Individual narcissism, need for closure and the two sides of negative partisanship

Abstract.

Negative party identification is an important and understudied side of party identification that is known mainly for its detrimental consequences such as democratic dissatisfaction and political polarisation. For a better understanding, it is important to know about its sociopsychological underpinnings, which have not been analysed so far. This article studies how narcissistic rivalry and need for cognitive closure affect negative party identification. Based on novel data from a national online sample from Germany (N = 1,307), I find that narcissistic rivalry and need for cognitive closure are central traits for negative partisanship, even after taking the Big Five factors into account. Furthermore, I argue that negative partisanship with established and anti-establishment parties fulfils different psychological needs: Negative partisans of a populist radical-right party show a different trait profile, which gives way to the idea that in certain cases negative partisanship can be considered a sign of a healthy democracy.

Keywords: Individual differences, negative partisanship, party identification, Germany, grandiose narcissism

Words: 8,295

1 Introduction

Affective partisan polarisation as well as negative partisanship have been on the rise in the last decades, not only in the US but also in many other democracies (e.g., Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Gidron, Adams, and Horne 2020; Iyengar et al. 2019; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016; Wagner 2020; Webster 2018). Analysis of the causes of the rise in inter-party animosity have described many different causes, including social group belongings such as positive party identification (e.g., Dias and Lelkes 2021; Mason 2016), party positions and ideological placements (e.g., (Lelkes 2018; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016). However, the role of negative party identification (NPI), the understudied side of partisanship which denotes a long-standing repulsion of a political party (e.g., Caruana, McGregor, and Stephenson 2015) has rarely been included in these studies, even though NPI was also found to drive increasing levels of polarisation (Abramowitz and Webster 2018; Bankert 2020). Previous research has already demonstrated the considerable impact of NPI, independently from positive party identification, for political attitudes and behaviour in the US and worldwide (e.g., Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Bankert 2020; Mayer 2017b; Medeiros and Noel 2014; Ridge 2020). I argue that studying NPI's sociopsychological underpinnings will help us to understand the general mechanism in the electorate for why some individuals are more likely to reject political parties, thus adding to polarisation of the electorate.

As individual differences shape individual responses to stimuli and to what they find appealing and not (Mondak 2010), they should of course affect also NPI which has not been studied before. Previous studies focusing on positive party identification have shown that individual differences matter for the existence and strength of the partisan attachments (Turner et al. 2010; Gerber et al. 2012). These studies relied on the widely used 'Big Five framework' (e.g., Costa and McCrae 1976) that decomposes personality into distinct traits such as *openness to*

experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism. The studies revealed that openness to new experiences, as well as agreeableness, relate positively in different countries to the likelihood of identifying with a political party (Gerber et al. 2012; Bakker, Hopmann, and Persson 2015). I argue however, that it is not enough to include only the Big Five framework as it does not encompass the entirety of a person's personality (e.g., Ashton et al. 2004; Back et al. 2013; Paulhus and Williams 2002). As a consequence, more recent concepts have been used to capture parts that are not covered well by the Big Five, such as grandiose narcissism (e.g., Raskin and Hall 1979) and the need for cognitive closure (Webster and Kruglanski 1994).

In this paper, I analyse how individual personality differences affect NPI. Conceptually, I rely on the narcissistic admiration and rivalry concept (NARC) (Back et al. 2013) as well as the need for cognitive closure (NFC). I argue that both concepts reflect the core of NPI very well. Narcissistic rivalry, the antagonistic pathway to maintain a grandiose self, relates well to NPI for maintaining superiority by derogating others. Furthermore, NFC, with its focus on the reduction of uncertainty and structure, relates well to NPI as a stable perception of the political system. I argue that the function that negative partisanship fulfils is also affected by parties' positions in the system. As populist radical right-wing (PRR) parties have many strong opponents who reject these parties as part of their preference for a liberal democracy (Meléndez and Kaltwasser 2021), NPI might fulfil a different function: Instead of merely structuring the political environment into fixed ingroups and outgroups, NPI with an anti-establishment party can rather be, or additionally be, a statement in favour of liberal democracy. I use new data from a national sample collected online in Germany to investigate the relationship between personality and NPI. Germany offers an ideal case because it has a moderate, pluralistic party system. It has also had a long period of stability, which is important for the analysis of stable

concepts such as partisanship, and it includes parties from all major party families as well as a PRR party.

The study shows that individual differences, mainly narcissistic rivalry and the need for cognitive closure, relate to NPI with established parties, even after taking the Big Five factors into account. This demonstrates that some individuals are generally more receptive to NPI – for instance, those who strive for supremacy through aggressive behaviour and by devaluing others are more likely to perceive adherents of other parties as political opponents, thus transferring individual differences into a polarised perception of the political sphere. However, NPI has mostly been discussed regarding its negative effects regarding polarisation and democratic satisfaction. I argue however, that NPI not always leads to negative outcomes, and that we need to distinguish between different kinds of NPI: i.e., between established and anti-establishment parties, because NPI with an anti-establishment party can be rather perceived as a statement for liberal democracy.

