The Role of Representation in Rebel Appeal: Why Voters Express Support for Parliamentary Dissent

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Abstract

Why do voters express support for rebellious politicians? Dissent could impede the parties that these voters support from attaining their goals and perhaps even undermine representative democracy. In survey experiments on nationally representative samples of the U.K. population, we elicit voters' perceptions of politicians who take on a series of attributes, one of which is voting against their party in parliament. We find no robust evidence that voters prefer rebels because their actions are congruent with preference of the broader public or the constituents of that rebellious MP's, or because voters appreciate dissent where it is cast as protest vote for the sake of "the people." We find, instead, that rebels are appreciated when they share voters' partian identity and policy preferences. Rebels are electorally successful if they substantively or descriptively represent voters; not because they are a mavericks in parliament trying to "stick it" to the establishment.

Keywords: Legislative behavior, Representation, Voting behavior, Party politics, Rebels

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1 Introduction

Voters often seem thrilled by politicians who cast themselves as outsiders or mavericks. Knowing this, politicians may portray themselves as rebels for electoral gain. Indeed, it is relatively common for politicians to buck the party line in political systems that allow for the cultivation of a "personal vote" such as the US and the UK (Carson et al., 2010; Slapin et al., 2018; Kirkland and Slapin, 2018). Research has found that MPs' rebellious behaviour can lead to higher political support (e.g. Kam, 2009; Campbell et al., 2016; Wagner, Vivyan and Glinitzer, 2019). But why do voters seem drawn to candidates for political office who rebel against their parties? We argue that voters appreciate MPs' dissent from the party line because they perceive rebellious acts as increasing the quality of political representation. Our study examines which aspect of representation – substantive, descriptive, and symbolic – drives voters' appreciation for dissenters. The abundance of rebel rhetoric during electoral campaigns, on the parliamentary floor, as well as in debates about the legitimacy of the current institutions of representative democracy make these questions of empirical and normative importance.

Using two experimental studies embedded in online surveys of nationally representative samples in the UK, we parse out the effects on voter support of different aspects of representation associated with MPs' dissent from the party. Within a political behavior and attitude survey, we ask respondents to consider a series of choices between two hypothetical representatives (Study 1) or to state approval of one hypothetical representative (Study 2). In both studies, respondents read a scenario in which parliament just voted on a bill. Aspects of the scenario, the content of the bill, as well as characteristics of party and MP(s) vary randomly in each vignette.

We test whether better *substantive representation* lies behind voters' preference for rebels by investigating variation in voters' support for dissenters as the policy position of the rebellious MP changes. We juxtapose such instrumentally driven preferences for better representation with desires for *descriptive representation*. Here we contend that rebellion is only viewed favorably when voters and the dissenting MP hold important characteristics in common (i.e., gender and partisanship). Finally, we consider the symbolic quality of rebellion. Voters may appreciate the act of dissent for expressive reasons. In particular, we are interested in whether voters prefer rebel MPs even if they have no influence in parliament, their appeal is based on a purely populist agenda, or they violate a norm of party discipline integral to the function in of representative democracy.

Our methodology, a conjoint experiment, is well suited to understand how citizens make complex multi-dimensional choices such as electoral decisions (Hainmueller, Hopkins and Yamamoto, 2014). We present each respondent with multiple situations where they have to indicate the preference for an MP with randomly assigned characteristics, including the MP's behavior in parliament as well as the context of the parliamentary decision. Adding experimental treatments where random assignment of treatment conditions happens at the respondent-level allows us to determine the mechanism by which voters' preferences for rebels emerge (Acharya, Blackwell and Sen, 2018). While rebellious behavior in the real world occurs only occasionally, in forms that cannot be controlled by the researcher, and with potentially recurring characteristics, we are able to elicit reactions of voters to a wide variety of contexts in which rebellious behavior occurs and to rebellion of differing nature. For instance, our design enables us to capture whether it is more important for voters that a rebel has changed the outcome of a parliamentary vote with her rebellion or that the rebel acts against public opinion in dissenting from the position of the party leadership. In reality, these two characteristics will often be correlated – a rebel may only vote against public opinion when his or her action does not have policy consequences. Only an experimental survey design allows us to causally identify which characteristic is more important for voters' support.

Like much of the existing literature, we find that voters do reward rebellious behavior. But our findings demonstrate that voter support for rebels is contingent on other factors related to the type of representation voters might desire. We find no robust evidence that voters reward rebels electorally because their actions are congruent with the preference of the majority of the public or the preferences of that rebellious MP's constituents. Voters also do not prefer dissent where it is cast as for the sake of "the people" or when rebel's actions can be seen as a protest vote (when the MP actually does not have much influence on political outcomes), explanations we argued to be indicative of voters making an expressive choice. We find, instead, that rebels are appreciated when they share voters' partisan identity and policy preferences. We also present some evidence that the shared party identity mechanism explains of voters' preference for rebels better than policy congruence. In our study of the UK electorate, rebels are electorally successful if they substantively or descriptively represent voters; not because they are a maverick in parliament trying to "stick it" to the party-elite by siding with "the people," and not because they are a symbol for the fight against the establishment.

These findings shed new light on democratic representation by elucidating how voters per-

ceive, reward, and punish MPs' individual decisions to support or rebel from their party. It adds both to the political science literature on representation, parties, and legislatures, the political psychology literature on expressive motivations behind political behavior, as well as to the psychology literature on groups, conformity, and collective decision-making.

2 Parliamentary rebellion and representation

Many studies, both in the UK and elsewhere, explore rebellion by examining the type of MP likely to deviate from the party line and the conditions under which they do so (e.g. Benedetto and Hix, 2007; Kam, 2009; Vivyan and Wagner, 2012; Ceron, 2015; Proksch and Slapin, 2015; Slapin et al., 2018; Bäck and Debus, 2017). In the context of the UK, these studies tend to find that rebels are ideological extremists in the governing party who have little chance of serving on the party's frontbench. Literature on the US Congress suggests that Members who deviate more often from their party can parlay rebellion into electoral support (Carson et al., 2010), and studies of Westminster systems suggest that casting votes against one's party can lead to greater name recognition and higher approval ratings (Kam, 2009). Research in this vein generally assumes that voters like rebellious activity, although it tends not to address the reasons why. Other literature has examined public support for populism and anti-system rhetoric (e.g. De Vries and Edwards, 2009; Barr, 2009), but has not generally connected the findings to the literature on political rebellion.

