

Democratic Resilience: Citizens' Evaluation of
Democratic Performance during the Great Recession

by

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TABLE OF CONTENT

CHAPTER 1. Introduction.....	8
1. The Vitality of Democracies during the Great Recession.....	8
2. Democratic Legitimacy.....	11
2.1. Conceptualization and Dimensions of Democratic Legitimacy.....	11
2.2. Satisfaction with Democracy	12
2.3. Limitations of Satisfaction with Democracy	13
2.4. The Prelude of Democratic Deconsolidation	14
3. Overview	15
4. References	24
CHAPTER 2. Democratic Resilience.....	32
1. Introduction	32
2. Theoretical Framework	34
2.1. Conceptualization of Democratic Resilience	34
2.2. Types of Democratic Outcomes after the Great Recession	36
2.3. Institutional Performances or Perception of Performances	37
3. Data and Methodology.....	41
4. Main Findings	43
4.1. Evolution of Satisfaction with Democracy after the Great Recession.....	43
4.2. Classifying based on Democratic Resilience framework	45
4.3. Explanatory Analysis.....	48
5. Conclusions.....	52
6. References	55
7. Appendix	64
CHAPTER 3. The Winner-Loser Gap in Polarized Elections in EU Countries	73
1. Introduction	73
2.Theoretical Framework	75
2.1. Considerations about the winner-loser gap	75
2.2. Polarization and its dimensions under debate.....	78
2.3. Types of party polarization and its effect on the winner-loser gap.....	80
3. Data and Methodology.....	82
4. Findings	84
4.1. Descriptive analysis of party polarization	84
4.2. Exploratory Analysis	87
4.3. Robustness Analysis.....	90
5. Discussion about mechanisms	92
6. Conclusions.....	92
7. References	94
8. Appendix	100
CHAPTER 4. Winners’ Loathing.....	106
1. Introduction	106
2. Theoretical Framework	108
2.1. Affective Polarization and Party Identification.....	108
2.2. Determinants of Affective Polarization in Multiparty Settings	109
2.3. The Influence of Affective Polarization on the Winner-Loser Gap.....	113
3. Data and Methodology.....	115
4. Findings	117
4.1. Affective Polarization in Multiparty Contexts	117
4.2. Polarized Citizens and the Winner-Loser Gap	120
5. Concluding remarks.....	124

7. Appendix	133
CHAPTER 5. Conclusions.....	137
1. Theoretical Contributions and Policy Proposals	137
2. Future research	141
3. References	143
Other research merits	146

CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1. The Vitality of Democracies during the Great Recession

The Great Recession was an unprecedented economic and political shock which stirred the stability and vitality of Western democracies. Initially, this event began with the collapse of Lehman Brothers in the US in 2008, which led to a crash of Wall Street markets only comparable to the economic shock of the Great Depression in 1929. Globalization proved more relevant than ever during the Great Recession, when almost all the economies around the globe collapsed along with the US economy, triggering an economic crisis that nearly stretched to another historic moment: the Covid-19 pandemic. But this crisis was never just an economic crisis. The aftermath of the Great Recession also eroded the legitimacy of consolidated democracies. While some Western democracies managed to overcome the shock and show that their institutions were resilient, other democracies were indefinitely damaged. Moreover, during this period, political actors who were disloyal to democratic principles appeared in all Western political scenarios, while polarization became an even greater problem. To understand the new political dynamics that emerged during the Great Recession and their impact on democracies, it is necessary to understand the historical path of how democracy became the "only game in town" (Linz & Stepan, 1996).

The third wave of democratization beginning in the early 1970s was a critical juncture in which democracy became the only desirable political system in all countries of the world (Diamond, 1999; Huntington, 1993; Kaase & Newton, 1995; Przeworski et al., 1999). The triumph and consolidation of liberal democracies in the last quarter of the twentieth century was a central political phenomenon in which countries began to adopt the basic institutions of democracy such as free elections, the formation of political parties of any ideology, and the establishment of representative parliaments. Nevertheless, not all democratization processes during this period were the same. For example, Fishman (2019) highlights the disparities in democratic transition between Spain and Portugal in 1970s. While in Spain the democratization process was led by Franco's elites, in Portugal the transition was mainly brought about by a social subversion that reversed hierarchies and reconfigured Portuguese cultural patterns, leading to the emergence of democracy in that country. These differences in the democratization process strongly shape the acceptance

and citizens' satisfaction of each of these democracies. While institutionally democracy was on the rise in many countries, deepening the idea of democracy among citizens took longer (Diamond, 1999; Torcal & Montero, 2006). On the one hand, citizens' attitudes toward democracy developed very slowly in the new democracies, mainly because many dynamics, legacies, and institutions of the authoritarian regimes were still present in these countries. On the other hand, critical citizens had become as a new figure in the consolidated democracies, and political discontent gained prominence in the political arena (Norris, 1999; Offe, 2006). As Linz (1978) noted, democracy not only depends on democratic institutions, but also requires stable reservoirs of democratic legitimacy to ensure the stability of the democratic regime. In the 1990s and early 2000s, both phenomena seemed to highlight the potential weaknesses of democracy's status as the "only game in town". Empirical evidence, however, refuted these doubts by flatly denying this possibility. Thus, democratic legitimacy reached an all-time high in almost all countries during this period, and citizens seemed quite satisfied with democracy (Kriesi, 2013; Norris, 2011; Offe, 2006; Torcal & Montero, 2006). At that time, no one could argue that democracies in economically developed countries could collapse or backslide, and democracies enjoyed strong democratic legitimacy among citizens. Nevertheless, this paradigm of democratic and economic well-being was turned on its head with the onset of the 2008 economic crisis: the Great Recession.

Przeworski (2019), in his book "Crises of Democracy", delves into the etymological roots of the word "crisis" to understand this phenomenon and align it with the narrative of the Great Recession. Crises represent an impulse or critical point at which people are forced to make decisions based on critical circumstances. In a time of economic crisis such as the Great Recession, European policymakers had to adopt very risky public policies to deal with the economic consequences of the 2008 crisis, without considering the potential political backlash that these decisions would trigger. In Europe, citizens perceived that national political elites were more responsive to the EU common interests than with their own increasingly precarious economic needs and situations (Ganuza, 2018; Hobolt & Wratil, 2020; Hooghe & Marks, 2009; Kriesi, 2013; Torcal, 2014). This perception increased considerably with the intervention of non-elected institutions -e.g., the Troika- in some economically bailed-out countries in the European Union, leaving an impression that politicians lack responsiveness and accountability at this period (Cordero & Simón, 2016; Ganuza, 2018; Magalhães, 2014; Sánchez-Cuenca, 2020; Torcal, 2014). Thus, the process of delegitimization of democracies spread throughout Western democracies, weakening one

of the basic foundations of democracy. Moreover, both academia and the media warned of an unprecedented situation in which democracy could be at risk or, rather, in crisis since the beginning of the Great Recession. The term "democratic backsliding", understood as a gradual process of erosion of democratic institutions and principles (Przeworski, 2019: 172), has gained prominence in academia. Various publications aimed to analyze and understand whether today's democracies are really in an "authoritarian regression" or whether, on the contrary, democratic deconsolidation is a mere illusion caused as a consequence of the Great Recession (Bermeo, 2016; Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Mechkova et al., 2017; Norris, 2017; Waldner & Lust, 2018). Following Przeworski (2019), the author argues that some democracies are indeed a period of unprecedented backsliding, and that this authoritarian regression is due to a subversion by stealth (2019: 173). Unlike previous democratic overthrows, such as in Argentina or Chile in the 1970s, where both democracies were subverted by military coups, today's democracies are not being dismantled in one fell swoop. Przeworski argues that the dismantling of democracy starts from the government in power, gradually eroding democratic institutions and using various legal instruments in illegitimate ways to gain more power (see also Ginsburg & Huq, 2018; Waldner & Lust, 2018). On the other hand, there are authors who argue that this democratic deconsolidation is a phenomenon that occurs only in a few short-lived and weak democracies. To extend this backsliding concern to Western stable democracies would be to exaggerate the potential of these phenomena (Alexander & Welzel, 2017; Norris, 2017). But to what extent are these claims true? Are democracies backsliding or are they merely in temporary crisis due to the economic shock of the Great Recession? To what extent might democratic delegitimization have irreversible effects on the proper functioning of democracy?

This dissertation analyzes citizens' evaluation of democratic performance during the Great Recession and examines the main political phenomena that played a fundamental role in changing and determining satisfaction with democracy in the European context. This dissertation introduction is therefore a theoretical and empirical approach to democratic legitimacy, as well as a deepening of the debate on the influence of democratic legitimacy on the stability and consolidation of democracies. First, I introduce the conceptualization of democratic legitimacy and its various dimensions -i.e., diffuse and specific support for democracy- since the early work of Easton (1965). I then focus on theoretical and empirical contributions to satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. This indicator of specific support for democracy is one of the most common indicators in public opinion surveys

and an important measure of citizens' evaluation of democratic performance. Undoubtedly, this indicator has been heavily criticized for various reasons (Canache et al., 2001; Ferrín, 2016; Linde & Ekman, 2003), so I endeavor to comment on the construct and measurement validity of satisfaction with democracy. Following, I explain the reasons why dissatisfaction with democracy could be considered a harbinger or prelude to the deconsolidation of Western democracies. Finally, I present an overview of the main objectives and chapters of this dissertation.

2. Democratic Legitimacy

2.1. Conceptualization and Dimensions of Democratic Legitimacy

In political science, the concept of legitimacy has a long tradition since Max Weber's initial contribution to the term, which distinguished between three types of legitimacy: rational-legal, traditional, and charismatic. Building on Weber's ideas about legitimacy, Easton (1965, 1975) created a theoretical and empirical framework to conceptualize and measure democratic legitimacy, linking this concept to support for democracy. Easton (1975: 436) defined support for democracy as the attitude with which people behave and orient themselves positively and favorably toward the democratic regime and political authorities. According to the author, much of the support for democracies is based on citizens' perception that the democratically elected authorities are responsible for the proper functioning of democracy and the effective distribution of goods and services provided by the state. Democratic support or legitimacy is therefore based on the belief that democracy is the "only game in town", i.e., no other type of regime than the democratic one is attractive or legitimate to citizens (Kriesi, 2013; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Norris, 2011; Torcal & Montero, 2006).

The importance of democratic legitimacy lies in the fact that the stability and vitality of democracies depends to a large extent on how legitimate a democracy is perceived by its citizens. Without this support, democracies could fall into crisis and be weakened until they disappear (Diamond, 1999; Easton, 1975; Inglehart, 2003; Lipset, 1959; Norris, 2011). As Claassen (2020) argues, this theoretical-empirical scheme initiated by Easton is widely used in academia as a starting point for evaluating and assessing support for democracies; however, there are few publications that empirically test the consequences of democratic legitimacy. Although there is a theoretical consensus on the influence of democratic legitimacy on the well-being of the democratic system, there is not much empirical

evidence to confirm this relationship. On the other hand, democratic legitimacy is a multidimensional phenomenon and there may be scenarios in which citizens broadly support the principles of democracy but criticize and doubt democratic institutions and their functioning (Norris, 1999, 2011).

These limitations of the concept of democratic legitimacy could be resolved by the famous distinction between diffuse and specific support for democracy proposed by Easton (1965, 1975). The author distinguished between diffuse and specific support for democracy in order to empirically capture the multidimensionality of democratic legitimacy. Diffuse support for democracy is conceptualized as a set of attitudes and beliefs by which citizens accept the basic principles of the democratic system, that is, the ideal of democracy over any other political regime. In contrast, specific support for democracy refers to citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system and trust in democratic institutions (Diamond, 1999; Easton, 1965, 1975; Kriesi, 2013; Linde & Ekman, 2003; Norris, 1999). The concept of satisfaction with democracy, the main variable outcome of this dissertation, comes from this second group, i.e., specific support for democracy.

2.2. Satisfaction with Democracy

Satisfaction with democracy is conceptualized as support for the performance of the democratic regime or, in other words, citizens' perception about democratic governments and institutions' effectiveness. Among the various dimensions of democratic legitimacy, satisfaction with democracy is the most studied item in academia (Ferrín, 2016). Moreover, this intermediate indicator of satisfaction with democracy is one of the most repeated items in public opinion surveys, asked on most occasions as the level of satisfaction with the way democracy works in the country (see Eurobarometer, LAPOP, CSES, European Social Survey, World Values Survey). In my view, the satisfaction with democracy indicator captures the legitimacy of the democratic system more accurately than other types of diffuse support questions that ask respondents whether they prefer a democratic or authoritarian regime. If citizens in consolidated democracies view democracy as the only socially desirable system, this would lead to an underestimation of responses in favor of dictatorships due to respondents' social desirability bias. That is, citizens who are more likely to favor autocratic regimes are more likely to lie to generate social desirability knowing that the "politically correct" or "moral" answer is democracy. The same logic could be applied to those citizens who have lived under autocratic regimes and now do so in democratic contexts: They are less likely to choose a response favoring dictatorship

because of their past experiences. In any case, there is no empirical evidence in this regard. However, it would be very important to know the empirical limitations of capturing diffuse support for democracy, i.e., support for the principles of the democratic regime.

2.3. Limitations of Satisfaction with Democracy

Nonetheless, the concept of satisfaction with democracy has been the target of numerous theoretical and empirical criticisms. Canache et al. (2001) argue that satisfaction with democracy lacks construct and measurement validity. These authors point out that respondents have difficulty answering about satisfaction with democracy because they lack a solid baseline from which to compare the current state of their democracies. Moreover, other authors elaborate on this criticism by arguing that respondents' answers are based on different scenarios, from their satisfaction with the electoral process and the inequality of electoral systems to the current level of political corruption in their country (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). In other words: If respondents think of different elements of democracy when they answer, construct validity is questioned because the researcher does not really know what is actually being measured. On the other hand, Linde and Ekman (2003) also criticize the suitability of satisfaction with democracy as an intermediate indicator of democratic legitimacy because of the theoretical conclusions drawn regarding this item. Both authors assert that satisfaction with democracy is a measure of citizens' evaluation of democratic development and not an indicator of support for democracy as the "only game in town". Thus, no one can directly link differences in satisfaction with democracy to the consolidation or deconsolidation of democracies (see also Diamond, 1999, 2015; Fuchs et al., 1995). Another important critique by Linde and Ekman (2003) relates to the effects of elections and party affiliation on satisfaction with democracy. Anderson (2005) argues that the mere fact of winning or losing elections has an impact on citizens' evaluation of democratic performance, creating a gap in satisfaction with the way democracy works between winners and losers, -i.e., the winner-loser gap. Winners are more likely to believe that the government is responsive to their needs and that they have a voice in the political process. On the other hand, losers may generate anger, resentment, and dissatisfaction about the functioning of the democratic system (Anderson, 2005; Craig et al., 2006; Esaiasson, 2011; Rich & Treece, 2018). Therefore, Linde and Ekman (2003:406) consider satisfaction with democracy as an imperfect and imprecise indicator that is highly dependent on citizens' party affiliation and voter status.

Despite these criticisms, this intermediate indicator of democratic legitimacy is widely used

in the academic community and dozens of publications continue to contribute to the conceptualization of this political phenomenon and to understand its causes and consequences. In her recent contribution, Ferrín (2016) confirms the construct validity of satisfaction with democracy, refuting the criticisms of Canache et al. (2001). She argues that citizens evaluate democracy in terms of how liberal democracy must function, that is, they do have a basis for such a comparison. However, the author also cautions that the dissonance between citizens' democratic ideals and the functioning of democracy also affects democratic satisfaction. For example, citizens with broader democratic ideals show lower satisfaction with democracy, certainly because these citizens seek greater deepening of democracy through more participatory processes than just voting in elections every four years. Precisely, the proper functioning of democracy depends not only on its authenticity, i.e., the functioning of electoral institutions, but also on democratic quality and depth (Fishman, 2016). Citizens who prefer democratic models with higher democratic quality, in which political life and participation are articulated beyond the parties, may find their own democracies deficient. Fishman and Tirado Castro (2021) show that the understandings of democracy held by MPs and those represented in the Spanish case diverge sharply. While MPs defend a minimalist and institutional democracy with little citizen participation beyond elections, citizens, regardless of party affiliation, prefer a more participatory democracy with a greater number of binding referendums. Undoubtedly, this disagreement about how democracy should work leads to less intentionality among political elites about democratic quality and greater democratic dissatisfaction among citizens. On the other hand, Martini and Quaranta (2019) refute Linde and Ekman's (2003) theory on the role of elections and partisanship by limiting this influence exclusively to the electoral period. According to these authors, the winner-loser gap narrows with the salience of elections for a twofold reason. While the winners perceive that the political elites do not fully, or only partially, fulfill their demands throughout the legislative period, the losers gradually regain confidence in the way democracy works and wait for a new call for elections. Without denying the validity of the criticisms previously raised, the empirical evidence shows that the weakness of the construct of satisfaction with democracy is certainly overestimated. However, one important critique remains unanswered for the moment: the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and democratic consolidation.

2.4. The Prelude of Democratic Deconsolidation

In his book *The Crisis of Democracy*, Crozier (1975) raised the question of what would

happen if, in a stable and wealthy democracy, citizens no longer have confidence in the democratic system or institutions and instead support authoritarian responses to their problems. To link dissatisfaction with democracy directly to democratic deconsolidation would undoubtedly be to exaggerate the explanatory power of political discontent (Alexander & Welzel, 2017; Diamond, 2015; Kriesi, 2013; Norris, 2011). Nevertheless, there are growing voices in academia warning of the disastrous consequences of the erosion of democratic legitimacy and support for its institutions after the Great Recession (Foa et al., 2020; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Offe, 2017; Przeworski, 2019). Recent studies show, for example, that people who are dissatisfied with democracy are more likely to support anti-democratic ideas and populist political parties that turn away from liberal democratic norms (Foa et al., 2020; Pew Research Center, 2018; Plattner, 2017).

Based on these arguments, I argue that democratic dissatisfaction is not a sufficient, but a necessary condition for democratic deconsolidation. The key to understanding the link between democratic dissatisfaction and deconsolidation is to understand that dissatisfaction with democracy is a prelude/harbinger of deconsolidation. If increasing dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy implies an increase in anti-democratic positions and the emergence of semi-loyal actors, this phenomenon may entail a questioning of the main foundations of democracy. In other words, the lack of specific support for democracy negatively affects diffuse support for democracy, thus weakening the vitality of the democratic system. Following Przeworski's (2019) argument, the current phenomenon of democratic backsliding does not emanate from military coups in consolidated democracies, but from a subversion by stealth of democratic principles using legal means in an illegitimate manner. The theory proposed in this thesis is that citizens allow these maneuvers precisely because the legitimacy of the democratic system's functioning remains low. Any shock that weakens specific democratic legitimacy for a long period can lead to a weakening of democratic stability in the long run, as this decline leads to an increase in illiberal positions among citizenry and, above all, the legitimacy of antidemocratic actors. It is therefore necessary to deepen our understanding of the determinants of satisfaction with democracy, especially in times of crisis when democratic legitimacy is at stake.

3. Overview

This thesis has four basic objectives, all intended to analyze and better understand citizens' evaluations of the functioning and evolution of democracy, and the main determinants of change in those evaluations during the Great Recession. In pursuit of the first objective, I

examine the evolution of satisfaction with democracy in EU countries during the Great Recession. On average, democratic satisfaction in EU countries decreased substantially after the onset of the Great Recession and, contrary to expectations, the recovery of satisfaction with democracy did not parallel the economic recovery of these countries, especially those most affected by the economic crisis (Lobo & Lewis-Beck, 2021; Ruíz-Rufino & Alonso, 2017; Schraff & Schimmelfennig, 2019; Valgarðsson & Devine, 2022). However, the crisis of democratic legitimacy was not equally pronounced in all EU countries. For example, there are democracies that suffered severe economic damage during the Great Recession and maintained stable levels of satisfaction with democracy, while others that experienced less economic impact suffered a sharp decline in democratic satisfaction. Similarly, some democracies now face a new paradigm of democratic legitimacy, where levels of satisfaction with democracy are now well below the pre-crisis average.

The second objective of this dissertation is to classify EU democracies according to these trajectories in order to make a theoretical and empirical contribution on the consequences of shocks. Democracies are constantly confronted with exogenous shocks, which, as I argued above, can weaken specific support for democracy and thus democratic legitimacy as a whole. In just 20 years, European democracies have faced an economic crisis that can only be compared to the crash of '29, and a global pandemic that is hardly unprecedented. Under conditions of strong democratic legitimacy, citizens might temporarily accept certain economic restrictions or make personal sacrifices required of their governments to cope with the aftermath of the shock (Catterberg, 2006; Zmerli & Van Der Meer, 2017). Thus, this second objective refers to the classification of countries as resilient or non-resilient in terms of satisfaction with democracy in the face of an exogenous shock. The resilience attribute refers to the ability of a system to avoid or adapt to adverse circumstances and still function properly (Bonnano, 2004; Joseph, 2013). If democracies manage to maintain their stability or restore their prior level of satisfaction with democracy by adapting to adverse circumstances, such democracies can be considered resilient.

Third, I identify the main determinants of satisfaction with democracy and the “winner-loser gap” during this period. The purpose of this dissertation is not only to understand how satisfaction with democracy evolved during the Great Recession, but also to identify the main determinants that explain the variation of specific support for democracy. Evidently, the economic nature of the Great Recession has led many scholars to focus on

macroeconomic conditions and changes to explain the different trajectories of satisfaction with democracy (Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014; Bermeo & Bartels, 2014; Cordero & Simón, 2016; Polavieja, 2013; Ruíz-Rufino & Alonso, 2017; Schraff & Schimmelfennig, 2019). Without dismissing these theories, this dissertation proposes a different empirical approach: It is not only macroeconomic conditions or institutional configurations that determine democratic satisfaction, but also citizens' perceptions of the economic and political performance of elites in their country. In other words, what matters is not so much whether or not there has been an economic recovery in macroeconomic terms, but whether citizens evaluate positively or negatively the performance of politicians and institutions during these times of crisis. Similarly, this thesis focuses on the salience of elections because of their impact on satisfaction with democracy. As argued earlier, winners of elections show greater satisfaction with the functioning of democracy than do losers after the election period (Anderson, 2005; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Craig et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2012). If satisfaction with democracy is strongly influenced by electoral dynamics, this could also have long-term implications for the stability of democratic legitimacy, that is, beyond the salience of elections.

Finally, in pursuit of the fourth objective I highlight the role that certain electoral strategies of political parties can play in undermining the level of democratic satisfaction and thus the basic principles of democracy. Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) have persuasively argued that political parties should be the main gatekeepers of democratic principles and that they must preserve democratic legitimacy, among other tasks. Among these principles is the practice of mutual tolerance, according to which parties portray their opponents as legitimate and democratic, and not as their "enemies to be defeated". However, current politics is characterized by a climate of hostility and mistrust, fueled to a large extent by the parties' polarizing strategies. This climate of political hostility permeates the citizenry where individuals begin to perceive their political opponents as their enemies, which reinforces the so-called affective polarization of citizens. After all, if your enemies are located within the democratic institutions, it is logical to perceive that democracy is failing or weak. That is, polarization in electoral periods not only weakens the principle of mutual tolerance, but also significantly reduces specific support for democracy. This thesis aims to understand and analyze the configuration of polarization and the mechanisms that cause satisfaction with democracy to decrease in a polarized environment.

To achieve these goals, this dissertation presents three research articles in the form of a compendium. The first article is "*Democratic Resilience: Political Efficacy and Satisfaction with Democracy during the Great Recession*". This article examines the evolution of democratic satisfaction and the moderating effect of key democratic features during moments of crisis, focusing on the aftermath of the Great Recession in EU countries. The article formulates democratic resilience as the set of democratic characteristics that successfully adapt to or overcome democratic delegitimization processes after a shock, characteristics that can be either institutional or general perceptions of citizens about the performance of political institutions. In the first section, I conceptually reformulate the notion of democratic resilience in light of the increasing importance of this concept in the literature. Afterwards, I offer an innovative classification of democracies based on their evolution of satisfaction with democracy following the economic shock of the Great Recession. This classification is essentially an analytical tool that distinguishes between what I formulate as preventive, recovered, and damaged democracies. Preventive democracies are those that have suffered a shock but that have not experienced a significant decline in satisfaction with democracy. Recovered democracies are those that have experienced a significant decline in satisfaction with democracy after the shock but that have regained their previous average level of democratic support in the long run. Damaged democracies are those that have not recovered previous levels of satisfaction with democracy. Although this does not necessarily mean that the damage is permanent, political recovery in these cases will at least take longer than economic recovery from the shock itself.

For the empirical analyses, I created a panel data set by merging three data sets - Eurobarometer, Varieties of Democracy, and Comparative Political Dataset- in which each observation corresponds to one European country in each year from 2004 to 2018. From the standpoint of estimation techniques, I used structural equation modeling, more specifically path analysis – endogenous to endogenous. Path analysis is ideally suited to the main objective of this article which is to account for both the direct and indirect effects of specific institutional variables on the outcome variable and requires assumptions similar to those of linear regressions. Basically, this article proposes that institutional and macroeconomic conditions directly influence citizens' perceptions about responsiveness and satisfaction with the national economy, while having a direct and indirect effect on satisfaction with democracy.

The study of democratic satisfaction trajectories during the Great Recession shows the

devastating impact of the economic crisis in Southern Europe and the transitory damage caused in several EU democracies in terms of citizens' evaluations of their democracy's performances. Similarly, the results show two puzzling cases, Hungary and Poland. However, I offer two possible explanations in the article by highlighting that the anti-elitist and people-based rhetoric of populist parties may have fostered a higher perception of political responsiveness among citizens (Geurkink et al., 2020; Harteveld et al., 2021; Mohrenberg et al., 2021; van Houwelingen & Dekker, 2021). Following the idea of output-oriented legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999), the results show that variation in democratic satisfaction depends less on how countries managed the 2008 crisis economically than on how crisis management was perceived by the population. Perceived responsiveness as well as perceptions of economic effectiveness prove to be drivers of crucial variation in satisfaction with democracy. The greater the citizens' perception of having responsive leaders and the greater the ability of these leaders to effectively communicate economic results to the population, the greater the chances of coping with the backlash of the Great Recession without a deterioration in democratic satisfaction. Moreover, from an institutional perspective, Quality of Government is a necessary attribute for democracies to have a reservoir of democratic legitimacy in which elected governments can increase the response to citizens' policy preferences. Government effectiveness and the absence of corruption have a major impact on the level of satisfaction with democracy in EU countries.

The second article is entitled "The Winner-Loser Gap in Polarized Elections in the EU Countries". This article is premised on the significance of the principle of mutual tolerance as a *sine qua non* condition for protecting democracy from backsliding (Levistky & Ziblatt, 2018; Przeworski, 2019). Party polarization, which has a top-down character, has apparently become one of the most effective strategies in election campaigns and a negative feature of current politics. The negative consequences of parties' polarizing actions play a role in creating a trade-off between electoral outcomes and democratic strength. Both scholars and the media are increasingly warning that party polarization is growing significantly and could have devastating consequences for European democracies. Indeed, some authors have looked at the detrimental effect of polarization on satisfaction with democracy in European multiparty systems during elections (Dassonneville & McAllister, 2020; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; McCoy et al., 2018). Accordingly, election winners tend to show higher satisfaction with democracy while losers show greater democratic dissatisfaction, i.e., the winner-loser gap. The literature does not address the

interaction between these phenomena: the winner-loser gap and party polarization. The main contribution of this article is to examine this gap in the literature and provide empirical evidence on the connection between polarization and the winner-loser gap. To this end, this research focuses on European multiparty contexts during the Great Recession, using data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and the innovative V-Party Dataset, which contains information on the position of political parties. This context and time period are particularly interesting because party polarization has recently attracted a great deal of scholarly attention and, as my article shows, party polarization increases sharply after the onset of the economic crisis. From an analytical perspective, I use multilevel analysis, or more precisely hierarchical multilevel models, in which individual and institutional estimators are used to calculate variation in satisfaction with democracy. The analyses are mainly based on the interaction between citizens' voting status and party polarization. Election winners are considered to be those who voted for the respective governing party or parties-including junior coalition parties- and election losers are the remaining citizens who participated in the elections.

