

## **How Electoral Systems Shape What Voters Think About Democracy**

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### **Abstract**

Scholars are divided over the question of whether polarized pluralism is good for or inimical to democratic legitimacy. I argue that this divide is due to the common conflation of different dimensions of the electoral supply - party system polarization and the number of parties - that require theoretical and empirical separation and specification. Using data from 24 democracies around the world, I show that party system polarization and number of parties strongly and separately influence the attitudes of those citizens who have incentives to take a negative view of the political system. Countries' macro-level supply of choices and individuals' predispositions interactively shape citizen consent such that distinct partisan offerings diminish the negative views disenchanting segments of the electorate hold. These results paint a more positive picture of the consequences of electoral fragmentation than is common among students of democracy.

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When they fail to offer choices, elections lose their meaning as instruments of democracy (Powell 2000). Yet, despite their centrality for the quality of democratic elections, little is known about how the variety of options voters have on Election Day affect people's views of the political system. Are the choices available to citizens connected to consent? Existing literature suggests that they are, but scholars disagree about whether more and more distinct choices are good or bad for the legitimacy of political systems. On one hand, scholars have reported higher levels of support for political systems with more proportional election rules and expansive party systems. On the other, a long-standing concern in comparative politics has been with the corroding effects of polarized and fragmented party systems, which often are thought to be the natural by-product of proportional electoral systems. Who, if anyone, is right?

To answer the question of whether fragmented and polarized party systems are good for or inimical to democratic support requires that we differentiate the key dimensions of electoral supply and delineate the logic by which they are expected to shape voters' attitudes about the political system. It also requires that we examine the connection between the kinds of choices democratic elections provide at the level of countries on one hand and the attitudes of individual voters on the other. Below, I do so by arguing that the menu of choices on hand at election time shapes citizen attitudes about democratic political systems, but that it does so with distinct consequences for different groups of voters. Electoral supply in the form of party system polarization and the number of viable parties influences citizens who have incentives to take a dim view of the political system differently from those who have reason to be content with the status quo. In particular, I posit that party systems act as safety valves for political discontent.

Analyses of data from 24 democracies around the world by the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* project reveal that countries' macro-level supply of choices and individuals' predispositions interactively shape citizen consent such that more and distinct partisan options diminish the negative views held by disenchanting segments of the electorate. In contrast to analysts pessimistic about the consequences of electoral fragmentation, the results reported below

suggest that distinct and abundant choices diminish the discontent of citizens with more negative views of the democratic order.

Below, I first discuss the competing theoretical and empirical claims made in the literature on electoral institutions, party systems, and system support. I then develop a model of contingent contextual effects on attitudes about the political system, which I subsequently test with the help of multivariate multilevel regression estimations. After reporting the results, I discuss the findings and avenues for future research.

### **Electoral Supply and System Support**

While students of democratic politics have long agreed that a country's electoral and party systems condition the stability and legitimacy of democratic political systems, they have developed conflicting expectations and evidence about how this works in practice (for a nice overview, see also Blais 1991). On one side is what one could term the "classical" view, which suggests that proportional representation and polarized party systems are bad for citizen support of electoral democracy because they signal and exacerbate competing and conflicting pressures that require peaceful accommodation within the body politic. On the other side, scholars have theorized that political systems characterized by proportional electoral rules and plentiful choices can function as a safety valve for political discontent and thus, ultimately, produce higher levels of legitimacy.

The classic position regarding the connection between electoral systems and legitimacy has been that, compared to single member district systems, proportional electoral systems may be hazardous for a democracy's health. In his famous essay on "Proportional Representation and the Breakdown of German Democracy," Ferdinand Hermens, for example, argued that the Weimar Republic's proportional electoral system was a necessary (though not sufficient) condition for the

breakdown of the German Republic (Hermens 1936, 1941).<sup>1</sup> Or, as Finer (1956: 623) observed, “PR kept both Nazism and Communism alive so that together they could murder the Weimar Republic” (see also Quade 2006). This general argument has been made and contested countless times (see, e.g., the review in Kreuzer 2001); its underlying logic is that proportional electoral systems provide incentives and opportunities for extremist parties to gain an electoral foothold and mobilize opponents of democracy, only to undermine it once the opportunity arises.

The position about the corroding effects of more proportional electoral systems was perhaps made most famous in political science by Giovanni Sartori’s conjecture that party systems characterized by a small number of relevant parties and limited ideological distance between them will help produce a more stable political system and a higher quality of democracy (Sartori 1976: 131-216). In Sartori’s view, party systems characterized by “polarized pluralism” were the least desirable because, in such systems, extreme elites can attain power on the backs of relatively small slivers of disenchanted electorates; at a minimum, political elites in polarized party systems have few incentives to cooperate.

Compared to Hermens’ legal and constitutional perspective, Sartori’s argument is less about formal institutions in the form of electoral laws and more about their consequences for elite incentives to accommodate. As such, it also is to a greater extent focused on party system fragmentation and polarization as a proxy for elite polarization and polarized polities built on structurally fragmented societies and unresolved, antagonistic cleavages. But like Hermens, Sartori foresees inferior performance of democratic systems with extensive and polarized party systems. The shared logic underlying the presumed relationship between electoral laws and legitimacy specified by Hermens and Sartori on the basis of the paradigmatic cases of Weimar Germany and post-WW II Italy is thus twofold: (a) that the party system acts as a transmission belt for political grievances and extreme ideological positions and ultimately an expression of the

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<sup>1</sup> Hermens was certainly not the first to discuss the virtues and disadvantages of electoral systems, but his argument took on particular significance after the failure of the Weimar Republic. Prior scholarship on the

level of political consensus in society; and (b) that electoral systems that allow a lack of consensus to be manifested in party systems lead to less cohesive democracy.

In contrast to this classic perspective, which focuses on the opportunities electoral systems provide political elites for mobilizing anti-system voters, a more recent, alternative perspective has focused on the ways in which voters perceive the offerings that elections provide, and how these may affect what voters think about the political system. That is, instead of focusing on how electoral systems and party systems shape the strategies of contending elites to mobilize discontent from above or how legitimacy beliefs reflect social structures and elite competition, this perspective focuses on the psychology of voters themselves.

Like the classic perspective, this bottom-up perspective starts from the empirical regularity that PR systems produce more parties (because of a lower effective threshold). When there are more parties, they have incentives to distinguish themselves ideologically in order to target identifiable segments of the electoral market. Rooted in a spatial, rather than socio-structural conception of electoral competition, it presumes that voters are motivated to make choices consistent with their self-interest as it can be represented in an ideological space. Like Hermens or Sartori, this perspective assumes that the performance of electoral systems shapes the reputation of the political system in citizens' eyes. However, it comes to very different predictions about the potential downsides of proportional representation (PR) and multipartism.

