

Politicians, Elections, and Satisfaction with Democracy

By
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Abstract

The study of democracy is a vast field of political science. More recently, there is a renewed interest in understanding what might cause stable democracies to backslide or to resist decline. This critical moment in time, in which liberal democracies are now one of the least common regime types in the world, serves as a backdrop for the focus of this thesis: politicians' assessments of electoral processes and the way democracy works.

Politicians are particularly important for democratic stability. They can be central in the process of democratic resistance or decline because of their influence over the views of citizens, or if elected, their decision-making power within political institutions. Because of this, it is both timely and imperative for researchers to (re-)examine processes and institutions in democratic countries, like electoral processes, and what politicians think of them.

Given the prominent role politicians have in democratic systems, this thesis presupposes that we can better understand the way democracy works by studying politicians directly, by considering what they think of the working of democracy, as well as examining how they engage with and think about electoral processes. However, while there is extensive research on citizens' democratic satisfaction, there is less consideration of politicians' attitudes and feelings about how democracy is working in their country. As such, this article-based thesis poses the following broad research question with respect to politicians: what are the determinants of politicians' democratic satisfaction and their perceptions of the electoral process?

Since elections are core to the democratic process, this thesis considers different aspects of the electoral process and how they might impact politicians' democratic satisfaction as a starting point. In doing so, the three articles in this dissertation establish several theoretical and empirical contributions to the broader study of democracy, as well as the narrower fields of satisfaction with

democracy (SWD), electoral processes, electoral management bodies (EMB), and politicians' behaviours. Some of these contributions include its consideration of whether election-related determinants influence politicians' SWD, deepening our understanding of how politicians' perceptions of electoral processes and EMB design preferences are influenced by other election-related determinants, and the first study to use a conjoint experiment to assess EMB preferences. The findings in the three articles indicate that politicians generally want democracy and elections to function in accordance with classic democratic ideals.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

A Critical Moment in the Study of Democracy

The study of democracy is a vast field of political science. Past research has focused on the relationship between democratization and economic growth (Doucouliagos & Ulubaşoğlu, 2008; Knutsen, 2012; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992), the conditions of democratic consolidation (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schedler, 1998) or what factors are needed to have a democratic political regime (Beetham, 1992, pp. 41-42; Dahl, 1971; Møller & Skaaning, 2013; Schumpeter, 1943). More recently, there is a renewed interest in understanding what might cause stable democracies to backslide (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner & Lust, 2018) or to resist decline (Carugati, 2020; Coppedge et al., 2022). This critical moment in time serves as a backdrop for the focus of this thesis: politicians' assessments of electoral processes and the way democracy works.

Politicians are particularly important for democratic stability. Elected officials hold decision-making power within political institutions and can influence institutional processes in their country (Friedman & Wong, 2008). Furthermore, politicians can influence the views of citizens (Bullock, 2011; Clayton et al., 2021; Zaller, 1992), and might attempt to either influence and/or respond to public opinion (Lenz, 2012; Merkley et al., 2020; Santoro et al., 2021). These considerations highlight the major influence politicians hold within democratic systems. However, politicians can also be central to the process of democratic decline. Political elites are often the drivers behind democratic backsliding (Wunsch, 2022, pp. 1-2) and democratic breakdown can occur when checks on elected leaders erode (Carugati, 2020, p. 6; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019).

Democratic decline is currently one of the most discussed topics amongst researchers and practitioners who examine democracy, and likely for good reason. More democratic decline is occurring around the globe (Gora & de Wilde, 2022; Grillo & Prato, 2023; Mechkova et al., 2017) and is happening in both long-lasting and newer democracies, like the United States, Hungary, Mexico, Turkey or Thailand (Gaspard & Stockemer, 2025, p. 1). Furthermore, liberal democracies are now one of the least common regime types in the world, with there being more autocracies than democracies in the current global period (Coppedge et al., 2025). Because of this, it is both timely and imperative for researchers to (re-)examine processes and institutions in democratic countries, like electoral processes, and what politicians think of them.

Examining electoral processes is especially important because free, fair and competitive elections are the bedrock of democracy. While a range of conditions are needed to have a liberal democracy (Beetham, 1992, pp. 41-42), or what Dahl calls polyarchy (1971), the selection of leaders during elections is the foundation of representative democracies (Schumpeter, 1943). Consequently, if there are concerns surrounding democratic decline, it is important to ensure that students of democracy deepen their understanding of the most fundamental process in democratic systems. This means studying electoral processes and the actors involved in those elections. Even though there are many actors involved in elections (like interest groups, media, or civil society organizations), competitive elections cannot happen without three specific actors: (1) citizens to cast votes, (2) politicians to run in elections, and (3) actors to administer the election.

Given the prominent role politicians have in democratic systems, this thesis presupposes that we can better understand the way democracy works by studying politicians directly, by considering what they think of the working of democracy, as well as examining how they engage with and think about electoral processes. While a rich body of literature exists about several aspects of politicians' attitudes and behaviours, there is currently a gap in our understanding of politicians' attitudes about electoral processes and the way democracy works.

The Study of Politicians' Attitudes and Behaviours

Understanding the motivations and behaviours of politicians is a major area in the field of political science. However, there has been a recent development in the field pertaining to how we study these key actors. Newer studies are (more) interested in exploring the attitudes of politicians (Kertzer & Renshon, 2022; Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024; Mévellec & Tremblay, 2016) through large scale surveys, or by digitalizing their legislative discourse (Beelen et al., 2017; Cochrane et al., 2021), as opposed to research designs of the past that prioritized interviews of a smaller number of politicians (Beamer, 2002; Dexter, 1970 (Reprinted 2012); Loat & MacMillan, 2014).

Several studies have now analysed the behaviour of elected officials in office or of candidates during elections. As actors, politicians have compositional differences between their characteristic traits in comparison to the traits of the masses (Kertzer, 2022) and hold beliefs that differ from those held by their corresponding citizens (Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024). Furthermore, politicians “tend to be vastly better off than citizens on every economic measure” (Carnes & Lupu, 2023, p. 253), even if there is no consensus on why

this is (see Carnes and Lupu's article for a full review of this debate). Politicians are therefore not only central to democratic systems as actors; they are also treated as a distinct unit of analysis in academic research.

Politicians are also generally conceptualized as strategic actors within their political system. Sheffer & Loewen (2019a) show that elected politicians consider risk preferences in terms of their own gains or losses when thinking about consequential public issues (p. 50). While Sheffer et al. (2018) shows that politicians make policy choices that are in line with the status quo, Sheffer and Loewen (2019b) have also demonstrated that elected officials will partake in riskier behaviour if they are overconfident about their chances of getting re-elected. However, politicians' decision-making is sometimes constrained by other factors, such as the policy positions of their political party. In these cases, Le Pennec (2023) finds that politicians will strategically change their advertising and communication approaches to focus on more neutral issues so that they can both appeal to a broader electorate and remain consistent with their political party. This is in line with Fourinaies and Smith (2024)'s work, which shows that politicians are more likely to respond to changes to vote-seeking incentives with activities and behaviour that they can control (campaigning or allocating their own resources) versus activities (such as specializing in policy through parliamentary activities) that are more constrained by other institutions, like legislatures or political parties.

Despite being strategic actors, politicians are often inaccurate in their assessments of the preferences or opinions of constituents (Broockman & Skovron, 2018; Sevenans et al., 2023; Walgrave et al., 2023). This is problematic for substantive representation, a dimension of representation that Pitkin (1967) says is about "acting for" constituents

through the activities that a representative undertakes (p. 142). Because politicians would need to know what constituents want, to in turn, attempt to act on those preferences, inaccurate assessments of preferences could result in actions that are not in line with the desires of citizens. Whether politicians succeed in meeting norms about substantive representation is up for debate, especially since there are several works examining politicians' abilities or attempts to respond to public opinion (Andersen & Coscia, 2026; Lenz, 2012; Merkley et al., 2020; Santoro et al., 2021). Although previous works show that politicians influence the policy positions and views of citizens (Bullock, 2011; Clayton et al., 2021; Zaller, 1992), it should be noted that this is distinct from whether they are *responsive* to public opinion. Willems et al. (2024) show that politicians refer to public opinion at different stages of the policy-making process. In a survey of Members of Parliament in Belgium and Canada, the authors show that public opinion has a more prominent role in politicians' decision-making when they select which policy issues to prioritize. However, other entities (such as experts, political parties, or interest groups) are more influential than public opinion during policy formulation (p. 851 & 860). Even though politicians could possibly improve how well they respond to public opinion, they tend to have similar policy and ideological positions as their constituents (Lucas, 2022; Lucas & Armstrong, 2021). Therefore, while politicians are generally strategic actors seeking (re-)election, their responsiveness and quality as representatives is still debated.

The recent development in how we study politicians also helps us to better assess how they interact with or assist certain groups within their constituencies (Broockman, 2013; Ferland et al., 2025b; Pereira, 2021). For example, using a series of audit experiments by emailing the offices of provincial and federal legislators in Canada (n = 988), Ferland

et al. (2025b) show that there is an absence of discrimination when it comes to providing services to constituents from visible minority or LGBTQ+ communities. However, some Canadian Members of Parliament were significantly less likely to respond to French emails (in the case of Anglophones) and English emails (in the case of Francophones). Similarly, Broockman (2013) emailed 6,928 United States state legislators to assess how they respond to black constituents, and found that elected officials are more likely to help constituents that share their own characteristics. In addition to providing clear insights on how politicians engage with constituents, these two studies also demonstrate the scope of the methodological shift taking place in the study of politicians (specifically, the use of large N studies and experimental methods).

However, while this methodological shift expands how we study the behaviour and attitudes of politicians, we still know very little about the determinants that influence their satisfaction with democracy (SWD) or their perceptions of the electoral process. Given the key role politicians have in democratic systems and electoral processes,¹ there is merit in doing more work to study their democratic attitudes.

The Study of Democratic Satisfaction

The literature on SWD is an extensive body of research within the broader topics of public opinion and political behaviour (see Singh and Mayne (2023) for a full review). Prior to the works in this thesis, the literature on SWD, which I review later in this section of the chapter, primarily examined the concept from the perspective of citizens.

¹ Politicians can influence institutional processes (Friedman & Wong, 2008), have influence within institutions in their country (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), can be part of the political elite that drives democratic backsliding (Wunsch, 2022, pp. 1-2), or can sow doubt in electoral results through discourse, to name a few examples.

The concept of SWD is rooted in studies on the political culture associated with democracies (Almond & Verba, 1963). It captures attitudes and feelings about how governance or politics is working. While there have been substantial conceptual debates about what constitutes SWD and what it measures,² scholars now generally consider democratic satisfaction as a mid-level indicator of political support (Norris, 1999, p. 1), between individuals' diffuse support for regime preferences (Easton, 1975), and specific support for actors like political parties and politicians (Ferland, 2015) or evaluations of government (Weatherford, 1992). More specifically, this conceptualization of SWD³ assesses "how well people generally think politics or governance is working" (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 9) and captures an individual's "perceptions of the performance of their country's political system, which happens to be democratic" (p. 10).

Prior to this dissertation, the bulk of the SWD literature examined the concept from the perspective of citizens. While there has indeed been important research done on the democratic satisfaction of elected representatives (Esaiasson et al., 2013; Häfner et al., 2023; Rosón & Díaz, 2020), more work is merited to expand our understanding of politicians' SWD in at least two ways. First, it is necessary to better understand the specific mechanisms that influence politicians' SWD, including determinants relating to the electoral process. Second, it is important to also consider politicians who lost the election, not just those who won and became elected representatives.

² Works like Canache et al. (2001) and Linde & Ekman (2003) offer a more pessimistic view of SWD as an indicator, whereas others like Dalton (2004) and Daoust & Nadeau (2023) offer a more optimistic conclusion about the comparability of SWD as a single-item measurement.

³ Some refer to this conceptualization as the 'encompassing approach' of SWD (Singh & Mayne, 2023).

Previous work on elected representatives consider their attitudes about their political system (Häfner et al., 2023; Stevens et al., 2006)⁴ and mainly elaborates on specific country or regional contexts. Other works have shown that specific determinants may impact the SWD of elected representatives. For example, elected representatives' perceptions of media influence has both direct and indirect impacts on their democratic satisfaction (Maurer, 2023). Additionally, holding populist attitudes can have a negative impact on assessments of democracy, institutions, or the separation of powers (Marenghi & Montero, 2024). However, there remains a gap in considering key determinants about electoral processes and other well-known determinants from the literature on citizens' SWD.

Other past works on elected representatives also began to compare their SWD to that of citizens in specific contexts. Esaiasson et al. (2013) as well as Rosón and Díaz (2020) consider whether levels of democratic satisfaction among elected representatives and citizens differ. While both studies compare levels of SWD between citizens and elected representatives, the scope of issues and jurisdictions that they examine differ. Esaiasson et al. focus more on individual demographic factors (such as gender, age, and education) and specific political and parliamentary settings (such as tax rate, economic growth, or type of political coalition) in Sweden, whereas Rosón and Díaz examine perceptions that the actors may hold, like determinants relating to political trust or corruption, for countries in Latin America.⁵ The overall findings comparing the SWD for both groups are mixed, since

⁴ It should be noted that the research conducted by Stevens et al. 2006 also considered other kinds of elites in Latin America (elites in business, academia, and media) in addition to governmental elites like elected representatives.

⁵ Rosón and Díaz also note that the determinants they consider for citizens and elected representatives “are not completely similar” because the databases they rely on fielded different questions to the target populations. Therefore, while the general category of indicators is similar (i.e., political trust and corruption) the specific indicators do vary.

Esaiasson et al. find that the difference between the democratic satisfaction of citizens and representatives is relatively small (with representatives generally being more satisfied), whereas Rosón and Díaz find that there is a major discrepancy in Latin America, with representatives being more satisfied than citizens. More work is therefore merited in other jurisdictions and contexts to better assess when gaps in SWD may occur.

While both studies examine important dimensions of the SWD of citizens and elected representatives, key determinants relating to the electoral process (including electoral integrity or the design of electoral management bodies (EMBs)) are not considered for elected representatives. Furthermore, many of the major themes and mechanisms that are studied in the citizens' SWD literature (such as the winner-loser gap, the role of representation, or the impacts of electoral systems, processes, and institutions) merit more attention from the perspective of politicians. For example, while these past works consider whether an elected representative is part of the party that formed government or the opposition, there is still a need to consider (1) whether there is a gap in SWD levels between winners and/or losers among corresponding citizens, and (2) the SWD of politicians who ran in the election but who were not elected.

This highlights an important gap in the literature on SWD – it does not consider the democratic satisfaction of politicians who did not win their seat. This exclusion is a major gap for at least two reasons. First, politicians who do not have a seat in the legislature could still be influential in their communities or online. Additionally, their perspectives about elections or the way democracy works could still impact public opinion. Their attitudes about the way democracy works, and elections in particular, is therefore still important to consider. Second, in studies on citizens' SWD, citizens' whose preferred choice did not win

their seat are still included in survey samples. If studies wish to assess whether the SWD of citizens and politicians differ, then it is both important and appropriate to include politicians who did not win their seats (since the citizens who voted for them would not be excluded from these considerations).

It should be noted that while newer studies have considered the democratic satisfaction of politicians who did not win their seat (Lindholm & Lauener, 2025), in addition to the SWD of elected representatives whose party won or lost (Rosón & Mateos, 2026), these works were published after two of the works from this dissertation (Ferland et al., 2025a; Gaspard, 2025). This context is important for how this dissertation relies on previous works from the SWD literature. Because previous research on the SWD of elected representatives did not consider (1) several election-related determinants and (2) did not extensively test mechanisms that are more common in the literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction, the dissertation instead relies heavily on the works from the citizens' SWD literature to inform its theoretical approaches.

With this context, the rest of this review considers four major themes in the citizens' SWD literature: first, the winner-loser gap; second, the role of representation; third, the quality and performance of government; and fourth, electoral systems, processes, and institutions. This review of the citizens' literature sets the basis for some of the key theoretical approaches that structure the analysis of politicians' SWD.

Winner-loser gap

The winner-loser gap examines whether the victory or defeat of a citizen's preferred candidate or political party during an election impacts their level of SWD. Winning (when

your preferred candidate is elected or your preferred party forms government) or losing (when your preferred candidate is not elected or your preferred party does not form government) is an important consideration in research on democratic satisfaction. This is because losers consenting to the outcome of the election is pivotal for democratic stability and the transfer of power (Anderson et al., 2005).

This helps to contextualize why researchers care about the winner-loser gap in studies on SWD: if democratic satisfaction captures feelings about how governance or politics is working, then having major differences in these assessments between two groups (winners versus losers) could be harmful to the working of democracy or democratic stability. In extreme cases, having very dissatisfied citizens could also potentially hinder the transfer of power after an election. Considerations about winning or losing are especially important for politicians because, for free and fair elections to work, candidates that lost must be able to accept their defeat and choose whether to rerun next time (Przeworski, 1991, p. 14). Consequently, the winner-loser gap is not only important for research on citizens' SWD but is also very likely an essential consideration for politicians' SWD. It is therefore necessary to review which factors might influence citizens' SWD when it comes to winning or losing, to help inform what we might similarly expect for politicians' democratic satisfaction.

Previous research on citizens' SWD shows that winners generally have higher levels of democratic satisfaction than losers. Winning is beneficial because nobody prefers to lose, but winning is also a proxy for policy congruence. If your preferred candidate or party is in power, your preferred policies are more likely to be enacted. However, the extent of a citizen's (dis)satisfaction is influenced by other determinants relating to their win (or

loss). For example, Anderson & Guillory (1997)'s research demonstrates that the presence of majoritarian or consensual institutions affects levels of SWD for winners or losers. Winners (citizens who voted for candidates or political parties who ended up being in government) in systems with consensual institutions are less satisfied than winners in systems with majoritarian institutions because they often need to form a coalition with other parties. However, losers in systems with consensual institutions are more satisfied than losers in systems with majoritarian institutions because they have more influence on the policy-making process. The winner-loser gap is thus greater under majoritarian institutions than consensual institutions. Given these findings, electoral system type is likely an important consideration for politicians' SWD, since the structures of these institutions would impact the degree of power that elected politicians have in legislatures.

The extent of the winner-loser gap is also impacted by factors that influence whether a citizen's preferred candidate or political party has (or seems to have) access to power. For example, the vote/seat share and cabinet positions that a political party receives affects SWD. In general, the more votes, seats, or cabinet positions, the higher the level of SWD (Blais et al., 2017). Additionally, the distance between a voter's ideology and the ideology of the current government, as well as the recency in which an election was won, affects levels of SWD (Curini et al., 2012). Specifically, ideological distance decreases SWD and winning more recently increases SWD. Thus, a voter's SWD increases when their preferred candidate or political party is in a position with access to (more) power. If this effect also applies to politicians, then politicians in positions with (more) power should also be more satisfied than those with less power.

It is also important to note that winning or losing can also affect evaluations of political institutions more broadly. Losing does not only contribute to lower SWD; it can also lead citizens to view political institutions or political regimes as corrupt (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003). Winning can also result in higher levels of political trust. Anderson & LoTempio (2002)'s examination of elections in the United States finds that citizens who voted for the presidential winner had higher levels of trust in government than those who voted for the losing candidate. If these rationales also apply to politicians, then those who lost an election may also have more negative views of their country's political institutions or regime.

In addition to considerations about political institutions, the level of government in which an election takes place could influence the winner-loser gap among citizens. Henderson (2008)'s paper on SWD in Australia, Canada, and the United Kingdom finds that winning during a national election matters more for citizens' SWD than winning at the riding level. In contrast, an earlier study on Canada by Blais & Gélneau (2007) finds that the outcomes of both local and national elections have a significant effect on SWD. It may, therefore, also be worth considering whether politicians participating in different levels of government within the same country have different levels of SWD.

Most of the works cited in this review about the winner-loser gap of citizens' SWD utilise observational data. However, it is important to note that newer studies have made substantial methodological progress on improving the causal inference of the determinants that impact citizens' SWD, like winning or losing. For example, Carey et al. (2022) use two survey experiments to assess whether citizens' perceived legitimacy of the political parties or candidate who won the election will change when those entities lose the popular

vote (the concept of ‘electoral inversion’). They find that electoral inversion does decrease the perceived legitimacy of candidates who won and that this effect is not influenced by margins of victory. Another study uses panel data along with a difference-in-differences approach to examine the relationship between electoral outcomes and SWD, which enabled them to make a more causal claim about the increase (and decrease) among winners’ (and losers’) democratic satisfaction (Halliez & Thornton, 2022).

Other studies have also made use of specific environmental and political circumstances as part of their methodological approaches. Daoust et al. (2024) uses a regression discontinuity design to compare citizens’ SWD just before and just after the citizens’ electoral status (winning or losing) is revealed, whereas Nemčok et al. (2026) take advantage of an unexpected change in government in Estonia in 2016 to assess the effects of winning or losing (without an election occurring) by mobilizing a difference-in-differences design. The findings in both these studies differ from most other research on the winner-loser gap. Daoust et al. find that there is no decay among losers or boost among winners in terms of their democratic satisfaction, while Nemčok et al. suggest that even if losing may reduce SWD, the effect of winning is statistically inconclusive and “modest at best” (p. 1).

Overall, most of the surveyed literature demonstrates that the effect of winning has a positive effect on citizens’ SWD.⁶ Therefore, it is important to consider whether politicians’ SWD and their evaluations of political institutions are also affected by winning or losing an election. This is an endeavour I address in chapters 2 (for politicians’ SWD) and 4 (for politicians’ perceptions of electoral processes).

⁶ In addition to the two outliers listed in previous paragraph (Daoust et al., 2024; Nemčok et al., 2026), Farrer & Zingher (2019) also argue that the winner effect only applies in a specific set of countries.

The role of representation

The concept of representation (Pitkin, 1967) consists of at least four dimensions that pertain to the role politicians have as representatives in democratic systems. First, *formalistic* representation, which relates to both the politician's authority to act as a representative and the ability of citizens to hold them accountable for their actions (p. 11). Second, *descriptive* representation refers to the notion that the characteristics of representatives should “mirror” the people” (p. 61), which in turn influences the composition of legislatures. This type of representation generally touches on the politics of identity and having those identities reflected in legislatures through representatives. Third, *symbolic* representation, which considers the role of representatives as symbols, and how they are “the recipient or object of feelings, expressions of feeling, or actions intended for what [they represent]” (p. 99). Put differently, being a living embodiment and a symbol of a larger concept or idea, like how a flag can materially symbolize the unity of a group of people (pp. 93 and 97). Finally, there is *substantive* representation, which is about how representatives are “acting for” (p. 142) constituents through their activities and actions. This type of representation touches on how well citizens are (or feel) represented in terms of their preferences being reflected in policy (which is also known as congruence). Out of these four dimensions of representation, substantive representation arguably has a strong connection to citizens' SWD. Since part of an individual's SWD is informed by the way governance works in their country, then feeling that their preferences are reflected in decision-making is an essential consideration. This idea is emphasized by Ferland (2021),

who finds that party, government, and policy congruence all positively impact citizens' SWD.

For politicians, doing a good job in terms of substantive representative is not only important for democratic norms, it is also a strategic consideration for politicians as they attempt to maximize political support (Downs, 1957). Most politicians therefore have an incentive to appeal to the largest number of citizens in their role as representatives. This contextualizes Ezrow & Xezonakis (2011)'s rationale for using the position of the median voter to best achieve substantive representation. Because the median voter is the ideological middle of a country's left-to-right axis,⁷ a country whose party system enacts more policy choices that are close to this median position will appeal to the greatest number of voters and be more likely to represent the majority of voters (p. 1156). In their analysis of 12 countries from 1976 to 2003, Ezrow & Xezonakis find that citizens' SWD is higher in political systems whose political parties enact choices that are closer to the median voter. Other important works also corroborate this connection between congruence and democratic satisfaction (Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Reher, 2015; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016) and assess whether congruence levels differ under certain circumstances, like in majoritarian versus proportional representation electoral systems (Ferland, 2016).

Studies on congruence emphasize the important role that representation has in citizens' assessments of how their political system functions. These studies also illustrate a rather straightforward trend: citizens generally have higher levels of SWD when they are more congruent with political actors/outcomes. The connection between representation and

⁷ The position of the left-to-right axis is dependent on the political context of the country.

SWD is therefore rather clear from the point of view of citizens. In short, the decisions of elected representatives influence citizens' assessments of the democratic system. However, the (possible) connection between representation and SWD from the perspective of politicians is much less clear. While the decisions of elected politicians influence citizens' SWD, it is less clear whether citizens (after electing the politician) have any kind of impact on how representatives assess the workings of democracy. Given the importance we place on both the concept of representation (Pitkin, 1967) and the classic ideals that inform how we understand the relationship between elected representatives and citizens (Almond & Verba, 1963; Dahl, 1971; Key, 1966), more work is needed to assess how representation influences SWD, but from the perspective of the representatives. This can be done by examining politicians' beliefs about voters and their behaviour. This is a task that I undertake in the chapter 3.

Quality and performance of government

The quality and performance of government are other important considerations for assessing SWD because it touches on perceptions of how the country's political system is performing. Perceptions about the quality and performance of government are indeed not limited to democratic countries. Citizens in non-democratic countries may also have positive or negative views about the quality and performance of their government. In turn, these views may influence their overall satisfaction with their (non-democratic) type of political system. In a democratic system, citizens' evaluations of government (Weatherford, 1992) is one dimension of their overall SWD, because these citizens reside in a country whose political system happens to be democratic.

Generally speaking, SWD among citizens is higher when they believe the democratic regime (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 15) and the economy (Kölln & Aarts, 2021; Quaranta & Martini, 2016) are performing strongly. Intuitively, it is plausible that citizens will be less satisfied with the way democracy works if their political system fails to meet their desired outcomes. This rationale also speaks to “supply-side theories of political support” (Quaranta & Martini, 2016, p. 165), which assumes that negative or positive assessments of the democratic system are dependent on failing or achieving desired outcomes. The same rationale applies to perceptions of the economy; if citizens believe the economy is not performing well, then their assessments of their political system will also be more negative (ibid).

Relatedly, economic performance remains an important contextual factor influencing democratic satisfaction. In their analysis of 72 elections in 45 countries from 1996-2016, Daoust & Nadeau (2021) show that economic circumstances can change which factors citizens look to in their evaluations of their own democratic satisfaction. Specifically, citizens will rely on their perceptions of the economy to inform their SWD when their country is not performing sufficiently in the provision of economic goods. However, citizens will shift their focus to perceptions of the democratic regime if their economic needs are being fulfilled (p. 5). Additionally, other work suggests that socio-economic factors are some of the most important drivers of citizens’ SWD (Cutler et al., 2023). This highlights the importance of considering contextual factors, like perceptions of the economy (in addition to political institutions), when examining citizens SWD. These considerations are also likely important for politicians’ SWD, since politicians may be

preoccupied with or concerned about specific contexts that are impacting or influencing the opinions of citizens in their country.

In addition to more contextual factors, citizens' experiences interacting with political institutions, or their perceptions of those institutions, might also influence their democratic satisfaction. Typically, when citizens have more positive (or more negative) evaluations of political institutions, they will have higher (or lower) levels of SWD. For example, SWD increases when citizens believe political institutions have low levels of corruption (Wagner et al., 2009) and decreases when citizens perceive civil servants who act in political institutions as unfair (Erlingsson et al., 2014). However, it should be noted that specific political objects like authorities or institutions typically have lower levels of citizen support than abstract political objects like regimes or the political community (van Ham et al., 2017). Additionally, even though bureaucratic output factors (government effectiveness, impartiality, professionalism, and the rule of law) and democratic input factors (polarization, absolute ideological congruence, the number of parties, and electoral systems) both influence perceptions of democratic government, citizens usually care more about output than input factors (Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014). Overall, research shows that even if citizens usually care more about output factors in their assessments, input factors still influence their satisfaction with the way their democratic system is working.

Electoral systems, processes, and institutions

Given the current need to study what might cause stable democracies to backslide, it is valuable to more narrowly examine input factors in relation to SWD. Some key studies on input factors from the SWD literature examine the impacts of electoral systems. Several

authors show that electoral systems may have contradictory consequences for democratic satisfaction. For example, proportional systems usually have more non-centrist political parties, that are more likely to form coalition governments (Blais & Bodet, 2006). However, these coalitions typically result in policy compromises between the governing parties that do not necessarily benefit centrist voters (Martin & Vanberg, 2014). As such, while one study finds that proportional systems may have a negative impact on levels of SWD (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008), other research argues that electoral proportionality fosters SWD (Christmann & Torcal, 2018). A possible explanation for this is that citizens value paradoxical elements of each electoral system, like having their votes counted equally (proportional systems) but less government fragmentation (majoritarian systems). Overall, while more work is needed to better establish a direct linkage between SWD and electoral systems (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 14), it is still important to consider which type of electoral system actors are in when examining citizens or politicians in different countries.

The SWD literature also considers input factors that pertain to other institutions and rules that govern elections. Several studies examine specific electoral institutions or rules that may impact citizens' SWD. Some examples of these topics include: the effects of candidate-centered ballot structures (Farrell & McAllister, 2006), compulsory voting among citizens with anti-democratic sentiments (Singh, 2018), a president or prime minister calling an early election (Morgan-Jones & Loveless, 2023), and the vote-to-seat translation after an election (Ferland, 2015). However, this thesis more narrowly examines how factors that relate to the governance of elections (such as the administration of the electoral process and the integrity of the election) might influence SWD.

Three key studies on the governance of elections include Fortin-Rittberger et al. (2017)'s findings on the negative effect of electoral fraud on levels of citizens' SWD, Daoust and Nadeau (2023)'s work highlighting the connection between perceptions of fairness in the electoral process and SWD, and Lundmark et al. (2020)'s examination of the administration of a regional election in 2010 in Sweden.

Fortin-Rittberger et al. (2017)'s study finds that electoral fraud (the antithesis of electoral integrity) negatively influences levels of citizens' SWD. Originally, these authors expected that the impact of electoral fraud would be weaker among winners (citizens who voted for candidates or political parties who ended up being in government) because winners would be more willing to accept the costs of electoral fraud if they benefit from their preferred choice being in a position of power. However, Fortin-Rittberger et al. instead found that electoral fraud has a negative impact on both winners and losers. Similar findings are corroborated by Daoust and Nadeau (2023), who demonstrate a link between citizens' perceptions of the fairness of the electoral process and their SWD. Specifically, the fairer citizens believe the electoral process was, the higher their democratic satisfaction will be.

Lundmark et al. (2020) examine a rerun of a regional election that needed to occur due to an error made by election officials while handling votes. The authors found that when there was a decrease (or increase) in confidence in election officials, there was also a decrease (or increase) in SWD at both the national and regional levels of government. This case study demonstrates that levels of confidence in election officials influence levels of citizens' SWD.

Studying the connection between the governance of elections and SWD is an ideal starting point for better understanding politicians' democratic satisfaction. As noted by Daoust and Nadeau (2023) “[for] many citizens, free and fair elections represent the foundations of democracy. It therefore [is] logical to [investigate] the relationship between elections and individuals’ satisfaction with the functioning of their democratic institutions, by examining their perceptions of the fairness of the electoral process in their country” (p. 34). This logic also applies to politicians. Additionally, elections are the main mechanisms in which politicians gain access to power (by being elected to a legislature), meaning that their evaluations of electoral processes are likely a fundamental component of their SWD. However, while elections are a foundational part of the democratic system, politicians may also have separate perceptions and attitudes about the workings of the electoral process. Free and fair elections are indeed the mechanism that legitimizes the democratic system and the offices of elected politicians, but these processes also have operational components. Politicians also have unique insights about these operations and may therefore have attitudes about the EMBs that administer elections; especially since politicians, in their role as candidates, must engage with EMBs and its election officials throughout several parts of the electoral process.⁸ These rationales serve as a valuable starting point for examining politicians’ SWD and assessments of the electoral process, as I do in chapters 2 and 4.

Thesis Research Question and Scope

While there is extensive research on citizens’ SWD, consideration of politicians’ attitudes and feelings about how democracy is working in their country merits more attention. As

⁸ For example, politicians or their team engage with EMBs and its election officials when registering as candidate, when submitting proof of expenditures or political financing documents, when posing questions about the electoral process and/or election laws, and during the counting of ballots.

such, building on the state of the scholarship on citizens' democratic satisfaction, this article-based thesis therefore poses the following broad research question with respect to politicians: what are the determinants of politicians' democratic satisfaction and their perceptions of the electoral process? Since elections are core to the democratic process, this thesis considers different aspects of the electoral process and how they might impact politicians' democratic satisfaction as a starting point.

In addition to the knowledge gap in the SWD literature, more work is also needed to better understand politicians' assessments of electoral processes. Politicians play a central role in election campaigns and electoral processes, which are fundamental to the way representative democracy works. While some work has been done to evaluate politicians' perceptions of electoral integrity (Schnaudt, 2023) or confidence in different EMB designs (Estévez et al., 2008; Rosas, 2010), we still know little about politicians' assessments of electoral processes. This thesis therefore provides evidence to address these gaps in our understandings of politicians' perceptions of electoral processes.

Summary of Each Chapter

In addition to this first introductory chapter, this dissertation is organized into four additional chapters. The thesis follows an article-based structure. The first article corresponds to chapter 2, the second to chapter 3, and the third to chapter 4. Chapter 5, the final chapter of this project, outlines the main conclusions of these works and provides recommendations for future research. Appendix 1 also includes an article I co-authored with my supervisor (Ferland et al., 2025a), as part of laying the foundation for a research agenda that aims at better understanding politicians' evaluation of the functioning of

democracy. The objective of the project was to replicate some of the main findings of the SWD scholarship with politicians. As such, we found that: centrist (extremist) politicians are more (less) satisfied with democracy relative to their corresponding citizens that hold the same ideological views; winners (politicians who won their seat or whose political party formed government) have higher democratic satisfaction than losers; and that the gap between winners and losers' democratic satisfaction is larger in electoral systems with more disproportionality. The current dissertation builds on this original study with the objective of considering new determinants of democratic satisfaction that are more specific to politicians and their involvement in electoral processes.

Chapter 2: Politicians, Electoral Integrity, and Electoral Management Bodies: A Cross-National Study on Satisfaction with Democracy

The first research article considers whether levels of electoral integrity, as well as the independence and capacity of the EMB(s) administering the election, influence politicians' democratic satisfaction. Like citizens, politicians also have views about the administration, freeness, and fairness of elections, which can, in turn, impact their assessments of the way democracy works in their country. Previous work shows that citizens' SWD will decrease when electoral fraud is present in an election (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), even after accounting for whether their preferred choice won or lost the election. However, politicians arguably have more to gain or lose from the results of elections, since winning gives them access to more power through political institutions. Consequently, politicians might be more willing to tolerate negative aspects of an election (poor electoral integrity or election administration) depending on their own circumstances.

However, this first article finds that while politicians have higher SWD when elections have more electoral integrity, this is of greater consequence to politicians who lost the election. Additionally, politicians have higher levels of democratic satisfaction in countries where EMBs have more resources and a greater capacity to administer elections, but the strength of the effect differs for politicians on the ideological right and left. Therefore, while politicians are generally more satisfied with democracy when electoral processes are working well, the individual characteristics of politicians also influence these effects. This article uses cross-national data from the Comparative Candidates Survey covering 49 elections, in 21 countries, from 2005 to 2021, to ascertain these findings. This first article was published in July 2025 in *Politics and Governance*.

Chapter 3: Are democratic idealists more satisfied with democracy?

The second research article continues to examine politicians' SWD by focusing on their role as representatives. Many works in the literature on citizens' SWD show that a citizen's democratic satisfaction increases when there is more congruence between their preferences and the policies adopted by government (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Ferland, 2021; Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). Put differently, if politicians behave in a way that results in better representation of citizens' preferences, citizens will have higher SWD. However, it is unclear if the way citizens behave (as representees) has any impacts on the SWD of their representatives (elected politicians). To examine the role of representation (a key part of representative democracies), from the perspective of elected politicians, this second research article considers whether representatives' beliefs about voters influence their democratic satisfaction. Using survey

data of Canadian municipal representatives from the Canadian Municipal Barometer (2021-2024),⁹ this article demonstrates that representatives are more satisfied with the way democracy works when they believe their system is working in accordance with classic democratic ideals. Representatives who believe that voters make decisions based on deeply held partisan or group identities (Democratic Realists) are less satisfied with democracy than representatives who think voters base their decisions on policy preferences (Democratic Idealists). These findings further demonstrate that politicians want democracy and elections to function in accordance with democratic expectations. This article has been revised and resubmitted to the journal *Representation*.

