Democratic Commitment: Explaining Citizens' Tolerance for Democratic Backsliding

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Habilitation

Democratic Commitment: Explaining Citizens' Tolerance for Democratic Backsliding

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Authorship statement

The formal requirement for a cumulative habilitation at the Department of Humanities, Social and Political Sciences of ETH Zurich foresees the submission of at least five publishable manuscripts, for three of which the applicant must be the sole or main author.

My habilitation is composed of two single-authored chapters of a book manuscript and three co-authored studies in article format. I am the main author for Study 1, co-written with Marc. S. Jacob and Laurenz Derksen whom I hired, respectively, as PhD Student and Research Assistant on the Swiss National Science Foundation grant that funds my habilitation research. I share equal co-authorship with Theresa Gessler for Studies 2 and 3, once as first and once as second author.

Cambridge, 24 September 2022

Natasha Wunsch

Introduction

The Puzzle of Citizen Tolerance for Democratic Backsliding

Democratic backsliding has become a major concern globally in recent years. Following the gradual expansion of democracy during the third wave of democratisation, the reverse phenomenon of declining democratic quality has since spread widely, including to several advanced democracies. Democratic backsliding consists of a 'state-led debilitation or elimination of any of the political institutions that sustain an existing democracy' (Bermeo 2016, 5–6). As such, it represents a specific form of the broader process termed 'autocratisation' that describes any movement away from democracy, including in the form of autocratic regression where the starting point of the process is already situated below the threshold towards a democratic system (Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Cassani and Tomini 2018). In contrast to the earlier blatant attacks against democracy leading to democratic breakdown, democratic backsliding tends to proceed more gradually via 'incumbent takeover' (Svolik 2015) or 'executive aggrandizement' (Bermeo 2016, 10), whereby an elected government gradually erodes democratic safeguards, occasionally to the point of dismantling them completely.

Political elites are thus the central agents of backsliding processes. At the same time, citizens play a key role in supporting – or at least tolerating – undemocratic practices by elected leaders. In electoral settings, they are the ones who allow authoritarian-leaning leaders to access power during the initial electoral contest. More importantly, they have periodic opportunities, via elections, to confirm or reject leaders who begin to engage in backsliding practices. As long as such elections remain reasonably free and fair, citizens thus represent the ultimate bulwark against democratic

backsliding. And yet, there are multiple instances of democratic backsliding in which voters have continued to support authoritarian-leaning leaders, enabling them to pursue the gradual dismantling of democratic safeguards over several electoral cycles. Survey evidence indicating widespread support for democracy among citizens from functioning democracies and backsliding countries alike (Wuttke et al. 2020) makes voters' failure to protect democracy at the ballot box all the more puzzling. This raises the central question my habilitation sets out to tackle: *Why do citizens in established democracies tolerate democratic backsliding?*

My central argument focuses on the role political culture – or more precisely, divergent democratic attitudes among citizens – plays in explaining the electoral success and enduring public support for authoritarian-leaning leaders despite their open violations of democratic standards. I posit that a lack of attitudinal consolidation around liberal democratic norms leaves important parts of the electorate vulnerable to buy-outs and illiberal appeals by political elites. Where weak commitment to liberal democracy among citizens and elites' willingness to consolidate their grip on power by dismantling checks and balances coincide, we can expect democratic backsliding to take hold.

My main contention is that despite widespread generic support for democracy as a regime form, divergent understandings of the core principles of democracy persist among citizens and affect their political behaviour. Leveraging different qualitative and quantitative methods, my habilitation seeks to open up the black box of generic 'support for democracy' to examine how such support relates to the concept of liberal democracy and how possible divergent understandings of democracy may explain citizen's failure to act against political elites engaged a backsliding. The distinct components of my habilitation explore different facets of the supposed

linkage between political culture and political behaviour to demonstrate the crucial role citizens' democratic attitudes play in enabling the deepening and entrenchment of democratic backsliding.

Bringing together two chapters of a book manuscript and three independent studies, my habilitation builds on extensive empirical material including focus groups and original survey data. I focus empirically on the cases of Poland and Hungary, two countries that were initially hailed as frontrunners of post-communist democratisation but have since experienced deepening societal polarisation and a gradual erosion of democratic standards. In Poland, democratic backsliding has taken hold since the arrival in power of the Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwosc*, or PiS) following the October 2015 parliamentary elections. As the first government since the country's democratic transition able to rule without any coalition partner, PiS has has engaged in continuous efforts to dismantle the country's checks and balances, establishing what country experts have qualified as a 'purely majoritarian democracy' (Sadurski 2018, 3) or a 'ruthlessly majoritarian' government style bent on dismantling any constraints on the executive (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016, 58). As of 2016, Poland was downgraded from a 'liberal' to an 'electoral democracy' according to the Varieties of Democracy indicator on regime type (Lührmann et al. 2018). Freedom House began classifying the country as a 'semi-consolidated' rather than a consolidated democracy following the reelection of the PiS party in 2019 (Freedom House 2020).

The Hungarian case offers an even starker example of democratic backsliding carried out by the Fidesz government and party leader Viktor Orbán from 2010 onwards (Ágh 2016; Bogaards 2018; Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018). In 2019, Hungary became the first European country to be downgraded by V-Dem to an 'electoral autocracy,' an assessment recently confirmed by the

European Parliament in a resolution that gained overwhelming support from MEPs (European Parliament 2022). Orbán, meanwhile in his fourth consecutive mandate, has been able to use his repeated electoral confirmation to consolidate his grip on power despite open violations of the rule of law. The failure of a united opposition coalition supporting a common candidate to overturn Orbán's rule at the latest parliamentary elections in April 2022 indicates the depth of the entrenchment of democratic backsliding in Hungary, with the last two elections no longer qualified as 'free and fair' by the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE).

Overall, Poland and Hungary thus represent prominent cases of democratic backsliding that are located at different stages of this process. Poland can be considered a democracy at a crossroads: significant steps towards democratic erosion have already occured, but elections erstwhile remain sufficiently competitive for voters still to be able to remove an authoritarian-leaning government by electoral means. In light of the increasing pressure on judicial independence and free media, citizens effectively stand center-stage as potential safeguards against a further dismantling of checks and balances and a full breakdown of democracy. In Hungary, in turn, democratic backsliding has proceeded to a point where a reversal of the ruling party at the ballot box appears increasingly unlikely. Citizens are therefore structurally constrained in their ability to resist a further dismantling of domestic checks and balances at the hands of Viktor Orbán. By probing the the linkages between citizens' understandings of democracy and their willingness to tolerate democratic backsliding, I am therefore able generate insights that are likely to hold in a range of contexts in which democracy comes under threat by an overpowering executive.

In the remainder of this introduction, I situate my argument in the existing literature that focuses primarily on the role of partisan polarisation as the main explanation for citizens' failure to act as bulwarks against democratic backsliding. I then develop my overarching theoretical argument in more detail and highlight the main contributions I consider my habilitation to make. Finally, I outline the different components of my project and briefly summarize the main insights of each of them.

Beyond Partisan Polarisation: Political Culture and Understandings of Democracy

The bulk of the literature on citizens' role in democratic backsliding has focused upon partisan or societal polarisation as the key explanation for voters' willingness to overlook democratic violations by elected leaders. Such broader societal divides underpinning processes of democratic backsliding have been qualified as 'pernicious' (McCoy and Somer 2018) or 'affective' polarisation (Orhan 2021; Kingzette et al. 2021). In essence, these approaches view voters as trading off partisan or in-group loyalty against support for democracy, with 'partisan double standards' (Graham & Svolik 2020) or 'democratic hypocrisy' (Simonovits et al. 2022) leading them to punish co-partisans less harshly for democratic violations than out-party candidates. Empirical studies of this dynamic have focused primarily on bi-partisan contexts and in particular the United States (Graham and Svolik 2020; Grossman et al. 2021; Simonovits et al. 2022), but even these settings have not consistently confirmed the expected effect of partisan polarisation (Gidengil et al. 2021; Carey et al. 2020).

That partisan loyalty affects voters' willingness to overlook democratic violations by their preferred candidate appears plausible. Still, positing partisan polarisation as the primary

mechanism explaining voters' tolerance for democratic backsliding would seem to imply that most voters recognise democratic violations in principle, but are either willing to discount them against partisan considerations or interpret such behaviours differently based on whether or not they are carried out by a co-partisan. I argue instead that voters may well be guided by fundamentally *divergent* conceptions of democracy, leading some to view certain practices as perfectly compatible with democracy, while others consider them to represent fundamental democratic violations.

Mass attitudes and public support for democracy have long been recognized as central factors shaping the depth and stability of democratic systems (Almond and Verba 1963; Easton 1965; 1975). Alongside the emergence of a stable institutional framework, a firm normative commitment to democracy among elites and citizens alike is seen as key to democratic consolidation. More recent studies drawing on longitudinal public opinion surveys confirm the positive effect of public support on subsequent democratic change as well as the endurance of democracy (Claassen 2020) or highlight significant divergence in citizens' level of regime support within democracies and autocracies alike (Mauk 2020). Despite broad consensus on the importance of public support for democratic stability however, the role of citizens' political attitudes remains underexplored in debates around democratic backsliding. In their comprehensive overview of different potential explanations of this phenomenon, Waldner and Lust dismiss political culture as an irrelevant dimension, arguing that:

> These structural features of political culture render these theories a low-probability bet to explain backsliding, for that would require both a democratic status quo that was consistent with underlying cultural values and practices and a subsequent reversal of democratic fortunes that was also consistent with underlying cultural norms. (2018: 99)

However, rejecting political culture as an explanatory factor with reference to its structural and enduring nature is problematic on two counts. For one, it seems to suppose a natural overlap between democratic norms held by citizens and the level of formal democracy, with the democratic status quo merely reflecting the level of public support for democracy. In contrast, scholarship on political culture has treated the relationship between values and beliefs and the political system as a chicken-and-egg question. Proponents of the 'human development theory' expect democratic government to result from widespread democratic values among the citizenry (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), with value change thus preceding formal democratisation. On the other hand, others see democratic stability as depending on the concomitant consolidation of a popular consensus around democratic attitudes (Rose et al. 1998, 95–96; Schmitter and Santiso 1998), with political attitudes catching up with institutional change. Overall, to expect underlying cultural norms to be systematically in sync with the level of formal democracy makes unnecessarily strong assumptions about the rigidity of norms over time and their parallel development with institutional processes.

More problematically still, refuting the relevance of political culture in processes of democratic backsliding is compelling only if we suppose a largely homogeneous political culture in each country that would drive democratic quality in one or the other direction. In practice, it seems much more likely for *distinct* democratic attitudes to co-exist in a given population, resulting in individual citizens being more or less prone to vigorously defending liberal democratic norms when faced with a real-life, multidimensional election situation. The central objective of my habilitation is therefore to explore the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes among citizens as well as the linkages between such attitudes and citizens' responses to democratic backsliding.

Theoretical Argument: Democratic Attitudes and their Impact on Political Behaviour

My argument is premised upon a liberal conception of democracy in which free and fair elections are complemented by strong guarantees of civil and political freedoms and the presence of counter-majoritarian constraints on executive power. I contend that citizens' tolerance of democratic backsliding results from a lack of attitudinal consolidation around such liberal democratic norms. This argument challenges the generally implicit assumption made by most previous studies of democratic backsliding that citizens share a common understanding of democracy and are therefore able to recognize democratic violations, leading them to actively trade off undemocratic practices against alternative values or benefits. In contrast, I suggest that even in reasonably consolidated democracies, alternative conceptions of democracy – including ones that are at odds with core liberal democratic norms – co-exist and inform citizens' political behaviour and eventual vote choice. The robustness of support for democracy thus becomes less a question of weighing up democratic attitudes against political candidates' personal, partisan, or policy-related characteristics, and instead a matter of divergent democratic attitudes that guide citizens' electoral choice.

In a nutshell, a lack of attitudinal consolidation – in the form of a persistence of divergent democratic attitudes among the population – constitutes a key vulnerability of a political system that authoritarian-leaning leaders can exploit to expand their powers and gradually cement their dominant position. I thus argue that weak commitment to liberal democracy undermines citizens' role as effective checks against democratic violations by leaving parts of the electorate vulnerable to authoritarian-leaning leaders who can seek to appeal to such alternative understandings to legitimate their actions. Ultimately, I contend that democratic backsliding occurs when non-liberal

or inconsistent democratic attitudes among the citizenry coincide with political elites willing to exploit this situation to push through an excessive accumulation of executive power. My habilitation focuses primarily on the demand side of this argument, i.e., the dimension of citizens' understandings of democracy and their impact on political choice.

My focus on the role of deep-seated variation in citizens' democratic attitudes suggests that the enduring stability of democracy depends not only on the democratic commitment of political elites, but crucially also upon a corresponding consolidation of liberal democratic norms among the electorate. Where this commitment is shallow or unequally developed across different groups of citizens, parts of the electorate remain open to tolerating democratic backsliding, resulting in continued electoral support for authoritarian-leaning leaders despite their open violations of democracy. By examining the linkages between political culture and political behaviour and relating the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes among citizens to vote choice, my habilitation investigates the micro-foundations of the relationship between mass attitudes and democratic stability.

In general, my habilitation makes three key contributions to ongoing debates. First, it elaborates a novel theoretical argument to explain citizen tolerance for democratic backsliding by singling out liberal democratic commitment as a central mechanism driving vote choice in such contexts. Citizens in backsliding countries, I argue, do not simply trade off democratic violations against partisan considerations or other benefits expected from a given candidate in a political competition. Instead, they hold fundamentally divergent conceptions of democracy that lead them to consider practices others view as open violations of democratic standards to be perfectly compatible with

their own understanding of democracy. Drawing on a broad range of empirical sources and methods, my habilitation demonstrates the crucial role citizens' understandings of democracy play in enabling the enduring success of authoritarian-leaning leaders.

Second, my habilitation contributes to the understanding of post-communist democratisation and its challenges. It underlines the enduring divergence in citizens' conceptions of democracy that leaves parts of the electorate vulnerable to majoritarian appeals or instrumental buy-outs. This lack of attitudinal consolidation threatens earlier achievements in democratisation by allowing political leaders to undermine the formal institutions, from judicial independence to the very electoral process, that underpin the democratic system. My findings suggest that the firm anchoring of liberal democratic norms is not only the final stage in the process of democratic consolidation (Offe 1991), but that the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes among citizens effectively constitutes an enduring vulnerability of democratic systems that can be exploited by elites seeking to undermine democratic achievements.

Third, my habilitation speaks to the literature on political culture and divergent understandings of democracy. I make the case for supplementing the study of mass attitudes and their impact on democratic stability with a closer scrutiny of individual-level divergence regarding support for liberal democratic principles. Factoring this attitudinal dimension into the analysis of political behaviour alongside ideological and policy-related factors can inform research into the determinants of voting behaviour and the interactions between demand and supply in the field of electoral studies.

Components of the habilitation

My cumulative habilitation is composed of two chapters from an ongoing book project and three independent studies in article format. Jointly, these contributions offer a comprehensive insight into citizens' democratic attitudes in Hungary and Poland and examine the impact of such attitudes upon tolerance for democratic backsliding and the wider structure of the political system.

The two chapters investigate the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes among citizens in contexts of democratic backsliding from different vantage points. Chapter 1 provides a qualitative analysis of distinct understandings of democracy based on focus group discussions among ordinary citizens in Hungary and Poland. The focus groups serve an exploratory purpose by offering an in-depth perspective on divergent democratic attitudes in the wider population. On this basis, I build an inductive typology that distinguishes between liberal, majoritarian, instrumental, and authoritarian attitudes. I describe the main features of these distinct perspectives with regards to the main source of democratic legitimacy, the roles of political leaders and citizens, and the resulting vulnerability for a democratic system.

Building on this typology, Chapter 2 develops a survey battery to examine the distribution and determinants of distinct understandings of democracy among representative samples of Hungarian and Polish citizens. It starts by demonstrating that existing measures from longitudinal surveys only insufficiently capture distinct understandings of democracy that persist even among citizens of reasonably consolidated democracies. My more nuanced analysis uncovers a large share of weak liberals across both populations and the presence of non-liberal attitudes among sizeable groups in both countries. Strong liberals, in contrast, remain a small minority and largely confined

to highly educated individuals enjoying financial stability. These patterns provide an empirical baseline for the subsequent analyses of the linkages between understandings of democracy and political choice.

Turning from the mapping to the consequences of divergent democratic attitudes, Studies 1 and 2 employ two candidate conjoint experiments that directly explore the relationship between distinct democratic attitudes and citizens' vote choice. Focusing on the Polish case, Study 1 sheds a pessimistic light on citizens' ability to act as a bulwark against democratic backsliding. By matching respondents' democratic preferences with democratic standpoints voiced by competing candidates, it assesses to what extent their level of liberal democratic commitment affects citizens' willingness to tolerate democratic backsliding. The experimental evidence confirms that respondents who embrace majoritarian or authoritarian attitudes towards democracy not only accept democratic violations more readily, but do so irrespective of a given candidate's partisan affiliation. Divergent understandings of democracy thus appear to explain a considerable portion of tolerance for democratic backsliding in the Polish context.

The findings from Study 2, conducted in Hungary, are less clear-cut. The experimental set-up seeks to probe the presence of a 'mosaic pattern' of support, whereby an authoritarian-leaning leader would be able to ensure enduring electoral support by offering a range of transactional payoffs to different voter groups. The study examines both direct trade-offs between democratic violations and alternative benefits – spanning a leader's culturally conservative position, economic buy-outs, or general views of democracy – as well as subgroup effects based on respondents' economic status and level of education and religiosity. Intriguingly, the strongest finding concerns

the clear rejection by Hungarian respondents of political leaders who advocate for a weakening of judicial independence. I discuss how the discrepancy between these experimental patterns and real-life enduring support for Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party may signal the limitations of conjoint experiments, but also the structural constraints – in particular the tilted electoral playing field – Hungarian voters face in translating their democratic preferences into political outcomes.

The final component, Study 3, goes beyond the individual-level linkage between understandings of democracy and vote choice to explore the systemic consequences of a protracted period of democratic backsliding upon affective polarisation between government and opposition supporters. This study contends that backsliding crystallizes an affective dislike among opposition supporters towards the governing party and its supporters that stems from divergent views of democracy itself. Leveraging survey data from Hungary and Poland, it pinpoints a clear government-opposition affective divide and shows how liberal democratic attitudes in particular among opposition supporters play into this dynamic. These findings suggest that where backsliding persists over a longer period, this process can shift even multi-party systems towards increasing bipolarity along a 'democratic divide.' Ultimately, this pattern indicates that affective polarisation may not necessarily be detrimental in contexts of democratic backsliding, but can instead play a positive role by contributing to unite the opposition around the defense of democracy.

Overall, the different components of my habilitation shed light on the puzzle of citizen tolerance for democratic backsliding in two crucial cases of this phenomenon in Europe, Hungary and Poland. I explore the heterogeneity and distribution of democratic attitudes among citizens and probe their impact upon vote choice as well as the broader structure of the political system. My

findings suggest not only that weak liberal democratic commitment is pervasive among the populations of both countries, but also that divergent democratic attitudes shape voters' responses to authoritarian-leaning leadership and can affect the very structure of political competition by forging new cleavages among the electorate.

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Chapter 1

Beyond Uniformity: Understandings of Democracy among Ordinary Citizens

To act as bulwarks against democratic backsliding, citizens need to have a clear understanding of what it is they are defending. So what does democracy mean to ordinary citizens? And to what extent does their conception of democracy align with a liberal definition of democracy premised upon comprehensive civic freedoms and limitations of executive power? Most empirical studies of mass attitudes towards democracy rely on broadly phrased survey questions about the extent to which citizens support 'democracy' or their relative approval for 'democratic governance' compared to various alternatives. On this basis, scholars conclude either that support for democratic norms is universally high (Weßels 2015; Wuttke et al. 2020) or provide a contested interpretation of impending 'deconsolidation' based on an alleged decline of popular support for democracy (Foa and Mounk 2016, 2017). What these studies tend to have in common is that they expect citizens to have a coherent, stable and – most importantly – common conception of democracy.

This chapter steps away from such top-down, researcher-driven measures of support for democracy to give space to citizens' views expressed in their own words. In doing so, it addresses what has been termed the 'software' of democracy (Agh 1996 quoted in Rose et al. 1998, p. 8), namely citizens' attitudes. These form the crucial complement to the institutional 'hardware' of a democratic system. The chapter probes the assumption that divergent understandings of democracy exist not just at the cross-national level but within the same population. Given citizens' central role in election processes, but also more broadly as democratic subjects, it seems crucial to

assess whether democracy means different things to different people, and how those understandings inform their evaluations of key elements in a democratic system.

To paint a fuller portrait of citizens' understandings of democracy, this chapter adopts a grounded perspective that draws on qualitative material collected via focus groups in Poland and Hungary. The open-ended nature of focus groups allows me to address both the multi-dimensional nature of democracy and the diversity of attitudes within the population. Rather than assuming that all citizens understand democracy similarly, this chapter thus engages in an exploratory inquiry of citizens' democratic attitudes. Moreover, the interactive dimension of the focus group set-up also sheds light on the way citizens negotiate democratic views and justify or adapt their perspectives. The objective is to uncover the various meanings citizens attach to democracy and to build an inductive typology of distinct understandings.

Such an approach is promising for a number of reasons. Theoretically speaking, it stands to provide fresh insights into discussions around political culture and citizens' beliefs about democratic principles and values. Mirroring earlier debates around 'democracies with adjectives,' Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) have pointed to 'democrats with adjectives' to describe the diverse views citizens hold on the substance of democracy. Similarly, Landwehr and Steiner (2017) have shown that different people can understand democracy in distinct, even opposing ways, resulting in a lack of consensus over specific political arrangements. A burgeoning literature on understandings of democracy indicates persistent divergence in citizens' democratic attitudes (Carlin and Singer 2011; Canache 2012; Davis et al. 2021; Ferrín and Kriesi 2016; Bakule 2020). By empirically exploring such distinct understandings of democracy against the backdrop of democratic

backsliding, this chapter sheds light on the ways in which divergent understandings may affect citizens' evaluations of the state of democracy in such contexts.

Ultimately, this chapter serves to probe the first part of my theoretical argument regarding the heterogeneity of citizen's democratic attitudes. By lending ordinary citizens voice, it offers an in-depth perspective on divergent democratic attitudes in the wider population that exclusively survey-based studies fail to capture. I begin by describing the process of data collection and data analysis via focus groups. The next two sections present the empirical insights on understandings of democracy in Hungary and Poland. A comparative section confronts the findings from both case studies. It draws out their broader insights and implications with respect to citizens' tolerance of democratic backsliding and develops an inductive typology of distinct conceptions of democracy that map their main features. The concluding section places the findings in the broader context of the book's argument and explains how they inform the operationalisation of democratic attitudes for subsequent use in the quantitative and experimental analyses presented in the following chapters.

Mapping understandings of democracy via focus groups

In this book, I use focus groups to probe the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes among citizens. Focus groups serve to "understand how a particular population or group process and negotiate meaning around a given situation" (Stanley 2016, p. 236). In contrast to research that draws on pre-established theories, focus groups privilege the perspective of the subject when gathering data (Cyr 2019, p. 10). The open-ended format of the focus group interview allows me to capture the complexity of citizens' views of democracy outside pre-established categories. The purpose of

focus groups for my research is thus two-fold: on the one hand, they enable the collection of in-depth, nuanced perceptions of democracy from the perspective of ordinary citizens, complementing and contextualising the quantitative findings presented in later chapters. On the other hand, the inductive typology built from the focus group material serves to inform and adapt the formulation of survey items probing citizens' support for liberal democracy and its alternatives in subsequent analyses.

This chapter draws on empirical material collected from nine focus groups comprising 52 participants in total. An initial pilot focus group was conducted in Warsaw in September 2020 to fine-tune the questionnaire and group composition, with four subsequent focus groups organised in Poland in November 2020 and in Hungary in February 2021. The focus group interviews lasted for between 90 and 120 minutes each and facilitated by a professional moderator in Polish and Hungarian, respectively. The same moderator conducted all groups in one country. The moderators received a discussion guide containing seven key questions along which the group interview should be organised (see appendix). The questionnaire was organised along a funnelling approach (Krueger 1998, p. 39), with an initial broader discussion ("Please describe what democracy means to you.") followed by several narrower, more focused questions.

Citizens' understandings of democracy are the sum of their abstract conceptions of the main features of a democratic system and their evaluations of the day-to-day practice of democracy in their country. The overall logic of the questionnaire thus sought to probe the depth of democratic commitment by exploring both what citizens understand by democracy and how this conception relates to their lived experience of democracy in their country. The same main questions were

asked in each of the focus groups to facilitate a more systematic comparison across groups (Morgan 1998). In addition, I prepared a more detailed moderator briefing containing additional instructions regarding the approximate length of time to spend on each area and how to probe overly general responses. Due to the ongoing Covid pandemic at the time, all but the first pilot interview in Poland took place online. While this virtual format may have reduced direct interactions between participants, it is also likely to have lowered the barrier to express disagreement or potentially more contestable views given that participants were not physically in the same space.

The general advice in composing focus groups is to strive for "homogeneity but with sufficient variation among participants to allow for contrasting opinions" (Krueger and Casey 2015, pp. 79–81). Uniform control characteristics are shared by all groups and thus eliminate variation across groups on these characteristics, facilitating the analysis and interpretation of the findings (Knodel 1993: 41). When composing individual groups, focus group scholars distinguish two main types of characteristics: those that are common to all groups (*control characteristics*) (Knodel 1993, pp. 37–42) and those that differentiate groups from one another (*break characteristics*).

For this study, participants were recruited based on a screening questionnaire to represent 'ordinary citizens' based on the overall distribution of certain socio-demographic chracteristics within the population. Specifically, participants were selected among those who disposed of a sufficient income to cover basic needs or more and had completed secondary education. In addition, respondents had to indicate at least an average interest in politics (choosing at least 3 in a five-point scale asking 'How interested are you in politics?') to be selected as focus group participants.

This criterion aimed to ensure a proper discussion may ensue, rather than participants refraining from voicing any opinion on politics. To reduce complexity and the number of different focus groups to be held, control characteristics ensured that all groups were mixed-gender and contained supporters of different parties in an effort to avoid one-sided discussions.

I used two break characteristics to determine focus group composition: first, groups were divided based on participants' geographical background, with two groups each held in the capital (Warsaw/Budapest), and two others in a smaller town (Lublin/Debrecen). With capitals often crystallizing opposition against democratic backsliding, the smaller towns were chosen based on their high vote share for the ruling party. This allows me to examine how urban/rural divides and the corresponding relative dominance of the governing party play into different understandings of democracy. Second, the groups differed according to generational cohort. Scholarship on post-communist democratisation has highlighted the enduring legacy of Communism and its impact on political attitudes (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017). This generational divide translated into four groups held among younger participants aged 25-40 years and four groups among participants aged 50-65 years. By selecting clearly distinct age brackets, I sought to ensure a differentiation between groups with and without Communist exposure while avoiding too large age differences within the group that may have resulted in seniority effects silencing younger, less experienced participants. Table 1 summarizes the sampling strategy for the focus groups.

Table 1: Focus group composition

	Type of characteristic		
Characteristic	**Uniform control**	**Composition control**	**Break**
Socio-economic status min. middle-range	X		
Education Completed secondary	X		
Generation 25-40 50-65		X	
Gender Male vs. female		X	
Region Urban Rural			X
Party preference Governing party Opposition party			X

I conducted the analysis of the focus group interviews in MaxQDA. All focus group interviews were recorded in audio and video format and these recordings were used to prepare a verbatim transcription and subsequent translation into English. Each transcript was between 21 and 28 single-spaced pages in length. The initial coding scheme was organised along the structure of the discussion guide (open coding) and further developed in an iterative process moving between the coding scheme and the transcripts. The overall coding process combined *a priori* codes referring to specific topics or theoretical concepts with *in vivo* codes generated from the transcripts themselves (Barbour 2018). I designed the coding process in such a way as to explore how distinct higher-level understandings of democracy relate to participants' specific evaluations of the state of the democracy in their country and their perception of the role of political leaders and citizens in a democratic system. This systematic approach facilitates a constant comparison analysis (Leech and Onwuegbuzie 2007, pp. 565–566) across groups and between the two countries to which we now turn.

Democratic disillusionment in Hungary

Hungarian focus groups portray a broadly liberal conception of democracy shared by most of the focus group participants. Civil liberties and equal rights are central to most participants, along with a fairly well-articulated understanding of the central institutional safeguards of democracy. The second section contrasts this with their pessimistic assessments of democratic practice in Hungary. Group discussions single out concrete democratic violations along with a general wariness of widespread corruption and growing polarisation. Overall, Hungarian citizens appear disillusioned by their lived experience of democracy. This disenchantment manifests itself in a rather apathetic view of citizen involvement and a willingness to engage in trade-offs between democratic performance and alternative benefits when it comes to vote choice.

Meanings of democracy: a broadly consensual liberal view

Hungarian focus group participants generally embrace a fairly liberal conception of democracy. Across all four groups, civil liberties and individual freedoms feature prominently. For most participants, 'freedom,' 'freedom of the individual,' 'freedom of speech,' or 'freedom of expression' are among the first associations mentioned when asked what democracy means to them. As one participant summarized: "Freedom. (…) This is the essence for everyone. (…) Everyone mentioned freedom of religion, speech, elections" (male, 51, Jobbik, Debrecen). Participants often associate individual freedoms with tolerance for others, especially in a polarised climate. According to a Fidesz supporter, "freedom of expression came to my mind but in a way that we respect the opinion of the others. Even if it is the opposite of ours" (female, 53, Fidesz, Debrecen). Another emphasised that divergent political views should not result in any negative

consequences for the individual, so that "(…) everyone is free to form an opinion, we do not judge people because of this. For example, you do not get into a worse position at a workplace or anywhere else because of it" (male, 25, Fidesz, Budapest). This emphasis on tolerance and non-discrimination was somewhat nuanced by an older participant from Debrecen who pointed to social norms as limits to freedom of expression: "We have to keep those social norms that have been set over the decades or centuries in written or unwritten form" (male, 65, Fidesz, Debrecen).

For the younger groups, media freedom plays a particularly important role. One participant highlighted that "you cannot live in a democracy in a way that you know nothing about your environment, and especially not if this information is filtered or manipulated" (male, 25, left-wing, Debrecen). This view is echoed even by supporters of the ruling Fidesz party, with another participant emphasizing that "as for free and independent press and media, it should not be influenced, governed by the given government" (female, 39, Fidesz, Budapest). These views contrast sharply with the increasingly restricted space for independent media in Hungary.

A second crucial element in citizens' conceptions of democracy concerns equality among citizens. Most fundamentally, this refers to equal rights for all, with participants stating that "everyone has the same rights in a democracy" (female, 39, Fidesz, Debrecen) and that "in a society that claims to be a democracy (…) there can be no differences made between individual and individual" (male, 40, Debrecen, Fidesz). Again, strong overtones of non-discrimination are voiced by several participants, in particular by those who do not support the governing Fidesz party. According to a left-wing participant, "it does not matter where we stand, we should have more or less the same opportunities" (male, 25, Debrecen, left-wing). Others list more explicitly the reasons for which

citizens should not be discriminated, emphasising that "for me democracy is where everyone is of equal value irrespective of their gender, race, religion" (female, 56, Budapest, Párbeszéd) or that "by equality I mean that all people are equal and they should not be discriminated based on their gender or religious or political opinion" (female, 33, Budapest, centre).

However, the endorsement of equal rights is not unconditional. Several participants instead underscore the correspondence between rights and obligations, for instance indicating that "equality of rights (…) means that obligations should also be shared equally" (male, 65, Budapest, Fidesz). These participants express an unease with citizens who allegedly fail to play their part in society and thus forfeit their entitlement to equal rights. In the words of a left-wing participant from Debrecen, "we can expect anything from society if we also add our own part. Without doing my part I cannot expect anything either I think" (female, 40, left-wing, Debrecen). A particularly harsh statement even questions the equal worth of citizens who do not contribute economically to society:

> I would add to the concept being of the same worth as others that it also depends on how much people contribute to the common good. We should consider those to be equal who do the same good for the community or have the same level of attitude to work. For example, I would not consider those to be equal who are not working or who are loungers with those who are careerists, observe the rules, work 8 hours with integrity. (male, 26, Fidesz, Debrecen)

Several participants in the younger Debrecen group concur with this view, with one expressing that "it sounds nice that all people are equal and we do everything equally but I would also make a difference in the sense that they should be useful members of society" (female, 40, left-wing, Debrecen). This position was also echoed by a discussion in the older Debrecen group about citizens' 'sense of responsibility,' with citizens who depend on social benefits not seen as entitled to negative opinions on the regime:

> It is easy to attack and say why this or that person won when they don't go to vote and don't meet their obligations as citizens. The same in connection with work. They do not only have the right to work but also an obligation so that they would not look at which social benefits they can use to live or raise children at a certain level. (…) And usually those people look for bad things and have negative opinion in most cases, both in terms of voting and other issues, who are not looking for the right path or maybe the more difficult one that can mean work, but the easier one, the loopholes. And it is always them who have negative opinions. (female, 53, Fidesz, Debrecen)

The notion that equality needs to be deserved stands in sharp contrast to the expansive social welfare provided during Communist times. As such, it seems to translate a particular projection of capitalist views on productive citizens that punishes those who are unable or unwilling to become economically self-reliant. It is striking to find this view expressed across the political board, including by citizens holding left-wing orientations.

A final dimension of meanings of democracy concerns the formal set-up of the political system. This dimension, often key in academic definitions, appears somewhat less centrally in the focus group discussions compared to civil liberties and equal rights. Older citizens from Hungary more frequently refer to free and competitive elections as a main feature of democracy, signalling the contrast with the single-party Communist system. A Fidesz supporter from Budapest stated "for me it means that everyone is free to vote every four years at the elections. Everyone can freely decide who they vote for" (female, 58, Fidesz, Budapest). Others highlighted "regime change and the multi-party system" as main characteristics of democracy (female, 56, Budapest, DK) or underlined that "one of the most important pillars is the multi-party system" (male, 40, Debrecen, Fidesz). A Jobbik supporter declared that "this is the point of democracy: there is not only one party where you are told what to do but you can freely choose what you like most" (male, 51, Jobbik, Debrecen).

The multi-party system was often mentioned in conjunction with opposition rights and checks and balances on the government. A younger participant from Debrecen claimed that "in a multiparty system it is not one party in charge as in a dictatorship but there is an opposition that also has a say in government" (female, 40, right-wing, Debrecen). Several participants from the younger group in Budapest also explicitly referred to the importance of a clear separation of powers. One indicated that "the three branches of power, executive, legislative and judicial are independent from each other but they also check on each other." (female, 33, centre, Budapest), while another – interestingly a Fidesz supporter – mentioned "independent courts: their work should not be influenced by the government either" (female, 38, Fidesz, Budapest). The contrast between citizens' principled support for checks and balances and the current concentration of powers at the hands of the Fidesz government becomes a central theme in discussions around evaluations of democratic practice.

Overall, Hungarian participants tend to associate democracy primarily with individual freedoms and equal rights. Despite broad consensus around the importance of equality and civil liberties however, participants are willing to accept several limitations, most notably when it comes to respect for social norms as a restriction to freedom of expression and a rather widely held view that access to equal rights requires citizens to play a productive role in the economy. The institutional dimension of democracy features less prominently in discussions, but tends to emphasize competitive elections and the separation of powers. In sum then, Hungarian citizens tend to embrace a rather liberal view of democracy in the abstract. This contrasts with their evaluations of the concrete state of democracy in their country.

Evaluations of democratic practice: a deeply pessimistic assessment

Asked to what extent Hungarian democracy corresponds to the kind of democracy in which they would like to live, focus group discussions become deeply pessimistic. Participants consider that the system is "far away from democracy" (male, 25, left-wing, Debrecen), there is "fake democracy" (male, 51, Debrecen, Jobbik) or indicate "zero" correspondence (male, 57, Democratic Coalition, Debrecen) between their democratic ideal and the democratic practice in Hungary. Citizens are able to pinpoint rather precisely where they see the main deficiencies and contrast these explicitly with the preceding discussion on abstract understandings: "Exactly because here we almost uniformly said freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, freedom of the press. We have none of these" (male, 57, DK, Debrecen). Focus group participants highlight the concentration of powers in the hands of Fidesz as the main problem:

> "I mentioned the rule of law and the separation of the three branches of power, executive, legislative and judicial. I think this is not really present here. The way I see it is that the executive branch is making the laws while they should be made by Parliament. Although we have to add that FIDESZ has a two-thirds majority. And they can achieve quite a lot. And I think this is quite a big problem. But it is the same way with the judicial branch. They are not fully independent either." (female, 33, centre, Budapest)

In the words of another, "there is a single-party system, they decide alone, they do what they want. If there is something they don't like, they modify the law. They do whatever they want as they can do anything" (male, 51, Debrecen, Jobbik). Participants link the hollowing of democratic standards to Fidesz's extensive media control, claiming that "what happens depends on what one or a few people say. And the others are silenced" (male, 51, Debrecen, Jobbik) or "if there is anything that Fidesz does not like, they immediately begin to hide things, begin to suppress, especially in the press" (male, 25, left-wing, Debrecen).

Equality is also considered to be under threat under the current Fidesz government, from two sides. For one, discrimination against certain groups undermines the equality of citizens, with a participant from Budapest claiming that "I think equality is also damaged because they stigmatize certain people, let them be women or gay, or someone with different religious beliefs" (female, 33, centre, Budapest). In addition, corrupt and nepotistic practices are seen to weaken the equality of rights: "There are people who are more equal and people for whom not the same rules apply" (female, 32, centre, Budapest). Another laments that "in a democracy (…) all common good should affect everyone the same way. What we see now is that those who are more familiar with politics or have connections, they can succeed much more in private life and business as well" (male, 26, Fidesz, Debrecen). An older participant explicitly contrasts democracy and widespread corruption in the attribution of public tenders: "It is not a democracy that all the tenders are won by the same group. Or the same person" (male, 57, Democratic Coalition, Debrecen).

Fidesz supporters tend to relativize some opposition supporters' harsh criticism of the Orbán government by engaging in broader system-level comparisons. On the one hand, they downplay the analogy between Fidesz rule and single-party domination under the Communist regime: "I think that in comparison with the previous system the framework is completely different. I would say it is better than it was. I am not saying that in many cases it is way better, but it is better than it was" (male, 36, Fidesz, Budapest). Mirroring a frequent practice by Fidesz politicians, others refer to political systems with similar arrangements to legitimize Fidesz practices for instance when it comes to the undermining of judicial independence: "I think there is some bias but this is also true in the United States. There also it is the politician who helps elect the prosecutor. So unfortunately there is some, but I think it would be the same under any government" (male, 25,

Fidesz, Budapest). Finally, some Fidesz supporters shift the blame from the governing party to opposition supporters whom they see at the source of current tensions in the country:

> "I do not feel there is no democracy. There are probably problems and I can also say that not everything goes in a perfect way but I would not necessarily say that this is the fault of the government or the leading party. (…) I see this among people as well, (…) it is not the Fidesz-voting private individuals who undermine the others, who do not accept it. But those who voted for the opposition." (female, 53, Fidesz, Debrecen)

This latter view reflects the societal polarisation that has deepened considerably since Fidesz' arrival in power, to the point where an opposition supporter even expresses doubt on the benefits of democracy itself when diverging views divide families and friends: "(…) this indicates to me that somehow this global democracy is not good. If we can get this far" (male, 57, DK, Debrecen).

In general, evaluations of democratic practice in Hungary under the Fidesz government contrast sharply with focus group participants' widely shared support for liberal democracy in the form of extensive civil liberties and equal rights. It is interesting to note that Fidesz supporters do not directly contest these negative evaluations. Instead, societal polarisation and the ongoing erosion of democratic standards in Hungary ultimately translate into a deep disillusionment with democracy and, as a result, an openness to alternative perspectives that explain citizens' apathy towards democratic violations by the governing party.

Citizen apathy and openness to alternatives to democracy

Discussions about democracy in the Hungarian focus groups signal a sharp divide between an abstract approval of liberal norms and the lived practice of democratic violations that many participants perceive distinctly. The broad convergence around diffuse support for the ideal of democracy stands in stark contrast to deep pessimism around the specific practice of democracy

in Hungary. This pessimism manifests in two distinct forms, both of which severely undermine citizens' role as defenders of democratic norms in the face of democratic backsliding. First, the gap between a democratic ideal and the day-to-day experience of democratic practice leads to a generalised decline of trust in elites and a passive, almost apathetic view of the role citizens can play in democratic systems. Second, democratic disillusionment makes citizens open to alternatives to a democratic system, be it in the form of strongman leadership or a narrow focus on their individual circumstances rather than the common good.

Democratic disillusionment transpires in several dimensions. For one, there is a wariness when it comes to elections as a means to change political fortunes: "Many people say that they do not go to vote as there is no point, the government has already decided what will happen" (female, 54, Fidesz, Debrecen). Even Fidesz supporters regret a lack of convincing candidates, signalling a generalised distrust in elites: "I cannot find the credibility that would be very important for me in any of the parties. To believe that they will actually do what they promise to do. (…) I feel that all the parties, the opposition have lost their credibility" (female, 38, Fidesz, Budapest). For an opposition supporter, "in Hungary the problem is that we do not vote for someone but against someone" (male, 57, Democratic Coalition, Debrecen). Beyond the electoral process, there is widespread resignation over citizens' ability to shape political processes:

> For me this is difficult, I always feel that if someone is living in Hungary, then obviously we cannot fully influence things so we need to accept what we have. As we live here, we cannot do a lot besides going to vote every four years. But what else can we do? If we live here, this means to me that we have to accept what we have here. (female, 58, Fidesz, Budapest)

Several participants express doubt over the depth of democratic culture and democratic commitment in the country: "(…) in Hungary there is no culture of democracy. People keep

complaining online and among each other but if they need to decide or go to vote or a demonstration, then they don't go" (female, 32, centre, Budapest). Another participant regrets:

> In Hungary I feel that we cannot really handle democracy. Many people do not go to vote because they don't understand that maybe we could live in a much better country if they also expressed their opinion. Somehow people in Hungary don't really know what to do with democracy. (female, 33, centre, Budapest)

In a telling statement, a Fidesz supporter acknowledges the flagrant deficiencies in Hungarian democracy, but sees no reason for concern over the alternative system Viktor Orbán is seeking to build:

> "I think that currently Hungarian democracy is not even close to the values of democracy. (…) In Hungary there is no multiparty system. There are many small parties that are trying to run. (…) The press is under the influence of the government, everything that should not be in a democracy is in the hands of the government. It is not necessarily bad but this is not democracy." (male, 40, Fidesz, Debrecen)

A striking resemblance across all four Hungarian focus groups is the high approval of strongman leadership. Previous research already highlights the puzzle of simultaneous support for democracy and strongman rule in the post-communist region (Lavric & Bieber 2020). Group discussions give insight into the motivations that underpin the alarmingly high rates of survey-based approval for strongman leadership: participants see a strong leader as someone "who executes the will of the people despite all circumstances" (female, 54, Fidesz, Debrecen) or "provides […] a sense of security at least for the majority of the country" (male, 25, left-wing, Debrecen). Besides, participants see a strong leader as more credible, with a left-wing participant expressing that such a person is needed "so that people would believe the leader in a democracy that it will be good this way and it will work like this together" (female, 40, left-wing, Debrecen). Nonetheless, some participants express wariness of an overly strong leader and emphasize the need to limit their

power, considering that "it creates pressure, as if the leader wanted to enforce his/her interest" (female, 39, Fidesz, Debrecen) and that "if the balance tips, then it is not democracy" (male, 25, left-wing, Debrecen).

A second expression of democratic disillusionment prioritizes individual benefits to be gleaned from the government in power. One Fidesz supporter expressed this instrumental perspective in the following terms:

> I have been voting for FIDESZ for a long time. They have made mistakes also, I can also see things that I do not agree with but if I look at both positive and negative things, the positive ones are clearly in a majority. For me in terms of the support of families, maybe they say that they have not yet increased the family allowance, but (…) compared to the allowances earlier there have been a lot of changes. And I think those who want to start a family, want to build a home, want to move forward can, even if it is not that easy and they don't have millions. (male, 57, Fidesz, Debrecen)

Asked about the role of citizens in a democracy, another group of participants offered views that focused very narrowly on their individual lives and particularly the realm of work over any engagement in public or political affairs. A young participant from Debrecen ventured "to work, pay taxes, maintain society this way. Observe the value system, maintain society" (female, 40, left-wing, Debrecen). An older participant expressed a similar view: "As for my role, I think it is to work if possible. Because I have been working for 43 years. So to fulfil my obligations" (female, 57, Fidesz, Debrecen). With few exceptions that referred to voting or expressing discontent to political leaders, participants articulated a resoundingly passive view of citizens' involvement in the democratic system, which was essentially limited to "maintaining the stability of the country, for example, by paying taxes, working" (male, 25, left-wing, Debrecen).

In conclusion, Hungarian citizens' views of democracy are characterized by a considerable gap between a democratic ideal and the current state of democracy in Hungary. Focus group discussions confer a very pessimistic view about political alternatives to the current Fidesz dominance as well as democratic culture in Hungary more generally. Rather than driving militant opposition to Fidesz in defence of liberal democratic norms, the gap between democratic aspirations and lived experience instead appears to foster democratic disenchantment. This perspective leads some to embrace strongman rule as an alternative to democracy that brings other benefits while others adopt a strikingly apathetic view of the role of citizens that focuses narrowly on fulfilling their work-related and electoral obligations.

Majoritarian temptation in Poland

Focus groups in Poland indicate a more diversified conception of democracy than those held in Hungary. Alongside liberal views that echo the Hungarian discussions, several participants express support for a majoritarian understanding that grants considerable leeway to elected leaders. At the same time, Polish participants express a similarly pessimistic perspective on the state of democracy. There is particular concern over an undue concentration of power at the hands of the executive and deepening societal polarisation, as well as fears that minority rights are being undermined. Democratic disillusionment exists alongside a majoritarian justification for the hollowing of democratic safeguards, ultimately indicating two distinct sources of tolerance for democratic backsliding among Polish citizens.

Meanings of democracy: heterogeneous attitudes

Discussions around meanings of democracy among Polish focus groups paint a more diverse picture compared to the Hungarian ones. As expected, many participants endorse liberal democratic values. These are articulated around civil liberties, equality, and institutional constraints, albeit with a somewhat distinct emphasis than in the Hungarian groups. For civil liberties, Polish participants tend to speak more generally about freedom rather than about specific civil liberties such as media freedom. Free choice or the 'right to choose' is presented as the overarching principle of democracy, with participants stating that "it's the most important rule in democracy. Other things like freedom are derived from it" (male, 65, PiS, Lublin) or that "having rights and freedoms, freedom to think how we want, freedom to choose. I think it is the most important thing about democracy" (female, 37, PiS, Warsaw). For others, freedom of choice refers mainly to elections: "It means that nobody can tell me whom to choose during the elections. I can make my own choice. I don't know whether it will be a good choice or a bad choice. But I can decide myself" (male, 38, PiS, pilot group).

In particular Warsaw-based participants also understand freedom of choice as tolerance for diversity. For older participants, such tolerance is often expressed with regards to religion: "I can choose what I want to believe in, whom I want to support, which ideas are appropriate for me, nobody can impose such things on me, including religion" (female, 58, PiS, Warsaw). Younger participants additionally emphasize tolerance for different sexual orientations: "I mean being able to choose where you want to live and with whom. (…) Not looking into anybody's bedrooms" (male, 27, PiS, Warsaw). Echoing a restriction to freedom of expression mentioned by a Hungarian participant, a left-wing participant contends that "I don't think that freedom means complete

lawlessness (…) we are bound by different codes, moral norms, and laws made in the given country" (female, 27, PO, Warsaw). This view contrasts with a perspective expressed by an older participant from Warsaw:

> If my freedom of choice is restricted and some norms and behaviours are imposed on me, it is not OK. If I can choose, if I don't accept something and I can do it, it means there is democracy. If I cannot, it is a dictatorship. (male, 51, centre, Warsaw)

Polish discussions around equality tend to focus on citizens having an equal say irrespective of their socio-economic status. These views are particularly prominent among Lublin-based participants, possibly translating a sense of citizens based outside the capital being 'left behind.' One participant voiced this feeling explicitly:

> Each vote has the same weight. It doesn't matter whether you live in a city or in a village... You are not more important because you live in a city. You are not more important because you are more affluent. (male, 35, centre, Lublin)

Two female participants similarly emphasized that "it's not that my voice is more important and your voice is less important. All votes are equal" (female, 36, PiS, Lublin) and that "everyone has access to all public institutions" (female, 26, PiS, Lublin). Another participant of weaker economic standing explained that "for me equality means that there are no divisions – there are no 'masters' and 'the poor.' All people are equal. Everyone has the right to work, everyone has the right to choose the government" (female, 56, PiS, Lublin), which another participant echoed stating that "there is no division into social classes" (male, 25, PO, Lublin).

Polish discussions on institutional features focus quite directly on the importance of the separation of powers, with participants highlighting that "de-politicisation of certain institutions is most important, for example the courts, state treasury companies" (male, 27, PiS, Lublin) or stressing "tripartition of power" (male, 59, PiS, Warsaw) and the need for "independent judicial, legislative,

and executive authorities" (male, 39, PO, Warsaw). A Lublin-based participant explains his concern over the lack of independence of institutions:

> If parties and politicians can influence bodies and institutions that should be independent, it's not right. We think that it doesn't concern us. Well, one day it may. One day, if you are on the wrong side, if you don't have the 'right' ID card, it may be used against you. (male, 51, centre, Warsaw)

Alongside these broadly liberal views, across all five focus groups held in Poland we also find participants express a strongly majoritarian conception of democracy. For many, majority-based rule is the very first item to come to mind when asked what democracy means to them. What is particularly striking is that this endorsement often does not come as a neutral statement equating majority rule to power being held by the people. Instead, it is explicitly presented as a form of government that forces a minority to accept decisions that may conflict with their interests or values. A young participant from Lublin contended: "In a democracy, the majority wins. The majority makes it [a decision] and we must submit to it. It also means submitting to those who won in the elections" (female, 35, centre, Lublin). Another opposition supporter from Warsaw defined democracy as "voice of the majority. In a democracy, the majority is right, not the minority..." (female, 30, PO, Warsaw). When asked by the moderator whether they agreed with this view, the remaining five members of the group expressed consent. Older participants tend to voice this perspective in even harsher terms, irrespective of their political orientation:

> Democracy is created by the majority. And if you are in the minority, you must accept it and wait until the next elections. (…) In the past [under Communist rule] everyone voted for the only "right" option, it was a unanimous decision, and everyone was "happy." Nowadays, democracy means exercising power based on a majority...and the minority will always think that perhaps they should leave the country, because the elections didn't go their way. (female, 62, PO, Warsaw)

There is an overwhelming sense among Polish citizens that "the majority is right" (female, 36, PiS, Lublin) or, in slightly different terms, that "the minority may be right, but the majority decides...and this may be painful" (male, 39, PO, Warsaw). Alongside the endorsement of majoritarian views by some, there is thus a corresponding majoritarian resignation among others who see robust majoritarianism and the resulting disregard for the political minority as regrettable, but ultimately as something that can be overcome only by electoral means. As a younger PiS supporter puts it, "unfortunately, you have to be a democrat. You have to accept things…and if you want to change things, choose another option, you must vote again" (male, 27, PiS, Warsaw).

Finally, there are some distinctly non-democratic overtones in particular among PiS supporters. One participant defines democracy as "observing the rules" (male, 40, PiS, pilot group) while another equates it with "order" (male, 63, PiS, Warsaw). Referring to women's protests around the limitation of abortion rights that were held during the period in which the focus groups were conducted, several older participants consider the limits of democracy to have been breached: "it's not democracy anymore, it is simple hooliganism" (female, 58, PiS, Warsaw). Another states that "we shouldn't confuse democracy with anarchy. What happens during some marches is anarchy" (female, 62, PO, Warsaw). A participant from Lublin echoes this view:

> At first they fought for their rights and then they wanted to abolish the government. C'mon, it's anarchy. They should face a trial and so on. Prison and that's it. It's calling for abolishing something that was democratically chosen. Encouraging anarchy. (male, 60, centre, Lublin)

In sum, discussions around abstract understandings of democracy in Poland reveal more heterogeneous views than seen in the Hungarian groups. Besides liberal views, we find a strongly majoritarian conception of democracy as well as some indication of authoritarian attitudes. Citizens' assessments of the state of democracy in Poland reflect this diversity of views.

Evaluations of democratic practice: an excessive concentration of power

There is acute awareness among Polish citizens of the decline in democratic quality under the ruling PiS government. Many participants express concern over the rule of law and an undue concentration of power at the hands of the executive. A younger participant from Lublin explains that "what I don't like in our democracy is that politicians can decide to make changes in the judicial power...there should be separation of powers," considering that the lack of judicial independence "contradicts equality" among citizens (male, 35, centre, Lublin). Another voices regret regarding an insufficient "tripartition of power – I mean independent judicial, legislative, and executive authorities. This area doesn't look best in Poland" (male, 39, PO, Warsaw). A particular source of concern is the fact that the President and parliamentary majority represent the same party, with several participants voicing a preference for cohabitation of different main parties in key executive offices. A Lublin-based participant laments that "it's a pity that the president is not from the opposition so that it's more fair. Now, they go too much 'hand-in-hand' and it seems that the President just signs the decisions made by someone else" (female, 36, PiS, Lublin). A Warsaw-based participant questions the democratic character of such power concentration:

> In Poland the system is based on the Sejm, the Senate, and the President…three stages. (…) And now PiS has it all... (…) If everyone is from the same political option, they just agree with one another. And I don't know whether it is a democracy, the other side has no chance to exert any influence. Because everything is in one hand. It's the same hand, only the fingers keep changing. (female, 62, PO, Warsaw)

Polarised media are viewed as particularly problematic, especially by younger participants and irrespective of their political orientation. One participant regrets that "there is no objectivity, there is no 'centre'" (male, 36, PiS, Warsaw), while an older PO supporter has lost trust in public media altogether: "TV news is really difficult to accept, it is not 'for people.' It seems that everyone wants to fool us. I feel as if I was somewhere else, not in my own country" (female, 65, PO, pilot

group). Moreover, participants lament "unequal access to public media in Poland" (male, 27, PiS, Lublin) and "a lot of manipulation in the Polish television, which strongly influences those who are least intelligent, naive, and usually elderly" (male, 25, PO, Lublin). A PiS voter concedes the lack of airtime for opposition candidates ahead of elections, judging that "in my opinion it is even difficult to say whether there is any democracy here" (male, 30, PiS, pilot group).

