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The importance of attachment to an ideological group in multi-party systems: Evidence from Israel

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Abstract

In this research, we examine the role of attachment to an ideological group as a source of stability in a volatile multi-party system. In two studies conducted in Israel ($N = 1320$), we show that a multi-item Attachment to an Ideological Group (AIG) scale is strongly tied to vote choice and political engagement, and its effects are independent of, and more powerful than, issue-based ideology and partisan identity strength. Compared to individuals with a weak ideological attachment, those who score highly on the AIG scale are more likely to vote for a party from their ideological camp and participate in politics. Moreover, in two survey experiments, respondents high in AIG displayed stronger anger or enthusiasm—known harbingers of political action—in response to threat or reassurance to their ideological group's status, attesting to a link between AIG and political engagement. Our findings underscore the importance of ideological group attachments in a volatile multi-party system.

Introduction

Party dealignment and electoral volatility have taken hold in a number of contemporary multi-party political systems. Across Western Europe, new parties have achieved unprecedented success whereas many traditional governing parties have hit record lows (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). Such electoral volatility can be traced to ineffective leadership, or to unresponsive mainstream parties that impel voters to switch parties or abandon partisan allegiances, especially in times of social, political, or economic change. In political contexts characterized by partisan dealignment and an absence of stable partisan attachments, the burning question is how voters make sense of politics (Bustikova, 2009).

In the absence of partisan attachment, what provides an anchor for voters' political decision making? What motivates their engagement in the democratic process? We propose that, as a viable alternative to partisan attachment, left-right ideology can bring stability to a volatile multi-party system. In this research, we examine whether identification with the political left or right, defined here as a "social identity," predicts vote choice and political engagement. It is well known that most vote switching in a multi-party system takes place within ideological blocs (e.g., Rahat et al., 2016). We examine whether this stability is grounded in issue positions or in ideological group attachments.

A burgeoning literature demonstrates that emotional and psychological attachments to an ideological group, an

"ideological identity," helps to shape political behaviors and vote choice (e.g., Huddy et al., 2015; Mason, 2018). Thus far, such effects have been demonstrated mostly in the American two-party system. No study of European multi-party systems has specifically examined the existence and ramifications of ideological identities. Yet, a comprehensive investigation is in order: If an effect parallel to the one found in a two-party system is obtained in multi-party systems, our overall understanding of politics and public opinion will be greatly enhanced. This article endeavors to shed light on this issue.

Specifically, the article examines whether voters' attachment to an ideological group predicts their political behavior and attitudes in Israel, a multi-party system characterized by intense ideological competition and party instability. Relying on two studies ($N = 1320$), we demonstrate that *Attachment to an Ideological Group (AIG)* strongly predicts Israelis' vote choice and political participation. We employ two vignette experiments in which respondents were exposed to either threatening or reassuring information regarding the status of their ideological group, to support our claim that *AIG* conditions emotional reactions. Defensive emotional reactions are precursors of political participation and provide further evidence of the link between a strong ideological identity and political engagement (Huddy et al., 2015). Our findings provide strong support for the contention that, irrespective of the strength of one's issue-based ideology, attachment to an ideological group is a strong predictor of voters' political judgment and behavior in multi-party systems. Our findings shed light on the underpinnings of voters' ideological loyalty and attendant actions to protect and strengthen the status of their respective ideological camps. We argue that ideological group attachments help to structure political behavior and attitudes in ways that promote ideological stability and mitigate voter destabilization within volatile multi-party systems.

Left-right ideology in multi-party systems

Ideology, commonly referred to as a "system of beliefs" (Converse, 1964), has been shown to structure voters' political perceptions and issue positions (e.g., Van der Eijk et al., 2005), as well as organize party groupings in the political space and guide voters' expectations regarding the likelihood of political alliances (e.g., Fortunato et al., 2016).

Traditionally, the left-right ideological spectrum has been analyzed as either a one- or two-dimensional continuum representing a broad worldview captured by positions regarding several key economic, social, and cultural issues (e.g., Bølstad and Dinas, 2017; de Vries et al., 2013). In the United States two-party system, conservative-liberal ideological self-placement predicts issue-based voting, especially among those with high

levels of political knowledge (Kalmoe, 2020; see also Freeder et al., 2019). In many European multi-party systems, left-right ideological self-placement is considered a strong force in politics. Indeed, the left-right continuum is often referred to as a "super-issue"; it is considered "one of the most important dimensions to describe voters' substantive political orientations"; and has been shown in research to be "one of the most important factors that determine European voters' choices at the ballot box" (van der Eijk et al., 2005: 166; de Vries et al., 2013).

However, scholars have suggested that the left-right division extends beyond ideology and issue preferences. Left versus right, or liberal versus conservative, ideological affiliations also reflect group affinities that carry considerable affective significance for voters, in both the United States and Europe (e.g., Conover and Feldman, 1981; Freire, 2008). More recently, it has been suggested that ideology also has an *identity*-based component (e.g., Mason, 2018): Voters' political behavior and attitudes are affected by their attachment to and identification with members of their respective ideological groups. Findings from this burgeoning literature are elaborated in the next section.

Attachment to an ideological group in multi-party systems

In recent years, scholars have distinguished between two separate components of ideology: issue-based ideology, on the one hand, and identity-based, or symbolic, ideology on the other (Devine, 2015; Ellis and Stimson, 2012; Mason, 2018). The former represents ideology as a coherent set of issue positions, while the latter is anchored in social identity and reflects one's attachment to an ideological group and its members. Ideology can thus be conceptualized as a set of substantive policy preferences as well as a social identity, and these two notions can be separated, both theoretically and empirically.

