

Institutional Context and Satisfaction with Democracy: Shaping the Winner-Loser Gap among Latin American Legislators

Mar Martínez Rosón¹  | Margarita Corral²  | Araceli Mateos¹ 

¹Universidad de Salamanca

²Brandeis University

Correspondence

Mar Martínez Rosón, Facultad de Derecho, Universidad de Salamanca, Campus Miguel de Unamuno s/n, 37007 Salamanca, Spain.
Email: roson@usal.es

Abstract

This article analyzes satisfaction with democracy among legislators in Latin America by centering on the impact of institutional settings. Our dataset contains 2,448 interviews from 17 countries between 2009 and 2022. The results of our multilevel logistic regression analysis underscore the significance of institutions, highlighting that perceptions of opportunities for participation in the legislative agenda-setting process increase legislators' satisfaction with the way democracy works. Nonetheless, institutional variables shape the satisfaction of winners (legislators close to governing parties) and losers (opposition) in different ways. Presidential legislative powers stand out as a key factor that reduces satisfaction for losers. Conversely, legislative fragmentation decreases winners' satisfaction with democracy.

KEYWORDS

Institutional design, Latin America, Legislators, Satisfaction with democracy, Winner-loser gap

Zusammenfassung

Dieser Artikel analysiert Demokratiezufriedenheit bei GesetzgeberInnen in Lateinamerika und konzentriert sich dabei auf die Auswirkungen institutioneller Rahmenbedingungen. Unser Datensatz enthält 2.448 Interviews aus 17 Ländern zwischen 2009 und 2022. Die Ergebnisse einer mehrstufigen logistischen Regressionsanalyse unterstreichen den Einfluss von Institutionen und zeigen, dass die Zufriedenheit der

This is an open access article under the terms of the [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/) License, which permits use and distribution in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, the use is non-commercial and no modifications or adaptations are made.

© 2025 The Author(s). *Swiss Political Science Review* published by John Wiley & Sons Ltd on behalf of Swiss Political Science Association.

Abgeordneten mit der Funktionsweise der Demokratie steigt, wenn sie den Eindruck haben, dass sie Möglichkeiten der Beteiligung am Prozess des legislativen Agenda-Settings haben. Allerdings beeinflussen institutionelle Variablen die Zufriedenheit von Gewinnern (der Regierung nahestehende Abgeordnete) und Verlierern (oppositionelle Abgeordnete) auf unterschiedliche Weise. Die Gesetzgebungsbefugnisse des Präsidenten erweisen sich als Schlüsselfaktor, der die Zufriedenheit der Verlierer verringert. Umgekehrt verringert die Fragmentierung der Gesetzgebung die Zufriedenheit der Gewinner mit der Demokratie.

Résumé

Cet article analyse la satisfaction des législateurs d'Amérique latine à l'égard de la démocratie en se concentrant sur l'impact des cadres institutionnels. Notre base de données contient 2 448 entretiens réalisés dans 17 pays entre 2009 et 2022. Les résultats d'une analyse de régression logistique multiniveaux soulignent l'importance des institutions, en mettant en évidence que la perception des possibilités de participation au processus d'élaboration de l'ordre du jour législatif augmente la satisfaction des législateurs à l'égard du fonctionnement de la démocratie. Néanmoins, les variables institutionnelles influencent différemment la satisfaction des gagnants (parlementaires proches du gouvernement) et des perdants (parlementaires de l'opposition). Les pouvoirs législatifs présidentiels apparaissent comme un facteur clé qui réduit la satisfaction des perdants. Inversement, la fragmentation législative diminue la satisfaction des gagnants à l'égard de la démocratie.

Riassunto

Questo articolo analizza la soddisfazione per la democrazia dei legislatori dell'America Latina, concentrandosi sull'impatto delle istituzioni. Il nostro set di dati contiene 2448 interviste condotte in 17 Paesi tra il 2009 e il 2022. I risultati di un'analisi di regressione logistica multilivello sottolineano l'importanza delle istituzioni, evidenziando che la percezione delle opportunità di partecipazione al processo di definizione dell'agenda legislativa aumenta la soddisfazione dei legislatori per il funzionamento della democrazia. Tuttavia, le variabili istituzionali determinano la soddisfazione dei vincitori (parlamentari vicini al governo) e dei vinti (parlamentari dell'opposizione) in modi diversi. I poteri legislativi presidenziali si distinguono come un fattore chiave che riduce la soddisfazione dei perdenti. Al contrario, la frammentazione legislativa diminuisce la soddisfazione dei vincitori per la democrazia.

INTRODUCTION

Citizens' satisfaction with democracy is a well-explored topic in political science (Linde & Ekman, 2003). While the existing literature predominantly focuses on public opinion, it is important to recognize the key role politicians play within the democratic system. Dissatisfied elites could try to destabilize the political system either through direct actions, modifying institutions and rules, or indirectly by fostering a negative atmosphere in society. Moreover, the rhetoric of representatives is a strong tool that citizens can use as cues that may damage democracies. Some recent events in Latin America have revealed legislators who have called democracy into question. In 2021, several legislators in El Salvador backed President Bukele's decision to replace all five magistrates of the Constitutional Chamber of the Supreme Court, an act that jeopardized judicial independence and democratic progress. Similarly, in Brazil, three members of Congress who supported Bolsonaro were investigated for inciting the public to participate in antidemocratic actions following the 2022 general elections. Scholars have shown that declarations from public officials affect voters (Costa et al., 2023; Fried & Harris, 2020) and this contagion effect is more relevant considering the growing presence of illiberal politicians in the Latin American region.

While satisfaction with democracy (SWD) among politicians holds significant importance, the existing literature on this subject is notably scarce. Elite opinion databases are scant because access to candidates and representatives is difficult and limited compared to the more accessible citizenry. The limited literature available has focused on the winner effect leaving other theoretical explanations unexplored. In this article, we attempt to overcome these data and theoretical limitations and expand our knowledge of this topic by analyzing SWD among legislators focusing on how institutional factors can affect individual satisfaction levels. To our knowledge, this article represents the first attempt to analyze the effect of institutional settings on SWD among legislators in the Latin American region. Our database includes 2,448 interviews with legislators in 17 Latin American countries between 2009 and 2022 from the Latin American Political Elites Project (PELA-USAL). The analysis contributes to a better knowledge of the impact of different political factors and the experiences of losers and winners that may affect stability within presidential systems, but it also expands the number of cases/countries and the type of variables in an attempt to have a better understanding of SWD among legislators.

The main goal of this article is to assess whether institutional arrangements—including legislative settings—that impose constraints on legislators' participation in legislative activities affect their satisfaction with democracy, after controlling for the level of democracy. Results suggest that, overall, participatory conditions affect SWD among legislators even though the effects differ for winners and losers. The gap between winners and losers in SWD decreases under certain institutional contexts that promote increased participation. Moreover, the literature focuses on changes among losers as the cause for the reduction of the gap, but the results here show that the gap gets narrower because SWD among losers increases with some opportunities for participation, getting closer to winners' levels of SWD but also because SWD among winners decreases as the context allows increased participation for all. These findings contribute both to the limited literature on satisfaction among representatives and to the theoretical debate on the implications of participatory conditions within institutions in presidential systems.

This article is organized as follows. In the next section we review the literature on SWD among politicians. Then, we develop the theoretical framework and the hypotheses related to institutional elements that affect SWD levels. We then present the database, the variables, and the statistical analyses. The article ends with a discussion of the main findings and their theoretical implications, but also some limitations and possible avenues for future studies.

SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY AMONG POLITICIANS

Literature that focuses on political elite opinion is scarce mainly because access to politicians is difficult, limited, and needs an important volume of resources and logistics. The effort is even larger when conducting personal interviews is the preferred instrument, since it is the most reliable tool to guarantee, for example, non-third person intervention. These problems, among others, may explain data limitations and ultimately, research shortage, especially if we compare it to the literature using public opinion.

To our knowledge, there are only a few pieces of research that focus on the analysis of SWD among candidates or representatives, and most of them include only a single country (Bowler et al., 2006; Esaiasson et al., 2013; Niessen et al., 2019). For the Latin American region, the literature is even more limited (Martínez Rosón & Mateos, 2025; Monsiváis-Carrillo, 2023; Singer, 2023) and, despite their value, all these pieces of literature have overlooked the relevance of institutional factors that may affect satisfaction among legislators.

As in public opinion, most studies on political elites assess the winner effect being the electoral winners those who tend to express more satisfaction (Bowler et al., 2006; Esaiasson et al., 2013; Singer, 2023). Singer (2023) highlights the relevance of the winner effect within the Latin America region by investigating whether citizen and elite evaluations of democratic performance vary depending on the strength of democracy. His results show that while the opposition tends to exhibit high levels of satisfaction despite their loss in strong democratic contexts, their satisfaction is lower in weaker democratic settings. Conversely, winners tend to disregard democratic erosion and maintain satisfaction even when democratic performance is poor, leaving losers —comprising both the elite and the general public— as the primary defenders of democratic institutions amidst threats.

Since the winner gap seems to be key in most studies on SWD other scholars consider additional aspects. For instance, Bowler et al. (2006) analyze how self-interest (being a winner or a loser candidate) and party interest (party in government or in opposition) can affect attitudes toward existing electoral rules and support for their change.¹ They find more SWD among candidates from the governing party than among candidates from the party in opposition. They also find evidence supporting the gap between winners (candidates that became legislators) and losers (unsuccessful candidates), the former having higher levels of SWD than the latter. Moreover, winners have a better assessment of elections and are more reluctant to support reforms that modify the electoral competition such as the adoption of term limits, the use of referendums and initiatives, or changes to compulsory voting.

Although the aforementioned pieces of research do design theoretical frameworks for analyzing the impact of institutional settings on SWD among politicians, they contain limited evidence indicating that individual political variables are the most important factors in explaining SWD, followed by parliamentary settings, which are more relevant than political performance variables (Esaiasson et al., 2013). Despite the significance that these aspects seem to have, our knowledge of them is hence very limited. For this reason, we address the analysis of institutional settings that affect legislators. In the next section, we explain the theoretical relationship between these factors and levels of SWD, and the expectations for Latin American legislators. Our goal is to contribute to the literature by developing a theoretical framework that helps us understand how these institutional variables impact SWD among legislators. Moreover, we assess the extent to which these aspects shape winners and losers differently, and how the gap between their perceptions changes in a presidential context.

¹They collect cases from four different countries: Australia, Germany, Netherlands, and New Zealand.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND HYPOTHESES: INSTITUTIONAL CONTEXT AND LEGISLATIVE SETTINGS

Several scholars have addressed the impact of institutional and political factors such as consensual democracies, different levels of power concentration, and government fractionalization on SWD among citizens (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Criado & Herreros, 2007; Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2017; Ruiz-Rufino, 2013; Wang, 2021; Wells & Kriekhaus, 2006). Based on Lijphart's distinction between majoritarian and consensual political systems, Anderson and Guillory (1997) find that consensual systems show higher levels of SWD than majoritarian systems because they allow more parties and diverse interests to participate in the exercise of power (Wells & Kriekhaus, 2006). Most of the literature states that rules that reinforce representation and constituency orientation among representatives increase SWD among citizens, although there are a few examples that found no evidence to support that relationship (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). For instance, Wagner et al. (2009) compare public opinion in different countries and do not find any evidence of a relationship between SWD and proportional representation, plurality, government fractionalization, or opposition fractionalization. In the same line, Donovan and Karp (2017) show that the positive effect of proportional systems and preferential ballots on SWD dissipates if corruption and income inequality are included and thus conclude that the effects of electoral rules may be overestimated.

Despite these exceptions, participatory conditions mostly appear to enhance public satisfaction. However, it remains unanswered whether participation affects satisfaction among representatives. We hypothesize that this is the case. Specifically, we propose that legislators who operate under institutional conditions that allow to maximize participation and provide greater opportunities for involvement in legislative activities and influence over outcomes will exhibit higher levels of SWD.

Legislators pursue multiple objectives related to public policy (Fenno, 1973) and their political careers (Mayhew, 1974; Schlesinger, 1966). However, various constraints often impede them, including constitutional rules, the legislative context, and party leadership. Specifically, legislators face constraints from three main dimensions: the institutional design of their country, the rules governing their legislature, and the norms established by their political party.² Increased participation allows legislators to communicate with voters, signal public policies, and control vote seeking (Pachón & Johnson, 2016; Taylor-Robinson & Ross, 2011; Tuttnauer & Wegmann, 2022). Here, we argue that rules and settings that provide legislators greater participation over their activities will be associated with more satisfaction with how democracy works. This is because such conditions enhance legislators' prospects of achieving political and career goals (Fenno, 1973; Mayhew, 1974; Schlesinger, 1966). In the following subsections, we address how institutional design and legislative constraints may influence SWD.

Institutional and Legislative Constraints

The first layer that limits legislators is the political system. The institutional design in each country creates different capacities for both the legislative and the executive branches to participate in the legislative process. The literature shows that presidential legislative powers and powers in the policy-making process of the legislature vary among the Latin American

²Here we analyze the first two factors and do not address party limitations, since there is a wide variation of aspects that affect party constraints (e.g., leadership structure, candidate selection rules, party discipline, etc.) and that introduce great variation within countries. They require a detailed analysis that goes beyond the scope of this article.

countries (Crisp et al., 2020; Negretto, 2013). As members of the legislature, representatives are directly affected by these differences in their daily activities. Thus, we argue that institutional designs that limit their participation in activities traditionally associated with the legislative processes may lead to less satisfaction.

Without previous evidence of how the distribution of powers affects SWD among representatives, the only available findings focus on the public. Singh and Carlin (2015) study the impact of presidential powers on SWD among the public in Latin America. They find that where presidents hold strong or weak formal powers, SWD decreases among mass opinion, whilst SWD increases where presidents have moderate levels of legislative powers. We anticipate that legislators will prefer presidents with low levels of legislative powers rather than the “happy medium” as that configuration will allow them to maximize their participation in the policy-making process. Scholars focused on institutional design in presidential systems show that separation of powers creates the conditions for the executive and the legislative to have different agendas (Arnold et al., 2017; Johnson & Crisp, 2003; Linz, 1990; Mainwaring, 1993). Moreover, presidents seem to be willing to compromise with the legislature only when they are unable to build coalitions with their institutional powers or pork (Arnold et al., 2017, p. 392). In this context, representatives will prefer presidents with weak legislative powers because otherwise, the influence of the legislature declines and, therefore, SWD among legislators will decrease. Thus, we expect that (H_1) *legislators in systems with strong legislative presidential powers will show lower levels of SWD than those in systems with weak legislative presidential powers.*