Asked to what extent Polish democracy corresponds to the democracy they would like to live in, citizens' assessments are overwhelmingly negative. A young participant from Warsaw considers that "in my case it is definitely below 50 per cent" (female, 30, PO, Warsaw), while another contends that "if I was to describe it in percentages, I would say that we have 50% democracy, it is not full…we have democracy, but it is restricted" (male, 63, PiS, Warsaw). Another blankly states: "There is no democracy in Poland, there is a dictatorship" (male, 59, PiS, Warsaw). An older participant summarizes the situation as follows:

> I have lived through different political systems and I can see that democracy is gradually ceasing to exist in Poland. (…) Over the years (…) perhaps we didn't move forward, but we also didn't move backward in our democracy. Only in the last five years has our democracy been completely decomposed. It terrifies me to see that. Obviously it wasn't perfect. But it did form a base and hope (…) In the last five years we made 15 steps backward and I don't see much chance for things to improve. (male, 58, PO, Lublin)

It is interesting to note that negative evaluations of democratic practice are expressed across all political orientations. There is considerable pushback against the majoritarian conception that finds expression in the concentration of powers by the government, which even PiS voters appear to find problematic. A young PiS voter likens the state of democracy in Poland to "a dictate of the majority... I mean 'we have the majority, so we do whatever we want'" (male, 27, PiS, Lublin).

Another participant in this group agrees that "only what the majority thinks counts, because they are the majority" (female, 36, PiS, Lublin). Similarly, an older participant who voted for the opposition presidential candidate complains that "after winning, you should not say that you will only represent the majority and the minority will have nothing to say. Those in the minority are also citizens of Poland and must be taken into account when exercising power" (female, 62, PO, Warsaw).

Where government and opposition supporters tend to differ is in the attribution of blame. For opposition supporters, the PiS government is abusing its dominant position to roll back democratic standards. This becomes particularly apparent in discussions around the desirability of a strong leader, with a female PO supporter likening strongman leadership under PiS party leader Jaroslaw Kaczyński to Augusto Pinochet's role in the Chilean military dictatorship:

> "I think that such a [strong] leader is a bad thing. (…) If there is a good balance in the Parliament, no mad person can run crazy ideas through the Parliament. And now a mad person has taken everything... Like Pinochet." (female, 62, PO, Warsaw)

Several other participants liken Kaczyński to a "dictator" or an "usurper" (male, 58, PO, Lublin), or claim that "if everything is in the hands of one party (…) it is a dictatorship" (male, 59, PiS, Warsaw).

Government supporters instead tend to relativize democratic backsliding under PiS by suggesting that Polish democracy inevitably implies a playing field tilted in favour of the incumbent, irrespective of their political orientation. Responding to criticism that "PiS has taken it all" (female, 62, PO, Warsaw), another participant contends that "if another party had won, it would

be exactly the same" (female, 58, PO, Warsaw). A younger participant from Lublin downplays the erosion of judicial independence by PiS, contending that:

> "It seems that the legislative power has not been of the right standard in Poland since the beginning. People of one regime were replaced with people from another regime. In my opinion the courts in Poland have never been independent. (…) First PO *(Civil Platform)* placed their people illegally in the Constitutional Tribunal and then – in order to do whatever they want – PiS replaced them with their people..." (male, 27, PiS, Lublin)

Several participants also refer to the existence of elections as proof of democracy, with a female participant claiming: "We have democracy, because nobody will stop us from participating in elections. If they kept us in prisons or locked in, we could say that we are somehow restricted" (female, 65, PO, pilot group). A PiS supporter contended that "the last elections were a celebration of democracy. The turn-out was as high as 68%, which shows that Polish society is starting to understand that power is in their hands" (male, 36, PiS, Warsaw). In response to this claim, a PO supported highlighted the incremental nature of backsliding that makes it less immediately perceptible to citizens:

> I don't know if you realise that we are all participating in a gradual process of "cooking a frog"... The changes we can see, and they are changes in the wrong direction, such changes don't happen abruptly, they are not made overnight... The temperature is gradually increased to make sure that the frog doesn't "jump out." It is done over a long period of time so that you don't realise that you have already been fuckeed. (male, 39, PO, Warsaw).

In sum, discussions regarding the state of Polish democracy among Polish citizens centre on the excessive concentration of power under the PiS government that mirrors the majoritarian conception of democracy expressed in discussions about abstract understandings of democracy. Whereas citizens are uniformly wary of the lack of checks and balances, PiS voters tend to consider this a consistent feature of Polish democracy rather than a characteristic of the party they support and downplay the seriousness of democratic erosion in their country. Differing perspectives on

PiS rule ultimately lead citizens to fear the consequences of deepening polarisation, with deep distrust in elites leading some to turn towards instrumental views of democracy.

Fear of polarisation and an instrumental approach to democracy

Political polarisation is high in Poland, and focus group discussions among Polish citizens translate a growing unease over a society that has become "deeply divided" (male, 51, centre, Warsaw). A young PiS supporter rejects claims of weakening democracy in Poland, but recognizes increasingly opposed preferences among different societal groups, claiming that "the problem is that too much freedom for one group creates discomfort in another group" (male, 36, PiS, Warsaw). Contrasting the homogenous ethnic set-up of the country with deepening political divisions, an older participant claims that:

> because we are a homogenous, one-nation country (…) theoretically, we should get on well and reach agreement on different things. (…) [But] in Poland it's 50/50 now: 50 per cent are satisfied and 50 per cent are dissatisfied. If a political option changes, it will be the same – troublemaking and rowdyism. (…) I am afraid of what will happen. I lived through Martial Law. (…) You must respect what you have, what has been achieved as a result of many years' of fighting. And over the last 20 years they have destroyed everything. There is no solidarity, there is nothing left. (male, 60, centre, Lublin)

A participant from the same group concurs with his pessimistic assessment, stating that "over recent years we have been dreadfully divided by politicians. (…) It will take a long time for us to become one nation again" (male, 58, PO, Lublin). In one group, participants even suggest that divisions may have been intentionally generated by politicians: "That's why the government wants to divide our society as much as possible (…) to prevent a revolution" (male, 30, PiS, pilot group).

Generalised distrust in elites also transpires from discussions on what citizens look for when choosing among candidates in an election. Two distinct perspectives emerge: for many, there is a

strong sense that election choice ultimately amounts to choosing the "lesser evil" (male, 25, PO, Lublin; female, 37, PiS, Warsaw; male, 58, PO, Lublin; female, 36, PiS, Lublin) rather than being deeply convinced by any one candidate's programme. A particularly illustrative exchange among the pilot group shows widespread consensus around this view:

> Participant A: I knew I had to vote, so I chose ...
> Participant B: The lesser evil? You were not the only one.
> Participant A: Yes, I chose the lesser evil.
> Participant C: Most people did the same.
> Participant A: But it shouldn't be this way...
> Participant B: Choosing between "being shot in the head" or "hanged"... They would tell you that you had a choice...

Several participants speak of democracy as "illusionary power" with politicians adopting an attitude of "once I am chosen, I will do whatever I want" (female, 30, PO, Warsaw). Another participant from the same group agrees that elections offer an "illusionary choice" (male, 39, PO, Warsaw). Besides, several participants doubt that electoral turnover would improve the situation. An opposition supporter merely expects that "the minority will become the majority, and it will be bad again" (female, 58, PO, Warsaw). A young participant sees emigration as the only way to escape the negative impact of politics: "If I want politics to have less influence on my life, the only idea I have is to leave the country" (male, 39, PO, Warsaw).

The widespread disillusionment with democracy and politics leads to an apathy among citizens already found in the Hungarian focus groups. Elections are seen as the only form of relevant participation, preventing citizens from engaging meaningfully in the political process outside of electoral moments. An older participant explains: "We can just watch and draw conclusions at the next elections… Putting a cross here or there. We cannot do anything else, can we?" (male, 58, PO, Lublin). Another from the pilot group considers that the only way for citizens to restrict

politicians' scope of power is "by not electing them. Once they are elected, we have nothing to say anymore" (male, 40, PiS, pilot group). Illustrating the difficulty of mobilizing those who may wish to resist democratic backsliding by supporting alternative candidates at the ballot box, a female participant contends: "Many people don't vote, because they don't think their vote can change anything. They voted this year, because they were told that their vote matters, and nothing changed, which makes them sad" (female, 30, PO, pilot group). An older participant summarizes the broader sense of disempowerment by claiming that "even if I participate in elections, and I always do, I don't influence anything. (…) I don't feel I have any influence whatsoever" (female, 65, PO, pilot group).

A further consequence of democratic disillusionment consists of citizens adopting an instrumental approach to democracy, selecting whichever candidate they expect to bring them the greatest individual benefit. A PiS supporter explicitly recognized nepotism and social benefits disbursed by the government as a positive change compared to their predecessors:

> The situation is definitely different now. What changed during the PiS times is that it is easier to get a job, without problems or high expectations. Now, even you don't have good education, you can find a good job through connections. In the past it was very difficult. The level of unemployment has gone down significantly and PiS gives money for children... (male, 30, PiS, pilot group)

Another participant explained his switch from PO to PiS in 2015 with the reduction of the pension age: "They [PiS] promised quite a lot of things and managed to implement some of them, including one that concerned me directly: Why would I retire at the age of 67, if I could retire at 65?" (male, 65, PiS, Lublin).

Others are more critical of making electoral choice dependent on such immediate benefits, suggesting that voters were "bought" (male, 58, PO, Lublin) and that "Polish society is tempted with different social programmes, which are 'stupid,' and we pay for them out of our own pockets. Some people don't see this" (male, 25, PO, Lublin). A PiS voter from the same group agrees: "The state manipulates the biggest social group. In a way people from this group are 'forced,' because they want to improve their lives, they take the money" (female, 36, PiS, Lublin). Another expresses her concern over how the instrumental motivations of PiS supporters affect democracy:

> Our democracy takes different turns... On the one hand the majority voted, on the other hand my impression is that the current government wants to stay in power for much longer and nothing is done to improve the situation in Poland. Those who take part in elections are those who stay at home and are drawn by things like 500+ [a family benefit introduced by PiS] and 13th pensions .... (female, 26, PiS, Lublin)

Compared to Hungary, Polish discussions contain more unease regarding the presence of a strong leader facing few constrictions. While a young PiS supporter supports that "a 'strong hand' would be useful to keep discipline... to keep control over what is happening in our country" (male, 27, PiS, Lublin), there is vocal criticism of such views by others. A younger participant from Lublin states that "in a democracy political power should not turn into tyranny, a dictatorship. If power is too strong, it turns into a dictatorship and the democracy vanishes" (male, 35, centre Lublin). A Warsaw-based older participant consider that "in the long term, having a strong leader is a bad thing" due to the emergence of "dictatorship and personality cult – which brings us to the situation we have in Belarus and Hungary." He qualifies Hungary explicitly as "an absolute dictatorship, unfortunately" (male, 59, PiS, Warsaw). Alluding to the PiS leader, a female participant fears: "A strong party leader? What is it to me? The party will do things that are good for the party. For me it is not democracy" (female, 30, PO, Warsaw).

In sum, the diversity of democratic attitudes among Polish participants is reflected in their divergent assessment of the state of democracy in the country. While most recognize the executive aggrandizement under the PiS government, some appear to endorse this practice as democratically legitimated due to the majority support the party secured at the elections. Overall however, we find widespread fear of the deepening political polarisation in the country and an openness among some to privilege instrumental considerations over respect for procedural standards when choosing for whom to vote.

Towards a typology of understandings of democracy

The in-depth exploration of views of democracy among Hungarian and Polish citizens reveals a number of similarities and differences between the two countries. In both cases, we find a considerable gap between abstract understandings of democracy, which tend to be broadly liberal – albeit less so in the Polish case – and a deeply pessimistic assessment of the concrete state of democracy in the country. Citizens in both countries share a sense of democratic disenchantment that leads to political apathy and a largely passive view of the role citizens should play in a democracy. In some cases, disillusionment over democratic practice leads to openness towards instrumental views, whereby benefits to be gleaned from political parties or leaders weigh more heavily for vote choice than their respect for democratic norms. In Hungary, we find considerable support for strongman leadership as a means to ensure the efficient delivery of public goods. In contrast, majoritarian views prevail in Poland, allowing supporters of both government and opposition parties to rationalize executive overreach under PiS rule as being a legitimate expression of the majority support they won at elections.

Beyond the comparative insights, the different views of democracy discussed in the focus groups allow us to build a typology of distinct understandings of democracy that can be found among citizens in both countries. Such a typology is necessarily reductive of the full range of views expressed. Instead, it seeks to distinguish broadly divergent conceptions of democracy that may be found among citizens and addresses how these may affect their willingness and ability to engage in the defence of democratic norms in contexts of backsliding.

Liberal understandings emphasize civil liberties and executive constraints as well as tolerance towards others and active engagement by citizens in the political process. They dominate citizens' conceptions in the abstract but clash with perceptions of democratic practice on the ground in both countries. In principle, strong commitment to liberal democratic norms should be expected to drive citizens' resistance to democratic backsliding. However, the perceived mismatch between citizens' democratic ideals and the reality of lived democracy appear instead to foster a disillusionment with democratic governance that leads to widespread disengagement from the political process. A first vulnerability of citizens' role as frontline defenders of democracy thus appears to consist of a gap between democratic aspirations and experience that becomes so wide that citizens retreat into political apathy rather than mobilisation, withdrawing from the political process or turning to alternatives that seem more readily achievable.

Majoritarian understandings highlight majority rule as the main source of legitimacy for a democratic system. This conception is compatible with the weakening of executive constraints and infringements upon minority rights and sees political leaders as mainly accountable to their own voters, rather than the electorate at large. Citizens embracing such understandings are able to

rationalize executive overreach as legitimated by the majority support a given political leader or party received at the polls. Elites may actively foster such understandings by engaging in majoritarian appeals and persuading citizens that their democratic violations are well-founded and a mere reflection of rights granted under their democratic mandate. Majoritarian understandings thus represent a key vulnerability of the political system to backsliding, since the steps they enable align precisely with the prevalent forms of democratic violations authoritarian-leaning leaders engage in as they gradually dismantle checks and balances.

Instrumental understandings focus on direct benefits voters may obtain from political leaders and parties. Such attitudes appear largely as the outcome of an initial disillusionment with democratic practice that leads voters to turn towards alternative benefits they may glean from the system. In the absence of a convincing political option able to live up to an abstract democratic ideal, instrumental understandings allow citizens to rationalize a narrow focus on individual gains as legitimate and aligned with political reality. Instrumental attitudes thus make voters open to buy-outs by political parties and leaders and lead them to trade off elites' respect for democratic standards against specific benefits such as welfare payments or social programmes. Especially for citizens with lower socio-economic status and education, elites can seek to activate such instrumental understandings to foster tolerance for democratic violations in exchange for other advantages.

Finally, *authoritarian* understandings mistake democracy for a system built to ensure public order and stability. Citizens holding such views tend to be fearful of the destabilizing potential of political competition and conflict and embrace strongman leadership and citizen obedience as a

way to prevent any disruption to their everyday life. They view citizens largely as passive subjects that should focus narrowly on playing a productive role in the economy and paying taxes. Authoritarian understandings also align closely with conservative views and the feeling that social norms and traditions need to be protected against overly progressive policies. Overall, such views are most clearly compatible with democratic backsliding and thus represent an important vulnerability in citizens' ability to rise up in the defence of democracy. At the same time, the relative share of participants expressing such views is small. Table 2 provides an overview of the main characteristics of the different understandings of democracy distilled from the focus group discussions.

Table 2: Typology of understandings of democracy

	Source of legitimacy	Role of leader	Role of citizens	Vulnerability to backsliding
Liberal: Democracy ensure freedom and equal rights for all.	Separation of powers Checks and balances	Govern in the interest of all citizens, including minorities	Active engagement in political processes Hold government accountable	Mismatch between democratic ideal and practice leads to disillusionment
Majoritarian: Democracy reflects the will of the majority.	Majority electoral support	Govern in the interest of own voters	Submit to majority vote Passivity between elections	Openness to majoritarian appeals and restraints on opposition and minorities
Instrumental: Democracy serves the distribution of public goods and individual benefits.	Delivery of public goods and services	Distribute welfare payments and public subsidies	Focus on concrete, often individual benefits	Openness to buy-outs
Authoritarian: Democracy preserves order and stability.	Maintain stability and public order	Strongman rule to prevent chaos and anarchy	Citizen obedience and respect for social norms Work and pay taxes	Openness to strongman leadership and Conservative limitations of freedoms

Conclusion

The focus group discussions provide insight into ordinary citizens' understandings of democracy. In both Hungary and Poland, we find a rather marked contrast between widespread diffuse support for a broadly liberal conception of democracy that clashes with a lack of specific support and low satisfaction with the way democracy operates in the respective country. Alongside the liberal conception, we identify alternative views of democracy, including a prominent majoritarian conception as well as instrumental approaches that seemingly result with a disillusionment over effective democratic performance. Some citizens express outright authoritarian attitudes. Overall, the discussions reveal heteregeneous understandings of democracy and, even among those who hold strongly liberal views, a prevalent apathy due to the gap between expectations and democratic reality.

How do these findings fit into the overall empirical strategy of the book? The aim of employing focus groups was to uncover distinct understandings of democracy as formulated by citizens themselves in order to build a typology of distinct understandings. This typology serves to refine our expectations regarding the different vulnerability of a democratic system to executive overreach. Moreover, it serves to inform the formulation of items used in the survey-based analyses of democratic attitudes discussed in the next chapter, that probes the distribution of distinct understandings among the population and explores how they relate to different socio-democraphic characteristics.

Appendix

Discussion guide for focus groups

Questions with an asterisk (*) indicate those where we sought to collect each participant's views.

1) As we mentioned when inviting you, we hope to learn a bit about your views of democracy. Before we jump into the questions however, I'd like each of you to tell us a bit about yourself. *Please tell us your first name, and give us a sense of how you would describe your interest in politics.

2) *Please describe what democracy means to you.
   What else comes to mind?
   What else?

3) *To what extent does democracy in Poland/Hungary correspond to the kind of democracy you want to live in?

4) *I would like to hear your view on the role of political leaders in a democracy. Do you think having a strong leader is a good or a bad thing for a democracy?
   Do you think political power in a democracy should be limited? If so, how?

5) *What is most important to you when choosing which party or candidate to vote for?

6) *Please tell me which role you see for citizens in a democracy.
   Which other forms of citizen involvement may there be?

7) *What about participation in political demonstrations?
   Under which conditions could you imagine participating in a political demonstration?
   *What about demonstrations in support of or against elected politicians?

8) I would now like to summarize some of the main points we discussed. [Three-minute summary of main discussion points by moderator] *Is this summary complete? Is there anything else you would like to mention about democracy in general or in Poland/Hungary in particular that has not yet been mentioned?

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Chapter 2

Who are the (non-)liberals?

Understandings of democracy and their correlates

Citizen tolerance for democratic backsliding represents a puzzle insofar as it conflicts with high levels of support for democracy shown in most survey-based studies (Zilinsky 2019; Weßels 2015; Dalton et al. 2008). There is often an implicit assumption that such support for democracy corresponds to an approval for the specific *liberal* variant of democracy that comes under pressure during processes of democratic backsliding. At the same time, there is a growing awareness that generic measures of support may be insufficient to capture variation in what democracy means to citizens and notably the potential weakness of support for liberal democratic norms (Wuttke et al. 2020; Mayne and Geißel 2018). Moreover, there have been efforts to develop a more differentiated measure of citizens' democratic attitudes that captures authoritarian orientations generally masked by broadly formulated survey questions (Kirsch and Welzel 2019; Kruse et al. 2019).

Building on these efforts as well as on the insights gleaned from the focus group discussions, this chapter analyses the presence, distribution, and correlates of divergent understandings of democracy among citizens in Poland and Hungary. In doing so, it fulfils two purposes with respect to my overarching theoretical argument. First, it presents a key pillar in the research design of my habilitation, namely how I measure the dependent variable – divergent understandings of democracy – that lies at the core of my theoretical argument. Second, it delivers a baseline overview of the relative prevalence and correlates of different democratic understandings in the two case studies, thus providing an empirical backdrop to the subsequent analyses of the linkages between democratic attitudes and political behaviour.

I begin by drawing on available survey data on democratic attitudes from the World Value Survey (WVS) to show that while support for liberal democratic norms is expectedly widespread, other existing measures already provide warning signs regarding the exclusive support for democracy among Polish and Hungarian citizens. At the same time, I situate Poland and Hungary within the broader universe of post-communist democracies to demonstrate that support for democracy in these two backsliding countries is no lower than among the populations of neighbouring countries with weaker or no such trends. This suggests that findings regarding the relevance of citizens' understandings of democracy when it comes to tolerating democratic violations are likely to travel beyond contexts in which backsliding has already taken hold.

In a second step, I provide a more granular insight into divergent democratic attitudes that mobilizes original data from online surveys conducted among representative samples of citizens in Poland and Hungary. I outline the development of an expanded item battery on understandings of democracy that combines established measures from the WVS with insights from my focus group discussions. Next, I explain how individual respondents were classified into specific understandings of democracy based on theoretically derived ideal-types. On this basis, I describe the distribution of divergent democratic attitudes among Hungarian and Polish respondents. This analysis highlights the relative shallowness of liberal democratic commitment in both countries: while large proportions of respondents endorse liberal views, many simultaneously approve of alternative views, leading me to classify them as 'weak liberals.' Moreover, although outright authoritarian attitudes prevail only among a small minority, egalitarian and majoritarian understandings are prominent in both countries and in Hungary even surpass the share of strong liberals. These insights provide empirical confirmation of the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes among citizens that is one of the core premises upon which I build my theoretical argument.

Finally, I engage in a series of correlational analyses to explore how different understandings relate to different levels of support for democracy and the government as well as to respondents' partisanship and established socio-economic characteristics thought to shape political behaviour. This analysis suggests that weak liberal or non-liberal views are particularly prominent among supporters of the ruling party and those who express satisfaction with the government, pointing to a relationship between lack of liberal democratic commitment and enduring support for a backsliding government. Moreover, I find in particular egalitarian attitudes to be more prominent among the less educated and poorer respondents, which points to the distribution of social benefits as an explanation for their willingness to overlook democratic violations.

Overall, this chapter serves to introduce my measurement of divergent democratic attitudes and to engage in a descriptive analysis of their prevalence across the population as well as among different subgroups. These analyses allow us to situate the selected case studies among a wider universe of cases and suggest different reasons citizens may have to tolerate democratic backsliding, which I probe in more depth in Studies 1 and 2.

Temporal and cross-country trends in support for democracy

One of two approaches tend to prevail in survey-based assessments of citizens' support for democracy: respondents are asked either to rate the importance of specific items for democracy, or to indicate their support for a democratic system alongside a range of potential alternatives. To provide a first overview of citizens' democratic attitudes in Poland and Hungary, I highlight some key trends for both established measurement approaches based on existing data from the World Value Survey (WVS).

To gauge levels of approval of specific aspects of democracy, the WVS asks respondents to rate the importance of three items classified as liberal elements of democracy: "People choose their leaders in free elections," "Civil rights protect people from state oppression" and "Women have the same rights as men." When looking at these elements in isolation, we consistently find very high support for all three of these elements in both Hungary and Poland (see Figures 1 and 2), seemingly indicating a high level of commitment to liberal democracy across the population.

Figure 1: Support for liberal elements of democracy in Hungary

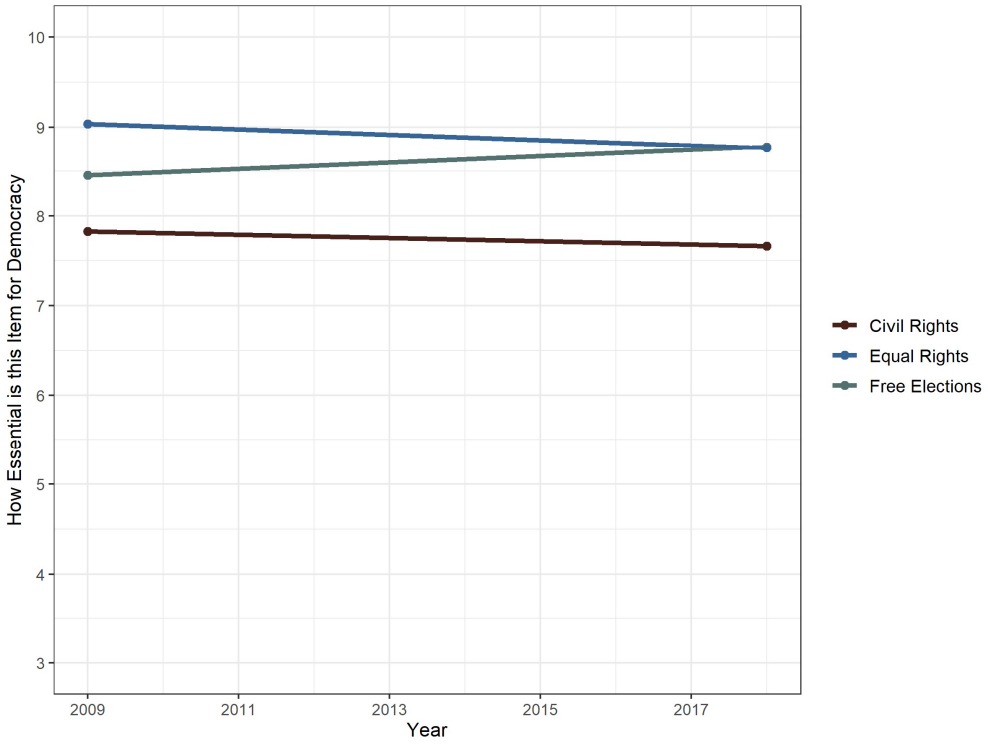
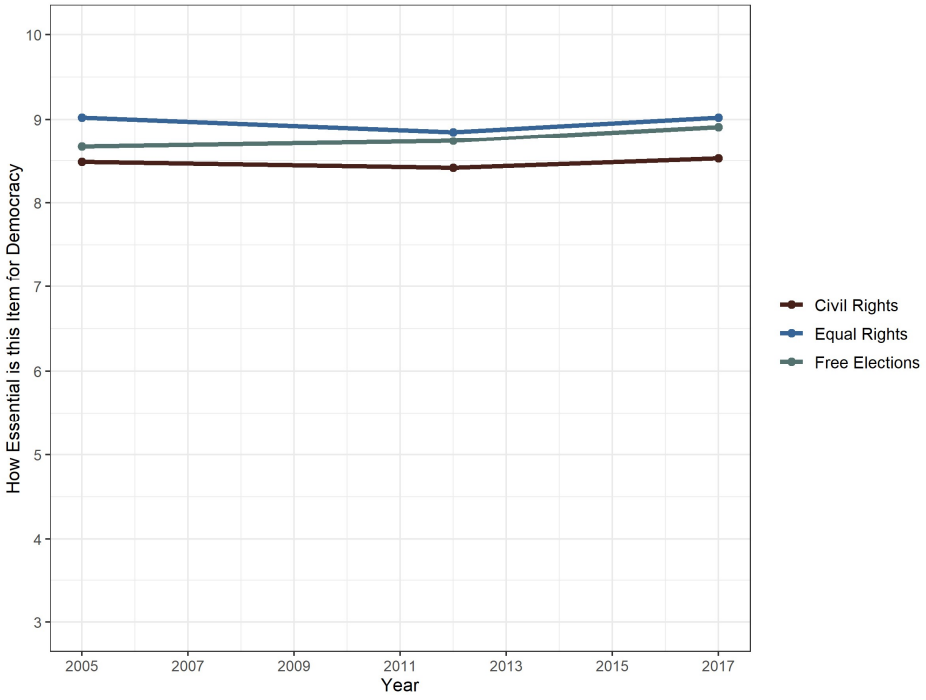
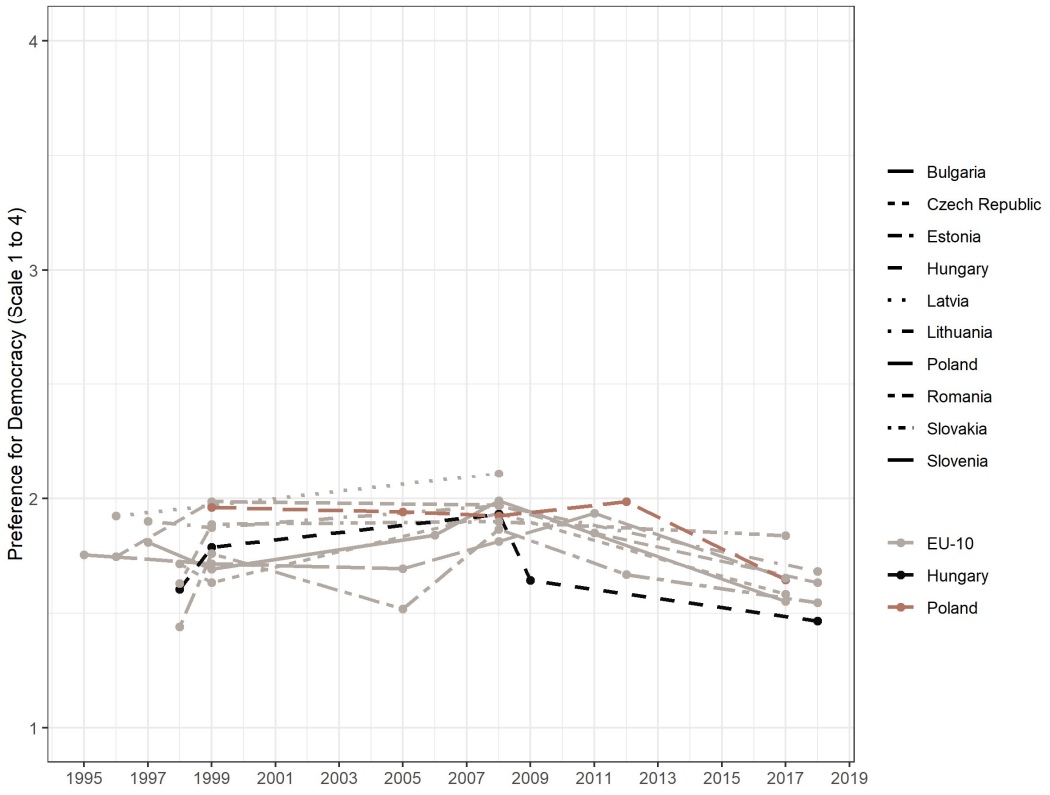


Figure 2: Support for liberal elements of democracy in Poland



However, this picture becomes somewhat more blurred when we compare relative support for a "democratic political system" to approval rates for a "strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and election." For both Hungary and Poland, across all available data points, preference for a strong leader largely surpasses preference for a democratic system. This observation is in line with earlier studies pointing to alarmingly high support for strongman leadership among citizens from post-communist countries (Lavrič and Bieber 2020) or even at the global level (Foa and Mounk 2016, 2017). To provide some regional contextualisation, Figures 3 and 4 compare support for the two alternative regime forms in Hungary and Poland to the scores for the ten remaining Central and Eastern European countries that experienced a similar democratic trajectory after the end of the Cold War. Figure 3 shows that support for a democratic system is low to intermediary across all twelve post-communist democracies and remarkably stable over time.

Figure 3: Support for a democratic system across Central and Eastern Europe

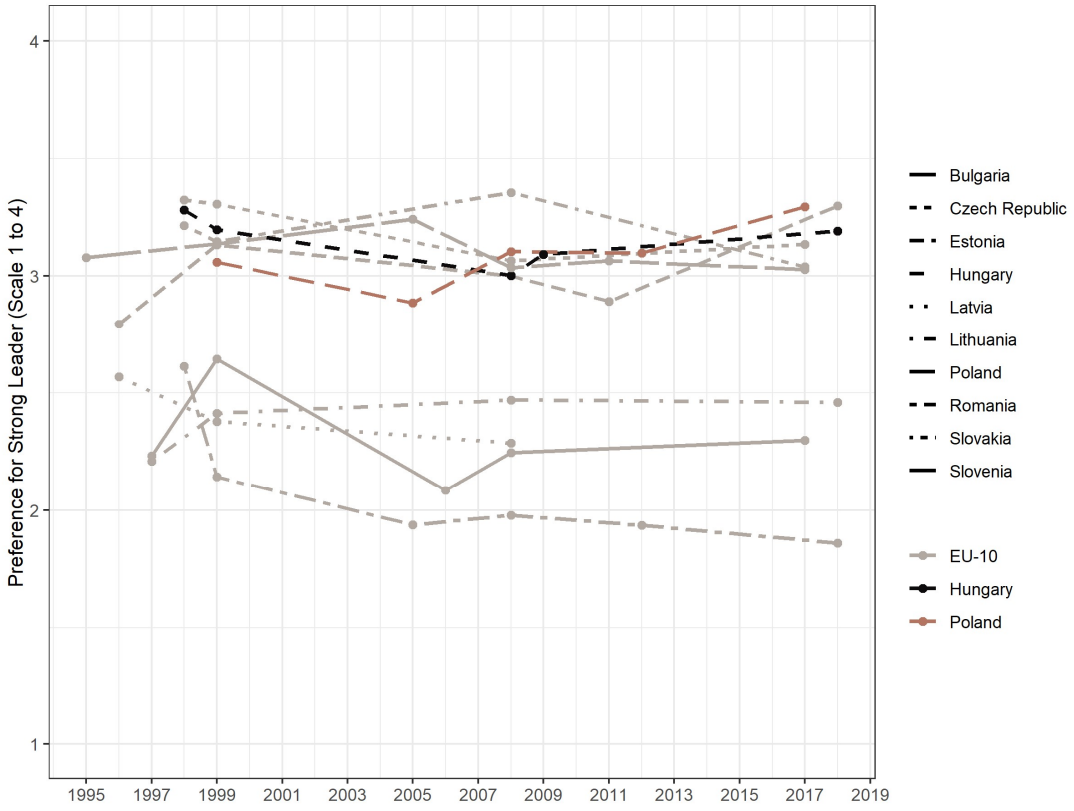


In turn, we observe two distinct groups of countries when it comes to support for strongman leadership. For a first group of countries – including Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania, and Romania – such support is overall low and comparable to the level of support for a democratic system. For a second group of countries however, public support for a strong leader is significantly *higher* than support for a democratic system.[1] In Poland, the upward trend in support for a strong leaders begins in 2005 and culminates in 2017 at 3.25 on a 4-point scale, seemingly mirroring the downward trend in support for a democratic system that drops by 0.7 points between 2012 and 2017. A similar pattern is observable in Hungary: support for a democratic system starts falling in 2008 and reached its lowpoint in 2018, while support for a strong leader has increased from 2008 onwards. This trend is worrying and confirms earlier concern over the

[1] The measure for Estonia shows unusually high variation, possibly due to the small sample size of WVS respondents in the country.

large proportion of 'weak democrats' among post-communist citizens compared to their Western European counterparts (Klingemann et al. 2006, pp. 4–5).

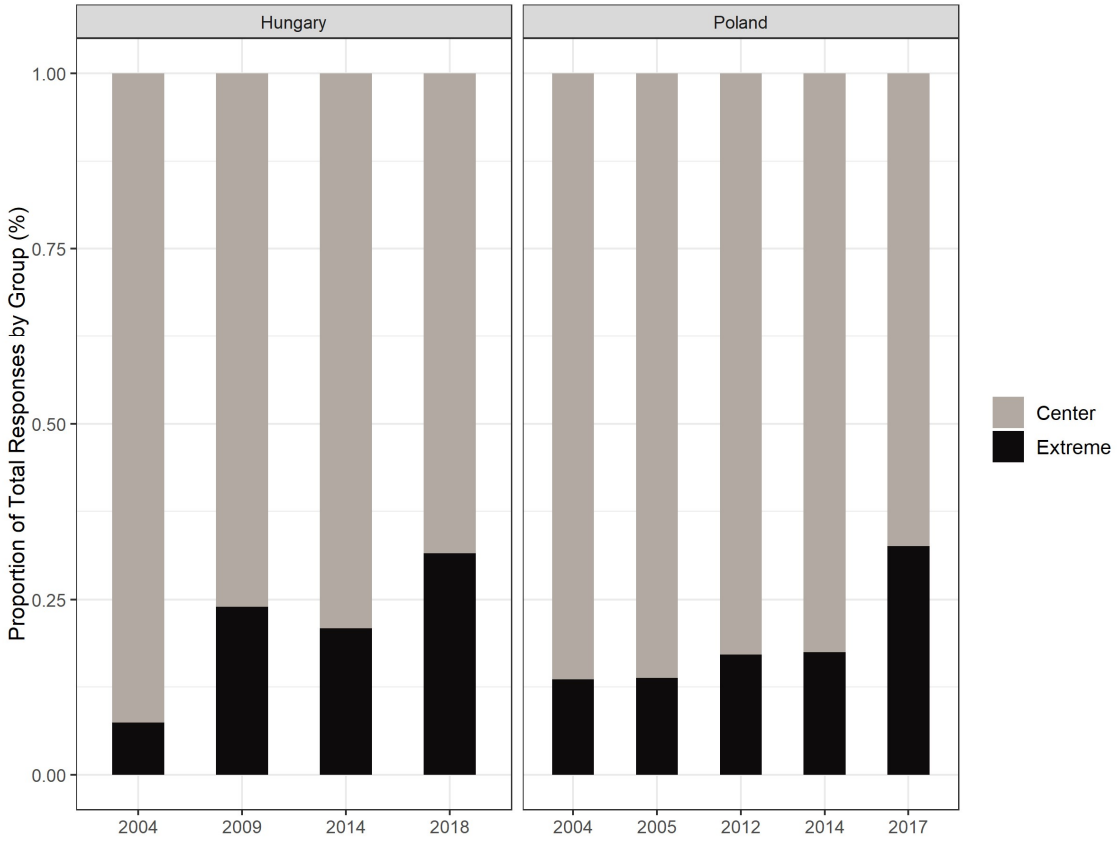
Figure 4: Support for a strong leader across Central and Eastern Europe



Finally, I examine changes in the distribution of citizens' evaluations of democracy over time across Hungary and Poland. The WVS contains a question asking respondents how democratically they consider their country to be governed. Over time, we observe a gradual polarisation of such views. In Hungary, respondents' evaluations of democracy diverge considerably more sharply in 2018 compared to a decade prior, with 32 per cent of respondents choosing an extreme score in 2018 compared to just 7 per cent in 2008 (see Figure 5). The trend in Poland goes in the same direction: while only 14 per cent chose extreme responses – be they positive or negative – in 2004, this share increased to 33 per cent in the latest available data

from 2017 (see Figure 6). These temporal trends indicate growing division in citizens' evaluations of their incumbents and mirror a general process of political polarisation that has characterized both countries in recent years.

Figure 5: Distribution of extreme vs. average responses for how democratically country is governed (Hungary)



Overall, the descriptive overview of trends in democratic support provides a contextualisation of the Hungarian and Polish cases both in geographic and temporal terms. At the same time, it shows the limitations of existing existing measures of support for democracy: on the one hand, survey batteries that focus on liberal democratic items tend to produce uniformly high approval of liberal democracy. On the other hand, batteries comparing generic support for democracy to approval of alternative regime types indicate more worrying patterns both when it comes to citizens' commitment to democracy as their preferred form of government and regarding the gradual polarisation of views around democratic practice in Hungary and Poland. These mixed

findings provide the backdrop for a more nuanced exploration of the shape and distribution of democratic understandings among the populations of both countries.

Measuring the heterogeneity of democratic attitudes

At the core of my habilitation's theoretical argument lies the assumption that a lack of attitudinal consolidation around liberal democratic norms makes a political system vulnerable to democratic backsliding by allowing authoritarian-leaning leaders to enjoy continued electoral support despite engaging in violations of democratic standards. To probe this argument empirically, a central element of my research strategy is therefore the development of a differentiated measure of citizens' democratic attitudes that allows me to assess their relative commitment to liberal democracy.

My starting point is the existing battery from the WVS that asks respondents to rate a series of items according to how essential they believe them to be for a democracy. Alongside the three liberal items explored above, the WVS contains three items to probe 'authoritarian understandings.' These have been used in previous studies to show that approval for liberal democracy often coexists with similar levels of support for authoritarian items in ways that suggest that democracy is 'confused' (Kruse et al. 2019) or 'misunderstood' (Kirsch and Welzel 2019) by respondents. The WVS authoritarian items span a range of non-democratic forms of government, asking respondents to rate their support for religious authorities interpreting laws, military rule, and people obezing their rulers. I choose to reformulate these items for my project to reflect some of the insights generated by my focus group discussions regarding the importance of public order, the futility of elections, and limitations to civic freedoms. Furthermore, I add three items to capture the majoritarian conception of democracy that featured prominently in particular among Polish focus group participants. Finally, the WVS contains three items that correspond to an 'egalitarian' understanding of democracy and

emphasize redistribution and social benefits awarded by the government. As with the liberal items, I conserve these essentially in their original formulation for my own survey to capture the outcome-focused, instrumental attitudes voiced by certain focus group participants. Table 1 displays the items on understandings of democracy contained in the WVS along with those I employed when collecting original survey data on democratic attitudes in Poland and Hungary. Moreover, Tables 2a and 2b compare the Cronbach's Alpha for the summated ratings of the three items per understanding for the latest WVS wave alongside the score from the surveys run for my habilitation project, showing a similar level of coherence across the different measures.

Table 1: Comparison of WVS items vs own understandings of democracy battery

	World Values Survey (WVS)	Own Survey
Liberal understanding	***L1**: People choose their leaders in free elections.*	***L1**: People choose their leaders in free elections.*
	***L2**: Civil rights protect peoples' liberty against oppression.*	***L2**: Civil rights protect people from state oppression.*
	***L3**: Women have the same rights as men.*	***L3**: Women have the same rights as men.*
Authoritarian understanding	***A1**: Religious authorities interpret the laws.*	***A1**: The government uses violence to enforce public order.*
	***A2:** The army takes over when government is incompetent.*	***A2**: Elections only serve to confirm the ruling party in office.*
	***A3**: People obey their rulers.*	***A3**: The government limits civic freedoms to rule efficiently.*
Majoritarian understanding	–	***M1**: The majority can always overrule the minority.*
	–	***M2**: Any law can be changed if there is a majority for it.*
	–	***M3**: The minority must accept the will of the majority in all circumstances.*
Egalitarian understanding	***E1**: Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor.*	***E1**: Government taxes the rich and subsidizes the poor.*
	***E2**: People receive state aid for unemployment.*	***E2**: People receive state aid for unemployment.*
	***E3**: The state makes people's income equal.*	***E3**: The state makes people's income more equal.*

Table 2a: Cronbach's Alpha for Hungary summated ratings

	WVS Wave 7 (2018)	Own Survey
Liberal	0.709	0.680
Egalitarian	0.502	0.617
Authoritarian	0.495	0.551
Majoritarian	–	0.603

Table 2b: Cronbach's Alpha for Poland summated ratings

	WVS Wave 7 (2017)	Own Survey
Liberal	0.718	0.703
Egalitarian	0.640	0.661
Authoritarian	0.458	0.747
Majoritarian	–	0.653

I integrated the above items into an online survey conducted by a professional survey organisation among a representative sample – based on age, gender, regional origin, and vote choice at the last national election – of 2'670 respondents in Poland between July and August 2021 and 1'989 respondents in Hungary between December 2021 and January 2022. Respondents were asked to rate each of the 12 items on a 7-point Likert scale according to how essential they considered them to be for a democracy. The item battery was preceeded by an attention check in an effort to ensure participants would read the different items closely prior to rating them.

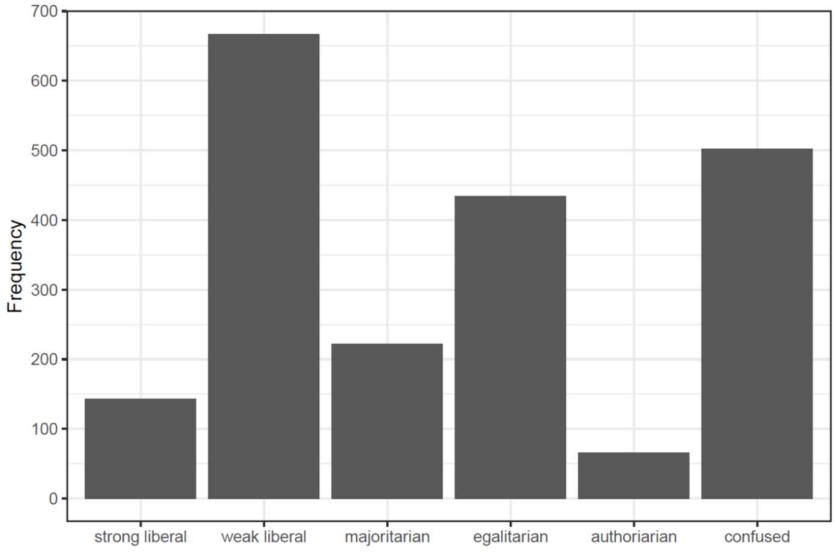
To aggregate respondents' ratings into a single measure of democratic attitudes, I proceeded in two stages: in a first step, I calculated the average across the three items chosen to represent a given understanding and constructed four new variables for liberal, majoritarian, egalitarian, authoritarian understanding of democracy for each respondent. In a second step, I developed theoretically derived ideal-types of understandings of democracy (for a similar approach used to classify respondents' perceived identity, see (Nicoli et al. 2020). To facilitate the assignment of individual respondents to one of six ideal-typical categories of understandings of democracy, I recoded these individual scores by dividing the 7-point scale into four equal segments that I qualified as low, medium low, medium high, and high. I distinguished six possible configurations:

- *Strong liberals* score highly on the liberal dimension but medium low at most on the other three dimensions;
- *Weak liberals* score highly on the liberal dimension, but also medium high on at least one additional dimension, meaning their exclusive commitment to liberal democratic norms is diminished;
- *Majoritarians* score at least as highly on the majoritarian dimension (high or medium high) as they do on the liberal dimension, and lower on the remaining two;

- *Egalitarians* score at least as highly on the egalitarian dimension (high or medium high) as they do on the liberal dimension, and lower on the remaining two;
- *Authoritarians* score at least as highly on the authoritarian dimension (high or medium high) as they do on the liberal dimension, and lower on the remaining two;
- I classified any remaining patterns as *confused* understandings. This residual category deliberately captures a broad range of inconsistent patterns (e.g. where respondents score low or medium across all or most dimensions or where two of the non-liberal categories receive the same high score) to avoid overinterpretation by assigning an unclear understanding to a specific ideal-type.

The distribution of different understandings of democracy among Hungarian and Polish respondents is shown in Figures 6 and 7. Among Hungarian respondents, weak liberals stand as as by far the largest group (34%), clearly surpassing even the residual category of confused understandings (25%). Another large group is composed of egalitarians (21%), of which there are twice as many as majoritarians (11%). Strong liberals represent a worryingly small share of respondents (7%), second only to authoritarians as the smallest category (3%).

Figure 6: Distribution of distinct understandings of democracy in Hungary

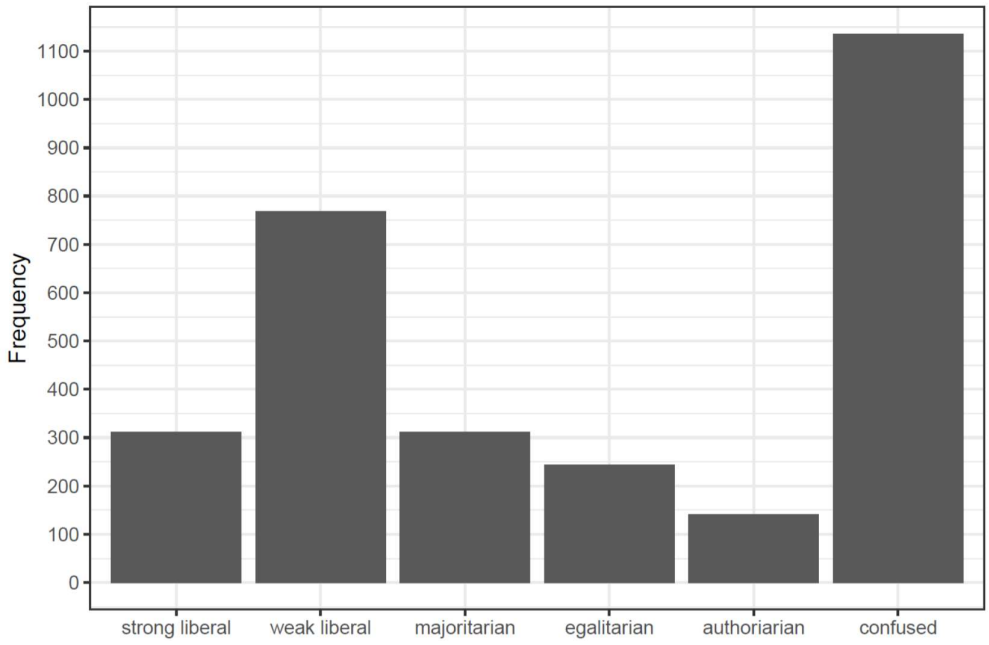


In Poland, it is notable that confused understandings prevail, accounting for well over a third (36%) of respondents (see Figure 7). It is worth highlighting that of these, a considerable number – 361 out of 972 respondents assigned to the confused category – score identically across all four dimensions. This pattern indicates that speeding during questionnaire completion, rather than actual conceptual confusion over democracy, may be one of the sources of these seemingly incongruous response patterns. At the same time, it seems useful to capture confused understandings explicitly in order to recognize that not all citizens will have fully formed and coherent attitudes towards democracy, with inconsistent patterns potentially indicating a low salience and resulting non-attitude towards the phenomenon surveyed (Goerres and Prinzen 2011, p. 5; Converse 1964). Still, given the large range of patterns contained in this residual category, I choose to remove it from subsequent analyses to avoid overinterpretation.

Among the remaining categories, weak liberals are the numerically largest group in Poland, with more than twice as many respondents (28%) falling into this category compared to any of the other substantive categories. Strong liberals are a clear minority of the sample (11%) and

identical in size to the majoritarian category (11%). Egalitarians are slightly less common (9%), and authoritarians represent the smallest share of Polish respondents (5%).

Figure 7: Distribution of distinct understandings of democracy in Poland



The distribution of understandings of democracy among Polish and Hungarian respondents confirms the weakness of liberal democratic commitment among both populations. Whereas a plurality in each country embraces liberal democratic views – the combined share of strong and weak liberals amounts to 39% of respondents in Poland and 41% in Hungary – only a negligeable group of respondents qualifies as strong liberals who hold exclusive attachment to such liberal democratic norms. In turn, support for a majoritarian conception rivals strong liberal democratic commitment in Poland and a large share of the population – even when accounting for possible measurement issues highlighted above – struggles to subscribe to any clear conception of democracy. In Hungary, strong liberals are clearly surpassed by those espousing a majoritarian view of democracy and dwarfed by a three times larger group of respondents with egalitarian views that privilege outcomes over procedures. These findings

already hint at some of the vulnerabilities a dominant executive may exploit to legitimize the rollback of domestic checks and balances.

Correlates of understandings of democracy

From the distribution of different understandings of democracy alone, we get a sense for the fragility of liberal democratic commitment among Polish and Hungarian citizens. To push this analysis further, I now turn to examining how distinct democratic attitudes relate to respondents' broader views of democracy as well as their partisan and socio-economic characteristics. As mentioned above, to avoid overinterpretation, I remove the confused category from these analyses due to the large diversity of profiles contained therein. If divergent understandings of democracy matter for citizens' vote choice, then who are the citizens who are most likely to hold views that conflict at least partially with a liberal conception of democracy? To shed some light on the correlates of different understandings of democracy, I conducted a series of multinominal logistic regressions that examine the relationship between understandings of democracy and different other factors that may be expected to shape respondents' political behaviour. Observed patterns should give some indication as to the principal sources of vulnerability in a democratic system, in other words, enable a better understanding of which parts of the population may be receptive to majoritarian and illiberal appeals or instrumental buy-outs proposed by a backsliding government.

Understandings of democracy and satisfaction

In a first step, I examine how distinct understandings of democracy relate to broader questions probing respondents' support for democracy at different levels. Spanning diffuse and specific measures alike (for a similar approach, see Weßels 2015), I correlate distinct understandings of democracy with their satisfaction with how democracy works in their country, their satisfaction with the government, and the overall importance respondents award to living in a democracy.

The first section of this chapter already highlighted a polarisation over time of respondents' views of how democratic their country is. The findings below suggest that divergent understandings of democracy correspond to distinct levels of satisfaction with a given system, with clearer correlations for the Polish case than the Hungarian one.