Specifically, the logic underlying this approach presumes that citizens value choices (Iyengar and Lepper 2000; see also Sen 1988). That is, more choices are seen as normatively appealing in a democracy and reflective of freedom. Moreover, it presumes that a greater number of more distinct parties increase the odds that voters' views will find articulation, leading them to experience and feel that their preferences can be represented through existing political channels. In this way, a more numerous and diverse menu of choices can enhance support for the existing political arrangements, including the political system, and this effect should be especially

pronounced among citizens with a political axe to grind (see also Anderson 2011; Blais and Loewen 2007).

Given their broad similarities, what can explain the different positions and findings between the classic view and its alternative? One possibility is that differing findings are due to case selection on the dependent or independent variable, the time period investigated, or perhaps the methodology employed. Another possibility is that the root cause is theoretical. I suspect it is a little bit of both. At the empirical level, it is apparent that case selection matters for the inferences that are drawn about the role of electoral institutions. While the classic view selects what most would consider new or failed democracies – thus selecting countries that score low on the dependent variable of legitimacy – the more recent perspective has typically selected countries that have highly stable and legitimate democratic systems.

Specifically, the traditional view relied heavily on a set of model cases of troubled democracies like Weimar Germany, the Spanish Republic of the 1930, post-war Italy, France Fourth Republic, or Chile in the 1960s to provide evidence of the corroding effects of proportional representation and multipartism. In contrast, the emerging literature on the positive effects of proportional electoral systems for system legitimacy has relied on a mix of single country studies and broader cross-national studies of stable democracies to make its case. Thus, Miller and Listhaug (1990) examined the connection between party systems and trust in government in Sweden, Norway, and the United States in the 1980s, arguing that flexible party systems, which allow small parties to be represented, are better for government trust because they allow the discontented to voice their frustration within the existing democratic framework (see also Miller and Listhaug 1999).<sup>2</sup> Consistent with this, several aggregate level, cross-national studies of advanced industrialized countries have reported that citizens in systems with more

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<sup>2</sup> But, as Listhaug et al. (2009) note, this explanation may not work in Sweden after the party system there underwent significant changes in 1988-91.

proportional electoral systems express higher levels of satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system (Anderson 1998; Lijphart 1999; Norris 1999).<sup>3 4</sup>

Aside from case selection, existing theories and empirical tests may come to varying conclusions about the connection between electoral systems and legitimacy because of a mismatch between the theories they articulate and the tests they conduct. First, their analyses tend to confound the varied consequences of electoral systems that deserve empirical separation. Specifically, they conflate the nature of the electoral system, as well as the number and distinctiveness of parties in a system – that is, they treat the multipartism and polarization facilitated by proportionality as symbiotic and reflecting a similar underlying cause. Good examples are Weimar Germany or Republican Italy, where polarization and party system fragmentation went hand in hand. And aggregate studies that simply examine the impact of electoral system proportionality on support for the political system without specifying the mechanisms by which the effects are produced are similarly indeterminate.

Second, theories about electoral system effects really are theories of heterogeneous electorates and require testing as such. Specifically, they specify that the effects of electoral systems differ for voters who are and who are not (or who feel and do not feel) represented in the democratic process. Specifically, the hazards of proportional representation articulated in the traditional view are really the hazards of elite manipulation of disenchanted mass publics – and therefore not all voters – while the hazards of proportional representation in the revisionist view similarly are the hazards of preventing disenchanted voters from voicing their grievances effectively at the ballot box. Thus, both views pay special attention to the critical role played by

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<sup>3</sup> Consistent with the general tenor of the positive effects of proportional representation and multipartism, Huber et al. argue that, as the party system offers more electoral choices to voters, individuals should be better able to identify which parties represent their views and thus navigate the political system. Critically, to Huber et al., more parties are expected to send better, clearer, and therefore more easily identifiable signals (Huber, Kernell, and Leoni 2005).

<sup>4</sup> Related to this, a recent individual level study based on CSES surveys by Banducci and Karp (2009) argued that the logic of PR systems leads supporters of smaller parties to feel like they are not wasting their votes.

malcontented segments of the electorate, though they differ in the motivations they ascribe to them: in one (the traditional view) they seek to undermine democracy; in the other (the revisionist view), they seek to be represented in the democratic process in order to air their grievances.

To specify the effects of electoral systems on system support, the challenge thus is to disentangle these conceptual issues and test them empirically on a set of countries with varied democratic traditions, to test them in a way that examines the impact of macro-level electoral conditions on individual beliefs, and to test them in a way that takes into account the heterogeneity in macro-level effects across different individuals. This is the task I turn to next.

### **A Model of Electoral Supply, Losing, and System Support**

The analyses reported below make use of data collected by the *Comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (CSES) project. The CSES is a collaborative research program among election studies conducted in democracies around the world (for more information, see [www.cses.org](http://www.cses.org)). Participating countries include a common module of survey questions in their post-election studies, all surveys must meet certain quality and comparability standards, and all are conducted as nationally representative surveys. The CSES also compiles ancillary data on the political systems, electoral systems, and parties in each election and that are combined with the survey data. The analyses below are based on Module 2 of the CSES, fielded between 2001 and 2006.<sup>5</sup> From this module, 24 countries provided the necessary individual and country level information.<sup>6</sup>

To bring some order to the thicket of competing claims about the connection between electoral laws, electoral options, and voters' views and behaviors that can be tested empirically, I develop a model that connects individual citizens and the electoral environment in which they make choices and judge their system based on several assumptions. First, it assumes that people

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<sup>5</sup> Unlike other modules of the CSES, Module 2 contains a critical dependent variable of interest (preference for democracy) and allows the analysis of a larger sample of democracies.

<sup>6</sup> Australia, Bulgaria, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Korea, Mexico, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States.



judge the performance and desirability of democratic institutions based in part on their experiences with electoral processes and institutions. Second, it assumes that voters are not political scientists – that is, it does not presuppose that voters are able to cite chapter and verse of the intricacies of electoral rules, vote-seat translation, or the dynamics of party systems. Instead, institutions are causally anterior and become visible to voters in the form of outcomes that constitute and constrain the choice they are called on to make in elections. Third, it assumes that electoral context has heterogeneous effects on citizen beliefs about the political system.

### **Variation in Electoral Supply**

Starting from these assumptions, I contend that electoral laws influence people’s opinions about the political system by shaping the nature of the electoral supply – defined here as the extent to which elections provide voters with meaningful choices. This supply is observed by voters and most proximately affects their behavior. The term “meaningful choices” implies that the electoral supply is differentiated (Klingemann and Weßels (2009) and Weßels and Schmitt 2008). Differentiation of the electoral supply has two structural characteristics that should be observable by voters: first, the number of choices; and two, how distinct they are.<sup>7</sup> Operationally, these correspond to the number and distinctiveness of partisan choices.

