Party Misperception, Party-voter Incongruence and Political Distrust *

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Abstract

To what extent do misperceptions of party positions affect voters' perception of representation and satisfaction with democracy? This paper offers an explanation using the case of the UK and data from the British Election Survey (BES) and the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES). We show that voters' perceptional gaps in understanding party positions contribute to political incongruence between party and voters, subsequently deteriorating their trust and satisfaction with government. From our analysis, the misperceptions about UK parties increase both perceived and actual incongruence between voters and parties, with those with higher perceptional gaps demonstrating higher party–voter incongruence. This perceptional gap further contributes to citizen distrust and dissatisfaction towards the political system.

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1 Introduction

The political party plays an important role in aggregating voters' interests and representing their preferences in the government. By voting for parties in general elections, citizens and voters are hoping their parties to be a representative that shares their preference and can make their voice heard (Downs 1957; Stokes 1963). Naturally, the political ideology held by political parties on socio-economic issues or reflected by their policy decision-making can largely influence their voters' trust in politics as well satisfaction in how democracy works (Esaiasson, Gilljam, and Persson 2017; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015; Hobolt 2012; Davies et al. 2021).

Several studies on representation linkage between voters and parties focus on actual party positions and citizens' self-placements on the left-right dimension (Arnold, Sapir, and Vries 2012; Arnold and Franklin 2012; Butler and Dynes 2016; Powell 2010). Such party-voter incongruence is typically used to explain the issues related to political representation (e.g., Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020; Wardt and Otjes 2022). However, in reality, voters cannot perfectly estimate or locate their party's ideology positions over time. The distance between voter's subjectively perceived party position and actual party position along the ideological spectrum is referred as ideological "misperception" about party's position.

Scholarly debates over the ideological linkage between parties and voters in explaining democratic dissatisfaction have been extensive in recent years (Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020). In the literature, cross-sectional variations in incongruence between voters and parties is an important factor that explains the variations in citizens' satisfaction with democracy. (Hobolt and Rodon 2020; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Mattila and Raunio 2006, 2012; Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020). While this is true, few studies take into consideration of voters' misperception about party's position, as in reality. Due to their misperception, subjectively perceived degree of incongruence by voters is not necessarily identical to the true level of incongruence. Therefore, the perceived incongruence should have important implications on the raising issue of citizens' political trust and satisfaction. Imagine if voter perceives large incongruence between themselves and their party.

That is, the voter senses large misalignment between their party's representation and their own stances and thereby, is more likely to feel discontent and less likely to trust the party.

In this paper, we take this concept of misperception seriously: voters cannot perfectly observe or sense the actual party position. Instead, they use their own perceived incongruence to subjectively judge the representation of their party. First, we document the evidence of the persistent voters' misperception about their party's position using a voter-level longitudinal data set surveyed by the British Election Study that tracks the same panel of respondents across time.

To further disentangle the relationship among misperception, incongruence and political trust (or satisfaction), we take advantage of the panel structure of our data set and directly test three hypotheses relating voters' misperception, subjectively perceived incongruence, and their trust or satisfaction about the politics, using panel regression models. Panel models facilitate us to isolate effects from (observed and unobserved) individual specific attributes, as well as effects from time. Specifically, we first investigate the relationship between misperception and perceived incongruence. Misperception and actual incongruence are shown to be the two important determinants on voters' perceived incongruence. Then, we examine the implication of the perceived incongruence on voters' political trust and satisfaction. We found that perceived incongruence has much larger decisive effect on influencing voters' political trust and satisfaction - large perceived incongruence deteriorates citizens' satisfaction with democracy.

The literature has envisioned several reasons for explaining how the linkage between parties and voters deteriorates citizens' trust in the political systems (e.g., Hobolt 2012; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Mattila and Raunio 2006, 2012; Goldberg, Elsas, and Vreese 2020; Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020). However, an essential, similar topic that has received less attention is whether voters' perception concerning party misplacement deteriorates citizens' democratic satisfaction with political systems and regime performance. In this paper, we build on the nexus of the literature between party misperception and political incongruence by investigating how citizens' misperceived gap disunifies their ideological preference vis a vis the parties' ideological position.

