception and ideological incongruence between voters and the party. In the final section, we use several regressions to test our hypotheses. From our analysis, misperceptions about UK parties increase both perceived and actual incongruence between voters and parties, with those with greater perceptional gaps demonstrating higher party–voter incongruence. This perception gap also contributes to citizen distrust and dissatisfaction with the political system.

2 Party Misperception and Incongruence

Since the seminal work of Campbell et al. (1960), the literature has empirically explored the ways in which individuals' partisan orientation influences how they perceive political information. According to the literature, there are a number of factors that may impede citizens' ability to acquire or process information and lead to incorrect perceptions of the locations of political parties. For instance, if citizens suffer from inadequate information, it stands to reason that they are more likely to display a greater degree of perceptual prejudice when judging political parties. Ahler (2014, 2016) and Ahler and Sood (2018) and Orr and Huber (2021) also examine how citizens' stereotypes can lead them to become more extreme than they are. Orr and Huber

(2021) found that some citizens misperceive the demographic composition of parties and that these misperceptions affect the beliefs and feelings of partisans toward the parties (Ahler and Sood 2018). Misperception is particularly prevalent with respect to major policy issues, on which political parties have the opportunity to make strategic declarations (Meyer and Wagner 2020; Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). As such, misperception impairs voters' ability to discern the parties' stances, it may therefore impede the alignment between parties and voters.

Understanding the effect of misperception on the representation link between parties and voters is important because parties, as vehicles that aggregate voters' interests, have the incentive to respond to their majority supporters precisely (Downs 1957). Theoretically, citizens with a higher (lower) level of socioeconomic status are more likely to have a better (worse) understanding of politics, which helps them observe politicians and parties more accurately (e.g., Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996; Luskin 1990; Meirick 2013). For example, education levels can moderate the degree of misperception due to education correlating with the variation in knowledge of left-right party placements (Carroll and Kubo 2018). Other research has suggested that highly informed voters are significantly more ideologically polarized than those who are less informed (Palfrey and Poole 1987). This polarization is related to the misperceptions of voters about the ideological positions of parties (Dahlberg 2013), and these misperceptions can have consequential effects on the beliefs and feelings of partisans towards parties (Ahler and Sood 2018). Experiments have shown that misperceptions can lead to polarization (Ahler 2014; Carlson and Hill 2021) and that education may have a complex role in promoting or inhibiting misperceptions, depending on the context (Meirick 2013). Taken together, this body of research suggests that understanding the effects of misperceptions on polarization is an important step towards understanding party-voter representation in democracies.

Because underlying knowledge of placements may be necessary for choosing parties on a spatial basis, some portion of the misaligment between voters and parties can be attributed to this misperception. We therefore argue that misperceptions of the parties' left-right position distort the ideological distance between voters' self-placement and their placement of parties and examine the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 1 *A greater degree of misperception of party positions leads to a greater*

degree of incongruence between parties and voters.

3 Party-voter Incongruence, Democratic Satisfaction, and Political Distrust

The literature on democracy has examined the role of various factors in citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy functions. Ezrow and Xezonakis (2011) demonstrated that higher levels of average party policy extremism lead to lower levels of satisfaction. Bakker, Jolly, and Polk (2020) found that party-partisan incongruence is associated with political disaffection at the national and European level. Hobolt (2012) argued that both performance and procedural factors are significant contributors to citizens' satisfaction with democracy in the EU. Dahlberg and Holmberg (2014) and Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016) showed that citizens are less satisfied with democracy when their views differ from those of the government on policy dimensions and that this effect is moderated by the level of political interest. Lastly, Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg (2015) revealed that dissatisfaction with democracy is largely determined by people's assessments of the government's performance, corruption, and subjective feelings of representation.

The literature has examined the connection between citizen dissatisfaction and the representation of voters by parties (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020; Dahlberg 2013; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015; Hobolt 2012; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Mattila and Raunio 2006, 2012; Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020). For example, research has shown that political incongruence across many issues heightens citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016) and incentivizes them to support anti-establishment parties (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020). Considering that the effects of incongruence on political trust may be driven by an inaccurate understanding of party positions, we posit the following hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 *The level of political trust and satisfaction of the respondents decreases with greater perceived incongruence between the party and voters*

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4 Measuring Individual-level Misperception

While cross-sectional studies in this literature can provide insight into dissatisfaction with democracy due to increasing disconnect between citizens and parties, they cannot separate effects from individual characteristics and time. We leverage the panel structure of the British Election Study, which is conducted monthly. The British Election Study consists of a series of monthly surveys of political opinions, perceptions, and preferences. A similar panel sample is tracked in waves between 2014 and 2019 (Schmitt et al. 2021). All respondents in these panels were asked to respond to self-reported perceptions of the left-right positions of the parties, except for demographic variables. A total of five waves are used, from wave 4 in 2015 to wave 17 in 2019. Since a questionnaire about self-reported perceptions of each party's left-right position was not included in the panel survey sample, certain waves were excluded.[2] To adjust our analysis for nonresponse, we incorporate the survey weights provided in the analysis.[3]

