

Politicians, Electoral Integrity, and Electoral Management Bodies: A Cross-National Study on Satisfaction With Democracy

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Abstract

Competitive elections that are free and fair are the bedrock of stable representative democracies. In this critical moment, in which there is an increase of democratic decline across states, it is imperative to (re-)examine fundamental democratic processes, like elections. In addition to citizens, politicians are key actors in the electoral process. Politicians can influence the views of citizens, make changes within political institutions, and contribute to democratic breakdown or backsliding. Therefore, understanding their views about the way democracy works is crucial. While there has been a recent increase in the scholarship on politicians' perceptions and behaviours, it has not yet considered whether aspects of the electoral process might affect politicians' democratic satisfaction. Furthermore, while the literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction is well-established, our understanding of politicians' satisfaction with democracy (SWD) is not. This article begins to address these gaps in the scholarship on SWD and politicians by examining whether electoral integrity and the characteristics of electoral management bodies influence politicians' levels of SWD. By analyzing cross-national data from The Comparative Candidates Survey covering 49 elections, in 21 countries, from 2005 to 2021, this article highlights three key findings: first, while electoral integrity affects levels of politicians' SWD, it matters more for politicians who lost the election. Second, electoral management bodies' independence does not affect politicians' levels of SWD. Third, while electoral management bodies' capacity influences politicians' levels of democratic satisfaction, the strength of the effect differs for politicians on the ideological right and left. The implications of these findings are explained in the article.

Keywords

democratic stability; electoral integrity; electoral management bodies; politicians; satisfaction with democracy

1. Introduction

The study of democracy is a vast field of political science that examines topics like the conditions of democratic consolidation (Linz & Stepan, 1996; Schedler, 1998), whether there is a relationship between democratization and economic growth (Doucouliagos & Ulubaşoğlu, 2008; Knutsen, 2012; Rueschemeyer et al., 1992), the types of outcomes that democracy produces (Gerring et al., 2022), and more recently, what might cause stable democracies to breakdown or resist decline (Carugati, 2020; Coppedge et al., 2022). With an increase of democratic decline occurring across states (Gora & de Wilde, 2022; Grillo & Prato, 2023; Mechkova et al., 2017), it is imperative for researchers to (re-)examine the processes and institutions of democratic countries in this critical moment. Past works have established the importance of competitive elections with high levels of electoral integrity (Møller & Skaaning, 2013, p. 144) and the ability of citizens to participate in those elections (Dahl, 1971) as necessary conditions for having a democratic political regime (or what Dahl calls polyarchy), and that the core aspect of the democratic process is the selection of leaders (Schumpeter, 1943). Put differently, competitive elections that are free and fair are the bedrock of democracy. However, recent research shows that democratic breakdown can occur when checks on elected leaders erode (Carugati, 2020, p. 60) and that political elites are often the drivers behind democratic backsliding (Wunsch, 2022, pp. 1–2). In addition to the powers elected officials have within political institutions, politicians more generally (candidates running in elections) can also influence the views of citizens (Bullock, 2011; Clayton et al., 2021; Zaller, 1992). Therefore, it is essential to consider the views of politicians in discussions about democratic stability and the electoral process.

Taking these points together highlights an important intersection in democratic studies that is sometimes taken for granted: elections and the key actors that participate in the electoral process (citizens and politicians) are the fundamental components of having and maintaining a stable representative democratic country. It therefore follows that the electoral process and these actors' overall satisfaction with the democratic system that they participate in are key considerations for democratic stability. However, while there is extensive literature on citizens' democratic satisfaction (see Singh & Mayne, 2023, for a recent review of this literature), we know very little about politicians' satisfaction with democracy (SWD). Although there has been a recent increase in the scholarship on politicians' perceptions and behaviours (Lucas et al., 2024; Sevenans et al., 2023; Walgrave et al., 2023), this has not included studies on SWD, or how various aspects of the electoral process (such as electoral integrity or the administration of elections by electoral management bodies [EMBs]) might affect SWD. This article therefore examines politicians' SWD and elements of the electoral process for the sake of better understanding an important component of democratic stability. It specifically investigates the following question: Does electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs affect politicians' SWD? Electoral integrity and EMBs serve as an important starting point for studying politicians' SWD, as electoral integrity is fundamental to the electoral process (and in turn, democratic stability), while the characteristics of EMBs could advance or inhibit electoral integrity. Furthermore, the article examines if other attributes of politicians (such as whether they won or lost the election and their left-to-right political ideology) might impact these effects.