Chapter 4: Canadian Politicians' Assessments of Electoral Management

The third research article shifts its focus from politicians' SWD and instead examines their perceptions of electoral integrity, their satisfaction with the EMB administering the election, and their preferences relating to an EMB's independence design. Rather than examining their satisfaction with the way in which democracy works, this chapter considers how they think the electoral process works, which is an essential process of their broader democratic regime. The chapter uses Canada as a case study to pose two questions. First, which factors influence politicians' satisfaction with the EMB administering the election and their perceptions of electoral integrity? Second, do Canadian politicians prefer having an EMB that is more (or less) independent from the government, and if so, how do they weigh the different dimensions of EMB independence? Using a novel conjoint experiment, the first to assess preferences pertaining to an EMB's design,

⁹ The author would like to thank Professors Jack Lucas and Lior Sheffer for generously allowing the use of their data from the Canadian Municipal Barometer.

and survey data administered through the Canadian Candidate Survey, this work provides two main contributions to the literature. First, the analysis shows that politicians' perceptions of foreign interference can have a critically negative impact on their perceptions of the electoral process. The second contribution is methodological in nature, as this article is the first to use a conjoint experiment to assess preferences pertaining to an EMB's design. The empirical results show that politicians do indeed have preferences about the four dimensions of an EMB's independence. Specifically, Canadian politicians prefer more independence for the institutional, personnel, and financial dimensions of an EMB, whereas they prefer less independence for an EMB's functional dimension (i.e., the competences and powers of the EMB). This work provides a model for future researchers who wish to assess the EMB design preferences of any actors involved in elections. This article is currently under review in the *Canadian Political Science Review*.

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

The fifth and final chapter of the dissertation begins by summarizing the main contribution of the thesis project. It then discusses the project's several theoretical and empirical contributions to the broader study of democracy, as well as to the fields of SWD, electoral processes, EMBs, and the attitudes of politicians. The chapter ends by listing considerations that practitioners may find of interest, reviewing the limitations of the project, and proposing possible areas of future research that build on the works in this dissertation.

Appendix 1¹⁰

Power and Ideology – A Comparison of Citizens’ and Politicians’ Satisfaction with Democracy

(Co-authored article published in November 2025 in the European Journal of Political Research by Benjamin Ferland, Valere Gaspard, and Johan Savoy)

Abstract

The scholarship on satisfaction with democracy has increased significantly in recent decades with scholars investigating how democratic satisfaction influences political attitudes and behaviors as well as the individual and contextual determinants of *citizens’* satisfaction with democracy. To our knowledge, however, scholars omitted to examine the democratic satisfaction of *politicians*. Making use of survey data from the Comparative Candidates Survey, this research note addresses this gap in the literature. As a first step in this endeavour, we pose two objectives. First, we want to compare *levels* of democratic satisfaction across citizens and politicians in different countries to evaluate whether mass-elites gaps are apparent. Second, we want to *replicate* core findings from the research on citizens but with politicians. As such, we examine two hallmark findings in the literature on democratic satisfaction with respect to the role of ideological extremism/nicheness and the winner-loser gap at elections. Our study contributes to the growing literature on elites’ attitudes and behaviors and identifies some of the conditions that favor and undermine

¹⁰ This article in the European Journal of Political Research (co-authored by the author of this thesis and one of the author’s co-supervisors) motivated the research conducted in chapters 2, 3 and 4 of this dissertation. The objective of this article was to replicate some of the main findings of the SWD scholarship with politicians. This article could not be included as a standalone chapter because the rules of the School of Political at the University of Ottawa require that the thesis author be the first author on any chapter included in the dissertation. The article is therefore included as an Appendix and does not count towards the minimum number of articles required for the completion of the thesis project.

politicians' satisfaction with democracy. This is a crucial research endeavor given elites' influence on public opinion and democratic stability.

Keywords: satisfaction with democracy, politicians, winner-loser gap, extremism

Introduction

Politicians are central actors in representative democracies. They raise money for campaigning at elections, canvass citizens to gain their support, participate in different party activities, aggregate social interests, sit in legislative committees, consult interest groups, develop and adopt legislative bills, scrutinize the government, take positions on and advocate for policies, and they may even inspire a sense of unity and identity among individuals, or incite hate and prejudice against others. Given these responsibilities and functions, one may wonder how these central actors of the democratic process evaluate the *working* of democracy? Indeed, politicians are in a unique position to evaluate the success and failure of representative democracies from different angles, by their involvement in the *electorate*, in *political organizations*, and in *governments* and *legislatures* (Dalton & Wattenberg, 2002; Key, 1958).

To date, the scholarship on political support has mostly considered the view of citizens. Easton (1965, 1975) initially distinguished citizens' diffuse support toward the political community or the regime from more specific forms targeted at political authorities. Norris (1999) expanded the *authorities*, *regime*, and *community* classification and proposed distinguishing between evaluations of political *actors*, regime *institutions*, regime *performance*, regime *principles*, and the political *community*. In theory, these

classifications may refer to both citizens and politicians. In practice, however, only citizens have been thoroughly scrutinized in public opinion research.

Regime performance is the type of political support that informs the questions we examine in this research note. As indicated by Norris (1999, 11), regime performance “taps a ‘middle level’ of support which is often difficult to gauge” in between specific support for actors and institutions, and support for the regime (e.g., democracy), which captures “how democracy functions in practice as opposed to the ideal”. The most well-known indicator of regime performance is perhaps “satisfaction with democracy” (SWD). This indicator has come to be understood as gauging “how well people generally think politics or governance is working” in practice instead of being an evaluation of the “democratic-ness” of the political system (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 9). Importantly, SWD is different than “an indicator of support for the *principles* of democracy” (Linde & Ekman, 2003, p. 405).

As reported recently by Singh and Mayne (2023), a considerable scholarship has investigated *citizens’ democratic satisfaction* in the last decades. On the one hand, scholars considered the role of SWD as a predictor of different forms of political attitudes and behaviors. For instance, studies examined the role of democratic satisfaction on support for radical parties (Arzheimer, 2009; Ramiro, 2016), voter turnout (Kostelka & Blais, 2018), and citizens’ *support* for democracy and institutional reforms (Claassen, 2020). On the other hand, the bulk of the scholarship considered factors that influence citizens’ levels of democratic satisfaction (Singh & Mayne, 2023). In particular, scholars highlighted the importance of winning elections (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais & Gélinau, 2007), ideological congruence with parties and governments (Ferland, 2021; Kim, 2009; Mayne

& Hakhverdian, 2017), compulsory voting (Singh, 2018), quality of governance (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003; Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014), and good economic conditions among other things (Cutler et al., 2023; Daoust & Nadeau, 2021). While this scholarship has expanded significantly, to our knowledge, scholars have yet to examine *politicians'* evaluations of the democratic process.

In this research note, we intend to lay the foundation of a new research agenda that aims at better understanding *politicians'* evaluation of the functioning of democracy. This might be important for several reasons. Identifying areas of friction or success in their assessment of the policy-making process may inform or complement work on institutional design and reform. It could also be valuable in identifying disconnects between *citizens'* and *politicians'* views about the working of democracy. Normatively, we would hope both actors share a similar understanding about the way their political system works. For example, dissatisfied citizens coupled with satisfied politicians would be a case of disconnected political elites, which could open the way to political cynicism, apathy or unrest. Alternatively, dissatisfied politicians may also be consequential for how citizens perceive the working of democracy, given the evidence of politicians' influence on public opinion (Clayton et al., 2021; Lenz, 2012). Maybe more importantly, politicians are pivotal for democratic stability and preventing backsliding (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019). Given the possible role of democratic satisfaction on support for democracy (Claassen, 2020) and the current erosion of democratic norms and institutions (V-Dem Institute 2025; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), it seems crucial to undertake an investigation of politicians' democratic satisfaction.

The Study

As an initial step in understanding politicians' SWD, we seek to accomplish two objectives. First, we want to compare *levels* of democratic satisfaction across citizens and politicians in different countries to evaluate whether mass-elites gaps are apparent and identify whether politicians or citizens are systematically more or less satisfied. Second, we want to *replicate* core findings from the research on citizens but with politicians. As such, we examine two hallmark findings in the literature on SWD with respect to the role of ideological extremism and the winner-loser gap at elections. In the next three sections, we investigate each question in turn by summarizing the state of the *citizens'* literature, contextualizing how it might pertain to *politicians*, and presenting the corresponding empirical results.

To this end, we combine data from modules 1 and 2 of the Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS 2016, CCS 2022) and modules 2-4 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES 2024). The CCS project surveys candidates running in national (semi-)parliamentary elections worldwide by administering a standardized questionnaire. Respondents are elected and unelected candidates to national parliamentary elections. The CSES also administers a standardized questionnaire to citizens in the context of their national elections in several countries around the world. In total, we were able to *match* citizens-candidates survey data comprising of our key variables of interest for 16 election studies across 10 (semi-) parliamentary democracies between 2005 and 2015 (Australia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Norway, Portugal, Romania, and Sweden). Our study includes 21,286 citizens and 8,975 candidates who ran for 71 political parties.¹¹

¹¹ The alternative to the CCS-CSES data is the European Election Studies. We preferred the former datasets since they cover (semi-) parliamentary elections which are commonly examined in studies of democratic

Our results show that politicians' level of democratic satisfaction is not systematically higher than citizens' in these elections. In about half the countries we study, politicians are more satisfied than citizens while we observe the opposite in the other countries. We also found that both more ideologically extreme politicians and citizens, and those from niche parties, are less satisfied than moderate mainstream individuals. Additionally, these relationships are stronger among politicians. This makes extreme politicians even less satisfied than their corresponding citizens and moderate politicians more satisfied than moderate citizens. We also report a greater winner-loser gap among politicians than citizens. In examining the different configurations of the winner-loser gap that are specific to politicians, we show that winning at the individual and at the party-level both matter for SWD. We also replicate the established result about the conditional role of majoritarian and proportional electoral systems in connection to the winner-loser gap.

Overall, we believe our study contributes to the growing scholarship on political elites' attitudes and behaviors (Broockman & Skovron, 2018; Kertzer, 2022; Sheffer et al., 2018; Walgrave et al., 2023) in identifying some of the conditions that may favor and undermine the SWD of key political actors in representative democracies. In doing so, we hope that our research will initiate further investigations of politician-specific factors. As we discuss in the conclusion, there are several related research questions that might be considered in the future.

satisfaction. While the pool of country-elections is greater in the CCS and CSES original datasets, key variables (e.g., democratic satisfaction and left-right ideological positions) were missing in many surveys covered by the CCS, or the CSES did not survey some of the elections covered by the CCS.

Comparing Levels of Citizens' and Politicians' Satisfaction with Democracy

Our first objective is to compare citizens' and politicians' *levels* of SWD over the same elections. In both the CCS and CSES projects, citizens' and politicians' SWD is measured with the typical question: “*On the whole are you very satisfied (coded 4), fairly satisfied (coded 3), not very satisfied (coded 2) or not at all satisfied (coded 1) with the way democracy works in [respondent's country]?’*”. In using this common indicator with politicians, two questions arise. First, are politicians answering this question as citizens or as politicians? It is important to note that the data collection for the CCS generally starts as soon as possible after an election finishes and that candidates are told they are being contacted because they ran in that election. Moreover, the first two modules of the questionnaire survey their political background and campaign experience, followed by questions on the works and responsibilities of legislators, and then their SWD. This sequence emphasizes their role as a candidate as they participate in the study.

Second, does the SWD indicator measure the same information for politicians as it does for citizens? We believe it does. As indicated previously, scholars have come to understand this indicator as broadly capturing what citizens think of “the everyday working of politics and governance” (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 10) and the outcomes it generates such as its representativeness or even its economic outputs. One way of showing this similarity is with construct validity (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Canache et al., 2001) and the *replication* of core findings from the research on citizens and testing whether it also applies to politicians. To prelude those analyses, we found similar results for politicians and citizens when it comes to ideological extremism and the winner-loser gap. That said, we also assume that politicians' SWD might be influenced by factors that are specific to their

unique involvement in the democratic process. This does not mean that the indicator has a substantively different meaning for citizens and politicians, but rather that politician-specific determinants of democratic satisfaction may also exist.

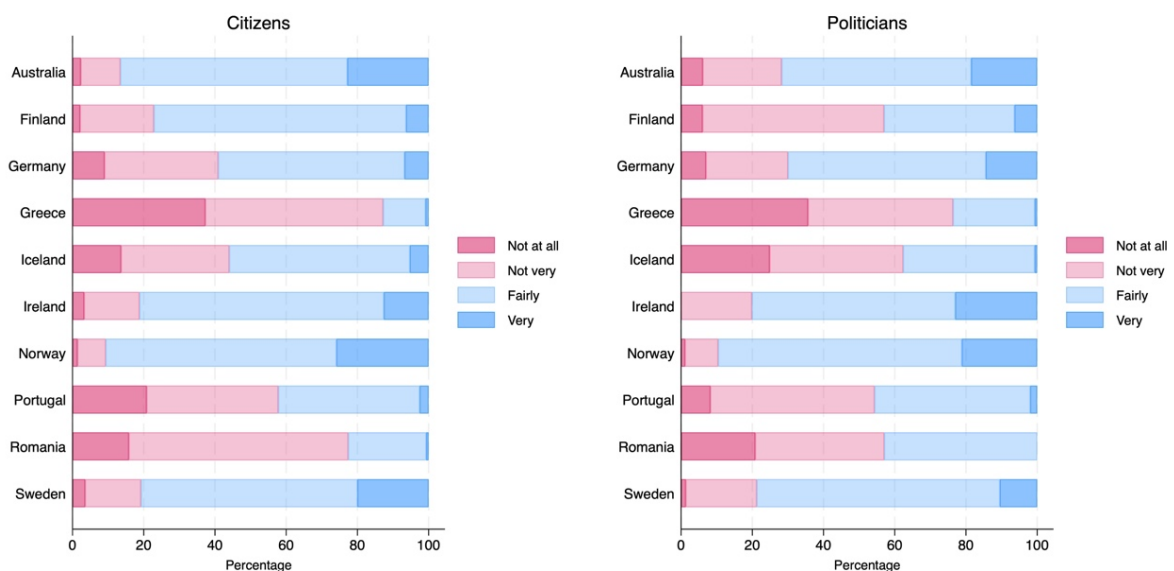
Figure 1.1 displays the distribution of democratic satisfaction across the ten countries for which it was possible to match citizens and politicians over the same elections.¹² For different reasons, we might expect politicians to be more satisfied with how democracy works in their country than citizens. Politicians, presumably, believe that they could contribute to future political change in being elected. Individuals with high socioeconomic status, typical of politicians (Phillips, 1998), are more likely to show high levels of political efficacy (Campbell et al., 1960) and to participate in politics (Verba et al., 1995). Politicians are also directly involved in the electoral process through their participation in elections and generally have some resources to publicize their policy views. Moreover, elected politicians have the opportunity to influence the policy-making process and have access to many resources (office, budget, employees, etc.) to achieve their legislative and constituency responsibilities, and to promote their political agenda. Even if politicians' influence on the legislative process varies greatly and depends on their parliamentary and cabinet responsibilities, such influence is not shared by most citizens.

Figure 1.1 shows that both citizens and politicians seem satisfied with the working of democracy in many countries. For example, in Australia, Germany, Ireland, Norway, and Sweden more than 60% of the citizens and politicians are very or fairly satisfied with democracy. However, politicians and citizens in Greece, Portugal, and Romania are the

¹² The average response rate of politicians across elections equals 39.3% with a standard deviation of 13.3. For the remaining politicians-based analyses, we weight our estimations to get a representative sample of the composition of the party candidates who ran in each election.

most unsatisfied with about 60% of the respondents being not at all or not very satisfied. The most likely reason that Greece's citizens *and* politicians are the most dissatisfied out of the countries we analyzed in Figure 1.1 is because the 2015 Greek election was held just after the government agreed to a bailout agreement, even though the population voted against the proposal in a referendum. Such turnover might have generated a lot of frustration among citizens and politicians alike. Finland, and to a lesser extent Iceland, on the other hand, present a surprising pattern where a majority of politicians are unsatisfied with the way democracy works while a majority of citizens appear to be satisfied.

Figure 1.1: Distribution of democratic satisfaction among citizens and politicians

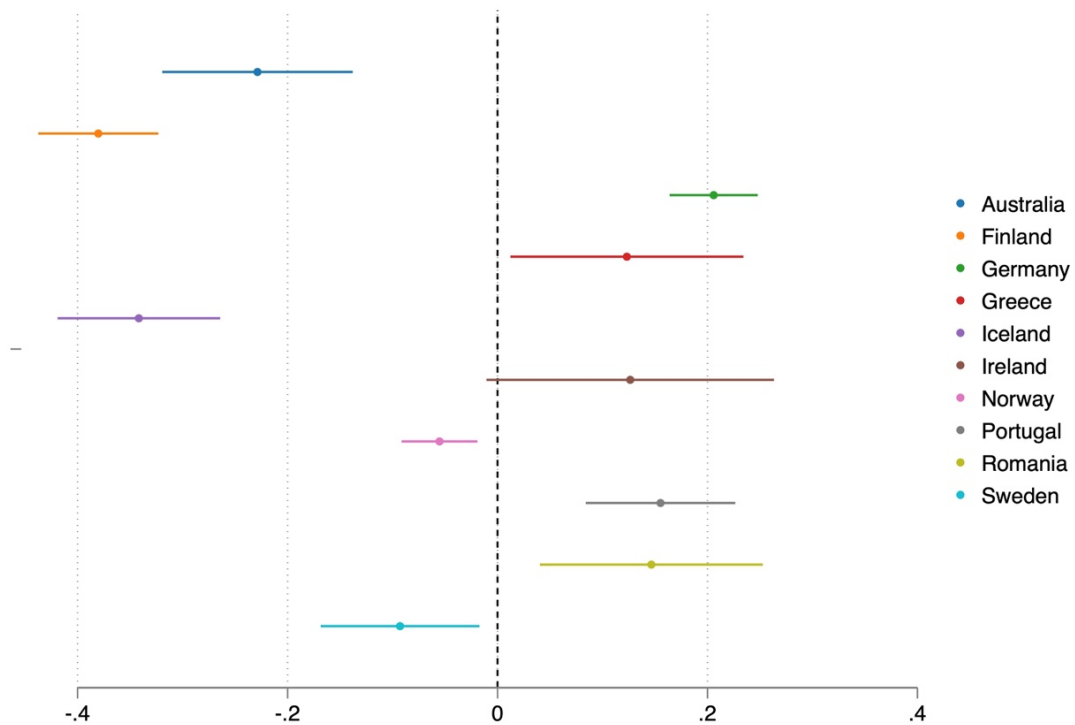


In Figure 1.2, we present the average difference in democratic satisfaction (the dots) between politicians and citizens by country with corresponding 95% confidence intervals (the horizontal lines). Dots to the right (left) of the vertical line 0 means that politicians

(citizens) are more satisfied on average.¹³ While politicians seem more satisfied in many countries (Germany, Greece, Ireland, Portugal, and Romania), they also appear less satisfied in several others (Australia, Finland, Iceland, as well as Norway and Sweden to a lesser extent). While contextual factors specific to some elections might possibly explain those differences (e.g., the rise of the right-wing populist True Finns party during the 2011 Finnish election, or the 2009 Icelandic election following the country's 2008 financial crisis), temporal reasons are less apparent in other elections. It is also important to keep in mind that the results in Figures 1.1 and 1.2 are based on 16 elections across 10 countries. It would thus be imprudent to characterize those results as countries' latent tendencies since contextual and idiosyncratic reasons may be prevalent. As such, it would be interesting in future studies to more attentively consider situations that generate such disconnect between citizens' and politicians' democratic satisfaction and then verify if similar tendencies are reported.

¹³ The dots represent the coefficients from a series of country-specific regressions where we regressed respondents' democratic satisfaction on a dummy variable identifying politicians in a dataset combining citizens and politicians. The results are substantively the same when we control for the ideological position of the citizens and candidates given the role of ideology on democratic satisfaction (see the next section).

Figure 1.2: Difference in democratic satisfaction between politicians and citizens



The role of ideological extremism and nichelessness on citizens' and politicians' SWD

Studies highlighted the role of democratic dissatisfaction in voters' support for radical left (Ramiro, 2016) and radical right (Arzheimer, 2009) political parties. Radical voters have generally more extreme ideological positions and should thus be less satisfied than more centrist citizens.¹⁴ Views from extreme left and right parties are often less represented in legislatures than the perspectives of mainstream centrist parties. Those parties therefore often form with the objective of heavily championing a small number of policy issues such as immigration (radical-right parties) or the environment (green parties) (Bélanger &

¹⁴ Note that the direction of the causality is not clear here. On the one hand, it is possible that voters on the extreme left or right become more dissatisfied as their views are less represented in political institutions. On the other hand, dissatisfied voters could be more open to the political messages of extreme parties which might then influence their ideological positions.

Meguid, 2008; Wagner & Meyer, 2014). As such, these niche parties often challenge the political system in which they compete, and their creation is often the result of a lack of coverage of those issues by mainstream political parties (Bischof, 2017).

While individuals with more extreme ideological positions are less satisfied with the way democracy works, we might think this relationship to be stronger for politicians than citizens. In particular, more extreme and niche politicians who decide to engage politically and represent parties that challenge the status quo of the political system should be even more dissatisfied with the current state of affairs than citizens with similar ideological dispositions. However, we should expect the opposite for mainstream and centrist citizens and politicians – these politicians should be even more satisfied than their corresponding citizens. Centrist and mainstream parties are generally part of the government or have more influence among opposition parties because of their size in legislatures. They are clearly those who benefit more from the political system. Among politicians and citizens, we might therefore expect moderate and mainstream politicians to be those most satisfied with the working of the democratic system.

Analyses

In Figure 1.3, we display the relationship between citizens' and politicians' democratic satisfaction and measures of extremism and party niche-ness. To locate the ideological position of politicians and citizens, we use a common measurement strategy which consists of positioning respondents on a 0-10 left-right ideological scale. As such, we use respondents' answers to the question: *"In politics, people sometimes talk about the 'left' and the 'right'. Where would you place your own views on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0*

means the most left and 10 means the most right?”. We transformed this individual-specific metric into 0-5 scores of *extremism*, where extreme left and right are combined. Parties’ nicheness is measured based on the indicator developed by Bischof (2017) which considers whether a party is dominant in niche segments of the party competition and the broadness of its party platform. This indicator also has the benefit of being continuous and dynamic over time.

We employ two empirical strategies in Figure 1.3. First, we pooled citizens’ and politicians’ data and estimated two separate OLS regressions where we regressed respondents’ democratic satisfaction on an interaction effect between *politicians* and *extremism*, and *nicheness*, respectively.¹⁵ The models control for gender, age, and include country fixed effects (see Table 1.A2 in Appendix 1.1 for the full results). The upper (lower) left graph displays the predicted values of those regressions across values of *extremism* (*nicheness*) for politicians (red) and citizens (blue). The dots represent the predicted values, and the lines illustrate the 95% confidence intervals. In both panels, we observe that centrist and mainstream citizens/politicians are the most satisfied (scores of about 2.7-3.0). In contrast, as scores of *extremism* and *nicheness* increase, democratic satisfaction decreases for both politicians and citizens. It also appears that moderate and mainstream politicians are more satisfied, while extreme and niche politicians are less satisfied, than their corresponding citizens. This is why the red dots (politicians) are above blue dots (citizens) under low scores of *extremism* and *nicheness*, but below the blue dots under higher scores.

¹⁵ Researchers have generally modeled citizens’ democratic satisfaction with linear regressions (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016) but some also employed ordered logistic regressions (Curini & Memoli, 2012; Singh, 2018) because of the ordinal level of measurement of the variable. Substantive results are generally robust to each empirical strategy. In our analyses, we prefer using linear models because they facilitate the interpretation of the regression coefficients, but our conclusions are robust to the use of ordered logistic regressions (see section 2 of Appendix 1.1). Scores of nicheness were assigned to citizens based on their vote choice.

In the center panels, the graphs display the corresponding average marginal effects (AME) of *politicians* across values of *extremism* and *nicheness* (this is literally the distance between the blue and red dots of the left panels with the associated 95% confidence intervals). The benefit of this visualization is to better identify which values of *extremism* and *nicheness* are statistically significant in differences of SWD across citizens and politicians (i.e., the AME of *politicians*). Under *extremism*, this is the case for scores between 0 and 2, as well as 5 (the most extreme position). Under *nicheness*, the AME of *politicians* are all statistically significant at the 0.05 level except when *nicheness* equals 0.5.

The second empirical strategy consists of comparing the democratic satisfaction of politicians with their own voters (citizens that support their party). We thus calculate the difference between the average democratic satisfaction of politicians and citizens by party and transform the pooled dataset into a party-level dataset of about 70 parties. We then regress this differential outcome variable on *extremism* and *nicheness*, respectively, while controlling for country fixed effects. In these new analyses, we kept the same parties' *nicheness* scores as above. For locating parties' *extremism*, we need a party-specific measure instead of the individual-specific measure that was used initially. We thus rely on the 0-10 left-right expert-placement provided by the national election study teams that collaborated with the CSES.¹⁶ In the right panels of Figure 1.3 (i.e., under Δ pol-cit party-level), we show the predicted values of these two regressions across values of *extremism* and *nicheness*. Recall here that the predicted values now represent the difference between the average democratic satisfaction of politicians and citizens by party. Positive (negative)

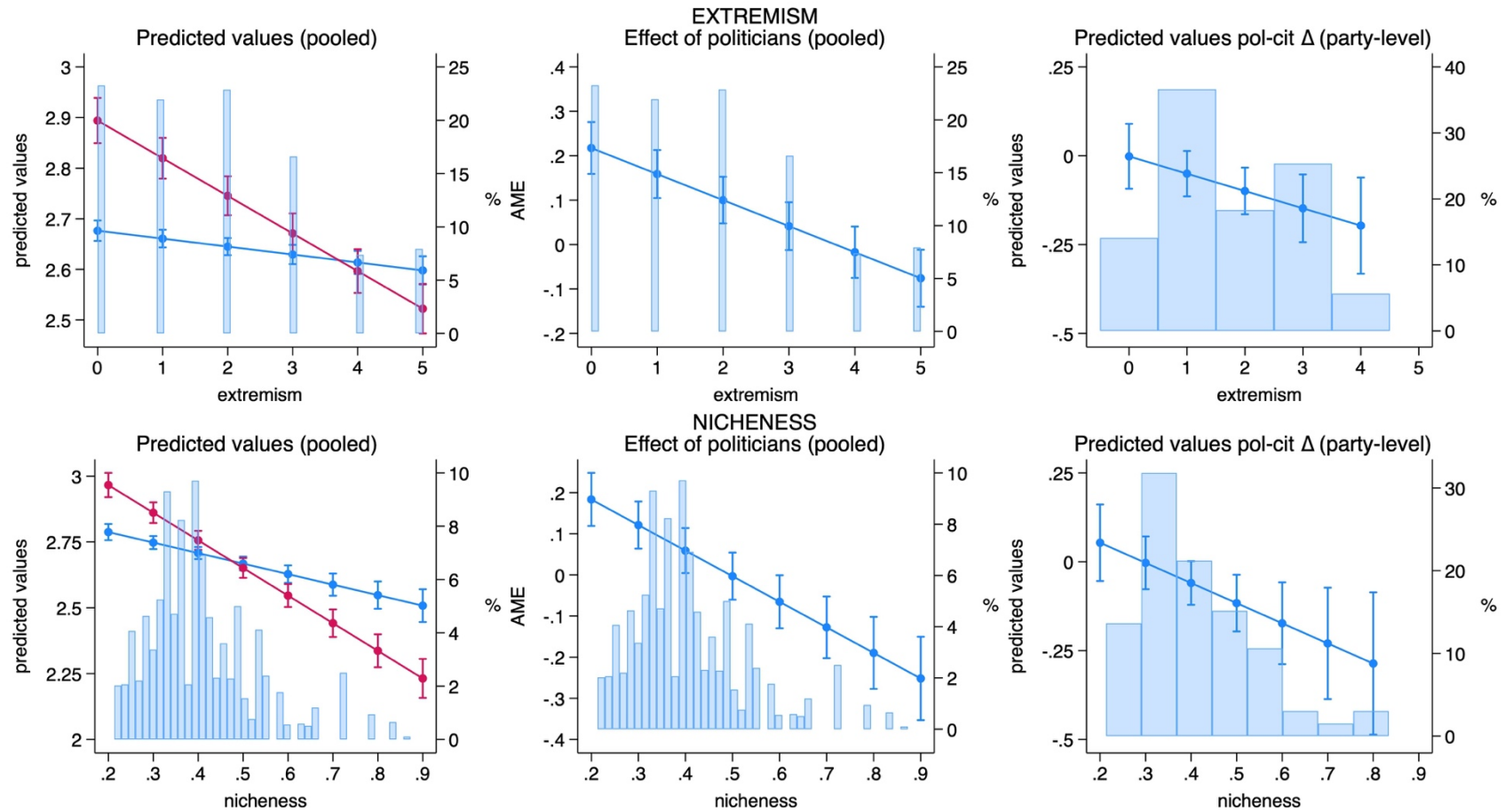
¹⁶ This methodology is similar to the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (CHES) project. We did not use the CHES because some country-elections were not covered.

scores indicate that politicians are more (less) satisfied than their voters. The results are similar to those observed in the previous panels. Politicians are significantly less satisfied than their voters in niche and extreme parties. The situation is a bit more nuanced with respect to centrist and mainstream parties where the differences fail to reach the conventional level of statistical significance, but the number of observations remain relatively low with about 70 parties.

Citizens, politicians, and the winner-loser gap in SWD

An established finding in the literature on citizens' SWD is that winners at elections (citizens who voted for a party that formed the government) are typically more satisfied than losers (citizens who did not vote for a party that formed the government) (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais & Gélneau, 2007). This is because winning procures satisfaction in itself (who prefers to lose a competition?) and winners might expect their preferred party in power to implement policies that better correspond to their preferences (Ferland, 2017, 2021). In addition, one may claim having won or lost their election at the district and/or national level. Indeed, citizens – as it is for politicians – might face different configurations of victory/defeat when looking at who wins in their district and which party is part of the new cabinet. For example, Henderson (2008) showed that winning at the national level generally matters more for voters than winning at local elections (see Blais and Gélneau (2007) for opposite findings).

Figure 1.3: Citizens' and politicians' democratic satisfaction across extremism and nicheness



Note. pol-cit pooled models: $SWD = \text{politicians} + Z + \text{pol} * Z + \text{controls}(\text{age women country FE})$; Z is extremism (nicheness) in upper (lower) panel. In the left graphs, predicted values of SWD are displayed for politicians (red) and citizens (blue). In the center graphs, the average marginal effect of politicians are displayed. Right graphs: outcome variable is the difference between the mean SWD of politicians and citizens by party; model: $\text{difference} = Z + \text{country FE}$; predicted values are reported.

Politicians might also face different configurations of victories or defeats. They could either win/lose in their district election and their party could be part or not part of the government. If their party joins a coalition government, it might also hold the position of the Prime Minister. All these types of wins should influence politicians' democratic satisfaction. An individual win should be, arguably, much more significant for politicians since it assures them a job among other things. We might also expect the magnitude of the winner-loser gap to be greater for politicians than citizens given the time, energy, and financial resources politicians personally invest in their own electoral campaign and political party.

Similarly, we might expect incumbents to be more satisfied with democracy. Curini et al. (2012) show that winning previous elections increases SWD, especially if voters are losers in the current elections. Incumbents also have first-hand experience of the policy-making process. They have access to many resources (office, budget, employees, etc.) to achieve their legislative and constituency responsibilities, and to promote their political agenda. While some representatives might encounter frustrations due to legislative gridlocks or even a lack of individual influence, we assume that incumbents generally enjoy their status, and this translates into higher SWD.

Analyses

Data from the CSES and CCS combined with the ParlGov dataset (Döring et al., 2022) identifies whether one's party won the election – i.e., if citizens voted for a party that forms the government or if politicians ran under that party. CCS data also provides candidates' self-reported answers to whether they were elected in the current election (17% of the respondents were elected) and in the previous election to identify incumbents (15% of the respondents). The results associated with citizens' and politicians' winner-loser gap are presented in Table 1.1. All models control for respondents' gender, age, ideological position and include country-election fixed effects. In columns 1 (citizens) and 2 (politicians), we compare the effect of a party win on citizens' and politicians' democratic satisfaction over the same pool of elections. The results support the classic finding that winners are more satisfied with the working of democracy. As expected, the effect is almost twice as big for politicians (0.25; $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) than it is for citizens (0.15; $p\text{-value} < 0.01$).

In the remaining columns 3-7 of Table 1.1, we examine different configurations of politicians' wins. We now leverage all data from the CCS project that permits such an investigation (i.e., not only data that matches CSES elections, see Table 1.A1 in Appendix 1.1 for the list of additional elections we use). The number of observations vary across columns 3-7 since not all questions were asked in each country-election survey (e.g., candidates were not always asked

whether they were individually elected or incumbents, presumably, because of ethical issues associated with the possibility of identifying them). Columns 3-4 present, respectively, the effect of individual wins and incumbency. The effect of an individual win (0.35; $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) seems slightly greater than a party win. Incumbents are also more satisfied by about 0.23 points ($p\text{-value} < 0.01$) as reported in column 4. In column 5, we examine the effects of all three variables simultaneously and notice that current election wins mostly drive the effect of incumbency reported in column 4 since the latter effect becomes not statistically significant when *winner (individual)* and *winner (party)* are in the model.

We then examine the interaction effect between *winner (individual)* and *winner (party)* in column 6 to establish which kind of win matters more for politicians. Indeed, a candidate could win their election in a district but see their party not joining the government, and vice-versa, or could win or lose at both the individual and party levels. Modelling an interaction effect between the two variables allows distinguishing the effect of each scenario. The results in column 6 indicate that an individual win (coefficient of 0.30; $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) and a party win (coefficient of 0.27; $p\text{-value} < 0.01$) influence democratic satisfaction similarly. Note that each of these coefficients indicate the effect of the variable when the other variable equals 0. This is that the effect of *winner (individual)* indicates the effect of an individual win when the candidate party did not join the government (i.e., *winner (party)* equals 0) – and vice versa.

Table 1.1: The winner-loser gap in democratic satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Winner (party)	0.15 (0.01)***	0.25 (0.07)***			0.30 (0.08)***	0.27 (0.08)***	0.21 (0.08)**
Winner (individual)			0.35 (0.06)***		0.21 (0.06)***	0.30 (0.11)***	0.28 (0.06)***
Incumbent				0.23 (0.06)***	0.08 (0.06)		
Winner ind. X winner party						-0.04 (0.12)	
PM party							0.15 (0.09)
<i>N</i>	21286	8280	8975	6173	5052	8975	8655

Note: country-election fixed effects and controls for age, gender and ideology are not displayed. Cluster-robust standard errors are in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01. See Table 1.A3 in the Appendix for full results.

Moreover, an individual win combined with one's party joining the government does not seem to increase one's satisfaction. This effect is given by the coefficient of *winner ind. X winner party* in column 6 and is not statistically significant. Finally, the results in column 7 (restricted to situations of coalition governments) also indicates that one's party holding the position of the Prime Minister in a coalition does not increase one's satisfaction.¹⁷

The role of electoral systems

A well-known finding in the SWD scholarship is that the winner-loser gap differs under majoritarian and consensual institutions. Anderson and Guillory (1997) found that the type of democratic system directly impacts how satisfied a winner or loser will be with their democracy. Winners in majoritarian systems are more satisfied than winners in consensual systems while losers in consensual systems are more satisfied than losers in majoritarian systems, indicating that how power is distributed in political institutions affects SWD. According to Anderson and Guillory, this is because “consensual systems provide the political minority with a voice in the decision-making process [...while] the more majoritarian the country's institutions, the more winners get to have a say and impose their will on the minority” (Anderson and Guillory 1997, 68). This expectation has been confirmed in several studies; the winner-loser gap in democratic satisfaction is greater under

¹⁷ In Table 1.A3 of Appendix 1.1, we show that the effect of *winner* is robust to the inclusion of party-level factors such as party size, nicheness, extremism, and intra-party ideological diversity.

majoritarian institutions than consensual institutions (Bernauer & Vatter, 2012; Martini & Quaranta, 2019; Wells & Krieckhaus, 2006). The same gap also appears across majoritarian and proportional representation electoral systems since power-sharing is more prominent in the latter due to a higher number of coalition and minority governments (Anderson et al., 2005; Ferland, 2015). We should therefore observe the same pattern among politicians.

