

3-15-2023

Perceived Party Differences, Election Outcomes, and Satisfaction with Democracy

Hannah M. Ridge

Chapman University, haridge@chapman.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.chapman.edu/polisci_articles



Part of the [Other Political Science Commons](#), and the [Political Theory Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hannah M. Ridge (2023) Perceived party differences, election outcomes, and satisfaction with democracy, *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2023.2189259>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Political Science at Chapman University Digital Commons. It has been accepted for inclusion in Political Science Faculty Articles and Research by an authorized administrator of Chapman University Digital Commons. For more information, please contact laughtin@chapman.edu.

Perceived Party Differences, Election Outcomes, and Satisfaction with Democracy

Comments

This is an Accepted Manuscript version of an article accepted for publication in *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* in 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2023.2189259>. It is deposited under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Creative Commons License



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial 4.0 License](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/)

Copyright

Taylor & Francis

Perceived Party Differences, Election Outcomes, and Satisfaction with Democracy

Abstract: Multiple studies have identified a significant gap between electoral winners' satisfaction with the functioning of their democracy and electoral losers' satisfaction. This disparity is attributed to the diverging policies the parties would enact. For this to be true, citizens must perceive true differences among the parties. Using 31 post-election surveys from 25 countries, this study finds that the win-loss satisfaction gap is conditioned by the perceived differences among the political parties in the democracy. The effect of winning or losing on citizens' satisfaction is significantly larger when citizens identify greater differences among the parties. This effect is driven by the difference in impact among citizens perceiving major differences among the parties. This differential effect underscores the importance of understanding citizens' perceptions of the parties in their democracy and contributes to researchers' knowledge of influences on democratic attitudes at a time when scholars are concerned about democratic decline.

Key Words: Political parties, elections, satisfaction with democracy, democracy, public opinion

Introduction

Functioning democracies provide citizens meaningful choices between the options in their political systems. At least one option should be acceptable, and the choices should be discernably distinct (Wessels and Schmitt 2008; Goodman and Murray 2007). If citizens do not perceive differences between the parties, the democracy is non-functional. Research on citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of their democracy (SWD) has revealed that citizens are aware of this necessity – they are less satisfied with their democracy when presented with a homogenous party environment (Ridge 2021b).

This project incorporates this principle into the substantial literature on the win-loss satisfaction with democracy gap. This literature presumes citizens anticipate different political futures based on which party wins an election. The victory effect should then be conditional on the perceived differences between the parties. Citizens who cannot perceive differences are less prepared to envision diverging political futures based on electoral outcomes, which means they will be less responsive to a defeat. The win-loss satisfaction gap would be greater among citizens perceiving greater differences.

The article examines this relationship using 31 post-election surveys from the 3rd Module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems. It finds that the difference in satisfaction between winners and losers increases as voters perceive more substantial distinctions between the parties. The increase in SWD from victory is not significantly different among those perceiving no differences and those perceiving minor differences among the parties. However, the win-loss satisfaction differential is substantially greater for voters who perceive major differences. Finally, the article considers the implications of party distinctiveness for research on the influence of perceived candidate homogeneity and for support for democracy.

Elections, Outcomes, and Satisfaction with Democracy

Choice matters for citizens in democracies. Democracy's functionality depends on the opportunities to make choices and the translation of those choices into the distribution of authority and governance outcomes. Arguably, voters cannot make an expressive choice unless a candidate is reasonably proximal to the voter and the choices are distinguishable (Wessels and Schmitt 2008). Appreciation of that fact translates into system (dis)satisfaction, meaning it implicates their specific support for democracy (Easton 1975). Citizens should be more satisfied with systems that feature meaningful choices than with systems that do not. At the same time, having too many options makes citizens feel confused or potentially regretful due to the variety, ultimately undercutting their satisfaction (Iyengar and Lepper 2000). When voters are presented with choices that are similarly attractive to them or when they cannot provide themselves a reason for choosing one option over another, they experience "preference uncertainty," leading to delayed decisions and dissatisfaction (Goodman and Murray 2007, 909; Rodon 2021).

Citizens' SWD is greater when parties cover more of the ideological spectrum and when they can identify a party that represents their preferences (Carey and Hix, 2011; Dalton, 1985; Harding 2011); this effect is moderated by the party's perceived ability to win (Hobolt, Hoerner, and Rodon 2020). Ideological congruence between citizens and their governments increases SWD (Kim 2009). The differences between parties in the system ultimately contributes to citizens' democratic satisfaction (Ridge 2021b; Torcal and Magalhães 2022). Individuals who perceive greater differences between the parties in their democracy express greater specific support for democracy. Where citizens view their parties as all the same — whether it be ideologically, because they share one position on a key issue, or because they are all in the same party family — they express lower SWD. The ameliorative effect of differentiation is greatest

among those who perceive minor differences. They are more satisfied than both those who see no differences and those who see major differences.

This manuscript extends this latter research by addressing the connection between electoral success, perceived party difference,¹ and satisfaction with democracy. A substantial portion of the SWD literature focuses on the win-loss satisfaction gap. Election winners are more likely to be satisfied with their democracies than the losers (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Daoust, Plescia, and Blais 2021). Two causes for the win-loss satisfaction gap have been argued. Firstly, people like winning at things (Anderson et al 2005; Singh, Karkoç, and Blais 2012).² Secondly, those who win anticipate policy congruence with the government they just elected. Different policy profiles will be pursued under the potential regimes, and the literature proposes that citizens' anticipation of those differences, coupled with their own political preferences, leads to diverging attitudes towards the system that generated those outcomes (Singh, Karkoç, and Blais 2012; Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012). This difference in satisfaction can endure for months after the election, as the parties enact their preferred policies and voters experience outcomes (Loveless 2020; Hansen, Klemmensen, and Serritzlew 2019).

For voters to anticipate and evaluate a difference in outcomes based on the election, they must recognize ideological, party family, or policy differences between the contesting parties.

The different programs they would enact give the voters a vested interest in the outcome: "Since

¹ The focus here is on the *perception* of differences, rather than overt differences. Citizens' opinions are dependent on what they believe to be true, whether or not it actually is. They could be over- or under-estimating the true differences, but their perception shapes their experience. The empirical reality can inform their perceptions, but this project evaluates the impact of those *perceptions* on the win-loss gap. The modeling does though account for the number and ideological dispersion of the parties.

² In contrast, Daoust, Plescia, and Blais (2021) find that "feeling" like one has won the election is not a substantial moderator of the satisfaction differential from actually voting for the winning party. Individuals who voted "optimally" ideologically and won are more satisfied than winners who did not vote their ideological preference position (Singh 2014). Thus, winning matters more emotionally too when it is accompanied by ideological congruence.

parties are still largely responsible for policy making, voters concerned with policy outcomes should have an important stake in, and feel affected by, whether their preferred parties win or lose” (Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012, 244). This stake is magnified where the parties are more distinct from each other.³ Where no difference is perceived, no difference in policy would be anticipated. As such, differential outcome effects should reflect perceived party differences.

