Elected Losers. How Party Performance Affects Legislators' Satisfaction with Democracy.*

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Does party performance in elections shape elected politicians' satisfaction with democracy? While prior work shows that losing candidates become less satisfied with democratic institutions, we know little about how *winning* politicians respond when their party loses power. This article argues that elected officials grow more dissatisfied with democracy when their party loses influence over the executive or legislative branch. Using longitudinal data from 8,141 Latin American legislators, we show that both opposition status and seat losses reduce satisfaction with democracy and trust in elections. These effects persist even in consolidated democracies. Interviews with opposition legislators suggest that this dissatisfaction is often channeled through frustrations with internal party dynamics following electoral setbacks. The findings carry important implications for democratic stability: unlike losing candidates, dissatisfied elected losers retain formal decision-making power and, as visible electoral winners, may also amplify broader public discontent with democracy.

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Introduction

A properly functioning democracy requires that those who lose elections remain supportive of the system. From Dahl's maximalist conception of polyarchy (2006) to Schumpeter's minimalist view of democracy (2010), democratic stability rests on losers' willingness not only to accept election results but also to sustain support for democratic institutions over time. Yet, a large literature shows that supporters of losing candidates perceive democracy as less fair and less legitimate, a phenomenon known as the winner-loser gap (Anderson et al., 2005; Blais and Gélineau, 2007; Han and Chang, 2016; Toshkov and Mazepus, 2022; Bækgaard, 2023). More recent work shows that these negative effects of losing elections extend beyond voters to political candidates who unsuccessfully compete for office (Senninger et al., 2024). Thus, while loser's consent is crucial for democracy's stability, elections can paradoxically undermine losers' support for democratic institutions.

In this article, we extend theories from the winner-loser gap literature to an even more consequential group of political elites: elected legislators. We argue that legislators evaluate elections not only in terms of their personal success but also through their party's performance. Losses in legislative seats, diminished opportunities for policy making, and weak post-election party alliances can generate dissatisfaction with both electoral outcomes and the democratic process itself. As a consequence, even legislators who win office may turn on democracy when their party performs poorly, representing a potential source of democratic discontent from within governing institutions. We refer to these politicians as *elected losers.*

Elected losers pose distinct risks for democratic stability compared to unelected candidates. While losing candidates typically lack the institutional capacity to undermine democratic processes, elected representatives retain substantial formal authority. At the same time, elites' allegations of fraudulent elections is increasingly common (Schnaudt, 2023) and such claims are known to erode citizens' support for democracy (e.g. Clayton

et al. 2021; Kapidžić and Stojarová 2021). Disaffected legislators can channel their frustration into institutional obstruction, legislative non-cooperation, or support for populist reforms that weaken democratic norms. Moreover, elected representatives, especially at the national level, receive disproportionate media exposure (Tresch, 2009; Yildirim et al., 2023), increasing the likelihood that their dissatisfaction with democracy reaches a broader audience. Among citizens, lower satisfaction with democracy has been linked to reduced democratic support, greater acceptance of autocratic measures (Mauk, 2020), higher protest participation (Anderson and Mendes, 2005), and lower voter turnout (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007). Whether similar dynamics operate among political elites remains an open and consequential question. If elected officials' commitment to democracy waxes and wanes with their party's electoral fortunes, the implications for democratic stability may be substantial.

These risks are especially pronounced in presidential systems, where opposition status remains fixed for the duration of the executive term. Prolonged exclusion from executive power limits minority parties' capacity to influence policy and may intensify frustration among their legislators. We therefore focus on Latin America as a critical case. The region's widespread adoption of presidentialism, combined with its history of democratic instability, creates conditions under which the effects of electorally frustrated legislators are likely to be particularly pervasive.

Despite its importance, scholars have paid little attention to democratic dissatisfaction among elected legislators. Extensive research examines the winner-loser gap among voters (Dahlberg and Linde, 2016a; Han and Chang, 2016; Toshkov and Mazepus, 2022; Bækgaard, 2023) and, more recently, among electoral candidates (Senninger et al., 2024), but little is known about whether these dynamics extend to elected legislators. Similarly, while research on elite behavior in opposition and minority parties has provided insights into their legislative strategies (Hix and Noury, 2015; Giannetti and Pedrazzani, 2016; Tuttnauer and Wegmann, 2022; Zucco, 2009), including in Latin America (Ribeiro

and Fabre, 2019; Zucco, 2009; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2020), it has yet to explore how losing-related frustrations affect legislators' satisfaction with democracy itself. We address this gap by asking whether legislators who win their seats but whose parties lose power -— either by entering opposition or by losing legislative seats —- become less satisfied with democracy.

Our central theoretical expectation is that legislators whose parties lose influence report lower satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral processes. We test this expectation using using longitudinal data from the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA-USAL) survey, comprising 8,141 observations of legislators. We estimate longitudinal models at the party level, exploiting within-party variation in attitudes as parties move in and out of government or experience changes in seat share. We find that both opposition status and seat share losses substantially reduce legislators' satisfaction with democracy and trust in elections. On average, opposition legislators are 14 percentage points less satisfied with democracy and 15 percentage points less trustful of elections, while a 1% loss in seat share corresponds to a 0.3 percentage point reduction in both outcomes. We replicate these findings using individual-level variation among legislators observed across waves after constructing identifiers from the survey's observable characteristics ($N = 1,535$). Further, we test and find no evidence that the effects are confined to weak or unconsolidated democracies.

The findings demonstrate clear differences between legislators in the opposition and those in government, as well as between parties that obtained fewer seats. By relying on within-party and within-individual variation, we ensure that these differences are driven by election outcomes rather than selection into losing parties. The article makes two key contributions. First, it develops a theory of democratic support among *elected losers*, extending theories of the winner-loser gap beyond losing candidates and their supporters, while linking them to research on opposition or minority-party behavior (Ballard and Hassell, 2021; Zucco, 2009; Tuttnauer and Wegmann, 2022). Second, it provides robust

empirical evidence on how electoral losses shape democratic attitudes among political elites. Together, these contributions identify a novel risk to democratic stability originating not from electoral defeat alone, but from elected officials who retain both the incentive and institutional capacity to act on their dissatisfaction.

The Winner-Loser Gap and Elected Legislators

A cornerstone of the functioning of democracy is the notion of loser's consent: that those who lose elections accept the outcome as legitimate and continue to trust the process (Anderson et al., 2005). Yet, extant empirical work has found a 'winner-loser gap' in satisfaction with democracy between those whose preferred candidate(s) won and those whose candidate(s) lost (Anderson et al., 2005). Focusing on citizens who support a losing candidate, the evidence is consistent and strong across most democratic contexts (Dahlberg and Linde, 2016b; Han and Chang, 2016; Blais and Gélineau, 2007), including Latin America (Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2020). Furthermore, the gap appears to be long-lasting (Hansen et al., 2019), and while institutional frameworks (Dahlberg and Linde, 2016b) and economic conditions (Han and Chang, 2016) can mitigate or exacerbate it, the gap remains a persistent feature of many democracies.

This phenomenon has significant normative implications. A large or persistent winner-loser gap among voters may alienate citizens from participating in elections and diminish their support for democracy. Research shows that declining satisfaction with democracy erodes trust in democratic institutions and increases support for autocratic measures (Mauk, 2020). Importantly, these attitudinal changes can influence political behavior. Drawing on evidence from 17 democracies, Anderson et al. (2005) argues that voters whose preferred parties are in the minority are more likely to engage in protests, particularly in newer democracies. Similarly, higher levels of frustration with democratic outcomes have been linked to lower electoral turnout (Grönlund and Setälä, 2007). Thus,

the winner-loser gap among citizens is a worrying sign for their commitment to democracy.

Recent evidence suggests that the winner-loser gap even extends to democratic elites. In a recent article, Senninger et al. (2024) find candidates to become less satisfied with democracy when they fail to get elected in Denmark, a strong democracy. This aligns with evidence that elites often blame uninformed voters or external factors for their defeats (Kingdon, 1967). As Senninger et al. (2024) note, the existence of the winner-loser gap among elites is particularly concerning given their power in shaping citizens' political views. Moreover, losing candidates may enter power at a later time where their dissatisfaction with democracy can influence the way they govern.

In this article, we argue there is another way for political elites to lose an election that has been largely overlooked: via the performance of their parties. Despite personally winning office, many elected representative belong to parties that experience a loss in terms of seats and/or control of the executive branch. We refer to such politicians as *elected losers*. Little is known about how such elected losers perceive the democratic process that secured their individual victories but led to their party's overall loss. While existing research has not examined this question directly, there is evidence consistent with this dynamic. For instance, legislators' behavior changes when their parties are in the parliamentary minority (Patterson, 1972; Ballard and Hassell, 2021) and opposition legislators often adopt different political strategies than those in government (Zucco, 2009; Zucco and Lauderdale, 2011; Tuttnauer and Wegmann, 2022). However, much of this research has focused on differences in institutional setups, leaving us with limited understanding of whether democratic outcomes that create elected losers influence their perceptions of democracy.

The prospect of democratically dissatisfied elected losers is a serious concern. Contrary to politicians that lose their seats as studied by Senninger et al. (2024), elected losers continue to wield formal power. Moreover, the centrality of the legislative bodies in

democratic systems implies stronger public authority and greater media exposure for politicians that are in versus out of office (Yildirim et al., 2023; Tresch, 2009; Dinas et al., 2015). Compared to ordinary losing candidates, elected losers thus have more power to spread democratic dissatisfaction to both public opinion and the democratic institutions that elected them. Elected elites' claims about the legitimacy of electoral processes are known to shape citizens' support for democracy (Clayton et al., 2021; Kapidžić and Stojarová, 2021; Berlinski et al., 2023). In the next section, we propose three key mechanisms that can explain elected losers' waning support for democracy.

Why elected losers turn against democracy

A political candidate's electoral success is typically defined by them winning office. Yet, what it means to win office depends in large part on their party's success. For winning candidates whose parties lose elections – either by losing government or obtaining fewer seats – the outcome may trigger a similar negative reaction as a personal election loss, mirroring psychological mechanisms in the broader literature on the winner-loser gap (Senninger et al., 2024; Bækgaard, 2023). This is in part due to the mental discomfort associated with being on the losing side, as well as the fact that winning candidates' influence in office depends on the power of their party. In this section, we identify two key ways in which a party can lose power that may undermine democratic support among its elected members and highlight how the effect can be amplified in presidential democracies. We subsequently lay out three psychological mechanisms that could explain this response.

The first significant way for parties to lose power is by losing control of the executive branch. Regardless of the political system, governments play a central role in the policy-making process. Consequently, a party's ability to fulfill its promises and implement its program is significantly weakened when it loses the executive branch. The loss of executive power is especially critical in presidential systems. Under presidentialism,

opposition status is fixed throughout the mandate period, as executive power typically cannot change hands mid-term, even if public support for the governing party diminishes, unlike in parliamentary systems. Moreover, the president typically wields even more executive decision-making power than parliamentary governments.

