# What contextual factors bridge the winner-loser gap in political support? Testing cross-national and over time effects in Europe

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#### Abstract

Electoral outcomes are central for political support and democratic legitimacy in terms of losers' consent. Using Bayesian multilevel models on survey data from thirty European countries between 2002 and 2015, this article (a) looks at the role of different aspects of the political system; (b) distinguishes between factors that mitigate the winner-loser gap from those that raise losers' consent; (c) accounts for both within and between country variation in political support. Findings show that consensual institutions have a prominent role in reducing the distance between winner and loser between countries. Differently, quality of government and economic performance increase losers' consent both within and between countries, although they do not attenuate the gap.

**Key words**: Political support · Winners and losers · Political institutions · Quality of government · Economic performance · European Social Survey · Bayesian multilevel models

Prepared for presentation at the WAPOR regional conference November 24-25th – 2016, Barcelona, Spain

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#### 1. Introduction

One influential explanation in the analysis of political support relates to election outcomes. The democratic game is characterized by the pursuit of power through elections, so that the electoral process creates winners and losers. In this respect, losers have been found to express less satisfaction with democracy and political trust. Thus, democratic consolidation and stability may result largely from losers' consent (Citrin and Green 1986; Lambert et al. 1993; Kaase and Newton 1995). As pointed out by Anderson et al. (2005) in their seminal book, a more systematic understanding of political legitimacy needs to study the factors that mediate the gap between winners and losers as well as the conditions under which losers are happier in some contexts than in others. So, what factors may moderate the impact of election outcomes on citizens' political support? We try to answer this question in this article also addressing some theoretical and empirical issues that can be found in previous research on the topic.

First, we put forward a more comprehensive theoretical framework. When considering the contextual factors affecting the impact of election outcomes on support, attention has been dedicated almost exclusively to the importance of the input-side of the political system, in terms of the institutional structure and the mechanisms of political representation, as the winner-loser gap seems to be more pronounced in majoritarian systems rather than in consensual ones. The logic is that the latter facilitates the inclusion of relevant political minorities within decision-making procedures, allowing representation and reducing the impact of losing (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson et al. 2005; Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Singh 2014).

Nevertheless, there might be other contextual factors that should be considered which relate to the output of the political system. Research has provided cross-sectional and longitudinal evidence on how the quality of the political process – in the form of rule of law, control of corruption or government effectiveness – have an effect on satisfaction with democracy and political trust (Wagner et al. 2009; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016). In the same way, recent contributions have looked at the role of macroeconomic performance, showing that support tends to go in hand with macroeconomic conditions (Dotti Sani and Magistro 2016; Quaranta and Martini 2016; van Erkel and van der Meer 2016). Some studies have argued that the quality of the institutional process might reduce the winner-loser gap (Dahlberg and Linde 2016), while none has looked at the role of economic performance. Overall, these approaches have been rarely employed simultaneously in the same empirical model.

Another important issue we deal with is the importance of distinguishing contextual factors for their different potential effect on the political support of winners and losers. In line with motivated reasoning and partisan bias theories (Kunda 1990; Bartels 2002; Jorit and Barabas 2012), we argue that losers should maintain consistency in their attitudes regardless the contextual conditions related to the output of the system. So, some factors may diminish the gap between winners and losers and increase losers' consent, while others may not affect the gap or even enlarge it as winners increase their support and losers do not. In other words, it is possible that other conditions beyond formal institutions of representation differ in their impact, so that the reaction of the two groups may not be homogeneous. Given that losers are the crucial player who need to consent to being governed (Anderson et al. 2005), it is important to provide a comprehensive test of major explanations of the origins of political support by assessing what factors reduce the tension between winners and losers or at least affect losers' consent.

Lastly, we advance an empirical strategy taking into account how the political support of winners and losers vary both *within* and *between* countries. On the one hand, existing studies have been usually based on varying number of countries or specific periods with the possibility that results are driven by time contingencies or country selection. In this regard, there has been little reflection regarding whether using one or another wave of a comparative survey might be determining the results. On the other hand, available research does not distinguish between cross-national and over-time variation. In contrast, this article explores both sources of variation, providing a more comprehensive analysis of the impact of election outcomes on support across a consistent set of European countries.

Using Bayesian multilevel models on pooled data from the European Social Survey (2016) for thirty countries between 2002 and 2015, this article tries to contribute to the debate exploring both the spatial and the temporal variation of the winner-loser gap as well as of the levels of losers' consent on two different indicators of political support such as satisfaction with democracy and trust in national parliament. As it will be discussed, in line with previous findings, consensual institutions have a prominent role in reducing the gap between countries while other factors seem to be not relevant. Lastly, contrary to our expectation, quality of government and economic performance increase losers' consent both between country and over time, although they do not attenuate the tension between the two sides of the barricade.

#### 2. The political support of winners and losers within and between countries

The study of citizen's attitudes about the functioning of democratic institutions is a central topic in political research as these are often associated to legitimate political systems. The core idea is that if citizens have positive attitudes towards the system this would be more stable (Dalton 2004; Norris 2011). Almost all research on how citizens evaluate democracy in their country draws inspiration from the concept of political support, or the extent to which people orient favorable attitudes towards different political objects (Easton 1975). In this respect, scholars distinguish between types of objects that might include the political community and the regime principles more in general as well as the procedures of a regime, the political institutions and the class of politicians. Moreover, citizens may express more diffuse support and affective attitudes referring to the general meaning given to that particular object. Eventually, they may convey specific support in the form of evaluative judgments about the functioning of authorities, their perceived decisions and their satisfaction with the output (Dalton 2004).

Regarding the origins of political support and attitudes towards democratic systems it is

possible to identify two theoretical traditions (Mishler and Rose 2001, 33–36). Cultural theories assume supportive attitudes to develop outside of the political system and emerge from early-life processes of socialization, so that they would largely be stable and immune to daily political experience. Institutional theories, instead, consider attitudes resulting from a rational assessment of the features of the context in which citizens live in and of the behavior of political authorities. In this latter group, a growing number of contributions have focused on the experience of being among winners and losers of the electoral process. Following this view, elections are the main channel to regulate political competition and a basic procedure for citizens to influence governments and their decisions. As a result, citizens may react in a different way depending on whether they are winners or losers, with several potential consequences for their attitudes and behaviors. In brief, elections connect micro-level individual behaviors with macro-level political decisions and they are the core institutional factor that structure people's reaction to politics.