Other studies have highlighted conditionality in the win-loss satisfaction gap. Anderson and Guillory (1997) find the effect is greater in majoritarian systems. Chang, Chu, and Wu (2014) show that the satisfaction gap is larger in young democracies than in established democracies, which have less experience with electoral turnover. Curini, Jou, and Memoli (2012 & 2015) find that victory is more impactful for those who are ideologically proximal to the winning party, especially among repeat winners, for whom additional victories provide diminishing marginal utility. Consensus democracy closes the win-loss satisfaction gap (Bernauer and Vatter 2012). Among winners, they are less satisfied if a coalition government forms with parties that they do not like (Singh and Thornton 2016). Singh (2014) identifies a conditional relationship between vote sincerity and winner effects. Ridge (2021b) notes that feeling close to a party and feeling represented by a party moderates the effect of perceived party difference. Nadeau et al (2021) note that the win-loss satisfaction gap is smaller in high-quality democracies.⁴ This manuscript continues in that tradition of conditional-effects examination. It contributes both to the literature on SWD and on the effects of perceived party differences.

³ Voters might also derive more satisfaction from a win in a system where the parties are more distinguished, particularly if they abhor a defeated party (Ridge 2020). An emotion-based boost even where parties are identical though would work against finding an effect here.

⁴ As this study uses post-election surveys from countries rated Free by Freedom House, all of which score 8 or higher on the Polity IV index, all are high-quality democracies. The gap is thus relatively narrowed in these country contexts. This fact works against finding an effect. The models account for the quality of the democracy with V-Dem’s Liberal Democracy Index, nonetheless, to account for this effect.

Predictions

Several studies have tapped into the result of perceived party differences, especially with respect to voting. The rational-emotional model of decision avoidance explains that voting requires the perception of choice, and, without it, citizens are less likely to participate and less likely to be invested in the outcome (Goodman and Murry 2007). Where choice is muted, voters may still derive utility from expressing directional preferences (Rodon 2021). However, they would not anticipate substantial policy differences deriving from the outcome: “When parties agree on policies, they become irrelevant to citizens” (Lupu 2015, 334). Thus, the effect of victory would be *relatively* muted where choice is absent. Citizens who perceive the parties in their system as functionally equivalent should experience a smaller victory satisfaction effect than those who perceive greater differences; the win-loss gap should increase with perceived party differentiation (H1a).

The effect of perceived difference is not necessarily linear, as that story might imply. Major or minor differences both improve over homogeneity from a choice perspective. Major and minor differences, though, may impact the win-loss experience differently. Wide ideological spread mean that the elections can induce major alterations in powerholders and political agenda. This emphasizes the profound differences that would result from one side winning as opposed to the other. The anticipated policy outcomes and response to them from winning or losing in these cases should be in sharper contrast, contributing to an increase in satisfaction among winners, a decrease in satisfaction among losers, or both. Rather than a linear enhancement, the win-loss satisfaction gap would be larger among citizens perceiving major differences than citizens perceiving minor differences (H1b).

In some circumstances, citizens may identify parties as the same or different for reasons they do not believe will have policy implications. For instance, if they think all parties are corrupt, the parties have different views on a separatist movement, or the parties have different ethnic bases, the citizens may use this information to evaluate difference levels. In such cases, they may not believe that the policy profile will ultimately change. Separation may not be viable, the ethnic groups may have shared policy preferences, or the corrupt parties could still follow their ideology or their voters' will. Arguably divergence on such bases contribute less to the win-loss satisfaction effect. This possibility works against finding a party-perception effect on the win-loss satisfaction differential.

Materials and Methods

To test these relationships, this study draws on the 3rd Module of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (2006-2011), a collection of post-election surveys (Comparative 2015). It is the only module to address citizens' perceptions of the differences between the political parties in their democracy. Given the focus on democracy and democratic satisfaction, the sample is subset to countries fulfilling the "conventional criteria for liberal democracy," which is to say countries identified as Free by Freedom House leading up to the election (Dahlberg et al., 2015; Dahlberg and Linde, 2016: 5). Cases were also removed where questions of interest were not answered in that survey. This leaves a sample of 24,388 respondents in thirty-one elections in twenty-five countries.

The first independent variable of interest is the perceived level of differences between the political parties in a country. Survey takers were asked, "During the election campaign, would you say that there were major differences between the [parties/candidates], minor differences, or no differences at all?" (Comparative 2015). While three levels of difference is limited, it is an

improvement on the binary classification that has been used in previous studies. In the previous studies, binary indicators have identified a distinction only between perceiving “important” or “major” differences between the parties, as opposed to perceiving “minor” or no differences (Lupu 2015; Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Goodman and Murry 2007). For the first hypothesis, the respondents’ ratings are included as a three-point scale from no differences (1) to major differences (3). For the second hypothesis, the response is included as a factor variable with perceiving minor differences as the reference category.

[Figure 1]

In this sample, some citizens in each country do not see differences between the parties in their system (7.2%). Almost half of the respondents see minor differences (49.4%). Nearly as many see major differences (43.4%). Compare this to experts evaluations. Figure 1 shows how the CSES collaborators rate the four largest parties by vote share in each country on a scale from left (0) to right (10). The ratings show varying degrees of distinctiveness. In no case do the experts assert that no differences exist among all the parties. At the same time, it is evident that some parties overlap on the ideological spectrum; these parties must distinguish themselves in other regards in order to attract voters.

The citizen evaluations are distinct from the expert evaluations. They are not fully independent, nor should they be. After all, they are evaluating the same party system. This perception metric is particular to the individual, rather than a measure of an objective fact.⁵ The objective level of variation within those systems in each election survey can be taken into

⁵ One might worry that winning an election is changing the respondents’ assignment to treatment. Best and Seyis (2021) note that winners see the governing parties as more ideologically aligned with themselves; if losers felt more aligned with their parties after a loss, then, in aggregate, the public might perceive greater distinctiveness. However, the literature does not find a consistent relationship between ideology ratings and perception of party distinctiveness (Lupu 2015; Anderson and Just 2018). Most pertinently, the data reveal no relationship between the winner/loser status and system rating on this three-point scale ($r=0.04$). Thus, this is not a substantial empirical concern.

account, but it is not dispositive. The argument here is focused on the perception the respondents' have, because or despite the reality of their country's party system.

[Figure 2]

The connection of perception and reality can be seen in the citizens' party-ideology ratings. Figure 2 shows the standard deviation in the ratings the citizens give to the four largest parties per election-year on the left-right scale, grouped by perceived difference. While these are aggregate figures, those identifying minor or no differences among the parties show relatively smaller standard deviations in their party ratings on the ideological scale. They actually report that these parties are more alike ideologically than the individuals who report viewing the parties as more distinct.

Additional features may increase the apparent distinctiveness of parties. For instance, a party that is affiliated with a religious or ethnic bloc might have similar ideological positions to other parties but be viewed as distinct by the voter, while parties may be homogenized in voters eyes if they are all viewed as corrupt or political insiders. Perceived hetero/homogeneity is relevant whether it is driven by ideological distinctions, party histories, membership base, or any number of features of the parties involved. Identifying the cause is left to future research.

