

The Social Nature of Political (Dis)Interest: Conceptualizing and Validating Political (Dis)Interest as a Social Identity *

Céline Laffineur[†], Bert N. Bakker, & Gijs Schumacher

University of Amsterdam

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Abstract

Political interest is fundamental to democratic engagement. Yet, its conceptualization remains debated. In this study, we offer a new but important perspective by conceptualizing political (dis)interest as a social identity. We introduce two innovative measures: the Positive Political Interest Identity Scale (PPIS) and the Negative Political Interest Identity Scale (NPIS). Employing Item Response Theory, we validate the construct validity of both scales in a pre-registered study in the Netherlands ($N = 2,060$). Using the same dataset, we also demonstrate their predictive validity. Importantly, the PPIS and NPIS uncover substantial differences in political attitudes and behaviors both *between* and *within* individuals who identify as politically (dis)interested. Recognizing political (dis)interest as a social identity enriches our understanding of the concept and its implications for politically relevant attitudes and behaviors, while also informing interventions to foster political interest equally across all citizens.

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[†]Corresponding author: c.laffineur@uva.nl

Political interest is a crucial correlate of various political attitudes and behaviors such as political engagement, party identification, staying informed, knowledge, and voter turnout (Boulianne, 2011; Luskin, 1990; Prior, 2018; Quintelier & van Deth, 2014; Stromback et al., 2013; Verba et al., 1995). Indeed, a democracy where political disinterest prevails is unlikely to thrive. The uneven distribution of political (dis)interest is then problematic, marking a strong “democratic divide” (Krupnikov & Ryan, 2022; Min, 2010, p. 25; Stromback et al., 2013). Surprisingly, despite its importance and pronounced societal disparities, the conceptualization of political (dis)interest remains debated. The lack of consensus hinders efforts to understand what influences and causes political (dis)interest, limiting efforts to promote political interest effectively and equally among all citizens.

Political interest is often understood as an attitude (Mattila et al., 2020; Maurissen, 2020). Some scholars think of it as curiosity, motivation, and attentiveness towards politics (Holt et al., 2013; Lupia & Philpot, 2005; van Deth, 1990), while others see it as affective involvement with politics (Blais & Daoust, 2020; Lane, 1956; Silvia, 2005), or as a combination of both cognitive and affective aspects (Prior, 2018). Indeed, recent work suggests that standard measures of political interest reflect its multi-faceted nature. For example, self-reported political interest captures cognitive as well as affective (dis)engagement with politics (Ferrín & García-Albacete, 2023). But also participants’ varying interpretations of politics (Ferrín et al., 2020; Götz et al., 2023). A particularly compelling and overlooked suggestion comes from Prior (2010, p. 763) who argues that “political interest behaves like a central element of political identity”.

In this study, we explore and test whether political interest and political disinterest constitute a meaningful social identity. By doing so, we follow a growing body of research highlighting the importance of social identities within politics (e.g., Bornschier et al., 2021; Boyer et al., 2022;

Egan, 2020; Huddy, 2001; Wagner & Eberl, 2024; West & Iyengar, 2022). We draw upon the state-of-the-art social identity literature, also recognizing that people can have multiple social identities within one-domain (Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Klandermans, 2014; Mason, 2023; McConnell, 2011; McConnell et al., 2013). To be specific, we argue that political (dis)interest serves as both a positive identity, defining the self through identification with a (dis)interest category, and as a negative identity, defining the self through distancing from a (dis)interest category (Bankert, 2021; Tajfel, 1981).

We introduce our Positive Political interest Identity Scale (PPIS) and our Negative Political interest Identity Scale (NPIS). Using a split-half approach¹, we first establish the construct validity of our scales through Item Response Theory using data from a preregistered study in the Netherlands (N=2,060) in December 2023. Next, we demonstrate the predictive validity of political (dis)interest as an identity. We associate our measures of positive and negative social identity with political attitudes and behaviors central to democracy. These results show that different levels of identification with (dis)interest in politics significantly affect broader political engagement and behaviors *between* and *within* groups. To summarize, our findings demonstrate that political (dis)interest indeed functions as a social identity, providing a new and enhanced lens to understand the nature of political (dis)interest.

Development and Stability of Political (Dis)Interest & Social Identity

In this study, we explore and test whether political (dis)interest is a social identity. Two lines of research provide indirect evidence supporting our argument. First, longitudinal studies suggest that political (dis)interest forms during adolescence (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2024; Mattila et al.,

¹see study procedure in Figure 1

2020; Prior, 2018; Russo & Stattin, 2017). Adolescence is a period crucial for developing personal identity (Branje, 2022; Crocetti et al., 2017; Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2018) and social identity (Albarello et al., 2018; Tanti et al., 2011). Early adolescents have a vague sense of self and are exploring various identities (Meeus, 2011). These can evolve into firm commitments in later teenage years depending on how carefully they think about those identities and how emotionally connected they feel towards them (Mannerström et al., 2017). Social identities offer younger people identity alternatives to facilitate exploration and provide input for personal identity formation (Crocetti et al., 2017; Tanti et al., 2011). Crucially for our argument is that political (dis)interest appears to develop during this critical stage of social identity formation: adolescence.

A second indication that political (dis)interest functions as a social identity comes from the stability of political interest in adulthood. Studies which track the same individuals over many years and repeatedly measure their (dis)interest in politics show that political interest remains remarkably stable (e.g., Mattila et al., 2020; Neundorf et al., 2013; Prior, 2018; Russo & Stattin, 2017). Adults either maintain an ongoing interest in politics or they remain disinterested (Prior, 2010). Reflecting on the stability of political interest, Prior (2010, p. 763) concludes that “political interest behaves like a central element of political identity, not like a frequently updated attitude”. The stability of political interest mirrors the enduring nature of partisanship which has also been established as a social identity (Greene, 2004; Huddy & Bankert, 2017; Huddy et al., 2015).

Observing that political interest develops in adolescence and is stable in adulthood provide first indications for our argument that political (dis)interest is a social identity. In the next section, we turn to the social identity literature (Tajfel & Turner, 1979; Turner et al., 1987) to explore whether political (dis)interest qualifies as a social identity.

Political (Dis)Interest as a Social Identity

People can define themselves by drawing to varying degrees on both personal and social identities (Haslam, 2004; Haslam & Ellemers, 2005). Social cognition research also shows that the self is organized in memory through multiple context-dependent "self-aspects" such as social roles or political identities (McConnell, 2011; McConnell et al., 2013). Social identity is a part of a person's self-concept derived from their subjective sense of belonging to a group, including the value and emotional significance they attach to that membership (Lannegrand-Willems et al., 2018; Tajfel, 1981). Measures such as the Identification with a Psychological Group scale (Mael & Tetrink, 1992) capture these key social identity aspects such as group belonging, emotional significance of group belonging, and feelings related to lower group status (Ellemers et al., 1999; Leach et al., 2008). This sense of belonging varies among individuals: some have a stronger identity than others (Huddy et al., 2018; Tanti et al., 2011). Importantly, social identities are fluid and shaped in the moment (Haslam et al., 1992).

Self-Categorization Theory (SCT) notes three factors that contribute to when and how likely we are to choose and act upon a specific group, called “social category salience” (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Oakes, 1987). Specifically, a social category, such as political (dis)interest, is salient depending on *comparative fit*, *normative fit*, and *person readiness*. Comparative fit refers to the way people categorize themselves and others into social groups by comparing the differences they see within a group to the differences between groups. People investigate how well a social category accounts for observed similarities and differences (Tajfel, 1981). If we apply this to political (dis)interest, people should be more inclined to identify as interested or disinterested based on whether differences between groups are more noticeable than differences within groups. This

principle applies to domains like political engagement and behaviour, where individuals interested in politics differ significantly from those who are not across various factors such as political efficacy, knowledge, news consumption, and participation in both conventional and unconventional political activities (for a review Prior, 2018).

Normative fit gauges how closely an individual's characteristics, behaviors, and attitudes align with the norms or expectations of a social group represented by the in-group prototype, i.e., the most ideal or typical model of a group member in a specific social context (Hogg et al., 1995; Van Lange et al., 2011). For example, STEM fields are often associated with men, leading to a "STEM identity" deficit amongst women (Kim et al., 2018). Similarly, political interest might also be seen as a male prototype. This highlights how, based on how well we or others conform to social group norms, normative fit influences the way we evaluate others and ourselves. Moreover, individuals interested in politics may see themselves as informed and responsible citizens, while perceiving the disinterested as lacking awareness, being indifferent to societal issues, or not fulfilling their civic duties. On the other hand, those uninterested in politics may view the politically engaged as overly opinionated or disconnected from everyday concerns, diverging from their own norms of disengagement from political matters.

Finally, perceiver readiness describes how a social group becomes prominent based on its importance to the individual or the situational accessibility. Therefore, political (dis)interest becomes a relevant social category if one values (dis)interest or if it is prominent in the immediate context. Political interest might be more valued by those who feel a strong sense of civic duty, whereas disinterest is important to individuals who seek to avoid conflict or distrust political elites. Also, during periods of heightened political debate or elections, political groups, ideologies and polarization become more visible in both public and private discourse, as well as in media coverage.

Overall, the exploration of political (dis)interest as a social identity aligns with key criteria from the social identity literature: comparative fit, normative fit, and perceiver readiness. These factors suggest that political (dis)interest can function as a social category, reflecting the dynamic ways individuals define themselves within political contexts.

Positive and Negative Social Identities

Individuals not only define themselves through the categories that they belong to. Identities can also form in opposition to groups to which they do not belong, a process known as negational categorization (Zhong et al., 2008). The idea that people can have both a positive and a negative social identity integrates insights from social identity, optimal distinctiveness, and balance theories (Brewer, 1991; Heider, 1946; Tajfel & Turner, 1979). Positive identity involves how much an individual's self-concept is shaped by the shared characteristics of their in-group, emphasizing alignment with group values and goals. In contrast, negative identity involves the rejection or opposition to out-groups, focusing on distancing oneself from the values, beliefs, or behaviors associated with those groups.

Research conceptualising partisanship as a social identity shows that people can have both a positive party identity and a negative party identity (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Bankert, 2023; Caruana et al., 2015; Medeiros & Noël, 2014; Titelman & Sajuria, 2023). Both have different origins and characteristics (Bankert, 2023), and it is possible to possess a positive identity without simultaneously having a negative identity, and conversely (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Iyengar et al., 2012). Interestingly, the in-group has been assumed to be “psychologically primary” (Zhong et al., 2008, p. 794). In line, positive identity has a stronger effect on vote choice and political

engagement than negative identity (Bankert, 2021; Medeiros & Noël, 2014). Attachment may be more important than rejection to motivate behavior.

