

# Differentiating the Sources of Post-Election Partisan Affect Warming

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## Abstract

While scholars have closely examined the intensification of negative affect across party lines during elections, less is known about the decline of partisan hostility in the aftermath of election campaigns. Synthesizing insights from research on electoral rules and political psychology, we theorize and empirically test two such mechanisms of post-election negative affect decline. The first is that of winners' generosity: the expectation that self-perceived election winners will express warmer feelings toward political opponents. The second is that of co-governance, which predicts that shared coalition status leads to warmer affective evaluations among governing parties. We provide evidence that these mechanisms operate as pressure valves of negative partisan affect. The empirical analyses leverage a uniquely uncertain political period following the 2021 Israeli elections, around which we conducted an original panel study. Our findings advance the comparative polarization literature and connect psychological and institutional accounts of temporal fluctuations in partisan affect.

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# 1 Introduction

Social scientists are increasingly concerned with the adverse implications of negative affect across party lines. Partisan resentment is associated with multiple negative outcomes, from discrimination of out-party supporters to democratic backsliding (Iyengar et al., 2019; Kingzette et al., 2021; McConnell et al., 2018; McCoy and Somer, 2019; Orhan, 2021).<sup>1</sup> It is thus not surprising that scholars have closely explored the drivers of partisan resentment and how they vary cross-nationally (Adams et al., 2022; Boxell et al., 2020; Drutman, 2020; Gidron et al., 2020; Hartevelde, 2021a,b; Horne et al., 2022; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021).

Partisan affect varies not only across countries, but also over time: it increases during election campaigns—and then subsides after elections conclude (Bassan-Nygate and Weiss, 2022; Hernández et al., 2021; Michelitch, 2015; Singh and Thornton, 2019). So far scholars have focused on the factors that intensify affective polarization over time. In this manuscript, we turn to mechanisms that lead to post-election reduction in negative partisan affect: that is, which partisans come to express warmer feelings toward which opposing parties, and at which points in time? Answering these questions is crucial if we seek to understand the processes that regulate partisan hostility in general, and to identify conditions that are conducive to improvement in partisan affect after election campaigns are over.

Synthesizing insights from research in electoral politics and political psychology, we theorize two such mechanisms of post-election decline in negative partisan affect: winners' generosity and coalitional power-sharing arrangements. Based on work in political psychology, and specifically Social Identity Theory, we expect that those who perceive themselves as winners of the elections will express lower levels of partisan dislike toward out-parties (Sheffer, 2020). Second, in line with work on coalition heuristics, we hypothesize that shared governance is reflected in warmer affective evaluations among supporter of co-governing parties (Horne et al., 2022; Praprotnik and Wagner, 2021). These two mechanisms serve as affective pressure valves, leading to post-election decline in out-party negative affect.

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<sup>1</sup>For a more skeptical view of the implications of affective polarization, see Broockman et al. (2020).

While these two mechanisms are analytically distinct, they are often hard to disentangle empirically. This is in part because in many democracies, public consensus regarding the likely composition of the new government is achieved shortly after election results are published,<sup>2</sup> and perceptions of whether a party has won an election are usually correlated with whether it ends up (or is expected to end up) in government. This makes it difficult to conclude whether post-election changes in partisan affect are driven by the effects of perceptions of who won the election or the composition of the government.

To address this challenge, we analyze novel panel survey data designed uniquely to facilitate the study of partisan affect in a multi-party context (Gidron et al., 2022). The Israel Polarization Panel (IPP) allows us to observe shifts in partisan affect before and after the elections, link them with citizens' perceptions of winners and losers in the elections, and document how these citizens' affective evaluations respond to coalition formation. We take advantage of a unique moment of political uncertainty, in which the composition of the governing coalition remained entirely unclear for an unusually long period of time after the elections. We focus on the elections that took place in March 2021, which was the fourth time Israel went to the polls since 2019. This election resulted in a high degree of uncertainty and prolonged coalition negotiations involving the entire spectrum of parties represented in the Knesset, which created a de-facto separation between the immediate post-election formation of perceptions of winners and losers and the formation of the coalition government in June 2021. (Below we provide evidence for this ambiguity in public opinion perceptions.) These unique circumstances, and the fact that the IPP includes waves fielded both before and after the election as well as after the formation of the government, allow us to avoid the frequently-occurring confounding of electoral performance and governance status. We are thus well-positioned to separately test our two theoretical mechanisms of post-election decline in negative partisan affect.

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<sup>2</sup>In a substantial number of countries the coalition is officially formed within a few days of the election, although there are instances of prolonged negotiations, not unlike the one we leverage here (Golder, 2010; De Winter and Dumont, 2008). The mean negotiation time for post-election coalitions in Europe is around four weeks (Ecker and Meyer, 2015), a third of the time negotiations lasted in the 2021 Israel case.

The analyses of the panel survey data support both our theoretical expectations. With regard to the mechanism of winners’ generosity, we find that self-perceived winners’ affective evaluations of all out-parties improved on average by 2.7 percentage points, a statistically significant change; we do not detect any change in out-party affective evaluations among self-perceived losers. The coalitional partnership effect is far stronger: when comparing pre-election to post-coalition formation sentiment change, we find that coalition members provide each other with an affective bonus of 8.6 percentage points, a highly significant change that is over three times larger than that of winners’ generosity.

These findings contribute to research that focuses on mechanisms of negative affect decline (Huddy and Yair, 2021; Levendusky and Stecula, 2021; McCoy and Somer, 2021). More specifically, our findings demonstrate how institutional contexts shape the diffusion of out-partisan negative affect in the aftermath of acrimonious elections (Drutman, 2020). While the mechanisms of winners’ generosity should operate across contexts (Sheffer, 2020), the coalitional pressure valve is only available in electoral systems that produce coalition governments (Lijphart et al., 1999). This notwithstanding, power sharing arrangements are a panacea for affective polarisation: we also document growing dislike among supporters of parties that switched from coalition to opposition status toward new coalition members.