Our paper further advances our understanding of the misperception between the party-voter linkage and democratic satisfaction with regime performance. Many studies have drawn attention to the cause of misperception and its adverse impacts on democracy 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 if mainstream parties can not sufficiently voice their concerns. However, we know less about how its harmful effects discount the linkage between voters and parties and therefore threaten our democratic system and government.

To this end, we investigate these research questions using the case of the British parties in England 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 strategies for measuring party misperceptio and representation incongruence between voters and party. In the final section, we use multiple regressions to test our hypotheses. From our analysis, the misperceptions about UK parties increase both perceived and actual incongruence between voters and parties, with those with higher perceptional gaps demonstrating higher party–voter incongruence. This perceptional gap further contributes to citizen distrust and dissatisfaction with the political system.

2 Party Misperception and Incongruence

Since the classic work of Campbell et al. (1960) entailed a detailed analytical review of voter preferences, individuals tend to see what is favourable to their partisan orientation. The literature has empirically examined how parties or politicians misperceive voter preference (Ansolabehere and Jones 2010) and investigate how citizens' stereotype induces them to be more extreme than they actually are (Ahler 2014, 2016; Ahler and Sood 2018; Orr and Huber 2021). As a result, some citizens in general misperceive many differences in the demographic composition of parties (Orr and Huber 2021). These stereotypes potentially affect partisans' beliefs about and feelings toward the parties (Ahler and Sood 2018).

The literature has envisioned several factors that discount citizens' ability to pro-

cess information and parties' misplacement. For instance, if citizens suffer insufficient information, it makes sense that they are more likely to demonstrate larger perceptional biasedness in judging political parties. These misperceptions were most prevalent for aspects of salient policies on which political parties are strategically capable of making claims (Meyer and Wagner 2020; Levendusky and Malhotra 2016). Such misperception hinders voters' ability to perceive parties' positions and contributes to an increasing party-voter distance and polarization (Carroll and Kubo 2018b; Belchior 2010).

Understanding the effect of misperception on representation linkage between parties and voters is important because parties as vehicles aggregating voters' interests have an 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 indeed can moderate the effect of polarization under presidential and federal institutional contexts (Carroll and Kubo 2018a). This is due to various levels of education that correlate with the variation in knowledge of left-right party placement. We argue that misperceptions of the parties' left-right position disunify ideological distance between a voter's self-placement and their placement of parties. We therefore present the following first hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1 *Higher probability of having misperceptions about party position leads a higher degree of incongruence between parties and voters*

3 Party-voter Incongruence and Democratic Distrust

Are the effects of incongruence on political trust driven by an accurate understanding of party positions? The literature has looked at the linkage between citizens' dissatisfaction and party-voter representation.(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, political incongruence on multiple issues is an important factor that increases citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy (Bakker, Jolly,

and Polk 2020; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016) and their incentive to support anti-establishment parties (Bakker, Jolly, and Polk 2020). These studies highlight the importance of a multidimensional perspective in studying political congruence between government preference and voters across countries. While these comparative studies can provide significant implications for understanding dissatisfaction with democracy from increasing disunity between citizens and parties, such a research approach may not isolate individual effects from personal attributes and times. Instead, we use the case of the UK and take advantage of the panel structure of the BES dataset to test the below hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2 *Respondents' level of political trust and satisfaction decreases as a result of larger perceived incongruence between party and voters*

