

Winner Animosity, Losers’ Dissent and the Rationales of Contestation^{*}

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Thanks!

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Abstract

The losers’ consent principle—that in democracies losers must accept and comply with electoral defeat—appears increasingly challenged. This erosion has been linked to affective polarization, yet the precise connection between the two phenomena remains underspecified. We advance and test a novel theoretical framework, arguing that animosity toward the election winner—the party expected to control executive power—motivates losers to contest results due to anticipated harmful government actions. Using an original pre-registered experiment fielded during Austria’s 2024 elections and a regression-discontinuity design with global data, we show that losing to one’s most disliked party lowers democratic satisfaction and raises support for contestation. Mixed-methods analyses reveal these reactions stem from substantive concerns about policy and undemocratic actions by the winner, not mere emotion. Our findings clarify a pathway from affective polarization to losers’ dissent, via winner animosity, and raise normative questions about the role of consent in democracy when contestation reflects militant democracy rationales.

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"All of us here today do not want to see our election victory stolen by emboldened radical-left Democrats [...] we will never concede."

— Donald Trump, Washington, January 6th, 2021

"Democracy means that I accept the election, but not that an old Nazi party takes over the government."

— Anonymous survey respondent, Austria, September 6-19th, 2024

Democracy depends on election losers. They must concede defeat, transfer power, and accept their opponents' governance until the next election ([Anderson et al. 2005](#); [Przeworski 1991](#); [Riker 1983](#)). This core pillar of democratic stability—losers' consent, or losers' willingness to accept election outcomes without overturning them—appears increasingly challenged. Losing candidates or parties rejected outcomes in one in five elections worldwide between mid-2020 and mid-2024 ([International IDEA 2024](#)), with the storming of the US Capitol in January 2021 and the attack on Brazilian institutions a year later among the most dramatic examples. In Europe, such as in Austria ([Reuters 2024](#)) and Italy ([NewsHour 2022](#)), election results have also triggered protests, particularly after far-right victories, fueled by concerns about winners' potential disregard for political rights and democratic restraint. These developments indicate the breadth of the losers' consent erosion in today's democracies, suggest distinct contestation dynamics, and demand renewed understanding of their causes and rationales.

Recent accounts have focused on affective polarization—the increasing gap between inpartisan warmth and hostility toward outpartisans ([Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012](#))—for its role in weakening democratic norms. Despite mixed evidence on its causal effect ([Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood 2023](#); [Harteveld et al. 2022](#); [Voelkel et al. 2023](#)), affectively polarized citizens have been shown to prioritize partisan loyalty over basic democratic principles, including the peaceful transfer of power ([Graham and Svolik 2020](#); [Kingzette et al. 2021](#); [Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay](#)

2022). Affectively polarized voters also report lower satisfaction with democracy after losing elections (Andrews and Huang 2024; Janssen 2023; Ridge 2020; Wagner 2021), potentially undermining institutional legitimacy and fueling undemocratic behavior. However, despite this evidence connecting affective polarization to losers’ consent erosion, the extent and specific mechanisms through which this connection operates remain underspecified.

We contribute to these debates by revisiting losers’ consent and its relationship with affective polarization by focusing on *Winner animosity*. We theorize that losers’ willingness to accept election defeats depends on animosity toward the election winner and the expectations this animosity captures. Winner animosity refers to a specific form of partisan animosity—negative affect toward political outgroups (Hartman et al. 2022, 1194)—directed vertically toward the election winner, i.e., the outparty expected to control executive power. While affective polarization captures the broader gap between inparty warmth and outparty hostility, empirical evidence shows this gap is driven primarily by outparty animosity rather than inparty affect (Garzia and Ferreira da Silva 2025) and that outparty animosity concentrates its negative democratic implications (Eroglu 2025; Nettasinghe, Percus, and Lerman 2025). We therefore argue that outpartisan affect directed toward the election winner is directly consequential to understanding affectively polarized voters’ reactions to electoral losses.

Building on this argument, we propose a novel theoretical framework to develop expectations about *whether* winner animosity fosters citizens’ dissent, *how* they are willing to contest election losses, and *why* they do so. Our theory departs from a conception of dissent as contestation actions that take place when control of the executive is lost. In contrast to attitudinal forms of dissent (such as dissatisfaction with democracy), our argument posits that actual contestation (e.g., protest mobilization) requires motivations that justify bearing the costs of dissent. Rooted in evidence that

affective polarization reflects policy distance and material disagreement ([Dias and Lelkes 2022](#); [Orr, Fowler, and Huber 2023](#); [Orr and Huber 2020](#); [Wagner 2024](#)), the key insight of our theory is that winner animosity motivates contestation not through emotion alone, but because voters anticipate harmful government actions that justify bearing contestation costs. As a result, costlier contestation actions require greater expected harm. Crucially, these anticipated actions, such as threatening policies or democratic backsliding, may vary by winner identity, shaping distinct rationales for contestation.

Empirically, we first test the core observable implication of our theory: losing to a most disliked winner, compared to a less disliked one, causally increases voters’ willingness to contest elections. We do so with a novel experiment during Austria’s 2024 parliamentary election, where FPÖ, SPÖ, and ÖVP were all credible contenders. We exposed participants, weeks before the vote, to hypothetical loss scenarios in which either their most disliked party (treatment) or a less disliked party (control) won. Hence, all participants face scenarios where they lose; we vary only which party wins. This design isolates the effect of winner identity and the expectations associated with each party on contestation support.

Second, moving beyond abstract indicators commonly used in the literature—such as satisfaction with democracy and trust in institutions (e.g., [Anderson et al. 2005](#); [Anderson and LoTempio 2002](#); [Daoust and Nadeau 2023](#))—we assess support for specific contestation modes spanning two dimensions: vertical contestation—by citizens—and horizontal contestation—by political actors and institutions. Our indicators also range from democratic dissent to outright rule violations, capturing citizens’ readiness to trade off democratic principles to block the winner from governing.

Third, we explore the rationales behind losers’ dissent. We expect losers’ motivations for dissent to stem from concerns about what the disliked winner will do once controlling the executive, and anticipate two rationales. On the one hand,

voters may fear harmful policies from the disliked winner, reflecting “democratic hypocrisy”—willingness to trade off democratic principles to block opposed policies (Cohen et al. 2022; Kingzette et al. 2021; Svolik 2020). On the other hand, voters may fear democratic backsliding, seeing the disliked winner as an undemocratic threat (Braley et al. 2023; Gessler and Wunsch 2025; Janssen, Kern, and Werner 2025). For such voters, dissent may express a militant defense of democracy (Capoccia 2013). We expect this motivation to be at least as common as the policy-based one, given contexts where democratic erosion stems from elected leaders who disregard forbearance, expand executive power, or weaken institutions (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Mazepus and Toshkov 2022; Werner, Bertson, and Marien 2025).

Our findings support our theoretical expectations. We find that exposure to a most disliked winner increases dissent consistently across attitudinal and intentional contestation items, though costlier or clearly undemocratic actions, such as violent protest, receive less support overall. Moreover, combining close-ended, forced-choice, and qualitative analyses of open-ended questions, we show that losing to a disliked winner triggers dissent both through policy and democratic concerns, but that democratic concerns dominate. We also observe variation depending on the party type. When the radical right wins, losers show a militant democratic response, rejecting the outcome over fears the winner will erode democracy from within. In contrast, when other parties win, losers display higher partisan democratic hypocrisy, grounding their rejection in policy opposition more than democratic threat.

In a follow-up analysis, we assess the external validity of our core findings and present observational evidence from a regression-discontinuity design. Results show that marginally losing to the most disliked candidate substantially lowers satisfaction with democracy—by a magnitude similar to our experimental benchmark, and varying by winner dislike distance. Together, these results reinforce the comparative validity of our findings.

This paper makes two main contributions. Theoretically, we clarify the connection between affective polarization and losers’ consent erosion by identifying winner animosity and its correlates as the linking mechanism. Winner animosity—animosity toward the party expecting to control executive power—operates not through emotion alone, but through expectations of harmful government actions that justify bearing contestation’s costs. This approach extends understanding of affective polarization beyond its “pure” emotional dimension, connecting it to the political rationales that make animosity consequential (Dias and Lelkes 2022; Orr, Fowler, and Huber 2023; Orr and Huber 2020; Wagner 2024). We further show that these rationales can vary by winner identity: voters anticipate both policy and democratic threats, with the latter dominating when radical-right parties win.

Empirically, we provide robust evidence of these theoretical mechanisms using a mixed-methods approach. We provide causal evidence through a novel experimental design embedded in a real election setting that manipulates winner identity among always-losers, isolating the effect of losing to more or less disliked parties while holding losing constant. The generalizability of these findings is supported by cross-national evidence using an RDD design. Combined with a mixed-methods design integrating novel contestation items and qualitative analysis of open-ended responses, we show empirically that losers’ consent erosion manifests across contestation modes—vertical and horizontal—and stems from distinct rationales rooted in expectations about government actions. We thus contribute to research moving beyond abstract indicators of support as proxies for consent (Lawall, Michalaki, and Tsakiris 2025; Tomic et al. 2024) and align this literature more closely with studies of democratic backsliding (e.g., Claassen et al. 2025).

Overall, our findings carry important normative implications. By distinguishing between democratic hypocrisy and militant democracy rationales, we challenge the view that equates losers’ consent with democratic stability. Under democratic threat,

denying trust to a strongly disliked opponent—even if democratically elected—may serve as a safeguard for institutions rather than evidence of democratic erosion. Yet these rationales can backfire when grounded in outpartisan misperceptions (Braley et al. 2023) or exploited by authoritarian candidates to justify undemocratic actions against opponents. While resolving this debate is beyond the scope of this paper, this analysis invites further reflections on whether losers’ dissent and contesting democratic outcomes—under specific conditions and forms—may be justified or even desirable within a functioning democracy.

The Losers’ Consent in Polarized Societies

In the game of democratic politics, elections determine winners—who take executive power and govern until the end of the electoral cycle—and losers. While winners can modify the rules of the game from within, it is losers who decide whether to keep playing (Anderson et al. 2005, 2). In other words, losers “decide when and how and whether to fight on” (Riker 1983, 62), raising the question of why those who lose choose to comply with election outcomes and “continue to participate rather than subvert democratic institutions” (Przeworski 1991, 15).

While long a topic of concern, the systematic study of losers’ consent in democracies took shape in the 1990s, when the term was coined (see Nadeau and Blais 1993) and research began examining how winner–loser status shapes democratic legitimacy. Although early work theorized losers’ compliance, empirical studies relied on available measures of abstract democratic attitudes—such as support for democracy as the best system and satisfaction with the way democracy works (SWD). Since then, numerous studies have found a winner–loser gap in democratic satisfaction that reverses with power alternation (Anderson et al. 2005). Losers also show lower trust in the political system (Anderson and LoTempio 2002), greater skepticism about election fairness (Reller, Anderson, and Kousser 2022), and less confidence in the judiciary (Böhringer

and Boucher 2024), among other outcomes (e.g., Allinger 2024; Anderson and Mendes 2006). This pattern holds across time and regimes—new, low-, and high-quality democracies; proportional and majoritarian systems; single and repeated losses; and despite many individual-level moderators such as partisanship or pre-electoral expectations (for a review see Daoust and Nadeau 2023)

Coinciding with a democratization period (Huntington 1991), the winner–loser gap was initially viewed positively—as a healthy pattern reflecting democracy’s natural alternation of power. Losers typically did not experience a SWD decrease after elections; rather, the gap stemmed from a stronger post-election boost among winners that faded over time. Theoretically, winners held more positive attitudes toward democracy through three mechanisms: greater influence on policy outcomes (utilitarian), the emotional satisfaction of seeing their preferred party win (psychological), and to maintain attitudinal consistency (cognitive). Losers, too, could experience a modest boost from the symbolic and expressive benefits of voting and from observing fair elections producing democratic outcomes, even when these did not benefit them directly (Blais and Gélneau 2007; Kostelka and Blais 2018; Nadeau and Blais 1993).

This dominant view has been challenged over the past decade. Between mid-2020 and mid-2024, losing candidates or parties publicly rejected electoral outcomes in one in five elections worldwide, while opposition parties boycotted one in ten (International IDEA 2024). Particularly dramatic cases have occurred in consolidated democracies such as the US, and contestation has become more common in Europe. Two concurrent developments may help explain this pattern.

First, radical parties—especially on the right—have gained significant ground over the past two decades, becoming major contenders (e.g., France) or even winners (e.g., Italy, the Netherlands, Austria) across Western democracies. Beyond the democratic risks posed by some of their policies, strong evidence shows that radical party voters experience systematic declines in SWD and trust after elections unless they win

(Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Rooduijn and Slageren 2022; Rooduijn, Van Der Brug, and De Lange 2016), raising doubts about their commitment to losers’ consent.

Second, the rise of radical parties has coincided with growing affective polarization—the gap between warmth toward one’s own party and hostility toward political opponents—across most Western democracies (Boxell, Gentzkow, and Shapiro 2024; Garzia, Ferreira da Silva, and Maye 2023). In some cases, such as the US, this trend has accelerated sharply, surpassing previous levels and raising doubts about democracy’s resilience under extreme societal tension (Iyengar et al. 2019). This concern is reinforced by extensive evidence that affectively polarized citizens exhibit partisan “democratic hypocrisy,” accepting democratic transgressions to keep their party in power, secure preferred policies, or block opponents from governing (Graham and Svobik 2020; Kingzette et al. 2021; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022). Moreover, there is growing consensus that losers’ democratic dissatisfaction is greater among polarized voters (Andrews and Huang 2024; Janssen 2023; Ridge 2020; Tomic et al. 2024; Wagner 2021).

However, the literature remains divided on the causal nature of this relationship. Experimental manipulations of affective polarization—typically through interventions on outpartisan feelings—show little effect on democratic norms or support (Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood 2023; Harteveld et al. 2022; Voelkel et al. 2023). Likewise, leveraging the unexpected shift in winner–loser status in Chile, Tomic et al. (2024) find that highly polarized losers report lower satisfaction with democracy but show negligible change in norms tied to losers’ consent. Overall, clear causal evidence linking affective polarization to losers’ consent erosion remains limited, and the specific nature of their connection unclear.

A further limitation concerns the normative understanding of losers’ dissent. Initially, dissent was deemed legitimate only “when the election turns out to be less than fair” (Anderson et al. 2005, 6). This view has since been challenged.

Increasingly, studies show that constraining the power of winners—even if fairly elected—may be as vital for democratic resilience as losers’ consent (Tomic et al. 2024; Werner, Bertsou, and Marien 2025). This argument is supported by evidence of recent backsliding, often driven by elected leaders who abandoned forbearance, weakened checks and balances, or pursued executive aggrandizement (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Mazepus and Toshkov 2022). Under these conditions, examining losers’ dissent and its motivations becomes crucial. Losers’ dissent may serve as a democratic safeguard, reflecting a militant democracy principle (Capoccia 2013)—the belief that democracies must prevent authoritarianism by limiting the rights of extreme or undemocratic actors. Yet the prevalence of such rationales among voters, and how they relate to affective polarization, remains largely unexamined.

Winner Animosity and the Rationales of Contestation

We propose a framework to explain why losers’ dissent intensifies among affectively polarized citizens, centered on the role of *winner animosity*. Affective polarization is characterized by two components: inparty positive affect and outparty negative affect. The latter is normally referred to as partisan animosity (Hartman et al. 2022)—negative affect toward political outgroups. This animosity can be directed horizontally toward outpartisans as individuals or vertically toward outparties as institutions. Winner animosity is a specific form of vertical partisan animosity directed toward the election winner, which, as we discuss below, is expected to control the executive power. As partisan animosity has been shown to concentrate the negative democratic implications of affective polarization (Eroglu 2025; Nettasinghe, Percus, and Lerman 2025), we argue that winner animosity carries the connection between affective polarization and losers’ dissent not through mere emotions, but through the underlying policy and material disagreements with the disliked winner that shape expectations of what the winner will do in government.

Our argument rests on a definition of *losing* in terms of access to executive power: losers are all eligible citizens who did not vote for the party or candidate leading the executive.¹ In majoritarian systems like the US, these are simply those who did not support the most-voted candidate, such as non-Republican voters in the 2024 election. In multi-party systems, losing is less straightforward: a party may win the most votes or seats yet fail to take executive power. Still, the top-voted party usually holds the largest seat share and leads government formation (Döring and Hellström 2013). Focusing on executive power aligns our definition with classic conceptions of losing (see Anderson et al. 2005; Przeworski 1991; Riker 1983). This approach also captures cases where voters dissent preemptively, expecting the top-voted party to form government—as seen in post-election protests after Austria’s 2024 election opposing a radical-right FPÖ government (Reuters 2024) or in Spain’s 2023 protests over Socialist–Catalan coalition talks (Euronews 2023).