This study joins the emerging literature on partisan affective evaluations outside the United States (Boxell et al., 2020; Hartevelde et al., 2021; Hartevelde, 2021a; Hartevelde and Wagner, 2022; Lauka et al., 2018; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021). Since virtually all Western democracies outside of the United States are characterized by multi-party systems, it is crucial that scholars pay closer attention to the ways in which multi-party competition and cooperation shape partisan resentment (Drutman, 2020; McCoy and Somer, 2019). Our findings should also motivate more theoretical work on how perceptions of winning and losing in elections are formed in multi-party system and on the implications of these perceptions on outcomes such as polarization, democratic well-being, and trust in government (Blais and G lineau, 2007; Esaiasson et al., 2022; Gattermann et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2012).

## 2 Theoretical expectations

Scholars have closely examined factors seen as responsible for *rising* affective polarization, such as social sorting into parties (Harteveld, 2021b; Mason, 2016), economic inequality (Stewart et al., 2020) and the rising salience of culture issues across Western publics (Gidron et al., 2020). While the literature is largely focused on what accounts for increases in affective polarization, there is evidence that negative partisan affect subsides after elections. Both Singh and Thornton (2019) and Hernández et al. (2021) convincingly document this decline in negative affect using comparative survey data and both attribute this pattern to the decreasing salience of elections in the aftermath of the campaigns. However, this existing work does not outline specifically which groups of partisans would come to express warmer feelings toward which out-parties. In addition, it is unclear whether there are countervailing developments that may attenuate this change, pushing some groups of partisans to express growing negative affect while their fellow citizens' affective evaluations of out-parties improve. Lastly, existing work does not consider the option that political events may shape the pace of post-election decline in negative partisan affect. To push forward this research agenda, we turn to two potential pathways of post-election reduced partisan animosity that are analytically distinct despite their almost inevitable co-occurrence in the dynamics of electoral competition: winning elections and power sharing through co-governing.

### 2.1 Winners' generosity

In the few accounts that trace post-election attitudinal dynamics (Baekgaard, 2021; Singh and Thornton, 2019), one major source of divergence in the pace and magnitude of decline in partisan hostility is the fate of one's party in the elections. Analyzing survey panel data collected before and after the Canadian elections of 2015, Sheffer (2020) shows that partisan-based discrimination (as measured in economic decision-making games) of election winners toward election losers declined substantially in the weeks following the elections while in-group

bias among elections losers remained stable. Importantly, this study focused on a case in which an opposition party gained an absolute majority and immediately formed government, making it difficult to identify whether any warming of affect towards losing parties emanates from being an electoral winner or from holding office.

Here, we depart from this line of work by focusing on a case in which electoral performance was temporally separate from and non-predictive of government membership. We also rely on voters' subjective evaluations of whether their parties won or lost, instead of determining it ourselves. This follows a growing body of work that uses such self-reports and finds that voters' perceptions of winning and losing are dependent on a broad set of factors (Plescia, 2019; Singh et al., 2012; Stiers et al., 2018). Voters' perceptions regarding their parties depend on holding office and gaining seats, but also vote share gains, being the largest party (irrespective of governing status), entering parliament for the first time, and a 'loyalty premium' in which a party's voters tend to report that it won more than out-partisans do (Baekgaard, 2021; Plescia, 2019; Singh, 2014). We therefore expect to see the potential impact of winning among those who see themselves as having voted for a winning party, allowing us to evaluate these perceptions at different points in time.

What explains why existing research identifies divergent affective patterns among election winners and losers? Insights from political psychology, and specifically Social Identity Theory, help explain this variation. Losing elections is a negative emotional experience, characterized by increased anger and anxiety (Huddy et al., 2015; Pierce et al., 2016). Such negative emotions may sustain a partisan sense of threat among the losers, which in turn would help sustain negative feelings toward partisan opponents. In contrast, "winners experience an opposite set of emotions, singling them out as more likely candidates for substantially reduced partisan-based discriminatory behaviour post-election" (Sheffer, 2020, 4). These positive emotions reduce the sense of partisan threat, allowing for levels of out-partisan bias to return to pre-election levels (Duck et al., 1998; Oc et al., 2018).

This leads us to pose our first hypothesis:

*H1 (Winners' generosity). Negative out-partisan affect will subside post-elections among perceived winners.*

## **2.2 Co-governance**

Institutional power-sharing arrangements, and specifically coalitional co-governance, can warm partisan affective evaluations. There are several theoretical reasons for why partisans are likely to express warmer feelings toward parties that serve in coalitions with their own party. First, parties that are in power together are perceived as more ideologically proximate (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013), and this perception of increased ideological proximity may translate into warmer affective evaluations (Lelkes, 2021). Second, public media interactions between parties that co-govern together are warmer than interactions across the coalition-opposition divide, and such warm elite interactions can signal to partisans that they should also express warmer affective evaluations toward coalitions partners (Adams et al., 2021). Lastly, coalitions can constitute a super-ordinate identity shared by its members; that is, supporters of coalition parties may develop a shared sense of 'we' against the 'them' of opposition parties (Brewer, 2000). This sense of shared identity is also likely to be reflected in warmer affective evaluations among coalition partners.

In line with this logic, Bassan-Nygate and Weiss (2022) identify a causal effect of information regarding potential coalition formation on affective evaluations within the Israeli context. They demonstrate experimentally that information signals that a unity government between left and right will be formed leads to warmer evaluations across the left-right partisan divide. Using a similar research design, Praprotnik and Wagner (2021) reports similar results from an experiment conducted in Austria.

These findings are supported by analyses of comparative observational data from a large number of countries, which similarly argue that coalitions are followed by warm partisan affect among co-governing partisans (Horne et al., 2022). Importantly, this affective coalitional bonus does not disappear the moment a coalition is dissolved. Analyzing survey data

collected since the mid-1990s across Western democracies, Horne et al. (2022) show that partisans provide coalition partners with an affective bonus that lingers in the immediate years following the dissolution of the coalition. These dense networks of present and past coalitional cooperation can help explain why affective polarization is lower in proportional systems with multi-party coalitions than in majoritarian systems with no coalition governments (Drutman, 2020; Gidron et al., 2020).