The number and distinctiveness of partisan choices arise from the strategic choices political elites make by choosing to organize political parties and where to position them politically. And while it is commonly believed that polarization – that is, the location of parties in the policy space – and fragmentation – the numbers of parties competing in the space – are correlated – hence Sartori’s idea of “polarized pluralism” – this does not have to follow. To examine whether this is the case requires information about both the number and distinctiveness of choices.

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<sup>7</sup> Fortuitously, these properties of the electoral supply are also the critical dimensions of party systems identified by earlier research on the connection between electoral and party systems on one hand, and system support on the other.

Measuring the number of parties is relatively straightforward, though it is more than simply a count of parties that appear on the ballot since many (if not most) parties are typically listed without a significant chance of winning votes or legislative representation. Thus, to measure the number of viable choices available to voters, I calculated the well-known *effective number of parties*, which weights the number of parties by their size (Laakso and Taagepera, 1979; Taagepera and Shugart 1999; see also Rae 1971).

The distinctiveness of choice is slightly more complicated. Previous research often presumed that the distinctiveness of choice was also related to the effective number of parties in a political system. Following Sartori and a long line of electoral researchers, the assumption was that party choices also reflected the social cleavages that exist in a society (see also Lijphart 1999).<sup>8</sup> That is, the assumption was that ideological polarization was greater when larger numbers of parties compete because of numerous cleavages. Conversely, following Downs, a smaller number of parties will all gravitate toward the middle, reducing ideological polarization.

However, this would only be true if the number and diversity of choice were synonymous. To gauge whether the number of choices in fact reflects the nature ideological or socio-structural divisions in society, it is important to consider the extent to which the choices are differentiated along some important dimension – that is, whether more parties also means more polarized choices. Conceptually, the distinctiveness of choices should capture the relative position of each party along a dimension of contestation, as well as weight the party's position by size since a larger party at an extreme end of this dimension would indicate greater polarization than a splinter party in the same position (cf. Dalton 2008).

Party system polarization reflects the dispersion of political parties along an ideological or policy dimension. Sartori (1976) focused attention on this concept when he compared the consequences of centripetal and centrifugal party systems. Similarly, many of Downs' (1957)

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<sup>8</sup> Along similar lines, one could measure the diversity of choice by the number of distinct party families that exist in the party system.

theoretical arguments on the consequences of party system competition were based on parties' presumed distribution along an ideological continuum. The logic of party system polarization thus implies that it should reflect the dispersion of parties along an ideological dimension; most commonly, this is taken to be a single Left-Right dimension.

The use of a Left/Right scale does not require that citizens possess a sophisticated conceptual framework or theoretical understanding of political philosophy. It simply assumes that positions on this scale summarize the issues and cleavages that structure political competition in a nation.<sup>9</sup> The CSES asked respondents to position themselves along a Left-Right scale and then position the parties in their nation on this same scale. These placements of the parties provide the basis for measuring polarization for the party system as a whole.<sup>10</sup> I employ the index developed by Dalton (2008; see also Dalton 2011), which measures the dispersion of parties along the Left-Right scale (see appendix).<sup>11</sup> This index is comparable to a measure of the standard deviation of parties distributed along the dimension.

Figure 1 shows the two dimensions of the electoral supply – the number and distinctiveness of electoral options – across the 24 countries included in the analysis. Regarding the number of electoral options, measured here as the effective number of electoral parties, the numbers reveal wide variation across countries, ranging from close to 2 in the United States to over 6 in Norway. Countries with more numerous viable options also include the Netherlands, Slovenia, Finland, Switzerland, France, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Sweden, and New Zealand at between 4 and 6; countries with few options also include Hungary, Spain, Australia, Portugal, Korea, Mexico, and the United Kingdom, at around 3 to 3.5 parties.

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<sup>9</sup> Inglehart (1990: 273), for instance, showed that people in most nations can locate themselves on the Left-Right scale and he described the scale as representing “whatever major conflicts are present in the political system” (also see Klingemann and Fuchs 1989; Huber and Inglehart 1995; Knutsen 1999).

<sup>10</sup> For a discussion of other measures of party ideological positions see Dalton (2008).

<sup>11</sup> This index has a value of 0 when all parties occupy the same position on the Left/Right scale, and 10 when all the parties are split between the two extremes of the scale.

When it comes to the distinctiveness of electoral options, here measured as the ideological polarization of party systems, Hungary and the Czech Republic lead the pack (at around 6), followed by Bulgaria, Spain, Iceland, Sweden, and Switzerland (at around 4). In contrast, voters in Australia, Canada, Mexico, Ireland, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Romania face much less distinct options at around 2.

[Figure 1 about here]

As the data also demonstrate clearly, the number and distinctiveness of choices constitute separable dimensions – multipartism and party system polarization are separate traits. The graph shows, for example, the well known fact that electoral offerings in majoritarian systems – such as Australia, the United States, or the United Kingdom Great Britain – are marked by a relatively small number of effective electoral parties and comparatively low levels of polarization. But a small number of parties do not necessarily imply convergence toward the median voter. For example, while Hungarian and Spanish voters, too, have relatively few effective options, these are much more distinct.

Conversely, Finland, the Netherlands, Norway, and Slovenia have a relatively large number of effective electoral parties, but only modest levels of ideological polarization on the level of Portugal or South Korea, countries with significantly smaller party systems.<sup>12</sup> Thus, numerous options do not have to be particularly distinct. And voters in Spain, Bulgaria, and Iceland, for example, have a moderate amount of options that are moderately distinct.<sup>13</sup> Together,

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<sup>12</sup> This does not mean, of course, that there are not other lines of political division not captured by the left-right ideological polarization score.

<sup>13</sup> The value of differentiating between the number of options and the nature of those options is also apparent when we compare the numbers in Figure 2 to those reported by Klingemann and Weßels (2009: 263-264) on the differentiation of the electoral supply, which is based at its core on the number of party and candidate offerings. While the Klingemann and Weßels measure, for example, identifies Hungary as having a relatively lower differentiation of electoral supply, Figure 2 reveals that this is true only with regard to the number of offerings, but not their distinctiveness. Similarly, to use another example, they

the two dimensions of the electoral supply provide a set of offerings that are quite distinct across countries and not easily categorized as belonging to one type or another.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Heterogeneous Consequences of Electoral Supply**

When considering the impact that these dimensions of the electoral supply may have on voters' beliefs, one critical question in light of the theoretical discussion above is whether all voters should be expected to be equally sensitive to the nature of the (cross-nationally variable) electoral supply. Consistent with existing scholarship, I argue that they should not; specifically, I presume that those who have reason to be discontented with the existing political arrangements are most likely to be affected by the nature of the available choices because these shape their opportunities to voice that discontent through electoral channels. That is, instead of assuming that more or fewer parties or more or less polarization is equally good or bad for everyone, I posit that the electoral supply is most critical for shaping legitimacy beliefs among the discontented. In particular, I argue that a more abundant and differentiated electoral supply allows those who dislike the existing arrangements more distinctive opportunities to voice that discontent clearly. Thus, in contrast to the scenario implicit in Hermens' and in Sartori's work, I expect the electoral supply to act as a safety valve for political discontent.