Anderson et al. (2005, 23–29) present three different mechanisms that might explain positive (negative) political support among electoral winners (losers). The first one is more an instrumental mechanism and has to do with the possibility of increasing expected benefits and utility via the results of the election. Winning an election may indeed increase the chances of seeing one's own policy preference satisfied. Then, winning an election may result in emotional effects increasing self-confidence as well as positive views and states of mind with respect to the perceived social and political context and the individual capacity to influence it. Finally, election outcomes may bring people to express more or less negative evaluations of the political process as a result of dissonance avoidance. Thus, winning and losing also affect individual cognitive consistency leading people to engage in motivated reasoning (Kunda 1990). This way, citizens will express more or less favorable attitudes filtering their opinions through the lens of the position they held in the electoral process.

During the years, these theoretical expectations have been gradually sustained by empirical research on public opinion and behavior. For example, losing at elections has been found to be associated to lower satisfaction with government performance, lower support for democracy as political regime, lower trust in politicians and political efficacy, a lower perceived fairness of the electoral process as well as higher propensity to support institutional reforms and to take part in different forms of political participation and protest (Citrin and Green 1986; Lambert et al. 1993; Kaase and Newton 1995; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Bowler and Donovan 2007; Singh et al. 2011; Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Curini et al. 2015).

Another finding is that the winner-loser gap seems also to vary over time, although this issue has been far less investigated in the literature. At the individual level, it has been shown that a change in the winner-loser status before and after an election term directly impacts political satisfaction, so that it is the fact of winning that generate a change in attitudes (Blais and Gélineau 2007; Singh et al. 2012; Chang et al. 2014). When considering the problem across countries, the gap seems to last for long periods of times during the electoral cycle and even beyond it, although in the European context, larger gaps are found in newer democracies compared to old and more established systems. In brief, the size of the gap may depend on the time-span considered and on

the context under study, which in turn points at the possibility that individual evaluations among the two considered groups of citizens change due to both individual characteristics as well as to contextual aspects (Anderson et al. 2005).

Thus, we put forward that the effect of losing on political support and the alternative factors that might be at play in moderating its impact should be investigated taking into account not only cross-national differences regarding the context, but also over-time variation so to assess how changes in the context may be related to the support of winners and losers.

# 3. Explaining the impact of election outcomes on political support: structure, process and performance

The role of contextual factors has played a prominent position in the analysis of citizens' political support (Zmerli and Hooghe 2011). The same applies for the study of the impact of the election outcome on winners' and losers' supportive attitudes, as this effect can depend on specific characteristics of the political systems. In this article, we try to expand existing models of legitimacy among winners and losers looking at the role of *structure*, *process* and *performance*. In other words, following seminal research (Rothstein 2009), we stress the importance of considering aspects of the input side of a system, namely how this is formed and interests are articulated through mechanisms of institutional representation, as well as features of the output side, that is how political process is implemented and its performance.

A relevant stream of research on the factors that influence political support of winners and losers has to do with the structure of the democratic system, that is with the set of constitutional arrangements and legal norms that constitutes its minimum characteristics (Roller and Bendix 2005, 20–22). According to the work of Lijphart (1999) and Powell (2000), modern democracies may be examined from the perspective of how majoritarian or consensual their rules are. In this respect, the majoritarian model promotes accountability and citizen control by reducing political fragmentation, and concentrates power in the hands of a majority with scarce room for minority veto. On the other hand, the consensual model makes it difficult to aggregate various interests into stable majority coalitions able to take decisions, although they are better suited to restrain majority rule by sharing power between different political actors.

When coming to the political support of winners and losers, previous research has shown that inclusive institutions may reduce the negative effect of losing elections. In contrast, majoritarian rules amplify differences in support as they reduce the chances of losers to influence majorities. In brief, the structure of political systems mediates the effect of the electoral status on the support of winner and losers, decreasing support among the former group and increasing it among the latter (Anderson et al. 2005). This seems to hold also when considering different indicators of consensual arrangements as a high number of parties, a less disproportional electoral rule, oversized or coalition cabinets, or a high degree of federalism (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Singh 2014). Lastly, when looking only at losers' consent, it has been found that their

evaluations are likely to be more positive under consensual models than in majoritarian systems (Anderson et al. 2005). Therefore, our expectation is that:

Consensual vis-a-vis majoritarian systems will narrow the winner-loser gap in political support, as they will have stronger effect on the political support of losers, between and within countries (H1).

However, a comprehensive evaluation of the contextual factors that might explain levels of political support among winners and losers should also include aspects of the output of the system with a specific look at the democratic process referring to the activities of political actors (Roller and Bendix 2005, 20–22). Attention towards the link between the qualities of the democratic process and political support has in fact increased gradually ever since 1990s (Offe 2006; Rothstein and Teorell 2008; Rothstein 2009; Morlino 2011). The idea is that political support depends on factors such as the level of bureaucratic quality, the control of corruption, or the effectiveness of institutions. Following this argument, citizens would not only consider how well they are represented into the main political arenas or over the national territory, but also how procedures work in practice and their degree of fairness and impartiality.

In this respect, there are empirical findings showing that corruption in public sector is strongly associated to overall levels of political trust (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016). On the same line, cross-national analysis on thirty-two countries tried to provide support to the thesis that an impartial bureaucracy and an effective government are of greater importance for citizens' satisfaction with democracy than representational devices (Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014). Finally, there is recent cross-national evidence on the importance of government effectiveness for diffuse support for regime principle and democracy as the most preferred system (Magalhães 2014).

A final aspect concerns the *performance* of the political system. In this respect, economic performance is seen as a crucial factor affecting political support (McAllister 1999), as the concept of democracy is often associated to a system ensuring wealth and economic security (Thomassen 1995). Along this line, recently, in Europe the attention has increased even more due to the harsh financial crisis that hit many countries in the region, with negative implications for the relationship between citizens and state institutions. For instance, it has been found that democratic satisfaction and political trust seems to run parallel to macroeconomic indicators (Quaranta and Martini 2016; van Erkel and van der Meer 2016). Similar effects have been found for the case of institutional trust at the supra-national level (Dotti Sani and Magistro 2016).

Now, what would be the effect of the quality of the process and the system's performance on political support of winners and losers? It should be noticed that, to the best of our knowledge, economic performance has never been included as a contextual factor to test whether it mediates the effect of election outcomes on political support, while the role of process as a factor for reducing the winner-loser gap has been accounted for in recent research, showing that it reduces the distance between the two groups (Dahlberg and Linde 2016).