The case for "identity-based ideology" rests on voters' attachment to, and social identification with, an ideological group, in keeping with the fundamental human tendency to identify with social groups. Social categorization theory posits that people organize reality by classifying objects into groups according to salient characteristics (Turner et al., 1987). In social contexts, in- and out-group categories are highly meaningful and shape the perception and evaluation of others (Turner et al., 1987). In a political context, the labels "left" and "right" designate, for many citizens, who is "us" and who is "them" (Devine, 2015; Mason, 2018). It has been demonstrated, moreover, that voters' knowledge of their political camp is acquired in the early stages of socialization and often becomes entrenched in their cognition and psyche (Green et al., 2002).

Thus far, studies on ideological group attachment have focused almost exclusively on the American two-party political arena (but see Pickup et al., 2021). We build on the existing research and apply it to a multi-party context. We contend that a deep sense of attachment and belonging to an ideological group in multi-party systems has a strong and independent effect on political judgments and behavior, giving rise to various forms of in-group loyalty. Such ideological attachments also anchor vote choice in contexts where partisanship, typically a stabilizing force, is weak because of a changed, unstable, or unresponsive party structure (Rahat et al., 2016).

Ideological groups or party blocs are important components of multi-party systems. They are characterized by stable cooperation among allied parties, which often form pre-electoral coalitions for the purpose of winning governing power. It is also well documented that volatile voters tend to switch between parties that are ideologically similar, but are far less likely to support a party from another ideological camp (e.g., Rahat et al., 2016). It follows that loyal political behavior and attitudes are predicted not only by the strength of agreement with a specific set of ideological issue stances—which in various multi-party systems will be important for many voters—but also by their subjective attachment to an ideological group: the stronger the attachment, the stronger the motivation to act in the group's interests.

We test the link between attachment to an ideological group and voters' electoral choice and political engagement, which we regard as two forms of loyal in-group behavior, in Israel—where, as shown below, ideological stances and policy preferences are strong predictors of vote choice. Hence, Israeli society makes for a strong test case in which to study the importance of attachment to an ideological group for political attitudes and voting patterns. At the same time, Israel has a highly fragmented multi-party system where party structure is constantly changing, and parties are weakening (Rahat et al., 2016). This volatility makes Israel a fitting case to examine whether ideological group attachments anchor political behavior. It also marks the boundaries of our analysis, a point that we discuss further in the conclusion.

Left-right ideology in Israel

Since its independence, Israel's political life has been structured by the left-right ideological division over the country's relations with its neighboring Arab states, and later, over the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (Arian and Shamir, 2001). Unlike many other democracies, in Israel the left-right ideological axis is salient mainly with respect to security and foreign affairs: Those on the left (or "doves") are generally supportive of territorial compromises intended to advance peace agreements with the neighboring Arab countries and the Palestinians, while those on the right ("hawks") tend to favor a more forceful stance which foregrounds security and the need to deter potential enemies (Shamir and Arian, 1999).

Over the years, Israel has been involved in numerous armed conflicts and has suffered several periods of deadly terror attacks. In such a reality, it stands to reason that the division along the left-right, hawkish–dovish ideological lines should be substantive and relevant for many Israelis. Indeed, Israel has been portrayed as "a polity that is highly ideological, where ideology is widely thought to play an important role, and where ideological discourse is strong […] Israeli politics, its parties, and its public have often been described as highly ideological by political and social observers" (Arian and Shamir, 1983: 143).

That said, it is somewhat surprising that Israelis' self-reported ideological orientations are not fully aligned with their issue positions regarding the Israeli–Palestinian conflict (a situation that holds in other contexts as well; see Ellis and Stimson, 2012). For example, data from the 2015 Israel National Election Study (INES)[1] show that roughly 25% of Jewish Israelis identifying as "right" or "moderate right" support the establishment of a Palestinian state and handing over Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem to Palestinian control, while 25% of Jewish Israelis identifying as "left" or "moderate left" think it is not possible to reach a peace agreement with the Palestinians.[2]

These results suggest that ideological labels in Israel are not fully coterminous with issue positions on the conflict. Accordingly, while Israelis' left-right ideological self-placement is a powerful predictor of the vote, as well as other political behaviors and attitudes (e.g., Shamir and Arian, 1999), Israel also provides a rich ground for testing the impact of ideological group attachment on political attitudes and behavior, above and beyond issue-based ideology and policy preferences.

Attachment to an ideological group in Israel: Our argument

We contend that, in Israel, the "left" and "right" ideological labels also capture distinct *social identities*, which affect political behavior: The left-right political division in Israel overlaps with major social cleavages such as secular-religious, Ashkenazi-Sephardic, and geographical center-periphery divides (Shamir and Arian, 1999). This patterning gives rise to stereotypes regarding citizens who support either the right- or the left-wing ideological party bloc. Combined with parental and communal socialization, such generalizations help people understand which political *qua* social group they are closer to, and wish to be part of (e.g., Green et al., 2002). Scholars have

established that group identities grow more cohesive and salient when multiple identity dimensions reinforce rather than cut across one another (e.g., Roccas and Brewer, 2002). Our case is rendered even more robust, however, owing to Israelis' tendency to identify less with a particular political party than with an ideological camp as a whole (Arian and Shamir, 2001).