Survey research using experimental methods provide the empirical evidence for the notion that voters like rebels. Building on a sample from the UK, researchers find that citizens do indeed express support for politicians who engage in rebellious behavior compared with those who toe the party and appreciate dissent when it is in line their policy preferences or when the rebel shares voters' party identity (Campbell et al., 2016). Campbell and co-authors further find evidence that the act of dissenting may signal valence to voters, that is, MPs possessing desirable qualities like integrity, honesty, or competence, and argues that some of the rebel effect is rooted in increased name recognition of mavericks (see also Kam, 2009). Other work investigates rebellion across systems and finds that in proportional electoral systems, which tend to be more party- than candidate-centered and where dissent is more costly, voters appreciate rebellion even more (Wagner, Vivyan and Glinitzer, 2019).

While existing literature posits possible mechanisms behind the electoral success of rebels, we

seek to tease out the relative importance of these mechanisms and understand the implications of rebellious activity for democratic representation. Staying within the UK's candidate-centered Westminster system, we explore voters' appreciation for rebellious activity rooted in their desired type of representation within the political system.¹

The appeal of a rebel with respect to *substantive representation* is related to the question whether the dissenting act aligns with voters policy preferences. Campbell et al. (2016) show that rebellion is often only desired when it aligns with voters' political ideology. Eliciting such instrumental motivation behind preferring a rebel is equivalent to testing the claim that

Hypothesis 1 voters support rebels when they share policy positions (Policy congruence mechanism).

Perceiving a politician as a dissenter may lead voters to think about norms regarding political representation. Democratic principals require MPs to be responsive to public desires beyond petty partisan squabbles. If this norm of responsiveness is violated, the legitimacy of the system of democratic representation may be under threat. Voters could, therefore, view a rebel as more representative of the policy preferences of either a constituency or the broader public. We explore whether:

Hypothesis 2 voters appreciate rebellious activity if it suits public or constituency opinion but reject it when it does not (Constituency congruence mechanism).

In other words, we evaluate whether voters value a constituency-minded, representative MP (as indicated by rebellion) over a MP who is a party soldier. A preference for a rebel rooted in such motivations is equivalent to desiring better substantive representation (Mansbridge, 1999). While Hypothesis 1 captures instrumental considerations at the individual level, Hypothesis 2 speaks to voters' instrumental motivations that aim for better substantive representation at the constituency or societal level.

The appeal of a rebel may not only lie in better substantive representation, but also in motivations related to descriptive representation, as voters' preference for descriptive and substantive representation are certainly related (Arnesen, Duell and Johannesson, 2019). In particular, we posit that voters support rebels only when they are fellow members of social groups important to voters:

¹The hypotheses presented in this section were registered with [omitted for blinded review]

Hypothesis 3 Voters support rebels when they share a group identity (Shared group membership mechanism).

Being represented by "one of your own" surely correlates with the desire to see particular policy preferences represented in parliament. But independent of such instrumental motivations, voters also value the symbolism of representation by fellow group members (Pitkin, 1967; Hayes and Hibbing, 2017). In this way, any evidence supporting Hypothesis 3 is not only an indication of instrumental motivations to support rebels for better descriptive representation, but also an expressive choice for someone who shares characteristics important to the voter. With respect to such expressive motivations we argue that a call for better substantive representation via representation by group members is often simply a preference for *symbolic representation*. This is particularly true when such symbolic representation is desired with respect to an MP who stands for the rather broad interests of "the people":

Hypothesis 4 Voters support a rebellious MP when a rebel is perceived to better represent the people (populism mechanism).

Note, how the populism mechanism is different from the mechanisms that speak to substantive policy representation or descriptive representation. It is a mechanism by which voters do not much care about specific consequences of their action in terms of policy preferences or implications for intra-party policy debate but appreciate *expressively* an MP who "sticks it" to the party leadership, in particular, and the political elite in general. Such expressive motivation may be divided in a direct account of action (expressive utility from doing it, i.e. voting for the rebel) and an indirect account of action (expressive utility from the consequences of the choice, i.e. a rebel in office) where the latter may yield consumption benefits (i.e., having a rebel in office and potential instrumental benefits) but also, as argued, have symbolic meaning (i.e., meaning of voting for a rebel). In this study, we specifically examine whether voting for a rebel as expressive behavior is motivated by the concern for symbolic significance of the action rather than indirect consequences such as having a particular platform implemented, having an MP in parliament who represents a particular group, or gaining/maintaining political power (Hamlin and Jennings, 2011). In the context of parliamentary dissent, preferences for symbolic representation may be seen as being expressively motivated.

Voters choice for a rebel can then be defined as purely expressively motivated, when the rebellious MP is usually not influential in the parliamentary process. Summarizing this idea, we

test whether

Hypothesis 5 voters support rebels even when they are not influential in parliament (No influence mechanism).

The opposing prediction as stated in Hypothesis 5, voters support rebels only when they are influential, provides yet another claim in line for the case for instrumental motivations driving support for dissenters as laid out in Hypothesis 1.

Finally, when voters want to express their position against the party leadership, in particular, and not just the political elite in general, they also support dissent. When support for the rebel is not rooted in instrumental motivations, then the voters' must value the symbolism of rebellion. In this sense, we test whether:

Hypothesis 6 voters value rebels as symbols of defiance of the party elite (No party soldier mechanism).