We argue that, apart from contrasting different theoretical perspective, we need to recognize the possibility that alternative conditions, input (structure) vs. output (process and performance), may have different effects. Some of them may interact with the gap reducing the difference between winners and losers, while others may leave losers' consent unaltered with the possibility of a higher gap across countries and over time. As mentioned in the previous section, it is often been argued that people tend to see the political world through the lens of their political predispositions (see Zaller 1992; Gerber and Green 1999). Thus, individuals are motivated to maintain consistency in their attitudes, selecting and processing information accordingly, so that they evaluate available political facts and figures in line with their prior beliefs (Kunda 1990; Taber and Lodge 2006; Taber et al. 2009). When individuals take political stands they also tend to internalize the values and norms of the group they feel to belong producing an in-group vs. out-group bias, which in turn affect attitudes and opinions (Gerber et al. 2010).

It has been shown, for instance, that having voted for a party increases how positively citizens evaluate a candidate relative to the competitor (Mullainathan and Washington 2009). Similarly, research has shown that the winner-loser electoral status strengthens partisan reasoning, with the consequential effect that citizens evaluate contextual conditions, as the performance of the political system, avoiding cognitive dissonance. Through a process of rationalization, the perception of performance issues are modeled according to citizens' political positions or electoral status (Bartels 2002; Jorit and Barabas 2012; Parker-Stephen 2013). Given this potential adjustment, losers might ignore or not recognize, purposely or not, for instance improvements in democratic process or economic performance. Thus, it is possible that losers would be less susceptible to such positive contextual conditions, given their partisan or electoral status, and that their support would be less affected by them. On the contrary, winners would see an increase in support as they might overappreciate improving contextual conditions, according to a similar mechanism, yet contrary, as for losers. They would see even more improvements to reinforce their electoral choice, with a resulting grow in the gap among the two groups. Hence, our expectation is that:

Increasing levels of the quality of democratic process and economic performance will enlarge the winner-loser gap, as such contextual conditions will have a weaker effect on the political support of losers, between and within countries (H2).

### 4. Data

We test our expectations using the European Social Survey (2016). The ESS is a repeated crosssectional survey held roughly every two years in several European countries. It includes indicators measuring political support, voting choices, attitudes and behaviors, along with demographic factors. These are important aspects which allow assessing both cross-country and over-time variation in the political support of winners and loser and studying the impact of factors related to the structure of the institutional system, its processes and performance. We use all the available surveys from round 1 to 7 for 30 stable and consolidated European democracies. This means that the dataset is made of 162 surveys distributed over 14 years, from 2002 to 2015. Unfortunately, not all countries included in the ESS participated in each round. This implies that dataset is unbalanced, i.e. it does not include the same number of surveys for each country. However, keeping all countries allows extending the sample and the time range analyzed.<sup>1</sup> The sample size of the dataset, keeping respondents from 18 and 85 years old, is 294647.

#### 4.1. Dependent variables

Political support is multidimensional in nature, as it may refer to several political objects and it may includes both specific evaluations as well as more diffuse affective attitudes (Dalton 2004). To provide a better test of our argument we analyze two indicators referring to different objects and orientations: the degree of satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system and the level of trust in the national parliament. Both variables are measured on an 11-point scale.

Satisfaction with democracy is probably the most used indicator to gauge support for regime norms and procedures. In spite of this, the item has been criticized for being unclear as it has often been considered also to conflate agreement with the work of incumbents (Anderson and Guillory 1997). Others have instead remarked that this might tap an evaluation of democracy as the best form of government (Canache et al. 2001). All in all, the indicator has become a standard in the literature on political support and in this article we consider satisfaction with democracy to elicit citizen's evaluations of regime procedures in practice and of the output it delivers (Linde and Ekman 2003; Dalton 2004; Norris 2011).

Given that the former indicator measures an evaluation about the system in general, we also study trust in institutions, in the form of national parliaments. This allows us to have a broader view on support as trust in institutions capture an orientation not about the system in general but towards core organizations of political representation in contemporary democracies. Also in this case, however, there is far from consensus in the literature.

Some authors have looked at trust in institutions as a more affective orientation which is not the mere results of the output of the system but an expression of attachment for the basic pillars of a democratic system (Easton 1975; Dalton 2004; Marien 2011). Others consider it as a rational evaluations about merits of that specific organization against an ideal benchmark (Levi and Stoker 2000; van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016). While we lean towards a more evaluative

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup>The countries included in our dataset are: Austria (6 rounds), Belgium (7), Bulgaria (4), Croatia (2), Cyprus (4), Czech Republic (6), Denmark (7), Estonia (6), Finland (7), France (5), Germany (7), Greece (4), Hungary (7), Iceland (2), Ireland (7), Italy (3), Latvia (2), Lithuania (4), Luxembourg (2), Netherlands (7), Norway (7), Poland (7), Portugal (7), Romania (2), Slovakia (5), Slovenia (7), Spain (7), Sweden (7), Switzerland (7), and United Kingdom (7). The first two rounds for France are unavailable due to complete missingness in one selected individual-level predictor. As the interview dates are not always available and data collection spans over months, we used the year of the beginning of data collection as a reference to link the surveys to country-year information. Details about the countries and years can be found in the Appendix, Table B3.

interpretation of trust in institutions, its inclusion allows having a more grounded view of support referring to precise political authorities.

#### 4.2. Individual-level independent variables

The variable of interest is measured at the individual-level, being a property of respondents. We build a variable classifying respondents according to their voting choices to identify their winner (majority) vs. loser (minority) status. We used information about the party voted at the last general elections and cabinet composition drawn from the ParlGov dataset (Doering and Manow 2016). If the respondent declared a voting choice for a party that was in office (i.e. part of the ruling cabinet) before the beginning of the survey data collection,<sup>2</sup> he or she was classified as a "winner"; while, if the respondent declared a voting choice for a party that was not in office (i.e. not part of the ruling cabinet) before the beginning of the survey data collection, he or she was classified as a "loser". We also classified respondents using two residual categories, which we coded as "non-identified". In fact, respondents could also declare to have casted a blank ballot, to have abstained from voting, he/she could refuse to answer or did not recall the voting choice. Thus, we separate between "non-identified voters" and "non-identified non-voters". Adding these categories allows fully classifying respondents with no loss of information.