Electoral integrity matters for politicians because the presence (or lack of presence) of electoral integrity during election processes provides confidence (or doubt) in the legitimacy of the election. Electoral integrity is especially important for democratic stability since it could play a pivotal role for politicians to accept the results of the election when they lose (Anderson et al., 2005, p. 4). Because electoral integrity both

legitimizes the victory or loss of politicians and helps to maintain democratic stability in the country they reside (or govern) in, the article's main expectation about electoral integrity is that politicians' SWD will be higher in countries with more electoral integrity. If the electoral process has low levels of electoral integrity (or there is the presence of electoral fraud), then politicians have reasons to doubt the outcome of elections—resulting in less democratic stability, since free and fair elections are fundamental in democratic systems. Because electoral integrity also legitimizes the victory of the winner, it is also expected that the effect of electoral integrity on SWD will be more important for winners than losers. This is based on the rationale of citizens' SWD, since citizens whose preferred choice won are usually more satisfied than citizens whose preferred choice lost (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais et al., 2017; Curini et al., 2012; Henderson, 2008). Since politicians occupy important positions of power in democratic systems, it is important to assess whether the connection between electoral integrity and SWD is the same for both politicians and citizens or if it differs depending on the type of actor being examined.

EMBs are tasked with organising the election process, certifying election results, and monitoring the conduct of political actors during an election (James et al., 2019). The characteristics of an EMB (its institutional design) are important for politicians because the way EMBs operate can greatly impact the legitimacy of the election process, and in turn, affect democratic stability through the presence (or lack of presence) of electoral integrity. Because of the connection between EMBs and electoral integrity, these institutions are important to examine as a key democratic safeguard. Previous work has found that when confidence in election officials decreases (or increases) there is also a decrease (or increase) in citizens' SWD at both the regional and national levels of government (Lundmark et al., 2020). This is also expected for politicians' SWD since the failure of EMBs to freely or fairly administer elections could result in electoral fraud (or at least yield lower electoral integrity). This article therefore has two main expectations about the characteristics of EMBs. First, that SWD will be higher in countries with EMBs that are more independent from the government. This is because having more independence in an EMB is more likely to create a level playing field for all politicians during elections and decreases the likelihood of government interfering in that electoral process. Second, that SWD will be higher in countries with EMBs that have a greater capacity (more resources) to administer the election since more resources should improve the administrative and procedural aspects of an election. If an EMB lacks the resources to administer elections, then its ability to conduct procedures relating to free and fair elections (such as ensuring access to the vote or counting ballots in a timely manner) may diminish. Additionally, because politicians on the ideological left are usually in favour of expanding procedures that increase voter turnout (James, 2012, p. 20), it is expected that the effect of EMB capacity on SWD will be greater for politicians on the ideological left than for those on the ideological right. The overarching rationale of the expectations for both electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs is that in most cases when electoral processes follow norms that are consistent with stable democracies—specifically, practices that allow for free and fair competitive elections—SWD will be higher.

To assess these expectations, the article uses cross-national data from The Comparative Candidates Survey (CCS) from politicians in 49 elections, across 21 countries, from 2005 to 2021. The results highlight three key findings in response to the research question. First, while politicians' SWD increases when there is more electoral integrity, the significance of the effect differs for politicians who won and lost the election. Specifically, when electoral integrity is low, politicians who lost the election will have lower levels of SWD than those who won. However, as electoral integrity increases, the SWD of losers becomes closer to that of winners. In contrast, SWD for winners remains relatively similar, irrespective of electoral integrity. This

implies that politicians care more about low levels of electoral integrity (at least in terms of their SWD) when they lose, but not when they win. Second, EMB independence from the government does not have a significant effect on politicians' SWD. While the independence of an EMB may still be important for the administration of elections, it seems to matter less for SWD once other electoral factors are considered. Third, when EMBs have a higher capacity (greater resources to administer an election), politicians' SWD will be higher. However, in contrast to what was expected from the literature, the effect of EMB capacity on SWD is greater for politicians on the ideological right than those on the ideological left.

