

Reluctant Partisans, not Undercover Partisans: Why Americans Increasingly Identify as Independent

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Abstract

In the United States, partisanship has a greater impact on political behavior than any other social identity. Yet the proportion of Americans who actively identify with a party, as opposed to Independents who “lean” toward one, is at its lowest point in decades. Existing research offers two explanations for why: First is that Americans identify as Independent for expressive reasons, distancing themselves from the nastiness of politics despite covertly preferring one party. The second understands non-identification as primarily instrumental, a function of disapproval with both political parties. Using eight waves of panel data from 2016-2022, I compare the strength of these competing explanations, and find support for only the instrumental explanation. The rise of so-called “Independents” is more directly a consequence of disliking both major parties as opposed to reluctance to reveal a hidden partisan preference.

Introduction

Identification with a political party is one of the most important, if not the most important, drivers of American political behavior (Campbell et al. 1960; Green, Palmquist and Schickler 2002). Yet Americans increasingly identify not as Democrats or Republicans, but Independents. A record proportion of Americans now identify as Independent (Jones 2024). Because Independents are less willing to talk about politics and less likely to vote (Klar and Krupnikov 2016; Pew Research Center 2019), this trend has raised concerns about American civic health.

Why do Americans increasingly identify as Independents, rather than Democrats or Republicans? Complicating this question is the voting behavior of Independents. Most Independents say they “lean” towards one of the two parties, and most of these so-called “leaners” vote similarly to partisans (Keith et al. 1992; Petrocik 2009). Existing explanations for why Americans choose to identify as Independent, despite most Independents’ seemingly partisan behavior, can be grouped in two broad categories. The first is that identifying as Independent is largely *expressive*. In this explanation, Independents have similar beliefs as partisans but choose the more socially desirable Independent label. The second is that identifying as Independent is largely *instrumental*. In this explanation, Independent party identification is driven by negative evaluations of both parties.

This study makes two significant contributions to existing work on the rise of Independent party identification in America. First, existing research has focused on the characteristics that predict someone will identify as an Independent rather than as a partisan. However, this approach is vulnerable to confounding or omitted variable bias, where an unmeasured variable predicts both identifying as Independent and the explanatory variable of interest. To avoid this, instead of examining *who* identifies as Independent, I examine *when* individuals switch from identifying as

partisans to identifying as Independent. Focusing on individual-level *change* is much less vulnerable to omitted variable bias, because all stable characteristics of individuals are controlled for (Allison 2009). Second, In addition of testing whether there is a statistically detectable relationship, I compare the relative predictive power of the instrumental versus expressive explanations against one another. It may be that people have both expressive and instrumental motivations for identifying as Independent, but one motivation is much stronger than the other.

I compare how well the expressive and instrumental explanations predict switching to Independent using eight waves of panel data collected from 2016 to 2022. I find strong support for the instrumental model of Independent party identification. People are most likely to switch from partisans to Independents when they decrease favorability towards their party, the standard bearer of their party, or in the case of Republicans the platform of their party. By contrast, I do not find support for the expressive model of Independent party identification. When people's perceptions of how divided American politics is and how vitriolic political discourse is increase, they are not more likely to switch to identifying as Independent. Taken together, these findings indicate that the increase in Americans who identify as Independent is not due to growing embarrassment at expressing a partisan identity. Instead, the trend reflects a declining favorability towards the two American political parties.

Why do Americans Identify as Independent?

The most prominent explanation for the rise of Independents, put forth in Klar and Krupnikov (2016), is that Independent party identification is largely expressive. Being seen as “Independent” is socially desirable, causing people to report that they are Independent even though they have

Reluctant not Undercover

partisan preferences. Most Independents are “undercover partisans” who “avoid partisanship not because they disagree with the parties ideologically or politically, but because being a party member is embarrassing” (Klar and Krupnikov 2016, p. 37).

This embarrassment and subsequent identification as Independent is a “response to the increasingly vitriolic tone of partisan politics in America today” (Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan 2022, p. 148). Because Americans increasingly perceive partisan politics to be nasty and unpleasant, they no longer wish to be seen as partisans. This does not mean that people do not support a party, but rather that they increasingly do not want to express their support. In summary, “people may have preferences for a party... but American politics is leading them away from the *expression* of those partisan preferences” (Klar and Krupnikov 2016, p. 14).

An alternative explanation for the rise of Independents holds that identifying as Independent is rooted in a lack of support for either party. Instrumental partisans’ party identification “reflects agreement with a party’s issue stances, moves in response to leader performance, and reacts to a party’s policy successes and failures” (Huddy, Bankert and Davies 2018, p. 174). In this explanation, most Independents vote similarly to partisans because one party better reflects their beliefs, but identify as Independent because unlike partisans they are largely dissatisfied with their options (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Siev, Rovenpor and Petty 2024). If Independents are primarily driven by instrumental concerns, their behavior is not that of “undercover” partisans who say they are Independent but support one party. Instead, they behave as *reluctant* partisans who do not identify with a party because there is no party they support, but who vote against the party they dislike more.

The two explanations offer different reasons why the majority of Independents say they “lean” towards one of the parties. The expressive explanation holds that the two-part measure of party

identification taps the political preferences of leaners while also capturing their embarrassment with identifying with a party: “Once they have distanced themselves from partisanship in the first question, these people then feel more comfortable admitting their “leanings” – which likely reflect their broader political preferences – in the second part of the partisanship measure” (Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan 2022, p. 149). By contrast, the instrumental explanation sees leaners as people who dislike both parties but dislike one more. Most Independents who say they lean towards one of the parties rate both parties unfavorably, while people who identify as partisans tend to rate one party positively and the other negatively (Lee et al. 2022). Leaners also express more willingness than partisans to vote for a viable third-party candidate (Bowler et al. 2009), implying that their vote choices are more due to a lack of alternative options than covert attachment to a party.