In the context of how elections and electoral context affect legitimacy beliefs, one obvious way to identify voters with a negative predisposition toward the political system is to focus on political losers. Recent work on electoral losers has shown consistently that voters who supported parties or candidates that failed to win power report more negative attitudes about the

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identify Spain as having a relatively high differentiation of electoral supply; as the numbers in Figure 2 show, this is primarily true with regard to the distinctiveness of choices. This is meant to be illustrative since our measures and theirs are not strictly comparable.

<sup>14</sup> The form of the electoral system, PR v. majoritarian system, is related to the number of effective number of parties (.48) and the level of polarization in a party system ( $r=.38$ ), but the correlation between the effective number of parties and polarization is .02.

political system (for a summary, see Anderson et al. 2005). By definition, these voters' views are not represented in government and they are, at least until the next election, political outsiders.

Consistent with this literature, I hypothesize that electoral losers exhibit more negative attitudes about the political system. Moreover, I hypothesize that the size of this negative effect varies as a function of the electoral supply. Specifically, I posit that the connection between losing and system support is contingent on the electoral supply, such that a more numerous and differentiated supply reduces the negative impact losing has on system attitudes because it provides the next best thing to winning outright: having one's political voice articulated clearly and visibly.

While the finding that electoral losers have more negative attitudes about the system has been replicated in a number of contexts (Banducci and Karp 2003; Karp and Bowler 2001; Henderson 2008; Blais and Gelineau 2007; Craig, Martinez, Ganous, and Kaine 2006; Criado and Herreros 2007; Ginsberg and Weisberg 1978; Loewen and Blais 2006), an important but largely unanswered question in this emerging literature has been whether this effect is due mostly to being in or out of power, or whether it is about being shut out of having one's policy positions represented in government. For example, we can imagine voters supporting parties that ultimately do not end up forming the government, yet those same voters having their policy positions represented in the policy process because they are close to the government's. Similarly, while voters may well have cast their ballot for a governing party, the government's position can end up being quite distant from the voter's own – for example, because of coalition or legislative bargaining (Kedar 2005). And regardless of which party or candidate people voted for, the government's position is not equally close to all voters'. As a result, I would expect voters whose policy positions go unrepresented – or what we could call “policy losers” – to express more negative opinions about the functioning of the political system than those whose own position is close to the government's, regardless of whether their party is in government. That is, aside from

coming out on the losing side in elections, incongruence between voter and government policy positions should foster negative attitudes about the political system (see also Paskeviciute 2006).

Similarly to the conjecture that the electoral supply should condition the effects of electoral losing, I hypothesize that the size of the negative effect of policy losing should vary as a function of the electoral supply. Thus, I posit that the connection between policy losing and system support is contingent on the electoral supply, such that a more numerous and differentiated supply reduces the negative impact losing has on system attitudes. In the next section, I turn to investigating this hypothesized contingent effect of the electoral supply on system attitudes.

### **Attitudes Toward the Democratic Political System**

To assess citizens' attitudes toward the political system, I examine responses to two survey questions. First, respondents were asked to report how satisfied they were with the way democracy works in their country; second, they were asked to report whether they thought democracy was better than other forms of government. These questions allow us to tap into different dimensions of attitudes about the political system. The democracy satisfaction indicator gauges system support at a low level of generalization. It does not refer to democracy as a set of norms, but to the functioning of the democratic political system (cf. Anderson and Guillory 1997). Thus, it gauges people's responses to the process of democratic governance; that is, a country's "constitution in operation" (Lane and Ersson 1991: 194) or its "constitutional reality" (Fuchs, Guidorossi, and Svensson 1995: 328; see also Klingemann 1999; Anderson et al. 2005).

As such, it is a useful indicator for connecting the performance of electoral institutions to what people think about the political system. It also bridges David Easton's (1965) distinction between diffuse and specific support. Diffuse support is typically considered a long-standing predisposition that "refers to evaluations of what an object is or represents—the general meaning it

has for a person—not of what it does” (Easton 1965: 273). Specific support derives from citizens' evaluations of system outputs; it is performance-based and may be more short term.

The second indicator examined here, support for democracy as a form of government, asked respondents whether they agreed or disagreed with the statement that "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government". This question does not tap into democracy as an ideal – rather, it asks respondents to compare democracy as a form of government to other forms of government. In this way, the indicator does not ask about current performance of the political system but explicitly taps into the rejection of undemocratic alternatives. This “Churchillian” support concept is especially relevant for the purposes of the analyses reported here, as the sample of countries includes states with a recent undemocratic past, where such comparisons between democracy and other types of government are particularly relevant and salient (cf. Mishler, Rose, and Haerpfer 1998). Together, these two indicators should allow us to cover the different and relevant dimensions of system attitudes for the purposes of this analysis.<sup>15</sup>

### **Variation in System Support Across Countries and Across Individuals**

Using the positive responses to the survey questions (see appendix), Figures 2a and b show the distribution of these measures of system support across the 24 countries included in this study for which the relevant variables included in the multivariate analyses described below are available.<sup>16</sup> Satisfaction with democracy is systematically higher in the older democracies, relative to the younger ones. Though there are exceptions, satisfaction levels are generally higher in the United States and the Scandinavian countries relative to newer democracies, including the Central-East European states, Mexico, and Korea. In countries such as Denmark, Ireland, Australia, the U.S., Norway, Spain, and Switzerland, for example, around 80 percent of

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<sup>15</sup> The Pearson correlation between the two items is .28.

<sup>16</sup> The analyses focus on legislative elections only.



respondents (and over 90 percent in the case of Denmark) express satisfaction with democracy. In stark contrast, only 20 to 30 percent of citizens in Bulgaria, Korea, and Mexico express such sentiments about their country's politics.

Levels of support for democracy as a form of government also are very high, especially in the older democracies. In fact, in these countries, democracy is considered the only game in town, with around 90 percent of respondents indicating support for democracy over undemocratic alternatives (though respondents in all countries make use of the full scale to express their attitudes about democracy). But in stark contrast, respondents in the newer democracies, including Bulgaria, Mexico, Hungary, the Czech Republic, or Romania express more ambivalent attitudes about democracy. This is consistent with related research, which shows that diffuse support tends to be lower new relative to old democracies (Klingemann 1999; Tóka 1995).

[Figure 2 about here]

The first critical question for the purposes of my analysis is whether the nature of the variation we see in citizens' responses to questions about the political system requires a set of explanations both at the level of individuals and at the level of countries. That is, do the data support the contention that support is both a function of individual characteristics and the nature of the political context that varies across countries? To determine whether there is significant variation in attitudes about the political system at the individual and country levels, I estimated multilevel regression models that decompose the variance in the dependent variables.<sup>17</sup> The argument that both levels of analysis are important for understanding each of our dependent variables is supported if both variance components are statistically significant (cf. Steenbergen and Jones 2002).