These results are theoretically important for better understanding SWD, electoral integrity, and EMBs, but are also relevant to practitioners of politics, election officials, and those concerned with democratic stability. To present these findings, the article is divided into four more sections. In Section 2, the article's theoretical framework for the concepts of SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs are presented, along with the expectations about how electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs might influence politicians' SWD. In Section 3, the methods, datasets, as well as the measurements used in the article's empirical models are explained. Section 4 shows the article's results and analysis. Finally, Section 5 provides the main findings of the analysis, its implications for democratic stability, and potential future avenues for research.

2. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this article describes three key concepts: SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs. Each concept is described in turn, along with the associated expectations for both electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs. Two hypotheses also consider whether winning or losing, as well as politicians' left-to-right political ideology, might influence the theoretical expectations about electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs. The overarching rationale of these expectations is that in most cases, when electoral processes follow norms that are consistent with stable democracies—specifically, practices that allow for free and fair competitive elections—SWD will be higher. However, this overarching expectation could be influenced by certain circumstances of politicians (such as whether politicians won or lost the election and their left-to-right political ideology).

2.1. SWD

Given there is no research on politicians' SWD (at the time of writing), a review of the vast and well-established literature on citizens' SWD provides a helpful understanding of SWD. SWD is rooted in studies on the political culture associated with democracies (Almond & Verba, 1963) and captures attitudes and feelings about how governance or politics is working. Scholars now consider SWD as a mid-level indicator of political support (Norris, 1999, p. 1), between individuals' diffuse support for regime preferences (Easton, 1975), and specific support for actors like political parties and politicians (Ferland, 2015) or evaluations of government (Weatherford, 1992). More specifically, this conceptualization of SWD assesses "how well people generally think politics or governance is working" (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 9) and captures an individual's "perceptions of the performance of their country's political system, which happens to be democratic" (p. 10). Several studies examine how levels of citizens' SWD are affected by their desired candidate (or party) winning or losing an election (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Blais et al., 2017; Curini et al., 2012; Henderson, 2008). Results consistently show that winners are more satisfied than losers. There is also substantial research in the SWD literature on how representation and citizens-elites ideological or policy

congruence affects citizens' SWD (Ezrow & Xezonakis, 2011; Ferland, 2016; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). At large, the literature shows that citizens feeling like their preferences are represented by political parties and governments is important for their levels of SWD. Research also exists on whether an individual's socio-demographics influences SWD, such as how Aarts et al. (2017) found that individuals with more education are typically more satisfied with democracy. Additionally, many studies have been conducted on how the quality of government and its institutions (Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2014; Erlingsson et al., 2014; van Ham et al., 2017; Wagner et al., 2009), as well as various electoral factors (Farrell & McAllister, 2006; Morgan-Jones & Loveless, 2023; Singh, 2018), affects citizens' SWD. Few studies have examined the connection between electoral integrity (or its antonym, electoral fraud) and SWD (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), or whether the performance of EMBs might influence SWD (Lundmark et al., 2020). While these studies on citizens serve as a helpful starting point for understanding SWD relative to the electoral process, it is important to examine politicians on their own because of their distinct roles in elections. Unlike citizens, politicians are elected to, removed from, or prevented from accessing, a position of power within government following an election. This means the way in which their SWD may be influenced by electoral processes could also differ. However, while it is plausible that politicians may be affected differently than citizens, past studies on SWD only focus on citizens, so there is no guiding research that clearly indicates how politicians' and citizens' SWD may differ. Therefore, this article's expectations serve as a starting point for understanding how politicians' SWD may be connected to electoral processes.