The second major way for parties to lose power is by declining representation in the legislative body, which largely determines a party's capacity to influence debates, set the political agenda, and shape policy outcomes. To effectively deliver results to constituents, a party typically benefits from holding a substantial share of seats. Under presidentialism, even if a party is in government, congressional veto power can severely undermine its ability to fulfill programmatic and electoral promises. Minority governments are especially prominent in presidential systems where they tend to struggle with the policy-making process (Negretto, 2006; Mainwaring, 1993).

When a party loses executive power or legislative representation, this can impact its candidates' democratic attitudes in several ways. The existing literature on the winner-loser gap suggests three mechanisms that can be extended to this setting: an affective, a utilitarian and a cognitive (paraphrasing Bækgaard, 2023). First, the "affective disappointment" (Bækgaard, 2023, p. 5) experienced by losers —akin to the frustration of seeing one's team lose to its rival— may be as or even more pronounced among members of a losing party. Legislators are almost by definition strong party identifiers, exacerbating the mental discomfort of losing (Senninger et al., 2024). The magnitude of affective disappointment is partially anchored to prior expectations about the party's performance, with unexpected and close losses theorized to have the strongest effect (Bækgaard, 2023).

Second, the utilitarian mechanism emphasizes the instrumental benefits that winning candidates derive from the power of their party. Legislators are partially driven by policy goals and these are less likely to be reached when their party loses influence. This may not only be a matter of principled disagreement but also genuine beliefs that rival party policies will worsen societal conditions (Singh et al., 2012; Erikson et al., 2000). This effect

is again likely to be more pronounced for legislators than voters, as they tend to be more ideologically committed to their party's policy platform (Broockman, 2016). In addition, on a personal level, party power often comes with certain temporary benefits for the individual legislator especially when it comes to control of the executive (Zucco, 2009; Zucco and Lauderdale, 2011; Tuttnauer and Wegmann, 2022).

Finally, party loss may trigger cognitive dissonance. Legislators typically believe that their party's platform and candidates are superior to the competition across various attributes. When their party or candidates under-perform, it may create a cognitive conflict with these beliefs. To resolve the conflict, legislators may, like partisan citizens, blame the election process (Anderson et al., 2005; Holmberg, 1999).

Importantly, these mechanisms imply different temporal dynamics. While certain emotional or psychological responses to the electoral outcome itself may fade quickly, others may persist for the duration of the term, and these are all else equal more concerning. In this sense, the utilitarian mechanism is especially relevant as it predicts sustained – or even intensifying – frustration. As legislators face repeated obstacles to implementing their agenda throughout the legislative session – whether through executive vetoes, coalition bargaining, or simple gridlock – the practical consequences of their party's weakened position become increasingly salient, deepening their frustration with the political system.

Finally, some of these mechanisms may naturally operate the opposite way: when a party increases its influence, members may experience positive affect from the result and lasting satisfaction from its instrumental benefits. We therefore expect winning to produce some positive effects alongside the negative effects of losing, though we anticipate the latter to be stronger. If confirmed, such symmetry would reveal legislators' satisfaction with democracy to be to some extent *contingent*: waxing and waning with their own political influence rather than reflecting stable commitments to democratic principles. Even if aggregate satisfaction remains stable over time, as winners' gains offset

losers' declines, the underlying cyclicality in attitudes is troubling. Democracy requires that political elites maintain commitment to democratic institutions precisely when they are out of power and find the system frustrating, i.e. the loser's consent. Election cycles may thus produce a rotating cast of disaffected elites whose democratic commitments weaken at precisely the moment their acceptance of defeat matters most — a risk amplified among those who, for whatever reason, have endured successive disappointing electoral outcomes.

This leads us to our main expectations: a party's loss of i) executive power and ii) parliamentary seats should reduce satisfaction with democracy and trust in the electoral processes among its elected members. We further outline three secondary expectations that directly engage our theory. First, the effects of winning and losing should be somewhat symmetrical. Second, dissatisfaction should emerge independently of measurable institutional unfairness, such as disproportionate seat allocation. If frustration only appears when there are reasons to consider outcomes unfair, that would not reflect the psychological mechanisms we theorize here. Finally, these dynamics should operate across diverse democratic contexts, not only in unconsolidated democracies. While weaker democratic institutions may generally inspire less confidence in electoral processes, the mechanisms we propose —affective disappointment, utilitarian benefits, and cognitive dissonance— are rooted in universal features of partisan psychology and should manifest even in well-established democracies.

Research Design

To test our expectations, we primarily rely on data from the Parliamentary Elites of Latin America Observatory at the University of Salamanca (PELA-USAL, Alcántara 2024). The dataset comprises a series of survey waves conducted between elections with national legislators across the region. We use all available waves in the dataset, encompassing re-

sponses from representatives serving in legislative periods between 1993 and 2023. The target population is all national legislators in each country and the sample coverage is high with survey response rates between 60% and 100%. This sums to a total of 8,141 observations across 99 country-wave surveys. The data is anonymized and no individual IDs are included, limiting the possibility of individual level analyses. However, for our purposes, the dataset has a panel structure at the party-wave level, allowing us to leverage within-party changes. Further, we use fuzzy matching to reconstruct a subset of legislator ID's ($N = 1,535$) to estimate within-legislator models on a smaller sample. Appendix A1 provides additional details on the country waves, sample sizes, and response rates.

There are several advantages of testing our theory in the Latin American context. On the one hand, the region possesses characteristics that make it a likely case for observing this phenomenon. Specifically, presidential systems are widely adopted across Latin America. The fixed nature of presidential terms and the significant concentration of executive power inherent in these systems exacerbate the challenges faced by opposition parties, providing a context where the effects of elected losers are easier to identify. At the same time, Latin America offers an opportunity to test the boundaries of our theory, as the region displays substantial variance in levels of democratic consolidation. From highly consolidated democracies such as Uruguay and Costa Rica to democracies that continue to face significant challenges, like Bolivia and Ecuador, this diversity allows us to examine whether the relationship between electoral results and satisfaction with democracy holds across varying institutional and political contexts. This helps gauging the generalizability of our findings as well as understanding how contextual factors influence the observed dynamics.

The PELA-USAL dataset provides a unique opportunity to examine changes in legislators' democratic support over time. We analyze two outcomes. The first is satisfaction with democracy, measured on a 4-point scale ranging from 1 ("very unsatisfied") to 4

("very satisfied"). The second outcome is trust in the most recent electoral process, measured on a 5-point scale where 1 indicates minimum trust and 5 represents maximum trust. To facilitate comparisons between these measures, both outcomes are scaled to a 10-point scale with higher values representing higher satisfaction and trust. Since satisfaction with democracy is not included in the first four survey waves, models using this outcome are limited to approximately 4,500 observations. Importantly, all surveys are fielded between one and two years after a given election. The fact that we register politicians' satisfaction with democracy so long after the relevant election result offers a harder but also more relevant test of our theory. If there is any effect of losing on satisfaction with democracy using these data, it will reflect more enduring changes in attitudes rather than immediate post-election reactions to losing.

Our key expectation is that lawmakers become less satisfied with and less trusting in democratic institutions when their party loses power. This power comes in two forms: control of the executive – in this case the presidency – and legislative representation. We measure the former as the respondent's party's status as a government or opposition party. We manually coded the government and opposition status of parties using publicly available election results. The second measure of party power is representation in the legislative body, measured as the party's seat share in its respective congress, ranging from 0 to 1. As PELA-USAL does not include this party-level information, we merged it with data from the Database of Political Institutions (Scartascini et al., 2021), which records the electoral results for the six largest parties per country-wave in our data. This restricts our observations to 4,926 and 2,620 for each of our outcomes, respectively. Although it would be preferable to include all parties, we expect this to have a modest impact on results. Changes in which parties make it to the top six are rare, limiting sample selection effects. While it necessarily limits the generalizability of the effects of seat share changes to the largest parties, these are also the parties that transition in and out of power most often, and which would consequently account for most of the variation in our independent vari-

ables either way. We therefore believe using this variable gets us reasonably close to the true effects of seat share.

Furthermore, we complement our data with data from two additional sources. First, since democratic consolidation is important for theorizing how these effects manifest in reality, we rely on the various democratic indices included in the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al., 2024). Second, we conduct a small set of interviews with legislators from a highly consolidated democracy in the region to further contextualize our analyses and results.

A key methodological challenge for testing our expectations is the endogeneity of party power. The kinds of parties that are in government and opposition, or with large or small seat shares, are different in ways that are likely to correlate with their members' democratic support. Any simple comparison between parties that are more and less powerful is therefore bound to be biased. In addition, our theoretical expectations are explicitly about what happens when parties lose or gain power, that is, within-party changes.

To address both of these issues, we exploit the panel structure of the data at the party level. We do this through two main model specifications. The first is a two-way fixed effects (TWFE) model with fixed effects at the party and country-year level. Including party fixed effects holds constant all time invariant party-level characteristics and partials out country-specific trends that are homogenous across parties. It thus compares levels of democratic support within parties when they are in and out of government and at different levels of seat share. As some sources of confounding are plausibly time-varying, including compositional changes in party membership, we further control for the ideology, gender and educational composition of party members. To better account for unmeasured time-varying characteristics, we also estimate lagged dependent variable (LDV) models that replace fixed effects with a one-wave lag of the dependent variable. This further mitigates potential dynamic endogeneity, as it holds constant unobserved confounders that shaped outcomes in the prior survey period. Under common circumstances, TWFE and

LDV models can be assumed to bracket the true result (Ding and Li, 2019). Further, for robustness, we estimate the relationship on a subset of legislators for whom we can construct panelist identifiers based on fuzzy matches on stable characteristics. This allows us to rule out any changes in party composition driving results. Finally, since our 'treatment' occurs at the level of parties rather than individual members, and at the level of elections between waves, we consistently cluster standard errors at the party-wave level (Abadie et al., 2023).

We further conduct a series of auxiliary analyses to probe our main results and examine alternative explanations. First, because variation in party power stems from parties both winning and losing elections, we test to what extent results are driven by losses vs gains in power. Second, it is worth considering whether elected losers may find the process unfair for good reasons. More concretely, elected losers' weakened support for democracy may be rooted in legitimate concerns over disproportionate seat allocation. We therefore test whether such gaps between vote share and seat share can explain the main effects. Finally to determine whether the results are confined to countries with unstable democracies, we investigate heterogeneous effects across varying levels of democratic consolidation.

Results

We now turn to the results. Before presenting model estimates, we characterize descriptively how the winner-loser gap varies over time and across countries in our data.