In Hungary, we find few significant relationships between understandings of democracy and measures of support for democracy. Perhaps echoing the high degree of dissatisfaction with democracy voiced in the focus groups, this sentiment appears shared across the board for Hungarian respondents, with no significant effect in either direction of understanding of democracy upon satisfaction with democracy. The relationship between satisfaction with government and democratic attitudes is somewhat counterintuitive: both egalitarians and authoritarians are significantly *less* likely to be satisfied with the government compared to weak liberals. Authoritarians may be expected to express dissatisfaction with the ruling party by simple virtue of their anti-system perspective. However, the finding for egalitarians is more puzzling, given that Fidesz has engaged in extensive vote-buying tactics and should therefore appeal to voters who value the delivery of public goods over the respect for formal procedures. Regarding the importance of living in a democracy, the authoritarian model is the only one to show a significant negative effect compared to weak liberals. Finally, there is practically no difference between strong and weak liberals regarding different measures of support for the democratic system. For Hungary, distinct understandings of democracy thus appear only weakly related to different measures of satisfaction with democracy.

Table 3: Covariates of UoD with satisfaction in Hungary (reference category weak liberals)

	Model 1. Strong Liberal	Model 2. Egalitarian	Model 3. Authoritarian	Model 4. Majoritarian
	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)

Satisfaction with democracy	-0.070	-0.009	0.039	0.049
	(0.088)	(0.059)	(0.124)	(0.072)
Satisfaction with government	-0.063	-0.181***	-0.440***	0.079
	(0.080)	(0.055)	(0.121)	(0.067)
Importance of democracy	0.092	-0.018	-0.222***	-0.027
	(0.063)	(0.035)	(0.052)	(0.042)
Intercept	-2.025**	0.371	0.988+	-1.335**
	(0.694)	(0.389)	(0.577)	(0.465)
N		1532		
AIC		4073.394		
Cox & Snell Pseudo R2		0.072		
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2		0.077		

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

In Poland, the picture is clearer (see Table 4). When it comes to satisfaction with democracy, all three groups of strong liberals, egalitarians, and authoritarians show a significantly lower satisfaction with democracy compared to weak liberals. This effect is strongest for authoritarians – whose radical views would understandably be at odds with a system of democratic government – but is also sizeable and highly significant for strong liberals, who are considerably less satisfied with the way democracy works in Poland compared to their weak liberal counterparts. Regarding satisfaction with government, we find a comparable degree of lower satisfaction of strong compared to weak liberals, signalling that those most committed to liberal democratic norms are the ones least likely to approve of the government. We find the reverse pattern for egalitarians: those who focus on outcomes over procedures are considerably more likely to be satisfied with the government than even the weak liberal reference group. This indicates that PiS' strategy of distributing social benefits to its core voter groups is successful: egalitarians may be somewhat less likely to be satisfied with democracy on the whole than weak liberals, but they are strongly supportive of the government. Finally, I examine the abstract importance respondents accord to living in a democracy. Predictably, this is somewhat more important for strong liberals compared to weak liberals. At the same time, both authoritarians and majoritarians are significantly less likely to value living in a democracy than weak liberals, with high effect sizes in both cases. This pattern suggests a considerable openness to non-democratic forms of government that further corroborates my assumption of a lack of attitudinal

consolidation not only around liberal democratic norms but regarding support for democracy more generally.

Table 4: Covariates of UoD with satisfaction in Poland (reference category weak liberals)

	Model 1. Strong Liberal	Model 2. Egalitarian	Model 3. Authoritarian	Model 4. Majoritarian
	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)
Satisfaction with democracy	-0.241***	-0.150*	-0.453***	0.006
	(0.067)	(0.071)	(0.097)	(0.063)
Satisfaction with government	-0.220**	0.305***	-0.054	0.036
	(0.071	(0.063)	(0.094)	(0.057)
Importance of democracy	0.163*	0.044	-0.389***	-0.315***
	(0.079)	(0.073)	(0.071)	(0.056)
Intercept	-0.740	-1.843***	1.976***	0.797*
	(0.535)	(0.481)	(0.477)	(0.363)
N	1774			
AIC	4850.288			
Cox & Snell Pseudo R2	0.162			
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2	0.172			

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

Overall, distinct understandings of democracy show a greater correlation with different levels of satisfaction with democracy and the government as well as the importance of living in a democracy in Poland than in Hungary. In Poland, the analyses produce significant findings in the expected direction, with strong liberals more critical towards democracy and the government alike, while egalitarians express higher satisfaction with the government than their weak liberal counterparts. Finally, the comparatively lower importance of democracy for both authoritarians and majoritarians indicates that these groups of citizens may be more willing to tolerate democratic backsliding by elected representatives. The weak correlations in Hungary seem to mirror the generalised disillusionment with democracy found in the focus groups, with differences in appreciation of democracy apparently minimal across respondents holding divergent conceptions of democracy.

Understandings of democracy and partisanship

Previous studies have suggested that partisanship plays an key role in citizens' willingness to tolerate democratic backsliding, with voters more likely to tolerate democratic violations by co-partisans and to punish such actions more harshly when conducted by their political opponents (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits et al. 2022; Fossati et al. 2021). But how does partisanship relate to understandings of democracy? One assumption may be that, as backsliding deepens, non-liberal understandings –in particular a majoritarian conception that legitimates the dismantling of checks and balance with the democratic mandate received by the governing party – become more widespread among their supporters. In reverse, it may be that liberal democratic commitment was weak among sympathizers of the governing party from the start, allowing it to benefit from a lower level of scrutiny regarding its democratic credentials even before beginning to implement a programme of democratic backsliding. In either case, it appears useful to examine the relationship between partisanship and different conceptions of democracy to better understand whether and how these two dimensions intertwine.

Table 5 shows the multinomial logistic regression results for Hungary, with Fidesz as reference category for the supported party and weak liberals as overall reference category for the different models. The clearest finding concerns respondents with authoritarian understandings, who are significantly more likely to vote for practically any party other than Fidesz compared to their weak liberal counterparts. It is important to recall that respondents with authoritarian orientations represent only a small minority of the sample, making it difficult to engage in a substantial interpretation of this finding. The only other strongly statistically significant relationship concerns egalitarians, who are considerably more likely to prefer the Democratic Coalition, the Green Party, and the radical right Jobbik over Fidesz than weak liberals. This is surprising given both the ideological spread of the more preferred parties, but also the extensive redistribution efforts Fidesz has engaged in to secure electoral support among less privileged

population groups. At the same time, it chimes in with the finding that egalitarians are less likely to express satisfaction with the government than weak liberals. Finally, for strong liberals, Momentum – a staunch critic of the governing Fidesz party – is the only party for which the positive effect compared to weak liberals is significant. Majoritarian understandings do not yield any significant findings regarding party preference. Since there is no considerable overlap between understandings of democracy and party preference in Hungary, it appears that the two aspects instead represent independent dimensions that may affect vote choice.

Table 5: Covariates of UoD with partisanship in Hungary (reference category weak liberals)

	Model 1. Strong Liberal	Model 2. Egalitarian	Model 3. Authoritarian	Model 4. Majoritarian
	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)
Supported Party [a]				
Democratic Coalition	0.056	0.925***	1.610**	-0.230
	(0.366)	(0.228)	(0.557)	(0.304)
Dialogue for Hungary	0.391	0.363	1.013	-0.106
	(0.592)	(0.464)	(1.106)	(0.539)
Socialist Party	0.590	1.072*	2.884***	-0.132
	(0.694)	(0.488)	(0.722)	(0.687)
Green Party	-0.508	1.409**	2.191*	0.156
	(1.071)	(0.458)	(0.878)	(0.623)
Jobbik	-0.056	1.157***	2.105***	-0.266
	(0.351)	(0.204)	(0.485)	(0.282)
Momentum	0.839*	0.325	1.891**	-0.838+
	(0.370)	(0.336)	(0.620)	(0.500)
None	-0.010	0.383+	1.724***	-0.310
	(0.284)	(0.197)	(0.468)	(0.233)
Intercept	-1.570***	-0.849***	-3.576***	-0.849***
	(0.152)	(0.116)	(0.383)	(0.116)
N	1532			
AIC	3373.827			
Cox & Snell Pseudo R2	0.079			
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2	0.084			

[a] Reference Category: Fidesz

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

In Poland, we find a somewhat distinct pattern (see Table 6). Both strong liberals, but also authoritarians prefer any other party over the ruling PiS compared to respondents with weak liberal orientations. The effect size for authoritarians is intuitive, with respondents holding such views roughly twice as likely to prefer the radical right Confederation party than any of the

other parties or the option of not voting. In contrast, it is less intuitive that strong liberals should similarly show the highest effect size for the Confederation party, which is most at odds with their liberal convictions. One partial explanation may be that strong liberals' dislike of PiS is so intense that they rate any other party more highly than PiS, even those that are ideologically even more extreme. Egalitarians are significantly less likely to vote for either of the two main liberal parties, Civic Coalition and Poland 2050, than for PiS, compared to weak liberals. Mirroring their strong satisfaction with the government highlighted in the previous analyses (see Table 4), this indicates that respondents holding egalitarian attitudes are most likely to support the ruling party that has delivered considerable welfare benefits to its core constituencies. Majoritarians, in turn, are somewhat less likely to prefer the liberal Civic Coalition over PiS than weak liberals, but somewhat more likely to prefer Confederation that has a clearly undemocratic outlook. Overall, PiS seems to attract citizens with weak liberal orientations along with egalitarians and majoritarians, though again without a clear overlap between understandings of democracy and partisanship that would suggest one dimension directly shapes the other.

Table 6: Covariates of UoD with partisanship in Poland (reference category weak liberals)

	Model 1. Strong Liberal	Model 2. Egalitarian	Model 3. Authoritarian	Model 4. Majoritarian
	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)
Supported Party [a]				
Civic Coalition	1.864***	-0.814***	1.025**	-0.424*
	(0.269)	(0.218)	(0.369)	(0.205)
Confederation	2.019***	-0.331	2.300***	0.533+
	(0.342)	(0.336)	(0.407)	(0.276)
Poland 2050	1.249***	-0.825***	1.022**	-0.200
	(0.290)	(0.233)	(0.381)	(0.207)
The Left	1.876***	-0.118	1.218*	-0.067
	(0.337)	(0.297)	(0.479)	(0.304)
None	1.151***	-0.437	1.789***	-0.161
	(0.348)	(0.281)	(0.394)	(0.270)
Constant	-2.281***	-0.693***	-2.828***	-0.795***
	(0.241)	(0.127)	(0.310)	(0.131)
N	1774			
AIC	4302.225			

Cox & Snell Pseudo R2	0.106
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2	0.112

[a] Reference category: Law and Justice (PiS)

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

Understandings of democracy and socio-demographic covariates

In a final set of descriptive analyses of my survey data, I examine how different democratic attitudes relate to respondents' key socio-demographic characteristics. Besides age and gender, I examine how respondents' place of residence (urban or rural), their level of education and their socio-economic status covary with different understandings of democracy. Again, weak liberals as the largest group in both populations represent the reference category.

Table 7 presents the main socio-economic covariates of different understandings of democracy in Hungary. For strong liberals, the only significant positive difference compared to weak liberals concerns respondents who enjoy a good financial position. In turn, respondents with egalitarian attitudes are less likely to indicate a fair or good financial situation and also less likely to have completed higher education compared to weak liberals. Authoritarians show a similar deviation to weak liberals but with a twice as high an effect size, suggesting that respondents holding such views are among the least privileged. Additionally, authoritarians are both less likely to be urban residents and less likely to be among the older generation than weak liberals. While rural residence is traditionally associated with less liberal political outlooks, the negative effect size of age may indicate that older respondents' experience of limited democracy under Communism makes them more sceptical towards authoritarian attitudes. Finally, I find no significant difference regarding the socio-economic characteristics of majoritarian respondents compared to weak liberals in Hungary. Overall then, in Hungary low levels of education and socio-economic status appear to make respondents more likely to embrace clearly illiberal or outcome-based conceptions of democracy, but do not play a

significant difference when it comes to distinguishing between strong and weak liberals as well as those holding majoritarian orientations.

Table 7: Covariates of understandings of democracy in Hungary (reference category weak liberals)

	Model 1. Strong Liberal	Model 2. Egalitarian	Model 3. Authoritarian	Model 4. Majoritarian
	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)
Gender:	0.025	0.136	-0.237	-0.297+
Female [a]	(0.187)	(0.126)	(0.267)	(0.157)
Residence:	-0.253	-0.095	-0.637*	0.009
Urban [b]	(0.194)	(0.129)	(0.294)	(0.160)
Age [c]				
35 – 54	0.206	0.042	-0.533	0.226
	(0.253)	(0.167)	(0.325)	(0.218)
55+	0.156	-0.008	-0.698*	0.309
	(0.259)	(0.168)	(0.336)	(0.219)
Education [d]				
Secondary	0.191	-0.288	-0.712+	-0.322
	(0.506)	(0.277)	(0.432)	(0.364)
Higher	0.128	-0.771**	-1.309**	-0.327
	(0.513)	(0.289)	(0.491)	(0.372)
Financial Situation [e]				
Fair	0.152	-0.510**	-1.397***	-0.017
	(0.322)	(0.176)	(0.296)	(0.250)
Good	0.940*	-0.786**	-1.436*	0.097
	(0.397)	(0.297)	(0.583)	(0.353)
Intercept	-1.988***	0.411	0.387	-0.864*
	(0.590)	(0.322)	(0.497)	(0.432)
N		1532		
AIC		4126.204		
Cox & Snell Pseudo R2		0.064		
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2		0.068		

[a] Reference category: male; [b] Reference category: rural; [c] Reference category: below 34; [d] Reference category: primary education; [e] Reference category: poor

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

In Poland, we find a similar picture to Hungary when it comes to the relevance of education. Egalitarians and authoritarians are significantly less likely to have completed higher and secondary education compared to weak liberals, while this difference is statistically significant for majoritarian respondents only with regards to higher education. Strong liberals appear somewhat more likely to have achieved a higher level of education compared to weak liberals. This pattern aligns with the expectation that higher levels of education make individuals less

likely to hold non-liberal attitudes towards democracy. Interestingly, differences in socio-economic status appear significant only for authoritarians in the Polish case, who are less likely than weak liberals to indicate a fair financial situation. The effect of a good financial situation fails to reach statistical significance, possibly again due to the small share of authoritarians in the sample. Residence is a significant factor only in the case of strong liberals, who are more likely than weak liberals to live in urban areas. Finally, there is a negative correlation between age and both authoritarian but also majoritarian attitudes, with older respondents less likely to hold such views compared to weak liberal attitudes than younger ones.

Table 8: Covariates of understandings of democracy in Poland (reference category weak liberals)

	Model 1. Strong Liberal	Model 2. Egalitarian	Model 3. Authoritarian	Model 4. Majoritarian
	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)	Log Odds (Std. Err.)
Gender	-0.020	-0.015	0.323+	-0.350*
Female [a]	(0.137)	(0.150)	(0.193)	(0.137)
Residence:	0.337*	-0.084	-0.015	-0.050
Urban [b]	(0.138)	(0.157)	(0.198)	(0.143)
Age [c]				
35-54	-0.144	0.199	-0.381+	-0.422*
	(0.174)	(0.192)	(0.227)	(0.169)
55+	-0.216	-0.236	-0.824***	-0.624***
	(0.176)	(0.203)	(0.243)	(0.174)
Education [d]				
Secondary	0.507+	-0.561*	-0.715**	-0.282
	(0.300)	(0.230)	(0.266)	(0.225)
Higher	0.565+	-0.809***	-1.127***	-0.569*
	(0.298)	(0.234)	(0.279)	(0.229)
Financial Situation [e]				
Fair	0.109	-0.024	-0.609**	0.144
	(0.174)	(0.176)	(0.224)	(0.169)
Good	0.312	-0.298	-0.248	0.014
	(0.195)	(0.223)	(0.254)	(0.201)
Intercept	-1.541***	-0.426	-0.360	-0.027
	(0.328)	(0.271)	(0.306)	(0.254)
N		1774		
AIC		5056.866		
Cox & Snell Pseudo R2		0.063		
Nagelkerke Pseudo R2		0.067		

[a] Reference category: male; [b] Reference category: rural; [c] Reference category: below 34; [d] Reference category: primary; [e] Reference category: Poor

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

In sum, the most marked difference in when it comes to socio-economic correlates of different understandings of democracy concern the distinction between egalitarians and authoritarians compared to weak liberals. It is the less educated and, less uniformly so, the less financially privileged that seem most open to conceptions of democracy that focus on outcomes or social order. In turn, there are few statistically significant differences between strong and weak liberals and between majoritarians and weak liberals. Age and gender also play a more minor role, with female respondents somewhat less likely than men to hold majoritarian conceptions over weak liberal ones, and older respondents less likely to embrace authoritarian and majoritarian attitudes at least in Poland. Overall, these patterns suggest that besides seeking to mobilize a more specific electorate holding egalitarian and authoritarian views, backsliding elites can count on the presence of voters with weak liberal and majoritarian attitudes across many different population groups, facilitating the building of a broad coalition of electoral support.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided a contextualisation of the two cases examined in depth in my habilitation, spelled out the survey-based measurement of divergent democratic attitudes, and surveyed their distribution and relevant correlates among representative samples of Hungarian and Polish respondents. The chapter's findings confirm the weakness of liberal democratic commitment among both populations. The largest share of respondents in both countries can be classified as weak liberals who, while embracing liberal democratic elements of democracy, also express approval for at least one of the alternative understandings of democracy. Besides, I find sizeable portions of egalitarian views and a considerable share of majoritarian attitudes, both of which outweigh the small minority of respondents that show strong and exclusive liberal democratic commitment.

The descriptive patterns discussed in the correlational analyses chime in with some of the insights generated by the focus group analysis: Hungarian respondents tend to have an almost uniformly bleak outlook on democracy and show considerable openness towards instrumental attitudes that concentrate on individual benefits to be obtained from the government in power rather than its democratic credentials. In Poland, the picture is more differentiated, with more significant differences between groups based on their distinct understandings of democracy, but at the same time a clearer relationship between egalitarians and support for both satisfaction with the government and partisan support for PiS.

Overall, the chapter's findings signal that divergent understandings of democracy exist among both the Hungarian and the Polish populations and these they correlate meaningfully with other factors thought to influence political behaviour. At the same time, we find no perfect alignment between a specific democratic understanding and partisan or socio-economic characteristics, suggesting that democratic attitudes form an independent dimension shaping citizens' political choice. In the following, I delve deeper into specific understandings of democracy relate to vote choice (Study 1) and how different trade-offs between a candidate's democratic performance and their alternative orientations affect leadership choice at the aggregate level as well as for different subgroups of the population (Study 2).

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The Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding: How Divergent Understandings of Democracy Shape Political Choice*

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Abstract

Why do citizens in democracies fail to punish political candidates who openly violate democratic standards at the ballot box? The bulk of existing research assumes that a common understanding of democracy underpins citizens' evaluations of different candidates, resulting in a trade-off between undemocratic practices and partisan or economic considerations. We shed doubt on this assumption by showing that divergent understandings of democracy coexist among citizens and affect vote choice. We leverage a novel approach to estimate individual-level citizen commitment to democracy by means of a candidate choice conjoint experiment in Poland, a country experiencing democratic backsliding in a context of deep polarization. We find support for our claim that respondents with less clear-cut liberal democratic attitudes not only tolerate democratic violations more readily, but do so irrespective of a given candidate's partisan affiliation. Thus, we contend that a lack of attitudinal consolidation around liberal democratic norms explains continued voter support for authoritarian-leaning leaders.

Keywords: democratic backsliding; voting behavior; democratic commitment; Poland; conjoint experiment
Word count: 11,792

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Introduction

Democratic backsliding has become a major concern globally in recent years (Waldner and Lust 2018; Diamond 2020; Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). Unlike democratic breakdowns, which are often characterized by external intervention or military coups, democratic backsliding occurs through an incremental erosion of democratic standards that may remain above the threshold to full-fledged regime change (Waldner and Lust 2018). Such processes are generally driven by 'executive aggrandizement' (Bermeo 2016) or 'incumbent takeover' (Svolik 2015), whereby dominant executives proceed to gradually dismantle domestic checks and balances and civil liberties. In electoral democracies, citizens thus represent the last bulwark to resist undemocratic practices by elected leaders (Schedler 2019). This raises the puzzle of why despite widespread support for democracy, citizens often fail to hold the government accountable for violations of liberal democratic principles (Svolik 2020; Aspinall et al. 2020; Fossati, Muhtadi, and Warburton 2021).

Several recent studies explore partisan polarization as the central explanation for authoritarian support (Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2021; Orhan 2021), identifying a 'partisan double standard' (Graham and Svolik 2020) or 'democratic hypocrisy' (Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022) that leads voters to punish democratic violations by candidates from their own party less harshly than others. What unites the bulk of existing research is the generally implicit assumption that a common understanding of democracy underpins citizens' evaluations of different candidates, leading them to actively trade off undemocratic practices for competing candidates' personal, partisan, or policy-related characteristics.

We challenge this explanation by exploring the presence of divergent understandings of democracy among the citizenry and probing how such differing understandings affect vote choice among candidates who express distinct democratic views. Concretely, we contend that even in reasonably consolidated democracies, alternative views of democracy—including ones that are at odds with some fundamental liberal democratic stipulations, such as the separation of powers and independent media—coexist and inform citizens' evaluations of alternative candidates and their eventual vote choice. The robustness of support for democracy thus becomes less a question of weighing up democratic violations against alternative elements of a candidate's profile, and more a matter of

divergent democratic attitudes that guide citizens' candidate preferences. In a nutshell, we contend that a lack of attitudinal consolidation around liberal democratic norms undermines citizens' role as effective checks against democratic violations, to the point where politicians' illiberal stances may even contribute to their electoral success.

Measurements of broad support for democracy are insufficient to capture these dynamics, resulting in a need for a more nuanced assessment of citizens' commitment to liberal democratic norms (see Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020, 11) and how this affects political behavior. Earlier findings highlight authoritarian orientations as a distinct party-voter linkage across Europe (Jacob and Wunsch 2021; Donovan 2019), indicating that authoritarian attitudes play an important role in explaining voter preferences even in established democratic systems. Our survey experiment further probes the demand-side of this argument by examining how differing understandings of democracy inform citizen support for candidates who endorse distinct democratic views.

Our focus on understandings of democracy speaks to a renewed interest in the nature and impact of mass attitudes on democratic stability and public support for democracy (Canache 2012; Welzel 2006; Claassen 2020; Mauk 2020). Probing the link between political attitudes and political behavior, we evaluate how divergent understandings of democracy may lead citizens to endorse candidates who advocate measures that fall short of liberal democratic standards. In essence, we expect respondents to favor candidates whose democratic positions are congruent with their own understanding of democracy. For voters with clear liberal understandings, we expect candidates' democratic stances to be particularly important, whereas voters with alternative understandings may base their vote choice on other elements of a candidate's profile and pay less attention to their specific democratic orientations. In this sense, only voters with crystallized liberal understandings of democracy can be expected to act as bulwarks against democratic backsliding, with the remainder of the electorate vulnerable to majoritarian appeals or even willing to tolerate outright violations of democratic standards.

We study the interplay between understandings of democracy and vote choice in Poland, a country that represents a paradigmatic case of democratic backsliding. Initially recognized as a front-runner in the post-communist democratic transformation, the country has experienced a gradual erosion of domestic checks and balances and the expansion of executive power under the ruling Law and Justice party (PiS) from 2015 onward (Buštíková and Guasti 2017; Bill and Stanley 2020;

Bakke and Sitter 2022; Sadurski 2018; Solska 2020). Moreover, Poland has been facing deepening political and societal polarization (Tworzecki 2019; Fomina 2019) that makes it a most likely candidate for explanations related to partisan considerations. Finding evidence for our alternative explanation based on divergent democratic attitudes among citizens in this context would therefore suggest our findings are likely to travel to other comparable instances of democratic backsliding in advanced democracies.

To assess the linkages between understandings of democracy and vote choice, we implement a preregistered, well-powered candidate choice conjoint experiment among a representative sample of citizens in Poland. We propose a more nuanced measurement of revealed understandings of democracy and their impact on candidate choice by leveraging the novel approach of Individual Marginal Component Effects (IMCEs) (Zhirkov 2021). This approach overcomes traditional unidimensional measurements of support for democracy and allows us to estimate how individual-level citizen commitment to democracy affects vote choice for candidates expressing differing democratic views. In methodological terms, our study is among the first to leverage IMCE estimates to answer a substantive research question. We compare the findings obtained through this novel technique to more established approaches to conjoint analysis and thus provide an illustration of the added value of individual-level analysis of respondent preferences as revealed in a conjoint experiment.

Analyzing democratic backsliding in a European, multi-party setting, our study contributes to a growing debate about the ability of citizens to act as democratic bulwarks in the face of executive takeover. Our findings point to a considerable heterogeneity in democratic views among Polish voters that leads parts of the electorate to overlook democratic violations at the ballot box. Controlling for partisanship and socio-demographic covariates, we show that divergent understandings of democracy explain a considerable portion of vote choice in the Polish context, in particular for respondents holding liberal democratic views. Thus, our analysis sheds light on the demand side of democratic backsliding by showing that deep-seated variation in democratic attitudes among the citizenry plays a key role in explaining the ongoing success of illiberal politics and the attendant deepening of democratic backsliding over several electoral cycles. We begin by spelling out the potential linkages between democratic attitudes and vote choice and how these in turn may play into processes of democratic backsliding. The following section provides a brief overview of the

Polish case as on of a democracy at a crossroads. We then detail our research design and in particular our measurement of divergent understandings of democracy. The empirical section presents our findings in respect to our different hypotheses. The conclusion summarizes our main insights and discusses their wider theoretical and practical implications.

Theorizing the Demand Side of Democratic Backsliding

Democratic backsliding is generally studied as an elite-driven process, whereby authoritarian-leaning leaders actively manipulate the rules of the democratic game in their favor and secure voters' continued approval through buy-outs or ideological appeals. The supply side is certainly crucial when it comes to implementing democratic violations and offering justifications for undemocratic practices. However, we contend that the demand side—political culture and citizens' views of democracy—is just as vital when it comes to understanding the vulnerability of certain democracies to the onset of democratic backsliding.

In doing so, we contest Waldner's and Lust's rejection of political culture as an explanatory factor for democratic backsliding on the grounds that the same variable—political culture—cannot simultaneously account for the initial deepening and subsequent erosion of democracy (Waldner and Lust 2018, 99). We claim that this logic is compelling only if we suppose a unitary, homogeneous political culture in each country that would drive democratization in one or the other direction. In practice, it seems much more likely for distinct democratic attitudes to coexist in a given population, resulting in individual citizens being more or less prone to vigorously defending liberal democratic norms when faced with a real-life, multidimensional election situation. This basic assumption informs our theoretical expectations regarding the linkages between democratic commitment and citizens' responses to democratic backsliding.

How Democratic Attitudes Affect Vote Choice

For citizens to play the role of effective safeguards against executive aggrandizement and the resultant democratic erosion, there is an important pre-condition: a shared understanding that liberal democracy is worth defending against the incumbent's attempts to overstep the limits of government (Weingast 1997; Saikonnen and Christensen 2020; Fossati, Muhtadi, and Warburton 2021).

Political culture has been cast as central to democratic consolidation, with democratic attitudes among citizens a key determinant of regime stability (Gunther, Diamandouros, and Puhle 1995, 3; Pridham 1995, 171; Linz and Stepan 1996). Attitudinal consolidation around liberal democratic norms thus becomes a crucial puzzle piece in the process of overall consolidation of the democratic system. Arguments regarding the relationship between democratic values and the political system alternatively focus on the demand side, expecting democratic government to result from widespread democratic values among the citizenry (Inglehart and Welzel 2005), or the supply side, with democratic stability depending on the concomitant consolidation of a popular consensus around democratic attitudes (Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998, 95-96; Schmitter and Santiso 1998).

Earlier seminal contributions on the importance of popular support for democracy (Almond and Verba 1963; Easton 1975; Lipset 1959) have informed more recent studies on the role of mass attitudes for democratic stability (Mauk 2020; Claassen 2020; Grossman et al. 2021; Fossati, Muhtadi, and Warburton 2021). Yet whereas the literature on political culture and its broader systemic relevance abound, there is comparatively little research on how democratic attitudes impact individual political behavior (for an exception, see Canache 2012). On the one hand, 'grievance theory' predicts that citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy drives greater political engagement (Kriesi 2012; Kern, Marien, and Hooghe 2015). On the other hand, the 'critical citizens' literature expects citizens' disillusionment with the democratic system to result in political inaction or a focus upon political activity outside established institutional channels (Klingemann 2014; Norris 1999, 2011). While predicting opposite outcomes, both approaches are premised on the notion that citizens share a similar understanding of what an ideal democracy should look like (Oser and Hooghe 2018, 713). In methodological terms, this often translates into democratic commitment being equated with citizens' support for the generic concept of democracy (Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020; Foa and Mounk 2016, 2017).

This conception is at odds with the burgeoning literature on alternative understandings of democracy that highlights persistent divergences in citizens' democratic attitudes (Carlin 2011; Canache 2012; Davis, Goidel, and Zhao 2021; Bakule 2020). Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) explore 'democrats with adjectives' as a mirror image to earlier debates around 'democracies with adjectives' (Collier and Levitsky 1997). Similarly, Landwehr and Steiner (2017) highlight that

different people can understand democracy in distinct, even opposing ways, resulting in a lack of consensus over specific political arrangements. Building on this literature, our study examines the linkages between political culture and political behavior or, more specifically, how divergent understandings of democracy among the citizenry affect vote choice in contexts of democratic backsliding, as we develop in the following.

From Understandings of Democracy to Democratic Backsliding

Democratic consolidation is held to be achieved once democracy becomes 'the only game in town' (Linz and Stepan 1996). This popular dictum implies not only a stable institutional framework, but also a firm commitment among both elites and citizens to conducting politics in accordance with democratic principles (Weßels 2015). Our study singles out precisely the lack of such widespread democratic commitment as a key vulnerability that authoritarian-leaning leaders can exploit to expand their executive powers. Hence, where divergent understandings of democracy among the citizenry meet political elites willing to exploit such attitudes to legitimize an erosion of democratic standards, we are likely to witness the onset of gradual backsliding that remains unchecked by voters.

This emphasis on distinct democratic attitudes contrasts with the bulk of the literature on citizens' responses to democratic backsliding that assumes citizens to share a broadly similar understanding of democracy (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022). Accordingly, candidate choice becomes an arbitration between different elements of competing candidates' profiles, with voters potentially trading off any democratic violations against candidates' personal, partisan, or policy characteristics. Our emphasis on divergent democratic attitudes disputes assumptions about the depth and permanence of democratic commitment even in societies considered as consolidated democracies. Instead, we suggest that the global spread of illiberal trends and democratic backsliding have brought systemic questions regarding the value of democracy back into the public discourse in ways that are likely to affect citizens' voting behavior.

Studies seeking to establish the presence of distinct democratic attitudes among citizens tend to produce nuanced typologies covering a range of different understandings. Focusing on Mexico, Schedler and Sarsfield (2007) differentiate between liberal, intolerant, paternalistic, homophobic,

and exclusionary democrats. Carlin (2011) draws on AmericasBarometer data to identify different sub-types of democratic support in Chile as being of a democratic, delegative, fair-weather, illiberal, and autocratic nature. Studying the Czech Republic, Bakule (2020) highlights the presence of liberal, illiberal, and xenophobic democrats as well as liberal non-democrats. These approaches provide important insights into the diversity of democratic attitudes in a given population. However, their level of detail makes them less useful when it comes to examining how distinct understandings of democracy inform vote choice via experimental methods.

To assess the linkages between democratic attitudes among citizens and distinct democratic views expressed by political candidates, we differentiate between three broad types of democratic attitudes. We distinguish these primarily based on the supposed source of democratic legitimacy. A *liberal* understanding goes beyond a general regime preference for democracy (Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020) to embrace equal rights and civil liberties for all citizens and the importance of executive constraints (O'Donnell 1998). In contrast, citizens holding *authoritarian* views of democracy may accept outright violations of democratic standards as legitimate to maintain social order and prevent chaos, with earlier studies qualifying such 'authoritarian notions of democracy' as 'democracy misunderstood' (Kirsch and Welzel 2019) or 'democracy confused' (Kruse, Ravlik, and Welzel 2019). Authoritarian attitudes have been shown to exist among citizens in many democracies (Singh and Dunn 2013), including in Europe (Jacob and Wunsch 2021; Vasilopoulos and Lachat 2018), Asia (Dore 2014), and Latin America (Cohen and Smith 2016). In line with earlier research, we expect liberal and authoritarian attitudes to lie at opposite ends of a spectrum (Kirsch and Welzel 2019) that captures the depth and exclusiveness of citizens' commitment to liberal democratic norms. To these two understandings, we add *majoritarian* attitudes as a third category to capture a distinct conception of democratic legitimacy (Allan 2017). Reflecting a populist emphasis on power lying with 'the people,' voters holding majoritarian views consider decisions supported by the political majority as democratic per se, irrespective of whether they violate central precepts of liberal democratic conceptions (Grigoriadis 2018; Urbinati 2017). In what has been qualified as 'majoritarian threat to liberal democracy' (Grossman et al. 2021) such voters thus grant the elected government considerable leeway to limit executive constraints or pursue critical media in an effort to implement its political program. While such an understanding may not be outright undemocratic, it does risk making voters more open to tolerating political leaders

who undermine traditional checks and balances.

So what happens when citizens themselves hold differing views of the nature and purpose of a democratic system? Fundamentally, we expect divergent understandings of democracy to inform citizens' vote choice and thus to play a key role when it comes to enabling the arrival in power and subsequent deepening of democratic erosion by authoritarian-leaning elites. We posit that political candidates in democracies not only represent different policy preferences but may also stand for distinct system-level preferences to which voters respond. In turn, we contend that if citizens' commitment to liberal democratic norms is key to ensuring their rejection of candidates who endorse democratic violations, then any shortcoming in this regard is likely to result in continued public support for candidates advocating backsliding practices.

We propose two distinct mechanisms linking divergent understandings of democracy and support for authoritarian-leaning candidates. The first mechanism focuses on the depth of liberal *democratic commitment* as a key predictor of vote choice. In essence, we assume democratic resilience to depend primarily on the strength of voters' commitment to liberal understandings of democracy. For those who express strong support for liberal democratic views, candidates' democratic positions should represent a particularly salient element for their vote choice and they should therefore be the ones to punish democratic violations at the ballot box most clearly. In contrast, we anticipate voters expressing support for majoritarian or authoritarian views to be more indifferent toward democratic violations and instead to privilege alternative elements when it comes to choosing between competing candidates. Since we consider authoritarian attitudes to be more diametrically opposed to liberal ones, we expect the salience of candidates' democratic views to be even lower for voters displaying authoritarian attitudes compared to those with majoritarian view. We hypothesize:

H1a (democratic commitment hypothesis): Respondents with more liberal understandings of democracy lend greater weight to candidates' democratic positions than those with more majoritarian or authoritarian attitudes.

Our second mechanism focuses on the *congruence* between a given voter's understanding of democracy and the democratic positions expressed by a candidate. In this case, we expect the

overlap between voters' and candidates' democratic views to drive vote choice. Hence, we should find not only that respondents expressing strongly liberal attitudes are most likely to support candidates with liberal views. In addition, we would also expect to find that respondents holding more majoritarian or authoritarian views of democracy similarly endorse candidates expressing corresponding democratic positions, possibly even to the point of rating lower those candidates who espouse liberal democratic views. In this case, the relevant aspect is not the relative salience of liberal democratic positions expressed by candidates, but rather the correspondence between views of democracy held by respondents and those expressed by political candidates. In other words, we submit that certain voters may support specific candidates not despite the undemocratic practices they sponsor, but precisely because these candidates profess views that align with their own attitudes. We therefore hypothesize:

H1b (congruence hypothesis): Respondents are more likely to prefer candidates whose democratic positions are congruent with their own understanding of democracy.

To further probe our theoretical argument regarding the relevance of divergent understandings of democracy, we investigate the presence of *partisan polarization* as a prominent rival explanation for voters' tolerance towards democratic violations (Ahlquist et al. 2018; Graham and Svolik 2020). This argument holds that partisan identification will lead voters to discount undemocratic practices advocated by a representative of their preferred party, especially in polarized contexts (Svolik 2019; Druckman, Peterson, and Slothuus 2013; Svolik 2021, 6). Despite some studies failing to confirm that voters are systematically more willing to tolerate democratic regressions by co-partisans (Carey et al. 2020; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2021, 10), it seems plausible that partisan attachments may lead voters to discount unpleasant information when it concerns candidates from their preferred party. Consequently, election results—and experiments that mirror elections—might reveal not polity preferences per se but preferences that are conditional on partisan forces. We therefore hypothesize:

H2 (partisan polarization hypothesis): Respondents punish candidates who correspond to their party preference less severely for expressing democratic views that violate democratic standards.

In sum, we propose to investigate how divergent understandings of democracy among the citizenry affect voting behavior when competing candidates express a range of democratic positions, some of which openly conflict with liberal democratic norms. We propose citizens' degree of liberal democratic commitment as well as the congruence between their democratic attitudes and the democratic views expressed by competing candidates as critical linkages between democratic attitudes and vote choice. To account for partisan-related dynamics, we also assess the role of partisan preference in explaining distinct levels of tolerance for democratic violations. Ultimately, we expect a lack of commitment to liberal democratic norms to affect citizens' willingness to tolerate democratic violations independently of partisan-related dynamics and use our experimental design to probe two distinct mechanisms linking understandings of democracy to vote choice.

Poland in 2021: Democracy at a Crossroads

The bulk of studies on citizens' views and mass polarization in the context of democratic backsliding has focused on the bipartisan context of the United States (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022; Grossman et al. 2021; Carey et al. 2019; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2021). The focus on a context displaying deep partisan polarization may have led scholars to privilege partisan-based explanations of citizens' responses to backsliding while potentially overlooking alternative dynamics that drive voters to support—or oppose—candidates endorsing non-liberal democratic views. Our own study focuses empirically on the case of Poland, a country similarly characterized by a high degree of partisan polarization, but that boasts a multiparty setting. This offers citizens a broader range of options than simply supporting or rejecting the incumbent party representative by opening the possibility of defecting to an ideologically closer alternative candidate.

Poland was viewed until recently as an exemplar of democratic transformation, but has since shifted toward becoming a prototype of democratic backsliding. Starting from its arrival in power following the 2015 parliamentary elections, the governing Law and Justice Party (*Prawo i Sprawiedliwość*, or PiS) has engaged in continuous efforts to dismantle the country's checks and balances. As the first government since the country's transition to democracy to be able to rule without any

coalition partner, PiS swiftly proceeded to remodel the judicial system and bring public media under government control, establishing what country experts have qualified as a 'purely majoritarian democracy' (Sadurski 2018, 3) or a 'ruthlessly majoritarian' government style bent on dismantling any constraints on the executive (Fomina and Kucharczyk 2016, 58). As of 2016, Poland was downgraded from a 'liberal' to an 'electoral democracy' according to the Varieties of Democracy indicator on regime type (Lührmann, Tannenberg, and Lindberg 2018). Freedom House began classifying the country as a 'semi-consolidated' rather than a consolidated democracy following the reelection of the PiS party in 2019 (Freedom House 2020). At the same time, Poland is situated among other established democracies with regard to general support for democracy among citizens (see Appendix G).

Poland's deep societal polarization sees socio-economic cleavages mapping rather neatly onto partisan divides, with the gradual emergence of 'two roughly equal nationalist-populist and centrist-liberal camps' (Markowski 2016, 1316). Over time, polarization has deepened in particular between the electorate of PiS and that of its main contender Civic Platform (*Platforma Obywatelska*, or PO). The shared religiosity and right-wing orientation that characterized both PiS and PO electorates in 2005 has given way to a much more clear-cut ideological division between the two camps since then (Fomina 2019, 86). In the wake of the 2019 parliamentary elections, PiS predominantly represents people with lower education levels, older people, and rural residents, whereas PO's electorate is constituted primarily of urban residents as well as those holding high professional status and university degrees (Markowski 2020).

In sum, Poland constitutes a democracy at a crossroads. Significant steps towards an erosion of democratic standards have already been taken, but elections, for now, remain sufficiently competitive for voters still to be able to remove an authoritarian-leaning government by electoral means. In light of the increasing pressure on judicial independence and free media, citizens effectively stand center-stage as potential safeguards against a further dismantling of checks and balances and a full breakdown of democracy. This sensitive stage in the process of democratic backsliding makes Poland a particularly promising case in which to probe the broader linkages between understandings of democracy and candidate choice while generating insights that are likely to hold in similar contexts of democratic threat.

Research Design: An Experimental Study in Poland

To examine to what extent divergent understandings of democracy play a role in voters' willingness to tolerate democratic backsliding, we develop an experimental design that consists of a paired candidate conjoint experiment. We begin by spelling out the study design and in particular the choice of the experimental setting and the experimental attributes. We then explain the measurement of the dependent variable in detail, highlighting the advantages of using individual marginal component effects (IMCE) to measure respondents' commitment to democracy over a more traditional approach based on Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs). Next, we describe the measurement of the main independent variable - understandings of democracy - and validate that our experimental attributes are correctly perceived by study participants as representing liberal, majoritarian and authoritarian conceptions. Finally, we present the empirical strategy we use to probe our hypotheses.

Study Design

To investigate to what extent divergent democratic attitudes inform vote choice in contexts of democratic backsliding, our analytical approach leverages a paired candidate choice conjoint experiment. This design offers a number of advantages when it comes to measuring democratic attitudes. Most importantly, it allows us to integrate alternative elements alongside the democratic positions contained in candidates' profiles to capture potential trade-offs voters engage in (Schedler 2019; Svolik 2020). This multi-dimensional set-up reduces the social desirability bias that plagues traditional one-dimensional survey questions used to measure support for democracy among voters (Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020; Foa and Mounk 2016, 2017), which often result in large shares of respondents in democracies and autocracies alike claiming a high commitment to democracy.

In our study, we placed respondents into a hypothetical electoral situation and asked them to choose between two competing profiles of candidates running for seats in the national parliament (*Sejm*). We use the conjoint setting to effectively manipulate elite behavior—the supply side of our argument—by varying the positions contained in our candidate profiles regarding the nomination of judges and the role of public media. Our selected attributes capture two elements—judicial independence and media freedom—that are crucial to liberal democracy but also offer a range of

options as to how they may be implemented in a democratic system. Varying candidates' positions on these two attributes thus enables us to probe the overall salience of candidates' democratic views and the relative impact of different variations to strong liberal views upon respondents' candidate choice.

We strive to capture divergent understandings of democracy on the elite side by formulating the levels for the two democratic attributes in line with the liberal, majoritarian, and authoritarian understandings we developed for the citizens' perspective. For judicial independence, we propose as a liberal position that judges should be selected based on cross-party consensus. This is a high standard that is not even met in many established democracies. Our majoritarian level proposes the selection of judges by the government, i.e. a democratically legitimized body that however does not reflect the full range of political views in the population. We seek to capture an authoritarian view by proposing that judges be selected by the leader of the ruling party. This conception is closest to the notion of a strong leader who does not have to deal with executive constraints and may use her office to undermine the separation of powers.

For views on the role of public media, we posit independent reporting on political developments as the liberal position. Our majoritarian position focuses on public media as the government's mouthpiece that serves to justify government policy towards the wider public. The authoritarian position goes one step further by stating that the purpose of public media is to defend government policy against criticism, thus completely sapping the role of media as a fourth power that can offer an independent take on government action. Table 1 displays our democratic attributes along with the levels reflecting distinct understandings of democracy.

We deliberately formulate our alternative items in such a way that the non-liberal (majoritarian and authoritarian) positions can be plausibly endorsed by candidates from either political camp. We choose this approach for three main reasons. First, choosing subtle violations allows us to model the gradual nature of democratic backsliding, which consists precisely of rather discrete ways to chip away at checks and balances that only jointly amount to a dismantling of democratic standards (Scheppele 2013). Second, we strive to avoid strong party-based cues when it comes to the specific violations endorsed by candidates, as these may bias our findings and make certain profiles seem less credible to respondents. Finally, we refrain from including positions that are so extreme that they would draw near universal condemnation, making it difficult to discriminate

Attribute	Levels	Concept
Judicial appointments	*Liberal*: Judges should be selected based on cross-party consensus. *Majoritarian*: Judges should be selected by the government. *Authoritarian*: Judges should be selected by the leader of the ruling party.	Judicial independence
Role of public media	*Liberal*: The role of public media is to report independently on political developments. *Majoritarian*: The role of public media is to justify government policy towards the wider public. *Authoritarian*: The role of public media is to defend government policy against criticism.	Media pluralism

Table 1: Democratic attributes and levels.

whether such condemnation is driven by a true commitment to liberal democratic norms or due to considerations of social desirability.

We partnered with the Warsaw-based market research company Inquiry—YouGov's representative for Central and Eastern Europe—to recruit a representative sample of Polish respondents based on age, gender, geographic origin, and vote choice at the last national election for our online survey, into which we embedded our conjoint experiment. The survey was conducted between 12 July and 12 August 2021 ($N = 2,706$). As specified in our preregistration, we removed speeders and those respondents who failed attention checks from our sample (Berinsky, Margolis, and Sances 2014), bringing the final sample we use for our analysis to 2,097 respondents. We report descriptives along with measures of sample representativeness for the final sample in Appendix A.3 and provide the full results for alternative sample specifications in Appendix B.5.

We asked respondents to complete twelve discrete choice tasks, each time choosing between two candidates (forced-choice) and rating each candidate on a scale from 1 (strongly disapprove) to 7 (strongly approve). Each candidate profile was identified with a neutral label ('Candidate A' vs. 'Candidate B') and displayed randomized information on seven attributes, with the order of attributes fully randomized anew for each choice task. Alongside candidates' respective democratic views, our competing profiles contained information on their gender, age, partisanship, and policy positions. To counter the critique of the limited external validity of conjoints due to their abstract nature, we selected policies that have been widely debated in the Polish context. We include the

full attribute table in Appendix A.2.

Dependent Variable: *Revealed* Democratic Attitudes

According to our theoretical argument, divergent understandings of democracy affect the extent to which citizens are likely to overlook democratic violations when selecting among competing candidates. We use our conjoint experiment to measure what we term *revealed* democratic attitudes by assessing the weight of candidates' democratic attributes in individual respondents' candidate ratings by computing *Individual* Marginal Component Effects (IMCEs) (Zhirkov 2021). Respondents' IMCEs then serve as a measure of our dependent variable. Before we turn to explaining the construction and purpose of IMCEs in more detail, we first discuss the caveats of existing candidate choice experiments that rely on *Average* Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs).

Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) and their Limits

Based on the candidate choice and rating experiment, we seek to estimate how much importance respondents assign to multidimensional candidate characteristics. Previous research has already implemented such choice experiments in which candidates, among others, have shown undemocratic conduct in the past or made undemocratic statements in electoral campaigns (e.g, Graham and Svolik 2020; Ahlquist et al. 2018; Carey et al. 2020). However, these analyses solely relate to the *average* effect of candidates' undemocratic behavior on respondents' choices between two candidates or to specific subgroups based on partisanship (e.g., Graham and Svolik 2020; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2021).

In a first step, we replicate the traditional approach by computing Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) for our candidate choice experiment, as shown in Figure 1. AMCEs allow researchers to estimate the effect of an individual treatment component over the joint distribution of the remaining attributes (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014, 10). Focusing on the attributes of the judiciary and media, the AMCEs suggest that, on average, respondents approve less of candidates who make majoritarian or authoritarian statements compared to liberal ones.[1]

1. Note that the largest effect on candidate choices can be attributed to shared partisanship between the respondent and candidate profiles.

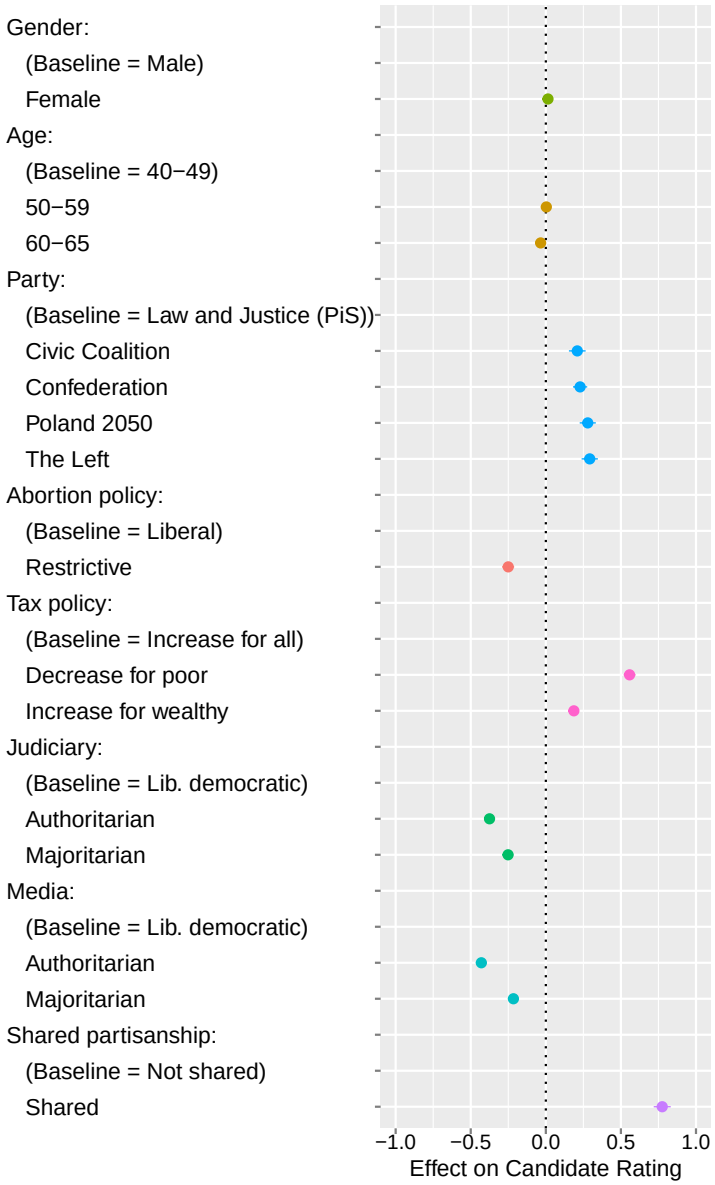

Figure 1: Pooled Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) of candidate attributes on candidate ratings. N=2,097.

However, AMCEs do not allow us to draw any inferences about the individual level. Specifically, the observed pattern may reflect a shared adherence to reasonably liberal democratic attitudes across our sample. However, the focus on *average* effects may just as well mask considerable divergence of democratic attitudes within our sample, with some respondents punishing democratic violations very harshly, while others are indifferent or even approve of candidates holding non-liberal democratic views. In brief, AMCEs do not allow us to directly investigate potential heterogeneity in the electorate with respect to their willingness to abandon candidates holding

majoritarian or authoritarian positions (cf. Zhirkov 2021). Yet it is precisely such divergent understandings of democracy at the individual level that underpin the causal mechanism we seek to probe in our study, leading us to adopt a recently proposed alternative approach to conjoint analysis via *Individual* Marginal Component Effects.

Individual Marginal Component Effects (IMCEs) as Measures of *Revealed* Democratic Attitudes

Individual Marginal Component Effects (IMCEs) have been recently introduced by Zhirkov (2021) to overcome some of the limitations of analyses focused on Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs). The intuition behind this approach is to estimate the effects of each candidate attribute at the individual level by regressing a respondent's ratings of each candidate[2] on the candidates' randomly assigned characteristics:

$$\mathbf{y}_i = \alpha_{il} + \beta_{il}\mathbf{X}_{il} + \varepsilon_{il}, \tag{1}$$

where $\mathbf{y}_i$ is a vector of ratings for each candidate profile made by respondent i, $\mathbf{X}_{il}$ a vector of values of attribute l shown to the respondent i, and ε_{il} a vector of respondent-specific errors. We define $\hat{\beta}_{il}$ as the IMCE for attribute l, and denote the IMCE for each attribute l with $\hat{\pi}_{il}$ (4). In our study, we focus on individuals' IMCEs for the two attributes relating to candidates' statements toward democracy (i.e., judicial appointments and role of public media). In essence, these IMCEs reveal how much respondents care about candidates' democratic stances in the evaluation of their multidimensional profiles.

IMCEs come with several advantages over aggregate analyses of choice experiments. Most importantly, while knowing the average share of citizens who would support a co-partisan candidate who behaves undemocratically is indisputably a relevant descriptive insight, it is similarly relevant to study what type of citizens exactly would support candidates with undemocratic attributes. In other words, we seek to identify what unites voters of undemocratic politicians, rather than to what extent a population would on average endorse undemocratic politicians.

2. IMCEs are computed with candidate ratings instead of choices to receive more reliable estimates at the individual level. We compare the AMCEs on the candidate rating with choices and find no differences in the relative weight of attributes (see Appendix B.2.3).

Previous research has proposed to divide a population into subgroups of interest (e.g., based on gender or partisanship) and study average conjoint behavior separately for these groups (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020). However, defining such subgroups for our attitudinal concept of understandings of democracy would require imposing arbitrary thresholds to distinguish different subgroups from one another. IMCEs, by contrast, enable us to assess the impact of different understandings of democracy on a continuous scale. Besides, aggregate analyses usually allow for examining only one covariate of interest at a time. But we often expect the covariate of interest to vary with other covariates, raising concerns about omitted variable bias.[3] By contrast, determining to what extent individual respondents care about candidates' stances toward democracy allows us to consider a range of explanatory variables jointly in a regression framework.

