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DOI
10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102926

Publication date
2025

Document Version
Final published version

Published in
Electoral Studies

Electoral Studies 95 (2025) 102926

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Electoral Studies

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/electstud

Turning up and down the partisan heat. Voters' psychological profile and changes in negative radical partisanship over the course of an election

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ARTICLE INFO

Keywords:
Negative radical partisanship
Expressive partisanship
Need for chaos
Dark personality
Populism
Longitudinal survey

ABSTRACT

Who is more likely to get "heated up" against their political rivals during the course of the campaign, as election day draws near? And for whom is such aggressive stance more likely to "cool down" in the aftermath of the election? Leveraging novel evidence from a four-wave longitudinal survey fielded in the weeks leading to – and the aftermath of – the Dutch national elections of November 2023 ($N = 5500$ in wave 1, $N = 1770$ in wave 4), we test for the predictors of changes in negative radical partisanship (NRP) in voters. We measure NRP via four independent indicators – support for political violence, partisan Schadenfreude, moral disengagement, and social distance – and investigate the extent to which the psychological profile of respondents affects whether they "heat up" and "cool down" their radical stance during the course of the election. Results suggest that expressive partisanship and need for chaos highly relate to upsurges of negative radical partisanship in the build-up to elections, while at the same time hampering any post-election cooling down. The dark personality profile of respondents and populist attitudes seem to relate only marginally to (de)radicalization. Data and codes are openly available for replication.

1. Introduction

1.1. Rationale

The contemporary attention to dynamics of affective polarization (e.g., Iyengar et al., 2012; Reiljan et al., 2024) has resulted in a wealth of studies showing, across numerous (mostly Western) contexts, that voters frequently adopt a negative partisan lens when thinking about their fellow countrymen. In the United States, for instance, a large shift towards negative sentiments for the out-party has been taking place since the 1980s (Abramowitz and Webster, 2016) – but this phenomenon is by far not limited to the U.S (see for instance Areal, 2024; Mayer, 2017 for studies in Europe). Furthermore, these negative sentiments for the out-party are not simply an opposite reflection of positive sentiments for the in-party, but exist on their own as a separate construct that has been shown to exert noticeable electoral effects in countries across the globe (e.g., Medeiros and Noël, 2014). Today, a large consensus in the literature exists that voters often explicitly showcase a profound dislike and disaffection for politically other-minded people, such as supporters of opposing parties (e.g. Harteveld, 2021; Reiljan and Ryan, 2021), often with dramatic consequences – from crumbling social cohesion (Törnberg, 2022) to depressed support for democratic norms (Kingzette et al., 2021).

Such negative partisan attitudes are not a stable trait – that is, they should be expected to vary depending on shifting circumstances. Most notably, the presence of elections – and the campaigns that lead to them – have been shown to "activate" partisan attitudes (Singh and Thornton, 2019). Election campaigns are pivotal moments for political attitude shifts (e.g., Banducci and Karp, 2003), creating possible short-term consequences during and right after the elections, as well as long-term effects if individual-level upticks in negative partisanship persist and accumulate over time. Evidence has shown, notably, that negative partisan attitudes can "heat up" during the pre-election phase – for instance, Martin and Nai (2024) show that affective polarization turns up during the span of an electoral campaign if the level of negative campaigning is higher, whereas Bassan-Nygate and Weiss (2022) find similar results for increased levels of electoral competition (see also Hernández et al., 2021). More in general, over the course of an election campaign positive in-party attitudes should consolidate, and negative out-party attitudes deepen (Hansen and Kosiara-Pedersen, 2017).

Building on the general intuition that negative partisanship is not a stable construct but, rather, should likely be subject to shifts depending

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https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102926
Received 31 July 2024; Received in revised form 6 March 2025; Accepted 13 March 2025
Available online 20 March 2025

on the evolution of the political calendar, this article makes a double contribution.

First, we expand the conceptual scope of negative partisanship beyond simply holding negative partisan attitudes and focus on the *radical* expression of such attitudes (i.e., *negative radical partisanship; NRP)*, that is, the extent in which voters showcase profound distaste and aggressive attitudes towards (voters of) the party they dislike the most, such as supporting violence towards them or reveling in misfortunes befalling them. Voters high in NRP do not simply dislike their political opponents – they actively feel hostile towards them. In this sense, opponents are not just seen as adversaries with whom we disagree, but fully as enemies, aligning with a more antagonistic mode of conflict over an agonistic mode (Mouffe, 2013). NRP can therefore be seen as an extreme, radical facet of affective polarization, one that focuses on experiencing radically hostile sentiments towards the political out-group. To what extent does negative *radical* partisanship change over time, most notably, over the course of an election? Does it heat up over the span of a campaign, and perhaps more importantly, does it cool down again, once the dust of the electoral competition settles down? Looking at aggregated trends in the USA between 2020 and 2022, Sandlin (2023) shows a general decline in violent partisan attitudes over time. On the shorter term, recent evidence has additionally shown that radical partisan attitudes can "cool down" after the election as a function of who the winners and losers were, and the post-election coalitions in place (Gidron and Sheffer, 2023).

Second, we look at whether of such possible changes of NRP over time are associated with the profile of respondents – that is, whether some individuals are more (or less) likely to experience changes in their radical partisan attitudes over the course of the election. Here we follow up on previous research highlighting the significance of individual-level, psychological, attributes in explaining electoral phenomena (Hunter, 2024; Hofstetter and Filsinger, 2024; Rhodes-Purdy, 2021). Studies have shown, unsurprisingly, that voters are not all equal before negative radical partisanship (e.g., Kalmoe and Mason, 2022; Webster et al., 2023) – for instance, more radical partisan attitudes have been shown for individuals high in attitudinal aggressiveness (Kalmoe, 2014) or showcasing a darker personality profile (Nai and Young, 2024). Much less clear is to what extent the profile of individuals is associated to *changes* in negative radical partisanship.