4 Measuring Individual-level Misperception

Individual survey responses utilized by this paper come from the British Election Study, administered monthly. The British Election Study surveys individual participants regarding their political opinions, perceptions and preference. The study tracks an identical sample of panelists across waves from 2014 to 2019 (Schmitt et al. 2021). Except for demographic variables, these waves of panel consist of all respondents who responded to self-reported perceptions about the left-right position of each party. Specifically, we merge multiple waves of the panels, spanning from wave 4, conducted in 2015, and wave 17, conducted in 2019. Note that from the panel survey sample, we exclude a certain waves due to the absence of a questionnaire on self-reported perceptions about each party's left-right position.[1] To adjust our analysis for non-response, we incorporate the survey weights provided in the analysis.[2]

To measure the most accurate left-right position of each British parties across time, we use the consensus (mean) ideological position obtained from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES), by pooling the individual expert's responses in 2014, 2017, and 2019, respectively (Bakker et al. 2015, 2018, 2020). Further, we match these accu-

[1] Specifically, we merge multiple waves of the panels, spanning from wave 4,conducted in 2015, and wave 17, conducted in 2019. Note that from the panel survey sample, we exclude a certain waves due to the absence of a questionnaire on self-reported perceptions about each party's left-right position.

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

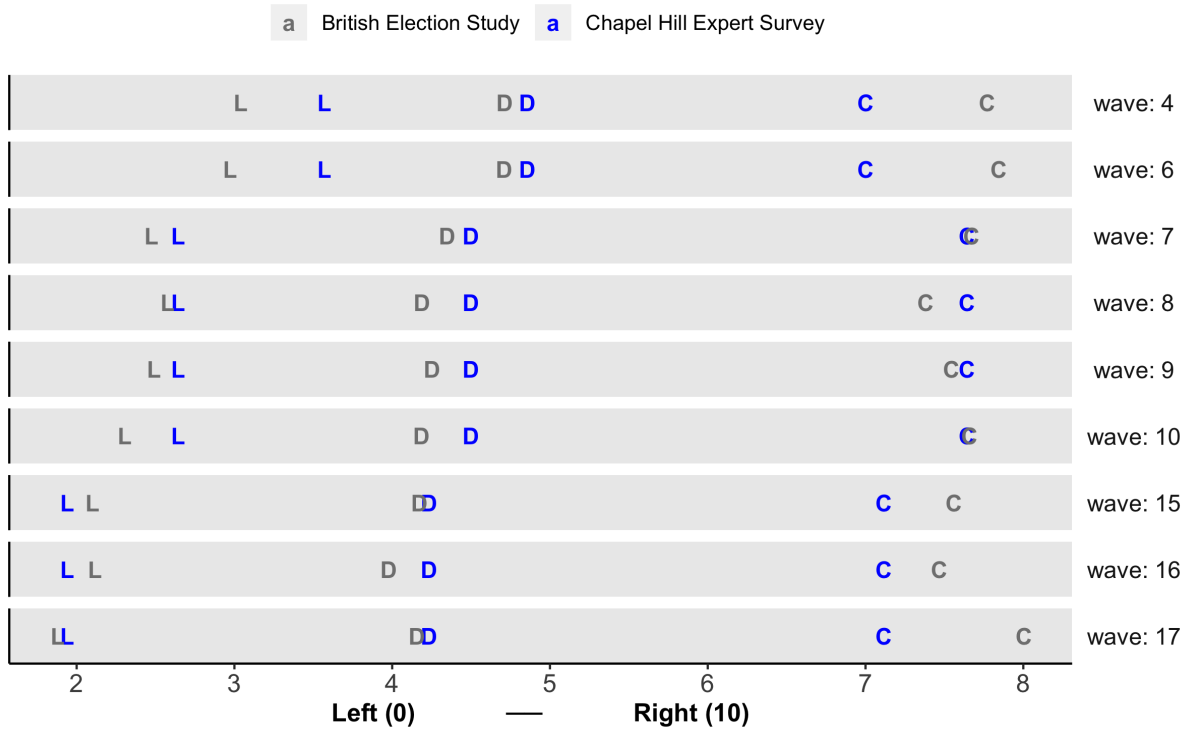
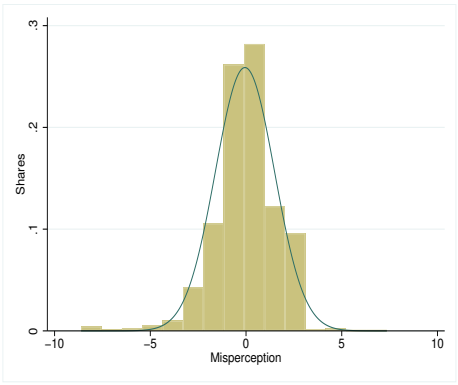