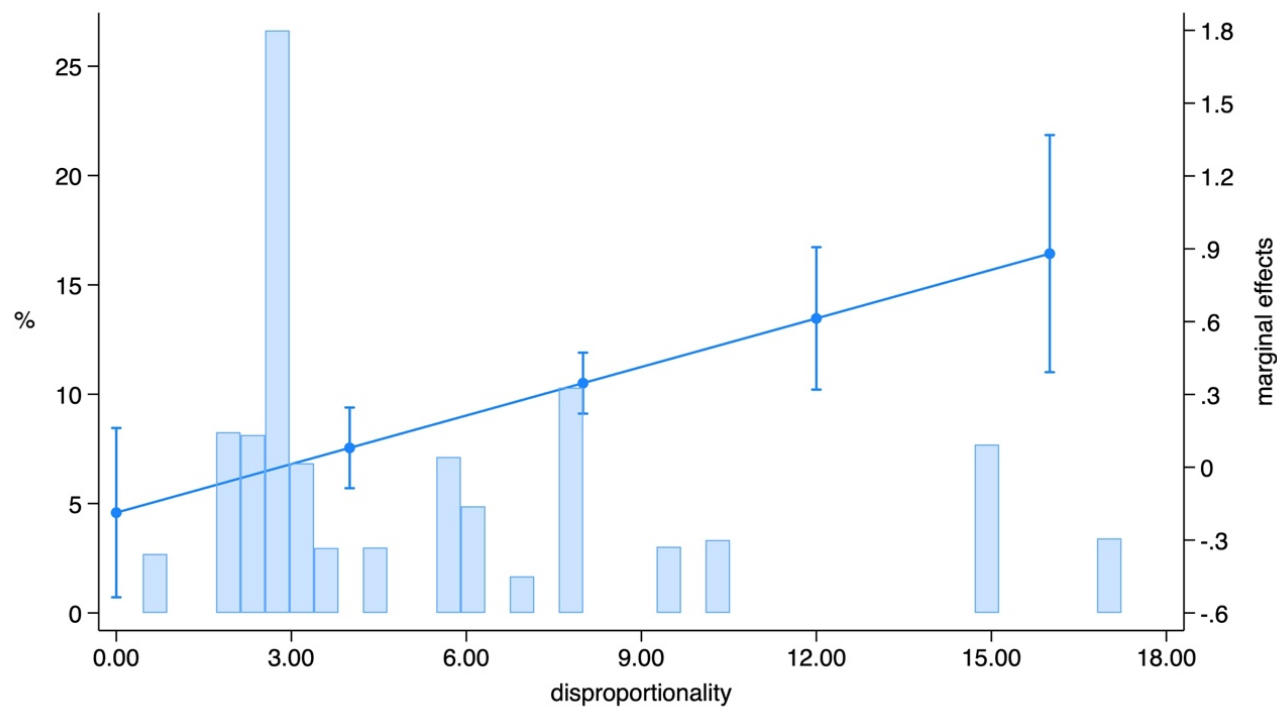
In Figure 1.4, we present the results of an interaction effect between *winner (party)* and the Gallagher index of votes-seats disproportionality.¹⁸ The model is based on a linear multilevel regression with random-intercepts for political parties and countries, as well as a weighting procedure that balances the country samples (see the data, control variables, and the full results in Table 1.A5 of Appendix 1.1).¹⁹ Corroborating the state of the literature about the conditional role of electoral systems on the winner-loser gap, the marginal effect of *winner (party)* increases as disproportionality increases. When electoral results show no disproportionality, the effect of *winner* is not statistically different than zero. In these cases, there is no gap between winners' and losers' democratic satisfaction. Then, as expected, we notice that the winner-loser gap in democratic satisfaction widens as electoral results become more disproportional. When

¹⁸ We use the variable *winner (party)* instead of *winner (individual)* because it is mainly parties in government that could have more power, not individuals. Furthermore, *winner (party)* also has more observations than *winner (individual)*.

¹⁹ In Figures 1.A1-1.A2 of Appendix 1.1, we present the results of the interaction based on the binning and kernel estimators as recommended by Hainmueller et al. (2019). This robustness check provides little evidence of non-linearity. Common support is less of an issue since there is enough variation in winner (party) across all values of disproportionality.

disproportionality equals 15, winners are more satisfied than losers by about 0.8 points. This is almost an entire point on the democratic satisfaction scale.

Figure 1.4: The winner-loser gap across votes-seats disproportionality



Discussion

In a recent literature review on democratic satisfaction, Singh and Mayne (2023) reported more than 400 hundred publications studying citizens' SWD. Surprisingly, to our knowledge, none of

these publications directly considered *politicians'* democratic satisfaction. Given the crucial role that politicians play in representative democracies, this omission represents an important gap in the literature. Combining data from the CCS and the CSES, we show that politicians' levels of SWD are not systematically higher than citizens. In many democracies, citizens exhibit higher satisfaction. This is surprising given the role of politicians in the democratic process and the associated socialization mechanism that should presumably make them more satisfied. We also confirm that more ideologically extreme politicians and those from niche parties are both less satisfied than mainstream centrist politicians and are also less satisfied than corresponding extreme voters. The results also corroborated empirical findings reported in previous studies which relate to the winner-loser gap and the conditional role of electoral systems in the latter.

On a positive note, the similarity between the results for politicians and citizens validates the meaning (to some extent) of the SWD indicator and its use with politicians. The results also suggest that politicians, like citizens, are responsive to the democratic outcome of winning and losing, which corroborate studies challenging elite exceptionalism (Kertzer, 2022). Some results, however, are more worrying in terms of the state of democracy. For example, moderate and mainstream citizens are *less* satisfied than their corresponding politicians. For some, this might be just another instance of "critical citizens" or "dissatisfied democrats" (Dalton, 2004; Norris, 1999). That said, if mainstream politicians are *more* satisfied than their corresponding voters, they are,

presumably, less likely to address the causes of citizens' dissatisfaction. This disconnect where mainstream and moderate politicians are the most satisfied while all other politicians and citizens are *less satisfied*, also parallels some of the claims made by populists who challenge representative democracies on the basis that the 'system' is working for these specific elites. Better unravelling of this mass-elites gap seems especially important to consider in future studies.

We hope this research note lays the groundwork for a new research agenda in the scholarship on democratic satisfaction with a new focus on *politicians*. While several known determinants of *citizens'* SWD might be considered in the future such as corruption (Anderson & Tverdova, 2003) quality of governance (Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014), and economic conditions (Cutler et al., 2023), scholars might also consider *new* determinants of democratic satisfaction *specific* to politicians such as their campaign experience and resources, their internal efficacy as policymakers, party discipline, coalition dynamics, and their interaction with electoral management bodies during electoral campaigns among other topics. Finally, in this period of democratic backsliding (V-Dem Institute 2025; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019), investigating politicians' democratic satisfaction appears to us to be even more essential. Democratic erosion often occurs through a slow period of deconsolidation in which political elites are pivotal (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019). Evidence of dissatisfied politicians might be a prelude to this process.

Appendix 1.1

Table 1.A1: List of countries and respondents (%)

Country (election)	Cit. & pol.	Only politicians	# pol. respondents	Response rate (%)
Australia (2007)	X	X	472	47.0
Belgium (2010)		X	451	39.6
Belgium (2014)		X	665	36.6
Denmark (2011)		X	375	47.8
Finland (2011)	X	X	911	39.4
Finland (2015)	X	X	480	23.0
Germany (2005)	X	X	1,031	44.0
Germany (2009)	X	X	789	N.A.
Germany (2013)	X	X	1,137	41.0
Greece (2007)		X	241	34.4
Greece (2015)	X	X	520	37.6
Iceland (2009)	X	X	504	66.7
Iceland (2013)	X	X	534	70.6
Ireland (2007)	X	X	186	39.9
Italy (2013)		X	672	23.3
Norway (2009)	X	X	1,015	51.5
Norway (2013)	X	X	598	N.A.
Portugal (2009)	X	X	203	28.4
Portugal (2011)		X	257	21.6
Portugal (2015)	X	X	306	26.5
Romania (2012)	X	X	407	22.6
Sweden (2014)	X	X	1,872	48.0
UK (2010)		X	1,472	36.4

Note: country-elections for the citizens-politicians comparison were used in Figures 1.1-1.4 and columns 1-2 of Table 1.1.

Country-election for the politicians-based analysis were used in columns 3-7 of Table 1.1, Figure 1.5, and Table 1.2. # of politicians' respondents represents the total number of respondents in each country study.

Response rates are provided in the technical report of each country research team.

Table 1.A2: The role of extremism/nicheness on citizens and politicians' SWD (models of Figure 3)

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
	Ind.-level	Ind.-level	Party-level	Party-level
Politicians	0.22 (0.03)***	0.31 (0.04)***		
Extremism	−0.02 (0.00)***		−0.05 (0.02)**	
Nicheness		−0.37 (0.06)***		−0.57 (0.23)**
Politicians X extremism	−0.06 (0.01)***			
Politicians X nicheness		−0.62 (0.09)***		
Women	−0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)		
Age	−0.00 (0.00)***	−0.00 (0.00)***		
Left-right position		0.10 (0.01)***		
L-r pos. X l-r pos.		−0.01 (0.00)***		
<i>N</i>	29566	19319	71	66

Note: country-election fixed effects in all models (not displayed.) Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 1.A3: Party-level factors and democratic satisfaction

	(1)
Women	0.02 (0.02)
Age	−0.00 (0.00)*
Extremism	−0.07 (0.01)***
Winner (party)	0.12 (0.06)**
Party diversity	−0.10 (0.09)
Nicheness	−0.50 (0.16)***
Constant	3.69 (0.29)***
<i>N</i>	8441

Note: country-election fixed effects not displayed. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 1.A4: The winner-loser gap in democratic satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Winner (party)	0.15 (0.01)***	0.26 (0.07)***			0.30 (0.08)***	0.27 (0.08)***	0.21 (0.08)***
Winner (individual)			0.35 (0.06)***		0.21 (0.06)***	0.30 (0.11)***	0.28 (0.06)***
Incumbent				0.23 (0.06)***	0.08 (0.06)		
Winner ind. X winner party						−0.04 (0.12)	
PM party							0.15 (0.09)
Women	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.02)	0.03 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.03 (0.04)	0.02 (0.02)	0.03 (0.02)
Age	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)**	−0.00 (0.00)**	−0.00 (0.00)**	−0.00 (0.00)**	−0.00 (0.00)***
Left-right position	0.07 (0.01)***	0.18 (0.05)***	0.15 (0.06)***	0.15 (0.05)***	0.12 (0.05)**	0.15 (0.05)***	0.15 (0.05)***
L-r pos. X l-r pos.	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.02 (0.00)***	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.01 (0.00)**	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.01 (0.00)***
N	21286	8280	8975	6173	5052	8975	8655

Note: country-election fixed effects not displayed. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Citizen results in column 1. Politician results in columns 2-7.

In Table 1.A4, we control for several confounding variables at the country-level that have been shown to influence democratic satisfaction and/or represent common control variables in previous studies. While we do not have clear expectations in terms of their possible associations with the independent variables, it is a conservative strategy to account for these variables since their addition will not bias the regression coefficients and respective standard errors, but could safeguard against an omitted variable bias (Porter & Gujarati, 2009). As such, the model account for federalism (federations coded 1; unitary states coded 0), semi-presidential system (coded 1; parliamentary system coded 0), the number of political parties in competition (i.e., the effective number of parties based on parties' vote share and as calculated with the formula developed by Laakso and Taagepera (1979)), party system polarization (Dalton, 2008), and the country's annual growth of GDP. All these control variables come from the Comparative Political Data Set, 1960-2020. We also account for time period with a dummy variable identifying elections held after 2010 (coded 1; 2010 is the median year in the time period we analyze) and before 2011 (coded 0). This multilevel regression includes more politicians (N=10,766) and covers more elections (23 elections in 14 countries) than previous analyses because we leveraged all CCS available data to this end.

Table 1.A5: The winner-loser gap across votes-seats disproportionality

	(1)	(2)	(3)
Women	−0.02 (0.03)	−0.02 (0.03)	−0.02 (0.02)
Age	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.00 (0.00)*
Left-right position	0.06 (0.02)***	0.07 (0.01)***	0.08 (0.02)***
L-r pos. X l-r pos.	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.01 (0.00)***
Winner (party)	−0.19 (0.18)	−0.18 (0.15)	−0.06 (0.12)
Disproportionality	−0.03 (0.02)	−0.04 (0.02)**	−0.02 (0.02)
Winner X disp.	0.07 (0.03)***	0.06 (0.02)***	0.04 (0.02)**
# parties	0.01 (0.07)	0.02 (0.07)	0.05 (0.07)
Polarization	−0.06 (0.11)	−0.04 (0.11)	−0.09 (0.12)
GDP growth (%)	0.01 (0.03)	0.02 (0.02)	−0.00 (0.02)
Federation	0.08 (0.26)	0.07 (0.25)	0.02 (0.28)
Presidential	−0.18 (0.23)	−0.18 (0.22)	−0.16 (0.25)
Post-2010	0.12 (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)	0.12 (0.08)
Constant	2.72 (0.53)***	2.60 (0.50)***	2.56 (0.70)***
Var(country) constant	−1.03 (0.19)***	−1.09 (0.18)***	−0.93 (0.17)***
Var(party) constant	−1.04 (0.11)***	−1.06 (0.11)***	−1.06 (0.12)***
Var(Residual) constant	−0.44 (0.02)***	−0.44 (0.02)***	−0.47 (0.03)***
<i>N</i>	10766	10766	10766

Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.

Column 1: party-country weight. Column 2: country weight. Column 3: party weight.

Figure 1.A1: The winner-loser gap across votes-seats disproportionality with the binning estimator

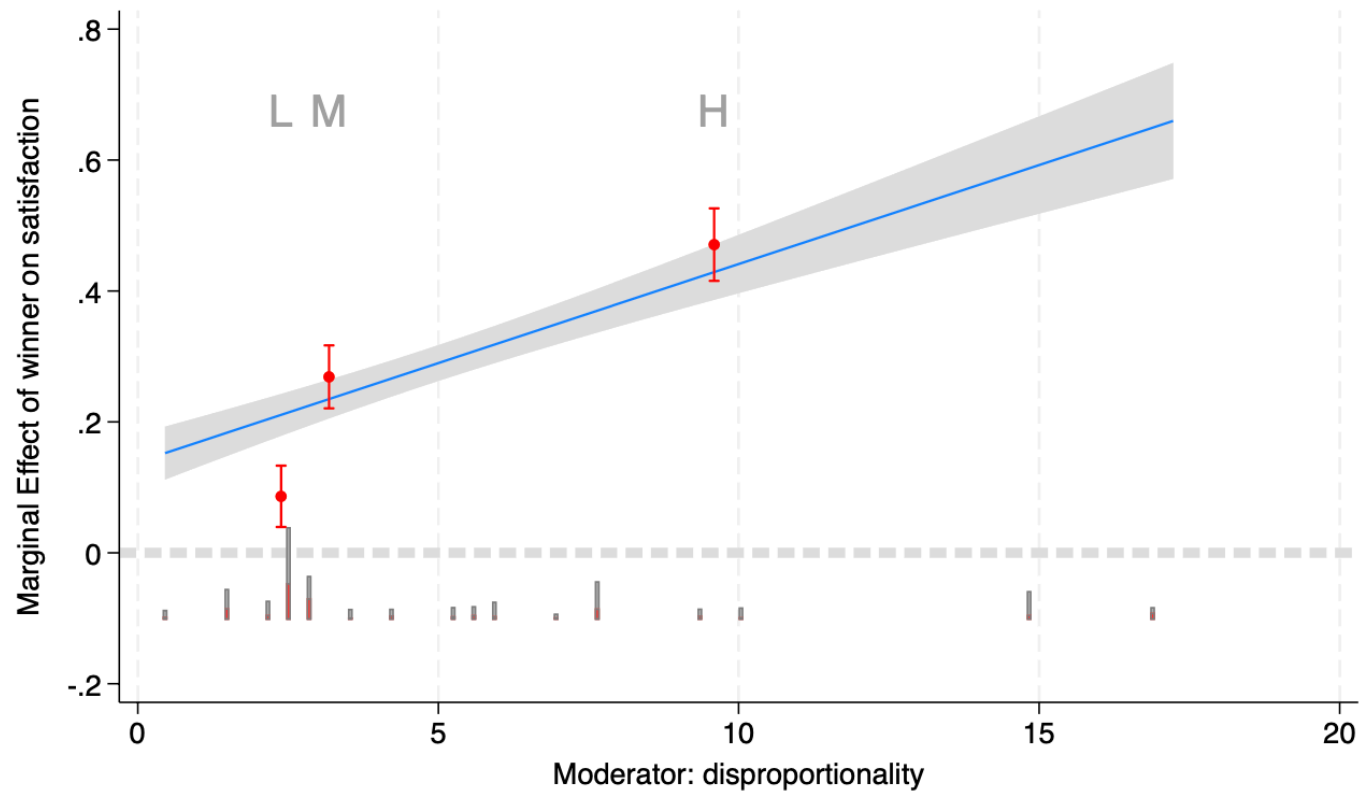
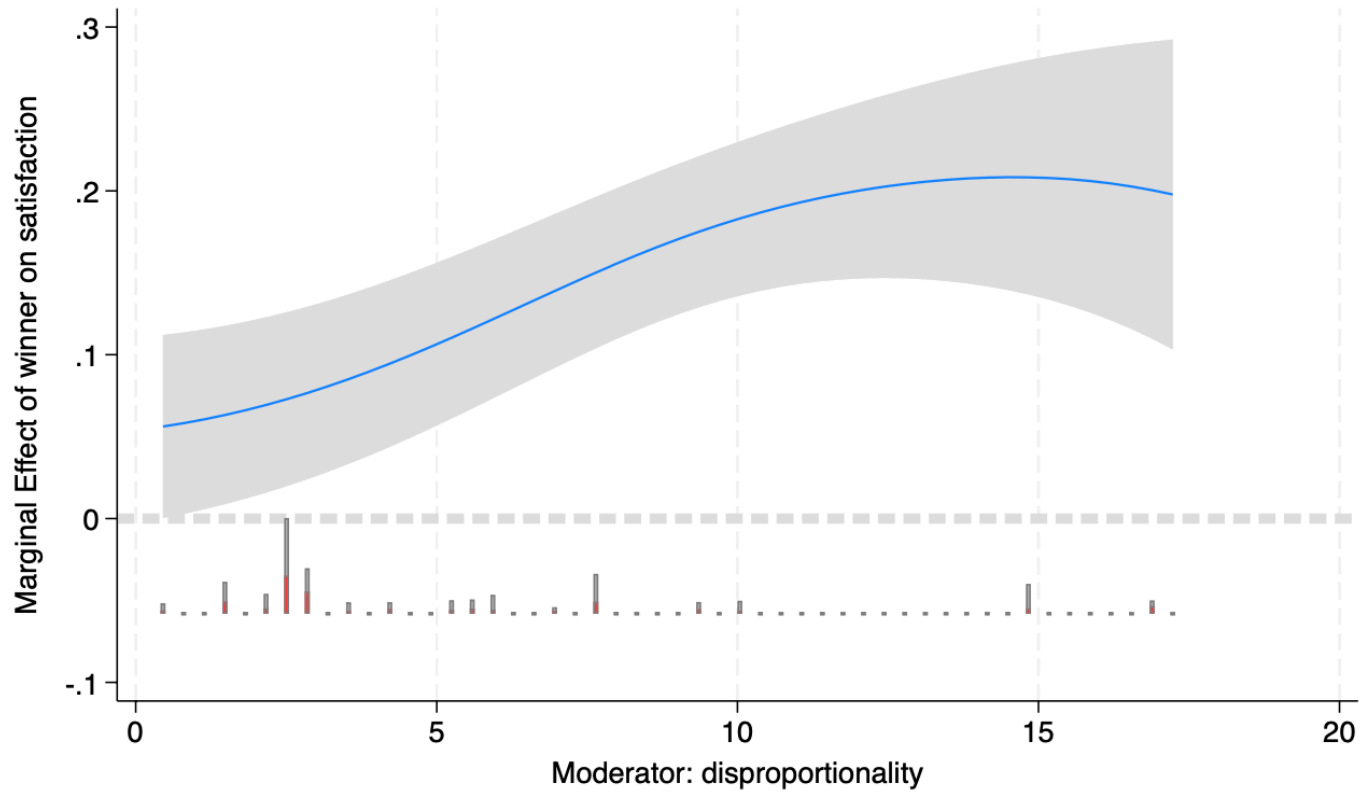


Figure 1.A2: The winner-loser gap across votes-seats disproportionality with the kernel estimator



Replication of the results based on ordered logistic regressions

N.B. In the tables and figures below, coefficients of the ordered logistic regressions are reported (not their average marginal effects).

Figure 1.A3: Democratic satisfaction among citizens and politicians across left-right positions

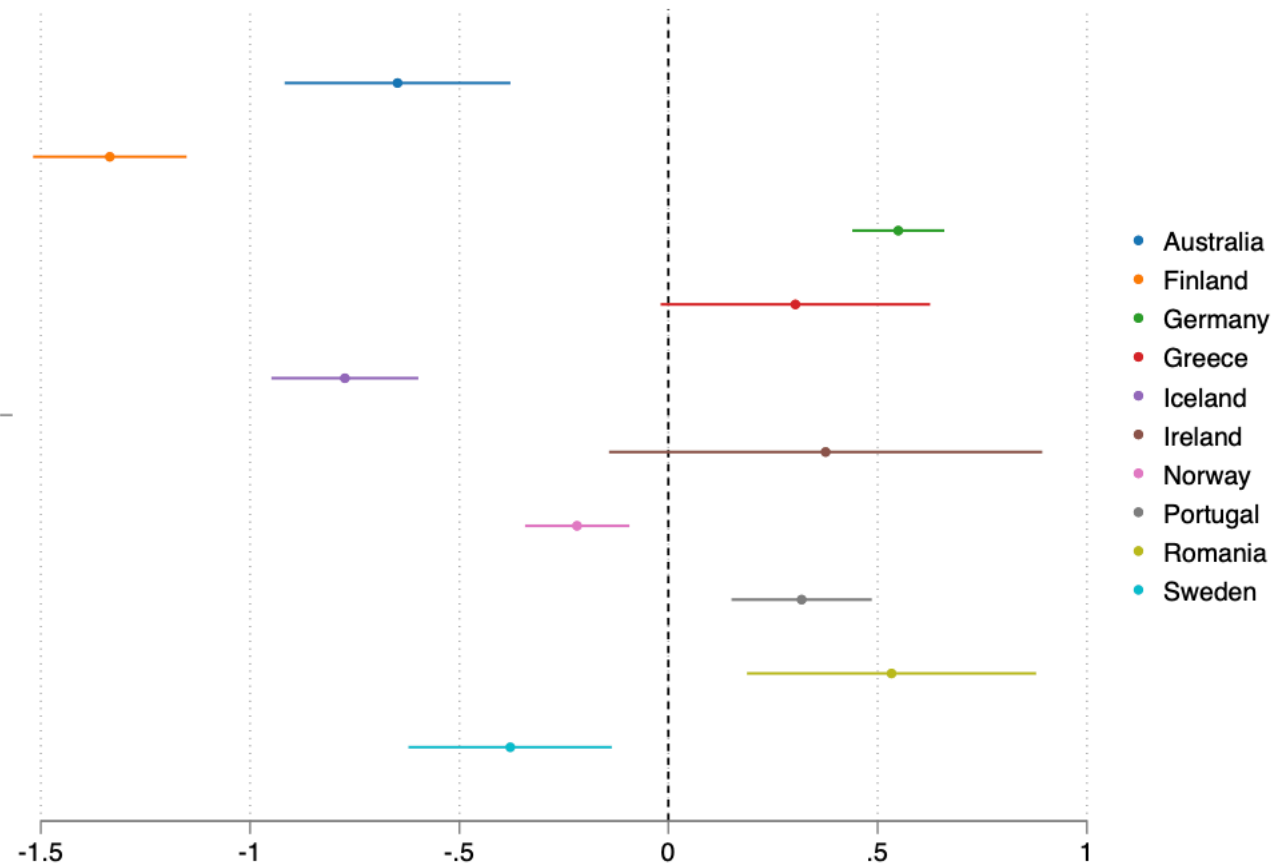


Table 1.A6: The role of extremism/nicheness on citizens and politicians' SWD

	(1) Ind.-level	(2) Ind.-level
Politicians	0.61 (0.09)***	0.31 (0.04)***
Extremism	−0.04 (0.01)***	
Nicheness		−0.37 (0.06)***
Politicians X extremism	−0.18 (0.02)***	
Politicians X nicheness		−0.62 (0.09)***
Women	−0.04 (0.02)*	0.01 (0.01)
Age	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.00 (0.00)***
Left-right position		0.10 (0.01)***
L-r pos. X l-r pos.		−0.01 (0.00)***
/		
Cut1	−3.93 (0.06)***	
Cut2	−1.92 (0.06)***	
Cut3	1.27 (0.06)***	
<i>N</i>	29566	19319

Note: country-election fixed effects in all models (not displayed.) Standard errors in parentheses. * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table 1.A7: The winner-loser gap in democratic satisfaction

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)
Winner (party)	0.43 (0.03)***	0.77 (0.21)***			0.83 (0.23)***	0.76 (0.21)***	0.58 (0.25)**
Winner (Individual)			0.96 (0.15)***		0.58 (0.19)***	0.82 (0.32)**	0.78 (0.16)***
Incumbent Winner ind.				0.61 (0.16)***	0.23 (0.19)	−0.09 (0.36)	
X winner party							
PM party							0.43 (0.29)
Women	−0.01 (0.03)	0.01 (0.06)	0.08 (0.07)	0.06 (0.10)	0.10 (0.11)	0.05 (0.07)	0.07 (0.07)
Age	−0.02 (0.01)***	−0.00 (0.00)	−0.01 (0.00)**	−0.01 (0.00)**	−0.01 (0.00)**	−0.01 (0.00)**	−0.01 (0.00)***
Left-right position	0.18 (0.02)***	0.54 (0.14)***	0.43 (0.15)***	0.44 (0.13)***	0.37 (0.14)***	0.42 (0.14)***	0.43 (0.14)***
L-r pos. X l-r pos.	−0.01 (0.00)***	−0.05 (0.01)***	−0.04 (0.01)***	−0.04 (0.01)***	−0.03 (0.01)***	−0.04 (0.01)***	−0.04 (0.01)***
/							
Cut1	−3.59 (0.09)***	−2.28 (0.65)***	−2.55 (0.62)***	−2.89 (0.86)***	−2.84 (0.87)***	−2.56 (0.60)***	−2.49 (0.60)***
Cut2	−1.54 (0.09)***	−0.06 (0.65)	−0.48 (0.63)	−0.84 (0.87)	−0.76 (0.89)	−0.45 (0.61)	−0.36 (0.62)
Cut3	1.76 (0.09)***	3.17 (0.68)***	2.65 (0.63)***	2.35 (0.87)***	2.57 (0.90)***	2.74 (0.62)***	2.85 (0.63)***
N	21286	8280	8975	6173	5052	8975	8655

Note: country-elected fixed effects not displayed. Cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses. * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01

Citizen results in column 1. Politician results in columns 2-7.

Table 1.A8: Democratic satisfaction across votes-seats disproportionality and party-level factors

	(1)	(2)
SWD_inverse		
Winner (party)	0.30 (0.26)	0.40 (0.18)**
Disproportionality	−0.23 (0.03)***	
Winner X disp.	0.07 (0.03)**	
Party diversity		−0.33 (0.28)
Party size		0.01 (0.01)
Nicheness		−1.48 (0.50)***
Left-right position	0.26 (0.08)***	0.47 (0.10)***
L-r pos. X l-r pos.	−0.02 (0.01)***	−0.05 (0.01)***
# parties	−0.15 (0.06)**	
GDP growth (%)	0.11 (0.03)***	
Federation	−0.21 (0.35)	
Presidential	−1.34 (0.22)***	
Post-2010	−0.11 (0.20)	
/		
Cut1	−5.65 (0.75)***	−5.24 (1.01)***
Cut2	−3.58 (0.74)***	−2.82 (0.99)***
Cut3	−0.72 (0.73)	0.58 (0.99)
N	10766	8441

Standard errors in parentheses; * p<0.10, ** p<0.05, *** p<0.01.
Model 2 includes country-election fixed effects (not displayed)

Chapter 2: Politicians, Electoral Integrity, and Electoral Management Bodies: A Cross-National Study on Satisfaction with Democracy²⁰

Abstract

Competitive elections that are free and fair are the bedrock of stable representative democracies. In this critical moment, in which there is an increase of democratic decline across states, it is imperative to (re-)examine fundamental democratic processes, like elections. In addition to citizens, politicians are key actors in the electoral process. Politicians can influence the views of citizens, make changes within political institutions, and contribute to democratic breakdown or backsliding. Therefore, understanding their views about the way democracy works is crucial. While there has been a recent increase in the scholarship on politicians' perceptions and behaviours, it has not yet considered whether aspects of the electoral process might affect politicians' democratic satisfaction. Furthermore, while the literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction is well-established, our understanding of politicians' satisfaction with democracy (SWD) is not. This article begins to address these gaps in the scholarship on SWD and politicians by examining whether electoral integrity and the characteristics of electoral management bodies (EMBs) influence politicians' levels of SWD. By analyzing cross-national data from The Comparative Candidates Survey covering 49 elections, in 21 countries, from 2005 to 2021, this article highlights three key findings: first, while electoral integrity affects levels of politicians' satisfaction with democracy, it matters more for politicians who lost the election. Second, EMBs' independence does not affect politicians' levels of satisfaction with democracy. Third, while EMBs' capacity influences politicians' SWD, the strength of the effect differs for politicians on the ideological right and left. The implications of these findings are explained in the article.

²⁰ This chapter was published in July 2025 in *Politics and Governance*.

Introduction

The study of democracy is a vast field of political science that examines topics like the conditions of democratic consolidation (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schedler, 1998), whether there is a relationship between democratization and economic growth (Doucouliagos & Ulubaşoğlu, 2008; Knutsen, 2012; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992), the types of outcomes that democracy produces (Gerring et al., 2022), and more recently, what might cause stable democracies to breakdown or resist decline (Carugati, 2020; Coppedge et al., 2022). With an increase of democratic decline occurring across states (Gora & de Wilde, 2022; Grillo & Prato, 2023; Mechkova et al., 2017), it is imperative for researchers to (re-)examine the processes and institutions of democratic countries in this critical moment. Past works have established the importance of competitive elections with high levels of electoral integrity (Møller & Skaaning, 2013, p. 144) and the ability of citizens to participate in those elections (Dahl, 1971) as necessary conditions for having a democratic political regime (or what Dahl calls polyarchy), and that the core aspect of the democratic process is the selection of leaders (Schumpeter, 1943). Put differently, competitive elections that are free and fair are the bedrock of democracy. However, recent research shows that democratic breakdown can occur when checks on elected leaders erode (Carugati, 2020, p. 60) and that political elites are often the drivers behind democratic sliding (Wunsch, 2022, pp. 1-2). In addition to the powers elected officials have within political institutions, politicians more generally (candidates running in elections) can also influence the views of citizens (Bullock, 2011; Clayton et al., 2021; Zaller, 1992). Therefore, it is essential to consider the views of politicians in discussions about democratic stability and the electoral process.

Taking these points together highlights an important intersection in democratic studies that is sometimes taken for granted: elections and the key actors that participate in the electoral process

(citizens and politicians) are the fundamental components of having and maintaining a stable representative democratic country. It therefore follows that the electoral process and these actors' overall satisfaction with the democratic system that they participate in are key considerations for democratic stability. However, while there is extensive literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction (see Singh & Mayne (2023) for a recent review of this literature), we know very little about politicians' satisfaction with democracy (SWD). Although there has been a recent increase in the scholarship on politicians' perceptions and behaviours (Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024; Sevenans et al., 2023; Walgrave et al., 2023), this has not included studies on SWD, or how various aspects of the electoral process (such as electoral integrity or the administration of elections by electoral management bodies (EMBs)) might affect SWD. This article therefore examines politicians' SWD and elements of the electoral process for the sake of better understanding an important component of democratic stability. It specifically investigates the following question: Does electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs affect politicians' SWD? Electoral integrity and EMBs serve as an important starting point for studying politicians' SWD, as electoral integrity is fundamental to the electoral process (and in turn, democratic stability), while the characteristics of EMBs could advance or inhibit electoral integrity. Furthermore, the article examines if other attributes of politicians (such as whether they won or lost the election and their left-to-right political ideology) might impact these effects.

Electoral integrity matters for politicians because the presence (or lack of presence) of electoral integrity during election processes provides confidence (or doubt) in the legitimacy of the election. Electoral integrity is especially important for democratic stability since it could play a pivotal role for politicians to accept the results of the election when they lose (Anderson et al., 2005, p. 4). Because electoral integrity both legitimizes the victory or loss of politicians and helps

to maintain democratic stability in the country they reside (or govern) in, the article's main expectation about electoral integrity is that politicians' SWD will be higher in countries with more electoral integrity. If the electoral process has low levels of electoral integrity (or there is the presence of electoral fraud), then politicians have reasons to doubt the outcome of elections – resulting in less democratic stability, since free and fair elections are fundamental in democratic systems. Because electoral integrity also legitimizes the victory of the winner, it is also expected that the effect of electoral integrity on SWD will be more important for winners than losers. This is based on the rationale of citizens' SWD, since citizens whose preferred choice won are usually more satisfied than citizens whose preferred choice lost (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais et al., 2017; Curini et al., 2012; Henderson, 2008). Since politicians occupy important positions of power in democratic systems, it is important to assess whether the connection between electoral integrity and SWD is the same for both politicians and citizens or if it differs depending on the type of actor being examined.

EMBs are tasked with organizing the election process, certifying election results, and monitoring the conduct of political actors during an election (James et al., 2019). The characteristics of an EMB (its institutional design) are important for politicians because the way EMBs operate can greatly impact the legitimacy of the election process, and in turn, affect democratic stability through the presence (or lack of presence) of electoral integrity. Because of the connection between EMBs and electoral integrity, these institutions are important to examine as a key democratic safeguard. Previous work has found that when confidence in election officials decreases (or increases) there is also a decrease (or increase) in citizens' SWD at both the regional and national levels of government (Lundmark et al., 2020). This is also expected for politicians' SWD since the failure of EMBs to freely or fairly administer elections could result in electoral

fraud (or at least yield lower electoral integrity). This article therefore has two main expectations about the characteristics of EMBs. First, that SWD will be higher in countries with EMBs that are more independent from the government. This is because having more independence in an EMB is more likely to create a level playing field for all politicians during elections and decreases the likelihood of government interfering in that electoral process. Second, that SWD will be higher in countries with EMBs that have a greater capacity (more resources) to administer the election since more resources should improve the administrative and procedural aspects of an election. If an EMB lacks the resources to administer elections, then its ability to conduct procedures relating to free and fair elections (such as ensuring access to the vote or counting ballots in a timely manner) may diminish. Additionally, because politicians on the ideological left are usually in favour of expanding procedures that increase voter turnout (James, 2012, p. 20), it is expected that the effect of EMB capacity on SWD will be greater for politicians on the ideological left than for those on the ideological right. The overarching rationale of the expectations for both electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs is that in most cases when electoral processes follow norms that are consistent with stable democracies – specifically, practices that allow for free and fair competitive elections – SWD will be higher.

To assess these expectations, the article uses cross-national data from The Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) from politicians in 49 elections, across 21 countries, from 2005 to 2021. The results highlight three key findings in response to the research question. First, while politicians' SWD increases when there is more electoral integrity, the significance of the effect differs for politicians who won and lost the election. Specifically, when electoral integrity is low, politicians who lost the election will have lower levels of SWD than those who won. However, as electoral integrity increases, the SWD of losers becomes closer to that of winners. In contrast, SWD for

winners remains relatively similar, irrespective of electoral integrity. This implies that the integrity of an election is more important for politicians who lose (at least in terms of their SWD). Second, EMB independence from the government does not have a significant effect on politicians' SWD. While the independence of an EMB may still be important for the administration of elections, it seems to matter less for SWD once other electoral factors are considered. Third, when EMBs have a higher capacity (greater resources to administer an election), politicians' SWD will be higher. However, in contrast to what was expected from the literature, the effect of EMB capacity on SWD is greater for politicians on the ideological right than those on the ideological left.