If Independent party identification is largely expressive, then Americans still privately behave like partisans but increasingly publicly retreat from political discussion. This implies that growing polarization endangers public political participation. On the other hand, if Independent party identification is largely instrumental, the main implication is on the health of the American party system. If more and more Americans do not favor either party, that indicates a broader failure of the parties to represent the wishes of Americans.

Hypotheses

I present five hypotheses based on the major explanations proposed for the rise in Independent party identification. All hypotheses are about how an increase in one variable predicts a change in the probability of switching to Independent. This is a strong test of proposed causes of Inde-

pendent party identification. If people are more likely to switch to Independent when their believe politics is embarrassing increases, that supports the expressive explanation. If people are more likely to switch to Independent when they become less favorable towards their party, that supports the instrumental explanation.

The first two hypotheses test Klar and Krupnikov's theory that identifying as an Independent is a "response to the increasingly vitriolic tone of partisan politics in America today" (Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan 2022, p. 148). Based on their theory, I predict that when Americans increase their perception the country is polarized and political discourse is uncivil, they will be more likely to switch to identifying as Independent.

*H*₁: When people increase their perception of how divided politics is, they are more likely to switch to identifying as Independent

*H*₂: When people increase their perception that political discourse is uncivil, they are more likely to switch to identifying as Independent

The final three hypotheses test the instrumental explanation of Independent party identification. If identifying as Independent is driven by evaluations of the parties, then, then people who change to view their party less favorably should be more likely to switch to identify as Independent. I operationalize evaluations of the party in three different ways, based on three dimensions of instrumental party identification: favorability towards the party, favorability towards the party's standard bearer, and favorability towards the party's platform.

*H*₃: When people decrease their favorability towards their party, they are more likely to switch to identifying as Independent

*H*₄: When people decrease their favorability towards their party's presidential nominee, they are more likely to switch to identifying as Independent

*H*₅: When people decrease their perceived agreement with their party's policy positions, they are more likely to switch to identifying as Independent

Data, Measures, and Method

Data comes from an eight-wave panel collected by Amerispeak/NORC at the University of Chicago from October 2016 to November 2022. Respondents were recruited using address-based random sampling. In total, 4,941 respondents participated in at least two waves of the panel. Of those, 1,293 identified as Independent in at least one wave and either Democrat or Republican in another wave. Respondent party identification and perceptions of party division were measured in all eight waves. Perceived civility of political discourse was measured in waves 2-7. Feeling thermometers towards each of the parties were measured in all waves except wave 4. Trump feeling thermometer was measured in all waves. Biden feeling thermometer was measured in the last four waves of the panel, from when he was the front-runner Democratic nominee through the first years of his presidency. Perceived agreement with party platform was measured in waves 3 and 5-8. Details on survey dates, respondents per wave, and response rates are in Appendix A.

Party identification was measured using the standard procedure (Campbell, Gurin and Miller 1954; Rosema and Mayer 2020). Respondents were first asked whether they identified as a Democrat, Republican, or Independent. Respondents who identified with one of the parties were asked whether they identified as a “strong” or “moderate” Democrat/Republican, while those who identified as Independent were then asked whether they “lean” Democrat, Republican, or neither. Because my dependent variable of interest is identifying as Independent, I use the initial question to determine Independent party identification and classify “leaners” as Independents.

Reluctant not Undercover

To measure perceived polarization, I used an index of four questions asking respondents how divided they thought American politics was. To measure perceptions of political civility, I used an index of four questions asking respondents to place the tone of contemporary political discussion between two words, where one word was more civil and the other less civil (for example, asking respondents to mark where political discussion fell on a scale from “rude” to “polite”.) The indexes held together fairly well, with an α of .65 for the perceived polarization index, and an α of .83 for the perceived political civility index.

I operationalize evaluations of the parties in three ways. To measure favorability towards each party and the party’s leader, I used standard 100 point feeling thermometers measuring warmth towards the Democratic party, the Republican party, Trump, and Biden. To determine which party is a respondent’s “in-party” versus “out-party” I use whichever party the respondent rated more highly when they entered the panel. Those who entered the panel rating both parties identically were excluded from analysis. To measure perceived alignment with each party’s policy platform, I used eight questions asking respondents’ policy preference on major political issues: Gun control, immigration, healthcare, trade, taxes, climate change, relations with China, and government aid to minorities. For each issue, respondents were asked not only their own preference, but also where they felt each party stood on the issue. For the set of issues I then took the average distance between the respondent’s preference and their perceptions of where each party stood. This generated two policy disagreement indexes (one for perceived disagreement with policies of the Democratic party and one for perceived disagreement with policies of the Republican party). These indexes had an α of .85 for perceived disagreement with the Republican party and .83 for perceived disagreement with the Democratic party. Question wordings for all measures are in Appendix B.

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To assess the influence of changes in the explanatory variables on the probability of switching to Independent, I used logistic regression with robust standard errors including both wave fixed effects and individual-level fixed effects. To test each hypothesis, I regress identifying as Independent (including “leaning” Democrat or Republican) on the explanatory variable of interest. For each model, Independent party identification is represented as a binary, with a value of “1” if the respondent identifies as Independent (including leaners) and “0” if the respondent identifies as either a Democrat or Republican.