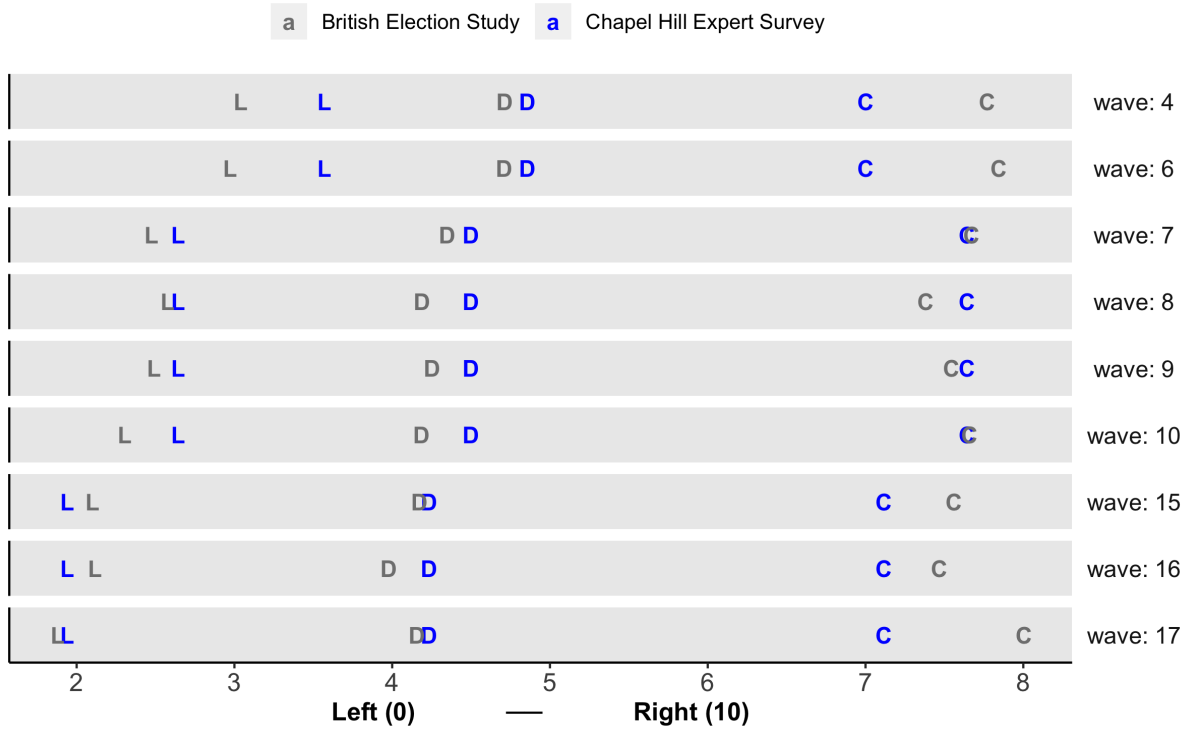


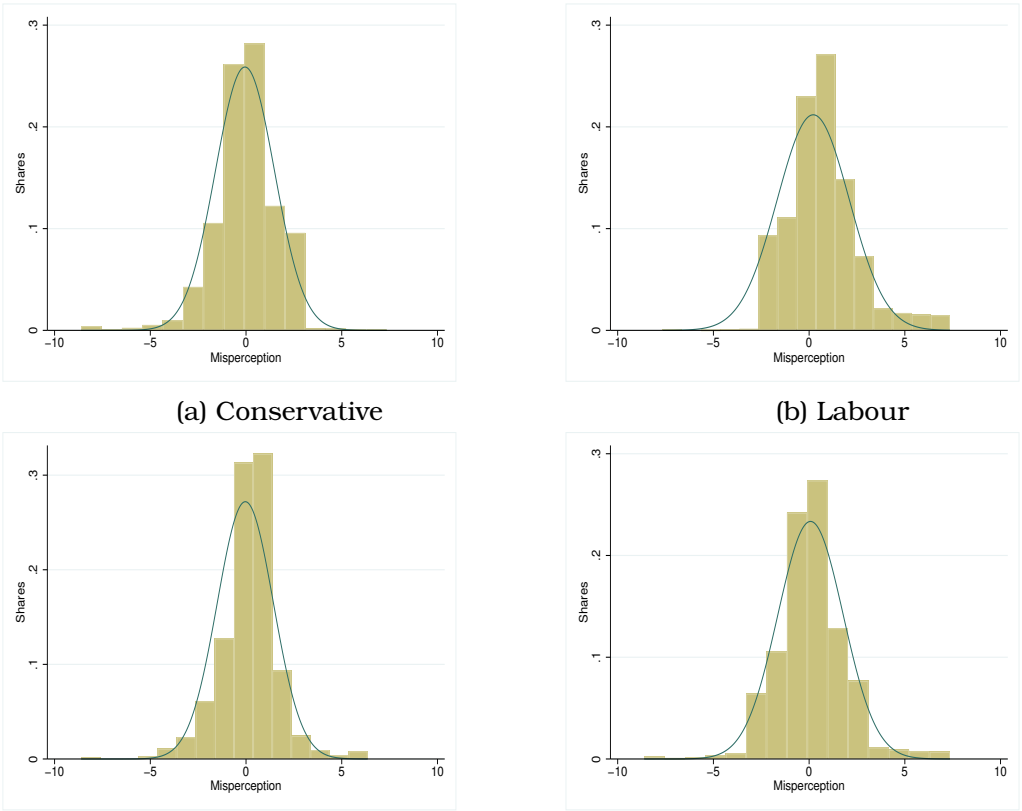
Figure 1: CHES Expert Placements and Average BES Respondent Misperceptions

Note: C = Conservatives, L = Labour, D = Liberal Democrats.

[2]Specifically, we merge multiple waves of the panels, spanning from wave 4, conducted in 2015, and wave 17, conducted in 2019.