Winners and losers are identified based on vote choice. Those who supported the party of the president or prime minister or one of the parties in the governing coalition are considered winners; these parties are identified based on the CSES macro reports. Voters who supported other parties are considered losers. CSES reports vote choice for presidential races, lower house district vote choice, lower house party list choice, upper house district vote choice, and/or upper house party list choice, depending on the election. If the dataset reports the vote choice in a presidential race, then that is used to identify a winner. If that is not included, then the vote

choice in the district is used; if that is not identified, the vote choice in the party list is used.⁶ Individuals who reported that they did not vote are coded as abstentions. Abstention and perceiving less difference and less polarization are correlated (Goodman and Murray 2007; Anderson and Just 2018). They are also less satisfied with democracy relative to voters (Blais and Gélinau 2007; Kostelka and Blais 2018). A factor variable is constructed with losers as the reference category. Although identifying outcome by vote choices is standard in this literature (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Dahlberg and Linde 2016), outcomes can also be assessed based on the party to which the citizen feels closest. By using closeness, strategic voters are linked to their true party.⁷ Citizens who feel close to a political party have bought in cognitively to their democracy, and this relationship is important for their democratic satisfaction (Converse 1969; Aldrich et al. 2020). As such, both metrics of outcome are employed here.

Some countries in the sample rely on coalition governments. The CSES surveys sometimes begin days after the election and may continue for weeks. It can take time for stable coalitions to form after an election. Research on partisan affect suggests that interparty affect's influence fades as the election recedes temporally (Hernández, Anduiza, and Rico 2021). The SWD and victory literature typically does not factor this delay into the models. Many coalitions are pre-announced or at least pre-speculated (Goodin, Güthm and Sausgruber 2008). As such,

⁶ Presidential vote is used for Brazil, Mexico (2006), the United States, and Uruguay. District vote is used for Australia, Canada, Estonia, Germany, Mexico (2009), and New Zealand. Party list vote is used for Austria, Croatia, Czechia, Finland, Greece, Ireland, Israel, Poland, Portugal, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. Upper house party list vote is used for Japan.

The results are robust to a specification that prioritizes party list vote over the district vote (Appendix 2).

⁷ For both metrics, winning and losing is treated as an objective fact: “feelings of either winning or losing are determined by the party’s performance as well as by prior expectations and party preferences” but people whose party is “in government” are much more likely to feel like they won (Plescia 2019, 810). Vote share and relative party performance contribute to a sense of electoral success (Plescia 2018), and subnational and supranational election results also contribute to SWD (Plescia et al. 2021; Ridge 2021a). As such, relying on the vote choice for the governing and opposition parties is a sensible proxy, as well as consistent with the literature. Strategic voters code as winners in the voting-choice-based coding. Including them works against finding victory effects.

even if the formalization of the coalition is not immediate, voters are not left in great suspense about who could be in government. Arguably, uncertainty about the winner would create noise that works against finding an effect of electoral outcomes. Recent studies have taken this into consideration, although which elections should be excised is muddled by factors like pre-announcements (Best and Seyis 2021). To address concerns that voters did not all know the coalition results prior to the survey, the models are re-estimated without countries in which the coalition was announced after the surveys started (Appendix 1).⁸

The outcome variable is satisfaction with democracy: “On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in COUNTRY?” (Comparative 2015). A four-point scale is taken from this from not at all to very satisfied. SWD is “an expression of approval of regime performance located between diffuse notions of support for democratic principles and specific attitudes toward political actors” (Blais, Morin-Chassé and Singh 2017, 86). It reflects the individual's opinion about the institutional performance in that country, rather than democracy as an idea (Linde and Ekman 2003). While some researchers argue against the use of such a broad indicator, particularly in new democracies (Canache, Mondak, and Seligson 2001), it is widely used in such studies, and its breadth is taken as a benefit (Wagner, Schneider, and Halla 2003).

Covariates that have been previously associated with winning, perceived differences, and SWD are included in the models. Respondents’ age is measured in years.⁹ Older respondents are more likely to view parties as polarized (Lupu 2015) and less likely to be satisfied with democracy (Ridge 2021b). Education is an eight-point scale with increasing scores indicating higher education. Education makes voters more likely to evaluate parties’ ideology and relative

⁸ The Czech Republic, Finland (2011), Germany (2005), Ireland, Poland (2005), and Switzerland.

⁹ The CSES data codes Americans over the age of 90 as 001; they are recoded to 90.

position accurately (Carroll and Kubo 2018; Dahlberg 2013). Education is associated with an increased propensity to view parties as polarized and to be satisfied with the democracy (Lupu 2015; Anderson and Just 2018; Aldrich et al 2020). Gender is an indicator for female; women are more likely to see parties as farther apart (Lupu 2015) and less likely to be satisfied with democracy (Ridge 2021b). Income is a five-point scale for income quintiles in that country-year; wealthier people identify greater polarization and higher satisfaction (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Lupu 2015; Anderson and Just 2018). Closeness to a political party is measured in a four-point scale from not at all close to very close; those who are closer perceive greater divergence in the parties and are more satisfied with democracy (Anderson and Just 2018; Aldrich et al. 2020). A binary variable indicates if a respondent feels represented by a party in the system; SWD is highly dependent on a sense of representation (Aarts and Thomassen 2008). Individuals who have strong negative sentiment towards other parties in their system may evaluate those party positions differently because of their animosity and have stronger reactions to winning and losing elections than citizens without such strong feelings (Ridge 2020; Mayer 2017). To account for this phenomenon, a binary indicator is included for citizens who say there is a party in their country for which they would never vote.

The extremity of respondents' political ideology is included as absolute distance of the respondents' position from the mid-point. Extremists can view their preferred parties as close to their position and other parties as farther from it (Granberg and Brown 1992), magnifying apparent differences between the parties (Anderson and Just 2018; Lupu 2015). Extremists may also have stronger responses to election returns. The absolute ideological distance between citizens and the winning party is also included to account for the ideological representation of winners in the government and their perception of it (Best and Seyis 2021; Curini, Jou, and

Memoli 2015; Anderson and Guillory 1997). Interest in politics is a four-point scale of attention paid to the recent electoral campaign. Politically-involved citizens perceive greater differences between parties and are more satisfied with their democracies (Granberg and Brown 1992; Anderson and Just 2018).

As regime outputs are important to citizens' satisfaction, several are included here. GDP per capita and unemployment are measures of the regime's economic output (Lühiste 2004). The Varieties of Democracy dataset's Liberal Democracy Index rating for the country is included (Coppedege et al 2020). Citizens' evaluations of the government's performance since the last election from very good to very bad are included, with higher scores indicating a worse opinion of the government's performance. Regime age is included to account for democratic stability. These address effects on citizen perceptions of the state quality and their democratic satisfaction (Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2015). The year previous to the election year is used in measuring GDP per capita, unemployment, and the democracy rating to ensure that the rating occurred prior to the election.