With losing defined as failing to control the executive, we understand losers’ *consent* as refraining from contesting election results. Losers’ dissent—opposite of consent—may appear in negative attitudes toward democracy, but true dissent involves contestation actions or support for them, which are costly. While later work emphasizes a “subjective” view based on (dis)confirmed expectations (Plescia 2019),² we argue that only the political costs of disliked government actions—actual or anticipated—can justify contesting democratic outcomes. Protesting, for instance, entails time, effort, and psychological costs.³ To undertake such costly actions, voters must perceive a

¹For simplicity, we treat abstainers and blank/null voters as losers, since they did not vote for the party leading the executive.

²This perspective emphasizes individual-level reactions: voters may respond positively when their party exceeds expectations or vice versa (Meffert et al. 2011), and depending on the strength of their party attachment (Baekgaard 2023).

³By psychological costs, we mean the burden of defying the shared moral and social norm that election results must be respected—a norm consistently supported in cross-national surveys (e.g., Claassen et al. 2025).

sufficiently serious threat. Emotional disappointment from a party’s underperformance rarely meets this threshold. By contrast, expected harmful government actions—especially policies threatening material well-being—can motivate contestation. Hence, losing executive power remains the key condition for understanding consent and the absence of contestation in democratic elections.

Within this framework, we argue that animosity toward the winner shapes losers’ willingness to accept electoral defeat. Affective polarization is rooted in substantial disagreement about policy and democratic preferences (Gessler and Wunsch 2025; Orr, Fowler, and Huber 2023; Orr and Huber 2020). Larger emotional distance to the winner, therefore, will be associated with policies that are more distant to the losers. Hence, all else equal, whether a more or less disliked party holds executive power will convey different expectations of government actions, ultimately shaping the likelihood of contestation. Specifically, when a more disliked party wins, voters will anticipate more harmful government actions rooted in their substantial disagreement with the winner’s platform. Thus, even if negative affect toward the winner may weaken perceptions of legitimacy and heighten distress through an emotional reaction, winner animosity will also trigger concrete expectations about harmful policies or undemocratic decisions that can justify bearing the costs of contestation. We identify two main threats from a disliked governing party that can erode losers’ consent: (1) policies contrary to losers’ preferences and (2) undemocratic or backsliding behavior.

We advance a set of pre-registered testable hypotheses⁴ to assess the core empirical implications of our argument. To be sure, we do not test the whole causal chain, but a series of interrelated observable implications that, if confirmed, would support our argument. We begin by examining our main causal expectation: *whether* losing to a particularly disliked party increases the likelihood of dissent. We test this in two ways. First, we use the most common and general measure of losers’ consent—satisfaction

⁴See the preregistration.

with democracy (SWD)—as a benchmark. Although widely used, SWD has been criticized for conceptual ambiguity and its limited ability to capture democratic commitment (Ferrin 2016; Linde and Ekman 2003; Singh and Mayne 2023). Moreover, as argued above, it poorly reflects losers’ dissent, being far removed from actual contestation. Still, we analyze whether losing to the most disliked party reduces SWD for two reasons. First, changes in SWD—not absolute levels—may indicate negative reactions to election outcomes, reflecting cognitive, emotional and utilitarian responses linked to contestation. Second, despite its flaws, SWD remains a core indicator in the losers’ consent literature. Including it allows us to link our findings on specific outcomes to prior research, reassessing earlier results in light of our evidence. Our first hypothesis is therefore as follows:

H1: Losing to a more disliked party will reduce satisfaction with democracy.

Second, we test whether losing to the most disliked party heightens dissent by measuring support for different contestation modes. We define contestation broadly, including both voter actions challenging election results or processes (*vertical contestation*) and support for elite strategies obstructing the incoming government (*horizontal contestation*). While contesting free and fair elections can be inherently anti-democratic, some forms of dissent remain constitutional, such as peaceful demonstrations, whereas others—like violent protests or unconstitutional judicial obstruction—clearly violate democratic norms. We thus examine support for contestation across a spectrum from democratic to undemocratic actions, with the latter being costlier. Given limited prior research on specific actions, we hypothesize that losing to a most disliked party increases support for contestation, while exploring outcome-specific differences to assess *how* citizens respond to a disliked winner. Our second hypothesis is as follows:

H2: Losing to a more disliked party will increase support for contestation.⁵

⁵This hypothesis departs from the preregistered version; see Appendix A11 for all

Our theory emphasizes that negative affect toward the winner is not merely an emotional reaction to losing against a disliked opponent but rests on rationales explaining *why* voters bear the costs of contestation. We propose two. The first, well-documented in both the affective polarization and losers’ consent literatures, is “democratic hypocrisy” (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022): citizens may reject the winner’s authority because they expect policies so opposed to their preferences that they are willing to trade off democratic principles—including losers’ consent—to block it.

A growing literature highlights an alternative rationale for losers’ dissent among affectively polarized voters. Research on affective polarization shows that perceptions of democratic threats from political opponents can be a source—rather than merely a result—of group divides (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Wunsch, Jacob, and Derksen 2025). In this view, losers’ dissent may stem from fears that opponents will violate democratic norms and restrict their rights (Braley et al. 2023; Janssen, Kern, and Werner 2025; McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). Though seemingly paradoxical, this perspective suggests voters may contest election outcomes as an act of “militant democracy” (Capoccia 2013), seeking to defend democracy from an undemocratic winner.

We lack strong priors to expect either explanation to prevail. Moreover, whether these logics are causal mechanisms or post-hoc rationalizations, and if they work in a mutually exclusive or reinforcing manner, remains unclear. Our goal here is thus exploratory and to advance this current debate by examining whether declining satisfaction with democracy—our indicator of losers’ consent erosion—seems primarily driven by policy (democratic hypocrisy) or democratic (militant democracy) rationales. Specifically, we examine how citizens rank and weigh these motivations against each other using a mixed-methods approach. This results in two hypotheses:

deviations.

H3a: Losing to a more disliked party will increase the prevalence of *policy*-rooted rationales for dissatisfaction.

H3b: Losing to a more disliked party will increase the prevalence of *democracy*-rooted rationales for dissatisfaction.

We acknowledge that other, non-theorized explanations for dissent may emerge, so we will explore them qualitatively and report them. Also, while earlier research suggests that losers’ consent erosion is concentrated among populist and radical voters (Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Rooduijn and Slageren 2022; Rooduijn, Van Der Brug, and De Lange 2016), recent experimental and qualitative evidence indicates it may also occur among voters with strong dislike of the winner, regardless of party (Canalejo-Molero and Le Corre Juratic 2024). However, the rationales for contestation across party types, as suggested above, may vary. Therefore, we also explore heterogeneous treatment effects by winning party. Finally, our winner animosity theory suggests that stronger animosity will increase contestation likelihood, so we will also explore heterogeneous treatment effects by dislike distance to the winner.

Experimental Evidence from the 2024 Austrian Elections

To test our hypotheses, we conducted a vignette experiment manipulating exposure to hypothetical election results where either their most disliked or less disliked party wins. The experiment drew on the 2024 Austrian parliamentary elections, where the three major parties—FPÖ, ÖVP, and SPÖ—all had credible chances of winning and forming a government, and where voters displayed strong negative affect toward these parties (Appendix A1). We recruited 2,500 respondents⁶ representative of the Austrian population by gender, age, and region, and surveyed them during the campaign, between September 6 and 19, 2024—ten days before the September 29

⁶The preregistered power analysis shows that 2,500 respondents suffice to detect even very small effects (Appendix A2).

election. The next section details our experimental design.

Experiment design

Our experiment manipulates exposure to a series of hypothetical election results scenarios depicted in vignettes. All respondents face scenarios where *they lose*, thereby holding non-winning constant.⁷ However, they are randomly assigned to losses against their most disliked or less disliked party. In this way, we induce exogenous variation in the identity of the winner, maximizing winner animosity for the treated, and allowing us to explore variation in dissatisfaction rationales. The September 2024 Austrian legislative election offered an ideal setting, as the three major parties had credible chances of winning, allowing exposure to either disliked potential winner.

To construct each respondent’s “losing” scenario and expose them to a most or less disliked winner, we first mapped partisan preferences using two pre-treatment indicators: (1) partisan identification and (2) like–dislike ratings for each major party. In multiparty systems, some voters identify with the major parties while others may identify with parties unlikely to win yet hold clear preferences among credible contenders. To address this variation, we used partisan ID to determine the preferred party for respondents identifying with one of the three main parties (FPÖ, SPÖ, ÖVP), and like–dislike scores for others, assigning the party with the highest rating as preferred. This approach uses the strongest available measure of partisan preference for each respondent. We then identified the two disliked parties and randomly assigned respondents to a scenario where either their most disliked (treatment) or less disliked (control) party wins.⁸ Respondents giving identical like–dislike scores to all or two

⁷Most losers’ consent studies compare winners and losers, conflating losing with non-winning (a collider in our framework). Focusing on *always-losers* allows us to identify the effect of losing conditional on the winner.

⁸All treatment-control combinations appear in Appendix A3.

parties were excluded.⁹ The final sample included 1,638 participants.¹⁰

The treatment is a vignette simulating a newspaper front page reporting the election winner the day after the vote. Before viewing it, respondents are reminded of the real 2024 Austrian parliamentary election’s date and features and told explicitly that the results are hypothetical. Using hypothetical scenarios to elicit reactions is well supported in psychological research (Carroll 1978) and has previously helped isolate the effects of election outcomes on political attitudes (e.g., Jacob 2022).

Below, we present the vignette introduction and examples for a respondent intending to vote for SPÖ, or another non-top-three party (e.g., the Greens) who rates SPÖ highest, ÖVP lower, and FPÖ lowest on the like-dislike scale, depending on assignment to the treatment or control condition.¹¹

*On September 29th, 2024, the parliamentary election to decide the next composition of the parliament and Austrian government will take place. Please **imagine you are on election night**, and the following hypothetical election results are being reported in the news.*¹²

⁹These respondents cannot experience losing to their most disliked party, either due to political apathy or partisan preferences not captured by our design. They are therefore excluded for both substantive and pragmatic reasons.

¹⁰See Appendix A6 for descriptive statistics and Appendix A7 for randomization checks.

¹¹Appendix A4 lists all vignettes.

¹²The vignettes translate as “The FPÖ / ÖVP won the election with 31% of the vote and is tasked with forming the new government.”

Die FPÖ hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:

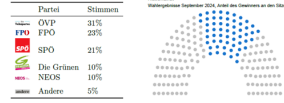


(a) Treatment condition vignette

Die ÖVP hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:



(b) Control condition vignette

Figure 1: Example of vignettes for SPÖ supporter who dislikes FPÖ more than ÖVP

After the vignette, respondents completed a short writing task to record their thoughts and reinforce engagement with the treatment. We then checked the manipulation by asking which party would lead the next government in the scenario, its likely coalition partners, and their feelings toward the reported winner. We expect treated respondents to correctly identify the exposed governing party and express stronger negative feelings toward it than those in the control condition.

Our main outcome variable measures support for different modes of contesting the election outcome. We also include abstract indicators of democratic support to benchmark our results against prior research on losers' consent. Whenever possible, we adapt measures from previous studies on affective polarization, satisfaction with democracy, and democratic norms, tailoring them to the specific scenario presented to respondents.

Our main benchmarking outcome is a 10-point scale measuring satisfaction with democracy: *"If these were the election results, how satisfied would you say you are with the way democracy works in Austria?"* . We use it to test our first hypothesis and to replicate findings with observational data in our cross-national analysis. We also include two traditional items widely used in the losers' consent literature. On a 10-point scale, respondents rate agreement with: *"We should respect the results of*

Table 1: Contestation outcomes by dimension and adherence to formal democratic rules

	Horizontal	Vertical
Democratic	• Parties impeding effective govt.	• Peaceful marches, Signing a petition
Undemocratic	• Judges blocking govt. beyond mandate	• Violent protest

elections, no matter which party wins” and *“Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government”*. The first captures abstract support for losers’ consent (Claassen et al. 2025), and the second general support for democracy.

For our second hypothesis, we use four items capturing *horizontal contestation* and two capturing *vertical contestation*. Among the horizontal modes, one is attitudinal and three intentional, measuring willingness to engage in specific contestation behaviors. The attitudinal item measures agreement on a 10-point scale with: *“It would be completely acceptable if losing parties’ supporters used violence when [winning party] enters government”* (Berntzen, Kelsall, and Hartevelt n.d.). The intentional items ask, also on a 10-point scale, how likely respondents would be to: *“Engage in violent protests organized to challenge the [winning party] government”*, *“Go on a protest march or demonstration against the [winning party] government”* and *“Sign a petition to ask for the repetition of the elections”*. All actions were shown in random order.

The two attitudinal items capturing *vertical contestation* measure agreement with: *“Other parties should do everything in their power to make it as difficult as possible for [winning party] to run the government effectively”* and *“The judiciary should restrict the [winning party] government power to the greatest degree, even if it involves overstepping its constitutional limits”*. Both are rated on 10-point scales and presented in random order with other attitudinal items. The first reflects actions by other parties and the idea of a *cordon sanitaire* (Turnbull-Dugarte 2025), while the second implies undemocratic judicial interference to hinder the incoming government. Table 1 summarizes our contestation outcomes.

To test our third hypothesis and identify respondents’ rationales for contestation,

we combine three approaches. First, we analyze unprimed reasoning behind satisfaction with democracy: *“You answered [respondent score] on a scale from 0 to 10 on how satisfied you would be with the way democracy works if you were confronted with these election results. Please explain your answer in a few words and why you feel this way.”*. We qualitatively coded 1,281 answers from dissatisfied respondents, classifying them as democratic (1) or policy (2) rationales, and inductively identifying other non-theorized reasons for dissatisfaction (Appendix A10). Second, we included a forced-choice item where respondents selected their main concern—policy threat, democratic threat, or none.¹³ Third, because these mechanisms may overlap (e.g., some may view democratic harm as a policy issue), we followed up with more specific questions about each. Policy threats referred to disagreement with economic, immigration, or climate policies, while democratic threats concerned the rule of law, court compliance, or media censorship. Overall, we capture rationales for dissatisfaction through a robust mixed-method design.¹⁴

Finally, alongside our outcome and conditioning variables, we included several pre-treatment survey items to assess sample representativeness, verify randomization, and explore potential heterogeneous treatment effects. These items covered gender, age, education level, household income (in quintiles), employment status, left–right self-placement, and expectations about electoral outcomes. Figure 2 summarizes the experimental design.

We test our three hypotheses by estimating average treatment effects (ATEs) through ordinary least squares (OLS) regressions. The main specification includes treatment status (T) as the key independent variable. Both continuous and ordinal dependent variables (DVs) are analyzed as continuous. For each hypothesis, we estimate the following equation:

¹³We randomize each statement’s wording across two versions to ensure wording does not drive the results.

¹⁴See the post-treatment questionnaire in Appendix A5.

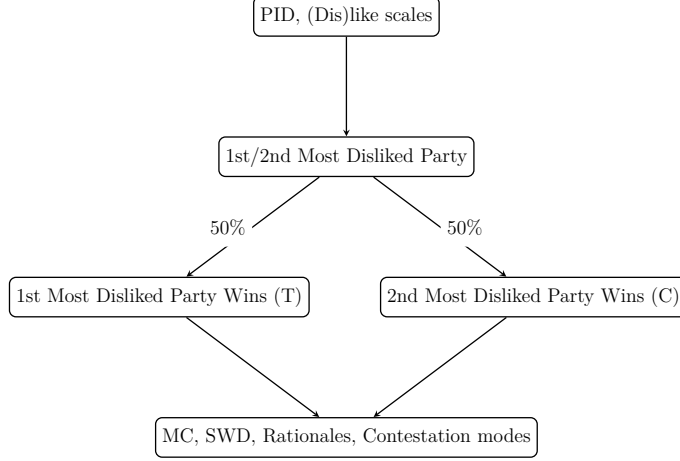


Figure 2: Experiment flow diagram

$$y_i = \alpha_0 + \delta_1 T_i + \varepsilon_i$$

where y is the dependent variable, δ is the coefficient of interest, representing the estimated average treatment effect (ATE), and ε is the error term. In additional specifications in the appendix, we add a vector of covariates X' to increase the precision of the estimates.

We use a multinomial specification for analyzing the forced-choice question on respondents' main concern. In this case, we estimate the following equation:

$$\Pr(y_i = j) = \frac{\exp(\alpha_j + \delta_j T_i)}{\sum_{k=1}^J \exp(\alpha_k + \delta_k T_i)}, \quad j = 1, \dots, J$$

where y_i is a categorical outcome with J possible categories and the parameters δ_j capture the effect of treatment T_i on the relative probability of choosing category j compared to the baseline category (*None of the above*). The coefficients are interpreted relative to the omitted baseline, and we present the results as average marginal effects (AMEs) for clarity.