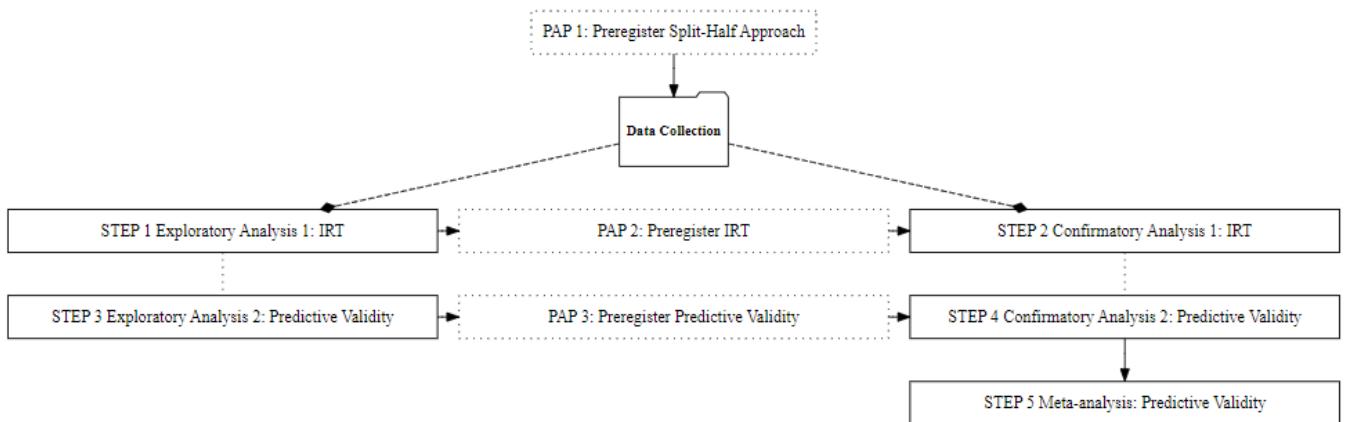
Research Design: Preregistered Split-Half Approach

We developed an 8-item Positive Political Interest Identity Scale (PPIS) and an 8-item Negative Political Interest Identity Scale (NPIS). This study has two main parts: (1) assessing the construct validity of our newly developed scales and (2) evaluating their predictive validity.

Flycatcher recruited 2,060 participants in the Netherlands with quotas for education, gender, region, and age (see Table A.1 for sample descriptives in Appendix 2). The survey ran in 2023 from December 15 to 22 and had ethical approval from the authors' institute. The questionnaire took 15-20 minutes and participants received three euros compensation. As preregistered in Pre-analysis Plan (PAP) 1, a random 3/4 ($N=1,553$) of participants saw our identity scales due to time and budget constraints (Lakens, 2022).

We analyzed the data using a split-half approach illustrated in Figure 1. This method was preregistered in PAP 1 before data collection ended on December 19, 2023. After data collection, the data manager randomly split the sample in two. The first author received a data set containing a random split-half with only the items of the political (dis)interest scales (PPIS & NPIS) to conduct exploratory analyses (EA) on the scale performance (Step 1 in Figure 1). We then preregistered our expectations of the scale performance in Pre-analysis Plan (PAP) 2 on February 8, 2024. The first author then received the second half of data only including again the scale items to conduct a confirmatory analysis (CA; Step 2, Figure 1).

Figure 1: Study Procedure Using the Split-Half Approach.



Note: This flowchart shows the different steps taken within this study using the split-half approach.

Exploratory analyses on the left side were done using the same first split-half of the data. Confirmatory analyses on the right side were done using the second-split half of the data. The meta-analysis in Step 5 was done with the whole sample. The three pre-analysis plans (PAP) are listed in the dotted squares in the middle.

To evaluate the predictive validity of the scales, the data manager sent the same subset as used for Step 1 to conduct Step 3, but containing all the variables from the survey. After exploring the scales' relationships with six selected variables (Step 3) we preregistered our hypotheses in Pre-analysis Plan (PAP) 3 on April 2, 2024. These were confirmed in Step 4 and in Step 5 through a confirmatory analysis and an internal meta-analysis for power reasons.

Step 1-2: Establishing the Scales' Construct Validity

Determining the In-Group and Out-Group

Before showing our scales to participants, they had to be allocated a political interest in-and out-group. We first asked respondents what we refer to as the standard political interest measure: “*Some people are very interested in politics, others much less. Where do you place yourself on a scale from not at all to very interested in politics?*”. Answer options were: (1) not at all, (2) a little, (3) fairly, or (4) very interested. Those who reported that they were “not at all” or “a little” interested were classified as uninterested and given the PPIS items that refer to those who are uninterested in politics as their in-group. The other participants who said that they were “fairly” or “very” interested in politics were classified as interested in politics and saw the version of the PPIS referring to interested people as their in-group (see section 1.1 Participants in Interested and Uninterested Group in Appendix 1 for how many people saw each version).

Political (Dis)Interest Scales

We adjusted the item-wording from the Identification with a Psychological Group scale (Mael & Tetrink, 1992) to measure political (dis)interest as a social identity. Table 1 (translated) and Table A.2 (original in Dutch; in Appendix 2) list the eight items for the two developed scales. We hereby follow work measuring partisanship as a positive social identity (in the Netherlands: Bankert et al., 2017; Greene, 2004).

The Positive Political interest Identity Scale (PPIS) gauges a person’s psychological and emotional attachment to their political interest in-group. We ask for example how often statements like

“*I feel close to people who are (un)interested in politics*” apply to them on a scale with four answer categories: never/seldom (1), sometimes (2), often (3), and always (4). In the PPIS, in-group can be people who are either interested or uninterested in politics. The items were presented in a random order.

Following Bankert (2022), we also measure the extent to which political (dis)interest centers around rejecting the political interest out-group. We ask for example how often statements like “*I feel anger towards people who are (un)interested in politics*” apply to them on a scale with four answer categories: never/seldom (1), sometimes (2), often (3), and always (4). The items were presented in a random order.

Table 1: Item Wording of the Political Interest Identity Scales.

Positive Political Interest Identity Scale (PPIS)	Negative Political Interest Identity Scale (NPIS)
1. I want to know what others think about people who are (un)interested in politics.	1. It makes me feel good when someone criticizes people who are (un)interested in politics.
2. I feel personally offended when someone criticizes people who are (un)interested in politics.	2. I don't have much in common with people who are (un)interested in politics.
3. I have a lot in common with people who are (un)interested in politics.	3. I feel anger towards people who are (un)interested in politics.
4. I feel connected to someone who is (un)interested in politics.	4. I don't feel connected to people who are (un)interested in politics.
5. People who are (un)interested in politics are 'my people'.	5. I find it important to distance myself from people who are (un)interested in politics.
6. If someone praises people who are (un)interested in politics, it makes me feel good.	6. People who are (un)interested in politics are not 'my people'
7. I find it important to be (un)interested in politics.	7. I want to know what others think about people who are (un)interested in politics.
8. I perceive myself as (un)interested in politics.	8. I do not perceive myself as (un)interested in politics.

Note: This table shows the scale items which were translated from Dutch to English. People were asked: “Indicate how often the following statements apply to you” with answer categories: never/seldom (1), sometimes (2), often (3), always (4).

Item Response Theory

We use Item Response Theory (IRT) to assess the measurement performance of the PPIS and NPIS. For scale development, IRT shows how individual items relate to the construct being measured, with response likelihood depending on the person's latent trait as well as on item properties like

difficulty, offering more flexibility and higher reliability than Modern Test Theory (Ayala, 2013). As we work with ordered multi-categorical data, we specified uni-dimensional Graded Response Models (GRM) (Samejima, 1969). In the exploratory analysis (Step 1 in Figure 1), we specified four GRMs (2 versions of the 2 scales = 4 GRMs) using the *first split-half* of the data. We pre-registered acceptable scale criteria in PAP 2. In the confirmatory analysis (Step 2 in Figure 1), we specified the same four models using the *second split-half* of the data. The following section reports and evaluates the measurement properties of the PPIS and NPIS based on how results from the confirmatory analysis align with the preregistered criteria in (PAP 2). Results for both the EA and CA can be generated separately through the replication files on the Open Science Framework (OSF).

Results

Item descriptives can be found in Table A.3 and Table A.4 in the Appendix 2. In PAP 2 we preregistered three hypotheses:

- (H1) Political (dis)interest can be conceptualised as a social identity.
- (H2) Political (dis)interest can be measured through a positive identity scale.
- (H3) Political (dis)interest can be measured through a negative identity scale.