Another notable contribution to the polarization literature is based on the use of different dimensions to measure party polarization. In the literature, party polarization is usually measured as the ideological distance that exists between different political parties with respect to economic positions (Dalton, 2008; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Sartori, 2005). During the Great Recession, economic issues significantly shaped the political debate in many European countries, especially in the early years of the economic crisis (Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014; Bermeo & Bartels, 2014; Cordero & Simón, 2016; Magalhães, 2014; Torcal, 2014). However, this is not the only issue that has been consistently at the forefront of political dynamics since the beginning of the crisis, and other political debates have also polarized the political arena (Dancygier & Margalit, 2020; Mole et al., 2021). For example, immigration has been a central issue in many countries, and, indeed, Brexit was strongly influenced by this type of polarization. Therefore, in operationalizing the concept in this study, I use not only economic polarization, but also three other types of polarization: disagreement regarding immigration, LGTBi+ rights and welfare. To calculate party polarization in each EU country, I used Dalton's ((Dalton, 2008) formula, in which polarization is the summation of the ideological distance between each party's position on each topic and the average position of all parties, divided by five and squared. Not all parties are equally strong in elections and contribute equally to the level of polarization. For this reason, this value is multiplied by the percentage of votes each party obtained in the

previous elections.

Initially, I hypothesize two effects of party polarization on the gap in satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers. The first hypothesis is that election winners are more satisfied with the way democracy works after highly polarized election than losers who suffered defeated. The second hypothesis states that party polarization erodes satisfaction with democracy among winners and losers alike, and that the more polarized an election is, the less democratic satisfaction for both groups. The results of this study show that neither hypothesis holds. The findings show that party polarization negatively affects satisfaction with democracy among both winners and losers of elections, especially among the former. The analysis reveals that as party polarization increases, satisfaction with democracy decreases so much among winners that the winner-loser gap narrows significantly and even disappears in some polarizing contexts. With the exception of LGTB⁺ polarization, all types of polarization reduce the winner-loser gap. Given these puzzling results, I conclude this article by discussing three different mechanisms that might explain why, contrary to expectations, party polarization has such a detrimental effect on winners' satisfaction with democracy

Based on the results obtained in the second article, I developed one of the main mechanisms presented and further elaborated it in the third article. The third article is called “Winners’ Loathing: How Affective Polarization Influences Democratic Dissatisfaction after Elections”. This article examines how certain partisan dynamics during elections, aimed at capitalizing on the votes of party sympathizers and weakening political opponents, also influence affective polarization and citizens' perceptions of the functioning of democracies. More specifically, the contribution of this article lies in examining the mechanisms through which affective polarization reduces post-election satisfaction with democracy after elections, particularly among winners, thus narrowing the winner-loser gap (see Anderson, 2005). To this end, the article is divided into two sections. First, the article examines the main triggers of affective polarization in electoral campaigns, focusing on two phenomena: party polarization (Bougher, 2017; Costa, 2021; Moral & Best, 2022; Reiljan, 2020; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016) and negative campaigning (Costa, 2021; Crawford et al., 2013; Nai, 2020; Sood & Iyengar, 2016). Second, this paper examines the relationship between affective polarization and the winner-loser gap. I hypothesize that polarized winners show higher levels of dissatisfaction with democracy than polarized losers due to the electoral dynamics of certain parties, thereby narrowing the winner-loser gap.

This study focuses on elections in European multiparty systems during the Great Recession. After the onset of the economic crisis, I find that both satisfaction with democracy and party polarization have changed substantially, with satisfaction with democracy dropping significantly and polarization rising considerably. Elections represent a fundamental core for the proper functioning of democracies, and it is at this point that the dynamics of party elections affect both satisfaction and affective polarization (Hernández et al., 2021; Martini & Quaranta, 2019). To conduct the empirical analysis, this article relies on two databases from which individual- and party-level information is extracted for each of the European countries during the electoral period: the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and the V-Party. I have also used multilevel analysis and structural equation modeling – path analysis- to test the hypotheses proposed in this research.

The findings show that democratic dissatisfaction increases mainly due to affective polarization, party polarization, and negative campaigning. Similarly, party polarization increases the level of affective polarization, while the empirical evidence on the effects of negative campaigning on this phenomenon is not entirely robust. Moreover, the results show that the winner-loser gap decreases significantly due to the decline in satisfaction with democracy among affective polarized winners. In this article, I provide two answers to the question of why this tendency is stronger among winners than among losers of elections. First, the descriptive results show a higher degree of affective polarization among winners than among losers. Although the differences are not very large on average, this gap widens significantly in countries with a high degree of affective polarization. Second, and most likely, the dissatisfaction of winners is greater because winning an election does not mean the absolute defeat of political rivals; opponents can also gain positions within political institutions, i.e., seats in parliament. If you, as the winner, feel that the victory was not fulfilling, you are more likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works and even to question the way democracy works. As some scholars have suggested (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Simonovits et al., 2022; Somer et al., 2021), polarization among citizens develops an attitude that undermines the principles of democracy and leads to what is known as democratic hypocrisy among winners of elections. If parties consistently pursue polarizing strategies during elections, it is likely to have a corrosive effect on democracy as a political system in the long run and open the door to more authoritarian and antidemocratic choices by citizens.

Taken together, the three articles show bases both for hope and concern for the future

prospects of democracy. My empirical analyses of democratic resilience and democratic challenges in Europe in the wake of the Great Recession add to existing literatures. My work contributes to both our empirical knowledge and our conceptual understanding of how democracy stands up to the new challenges that emerge in the context of crises.

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CHAPTER 2

Democratic Resilience: Political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy after the Great Recession in the European Union

1. Introduction

What determines whether democracies prove resilient in the face of unexpected shocks? This question has been of growing importance for European polities – and democracies throughout the world – in recent years. During recent decades, whereas many European countries have strengthened their democracies through stable political institutions and well-organized civil societies, others have experienced significant democratic difficulties, in some instances approaching a breakdown scenario, turning into hybrid or even authoritarian regimes (Ágh 2016; Foa and Mounk 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019). In most EU countries, as Linz and Stepan (1996) famously posed the matter, the democratic system had become “the only game in town” prior to the Great Recession. Two mechanisms empirically supported this outcome. On the one hand, the internal pressures of loyal political actors and civil society and, on the other hand, the pressure of international actors bolstered the establishment and then consolidation of democratic regimes and the protection of basic human rights (Offe 2017). Nonetheless, after the Great Recession, social scientists and the media have raised concerns about the health of previously consolidated democracies due to the reemergence of populist actors, the politics of Brexit, and the American presidency of Donald Trump (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Lindvall 2012; Przeworski 2019). This global trend has strongly affected the previous democratic bastion of European Union member states. More recently, the Covid-19 crisis has affected all countries. Within the European Union, leaders have found themselves approving unprecedented measures to contain the pandemic, in some countries restraining civil liberties to protect the citizenry’s health. This article addresses the question of why some country cases are much more successful than others in addressing large new challenges such as the Great Recession in ways that reinforce their democracies instead of placing them in danger. The research findings presented here show how *perceptions of responsiveness* and satisfaction with the economy help to bolster the legitimacy of institutions in times of

crisis. In this context a new political science paradigm has questioned whether the most significant problems of democracies may reside primarily *within* the system. This innovative paradigm views democracies as dynamic systems influenced by both contingent circumstances and systematic factors (Luhmann 1998), that may strengthen or weaken the impact of exogenous shocks. This suggests the importance of examining patterns of democratic stability in moments of stress – i.e., an economic crisis- and of observing the stabilizing (or destabilizing) components of democratic regimes. As formulated by Norris (2017: 18), “*Regimes may appear resilient until they are not*”.

This paper examines the evolution of democratic satisfaction and the moderating effect of key democratic features in moments of crisis, shaping *democratic resilience*. The article formulates *democratic resilience as the democratic characteristics which successfully adapt to or overcome democratic delegitimization processes after a shock*, characteristics that could be either institutional or instead reflective of general perceptions of citizens about democracy. More specifically, I seek to identify the political features or dynamics that reinforce democratic political satisfaction in European cases after the economic recession beginning in 2008.

In the following sections, the discussion conceptually reframes the notion of *democratic resilience*. Afterwards, I offer an innovative classification of democracies based on their trajectories of change after the Great Recession’s economic shock. This classification is essentially an analytical tool that differentiates between *preventive*, *recovered*, and *damaged democracies*, using this classification to analyze the cases’ different tendencies regarding democratic satisfaction. For the empirical analyses, I have created a panel dataset – merging three datasets: *Eurobarometer*, *Varieties of Democracy*, and *Comparative Political Dataset*- in which each observation corresponds to a European country in each year from 2004 to 2018. The study of democratic satisfaction trajectories during the Great Recession shows the devastating impact of the economic crisis in Southern Europe and the transitory damage caused in several EU democracies in terms of citizens’ evaluations of their democracy’s performances. Following the idea of *output-oriented legitimacy* (Scharpf, 1999), the findings show that variation of democratic legitimacy is less a function of how countries have economically managed the crisis of 2008 than how the management of crisis was perceived by the population. The key finding shows that perceptions of citizens about system *responsiveness* and *satisfaction with the national economy* have intervened decisively, shaping levels of democratic satisfaction, holding more predictive weight than other macroeconomic or political institutional features and boosting the capacity of democracies to overcome the delegitimization crisis that started after the financial collapse of 2008.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Conceptualization of Democratic Resilience

This article contributes to the literature conceptualizing *democratic resilience*, formulating this as *the democratic characteristics which successfully adapt to or overcome democratic delegitimization processes after a shock*. In the social sciences, resilience refers to the ability of a system to avoid or adapt to adverse circumstances and still function properly (Bonanno 2004; Joseph 2013). This attribute remains understudied and under-conceptualized in political science. Indeed, many recent publications have understood *resilience* as an inherent trait of democratic systems, without establishing an adequate theoretical foundation for this notion. I emphasize that democracies in fact encounter plenty of challenges that test both the stability of the democratic system and popular support for its institutions. In less than fifteen years, all Western consolidated democracies have faced a severe economic crisis, the Great Recession, and a threatening health scenario in the Covid-19 pandemic. Empirical evidence already suggested that delegitimization processes have expanded after the Great Recession, weakening the bases of democracies (Foa and Mounk, 2017; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018; Norris and Inglehart 2019). The notion of democratic resilience provides a new conceptual framework for examining the necessary and sufficient conditions under which democracy can overcome a disruption in the level of democratic legitimacy in the face of an exogenous crisis. Democracies have different starting points and room for maneuver to overcome these crises, and shocks are not all the same either: neither in terms of type, severity, or timing¹. Thus, this article proposes a new perspective on this issue. The approach adopted here seeks to specify two ideas: an innovative classification of democracies according to their variation in levels of democratic satisfaction *across time* after a shock, and the features that promote the survival of democratic regimes and maintain their satisfaction with democracy during such shocks.

To empirically capture citizens' evaluations of democracy – i.e., democratic legitimacy, scholars have largely relied on the conceptualization of David Easton (1965, 1975). Easton famously distinguished between diffuse and specific support for democracy. Diffuse

¹ For example, would the Covid-19 crisis have been approached differently depending on which Western countries faced it before? The room for maneuver of these countries facing this shock is different, depending on their welfare state, their health care system, the behaviour of people or, even the timing – when the first wave of Covid-19 hit Germany, Italy had already been struggling with this crisis for two months.

support refers to the generalized attachment to the democratic regime, or as Linz and Stepan (1996) posed it, the general understanding among the citizenry that democracy is “the only game in town”. On the other hand, specific support refers to the approval of democratic institutions and political decisions (Easton 1975: 444). Whereas diffuse support is the steadier of the two concepts and its determinants are anchored to the normative standards of democracy in each country, specific support fluctuates more in time due to the constantly changing evaluations of citizens about their parliament, parties, and governments (Easton 1975; Norris 1999, 2011). Similarly, diffuse support for democracy is significantly related to democratic consolidation (Linz and Stepan, 1996; Diamond, 1999; Claassen, 2019), while indicators of specific support lack this direct relationship with consolidation (Linde and Ekman, 2003; Norris, 2011; van Ham and Thomassen, 2017).

Scholars have widely used *satisfaction with democracy* as a proxy for *specific support for democracy*, more specifically, as proxy for support for the performance of the democratic regime and to capture the democratic governments and institutions’ effectivity to deliver public goods (Almond and Verba 1963; Linde and Ekman, 2003; Lipset and Schneider 1983; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Torcal and Montero 2006). To link dissatisfaction with democracy directly to democratic deconsolidation would undoubtedly be to exaggerate the explanatory power of political disaffection and the decline in specific support for democracy. (Norris, 2011). However, this article aims to present a different perspective that better fits the empirical evidence and is consistent with the concept of democratic resilience. According to recent studies (Pew Research Center, 2019; Hartevelt et al., 2019; Foa et al., 2020), citizens who are more dissatisfied with democracy are more inclined to vote for populist parties and to display attitudes and sentiments contrary to democratic principles. As van Ham and Thomassen (2017) suggested, prolonged dissatisfaction with democracy may have a spillover effect on citizens’ evaluation of democracy, which would inevitably lead to anti-democratic attitudes. Thus, democratic dissatisfaction is not the only or necessary condition for democratic deconsolidation, even if it is a prelude to the coexistence of political actors and ideologies that violate democratic principles. For these reasons, the Great Recession provides a good framework for studying this phenomenon as both democratic dissatisfaction and the rise of populist parties increased significantly, though not in parallel, during this period of economic crisis.

in the wake of the third wave of democratization (Huntington 1975, 1991), almost every European country had achieved high levels of democratic satisfaction (Bermeo 2016; Levi and Stoker 2000; Levitsky and Way 2015; Lijphart 1999; Norris 1999 2011; Offe 2006;

Torcal and Montero 2006). Before the 2008 economic crisis, satisfaction with democratic regimes remained relatively stable over time, and empirical evidence pointed to a rise in this indicator during the 90s and 2000s (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Foa et al., 2020; Inglehart 1999, 2003; Marien and Hooghe 2011; Thomassen and van Ham, 2017). Nevertheless, during the economic turmoil caused by the Great Recession, satisfaction with democracy has deteriorated in many European democracies, whether due to poor economic performance or the negative influence of political performance (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Bermeo and Bartels 2013; Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso, 2017; Van Erkel and Van der Meer 2016). Although the evidence suggests that democratic satisfaction declined during the Great Recession, the dynamics at play have not led to an actual increase in support for authoritarian regimes. On the contrary, democratic principles have generally not been questioned by citizens and, ultimately, diffuse support for the democratic system has slightly increased (Cordero and Simon 2016; Magalhaes 2014). Rather, citizens from consolidated democracies have criticized how their democracies work and have demanded more *democratic quality* and *depth*, especially after the interference of supranational and external political and economic actors in national politics (De Marco *et al.* 2018; Diamond 2015; Fishman, 2016; Ganuza and Nez 2017; Levitsky and Way 2015; Offe 2017; Torcal 2014). As Bauman (2016) persuasively formulated the matter, “*the current crisis of democracy is a crisis of democratic institutions*”: our democratic leaders are considered corrupt and/or inept to solve critical crises, but the idea of democracy maintains robust support.

2.2. Types of Democratic Outcomes after the Great Recession

This paper proposes a new methodological tool that takes account of such disturbances in pre-existing trends, an analytical categorization that facilitates our empirical study of trajectories of change in *satisfaction with democracy* during the Great Recession. I argue that it is important to highlight that some European countries experienced a massive decline in their levels of democratic satisfaction, whereas others were completely stable and suffered no change after the beginning of the Great Recession. But crucially, rather than focusing simply on the outcome reflected in levels of democratic support in each country at a *given point in time*, my framework identifies fundamental typological differences in countries’ trajectories over time, analytically placing these countries’ trajectories in three distinct categories: *preventive democracies*, *recovered democracies*, and *damaged democracies*.

The first cluster of cases, *preventive democracies*, includes those that faced an economic shock but have not experienced any significant decay in satisfaction with democracy. These

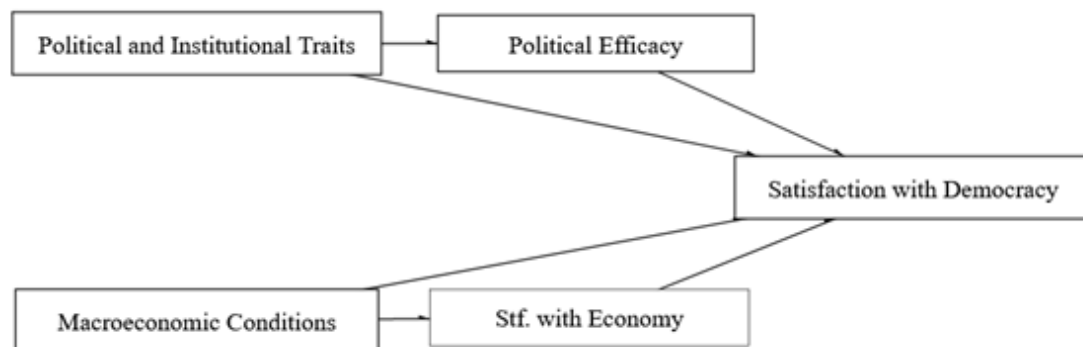
democracies have prevented the onset of delegitimization processes; their democratic characteristics must be considered resilient. The second cluster, *recovered democracies*, are those that experienced a substantial deterioration in *satisfaction with democracy* after the economic shock but that, in the long run, have reestablished previous mean levels of democratic support. In these cases, political institutions succeeded in finding solutions that returned to stable levels of specific support for democracy. The system was ultimately resilient enough to overcome effects of economic crisis. In the third cluster, *damaged democracies* are conceptualized as those that have *not* restored previous levels of satisfaction with democracy. Although this does not necessarily mean that the damage is destined to be permanent, political recovery will at a minimum take longer in these cases than the process of recovering from the economic shock itself (Offe 2006; Przeworski 2019). Thus, my empirically based assumption is that this distinction can help identify underlying causes that determine whether a country follows one trajectory or another, that is, preventing or overcoming shocks to legitimacy or failing to do so.

2.3. Institutional Performances or Perception of Performances

Which factors have shaped cross-case variation in *satisfaction with democracy* during the Great Recession? The literature has provided two empirical frameworks to address this question. Owing to the economic character of the crisis, most prominent articles and books have focused on how macroeconomic conditions have influenced democratic satisfaction (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Bermeo and Bartels 2013; Cordero and Simon, 2014; Polavieja 2013; Morlino and Quaranta, 2016; Schraff and Schimmelfennig, 2019; Van der Meer and Dekker 2011). High levels of unemployment, a substantial decline in GDP, and increasing public debt that set the stage for the bail-out of certain countries, provoked a severe deterioration of satisfaction with democracy, especially in Southern European countries. Likewise, the austerity measures linked to economic bailouts supervised by the *Troika* weakened the welfare state in the bailed-out countries, leading to cuts in pensions, social benefits, unemployment benefits and increases in taxes.

Nonetheless, despite the preliminary evidence on the impact of these economic factors, further research has discovered certain flaws in this paradigm. Theoretically, the more incumbents achieve generally desired public policies for their citizens, the greater the levels of regime support (Easton, 1975; Sanders et al., 2014). Nonetheless, European Union governments have confronted a dissonance between what their citizens wanted and the demands of supranational institutions in the aftermath of the financial crisis of 2008 (Jones,

2009). This dissonance is potentially of great significance for the idea of output-oriented legitimacy (Scharpf, 1999, Schmidt, 2013) which understands institutional legitimacy to rely on citizens' perception about how democratic institutions performed rather than what institutions accomplished. The argument proposed in this paper follows both this sensibility and the analytical approach previously offered in literature (Bartels 2013; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Kriesi 2012; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Magalhaes 2014; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Torcal 2014; Van der Meer and Dekker 2011): I argue that it is not political or economic macroconditions themselves that directly influence democratic support, but instead the *perceptions* of citizens that drive variation in satisfaction with democracy. Those perceptions can, in turn, be analytically decomposed in theoretically crucial paths. This article emphasizes the role of citizen perceptions of *political system responsiveness* and *evaluations of the national economy* as the main determinants of the trajectories of change in democratic satisfaction. *Figure 1* shows the theoretical approach that this research presents to understand how satisfaction with democracy has evolved during the Great Recession. As illustrated by this figure, both phenomena are influenced by *political and institutional traits* and *macroeconomic conditions*, respectively, and both factors moderate the effect of these conditions on the democratic satisfaction outcome. I conceptualize perceptions about system responsiveness as strongly linked to political efficacy as conditioned by political and institutional traits.



One of the most important features of political life that varies across democracies is the magnitude of political leaders' responsiveness to demands and concerns of citizens, especially citizens of limited economic means (Gillens 2015; Fishman 2016, 2019; Soroka and Wlezien 2010). The literature on responsiveness has studied and used several methodological pathways to measure this characteristic of country cases; the most prominent operationalization of this political phenomenon is political efficacy. Political efficacy was initially conceptualized by Campbell *et al.* (1954:187) as “*the feeling that individual*

political action does have, or can have, an impact on the political process". Subsequently, scholars elaborated this notion, separating the concept into two related factors: *internal* and *external efficacy* (Balch 1974; Craig and Maggiotto 1982). While the former relies on the inner perception of one's own ability and capacity to actively participate in politics, *external political efficacy* is understood as the belief that political leaders and institutions are responsive to one's demands (Craig 1979; Craig and Maggiotto 1982; Finkel 1985; Verba *et al.* 1995). As such, external efficacy seems suitable as a proxy for the *perception of responsiveness*. The literature sees variation in external efficacy as strongly determined not only by personal and psychological conditions (Anderson 2010), but also by certain institutional configurations (Karp and Banducci 2008; Lobo and Razzuoli 2017). Among those institutional traits, only the number of parties in the government and electoral disproportionality significantly contribute to this variance.

in any case, there is broad scholarly consensus about the negative effect of unresponsive elites on democratic legitimacy during the Great Recession. Several European countries, especially most of those that were economically "intervened" by external actors, experienced decreased satisfaction with democracy due to the interference of supranational institutions such as the EU, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Central Bank (ECB) in the decision-making nexus that linked governing elites to the citizenry. Despite scholarly findings suggesting that national governments are more responsive to domestic public opinion than to the EU common interest (Hagemann, Hobolt and Wratil 2016; Hobolt and Wratil 2020, Hooghe and Marks 2009, Torcal *et al.*, 2012), the perception of the citizenry seems far from this assessment. The intervention of non-elected institutions in countries' economies generated a broadly shared view that political leaders have lacked both responsiveness and political accountability during the economic crisis that began in 2008 (Cordero and Simón 2016; Ganuza *et al.* 2018; Magalhaes 2014; Sanchez-Cuenca 2020; Torcal 2014). Nonetheless, as Magalhaes (2014) and Cordero and Simón (2016) argued, the resulting critique of the contemporary practice of democratic institutions is not correlated with lower support for democratic values themselves, but with citizens' evaluations of democratic performance. Citizens, it seems, aspire to changes *within* democracy rather than discarding democracy and establishing an autocratic regime.

Another important point highlighted in the literature is the impact of the quality of government on citizens' perceptions of political efficacy and democratic performance. Democracies in which political institutions are more transparent and freer of corruption,

and which have an efficient public administration are characterized by higher levels of political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy than those countries that lack these features (Dahlbert and Holmberg, 2014; Lapuente and Rothstein, 2014; Norris, 2011; Rothstein, 2009). Thus, government effectiveness is a necessary attribute for democracies to have a reservoir of democratic legitimacy in which elected governments can respond to policy preferences using the public resources of the state (Christmann, 2018; Diamond and Morlino, 2005; Martini and Quaranta, 2019; Rothstein, 2019). Nonetheless, the quality of government and citizens' perceptions of it depend heavily on the duration of democracies. Countries with shorter democratic past have lower quality of government while democracies with longer histories enjoy high levels of government effectiveness. Therefore, the duration of democracy also has a direct impact on political efficacy and satisfaction with democracy (Borang et al., 2017).

Finally, another recent and thought-provoking contribution about the linkage between political responsiveness and satisfaction with democracy suggests that radical right parties were able to increase democratic satisfaction through their populist rhetoric (Harteveld et al., 2021; Zaslove et al., 2020). These authors claim that the anti-elite and popular rhetoric from these populist parties increased citizens' perception of both political responsiveness and inclusiveness in the political realm, ultimately boosting the average levels of satisfaction with democracy of voters. If citizens do – as that argument asserts – aspire to make democracy work better and to feel more included in the political realm, it follows logically that a stronger feeling of external political efficacy, if indeed it is attained, should be highly favorable to the resilience of democracies, moderating the aftermath of economic crisis and its effect on satisfaction with democracy. On this basis, I hypothesize two ideas:

The more citizens feel their demands are listened to by political institutions and leaders, the greater the levels of satisfaction with democracy (H_{1a}).

The fluctuation of external political efficacy positively correlates with variation on satisfaction with democracy during the Great Recession (H_{1b}).

Additionally, empirical findings revealed that citizens' subjective perception of the economy – i.e., *satisfaction with the national economy* – is a greater predictor of variation in satisfaction with democracy than objective macroeconomic conditions themselves (Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck, 2014; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Muro and Vidal 2017; Torcal 2014). Several analysts have emphasized how perceptions of the national economy have also determined democratic satisfaction trajectories during times of crisis

(Bartels 2013; Cordero and Simon 2016; Valgarðsson and Devine, 2021; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Hetherington and Rudolph 2015; Kriesi 2012). Nonetheless, it remains necessary to highlight how this economic satisfaction is shaped under periods of economic crisis, with a focus on which macroeconomic conditions have shaped the variation of this estimator. In line with the literature about economic voting (Duch and Stevenson, 2008; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier, 2000; Schäfer, 2012), *satisfaction with the national economy* might be influenced by variation of GDP per capita, unemployment rates, public debt, inflation, bail-out status, and a substantial growth of inequality. Based on these previous findings, I hypothesize that:

Satisfaction with the national economy plays a fundamental role to maintain levels of satisfaction with democracy stable after an economic shock such as the financial collapse of 2008 (H_{2a}).

3. Data and Methodology

This section describes the sources of information used for the empirical analyses and the statistical model best suited to our objectives. The study relies on three datasets containing country-level data for all European Union countries before and after the economic crisis that began in 2008. For almost all countries, the data extend from 2003 to 2019, prior to the Covid 19 pandemic crisis. However, given the focus on democratic resilience during the Great Recession, the time span for the regressions was shortened (2009-2019). The three datasets were merged into one panel file containing one observation per country and year. The first dataset is the Eurobarometer, a collection of surveys of approximately 1,000 face-to-face interviews in each EU country. Owing to the repetition of certain questions on the state of democracy and the countries' economies in multiple waves, the Eurobarometer data allow the study of historical trends. The magnitude of the Great Recession's economic shock varied a great deal by country. Our sample is composed of 28 countries (27 EU countries and the United Kingdom) for which mean levels of the dependent and explanatory variables have been calculated from 16 survey waves, providing a dataset of 435 observations. Additionally, the database relies on two well-funded and open-access international datasets for macrolevel information on each country: the *Varieties of Democracy Dataset* and the *Comparative Political Data Set*. Based on expert surveys, both datasets provide essential information about the political and economic systems of EU countries.