Descriptive results

We begin by examining the descriptive relationship between opposition party membership and levels of democratic satisfaction and trust. The top panel of Figure 1 illustrates the trends over time for legislators in government coalitions compared to those in op-

position. As shown, both overall levels and gaps between the two groups have been a relatively persistent feature of Latin American democracies in the past 20-30 years. This is striking, as one might expect both gradually increasing levels as well as a narrowing gap given the accumulating democratic experience in a region of predominantly newer democracies (Cho, 2014; Mattes and Bratton, 2007). These findings suggest, tentatively, that winner-loser gaps cannot be attributed solely to a lack of democratic experience.

Moreover, the gaps are a consistent feature across countries. The bottom panel of Figure 1 illustrates the mean differences between opposition and government parties for all included countries. As shown, most of the included countries display significant and very substantial winner-loser gaps in trust in and satisfaction with the democratic process. Still, these gaps vary substantially between countries, mostly ranging from around 1 to 4 points on the 10-point scale. These results suggest preliminarily that winner-loser gaps are a consistent feature in the region, marking even successful democracies. However, these descriptive results cannot tell us whether the gaps we see are explained by winning and losing. For instance, politicians who select into opposition parties may be less committed to democracy than other politicians. Alternatively, politicians that are less committed to democracy may be more unpopular, keeping them in opposition. To examine whether these attitudes are truly fluctuating in response to winning and losing, we now turn to a longitudinal analysis.

The effect of party performance on democratic satisfaction

Next, we estimate how legislators respond to changes in their party's power to test the first part of our main expectation: that legislators become less trusting in and satisfied with democracy when their party is in opposition than when it is in government. Figure 2 presents estimates from the TWFE and LDV models. As shown on the left panel, legislators' express markedly lower satisfaction with their country's democratic system when they are in opposition than when they are in government. The difference is very

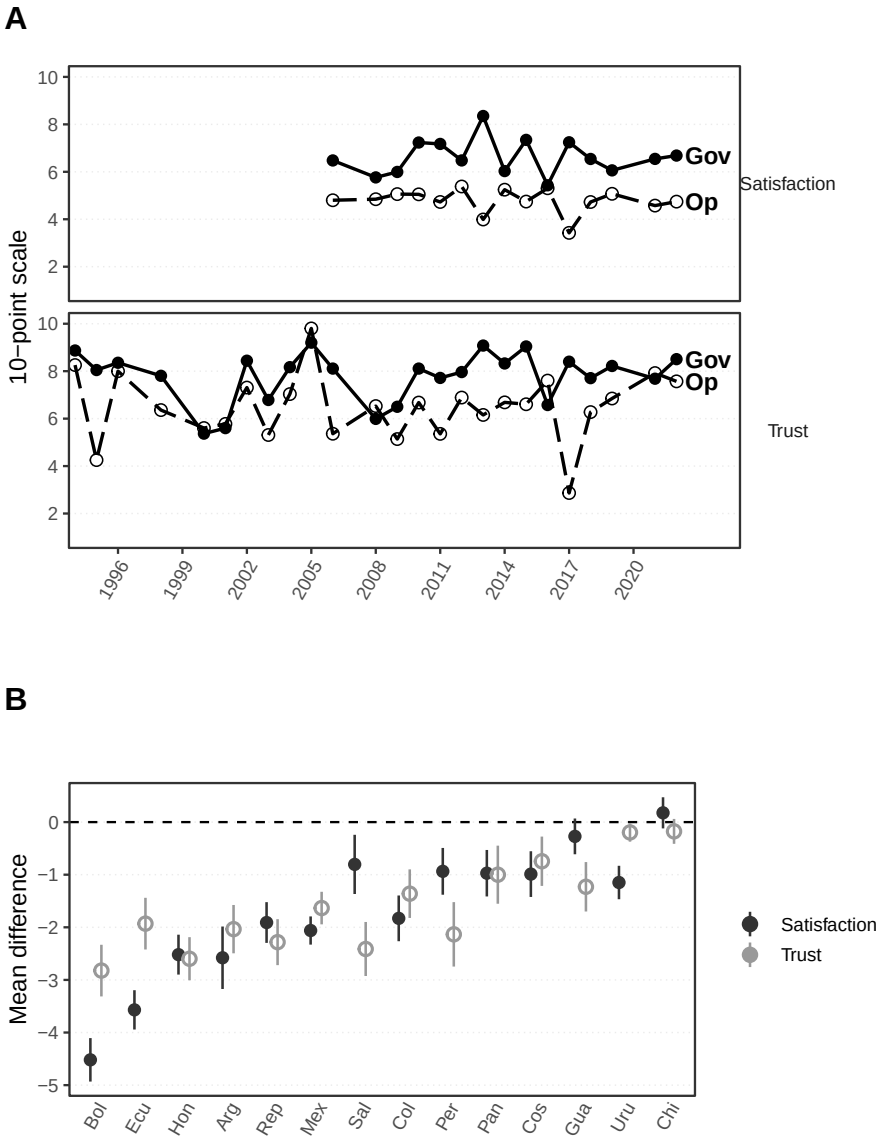

Figure 1: Differences in satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral institutions between opposition and government legislators (both measured on 10-point scales). Panel A shows average trends between government and opposition legislators over time across the region. Panel B shows the average gaps over time within each country.

substantial with legislators being, on average, 14-17 percentage points less satisfied with democracy when their parties are in opposition, ($p < .01$). Similarly, legislators' trust in the election process is on average around 15 percentage points lower when they are in opposition ($p < .01$). These estimates are robust across model specifications, and the inclusion of time-varying party-level controls including ideology, educational composition and gender composition makes virtually no difference to the estimates. In sum, the results are robust to different assumptions about the structure of unobserved confounding.

The right panel of Figure 2 shows results for seat share as the independent variable instead of opposition status. These models test our expectation that a decline in a party's seat share predicts a decline in satisfaction with and trust in democracy among its elected members, controlling for opposition status. The results are consistent with our expectation for both outcomes. Specifically, a 1 percentage point decrease in party seat share is associated with a 0.3 percentage point decrease in both satisfaction with democracy and trust in elections ($p < .01$), both measured on a 10-point scale. As these models control for government/opposition status, they suggest that seat share matters independently from executive power. Yet, the effect appears somewhat smaller than for opposition status. The average absolute election-on-election change in seat share in the dataset is around 9.2 percentage points, suggesting that a typical seat-share related change in satisfaction with democracy and trust in elections is around 2.8 points.

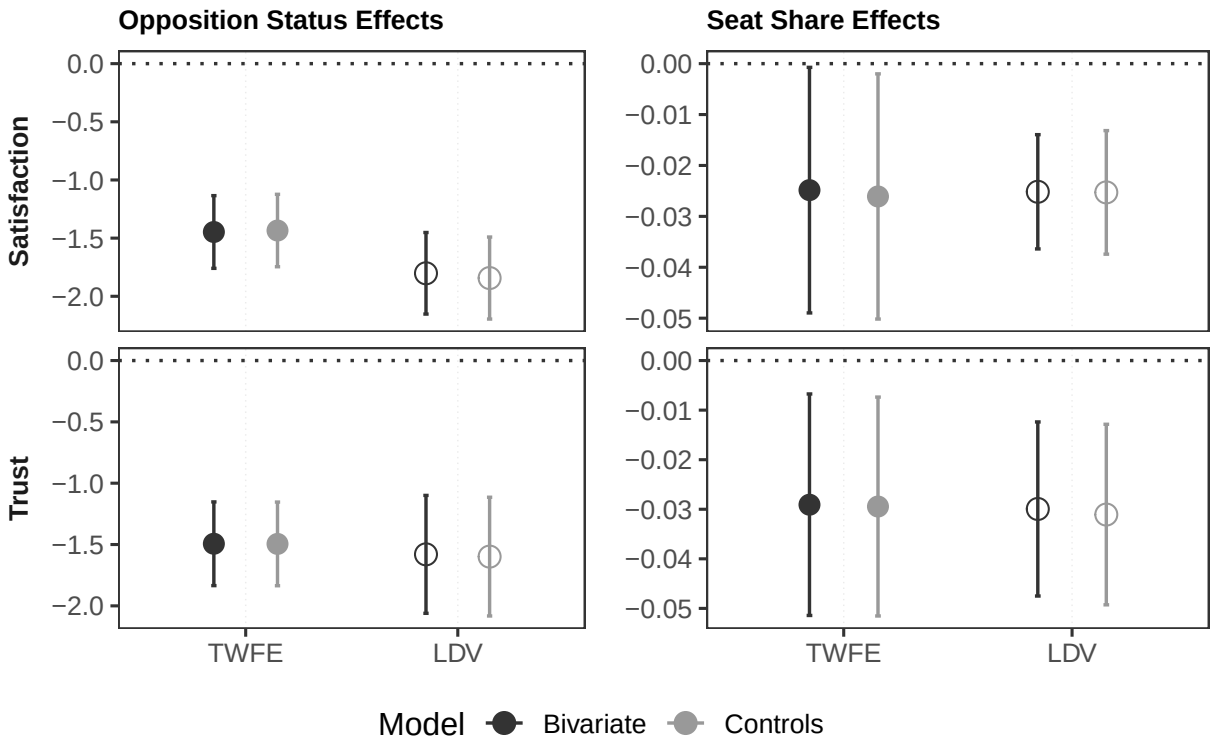

Figure 2: The effect of opposition status/seat share on satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral institutions. Estimates from two-way fixed effects (TWFE) and lagged dependent variable (LDV) models with and without controls with party-level clustered errors. The left panel shows coefficients on party-level opposition status, and the right panel shows coefficients on party-level seat share (inverted). Both outcomes are measured on 10-point scales. Control variables are party-level ideology, education and gender (LDV models also control for party-level opposition status).

All in all, in line with our theoretical expectations, we find a clear and substantial difference between *elected losers* and winners in their perceptions of democracy and trust in elections, even when comparing within parties over time. While the effect is strongest for control of the executive, we also find seat share to play an independent role.

Individual-level effects

The main analysis estimates party-level effects. Because the survey is anonymized and provides no individual IDs, any estimated relationships in these data must be interpreted at the party level. To infer anything about individual-level attitude changes, we must

therefore assume that party compositions do not dramatically change in relevant ways across election cycles. There is no way this can be fully guaranteed, and as we will argue later (using qualitative evidence), one potential consequence of party under-performance is internal party conflict, which could itself change party composition.