2 Theoretical framework

2.1 Negative partisanship as a social identity

Party identification¹ is one of the most used concepts in electoral research (Thomassen and Rosema 2009). The classic notion of party identification goes back to the ‘The Voter Decides’ (Campbell, Gurin, and Miller 1954) and ‘The American Voter’ (Campbell et al. 1960). In this sense, party identification is used “to characterize the individual’s affective orientation” (Campbell et al. 1960, 121) towards a political party. In the 1970s and 1980s, a revisionist

¹ In agreement with the common usage, ‘party identification’ without qualification always refers to positive party identification.

critique focused on the presumed lack of stability of partisanship that is seen rather as a “running tally” of on-going evaluations of political events (Fiorina 1981; Popkin et al. 1976), which represents an instrumental understanding of partisanship (e.g., Huddy, Mason, and Aarøe 2015). Nowadays, party identification research is mostly considered in the sense of the original meaning as a long-standing affective orientation that is conceptualised within the social identity approach (Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Greene 1999; Kelly 1989). According to the social identity approach (Tajfel and Turner 1979; Turner et al. 1987), individuals tend to structure their social environment into ingroups and outgroups, based on a fundamental need to belong to a social group and to reduce complexity and uncertainty (Brewer and Brown 1998). As Henri Tajfel put it, social identity is that part of an individual’s self-concept “which derives from his knowledge of his membership of a social group (or groups), together with the value and emotional significance attached to that membership” (Tajfel 1981, 255). Congruently, party identification is just one of an individual’s many group memberships that offers a sense of belonging and emotional significance (Tajfel and Turner 1979), and thus has an affective and cognitive component (Burden and Klofstand 2005). Accordingly, Gerber et al. (2012) argue that party identification has two different but related benefits for the identifiers: it provides a cognitive structure for interpreting the political environment, and it offers an affective element of group belonging. Individuals also have a need for a positive distinctiveness of their group from other groups, which can lead to intergroup accentuation and favouritism, as well as outgroup derogation (Brewer and Brown 1998; Turner and Reynolds 2010). Conceptualising party identification as a social identity allows slight deviations from the original assumption of stability (e.g., Huddy, Bankert, and Davies 2018). For example, if a party loses electoral ground, partisanship is still perceived as a relatively stable expression of a person’s social identity.

The related concept of negative party identification (NPI) has received considerably less interest so far. Even though NPI was part of the original definition of party identification, it was mentioned only in passing (Campbell et al. 1960, 121–22). It was noted that identification can be “negative”, and it is the “repelling quality” of the party that is central for identification, without anything else concerning the concept or without possible ways of measuring it. Consequently, the few existing studies have different notions of NPI and its measurement (Bankert 2020; Garry 2007; Maggiotto and Piereson 1977; Mayer 2017b; Richardson 1991; Ridge 2020; Rose and Mishler 1998; Spoon and Kanthak 2019). Even though NPI is often measured at the attitudinal level, there is agreement that conceptually, negative partisanship should be perceived at the identity level, in congruence with positive party identification. Caruana, McGregor, and Stephenson (2015) for example define NPI as a long-standing affective repulsion of a party that is more stable than simply disliking a party, and that causes motivated reasoning against this party, in a similar way to positive party identification.²

Relying on the social identity approach, we can identify the outgroup as a central element of importance (e.g. Ridge 2020). According to work on “negational identities” (Zhong et al. 2008), we can argue that NPI is a case of a negational identity that provides two benefits that are similar to positive party identification: It provides a structure for dealing with the political environment, and it offers affective benefits based on *not* belonging to a certain social category or group.

2 Of course, NPI can also be perceived from an instrumental, rationalist perspective and as such individuals may oppose parties based on issue-agenda. However, an expressive notion where negative partisanship is deeply rooted in social identities seems more likely as “negative partisanship tends to be related to strong emotions like collective threat and defence of political identities.” (Meléndez and Kaltwasser 2021, 4).

Conceptually, earlier research questioned whether NPI can exist independently of positive party identification (Maggiotto and Piereson 1977), although there is broad agreement nowadays that individuals may hold both types of identification separately (Bankert 2020; Medeiros and Noel 2014; Rose and Mishler 1998). According to recent works based on social identity theory (e.g., Leonardelli and Toh 2015), individuals vary when it comes to the categories/groups they emphasise for obtaining positive distinctiveness (Turner et al. 1987). Most people hold intergroup categorisations and clearly defined demarcations of the ingroup (“us”) and outgroup (“them”). However, each one is also possible without the other. For example, individuals may just use a clearly defined outgroup for differentiation of the social self.

However, not all party families have the same appealing or repelling effect. As PRR parties have become a main feature in most European party systems, their unique positions need to be considered when analysing negative partisanship in European multi-party systems. PRR parties are reported as the party family with the highest share of negative partisanship in Western Europe (Meléndez and Kaltwasser 2021). Meléndez and Kaltwasser (2021) argue that PRR parties generate emotionally charged debates about certain issues such as immigration that might also trigger ideological polarisation among themselves and among other voters. Consequently, negative identifiers with PRR parties show high levels of democratic support, as the negative partisanship in this case is not only about how one structures the political environment, it is also a statement in favour of liberal democracy. Consequently, I argue that NPI with PRR parties, and with the other more mainstream parties, is different and fulfils different functions.

2.2 Negative partisanship and personality

Now I turn to the relationship between personality and party identification. I argue that individual differences are an important source of variation for explaining partisanship which

has been understudied in the past. NPI might also be affected by current politics and short-term factors (Webster 2018), but understanding why some individuals are more likely to reject identification with a specific political party allows us to study the underpinnings of NPI more clearly. As individual differences such as personality traits and needs shape individuals' responses to stimuli and affect what they find appealing or repelling (Mondak 2010), these differences should naturally affect how individuals structure their political world.

