

Satisfaction with Democracy:  
evidence from Westminster systems

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## Satisfaction with democracy: evidence from Westminster systems<sup>1</sup>

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Stable democratic systems must engender among citizens positive attitudes towards the regime. Such positive attitudes include a sense of trust, efficacy, confidence and satisfaction and together create a reserve of goodwill among citizens that Almond and Verba argued could be affected by the institutional framework of the polity (Almond and Verba 1963). Contemporary projects of institutional reform have made a similar link, arguing that institutional rejuvenation will foster improved attitudes to the polity. Devolution to sub-state units within the United Kingdom, a changed electoral system in New Zealand, a referendum on whether to adopt a domestic head of state in Australia and various constitutional referendums in Canada demonstrate considerable energy to the institutional design of the polity within Westminster systems. While treated to considerable attention in academic works what such treatments often leave out, however, are examinations of satisfaction with democracy. We know that levels of trust and efficacy are lower than they once were, and presume that satisfaction has followed a similar trend. Institutional design is assumed to provide the necessary solution to contemporary political ills and yet the sources of discontent are rarely linked to the institutional solutions. This is all the more surprising as a considerable literature examines satisfaction with democracy in both developed and emerging democracies. This paper examines levels of satisfaction among the Westminster democracies of Canada, the United Kingdom and Australia to determine whether these polities exhibit higher or lower levels of satisfaction than other polities, and second, to account for any such differences. This forms part of a larger work on institutional reform and political culture in Canada, the UK, Australia and New Zealand.

Westminster democracies are characterised by the presence of the executive within the legislature, a feature that is thought to ensure a greater diffusion of power than

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presidential systems. The presence of strong party discipline is credited both with creating strong majority governments, clear electoral choices for voters and, at times, frustrating the desires of citizens for representation that reflects local realities. Furthermore, such systems have often been paired with single-member plurality, or first-past-the-post, electoral systems that encourage a geographic link between voters and their representatives and a smaller number of parties than proportional representation. Although satisfaction with democracy is perceived as a measure of diffuse regime support, existing research clearly links it to regime performance and the operation of elections. The institutions that structure electoral competition can be assumed to have an impact on levels of satisfaction.

### **Literature**

Research examining the quality of democracy first focused on the context in which democracy could flourish. Thus for Tocqueville social equality is a necessary feature (Tocqueville 1945) Almond and Verba advocate sufficiently supportive attitudes among the population (Almond and Verba 1963) and Huntington (1991) emphasises the importance of a stable market economy. Lipset argues that prior existence as a British colony is a guarantor of democracy stability (Lipset 1993) and has argued previously that Protestant countries provide a better context for democratic government, a point supported both by Huntington and Trudeau (1967).

Attention to specific institutional features also figures in this debate. For our purposes, however, the attention to institutional design and the levels of citizen satisfaction with democracy proves more useful. Linz (1988) argues that parliamentary systems in which executive power is relatively diffuse are more democratic, a point raised by Norris to suggest that citizens will also be more satisfied with democracy in these polities. The electoral system is linked to satisfaction with democracy although there is less consensus on its effects. Norris claims single member districts allow people to identify politicians and thus feel more connected to the political system. This also allows individuals to better exercise control at the ballot box, providing a clear link between vote cast and the party forming government, a feature often absent in more proportional systems. Single

member districts also limit the number of parties, which Norris also argues appeals to voters. Weil similarly claims that the party fragmentation often occurring in proportional systems can lead to higher levels of dissatisfaction (Weil 1989). This is, however, a contested point. Miller and Listhaug argue that a smaller number of parties means fewer choices for voters. Multi-party systems, they argue, better channel discontent among voters and lead to higher levels of satisfaction. (Miller and Listhaug 1990). Literature on satisfaction, confidence, trust and efficacy, tied together as relatively diffuse support, highlight the importance of additional predictors. These include political interest (Anderson and Tverdova 2003) political knowledge (Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2003) education, income, positive assessments of personal and national economic situations (Anderson and LoTiempo 2002) and support for incumbents (Miller and Listhaug 1990)

Because of the perceived link between satisfaction with democracy and the functioning of the electoral system considerable research explores the impact of backing electoral winners and losers in single member district elections. Nadeau and Blais justify this attention, noting “the viability of electoral democracy depends on its ability to secure the support of a substantial proportion of individuals who are displeased with the outcome of the election” (Nadeau and Blais 1993). Anderson and Guillory (1997) argue that winners are more likely to be satisfied with the way democracy works because it has produced a result that they support. Losers, by contrast, may feel that ‘the system’ has delivered an unfair victory or an undesirable government. The test of democracy, then, lies in the ability of the system to engender positive feelings on the part of the losers. This result would be exacerbated by majoritarian electoral systems that leave no guarantee of representation for parties that run a consistent second in electoral contests across the state. Losers in consensual systems, however, tend to be less dissatisfied than losers in majoritarian systems (Anderson and Guillory 1997, Banducci and Karp 2003).