Fortunately, the survey contains some stable observable candidate characteristics that allow for matching some candidate records over time. This allows us to construct individual identifiers for a sub-sample ex-post and re-run our models with individual-level fixed effects for this subsample. Specifically, we construct fuzzy-match IDs from six variables that either do not change with time or do so in a predictable manner: country, district, party, age, gender, and first-time-in-office status. In this way, a respondent observed in wave t_1 will be matched to a respondent with the same characteristics in t_2. For instance, a 35-year-old woman elected for party X in district 1 and serving her first term in 1993 is matched to a respondent in wave t_2 (1998) who is a woman from the same country, district and party, five years older (≈ 40) and not a first-timer. We only use those observations for which a unique match is found per wave. Repeating this process for the full sample yields 1,535 observations representing 559 unique legislators (see Appendix B3 for the exact procedure). We leave an age window of $\pm$ 2 years as we do not have the precise day of birthday of the respondents nor the survey's exact date of application. This approach relaxes the need for an external identifier while still recovering temporal change at the individual level using only observable —and stable— demographic and partisan attributes.

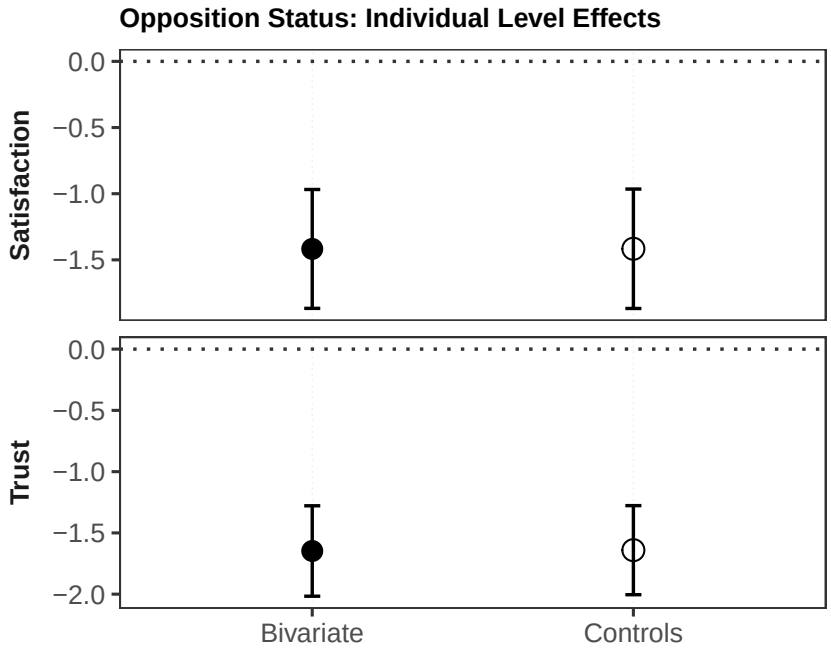

Figure 3: The effect of opposition status/seat share on satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral institutions on subsample of respondents with a panel ID. Individual-level estimates from two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models with and without controls with party-level clustered errors. Figure shows coefficients on respondent party's opposition status. Both outcomes are measured on 10-point scales. Control variables are ideology, education and gender.

Using these data we then estimate two-way fixed-effects (TWFE) models with year and individual FEs. Because the treatment —being in opposition — occurs at party level, standard errors are clustered by party. Figure 5 reports the results. On average, legislators trust elections 16 percentage points less ($p < 0.01$) and are 14 percentage points less satisfied with democracy ($p < 0.01$) when they are in opposition than when their parties hold executive office. These effects are substantial and nearly identical to party-level estimates. Note that we leave out the analysis for seat share due to insufficient statistical power.

We further probe the robustness of these results by repeating the fuzzy match four times where we tighten the age window (± 1 year), and add supposedly time invariant characteristics such as mother's education and/or "politicians in family" as match criteria. Although each change reduces sample size and precision, the results are virtually

unchanged (see appendix B3).

Probing the mechanism

So far, we have interpreted results in line with our theoretical argument that the effect of losing elections is tied to affective disappointment, partisan cognitive dissonance, and/or the personal utility of access to political power. Nevertheless, our findings might also be explained by mechanisms that fall outside our theoretical framework and would carry different—potentially less alarming—normative implications. Additionally, they may only be a feature of less consolidated democracies. In this section, we provide some additional tests of the mechanism by examining: (i) the effect of winning, (ii) substantive institutional objections to the electoral system itself; and (iii) effect heterogeneity by democratic consolidation.

The effect of winning

Our main results do not directly capture the effect of losing power, but rather the compound effect of losing and winning. Since our main contrast compares winners and losers, both sides could drive the observed effect, as we have theorized. However, it could even be entirely attributed to winners becoming more supportive of democracy than losers becoming less satisfied, as Esaiasson (2011) argues may be the case for voters. If true, this would undermine the notion that "elected losers" pose a democratic problem.

To test this, we construct party-level indicators for transitions into and out of government between consecutive party-election periods. This allows us to estimate the average difference in democratic attitudes in election periods where a party switches status, relative to periods where its status is stable. We implement a TWFE specification to identify these effects from within-party changes over time, netting out country–year shocks. Because this analysis relies on fewer transitions than the main specification, it has a smaller

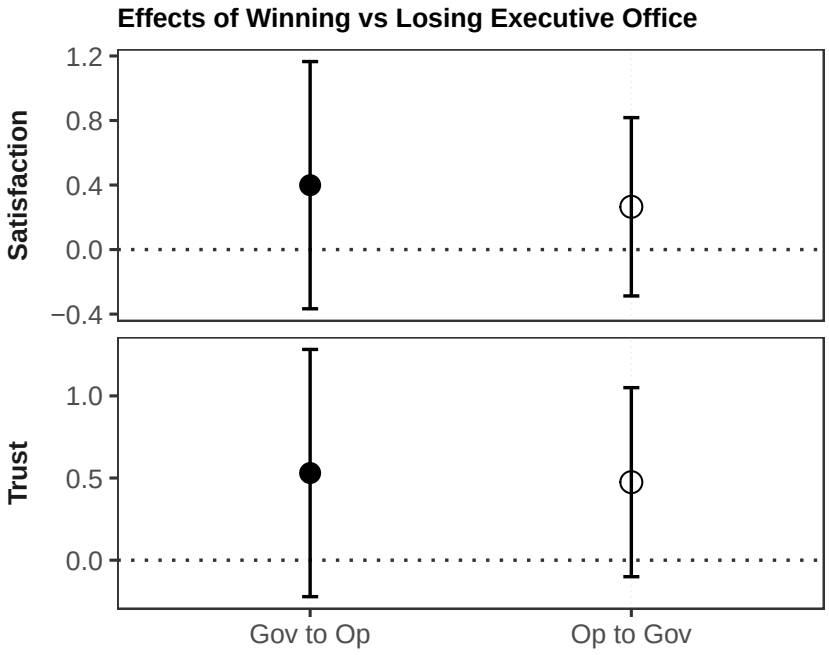

Figure 4: The effect of winning and losing executive office on satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral institutions. Estimates from models comparing pairs of consecutive legislative periods where parties transitioned to government and pairs where parties transitioned out of government to pairs with stable opposition or government status. Party-level clustered errors. Both outcomes are measured on 10-point scales. The sign of the opposition models' point estimates has been reversed to allow for direct comparison.

sample and weaker statistical power, and does not decompose all transitions. Yet, if Esaiasson's mechanism dominates, we would observe effects concentrated among parties transitioning into power.

This is not what we find. As shown in Figure 4, both winning and losing parties exhibit effects of similar magnitude, though point estimates are imprecise. These results are not consistent with winners' increased satisfaction accounting for the observed winner-loser gap on its own, and suggest instead somewhat symmetric effects. This would imply that support for democracy among political elites is contingent and cyclical, waxing and waning with the extent of their party's political influence.

The role of substantive institutional concerns

Another alternative explanation is that dissatisfaction stems from legitimate grievances about electoral institutions rather than the psychological mechanisms we theorize. If frustration only appears when there are reasons to consider outcomes unfair, this could reflect legitimate concerns with institutional design rather than responses to losing power. A key fairness criterion used by scholars, politicians and voters alike is proportionality: the degree to which seat shares reflect vote shares (Plescia et al., 2020; Lijphart et al., 1999). If losing parties often receive fewer seats than their vote shares warrant, such substantive concerns could explain our results.

We test this by measuring the electoral disproportionality of party seat shares: the gap between vote share and seat share in each election. This vote-seat share gap exhibits substantial variation, with a quarter of observations showing seat share underperformance exceeding 6 percentage points, some reaching 21 points, while the maximum over-performance is just 8 points.

We regress both dependent variables on the vote-seat gap using the TWFE specifications from our main analysis. If our main results are driven by this mechanism, we should expect a negative relationship. Because we calculate the gap as *vote share* − *seat share*,

larger positive gaps between the proportion of votes and seats would predict lower satisfaction and trust. Our results, depicted in Figure 5, indicate no significant relationship between the vote-seat gap and either outcome, and neither point estimate even has the correct sign. This suggests our main results are not explained by substantial concerns over disproportional representation, which is a primary source of procedural unfairness. Other forms of electoral imperfections may exist, which we address when examining potential effect heterogeneity by democratic consolidation below.

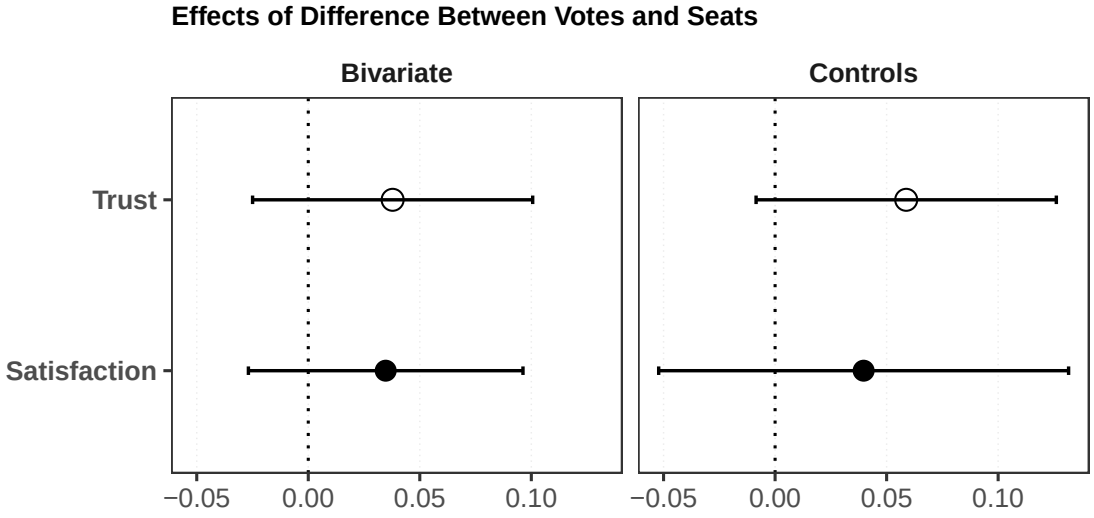

Figure 5: The effect of the vote share-seat share gap on satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral institutions. Estimates from two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models with party-level clustered errors. Both outcomes are measured on 10-point scales. Control variables are party-level ideology, education and gender as well as party-level opposition status

The role of democratic consolidation

Some countries in Latin America have historically faced challenges in consolidating their democracies. In this context, one might expect the effect of losing to be strongest in countries that do not qualify as fully democratic. This naturally raises the concern that the overall result is confined to elected losers in weak democracies, reflecting pre-existing democratic deficits.