Figure 1: CHES Expert Placements and Average BES Respondent Misperceptions
Note: C = Conservatives, L = Labour, D = Liberal Democrats.

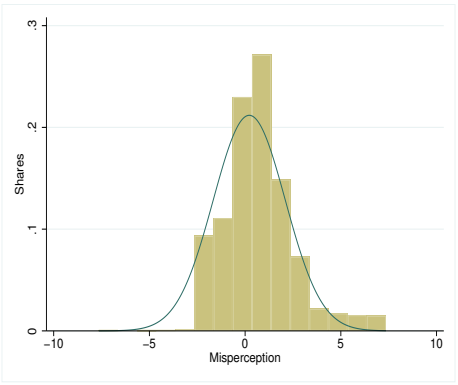
rate positions from CHES with the BES responses based on the closest year [3]. In the CHES questionnaire, experts are asked same questions regarding the left-right position for each party in England along the ideological spectrum, measured by the identical scale to the BES questionnaire. Note that expert surveys from different sources demonstrate consistency with each other at the aggregate level and produce comparable political positions of each parties across time. For instance, Figure 1 shows that the average party positions surveyed by CHES experts largely resemble the the corresponding average positions from BES Expert Survey for each of the three major parties in England. In total, we include nine waves of the panel containing 289,157 respondents from regions of England areas.

Figure 1 displays the average voters' perceived ideological position of the major party in England, on a scale from 0 to 10. Scale 0 represents "left" in ideology, while scale 10 represents "right" in ideology. Capital letter "C", "L" and "D" denotes Conservative, labour and Liberal Democrats party, respectively. Grey placements corresponds to average perceived positions from BES voters and blue placements corre-

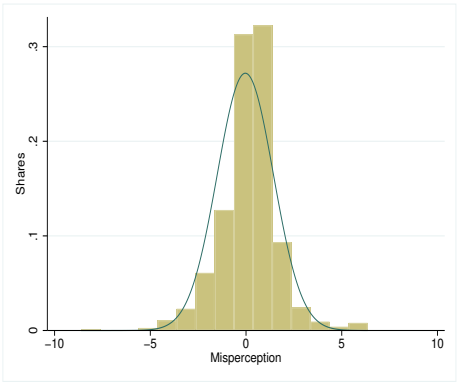
[3]For full structure of survey, see Table 8 of Appendix E