Consider a hypothetical Israeli citizen who identifies with the ideological right and regards her membership in that political camp as an important aspect of her self-concept. That person's political behavior will differ substantially from those of a compatriot who identifies with the ideological left. The discrepancy in political behavior stems not only from their divergent policy preferences, that is, their issue-based ideology. They also emanate from their affinities with differing ideological, religious, ethnic, and other social groups. It is no coincidence that, during electoral campaigns, public figures and political elites in Israel routinely target the socio-cultural groups comprising a specific ideological group. Furthermore, as a strategy to garner the support of the in-group, elites often denigrate their ideological rivals as being part of an inferior socio-cultural group (Amiran, 2015). In light of the above, we set forth several testable hypotheses.

Our first two hypotheses relate to political participation and vote choice, which we consider as two aspects of loyalty to an ideological group. Israel is a multi-party system in which dozens of parties compete in each election. Many of these parties diverge substantially in terms of their ideological positions, a reality that does not escape voters' attention (e.g., Bargsted and Kedar, 2009), and in all probability affects their vote choice.

However, Israelis' voting decisions are also likely to be affected by their attachment to an ideological group. A strong attachment to a group creates an impetus to conform with its norms (Huddy, 2001; Malka and Lelkes, 2010). Thus, an Israeli who feels strongly attached to, say, the ideological right, might feel compelled to vote for a party from the right-wing bloc even if her issue-based ideology is more congruent with the platform of a centrist party. In voting for the right-wing party bloc, this individual conforms to the norms of her in-group, signals support for that group, and increases its chances of winning the election. The choice of a particular party within one's preferred ideological bloc might depend, up to a point, on specific ideological considerations or idiosyncratic preferences (see Bølstad and Dinas, 2017). At the same time, voting for a party from another ideological bloc, or even abstaining, would be deemed as failing one's in-group and violating its norms. Hence, we hypothesize that:[3]

H1: The stronger one's attachment to an ideological group, the more one is likely to vote for a party

from one's ideological party bloc regardless of the strength of one's issue positions.

In a similar vein, Huddy et al. (2015, 2018) demonstrated that Americans and Western Europeans with a strong attachment to their party exhibit higher levels of political participation, irrespective of the reported strength of agreement with their party's issue platform. The authors interpret this finding as a form of party loyalty: taking action to help their preferred party win the election. We likewise expect strong ideological group attachments to elicit loyal in-group behavior and therefore hypothesize that:

H2: The stronger one's attachment to an ideological group, the more one is likely to participate in politics, regardless of the strength of one's issue positions.

Finally, we expect Israelis with a strong group attachment to display another form of loyal group behavior: either defensive or positive emotions in reaction to a threat or reassurance, respectively, to their group's status and electoral success. Emotions in general, and anger and enthusiasm in particular, are known to propel political action and are therefore strong predictors of political participation (e.g., Groenendyk and Banks, 2014). Typically, "defensive group emotions are felt most intensely by the strongest group identifiers" (Huddy et al., 2018: 191), and this pattern should apply to positive emotions as well. We thus anticipate that Israelis with strong emotional and psychological attachment to an ideological group will display defensive emotions when they encounter information that compromises its status. Such information will be taken as implicating their in-group and therefore as a call to rally in its defense. In contrast, when exposed to information favorable to their ideological group's standing and reputation, such individuals are expected to present strong positive emotional reactions, for example, enthusiasm.

H3: The stronger one's attachment to an ideological group, the more one is likely to exhibit defensive emotional reactions in response to information threatening its status, and positive emotional reactions in response to reassuring information.

Methodology

To test our hypotheses, we conducted two online surveys among Jewish Israelis, the majority ethnic group in Israel. Since the main ideological competition in Israel has traditionally been between the left and the right, our analyses focus on leftists and rightists, and relate to centrists only tangentially.

Overview of the two studies

Study 1 was fielded in July 2018, when an Israeli national election was not expected for at least another year, whereas Study 2 was fielded at the end of August 2019, less than 3 weeks before the September 2019 national election. Study 1 was intended to provide initial evidence for the predictive power of ideological group attachment, and Study 2 was designed to replicate Study 1 and examine whether an ideological group attachment also predicts political participation.

Samples

Study 1. Using *Midgam Panel*, a company conducting online surveys in Israel, we surveyed 617 Jewish Israelis between 17 and 19 July 2018. Our sampling strategy was designed to compare between leftists and rightists; accordingly, centrists were intentionally undersampled, while leftists were oversampled (for more details on the samples in the two studies and a comparison with a nationally representative sample, see Supplementary Appendix Table A1). As a consequence, the sample is younger, slightly more secular, and more left-leaning than the national Jewish Israeli population: mean age is 38.9 (SD = 12.8), the percentage of women is 50.1, 55.9% of the sample self-identified as right-wing, 16.9% as center, and 27.2% as left-wing.

Study 2. Using the same survey company and sampling strategy as in Study 1, we surveyed 703 Jewish Israelis between 27 August and 1 September 2019. As in Study 1, the sample is younger (M_{age} = 42.4), more secular (30% non-observant), and more right (71%) and left (29%) than the national Jewish Israeli population. Political centrists were omitted to focus on respondents who are part of the two historically important ideological groups in Israel.

Measures

Attachment to an ideological group: To gauge Israelis' attachment to an ideological group, we adapted the 8-item partisan identity scale used by Bankert et al. (2017) and Huddy et al. (2018), which taps "a subjective sense of group belonging, the affective importance of group membership, and the affective consequences of lowered group status—all of which are crucial ingredients of a social identity" (Huddy et al., 2018, 179). Respondents first answered a branching question tapping their general political identification: "right," "moderate right," "center," "moderate left," "left," and "other." Those who identified with right or moderate right were considered as rightists; those identifying as left or moderate left—as leftists; and those identifying as center—as centrists. Respondents then answered eight "group attachment" items, adapted such that the "group" chosen in response to the branching question figured as the

respondent's ideological group, including "when I talk about [rightists/leftists] I usually say 'us' as opposed to 'them,'" "when people criticize [rightists/leftists] I take this as a personal insult," and "when people say good things about [rightists/leftists] it makes me feel good."[4] Notably, none of the eight items mentions policy issues or ideological stances.