According to our theorized mechanisms, we would expect to observe the effect of

losing across both more and less consolidated democracies. Still, however, democratic consolidation is likely to reduce the effect, as internalized democratic norms can inhibit elected losers' tendency to blame the system. Indeed, prior empirical work on the winner-loser gap among citizens has found effects to be consistently significant, yet somewhat context-dependent in this way (Anderson et al., 2005). We similarly anticipate a significant effect for elected losers across all levels of democracy, with the strongest effects in the weakest democracies.

To test whether the effect of losing is concentrated in less democratic countries, we subset country-wave observations into three levels of democratic consolidation using data from the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al., 2024) and estimate the TWFE models separately within each. We use two measures of democracy from the V-Dem dataset: the polyarchy index and the liberal democracy index. Both indices rate countries on a scale from 0 to 1 but have somewhat different distributions, with polyarchy scores being higher. We therefore categorize the top and bottom quartiles of both variables as 'high' and 'low', respectively, with the inter-quartile range being the 'middle' category. As a reference, those in the highest brackets share similar democratic consolidation levels as countries like the United States, France or the Netherlands (see Appendix C3 for descriptives). Since a few countries shift between these categories over the period of study, the three-level classifications are technically applied to country-waves rather than countries.

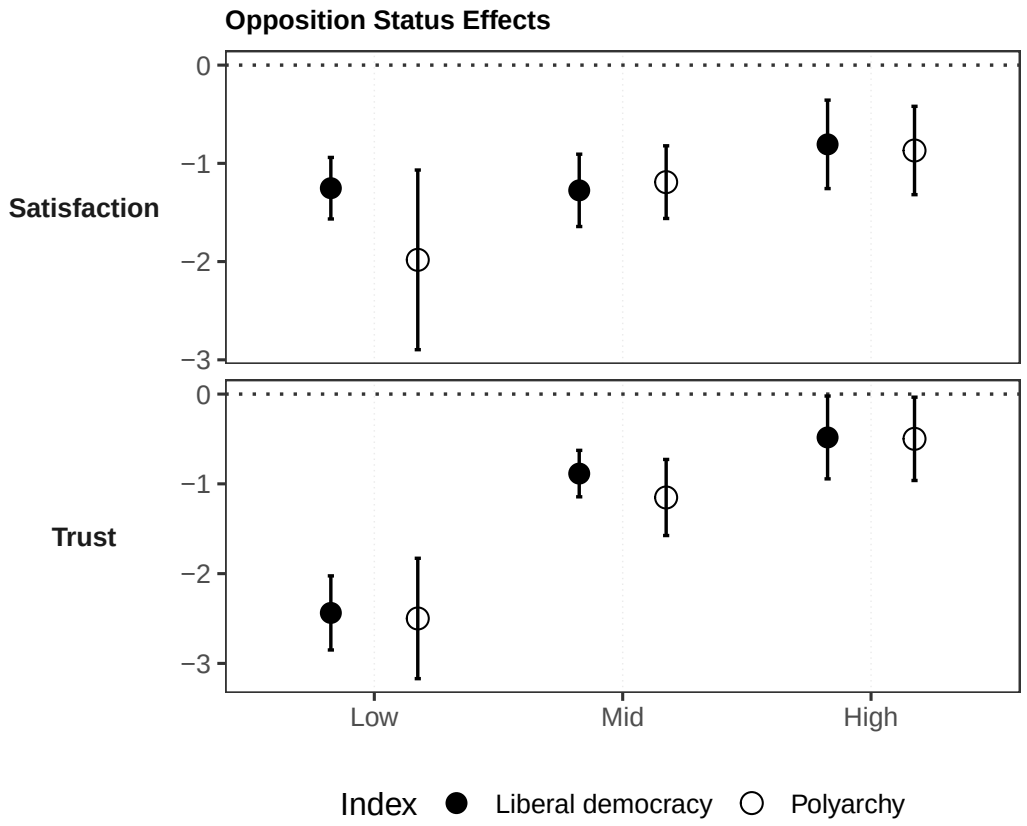

Figure 6: The effect of opposition status on satisfaction with democracy and trust in electoral institutions, conditional average treatment effects by three levels of democratic consolidation (V-Dem polyarchy and liberal democracy indices). Estimates from two-way fixed effects (TWFE) models with party-level clustered errors. Both outcomes are measured on 10-point scales.

Figure 6 presents the results of this analysis. As shown, the effects of losing government on both satisfaction with democracy and trust in elections are significant across all levels of democratic consolidation as measured by both V-Dem indices. For example, elected losers from countries in the lowest quartile are less satisfied with democracy by nearly 20 percentage points compared to their elected counterparts in government ($p < 0.01$). In the top quartile, this gap is smaller but still significant at around 10 percentage points ($p < 0.01$). The results for trust are similar although the effect for elected losers in the strongest democracies is only around 5 percentage points ($p < 0.05$). In sum, the effect of losing government is present across countries in the region, regardless of their level of democratic consolidation. While the effect of elected losers is strongest in weak

democracies, it cannot be fully attributed to lack of institutional strength and remains substantially significant even in the strongest democracies.

Democratic Frustrations and Party Dissatisfaction: Qualitative Evidence

Our analysis suggests that elected legislators become less supportive of democracy when their party loses power. We have proposed several theoretical mechanisms for this, pointing to affective disappointment, cognitive dissonance, and the personal utility of access to power. Yet, our analysis so far has had little to say about these specific mechanisms. To further probe our theoretical explanation for these empirical patterns, we conducted three interviews with legislators from the same highly consolidated democracy in the region. We reached out specifically to members of current opposition parties while aiming for ideological diversity. While the interviewees all share the experience of being outside government, they do not belong to the same coalition and therefore do not necessarily coordinate their opposition strategies. All our interviews followed a semi-structured format, in which legislators were asked about their experiences with frustrated colleagues, rather than their personal frustrations, to minimize defensive responses. Further details on the interview process are provided in Appendix D1.

These interviews supplement our quantitative results in two important ways. First, they provide some useful contextualization, situating them in the real-world experiences of legislators. Second, and more specifically, they can help corroborate our mechanisms and provide further detail. Furthermore, besides offering concrete examples of how lawmakers respond to the frustration of their party losing an election, the interviews shed light on a mechanism which we had not considered in our analysis, nor would be able to fully capture with our data, namely frustration with one's own party.

Electoral loss and frustrations with the democratic process

Our interviewees highlighted several aspects of the electoral process that corroborated our theorized mechanisms. Three key aspects mentioned by the legislators stand out as particularly relevant to our argument. First, they all were frustrated by the perceived capacity and leadership style of the (out-party) successful presidential candidate, indicating a mismatch between a democratic procedure and a perceived 'wrong' outcome, consistent with our cognitive dissonance mechanism. As one legislator noted, *"(...) [T]he [winner candidate] does not bring together a political force, a solid political project, beyond just influential people who want the power"* (Legislator 1, male, center-right). One interviewee was explicitly dissatisfied with the process, criticizing the perceived lack of importance voters placed on party programs, instead overemphasizing superficial traits such as friendliness (Legislator 3, female, left-wing — see quote 1 in Appendix D4). More broadly, another legislators also reflected on how the frustration with election results can affect those who lost (Legislator 2, female, center-left):

> "[T]here is a kind of frustration of saying, (referring to a presidential candidate) "Oh, man, I trained my whole life for this, my whole professional life to get to a position high as for the presidency, and in the last 3 elections in our country, people who were not as well prepared were elected". I do see this frustration. It's like almost anyone can be president nowadays. While there are those who have taken this seriously, people who have actually prepared [for the job]. That is very demoralizing (...)"

Second, there is a clear awareness among legislators of the critical role that executive power plays in the policy-making process. Losing control of the government severely limits a party's ability to advance its policy agenda, consistent with our proposed utility mechanism. As raised by them, this issue appears particularly problematic for policies with a local focus, as it directly hinders a party's (perceived) ability to meet the promises done to and needs of its constituents. Such limitations place significant pressure on candidates who aim to fulfill campaign promises but are unable to do so due to their lack of control over the executive and therefore over policy-making. In some cases, this even leads some elected losers to leave their parties or steer their parties in the direction of

the governing party's ideology. Legislator 2 (female, center-left) illustrates this with the case of an elected mayor from her party who, shortly after an election where they lost the executive, resigned from the party to align with the new government's party instead (see quote 6 in Appendix D3). Similarly, Legislator 3 (female, left-wing) highlights how traditional parties often adjust to align with the ruling party to gain more influence to enact their agenda: *"The [traditional party] is a party that has become very disconfigured ideologically since it has been very close to the ruling party. This lack of identity has suited them very well for doing business."*

Third, in explaining the effects of electoral results on legislators, our interviewees point to how it interacts with a salient feature of the broader political context: citizens' low trust in politicians. When asked how election results contribute to frustrations among party members, Legislator 2 (female, center-left) remarked: *"It does connect with the distrust that exists around politicians in general, and there is frustration with that distrust. One is the victim of a lot of hate when getting involved in politics, and that does generate frustration"* (see also quote 9 in Appendix D3). Legislator 3 (female, left-wing) echoes this sentiment, noting that although the situation has improved slightly, not long ago, simply being part of a political party was a source of shame. She argues that such perceptions among citizens drive support for candidates who eschew programmatic platforms in favor of strategies that exploit and amplify public contempt to secure votes (quote 3 in Appendix D4). This latter point again links back to the idea that *elected losers'* perceptions of winning opponents can trigger cognitive dissonance if they think they are winning for the wrong reasons.

Dissatisfaction with one's own party

We have theorized that legislators may turn against the democratic system when their party loses an election. However, they may also blame their own party for its performance. Despite belonging to ideologically different parties, the interviewed legislators all agree that electoral outcomes have a significant impact on internal party dynamics.

When asked about their colleagues' reactions to their party's under-performance, they pointed to how election results can trigger internal conflicts. These conflicts arise both from internal pressures on candidates to succeed: *"There are internal dynamics within the party itself that generate a lot of pressure on the candidates. And I feel that the anger is more about that (...)."* (Legislator 2, female, center-left) and from heightened expectations based on past performance, especially within traditional parties: *"[Because of the results] the [traditional party] has a fairly large internal debate because it has been the hegemonic party in [the country]."* (Legislator 1, male, center-right).