[3]For a further discussion of underlying design for weights and samples, please see British Election Study (Schmitt et al. 2021, 7–10)

To measure the left-right ideological positions of British parties over time, the consensus (mean) ideological positions obtained from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) in 2014, 2017, and 2019 (Bakker et al. 2015, 2018, 2020) are used. These accurate CHES positions are then matched with the responses from the British Election Study (BES) for the closest year (see Appendix E, Table 8 for the exact survey structure). CHES experts were asked the same questions as the BES respondents regarding the left-right positions of each party along the ideological spectrum. Expert surveys from different sources have demonstrated consistency at the aggregate level, with the average positions of the parties surveyed by the CHES experts largely resembling the corresponding average positions from the BES Survey for the three main parties, as shown in Figure 1. In total, nine waves of the panel survey were included, including 289,157 respondents.



(a) Conservative (b) Labour

(c) Liberal Democrats (d) All

Figure 2: The Distributions of Misperception from Wave 7

Figure 1 displays the perceived ideological position of the major parties in England by average voters on a scale from 0 to 10. Scale 0 represents the "left" in ideology, while scale 10 represents “right” in ideology. Capital letters “C”, “L”, and “D” denote

the Conservative, Labor, and Liberal Democrats parties, respectively. Gray placements correspond to average perceived positions from BES voters, and blue placements correspond to average positions measured by Chapel Hill Survey experts. The average voter's perception of each party's position is close to the actual party position measured by experts. For example, in wave 7, the average perceived position of each of the three major parties by their voters nearly coincides with the actual position. Figure 2 further illustrates the distribution of the difference between the individual voter's perception and the corresponding actual position for wave 7. The yellow columns present the histogram of the distribution, and the continuous lines are fitted normal distributions. Subplots (a)-(d) show the histogram and distribution for the Conservative, Labour, and Liberal Democrats parties, respectively. The distributions are dispersed, with noticeable proportions of respondents being away from the center. The average misperception is close to 0, however, there is considerable heterogeneity among voters. This heterogeneity generally persists across different waves and for different parties.

5 Modeling Misperception and Incongruence on Political Distrust

Misperception ($\hat{\pi}_{i,t}$) is defined as the absolute perceptional gap between individual respondent's perception held on a party's position and the corresponding average perception from the CHES. Specifically, it is calculated as

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

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

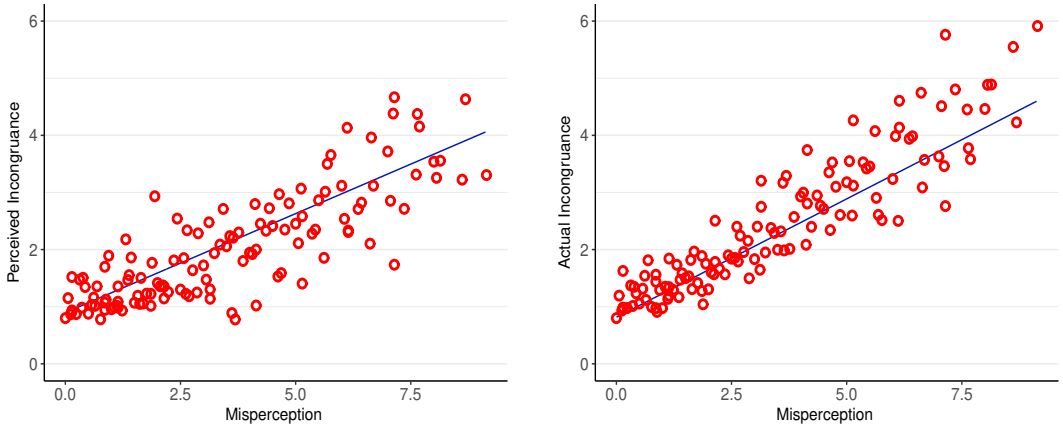
Actual incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$) is defined as the absolute difference between the individual BES respondent's self-placement on general left-right positions and the corresponding average perception of the CHES experts. This is calculated as

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

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

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

The subplots in Figure 3 depict the correlations between misperception and incongruence between the party and the voter, both perceived and actual.[4] Clearly, a higher misperception correlates with a higher subjectively perceived incongruence and a greater actual incongruence.



(a) Perceived Incongruence on Misperception

(b) Actual Incongruence on Misperception

Figure 3: Misperception and Subjectively Perceived Party-voter Incongruence and Objectively Actual Incongruence

Finally, we consider the following panel regression model by including both individual-specific and time fixed effects:

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

where $\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$ denotes respondent i's perceived incongruence of their own affiliated party in wave t and $\gamma_{t,t}$ denotes the actual incongruence between respondent i and their party in wave t. The misperception of respondents about the ideological position

[4]Binscatters are used. Observations are classified into 100 bins Figure 3a and Figure 3b.

of the party they support at time t is represented by $\pi_{i,t}$. The panel data regression framework captures the impact of the stable personal and demographic characteristics of the respondents on this misperception with vector of control variables $C_{i,t}$ that includes the respondent's ideological extremeness, the perceived degree of polarization in wave t, and respondent-specific fixed effects v_i as well as the time effect m_t.

Table 1: Regression Party Misperception on Perceived and Actual Voter-party Incongruence

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)	Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$)			0.372***
			(0.009)
Misperception ($\pi_{i,t}$)	0.199***	0.327***	0.254***
	(0.005)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Self-placement Deviation	0.116***	-0.141***	-0.184***
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Perceived Polarization	-0.022***	0.053***	0.061***
	(0.002)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Constant	1.007***	0.934***	0.559***
	(0.022)	(0.030)	(0.033)
Individual FE	✓	✓	✓
Time FE	✓	✓	✓
N	130,305	130,305	130,305

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

To determine whether voters' misperception of party positions leads to perceived incongruence, Table 1 demonstrates the correlation between voters' misperception of their party's ideology position and actual and subjectively perceived party-voter incongruence using the panel data set. Columns (1) and (2) indicate that both actual and perceived party-voter incongruence are positively associated with voters' misperception. Specifically, column (1) indicates that one additional unit of misperception increases the actual incongruence between voter and party by 19.9% on average, while column (2) indicates that one additional unit of misperception increases the voter's perceived incongruence by 32.7%. This suggests that those who misperceive their party's position to a greater extent subjectively believe that there is a larger gap between their ideological position and the party's position.