A binary variable distinguishes presidential democracies from parliamentary or mixed democracies; a sense of representation through election outcomes is higher in majoritarian systems, while the more proportional systems are associated with reduced SWD (Aarts and Thommasen 2008). An objective measure of partisan difference is also included in the models. It measures the left-right spread of the system's parties on the zero to ten ideology rating weighted by the parties' vote share; the rating uses the expert ideology ratings and does not include countries not rated Free by Freedom House or countries that only had a presidential election that year (Dalton 2008). Citizens in countries with mixed electoral systems and countries with more polarized parties are more likely to think of party ideologies one-dimensionally (Carroll and

Kubo 2021). Unsurprisingly, voters in more polarized systems perceive greater differences between the parties (Lupu 2015). More parties and more polarized systems may not make voters evaluate parties' ideological positions more accurately though, nor are citizens more accurate about bigger parties' ideology (Dahlberg 2013). Using the weighted number accounts both for the number of parties, in terms of system size, and the larger role that major parties play in politics, commentary, and citizens' impressions. Another measure accounts for the effective number of political parties, which is the number of parties in the system weighted by their vote share; this recognizes the number of options among which citizens are evaluating the differences, the likelihood that a coalition government will be necessary, and the chances that any particular party might win. Countries with more parties have wider coverage, but the parties are also closer together, reducing a sense of overall distinction, especially since the effective number of parties down weights unpopular extreme parties (Lupu 2015; Anderson and Just 2018).

To account for the fact that the surveys were conducted within countries, multilevel mixed-effects models with election as the grouping factor are used; this accounts for natural clustering in the data (Christensen 2015). Multilevel mixed-effects models were used in Ridge (2021b). They were computed with the “brms” package (Bürkner 2017). The continuous age, unemployment rate, and GDP per capita variables are scaled. As the satisfaction with democracy variable has four levels, ordered logistic regression models are used (Kim 2009; Blais and Gélinau 2007).

Results

[Table 1]

The results are presented in Table 1. Models 1 and 2 interact the (level of) perceived party differences and winner/loser/abstainer status to evaluate the hypotheses. Models 3 and 4 repeat these models with the alternative winner/loser/abstainer classification.

The positive and significant interaction term between perceived party differences and voting for a winning party in Model 1 indicates that, as citizens perceive greater differences between the parties in their system, the effect of winning the recent election on their satisfaction is stronger (0.13). The win-loss satisfaction gap is larger when greater differences are identified. This is consistent with the first hypothesis. The interaction is also significant and positive using the party-closeness-based win/loss status (Model 3).

Furthermore, the result is robust to subsetting for coalition formation (Appendix 1). In fact, the interaction effect is larger without those cases. Winners who were still uncertain of their victory did not enjoy the same boost in satisfaction and/or losers holding out hope against defeat did not yet take the satisfaction hit, so removing those cases removed noise and untreated cases from the analysis.

Model 2 addresses the second hypothesis. The factor variable distinguishes the relationship by level of perceived difference relative to perceiving minor differences. The interaction term between voting for a winning party and identifying major differences among the parties, as opposed to minor differences, is positive and statistically significant (0.21) (Model 2). Perceiving major differences increases the already relatively positive effect of winning on SWD (0.49). The effect is sizeable, representing over a half-coefficient increase in the win effect among these respondents relative to the other minor-difference-identifying winners. The interaction is also positive and significant in the alternative victory measurement (Model 4). The

interactions remain significant and are of greater magnitude in the reduced country sample models (Appendix 1). These findings are consistent with the second hypothesis.

[Figure 3]

The relationship is visualized in Figure 3, which shows predicted values for a hypothetical respondent. The plot shows that winners are more likely to be satisfied than losers and that those who perceive minor differences are also more likely to be satisfied than those perceiving no differences. The win-loss satisfaction gap is not substantively different based on perceiving minor differences and no differences, although those who perceive minor differences are more likely to be satisfied. The major and minor differences perception groups show a different pattern. There is a larger win-loss satisfaction differential under greater party distinctiveness. Those who perceive major differences among the parties are more responsive to the electoral outcomes.¹⁰

This suggests a non-linear relationship for winning and satisfaction with democracy. This is consistent with the earlier studies on conditional winner-loser effects on SWD. The win-loss gap is amplified for those who see the parties as more distinct. Prior scholarship has noted that perceiving minor differences among the parties, as opposed to no differences, has a direct positive effect on satisfaction with democracy; this perception is then directly beneficial to democratic attitudes. However, it does not change the win-loss-satisfaction relationship. Major differences do. This finding further demonstrates the impact of potentially-substantial policy shifts with each election on democratic attitudes.

Discussion and Conclusions

¹⁰ To generate the estimates and error bounds the “brms” package uses the static Hamiltonian Monte-Carlo (HMC) Sampler. Numeric variables are conditionalized with their means; the reference level is used for factor variables.

A substantial literature on satisfaction with democracy has addressed circumstances under which winners and losers in political contests are more or less satisfied with their democracy. Influences on SWD are important, as recent studies have demonstrated that the satisfaction advantage for victory relative to defeat can persist for years (Loveless 2020; Hansen Klemmensen, and Serritzlew 2019). This study addresses the difference in democratic satisfaction by considering the impact of the perceived difference in the political system on the size of that gap. Following previous research on the conditional nature of the victory effect, it examines the role of perceiving the parties in the political system as diverse or not. In doing so, it builds on recent work showing that perceiving political candidates or parties as all the same has a deleterious effect on citizens' democratic attitudes and behaviors.

This study finds that winning an election has a greater effect on satisfaction among those who perceive greater differences between the parties. While other winners may share satisfaction in victory, these winners foresee a greater contrast between the potential outcomes that the potential regimes could have generated. Differences between the parties means that the different outcomes will lead to different results. Where the parties are viewed as the same, victory offers less post-election policy contrast. In diverse systems, an electoral victory means their preferred result was chosen over one that would be less palatable. In turn, they are more satisfied with the system that generated this result and the course it will run in the future.

The driving force in this conditional effect pattern appears to be the citizens perceiving major differences between the parties. The win-loss satisfaction gap is most impacted by those perceiving *major* differences as opposed to *minor* differences among the parties. Perceiving no difference as opposed to minor differences does not significantly change the scope of the win-

loss satisfaction differential. This study thus uncovers additional evidence of conditional effects of electoral outcomes on citizens' system satisfaction.

This difference in patterns indicates that the influence of difference and perceived distinctiveness between candidates and parties is not rooted solely in small differences or large ones. Additional work remains to be done to understand the implications of citizens' perceptions of party homogeneity and heterogeneity. Research has broached which citizens are likely to perceive such differences (Abramowitz and Saunders 2008; Lupu 2015). Cross-temporal analyses could examine the influence of party system developments on citizens' evaluations. Furthermore, understanding of this domain would benefit from qualitative studies that provide greater nuance and context-specific responses. For instance, it could demonstrate the role of second-axis issues in shaping citizens' perceptions of party system distinctiveness. The cause of perceived distinctiveness (e.g., programmatic differences or personalistic party connections) could shape what citizens gain from system-wide variety or electoral victory. If citizens perceive differences between the parties for non-ideological reasons (e.g., ethnic affiliations) or reasons that will not change the anticipated political outcomes, then the victory enhancement from perceived party differences may be attenuated. Respondent-specific drivers could be considered as well. Personality factors, such as Manicheanism or cynicism, could impact the emotional or policy response to outcomes. Vote-choice sincerity may mediate this effect; patronage-based votes, for instance, may be less informed by party differences. Researchers can also consider other manifestations of these differing perceptions. Strong work has been done on voting behavior (Goodman and Murray 2007; Rodon 2021). Other effects remain to be explored. For instance, scholars could consider the implications for voters' sense of political efficacy or their

support for minority party candidates and direct democracy. Voters perceiving system homogeneity may seek other avenues for political representation and expression.