After the introduction and establishment of the Big Five³ framework, which allowed personality traits to be more concisely conceptualised in a parsimonious model, analysis of personality and politics became more and more popular (Mondak 2010). In this understanding, personality is based on five traits: *openness to experience*, *conscientiousness*, *extraversion*, *agreeableness* and *neuroticism*. Even though the Big Five framework was introduced in the 1970s, its assimilation into political science only occurred after a considerable time lag. A new increase in publications started in the late 2000s, when studies analysed the relation between the Big Five personality traits, value orientations, party attachments, ideological positions, and vote choice (e.g., K. Ackermann and M. Ackermann 2015; Bakker, Hopmann, and Persson 2015; Caprara et al. 2006; Gerber et al. 2012; Schoen and Schumann 2007; Schoen and Steinbrecher 2013). Previous studies of the relationship between individual differences and

3 The Big Five framework (Goldberg 1993) and Five Factor model (Costa and McCrae 1976; Costa Jr and McCrae 1992) are very similar and are often used interchangeably. Their major difference is the measurement: the Big-Five approach uses lexical items based on adjectives, whereas the FFM usually uses statements that are evaluated as “apply/does not apply”. However, established instruments such as the German BFI-10 often claim to embrace both concepts.

partisan attachments already showed that the underpinnings of positive party identification can be successfully explored with the Big Five framework (e.g., Bakker, Hopmann, and Persson 2015; Gerber et al. 2012). The current state of research can be summarised up quickly: Gerber et al. (2012, US) and Bakker, Hopmann, and Persson (2015, Germany) proposed that partisan attachments offer both a sense of belonging in the political world as well as a structure. Findings partly confirm this. Extraversion and agreeableness, for example, relate to the likelihood of holding positive partisan attachments in the US and Germany. Looking at the negative partisan affect, Webster (2018) reported a negative link with extraversion as well as a negative link between negative affect and agreeableness.

Even though studies from psychology show that the Big Five framework does not encompass the entirety of an individual's personality (e.g., Ashton et al. 2004; Paulhus and Williams 2002) newer personality frameworks such as the HEXACO approach (adding honesty/humility as a sixth trait) or the “dark triad” (psychopathy, Machiavellianism, narcissism) have rarely entered political science to date – and even if they have, they have not used the latest measurements (e.g., Hatemi and Fazekas 2018). I argue, however, that two newer frameworks – the concept of narcissistic admiration and rivalry (NARC) (Back et al. 2013) and the need for cognitive closure (Kruglanski 2014; Webster and Kruglanski 1994) – are especially useful for analysing the underpinnings of NPI, as they show a deep theoretical relation to the two benefits of NPI: providing structure as well as affective meaning.

NARC (Back et al. 2013) was introduced recently and has been successfully applied to the explanation of political attitudes and right-wing populist vote choice (Cichocka, Dhont, and Makwana 2017; Mayer, Berning, and Johann 2020). According to NARC, grandiose narcissism – the subclinical variant of narcissism – consists conceptually of two underlying sub-dimensions that each provides a unique pathway to maintain the grandiose self. An

agentic/adaptive path called “narcissistic admiration” – characterised by self-promotion and which relies on striving for uniqueness – fantasises about grandiosity and charming behaviour. There is also a maladjusted pathway called “narcissistic rivalry”. This pathway is characterised by self-defence mechanisms, and it relies on devaluing others through aggression and hostility, which often ends in social conflict (Back et al. 2013).

I do not expect to find that narcissistic admiration relates to NPI in a particular way. However, the maladaptive pathway of narcissistic rivalry, with its focus on the devaluation of others, should closely match NPI’s benefit of providing an affective value in the political sphere. Narcissistic rivalry in particular should thus be positively related to NPI. However, as argued above, the type of party an individual identifies with negatively also matters for the assumed relation between personality and NPI. In the case of PRR parties, NPI can be seen not so much as a category that simply structures the environment and provides affective meaning, functioning as an outlet for derogating others, but it can be seen more as a preference for liberal democracy. Previous works have shown high levels of NPI towards such PRR parties, and the rejection of such parties often has a high cross-party consensus in the population (Meléndez and Kaltwasser 2021; Mudde 2013). Hence, I propose that narcissistic rivalry would relate positively to NPI with all established parties (Hypothesis 1a) but would relate negatively to NPI with a PRR party (Hypothesis 1b).

Apart from personality traits, personality psychology has also considered the role of individual needs; a perspective that gained traction again in research in the 2000s. The need for cognitive closure especially (Kruglanski 2014; Webster and Kruglanski 1994) has been applied widely in political science. NFC combines a desire for order and structure with decisiveness and closed-mindedness. It increases tendencies to maintain the current status quo by favouring structure and stability (Kruglanski 2014). Individuals with high levels of NFC therefore apply dogmatic

styles of reasoning, which leads to a mindset that is dominated by intergroup categorisations of “us” and “them”. NFC thus predicts right-wing authoritarianism and other right-wing attitudes (Altemeyer 2004; Guay and C. Johnston 2020; van Hiel, Pandelaere, and Duriez 2004). In addition, Luttig (2018) found that NFC relates positively to the strength of partisan identity and to in-party and out-party affect and argued that parties are providers of structure. I argue that NFC, and the desire for well-defined and fully formed categorisations, closely matches NPI’s benefit of providing structure. High levels of NFC should thus relate positively to NPI, no matter what function the party has in the party system. Parties should therefore be epistemic providers of structure regardless of their positions and stances. I thus propose that NFC positively relates to NPI: the higher the need for cognitive closure, the higher the structuring of the political environment into defined outgroups (Hypothesis 2).