Results

We assess the success of our manipulation in two ways. First, we plot responses identifying which party would lead the government following the hypothetical election outcome. Second, we estimate the ATE of the most disliked party's victory on feelings toward the hypothetical winner using a feeling thermometer. Figure 3 confirms that the manipulation was strong and effective. As the left panel shows, respondents exposed to FPÖ, SPÖ, or ÖVP as winners were much more likely to identify that party as the likely government leader. Moreover, treated respondents felt on average about 25 degrees cooler toward the winner when their most disliked party won. The distribution also reveals pronounced winner animosity, with many treated respondents reporting intense negative affect (0 degrees) toward the winner.

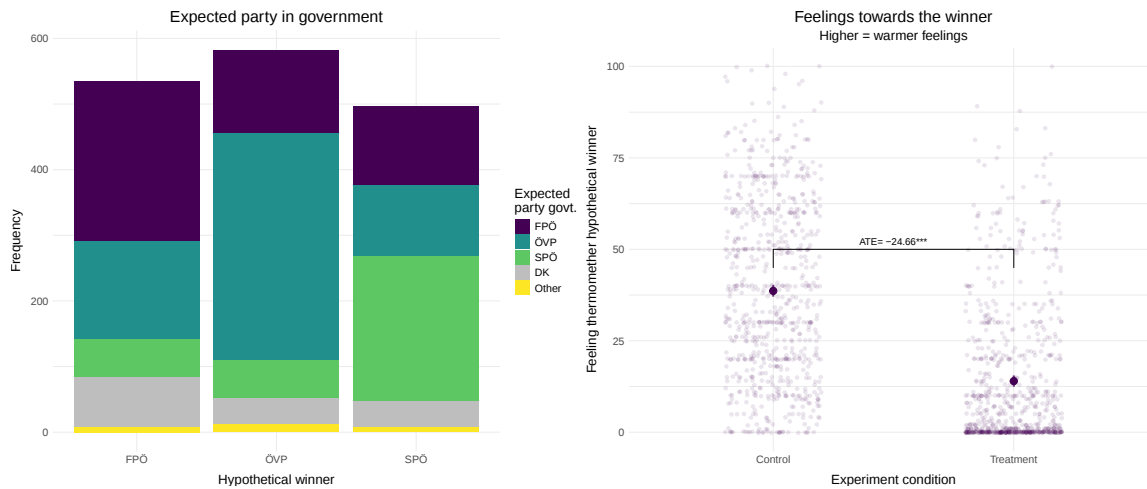


Figure 3: Manipulation checks results

Note: The left plot shows which party respondents expected to lead government formation, with the hypothetical winner seen as most likely. The right plot shows the ATE on feelings toward the winner, indicating significantly cooler feelings under treatment (see Table 7, Appendix 8).

We now turn to the formal test of our three hypotheses. First, we benchmark the effect of a most disliked winner on losers' consent erosion by estimating its impact on

satisfaction with democracy, the most common indicator in this literature. The left panel of Figure 4 shows an estimated ATE of $-.37$ standard deviations—a decrease of nearly 1.3 points on a 0–10 scale when exposed to the most disliked winner scenario.¹⁵ These results strongly support Hypothesis 1, indicating that losing to a most disliked candidate—compared to losing to a less disliked one—causally and substantially reduces satisfaction with democracy.

Turning to the right panel of Figure 4, we examine how losers express dissent and contest elections. Strikingly, the answer is “in any possible way.” When losing to the most disliked party, respondents show greater support for both vertical and horizontal contestation—democratic and undemocratic alike—even when actions are costly, such as protesting. We find significant effects across all contestation modes except violent protest (consistent with Westwood et al. 2022), providing strong evidence for Hypothesis 2. The largest effect appears for horizontal contestation, namely support for opposition blocking strategies. Effects are smaller but still substantial for more personally costly actions (protesting, signing petitions) and undemocratic ones (judicial overreach), consistent with our argument that dissent is costly. Finally, exposure to a most disliked winner modestly affects abstract losers’ consent indicators but not abstract democratic support (“democracy is the best system”), suggesting the latter is conceptually distinct, while satisfaction with democracy and respect for election results align with Anderson et al.’s (2005) original framework.¹⁶

¹⁵Appendix A6 reports outcome variable distributions.

¹⁶As preregistered, we replicated main models with controls, robust SEs, and p-values adjusted for multiple hypotheses testing (Appendix A8). Factor analysis confirmed horizontal and vertical contestation and attitudinal support distinctions, as well as our main findings (Appendix A9.1).

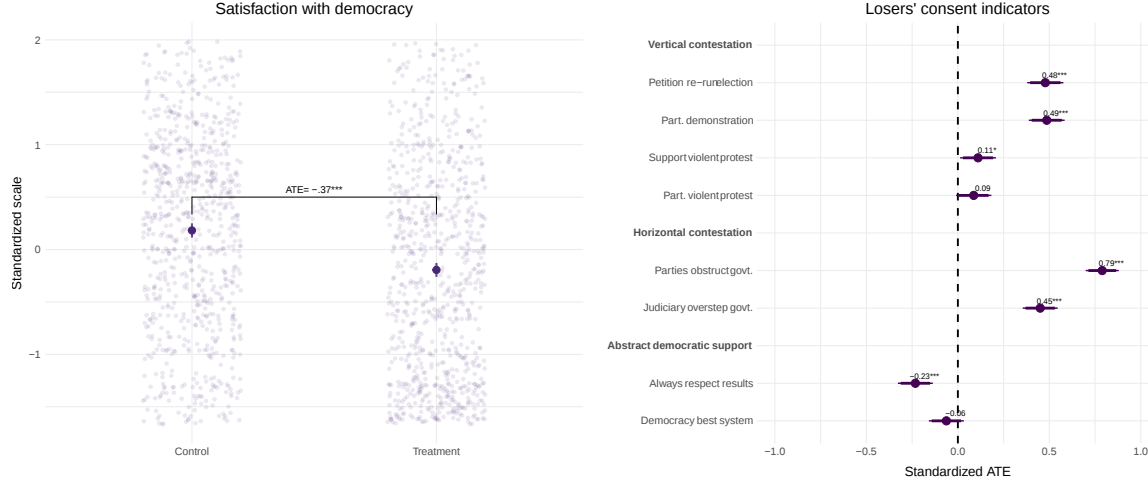


Figure 4: ATE on SWD (left) and on support for contestation (right)

Note: The left plot shows the ATE on satisfaction with democracy; the right shows ATEs on support for contestation and abstract democratic support. All outcomes are standardized. Results indicate lower satisfaction and higher contestation support, with no significant effects for violent protest or for seeing democracy as the best system (Tables 7–9, Appendix 8).

Moreover, exploratory analyses of heterogeneous treatment effects by dislike distance provide additional evidence supporting our argument (Appendix A9.2). Interacting the treatment with dislike distance between the preferred party and the winner (while holding specific winner constant) indicates that support for contestation and dissatisfaction increase with more negative affect toward the winner. Thus, the intensity of dislike (i.e., animosity) matters for contestation. Interactions are significant for SWD and for all elite-driven contestation items, but only for some horizontal modes, though coefficients are always in the expected direction.

Finally, we provide evidence supportive of hypotheses 3a and 3b that substantive rationales for dissatisfaction become more prevalent against the most disliked winner. In an exploratory manner, we also find suggestive evidence that democratic concerns dominate. We proceed in several steps. First, we estimate the ATE on items capturing

respondents’ main concerns, shown in Figure 5. Results indicate that fears about democracy’s future are the primary source of dissatisfaction following a disliked winner. As the right panel shows, when forced to choose their main concern, respondents exposed to their most disliked candidate are far more likely to cite democratic threats and less likely to report no concern. This is also the case regardless of the most disliked party identity, as our HTE analyses displayed in Figure 11 in our supplementary materials show.

Second, we analyze perceptions of threats with separate items. We find that a disliked winner heightens both policy and democracy concerns. All indicators, including aggregated indexes, show large and significant effects, the smallest exceeding .6 standard deviations. These results support our broader argument: a disliked winner increases contestation by raising fears about harmful government actions.

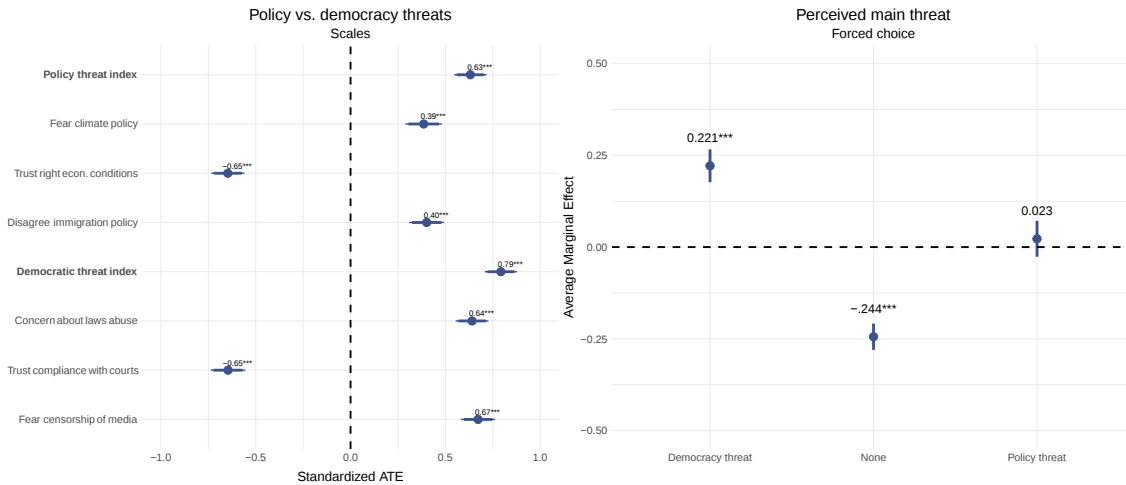


Figure 5: ATE on policy vs. democracy threats

Note: The left plot shows ATEs on standardized Likert items and indexes capturing democratic and policy concerns. The right plot shows ATEs from a forced-choice question contrasting policy and democratic concerns with “none” between control and treatment (Tables 10–12, Appendix 8).

Third, we triangulate these findings by exploring unprimed answers where respon-

dents explain why they feel unsatisfied with democracy in the given scenario. This question precedes all other outcomes, reducing concerns about ex-post rationalization (Krishnarajan 2022). As shown in the left panel of Figure 6, respondents exposed to their most disliked candidate were more likely to mention threats or erosion of democracy if that candidate won. Only about 10% referenced democratic rationales in the control condition, nearly doubling under treatment.¹⁷

“These parties stand for nothing good and, in my opinion, are a threat to our democracy and to the people of this country.”

“Because Austria would no longer have democracy after that.”

These examples show that responses range from disillusionment about the system’s future to a strong sense of threat when facing a despised winner. By contrast, policy-based rationales increase only slightly under treatment. Respondents also cite other sources of dissatisfaction, including inertia or fatalism (e.g., “nothing changes,” especially after an ÖVP victory), disappointment reflecting a majoritarian view of democracy and a maximalist idea of losers’ consent (e.g., “I disagree, but the majority has spoken”), and general “anti-system” sentiments directed at parties and representative institutions (Appendix A10). Yet none of these alternative rationales appears more frequently than policy- or democracy-based justifications.

¹⁷LLM-coded replication yields similar findings (Appendix A10).

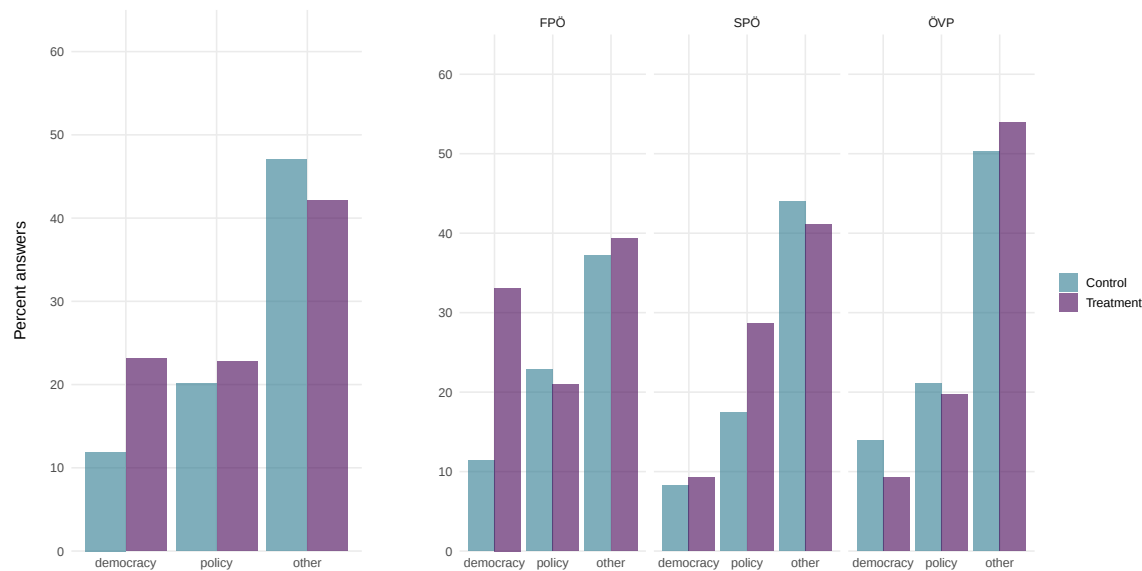


Figure 6: Share of answers displaying democracy, policy, and/or other rationales - pooled (left) and by election winner (right)

Note: The left plot shows pooled answers; the right groups them by election winner.

The right panel reveals another important pattern: most democratic rationales specifically reference the FPÖ, whereas mentions of policy threats more often concern the SPÖ. As the quotes below show, respondents directly invoke the FPÖ’s *Nazi* heritage and, at times, specify which aspects of democracy they expect the regime to erode.

“Democracy means that I accept the election, but not that an old Nazi party takes over the government”

“Our democracy has suffered a great deal over the last five years, and I fear for the media and the judiciary in the event of an Fpö participation”.

By contrast, the policy threat posed by the SPÖ is often framed around immigration and budgetary policies, as illustrated by the following response:

“A government under the ‘leadership’ of the SPÖ would be the downfall for Austria. Migrants would “flood” Austria and pull everything out of the

social system that goes. Actually, there is nothing left anyway. A large part of our pensions, for example, is already paid out of taxes and not out of the payroll system”.

This variation aligns with additional quantitative analyses of heterogeneous treatment effects by hypothetical winning party. The effect of exposure to the most disliked candidate on dissatisfaction with democracy, support for contestation, and perceptions of democratic threat is stronger under an FPÖ winner scenario (Table 23 in Appendix A9.2).

Taken together, these findings strongly support our hypotheses and theory. Citizens respond to a disliked election winner with greater dissatisfaction and stronger support for both vertical and horizontal contestation. This dissent appears driven by concerns over the winner’s actions once in power. While rationales rooted in both policy and democratic concerns arise, democratic ones—rather than mere hypocrisy—predominate. In Austria, militant-democracy rationales are particularly pronounced under far-right victory scenarios. Thus, although contestation is costly, concerns about a disliked winner in power seem strong enough to justify bearing these costs, even if rationales vary across losers.

Assessing External Validity with Cross-National Evidence

We find in the Austrian context that citizens respond to a disliked election winner with greater dissatisfaction. We now further investigate how this experimental finding may generalize cross-nationally with observational data. Due to data constraints, we focus on satisfaction with democracy as the main outcome, using observational survey data from real-world elections worldwide. Prior research shows that losers who dislike the winner report lower democratic satisfaction, though this evidence is largely correlational or case-specific. Here, we exploit close races with a regression discontinuity design and multiple post-election cross-sectional surveys to demonstrate

that a disliked winner causally and broadly reduces SWD.

Data and Identification Strategy

To identify the effect of losing to the most disliked party, we use data from waves 1–5 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) survey (2024), covering democratic elections worldwide between 1996 and 2021. The CSES consistently measures vote choice, satisfaction with democracy, and like–dislike ratings for all major parties. Satisfaction with democracy is measured with the 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 of the respondent]?* We recode this into a continuous 1–4 scale, rescaled so higher values indicate greater satisfaction, and standardized. The like–dislike scale asks respondents to rate each political party from 0 (*strongly dislike*) to 10 (*strongly like*).