More critically, they also agree that electoral outcomes affect certain party members with weaker programmatic or ideological commitment. Under the pressure of the next election, candidates who have won office may leave their parties if they are dissatisfied with their performance, pointing to a direct effect on party systems. All three legislators recounted experiences of co-party members either leaving or threatening to leave their parties due to disappointing results. Reflecting on what he has observed in other parties, Legislator 1 (male, center-right) noted: *"(...) [I]f I get angry with the party I'm in, I go and found another political party, right? And this in the end does not nourish the construction of agreements. We have minorities, small minorities that do not manage to build large majorities."* Legislator 2's (female, center-left) reaction when recounting the earlier example of the party-switching mayor further illustrates this frustration. After describing the candidate as a threat to democracy, she concludes her statement with: *"Who the fuck do they think they are?"* (see full quote 6 in Appendix D3). Legislator 3 (female, left-wing) also touched on this dynamic, describing how, in local elections, candidates seeking to improve their electoral prospects will often leave their own party for other parties with more successful platforms, despite having no ideological connection to those parties (see quote 1 in Appendix D4).

These observations can be taken to suggest that the cognitive dissonance mechanism we have theorized is more complex for party members than for voters. Confronted with

an undesirable outcome of an otherwise legitimate election process, party members may be more inclined to resolve the resulting dissonance by turning against their parties instead of blaming the system. Unlike voters, party members have greater insight into their party's campaign strategies and internal decision-making processes and this might make them more attuned to its failings. Given the typically hierarchical structure of party organizations and frequent disagreements over strategic choices, party members may be encouraged to leave the party. Consequently, part of elected losers' dissatisfaction may be expressed in frustration with the way their party works. While this is unlikely to be captured by our outcome variables in the quantitative analysis, this in-party dissatisfaction suggests a different, rather concrete effect on party systems in the form of party-switching.

Discussion and Conclusion

The literature on the winner-loser gap has predominantly focused on how voters respond when their preferred candidate or party loses an election. It has consistently found that electoral losers report lower satisfaction with democracy (Anderson et al., 2005; Blais and Gélineau, 2007; Han and Chang, 2016; Toshkov and Mazepus, 2022; Bækgaard, 2023). More recent work demonstrates that these negative reactions extend to candidates who lose elections themselves (Senninger et al., 2024). This article advances the literature by asking whether parties' electoral performance also shapes democratic attitudes among politicians who remain in office. Using longitudinal data on Latin American legislators spanning three decades, we show that politicians who *win* legislative seats can nonetheless turn on democracy when their parties lose power. These effects emerge both when parties lose executive office and when they suffer declines in legislative seat share.

The implications of these findings are substantial. Unlike losing candidates or ordinary citizens, *elected losers* are part of the legislative branch and retain formal policy-

making authority. This institutional position grants them a unique platform to publicly communicate and act on their dissatisfaction. Frustration following electoral losses may encourage legislators to erode voters' trust in democratic processes, obstruct policy-making, or support reforms designed to manipulate democratic rules in their favor. Research on citizens shows that dissatisfaction with democracy is linked to greater acceptance of authoritarian measures (Mauk, 2020) and with behaviors such as protest participation or electoral disengagement (Anderson and Mendes, 2005; Grönlund and Setälä, 2007). If similar mechanisms operate among political elites, their discontent could exacerbate polarization, legislative gridlock, and institutional distrust – dynamics that can be especially destabilizing in fragile democracies.

These concerns are particularly salient in the Latin American context. Presidentialism, the dominant political system in the region, inherently concentrates power in the executive branch, heightening the stakes of electoral defeat. Losing the presidency carries material consequences for a party's access to policy-making and limits legislators' influence for the duration of the presidential term. This institutional rigidity contrasts with parliamentary systems, where post-election coalition-building can provide opportunities for under-performing parties to regain influence, potentially mitigating the psychological effects of electoral loss. In Latin America, by contrast, prolonged opposition status may intensify frustration among elected legislators and increase the likelihood that dissatisfaction with electoral outcomes spills over into broader disaffection with democracy.

This study contributes to the winner-loser gap literature by extending its scope to elected politicians. The findings demonstrate that winning office does not insulate legislators from the negative attitudinal consequences of electoral defeat at the party level. By introducing the concept of *elected losers*, the article bridges research on the psychological consequences of electoral loss with work on the institutional incentives facing opposition and minority-party legislators. In doing so, it highlights a previously underappreciated source of democratic vulnerability: dissatisfaction among political elites who

possess both visibility and formal authority. We believe this offers a more comprehensive understanding of how electoral outcomes influence both attitudes and behavior within representative bodies.

Furthermore, our results suggest that the winner-loser gap among elites may be more consequential than previously recognized. Whereas much of the existing literature emphasize citizens' attitudes, dissatisfaction among legislators has direct implications for governance, policymaking, and the resilience of democratic institutions. Future research should examine whether and how elite dissatisfaction with democracy translates into concrete legislative behavior, such as opposing democratic reforms, support for restrictive electoral rules, or challenges to electoral integrity.

The results of this study opens up several avenues for future research. First, while this study focuses on Latin America, scholars should examine whether similar dynamics operate in other contexts. Do elected losers in parliamentary systems exhibit comparable dissatisfaction, or does coalition-building provide a buffer against these effects? Additionally, how do these dynamics play out in countries like the United States or other western democracies, where movements and anti-democratic sentiments have gained traction in recent years? Second, future work should explore the consequences of elite dissatisfaction, including party switching, factionalism, defections to anti-democratic movements, and legislative behavior, particularly on issues related to democratic reforms. Third, the role of electoral institutions deserves closer scrutiny. While we found no evidence that mismatches between vote share and seat share explain our results, future studies could investigate whether other institutional factors – such as electoral thresholds, districting rules, or term limits – may condition how electoral outcomes shape legislators' democratic attitudes. Finally, recent episodes of elite contestation of election results in established democracies, such as President Trump's and President Bolsonaro's post-election behavior and the rise of far-right populist leaders, suggest that democratic dissatisfaction among elected officials may be rising globally. Understanding its causes and conse-

quences remains a pressing task for research on democratic stability and backsliding.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

The authors declare no competing nor conflicting interests.

The authors affirm that this article adheres to the principles concerning research with human participants laid out in APSA's Principles and Guidance on Human Subject Research (2020). Although drawing on research with human participants, the authors claim exemption from organizational ethical review and provide reasoned justification in the appendix (see section E).

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Appendix: For Online Publication

Appendices

Appendix A - Survey Data

The study uses data from the PELA observatory dataset. It includes most countries and waves. Table A1 summarizes the countries, waves, sample size and response rate. Note that the survey targeted a representative sample of the population in each of its waves. The response rate is with respect to that target and not the total population.

Country	Waves	Sample Size (% of pop)	Response Rate
Argentina	2010	70 (27%)	68%
	2013	67 (26%)	87%
Bolivia	1996	74 (57%)	57%
	1998	98 (75.38%)	100%
	2002	80 (61.5%)	100%
	2006	98 (75.4%)	100%
	2010	97 (74.6%)	99%
	2015	93 (71.54%)	100%
Chile	1993	93 (77.5%)	89%
	1997	89 (74.2%)	100%
	2002	88 (73%)	97%
	2006	90 (75%)	100%
	2010	86 (70%)	100%
	2014	68	No Info.
Colombia	1998	88 (54.66%)	85%
	2002	95 (57%)	99%
	2006	107 (64.5%)	99%
	2010	91 (55%)	100%
	2014	84 (50.9%)	93%
	2018	69 (40.59%)	88%
Costa Rica	1993	52 (91.2%)	91%
	1998	49 (85.9%)	86%
	2002	51 (90%)	100%
	2006	57 (100%)	100%
	2010	56 (98.3%)	98.3%
	2014	55 (95%)	100%
	2018	44 (77%)	97%
Ecuador	1998	112 (92.6%)	97%
	2002	98 (73%)	100%
	2006	98 (75.4%)	100%
	2013	94 (68.6%)	98%
	2017	88 (64.23%)	97%
Guatemala	1995	63 (78.8%)	100%
	2000	79 (70%)	100%
	2004	121 (77%)	100%
	2008	97 (61.4%)	100%
Honduras	1994	67 (52.34%)	65%

	1997	71 (55.5%)	100%
	2002	102 (79.69%)	99%
	2006	91 (71.09%)	100%
	2010	91 (70%)	100%
	2014	82 (64.06%)	100%
Mexico	1994	123 (24.6%)	77%
	1997	126 (25.2%)	100%
	2000	124 (24%)	99%
	2003	124 (24.8%)	99%
	2006	128 (25.6%)	99%
	2009	98 (19.6%)	98%
	2012	90 (18%)	75%
	2015	100 (20%)	100%
Panama	1999	64 (90%)	100%
	2004	68 (87.2%)	100%
	2013	47 (79%)	100%
	2019	61 (85.9%)	94%
Paraguay	1993	47 (58.7%)	80%
	1998	65 (81.2%)	100%
	2003	56 (70%)	90.3%
	2008	72 (90%)	100%
	2013	55 (68.7%)	95%
	2018	58	No Info.
Peru	1995	87 (72.5%)	97%
	2001	83 (69.7%)	98%
	2006	96 (80%)	100%
	2011	93 (72%)	95%
	2016	73 (56.15%)	94%
Dominican Republic	1994	62 (51.7%)	72%
	1998	103 (69.1%)	92%
	2002	118 (78.7%)	98%
	2006	94 (52.8%)	98%
	2010	78 (42.6%)	100%
	2016	61 (32.1%)	64%
Salvador	2012	62 (74%)	98%
	2015	56 (67%)	93%
Uruguay	1995	73 (73.7%)	91%
	2000	68 (68.7%)	92%
	2005	86 (86.9%)	100%
	2010	79 (79.8%)	99%
	2015	69 (69.7%)	92%
Total		6436	

Appendix B: Main Analysis

Appendix B1: Two-Way Fixed Effects

Figure 2 included in the article reports the results of the TWFE models regressing our independent variables to both our outcomes with party and country-yer fixed effects. In the tables below are presented the full results of such models, including one using year fixed effects instead of country-year. Table 2 reports the results for opposition status; table 3 the results of seat share. As can be observed, the effect of both independent variables are significantly consistent across the board.