Democratic legitimacy, or support, has many facets and however, due to the lack of exhaustive information on all those dimensions from the selected datasets, this article exclusively covers *Satisfaction with democracy*. This dependent variable captures how satisfied

citizens are with their democracies (scoring from 1 – *Low satisfaction with democracy*- to 4 – *High satisfaction with democracy*). I have calculated mean levels of *Satisfaction with democracy* for each country year.

I now seek to identify the economic and political determinants of cross-national and over time variance in resilience during the Great Recession. I mainly focus on the direct effect of *perceptions of citizens* about political efficacy and satisfaction with the national economy and the indirect effect of macroeconomic and institutional conditions on *satisfaction with democracy*. The first explanatory variable introduced here is *External political efficacy*, understood as a proxy for citizen perceptions of responsiveness. This predictor is obtained from the *Eurobarometer* surveys, more specifically, from the following question - “*Do you think your voice counts in your country? (in political terms)*”. Using the results, I calculated the percentage of citizens who feel they can intervene effectively in their national politics as well as the variation per year. As for the institutions which have a direct effect on this estimator and an indirect effect on the dependent variable, I have included in the analyses the following variables: *Government Ideology*, *Elections*, *Government Change*, *Cabinet Type*, *Electoral System*, *Disproportionality*, *Effective Number of Parties*, *Bail-Out status*, *Quality of Government*, *% Radical Right Votes*, and *Radical Right Governing*. Alongside these estimators, *Satisfaction with the national economy* is also used as the main predictor for the models. As our dependent variable, *Satisfaction with democracy*, is measured, this estimator scores 1 – *Low satisfaction with national economy*- to 4 – *High satisfaction with national economy*- and I have calculated mean levels for every country-year. Following suggestions in the literature, *GDP Decline*, *Unemployment Rates*, *Debt*, *Inflation*, and *Gini Index* has been included to check the influence of these variables on both satisfaction estimators. Several other independent factors have also been included in the models to obtain robust results in the regressions; all the information about them is available in the Appendix.

From the standpoint of estimation techniques, this article employs *Structural Equation Models*, more specifically *Path Analysis* – Endogenous to Endogenous. Path analysis considers both direct and indirect effects of certain variables on the outcome variable and requires similar assumptions as linear regressions, that is, the lack of inclusion of relevant variables in the model could significantly affects the path coefficients (Garson, 2008). This type of analysis used to be considered causal modeling; however, many authors (Heise, 1969; Holland, 1988) criticize the view that path modeling establishes causal relationships between variables, instead of using experimental and causal inference designs. To be cautious about the results and their implications for causality, I do not assume that the

results obtained in this article are necessarily causal, but only that they show predictive value for variation in the outcome variable. The path model for this article represented in *Figure 1* shows that *Satisfaction with democracy* is directly predicted by *External Political Efficacy* and *Satisfaction with the Economy* and directly and indirectly by macroeconomic and institutional traits. Country and year fixed effects have been included to control variation within countries and years, and all estimators have been standardized to check the size effects of the variables. In order to test the robustness of the results, the article includes in the Appendix another two SEM models in which the independent variables are lagged to check the effect of the estimator in t-1.

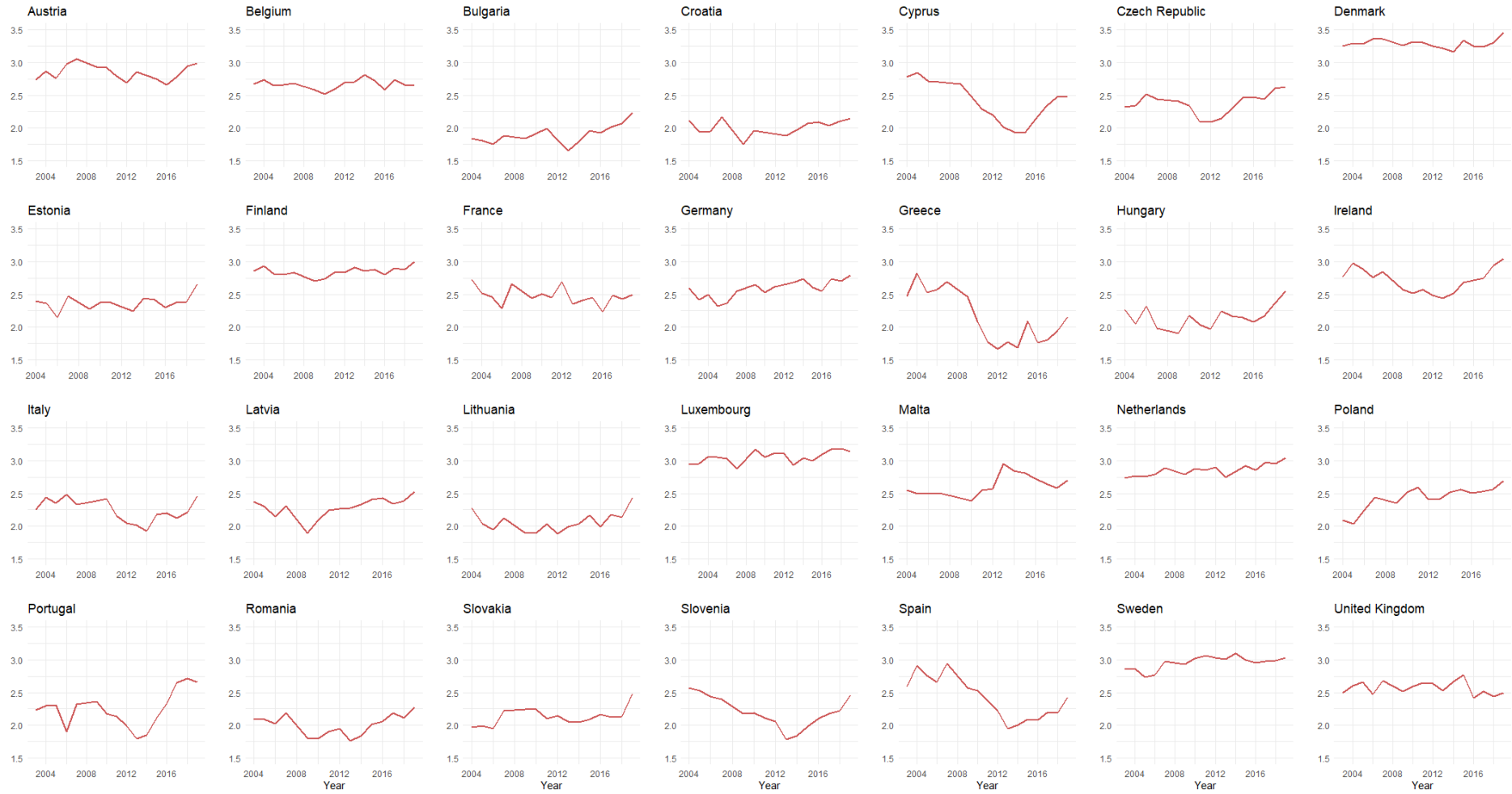
4. Main Findings

4.1. Evolution of Satisfaction with Democracy after the Great Recession

Figure 2 shows the evolution of satisfaction with democracy before and after the onset of the economic crisis in 2008, based on the Eurobarometer surveys. First, this figure illustrates the massive decline in *Satisfaction with democracy* in Southern European countries during the Great Recession. In Greece, Spain and Cyprus, democratic satisfaction has deteriorated, and their average scores are far from recovering. In contrast, Italy and Portugal have recently accomplished a remarkable comeback, regaining their former average levels of democratic satisfaction. Portuguese democracy, for example, was able to recover despite the difficult economic situation following the 2011 financial bailout, likely due to the country's political culture and democratic depth, which foster the responsiveness of elites to social pressures - precisely the key mechanism hypothesized here (Fishman 2019). All in all, citizens' resentment of political elites is more manifest than before in these Southern democracies, a panorama that has led to a new partisan electoral arena in Greece, Italy and Spain (Cordero and Simón 2016; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Muro and Vidal 2017).

Prior to the Great Recession, Central and Eastern European countries scored lowest in *Satisfaction with democracy*, and it was intuitively expected that they would suffer a greater decline during the economic crisis than the rest of Europe. That was not the case. Most of those democracies did not experience a severe deterioration in their satisfaction, except for Slovenia, which ultimately ended up returning to its previous average level. Similarly, the Western and Northern European democracies present the most stable trends in satisfaction

Figure 1. Historical trend of Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union by country



Source: Eurobarometer (2003-2018)

with democracy before 2008. With the exception of Ireland, another bailed-out economy where satisfaction with democracy declined significantly, the lessons to be extracted from this cluster appear more positive owing especially to the fortitude of Nordic democracies. Indeed, the Great Recession was not the only event influencing variation in democratic satisfaction. Many country-specific events, such as the Gyurcsány scandal and protests in Hungary, the extensive corruption cases uncovered in Spain in 2011 and 2012, or Brexit in the UK, could also influence the outcome variable. For this reason, I include several control variables in the analysis that are not only related to macroeconomic conditions.

4.2. Classifying based on Democratic Resilience framework

The consequences of the Great Recession disturbed prior levels of democratic support in many national cases; previous classifications of democracies specifying those most legitimized by their citizens have become outdated. In the recent literature, there is mixed evidence on the recovery of satisfaction with democracy in European Union countries, especially those that have experienced a bailout. On the one hand, Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso (2017) have highlighted the detrimental effects of austerity measures related to the bailout. The authors claim that satisfaction with democracy remains low despite the economic recovery and that a new paradigm of disenchantment with politics has taken root in these European societies. On the other hand, Schraff and Schimmelfennig (2019) have elaborated a more optimistic reading. These authors found that satisfaction with democracy is on the rise again along with the economy in countries that have experienced harsh economic scenarios.

My analysis sheds light on this debate. I have categorized countries' democratic satisfaction trajectories through the following criteria. As previously noted, it proves highly useful to classify democracies as falling within three possible democratic resilience pathways to their ultimate outcomes, focusing on the trajectory of change in democratic support after the period of economic crisis. The dynamics underpinning outcomes may well vary by trajectory and it is for that reason that I find it analytically useful to introduce this distinction. The experiences of *preventive*, *recovered* and *damaged* democracies are fundamentally different, raising the possibility that explanations for their ultimate outcomes are also different.

We examine historical trends in satisfaction with democracy through the lens of this categorization. For each democracy, we calculated the mean value of *Satisfaction with democracy* before the economic crisis (2003/2004 - 2007) and classified countries according

Table 1. Classification of the democratic outcomes of 28 European countries

Countries	2010	2015	2019
Austria	Preventive	Recovered ¹	Recovered ¹
Belgium	Damaged ²	Recovered ¹	Recovered ¹
Bulgaria	Preventive	Recovered ¹	Recovered ¹
Croatia	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered
Cyprus	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Czech Republic	Preventive	Recovered	Recovered
Denmark	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Estonia	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Finland	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
France	Preventive	Recovered	Recovered
Germany	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Greece	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Hungary	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered
Ireland	Damaged	Damaged ¹	Recovered
Italy	Preventive	Damaged ¹	Recovered
Latvia	Damaged ¹	Recovered	Recovered
Lithuania	Damaged ¹	Recovered	Recovered
Luxembourg	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Malta	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered ¹
Netherlands	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Poland	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Portugal	Preventive	Damaged ¹	Recovered
Romania	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered
Slovakia	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Slovenia	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered
Spain	Damaged ¹	Damaged	Damaged
Sweden	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
United Kingdom	Preventive	Preventive	Recovered

Source: Data from Eurobarometer (2003/2004-2018)

² Democratic Resilience outcome not corroborated under 90% criteria

to their decline after the onset of the Great Recession in 2008. If, in any of the subsequent years, the average *Satisfaction with democracy* in a country declined by more than 5%, the case was initially classified as a *damaged democracy*. The remaining cases - those in which the decline did not cross over the 95% threshold - are classified as *preventive democracies*. Of the democracies that were initially classified as *damaged*, I have re-classified those that again exceeded the 95% threshold in one of the subsequent years after their decline as *recovered democracies*. Otherwise, that is in those cases that remain below the 95% threshold, democracies are considered to be *damaged*.

Table 1 shows each country-year observation categorized within these three different trajectory outcomes and the resilience status of each country in 2010, 2015, and 2019. To test the robustness of this classification, I present in *Table B3* in the Appendix a more flexible analysis in which the variation of average levels of *Satisfaction with Democracy* is broadened to a threshold of 90%. Relatively few democracies - seven out of twenty-eight - completely prevented negative political outcomes of the aftermath of the crisis. These *preventive democracies* did not

face a significant delegitimization process in satisfaction with democracy. However, the most anticipated outcome is the initial lack of resilience of most Southern European countries and certain Central Eastern European countries. By 2010, twelve out of twenty-eight countries were already experiencing downward trends. The evidence does not denote fully irreparable damage in democratic support in most countries, but many of the findings involve some measure of meaningful decline in democratic satisfaction (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015). Nevertheless, only three countries of the whole EU could be considered as *damaged* by the end of this decade (2019): Cyprus, Greece, and Spain. Most countries experienced a recovery and *bounced back* to previous mean levels of democracy satisfaction. As such, the *Satisfaction with democracy* recovery did not concur with the economic recovery after the crisis but instead took place a few years later, understanding and corroborating the mixed evidence from Schraff and Schimmelfennig's (2019) and Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso (2017). As argued here, *Satisfaction with democracy* in most of these countries begins to decline even before the bailout. At most, the bailouts depressed average satisfaction with democracy even more, but the trend was already downward.

Likewise, these results highlight the performance of Central and Eastern Europe countries: despite their initial low levels of democratic satisfaction, most of these countries show resilient trends after the shock caused by the Great Recession. This finding provides an

important contribution to the literature and enhances the way democracies can be understood and classified. Low levels of democratic satisfaction do not guarantee that exogenous shocks will produce further deterioration; that starting point may instead simply generate continuity at low levels of satisfaction. In general, while some European countries remained *preventive* during the Great Recession, among those that suffered a significant loss of democratic satisfaction some recovered earlier than others, raising again the question of what factors can account for these patterns and serve as drivers of democratic resilience. Nevertheless, the most puzzling cases in this classification are Hungary and Poland, both considered resilient in the face of the Great Recession legitimacy shock. This limitation in the classification of countries may be motivated by two mechanisms. First, changes in the levels of satisfaction with democracy respond to retrospective evaluations of the functioning of democracy. Houwelingen and Dekker (2021) precisely highlight the particularity of the Polish case in which Polish citizens are the only ones in Europe who evaluate the functioning of democracy better today compared to the functioning of democracy 10 years ago. The Hungarian case may be similar, although with a more recent retrospective evaluation due to the Gyurcsány scandal in 2010. On the other hand, this limitation may be due to the rise of far-right populist parties in both countries and the consequent boost in political efficacy (Harteveld et al., 2021; Mohrenberg et al., 2019; Snegovaya and Petrova, 2020; Zaslove et al., 2020, although I will elaborate on this argument in the following section.

4.3. Explanatory Analysis

In this article, *Democratic resilience* refers to the set of conditions that help democracies overcome the aftermath of any economic shock. *Tables 2 and 3* show the main estimators that have played an active role in the levels of satisfaction with democracy, as well as in their variation during this ten-year period (2009-2019).

In Table 2, the SEM estimation models show the direct and indirect determinants of *Satisfaction with democracy*, highlighting the role of *External political efficacy* and *Satisfaction with the economy*. Since these sets of estimators affect the variance of political efficacy and economic satisfaction by country, these results show the indirect effect of these estimators on the outcome variable - *Satisfaction with democracy*. Regarding the first set of predictors (1), the findings confirm what was established in the theoretical framework. Political efficacy is positively influenced by high government effectiveness, proportional electoral systems, and

coalition governments, while a large number of political parties have a negative impact. Corroborating the controversial effects of the extreme right on political efficacy (Harteveld

Table 2. Determinants of Satisfaction with Democracy during the Great Recession

Predictors	<i>External Political Efficacy</i> (1)	<i>Satisfaction with Economy</i> (2)	<i>Satisfaction with Democracy</i> (3)
<i>Institutional Traits</i>			
Government Ideology (Ref. Left)	0.181* (0.092)		
Elections	0.055 (0.075)		0.087 (0.055)
Democracy Duration	0.217** (0.063)		0.296*** (0.049)
Cabinet Type (Ref. Coalition)	0.250** (0.079)		
Electoral System (Ref. Proportional)	0.317*** (0.050)		
Disproportionality	-0.137* (0.054)		
Effective Number of Parties	-0.106*** (0.027)		
Quality of Government	0.536*** (0.062)		0.480*** (0.047)
% Radical Right Votes	0.102* (0.049)		-0.068* (0.033)
Radical Right Governing	-0.240* (0.107)		0.118 (0.071)
<i>Macroeconomic Conditions</i>			
▼ GDP per capita		-0.226*** (0.056)	-0.042 (0.029)
▲ Unemployment		-0.094 (0.049)	0.019 (0.027)
Debt		-0.278*** (0.047)	-0.120 (0.034)
Gini Index		-0.057 (0.049)	0.005 (0.021)
Bailed-out		-0.498** (0.158)	-0.184** (0.082)
<i>Final model</i>			
External Political Efficacy			0.192*** (0.044)
Satisfaction with Economy			0.372*** (0.037)
Observations	305	305	305
Fixed Effects by Country/Year	✓	✓	✓
R ²	0.615	0.455	0.890

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

et al., 2021; Zaslove et al., 2020; Mohrenberg et al., 2019), an increase in votes to the extreme right correlates positively and significantly with external political efficacy, while government by the far right has a negative effect. On the other hand, column (2) shows that the decline in GDP, *Debt* and *Bailed-Out* have a negative impact on *Satisfaction with the economy*, whereas other macroeconomic covariates also contribute negatively but not significantly to this perception.

What then happens to *Satisfaction with democracy*? This outcome is predicted by various institutional and macroeconomic factors as well as by the main explanatory variables. High levels of *External political efficacy* and *Satisfaction with the economy* exert a positive predictive effect on democratic satisfaction, while the findings show that only Bail-out has a significant effect on the outcome among the macroeconomic factors. Similarly, the results suggest that *Democracy Duration* and *Quality of Government* positively correlates with *Satisfaction with democracy*, while *Bail-Out* diminishes democratic satisfaction. Indeed, *Quality of Government* substantially enhances both political efficacy and democratic satisfaction, that is, it has a direct and indirect large effect on the outcome variable and obtains one of the largest and most consistent coefficients in both models.

in any case, *Satisfaction with democracy* must be analyzed not only in absolute values but also in relative ones. This study aims to determine the impact of the explanatory variables on variation in democratic satisfaction by year, to understand and examine in depth the changes in trajectories that have occurred during this period. The results in *Table 3*, unlike the previous table, show the variation by year for each of the variables of interest: ▲ *External political efficacy* (1), ▲ *Satisfaction with the economy* (2), and, finally, ▲ *Satisfaction with democracy* (3). While in the first two outcomes no robust effect estimators are discernible - except for the negative relationship between *Satisfaction with the economy* and *GDP Decline*;- the variation in *Satisfaction with democracy* is substantially influenced by different institutional, macroeconomic and perception predictors. Especially worthy of note is the role of *External political efficacy* and *Satisfaction with economy* in this outcome. Both estimators show a positive and robust coefficient, i.e., the increase in the variance of both correlates with higher democratic satisfaction. Even though *Elections* presents the highest effect, the following two estimators in the magnitude of their predictive effect are *External Political Efficacy* and *Satisfaction with the Economy*. The influence of both predictors on the outcome is undeniable. Moreover, the results show that certain macroeconomic variables also prove predictive of

this variation. Although the decline in GDP itself had no effect on variation in our dependent variable, the steady rise in unemployment and growing inequality contributed negatively to the perception of democracy year after year and weakened the foundations of democratic systems. Unexpectedly, holding elections increases democratic satisfaction, although it should be remembered that this effect is due to the salience of elections and this effect dissipates over time (Martini and Quaranta, 2019).

Table 3. Variation of Satisfaction with Democracy during the Great Recession

Predictors	▲ <i>External Political Efficacy</i> (1)	▲ <i>Satisfaction with Economy</i> (2)	▲ <i>Satisfaction with Democracy</i> (3)
<i>Institutional Traits</i>			
Government Ideology (Ref. Left)	-0.159 (0.156)		
Elections	0.158 (0.120)		0.388*** (0.111)
Democracy Duration	0.020 (0.052)		-0.001 (0.047)
▲ Quality of Government	0.077 (0.048)		0.050 (0.050)
▲ % Radical Right Votes	0.065 (0.062)		0.000 (0.049)
Radical Right Governing	-0.048 (0.196)		0.023 (0.121)
<i>Macroeconomic Conditions</i>			
▼ GDP per capita		-0.555** (0.172)	-0.104 (0.066)
▲ Unemployment		0.119 (0.123)	-0.239*** (0.052)
▲ Gini Index		-0.035 (0.049)	-0.109*** (0.028)
Bailed-out		-0.347 (0.182)	-0.076 (0.158)
<i>Final model</i>			
▲ External Political Efficacy			0.349*** (0.076)
▲ Satisfaction with Economy			0.274*** (0.072)
Observations	306	306	306
Fixed Effects by Country/Year	✓	✓	✓
R ²	0.021	0.272	0.351

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

To sum up, this collection of evidence clearly shows how greater citizen perceptions of the responsiveness of policymakers helped to keep the average level of *Satisfaction with Democracy* stable during the Great Recession, confirming the expectation formulated in the first hypotheses (H_{1a} and H_{1b}). Not only did *External political efficacy* help maintain and indeed increase satisfaction with democracy, but *Satisfaction with the economy* also played an important role in this variation, confirming the expectation formulated in hypothesis H_{2a}. The effect of both predictors is robust and significant in both SEM models, underlining the importance of these attributes in democratic resilience

5. Conclusions

The financial collapse of 2008 exerted strongly negative economic consequences in almost all European Union democracies; most of these countries took several years to recover economically. Crucially, the Great Recession also induced a sharp decline in democratic satisfaction in most European countries which were severely affected by the aftermath of this event. To further the understanding of the evolution of the satisfaction trends, this article has presented a classification of three trajectories of variation of democratic satisfaction as affected by the Great Recession. Although this economic shock tested the strength and health of all democracies, this research has shown that most European democracies - 25 out of 28 - have essentially overcome or adapted to these adverse circumstances in terms of democratic satisfaction. Therefore, these democracies - whether *preventive* or *recovered* in the typology introduced here - can be considered resilient. On the other hand, most Southern European countries were deeply damaged not only economically but also in terms of democratic satisfaction. Although these Southern European democracies were ultimately able to restore their economies, lower levels of external political efficacy and low public satisfaction with the national economy reduced the chances of reestablishing previous levels of satisfaction with democracy. Within this region, only Portugal and Italy managed to escape this pattern. In general, these findings could be perceived as controversial. *Damaged* countries in this formulation are not, in principle, immersed in processes of full democratic deconsolidation whereas other countries classified as *resilient* are - e.g., Hungary and Poland. Similarly, almost all European countries have experienced a rise of extremist parties - in many cases actual *disloyal actors* - regardless of their evolution in democratic satisfaction. Although it may seem theoretically logical to attribute instances of actual democratic deconsolidation to a loss of democratic satisfaction, the descriptive findings show that the correlation between these phenomena is

lower than expected. Nonetheless, democratic (dis)satisfaction is an intrinsically important variable and calls out to be studied and understood.

The main argument of this paper emphasizes the predictive role of citizens' perception of democratic institutions' performance rather than the objectives accomplished by those institutions in times of crisis. The findings suggest that *External political efficacy* and *Satisfaction with the economy* are traits strongly favorable to democratic resilience. The greater citizens' perception of having responsive leaders and the greater the ability of these leaders to effectively communicate economic results to the population, the higher the chances of coping with the backlash of the Great Recession without a deterioration in democratic satisfaction. It is widely recognized that during the economic crisis, the representation linkage between the citizenry and politicians in the European Union has weakened (Bartels 2013; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Torcal 2014) and, thus, that as a result the demand for new, in some instances unconventional, ways of exercising political participation has increased (della Porta, 2013). One potential explanation tested in this analysis is whether the emergence of radical right parties during the Great Recession restored the representation linkage between political elites and the citizenry, increasing levels of external political efficacy. From a political supply-side perspective, the anti-elitist and people-based rhetoric of populist parties could have promoted higher perceptions of political responsiveness among citizens (Harteveld et al., 2021; Mohrenberg et al., 2019; Snegovaya and Petrova, 2020; Zaslove et al., 2020). At first glance, the results suggest that the rise of extreme right parties has an indirect and positive effect on satisfaction with democracy; however, that conclusion may be shaped by prior developments that influenced both the baseline in democratic satisfaction and the emergence of far-right parties. It is highly probable that a sharp decline in democratic satisfaction during the Great Recession could have influenced the re-emergence of these far-right parties. Therefore, future research could focus on examining individual panel data that captures this relationship between voting for the extreme right and external political efficacy and the mechanism behind it. Similarly, this article fails to identify which democratic configurations explain the variance of political efficacy and further research is necessary. On the whole, these findings on the importance of policy responsiveness empirically support the intuition of many scholars regarding the containment of the backlash to the economic crisis. In substantive terms, this article strongly suggests that more responsive democracies are better equipped than less responsive ones to handle the political risks of economic crisis. Perceived responsiveness

as well as perceptions of economic effectiveness prove to be drivers of crucial variation in such effects.

The Great Recession was an enormous economic shock, the consequences of which varied widely from country to country in both economic and political terms. The analysis presented in this article shows that democracies are capable of successfully managing this kind of shock. Understanding this capacity - and the variables that underlie it - is essential to understanding the current political panorama in the European Union and elsewhere. An economic crisis initially causes at least some "damage" to consolidated democracies and has potential spillover effects. As previously argued, dissatisfaction with democracy does not imply a direct decline in democratic consolidation, but it is a sufficient condition to the emergence of disloyal political actors that violate the basic principles of democracy and, thus, democratic deconsolidation.