2.2. Electoral Integrity

Electoral integrity is an essential aspect of the electoral process in a representative democratic system and is important for maintaining democratic stability. Electoral integrity captures several aspects of an election such as the quality, fairness, or impartiality of the election process (Schnaudt, 2023), the norms that govern elections (Norris et al., 2014), or the absence of these norms (van Ham, 2015). Norris (2014) explains that electoral integrity also legitimizes the offices of the newly elected winners and legitimizes the outcome for those who lost (p. 115), which could be pivotal for democratic stability (Anderson et al., 2005, p. 4). Additionally, when there are failures of electoral integrity, citizens' attitudes towards democracy become more negative (González et al., 2024). There are ongoing debates about how to assess if electoral integrity is present or absent in an election, for example: whether the parameters of electoral integrity are determined by international norms and standards (Norris et al., 2014), the cultural context of the country, or its public's perception (Elklit & Reynolds, 2002), or if it is rooted within democratic principles (Beetham, 1994; Garnett & James, 2021). However, there is a broad agreement that electoral integrity matters throughout several stages of the election process. Given this context, this article looks at Fortin-Rittberger et al.'s (2017) research on electoral fraud (the antithetical of electoral integrity) and citizens' SWD. Fortin-Rittberger et al.'s (2017) broad expectation was that the presence of electoral fraud should generally decrease SWD. This should also apply to politicians, who are typically favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018), and would in turn be more satisfied when election processes reflect the norms of stable democracies. Therefore, the presence of electoral integrity should generally increase SWD:

H1a: If the level of electoral integrity is greater in a country, then politicians' SWD will be higher.

Fortin-Rittberger et al. (2017) also expected that the effect of electoral fraud on SWD would be weaker amongst citizens whose preferred choice won. This is because winners would be willing to accept the costs

of electoral fraud (and a lower-quality election) when they benefit from receiving the policy gains associated with having their preferred choice in a position of power. Yet, they found that the presence of electoral fraud resulted in lower levels of citizens' SWD for both winners and losers. Winning an election increases SWD (in comparison to losing) under the conditions of the election being administered in a free and fair manner. However, in cases when electoral fraud occurs, Fortin-Rittberger et al. (2017, p. 362) found that the winner–loser gap disappears, which suggests that both winners and losers value the absence of electoral fraud. This rationale should also extend to politicians in national elections. If politicians win (or lose) under free and fair conditions, then the legitimacy of their victory (or defeat) is less likely to be questioned. Electoral integrity helps to legitimatise the winner's elected position and limits the ability of losing politicians to blame their loss on the election process. Therefore, the following hypothesis is given with respect to the effects of electoral integrity on SWD for winners and losers:

H1b: If the level of electoral integrity in a country affects politicians' SWD, then this effect will be greater for winners than for losers.

2.3. EMBs

EMBs are tasked with organising election processes, monitoring the conduct of actors during elections, and certifying election results (James et al., 2019). These institutions are connected to electoral integrity, as their designs can increase or impede electoral legitimacy (Langford et al., 2021), but more work is needed to better understand the connection between election administration and democratic performance (Norris, 2019, pp. 391–392). EMBs are responsible for several aspects of the electoral process that influence electoral integrity such as the rules that govern elections (Garnett & Keir, 2022, p. 333) and the counting process (Atkeson et al., 2015). The design of EMBs and how they operate can greatly impact the legitimacy of the election process, and these designs vary by country. There are seven dimensions (or characteristics) of EMBs: independence, capacity, centralisation, the scope and division of tasks, technology, personnel, and the EMB's relations with external actors (James et al., 2019). This project focuses specifically on independence and capacity (the EMB's available resources) since these two characteristics are frequently discussed in research on EMBs. Additionally, these characteristics serve as good starting points for deepening our understanding of the connection between EMBs and SWD, as it is less theoretically clear how other characteristics of EMBs might affect politicians' SWD.