This leads us to pose our second hypothesis:

*H2 (coalition bonus). Following coalition formation, supporters of coalition parties express warmer feelings toward other coalition parties.*

## 2.3 Observable Implications

The two hypotheses generate distinct observable implications. First, they are distinct with regard to the relevant out-parties: while our winners' generosity hypothesis (H1) predicts post-election decline of negative affect among winners toward *all* out-parties, our co-governance hypothesis (H2) predicts decline in negative affect specifically among members of the coalition (that is, when evaluating affect by supporters of coalition parties towards the other coalition parties).

Second, the observable implications of the two hypotheses are distinct *temporally*. Initial perceptions of who won in the elections are already formed in the immediate aftermath of an election, while coalition formation negotiations can be stretched over long periods of time and their outcome can remain uncertain throughout their duration. The time period between election results are known and before a coalition government is formed is when the implications of our winners' generosity (H1) can be measured, while the effects of co-governance (H2) kicks in following the formation of the government. When the expected composition of a future government is known - whether because it is comprised of a one-party majority government, the identity of which is clear given the result of the election, or because there is public consensus on who will be the parties that are likely to form



government - then H1 and H2 are confounded and affective evaluations of winners/losers are inevitably intertwined with evaluations of parties' (assumed) governing role.

In the Israeli context, three months have passed between the March 2021 elections and the formation of the new government in June 2021, and during that period of time, it was largely unclear what its composition might be, with an overwhelming majority of citizens expecting that no government will be formed and another election will be called even as late as May 2021, and the main potential coalition configurations discussed in the media were seen by voters as equally (un)likely to be realized (Hermann and Anabi, 2021).<sup>3</sup> As we discuss below in detail, self-perceptions of winning and losing the elections, as recorded immediately after the elections, do not correspond with the eventual composition of the coalition: some parties that were perceived as winners ended up in the opposition and were accordingly perceived as losers by a majority of their voters, while self-perceived losers were eventually part of the government and their voters perceived them eventually as winners. We find this wholesale reversal of perceptions among six of the eleven parties for which we have these evaluations. By and large then, respondents were unable to foresee which parties will be included in the eventual coalition government. As a result, we are able to separately evaluate the impact of winners' generosity and of co-governance. We now turn to discuss in further detail the Israeli political context and how it allows us to test our hypotheses.

## 3 Data and Measurement

### 3.1 The Israeli Case

The Israeli political arena in 2021 provides us with a useful case study to test the hypothesized mechanisms of post-election decline in negative affect. Israel, with its proportional electoral

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<sup>3</sup>As described by the new York Times on the evening of the elections: "The muddy result could extend the period of political uncertainty and polarization that has sent Israel reeling from election to election, failing each time to return a stable government. And it could lead to a fifth election." <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/03/23/world/middleeast/netanyahu-israel-election.html>

rules, is characterized by a highly fragmented party system. The effective number of parties in Israel has been around 8 when averaging over the last 20 years (Gallagher, 2019). All governments in Israel have been coalition governments (Bassan-Nygate and Weiss, 2022).

In 2019, Israel entered a period of intense political uncertainty, with four election taking place within only two years. The analyses below utilize data collected before and after the fourth election, which took place in March 2021 and led to the formation of a new coalition government in June 2021—ousting Benjamin Netanyahu from the premiership he has held for 12 consecutive years. The coalition government formed in June 2021 brought together a diverse set of parties, ranging not only from the far right to the deep left but also incorporating an Islamist party, thus breaking a historical taboo in Israeli politics.

The coalition formed in June 2021 was surprising even for astute observers of Israeli politics. This is relevant for our research design, as the question of which parties will be part of the coalition was far from settled in the immediate aftermath of the elections. The election resulted in a stalemate, as neither the Netanyahu-led bloc nor the anti-Netanyahu bloc could amass a majority of 61 votes to form government (the Israeli Knesset has 120 seats). During the three months of coalitional negotiations, it was uncertain that any coalition will be formed, and the option of fifth elections was widely seen as a the most likely outcome even in late May (Hermann and Anabi, 2021). Even more importantly, it was unclear whether an eventual government, if formed, will be based on the Netanyahu-led bloc or an Anti-Netanyahu amalgamation of parties (which was the eventual result), nor was it clear what the party composition of either of these potential coalitions consist of. The composition of the government only became apparent in the final days of this period, and the government’s successful swearing in June was seen as doubtful even as the vote was unfolding in parliament.

This prolonged political limbo allows us to distinguish between the observable implications of our two hypotheses: we can test the implications of winners’ generosity on partisan affect (H1) by looking at subjective perceptions of winning immediately following the elections, and separately gauge the effect of co-governance on affective evaluations (H2) by look-

ing at changes in affect following the formation of the government. Compared to our research design, observational work on positive affect among coalition members is not well-positioned to distinguish whether this warm affect is related to co-governance rather than to other processes such as winners' generosity (Horne et al., 2022). Others have used an experimental design to show that pre-election expectations for the formation of a broad post-election coalition attenuates population-wide affective polarization levels. This design cannot, however, provide real-world evidence on the impact of actual, post-election co-governance status on affect (Bassan-Nygate and Weiss, 2022; Praprotnik and Wagner, 2021).

### 3.2 The Israeli Polarization Panel

To examine the two hypotheses introduced above, we analyze data from the Israeli Polarization Panel [IPP] (Gidron et al., 2022). The IPP consists of panel survey data (repeated respondents), designed specifically to examine multiple dimensions of polarization. It covers the four election cycles that took place between 2019 and 2021, with the last wave fielded following the formation of the unity government formed in June 2021. This dataset is thus uniquely suited to examine within-individuals variations in partisan affect during the campaign, following the elections, and at the aftermath of a new coalition formation. While the IPP contains ten survey waves, the analyses below are limited to the last three waves, since only they include all relevant questionnaire items. These survey waves were fielded shortly before and after the March 2021 elections, and then following the formation of the eventual government in June 2021.