6. References

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7. Appendix

A. Summary of the Variables

Table A1. Methodological specifications of control variables

Name of the variable	Source	Codification
External Political Efficacy	Eurobarometer <i>“Do you think your voice counts in your country? (In political terms)”</i>	For each year and country, I calculated the percentage of citizens who feel they can intervene effectively in their national politics
Satisfaction with economy	Eurobarometer <i>‘On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with your national economy?’</i> , and the categorical responses are 1- <i>Very Satisfied</i> / 4 – <i>Not at all satisfied</i> .	For each year and country, the average values have been calculated.
▼ <i>GDP per capita</i>	Comparative Political Dataset (<i>realgdpgr</i>)	Percentage of the real increase of GDP per capita in each year (inversed)
▲ Unemployment Rates	Comparative Political Dataset (<i>unem</i>)	For each year, the increase of the unemployment rate has been calculated.
Debt	Comparative Political Dataset (<i>Debt</i>)	
Gini Index	World Bank Data Bank	
Government Ideology	Comparative Political Dataset (<i>gov_party</i>)	Categories 1 and 2 correspond to majority of right wing parties in the government and are coded with 0. Categories 4 and 5 correspond to left wing incumbents, coded as 1. The rest have been treated as missing values.
Elections	Comparative Political Dataset	Elections were held that year, coded as 1, otherwise, 0.
Democracy Duration	Varieties of Democracy (<i>v2x_libdem</i>)	Calculated age of democracy according to this index.
Cabinet Type	Comparative Political Dataset (<i>gov_type</i>)	Firstly, categories 6 and 7 that correspond to technocratic governments have been coded as missing. Categories 2 ‘ <i>Minimal winning coalition</i> ’ and 3 ‘ <i>Surplus coalition</i> ’ were recoded to 1, and

Electoral System	Comparative Political Dataset (prop)	the rest of categories to 0. Categories 1 and 2 correspond to proportional and mixed electoral systems and have been coded with 1. Category 0 has been coded with 0.
Effective Number of Parties	Comparative Political Dataset (<i>effpar_leg</i>)	Party fragmentalization in the parliament.
Perceived Corruption	Transparency International (<i>Corruption Perception Index</i>)	Inverted
% Radical Right Votes	Different sources (Most of the information has been collected from V-Party). Only Parliamentary elections have been considered.	
Radical Right Governing	Different sources (Most of the information has been collected from V-Party)	Dummy variable regardless of their position in the government (senior or junior coalition member or single majority)
Bailed out	Ruiz-Rufino and Alonso (2016)	Starting from the year that country was bailed out by the Troika, it changes from 0 to 1.

Table A2. Descriptive Statistics (All variables)

Variable	Obs	Mean	Std.Dev.	Skewness	Kurtosis
Satisfaction with Democracy	435	2.47	0.39	0.131	2.32
External Political Efficacy	306	57.49	20.89	-0.033	2.14
Satisfaction with Economy	306	2.18	0.52	0.183	2.07
∇ <i>GDP per capita</i>	306	1.48	3.60	-0.326	12.31
Δ Unemployment Rates	306	-0.39	2.19	1.489	11.21
Debt	306	74.63	40.25	0.592	3.11
Gini Index	305	31.46	4.06	-1.49	13.35
Government Ideology (ref. Left)	306	0.21	0.41	1.43	3.04
Elections	306	0.26	0.44	1.075	2.16
Democracy Duration	306	57.45	36.95	0.594	1.89
Cabinet Type (ref. Coalition)	306	0.37	0.48	0.527	1.28
Electoral System (ref. Proportional)	306	0.87	0.33	-2.234	5.99
Effective Number of Parties	306	4.14	1.50	0.812	3.63
Quality of Government	306	0.75	0.16	-0.184	2.14
% Radical Right Votes	306	16.98	17.5	0.982	2.97
Radical Right Governing	305	0.29	0.45	0.916	1.84
Bailed Out	306	0.17	0.38	1.758	4.09

B. Evolution of Satisfaction with Democracy in European countries

Table B1. Satisfaction with Democracy in the European Union and UK

Country	Year															
	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Austria	2.73	2.86	2.75	2.98	3.05	2.93	2.92	2.79	2.69	2.86	2.80	2.74	2.66	2.78	2.95	2.98
Belgium	2.67	2.74	2.65	2.66	2.68	2.58	2.52	2.59	2.69	2.70	2.82	2.72	2.59	2.73	2.66	2.65
Bulgaria		1.83	1.80	1.75	1.88	1.83	1.92	1.99	1.81	1.66	1.79	1.96	1.92	2.02	2.06	2.23
Croatia		2.11	1.93	1.95	2.16	1.75	1.83			1.89	1.97	2.07	2.09	2.04	2.11	2.14
Cyprus		2.78	2.84	2.72	2.70	2.67	2.48	2.28	2.20	2.02	1.93	1.92	2.13	2.33	2.47	2.47
Czech Republic		2.32	2.34	2.52	2.44	2.41	2.35	2.09	2.09	2.15	2.30	2.46	2.47	2.44	2.61	2.63
Denmark	3.25	3.29	3.29	3.36	3.36	3.26	3.31	3.31	3.25	3.22	3.16	3.34	3.26	3.24	3.31	3.46
Estonia		2.39	2.36	2.14	2.48	2.27	2.37	2.38	2.31	2.25	2.44	2.42	2.29	2.37	2.38	2.66
Finland	2.86	2.93	2.81	2.80	2.84	2.71	2.74	2.83	2.84	2.91	2.86	2.88	2.80	2.90	2.88	3.00
France	2.73	2.51	2.47	2.29	2.66	2.44	2.50	2.45	2.70	2.35	2.41	2.46	2.23	2.48	2.42	2.49
Germany	2.41	2.50	2.32	2.36	2.55	2.65	2.53	2.62	2.64	2.69	2.73	2.61	2.55	2.74	2.70	2.79
Greece	2.47	2.82	2.53	2.57	2.69	2.46	2.08	1.77	1.67	1.77	1.68	2.09	1.76	1.80	1.95	2.15
Hungary		2.26	2.04	2.32	1.98	1.90	2.02	2.04	1.97	2.24	2.17	2.14	2.07	2.17	2.36	2.55
Ireland	2.77	2.98	2.89	2.76	2.84	2.57	2.52	2.57	2.48	2.44	2.52	2.68	2.72	2.75	2.95	3.04
Italy	2.25	2.44	2.36	2.48	2.33	2.39	2.42	2.15	2.04	2.01	1.92	2.17	2.20	2.12	2.21	2.46
Latvia		2.37	2.30	2.14	2.31	1.90	2.09	2.24	2.26	2.27	2.34	2.40	2.43	2.34	2.38	2.53
Lithuania		2.28	2.03	1.95	2.13	1.89	1.89	2.04	1.89	1.99	2.04	2.16	1.99	2.17	2.14	2.44
Luxembourg	2.95	3.06	3.06	3.03	2.88	3.17	3.05	3.12	3.11	2.93	3.04	2.99	3.10	3.17	3.18	3.14
Malta		2.55	2.50	2.49	2.50	2.43	2.38	2.55	2.57	2.95	2.85	2.81	2.72	2.64	2.58	2.71
Netherlands	2.74	2.77	2.76	2.79	2.89	2.79	2.87	2.85	2.90	2.75	2.84	2.93	2.86	2.98	2.96	3.04
Poland		2.09	2.03	2.24	2.44	2.35	2.52	2.60	2.41	2.40	2.51	2.56	2.51	2.53	2.57	2.69
Portugal	2.23	2.30	2.30	1.90	2.32	2.36	2.17	2.13	1.99	1.79	1.85	2.11	2.34	2.65	2.72	2.66
Romania		2.08	2.09	2.03	2.19	1.81	1.79	1.90	1.95	1.76	1.84	2.02	2.06	2.18	2.11	2.27
Slovakia		1.97	1.99	1.95	2.22	2.25	2.25	2.10	2.15	2.05	2.04	2.09	2.16	2.13	2.14	2.48
Slovenia		2.57	2.52	2.45	2.40	2.18	2.19	2.11	2.06	1.79	1.84	1.98	2.10	2.17	2.22	2.46
Spain	2.59	2.91	2.75	2.66	2.95	2.57	2.52	2.37	2.22	1.94	2.00	2.09	2.08	2.20	2.19	2.43
Sweden	2.86	2.87	2.74	2.77	2.98	2.94	3.02	3.07	3.03	3.01	3.09	3.00	2.96	2.97	2.98	3.03
United Kingdom	2.49	2.61	2.66	2.48	2.68	2.52	2.60	2.64	2.64	2.53	2.67	2.76	2.41	2.52	2.44	2.50

Source: Eurobarometer (2003-2018)

Table B2. Classification of EU countries and UK regarding Democratic Resilience (Threshold: 95%)

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Austria	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Belgium	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Bulgaria	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Croatia	Damaged	Damaged				Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Cyprus	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Czech Republic	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Denmark	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Estonia	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Finland	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
France	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Germany	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Greece	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Hungary	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Ireland	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Italy	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered
Latvia	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Lithuania	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Luxembourg	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Malta	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Netherlands	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Poland	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Portugal	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Romania	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Slovakia	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Slovenia	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered
Spain	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Sweden	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
United Kingdom	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Damaged	Recovered

Table B3. Classification of EU countries and UK regarding Democratic Resilience (Threshold: 90%)

Country	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Austria	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Belgium	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Bulgaria	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Croatia	Damaged	Damaged			Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Cyprus	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Czech Republic	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Denmark	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Estonia	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Finland	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
France	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Germany	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Greece	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Hungary	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Ireland	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Italy	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered
Latvia	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Lithuania	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Luxembourg	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Malta	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Netherlands	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Poland	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Portugal	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Romania	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered	Recovered
Slovakia	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
Slovenia	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Recovered
Spain	Preventive	Preventive	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged	Damaged
Sweden	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive
United Kingdom	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive	Preventive

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C. Structural Equation Model with Lagged Variables

Table C1. Determinants of Satisfaction with Democracy (Lagged)

Predictors	<i>External Political Efficacy</i>	<i>Satisfaction with Economy</i>	<i>Satisfaction with Democracy</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Institutional Traits</i>			
Government Ideology _{t-1} (Ref. Left)	-0.011 (0.024)		
Elections _{t-1}	-0.026 (0.022)		-0.031 (0.020)
Democracy Duration _{t-1}	0.105 (0.054)		
Cabinet Type _{t-1} (Ref. Coalition)	0.047 (0.025)		
Electoral System _{t-1} (Ref. Proportional)	0.073* (0.031)		
Disproportionality _{t-1}	0.021 (0.027)		
Effective Number of Parties _{t-1}	-0.088** (0.033)		
Quality of Government _{t-1}	0.056 (0.052)		0.298*** (0.045)
% Radical Right Votes _{t-1}	0.010 (0.033)		-0.067* (0.028)
Radical Right Governing _{t-1}	-0.097 (0.067)		0.116 (0.063)
<i>Macroeconomic Conditions</i>			
▼ GDP per capita _{t-1}		-0.024 (0.031)	-0.030 (0.031)
▲ Unemployment _{t-1}		-0.040 (0.027)	-0.001 (0.030)
Debt _{t-1}		0.025 (0.034)	-0.070* (0.034)
Gini Index _{t-1}		0.018 (0.032)	-0.001 (0.027)
Bailed-out _{t-1}		0.076** (0.029)	-0.015 (0.030)
<i>Final model</i>			
External Political Efficacy _{t-1}			0.132*** (0.036)
Satisfaction with Economy _{t-1}			0.375*** (0.038)
Observations	305	305	305
Fixed Effects by Country/Year	✓	✓	✓
R ²	0.135	0.092	0.806

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table C2. Variation of Satisfaction with Democracy during the Great Recession (Lagged)

Predictors	▲ <i>External Political Efficacy</i>	▲ <i>Satisfaction with Economy</i>	▲ <i>Satisfaction with Democracy</i>
	(1)	(2)	(3)
<i>Institutional Traits</i>			
Government Ideology _{t-1} (Ref. Left)	-0.066 (0.051)		
Elections _{t-1}	-0.014 (0.058)		-0.214*** (0.057)
Democracy Duration _{t-1}	-0.005 (0.057)		-0.040 (0.049)
▲ Quality of Government _{t-1}	-0.069 (0.043)		0.141** (0.047)
▲ % Radical Right Votes _{t-1}	-0.001 (0.053)		-0.086 (0.052)
Radical Right Governing _{t-1}	-0.083 (0.123)		0.059 (0.125)
<i>Macroeconomic Conditions</i>			
▼ GDP per capita _{t-1}		-0.139* (0.068)	0.009 (0.073)
▲ Unemployment _{t-1}		0.093 (0.058)	-0.176* (0.072)
▲ Gini Index _{t-1}		-0.776*** (0.067)	-0.396*** (0.086)
Bailed-out _{t-1}		-0.019 (0.017)	0.060 (0.066)
<i>Final model</i>			
▲ External Political Efficacy _{t-1}			0.050 (0.079)
▲ Satisfaction with Economy _{t-1}			0.036 (0.066)
Observations	306	306	306
Fixed Effects by Country/Year	✓	✓	✓
R ²	0.012	0.724	0.184

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

CHAPTER 3

The Winner-Loser Gap in Polarized Elections in EU Countries

1. Introduction

The acceptance of electoral outcomes has become a major issue of relevance extending beyond new democracies. During election campaigns, citizens and political parties are immersed in dynamics that may affect the acceptance of these results. First, the status of the winner or loser of an election is closely linked to democratic legitimacy. Originally, Anderson (2005) analyzed in detail the differences in satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers, conceptualizing the winner-loser gap and a new theoretical framework. According to this concept, losers may be resentful and dissatisfied with the democratic system, weakening citizen support for the basic principles of democracy. Events such as the storming of the U.S. Capitol in early January 2021 reflect this reality that challenges the strength of democratic values. On the other hand, political parties are in principle fundamental players defending the democratic game (Anderson 2005; Linz and Stepan 1996; Przeworski 1991). Levistky and Ziblatt (2018) have emphasized the principle of mutual tolerance as an indispensable condition for protecting democracy from its possible "death." However, it is becoming increasingly clear that in some contexts parties prefer to use polarizing strategies to mobilize and harness the votes of their partisans, even if this leads to a clear loss of mutual tolerance and an expansion of negative sentiments towards democracy and its actors (Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018; McCoy, Rahman and Somer 2018; Muñoz and Meguid 2021; Nai 2020; Sood and Iyengar 2016; Sood and Lelkes 2012). Party polarization, which has a top-down character, has seemingly become one of the most effective strategies in election campaigns. The negative consequences of polarizing actions seem to play a role in creating a trade-off between electoral outcome and democratic strength. Indeed, some authors have addressed the impact of polarization on satisfaction with democracy in European multiparty systems (Dassonneville and McAllister 2020; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Kingzette et al. 2021).

Both dynamics are highly related to the post-electoral period and the acceptance of the electoral outcome. Nevertheless, the literature fails to address the interaction between the winner-loser gap and party polarization. This article examines this gap in the literature and

provides empirical evidence to support its unexpected conclusion. To this end, this study focuses on European multiparty contexts during the Great Recession, using data from the European Social Survey (ESS) and the innovative V-Party Dataset, which contains information on the position of political parties. This context and period are especially interesting because party polarization has recently become a much-studied issue. Both scholars and the media are increasingly warning that party polarization is growing significantly and may have devastating consequences for European democracies.

This paper contributes to the literature on the winner-loser gap and polarization by exploring the interaction between these two phenomena, and also offers other theoretical and empirical contributions which are worth highlighting. First, it is important to note that this research supports the hypothesis that parties polarize citizens rather than the other way around (Costa 2021; Moral and Best 2022; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016). I consider polarization a top-down political phenomenon that is strongly influenced by the positioning of political parties on various issues. From this perspective, societal phenomenon of affective polarization (Diermeier and Li 2019; Druckman and Levendusky 2019; Gidron, Adams and Horne 2019; Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012) results precisely from the polarization strategies that political parties use to mobilize their voters or align their positioning with the interests of the party itself. Another notable contribution to the polarization literature is based on the use of different dimensions of party polarization. When the literature talks about party polarization, it focuses almost exclusively on the ideological distance that exists between different political parties with respect to economic positions (Dalton 2008; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Sartori 2005). During the Great Recession, economic issues significantly shaped the political debate in many European countries, especially in the early years of the economic crisis (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Bermeo and Bartels 2014; Cordero and Simón 2016; Magalhães 2014). However, this is not the only issue that has been consistently at the forefront of political dynamics from the onset of the crisis through 2018, and other political debates have developed that have further polarized the arena (Dancygier and Margalit 2020; Mole, Golec de Zavala and Ardag 2021). For example, immigration has been a central issue in many countries, and, indeed, Brexit was strongly influenced by this type of polarization. Therefore, in this research, in operationalizing the concept I use not only economic polarization, but also three other types of polarization: immigration, LGBTBi+ rights and welfare polarization.

Initially, one might expect that electoral winners would be more satisfied with the democratic system after highly polarized elections, than losers, who were defeated

electorally. Counterintuitively, the findings of this study show that this is not the case. The results show how party polarization negatively affects satisfaction with democracy among both winners and losers of elections. Indeed, the analysis reveals that as party polarization increases, winners exhibit lower levels of satisfaction with democracy to such an extent that the winner-loser gap substantially narrows, and even disappears in some polarizing contexts.

2.Theoretical Framework

2.1. Considerations about the winner-loser gap

Elections are at the core of democracy. From a normative perspective and in practical terms, elections have the capacity to resolve social conflicts peacefully and to allocate the right to govern in a consensual manner. For this to happen, it is necessary that citizens widely accept the results of elections and afford legitimacy to these democratic processes (Evans and Norris 1999; Ginsberg 1982; Kornberg and Clarke 1992; Lijphart 1994; Nadeau and Blais 1993; Norris 1999). in the formulation of Przeworski (1991), elections regularly have winners and losers, and the legitimacy of the democratic system depends largely on the acceptance of their outcomes. The logic of the system assumes that the losers accept their electoral defeat, understanding that the democratic system offers them another chance in the next elections. Winners and losers in principle accept democracy as the "only game in town" (Linz and Stepan 1996). Otherwise, the preservation and consolidation of the democratic system would be severely challenged, and anti-democratic attitudes could spread among citizens. However, it is not the same to win or lose elections. Electoral outcomes are likely to affect how citizens perceive democracy and to shape a variety of political-psychological factors related to those outcomes. This political relationship is generally known as the winner-loser gap (Anderson 2005; Anderson and LoTempio 2002; Anderson and Tverdova 2001; Clarke and Acock 1989; Craig et al. 2006; Rich and Treece 2018; Singh, Karakoç and Blais 2012). The winner-loser gap is a well-documented phenomenon that underscores how winners of elections tend to be more satisfied with democracy and show higher levels of political trust, while losers experience a dislike of the democratic system. Citizens who voted for a winning party may expect the government to be more responsive to their preferences and believe they can influence policy, improving their perceptions of democracy. in other words, winning elections has positive psychological effects that transcend all other political considerations. On the other hand, losers are less supportive of the democratic system since they expect that political elites will

not accede to their demands. Defeat can lead to resentment toward the winners and disillusionment with democracy itself, feelings that are closely related to lower levels of democratic satisfaction (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Frenkel and Doob 1976; McCaul, Gladue and Joppa 1992; Wilson and Kerr 1999).

The literature distinguishes between various individual and institutional factors that affect the winner-loser gap. In terms of individual factors, scholars have mainly focused on the different profiles of losers and their correlation with levels of satisfaction with democracy. Contrary to initial arguments that portray losers as a monolithic group that experiences electoral defeat similarly, research has shown that individual characteristics such as education, age, number of electoral participations, or ideology of the voted party affect how much each citizen accepts electoral defeat (Anderson 2005; Chang, Chu and Wu 2014; Craig et al. 2006; Rothstein 2009; Singh, Karakoç and Blais 2012). Moreover, this gap also exists between election losers and non-voters; non-voters show lower levels of democratic support (Rich 2015). From all these studies on the individual characteristics of losers, Nadeau et al. (2021) distinguished two main types of losers: graceful losers - less emotionally engaged, politically savvy and ideologically moderate voters - and sore losers - voters of extreme parties and highly polarized voters. The role of gracious losers, or politically sophisticated losers, is especially crucial in contexts where it is difficult to accept electoral defeat, for example, after polarized elections (Moral and Best 2022).

Institutional configurations also play a role in widening or narrowing the gap between winners and losers. The winner-loser gap literature has grown so much that evidence of this phenomenon has been found in both two-party and multiparty contexts. Contrary to the initial hypotheses of Lijphart (1989) dynamics of winning or losing elections are also reproduced in multiparty systems, especially in circumstances in which access to government is at stake (van der Meer and Kern 2019; van der Meer and Steenvoorden 2018). Likewise, there is no doubt that the greater the checks and balances in a democratic system, the smaller the negative impact of electoral defeat. For example, citizens may feel more protected in the face of an ideologically different government, knowing that regional governments, opposition parties, and the judiciary can defend their preferences and resist any attempt to oppress the non-victorious minority (see McCoy, Simonovits and Littvay 2020). Moreover, apart from differences in satisfaction with democracy across countries due to their own characteristics (Norris 2011; Torcal and Montero 2006; Zmerli and Van der Meer 2017), Anderson (2005) highlighted the fact that the winner-loser gap is more pronounced and empirically perceptible under new democratic regimes, especially in

former USSR countries. The greater the democratic experience of the citizens and the country, the greater the habit of accepting the electoral results and internalizing the democratic game. Defeat is only temporary, and democracy offers citizens the opportunity to regain power in the next election date, as set by law or constitution. Any sign of disappointment or dissatisfaction would therefore be subjected to other phenomena and political contexts in the medium and long term, such as approval of policies completely against the preferences of the losers and/or perceptions of poor political and economic performance (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Esaiasson 2011; Lijphart 1994; Rich and Treece 2018; Wells and Kriekhaus 2006).

Following these arguments which assume that the winner-loser gap varies across time, Martini and Quaranta (2019) make a fundamental critique on the institutional perspective. These authors found that institutional configurations - i.e., input-side factors - do not explain the time variation of the winner-loser gap phenomenon in the same way as citizens' evaluations of policy performance - i.e., output-side factors. The winner-loser gap merely represents the difference in satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers after the electoral date. Any subsequent change in this gap is not related to the status created by the elections, but rather to the way the political process unfolds and the performance of the incumbents. Even though certain institutional features such as the number of veto players, the division of power in each country - i.e. federalism - and electoral rules - first-past-the-post vs. proportional representation - may moderate the effect on this winner-loser gap (Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Hernández and Kriesi 2016; Listhaug, Aardal and Ellis 2009; Torcal and Montero 2006), their potential explanatory power is temporally limited to few months after the electoral date.

Electoral defeat and acceptance of election results are cornerstones of well-functioning democracies. Using satisfaction with how democracy works (SWD) as an indicator of this acceptance could be considered an imperfect but very useful measure to capture this political reality. Although the causes and consequences are still under study, there is no doubt that the winner-loser gap is a reality in European multiparty contexts. The literature extensively confirms the existence and theoretical coherence of this electoral political phenomenon. However, that clarity and consensus in existing findings is not matched by consensus or clarity on the second political phenomenon examined in this article: polarization.

2.2. Polarization and its dimensions under debate

The conceptualization and measurement of polarization has generated a large body of literature. Giovanni Sartori was one of the first political analysts to study polarization, basing his arguments on Downs' (1957) spatial model of voting. Sartori (2005) conceptualized polarization or party polarization as the relative distance between political parties along the ideological continuum, using almost exclusively the economic position of each party to calculate this distance. From this initial standpoint, many scholars have sought to measure polarization empirically using various formulas and perspectives (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Cox 1990; Dalton 2008; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Hetherington 2001; Knutsen 1998; McCoy, Rahman and Somer 2018). Polarization is a central process in politics in which societies align along few dimensions, reducing the diversity of issues and debates that occur in the political sphere in any country (McCoy, Rahman and Somer 2018). Historically, polarization has been an instrument used by political parties to differentiate themselves from their democratic opponents, increase voter mobilization, and consolidate positions within the party system (LeBas 2018; Lupu 2015; Przeworski and Sprague 1986; Somer and McCoy 2018). Recently, scholars and the media have focused on this political phenomenon and portrayed its pernicious effect on democratic societies. Nevertheless, polarization does not always need to have a detrimental or negative impact for democracies. It is worth noting how parties have mobilized to defend positions that would improve democratic quality, for example, by defending women's or certain minorities' suffrage. As Sommer and McCoy (2018) say, polarization is a "double-edged sword". On the one hand, polarization divides societies into opposing blocs (the logic of "Us vs. Them") and suppresses understanding among political actors, leading to growing citizen dissatisfaction with the democratic system. On the other hand, polarization is also associated with greater political engagement and participation, as well as the defense of issues that can lead to an improvement in democracy. With the advent of databases that capture party positions on many different issues - e.g., the Manifesto Project, Chapel Hill expert survey, and more recently V-Party - and Dalton's prominent formula for polarization (Dalton 2008), studies on this topic have become standardized and have offered a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. However, one of the main challenges related to studying polarization concerns how to meet the objective of measurement (see Schmitt 2016) in a way that distinguishes between the different dynamics of polarization. In the current literature, scholars have sought to clarify whether political elites are responsible for polarization and voters follow their parties' cues, or whether voters have first changed

their preferences and parties then follow their logic to capitalize on their votes (Costa 2021; Diermeier and Li 2019; Moral and Best 2022; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016).

in the current literature, party or ideological polarization refers to the distance between political parties in their opinions and views (Baldassarri and Gelman 2008; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Lupu 2013, 2015; McCoy, Simonovits and Littvay 2020; Schmitt 2016). This type of polarization allows citizens to clearly distinguish between parties' ideologies and electoral preferences, potentially leading to more alliances and participation among citizens. Indeed, certain articles have shown that high levels of ideological polarization are highly correlated with greater political engagement and voter turnout. When the level of party polarization in multiparty systems is low, the influence of political parties on citizens decreases and parties might eventually become irrelevant in the political arena (Carmines and Stimson 1989; Hetherington 2001; Lupu 2015; Nai 2020). This perspective assumes that part of the survival of political parties depends on at least some degree of polarization and the communicative strength of parties to highlight ideological differences with their opponents (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Galasso, Nannicini and Nunnari 2020; Somer and McCoy 2018).

Do citizens polarize in response to party polarization or does the process operate the other way around? Parties are expected to represent the interests and preferences of their constituents in democratic systems (Pitkin 1967) and to mobilize on behalf of voters' preferences (Downs, 1957). However, the evidence for this representation and responsiveness linkage is mixed. Although certain authors assume that parties are guided by voters' preferences and prioritize issues that are particularly salient to citizens (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Klüver and Spoon 2016; Spoon and Klüver 2017; Wagner and Meyer 2014), there is a growing literature that shows that this is not the case. Political elites are more likely to respond to the preferences of politically engaged (Abramowitz 2010; Moral 2017; Moral and Best 2022) and high-income and social class citizens (Gilens 2012; Lupu and Castro 2022; Wlezien and Soroka 2011) than to the preferences of the median voter. Similarly, recent work on the relationship between citizens and parties has shown that political parties tend to polarize first, and citizens respond second. in their recent article, Moral and Best (2022) disentangle this simultaneity problem and show consistent empirical work whose findings suggest that parties move toward different policy position first and that voters, especially the politically sophisticated, respond to these changes afterwards. in the same line, Hernandez et al. (2021) argued that the dynamics inherent in elections partially influence the degree of affective polarization (Gidron, Adams and Horne 2019;

Iyengar, Sood and Lelkes 2012; Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021). Their findings suggest that ideological polarization frames and reinforces affective polarization after elections, however the greater the number of post-election days, the lower the level of affective polarization. Another example of this perspective can be found in the article by McCoy et al. (2020), which proposes a theoretical path from party polarization to democratic erosion. Consequently, many scholars have warned of the vicious cycles that follow negative campaigning, which could lead to an increase in levels of affective polarization and negative partisanship as negative perceptions of political opponents increase (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Nai 2020). Thus, as previous studies suggest (Abramowitz 2010; Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Hetherington and Rudolph 2018; Moral and Best 2022; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016), polarization has an inherent top-down dynamic, and the contribution of these articles confirms the idea that the electorate follows party polarization rather than the other way around.