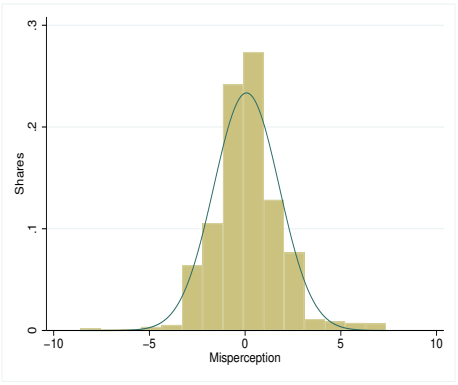
(a) Conservative



(b) Labour



(c) Liberal Democrats



(d) All

Figure 2: The Distributions of Misperception from Wave 7

sponds to average positions measured by Chapel Hill Survey experts. On average, the average voters' perceived positions of each party are close to the actual party position measured by the experts. For example, in wave 7, the average perceived position of each the three major parties by their voters matches the actual position very closely. Particularly, the positions almost coincide with each other for conservative party. Figure 2 further illustrates distributions of the difference between individual voter's perception and the corresponding actual position for wave 7. Yellow columns present the histogram of the distribution and continuous lines are fitted normal distributions. Subplots (a)-(d) show the histogram and the distribution for Conservation, Labour, Liberal Democrats party and all these three parties, respectively. Distributions are quite dispersed, with quite noticeable proportions of respondents being away from the centre. Even though the average perceived positions are close enough to the actual position with average mispeception being close to 0, there exists a huge heterogeneity among voters. Such heterogeneity among voters 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. Particularly, it is calculated as

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

where $\alpha^p_{i,t}$ denotes respondent i's perception on the party p's left-right ideological position in wave t and $\bar{\alpha}^p_t$ is the average position of the party p's in wave t reported by CHES experts. Therefore, the resulted distance, $\hat{\pi}_{i,t}$, between respondent and experts measures respondent i's misperception on party p's position in wave t. Particularly, we emphasize on the misperception about the voter voted party in the previous general election so that $\hat{\pi}_{i,t}$ denotes the misperception of voter i has about their own party.

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

$$\gamma^p_{i,t} = |\alpha^s_{i,t} - \bar{\alpha}^p_t|, \tag{2}$$

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

$$\hat{\gamma}^p_{i,t} = |\alpha^s_{i,t} - \alpha^p_t|. \tag{3}$$

Subplots in Figure 3 depict the correlations between misperception and perceived and actual incongruence between party and voter.[4] Clearly, higher misperception correlates with larger subjectively perceived incongruence and actual incongruence.

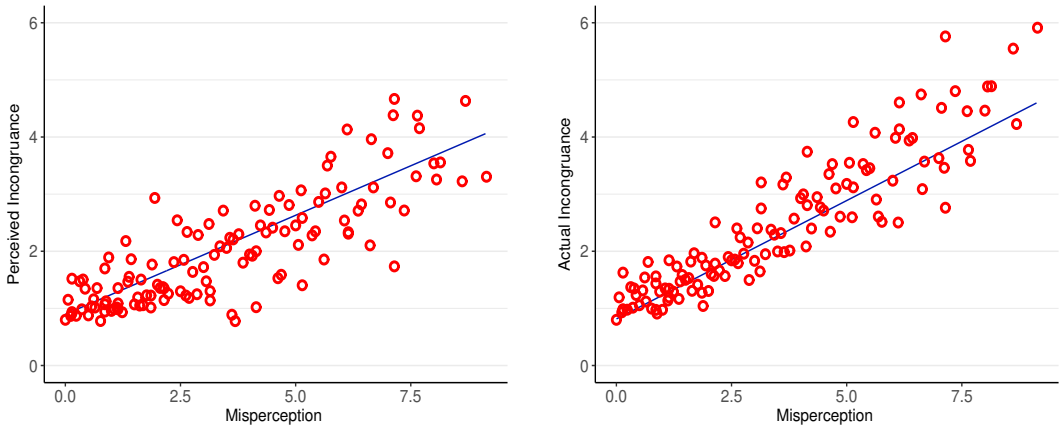
Finally, we consider the following panel regression model by including both individual-specific and time fixed effects:

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

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

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. $\pi_{i,t}$ represents their misperception about affiliated party's ideological position. In addition, $C_{i,t}$ is a vector of control variables controlling respondents' attribute that vary across time, including how extreme respondent i's ideological position is and their perceived degree of polarization in wave t. v_i captures the respondent-specific fixed effect and m_t captures the time (wave) effect. The advantage of employing panel data regression is that such framework allows us to isolate the impact from stable personal and demographic characteristics.