An examination of winners and losers was further developed by Anderson and LoTiempo (2002), who distinguished between those who backed a winning candidate for the presidency, and those who backed a winning party in elections for the Senate or Congress. This approach creates clear winners, those who backed winners in both

elections, clear losers, those who backed losers in both elections, and a middle category, who supported one winning option, and one losing option. Anderson and LoTiempo argue the distribution of spoils in the American political system suggests that voters will be happier if they supported a presidential winner and a house loser, and less satisfied if they backed a house winner and candidate other than the president. This distinction between categories is useful, as it acknowledges that there is more than one electoral competition in a country, and acknowledges a hierarchy of winning for voters. At the same time, it prioritizes aggregate results at the expense of local results. Given the attention to institutional change in Westminster systems, the prevalence of single-member district electoral systems,<sup>2</sup> and the potential impact of losing on those in majoritarian systems it is worth determining whether national or local winners and losers possess differing levels of satisfaction with democracy.

### **Methodology**

Data for this paper are from the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) dataset, module 1, 1996-2001. The entire dataset contains information on over 30 countries involving 62,409 respondents and contains questions probing attitudes to politics and the functioning of elections. Much of the data were collected during election studies in the constituent countries. The paper relies first on this aggregate dataset and later, on a smaller sub-set of these data, including only respondents from Canada, Great Britain and Australia.<sup>3</sup> These three case studies contribute 1798, 1851 and 2897 respondents respectively to this smaller dataset. Each of these cases is a bicameral Westminster system with a relatively weak upper house, a common head of state and single-member district elections. In addition, the inclusion of Australia allows us to determine whether the Alternative Vote (AV), an electoral system in which the constituency winner must earn more than half of the popular vote, produces differing levels of satisfaction than Single Member Plurality (SMP) elections. While the United States also conducts single-

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<sup>2</sup> Clearly there are exceptions to this: the recent adoption of MMP in New Zealand, in addition to the modified Additional Member System in the devolved assemblies in Scotland and Wales, produces Westminster systems with more proportional electoral systems.

<sup>3</sup> The UK component of the survey did not include respondents from Northern Ireland and so for clarity this data point will be referred to as Great Britain. The paper refers to the political system as the United Kingdom.

member district elections, the focus of the political system is less clearly on the lower house and, as Anderson and LoTiempo argue, more tied to the presidency. By excluding this country from the examination we preclude grounding attitudinal differences in institutional differences. This smaller sub-set includes additional variables created by the author to determine whether respondents voted for the party that formed the government, the party that won in the constituency, ideological distance from the national winner and ideological distance from the constituency winner. Reasons for this are discussed below.

### **Analysis**

To determine whether institutions have an impact on satisfaction with democracy it is essential to examine levels of support across the CSES dataset. There is reason to believe that institutions, particularly electoral institutions, structure levels of democratic support. Easton's distinction, between specific and diffuse support (Easton 1970), and its later amendment by Norris (Norris 1999), has been used by researchers interested in exploring satisfaction with democracy. Such research questions whether satisfaction probes specific attitudes to elections and incumbents, or whether it is more indicative of wider regime support. Canache, Mondak and Seligson argue that the indicator is used with little attention or consensus to what it measures (Canache, Mondak and Seligson 2001). Since their article appeared, however, it has been cited by those working with the indicator as proof of caution, and yet does not appear to have deterred those already using the measure (Karp, Banducci and Bowler 2003). Schneider summarizes this view, noting that "although [the measure] contains some ambiguity that ambiguity is acceptable" (Schneider 2003). Canache, Mondak and Seligson argue that the measure is seen both as an indicator of regime support, regime performance and support for incumbents. While they suggest that this undermines the utility of the measure, one could argue that the electoral system affects both the current incumbents and the behaviour of the regime. Data from the CSES further suggest that satisfaction with democracy is strongly associated with the electoral system. The gamma statistic between satisfaction with democracy and the conduct of the previous election is .595 and significant at the .01 level.

Figure 1 about here.

If the institutional structure appears to have an impact on satisfaction with democracy, the results of figure 1 are not surprising. Figure 1 reports levels of satisfaction with democracy in the various countries of the CSES dataset. The results vary from a high of 30.9% ‘very satisfied’ respondents in Australia to 0.7% similar respondents in Russia. For the most part the advanced industrial countries report higher levels of satisfaction, although it is worth noting that in no country is more than one third of respondents very satisfied with the way democracy works. Exceptions to this include Belgium, which reported a lower than average proportion of very satisfied respondents. To determine whether there are institutional predictors of satisfaction with democracy, two tables prove useful. Tables 1a and 1b examine the proportion of satisfied respondents with respect to various institutional features. Table 2 reports the results of multivariate regression analysis.

Table 1a and 1b about here.

Table 1a reports the proportion of satisfied respondents (very satisfied and fairly satisfied) in each of the countries with sample sizes exceeding 1,000. It demonstrates the prevalence of parliamentary systems among those with higher proportions of satisfied respondents. Single-member district electoral systems and countries with monarchs also tend to have higher proportions of satisfied respondents. Together, these three features typify the Westminster democracies of Canada, the UK and Australia. To better illustrate the variations contained within table 1a, table 1b demonstrates the average proportion of respondents who were satisfied with democracy by institutional feature. The table confirms that parliamentary systems have higher proportions of satisfied respondents. They also have smaller standard deviations, suggesting greater uniformity of responses. This is not surprising as presidential and semi-presidential systems have been employed in newer democracies, who we could expect to have differing levels of satisfaction from established first wave presidential regimes such as the United States. The table also notes that single-member districts have higher proportions of satisfied respondents. This

confirms research that suggests single-member districts provide better links between voters and politicians, and provide clear choices to voters. This high result is based on very few cases, however, as only Canada, the US, Great Britain and Australia employ single-member districts in this dataset. While the first three employ SMP, the Australian use of Alternative Vote and compulsory voting could each be driving satisfaction among this group. The table also notes that bicameral and federal institutions provoke higher proportions of satisfied respondents, as do countries with monarchies. As this last column ignores the constitutional role of the monarchy this could be a proxy for other institutional features typical of established western democracies. To determine whether different institutional features have an independent impact on satisfaction with democracy table 2 summarizes the results of multivariate analysis.