2.3. Types of party polarization and its effect on the winner-loser gap

Party polarization is a phenomenon that has increased in all European democracies since the onset of the Great Recession in 2008. Similarly, democratic satisfaction has deteriorated sharply in many Western countries during this period of economic turmoil (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Bermeo and Bartels 2014; Magalhães 2014; Van Erkel and Van Der Meer 2016). Although some countries have managed to recover from this setback in terms of democratic legitimacy, the dynamics of this political momentum are to some extent linked to the rise of polarization in the political arena (Kim 2015; Levendusky 2009; Mason 2015). The Great Recession has had a significant impact on the economic and social policy position of parties (Dassonneville and Lewis-Beck 2013), but more importantly, many challenger parties have entered the political arena, widening ideological differences between parties, i.e., party polarization (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Hooghe and Marks 2018; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018). Not only has party polarization increased due to populist rhetoric about the economic situation, but also certain issues have also led to heated debates in European countries. For example, immigration and the expansion of LGBTBi+ rights in Europe have caused great tension between parties and these disputes continue today. On the one hand, immigration has strongly polarized European societies in recent years. Although mainstream parties have converged on this issue (Alonso and Fonseca 2012; Bohman and Hjerm 2016; Dancygier and Margalit 2020; Hooghe and Marks 2018), the emergence of extreme far-right parties in the political arena has broadened the spectrum of ideas within the citizenry, bringing immigration more to the forefront of the

political arena and thus significantly increasing polarization in many European countries (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Akkerman 2015; Dancygier and Margalit 2020; Mudde 2013). On the other hand, LGBTBi+ rights remained controversial in Europe and generate profound debates, especially in Central and Eastern European countries. Despite top-down pressure by EU institutions to promote equal rights for LGBTBi+ communities in all European countries (Mole 2016), attacking homosexuality and any kind of non-conforming gender individuals has become a particularly common party strategy in Central and Eastern European countries (Kuhar and Ceglak 2016; Mole, Golec de Zavala and Ardag 2021; Norris and Inglehart 2019; O'Dwyer and Vermeersch 2016). As these authors point out, the rights of LGBTBi+ communities in these countries have been widely challenged and restricted leading to greater party polarization in these contexts. Thus, focusing exclusively on the economic and welfare positions of political parties may be a limitation in studying party polarization as a political phenomenon in the European context. Therefore, this article addresses different types of party polarization – differentiating by the thematic terrain in which polarization emerges – and analyzes the effects of all of them, individually and collectively.

What are the effects of party polarization on satisfaction with democracy? Despite the lack of a broad body of evidence on this relationship, the consensus among scholars is clear: party polarization significantly reduces levels of democratic satisfaction. Regardless of the origin of polarization, the literature shows a clear tendency of polarization to reduce social cohesion and the democratic support base (Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister 2020; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Gervais 2016, 2019). Both political phenomena, satisfaction with democracy and ideological polarization, have a significant impact on support for democracy. However, scholars have not addressed how the winner-loser gap interacts with party polarization, leaving a significant gap in the literature. Building on these previous theoretical arguments about mobilization and the detrimental effect of party polarization, I propose several possible hypotheses regarding the interaction between the two phenomena. First, we might expect the difference in satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers to increase as party polarization increases. If voting for a winning party elicits affective and positive psychological responses and voting for a losing party leads to anger and disillusionment with the democratic system, then party polarization could magnify the effect that enhances and promotes these feelings in both groups. This logic generates the following hypothesis: *The higher the degree of party polarization, the greater the difference in satisfaction with democracy between the winners and losers of elections (H_{1a}).*

Another possible outcome of this interaction is based on the negative influence of polarization in general (Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Dassonneville and McAllister 2020; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011). That is, party polarization has such a detrimental effect on citizens' evaluation of the functioning of democracy that both winners and losers may tend to lose support for their democratic regimes. In this case, the expected trends would be negative and parallel, and the interaction is not necessarily significant. In this alternative logic the hypothesis is that *the higher the levels of party polarization, the lower the levels of satisfaction with democracy in both groups indistinctively* (H_{1b}).

However as noted earlier, analysis of party polarization should not focus only on economic issues but should also consider the various types of salient issues that can generate polarizing dynamics in any political context. Unfortunately, the literature in this regard is rather sparse and crucially, scholars have never addressed the interaction between party polarization and the winner-loser gap. In order to address this important gap, I explore the interaction for each type of polarization and expect to find differences depending on the issues that increase polarization in each country.

3. Data and Methodology

To empirically analyze the connection between both political phenomena, polarization and the winner-loser gap, this research uses three different data sets that contain individual and country level information. For individual level data, the analyses rely on the European Social Survey dataset, a collection of interviews in numerous European countries that covers a period from 2002 to 2018. This research uses this database as the standpoint to select the countries and years that are considered for the analyses, obtaining around 350,000 surveys in 25 countries in different years based on the ESS data. At the country level, this research uses an innovative expert-survey about political parties which was recently published by the Varieties of Democracy Institute: The V-Party Database (V-Dem Project). This database contains specific information about a wide variety of political parties across the globe from 1970 to 2019 – from their party organization to their electoral results and ideological positions. Additionally, we included another data set, the Comparative Political Data Set, to complete the information about the political and democratic characteristics at the country level for the whole sample.

Following the winner-loser gap literature, we use Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) as the main dependent variable of this research. This proxy for democratic legitimacy captures how satisfied citizens are with the way their democracies work, scoring from 1 – Low

satisfaction to 10 – High Satisfaction. Admittedly, this estimator is an imperfect measure and has its limitations in capturing democratic legitimacy, especially as a proxy for the acceptance of electoral defeat. Nevertheless, due to data availability, many scholars on this topic have adopted this measure as a useful indicator of citizens' evaluations of the functioning of the democratic system (Anderson 2005; Daoust, Plescia and Blais 2021; Linde and Ekman 2003; Nadeau, Daoust and Dassonneville 2021; Singh, Karakoç and Blais 2012). As the question is asked - i.e., how democracy works in your country -, this indicator of satisfaction with democracy functions as a concrete measure to capture the citizens' view of their own democracy, without evaluating all of the political institutions that make up the democratic system.

For this article, the explanatory variables are two. Firstly, Vote for Incumbent Party is a dummy variable that captures whether the respondent voted for the incumbent party in the ESS, i.e., the governing party or any junior coalition party. in parliamentary systems, all parties that collaborated with the ruling party in parliament but are not involved in the government are not counted as incumbents. in presidential systems such as France's, only the votes in the second round are considered. in general, this methodological strategy excludes all cases of voters who abstained in previous elections. Secondly, as previously mentioned, the analyses of polarization should consider the different dimensions of this phenomenon. To this end, I have calculated the levels of party polarization for each country-year using four different items drawn from the V-Party dataset. I have used Dalton's (2008) formula to calculate the ideological distance between parties. Party Polarization is calculated for each election (t) in every country (j). in formula (1), p_i is the position of one party, \hat{p} is the average position of all parties and the resulting value from this subtraction is divided by five and squared.

$$Party\ Polarization_{tj} = \sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n votes_i * \left(\frac{p_i - \hat{p}}{5}\right)^2}$$

First, I calculated economic polarization based on each party's economic position on the economic left-right scale (variable). Second, polarization with respect to immigration is based on each party's positions on the entry of immigrants into their country (v2paimmig), generating a range of values from strongly disagree to strongly agree. Similarly, I calculated polarization on LGTBi+ issues based on political parties' acceptance or rejection of the

queer community (v2palgbt). Fourth, I used the parties' position on advocacy for mean-tested or universalistic welfare policies (v2pawelf). Furthermore, I added two additional measures of party polarization to better fit the evaluation of the proposed hypotheses. Thus, I calculated which of the polarizations is highest in each country-year and took this value to create a measure of party polarization. The purpose of this measure is to test whether the type of polarization does not matter, but whether the mere fact that parties are polarized in any way at all affects the winner-loser gap. Similarly, I also calculated an average polarization index based on the four items. However, this methodological strategy does not have the statistical support of Factor Component Analysis (FCA) since the values obtained do not confirm a strong statistical relationship between the different dimensions of polarization, with the exception of economic and welfare polarization.

The main contribution of this article is based on its study of the interaction between the individual estimator Vote for Incumbent Party with Party Polarization of each country-year to determine the impact on Satisfaction with Democracy. Further information about party polarization by country is presented in Table B1 in the Appendix. For this research, I employ a hierarchical multilevel model with random intercepts by country (level 2) and country-year (level 3), using individual and contextual estimators with standardized coefficients. Similarly, I included individual and contextual controls that determine individual levels of democratic satisfaction consistent with the literature to check the robustness of the results. The resulting model is:

$$\begin{aligned}
 \text{Satisfaction with Democracy}_{ij} = & \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{Vote Incumbent}_{ij} + \beta_2 \text{Party Polarization}_{ij} + \\
 & \beta_3 \text{Vote Incumbent}_{ij} * \text{Party Polarization}_{ij} + \beta_4 \text{Individual Controls}_{ij} \\
 & + \beta_5 \text{Country_Year Controls}_{ij} + u_j + u_{ij} + e_{ij}
 \end{aligned}$$

4. Findings

4.1. Descriptive analysis of party polarization

Since the beginning of the Great Recession, scholars and the media have reported an increase in party polarization in almost all European democracies. Figure 1 shows the evolution of average party polarization across European countries and confirms this common sentiment. From 2002 to 2008, party polarization remained quite stable on all issues and, in fact, a gradual decrease in polarization on immigration was observed before the beginning of the economic crisis. This trend changes completely with the onset of the

Great Recession. From then on, party polarization increases significantly in all countries and discrepancies between effective parties in different political contexts increase. Without going into detail about the possible causes of this expansion, it is worth highlighting the fact that immigration polarization increased substantially during these years. Following the literature, this rise is very likely due to the emergence of extreme parties in Europe and their anti-immigrant discourses intended to capitalize on the fears of voters made more vulnerable by the economic crisis of 2008 (Abou-Chadi and Krause 2020; Akkerman 2015; Bohman and Hjerm 2016; Dancygier and Margalit 2020). Similarly, Figure 1 shows how economic polarization, and to a lesser extent welfare polarization, increased significantly during these years due to dissatisfaction with the economic situation and the interventions of supranational actors in certain EU national economies (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Bermeo and Bartels 2014; Cordero and Simón 2016; Magalhães 2014; Muro and Vidal 2017). Finally, the LGTBi+ issue has also led to an increase in disagreements between political parties, straining cordiality and mutual tolerance. Parties are now positioning themselves more and more either for or against the LGTBi+ collective (Kuhar and Ceplak 2016; Mole, Golec de Zavala and Ardag 2021; O’Dwyer and Vermeersch 2016).

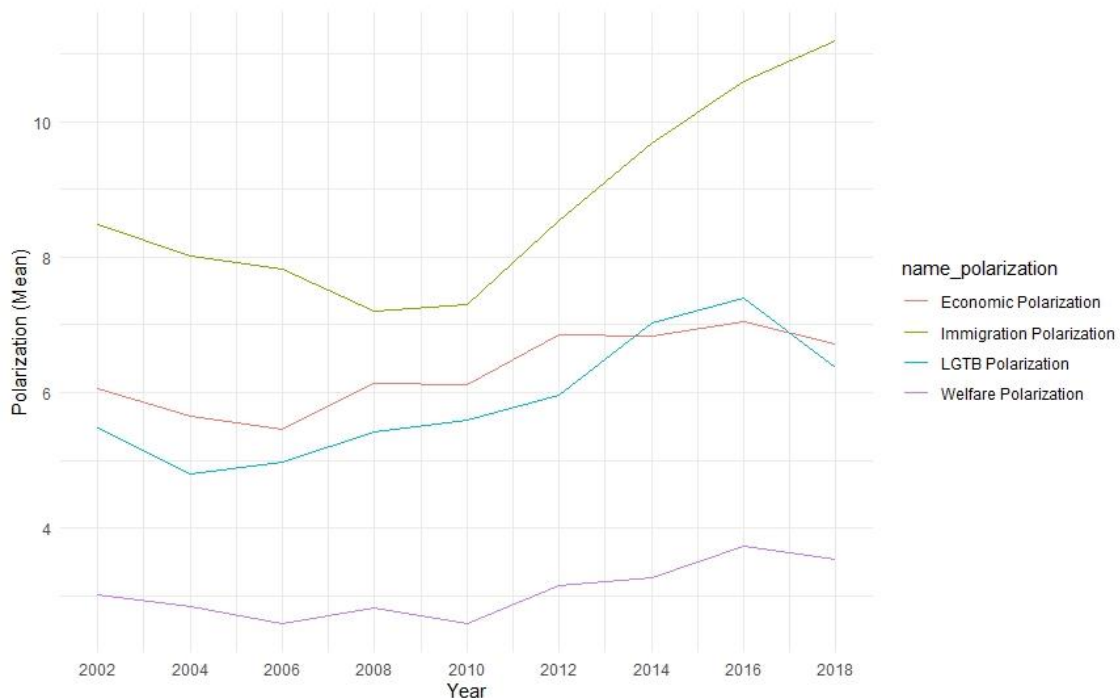


Figure 1. Evolution of Party Polarization in four different issues (2002-2018)

Average party polarization increased on all issues since the onset of the Great Recession. But which issues have caused the highest party polarization in European Union countries? Figure 2 answers this question by showing the percentage of issues that have caused the highest levels of polarization in European multi-party contexts after the onset of the Great

Recession. The results reveal that the most polarizing issue in European countries during these years was the existing discrepancies on immigration issues, the most polarizing issue in 45% of EU countries. After that, economic polarization and LGTBI+ polarization go hand in hand as relevant arenas of severe division among European political parties. Finally, welfare polarization does not seem to have been the main cause of party polarization, except for the Netherlands in the early years of the crisis³.

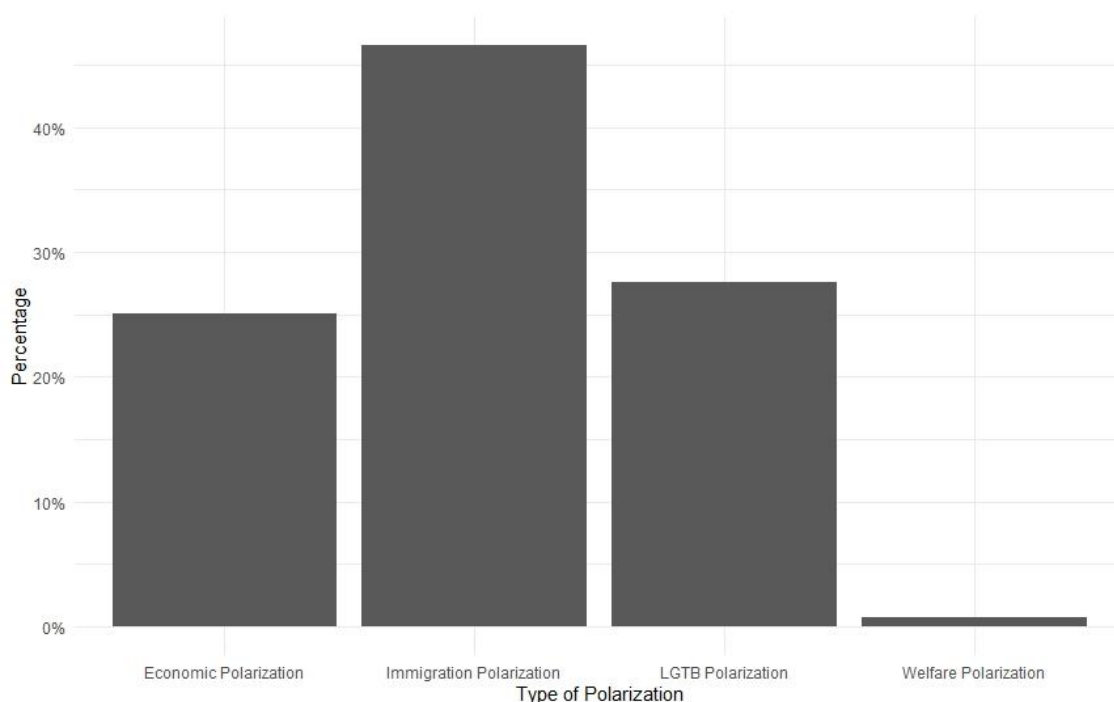


Figure 2. Proportions by issue of Party Polarization since the beginning of the Great Recession

in short, there are two clear-cut conclusions to be drawn from these descriptive analyses. First, the findings confirm that the degree of party polarization in EU countries has significantly increased since the beginning of the economic crisis. While satisfaction with democracy has largely decreased in many European Union countries during these years, parties have polarized, and their discrepancies intensified. On the other hand, during the Great Recession, despite the economic nature of the crisis, it was not only disagreements between parties on economic issues that drove polarization. During these years, party polarization was multidimensional, and in many cases the issue of immigration seems to have caused more disagreement than any other political issue. Considering these two points

³ Detailed information on the highest polarization in each of the country-year can be consulted in Table B1 in the Appendix.

about the evolution of party polarization during the Great Recession, then the remaining question would be what happens to the winner-loser gap in polarized political contexts.

4.2. Exploratory Analysis

To test our hypothesis, I analyze the effects of voting for the incumbent party and party polarization on citizens' satisfaction with democracy. Table 1 summarizes the results of the hierarchical multilevel model with standardized coefficients, exclusively presenting the effects of the main explanatory variables and their interactions⁴. The results show that the effect of voting for any ruling party increases democratic satisfaction. Vote for Incumbent has a significant positive influence on Satisfaction with Democracy and compared with the rest of estimators, the size effect is quite substantial. This is not an unexpected finding since the literature has widely corroborated this phenomenon⁵. On the other hand, the results are not as robust when the polarization variable is used in any of its dimensions. Contrary to what was proposed by Ezrow and Xezonakis (2011) or, more recently, Dassonneville and McAllister (2020), party polarization has the expected negative effect, but it is not significant in any of its dimensions or measures used in this study.

As mentioned earlier, party polarization does not have an impact per se according to the results, but it does affect the winner-loser gap very significantly although not in the expected direction. Originally, the proposed hypotheses of this study assumed that party polarization would have a positive effect on the winner-loser gap, i.e., that the more polarized the previous elections, the larger the gap between winners and losers in terms of satisfaction with democracy. Alternatively, the effect would not also be significant since it would reduce satisfaction with democracy in both groups. However, this was not the case. The results of the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and Polarization are negative and significant in almost all models. Looking at the interaction results in all cases, except column (3), higher polarization has a negative effect on the democratic satisfaction of the winners of the last elections. Thus, the winner-loser gap counterintuitively narrows as party polarization increases.

⁴ Full and null models can be consulted in the Appendix

⁵ It is true that a recent paper by Daoust et al. (2021), using their own database, argues that this effect is not so. However, the literature on the winner-loser gap is quite extensive and, as the results shown in this paper, all points in the same direction.

Table 1. The Winner-Loser Gap and Party Polarization on SWD

Predictors	Satisfaction with Democracy					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Vote for Incumbent	0.239*** (0.007)	0.230*** (0.007)	0.220*** (0.007)	0.228*** (0.007)	0.230*** (0.007)	0.231*** (0.007)
Economic Polarization	-0.053 (0.043)					
Econ. Polz. * Incumbent	-0.078*** (0.007)					
Immigration Polarization		-0.009 (0.047)				
Immig. Polz. * Incumbent		-0.031*** (0.007)				
LGTB Polarization			-0.004 (0.045)			
LGTB Polz. * Incumbent			0.064*** (0.007)			
Welfare Polarization				-0.079 (0.048)		
Welfare Polz. * Incumbent				-0.034*** (0.006)		
Highest Polarization					0.004 (0.045)	
Highest Polz * Incumbent					-0.027*** (0.007)	
Polarization Index						-0.048 (0.044)
Polz. Index * Incumbent						-0.029*** (0.007)
Observations	239,088	239,088	239,088	239,088	239,088	239,088
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ICC	0.739	0.708	0.681	0.769	0.702	0.760

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Except for LGTB+ polarization which shows different pattern, the results show that all polarization measures used in this article reduce Satisfaction with democracy among winners. Thus, the higher the polarization, the smaller the gap in terms of democratic satisfaction between winners and losers, regardless of whether the issues are economic, immigration or welfare. in any case, the polarization effect does not have the same strength

in all the models and since all measures are standardized, I can compare them. Analyzing the size effect of each dimension of polarization, the data show that economic polarization is the most important determinant of lower satisfaction with democracy among election winners. On the other hand, immigration polarization, which is the most common in the European political context, has the smallest effect on reducing this gap. The polarization index also indicates a negative effect on the interaction with Vote for Incumbent; however, its coefficient is among the lowest compared to the others.

Figures 3 and 4 best illustrate this phenomenon by including the average marginal effect of the interaction. Not only do winners of polarized elections exhibit lower Satisfaction with democracy than winners of non-polarized elections, but these figures show that this decline is significant enough that their satisfaction with democracy is similar to that of losers of highly polarized elections. In other words, both trends converge on almost all dimensions of polarization. The only dimension that escapes this dynamic is that of LGTb+ polarization. In this case, winners of highly polarized elections show greater satisfaction with democracy, while losers show greater democratic dissatisfaction. In general, the winner-loser gap does not widen, but instead narrows, as winners' satisfaction with democracy decreases in highly polarized elections. Thus, the result shows that none of the originally proposed hypotheses could be confirmed: the higher the level of party polarization, the smaller the gap between winners and losers.

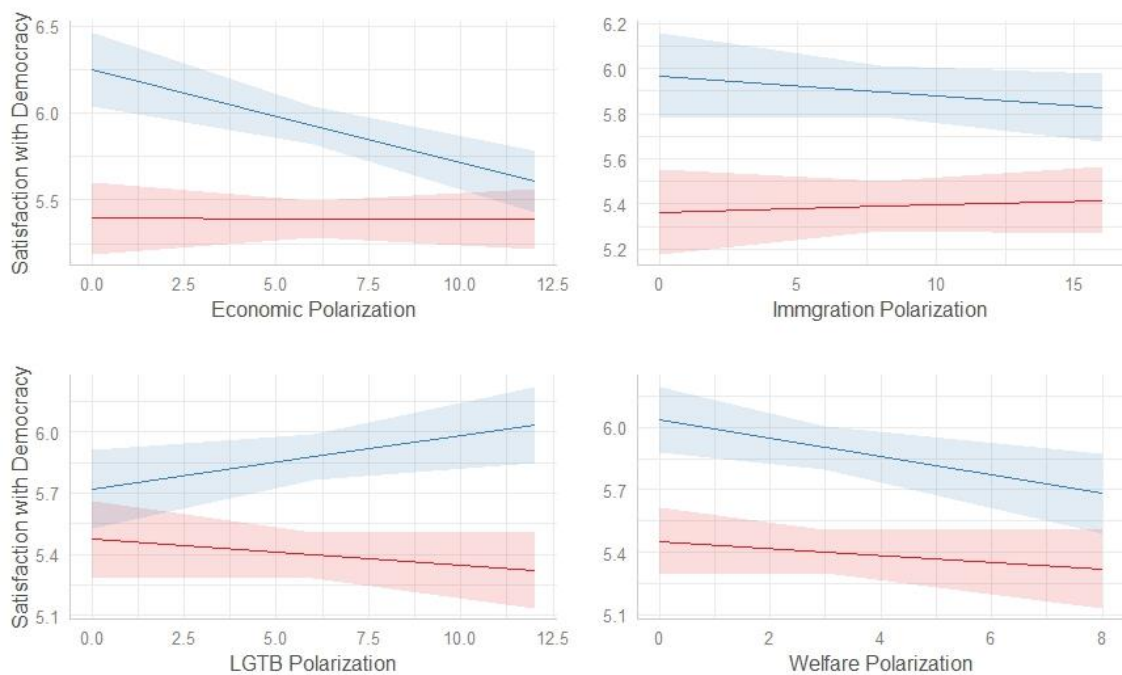


Figure 3. Average Marginal Effect of the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and Polarization by Type of Polarization.

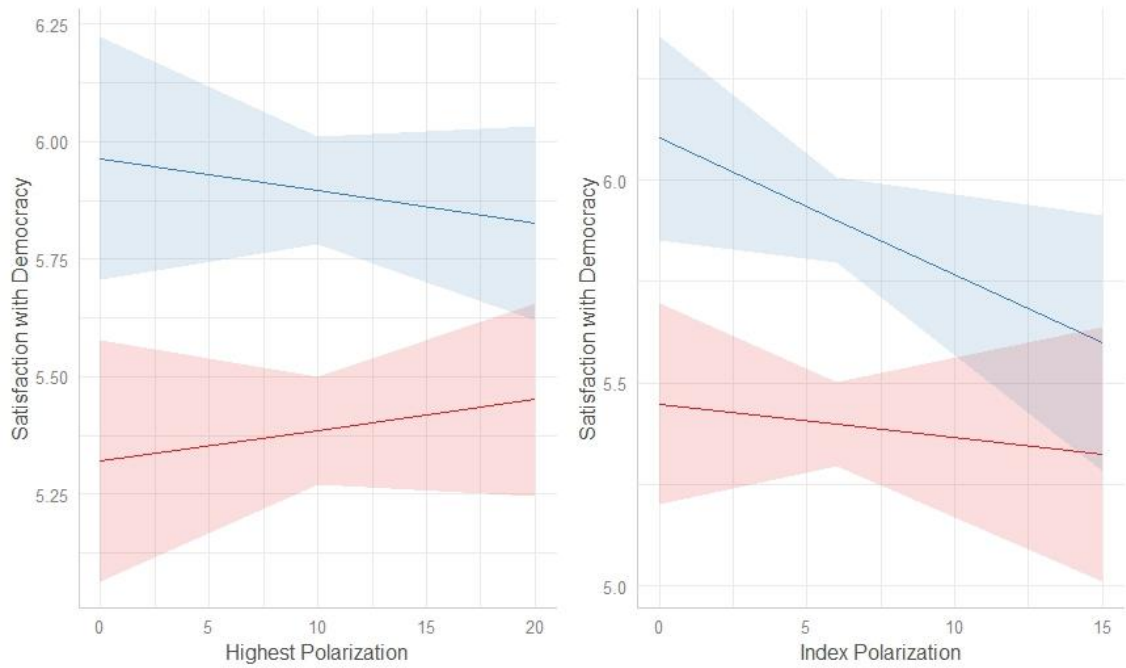


Figure 4. Average Marginal Effect of the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and Polarization by Highest Polarization and Index Polarization.

4.3. Robustness Analysis

Due to these counterintuitive results, an additional robustness analysis has been included in order to test the strength of these findings. Since both phenomena, party polarization and the winner-loser gap, are closely related to the election date, Table 2 replicates the same analyses using only surveys conducted six months after the election. Reducing the sample to surveys conducted six months after the election could in principle show different patterns; a replication of essentially the same results would strengthen their robustness. However, it is important to keep in mind that this reduction in coverage means using only 10% of the sample and only 9 countries from the original 25.

Table 2 applies this new temporal filter and shows some differences from the previous model that should be noted. Most notably, the effect of Party Polarization has changed in all models included in this analysis except the one in column (4). Based on these results, party polarization is now negative and significant, further supporting the literature on the detrimental effect of polarization on satisfaction with democracy. Most crucially for this paper's distinctive contribution, the findings confirm the robustness of the results obtained earlier in Table 1: higher levels of party polarization reduce Satisfaction with Democracy more for winner than for losers. In Appendix D, I have included the same figures on the average marginal effect of the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and the different

measure of party polarization. These figures also confirm the results obtained above. There is only one difference: LGTB⁺ polarization has a positive and significant effect, but as can be seen in Figure A1, the trends are downward in both groups. Greater polarization on LGTB⁺ issues by parties during the election period leads to greater democratic dissatisfaction among both winners and losers. In short, both analyses show the same unexpected pattern: the greater the party polarization, the smaller the winner-loser gap, as winners' satisfaction with democracy decreases significantly.