Do voters' misperception of party position cause percieved incongruence? To answer this question, Table 1 demonstrates the relationship between voters' misperception about ideology position of their party and actual, as well as subjectively perceived party-voter incongruence using the panel data set. Columns (1) and (2) illustrate that both actual and perceived party-voter incongruence are positively correlated with voters' misperception. In column (1), one additional unit of misperception increases 19.9% unit of actual incongruence between voter and party on average. In column (2), one additional unit of misperception increases voter's perceived incongruence by 32.7% unit. Those who misperceive their party position to a larger extent subjectively



(a) Perceived Incongruence on Misperception

(b) Actual Incongruence on Misperception

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

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

Dependent Variable:	Actual Incongruence ($\gamma_{i,t}$) (1)	Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$) (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.

believe an existence of a larger gap between their ideological position and party's position.

We find strong support for our first hypothesis that misperceptions explain part of the perceived incongruence between voters and parties. This significant impact of misperception on perceived incongruence persists even if we additionally control for the actual incongruence, as is illustrated in column (3), under the equation specification 3. Both actual incongruence and misperception significantly contribute to larger subjectively perceived incongruence, increasing by 37.2% unit and 25.4% unit, respectively. This agrees with the patterns recorded in Figure 3. Overall, voters' perceived incongruence are positively determined by actual incongruence and their misperception about party's ideology positions. Interestingly, voters reporting a more extreme self ideological 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 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]

[5]Table 3 in Appendix B robustly replicates the results of Table 1 under a framework of a pooled ordinary least squares (OLS), controlling for a wide range of demographic characteristics including age, education level, gender, survey year, party affiliation and the number of information sources reported by each respondent. The base group is female respondent from high income group, with affiliation with other parties and having education degree of postgraduate and above.

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:

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

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 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. $\pi_{i,t}$ represents their misperception about affiliated party's ideological position. In addition, $C_{i,t}$ is a vector of control variables controlling respondents' attributes that vary across time, including how extreme respondent i's ideological position is and their perceived degree of polarization in wave t. v_i captures the respondent-specific fixed effect 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 the 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 additionally included in the model, the effect of the actual incongruence becomes insignificant. Instead, the perceived incongruence has significantly negative impact on individual voter's political trust. Under column (2), one unit increase in actual incongruence moves down political satisfaction by 0.2% unit of standard deviation, while one unit increase in perceived incongruence have

[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, interviewee responses on a Likert-type 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 we again divide its 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.

seven times more impact, moving political satisfaction down by 1.4% unit of standard deviation.

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.

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

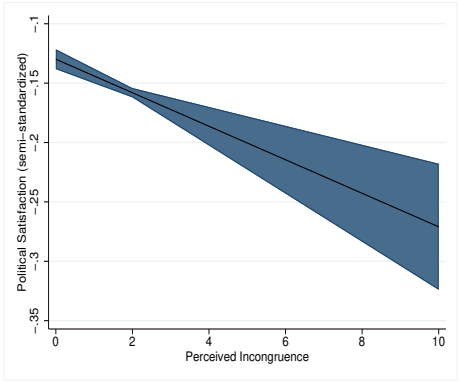
$$\hat{y}^*_{i,t} = \alpha_1 \hat{\gamma}_{i,t} + \alpha_2 \pi_{i,t} + \alpha_3 \gamma_{i,t} + \theta C_{i,t} + \epsilon_i + w_t + u_{it}, \tag{6}$$