The sample in the IPP, recruited by the Midgam-Panel public opinion firm, includes almost only Jewish Israelis (who make up around 80% of the Israeli population).<sup>4</sup> It was originally balanced primarily on party voting in the election preceding the beginning of data collection (2015). Since data collection spans over a time period of more than two years, the

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<sup>4</sup>This gap in our data reflects an ongoing deficiency in Israel's survey sampling market. Unfortunately, none of the local sample vendors we contacted were able to offer a re-interview sample of Palestinian citizens of Israel in any meaningful numbers.

panel experienced inevitably attrition.<sup>5</sup> That being said, we did not find that attrition is correlated with partisan identification, which is the main variable determining the representativeness of the sample. Since the analyses below investigate within-individual variations in partisan affect over time (and focus on the final three wave of the panel, between which there was minimal drop-off), potential implications of attrition for the representativeness of the data do not pose concerns for inference. The sample used in the current analysis consists of respondents who participated in the eight wave (N=1,268), the ninth wave (N=1,240) and the tenth wave (N=1,238) of the IPP, of which exactly 1,000 participated in all three waves. Full breakdown of per-wave descriptive statistics is provided in the online appendix.

We measure our dependent variable, partisan affect, using the out-party feeling thermometer: “the workhorse survey item” for scholars of affective polarization in the United States (Iyengar et al., 2019, 131) and in comparative research (Boxell et al., 2020; Wagner, 2021). The feeling thermometer survey question appears in the IPP in the following version, adopted from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems questionnaire: “What is your attitude towards each of the following parties? Rate your response on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 is rejection/hatred, 10 is support/sympathy; and 5 is in between.”

Our two independent variables are as follows. To test the winners’ generosity hypothesis (H1), we rely on respondents’ subjective assessments of whether a given party has won or lost the election. We use the following survey question: “In light of the election results, do you think that each of these parties won the elections or lost the elections?” and collect evaluations for each party who ran in the election and was seen as likely to cross the 3.25% electoral threshold. This survey question is adopted from previous research that examined subjective perceptions of election winners and losers (Blais et al., 2021; Singh et al., 2012; Stiers et al., 2018). We classify winning / losing parties based on whether a majority of their voters believed, in the post-election wave, that their party won the election. (We collected similar assessments in the tenth, post-government formation wave of our survey.)

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<sup>5</sup>In the tenth survey wave, we were able to reach only 50% of participants who took part in the first wave. For further information on sampling, see Gidron et al. (2022).

Our second independent variable, co-governance, is based on membership in the government formed in June 2021. The relevant classification for each party, and those parties' post-election and post-government formation own-party winning assessments, are reported in Table 1. Importantly, being perceived as an election winner post-election is hardly predictive of eventual co-governance status. Of the eight parties perceived by their voters as post-election winners, only five ended up in coalition. The three parties perceived as losers post-election all ended up in coalition. Post-government formation evaluations of parties' winning/losing status changed accordingly: for example, 78% of Likud voters thought their party won the election in the post-election survey, but after the formation of government only a minority (45%) continued to hold this perception. In stark contrast, only 17% of Tikva Hadasha's voters believed, post-election, that their party won (classifying the party as an election loser), a figure that soared to 65% once the party ended up in government.

## 4 Results

### 4.1 Results: Winners' Generosity

Our first hypothesis is that self-perceived winners will come to express more positive affect toward out-parties relative to their pre-election affect towards the same targets (H1). To examine this hypothesis, we look at data collected before the election and after the election—yet prior to the formation of the new coalition government.

Table 2 reports changes in affective evaluations of out-parties in the pre- and post-election panel waves, divided into two subgroups: those who perceive themselves as having voted for an election winner (“Winners”), and those who believe the party they voted for lost (“Losers”), as identified in Table 1. Figure 1 plots the sentiment change reported in Table 2. The results strongly supports our theoretical expectation: the expressed affect of winners toward all out-parties has warmed in the immediate aftermath of the elections, and this changes is statistically significant and substantively noteworthy (0.27 points increase from

a 3.45 base rate affect on a 0-10 scale, which is an 8% increase). This is not the case when examining changes in affect of elections losers toward all out-parties: the change here is far from statistically significant, and is the opposite direction (toward cooler feelings).

We provide further detail on these changes in Table 2 in the online appendix, where we report an analysis of pre-post election sentiment change among self-perceived winners and losers towards each party separately. We exclude respondents who voted for the evaluated party to avoid conflating generosity towards others with self-evaluations. While some parties are the target of substantial affect warming by both winners and losers (e.g. Kahol-Lavan, with +0.87 and +0.87 changes, respectively), in most other cases the positive changes in affect are far more pronounced among winners, such as a +0.36 vs. +0.06 change in affect towards the Likud among winners and losers, or +0.31 vs. +0.07 towards Tikva Hadasha. We observe statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) warming of affect by winners towards eight out of the 13 parties we evaluate (11 out of 13 at the  $p < 0.1$  threshold), compared with just four such cases among losers.

Vote Choice	Seats Won	Seat Change	Post-Elec. Perception	Prop. Believing Own-Party Won (Post Elec.)	Governance Status	Prop. Believing Own-Party Won (Post Gov.)
Haavoda	7	+4	Won	0.75	Coalition	0.91
Hazionut Hadatit	6	+4	Won	0.91	Opposition	0.55
Israel Beitenu	7	0	Lost	0.40	Coalition	0.82
Kahol Lavan	8	-7	Won	0.89	Coalition	0.93
Likud	30	-6	Won	0.78	Opposition	0.45
Meretz	6	+3	Won	0.80	Coalition	0.87
Shas	9	0	Won	0.92	Opposition	0.51
Tikvah Hadasha	6	-	Lost	0.17	Coalition	0.65
Yahadut Hatorah	7	0	Won	0.51	Opposition	0.31
Yemina	7	+4	Lost	0.50	Coalition	0.73
Yesh Atid	17	+4	Won	0.69	Coalition	0.94

Table 1: Party performance and voters’ perception of party performance in the March 2021 election. Note: Raam and Joint List are not listed owing to limited sample. Tikvah Hadasha was not represented in the Knesset prior to 2021. Post-election classification is based on majority of party’s voters believing the party won or lost.