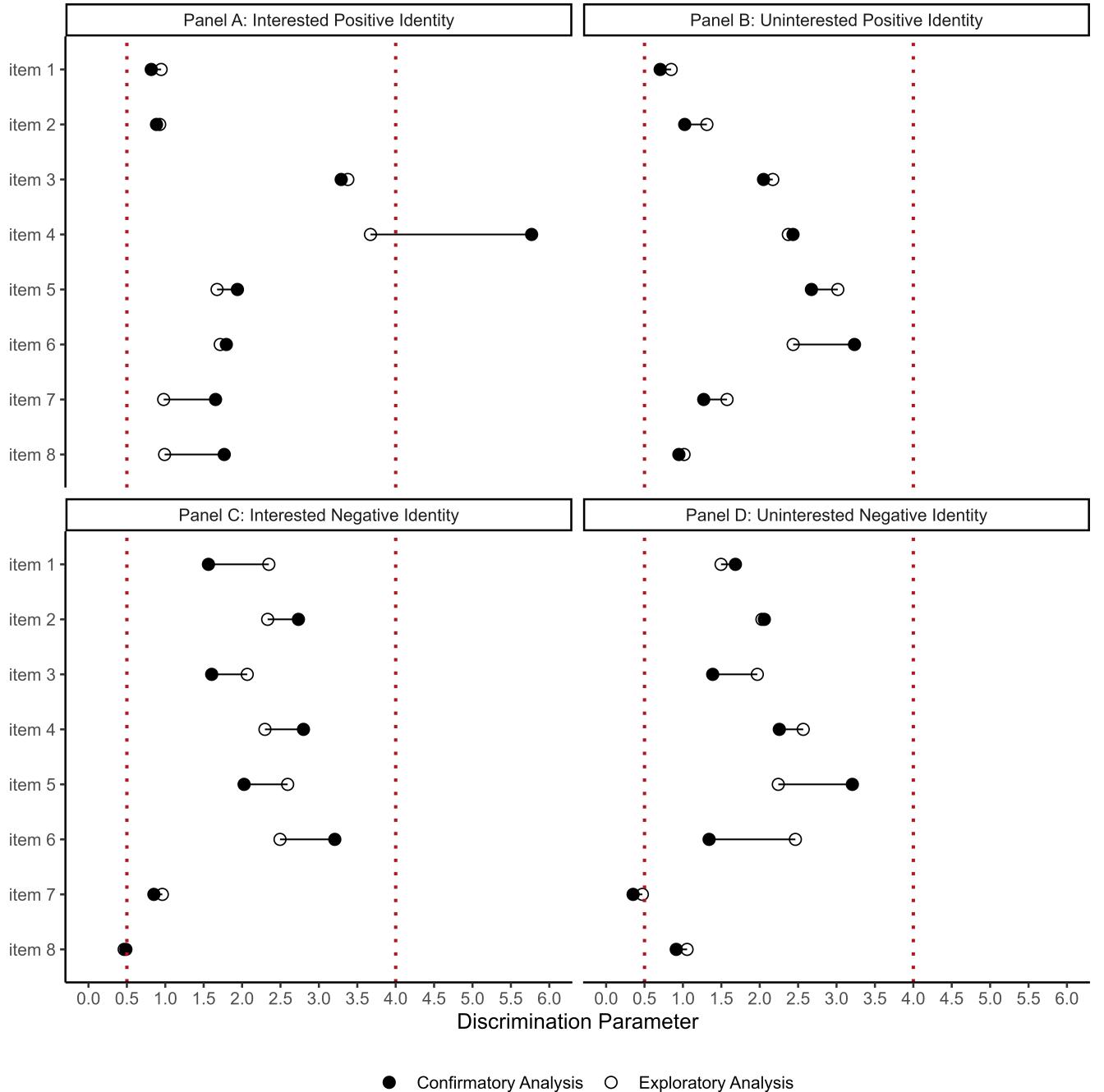
As IRT is primarily concerned with the relationship between individual scale items and the overall measured construct - here political (dis)interest identity (Mazur, 2022), we preregistered in PAP 2 an analysis strategy focusing on (1) item-level statistics and (2) person fit to evaluate our scales and test the hypotheses (Mazur, 2022).

Item fit & Item information

First, to evaluate the performance of each scale item, we rely on the S-X2 of Orlando and Thissen (2000) and the associated Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA). We conducted the item-fit test using the Benjamini-Hochberg correction to control for multiple testing (Benjamini & Hochberg, 1995; Liu et al., 2023; Sauder & DeMars, 2020). For each item, the RMSEA was lower than or equal to the preregistered threshold in PAP 2 of 0.08 (see Tables A.5, A.6, A.7, A.8 in Appendix 2) in the EA as well as in the CA (Browne & Cudeck, 1992). The associated S-X2 statistic was also non-significant for all items in the EA ($p < .05$), suggesting an adequate item fit (Orlando & Thissen, 2000). In the confirmatory analysis, Item 1 in the NPIS was statistically significant for interested participants, $p=0.008$, and Item 3 in the NPIS for uninterested participants, $p=.016$. However, they fall within the preregistered IRT parameters outlined below.

For graded response models, each item is described by two parameters: Item discrimination parameters (α) and item difficulty parameters (β). First, higher α values suggest items that are effective at discriminating between individuals with different trait levels. Figure 2 illustrates α , showing how much information an item provides towards measuring the latent concept (see Table A.9 for discrimination parameters; see Figures A.1, A.2 for Item Information Curves in Appendix 2).

Figure 2: Item Discrimination Parameters of PPIS and NPIS Items.



Note: This plot displays the contribution of each scale item to measuring the latent concept. Items can be found in Table 1.

Overall, Figure 2 shows that the introduced items are effective at discriminating between indi-

viduals with different trait levels. Some items require some attention. In panel A (Figure 2), the CA value for Item 4 ($\alpha=5.77$) is above the threshold ($\alpha=4$). However, further analysis does not indicate that the scale becomes more reliable when dropping this item (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.80$ [EA] and 0.84 [CA]). In panel C (Figure 2), the CA value for Item 8 ($\alpha=0.49$) is just below the threshold ($\alpha=0.50$). Further analysis indicates that reliability improves when Item 8 is dropped (Cronbach's α goes from 0.78 to 0.88 in EA and from 0.76 to 0.82 in CA). In panel D (Figure 2), the CA value for Item 7 ($\alpha=0.35$) is slightly below the threshold ($\alpha=0.50$). Further analysis indicates that reliability improves when Item 7 is dropped (Cronbach's α goes from 0.76 to 0.79 in EA and from 0.68 to 0.71 in CA). Going forward, the wording of Items 7 and 8 could be simplified. Fit-issues can arise due to complex phrasing of questions.

Second, *beta*'s represent at which trait level there is a 50% probability of scoring at or above an answer category on an item. We did not preregister expectations for this parameter. Nonetheless, the Item Information Curves show that the items cover a good range over the latent concept (see Figures A.1, A.2 in Appendix 2). Going forward, further studies might consider dropping items that cover the same ranges, selecting the item with the highest α value to be more time efficient.

Person fit

To assess person fit, we considered the Z_h statistic, appropriate for ordered multi-category data, to see how many participants align with the responses expected by the specified model (Drasgow et al., 1985; Felt et al., 2017). In the EA as well as in the CA, less than 5% of observations were under -2 or over 2 (Felt et al., 2017; Mazur, 2022). Person fit results can be found in Table A.10 in the Appendix 2. As the majority of participants' responses fit the model's expectations, we confirm that the scales are accurately capturing the intended latent construct.

Positive & negative identity scale correlation

Finally, and following Bankert et al. (2017), we also verified whether both scales are indeed measuring two different constructs. These analyses were not preregistered and thereby exploratory. We look at the correlation between mean PPIS and NPIS scores in the EA and CA. The mean scores of positive and negative identity correlate EA=0.53 and CA=0.51 with each other. This suggests that the scales are related but different.

To conclude, our preregistered assessments show that the PPIS and NPIS perform well in terms of item fit, IRT parameters, and person fit. After considering the different aspects of our survey questions and how people answered them, we accept H1-3. We argue that our items are good at measuring the intended latent concept, indicating that (dis)interest can be measured as a social identity. The following section will also demonstrate that the scales are effective at differentiating *between* and *within* politically interested and uninterested people.

Step 3-5: Predictive Validity of Political (Dis)Interest Identity Scales

Having established the construct validity of our scales, we turn to their predictive validity. Here, we show that our interest identity scales have meaningful and substantive associations with political attitudes and behaviors, namely political activism, consumption of political news, openness to political news, political efficacy, confidence in political knowledge, and factual political knowledge.

We measured political activism by asking how likely participants were to engage in a set of

five different political activities. Political news consumption refers to the self-reported frequency of consuming political news on a 7-point Likert scale. Three questions were asked about news avoidance (e.g., “I deny political news”) on a 7-point Likert scale, which we reverse coded to reflect openness to political news for ease of interpretation. Political efficacy was gauged through six statements on a 7-point Likert scale. Items 3 to 6 were negatively phrased and were reverse coded. Confidence in political knowledge was asked through three statements on a 7-point Likert scale. Questions 2 and 3 were negatively phrased and were reverse coded. Factual political knowledge was assessed through four questions about Dutch politics (multiple choice). Originally, we had five questions. But question one was removed because of a coding issue in the survey. However, 92 percent gave the same answer on question one. For all variables with more than one item, we added the individual items, and then z-standardized all the variables. Table A.11 contains the exact question wording for the outcomes, Table A.12 the descriptives, and Table A.13 the psychometrics of the outcomes in the Appendix 2.

Preregistered Modelling Strategy

We specified six three-way interaction models, one for each dependent variable (Step 3 in Figure 1). The following equation summarizes our three-way interaction models whereby we regress each of the six outcome measures on standard interest (coded as 0 [uninterested] and 1 [interested] to reflect the allocated groups), positive identity (PosId is the mean score on PPIS), negative identity (NegId is the mean score on NPIS) and all consecutive interaction terms. Finally, we control for age, education, gender (female) and ideology. The three-way interaction models allow us to explore how positive and negative identity, individually and combined, are associated with the specified

outcomes, and whether these associations differ between interested and uninterested people (two-sided, $p < .05$).

- **Equation:** outcome (1-6) = $b_1 \times \text{Interested} + b_2 \times \text{PosId} + b_3 \times \text{NegId} + b_4 \times \text{PosId} \times \text{NegId} + b_5 \times \text{Interested} \times \text{PosId} \times \text{NegId} + b_6 \times \text{Age} + b_7 \times \text{Education} + b_8 \times \text{Female} + b_9 \times \text{Ideology}$

We investigate the interactions closer by analyzing the differences (contrasts) and similarities of Estimated Marginal Means (EMM) between each combination (two-sided, $p < .05$). The individual contrasts, i.e., differences between each interest and identity combinations, can be generated using the replication files which can be found on OSF.

