

THE POLITICAL REPRESENTATION CYCLE AND CITIZEN SATISFACTION WITH THE DEMOCRATIC PROCESS

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Abstract

This project investigates how citizens in advanced industrial democracies evaluate their democratic institutions. Previous literature has focused on the role of either individual characteristics - personal economic conditions, whether a voter identifies with a winning political party, etc. - or institutional structures to determine what drives the level of satisfaction with democracy in a country. The former explanations are unable to account for systematic differences across countries, while the latter explanations are unable to account for rapid year-to-year shifts in satisfaction or the variation in satisfaction within system types.

Instead, I argue that electorates across all types of democracies primarily desire one thing: political representation. In this dissertation I argue that the quality of the connections between voters and political parties, on the one hand, and voters and the government on the other, is crucial to understanding why some individuals are more satisfied with their political institutions than others. I find that as the quality of the connection between a voter and their party decreases, the likelihood that they will be satisfied with their democracy decreases accordingly. Moreover, I find that the quality of this connection conditions the positive effect of selecting a winning political party. Finally, I find that the way a government terminates - whether by regular elections or conflict between government parties - has a strong impact on the level of satisfaction in a country.