In both studies, the items were strongly correlated across the entire sample (αs = 0.88–0.90), and an exploratory factor analysis, using the iterated principal factor method, revealed a single factor with eigenvalue greater than one (eigenvalues=3.97–4.45 and 83–87% of the variance explained). We thus created an *Attachment to an Ideological Group (AIG)* scale that varies between 0 and 1, with higher values denoting stronger attachment. In both studies, the *AIG* scores of rightists and leftists were similar (Study 1: $M_{rightists}$ = 0.48; $M_{leftists}$ = 0.53 and Study 2: $M_{rightists}$ = 0.52; $M_{leftists}$ = 0.55).

Issue-based ideology: In both studies, Israelis' left-right policy preferences on security and foreign affairs were captured with a three-item *Issue-based ideology* scale tapping preferences concerning the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. The items required respondents to indicate their position on the following issues: (1) the establishment of a Palestinian state; (2) the future of Arab neighborhoods in Jerusalem; and (3) a peace agreement with the Palestinians. All items used a 4-point scale (see Supplementary Appendix Section J for full wording). These items showed high intercorrelation in both studies (αs = 0.85–0.87) and were averaged to create an *Issue-based ideology* scale that ranges between 0 and 1 (higher values denoting more rightist/hawkish stance; Study 1: M = 0.59; Study 2: M = 0.68). Respondents were also asked to place themselves on a 7-point *Ideological self-placement* item (1-right and 7-left; Study 1: M = 3.40; and Study 2: M = 3.10). Notably, the *Issue-based ideology* scale strongly correlated with the standard, single *Ideological self-placement* item in both studies (rs = −0.75−−0.78 and ps < 0.001, two-tailed tests throughout).

Our key focus is loyalty within an ideological camp. From that perspective, it is important to determine the strength of one's agreement with one's ideological camp on key issues. We created an *Aligned issue-based ideology* measure that taps the extent to which one's issue preferences align with the stances of one's ideological camp on the *Issue-based ideology* scale, that is, their strength of ideological alignment. This *Aligned issue-based ideology* measure varies between 0 and 1, with 0 indicating that the respondent's stance on the three ideological issues deviates from that of the group (misalignment), while one indicates strong congruence on all three issues (aligned)[5] (M = 0.52 in both studies).

Importantly, in both studies, the correlation between the *AIG* scale and the *Aligned issue-based ideology* measure

emerged as moderate among both rightists (rs = 0.21–0.25) and leftists (rs = 0.25–0.39) (ps < 0.001). This suggests that, in Israel, the strength of policy positions and the strength of ideological group attachment are related yet clearly distinct within an ideological camp. In other words, a convinced leftist might not strongly agree with the establishment of a Palestinian state or support a peace agreement, whereas a staunch rightist might not strongly oppose such steps.

Voting intention: Respondents were asked about their voting intention, as follows: "If Knesset elections were held today, which party would you vote for?" Respondents were presented with a list of all parties which at the time had seats in the Knesset. They could also choose the option labeled "other" and manually add another party, or indicate that they were undecided or did not intend to vote. Our first dependent variable, *In-bloc vote*, is a dummy variable, with 1 denoting one's intention to vote for parties considered as part of one's ideological bloc, and 0 otherwise (Study 1: M = 0.62 and Study 2: M = 0.71).[6]

Political participation: In Study 2, we utilized three measures taken from the INES: (1) *Intention to vote*: Respondents were asked to indicate their intention to vote in the upcoming election, on a 4-point scale ("certain no" to "certain yes"; 75.8% answered "certain yes"); (2) *Political discussion*: Respondents were asked to what extent they discuss political matters with family and friends, on a 4-point scale ("not at all" to "to a large extent"; 72.8% chose the two highest categories); and (3) *Online political participation*: Respondents first indicated whether they use social media platforms; those who answered "yes" were then asked three 5-point items ("never" to "several times a day"), tapping the number of times they had performed the following actions on social media in the past week: (i) expressed their opinion on political topics; (ii) shared political posts by parties or politicians; and (iii) shared posts on political topics written by other people. Next, we created an *Online political participation* scale by averaging the three items (α = 0.88) and rescaling them to vary between 0 and 1 (M = 0.13).

Control variables: In all analyses, we control for the *Aligned issue-based ideology* measure which was expected to predict in-bloc voting and political participation. We also asked two policy-based items that tapped respondents' *economic*-based ideological orientation[7] and support for Jewish religious law,[8] as Shamir and Arian (1999) have shown that these items predict voting in Israel. We rescaled these two items to capture one's correct ideological alignment and intensity of support on a given issue and used these "aligned intensity" items as additional controls. Additionally, we control for demographic variables that were previously shown to predict the vote in Israel (Shamir and Arian, 1999): age, gender (female), education, and religiosity.

In Study 2, we also control for attachment to a political *party*—a strong predictor of political participation in

various European multi-party systems (Huddy et al., 2018)—to discriminate between the power of ideological group attachment and of political party attachment to predict Israelis' political participation. To create a "partisan identity" measure, we used a 4-item scale taken from the INES, with the items gauging respondents' attachment to the party they feel closest to. By averaging these items, we then created a *Partisan identity* scale (α = 0.83 and M = 0.55), which was found to strongly correlate with the *AIG* scale (r = 0.55 and p < 0.001). All control variables were set to vary between 0 and 1 (for descriptive statistics, see Supplementary Appendix Table A2).