Table 2 about here

Table 2 reports the un-standardized OLS coefficients and standard errors for dependent variable 'proportion of satisfied respondents. The model contains several predictors mentioned in previous research. It focuses both on the institutions that structure political debate and on the economic stability of the state. Model 1 includes institutional features that are usually stable within a State, notably the presence of one or two chambers, federal systems and whether the polity is a parliamentary or presidential democracy. Model 2, the fully-specified model, includes additional predictors that are more mutable. This includes the method of electoral system, the democratic wave in which the polity began continuous democratic elections and GDP per capita. The adjusted  $R^2$  for the fully-specified model is respectable, at .588, but the high standard errors for most of the indicators inhibit much of the analysis. Only two indicators present statistically significant findings: whether the country has a monarch and the GDP per capita, both of which have a positive impact on satisfaction with democracy. Of course, given the clustering of institutional features it is possible that the perceived effect of one indicator is a proxy for another institution. This is likely the case with the presence of monarchs as it could easily be a proxy both for parliamentary heritage and old-world democracies. The results tend to support quite clearly economic theories of democratic development, in



which stable economies provide better bedrock for democratic satisfaction. While these tables help to understand aggregate levels of satisfaction across countries they are not useful to explain variations in satisfaction within countries. The remaining analysis focuses on Canada, Great Britain and Australia in order to provide a window on varying assessments of regime stability and performance.

*Predictors of satisfaction with democracy*

A brief examination of the distribution of respondents on satisfaction with democracy confirms results highlighted in previous tables. Australia has far more respondents who are ‘very satisfied’ with democracy (30.9) than either Canada (13.5) or Great Britain (16.5). This gap narrows when one includes ‘fairly satisfied’ respondents although Canada (62.9) still lags far behind the other polities, approximately three quarters of whom are satisfied. The proportions of those who are dissatisfied are, by contrast, more similar. What then, could account for the differences within and across these countries? If we know that those who participate in elections tend to be satisfied with democracy (Nadeau, Blais, Nevitte and Gidengil 2000, Henderson 2003) then this could account for higher levels of satisfaction in Australia, where compulsory voting guarantees higher levels of participation. The alternative vote could also increase satisfaction. If at least half of all voters in a district must have backed, in some way, the eventual winner then this reduces the total number of ‘losers’ in an electoral system. If we know that losers are less happy with democracy then a reduction in the total number of these respondents could also elevate levels of satisfaction. And yet this cannot explain total variations within and across these cases.

If the political systems in Canada, Great Britain and Australia employ majoritarian electoral systems that are grounded in constituencies, and if this geographic link between voters and politicians is seen, by some, as a strength of the political system, then it is worth determining whether it produces variations in satisfaction with democracy. Furthermore, if the local competition is supposed to be significant to voters, it is worth distinguishing not only between levels of aggregate support, but also between aggregate and local winners and losers. In other words, candidates may back a party that eventually

won the election, but may be represented locally by a party other than their favoured option. Voters may also have voted for an opposition party, and thus be classified as national ‘losers’, but may have supported a winning candidate in their constituency. We must also consider voters who backed neither a candidate who won locally, nor a party that won the election. Clearly if the strength of a democratic system depends on its ability to garner support from electoral losers, then we must examine the reserve of support among those who lost both nationally and locally. Table 3 illustrates these distinctions between national and local winners and losers.

Insert Table 3 about here.

Table 3 identifies a hierarchy of winning in single-member constituencies. The table distinguishes between those who backed winners at the national level (supporters of party X) and those who backed winners at the local level. It suggests that those who backed national winners and local losers will be more satisfied with the outcome of the election than those who backed winning candidates of party Y. The table also distinguishes between those who backed party Y in a constituency in which it lost, and those who backed party Z. It suggests that the hierarchy of winners and losers must acknowledge that there is a geographic link between voters and politicians, and a representative link in terms of ideology. Thus voters who lost both locally and nationally may be appeased, somewhat, by the presence of politicians who hold a similar ideology in the lower house. These voters can be separated from those who backed parties that are not represented in the house, or perhaps do not hold official party status. It is worth distinguishing between those who backed the party of government, those who did not but backed a local winner, and those voters who are represented neither by the governing party nor the locally-elected party. This will determine whether a hierarchy of winners produces variations in satisfaction with democracy. It is not yet clear whether voters assess their own status as winners or losers on a national or a local scale, nor whether the effect is a compounding one. This is particularly important in single member electoral systems, where local ties are seen as a hallmark of democratic stability and a guarantor of greater satisfaction with democracy.

Insert table 4 about here.