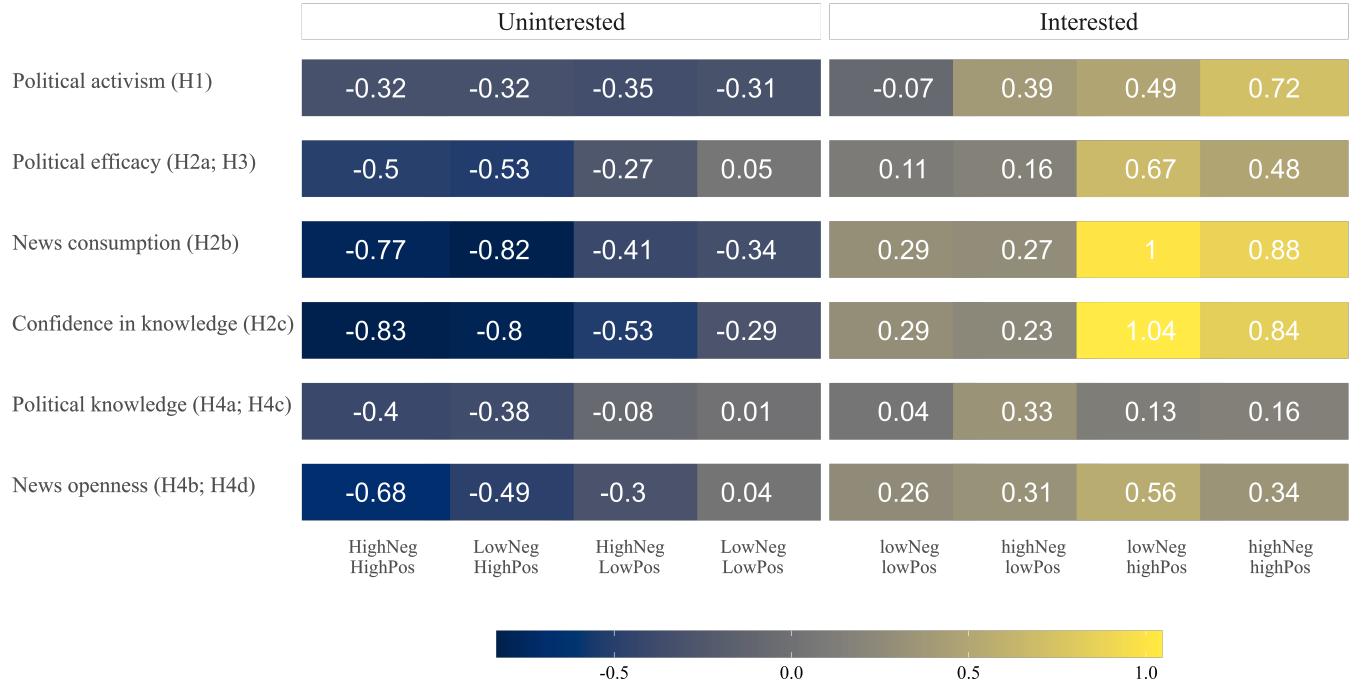
A post-hoc sensitivity analysis, using the InteractionPowerR package (Baranger et al., 2023), shows that our sample is sufficiently powered to reliably detect effect sizes of interest (Lakens, 2022). In both the exploratory and the confirmatory samples, we have enough participants to detect a two-way interaction effect of 0.16 (standardized) of PosId*NegId, 0.12 (standardized) of PosId*Interested, and of 0.11 of NegId*Interested. We expect that the three-way interaction effect that we can reliably detect will be slightly bigger than the two-way interaction effect: that said, this remains speculation at this point (see section 1.2 Power Analysis for Three-way Interaction Models in Appendix 1 for more information about the power analysis).

In the following section we evaluate our preregistered meta-analysis over the whole data set in relation to the four preregistered hypotheses in PAP 3. Results from the Exploratory Analyses [EA] and Confirmatory Analyses [CA] can be derived individually from the replication files on OSF.

Results

The following results demonstrate that positive identity accentuates differences *within* individuals who are interested in politics, as well as *within* uninterested people. These differences are overlooked when relying solely on a conventional one-item measure of political interest. Specifically, positive identity is a statistically significant predictor for all six outcomes within the group of politically interested participants, and in five out of six outcomes within the group of uninterested people. The associations are also in the expected direction with large effect sizes of one to two standard deviations. Figure 3 visualizes these results. The highest predicted values (yellow) are on the right side of the figure which displays the estimated marginal means for politically interested participants with *high positive identity*. Conversely, for uninterested participants, the lowest values (blue) are on the left, illustrating the estimated marginal means for politically uninterested participants with *high positive identity*. Negative identity is only a statistically significant correlate of more political activism for interested participants ($b_3=0.20$, $se=0.07$) but not in any of the other relationships. Further, only for two out of six outcomes is the three-way interaction for both groups statistically significant: political efficacy ($b_5[\text{interested}]=-0.20$, $se=0.06$; $b_5[\text{uninterested}]=0.14$, $se=0.04$), and confidence in political knowledge ($b_5[\text{interested}]=-0.12$, $se=0.05$; $b_5[\text{uninterested}]=0.08$, $se=0.03$). We discuss the relationships in detail, primarily referring to the preregistered hypotheses outlined in PAP 3. These hypotheses are based on the exploratory analysis (Step 3 in 1).

Figure 3: Heatmap of Estimated Marginal Means for the Association of Political Interest Identity with Political Outcome Variables.



Note: This heatmap shows the estimated marginal means of 6 different regression models from the meta-analysis (each row is a model). The marginal means are based on three-way interaction models, distinguishing between uninterested (left) and interested (right) people and setting low and high negative and positive identity to one standard deviation under/above the standardized means of interested / uninterested participants. The dark blue squares indicate lower than average predicted values on the dependent variable, yellow squares indicate higher than average predicted values. The hypotheses were preregistered in PAP 3.

H1: Political activism

In PAP 3, we preregistered a three-way interaction effect whereby (h1a) interested people with both high negative and high positive identity report the highest level of political activism. First, we find in the meta-analysis that higher positive identity ($b_2=0.26$, $se=0.09$) as well as higher nega-

tive identity substantively increases reported political activity within the interested group ($b_3=0.20$; $se=0.07$; see Table A.14 for regression table in Appendix 2). Furthermore, although the three-way interaction term is not statistically significant within the meta-analysis, the Estimated Marginal Mean (EMM) for this specific identity combination (EMM=0.72, $se=0.06$) is statistically significantly higher compared to all other (dis)interest combinations. The darker yellow squares in row 1 of Figure 3 illustrate this. Within the group of uninterested people, we do not find any statistically significant associations between positive or negative interest identity and political activism.

We also preregistered a three-way interaction effect whereby (h1b) interested people with low negative identity and low positive identity do not differ from uninterested participants². As can be seen in Figure 3, as well as in the interaction plot in Figure A.3 in Appendix 2, interested people with low negative identity and low positive identity (EMM=-0.07, $se=0.06$) do not differ much from uninterested participants (EMM=ranges from -0.35 to -0.31). Therefore, we accept h1a and h1b.

H2: Political efficacy (h2a), news consumption (h2b), and confidence in knowledge (h2c)

In PAP 3, we preregistered a two-way interaction effect whereby interested people with a high positive identity have the highest level on political efficacy (h2a), news consumption (h2b) and confidence in knowledge (h2c). Within the interested group, participants high on positive identity had

²Our claims of similarity are based on a failure to reject the null-hypothesis. This does not imply that we can reject the null-hypothesis of a difference. Equivalence tests could evaluate this difference, but to the best of our knowledge, this is not yet implemented for interaction models. Therefore a slight chance remains that these groups should be considered statistically different.

substantively more confidence in their political knowledge compared to people who reported lower positive identity ($b_2=0.68$, $se=0.08$) in the meta-analysis. Conversely, we find that a higher positive identity decreases confidence in political knowledge within the group of individuals uninterested in politics ($b_2=-0.27$, $se = 0.07$). Negative identity had no statistically significant association with confidence in knowledge in both groups ($b_3[\text{interested}]=-0.02$, $se=0.07$); $b_3[\text{uninterested}]=-0.02$, $se=0.05$). As preregistered we find similar effects in the meta-analysis for positive identity when analyzing political news consumption (h2b) and political efficacy (h2a; see Figure 3 rows 2-3). Overall, we confirm H2a-c that positive political identity is associated with higher political efficacy, more news consumption and higher perceived political knowledge among the politically interested participants. Moreover, positive identity is associated with lower political efficacy, news consumption and perceived knowledge among politically uninterested participants. Figure 3 highlights that participants with high positive identity have respectively the highest (interested; yellow squares) and lowest (uninterested; dark blue squares) values on news consumption, efficacy, and perceived knowledge.

H3: Political efficacy

We also preregistered in PAP 3 that (H3) people interested in politics with a low positive identity will have similar political efficacy scores as those uninterested in politics. We did not entirely replicate this pattern in the meta-analysis because of a coding error in the exploratory analysis³. With the correct coding, differences between and within the groups become starker. Positive identity becomes a statistically significant predictor for uninterested people. Moreover, in both interest groups, the three-way interaction becomes statistically significant and mirrors results for h2a-h2c

³We mistakenly re-coded Item 2, initially suggesting fewer differences between and within the groups

($b_5[\text{interested}] = -0.20$, $\text{se} = 0.06$); $b_5[\text{uninterested}] = 0.14$, $\text{se} = 0.04$). The meta-analysis shows that interested participants with low positive identity (EMM=ranges from 0.11 to 0.16) have similarly low scores on political efficacy than uninterested people with low positive and low negative identity (EMM=0.05; see greyish squares in row 2 of Figure3).

H4: Political knowledge (h4a/c) and News openness (h4b/d)

In PAP 3, we preregistered a two-way interaction effect whereby uninterested people with high positive identity have the lowest level of political knowledge (h4a) and the highest level of news avoidance (h4b). We deviate from our PAP 3 by reverse coding news avoidance to reflect news openness so that all effects are in the same direction. In line with h4b, we find that for uninterested people, a higher positive identity reduces openness to news ($b_2 = -0.32$, $\text{se} = 0.09$). Within the interested group, we find that a higher positive identity increases openness to news ($b_2 = 0.42$, $\text{se} = 0.11$). Negative identity has no statistically significant association in both groups ($b_3[\text{interested}] = 0.12$, $\text{se} = 0.10$); $b_3[\text{uninterested}] = -0.11$, $\text{se} = 0.07$). Row 6 in Figure 3 also illustrates that participants with high positive identity have respectively the highest (interested) and lowest (uninterested) values on news openness.

For political knowledge, we find that positive identity is negatively associated with knowledge within uninterested people in the meta-analysis($b_2 = -0.25$, $\text{se} = 0.09$). Within the interested group, positive identity is significantly associated with more political knowledge, but only in the meta-analysis ($b_2 = 0.23$, $\text{se} = 0.11$). However, in estimated marginal means, positive identity makes no difference within the interested group. Row 5 in Figure 3 shows that participants with high positive identity have the lowest (uninterested) values on political knowledge, but not necessarily the highest (interested) [see row 5 square “Interested highNeg lowPos”].

We also preregistered that uninterested people with low positive identity have similar levels of political knowledge (h4c) and news openness (h4d) than interested participants. First, one could argue that uninterested people with a low negative and a low positive identity have levels of news openness (EMM=0.04, se=0.08) that resemble those of interested people with low negative and low positive identity (EMM=0.26, se=0.08). However, we do not confirm h4d entirely as uninterested people with low positive and high negative identity are not similar to interested people. Second, uninterested people with a low positive identity have similar levels of knowledge than all interested people (h4c), except for the interested with high positive and low negative identity. The greyish squares in Figure 3 row 5 illustrate this pattern.