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<sup>17</sup> Where  $\text{Support}_{ij} = \gamma_{00} + \delta_{0j} + \epsilon_{ij}$ . In this model,  $\gamma_{00}$  is the grand mean on the support indicator. The sources of cross-national variation, which cause particular countries to deviate from this mean, are in  $\delta_{0j}$ , and  $\epsilon_{ij}$  contains the sources of inter-individual variation.

Table 1 shows estimates of the variance components. Both variance components are statistically significant for all dependent variables, suggesting that there is significant variance in levels of satisfaction with democracy and acceptance of democracy at both levels of analysis. Results of the variance component models show that country-level variance is proportionally smaller than individual-level variance for all three dependent variables. Specifically, individual-level variance constitutes 68.5% of the total variance in satisfaction with democracy and 73.3% in support for democracy.<sup>18</sup> Given that these data are measured at the individual level, this is not entirely surprising (Steenbergen and Jones 2002: 231), but it is interesting that there is relatively more variance at the macro level in the model of satisfaction with democracy (31.5%) than in the model of preference for democracy (26.7%). At the same time, the results of the models indicate clearly that there is significant variation in the sources of system support at both levels of analysis, but much more (more than twice as much) at the level of individuals. Thus, I now turn to the question of whether the model I have specified can account for some of this variance.

[Table 1 about here]

### **Multilevel Models of Attitudes About the Political System**

To see whether the electoral supply as conceptualized and measured here affects people's attitudes, the next step in the analysis requires that we merge information about the country-level electoral supply with the individual survey data and construct estimation models that include important individual level and country-level predictors of system support. At the individual level, most importantly, establishing that political losers take a dim view of the political system requires categorizing respondents as electoral and policy losers. I classified respondents as electoral losers with the help of a survey question that asked which party the individual voted for in the election. I

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<sup>18</sup> These calculations are based on the ratios of each variance component relative to the total variance in system support (cf. Bryk and Raudenbush 1992; Snijders and Bosker 1999).

then combined these responses with information about the party or parties that controlled the executive branch after the election. If the respondent's reported vote choice did not match the actual party in power, I scored that individual as 1 (electoral loser); all others were scored 0.

To categorize voters as policy losers, I measured the distance between the respondent's self-placement on the left-right scale and the government's left-right position, calculated as a weighted average of the governing parties' left-right positions (see appendix for details). Thus, individuals further removed from the government's position received a higher score than individuals closer to the government's position.<sup>19</sup>

To ensure that the multivariate models were well specified, I also controlled for a number of important individual level and country-level predictors of system support. Including these variables avoids drawing faulty inferences due to spuriousness that can result from omitting relevant variables. At the individual level, I included a standard set of demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, marital status), political ideology (left-right placement), electoral participation<sup>20</sup>, and identification with a political party. At the level of countries, I controlled for level of economic development, level of democracy, age of the party system, and government ideology. The age of the party system is a particularly important control variable because it measures the predictability of electoral choices from one election to the next. The argument here is that there is little point in talking about electoral supply if voters cannot learn about them because they change rapidly and unpredictably from one electoral contest to the next. At the same time, the stability of the choices, registered in the age of the party system, could also be taken to be an indicator of legitimacy and thus be considered endogenous to system support attitudes (see also Mainwaring 1999). Because of its importance but ambiguous causal

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<sup>19</sup> Electoral and policy losing are not synonymous, as the Pearson correlation between the two is .27.

<sup>20</sup> Following the argument that participation enhances feelings of trust and external efficacy (and vice versa) (cf. Finkel 1987), I included a variable distinguishing voters and nonvoters to control for differences attributable to having participated in the election. I expect that those who participated in the election (coded 1) will have more positive attitudes toward the political system than those who did not (coded 0).

connection to the dependent variables examined here, this variable is included as a control variable.

### **Direct Effects of Losing and Electoral Supply on System Support**

To estimate the effect of macro-level variables, such as the electoral supply, on individual level outcomes requires the estimation of multilevel models (cf. Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Table 2 reports the results of a multivariate, multilevel random intercept, random slopes model estimating the direct effects of electoral supply on system attitudes. The random slopes portion of the estimation model is designed to ascertain whether the effects of electoral and policy losing vary systematically across countries.

The results show that the measures of electoral supply do not have a direct effect on people's views of the political system. That is, knowing that polarization is high or low or that electoral options are numerous or few does not help to predict whether people, on average, express more positive or negative views of the political system. The only macro-level variables that reveal significant effects are the level of democracy and the age of the party system. Citizens in more democratic countries and in countries with older party systems express greater satisfaction with the working of the political system and are more likely to endorse democracy as their preferred system of government.

In contrast, a number of individual level variables have significant effects on system support. Among them, most importantly, we find that electoral losers are less satisfied with how well democracy works, and they are less likely to prefer democracy. At the same time, the variable measuring policy losing exerts such a direct effect only on satisfaction with the way democracy works. Thus, consistent with earlier work on electoral losers, election outcomes significantly shape voters' views of the political system, but this direct effect is more pronounced for electoral losing than for policy losing.

The other individual level variables exert results consistent with past research. Thus, people who voted, who feel close to parties, and locate themselves on the right express more positive attitudes about the political system. As well, the results show that older respondents report less satisfaction with the way democracy works but value democracy more. As expected, individuals with higher levels of education and income express significantly more positive attitudes about the performance of the political system (democracy satisfaction) and a more pronounced preference for democracy.

Taken together, these results suggest two preliminary conclusions: individuals whom the electoral process has placed on the losing side express systematically more negative views of the performance and desirability of democratic political systems. Moreover, electoral options in the form of the number and distinctiveness of political parties do not shape attitudes about the political system independently. Whether they do so in interaction with electoral or policy losing is the question I turn to next.

[Table 2 about here]

### **Contingent Effects of Losing and Electoral Supply on System Support**

To establish whether the electoral supply is a more critical variable for shaping system support among some segments of the electorate – that is, whether electoral supply has contingent effects, as I have hypothesized above – I examine the interactive effects of losing and electoral supply on system support in a series of multilevel random intercept models. These models are identical to those reported in Table 2, with the exception that they also include two interaction terms – losing by polarization and losing by effective number of electoral parties. The results of such models examining the interactions of electoral losing and electoral supply are shown in Table 3.

The multilevel contingent effects models of electoral losers, electoral supply, and system support reported in Table 3 show that there are indeed systematic contingent effects. As before, losers are less satisfied with how democracy works and less likely to prefer democracy. And as in the models shown in Table 2, the electoral supply does little to shape system support (among winners). What is notable, however, is that the independent effect of electoral losing are much larger than in the direct effects model, and that there are consistently significant effects for policy losers on system support once a contingent effects model is estimated.