I included individual and wave fixed effects and calculate the odds ratios for each logistic regression. This means the model coefficients represent the predicted probability of *switching to* identifying as Independent given a 1 unit increase in the explanatory variable of interest, relative to the predicted probability of switching to Independent had that variable remained constant (Allison 2009). For ease of comparison, I re-scale all explanatory variables to have a mean of 0 and standard deviation of 1.¹ This means for all variables, a 1 unit increase represents a 1 standard deviation increase. For example, if the coefficient for “Perceived Polarization” was “2”, that would mean that respondents were twice as likely to switch to identifying as an Independent when their perceptions of how divided the country was increased by 1 standard deviation, relative to how likely they were to switch to Independent when their perceptions of how divided the country was did not change.

¹A potential concern here is that while all variables were scaled to have the same standard deviation, individuals may change more on some variables than others. In other words, the *within-subject* variance for some variables may be much smaller than others, even if all variables have the same *between-subject* variance. In Appendix C I follow the recommendation of Mummolo and Peterson (2018) in assessing whether an individual changing one between-subject standard deviation is plausible for each explanatory variable. For all variables, it was common for respondents to a shift one between-subject standard deviation over the course of the panel, meaning the coefficients represent plausible within-person change.

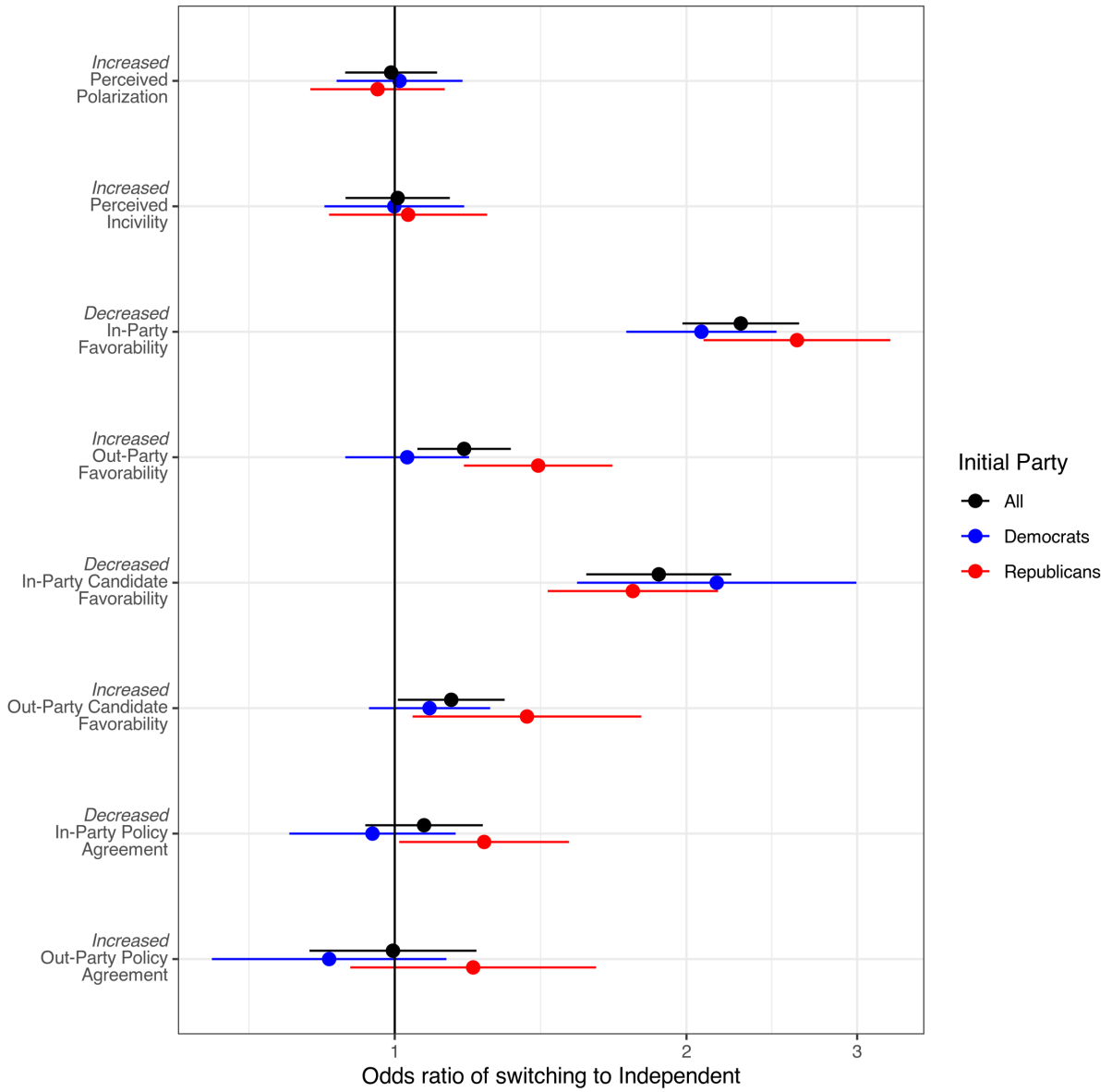
Results

Figure 1 shows the coefficients for each explanatory variable tested. Points represent the probability of switching to Independent given an increase of 1 standard deviation in the variable of interest, relative to the probability of switching to Independent if that variable remained constant. The black points are estimates using the entire sample. To test for potential party heterogeneity in factors leading people to identify as Independent (e.g. Klar, Krupnikov and Ryan 2022), the red and blue points represent estimates from the subset of respondents who initially rated the Republican party or Democratic party more favorably when they entered the panel. Regression tables for all models used to create the figure are in Appendix D.

I do not find support for the expressive explanation for identifying as Independent. Whether measured as perceptions of disagreement (H_1) or perceptions of vitriol (H_2), increasing perceptions of political division were not a significant predictor of switching to Independent. Therefore, I fail to find support for H_1 or H_2 .