Our identification strategy mirrors the experimental design, focusing on *always-losers* who narrowly lose to their most disliked party. Holding non-winning constant, we isolate variation in winner identity. To do so, we restrict the sample to parliamentary elections in parliamentary or semi-presidential systems, since government formation in presidential systems is independent of parliamentary outcomes. We identify winners using parties’ seat shares: voters for the largest-seat party are classified as winners and excluded. We also exclude voters for the second-largest party (*near-winners*), yielding a sample of third-party voters (*always-losers*).¹⁸ Among always-losers, we classify as treated those who dislike the seat-winning party more than the runner-up, and as controls those who dislike the runner-up more. We exclude elections with tied seat shares and voters rating both parties equally. The final dataset includes 84862

¹⁸We acknowledge that seat shares imperfectly proxy executive control and that CSES surveys sometimes precede government formation. However, voters anticipate government formation based on seat shares, and the largest party typically leads this process (Döring and Hellström 2013), making this the best available approximation.

observations across 148 elections in 42 countries.¹⁹

Disliking the winner more is endogenous and may correlate with individual or party traits. To approximate random assignment, we exploit close races using a regression discontinuity design (RDD). The running variable is the seat-share difference between the winner and runner-up; treatment is the most disliked party narrowly winning (threshold = 0). In close contests, which party wins depends on a few seats, making treatment *as-if random*. The RDD identifies the local average treatment effect (LATE) under the assumption that units near the threshold cannot manipulate the running variable—highly implausible in democratic elections. The next section validates these assumptions.

Validation Assumptions and Model Specification

RDD validity requires continuity of the running variable at the threshold and balance on observables. Although vote choice and like–dislike ratings are measured post-election, raising potential post-treatment bias, we find no visible discontinuity in the running variable’s distribution. A McCrary density test detects a small but statistically significant jump at the cut-off; we address this with robustness checks (Appendix B2). Balance tests show no significant discontinuities in individual-level covariates, though some imbalances emerge in party-level traits (Appendix B2). To strengthen causal identification, our main models control for gender, age, ideology, and income at the individual level, and vote share and radical-right support at the party level. We report baseline models without controls in Appendix B3.

Our final model specification is given by the following equation:

$$SWD_i = \alpha + \delta \cdot \text{Treatment}_i + f(\text{SeatDiff}_i) + \mathbf{X}_i\beta + \varepsilon_i$$

where SWD_i is satisfaction with democracy for individual i , the variable

¹⁹Appendix B1 reports descriptive statistics and included elections.

Treatment_i equals 1 if the most disliked party barely won, and 0 otherwise. The term $f(\text{SeatDiff}_i)$ represents a flexible function of the running variable—the seat-share difference between the top two parties, centered at zero. $\mathbf{X}_i$ is a vector of control variables, including individual-level characteristics (gender, age, ideology, and household income) and party-level characteristics (vote share and radical right support). ε_i is the error term. The coefficient of interest, δ , captures the **local average treatment effect** (LATE) of a most-disliked party narrowly winning.

Results

We estimate the RD specification using a non-parametric local linear regression implemented with the ‘RDrobust’ package in R (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2015). This package applies three complementary methods—conventional, bias-corrected, and robust to large bandwidths—and selects optimal bandwidths via a data-driven algorithm (Calonico, Cattaneo, and Farrell 2020; Calonico, Cattaneo, and Titiunik 2014). We estimate models for the full sample and by dislike distance subsets (low, median, and high), expecting stronger effects when the winner is more intensely disliked.²⁰

Figure 7 plots the results. The full-sample model (left panel) estimates a $-.207$ SD effect of a most-disliked party victory on satisfaction with democracy, consistent across specifications (p-values near zero). The right panel shows stronger effects with greater dislike distance: about a half-SD reduction in SWD for the highest dislike group, smaller but significant effects for median and low groups.

²⁰We compute the dislike distance as the absolute difference between the like–dislike scores for the winner and the runner-up. Based on quartiles, we classify respondents into three groups: low (below the first quartile, $n = 34,038$, $\bar{x} = 1.47$), medium (second and third quartiles, $n = 22,530$, $\bar{x} = 3.44$), and high (fourth quartile, $n = 28,304$, $\bar{x} = 6.6$) dislike distance.

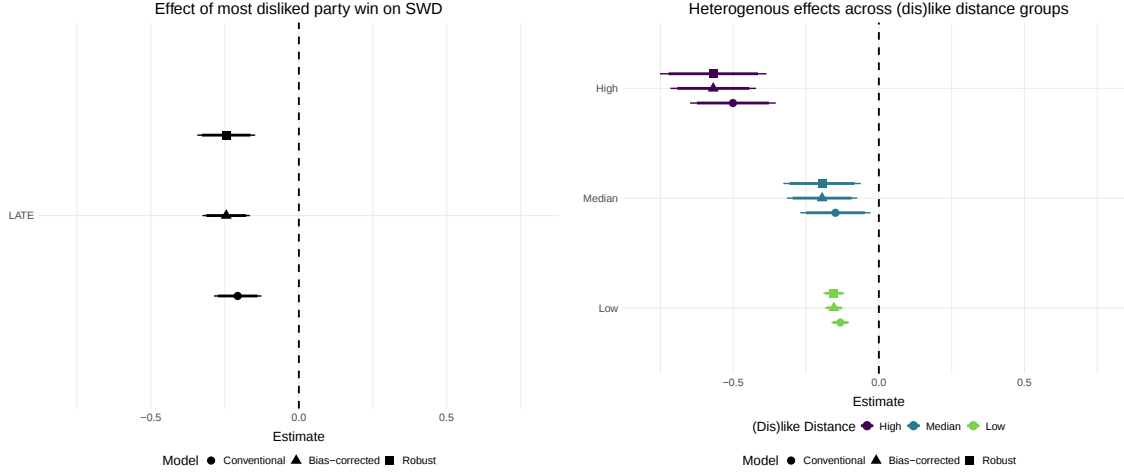


Figure 7: Coefficient plot of the disliked winner ATE on SWD estimated for the whole sample (left) and by dislike distance groups (right)

Note: Reported coefficients come from a RDD estimated with the `rdrobust` package in R, including controls for age, gender, ideology, income, voted party’s vote share, and whether it was a radical-right party.

Robustness checks confirm these findings. Baseline models without covariates yield statistically significant negative coefficients, though about half the size. Estimates consistently range between -0.4 and -0.1 SD across alternative specifications and subsamples (Appendices B3-B4).²¹

Overall, our findings consistently show that losing to a disliked party reduces satisfaction with democracy—and when that party is intensely disliked, the decline is substantial. Over 25% of losers in our sample reported an average .5 SD reduction in SWD when losing to their most disliked party. Crucially, these results align closely with our experimental evidence, where the manipulation reduced SWD by nearly .4 SD on average. Thus, our results substantively support Hypothesis 1 in a comparative, real-world context, strengthening the generalizability of our theory

²¹Appendix B4 presents additional robustness tests—including a jackknife procedure, Monte Carlo placebo simulations, and alternative bandwidth replications—reinforcing the causal interpretation of our results.

beyond the experiment. Losers’ democratic dissatisfaction rises when facing intensely disliked winners, and, as our experiment shows, this puts their acceptance of electoral defeat at risk.

Conclusion

This paper demonstrates that animosity toward the election winner triggers support for contestation among election losers, specifying a channel from affective polarization to the erosion of losers’ consent. Combining a pre-registered experiment during the 2024 Austrian elections with a comparative regression-discontinuity design, we show consistent causal evidence that losing to one’s most disliked party substantially reduces SWD across a broad spectrum of voters. Crucially, and unlike previous studies, our novel experimental study shows that losers express dissent concretely—through support for costly contestation modes by citizens and political elites. Most importantly, we unpack the rationales sustaining losers’ contestation motives, which are founded on expected harmful actions by the winner in government. In doing so, we show that winner animosity operates not through emotion alone, but through substantive concerns about the incoming government.

While our findings emphasize that a widely disliked winner, even when democratically elected, may provoke reactions that endanger the sustainability of its government and, ultimately, democracy, they also highlight important variation across rationales that put into question the normative implications of dissent. Through an original mixed-methods approach, we show contestation is not only driven by democratic hypocrisy, but also by perceived threats to democracy from the disliked winner. Treated respondents were far likelier to voice concerns about democratic backsliding and violations of core norms by the incoming party. This perception is strongest when the far-right FPÖ is the winner, but not when other mainstream parties prevail. The belief that a disliked winner endangers democracy thus provides a rational—though

troubling—basis for losers’ consent erosion.

Altogether, our findings have important implications. In a context of broadening affective polarization, losers’ consent erosion is no longer confined to fringe voters but may spread in polarized democracies. While support for violent protest remains unchanged, the greater willingness to undermine rules ensuring the peaceful transfer of power underscores the fragility of democratic norms when polarization fuels fears about the system’s future. Yet, this finding may also be read positively: in Austria, those most opposed to an FPÖ victory favored constraining its power under the principle of militant democracy ([Capoccia 2013](#)), seeking to protect the regime itself.

However, the militant democracy principle is a double-edged sword, raising an important normative dilemma. On one hand, when democratic threats from a competing party are real and legitimate, citizens’ willingness to act to protect democracy is encouraging. Yet, framing a competitor as a threat—when such claims are unfounded—can also prompt citizens to breach democratic norms. The recent US experience illustrates this danger: false allegations of 2020 election fraud by Donald Trump led to the January 6 riots and attacks on democratic institutions. By contrast, Democrats failed to mobilize voters around this principle in 2024—a failure made more consequential by renewed democratic backsliding under Trump, confirming the validity of those earlier concerns.

In summary, “sometimes losers refuse to concede for good reason” ([Anderson et al. 2005, 6](#)). We show that these reasons exist in losers’ minds. The question remains, however, when and how such reasons are justifiable. We believe this paper takes an important first step in advancing that debate. First, we provide a reinvigorated theoretical framework for the empirical study of losers’ consent. This framework emphasizes anticipated or current government actions as rational triggers of dissent and focuses on costly but consequential contestation—rather than abstract measures of democratic support—as the observable implications of factual dissent. With this

framework, we hope to see similarly rich case studies conducted in other contexts, and cross-national research to delineate the scope conditions under which contestation and its rationales emerge. Specifically, future research could show whether the militant democracy rationale, mainly raised in relation to the radical-right party victory in the Austrian case, travel across established democracies. Second, we expect future empirical work to refine contestation measures and identify the conditions that enable or trigger dissent beyond animosity toward the election winner. Such research could shed light on puzzles like why Donald Trump, despite being intensely disliked, has faced relatively little contestation—perhaps due to weak opposition elites, state entrenchment, or movement coordination challenges. While our shift to intentional behavior measures is a first step, future research should also integrate real-world behavioral outcomes into the study of losers’ consent. Finally, we see a need for more normative work defining the rationales and modes of dissent and setting the conditions under which contestation can be legitimate rather than harmful to democracy.

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Winner Animosity, Losers' Dissent and the Rationales of Contestation

Supplementary Materials

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Appendix A. Experiment

A1. Context of the 2024 Austrian Parliamentary Election

Table 1 shows that Austrian party evaluations are sharply polarized. FPÖ is strongly disliked by SPÖ/Greens—and reciprocally dislikes left parties—while right-leaning voters view SPÖ/Greens negatively, underscoring a divided landscape.

Table 1: Like-dislike scores matrix for Austrian political parties

	ÖVP	SPÖ	FPÖ	NEOS	Grüne
ÖVP	7.87	3.66	4.46	5.00	2.88
SPÖ	3.47	7.81	1.69	3.78	4.76
FPÖ	5.31	3.04	7.94	3.67	1.15
NEOS	5.17	4.24	3.67	2.38	3.65
Grüne	2.86	5.80	1.15	4.19	7.88

Note:

The data is from the 2017 CSES post-electoral survey.

Figure 1 shows 2024 pre-election polling of a tight three-way race (FPÖ, ÖVP, SPÖ), with all within a few points.

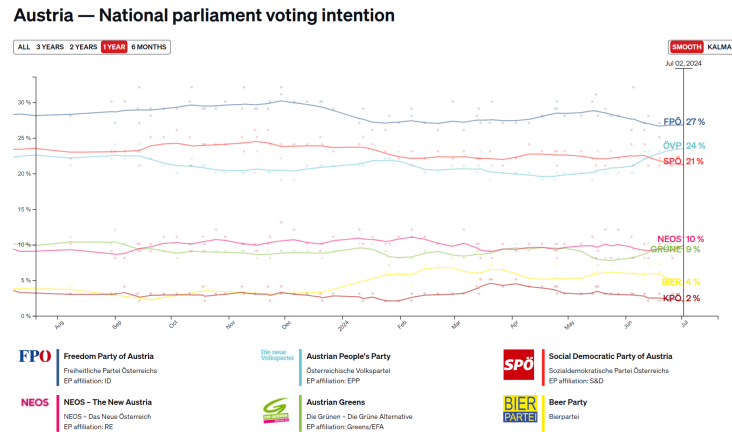


Figure 1: Estimated Electoral Results from Average of Election Polls, 20.07.2024 (Source: POLITICO)

A2. Pre-Registered Power Analysis of the Experiment

We conducted a two-sample t-test power analysis based on the standardized effects from the RDD (LATE = -0.216 ; lower-bound LATE = -0.092). The analysis set $\alpha = 0.05$ and calculated required sample sizes across power levels (0.2–1.0) using the normal approximation.

As shown in Figure 2, detecting the LATE (-0.216) with 90% power requires roughly 450 respondents, while detecting the smaller lower-bound LATE (-0.092) needs about 2,500. These results guided our pre-registered sample size target.

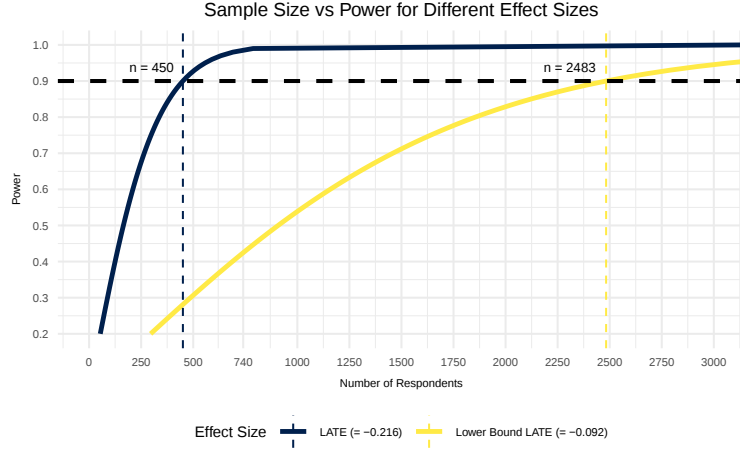


Figure 2

A3. Experiment Design Table

Table 2 details all possible treatment-control combinations.

Table 2: Assignment of Treatment Conditions by Party Preferences

Combination	Condition	Vignette
1st most disliked: FPÖ, 2nd most disliked: ÖVP	Treatment	FPÖ wins, ÖVP second
	Control	ÖVP wins, FPÖ second
1st most disliked: FPÖ, 2nd most disliked: SPÖ	Treatment	FPÖ wins, SPÖ second
	Control	SPÖ wins, FPÖ second
1st most disliked: ÖVP, 2nd most disliked: FPÖ	Treatment	ÖVP wins, FPÖ second
	Control	FPÖ wins, ÖVP second
1st most disliked: ÖVP, 2nd most disliked: SPÖ	Treatment	ÖVP wins, SPÖ second
	Control	SPÖ wins, ÖVP second
1st most disliked: SPÖ, 2nd most disliked: FPÖ	Treatment	SPÖ wins, FPÖ second
	Control	FPÖ wins, SPÖ second
1st most disliked: SPÖ, 2nd most disliked: ÖVP	Treatment	SPÖ wins, ÖVP second
	Control	ÖVP wins, SPÖ second

A4. Experiment Vignettes

Die FPÖ hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:

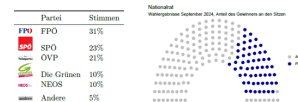


(a) FPÖ wins, ÖVP second

Die FPÖ hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:

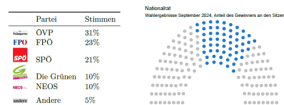


(a) FPÖ wins, SPÖ second

Die ÖVP hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:

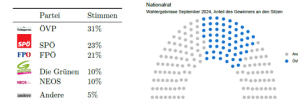


(a) ÖVP wins, FPÖ second

Die ÖVP hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:



(a) ÖVP wins, SPÖ second

Die SPÖ hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:

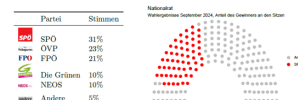


(a) SPÖ wins, FPÖ second

Die SPÖ hat die Wahl mit 31% der Stimmen gewonnen und wird mit der Bildung der neuen Regierung beauftragt.