Table 2: TWFE models - Opposition Status

	Time FEs		Country-time FEs		Time-varying covariates	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Opposition status	−1.45 (0.16)***	−1.45 (0.22)***	−1.45 (0.16)***	−1.49 (0.17)***	−1.43 (0.16)***	−1.49 (0.17)***
Idelogy					0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Educ. Degree					−0.01 (0.00)	0.00 (0.02)
Gender					−0.12 (0.09)	−0.16 (0.07)*
Total N	4652	7076	4652	7076	4570	6942
SE clusters	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party
FE: country-year	X	X	X	X	X	X

Table 3: TWFE models - Seat Share

	Time FEs		Country-time FEs		Time-varying covariates	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Share of Seats	−0.02 (0.01)*	−0.03 (0.01)*	−0.02 (0.01)*	−0.03 (0.01)*	−0.03 (0.01)*	−0.03 (0.01)**
Gov. Status	−0.87 (0.16)***	−1.05 (0.22)***	−0.87 (0.16)***	−1.05 (0.22)***	−0.84 (0.17)***	−1.03 (0.23)***
Idelogy					−0.06 (0.03)+	−0.06 (0.03)*
Educ. Degree					−0.01 (0.05)	−0.06 (0.04)+
Gender					0.16 (0.13)	0.19 (0.10)+
Total N	2620	4893	2620	4893	2559	4708
SE clusters	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party
FE: country-year	X	X	X	X	X	X

Appendix B2: Lagged Dependent Variable

As mentioned in the article, we run two complementary models as robustness checks. Starting with the lagged dependent variable (LDV), below are the full results.

Table 4: LDV models - Opposition Status

	Period 1: missing		Period 1: mean+dummy		+ covariates	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Opposition status	−1.48 (0.18)***	−1.37 (0.27)***	−1.67 (0.15)***	−1.52 (0.24)***	−1.71 (0.16)***	−1.54 (0.24)***
Idelogy					0.00 (0.00)	0.01 (0.00)*
Educ. Degree					−0.03 (0.02)	−0.04 (0.03)+
Gender					−0.20 (0.12)+	−0.17 (0.11)
Total N	2841	5149	3785	7049	3710	6914
SE clusters	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party

Table 5: LDV models - Seat Share

	Period 1: missing		Period 1: mean+dummy		+ covariates	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Share of Seats	−0.03 (0.01)***	−0.02 (0.01)*	−0.02 (0.01)***	−0.03 (0.01)**	−0.02 (0.01)***	−0.03 (0.01)**
Gov. Status	−1.04 (0.34)**	−1.23 (0.39)**	−1.16 (0.28)***	−1.33 (0.32)***	−1.19 (0.29)***	−1.36 (0.33)***
Idelogy					−0.01 (0.05)	−0.09 (0.06)
Educ. Degree					0.02 (0.07)	0.04 (0.07)
Gender					0.17 (0.19)	0.21 (0.13)
Total N	1463	3406	1976	4893	1927	4708
SE clusters	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party

Appendix B3: Estimating individual IDs within sample

To assign unique rows to potentially identified individuals, we began by giving every survey record a permanent row id (its row number in the full cross-section). Next, for each country, we ordered its survey waves chronologically and matched each wave t_1 only to its immediately following wave t_2. This keeps the graph of possible links sparse and avoids an $O(N^2)$ explosion of comparisons.

We then linked every record in wave t_1 to every record in wave t_2 whenever they matched exactly on party, gender, district as well as whether they satisfied two additional filters: (1) Age drift: $|age_1 + (t_2 - t_1) - age_2| \leq 2$ years, to allow for imprecision in reported ages and survey-field dates. (2) First-election guard: it cannot be $firstelec == 1$ in both periods (since one cannot be "first-time" twice).

To match the observations we treated each survey row as a node in an undirected graph and added an edge for every plausible $t_1 \rightarrow t_2$ match. We then computed the graph's connected components: each component is a cluster of rows—across multiple waves that are plausibly the same individual. We labeled every row with its component index ($individual_{ID}$).

Finally, we appended $individual_{ID}$ back onto the original dataset. Rows sharing the same $individual_{ID}$ form a pseudo-panel "track" of the same person across survey waves. Because only respondents with at least two linked waves contribute to any within-ID variation, any single-wave respondents are effectively dropped from estimates that exploit panel structure. This approach relaxes the need for an external identifier while still

recovering temporal change at the individual level using only observable —and stable— demographic and partisan attributes. The results are summarized in the table below:

Table 6: Unique IDs and frequencies

Times Observed	# Unique IDs	Observations
2	397	794
3	113	339
4	38	152
5	20	100
6	9	54
7	4	28
8	5	40
9	2	18
10	1	20
Total	**589**	**1535**

Given that matching is done based on observables, we re-run the proceedure with a set of stricter conditions as robustness check. Table 11 and 12 present the results of 5 models for each outcome: 1. the main which was included in the body of the article. Models 2-5 differ in the variables used to identify individuals in the following ways:

- (2) Age drift ≤ 1 instead of 2
- (3) On top of age (+- 2), gender, party and district, we add mother's education
- (4) Same as 3, but we also add whether they have other politicians in the family
- (5) Same as 3. but with age drift of +- 1

Table 7: Individual level TWFE - Satisfaction with democracy

	Main	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Opposition Status	−1.41 (0.22)***	−1.36 (0.25)***	−1.16 (0.42)**	−0.96 (0.51)+	−1.10 (0.42)**
Total N	868	751	459	354	399
SE clusters	by: party_countryby: party_countryby: party_countryby: party_countryby: party_country				
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X

Table 8: Individual level TWFE - Trust in elections

	Main	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Opposition Status	−1.81 (0.25)***	−1.88 (0.27)***	−1.69 (0.30)***	−1.67 (0.36)***	−1.72 (0.33)***
Total N	1367	1149	742	568	633
SE clusters	by: party_countryby: party_countryby: party_countryby: party_countryby: party_country				
FE: year	X	X	X	X	X

Table 10: The effect of vote and seat share discrepancies

	TWFE		+ covariates	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Dif. Vote and Seat Shares	0.03 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.05)	0.06 (0.03)+
Gov. Status			0.88 (0.22)***	1.14 (0.28)***
Idelogy			0.14 (0.06)*	0.02 (0.03)
Educ. Degree			−0.10 (0.07)	0.02 (0.04)
Gender			−0.25 (0.27)	−0.23 (0.15)
Total N	1000	3044	983	2907
SE clusters	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party
FE: country-year	X	X	X	X

Appendix C: Probing the Mechanism

In this section of the Appendix we will present the complete results for the additional tests of mechanisms described in the main body of the article.

Appendix C1: The role of winning

Below are presented the results for an alternative mechanism, i.e. that results are driven by parties moving from opposition to government. As we can observe, there is no clear effect of neither winning or losing by itself, suggesting that it is a compounded effect. This shows that it is unlikely that winning was driving the effects observed in the main analysis.

Table 9: Winning vs Losing Models

	Pooled OLS		TWFE	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Became gov	0.41 (0.30)	0.34 (0.29)	0.27 (0.28)	0.47 (0.29)
Became opp	−0.44 (0.35)	−0.53 (0.31)+	−0.40 (0.39)	−0.53 (0.38)
Total N	3644	5097	3642	5095
SE clusters	by: party	by: party	by: party	by: party
FE: country-year			X	X

Appendix C2: The role of institutional concerns

The table bellow corresponds to the results reported in Figure 4 of the main body of this article.

Appendix C3: The role of democratic consolidation

Descriptive data on the distribution of country-years in both V-Dem indices: liberal democracy and polyarchy.

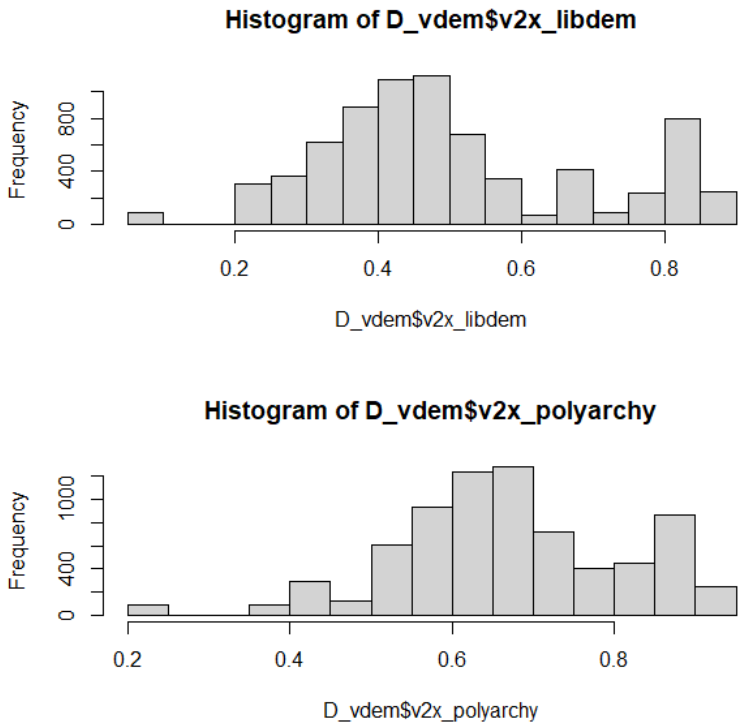

Figure 7: Distribution of units in both democratic indices

Table 11: V-Dem Indices - Quartile Distribution

V-Dem LibDem Distribution						
Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.	NA's
0.0940	0.3690	0.4630	0.5034	0.6010	0.8580	1
V-Dem Polyarchy Distribution						
Min.	1st Qu.	Median	Mean	3rd Qu.	Max.	NA's
0.2420	0.5680	0.6700	0.6735	0.7690	0.9140	1

Table 10 also presents the average scores in each of the V-Dem indices for each included country. As can be observed, there is quite a variance in the region, with countries with clearly highly consolidated democratic systems.

Table 12: Country average in democratic indices in the period

Country	Lib-Dem	Polyarchy
Argentina	0.623	0.798
Bolivia	0.440	0.683
Chile	0.804	0.859
Colombia	0.484	0.610
Costa Rica	0.844	0.896
Dominican Republic	0.346	0.611
Ecuador	0.414	0.640
El Salvador	0.451	0.640
Guatemala	0.362	0.541
Honduras	0.288	0.485
Mexico	0.430	0.629
Panama	0.548	0.731
Paraguay	0.417	0.570
Peru	0.542	0.681
Uruguay	0.822	0.887

Table 13: Heterogeneity - Low Democracies

	Lib-Dem		Polyarchy	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Opposition status	−1.27 (0.16)***	−2.45 (0.20)***	−1.97 (0.45)***	−2.51 (0.33)***
Idelogy	−0.01 (0.00)	−0.01 (0.01)	−0.02 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Educ. Degree	−0.01 (0.00)*	−0.04 (0.02)	−0.11 (0.09)	−0.05 (0.05)
Gender	−0.21 (0.18)	−0.28 (0.18)	−0.22 (0.29)	−0.23 (0.19)
Total N	1003	1745	656	1486
SE clusters	by: party_country	by: party_country	by: party_country	by: party_country
FE: country-year	X	X	X	X

Table 14: Heterogeneity - Mid Democracies

	Lib-Dem		Polyarchy	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Opposition status	−1.26 (0.18)***	−2.45 (0.20)***	−1.17 (0.18)***	−1.17 (0.21)***
Idelogy	0.00 (0.00)	−0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
Educ. Degree	0.01 (0.05)	−0.04 (0.02)	0.00 (0.00)	−0.02 (0.03)
Gender	−0.19 (0.14)	−0.28 (0.18)	−0.24 (0.12)*	−0.28 (0.08)**
Total N	2080	1745	2412	3391
SE clusters	by: party_country	by: party_country	by: party_country	by: party_country
FE: country-year	X	X	X	X

Table 15: Heterogeneity - High Democracies

	Lib-Dem		Polyarchy	
	satisfaction	trust	satisfaction	trust
Opposition status	−0.81 (0.23)***	−0.48 (0.23)*	−0.87 (0.22)***	−0.50 (0.23)*
Idelogy	−0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.01)	0.00 (0.00)
Educ. Degree	−0.02 (0.08)	0.13 (0.06)*	−0.01 (0.07)	0.12 (0.06)*
Gender	0.03 (0.18)	0.01 (0.11)	0.08 (0.17)	0.05 (0.11)
Total N	1197	1817	1214	1832
SE clusters	by: party_country	by: party_country	by: party_country	by: party_country
FE: country-year	X	X	X	X

Appendix D: Interviews

Appendix D1: Interview Sampling Plan

For our interview sampling strategy, we considered the following factors. First, we targeted highly consolidated democracies, as they serve as a least-likely case—if patterns of frustration emerge in these contexts, they are likely to be even more pronounced in less consolidated democracies. Second, we focused on members of the opposition to capture grievances among elected losers. Finally, we sought to maximize variation among opposition parties to ensure that respondents' perspectives were not merely reflections of official party positions or strategies.