By contrast, I find strong support for the instrumental explanation for identifying as Independent. Decreasing favorability towards one's preferred party was an extremely strong predictor of switching to Independent (H_3). A respondent who decreased their in-party favorability by one standard deviation was 2.28 times as likely to switch to Independent relative to those who did not change their party favorability ($p < .001$). A respondent who increased out-party favorability by one standard deviation was 1.18 times as likely to switch to Independent ($p < .01$). While this relationship was statistically significant, it was much weaker than in-party favorability and was driven entirely by Republican sentiment towards the Democratic party. This result supports the idea that identifying as Independent is caused by dissatisfaction with both political parties; peo-

Reluctant not Undercover



Points represent odds ratios for switching party identification to Independent given a one-standard deviation increase in the independent variable of interest. Bars represent 95% confidence intervals. X axis is on log scale.

Figure 1: Predicted Likelihood of Switching to Independent

ple tend to switch to Independent when they change to view their preferred party more negatively rather than when they change to view the other party more positively.

Similarly, decreasing favorability towards the party standard bearer strongly predicted switching to identifying as Independent (H_4). A 1 standard deviation decrease in favorability towards one's party's candidate predicted a respondent was 1.87 times as likely to switch to Independent. Increased favorability towards the other party's candidate predicted a respondent was 1.14 times as likely to switch to Independent ($p < .05$).

Finally, decreasing agreement with one's party's policy positions only partially predicted switching to Independent (H_5). A one standard deviation decrease in perceived agreement with a respondent's party's policies predicted the respondent was 1.07 times as likely to switch to Independent. For respondents who initially favored the Republican party, a one standard deviation decrease predicted they were 1.21 times as likely to switch to Independent ($p < .05$). It is not clear why policy disagreement predicted switching to identifying as Independent for Republicans but not Democrats. Perceptions of disagreement with the out-party did not significantly predict switching to identifying as Independent. Overall, perceived issue agreement with a party appears to play a weaker role in identifying as Independent than favorability towards either a party or its standard bearer.

Discussion

These results demonstrate that the primary driver of identifying as Independent is favorability towards one's own party, the standard bearer of the party, and to a lesser extent the policy platform of the party. That does not mean that expressive motivations play *no* role in identifying as Inde-

pendent; while I did not find a significant relationship between expressive motivations and party identification, such a relationship might be detectable with a larger sample or over a longer time period. However, any role expressive motivations play is much smaller than the role of instrumental motivations.

An optimistic interpretation of these findings might see them as evidence of citizen competence, where people base their party identification on evaluations of the parties rather than blind loyalty. However, the fact that negative evaluations of one's own party are more predictive than positive evaluations of the other party speaks against the idea that people are becoming Independents because they are drawn to the other party. The question of why the parties have become less popular is a topic for future work. Possible explanations include lower-quality candidates running due to the devaluing of political office (Hall 2019), the growing nationalization of politics meaning parties are less able to cater to local concerns (Hopkins 2018), or rising elite polarization alienating moderate voters (Groenendyk, Sances and Zhirkov 2020).

This work studies changes in party identification among the same group of individuals over time, but I do not examine changes in cohort replacement over time. If growing identification as Independent is primarily driven by young people being less attached to parties than older Americans (Dalton 2002), this paper cannot detect that. However, even if cohort replacement plays a large role in the rise of Independents, this paper demonstrates that young people failing to join a party is likely based on unhappiness with the parties rather than an expressive desire to distance themselves from party labels.

As of May 2024, one-quarter of Americans viewed both Trump and Biden negatively. This was the highest proportion of Americans who disliked both presidential candidates in at least 30 years (Gracia and Copeland 2024). The growing number of Independents are another troubling

Reluctant not Undercover

sign that Americans are increasingly unhappy with their political options.

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Appendices

Contents

A	Panel Information	2
A.1	Wave Statistics	2
A.2	Change in Party Identification Over Time	2
B	Measures	4
B.1	Party Identification	4
B.2	Perceived Political Polarization	4
B.3	Perceived Political Discourse Civility	4
B.4	Party Favorability	5
B.5	Party Leader Favorability	5
B.6	Perceived Policy Agreement	5
B.6.1	Gun Control	5
B.6.2	Immigration	6
B.6.3	Healthcare	6
B.6.4	Trade	6
B.6.5	Taxes	7
B.6.6	Climate Change	7
B.6.7	Relations with China	8
B.6.8	Helping Minorities	8
C	Testing Plausibility of Within-Subject Change	10
D	Regression Tables for Figure 1	11

A Panel Information

A.1 Wave Statistics

Table 1 shows the wave dates, number of respondents, and the cumulative response rate (CUMRR2). This rate was calculated by NORC based on the rates of recruitment, completion, and retention for each panel wave (Callegaro and DiSogra 2008). New respondents were recruited and added to the panel in all waves except wave 6. Because the analysis in the paper examines individual-level change over time, respondents who only appeared in a single wave dropped out of the models.

Wave	Survey Dates	Num. Respondents	Cumulative Response Rate
1	10/14/2016-10/31/2016	3214	60.4%
2	7/14/2017-8/1/2017	3152	60.1%
3	10/10/2018-11/14/2018	3202	53.7%
4	6/7/2019-7/5/2019	3419	62.0%
5	2/12/2020-3/30/2020	3502	70.9%
6	10/6/2020-10/30/2020	3053	75.5%
7	4/6/2021-5/17/2021	3058	90.5%
8	10/12/2022-11/7/2022	4357	65.0%

Table 1: Panel Information by Wave

A.2 Change in Party Identification Over Time

I summarize how party identification changed through the course of the panel in Figure 2. The figure shows the number of panel respondents who identify as Democrats, Republicans, or Independents in each panel wave. The flows indicate how respondents changed from one wave to another, with the width of each flow indicating how many respondents changed in a particular direction between two waves. As expected, respondents were most likely to continue identifying with the same party between waves. Among the respondents who did change party, they were much more likely to switch from partisan to Independent or vice versa than they were to switch from Democrat to Republican or Republican to Democrat.