Legislative branches perform a range of functions, from lawmaking and representation to overseeing the executive. However, the literature shows that the powers allocated to legislatures vary significantly, shaping their capacity to influence policy. Some legislatures have extensive tools at their disposal, empowering legislators to craft and implement their preferred policies, while others lack the necessary resources to draft and enact legislation that reflects their priorities (Crisp et al., 2020; Negretto, 2013; Wang, 2021). Legislatures with strong legislative powers are better able to represent their constituents (Crisp et al., 2020) and can limit executive initiatives, propose alternatives, and amplify citizens' demands (Wang, 2021). Moreover, legislatures with greater powers can oversee the executive and monitor the bureaucracy more effectively (Fish, 2006). Ultimately, we expect that stronger legislatures enable legislators to better fulfill their roles and accomplish their political goals, leading to greater satisfaction. Where legislators have strong legislative powers, they will have the opportunity to have more leverage and tend to show higher levels of SWD. However, where the legislature is weak, representatives will display lower levels of SWD. Overall, (H_2) *legislators in systems where the legislature has strong powers will tend to exhibit higher levels of SWD than those in systems where the legislature has weak legislative powers.*

The second group of constraints that limits legislators' actions lies within the legislature itself. Each legislature follows different rules that provide distinct capacities to legislators, legislative groups, committees, or directory members. In the legislative process, setting the agenda is relevant for legislators because those with the power to control it “have a significant advantage over the membership at large” (Alemán, 2006, p. 125). They act as policy gatekeepers restricting or pushing policy change (Alemán, 2006). However, other scholars show that there is a strategic use of the agenda-setting powers for all legislators regardless of their position (Taylor-Robinson & Ross, 2011). While Pachón and Johnson (2016) find that Colombian government parties and their coalition allies use agenda-setting powers to advance their position and undermine the opposition, Tuttnauer and Wegmann (2022) identify situations in which the legislative agenda can also benefit the opposition by helping them promote their goals and capture voters' support. In other words, it seems that despite their situation as government or opposition, access to the process of forming the agenda can give legislators more participation and a sense of control over their parliamentary affairs (Taylor-Robinson & Ross, 2011). Taking these results into account, we expect that (H_3) *legislators in systems that allow them to*

participate in the agenda-setting process will display higher levels of SWD than those in more restrictive systems.

In addition, participation in legislative affairs can be affected by levels of legislative fragmentation because the lack of a single party or a coalition with the majority erodes the control of the agenda (Alemán, 2006, p. 131). This is especially relevant for our study here given the widespread presence of multiparty presidentialism in Latin America (Kitschelt et al., 2010; Mainwaring, 1993; Pereira & Melo, 2012). The relationship between fragmentation and SWD among elites has not been tested before and analyses using public opinion data yield mixed results. When looking at citizens, Christmann and Torcal (2018) find that not all pluralistic factors increase SWD and specifically “countries with greater legislative party fractionalization tend to have lower levels of SWD” and “increasing party fractionalization leads to decreases in SWD within countries over time” (p. 604). For Cutler et al. (2023) the number of parties present in the legislature is related to the extent of diversity that is being represented and the variety of interests that are voiced. Nevertheless, they do not find evidence to support a relationship between legislative fragmentation and SWD. Dassonneville and McAllister (2020) also do not find support for such a relationship with a wider pool of parties only marginally affecting citizens' SWD.

We believe that fragmentation can affect SWD among legislators in two different ways, given previous research on Latin America (Morgenstern et al., 2008). On the one hand, it is possible that legislators will be more satisfied in systems with higher levels of fractionalization than in systems with lower levels because a large number of parties will prevent a strong presidential majority (Morgenstern et al., 2008) and that will give all legislators more influential roles. On the other hand, legislative fragmentation can negatively affect legislators given that it imposes limits to their influence and capacities lowering SWD. Fragmentation forces representatives to compromise, but when agreement is hard to achieve, conflict and confrontation may arise. Furthermore, despite the impact of fragmentation on presidential capacities—given that “presidents must bargain with legislatures that are frequently prone to reject executive proposals thus forcing the president to compromise” (Morgenstern et al., 2008, p. 161)—presidents have strategic responses. These may involve buying “support with policy or pork, or attempt to evade the legislative process” (Morgenstern et al., 2008, p. 161). In sum, we thus think that higher legislative fragmentation will lead to lower levels of SWD among legislators because of the risk of confrontation between the president and the legislature, the more likely presidential control, and representatives' more limited influence. Overall, we posit that (H_4) *representatives from legislatures with high levels of fractionalization will show less SWD than those in legislatures with low levels of legislative fragmentation.*

Institutional Context and the Winner-Loser Gap

All the aforementioned institutional elements have the potential to influence legislators' SWD. However, this effect is unlikely to be uniform. We hypothesize that the impact of these variables may affect losers and winners differently. Several studies have shown that contextual and institutional conditions facilitating participation not only influence SWD but also impact the gap in SWD between losers and winners. For instance, Anderson and Guillory (1997), using public opinion data, find that the gap in SWD between losers and winners is smaller in consensual political systems, where power is more diffuse, than in majoritarian regimes, where the power is concentrated.³ Wang (2021) also finds similar results among Latin American citizens. The gap between winners and losers tends to be reduced when legislators' capacity to oversee the executive is stronger.

³The effect of economic performance on SWD is less relevant in consensual democracies than in majoritarian countries (Criado & Herreros, 2007; Kestilä-Kekkonen & Söderlund, 2017).

There are at least three explanations for the narrowing (or widening) of this gap. First, changes in such a gap can be explained by fluctuations among losers but not winners. Some restrictions over legislators that limit the exercise of power may have a larger negative effect among losers than winners since the former cannot compensate for limitations imposed by the institutional context with benefits associated with winning. Losers' limited resources force them to make the most out of their scarce possibilities and will value any opportunity to participate in the decision-making process and voice their positions. The second possibility is the opposite, winners showing larger changes in SWD while losers' satisfaction remains stable. This possibility may apply to aspects that increase or decrease participation of winners but do not modify or affect losers' participation in legislative activities. The last option that may cause changes in the SWD gap is that the differences in institutional constraints affect both winners' and losers' SWD. If the effect of the variable goes in the same direction, the gap will remain stable. However, the distance between winners and losers will increase or decrease when factors affect both groups, but in opposite directions, meaning that those traits increase participation for one group at the expense of the other. Taking into account these three possibilities we analyze which institutional factors reduce the winner-loser gap in SWD among legislators but also if that reduction is caused by changes in SWD levels for winners, losers, or both. In the remainder of the section, we address how the institutional context may affect winners and losers differently.

To begin with, the institutional design affects all legislators, but it may have a stronger effect on winners or losers. The literature that focuses on the impact of legislative powers on SWD also goes in this direction. Wang (2021) finds that the gap in satisfaction among the public decreases where the legislature has a high level of control over the executive because the preferences of the opposition voters are more likely to be heard and represented (p. 3). Given this limited evidence, we anticipate that in contexts where the legislature has more policy-making powers, the gap between winners and losers will be smaller given that losers will have more opportunities to hear and voice their positions.

We expect the opposite in relation to the legislative powers of the president. Previous research shows that “the public has a fairly sophisticated understanding of how much influence parties have inside and outside of the government in presidential systems” (Martínez-Gallardo & Singer, 2021, p. 21). They find that as presidential power increases, the gap in satisfaction levels between coalition party supporters and supporters of the president grows. If changes in presidential powers modify satisfaction for the public supporting different parties within the coalition, it is possible that this variable also affects legislators, increasing the gap in satisfaction between losers and winners as presidential power increases. In this case, we expect winners to accept greater presidential powers more than losers. Therefore, SWD among losers will decrease due to the legislature's limited role in the policy-making process.

Regarding the effect of constraints to participation within the legislature, we also expect a narrower gap when legislators have more control over the legislative agenda. We think that the gap will decrease because legislators in the opposition need this resource to communicate with voters (Tuttnauer & Wegmann, 2022), and although winners can use the agenda to hurt the opposition (Pachón & Johnson, 2016) they have more resources —i.e., beyond agenda-setting powers— to participate, communicate with voters, and hurt the opposition.