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

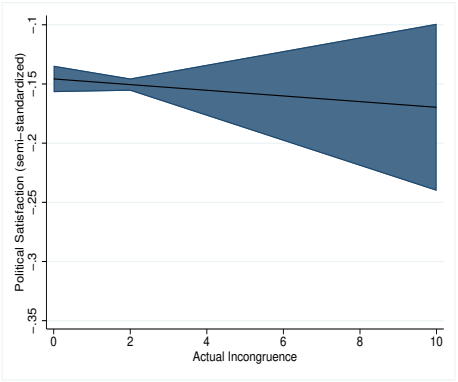
where the dependent variable $y_{i,t}$ is the discrete level of political satisfaction (upper panel column (3) and (4)) or trust (lower panel column (3) and (4)), elicited by voter i on a scale of 1 (no trust) to 7 (complete trust). We assume a continuous latent variable of political satisfaction (or trust), $\hat{y}^*_{i,t}$, on voters' mind when they are making judgement on how much satisfaction (or trust) they have in politics. For example, if this latent variable falls within the range of $[S_1, S_2)$, the voter will select a level of satisfaction (or trust) at scale 2. Under this framework, columns (3) and (4) in the upper panel report the estimation results for political satisfaction. Column (3) shows that without including perceived incongruence in the regression, actual incongruence can significantly cause reduction in satisfaction - one unit increase in actual incongruence makes voter 5.7% more likely to report a lower scale of satisfaction. In column (4), after including perceived incongruence, the impact of actual incongruence halves (though is still significant) and perceived incongruence has 3 times more negative impact than actual incongruence on satisfaction - one unit increase in perceived incongruence makes voter 7.3% more likely to report a lower scale of satisfaction. Subplots 4a and 4b in Figure 4 show the fitted value of semi-standardized political satisfaction against perceived incongruence and actual incongruence with 95 % confidence interval (blue shaded area), respectively. Rising perceived incongruence can effectively bring down political satisfaction, while the effect of actual incongruence is not very significant.

Turning to political trust in the lower panel of Table 2, we find the estimated results are robustly similar to the political satisfaction. In general, the effect of actual incongruence on political trust is not significant or meaningfully smaller than the effect of perceived incongruence, depending on the specification. In column (2), one unit increase in actual incongruence cannot significantly moves down political satisfaction, but one unit increase in perceived incongruence brings down political trust by 1.1% unit of standard deviation. In column (3), without controlling for perceived incongruence, it seems that an increase in actual incongruence can significant lower the political trust by 8.3% unit of standard deviation. However, once the perceived incongruence is included the impact of actual incongruence is halved and meaningfully smaller than that of perceived incongruence. Subplots 4c and 4d in Figure 4 show the fitted value of semi-standardized political trust against perceived incongruence and actual incongruence with 95 % confidence interval (blue shaded area), respec-

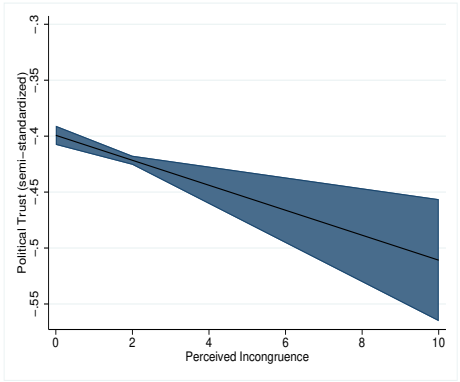
tively. Similar to political satisfaction, increasing perceived incongruence can effectively bring down political trust, while the effect of actual incongruence is not very significant.



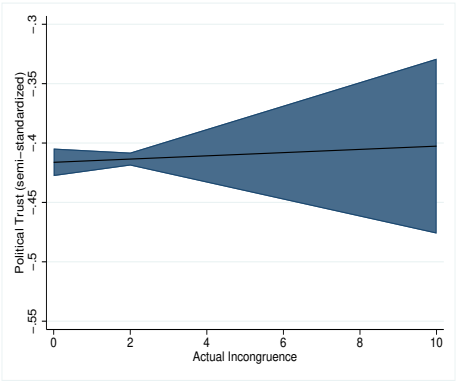
(a) Perceived Incongruence on Political Satisfaction



(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

7 Conclusion

Scholarly discussion over political trust in explaining party-voter incongruence has been extensive in recent years (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). An essential, similar topic that has received less attention is whether voters' subjective perception concerning party representation, which raises from their misperception about party's position, deteriorates citizens' democratic satisfaction with political systems and regime performance. In reality, voters can not perfectly locate

party's ideology position and persistently have mispercetion on party's positions. As a results, subjectively perceived degree of incongruence by voters is not necessarily identical to the true level of incongruence. Few studies take into consideration of voters' misperception about party's position and its implication on political trust and satisfaction.