Die Ergebnisse der drei wichtigsten Parteien sind:



(a) SPÖ wins, ÖVP second

A5. Post-Treatment Questionnaire

Table 3: Survey questionnaire items

Name	Question (DE)	Question (EN)	Response
Writing Task	Was kommt Ihnen in den Sinn, wenn Sie an dieses mögliche Wahlergebnis denken? Schreiben Sie in ein paar Worten auf, woran Sie bei dem Szenario, dass die {e://Field/winner} gewinnt, denken.	What comes to your mind when you think about this potential election result? Write in a few words what the scenario of the [winning party] winning makes you think about.	Open
Manip. Check Govt.	Welche Partei würde Ihrer Meinung nach auf der Grundlage dieser Wahlergebnisse die Regierungsbildung anführen?	Which party do you think will lead the formation of the government based on the election results available to you?	1. ÖVP 2. SPÖ 3. FPÖ 4. Other (open) 5. Don't know
Manip. Check Coalition	Und mit welcher Partei wird sie Ihrer Meinung nach am ehesten eine Koalition eingehen?	And which party do you think she is most likely to form a coalition with?	1. ÖVP 2. SPÖ 3. FPÖ 4. Other (open) 5. Don't know [winning party excluded] 0-100
Manip. Check Feeling Thermometer	Wie begeistert oder enttäuscht sind Sie von diesem potenziellen Gewinner ({e://Field/winner}) der kommenden Wahl? Geben Sie anhand dieses "Gefühlsthermometers" an, wie warm oder kalt Sie dem Gewinner gegenüberstehen. Bewertungen zwischen 50 und 100 Grad bedeuten, dass Sie sich dem Gewinner gegenüber wohlwollend und warm fühlen. Bewertungen zwischen 0 Grad und 50 Grad bedeuten, dass Sie dem Gewinner gegenüber negativ eingestellt sind.	How excited or disappointed are you about this potential winner [winning party] of the upcoming election? Use this "feeling thermometer" to indicate how warm or cold you feel towards the winner. Ratings between 50 and 100 degrees mean that you feel warm and favorable towards the winner. Ratings between 0 degrees and 50 degrees mean that you have a negative attitude towards the winner.	
SWD	Wie zufrieden wären Sie mit dem Funktionieren der Demokratie in Österreich, wenn dies das Wahlergebnis wäre?	If these were the election results, how satisfied would you say you are with the way democracy works in Austria?	0-10
SWD Rationale	Sie haben mit \${q://QID395/TotalSum} auf einer Skala von 0 bis 10 geantwortet, wie zufrieden Sie mit der Funktionsweise der Demokratie wären, wenn Sie mit diesen Wahlergebnissen konfrontiert würden. Bitte erläutern Sie Ihre Antwort in wenigen Worten und begründen Sie, warum Sie so denken.	You answered [respondent score] on a scale from 0 to 10 on how satisfied you would be with the way democracy works if you were confronted with these election results. Please explain your answer in a few words and why you feel this way.	open
Mechanism Forced	Im Folgenden finden Sie verschiedene Aussagen zu den Ergebnissen, die Sie gesehen haben. Denken Sie daran, dass die {e://Field/winner} mit 31 % der Stimmen gewonnen hat. Welcher dieser Aussagen stimmen Sie vor diesem Hintergrund am ehesten zu? Bitte wählen Sie die Aussage aus, der Sie am meisten zustimmen, oder wählen Sie "Ich stimme keiner dieser Aussagen zu" aus, wenn Sie mit keiner dieser Aussagen einverstanden sind.	Below are different statements about the results that you saw. Remember that the [winning party] won with the 31% of the vote share. With this scenario in mind, with which of these statements do you agree the most? Please select the statement you agree with the most, or "none of the above" if you do not agree with any of these statements.	<i>Below</i> [only one policy and one democracy related option randomly displayed to each respondent]
.policy I	1. Ich bin besorgt über das politische Programm, das die {e://Field/winner} betreiben würde	1. I am concerned about the political program that would be implemented by the [winning party]	
.policy II	2. Ich befürchte, dass die {e://Field/winner} bestimmte politische Maßnahmen umsetzen wird, mit denen ich nicht einverstanden bin	2. I am concerned that the [winning party] will implement specific policies I strongly disagree with.	
.democracy I	3. Ich bin besorgt über die Zukunft unseres demokratischen Systems nach der Wahl der {e://Field/winner}	3. I am concerned about the future of our democratic system with the election of the [winning party].	
.democracy II	4. Ich bin besorgt, dass die {e://Field/winner} unserem politischen System schaden könnte	4. I am concerned that the [winning party] may harm our democratic system.	
. none	5. Ich stimme keiner dieser Aussagen zu	5. None of the above.	
Intro Mechanism Scale	Und inwieweit stimmen Sie jeweils den folgenden Aussagen zu?	And to which extent do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?	-
Disagree immigration policy	Die {e://Field/winner} würde eine Einwanderungspolitik betreiben, mit der ich überhaupt nicht einverstanden bin.	The [winning party] would implement immigration policies that I strongly disagree with.	0-5
Trust right econ. conditions	Die {e://Field/winner} würde die richtigen politischen Maßnahmen ergreifen, um die wirtschaftlichen Bedingungen der Österreicher zu verbessern.	The [winning party] would adopt the right policies that will improve Austrians' economic conditions.	0-5

Name	Question (DE)	Question (EN)	Response
Fear climate policy	Ich fürchte die Klimapolitik, die die \${e://Field/winner} umsetzen würde.	I fear the kind of climate policies the [winning party] would implement.	0-5
Concern about laws abuse	Ich bin besorgt, dass die \${e://Field/winner} Gesetze für ihre eigenen Interessen missbrauchen könnte.	I am concerned that the [winning party] may bend laws for its own interest.	0-5
Trust compliance with courts	Ich vertraue darauf, dass die \${e://Field/winner} und ihre Führungskräfte sich immer an Gerichtsurteile halten werden, auch wenn sie gegen sie gerichtet sind.	I trust that the [winning party] and its leaders would always abide to court rulings, even those against them.	0-5
Fear censorship of media	Ich befürchte, dass die \${e://Field/winner} Medien zensurieren will, die sie für zu kritisch hält.	I fear that the [winning party] may want to censor media sources that it considers too critical.	0-5
Intro Consent Attitudes	Stellen Sie sich nun erneut vor, dass dies die tatsächlichen Wahlergebnisse sind und die \${e://Field/winner} die Regierungsbildung leitet. Inwieweit würden Sie den folgenden Aussagen zustimmen?	Now, imagine again that those are the real election results and that the [winning party] leads the formation of government. To what extent would you say that you agree or disagree with the following statements?	-
Parties obstruct govt.	Die anderen Parteien sollten alles in ihrer Macht Stehende tun, um es \${e://Field/winner} so schwer wie möglich zu machen, die Regierung effektiv zu führen.	Other parties should do everything in their power to make it as difficult as possible for [winning party] to run the government effectively.	0-5
Judiciary overstep govt.	Die Justiz sollte die Regierungsgewalt der \${e://Field/winner} so weit wie möglich einschränken, selbst wenn dies eine Überschreitung ihrer verfassungsmäßigen Grenzen bedeutet.	The judiciary should restrict the [winning party] government power to the greatest degree, even if it involves overstepping its constitutional limits.	0-5
Support violent protest	Es wäre völlig akzeptabel, wenn die Anhänger der unterlegenen Partei Gewalt anwenden würden, wenn \${e://Field/winner} an der Regierung beteiligt ist.	It would be completely acceptable if losing parties' supporters used violence when [winning party] enters government.	0-5
Always respect results	Wir sollten die Ergebnisse von Wahlen respektieren, unabhängig davon, welche Partei gewinnt.	We should respect the results of elections, no matter which party wins.	0-5
Democracy best system	Die Demokratie mag Probleme mit sich bringen, aber sie ist besser als jede andere Regierungsform.	Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government.	0-5
Intro Consent Behaviour	Wie wahrscheinlich ist es, dass Sie nach diesem Wahlergebnis an einer der folgenden Aktionen teilnehmen würden?	Following the election results, how likely is it that you would participate in any of the following actions?	-
Part. violent protest	Teilnahme an gewaltsamen Protesten, die organisiert werden, um die Regierung von \${e://Field/winner} in Frage zu stellen.	Engage in violent protests organized to challenge the [winning party] government.	0-10
Part. demonstration	Beteiligung an einem Protestmarsch oder einer Demonstration gegen die Regierung von \${e://Field/winner}.	Go on a protest march or demonstration against the [winning party] government.	0-10
Petition re-run election	Unterzeichnung einer Petition, um eine Wahlwiederholung zu fordern.	Sign a petition to ask for the repetition of the elections.	0-10

A6. Descriptive statistics

Table 4: Assigned winner by vote intention and treatment condition

Vote Intention	Control condition			Treatment condition		
	FPÖ	SPÖ	ÖVP	FPÖ	SPÖ	ÖVP
FPÖ	12 (5.6%)	72 (33.5%)	131 (60.9%)	3 (1.2%)	154 (62.9%)	88 (35.9%)
SPÖ	21 (12.8%)	5 (3.0%)	138 (84.1%)	141 (84.4%)	3 (1.8%)	23 (13.8%)
ÖVP	35 (25.0%)	96 (68.6%)	9 (6.4%)	90 (65.2%)	47 (34.1%)	1 (0.7%)
Abstention/Null	4 (10.8%)	15 (40.5%)	18 (48.6%)	21 (56.8%)	9 (24.3%)	7 (18.9%)
Beer Party	2 (5.7%)	11 (31.4%)	22 (62.9%)	26 (78.8%)	5 (15.2%)	2 (6.1%)
KPÖ	2 (10.0%)	5 (25.0%)	13 (65.0%)	16 (80.0%)	2 (10.0%)	2 (10.0%)
NEOS	5 (9.3%)	24 (44.4%)	25 (46.3%)	55 (91.7%)	4 (6.7%)	1 (1.7%)
No Answer	9 (11.4%)	25 (31.6%)	45 (57.0%)	42 (60.0%)	17 (24.3%)	11 (15.7%)
Other	0 (0.0%)	1 (11.1%)	8 (88.9%)	3 (75.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (25.0%)
The Greens	2 (3.8%)	8 (15.1%)	43 (81.1%)	52 (89.7%)	2 (3.4%)	4 (6.9%)

Table 5: Descriptive statistics of experiment data

Variable	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Min	Pctl. 25	Pctl. 75	Max
Treatment	1638						
... Control	806	49%					
... Treatment	832	51%					
Gender (Female = 1)	1633	0.49	0.5	0	0	1	1
Age	1638	50	17	16	35	64	88
Education	1638						
... Primary education	83	5%					
... Secondary education	1120	68%					
... Tertiary education	435	27%					
Household income (quintiles)	1463	2.9	1.2	1	2	4	5
Unemployed	1622	0.4	0.49	0	0	1	1
Left-Right ideology	1524	5	2	0	4	6	10
Expected FPÖ winner	1638	0.62	0.48	0	0	1	1
Petition re-run election	1436	2.8	3.5	0	0	5	10
Part. demonstration	1480	2.2	3.2	0	0	4	10
Support violent protest	1520	1.6	1.1	1	1	2	5
Part. violent protest	1503	0.83	2	0	0	0	10
Judiciary overstep govt.	1520	3	1.4	1	2	4	5
Parties obstruct govt.	1499	2.5	1.3	1	1	3	5
Satisfaction with democracy	1612	4.5	3	0	2	7	10
Always respect results	1541	4.2	0.99	1	4	5	5
Democracy best system	1540	4.4	0.92	1	4	5	5

Note: The experiment sample excludes respondents without a uniquely most-liked or most-disliked party among the three main competitors (FPÖ, SPÖ and öVP). These respondents were surveyed but not participated in the experiment.

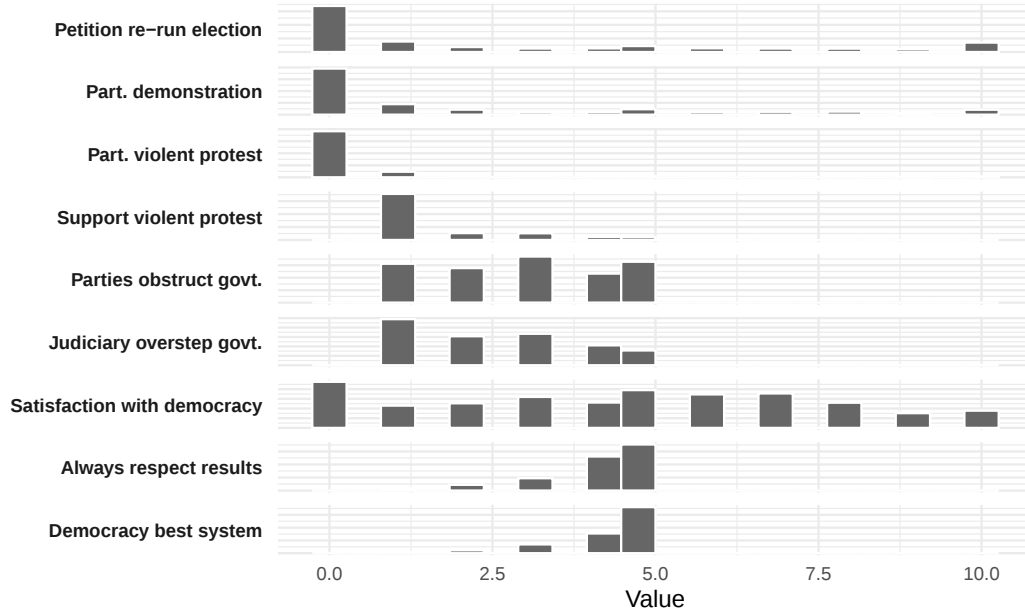


Figure 9: Distributions of outcome variables

A7. Randomization check

Table 6: Covariate balance test

Characteristic	Control N = 806	Treatment N = 832	p-value
Gender (Female = 1)	373 (46%)	432 (52%)	0.024
Age	52 (35, 64)	52 (36, 63)	0.4
Education			0.9
Primary education	41 (5.1%)	42 (5.0%)	
Secondary education	556 (69%)	564 (68%)	
Tertiary education	209 (26%)	226 (27%)	
Household income (quintiles)			0.14
1	109 (15%)	113 (15%)	
2	164 (23%)	163 (22%)	
3	226 (31%)	198 (27%)	
4	165 (23%)	169 (23%)	
5	64 (8.8%)	92 (13%)	
Unemployed	327 (41%)	322 (39%)	0.5
Left-Right ideology	5.00 (4.00, 6.00)	5.00 (4.00, 6.00)	0.4
Expected FPÖ winner	498 (62%)	522 (63%)	0.7

¹ n (%); Median (Q1, Q3)

² Pearson's Chi-squared test; Wilcoxon rank sum test

A8. Regression Tables

A8.1. Baseline specifications

Table 7: OLS Estimates. DVs: Affect for the winner and abstract consent

	Affect for the Winner	Satisfaction with democracy	Always respect results	Democracy best system
Treatment	−24.613*** (1.111) [<0.001]	−0.371*** (0.048) [<0.001]	−0.235*** (0.049) [<0.001]	−0.062 (0.049) [0.201]
Num.Obs.	1551	1612	1541	1540
R2	0.241	0.035	0.015	0.001
R2 Adj.	0.240	0.035	0.014	0.000
F	490.551	59.136	23.343	1.636
RMSE	21.86	0.97	0.95	0.95

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: All the DVs are standardized except 'Affect for the winner'.

Standard errors are displayed in parentheses, p-values between brackets.

The estimates are plotted in Figures 3 and 4 of the main text.

Table 8: OLS Estimates. DVs: Horizontal contestation

	Judiciary overstep govt.	Parties obstruct govt.
Treatment	0.451*** (0.049) [<0.001]	0.792*** (0.046) [<0.001]
Num.Obs.	1499	1520
R2	0.054	0.164
R2 Adj.	0.054	0.163
F	85.768	297.414
RMSE	0.94	0.89

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

Standard errors are displayed in parentheses, p-values between brackets.

The estimates are plotted in Figure 4 of the main text.

Table 9: OLS Estimates. DVs: Vertical contestation

	Part. violent protest	Support violent protest	Petition re-run elections	Part. demonstration
Treatment	0.083+ (0.049) [0.093]	0.111* (0.050) [0.026]	0.482*** (0.050) [<0.001]	0.490*** (0.050) [<0.001]
Num.Obs.	1503	1520	1436	1480
R2	0.002	0.003	0.060	0.062
R2 Adj.	0.001	0.003	0.059	0.061
F	2.823	4.988	91.316	96.856
RMSE	0.95	0.97	0.95	0.96

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

Standard errors are displayed in parentheses, p-values between brackets.

The estimates are plotted in Figure 4 of the main text.

Table 10: OLS Estimates. DVs: Mechanisms — democracy

	Concern laws abuse	Trust courts compliance	Fear media censorship	Democratic threat index
Treatment	0.645*** (0.044) [<0.001]	-0.644*** (0.046) [<0.001]	0.676*** (0.046) [<0.001]	0.793*** (0.043) [<0.001]
Num.Obs.	1535	1518	1514	1468
R2	0.124	0.115	0.127	0.188
R2 Adj.	0.123	0.114	0.127	0.188
F	216.394	196.885	220.834	339.591
RMSE	0.86	0.89	0.88	0.82

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

Standard errors are displayed in parentheses, p-values between brackets.