This is a preference for independent MPs. We acknowledge, however, that a preference for a MP who is not a party solider, even when the voter does not consider aspects of better substantive or descriptive representation, may have an instrumental rationale. The literature in psychology provides us with a general discussion of how one may view rebels, beyond the political realm. Early research argued that conformity has been seen as problematic for a group's success (Nemeth, 1995) – while later work sees it as an asset (Jetten and Hornsey, 2010). Why should being a rebel work to the benefit of the group (which is the party/constituency/public in our study)? Nemeth (1995) argues that seeing somebody who is dissenting with the majority triggers divergent thinking of the kind: how can they be so sure and yet so wrong. Minority opinions are said to stimulate a search for information on all sides of the issue (Nemeth and Rogers, 1996) and change onlookers' own level of conformity (Nemeth and Chiles, 1988). Therefore, we may formulate Hypothesis 6 alternatively as: voters value rebels as MPs when they push diverging ideas for the benefit of the party.

We investigate hypothesis 1, 2, and 6 in Study 1 and hypotheses 1, 3, 4, and 5 in Study 2.

3 Study 1

3.1 Methodology

Sample We embedded our experiment within a longer online survey administered by Delta Poll on a sample representative of the UK electorate. The survey collected observations on 2540 respondent of which 2055 consented to start our experiment and we took outcome measures for 1699 respondents.² The average age in our sample is 43 (sd 19), 54% identify as women, 36% of respondents report on having a University degree, and 6% indicate to be students. 23% of respondents identify with the Conservative Party, 35% with the Labour Party, and 74% indicated to have turned out for the 2017 UK General Election.

Experimental design In Study 1, we present respondents with six short experimental vignettes that describe the hypothetical voting behavior of two MPs on a bill in parliament. MPs' behavior and the context of the bill are characterized by various attributes. We randomly vary these attributes in a two-step procedure.

In step 1, we randomly assign respondents to treatments in a 2-by-2 design, creating a between-respondent experimental design. These treatments vary the subject of the parliamentary vote (*issue treatments*: whether the bill mentioned in the introductory text concerns "taxes and government spending" or "immigration;") and whether the respondent receives a prime to consider voting in parliament as an act where MPs usually vote with their respective parties (*party discipline treatment*). In particular, before respondents see the profiles of the two MPs, they are given an introductory text: "Recently, Parliament voted on a bill that would affect the levels of [taxes and government spending/immigration]. People have different opinions about what their Member of Parliament should do[, but usually MPs support the position of their party]. Please compare the two following MPs and answer our three questions. You will be asked to make six comparisons. Please remember there are no right or wrong answers."

Table 1 lists the number of respondents and number of observations (six per respondent) by issue and party discipline treatment conditions.

²Throughout the screens of the survey that were part of the conjoint experiment, we did not force responses on our outcome measures. As a consequence, we obtained observations on fewer respondents than 2055 for any of the six hypothetical choices. In particular, the response rate was 65% in the first choice and declined monotonically to 55% in the sixth and last choice.

Treatment	Treatment Condition		# of respondents	
Issue Immigration Taxes and spending		$5088 \\ 5106$	848 851	
Party discipline	No party discipline prime Party discipline prime	$5082 \\ 5112$	847 852	

Table 1: Number of respondents and number of observations by between-subject treatment conditions. Overall, Study 1 features 14668 on 1699 subjects.

Then, in step 2, voters are presented with MP profiles; Figure 1 is an example of what respondents see on their screens.

MP 1	MP 2		
Conservative	Labour		
The MP's party leadership voted in favour of	The MP's party leadership voted in favour of		
the bill	the bill		
The majority of the public opposes the bill	The majority of the public opposes the bill		
The majority of the public in the MP's electoral	The majority of the public in the MP's		
district supports the bill	electoral district opposes the bill		
The MP voted against the MP's party	The MP voted with the MP's party		
The MP's party leadership did not condemn the	The MP's party leadership did not condemn		
MP's behaviour	the MP's behaviour		

Figure 1: Exemplifying profiles of candidates as shown to respondents

The respondents are shown six attributes, five of which are selected randomly from a set of 11. The attributes shown are randomized across vignettes (but the same attributes are shown for both candidates within one vignette) and the exact realization of the attribute levels are randomly assigned (and potentially differ between candidates within one vignette), creating a conjoint experimental design. We randomly assign attributes and attribute levels to the two hypothetical candidates presented to respondents. Respondents see MP traits that describe how long the MP has served in parliament (tenure), whether the position the MP takes on the bill is moderate or extreme (policy position), whether the MP mostly works on constituency or national issues (constituency issues), and, most importantly, whether the MP rebelled against the party in the vote taken (rebellion). We further give information about party traits, i.e., whether the MP sits with the Conservative party, the Labour party, or the Liberal Democrats (party) and whether the party leadership supported the bill brought forward in parliament (leadership position). Finally, we tell respondents about the context of the vote taken in parliament and show whether the majority of the public supported the bill (public opinion), whether the the terms of the taken in parliament and show whether the majority of the public supported the bill (public opinion).

majority of the constituency supported the bill (*constituency opinion*), whether the MP was pivotal in the vote (*pivotal*), and whether UKIP announced support for the position the MP took (*UKIP support*).³

For the *party's position*-attribute the same values for both MPs are shown if both MPs are from the same party and *party* is also one of the shown attributes. When *public opinion* is randomly determined to be one of the attributes, it also shows the same value for both MPs. The *rebellion*-attribute is displayed on every vignette but the exact position in the table of attributes varies randomly to increase the number of observations with this attribute that is of core interest. Recall, the exact realisation of attribute values associated with MP traits, party traits, and context attributes are randomised at the vignette level (each respondent sees six vignettes) while the issue of the bill voted upon in parliament as well as whether respondents saw the party discipline prime is randomly assigned at the respondent level.

On the same screen where we show the profiles of the two hypothetical MPs, respondents are asked to answer three questions. These three questions constitute our outcome measures: vote preference MP 1 vs MP 2, favorability towards MP 1, and favorability towards MP 2.⁴

Finally, we prompt respondents with a manipulation check: we ask for a guess of how many instances of MPs voting against their party happened in the approximately 250 votes the UK House of Commons casts ever year. The overall mean answer is 85 (sd = 66). We do not find a difference in the estimated number of respondents across treatment groups of the party discipline primes treatment. In other words, we cannot be sure respondents recognized the oneline prime telling them that MPs usually vote with their party or do not connect party discipline and rebellious behavior as intended. There is, however, a positive and significant relationship between observing an instance of a rebel (a candidate profile that contains an MP that is said to have voted against the party) and the estimated number of events in parliament where a MP voted against the party. The coefficient estimate of a regression of guessed number of rebel events on a count of observed rebel events in the experiment is 5.43 (se = .86) with an associated p < .01.