These results are theoretically important for better understanding SWD, electoral integrity, and EMBs, but are also relevant to practitioners of politics, election officials, and those concerned with democratic stability. To present these findings, the article is divided into four more sections. In Section 2, the article's theoretical framework for the concepts of SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs are presented, along with the expectations about how electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs might influence politicians' SWD. In Section 3, the methods, datasets, as well as the measurements used in the article's empirical models are explained. Section 4 shows the article's results and analysis. Finally, Section 5 provides the main findings of the analysis, its implications for democratic stability, and potential future avenues for research.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article describes three key concepts: SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs. Each concept is described in turn, along with the associated expectations for both electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs. Two hypotheses also consider whether winning or losing, as well as politicians' left-to-right political ideology, might

influence the theoretical expectations about electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs. The overarching rationale of these expectations is that in most cases, when electoral processes follow norms that are consistent with stable democracies – specifically, practices that allow for free and fair competitive elections – SWD will be higher. However, this overarching expectation could be influenced by certain circumstances of politicians (such as whether politicians won or lost the election and their left-to-right political ideology).

SWD

Given that there is less research on politicians' SWD, a review of the vast and well-established literature on citizens' SWD provides a helpful starting point to better understand the concept of democratic satisfaction. SWD is rooted in studies on the political culture associated with democracies (Almond & Verba, 1963) and captures attitudes and feelings about how governance or politics is working. Scholars now consider SWD as a mid-level indicator of political support (Norris, 1999, p. 1), between individuals' diffuse support for regime preferences (Easton, 1975), and specific support for actors like political parties and politicians (Ferland, 2015) or evaluations of government (Weatherford, 1992). More specifically, this conceptualization of SWD assesses "how well people generally think politics or governance is working" (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 9) and captures an individual's "perceptions of the performance of their country's political system, which happens to be democratic" (p. 10). Several studies examine how levels of citizens' SWD are affected by their desired candidate (or party) winning or losing an election (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais et al., 2017; Curini et al., 2012; Henderson, 2008). Results consistently show that winners are more satisfied than losers. There is also substantial research in the SWD literature on how representation and citizens-elites ideological or policy congruence affects citizens' SWD

(Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Ferland, 2016; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). At large, the literature shows that citizens feeling like their preferences are represented by political parties and governments is important for their levels of SWD. Research also exists on whether an individual's socio-demographics influences SWD, such as how Aarts et al. (2017) found that individuals with more education are typically more satisfied with democracy. Additionally, many studies have been conducted on how the quality of government and its institutions (Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014; Erlingsson et al., 2014; van Ham et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2009), as well as various electoral factors (Farrell & McAllister, 2006; Morgan-Jones & Loveless, 2023; Singh, 2018), affects citizens' SWD. Few studies have examined the connection between electoral integrity (or its antonym, electoral fraud) and SWD (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), or whether the performance of EMBs might influence SWD (Lundmark et al., 2020). While these studies on citizens serve as a helpful starting point for understanding SWD relative to the electoral process, it is important to examine politicians in their own right because of their distinct roles in elections. Unlike citizens, politicians are elected to, removed from, or prevented from accessing, a position of power within government following an election. This means the way in which their SWD may be influenced by electoral processes could also differ. However, while it is plausible that politicians may be affected differently than citizens, there is no guiding research that clearly indicates whether politicians' and citizens' SWD may differ when it comes to the impact of electoral processes. Therefore, this article's expectations serve as a starting point for understanding how politicians' SWD may be connected to electoral processes.

Electoral Integrity

Electoral integrity is an essential aspect of the electoral process in a representative democratic system and is important for maintaining democratic stability. Electoral integrity captures several aspects of an election such as the quality, fairness, or impartiality of the election process (Schnaudt, 2023), the norms that govern elections (Norris et al., 2014), or the absence of these norms (van Ham, 2015). Norris (2014) explains that electoral integrity also legitimizes the offices of the newly elected winners and legitimizes the outcome for those who lost (p. 115), which could be pivotal for democratic stability (Anderson et al., 2005, p. 4). Additionally, when there are failures of electoral integrity, citizens' attitudes towards democracy become more negative (González et al., 2024). There are ongoing debates about how to assess if electoral integrity is present or absent in an election, for example: whether the parameters of electoral integrity are determined by international norms and standards (Norris et al., 2014), the cultural context of the country, or its public's perception (Elklit & Reynolds, 2002), or if it is rooted within democratic principles (Beetham, 1994; Garnett & James, 2021). However, there is a broad agreement that electoral integrity matters throughout several stages of the election process. Given this context, this article looks at Fortin-Rittberger et al.'s (2017) research on electoral fraud (the antithetical of electoral integrity) and citizens' SWD. Fortin-Rittberger et al.'s (2017) broad expectation was that the presence of electoral fraud should generally decrease SWD. This should also apply to politicians, who are typically favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018), and would in turn be more satisfied when election processes reflect the norms of stable democracies. Therefore, the presence of electoral integrity should generally increase SWD:

H1a: If the level of electoral integrity is greater in a country, then politicians' SWD will be higher.

Fortin-Rittberger et al. (2017) also expected that the effect of electoral fraud on SWD would be weaker amongst citizens whose preferred choice won. This is because winners would be willing to accept the costs of electoral fraud (and a lower-quality election) when they benefit from receiving the policy gains associated with having their preferred choice in a position of power. Yet, they found that the presence of electoral fraud resulted in lower levels of citizens' SWD for both winners and losers. Winning an election increases SWD (in comparison to losing) under the conditions of the election being administered in a free and fair manner. However, in cases when electoral fraud occurs, Fortin-Rittberger et al. (2017, p. 362) found that the winner–loser gap disappears, which suggests that both winners and losers value the absence of electoral fraud. This rationale should also extend to politicians in national elections. If politicians win (or lose) under free and fair conditions, then the legitimacy of their victory (or defeat) is less likely to be questioned. Electoral integrity helps to legitimize the winner's elected position and limits the ability of losing politicians to blame their loss on the election process. Therefore, the following hypothesis is given with respect to the effects of electoral integrity on SWD for winners and losers:

H1b: If the level of electoral integrity in a country affects politicians' SWD, then this effect will be greater for winners than for losers.

EMBs

EMBs are tasked with organising election processes, monitoring the conduct of actors during elections, and certifying election results (James et al., 2019). These institutions are connected to electoral integrity, as their designs can increase or impede electoral legitimacy (Langford et al., 2021), but more work is needed to better understand the connection between election administration and democratic performance (Norris, 2019, pp. 391-392). EMBs are responsible for several aspects of the electoral process that influence electoral integrity such as the rules that govern elections (Garnett & Keir, 2022, p. 333) and the counting process (Atkeson et al.,

2015). The design of EMBs and how they operate can greatly impact the legitimacy of the election process, and these designs vary by country. There are seven dimensions (or characteristics) of EMBs: independence, capacity, centralisation, the scope and division of tasks, technology, personnel, and the EMB's relations with external actors (James et al., 2019). This project focuses specifically on independence and capacity (the EMB's available resources) since these two characteristics are frequently discussed in research on EMBs. Additionally, these characteristics serve as good starting points for deepening our understanding of the connection between EMBs and SWD, as it is less theoretically clear how other characteristics of EMBs might affect politicians' SWD.

An EMB's overall independence is based on different aspects of the institution, such as its institutional design, the way its personnel are chosen, how it is financed, the types of powers it has, and to whom it is accountable to (van Aaken, 2009). Independence is examined as both *de jure* and *de facto* (van Ham & Garnett, 2019). *De jure* independence consists of formal autonomy from the government that is recognized by law or norms, while *de facto* independence (independence in fact) is mediated by *de jure* independence as well as other variables that fall outside of the scope of EMBs (e.g., free media, civil society, and the presence of election observers). To the author's knowledge, there are no studies that examine how the independence of EMBs affects SWD, but some articles examine how the independence of EMBs might affect politicians' confidence or trust in the election process (Estévez et al., 2008; Rosas, 2010). Some research proposes that granting politicians and their political parties influence within EMBs will give political actors more confidence or trust (Estévez et al., 2008), while others like Rosas (2010) found that in most cases, politicians' confidence in elections increases when EMBs are independent. However, it should be noted that both Estévez et al. (2008) and Rosas' (2010) research examine countries in Latin

America, whose political circumstances as newer democracies differ in comparison to older democracies. Specifically, in newer democracies, there may be concerns about government control over EMBs (since these institutions have been around for less time), so political parties and politicians may trust these institutions more if they are involved in these election processes. In more established democracies, there may be fewer concerns about government control over EMBs, so these political actors might be more comfortable being less involved in electoral processes. Furthermore, even if political parties or politicians have influence within EMBs, it does not necessarily mean that all politicians or parties have the same level of involvement or leverage in those institutions. While there are mixed findings about the effects of EMB independence on electoral integrity (van Ham & Garnett, 2019), there is a reoccurring trend which argues that democratic countries should have EMBs that are independent of the government (Onishi, 2012, p. 62; Pal, 2016, p. 86). Overall, because having an independent EMB is more likely to create a level playing field for politicians, the article's expectation for this characteristic is as follows:

H2: If EMB independence is greater in a country, then politicians' SWD will be higher.

The article now examines EMB capacity, which pertains to the resources it has at its disposal to deliver an election. In addition to simply being able to administer the election, "capacity further helps to ensure elections that are legitimate by improving confidence" (Langford et al., 2021, p. S65), and makes it more difficult for political actors to perform acts of electoral fraud like vote-buying (Lundstedt & Edgell, 2022). EMB capacity is therefore important for electoral integrity, and by consequence, the overall electoral process. Since giving EMBs more resources usually improves the administrative and procedural aspects of an election, it is unlikely that politicians will have higher levels of SWD if the EMB has fewer resources. Because politicians are typically favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018), it is unlikely that they would

be more satisfied with the performance of their country's political system when EMBs have a lower capacity, especially since a lower capacity could increase the likeliness of electoral fraud:

H3a: If EMBs have greater resources in a country, then politicians' SWD will be higher.

EMB capacity also affects the ease by which citizens can access the vote. Because some politicians or political parties may attempt to (de)mobilise various groups of the electorate for the purposes of winning (Daniels, 2020, pp. 2-4; Tamas, 2023), the way EMB capacity influences a politician's SWD may vary depending on the political ideology of the politician. James (2012, p. 20) argues that in many cases, politicians on the ideological left attempt to expand procedures that increase voter turnout, while politicians on the ideological right attempt to restrict procedures that increase turnout. Even though politicians might not control the number of resources made available to EMBs, their desire to (de)mobilise various groups may play out indirectly based on the EMB's capacity. While politicians should in general be more satisfied when EMBs have a higher capacity, this effect may be greater for politicians on the ideological left:

H3b: If EMBs having greater resources in a country affects politicians' SWD, then this effect will be greater for politicians on the ideological left than politicians on the ideological right.

Methodology, Datasets, and Measurements

Datasets

To test the article's expectations, I combine four distinct datasets: the CCS, the Parliaments and Governments Database (ParlGov) project, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) survey, and the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS). The CCS is a multi-national dataset that surveys candidates running in national parliamentary elections. Module I (2005–2012; CCS, 2012) collected data from 32 elections in 24 countries, Module II (2013–2018; CCS, 2018) collected data from 30 elections in 21 countries, while Module III (2019–2024; CCS, 2024) was still in advance

release at the time of writing. Due to missing observations of key variables for some elections, the analysis only considers 49 national elections from the CCS datasets between the period of 2005 to 2021. These 49 national elections occurred in the following 21 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Therefore, the cases of this study are limited to those available in the CCS dataset. The ParlGov (Döring et al., 2022) project provides additional context about which candidates won (those whose political party formed government) and those that lost (all other candidates) for each election in the CCS datasets so that this article's dataset can determine which politicians were winners or losers in each election. The final two datasets, the V-Dem survey (Coppedge et al., 2024) and the CPDS (Klaus et al., 2022), provide country-level data for each election in the CCS dataset. The V-Dem survey is informed by responses and judgements from experts, while the CPDS uses annual data from the surveyed countries. The variables that each dataset informs are discussed throughout the remainder of this section.

Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this article, politicians' SWD, is informed by data from the core questionnaire of the CCS. The CCS datasets have the common indicator used in studies of SWD (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 7; Valgarðsson & Devine, 2022, p. 580) for measuring individuals' level of SWD, which is: "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 Candidates Survey Module III.*, 2024, p. 17). The individual-level data from the CCS is transformed into country-election aggregated scores for the purposes of this analysis. While conducting an individual-level

analysis over an aggregate-level analysis is usually ideal, missing data on several individual variables prevents the use of the former empirical strategy. Specifically, some individual-level demographic data that are generally controlled for (like age, gender, or education) are not included in some CCS national surveys for confidentiality reasons. This is because politicians are a small population and can in some cases be easily identified in surveys with their demographic data. Since these missing variables vary across countries and election years, opting for individual-level analyses would significantly reduce the number of countries that could be analyzed and would undermine the statistical power of this cross-national analysis. Conducting the analysis at the aggregate level has the advantage of circumventing this problem. Reassuringly, the article's conclusions are substantively the same when replicating the analysis at the individual level without demographic controls (see Appendix 2). The individual-level data from politicians is therefore transformed into weighted aggregate variables so that there is a single weighted mean of politicians' SWD for each country and election year (the same is done for the CCS data on politicians' self-placement on the ideological spectrum). Creating aggregate variables ensures that responses from politicians can be regressed with the other variables in this study that are at the country level. Politicians' responses from the CCS are weighted by political parties within each country – based on the number of respondents in each political party relative to the total responses from politicians in that country – to adjust for any unequal number of responses from a political party within a country. In total, 26,183 observations from politicians surveyed by the CCS were used to create the aggregate variables for this article (see Appendix 2 for the average level of SWD by country according to the CCS data).

Independent Variables

The CCS data also informs one of the article's independent variables, where a politician self-places on a 0–10 left-to-right ideological spectrum. Additionally, by merging data from the CCS and the ParlGov datasets, the analysis can determine whether a politician's political party is part of the cabinet at the time that they responded to the CCS survey. This is important for identifying whether a politician won or lost during the election year in which they were surveyed.

As of Module III, existing CCS surveys do not pose questions about politicians' views of electoral integrity or the characteristics of EMBs in their country. Because of this, the V-Dem survey is used to measure the study's three remaining independent variables: electoral integrity, EMB independence, and EMB capacity. V-Dem is the only established dataset that has measurements of electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs for each election year that this article examines. Other datasets like the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (Garnett et al., 2024), the Electoral Learning and Capacity Building survey (Norris et al., 2016), and the Electoral Management Surveys (James & Garnett, 2023), only cover some of the election years surveyed by the CCS. Therefore, this article limits its analysis to the V-Dem dataset's country-level variables to prioritize having a larger sample size. To measure electoral integrity, V-Dem uses its electoral democracy index, which is based on five distinct indicators: freedom of association, clean elections, freedom of expression, elected officials, and suffrage. Electoral integrity is measured on an overall score of 0 to 100. Meanwhile, EMB independence and EMB capacity are measured on an overall score of 0 to 4. EMB independence is measured by the EMB's autonomy from government when it comes to the impartial application of administrative rules and election laws in national elections, whereas EMB capacity is measured by whether the EMB has the resources and staff needed to administer a well-run national election.

Control Variables

The control variables for this study are informed by the CPDS. The CPDS provides country-level data about national institutions and economic measurements. The analysis for this article considers the following country-level controls: whether the country is a federation (federalism), whether the country has a parliamentary or mixed system (system type), the country's effective number of parties (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979), and the percentage change of the country's real GDP from the previous year for that election year. These country-level control variables were chosen because different types of political institutions might impact SWD differently (van Ham et al., 2017) and perceptions of the economy can influence democratic satisfaction (Kim, 2009). For federalism, any country that was categorized as having either "weak federalism" or "strong federalism" was coded as a federal country. Because the CCS dataset only surveys countries with parliamentary systems (meaning these countries are either full parliamentary systems or mixed systems with some parliamentary characteristics), the variable "system type" is recoded to identify whether a country has either a full parliamentary system or a mixed system (semi-presidential or hybrid). Because full presidential systems are not captured by the CCS, presidential systems are not included within the scope of this study. If cross-national data on politicians' SWD in presidential systems becomes available, then future articles might consider whether these results change in presidential systems. Readers interested in seeing a table containing the complete list of the main variables for this study may consult Appendix 2.

Empirical Models

To investigate whether politicians' levels of SWD are influenced by electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs, a series of OLS regressions are estimated using the previously listed variables. The analysis covers 49 observations (49 elections across 21 countries). Each observation represents an election, consisting of an aggregation of politicians' responses and country-level variables. However, due to missing responses in some elections for winning or losing, and politicians' political ideology, some models contain fewer observations. Specifically, the model assessing the conditional effects of winning or losing (Table 2.2) uses 44 observations, while the model examining the conditional effects of politicians' left-to-right political ideology (Table 2.3) uses 47 observations.

Results

The Effects of Electoral Integrity, EMB Independence, and EMB Capacity

In Table 2.1, the results of the linear regression of politicians' level of SWD on electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs are shown. Each column adds a variable of interest to control for (EMB independence in column two, EMB capacity in column three, and the remaining control variables in column four). Overall, the adjusted R-squared indicates that the models adequately explain the variation in levels of politicians' SWD in the countries being analyzed.

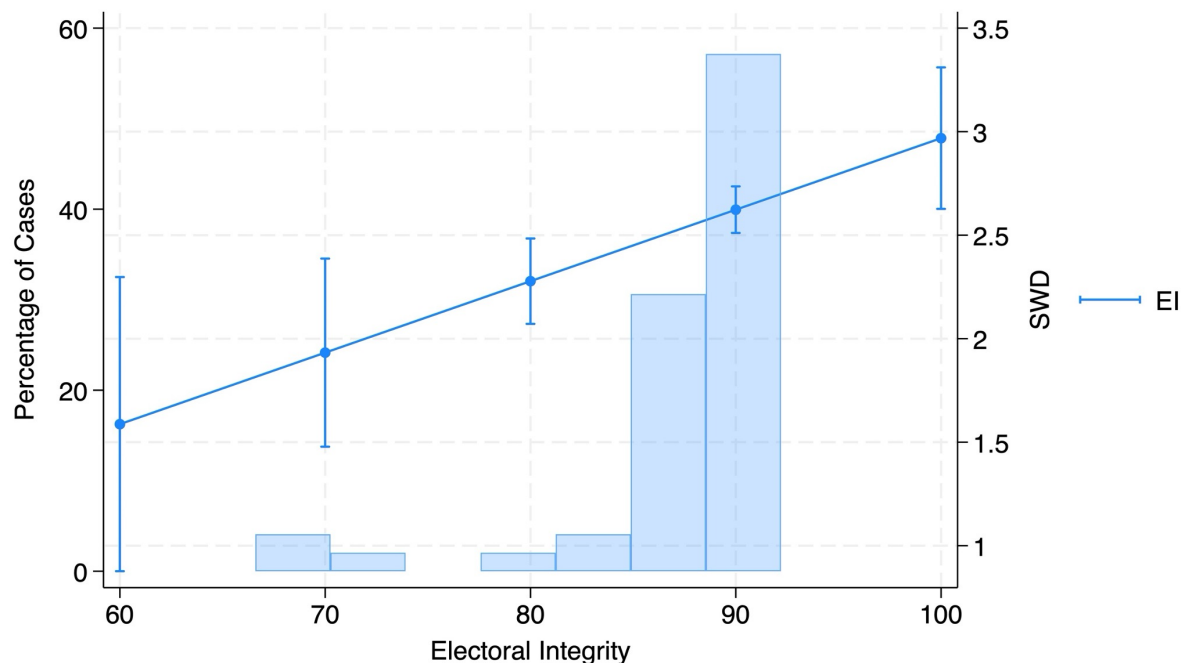
Table 2.1: Explaining politicians' SWD

	(1) Integrity	(2) Independence	(3) Capacity	(4) Controls
Electoral Integrity	0.03 (0.01)***			0.03 (0.01)**
EMB Independence		0.28 (0.16)*		−0.22 (0.20)
EMB Capacity			0.75 (0.20)***	0.58 (0.23)**
Federalism				0.19 (0.10)*
Mixed System				0.17 (0.09)*
Effective Number of Parties				−0.05 (0.03)*
GDP				0.04 (0.02)**
Constant	−0.18 (0.44)	1.54 (0.56)***	−0.29 (0.74)	−1.81 (0.96)*
<i>N</i>	49	49	49	49
adj. R-sq	0.160	0.025	0.219	0.394

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

The results confirm that politicians' SWD will be higher in countries with more electoral integrity (H1a) when other factors are held constant. As expected, the effect of electoral integrity on politicians' SWD is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01^{***}$ and $p < 0.05^{**}$) in both models. In the final regression with each independent and control variable included, politicians' SWD increases by 0.03 points ($p < 0.05^{**}$) along each point of electoral integrity on the x-axis (0 to 100). Furthermore, a multicollinearity test indicates that there is a low level of multicollinearity in the final model (mean VIF of 1.52). The substantive effect of electoral integrity is illustrated in Figure 2.1. The graph shows that levels of SWD are just under two out of four points for elections with a low level of electoral integrity (score of 70) while just above 2.5 for elections with a high score of electoral integrity (90).

Figure 2.1: Predicted Values of Democratic Satisfaction Across Electoral Integrity



Note: The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

Moving to the effects of the characteristics of EMBs on SWD, the results in column two of Table 2.1 indicate that EMB independence does not substantially influence politicians' SWD. While the effects of EMB independence on SWD are initially significant in column two ($p < 0.10^*$) when regressed individually, the effect is no longer significant once the remaining variables are added in column four. Therefore, H2 is not supported.

In contrast, the results for column three of Table 2.1 show that the effect of EMB capacity on politicians' SWD is positive and as expected, statistically significant ($p < 0.01^{***}$). The effect also holds when controlling for additional variables in column four ($p < 0.05^{**}$). This confirms that politicians' SWD will be higher in countries with EMBs that have greater resources (H3a).

The Conditional Effect of Winning/Losing

Next, the effects of the interaction between winning or losing on electoral integrity, and whether this interaction might influence politicians' levels of SWD (H1b) are examined. "Winners" are politicians whose political party is part of the cabinet while "losers" are all other politicians in the sample. Two aggregate dependent variables are created to test whether the effect of electoral integrity is greater for winners than losers: the first is the mean of SWD among winners within each country-election, and the second is the mean of SWD among losers within each country-election. Each country's average SWD for winners and losers are weighted to ensure that any political party is not over or underrepresented. This makes it possible to test for the effect of electoral integrity on the SWD of winners and losers respectively.

Table 2.2 replicates the same model of column four from Table 2.1, but for winners and then for losers. The model considers 44 elections instead of all 49 elections because in five country-level observations (Canada in 2008, Czech Republic in 2017, Greece in 2012, Iceland in 2016, and

Romania in 2016) there were no responses from politicians whose political party formed cabinet (winners). However, even if these five observations are included, the overall effect of electoral integrity on winners' and losers' SWD does not change substantially (see the Appendix 2 for the model with all 49 elections). The results in Table 2.2 show that while the effect of electoral integrity on winners' SWD is not significant, electoral integrity is significant for losers ($p < 0.05^{**}$) and increases their SWD by a coefficient of 0.05. This goes against what was expected for H1b.

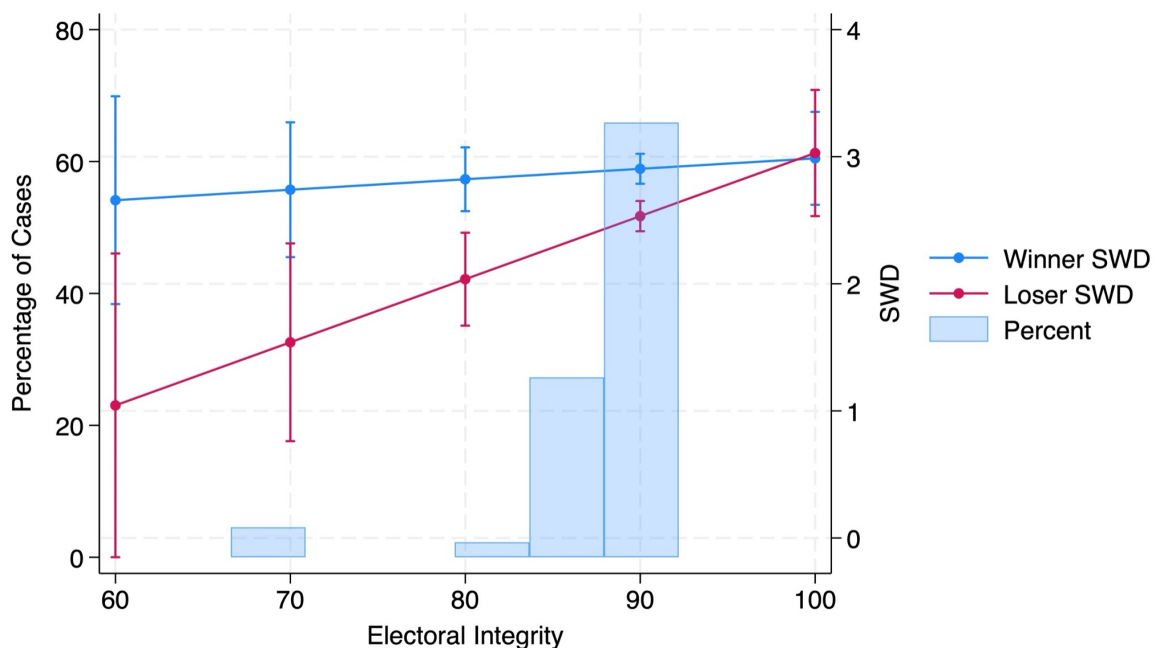
Table 2.2: The effect of electoral integrity on winners' and losers' SWD

	(1) Winner	(2) Loser
Electoral Integrity	0.01 (0.01)	0.05 (0.02)**
EMB Independence	-0.08 (0.18)	-0.24 (0.24)
EMB Capacity	0.29 (0.25)	0.66 (0.29)**
Federalism	0.25 (0.11)**	0.15 (0.11)
Mixed System	-0.04 (0.11)	0.21 (0.10)**
Effective Number of Parties	-0.03 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)*
GDP	0.04 (0.02)**	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	1.42 (1.22)	-3.48 (1.96)*
<i>N</i>	44	44
adj. R-sq	0.159	0.411

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

Figure 2.2 displays how levels of SWD for winners and losers change as the score of electoral integrity increases. When electoral integrity is low, losers are significantly less satisfied than winners on average. However, once electoral integrity is higher, losers have closer levels of SWD to winners, whereas winners' SWD does not change substantially across electoral integrity scores. This implies that so long as politicians win, they are more satisfied with democracy, even if the elections in their country have lower electoral integrity. This finding differs from what occurs with citizens' SWD and electoral integrity. In contrast, both citizens who won and lost value the absence of electoral fraud when it comes to their SWD (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), whereas politicians who won appear to be agnostic on electoral integrity, at least when it comes to their own SWD.

Figure 2.2: Predictive Values of Democratic Satisfaction Across Electoral Integrity (for Winners and Losers)



Note: The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

The Conditional Effect of Left-to-Right Political Ideology

The final model examines whether politicians' position on the left-to-right ideological spectrum influences the effect of EMB capacity on politicians' SWD. Politicians self-rank their ideological position on a scale from 0 (left) to 10 (right), with 5 being the ideological centre. This expectation is tested using the same method that was used for the conditional role of winning or losing. For these models, two aggregate dependent variables were calculated: the first is the mean level of SWD for politicians on the left (0–4), and the second is the mean level of SWD for politicians on the right (6–10). Because the rank of five is the exact cutoff point on the scale, politicians who self-placed at five were excluded from both measures since they represent the centre of the ideological spectrum. Even if politicians who self-placed at the rank of five are included, the results do not change substantially (see Appendix 2 for this model). Each country's averages are once again weighted to ensure any political party is not over or underrepresented. The model only contains 47 out of the 49 elections since political ideology is excluded from the surveys for Finland in 2007 and New Zealand in 2011. The effect of EMB capacity on SWD for left-wing and right-wing politicians is subsequently regressed.

The results in Table 2.3 indicate that while EMB capacity is not significant for politicians on the ideological left, it is significant ($p < 0.05^{**}$) for politicians on the ideological right. These findings reject the article's final expectation (H3b). Interestingly, this means that we should instead expect that in countries with EMBs that have greater resources, SWD will be greater for politicians on the ideological right. Figure 2.3 displays how levels of SWD change across the score of EMB capacity for politicians on the ideological left and right. When EMB capacity is lower, levels of SWD for leftist and rightist politicians are similar. While SWD increases for both politicians on

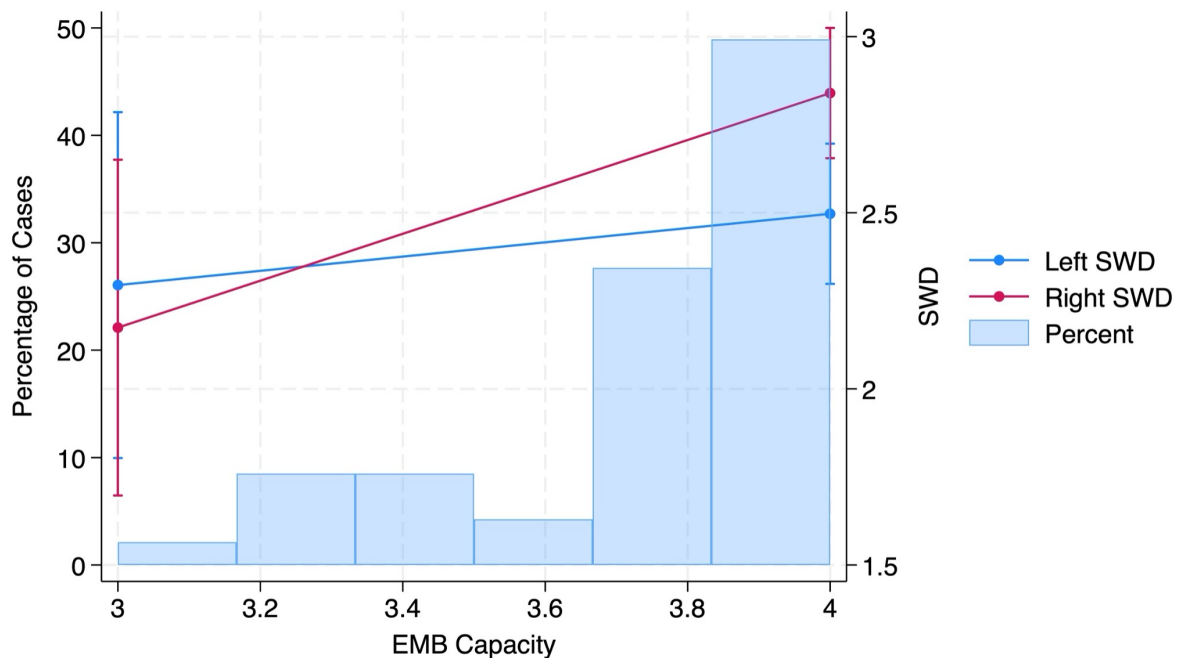
the left and right as EMB capacity increases, it does not increase at a significant rate for politicians on the left, whereas it does for politicians on the right.

Table 2.3: EMB capacity on SWD for politicians on the ideological left and right.

	(1) Left SWD	(2) Right SWD
EMB Capacity	0.20 (0.32)	0.67 (0.31)**
Electoral Integrity	0.04 (0.02)**	0.02 (0.01)*
EMB Independence	−0.21 (0.24)	−0.12 (0.22)
Federalism	0.12 (0.10)	0.20 (0.11)*
Mixed System	0.15 (0.10)	0.15 (0.11)
Effective Number of Parties	0.01 (0.02)	−0.09 (0.04)**
GDP	0.03 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)**
Constant	−1.39 (1.78)	−1.30 (0.86)
<i>N</i>	47	47
adj. R-sq	0.237	0.305

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

Figure 2.3: Predictive Values of Democratic Satisfaction Across EMB Capacity (for Left-to-Right Ideology)



Note: The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

These findings are in direct contrast to what was expected. James's (2012) argument about politicians and voter turnout states that politicians on the right attempt to restrict voting procedures that increase turnout, while those on the left attempt to expand procedures that increase turnout. Because more resources result in better election procedures (which helps to expand voting procedures or access to the vote), it would be expected that those interested in having lower turnout would be more satisfied when EMBs have fewer resources. Interestingly, electoral integrity is significant ($p < 0.05^{**}$) for politicians on the left (coefficient: 0.04) while only significant at ($p < 0.10^{*}$) for politicians on the right (coefficient: 0.02). While both electoral integrity and EMB capacity are important for free and fair elections, future work should continue to examine the

relationship between a politician's political ideology and which part(s) of the election process concerns them most.

Discussion and Conclusion

This article serves as a starting point for developing theories about the relationships between politicians' SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs. It examined whether electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs affect cross-national levels of politicians' SWD. Overall, it finds that electoral integrity and at least one characteristic of EMBs influence cross-national levels of politicians' SWD. Because of the limited available data on politicians' perceptions of electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs, future research should build on this article by surveying politicians about these topics in conjunction with questions about SWD, to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms at work. These findings therefore serve as a starting point to help address a major gap in the SWD literature and have important implications for discussions on democratic stability. Both topics are highlighted by the article's key three findings.

First, levels of politicians' SWD are higher in countries with higher electoral integrity. However, the impacts of electoral integrity on politicians' SWD are not the same among all politicians. Specifically, when electoral integrity is lower in a country, politicians who lost the election have significantly lower levels of SWD than winners. When electoral integrity is higher in a country, losers' SWD increases. Politicians that won therefore have much higher levels of SWD relative to losers when electoral integrity is low. This result should concern readers: levels of electoral integrity in a country have a greater impact on politicians' SWD when they lose, while politicians who win do not seem to be substantially impacted in terms of their democratic

satisfaction. Since low levels of electoral integrity negatively effects SWD for citizens regardless of winning or losing (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), these results highlight a key difference between citizens' and politicians' SWD in the context of elections. Interestingly, this finding about politicians matches Fortin-Rittberger et al.'s (2017, p. 353) original rationale about winning being more important than electoral fairness for SWD. While this rationale is rejected when examining citizens, it holds for politicians, inferring that when politicians win, their commitments to electoral fairness are weaker than their equivalent citizens. This is important because politicians can influence institutional processes in their country (Friedman & Wong, 2008), yet winners in elections are less supportive of changes to institutions (Bowler et al., 2006). If levels of electoral integrity have less of an impact on the SWD of politicians who win, then they might (further) lack the incentive to change electoral processes when electoral integrity is low. This is not an issue when electoral integrity in a country is high but could make maintaining democratic stability more difficult when electoral processes are weaker since politicians that won may be less concerned about issues of electoral integrity.

The second key finding is that after considering the article's control variables, EMB independence from the government does not significantly influence the average level of SWD of politicians in the surveyed countries. Because there are contradictory theories in the literature about how an EMB's independence might affect politicians' confidence or trust in the election process (Estévez et al., 2008; Rosas, 2010), it may not be surprising that there are no significant results about the relationship between EMB independence and politicians' levels of SWD. Yet, there is also a convention among both practitioners and academics that having an independent EMB is part of the ideal of election management since it better enables election officials to impartially and neutrally administer elections (Garnett, 2022, p. 148; Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002,

p. 15). While the independence of EMBs may still be important administratively, it seems to matter less for SWD once other factors are considered. However, it is difficult to provide definitive reasoning to explain the lack of significant results given the available data. Future studies could therefore assess politicians' perceptions of their country's EMB(s) independence to better understand this relationship.

The third and final key finding of this article is that the level of politicians' SWD increases in countries with EMBs that have a higher capacity (greater resources) to administer elections. EMB capacity may significantly influence politicians' levels of SWD (in contrast to EMB independence) because the relationship between an EMB's capacity and the quality of the election processes is clearer (more resources means that the EMB has a higher capacity to prevent malpractice or electoral fraud). However, it is important to note that a politician's position on the left-to-right ideological spectrum influences the degree to which EMB capacity has a positive effect on their SWD. In contrast to what was expected from the literature, the effect of EMB capacity on SWD is greater for politicians on the ideological right than those on the ideological left (since the effect is not significant for politicians on the left). Future work could assess why EMB capacity might be more important for politicians' SWD on the right than those on the left.

In conclusion, while these findings serve as a starting point for examining the relationships between politicians' SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs, more work must be done by assessing the individual opinions of politicians about these electoral determinants. More broadly, understanding these relationships is important for the study of democratic stability, especially as more countries experience some form of democratic decline. Because politicians can influence the views of citizens and the processes of democratic institutions, it is crucial that we better understand their attitudes towards both the electoral process and the way that democracy

works in their country. Future research might also consider whether other democratic-related determinants like legislative processes, political institutions, and party politics, influence politicians' SWD. While these attitudes may not be concerning when representative democratic systems are working as intended, they can become harmful in cases where democratic processes begin to weaken or fail. In this critical moment for democracy, it is imperative that researchers (re-)examine the processes and institutions of democratic countries – this must also include a better understanding of the politicians that lead these systems.