An EMB's overall independence is based on different aspects of the institution, such as its institutional design, the way its personnel are chosen, how it is financed, the types of powers it has, and to whom it is accountable to (van Aaken, 2009). Independence is examined as both *de jure* and *de facto* (van Ham & Garnett, 2019). *De jure* independence consists of formal autonomy from the government that is recognized by law or norms, while *de facto* independence (independence in fact) is mediated by *de jure* independence as well as other variables that fall outside of the scope of EMBs (e.g., free media, civil society, and the presence of election observers). To the author's knowledge, there are no studies that examine how the independence of EMBs affects SWD, but some articles examine how the independence of EMBs might affect politicians' confidence or trust in the election process (Estévez et al., 2008; Rosas, 2010). Some research proposes that granting politicians and their political parties influence within EMBs will give political actors more confidence or trust (Estévez et al., 2008), while others like Rosas (2010) found that in most cases, politicians' confidence in elections increases when EMBs are independent. However, it should be

noted that both Estévez et al. (2008) and Rosas' (2010) research examine countries in Latin America, whose political circumstances as newer democracies differ in comparison to older democracies. Specifically, in newer democracies, there may be concerns about government control over EMBs (since these institutions have been around for less time), so political parties and politicians may trust these institutions more if they are involved in these election processes. In more established democracies, there may be fewer concerns about government control over EMBs, so these political actors might be more comfortable being less involved in electoral processes. Furthermore, even if political parties or politicians have influence within EMBs, it does not necessarily mean that *all* politicians or parties have the same level of involvement or leverage in those institutions. While there are mixed findings about the effects of EMB independence on electoral integrity (van Ham & Garnett, 2019), there is a reoccurring trend which argues that democratic countries should have EMBs that are independent of the government (Onishi, 2012, p. 62; Pal, 2016, p. 86). Overall, because having an independent EMB is more likely to create a level playing field for politicians, the article's expectation for this characteristic is as follows:

H2: If EMB independence is greater in a country, then politicians' SWD will be higher.

The article now examines EMB capacity, which pertains to the resources it has at its disposal to deliver an election. In addition to simply being able to administer the election, "capacity further helps to ensure elections that are legitimate by improving confidence" (Langford et al., 2021, p. S65), and makes it more difficult for political actors to perform acts of electoral fraud like vote-buying (Lundstedt & Edgell, 2022). EMB capacity is therefore important for electoral integrity, and by consequence, the overall electoral process. Since giving EMBs more resources usually improves the administrative and procedural aspects of an election, it is unlikely that politicians will have higher levels of SWD if the EMB has fewer resources. Because politicians are typically favourable towards democracy (Best & Vogel, 2018), it is unlikely that they would be more satisfied with the performance of their country's political system when EMBs have a lower capacity, especially since a lower capacity could increase the likeliness of electoral fraud:

H3a: If EMBs have greater resources in a country, then politicians' SWD will be higher.

EMB capacity also affects the ease by which citizens can access the vote. Because some politicians or political parties may attempt to (de)mobilise various groups of the electorate for the purposes of winning (Daniels, 2020, pp. 2-4; Tamas, 2023), the way EMB capacity influences a politician's SWD may vary depending on the political ideology of the politician. James (2012, p. 20) argues that in many cases, politicians on the ideological left attempt to expand procedures that increase voter turnout, while politicians on the ideological right attempt to restrict procedures that increase turnout. Even though politicians might not control the number of resources made available to EMBs, their desire to (de)mobilise various groups may play out indirectly based on the EMB's capacity. While politicians should in general be more satisfied when EMBs have a higher capacity, this effect may be greater for politicians on the ideological left:

H3b: If EMBs having greater resources in a country affects politicians' SWD, then this effect will be greater for politicians on the ideological left than politicians on the ideological right.