Overall then, self-diagnosed election winners consistently express a more positive senti-

ment towards all the parties in the political system once elections take place. Importantly, because these evaluations were reported shortly after the election and before any meaningful information regarding the future composition of the government, they are likely based on categorization that is derived from features such as the seat gain or loss of given parties relative to previous attainment, pre-election polling-based expectations, or a party’s ability to pass the electoral threshold—but not on the eventual governing status. Other factors may play a role, such as an expression of an expectation (strategic or honest) that one’s party would be part of the eventual government, or a desire to express in-group support, but it is difficult to form a clear expectation on the direction in which they are supposed to bias such individuals’ changes in affective evaluations towards out-parties. What is clear is that these results substantiate that there is a meaningful difference between winners and losers in their willingness to sustain negative affect towards out-parties, in line with our first hypothesis.

Subgroup	Evaluation of: of:	Pre-Election Affect	Post-Election Affect	Sentiment Change (Pre-Elec. to Post-Elec.)	Change <i>p</i>
Winners	All Out-Parties	3.45	3.73	0.27	0.000
Losers	All Out-Parties	3.60	3.57	-0.03	0.39

Table 2: Sentiment towards parties in the March 2021 Israel elections. Winners subgroup consists of respondents who believed the party they voted for won the election. Losers subgroup are those who believed their party lost. Affect values are means per subgroup and evaluation target. Sentiment change is the difference between post-election and pre-election affect. *p*-values derived from two-sided *t*-tests.

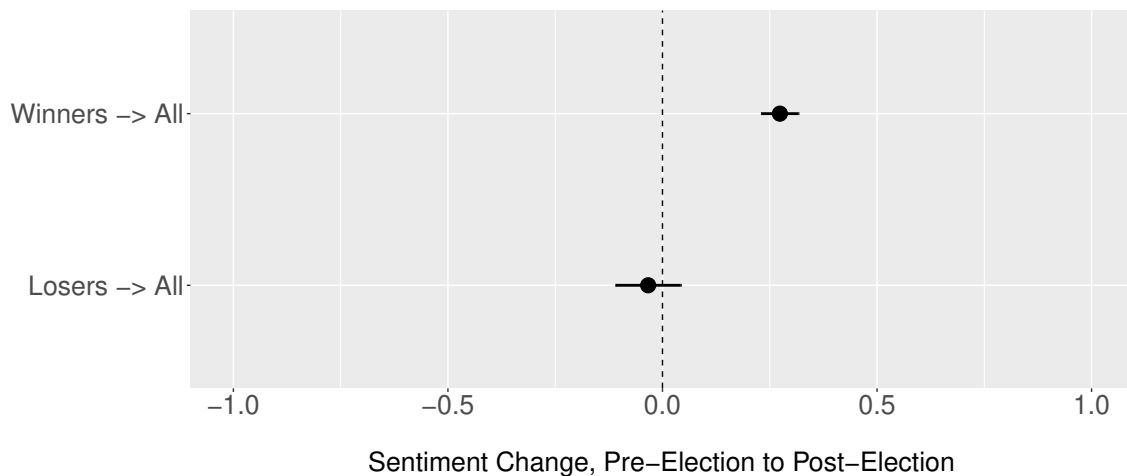


Figure 1: Pre-election to post-election sentiment change, among self-perceived election winners and losers, all out-parties.

## 4.2 Results: Co-Governance

Our second hypothesis is that co-governance generates warmer feelings coalition partners (H2): that is, when one's preferred party forms a coalition with other parties, one will come to express warmer affect toward co-governing parties. Our panel data allows us to observe within-individual fluctuations in partisan affect following real-world coalition agreements.

To test our second hypotheses, we investigate differences in expressed partisan affect as measured before the elections and after the formation of the coalition government. We also report results measured in the post-election wave of the survey (i.e. after the election but before the formation of government), substantiating that the bulk of the change in affect is borne out of coalition formation dynamics and not prior to them.



The results of our analyses, reported in Table 3 below and illustrated in Figure 2, provides strong evidence that co-governance plays a major role in shaping partisan affect, and in particular, in alleviating negative pre-election out-party sentiment. Supporters of parties that entered the coalition have significantly warmed up to out-parties, as can be seen in row 1 in Table 3. This change (+0.48 on a 0-10 affect scale) is highly statistically significant and substantively large, almost double the size of the shift among post-election self-perceived winners described in Table 2. The positive shift in affect among supporters of eventual coalition parties is particularly large (+0.86) towards co-governing out-parties (row 3 in Table 3). This change in affect is very similar to that reported in previous work on co-governance and affect that analyzed cross-sectional survey data (Horne et al., 2022). A positive change in affect towards opposition parties (row 4) is also apparent, but it is less than half the magnitude of the positive change observed towards co-governance partners.

That these patterns appear to be strongly tied to governing status is further bolstered by a closer inspection of the temporal trajectories of affect change among eventual coalition and opposition members across our three survey waves. Looking at row 3 in Figure 2, we see that immediately after the election there is already a positive change in the affect directed by voters of eventual coalition parties towards those parties that they would co-govern with (+0.35). However, this change is substantially smaller than the subsequent +0.51 warming of affect towards those eventual coalition parties that we observe between the post-election period and the actual formation of the coalition. (Together, these changes amount to the total +0.86 sentiment change mentioned earlier.) Moreover, the post-election warming toward coalition parties is very similar to the warming that the same future-coalition voters experience towards the eventual opposition parties (a change of +0.38 and +0.28, respectively, see rows 3 and 4), suggesting that it might be an artifact of winner’s generosity experienced by some of these voters. In comparison, the subsequent change in affect towards eventual opposition parties moving from post-election to post-government is effectively zero (+0.04), which, compared with the +0.51 change in affect in this period of time towards co-

governance partners, is suggestive of these affective changes taking place primarily as a result of changes brought upon by the formation of the government rather than by processes that preceded it. These dynamics, then, are also well-aligned with the observable implications of H2.