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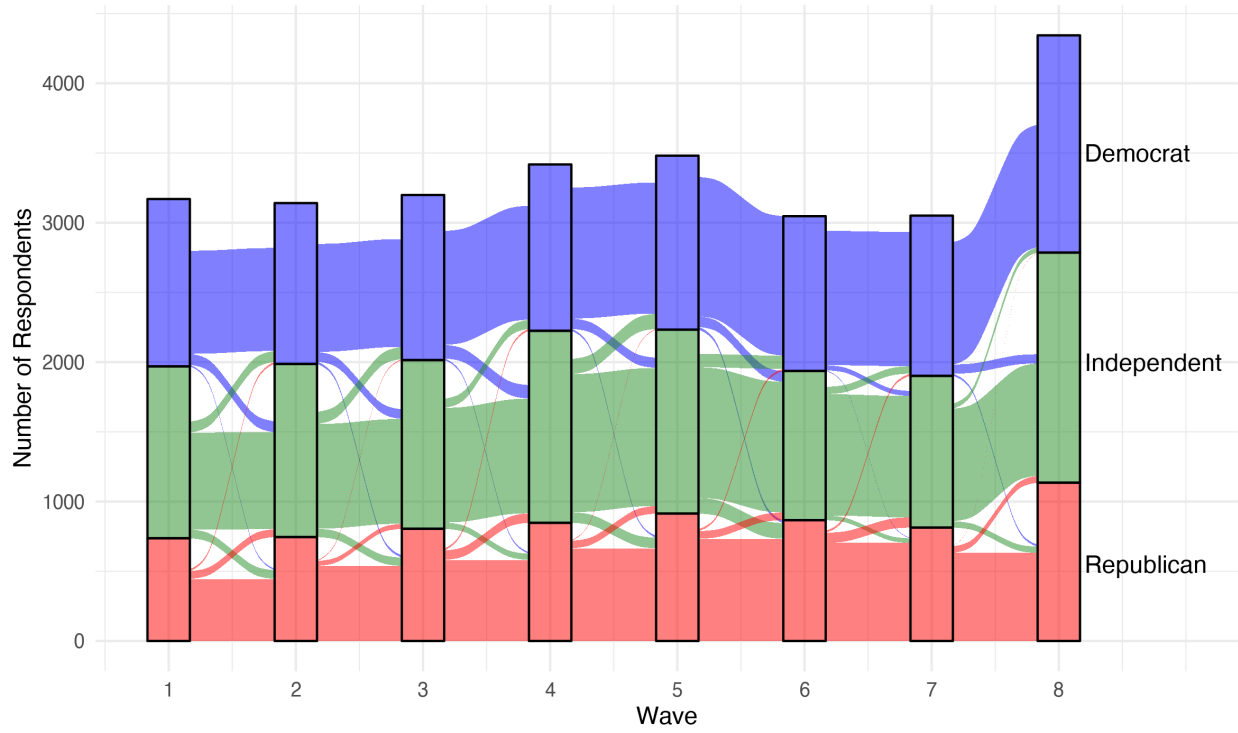


Figure 2: Number of respondents by party in each panel wave

B Measures

B.1 Party Identification

- “Do you consider yourself a Democrat, a Republican, an independent or none of these?” [Democrat, Republican, Independent, None of these]
- (If Democrat) “Do you consider yourself a strong or moderate Democrat?” [Strong Democrat, Moderate Democrat]
- (If Republican) “Do you consider yourself a strong or moderate Republican?” [Strong Republican, Moderate Republican]
- (If Independent or None of these) “Do you lean more toward the Democrats or the Republicans?” [Lean Democrat, Don’t Lean, Lean Republican, Other]

B.2 Perceived Political Polarization

To measure perceived political polarization, I use an index of the following four measures (α .65). Questions 3 and 4 were reverse coded so higher values represent greater perceptions of polarization:

- “How politically divided are Americans these days?” [Not at all divided, Somewhat divided, Very divided, Extremely divided]
- “How much agreement is there between the policies that Republican and Democratic voters want these days?” [A great deal of agreement, Some agreement, Very little agreement, No agreement at all]
- “Some people say the American public is extremely polarized politically these days, while others think this is not really true. Which statement best describes your view of the American public?” [Americans are extremely polarized, Americans are somewhat polarized, Americans are not very polarized, American are not at all polarized]
- “More and more Americans have extreme views these days. Do you...” [Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree]

B.3 Perceived Political Discourse Civility

To measure perceptions of the civility of political discourse that a respondent sees on the news, I used the following index asking respondents to place their feelings on a set of 1-10 scales. I made an index based on the extent to which a respondent viewed political discussion as civil (α .83):

“Based on what you have seen, how would you describe the general tone of political discussions in the news these days? The closer your mark is to one of the two words at opposite ends of the scale, the more strongly you feel that word describes the tone.”

- Rude – Polite
- Friendly – Hostile
- Agitated – Calm
- Cooperative – Quarrelsome

B.4 Party Favorability

Party feeling thermometers were asked in random order.

- “Please rate the [Republican Party/Democratic Party] on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Rating above 50 means that you feel favorable and warm, and rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool. Even if you would like to rate the [Republican Party/Democratic Party] at 0, please click the button to make sure your response is recorded properly.”
- “Now please rate the [Democratic Party/Republican Party] on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Rating above 50 means that you feel favorable and warm, and rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool. Even if you would like to rate the [Democratic Party/Republican Party] at 0, please click the button to make sure your response is recorded properly.”