Table 2. The Winner-Loser Gap and Party Polarization on SWD

Predictors	Satisfaction with Democracy					
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Vote for Incumbent	0.267*** (0.023)	0.205*** (0.020)	0.197*** (0.020)	0.185*** (0.019)	0.197*** (0.020)	0.200*** (0.019)
Economic Polarization	-0.114** (0.043)					
Econ. Polz. * Incumbent	-0.147*** (0.022)					
Immigration Polarization		-0.118* (0.047)				
Immig. Polz. * Incumbent		-0.074*** (0.019)				
LGTB Polarization			-0.247*** (0.045)			
LGTB Polz. * Incumbent			0.043* (0.017)			
Welfare Polarization				-0.143 (0.100)		
Welfare Polz. * Incumbent				-0.036** (0.013)		
Highest Polarization					-0.100* (0.045)	
Highest Polz * Incumbent					-0.042* (0.020)	
Polarization Index						-0.111*** (0.044)
Polz. Index * Incumbent						-0.067*** (0.007)
Observations	22,482	22,482	22,482	22,482	22,482	22,482
Controls	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

5. Discussion about mechanisms

What mechanism explains this counter-intuitive narrowing of the winner-loser gap in polarized elections? Although further research is required to fully understand this political phenomenon, I would like to propose the following arguments to shed a suggestive light on this finding. Firstly, this relationship could be explained by the emergence of radical parties in almost all EU countries. Regardless of their ideology, winners may negatively perceive the emergence and achievement of institutional power by such parties (Eatwell 2000; Norris and Inglehart 2019). Secondly, and continuing with the idea of the emergence of new parties, the increase in parliamentary fragmentation has led to new dynamics of political competition, forcing election-winning parties to make agreements with their political rivals. In previous electoral periods, winning elections directly meant achieving executive power. Currently, winning parties have to seek post-election coalitions with their opponents, leaving aside political disputes and looking for more points of encounter and cohesion between parties (Bermeo and Bartels 2014; De Giorgi and Moury 2015). The third explanation is related to the latter: the negative effect of electoral campaigns and their aftermath on the winners. Mutual tolerance between political parties is a key principle for the stability of democratic systems (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018); polarization strategies that are intended to mobilize voters may well directly undercut that democratic requisite and also negatively reshape the perceptions of electoral adversaries. During electoral campaigns, parties employ various strategies to activate participation among their own supporters by shaping their feelings towards opposing parties and attacking and demonizing them often in personal terms, thereby increasing affective polarization (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Crawford, Modri and Motyl 2013; McCoy, Simonovits and Littvay 2020; Sood and Iyengar 2016). According to Nai (2020), this negative campaigning could be the best electoral strategy for all parties regardless of their competitive position, even though the consequences of negative campaigning may have an erosive effect on democracy. Stigmatization and demonization between parties during election campaigns permeate civil society and lead voters to perceive their opponents as enemies to be defeated.

6. Conclusions

Polarization is one of the most discussed political phenomena in academia and in the media. Recent events have demonstrated how dangerous the effects of polarization can be following a highly polarized election. This article focuses on the multiparty systems that characterize most countries in the European Union and shows the profound deterioration

of the democratic system in scenarios with polarized elections. Contrary to our two original hypotheses, our empirical findings show that party polarization does not increase the gap between winners and losers, exerting its negative effects disproportionately on electoral losers, but instead decreases the gap between winners and losers of elections precisely because of the sharply negative effect of polarization on the democratic satisfaction of election victors. Party polarization adversely affects the democratic satisfaction of both winners and losers regardless of the issue that creates this polarization, but especially winners' democratic satisfaction. The winners of polarized elections are so dissatisfied with the democratic system that their satisfaction level with democracy approaches that of the losers. Due to the unexpectedness of these results, this article also suggests certain future lines of research that might explain the mechanism by which winners experience a greater decline in their satisfaction with democracy after polarized elections.

To sum up, this study has succeeded in unraveling descriptively the relationship between two widely known political phenomena, namely party polarization and the winner-loser gap. Also noteworthy is the use of different measures of polarization based not only on a wide variety of formulas but mainly focusing on the issues that generate this polarization. That is, my operational approach to polarization identifies the issues over which political parties polarize and, subsequently, mobilize their constituents (Moral and Best 2022). The impact of party polarization, which also has positive aspects such as higher voter turnout and stronger party loyalty (Fiorina and Abrams 2008; Lupu 2015; Somer and McCoy 2018), could jeopardize citizens' perceptions of their own democracy by calling into question the foundations of the democratic system and leaving room for greater political dissatisfaction with a number of related consequences.

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8. Appendix

A. Summary of the Variables

Table A1. Methodological specifications of the research variables

Name of the variable	Source	Codification
Satisfaction with Democracy	European Social Survey	1. Low Satisfaction with the way democracy works – 10. High satisfaction with the way democracy works
Vote for the incumbent	European Social Survey	Dummy variable that captures if the interviewee voted for the incumbent party, that is, the governing party or any junior coalition party
Vote Radical Party	European Social Survey	Dummy variable that captures if the interviewee voted for a radical populist left/right party following V-Party classification based on <i>Anti-elitism</i> and <i>People-Centrism</i> variables
Age	European Social Survey	
Sex	European Social Survey	Reference: Women = 1
Education	European Social Survey	
Ideology	European Social Survey	
Income	European Social Survey	
Political Interest	European Social Survey	
Satisfaction with Economy	European Social Survey	1. Low Satisfaction with the national economy – 10. High satisfaction with the national economy
Closeness Party	European Social Survey	Based on the question “How close you feel to your party”
Time after the Previous Election	European Social Survey	Difference in months between the last election held in the country and the interview by the ESS
Former USSR country	Comparative Political Data Set	
New Government	Comparative Political Data Set	Reference: Government changed after the election = 1
Legislative Fragmentalization	Comparative Political Data Set	Based on Rae Fragmentalization Index
Federalism	Comparative Political Data Set	

Name of the variable (cont.)	Source	Codification
Government Effectiveness	World Bank	
GDP Growth	Comparative Political Data Set	
Debt	Comparative Political Data Set	
Unemployment	Comparative Political Data Set	
Economic Polarization	V-Party Dataset (Varieties of Democracy Institute)	Using the economic position of each party based on Economic left-right scale (<i>v2pariglef</i>), containing values from 0. <i>Far Left</i> to 6. <i>Far Right</i>
Immigration Polarization	V-Party Dataset (Varieties of Democracy Institute)	Based on each party's positions on the entry of immigrants into their country (<i>v2paimmig</i>), a range of values from strongly disagree to strongly agree.
LGTBi+ Polarization	V-Party Dataset (Varieties of Democracy Institute)	Party's position on LGTBi+ issues based on political parties' acceptance or rejection of the queer community (<i>v2palgbt</i>).
Welfare Polarization	V-Party Dataset (Varieties of Democracy Institute)	Based on parties' position on advocacy for mean-tested or universalistic welfare policies (<i>v2pavelf</i>)
Highest Polarization	V-Party Dataset (Varieties of Democracy Institute)	Based on the highest value of polarization in each country-year
Index Polarization	V-Party Dataset (Varieties of Democracy Institute)	Add four different measures of polarization and dividing them by four to create this average measure of polarization by country-year

B. Descriptive Statistics

Table B1. Party Polarization by country during the Great Recession

Country	Economic Polarization	Immigration Polarization	LGTBi+ Polarization	Welfare Polarization	Index Polarization
Austria	3.30	16.60	6.71	7.74	8.59
Belgium	7.74	10.38	1.96	0.70	5.19
Bulgaria	4.65	5.34	5.05	0.72	3.94
Croatia	2.26	6.54	4.63	0.35	3.45
Cyprus	6.64	6.11	1.86	1.02	3.91
Czech Republic	8.94	4.06	4.04	1.73	4.69
Denmark	5.25	14.60	5.39	1.97	6.80
Estonia	5.98	4.18	8.44	1.67	5.07
Finland	8.10	12.81	6.14	3.73	7.69
France	7.07	7.50	9.10	2.58	6.56
Germany	7.38	13.24	9.97	5.72	9.08
Greece	8.62	8.78	7.15	3.39	6.99
Hungary	0.73	3.05	6.26	1.10	2.78
Ireland	2.99	0.35	1.29	1.61	1.56
Italy	5.25	14.15	8.71	7.95	9.01
Latvia	2.77	6.37	3.15	3.62	3.98
Lithuania	4.07	3.99	6.88	2.36	4.32
Netherlands	8.62	12.81	1.05	11.48	8.49
Poland	1.59	9.04	9.37	1.03	5.25
Portugal	9.25	3.46	10.75	5.10	7.14
Slovakia	9.62	14.86	4.64	1.64	7.69
Slovenia	10.72	16.57	12.65	3.97	10.98
Spain	12.34	11.59	9.73	2.92	9.14
Sweden	9.29	5.22	3.55	0.22	4.57
United Kingdom	6.58	16.68	3.89	5.56	8.18

C. Null Model

Table A3. Null model with country-year fixed effects

Predictors	Satisfaction with Democracy (1)
Constant	5.013*** (0.095)
Observations	22,482
Country-Year Effects	✓
Log-Likelihood	-516,893.00
Akaike Inf. Crit	1,033,792.00
Bayesian Inf. Crit.	1,033,823.00

D. Robustness Analyses

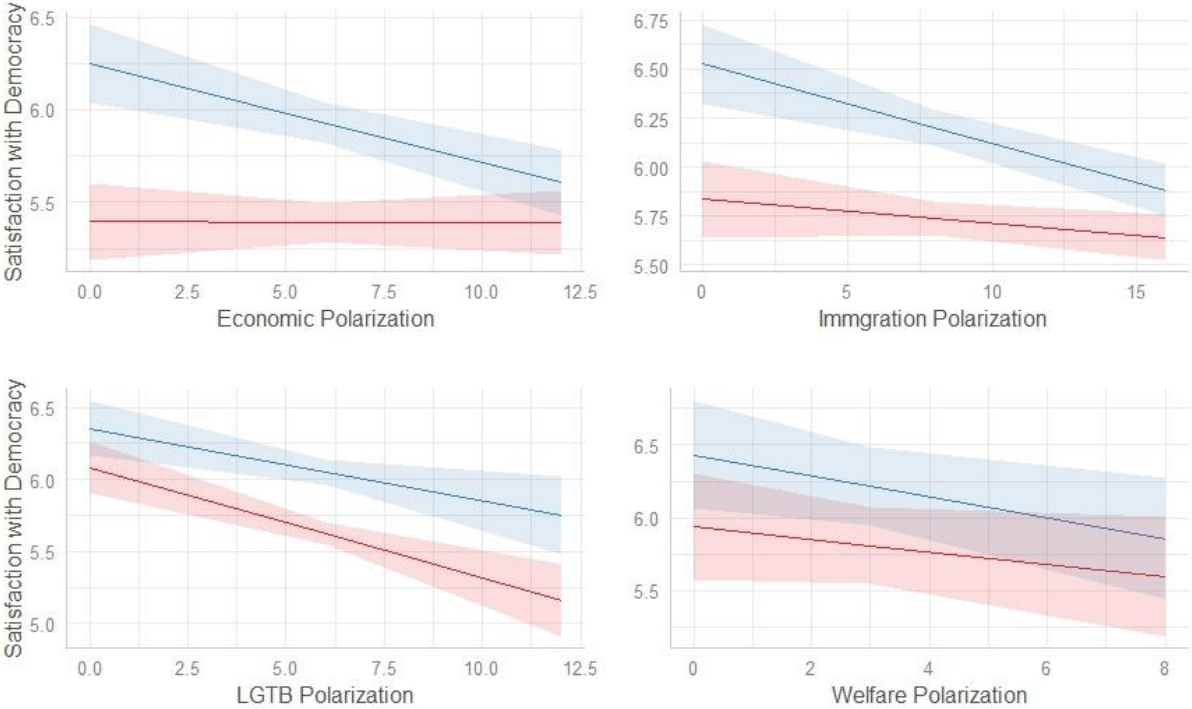


Figure A1: Average Marginal Effect. Figure represents the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and Polarization by Type of Polarization in surveys made 6 months after the election.

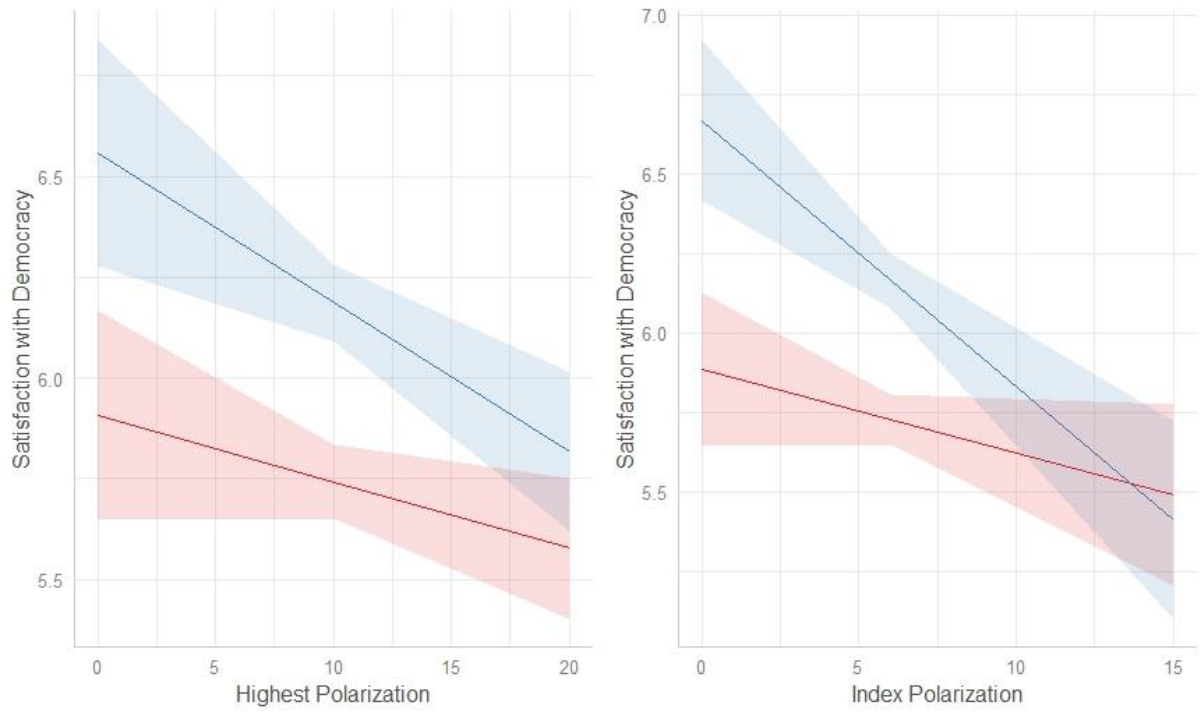


Figure A2. Average Marginal Effect. Figure represents the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and Highest and Index Polarization in surveys made 6 months after the election.

CHAPTER 4

Winners' Loathing: How Affective Polarization Influences Democratic Dissatisfaction after Elections

1. Introduction

Does polarization impact citizens' evaluations of their own democracies? Polarization is increasingly attracting the attention of scholars and the media due to the possible consequences of this phenomenon for democratic stability. The various studies on polarization show that citizens and political elites are polarizing and abandoning intermediate positions in ideological terms (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Fiorina, 2017; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2018; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Wagner, 2021). This consensus on the rise of polarization, however, has led to a deeper debate about how to conceptualize and measure polarization. On the one hand, some scholars argue that polarization is the ideological division of political parties in various national debates. This polarization is referred to as party polarization. This perspective focuses on political parties and their influence on citizens' ideologies, with parties being responsible for marking polarization a top-down phenomenon (LeBas, 2018; Lupu, 2015; Moral & Best, 2022; Somer & McCoy, 2018). On the other hand, other authors have recently conceptualized affective polarization as the result of citizens' feelings of belonging to one political group and their sympathy or aversion towards other political groups. In contrast to the former, affective polarization is based on the difference between sympathy for like-minded people and dislike for dissenters. This perspective indicates that affective polarization affects political elites from the bottom-up (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019; Iyengar et al., 2012; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). Both dynamics are being widely studied, however, the consequences of polarization on citizens' evaluation of democracy are understudied in the academia. This paper aims precisely to present empirical evidence on this gap in the polarization literature.

This article examines how certain partisan dynamics during elections, which aim to capitalize on the vote of their sympathizers and weaken political opponents, also influence affective polarization and citizens' perceptions of the functioning of democracies. More specifically, the contribution of this paper lies in the study of the mechanisms by which affective polarization decreases satisfaction with democracy after elections, especially among winners, thus decreasing the winner-loser gap (*see* (C. Anderson, 2005)). For this purpose, the article is divided into two

sections. First, the article examines the main triggers of affective polarization in election campaigns, focusing on two phenomena: party polarization (Bougher, 2017; Costa, 2021; Moral & Best, 2022; Reiljan, 2020; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016) and negative campaigning (Costa, 2021; Crawford et al., 2013; Nai, 2020; Sood & Iyengar, 2016). Second, this paper examines the relationship between affective polarization and the winner-loser gap. I hypothesize that polarized winners show higher levels of dissatisfaction with democracy than polarized losers, thereby narrowing the winner-loser gap. The mechanism of this phenomenon lies in the effect of affective polarization on the sense of belonging to certain ideological branches and the perception of democratic opponents during elections. This results in a path argument in which party polarization and negative campaigns have a direct and indirect effect on satisfaction with democracy via affective polarization.

This study focuses on elections in European multiparty systems during the Great Recession. After the onset of the economic crisis, evidence shows that both satisfaction with democracy and political polarization have been severely affected, with satisfaction with democracy falling significantly and polarization rising substantially. On the other hand, elections represent a fundamental core for the proper functioning of democracies, and it is precisely at this moment that the party electoral dynamics affect both satisfaction and affective polarization (Hernández et al., 2021; Martini & Quaranta, 2019). To conduct the empirical analysis, this article relies on two databases from which individual- and party-level information is extracted for each of the European countries during the election period: the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems and the V-Party. I have also used multilevel analysis and structural equation modelling to test the hypotheses proposed in this research.

The findings show that democratic dissatisfaction increases mainly due to affective polarization, party polarization and negative campaigning. Similarly, party polarization increases the level of affective polarization, while the empirical evidence on the impact of negative campaigning on this phenomenon is not entirely robust. What about the winner-loser gap? The results show that the gap due to lower satisfaction with democracy decreases significantly among affective polarized winners. This phenomenon also occurs among losers, although not as strongly, resulting in the near disappearance of the gap between winners and losers among highly polarized citizens. Polarization and demonization between parties during election campaigns constantly permeate civil society, leading voters to perceive their opponents as enemies to be defeated. As a result, the most affectively polarized winners may feel that democracy is insufficient or has failed because their "enemies" are in the institutions.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Affective Polarization and Party Identification

According to Social Identity Theory, people perceive themselves through, and identify with, their sociodemographic characteristics such as class, race, gender, ethnicity, and sexual orientation; politically meaningful identity groups form around these characteristics (Brewer, 1993; Tajfel, 1978). The resulting sense of belonging creates a dynamic in which individuals not only perceive that they belong to a social group (in-group identification), but also see others as not belonging to their group (out-group identification). This group identification is also evident with respect to party identification. Hence citizens form social identities around their party identifications and ideologies. (Aldrich et al., 2020; Campbell et al., 1960; Greene, 1999; Huddy et al., 2015; Ridge, 2020). Political parties take rooting in these social – and political – identities and seek to capitalize on them during electoral periods due to their stable and robust character (Lipset & Rokkan, 1967). In general, citizens who feel they belong to the same political group are more likely to agree with their like-minded people and feel more affinity to those who share their ideals and values (Crawford et al., 2013; Kingzette et al., 2021; Lavine et al., 2012; Lelkes, 2018). In contrast, citizens develop negative prejudice and feelings of contempt toward people who do not belong to their political color (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Crawford et al., 2013; E. Hartevelde & Markus Wagner, 2020; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2018; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015; Mason, 2015) and towards political elites of opposing parties (Costa, 2021; Druckman & Levendusky, 2019). Indeed, this range of feelings between the in-group and the out-group is the ontological starting point of the so-called affective polarization.

Iyengar et al. (2012) famously conceptualized the definition of affective polarization. These authors conceptually differentiate affective polarization from previous notions of polarization, moving the focal point from parties' positions to the citizenry and their party affiliations. Therefore, affective polarization is understood as “*the extent to which partisans view each other as a disliked group [...and] the more appropriate test of polarization is affective, not ideological, identity*” (2012: 406). These arguments have provoked a profound debate since polarization is no longer exclusively about political parties and their ideological differences, but also about citizens' affiliations and feelings toward (or against) democratic opponents (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019; Gidron et al., 2019; Hetherington & Rudolph, 2018; Iyengar et al., 2019; Iyengar & Westwood, 2015). Affectively polarized citizens are more likely to take partisan cues and feel the need to signal and reinforce their ideological positions to out-group individuals (Kingzette et al., 2021; Lavine et al., 2012; Lelkes, 2018). Nonetheless, one of the limitations of the literature on affective polarization is

that it focuses primarily on the study of the U.S. two-party context. Affective polarization between Democrats and Republicans is a recently studied phenomenon and for scholars it is easier to capture feelings of dislike and hostility between these two parties since typically they cannot be disrupted by a third party. Few authors have applied the same analyses to multiparty settings such as European ones; however, those studies that have been done are quite excellent from a theoretical and empirical point of view. Authors have empirically demonstrated the existence of affective polarization in multiparty settings, pointing out, among other things, the strong relationship between this political phenomenon and citizens' engagement with democracy (Wagner, 2021), the influence of time after elections on affective polarization (Hernández et al., 2021), and the asymmetric hostility toward far-right parties (E. Hartevelde & Markus Wagner, 2020; Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila, 2021; Reiljan, 2020). Nevertheless, the literature still falls short in addressing the question of why affective polarization emerges or increases during elections. This article addresses that gap in the literature by demonstrating the major effect of certain electoral dynamics on affective polarization.

2.2. Determinants of Affective Polarization in Multiparty Settings

Party Polarization

Elections are at the core of democracies. Political parties strategically promote certain dynamics during electoral periods to achieve a double goal. On the one hand, parties determine and signal their ideologies as a strategy to mobilize the votes of their partisans and supporters. If parties do not opt for ideological distancing, voters may not be able to discern the proposals of the different candidates, which may lead to lower voter mobilization (LeBas, 2018; Lupu, 2015; Przeworski & Sprague, 1986; Somer & McCoy, 2018). This electoral dynamic leads to what is known as party or ideological polarization. On the other hand, parties develop negative campaigns to reinforce negative feelings and evaluations of their democratic opponents - i.e., out-group stereotypes (Costa, 2021; Galasso et al., 2020; Nai, 2020; Sood & Iyengar, 2016). This article discusses both political phenomena as determinants of affective polarization in multiparty settings.

From Sartori's initial standpoint (2005), party or ideological polarization is conceptualized as the relative distance between political parties along the ideological continuum between left and right. (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Baldassarri & Gelman, s. f.; Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Lupu, 2013, 2015; McCoy et al., 2018). According to these authors, this type of polarization allows citizens to clearly distinguish between the positions of political parties on various issues. Moreover, in multiparty systems, parties try to distinguish themselves as much as possible and signal this in order not to

degenerate into insignificance in the political arena (Fiorina & Abrams, 2008; Levendusky, 2009; Lupu, 2015; Somer & McCoy, 2018).

in the current literature on party polarization, there is a profound debate about whether such polarization permeates citizens' viewpoints or, on the contrary, the public remains centrist and is less polarized than political parties. On the one hand, some scholars argue that party polarization has indeed increased significantly in recent years and has had a centrifugal effect on citizens' opinions and ideologies, which are more distanced today than ever (Abramowitz & Saunders, 2008; Mason, 2015). Moral and Best (2022) and Costa (2021), for example, have found empirically that citizen polarization responds to party polarization. This argument refutes previous ones that claimed that political parties move along the left-right continuum in response to the demands of the median voter (Ezrow et al., 2014; Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Spoon & Klüver, 2017; Wagner & Meyer, 2014). On the other side of the debate, some authors have claimed that most of the population has polarized affectively rather than ideologically (Abramowitz & Webster, 2016; Gidron et al., 2019; Iyengar et al., 2012; Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016); or that polarization responds to the existing biased view of citizens toward politicians and the political environment in general (Druckman & Levendusky, 2019; Fiorina, 2017; Lelkes, 2018). From this point of view, it is worth highlighting the studies of Rogowski and Sutherland (2016) and Druckman and Levendusky (2019), who claim that polarization distorts citizens' perceptions of candidates and of political leaders of opposing parties. In other words, these authors argue that party polarization does not increase the ideological distance between citizens, but merely causes a distortion in voters' perceptions of how polarized the political arena is. This phenomenon is also known as perceived polarization (Enders & Armaly, 2019; Lelkes, 2018; Levendusky & Malhotra, 2016). This debate is far from over. It is true, however, that both positions find a correlation between party polarization and citizens' perceptions and opinions of their democratic opponents. This correlation serves as the basis for constructing a theoretical framework that relates both political phenomena.

Party polarization activates and reinforces affective evaluations of opponents (Bougher, 2017; Reiljan, 2020; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). During elections, political elites seek to reinforce their constituents ideological positioning and disrupt their own voters' perceptions of opposing parties' elites and ideologies. Indeed, if party polarization leads citizens to develop more negative attitudes toward their political opponents - i.e., greater affective polarization – political parties are more likely to have greater incentives to develop this dynamic, regardless of the potential backlash of this strategic choice (Hernández et al., 2021; McCoy et al., 2020; Rogowski & Sutherland, 2016). However, some authors criticize the possible endogeneity of this relationship at the individual level: citizens show greater hostility towards voters who belong to more distant

ideologies, while they perceive political opponents they dislike as ideologically more distant (Diermeier & Li, 2019; E. Harteveld & Markus Wagner, 2020; Lelkes, 2018). Returning to Social Identity Theory, voters feel closer to those voters with whom they share their vote and ideology (like-minded) -i.e., in-group sympathy- while at the same time they would affectively and ideologically reject those who do not belong - i.e., out-group aversion. If both phenomena are connected at the individual level and party polarization precedes citizen polarization (Costa, 2021; Moral & Best, 2022), an attractive strategy for political parties is to widen the ideological gap with other parties and, consequently, to foster a sense of belonging to the party and hostility toward rivals. This strategy not only displaces voters' ideology following party cues, but also generates negative feelings toward political opponents by activating affective polarization. Based on these considerations, the following hypothesis is proposed: *affective polarization increases if the ideological gap between political parties -i.e., party polarization- widens (H₁)*.

Party polarization, however, is not completely exempt from the limitation caused by simultaneity. Parties' policy proposals during campaigns may be influenced by partisans' dislike of other political rivals. For example, Green and left-wing parties might propose policies that run counter to far-right parties because voters of these parties have a strong aversion to the latter (*see* Kekkonen & Ylä-Anttila, 2021). This approach raises two problems. First, political parties may not be fully aware of this prior affective polarization. In this multiparty scenario, the combination between parties and citizens' like/dislike about other parties increases significantly, making strategic planning based on affective polarization challenging. This point is not addressed in this article due to the lack of information on political elites' knowledge and perceptions of the affective polarization of their partisans. Second, and more importantly, political parties themselves may have been the instigators of feelings of hostility toward their rivals, which reinforces affective polarization. This second strategy is what is known as negative campaigning and is discussed in the following section.