We also control for a number of factors relevant for political support (Dalton 2004; Norris 2011). First, we control for socio-demographic factors, such as gender; age in categories; and employment status. Then, we control years of completed education, as far as education is an important resource to evaluate the performance of the political system and its institutions (Dalton 2005). We also control for an egotropic evaluation of the economy using an indicator measuring feelings about the household income, given that evaluations of the performance of the political system and its institutions (Dalton 2004).<sup>3</sup>

Party identification may amplify the importance of the electoral status of respondents (Anderson et al. 2005). Thus, we use an indicator capturing whether respondents are close or not to any political party. Then, we include a measure of political interest. This factor is relevant for political support as it might enable citizens to retrieve political information and, thus, make up their minds about how the political systems and its institutions are doing their job (see Delli Carpini and Keeter 1996). We also account for a measure of media usage, that is how much time the respondent spends watching news or programs about politics on an average day. Indeed, the role of political information has been debated in the literature on political support given its positive or negative effects (Norris 2000; Dalton 2004). Eventually, we control for ideology. It has been underlined that citizens positioning at the extreme of the left right scale should have lower level of support

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup>As interview dates are not often available we used this criterion to identify winners and losers. See the Appendix, Table B4 for the list of parties used for classifying respondents.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup>We do not use sociotropic evaluations of the economy to avoid endogeneity (Pickup and Evans 2013). Using such evaluations would not allow disentangling whether positive judgments of the economy proceeds positive political support, or the opposite, producing an over-estimation of its effects.

compared to those leaning on the center. This is because "extremists" have stronger political opinions and are generally dissatisfied with the current state of affairs (Anderson et al. 2005).<sup>4</sup>

#### 4.3. Contextual-level independent variables

One of the goals of this study is assessing the role of contextual factors on the political support of winners and losers across countries and over time. Therefore, we account for time-varying variables measured at the survey-level, that are country-years, and at the country-level. We use three indices for each one of the dimensions analyzed.

To analyze the effect of the structure of the political system we rely on the "executive-parties" dimension (Lijphart 1999). This index should account for how the power is concentrated vs. dispersed among the two poles parties vs. executives. Therefore, this index captures how the political system is characterized by two party vs. multi party system; single party vs. multi party cabinets; a dominant executive vs. a balanced executive-parliament relation; a disproportional vs. proportional electoral law; and a pluralist vs. corporatist model of interest groups. To build this index we rely on five indicators: the "effective number of parties" (seats), the classic measure outlined by Laakso and Taagepera (1979); the absolute number of parties in cabinet; the level of disproportionality of the electoral law (Gallagher 1991), all taken from the ParlGov dataset (Doering and Manow 2016); a measure capturing the balance between executive and legislative powers, which accounts for the balance of powers between opposition and government and the proportion of parliamentary seats belonging to governing parties, taken from the Democracy Barometer dataset (Bühlmann et al. 2012); and a measure capturing the extent to which major civil society organizations are consulted by policymakers on policies relevant to their members, taken from the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al. 2016). The index is built using Bayesian factor analysis, indicating that the five indicators are strongly related to the latent variable "executive-parties" measuring the degree inclusiveness or exclusiveness of the political system.<sup>5</sup> Of course, the model outline by Liphart (1999) involves other dimension: the "federal-unitary" dimension. However, we decided not to account for it as largely stable over time and more anchored in institutional provisions (Liphart 1999, 254; see also Vatter et al. 2013).

To measure the *process* of the political systems, we built an index of "quality of government". We use three indicators drawn from the WorldWide Governance Indicators (Kaufmann et al. 2009). The first is "government effectiveness" measuring the quality of public and civil services, their independence from political pressure, and credibility to commit to policies; the second is "rule of law" measuring the compliance to the rules of society, the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, the courts, and the probability of crime and violence; the third is "control of

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup>We also included, in previous analyses, a variable measuring the absolute distance between the respondents' ideological positions and the weighted average cabinet position (see Golder and Stramski 2010; Curini et al. 2015). Results were similar to those presented here. The descriptions of the individual-level independent variables are reported in the Appendix, Table B1. See Table A1 for the summary statistics.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup>Model and numerical results are reported in the Appendix, Section C.

corruption" measuring whether public power is used for private or personal profit, accounting for both petty and grand forms of corruption. These three indicators allow measuring the "quality of government" meant as "impartiality" in the way institutions exercise the government authority (Rothstein and Teorell 2008). In sum, the three indicators should be underlying a latent factor measuring the extent to which practices such as nepotism, clientelism, unfair or un-meritocratic recruitment, patronage, or discrimination are avoided. To test the expectation that the indicators form a unidimensional latent factor, we used Bayesian factor analysis, showing that they are strongly related to the latent variable we define as "quality of government".<sup>6</sup>

To account for the *performance* of the political system we look at the status of the economy. One of the problems with the measurement of macro-economic conditions is that it is never clear which aspect is the most relevant. Therefore, a solution to this issue is the use of an index accounting for multiple elements that matter for the main actors of an economic system: citizens, firms and governments. This summary measure is the "economic performance index" (Khramov and Lee 2013), a weighted index taking into account for macro-economic indicators such as growth, unemployment, deficit and inflation (International Monetary Fund 2016), each capturing the economy's monetary status, production status, fiscal status, and the general status.<sup>7</sup>

# 5. Model

The dataset employed in this study consists of repeated cross-sectional surveys. This means that respondents, the level-1 observations, are nested in surveys, i.e. country-year, that is the level-2. The latter is, in turn, nested in countries that constitute the level-3. Moreover, the data structure implies that we deal with different types of variation: longitudinal and cross-sectional. Therefore, we can explore how the level of political support of winners and losers vary *within* and *between* countries. In order to deal with such complexity we estimate three-level hierarchical models and include both survey- and country-level variables (Fairbrother 2014; Bell and Jones

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup>Model and numerical results are reported in the Appendix, Section C.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup>In previous analyses we also accounted for additional variables. We included a variable potentially capturing unobserved characteristics, which is time (in years). We included, as a country characteristic, a dummy variable designating whether the respondent lives in a Central-eastern European country. This variable was meant to control for political, historical and cultural legacies which might, in turn, capture unobserved characteristics (Fuchs et al. 2006). We also included a dummy variable indicating whether in the year prior the survey parliamentary elections were held in the country, following the argument that elections are an important moment in democratic life connecting citizens to the political system, allowing them to have a say in politics, with positive consequences for political support (Anderson et al. 2005). Results were similar to those presented here, therefore we decided to drop these variables to achieve a more parsimonious specification. The descriptions of the survey-level independent variables are reported in the Appendix, Table B2. See Table A2 for the summary statistics.