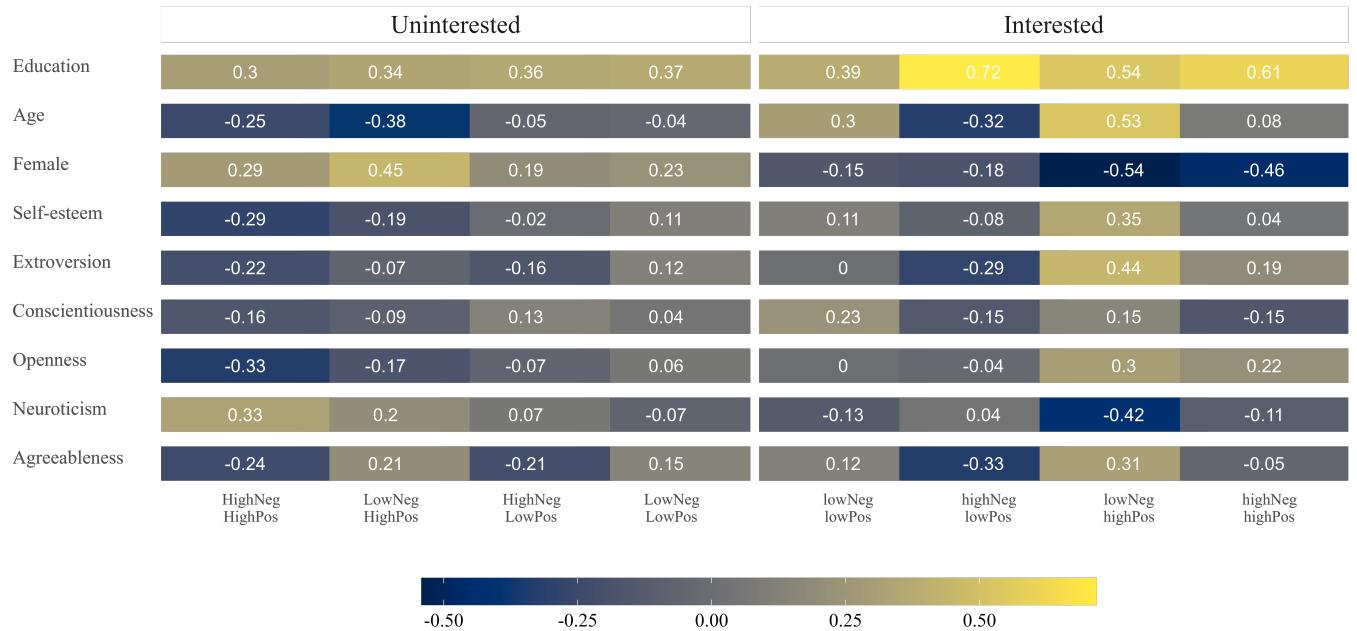
Conclusion: Predictive validity of the PPIS and NPIS scales

We conclude that positively identifying with your in-group of (dis)interested people is correlated with large differences in several political outcomes. The differences between those that positively identify with political disinterest and those that positively identify with political interest is around one and two standard deviations on the tested outcome variables. Figure 3 illustrates this pattern with the dark blue colors on the left (lowest values for uninterested and positive identifying) and the yellow colors on the right (highest values for interested and positive identifying). We also find that for some outcome variables the values of disinterested and interested participants with low positive identity do not differ much. In sum, the identity scales we introduce significantly add to the predictive validity that the political (dis)interest concept has on political attitudes and behaviors.

Exploratory test: The correlates of PPIS and NPIS

Who scores high or low on the PPIS and NPIS scales? To answer this we specified the same three-way interaction models in Figure 4 with demographics (gender, age, education) and personality traits (Big 5, self-esteem) as dependent variables⁴ (see Table A.1 in Appendix 2 for descriptives). We did not preregister this.

Figure 4: Heatmap of Estimated Marginal Means for the Association of Political Interest Identity with Demographics and Personality.



Note: The marginal means are based on three-way interaction models, distinguishing between uninterested (left) and interested (right) people and setting low and high negative and positive identity to one standard deviation under/above the standardized means of interested/uninterested participants. The dark blue squares indicate lower than average predicted values on the dependent variable, yellow squares indicate higher than average predicted values.

⁴We also collected measures of dogmatism, social dominance orientation and need for cognition in the survey. But to avoid information overload, these results can be derived from the replication files on OSF

In line with other research (e.g. Prior, 2018), the heatmap in Figure 4 shows that women are more likely than men to identify as uninterested. In this group, women report similar levels of both positive and negative identity. Moreover, younger people are more likely to identify positively with the uninterested group. There is greater variation within the interested group: younger people tend to have a negative view of those who are uninterested, while older individuals are more likely to view themselves as politically interested. In line with the broader personality and political interest literature (for a review see Bromme et al., 2022; Freitag & Zumbrunn, 2024) we find weak indications that personality traits set apart those being interested from those being uninterested in politics. Yet, we find that personality traits set-apart especially people *within* each group. A few results stand out: for the uninterested, higher levels of neuroticism are associated with high positive and high negative identity. Among the interested, those having a high positive and a high negative identity have lower levels of conscientiousness compared to those who have a weak positive and a weak negative identity. Overall, these results reveal significant variation both between and within the politically interested and uninterested groups, highlighting the range of factors linked to political identity.

Discussion

Political interest is crucial to the functioning of democratic societies. Yet, its conceptualization remains debated. The lack of consensus hinders efforts to understand what influences and causes political (dis)interest, limiting efforts to promote political interest effectively and equally among all citizens. This study addresses this by conceptualizing and measuring political (dis)interest as a social identity. We hereby follow a growing body of research highlighting the importance and

existence of multiple social identities within politics (e.g., Bornschier et al., 2021; Egan, 2020; Huddy, 2001; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Klandermans, 2014; Mason, 2023; McConnell et al., 2013; Wagner & Eberl, 2024; West & Iyengar, 2022). Our main contribution lies in demonstrating that political (dis)interest functions as a social identity, offering a new perspective on this concept and advancing our understanding of its implications for political engagement and behavior.

Specifically, we demonstrated the construct and predictive validity of our novel measures which capture this social identity aspect of political (dis)interest. Using Item Response Theory, the most appropriate method for our assessments, we convincingly demonstrated that political (dis)interest can be accurately gauged through our newly developed Positive Political Interest Identity Scale (PPIS) and Negative Political Interest Identity Scale (NPIS). We also established the predictive validity of these scales by correlating them with six political outcome variables, revealing large variations on political activism, political efficacy, news consumption, news openness, confidence in knowledge and political knowledge between as well as *within* the interested and uninterested group. These strong disparities would have gone unnoticed if we had only used (the) standard political interest measure(s).

The two main parts of this study, (1) assessing the construct validity of our newly developed scales and (2) evaluating their predictive validity, align with the social identity literature. We demonstrate a strong comparative fit, showing that (dis)interest in politics indeed constitutes a meaningful divide in society (Krupnikov & Ryan, 2022). Our identity scales are good at discriminating across different trait levels, and highlight meaningful differences *between* those interested and disinterested in politics. Concerning differences *within* interested people, our findings align with recent work by Krupnikov and Ryan (2022, p. 34), who argue that “gradations [in people’s relationships with politics] form an especially meaningful political divide in the highest categories

of interest". Yet, our findings also uncover important variations within the *uninterested* group in the degree to which they positively identify with being uninterested, underscoring the importance of examining variability within both interested *and* disinterested individuals. We also show differences *within* both groups in how strongly individuals identify with their in-group, and disengage with their out-group (Haslam & Ellemers, 2005; Turner et al., 1987). Our findings also align with earlier studies showing that the strength of positive identification with one's in-group is linked to differences in attitudes and behaviors (Bankert, 2021; Huddy, 2018). This pattern holds true for both those who are interested and those who are not. The social identity approach suggests that stronger identification increases the likelihood of adopting or internalizing the group's typical values, norms, attitudes, and behaviors (Huddy et al., 2018; Tanti et al., 2011).

Our results regarding negative identity are less conclusive. The findings align with the literature on partisanship which also shows that positive identity has better predictive validity than negative identity (Bankert, 2021; Medeiros & Noël, 2014). Negative identity is however not the opposite of positive identity and may exert "different powers", relating to attitudes and behaviors which were not tested in this study (Caruana et al., 2015). Future research should explore when and how negative identity uncovers meaningful distinctions among politically (dis)interested individuals.

This study is only a starting point and we welcome further research to explore the construct and predictive validity of (dis)interest as a social identity across different contexts. First, to better understand political (dis)interest as a social identity, we need to know when and how it develops. As our study relied on a cross-sectional design using a sample of Dutch adults, it cannot answer this. Given that political interest develops during adolescence (Hoskins & Janmaat, 2024; Prior, 2018; Russo & Stattin, 2017), exploring the emergence and determinants of political (dis)interest as an identity requires tracking adolescents over time. Second, a person can belong to various socio-

political groups (Amiot et al., 2007; Kang & Bodenhausen, 2015; Klandermans, 2014; Mason, 2023; McConnell et al., 2013). In politics, partisanship (Huddy et al., 2018), gender (Boyer et al., 2022), ethnicity (Egan, 2020) nationality (Huddy & Khatib, 2007), religion (Margolis, 2018), and political (dis)interest have been established as meaningful social identities to understand politically relevant attitudes and behaviors. Future research should explore how these identities are structured hierarchically.

To conclude, our main contribution lies in demonstrating that political (dis)interest functions and can be measured as a meaningful social identity. Our findings have also practical implications for stakeholders invested in fostering political engagement. For instance, interventions informed by the social identity approach aimed at modifying prototype content, as discussed by Kim et al. (2018) in their work on women in STEM, could prove invaluable in enhancing political interest. Specifically, social identity research suggests that modifying the in-group prototype (amongst group leaders) is highly effective in making the social category more inclusive, and thereby enhancing social identification (Seyranian, 2013, 2017; Tajfel, 1981).

Recognizing that political (dis)interest is a social identity helps our understanding of the concept and its repercussions, while also providing stakeholders with tools to cultivate political interest equally amongst all citizens. By establishing political (dis)interest as a meaningful social identity, our research deepens understanding of its implications for inclusive democratic engagement.