These results are not presented without caveats. Firstly, these surveys were taken as part of the CSES. Countries opt to participate. The countries may also opt out of certain questions. As such, the results presented here are taken from a non-random and incomplete set of democracies. They are also limited by the inclusion of certain questions for potential variables. Secondly, these results come only from one wave of surveys. Systems' parties and their platforms may have changed. Affective, social, and ideological polarization and depolarization have transpired to varying degrees in different countries over the years since these surveys (Boxell et al. 2020; McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). It is possible that the pattern has developed over time with these changes in citizens' social and political attitudes and awareness. Lastly, the results in the survey reflect point-in-time evaluations; they cannot demonstrate change over time. Cross-temporal effects are thus beyond the scope of this study. Additional surveys would provide both up-to-date measurements of citizens' perceptions of party differences and their response to it and could introduce a larger set of democracies. Panel designs could allow for pre-electoral estimation of party position and public perception. Those surveys would also allow further research into the causes and consequences of citizens' evaluations of their democracy's party distinctiveness.

Despite these limitations, furthering our understanding of citizens' attitudes towards their democracies and their functioning is useful for understanding democratic durability. Election coverage focuses on the winning team and their plans for the future, but other sectors matter for that future too. Losers are "veto players of democratic governance" (Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2011: 244), and losing is shaping their democratic attitudes. Winners are more likely to believe

that “politics works in a transparent way and that the government works for all” (Toshkov and Mazepus 2020, 19) and are also less likely to believe that the government has too much power to enact its will (Anderson and Tverdova 2001); losers, in turn, place more value on checks and balances (Toshkov and Mazepus 2020). Losers also have a reduced sense of political efficacy, less social trust, less trust in political institutions, and reduced life satisfaction (Toshkov and Mazepus 2020). Losers are less satisfied with their democratic system overall.

In order for democracy to endure, losing partisans must be willing to see it continue. They have the option of rejecting the outcome and rejecting democracy, at least how it is practiced in their country. Continuance acknowledges an acceptance of the system, even when it does not produce the outcome they wanted. Satisfaction with how it is functioning at the time should encourage that acceptance. This support is recognized as a girder for citizens’ support for democracy in general. Losers can draw on their reservoir of democratic goodwill to sustain their institutional commitments (Easton 1975; Linde and Peters 2020). Winners, the literature suggests, are adding to their own reserves of democratic sustenance through the system satisfaction bump.

Other factors contribute to the confluence of public support for democracy and democratization or democratic backsliding. Political leaders’ behavior, institutional structures, and economic circumstances, among other factors, can contribute to that connection. Still, the will of the public can never be a trivial feature of a democracy – by definition. Thus, a better understanding of the factors that support systemic satisfaction leads to better understanding the public will to sustain democracy.

Figure 1: Expert Ideological Placement of the Largest Parties

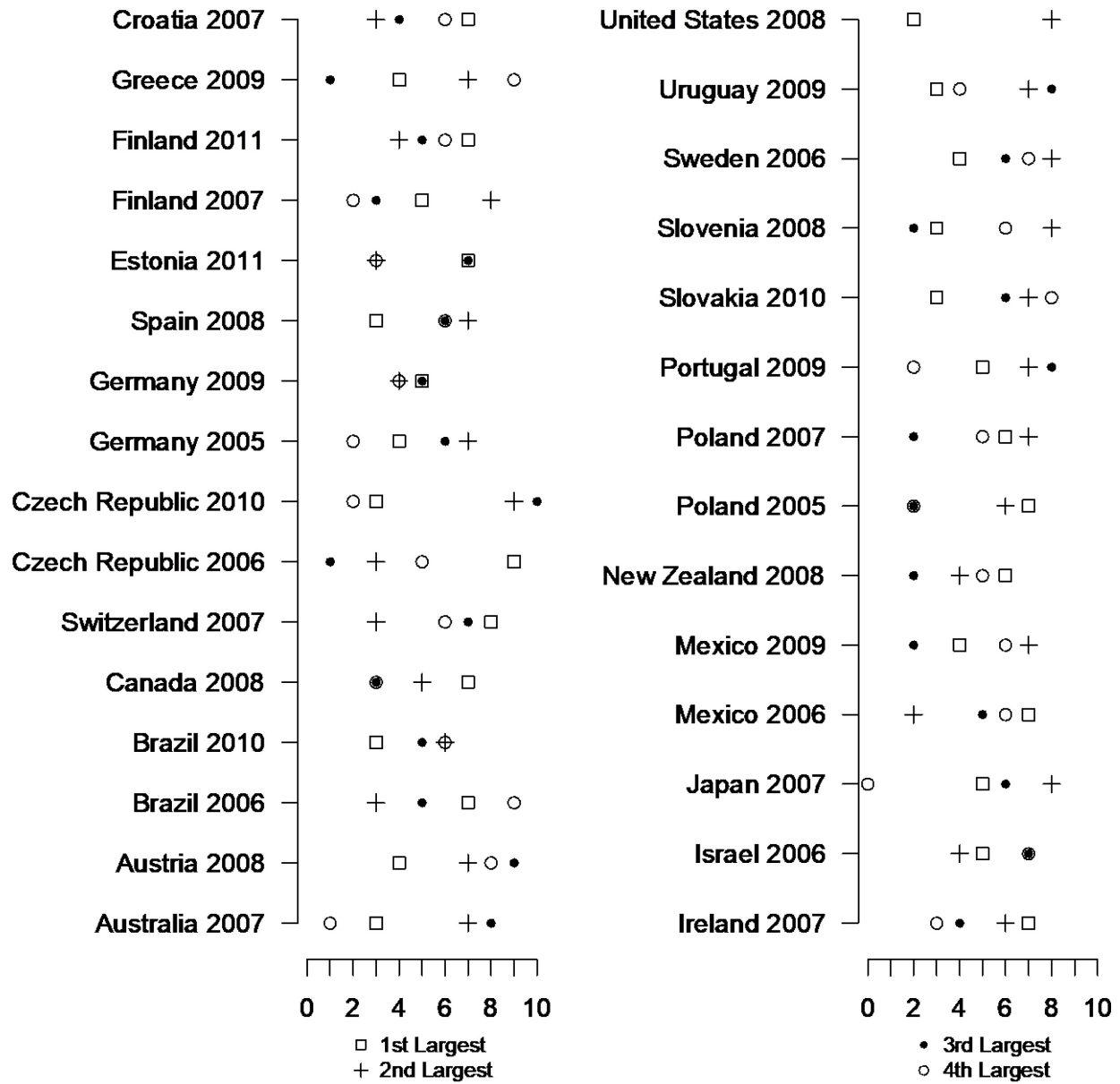
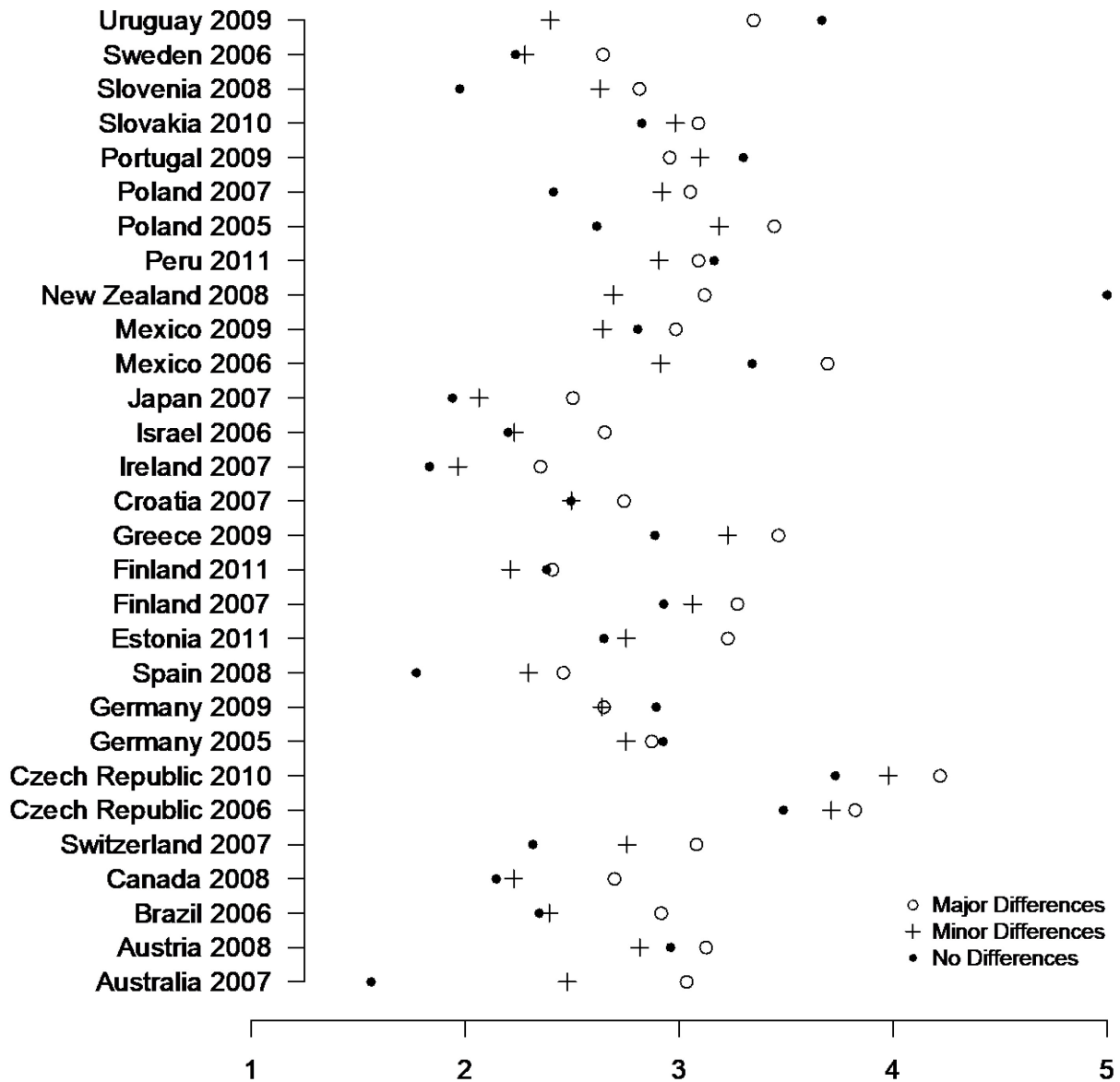