Table 4 tracks levels of satisfaction by winners and losers. The aggregate results demonstrate that there is little difference in the proportion of satisfied voters by voter type. Those who backed winning candidates both locally and nationally had similar proportions of satisfied respondents to those who backed losing candidates. Not only do these aggregate results suggest that there is little difference between those who backed national winners and those who backed local winners, they also show that there is little difference between total winners and total losers. Indeed the only interesting difference is those who did not vote. Non-voters had fewer satisfied respondents than those who cast ballots, regardless of the party voted for. This calls into question whether those who backed winners are more satisfied with democracy. When we disaggregate by case study, however, we find some interesting differences.

In Australia, respondents who backed a winner, whether national or local, were more satisfied than those who backed losers at both levels. Here the difference is not between winning nationally and losing nationally, but winning at any level, and losing. In addition, non-voters in Australia have far fewer satisfied respondents, a predictable finding given the compulsory nature of voting in Australia. One could expect that braving a fine for non-voting would be a more committed expression of discontent than in countries where non-voting carries no penalties. In Canada, however, the difference is not between winning and losing, but between national winners and national losers. Those who backed the Liberal party had larger proportions of satisfied respondents than those who backed non-Liberal local winners, or those who backed losing candidates and parties. Here too those who didn't vote possess fewer satisfied respondents although the proportions are indistinguishable from national losers. If in Australia winning matters, regardless of whether it is at the national or local level, in Canada, backing a national winner is more likely to produce satisfied respondents. Last, in Great Britain, regardless of whether candidates backed a winning or losing party or candidate, all groups appear to have similar proportions of satisfaction. Those who didn't vote and those who backed

national and local winners had very similar proportions of satisfied voters. The exception to this is those who backed local winners and national losers, almost 90% of whom were satisfied with democracy. The reasons for this are not immediately clear. It could be that the dominance of Conservative voters among this category were more likely to be satisfied, given the 18 years of Conservative rule in the United Kingdom. It is also possible that this group was more ideologically supportive of satisfaction. Attempting to determine why differences appear in some cases and not in others could thus make use of ideological differences among voters.

Previous research on winners and losers portrays voters' assessments of electoral results as a zero sum game: those who backed winning candidates will be more satisfied than those who backed losing candidates. And yet we know individuals do not view all parties equally. Parties hold different positions on a left-right scale, as do voters. It is reasonable to assume, then, that voters who backed losing parties will feel better if the eventual winner is closer to their own self-placement on a left-right scale than if the governing party is less proximate. If voter and winning party are far apart, then the winner-loser dichotomy will be exacerbated. If they are close together, then the effect could be minimized. If proximity and directional models can attempt to explain the choices of voters before they arrive at the ballot box, then it is reasonable to assume that similar assessments can be made when evaluating democratic performance. The dataset already distinguishes between those who backed national losers and local losers. It also examines the distance between the left-right placement of voters and the left-right place of national and local winners. The paper hypothesises that those losers who are more proximate to the winning party will be more satisfied with democracy than those who are more distant.

The dataset created two variables to measure ideological difference, both of which make use of voter self-placement on a left-right ideological scale. The first variable measures distance between voters and the ideological placement of the national winning party, as determined by the domestic CSES team, while the second measures distance between voters and the ideological placement of the winning party in the constituency. This then

allows us to determine whether losing voters are more satisfied with democracy if they are closer, ideologically, to the winners.

Table 5 about here.

Table 5 summarizes several key pieces of information about ideological difference. The table first reports the range of ideological differences in each country. Voters who had the same self-placement on the left-right scale as the national winner were coded as zero, while those whose self-placement was different were coded as above or below the national winner. Negative numbers imply self-placement that is more left-wing than the national winner, and positive numbers imply more right-wing views. There is little difference among the countries in the total range of distance from the national winner and the range of ideological distance from the local winner is fairly similar, if slightly larger. We find, however, that average ideological distance varies by country. In Canada, respondents tend to be relatively close to the placement of the Liberal party, deviating on average by .332 points from the 5.0 score attributed to the national winners. Average ideological distance is higher in Australia and in Great Britain, where there is an approximately one-point difference between voter self-placement and the placement of the winning party. In all three cases voters tended to deviate to the left of the winning party. Deviations from local winners were smaller still. But of course examining ideological distance is useful to help explain satisfaction with democracy among losers. Among national losers, ideological distance from the winning party was smaller than total ideological distance. Again, all three countries tended to produce average deviations to the left of the placement of national winners. The difference is greatest in Great Britain, where national losers tend to be 1.94 points to the left of the Labour party. This is an expected finding, given the emergence of new Labour and the party's shift to the right for the 1997 election. Last, if we examine correlations between ideological distance and satisfaction with democracy we find a significant and negative relationship between the two. Both Spearman's rho and Pearson's r results show that as ideological distance increases, satisfaction with democracy decreases, although in all cases the correlations are relatively weak, at less than -.1. This suggests, however, that while winning and

losing may affect satisfaction with democracy, so too may ideological distance from the winning party. But which has the greater impact on satisfaction with democracy?

Table 6 about here.