Negative Campaigns

Negative campaigning refers to messages and ads that aim to attack and demonize political rivals in order to win more votes or demobilize opponents during election campaigns (Costa, 2021; Galasso et al., 2020; Nai, 2018; Sood & Iyengar, 2016). Recently, many scholars have warned that campaigns have become more antagonistic and difficult to ignore than ever before. In negative campaigns political actors violate the principles of mutual tolerance between political parties and portray their opponents not as those who think differently, but as enemies to be defeated in elections (Levistky & Ziblatt, 2018). The use of online social networks also seems to encourage the

constant severe division between political forces. Contrary to what one might expect, parties prefer to attack their opponents through the various online social platforms, rather than promote their electoral proposals to their potential voters (Costa, 2021; Galasso et al., 2020; Nai, 2018, 2019). But are these types of negative campaigns effective in winning votes? Findings on the mobilizing or corrosive effects of negative campaigns are quite mixed. On the one hand, some scholars point out that negative messages (mudslinging) have a backlash effect on the evaluation of the source of attacks. From this perspective, parties would have no incentive to launch negative campaigns regardless of whether they are behind in the polls or very close to winning elections, since voters would not really support this type of electoral strategy (Carraro & Castelli, 2010; Dowling & Krupnikov, 2016; Fridkin & Kenney, 2011, 2004; Galasso et al., 2020; Nai, 2020). However, this argument leaves unanswered the question of why parties keep opting for negative campaigning instead of promoting their own good management or electoral promises.

This article proposes that negative campaigning could be beneficial to parties because it reinforces partisanship among their voters and portrays their opponents as a threat. In other words, negative campaigns lead to a form of partisan loyalty that signifies greater affective polarization. The relationship between negative campaigning and affective polarization is a phenomenon that has recently attracted considerable interest in response to the motivation of parties to initiate attacks on opposing parties. In their recent work, Sood and Iyengar (2016) explain why negative messages in electoral campaigns are particularly effective in modifying evaluations of opposing candidates. They argue that negative campaigning strengthens partisan identity and attachment through messages that convince and persuade voters and supporters of the positive aspects of parties' own candidates while highlighting negative stereotypes of their opponents. In general, citizens possess certain partisan biases before elections, in which they perceive like-minded people as having positive characteristics, and dissenters as having stereotype-conforming negative traits (Crawford et al., 2013; Haslam, 2006; Loughnan et al., 2009). Such negative messages reinforce voters' partisan biases and, consequently, increase sympathy or aversion toward political parties - i.e., affective polarization.

From this perspective, there are two reasons why political parties find electoral incentives in going negative. First, parties launch negative messages to distance themselves from their opponents and to reinforce the partisanship of their voters and supporters. Criticizing and pointing out the shortcomings of other parties solidifies perceptions of negative stereotypes, for example, by highlighting the weaknesses or inconsistencies of the opponent. Second, and more likely, parties might use these electoral strategies to remove the possibility of voting for the opposing party from citizens' minds. By attacking and demonizing their political rivals, rather

than portraying the opposing party as another democratic opponent, which is equally valid but has different ideas, parties could discourage their own and undecided voters from voting for the opposing party. However, both perspectives depend on the parties' ability to spread these messages to the population and manipulate citizens, which does not diminish the validity of the incentive of going negative. Based on the instigation between parties during electoral campaigns, I hypothesize the following: *the stronger the attacks during the campaign between political parties, the greater the affective polarization* (H₂).

2.3. The Influence of Affective Polarization on the Winner-Loser Gap

in the previous sections, I argued about the origins and causes of affective polarization according to the recent literature on the subject. The discussion focused mainly on the electoral period due to the temporal component of affective polarization (see Hernández et al., 2021; Rodriguez et al., 2022), the impact of party polarization and changes in ideology to obtain a share of votes, and the influence of campaigns. Nonetheless, the main objective of this article is to analyze the relationship between affective polarization and the winner-loser gap. The winner-loser gap is conceptualized as the gap in satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers of free elections (Anderson, 2005; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Craig et al., 2006; Rich & Treece, 2018; Singh et al., 2012). in general terms, winners of elections are more satisfied with democracy after elections, while losers harbor negative feelings and dissatisfaction with the democratic system due to their defeat⁶.

There is not much literature on the effects of affective polarization on satisfaction with democracy. On the one hand, Wagner (2020) in his introduction to affective polarization in multiparty settings, partially examines the impact of this political phenomenon on satisfaction with democracy. His results show that, regardless of the type of formula used, the more affectively polarized citizens are, the greater their dissatisfaction with democracy. But the most interesting study on this relationship is undoubtedly Ridge's (2020) on the phenomenon of negative party identity. in contrast to positive party identity (Aldrich et al., 2020), the author defines negative party identity as the feeling of hostility and aversion toward other political parties. As the author argues, this concept seems to be closely related to the idea of affective

⁶ In an earlier paper, I showed how party polarization negatively affects this gap. Winners in highly polarized elections feel greater dissatisfaction with democracy, to such an extent that even their levels coincided with the losers' democratic satisfaction, significantly narrowing the winner-loser gap. In the discussion section, I present possible mechanisms that might explain why winners are more dissatisfied in polarized political environments. One such possibility is the influence of affective polarization

polarization; however, her empirical methodology is far from the formulas that have been used to measure this phenomenon in multiparty contexts (see Wagner, 2020; Hartevelde and Wagner, 2021; Reiljan, 2020, Hernández et al., 2021). According to their results, the higher the negative party identity, the higher the level of dissatisfaction with democracy among winners of elections. That is, the greater the dislike toward other political parties, the greater the dissatisfaction with democracy despite winning elections.

This article contributes to the literature on affective polarization by examining the relationship between this phenomenon and the winner-loser gap, a relationship that has been little studied and is fundamental to a better understanding of contemporary electoral dynamics. Based on the importance of elections, parties employ various strategies to activate the participation of their own supporters by shaping their feelings toward opposing parties and by attacking and demonizing them, which reinforces affective polarization (Iyengar et al., 2012; Rogowski and Sutherland, 2015; Hernández et al., 2021; McCoy et al., 2020; Moral and Best, 2020). Democracy is not maintained by eliminating one's opponents, but by competing for votes in elections, accepting the victory of the parties who obtained the government, and tolerating the minority parties and groups that received lower vote shares (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018; Linz & Stepan, 1996; Przeworski, 2019). Ideally, political parties would respect the principle of mutual tolerance. However, polarization and demonization between parties during campaigns constantly permeate civil society and lead voters to perceive their opponents as *enemies to be defeated*. The winning party may be even forced to form coalition governments with those who were senders and receivers of their attacks. Under this scenario in which coalitions are necessary to form a new government, winners of elections feel disappointed since their party is obliged to negotiate with those hatred parties. As such, the most affectively polarized winners may feel that democracy is insufficient or has failed because their "enemies" are in the institutions. This mechanism, closely related to the concept of democratic hypocrisy (McCoy et al., 2020), explains why polarized winners feel greater dissatisfaction than polarized losers and why, therefore, the winner-loser gap narrows. Similarly, I cannot rule out the possibility that the causes of greater affective polarization also have direct effect on satisfaction with democracy. Both party polarization and negative campaigns may have direct and indirect effects on citizens' perceptions of the functioning of democracy. Therefore, I propose three hypotheses that capture the complexity of the relationships that occur in these polarization contexts:

The greater the affective polarization, the greater the dissatisfaction with democracy of the winners and, hence, the narrower the winner-loser gap (H₃).

in elections with high party polarization, winners' dissatisfaction with democracy increases, leading to a reduction in the winner-loser gap (H₄).

Under negative campaign contexts, winners of elections feel greater dissatisfaction with democracy, which shrinks the gap between winners and losers of elections (H₅).

3. Data and Methodology

This article focuses on the study of electoral dynamics on satisfaction with democracy in EU countries after the onset of the Great Recession. To test the hypotheses of this study, I used modules 3-4 of the CSES Integrated Module Dataset (IMD) merged with module 5, i.e., all CSES modules after the beginning of the 2008 economic crisis and prior to the Covid-19 crisis. The CSES surveys are of particular interest because they collect post-election information in dozens of countries around the world and are one of the few open databases that capture in-group and out-group citizens' feelings toward political parties in their surveys. This information is essential to construct indices of affective polarization, especially in multiparty settings. The sample used in this research consists of a total of 57,617 surveys in 21 EU countries, including the United Kingdom, and their respective elections from 2008 to 2019. Unfortunately, the CSES database does not have information on all elections held in all these countries during this period, but it is still a very significant sample for the study of European multiparty elections. Similarly, I merged the database offered in the CSES on Party Polarization Measure Index, which offers an index measuring the variation of parties along the left-right scale in legislative elections (Dalton, 2008, 2017). Given the lack of information on Module 5, I use the same method to calculate party polarization that the author offers and completed the database with the values obtained. Finally, I extracted and inserted data on political parties, their ideological positioning, and electoral strategies from the V-Party database offered by the V-Dem Institute.

The main dependent variable in this study is *Satisfaction with Democracy*. The winner-loser gap literature is largely based on the gap that exists between winners and losers of elections with respect to this indicator of specific support for democracy. Not only is satisfaction with democracy used assiduously in winner-loser gap studies, but the use of this variable as an indicator of support for democracy is widespread because of its empirical conciseness (C. Anderson, 2005; Daoust et al., 2021; Nadeau et al., 2021; Norris, 1999; Torcal & Montero, 2006). Nevertheless, there are critics of the use of this indicator as the most appropriate for measuring support for democracy. The main criticism is that it cannot be extrapolated that high dissatisfaction with democracy implies low support for democracy as a political system; it may simply reflect dissatisfaction with the way democracy works in the respondent's country. Despite

the criticisms, this indicator is widely used and accepted in this type of analysis. In the CSES surveys, *Satisfaction with Democracy* is collected with the following question: “*On the whole, are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [COUNTRY]?*”.

To measure affective polarization, I use the formulation offered by Wagner (2020) to measure this political phenomenon in multiparty contexts. This measure is based on like/dislike scores for the different political parties that compose the political scene in each country. The spread measure of affective polarization is operationalized as the weighted average difference between party like and dislike scores relative to the average like/dislike scores of individual respondents for each party and the formula notation is the following:

$$Spread_i = \sqrt{\sum v_p (like_{ip} - \overline{like}_i)^2}$$

At the contextual level, this study focuses on the impact of party system polarization and negative campaigns on satisfaction with democracy and affective polarization. The first indicator, *Party Polarization*, derives from the distance between parties on the ideological left-right axis according to citizens' perceptions of each party, weighted by the percentage of votes obtained in previous elections. The second indicator, *Negative Campaigning*, derives from the following question from the V-Party Dataset: “*Prior to this election, have leaders of this party used severe personal attacks or tactics of demonization against their opponents?*”. Each party can score from 0 to 4, with the first value representing constant attacks on other political parties and the second value indicating that the leader of that party has never attacked or demonized other parties. Based on each party's score, I inverted the values of the scale and constructed an index that calculates the average score, weighted by the percentage of votes.

Finally, our main analyses are divided into two different regression models. First, this study includes hierarchical linear models with country-election random intercepts in which the dependent variables are affective polarization and satisfaction with democracy. Similarly, I included control variables to test the robustness of the results, although, as I show below, the sample is significantly reduced due to the lack of information on some of the covariates. Second, I use generalized structural equation modeling, more specifically path analysis since none of the variables are fully exogenous, to analyze the linkage mechanism between the election contextual variables, *Party Polarization* and *Negative Campaigning*, on affective polarization and the winner-loser gap. All models have standardized coefficients to facilitate comparison of the effect of the explanatory variables.

4. Findings

4.1. Affective Polarization in Multiparty Contexts

This article focuses on the influence of affective polarization on the winner-loser gap in European multiparty contexts. Figure 1 is a violin graph showing the differences in means and distributions among three groups according to their voter status: Winners, Losers, and Abstainers. According to this graph, the mean difference in affective polarization between winners and losers is minimal. Both groups have a normalized kernel distribution, and the mean comparison analysis shows that the difference between winners ($\mu=2.56$, $\sigma^2=0.96$) and losers ($\mu=2.46$, $\sigma^2=0.95$) is significant⁷ but not substantial.

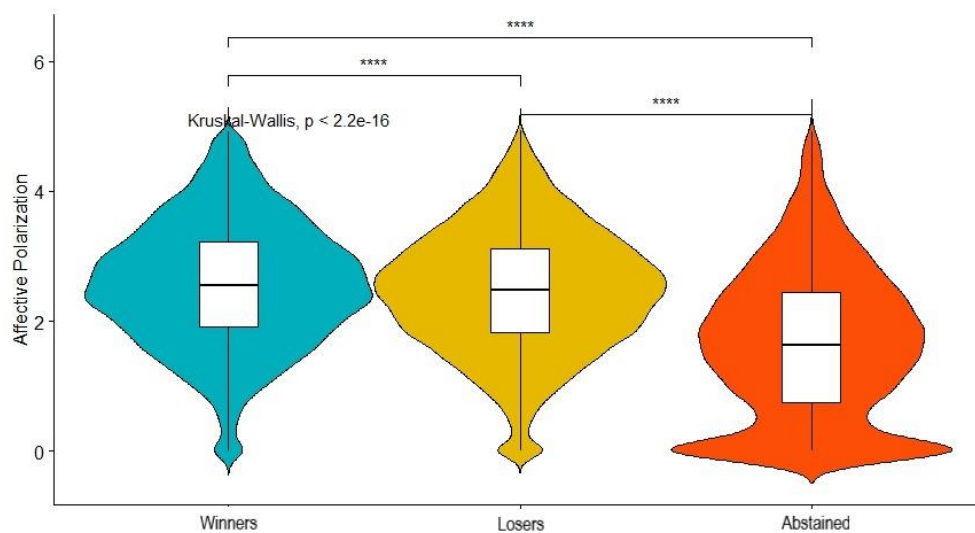


Figure 1. Electoral Citizens' Status and Affective Polarization

The most notable difference in this graph is undoubtedly the distribution of affective polarization among abstainers. Not only do abstainers have lower mean scores ($\mu=1.64$, $\sigma^2=1.16$) than the other two groups, but their distribution also shows that a large proportion of these citizens hardly feel sympathy or dislike for any political party. This result could indicate two important elements. First, the reason why there are so many abstainers with such values could be their lack of interest in politics, a phenomenon that affects both turnout and affective polarization. Second, analyzing this difference is essential before running the multilevel and SEM regressions, as this disparity in distribution may affect the results. Following the winner-loser gap literature, there is a profound

⁷ Figure 1 shows only the Kruskal-Wallis test, but the results are identical using other comparison of means analyses such as Welch's and the T-Student's test.

debate about whether or not abstainers should be counted as losers. Some authors warn of the limitations and problems this might entail, as the dynamics between both groups are different (see Rich). Therefore, only those citizens who participated in the elections are counted as losers in the following regressions.

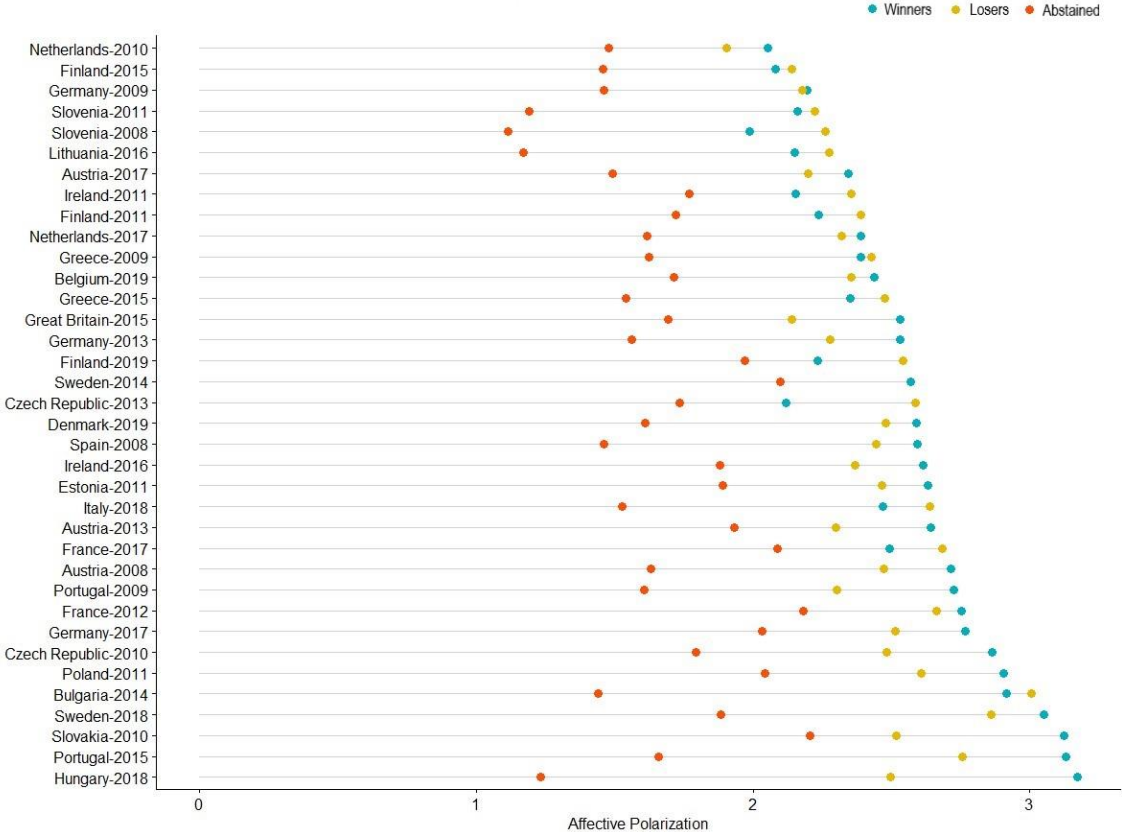


Figure 2. Electoral Citizens’ Status and Affective Polarization by Country-Election

Figure 2 displays the results of the differences between winners, losers, and abstainers by country-election in EU countries. Elections with higher levels of affective polarization coincide with those in which winners are, on average, more polarized than losers. Conversely, winners in elections with lower levels of affective polarization have lower average scores than losers, although the gap is not very large. Despite the fact that the sample does not include multiple elections for each country, Figure 2 does not show pronounced temporal patterns. That is, since the onset of the Great Recession, affective polarization does not seem to have increased equally in all countries. For example, there are countries such as Finland, Germany, Ireland, and Sweden in which the increase in affective polarization between one election and the previous one is quite remarkable. In other countries such as Austria, the Czech Republic, and France, this phenomenon is just the opposite. In other words, the data across the EU countries do not show a clear pattern of increasing affective polarization during the Great Recession. Finally, the results

again show that the gap in affective polarization between winners and losers is not very large, and that abstainers are the least polarized of these three groups in all countries.

Table 1. Determinants of Affective Polarization in EU Multiparty Contexts

Predictors	Affective Polarization		
	(1)	(2)	(3)
Party Polarization		0.096*	0.094***
		(0.046)	(0.007)
Negative Campaigning		0.064	0.067
		(0.044)	(0.041)
Female			0.018***
			(0.006)
Age			0.112***
			(0.006)
Education			0.014*
			(0.006)
Ideology ²			0.105***
			(0.006)
Time after elections			-0.027
			(0.038)
Constant	0.230***	0.230***	0.230***
	(0.007)	(0.007)	(0.007)
Observations	34,240	34,240	29,124
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓	✓
ICC	0.044	0.039	0.033

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

What were the determinants of affective polarization in European countries during the Great Recession? The multilevel analysis presented in Table 1 shows three multilevel models with country-election fixed effects: Null model (1), explanatory variables (2) and explanatory and control variables (3). A common feature of these three models is the low level of intraclass correlation (ICC), i.e., how similar units within the same group are with respect to a quantitative trait, in this case affective polarization. Analysis of the results of the regressions in column (2) shows that both *Party Polarization* and *Negative Campaigning* have a positive effect on *Affective Polarization*, with the former being the only one to have a significant effect. These results are replicated in column (3), in which several control variables are included⁸. Both covariates continue to increase the level of *Affective Polarization*, but only *Party Polarization* has a significant

⁸ Initially, *Close to Party* variable had been added as a control variable, but the strong correlation with the dependent variable caused significant multicollinearity problems.

effect. What's more, *Party Polarization*'s coefficient shows a large effect on this phenomenon, although there are predictors whose size-effect is even larger. Based on these results, I corroborate the relationship proposed in hypothesis H₁, but not the effect of negative campaigning on affective polarization (H₂).

Table 1 also reveals other results that are interesting for the in-depth analysis of affective polarization. The results show that being a woman has a positive effect on affective polarization, while higher age and higher educational level have a positive effect on this relationship. *Ideology* squared estimator also suggests that citizens who position themselves at the extremes of the left-right scale are also those who exhibit higher levels of affective polarization. The time between the election and the survey has a negative but not significant effect, which partially confirms the effect of this predictor on the affective polarization phenomenon (Hernández et al., 2021).

4.2. Polarized Citizens and the Winner-Loser Gap

During the Great Recession, satisfaction with democracy varied considerably in many European democracies. Table 2 shows the results of the main determinants of satisfaction with democracy during this period after the 2008 economic crisis, presenting individual and contextual variables that influence citizens' perceptions of the state of democracy in their country. The results of the multilevel regression reveal several noteworthy aspects. First, voting for the winning party has a positive effect on democracy satisfaction in all models and is by far the best estimator for the dependent variable. Second, *Affective Polarization* has a negative effect on *Satisfaction with Democracy*. The interaction between *Vote for the Incumbent* and this predictor is also significantly negative, suggesting that the greater the affective polarization, the smaller the positive effect of the having voted for the winning party in the elections on satisfaction with democracy. Third, the results for the contextual variables *Party Polarization* and *Negative Campaigning* are identical in all models except the model presented in column (5). Both covariates reduce satisfaction with democracy, although these results are not significant. Yet, the interaction with being an election winner has a negative and significant effect. That is, winners show lower levels of satisfaction with democracy in electoral contexts where party polarization was higher and/or where attacks and demonization between political parties were more continuous during the campaign. Finally, column (5) shows the results of these predictors along with the effect of other control variables. A serious problem arises in this regression. The sample is reduced to only 9,000 cases, a reduction of almost 40% compared to previous analyses. Despite this reduction, however, the results remain stable. While *Affective Polarization* has the same negative impact as in the previous models, *Party Polarization* and *Negative Campaigning* increase their coefficients considerably and gain significance in their non-

interactive effect. *Negative Campaigning*, however, loses its significance in the interaction, while *Party Polarization* retains it with a higher coefficient than in the previous models.

Table 2. Determinants of Satisfaction with Democracy in EU countries

Predictors	Satisfaction with Democracy				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Vote for Incumbent		0.094*** (0.005)	0.097*** (0.005)	0.088*** (0.005)	0.071*** (0.009)
Affective Polarization		-0.037*** (0.005)		-0.037*** (0.005)	-0.114** (0.043)
Affective Polz. * Incumbent		-0.022*** (0.005)		-0.028*** (0.005)	-0.147*** (0.022)
Party Polarization			-0.066 (0.063)	-0.071 (0.064)	-0.193** (0.068)
Negative Campaigning			-0.056 (0.064)	-0.058 (0.064)	-0.208*** (0.059)
Party Polz. * Incumbent			-0.033*** (0.005)	-0.037*** (0.005)	-0.064*** (0.008)
Negative Camp. * Incumbent			-0.018*** (0.005)	-0.020*** (0.005)	-0.012 (0.008)
Constant	2.418*** (0.074)	2.500*** (0.063)	2.509*** (0.061)	2.498*** (0.061)	2.348*** (0.086)
Observations	32,753	23,266	23,266	23,266	8,917
Controls	X	X	X	X	✓
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ICC	0.200	0.157	0.146	0.149	0.063

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

The interactions shown in Table 3 presents the effect of the explanatory variables in the winner-loser gap, however a visual representation could be more useful. Figure 3 displays the average marginal effects for a better graphical visualization of these interactions. The three graphs in Figure 3 show very similar patterns. Party polarization significantly reduces the winner-loser gap, reaching a point where the difference in satisfaction with democracy is no longer significant. In other words, the winner-loser gap disappears in contexts with high party polarization. The same effect is seen in affective polarization. The trends of winners and losers are both negative the more *Affective Polarization* increases. However, the dissatisfaction of winners is greater the more

these citizens are affectively polarized. Consequently, the higher the affective polarization, the smaller the gap between winners and losers. Winners are also the main losers in terms of the impact of negative campaigns. Although the losers also show higher levels of dissatisfaction with democracy, this detrimental effect is so pronounced among winners that their levels collide with those of the losers.

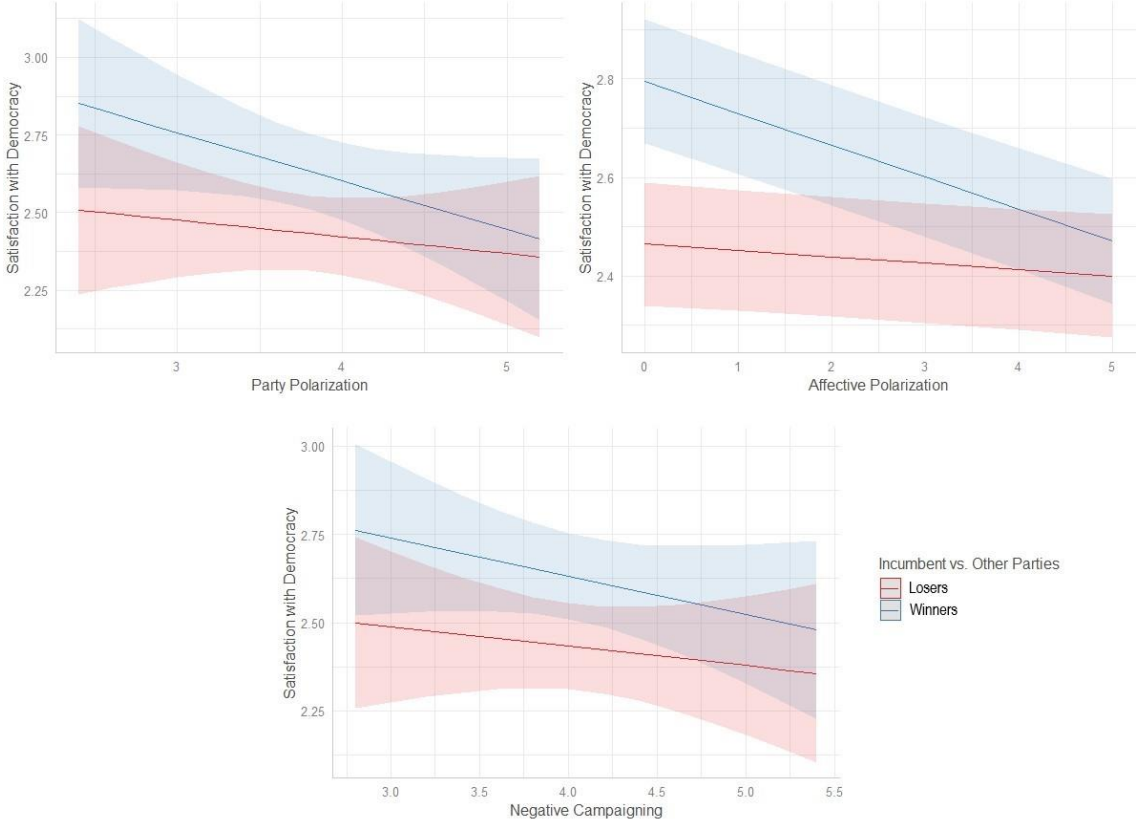


Figure 3. Average Marginal Effects. Each figure represents the interaction between Vote for Incumbent and each explanatory variable

To check the robustness of the results, Table A1 and Figure A1 in the Appendix repeat these analyses, but with some modifications. On this occasion, the definition of losers is widened to include abstainers. The results are identical to those obtained previously, although it should be noted that the strength of the interaction between *Affective Polarization* and *Vote for the Incumbent* decreases. Although the effect is still negative and significant, Figure A1 shows how the greater the affective polarization, the greater the dissatisfaction with democracy among both winners and losers, with the difference not disappearing in the highest cases of affective polarization. In other words, satisfaction with democracy declines almost in parallel between winners and losers of elections when electoral abstainers are included in the latter group.