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Appendices

Appendix 1

1.1 Participants in Interested and Uninterested Group

A total of 813 participants was interested (fairly or very interested) in politics ($N = 412$ [Exploratory Analyses; henceforth: EA]; $N = 401$ [Confirmatory Analysis, henceforth: CA]) and saw the PPIS and the NPIS versions for interested participants. A total of 740 participants was uninterested (not at all or a little) in politics ($N = 374$ [EA]; $N = 366$ [CA]) and saw the PPIS and NPIS versions for uninterested participants.

1.2 Power Analysis for Three-way Interaction Models

To be specific, in both split-halves, we have enough participants to detect a two-way interaction effect of $b = 0.16$ (standardized) of PosId*NegId, $b = 0.12$ of PosId*Interested, and of $b = 0.11$ of NegId*Interested. This means we can detect small interaction effects. Note that at this point we limit sensitivity to two-way interactions. In the next iteration of the paper we also include the power analysis for the three-way interaction. These are complicated and we need more time to conduct these. Yet, we expect that the three-way interaction effect that we can reliably detect will be slightly bigger than the two-way interaction effect: that said, this remains speculation at this point.

Appendix 2

Tables

Table A.1: Descriptives of the Whole Sample.

	N	Mean	SD	Mdn	Min	Max
age	2,060	52.99	16.27	54	17	93
sex	2,056	0.52	0.50	1	0	1
education*	2,060	3.20	1.33	3	1	5
ideology	1,578	5.21	2.18	5	0	10
pol_interest	2,060	2.56	0.83	3	1	4
pos_id_mean	1,553	1.85	0.58	1.75	1	4
neg_id_mean	1,553	1.58	0.43	1.50	1	3.62
selfEsteem	1,562	5.55	1.25	5.80	1	7
neuroticism	1,361	2.44	0.81	2.50	1	5
openness	1,361	3.58	0.69	3.50	1.25	5
agreeableness	1,361	3.96	0.67	4	1	5
extroversion	1,361	3.12	0.85	3.25	1	5
conscientiousness	1,361	3.88	0.70	4	1.25	5
dogmatism	1,367	2.10	0.54	2.09	1	4.64
sdo	1,825	3.38	0.89	3.38	1	6.75
nfc	1,361	4.71	0.98	4.70	1	7

Note: sex = male (0), female (1); education = lagere school & VMBO (1), HAVO_VW_Gymnasium (2), MBO (3), HBO (4), Universiteit (5); ideology = left (0) - right (10).

Table A.2: Item Wording of the Political Interest Identity Scales (Dutch Version).

Positive Political Interest Identity Scale (PPIS)	Negative Political Interest Identity Scale (NPIS)
1. Ik wil weten wat anderen denken over mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.	1. Het geeft me een goed gevoel als iemand kritiek levert op mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.
2. Het voelt als een persoonlijke belediging als iemand kritiek levert op mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.	2. Ik heb niet veel gemeen met mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.
3. Ik heb veel gemeen met mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.	3. Ik ervaar boosheid ten opzichte van mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.
4. Ik voel me verbonden met iemand die (on)geïnteresseerd is in politiek.	4. Ik voel me helemaal niet verbonden met mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.
5. Ik beschouw mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek als 'mijn mensen'.	5. Ik vind het belangrijk om mij te distantiëren van mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.
6. Als iemand mensen die in politiek (on)geïnteresseerd zijn prijst, geeft me dat een goed gevoel.	6. Ik beschouw mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek niet als 'mijn mensen'.
7. Ik vind het belangrijk om (on)geïnteresseerd te zijn in politiek.	7. Ik wil weten wat anderen denken over mensen die (on)geïnteresseerd zijn in politiek.
8. Ik zie mezelf als (on)geïnteresseerd in politiek.	8. Ik zie mezelf niet als politiek (on)geïnteresseerd.

Note: This table shows the original scale items in Dutch. People were asked: Geef aan hoe vaak de onderstaande uitspraken op u van toepassing zijn. nooit/zelden (1), soms (2), vaak (3), altijd (4)

Table A.3: Descriptives for all Items of the Positive Interest Identity Scale PPIS.

	N	Mean	SD	Mdn	Min	Max
IntPos1	813	1.86	0.77	2	1	4
UnintPos1	740	1.29	0.53	1	1	4
IntPos2	813	1.55	0.73	1	1	4
UnintPos2	740	1.38	0.66	1	1	4
IntPos3	813	2.35	0.69	2	1	4
UnintPos3	740	1.67	0.72	2	1	4
IntPos4	813	2.29	0.73	2	1	4
UnintPos4	740	1.52	0.68	1	1	4
IntPos5	813	1.84	0.76	2	1	4
UnintPos5	740	1.35	0.62	1	1	4
IntPos6	813	1.78	0.76	2	1	4
UnintPos6	740	1.19	0.47	1	1	4
IntPos7	813	2.92	0.73	3	1	4
UnintPos7	740	1.28	0.53	1	1	4
IntPos8	813	2.97	0.72	3	1	4
UnintPos8	740	2.11	0.89	2	1	4

Note: This table shows the descriptives for all items of the PPIS for interested (“Int”) and uninterested (“Unint”) participants; numbers refer to the items.

Table A.4: Descriptives for all Items of the Negative Interest Identity Scale NPIS.

	N	Mean	SD	Mdn	Min	Max
IntNeg1	813	1.41	0.65	1	1	4
UnintNeg1	740	1.22	0.51	1	1	4
IntNeg2	813	1.79	0.77	2	1	4
UnintNeg2	740	1.76	0.74	2	1	4
IntNeg3	813	1.41	0.59	1	1	4
UnintNeg3	740	1.16	0.45	1	1	4
IntNeg4	813	1.69	0.73	2	1	4
UnintNeg4	740	1.66	0.78	1	1	4
IntNeg5	813	1.32	0.57	1	1	4
UnintNeg5	740	1.23	0.51	1	1	4
IntNeg6	813	1.50	0.69	1	1	4
UnintNeg6	740	1.33	0.61	1	1	4
IntNeg7	813	1.53	0.67	1	1	4
UnintNeg7	740	1.49	0.68	1	1	4
IntNeg8	813	2.46	1.18	3	1	4
UnintNeg8	740	2.29	0.87	2	1	4

Note: This table shows the descriptives for all items of the NPIS for interested (“Int”) and uninterested (“Unint”) participants; numbers refer to the items.

Table A.5: Item fit Statistics for Positive Identity Items of Interested Participants.

Model	item	S_X2	df.S_X2	RMSEA.S_X2	p.S_X2
IntPosEA	Item 1	12.80	22	0	0.940
IntPosEA	Item 2	34.22	20	0.041	0.198
IntPosEA	Item 3	11.30	13	0	0.937
IntPosEA	Item 4	11.76	13	0	0.937
IntPosEA	Item 5	16.16	17	0	0.937
IntPosEA	Item 6	17.81	17	0.011	0.937
IntPosEA	Item 7	17.94	24	0	0.940
IntPosEA	Item 8	14.21	21	0	0.940
IntPosCA	Item 1	20.83	23	0	0.709
IntPosCA	Item 2	26.33	21	0.025	0.392
IntPosCA	Item 3	18.50	15	0.024	0.392
IntPosCA	Item 4	4.36	10	0	0.930
IntPosCA	Item 5	24.52	18	0.030	0.392
IntPosCA	Item 6	16.55	19	0	0.709
IntPosCA	Item 7	31.89	23	0.031	0.392
IntPosCA	Item 8	22.83	19	0.022	0.392

Note: This table shows the item fit statistics for the positive identity items of interested participants in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Table A.6: Item fit Statistics for Negative Identity Items of Interested Participants.

Model	item	S_X2	df.S_X2	RMSEA.S_X2	p.S_X2
IntNegEA	Item 1	18.52	14	0.028	0.596
IntNegEA	Item 2	18.79	15	0.025	0.596
IntNegEA	Item 3	19.08	14	0.030	0.596
IntNegEA	Item 4	10.978	15	0	0.824
IntNegEA	Item 5	9.85	13	0	0.824
IntNegEA	Item 6	16.60	15	0.016	0.686
IntNegEA	Item 7	21.06	21	0.003	0.728
IntNegEA	Item 8	21.03	28	0	0.824
IntNegCA	Item 1	35.96	14	0.063	0.008
IntNegCA	Item 2	8.61	15	0	0.897
IntNegCA	Item 3	12.69	14	0	0.636
IntNegCA	Item 4	12.62	14	0	0.636
IntNegCA	Item 5	13.69	15	0	0.636
IntNegCA	Item 6	18.06	14	0.027	0.636
IntNegCA	Item 7	20.85	20	0.010	0.636
IntNegCA	Item 8	29.54	26	0.018	0.636

Note: This table shows the item fit statistics for the negative identity items of interested participants in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Table A.7: Item fit Statistics for Positive Identity Items of Uninterested Participants.

Model	item	S_X2	df.S_X2	RMSEA.S_X2	p.S_X2
UnintPosEA	Item 1	11.86	12	0	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 2	18.48	17	0.015	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 3	11.80	12	0	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 4	13.07	11	0.022	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 5	11.54	10	0.020	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 6	7.15	7	0.008	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 7	12.36	13	0	0.499
UnintPosEA	Item 8	32.72	22	0.036	0.499
UnintPosCA	Item 1	9.62	11	0	0.565
UnintPosCA	Item 2	26.46	14	0.049	0.090
UnintPosCA	Item 3	13.15	10	0.029	0.246
UnintPosCA	Item 4	9.72	6	0.041	0.219
UnintPosCA	Item 5	15.14	8	0.049	0.119
UnintPosCA	Item 6	10.61	5	0.055	0.119
UnintPosCA	Item 7	13.71	5	0.069	0.090
UnintPosCA	Item 8	22.26	17	0.029	0.233

Note: This table shows the item fit statistics for the positive identity items of uninterested participants in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Table A.8: Item fit Statistics for Negative Identity Items of Uninterested Participants.