B.5 Party Leader Favorability

- “Please rate Donald Trump on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Rating above 50 means that you feel favorable and warm, and rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool. Even if you would like to rate Donald Trump at 0, please click the button to make sure your response is recorded properly.”
- “Please rate Joe Biden on a thermometer that runs from 0 to 100 degrees. Rating above 50 means that you feel favorable and warm, and rating below 50 means that you feel unfavorable and cool. Even if you would like to rate Joe Biden at 0, please click the button to make sure your response is recorded properly.”

B.6 Perceived Policy Agreement

Different sets of policy questions were asked in different waves. In each wave, I measured a respondent’s average distance between each party for the questions asked in that wave.

B.6.1 Gun Control

Measured in waves 5, 6, 7, and 8

- “Should gun ownership laws be made stricter, less strict, or kept about the same?” [Much more strict, A little more strict, Kept about the same, A little less strict, Much less strict]
- “Where do you think the Republican Party stands on this issue?” [The Republican Party favors laws on gun ownership that are much more strict, The Republican Party favors laws on gun ownership that are a little more strict, The Republican Party favors keeping laws on gun ownership about the same, The Republican Party favors laws on gun ownership that are a little less strict, The Republican Party favors laws on gun ownership that are much less strict]
- “How about the Democratic Party? Where do you think the Democratic Party stands on this issue?” [The Democratic Party favors laws on gun ownership that are much more strict, The Democratic Party favors laws on gun ownership that are a little more strict, The Democratic Party favors keeping laws on gun ownership about the same, The Democratic Party

favors laws on gun ownership that are a little less strict, The Democratic Party favors laws on gun ownership that are much less strict]

B.6.2 Immigration

Measured in waves 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8.

- “Please indicate whether you favor or oppose each of the following proposals addressing immigration: Provide a path to citizenship for some illegal aliens.” [Strongly favor, Somewhat favor, Neither favor nor oppose, Somewhat oppose, Strongly oppose]
- “How about the Republican Party? Do they favor or oppose providing a path to citizenship for some illegal aliens?” [Republicans strongly favor providing a path to citizenship, Republicans somewhat favor providing a path to citizenship, Republicans neither favor nor oppose providing a path to citizenship, Republicans somewhat oppose providing a path to citizenship, Republicans strongly oppose providing a path to citizenship]
- “How about the Democratic Party? Do they favor or oppose providing a path to citizenship for some illegal aliens?” [Democrats strongly favor providing a path to citizenship, Democrats somewhat favor providing a path to citizenship, Democrats neither favor nor oppose providing a path to citizenship, Democrats somewhat oppose providing a path to citizenship, Democrats strongly oppose providing a path to citizenship]

B.6.3 Healthcare

Measured in waves 5 and 6

- “In your opinion, which is the best way for our country to handle healthcare? Should we...” [Eliminate the Affordable Care Act and have private healthcare only, Keep the Affordable Care Act as currently modified, Keep the Affordable Care Act but provide the option of choosing government-run healthcare, Eliminate private healthcare and switch to government-run healthcare only]
- “Where do you think the Republican Party stands on this issue? Which of these options comes closest to how the Republican Party thinks we should handle healthcare?” [Eliminate the Affordable Care Act and have private healthcare only, Keep the Affordable Care Act as currently modified, Keep the Affordable Care Act but provide the option of choosing government-run healthcare, Eliminate private healthcare and switch to government-run healthcare only]
- “Where do you think the Democratic Party stands on this issue? Which of these options comes closest to how the Democratic Party thinks we should handle healthcare?” [Eliminate the Affordable Care Act and have private healthcare only, Keep the Affordable Care Act as currently modified, Keep the Affordable Care Act but provide the option of choosing government-run healthcare, Eliminate private healthcare and switch to government-run healthcare only]

B.6.4 Trade

Measured in waves 3, 5, 6, and 8

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- “Do you favor or oppose the federal government in Washington negotiating more free trade agreements?” [Strongly favor, Somewhat favor, Neither favor nor oppose, Somewhat oppose, Strongly oppose]
- “Where do you think the Republican Party stands on the issue of trade agreements? Do they favor or oppose the federal government in Washington negotiating more free trade agreements?” [Republicans strongly favor more free trade agreements, Republicans somewhat favor more free trade agreements, Republicans neither favor nor oppose more free trade agreements, Republicans somewhat oppose more free trade agreements, Republicans strongly oppose more free trade agreements]
- “How about the Democratic Party? Do they favor or oppose the federal government in Washington negotiating more free trade agreements?” [Democrats strongly favor more free trade agreements, Democrats somewhat favor more free trade agreements, Democrats neither favor nor oppose more free trade agreements, Democrats somewhat oppose more free trade agreements, Democrats strongly oppose more free trade agreements]

B.6.5 Taxes

Measured in waves 6, 7, and 8

- “Please tell us how much you agree or disagree with each of the following statements: Federal taxes should be cut, even if it means cutting back on government programs and services.” [Strongly agree, Somewhat agree, Neither agree nor disagree, Somewhat disagree, Strongly disagree]
- “Where do you think the Republican Party stands on taxes? Do Republicans favor or oppose cutting federal taxes, even if it means cutting back on government programs and services?” [Republicans strongly favor cutting federal taxes, Republicans somewhat favor cutting federal taxes, Republicans neither favor nor oppose cutting federal taxes, Republicans somewhat oppose cutting federal taxes, Republicans strongly oppose cutting federal taxes]
- “How about the Democratic Party? Do Democrats favor or oppose cutting federal taxes, even if it means cutting back on government programs and services? Do Democrats favor or oppose cutting federal taxes?” [Democrats strongly favor cutting federal taxes, Democrats somewhat favor cutting federal taxes, Democrats neither favor nor oppose cutting federal taxes, Democrats somewhat oppose cutting federal taxes, Democrats strongly oppose cutting federal taxes]