The estimates are plotted in Figure 5 of the main text.

Table 11: OLS Estimates. DVs: Mechanisms — policy

	Disagree immigration policy	Trust economic conditions	Fear climate policy	Policy threat index
Treatment	0.400*** (0.047) [<0.001]	-0.647*** (0.044) [<0.001]	0.389*** (0.049) [<0.001]	0.632*** (0.043) [<0.001]
Num.Obs.	1509	1526	1500	1439
R2	0.046	0.123	0.041	0.128
R2 Adj.	0.045	0.122	0.040	0.128
F	72.784	213.432	63.521	211.801
RMSE	0.91	0.86	0.95	0.82

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

Standard errors are displayed in parentheses, p-values between brackets.

The estimates are plotted in Figure 5 of the main text.

Table 12: Average Marginal Effects from Multinomial Logit. DV: Perceived main threat

Outcome	Treatment AME	95% CI	P-value
None	-0.245***	[-0.281, -0.209]	0.000
Policy threat	0.022	[-0.029, 0.072]	0.399
Democracy threat	0.223***	[0.178, 0.268]	0.000
N	1527		
McFadden's R squared	0.065		

Note:

AME Contrast = Treatment — Control. The AMEs are plotted in Figure 5 of the main text.

A8.2. Baseline specifications with covariate adjustment, robust standard errors and adjusted p-values

Table 13: OLS with covariates and robust SEs. DVs: Affect and abstract consent

	Affect for the Winner	Satisfaction with democracy	Always respect results	Democracy best system
Treatment	−24.825*** (1.193) [<0.001]	−0.386*** (0.053) [<0.001]	−0.235*** (0.049) [<0.001]	−0.075 (0.049) [0.131]
Gender (Female = 1)	0.225 (1.246) [0.857]	−0.119* (0.055) [0.032]	−0.318*** (0.053) [<0.001]	0.038 (0.051) [0.453]
Age	−0.220*** (0.046) [<0.001]	0.001 (0.002) [0.573]	0.011*** (0.002) [<0.001]	0.012*** (0.002) [<0.001]
Secondary Education	−2.988 (3.537) [0.398]	−0.196 (0.147) [0.183]	0.417** (0.161) [0.010]	0.166 (0.144) [0.250]
Household income	−0.133 (0.500) [0.791]	0.007 (0.022) [0.736]	0.056* (0.022) [0.011]	0.053* (0.022) [0.016]
Unemployed	3.028+ (1.572) [0.054]	−0.052 (0.071) [0.466]	−0.083 (0.070) [0.230]	−0.068 (0.070) [0.330]
Left-right ideology	1.601*** (0.333) [<0.001]	0.053*** (0.014) [<0.001]	0.035* (0.014) [0.010]	−0.080*** (0.013) [<0.001]
Expect FPÖ in govt.	−1.112 (1.235) [0.368]	−0.134* (0.055) [0.014]	−0.009 (0.052) [0.857]	−0.102* (0.051) [0.045]
Num.Obs.	1314	1347	1303	1301
R2	0.277	0.065	0.121	0.084
R2 Adj.	0.272	0.058	0.115	0.078
RMSE	21.35	0.96	0.88	0.88
Robust SEs (HC2)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: All the DVs are standardized except 'Affect for the winner'.

HC2 robust SEs in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

The baseline specifications are in Table 7 of the Appendix.

Table 14: OLS with covariates and robust SEs. DVs: Horizontal contestation

	Judiciary overstep govt.	Parties obstruct govt.
Treatment	0.442*** (0.052) [<0.001]	0.844*** (0.049) [<0.001]
Gender (Female = 1)	0.130* (0.055) [0.019]	−0.125* (0.053) [0.018]
Age	−0.002 (0.002) [0.224]	0.001 (0.002) [0.758]
Secondary Education	0.055 (0.136) [0.689]	0.183 (0.124) [0.141]
Household income	−0.096*** (0.022) [<0.001]	−0.075*** (0.021) [<0.001]
Unemployed	−0.113+ (0.068) [0.098]	−0.115+ (0.064) [0.073]
Left-right ideology	−0.002 (0.014) [0.892]	−0.055*** (0.013) [<0.001]
Expect FPÖ in govt.	0.004 (0.055) [0.942]	−0.028 (0.052) [0.592]
Num.Obs.	1273	1288
R2	0.085	0.209
R2 Adj.	0.078	0.204
RMSE	0.93	0.87
Robust SEs (HC2)	Yes	Yes

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

HC2 robust SEs in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

The baseline specifications are in Table 8 of the Appendix.

Table 15: OLS with covariates and robust SEs. DVs: Vertical contestation

	Part. violent protest	Support violent protest	Petition re-run elections	Part. demonstration
Treatment	0.090+	0.125*	0.476***	0.526***
	(0.051) [0.080]	(0.053) [0.020]	(0.055) [<0.001]	(0.053) [<0.001]
Gender (Female = 1)	-0.020	-0.060	0.120*	-0.146*
	(0.056) [0.720]	(0.056) [0.286]	(0.059) [0.044]	(0.057) [0.010]
Age	-0.010***	-0.008***	-0.006**	-0.005*
	(0.002) [<0.001]	(0.002) [<0.001]	(0.002) [0.005]	(0.002) [0.029]
Secondary Education	0.072	0.169	-0.093	-0.052
	(0.142) [0.611]	(0.106) [0.113]	(0.150) [0.536]	(0.146) [0.722]
Household income	-0.066**	-0.057*	-0.058*	-0.051*
	(0.022) [0.003]	(0.022) [0.012]	(0.025) [0.019]	(0.024) [0.035]
Unemployed	0.079	-0.106	-0.118	-0.083
	(0.077) [0.305]	(0.068) [0.118]	(0.075) [0.115]	(0.072) [0.250]
Left-right ideology	0.043*	0.041**	-0.014	-0.089***
	(0.017) [0.011]	(0.015) [0.009]	(0.016) [0.384]	(0.016) [<0.001]
Expect FPÖ in govt.	-0.057	-0.067	0.085	0.123*
	(0.055) [0.298]	(0.057) [0.241]	(0.056) [0.131]	(0.055) [0.025]
Num.Obs.	1272	1289	1218	1253
R2	0.044	0.043	0.095	0.117
R2 Adj.	0.037	0.036	0.089	0.111
RMSE	0.92	0.96	0.95	0.94
Robust SEs (HC2)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

HC2 robust SEs in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

The baseline specifications are in Table 9 of the Appendix.

Table 16: OLS with covariates and robust SEs. DVs: Mechanisms — democracy

	Concern laws abuse	Trust courts compliance	Fear media censorship	Democratic threat index
Treatment	0.651***	-0.664***	0.695***	0.814***
	(0.047) [<0.001]	(0.050) [<0.001]	(0.049) [<0.001]	(0.047) [<0.001]
Gender (Female = 1)	0.008	-0.196***	0.147**	0.140**
	(0.050) [0.866]	(0.052) [<0.001]	(0.052) [0.005]	(0.049) [0.004]
Age	0.002	0.002	0.000	0.000
	(0.002) [0.360]	(0.002) [0.295]	(0.002) [0.998]	(0.002) [0.900]
Secondary Education	0.162	-0.140	-0.033	0.113
	(0.128) [0.204]	(0.138) [0.312]	(0.128) [0.797]	(0.125) [0.368]
Household income	-0.042*	0.049*	-0.028	-0.046*
	(0.020) [0.039]	(0.021) [0.019]	(0.021) [0.175]	(0.020) [0.025]
Unemployed	-0.136*	0.034	-0.017	-0.061
	(0.062) [0.029]	(0.066) [0.603]	(0.064) [0.795]	(0.060) [0.305]
Left-right ideology	-0.050***	0.024+	-0.064***	-0.059***
	(0.013) [<0.001]	(0.013) [0.080]	(0.012) [<0.001]	(0.012) [<0.001]
Expect FPÖ in govt.	0.046	-0.070	0.064	0.077
	(0.050) [0.361]	(0.052) [0.182]	(0.051) [0.214]	(0.049) [0.117]
Num.Obs.	1296	1290	1280	1249
R2	0.148	0.149	0.168	0.231
R2 Adj.	0.142	0.143	0.162	0.226
RMSE	0.85	0.88	0.87	0.81
Robust SEs (HC2)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

HC2 robust SEs in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

The baseline specifications are in Table 10 of the Appendix.

Table 17: OLS with covariates and robust SEs. DVs: Mechanisms — policy

	Disagree immigration policy	Trust economic conditions	Fear climate policy	Policy threat index
Treatment	0.413*** (0.051) [<0.001]	-0.713*** (0.047) [<0.001]	0.408*** (0.053) [<0.001]	0.677*** (0.047) [<0.001]
Gender (Female = 1)	0.097+ (0.054) [0.070]	-0.060 (0.049) [0.220]	0.033 (0.055) [0.544]	0.071 (0.049) [0.151]
Age	0.003+ (0.002) [0.093]	-0.008*** (0.002) [<0.001]	0.003 (0.002) [0.179]	0.006** (0.002) [0.002]
Secondary Education	0.109 (0.133) [0.412]	0.241* (0.116) [0.038]	0.111 (0.141) [0.429]	-0.006 (0.136) [0.967]
Household income	-0.021 (0.022) [0.329]	-0.023 (0.021) [0.266]	-0.037 (0.023) [0.103]	-0.017 (0.021) [0.407]
Unemployed	0.002 (0.065) [0.973]	0.033 (0.062) [0.589]	-0.121+ (0.071) [0.086]	-0.065 (0.062) [0.298]
Left-right ideology	0.011 (0.013) [0.392]	0.004 (0.013) [0.754]	-0.095*** (0.014) [<0.001]	-0.038** (0.013) [0.003]
Expect FPÖ in govt.	0.091+ (0.054) [0.091]	-0.025 (0.050) [0.611]	0.029 (0.055) [0.592]	0.067 (0.049) [0.178]
Num.Obs.	1280	1289	1271	1225
R2	0.059	0.168	0.096	0.162
R2 Adj.	0.052	0.162	0.089	0.156
RMSE	0.90	0.84	0.93	0.82
Robust SEs (HC2)	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All the DVs are standardized.

HC2 robust SEs in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

The baseline specifications are in Table 11 of the Appendix.

Table 18: Treatment effects with family-wise error rate (FWER) adjustments (FDR and Bonferroni corrections)

DV	Estimate	SE	p_raw	p_FDR	p_Bonf
Affect Winner	-24.613	(1.111)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Satisfaction with democracy	-0.371	(0.048)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Judiciary overstep govt.	0.451	(0.049)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Parties obstruct govt.	0.792	(0.046)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Support violent protest	0.111	(0.050)	0.026	0.029	0.462
Always respect results	-0.235	(0.049)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Democracy best system	-0.062	(0.049)	0.201	0.201	1.000
Part. violent protest	0.083	(0.049)	0.093	0.099	1.000
Part. demonstration	0.490	(0.050)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Petition re-run election	0.482	(0.050)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Concern laws abuse	0.645	(0.044)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Trust courts compliance	-0.644	(0.046)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fear media censorship	0.676	(0.046)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Disagree immigration policy	0.400	(0.047)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Right econ. conditions	-0.647	(0.044)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Fear climate policy	0.389	(0.049)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Democratic threat index	0.793	(0.043)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Policy threat index	0.632	(0.043)	0.000	0.000	0.000

A9. Additional quantitative analyses

A9.1. Factor analysis of the losers' consent outcomes

As pre-registered, we conducted an exploratory factor analysis of the nine standardized losers' consent outcomes to verify that results reflect underlying latent dimensions rather than individual items. A parallel analysis with maximum likelihood extraction and model fit indices support a four-factor solution (TLI .96, RMSEA .05).

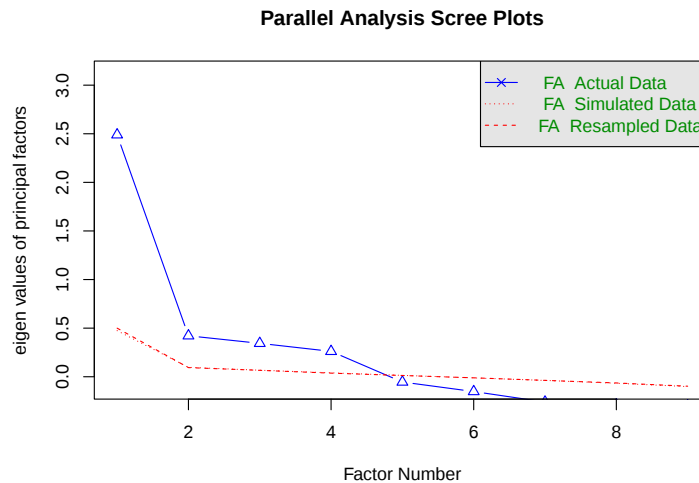


Figure 10: Parallel analysis of losers' consent outcomes

The factor analysis reveals four partly correlated dimensions of losers' consent: vertical contestation (citizen actions such as petitions, demonstrations, and protests), horizontal contestation (political and judicial constraints on government), abstract democratic attitudes (respecting election results and valuing democracy), and a diffuse dimension combining dissatisfaction with tolerance for violence. Together, these findings confirm the theoretical distinction between vertical and horizontal contestation while showing that factual dissent differs from, yet remains related to, abstract democratic support.

ATE estimates show that a most disliked winner increases vertical contestation by about 0.5 SD and horizontal contestation by 0.6 SD, while reducing abstract democratic attitudes by over 0.25 SD and leaving the diffuse dimension unchanged. These results confirm the item-level findings and reveal coherent dimensions of dissent.

Table 19: OLS Estimates. DVs: Factor scores from 4-factor solution (losers' consent)

	Vertical contestation (ML1)	Horizontal contestation (ML2)	Radical dissatisfaction/violence (ML3)	Abstract democratic attitudes (ML4)
Treatment	0.529*** (0.050) [<0.001]	0.643*** (0.044) [<0.001]	-0.033 (0.044) [0.451]	-0.272*** (0.045) [<0.001]
Num.Obs.	1268	1268	1268	1268
R2	0.082	0.142	0.000	0.028
R2 Adj.	0.082	0.142	0.000	0.028
F	113.439	210.288	0.568	36.913
RMSE	0.88	0.79	0.79	0.80

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: Factor scores estimated with regression method from a 4-factor solution.

All models include only the treatment condition as predictor.

Standard errors in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

A9.2. Analysis of Heterogeneous Treatment Effects

We test whether reactions differ by the hypothetical election winner (FPÖ, ÖVP, or SPÖ). OLS and multinomial models include interactions between treatment and winner, holding *dislike distance* constant to separate intensity from qualitative differences in reactions. Figures 10–11 and Tables 21–24 present results.

Across parties, losing to the most disliked winner reduces losers' consent, but reactions are strongest under an FPÖ victory—marked by greater protest support, demands to constrain government, and democratic dissatisfaction. By contrast, declines in belief that democracy is best arise mainly under ÖVP or SPÖ wins. Overall, radical-right victories provoke sharper dissent, though consent erosion is consistent across parties.