Table 1: Overview of hypotheses

Personality traits	Main aspects	NPI	
		Towards established parties	Towards PRR parties
Narcissistic admiration	Strive for uniqueness, seeking social admiration, charmingness	0	0
Narcissistic rivalry	Strive for supremacy, devalue others	+ (H1a)	– (H1b)
Need for closure	Desire for certainty and structure	+ (H2)	

3 Data and methods

The data for this study was collected in a three-wave panel study on social cohesion in German society in December 2020, and in February and May 2021. The survey was fielded online using an Online Access Panel by the market research company respondi, with matched quotas for age, gender, and federal state in wave 1. An oversampling of respondents who were born abroad

or whose parents were born abroad was applied. Only participants who took part in all three waves of the study as well as who were born in Germany were used for the analyses. All participants with missing values on the independent variables were excluded (final N = 1,307).⁴ Due to the non-representative nature of the data, although quotas were applied, generalisations will be drawn with caution. As the survey was fielded during the COVID-19 pandemic, when lockdown measures were partly in place, it can be questioned whether this specific situation affects the variables of interest. Furthermore, not all the measures were included in the same wave, with NPI included in wave 2 and NFC included in wave 3. I argue however that the variables of interest are supposed to be stable components, either of personality and individual needs or of stable, long-standing party attachments, and thus were only marginally affected by the survey topic or by the different time periods.

3.1 Measures

3.1.1 Dependent variable: Measuring partisan attachment

For the measurement of NPI, there are so far four different approaches to measurement. First, some authors (e.g., Maggiotto and Piereson 1977; Richardson 1991) measure NPI as negative affective evaluations of a party. Second, some authors operationalise it as a negative behavioural attitude such as the intention never to vote for a party (e.g., Medeiros and Noel 2014; Rose and Mishler 1998). Third, others employ a combination of the first and second approaches, and combine the so-called affective and behavioural facets (Mayer 2017b; Ridge 2020). However, in the context of positive party identification, evaluations are judged as being too short term to properly represent a long-standing identification (e.g., R. Johnston 2006).

⁴ Panel attrition from wave 1 to wave 2 was 20%, and attrition from wave 2 to wave 3 was 30%. Out of the 2,954 people taking part in wave 1, 1,660 also took part in waves 2 and 3.

Furthermore, using behavioural intentions contradicts the original idea of Campbell et al. (1960) that partisanship is conceptually different from vote choice and introduces a tautological element to the concept. This means that negative party evaluations and behavioural intentions might be used in cases where no other indicators are available, but in general, they are insufficient for analysing negative partisanship thoroughly.

A fourth approach thus looks at new ways to measure the concept based on social identity theory (Bankert 2020; Garry 2007; Mayer 2017a). Bankert (2020) uses a rephrased social identity scale by Mael and Tetrick (1992) with eight items whose applicability for multi-party systems seems problematic for her analyses in the US, as this would mean that respondents would have to answer eight questions for every party. Garry (2007) studies the Northern Ireland multi-party system and operationalises NPI with two items: supporting or opposing a party, and feeling close to or distant from a party. Based on this study, Mayer (2017a) proposes and validates a single-item measure that focuses on the “us” vs. “them” distinction in combination with emotional significance. Respondents are asked if they perceive adherents of a party as political opponents when they talk to them. This item is assumed to capture the process of outgroup categorisation while still being able to be used for more than one party in multi-party systems: “If somebody reveals that they are an adherent of [this party], I usually see them as a political opponent”. This statement was presented to all six major parties for a response (Christian Democrats CDU/CSU, Social Democrats, Free Democrats, Left Party, Greens, and Alternative for Germany [AfD]) in wave 2 of the survey. Responses were on a five-point rating scale, ranging from 1 (do not agree at all) to 5 (very strongly agree). Concerning these NPIs, Figure 1 shows the distribution by party. We see that more than 63 percent of the sample agree or very strongly agree that adherents of the AfD are political opponents, whereas this number is

considerably lower for all other parties. This adds evidence to the thought that NPI with the AfD might be triggered by different or additional factors.

Figure 1: Different types of negative party identification

3.1.2 Independent and control variables

To measure narcissism, I rely on a validated short scale of the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Questionnaire (NARQ) (Back et al. 2013) that measures each dimension with three items such as “I earned being viewed as a great personality” for narcissistic admiration, and ‘I want my opponents to fail’ and “Most people are losers” for narcissistic rivalry (e.g., Paulhus and Williams 2002). The answer options ranged from 1 (does not apply at all) to 6 (fully applies). As the NARC framework conceptualises both dimensions as being correlated and not independent of each other, I argue that both dimensions of grandiose narcissism have to be included together in the models to be able to disentangle the relationship properly, even though there are no a-priori hypotheses for narcissistic admiration. NFC was measured with a short

scale that used one item for each of the five dimensions (similar to Rinke 2019), such as “I dislike unpredictable situations”.

In addition, to show that the results also hold true for traditional personality frameworks, I control for the Big Five personality traits in each analysis. I used the German Big Five Inventory (BFI-10), a validated German short scale (Rammstedt and John 2007). Satisfaction with democracy was measured with the question “How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Germany?”, with responses ranging from 0 (not satisfied at all) to 10 (totally satisfied). Gender, origin (East/West), educational levels, and age were included to control for primary socialisation and social group belonging (e.g., Gerber et al. 2012; Schoen and Schumann 2007).