Identification To examine the effect of candidates' attributes such as rebellious activity on vote choice, we estimate the relative importance of one attribute assigned to the candidates over others. Following Leeper, Hobolt and Tilley (2019), we estimate for each candidate attribute the

³The exact wording of attribute realisation is shown in Section A of the appendix.)

⁴The exact wording of the outcome measure is shown in Section A of the appendix.

marginal means of our outcome measures *vote preference* and voters' feeling of warmth towards that candidate (feeling thermometer, variable *favorability*). That is we compute the rate at which voters choose a candidate and the mean favorability for a given candidate attribute averaging over all combinations of any other candidate attribute shown to voters. Then, we compare marginal means across different values of MP's attributes, for example, the marginal mean of the outcome measure for an MP who rebelled vs an MP who did not rebel.

To test hypothesis 6 that voters' views on rebels change when the dissenting act can be seen as defiance of party discipline, we compute the difference in marginal means on the outcome measures associated with being a rebel across the conditions of the party discipline treatment. We find evidence for the *no party soldier mechanism* when voters' preference and approval of a rebelling MP, in contrast to an MP who does not rebel, is higher in the treatment condition where party discipline is not primed vs when it is primed. We can give the behavioral effect of taking away the party discipline prime the interpretation of a response of voters to considering the rebellious act against party leadership to be of symbolic nature because other attributes contained in the experimental vignette that indicate to voters better substantive (e.g. moderate or extreme policy positions of the MP) or descriptive representation (e.g. party of the MP) account for MP's characteristics that may trigger voters' instrumental motivations instead.⁵

Evaluating hypothesis 2, whether voters' preference for a rebel is lower when a rebellious act runs counter to public or constituency opinion, we compare the marginal mean of vote preference and favorability when public/constituency opinion aligns with the rebel's vote to when it does not. We identify the constituency congruence mechanism when voters' appreciation of the rebel MPs vs non-rebel MPs is larger in situations where the MPs behavior runs counter to the preference of the majority of the public or the constituency.

Testing the policy congruence mechanism (Hypothesis 1), we compare the marginal means on our outcome measures for dissenting MPs and non-dissenting MPs when the MP is described as being moderate over when s/he is said to be extreme. We would find evidence for such mechanism if rebellion boosts approval for moderate MPs more than extreme MPs. However, because the correlation between preferring a moderate policy platform and policies that are close to voters' own preferences may not be high, Study 2 gives a more precise test of policy congruence as explanation for support for rebels.

The identification of the marginal mean of the outcome measures associated with any at-

⁵The comparison of marginal means between the issue treatment conditions serves as robustness check on all hypothesis tests in Study 1.

tribute rests on two further assumptions. First, the order of decision vignettes shown to respondents and the order of attributes within displayed profiles do not matter for respondents' choice. To meet this assumption, we randomize the order of vignettes and attributes across respondents and control for order in our regressions (variable *vignette* #). Additionally, the randomization of attributes and realizations of the values of attributes need to be carried out in such a way that respondents' choices are statistically independent of the vignette assignment (accomplished by randomization within the survey software). Second, we assume that the number of attributes does not change responses; a larger number of attributes per profile should not lead to satisficing, in which respondents use choice heuristics to break down the complexity of too much information.⁶

Because voters only see a random selection of five out of 11 possible MP attributes in Study 1, the reported marginal means estimates are based on partially imputed data. That is, we take each observation (a respondent-vignette pair) and randomly assign values on those attributes that are not shown for that particular observation. Then, we compute marginal means. We repeat this procedure for 10000 iterations. Note, in this data, the missing at random assumption crucial to valid inference based on imputed data is trivially met by experimental design. Using this procedure also implies that marginal means estimates are the mean taken from 10000 computed marginal means, the standard errors the .025 and upper .975 percentiles of those 10000 estimates, and any p-value reported in Study 1 is the proportion of tests rejecting the null hypothesis of the estimate being zero on a given attribute trait. The reported p-value accounts for standard errors being clustered at the respondent- and respondent-vignette pair-level.

Further, when describing the results of a conjoint experiment it is important to note that any statement that reads "voters prefer MPs characterized by attribute 1 over MPs characterized by attribute 2" should more precisely state that the average value of an outcome measure is higher for MPs with attribute 1 than for MPs with attribute 2 and not make claims that seem to be true for the electorate in the aggregate. Such claims about the electorate in the aggregate could be problematic given that we are making mean comparisons where a subset of respondents with particularly strong preference for MPs with attribute 1 over MPs with attribute 2 could drive reported results. It could happen that if we would count up how many respondents who prefer an MP with attribute 1 over a MP with attribute 2 in a pairwise comparison, we may end up with a majority of respondents with a preference for the MP with attribute 2 than the MP

⁶Bansak et al. (2018) find that choice tasks with up to 30 attributes do not lead to meaningful changes in the estimates of the relative importance of any one attribute; our number of attributes is well below that number.

with attribute 1. Since we are interested in how voters perceive rebels when taking into account voters' strength of preferences as well, however, we ignore the mentioned caveat and take the marginal means as a (mostly) valid measure of the electorate's preferences over MPs of a given attribute (i.e., rebels). One reason for this interpretation is that while every voter only has one vote, those with stronger preference are more likely to turn out or more likely to campaign and therefore have more leverage over electoral results in the real world.

3.2 Results

Do voters like rebels? Before we test the main hypotheses, we assess whether voters value rebels, in general, as well as how important other candidate characteristics and features of the contexts of a rebellious vote are in respondents' assessment of MPs. Since we are estimating marginal means for all candidate attributes, putting the main attributes of interest into context, we will present results graphically. Marginal means are given for all candidate attributes with associated confidence intervals on the x-axis.