IMCEs rely on the same set of assumptions as AMCEs. That is, only when the assumptions of (1) stability and no carryover effects, (2) no profile-order effects, and (3) completely independent randomization of the profiles in a conjoint experiment hold, IMCEs can be estimated independently for each respondent (Hainmueller, Hopkins, and Yamamoto 2014; Zhirkov 2021). For our candidate choice experiment, we verified assumption 1 (see Appendix B.2.2) and assumptions 2 and 3 are true by design, allowing us to proceed with the estimation of IMCEs.

Figure 2 reports the IMCEs for the democratic attributes by partisan identification. In line with our theory, the IMCEs demonstrate that respondents punish majoritarian- and authoritarian-leaning candidates to substantially different degrees. Even though the distributions of different understandings differ somewhat within each partisan group, we find a considerable degree of divergence in the extent to which respondents reject or—in some cases—approve of more majoritarian candidates. This pattern suggests that Polish voters show distinct reactions to majoritarian and authoritarian candidate behavior: some consistently punish such candidates, others are indifferent to candidates' democratic conduct, and others still even actively support such behavior.[4]

3. For instance, when a population is divided into partisan subgroups and average choice behavior is compared against each other, one could not rule out that age confounds the behavioral differences found for different partisan groups.

4. Appendix B.6 provides statistical evidence on the association between party preference and understandings of democracy.

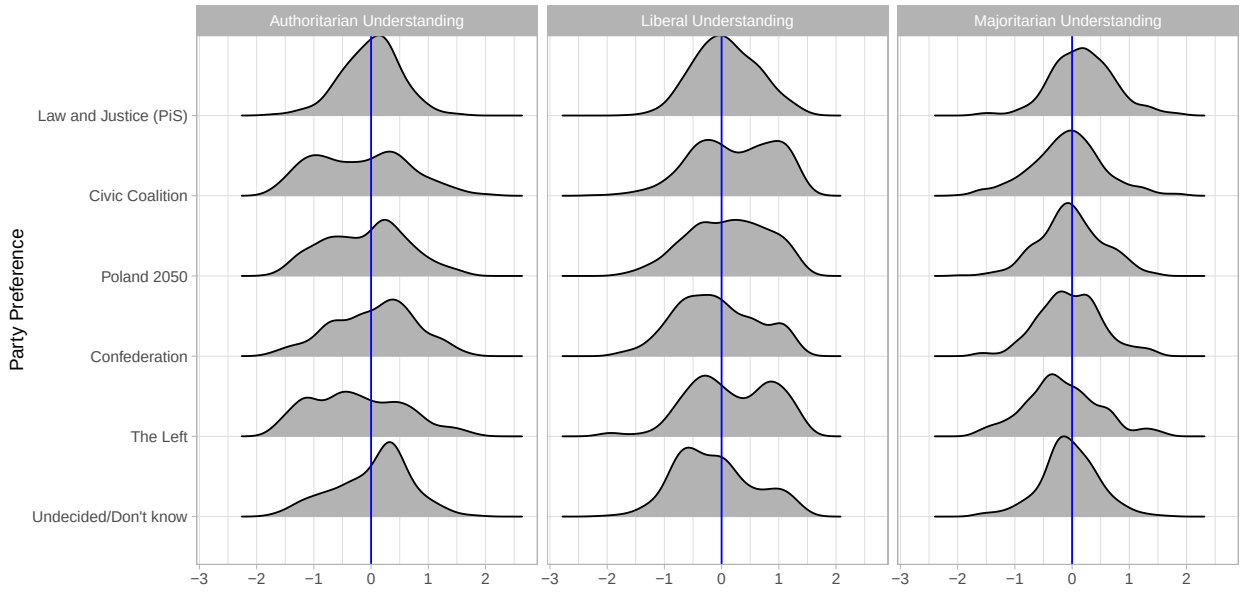

Figure 2: Distribution of individual scores for liberal, majoritarian, and authoritarian understandings of democracy by supporters of principal Polish parties. Baseline category for majoritarian and authoritarian attribute levels is the liberal attribute level. See Table 1 for attribute description.

Independent Variables: Understandings of Democracy

Seeking to explain heterogeneity in individuals' revealed democratic attitudes—our dependent variable—we implement a measurement model to gauge individuals' understandings of democracy. We introduce the resulting individual factor scores as independent variables into a regression model, controlling for party preference and socioeconomic variables.

To measure respondents' understandings of democracy, we draw on a revised and expanded item battery from the World Value Survey (WVS) (Haerpfer et al. 2020) and implement the measurement model outlined in our preregistration. The items which we consider to relate to a liberal understanding of democracy are identical to the WVS question wording, namely "People choose their leaders in free elections," "Civil rights protect people from state oppression," and "Women have the same rights as men." We compare the distribution of Polish respondents in the 2017-2020 WVS study with country samples from around the world and find that Polish respondents subscribe to a liberal understanding of democracy to a comparatively high degree (see Appendix C.2), justifying our qualification of Poland as a reasonably consolidated democracy that can provide insight into similarly established democratic systems.

As for measures tapping into a majoritarian understanding of democracy, we developed three

novel items that refer to the powers of the elected majority and its relationship with the minority. We pre-tested a series of six majoritarian items among a smaller sample of Polish respondents and eventually chose three items, which we included in our pre-registration. Specifically, we ask respondents to what extent they agree with the following three items being essential elements of a democracy: "The majority can always overrule the minority," "Any law can be changed if there is a majority for it," and "The minority must accept the will of the majority in all circumstances."

Lastly, we presented respondents with three items gauging the extent to which they subscribe to an authoritarian understanding of democracy. We adapted these from the more general items in the World Value Survey to fit the context of a more advanced democracy: "The government uses violence to enforce public order," "Elections only serve to confirm the ruling party in office," "The government limits civic freedoms to rule efficiently." The order of all items measuring understandings of democracy was randomly assigned for each respondent.

Based on these observed items, we implemented an ordered confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with three latent variables corresponding to a liberal, majoritarian, and authoritarian understanding of democracy.[5] We compute individual factor scores for each latent variable based on the model. Since the different understandings may be correlated with one another,[6] we allow covariance between the three latent variables. The model indicates a good model fit (χ^2 = 284.44, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.98, RMSEA = 0.06), suggesting that our measures are internally valid (see details of measurement model in Appendix B.1).

To further probe the robustness of our measurement, we assess to what extent individuals' understandings of democracy correspond to their evaluation of candidates' democratic attributes we had included in the conjoint. We therefore asked respondents outside the actual candidate choice experiment how democratic they thought each of the statements toward judges and media was (see Appendix B.7).[7] We implement an OLS regression model of our different levels of the two democratic attributes in our conjoint on understandings of democracy, party preference,

5. Cronbach's alpha for liberal items = 0.703, for majoritarian items = 0.653, and for authoritarian items = 0.747.

6. Indeed, as the measurement model indicates (Table B.1), liberal and authoritarian understandings are negatively correlated (-0.37, $p < 0.001$). By contrast, authoritarian and majoritarian understandings are positively correlated (0.27, $p < 0.001$). Liberal and majoritarian understandings co-vary only marginally (0.04, $p < 0.001$).

7. The question wording was: "There are different views of what can be considered democratic and what not. How democratic do you think each of the following statements is?" The scale ranged from "Not at all democratic" (1) to "extremely democratic" (7).

	Judges: Lib.	Judges: Maj.	Judges: Auth.	Media: Lib.	Media: Maj.	Media: Auth.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Liberal understanding	0.709***	−0.358***	−0.436***	0.746***	0.005	−0.320***
	(0.075)	(0.094)	(0.084)	(0.071)	(0.094)	(0.085)
Majoritarian understanding	0.015	0.437***	0.198**	−0.019	0.263**	0.212**
	(0.068)	(0.085)	(0.076)	(0.064)	(0.085)	(0.077)
Authoritarian understanding	0.137	−0.065	0.145	0.032	0.210*	0.337***
	(0.082)	(0.103)	(0.091)	(0.078)	(0.103)	(0.093)
Confederation	−0.306**	0.676***	0.113	−0.117	0.277	0.239
	(0.115)	(0.145)	(0.129)	(0.110)	(0.146)	(0.131)
Law and Justice	−0.383***	1.525***	1.077***	−0.464***	1.233***	1.450***
	(0.081)	(0.101)	(0.090)	(0.077)	(0.102)	(0.092)
Poland 2050	0.180*	0.091	−0.101	0.150	0.296**	−0.096
	(0.088)	(0.110)	(0.098)	(0.083)	(0.111)	(0.100)
The Left	0.081	0.013	−0.104	0.076	−0.042	−0.116
	(0.127)	(0.160)	(0.142)	(0.121)	(0.160)	(0.144)
No party preference/Don't know	−0.196*	0.401***	0.078	−0.111	0.241*	0.196*
	(0.081)	(0.101)	(0.090)	(0.077)	(0.102)	(0.092)
Constant	4.801***	3.277***	2.766***	5.497***	2.886***	2.426***
	(0.150)	(0.188)	(0.167)	(0.143)	(0.189)	(0.170)
Socioeconomic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,097	2,097	2,097	2,097	2,097	2,097
R^2	0.188	0.213	0.232	0.236	0.151	0.270
Adjusted R^2	0.181	0.206	0.226	0.229	0.144	0.264
Note:						*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 2: OLS regression of statements toward judges and media on understandings of democracy, party preference, and sociodemocraphics. Reference categories: Party preference = Civic Coalition. Full table can be found in the Appendix B.4.

and socioeconomic controls and report the results in Table 2.[8] In line with our expectations, a higher liberal understanding of democracy is associated with evaluating liberal positions toward the judiciary and the media as more democratic. In contrast, majoritarian understandings are positively correlated with majoritarian and, to a lesser extent, with authoritarian statements. An authoritarian understanding is only positively associated with considering an authoritarian stance toward the media as democratic. This correspondence between our independent measure of respondents' understandings of democracy and their evaluation of the items we chose to include in the conjoint strengthens our confidence in the existence of discrete understandings of democracy that shape citizens' views of candidates advocating distinct democratic views. We report the full model in Appendix B.4.

8. Variance inflation factor (VIF) for liberal understanding = 3.71, majoritarian understanding = 2.18, authoritarian understanding = 4.57. Tables B.13 and B.14 show OLS model without authoritarian understanding.

Empirical Strategy

To assess how divergent understandings of democracy affect vote choice, we implement OLS models regressing individuals' IMCEs for democratic attributes ($\hat{\pi}_{il}$) on a vector of their understandings of democracy ($\mathbf{X}_i$), controlling for a vector of partisanship and sociodemographic variables ($\mathbf{Z}_i$):

$$\hat{\pi}_{il} = \alpha_i + \beta_1 \mathbf{X}_i + \beta_2 \mathbf{Z}_i + \varepsilon_i. \tag{2}$$

More specifically, we evaluate the relevance of divergent democratic attitudes while controlling for party preference and socio-demographic variables. Controlling for respondents' preferred party allows us to rule out that different partisan attachments confound the relationship between understandings of democracy and revealed democratic attitudes. Similarly, adding socio-demographic variables (age, gender, education, income, perceived economic status) helps mitigate concerns over omitted variables bias, as socioeconomic status could also feed into respondents' level of democratic commitment as measured in the candidate experiment.

Although we control for various variables in our regression analysis, it is important to highlight that the effects identified for the understandings of democracy on revealed democratic attitudes are correlational and cannot be assigned a causal interpretation. Still, we consider that our vector of various control variables represents a considerable methodological improvement compared to the hitherto implemented subgroup analysis of aggregated estimates.

Empirical Results

Our empirical analysis tests our argument according to which divergent understandings of democracy feed into political choice. In a first step, we examine to what extent divergent democratic attitudes help to explain why citizens show different levels of democratic commitment at the ballot box. We follow up with a series of additional analyses to establish that understandings of democracy are indeed a largely independent dimension guiding citizens' vote choice. In a second step, we examine evidence for the rival hypothesis of partisan polarization, testing whether voters punish majoritarian and authoritarian out-party candidates more than co-partisans. A final section discusses our findings with respect to the hypotheses we formulated.

	Judges: Maj.	Judges: Auth.	Media: Maj.	Media: Auth.
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Liberal understanding	−0.151**	−0.214***	−0.024	−0.137**
	(0.051)	(0.051)	(0.049)	(0.052)
Majoritarian understanding	0.140**	0.098*	−0.022	0.020
	(0.046)	(0.047)	(0.044)	(0.047)
Authoritarian understanding	−0.004	0.003	0.057	0.061
	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.053)	(0.057)
Confederation	0.224**	0.141	0.056	0.114
	(0.078)	(0.080)	(0.075)	(0.080)
Law and Justice	0.346***	0.291***	0.177***	0.265***
	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.052)	(0.056)
Poland 2050	0.057	0.064	0.025	0.005
	(0.059)	(0.060)	(0.057)	(0.061)
The Left	0.013	0.066	−0.017	0.030
	(0.086)	(0.087)	(0.083)	(0.088)
No party preference/Don't know	0.131*	0.096	0.063	0.125*
	(0.055)	(0.056)	(0.052)	(0.056)
Constant	−0.215*	−0.282**	−0.403***	−0.594***
	(0.101)	(0.103)	(0.097)	(0.104)
Socioeconomic Controls	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Observations	2,097	2,097	2,097	2,097
R^2	0.069	0.068	0.022	0.048
Adjusted R^2	0.061	0.060	0.014	0.039
Note:				*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

Table 3: OLS regression of revealed democratic attitudes (IMCEs) on liberal, majoritarian, and authoritarian understandings of democracy, controlling for party preference and socioeconomic controls. Maj. = Majoritarian, Auth. = Authoritarian. Reference category for party preference = Civic Coalition. The full regression table can be found in Table B.5.

Do Understandings of Democracy Explain Revealed Democratic Attitudes?

Our central argument holds that divergent understandings of democracy feed into citizens' political choice in contexts of democratic backsliding. To probe this assumption, we implement an OLS regression predicting respondents' revealed democratic attitudes (i.e., IMCEs for democratic candidate attributes).[9] Table 3 reports our main findings.

The results indicate that the more citizens subscribe to a liberal understanding of democracy, the less supportive they are of candidates who make (1) majoritarian and (2) authoritarian claims about the judiciary and (3) propose authoritarian-leaning reforms of media independence. In turn, a higher majoritarian understanding is associated with stronger support for candidates delivering majoritarian and authoritarian statements about the appointment of judges. By contrast, a majoritarian understanding does not predict the approval of candidates proposing majoritarian and authoritarian views on the role of public media. Similarly, a higher authoritarian understanding is

9. While the VIF does not indicate strong multicollinearity between the understandings of democracy items, we remove the authoritarian understanding variable in Table B.6. These models result in a very low VIF; the effects identified for liberal and majoritarian understandings remain the same.

not negatively related to respondents' democratic commitment shown in the candidate experiment.

We add party controls to our models to show that the effect of distinct understandings of democracy holds even when we account for citizens' partisan affiliation and other party-related dynamics. Indeed, we may assume a certain overlap between understandings of democracy and party affiliation, which would undermine our argument that distinct democratic attitudes represent a largely independent dimension playing into citizens' vote choice. We undertake different analyses to discard this possibility.

First, the distribution of revealed democratic attitudes suggests that different behavioral patterns coexist within each partisan group (see Figure 3): across political parties, a strikingly even distribution in the number of respondents in each partisan group either approves less of political candidates making majoritarian and authoritarian claims, is indifferent towards candidates' democratic stances, or even supports candidates with a majoritarian or authoritarian orientation. While supporters of the ruling PiS party tend to be on average more indifferent towards candidates' stances towards democracy, many supporters of this party rate majoritarian and authoritarian candidates consistently more negatively than liberal ones.

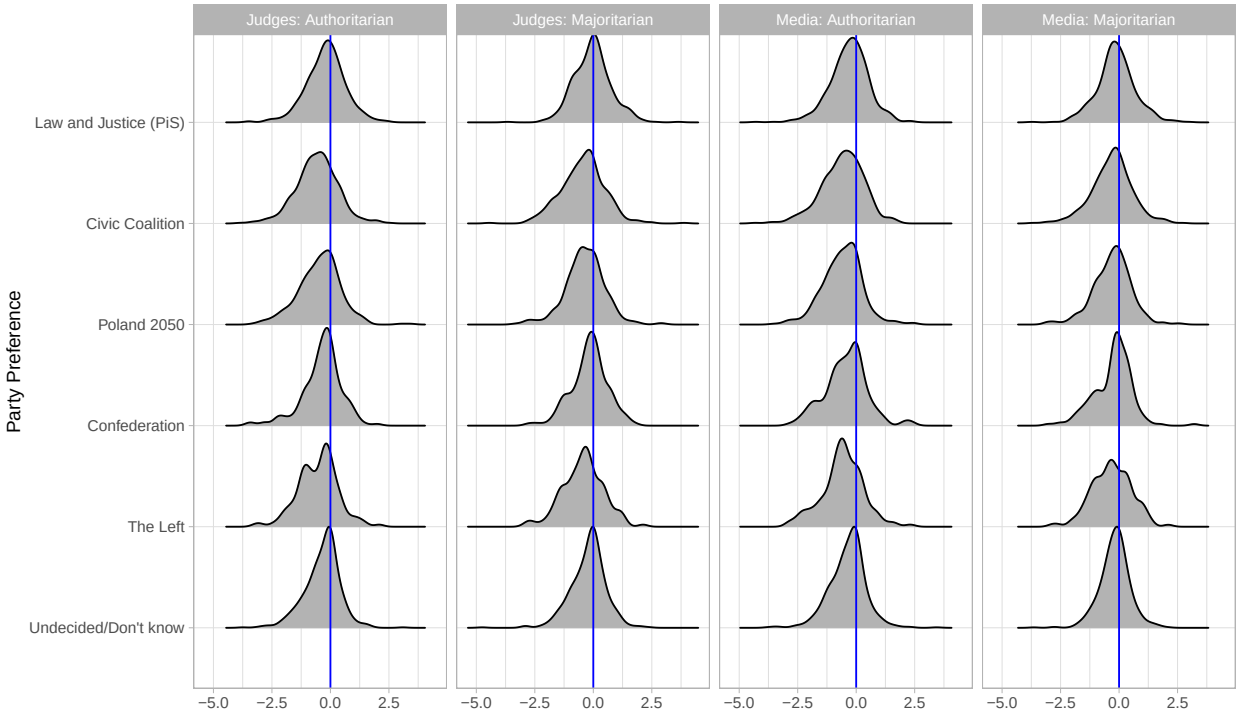

Figure 3: Distribution of individual scores for respondents' revealed democratic attitudes (i.e., IMCEs for liberal, majoritarian, and authoritarian attribute levels) by supporters of principal Polish parties.

Finally, one may assume that divergent understandings of democracy are driven primarily by supply-side dynamics, for instance in the form of PiS rule deepening majoritarian understandings among its voters. While we are not able to refute this assumption with our own survey data collected at a single time-point, we examine data collected by the Polish panel survey POLPAN (Słomczyński and Tomescu-Dubrow 2021). These data show that while understandings of democracy fluctuate somewhat over time, majoritarian understandings have actually slightly declined since the arrival of PiS in power, signaling that they exist independently in citizens (see Appendix C.1). Overall, we are therefore confident that understandings of democracy are not a mere reflection of partisanship but a largely independent dimension in citizens.

Do Voters Punish Co-Partisans Less Severely than Out-Partisans?

In a second step, we examine the rival explanation that focuses on partisan polarization as the key reason driving citizens to tolerate democratic violations by co-partisans. To test whether voters punish majoritarian and authoritarian out-party candidates more than in-party ones, Figure 4 displays the Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs)[10] conditional on whether or not the candidate shared the respondent's party identification.[11] The results do not lend support to the claim that voters punish in-party candidates less severely than out-party ones; instead, respondents disapprove of majoritarian and authoritarian views in co-partisans to the same extent as they do of similarly oriented out-party candidates.

This finding is in stark contrast to previous studies in the bi-partisan context of the United States that see partisan polarization as the main motive driving voters to overlook democratic violations (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits, McCoy, and Littvay 2022). One explanation for this discrepancy may be that the Polish multi-party setting weakens the effect of partisan polarization, since voters have an ideologically more proximate alternative to defect to if their co-partisan candidate violates democratic standards.

To probe the robustness of our findings regarding the absence of partisan polarization in Poland,

10. In line with our preregistration, we only compute AMCEs to test Hypothesis 2 since there are too few profile constellations with out- and in-party candidates due to the limited number of within-camp choice tasks observed for each respondent, so that marginal component effects at the individual level would yield unreliable estimates.

11. Note that in contrast to the overall effect of shared partisanship on candidate choices (see Figure 1, we here focus on whether respondents lend greater or lesser weight to candidates' statements about democracy *depending* on whether or not such claims are made by a co- or out-partisan candidate.

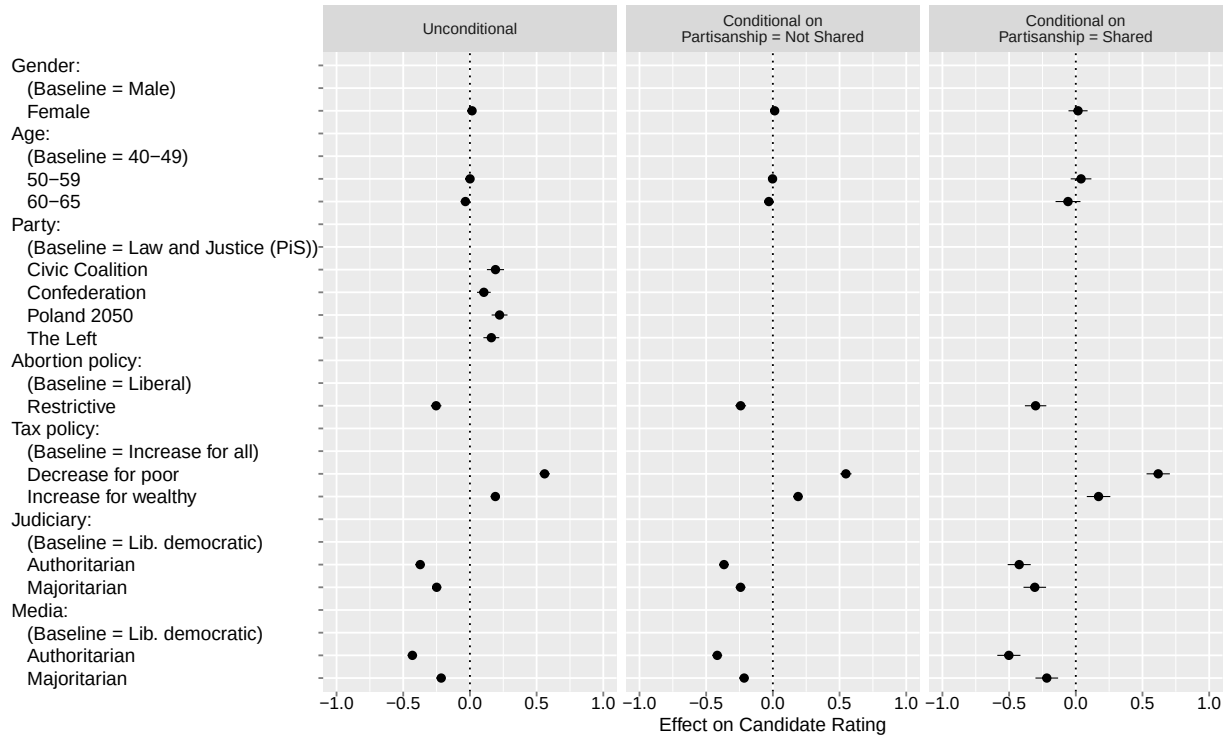

Figure 4: Average Marginal Component Effects (AMCEs) of candidate attributes conditional on whether or not candidate shared respondents' party orientation. N=2,097. 95% confidence intervals are shown.

we repeat our analysis among a subsample of choice tasks pitting candidates from similar political camps (i.e., left and right) against one another, thus approximating the Polish setting to a bipartisan system. This analysis yields mixed findings: whereas voters on the left approve consistently less of co-partisan candidates when they run against another candidate from a left-wing party, Polish right-wing voters are less willing to switch to a different candidate on the political right when she favors majoritarian or authoritarian democratic positions (results reported in Appendix B.2.4). Thus, the moderating effect of a multi-party system on partisan polarization and the attendant tolerance of democratic violations appears more pronounced among left-wing rather than right-wing voters in Poland.

How Do Democratic Attitudes Shape Vote Choice?

Our findings so far suggest that divergent democratic attitudes play a discrete and non-negligible role in shaping citizens' vote choice in contexts of democratic backsliding. But how exactly do different understandings of democracy affect voters' evaluations of competing candidates? Our

theoretical discussion posits two distinct mechanisms—democratic commitment and democratic congruence—that may link democratic attitudes to vote choice.

Illustrating this relationship, we compute the predicted values for the outcome variables in the regression conditional on the three understandings, holding all other variables constant at their means. Figure 5 displays the marginal effects of respondents' understandings of democracy on each revealed democratic attitude. Except for the majoritarian-leaning attribute on media independence, the results suggest that respondents who score low on the liberal understanding scale are indifferent to candidates' democratic views, be they liberal, majoritarian, or authoritarian.[12]

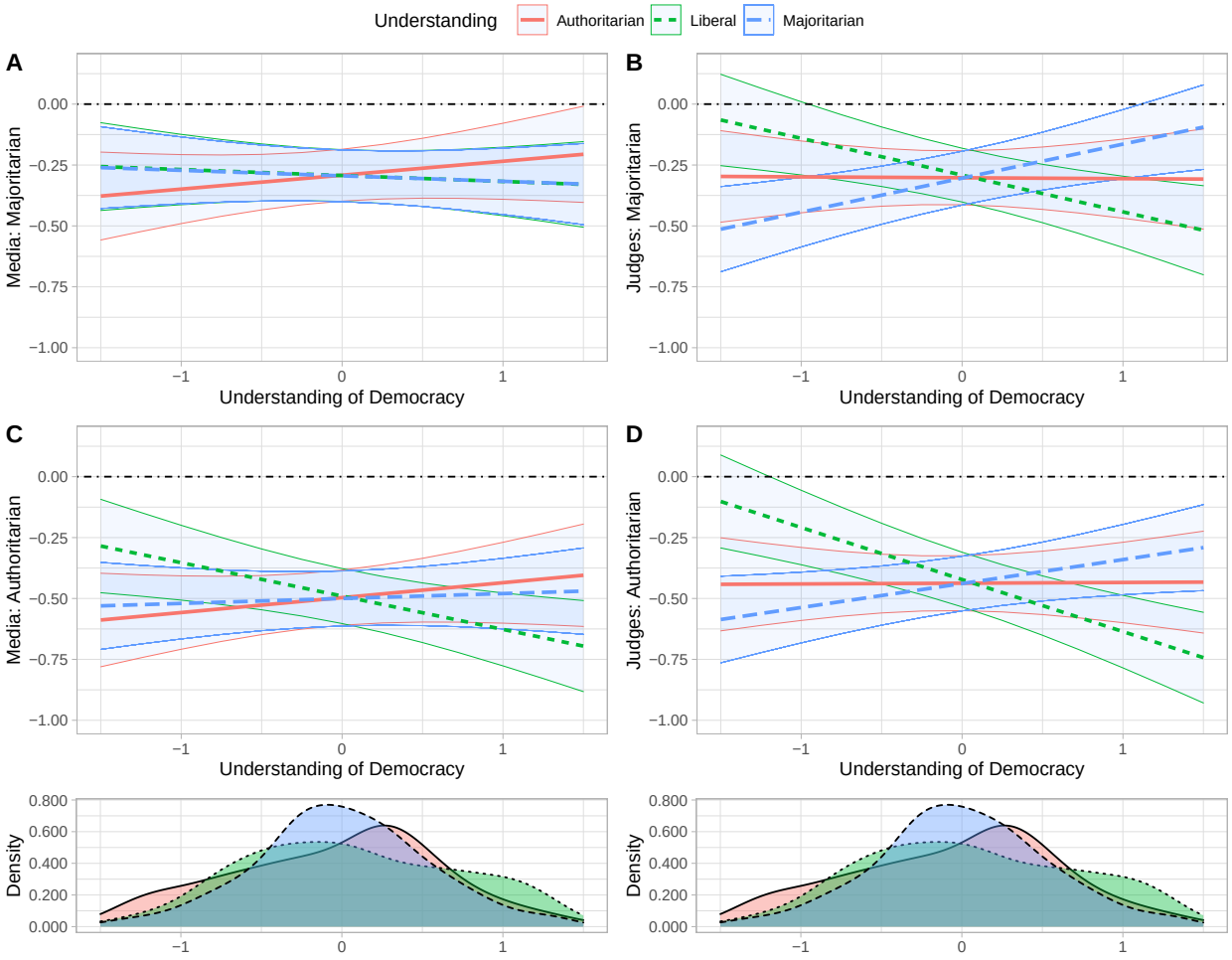

Figure 5: Marginal effects of understandings of democracy on revealed democracy attitudes toward (A) Media: Majoritarian, (B) Judges: Majoritarian, (C) Media: Authoritarian, and (D) Judges: Authoritarian based on Models 1-4 in Table 3. Ribbons represent 95% confidence intervals.

12. Note that a predicted value of zero substantially indicates that respondents rate candidates who have made authoritarian or majoritarian statements similar to those who have made liberal claims.

The reverse pattern emerges with respect to candidates' majoritarian and authoritarian stances toward judicial appointments: the more respondents hold a majoritarian understanding of democracy, the less they differentiate between liberal- and majoritarian- or authoritarian-leaning candidates in their ratings. By contrast, a majoritarian understanding is not significantly related to candidates' statements about media independence.

As for authoritarian understandings, although the variable's estimate fails statistical significance in all four models, the results suggest that, all else equal, respondents subscribing to an authoritarian understanding are slightly more supportive of candidates with majoritarian and authoritarian attributes concerning media independence.

How do these findings relate to the two mechanisms we developed to explain the linkages between understandings of democracy to vote choice? Consistent with our democratic commitment mechanism (Hypothesis 1a), we find that the more respondents subscribe to a liberal understanding, the more they disapprove of candidates making majoritarian or authoritarian claims. For respondents holding majoritarian or authoritarian views, indifference prevails when it comes to candidates' democratic positions. Strong commitment to liberal democratic norms thus appears as a central factor shaping citizens' responses to candidates who deviate from these norms.

We find less consistent evidence regarding the relevance of democratic congruence (Hypothesis 1b). To be sure, the tendency by respondents with liberal understandings to punish candidates displaying alternative views of democracy can be interpreted as supporting our congruence mechanism. However, we find only partial support for the parallel assumption that an overlap between majoritarian understandings of citizens and majoritarian positions held by candidates shapes vote choice, and no evidence that this is the case for authoritarian orientations. Hence, divergent understandings of democracy within the citizenry appear to enable democratic backsliding primarily due to a lack of widespread liberal democratic commitment, rather than being due to voters with non-liberal democratic attitudes actively supporting candidates who propose democratic violations that correspond to their understanding of democracy.

Conclusions: The Role of Divergent Understandings of Democracy in Democratic Backsliding

Our study set out to probe an alternative explanation of why citizens, despite overwhelmingly supporting democracy in principle, may fail to use elections to remove political elites holding non-liberal democratic views from power. We contend that failure to punish democratic violations at the ballot box reflects considerable heterogeneity among citizens regarding their understandings of democracy, and notably a lack of attitudinal consolidation around liberal democratic norms. Our empirical findings lend support to our theoretical argument linking citizens' democratic attitudes to their vote choice. Overall, we confirm that voters with strong liberal democratic understandings punish democratic violations most consistently. Where such liberal democratic commitment is weak or unevenly distributed across the electorate, citizens consequently fail to play the role of democratic bulwarks against authoritarian-leaning elites.

By unpacking the unidimensional measurement of "support for democracy," our study makes several contributions to our understanding of democratic backsliding and the place of citizens in such processes. Most fundamentally, our findings question the assumption in much of the existing research that people have a common understanding of democracy, and – especially in polarized contexts – are willing to sacrifice democratic performance in favor of partisan goals. In fact, our empirical findings contradict partisan double standards as an explanation for vote choice, since the punishment of democratic violations does not differ based on whether candidate profiles share respondents' partisanship or not.

Conceptually, our analysis expands upon earlier findings highlighting the threat of majoritarian voters for liberal democracy (Grossman et al. 2021) or pointing to authoritarian ties between parties and voters (Jacob and Wunsch 2021) to propose an overarching argument regarding the linkages between democratic attitudes and political behavior and their relevance in contexts of democratic backsliding. We contrast liberal democratic attitudes with non-democratic authoritarian conceptions as well majoritarian views as a more "natural" understanding of democracy that requires less critical thinking than liberal views. In doing so, we respond to calls to investigate how the strength of democratic beliefs (Carlin 2018, 419) and the liberal-democratic quality of citizens' regime preferences (Wuttke, Gavras, and Schoen 2020) relate to vote choice and eventual

democratic outcomes.

We put forward - and empirically investigate - two distinct mechanisms that may account for the impact of divergent democratic attitudes upon vote choice. While it may seem plausible to assume that citizens do not just accept, but actually support politicians with majoritarian views, our findings suggest that this is not the case. Instead, our main insight suggests that it is not so much the diversity of citizens' democratic views - and their potential overlap with democratic positions expressed by political candidates - that counts, but rather the relative strength of liberal democratic commitment in a given population. Where deep commitment to liberal democratic norms is not forthcoming, part of the electorate remains vulnerable to political elites who justify democratic violations with majoritarian or even authoritarian appeals.

Our empirical analysis analysis of the Polish case shows that such widespread liberal democratic commitment is not forthcoming in the Polish electorate. Although Polish voters on average reject candidates who actively endorse a weakening of checks and balances, the picture is more complex at the individual level: parts of the electorate hold majoritarian or authoritarian views of democracy and are therefore indifferent toward candidates who advocate undermining key features of liberal democracy. Such weak democratic commitment may be considered a specific characteristic of post-Communist political systems (Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017, 309–310). However, given the rise of increasingly open illiberal appeals by political leaders from the United States to Hungary to Brazil, we are confident that our findings on inconsistent democratic attitudes as a key vulnerability of political systems to democratic backsliding are generalizable to other polarized countries experiencing democratic backsliding.

Ultimately, our empirical investigation of divergent democratic attitudes and their impact on contexts of democratic backsliding helps to reconcile earlier findings on generally very high nominal "support for democracy" with electoral victories of illiberal parties or candidates. These findings hold implications for the potential recipe to make citizens into effective bulwarks for democracy: rather than a mass of ideologically centrist voters willing to abandon incumbents acting undemocratically (Svolik 2020, 27), we contend that what is needed to counter democratic backsliding is a firm commitment not simply to democracy in its broadest sense, but to the specific principles of separation of powers and civil liberties that underpin liberal democracy.

In practical terms, our analysis indicates that where attitudinal consolidation around liberal

democratic norms remains insufficiently developed, voters cannot reliably act as safeguards against democratic backsliding. Instead, they remain vulnerable to majoritarian and authoritarian appeals by elites. Where such non-liberal elites coincide with an electorate whose commitment to liberal democracy is not firmly anchored, they may successfully activate latent—or open—non-liberal understandings of democracy upon which they can draw to legitimize their gradual dismantling of democratic standards. Future research would do well to investigate the role elites play in mobilizing such alternative democratic attitudes to garner enduring popular support for their illiberal designs.

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Explaining the Entrenchment of Authoritarian Leadership: A Mosaic Approach to Voters' Tolerance for Democratic Backsliding

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Abstract

In contexts of democratic backsliding, citizens represent the last bulwark against the systematic dismantling of checks and balances by overbearing executives. So what drives citizens to tolerate political leaders who endorse democratic violations? We leverage a conjoint survey experiment in Hungary to disentangle the reasons leading the different voter groups to overlook a leader's undemocratic positions. Our empirical findings indicate the presence of a composite effect: despite widespread condemnation of democratic violations, certain subgroups punish candidates' non-democratic positions less harshly in the presence of economic buy-outs or cultural conservatism. Where authoritarian-leaning elites succeed in offering targeted compensations to each of these subgroups, we suggest they can build mosaic support among voters to secure enduring electoral support despite their undemocratic behaviour. Our study feeds into broader debates on the role and limitations of citizens when it comes to countering trends of democratic backsliding.

Keywords: autocratisation, conjoint experiment, democratic backsliding, Hungary

Introduction

Democratic backsliding is among the gravest challenges facing contemporary democracies. From the United States to several countries in Central-Eastern Europe, the gradual erosion of democratic quality via the systematic dismantling of institutional checks and balances increasingly touches democracies previously hailed as consolidated (Greskovits 2015; McCoy et al. 2018; Carey et al. 2019). A particular puzzle in such contexts is why citizens, despite high levels of general support for democracy, lend electoral support to authoritarian-leaning leaders (Ahlquist et al. 2018; Mazepus and Toshkov forthcoming; Wunsch et al. 2021), in other words: *what drives citizens to tolerate political leaders who advocate a programme of democratic erosion?*

Studies to date have tended to focus on partisan polarisation as a key explanation for citizens' tolerance of democratic backsliding. Often focusing on bipartisan systems, these studies single out a 'partisan double standard' (Graham and Svolik 2020) or 'democratic hypocrisy' that leads voters to punish democratic violations by co-partisans less harshly (Simonovits et al. 2022; Gidengil et al. 2021). Others have pointed to the role of economic trade-offs (Svolik 2019) or divergent democratic attitudes leading the electorate to overlook violations of democratic principles (Grossman et al. 2021; Wunsch et al. 2022). Rather than advancing a single explanation, our study seeks instead to establish a 'mosaic' pattern of authoritarian support, whereby different groups of citizens prioritize distinct alternative benefits over a given leader's democratic credentials. Eventually, we expect these distinct logics to add up to a sufficiently large support so as to maintain an authoritarian-leaning leader in power.

To probe this argument, we leverage a pre-registered, well-powered conjoint experiment that asks respondents to choose between two alternative leadership profiles that contain information on

competing leaders' democratic views alongside attributes relating to their economic positions and their degree of cultural conservatism. This allows us to assess distinct explanations for voters' willingness to overlook democratic violations endorsed by prospective leaders and to examine these not only at the aggregate level, but also for distinct subgroups. Our empirical analysis focuses on the case of Hungary as one of the most severe cases of democratic backsliding among erstwhile consolidated democracies. Since his arrival in power in 2010, Prime Minister Viktor Orbán has gradually expanded his powers by deliberately weakening a range of traditional democratic safeguards (Scheppele 2013). We thus probe the puzzle of citizen tolerance for democratic backsliding in a case where democracy is already massively under threat, making citizens' responses to authoritarian leadership particularly salient.

Our empirical analysis shows on average a remarkably high and consistent condemnation of democratic violations across all voter groups. Leaders advocating non-democratic positions regarding either judicial independence or their general conception of democracy are universally punished, with our democratic attributes showing by far the greatest effect size. Still, we find some variation with regards to subgroups: the rejection of non-democratic candidates is stronger among highly educated respondents and those of higher economic status. In turn, respondents with lower economic status are more open to buy-outs in the form of direct payments granted in a context of economic recovery, while religious respondents tend to punish leaders willing to defend traditional culture against external influences less harshly for democratic violations. We thus find some evidence for our assumption of mosaic support, but also note a discrepancy between our experimental findings and the empirical reality of continued electoral endorsement of Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party.

By examining the determinants of citizen tolerance for authoritarian-leaning leaders in a context of advanced democratic backsliding, our study makes two important contributions to our understanding of citizens' responses to such processes. For one, we confirm that economic or cultural aspects increase certain groups' willingness to overlook democratic violations on the part of their leaders, lending support to our expectations of a mosaic pattern in this regard. At the same time, we show that the defence of democratic quality remains a strong priority for the bulk of citizens in a previously consolidated democratic system. The fact that voters are unable to translate such democratic attitudes into electoral outcomes shifts attention to the supply side, where electoral manipulation and a lack of open advocacy for democratic violations by political leaders may explain the gap between our experimental results and electoral outcomes in Hungary. This interpretation has important implications both for future research seeking to explain the persistence and entrenchment of democratic backsliding and for practical approaches developed to resist the erosion of democracy.

The following section presents the theoretical rationale of our study and the hypotheses we test with our conjoint experiment. We then discuss Hungary as a model case of severe democratic backsliding before outlining our research design. The next section presents our empirical findings and discusses the identified gap between strong condemnation of backsliding in the experimental setting and enduring electoral support for Orban and Fidesz. Our conclusion articulates the broader implications of our findings and spells out some promising research avenues to futher explore the supply side of democratic backsliding via media and elite discourses.

Explaining citizen tolerance for democratic backsliding

The bulk of the literature on citizen tolerance of democratic backsliding has highlighted partisan polarisation to explain why voters fail to punish co-partisans who disregard democratic limits on their power (Graham and Svolik 2020; Simonovits et al. 2022; Svolik 2020; Gidengil et al. 2021). While this is a plausible mechanism, it has not been systematically reproduced in empirical studies (Carey et al. 2020; Wunsch et al. 2022). Nor are its theoretical premises entirely clear: should voters be expected to overlook democratic violations by co-partisans on the grounds of affective polarisation along party lines (Orhan 2021)? Or does the party label effectively cue for ideological differences that draw voters to one rather than another candidate, with policy disagreement thus more important than partisan identity (Dias and Lelkes 2021)?

Going beyond an analysis of dynamics of partisan polarisation, our study probes alternative explanations for citizens' tolerance of democratic violations. Concretely, citizens may choose to overlook democratic backsliding due to a) a failure to recognize democratic violations undertaken by a leader, b) prioritizing alternative benefits promised by a leader over respect for democratic procedures, or c) competing conceptions of democracy that lead to diverging assessments of the democratic nature of a given leaders' actions (Schedler 2019, p. 8). Our study addresses all three of these possible explanations, probing their relative weight at the aggregate level as well as for different subgroups. In doing so, we do not strive to identify a single overarching driver of citizen tolerance of democratic backsliding. Instead, we aim to disentangle a composition effect, whereby different types of voters are drawn to support authoritarian-leaning leaders for different reasons.

Our basic premise is that citizens in previously consolidated democracies should, on average, recognize and condemn violations of basic democratic norms where political leaders endorse such

views. Democratic consolidation thus implies not only elites' acceptance of democracy as 'the only game in town' (Linz and Stepan 1996, p. 15), but also that the vast majority of citizens be strongly committed to democracy and can therefore be expected to safeguard democratic standards during electoral decisions. Accordingly, we expect authoritarian punishment to be the default option guiding voters' choice at the ballot box. This baseline hypothesis forms the starting point for our further theorisation of potential sources of citizen tolerance for democratic violations.[1]

H1 (*authoritarian punishment*): Voters are less likely to choose a leader who advocates for democratic violations.

In the next step, we conceptualise several distinct priorities that voters may decide to place above a given leader's respect for democratic norms. In doing so, we probe whether such alternative priorities may override voters' willingness to punish democratic backsliding at the ballot box by focusing their attention on a different element of a prospective leader's electoral platform. We examine the impact of three distinct alternative priorities voters may value. For one, a leader's cultural orientations may play an important role for the electorate. Evidence from cross-sectional surveys suggests that voters with a 'protection-based attitude package' combining right-wing cultural and left-wing economic attitudes are more open to endorsing a political leader unconstrained by democratic rules due to their prioritisation of social order and economic stability (Malka et al. 2020, p. 2). A leader who expresses culturally conservative orientations may therefore be valued more highly than a competitor who shows openness to transform the societal make-up. We thus hypothesize:

[1] While social desirability may bias response patterns in favour of a negative evaluation of leader profiles containing democratic violations, we use a conjoint design to alleviate this concern.

H2 (*value-based priority*): Voters tolerate democratic erosion because they value a leader's degree of cultural conservatism more highly than their respect for democratic procedures.

Second, citizens may place economic benefits above a leader's respect for democratic procedures. Instrumental support for democracy and a preference for economic outcomes have been shown to affect citizens' evaluations of democracy in several contexts (Singer 2018; Landwehr and Leininger 2019), with the prospect of economic gains potentially outweighing concern over problematic democratic views. Such economic considerations have also been shown to matter when it comes to voting decisions (Mazepus and Toshkov forthcoming). We therefore expect:

H3 (*economic priority*): Voters tolerate democratic erosion because they value a leader's economic positions more highly than their respect for democratic procedures.

Finally, we consider competing conceptions of democracy that may shape voters' evaluations of a leadership candidate. Resisting an authoritarian-leaning leader at the ballot box requires a solid commitment to liberal democratic norms and the willingness to place a leader's respect for such norms above the collective outcomes or individual benefits their political actions may produce. We therefore examine how divergent conceptions of democracy may inform citizens' leadership preferences. In other words, voters may value a leader's general view of democracy more highly than any specific democratic violation they may engage in, privileging for instance a leader's commitment to egalitarian, outcome-oriented rule over their specific respect for a procedural dimension of democracy whose violation they accept more readily. We thus formulate a final hypothesis on alternative priorities:

H4 (*democratic conceptions priority*): Voters tolerate democratic erosion because they value a leader's democratic priority more highly than their respect for democratic procedures.

We do not expect all citizens to be receptive to the three aforementioned alternative priorities. Instead, we build our argument on the insight that electoral coalitions always consist of a heterogeneous group of voters. Cas Mudde (2007, 225) sees the assumption of a homogeneous electorate as one of the fundamental problems of empirical research on radical right support: the 'stereotypical voter' of a populist radical right party in fact constitutes a minority of its electorate. Other studies similarly highlight the heterogeneity of electorates of specific politicians and populist right parties (Damhuis 2020; Ekins 2017). Specifically, we assume that voters will be attracted to different aspects of a leader's programme. We probe this expectation for different subgroups of the population, which we expect to be potentially more open to tolerating democratic violations by a political leader than others.

"(…) we make the case that in order to understand a party's electoral success we need to consider not just the predictive power of certain attitudes but also the ways in which they are incorporated into politics. (…) It must therefore broaden its support beyond its secure voting base in order to be electorally successful (e.g. Tilley and Evans, 2017). This entails mobilizing a coalition of interests between different social classes or groups with different preferences. In sum, the size of, and coalition potential between, groups plays a key role in explaining successful electoral performance."
"The implication of this distinction between core and peripheral voter groups is as follows. While the culturalists are core supporters and hence more likely to vote for the far right, it does not automatically follow that they are more important. To be successful, far right parties can, and often do, draw on a subset of an often larger peripheral electoral group composed of materialists, whose preferences may be more likely to include other parties addressing their economic concerns about immigration. The materialists may not be the core constituency of far right parties, but they are nevertheless important to these parties because they are highly likely to support them given their immigration skepticism. As a result, it is precisely materialist voters who need to be mobilized by far right parties and in many ways determine the broader electoral success of such parties."

"The materialist group determines far right party success because of its numerical majority despite the fact that individual concerns about immigration's cultural impact have a stronger effect on individual far right party support than do concerns about its economic impact. Therefore, while it may well be that the core of support for far right parties objects to immigration on cultural grounds, it is the more economically oriented concerns that are especially influential in allowing these parties to expand beyond that core, and indeed those without immigration concerns. In other words, in order to increase their electoral chances, far right parties must mobilize immigration-related grievances beyond culture." (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020, pp. 431–432)

"those who dislike the impact of immigration on the economy are important to the far right in numerical terms as they allow these parties to extend their support beyond their secure voting base. These findings confirm that the far right parties that are more likely to be electorally successful are those able to mobilize a 'winning anti-immigrant coalition' which consists of both the vast majority of the few core supporters who care strongly about the cultural impact of immigration and a subset of the numerically larger group of voters who care strongly about the economic impact of immigration." (Halikiopoulou and Vlandas 2020, p. 445)

We define these subgroups along established socio-demographic markers to examine potentially distinct effect sizes for our afore-mentioned priorities across different groups of the population. First, we examine a potential urban-rural divide. Here, the traditional assumption is that inhabitants of cities are more liberal in their democratic attitudes than the rural population, that may be more open to tolerating democratic backsliding for different reasons. Second, we expect tolerance of democratic backsliding to vary with respondents' level of education. More highly educated voters should be better able to recognize violations of democratic norms and less susceptible to trading these off against alternative priorities. Third, we probe the role of economic status when it comes

to tolerating democratic violations. We expect voters of weak economic standing to be particularly open to economic buy-outs that may offset their concerns for problematic democratic positions embraced by a prospective political leader. Finally, we analyze the role of religiosity. Here, we expect voters with higher degrees of religiosity to value leaders' cultural conservatism, potentially leading them to overlook a candidate's democratic attitudes where they promise to safeguard traditional values.

In sum, we propose a mosaic approach that probes distinct logics determining whether citizens are able and willing to act as bulwarks against democratic backsliding: their capacity to recognize and willingness to punish democratic violations (H1), their preference for alternative positions endorsed by a leader (H2-H4), and the different likelihood of specific subgroups of the population to value such alternative benefits more highly than a leader's respect for democratic procedures (H5-H9, see appendix). We propose to evaluate these hypotheses in the context of Hungary, a country that stands out both for its initial level of democratic consolidation and the subsequent depth of its experience of democratic backsliding, as we explain in the following.

Hungary as a blueprint of democratic backsliding

Initially hailed as a frontrunner of post-Communist democratisation, Hungary has experienced particularly severe democratic backsliding under the Fidesz government and party leader Viktor Orbán since his arrival in power in 2010 (Ágh 2016; Bogaards 2018; Bozóki and Hegedűs 2018). In this sense, Hungary represents a blueprint of democratic erosion, with Orbán gradually chipping away at central democratic safeguards such as judicial independence and independent media to consolidate his grip on power. Scholars have described the outcome of this process as a 'Frankenstate' (Scheppele 2013), with seemingly minor individual reforms eventually amounting

to a thoroughly transformed – and considerably less democratic – political system. Both V-Dem and Freedom House expert surveys concluded that Hungary passed the threshold towards an electoral autocracy in 2019 (Freedom House 2020; Maerz et al. 2020), becoming the first erstwhile liberal democracy to do so.

This gradual erosion of democratic quality in Hungary occurred against the backdrop of regular elections, with Orbán securing his fourth consecutive mandate in the parliamentary elections of April 2022. At the same time, repeated reforms of the electoral process progressively limited the ability of the opposition to make inroads, with the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE-ODIHR) raising significant concerns and qualifying both the 2014 and 2018 national elections as 'free but not fair' (Hegedűs and Levine 2022). In the latest 2022 elections, all opposition parties managed to rally around a single candidate, Péter Márki-Zay, in an effort to outplay Fidesz' increasingly obvious attempts to tilt the electoral playing field in its favour, but eventually failed to muster sufficient voter support to replace Orbán at the helm of the government.

Orbán's current period of rule is not his first stint in government. Between 1998 and 2002, Fidesz, as senior coalition partner, oversaw a significant strengthening of the Prime Minister's powers (Uitz 2010) that laid the groundwork for the subsequent process of executive expansion. His eventual return to power in 2010 was facilitated by a particularly fateful constellation of anti-incumbent voting following the decredibilisation of the ruling Socialist Party and the increasingly visible fallout of the global economic crisis for Hungary (Batory 2016). Four years on, Fidesz succeeded in producing a 'perfect storm' (Bakke & Sitter 2020: 12) by securing a supermajority which, combined with a weak constitution, a fragmented opposition and a European Commission

hesitant to speak out against rule of law violations, allowed Orbán to cement his grip on power via via repeated constitutional changes.

It is interesting to note that the Fidesz party transformed from a liberal youth party to a conservative people's party (Vegetti 2019) able to unite a considerable proportion of the electorate behind itself. Enyedi (2005) has described the party's transformation during the 1990s and 2000s as a conscious process of building a sustainable coalition by uniting agrarian, religious and national-conservative interests, eventually integrating separate segments of society to constitute a 'mosaic cleavage party' that serves several core groups. By studying citizens' responses to democratic backsliding in this specific context, we are able to probe both how different constituencies may respond to democratic violations and how the deepening of democratic erosion affects citizens' ability to act as bulwarks against the dismantling of democratic safeguards.

Research design and data

Conjoint design

Our empirical analysis leverages a candidate choice conjoint experiment, a design often used to alleviate social desirability bias when probing respondents' views on sensitive topics (Horiuchi et al. 2021). By selecting among fully randomized profiles that contain additional elements besides candidates' democratic orientations, conjoints reduce respondents' propensity to vote in line with social desirability. Our conjoint experiment placed respondents not into the traditional scenario of hypothetical elections, but rather asked them to select between two competing profiles of political leaders. This design allows us to integrate broader system-level preferences that it would be less common to find in competing candidate profiles, which generally focus on specific policy preferences.

In designing our attribute table for candidate profiles, we deliberately left out partisanship in order to avoid respondents focusing on this element to guide their choice (Kirkland & Coppock 2018). A previous survey experiment (Dias and Lelkes 2021) showed that respondents' evaluations are much more strongly affected by the candidate's ideology than their party affiliation (McCarty 2019, p. 65), with party affiliation often understood as a cue for substantive positions (Orr and Huber 2020). We therefore focus in our profiles on the substantive elements that may make a leader appealing to citizens. In turn, we do include party preference as a relevant analytical category when it comes to evaluating response patterns among voters.

Our principal attribute of interest concerns *democratic violations*, which we measure by providing respondents with three alternative views of judicial independence. By focusing on judiciary reform, we choose a central element of democratic backsliding which others have referred to as 'capturing the referees' (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). At the same time, judicial independence is a procedural element of democracy that not all respondents may intuitively identify as democratic violation, thus setting a comparatively high threshold for condemnation in comparison to more blatant violations such as electoral manipulation. Our distinct levels for this attribute capture a liberal, a majoritarian, and an authoritarian understanding of judicial independence (see appendix Table A1 for the full attribute table).