Table 2: Descriptive statistics for all independent and control variables

Construct	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Measured in Wave
Narcissistic Admiration	1	6	2.73	1.16	1
Narcissistic Rivalry	1	6	2.19	1.03	1
Need for Closure	1	5	3.45	0.71	3
Big Five: Openness	1	5	3.41	0.97	1
Big Five: Conscientiousness	1	5	3.85	0.80	1
Big Five: Extraversion	1	5	3.06	1.02	1
Big Five: Agreeableness	1	5	3.20	0.78	1
Big Five: Neuroticism	1	5	2.53	0.96	1
Male	0	1	0.58		1
East	0	1	0.14		1
Education	1	3	2.36	0.73	1
Age	18	74	47.92	14.02	1
Satisfaction with Democracy	0	10	5.56	2.99	1

3.2 Method

For the analyses of NPI, the data was stacked, i.e. transformed into long format, meaning that the unit for analysis is no longer the respondent, but the respondent’s negative identification strength with a single party (see also van der Eijk et al. 2006). This stacked data format allows

the analysis of the general patterns between personality and negative party identification for all parties and is often used for the analysis of multi-party systems (Nasr 2020; Oskarson, Oscarsson, and Boije 2016). As the voter-party dyad is the unit of interest, the stacked data format increases the sample size by a factor of six. It is thus important to account for clustering at the level of the individuals (Beck and Katz 1995). I estimated OLS regression with robust standard errors and included party fixed effects by relying on dummy variables for the parties. All variables were rescaled to 0–1 to allow comparisons of unstandardised coefficients within and between models.

4 Results

First, I analysed how narcissistic rivalry relates to NPI. The results for the main variables of interest are displayed in Figure 2. For NPI with established parties, narcissistic rivalry shows the strongest relation to NPI. Those participants with high narcissistic rivalry also have stronger NPI (total effect: 1.1 scale points). This shows that those who strive for supremacy through aggressive behaviour and by devaluing others are also more likely to perceive adherents of other parties as political opponents, thus transferring individual differences into a polarised perception of the political sphere. In contrast, narcissistic rivalry is negatively related to NPI with the AfD. This means that individuals who are low on narcissistic rivalry, in particular, view adherents of the AfD as political opponents (total effect: 0.8 scale points). These converging directions of the relationship of narcissistic rivalry with NPI can be considered as the first evidence that NPI with an anti-establishment⁵ party may mean something different,

⁵ Some might argue that the Left Party, which is partly observed by some state offices for the Protection of the Constitution, should not be considered an established party. I base my distinction of established and anti-establishment on the parties' position in the political system.

namely a stance on the support for liberal democracy and NPI with other parties. Furthermore, narcissistic rivalry, in comparison with other traits, has a very close relationship with NPI. Hypotheses 1a and 1b can thus be confirmed.

Figure 2: Coefficient plot for the relationship between personality and negative party identification, unstandardised estimates

Note. OLS regressions estimated with fixed-effects for parties in M1, M1 and M2 with cluster robust standard errors. Controls for age, gender, origin, and education, as well as party fixed effects, have been dropped from the graph. For

As the Left Party is part of several coalitions at the state level, I consider it to be an established party here. I also conduct all analyses separately by party (see Supplementing Information, Table SI 2) and can show that the patterns for NPI with the Left party correspond closely with the patterns for the other established parties.

the full list, see Appendix, Table 3. Coefficients are displayed with the 99% and 95% CI.

A high NFC relates positively to NPI strength, both for NPI with the AfD and with all other parties. NFC increases NPI by 0.6 scale points for all parties except the AfD. NFC thus relates positively to all NPI, regardless of the party family or the position within the political system. However, this relationship only reaches conventional levels of statistical significance for NPI with established parties. Hypothesis 2 for the positive relation between NFC and NPI can thus be partly confirmed.

The Big Five factors were included as controls in the models (see Appendix, Table 3) to show that the effects of narcissistic admiration and narcissistic rivalry are not mediated by the more established Big Five personality traits. Instead, these traits have independent, significant relations with NPI with established parties. These are, however, less than half of the effect of narcissistic rivalry. For NPI with the AfD, only one trait – conscientiousness – shows a significant, negative relation. Among the other control variables, the Left Party has the highest level of NPI among all the other parties. Furthermore, on average, men have higher levels of NPI towards established parties than women. There is no significant gender difference for NPI with the AfD. Also, there is no significant relation between age, education or geographic origin for NPI with established parties. In contrast, age, high education (compared to low), as well as being from West Germany, relate positively towards NPI with the AfD.

As NPI with right-populist parties has been associated with favouring liberal democracy (e.g., Meléndez and Kaltwasser 2021), I first look at how NPI relates to satisfaction with democracy. Previous studies found that NPI relates negatively to democratic satisfaction (e.g., Ridge, 2020).

While the average value is 4.70 for those who have NPI⁶ with an established party (ranging from 4.3 for NPI GREENS to 5.1 for NPI FDP), the average value is 6.2 for those with an NPI with the AfD. This shows that satisfaction with democracy is substantially higher for those who negatively identify with the AfD. Next, I ran additional models which included satisfaction with democracy (Table 3, M1b and M2b). NPI with established parties, including satisfaction with democracy, barely reduces the size of the correlation between narcissistic rivalry and NFC and NPI respectively. In contrast, for NPI with the AfD, there is no significant negative relation with narcissistic rivalry, thus adding evidence to the proposal that NPI with an anti-establishment party has a different function for those identifiers, namely taking a stance for liberal democracy.

As robustness checks, I replicated the estimates using multi-level linear regression models with random intercepts and robust standard errors, with party*respondents as 1st level and respondents as 2nd level units with dummy variables for the parties (see Supplementing Information, Table SI 1, that basically shows the same result). Furthermore, a decomposition of the relationship by party (see Supplementing Information, Table SI 2) shows that the positive relationship between narcissistic rivalry and NPI can be found for all parties except the AfD. In addition, the positive relationship between NFC and NPI can be observed for four out of the five established parties except the Left Party. I also replicated these analyses with traditionally used operationalisations of NPI that rely on “feeling thermometers” and a question about which party a person would never vote for. These results show the same relationship with narcissistic rivalry (see Supplementing Information, Table SI 3) but not with NFC. As the traditional

6 For this analysis, I recoded NPI into two categories and treated all those who answered with 4 or 5 for the opponent question as having NPI and others as not having NPI.

operationalisation focuses heavily on the affective short-term part of NPI, and NFC is supposed to relate to the cognitive side of NPI, these results are consistent from this point of view. Last, I estimated all models with positive party identification as the dependent variable (see Supplementing Information, Table SI 4). These results show that positive party identification with an established party is only weakly related to any personality variable, except for one trait, Agreeableness, from the Big Five framework. Identifying with the AfD however relates positively to narcissistic rivalry.