Finally, we also suspect legislative fragmentation to affect winners and losers differently. We expect to find a larger gap in SWD when the level of fractionalization is low because in these circumstances winners will be able to develop their activities facing a weak opposition which in turn will keep SWD among losers (winners) low (high). On the contrary, when the level of fractionalization is high the gap will decrease because strong opposition will have more chances to block winners and presidential proposals, which will increase SWD among losers and decrease satisfaction among winners.

DATA AND ANALYSES

To test the impact of institutional dynamics on satisfaction with democracy, we use survey data from the University of Salamanca's Latin American Elites Project (PELA-USAL), which has collected first-hand information from legislators in the region since 1994. Our dataset contains 2,448 parliamentary representatives from 17 Latin American countries.⁴ We use two databases for each country, except for Venezuela, which has only one recent survey (see [Table 1a](#) in the Appendix for the distribution of interviews).

To test our expectations, we include four independent variables. Two variables reflect the institutional design, including indicators of presidential legislative powers and legislature's policy-making powers. The other two variables pertain to legislative settings: legislative fragmentation and legislators' points of view about their participation in the agenda-setting process. This last indicator, unlike the other three, comes from the survey and taps into legislators' self-reported assessments of their control of the agenda. It serves as a subjective measure, complementing the other variables—which rely on objective normative or legal instruments—and provides a more comprehensive view of legislators' participation in their roles as political actors.

To evaluate if these variables that enable participation will reduce the gap between winners and losers, we consider how legislators position themselves as either part of the government or the opposition. Interactions with the winner-loser variable will show if the gap between winners and losers in SWD levels increases or decreases depending on the level and perception of the institutions that foster or limit legislators' participation in their traditional tasks. In the remainder of the section, we describe each of these variables and address potential concerns.

Our dependent variable, **satisfaction with democracy**, is measured with the following question: “In general, would you say that you are very satisfied, satisfied, dissatisfied, or very dissatisfied with the way democracy works in your country?” Despite the fact that researchers widely use this item to assess the endorsement of the democratic regime's performance and how democracy works, its use has generated substantial debates regarding its conceptualization and measurement (Canache et al., 2001; Linde & Ekman, 2003; Quaranta, 2018). First, with respect to the concept, several studies have shown that items of economic performance indicate a close connection to country-level measures of SWD (Dalton, 2004; Finkel et al., 1989; Newton, 2006). Furthermore, this indicator seems to be responsive to changes in the environments and contexts, as well as sensitive to different views of democracy (Adcock & Collier, 2001; Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017; Linde & Ekman, 2003). Secondly, regarding the measurement, a wide range of studies have analyzed the reliability of this instrument by comparing the different scales used (Poses & Revilla, 2022; Valgarðsson & Devine, 2022).

Studies that analyze and compare this indicator have used various scales, including 11-point scales (with or without a midpoint label) or a 4-point scale with specific characteristics (e.g., unipolar fully labeled scale, bipolar fully labeled scale, bipolar scale with verbal labels only for the endpoints). In our case, the PELA questionnaire uses a 4-point scale and following Bernauer and Vatter (2012) and Fan and Zhang (2022), we recode it into a dummy variable and run a multilevel logistic regression. Respondents who reported being very satisfied or satisfied were coded as 1, and those reporting being dissatisfied or very dissatisfied were coded as 0.⁵ This study contributes both to the debate on the indicators used to measure satisfaction with democracy and to the discussion on the use of this concept in political science. First, it evaluates that our measure captures variability in SWD among legislators. Second, it highlights the relevance of considering institutional contexts, rather

⁴Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela.

⁵[Table 2a](#) in the Appendix shows descriptive statistics for all the variables in our models.

than focusing solely on economic factors, to better explain the connection with country-level satisfaction levels.

Expecting that institutional design and the structure of the legislature will affect representatives' participation and influence, which in turn will have an impact on legislators' satisfaction with democracy, we rely on four independent variables and one more variable to account for the winner-loser status. To test the relevance of the institutional design, we include two variables that measure **presidential legislative powers** and **legislative policy-making powers**. We use the presidential legislative powers and legislative policy-making powers indexes from Crisp et al. (2020), keeping their original measurement for each of these variables. Each variable measuring presidential and legislative powers has three values ranging from 1 to 3, with higher values meaning more powers for the president and legislators, respectively.⁶

The next two variables measure additional limits within the legislature. The first one is a question that asks legislators who they think defines the **legislative agenda**: the majority party, the president of congress, legislators, the executive power, or others. In our analysis, we recoded this variable so it allows us to compare legislators (1) to the rest of actors (0). The second variable measures legislative fragmentation including the **effective number of parliamentary parties' index** (ENPP).⁷

Finally, to assess differences between **winner and loser** as well as changes in the gap in SWD between these two groups, a dichotomous variable captures whether legislators consider themselves part of the government (winners 1) or otherwise (losers 0). This variable measures legislators' self-perceptions rather than classifications based on their party affiliation and party coalitions. Doing this, the variable accounts for those who feel winners even though they may or may not be part of a formal coalition due to pre-electoral, run-off, or post-electoral coalitions. We want to measure each legislator's self-position, regardless of their party's formal location because they may feel opposition (government) even if their political party is (not) part of the government or the government coalition. We are interested in their individual perceptions, not the political party's status because the level of institutionalization in many Latin American party systems is limited, and there are many informal and/or temporary coalitions, and even individual agreements which are less common in institutionalized systems. Moreover, party cohesion is not guaranteed in all Latin American legislatures, and this individual measure of the winner-loser status allows us to keep all legislators in the analysis even if they are independents.

With the remaining variables we control for four aspects that may be affecting SWD. We consider controls for individual traits (first time legislators) (Esaïsson et al., 2013), socio-demographic factors (age and gender), and country traits (democracy status) (Singer, 2023). Thus, to control the effect of legislators' political careers on their SWD, we make use of a question measuring if this is the first time they are in congress (1) or if they are senior members (0). We add measures of gender (male 1 vs. female 0) and age. Finally, we use the liberal democracy index from V-DEM to control for democratic status. Singer (2023) shows that democracy levels are relevant for both winners and losers. While the opposition, despite having lost the election, displays high (low) levels of satisfaction when democracy is strong (weak), winners tend to ignore the erosion of democracy and remain satisfied even under circumstances of poor democratic performance. According to Singer (2023), this situation leaves losers as the primary actors that will protect democratic institutions when they are under threat.

⁶The values for the legislative powers of the president measure are 1 = presidents with weak legislative powers; 2 = agenda-setting powers; 3 = proactive powers. The values for the legislative policy-making powers index are 1 = very limited powers; 2 = constrained except by the budget; 3 = extended powers except by the budget.

⁷See Gallagher (2023), election indices dataset at https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/about/people/michael_gallagher/EISystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf, accessed April 29, 2025. We calculated the missing values for Honduras and Ecuador.

We use a multilevel random-intercept logistic regression model with legislators (level-1) nested within countries (level-2). Additionally, we standardized our independent variables to facilitate comparisons by adjusting for differences in scales and measurement units. [Table 1](#) presents the results of our four multilevel regression models with just main effects while [Table 2](#) shows those same four models including interactions between our institutional variables and the winner-loser status. Models in [Table 1](#) control for levels of democracy along with the aforementioned individual-level characteristics, and models in [Table 2](#) include the interaction between liberal democracy and winner/loser status as a control.

Model 1 considers the effect of presidential powers, Model 2 the effect of the policy-making powers of the legislature, Model 3 the effect of the control of the legislative agenda, and Model 4 the effect of fractionalization on SWD levels. We use the first two models to test our hypotheses H_1 and H_2 , and the third and fourth models to test hypotheses H_3 and H_4 .