Figure 2: Mean Standard Deviations in Party Ratings of the Four Largest Parties by Perceived Party Difference



Note: Only one New Zealander was in the “no difference” category.

Figure 3: Predicted Probabilities of Level of Satisfaction with Democracy (Model 2)

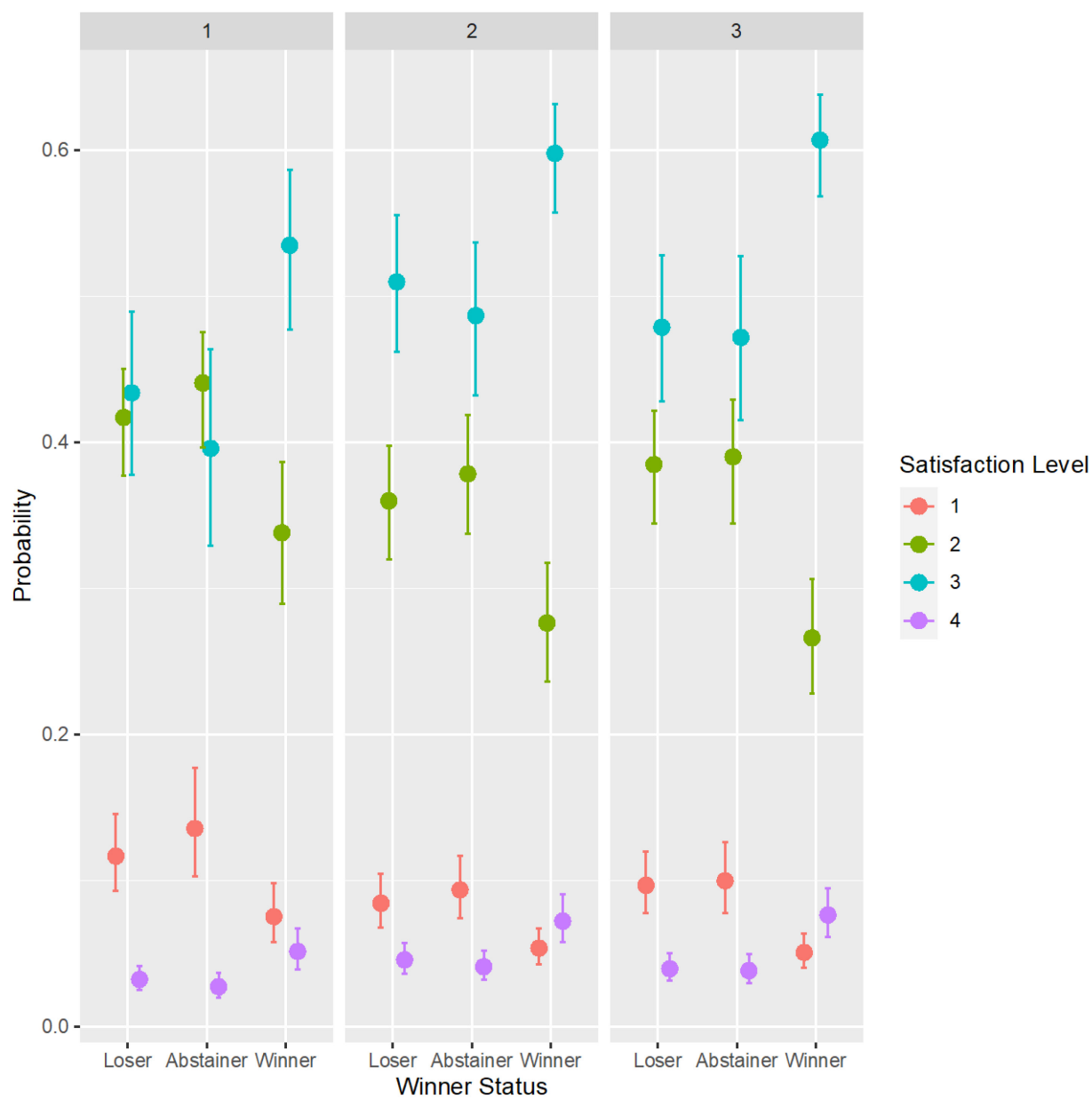


Table 1

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Party Differences	-0.00 (0.03)		-0.05 (0.04)	
No Party Differences		-0.36** (0.07)		-0.38** (0.11)
Major Party Differences		-0.15** (0.04)		-0.20** (0.05)
Voted for a Winning Party	0.26** (0.11)	0.49** (0.04)		
Close to a Winning Party			0.29 (0.15)	0.51** (0.05)
Abstained	-0.34* (0.17)	-0.11 (0.06)	-0.14 (0.13)	0.23** (0.05)
Age	-0.05** (0.01)	-0.05** (0.01)	-0.05** (0.01)	-0.04** (0.01)
Female	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)	-0.08** (0.03)
Education	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Income Quintile	0.09** (0.01)	0.09** (0.01)	0.09** (0.01)	0.09** (0.01)
Closeness to a Party	0.08** (0.02)	0.08** (0.02)	0.09** (0.02)	0.09** (0.02)
Interest in Politics	0.18** (0.02)	0.18** (0.02)	0.20** (0.02)	0.20** (0.02)
Ideological Distance from Winner	-0.07** (0.01)	-0.07** (0.01)	-0.08** (0.01)	-0.07** (0.01)
Ideological Extremity	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)	0.02* (0.01)
Never Vote for a Party	-0.17** (0.04)	-0.17** (0.04)	-0.16** (0.04)	-0.16** (0.04)
Represented by a Party	0.32** (0.03)	0.31** (0.03)	0.36** (0.03)	0.35** (0.03)
Government Performance Evaluation	-0.69** (0.02)	-0.69** (0.02)	-0.70** (0.02)	-0.69** (0.02)
GDP per Capita	0.44** (0.20)	0.44** (0.19)	0.45** (0.20)	0.45** (0.19)
Unemployment Rate	0.15 (0.12)	0.14 (0.12)	0.14 (0.12)	0.14 (0.12)
Liberal Democracy Index	2.69* (1.39)	2.62* (1.36)	2.63* (1.37)	2.58* (1.37)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Presidential System	0.94** (0.34)	0.95** (0.33)	0.92** (0.33)	0.95** (0.34)
Regime Age	0.01* (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Effective Number of Electoral Parties	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.06 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)	-0.05 (0.05)
Party Polarization	0.05 (0.11)	0.05 (0.10)	0.05 (0.11)	0.06 (0.10)
Party Differences:Abstained	0.11 (0.07)			
Party Differences:Voted for a Winning Party	0.13** (0.05)			
No Party Differences:Abstained		-0.06 (0.14)		
Major Party Differences:Abstained		0.08 (0.10)		
No Party Differences:Voted for a Winning Party		-0.00 (0.12)		
Major Party Differences:Voted for a Winning Party		0.21** (0.06)		
Party Differences:Abstained			0.19** (0.05)	
Party Differences:Close to a Winning Party			0.15** (0.06)	
No Party Differences:Abstained				-0.08 (0.12)
Major Party Differences:Abstained				0.17** (0.07)
No Party Differences:Close to a Winning Party				0.24 (0.16)
Major Party Differences:Close to a Winning Party				0.27** (0.07)
1 2	-0.97 (1.06)	-1.08 (1.04)	-0.91 (1.06)	-0.89 (1.04)
2 3	1.18 (1.06)	-1.08 (1.04)	1.24 (1.06)	1.26 (1.04)
3 4	4.44** (1.06)	4.34*** (1.04)	4.49*** (1.06)	4.51*** (1.04)
Num. obs.	23477	23477	23407	23407
Groups (Election)	31	31	31	31
SD(Intercept)	0.47	0.46	0.46	0.46
**p<0.5; *p<0.1				

Works Cited