Appendix 2

Figure 2.A1: Average SWD by Country

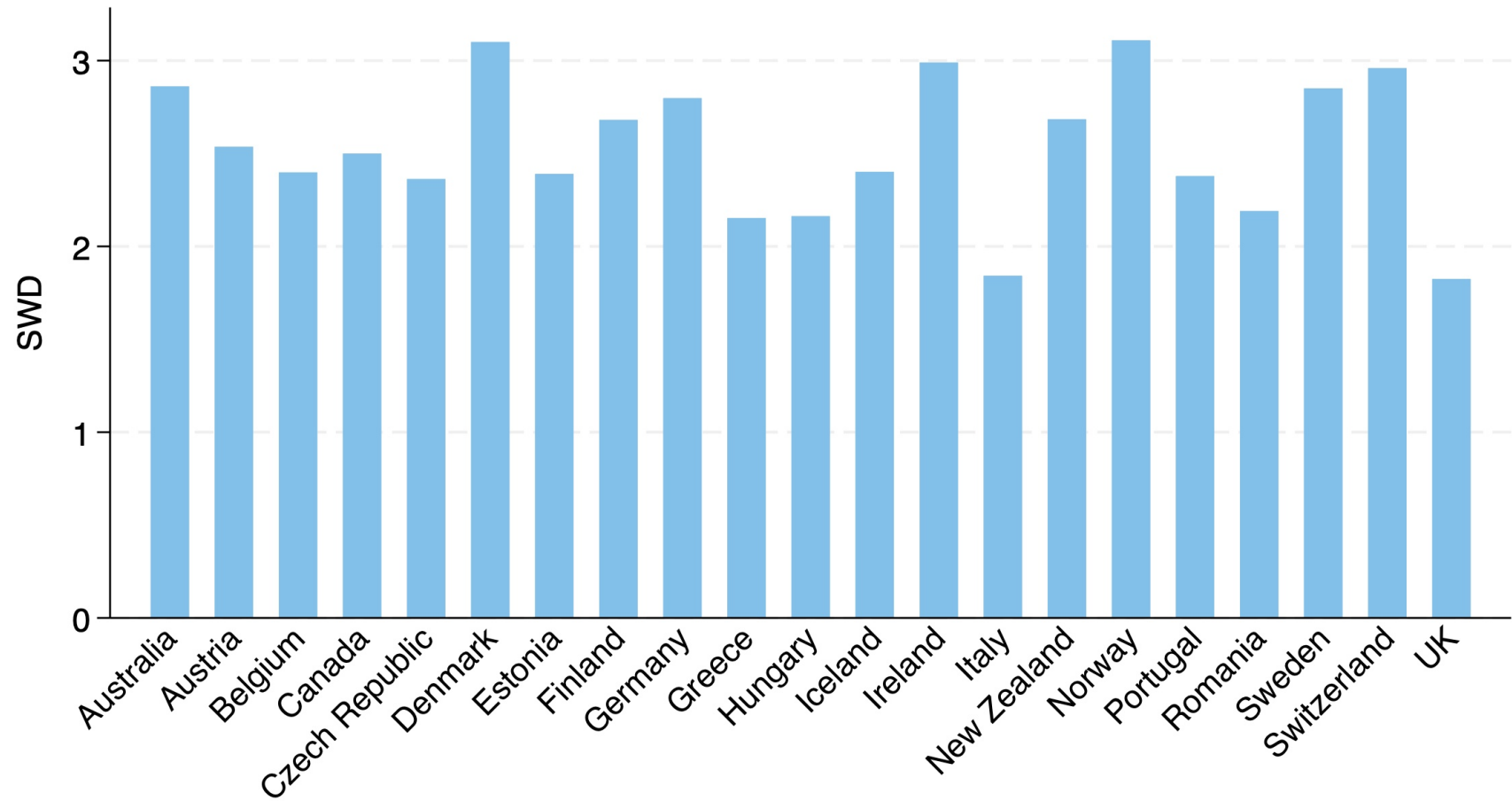


Table 2.A1: Individual-level analysis of Politicians' SWD (not aggregated)²¹

	(1) Integrity	(2) Independence	(3) Capacity	(4) Controls
Electoral Integrity	0.05 (0.00)***			0.05 (0.00)***
EMB Independence		0.05 (0.02)**		-0.31 (0.02)***
EMB Capacity			1.02 (0.02)***	0.68 (0.03)***
Federalism				0.09 (0.01)***
Mixed System				0.12 (0.01)***
Effective Number of Parties				-0.04 (0.00)***
GDP				0.04 (0.00)***
Constant	-2.02 (0.13)***	2.53 (0.07)***	-1.17 (0.09)***	-3.15 (0.15)***
<i>N</i>	26,183	26,183	26,183	26,183
adj. R-sq	0.067	0.000	0.076	0.132

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

²¹ It should be noted that while the significance of the effects on SWD increased in most cases (due to the substantially higher number of observations when SWD is not aggregated) the direction and substance of the effects did not change in comparison to the main analysis. This speaks to the benefits of the more cautious approach taken in the main analysis with fewer observations.

Table 2.A2: 49 Observations for Losers' SWD

	(1) Winner	(2) Loser
Electoral Integrity	0.01 (0.01)	0.04 (0.02)**
EMB Independence	−0.08 (0.18)	−0.17 (0.24)
EMB Capacity	0.29 (0.25)	0.60 (0.27)**
Federalism	0.25 (0.11)**	0.20 (0.11)*
Mixed System	−0.04 (0.11)	0.24 (0.10)**
Effective Number of Parties	−0.03 (0.03)	−0.06 (0.03)**
GDP	0.04 (0.02)**	0.04 (0.02)**
Constant	1.42 (1.22)	−2.85 (1.46)*
<i>N</i>	44	49
adj. R-sq	0.159	0.398

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

Table 2.A3: Centrist Politicians Included in Both Left and Right SWD Measurements

	(1) Left SWD	(2) Right SWD
EMB Capacity	0.35 (0.30)	0.79 (0.27)***
Electoral Integrity	0.04 (0.02)**	0.02 (0.01)*
EMB Independence	−0.23 (0.24)	−0.12 (0.23)
Federalism	0.20 (0.11)*	0.26 (0.11)**
Mixed System	0.18 (0.10)*	0.21 (0.10)*
Effective Number of Parties	−0.01 (0.03)	−0.09 (0.03)**
GDP	0.03 (0.02)*	0.05 (0.02)**
Constant	−1.94 (1.52)	−1.76 (0.80)**
<i>N</i>	47	47
adj. R-sq	0.308	0.403

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

When politicians with a self-placement of five are included in both measures (to account for the ideological centre) the results do not change substantially. The results for ‘Left SWD’ are still not significant, while the results for ‘Right SWD’ are more significant ($p < 0.01$ ***) and the coefficient increases from (0.67) to (0.79).

Chapter 3: Are democratic idealists more satisfied with democracy?²²

Abstract

While the literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction is vast and well-established, less research has been conducted to assess politicians' levels of satisfaction with democracy (SWD). This is necessary to examine, as politicians are major actors in democratic states that represent citizens in legislatures. This article begins to address the gap in the SWD scholarship by utilizing various theories that postulate how voters behave during elections. Specifically, I examine whether politicians' (the representatives') beliefs about voters (whom they represent) influence their democratic satisfaction. Using survey data of Canadian municipal representatives from the Canadian Municipal Barometer (2021-2024), this article demonstrates that representatives are more satisfied with the way democracy works when they believe their system is working in accordance with classic democratic ideals. Representatives who believe that voters make decisions based on deeply held partisan or group identities (Democratic Realists) are less satisfied with democracy than representatives who think voters base their decisions on policy preferences (Democratic Idealists).

²² This chapter has been revised and resubmitted to the journal *Representation*.

Introduction

Public opinion researchers are showing increasing interest in studying politicians, might they be candidates in elections or elected members of legislatures (Kertzer & Renshon, 2022). Politicians are a kind of political elite that represent citizens interests in political institutions (Pitkin, 1967) and attempt to have influence over several parts of the political system (Parry, 1969). Furthermore, they are key actors during and after elections in democratic countries, since they either run as candidates and lose, or win and become representative elites (Best & Vogel, 2018, p. 339). Given their central role in democratic countries and the influence they can have over citizens as representatives, it is important to examine politicians' public opinion in the larger context of studying democracy.

Recent research on politicians investigates their behaviors and attitudes. This includes their decision-making processes, policy choices, and risk tolerance (Sheffer & Loewen, 2019a, 2019b; Sheffer et al., 2018), politicians' (often inaccurate) assessment of the preferences and opinions of constituents (Broockman & Skovron, 2018; Sevenans et al., 2023; Walgrave et al., 2023), whether they influence and/or attempt to respond to public opinion (Lenz, 2012; Merkley et al., 2020; Santoro et al., 2021), and how they interact with or assist certain groups within their constituencies (Broockman, 2013; Ferland et al., 2025b; Pereira, 2021). Importantly, there are compositional differences between the characteristic traits of politicians in comparison to the masses (Kertzer, 2022) as well as beliefs politicians have that differ from those held by their corresponding citizens (Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024).

Empirical studies have shown that the attitudes of politicians frequently differ from those of citizens, however, more work examining politicians' satisfaction with democracy (SWD) is needed. While the literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction is well-established (see Singh and

Mayne, 2023 for a recent literature review), only some research has considered the SWD of elected representatives (Esaiasson et al., 2013; Häfner et al., 2023; Rosón & Díaz, 2020) or of both elected representatives and politicians who were not elected (Ferland et al., 2025a; Gaspard, 2025). This article builds on these developments and examines whether *politicians' beliefs about voters* might influence their democratic satisfaction. By *politicians' beliefs about voters*, I mean whether politicians think (1) voters are motivated by their policy preferences at elections instead of being driven by their social and partisan identities, and (2) have the capacity to reward and punish incumbents for their actions.²³

Previous work on politicians' beliefs about voters show that politicians have different theories about the behavior of voters (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024). More often than not, politicians hold views akin to “democratic realism” – the belief that voters are largely ignorant about politics, single-issue oriented, and focused on the short-term (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024, p. 12). Other politicians hold views akin to “democratic idealism”, which instead posits that voters are rational and informed decision-makers (Downs, 1957), and vote for candidates with policy positions that are closest to their own views (Jessee, 2009, 2012; Schonfeld & Winter-Levy, 2021). I expect that politicians will have higher democratic satisfaction when their beliefs about voters conform to democratic ideals about the way citizens and their representatives *ought* to engage (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 478), especially since politicians are

²³ Recent work on politicians' beliefs about voters identify at least eight theoretical debates politicians may hold (Lucas et al., 2024b). The eight debates include: (1) whether voters rely on their identity or policy preference(s) to vote; (2) whether voters are oriented towards long-term or short-term policy concerns; (3) whether voters are ignorant or knowledgeable about politics; (4) whether voters consider multiple issues or only a single issue when voting; (5) whether political parties and ideas or political leaders motivate voters; (6) whether voters are prospective and focus on policies that could occur, or are retrospective and care more about policies that did occur; (7) whether voters are sociotropic (choose to assess the state of the overall environment they are part of) or egocentric (only focus on their own circumstances); and (8) whether voters (un)fairly reward (or punish) politicians for actions within (or outside of) their control. This article only considers two of these debates because in some cases, it is unclear how their beliefs fit into expectations of voter behavior through the lens of democratic ideals, while in other cases there is limited data available to conduct multi-year analyses.

usually favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018). Put differently, politicians' democratic satisfaction should be higher when they believe their system is working in accordance with democratic norms – specifically, among democratic idealists who hold views of voters that are more positive and consistent with classic democratic theories (Dahl, 1971; Key, 1966; Schumpeter, 1943). Studying the connection between politicians' SWD and their beliefs about voters is important for assessing politicians' views and behaviours about the way their democracy works. Politicians' theories about voters can change how they engage with the electorate. For example, they might believe they must mobilize voters around social identities or appeal to voters by advancing policy stances. Consequently, these behaviours shape what occurs during election campaigns and could have a negative (or positive) impact on how citizens believe the way democracy works.

To assess whether politicians' democratic satisfaction is influenced by their beliefs about voters, this article uses data from the Canadian Municipal Barometer (2021-2024),²⁴ which considers responses from elected municipal representatives in over 1,000 municipalities across Canada. Surveying representatives at the municipal level is useful for studying politicians' behaviours because of the larger sample size available relative to other levels of government. The findings demonstrate that politicians who believe that voters make decisions based on deeply held identities (democratic realists) are less satisfied with democracy than those that think voters base their decisions on policy preferences (democratic idealists). However, politicians' beliefs about whether voters correctly or unfairly blame them for their actions does not significantly influence their democratic satisfaction once other factors are considered.

²⁴ The author would like to thank Professors Jack Lucas and Lior Sheffer for generously allowing the use of their data from the Canadian Municipal Barometer.

Democratic ideals, SWD and the role of representation

Studies on whether representation affects citizens' democratic satisfaction typically show that SWD is higher when there is more representation (congruence) between an individual's preferences and the policies adopted by government (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Ferland, 2021; Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). From the perspective of politicians, having high levels of representation (and by consequence, higher citizens' SWD) is an important strategic consideration, as politicians attempt to maximize political support (Downs, 1957). Having congruence between representatives and citizens is also consistent with classic democratic ideals of a representative democracy (Dahl, 1971; Key, 1966). As discussed by Almond & Verba, citizens must trust that politicians will act in accordance with their preferences for the relationship between citizens and their representatives to work:

“Certain things are demanded of the ordinary citizen if elites are to be responsive to him: the ordinary citizen must express his point of view so that elites can know what he wants; he must be involved in politics so that he will know and care whether or not elites are being responsive, and he must be influential so as to enforce responsive behavior by the elites. In other words, elite responsiveness requires that the ordinary citizen act according to the rationality-activist model of citizenship. But if the alternate pole of elite power is to be achieved, quite contradictory attitudes and behavior are to be expected of the ordinary man. If elites are to be powerful and make authoritative decisions, then the involvement, activity, and influence of the ordinary man must be limited. The ordinary citizen must turn power over to elites and let them rule.” (Almond & Verba, 1963, p. 478)

This classic democratic ideal posits that citizens benefit by having their preferences met and enacted by their representatives, while politicians enjoy the power to govern on behalf of citizens.

When each side's conditions of this ideal are met, both groups should be more satisfied with the way democracy works.

The scholarship on citizens' democratic satisfaction shows that citizens' SWD is higher when their preferences are adopted by government. When elected representatives complete their part of the democratic ideal (by being responsive to citizens), citizens are more satisfied.²⁵ The counterpart of this democratic ideal, from the perspective of representatives, is that citizens should be informed, preference-oriented, and have the capacity to fairly reward or punish their representatives. Representatives should therefore generally be more satisfied when they believe voters behave in accordance with classic democratic ideals. Consequently, representatives' democratic satisfaction should be influenced by their beliefs about voters.

Indeed, the beliefs of representatives are subjective, and the way voters determine who to vote for may differ from what representatives believe about voters. However, as discussed in the next section of this article, there are ongoing debates about how voters choose their preferred candidate. Furthermore, citizens' beliefs about their representatives (like their perceptions of a representative's ideological position) or citizens' beliefs about government performance (such as their perception of the government's effectiveness or how well the economy is performing) are also subjective. Therefore, even if what representatives believe about voters is (in)accurate, there is value in understanding their beliefs, as it may change how representatives think about, or engage in, their democratic system as decision-makers.

²⁵ While input factors like the quality of democracy matter for citizens' SWD, it should be noted that output factors like government effectiveness have a greater effect on citizens' democratic satisfaction (see Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014). However, input factors are still important to examine, especially in the broader context of the study of democracy and the way representatives engage with or think about citizens.

Politicians' theories about voters

There are several kinds of beliefs that politicians might have about voters. These include beliefs about how voters behave (Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024), whether voters care about long-term choices (Sheffer et al., 2024, p. 403), or which factors matter most to voters when they decide which political party to support (Strömbäck et al., 2013). Politicians' individual circumstances might also influence their beliefs. For example, John W. Kingdon (1967) finds that elected politicians are most likely to believe that voters are informed and vote based on the quality of candidates, whereas politicians who lost believe that voters are uninformed and vote based on party labels. Other works show that partisanship as well as different models of party competition can influence the way in which politicians believe that voters behave (Ekengren & Oscarsson, 2011).

This article assumes that politicians' beliefs about voters might also influence their satisfaction with the way democracy works. There are different models (theories of elections) that exist which attempt to explain how voters *should* behave in representative democracies. As noted earlier, politicians hold different beliefs about voters which are associated with different theories of elections (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024; Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024). It is therefore plausible that when politicians think voters behave in accordance with one of these theories of elections, that these beliefs might influence politicians' SWD. Building on the work of Achen and Bartels (2017), this article presents three classic theories of elections that directly connect to democratic ideals and that have recently received attention in other parts of the literature (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024): (1) *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting* versus (2) *democratic realism* and *group politics*, and then (3) *retrospective theory*.

Democratic idealism versus democratic realism

Democratic idealism contends that the policy platforms of candidates or political parties dictate the electoral decisions of voters. This means that voters look to the future for their decision-making during elections and vote for parties that best represent their own preferences. This theory is formalized by the *spatial voting* model of voting behaviour, which presupposes that voters support candidates with policy positions that are closest to their own views (Downs, 1957; Jessee, 2009, 2012; Schonfeld & Winter-Levy, 2021). After being elected, representatives would then pursue policies that will help them win again in the future, which some have found does indeed occur in practice (Ansolabehere et al., 2001). *Spatial voting* and consequently *democratic idealism* are consistent with the democratic norms that Almond and Verba (1963) and others (Dahl, 1971; Downs, 1957) believe is needed to maintain the civic culture of a democratic system. The citizen is active in knowing what their preferences are and votes for a politician that reflects those preferences but then becomes passive when their representative governs on their behalf. There are at least two reasons to expect that democratic idealists should have higher SWD. First, politicians are typically favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018), so they should be more satisfied when they believe their system is working in accordance with democratic norms. Second, within the model of *spatial voting*, the voter must be sufficiently informed to determine which politician best represents their own preferences. This is not an unrealistic expectation of citizens, since past empirical evidence finds that the policy opinions of voters closely aligns with the political party they vote for (Costello et al., 2012; Dalton et al., 2011), and that changes to a political party's ideology does cause voters to support a different party (Ferland & Dassonneville, 2021). Since politicians primarily campaign by taking stances on policy issues, it must be satisfying to believe

that voters act on those stances. For elected representatives in particular, believing voters made an informed policy decision (to elect them to office) should on its own make representatives happy, but it may also provide them with a greater sense of legitimacy and authority to govern and enact policies on behalf of voters. Given these rationales, it is expected that elected representatives should have higher democratic satisfaction if they believe that voters behave in accordance with *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting*:

H1: Elected representatives who believe voters cast their vote based on their policy preferences are more satisfied with the working of democracy.

An alternative model to *democratic idealism* is *democratic realism*. *Democratic realism* assumes that voters do not make their electoral decisions based on sound policy preferences but rather on other factors like the groups or social identities that they belong to (*group politics*) (Achen & Bartels, 2017). Democratic realists also believe that voters cannot fulfill the democratic ideal of making rational decisions about their preferences, making *democratic realism* and *group politics* the antithesis of *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting*. For example, Joseph Schumpeter states that when it comes to national-level policy issues that voters “prove themselves bad and indeed corrupt judges of such issues, and often they even prove themselves bad judge of their own long-run interests” (1943, p. 260), and that “the typical citizen drops down to a lower level of mental performance as soon as he enters the political field” (p. 262). Whereas political elites and hyper-involved citizens can connect their interests to different policy preferences and hold consistent ideological beliefs, the vast majority of voters do not (Converse, 2006; Kinder & Kalmoe, 2017). Rather than using policy preferences or issues as a guide for making political decisions, the average citizen may instead prioritize their partisanship or political identity (Campbell et al., 1960, p. 16; Mason, 2018, p. 16) when casting their ballot. Others have found

that voters will even blindly adopt a politician's policy stances "even when they know little or nothing of that politician's overall ideology" (Lenz, 2012, p. 3).

Democratic realism therefore contends that the typical voter does not have the knowledge, willingness, or commitment that is needed to make political decisions that are based on policy preferences or their interests. Voters instead use the various attitudes of politicians and political parties towards social groups as cues to more easily understand politics, rather than focusing on the intricacies of policy issues (Achen & Bartels, 2017, p. 232). Practically, this means that during elections and in the realm of politics, the average voter will make decisions based on the groups they belong to and "acquire partisan loyalties by means of childhood and socialization" (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024, pp. 2-3). Because *democratic realism* and *group politics* is the antithesis of *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting*, it is expected that elected representatives who are democratic realists should have lower democratic satisfaction.

H2: Elected representatives who believe voters cast their vote based on their social/political identities are less satisfied with the working of democracy.

The two rationales informing this expectation (H2) are the opposite of those presented for (H1). First, since politicians are typically more favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018), it is unlikely that representatives will be more satisfied when they believe that the behaviour of voters contradicts traditional democratic norms. Second, if a voter's decision is not based on their policy preferences, then the mandate of the elected representative (or even the reason voters chose to elect them) is much less clear. Elected representatives like to believe that voters make their decisions based on the quality of candidates (Kingdon, 1967). However, the assumption that voters make decisions based on deeply held identities contradicts the belief that the politician and their policy stances are the driving-force behind the voter's decision.

Retrospective theory

Retrospective theory assumes that voters choose who to vote for based on the past successes or failures of their incumbent government or representative, rather than what parties or candidates could do in the future (Fiorina, 1981; Key, 1966). Unlike the future-oriented aspect of *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting*, proponents of *retrospective theory* believe that voters base their decision on how they anticipate the incumbent officeholder to behave if re-elected (Ferejohn, 1986, p. 8), rather than being driven by the promise of policies that could happen in the future (Downs, 1957). *Retrospective theory* puts the incumbent politician or political party at the centre of voters' choice. The decision to re-elect the incumbent or to take a risk on an unknown candidate ultimately depends on the voter's opinion of the incumbent. However, an important consideration of *retrospective theory* involves the criteria that voters use to reward or punish the incumbent. Ideally, if voters are retrospective, they should (fairly or correctly) reward or punish the actions of the incumbent. Some research is more generous towards voters' abilities to be clear-eyed in their judgements of incumbents (Fowler & Hall, 2018; Healy & Malhotra, 2013), while others argue that voters are blind in their judgements and (unfairly or incorrectly) reward or punish incumbents for reasons that have very little to do with their performance (Achen & Bartels, 2017; Healy et al., 2010). Either way, *retrospective theory* is worth considering in this study of politicians' SWD because past surveys and interviews of politicians demonstrate that they hold beliefs about whether voters (un)fairly and (in)correctly blame or reward them (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024; Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024).

While *retrospective theory* differs from *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting* in terms of its temporal consideration, its assumption that voters can fairly/correctly reward or punish the incumbent is still consistent with classic democratic norms, especially when it comes to elections

as an instrument of accountability (Powell, 2000). Although looking to the past actions of incumbents arguably requires less work than assessing future policy promises (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024, p. 2), it still forces voters to reflect on their priorities and to rationally decide whether they will punish or reward the incumbent. However, if voters unfairly/incorrectly reward or punish the incumbents and are blind in their retrospection, then the *retrospective theory* contradicts classic democratic norms. These rationales should also apply to representatives' beliefs about voters and its influence on democratic satisfaction. Specifically, if representatives believe that voters fairly/correctly reward or punish them for their actions, then their democratic satisfaction should be higher (whereas it should be lower if they believe voters unfairly/incorrectly reward or punish them). Because *retrospective theory* focuses on the voter's attitudes about the incumbent, the following expectation is appropriate for elected representatives in particular:

H3: Elected representatives who believe that voters correctly (unfairly) blame or reward them for actions within (outside of) their control, are more (less) satisfied with the working of democracy.

Methodology, Datasets, and Measurements

To test these expectations, this article relies on data from the Canadian Municipal Barometer (CMB), a multiyear annual survey of locally elected councillors and mayors from 1,000 municipalities across Canada (Lucas, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). To the author's knowledge, this is the only dataset on politicians that includes questions on both their beliefs about voters and SWD. Municipal representatives in Canada are responsible for local policy issues including local roads, public sewage, water supplies, public transit, cultural facilities and libraries, but the extent in which municipalities have authority over these decisions varies by province (Young, 2009). This is because municipal institutions ultimately exist at the discretion of the provinces under Canada's constitution (Government of Canada, 2025 (92(8))), so the responsibilities of municipal

representatives could vary by province. The data from the CMB spans over four years (2021 to 2024), to capture each survey year that poses questions about representatives' theories about voters. There are 867 responses in 2021, 1,020 responses in 2022, 1,034 responses in 2023, and 938 responses in 2024, for a total of 4,799 observations of municipal representatives across the four surveyed years. Due to non-responses for several variables of interest for this study, including lower response rates in some provinces and the territories, the number of observations in the analysis varies. This is not an issue since Canadian municipal politicians as a group are a small population,²⁶ so the sample still represents a substantial portion of this group. For transparency, any analysis in the article states when there are variations in the number of observations. The remainder of this article's methodological section explains the variables for the analysis.

Dependent Variable

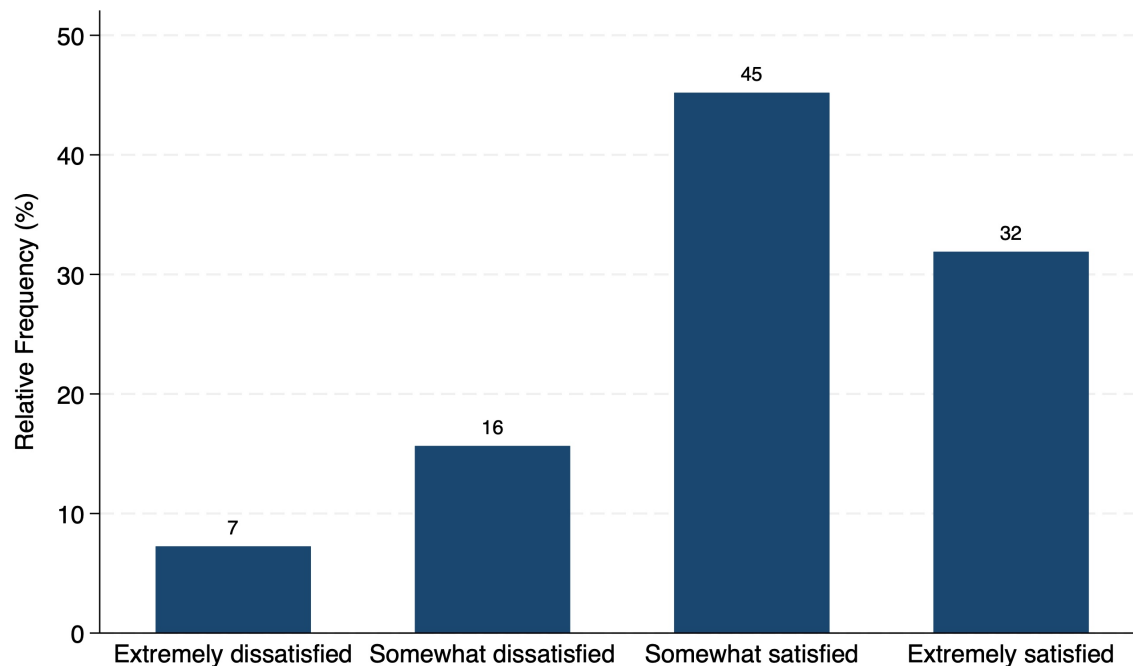
The dependent variable of this article is representatives' democratic satisfaction. This item is typically considered a mid-level indicator of political support (Norris, 1999), which falls between diffuse support (for the regime's principles, institutions, and performance) and more specific support for the political community, political actors like political parties (Ferland, 2015), or their evaluations of government (Weatherford, 1992). It captures "how well people generally think politics or governance is working" (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 9) in their country "which happens to be democratic" (p. 10). The CMB dataset has the common indicator that is used in studies of democratic satisfaction (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 7; Valgarðsson & Devine, 2022, p. 580) to measure individuals' level of democratic satisfaction: "in general, how satisfied are you

²⁶ While the number of municipal representatives varies greatly by municipality, they remain a relatively small population. For example, Canada's capital city of Ottawa has 24 councillors plus its mayor (City of Ottawa, 2025), whereas the nearby town of Smiths Falls has 6 councillors plus its mayor (The Town of Smiths Falls, 2025).

with the way democracy works in your municipality?” (Lucas, 2021, 2022, 2023, 2024). Respondents could select that they are either extremely dissatisfied, somewhat dissatisfied, somewhat satisfied, or extremely satisfied.²⁷ The reference to the working of democracy in a representative’s municipality (as opposed to the typical public opinion research question about their country) is necessary to assess their views as representatives, since the municipal level is the jurisdiction in which they were elected to and have power in. Figure 3.1 displays the relative frequency (%) of representatives that selected one of the four responses. 2,625 (77%) are either somewhat or extremely satisfied with the way democracy works in their municipality, whereas 780 (23%) are somewhat or extremely dissatisfied. The substantially higher number of politicians that are satisfied with the way democracy works is not surprising because the CMB surveys only elected representatives. Past work on citizens’ SWD (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais & Gélinau, 2007; Curini et al., 2012; Henderson, 2008) and newer work on politicians’ SWD (Ferland et al., 2025a; Gaspard, 2025) consistently demonstrates that winners in elections have higher democratic satisfaction than losers. Because the majority of respondents are somewhat or extremely satisfied with democracy, it is important to note that any potential effects of an independent variable on their SWD is more likely to have a small effect size. However, this also means that any significant effects on their democratic satisfaction are impactful enough in practice to influence these high levels of SWD.

²⁷ Respondents that were unsure of their democratic satisfaction were recoded as non-responses in the dataset.

Figure 3.1: Relative Frequency (%) of Responses for Representatives' SWD



Independent Variables

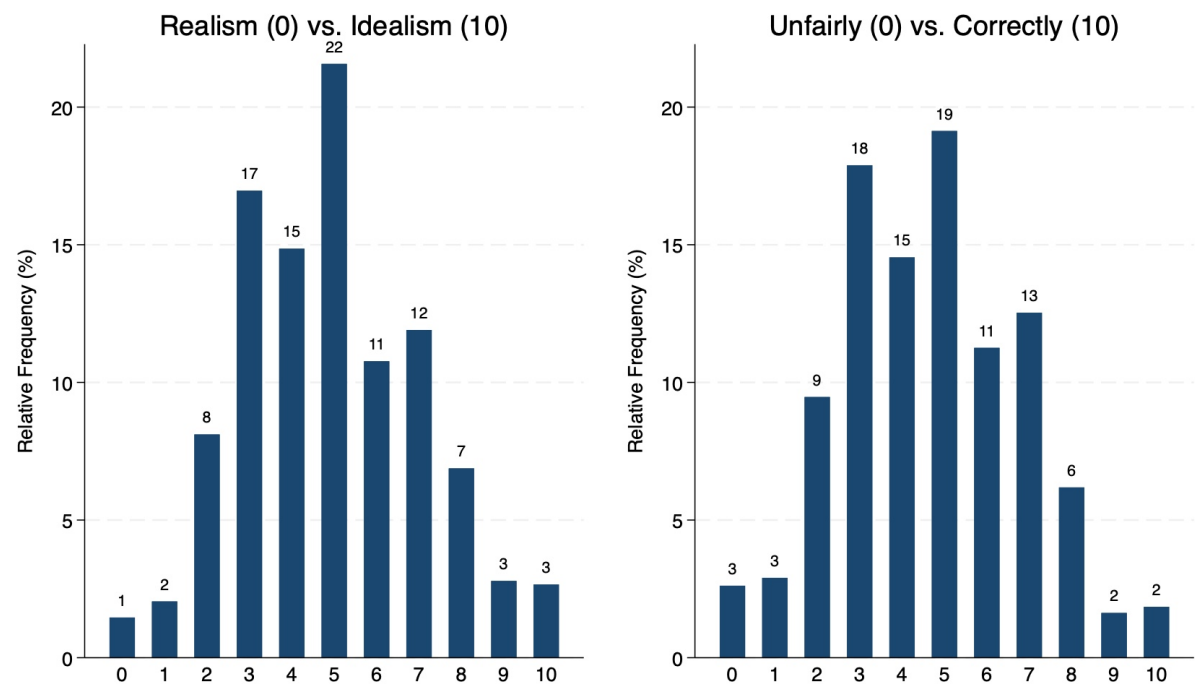
I consider two independent variables from the CMB surveys to test whether representatives' theories about voters effect their levels of SWD. For testing hypotheses 1 and 2 with respect to politicians' perceptions of voters being policy-motivated or identity-motivated, I use the following question: "Some say that voters make their decisions based on their policy preferences. Others say that voters' choices have much more to do with their deeply held partisan or other group identities. Where would you position yourself in this debate [on a 0 to 10 scale]?" with 0 being "policy preferences" and 10 "deeply held identities". I recode this *realism-idealism* variable so that 0 measures voters making decisions based on deeply held partisan or group identities and 10 based on policy preferences.

For hypothesis 3, which relates to politicians' perceptions of voters being able to unfairly or correctly assign blame, I use the question: "Some say that voters often blame or reward

politicians for events that are totally outside the politician's control. Others say that voters are good at knowing which events politicians are and are not responsible for." Respondents were also asked to locate themselves on a 0 (Unfairly Blame or Reward) to 10 (Correctly Blame or Reward) scale. The relative frequency (%) of responses among representatives for the Realism-Idealism and Unfairly-Correctly variables are both illustrated in Figure 3.2.

The frequency of representatives' responses for their theories about voters varies much more than their levels of SWD. When it comes to representatives' beliefs about voters on the Realism-Idealism debate, 43% of representatives think voters make decisions based on deeply held identities (0-4), 36% think it is policy preferences (6-10), and 22% chose the cutoff point (mean 5.09). For representatives' beliefs about whether voters unfairly or correctly reward and blame politicians (the *Retrospective Theory* debate), 48% of representatives believe voters do so unfairly (0-4), 34% believe voters do so correctly (6-10), and 19% chose the cutoff point (mean 4.67). Therefore, a greater number of representatives in the sample are democratic realists. While this observation has been noted in previous studies on politicians' theories about voters (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024; Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024), it is worth re-stating within the context of representatives' democratic satisfaction.

Figure 3.2: Relative Frequency (%) of Responses for Representatives’ Theories about Voters



Control Variables

I control for six common individual-level control variables in the article’s models to account for differences in the social identities or circumstances of the respondents: the year that they were born (age); their gender identity (gender); their racial background (race); the highest level of education they completed (education); the province or territory in which they reside (jurisdiction); and the year the survey was conducted (year). It should be noted that ‘race’ was recoded as a binary variable (“white” and “visible minority”) since 89% of respondents were white with the remaining 11% of respondents split between twelve separate groups. While it is important to consider the experiences of different groups, this categorization was done to simplify the statistical analysis, given the very low number of respondents for some groups. Additionally, due to low response rates in some provinces and the territories, the analysis only considers elected

municipal politicians from Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Ontario, New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Quebec, and Saskatchewan (any jurisdiction with fewer than 2% of the total observations were dropped).

I also consider three control variables which could influence the beliefs or behaviour of these individuals in their position as elected politicians: their self-placement on the left-to-right political ideological scale (ideology),²⁸ the office (coded as 1 for mayor or deputy mayor and 2 for councillor) in which they were elected to at the time of the survey (position),²⁹ and their views on the overall fiscal health of their municipality at the time of the survey (economy).³⁰ The complete list of variables is listed in Appendix 3. To investigate whether the democratic satisfaction of elected representatives is influenced by their beliefs about voters, OLS regressions are estimated using the previously listed variables.

Results

The results of the linear regressions are presented in Table 3.1. Each column adds a variable of interest to control for. Column one shows the effects of the Realism-Idealism variable on SWD, Unfairly-Correctly in column two, and the remaining control variables in column three. Because there were some non-responses across variables, the observations differ in each model (3,079 in column one, 3,130 in column two, and 2,619 in column three when the control variables are considered). The adjusted R-squared for the models are low because most representatives in the sample are either somewhat or very satisfied with democracy, which also explains the smaller

²⁸ Previous studies have found that politicians' perspectives or attitudes towards various issues are driven by ideology (Lauener & Bernhard, 2023; Reinl & Giebler, 2021).