Subgroup	Evaluation of:	Pre-Election Affect	Post-Election Affect	Post-Gov. Affect	Sentiment Change (Pre-Elec. to Post-Gov.)	Change $p$
Coalition	All Out-Parties	3.09	3.41	3.57	0.48	0.000
Opposition	All Out-Parties	3.89	3.91	3.38	-0.50	0.000
Coalition	Coalition	3.99	4.34	4.85	0.86	0.000
Coalition	Opposition	2.31	2.59	2.63	0.33	0.000
Opposition	Coalition	2.86	2.96	2.19	-0.67	0.000
Opposition	Opposition	4.16	3.92	3.86	-0.30	0.000

Table 3: Sentiment towards parties in the March 2021 Israel elections. Coalition subgroup consists of respondents who voted for parties who eventually formed the post-election government. Opposition subgroup are those who voted for parties that formed the post-election opposition. Evaluations are of either eventual coalition or opposition parties, or of all out-parties. Affect values are means per subgroup and evaluation target. Sentiment change is the difference between post-government formation and pre-election affect. p-values derived from two-sided t-tests.

While our hypothesis dealt explicitly with the role of co-governance as an affective pressure value, and appears to be strongly supported, our analysis uncovers a symmetric negative pattern, in which supporters of eventual opposition parties express a significantly more negative affect towards all out-parties (row 2) and especially towards coalition parties (row 5). The magnitude of negative affect change among opposition party supporters is equal to the positive shift among supporters of coalition parties, and largely occurs between the post-election survey and the formation of the government, pointing to the cementing of the coalition/opposition status as its likely driver, similar to our primary result here regarding coalition supporters. It seems that while co-governing status acts as an effective pressure value in terms of system-wide partisan affect, it also foments strong resentment that further exacerbates negative affect among those who are left out of power - at least in the immediate aftermath of power consolidation.

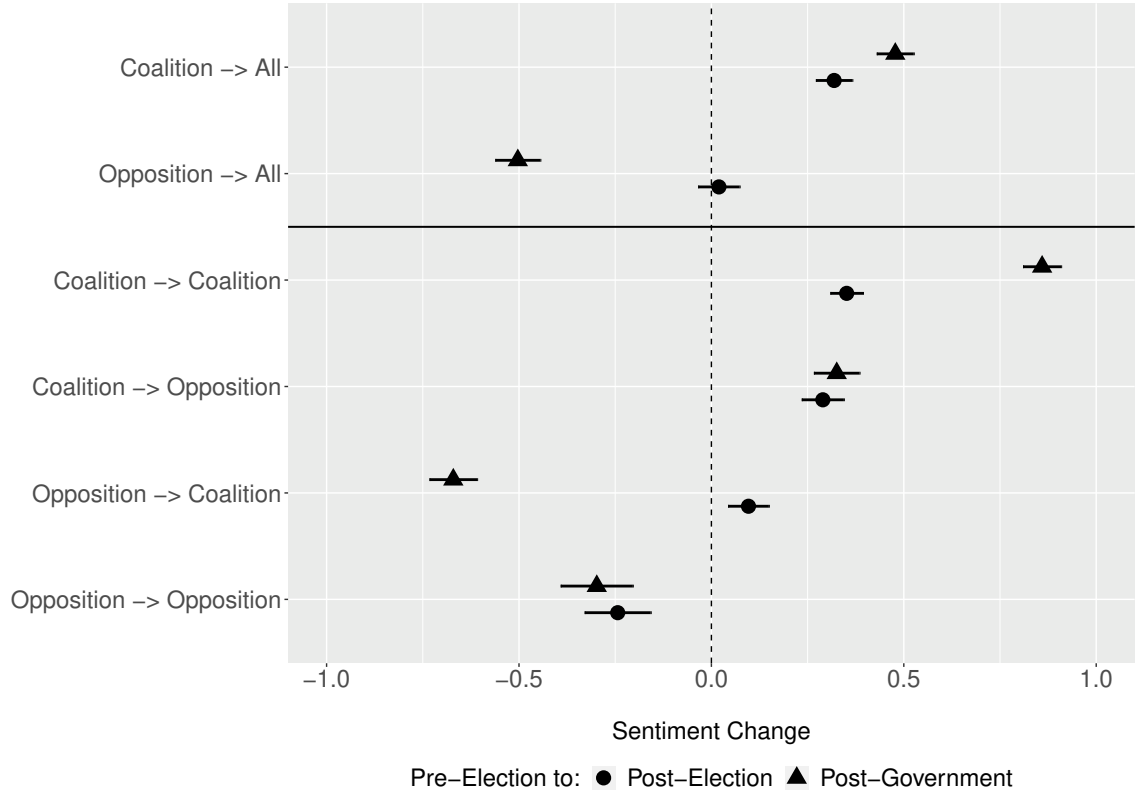


Figure 2: Pre-election to post-government sentiment change, among supporters of eventual coalition and opposition parties, towards eventual coalition and opposition parties.

## 5 Discussion and Conclusions

In this manuscript, we contribute to the emerging comparative polarization literature by shedding light on mechanisms of post-election decline in negative partisan emotions. Analyzing novel panel data collected in Israel during a highly politically tumultuous time period, we provided evidence that self-perceived election winners express warmer affect toward out-partisans compared to self-perceived election losers. This is in line with the argument Social Identity Theory, which predicts a lower sense of threat to translate into decreased partisan animosity. Then, we showed that people express warmer feelings toward parties that entered a coalition with their preferred party, even when this coalition is highly diverse and unexpected. This, in turn suggests that even in highly fragmented party-systems, citizens draw

affective boundaries around political blocks that are broader than just their party (Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila, 2021)—and that these boundaries are not set in stone but rather respond to elite signals in the form of co-governance.

In terms of our research design, we were able to distinguish between the operation of these two mechanisms by leveraging unique circumstances of prolonged coalition negotiations, which separated temporally the initial formation of perceptions regarding who won the elections from the formation a multiparty coalition government. This enabled us to show that the decrease in negative affect associated with coalition co-membership is about double the size of that associated with being a post-election self-perceived winner. While the two mechanisms have distinct and substantial contributions to reducing post-election partisan hostility, co-governance is a substantially stronger driver of changes in affect.

The two pressure valves for negative partisan affect, winners' generosity and co-governance, differ in their availability across political contexts. The decline in negative affect toward out-parties among self-perceived election winners can operate in both majoritarian and proportional electoral systems: our findings from the highly proportional Israeli context echoes previous work that analyzed partisan affect in the majoritarian Canadian system (Sheffer, 2020). However, the availability of the second mechanism for attenuating negative partisan affect, that of co-governance in multiparty coalitions, is conditioned by electoral rules (Drutman, 2020; Lijphart et al., 1999). It is only in proportional systems that a mechanism based on multi-party cooperation can operate. This distinction highlights a potential source of affective polarization in majoritarian systems.