B.6.6 Climate Change

Measured in waves 5, 6, and 8

- “Do you personally believe that climate change is a threat to the well-being of people in the United States?” [Definitely believe, Somewhat believe, Somewhat don’t believe, Definitely don’t believe]
- “Where do you think the Republican Party stands on the issue of whether climate change is a threat to the well-being of people in the United States?” [The Republican Party believes that climate change is definitely not a threat to our country, The Republican Party believes that climate change is only a minor threat to our country, The Republican Party believes

that climate change is a significant threat to our country, The Republican Party believes that climate change is one of the greatest threats facing our country]

- “How about the Democratic Party? Where do you think the Democratic Party stands on the issue of whether climate change is a threat to the well-being of people in the United States?” [The Democratic Party believes that climate change is definitely not a threat to our country, The Democratic Party believes that climate change is only a minor threat to our country, The Democratic Party believes that climate change is a significant threat to our country, The Democratic Party believes that climate change is one of the greatest threats facing our country]

B.6.7 Relations with China

Measured in waves 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8

- “These days there are different views about China. Some people see China as more of an opportunity for new markets and economic investment, while others see it as a threat to our jobs and security. Still others are somewhere in between. Which view is closer to your own?” [China is an opportunity for new markets and investment, China is a threat to U.S. jobs and security, Somewhere in between]
- (If opportunity) “Do you feel strongly that China is an opportunity for new markets and investment, or only somewhat that China is an opportunity for new markets and investment? [Strongly, Somewhat]
- (If threat) “Do you feel strongly that China is a threat to our jobs and security, or only somewhat that China is a threat to our jobs and security? [Strongly, Somewhat]
- “Where would you place the Republican Party on this scale? Do they feel China is more of an opportunity or a threat?” [Republicans feel strongly that China is an opportunity for new markets, Republicans feel somewhat that China is an opportunity for new markets, Republicans are somewhere in between these positions, Republicans feel somewhat that China is a threat to US jobs and security, Republicans feel strongly that China is a threat to US jobs and security]
- “How about the Democratic Party? Do they feel China is more of an opportunity or a threat?” [Democrats feel strongly that China is an opportunity for new markets, Democrats feel somewhat that China is an opportunity for new markets, Democrats are somewhere in between these positions, Democrats feel somewhat that China is a threat to US jobs and security, Democrats feel strongly that China is a threat to US jobs and security]

B.6.8 Helping Minorities

Measured in waves 3, 5, 6, 7, and 8

- “Some people feel that the government in Washington should make every effort to improve the social and economic position of blacks and other minority groups. Others feel that the government should not make any special effort to help minorities. Where would you place yourself on this scale?” [Strongly favor the government making every effort to help minority groups, Somewhat favor the government making every effort to help minority groups, Neither favor nor oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups,

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Somewhat oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups, Strongly oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups]

- “Where would you place the Republican Party on this scale? Do they favor or oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups?” [Republicans strongly favor the government making every effort to help minority groups, Republicans somewhat favor the government making every effort to help minority groups, Republicans neither favor nor oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups, Republicans somewhat oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups, Republicans strongly oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups]
- “Where would you place the Democratic Party on this scale? Do they favor or oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups?” [Democrats strongly favor the government making every effort to help minority groups, Democrats somewhat favor the government making every effort to help minority groups, Democrats neither favor nor oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups, Democrats somewhat oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups, Democrats strongly oppose the government making every effort to help minority groups]

C Testing Plausibility of Within-Subject Change

To compare the explanatory power of different variables, in Figure 1 I convert all of them to have the same mean and standard deviation. However, even though this standardizes between-subject variation some may vary far more within-subject than others. For some variables, many people may shift one or more between-subject standard deviations over the course of the panel, while for other variables, such a shift may be highly implausible.

In this section, I test whether the counterfactual of a one standard deviation change is plausible for all explanatory variables using the approach of Mummolo and Peterson (2018). In Figure 3 I show the distribution of within-person ranges for each explanatory variable, in terms of between-subject standard errors. In other words, for each respondent, what is the difference between their maximum and minimum response for each variable over the course of the panel? And how does this compare to the counterfactual presented in Figure 1 of a change of one standard deviation?