All in all, evidence seems to suggest that negative radical partisanship tends to "heat up" in the weeks leading to an election, and somewhat "cool down" afterwards. What remains unclear, in particular comparing the different phases of an election, is for whom these changes in negative radical partisanship are more likely to occur. Who is more likely to get "heated up" against their political rivals during the course of the campaign, as election day draws near? And for whom is such aggressive stance more likely to "cool down" again in the aftermath of the election? This is what our study sets out to explore.

1.2. Mapping changes in negative radical partisanship: the study

We present the results of a four-wave longitudinal survey fielded in the weeks leading to – and the aftermath of – the Dutch national elections of November 2023 ($N = 5500$ in wave 1, $N = 1770$ in wave 4).[1] Across these four waves, we measure the evolution of negative radical partisanship, to study how this may "heat up" during the campaign, but also "cool down" afterwards. The Netherlands can be seen as a conservative or least likely case, due its fragmented party system, a long-standing tradition of being a consociational democracy (Bogaards et al., 2019) and relatively lower levels of partisan identification (Thomassen et al., 2009) which could all act as safeguards against radical partisanship. At the same time, recent years have seen the success of several populist radical right parties and increasing levels of polarization (Silva, 2018). Yet, against this backdrop, the 2023 campaign was relatively tame,[2] likely framing it again as a conservative scenario to test for dynamic of escalating and de-escalating NRP.

We leverage the fact that measures for four expressions of NRP were included in all four waves of the survey. Notably, we measure NRP in terms of (i) *moral disengagement*, that is, the uncoupling of internal moral standards from one's own (political) actions or attitudes when it comes to how members of the out-group ought to be treated (Moore, 2015; Kalmoe and Mason, 2022), (ii) *partisan Schadenfreude*, that is, experiencing pleasure at misfortune incurred to out-party individuals, including violent misfortune (Webster et al., 2023; Nai and Otto, 2021), (iii) *social distance*, that is, the reluctance to socially associate and engage with people from the political out-group (Bogardus, 1933; Iyengar and Krupenkin, 2018), and even (iv) support *for politically-motivated violence*, including support for specific violent acts committed by in-party individuals against members of the out-party (Westwood et al., 2022; Nai and Young, 2024).

The individual evolutions across the four longitudinal waves of NRP – most notably, whether respondents experienced a "heating up" in the weeks leading to the election, and a "cooling down" afterwards – and the deep personal underpinnings of these changes, are the central focus of our investigation. We particularly pay attention to the role played by (i) expressive partisanship, (ii) the "dark" psychological profile of respondents (dark personality traits, need for chaos), and (iii) populist attitudes. We discuss these factors below.

All data and code are available for replication and re-analysis at the following OSF repository: https://osf.io/ma6u7/.

1.3. Respondents deep profile and negative radical partisanship

Negative radical partisanship, in itself, should be particularly experienced by respondents with stronger partisan identities, a darker personality profile, and holding populist attitudes.

First, ample evidence seems to support the existence of a strong positive association between party identity strength and radical partisanship; citizens with a stronger partisan identity have been found to feel more negative about out-partisans (Iyengar et al., 2012), and to be more likely to support politically motivated violence against the political out-group (Kacholia and Neuner, 2022; Kalmoe and Mason, 2022). *Expressive partisanship*, which specifically conceptualizes partisan proximity not simply in instrumental terms but in terms of social identity (Huddy et al., 2015; Bankert et al., 2017), should thus logically be associated with stronger negative partisan attitudes.

Second, beyond partisan identity, there are some reasons to anticipate a more marked negative radical partisanship among respondents with a *"darker" personality profile*. Dark personality traits – narcissism (bombastic self-promotion and tendency for ego gratification), psychopathy (callousness, incapacity to connect emotionally to other human beings, impulsivity, recklessness), and Machiavellianism (proclivity for strategic behavior regardless of the consequences, tendency to lie) broadly reflect the more callous, insensitive, and uncompromising facets of human personality (Nai and Maier, 2024; Paulhus, 2014; Furnham et al., 2013). Dark traits, and in particular psychopathy, have been often associated with aggressive social behaviors. Evidence links them with bullying and harassing behaviors (Goodboy and Martin, 2015), moral disengagement in offenders (Brugués and Caparrós, 2022), violent recidivism in inmates (Harris et al., 1991), cyber-aggression (Pabian et al., 2015), generally antisocial behaviors (Triberti et al., 2021) - and even support for political violence (Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2021;

[1] Data collection received full ethical approval from the University of Amsterdam on September 18, 2023.

[2] Biedermann, F. (2023). "The Netherlands is sleepwalking towards the general election", *The New European*, 18 November 2023. https://www.theneweuropean.co.uk/the-netherlands-is-sleepwalking-towards-the-general-election/.

Nai and Young, 2024), in particular related to in-group relative deprivation (Pavlović and Franc, 2023). Similarly, people high in *need for chaos*, "a desire for a new beginning through the destruction of order and established structures" (Arceneaux et al., 2021, p. 2), have been associated with a more marked predisposition towards sharing "hostile" political content (Petersen et al., 2023) and engage in political violence (Arceneaux et al., 2021). Need for chaos indicates a strong attitudinal disposition towards "burning it all down" and should naturally be associated with a more radical stance towards political adversaries.

Third, and finally, respondents higher in *populist attitudes* should experience higher degrees of negative radical partisanship as well. Attitudinally, populists showcase "a pronounced tendency to pick fights" and "reward combative behavior" (Rhodes-Purdy, 2021, p.1), often unfolding via a more "antagonistic and combative style" (Moffitt, 2020, p.80). Indeed, populism is frequently associated with expressions of moral outrage (Rico et al., 2017) and feelings of anger and rage (Wirz, 2018), likely leading towards more violent behaviors (Lambert et al., 2019), and intolerance towards political opponents (Bos et al., 2023). Recent evidence even suggests a temporal causality between populist attitudes and interpersonal hateful attitudes, the former explaining a rise in the latter (but not vice-versa; Martínez et al., 2023). In terms of political dynamics more specifically, populist attitudes tend to reflect strong antagonistic political views – both in terms of suspicion towards political elites and strong negative sentiments towards the out-group (Akkerman et al., 2014) – suggesting the potential of a psychological association between populist attitudes and negative radical partisanship (e.g., Erisen et al., 2021). Experimental evidence shows for instance a strong association between populist attitudes and affective polarization, in particular when respondents are exposed to elite negativity and incivility (Nai and Maier, 2024b).