To capture alternative benefits respondents may prioritize over a leader's position on democratic violations, we include an attribute on *economic buy-outs* that focuses on diverse means to achieve economic recovery and another on *cultural conservatism* that formulates distinct views regarding the need to protect traditional Hungarian culture. Finally, we include an attribute on *democratic conceptions* that presents three alternative views of the main priority a government should focus

on regarding the broader democratic process. We include a liberal conception emphasizing equal rights for all people[2], an egalitarian one that highlights improving living conditions for all citizens, and a majoritarian view that presents implementing the will of the majority as main objective for the government. Besides these items, our conjoint design also includes candidates' *age* and *gender* to offer a more complete profile.

We embedded our conjoint experiment into an online survey fielded in Hungary by YouGov's partner in Central-Eastern Europe, the Warsaw-based market research company Inquiry. The survey was conducted between December 28th 2021 and January 14th 2022 among 2'004 respondents sampled to be representative of the general Hungarian population regarding age, gender, geographic location and vote choice at the last national election. We report sample descriptives and assess sample representativeness in the appendix (see Table A2). Respondents answered general questions on Inquiry's website and completed the conjoint portion in a survey programmed separately in Qualtrics. Following the removal of respondents who spent less than 4.2 minutes (fastest 10%) or more than 22.5 minutes (slowest 10%) on the conjoint section of the survey, our final sample contained 1'625 respondents.

Our conjoint task prompted respondents to indicate which leader profile they would prefer (forced choice) as well as to rate each profile on a scale from 1 (strongly disapprove) to 7 (strongly approve). Respondents were invited to complete ten separate conjoint tasks. We compared overall ratings across the ten choice tasks to those for only the first tasks and found no significant differences (see Figure A1). Each profile was identified with a neutral label ('Leader A' vs. 'Leader

[2] We choose the formulation 'people' (*ember*) rather than 'citizens' (*polgár*) to emphasize that equal rights should not only apply to the narrow group of Hungarian nationals.

B') and displayed randomized information on six distinct attributes with up to three levels, with the attribute order fully randomized anew for each choice task.

Conjoint analysis

Given the various critiques formulated towards the use of Average Marginal Component Effect (AMCE) to analyze conjoint results (Zhirkov 2021; Ganter 2021), we report unadjusted marginal means (MM) to provide a descriptive summary of respondent preferences following Leeper et al. (2020) to assess our first hypothesis on aggregate patterns. In a second step, we estimate the average component interaction effect (ACIE), defined by Hainmueller et al. (2014), to assess whether the presence of certain alternative elements in a leader's profile may lead respondents to overlook democratic violations more readily, as formulated in Hypotheses 2-4. For this variation, we estimate:

$$Y_{ijk} = \acute{\alpha} + T1_{ijk}\beta_1 + T2_{ijk}\beta_2 + (T1 * T2)_{ijk}\beta_3 + X_i\,\gamma + \varepsilon_i$$

where T1 is a vector of dummy variables for the attribute on democratic violations, while T2 is a vector of dummy variables representing the other three attributes of interest. T1 * T2 is the vector of interactions between T1 and T2. β_3 denotes the ACIE.

To test the specific interaction effects between feature levels and the subgroup identifier, we rely on the recommendations for subgroup analyses in conjoint designs developed by Leeper et al. (2020). Specifically, we estimate the conditional marginal means for different subgroups and assess differences between conditional marginal means. Our subgroups of interest are characterized by respondents' origin (urban/rural), level of education, economic status, and their level of religiosity. We describe our selected cut-offs and report alternative solutions – which do not significantly affect our conclusions – in the appendix (see figures A4 to A7).

Empirical findings

To probe the extent and reasons of citizen tolerance of democratic backsliding, we analyse the data from our survey experiment in three stages. First, we examine to what extent citizens recognize democratic violations and discuss how such awareness differs across voter groups. Second, we turn to our conjoint findings to evaluate whether endorsing democratic violations entails an electoral punishment of prospective leaders. Finally, we assess which characteristics – at both the leader and the voter level – make respondents more likely to overlook democratic violations.

The subtle and incremental nature of democratic backsliding is often seen as one of the main reasons why citizens fail to rise against political leaders who gradually expand their executive power by dismantling domestic checks and balances (Bermeo 2016; Waldner and Lust 2018). We therefore begin our empirical analysis by exploring the response patterns for the survey questions asking responding for their evaluation of the different attributes included in the leadership profiles outside of the conjoint setting ('benchmark questions'). For the attribute on democratic violations, which we measure by proposing three distinct views of judicial independence, the aggregate pattern is very clear. On average, respondents evaluate a liberal view, whereby judges engage in constitutional review of new laws, significantly more positively than alternative positions that expect judicial restraint in the case of laws enjoying strong government support or endorse the removal of judges who hamper the implementation of the government programme. This pattern is consistent with only minor deviations across different socio-economic subgroups. We do find a substantial difference based on respondents' party preference, however, whereby Fidesz supporters tend to evaluate both the majoritarian and the authoritarian position on judicial independence a full point higher than supporters of left parties (see appendix Figure A2 and Table A3).

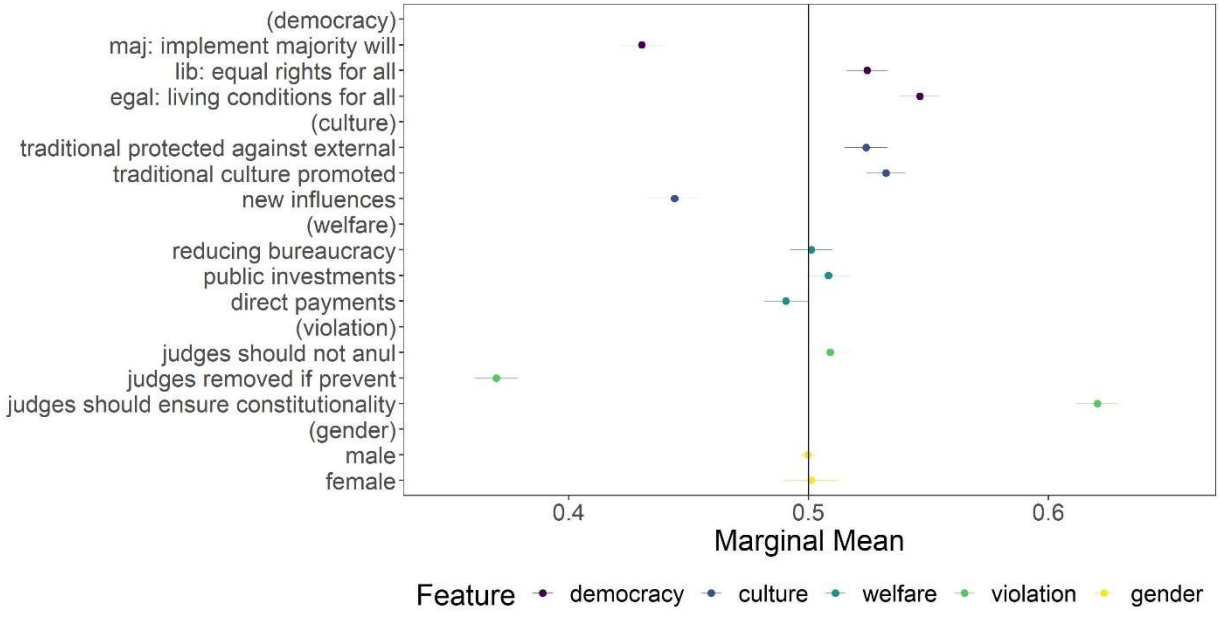
For conceptions of democracy, we find much less significant differences between the three alternative views – liberal, egalitarian, and majoritarian – contained in our attribute table. On average, respondents rate the liberal and egalitarian view virtually identically (6.1), with the majoritarian conception following closely (5.5). Again, differences across socio-economic subgroups are negligible and rather minor for party-based differences, with a somewhat higher rating of the liberal conception among left parties than for the supporters of Fidesz or Jobbik (see appendix Table A3).

These descriptive patterns thus indicate that Hungarian respondents are able to recognize violations of procedural democratic standards concerning judicial independence, and do so irrespective of their socio-economic background, with the main source of divergence stemming from distinct party preferences. The picture is less clear-cut when it comes to more general conceptions of democracy. Here, we find strong approval of an egalitarian conception that focuses on economic outcomes rather than equal rights, and a similarly strong endorsement of a majoritarian conception that potentially justifies a suppression of minority rights. Both dimensions point to vulnerabilities with regards to voters' democratic commitment that may point to alternative benefits they choose to value more highly than formal democratic standards.

We have established that voters recognize democratic violations, but do they also punish political leaders for endorsing such violations, preferring candidates who espouse liberal democratic views over those advocating alternative positions? Our first hypothesis concerned voters' willingness to withhold support from political leaders who endorse undemocratic positions. Our data confirm this hypothesis (see Figure 1). In fact, both our democratic attributes show the largest effect on voter preferences across the sample: respondents punish leaders for endorsing the removal of judges

where they prevent the government from implementing its programme and view leaders holding a strongly majoritarian conception of democracy more negatively. In turn, leaders adopting a liberal view of judicial independence – that judges should review the constitutionality of new laws adopted by the government – are rated significantly more positively even compared to our intermediary level, where judges should not annul laws that enjoy strong government support.

Figure 1. Leadership preferences for full sample



The aggregate picture is less clear-cut for conceptions of democracy: although respondents rate majoritarian positions more negatively, our egalitarian conception – that the government should improve the living conditions for all citizens – is viewed even more positively than our liberal level, according to which the government should ensure equal rights for all people. This slight preference for outcomes – in terms of government performance – over the procedural item focused on rights does not translate, however, into strong variation for our attribute relating to economic benefits, where observed differences between the distinct levels is minimal and none appears statistically

significant. Finally, cultural conservatism also seems to play an important role for citizens' evaluations of political leaders, with openness to new influences viewed negatively, whereas both a moderate and a strong willingness to protect traditional values receive similar degrees of approval by respondents.

Overall, the high condemnation of democratic violations at the aggregate level contrasts with enduring electoral support for Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party during real-life electoral contests in Hungary. We therefore turn to a more fine-grained analysis of the characteristics that may lead certain voter groups to choose to overlook democratic violations, distinguishing two levels of analysis: on the one hand, we examine the impact of alternative items contained in a prospective leaders' profile; on the other, we assess how characteristics at the voter level shape evaluations of competing candidates.

To probe alternative priorities respondents might value over a leader's respect for democratic standards, we estimate the interaction between our attribute on democratic violations and the three other substantive attributes that we consider may affect respondents' evaluations of alternative leader profiles. This means that we test to what extent the punishment of democratic violations depends on which level of the other attributes is present in a given choice task. Interestingly, we note no significant impact for either of the three alternative priorities at the aggregate level (see Figures A3 to A5 in the appendix).

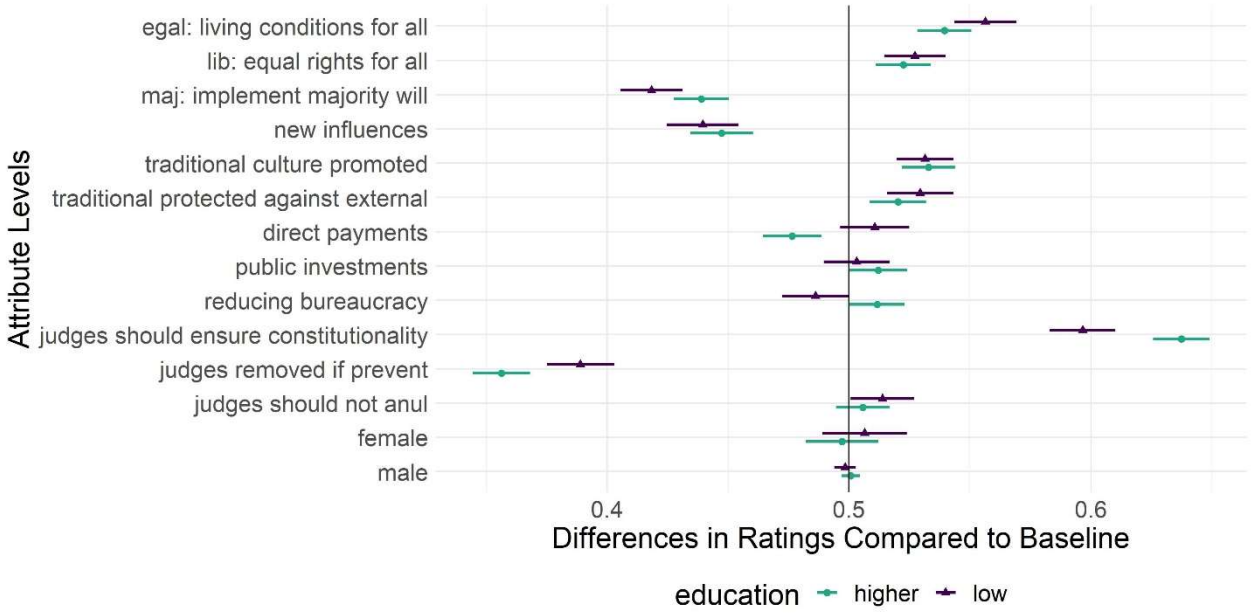
Against the backdrop of our null findings on alternative priorities at the level of the full sample, we proceed to examine possible differences at the subgroup level. Here, we probe the presence of a composite effect, whereby different parts of the population focus on distinct elements of a leader's

profile when choosing to overlook democratic violations. Our expectation is that if we do not find evidence of alternative priorities leading voters to tolerate democratic backsliding across the population, there may be subsections with such preferences that jointly amount to building sufficient electoral support for an authoritarian-leaning leader to arrive – and possibly remain – in power.

Regarding an urban-rural divide, we find only very minor and statistically insignificant differences between respondents from large towns and cities in comparison to those living in small towns and rural regions (see Figure A6a and A6b). The only observable difference – which still remains below the conventional level of statistical significance – concerns the attribute on conceptions of democracy, with rural respondents somewhat more supportive of egalitarian views and more critical of majoritarian positions than urban respondents.

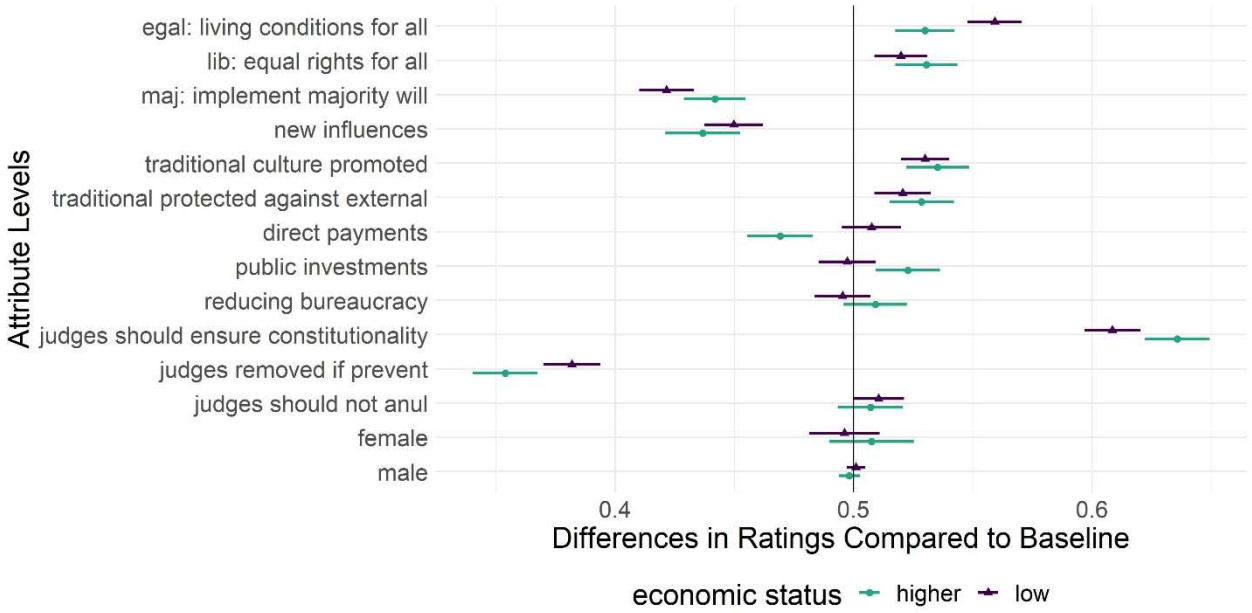
Second, we expected differing education levels to translate into a differential willingness to tolerate democratic violations by political leaders. Indeed, while the general tendency goes into the same direction, we do find a significantly higher level of punishment for leaders undermining judicial independence among respondents holding at least an A-level degree compared to those who do not. Inversely, and again as predicted, highly educated respondents value the liberal level of our democratic violations attribute more highly than do less educated ones (see Figure 2). Besides, we find a slightly negative view towards direct payments – our measurement of economic buy-outs – among highly educated respondents, whereas less educated respondents view this item more positively (though not to the extent of statistical significance). An alternative operationalisation of levels of education distinguishing respondents with a university degree from those without yields very similar findings (see appendix Figure A7).

Figure 2. Subgroup analysis of highly educated vs. less educated respondents



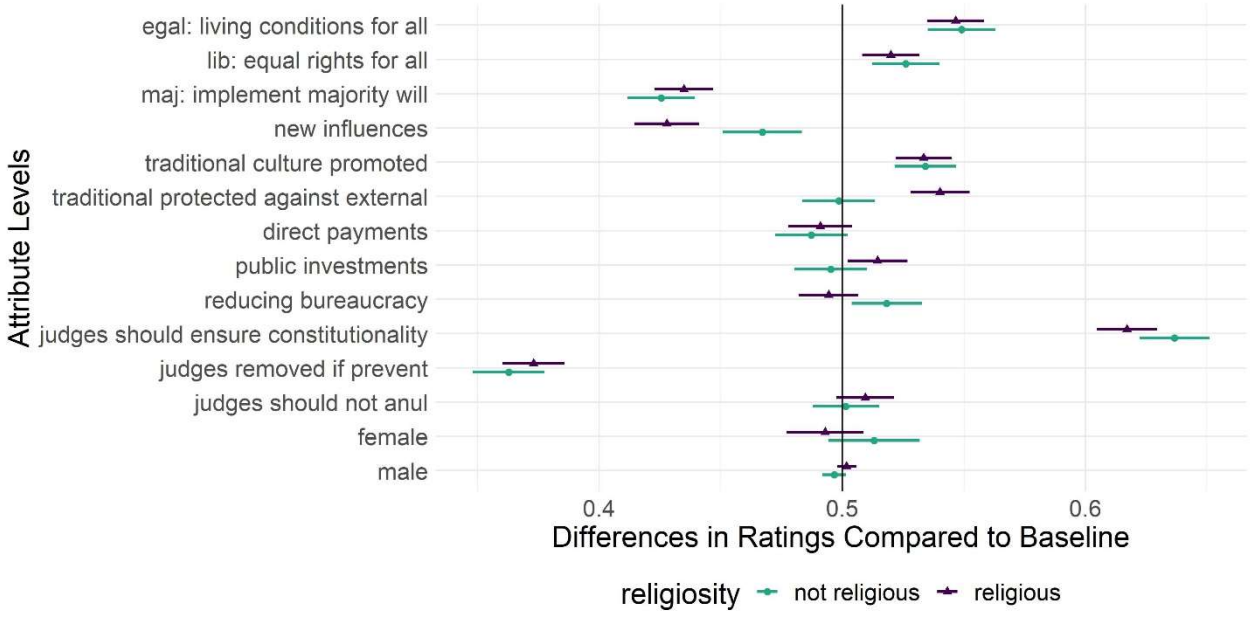
One of the central interactions we expected to find was between the economic benefits promised by a leader and their democratic credentials. Whereas we do not find evidence for such openness to economic buy-outs for the overall population, our subgroup analysis does show that citizens of low economic status are more likely to tolerate democratic violations by political leaders (see Figure 3). For one, respondents with a lower economic status appear more willing to overlook democratic violations and assign somewhat lower importance to political leaders respecting judicial independence in reviewing the constitutionality of new laws. Moreover, respondents with lower economic status value leaders holding egalitarian conceptions of democracy more highly. Inversely, we find respondents of high economic status to evaluate direct payments promised by political leaders in the context of economic recovery more negatively.

Figure 3. Subgroup analysis based on high vs. low economic status



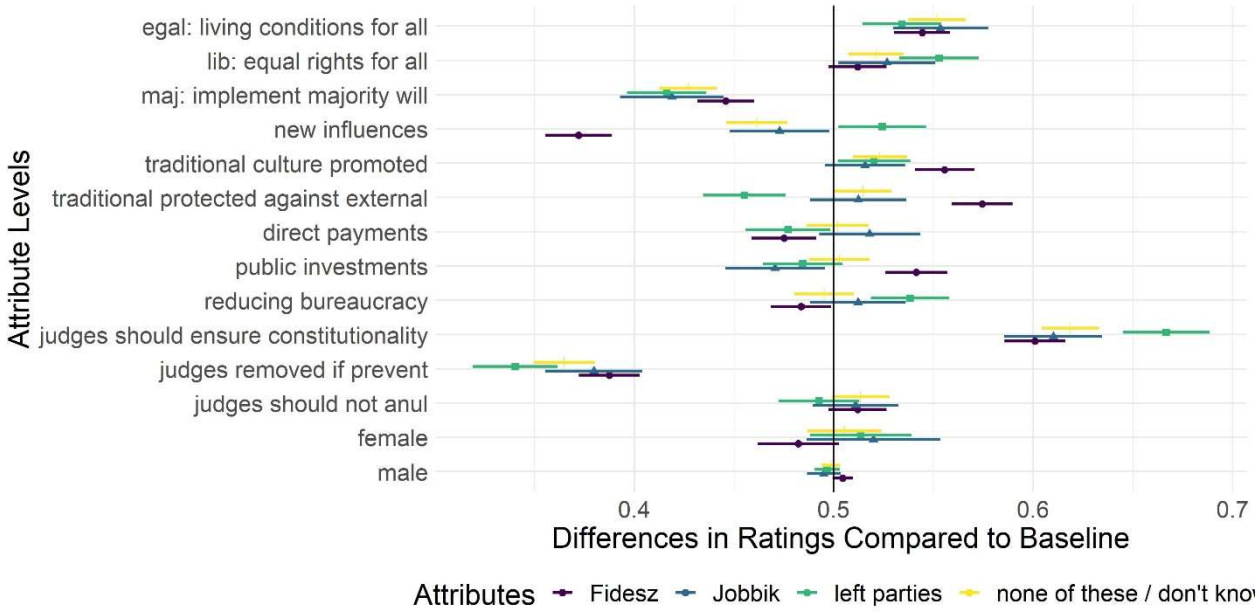
Finally, we further probe our expectation regarding value-based priority, which did not hold for the overall sample, by comparing response patterns of a subgroup indicating any degree of religiosity to those claiming to be 'not religious at all.' There is no statistically significant difference in the evaluation of democratic violations, but we do find that more religious respondents punish openness to new cultural influences more harshly (see Figure 4). Similarly, they reward political leaders who are ready to defend traditional Hungarian culture against outside influences, whereas non-religious respondents show a neutral attitude towards this position.

Figure 4. Subgroup analysis of religious vs. non-religious respondents



Our subgroup analysis leads us to reject the existence of an urban-rural divide when it comes to tolerance for democratic backsliding. We do however find some support for our remaining three subgroups, with a greater openness to tolerating democratic backsliding among less educated, less economically privileged, and more religious respondents. These patterns point in the direction of diverse reasons, rather than a single factor driving voters to overlook democratic violations, and hint at a 'mosaic' pattern of support for authoritarian-leaning leaders.

Figure 5. Conjoint analysis based on prospective partisan preference



Finally, we explore the impact of partisan dynamics at the respondent level. We had deliberately excluded party labels from our leadership profiles on the assumption that these may guide respondents' choices in conjoint tasks while ultimately masking the true motivations driving their vote choice which they derive from partisan cues if the candidates' party affiliation is provided. To gauge the role of respondents' partisan preference upon tolerance for democratic backsliding, we conduct the conjoint analysis based on respondents' party identity. We report in Figure 5 the findings for prospective partisan preference, measured as likely vote choice in an upcoming election. These findings align with retrospective party preference based on respondents' reported vote choice during the last parliamentary elections in 2019 (see appendix Figure A8), with both specifications indicating some divergence in voters' willingness to tolerate democratic violations based on partisan preference. Generally speaking, supporters of left parties as well as undecided and non-voters place greater weight on leaders' democratic credentials than supporters of Fidesz and Jobbik. Moreover, we find Fidesz supporters to be particularly adamant about leaders shielding

Hungarian traditional culture from new influences, indicating that values-based orientations play an important role in explaining Fidesz voters' tolerance for democratic transgressions under Orbán's rule. At the same time, economic buy-outs do not seem to be relevant to Fidesz supporters, who prefer blanket 'public investments' rather than direct payments to citizens as a means of economic recovery. Despite the variation in partisan-based patterns of conjoint responses, Fidesz supporters' culturally conservative views do not appear to prevail over their rejection of leaders respecting judicial independence nor their critical evaluation of leaders holding majoritarian conceptions of democracy.

Discussion and conclusion

Our study aimed to tease out the reasons underpinning citizens' leadership preferences in contexts of democratic backsliding. Going beyond the widespread focus on partisan dynamics, we sought to examine a set of competing explanations in parallel, probing both citizens' resolve to punish prospective leaders who openly advocate democratic violations as well as a set of alternative benefits voters may choose to prioritize when they decide whether to tolerate democratic backsliding. Specifically, we examined the presence of a 'mosaic pattern' of support, whereby authoritarian leadership is sustained by distinct subgroups of the population who choose to tolerate democratic backsliding for different reasons. Our empirical analysis delivers mixed findings on this question.

Perhaps reassuringly, our strongest finding concerns the rejection of leaders who endorse democratic violations, which we confirm in all our analyses. Hungarian respondents clearly punish political leaders who advocate for a weakening of judicial violence and are not willing to prioritize alternative benefits such as a leader's culturally conservative views, economic buy-outs, or general

views of democracy over a leader's respect for basic procedural constraints. This leads us to to reject all three of our hypotheses on interaction effects. In turn, our subgroup analysis does produce some evidence of a composition effect. Economic buy-outs appear somewhat relevant for economically weaker as well as less educated respondents, who also punish democratic violations less harshly than their respective counterparts. A leader's cultural orientation is important for religious respondents, without however coinciding with a significantly greater likelihood of punishing democratic violations. Besides, we find that Fidesz supporters are somewhat less harsh in their condemnation of democratic violations and may be particularly receptive to a leadership that mobilises culturally conservative arguments to justify certain limitations to executive oversight and the respect for procedural democratic standards.

Overall, while our findings may be comforting at a political level, the discrepancy between our experimental patterns and the enduring support Viktor Orban has been able to garner time and again in real-life electoral contests in Hungary effectively deepens the theoretical puzzle of citizen tolerance of democratic erosion. Our study departed from the premise that given the right recipe, a leader lacking democratic credentials would be able to overcome voters' resistance by offering a range of transactional payoffs to offset their reluctance to accept democratic violations. This is clearly not the case for the population at large. The strongly negative evaluation of profiles containing democratic violations is all the more remarkable given we had chosen a rather subtle form of backsliding via the hollowing of judicial independence, and nonetheless respondents appear both able to identify democratic violations and willing to punish these, even if this means foregoing alternative benefits leaders propose.

In terms of the theoretical implications of our findings, we thus identify a new puzzle that merits further exploration: rather than highlighting a lack of democratic resilience in consolidated democracies that is at the core of many existing studies (Graham & Svolik 2020; Simonovits et al. 2022; Gidengil et al. 2022), we pinpoint the presence of strong democratic attitudes in an increasingly autocratized system. Citizens are often cast as the ultimate bulwarks able to uphold democratic values where political leaders begin to dismantle institutional safeguards. In contrast, our study points to the importance of going beyond the demand side of voter preferences to explain the persistence of electoral support for democratic backsliding. Specifically, we highlight relevant context factors to be integrated into future analyses and suggest new avenues for research in this important area.

For one, experimental research only incompletely reflects actual electoral decisions in that, by virtue of necessity, it presents democratic violations in much starker terms than voters may be expected to find in the real world. In practice, the incremental nature of democratic backsliding may be sufficiently surreptitious for voters to fail to realize what is happening until it is too late. Besides, backsliding leaders generally do not tend to engage in open advocacy of democratic violations, possibly leading part of the electorate to simply fail to recognize such intentions which we lay bare in a very direct way in our conjoint experiment. While Orbán did openly embrace of the concept of 'illiberal democracy,' he never advocated directly for a dismantling of democratic safeguards, but instead took care to carefully justify his reforms by reference to similar arrangements in other countries. Such justifications – both democratically grounded ones and openly undemocratic ones – could be integrated into future experimental research to assess how they affect voters' tolerance for the proposed measures.

Furthermore, snapshot survey-based insights fail to capture the deteriorating contexts in which electoral contests are held in backsliding countries. In Hungary specifically, repeated electoral confirmation has allowed Orbán to consolidate his grip on power and tilt the electoral playing field ever more in his favour. In this sense, our somewhat puzzling findings may capture precisely the gap between voters' democratic preferences and the systemic hurdles they face in translating them into electoral outcomes: where democratic backsliding has become entrenched, overturning authoritarian-leaning leadership at the ballot box may become increasingly unlikely. Accounting for the degree of electoral freedom in a given country – possibly by comparing different cases where free and fair elections are present to divergent extents – may help make sense of how survey-based responses relate to real-life constraints on citizens' ability to hold backsliding governments to account.

Finally, our study points to an important practical implication when it comes to preventing the deepening and ultimate entrenchment of democratic backsliding. If unchecked autocratisation increases the hurdles for citizens to act as effective bulwarks for democracy, it is important to intervene early to counter political leaders' efforts to dismantle checks and balances. Where such attempts are not addressed at an early stage, they may continue to unfold until the very electoral process itself as the core of the democratic system is no longer reflective of voters' democratic preferences. Ultimately, one plausible interpretation of our findings is that citizens may not be unwilling, but structurally unable to overturn authoritarian-leading leadership. To counter democratic backsliding, be it via domestic or international means, it therefore appears crucial to intervene early on to prevent the process of democratic erosion from reaching a point where a return to democracy by regular electoral means becomes increasingly elusive.

Appendix

Table A1: Overview of attributes and levels used in conjoint

Attribute	Levels	Concept
Gender	Female (weighted at 20%) Male	Socio-demographics
Age	Age [integer from 40 to 60]	Socio-demographics
Democratic violation	Judges should be removed from office if they prevent the government from implementing its programme. Judges should not annul laws that enjoy strong government support. Judges should ensure that new laws adopted by the government comply with the constitution.	Judicial independence
Democratic priority	*Egal*: The government should improve living conditions for all citizens. *Maj*: The government should implement the will of the majority. *Lib*: The government should ensure equal rights for all people.	Conceptions of democracy
Cultural conservatism	Traditional Hungarian culture should be promoted. Traditional Hungarian culture should be protected against external influences. Hungarian culture should be open to new influences.	Cultural preferences
Buy-outs	Economic recovery should be supported by direct payments to citizens. Economic recovery should be supported by public investments. Economic recovery should be supported by reducing bureaucracy.	Economic benefits

Table A2: Target and sample (full and restricted) distribution of vote choice at the last national elections, region of residence, gender and age

	Target %	Full Sample %	Restricted Sample %
Vote 1st Round 2018 Parliamentary Elections[3]			
Fidesz – KDNP	33%	35%	36%
Jobbik	13%	14%	15%
MSZP – PM	8%	7%	7%
LMP	5%	5%	5%
DK	4%	4%	4%
Other candidates	5%	6%	5%
Did not vote	33%	29%	28%
Grouped Region[4]			
Southern Great Plain	13%	14%	13%
Southern Transdanubia	9%	9%	9%
Northern Great Plain	15%	15%	15%
Northern Hungary	12%	12%	11%
Central Transdanubia	11%	10%	10%
Central Hungary	30%	31%	32%
Western Transdanubia	10%	9%	10%
Gender			
Male	47%	48%	48%
Female	53%	52%	52%
Age			
12-24	9%	10%	9%
25-34	15%	17%	14%
35-44	19%	20%	21%
45-54	17%	18%	19%
55+ (NET)	40%	35%	37%

[3] Sampling targets for election results are derived from the Hungarian National Election Office (https://www.valasztas.hu/ogy2018)

[4] Sampling targets for region, gender and age are derived from the US Census Bureau (https://www.census.gov/)

Figure A1: Vote patterns across choice tasks

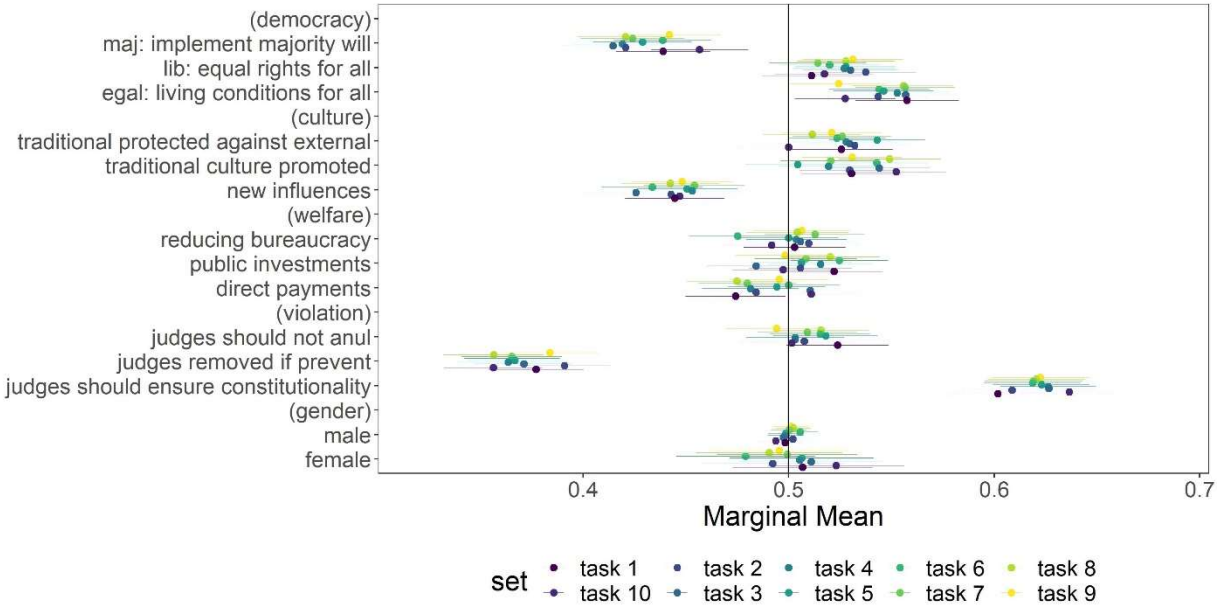


Figure A2: Distribution of responses for benchmark questions

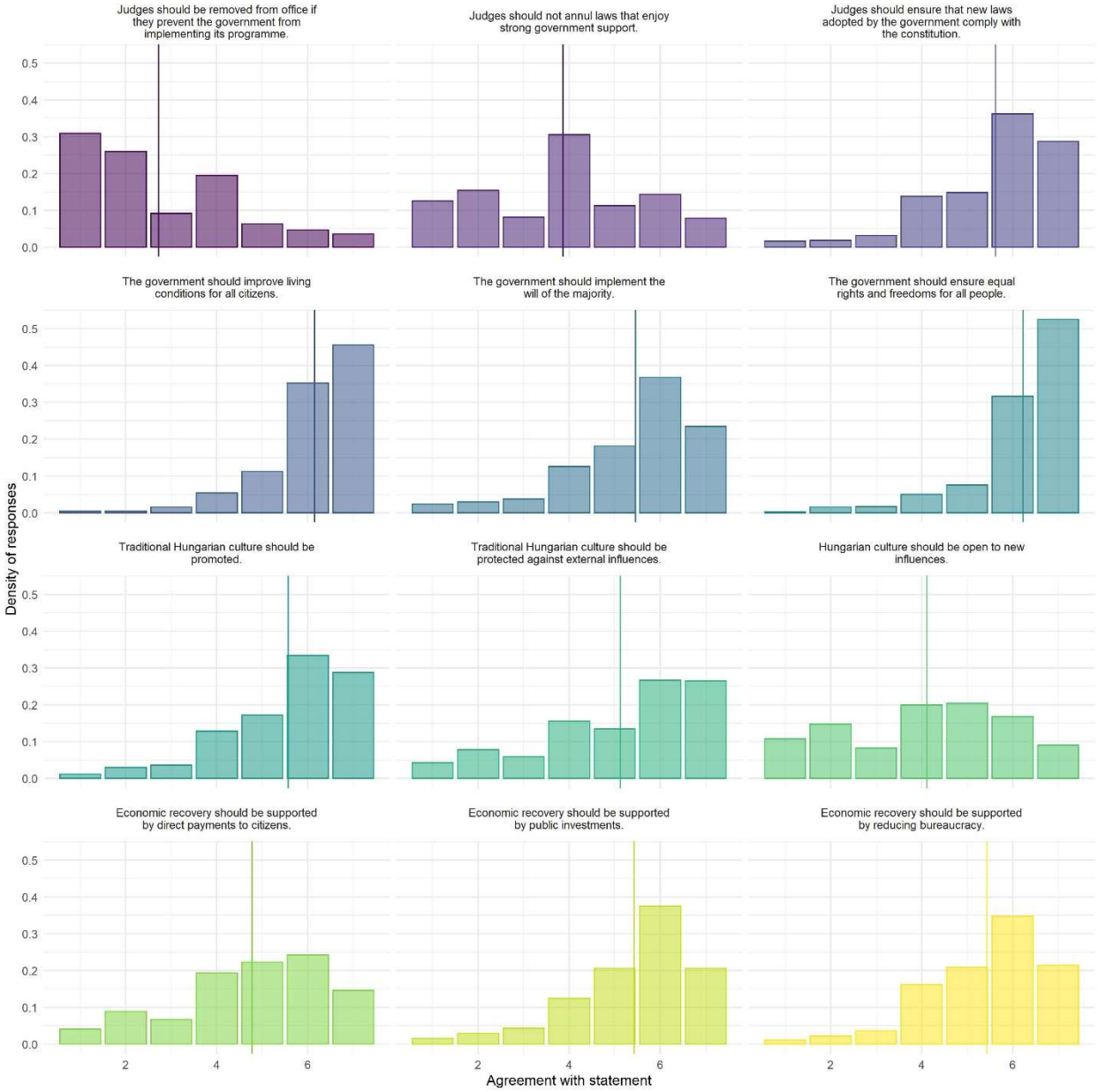


Table A3: Responses to benchmark questions by party preference

	Unique (#)	Missing (%)	Mean	SD	Min	Median	Max
Judges should be removed from office if they prevent the government from implementing its programme.	7	0	2.9	1.7	1.0	2.0	7.0
Judges should not annul laws that enjoy strong government support.	7	0	3.9	1.8	1.0	4.0	7.0
Judges should ensure that new laws adopted by the government comply with the constitution.	7	0	5.5	1.4	1.0	6.0	7.0
The government should improve living conditions for all citizens.	7	0	6.1	1.1	1.0	6.0	7.0
The government should implement the will of the majority.	7	0	5.4	1.5	1.0	6.0	7.0
The government should ensure equal rights and freedoms for all people.	7	0	6.1	1.2	1.0	6.0	7.0
Traditional Hungarian culture should be promoted.	7	0	5.5	1.4	1.0	6.0	7.0
Traditional Hungarian culture should be protected against external influences.	7	0	5.1	1.7	1.0	6.0	7.0
Hungarian culture should be open to new influences.	7	0	4.1	1.8	1.0	4.0	7.0
Economic recovery should be supported by direct payments to citizens.	7	0	4.8	1.6	1.0	5.0	7.0
Economic recovery should be supported by public investments.	7	0	5.3	1.4	1.0	6.0	7.0
Economic recovery should be supported by reducing bureaucracy.	7	0	5.4	1.4	1.0	6.0	7.0

Figure A3: Interaction between cultural conservatism and democratic violations

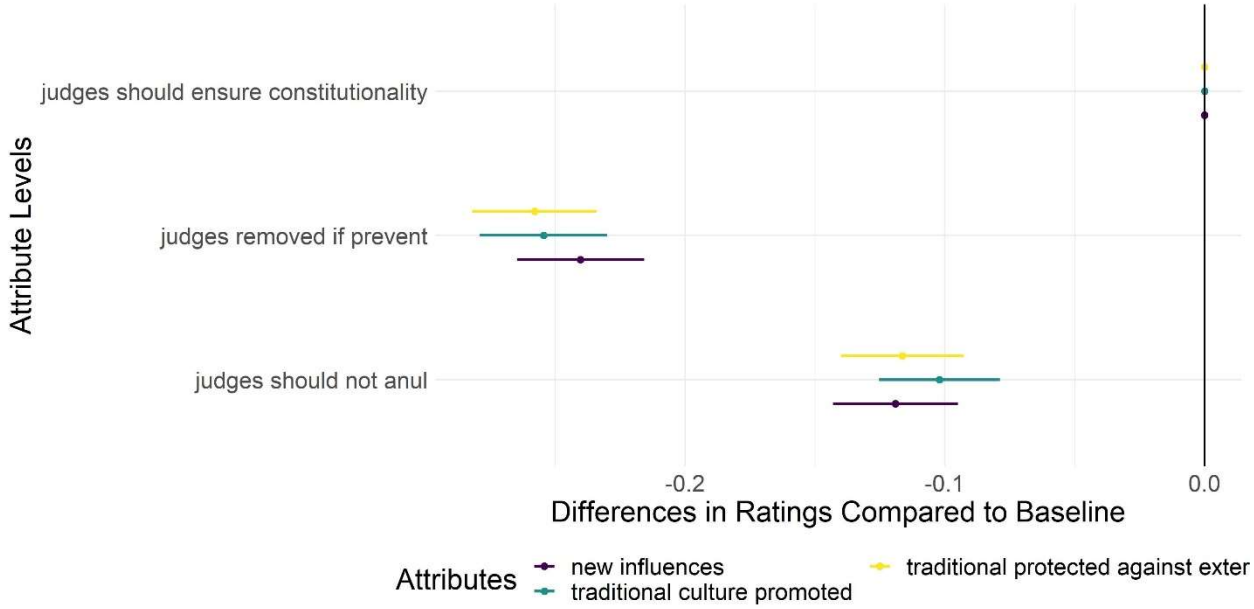


Figure A1 evalautes the presence of a value-based priority: do voters tolerate democratic erosion because they value a leader's degree of cultural conservatism more highly than their respect for democratic procedures? This does not appear to be the case, with virtually no variation in the effect size of the different levels on our democratic violations attribute when compared against leader's varying degrees of cultural conservatism.

Figure A4. Interaction between economic positions and democratic violations

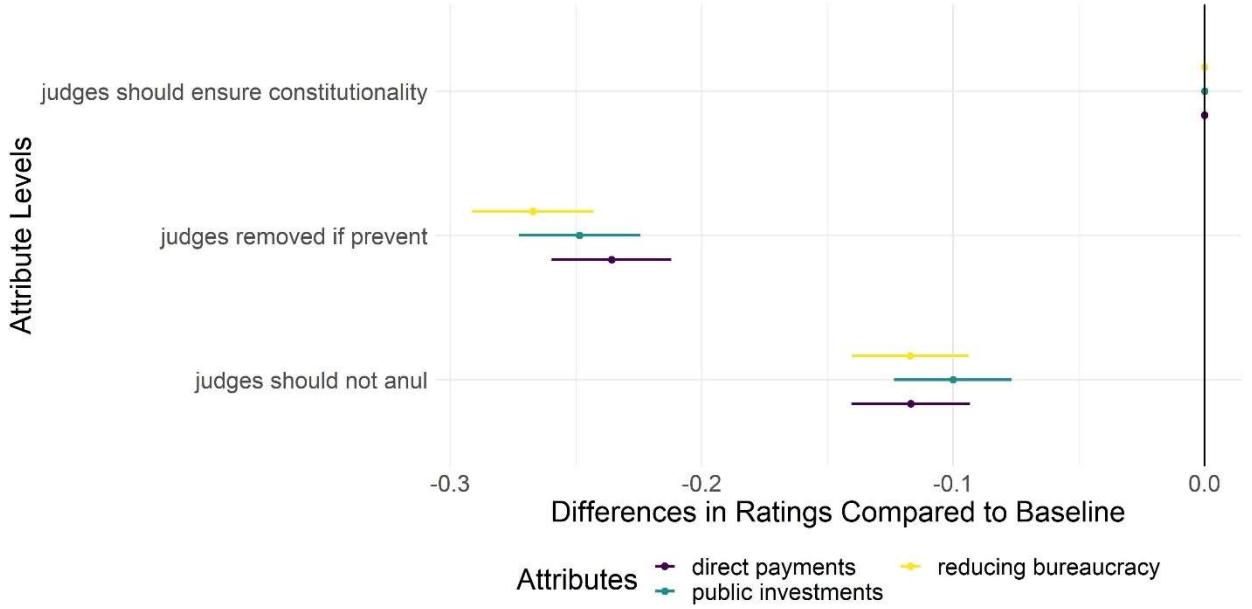


Figure A4 examines the importance of economic priorities. Do voters discount democratic erosion against the prospective economic benefits a leader may be able to offer? Again, there appears to be no explicit interaction between economic benefits and democratic violations for the full sample. Voters punish leaders for endorsing non-democratic views of judicial independence irrespective of the economic views they hold.

Figure A5. Interaction between conceptions of democracy and democratic violations

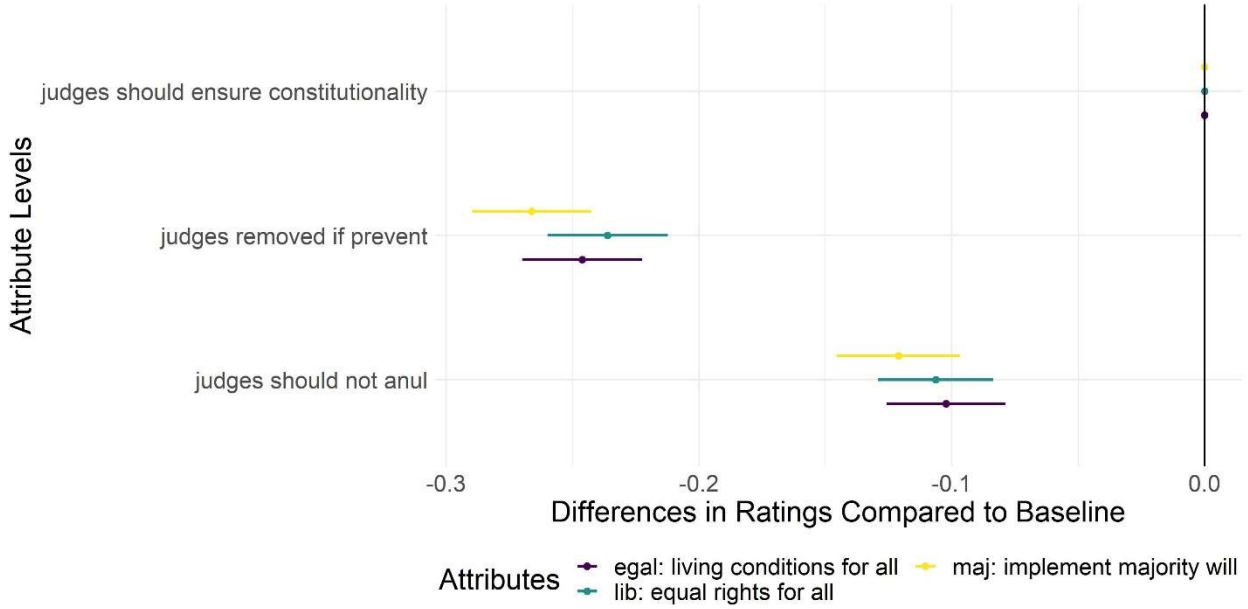
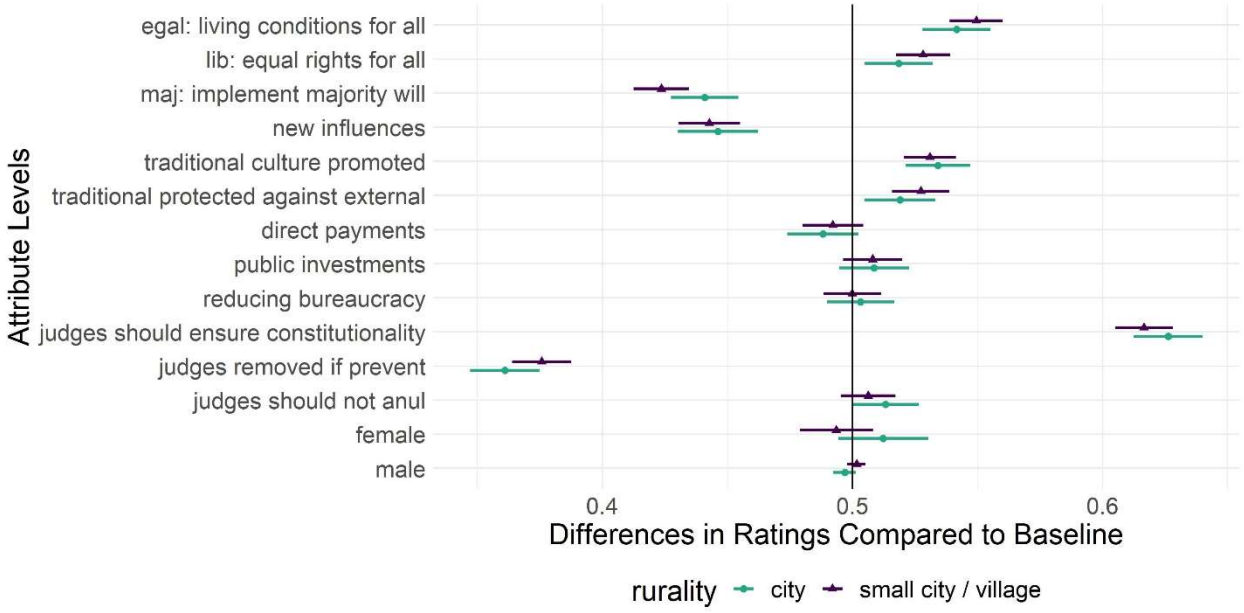


Figure A5 probes the interaction between distinct conceptions of democracy advocated by leaders and their impact on respondents' evaluations of democratic violations. Here, our expectation was that voters may be willing to overlook procedural democratic violations as long as a prospective leader shared a broadly democratic outlook on the overall role of the government. Once more, the effect of such interactions appears minor at best, with respondents no more or less tolerant of violations of judicial independence depending on the general view of democracy a leader holds.

In sum, our analyses based on the full sample indicate that Hungarian respondents are capable of recognizing democratic violations advocated by political leaders, and that neither value-based nor economic orientations, nor leaders' broad conceptions of democracy are able to deter them from punishing leaders for endorsing such violations. These findings lead us to reject all three of our hypotheses 2-4.

Figure A6a. Subgroup analysis urban vs. rural respondents



The overall pattern remains largely identical if we operate an alternative cut-off, differentiating between respondents from large cities – in Hungary, this essentially means Budapest – and others (see Figure A6b). This unexpected finding challenges the widespread assumption that urban areas tend to concentrate liberal, cosmopolitan voters who are ready to challenge democratic backsliding, whereas supporters of strongman leadership concentrate in rural areas.