5 Conclusion

This article intends to add to the literature on the relationship of individual differences with NPI. Previous studies only analysed positive party identification and did not take negative party identification into account. Employing a novel measure that conceptualises NPI within the social identity framework as the stable perception of party adherents as political opponents, I show that considerable parts of the voting population – more than 80 percent in Germany – have at least one NPI. A lot of these NPIs are against the AfD, a populist radical-right party that is currently not considered for coalition by the other political parties. For the analysis of individual differences, I employed the Narcissistic Admiration and Rivalry Concept (NARC), as well as the need for cognitive closure (NFC), and controlled for the Big Five personality traits.

I found a diverging relationship for narcissistic rivalry and NPI towards established parties and the AfD. Individuals with high narcissistic rivalry are more likely to perceive adherents of other parties as political opponents, because such a friend–foe perception of the political world relates to their striving for supremacy by devaluing others. However, narcissistic rivalry relates

negatively to perceptions of the AfD as a political opponent. In this case, those who do not perceive politics in an aggressive way classify the AfD as an opponent. NFC, on the other hand, shows a positive relationship for NPI, no matter with which party. However, this positive relation is only statistically significant for NPI with established parties. Neither of the individual differences studied was found to relate to positive party identification, thus showing that NPI and positive party identification have different underlying personality profiles and thus might fulfil different functions for orientation in the political sphere. Furthermore, satisfaction with democracy significantly reduces the correlation between narcissistic rivalry and NPI with the AfD, but does not reduce the correlation for NPI with established parties. This hints at the idea that NPI with an anti-establishment party has a different function for identifiers.

The overall finding is that individual personality differences should not be disregarded, because understanding the general patterns between personality and partisanship can help us to understand better why some people have certain partisan attachments and others do not, regardless of their primary socialisation and social group belongings. Furthermore, these results highlight that narcissistic rivalry and NFC relate to both the more complex and the more dangerous kind of partisanship that fosters societal conflict – i.e., negative partisanship. However, the findings also show that not all NPI should be treated the same. NPI with an anti-establishment party relates to a different personality profile than NPI with established parties. This demonstrates that NPI is not necessarily connected to negative outcomes for the political system and its legitimacy per se, but that negative consequences arise mainly out of the repulsion of established parties.

The findings of this article add to the growing literature that highlights the importance of narcissism for political orientation. They also give new insights into the harmful outcomes of narcissistic rivalry: i.e., driving perceptions of a political sphere with clearly defined ingroups

and outgroups that are difficult to overcome. Especially in multi-party systems such as Germany, many clearly defined, closed partisans can be problematic due to their reduced flexibility when a change of the majority drives the need for new coalitions across ideological camps which might be opposed by negative partisans. However, studies of multi-party systems should always consider the possible functions that NPI might fulfil towards different party families. Aggregating the analyses for all the parties might blur important differences.

Nevertheless, this study's data were only cross-sectional and were collected from an online survey with access quotas, thus biasing the results and making it hard to draw general conclusions. The present analysis was constrained by other data limitations as well. It not only covers one point in time but also only one country: Germany. It is possible that the relationships analysed in this paper are entirely different in other countries. Furthermore, the explanatory power of the models is very low, which was to be expected, as partisan attachments are causally distant from personality traits. However, although party identity is part of social identity, and thus closer to personality than to vote choice for example, there might be other intermittent variables that have been omitted.

Despite these limitations, the results of this study provide evidence to show (a) the need for more analysis of personality and political orientations, and (b) the importance of including NPI for a more encompassing picture in studies of political behaviour.

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7 Appendix

Table 3: OLS Regression of Personality on NPI, unstandardised coefficients

	M1 NPI with established parties	M2 NPI towards AfD	M1b NPI with established parties + Satisfaction	M2b NPI with AfD + Satisfaction
Narcissistic Admiration	0.25** (0.09)	0.08 (0.23)	0.30*** (0.09)	-0.09 (0.22)
Narcissistic Rivalry	1.10*** (0.10)	-0.81** (0.27)	0.91*** (0.10)	-0.30 (0.26)
Need for Closure	0.63*** (0.10)	0.42 (0.28)	0.66*** (0.10)	0.34 (0.27)
Big5: Openness	0.18* (0.07)	0.28 (0.19)	0.18* (0.07)	0.29 (0.17)
Big5: Conscientiousness	0.30*** (0.09)	-0.65** (0.22)	0.25** (0.09)	-0.52* (0.21)
Big5: Extraversion	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.16 (0.19)	-0.05 (0.07)	-0.13 (0.17)
Big5: Agreeableness	-0.30*** (0.09)	0.26 (0.23)	-0.18* (0.09)	-0.11 (0.22)
Big5: Neuroticism	-0.16* (0.08)	0.20 (0.23)	-0.17* (0.08)	0.22 (0.21)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.02*** (0.00)
<i>Education (ref. cat.: low)</i>				
Education: mid	0.03 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.13)	0.04 (0.05)	-0.12 (0.12)
Education: high	-0.09 (0.05)	0.37** (0.13)	-0.04 (0.05)	0.25* (0.12)
Gender: male	0.30*** (0.03)	-0.18 (0.09)	0.30*** (0.03)	-0.19* (0.08)
Origin: East Germany	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.39** (0.12)	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.18 (0.12)
<i>Party (ref. cat: CDU)</i>				
SPD	-0.00 (0.05)		-0.00 (0.04)	
Greens	0.14** (0.05)		0.14** (0.05)	
FDP	0.29*** (0.05)		0.28*** (0.05)	
Left Party	0.44*** (0.05)		0.44*** (0.05)	
Satisfaction with democracy			-0.60*** (0.01)	1.90*** (0.01)
Constant	1.37*** (0.15)	3.12*** (0.41)	1.71*** (0.15)	2.13*** (0.39)
N	6,485	1,307	6,485	1,307
R ²	0.09	0.06	0.11	0.18
AIC	21285	4786	21141	4605
BIC	21407	4858	21270	4683