2015). The linear random-intercepts and slopes three-level models are specified as follows:

$$y_{ijc} \sim N(\alpha_j + \beta_j x_{ijc} + \beta_1 x_{1ijc} + \dots + \beta_k x_{kijc}, \sigma_y^2)$$
(1)

$$\begin{bmatrix} \alpha_j \\ \beta_j \end{bmatrix} \sim N \Biggl( \begin{bmatrix} \mu_{\alpha} + \gamma_1 z_{1j} + \gamma_2 z_{2j} + \gamma_3 z_{3j} + \delta_c \\ \mu_{\beta} + \nu_1 z_{1j} + \nu_2 z_{2j} + \nu_3 z_{3j} + \omega_c \end{bmatrix}, \Sigma \Biggr)$$
(2)

$$\begin{bmatrix} \delta_c \\ \omega_c \end{bmatrix} \sim N \Biggl( \begin{bmatrix} \theta_1 w_{1c} + \theta_2 w_{2c} + \theta_3 w_{3c} \\ \lambda_1 w_{1c} + \lambda_2 w_{2c} + \lambda_3 w_{3c} \end{bmatrix}, \Phi \Biggr)$$
(3)

Equation (1) represents the individual-level. The term  $y_{ijc}$  indicates the dependent variable, where *i* indexes the *i* = 1, ..., *N* respondents in *j* = 1, ..., 162 surveys (country-years) in *c* = 1, ..., 30 countries. The random-intercepts  $\alpha_j$  and slopes  $\beta_j$  capture, respectively, the political support of electoral winners and the difference in support between winners and losers across the *j*-th surveys (country-year). The terms *x* indicate the *k* individual-level variables, and the fixed  $\beta$  the individual-level coefficients. The term  $\sigma_q^2$  indicates the variance of the responses.

Equation (2) represents the survey-level. The variation in the levels of political support of winners,  $\alpha_j$ , and the difference among winners and losers,  $\beta_j$  across surveys follow a Normal distribution. These have as mean a linear combination of  $\mu_{\alpha}$ , which is the overall level of political support for the winners, and  $\mu_{\beta}$  which is the overall offset of electoral losers from the winners' baseline level of support (i.e. the effect of being an electoral loser); the 3 survey-level variables  $z_j$  (executive-parties, quality of government and economic performance index) and their coefficients  $\gamma$  and  $\nu$ . The coefficients indicated by  $\gamma$  capture the effect of survey-level variables of the political support of winners, while the coefficients indicated by  $\nu$  capture the effect of survey-level variables on the winner-loser gap in support. At the survey-level, the predictors are entered in the equation as group-mean centered (their values are subtracted from the country mean, that is  $z_j - \bar{z}_j$ ) to capture the effect of *within*-country varying characteristics. The combinations also include additional random terms, indicated by  $\delta_c$  and  $\omega_c$ , taking into account that the survey-specific intercepts and slopes are nested in countries.

Equation (3) represents the country-level. The country-specific random-effects follow a common Normal distribution with mean a linear combination of the 3 country-level variables  $w_c$ (executive-parties, quality of government and economic performance index) and their coefficients  $\theta$  and  $\lambda$ . The coefficients indicated by  $\theta$  capture the effect of country-level variables of the political support of winners, while the coefficients indicated by  $\lambda$  capture the effect of country-level variables on the winner-loser gap in support and, as before, represent the offset in the effect of these variables for the groups of losers. The predictors enter the equation as country-means (the country-year values are averaged over the years for each country, thus  $w_c = \bar{z}_j$ ) to capture the effect of country characteristics *between* the countries.<sup>8</sup>

Eventually, as both the intercepts and slopes vary over surveys and over countries, it is assumed that they follow a common multivariate normal distribution, with variance-covariance matrices

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup>Therefore, survey and the country-level variables are orthogonal, so that their coefficients can be estimated separately.

 $\Sigma = \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_{\alpha}^2 & \rho \sigma_{\alpha} \sigma_{\beta} \\ \rho \sigma_{\alpha} \sigma_{\beta} & \sigma_{\beta}^2 \end{bmatrix} \text{ and } \Phi = \begin{bmatrix} \sigma_{\delta}^2 & \rho \sigma_{\delta} \sigma_{\omega} \\ \rho \sigma_{\delta} \sigma_{\omega} & \sigma_{\omega}^2 \end{bmatrix}.$  These allow estimating the variance of the survey and country variation in the levels of political support of winners and losers, and their covariance.

The models are estimated in the Bayesian framework. This is done for the following reasons. The surveys in our dataset, i.e. country-years, are not randomly drawn from a larger population. Maximum Likelihood estimation is based on asymptotic and sampling assumptions which are difficult to meet when using such data. Bayesian analysis, instead, is based on the available data, making inference on what it is actually observed. This means that it allows finding the uncertainties, in terms of probability, of the estimates without any reference to the population, in our case, of countries over time. Moreover, this method of estimation allows great flexibility and it is well suited to model complex data structures (see Gelman and Hill 2006; Jackman 2009; Stegmueller 2013). Thus, for the coefficients at the individual-, survey- and country-level we use N(0, 1000) prior, as well as for  $\mu_{\alpha}$  and  $\mu_{\beta}$ . For the individual-level variance we use U(0, 10) prior, while for the variance-covariance matrices we use an inverse-Wishart distribution with 3 degrees of freedom and a diagonal scale matrix. <sup>9</sup>

#### 6. Findings

Table 1 reports the estimates of the three-level random-intercepts and slopes models predicting variation within-countries (surveys or country-years) and variation between-countries in the level of satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament among winners, as well as in the winner-loser gap in this two indicators.

Starting from the top of Table 1, describing how within and between contextual factors affect the political support of electoral winners, we see that, on average, they have a score of satisfaction with democracy equal to 4.55 and trust in parliament of 3.65 (intercept). Thus, democracy as a system enjoys a substantially higher evaluation compared to national parliament across the European countries analyzed between 2002 and 2015. Below these coefficients in Table 1, the overall gap in support between winners and losers and the effect of survey and country-level variables on it are reported. The intercept provides the difference in the level of satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament between winners and losers. On average, an electoral loser has, respectively, a score on the two dependent variables of 0.701 and 0.637 points lower than electoral winners. This is, of course, unsurprising, although it is worth noting that the winner-loser gap is similar in magnitude although we consider two indicators that are considered to measure different aspects of political support.