3. Methodology, Datasets, and Measurements

3.1. Datasets

To test the article's expectations, I combine four distinct datasets: the CCS, the Parliaments and Governments Database (ParlGov) project, the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) survey, and the Comparative Political Data Set (CPDS). The CCS is a multi-national dataset that surveys candidates running in national parliamentary elections. Module I (2005–2012; CCS, 2012) collected data from 32 elections in 24 countries, Module II (2013–2018; CCS, 2018) collected data from 30 elections in 21 countries, while Module III (2019–2024; CCS, 2024) was still in advance release at the time of writing. Due to missing observations of key variables for some elections, the analysis only considers 49 national elections from the CCS datasets between the period of 2005 to 2021. These 49 national elections occurred in the following 21 countries: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Therefore, the cases of this study are limited to those available in the CCS dataset. The ParlGov (Döring et al., 2022) project provides additional context about which candidates won (those whose political party formed government) and those that lost (all other candidates) for each election in the CCS datasets so that this article's dataset can determine which politicians were winners or losers in each election. The final two datasets, the V-Dem survey (Coppedge et al., 2024) and the CPDS (Klaus et al., 2022), provide country-level data for each election in the CCS dataset. The V-Dem survey is informed by responses and judgements from experts, while the CPDS uses annual data from the surveyed countries. The variables that each dataset informs are discussed throughout the remainder of this section.

3.2. Dependent Variable

The dependent variable of this article, politicians' SWD, is informed by data from the core questionnaire of the CCS. The CCS datasets have the common indicator used in studies of SWD (Singh & Mayne, 2023, p. 7; Valgarðsson & Devine, 2022, p. 580) for measuring individuals' level of SWD, which is: "On the whole are you very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in [country]?" (The Comparative Candidates Survey, 2024, p. 17). The individual-level data from the CCS is transformed into country-election aggregated scores for the purposes of this analysis. While conducting an individual-level analysis over an aggregate-level analysis is usually ideal, missing data on several individual variables prevents the use of the former empirical strategy. Specifically, some individual-level demographic data that are generally controlled for (like age, gender, or education) are not included in some CCS national surveys for confidentiality reasons. This is because politicians are a small population and can in some cases be easily identified in surveys with their demographic data. Since these missing variables vary across countries and election years, opting for individual-level analyses would significantly reduce the number of countries that could be analyzed and would undermine the statistical power of this cross-national analysis. Conducting the analysis at the aggregate level has the advantage of circumventing this problem. Reassuringly, the article's conclusions are substantively the same when replicating the analysis at the individual level without demographic controls. The individual-level data from politicians is therefore transformed into weighted aggregate variables so that there is a single weighted mean of politicians' SWD for each country and election year (the same is done for the CCS data on politicians' self-placement on the ideological spectrum, which is discussed more in Section 3.3). Creating aggregate variables ensures that

responses from politicians can be regressed with the other variables in this study that are at the country level. Politicians' responses from the CCS are weighted by political parties within each country—based on the number of respondents in each political party relative to the total responses from politicians in that country—to adjust for any unequal number of responses from a political party within a country. In total, 26,183 observations from politicians surveyed by the CCS were used to create the aggregate variables for this article (see Supplementary Materials A for the average level of SWD by country according to the CCS data).

3.3. Independent Variables

The CCS data also informs one of the article's independent variables, where a politician self-places on a 0–10 left-to-right ideological spectrum. Additionally, by merging data from the CCS and the ParlGov datasets, the analysis can determine whether a politician's political party is part of the cabinet at the time that they responded to the CCS survey. This is important for identifying whether a politician won or lost during the election year in which they were surveyed.

As of Module III, existing CCS surveys do not pose questions about politicians' views of electoral integrity or the characteristics of EMBs in their country. Because of this, the V-Dem survey is used to measure the study's three remaining independent variables: electoral integrity, EMB independence, and EMB capacity. V-Dem is the only established dataset that has measurements of electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs for each election year that this article examines. Other datasets like the Perceptions of Electoral Integrity (Garnett et al., 2024), the Electoral Learning and Capacity Building survey (Norris et al., 2016), and the Electoral Management Surveys (James & Garnett, 2023), only cover some of the election years surveyed by the CCS. Therefore, this article limits its analysis to the V-Dem dataset's country-level variables to prioritize having a larger sample size. To measure electoral integrity, V-Dem uses its electoral democracy index, which is based on five distinct indicators: freedom of association, clean elections, freedom of expression, elected officials, and suffrage. Electoral integrity is measured on an overall score of 0 to 100. Meanwhile, EMB independence and EMB capacity are measured on an overall score of 0 to 4. EMB independence is measured by the EMB's autonomy from government when it comes to the impartial application of administrative rules and election laws in national elections, whereas EMB capacity is measured by whether the EMB has the resources and staff needed to administer a well-run national election.