Most importantly for the purposes of this paper, there are highly significant interaction effects between the variables measuring political losers and the electoral supply. Specifically, electoral losers living in countries with a more clearly differentiated electoral supply express significantly more faith in the workings of the political system and democracy as a preferred political system. These results support the contention that the electoral supply shapes the system views of electoral losers, rather than the electorate writ-large. Moreover, there is a significant effect for the interaction between electoral losing and the number of parties on democracy satisfaction: this suggests that living in a country with greater number of choices reduces the negative effect of losing on system support. Taken together, these results speak in favor of the safety valve hypothesis, rather than the notion that polarized party systems are inimical to legitimacy.

The results for the interactive effects of policy losing and electoral supply on system support also show consistent support for the safety valve hypothesis. Another way to think about this is to ask whether the electoral supply has a stronger or weaker support among policy winners and losers. As previously, the estimation models contain two interaction terms – policy losing by polarization and policy losing by effective number of electoral parties. These contingent effects models of policy losers, electoral supply, and system support reveal that there are indeed contingent effects of electoral supply on system support. As before, these models, too, show that electoral losers report lower levels of satisfaction with how democracy works and are less likely

to prefer democracy as a system of government. In a departure from the results in Table 2, the results in Table 3 show that policy losers are also significantly more likely to be dissatisfied with the performance of the political system, or less likely to express a preference for democracy.

Since it is unsatisfactory to report the direct effects of variables that are part of interaction terms, the results for the interaction analyses are the key test of my safety valve hypothesis. The results shown in Table 3 demonstrate highly significant interaction effects between policy losers and polarization. This implies that policy losers living in countries with a more clearly differentiated electoral supply have more faith in the workings of the political system and democracy as a system of government. Put another way, the negative effect of being a policy loser is significantly diminished in countries that provide a more distinct set of choices.

As in the case of electoral losers, there is a significant effect for the interaction between policy losing and the number of parties on preference for democracy. This suggests that living in a country with greater number of meaningful choices reduces the negative effect of losing on preference for democracy. All around these estimation results clearly speak in favor of the safety valve hypothesis; or put more conservatively, nothing in these results suggest that there is a significant downside to a distinct and numerous electoral supply when it comes to legitimacy beliefs among voters with reasons to be discontented.

[Table 3 about here]

These results can also be expressed substantively as predicted changes in the dependent variables for different values of the independent variables. Figures 3 and 4 use Table 3 model estimates to chart system support for political losers and non-losers, conditioned across values of political context. Specifically, I simulate three scenarios: first, an electoral context marked by few choices and low polarization; second, at mean levels of electoral supply; and third, in an electoral context characterized by abundant choices and high levels of polarization.

The results shown in Figures 3 and 4 are straightforward. Electoral and policy losers like their political system better if there are more parties that offer more distinct options to choose from on Election Day. Conversely, losers are much less enamored with the political system when they live in countries with few and indistinguishable options on Election Day. While winners are happier than losers in countries with few options that are located near each other in the ideological space, losers are happier than winners in countries with many and differentiated options. Thus, it appears that living in a Downsian world of two parties that fail to offer distinct choices is agony for policy and electoral losers, but bliss for winners. In contrast, living in a country with a multitude of distinct parties elevates the level of system support among losers and diminished it among winners.<sup>21</sup> Worth noting is also the fact that this pattern of effects is somewhat more pronounced with regard to evaluations of the democratic system's performance than for people's preference for democracy as a system of governance. Thus, electoral supply coupled with individual status as political winner or loser has stronger effects on evaluations of system performance than the desirability of democracy.<sup>22</sup>

[Figures 3 and 4 about here]

### **Conclusion**

In recent years, a number of contemporary democracies have sought to reform their electoral systems, typically with very specific goals in mind. Among them has frequently been the desire to increase the legitimacy of the political system by enhancing citizens' sense that voting matters and their voices are represented. Yet, how exactly electoral systems help to produce citizen consent has long been subject to debate, and oftentimes without the requisite

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<sup>21</sup> While the size of these effects is not overwhelming, it is worth keeping in mind for purposes of comparison, that they are on the same order or larger than the effects of other important independent variables, such as education, income, or ideology.

<sup>22</sup> Part of the reason for this in all likelihood lies in the more restricted range of responses to the question about the desirability of democracy.



evidence that would allow us to adjudicate among competing perspectives. One long-standing debate has to do with the consequences of proportional representation systems. To mix metaphors, by serving as transmission belts for political grievances, do they act as safety valves for democracy or do they allow Trojan horses to undermine democracy?

In this paper, I set out to examine the impact of electoral rules by examining their consequences in the form of the volume and distinctiveness of the electoral supply has corroding or salutary effects on how people view the political system. The results are in, and they suggest that a differentiated supply and a more numerous supply have positive effects on system support. But these effects are not present for all voters; instead, they exist chiefly among voters whom the political system has left unrepresented, either in government or in the policy process. Thus, the electoral supply shapes system support, but it is most critically important for those with a political axe to grind. Put simply, differentiation begets legitimation among political losers.

These findings run counter to Sartori's conjecture; they reveal that the quantity and quality – fragmentation and polarization – are separable traits of the electoral supply. Moreover, to the extent that they coincide, polarized pluralism begets happier political losers. Whether these results are the result of the times we live in, and thus perhaps not as contradictory to the analyses of Hermens and Sartori as they seem, is unclear at this point. And absent direct comparisons between this set of countries at this point and an earlier one, it will be difficult to find out. But at a minimum, we can say that there is no indication that a more differentiated and more numerous electoral supply has negative consequences for how citizens view the political system. This is reassuring, but it does raise the question of whether the more limited electoral supply in countries such as the United States is at least partially responsible for the erosion of public support for the political system there (cf. Dalton 2007). Speaking more generally, the findings suggest that parties' incentives to place themselves in the political center may be useful for winning votes but have the undesirably by-product of undermining people's faith in elections and democracy

(Weßels n.d.). Yet again, absent further and more detailed and systematic analyses of the connection between changes in electoral supply and system support, this remains conjecture.

The analyses reported here rely on conceptualizations and measurement of the electoral supply at the level of the nation-state. One interesting and unanswered question is whether the supply of electoral choices at the sub-national level may exacerbate or attenuate the effects I have demonstrated here. Research on economic voting and losers' consent suggests that subnational politics is a fertile area for answering such questions (Anderson 2006; Loewen and Blais 2006). Moreover, these findings raise interesting potential questions about the extent to which polarization can help orient voters and supply important information about the political system.

The results also speak to open questions in the growing literature on how losers view the political system. They show that disentangling electoral and policy losing is important; they reveal that policy losing and electoral loss have separable consequences. Moreover, they suggest that some findings in that literature – e.g., that losers like consensual democracy (Anderson and Guillory's 1997) – may be combining a set of structural and institutional factors – e.g., party systems, polarization, and coalition government – that require conceptual and empirical separation in order to adequately identify the ways in which electoral and policy losers react to the political context. Moreover, they provide a potential explanation for the legitimacy puzzle of why dissatisfied citizens continue to support a political system (Booth and Seligson 2009).