1.4. Changes in negative radical partisanship

All in all, evidence from recent research in electoral behavior, political communication, and social psychology seems to suggest that respondents with a more "aggressive" profile (higher dark traits, higher need for chaos, higher populist attitudes), but also respondents with a stronger partisan identity, might be more likely to engage in various forms of negative radical partisanship. Yet, these trends suggest a "static" association between respondents' profile and radical partisanship, not necessarily a dynamic one – that is, they are les informative about whether such deep traits are related to *changes* in NRP over time.

Evidence from existing research could suggest also a dynamic association. For instance, psychopathy has been associated with reckless impulsivity (Jones and Paulhus, 2011), suggesting not only a proclivity for more violent behaviors and attitudes but also the tendency to *more quickly* engage in them – in our case, this could translate in a greater proclivity not simply towards NRP, but also towards heating up such radical attitudes (and lower likelihood to cool them down). Similarly, individuals with a strong party identity may be more likely to heat up during the electoral campaign; for hyperpartisan voters there is more at stake during the election in terms of their team winning and losing, which could further flare up the rivalry with the out-party. Evidence from large-scale comparative studies Martin and Nai (2024) shows, for instance, that it is especially strong partisans who become more hostile to political out-groups when exposed to more aggressive election campaigns.

Yet, existing evidence seems insufficient to formalize strong expectations in terms of how voters' deep profile shapes changes in their negative radical partisanship over time – we will thus refrain from doing so, and instead explore patterns of "heating up" and "cooling down" NRP, over the course of an election, as a function of respondents' strength of partisan identity, dark profile, and populist attitudes.

2. Data and methods

2.1. The longitudinal dataset

We leverage novel data from a high-quality multi-wave longitudinal survey conducted during the 2023 national elections in the Netherlands (November 22, 2023). The 2023 Dutch Election Monitor Survey (DEMoS) includes data from respondents surveyed in four different longitudinal waves – that is, some respondents were surveyed up to four different times (no recontact of respondents who dropped out between waves) – respectively in October/November 2023 (wave 1; $N = 5500$), mid-November 2023 (wave 2, pre-election; $N = 4478$), late November 2023 (wave 3, post-election; $N = 2639$), and late January 2024 (two months after the election; wave 4; $N = 1770$). While this is not central for the scope of this investigation, the first wave (w1) is composed of two separate subsamples: subsample 1 ($N = 2039$) is a normal wave, in which all respondents in the sampling frame were invited to participate at the same time (early October 2023), whereas subsample 2 ($N = 3461$) was surveyed following a rolling cross-sample design (RCS; Johnston and Brady, 2002). In an RCS design, respondents are randomly distributed in random batches, surveyed at regular intervals over the whole duration of the wave – in our case, 19 batches of approximately 190 respondents each, a new batch being opened every other day between early October and mid-November 2023. Respondents in both w1 subsamples were invited to participate to w2 regardless of their participation to the RCS or not. In our main analyses the two subsamples are simply merged into a unique wave 1 (robustness checks that control for the difference in survey mode for w1 yield consistent results). Prior to data collection we asked the polling institute I&O to establish a sampling frame in such a way to reflect the composition of the Dutch population in terms of age, gender, education, region and voting behavior at the last general election (2021). The 1°% fastest respondents (speeders, $N = 105$) were excluded from wave 1 onwards. The sample composition for the four waves can be found in Table D1, Appendix D.

We leverage the relative distance between the four waves to create three different "phases" of the election, which are investigated in terms of changes in negative radical partisanship: (i) a "heating up" phase, which reflects changes from w1 to w2, that is, in the almost two months leading to the election, capturing most of the campaign; (ii) an "election phase", which reflects changes from w2 to w3, that is, comparing the days just before and after the election; and (iii) a "cooling down" phase, which reflects changes from w3 to w4, that is, over the two months after the election. Fig. 1 graphically illustrates the four longitudinal waves of DEMoS over time, and the three phases identified.

2.2. Measuring negative radical partisanship

Each of the four waves of the survey includes four separate measures of respondents' negative radical partisanship*:* support *for violence committed against members of the out-party*, *partisan Schadenfreude*, *moral disengagement*, and *social distance*. All four measures rely on a prior identification of respondents' most liked and most disliked parties (respectively, the in- and out-parties), which stems from two separate closed-ended questions asked early on in the questionnaire. Respondents' answers to these questions are piped-in when required in the batteries used for the four indicators of NRP. The precise wording of all survey items used is in Appendix B. See Table A1 (Appendix A) for descriptive statistics and reliability scores, for all four waves.

Although party identity is generally less strong and more complex in multi-party systems such as the Netherlands – with some people rather identifying with ideological blocks – studies have shown that even in this context a large part of the population still identifies (at least to some extent) with a political party (Bankert et al., 2017).