Our first hypothesis that misperceptions explain part of the perceived incongruence between voters and parties is strongly supported. Even when controlling for the actual incongruence, as illustrated in column (3) of equation specification 3, both ac-

tual incongruence and misperception contribute significantly to the larger subjectively perceived incongruence, increasing by 37.2% units and 25.4% units, respectively. This pattern is corroborated in Figure 3. In conclusion, our findings suggest that voters' perceived incongruence is positively determined by both actual incongruence and misperception about party's ideology positions. Interestingly, voters reporting a more extreme ideological self placement causes larger actual incongruence, meaning that their placement is drifting away from the party's actual position measured by the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, while they nevertheless perceive smaller incongruence with their voted party. Additionally, if a voter perceives higher polarization between the two major parties, they generally perceive larger incongruence.[5]

6 Perceived Incongruence, Actual Incongruence and Satisfaction

To fully study the impact of perceived incongruence on party satisfaction and political trust, we consider the following panel regression model:

$$\hat{y}_{i,t} = \alpha_1 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \alpha_2 \pi_{i,t} + \alpha_3 \gamma_{i,t} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{5}$$

where $\hat{y}_{i,t}$ denotes the semi-standardized measurement of respondent i's political satisfaction or political trust.[6] $\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$ denotes the perceived incongruence of the respondent i' of their own affiliated party in wave t and $\gamma_{t,t}$ denotes the actual incongruence between respondent i and their party in wave t. $\pi_{i,t}$ represents their misperception about the ideological position of their affiliated party. Furthermore, $C_{i,t}$ is a vector

[5] Table 3 in Appendix B displays similar results to those of Table 1 using a pooled ordinary least squares (OLS) approach, controlling for demographic characteristics including age, education level, gender, survey year, party affiliation, and the number of information sources reported by each respondent. The base group consists of female respondents from high-income groups, with affiliations with other parties, and with postgraduate and higher education degrees.

[6] *Political satisfaction* and *political trust* are normalized as follow. First, *political trust* is how satisfied the citizen is with the democracy in the UK. They are asked: "On the whole, how satisfied, or dissatisfied are you with how democracy works in the UK?" The interviewee responds on a Likert-type scale of 1 to 4 ranging from "*Very dissatisfied*" to "*Very satisfied*". We normalize so that the response "*Very dissatisfied*" is valued at -1.5 and "*Very satisfied*" is valued at 1.5. Then, we divide the distribution by its standard deviation. As to political satisfaction, the question is asked about how much the interviewee trusts Members of Parliament: "How much trust do you have in Members of Parliament in general?" Similarly, the responses of the interviewees are on a Likert scale of 1 to 7 spanning from "*No trust*" to "*A great deal of trust*". We recode the original value from 4 to 0, and again divide by the standard deviation to construct a semi-standardized trust of the UK Members of Parliament. In this way, the mean response across the population can be interpreted in terms of standard deviations away from a neutral effect.

of control variables for the attributes of the respondent that vary over time, including the ideological position of the extreme respondent i' and the perceived degree of polarization on the wave t. v_i captures the respondent-specific fixed effects and m_t captures the time (wave) effect. Columns (1) and (2) in the upper panel of Table 2 report the estimation results using political satisfaction as the dependent variable. Column (1) considers the case where perceived incongruence is not included as a regressor, while column (2) shows results when both perceived and actual incongruence are included in the model. When perceived incongruence is absent from the model in column (1), actual incongruence can significantly and negatively explain the volatility of political satisfaction. However, once the perceived incongruence is also included in the model, the effect of the actual incongruence becomes insignificant. Instead, the perceived incongruence has a significantly negative impact on individual voter's political trust. Under column (2), one unit increase in actual incongruence decreases political satisfaction by 0.2% unit of standard deviation, while one unit increase in perceived incongruence has seven times more impact, lowering political satisfaction by 1.4% of the standard deviation.

Alternatively, we consider the following ordered panel logit regression model:

$$\hat{y}^*_{i,t} = \alpha_1 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \alpha_2 \pi_{i,t} + \alpha_3 \gamma_{i,t} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{6}$$

$$y_{i,t} = \begin{cases} 1 & \text{if } \hat{y}^*_{i,t} < S_1 \\ 2 & \text{if } S_1 \leqslant \hat{y}^*_{i,t} < S_2 \\ \vdots & \vdots \\ 7 & \text{if } S_7 \leqslant \hat{y}^*_{i,t} \end{cases} \tag{7}$$

where the dependent variable $y_{i,t}$ is the discrete level of political satisfaction (upper panel column (3) and (4)) or trust (lower panel column (3) and (4)) of the voter i on a scale of 1 to 7. We assume that there is a continuous latent variable of political satisfaction or trust, $\hat{y}^*_{i,t}$, in voters' minds when they make judgements on their satisfaction with democracy or trust in politics. If this latent variable falls within the range of $[S_1, S_2)$, the voter will select a level of satisfaction or trust of 2. The upper panel of Figure 4 reports the estimation results for political satisfaction in columns

Table 2: Regression Perceived Incongruence and Actual Incongruence on Satisfaction and Trust