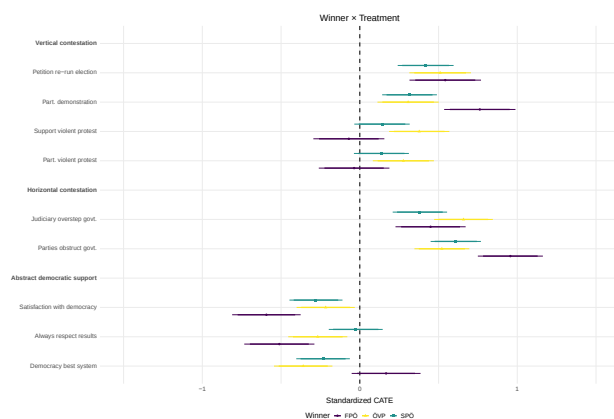


Figure 11: HTE by hypothetical winner on losers' consent indicators

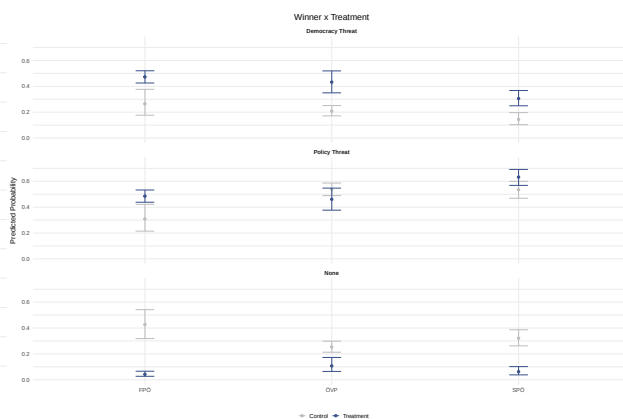


Figure 12: HTE by hypothetical winner on democratic vs. policy concerns

Table 20: OLS Estimates with Interactions. DVs: Abstract support by Dislike Distance and Winner

	SWD	Always respect results	Democracy best system
Treatment	0.056 (0.116) [0.629]	−0.162 (0.118) [0.171]	−0.427*** (0.117) [<0.001]
Dislike Distance	0.118*** (0.017) [<0.001]	0.021 (0.018) [0.240]	0.013 (0.018) [0.466]
Winner = SPÖ	0.130+ (0.075) [0.082]	0.016 (0.076) [0.829]	−0.103 (0.076) [0.175]
Winner = FPÖ	0.192+ (0.110) [0.082]	0.225* (0.114) [0.048]	−0.059 (0.112) [0.596]
Treatment x Dislike Distance	−0.087*** (0.025) [<0.001]	−0.035 (0.025) [0.168]	0.021 (0.025) [0.401]
Treatment x Winner = SPÖ	−0.062 (0.126) [0.624]	0.240+ (0.129) [0.064]	0.129 (0.128) [0.314]
Treatment x Winner = FPÖ	−0.380*** (0.145) [0.009]	−0.242 (0.149) [0.104]	0.530*** (0.146) [<0.001]
Num.Obs.	1612	1541	1540
R2	0.074	0.027	0.035
R2 Adj.	0.070	0.023	0.031
F	18.422	6.169	8.012
RMSE	0.95	0.95	0.94

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Note: All DVs are standardized.

Models include interactions between treatment and dislike distance, and between treatment and winner (baseline: ÖVP).

Standard errors in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

Table 21: OLS Estimates with Interactions. DVs: Horizontal contestation by Dislike Distance and Winner

	Judiciary overstep govt.	Parties obstruct govt.
Treatment	0.372** (0.118) [0.002]	0.186+ (0.110) [0.092]
Dislike Distance	-0.053** (0.018) [0.003]	-0.090*** (0.016) [<0.001]
Winner = SPÖ	-0.016 (0.076) [0.831]	0.024 (0.071) [0.732]
Winner = FPÖ	-0.037 (0.113) [0.746]	0.009 (0.105) [0.933]
Treatment x Dislike Distance	0.093*** (0.025) [<0.001]	0.109*** (0.023) [<0.001]
Treatment x Winner = SPÖ	-0.282* (0.129) [0.029]	0.091 (0.120) [0.449]
Treatment x Winner = FPÖ	-0.212 (0.148) [0.153]	0.433** (0.138) [0.002]
Num.Obs.	1499	1520
R2	0.068	0.200
R2 Adj.	0.064	0.196
F	15.522	53.986
RMSE	0.93	0.88

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All DVs are standardized.

Models include interactions between treatment and dislike distance, and between treatment and winner (baseline: ÖVP).

Standard errors in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

Table 22: OLS Estimates with Interactions. DVs: Vertical contestation by Dislike Distance and Winner

	Part. violent protest	Support violent protest	Petition re-run elections	Part. demonstration
Treatment	0.310* (0.123) [0.012]	0.467*** (0.121) [<0.001]	0.344** (0.124) [0.006]	0.231+ (0.123) [0.061]
Dislike Distance	0.000 (0.018) [0.990]	0.006 (0.018) [0.735]	-0.043* (0.018) [0.020]	-0.051** (0.018) [0.004]
Winner = SPÖ	-0.012 (0.077) [0.879]	0.111 (0.078) [0.156]	-0.110 (0.079) [0.166]	-0.146+ (0.077) [0.057]
Winner = FPÖ	0.043 (0.114) [0.704]	0.105 (0.115) [0.362]	-0.059 (0.115) [0.608]	-0.185 (0.115) [0.108]
Treatment x Dislike Distance	-0.012 (0.026) [0.634]	-0.029 (0.026) [0.267]	0.055* (0.026) [0.038]	0.025 (0.026) [0.327]
Treatment x Winner = SPÖ	-0.135 (0.133) [0.310]	-0.241+ (0.132) [0.069]	-0.092 (0.135) [0.493]	0.017 (0.133) [0.899]
Treatment x Winner = FPÖ	-0.310* (0.151) [0.041]	-0.444** (0.151) [0.003]	0.034 (0.153) [0.822]	0.454** (0.153) [0.003]
Num.Obs.	1503	1520	1436	1480
R2	0.008	0.016	0.069	0.087
R2 Adj.	0.003	0.012	0.064	0.083
F	1.684	3.607	15.045	20.138
RMSE	0.95	0.97	0.95	0.94

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Note: All DVs are standardized.

Models include interactions between treatment and dislike distance, and between treatment and winner (baseline: ÖVP).

Standard errors in parentheses, p-values in brackets.

Table 23: Conditional Average Marginal Effects from Multinomial Logit with Interactions. DV: Perceived Main Threat

Winner	Category	Treatment AME	95% CI	P-value
ÖVP	Democracy Threat	0.218***	[0.136, 0.305]	0.000
ÖVP	None	-0.149***	[-0.191, -0.084]	0.000
ÖVP	Policy Threat	-0.069	[-0.153, 0.016]	0.113
FPÖ	Democracy Threat	0.211***	[0.164, 0.258]	0.000
FPÖ	None	-0.386***	[-0.401, -0.362]	0.000
FPÖ	Policy Threat	0.175***	[0.128, 0.222]	0.000
SPÖ	Democracy Threat	0.165***	[0.109, 0.227]	0.000
SPÖ	None	-0.260***	[-0.284, -0.221]	0.000
SPÖ	Policy Threat	0.094**	[0.031, 0.154]	0.002
N			1527	
McFadden's R squared			0.096	

Note:

AME Contrast = Treatment – Control, reported separately by hypothetical winner (baseline: ÖVP).

A10. Analysis of the Open-Ended Questions

A10.1. Codebook and analysis design

Sample. We qualitatively analyze open-ended answers from respondents who (1) reported low satisfaction with democracy (0–5), (2) provided a valid textual answer (not NA or incoherent), and (3) whose responses were successfully translated from German to English (Helsinki-NLP model; DEEPL if unclear).

Procedure. A random subsample ($n = 188$) was first double-coded by two researchers following our preregistered deductive categories. Based on agreement checks, new inductive codes were added. The remaining ~1,100 answers were then split and independently coded using the revised scheme.

Category	Definition	Example	Notes
Democracy	Mentions threats or concerns about democracy, its functioning, or principles.	“The ÖVP crushes democracy.”	Deductive
Policy	Refers to issues, ideology, or expected government policies.	“FPÖ policies would isolate Austria economically.”	Deductive
Party Affect	Negative feelings toward a specific party or leader (explicit evaluation required).	“ÖVP is shit.”	Deductive
Other	Mentions another rationale not captured above.	“Profit comes with money.”	Inductive
Other_spec	Topic label for <i>Other</i> (e.g., corruption, inertia, coalition, fatalism).	“Corruption.”	Inductive
Unspecified	Vague or unclear rationale for dissatisfaction.	“Couldn’t contain me.”	–
Satisfied	Expresses satisfaction despite low SWD score.	“Maybe something changes.”	Added v2
NA	Incomprehensible or untranslatable response.	–	Added v2

Changes in Version 2 (26.03.2025):

Refined *party_affect* (explicit negative evaluation required); added *satisfied* and *NA* codes; standardized *other_spec* topics.

A10.2. Results I: Distribution of “other” rationales

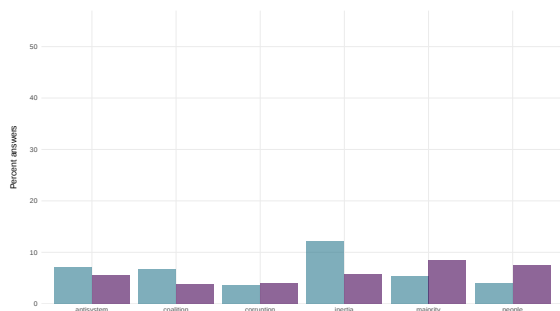


Figure 13: Share of other rationales by treatment condition

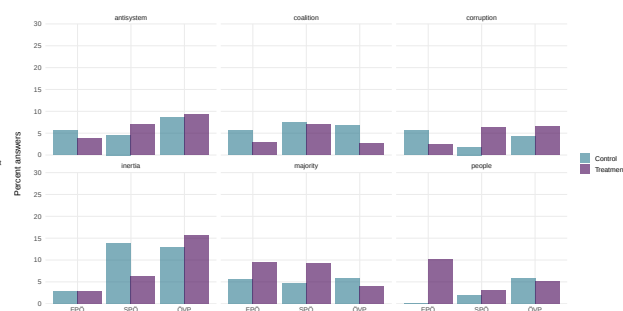


Figure 14: Share of other rationales by treatment and hypothetical winner

A10.3. Results II: LLM Automated coding distributions

Model prompt

- **democracy**: answer refers to the democratic process and/or ‘democraticness’ concerns
- **policy**: answer refers to specific policies, policy issues, or ideology (e.g. conservative, liberal...) concerns.
- **other**: other rationale expressed.
- **unspecified**: answer showcases dissatisfaction with democracy without specific rationale around it.
- **na**: non-response or automated-coding of don’t knows and non-meaningful answers (using the few-shot LLama 3.1 LLM model)

Results

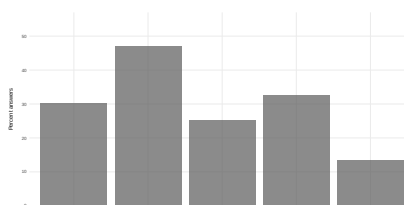


Figure 15: LLM-coded rationales of SWD - pooled answers

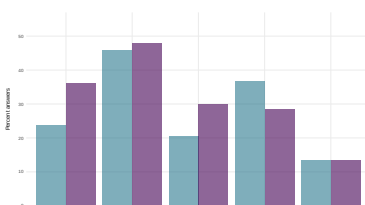


Figure 16: LLM-coded rationales of SWD - by treatment condition

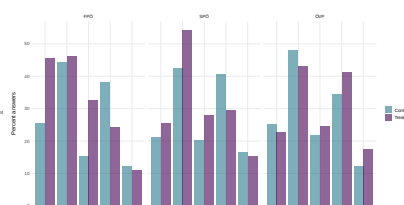


Figure 17: LLM-coded rationales of SWD - by treatment condition and hypothetical winner

A11. Deviations from the Preregistration

We list here the deviations from our [preregistration](#):

- For clarity, the wording of the hypotheses was changed from “a more disliked party victory” to “losing to a more disliked party.” The substantive predictions remain the same.
- We refined the theoretical dimensions of contestation: instead of *behavioral/attitudinal* and *democracy/violence* categories, we now distinguish *horizontal* (judiciary, parties) and *vertical* (protest, violence) contestation, plus *abstract measures*. The factor analysis in Appendix A9.1 supports this revision.
- Hypothesis 2 was reworded to match these new dimensions, without altering its core prediction.

- Hypothesis 3 was split in two alternative hypotheses (a) and (b) to allow its confirmation/rejection, without altering its core prediction.
- Respondents failing attention checks were excluded during fieldwork, rather than in post-survey quality controls.
- We added a multinomial model for the forced-choice mechanism outcome, which was not preregistered but suits its categorical nature.
- Replications used HC2 instead of HC3 robust errors, as results were stable.
- We applied 95% instead of preregistered 90% confidence intervals for consistency.
- All sampling quotas were met except education, relaxed due to low panel availability.

All other analyses adhere to the preregistered plan.

A12. Research Ethics of the Experiment

This study complies with APSA’s *Guide to Professional Ethics* (2012) and *Principles and Guidance for Human Subjects Research* (2020). All participants gave informed consent, confidentiality was ensured, no deception was used, and no harm was identified. Respondents were compensated by *Bilendi*. The experiment was approved by the University of Lucerne Ethics Board (IRB #2024-010, 31.08.2024) and preregistered prior to data collection.

Appendix B. Regression Discontinuity Design

B1. Descriptive Statistics

B1.1. Summary of descriptive statistics

Table 24: Table A1: Summary of descriptive statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Treatment	84,862	0.5	0.5	0	1
Diff. in seats (running var.)	84,862	1.9	18.3	−53.8	53.8
Satisfaction with democracy	84,862	2.6	0.8	1	4
(abs) Dislike difference	84,862	3.7	2.4	1	10
Gender (= male)	84,673	0.5	0.5	0	1
Age	84,243	46.6	17.1	16	99
Household income	48,316	3.0	1.4	1	5
Left-right self-position	72,439	5.0	2.5	0	10

B1.2. List of countries and election studies

Table 25: List of cases included in the study

Country	Study year
Norway	1997, 2001, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017
Albania	2005, 2017
Australia	1996, 2004, 2007, 2013
Austria	2008, 2013, 2017
Belgium	1999, 2019
Bulgaria	2001, 2014
Canada	1997, 2004, 2008, 2011, 2015, 2019
Croatia	2007

Table 25: List of cases included in the study (*continued*)

Country	Study year
Czech Republic/Czechia	1996, 2002, 2006, 2010, 2013, 2017, 2021
Denmark	1998, 2001, 2007, 2019
Estonia	2011
Finland	2003, 2007, 2011, 2015, 2019
France	2007
Germany	1998, 2005, 2009, 2013, 2017, 2021
Great Britain	1997, 2005, 2015, 2017, 2019
Greece	2015, 2009, 2012, 2019
Hungary	2018
Iceland	1999, 2003, 2007, 2009, 2016, 2017
India	2019
Ireland	2002, 2007, 2011, 2016
Israel	1996, 2003, 2006, 2013, 2020
Italy	2018
Japan	1996, 2017
Latvia	2018
Lithuania	2016, 2020
Montenegro	2012, 2016
Netherlands	1998, 2006, 2010, 2017, 2021
New Zealand	1996, 2002, 2008, 2011, 2014, 2017, 2020
Poland	1997, 2001, 2005, 2007, 2011, 2019
Portugal	2002, 2005, 2009, 2015, 2019
Romania	1996, 2004, 2012, 2016
Russian Federation	1999
Serbia	2012
Slovakia	2010, 2016, 2020
Slovenia	1996, 2004, 2008, 2011
South Africa	2009, 2014
Spain	1996, 2000, 2004, 2008
Sweden	1998, 2002, 2006, 2014, 2018
Switzerland	1999, 2003, 2007, 2011
Taiwan	1996, 2001, 2012, 2016, 2020
Thailand	2007, 2011, 2019
Turkey	2011, 2015

B2. Validation of the RDD Assumptions

We use the McCrary density test to assess potential sorting around the RDD cutoff. The test shows a statistically significant but small discontinuity at the threshold ($z = -3.93$, $p < 0.001$), indicating a 4.7% density drop visually reported in the left plot of Figure 18. This minor deviation is not consistent with meaningful sorting and likely reflects mild post-treatment bias—respondents near the cutoff may adjust their feelings toward the winner after the election. Given that neither voters nor parties can manipulate outcomes around the cutoff, this small discontinuity does not threaten identification.

We also estimate effects around the seat threshold on placebo outcomes not affected by treatment: party vote share, radical right vote, ideology, income, age, and gender. Party-level data are from Canalejo-Molero (2024). Results are plotted in the right plot of Figure 18. They show negligible effects overall, with confidence intervals overlapping zero. Minor imbalances appear for party-level variables and age, supporting the inclusion of covariates in the main models to improve precision and meet RDD assumptions.

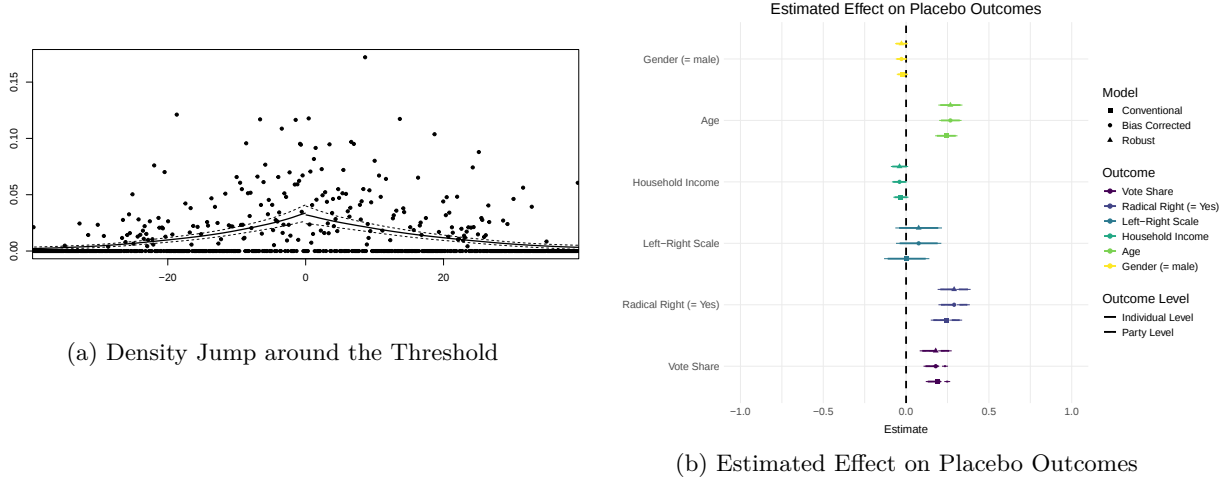


Figure 18: Validation assumptions

B3. Regression Tables

B3.1. Baseline specifications without control variables

Baseline models without covariates yield effects consistent with the main results, though smaller in magnitude. This similarity across specifications supports the robustness of our findings and indicates that results are not driven by sample conditioning or model adjustments.