2.2.1. Support for violence

We measure support for political violence as respondents' support

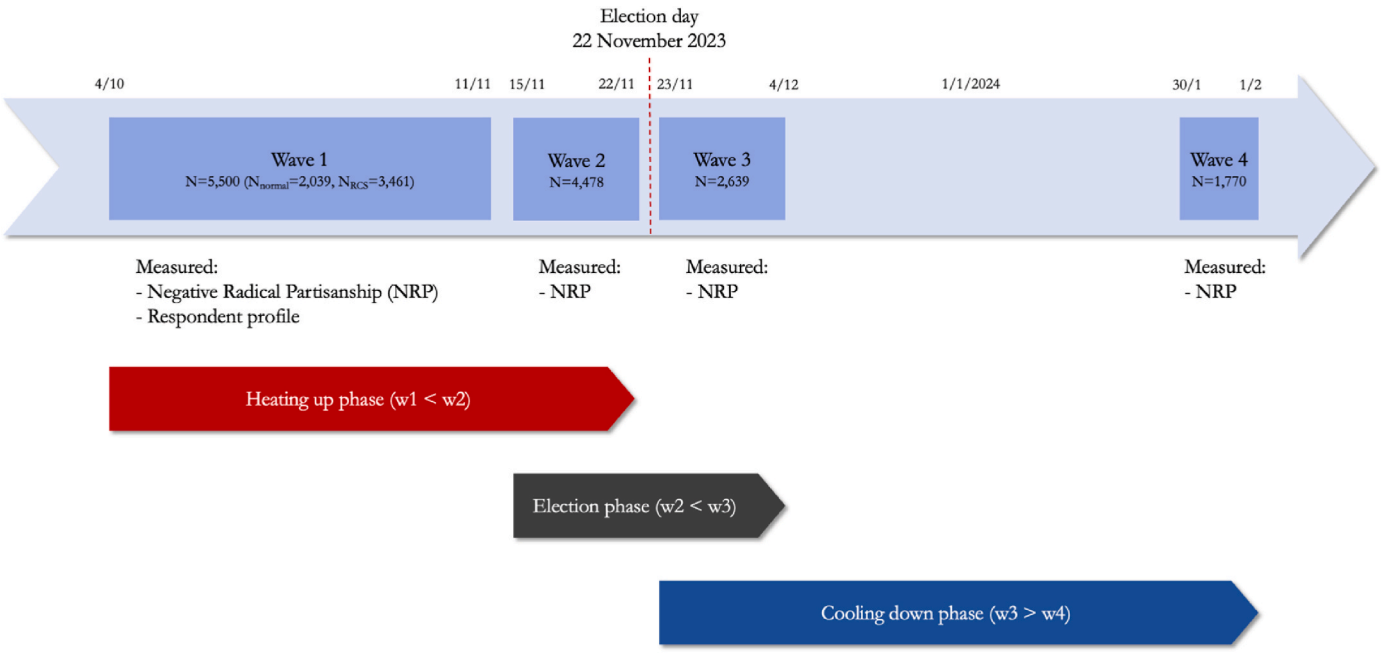

Fig. 1. Four survey waves and the three phases.

for a concrete partisan violent act committed against a person identified as a supporter of the party they dislike the most (out-party), using a vignette approach inspired by the materials in Westwood et al. (2022). In contrast with traditional attitudinal scales (e.g., Gøtzsche-Astrup, 2021; Kalmoe, 2014; Kalmoe and Mason, 2022), this approach grants a realistic grounding to the measurement of support for political violence – and, possibly, a more conservative estimate.

Respondents were asked to read a short fictive newspaper article describing a co-partisan individual (i.e., an individual explicitly described as being a voter of the respondent's preferred party) punching an out-partisan individual (i.e., a voter of respondent's most disliked party) in the face, so that this latter had to be brought to the hospital. The violent act was explicitly framed as stemming from partisan considerations; the aggressor was reported saying that he was "upset that [out-party] voters were gathering next to his house, because he really disagrees with that party."

After reading the article respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with five statements: "I support what [the aggressor] did", "What [the aggressor] did could under some circumstances be justified", "[the aggressor] should face criminal charges", "These things happen all the time in the Netherlands", and "[the aggressor] was likely provoked to react like that" (from 1 "disagree strongly" to 7 "agree strongly"). After reversing the third statement the average agreement across the five statement yields a 1–7 scale of support for partisan violence. Average support for partisan violence varies between a minimum of 2.69 (SD = 0.90) in wave 1 to a maximum of 2.73 (SD = 0.93) in wave 3.

2.2.2. *Partisan schadenfreude*

The measure of partisan Schadenfreude – that is, the extent to which respondents experience joy or pleasure when misfortune befalls their political opponents - was inspired by materials in Webster et al. (2023) and Nai and Otto (2021). Respondents were presented the hypothetical situation that a new neighbour, a supporter of respondent's most disliked party, "recently lost their job and is experiencing financial difficulty." They were afterwards asked to what extent they agree or disagree with a series of four statements, such as "I would be a little amused by what happened to them" and "I would find it difficult to resist a smile" (from 1 "Disagree strongly" to 7 "Agree strongly"). The average support for these four statements (after reversing the fourth one, "I would feel sorry for them") yields a 1–7 measure of partisan Schadenfreude. Average partisan Schadenfreude varies between a minimum of 2.27 (SD = 1.22) in wave 1 to a maximum of 2.29 (SD = 1.22) in wave 4.

2.2.3. *Moral disengagement*

For the measure of moral disengagement, we have adapted the battery discussed in Kalmoe and Mason (2022) to the Dutch case (and slightly simplified it). Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of five statements, such as "[out-party] voters are not just worse for politics—they are downright evil" and "If [in-party] voters break a few rules to oppose [out-party] voters, it's because they need to do it for the sake of the country" (from 1 "Disagree strongly" to 7 "Agree strongly"). The average support for the five statements yields a 1–7 measure of moral disengagement. Average moral disengagement varies between a minimum of 3.33 (SD = 1.35) in wave 3 to a maximum of 4.01 (SD = 1.32) in wave 1.

2.2.4. *Social distance*

Finally, for the social distance measure we have adapted the traditional measure introduced in Bogardus (1933). Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of four statements, such as "I would be upset if a family member of mine would be a [out-party] voter" and "I don't have any problems with having close personal friends who are [out-party] voters" (reversed) (from 1 "Disagree strongly" to 7 "Agree strongly"). After recoding the reversed statement, the average support for the four statements yields a 1–7 measure of social distance. Average social distance varies between a minimum of 3.26 (SD = 1.47) in wave 3 to a maximum of 3.48 (SD = 1.43) in wave 2.