Figure 2 shows a higher marginal mean in a voter's preference for and warmer feeling towards a rebelling MP in contrast to a MP who does not vote against party leadership. The probability of a MP being chosen increases significantly from .49 to .51 (Difference, .02 (.00, .03), p < .01) when the MP voted against the party in contrast to when the MP did not rebel. The warm feeling towards a candidate also increases when that candidate votes against the party but not significantly so; the difference in marginal means of favorability between a rebelling MP and an MP who votes with the party is 0.68 (-.06, 1.41).

The largest differences between values of any attribute in marginal means of MP's electoral prospects (vote preference) emerges for candidate who spend more time on constituents than national issues. This MP has a significantly higher probability, .06(.05, .08), p < .01), of being preferred compared with an MP who spends more time on national than constituency issues. Voters also feel by warmer towards such an MP (by 2.3(1.6,3), p < .01). Also, an MP is significantly more likely to be voted back into office if the MP's constituency support the bill and the MP's vote changed the final vote tally but also when the MP is a moderate. The MP receives significantly less support when UKIP supported the MP's voting behavior. In terms of favorability, MPs receive warmer feelings if the constituency support and UKIP opposed the bill under considerations. Voters also feel warmer towards Labour than Conservative MPs but do not distinguish between moderate and extreme MPs in similar fashion than with respect to

their vote preference.

Figure 2: Marginal mean of *choosing* MP and *feeling* warm towards MP by MP, party, and context characteristics



In other words, and in line with previous literature, voters generally prefer rebellious MPs. The finding of a tendency among respondents to prefer candidates who vote against their own party is robust to variation in the issue tackled in the bill.⁷

Is rebellion rewarded when it is congruent with voters' policy preferences? We can say that voters appreciate dissent for its instrumental value leading to better substantive representation when their preference for and approval of a rebelling MP is higher when that MP is closer to them with regard to policy (Hypothesis 1). To assess this mechanism we compare the marginal means on the two outcome measures for rebels vs non-rebels who are also described as moderates (in contrast to taking an extreme position). Figure 3 illustrates a clear preference for MPs with moderate policy positions over those with more extreme policy positions.

⁷Figure B.13 shows marginal means for both outcome measures for all MP attributes.



Figure 3: Marginal mean of *vote preference* and *favorability* for a rebellious MP by whether the rebels holds moderate or extreme policy positions.

The effect of rebellion on vote preferences and approval, that is the difference in outcome measures between MPs who rebel and those who do not, is not significantly larger for moderate than extreme MPs. The higher marginal means for rebels over those MPs who fall in party line is not driven by whether the MPs policy position is moderate or extreme in Study 1. In Study 2 we will see that policy proximity does influence voters' evaluation of rebels.

Is rebellion rewarded when it is congruent with constituency or broader public preferences? In Figure 2 we saw that voters have a general preference for rebels, controlling for the support of the public and the MP's constituency for the bill, along with other covariates. To test whether voters condition their support for a rebel MP on whether that MP voted against a public or constituency position, we need to show the marginal means of rebellion on vote preference and favorability separately for situations where MPs' rebellion against the party coincides with a vote against the public/constituency position on the bill and situations where voting against the party meant voting in line with public/constituency position on the bill.

Figure 4 shows the marginal mean of vote preference for and favorability of an MP who rebelled against party leadership in a way that meant a vote against the public/constituency opinion or in a way aligned with public/constituency opinion.

Figure 4: Marginal mean of *vote preference* and *favorability* for a rebellious MP by whether the rebels vote was with or against public or constituency opinion.



Interestingly, and against our expectation, we find a significantly higher vote preference for and favorability of an MP who behaves counter to the preferences over his/her constituency. In particular, while the share of voters' who prefer a rebel MP whose behavior runs counter to the opinion of the majority of the public and the opinion of the MP's constituency is .54 (.52, .56), it is only .46 (.44, .47) when the MPs choice align with the majority of the public and their constituency. A similar pattern emerges for voters' assessment of favorability of the MP where MP's rebellious vote choice is seen most favorably when it oppose the opinion of the majority of the public as well as the constituency's opinion (58 (57, 59) vs 53 (52, 54)). Marginal means on our outcome measures vote preference and favorability in situations in which rebelling against the party puts an MP at odds with either the broader public or his/her constituency fall in between those two boundary cases. In other words, we do not find any evidence that voters' preference for rebels is explained by the *constituency congruence mechanism*.

To summarize,

Result 1 voters do not show a stronger preference for rebellious MPs when the MPs' behavior aligns with the opinion of the majority of the public or the majority of MPs' constituency.

Is rebellion rewarded when it opposes party discipline? We argued that voters may prefer independently minded MPs "sticking it" to the party elite and who are not simple party soldiers (Hypothesis 6). We test whether that is the case by comparing the marginal mean of vote preference and favorability of rebellious and non-rebellious MPs in the treatment condition containing a prime that tells respondents MPs usually vote with the party (party discipline prime treatment) and compare behavior there to choice of a control condition where voters did not see the party discipline prime. Figure 5 provides no evidence for Hypothesis 6. Priming a norm of party discipline does not affect voters' valuation of rebels.

Figure 5: Marginal means of *vote preference* and *favorability* for rebellious and non-rebellious MPs in party discipline prime condition and no prime condition.



We conclude from the observation that preference for rebels are not conditional on whether voters are primed to consider party discipline a lack of evidence for the *no party soldier mechanism*.

Result 2 Voters preferences for rebels is not driven by an appreciation of MPs who defy party discipline.

Recall, we have reasons to believe that the party discipline prime treatment failed to induce differences in whether respondents considered party discipline a salient consideration when making their choice (see results on the manipulation check presented in the previous subsection).

4 Study 2

In Study 1, we find that voters express a preference for rebellious MPs that is not driven by considerations of norms to vote with the party, whether the rebel activity aligns with what voters believe to be a better representative of the MP's constituency or the broader public in substantive terms. We hypothesized that the observed preference for rebel MPs maybe rather driven by voters' expressive preferences and voting for a rebel should be seen as symbolic act. In this second study, therefore, we focus on identifying rebellion as expressive symbolic act. We implemented another survey experiment to separate expressive from instrumental motivations behind vote choice.