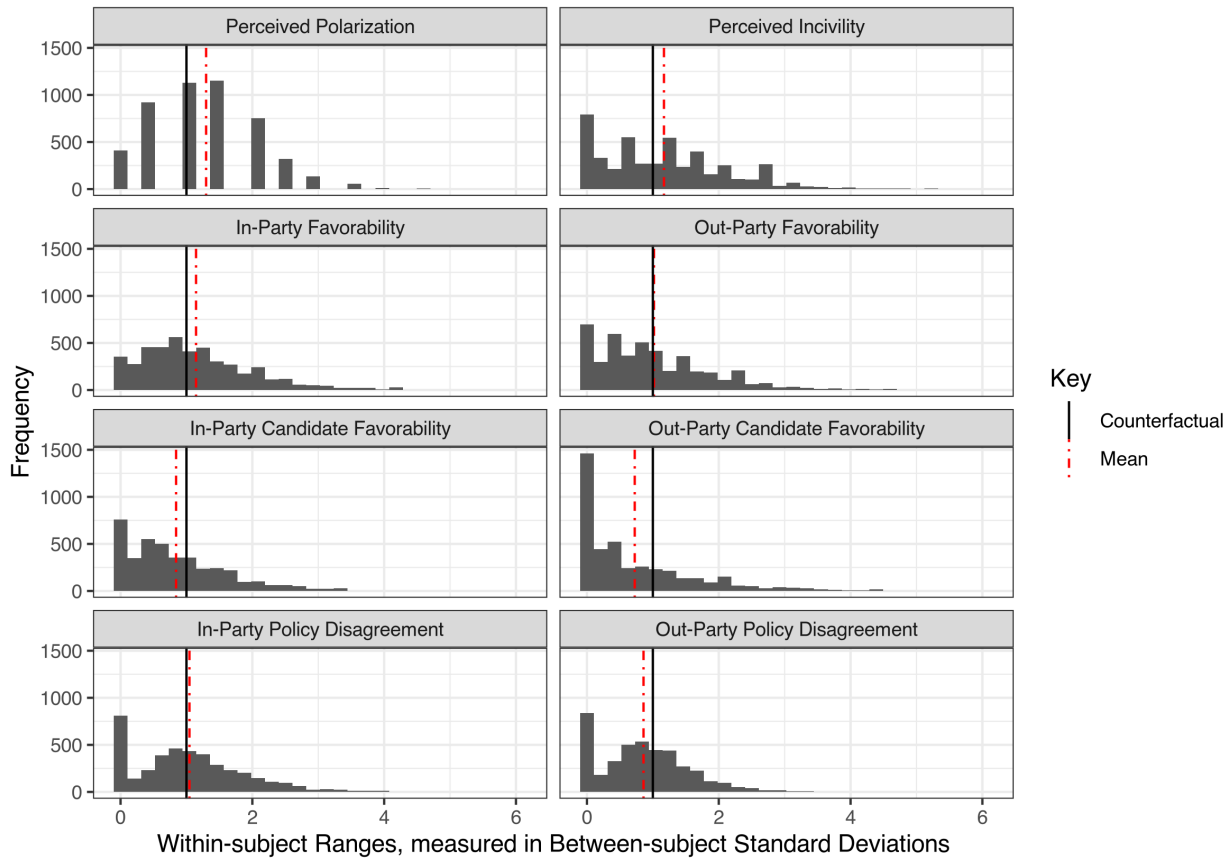


Figure 3: Distribution of Within-subject Ranges for All Explanatory Variables

As Figure 3 demonstrates, for all variables many respondents change one between-subject standard deviation or more over the course of the panel. This means that the coefficients in Figure 1 are reasonable estimates of real-world behavior.

D Regression Tables for Figure 1

In Tables 2, 3, and 4, I show the regression tables used to construct Figure 1. Note that these are the raw coefficients, not the odds ratios displayed in the figure. I show three tables. The first shows coefficients among all respondents; the second shows coefficients among those who initially favored the Democratic Party; and the third shows coefficients among those who initially favored the Republican Party.

Reluctant not Undercover

	Perceived Polarization	Perceived Discourse Civility	In-party Unfavorability	Out-party Favorability	In-Party Candidate Unfavorability	Out-Party Candidate Favorability	In-Party Policy Disagreement	Out-Party Policy Agreement
Perceived Polarization	-0.009							
	(0.056)							
Perceived Discourse Civility		0.007						
		(0.063)						
In-Party Favorability (Reversed)			0.822***					
			(0.071)					
Out-Party Favorability				0.165**				
				(0.057)				
In-Party Candidate Favorability (Reversed)					0.627***			
					(0.088)			
Out-Party Candidate Favorability						0.134*		
						(0.065)		
In-Party Policy Disagreement							0.070	
							(0.071)	
Out-Party Policy Disagreement (Reversed)								-0.004
								(0.101)
Num.Obs.	5876	3759	4706	4637	3545	4216	2795	2803
FE: wave	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: ID	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 2: Raw Coefficients for Figure 1, All Respondents

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	Perceived Polarization	Perceived Discourse Civility	In-party Unfavorability	Out-party Favorability	In-Party Candidate Unfavorability	Out-Party Candidate Favorability	In-Party Policy Disagreement	Out-Party Policy Agreement
Perceived Polarization	0.011							
	(0.076)							
Perceived Discourse Civility		-0.001						
		(0.085)						
In-Party Favorability (Reversed)			0.729***					
			(0.091)					
Out-Party Favorability				0.030				
				(0.075)				
In-Party Candidate Favorability (Reversed)					0.765***			
					(0.169)			
Out-Party Candidate Favorability						0.083		
						(0.073)		
In-Party Policy Disagreement							-0.053	
							(0.101)	
Out-Party Policy Disagreement (Reversed)								-0.156
								(0.142)
Num.Obs.	3383	2150	2703	2666	986	3368	1570	1573
FE: wave	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: ID	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 3: Raw Coefficients for Figure 1, Respondents who Initially Favored the Democratic Party

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	Perceived Polarization	Perceived Discourse Civility	In-party Unfavorability	Out-party Favorability	In-Party Candidate Unfavorability	Out-Party Candidate Favorability	In-Party Policy Disagreement	Out-Party Policy Agreement
Perceived Polarization	-0.041							
	(0.081)							
Perceived Discourse Civility		0.032						
		(0.096)						
In-Party Favorability (Reversed)			0.956***					
			(0.113)					
Out-Party Favorability				0.341***				
				(0.090)				
In-Party Candidate Favorability (Reversed)					0.566***			
					(0.103)			
Out-Party Candidate Favorability						0.314*		
						(0.139)		
In-Party Policy Disagreement							0.212*	
							(0.103)	
Out-Party Policy Disagreement (Reversed)								0.186
								(0.149)
Num.Obs.	2493	1609	2003	1971	2559	848	1225	1230
FE: wave	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
FE: ID	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 4: Raw Coefficients for Figure 1, Respondents who Initially Favored the Republican Party