Dependent Variable:	Political Satisfaction			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Semi-standarized	Semi-standarized	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit
Actual Incongruence	-0.009**	-0.002	-0.057***	-0.025**
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.010)	(0.011)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.014***		-0.073***
		(0.003)		(0.008)
Self-placement Deviation	0.009**	0.007	-0.084***	-0.095***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Perceived Polarization	0.004**	0.005**	0.036***	0.041***
	(0.002)	(0.002)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Constant	-0.510***	-0.495***		
	(0.020)	(0.020)		
Waves	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	68042	67927	68042	67927
Adjusted R^2	0.074	0.073		
Dependent Variable:	Political Trust			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Semi-standarized	Semi-standarized	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit
Actual Incongruence	-0.002	0.001	-0.083***	-0.042***
	(0.005)	(0.004)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.011***		-0.092***
		(0.003)		(0.009)
Self-placement Deviation	0.025***	0.034***	0.122***	0.108***
	(0.006)	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.012)
Perceived Polarization	0.005**	0.005**	-0.002	0.004
	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Constant	-0.701***	-0.637***		
	(0.023)	(0.020)		
Waves	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	47318	58915	59113	58915
Adjusted R^2	0.087	0.087		

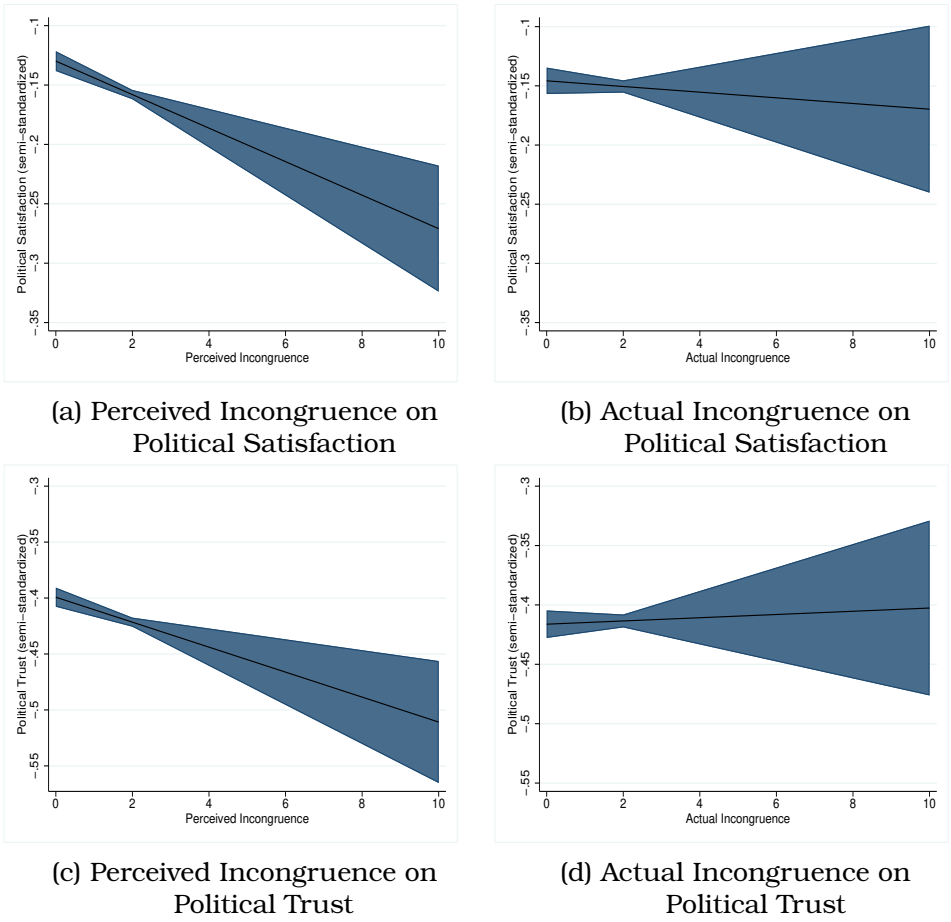
* $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$
Note: Robust standard errors in parentheses.

(3) and (4). Without including perceived incongruence in the regression, column (3) shows that actual incongruence can significantly reduce satisfaction. After including perceived incongruence in column (4), the impact of actual incongruence is halved (though still significant) and perceived incongruence has a three times greater negative impact on satisfaction. Figure 4a and Figure 4b in Figure 4 illustrate the fitted values of semi-standardized political satisfaction against perceived incongruence and actual incongruence, respectively, with 95% confidence intervals (shaded area). Increasing perceived incongruence can effectively decrease political satisfaction, while the effect of actual incongruence is not significant.

Analyzing the lower panel of Table 2 reveals that the effect of actual incongruence on political trust is not significant and is substantively much smaller than the effect of perceived incongruence, depending on the specification. Specifically, in column (2), a unit increase in actual incongruence does not significantly reduce political trust, but a unit increase in perceived incongruence reduces political trust by 1.1% units of standard deviation. In column (3), without controlling for perceived incongruence, it appears that an increase in actual incongruence significantly lowers political trust by 8.3% units of standard deviation. However, once perceived incongruence is included in column (4), the impact of actual incongruence is halved and is much smaller than that of perceived incongruence. This is demonstrated in Figure 4, which shows the fitted value of the semi-standardized political trust against perceived incongruence and actual incongruence, along with the 95 % confidence interval (shaded area). The results indicate that increasing perceived incongruence can effectively reduce political trust, while there is no substantive effect of actual incongruence.