Note. All independent variables normalised to 0–1 range. M1 includes stacked data for the five established parties.

Supplementing Information

Table SI 1: Comparison of OLS Regression with Party Dummies and Multi-Level Modelling

	M1 NPI with established parties	M1M NPI with established parties (multi-level)
Narcissistic Admiration	0.25** (0.09)	0.25 (0.15)
Narcissistic Rivalry	1.10*** (0.10)	1.09*** (0.16)
Need for Closure	0.63*** (0.10)	0.63*** (0.17)
Big5: Openness	0.18* (0.07)	0.17 (0.11)
Big5: Conscientiousness	0.30*** (0.09)	0.29* (0.14)
Big5: Extraversion	-0.04 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.11)
Big5: Agreeableness	-0.30*** (0.09)	-0.31* (0.13)
Big5: Neuroticism	-0.16* (0.08)	-0.16 (0.13)
Age	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Education (ref. cat.: low)		
Education: mid	0.03 (0.05)	0.03 (0.08)
Education: high	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.10 (0.08)
Gender: male	0.30*** (0.03)	0.30*** (0.05)
Origin: East Germany	-0.01 (0.05)	-0.02 (0.08)
Party (ref. cat: CDU)		
SPD	-0.00 (0.05)	-0.00 (0.03)
Greens	0.14** (0.05)	0.14*** (0.04)
FDP	0.29*** (0.05)	0.28*** (0.03)
Left Party	0.44*** (0.05)	0.44*** (0.05)
Constant	1.37*** (0.15)	1.41*** (0.23)
Variance (Level2 Intercept)		-0.24*** (0.03)
Variance (Level1 Error)		-0.03* (0.02)
N	6,485	6,485
R ²	0.09	
AIC	21285	19908
BIC	21407	20043

Note. M1M includes party*respondents as 1st level and respondents as 2nd level

Table SI 2: OLS Regression of Personality on NPI by Party, Unstandardised Coefficients

	M3 NPI CDU	M4 NPI SPD	M5 NPI GREENS	M6 NPI FDP	M7 NPI Left Party	M2 NPI AfD
Narcissistic Admiration	0.33 (0.19)	0.28 (0.19)	0.03 (0.19)	0.26 (0.19)	0.35 (0.21)	0.08 (0.23)
Narcissistic Rivalry	1.02*** (0.22)	1.34*** (0.22)	1.51*** (0.23)	0.80*** (0.22)	0.81** (0.25)	-0.81** (0.27)
Need for Closure	0.45* (0.22)	0.69** (0.21)	0.94*** (0.23)	0.59** (0.22)	0.48 (0.26)	0.42 (0.28)
Big5: Openness	0.46** (0.15)	0.23 (0.15)	-0.15 (0.16)	0.66*** (0.15)	-0.32 (0.17)	0.28 (0.19)
Big5: Conscientiousness	-0.08 (0.19)	0.42* (0.18)	0.47* (0.20)	-0.19 (0.19)	0.87*** (0.21)	-0.65** (0.22)
Big5: Extraversion	0.05 (0.15)	-0.13 (0.14)	0.09 (0.16)	-0.18 (0.16)	-0.05 (0.18)	-0.16 (0.19)
Big5: Agreeableness	0.00 (0.18)	-0.29 (0.18)	-0.54** (0.20)	-0.04 (0.19)	-0.64** (0.21)	0.26 (0.23)
Big5: Neuroticism	-0.00 (0.17)	-0.24 (0.17)	-0.49** (0.18)	0.07 (0.18)	-0.16 (0.20)	0.20 (0.23)
Age	-0.01* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
Education (ref. cat.: low)						
Education: mid	0.04 (0.11)	-0.00 (0.10)	0.11 (0.11)	-0.01 (0.11)	-0.00 (0.12)	-0.10 (0.13)
Education: high	-0.06 (0.10)	-0.16 (0.10)	-0.06 (0.11)	-0.10 (0.11)	-0.07 (0.12)	0.37** (0.13)
Gender: male	0.31*** (0.07)	0.28*** (0.07)	0.39*** (0.08)	0.23** (0.08)	0.29*** (0.08)	-0.18 (0.09)
Origin: East Germany	0.11 (0.10)	-0.03 (0.09)	0.18 (0.10)	0.08 (0.10)	-0.39*** (0.11)	-0.39** (0.12)
Constant	1.47*** (0.29)	1.34*** (0.29)	1.35*** (0.33)	1.54*** (0.31)	2.01*** (0.36)	3.12*** (0.41)
N	1,307	1,307	1,307	1,307	1,307	1,307
R ²	0.08	0.11	0.12	0.06	0.07	0.06
AIC	4132	4019	4333	4241	4500	4786
BIC	4205	4091	4405	4313	4573	4858