The following discussion will focus separately on the within and between effects of the structure, process and performance variables on the political support of winners and losers.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>9</sup>The models are estimated using Gibbs sampling run for 100000 iterations with a burn-in period of 50000 iterations (thinned by a factor of 10) and one chain. Regarding the number of chains, we follow Jackman (2009) who suggests running one longer chain rather than multiple shorter chains. Standard diagnostics were used to evaluate the convergence of the samplers. The models were also tested for multicollinearity.

# [Table 1 here]

#### 6.1. Within country analysis

As we mentioned above, the political support of winners and losers, as well as the resulting gap between the two groups, might be present not only between countries but also within them. The standard deviation of the survey-level random effects for the effect of being a loser, reported at the bottom of Table 1, indicates that substantial variation exists across surveys. To make this result easy to grasp, Figures 1 illustrates the trends in the winner-loser gap, that is the within country variation. It appears that the two trends are not very different from each other and that the gaps are not completely stable in European countries. For instance, we can see that in Austria there is a worsening of the gap in 2010, and a reduction in the latest years; in Czech Republic it seems that the gap becomes larger until 2011, while later it shrinks; in Estonia, Finland of France the trend seem to be negative overall; in Germany there are a few up and downs over the period analyzed; in Norway the negative trend that can bee seen until 2012 is reversed afterwards; a similar trend can be seen for Portugal where the gap becomes larger in 2008 and shrinks to prior levels in the following years. In other countries, as Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Sweden, Switzerland or the United Kingdom, the trends are more rigid. In the end, as previous literature has shown (Anderson et al. 2005), the winner-loser gap is not still over time and our analysis extends this conclusion to a larger pool of countries.

# [Figure 1 here]

Given that variation in the winner-loser gap in support is found within countries, do surveylevel variables explain it? As mentioned in the theoretical section of the article we argued that three contextual characteristics might come into play in the explanation of the variation in the support of winners and losers – the structure of the political system, its process and performance – which are measured as group-mean centered scores to assess within country effects.

Looking at the coefficients ( $\nu$ ) of the variables predicting the variation in the winner-loser gap in political support across country-years in Table 1, we simply realize that within-country changes in the executive-parties dimension, quality of government and economic performance do not matter. Indeed, increasing levels in the three indices are not associated with a reduction, or an enlargement, in the winner loser gap within countries in both satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament. Thus, changes in the structure of the political system, the quality of the political process and its output are not meaningful factors to explain the within-country shifts in the winner-loser gap in political support, not supporting our expectations regarding the different effects of contextual conditions on the gap, at least when considering longitudinal variation (H1 and H2). We illustrate the lack of association between survey-level factors and the winner-loser gap in support in Figure 2. The flat lines indicate that as the values of the three within country variables increase, the gap between winners and losers does not narrow nor enlarge.

# [Figure 2 here]

Nevertheless, this does not imply that the considered factors are completely irrelevant for the political support expressed by the two groups. As we argued, our analysis is not only restricted to the winner-loser gap but it also focus on the factors that increase losers' consent alone. In this respect, the Bayesian estimation of the models makes it easy to find the levels of support of winners and losers separately, together with the effects of higher-level variables, exploiting the MCMC simulation. Results are illustrated in Figure 3. As can be seen, the panels reveal a hidden finding, showing that at least two survey-level predictors have an association with the political support of losers, as well as of winners. These findings contradict our expectation that the political support of loser would be less affected by positive changes in the levels of process and performance. The figure shows, in fact, that increasing within country quality of government and economic performance corresponds to a growth in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament, with no differences between the two groups of respondents. This is why the coefficients predicting the winner-loser gap in support, v, approximate zero. Hence, Figure 3 indicates that when quality of government and economic performance improve within countries, this translates into a positive spillover for political support of losers, strengthening their consent. While these variables do not reduce the tension among winners and losers, they favor in any case political support in both groups. This is in line with previous research showing an overall positive effect of the quality of institutions and macro-economic conditions over time on political support (Quaranta and Martini 2016; van Erkel and van der Meer 2016; Wagner et al. 2009). While losers still filter information according to their electoral status (Taber et al. 2009; Jorit and Barabas 2012), when contextual conditions improve, also the political support of losers grows on average. Lastly, the lack of effect of contextual conditions of the winner-loser gap is due to the fact that they have a similar effect on support across the two groups of respondents.

# [Figure 3 here]

#### 6.2. Between country analysis

We now look at the between country variation of political support of winners and losers and the gap among them. At the bottom of Table 1 is reported the standard deviation of the country-level random effect of being an electoral loser, also showing that considerable variation can be found between countries. Figure 4 shows the winner-loser gap across countries. As before, it seems that there are not marked differences between the two indicators of political support among the countries analyzed. The figure indicates that across all countries the gap between winners and losers in support is consistently distant from the zero line, thus pointing to the fact that these two groups have clearly distinguishable levels of satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament. Nevertheless, countries do not have similar gaps. Indeed, the gaps in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament ranges, respectively, from a maximum of -0.22 and -0.33 to a minimum

of -1.28 and -1.07. The countries with the narrower gap between winners and losers seem to be the Netherlands, Switzerland, Finland and Belgium. At the bottom of the distribution we can see Cyprus, Hungary, Croatia, France, and Spain.

#### [Figure 4 here]

Thus, we assess whether the country-averaged scores capturing differences between countries in the institutional structure quality of government and economic performance explain the winnerloser gap in both satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament across countries. Looking at the coefficients ( $\lambda$ ) of the variables we see that country-averaged scores in the executive-parties index predict the variation in the winner-loser gap in both satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament, while the other two variables do not, although their signs are in the expected direction. In other words, an increase of one point in the executive-parties index across countries corresponds to reduction of the winner-loser gap in satisfaction with democracy of about 0.172, and in trust in parliament of about 0.159, confirming our expectation regarding the role of structure (H1).