Taken together, the results presented in this paper show that the nature of the available choices influences the attitudes of those citizens who already have strong incentives to take a dim view of the political system such that distinct partisan offerings diminish the negative views electoral and policy losers hold. This means that countries' macro-level supply of choices and individuals' predispositions interactively shape citizen consent, complicating the story of how electoral contexts shape consent. But they also clearly suggest that polarization and multiparty systems do not delegitimize the state, as is commonly believed. Misery loves choices, making the electoral supply a potential safety valve for democracy.

## APPENDIX

### Country-Level Variables

**Effective number of parties.** Calculated by the Laakso and Taagepera (1979) formula:

$$ENEP = \frac{1}{\sum v_i^2},$$
 where  $v_i$  is the percent of votes obtained by the  $i^{\text{th}}$  party.

**Party system polarization.** This index measures the ideological dispersion of parties on a Left/Right scale, based on the Left/Right location of parties as determined by the publics in each nation, weighted by each party's vote share:  $\text{SQRT}\{\sum(v_i)*([\text{party L/R score}_i - \text{party system average L/R score}]/5)^2\}$ , where  $v_i$  is the percent of votes obtained by the  $i^{\text{th}}$  party, and the subscript  $i$  denotes individual parties (Source: Dalton (2008)).

**Level of development.** The Human Development Index (HDI) measures the average achievements in a country in three basic dimensions of human development: a long and healthy life, knowledge and a decent standard of living. If the HDI was not available for the year of the survey, the nearest HDI statistic was used. Source: United Nations Development Program.

**Level of democracy.** Reversed Freedom House Scores at the year of the election study. This score is the average between the civic liberties and political rights indicators. Theoretically, the highest level of freedom is 7 and the lowest is 1. Source: Freedom House.

**Age of party system.** Average age of political parties in a country. We included the two largest parties in the election. For new democracies, party age is calculated to begin with the start of democracy, even if some form of the party existed previously. Source: Keefer, P. 2005. DPI2004, Database of Political Institutions: Changes and Variable Definitions. World Bank. Available at: [http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/DPI2004\\_variable-definitions.pdf](http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTRES/Resources/DPI2004_variable-definitions.pdf).

**Government ideology.** This index measures the ideological dispersion within the government along the Left/Right scale immediately prior the election. It is based on the Left/Right location of parties as determined by the publics in each nation, weighted by the vote share each party contributed to the total government vote share. The Polarization Index is measured as:

GOV2\_PI=SQRT { $\Sigma$ (percent of the total government vote share of party<sub>i</sub>)\*([party L/R score<sub>i</sub> – government average L/R score]/5)<sup>2</sup>}, where i represents individual parties. Source: CSES, Module II.

### **Individual-Level Variables and Question Wording**

**Satisfaction with democracy.** On the whole, are you very satisfied [4], fairly satisfied [3], not very satisfied [2], or not at all satisfied [1] with the way democracy works in [country]?

**Preference for democracy.** Please tell me how strongly you agree or disagree with the following statement: "Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government." (Do you agree strongly [4], agree [3], disagree [2], or disagree strongly [1] with this statement?)

**Electoral loser.** Based on survey question that recorded which party respondent voted for in the general election? If party choice matched with an opposition party [1]; all others [0].

**Policy loser.** Constructed from scale measuring respondent left-right self-placement and respondents' placements of political parties on the left-right scale. Measures the absolute distance between the respondent left-right position and the governing parties' positions (for parties with cabinet portfolios, weighted by the proportion of cabinet portfolios for each party).

**Voted.** Whether respondent cast ballot [1], or not [0].

**Female.** 1=male, 2=female.

**Age.** Actual age, in years.

**Education.** 1=lower, 2=middle, 3=upper.

**Income.** Household income in quintiles; lowest quintile=1; highest quintile=5.

**Political ideology.** Left-right self placement based on the following question: "In politics people sometimes talk of left and right. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?" 0=left, 10=right.

**Marital status.** Married=1; all others=0.

**Close to party.** "Do you usually think of yourself as close to any particular political party?", Yes=1; no=0.

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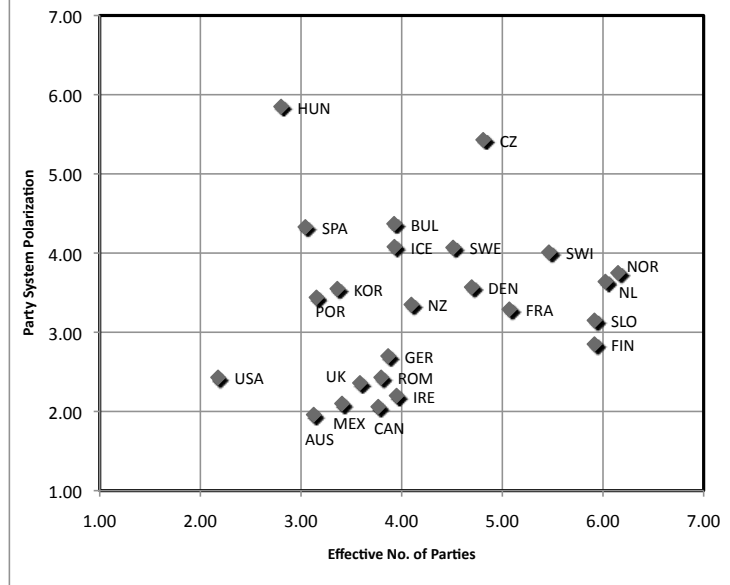
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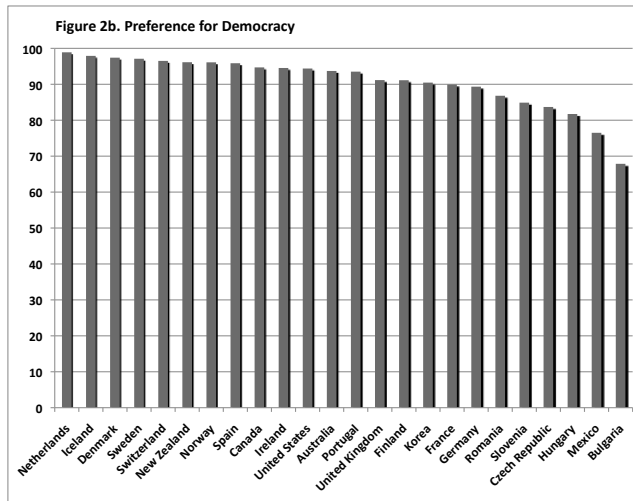
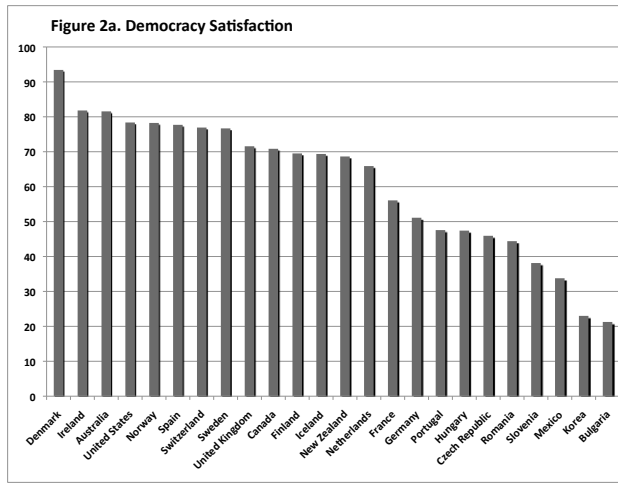