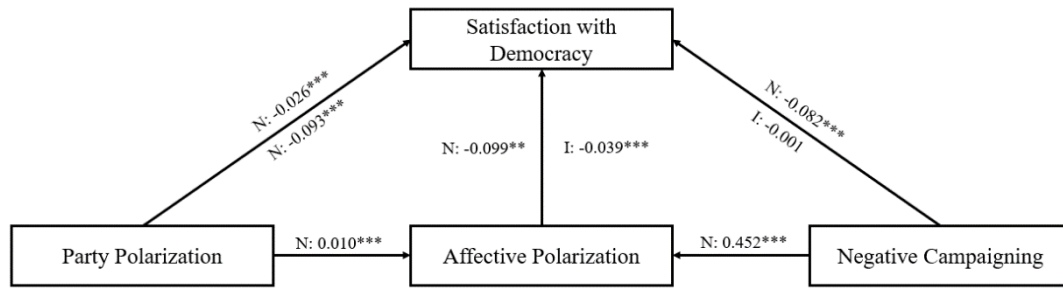


Figure 4. Main Paths of Structural Equation Model on Satisfaction with Democracy

To conclude this section of the analysis, I run a structural equation model (SEM) to measure the direct and indirect effect of explanatory variables on satisfaction with democracy. Figure 4 shows the effects of *Party Polarization* and *Negative Campaigning* on *Affective Polarization* and *Satisfaction with Democracy* and the effect of *Affective Polarization* on the dependent variable. The coefficients shown in Figure 4⁹ correspond to the following: the N coefficients correspond to the effect of the variable itself, while the I coefficients correspond to the interaction of the explanatory variables with the *Vote for Incumbent* variable. The results of the SEM analyses tend to validate the above findings and proposed hypotheses. During elections, both *Party Polarization* and *Negative Campaigning* increase the levels of affective polarization. Ideological distancing and constant attacks between political parties during election campaigns increase citizens' attachment to their parties and aversion to political rivals, which would confirm hypotheses H1 and H2. These strategies not only increase affective polarization, but also damage citizens' perceptions and evaluations of their own democracy. Thus, both have a negative and significant effect on satisfaction with democracy. Similarly, *Affective Polarization* negatively influences *Satisfaction with Democracy*, showing the greatest size effect of these three explanatory variables. What then happens with the winner-loser gap? in SEM analyses, the interactions replicate most of the results obtained earlier with one partial qualification. Affective and party polarization increase democratic dissatisfaction more among winners of elections than among losers, thus narrowing the gap between winners and losers. *Negative Campaigning*, however, does not have a significant effect in its interaction with *Vote for Incumbent*, even though this covariate shows a negative but small effect. Thus, these results support hypotheses H₃ and H₄, but does not corroborate H₅.

⁹ All these coefficients are from the SEM analysis presented in Table B1 in the Appendix. Similarly, Table B2 shows the same analyses with control variables, but due to the drastic reduction of the sample and the fact that the results almost remain the same, I preferred to show the previous SEM analysis coefficients

5. Concluding remarks

The behavior of political parties during elections determines the health of democracy. The electoral strategies of parties during elections permeate citizens and shape their perceptions of the political world, provoking a reassessment and reconceptualization of the meaning of democracy. This article focuses on examining party polarization and negative campaigning as triggers of affective polarization and, consequently, how these three explanatory variables erode satisfaction with democracy. The findings reveal that both party polarization and negative campaigning increase affective polarization. That is, the greater the ideological distance between political parties and the greater the demonization between politicians during the campaign, the greater the exacerbation of feelings of belonging to one political party and aversion toward other political competitors. Negative Campaigning does not have a fully robust effect, however, as it did not reach significance in the multilevel analyses, but it did in the structural equation models. If parties adopt strategies that increase affective polarization during campaigns, citizens can be expected to perceive their democratic opponents as "*enemies to be defeated*".

However, the main objective of this article is to test the mechanism by which confrontation between political elites during campaigns affects citizens' perceptions about the functioning of democracy and about other political parties to which they do not feel close or identified with. The more polarized winners of elections are, the less satisfaction they feel with democracy, because they harbor greater loathe and aversion against their political rivals. Although affective polarization also has a negative impact on losers' satisfaction with democracy, this phenomenon is more widespread among winners and, above all, much more pronounced among winners than among losers. This dissatisfaction would lead to a narrowing of the winner-loser gap. The results confirm that affective polarization reduces satisfaction with democracy, and this effect is stronger among winners than losers of elections. Party polarization and negative campaigning also do not have a robust negative effect in all analyses, but both variables do show a determinant negative effect on winners' satisfaction with democracy. Thus, these three explanatory variables narrow the winner-loser gap, so that the greater the party polarization and affective polarization and the greater the number of attacks between political parties, the smaller the gap in satisfaction with democracy between election winners and losers.

But why is this damaging tendency stronger among winners than losers? This article proposes two answers. First, the descriptive results show a higher degree of affective polarization among winners than among losers. Although the differences are not very large on average, this distance increases significantly in countries with high levels of affective polarization. Second, and most

likely, the dissatisfaction of winners is greater because winning an election does not mean the absolute defeat of political rivals, but rather that opponents may also gain positions within political institutions, i.e., seats in parliament. If you, as the winner, feel that the victory was not fulfilling, you are more likely to be dissatisfied with the way democracy works and to question the suitability of democracy. As some scholars have suggested (Haggard & Kaufman, 2021; Simonovits et al., 2022; Somer et al., 2021), polarization among citizens develops attitudes that undermine the principles of democracy, creating what is known as *democratic hypocrisy* among winners of elections. Nevertheless, the effect of elections does not remain stable over time, as both satisfaction with democracy and affective polarization decrease in intensity over the term. The former because winners find that their party does not fully address their demands and, also, satisfaction started to be more related to the incumbent's performance than to the electoral victory (Martini and Quaranta, 2019). The latter is because affective polarization must be constantly activated to be effective, and political parties have no incentive to do so during non-election periods. Consequently, citizens gradually moderate their feeling of like/dislike as electoral momentum wanes and affective polarization begins to fade (Hernández et al., 2021). The electoral hangover rebalances both phenomena, which are closely related to the salience of the elections. Future research could focus on the long-term damage done to democracy and its institutions by violating the principles of mutual tolerance during election periods. If parties consistently pursue such polarizing strategies during elections, this is likely to have a corrosive long-term effect on democracy as a political system and open the door to more authoritarian and antidemocratic choices by citizens.

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7. Appendix

A. THE WINNER-LOSER GAP WITH ABSTAINERS

Table A1. Determinants of Satisfaction with Democracy in EU countries

Predictors	Satisfaction with Democracy				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Vote for Incumbent		0.111*** (0.004)	0.118*** (0.004)	0.106*** (0.004)	0.076*** (0.008)
Affective Polarization		-0.050*** (0.004)		-0.051*** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.0007)
Affective Polz. * Incumbent		-0.009*** (0.004)		-0.014*** (0.005)	-0.016* (0.007)
Party Polarization			-0.063 (0.063)	-0.016 (0.039)	-0.186** (0.064)
Negative Campaigning			-0.059 (0.064)	-0.061 (0.071)	-0.210*** (0.055)
Party Polz. * Incumbent			-0.032*** (0.005)	-0.035*** (0.005)	-0.059*** (0.007)
Negative Camp. * Incumbent			-0.017*** (0.004)	-0.019*** (0.004)	-0.010 (0.007)
Constant	2.418*** (0.074)	2.456*** (0.063)	2.460*** (0.061)	2.467*** (0.073)	2.322*** (0.081)
Observations	32,753	29,849	29,849	29,849	11,727
Controls	X	X	X	X	✓
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
ICC	0.200	0.149	0.146	0.140	0.110

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

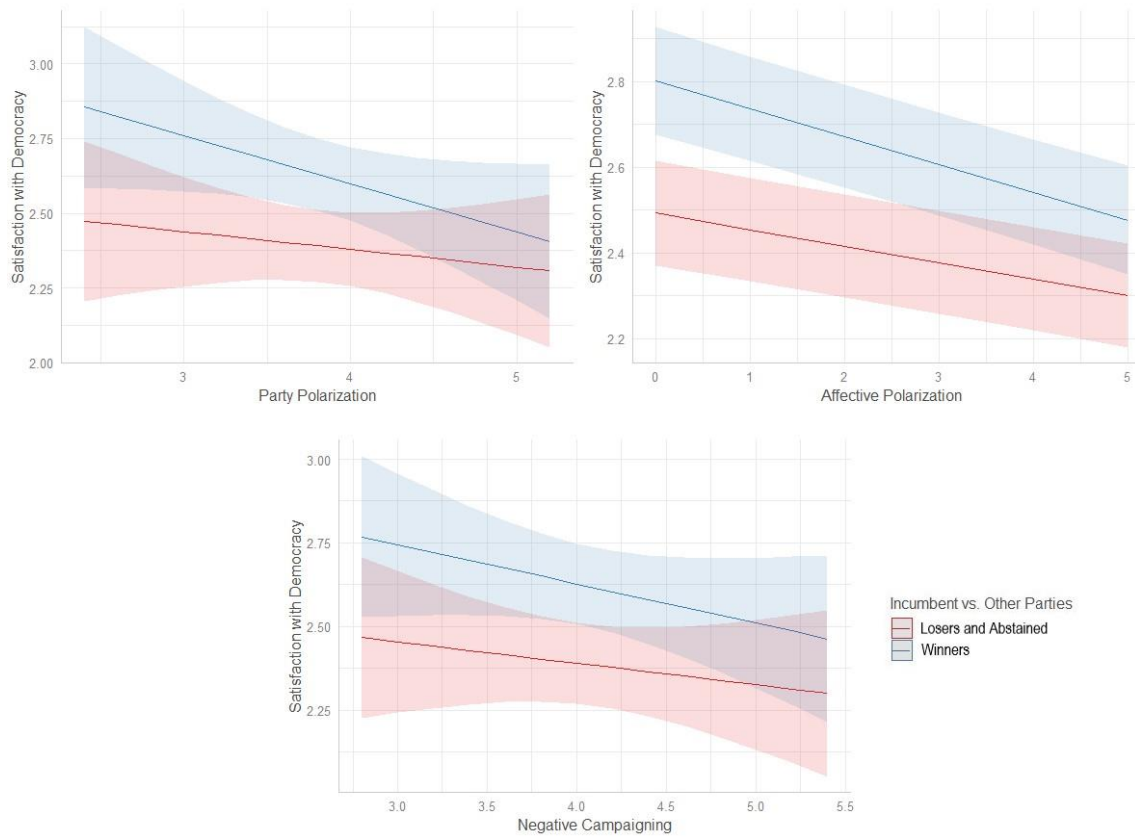


Figure A1. Average Marginal Effects. Each figure represents the interaction between Vote for the Incumbent and each explanatory variable

B. STRUCTURAL EQUATION MODEL ANALYSES

Table B1. Structural Equation Model

Predictors	Affective Polarization (1)	Satisfaction with Democracy (2)
Vote for Incumbent		0.249*** (0.029)
Affective Polarization		-0.099** (0.031)
Party Polarization	0.010*** (0.002)	-0.026*** (0.007)
Negative Campaigning	0.452*** (0.002)	-0.082*** (0.006)
Affective Polarization *Incumbent		-0.039*** (0.010)
Party Polarization * Incumbent		-0.093*** (0.015)
Neg. Campaigning * Incumbent		-0.001 (0.002)
Constant	0.044*** (0.007)	2.673*** (0.027)
Observations	23,266	23,266
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓
R Squared	0.085	0.035

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

Table B2. Structural Equation Model with controls

Predictors	Affective Polarization (1)	Satisfaction with Democracy (2)
Vote for Incumbent		0.265*** (0.042)
Affective Polarization		-0.060** (0.025)
Sex	0.001 (0.002)	0.013 (0.008)
Age	-0.002 (0.002)	-0.009 (0.008)
Education	0.003 (0.002)	0.068*** (0.008)
Ideology ²	0.000 (0.002)	-0.037*** (0.008)
Time after Elections	-0.123*** (0.009)	-0.256*** (0.033)
Party Polarization	0.015*** (0.004)	-0.222*** (0.014)
Negative Campaigning	0.447*** (0.004)	-0.139*** (0.022)
Satisfaction with Economy		0.152*** (0.008)
Political Efficacy		0.057*** (0.010)
GDP Growth		0.046*** (0.004)
Unemployment Rates		-0.078*** (0.007)
Effective N ^o of Parties		0.211*** (0.021)
Affective Polarization *Incumbent		-0.043*** (0.017)
Party Polarization * Incumbent		-0.110*** (0.017)
Neg. Campaigning * Incumbent		-0.004 (0.003)
Constant	0.086*** (0.029)	2.096*** (0.095)
Observations	8,302	8,302
Country-Year Effects	✓	✓
R Squared	0.884	0.211

Note: Standard errors in parentheses * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

CHAPTER 5

Conclusions

1. Theoretical Contributions and Policy Proposals

The central theoretical contribution of this dissertation is the conceptualization of democratic resilience and the classification of democracies based on the evolution of democratic satisfaction over the course of an exogenous shock. Recently, the concept of resilience in democratic contexts has been used in an increasing number of academic publications and reports. However, there is no common and coherent theoretical framework for all these publications (see Holloway and Manwaring, 2022). The closest and most recent attempt to give coherence and theoretical strength to this democratic attribute was made by the researchers of Varieties of Democracy and their publications in issue 5 of the journal *Democratization* (Boese et al., 2021; Luhrmann, 2021; Merkel and Luhrmann, 2021); yet their ideas differ from earlier and later conceptualizations of democratic resilience.

The conceptualization and empirical development of the concept of democratic resilience presented in this thesis has a twofold innovative objective. First, to contribute to a characteristic of democracies that is rather underdeveloped in the literature and necessary to understand the progress and stability of democracies in the face of exogenous shocks (Holloway and Manwaring, 2022). In contrast to this recent literature, this conceptualization of democratic resilience emphasizes primarily the aftermath of exogenous shocks that threaten the stability of democratic legitimacy. It is the shock itself, rather than its consequences, that affects democratic stability, and thus the theoretical and empirical interest must be in examining this phenomenon. Any subsequent consequences or lack of consequences depend on how democracies have adapted to or overcome this initial shock, which really endows democracies with the attribute of resilience. Second, classifying countries according to their evolution is an analytical tool that can be easily applied to any crisis context. As mentioned earlier, a damaged democracy does not directly imply democratic deconsolidation. Nevertheless, the irreversible damage caused by the shock is likely to foster long-term negative consequences such as the rise of far-right populist parties or the spread of antidemocratic attitudes among the population. I also want to emphasize the consistency of this classification by highlighting the analysis of the preventive countries. These preventive countries, which did not experience a significant decline in satisfaction with democracy during

the worst years of the Great Recession economic crisis, remain stable during these years through 2019, with no significant decline in democratic satisfaction during the years of economic recovery. In other words, the democratic resilience framework and its classification would be weakened if democratic legitimacy were to decline during the recovery phase, without having previously done so during the most critical moments caused by the shock. The theoretical and empirical consistency of the concept of democratic resilience and its classification has been largely proven during this dissertation.

Nevertheless, the concept of democratic resilience based on democratic legitimacy has some limitations in properly explaining the causal link between exogenous shocks and democratic deconsolidation. As argued above, the rise of the far right is a movement that runs through almost all countries in Europe and its electoral strength is reflected in both damaged and preventive democracies. This limitation may be related to the ecological fallacy. In preventive democracies, average satisfaction with democracy may have remained stable, while a significant percentage of the population has reduced its specific support for the democratic system and opted for challenger parties, including far-right parties. In other words, a stable average has masked the fact that the percentage of people most dissatisfied with democracy has increased in these democracies. Further research is needed to explore the relationship between these two phenomena and to understand why some countries have managed to overcome the economic crisis in terms of democratic legitimacy but experience a rise of far-right populism. Despite this limitation, this dissertation empirically identifies the individual and institutional determinants that have influenced the decline in personal satisfaction with democracy, overcoming the problems associated with this ecological fallacy.

Another central theoretical contribution of this dissertation is that the stability of democratic legitimacy, and thus the strength of the democratic system itself, depends more on the parties than on the citizens. Therefore, I opt for the thesis put forward by Levitsky and Ziblatt (2018) in their book *"How Democracies Die"* in which they pointed out the fundamental role of political parties for the proper functioning of democracy. According to the authors' argument, parties are the main gatekeepers of democracy and must act as catalysts and inhibitors of antidemocratic attitudes and parties. The empirical evidence in the second and third articles points precisely to the fact that electoral dynamics adopted by parties can undermine levels of satisfaction with democracy and the principle of mutual tolerance. For example, party polarization increases the affective polarization of citizens and disrupts citizens' perception of democratic rivals, who may view the other parties as "enemies to be defeated". Increasing citizen polarization contributes greatly to citizens' disrespect for other parties and their questioning of the adequacy of the

democratic system's functioning. While this does not automatically mean a democratic backsliding or regression, these dynamics foster the emergence and legitimacy of far-right parties that can ultimately undermine democratic principles.

On the contrary, the argumentation of this thesis contradicts Przeworski's ideas (2019), in which the author considers citizens as the gatekeepers of democracy. Przeworski (2019: 185-187) argues that citizens concerned about the state of democracy must act quickly to turn their backs on the government and its attempts to undermine democracy in order for the government to desist from these stealthy actions. This argument is asking for the impossible. Polarization is a phenomenon with a pronounced top-down character (Costa, 2021; Moral and Best, 2022) used by political parties to increase voter turnout and decrease the turnout of their opponents. Giving citizens the responsibility on citizens to be critical and not fall into these dynamics of "intolerance" is extremely complicated, especially considering the difficult personal situation they may find themselves in due to moments of crisis. Therefore, this thesis proposes that political parties should take the initiative to protect democracy by not setting in motion dynamics that undermine democratic principles in the medium and long term. The short-term electoral costs for political parties may be high, but this is the only way to ensure the stability of democracy as the "only game in town" and the non-appearance of actors who undermine democracy in stealthy ways.

It is always a challenge to apply the results of academic research to the creation of sustainable and viable public policy, but this research was conducted not only with the goal of making a theoretical contribution, but also to have an impact in the political realm. Building on the first article on democratic resilience, I demonstrated the importance of external political efficacy as a determinant of satisfaction with democracy. Moreover, the findings confirmed how right-wing populist parties have benefited from the lack of external political efficacy in many European countries (Geurkink et al., 2020; Hartevelde et al., 2021; Mohrenberg et al., 2021). This scenario shows the need for greater democratic quality and depth, that is, greater citizen involvement in the decision-making process and greater civic engagement of the lower classes (Fishman, 2016). In terms of formal participation, democracy cannot be legitimized exclusively by holding presidential and/or parliamentary elections every four or five years, and by calling for referendums only rarely and on a partisan basis. The evolution and legitimacy of European democracies could be greatly enhanced if citizens were offered more mechanisms for participation and policy-making that would improve citizens' perceptions of responsiveness. The goal of these participatory processes would have been twofold. First, citizen participation in decision making would prevent "democratic fatigue" caused by the constant power struggle

between political elites (Ganuza and Mendiharat, 2020; van Reybrouck, 2018). This dissertation has empirically demonstrated how the electoral dynamics of parties undermine citizens' evaluations of democratic performance while significantly increasing party and affective polarization. Second, and more thought-provoking, these democratic exercises could significantly reduce polarization in many political contexts. If public debate is not about party cues and identification, but about solving public problems (Dowlen, 2017), the ability of parties to articulate citizens' ideology is significantly reduced. Faced with a process of public decision-making and free participation, citizens would discuss and debate their different positions and converge their positions to reach the majorities necessary to pass and adopt new public policies. In these processes, citizens would not depend so much on the position of political parties to determine their own ideologies, but would make their decisions based on their own criteria and experiences. Parties would also not be able to engage in bloc politics and homogenize all debates simultaneously as this would require a highly organized structure with unaffordable costs.

Some countries are tentatively exploring different avenues of participation, such as participatory budgeting or e-participation in decision making. While these efforts are necessary, they are still quite sparse, and participation rates are quite low mainly because of economic and thus political inequality (Ganuza and Baiocchi, 2020; Krenjova and Raudla, 2013; Sintomer et al., 2008, 2016). Inequality of opportunity is one of the most important limitations and criticisms of radical or participatory democracy (Boucher, 2008; Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2008; Tønder and Simons, 2005). In contemporary democracies, there are many economic and gender barriers to citizens' political participation. The knowledge and experience required can be a barrier to participation in the medium and long term. For example, some citizens may drop out of these deliberative processes earlier due to the complexity of the issues being debated, about which they may know little or nothing. Ultimately, this complexity develops a sense of apathy toward these processes and the more frequent this sense, the lower the participation of these citizens will be. Because of this limitation, only those citizens who have more time to learn and inform themselves about the various public policies participate the most. In fact, this leads to political inequality, because it is the men and the higher social classes who have more time to inform themselves and therefore participate more (Gallego, 2007; Ekman and Amnà, 2012; Ferrín et al., 2020; Fraile and Gomez, 2017; Gallego, 2007; Grasso and Giugni, 2016; Greenstein, 2017). Lupu and Tirado (2022) argue that it is precisely this participation gap between social classes that can lead to unequal policy responsiveness, with political elites more responsive to the demands of higher social classes. Moreover, political elites do not seem very eager to lose power by allowing greater political participation, which exacerbates democratic dissatisfaction among citizens (Fishman and Tirado

Castro, 2021). Despite the limitations of these processes, the "path is made by walking" and citizens must demand to the authorities to promote this type of participatory practices while increasing political education and conciliation to ensure equal participation of all citizens. The more deliberative procedures are held in a democracy, the greater the democratic experience of citizens and the greater the perception of responsiveness.

2. Future research

One of the major limitations of this dissertation is the reliance on secondary databases, which, despite their enormous usefulness, did not fully meet the needs raised in the various researches. Thanks to the research and data collection efforts of various institutions, social science researchers are now able to conduct in-depth analyses of citizens' opinions, attitudes, beliefs, and trends in democratic societies. However, there is still a long way to go in this regard, especially in terms of methodology. In this section, I would like to briefly present various ramifications arising from this thesis, with special attention to periodic data collection and experimentation.

The main point I would like to make is, first, the need for panel data on the evolution of citizens' opinions and attitudes toward democracy in times of crisis. At the European level, there are very few databases that regularly collect data on the same sample. These data could be very useful to observe and analyze trends in citizens' opinions, to correctly isolate possible variation mechanisms, and to rigorously and scientifically support the conclusions drawn from the research. For example, with the help of these data, we could isolate the reasons why satisfaction with democracy has decreased in some countries or among some citizens, thus identifying causal mechanisms and not only relationships between variables. Regarding the lack of data, I would also like to emphasize that more specific data on affective polarization are needed in the European case. Currently, there are few data on affective polarization in the European multiparty context, which severely limits research on this novel phenomenon. Therefore, it is necessary to obtain data on how citizens evaluate their compatriots who vote for other political parties, beyond feelings of sympathy or dislike, and what are the main determinants on which this polarization/division of citizens is based.

Second, the democratic resilience framework presented in the first article is a fundamental contribution to analyzing and understanding the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic for Western democracies. During the Covid-19 pandemic, citizens had to make many personal sacrifices and many civil liberties were curtailed due to the dangerous nature of the virus. Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic can be treated as an exogenous phenomenon, and quasi-experimental methods may have a place in this type of research. Analyzing other crisis periods

such as this one would add more theoretical and empirical strength to the concept and classification of democratic resilience, making it appropriate to study this pandemic framework and its consequences at the level of democratic legitimacy. In addition, it would also be interesting to analyze whether the paradigm shift in satisfaction with democracy after the Great Recession had an antecedent effect on the crisis triggered by Covid-19. As pointed out in the first article, some European democracies suffered damage in terms of democratic satisfaction after the Great Recession, while others managed to recover just before this phenomenon. The research question would then be whether the damaged democracies suffered more in terms of satisfaction with democracy than the democracies that were resilient during this period.

Third, polarization was one of the central phenomena under which this thesis was articulated and is currently gaining prominence in both academia and the media. As previously shown, polarization in its double dimension, party and affective, has a negative impact on satisfaction with democracy, and the greater this phenomenon is in a society, the lower the satisfaction with democracy, especially among those who win elections. Apart from possible studies focusing on the temporal impact of polarization on democratic satisfaction after elections, I consider that there is another even more interesting point to be developed in future research: asymmetric polarization. This concept is relatively underdeveloped in the literature (see Hacker and Pierson, 2015) and is essentially necessary to understand who causes polarization in a democracy. Asymmetric polarization means that not all parties distance themselves ideologically at the same time; what's more, it is possible that only one of the main parties in the country's political scene is the one that distances itself from the others. This dynamic, in which parties asymmetrically distance themselves from their political rivals, causes their own voters to shift ideologically as well and also generate polarization (Moral and Best, 2022). In short, it is important to know how and why parties choose to polarize political debate, because the consequences of these actions for democratic legitimacy have become clear in this research.

Finally, the recent research on antidemocratic attitudes and affective polarization proposed by Svobik (2019) and Simonovits et al. (2022) requires further empirical support to deepen the theories proposed by these authors. The strategy of identifying this phenomenon based on experiments is the most successful method to address this issue. Therefore, new experiments are needed to understand why citizens show this democratic hypocrisy. It is not only interesting to know how it is articulated, but it is also important to know what are the main determinants of these anti-democratic attitudes that are latent in the responses of citizens. Democracy is in danger if citizens are willing to use anti-democratic measures against their political opponents, as this

would legitimize authoritarian measures to persecute and attack minorities and ideologically opposing groups.

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Other research merits

During my doctoral studies, I conducted further research and published papers in academic journals, books, and academic conferences. In terms of publications, I published the research article "Unequal Policy Responsiveness in Spain", which appeared in the journal *Socio-Economic Review* in 2022, together with Dr. Noam Lupu (Vanderbilt University, USA). I also co-authored a book chapter titled "How Democracy Works: Divergent Perspectives of Representatives and Citizens" in 2021 with Dr. Robert M. Fishman in the book *Politicians in Hard Times: Spanish and South European MPs Facing Citizens after the Great Recession* edited by Dr. Xavier Coller and Dr. Leonardo Sánchez-Ferrer and published by Routledge. I have also participated in research seminars such as the Political Behaviour Colloquium of the European University Institute (EUI) and in four academic congresses - three international (First Spanish ESS Congress (2018), 26th International Conference of Europeanists (2019) and 26th IPSA World Congress of Political Science) and one national (XIV AECPA Congreso en Ciencias Políticas). Finally, I would like to highlight my work as a research assistant in the creation of the Global Legislator Dataset under the direction of Dr. Miriam Golden (European University Institute, Italy). This database, which collects socio-demographic information on all parliamentarians in the world in 2015-2016, has not yet been published for open access.