²⁹ The position of Canadian municipal politicians influences who they believe it is important to represent, how they spend their time, and which activities they focus on (Blidook et al., 2021). Since this is connected to their role as representatives, it could arguably affect their views of both voters and their democratic system.

³⁰ Other works in the SWD literature demonstrate that economic factors can influence individuals' democratic satisfaction (Kölln & Aarts, 2021; Kornberg & Clarke, 1992; Quaranta & Martini, 2016).

effect size of any significant variables. Arguably, the low variability of representatives' SWD demonstrates the actual impact of the results. Even though 77% of representatives are somewhat or very satisfied with democracy, their theories about voters still has a significant effect on their views about the way democracy is working.

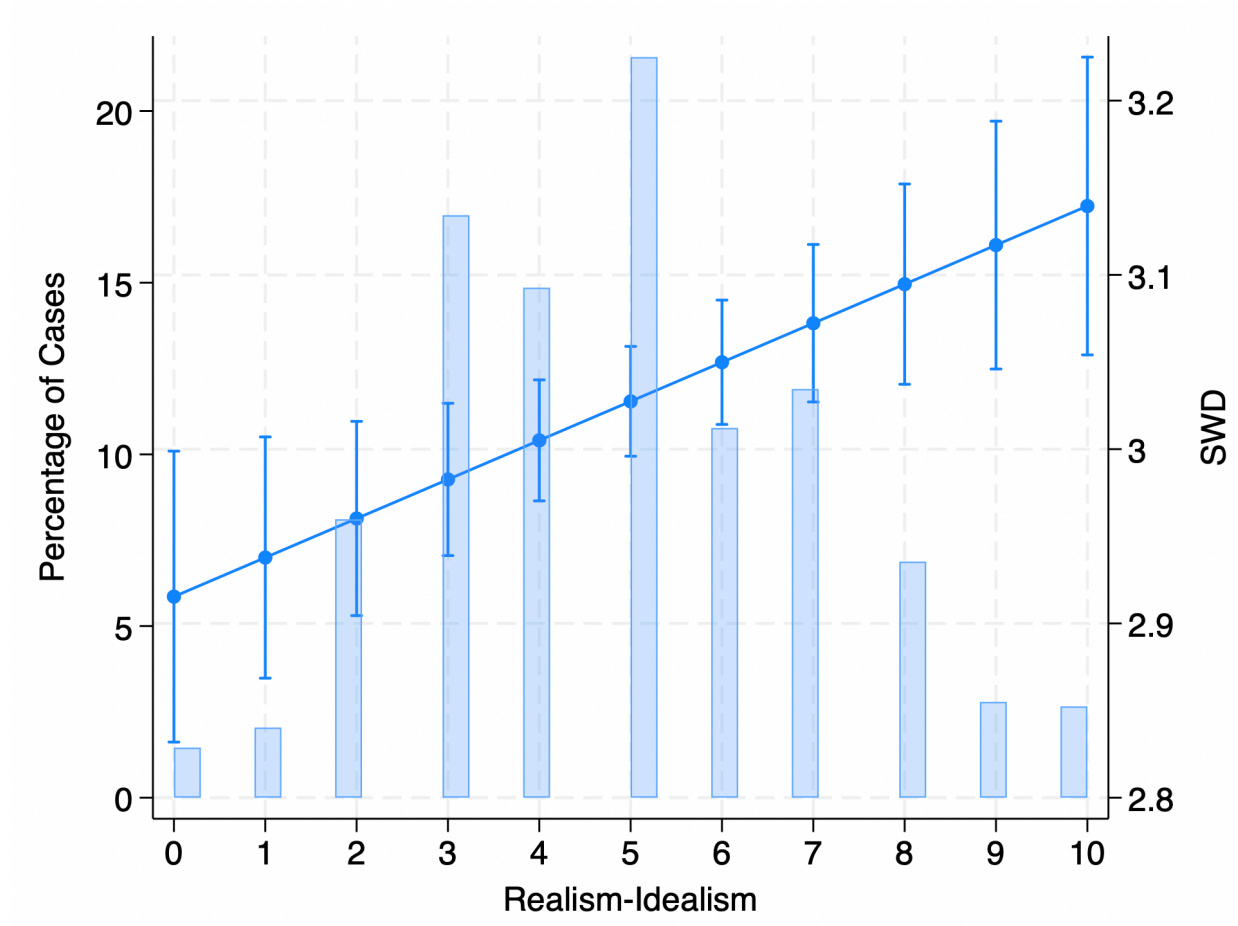
As expected, the effect of the Realism-Idealism variable on representatives' SWD is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01^{***}$) in both models. Since the variable measures "0" as voters making decisions based on deeply held partisan or group identities and "10" as policy preferences, the results demonstrate that representatives who believe voters make decisions based on policy preferences (democratic idealists) will have higher SWD than those who believe that voters make decisions based on their deeply held identities (democratic realists). This is in line with the rationale presented for H1 and H2. The strength of this effect shows a coefficient of (0.03) in the first model and (0.02) in the final model with the control variables. While the coefficient in the final model seems small, Figure 3.3 illustrates its substantive effect. The graph shows that representatives who believe that voters base their decision entirely on deeply held beliefs have a SWD score of 2.9, whereas those who believe voters do so entirely based on policy preferences are just above 3.1. At first glance, this is a small increase in democratic satisfaction. However, if we consider the very low variability in representatives' SWD and that most are satisfied with democracy in their municipalities, this increase in their democratic satisfaction (even when controlling for individual-level and systemic-level variables) is quite telling. These findings therefore confirm both H1 and H2.

Table 3.1: The effect of representatives' beliefs about voters on their SWD

	(1) Realism-Idealism	(2) Unfairly-Correctly	(3) Controls
Realism-Idealism	0.03 (0.01)***		0.02 (0.01)***
Unfairly-Correctly		0.01 (0.01)*	0.00 (0.01)
Age			−0.00 (0.00)
Female			−0.07 (0.04)*
Other			0.04 (0.06)
Visible Minority			−0.01 (0.05)
Education			0.01 (0.01)
Left-Right			0.00 (0.01)
Councilor			−0.25 (0.04)***
Economy			0.11 (0.01)***
2022			0.01 (0.05)
2023			0.05 (0.05)
2024			0.10 (0.05)**
NB			−0.33 (0.12)***
QC			−0.46 (0.08)***
ON			−0.17 (0.07)**
MB			−0.18 (0.14)
SK			−0.10 (0.10)
AB			−0.09 (0.08)
BC			−0.19 (0.08)**
Constant	2.89 (0.04)***	2.96 (0.04)***	2.54 (0.16)***
<i>N</i>	3079	3130	2619
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.004	0.001	0.097

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

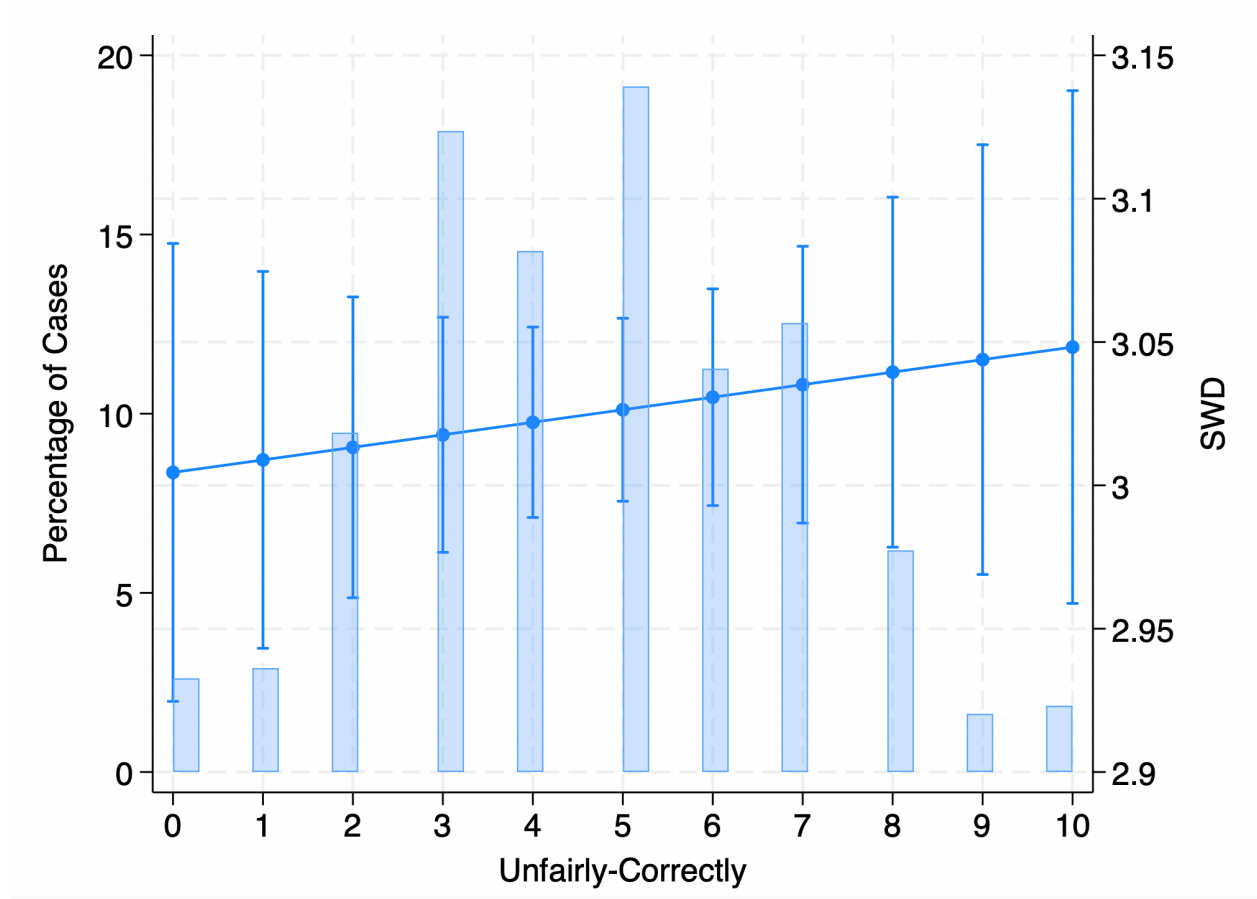
Figure 3.3: Predicted values of SWD across values of Realism-Idealism



Note: Figure 3.3 illustrates the predicted values of SWD across the Realism-Idealism belief about voters. The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

Moving to the results regarding representatives' beliefs about voters unfairly (0 out of 10) or correctly (10 out of 10) rewarding or blaming them for their actions, the analysis in Table 3.1 initially shows that the size of the effect is very small with a coefficient of (0.01) and a significance of ($p < 0.10^*$). Once we account for the control variables in column three of Table 3.1, the relationship is no longer significant. Even though the positive direction of the relationship is consistent with what was expected for H3 (see Figure 3.4), the lack of a significant effect in the final model and its very small coefficient means that H3 is not confirmed.

Figure 3.4: Predicted values of Unfairly-Correctly across SWD



Note: Figure 3.4 illustrates the predicted values of SWD across the Unfairly-Correctly belief about voters. The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

The findings of this analysis demonstrate that when representatives hold beliefs that are in line with *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting*, their SWD will be higher (H1), whereas when those beliefs are in line with *democratic realism* and *group politics*, their SWD will be lower (H2). However, this does not apply to their beliefs about voters (un)fairly rewarding or blaming them (H3) once control variables are considered. The results for H1 and H2 suggest that when representatives hold beliefs about voters that are consistent with classic democratic ideals that they will have higher SWD. Additionally, the control variables demonstrate that when municipal

representatives' satisfaction with the economy is high, so will their SWD. This is consistent with the broader literature on the influence of perceptions of the economy on democratic satisfaction and public opinion (Cutler et al., 2023; Daoust & Nadeau, 2021). Interestingly, among elected representatives, councilors are less satisfied ($p < 0.01^{***}$) than mayors and deputy mayors by a coefficient of (0.25). This likely speaks to the effect of different kinds of winners in local government; elected officials with additional influence (like mayors or deputy mayors) will be more satisfied than other elected officials (councilors). Interestingly, at the national level, politicians who are elected and part of the government are not significantly more satisfied than politicians who were elected as part of the opposition (Ferland et al., 2025a). Therefore, the type of win among elected officials may only begin to affect democratic satisfaction once the amount of influence they can gain within their jurisdiction crosses a certain threshold.

Robustness checks

It should be noted that I chose to exclude whether politicians ran with a party or under a slate (party) and the likeliness that they will run again in the next municipal election (re-election) as control variables in the main analysis. This is because of the substantial number of missing observations for these two variables in the dataset. The party variable was not put in field for the 2021 survey while the re-election variable is missing from the 2022 survey, meaning the inclusion of these variables limits the analysis to 2023 and 2024. Additionally, only two provinces (British Columbia and Quebec) allow candidates to run as part of a political party or candidate slate, so respondents in these circumstances are limited to two jurisdictional contexts. To account for this, I conduct two separate robustness checks of these variables Appendix 3. Despite the substantially lower number of observations in these models ($n = 1,863$ for Table 3.A2 and $n = 1,989$ for Table

3.A3), the predicted values of Realism-Idealism across SWD (H1 and H2) remain statistically significant when controlling for the “re-election” variable ($p < 0.05^{**}$) and the “party” variable ($p < 0.10^*$) with a coefficient of (0.02) for both cases.

Discussion and Conclusion

The connection between representatives (*politicians*) and who they represent (*citizens/voters*) is fundamental in representative democracies. While often theorized from the perspective of citizens/voters, this research contributes to better understanding this connection from the perspective of politicians by examining whether representatives’ beliefs about voters influence their levels of SWD. Since most of the literature on democratic satisfaction focuses solely on citizens, evaluating politicians as a group also deepens our understanding of the SWD concept.

The main finding of this article is that representatives with beliefs about voters that align with *democratic idealism* and *spatial voting* are more satisfied with democracy than those aligned with *democratic realism* and *group politics*. Indeed, politicians are more satisfied when they believe their system is working in accordance with democratic norms. Since politicians are usually favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018) it is coherent to expect that representatives who hold beliefs that closely align with classic democratic ideals (Almond & Verba, 1963; Downs, 1957) will have higher SWD. These findings highlight an important aspect of representatives’ attitudes towards their democratic system of governance: they want the system to work in accordance with classic democratic ideals, at least from the perspective of their democratic satisfaction.

If representatives have higher SWD when voters conform with classic democratic ideals, is it possible that politicians may prefer voters to not make decisions based on deeply held political

or group identities? Many advanced democracies are experiencing an increase in conflict about cultural issues (Bonomi et al., 2021, p. 2371), along with voters holding polarizing views that correspond with what they perceive is their group's identity (p. 2374). Others have found that politicians can influence the views of citizens (Bullock, 2011; Clayton et al., 2021; Zaller, 1992) and that "voters seem to follow [politicians] rather blindly", which give representatives "freedom in the policies they enact without fear of electoral repercussions" (Lenz, 2012, p. 3). While a substantial portion of politicians are democratic realists (Lucas, Sheffer, & Loewen, 2024), the findings of this article demonstrate that the politicians who are democratic idealists are more satisfied with the way democracy works. This brings forth an important question for consideration – do any politicians want (or choose) to be democratic realists, or are (most) democratic realists simply politicians who are disappointed by or cynical about their democracy's circumstances? Additionally, is it voters or politicians who determine the way elections work? Are voters simply "busy with their lives" (Achen & Bartels, 2017, p. 9) and force politicians to take shortcuts by appealing to their group and partisan identities? Or are politicians the ones that lead voters away from policy issues and towards decisions rooted in identity politics and their group identities? If politicians believe they can only win elections by mobilizing voters around social identities (rather than advancing policy stances in their communications), their theories about voters could have a negative impact on how citizens believe the way democracy works, especially in the current context of worsening political polarization globally (Nord et al., 2025). With more states experiencing some form of democratic decline (Gora & de Wilde, 2022; Grillo & Prato, 2023; Mechkova et al., 2017), we must take politicians' views and behaviours about the way democracy works more seriously.

There are several other possibilities of additional research that can expand this field. This might include considering beliefs about voters from the perspective of candidates that were not elected, or assessing any potential differences between democratic idealists and realists. Past findings show that politicians' beliefs about voters influence their behaviour (Ekengren & Oscarsson, 2011; Kingdon, 1967; Strömbäck et al., 2013), so future research may consider whether democratic idealists or realists engage differently in democratic processes and institutions. Since more cynical interpretations of *democratic idealism* see the theory as a belief “that props up elite rule” (Achen & Bartels, 2017, p. 327), one might consider whether democratic idealists are actually committed to classic democratic ideals, simply enjoy a system in which they are the beneficiaries, or hold a mix of these two rationales.

Appendix 3

Table 3.A1: Variable List

Variable	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation	Surveyed Year(s)
<i>SWD</i>	3,405	3.02	.87	2021-24
<i>Idealism-Realism</i>	3,083	5.09	2.13	
<i>Unfairly- Correctly</i>	3,136	4.67	2.15	2021-24
<i>Age</i>	2,952	56.92	12.27	2021-24
<i>Gender</i>	3,004	.50	.63	2021-24
<i>Race</i>	3,031	.12	.32	2021-24
<i>Education</i>	2,976	4.72	1.36	2021-24
<i>Jurisdiction</i>	3,450	36.01	13.15	2021-24
<i>Year</i>	3,652	2022.50	1.10	2021-24
<i>2021</i>	852	-	-	-
<i>2022</i>	1,001	-	-	-
<i>2023</i>	909	-	-	-
<i>2024</i>	890	-	-	-
<i>Ideology</i>	3,074	5.19	2.01	2021-24
<i>Position</i>	3,314	1.80	.40	2021-24
<i>Economy</i>	3,365	6.81	1.80	2021-24
<i>Re-election</i>	2,186	1.38	.80	2021 & 2023-24
<i>Party</i>	2,565	.20	.40	2022-24
<i>N</i>	3,652	-	-	-

Table 3.A2: Models with the re-election control variable

	(1) Realism-Idealism	(2) Unfairly-Correctly	(3) Controls
Realism-Idealism	0.03 (0.01)***		0.02 (0.01)**
Unfairly-Correctly		0.01 (0.01)*	−0.00 (0.01)
Age			0.00 (0.00)
Female			−0.10 (0.04)**
Other			0.11 (0.07)
Visible Minority			−0.03 (0.06)
Education			0.01 (0.02)
Left-Right			0.00 (0.01)
Councilor			−0.23 (0.05)***
Economy			0.11 (0.01)***
Unsure			0.07 (0.06)
Seeking re-election			0.06 (0.05)
2023			0.06 (0.05)
2024			0.11 (0.05)**
NB			−0.34 (0.14)**
QC			−0.50 (0.09)***
ON			−0.21 (0.09)**
MB			−0.22 (0.18)
SK			−0.12 (0.11)
AB			−0.09 (0.10)
BC			−0.21 (0.10)**
Constant	2.89 (0.04)***	2.96 (0.04)***	2.51 (0.20)***
<i>N</i>	3079	3130	1863
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.004	0.001	0.094

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table 3.A3: Models with the party control variable

	(1) Realism-Idealism	(2) Unfairly-Correctly	(3) Controls
Realism-Idealism	0.03 (0.01)***		0.02 (0.01)*
Unfairly-Correctly		0.01 (0.01)*	0.00 (0.01)
Age			−0.00 (0.00)
Female			−0.09 (0.04)**
Other			0.03 (0.07)
Visible Minority			0.04 (0.06)
Education			0.01 (0.02)
Left-Right			0.01 (0.01)
Councilor			−0.29 (0.05)***
Economy			0.10 (0.01)***
In a Party			0.10 (0.06)
2023			0.04 (0.05)
2024			0.08 (0.05)*
NB			−0.42 (0.14)***
QC			−0.49 (0.09)***
ON			−0.18 (0.08)**
MB			−0.09 (0.15)
SK			−0.13 (0.12)
AB			−0.09 (0.09)
BC			−0.19 (0.09)**
Constant	2.89 (0.04)***	2.96 (0.04)***	2.63 (0.19)***
<i>N</i>	3079	3130	1989
adj. <i>R</i> ²	0.004	0.001	0.093

Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Chapter 4: Canadian Politicians' Assessments of Electoral Management³¹

Abstract

We know very little about politicians' preferences when it comes to the management of elections, despite their central role in the electoral process. Using Canada as a case study, this article poses two questions. First, which factors influence politicians' satisfaction with the electoral management body (EMB) administering the election and their perceptions of electoral integrity? Second, do Canadian politicians prefer having an EMB that is more (or less) independent from the government, and if so, how do they weigh the different dimensions of EMB independence? Using a novel conjoint experiment, the first to assess preferences pertaining to an EMB's design, and survey-data administered through the Canadian Candidate Survey, this analysis finds that Canadian politicians' perceptions of foreign interference impact their perceptions of the electoral process, but populist attitudes and whether they won the election do not. Additionally, their preferences relating to the functional independence of EMBs are in opposition to Canada's current system.

³¹ This chapter is currently under review in the Canadian Political Science Review.

Introduction

Competitive elections are the minimum requirement for a democratic political regime (Møller & Skaaning, 2013, p. 144). While other conditions are needed to have a liberal democracy (Beetham, 1992, pp. 41-42), or what Dahl calls polyarchy (1971), the selection of leaders during elections is the bedrock of representative democracies (Schumpeter, 1943). Surely there are several important actors in contemporary elections (including media, interest groups, and civil society organizations). Yet, competitive elections cannot happen without three specific actors: (1) citizens to cast votes, (2) politicians to run in elections, and (3) actors to administer the election.

Electoral management bodies (EMBs) are responsible for the administration of election processes, certifying results, and monitoring the conduct of actors during elections. The design of these institutions can, therefore, impede or promote electoral integrity, and in turn, electoral legitimacy (Langford et al., 2021). For example, we know that an EMB's design can influence the quality and effectiveness of the services it provides during elections (James et al., 2019, p. 302) as well as broader perceptions like confidence in the electoral process (Rosas, 2010). Among the different institutional components of EMBs, like its scope of tasks or capacity, its independence from government is a core feature of high-quality elections (Hyde & Pallister, 2015, p. 380; Omotola, 2010). Indeed, scholars have shown that having EMBs with *de jure* independence from government (the *agency model* of EMB) is good for free and fair elections (Gazibo, 2006; Hartlyn et al., 2008; Trebilcock & Chitalkar, 2009), as opposed to operating from within the executive branch (the *governmental model* of EMB). For example, Hartlyn et al.'s examination of presidential elections in the Caribbean and Latin America finds election observers are more accepting of electoral processes when they are administered by non-partisan EMBs, and conclude

that “independent, professional [EMBs] are close to being a sufficient condition for successful elections” (2008, p. 89).

While existing research highlights the importance of both EMBs and their performance for electoral processes, the current scholarship does little to consider actors’ perceptions of these institutions. Particularly, we do not know how politicians who run in elections evaluate the design of their country’s EMB(s), which EMB dimensions matter most to them, or if other factors influence their evaluations of an EMB’s design or performance. This omission is surprising given the unique relationship that connects politicians and EMBs. Politicians engage with EMBs throughout several stages of the electoral process, so the conduct and design of EMBs can greatly influence politicians’ experiences during elections. Furthermore, elected politicians might also attempt to modify election laws or alter institutional processes (Friedman & Wong, 2008), meaning their perceptions can have tangible impacts on the way elections and democracy work.

Given this context, this article poses two questions. First, which factors influence politicians’ satisfaction with the EMB administering the election and their perceptions of electoral integrity? There is an emerging scholarship that directly surveys politicians to better understand their attitudes and behaviours (Lenz, 2012; Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024; Sevenans et al., 2023; Walgrave et al., 2023), but only some work examines their perceptions of electoral integrity (Schnaudt, 2023)³², or whether EMB characteristics influence politicians’ democratic satisfaction (Gaspard, 2025) and confidence in electoral processes (Estévez et al., 2008; Rosas, 2010). This article builds on this recent scholarship to better understand the motivations driving politicians’ attitudes and perceptions surrounding electoral processes. Given the major influence politicians

³² Fisher & Sällberg (2020) also consider how the election agents of candidates evaluate electoral integrity.

can possess over narratives about the fairness and freeness of elections, analyzing their motivations is essential for studying elections and democracy.

Considering the importance of EMB independence for free and fair elections, this article's second question asks: do Canadian politicians prefer having an EMB that is more (or less) independent from the government, and if so, how do they weigh the different dimensions of EMB independence? Scholars generally identify four different dimensions of EMB independence: (1) *institutional*, (2) *personnel*, (3) *financial*, and (4) *functional*, independence (van Aaken, 2009; van Ham & Garnett, 2019).³³ If some of these dimensions matter to key actors more than others, EMBs might consider allocating their resources or attention towards (further) improving these dimensions. Moreover, understanding which dimensions might matter to these actors improves our theoretical understanding of how EMB independence impacts electoral processes.

This article addresses these questions using survey data of politicians and a novel conjoint experiment, the first to assess preferences pertaining to an EMB's design, administered through the Canadian Candidate Survey (CCS) for the 2025 Canadian federal election.³⁴ Canada is an ideal case study to examine these questions because it is typically portrayed around the globe as having high-quality elections (Garnett et al., 2025; Garnett & Leibel, 2022, p. 32), has the world's first agency model of EMB (Elections Canada), and is similar in terms of design and institutions to other parliamentary democracies, which increases the comparability of any findings in this article. Furthermore, because recent studies have considered what might cause stable democracies to either

³³ A previous study identifies the impact that these *de jure* dimensions have on *de facto* independence (*de facto* independence being the factors of the electoral process that fall outside the direct scope of the EMB (see van Ham & Garnett, 2019)). However, we do not yet know which dimensions of an EMB's independence are valued most by the actors who participate in elections.

³⁴ While citizens' preferences are also important, previous research already shows that Canadian citizens have very positive perceptions of electoral management in their country (Garnett & Leibel, 2022).

resist democratic decline or fall victim to it (Carugati, 2020; Coppedge et al., 2022), it is worth examining and learning from the contexts of democratic countries that have (so far) resisted decline.

This article is organized in four additional sections. Section 2 provides the article's theoretical framework and four hypotheses (H1a-H4b) pertaining to politicians' satisfaction with Elections Canada, their perceptions of electoral integrity, and preferences relating to an EMB's independence. The overarching rationale for these expectations is that Canadian politicians will have more *negative* perceptions of the electoral process and go *against* the Canadian status quo of EMB independence when they think elections or democracy are *not* working well. Section 3 explains the methods, datasets, and measurements used in the article's empirical models. Section 4 shows the article's results and analysis. Finally, Section 5 discusses the implications of the main findings of the analysis as well as potential future avenues for research.

Theoretical Framework

Satisfaction with Elections Canada and Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

EMBs like Elections Canada are democratic institutions that are responsible for administering elections, certifying election results, and monitoring the conduct of political actors during elections (Garnett, 2022; James et al., 2019; van Ham & Garnett, 2019). Previous studies have found that the design of EMBs (Estévez et al., 2008; James, 2014; Rosas, 2010), confidence in the EMB's election officials (Garnett, 2019b), the ways elections are administered (González et al., 2024; James & Clark, 2021), the EMB's capacity (Garnett, 2019a), and the rules or processes that govern elections (Atkeson et al., 2015; Garnett & Keir, 2022), influence both electoral integrity and confidence in the election process. This means that the quality of the administration of elections can alter the overall integrity and legitimacy of the election. Yet, little work has been done to

examine politicians' satisfaction with EMBs, despite the central role that politicians play as candidates during elections.

Studying politicians' perceptions of electoral integrity involves analyzing the concept through a *sociological* and *mass perception* approach³⁵, which involves exploring the cultural context of a country, as well as individuals' perceptions of the fairness and freeness of the election (Elklit & Reynolds, 2002), to assess electoral integrity. This approach to studying electoral integrity is arguably the most important in practice – if the actors participating in the electoral process do not believe in its legitimacy, how can we expect them to adhere to the results? Furthermore, negative perceptions of the electoral process could even lead to physical manifestations of dissatisfaction or distrust in established democracies, like during the January 6, 2021, Capitol riot in the United States. Therefore, positive perceptions of electoral integrity are crucial for democratic stability, especially among those who lost, highlighting the importance of *losers' consent* (Anderson et al., 2005). However, it is important to note that *perceptions* of electoral integrity might not match expert assessments of electoral integrity. These perceptions might also not consider democratic norms that differentiate high-quality elections from low-quality ones. This is because the opinions of politicians or citizens could be influenced by factors that are not related to the quality of the election or its administration, and some individuals might even hold false beliefs about voter fraud (Pennycook & Rand, 2021). However, even if individuals' perceptions of electoral integrity and/or satisfaction with EMBs are not rooted in factual beliefs or are solely based on bad experiences, the potential repercussions of their attitudes are serious, and

³⁵ There are four common approaches for assessing electoral integrity. These consist of the (1) the legal approach (Ahlquist et al., 2014; Lehoucq, 2003; Minnite, 2010; Scheppele, 2006), (2) the international norms approach (Norris et al. 2014; Norris, 2015: p. 4), (3) the normative or democratic theory approach (Beetham, 1994; Garnett & James, 2021; James & Garnett, 2025), and (4) the sociological or mass perceptions approach (Elklit & Reynolds, 2002; González et al., 2024; Pennycook & Rand, 2021).

should thus be taken seriously. This article therefore examines three election-related factors that might influence politicians' satisfaction toward EMBs and their perceptions of electoral integrity: (1) winning or losing an election, (2) holding populist attitudes, and (3) perceptions of foreign interference.

Winning or Losing

For free and fair elections and democratic political regimes to work, electoral losers must be able to accept their defeat and choose whether to rerun next time (Przeworski, 1991, p. 14). Previous work finds that both citizens (Mauk, 2022) and political elites (Lago & Martinez i Coma, 2017) are more likely to accept and consent to their electoral loss when elections are administered fairly and freely. However, Schnaudt (2023)'s research on politicians in Germany finds that candidates who were not successful in winning their seat in parliament were more likely to hold negative perceptions of electoral integrity and fairness. In addition to winning or losing their own election, Canadian politicians might also consider whether their political party formed a government (won) or became part of the opposition (loss). While politicians who lost might generally have more negative views of the election campaign than those who won, these views may also translate to how they evaluate interactions that took place during the campaign, like their engagements with EMBs. Therefore, I propose the following hypotheses about the impacts of winning or losing:

H1a: Canadian politicians who lost (won) will be less (more) satisfied with Elections Canada.

H1b: Canadian politicians who lost (won) will have more negative (positive) perceptions of electoral integrity.

Populist Attitudes

Mudde (2004) famously defines populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people” (p. 543). Politicians with populist attitudes (seeing ‘the corrupt elite’ as the opponent) might, therefore, challenge and campaign against established political orders (Doyle, 2011). This could include institutions like EMBs, because populists are generally less trusting of institutions (Marenghi & Montero, 2024; Peresman et al., 2025) and populist attitudes are a significant predictor of distrust in political institutions (Štětka et al., 2025). Furthermore, populist politicians might also consider election officials in EMBs as part of the ‘elites’ in the society.

When it comes to perceptions of electoral integrity, previous works show that citizens who hold populist values are more likely to mistrust elections (Norris et al., 2019) and that German candidates who ran for populist parties had overall more negative perceptions of electoral integrity (Schnaudt, 2023). It is also critical to assess whether populist attitudes translate into less satisfaction with EMBs, because elites can encourage citizens to disagree with experts (Darmofal, 2005). Given this background, I propose two hypotheses on politicians’ populist attitudes:

H2a: Canadian politicians with stronger (weaker) populist attitudes will be less (more) satisfied with Elections Canada.

H2b: Canadian politicians with stronger (weaker) populist attitudes will have more negative (positive) perceptions of electoral integrity.

Perceptions of Foreign Interference

During Canada's 2025 general election, various media and actors expressed concerns about foreign interference in the electoral process (Tenove & Tworek, 2025; The Canadian Press 2025).^{36,37} Since foreign interference in the electoral process threatens the freeness of elections and the democratic process (Chechelashvili et al., 2023, pp. 52-53) and might intentionally attempt to (dis)advantage specific candidates or political parties (Mohan & Wall, 2019, p. 110), politicians have normative and strategic reasons to associate foreign interference as a negative impact on the electoral process. Past research has found that electoral interventions can influence the public's opinion of the credibility or functioning of an election, even if it rarely affects the actual administration of the election (Levin, 2025, p. 9). Furthermore, the presence of foreign intervention is also found to increase distrust in election results (Tomz & Weeks, 2020, p. 865). This should also apply to politicians' perceptions of foreign interference. If they believe foreign interference occurred in the election, their satisfaction with Elections Canada and their perceptions of electoral integrity should be more negative:

H3a: Canadian politicians who believe the election was (not) affected by foreign interference will be less (more) satisfied with Elections Canada.

H3b: Canadian politicians who believe the election was (not) affected by foreign interference will have more negative (positive) perceptions of electoral integrity.

Winning or losing, populist attitudes, and perceptions of foreign interference should impact Canadian politicians' evaluations of the electoral process. Their evaluations might also have

³⁶ A *Retrospective Report* from the Government of Canada's *Security and Intelligence Threats to Elections (SITE) Task Force* released October 2025 found that foreign attempts to undermine the election did not affect "the integrity of the election, or the ability of Canadians to exercise their right to choose their democratic representatives freely and fairly" (Government of Canada, 2025). However, politicians' perceptions about the influence of foreign interference before (or even after) the release of this report might differ than the findings of the SITE Task Force.

³⁷ This research focuses on perceptions of foreign interference given the attention the topic received during the general election. However, future research might also consider perceptions of other kinds of electoral interference.

negative consequences for how they assess the administration of elections. Specifically, Canadian politicians who are dissatisfied with the electoral process might want to make changes to electoral institutions. Considering the importance of EMB independence for free and fair elections, it is worth examining whether evaluations of the electoral process influence politicians' preferences for having more (or less) independent EMBs.

EMB Independence Preferences

Historically, in Canada and several other stable democracies, the administration of elections was far from fair and free. In the first five decades of federal Canadian politics after Confederation in 1867, voters experienced threats and intimidation at polling places (Elections Canada 2024), the then “Revising Officers” that administered elections were often selected through patronage (Pilon, 2017, p. 115), and voting laws were subject to manipulation (Courtney, 2007). Frustration and challenges around the status quo at the time resulted in major reforms, including the creation of the Office of the Chief Electoral Officer (Elections Canada), the world’s first independent and non-partisan EMB. This model of EMB is often referred to as the *independent model* (Catt et al., 2014; van Aaken, 2009) or the *agency model* (Norris, 2015). As of 2025, 138 countries have an agency model to administer national elections, making it the most popular EMB model globally (see International IDEA (2025) for the complete list). Independence refers to the degree to which an EMB is “formally independent from government” (James et al., 2019, p. 300). The *de facto* independence of EMBs is also considered by other scholars in this literature (van Aaken, 2009; van Ham & Garnett, 2019),³⁸ and whether other factors, like an EMB’s governance network, must also be considered when categorizing EMB independence (James, 2019, pp. 89-103).

³⁸ *De jure* independence is the formal rules and legal frameworks that regulate the EMB. *De facto* independence is shaped by *de jure* independence, the ability of electoral officials to make decisions in practice, and other factors in

There are four dimensions of an EMB's *de jure* independence: (1) its *institutional* independence (*what is the EMB's relationship with the executive branch of government?*), (2) its *personnel* independence (*how is the EMB's staff and highest position, like the Chief Electoral Officer, appointed to and removed from office?*), (3) its *financial* independence (*how is the EMB's budget determined?*), and (4) its *functional* independence (*what are the competences and powers of the EMB?*). Countries might design dimensions of an EMB to align with the principles and framework of the agency model or the *governmental model* (Catt et al., 2014; Norris, 2015; van Aaken, 2009). The agency model consists of designing the EMB as a separate agency from the executive branch of government (like Elections Canada), while the governmental model integrates the EMB's framework, duties, and decision-making within the executive branch of government. An EMB might align some of its dimensions with the agency model, and others with the governmental model, which is why some EMBs are categorized as having a *mixed* model (Catt et al., 2014, p. 8; López-Pintor, 2000).