Table 6 contains the logit coefficients of regression analysis where the DV satisfaction with democracy is coded as 1 if the respondent indicated they were very or fairly satisfied with democracy, and 0 if they were not very or not at all satisfied with democracy. The results contain three models. Model 1 tests the impact of winning and ideological distance on levels of satisfaction. The model distinguishes between those who backed local winners and national losers, those who backed national winners but in constituencies where they did not gain seats, and those who voted for the national winner in a constituency where it gained a seat. By eliminating total losers this precludes the possibility of collinearity in the model. Model 1 also includes the ideological distance from the national winner and from the local winner. Model 2 includes political predictors found in prior research to be determinants of satisfaction. These include political knowledge and partisan identification for two of the opposition parties. This will help to determine whether those who backed more successful parties were more satisfied with democracy. Last, model 3, the fully-specified model, includes standard socio-demographic information cited in previous literature as predictors of satisfaction, specifically gender, age, education and income. The results show that different predictors drive satisfaction with democracy in each of the three case studies. In all three cases model 1 does not account for much of the variation in the dependent variable. The Cox and Snell, and the Nagelkerke  $R^2$  were both below .1 for the first model of all three cases, never exceeding .2 for the fully-specified model.

Immediately relevant is the variation in results across the three case studies. In Australia, backing a national winner does not appear to drive satisfaction with democracy whereas this feature is more relevant in Canada and Great Britain. In both of these cases backing the eventual government in a constituency where it gained a seat prompted a significant and positive increase in satisfaction with democracy, an effect that remains in the fully-

specified model. Backing a local winner only, however, does much less to improve satisfaction. The effect is not significant in Great Britain, and significant only in Model 1 for the other two countries. In addition, the impact is not in the same direction. In Australia, backing a local winner is the only indicator in the hierarchy of winning that has a positive and significant impact on satisfaction. In Canada, however, it operates in the opposite direction: those who backed local winners and national losers were less likely to be satisfied with democracy.

Equally interesting is the role of ideological distance. In Canada, ideological distance is an irrelevant predictor of satisfaction with democracy. In Australia and Great Britain it remains significant in all three models. Surprisingly, it operates in opposite directions. In Australia, the farther an individual is from the national winner the more likely they are to be satisfied with democracy, while the farther they are from the constituency winner the less likely they are to be satisfied. When combined with the impact, in Model 1, of backing local winners this suggests that local contests have a greater impact on satisfaction than national contests. In Great Britain however, greater distance from the national party detracts from satisfaction, while distance from local winners increases satisfaction. Together these results suggest that it is not merely whether one backs a winner or loser, but also whether one is proximate to the eventual winner. If one is choosing between the proximity and directional models to explain voter satisfaction, it appears that the directional model accounts for voter satisfaction in Canada while the proximity model provides greater explanatory power in Australia and Great Britain.

Results of the regression analysis also confirm previous research that suggests political knowledge and income have a positive impact on satisfaction with democracy. In Australia and Great Britain political knowledge has a significant and positive impact on satisfaction and, in the Australia case, this effect remains in the fully-specified model. Income has an expected positive impact on satisfaction in Canada and Great Britain. Gender and education, however, do not appear to be predictors of satisfaction, despite what one might expect. It is worth examining, however, why certain predictors operate in one country and not in others.

In Australia, the lack of influence of winner/loser status on satisfaction with democracy suggests that the alternative vote and compulsory voting together reduce the rewards for winners and the punishment for losers. This could also help to explain why each of the socio-economic variables has no effect. If we know that certain elements of the population are less likely to vote – women, young people, those without university degrees or those with lower incomes – then the compulsory nature of voting ensures the participation. This equalization of participation could have a corollary impact of equalizing voter satisfaction. The alternative vote, however, could perhaps account for the limited rewards for winners and the absence of dissatisfaction among losers. This could explain why ideological distance and knowledge are the pre-eminent predictors of satisfaction with democracy. Less clear, however, is the difference between Canada and Great Britain.

Canada and Great Britain both employ single-member plurality elections and possess similar levels of turnout. One particular difference, however, is the ideological range of parties operating in each country. In Canada, the left-right ideological scores assigned by the CSES team show a range of three to eight, identical to the range of parties operating in Great Britain. In Canada, however, the Liberal party is towards the mid-point of this scale, at five. The official opposition, the Reform party, earned an eight on the same scale. This produces a range of three between the two largest parties, measured by number of seats in the house. The range between the Liberals and their previous main rivals, the Progressive Conservatives, is only one. As a result, while the total ideological distance in Canada is relatively broad, the main electoral contest takes place in a relatively restrained spectrum. In Great Britain, however, the two main parties occupy the end points of the scale, three and eight respectively. So while the ideological range is similar to that in Canada, the main electoral contest is far more polarized. This may explain then, why winning and losing is more important in Canada, and proximity to the eventual winner is more important in Great Britain.