4.1 Methodology

Sample We collect responses from 822 participants in our online survey administered through online survey firm Prolific. Participants received £1.5 for taking the survey. The sample was drawn to be representative of the UK adult population in age, gender, and ethnicity. With an average age of respondents of 45 (sd 15), 51% who identify as women, 20% who identify with the Conservative Party, and 33% who identify with the Labour Party, the sample of Study 2 is indistinguishable on those observables from the sample in Study 1. The Prolific sample is only heavier on student participant (12% of respondents declare to be a student, that is significantly more than the larger, representative sample drawn for Study 1) and sees more support for Liberal Democrats and other parties.

Experimental design In the experiment of Study 2, respondents are presented with a series of five hypothetical MPs.

Respondents see *MP traits* that describe the MP's gender (*gender*), whether the MP rebelled against the party in the vote taken (*rebellion*), whether the MP usually has much influence in parliament (*influence*), whether the vote taken by the MP aligned or opposed the respondents' policy position (referencing the policy positions we elicited from respondents pre-experiment, *policy congruence*), and whether the MP claimed that the vote represents the wishes of the people (*populism*). Further, we give respondents information about *party traits*, in particular the MP's party membership (*partisan identity*). Finally, we tell respondents about the *context* of the vote taken in parliament and show whether the bill was passed by parliament (*vote*), the policy area covered by the bill (*bill*), whether the majority of the public supported the bill (*public opinion*), and whether the MP was pivotal in the vote taken in parliament (*pivotal*).⁸ Figure 6 is an example of what respondents see on their screen in Study 2. Respondents had to move the slider to be able to continue to the next screen.

⁸The exact wording of attribute realisation is shown in Section A of the appendix.

Figure 6: Exemplifying screen as shown to respondents

Members of Parliament adopted a bill on taxes and public spending. The bill was adopted by a vas	t			
majority. The majority of the public was against the bill.				
Think about a Member of Parliament (MP) who voted against the bill together with her party.				
The MP says the vote represents the wishes of the people.				
With this vote, the MP showed a position on the issue that is in opposition to yours stated above.				
This MP usually does not have much influence in what the party does.				
How likely is it that you would vote for such a MP in a general election?				
Very unlikely Ve	ery likely			
0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9	10			
0				

We implement a two-step, sequential randomization. In step 1, we randomly vary the attribute levels of the attributes *rebellion*, *gender*, *vote*, *bill*, and *pivotal* across the five vignettes shown to each respondent, creating a conjoint experimental set-up. These attributes describe a parliamentary vote in which a MP may or may not rebel against his/her party and which further varies in the subject of the bill (i.e., immigration, taxation/spending, environmental protection), whether the bill passed, whether the public supported or opposed the bill, the gender of the MP, and whether the MP was pivotal.

In step 2, the crucial step of our design to separate the mechanism behind voters' support for rebels, we randomly vary attributes levels for attributes *populism*, *influence*, *shared partisan identity*, and *policy congruence* across respondents, creating a between-respondent experimental design. Table 2 lists number of respondents and the number of observations in each condition of those four treatments.

Treatment	Conditions	# of obs	# of respondents	
Populism	MP said to represent people [Empty]	$\begin{array}{c} 1970\\ 2140 \end{array}$	$394 \\ 428$	
Influence	MP has no influence [Empty]	$2125 \\ 1985$	$425 \\ 397$	
Shared party identity	In-party Out-party [Empty]	470 1720 1920	$94 \\ 344 \\ 384$	
Policy congruence	Aligned with MP In opposition to MP	$2230 \\ 1880$	446 376	

Table 2: Number of respondents and number of observations by between-subject treatment conditions. Overall, Study 2 features 4110 observations on 822 respondents.

Note, to evaluate the *shared partisanship mechanism* we compare MP approval for those respondents who where told that the MP shares their partisan identity vs those who do not. In the former case, respondents may either be supporters of the Conservative Party or Labor Party.

The outcome measure asks respondents whether they would vote for such an MP in the general election (*MP approval*). Before the experimental vignettes, we collect responses of moderator variables: partisanship identity scale (see Huddy, Mason and Aarøe (2015), p.7), issue positions, ideological self-placement, turnout and vote choice, and standard demographic information.

We further implement a series of manipulation checks. Similar to Study 1, we ask respondents "How often do you expect a very rebellious MP to vote against his or her party over the course of 100 votes?" The mean answer is 34 out of 100 (sd 23), which is indistinguishable from the mean answer of 85 out of 250 in Study 1. Except for the shared party identity treatment (p = .08, there is balance in respondents answer to this question in the betweenrespondent treatment conditions. Note, the question for the number rebellious votes is not the most telling manipulation check for the effect of the populism, influence, shared party identity, and policy congruence treatment as implemented in Study 2. To evaluate the effectiveness of our manipulations, we rather asked another set of questions: whether they recall the MP's vote choice and the party he/she represented in the last of the five vignettes shown to each respondent. And, we asked whether they thought the MP described in that last vignette is "representing the people" or whether s/he is a "party soldier." Obviously, respondents are more likely to recall the party of the MP in the last vignette they were shown when that vignette actually featured the party affiliation of the MP (p < .01), without any difference between in- vs out-party treatment conditions. Across treatment conditions, respondents are not more likely to recall the behavior of the MP in the last vignette they were shown or in their opinion about that MP being more representative or being a party soldier.⁹