The odds ratios in Models 1–4 reveal that the variable with the largest effect on satisfaction with democracy is the winner-loser status. As expected, those who consider themselves part of the government express significantly higher levels of satisfaction with the way democracy works. The probability of legislators being satisfied with the functioning of democracy, as opposed to being dissatisfied, is primarily linked to a factor that is not directly institutional, but rather to their perception of themselves as part of the government or not.

Regarding our expectations for institutional design, the results in [Table 1](#) (Model 1 and Model 2) show that presidential legislative powers play a significant role, providing support for H_1 . Specifically, in cases where the president holds strong legislative powers, representatives tend to express significantly lower levels of SWD. However, the legislature's policy-making powers are not statistically significant, meaning we found no support for H_2 , which expected that stronger powers would increase SWD levels. Our finding suggests that legislators' SWD might be more influenced by other political actors performing some of their traditional roles, rather than by the breadth of their formal legislative powers.

Our second set of variables highlight the relevance of legislative settings for legislators' SWD, and our models include perceptions about legislators' influence on agenda-setting and legislative fragmentation. We expect that representatives who perceive greater participation in the agenda-setting (H_3) or work in contexts of low levels of fragmentation (H_4) will exhibit more SWD. In line with the third and fourth hypotheses, results show that legislators that perceive they control the legislative agenda-setting and representatives in less fragmented legislatures tend to be more satisfied with democracy.

Lastly, to test whether the winner-loser status has a moderating effect and to explore if institutional and legislative variables that allow more participation reduce the satisfaction gap between losers and winners, we run a second set of analyses. [Table 2](#) includes interaction effects between our main independent variables and being a winner-loser legislator and [Figures 1–4](#) below visualize the interactions and show predictive margins for hypothetical winners and losers.

[Table 2](#) shows that two out of four interactions are significant (Model 1—presidential legislative powers—and Model 4—ENPP—), with the interactions between the winner/loser status and legislature's policy-making powers and legislators' perceptions of agenda control, respectively, not being significant. [Figure 1](#) shows that the effect of presidential legislative powers affects winners' and losers' SWD differently: losers' SWD decreases as the president has more powers while winners' SWD remain stable. As expected, the gap between winners and losers is wider under presidents with proactive legislative powers. Strong presidential powers concern losers, whereas winners feel comfortable with presidential prerogatives. [Figure 2](#) illustrates how the policy-making powers of the legislature affect SWD for winners and losers. In this case, and contrary to our expectations, increasing legislative powers do not affect the gap between the two groups and the effect is similar for both with a slight decrease in satisfaction when legislatures have extended powers, controlling for the other variables in the models.

TABLE 1 Satisfaction with Democracy among Latin American Legislators: Main Effects.

	Model 1 President's Legislative Powers	Model 2 Legislature's Policy-making Powers	Model 3 Legislative Agenda	Model 4 ENPP
Constant	0.637 (0.239)	0.761 (0.386)	0.558 (0.222)	0.727 (0.300)
<i>Individual-level Variables</i>				
Winner	7.221*** (0.805)	7.199*** (0.803)	7.230*** (0.818)	7.151*** (0.799)
First Time legislator	0.663*** (0.075)	0.663*** (0.076)	0.657*** (0.076)	0.679*** (0.078)
Male	1.379*** (0.151)	1.378*** (0.151)	1.390*** (0.155)	1.364*** (0.150)
Age	0.988** (0.004)	0.988** (0.004)	0.988** (0.004)	0.989** (0.004)
Legislative Agenda			1.538*** (0.206)	
<i>Group-level Variable</i>				
President's Legislative Powers	0.467** (0.182)			
Legislature's Policy-Making Powers		0.786 (0.316)		
Effective Number of Parties	10.070*** (5.020)	5.894*** (3.285)	7.202*** (3.563)	0.267*** (0.124)
Liberal Democracy				9.662*** (5.162)
<i>Random Effects</i>				
Country	0.277 (0.118)	0.351 (0.143)	0.354 (0.146)	0.426 (0.173)
Variance (Group-level)	CI (0.119, 0.640)	CI (0.157, 0.784)	CI (0.158, 0.795)	CI (0.192, 0.947)
ICC	0.077	0.096	0.097	0.114
<i>Model Fit Statistics</i>				
Observations	2,356	2,356	2,321	2,356
Groups	17	17	17	17
AIC	2547.85	2550.87	2482.62	2542.74
BIC	2593.96	2596.98	2528.618	2588.86

Note: Odds ratio.
 *** $p < 0.01$. ** $p < 0.05$. * $p < 0.1$.

TABLE 2 Satisfaction with Democracy among Latin American Legislators: Interactions.

	Model 1 President's Legislative Powers	Model 2 Legislature's Policy-making Powers	Model 3 Legislative Agenda	Model 4 ENPP
Constant	0.193*** (0.079)	0.254** (0.138)	0.184*** (0.079)	0.213*** (0.095)
<i>Individual-level Variables</i>				
Winner	110.31*** (30.729)	92.86*** (0.532)	92.05*** (26.10)	146.80*** (43.57)
First Time legislator	0.690*** (0.082)	0.689*** (0.081)	0.687*** (0.082)	0.719*** (0.086)
Male	1.408*** (0.082)	1.400*** (0.159)	1.414*** (0.163)	1.395*** (0.16)
Age	0.991** (0.004)	0.990* (0.004)	0.991* (0.004)	0.989* (0.004)
Legislative Agenda			1.276 (0.214)	
<i>Group-level Variable</i>				
President's Legislative Powers	0.390** (0.163)			
Legislature's Policy-Making Powers		0.742 (0.310)		
Effective Number of Parties			46.59*** (25.92)	
Liberal Democracy	81.60*** (47.14)	37.58*** (23.31)		0.683 (0.339)
<i>Interactions</i>				
Winner * President's Legislative Powers	2.068** (0.653)			
Winner * Legislature's Policy-Making Powers		1.104 (0.340)		
Winner * Legislative Agenda			1.257 (0.365)	
Winner * ENPP				0.112*** (0.053)
Winner * Liberal Democracy	0.002*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.002)	0.005*** (0.002)	0.0079*** (0.003)
<i>Random Effects</i>				
Country	0.302 (0.129)	0.359 (0.148)	0.3661 (0.150)	0.4446(0.180)
Variance (Group-level)	CI (0.131, 0.697)	CI (0.160, 0.87)	CI (0.163, 0.821)	CI (0.201, 0.986)
ICC	0.084	0.098	0.100	0.119
<i>Model Fit Statistics</i>				
Observations	2,356	2,356	2,321	2,356
Groups	17	17	17	17
AIC	2411.63	2419.29	2360.29	2390.77
BIC	2469.28	2476.94	2417.87	2448.42

Note: Odds ratio.
*** $p < 0.01$. ** $p < 0.05$. * $p < 0.1$.

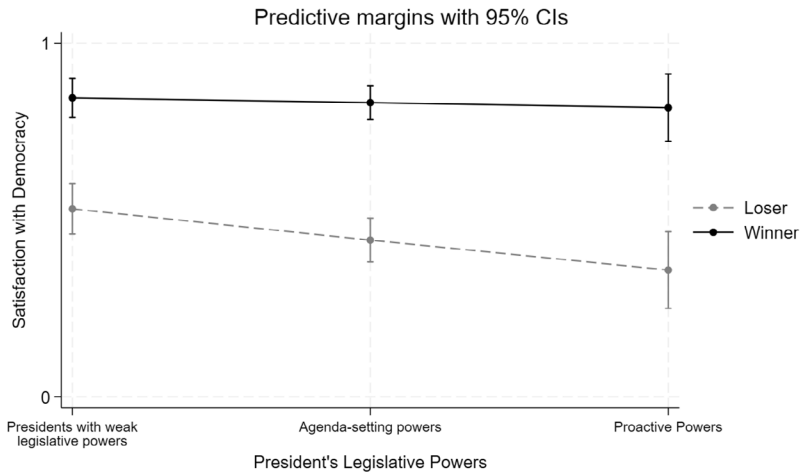


FIGURE 1 Exploring Interaction Effects: Winner-Loser Gap and Presidential Legislative Powers.