Figure A6b. Subgroup analysis large city vs. outside Budapest

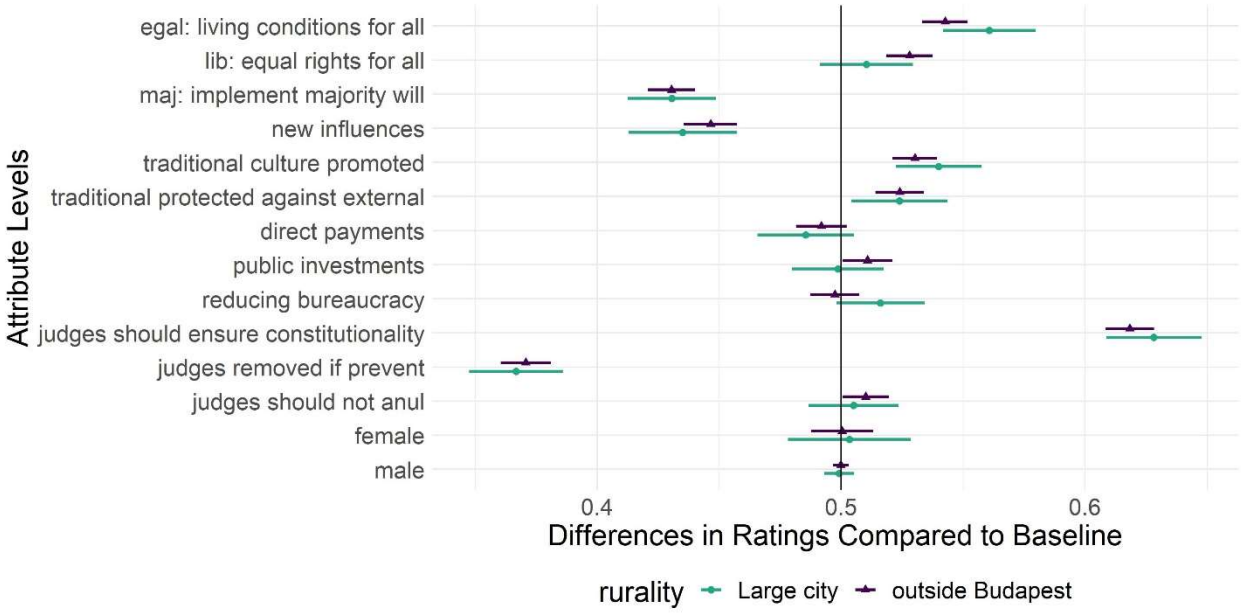


Figure A7. Subgroup analysis of respondents with vs. without university degree

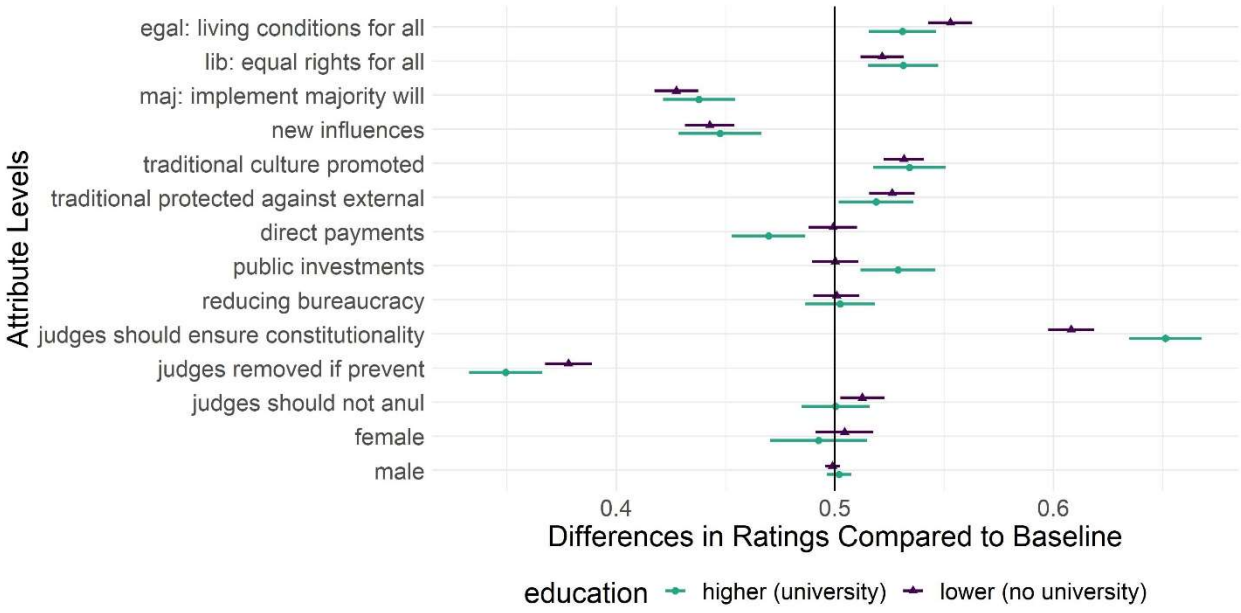
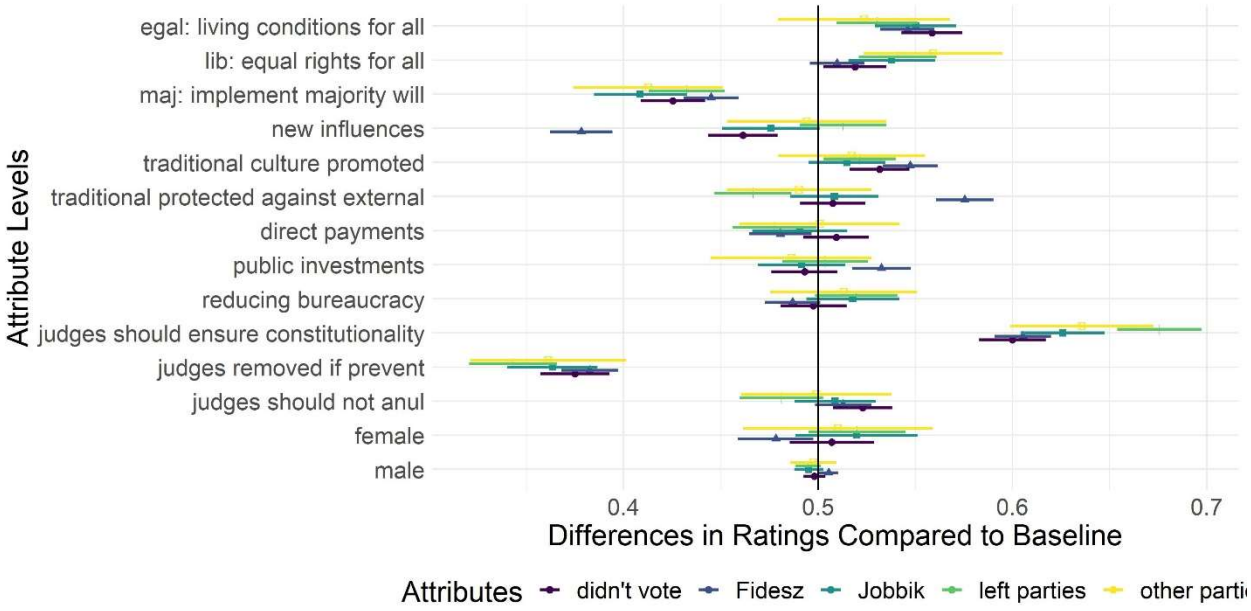


Figure A8. Conjoint analysis based on retrospective partisan preference



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A new regime divide? Affective polarization and attitudes towards democratic backsliding

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2022-09-21

Abstract:

Affective polarization has been posited as a key explanation for citizens' tolerance towards democratic backsliding. Our study adopts the opposite perspective, studying affective polarization not as a cause of backsliding, but as its consequence. We contend that backsliding crystallizes an affective dislike among opposition supporters towards the governing party and its supporters that stems from divergent views of democracy itself. To explore this argument, we leverage original survey data collected in Hungary and Poland. Our results indicate a clear government-opposition divide in affect towards parties and show how liberal democratic attitudes in particular among opposition party supporters play into this dynamic. We submit that where backsliding persists over a longer period, this process can shift even multi-party systems towards increasing bipolarity along what we term a 'democratic divide.' Ultimately, our findings thus suggest that affective polarization may not necessarily be detrimental in contexts of democratic backsliding, but can instead play a positive role by contributing to unite the opposition around the defense of democracy. Our study thus offers a novel perspective on affective polarization and the partisan dynamics at play in contexts of democratic backsliding.

Work in progress, feedback welcome.

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Introduction

Politics in many societies are increasingly shaped by the strong affective responses of citizens to those who do not share their political beliefs. Scholarship has studied this phenomenon as *affective polarization* (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Huddy and Bankert 2017), an identity-based positive bias towards elites and supporters of one's own party coupled with a dislike for rival parties and their supporters (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Abramowitz and Webster 2018). Next to spatial models of party choice (Downs 1957; Fiorina 1981), such identity-based explanations play a significant role in understanding political behavior (Greene 1999; Bankert, Huddy, and Rosema 2017).

While many negative outcomes have been ascribed to affective polarization (Iyengar et al. 2019), one key concern is that affective polarization may increase tolerance for undemocratic behavior by governments (Kingzette et al. 2021; McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Orhan 2022; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2021). According to this literature, affective polarization contributes to democratic erosion by increasing partisan loyalty and decreasing the importance citizens give to democratic procedures. More specifically, the strength of partisanship has also been found to be associated with 'partisan double standard' (Graham et al. 2020) or 'democratic hypocrisy' (McCoy, Simonovits, and Littvay 2020), i.e., the willingness to overlook democratic violations by one's own party. Affective polarization has thus been posited as a key explanation for citizens' tolerance for democratic backsliding.

We argue that this focus neglects the context in which affective polarization emerges: in countries that have experienced significant democratic backsliding, we contend that affective polarization may itself be shaped by citizens' views of such democratic backsliding. Similar to the 'regime divide' that influenced coalition formation and party support in the immediate post-communist period (Grzymala-Busse 2001), we argue that democratic backsliding can forge a new regime divide that polarizes party evaluations around the issue of liberal democracy. For citizens who prioritize liberal democratic values, a governing party that violates democratic norms and its supporters may become unacceptable. In turn, they may find other opposition parties and their supporters more acceptable, even when they disagree on policy grounds. Hence, we contend that affective polarization may not only be a determinant of tolerance for democratic backsliding, but also a consequence

of the process of backsliding itself.

Our argument nuances the critical perspective on affective polarization that most of the literature has adopted. Multiple studies have highlighted that affective polarization inhibits behaviors desirable for democracy (Iyengar et al. 2019; Gidengil, Stolle, and Bergeron-Boutin 2021; Somer and McCoy 2018; Gidron, Adams, and Horne 2020; Pierson and Schickler 2020). This conventional perspective sees polarization as contributing to voters on either side of the affective divide tolerating democratic backsliding by an in-group incumbent. In contrast, our perspective suggests that support for democracy need not be undermined by affective polarization. Instead, democratic backsliding may effectively reinforce the commitment to democratic norms on one side of the affective divide, eventually favoring a joint mobilisation by a range of opposition parties. Hence, we suppose attitudes towards democracy to act as a potential transmission belt, with democracy becoming the very issue around which affective polarization is organized.

To explore this argument empirically, our study addresses two central questions: first, to what extent does a given party's government participation rather than ideological divisions determine citizens' evaluations of partisan groups? Second, do divergent party evaluations among citizens signal a divide over democracy itself? We study these two questions in the context of Hungary and Poland, two countries identified as being among the top autocratizers worldwide (Hellmeier et al. 2021). We draw on original survey data combining individual-level measures of affect towards parties (based on evaluations of parties or party supporters) with information on respondents' vote choice and views of democracy. Using regression models, we predict such evaluations using vote choice, democratic attitudes and a range of control variables.

Our findings confirm our main argument that support for liberal democracy may indeed reinforce affective polarization. First, we demonstrate the existence of a government-opposition divide when it comes to voters' evaluations of (supporters of) other parties: opposition supporters are most hostile towards the ruling party, whose supporters in turn view all opposition party supporters negatively. Moreover, our data lend support to our expectation of liberal democratic attitudes forming the main dividing line: liberal conceptions of democracy have a sizable and significant negative effect on evaluations of the respective ruling party (supporters) by opposition supporters, whereas they have a

positive effect on the evaluation of (supporters of) most opposition parties. As anticipated, evaluations of more radical or discredited parties form a partial exception. Finally, we are able to show that vote intention effectively moderates the effect of democratic attitudes, with citizens – specifically opposition supporters – who value democracy evaluating their in-group more favorably but out-groups more negatively. Ultimately, our findings suggest a two-way relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding, with mutually reinforcing dynamics leading to a new regime divide around attitudes towards backsliding.

The remainder of the paper is organised as follows. We begin by situating our argument within existing scholarship on the dynamics of affective polarisation and their presumed role in democratic backsliding. We then develop our theoretical argument and spell out the hypotheses that guide our empirical analysis. The following section introduces our cases and outlines our research design, data, and operationalization. We then present our empirical findings. The final section summarizes our main insights and discusses their theoretical and practical implications.

Affective polarization, partisan dynamics, and democratic backsliding

Affective polarization has been defined as "the increasing effect of partisanship on interpersonal affect" (Dias and Lelkes 2021, 2). The bulk of research in this area has studied how deepening partisan identity among voters - and a corresponding dislike for supporters of other parties - translate into a broader polarization that divides society into distinct camps. Our research speaks to several ongoing debates around the nature and drivers of affective polarization and its relationship to democratic backsliding.

For one, we examine the interplay between substantive disagreement over democracy and attendant affective polarization along party lines. Scholars remain divided on the extent to which substantive differences in elite positions or voters' preferences contribute to deepening partisan-based affective divides. This debate has been cast as an opposition between affective polarisation, which is grounded primarily in group identity, and ideological or issue-based polarization where the divide among the electorate stems from diverging views over a given policy or issue area. Whereas some view ideological and affective

polarization as going largely hand-in-hand (Abramowitz 2010, 2013) and reflecting a growing divergence of policy positions among elites (Rogowski and Sutherland 2016), others contend that partisan-ideological sorting drives social polarization despite only moderate differences among voters' issue preferences (Mason 2015). A synthesis of these views suggests that it is the combination of partisan identity and policy disagreement that drives affective polarization among voters (Webster and Abramowitz 2017). More recent findings indicate that partisan-based affective divides run deeper than effective policy disagreement (Dias and Lelkes 2021). We contribute to this debate by exploring how the strength of liberal democratic sentiment shapes voters' perceptions of different parties and their supporters.

Of late, there have been efforts to expand the study of affective polarization beyond the partisan realm to explore how divergent evaluations of major political events may foster an affective divide in a given population. Studying the impact of Brexit on affective polarization in the British electorate, Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley (2021) suggest that such polarization may occur not just along party lines, but also "by identification with opinion-based groups" that potentially cut across previously existing partisan divisions (Hobolt, Leeper, and Tilley 2021: 1476). We examine to what extent democratic backsliding may drive such opinion-based polarization between voters based on their divergent evaluations of the giverning party's democratic credentials.

Finally, we offer a novel perspective on the relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding. So far, studies have focused on establishing how affective divides in the population may lead to or further democratic backsliding, pointing to different mechanisms underpinning this relationship. On the one hand, affective polarization is held to lead to partisan bias in evaluations, with voters more willing to accept transgressions by politicians of their own party (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Graham et al. 2020) or rationalizing democratic violations as being in accordance with democratic standards where such behavior aligns with their political preferences (Krishnarajan 2022). Ideologically speaking, partisan loyalty may lead citizens to conform with their party's positions and support its candidates across a range of policy dimensions (Iyengar et al. 2019; Iyengar and Krupenkin 2018). More specific to democratic procedures, previous studies mention the politicization of democratic norms, such as checks and balances or

opposition rights (Kingzette et al. 2021), which may decrease voters' willingness to punish extreme behavior by politicians of a party they identify with (Graham et al. 2020; Pierson and Schickler 2020). On the other hand, affective polarization makes extreme institutional reforms electorally viable, thereby potentially favouring the emergence of 'closet autocrats' while leaving citizens uncertain over an incumbent's true intentions (Chiopris, Nalepa, and Vanberg, n.d.). Hence, unlike ideological polarization that may stimulate political competition, affective polarization represents a risk to the democratic system (Reiljan 2020), as intense inter-party animosity may favour democratic violations by the incumbent party or coalition and tolerance for such behaviour on the part of its supporters.

Probing the macro-level relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding, Orhan (2022) argues that affective polarization is key in driving support for undemocratic politicians, as it promotes cynicism, intolerance and blind partisan loyalty. Drawing on cross-national data from the V-Dem liberal democracy index, he shows that an increase in affective polarization is associated with the likelihood of democratic backsliding in the form of decreasing accountability, individual liberties and deliberation. However, the analysis is cross-sectional and cannot account for changes over time, leaving the causal direction of the relationship open to interpretation. As we develop in the following, it is at least as plausible to view the relationship as running in the opposite direction, from democratic backsliding towards a deepening of affective polarization among citizens.

In sum, most studies of affective polarization take its existence as a given: instead of delving into the reasons why citizens dislike other parties and their supporters, affective polarization is taken as a characteristic of respondents, thus disregarding the context in which it has emerged. In contrast, the (to our knowledge) only study that attempts to manipulate levels of affective polarization (Broockman, Kalla, and Westwood 2020) finds no evidence that partisan affect produces political consequences. While it therefore appears plausible for affective polarization to affect democratic backsliding, especially correlational studies at the macro-level cannot accurately separate this relationship from the reverse effect. Hence, whether democratic backsliding also shapes affective polarization remains unclear.

Theorizing an emergent regime divide around democracy

We propose a novel perspective on the macro-level relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding, suggesting that democratic backsliding may itself contribute to affective polarization. Importantly, we do not contest previous studies that view affective polarization as a contributing factor to democratic backsliding. Instead, we suggest that the macro-level relationship between democratic backsliding and affective polarization may be a two-way one, whereby affective polarization may promote tolerance for backsliding just as backsliding may foster affective polarization.Specifically, we suggest that for citizens who prioritize liberal democratic values, a governing party that violates democratic norms and its supporters may become unacceptable. In turn, they may find other opposition parties and their supporters more acceptable, even when they disagree on policy or ideological grounds. In a nutshell, we submit that democratic backsliding may foster affective polarization.

We develop our argument in three stages. First, we theorize the emergence of an affective divide between government and opposition parties and their supporters. We then address how we expect the role of liberal democratic values to play into this relationship. Finally, we explain how partisan preference may moderate the effect of democratic values on affective dislike towards the governing party and its supporters. Ultimately, we argue that democratic backsliding, by increasing the salience of voters' democratic preferences, may lead to affective polarisation around democratic values themselves, uniting opposition supporters in defence of democracy despite their ideological differences.

A new regime divide

Theoretically, our argument holds that undemocratic forms of government can structure political competition and foster a divide grounded in citizens' attitudes towards ongoing democratic violations. Divergent preferences regarding the shape of the political system are a longstanding issue of political contention [refs.]. In the context of post-communist democratization, this idea has been articulated as a 'regime divide,' whereby association with or opposition to the former communist system shapes party coalitions as well as electoral punishment (Grzymala-Busse 2001). Parties that were not involved with the previous regime are unwilling to cross this 'regime divide' and collaborate with

representatives of the former regime, while former governing parties also hesitate to collaborate with the erstwhile opposition.

Similar to this post-communist 'regime divide,' we argue that democratic backsliding can shape a new regime divide that polarizes evaluations of parties and their supporters around attitudes towards democratic backsliding. Those who feel the government violates democratic norms will be unwilling to cross the government-opposition divide, just as government supporters will seek to distance themselves from parties criticizing the government they support as undemocratic.

Our argument echoes research on the role of coalition signals for affective polarization (Praprotnik and Wagner, n.d.) showing that news reports about parties' willingness to enter a coalition decrease affective polarization by reducing the perceived ideological distance between parties. Similarly, Bantel (n.d.) and Harteveld (2021) enlarge the typical focus on party-based affective polarization to the notion of broader camps around which partisan affect may be structured. They focus on ideological orientations when distinguishing such distinct camps, for instance examining respondents' feelings towards the larger group of 'leftists' rather than more specifically 'social democrats.' Adapting this approach to our argument, we contend that camps may correspond to distinct views of democracy, with supporters of the ruling party in a backsliding regime holding distinct views of liberal democracy compared to supporters of a range of opposition parties.

We expect this dynamic to play out in contexts where democratic backsliding is ongoing and carried out by a dominant ruling party or coalition. It is in these settings that the increased salience of democratic attitudes among voters is likely to affect their evaluation of different parties and their supporters, with democratic preferences overriding potential ideological differences among the opposition. Moreover, we can expect this effect to be magnified where opposition parties jointly form an electoral coalition, mirroring Bantel's (2021) demonstration that a cross-camp coalition government may weaken affective polarization.

As a first step, the dynamic we outline should lead to a government-opposition divide in feelings toward supporters of other parties: citizens who vote for opposition parties should evaluate supporters of other opposition parties more positively than supporters of the government. Our argument goes beyond establishing negative partisanship (Abramowitz and Webster 2016; Abramowitz and Webster 2018) that sees opposition supporters to

evaluate the governing party critically. Instead, it is only when we also see positive evaluations of the supporters of (other) opposition parties that we observe the emergence of the expected regime divide.

Government-opposition hypothesis:

- **H1: Evaluations of party supporters follow a government-opposition divide.**

Our argument concentrates primarily on opposition supporters: while governments engaging in democratic backsliding have in many cases consisted of or at least been dominated by a single party, the opposition is often more heterogeneous. In fact, failure to coalesce among the opposition has frequently been identified as a central stumbling block for the defense of democracy (Selçuk and Hekimci 2020; Ong 2021; Gandhi and Reuter 2013; Ziegfeld and Tudor 2017). Hence, we focus our analysis primarily on opposition supporters. Still, we do not expect the divide between feelings towards the supporters of opposition and governing parties to necessarily be larger among the opposition supporters than for government supporters.

Democracy and the regime divide

An affective divide along government-opposition lines may simply reflect incumbency and in particular the resentment among opposition supporters towards those in power. If the outlined divide is also substantively about democracy, as we suppose, those who value liberal democracy and strongly reject democratic backsliding should exhibit a stronger affective reaction towards the supporters of governing parties that violate democratic norms. Especially when opposition parties jointly object to such violations, we expect this to strengthen affective polarization between a government and opposition block. Ultimately, we theorize the emergence of a new regime divide whereby issue-based polarization around evaluations of democracy fuels deepening of affective polarization between government supporters and government opponents.

In line with traditional approaches, we assess affective polarization at the level of evaluations of party supporters. At the same time, we are specifically interested in whether respondents with a more liberal understanding of democracy evaluate supporters of the governing parties more negatively and, in turn, opposition party supporters more positively,

compared to those who care less about liberal democracy. In other words, we expect the strength of respondents' liberal democratic attitudes to moderate their evaluations of parties and their supporters. With these hypotheses, we also once again probe whether the hypothesized polarizing effect of democratic backsliding mostly occurs by creating an out-group that is loathed or can also occur by uniting an in-group of otherwise possibly disparate opposition parties.

Democracy hypotheses:

- **H2a: Respondents who have a liberal understanding of democracy feel more negatively towards ruling party supporters.**
- **H2b: Respondents who have a liberal understanding of democracy feel more positively towards supporters of opposition parties.**

Finally, we ask whether vote intentions moderate the effect of a liberal understanding of democracy. This allows us to assess how democratic attitudes and partisanship interact when it comes to affective polarization. That is, we assess whether the hypothesized effect of a liberal understanding of democracy is unique to opposition supporters, works differently for government and opposition supporters or is a uniform expression of a general skepticism of liberal democratic voters towards an illiberal government. Specifically, we do not expect the effect of a liberal understanding of democracy to be universal: a host of studies has provided evidence of partisan-motivated reasoning (Ward and Tavits 2019; Leeper and Slothuus 2014; Malhotra and Margalit 2010), including when it comes to evaluations of democracy (Anderson et al. 2005; Blais and Gélineau 2007) and democratic violations (Ahlquist et al. 2018; Mochtak, Lesschaeve, and Glaurdić 2021; Bowler and Donovan 2016; Beaulieu 2014). Hence, an identification with a governing party may bias citizens' perspective, overriding the effect of our democracy hypotheses.

Partisan hypothesis:

- **H3: Vote intention moderates the effect of a liberal understanding of democracy on feelings towards party supporters.**

The Cases

We focus our empirical analysis on two European countries that have experienced protracted democratic backsliding: Hungary and Poland. Both countries constitute fairly advanced instances of democratic backsliding and have seen a politicization of democratic governance and deepening societal polarization (Vegetti 2019; Fomina 2019; Solska 2020). However, they also differ in important regards, providing additional robustness to our argument. These differences concern both institutional factors, in particular divergent electoral systems, and contextual conditions including the party landscape and political history that shape the likelihood of the emergence of a regime divide.

Regarding institutional factors, the Polish electoral system is a proportional system that does not require parties to coalesce. In contrast, the Hungarian system – which allocates the majority of seats in single-member districts – has strong majoritarian tendencies that provides important incentives for parties to cooperate. An electoral reform by the Fidesz government in 2012 only increased these tendencies (Tóka 2014). Hence, opposition parties in Hungary have engaged in coalition-building to a larger extent than Polish parties, potentially leading to the coalition-signalling rhetoric that mutes affective polarization (Praprotnik and Wagner, n.d.). In Poland, the onset of democratic backsliding is more recent and elections remain competitive. The situation of the ruling PiS party is therefore more precarious than that of Fidesz, with success at the ballot box still a real possibility for the opposition during electoral contests (Bakke and Sitter 2022).

On the contextual side, however, Hungary is nevertheless a hard case for a regime divide to emerge: with the far-right Jobbik, one of the governing Fidesz party's main competitors is ideologically distant from the other opposition parties (see e.g. Róna 2016). Although the party has gone through a process of moderation in the past years (Borbáth and Gessler 2021), these ideological differences are not easy to bridge. In fact, appeasing Jobbik voters has been key to Fidesz' policy agenda (Kreko and Mayer 2015; Böcskei and Molnár 2019). Table 1 shows the democracy scores for the different Hungarian parties, indicating a stark divide between Fidesz and Jobbik on the one hand, and leftist parties on the other (see also Table A1 for alternative measures). Given the party's radical right orientation, Jobbik evaluations by voters may be subject to unique dynamics (Harteveld 2021). Specifically, its critical stance towards democracy and liberal institutions (Kyriazi 2016; Pirro 2016;

Table 1: Hungary Democracy Scores (CHES – 2019).

Party	Score
Democratic Coalition	3.000
Dialogue for Hungary	-
Fidesz – KDNP	9.466
Hungarian Socialist Party	4.400
Hungary's Green Party	3.200
Jobbik	8.600
Momentum	2.000

Note: average expert rating of party preference for civil liberties (0) versus law and order (10) (CIVLIB_LAWORDER).

Pytlas 2017; Krekó and Juhász 2018) may override potential in-group feelings for citizens who value liberal democracy. Hence, in line with our pre-registration, when interpreting the results we will evaluate our hypothesis both considering and excluding Jobbik.

Finally, the recent political history of Hungary (Gessler and Kyriazi 2019; Tóka and Popa 2013) has also led to significant divides within the left opposition. Most notably, there are differences between left-wing parties whose representatives have held previous government office (MSZP, DK) and those who where never in power. Consequently, despite the hypothesized in-group effect, we expect considerable divides among the other opposition parties, primarily between parties with close connections to previous governments – such as MSZP and DK – and those who have no such connections.

In contrast to the ideological heterogeneity and structural weakness of the Hungarian opposition, the Polish opposition is overall stronger and more coherent (Solska 2020). The two strongest opposition parties, the Civic Coalition as long-standing rival of the ruling Law and Justice (PiS) party and the more recently created Poland 2050, both appeal to a broadly liberal conservative electorate and are therefore ideologically very compatible. Table 2 shows the democracy scores for the main Polish party coalitions included in our survey (with coalition ratings based on the aggregation of their members' individual scores) (see also Table A2 for alternative measures).

As shown, the newly-founded far-right party Confederation forms an exception among the Polish opposition parties, leading us to treat it separately in our analysis. This is similar to but goes beyond our treatment of Jobbik in Hungary, as Confederation does not cooperate with the Polish opposition. Nevertheless, amid deepening societal polarization (Markowski

Table 2: Poland Democracy Scores (CHES – 2019).

Party	Score
Civic Coalition	2.937
Confederation	8.611
The Left	1.444
Law and Justice	9.100
Poland 2050	-

Note: average expert rating of party preference for civil liberties (0) versus law and order (10) (CIVLIB_LAWORDER).

2020) and party positions on liberal democracy among the most salient issues in political debates, Poland appears a more likely case to find the expected democracy-related regime divide.

Research Design & Data

We study how attitudes towards (liberal) democracy shape affective polarization based on two surveys with a total sample of N=2'000 respondents in Hungary (Study 1) and N=2'700 in Poland (Study 2). Both surveys were conducted online among representative samples of the population (based on age, gender, size of town or region and vote choice in the last national election) and were fielded by YouGov's partner in Central-Eastern Europe, the Warsaw-based market research company Inquiry, between late 2021 and early 2022.

We preregistered Study 1 before fielding the survey and later amended the preregistration with our plan for Study 2 (based on secondary data collected previously by one of the authors), before analyzing the data.[1] For both surveys, the main focus was a conjoint task which was preregistered separately. Following the conjoint, respondents were asked a series of questions related to their political preferences and socio-economic background that also included the questions used in this study.

Empirical Strategy

As dependent variable, we draw on **evaluations of party supporters** (Study 1) **and parties** (Study 2) based on a feeling thermometer. Feeling thermometer scores are frequently used to operationalize affective polarization, including in the context of multi-

[1]The pre-analysis plan is available at https://osf.io/a8utq/

party systems (Wagner 2021; Reiljan 2020). However, we focus on the evaluation of (the supporters of) individual parties here to avoid the distortions that the aggregation of measures into an affective polarization score would introduce. This is because measuring affective polarization in multi-party systems is significantly more complicated than in bipartisan contexts (Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021).[2]

In the two studies, our measures of evaluations differ in their object. Differentiating several measures of party evaluations, Druckman and Levendusky (2019) shows that party ratings may be more negative than party supporter ratings and mostly capture feelings about party elites. However, both ratings are widely used in the literature on affective polarization and we have no reason to assume systematic differences. Furthermore, in Study 1, party supporters are evaluated with an 11-point scale, while Study 2 uses a 7-point scale. We include the distribution of these scores for all parties included in the studies in both countries in Figures A1 and A2 in the Supplementary Material. The distribution of these dislike-like scores shows significant variation in the distribution of scores but gives us no reason to assume there is systematic bias in either of the measurements.

To test the government-opposition hypothesis (H1), we descriptively compare the distribution of feeling thermometer scores for each party among opposition supporters, excluding the party for which a respondent voted. We also formally test the government-opposition divide, using a t-test to compare the feelings towards Fidesz supporters with the feeling towards supporters of any party, as well as the average of all opposition parties.

To test the democracy hypotheses (H2a and H2b), we estimate a regression model predicting the support for each opposition party. Here, we implement the following models for each of the dependent variables:

$$evaluation_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 libdem + \beta_2 gender + \beta_3 age + \beta_4 economy + \beta_5 lr + \beta_6 govoppo + \beta_7 polinterest + \epsilon_i$$

where

- *libdem* is a factor measuring democratic attitudes from a battery of questions. For Study 1, these are four questions from the European Social Survey which we

[2]While measures of AP in multi-party contexts exist, they typically include weighting for party size (Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021) which is difficult in our cases where some parties have not run in prior elections. Some measures (Reiljan 2020) only include partisans but not undecided voters, whereas spread-based measures (Wagner 2021) may be sensitive to the size of blocks.

preregistered, resulting in a factor that reflects the importance of free and fair elections, equal treatments by the courts and control of the government by courts with minority rights not loading on the factor (See Table A3 in the Supplementary Material). For Study 2, we include a larger adapted battery of World Value Survey questions to measure liberal, authoritarian and majoritarian attitudes. We measure liberal attitudes by estimating a two-factor solution (given the broader set of items) and selecting the factor that represents liberal items. This leads us to a factor on which the three liberal items load clearly, whereas the authoritarian items load negatively and the majoritarian items are mostly absent, instead loading on the second dimension (See Table A4 in the Supplementary Material).

- *govoppo* is respondents' vote intention in the next election, simplified into government, opposition and non-voters; for Study 2 additionally separating Confederation
- a range of control variables is included: respondents' gender, age, economic situation, left-right position and political interest. Detailed descriptions are included in Table A5 in the Appendix.

To test the partisan hypothesis (H3) that assumes an interaction, we use the following formula that interacts attitudes towards liberal democracy with vote intention:

$$evaluation_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 libdem + \beta_2 govoppo + \beta_3 (libdem_i x govoppo) + \beta_4 gender + \beta_5 age + \beta_6 economy + \beta_7 lr + \beta_8 polinterest + \epsilon_i$$

Robustness Checks As robustness checks, we preregistered several alternative specifications: Given left and right are used differently in Central-Eastern Europe, we also test a more differentiated measure of the left-right axis as a robustness check of our test for H2a and H2b. For this, we use the following formula:

$$evaluation_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 libdem + \beta_2 gender + \beta_3 age + \beta_4 economy + \beta_5 econlr + \beta_6 cultlr + \beta_7 govoppo + \beta_8 polinterest + \epsilon_i$$

where

- *econlr* is a scale of economic left-right positions, obtained from two survey items that ask about income equality and welfare provisions;
- *cultlr* is a scale of cultural left-right positions, obtained from two survey items that

ask about immigration and equal rights for gays and lesbians;

Similarly, we also include the more complex party variable in another robustness check to also address case-specific dynamics:

$evaluation_i = \beta_0 + \beta_1 libdem + \beta_2 gender + \beta_3 age + \beta_4 economy + \beta_5 lr + \beta_6 party + \beta_7 polinterest + \epsilon_i$

- *party* is respondents' vote intention in the next election.

Finally, we replicate the main models to test H2a & H2b, excluding respondents who stated that they voted for the party that is used as a dependent variable. While we expect that not all voters will actually feel close to the party they intend to vote for, this provides a more conservative estimate of the evaluation of in- and out-group evaluations beyond the party for which a respondent votes.

Results

Before delving into the specific survey results on affective polarization and democratic attitudes in each of our case studies, we first explore empirical evidence regarding attitudes towards democracy over time in both countries. Our argument holds that democratic backsliding may lead to a deepening of affective polarization around democratic attitudes. By examining the evolution of democratic attitudes over a longer period, we seek to contextualize the snapshot insight provided by our original survey data that we conducted at a single time point.

To this effect, Figure 1 shows the over-time development of responses to the question how democratic citizens think their country is. At first sight, change is limited in both countries with a largely stable average hovering around the middle of the scale. This aggregate perspective, however, hides an underlying polarization of attitudes towards democracy in these countries: Figure 2 shows the share of respondents who choose responses at either extreme of the scale: in both Hungary and Poland, this share increases from a rather low level to more than a third of respondents. The selected question item corresponds more closely to specific support for democracy (Easton 1975) and translates an increasing divergence in citizens' evaluations of democratic performance. This pattern is in line with our assumption that democratic backsliding eventually contributes to a deepening of

affective polarization around democratic attitudes over time. Against this backdrop, we further explore the shape and depth of this divide drawing on the survey data we collected in Poland and Hungary.

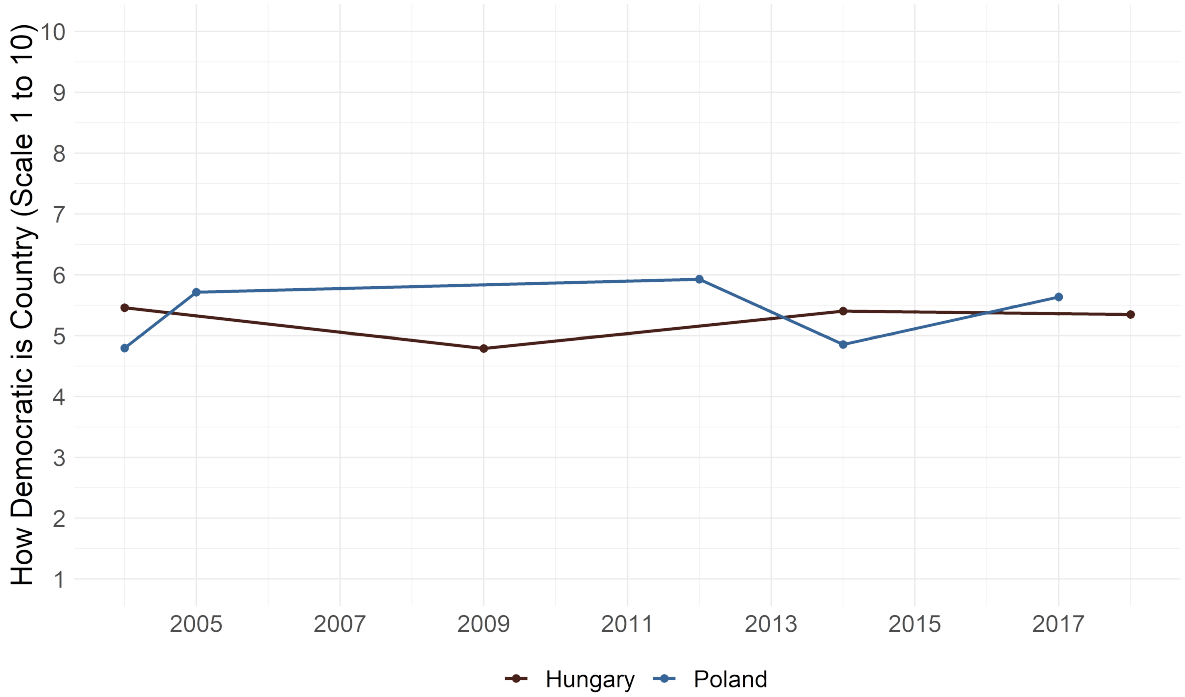

Figure 1: Time Series of "How Democratic is your Country?" question in Hungary and Poland. Rescaled to 10-point scale where original scale was 11-points.

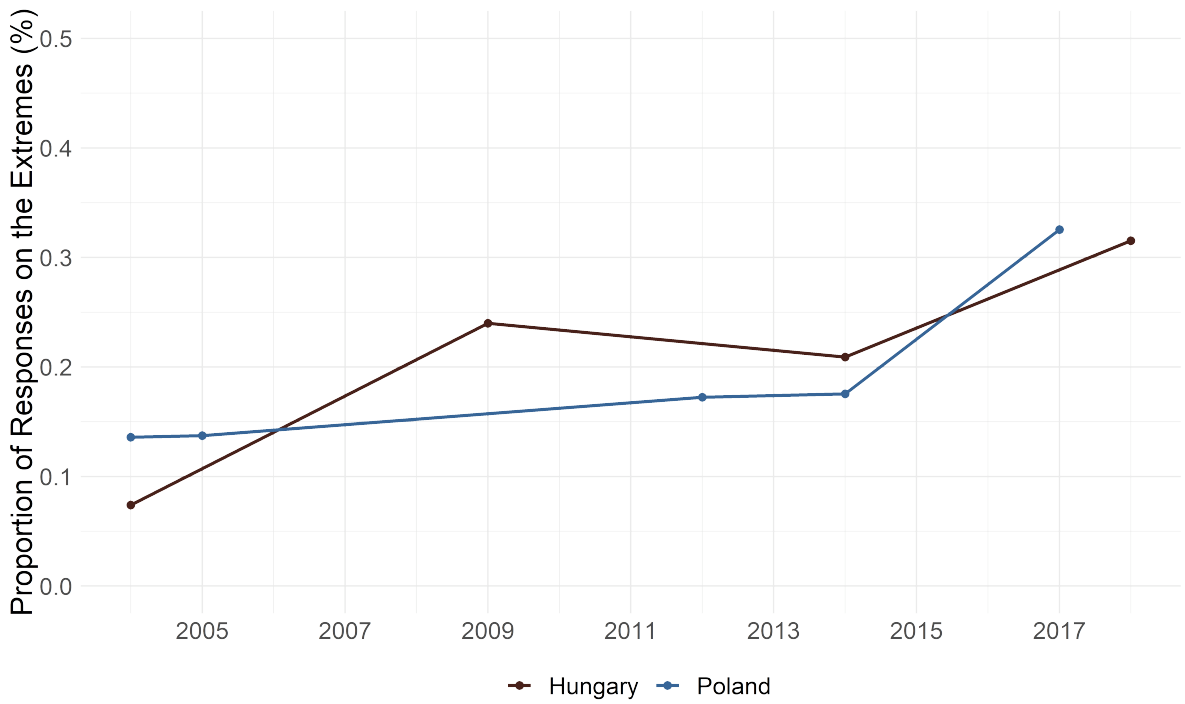

Figure 2: Share of extreme responses in Hungary and Poland. Extremes are defined as the two extreme values on either side of the scale.

Study 1: Hungary

A new regime divide in Hungary We begin by examining the evaluation of support for specific parties by government and opposition supporters. As shown in Figure 3, government and opposition supporters in Hungary differ starkly in their evaluations, clearly highlighting the entrenchment of the government and opposition camps in Hungary: government supporters in the upper panel rate all opposition parties decidedly more negatively than the population mean (dashed line) does. Judging the supporters of each opposition party, between just above a quarter (Green Party) and 42 per cent (Democratic Coalition) of all prospective Fidesz voters select the most extreme dislike score for opposition supporters. This is mirrored by opposition supporters' dislike of Fidesz: here, the gap between the opposition supporters' mean evaluation of Fidesz and the population average (including opposition supporters) amounts to almost 3 points on an 11-point scale. More than half of the opposition supporters select the most extreme dislike category for Fidesz, while this share is around or below 6 per cent for each opposition party.

Given the literature suggests voters tend to voice more moderate opinions when asked

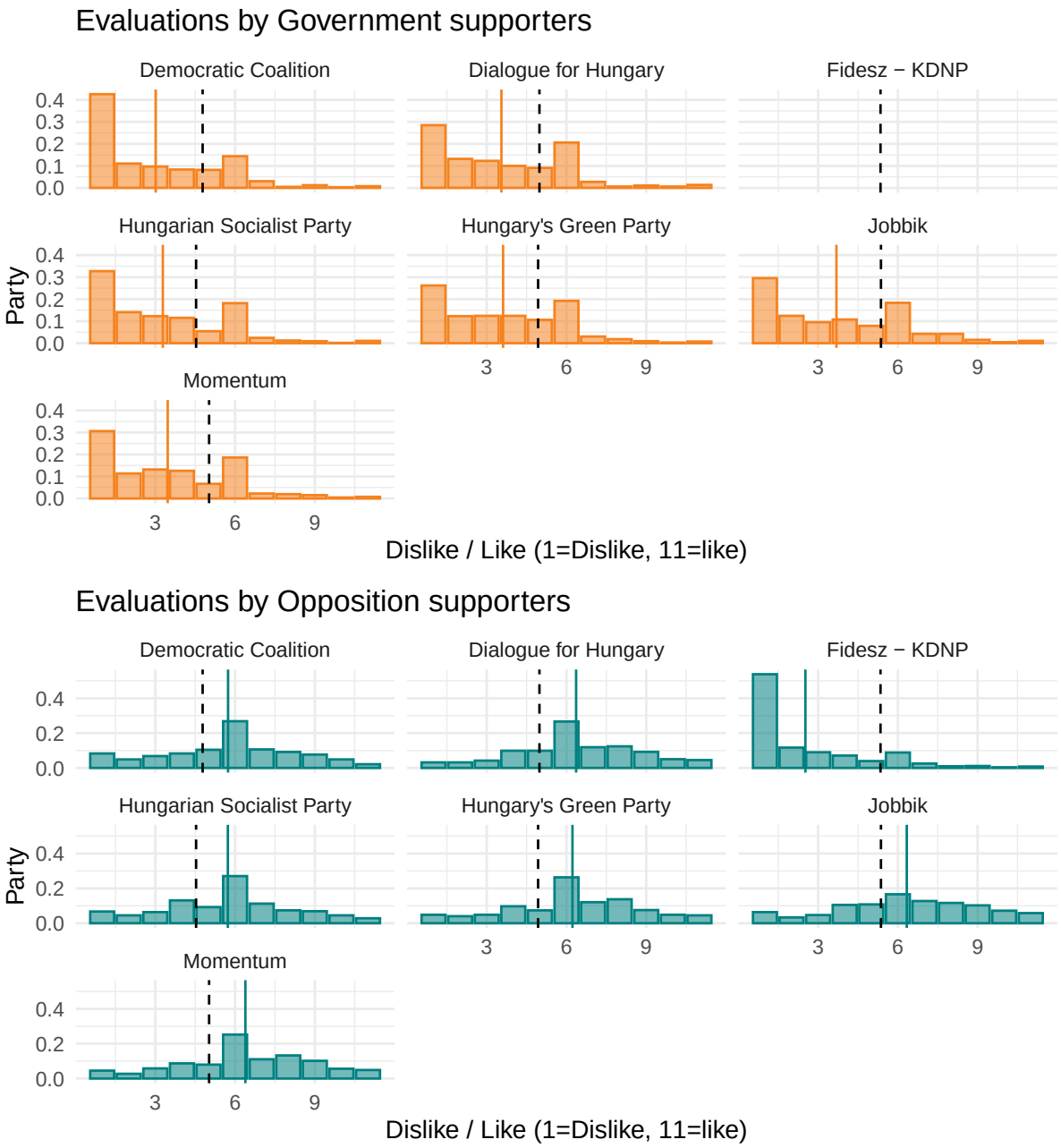

Figure 3: Evaluations of parties by vote intention (excluding intended vote)

about the *supporters* of other parties (Druckman and Levendusky 2019), this amount of dislike is momentous. This finding not only shows the high level of partisan division in Hungary that are reflected in citizens' interactions with supporters of other parties, it also provides support for the expectation we posited in the *government-opposition hypothesis*: opposition voters evaluate Fidesz significantly more negatively but all opposition parties significantly more positively. The opposite is true for Fidesz voters, who evaluate their own group very positively but supporters of all opposition parties negatively.

While these results are descriptive, they also receive support from regression models predicting the evaluation of supporters of different parties by vote intention, compared to a baseline of undecided and non-voters. We include these results which confirm the size of the government-opposition gap in the Supplementary Material (Table A6). To ease the comparison to undecided voters – which we have left out in our descriptive results – we also include a plot of estimates for the three partisan groups in Figure A7. Moreover, these regression results also hold when we consider our preregistered robustness checks of alternative left-right measures (Table A9 and Figure A9), a complex party measure (Table A11 and Figure A10) and when we estimate the model without including evaluations of the party each respondent intends to vote for (Table A13 and Figure A11). While there is heterogeneity between the supporters of different opposition parties, the clear government-opposition divide remains visible in all these specifications.

Democracy and the regime divide in Hungary Having established the size of the regime divide, we now turn to its content. Table 3 presents regression models that predict the evaluation of the supporters of different parties. The independent variables are support for Fidesz and the opposition compared to a baseline of undecided voters. Beyond the left-right variable contained in the table, the models also include controls for age, economic status, gender, and political interest. To assess whether the divide we study is substantively about democracy, we draw on democracy support, measured here in a more diffuse way (Easton 1975) by the items discussed in the Research Design section. Given the widespread support for democracy among citizens, our measure of conceptions of liberal democracy is heavily skewed with supporters of all parties mostly considering all items as important (Figure A4). This is also visible from the distribution of the raw variable (see Figure A3).

Including democracy support into the models allows us to estimate how a liberal conception of democracy affects the evaluation of different party supporter groups (*democracy hypotheses*). Again, the models mostly confirm our expectations: conceptions of democracy have a sizable and significant negative effect on evaluations of Fidesz voters, whereas they have a positive effect on the evaluation of supporters of most opposition parties. Notable exceptions are evaluations of Jobbik and MSZP supporters: the effect of democratic attitudes on the evaluation of Jobbik supporters is not significant and slightly negative, compared to a slightly positive but insignificant effect on MSZP supporters. Moreover, the effect on supporters of the Democratic Coalition (DK) is only significant at the $p < 0.05$ level and looses significance in some of our alternative specifications in the supplementary material (see Tables A10, A12, A14). These caveats are, however, in line with our preregistered expectations about the specific case: given its political program and right-wing ideology, we suggested Jobbik may be excluded from the 'democratic divide.' Similarly, we assumed that the former governing parties MSZP and DK may be more divisive.

Table 3: Regression results democracy model Hungary (baseline: undecided voters)

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	1.87 ***	4.41 ***	5.47 ***	5.71 ***	5.46 ***	5.63 ***	5.35 ***
	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
Fidesz	4.54 ***	-1.22 ***	-0.81 ***	-1.22 ***	-1.18 ***	-1.28 ***	-1.03 ***
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
opposition	-1.65 ***	2.69 ***	1.24 ***	1.82 ***	1.28 ***	1.46 ***	1.24 ***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)
left-right	0.24 ***	0.03	-0.30 ***	-0.36 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.26 ***	-0.24 ***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Democracy	-0.27 ***	-0.01	0.05	0.16 *	0.23 ***	0.34 ***	0.23 ***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
N	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034
R2	0.63	0.30	0.22	0.33	0.27	0.29	0.24

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Controls included for gender, age (categorical), political interest, economic status and left-right position.

In a third step, we evaluate to what extent vote intention moderates the effect of democratic attitudes. We called this our *partisan hypothesis* because we expected the effects to be restricted to in-camp evaluations by opposition supporters and did not expect the same effect of democratic attitudes for Fidesz voters. For this purpose, we interacted the liberal democracy scale with the indicator for government/opposition support. As the raw coefficients of interaction models with factor variables are difficult to interpret, we report the full model in the supplementary material (Table A8) and plot the interaction effects for each party in Figure 4. Here, the y-axis plots the feeling thermometer scores for each party with the x-axis showing the variation in democratic attitudes. The two lines represents a different partisan group as included in our previous models (prospective opposition voters and Fidesz voters). We show the full analysis including undecided and non-voters in the Appendix.

We focus first on how prospective opposition voters evaluate the supporters of different parties, dependent on their level of support for liberal democracy: among prospective opposition voters, we find a negative effect of liberal democracy on evaluations of Fidesz supporters. This contrasts with a positive effect of liberal democracy on the evaluations of most opposition party supporters among this group. This effect is sizable and significant for DK, Dialogue, Momentum and LMP. In contrast, the effect is very weak and – in the case of Jobbik – slightly negative for evaluations of Jobbik and MSZP voters. This pattern is again broadly confirmed by our robustness checks included in the supplementary material and is in line with our assumptions, since we expected the in-party bonus of democracy-affirming opposition voters not necessarily to extend to the right-wing Jobbik party.

For Fidesz voters, we do not find a positive effect of support for democracy on evaluations of opposition party supporters. Specifically, we find a very small positive effect on evaluations of Fidesz supporters and small negative effects on the evaluation of most opposition parties with the exception of LMP. Given the very small effect sizes, this leads us to conclude that how Fidesz voters evaluate the supporters of (other) parties seems to be largely unaffected by their support for liberal democracy.

Overall, our findings in Hungary are in line with our expectations regarding the emergence of a 'democracy divide' between government and opposition supporters against the

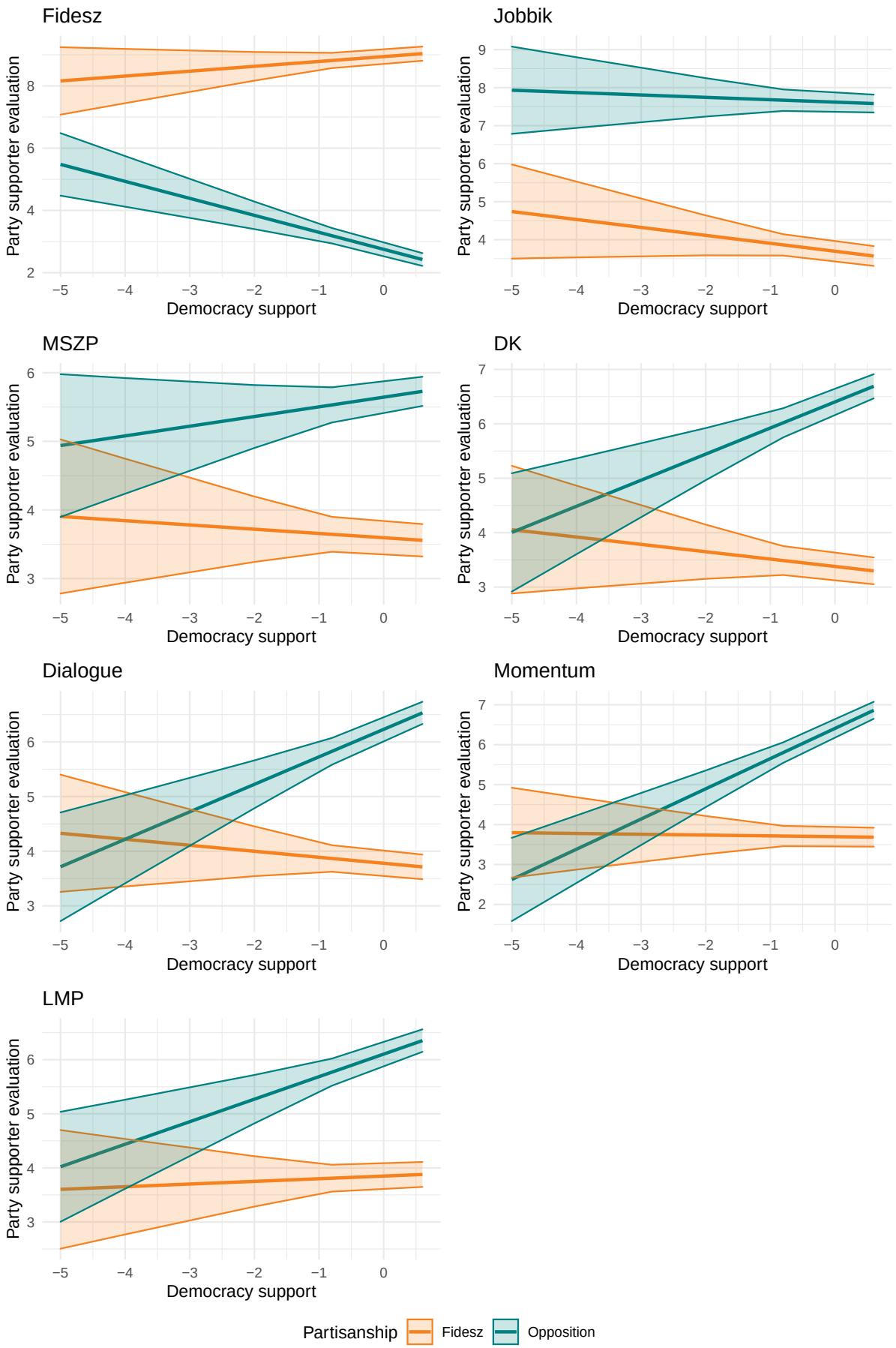

Figure 4: Interaction effect of party choice and democracy attitudes in Hungary

backdrop of deepening democratic backsliding. We find clear affective polarisation between Fidesz supporters and those supporting the opposition, a significant effect for democratic attitudes shaping respondents' attitudes towards different parties, and an interaction between such attitudes and vote intention in the expected direction. These findings map neatly onto the emergence of a joint electoral coalition in Hungary in the run-up to the last parliamentary elections in April 2022, suggesting that a common desire to defend democratic values was one of the key drivers of this joint mobilization.

Study 2: Poland

A new regime divide in Poland? To probe whether our results generalize beyond the Hungarian case and the unique opposition coalition in Hungary, we repeat our analysis with data from Poland. In the first step, we again descriptively address the camp structure present in the opposition. Notably, we find a less clear divide here: government supporters are primarily more critical of their main competitor – the Civic Coalition – which is disliked by almost half of the PiS supporters, while their evaluations of the other opposition parties are rather moderate. Notable is also their fairly positive evaluation of Confederation, a far-right party alliance that includes monarchist parties.