7 Conclusion

In recent years, scholars have discussed political trust in the context of explaining party-voter incongruence (e.g. Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020; Dahlberg 2013; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015; Hobolt 2012; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Mattila and Raunio 2006, 2012; Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020). Recently, there has been a growing body of research on how misperceptions about parties' positions affect the level of democratic satisfaction among citizens and



(a) Perceived Incongruence on Political Satisfaction

(b) Actual Incongruence on Political Satisfaction

(c) Perceived Incongruence on Political Trust

(d) Actual Incongruence on Political Trust

Figure 4: Marginal Effects Plot for the Effect of Party-voters Incongruence on Political Trust and Satisfaction

their trust in politics. This research has shown that when voters have an inaccurate perception of where a party stands on issues, it can lead to a decrease in their satisfaction with the political system and their trust in the regime. However, less attention has been paid to examining how voters' misperceptions of a party's position can lead to decreased democratic satisfaction and perceptions of regime performance. Voters often do not accurately identify a party's ideological position, leading to incorrect assumptions about where parties stand on various issues, yet studies have not explored how these misperceptions impact trust in politics and general satisfaction.

In this paper we examined the role of misperception in perceived incongruence between citizens and their preferred political party. We employ panel regression models to control for unobserved personal attributes and investigate how misperception of ideology contributes to perceived political incongruence and its consequences. Using data from the British Election Survey and the case of the United Kingdom, our research findings suggest that misunderstandings of UK political parties lead to an

increase in perceived and actual incongruence between voters and parties, with those experiencing greater perceptional gaps exhibiting a greater degree of party-voter incongruence. This, in turn, contributes to citizens' distrust and dissatisfaction with the political system, as they feel that it is not working in their favor. Furthermore, we find evidence that a higher level of perceived incongruence is associated with a higher level of misperception about party positions at the voter level. Moreover, we observe that perceived incongruence has a larger, more decisive effect on influencing voters' political trust and satisfaction, as significant perceived incongruence diminishes citizens' satisfaction with democracy. Given the consequences of voters' misperceptions for their trust in politics and satisfaction with democracy, our results show the need to differentiate between how much incongruence voters believe exists and how much actually exists.

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A The Spatial Relationship between Misperception, Perceived Incongruence, Actual Incongruence

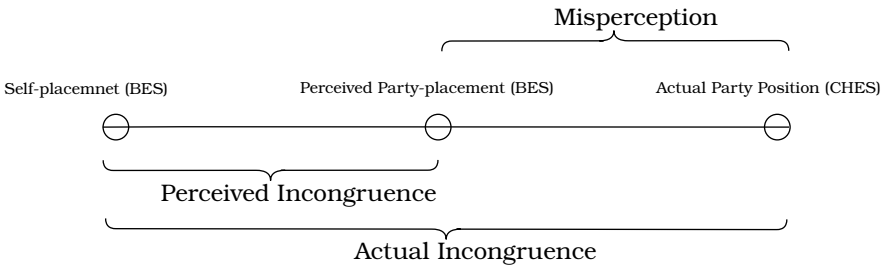

Figure 5: Actual party position is to the right of perceived party-placement.

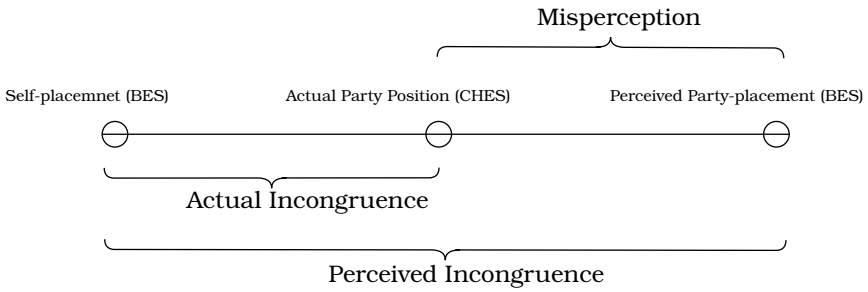

Figure 6: Perceived Party Position is to the right of Actual party position.

B Regression on Party Misperception for Perceived and Actual Voter-party Incongruence with Controls

Table 3: Regression on Party Misperception for Perceived and Actual Voter-party Incongruence with Controls

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

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

C Regression on Party-voter Incongruence on Political Satisfaction and Trust with Controls

Table 4: Regression on Perceived and Actual Incongruence for Political Satisfaction with Controls

Dependent Variable:	Political Satisfaction			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized	Semi-standarized
Actual Incongruence	-0.025***	0.007	-0.011***	0.005
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.070***		-0.034***
		(0.006)		(0.003)
Self-placement Deviation	-0.102***	-0.109***	-0.050***	-0.053***
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Perceived Polarization	0.022***	0.026***	0.010***	0.012***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Income: Middle	0.127***	0.124***	0.061***	0.059***
	(0.018)	(0.018)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Top	0.145***	0.143***	0.071***	0.070***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.009)	(0.009)
Age	-0.011***	-0.011***	-0.006***	-0.006***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age^2	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: A-level	-0.020	-0.020	-0.009	-0.010
	(0.021)	(0.021)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Undergraduate	-0.111***	-0.110***	-0.054***	-0.053***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Postgrad	-0.298***	-0.296***	-0.147***	-0.146***
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Party Affiliation: Conservative	1.079***	1.064***	0.520***	0.512***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.014)	(0.014)
Labour	-0.198***	-0.213***	-0.099***	-0.106***
	(0.029)	(0.029)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Liberal Democrat	-0.091***	-0.118***	-0.049***	-0.062***
	(0.033)	(0.033)	(0.017)	(0.017)
UKIP	-0.436***	-0.447***	-0.218***	-0.223***
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.018)	(0.018)
Green Party	-0.713***	-0.719***	-0.363***	-0.366***
	(0.047)	(0.047)	(0.024)	(0.024)
BNP	-0.335	-0.381	-0.154	-0.175
	(0.450)	(0.443)	(0.235)	(0.231)
Change UK	0.308	0.314	0.158	0.160
	(0.194)	(0.196)	(0.101)	(0.101)
Brexit Party	-0.509***	-0.492***	-0.252***	-0.243***
	(0.058)	(0.058)	(0.029)	(0.029)
An Independent Candidate	-0.110	-0.116	-0.087	-0.089
	(0.376)	(0.364)	(0.191)	(0.186)
I Would/Did Not Vote	-0.355***	-0.335***	-0.166***	-0.157***
	(0.077)	(0.077)	(0.038)	(0.038)
Other	-0.612***	-0.600***	-0.310***	-0.304***
	(0.079)	(0.079)	(0.039)	(0.039)
Gender: Male	-0.088***	-0.087***	-0.042***	-0.041***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Attention to Politics	-0.083***	-0.083***	-0.040***	-0.040***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
News Sources	0.053***	0.053***	0.028***	0.028***
	(0.010)	(0.010)	(0.005)	(0.005)
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wave	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant			-0.188***	-0.153***
			(0.058)	(0.058)
N	68042	67927	68042	67927
Adjusted R^2			0.153	0.154