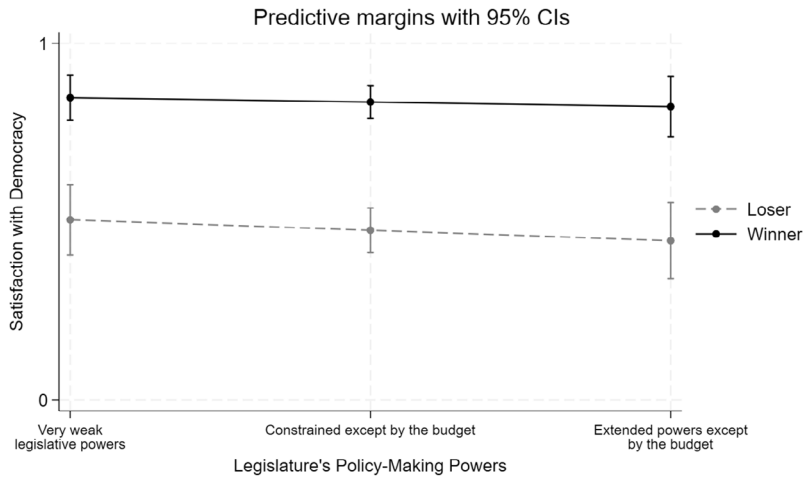


FIGURE 2 Exploring Interaction Effects: Winner-Loser Gap and Legislature's Powers.

Finally, [Figure 3](#) and [Figure 4](#) depict how legislative constraints affect winners' and losers' SWD. In the first case, there are no differences in the slopes of both groups, and therefore, SWD increases equally for winners and losers when legislators perceive they control the agenda ([Figure 3](#)). The effect of fragmentation on SWD tells a different story ([Figure 4](#)). As legislative fragmentation increases, as we expected, the gap between winners and losers disappears due to a clear reduction of SWD among winners. It seems that winners are aware that compromising with more parties and diverse interests is more difficult and may reduce political leeway.

Overall, interactions show that SWD is not stable, and different institutional and legislative settings affect satisfaction levels for both winners and losers, by either narrowing or widening the gap between the two groups. Legislative fragmentation affects winners by decreasing their satisfaction, while proactive presidential legislative powers affect losers by decreasing their satisfaction.

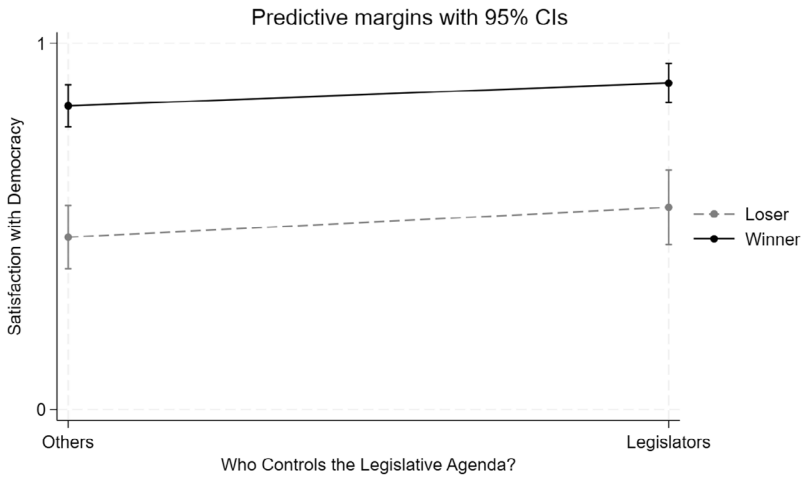


FIGURE 3 Exploring Interaction Effects: Winner-Loser Gap and Agenda-Setting.

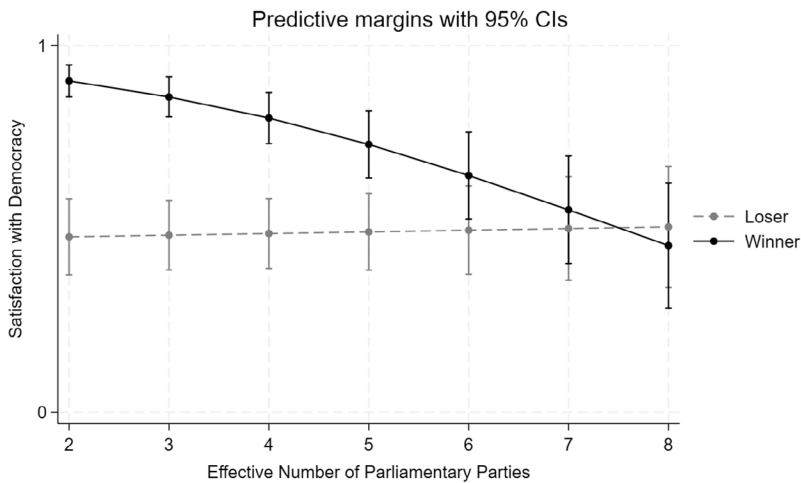


FIGURE 4 Exploring Interaction Effects: Winner-Loser Gap and Legislature's Fragmentation.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Institutional and legislative settings that promote participation matter for Latin American legislators' SWD. Based on 2,448 interviews from 17 countries between 2009 and 2022, our findings show that settings that allow for legislators' control over the legislative agenda have a positive effect on their SWD, regardless of their condition as winner or loser. When legislators consider that they have the power to set the parliamentary agenda, they tend to display higher levels of SWD. Both winners and losers might see agenda-setting control as means to advance their policy priorities, signaling issues that their supporters demand, or as a leverage in their internal negotiations.

Nonetheless, the results indicate that factors such as presidential legislative powers and the effective number of parties are also significant but influence winners and losers in different ways. The diverse effect of those institutional and legislative variables on winners and losers gives us a novel theoretical understanding of the influence of settings that allow participation

in the legislative process on SWD. As expected, we observed relevant insights: presidential legislative powers appear to decrease losers' satisfaction, while legislative fragmentation has a stronger effect, diminishing winners' satisfaction as the effective number of parties increases. On the contrary, extended policy-making powers of the legislative and agenda control do not differentiate between winners and losers.

Our analyses also reveal some changes in the distance between winners' and losers' SWD. For instance, the gap between winners' and losers' satisfaction widens when the president has greater legislative powers, because SWD among losers decreases. Losers might see the president as a competing actor, being afraid that the president will take credit for the policies that come from the legislative branch or will interfere in the political agenda. Nonetheless, policy-making powers of the legislature do not modify the distance between the two groups, given that satisfaction declines at similar rates among losers and winners. Gaining a clearer understanding of how these powers are distributed could be key to better explaining these findings, creating opportunities for additional investigation.