Table SI 3: Logistic Regression of Personality on NPI, Traditional Operationalisations, Average Marginal Effects

	M1b	M1c	M1d	M2b	M2c	M2d
	NPI with established parties			NPI AfD		
	Thermometer + never vote	Feeling thermometer < 0	Never vote	Thermometer + never vote	Feeling thermometer < 0	Never vote
Narcissistic Admiration	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.14*** (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)	-0.09 (0.06)	-0.12* (0.05)	-0.04 (0.05)
Narcissistic Rivalry	0.14*** (0.03)	0.16*** (0.04)	0.18*** (0.03)	-0.38*** (0.06)	-0.25*** (0.06)	-0.31*** (0.06)
Need for Closure	-0.01 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)	0.00 (0.04)	0.00 (0.07)	-0.03 (0.07)	-0.05 (0.07)
Big5: Openness	0.06** (0.02)	0.06* (0.03)	0.06* (0.02)	0.14** (0.05)	0.03 (0.04)	0.07 (0.05)
Big5: Conscientiousness	0.10*** (0.03)	0.10** (0.03)	0.07* (0.03)	-0.18** (0.06)	-0.14** (0.05)	-0.19** (0.06)
Big5: Extraversion	-0.06** (0.02)	-0.05* (0.03)	-0.04 (0.02)	-0.13** (0.05)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.09 (0.05)
Big5: Agreeableness	-0.24*** (0.03)	-0.27*** (0.03)	-0.22*** (0.03)	0.19** (0.06)	0.17** (0.05)	0.24*** (0.06)
Big5: Neuroticism	-0.11*** (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.10*** (0.03)	-0.00 (0.06)	0.02 (0.05)	0.07 (0.06)
Age	0.00** (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00*** (0.00)	0.00* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
<i>Education (ref. cat.: low)</i>						
Education: mid	0.01 (0.02)	-0.00 (0.02)	-0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Education: high	-0.02 (0.02)	-0.03 (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)	0.19*** (0.04)	0.12*** (0.03)	0.09** (0.04)
Gender: male	0.04** (0.01)	0.05*** (0.01)	0.04** (0.01)	-0.06* (0.02)	-0.05* (0.02)	-0.08*** (0.02)
Origin: East Germany	0.05*** (0.01)	0.02 (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)	-0.06 (0.03)	-0.06* (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)
<i>Party (ref. cat: CDU)</i>						
SPD	-0.04** (0.01)	0.03 (0.02)	-0.06*** (0.02)			
Greens	0.04* (0.02)	0.00 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)			
FDP	0.06*** (0.02)	0.17*** (0.02)	0.06*** (0.02)			
Left Party	0.13*** (0.02)	0.14*** (0.02)	0.13*** (0.02)			
N	7,057	7,057	7,057	1,419	1,419	1,419
Pseudo-R ²	0.04	0.11	0.03	0.09	0.04	0.10
AIC	7617	1521	9461	1267	7689	1220
BIC	7741	1594	9584	1341	7811	1292

Table SI 4: Regression of Personality on NPI and PPI

	M8 PPI with established parties	M2 NPI with established parties	M9 PPI with AfD	M3 NPI with AfD
Narcissistic Admiration	0.01 (0.02)	0.25** (0.09)	0.01 (0.03)	0.08 (0.23)
Narcissistic Rivalry	-0.01 (0.02)	1.10*** (0.10)	0.12** (0.04)	-0.81** (0.27)
Need for Closure	0.02 (0.02)	0.63*** (0.10)	-0.00 (0.05)	0.42 (0.28)
Big5: Openness	0.01 (0.02)	0.18* (0.07)	-0.01 (0.03)	0.28 (0.19)
Big5: Conscientiousness	-0.02 (0.02)	0.30*** (0.09)	0.06 (0.04)	-0.65** (0.22)
Big5: Extraversion	0.01 (0.02)	-0.04 (0.07)	0.07* (0.03)	-0.16 (0.19)
Big5: Agreeableness	0.05* (0.02)	-0.30*** (0.09)	-0.15*** (0.04)	0.26 (0.23)
Big5: Neuroticism	0.00 (0.02)	-0.16* (0.08)	-0.01 (0.04)	0.20 (0.23)
Age	0.00* (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	0.01*** (0.00)
<i>Education (ref. cat.: low)</i>				
Education: mid	-0.00 (0.01)	0.03 (0.05)	-0.01 (0.02)	-0.10 (0.13)
Education: high	0.02* (0.01)	-0.09 (0.05)	-0.06** (0.02)	0.37** (0.13)
Gender: male	0.01 (0.01)	0.30*** (0.03)	0.04* (0.02)	-0.18 (0.09)
Origin: East Germany	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.05)	0.05** (0.02)	-0.39** (0.12)
<i>Party (ref. cat: CDU)</i>				
SPD	-0.05*** (0.01)	-0.00 (0.05)		
Greens	-0.01 (0.01)	0.14** (0.05)		
FDP	-0.12*** (0.01)	0.29*** (0.05)		
Left Party	-0.10*** (0.01)	0.44*** (0.05)		
Constant		1.37*** (0.15)		3.12*** (0.41)
N	6,485	6,485	1,307	1,307
AIC	5637	21285	750	4786
BIC	5761	21407	824	4858

Note. Positive party identification was measured with the traditional German single item in wave 3 “Many people in the Federal Republic lean toward a particular party for a long time, although they may occasionally vote for a different party. How about you?” About 81 percent of respondents report a party identification. Logistic regression with AME for PPI, OLS Regression for NPI