On the other side, even though we exclude Confederation from the opposition block, we see strong agreement among opposition supporters only in the condemnation of the PiS party and – to a lesser extent – Confederation. Of course, the specific values cannot be compared to the Hungarian case, given that the scale and the object (party supporters versus parties) differ.

Again, these descriptive results receive support from the baseline regression model which we include in Table A16 in the Supplementary Material, which confirms the government-opposition divide also shown in Figure A12. Overall, while we do not observe the government-opposition divide to the same extent as in Hungary, the observed differences are in line with our expectations.

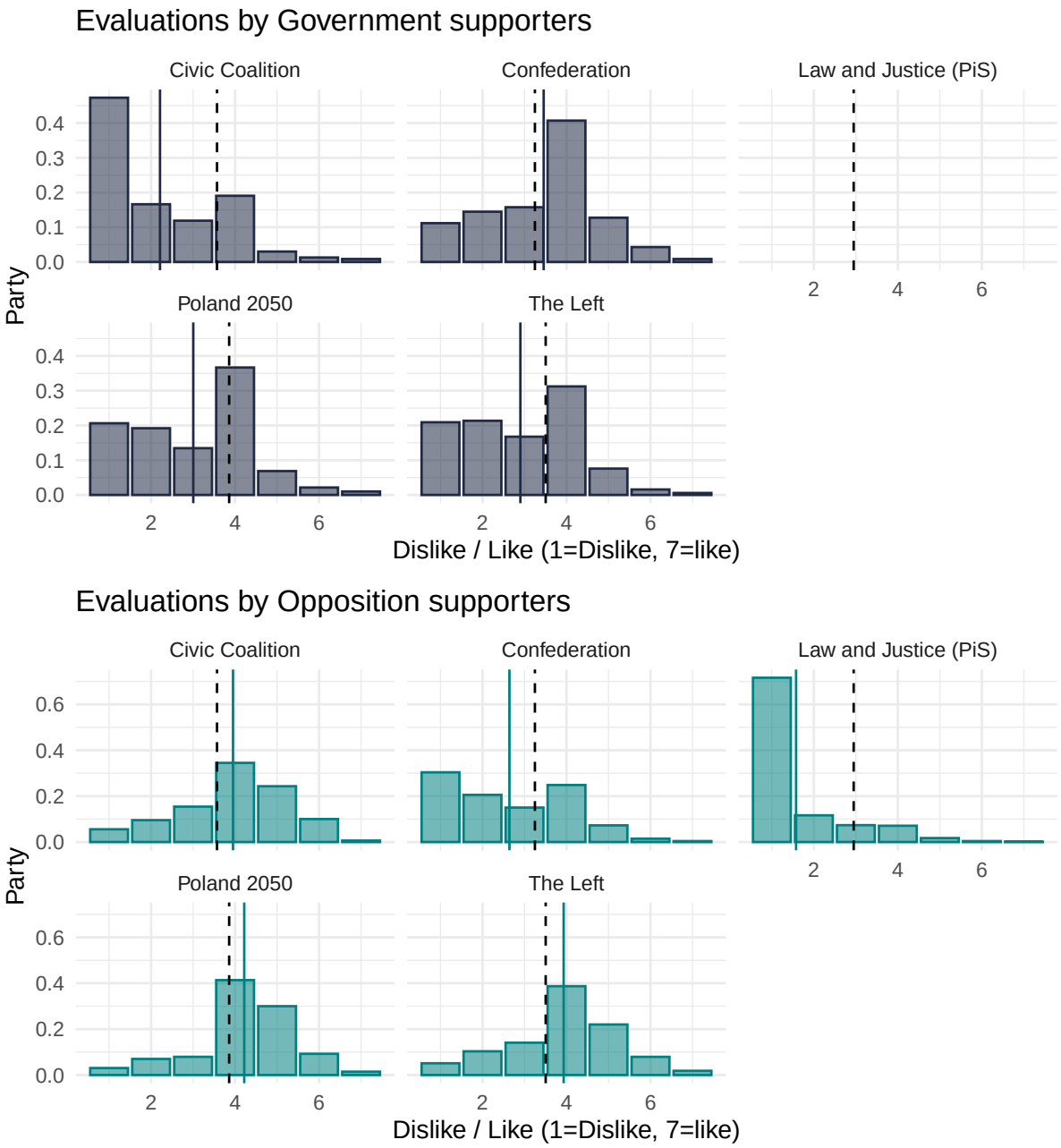

Figure 5: Evaluations of parties by vote intention (excluding intended vote)

Democracy and the regime divide in Poland We turn to addressing how liberal democracy influences the size of this divide, proceeding in line with our analysis of the Hungarian case by estimating a regression model that includes attitudes towards liberal democracy. Interestingly, Table 4 reveals that support for liberal democracy across the entire sample has a negative effect on the evaluation of PiS, PO and Confederation. In other words, across the pooled sample, the former governing coalition PO is also seen more critically by more democracy-supporting individuals, to a similar extent as the incumbent PiS and the far-right Confederation party.

Table 4: Regression results democracy model Poland (baseline: undecided voters)

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.43 ***	3.86 ***	3.54 ***	4.96 ***	2.27 ***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
PiS	2.62 ***	-0.93 ***	-0.54 ***	-0.06	-0.06
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
opposition	-0.95 ***	1.24 ***	1.00 ***	0.48 ***	-0.51 ***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
confederation	-0.41 ***	-0.73 ***	-0.73 ***	-0.62 ***	1.86 ***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
left-right	0.24 ***	-0.22 ***	-0.07 **	-0.48 ***	0.20 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Democracy	-0.07 **	-0.07 *	0.04	0.01	-0.15 ***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
N	2910	2910	2910	2910	2910
R2	0.65	0.40	0.27	0.32	0.27

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Controls included for gender, age (categorical), political interest, economic status and left-right position.

However, this may partially be a result of partisan bias: Figure 4 highlights heterogeneity in the effect of democracy support across the different groups that is mostly in line with our results from Hungary: for opposition supporters (including supporters of PO, Poland 2050 as well as the Left), democracy support decreases evaluations of PiS and

increases evaluations of all parties within the opposition block. However, the effects are substantively small and do not reach statistical significance in some of the cases (see Table A18). This can also be seen from the less steep slopes: most of the time, support for democracy does not really seem to make a difference in Poland. Where it does, its impact is primarily negative.

Overall, our findings indicate that the government-opposition divide crystallizes around the ruling PiS party and its traditional opponent PO, rather than extending more broadly to all opposition parties. This may in part be explained by the novelty of Polska 2050, the second large opposition party besides PO. Founded only in 2020, this party may still be difficult to situate for many respondents, with antagonism instead focused around the two traditional rivals PiS and PO.

Ultimately, we suggest we may see a less entrenched opposition coalition in Poland than was the case in Hungary. Instead, in the Polish context, democracy support seems to burn rather than build bridges and increase dislike rather than enable coalitions.

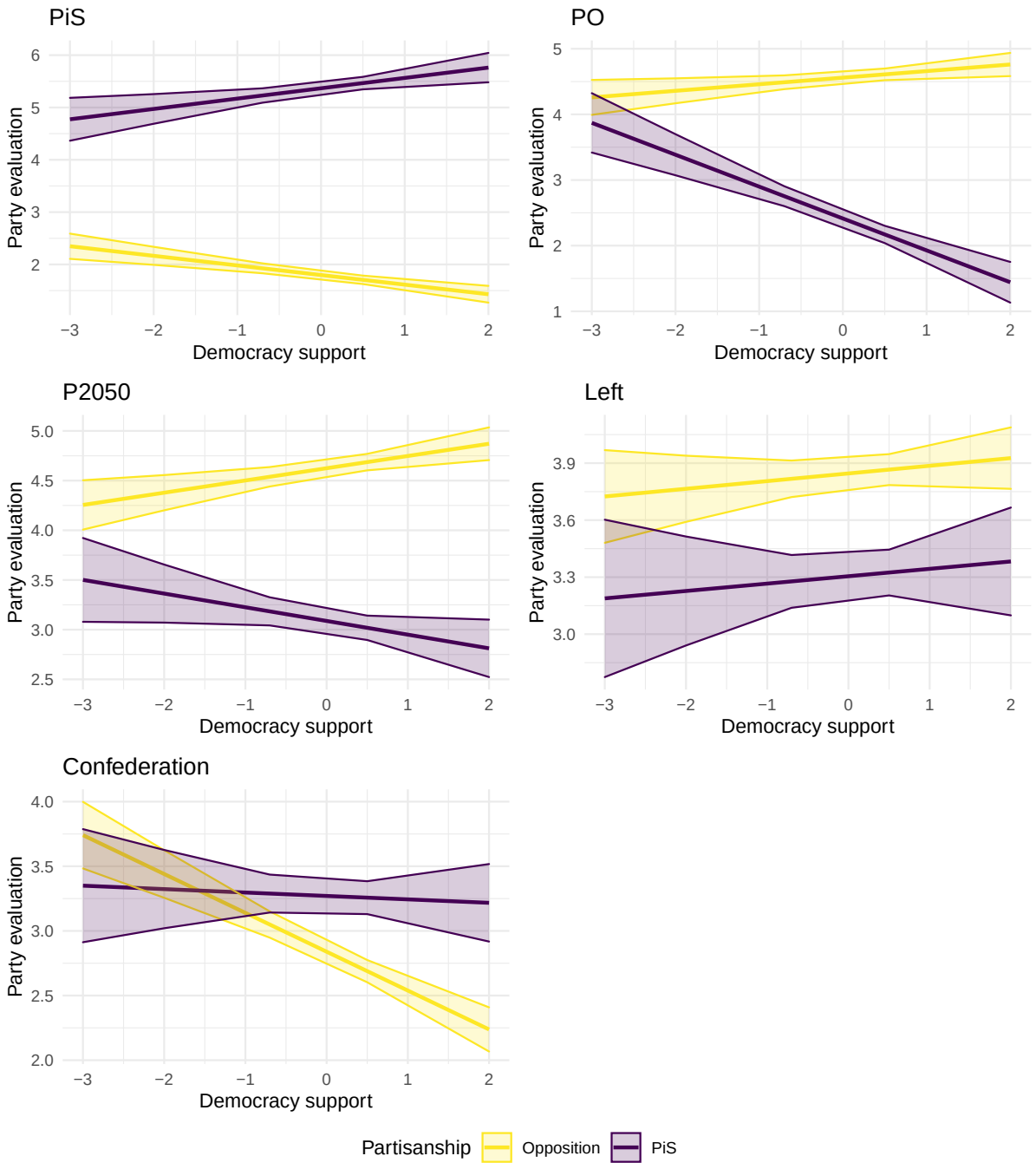

Figure 6: Interaction effect of party choice and democracy attitudes in Poland

Discussion and conclusion

Our study set out to assess whether, besides being a contributing factor to democratic backsliding, affective polarization may also be a consequence of a protracted episode of backsliding. Our empirical analysis indicates that support for liberal democracy may indeed reinforce affective polarization: citizens – or more specifically opposition supporters – who value democracy tend to evaluate their in-group more favorably but out-groups more negatively. However, we find some partial exceptions to this pattern, particularly concerning the populist right-wing Jobbik party in Hungary and the Confederation party in Poland, which are less integrated into the opposition block. Moreover, we do not find a strongly coherent opposition block in Poland. Instead, opposition supporters seem to be united in their dislike of the government, but less clearly united across opposition party lines.

Our analysis highlights a number of similarities and differences between the Hungarian and the Polish cases. In both cases, we find a strong affective dislike of the ruling party among opposition supporters. However, affective polarisation in Hungary spans also the emergence of a more united group of opposition parties. This may be due to the majoritarian nature of the Hungarian electoral system having forced opposition parties to band together, thus leading their supporters to view each other as allies against an undemocratic government. Ultimately, this tendency has shifted the Hungarian multi-party system towards an increasingly bipolar structure, with opposition supporters uniting around their opposition to the government and its democratic violations.

This effect has not occurred to the same extent in Poland. Here, democratic attitudes only seem to shape the condemnation of anti-democratic actors, without however forging a coherent in-group among supporters of distinct opposition parties. In Poland, our findings indicate a more classical divide between the two main parties that have alternated in power over the past years. Two factors may explain this pattern: for one, Poland finds itself at a comparatively earlier stage in the backsliding process, when group identities are less strongly structured by democratic attitudes and distinct partisan preferences persist among opposition supporters. Moreover, the recent emergence of Poland 2050 as a new and rather successful opposition party may explain why the hypothesized government-opposition divide is less strong in the country while the supporters of the two traditionally

dominant parties make up their mind how to view this new party and its supporters. We can only speculate whether a united pro-democratic front running in the Polish elections in the future might bridge these gaps.

In considering the implications of our analysis, there is an important caveat: we analyze observational data from a single point in time and hence cannot make inferences about the causal and temporal order of democratic backsliding and affective polarization beyond pointing to broader trends regarding the polarization of democratic attitudes over time. Instead, we propose a different lens through which researchers can analyze the macro-level relationship between both processes. That is, we do not contest potential effects of affective polarization on tolerance for democratic backsliding. Rather, we argue that we may *also* interpret affective polarization as a consequence of a government's undemocratic behavior. Specifically, we posit a mutually reinforcing relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding, whereby affect-based tolerance of democratic violations by government supporters leads to a polarization of party evaluations around views of liberal democracy, eventually producing a regime divide that unites an otherwise disparate group of opposition parties in their rejection of the incumbent and their supporters due to concerns over democracy. In this sense, our findings confirm the relevance of 'camp-based' affective polarization (Bantel, n.d.; Harteveld 2021) that shifts in response to political outcomes and can unite broader groups of party supporters in opposition to a common out-group.

Ultimately, the presence of a two-way dynamic between democratic backsliding and affective polarization may alter our evaluation of the role affectively polarized electorates play in contexts of democratic backsliding: when affective polarization is a response to the degradation of democracy, it may actually favor the exclusion of anti-democratic actors and increase voters' and party elites' willingness to bridge ideological differences in defense of democracy. Opposition coalitions – which may successfully compete with incumbents engaged in executive aggrandizement – may actually be more likely to emerge when citizens are united by a 'democratic divide.'

Our analysis focused on two countries from the post-communist region, where initial democratisation was already characterized by a 'regime divide' related to the communist past of certain parties (Grzymala-Busse 2001). The common historical legacy of our two

case studies may be thought to limit the generalisability of our argument. At the same time, multi-party settings with high levels of fragmentation and ideological heterogeneity among opposition parties arguably represent a significant hurdle for a joint mobilisation of opposition parties around the defence of democracy. The fact that we find clear signs of this dynamic in Hungary and, more tentatively, Poland, makes us confident that our findings hold wider significance for our understandings of the societal dynamics resulting from democratic backsliding.

Ultimately, societal polarization represents a trend that extends well beyond the specific post-communist context (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018; Somer, McCoy, and Luke 2021; Carothers and O'Donohue 2019). In light of the spread of democratic backsliding across different world regions, it therefore seems plausible to expect similar dynamics of affective polarization around democratic attitudes to emerge in different geographic contexts. We are therefore confident that our argument regarding the two-way relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding holds insights that are relevant well beyond the Hungarian and Polish cases. The ongoing debates around the attack on the US Capitol on 6 January 2021 are a case in point: partisan polarization in the United States increasingly mirrors a divide in democratic attitudes.

In the future, researchers may want to investigate this relationship with an experimental or panel approach that allows them to tease out the causal relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding. Such evidence would be key to a comprehensive and dynamic understanding of affective polarization in contexts of democratic backsliding. Our study provides a first indication of the dynamics and mechanisms that may underpin such processes.

Finally, our findings highlight the importance of studying the effect of political elites and media on affective polarization: while we have not investigated why attitudes towards democracy matter for affective polarization, the strength and character of the long-standing political conflict around the issue of democracy in Hungary (Gessler and Kyriazi 2019) as well as in Poland is a potential explanation. That is, when parties mobilize voters' democratic attitudes in election campaigns, these attitudes can shape how voters evaluate –and eventually choose among– parties.

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Supplementary material

Democracy stances

Table A1: Average Expert Rating on Party Preference for Liberal Democratic Norms (Hungary)

	CHES (2019)	POPPA (2019)	V-Party (2014)	Global Party
	CIVLIB_LAWORDER	*laworder*	*ep_galtan*	*Q4.7*
Democratic Coalition	3.000	2.384	2.571	1.600
Dialogue for Hungary	-	1.909	NA	1.857
Fidesz – KDNP	9.466	9.000	8.643	9.400
Hungarian Socialist Party	4.400	3.500	4.071	1.857
Hungary's Green Party	3.200	2.714	2.929	1.846
Jobbik	8.600	8.285	9.500	7.000
Momentum	2.000	-	-	-

All variables are at an interval scale ranging from liberal (0) to authoritarian (10).

Table A2: Average Expert Rating on Party Preference for Liberal Democratic Norms (Poland)

	CHES (2019)	POPPA (2019)	V-Party (2014)	Global Party Survey
	CIVLIB_LAWORDER	*laworder*	*ep_galtan*	*Q4.7*
Civic Coalition	2.937	3.350	4.667	1.615
Confederation	8.611	7.000	-	-
The Left	1.444	1.200	2.397	-
Law and Justice	9.100	9.200	9.143	8.785
Poland 2050	-	-	-	-

All variables are at an interval scale ranging from liberal (0) to authoritarian (10).

Feeling thermometer scores

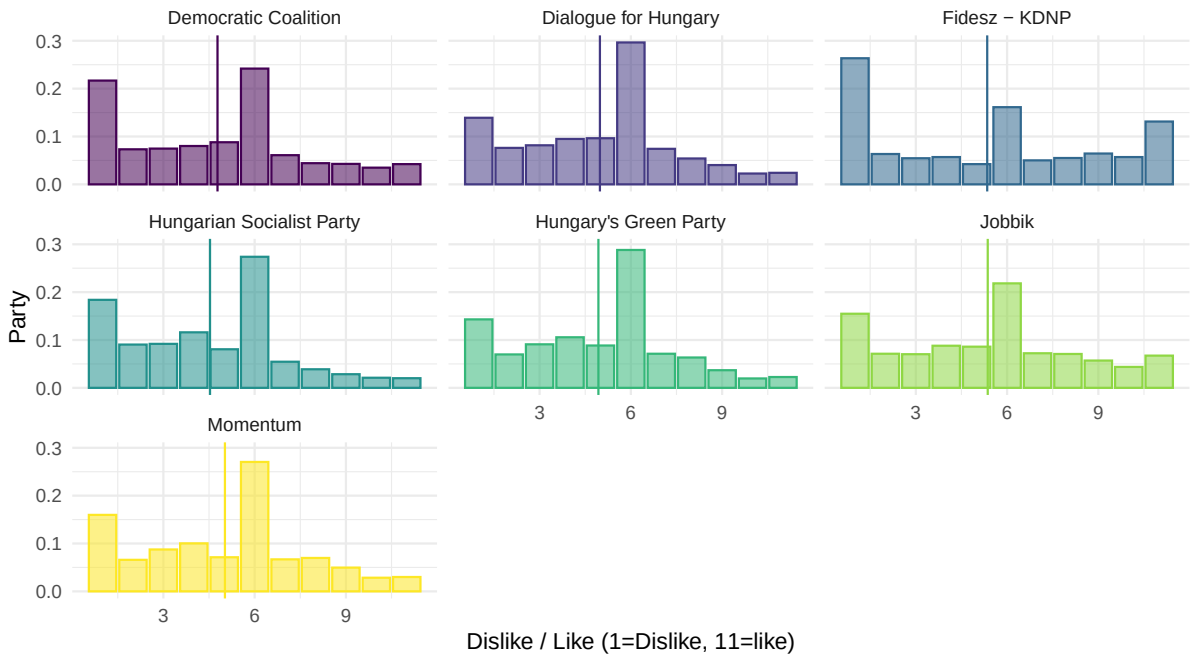


Figure A1: Distribution of dislike-like scores for each party (Hungary)

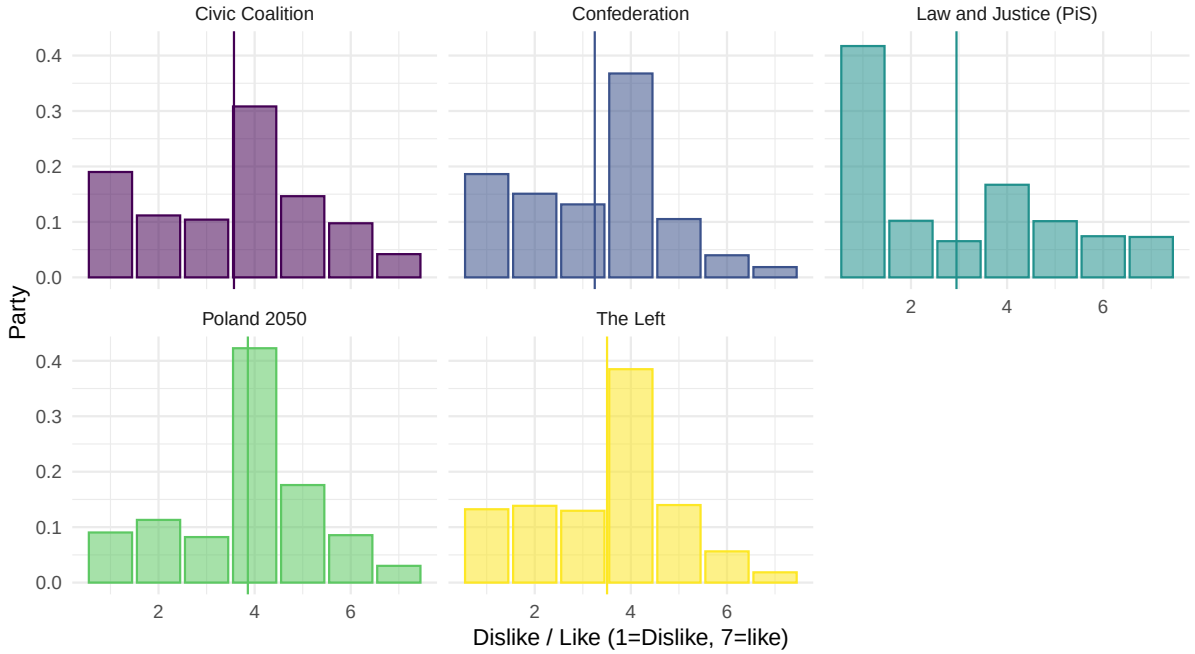


Figure A2: Distribution of dislike-like scores for each party (Poland)

Liberal Democracy Factors

Table A3: Factor loadings for items on a single liberal democracy factor

Question	Loading
National elections are free and fair	0.85
The courts treat everyone the same	0.79
The courts are able to stop the government acting beyond its authority	0.73
The rights of minorities are protected	0.49

Table A4: Factor loadings for items on two democracy factors

Dim	Question	Factor1	Factor2
Lib.	People choose their leaders in free elections.	0.66	0.16
Lib.	Civil rights protect people from state oppression.	0.62	0.06
Lib.	Women have the same rights as men.	0.55	0.11
Auth.	The government uses violence to enforce public order.	-0.60	0.33
Auth.	Elections only serve to confirm the ruling party in office.	-0.48	0.37
Auth.	The government limits civic freedoms to rule efficiently.	-0.63	0.36
Maj.	The majority can always overrule the minority.	0.03	0.63
Maj.	Any law can be changed if there is a majority for it.	0.05	0.58
Maj.	The minority must accept the will of the majority in all circumstances.	-0.07	0.56

Variable Overview

Variable	Measure
libdem	Battery of democratic attitudes
age	categorical variable, measuring age in the following categories: 18-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+
economy	Study 1: respondents' subjective economic situation in the following five categories: I struggle to cover my basic needs, I can cover my basic needs, but nothing more, I can cover my basic needs and have some money left over, My financial situation is good, My financial situation is very good. Study 2: respondents' satisfaction with their personal economic situation in seven categories: strongly dissatisfied (1) to strongly satisfied (7)
lr	Study 1: 11-point scale of left-right positions; Study 2, 7-point scale of left-right positions
govoppo	respondents' vote intention in the next election, simplified into government, opposition and non-voters, Study 2 separates Confederation voters.
polinterest	respondents' political interest;

Table A5: Definition of variables

Descriptives Democracy (ESS, Study 1)

Figure A3: Distribution of democracy conception items (HU)

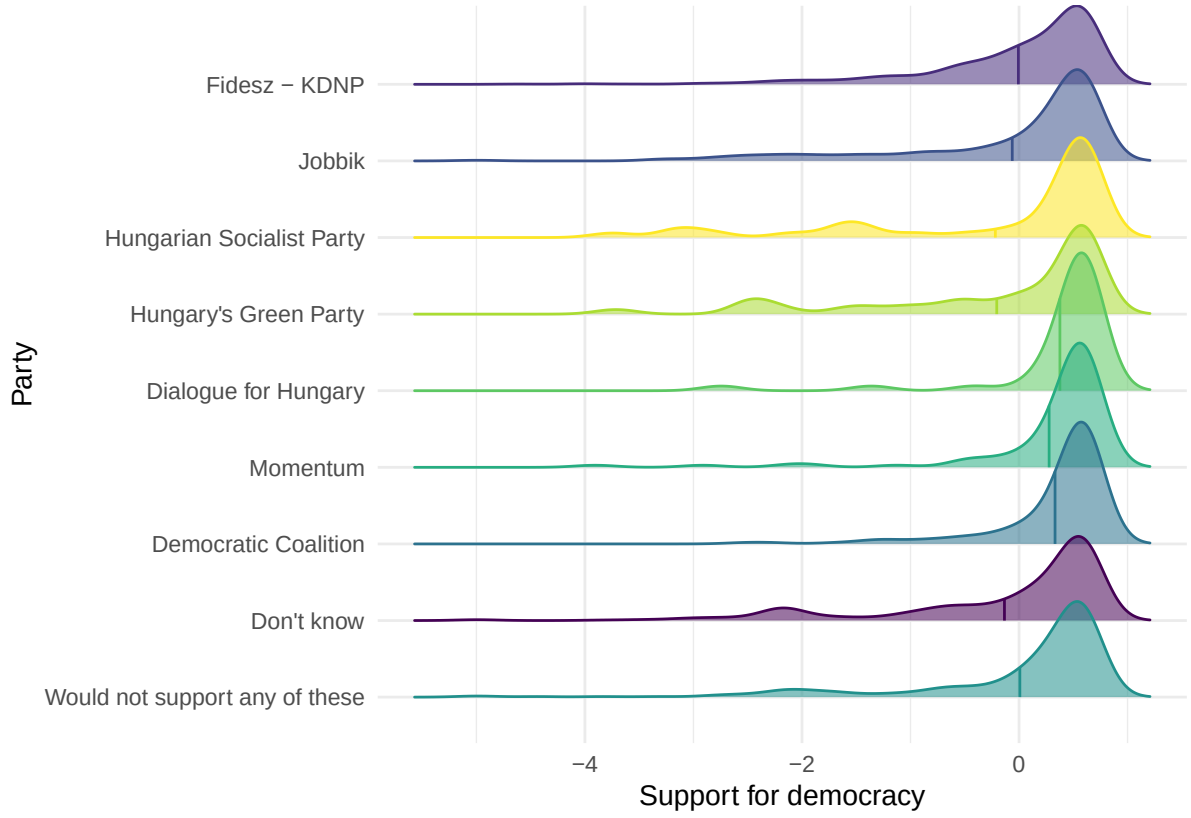


Figure A4: Factor distribution of democracy conceptions by party (HU)

Descriptives Democracy (WVS, Study 2)

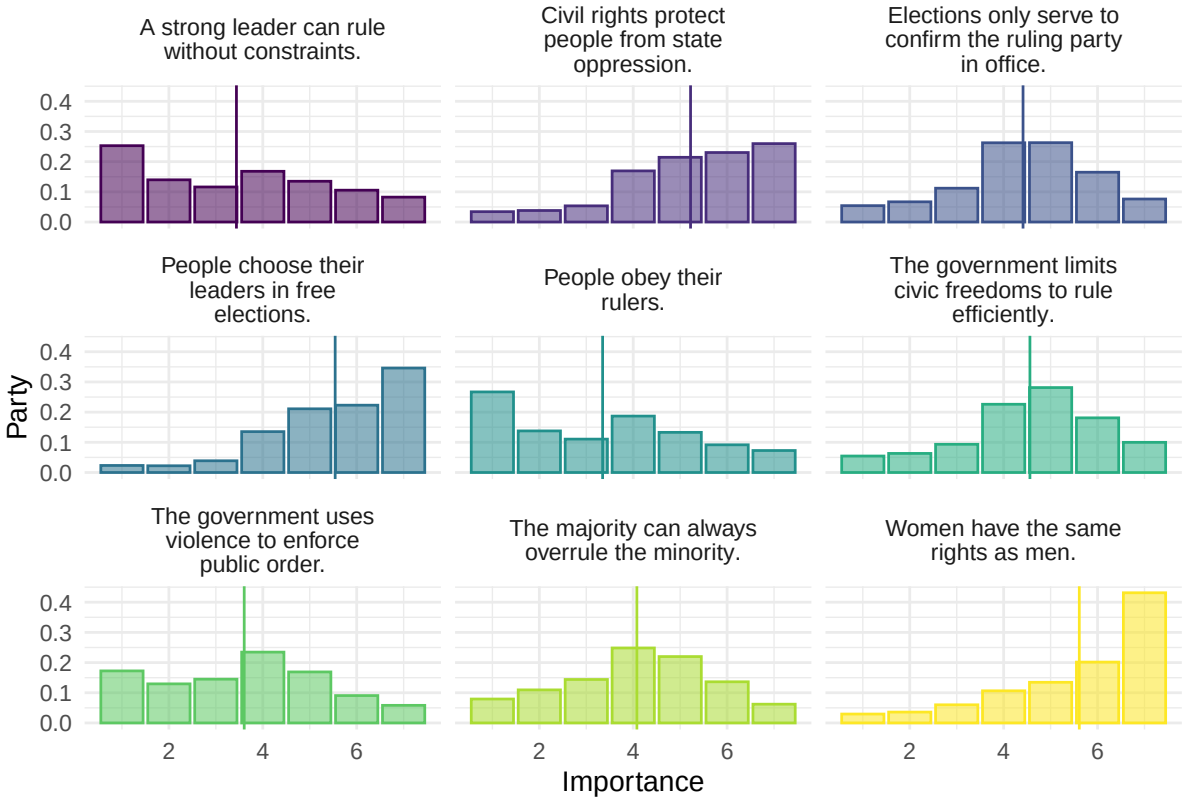


Figure A5: Distribution of democracy conception items (PL)

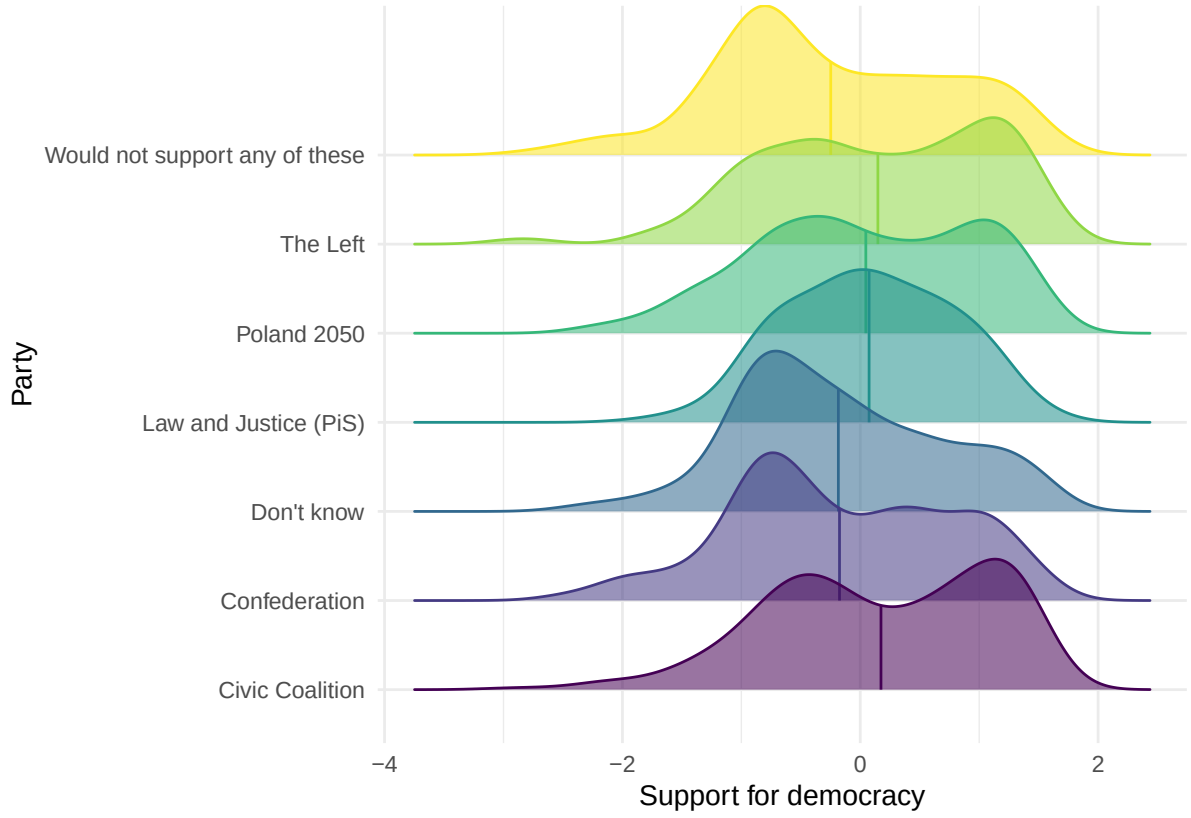


Figure A6: Factor distribution of democracy conceptions by party (PL)

Regression Model H1 (Study 1)

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.12***	4.42***	5.42***	5.57***	5.25***	5.31***	5.14***
	(0.30)	(0.34)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.30**	−0.02	0.21*	0.30**	0.21*	0.11	0.07
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
gov_oppFidesz	4.56***	−1.22***	−0.82***	−1.23***	−1.19***	−1.29***	−1.04***
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.68***	2.69***	1.24***	1.83***	1.30***	1.48***	1.25***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)
age_group2	−0.24	−0.04	0.10	0.48*	0.14	0.09	0.20
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.34	−0.22	0.27	0.44*	0.10	0.07	0.23
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
age_group4	0.05	−0.29	0.17	0.57**	0.15	−0.16	0.17
	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.15	−0.44*	0.46*	0.80***	0.31	−0.03	0.25
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.18)
economy2	0.32*	0.15	0.26	0.27	0.29	0.58***	0.45**
	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.37*	−0.24	0.21	0.07	0.12	0.65***	0.38*
	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.34	0.11	0.13	0.08	0.65**	0.96***	0.67**
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
economy5	0.67	0.76	−0.25	−0.86	0.22	0.92	0.46
	(0.61)	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.66)	(0.60)	(0.64)	(0.62)
polinterest2	0.53**	0.88***	0.50*	0.53*	0.86***	0.70***	0.71***
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.49**	0.70***	0.41*	0.57**	0.92***	0.87***	0.82***
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.18)
polinterest4	0.36	0.62**	0.52**	0.70***	1.16***	1.06***	0.97***
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
polinterest5	0.44	0.35	0.40	0.74**	1.11***	1.05***	0.68**
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.24***	0.03	−0.30***	−0.36***	−0.26***	−0.27***	−0.25***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
R^2	0.62	0.30	0.22	0.33	0.27	0.28	0.23
Adj. R^2	0.62	0.29	0.21	0.32	0.26	0.27	0.22
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A6: Statistical Models H1

Figure A7: Government-opposition divide in Hungary

Full Regression Models H2 & H3 including controls (Study 1)

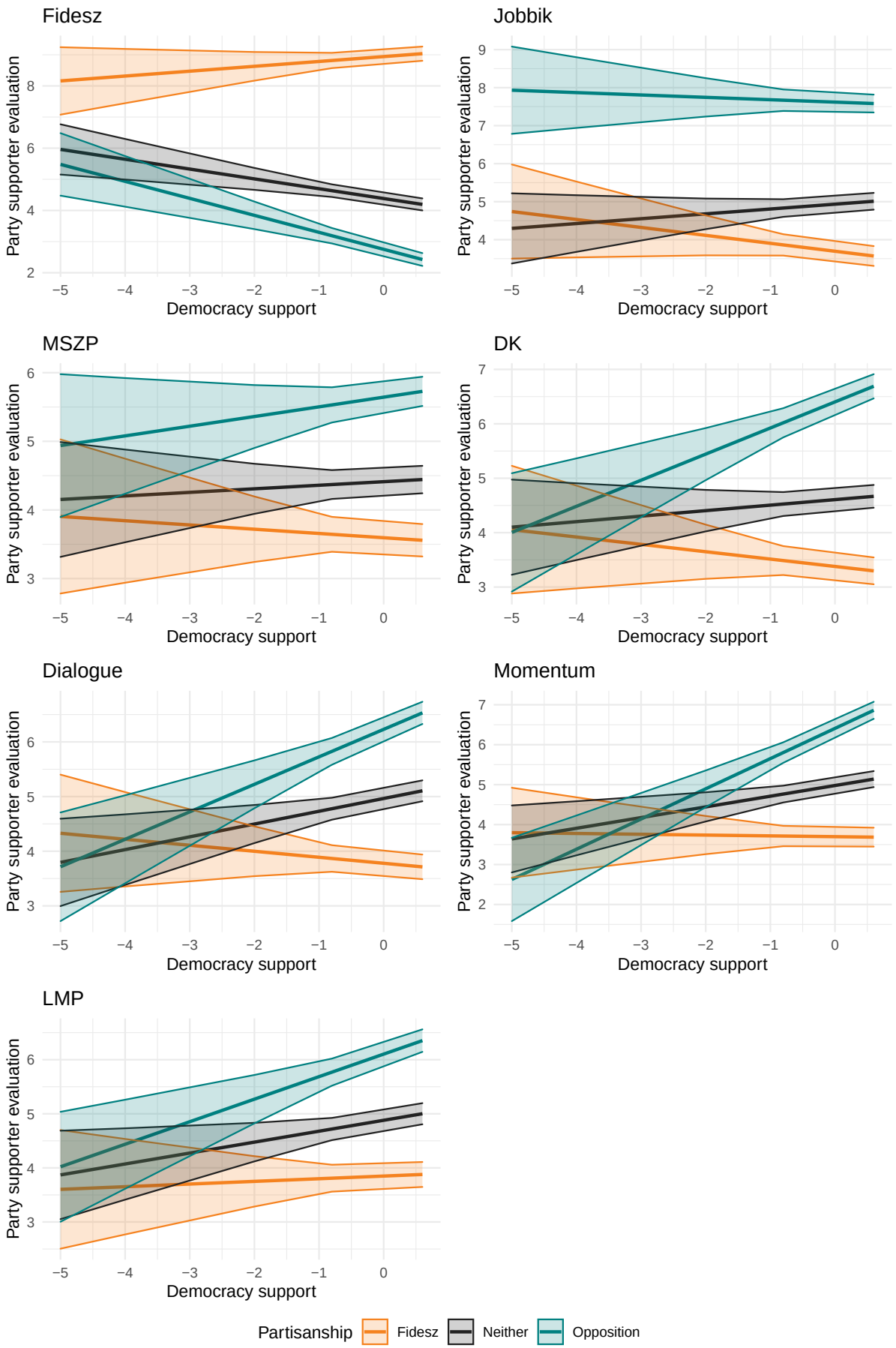


Figure A8: Interaction effect of party choice and democracy attitudes in Hungary

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	1.87***	4.41***	5.47***	5.71***	5.46***	5.63***	5.35***
	(0.31)	(0.35)	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.34***	−0.01	0.20	0.28*	0.18	0.07	0.04
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
gov_oppFidesz	4.54***	−1.22***	−0.81***	−1.22***	−1.18***	−1.28***	−1.03***
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.65***	2.69***	1.24***	1.82***	1.28***	1.46***	1.24***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)
age_group2	−0.14	−0.03	0.08	0.42	0.05	−0.04	0.12
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.21	−0.22	0.24	0.36	−0.02	−0.10	0.11
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group4	0.24	−0.28	0.14	0.46*	−0.01	−0.40	0.01
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group5	0.05	−0.43*	0.42*	0.69***	0.14	−0.27	0.09
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
economy2	0.35*	0.15	0.25	0.25	0.26	0.54***	0.42**
	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.40**	−0.24	0.20	0.05	0.10	0.61***	0.35*
	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.35	0.11	0.13	0.08	0.64**	0.95***	0.66**
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
economy5	0.55	0.75	−0.22	−0.80	0.32	1.06	0.55
	(0.61)	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.66)	(0.60)	(0.63)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.54**	0.89***	0.49*	0.52*	0.85***	0.68***	0.69***
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.58**	0.70***	0.40*	0.52**	0.85***	0.76***	0.74***
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
polinterest4	0.49*	0.62**	0.49*	0.62**	1.05***	0.90***	0.86***
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
polinterest5	0.57*	0.35	0.37	0.67**	1.00***	0.89***	0.56*
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.24***	0.03	−0.30***	−0.36***	−0.26***	−0.26***	−0.24***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
ess	−0.27***	−0.01	0.05	0.16*	0.23***	0.34***	0.23***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
R^2	0.63	0.30	0.22	0.33	0.27	0.29	0.24
Adj. R^2	0.63	0.29	0.21	0.32	0.27	0.28	0.23
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A7: Statistical Models H2

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	1.93***	4.39***	5.45***	5.66***	5.41***	5.56***	5.32***
	(0.30)	(0.35)	(0.32)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.31**	−0.01	0.21*	0.30**	0.21*	0.10	0.05
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
gov_oppFidesz	4.56***	−1.24***	−0.82***	−1.23***	−1.19***	−1.28***	−1.03**
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.63***	2.69***	1.23***	1.80***	1.26***	1.43***	1.22***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)
ess	−0.32***	0.13	0.05	0.10	0.23**	0.27**	0.20*
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
age_group2	−0.12	−0.03	0.08	0.40	0.03	−0.07	0.11
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.18	−0.21	0.23	0.32	−0.05	−0.15	0.09
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group4	0.26	−0.27	0.13	0.43*	−0.03	−0.44*	−0.01
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group5	0.07	−0.41	0.41*	0.64**	0.11	−0.34	0.06
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
economy2	0.31*	0.18	0.26	0.27	0.29*	0.56***	0.43**
	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.34*	−0.21	0.22	0.09	0.14	0.65***	0.38*
	(0.15)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.33	0.13	0.13	0.08	0.65**	0.96***	0.67**
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
economy5	0.45	0.84	−0.20	−0.76	0.39	1.11	0.58
	(0.61)	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.66)	(0.60)	(0.63)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.55**	0.85***	0.49*	0.53*	0.84***	0.69***	0.70***
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.58**	0.66**	0.40*	0.54**	0.85***	0.79***	0.76***
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
polinterest4	0.50*	0.59**	0.49*	0.65**	1.06***	0.93***	0.87***
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
polinterest5	0.61**	0.33	0.37	0.65**	0.97***	0.86***	0.55*
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.23***	0.03	−0.30***	−0.35***	−0.25***	−0.26***	−0.24**
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
gov_oppFidesz:ess	0.47***	−0.34*	−0.11	−0.24	−0.34**	−0.29*	−0.15
	(0.13)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)
gov_oppOpposition:ess	−0.23	−0.19	0.09	0.38**	0.27*	0.49***	0.21
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
R^2	0.63	0.30	0.22	0.34	0.28	0.30	0.24
Adj. R^2	0.63	0.29	0.21	0.33	0.27	0.29	0.23
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A8: Statistical Models H3

two-dimensional left-right (Study 1)

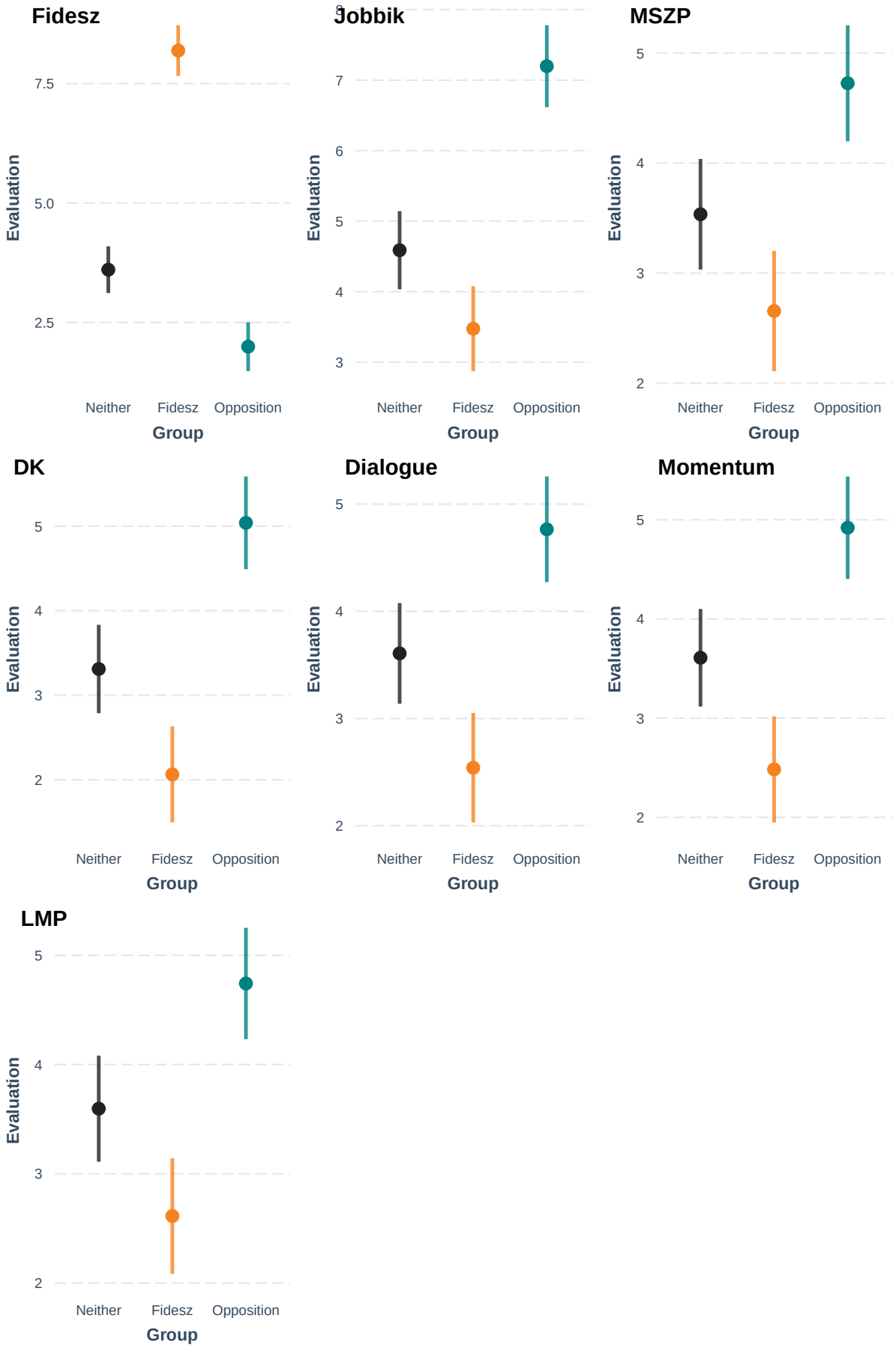


Figure A9: Government-opposition divide in Hungary

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.41***	4.94***	4.89***	5.16***	5.43***	5.63***	5.12***
	(0.28)	(0.32)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.28)
gender2	0.31**	−0.05	0.22*	0.30**	0.20*	0.09	0.06
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
gov_oppFidesz	4.59***	−1.11***	−0.88***	−1.25***	−1.07***	−1.13***	−0.98***
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.61***	2.61***	1.19***	1.73***	1.16***	1.31***	1.15***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)
age_group2	−0.27	−0.06	0.16	0.55**	0.20	0.16	0.26
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.41*	−0.25	0.38	0.59**	0.25	0.25	0.35
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
age_group4	−0.02	−0.32	0.29	0.71***	0.29	−0.00	0.28
	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.27	−0.47*	0.64***	1.02***	0.51**	0.20	0.42*
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.18)
economy2	0.29*	0.16	0.28	0.30	0.32*	0.60***	0.47**
	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.34*	−0.16	0.20	0.07	0.12	0.64***	0.39*
	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.33	0.22	0.06	0.02	0.60**	0.90***	0.64**
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.22)
economy5	0.86	0.82	−0.54	−1.23	−0.09	0.56	0.19
	(0.61)	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.65)	(0.59)	(0.61)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.59**	0.90***	0.41*	0.42*	0.78***	0.61**	0.63**
	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.60**	0.69***	0.28	0.40*	0.78***	0.72***	0.69***
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
polinterest4	0.58**	0.62**	0.25	0.36	0.88***	0.77***	0.72***
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
polinterest5	0.75***	0.34	0.01	0.24	0.67**	0.57*	0.29
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.23)
lr_econ	0.06**	−0.08**	−0.03	−0.05*	−0.05*	−0.05*	−0.05*
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
lr_cult	0.16***	−0.02	−0.20***	−0.26***	−0.26***	−0.29***	−0.21***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
R^2	0.63	0.30	0.22	0.34	0.31	0.33	0.25
Adj. R^2	0.62	0.30	0.21	0.34	0.31	0.33	0.25
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A9: Statistical Models H1

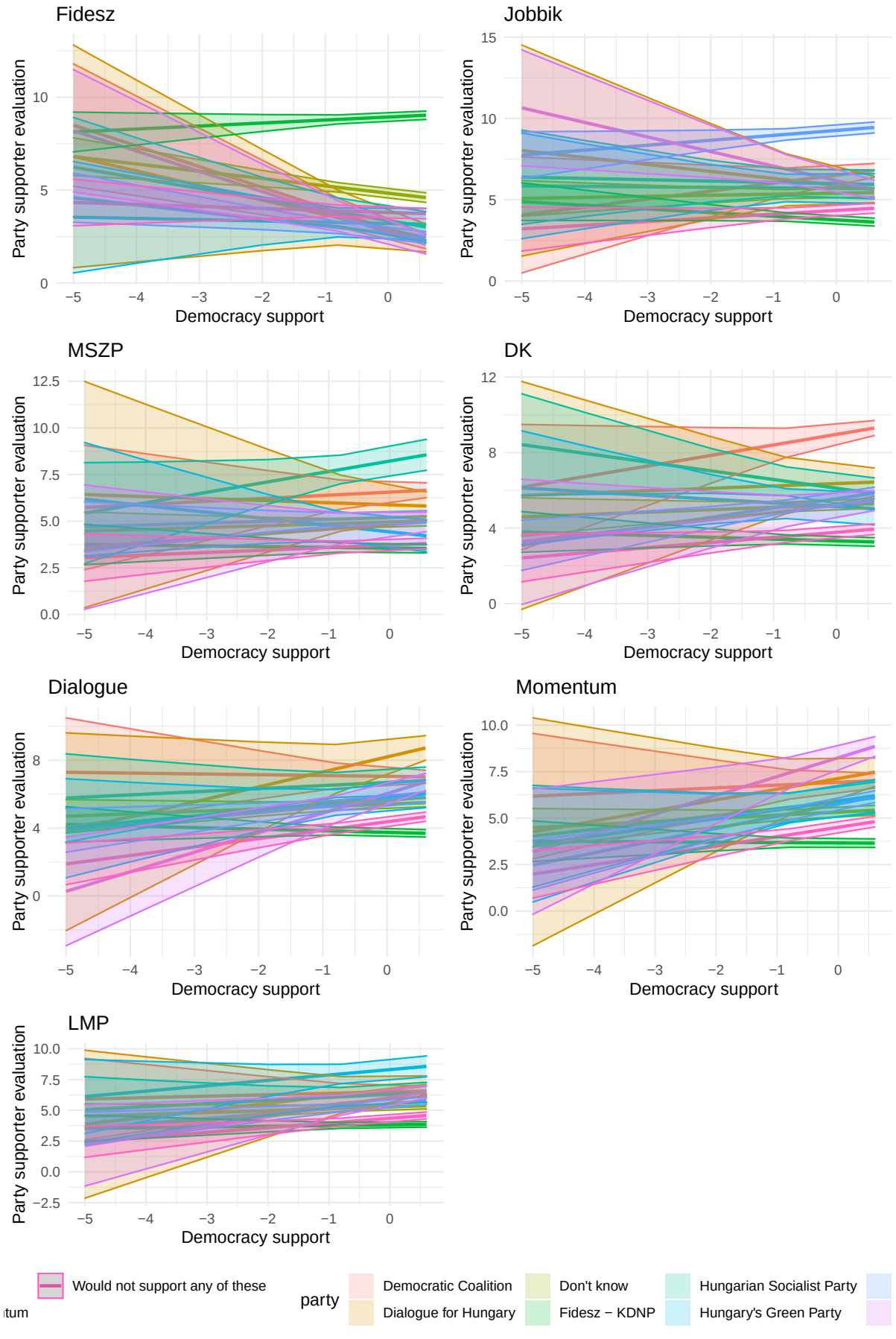
	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.31***	4.89***	4.88***	5.20***	5.50***	5.76***	5.19***
	(0.28)	(0.32)	(0.29)	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.28)	(0.28)
gender2	0.33**	−0.04	0.22*	0.30**	0.19	0.07	0.05
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
gov_oppFidesz	4.59***	−1.11***	−0.88***	−1.25***	−1.07***	−1.13***	−0.99***
	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.61***	2.61***	1.19***	1.73***	1.16***	1.31***	1.15***
	(0.12)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
age_group2	−0.20	−0.03	0.17	0.53*	0.16	0.08	0.21
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.32	−0.21	0.39	0.56**	0.19	0.14	0.28
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
age_group4	0.11	−0.25	0.30	0.67**	0.20	−0.17	0.18
	(0.20)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.13	−0.41	0.65***	0.98***	0.42*	0.03	0.32
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
economy2	0.32*	0.18	0.28	0.29	0.30*	0.57***	0.45**
	(0.15)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.39*	−0.14	0.20	0.05	0.09	0.57***	0.35*
	(0.16)	(0.18)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.38	0.24	0.07	0.01	0.56**	0.84***	0.60**
	(0.22)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.22)
economy5	0.80	0.79	−0.54	−1.21	−0.05	0.64	0.24
	(0.61)	(0.69)	(0.63)	(0.65)	(0.59)	(0.61)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.60**	0.91***	0.41*	0.42*	0.77***	0.59**	0.62**
	(0.20)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.66***	0.72***	0.28	0.38	0.74***	0.64***	0.64***
	(0.18)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)
polinterest4	0.67***	0.66**	0.26	0.33	0.82***	0.65***	0.65***
	(0.19)	(0.22)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)
polinterest5	0.85***	0.38	0.01	0.21	0.61**	0.45	0.22
	(0.23)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.23)
lr_econ	0.03	−0.09***	−0.03	−0.04	−0.03	−0.02	−0.03
	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
lr_cult	0.15***	−0.02	−0.20***	−0.26***	−0.26***	−0.28***	−0.21***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
ess	−0.21***	−0.10	−0.01	0.06	0.14*	0.26***	0.16**
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
R^2	0.63	0.30	0.22	0.34	0.31	0.34	0.26
Adj. R^2	0.63	0.30	0.21	0.34	0.31	0.33	0.25
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A10: Statistical Models H2