This holds significant theoretical relevance as institutional and legislative factors that enhance SWD prove beneficial for the system given that losers' consent is an important element for democracy and stability, especially in presidential systems. Most of the literature has focused on how participatory conditions can increase satisfaction among losers (Singer, 2023; Wang, 2021). Our research contributes to this literature by showing that some of these institutional factors affect losers, but other variables affect winners. Moreover, these findings carry practical implications. First, researchers should extend their focus to winners, especially in situations where aspects of the party system temper their satisfaction. Second, it seems that not all possible changes in the institutional context will increase losers' satisfaction (i.e., reforms that affect policy-making powers of the legislature), even if these reforms seem to increase participatory conditions. At the same time, our findings also contribute to several ongoing debates in political science. The first one is connected to governability in presidential systems and how various institutional combinations may contribute to stability. The second focuses on the role of the opposition (losers) and the relationship between institutional factors, satisfaction with democracy, and losers' consent.

Nevertheless, our study has some limitations and raises some questions to be addressed in future research. First, most of the PELA interviews take place at the beginning of the legislature and perceptions of being a winner or loser may change over its course. Some researchers adopt a temporal perspective, considering how previous experiences of winning and losing or how changes in the winner-loser status affect SWD. Unfortunately, we were not able to include the effect of these time-related aspects, but future analysis can explore these factors. Second, our analysis only covers presidential systems because we focus on the Latin American region, leaving these questions unanswered for parliamentary systems. Finally, three methodological aspects warrant further analysis: the measurement of the dependent variable (SWD), the determination of the winner-loser status, and the relevance of party variables. Some authors, such as Valgarðsson and Devine (2022), have demonstrated that SWD results can vary depending on the survey's measurement approach. To address this, they recommend using multiple information sources. However, in studies on parliamentary elites, obtaining diverse sources can be challenging due to difficulties in securing interviews. Thus, for upcoming research on elites' SWD, it might be more appropriate to use an 11-point scale, with an explicit midpoint label, as opposed to a 4-point scale (Poses & Revilla, 2022). Regarding the winner-loser status, we use a variable based on legislators' self-perceptions rather than party affiliation or coalition. Consequently, our findings may not be directly comparable to studies using different measures of the winner-loser variable. We encourage future studies to adopt subjective

measurements to validate our findings. Lastly, new analyses should focus on how party traits, such as institutionalization, leadership, or discipline, affect legislators' satisfaction.

All things considered, our study provides insightful theoretical and empirical contributions to expand the knowledge about satisfaction with democracy among legislators, as well as some ideas for future research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

We thank Tiffany Barnes and the anonymous referees for their helpful comments. Of course, any errors are solely our own.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in PELA repository at <https://oir.org.es/pela/bases-de-datos/>

ORCID

Mar Martínez Rosón  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6657-2202>

Margarita Corral  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6073-9753>

Araceli Mateos  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-6208-5917>

REFERENCES

- Aarts, K., & Thomassen, J. (2008). Satisfaction with democracy: Do institutions matter? *Electoral studies*, 27(1), 5–18. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2007.11.005>
- Acock, R., & Collier, D. (2001). Measurement validity: A shared standard for qualitative and quantitative research. *American Political Science Review*, 95(3), 529–546. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055401003100>
- Alemán, E. (2006). Policy gatekeepers in Latin American legislatures. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 48(3), 125–155. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1548-2456.2006.tb00358.x>
- Anderson, C. J., & Guillory, C. A. (1997). Political institutions and satisfaction with democracy: A cross-national analysis of consensus and majoritarian systems. *American Political Science Review*, 91(1), 66–81. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2952259>
- Arnold, C., Doyle, D., & Wiesehomeier, N. (2017). Presidents, policy compromise, and legislative success. *The Journal of Politics*, 79(2), 380–395. <https://doi.org/10.1086/688080>
- Bernauer, J., & Vatter, A. (2012). Can't get no satisfaction with the Westminster model? Winners, losers and the effects of consensual and direct democratic institutions on satisfaction with democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 51(4), 435–468. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1475-6765.2011.02007.x>
- Bowler, S., Donovan, T., & Karp, J. A. (2006). Why Politicians Like Electoral Institutions: Self-Interest, Values, or Ideology? *The Journal of Politics*, 68(2), 434–446. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1468-2508.2006.00418.x>
- Canache, D., Mondak, J. J., & Seligson, M. A. (2001). Meaning and measurement in cross-national research on satisfaction with democracy. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 65(4), 506–528. <https://doi.org/10.1086/323576>
- Christmann, P., & Torcal, M. (2018). The effects of government system fractionalization on satisfaction with democracy. *Political Science Research and Methods*, 6(3), 593–611. <https://doi.org/10.1017/psrm.2017.23>
- Costa, A. M., Rizzotto, M. L., & de Vasconcelos Costa Lobato, L. (2023). Lula for President: the heritage and the challenges for the democratic field. *Saúde em Debate*, 46, 921–925. <https://doi.org/10.1590/0103-11042022135001>
- Criado, H., & Herreros, F. (2007). Political support: Taking into account the institutional context. *Comparative Political Studies*, 40(12), 1511–1532. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140066292117>
- Crisp, B. F., Olivella, S., & Rosas, G. (2020). *The chain of representation: Preferences, institutions, and policy across presidential systems*. Cambridge University Press.
- Cutler, F., Nuesser, A., & Nyblade, B. (2023). Satisfaction with Democracy: The Impact of Institutions, Contexts and Attitudes. *Canadian Journal of Political Science/Revue Canadienne de Science Politique*, 56(1), 1–25. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0008423922000853>
- Dalton, R. J. (2004). *Democratic challenges, democratic choices: The erosion of political support in advanced industrial democracies*. Oxford University Press.
- Dassonneville, R., & McAllister, I. (2020). The party choice set and satisfaction with democracy. *West European Politics*, 43(1), 49–73. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2019.1609286>
- Donovan, T., & Karp, J. (2017). Electoral rules, corruption, inequality and evaluations of democracy. *European Journal of Political Research*, 56(3), 469–486. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12188>