Elections Canada is the EMB in Canada responsible for the administration of federal elections.³⁹ It is considered an agency model because the design of its four independence dimensions aligns with the principles of being formally independent from the government. It is (1) *institutionally independent* because the EMB reports directly to Parliament and its Chief Electoral Officer can only be removed (for cause) by the Governor General after a joint address from the House of Commons and the Senate. It has (2) *personnel independence* because the Returning

the electoral process (such as but not limited to election observers, free media, rule of law, and other checks and balances on institutions) that enable free and fair elections. Because *de facto* independence includes factors of the electoral process that fall outside the direct scope of EMBs, this article focuses on the perceptions of the dimensions of an EMB's *de jure* independence.

³⁹ It should be noted that Canada's federal level also has a separate EMB (the Commissioner of Canada Elections) responsible for the compliance and enforcement of federal elections laws (*Canada Elections Act* and *Referendum Act*). Additionally, ten independent Electoral Boundaries Commissions (one per province) are responsible for the redistribution of federal electoral districts once per decade. This article focuses specifically on Elections Canada because it is the EMB with the mandate to administer federal elections.

Officers for each electoral district are appointed by the Chief Electoral Officer and cannot be registered with or financially contribute to a political party. It has (3) *financial independence* because the EMB's expenditures to fund electoral events are not subject to annual parliamentary approval and are instead drawn directly from Canada's Consolidated Revenue Fund through a statutory authority. This ensures the EMB can administer an electoral event at any time. However, the salaries of its permanent positions are funded through an annual parliamentary appropriation. It also has (4) *functional independence* because, during the counting process, while candidates or their representatives can object to ballots being counted or not counted, election officers are the ones to determine whether a ballot is counted.⁴⁰

Agency models of EMBs, like Elections Canada, are widely considered “the norm” (Pal, 2016, p. 86) or “gold standard” (Garnett, 2022, p. 148) of election administration by practitioners and scholars. Some scholars argue that agency models are a necessary condition for a country to have free and fair (Gazibo, 2006; Hartlyn et al., 2008; Trebilcock & Chitalkar, 2009) and high-quality (Hyde & Pallister, 2015, p. 380; Omotola, 2010) elections. Additionally, agency models can help new democracies consolidate (Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002, p. 15), and better prevent the incumbent from attempting to manipulate elections (Hartlyn et al., 2008; Lehoucq, 2002; Pastor, 1999). Therefore, agency models are considered good for electoral integrity. Even though the prominence of the agency model has grown overtime (López-Pintor, 2000), it should be noted that several established democracies do not have an agency model (Birch, 2011), including but not limited to France, Germany, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Additionally, EMBs can be categorized as autonomous under a country's law (*de jure*

⁴⁰ The election officer's final say in this counting process is distinct from a judge's capability to reverse a decision during a judicial recount or through the process of formally contesting an election in court. Therefore, while the decision of an election officer in the counting process is final, there remains additional mechanisms in the law to (further) ensure a fair process.

independence) but not be independent in practice (Garnett, 2022, pp. 148-149; Kerr & Lührmann, 2017; Norris, 2015). Therefore, some argue that *de facto* independence is what actually matters for electoral integrity (Birch & van Ham, 2017). While these are important considerations, examining the independence dimensions of the agency model is still valuable, given it is the world's most popular EMB model.

In relation to the article's second research question, some studies suggest that politicians' trust or confidence in the performance of an EMB will be higher when they are directly involved in and can influence the EMB's processes (Estévez et al., 2008). Indeed, directly observing, overseeing, or being involved in its administration could help politicians trust the electoral process. However, others found that having an independent EMB increases politicians' confidence in elections (Rosas, 2010). Both findings could be true simultaneously – politicians might want to be more involved when they think elections are not working well but are comfortable not being involved if elections are well administered. The administration of elections in Canada is generally well regarded by Canadian citizens (Garnett & Leibel, 2022) and expert assessments consistently give the country high ratings in terms of electoral integrity (Garnett et al., 2025) and the freeness and fairness (Coppedge et al., 2025) of its federal elections. Therefore, it is expected that Canadian politicians should prefer dimensions of EMB independence that are associated with the agency model. Not only are these dimensions consistent with the current practices in Canada, but they likely contribute to the country's well-administered elections:

H4a: Canadian politicians will prefer each EMB dimension to be independent.

Since the agency model is the status quo in Canada, Canadian politicians are likely partial to an EMB design that they are familiar with (in the same way that we might expect politicians in

a country with a governmental model to prefer that type of EMB model). This is especially compelling, since politicians also generally make policy choices that are in line with the status quo (Sheffer et al., 2018). However, some Canadian politicians might not be satisfied with the way elections are administered in Canada or might have negative perceptions of electoral integrity. In these cases, in which Canadian politicians believe the electoral process is not working well, their EMB independence preferences might diverge from the agency model and Canada's current practices. Similarly, a dissatisfied politician in a country with a governmental model of EMB might also wish to change their country's practices. Since Canada has an agency model, it is expected that politicians who are dissatisfied with Elections Canada and have negative perceptions of electoral integrity will have EMB independence preferences that diverge from the agency model:

H4b: Canadian politicians who are dissatisfied with the electoral process will prefer a less independent EMB.

Methodology

Dataset and Conjoint Experiment

To test these expectations, this article relies on survey questions and a novel conjoint experiment that were conducted through the CCS for Canada's 45th General Election in 2025.⁴¹ Conjoint experiments assess respondents' preferences by asking them to evaluate and select alternative profiles about a given subject (Bansak et al., 2021b). These alternative profiles contain different attributes that are presented as one object and are usually shown in a table along with one or more

⁴¹ The Canadian Candidate Survey is part of the Comparative Candidate Survey, a multi-national dataset that surveys candidates running in national parliamentary elections. The items used in this article are drawn from an additional module, separate from the standardized CCS questionnaire. Data collection began four days after election day and ended four months later (participants were sent three reminders to complete the survey during this period). Valid contact information was established for 1,302 candidates, from the population of 1,336 that ran for the Liberal Party of Canada (342), Conservative Party of Canada (342), Bloc Québécois (78), New Democratic Party (342), and Green Party of Canada (232). These candidates were contacted via official or personal email (when available) or via social media (LinkedIn or Facebook).

questions. In this experiment, EMB profiles are created using randomized attributes for each of the four dimensions of an EMB's independence. Each dimension has two possible attributes: one that reflects the agency model and another that opposes the agency model of EMB. Respondents are given a brief scenario text and are then asked to select which EMB profile they would prefer to administer elections (either EMB A or B). This process is repeated four times with different EMB profiles by randomizing the attributes for each independence dimension (see Table 4.1).

With n=328 respondents to the 2025 CCS (see Appendix 4 for additional information on the sample composition), four tasks balance the effect size of the study (Stefanelli & Lukac, 2020) while making sure respondents are not over-encumbered by the survey. Repeating this process with different combinations of attributes allows respondents to identify preferences while also creating scenarios where they are forced to make trade-offs about their preferred attributes (Bansak et al., 2021b; Ferrer, 2023). By manipulating these variables, conjoint experiments help researchers uncover which factors effect respondents' preferences when "we do not already know the answer" (Sniderman, 2018, p. 266) and "enables researchers to estimate the causal effects of multiple treatment dimensions and assess several causal hypotheses simultaneously" (Hainmueller et al., 2014, p. 1). I preregistered this study with the Open Science Foundation.^{42,43,44}

⁴² The preregistration is available online: <https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/ST9EC>

⁴³ No specific hypotheses associated with the four independence dimensions were preregistered. There is no strong prior reason to hypothesize which independence dimension(s) should matter more to (dissatisfied) politicians. One could think that personnel or functional independence might have the most direct impact, since it involves determining who is an election official and who has final say over votes counting. However, institutional or financial independence could be considered very important, since these dictate the structure of the EMB and how it receives its financial resources, which could both impact the broader quality of the election.

⁴⁴ The author thanks Thomas Galipeau for their helpful advice about the administration of conjoint experiments.

Table 4.1: Conjoint Instructions and Attributes

Instructions Electoral management bodies (like Elections Canada) are in charge of administering elections. Their design and characteristics may vary by country. In the next 4 questions, you will be presented fictive Electoral Management Bodies with different characteristics. For each question, we will ask you whether you personally prefer Electoral Management Body A or Electoral Management Body B to administer elections?		
Characteristics	Electoral Management Body A	Electoral Management Body B
<i>Organisational design</i> The Chief Electoral Officer can only be removed by...	...Parliament, based on serious accusations.	...a Minister in-charge of overseeing the organisation.
<i>Personnel</i> The Returning Officers in ridings are chosen...	...by the Chief Electoral Officer.	...from a list given by Members of Parliament.
<i>Finances</i> The budget of the organisation is...	...drawn from a pre-determined annual fund that is not subject to the government's approval.	...determined annually by the government.
<i>Recount</i> If a candidate in a riding objects to a ballot being counted or not counted...	...the Returning Officer determines whether it is counted.	...an election board (made up of representatives from each political party) determines whether it is counted.
Which electoral management body would you personally prefer to administer elections? 1 = Electoral Management Body A 2 = Electoral Management Body B		

Variables and Empirical Models

Politicians' satisfaction with Elections Canada (scale of 1-4, with 1 being "not at all satisfied" and 4 being "very satisfied") and perceptions of electoral integrity (scale of 0-10, with 0 being "very poor" and 10 being "very good") inform the dependent variables in the first part of this study, while their EMB choice (selecting EMB A or B) inform the second part. These are estimated in a series of OLS regressions that weight responses by political party.

In the first part of the analysis, I consider four independent variables. First, *elected*, to measure whether they won their seat in Parliament, with 0 being "not elected" and 1 being "elected". Second, *formed government*, to measure victory at the national level (their political party winning), with 0 being their party formed "part of the opposition" and 1 being "formed government". Third, *populist attitudes* are assessed by merging eight indicators of populist attitudes that are each measured on five category Likert-scales (see Appendix 4 for the list of indicators). The eight indicators use a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being "strongly disagree", 3 "neither agree nor disagree" and 5 "strongly agree" with the populist attitude. Fourth, *perceptions of the impact of foreign interference* (scale of 1 to 4), with 1 being "not at all affected" and 4 being "very affected". The relative frequency (%) of responses for the two dependent and four independent variables for part one of the analysis are illustrated in Figure 4.1.

Figure 4.1: Distribution of the Main Variables

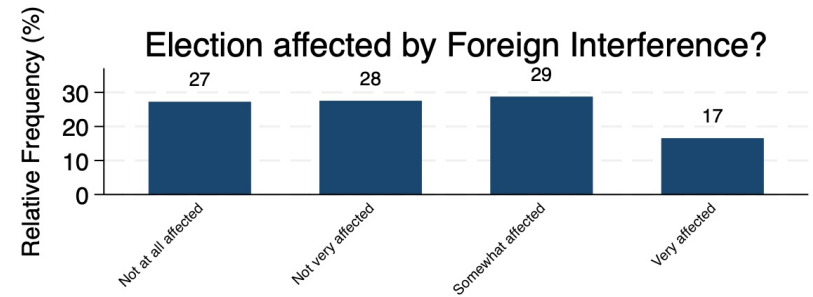
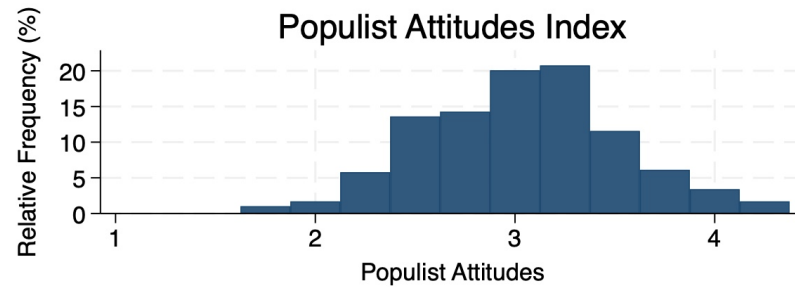
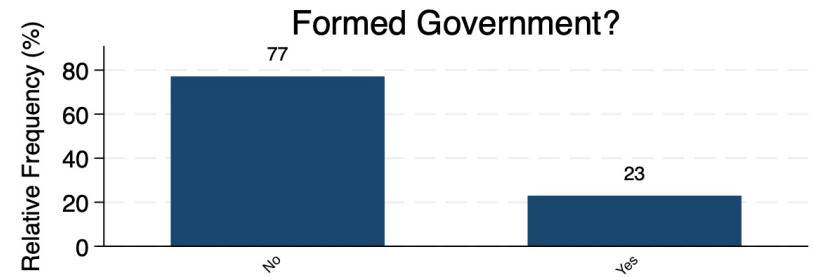
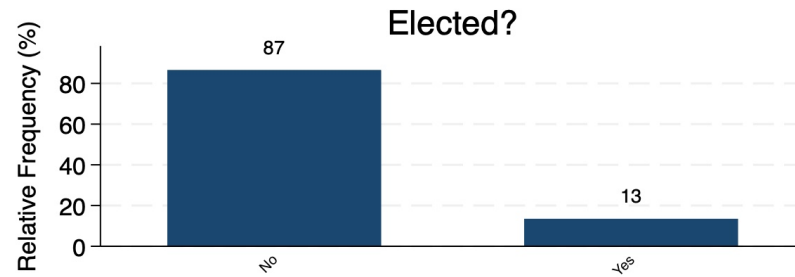
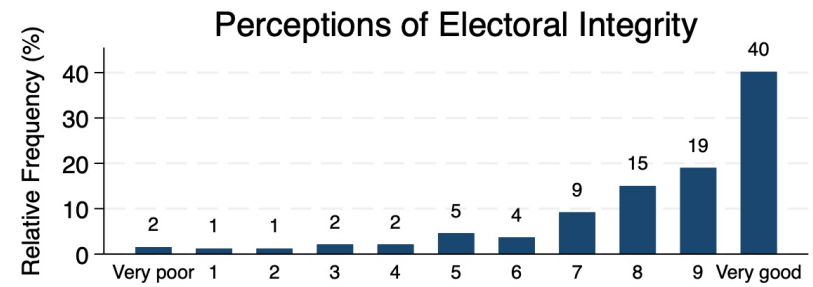
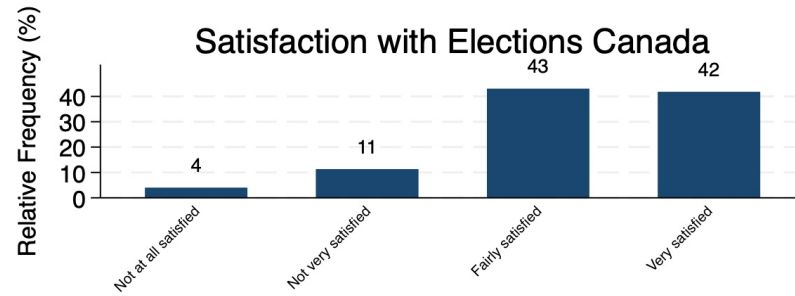


Figure 4.1 highlights that overall, most Canadian politicians are satisfied with Elections Canada (85%) and have a positive (83%) perception of electoral integrity (if they chose a rank of 7 or higher). These percentages indicate that, from the perspective of the candidates running in the election, the quality of Canada's federal electoral process is very high. This is consistent with expert-assessments (Coppedge et al., 2025; Garnett et al., 2025) and past citizen assessments (Garnett & Leibel, 2022) of the country's electoral processes. This indicates that in Canada, experts' and actors' interpretation of the quality of the electoral process do not fundamentally diverge. This is positive in terms of assessing the health of Canadian democracy and for future studies on Canadian electoral processes, since this preliminary evidence shows that there is minimal bias between expert-based and actor-based perceptions of these specific concepts.

The third and fourth graphs in Figure 4.1 show the percentage of politicians who are elected versus non-elected, and part of the government versus opposition, in the survey sample. The fifth graph illustrates the relative frequency of the strength of populist attitudes held by politicians. Politicians with a score closer to 1 hold weaker populist attitudes, while those with a score closer to 5 hold stronger ones. A score of three corresponds to the mean of the standardized index, not the original five category Likert-scales for each indicator. The sixth and final graph highlights a very interesting finding – Canadian politicians are split on whether the election was affected (46%) or not affected (55%) by foreign interference.⁴⁵ Given the growing prominence of this issue, both in Canada and abroad, these results might indicate that foreign interference attempts are somewhat succeeding. Even if there is little evidence that the electoral process was affected by foreign interference (Government of Canada 2025), the fact that nearly half of the candidates in the

⁴⁵ The extra percentage point (101% total) in the Figure is due to rounding.

election *believe* it affected the election might be just as harmful, especially if these beliefs influence their satisfaction with Elections Canada or their perceptions of electoral integrity.

The first part of the analysis also considers four common individual-level control variables: (1) the region they reside in (*jurisdiction*);⁴⁶ (2) their gender identity (*gender*);⁴⁷ (3) whether they reside in a rural area or village, a small- or middle-sized town, a suburb, or a large town or city (*Place Type*); and (4) their level of education (*education*). The second part of the analysis merges a standardized version of both the politicians' satisfaction with Elections Canada and perceptions of electoral integrity variables, to create an index measuring their overall *satisfaction with the electoral process* (SEP). The SEP index was then rescaled (0-10) to simplify its interpretation and is put in interaction with each of the four dimensions of EMB independence in a series of separate OLS regressions. The data was reshaped into long-format to account for the four tasks executed by the respondents, meaning each respondent appears eight times in the dataset (two rows for each of the four processes). Therefore, each regression uses cluster-robust standard errors on respondents (to bundle responses from the same respondent) and weights for responses by political party. The complete variable list is displayed in Appendix 4.

Results

Satisfaction with Elections Canada

Table 4.2 displays the results of the linear regression of politicians' satisfaction with Elections Canada on being elected, forming government, populist attitudes, and foreign interference.⁴⁸

⁴⁶ Canada's territories are excluded from the analysis due to insufficient survey response rates. The ten provinces are grouped by region.

⁴⁷ The analysis is limited to respondents who identified as male or female due to insufficient response rates among other gender identities.

⁴⁸ A multicollinearity test indicates that there is a low level of multicollinearity in the final model (mean VIF of 1.22).

Table 4.2: Explaining Politicians' Satisfaction with Elections Canada

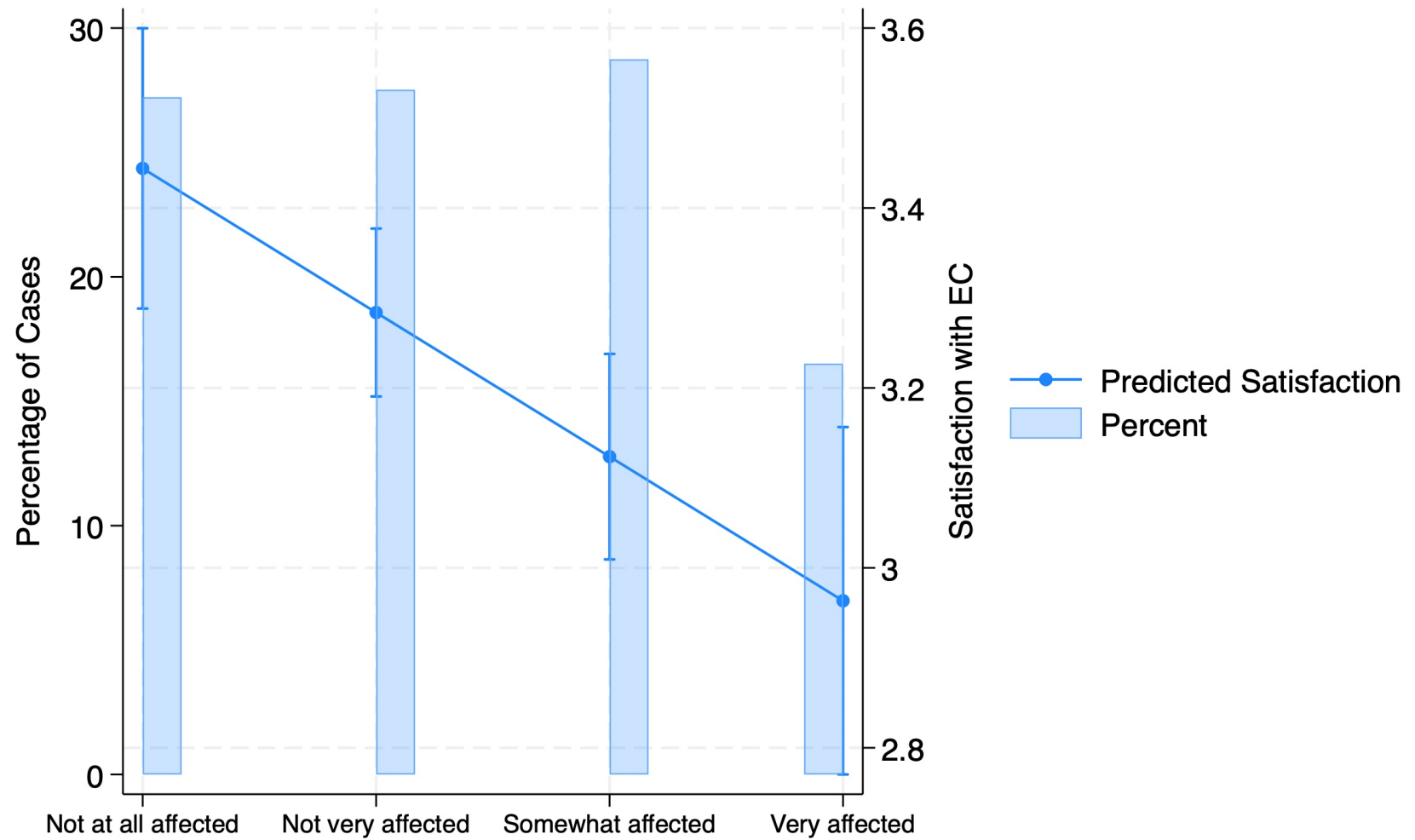
	(1) Elected	(2) Party Win	(3) Pop. Att.	(4) For. Inter.	(5) Controls
Elected	0.14 (0.13)				0.08 (0.13)
Formed Government		0.20 (0.11)*			0.02 (0.12)
Populist Attitudes			-0.20 (0.09)**		-0.10 (0.09)
Foreign Interference				-0.18 (0.05)***	-0.16 (0.05)***
Western Provinces	0.09 (0.12)	0.06 (0.12)	0.09 (0.12)	0.11 (0.12)	0.13 (0.12)
Quebec	-0.31 (0.12)***	-0.32 (0.12)***	-0.33 (0.12)***	-0.27 (0.12)**	-0.28 (0.12)**
Atlantic Provinces	0.20 (0.16)	0.20 (0.16)	0.18 (0.17)	0.17 (0.15)	0.18 (0.15)
Female	-0.09 (0.10)	-0.12 (0.10)	-0.12 (0.10)	-0.09 (0.09)	-0.09 (0.10)
Place Type	0.05 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.05 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)	0.04 (0.04)
Education	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.04)	-0.02 (0.04)
Constant	3.17 (0.20)***	3.19 (0.20)***	3.83 (0.38)***	3.62 (0.22)***	3.90 (0.40)***
<i>N</i>	270	270	269	269	268
<i>R</i> ²	0.08	0.08	0.09	0.13	0.14

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

The results confirm that politicians who believe the election was affected by foreign interference will be less satisfied with Elections Canada (H3a) when other factors are held constant. As expected, the effect of perceptions of foreign interference is negative and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$) with a coefficient of (-0.16) in the final regression. The substantive effect of these perceptions is illustrated in Figure 4.2. The graph shows that the predicted satisfaction with Elections Canada is above 3.4 (out of 4) for Canadian politicians who believe foreign interference did not affect the election campaign (about 27% of the respondents), whereas the average is below 3 for those who believe the election campaign was very affected (about 16.5% of the respondents).

Moving to the other effects in the model, being elected, having your political party form a government, and populist attitudes do not have a significant effect. Initially, forming a government is close to a significant effect ($p < 0.10$) when regressed individually with the four common individual-level control variables. The same occurs for populist attitudes, which has a significant effect ($p < 0.05$). However, both effects are no longer significant once the remaining independent variables are added in column 5. Therefore, both H1a and H2a are not supported. Because foreign interference remains significant in the final model, this variable might be driving most of the effect. Future work might therefore consider whether holding populist attitudes makes individuals more susceptible to believing that foreign interference impacted elections. Interestingly, politicians running in Quebec are, on average, less satisfied with Elections Canada ($p < 0.05$, coefficient (-0.28)).

Figure 4.2: Substantive effect of Foreign Interference on Satisfaction with Elections Canada



Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

In the next analysis, I regress politicians' perceptions of electoral integrity on the same variables. Table 4.3 displays these results. Forming a government ($p < 0.01$) and populist attitudes ($p < 0.01$) are both initially significant when regressed on their own with the four control variables, but these effects are no longer significant once all independent variables are included. Like in the final model of Table 4.2, perceptions of foreign interference seem to be driving most of the effect. Therefore, the second hypothesis about winning or losing (H1b) and populist attitudes (H2b) are not supported.

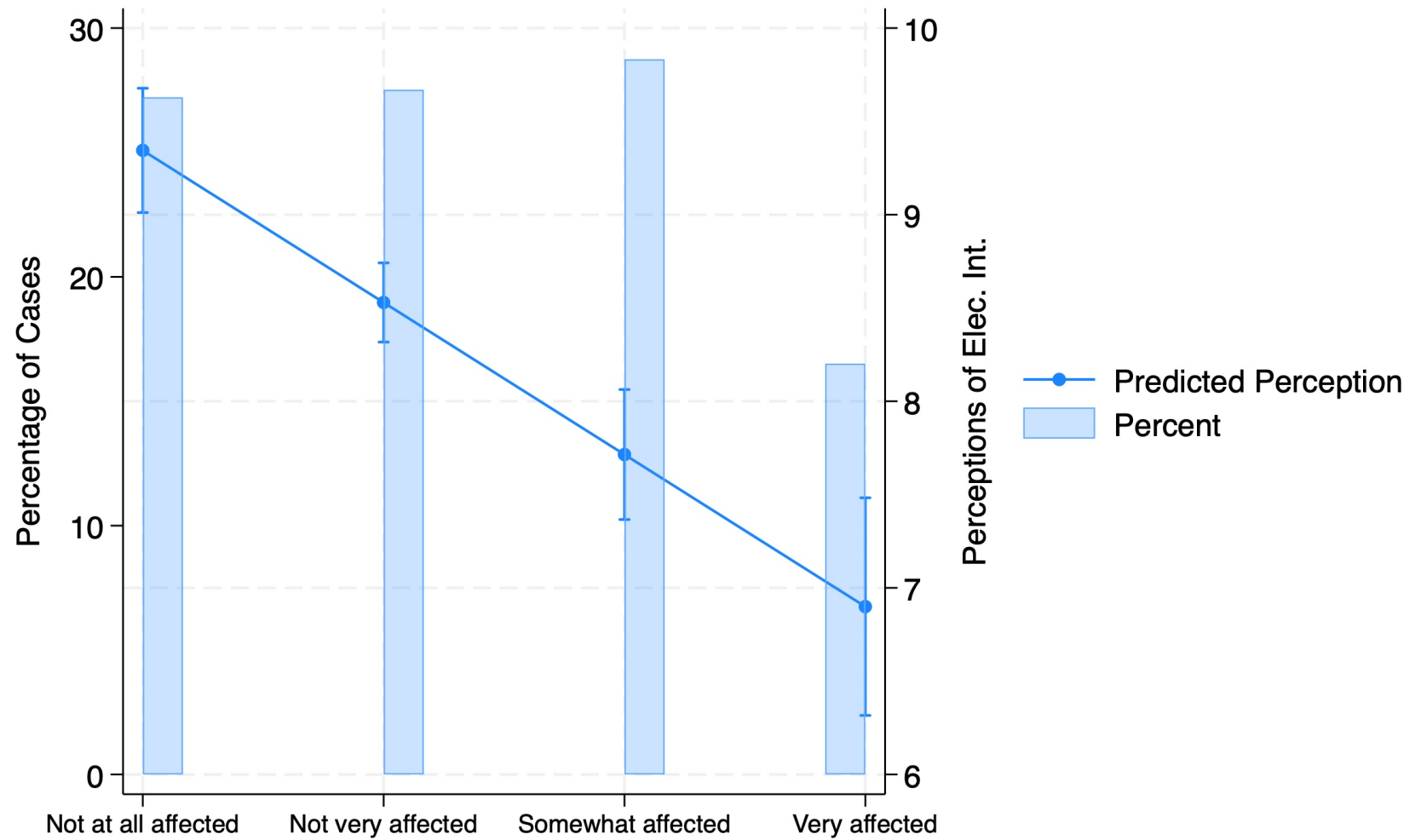
Perceptions of foreign interference ($p < 0.01$, coefficient (-0.81)) again have a significant and strong effect on perceptions of electoral integrity supporting H3b. This effect is illustrated in Figure 4.3. Politicians who believe foreign interference did not affect the election campaign have a predicted perception of electoral integrity that is just above 9, whereas those who believe it was very affected will average below 7 (more than a 2-point difference). This is a substantial effect and shows how beliefs about the impacts of foreign interference can have a major influence on perceptions of electoral integrity.

Table 4.3: Explaining Politicians' Perceptions of Electoral Integrity

	(1) Elected	(2) Party Win	(3) Pop. Att.	(4) For. Inter.	(5) Controls
Elected	0.20 (0.35)				−0.20 (0.29)
Formed Government		1.11 (0.26)***			0.39 (0.29)
Populist Attitudes			−0.85 (0.29)***		−0.32 (0.27)
Foreign Interference				−0.89 (0.13)***	−0.81 (0.14)***
Western Provinces	−0.47 (0.33)	−0.49 (0.31)	−0.42 (0.32)	−0.24 (0.31)	−0.27 (0.32)
Quebec	−1.05 (0.36)***	−1.06 (0.34)***	−1.11 (0.35)***	−0.83 (0.31)***	−0.88 (0.32)***
Atlantic Provinces	−0.10 (0.46)	−0.07 (0.45)	−0.13 (0.43)	−0.22 (0.36)	−0.21 (0.35)
Female	−0.25 (0.28)	−0.32 (0.27)	−0.34 (0.28)	−0.19 (0.24)	−0.26 (0.25)
Place Type	0.23 (0.11)**	0.22 (0.11)**	0.23 (0.11)**	0.16 (0.10)	0.17 (0.10)*
Education	0.07 (0.12)	0.00 (0.12)	0.01 (0.12)	0.05 (0.11)	0.01 (0.11)
Constant	7.88 (0.57)***	7.95 (0.56)***	10.66 (1.11)***	10.12 (0.62)***	11.01 (1.04)***
<i>N</i>	268	268	267	267	266
<i>R</i> ²	0.07	0.12	0.10	0.26	0.27

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

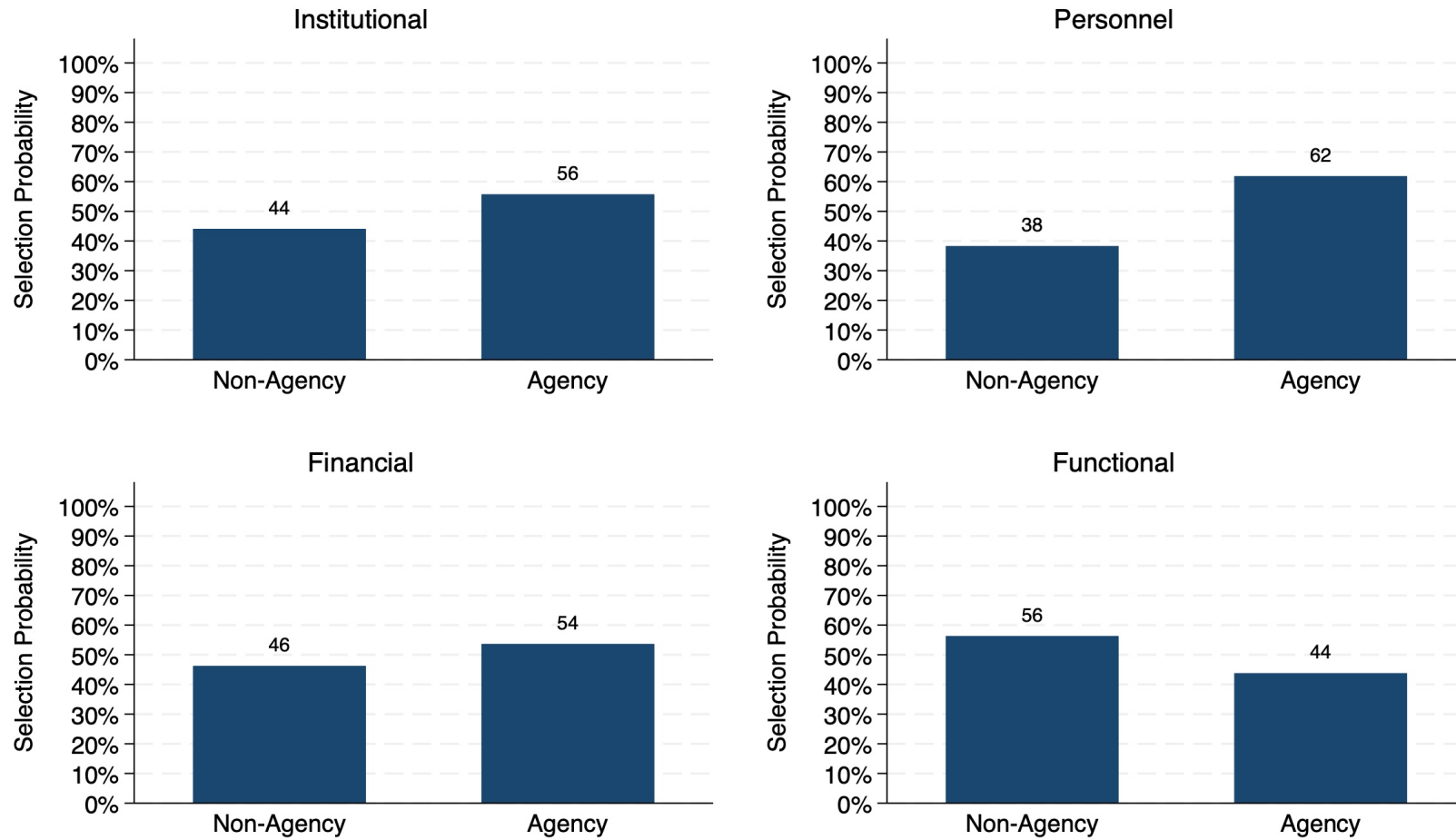
Figure 4.3: Substantive effects of Foreign Interference on Electoral Integrity



EMB Independence Preferences

I now examine politicians' preferences toward EMB independence and assess whether their overall *satisfaction with the electoral process* (SEP) influence these preferences. To begin, Figure 4.4 illustrates the substantive results of the conjoint experiment on politicians' EMB independence preferences (see Appendix 4 for the regression results, each EMB dimension preference is significant at $p < 0.01$). The results show that Canadian politicians prefer that the institutional, personnel, and financial dimensions of an EMB align with the agency model. They are 12% more likely to prefer an EMB with an agency model of institutional independence, 24% for personnel independence, and 8% for financial independence (these percentages are shown by the differences between the bars in Figure 4.4). However, it is very surprising to note that Canadian politicians prefer the non-agency model of EMB for functional independence. Specifically, they are 12% more likely to select an EMB with a non-agency model of functional independence. Not only does this contradict H4a which is informed by previous research, but it is also in opposition to the current EMB design of Elections Canada. It seems that Canadian politicians generally prefer the agency model of EMB, *except for when it comes to who determines whether an objected ballot is being counted*. While the agency model places this responsibility in the hands of election officials, Canadian politicians would rather political party representatives have this power (which gives more partisan decision-making power in the electoral process). These results therefore confirm H4a for three of the four dimensions, since Canadian politicians only prefer a non-agency model for functional independence.

Figure 4.4: Selection Probability Preferences across Independence Dimensions



Note: the 95% confidence intervals as follows: (1) Institutional (Non-Agency: 0.41, 0.47; Agency: 0.52, 0.59); (2) Personnel (Non-Agency: 0.35, 0.42; Agency: 0.59; 0.65); (3) Financial (Non-Agency: 0.43, 0.50; Agency: 0.50, 0.57); (4) Functional (Non-Agency: 0.53, 0.60; Agency: 0.41; 0.47).

The linear regression models in Table 4.4 show the results of the interaction effects between the index of politicians' overall SEP and each independence dimensions (non-agency attributes are coded as 0 whereas agency attributes are coded as 1). The results relating to H4b (whether *Canadian politicians who are dissatisfied with the electoral process will prefer a less independent EMB*) are close to significance for two dimensions. The interaction effect between the overall SEP and personnel (coefficient 0.02) as well as functional (coefficient 0.02) independence are both positive (as expected), but only statistically significant at the 0.10 level. These results suggest to some extent that positive (negative) perceptions of the electoral process increase (decrease) the likeliness of preferring the agency model for both personnel and functional independence. The low proportions of Canadian politicians who are dissatisfied with Elections Canada and/or have negative perceptions of electoral integrity (recall the results of Figure 4.1) likely explains the failure to achieve statistical significance that is at the 0.05 level or above.