To better illustrate the association between the three country-level variables and the winnerloser gap we can look at Figure 5. When the power is more concentrated in the executive the winner-loser gap tends to be more pronounced across countries. Countries leaning on this side of the dimensions, that is more majoritarian countries as the United Kingdom, Greece, Hungary, Spain or France, have in fact a gap ranging from -1.28 to -0.70 for satisfaction with democracy, and from -1.04 to -0.75 for trust in parliament. On the other side of the spectrum, we see that more consensual democracies where power is more dispersed among parties and other actors have a narrower gap among winners and losers. Countries as Belgium, Latvia, Switzerland and Finland, with higher scores on the executive-parties index, also have smaller gaps in both satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament, which are for both dependent variables around -0.3.<sup>10</sup> Lastly, Figure 5 also clearly illustrates that the quality of the process and the performance of the political system do not bridge the gap in political support, nor they increase it, disconfirming once again our second hypothesis (H2).

# [Figure 5 here]

Although it has been found that the cross-country levels of quality of government and economic performance do not account for the winner-loser gap between countries, again, this does not imply that these variables do not matter for the political support of losers and winners. In fact, we posited that the effects of structure would be stronger on the political support of losers, while the effects of process and performance would be weaker, or even irrelevant.

The flat associations shown in Figure 5 might, in fact, disguise the different effects of contextual conditions among the two groups. Thus, Figure 6 illustrates how the level of support of winners

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>10</sup>The plot also indicates that Belgium is an outlier, as it has a much higher score on the executive-parties index than others. To make sure that this county is not influential we also ran the models excluding it, finding unaltered results.

and losers change along the scores of the three country-level variables. As can be seen, variation in the structure of the institutional system does not affect the level of support of winners but it is associated with a substantial increase of support among losers, which is about one point across the range of the contextual independent variable, resulting in a lower gap among the two groups, confirming our expectation. Instead, the effect of the quality of government increases the political support of losers (and winners) significantly, and this not weaker among this group, as we expected. Indeed, the increase in support along the range of this variable is about 2.5 points on an 11-point scale, indicating a boost in losers' consent.

Eventually, cross-country differences in economic performance correspond to higher support among losers (and also winners), again challenging our expectation, although the associations are not sufficiently precise. Thus, the structure of the political system seems to narrow the gap between winners and losers, as it has a more marked effect on the political support of losers rather than that of winners, confirming previous research (Anderson et al. 2005). Instead, the other contextual conditions affect the political support of winners and losers to the same extant, leaving the distance unaltered. As already stressed, losers react in a negative way as much motivated reasoning and partisan bias approaches would suggest, but our derived expectation on the effect of the weaker or insignificant effect of such variables on the political support of losers is not supported. Evidence indicates that in countries where quality of government, and in part economic performance is better, losers' consent is stronger.

#### [Figure 6 here]

#### 7. Discussion and conclusion: new wine in old bottles?

In the last few decades, there has been increasing attention for the study of the negative consequences of losing the elections for political support. The main reason for that is that the stability and consolidation of democracies may actually depend on the level of consent expressed by losers, so that it is fundamental to understand what factors may strengthen or attenuate it as well as the condition under which tension between winners and losers is mitigated (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson et al. 2005). Existing literature has provided some evidence on the role of consensual institutions, although this is also undermined by some shortcomings. So far, most of the empirical research has not provided a comprehensive test of alternative contextual factors that might mitigate the impact of election outcomes on political support. Studies also do not distinguish the potential effects of different types of conditions. Lastly, available evidence is only based on cross-country differences while over time variation including contextual changes has not been explored yet. Briefly, the inclusion of alternative explanations and time dimension may provide a new perspective regarding the relationship under study.

This article aimed at addressing these problems by proposing a more comprehensive theoretical framework sustained by an empirical strategy based on the use of repeated cross-sectional surveys to account for longitudinal and cross-sectional variation in the support of winners and losers.

Regarding the theoretical approach proposed, in line with recent work (Roller and Bendix 2005; Rothstein 2009), we have expanded models of political legitimacy between winners and losers by including not only aspects related to the input-side of the political system, as the institutional mechanisms of representation, but also considering features related to the output as the quality of the political process in terms of the control of corruption, the impartiality of bureaucracy and the government effectiveness. We have also included the system's performance especially in the form of the economic output, as political support often mirrors business cycles. Lastly, with respect to the empirical strategy, we have analyzed two indicators of political support, namely satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament, in thirty European democracies between 2002 and 2015, which allowed assessing the variation in support between and within countries, with the advantage of reducing selection problems.

Our results, first, show that the winner-loser gap is present across a relatively long period and between a large number of countries, extending previous research on the topic, in particular providing evidence of the variation in support among the two groups over time, not only across countries. When coming to the effect of the explanatory factors, we have stressed the importance of distinguishing between factors that attenuate the gap from those that may leave the gap unaltered or even increase it. In line with previous findings we anticipated that consensual institutions could reduce the distance between the winners and losers. On the other hand, building on theories of motivated reasoning and partisan bias (Kunda 1990; Bartels 2002; Jorit and Barabas 2012), we expected that losers would be indifferent to a better output of the system in the form of democratic quality and economic performance with a resulting increase in the distance between the two groups. With respect to our first hypothesis, our results confirm that the institutional structure is the only factor that seems to have a role in mitigating the gap, although this applies only to between-country variation and not to within-country variation. In other words, while lower gaps are present in more consensual arrangements, an over time increase in the degree of institutional inclusiveness does not necessarily lead to a reduction of the gap in the same country. In this respect, it should be noticed that the effect of winning and losing an election is the result of a regular experience with the democratic game, so it is possible that a change in the structure of the system may take some time to translate into a change in the distance between the two groups. Moreover, the institutional structure is actually subject to smaller temporal changes than other aspects of the political context. All in all, our findings provide further support for traditional explanations which praise the contingent effect of consensual institutions in reducing differences between winners and losers (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson et al. 2005; Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Singh 2014), but we praise future investigation to consider also the temporal dimension.

When coming to our second hypothesis our findings reject it. Indeed, we do not find an increase in the gap in political support among winners and losers due to aspects related to the output of the political system. On the contrary, we find a positive effect of the quality of government and economic performance on the two groups both across countries and over time. This is a very interesting result because, while we confirm that losers are less supportive than winners, they are on average more satisfied with democracy and more trustful in the national parliament in periods and countries in which the political process is fairer and the performance is higher. In short, while under better quality of the process and the system's performance the gap remains stable, against recent research (Dahlberg and Linde 2016), losers' consent increases.