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

Table 5: Regression on Perceived and Actual Incongruence for Political Trust with Controls

Dependent Variable:	Political Trust			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ordered Logit	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized	Semi-standarized
Actual Incongruence	-0.039***	0.013	-0.015***	0.010**
	(0.007)	(0.008)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Perceived Incongruence		-0.114***		-0.055***
		(0.006)		(0.003)
Self-placement Deviation	0.013**	0.001	0.009***	0.003
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.003)
Perceived Polarization	-0.026***	-0.019***	-0.015***	-0.011***
	(0.004)	(0.004)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Income: Middle	0.041**	0.038**	0.022**	0.021**
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Top	0.061***	0.057***	0.032***	0.030***
	(0.019)	(0.019)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Age	-0.037***	-0.036***	-0.019***	-0.019***
	(0.003)	(0.003)	(0.002)	(0.002)
Age^2	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: A-level	-0.009	-0.008	-0.009	-0.008
	(0.022)	(0.022)	(0.011)	(0.011)
Undergraduate	0.079***	0.081***	0.039***	0.041***
	(0.020)	(0.020)	(0.010)	(0.010)
Postgrad	0.152***	0.157***	0.085***	0.088***
	(0.028)	(0.028)	(0.015)	(0.015)
Party Affiliation: Conservative	1.061***	1.040***	0.552***	0.541***
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.016)	(0.016)
Labour	0.344***	0.324***	0.185***	0.175***
	(0.032)	(0.032)	(0.017)	(0.017)
Liberal Democrat	0.562***	0.524***	0.298***	0.278***
	(0.036)	(0.036)	(0.019)	(0.019)
UKIP	-0.779***	-0.810***	-0.376***	-0.388***
	(0.041)	(0.041)	(0.020)	(0.020)
Green Party	-0.305***	-0.310***	-0.164***	-0.167***
	(0.049)	(0.049)	(0.025)	(0.025)
BNP	-1.396**	-1.474**	-0.644**	-0.677***
	(0.690)	(0.679)	(0.267)	(0.262)
Change UK	0.402	0.423	0.255	0.263
	(0.308)	(0.315)	(0.185)	(0.185)
Brexit Party	-0.741***	-0.710***	-0.329***	-0.317***
	(0.071)	(0.071)	(0.032)	(0.032)
An Independent Candidate	0.307	0.331	0.174	0.194*
	(0.220)	(0.221)	(0.109)	(0.110)
I Would/Did Not Vote	-0.336***	-0.321***	-0.119***	-0.116***
	(0.084)	(0.085)	(0.040)	(0.040)
Other	-0.245**	-0.236**	-0.100**	-0.095**
	(0.097)	(0.096)	(0.046)	(0.046)
Gender: Male	-0.101***	-0.097***	-0.048***	-0.045***
	(0.015)	(0.015)	(0.008)	(0.008)
Attention to Politics	0.151***	0.152***	0.076***	0.076***
	(0.005)	(0.005)	(0.002)	(0.002)
News Sources	0.155***	0.154***	0.079***	0.078***
	(0.009)	(0.009)	(0.004)	(0.004)
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wave	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant			-1.126***	-1.088***
			(0.060)	(0.060)
N	59113	58915	59113	58915
Adjusted R^2			0.161	0.166

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

D Regression on Party-voter Incongruence on Political Satisfaction and Trust with Controls by Mainstream Parties

Table 6: Regression on Perceived and Actual Incongruence for Political Satisfaction by Conservative Party and Labour Party with Controls

Dependent Variable:	Conservative		Labour	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized
Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)	-0.099***	-0.043***	-0.071***	-0.036***
	(0.012)	(0.005)	(0.011)	(0.005)
Actual Incongruence	0.005	-0.001	0.104***	0.055***
	(0.014)	(0.006)	(0.014)	(0.007)
Self-placement Deviation	-0.007	-0.005	-0.234***	-0.116***
	(0.012)	(0.005)	(0.012)	(0.006)
Perceived Polarization	0.052***	0.020***	0.000	-0.000
	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.003)
Income: Middle	0.017	0.004	0.225***	0.110***
	(0.034)	(0.014)	(0.033)	(0.017)
Top	-0.049	-0.021	0.264***	0.130***
	(0.034)	(0.014)	(0.034)	(0.017)
Age	-0.018***	-0.008***	0.000	0.001
	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Age × Age	0.000**	0.000**	0.000	0.000
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: A-level	-0.019	-0.010	-0.008	-0.001
	(0.036)	(0.015)	(0.042)	(0.021)
Undergraduate	-0.025	-0.011	-0.135***	-0.060***
	(0.034)	(0.015)	(0.037)	(0.019)
Postgrad	-0.137**	-0.056**	-0.266***	-0.127***
	(0.055)	(0.023)	(0.051)	(0.026)
Gender: Male	-0.039	-0.018	-0.096***	-0.044***
	(0.028)	(0.012)	(0.028)	(0.014)
Attention to Politics	0.008	-0.000	-0.112***	-0.054***
	(0.008)	(0.003)	(0.008)	(0.004)
News Sources	0.004	0.005	0.062***	0.032***
	(0.018)	(0.008)	(0.018)	(0.009)
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wave	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant		-0.014		0.022
		(0.091)		(0.101)
Adjusted R^2		0.154		0.166
N	23143	23143	19655	19655