2.2.5. *Negative radical partisanship index*

In all four waves the four measures of negative radical partisanship are rather strongly associated. The weakest bivariate association across all waves is between support for violence and social distance in wave 1, r

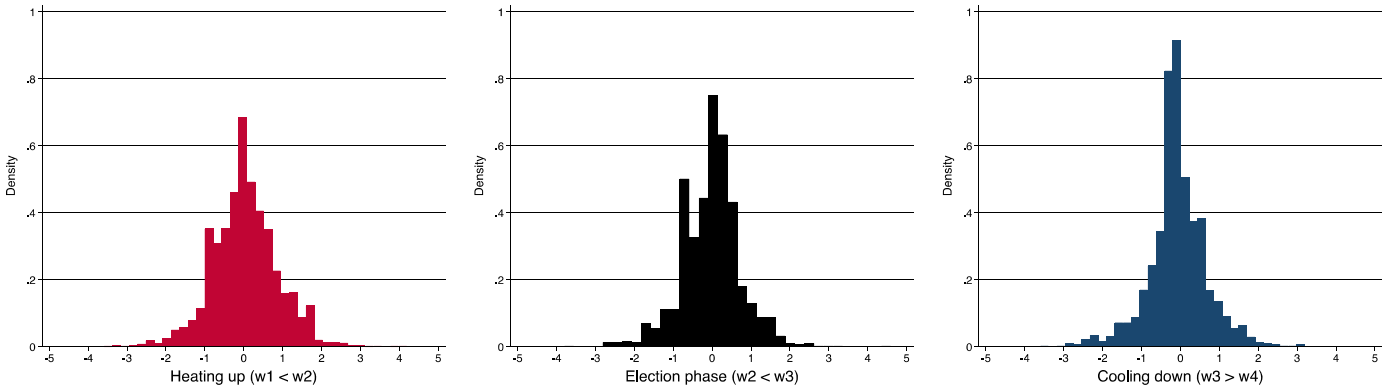

Fig. 2. Changes in negative radical partisanship.

(5498) = 0.27, $p < .001$, and the strongest is between moral disengagement and partisan Schadenfreude in wave 3, $r(2637) = 0.45$, $p < .001$. Fig. A1 (Appendix A) illustrates the bivariate association between all four variables in wave 1.

Leveraging these associations, we have computed, in each wave, a negative radical partisanship (NRP) index that takes the average value across the four indicators.[3] In order to detect overarching trends, we leverage changes in the NRP index for the main analyses; separate analyses for the four dimensions of radical partisanship are in the appendix (e.g., Fig. A5).

2.3. Changes in negative radical partisanship over time

Average levels on the four dimensions of negative radical partisanship are relatively comparable across the four waves. The more granular data provided by the answers gathered in the rolling-cross section component in wave 1 confirm a trend of average stability over time, as shown in Fig. A2 (Appendix A). Average scores on negative radical partisanship are also relatively stable across waves (Fig. A2).

Yet, such average stability does not prevent the presence of longitudinal *within-individual variations* – that is, changes in negative radical partisanship over time for specific respondents. Such individual-level variations are the focus of this investigation.

We have computed three measures to capture within-individual variations of negative radical partisanship (NRP) over the course of time. Remember that our longitudinal dataset includes, for each respondent, four measurements over time: a first measurement at the beginning of the campaign, a second measurement just before the election of November 22, 2023, a third measurement right after the election, and a fourth measurement up to two months after the election. Comparing these four datapoints, we computed the following three measures of changes in negative radical partisanship: (i) a measure of "*heating up*" that picks up whether the responded increased their NRP scores during the pre-election campaign; this measure subtracts wave 1 scores from wave 2 scores, so that positive scores indicate an *increase* in NRP in the pre-election phase (that is, w1 < w2); (ii) an "*election phase*" measure that picks up whether the responded increased their NPR scores from just before to just after the election; this measure subtracts wave 2 scores from wave 3 scores, so that positive scores indicate an *increase* in NRP around the election (that is, w2 < w3); (iii) a measure of "*cooling down*" that picks up whether the responded decreased their NRP scores during the post-election phase; this measure subtracts wave 4 scores from wave 3 scores, so that positive scores indicate an *decrease* in NRP in the post-election phase (that is, w3 > w4). The three variables have a theoretical range between −7 and +7; in reality, those variable range approximately between −4 and +4. As shown in Fig. 2, the distribution of observations on these three variables is centered around zero (indicating respondents who did not change their NRP score between waves) and is relatively concentrated around this midpoint (standard deviations are around 0.8 approximately).[4]

2.4. Respondent profile

To avoid any cross-contamination between explanandum and explanans, all dimensions of respondents' profile were measured in wave 1. The precise wording of all survey items used can be found in Appendix C. See Table A2 (Appendix A) for descriptive statistics and reliability scores (Cronbach's alphas).

2.4.1. Expressive partisanship

Expressive partisanship – that is, how much respondents *identify* with their own in-party – was measured adapting the "social identity" scale discussed in Bankert et al. (2017) for the Dutch case. Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of five statements related to their preferred party (in-party), such as "When people criticize this party, it feels like a personal insult" or "When I meet someone who supports this party, I feel connected with this person" (from 1 "Disagree strongly" to 7 "Agree strongly"). The average support for the five statements yields a 1–7 measure of expressive partisanship ($M = 3.39$, $SD = 1.25$).

2.4.2. Dark personality traits

The dark traits were measured via the Dirty Dozen inventory (Jonason and Webster, 2010). For each of the three dark traits, respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of four statements, such as "I tend to want others to admire me" (for narcissism), "I tend to lack remorse" (for psychopathy), or "I tend to manipulate others to get my way" (for Machiavellianism) (from 1 "disagree strongly" to 7 "agree strongly"). Those statements are averaged to obtain 1-7 measures of narcissism ($M = 2.61$, $SD = 1.14$), psychopathy ($M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.07$), and Machiavellianism ($M = 1.82$, $SD = 0.93$).