Survey experiments

To test H3, we implemented a vignette experiment in each study. In the experiments, respondents read a mock news article presenting either a threat or reassurance with regard to the status of their respective ideological groups. The purpose of these manipulations was to examine whether one's attachment to an ideological group conditions one's loyal emotional reaction to group-relevant information.[9] In the main text, we present the results for the Study 1 experiment, and in Supplementary Appendix Section E, we present the Study 2 experiment, which successfully replicates Study 1 experimental findings.

Experiment: Study 1. Two versions of a mock news article elaborated on the then uncertain outcome of legal investigations into Prime Minister Netanyahu's activities (Winer, 2018). Netanyahu was the head of the right-wing Likud party and of the right-wing coalition, and we anticipated that his indictment on bribery charges might compel him to step down, hurting the prospects of the ideological right to stay in power, whereas dropping the charges against him could substantially improve the right coalition's prospects.

The first, "pro-left," article stated that indictments against Netanyahu on charges of bribery were imminent, which was expected to weaken the electoral prospects of the right-wing bloc to stay in power. The second, "pro-right," article stated that the charges against Netanyahu would be dropped shortly, raising the chances that the ideological right would stay in power. We deemed both scenarios realistic given that the charges against Netanyahu were unprecedented and that he vehemently denied all the allegations (Winer, 2018) (for the full vignettes, see Supplementary Appendix Section G). Importantly, to test H3, we created a *threat* dummy variable which takes the value 1 if the respondent read a "threatening" article (e.g., a rightist respondent reading the pro-left article), and 0 otherwise.

After reading the vignette, respondents answered several items tapping their emotional reactions to the article, our main outcome variables. Previous studies have shown that

"emotion is a well-documented prelude to action" (Huddy et al., 2015: 14). Specifically, "anger motivates political interest and protest activity, and positive enthusiasm is associated with political engagement" (Huddy et al., 2015: 2; see also Groenendyk and Banks, 2014; Huddy et al., 2021). Threat and reassurance to the status of one's political group are likely to arouse emotions and generate political activity among strong group supporters who are highly motivated to defend the group's status and advance it (Huddy et al., 2015). We thus tested whether the *AIG* scale conditions one's emotional reactions to a threat or reassurance to one's ideological group, anticipating that different emotional reactions will be mostly experienced by those high on the *AIG* scale.

In our experiment, respondents were asked to indicate their reaction with respect to four emotions: anger, enthusiasm, concern, and satisfaction; response options ranged from "I did not feel any [emotion in question]" to "I felt [the emotion in question] to a very great degree." Since anger and concern (or fear) have distinct behavioral consequences, with anger increasing political participation and concern increasing political contemplation (e.g., Groenendyk and Banks, 2014), we recoded the single *Anger* item to vary between 0 and 1 ($M = 0.29$), and similarly recoded the single *Concern* item ($M = 0.22$). The enthusiasm and satisfaction items emerged as highly correlated ($r = 0.70$ and $p < 0.001$) and were combined into an *Enthusiasm* scale, ranging between 0 and 1 ($M = 0.14$).

Estimation strategy

We first test whether the *AIG* scale predicts in-bloc voting (*H1*). Our analysis takes the following functional form

$$y_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 AIG\ scale\ + \Omega + \varepsilon \qquad (1)$$

where y_i denotes voting for a party from one's ideological bloc (*In-bloc vote*); β_1 captures the coefficient of the *AIG* scale among rightists and leftists, which we expect to be positive and significant; Ω is a vector of the above-mentioned controls; and ε is an idiosyncratic error term.

We next test whether *AIG* predicts political participation (H2) among rightists and leftists combined. This analysis takes the same functional form as in equation (1), where y_i denotes the three political participation measures, and Ω also includes *Partisan identity* scale.

To test *H3*, which involves an experimental component, we estimate the following equation

$$\begin{aligned} y_i = \beta_0 &+ \beta_1 AIG\ scale\ + \beta_2 Threatening\ condition \\ &+ \beta_3 AIG\ scale * Threatening\ condition\ + \beta_4 Right \\ &- wing\ supporter + \Omega + \varepsilon \end{aligned}$$

$$(2)$$

where y_i denotes emotional reactions; β_1 captures the difference in the coefficient of the *AIG* scale in the "reassuring"

condition; β_2 captures the coefficient of the "threatening" versus "reassuring" condition when the *AIG* scale equals zero; our main estimate, β_3, captures the difference in the effect of the *AIG* scale for respondents in the "threatening" versus "reassuring" condition, and we expect it to be significant, demonstrating that the *AIG* scale conditions emotional reactions to threatening/reassuring information (increase in the anger and concern emotions and decrease in the enthusiasm emotion); β_4 captures the difference between rightists and leftists; and Ω is the vector of the same controls used to test H1.

Results

Table 1 presents results from Study 1: in Models 1–2, the dependent variable is *In-bloc voting*. As can be clearly seen in both models, the *AIG* scale strongly predicts intention to vote for a party from one's ideological bloc, while other control variables, in particular the *Aligned issue-based ideology* scale, are less consistent predictors of in-bloc voting.

The predicted probabilities of in-bloc voting for right-wing (Model 1) and left-wing (Model 2) respondents are presented graphically in Figures 1(a) and (b). In Model 1, holding all other variables constant at their respective

Table 1. Study 1: Vote intention for parties from one's ideological bloc.