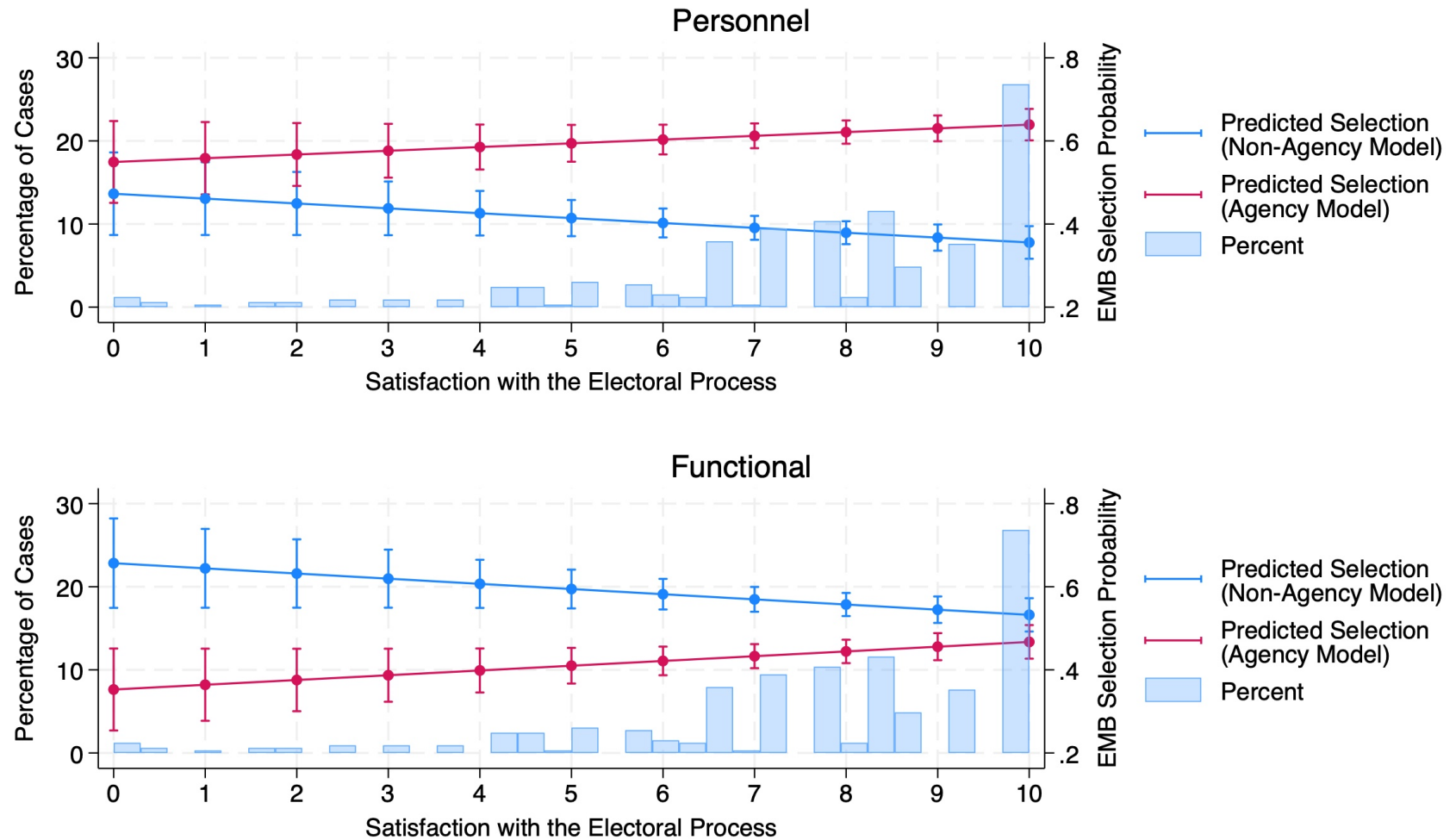
I present the predicted values associated with these interactions in Figure 4.5. When it comes to personnel independence, very dissatisfied politicians, on average, are almost as likely to select the agency or non-agency model. As their satisfaction increases, their likeliness of selecting the agency model also increases. However, for functional independence, dissatisfied politicians are much more likely to select the non-agency model, whereas very satisfied politicians seem as likely to select the agency model or non-agency model. This is noteworthy because Canadian politicians generally prefer the non-agency model of functional independence, which means that having more positive evaluations of the electoral process can impact their preferences. Therefore, the results provide some evidence that assessments of the electoral process might indeed influence preferences relating to an EMB's design.

Table 4.4: Explaining Politicians' EMB Independence Preferences

	(1) Institutional	(2) Personnel	(3) Financial	(4) Functional
SEP	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)*	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.01 (0.01)*
Institutional	−0.06 (0.13)	0.12 (0.03)***	0.12 (0.03)***	0.12 (0.03)***
Personnel	0.23 (0.03)***	0.08 (0.10)	0.24 (0.03)***	0.23 (0.03)***
Financial	0.07 (0.03)***	0.08 (0.03)***	−0.02 (0.09)	0.07 (0.03)***
Functional	−0.12 (0.03)***	−0.12 (0.03)***	−0.12 (0.03)***	−0.30 (0.10)***
Institutional * SEP	0.02 (0.02)			
Personnel * SEP		0.02 (0.01)*		
Financial * SEP			0.01 (0.01)	
Functional * SEP				0.02 (0.01)*
Constant	0.44 (0.07)***	0.44 (0.06)***	0.40 (0.05)***	0.44 (0.06)***
<i>N</i>	2248	2248	2248	2248
<i>R</i> ²	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.09

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.*

Figure 4.5: Predicted values of EMB Selection across Satisfaction with the Electoral Process



Conclusion

This article posed two questions. First, “which factors influence politicians’ satisfaction with the EMB administering the election and their perceptions of electoral integrity?” Second, “do Canadian politicians prefer having an EMB that is more (or less) independent from the government, and if so, how do they weigh the different dimensions of EMB independence?” The article’s key findings in response to these questions along with recommendations for future research are discussed in turn.

Winning or Losing

The non-significant findings for winning and losing are surprising, given previous work showing that candidates in Germany were more likely to have negative perceptions of electoral integrity if they lost (Schnaudt, 2023). Furthermore, other research highlights that assessments of broader satisfaction with democracy are influenced by winning or losing for both politicians (Ferland et al., 2025a) and citizens (Anderson & Guillory, 1997). Are Canadian politicians or the 2025 federal election an anomaly? Or could it be that winning or losing is not always a significant predictor of actors’ assessments of the way democracy is working (Daoust et al., 2024; Nemčok et al., 2026)? Alternatively, are politicians’ assessments of electoral processes more complicated, or even distinct, from their assessments of other parts of the democratic system? It should be noted that from a normative perspective, a narrower winner-loser gap for perceptions about the electoral process is also arguably good news for democracy,⁴⁹ since it indicates that politicians’ assessments about the freeness or fairness of the election are separate from their election outcomes. Overall,

⁴⁹ Previous works have also found that a key feature of healthy democratic systems is having a narrow winner-loser gap when it comes to the democratic satisfaction of citizens (Nadeau et al., 2021).

these non-findings raise questions that other scholars might seek to address by examining other countries.

Populist Attitudes

It is interesting to note that populist attitudes do not influence Canadian politicians' satisfaction with Elections Canada or their perceptions of electoral integrity. Previous findings show that populists are generally less trusting of institutions (Peresman et al., 2025), more distrustful of political institutions (Štětka et al., 2025), and that populist politicians in particular have more negative perceptions of electoral integrity (Schnaudt, 2023). However, the results for both H2a and H2b show that, once other factors like perceptions of foreign interference are considered, these relationships are not significant. Future studies might consider if populist attitudes might influence evaluations of other more specific parts of electoral processes or institutions, like perceptions of foreign interference.

Perceptions of Foreign Interference

The analysis found that politicians' beliefs that foreign interference affected the election have a negative effect on both their satisfaction with Elections Canada and perceptions of electoral integrity. However, a security assessment (which was released months after conducting the survey) found that foreign attempts to undermine the federal election did not impact the integrity of the election (Government of Canada 2025). This is an alarming finding, since it demonstrates that foreign interference attempts can influence Canadian politicians' *perceptions* of the electoral process, even if the interference attempts did not infringe on the ability of Canadians to freely and fairly vote. Foreign interference might not have affected the actual integrity of the electoral process

in Canada, but the additional threat it poses to Canadian democracy (and likely to elections in any democratic country) lies in the finding that it can affect the *sociological* element of electoral integrity. An unsuccessful foreign interference attempt can still be successful in subverting perceptions of the electoral process if the actors participating in the election become skeptical of the threat or impacts of foreign interference on the process. Researchers and practitioners might therefore consider (further) investigating how to best help domestic actors identify and assess allegations or attempts of foreign interference. Future research might also consider examining politicians' perceptions of other kinds of alleged (domestic) electoral interference and whether these views also influence politicians' evaluations of the electoral process.

EMB Independence

One of the most surprising results of this analysis is that Canadian politicians prefer the non-agency model of functional independence, given that it contradicts the current design of Elections Canada. However, the interaction effects on politicians' personnel and functional independence preferences suggest that their evaluations of the electoral process can indeed influence their preferences relating to an EMB's design. This is both theoretically and practically noteworthy. Theoretically, these results suggest electoral processes not only influence broader democratic outcomes – like satisfaction with democracy (Gaspard, 2025; Lundmark et al., 2020)) – but also preferences of an EMB's design. In terms of causal linkages, this would mean that actors' perceptions of the electoral process might work in two directions. Past work proposes that an EMB's design affects its performance, which then impacts outcomes like electoral integrity (James et al., 2019, p. 302). However, this work shows that outcomes also seem to influence design preferences. Practically, if evaluations of the electoral process can influence EMB design

preferences, then EMBs have additional reasons to aim to administer high-quality elections. Not only does administering well-run elections fulfill their *raison d'être*, but it seems to also have tangible impacts on whether politicians prefer the country's current EMB design to alternative ones.

Concluding Notes

In addition to the theoretical and empirical contributions listed above, this article makes a broader methodological contribution to the literature on electoral processes and election administration. To the author's knowledge, this article is the first to use a conjoint experiment to assess preferences pertaining to an EMB's design. Using this experimental approach can help to deepen our understanding of EMBs and the electoral process more broadly. For example, future studies might replicate this experiment for the six other parts of an EMB's design (capacity, centralization, scope and division of tasks, technology, personnel and relationships with external actors (James et al., 2019)) or assess which part(s) of the electoral process matter most to actors' perceptions of electoral integrity. Overall, the introduction of conjoint experiments to this literature opens a new and innovative way to expand our knowledge of electoral processes. In the current period of democratic decline (Gora & de Wilde, 2022; Grillo & Prato, 2023; Mechkova et al., 2017) and given the threats to democracy across the globe, it is imperative to use any tools at our disposal to better understand key democratic processes, especially elections.

Appendix 4

Table 4.A1: Composition of the candidates' sample and population (%)

Factor	Candidate survey	Candidate population
N	328	1,336
What party did you stand for in this election?		
Liberal Party of Canada	22.9%	26%
Conservative Party of Canada	16.8%	26%
New Democratic Party	22.3%	25%
Green Party of Canada	30.2%	17%
Bloc Québécois	7.6%	6%
No answer	0.3%	-
Jurisdiction		
Ontario	31.7%	34%
Western Provinces	27.1%	30%
Quebec	32.0%	26%
Atlantic Provinces	8.5%	9%
Territories	0.6%	1%
Do you consider yourself to be?		
Male	50.9%	62%
Female	35.1%	38%
Other identity, prefer not to answer, or no answer	14.0%	-
Do you live in a –		
Rural area or village	18.6%	-
Small or middle-sized town	18.9%	-
Suburb of a large town or city	18.9%	-
Large town or city	32.6%	-
No answer	11.0%	-
Education		
Lower secondary	2.4%	-
Upper secondary	11.6%	-
Post-secondary / non-tertiary	12.8%	-
Short-cycle tertiary	29.0%	-
Bachelor or equivalent	21.3%	-
Master or equivalent	12.5%	-
No answer	10.4%	-

Table 4.A2: Populist Attitudes Indicators

Indicator #	Survey Question	Possible Responses
-	<i>Do you agree or disagree with the following statements on democracy in Canada?</i>	-
1	Legislation reflects the interests of the majority of citizens.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree
2	Political parties are the essential link between citizens and the state.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree
3	Special interests have too much influence on law making.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree
4	Parliament, not voters, should make final decisions on law and policy.	1 = Strongly agree 2 = Agree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Disagree 5 = Strongly disagree
5	Citizens should be able to initiate a binding referendum.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree
6	What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out one's principles.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree
7	The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree
8	The will of the majority should always prevail, even over the rights of minorities.	1 = Strongly disagree 2 = Disagree 3 = Neither agree nor disagree 4 = Agree 5 = Strongly agree

Table 4.A3: Variable List

Variable	Observations	Mean	Standard Deviation
<i>Satisfaction with Elections Canada</i>	328	3.23	0.80
<i>Perception of Electoral Integrity</i>	326	8.22	2.31
<i>Elected</i>	319	0.13	0.34
<i>Formed Government</i>	327	0.23	0.42
<i>Populist Attitudes Index</i>	294	2.98	0.50
<i>Perception of Foreign Interference</i>	327	2.35	1.05
<i>Jurisdiction</i>	326	-	-
<i>Gender</i>	282	0.41	0.49
<i>Place Type</i>	292	-	-
<i>Education</i>	294	4.03	1.31
<i>Satisfaction with the Electoral Process (SEP) (index)</i>	2,624	7.66	2.16
<i>N (original survey)</i>	328	-	-
<i>N (conjoint analysis)</i>	2,624	-	-

Table 4.A4: Regression Results for EMB Independence Preferences

	(1) EMB Independence
Institutional	0.12 (0.03)***
Personnel	0.23 (0.03)***
Financial	0.07 (0.03)***
Functional	−0.12 (0.03)***
Constant	0.35 (0.03)***
<i>N</i>	2248
adj. R^2	0.088

*Note: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$. A multicollinearity test indicates that there is a very low level of multicollinearity in the model (mean VIF of 1.00).*

Chapter 5: Conclusion and Recommendations

Given the vivid concerns of democratic decline – and the particularly important role politicians have in relation to democratic stability or backsliding – it is imperative for researchers to (re-)examine processes and institutions in democratic countries, as well as citizens and politicians' attitudes towards these structures. This dissertation tackled this challenge by exploring the attitudes of politicians. As such, it unravels our understanding of politicians' perceptions of electoral processes, and it further strengthens the foundation for future work on politicians' satisfaction with democracy (SWD). The articles in this manuscript jointly contribute to this goal by examining how election-related determinants influence politicians' SWD and their specific perceptions of electoral processes. Because the bedrock of representative democracies is the selection of leaders through free, fair, and competitive elections (Schumpeter, 1943), it is crucial to consider electoral processes when studying politicians' assessments of democracy.

While each article in this manuscript contains theoretical and empirical contributions that are noteworthy within their areas of focus, this thesis finds that politicians generally want democracy and elections to function in accordance with classic democratic ideals. Their democratic satisfaction is higher when elections are freer and fairer, when EMBs have a greater capacity to administer elections, and when they believe voters make decisions based on policy preferences (i.e., when they believe that voters are democratic idealists). Politicians also have more negative perceptions of electoral processes when they think that external forces like foreign interference are impacting elections. This does not imply, however, that all politicians will always act in accordance with classic democratic ideals. If all actors in democratic systems behaved in accordance with these democratic expectations at all times, then there would likely be fewer concerns surrounding the stability of democratic systems. However, it is promising (and maybe

even hopeful) to see evidence that politicians' assessments of the working of democracy and elections will be more positive when these processes follow democratic expectations.

In addition to this overarching finding about politicians' attitudes about the working of democracy and elections, this thesis makes several theoretical and empirical contributions to the broader study of democracy, as well as the fields of SWD, electoral processes, electoral management bodies (EMBs), and politicians' attitudes. The next sections of this chapter discuss these theoretical and empirical contributions, and then consider several implications for practitioners. The chapter concludes by reviewing the limitations of this project and suggests possible areas of future research.

Theoretical Contributions

This thesis produced three major theoretical contributions to studies of democracy, politicians, and electoral processes. The first major contribution of this project is its consideration and proposal of original factors influencing politicians' democratic satisfaction. Previous research on SWD mainly focuses on citizens (Singh & Mayne, 2023), along with some considerations of elected representatives (Esaiasson et al., 2013; Häfner et al., 2023; Rosón & Díaz, 2020). However, these past works did not consider the views of politicians who ran as candidates but were not elected to the legislature. While other works on politicians have examined several aspects of their behaviour (Lucas, Sheffer, Loewen, et al., 2024; Sevenans et al., 2023; Walgrave et al., 2023) or their views about their own roles in legislatures (Loat & MacMillan, 2014), previous literature did not sufficiently consider their assessments of the way democracy works. Furthermore, there is a gap in past studies in terms of their consideration of determinants relating to the electoral process when it comes to SWD of politicians. Studying these perspectives about the way politicians think democracy works is timely and of practical importance (given the ongoing discussions about the

global state of democratic countries) but is also theoretically noteworthy because some of the views of politicians differ than their corresponding citizens. In a preliminary work for this thesis dissertation (Ferland et al., 2025a), in which I am a co-author, we replicate established findings of citizens' SWD, but for politicians. We find that centrist (extremist) politicians are more (less) satisfied with democracy relative to their corresponding citizens that hold the same ideological views. We also find that politicians whose political party formed governments (winners) are even more satisfied than corresponding citizens (whose preferred party won).

I built on this initial collaboration to consider some factors that could be specific to politicians' democratic satisfaction. As such, this thesis considered the role of the electoral process (with a narrower focus on electoral integrity and EMBs that administer elections), given the distinct role that politicians have in election campaigns. It also considered the unique role that elected politicians have as representatives by examining their beliefs about the voters that they represent. These factors touch on two unique roles and experiences that politicians have in democratic systems: (1) their attempt as a candidate to get elected and (2) if elected, their role as a representative. In considering these unique circumstances for politicians, I argue that studying politicians' democratic satisfaction is an important consideration for evaluating broader democratic stability. By extension, I proposed that politicians' SWD will be higher when factors that impact politicians, like electoral processes and their beliefs about voters, are more consistent with democratic norms (such as free and fair elections or voters selecting leaders based on their policy stances rather than deeply held identities). Evidence in chapters 2 and 3 demonstrates that politicians have higher SWD when these factors function in accordance with democratic expectations. These are shown through mechanisms pertaining to electoral processes and politicians' beliefs about voters.

Chapter 2 argues that politicians will have higher SWD in countries with more electoral integrity, with EMBs that have more independence, and with EMBs that have more resources (a higher capacity) to administer elections. These rationales are based on mechanisms that relate to having freer and fairer elections (e.g., having higher electoral integrity legitimizes those who won the election and gives more confidence in the outcome for those who lost, or an EMB having more resources to better administer elections). The results in chapter 2 confirm the rationales given for electoral integrity and EMB capacity on politicians' SWD.

Additionally, winning or losing the election (when it comes to electoral integrity), and a politician's left-to-right ideology (when it comes to EMB capacity) impact the degree to which politicians are satisfied. Interestingly, the influence of electoral integrity on SWD differs between politicians who won and citizens whose preferred candidate won. Whereas past research on citizens shows that the SWD of both winners and losers are influenced by the presence (or absence) of electoral fraud (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), it seems electoral integrity has a greater impact on politicians who lost. This finding demonstrates that the mechanism explaining the relationship between electoral integrity and SWD differs between politicians and citizens. This reinforces the notion that there are specific factors to consider for politicians when examining their SWD, given their unique role in democratic systems.

When focusing on representatives' (elected politicians') beliefs about voters (another factor that is unique to their role in democratic systems) in chapter 3, I make a similar argument to the one in chapter 2. Politicians will have higher SWD when they believe their system is working in accordance with democratic expectations. Specifically, when elected politicians believe that voters make decisions based on policy preferences (which is in line with democratic idealism), rather than believing that voters make decisions based on deeply held identities (which is in line with

democratic realism). Since politicians primarily campaign by taking stances on policy issues, it is plausible that they would be more satisfied when they believe that voters act on those stances. For elected politicians, believing voters made an informed policy decision (to elect them to office) should, on its own, make representatives happy, but it may also provide them with a greater sense of legitimacy and authority to govern and enact policies on behalf of voters. The results of chapter 3 reinforce this rationale, since elected politicians who are democratic idealists do indeed have higher SWD than those who are democratic realists.

Overall, the first major theoretical contribution of this thesis is examining factors that are specific to politicians' SWD and their unique position in democratic systems. Both chapters 2 and chapter 3 demonstrate that the relationship between these factors and their democratic satisfaction can be explained by wanting electoral processes and their democratic system to work in accordance with democratic expectations.

The second major theoretical contribution pertains to better understanding politicians' perceptions of electoral processes and how election-related determinants might influence these views. Several factors were considered that may influence politicians' assessments of these processes differently than citizens. For example, for a politician, winning or losing arguably has higher personal stakes than for citizens, since a win or a loss for a politician determines whether they have access to power as a representative. Additionally, politicians' deeper involvement in electoral campaigns could impact the degree to which their populist attitudes or perceptions of foreign interference influence their assessments of electoral processes. In general, it was expected that politicians will have more positive perceptions of electoral processes if: (1) they were in circumstances they viewed as more positive (if they were elected or their party formed government), (2) they hold more positive attitudes about political institutions (those with fewer

populist attitudes), and (3) if they believe the electoral process was not impacted by foreign interference. By examining Canada's 45th general election through the Canadian Candidates Survey, the results confirm part of these rationales. A politician's party forming government and whether they hold populist attitudes initially had a significant impact on their satisfaction with Elections Canada (the EMB administering the Canadian general election), and their perceptions of electoral integrity. However, these effects were no longer significant once their perceptions of foreign interference were considered, which had the strongest effect on their perceptions of the electoral process.

The strong impact that perceptions of foreign interference have on both politicians' satisfaction with the administration of the election and their perceptions of electoral integrity points to a broader theoretical contribution to the literature on electoral integrity. Specifically, the importance of the sociological approach to our understanding of electoral integrity. While there are clear reasons to study and assess electoral integrity using the democratic theory/normative (James & Garnett, 2025) or international norms (Norris et al., 2014) approaches, the findings of this project show that we should not discount the sociological approach. Surely, actors' assessments about the freeness and fairness of elections can be incorrect (Pennycook & Rand, 2021), but their views are arguably the most important, since negative assessments could result in challenges to the legitimacy of the electoral process. This does not suggest that the sociological approach to electoral integrity should be the only, or dominant, approach. Rather, the evidence in this dissertation shows that the sociological approach should be used in conjunction with other approaches (like the democratic theory/normative approach) to ensure that we consider both expert and public assessments of electoral integrity. Therefore, future research on electoral integrity might consider integrating these two main approaches into their works.

The third major theoretical contribution specifically relates to the connection between Canadian politicians' perceptions of the electoral process and whether these perceptions can influence preferences about the design of an EMB. It was initially expected that Canadian politicians should generally prefer an EMB design that reflects current practices in their country. Specifically, Canadian politicians should prefer that the four dimensions of an EMB's independence (institutional, personnel, financial, and functional) be more independent, since this is in line with current practices in Canada. By extension, I argued that Canadian politicians who are dissatisfied with the electoral process will prefer a less independent EMB. If Canadian politicians believe the electoral process is not working well, their preferences might diverge from Canada's current practices (in the same way that the preferences of a dissatisfied politician in a different country might diverge from the design of their country's EMB).

The results of chapter 4 speak to these expectations. Canadian politicians do indeed have clear preferences relating to the dimensions of an EMB's independence. Their functional independence preferences, however, do not align with current practices in Canada (whereas their institutional, personnel, and financial independence preferences do). Canadian politicians seem to prefer that EMBs have less functional independence. However, their perceptions of electoral processes can partially influence these preferences.⁵⁰ Not only does this suggest that politicians have views about the design and independence of an EMB, but that these views can be influenced by their perceptions of the electoral process. This implies that for politicians, different parts of the electoral process, and their assessments of them, are interconnected. This theoretical contribution also has practical implications – if politicians' assessments of electoral processes are

⁵⁰ When it comes to personnel independence, very dissatisfied politicians, on average, are almost as likely to select the agency or non-agency model. As their satisfaction increases, their likeliness of selecting the agency model also increases. However, for functional independence, dissatisfied politicians are much more likely to select the non-agency model, whereas very satisfied politicians seem as likely to select the agency model or non-agency model.

interconnected, then success or failure in one part of the electoral process can have impacts on others. For practitioners, like election officials working in EMBs, these are important considerations, since (dis)satisfaction in one area can influence politicians' perceptions of their preferred EMB design. While chapter 4 only considers an EMB's independence, it is plausible that this might also translate to other parts of an EMB's design.

Empirical Contributions

In addition to these theoretical contributions, there are also two notable empirical contributions made to the study of democracy, politicians, and electoral processes. The first and arguably biggest empirical contribution of this project is that it contains the first study to use a conjoint experiment to assess EMB preferences. Conjoint experiments in political science are growing in prominence, and have been used to examine topics like whether citizens' preferences influence their democratic satisfaction (Hobolt et al., 2021; Merkley et al., 2019; VanDusky-Allen & Utych, 2021), voters' perspectives of (corrupt) politicians (Breitenstein, 2019; Ferrer, 2023), voters' choices and priorities when party labels are absent (Kirkland & Coppock, 2018), citizens' attitudes towards immigrants (Hedegaard, 2021), as well as voters' and public officials' biases regarding women's representation in politics (Teele et al., 2018) among others. The significant findings of chapter 4 demonstrate that this methodological approach is also useful for assessing actors' preferences relating to EMBs. While this project focused on EMB independence, future work might focus on other EMB dimensions (such as its capacity, centralisation, the scope and division of tasks, technology, personnel, or the EMB's relations with external actors (James et al., 2019)). Studies can also assess which dimensions matter most to different groups of actors (for example, whether politicians prefer an EMB with more independence or a higher capacity if they had to make a

trade-off). In short, conjoint studies can be a very useful tool for assessing the causal mechanisms of several topics in the study of electoral processes and institutions.

The project's second major empirical contribution directly pertains to the study of Canadian politics. The third and fourth chapters demonstrate important findings about Canadian politicians operating at the municipal and federal levels of government. Furthermore, the work in the fourth chapter includes original data from politicians that participated in the 2025 Canadian federal election. This dataset includes many insights about Canadian politicians' perspectives on election-related determinants (including their perceptions of foreign interference, electoral integrity, or satisfaction with the EMB administering the election), which can be used in conjunction with other data on their behaviour. Studies in other jurisdictions might consider including questions on these election-related determinants so that more generalizable theories about politicians' perceptions of electoral processes can be assessed.

Considerations for Practitioners

Practitioners who are concerned about the well-being of democracy or the conduct of electoral processes in their country might use the findings in this project as helpful evidence to further inform their considerations about area(s) of focus for policies or institutional reform. Chapter 2 demonstrates the importance of electoral integrity and EMB capacity from the perspective of politicians' SWD, while chapter 4 demonstrates how perceptions of foreign interference can influence perceptions of the electoral process (which can, in turn, influence preferences surrounding an EMB's independence). In response, practitioners might consider looking into ways to strengthen institutions or processes relating to these concepts. For example, since perceptions of foreign interference have a major impact on perceptions of electoral integrity, practitioners

might consider putting (more) resources towards educating actors about the impacts of foreign interference or towards (additional) safeguards to help negate its impacts.

This dissertation also offers insights about electoral processes and EMB design in Canada. The results of the conjoint experiment in chapter 4 show that Canadian politicians prefer a model of functional independence that is not consistent with current EMB designs in Canada. Specifically, when it comes to a candidate objecting to a ballot being counted or not counted, the surveyed politicians seem to prefer that an election board (made up of representatives from each political party) determines whether the ballot is counted, rather than having the electoral district's Returning Officer (an election official) determine whether it is counted. However, the results also show that politicians who are more satisfied with the electoral process are less likely to prefer having an election board determine whether the ballot is counted.

These insights from Canada should be of interest to practitioners in both Canada and abroad. In Canada, candidates or their representatives are allowed to be present at a polling station when votes are counted (Government of Canada 2026, s. 283(1)(b)). There may therefore be two plausible explanations to rationalize why candidates (who already have their representatives present during the counting process) also want their representatives to determine whether a ballot is counted. Candidates could either (1) simply want more control over the process, since it impacts whether they are elected to a legislature, or (2) may not be satisfied with the decision-making of election officials at polling stations. The first explanation seems more plausible, given that 85% of the politicians surveyed in chapter four are either "fairly satisfied" or "very satisfied" with Elections Canada. However, given the results of the conjoint experiment, election officials might consider asking candidates *why* they might prefer that an election board has final say over whether a ballot is counted. Further assessing these perceptions could give helpful insights into how

election officials could improve the experience of candidates or their representatives during the counting process.

Practitioners abroad might also consider how more positive perceptions of the electoral process make politicians (somewhat) more willing to accept the status quo of the EMB. While additional research is needed to confirm whether these mechanisms are replicable for politicians in other jurisdictions, these findings demonstrate that perceptions of the electoral process can have actual impacts on EMB design preferences. This is especially important, given that elected politicians can attempt to change EMB designs by trying to pass legislation as representatives. In short, the experiences of politicians and their preferences *could* have actual impacts on the design of EMBs and consequently, the administration of elections.

Limitations of the Studies

There are three main limitations of the studies in this project. These limitations pertain to (1) the scope of the democratic-related determinants that the three articles examine, (2) the types of jurisdictions used as case studies, and (3) the type of data used throughout the project. While this thesis intentionally focuses on election-related determinants (since elections are the foundation of democratic systems and are therefore a good starting point for studying politicians' assessments of these systems), this narrower focus can be considered the first limitation of the project. Specifically, the studies in this project do not consider other important elements of the democratic system that are critical to a democracy's health and stability, or that are relevant to politicians' unique roles in these systems. For example, understanding politicians' views about non-election related political institutions (like courts or the legislature), decision-making processes, or the use of executive power, are all considerations that can influence how we theorize about politicians' assessments of the democratic system. Politicians might want electoral processes to follow classic democratic

ideals, but it is also plausible that their views may differ when it comes to other institutions or processes (especially for institutions in which they hold decision-making power as elected representatives). Therefore, while this project serves as a fundamental starting point for better understanding politicians' assessments of democratic systems, the work needed on this topic is far from complete.

Like other studies, a general limitation of this work is the number of case studies and jurisdictions that could be considered. Given this work's focus on parliamentary countries and two levels of government in Canada (federal/municipal), future studies should investigate other contexts and jurisdictions. Some examples include comparing politicians' attitudes in countries with presidential systems of government or doing more specific case studies (like the ones done for Canada) but in countries with different electoral systems. Since Canada has majoritarian electoral systems, it is worth examining whether politicians' attitudes may differ in countries with proportional or mixed systems. For researchers interested in studying Canada, future work should examine politicians at the subnational level (provincial or territorial politics). Doing so can provide deeper insights about Canada by comparing whether its politics (and, more narrowly, the behaviour of its politicians) varies by subnational jurisdiction (Turgeon, 2014). Overall, while the jurisdictions and levels of government considered in this dissertation met the needs of the questions being examined, future work should use other cases that were not considered in this work.

The third main limitation of this project is its sole focus on quantitative data. Using survey data has several advantages (such as being able to consider the perspectives of a much greater number of politicians and uncovering correlations through statistical analyses) but the field of SWD could benefit from additional qualitative work. Singh and Mayne (2023, p. 22) discuss how a qualitative account of citizens' SWD could help to deepen our understanding of the drivers

behind certain relationships, like the connection between winning and democratic satisfaction. Similarly, I propose that these types of works can also enhance our theories about politicians' SWD, or even their perceptions of the electoral process. Additionally, having more qualitative accounts from politicians, like the work done in (Loat & MacMillan, 2014), might highlight other factors within democratic systems that matter to politicians and their SWD, but that are not discussed in the current democratic satisfaction literature.

Areas of Future of Research

To conclude, this project recommends three major areas for future research, which build on the findings of this dissertation. First, as discussed throughout several sections of this thesis, more research on politicians' democratic satisfaction is merited. In addition to the co-authored work done in Ferland et al. (2025a), which focuses on politicians' ideological positions as well as the winner-loser gap, the main findings in this thesis relate to whether electoral determinants and politicians' beliefs about citizens influence their SWD. Future work on politicians' democratic satisfaction should, therefore, build on this research and expand into other democratic related determinants. The predictors of citizens' SWD listed in Singh and Mayne (2023)'s review of the literature, like perceptions of economic performance, could serve as a suitable starting point. However, there are also likely factors that may be more relevant to politicians than citizens based on their unique experiences, like politicians' perceptions of procedures within legislatures. More recent research (Lindholm & Lauener, 2025; Rosón & Mateos, 2026) has already begun to further contribute to this research agenda. Overall, it is worth deepening our knowledge of politicians' SWD to better understand how these key actors in democratic systems think about democracy. Nonetheless, future research might also consider other types of political elites (such as actors in bureaucracies, political organizations, or other state institutions), rather than just politicians, like

in at least one previous work (Stevens et al., 2006). As previously discussed in this chapter, there are calls for more qualitative studies on SWD. This methodological approach seems specifically well suited for studying smaller groups of actors within democratic systems, like political elites who are not politicians.

The second recommended area of future research touches on a difference in the data used in this project's second and fourth chapters. In the second chapter, expert assessments of electoral integrity are used to assess whether politicians' SWD is higher in countries with more electoral integrity. In the fourth chapter, Canadian politicians are asked about their perceptions of electoral integrity. While the core difference in these datasets is who is being asked to assess the integrity of the election (academic experts versus politicians participating in the electoral process), it also touches on how electoral integrity is conceptualized and measured. Academic experts are asked to assess how well an election aligns with certain principles. Put differently, about how they think democracies ought to work in theory as compared to normative benchmarks, like in the democratic theory/normative approach to electoral integrity (James & Garnett, 2025). When politicians are asked about their perceptions of electoral integrity, we are relying on a more sociological (also known as "mass perception") understanding of electoral integrity. This approach is rooted in the premise that actors consider the cultural context, traditions, and norms of their country when evaluating the integrity of an election (Birch, 2011, p. 12; Elklit & Reynolds, 2002; James & Garnett, 2025, p. 9). Mainly, what the actors in a democratic system think about their own country's election in terms of its freeness and fairness. In future studies, it would be important to adopt similar benchmarks with both actors. Possible incongruence across politicians' and experts' assessments are possible and might raise a normative issue: should assessments of electoral integrity (which could encourage or influence actual changes to electoral processes or conceptions

of electoral legitimacy) be determined by academic experts or the actors in those elections? On the one hand, actors in elections have certain incentives, which could therefore influence their assessments of, or how they talk about, electoral processes in their own country. On the other hand, if actors in elections do not perceive an election to be free and fair, then these perceptions could lead to a crisis of democratic legitimacy, even if these perceptions are grounded in little evidence. This is not to suggest that we should study electoral integrity based on public opinion alone. However, future work might consider if there are differences between experts' and actors' assessments of electoral integrity. If these differences do exist in several jurisdictions, then it is worth doing more work to examine why these differences may exist.

The final recommended area of future research is methodological and suggests the further use of conjoint experiments to research preferences about electoral processes or the design of EMBs. Because these experiments force respondents to make trade-offs, utilizing this tool can help us to better understand which parts of electoral processes or institutions matter most to actors in elections. Conjoint experiments have theoretical and empirical benefits when it comes to establishing better potential causal mechanisms (Hainmueller et al., 2014). However, the information that is produced in these studies can also be very useful for practitioners in democratic institutions. In politics, resources are limited or finite – there is not always enough money or human capacity to implement the ideal of a given policy, program, process, or idea. In turn, actors in political institutions may need to make decisions about where to allocate resources. While these decisions should not solely be made based on the results of conjoint experiments, they can serve as a helpful point of information to assess the priorities and preferences of the people impacted by these processes or institutions. In the case of elections, having more data about actors' priorities and preferences could give additional insights about where EMBs could allocate resources to try

to ensure actors in elections are more satisfied with the administration of the electoral process. Overall, the use of conjoint experiments can support both the development of theory in political science and empirically driven insights in the practice of politics.

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