2.4.3. Need for chaos

Need for chaos – "a desire for a new beginning through the destruction of order and established structures" (Arceneaux et al., 2021, p. 2) – was measured by asking respondents whether they agree or disagree with a series of seven statements, such as "I think society should be burned to the ground" or "I need chaos around me – it is too boring if nothing is going on" (from 1 "Disagree strongly" to 7 "Agree strongly").

[3] $\alpha(w1) = 0.66$; $\alpha(w2) = 0.70$; $\alpha(w3) = 0.72$; $\alpha(w4) = 0.72$.

[4] Fig. A4 (Appendix A) plots the three measures of within-respondent change in negative radical partisanship over time, for each of the four original indicators.

The average support for the seven statements yields a 1–7 measure of need for chaos ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 0.73$).

2.4.4. Populist attitudes

Populist attitudes are measured adapting the scale discussed in Akkerman et al. (2014). Respondents were asked whether they agree or disagree with a series of five statements grouped in two main dimensions, respectively, people-centrism (e.g., "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions") and anti-elitism (e.g., "Elected officials talk too much and take too little action"), all (from 1 "Disagree strongly" to 7 "Agree strongly". Following the approach discussed in Wuttke et al. (2020), we created one subscale for each of the two dimension and kept the value of the subscale with the lower score as value for the populist attitudes scale ($M = 3.95$, $SD = 1.41$).

3. Results

As we discussed above, reasons exist to expect a positive association between negative radical partisanship and respondents' strength of partisan attachment, dark personality, and populist attitudes. Zero-order correlations, calculated for scores in wave 1 (Table 1), seem to confirm this general positive association. The table shows however also some weaker (or even non-significant) associations, for instance between narcissism and moral disengagement, or between psychopathy and social distance. The table shows even a negative association between populist attitudes and social distance.

To what extent are these profile characteristics associated with *changes* in negative radical partisanship? Fig. 3 plots the coefficients for the different models where we have regressed such changes over time on respondents' profile. The left-hand panel estimates a "heating up" in NRP in the weeks leading to the election (that is, an increase between w1 and w2); central panel estimates changes in the election period, that is, an increase between w2 (just before the election) and w3 (just after the election); the right-hand panel estimates a "cooling down" in NRP in the two months after the election, that is, a decrease between w3 and w4. All variables in the models vary between 1 and 7, so the magnitude of their effects is comparable. The coefficient plots showcase confidence intervals at the 90°% (inner boundaries, darker color), 95°%, and 99.8°% level (outer boundaries, in lighter color) – this latter resulting from a

Table 1
Radical partisanship and respondent profile; zero-order correlations.

		Support for violence	Partisan Schadenfreude	Moral disengagement	Social distance
Strength of party identification	*r*	0.10	0.14	0.29	0.24
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Narcissism	*r*	0.11	0.13	0.05	0.11
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
Psychopathy	*r*	0.11	0.18	0.09	0.00
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.864
Machiavellianism	*r*	0.12	0.16	0.03	0.06
	p	0.000	0.000	0.038	0.000
Need for chaos	*r*	0.28	0.25	0.20	0.03
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.031
Populist attitudes	*r*	0.20	0.14	0.28	−0.10
	p	0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000

$N = 5500$ (w1).

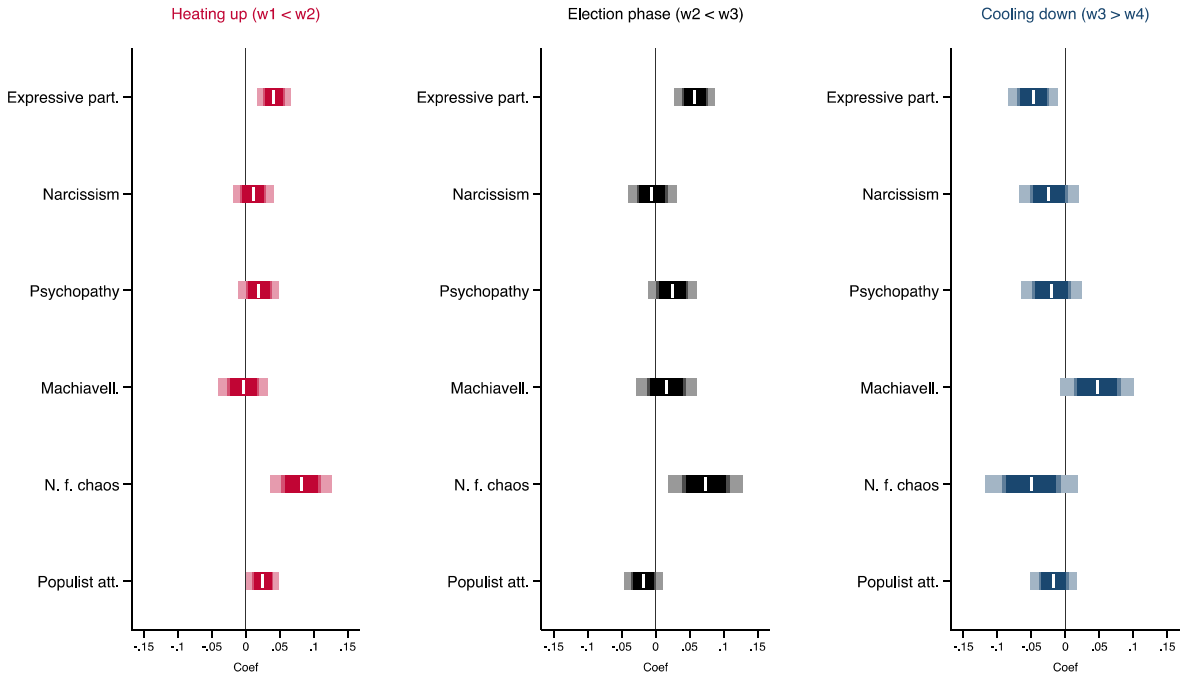

Fig. 3. The roots of heating up and cooling down negative radical partisanship.
Note. Coefficient plot with 90°% (innermost area, darkest color), 95°%, and 99.8°% (outermost area, lighter color) confidence intervals. Heating up (left-hand panel) indicates an increase in radical partisanship between wave 1 and wave 2 (w2-w1). The election period (central panel) indicates an increase in radical partisanship between wave 2 and wave 3 (w3-w2). Cooling down (right-hand panel) indicates a decrease in radical partisanship between wave 3 and wave 4 (w3-w4).