	(1)	(2)
	Rightist respondents	Leftist respondents
AIG scale	3.41***	3.85***
	(0.75)	(1.13)
Aligned issue-based ideology	0.54	0.32
	(0.47)	(0.69)
Aligned economic issue	0.68*	0.38
	(0.28)	(0.29)
Aligned religious issue	0.20	0.01
	(0.28)	(0.64)
Age	−0.01	−1.43+
	(0.56)	(0.77)
Female	0.16	0.09
	(0.31)	(0.38)
Religiosity	1.91**	−1.83+
	(0.65)	(1.04)
Education	−0.24	−0.59
	(0.46)	(0.70)
Constant	−2.74***	−0.51
	(0.60)	(1.53)
Observations	259	160
Pseudo R-squared	0.217	0.143

Robust standard errors in parentheses; ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$, +$p < 0.1$. Results from logistic regressions.
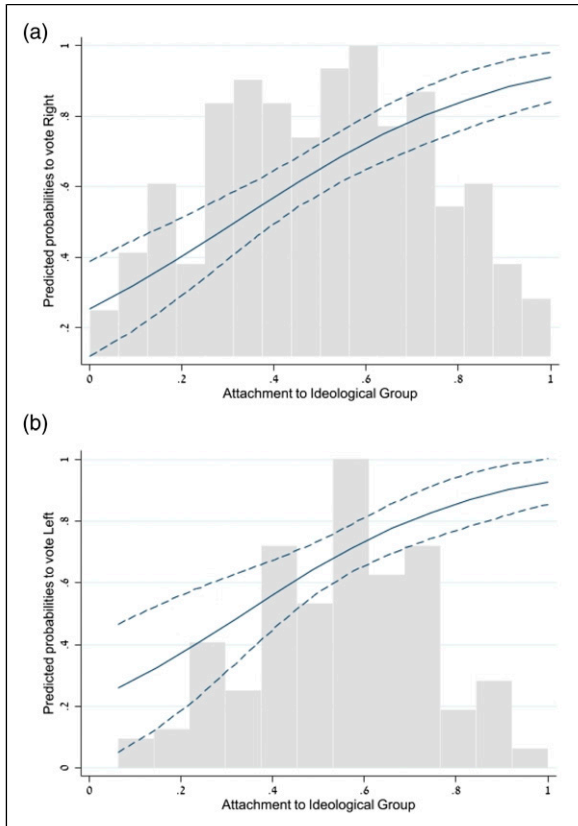
Figure 1. Predicted probabilities based on Table 1. Panel A. In-bloc voting among right-wing respondents (Model 1). Panel B. In-bloc voting among left-wing respondents (Model 2).

means, the probability that a rightist with the lowest *AIG* score will vote for a right-wing party is 25.4% [95% CIs: 12.0–38.9], while for a rightist with the highest *AIG* score this probability is 91.1% [84.1–98.2]. In Model 2, the probability that a leftist with the lowest *AIG* score will vote for a left-wing party is 21.5% [1.0–42.0], while for a leftist with the highest *AIG* score this probability is 92.8% [85.4–100.2]. These results support H1. Notably, they are also replicated in Study 2 (see full results in Supplementary Appendix Section D). Supplementary Appendix Table D2 also shows that the *AIG* scale significantly predicts in-bloc voting, regardless of whether *Aligned issue-based ideology* is included or excluded from the analysis, while *Aligned issue-based ideology* significantly predicts in-bloc voting in Study 1 only when *AIG* is excluded.

Table 2 displays the test of H2, which pertains to political participation as a further measure of ideological loyalty. We combined the analyses for both rightists and leftists, and in addition to the previously used controls, we also control for the strength of *Partisan identity*.

Model 1 shows the results of an ordinal regression predicting intention to vote in the upcoming election ("certain no" to "'certain yes"). The *AIG* scale strongly predicts intention to vote: Holding all variables constant at their means, the probability that those with the lowest *AIG* score will select "certain yes" is 62.0% [46.7 and 77.3] while for those with the highest *AIG* score that probability is 91.5% [86.7 and 96.2]. The *AIG* scale also strongly predicts political discussions (Model 2) and online political participation (Model 3). The *Partisan identity scale* also predicts political discussion and online political participation, but to a lesser extent. These results provide robust support for the power of attachment to an ideological group to predict political participation.

We also conducted several robustness tests, detailed in Supplemenatry Appendix Section D. *Inter alia*, we conducted matching analyses intended to balance respondents with low and high *AIG* scores on all observables, and we replicated Tables 1 and 2 using a shorter, 4-item *AIG* scale. Overall, the results of the robustness tests further support H1 and H2. Still, these hypotheses were tested using observational data. Therefore, we test H3—whether an ideological group attachment conditions defensive emotional reactions to status threats and reassurances—using two vignette experiments: The results of the Study 1 experiment are presented below while the results of the Study 2 experiment are presented in Appendix Section E.

Study 1 experimental results

In this experiment, leftists and rightists were randomly assigned to read a vignette that was either threatening or reassuring to the status of their respective ideological camps.[10] As expected, respondents assigned to the threatening condition reported feeling more negative emotions (anger and concern) and less positive emotions (enthusiasm) than those assigned to the reassuring condition ($ps < 0.001$ and Cohen d's>0.48) (full results are reported in Supplementary Appendix Section C).

To test H3, we run three separate models predicting anger, concern, and enthusiasm, respectively. Importantly, the *AIG* scale now interacts with the *threat* dummy variable, tapping the predictive power of that scale in the threatening versus reassuring condition. To examine the possibility that respondents' issue-based ideology conditions their emotional response to the vignettes, the model also interacts the *Aligned issue-based ideology* item with the *threat* dummy.