That being said, the normative implications are far from straightforward. On the one hand, considering that intense affective polarization corrodes the "social and political fabric" (Levendusky and Stecula, 2021, 2)—it is no wonder that scholars have looked for mechanisms to diffuse out-partisan dislike, and from this perspective, co-governance can be cast as a normatively positive process. Yet at on the other hand, affect warming through co-governance may blur the emotional boundaries between mainstream and nativist authoritarian parties,

granting them greater legitimacy alongside the obvious impacts on policy (not unlike such parties' entrance into parliaments, see, e.g. Abou-Chadi and Krause, 2020). Such radical right parties are often strongly disliked, far beyond what is expected simply based on their extreme policies (Harteveld et al., 2021). An improvement in affect towards these parties through inclusion in coalition governments is not necessarily desirable or helpful for the long-term viability of democracies, even if it leads to lower levels of affective polarization.

There is an additional reason against interpreting our results as suggesting that the post-election formation of multi-party coalitions solves the challenge negative partisan affect. Our results uncover a dark side of coalition governance: we documented a pattern in which opposition parties express *growing* resentment toward members of a new governing coalition, a negative change that is equivalent in magnitude to the improvement in sentiment observed among supporters of coalition parties. This pattern is particularly intriguing because existing work documents an overall gradual decline in partisan attachment once elections take place, and, by implication, in citizens' willingness to express partisan resentment over time (Michelitch and Utych, 2018). Consolidating these seemingly contradictory patterns is of theoretical interest, and future work should investigate whether and how the spike we observe in negative affect among those whose parties end up in opposition lingers over time. Furthermore, scholars of partisan affect in multiparty systems should also examine whether certain types of coalition governments—for instance majority versus minority governments, more ideologically coherent versus aisle-crossing coalitions, and those that are comprised of a small versus large number of parties—breed more intense partisan resentment.

The analyses above have several limitations. While we take advantage of the unique political circumstances in Israeli politics, the fact that respondents experienced four elections in two years (the last of which is the focus of this work) may raise questions about generalizability. This reservation becomes even more acute considering that the Israeli coalition formed during the time period covered in this study was highly idiosyncratic: it was not only highly diverse ideologically, but also included an Islamist party for the first time in Israel's

history. If anything, however, this setup poses a harder test for the co-governance hypothesis we test, as it should make it harder for partisans to assume a shared governing identity with coalition parties that they are strongly opposed to on ideological and/or ethno-nationalist grounds. That we do find such an effect under these circumstances is striking, and portrays co-governance as a promising, powerful institutional mechanism for alleviating partisan animosity - at least in the short run. As more comparative panel data regarding polarization accumulates, we hope future work delineates the scope conditions of our theoretical claims.

# Conflicts of interests/Competing interests

There is no conflict of interest.

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# 1 Differentiating the Sources of Post-Election Partisan Affect Warming: Online Appendix

## 1.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics for each of the three panel waves included in our analysis, showing both per-wave distributions and their comparison overtime to substantiate that survey attrition was not meaningfully uncorrelated with our variables of interest, including 2015 vote choice, gender, age, religiosity, and education.

Figure 1 provides a visual summary of attrition across our three panel waves. Overall, 1,000 respondents participated in all three waves. Out of the original 1,268 respondents in wave 8 (the pre-election wave) 108 respondents only participated in wave 9 but not in wave 10, and an additional 85 respondents only participated in wave 10 but not in wave 9.