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**Figure 1. Differentiation of the Electoral Supply**





**Table 1. Variance Decomposition in System Support**

	<b>Satisfaction With Democracy</b>	<b>Preference For Democracy</b>
<i>Fixed Effects</i>		
Constant	2.616*** (.069)	3.316*** (.048)
<i>Variance Components</i>		
Country-level	.328*** (.048)	.236*** (.035)
Individual-level	.714*** (.003)	.648*** (.002)
-2Log likelihood	38467.9	34099.2
Macro N	24	24
Micro N	35497	34534

*Notes:* Entries are maximum likelihood estimates; standard errors in parentheses.  
\* p < 0.05; \*\* p < 0.01; \*\*\* p < .001.

**Table 2. Random Intercept Models of System Support in 24 Countries**

	Satisfaction With Democracy	Preference For Democracy
Electoral loser	-.117*** (.010)	-.025** (.009)
Policy loser	-.007* (.003)	.004 (.003)
Effective number of parties	.027 (.045)	.007 (.025)
Polarization	-.003 (.054)	.026 (.030)
Electoral participation	.162*** (.014)	.125*** (.013)
Close to party	.118*** (.009)	.112*** (.008)
Respondent ideology (left-right)	.023*** (.002)	.015*** (.002)
Age	-.017*** (.005)	.044*** (.004)
Female	-.012 (.009)	-.043*** (.008)
Education	.013* (.006)	.097*** (.005)
Married	-.000 (.010)	-.017† (.009)
Income	.026*** (.004)	.046*** (.003)
Level of development	.036 (.446)	.064 (.249)
Level of democracy	.247† (.139)	.243** (.078)
Age of party system	.004* (.002)	.002* (.001)
Government ideology	.002 (.042)	.012 (.023)
Constant	2.244*** (.572)	2.602*** (.319)
<i>Variance Components</i>		
Country-level	.231	.128
Individual-level	.692	.627
$\rho$	.10	.04
$R^2$ (overall)	.16	.15
Macro N	24	24
Micro N	26105	25724

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Module II.

Notes: Random intercept multilevel regression models; standard errors in parentheses.

†:  $p < .1$ ; \*:  $p < .05$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ .

**Table 3. Multilevel Contingent Effects Models of Political Losers, Electoral Supply, and System Support in 24 Countries**

	Satisfaction With Democracy			Preference For Democracy		
Electoral loser	-.705*** (.044)	-.131*** (.010)	-.615*** (.046)	-.236*** (.041)	-.029** (.009)	-.192*** (.042)
Policy loser	.014*** (.003)	-.159*** (.015)	-.114*** (.015)	.001 (.003)	-.064*** (.013)	-.048*** (.014)
Number of parties	.012 (.052)	.008 (.041)	.002 (.050)	.001 (.028)	-.006 (.018)	-.008 (.021)
Polarization	-.058 (.062)	-.078 (.050)	-.100† (.060)	.007 (.034)	.002 (.021)	-.006 (.024)
Electoral loser * no. of parties	.039*** (.008)	--	.034*** (.008)	.015* (.007)	--	.010 (.007)
Electoral loser * polarization	.133*** (.009)	--	.108*** (.009)	.046*** (.008)	--	.038*** (.008)
Policy loser * no. of parties	--	.009*** (.002)	.006* (.002)	--	.007*** (.002)	.006** (.002)
Policy loser * polarization	--	.033*** (.003)	.023*** (.003)	--	.011*** (.002)	.008** (.002)
Electoral participation	.164*** (.014)	.165*** (.014)	.165*** (.014)	.125*** (.013)	.126*** (.013)	.126*** (.013)
Close to party	.157*** (.010)	.118*** (.009)	.116*** (.009)	.111*** (.008)	.112*** (.008)	.111*** (.008)
Respondent ideology (left-right)	.022*** (.002)	.020*** (.002)	.020*** (.002)	.015*** (.002)	.015*** (.002)	.015*** (.002)
Age	-.016*** (.005)	-.016*** (.005)	-.015*** (.004)	.044*** (.004)	.044*** (.004)	.044*** (.004)
Female	-.012 (.009)	-.012 (.009)	-.012 (.009)	-.043*** (.008)	-.043*** (.008)	-.043*** (.008)
Education	.013* (.006)	.012* (.006)	.012* (.006)	.097*** (.005)	.096*** (.005)	.096*** (.005)
Married	-.002 (.010)	.000 (.010)	-.001 (.010)	-.017† (.009)	-.016† (.009)	-.017† (.009)
Income	.026*** (.004)	.026*** (.004)	.026*** (.004)	.046*** (.003)	.046*** (.003)	.046*** (.003)
Level of development	.039 (.514)	.002 (.408)	.015 (.498)	.065 (.279)	.054 (.172)	.058** (.202)
Level of democracy	.237 (.160)	.250* (.127)	.241 (.155)	.239** (.087)	.247*** (.054)	.242*** (.063)
Age of party system	.004* (.002)	.004** (.002)	.004* (.002)	.002* (.001)	.002** (.001)	.002** (.001)
Government ideology	.002 (.049)	.009 (.038)	.007 (.047)	.012 (.026)	.014 (.016)	.013 (.019)
Constant	2.493*** (.660)	2.589*** (.523)	2.682*** (.639)	2.690*** (.358)	2.750*** (.222)	2.779*** (.261)
<i>Variance Components</i>						
Country-level	.267	.211	.258	.144	.087	.102
Individual-level	.689	.690	.688	.626	.627	.626
$\rho$	.13	.09	.12	.05	.02	.03
$R^2(overall)$	.170	.170	.174	.155	.155	.156
Macro N	24	24	24	24	24	24
Micro N	26105	26105	26105	25724	25724	25724

Source: Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, Module II.

Notes: Random intercept multilevel regression models; standard errors in parentheses.

†:  $p < .1$ ; \*:  $p < .05$ ; \*\*:  $p < .01$ ; \*\*\*:  $p < .001$ .