This paper takes the concept of misperception seriously. Particularly, we focus on the voter-level subjective perceived party position, misperception, and the resulted perceived incongruence between themselves and party, using frameworks of panel regression models to control for unobserved personal attributes. The paper is build on the nexus of the literature between party misperception and political incongruence by investigating how citizens' misperceived gap disunifies their ideological preference vis a vis the parties' ideological position. From our analysis, the misperceptions about UK parties increase both perceived and actual incongruence between voters and parties, with those with higher perceptional gaps demonstrating higher party–voter incongruence. This perceptional gap further contributes to citizen distrust and dissatisfaction towards the political system. We found voter-level evidence that a higher level of misperception about party position contributes to a higher level of perceived incongruence. That is, if a voter more mistakenly interpret the party position, it is more likely for they to subjectively believe that their party does not represent themselves well. Further, we found that perceived incongruence has much larger decisive effect on influencing voters' political trust and satisfaction - large perceived incongruence deteriorates citizens' satisfaction with democracy.

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

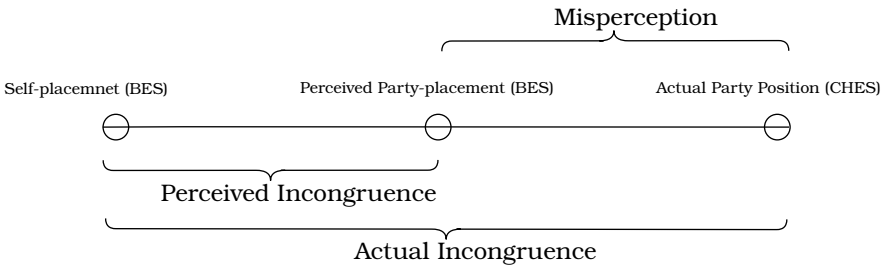

Figure 5: Actual party position is to the right of perceived party-placement.

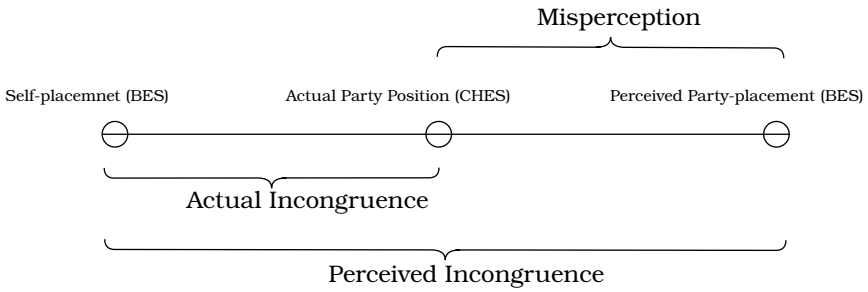

Figure 6: Perceived Party Position is to the right of Actual party position.

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 ($\gamma_{i,t}$) (1)	Perceived Incongruence ($\hat{\gamma}_{i,t}$) (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:* 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:* 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:* 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:* 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:* 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) (Bakker et al. 2015; 2018; 2020, p161, British Election Study).

- *BES:* In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on the following scale? (0 left to 10 right) (Schmitt et al. 2021, p160, British Election Study).

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 before tax deductions. What is your gross household income? (Respondents are then provided with a scale of 1 to 15 ranging from *"under £5,000 per year"* to

"£150,000 and over per year" in an ascending order. We re-categorize each respondent into either the top, or the middle or the low income group based on the percentile along the self-reported income distribution in the survey: we recode the top one-thirds as *"Top"*, the middle one-thirds as *"Middle"* and the bottom one-thirds as *"Bottom"*.)(Schmitt et al. 2021, p34, British Election Study)

- *Gender* Are you...? (Female or Male) (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)?