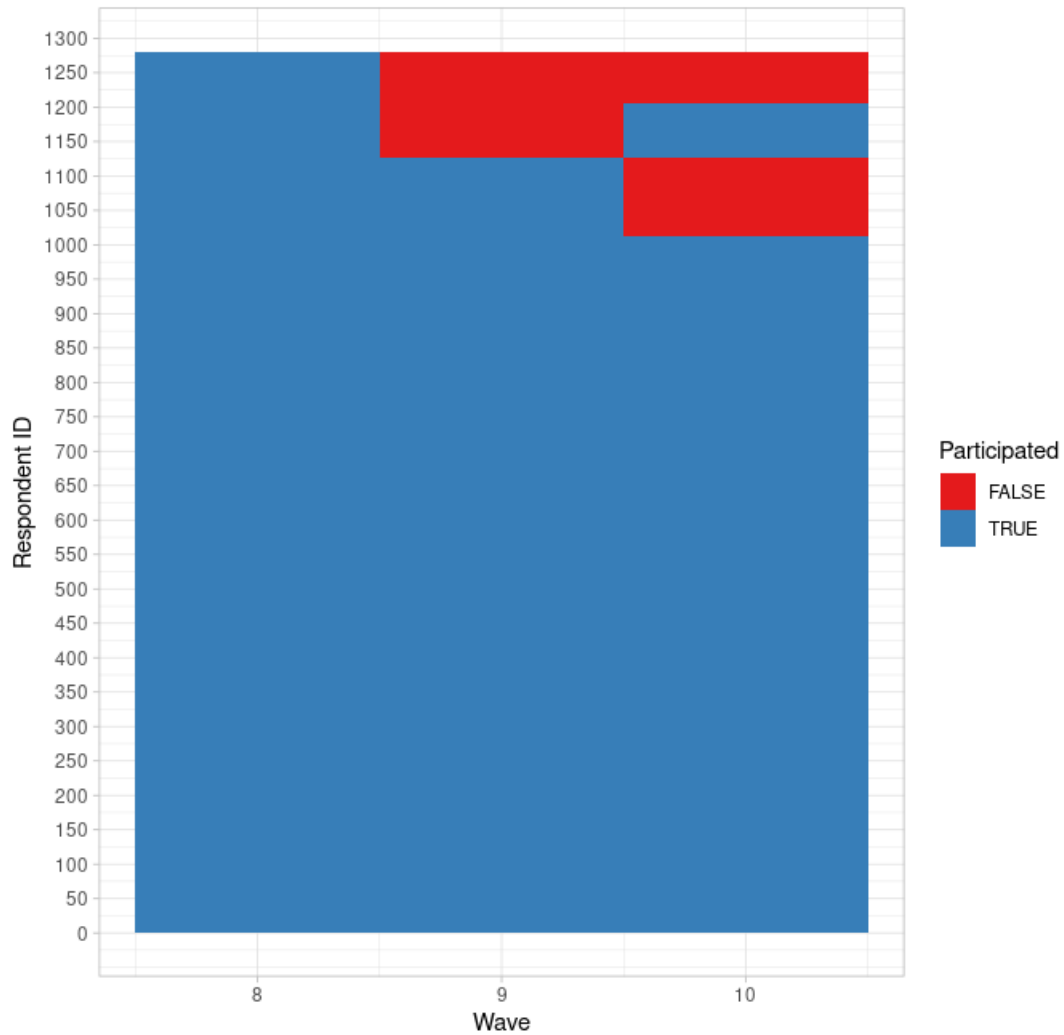


Figure 1: Survey attrition by wave, relative to wave 8. Blue represents respondents who participated in the relevant wave, red represents respondents who did not participate.

## 1.2 Breakdown of Winners' Generosity Results by Evaluated Out-Party

Table 2 presents the change in affect among self-perceived winners and losers towards all parties for which thermometer scores were collected in our study. Results for each wave are means of ratings made by self-perceived winners/losers, excluding respondents who voted for the rated party. For example, in the first row, the means are obtained from all respondents

who in the post-election wave reported that their party won the election, excluding such respondents who voted for Haavoda.

Table 1: Sample Demographics

	$W_8$	$W_9$	$W_{10}$
2015 Vote			
Likud	18.4%	18.5%	18.1%
Mahane Zioni	18.4%	19.3%	18.5%
Joint List	0%	0%	0%
Yesh Atid	8.4%	8.1%	8.3%
Kulanu	7.1%	6.8%	6.9%
Habayit Hayehudi	6.4%	7%	6.6%
Shas	3.9%	4%	4%
Yahadut Hatorah	5.4%	5.1%	4.9%
Israel Beitenu	5.1%	5.2%	5%
Meretz	3.4%	3.3%	3.7%
Yachad	3%	3.1%	2.9%
Ale Yarok	0.9%	1%	0.9%
Other	0.2%	0.2%	0.1%
Abstained	19.4%	18.4%	20.1%
Too young/No answer	0%	0%	0%
Age			
18-26	9.4%	9%	9.3%
27-45	49.5%	49.6%	49.5%
45+	41.1%	41.3%	41.2%
Female	46.1%	46.2%	46.6%
Religiosity			
Secular (Hiloni)	60.47%	60.66%	60.24%
Conservative (Masorti)	16.8%	16.7%	16.99%
Orthodox (Dati)	13.36%	13.23%	13.50%
Ultra-orthodox (Haredi)	9.38%	9.41%	9.27%
Education			
Unknown	0.31%	0.36%	0.37%
Up to 8 years of study	0.7%	0.53%	0.64%
9-10 years of study	0.94%	0.89%	0.73%
11-12 years of study	6.02%	5.95%	6.43%
High school education	0.7%	0.71%	0.55%
Graduated from high school	11.48%	11.55%	11.2%
During non-academic post-secondary edu.	1.88%	1.78%	1.93%
Graduated non-academic post-sec. edu.	16.41%	16.52%	17.26%
Bachelor degree student	9.61%	9.15%	9.27%
Bachelor degree graduate	31.56%	31.71%	31.13%
Master degree student	3.05%	2.93%	2.94%
Master degree graduate	15.16%	15.63%	15.34%
Doctoral student	0.7%	0.71%	0.64%
Doctor	1.48%	1.6%	1.56%



Subgroup	Evaluation of: of:	Pre-Election Affect	Post-Election Affect	Sentiment Change (Pre-Elec. to Post-Elec.)	Change <i>p</i>
Winners	Haavoda	3.66	4.22	0.56	0.001
Winners	Hazonut-Hadatit	3.52	3.49	-0.03	0.87
Winners	Israel-Beitenu	3.47	3.51	0.04	0.78
Winners	Joint-List	1.75	1.95	0.20	0.09
Winners	Kahol-Lavan	3.51	4.39	0.87	0.000
Winners	Likud	3.48	3.83	0.36	0.07
Winners	Meretz	2.81	3.37	0.56	0.001
Winners	Raam	1.56	2.22	0.66	0.000
Winners	Shas	3.05	3.44	0.39	0.02
Winners	Tikva-Hadasha	4.09	4.40	0.31	0.03
Winners	Yahadut-Hatorah	3.12	3.44	0.32	0.05
Winners	Yemina	4.31	4.58	0.27	0.08
Winners	Yesh-Atid	3.46	4.13	0.67	0.000
Losers	Haavoda	3.65	3.94	0.29	0.19
Losers	Hazonut-Hadatit	3.37	3.37	0.002	0.99
Losers	Israel-Beitenu	3.91	3.60	-0.30	0.20
Losers	Joint-List	1.52	1.91	0.39	0.02
Losers	Kahol-Lavan	3.76	4.64	0.88	0.000
Losers	Likud	3.85	3.91	0.06	0.82
Losers	Meretz	2.51	2.97	0.46	0.03
Losers	Raam	1.67	2.04	0.37	0.03
Losers	Shas	3.03	3.18	0.15	0.55
Losers	Tikva-Hadasha	4.69	4.63	-0.07	0.75
Losers	Yahadut-Hatorah	2.56	2.73	0.17	0.45
Losers	Yemina	4.39	4.42	0.03	0.89
Losers	Yesh-Atid	3.91	4.19	0.28	0.25

Table 2: Sentiment towards parties in the March 2021 Israel elections. Winners subgroup consists of respondents who believed the party they voted for won the election. Losers subgroup are those who believed their party lost. Affect values are means per subgroup and evaluation target. Sentiment change is the difference between post-election and pre-election affect. *p*-values derived from two-sided *t*-tests.