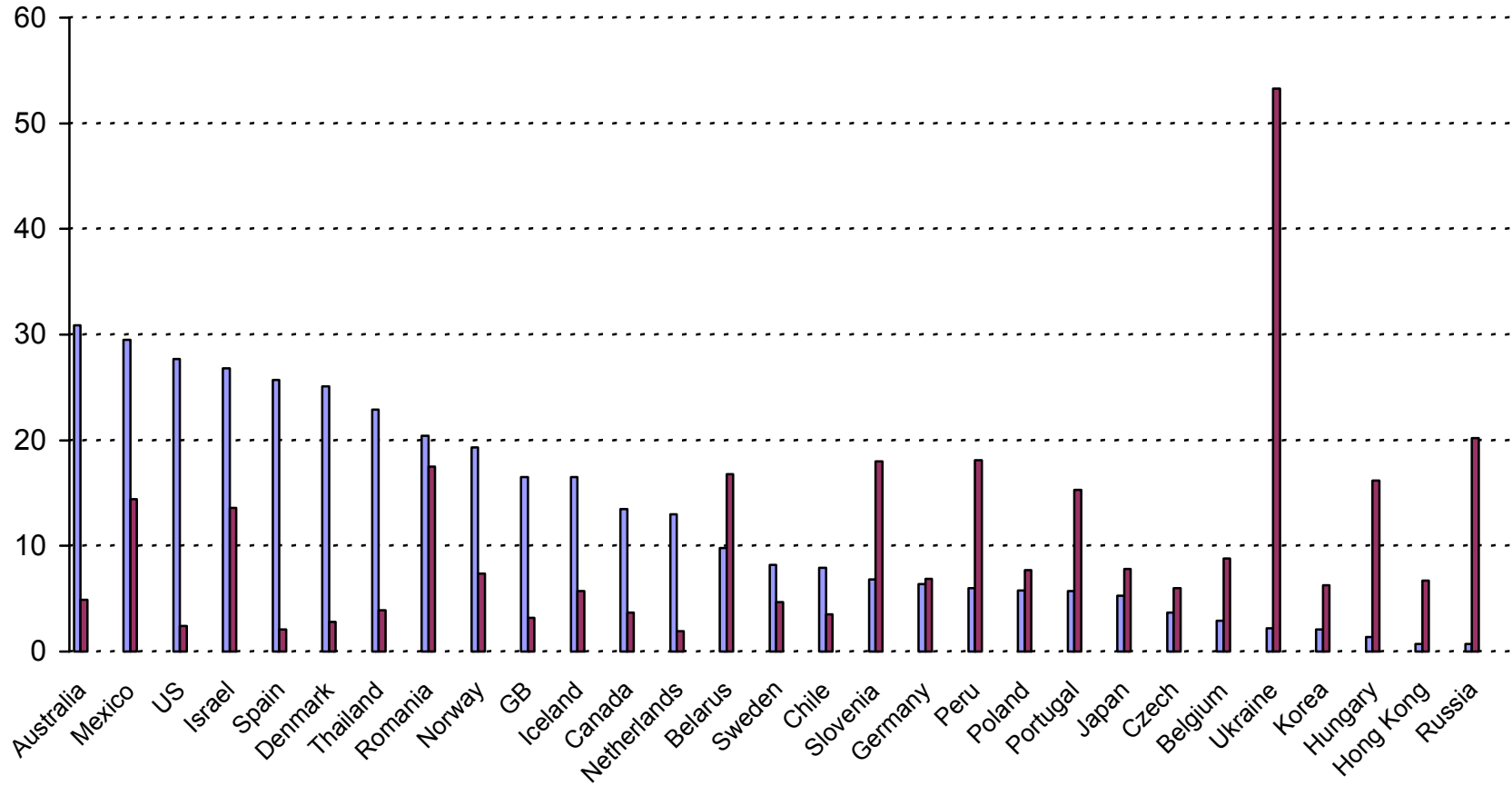


Canada and Great Britain also share key predictors. Income is relevant in both cases, as a positive predictor. Because we know that those with higher incomes are more likely to vote in electoral contests this suggests that those with higher incomes approach politics with a greater sense of efficacy than those with lower incomes. It is not surprising, then, that this predictor is significant in both countries. In addition, Conservative party identification in Canada and Great Britain is a significant and positive predictor of voter satisfaction. One could suggest that Conservative partisan identification in Great Britain would be associated with higher satisfaction in part because of the history of electoral success by the Conservative party. Before 1997 the party had governed for the previous 18 years and has been in power for much of the post-war period. In Canada this is clearly not the case. This Conservative party, long-subject to the Tory-syndrome of electoral failure and frequent leader changes, has not enjoyed similar levels of electoral success. The party governed from 1984 to 1993 but was soundly defeated at the end of this period and reduced from a majority government to two seats. Initially, then, one might be surprised that Conservative voters would be satisfied with the way democracy works in Canada, given the violence done to the party at the hands of the electoral system. What this suggests, however, is that the tenets of conservatism figure in assessments of satisfaction with democracy. If the measure is assumed to reflect both assessments of incumbents, electoral institutions and diffuse regime support then this could be evidence of regime assessment. Conservative parties in both Canada and Great Britain, despite variations in their economic and social platforms, are united in their desire to shore up the existing system. This, then, could account for the similar coefficients in Canada and Great Britain.

Taken together, these results suggest that winning and losing is not the key determinant of satisfaction with democracy and indeed that the ideological proximity to the eventual winners is also important. It would be useful to investigate this in single-member districts with widely varying numbers of parties and varying ideological ranges of key combatants. Whether ideological differences are relevant in the two-party electoral politics of the United States, for example, would be worth testing. Future research might also seek to determine whether region figures largely in assessments of satisfaction and

how, in particular, this interacts with ideological distance. Last, this paper has avoided assessments of nationalist voters. It is entirely likely that those who backed the Bloc Québécois, the Scottish National Party and Plaid Cymru, in Quebec, Scotland and Wales respectively, could have entirely different assessments of satisfaction with democracy, something that might play to a more diffuse interpretation of the measure. At present, however, it appears that the existing measure has much to do with electoral institutions, and demonstrates how similar systems prompt differing reactions among the voting publics in Canada, Great Britain and Australia.