Model	item	S_X2	df.S_X2	RMSEA.S_X2	p.S_X2
UnintNegEA	Item 1	16.40	14	0.021	0.386
UnintNegEA	Item 2	21.78	12	0.047	0.136
UnintNegEA	Item 3	17.61	10	0.045	0.136
UnintNegEA	Item 4	13.45	14	0	0.492
UnintNegEA	Item 5	17.29	10	0.044	0.136
UnintNegEA	Item 6	17.26	14	0.025	0.386
UnintNegEA	Item 7	18.46	17	0.015	0.412
UnintNegEA	Item 8	34.84	21	0.042	0.136
UnintNegCA	Item 1	4.16	7	0	0.821
UnintNegCA	Item 2	9.88	9	0.016	0.720
UnintNegCA	Item 3	22.57	7	0.078	0.016
UnintNegCA	Item 4	15.45	12	0.028	0.580
UnintNegCA	Item 5	3.68	5	0	0.821
UnintNegCA	Item 6	6.72	11	0	0.821
UnintNegCA	Item 7	8.93	13	0	0.821
UnintNegCA	Item 8	27.94	17	0.042	0.183

Note: This table shows the item fit statistics for the negative identity items of uninterested participants in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Table A.9: Discrimination Parameter *alpha* of Scale Items.

Parameter	Model	Item 1	Item 2	Item 3	Item 4	Item 5	Item 6	Item 7	Item 8
a	IntPosEA	0.95	0.93	3.38	3.67	1.67	1.72	0.98	0.99
a	IntNegEA	2.35	2.33	2.07	2.30	2.59	2.49	0.96	0.46
a	UnintPosEA	0.85	1.31	2.17	2.37	3.02	2.44	1.57	1.01
a	UnintNegEA	1.50	2.03	1.97	2.57	2.24	2.46	0.47	1.05
a	IntPosCA	0.82	0.89	3.29	5.77	1.94	1.79	1.65	1.77
a	IntNegCA	1.56	2.73	1.60	2.80	2.03	3.21	0.85	0.49
a	UnintPosCA	0.70	1.02	2.05	2.43	2.67	3.23	1.27	0.95
a	UnintNegCA	1.68	2.06	1.39	2.26	3.21	1.34	0.35	0.91

Note: This table shows the discrimination parameter *alpha* for each item of the scales in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis; IntPos for example refers to the PPIS version for interested participants.

Table A.10: Person fit Statistics.

Fitting	Model	Zh.fit	Analysis
Fit	IntPosEA	0.95	EA
Misfit	IntPosEA	0.05	EA
Fit	IntNegEA	0.96	CA
Misfit	IntNegEA	0.04	CA
Fit	UnintPosEA	0.98	EA
Misfit	UnintPosEA	0.02	EA
Fit	UnintNegEA	0.96	CA
Misfit	UnintNegEA	0.04	CA
Fit	IntPosCA	0.98	EA
Misfit	IntPosCA	0.02	EA
Fit	IntNegCA	0.97	CA
Misfit	IntNegCA	0.03	CA
Fit	UnintPosCA	0.97	EA
Misfit	UnintPosCA	0.03	EA
Fit	UnintNegCA	0.96	CA
Misfit	UnintNegCA	0.04	CA

Note: This table shows the proportion of participants aligning (“Fit”) or misaligning (“Misfit”) with the responses expected by the specified model of the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Table A.11: Outcome Variables and Their Operationalizations.

Variables	Operationalizations
Political activism	<p>How willing would you be to do the following for a political issue you care about? (1) not at all willing - (7) very much willing:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Work or volunteer in a political party or action group? 2. Wear or display a campaign badge/sticker? 3. Sign an (online) petition? 4. Take part in a lawful public demonstration? 5. Post or share anything about politics online, for example on blogs, via email or on social media such as TikTok or Instagram?
News consumption	How often do you follow political news? (1) not much at all - (7) always
News avoidance/openness	<p>We would like to ask you some questions now about how you feel about political news (1) strongly disagree - (7) strongly agree:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I'd rather ignore the news related to politics. 2. Political news makes me feel emotionally charged. 3. The news related to politics gives me the feeling of getting overloaded with information.
Political efficacy	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1) fully disagree - fully agree (7):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. I am capable of playing an active role in politics. 2. I have a clear understanding of the major political issues in this country. 3. Members of Parliament do not care about the opinion of people like me. 4. The political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion. 5. People like me have no influence on government policy. 6. Sometimes politics seems so complicated that people like me find it difficult to understand what is going on.
Confidence in political knowledge	<p>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements? (1) completely disagree) - (7) completely agree:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. In my group of friends, I am an expert on politics. 2. Compared to most people, I know less about political issues and the latest news

Continued on next page

Table A.11 – continued from previous page

Variables	Operationalisations
	3. I know a lot about political issues and the latest political developments.
Political knowledge	<p>1. Who is currently the President of France? Marie Le Pen, Emmanuel Macron, Jacques Chirac, Francois Hollande, Nicolas Sarkozy</p> <p>2. Who is currently the Managing Director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF)? Kristalina Georgieva, Christine Lagarde, Ban Ki Moon, Nancy Pelosi, Janet Yellen</p> <p>3. How many signatures does a citizens' initiative need to be considered by the House of Representatives? 10k, 40k, 50k, 65k, 100k</p> <p>4. What is the current position of the shown person? President of the European Council, Acting Minister of Education, Parliamentary Leader of D66, Member of the European Parliament, Acting Minister of Social Affairs and Employment.</p>
Standard Political Interest	Some people are very interested in politics, others much less. Where do you place yourself on a scale from not at all to very interested in politics? (1) not at all, (2) a little, (3) fairly, (4) very interested.

Table A.12: Descriptives for the Outcome Variables.

	N	Mean	SD	Mdn	Min	Max
political activism	2,044	2.98	1.38	2.80	1	7
pol_news_con	1,562	4.39	1.72	5	1	7
news_openness	1,566	4.86	1.30	5	1	7
pol_efficacy	1,562	3.83	1.03	3.83	1.17	7
pol_confidence	1,562	3.78	1.35	4	1	7
pol_knowledge	1,562	0.55	0.25	0.50	0	1

Note: This table shows the descriptives for the outcome variables.

Table A.13: Cronbach's Alpha for Outcome Variables.

Variables	Alpha	Items
Activism	0.83	5
Efficacy	0.74	6
Confidence in Knowledge	0.82	3
Knowledge	0.35	4
News Openness	0.46	3

Note: This table shows the Cronbach's alpha for each outcome variable where multiple items were used to measure a concept.

Table A.14: Regression Table of Three-way Interaction Models for each Outcome Variable from the Meta-Analysis.

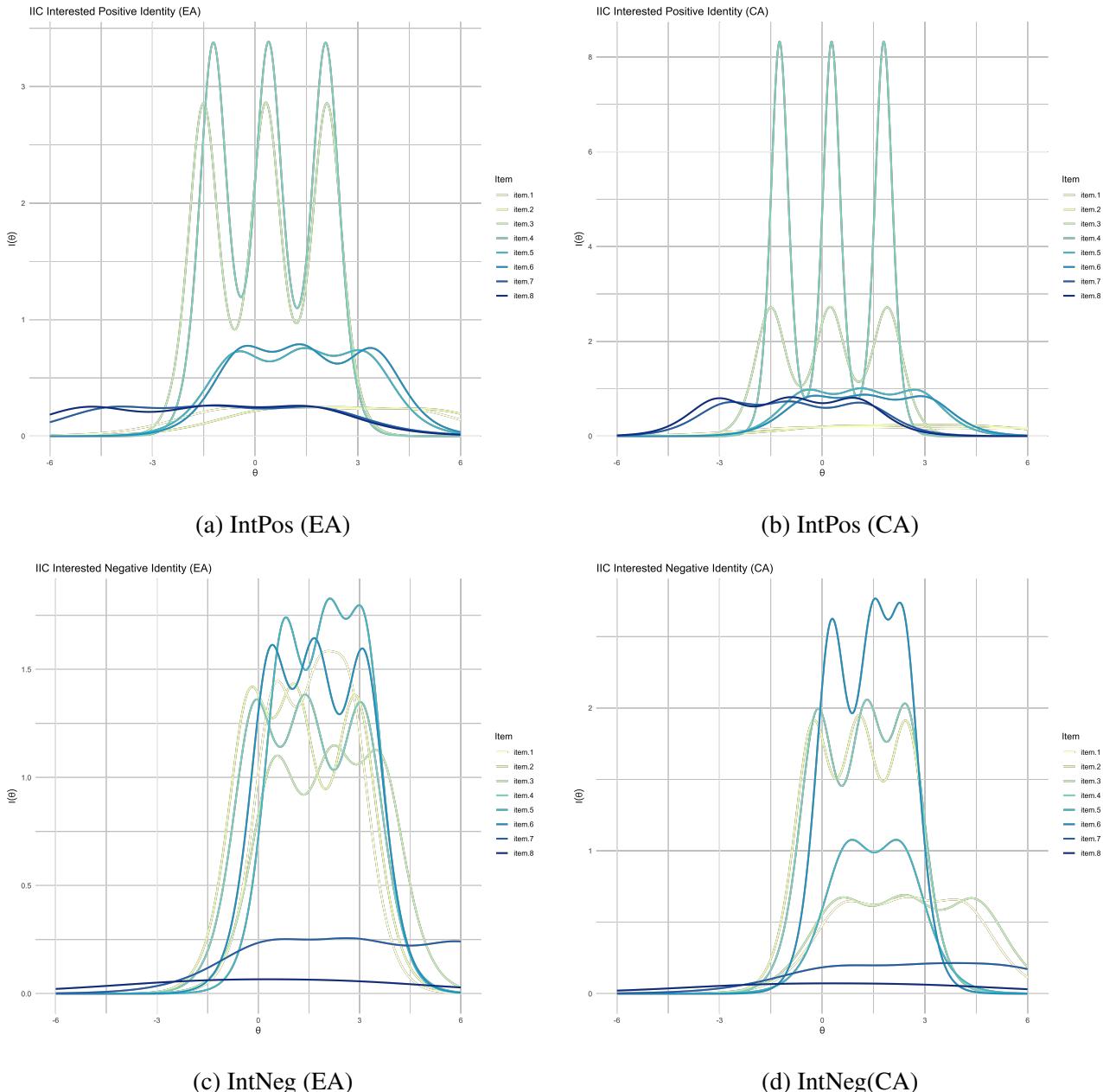
	political activism	political efficacy	news consumption	news openness	confidence in knowledge	political knowledge
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
age	-0.06*	-0.06	0.16***	0.09**	-0.02	0.13***
	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Edu2	0.09	0.51***	0.27***	0.29**	0.20**	0.33**
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.10)	(0.13)
Edu3	-0.13	0.28***	-0.01	0.08	0.03	0.19*
	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.11)
Edu4	0.04	0.56***	0.09	0.19*	0.22**	0.41***
	(0.09)	(0.11)	(0.09)	(0.12)	(0.09)	(0.12)
Edu5	-0.04	0.84***	0.13	0.34***	0.22**	0.61***
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.13)	(0.10)	(0.13)
female	0.06**	-0.04	-0.09***	-0.18***	-0.12***	0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Ideology	-0.17***	-0.12***	0.08***	0.07**	0.06**	-0.03
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.04)
Analysis	-0.03	0.02	0.01	-0.01	0.03	-0.02
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Interested	0.52***	0.70***	1.16***	0.90***	1.17***	0.55***
	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.11)
PosId	0.01	-0.27***	-0.30***	-0.32***	-0.27***	-0.25***
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.09)
NegId	-0.00	0.01	0.03	-0.11	-0.02	-0.01
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.07)
Interested:PosId	0.26***	0.54***	0.69***	0.42***	0.68***	0.23**
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.11)
Interested:NegId	0.20***	0.00	-0.04	0.12	-0.02	0.13
	(0.07)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.10)	(0.07)	(0.09)
PosId:NegId	0.02	0.14***	0.05	0.06	0.08**	0.02
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.05)	(0.03)	(0.05)
Interested:PosId:NegId	-0.08	-0.20***	-0.08*	-0.13*	-0.12**	-0.10
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.07)	(0.05)	(0.06)
Constant	-0.31***	-0.94***	-0.88***	-0.77***	-0.94***	-0.69***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.08)	(0.11)	(0.08)	(0.11)
N	1,170	779	779	780	779	779
R ²	0.23	0.30	0.55	0.27	0.51	0.11
Adjusted R ²	0.22	0.29	0.54	0.25	0.50	0.09
Residual Std. Error	0.86 (df = 1154)	0.84 (df = 763)	0.68 (df = 763)	0.87 (df = 764)	0.70 (df = 763)	0.93 (df = 763)