Regarding the interview structure, we conducted semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions. To minimize defensive responses that could hinder candid answers, we employed an indirect approach—rather than asking interviewees directly about their own frustrations, we inquired about how they perceived their colleagues, both within and outside their party, to react to electoral losses. Each interview was designed to last approximately 30 minutes.

Appendix D2: Legislator 1 Quotes

Table 16: Legislator 1 Quotes

Legislator 1 (Male, center-righ wing)	**Transcription**
Quote 1	Obviously, at a social level, we are facing a disenchantment with the people, both at an institutional level and in terms of support for democracy. This is due, for example, to the fact that the candidate who is now president, the winning candidate, is the result of systemic attacks on some media outlets directly. A deputy who was a journalist at one point questioned the Electoral Court. This reflects a new dynamic and a new discursive narrative established in the political campaign processes, which is to me.
Quote 2	Well, today I am a colleague of [losing candidate], who was a presidential candidate in 2018, moving on to the second round and losing against [winning candidate]. (...) 4 years later an investigation was concluded regarding the financing of his campaign, in which he attacked several media outlets saying that they used their power of influence to damage his image. The discussion remains on the table regarding what the result would have been in his perception. However, the Electoral Court evidently rejected a good part of the financing of his political campaign. I think that's what strikes us, right? This colleague has a worse image regarding campaign financing. And other colleagues also have some kind of contradiction.
Quote 3	Well, the [traditional party] has a fairly large internal debate because it has been the hegemonic party in [country]. So, different political actors use the narrative that the [party], when it has had the possibility of influencing the Executive and Legislative branches, has not done so in a timely manner, legislating for the citizens. However, I think that the discourse of the [party] does not reflect that [the country] is a nation of peace that we could build. Their candidate is [name], who does not bring together a political force, a solid political project beyond people with influence who want to participate.
Quote 4	Just yesterday there was a very interesting discussion in the legislative plenary, in which they called the government party a gathering of different actors who do not have ideological clarity, right? And then they said that when a gathering of people is made, you do not know where it will go or where it will shoot.
Quote 5	Perhaps not that the process is not legitimate, but the development of the process, the issue of access to financing, how the issue of access to this advertising occurs in different media, how the income from this political debt is distributed, the ease of registering a political party. So this whole operating environment, that if I get angry with the party I'm in, I go and found another political party, right? And this in the end does not nourish and does not force the construction of agreements. We have minorities, small minorities that do not manage to build large majorities.

Appendix D3: Legislator 2 Quotes

Table 17: Legislator 2 Quotes

Legislator 2 (Female, center-left wing)	**Transcription**
Quote 1	What I have seen and what worries me... I mean, I am not pretending that in its time, in the best moment of my party, everyone thought only about ideology and policies or about being a party as a center of thought. I am not thinking that it was like that always either, people too, wanted to win elections and hold office and all that. That's all very good. But being part of traditional parties that no longer elect presidents, it seems that the idea of seeing the party as a center of thought and where we are going as a country and what policies we want to promote is lost.
Quote 2	So what I have seen, to answer your question, is that when a candidate loses an election in a traditional party, people's commitment to the party goes down. Many of them go to any other party that gives them a chance to win. And many times, these are new parties that have no experience, no thought, no ideology, no vision, nothing. They are simply parties that can take them to the top. To win elections, whether at the congressional or municipal level. So that is what I have seen, or how frustration has manifested itself.
Quote 3	There is an ambition for power and that seems very good to me. In other words, people should have goals and in whatever area they want and in politics that is also valid. But I also think that there is frustration where people are like "I joined a party and really wanted to collaborate. I had ideas and desire, but I didn't have space and therefore my causes didn't have space either. So that's why I'm leaving
Quote 4	It happens a lot in my party. Which is conservative in many things. There are conservatives in economic matters, which I don't have much of a problem with, but also conservative in social matters? Well, yes, there I do have a problem. But also, even from the economic point of view, there are ideas that, in my opinion, are of a retrograde social democracy. Within the party there is a social democracy that, let's say, is the one that played in the fifties and a social democracy of the 21st century. And maybe those of us who consider ourselves a little more new wave do see those old ideas reflected more in the party. And I personally do believe that that is one reason why the party loses again and again and again.
Quote 5	But there is something else, and this may be interesting for you. Given the profile of the people who come to the Legislative Assembly from my party, many come with eminently regional or local platforms. And that from the opposition, these issues are very difficult to work on. because the government is not willing to help opposition deputies. It seems that there is frustration in the sense that they receive too much pressure from their communities to generate results that they cannot achieve as opposition deputies and that does translate into frustration with the party.

Table 18: [Continuation] Legislator 2 Quotes

Legislator 2 (Female, center-left wing)	**Transcription**
Quote 6	What I feel is that they don't care. It seems that maybe they do trust the system, but due to pressure from the president, they take certain actions. Even if that has a negative impact on the system, they don't care. So, for example, we have a mayor, that is, someone who won the local election as a member of our party. She resigned from our party while exercising her functions to put herself at the disposal of the Government. I mean, who the fuck do they think they are? Our party has thousands of defects, I mean, I understand that people are asking how we are going to rebuild the party. All of that seems super valid to me. But as a citizen and as a social scientist, what I am seeing is that this government is being a threat to the democratic system, that is my perception. But at the same time I have local authorities who prefer to ally themselves with the government to achieve the local interests of their community. But they are not seeing the big picture.
Quote 7	So the opposition in the country is doing less and less. And that will have an impact on the democratic system. So I think it's not that they don't believe in the democratic system, but that protecting the democratic system by remaining firm in the opposition, they see it as having a very high cost.
Quote 8	But yes, there are internal dynamics within the party itself that generate a lot of pressure on the candidates. And I feel that the anger is more about that than about the democratic system. I think that in [country], there has been a trust in the democratic system in general. So I don't feel like it's going that way the frustration. But it does connect with the distrust that exists around politicians in general and there is frustration with that distrust. One is victim of a lot of hate when getting involved in politics and that does generate frustration.
Quote 9	I can only speak about what I have seen in my party. But it is frustrating because everything it works like a feedback. There is a kind of distrust in political parties, but it is a long-standing distrust. And I used to work in research, and I had to see how opinion polls regarding democracy 15 years ago. And the political parties from that moment on already had a level of trust of around 10% and the congresses too, and that has not changed. And so those things that we saw as trust, it is very difficult to get around them. I mean, there may be a Legislative Assembly that comes and makes the best reforms for the country, but my feeling is that that is not going to translate into greater trust. So I think that when you get into politics, especially if you have to work in Congress or in the parties, you feel like you are being hated. Respect for the political figure has been lost. And that also attracts people, maybe not of the best quality, because the price to pay is very high. Like your own image, right? So I think that makes the level of the parties go down even more, and that fuels more distrust. It's a vicious cycle.

Appendix D4: Legislator 3 Quotes

Table 19: Legislator 3 Quotes

Legislator 3 (Female, left wing)	**Transcription**
Quote 1	Few people vote for the program. Unfortunately, they vote more for the image of the candidate, and the candidate, yes, is consistent. By using flags and names of parties without really having an organic link with them, then, perhaps there is a complaint a little deeper about what happened to them. And here too, in the country there has been a discussion (...). Many parties lent their flags even to political figures from other parties, because in their parties of origin they were not allowed to be the main candidate. So there was a kind of traffic of candidates. This dissolves a little the logic of the party structure that is one of the rules of the game of the system that we have. That is, people are supposed to vote for a flag that is backed by a program, but it turns out that they vote for that one and they are voting for another. In that sense, there is a loss of legitimacy, but not of legality, and it is not yet a loss that would make people say, there is a democratic rupture here, but there is a kind of weakening. Yes, there is a perception that there is a dilution, a rarefaction of the rules that are being changed or that the rules are not achieving their goals
Quote 2	There is a question about the issue of access to resources to reach citizenship. Perhaps it is recognized that the system is not so egalitarian, let's say, that there is a bit of inequality from the start in the electoral process, right? That does not make it as fair as it is proposed.
Quote 3	And with a good vote, even a presidential campaign by one of the representatives of the two big parties of the traditional two-party system who ran with the slogan that he was the least bad. I think that was one of the indicators of the disdain that was being fostered for politics and that they were trying to channel, right? People said, they are all bad (...)
Quote 4	There was even a period when it was common to think that belonging to a party was a cause for shame, now it is becoming a little more normal to have political participation, but it is no longer a matter of that crazy joy that was previously promoted, let's say, almost like a carnival, right?

Appendix E: Ethical Considerations

The data used in this study was not obtained by us, but is part of the PELA-USAL project as discussed in the Research Design section. The data is publicly available for anyone to use.

We held three interviews with legislators with full informed consent. The participants explicitly acknowledged the purpose of the study and voluntarily agreed to take part with no compensation or incentives provided. This consent was granted based on strict assurances of anonymity and confidentiality, which have been fully upheld. All quotes have been carefully modified to prevent identification, and we have thoroughly reviewed the data to ensure that no information could reveal the identities of the participants.

These conversations do not qualify as human subjects research as they are fully anonymized, did not collect identifiable private information about individuals, involved public figures discussing matters strictly related to their professional roles, and was not a systematic investigation. Moreover, following APSA's Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research, there was no risk of harm or trauma, no deception, and no activity that was disrespectful. There was no broader social impact of these conversations and no intervention or impact on political processes