**Figure 1: Satisfaction with democracy**



Source: CSES Module 1, 1996-2001. Bars represent the percent of respondents ‘very satisfied’ and ‘not at all satisfied’ with the way democracy works. Higher values for ‘very satisfied’ are reported to the left of the graph.

**Table 1a: Satisfaction with democracy and institutional features**

	<b>Year</b>	<b>% satis</b>	<b>Political system</b>	<b>Electoral system</b>	<b># chambers</b>	<b>Federal?</b>	<b>Monarch?</b>
Norway	1997	<b>90.30</b>	Parliamentary	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
Denmark	1998	<b>89.20</b>	Parliamentary	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
Netherlands	1998	<b>88.40</b>	Parliamentary	Regional PR	Bicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
Spain	2000	<b>86.00</b>	Parliamentary	Mixed	Bicameral	Federal	Monarchy
United States	1996	<b>80.50</b>	Presidential	SMP	Bicameral	Federal	
Iceland	1999	<b>79.40</b>	Semi presidential	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	
Australia	1996	<b>78.00</b>	Parliamentary	Alternative Vote	Bicameral	Federal	Monarchy
Thailand	2001	<b>76.90</b>	Parliamentary	Mixed	Bicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
GB	1997	<b>74.90</b>	Parliamentary	SMP	Bicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
Chile	1999	<b>74.70</b>	Presidential	Regional PR	Bicameral	Unitary	
Canada	1997	<b>72.90</b>	Parliamentary	SMP	Bicameral	Federal	Monarchy
Belgium	1999	<b>71.82</b>	Parliamentary	Regional PR	Bicameral	Federal	Monarchy
Sweden	1998	<b>71.00</b>	Parliamentary	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	
New Zealand	1996	<b>68.50</b>	Parliamentary	Mixed	Unicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
Japan	1996	<b>63.50</b>	Parliamentary	Mixed	Bicameral	Unitary	Monarchy
Germany	1998	<b>63.40</b>	Parliamentary	Mixed	Bicameral	Federal	
Poland	1997	<b>63.00</b>	Semi presidential	Regional PR	Bicameral	Unitary	
Czech	1996	<b>61.10</b>	Parliamentary	Regional PR	Bicameral	Unitary	
Israel	1996	<b>53.40</b>	Parliamentary	National PR	Unicameral	Unitary	
Portugal	2002	<b>53.00</b>	Semi presidential	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	
Romania	1996	<b>43.90</b>	Semi presidential	Regional PR	Bicameral	Unitary	
Hungary	2002	<b>42.20</b>	Parliamentary	Mixed	Unicameral	Unitary	
Mexico	2000	<b>41.60</b>	Presidential	Mixed	Bicameral	Federal	
Korea	2000	<b>41.20</b>	Presidential	Mixed	Unicameral	Unitary	
Peru	2001	<b>35.30</b>	Semi presidential	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	
Slovenia	1996	<b>32.20</b>	Semi presidential	Regional PR	Unicameral	Unitary	
Russia	2000	<b>16.10</b>	Semi presidential	Mixed	Bicameral	Federal	
Ukraine	1998	<b>9.20</b>	Semi presidential	Mixed	Unicameral	Unitary	

Source: CSES Module 1: 1996-2001

**Table 1b: Satisfaction with democracy by institutional feature**

System		Electoral System		# chambers		Federal?		Monarchy?	
Parl'y	72.0 (13.4)	SMD	76.10 (3.9)	Uni'l	57.52 (25.0)	Unitary	60.32 (21.4)	Monarch	77.62 (8.9)
Semi-pres	41.5 (23.5)	Mixed	50.86 (25.3)	Bi'l	66.05 (18.7)	Federal	67.93 (22.0)	None	50.53 (21.0)
Pres'l	59.9 (23.5)	Reg'l PR	66.7 (18.2)						

Source: CSES Module 1: 1996-2001. Average proportion of respondents who are satisfied with democracy (including very satisfied and fairly satisfied). Standard deviations are in parentheses.

**Table 2: Satisfaction with democracy across countries**

	Model 1	Model 2
Constant	49.30 (9.25)	36.48 (13.02)
Parliamentary system	-2.75 (12.92)	-5.23 (10.99)
Bicameral system	2.88 (8.44)	9.55 (7.08)
Monarch	28.10** (9.71)	19.83* (8.75)
Federal system	4.04 (9.37)	-3.35 (8.82)
PR		-.641 (11.38)
Mixed system		-10.53 (10.52)
GDP pc (2001 US\$)		.001* (.001)
Democratic wave		-5.716 (11.41)
Adj R <sup>2</sup>	.307	.588

Source: CSES, various. DV Proportion satisfied with democracy  
Results are unstandardized OLS coefficients with standard errors in parentheses .

*Institutional information* (Parliamentary system, bicameral system, monarch, federal system, PR and Mixed electoral system) is from the Inter-Parliamentary Union. Each variable is a binary variable where 1=trait present, 0=trait absent.