*p < .1; **p < .05; ***p < .01

Note: Interested = re-coded standard political interest (0,1), PosId = mean on positive identity scale, NegId = mean on negative identity scale.

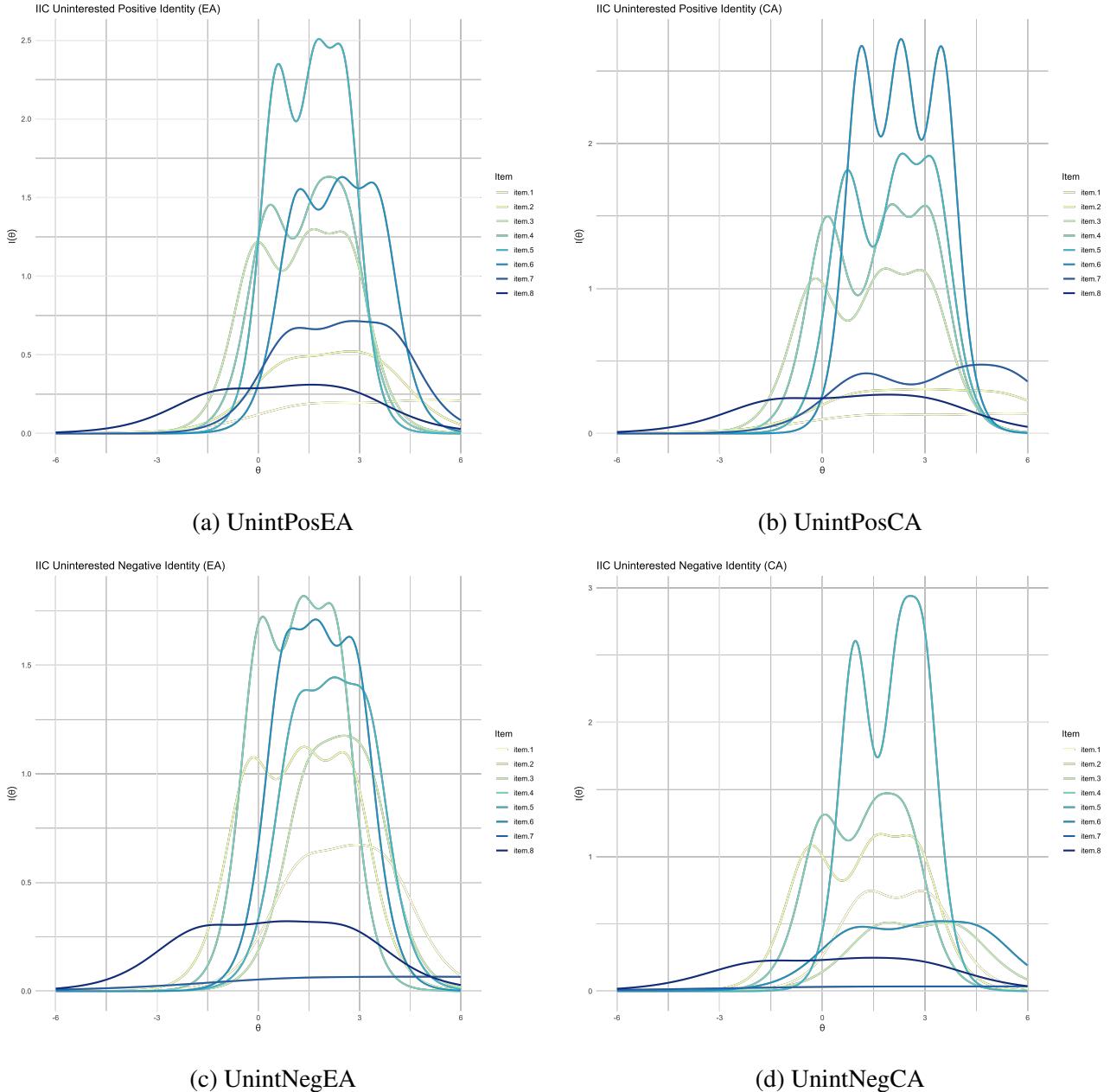
Figures

Figure A.1: Item Information Curves for the Interested Group.



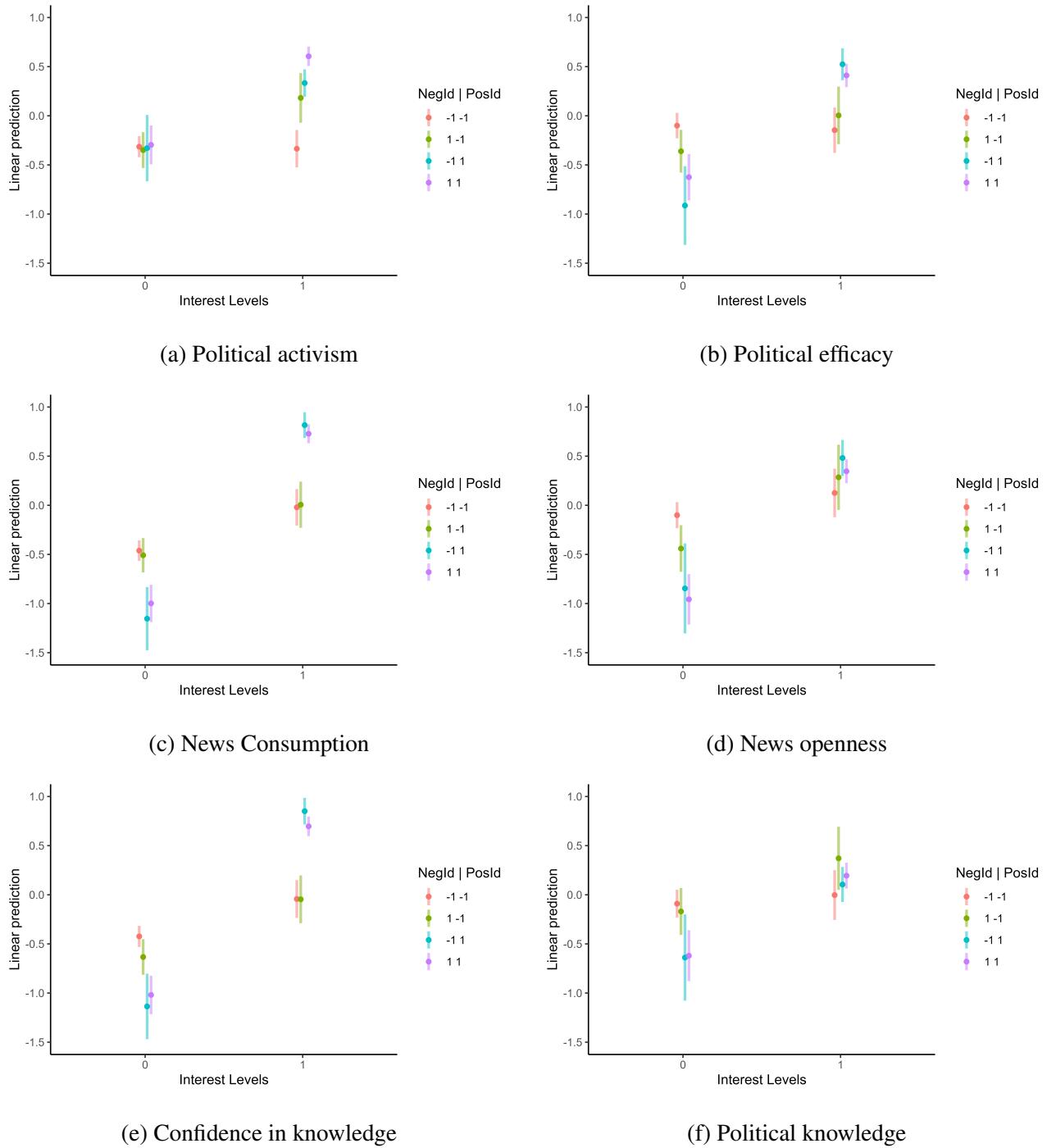
Note: This figure shows the item information curves for the PPIS (Pos) and NPIS (Neg) version for interested participants in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Figure A.2: Item Information Curves for the Uninterested Group.



Note: This figure shows the item information curves for the PPIS (Pos) and NPIS (Neg) version for uninterested participants in the exploratory (EA) and confirmatory (CA) analysis.

Figure A.3: Three-way Interaction Plots from the Meta-Analysis.



Note: This figure shows the three-way interaction models for each outcome variable from the meta-analysis. We set low and high negative and positive identity to -1 (standard deviation from the mean) and 1 respectively.