Identification In study 2, we test for four mechanism behind voting for a rebel: the populism mechanism, the policy congruence mechanism, the no influence mechanism, and the shared group membership mechanism. More specifically, to identify the explanatory power of the populism mechanism on preferences for a rebel, we first compute the mean of the approval outcome measure for the rebel attribute averaging over all other attributes (that is, we compute the marginal mean of the outcome measure for the *rebellion* attribute level: MP voted against his/her party) for respondents who also see the populism treatment condition "The MP says the vote represents the wishes of the people." Comparing that marginal mean to the marginal mean of the rebel attribute level when respondents see the baseline condition of the populism treatment, that is no text is given, we obtain an estimate of the effect of highlighting the MPs populist agenda. In similar fashion, we are able to compute the effect of a shared partisan identity on the marginal mean of being a rebel by comparing the marginal mean computed for the rebel attribute levels when the respondent shares a party identity with the MP vs when s/he does not share a partisan identity (shared group membership mechanism). In a second test, we compare marginal means of *MP approval* of rebels when they are shown to be male MPs to when they are female MPs. Note that the test based on shared partial partia respondent experimental component while information about MPs gender, and therefore shared gender status, utilizes variation within the conjoint experimental part of the study. The former is the more robust way to identify the mechanism behind the causal effect of rebellion on MP approval. We further test the *policy congruence mechanism* contrasting the marginal mean of MP approval for rebels for respondents who where told that the MP's vote is aligned with their policy positions vs when it is said to oppose them. And, the *no influence mechanism* by looking at the difference in marginal means of rebel MP approval for respondents who were shown the

⁹Summary statistics for the manipulation check variables are shown in Table B.3 in the Appendix.

statement that "This MP usually does not have much influence in what the party does" and respondents who did not see such statement.

4.2 Results

Before we give the main results on the our tests for the four mechanism behind voters' preference for rebels, Figure 7 lists the marginal means associated with the full list of attribute levels shown to respondents assigned at the vignette level (conjoint experimental component of the study).





Overall, we find the highest approval for an MP who voted for the bill and rebelled; for such a case the marginal mean of *MP Approval* is 4.53 (4.36, 4.70). An MP who did not rebel but still voted for the bill in question is much liked by voters still (marginal mean of 4.39 (4.21, 4.57). In fact, MPs who voted for the bill received significantly higher approval than MPs who voted against the bill. MPs who voted against the party are slightly more liked than MPs who voted with the party. Note, the study was not powered to identify differences in marginal means between the context attributes levels but to identify differences in the marginal mean of being a rebel for the the different conditions of the treatment attribute levels. The lowest level of approval of the MP emerges for an MP who voted with the party and opposed the bill in question: 4.01 (3.85, 4.16). Is rebellion rewarded when it is congruent with voters' policy preferences? As in Study 1, we ask once more whether voters appreciate dissent for its instrumental value for better substantive representation? Appreciation of the rebellious MP runs through this mechanism when voters' approval for a dissenting MP is higher when that MP is closer to them in policy platform than when s/he is further away (Hypothesis 1). In Study 2, we present a treatment where respondents are either told the MP's actions align with their previously stated policy preferences or not; this is a more precise test of the hypothesis than the cruder moderate vs extreme policy position measure adopted in Study 1. Figure 8 shows a significantly and substantially higher approval of a rebel MP when that rebel's action aligns with the voters' policy position than when it does not (hollow black marker). In particular, the difference in marginal mean of *MP approval* between the two treatment conditions of the policy congruence treatment is 1.41(1.05, 1.76)

Result 3 Voters strongly prefer rebels whose actions align with their policy positions.



Figure 8: Average treatment effects on the marginal mean of MP approval)

Is rebellion rewarded when the dissenting MP shares a group membership with voters? Among all mechanism, Figure 8 provides the strongest evidence for the *shared group* membership mechanism. When MP and voter share a partisan identity, the marginal mean of MP approval for a rebel is by 1.97 (1.48, 2.46) higher than when the MP did not vote against the party (hollow gray marker). Our design also allows us to separate whether the effect of co-partisanship is driven by voters' belief that an MP who shares their party affiliation also implements similar policies. Figure 9 displays the treatment effect of policy congruence (marginal mean of MP)

approval when voters' policy positions are aligned with MP minus when they are opposed) for the in- and out-party treatment conditions and the treatment effect of shared party identity (marginal mean of MP approval when the MP is affiliated with voters' in-party minus when the MP Is affiliated with the out-party.

Figure 9: Marginal means of MP by attribute level, voters' gender, and whether voter and MP share the same gender.



While neither the policy congruence effect nor the shared party effect are different across the treatment conditions of the shared party identity and policy congruence treatment conditions, respectively, the shared party effect on *MP approval* is larger, than the policy congruence effect; this difference in effects, however is not statistically significant.

Party affiliation is not the only relevant group membership salient in elections. Shared gender identity may facilitate the appeal of a rebel MP in similar ways. However, we even find a decrease in approval when a male MP rebels vs when such MP does not rebel among male voters but that effect is not significantly different from zero (p = .14). As Figure 10 shows, no further effects of shared gender identity emerge that explain voters' preference for rebels.

Figure 10: Marginal means of MP by attribute level, voters' gender, and whether voter and MP share the same gender.



Evaluating the *shared group membership mechanism* yields a finding for a particular shared group identity, partisanship:

Result 4 Voters strongly prefer rebels who are affiliated with the party with which they identify; there is weak evidence that this shared party identity mechanism explains more of voters' preference for rebels than the policy congruence mechanism.

Is rebellion rewarded as expressive choice? Study 2 does not provide any evidence for the *no influence mechanism* or the *populism mechanism*. The treatment effect of the influence and populism is negligible and not significantly different from Figure 8 zero (black and blue markers, respectively). Summarizing these observations:

Result 5 Voters support for rebels is not expressively motivated.

5 Conclusion

Extant literature finds a preference for rebellious MPs across Western democracies, in general, and the UK, in particular, and our study confirms this finding. We contribute a test of various mechanism behind that preference for rebels. We find no robust evidence that voters reward rebels electorally because their actions against party line is congruent with the preference of the majority of the public or the preferences of that rebellious MP's constituents. Voters also do not prefer rebels on account of their rebellion for the sake of "the people" or when the MP casts a protest vote (when the MP actually does not have much influence on political outcomes), explanations we argued could be indicative of voters making an expressive choice. These null findings are particularly interesting given that so much dissent happen precisely when rebellion does not affect policy outcomes, and rebels do tend to cast dissent as a vote for the people.