*GDP pc* statistics are from UNDP 2003 and are reported in 2001 US dollars adjusted for purchasing power parity. I. Information on democratic wave

*Democratic wave* is based on Huntington 1991 where 1<sup>st</sup> wave is coded as 1, 2<sup>nd</sup> wave is coded as .5 and third wave coded as 0.

**Table 3: Winners and losers in SMP**

Assume 3 parties:

- Party X forms government
- Party Y is opposition
- Party Z elected no members

Voted for party X		Voted for party Y		Voted for party Z
X wins constituency	X loses constituency	Y wins constituency	Y loses constituency	
National winner	National winner	National loser	National loser	National loser
Local winner	Local loser	Local winner	Local loser	Local loser

Winner .....Loser

**Table 4: Proportion satisfied with democracy, by winners and losers**

	National winner	National winner	National loser	National loser	Didn't vote
	Local winner	Local loser	Local winner	Local loser	
All 3 cases	74.3	77.6	79.1	77.7	67.4
Australia	82.3	81.0	81.4	73.9	58.3
Canada	87.9	83.6	64.4	70.0	68.5
Great Britain	71.8	73.3	86.9	77.4	68.0

Source: CSES Module 1, 1996-2001

**Table 5: Ideological distance from national and local winners**

	Australia	Canada	Great Britain
<b>National winners</b>			
Ideological score of winning party	4.5	5.0	4.0
Range of ideological distance from national winner	-5.5 to +4.5	-5 to +5	-6 to +4
Average ideological distance from national winner	-.956 (2.01)	-.332 (1.95)	-1.03 (2.45)
Average ideological distance from national party for national losers	-.282 (1.85)	-.315 (2.05)	-1.94 (2.06)
Pearson's r and Spearman's rho distance from national winner and satisfaction with democracy	-.085***, -.073***	-.040*, -.031	-.180***, -.183**
<b>Local winners</b>			
Range of ideological distance from local winner	-5.5 to +6.5	-7 to +8	-7 to +8
Average ideological distance from local winner	-.408 (2.18)	.117 (2.52)	-.072 (2.64)
Average ideological distance from local party for local losers	.029 (1.97)	-.092 (2.82)	-1.49 (2.16)
Pearson's r and Spearman's rho distance from local winner and satisfaction with democracy	-.081***, -.066***	-.048***, -.046*	-.094***, -.093***

LR scale where 0=left wing, 10=right wing. Standard deviations are in parentheses.\*\*\*=p<.1, \*\*=p<.05, \*=p<.01

**Table 6: Predictors of satisfaction with democracy**

	Australia			Canada		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Nat'l & local winner	.223 (.421)	.385 (.482)	.480 (.498)	1.341*** (.350)	1.741*** (.375)	1.707*** (.379)
Nat'l winner only	.618 (.489)	.807 (.528)	.881 (.542)	1.134*** (.427)	1.586 (.452)***	1.616*** (.456)
Local winner only	.886* (.492)	.731 (.504)	.678 (.513)	-.585 (.229)**	-.178 (.258)	-.194 (.259)
Nat distance	.491** (.250)	.490* (.265)	.504* (.278)	-.071 (.070)	-.031 (.075)	-.010 (.077)
Local distance	-.498* (.256)	-.497* (.265)	-.498* (.276)	.081 (.056)	.086 (.058)	.074 (.058)
Political knowledge		.388** (.191)	.463** (.198)		.178 (.112)	.161 (.117)
Labour id		.310 (.414)	.375 (.428)		1.190*** (.344)	1.32*** (.346)
National id		1.601 (1.112)	1.560 (1.134)		.184 (.307)	.190 (.311)
Gender (fem=high)			.478 (.307)			-.022 (.215)
Age			-1.069 (.872)			.719 (.604)
Education			-.848 (.644)			-.318 (.522)
Income			.091 (.594)			.712* (.412)
Constant	1.760*** (.250)	.628 (.585)	1.127 (.890)	1.001*** (.150)	.206 (.321)	-.196 (.565)
C&S and N R <sup>2</sup>	.014, .025	.032, .056	.045, .080	.076, .113	.100, .150	.106, .159
% predicted	85.7	85.7		76.2	76.6	75.9

Source: CSES Module 1 1996-2001, DV satisfaction with democracy. \*= $p < .1$ , \*\*= $p < .05$ , \*\*\*= $p < .01$

	Great Britain		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Nat'l & local winner	.168 (.210)	.817*** (.254)	.789*** (.258)
Nat'l winner only	-.443 (.339)	.304 (.364)	.268 (.368)
Local winner only	-.011 (.297)	.068 (.296)	.026 (.300)
Nat distance	-.367*** (.075)	-.250*** (.077)	-.222*** (.078)
Local distance	.194*** (.068)	.145** (.067)	.119* (.068)
Political knowledge		.175* (.091)	.088 (.100)
Labour id			1.322*** (.318)
National id		.389 (.314)	.359 (.318)
Gender (fem=high)			.024 (.175)
Age			1.049** (.464)
Education			-.274 (.465)
Income			1.172*** (.356)
Constant	1.060*** (.161)	-.019 (.309)	-.612 (.459)
C&S and N R <sup>2</sup>	.046, .071	.074, .115	.086, .134
% predicted	79.2	79.3	79.6

Source: CSES Module 1 1996-2001 DV satisfaction with democracy. \*= $p < .1$ , \*\*= $p < .05$ , \*\*\*= $p < .01$



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