- Aarts, Kees, and Jacques Thomassen. "Satisfaction with democracy: Do institutions matter?" *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 1 (2008): 5-18.
- Abramowitz, Alan I., and Kyle L. Saunders. "Is polarization a myth?" *The Journal of Politics* 70, no. 2 (2008): 542-555.
- Aldrich, J., G.A. Bussing, A. Krishnamurthy, N. Madan, K. Mehling, K. Renberg, and H. Ridge. 2020. "Does a Partisan Public Increase Democratic Stability?" *Research Handbook for Political Partisanship*. Oscarsson & Holmberg.
- Anderson, Christopher J., André Blais, Shaun Bowler, Todd Donovan, and Ola Listhaug, eds. *Losers' consent: Elections and democratic legitimacy*. OUP Oxford, 2005.
- Anderson, C.J., and C.A. Guillory. 1997. "Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems." *American Political Science Review* 91, no. 1: 66-81.
- Anderson, C.J., and A. Just. 2018. "Tweedledum and Tweedledee? A Cross-national Analysis of How Voters View the Electoral Supply." Paper presented at *Annual Meeting of the American Political Science Association*. Boston, MA.
- Anderson, C. J., & Tverdova, Y. V. 2001. Winners, losers, and attitudes about government in contemporary democracies. *International political science review*, 22(4), 321-338.
- Bernauer, J., & Vatter, A. 2012. Can't get no satisfaction with the Westminster model? Winners, losers and the effects of consensual and direct democratic institutions on satisfaction with democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(4), 435-468.

- Best, Robin E., and Didem Seyis. "How do voters perceive ideological congruence? The effects of winning and losing under different electoral rules." *Electoral Studies* 69 (2021): 102201.
- Blais, A., and F. Gélneau. 2007. "Winning, losing and satisfaction with democracy." *Political Studies* 55, no. 2: 425-441.
- Blais, A., A. Morin-Chassé, and S. P. Singh. 2017. "Election outcomes, legislative representation, and satisfaction with democracy." *Party Politics* 23, no. 2: 85-95.
- Boxell, Levi, Matthew Gentzkow, and Jesse M. Shapiro. *Cross-country trends in affective polarization*. No. w26669. National Bureau of Economic Research, 2020.
- Bürkner, Paul-Christian. "brms: An R package for Bayesian multilevel models using Stan." *Journal of statistical software* 80 (2017): 1-28.
- Canache, D., J.J. Mondak, and M.A. Seligson. 2001. "Meaning and measurement in cross-national research on satisfaction with democracy." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 65, no. 4: 506-528.
- Carey, J.M., and S. Hix. 2011. "The electoral sweet spot: Low-magnitude proportional electoral systems." *American Journal of Political Science* 55, no. 2: 383-397.
- Carroll, Royce, and Hiroki Kubo. "Explaining citizen perceptions of party ideological positions: The mediating role of political contexts." *Electoral Studies* 51 (2018): 14-23.
- Carroll, Royce, and Hiroki Kubo. "Measuring and explaining the complexity of left-right perceptions of political parties." *Electoral Studies* 71 (2021): 102310.
- Chang, E., Chu, Y. H., & Wu, W. C. (2014). Consenting to lose or expecting to win? Inter-temporal changes in voters' winner-loser status and satisfaction with democracy. *Elections and democracy: Representation and accountability*, 232-253.

- Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (www.cses.org). CSES Module 3 Full Release [dataset and documentation]. December 15, 2015 version. doi:10.7804/cses.module3.2015-12-15
- Coppedge, M, J Gerring, CH Knutsen, SI. Lindberg, J Teorell, D Altman, M Bernhard et al. 2020. "V-Dem Codebook v10."
- Curini, L., W. Jou, and V. Memoli. 2012. "Satisfaction with democracy and the winner/loser debate: The role of policy preferences and past experience." *British Journal of Political Science* 42, no. 2: 241-261.
- Curini, Luigi, Willy Jou, and Vincenzo Memoli. *Why Policy Representation Matters: The consequences of ideological proximity between citizens and their governments*. Routledge, 2015.
- Dahlberg, Stefan. "Does context matter–The impact of electoral systems, political parties and individual characteristics on voters' perceptions of party positions." *Electoral Studies* 32, no. 4 (2013): 670-683.
- Dahlberg, S., and J. Linde. 2016. "Losing Happily? The Mitigating Effect of Democracy and Quality of Government on the Winner–Loser Gap in Political Support." *International Journal of Public Administration* 39, no. 9: 652-664.
- Dahlberg, S., J. Linde, and S. Holmberg. 2015. "Democratic discontent in old and new democracies: Assessing the importance of democratic input and governmental output." *Political Studies* 63: 18-37.
- Dalton, R.J. 1985. "Political parties and political representation: Party supporters and party elites in nine nations." *Comparative Political Studies* 18, no. 3: 267-299.
- Dalton, R.J. 2008. "The quantity and the quality of party systems: Party system polarization, its measurement, and its consequences." *Comparative Political Studies* 41, no. 7: 899-920.

- Daoust, Jean-François, Carolina Plescia, and André Blais. "Are People More Satisfied with Democracy When They Feel They Won the Election? No." *Political Studies Review* (2021).
- Easton, David. 1975. "A re-assessment of the concept of political support." *British journal of political science* 5, no. 4: 435-457.
- Goodin, Robert E., Werner Güth, and Rupert Sausgruber. "When to coalesce: Early versus late coalition announcement in an experimental democracy." *British Journal of Political Science* 38, no. 1 (2008): 181-191.
- Goodman, Craig, and Gregg R. Murray. "Do you see what I see? Perceptions of party differences and voting behavior." *American Politics Research* 35, no. 6 (2007): 905-931.
- Granberg, Donald, and Thad A. Brown. "The perception of ideological distance." *Western Political Quarterly* 45, no. 3 (1992): 727-750.
- Hansen, Sune Welling, Robert Klemmensen, and Søren Serritzlew. "Losers lose more than winners win: Asymmetrical effects of winning and losing in elections." *European Journal of Political Research* 58, no. 4 (2019): 1172-1190.
- Harding, R. 2011. "Freedom to Choose and Democracy: The Empirical Question." *Economics & Philosophy* 27, no. 3: 221-245.
- Hobolt, Sara B., Julian M. Hoerner, and Toni Rodon. 2020. "Having a say or getting your way? Political choice and satisfaction with democracy." *European Journal of Political Research*.
- Iyengar, Sheena S., and Mark R. Lepper. "When choice is demotivating: Can one desire too much of a good thing?" *Journal of personality and social psychology* 79, no. 6 (2000): 995.

- McCoy, J., Rahman, T., & Somer, M. 2018. Polarization and the global crisis of democracy: Common patterns, dynamics, and pernicious consequences for democratic polities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(1), 16-42.
- Kim, M. 2009. "Cross-national analyses of satisfaction with democracy and ideological congruence." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 19, no. 1: 49-72.
- Kostelka, Filip, and André Blais. "The chicken and egg question: Satisfaction with democracy and voter turnout." *PS: Political Science & Politics* 51, no. 2 (2018): 370-376.
- Linde, J., and J. Ekman. 2003. "Satisfaction with democracy: A note on a frequently used indicator in comparative politics." *European Journal of Political Research* 42, no. 3: 391-408.
- Linde, Jonas, and Yvette Peters. 2020. "Responsiveness, support, and responsibility: How democratic responsiveness facilitates responsible government." *Party Politics* 26, no. 3: 291-304.
- Loveless, Matthew. 2020. "When you win, nothing hurts: The durability of electoral salience on individuals' satisfaction with democracy." *Political Studies*.
- Lühiste, K. 2014. "Social protection and satisfaction with democracy: A multi-level analysis." *Political Studies* 62, no. 4: 784-803.
- Lupu, N. 2015. "Party polarization and mass partisanship: A comparative perspective." *Political Behavior* 37, no. 2: 331-356.
- Mayer, Sabrina Jasmin. "How negative partisanship affects voting behavior in Europe: Evidence from an analysis of 17 European multi-party systems with proportional voting." *Research & Politics* 4, no. 1 (2017).

Nadeau, Richard, Jean-François Daoust, and Ruth Dassonneville. "Winning, Losing, and the Quality of Democracy." *Political Studies* (2021).

Plescia, Carolina. "On the subjectivity of the experience of victory: who are the election winners?" *Political Psychology* 40, no. 4 (2019): 797-814.

Plescia, Carolina. "On the subjectivity of the experience of victory: who are the election winners?." *Political Psychology* 40, no. 4 (2019): 797-814.

Plescia, Carolina, Jean-Francois Daoust, and André Blais. "Do European elections enhance satisfaction with European Union democracy?" *European Union Politics* 22, no. 1 (2021): 94-113.

Ridge, H.M. 2020. "Enemy Mine: Negative Partisanship and Satisfaction with Democracy." *Political Behavior*.

Ridge, Hannah M. "Electoral outcomes and support for Westminster democracy." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* (2021): 1-20.

Ridge, H.M. 2021. "Just Like the Others: Party Differences, Perception, and Satisfaction with Democracy." *Party Politics*.

Rodon, Toni. 2021. "Caught in the middle? How voters react to spatial indifference." *Electoral Studies*. No. 73 (2021): 102385.

Singh, S. P. 2014. "Not all election winners are equal: Satisfaction with democracy and the nature of the vote." *European Journal of Political Research*, 53(2), 308-327.

Singh, S., E. Karakoç, and A. Blais. 2012. "Differentiating winners: How elections affect satisfaction with democracy." *Electoral Studies* 31, no. 1: 201-211.

- Singh, Shane P., and Judd R. Thornton. "Strange bedfellows: Coalition makeup and perceptions of democratic performance among electoral winners." *Electoral Studies* 42 (2016): 114-125.
- Torcal, Mariano, and Pedro C. Magalhães. "Ideological extremism, perceived party system polarization, and support for democracy." *European Political Science Review* (2022): 1-18.
- Toshkov, Dimitar, and Honorata Mazepus. 2020. "Winning and Losing Democratic Elections: Effects on Political and Social Attitudes and Subjective Well-Being."
<https://osf.io/preprints/j9dty/>
- Wagner, A.F., F. Schneider, and M. Halla. 2009. "The quality of institutions and satisfaction with democracy in Western Europe—A panel analysis." *European Journal of Political Economy* 25, no. 1: 30-41.
- Wessels, Bernhard, and Hermann Schmitt. "Meaningful choices, political supply, and institutional effectiveness." *Electoral Studies* 27, no. 1 (2008): 19-30.
- World Bank, World Development Indicators. 2018. Unemployment, total (% of total labor force) (modeled ILO estimate).