Figure 2 presents the predicted values for the three emotional reactions across levels of the *AIG* scale (left-hand column) and levels of the *Aligned issue-based ideology* scale (right-hand column).[11] Clearly, the *AIG* scale strongly conditions one's emotional reactions to the experimental vignettes across all three emotions, while the *Aligned issue-based ideology* scale does not.

For example, after reading a threatening article, respondents with the lowest *AIG* score reported a low level of *concern*: 0.05 in the 0–1 scale [−0.06 and 0.16], while those with a high *AIG* score reported a rather high level of *concern*: 0.57 [0.45 and 0.68]. In contrast, when reading the

Table 2. Study 2: Political participation.

	(1) Intention to vote in the next election	(2) Political discussion	(3) Online political participation
AIG scale	1.88**	3.21***	0.18**
	(0.61)	(0.58)	(0.06)
Partisan Identity scale	0.32	0.99*	0.12*
	(0.50)	(0.47)	(0.05)
Aligned issue-based ideology	−0.13	0.21	−0.01
	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.03)
Aligned economic issue	0.10	0.66***	0.01
	(0.16)	(0.13)	(0.01)
Aligned religious issue	0.18	0.07	0.01
	(0.14)	(0.10)	(0.01)
Age	1.06**	−0.05	0.03
	(0.41)	(0.30)	(0.04)
Female	0.03	−0.42**	−0.08***
	(0.21)	(0.16)	(0.02)
Religiosity	−0.03	−0.26	−0.03
	(0.31)	(0.25)	(0.03)
Education	−0.21	0.36	−0.02
	(0.32)	(0.23)	(0.03)
Cutpoint 1	−2.37***	−0.95*	
	(0.50)	(0.40)	
Cutpoint 2	−1.56***	1.53***	
	(0.45)	(0.38)	
Cutpoint 3	0.24	4.02***	
	(0.43)	(0.42)	
Constant			0.01
			(0.04)
Observations	599	599	522
R-squared			0.12

Robust standard errors in parentheses; ***$p < 0.001$, **$p < 0.01$, *$p < 0.05$, +$p < 0.1$. Models 1–2 use an ordered logit (ordinal) regression. Model 3 uses an OLS regression.

reassuring article, respondents' *AIG* score did not predict *concern* at all. Similar results were obtained for *anger*. As expected, the opposite results were obtained for *enthusiastic* responses, with *AIG* predicting *enthusiastic* reaction in the reassuring condition but not in the threatening condition. Overall, these results support H3.

In the Study 2 experiment (Supplementary Appendix Section E), we randomize both *status* threat (whether one's ideological camp will likely win or lose the election) and *issue* threat (depending on one's ideological camp, whether or not negotiations with the Palestinians are likely to resume). Results show that *AIG* strongly conditions one's emotional reactions to a status threat or reassurance, providing additional support for H3.

Discussion

To date, research into attachment to ideological groups has been conducted almost exclusively in the US two-party system (but see Pickup et al., 2021). Our study extends the scope of these investigations to Israel, a setting where the effect of this phenomenon is arguably less likely to be felt, owing to pronounced issue-based cleavages. Nonetheless, our results demonstrate empirically that such affinities are an important element in political and public opinion in Israel and, in all probability, in multi-party polities at large.

Various contemporary multi-party systems are characterized by electoral volatility and weakening of party-voter ties (Oesch and Rennwald, 2018). In this perpetually changing electoral landscape, voters' attachment to an ideological group might constitute a stabilizing force, mitigating support for anti-establishment and extreme political groups (cf. Huddy et al., 2021). While we did not examine the latter possibility in the current article, this is a promising avenue for future studies. Pressing questions that deserve future research attention include the following: How common is AIG within other multi-party systems? Who is most, or least, likely to have a strong AIG? Does
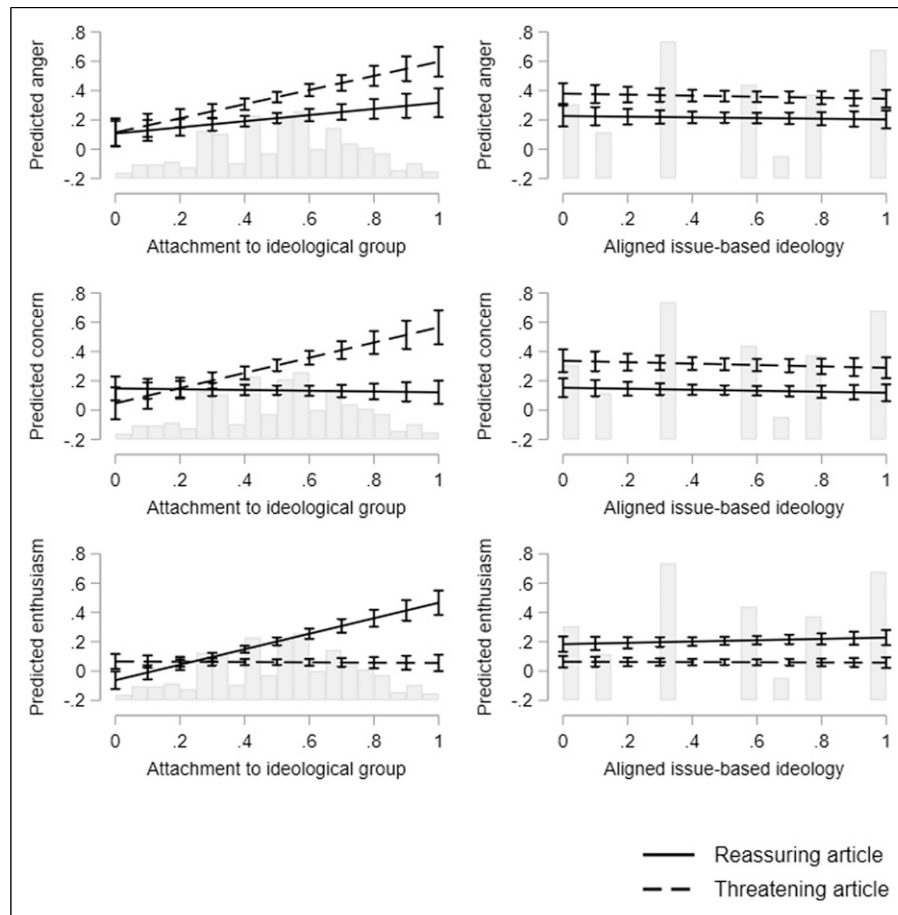
Figure 2. Study 1: experimental results (defensive emotions). *Note*: Results based on Supplementary Appendix Table C1. The left-hand column displays the relationship between the *AIG* scale and defensive emotions in response to group status threat/reassurance. The right-hand column presents the relationship between ideological issue-based alignment and defensive emotions.