We find that rebels are appreciated when they share voters partian identity and policy preferences and we presented some evidence that the shared the party identity mechanism explains more of voters' preference for rebels than policy congruence.

While the effects we do find are in line with existing literature, our study has more to say about whether the support for dissenters is an expression of voters' particular preference over types of representation. Whichever motivations drives support for rebels, however, to win elections and govern effectively, a significant body literature suggests that presenting a coherent party message helps at election time by cueing voters into the party "brand" (Kiewiet and McCubbins, 1992; Cox and McCubbins, 2005). This unified message is particularly important in party-centered electoral systems (Proksch and Slapin, 2015), where voters are unwilling to support parties that they consider too divided or incoherent (Greene and Haber, 2015). This literature would suggest that parties ought to do their utmost to prevent rebellion. However, others have suggested that parties can pick up votes through obfuscation, trying to be all things to all voters (Somer-Topcu, 2015). It is therefore unclear under which conditions rebellion is advantageous to a politician, to the party, and to parliamentary democracy more generally. Short-term gains for individual rebels may be juxtaposed with long-term erosion of parties' ability to maintain a coherent brand, to govern and ultimately the ability of democratic institutions to function. Given that our results point to an expressive explanations, linked with descriptive representation, the appreciation of the electorate for dissent may not boost populism or undermine the ability of democratic institutions to deliver desired policies, as some may fear. Rebels are only successful if they offer voters descriptive, and perhaps, substantive representation.

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Appendix

A Experimental design appendix

A.1 Study 1

Attributes and the realizations of attribute levels are taken from the following list:

- 1. *party:* The MP's party (e.g. Conservative, Labour, Liberal Democrat): "Conservative", "Labour", "Liberal Democrats"
- 2. *leadership position:* Whether the party leadership voted in favour or against the bill: "The MP's party leadership voted in [favour/against] the bill"
- 3. *rebellion:* Whether the MP voted with or against his party: "The MP voted [with/against] the MP's party"
- 4. *public opinion:* Whether the majority of the public supported the bill: "The majority of the public [supports/opposes] the bill"
- 5. district opinion: Whether the majority of the public in the MP's electoral district supported the bill: "The majority of the public in the MP's electoral district [supports/opposes] the bill"
- 6. *pivotality:* Whether the vote by the MP made a difference to the outcome of the vote: "The MP's vote [did not change/changed] the final vote tally"
- 7. *policy position:* Whether MP takes an extreme or moderate position: "The MP takes an [extreme/moderate] position on the bill"
- 8. *party competition:* Whether UKIP supports or opposes the MP's voting behaviour: "UKIP [supports/opposes] the MP's voting behaviour"
- 9. *tenure:* Whether the MP has spent three, ten or twenty-one years in parliament: "The MP has been a member of parliament for [three/ten/twenty-one] years"
- 10. constituency service: The amount of time that an MP spends in the constituency: "The MP spends [more/less] time working on local constituency issues than national issues."

Outcome measures elicited below the MP profiles on the same screen:

- 1. approval of MP 1: "How favourable do you feel towards MP 1 on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 means very unfavourable and 100 means very favourable."
- 2. approval of MP 2: "How favourable do you feel towards MP 2 on a scale of 0 to 100, where 0 means very unfavourable and 100 means very favourable."
- 3. Vote intention: "In a hypothetical election, if these two MPs were standing against one another in an election, which MP would you vote for?"



Figure A.11: Attrition in outcome measures over six vignettes.

A.2 Study 2

Attribute levels vary randomly, the realizations of attribute levels are taken from the following list:

Conjoint experimental design:

- 1. Vote: Whether the bill was passed by parliament: "adopted", "voted down"
- 2. *Bill*: The subject of the bill: "immigration", "taxes and public spending", "environmental protection"
- 3. Pivotality: Whether the vote by the MP made a difference tot he outcome: "slim", "vast"
- 4. Public opinion: Whether the majority of the public supports the bill: "for", "against"
- 5. Gender: Whether the MP is female or male: "his", "her"
- 6. *Rebellion*: Whether the MP voted with or against his party: "against the bill and against", "against the bill together with", "for the bill but against", "for the bill together with"

Between-respondent experimental design:

- 7. *Influence*: Whether the MP usually has influence in parliament: "This MP usually does not have much influence in what the party does.", [Empty]
- 8. Populism: "The MP says the vote represents the wishes of the people.", [Empty]
- 9. Partisan identity: "The MP represents the Labour Party", "The MP represents the Conservative Party", [Empty]
- 10. *Policy congruence*: Whether the vote of the MP aligned with the issue position stated by the respondent: "aligned with", "in opposition to"

Outcome measures elicited below the MP profiles on the same screen:

1. "How likely is it that you would vote for such a MP in a general election?" [Scale 0="Very unlikely" to 100="Very likely"]

B Statistical appendix

B.1 Summary statistics



Figure B.12: Sample characteristics of Study 1 (N=2055) and Study 2 (N=822, if available)

Table B.3: Summary statistics of manipulation checks in Study 2

Treatment	Condition	MP choice	MP party	MP represents	MP soldier
Shared party	[Empty]	0.48(0.50)	0.71(0.46)	2.97(1.01)	2.86(0.80)
	In-/Out-party shown	0.49(0.50)	0.82(0.38)	2.87(1.01)	2.82(0.83)
Populism	[Empty]	0.48(0.50)	0.77(0.42)	2.90(1.01)	2.81(0.83)
	MP represents	0.49(0.50)	0.77(0.42)	2.93(1.02)	2.87(0.80)
Policy congruence	Different position	$0.51 \ (0.50)$	0.76(0.43)	2.86(1.01)	2.86(0.87)
	Same position	0.47(0.50)	0.78(0.42)	2.96(1.01)	2.82(0.77)
Influence	[Empty]	0.54(0.50)	0.81(0.40)	2.89(1.00)	2.86(0.78)
	MP has no influence	$0.43\ (0.50)$	0.74(0.44)	2.94(1.03)	$2.81 \ (0.85)$

B.2 Study 1: Robustness and additional analysis

Figure B.13: Marginal mean of vote preference and favorability for all MP attributes by issue treatment.