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

Table 7: Regression on Perceived and Actual Incongruence for Political Trust by Conservative Party and Labour Party with Controls

Dependent Variable:	Conservative		Labour	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized	Ordered Logit	Semi-standarized
Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$)	-0.124***	-0.057***	-0.120***	-0.058***
	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.006)
Actual Incongruence	0.005	-0.004	0.106***	0.058***
	(0.014)	(0.007)	(0.015)	(0.007)
Self-placement Deviation	0.063***	0.030***	-0.041***	-0.019***
	(0.013)	(0.006)	(0.012)	(0.006)
Perceived Polarization	-0.008	-0.007**	-0.049***	-0.025***
	(0.007)	(0.003)	(0.007)	(0.004)
Income: Middle	-0.113***	-0.046***	0.123***	0.067***
	(0.033)	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.017)
Top	-0.088***	-0.036**	0.148***	0.080***
	(0.033)	(0.016)	(0.034)	(0.017)
Age	-0.047***	-0.023***	-0.036***	-0.019***
	(0.006)	(0.003)	(0.005)	(0.003)
Age × Age	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***	0.000***
	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)	(0.000)
Education: A-level	-0.045	-0.020	0.105**	0.048**
	(0.035)	(0.017)	(0.043)	(0.021)
Undergraduate	-0.098***	-0.046***	0.249***	0.125***
	(0.033)	(0.016)	(0.038)	(0.019)
Postgrad	-0.258***	-0.116***	0.431***	0.226***
	(0.051)	(0.025)	(0.051)	(0.026)
Gender: Male	-0.321***	-0.157***	0.095***	0.054***
	(0.026)	(0.013)	(0.028)	(0.014)
Attention to Politics	0.179***	0.082***	0.182***	0.092***
	(0.008)	(0.004)	(0.008)	(0.004)
News Sources	0.099***	0.048***	0.180***	0.094***
	(0.015)	(0.007)	(0.016)	(0.008)
Occupation	✓	✓	✓	✓
Wave	✓	✓	✓	✓
Constant		-0.356***		-1.074***
		(0.102)		(0.094)
Adjusted R^2		0.173		0.100
N	21040	21040	18196	18196

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

E Data Structure

In total, we include nine waves of the panel containing 289,157 respondents from regions of England areas. The corresponding data structure is reported in Table 8.

Table 8: Data Structure of British Election Survey and Chapel Hill Expert Survey

	BES Respondents	Administered in	CHES Experts	Administered in
Waves 4 - 6	92,080	2015	337	2014-2015
Waves 7 - 10	124,752	2016	228	2014-2015
Waves 15	30,842	2018	228	2017-2018
Waves 16 - 17	72,325	2019	277	2019-2020
	289,157		842	

Source: British Election Study and Chapel Hill Expert Survey.

F Survey Questions and Wording

F.1 Misperception

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

- *CHES experts' general placements of political party positions:* position of the party in 2014 (2017 and 2019) in terms of its overall ideological stance (from 0 extreme left, 5 center, to 10 extreme right) (Bakker et al. 2015; 2018; 2020, pp14, Chapel Hill Expert Survey).

- *BES respondent's general placements about party positions:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place the following parties on this scale (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al. 2021, 161, British Election Study)?

F.2 Actual Incongruence

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

- *CHES experts' general placements of political party positions:* position of the party in 2014 (2017 and 2019) in terms of its overall ideological stance (from 0 extreme

left, 5 center, to 10 extreme right) (Bakker et al. 2015; 2018; 2020, pp14, Chapel Hill Expert Survey).

- *BES respondents' self-placement on general left-right positions:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the following scale? (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al. 2021, 160, British Election Study)?

F.3 Perceived Incongruence

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

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

- *BES respondent's self-placement on the left–right scale* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the following scale? (0 left to 10 right) (p160, British Election Study).

F.4 Control Variables (BES)

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

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

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

- *Income Level:* Gross household income is the combined income of all those earners in a household from all sources, including wages, salaries, or rents and be-

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

- *Gender* Are you...? (Female or Male) (p450, British Election Study)?
- *Attention to Politics* How much attention do you generally pay to politics? (0 left to 10 right) (160, British Election Study)?
- *News Sources* During the last seven days, on average how much time (if any) have you spent per day following news about politics or current affairs from each of these sources? (Television; Newspaper including online; Radio; Internet Talking to other people) (p160, British Election Study)?
- *Job Occupation* National Statistics Socio-economic classification analytic classes based on Standard Occupational Classifications 2010 (Employers in large organisations and higher managerial; Higher professional occupations; Lower professional and managerial and higher supervisory; Intermediate occupations; Employers in small organisations and own account workers; Lower supervisory and technical occupations; Semi-routine occupations; Routine occupations) (p160, British Election Study)?