AIG vary across political contexts and if so, which aspects of the political system promote weak or strong ideological identities? Are ideological identities stronger, for example, in systems in which coalitional governments are formed by ideologically aligned parties than in systems in which the left–right axis has been changed by the intrusion of populist parties or parties that do not fall on the traditional axis.

Voters' attachment to ideological groups can mitigate the impact of partisan instability and foster closer alignment between citizens and policy makers (Debus and Müller, 2013). Even as the electoral fortune of individual parties rise and fall, the share of votes allocated to an ideological bloc can remain stable (e.g., Rahat et al., 2016). Group attachments also enhance political representation: Although the importance of party identification to vote choice has declined in some settings in recent years, the link between citizens and elected politicians in parliamentary systems is, nonetheless, largely sustained, through the association of the former with one of the political-ideological blocs. Parties can gain popular support by belonging to one of the blocs operating in a given political arena. A disregard of voters' attachment to ideological groups might therefore hinder parties' efforts to communicate with voters and obtain their support. From this perspective, voters' attachment to an ideological group not only stabilizes the party system but also enhances representative democracy at large.

This article has analyzed responses of Israeli leftist and rightist participants. However, in recent decades, a new centrist party bloc has emerged and gained traction in many multi-party systems, including the Israeli political arena (Shamir, 2015). One might wonder to what extent centrists' vote choices are governed by issue versus identity considerations: Do centrists vote based on ideology, group attachment, or both? Our study (see Supplementary Appendix Section I) provides tentative support that centrists are also affected by their attachment to the center ideological group. More research on centrist voters is in order, insofar as, supporters of the ideological center constitute a substantial section of the contemporary electorate in many countries besides Israel.

This article is not without limitations. First, our samples are not representative of the Israeli Jewish population, and it remains an open question whether a study using a probability-based, representative sample (such as the INES studies) would replicate our results. Second, we tested the importance of attachment to an ideological group only in one multi-party system, and there is a clear need to further demonstrate the importance of identity-based ideology in other multi-party systems.

Furthermore, our results are based on correlational data, and the experimental effects were moderated by an *AIG* scale which was not experimentally manipulated. Future research should experimentally vary the intensity of ideological identity to examine its causal effect. Panel studies can also shed light on change in the *AIG* scale over time. Relatedly, more advanced theoretical and empirical research is needed to shed light on the causal relationship between ideological group attachment and ideological orientations. Are issue positions affected by attachment to an ideological group, or vice versa? Or perhaps the relation is reciprocal? Much progress in this matter has been achieved in the American context (e.g., Levendusky, 2009). More research is needed on the causal ordering of ideological group attachment and issue preferences in multi-party systems.

These limitations notwithstanding the studies reported in this article document the power of an ideological group identity to shape vote choice and increase political engagement in a complex and volatile multi-party system. In this way, ideological identities add stability to multi-party systems and deserve greater attention from political behavior researchers than they have received to date.

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Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. http://www.ines.tau.ac.il/
2. In our samples, these estimates are only slightly lower, by about 5–10%.
3. Our hypotheses here are based on hypotheses enumerated in a grant proposal which was submitted 3 months prior to the fielding of Study 1 (see Supplementary Appendix Section H).
4. Supplementary Appendix Tables B1–B2 present the wording of all eight items and the distribution of the responses in the two studies.
5. In both studies, 11–12% of leftists and rightists scored 0 on this measure.
6. The note in Supplementary Appendix Table A2 presents the ideological party bloc classifications.
7. Respondents answered a 4-point item asking whether they favored a capitalist or a socialist approach to the structuring of economic life in Israel ("definitely socialist" to "definitely capitalist"). In both studies this item only weakly correlated with the *Issue-based ideology scale* (rs = 0.09–0.14).
8. Respondents answered a 3-point item asking what should be prioritized in cases of a contradiction between democracy and Jewish religious law ("upholding democracy" to "keeping the Jewish law").
9. Both experiments included deception, and therefore at the end of the survey respondents were debriefed as to the nature of the manipulation.
10. The results of the factual manipulation checks used in the two studies are detailed in Supplementary Appendix Section F.
11. The results are presented in tabular format in Supplementary Appendix Table C1.

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