Table 26: RDD estimation of the LATE for the whole sample. Baseline specification without control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	-0.034+ (0.060) [0.018]	-0.041* (0.020) [0.018]	-0.041* (0.046) [0.021]
Election Clustered SEs	No	No	No
Ind-Lvl Controls	No	No	No
Party-Lvl Controls	No	No	No
Bandwidth	8.1931775401364	14.6787170857908	14.6787170857908
Total.Numb.Obs	84862	84862	84862
Effective.Numb.Obs	36904	54511	54511
Left.CutOff	18580	25966	25966
Right.CutOff	18324	28545	28545

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

Table 27: RDD estimation of the LATE for the low, median and high dislike distance samples. Baseline specifications without control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	0.007 (0.797) [0.029]	-0.006 (0.839) [0.029]	-0.006 (0.863) [0.034]	-0.027 (0.446) [0.036]	-0.043 (0.233) [0.036]	-0.043 (0.309) [0.042]	-0.167*** (<0.001) [0.030]	-0.164*** (<0.001) [0.030]	-0.164*** (<0.001) [0.037]
(Dis)Like Difference	Low	Low	Low	Median	Median	Median	High	High	High
Election Clustered SEs	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ind-Lvl Controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Party-Lvl Controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bandwidth	6.50058166173885	11.8228853849765	11.8228853849765	7.54750270346272	14.0512709426177	14.0512709426177	9.88149278526593	15.6167414994752	15.6167414994752
Total.Numb.Obs	34028	34028	34028	22530	22530	22530	28304	28304	28304
Effective.Numb.Obs	13149	19925	19925	9454	14442	14442	17967	17967	17967
Left.CutOff	6572	9828	9828	4707	6840	6840	7155	8338	8338
Right.CutOff	6577	10097	10097	4747	7602	7602	7122	9629	9629

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets. Observations within ± 1 seat share of the threshold were excluded to mitigate potential sorting (post-treatment bias) around the cutoff.

B3.2. Baseline specifications with control variables

These tables report the main specifications shown in Figure 7. Models include individual (age, gender, ideology, income) and party-level (vote share, radical right) controls. Standard errors are clustered by election–country–year to account for intra-cluster correlation (Abadie et al. 2023).

Table 28: RDD estimation of the LATE for the whole sample. Baseline specification with individual and party-level control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	−0.207*** (<0.001) [0.041]	−0.246*** (<0.001) [0.041]	−0.246*** (<0.001) [0.050]
Election Clustered SEs	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ind-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	3.91726926403183	10.5717899494403	10.5717899494403
Total.Numb.Obs	20685	20685	20685
Effective.Numb.Obs	6740	13518	13518
Left.CutOff	3523	6486	6486
Right.CutOff	3217	7032	7032

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

Table 29: RDD estimation of the LATE for the low, median and high dislike distance samples. Baseline specifications with control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	−0.132*** (<0.001) [0.015]	−0.154*** (<0.001) [0.015]	−0.154*** (<0.001) [0.018]	−0.149* (0.015) [0.062]	−0.195** (0.002) [0.062]	−0.195** (0.004) [0.068]	−0.501*** (<0.001) [0.075]	−0.569*** (<0.001) [0.075]	−0.569*** (<0.001) [0.093]
(Dis)Like Difference	Low	Low	Low	Median	Median	Median	High	High	High
Election Clustered SEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ind-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	3.55679202994826	10.7238114358433	10.7238114358433	5.726137428379	13.0754821561059	13.0754821561059	4.1807893131949	11.7154069565334	11.7154069565334
Total.Numb.Obs	8407	8407	8407	5941	5941	5941	6337	6337	6337
Effective.Numb.Obs	3055	5875	5875	2537	4206	4206	1840	4144	4144
Left.CutOff	1546	2877	2877	1226	1979	1979	1013	1934	1934
Right.CutOff	1509	2998	2998	1311	2227	2227	827	2210	2210

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

B3.3. Additional specifications I: Donut RDD

We replicate baseline models using a donut RDD (Cattaneo and Titiunik 2022), excluding observations within ± 1 seat share of the threshold to address sorting or post-treatment bias. Results remain strong—larger, significant, and in the expected direction.

Table 30: Donut RDD estimation of the LATE for the whole sample. Baseline specification without control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	−0.260*** (<0.001) [0.046]	−0.289*** (<0.001) [0.046]	−0.289*** (<0.001) [0.053]
Election Clustered SEs	No	No	No
Ind-Lvl Controls	No	No	No
Party-Lvl Controls	No	No	No
Bandwidth	4.27161820206683	10.1250077473112	10.1250077473112
Total.Numb.Obs	78302	78302	78302
Effective.Numb.Obs	15576	39542	39542
Left.CutOff	7846	19046	19046
Right.CutOff	7730	20496	20496

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

Table 31: Donut RDD estimation of the LATE for the low, median and high dislike distance samples. Baseline specifications without control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	0.004 (0.942) [0.053]	-0.023 (0.669) [0.053]	-0.023 (0.728) [0.065]	-0.221** (0.004) [0.076]	-0.265*** (<0.001) [0.076]	-0.265** (0.003) [0.089]	-0.440*** (<0.001) [0.074]	-0.484*** (<0.001) [0.074]	-0.484*** (<0.001) [0.081]
(Dis)Like Difference	Low	Low	Low	Median	Median	Median	High	High	High
Election Clustered SEs	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Ind-Lvl Controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Party-Lvl Controls	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bandwidth	5.71497158825691	11.4715576024293	11.4715576024293	5.02219123252217	11.4253665192161	11.4253665192161	5.6820371663312	14.6572540810722	14.6572540810722
Total.Numb.Obs	31151	31151	31151	20780	20780	20780	26371	26371	26371
Effective.Numb.Obs	8876	16568	16568	5010	11282	11282	5768	15901	15901
Left.CutOff	4250	8022	8022	2347	5214	5214	2843	7158	7158
Right.CutOff	4626	8546	8546	2663	6068	6068	2925	8743	8743

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

B3.4. Additional specifications II: baseline specification with different combinations of individual and party level control variables

We test model robustness by adding individual, party, and full controls sequentially. Effects remain stable, significant, and in the expected direction, confirming the robustness of our results.

Table 32: RDD estimation of the LATE for the whole sample. Baseline specifications with different combinations of control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	-0.133* (0.035) [0.063]	-0.171** (0.007) [0.063]	-0.171* (0.015) [0.070]	-0.112* (0.038) [0.054]	-0.143** (0.008) [0.054]	-0.143* (0.024) [0.063]	-0.207*** (<0.001) [0.041]	-0.246*** (<0.001) [0.041]	-0.246*** (<0.001) [0.050]
Election Clustered SEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ind-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party-Lvl Controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	6.44647671116662	12.9001000963665	12.9001000963665	4.96388276596174	11.2167776914189	11.2167776914189	3.91726926403183	10.5717899494403	10.5717899494403
Total.Numb.Obs	41946	41946	41946	30826	30826	30826	20685	20685	20685
Effective.Numb.Obs	17741	26967	26967	10603	19697	19697	6740	13518	13518
Left.CutOff	9362	13492	13492	5071	9303	9303	3523	6486	6486
Right.CutOff	8379	13475	13475	5532	10394	10394	3217	7032	7032

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

B3.5. Additional specifications III: additional specifications with alternative sets of control variables

We test robustness by adding country-year fixed effects, interview timing ([Hernández, Anduiza, and Rico 2021](#)), and interview mode ([Valentim 2021](#)) as controls. Party-level covariates are excluded due to collinearity. Results remain consistent in direction and significance, reinforcing confidence in our main findings.

Table 33: RDD estimation of the LATE for the whole sample. Baseline specifications with alternative sets of control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	-0.155*** (<0.001) [0.021]	-0.146*** (<0.001) [0.021]	-0.146*** (<0.001) [0.024]	-0.150+ (0.051) [0.077]	-0.196* (0.011) [0.077]	-0.196* (0.027) [0.089]	-0.219*** (<0.001) [0.052]	-0.255*** (<0.001) [0.052]	-0.255*** (<0.001) [0.063]
Election Clustered SEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ind-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party-Lvl Controls	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Country FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Year FEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Election Date Dist.	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Interview Mode	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	3.54264596856283	5.1915908302825	5.1915908302825	5.1940637569169	12.8211918364729	12.8211918364729	4.1239800580939	11.413676652288	11.413676652288
Total.Numb.Obs	41946	41946	41946	17912	17912	17912	20685	20685	20685
Effective.Numb.Obs	11441	14640	14640	6580	12231	12231	6740	13953	13953
Left.CutOff	6378	7952	7952	3127	5614	5614	3523	6652	6652
Right.CutOff	5063	6688	6688	3453	6617	6617	3217	7301	7301

+ p < 0.1, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

B3.6. Additional specifications IV: replication of the main specification for different sample subsets

We replicate our models across three subsamples: parliamentary systems (where victories determine the executive), full democracies (V-Dem > 0.5, where elections matter most), and voters only (who are directly

affected by outcomes). Effects remain robust across all, reinforcing the strength and generalizability of our findings.

Table 34: RDD estimation of the LATE for the whole sample. Baseline specifications with alternative sets of control variables.

	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust	Conventional	Bias Corrected	Robust
LATE	-0.223*** (<0.001) [0.046]	-0.259*** (<0.001) [0.046]	-0.259*** (<0.001) [0.054]	-0.142*** (<0.001) [0.028]	-0.160*** (<0.001) [0.028]	-0.160*** (<0.001) [0.029]	-0.207*** (<0.001) [0.041]	-0.245*** (<0.001) [0.041]	-0.245*** (<0.001) [0.050]
Election Clustered SEs	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Ind-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Party-Lvl Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Only Parliamentary Systems	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No	No	No
Only Full Democracies	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Excluding Abstainers	No	No	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Bandwidth	4.42321011893936	12.1738541034266	12.1738541034266	9.24086168421091	21.0113180571234	21.0113180571234	3.91969932230682	10.578171086453	10.578171086453
Total.Numb.Obs	20203	20203	20203	17470	17470	17470	20677	20677	20677
Effective.Numb.Obs	7092	14233	14233	10030	15381	15381	6734	13512	13512
Left.CutOff	3733	6806	6806	4655	7067	7067	3521	6484	6484
Right.CutOff	3359	7427	7427	5375	8314	8314	3213	7028	7028

+ $p < 0.1$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$
P-values in parentheses; standard errors in brackets.

B4. Additional Robustness Checks

Figure 19 brings together all robustness checks, confirming the stability and credibility of our findings. Plot A shows that across model specifications, the estimated local average treatment effect (LATE) remains consistently around -0.2 , except for the baseline model without controls, which yields a smaller effect. This consistency demonstrates that even under the most conservative assumptions, the most disliked party winning leads to a measurable decline in satisfaction with democracy.

To ensure that no single election drives the results, we re-estimate our main model using a jackknife procedure that sequentially drops one election at a time. The resulting coefficients in plot B remain closely aligned with the main estimate, with overlapping confidence intervals across iterations—indicating that the effect is not driven by outlier contexts but generalizes across elections.

We further assess sensitivity to bandwidth choice by re-estimating the main specification across a fine grid ranging from 2 to 20 seat-share points. Estimates remain negative and stable beyond very narrow bandwidths, where small effective samples increase uncertainty. Beyond 5 seat-share points, results converge toward a consistent effect of roughly -0.2 , confirming robustness to bandwidth choice (Plot C).

Finally, placebo simulations test whether the observed discontinuity could arise by chance. Using 1,000 random draws of 10,000 observations each, we re-estimate the RDD at either the true cutoff or a randomly assigned placebo cutoff. Only models estimated at the real threshold produce consistently negative and statistically significant effects (-0.2), while placebo cutoffs yield effects centered around zero (Plot D). This combination of model, bandwidth, and placebo robustness checks provides strong evidence that the observed decline in democratic satisfaction reflects a genuine discontinuity at the point where the most disliked party wins—rather than an artifact of specification choices or random variation.

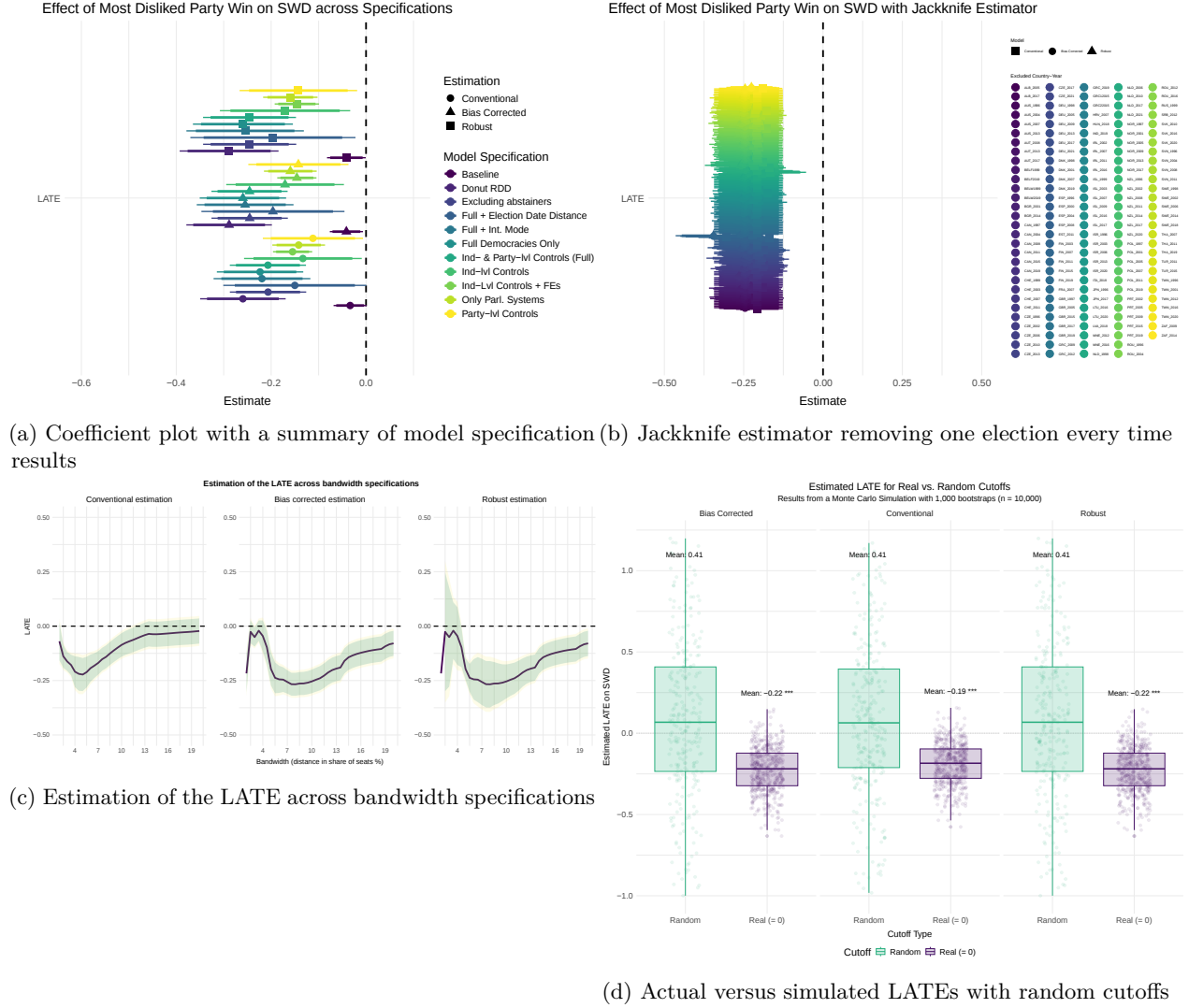


Figure 19: Additional robustness checks

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