Bonferroni correction to account for the presence of multiple comparisons within each model (specifically, when considering also the separate dimensions of radical partisanship,[5] 6 * 5 = 30 comparisons; significance threshold lowered to $p < .05/30 = 0.002$). All models are also controlled by the number of days between datapoints on different waves (e.g., number of days between responses in w1 and w2 for the heating up phase), and by the preferred party at w1 (reference: NSC), gender (female = 1), age in years, and education level (1–3). Finally, all models are controlled by lagged dependent variables (LDVs), that is, values on the dependent variable at the beginning of the period (e.g., value of negative radical partisanship at w1 for the heating up phase); while the inclusion of LDVs has been criticized in the past (e.g., Achen, 2000), their inclusion has generally been shown to yield more conservative estimates (Wilkins, 2018); because our dependent variable measures changes between t0 and t1, including the LDV allows furthermore to account for the fact that changes across time have different starting points. Full results are in Tables A3–A7 (Appendix A). Fig. 3 focuses on the index of negative radical partisanship (NRP); separate models for the four dimensions (support for violence, partisan Schadenfreude, moral disengagement, and social distance) are in Fig. A5, Appendix A.

Expressive partisanship relates to an increase in NRP over time, both for the pre-election time (that is, between w1 and w2) and around the election (between w2 and w3), and this even when considering the stricter confidence interval of 99.8°% after Bonferroni corrections. Strong expressive partisanship furthermore reduces the chances of a "cooling off" in the weeks after the election (between w3 and w4), all things considered. These trends generally exist across all dimensions of negative radical partisanship (Fig. A5). All in all, expressive partisanship seems an important predictor of a strengthening of NRP, which gets stronger as election gets close, and is less likely to weaken once the game is set. People with strong social identification along partisan lines, in other terms, are more likely to get radicalized and remain so.

Second, dark personality traits have a rather negligible relationship with increased and decreased NRP. The personality predictors are seldomly significant, even considering a more permissive significance threshold of 10°%, and their magnitude remain overall meagre. A partial exception is psychopathy (Fig. A5), which significantly increases support for violence and moral disengagement (and even, if more weakly so, the general index of negative radical partisanship) during the election phase. Psychopathy also significantly reduces the chances of cooling down partisan Schadenfreude. Narcissism and Machiavellianism seem largely unrelated to changes in NRP. All in all, if some evidence exists that psychopathy is associated with stronger heating up and weaker cooling down, dark personality traits have comparatively a weaker association to *changes* in negative radical partisanship.

Populist attitudes have an effect generally comparable to the one of dark traits, that is, not particularly strong overall, with a few exceptions; populist attitudes increase moral disengagement during the heating up phase, but somewhat reduce social distance during the election phase (Fig. A5). All in all, however, the association of populist attitudes with changes in NRP are rather meagre.

The effects of need for chaos are much clearer. Individuals scoring high on need for chaos are associated with an uptick in negative radical partisanship during the pre-election phase, (in particular when it comes to support for election violence, partisan Schadenfreude, and moral disengagement, Fig. A5), and during the election phase. Higher need for chaos is also somewhat associated with lesser "cooling off" – that is, it is associated with weaker de-radicalization – after the election, most notably when it comes to support for election violence. All in all, reflecting trends for expressive partisanship, respondents who score high on need for chaos easily heat up, but do not immediately cool down.

Fig. A6 (Appendix A) substantiates the effects found for all predictors on changes in negative radical partisanship (additive index), with marginal effects with 99.8°% confidence intervals. The figure clearly shows the role of expressive partisanship to beef up radicalization and prevent de-radicalization, the driving role of need for chaos in increasing partisan radicalization in the early phases, and (somewhat) the reduced deradicalization in the post-election phase among respondents high on this latter trait. The comparatively weaker effect played by the dark personality traits and populist attitudes also appears clearly.[6]

4. Conclusion and discussion

In this note we expand previous research (Hernández et al., 2021; Singh and Thornton, 2019) establishing the role of the electoral context in strengthening partisanship, by zooming in on the activation and persistence of *negative radical* partisanship during the 2023 Dutch election campaign and its aftermath. In addition, we set out to examine which voters are more likely to get "heated up" against their political rivals during the course of the campaign, as election day draws near - and for whom such confrontational stance "cools down" again in the aftermath of the election. Here we focus both on expressive partisanship, as well as the psychological profile of voters, arguing that to understand which voters are more likely to consolidate their negative partisan stances, electoral researchers should not overlook the key role of psychological factors (Hofstetter and Filsinger, 2024; Hunter, 2024; Rhodes-Purdy, 2021). Leveraging a four-wave longitudinal survey fielded before and after the Dutch national elections of November 2023, we measured the evolution of four indicators of negative radical partisanship among individual voters: support for politically motivated violence, partisan Schadenfreude, moral disengagement, and social distance.

Our results show that expressive partisanship, in particular, is a key predictor of increasing negative radical partisanship (both in the weeks leading up to the election and in the days around the election itself) and, perhaps even more conspicuously, expressive partisanship prevents respondents from "cooling down" their negative partisan ardors once the election has come and gone. This last trend, perfectly in line with studies showcasing the centrality of expressive partisanship for political attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Huddy et al., 2015), should be source for concern. While a temporal heating up of NRP can be expected in times of elections where politics is most salient and the conflict between partisans is at its highest – similar to the rivalry between fans of rival sport teams being the highest in the run-up to an important match – these rivalries should cool down again once the dust has settled and elections are over. The fact that this is not happening for voters that develop a strong social identity along partisan lines could indicate that elections – at least under certain circumstances – may have a more structural polarizing effect for strong partisans. This could be a potentially explanator for the high, and sometimes even increasing levels of affective polarization we witness in several countries (Iyengar et al., 2012; Phillips, 2022).