- Esaiasson, P., Gilljam, M., & Karlsson, D. (2013). Sources of Elite Democratic Satisfaction. How Elected Representatives Evaluate Their Political System. In *Stepping Stones: Research on Political Representation, Voting Behavior and Quality of Government*. Department of Political Science, University of Gothenburg.
- Fan, Z., & Zhang, N. (2022). Disconnected citizens in the social media age: unpacking the effects of digital exclusion on satisfaction with democracy in Europe. *Information Technology & People*, 35(5), 1652–1673. <https://doi.org/10.1108/ITP-05-2020-0357>
- Fenno, R. F. (1973). *Congressmen in Committees*. Little, Brown.
- Finkel, S. E., Muller, E. N., & Seligson, M. A. (1989). Economic crisis, incumbent performance and regime support: A comparison of longitudinal data from West Germany and Costa Rica. *British Journal of Political Science*, 19(3), 329–351. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123400005512>
- Fish, M. S. (2006). Stronger Legislatures, Stronger Democracies. *Journal of Democracy*, 17(1), 5–20. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2006.0008>.
- Fortin-Rittberger, J., Harfst, P., & Dingler, S. C. (2017). The costs of electoral fraud: establishing the link between electoral integrity, winning an election, and satisfaction with democracy. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, 27(3), 350–368. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2017.1310111>
- Fried, A., & Harris, D. B. (2020). In Suspense: Donald Trump's Efforts to Undermine Public Trust in Democracy. *Society*, 57, 527–533. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s12115-020-00526-y>
- Gallagher, M. (2023). *Election indices dataset*. https://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/about/people/allagh_gallagher/EISystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf
- Johnson, G. B., & Crisp, B. F. (2003). Mandates, powers, and policies. *American Journal of Political Science*, 47(1), 128–142. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-5907.00009>
- Kestilä-Kekkonen, E., & Söderlund, P. (2017). Is it all about the economy? Government fractionalization, economic performance and satisfaction with democracy across Europe, 2002–13. *Government and Opposition*, 52(1), 100–130. <https://doi.org/10.1017/gov.2015.22>
- Kitschelt, H., Hawkins, K. A., Luna, J. P., Rosas, G., & Zechmeister, E. J. (2010). *Latin American party systems*. Cambridge University Press.
- Linde, J., & Ekman, J. (2003). Satisfaction with democracy: A note on a frequently used indicator in comparative politics. *European Journal of Political Research*, 42(3), 391–408. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.00089>
- Linz, J. J. (1990). The perils of presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy*, 1(1), 51–69.
- Mainwaring, S. (1993). Presidentialism, multipartism, and democracy: the difficult combination. *Comparative Political Studies*, 26(2), 198–228. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414093026002003>
- Martínez-Gallardo, C., & Singer, M. (2021). *Feeling Like a Winner? Coalition Status and Democratic Satisfaction in Latin America*. Paper prepared for presentation at the LAPOP 2021 The Public and Democracy in the Americas Conference.
- Martínez Rosón, M., & Mateos, A. (2025). Losing Hurts: Defeated Legislators and Satisfaction with Democracy in Latin America. *Political Studies Review*, 14789299241311769.
- Mayhew, D. R. (1974). Congressional elections: The case of the vanishing marginals. *Polity*, 6(3), 295–317. <https://doi.org/10.2307/3233931>
- Monsiváis-Carrillo, A. (2023). Happy Winners, Sore Partisans? Political Trust, Partisanship, and the Populist Assault on Electoral Integrity in Mexico. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 15(1), 72–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X221136147>
- Morgenstern, S., Negri, J. J., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2008). Parliamentary opposition in non-parliamentary regimes: Latin America. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 14(1–2), 160–189. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572330801921166>
- Negretto, G. (2013). *Making Constitutions: Presidents, Parties, and Institutional Choice in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Newton, K. (2006). Political support: Social capital, civil society and political and economic performance. *Political Studies*, 54(4), 846–864. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2006.00634.x>
- Niessen, C., Schiffino, N., Jacquet, V., & Deschamps, L. (2019). Critical Candidates: Elite Attitudes Towards the Functioning of Representative Democracy. In *Candidates, Parties and Voters in the Belgian Partitocracy* (pp. 341–363). Springer International Publishing.
- Pachón, M., & Johnson, G. B. (2016). When's the party (or coalition)? Agenda-setting in a highly fragmented, decentralized legislature. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, 8(2), 71–100. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802X1600800203>
- Parliamentary Elites of Latin America (PELA-USAL). University of Salamanca (1994-2025).
- Pereira, C., & Melo, M. A. (2012). The surprising success of multiparty presidentialism. *Journal of Democracy* 23(3): 156–170. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2012.0041>
- Poses, C., & Revilla, M. (2022). Measuring satisfaction with democracy: how good are different scales across countries and languages? *European Political Science Review*, 14(1), 18–35. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773921000266>

- Quaranta, M. (2018). How citizens evaluate democracy: an assessment using the European Social Survey. *European Political Science Review*, 10(2), 191–217. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773917000054>
- Ruiz-Rufino, R. (2013). Satisfaction with democracy in multi-ethnic countries: The effect of representative political institutions on ethnic minorities. *Political Studies*, 61(1), 101–118. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2012.00955.x>
- Schlesinger, J. A. (1966). *Ambition and politics: Political careers in the United States*. Rand McNally.
- Singer, M. M. (2023). Fiddling while democracy burns: partisan reactions to weak democracy in Latin America. *Perspectives on Politics*, 21(1), 9–26. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592721002899>
- Singh, S. P., & Carlin, R. E. (2015). Happy medium, happy citizens: Presidential power and democratic regime support. *Political Research Quarterly*, 68(1), 3–17. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1065912914534534>
- Taylor-Robinson, M. M., & Ross, A. D. (2011). Can Formal Rules of Order be Used as an Accurate Proxy for Behaviour Internal to a Legislature? Evidence from Costa Rica. *The Journal of Legislative Studies*, 17(4), 479–500. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13572334.2011.617552>
- Tuttnauer, O., & Wegmann, S. (2022). Voting for votes: Opposition parties' legislative activity and electoral outcomes. *American Political Science Review*, 116(4), 1357–1374. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055422000338>
- Valgarðsson, V. O., & Devine, D. (2022). What satisfaction with democracy? A global analysis of “satisfaction with democracy” measures. *Political Research Quarterly*, 75(3), 576–590. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129211009605>
- Wagner, A. F., Schneider, F., & Halla, M. (2009). The quality of institutions and satisfaction with democracy in Western Europe—A panel analysis. *European Journal of Political Economy*, 25(1), 30–41. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ejpoleco.2008.08.001>
- Wang, Y. (2021). Legislative strength and democratic satisfaction in presidential democracies. *Electoral Studies*, 71, 102333. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2021.102333>
- Wells, J. M., & Krieckhaus, J. (2006). Does national context influence democratic satisfaction? A multi-level analysis. *Political Research Quarterly*, 59(4), 569–578. <https://doi.org/10.1177/106591290605900406>

How to cite this article: Martínez Rosón, M., Corral, M. & Mateos, A. (2025). Institutional Context and Satisfaction with Democracy: Shaping the Winner-Loser Gap among Latin American Legislators. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 00, 1–21. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12664>

APPENDIX A

TABLE 1A Survey Distribution by Country and Legislative Period.

Country	Legislative Period	Interviews
Argentina	2009–2015	67
	2021–2025	110
Bolivia	2015–2020	93
	2021–2025	101
Chile	2014–2018	68
	2022–2026	76
Colombia	2018–2022	74
	2022–2026	79
Costa Rica	2018–2022	55
	2022–2026	44
Dominican Republic	2016–2020	61
	2020–2024	97
Ecuador	2017–2021	88
	2021–2025	82
El Salvador	2015–2018	56
	2018–2021	79
Guatemala	2012–2016	87
	2016–2020	78
Honduras	2018–2022	92
	2021–2025	86
Mexico	2015–2018	100
	2018–2021	103
Nicaragua	2012–2017	52
	2017–2022	59
Panama	2014–2019	47
	2019–2023	61
Paraguay	2013–2018	55
	2018–2023	51
Peru	2016–2021	73
	2021–2026	57
Uruguay	2015–2020	69
	2020–2025	81
Venezuela	2016–2021	67

TABLE 2A Descriptive Statistics.

Variable	Frequencies and means (percentages and sd)
Satisfaction with Democracy	
Dissatisfied	885 (36.5%)
Satisfied	1,542 (63.5%)
Winner	
Government	1,055 (43.1%)
Other	1,393 (56.9%)
President's Legislative Powers	1.609 (0.784)
Legislature's Policy-Making Powers	1.909 (0.839)
Agenda Setting	
Legislators	514 (21.3%)
Other	1,897 (78.7%)
ENPP	3.449 (1.545)
First Time Legislator	
Previous experience	844 (34.5%)
First time Legislator	1,600 (65.5%)
Gender	
Woman	740 (30.4%)
Man	1,691 (69.6%)
Age	47.87 (11.29)
Liberal Democracy	0.49 (0.19)
N	2,448

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHIES

Mar Martínez Rosón is an Associate Professor at University of Salamanca. Her research focuses on ambition and political career, political representation, and gender in Latin America. roson@usal.es

Margarita Corral is a Lecturer and Data Analysis Specialist at Brandeis University. Her research interests include political representation, political ideology, political parties and public opinion in Latin America. mcorral@brandeis.edu

Araceli Mateos (PhD, University of Salamanca) is an Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Salamanca. Her lines of research are linked to the influence of political attitudes on political and electoral behavior, public opinion studies, and research methodology. amd@usal.es