Figure A10: Government-opposition divide in Hungary

Complex party measure (Study 1)



	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum
(Intercept)	2.63***	5.34***	5.88***	6.12***	5.59***	5.45***
	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.31)	(0.31)	(0.30)	(0.32)
gender2	0.22*	−0.07	0.11	0.17	0.11	0.04
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
partyFidesz - KDNP	4.07***	−1.63***	−1.39***	−1.91***	−1.67***	−1.68***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
partyJobbik	−2.18***	3.84***	0.25	0.30	0.20	0.41*
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
partyDemocratic Coalition	−2.27***	1.26***	1.65***	3.89***	1.59***	1.60***
	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.22)
partyWould not support any of these	−1.08***	−1.05***	−1.22***	−1.45***	−1.03***	−0.81***
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.17)
partyMomentum	−2.43***	0.52	−0.07	0.09	0.95***	3.22***
	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.28)
partyDialogue for Hungary	−2.23***	0.32	0.88*	1.16**	3.09***	1.99***
	(0.38)	(0.41)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.37)	(0.39)
partyHungary's Green Party	−1.65***	0.31	−0.44	−0.05	0.32	0.50
	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.38)
partyHungarian Socialist Party	−1.34***	0.60	3.14***	0.96**	1.22***	0.44
	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.38)
age_group2	−0.21	−0.05	0.02	0.36	0.14	0.24
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.32	−0.17	0.19	0.30	0.07	0.15
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)
age_group4	0.08	−0.26	0.11	0.49*	0.15	−0.03
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.17	−0.35	0.21	0.37*	0.17	0.03
	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)
economy2	0.31*	0.15	0.24	0.19	0.25	0.55***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)
economy3	0.37*	−0.14	0.17	−0.01	0.05	0.53***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
economy4	0.33	0.27	0.10	0.08	0.56**	0.85***
	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.22)
economy5	0.56	0.37	−0.34	−0.95	0.19	0.98
	(0.61)	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.61)	(0.59)	(0.62)
polinterest2	0.42*	0.76***	0.39*	0.39*	0.79***	0.63**
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.47*	0.75***	0.39*	0.47**	0.88***	0.79***
	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)
polinterest4	0.35	0.81***	0.46*	0.58**	1.07***	0.92***
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)
polinterest5	0.48*	0.69**	0.34	0.48*	0.99***	0.84***
	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.24***	−0.06*	−0.25***	−0.28***	−0.21***	−0.22***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
R^2	0.63	0.39	0.28	0.43	0.31	0.32
Adj. R^2	0.63	0.38	0.27	0.43	0.30	0.32
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A11: Statistical Models H1

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.39***	5.38***	5.96***	6.26***	5.81***	5.76***	5.71***
	(0.32)	(0.34)	(0.32)	(0.32)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.25*	−0.07	0.10	0.15	0.09	−0.00	−0.05
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
partyFidesz - KDNP	4.07***	−1.63***	−1.39***	−1.91***	−1.67***	−1.68***	−1.47***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)
partyJobbik	−2.16***	3.84***	0.24	0.29	0.18	0.39*	0.23
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.17)
partyDemocratic Coalition	−2.21***	1.26***	1.63***	3.85***	1.53***	1.52***	1.16***
	(0.21)	(0.23)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.21)
partyWould not support any of these	−1.05***	−1.06***	−1.23***	−1.46***	−1.06***	−0.84***	−0.94***
	(0.17)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.16)
partyMomentum	−2.34***	0.50	−0.10	0.04	0.87***	3.10***	0.90***
	(0.27)	(0.29)	(0.27)	(0.27)	(0.26)	(0.28)	(0.27)
partyDialogue for Hungary	−2.15***	0.31	0.85*	1.11**	3.01***	1.88***	1.53***
	(0.38)	(0.41)	(0.38)	(0.38)	(0.37)	(0.39)	(0.38)
partyHungary's Green Party	−1.67***	0.31	−0.44	−0.04	0.35	0.54	2.97***
	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.37)
partyHungarian Socialist Party	−1.39***	0.61	3.16***	1.00**	1.27***	0.51	1.00**
	(0.37)	(0.40)	(0.37)	(0.37)	(0.36)	(0.38)	(0.37)
age_group2	−0.12	−0.07	−0.01	0.31	0.06	0.13	0.17
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.20	−0.19	0.15	0.22	−0.04	−0.01	0.12
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
age_group4	0.25	−0.28	0.06	0.38	−0.01	−0.25	0.04
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
age_group5	0.01	−0.38	0.15	0.26	0.01	−0.19	0.03
	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
economy2	0.33*	0.15	0.23	0.18	0.23	0.52***	0.39**
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.39*	−0.15	0.16	−0.03	0.03	0.50**	0.32*
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)
economy4	0.34	0.26	0.09	0.07	0.56**	0.84***	0.61**
	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.21)	(0.22)	(0.22)
economy5	0.46	0.38	−0.31	−0.89	0.28	1.10	0.56
	(0.60)	(0.65)	(0.61)	(0.60)	(0.59)	(0.61)	(0.60)
polinterest2	0.44*	0.76***	0.39*	0.38	0.77***	0.61**	0.61**
	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.54**	0.74***	0.36*	0.43*	0.81***	0.69***	0.68***
	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.18)
polinterest4	0.46*	0.79***	0.42*	0.51**	0.97***	0.78***	0.77***
	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
polinterest5	0.59**	0.68**	0.30	0.42	0.89***	0.70**	0.47*
	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.24***	−0.06*	−0.25***	−0.28***	−0.21***	−0.22***	−0.21***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
ess	−0.24***	0.03	0.08	0.15*	0.22***	0.31***	0.24***
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.06)
R^2	0.64	0.39	0.28	0.44	0.32	0.33	0.27
Adj. R^2	0.63	0.38	0.27	0.43	0.31	0.33	0.26
Num. obs.	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034	2034

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A12: Statistical Models H2

Excluding own party (Study 1)

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.37***	5.09***	5.34***	5.50***	5.24***	5.20***	5.08***
	(0.39)	(0.37)	(0.31)	(0.32)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.20	0.04	0.22*	0.27*	0.19	0.12	0.05
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.61***	1.27***	1.09***	1.00***	1.17***	1.21***	1.12***
	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
age_group2	−0.36	−0.23	0.10	0.31	0.14	0.20	0.29
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.36	−0.26	0.23	0.24	0.07	0.15	0.27
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group4	0.07	−0.38	0.14	0.42*	0.16	−0.07	0.23
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.32	−0.38	0.40*	0.37	0.29	0.14	0.32
	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.18)	(0.20)	(0.19)
economy2	0.45*	0.29	0.31*	0.24	0.26	0.56***	0.48**
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)
economy3	0.52**	0.02	0.26	0.03	0.11	0.56***	0.43**
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.81**	0.45	0.13	0.11	0.62**	0.84***	0.70**
	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
economy5	0.35	0.35	−0.19	−0.76	0.23	1.02	0.54
	(0.91)	(0.76)	(0.62)	(0.63)	(0.60)	(0.63)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.72**	0.93***	0.46*	0.52*	0.89***	0.74***	0.70***
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.61**	0.68**	0.42*	0.48*	0.95***	0.85***	0.79***
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.18)
polinterest4	0.29	0.72**	0.48*	0.61**	1.19***	0.99***	0.95***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
polinterest5	−0.25	0.52	0.39	0.34	1.11***	0.86***	0.66**
	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.22)	(0.24)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.19***	−0.11**	−0.29***	−0.30***	−0.26***	−0.26***	−0.25***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
gov_oppFidesz		−1.08***	−0.83***	−1.24***	−1.19***	−1.28***	−1.04***
		(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
R^2	0.17	0.15	0.20	0.22	0.25	0.24	0.22
Adj. R^2	0.16	0.14	0.19	0.22	0.24	0.24	0.21
Num. obs.	1374	1761	1995	1870	1997	1951	1996

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A13: Statistical Models H1

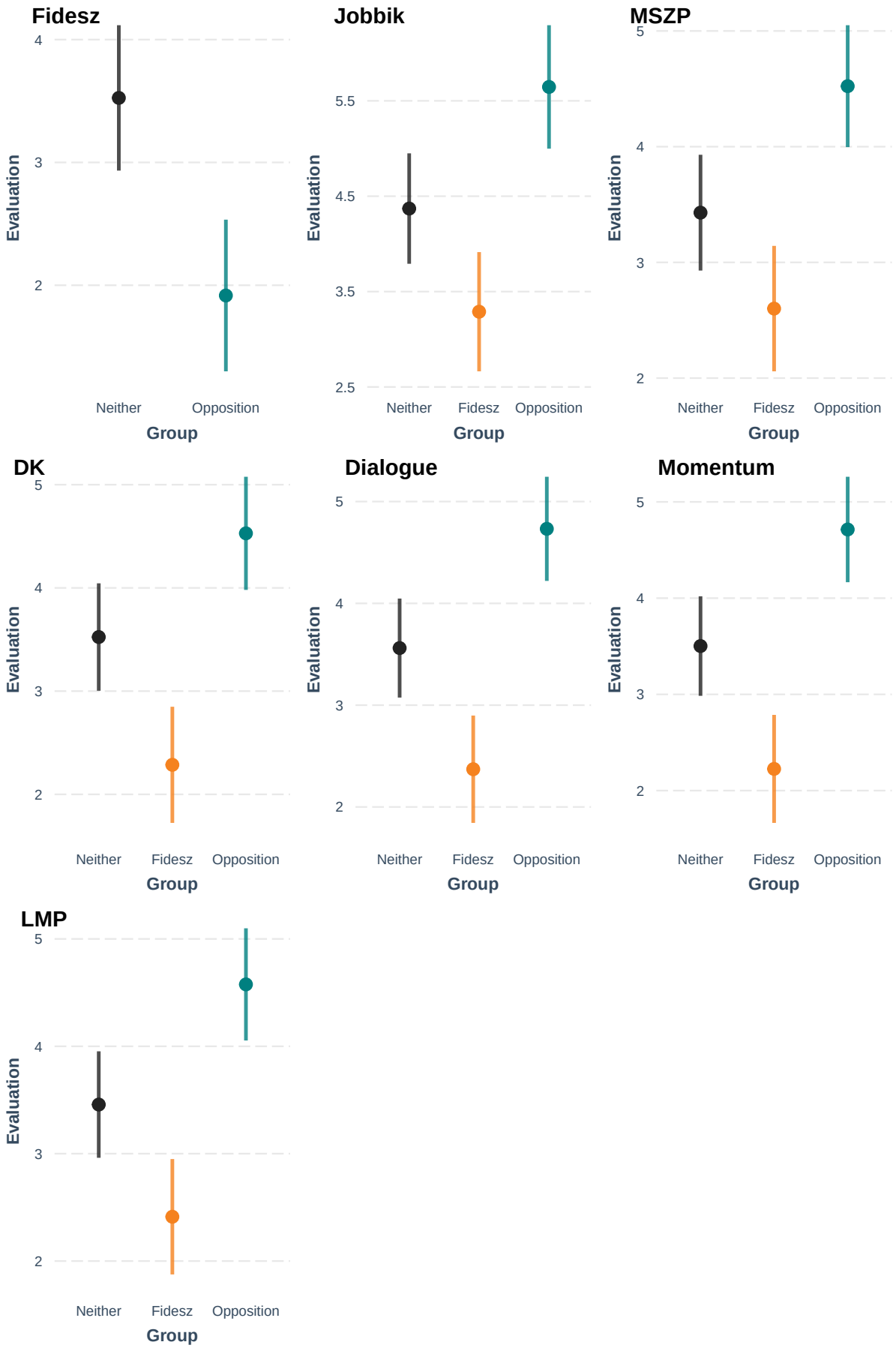
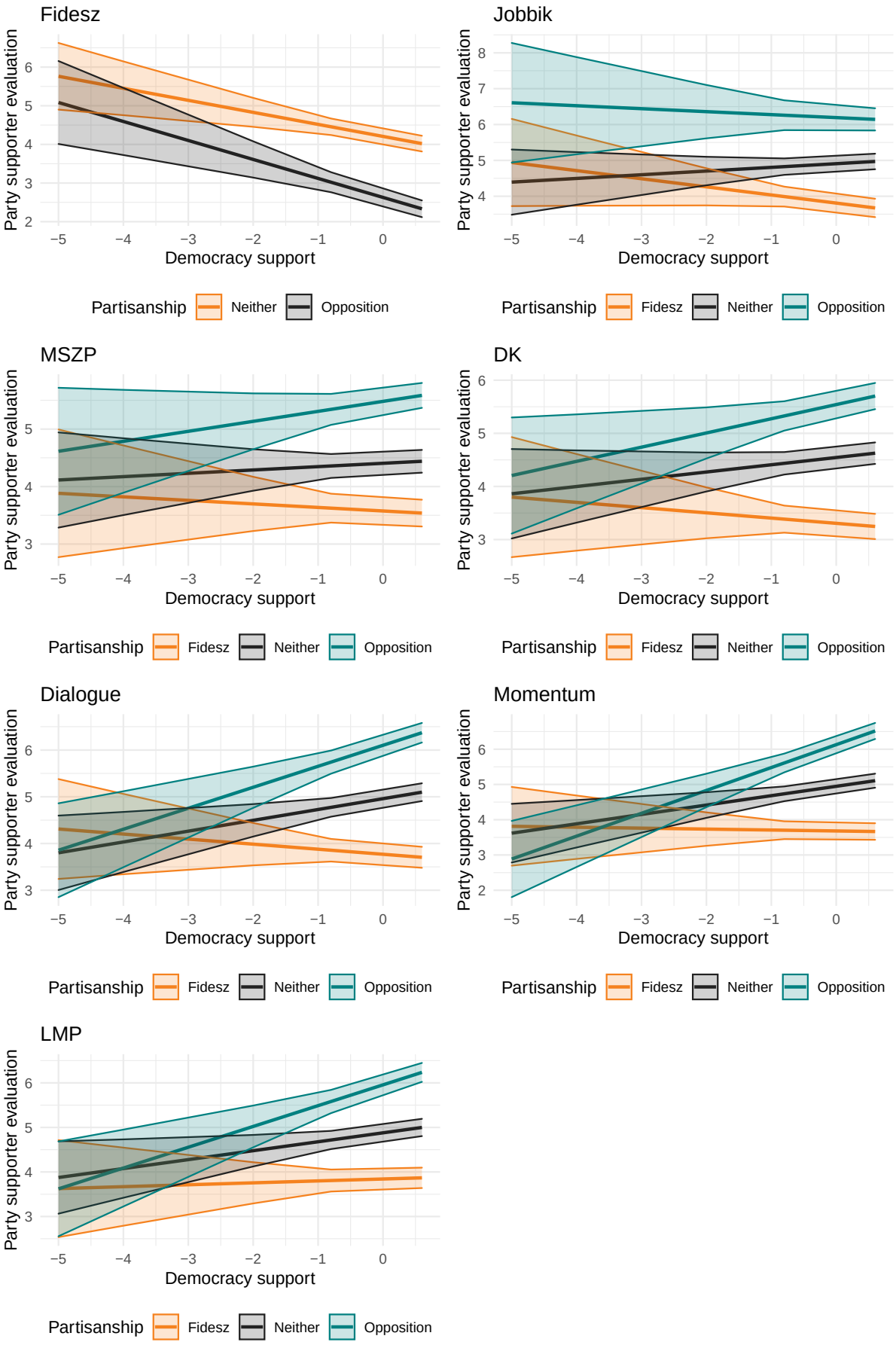


Figure A11: Government-opposition divide in Hungary


Fidesz
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Neither
Opposition
Jobbik
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Fidesz
Neither
Opposition
MSZP
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Fidesz
Neither
Opposition
DK
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Fidesz
Neither
Opposition
Dialogue
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Fidesz
Neither
Opposition
Momentum
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Fidesz
Neither
Opposition
LMP
Party supporter evaluation
Democracy support
Partisanship
Fidesz
Neither
Opposition

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.02***	5.07***	5.40***	5.61***	5.44***	5.49***	5.30***
	(0.39)	(0.37)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.24	0.04	0.22*	0.26*	0.16	0.08	0.03
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.58***	1.28***	1.09***	1.00***	1.16***	1.19***	1.10***
	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
age_group2	−0.23	−0.23	0.08	0.27	0.06	0.09	0.21
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.17	−0.25	0.20	0.18	−0.04	−0.00	0.16
	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group4	0.34	−0.36	0.09	0.34	0.01	−0.29	0.07
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.04	−0.36	0.36	0.29	0.13	−0.08	0.16
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
economy2	0.47**	0.29	0.31*	0.23	0.24	0.53***	0.45**
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.52**	0.02	0.25	0.02	0.08	0.52**	0.41**
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.82**	0.45	0.13	0.10	0.62**	0.84***	0.70**
	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
economy5	−0.10	0.34	−0.16	−0.72	0.32	1.13	0.64
	(0.91)	(0.76)	(0.62)	(0.63)	(0.60)	(0.63)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.76**	0.93***	0.46*	0.51*	0.88***	0.72***	0.69***
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.75***	0.69**	0.40*	0.44*	0.88***	0.75***	0.71***
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
polinterest4	0.49*	0.73**	0.45*	0.55**	1.09***	0.85***	0.84***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
polinterest5	0.00	0.53	0.36	0.28	1.01***	0.72**	0.54*
	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.19***	−0.11**	−0.29***	−0.29***	−0.25***	−0.26***	−0.25***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
ess	−0.38***	−0.02	0.06	0.11	0.21***	0.30***	0.24***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
gov_oppFidesz		−1.08***	−0.83***	−1.23***	−1.18***	−1.26***	−1.03***
		(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
R^2	0.18	0.15	0.20	0.23	0.26	0.25	0.22
Adj. R^2	0.17	0.14	0.19	0.22	0.25	0.24	0.22
Num. obs.	1374	1761	1995	1870	1997	1951	1996

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A14: Statistical Models H2

	Fidesz	Jobbik	MSZP	DK	Dialogue	Momentum	LMP
(Intercept)	2.02***	5.05***	5.38***	5.58***	5.39***	5.44***	5.25***
	(0.39)	(0.37)	(0.31)	(0.33)	(0.30)	(0.32)	(0.31)
gender2	0.23	0.05	0.23*	0.27*	0.18	0.10	0.05
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)
gov_oppOpposition	−1.58***	1.29***	1.08***	1.00***	1.14***	1.18***	1.08***
	(0.13)	(0.17)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.13)
ess	−0.31***	0.10	0.06	0.14	0.23**	0.27**	0.20*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
age_group2	−0.22	−0.23	0.07	0.26	0.04	0.08	0.20
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group3	−0.15	−0.24	0.19	0.17	−0.06	−0.04	0.13
	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group4	0.36	−0.35	0.08	0.33	−0.01	−0.31	0.06
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.21)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
age_group5	−0.01	−0.34	0.35	0.28	0.11	−0.13	0.13
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.19)
economy2	0.47**	0.32	0.31*	0.25	0.27	0.55***	0.46**
	(0.18)	(0.18)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)
economy3	0.52**	0.06	0.27	0.06	0.12	0.57***	0.43**
	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.16)	(0.17)	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.16)
economy4	0.83**	0.47	0.14	0.12	0.63**	0.86***	0.70**
	(0.30)	(0.26)	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.22)	(0.23)	(0.22)
economy5	−0.06	0.45	−0.13	−0.66	0.39	1.20	0.67
	(0.91)	(0.77)	(0.62)	(0.63)	(0.60)	(0.63)	(0.61)
polinterest2	0.74**	0.90***	0.46*	0.50*	0.88***	0.73***	0.69***
	(0.24)	(0.24)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.20)
polinterest3	0.72**	0.64**	0.41*	0.44*	0.89***	0.77***	0.73***
	(0.22)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.19)	(0.19)
polinterest4	0.47*	0.69**	0.45*	0.55**	1.10***	0.87***	0.86***
	(0.23)	(0.23)	(0.20)	(0.21)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.20)
polinterest5	0.00	0.50	0.35	0.27	0.98***	0.70**	0.53*
	(0.30)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.25)	(0.23)	(0.24)	(0.23)
lrscale	0.19***	−0.11**	−0.29***	−0.29***	−0.25***	−0.25***	−0.24***
	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
gov_oppOpposition:ess	−0.18	−0.19	0.12	0.13	0.22	0.38**	0.27*
	(0.13)	(0.18)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
gov_oppFidesz		−1.10***	−0.83***	−1.24***	−1.19***	−1.27***	−1.04***
		(0.15)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)
gov_oppFidesz:ess		−0.33*	−0.12	−0.24	−0.34*	−0.29*	−0.16
		(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.14)	(0.14)
R^2	0.18	0.16	0.20	0.23	0.26	0.26	0.23
Adj. R^2	0.17	0.15	0.19	0.22	0.25	0.25	0.22
Num. obs.	1374	1761	1995	1870	1997	1951	1996

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A15: Statistical Models H3

Regression Model H1 (Study 2)

Table A16: Regression results baseline model Poland (baseline: undecided voters)

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.47 ***	3.90 ***	3.52 ***	4.96 ***	2.36 ***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
PiS	2.62 ***	-0.93 ***	-0.54 ***	-0.06	-0.08
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
opposition	-0.97 ***	1.22 ***	1.01 ***	0.49 ***	-0.54 ***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
confederation	-0.41 ***	-0.72 ***	-0.73 ***	-0.62 ***	1.87 ***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
left-right	0.24 ***	-0.22 ***	-0.07 **	-0.48 ***	0.20 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
N	2910	2910	2910	2910	2910
R2	0.65	0.40	0.27	0.32	0.26

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Controls included for gender, age (categorical), political interest, economic status and left-right position.

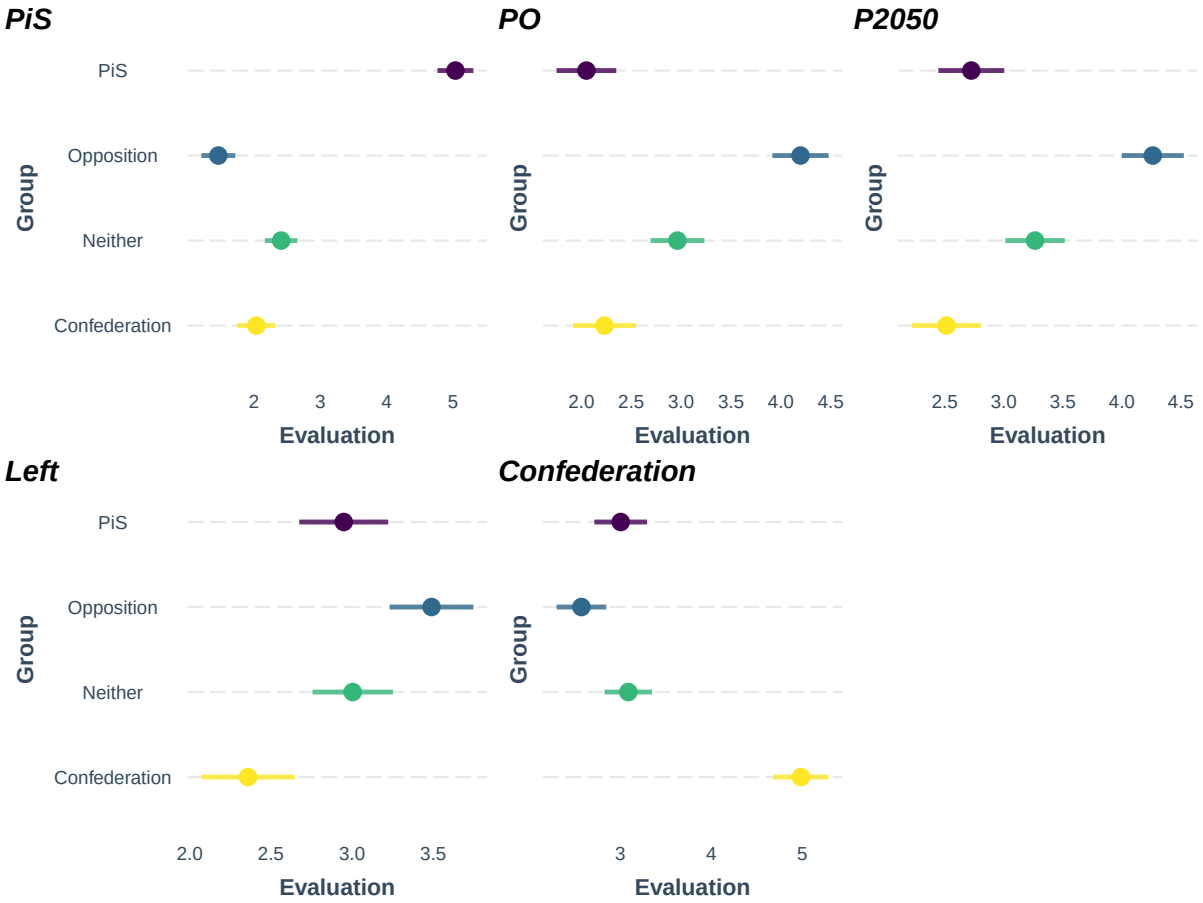


Figure A12: Government-opposition divide in Poland

Regression Model H2 (Study 2)

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left Coalition	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.43***	3.86***	3.54***	4.96***	2.27***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
gender2	0.09	0.15**	0.19***	0.18***	−0.02
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
gov_oppPiS	2.62***	−0.93***	−0.54***	−0.06	−0.06
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
gov_oppConfederation	−0.41***	−0.73***	−0.73***	−0.62***	1.86***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
gov_oppOpposition	−0.95***	1.24***	1.00***	0.48***	−0.51***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
age_group2	0.09	0.08	0.05	−0.13	0.20*
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
age_group3	0.15	0.24*	0.16	0.06	0.21*
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
age_group4	0.15	0.38***	0.15	0.11	0.15
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.07	0.42***	0.08	0.14	0.02
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
economy2	0.10	0.00	0.25*	0.10	0.27*
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy3	0.32**	0.14	0.23*	0.25**	0.28**
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
economy4	0.38***	0.19	0.31**	0.31***	0.27**
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy5	0.45***	0.08	0.21*	0.19	0.35***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
economy6	0.67***	−0.05	0.13	0.26*	0.45***
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
economy7	0.94***	−0.18	−0.18	0.03	0.27
	(0.17)	(0.19)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
polinterest2	−0.26**	−0.00	−0.01	0.05	−0.10
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.17*	−0.10	−0.01	−0.02	−0.07
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.23*	−0.09	−0.18	0.02	−0.34***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
polinterest5	−0.14	−0.13	−0.28*	−0.13	−0.36**
	(0.12)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)
lrscale	0.24***	−0.22***	−0.07**	−0.48***	0.20***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
wvs	−0.07**	−0.07*	0.04	0.01	−0.15***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
R^2	0.65	0.40	0.27	0.32	0.27
Adj. R^2	0.65	0.40	0.27	0.31	0.27
Num. obs.	2910	2910	2910	2910	2910

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A17: Statistical Models H1

Regression Model H3 (Study 2)

Table A18: Regression results democracy model Poland (baseline: undecided voters)

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.49 ***	3.77 ***	3.50 ***	4.96 ***	2.33 ***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
PiS	2.62 ***	-0.91 ***	-0.54 ***	-0.06	-0.08
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
opposition	-0.95 ***	1.23 ***	1.00 ***	0.49 ***	-0.51 ***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
confederation	-0.37 ***	-0.73 ***	-0.75 ***	-0.64 ***	1.90 ***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
left-right	0.22 ***	-0.20 ***	-0.06 **	-0.48 ***	0.19 ***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Democracy	-0.07	-0.14 *	0.04	-0.00	-0.05
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
Dem*PiS	0.26 **	-0.35 ***	-0.17 *	0.04	0.02
	(0.08)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
Dem*Opp	-0.12	0.24 ***	0.09	0.04	-0.25 ***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.07)
Dem*Conf	0.16	0.09	-0.09	-0.12	0.14
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
N	2910	2910	2910	2910	2910
R2	0.65	0.41	0.28	0.32	0.28

*** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$. Controls included for gender, age (categorical), political interest, economic status and left-right position.

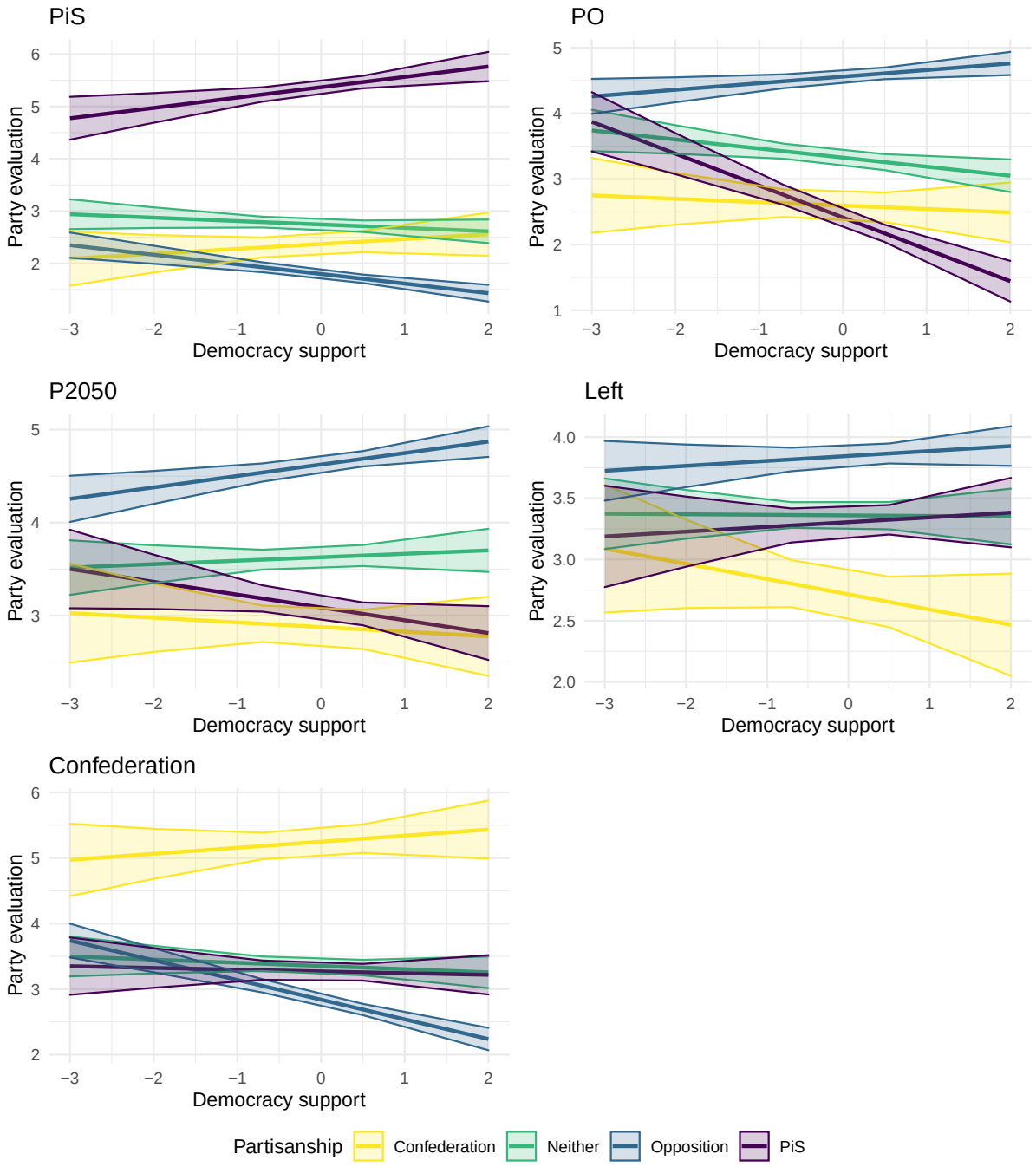
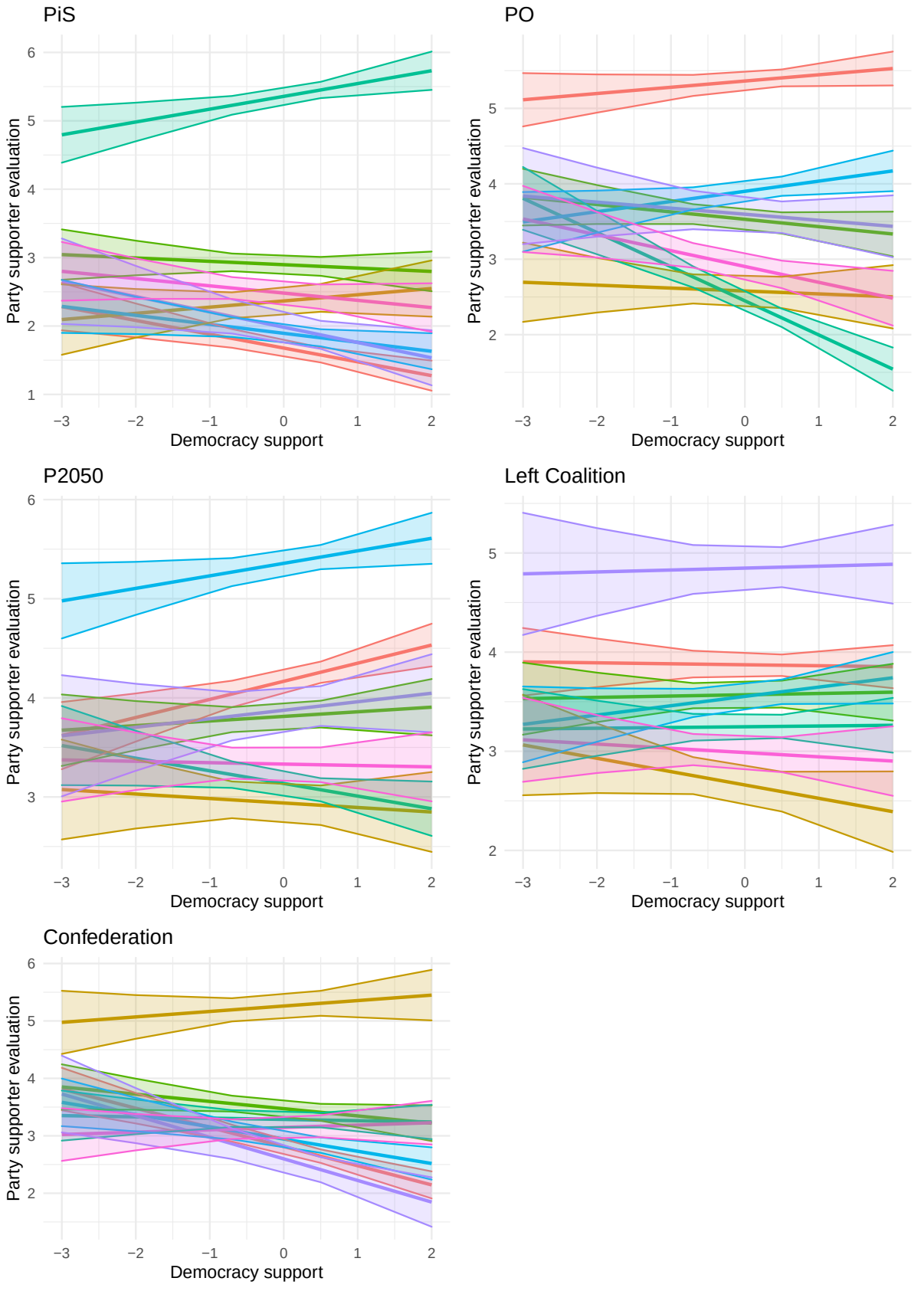


Figure A13: Interaction effect of party choice and democracy attitudes in Poland

Complex party measure (Study 2)



	PiS	PO	P2050	Left Coalition	Confederation
(Intercept)	0.35*	6.23***	4.39***	5.16***	1.89***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
gender2	0.07	0.12*	0.15**	0.17***	−0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
partyConfederation	0.68***	−2.77***	−1.23***	−1.18***	2.46***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
partyDon't know	1.25***	−1.84***	−0.38***	−0.30***	0.71***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyLaw and Justice (PiS)	3.71***	−2.93***	−1.06***	−0.62***	0.52***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyPoland 2050	0.24**	−1.47***	1.17***	−0.31***	0.16*
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyThe Left	0.32**	−1.82***	−0.32**	0.98***	−0.21
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
partyWould not support any of these	0.84***	−2.43***	−0.85***	−0.87***	0.35***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group2	0.11	−0.07	0.00	−0.05	0.17
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
age_group3	0.16	0.06	0.13	0.13	0.18
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
age_group4	0.15	0.16	0.11	0.20*	0.09
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.09	0.13	0.13	0.23**	−0.04
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
economy2	0.10	0.04	0.23*	0.12	0.28*
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy3	0.30**	0.16	0.26**	0.23*	0.27*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)
economy4	0.37***	0.16	0.32***	0.29**	0.25*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy5	0.43***	0.05	0.22*	0.18	0.31**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy6	0.65***	−0.02	0.18	0.22	0.43***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.13)
economy7	0.93***	−0.17	−0.19	0.04	0.25
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
polinterest2	−0.29***	−0.07	−0.02	0.04	−0.16
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.20**	−0.12	−0.02	−0.04	−0.12
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.27**	−0.16	−0.09	−0.03	−0.40***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
polinterest5	−0.17	−0.29*	−0.18	−0.17	−0.44***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
lrscale	0.25***	−0.24***	−0.14***	−0.41***	0.18***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
R^2	0.65	0.49	0.35	0.36	0.27
Adj. R^2	0.65	0.49	0.34	0.35	0.26
Num. obs.	2910	2910	2910	2910	2910

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A19: Statistical Models H1

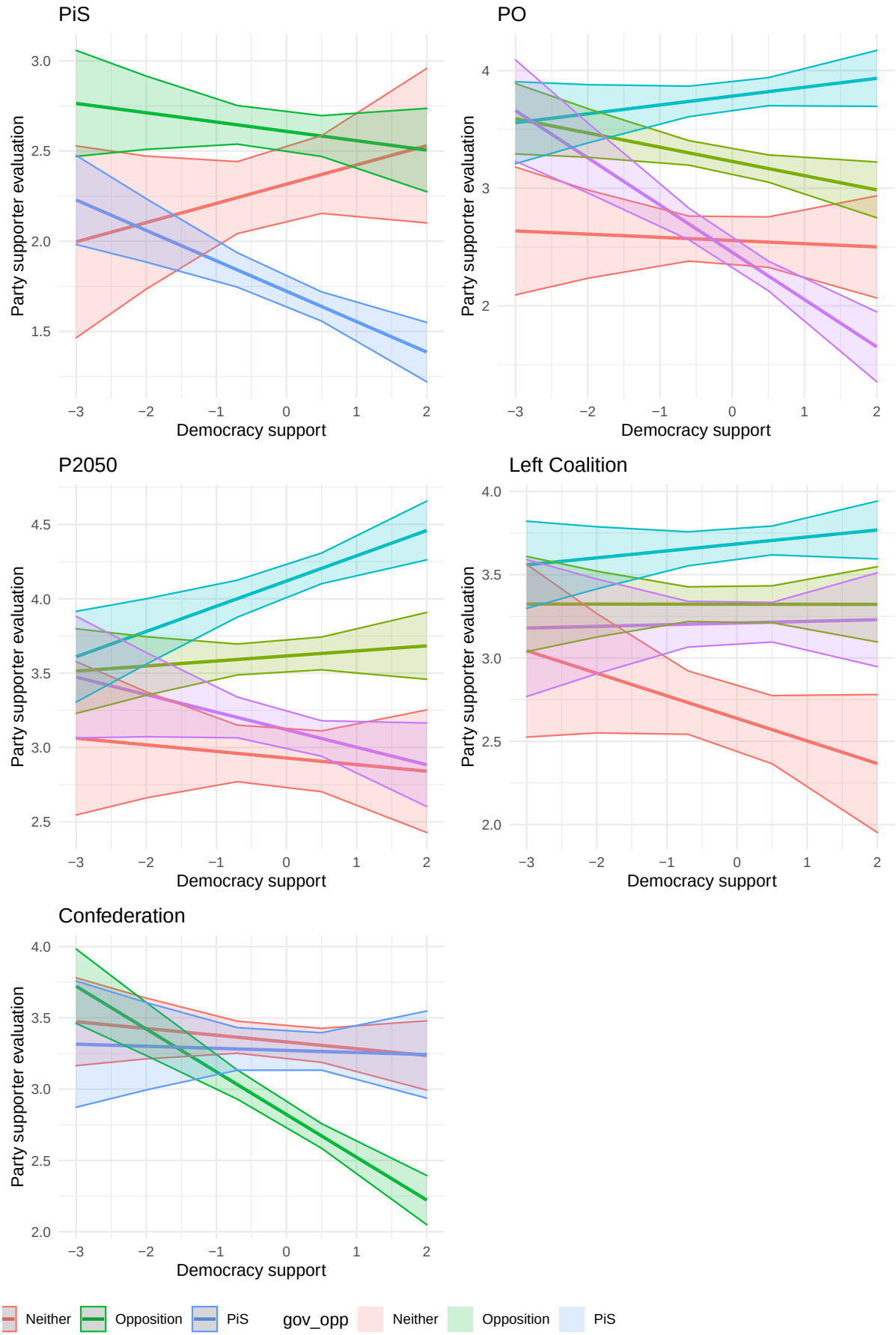
	PiS	PO	P2050	Left Coalition	Confederation
(Intercept)	0.32*	6.20***	4.41***	5.16***	1.83***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
gender2	0.07	0.12*	0.15**	0.17***	−0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
partyConfederation	0.66***	−2.79***	−1.22***	−1.18***	2.42***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
partyDon't know	1.23***	−1.86***	−0.37***	−0.30***	0.68***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyLaw and Justice (PiS)	3.70***	−2.94***	−1.05***	−0.62***	0.50***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyPoland 2050	0.23**	−1.48***	1.17***	−0.31***	0.16
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyThe Left	0.32**	−1.81***	−0.32**	0.98***	−0.21
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
partyWould not support any of these	0.83***	−2.45***	−0.84***	−0.87***	0.31**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group2	0.11	−0.07	0.00	−0.05	0.17
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
age_group3	0.17*	0.07	0.13	0.13	0.19*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
age_group4	0.17	0.17	0.10	0.20*	0.12
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.11	0.15	0.11	0.23**	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
economy2	0.10	0.03	0.23*	0.12	0.27*
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy3	0.31**	0.17	0.25**	0.23*	0.28**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)
economy4	0.37***	0.17	0.31***	0.29**	0.26**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy5	0.45***	0.06	0.21*	0.18	0.34***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy6	0.67***	−0.01	0.17	0.22	0.46***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
economy7	0.94***	−0.16	−0.19	0.04	0.27
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
polinterest2	−0.27**	−0.05	−0.03	0.04	−0.12
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.19*	−0.11	−0.03	−0.04	−0.08
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.24*	−0.13	−0.12	−0.04	−0.33**
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
polinterest5	−0.13	−0.26*	−0.21	−0.17	−0.36**
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
lrscale	0.25***	−0.23***	−0.14***	−0.41***	0.18***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
wvs	−0.07**	−0.07**	0.05*	0.00	−0.15***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
R^2	0.65	0.49	0.35	0.36	0.28
Adj. R^2	0.65	0.49	0.35	0.35	0.27
Num. obs.	2910	2910	2910	2910	2910

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A20: Statistical Models H2

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left Coalition	Confederation
(Intercept)	0.39*	6.10***	4.35***	5.16***	1.90***
	(0.15)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.16)
gender2	0.07	0.12**	0.15**	0.17***	−0.04
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
partyConfederation	0.69***	−2.78***	−1.23***	−1.21***	2.45***
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
partyDon't know	1.22***	−1.83***	−0.35***	−0.30***	0.66***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyLaw and Justice (PiS)	3.68***	−2.91***	−1.03***	−0.63***	0.47***
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyPoland 2050	0.22**	−1.46***	1.19***	−0.32***	0.13
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
partyThe Left	0.31**	−1.77***	−0.29**	0.97***	−0.21
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
partyWould not support any of these	0.80***	−2.46***	−0.84***	−0.89***	0.33***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
wvs	−0.20***	0.08	0.18***	−0.01	−0.33***
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.06)
age_group2	0.11	−0.08	−0.00	−0.05	0.18*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
age_group3	0.17*	0.06	0.13	0.13	0.19*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
age_group4	0.17	0.16	0.09	0.19*	0.13
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.10	0.16	0.12	0.23**	0.01
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
economy2	0.09	0.03	0.23*	0.12	0.26*
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy3	0.32**	0.14	0.24*	0.23*	0.29**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.10)
economy4	0.38***	0.14	0.30***	0.29**	0.27**
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy5	0.46***	0.04	0.20*	0.17	0.35***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
economy6	0.65***	0.02	0.18	0.22	0.45***
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
economy7	0.91***	−0.09	−0.16	0.04	0.25
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.18)
polinterest2	−0.27**	−0.03	−0.03	0.04	−0.14
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.18*	−0.09	−0.02	−0.04	−0.10
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.23*	−0.12	−0.11	−0.04	−0.33***
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
polinterest5	−0.13	−0.27*	−0.21	−0.17	−0.36**
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.12)
lrscale	0.23***	−0.21***	−0.13***	−0.41***	0.17***
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
partyConfederation:wvs	0.29**	−0.12	−0.23*	−0.12	0.43***
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
partyDon't know:wvs	0.15	−0.18*	−0.14	0.02	0.21*
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
partyLaw and Justice (PiS):wvs	0.39***	−0.54***	−0.31***	0.02	0.31***
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
partyPoland 2050:wvs	0.07	0.05	−0.06	0.10	0.12
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)

Excluding own party (Study 2)



	PiS	PO	P2050	Left	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.55***	4.11***	3.60***	4.64***	2.42***
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.17)
gender2	0.10	0.23***	0.22***	0.20***	−0.02
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
gov_oppConfederation	−0.32**	−0.67***	−0.67***	−0.66***	
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	
gov_oppOpposition	−0.90***	0.54***	0.53***	0.36***	−0.53***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)
age_group2	0.11	−0.01	0.04	−0.03	0.24*
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group3	0.21*	0.10	0.14	0.18*	0.23*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group4	0.17	0.16	0.12	0.24*	0.17
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.02	0.03	0.12	0.28**	0.03
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
economy2	0.14	0.05	0.34**	0.06	0.27*
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.12)
economy3	0.43***	0.19	0.39***	0.21*	0.23*
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy4	0.49***	0.22*	0.45***	0.30**	0.26*
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy5	0.45***	0.06	0.37***	0.15	0.34**
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy6	0.62***	−0.07	0.27*	0.21	0.41**
	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)
economy7	0.87***	−0.29	−0.05	0.03	0.27
	(0.24)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.19)
polinterest2	−0.37***	−0.06	−0.01	0.06	−0.19*
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.26**	−0.14	−0.01	−0.03	−0.12
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.51***	−0.32**	−0.16	−0.01	−0.48***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
polinterest5	−0.54***	−0.56***	−0.30*	−0.13	−0.54***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
lrscale	0.21***	−0.24***	−0.12***	−0.42***	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
gov_oppPiS		−0.78***	−0.50***	−0.11	−0.05
		(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
R^2	0.22	0.29	0.19	0.26	0.12
Adj. R^2	0.22	0.28	0.19	0.26	0.11
Num. obs.	2212	2328	2456	2735	2690

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A22: Statistical Models H1

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left Coalition	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.51***	4.05***	3.63***	4.65***	2.32***
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)
gender2	0.10	0.23***	0.22***	0.20***	−0.02
	(0.05)	(0.06)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
gov_oppConfederation	−0.32**	−0.67***	−0.66***	−0.66***	
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	
gov_oppOpposition	−0.88***	0.56***	0.51***	0.36***	−0.50***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)
age_group2	0.11	−0.02	0.04	−0.03	0.23*
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group3	0.22*	0.10	0.14	0.18	0.24*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group4	0.18	0.17	0.12	0.24*	0.20
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.04	0.05	0.10	0.27**	0.08
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
economy2	0.14	0.04	0.35**	0.06	0.26*
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.12)
economy3	0.44***	0.20	0.38***	0.21*	0.25*
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy4	0.49***	0.23*	0.45***	0.30**	0.27**
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy5	0.48***	0.08	0.36***	0.15	0.38***
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy6	0.64***	−0.05	0.26*	0.21	0.44***
	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)
economy7	0.86***	−0.27	−0.06	0.03	0.30
	(0.24)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.19)
polinterest2	−0.34***	−0.03	−0.02	0.06	−0.14
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.24**	−0.11	−0.02	−0.03	−0.08
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.47***	−0.28*	−0.18	−0.01	−0.40***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
polinterest5	−0.48***	−0.51***	−0.32*	−0.14	−0.46***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
lrscale	0.21***	−0.24***	−0.12***	−0.42***	0.18***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
wvs	−0.10***	−0.10**	0.05	0.01	−0.17***
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
gov_oppPiS		−0.77***	−0.50***	−0.11	−0.04
		(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
R^2	0.23	0.29	0.19	0.26	0.13
Adj. R^2	0.22	0.28	0.19	0.26	0.12
Num. obs.	2212	2328	2456	2735	2690

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A23: Statistical Models H2

	PiS	PO	P2050	Left Coalition	Confederation
(Intercept)	1.53***	3.99***	3.58***	4.64***	2.37***
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.16)	(0.16)	(0.17)
gender2	0.10	0.23***	0.22***	0.20***	−0.02
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
gov_oppConfederation	−0.29**	−0.67***	−0.69***	−0.69***	
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	
gov_oppOpposition	−0.89***	0.56***	0.50***	0.36***	−0.51***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)
wvs	−0.05	−0.12*	0.03	−0.00	−0.05
	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)	(0.05)
age_group2	0.11	−0.02	0.03	−0.03	0.25*
	(0.09)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group3	0.22*	0.10	0.13	0.18*	0.25**
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.10)
age_group4	0.20	0.17	0.11	0.24*	0.22*
	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
age_group5	0.05	0.07	0.11	0.27**	0.08
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)
economy2	0.13	0.04	0.35**	0.06	0.26*
	(0.11)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.12)
economy3	0.44***	0.18	0.38***	0.21*	0.27*
	(0.10)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy4	0.50***	0.20	0.44***	0.30**	0.30**
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy5	0.48***	0.06	0.36***	0.15	0.40***
	(0.11)	(0.12)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.11)
economy6	0.63***	−0.04	0.28*	0.21	0.44***
	(0.15)	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.13)
economy7	0.85***	−0.22	−0.03	0.03	0.27
	(0.24)	(0.19)	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.19)
polinterest2	−0.35***	−0.03	−0.02	0.06	−0.16
	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.09)
polinterest3	−0.24**	−0.12	−0.01	−0.03	−0.10
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
polinterest4	−0.46***	−0.27*	−0.18	−0.01	−0.42***
	(0.11)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	(0.10)
polinterest5	−0.48***	−0.52***	−0.32**	−0.14	−0.46***
	(0.14)	(0.14)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.13)
lrscale	0.21***	−0.22***	−0.11***	−0.42***	0.17***
	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
gov_oppConfederation:wvs	0.16	0.09	−0.08	−0.14	
	(0.10)	(0.11)	(0.10)	(0.10)	
gov_oppOpposition:wvs	−0.12	0.20**	0.14*	0.04	−0.25***
	(0.06)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.07)
gov_oppPiS		−0.77***	−0.50***	−0.11	−0.06
		(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.08)
gov_oppPiS:wvs		−0.28**	−0.15	0.01	0.03
		(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.09)
R^2	0.23	0.30	0.20	0.26	0.14
Adj. R^2	0.22	0.29	0.19	0.26	0.13
Num. obs.	2212	2328	2456	2735	2690

$^{***}p < 0.001$; $^{**}p < 0.01$; $^{*}p < 0.05$

Table A24: Statistical Models H3