Results for the dark personality of respondents were more nuanced. On the one hand, when it comes to personality traits only psychopathy

[5] While the analyses for the separate dimensions of negative radical partisanship are only present in the Appendix, the fact that these models have been run (and are referred to in our discussion of results) calls in our opinion for taking them into account when correcting for multiple comparisons, yielding a more conservative threshold for Type I error.

[6] Robustness checks show comparable results in models that control for the survey mode in wave 1 (normal vs. RCS; Tables A8–A12) and run only on respondents that are included in all four waves, to account for potential sample differences due to attrition (Tables A13–A17). Results are furthermore robust when using different baseline variables for expressive partisanship and populist attitudes (notably, instead of using variables measured in wave 1, using variables measured in subsequent waves, as relevant – e.g., the measure in wave 3 for models that estimate "cooling down"); see Table A18.

was significantly associated with changes in NRP – specifically, a heating up on some indicators during the election phase, and a lack of cooling down for partisan Schadenfreude in the post-election phase. Narcissism and Machiavellianism seem largely irrelevant to explain changes in NRP, and this seems also the case for populist attitudes. On the other hand, need for chaos is strongly and positively associated with increasing NRP, in particular during the pre-election phases, and somewhat associated with lower de-radicalization after the election. While not as clear cut as the effects for party identity strength, these trends indicate that political and psychological attitudes also have an important role to play to explain (changes in) NRP.

Our study is not without limitations. Two stand out in particular. First, we cannot exclude of course that stronger cooling down effects exist when a longer time horizon is taken into account. Research on the persistence of attitude change over time (e.g., Petty et al., 2014) certainly seems to suggest that newly formed attitudes do not last forever. This might be particularly the case in the Netherlands, where traditionally government formations tends to take multiple weeks or even months (as it was the case in the aftermath of the November 2023 election); in such circumstances, the dust may only truly settle once there is a new government in place, much later on that in other comparable political systems. We encourage future research to model the dynamics of radical partisanship over an even longer time period.

Second, and relatedly, the strength of our generalizations is necessarily limited by the fact that our investigation focuses on one election and one country only. Results might differ in different contexts and – even more importantly – might be moderated by contextual factors. Large-scale comparative evidence seems to suggest that the nature of the context explains macro differences in radical partisanship – for instance, more aggressive elites are associated with deeper affective polarization in the public Martin and Nai (2024). Focusing on one case makes it much harder to pick up the intervening role of contextual circumstances, which can potentially act as powerful confounders. The 2023 Dutch elections were somewhat exceptional in the sense that the populist radical right-wing party PVV won the elections with a considerable margin. We cannot fully exclude that this may have partly tempered the level in which NRP cooled down and could potentially also explain the link with populist attitudes. Thinking more specifically at the 2023 Dutch elections, furthermore, one specific event comes to mind that could have potentially altered the trajectory of partisan attitudes: on October 26, 2023, in the midst of the election campaign, Thierry Baudet, firebrand leader of the far-right *Forum for Democracy* (FvD) party in the Netherlands, was violently attacked while taking part to a public event in Ghent, Belgium, by an individual shouting anti-fascist messages.[7] In line with evidence from other studies (e.g., Krakowski et al., 2022; Dinas et al., 2016; but see Holliday et al., 2024), such an attack against political candidates could have led to shifts in partisan attitudes; evidence discussed in Nai et al. (2025) seems to suggest that this is the case only on the short term. Additionally, robustness checks that compare "heating up" in our data for people interviewed before vs. after the attack show rather similar trends (Fig. A7, Appendix A). Regardless, the presence of such a pivotal event calls for much more attention to the role of contextual intervening factors when investigating individual factors leading to heating up and cooling down radical partisanship.

Notwithstanding these limitations, this study provides important preliminary insights into how voters' psychological profile – affective partisanship, dark personality profile, and populist attitudes – help explaining whether the public gets radicalized - and stays so. Negative radical partisanship, and political violence more specifically, seem unfortunately to be a defining feature of democratic systems across the world – from the violent assault to the US Capitol in January 2021 to the assassination of Shinzo Abe in Japan (and assassination attempts against political leaders in Argentina, Brazil, the USA, and more). Identifying why (and for how long) segments of the population become radicalized to the point of engaging in acts that aim at subverting the political order will, undoubtfully, be a key challenge for policy makers, civil society organizations, and educators for the immediate future. Through delegitimization and a dehumanization of political opponents, negative radical partisanship could threaten the procedural conception of democracy (Fennema and Maussen, 2000), with dramatic consequences.

Our findings indicate that elections have the power to strengthen and consolidate negative radical partisanship, threatening the cohesion of society and the sustainability of democracy.

[7] "Dutch far-right leader Thierry Baudet attacked with an umbrella." *POLITICO*, October 26, 2023. https://www.politico.eu/article/dutch-far-right-leader-thierry-baudet-attacked-with-an-umbrella/(accessed on December 8, 2024).

CRediT authorship contribution statement

Alessandro Nai: Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Methodology, Investigation, Funding acquisition, Formal analysis, Data curation, Conceptualization. **Patrick F.A. van Erkel:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Conceptualization. **Linda Bos:** Writing – review & editing, Writing – original draft, Funding acquisition, Conceptualization.

Declaration of competing interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Acknowledgments

We are very grateful to the journal editors and anonymous reviewers for their contstructive suggestions and support along the process. All remaining mistakes are our own responsibility. Alex Nai and Linda Bos acknowledge the generous financial support from the Amsterdam School of Communication Research (ASCoR), which was instrumental for data collection.

Appendix A to D. Supplementary data

Supplementary data to this article can be found online at https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2025.102926.

Data availability

The data is already available for replication at the following anonymous OSF repository: https://osf.io/ma6u7/

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