One limitation of this article is the use of a general comparative survey not specifically designed for the study of elections. Thus, it might possible that responses about voting choices are not accurate given the time between the last election contest and the collection of data. Although, this might be seen as a problem, in any case, the fact that respondents may not recall correctly or change their voting choice provides an indication about what party that she/he feels worth of being voted. Then, despite being a general survey, the ESS confirms that the winner-loser gap in support exists, implying that it well captures it. In addition, the ESS allows a large comparative and longitudinal study of the support of winners and losers offering a wide coverage of a stable and coherent group of democracies using the same survey instrument and ensuring reliable estimates.

Taken together, this article suggests three important points. First, a comprehensive understanding of the impact of election outcomes on political support should take into account both the overall gap between winners and losers as well as the level expressed by the two groups separately. This allows unrevealing how different contextual outcomes mitigate the effect of elections. Then, when studying the problem we should not restrict our attention only to factors related to the institutional structure. Indeed, if we look our results from the perspective of losers' consent the output of the system turns out to be at least as important as the input. This leads us to the last point, that is, the fact that not all losers are equal. Some are more sensitive to contextual changes than others, so that we need to understand what individual conditions make them more open to include such information in their calculus of support.

All in all, this article has tried to shed some new light on how political context matters for winners and losers. We have done this by expanding existing theoretical frameworks and adding brand new evidence. Future research could pursue a similar strategy by, for instance, differentiating between types of winners and losers. In this article we assumed that losers are all the same, yet, they could differently perceive changes in contextual conditions due to education and political sophistication. Another point worth of future investigation could regard the behavioral consequences of the electoral status in terms of political participation and protest potential and its interplay with contextual conditions. This is another important point which emphasizes the importance of exploring the connections between micro- and macro-level conditions when studying political legitimacy across different groups of citizens.

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**Table 1:** Linear random-intercepts and slopes three-level models predicting satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament among winners, and the winner-loser gap (the effect of being an electoral loser) in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament across within and between countries in Europe.

	Satisfaction with democracy (1)		Trust in parliament (2)	
	est.	95% c.i.	est.	95% c.i.
Political support of winners				
Intercept, $\mu_{\alpha}$	4.553	[4.510; 4.596]	3.649	[3.607; 3.690]
Survey-level				
Executive-parties index, $\gamma_1$	-0.000	[-0.198; 0.199]	0.140	[-0.037; 0.322]
Quality of government index, $\gamma_2$	0.665	[0.185; 1.141]	0.970	[0.535; 1.383]
Economic performance index, $\gamma_3$	0.029	[0.017; 0.040]	0.034	[0.024; 0.044]
Country-level				
Executive-parties index, $\theta_1$	0.026	[-0.238; 0.278]	-0.034	[-0.270; 0.194]
Quality of government index, $_{\theta_2}$	0.586	[0.300; 0.872]	0.526	[0.269; 0.783]
Economic performance index, $\theta_3$	0.022	[-0.025; 0.070]	0.035	[-0.007; 0.078]
Winner-loser gap in political support				
Intercept, $\mu_{\beta}$	-0.701	[-0.752; -0.650]	-0.637	[-0.687; -0.587]
Survey-level				
Executive-parties index, $\nu_1$	0.057	[-0.083; 0.192]	-0.028	[-0.167; 0.107]
Quality of government index, $v_2$	0.029	[-0.306; 0.365]	0.149	[-0.176; 0.477]
Economic performance index, $\nu_3$	0.002	[-0.006; 0.010]	-0.002	[-0.010; 0.006]
Country-level				
Executive-parties index, $\lambda_1$	0.172	[0.019; 0.327]	0.159	[0.024; 0.292]
Quality of government index, $\lambda_2$	0.006	[-0.170; 0.173]	0.011	[-0.141; 0.154]
Economic performance index, $\lambda_3$	0.011	[-0.018; 0.040]	0.012	[-0.012; 0.037]
Variance components				
Response, $\sigma_{u}$	2.141	[2.135; 2.147]	2.202	[2.196; 2.208]
Political support of winners				
Survey-level, $\sigma_{\alpha}$	0.410	[0.364; 0.468]	0.369	[0.328; 0.420]
Country-level, $\sigma_{\delta}$	0.530	[0.401; 0.726]	0.486	[0.369; 0.669]
Winner-loser gap in political support				
Survey-level, $\sigma_{\beta}$	0.260	[0.225; 0.301]	0.254	[0.220; 0.295]
Country-level, $\sigma_{\omega}$	0.312	[0.237; 0.428]	0.263	[0.202; 0.360]
Correlations				
Survey-level, $\rho_{\alpha\beta}$	-0.129	[-0.309; 0.060]	-0.065	[-0.251; 0.134]
Country-level, $\rho_{\delta\omega}$	-0.222	[-0.570; 0.197]	-0.066	[-0.461; 0.356]
Deviance	1	082498.081	1108938.028	

*Note*: based on 10000 MCMC draws. Respondents for model (1): 248238; respondents for model (2): 251093. Number of surveys: 162. Number of countries: 30. Entries are posterior medians, entries in square brackets are posterior 95% intervals. The models include the following individual-level variables: non-identified voter, non-identified non-voter, gender, age, employment status, feeling about income, education, party identification, political interest, tv usage, and ideology. Continuos variables are mean-centered.

Satisfaction with de Trust in parliament 0.0 -0.5 -1.0 ht-h -1.5 Estonia Finla Fran Germ Greece 0.0 -0.5 -1.0 -1.5 Winner-loser gap within countries Hungary Latvia Iceland Ireland Italy ithuania 0.0 -0.5 1 -1.0 -1.5 Norway Poland Portugal Romania . • 0.0 -∳∳ -0.5 ┝╋┥ -1.0 -1.5 United Kinad Switzerland 0.0 -0.5 -1.0 -1.5 

**Figure 1:** The winner-loser gap (the effect of being an electoral loser) in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament within European countries, with 95% intervals.

**Figure 2:** The effect of the executive-parties index, quality of government index and economic performance index on the winner-loser gap (the effect of being an electoral loser) in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament within European countries, with 95% intervals.



**Figure 3:** The effect of the executive-parties index, quality of government index and economic performance index on the level satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament of winners and losers within European countries, with 95% intervals.



**Figure 4:** The winner-loser gap (the effect of being an electoral loser) in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament between European countries, with 95% intervals.



**Figure 5:** The effect of the executive-parties index, quality of government index and economic performance index on the winner-loser gap (the effect of being an electoral loser) in satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament between European countries, with 95% intervals.



**Figure 6:** The effect of the executive-parties index, quality of government index and economic performance index on the level satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament of winners and losers between European countries, with 95% intervals.