3.4. Control Variables

The control variables for this study are informed by the CPDS. The CPDS provides country-level data about national institutions and economic measurements. The analysis for this article considers the following country-level controls: whether the country is a federation (federalism), whether the country has a parliamentary or mixed system (system type), the country's effective number of parties (Laakso & Taagepera, 1979), and the percentage change of the country's real GDP from the previous year for that election year. These country-level control variables were chosen because different types of political institutions might impact SWD differently (van Ham et al., 2017) and perceptions of the economy can influence democratic satisfaction (Kim, 2009). For federalism, any country that was categorized as having either "weak federalism" or "strong federalism" was coded as a federal country. Because the CCS dataset only surveys countries with parliamentary systems (meaning these countries are either full parliamentary systems or mixed systems with

some parliamentary characteristics), the variable “system type” is recoded to identify whether a country has either a full parliamentary system or a mixed system (semi-presidential or hybrid). Because full presidential systems are not captured by the CCS, presidential systems are not included within the scope of this study. If cross-national data on politicians’ SWD in presidential systems becomes available, then future articles might consider whether these results change in presidential systems. Readers interested in seeing a table containing the complete list of the main variables for this study may consult Supplementary Materials B.

3.5. Empirical Models

To investigate whether politicians’ levels of SWD are influenced by electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs, a series of OLS regressions are estimated using the previously listed variables. The analysis covers 49 observations (49 elections across 21 countries). Each observation represents an election, consisting of an aggregation of politicians’ responses and country-level variables. However, due to missing responses in some elections for winning or losing, and politicians’ political ideology, some models contain fewer observations. Specifically, the model assessing the conditional effects of winning or losing (Table 2) uses 44 observations, while the model examining the conditional effects of politicians’ left-to-right political ideology (Table 3) uses 47 observations.

4. Results

4.1. The Effects of Electoral Integrity, EMB Independence, and EMB Capacity

In Table 1, the results of the linear regression of politicians’ level of SWD on electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs are shown. Each column adds a variable of interest to control for (EMB independence in column two, EMB capacity in column three, and the remaining control variables in column four). Overall, the adjusted R-squared indicates that the models adequately explain the variation in levels of politicians’ SWD in the countries being analyzed.

Table 1. Explaining politicians’ SWD.

	(1) Integrity	(2) Independence	(3) Capacity	(4) Controls
Electoral Integrity	0.03 (0.01)***			0.03 (0.01)**
EMB Independence		0.28 (0.16)*		−0.22 (0.20)
EMB Capacity			0.75 (0.20)***	0.58 (0.23)**
Federalism				0.19 (0.10)*
Mixed System				0.17 (0.09)*
Effective Number of Parties				−0.05 (0.03)*
GDP				0.04 (0.02)**
Constant	−0.18 (0.44)	1.54 (0.56)***	−0.29 (0.74)	−1.81 (0.96)*
N	49	49	49	49
adj. R-sq	0.160	0.025	0.219	0.394

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

The results confirm that politicians' SWD will be higher in countries with more electoral integrity (H1a) when other factors are held constant. As expected, the effect of electoral integrity on politicians' SWD is positive and statistically significant ($p < 0.01$ and $p < 0.05$) in both models. In the final regression with each independent and control variable included, politicians' SWD increases by 0.03 points ($p < 0.05$) along each point of electoral integrity on the x-axis (0 to 100). Furthermore, a multicollinearity test indicates that there is a low level of multicollinearity in the final model (mean VIF of 1.52). The substantive effect of electoral integrity is illustrated in Figure 1. The graph shows that levels of SWD are just under two out of four points for elections with a low level of electoral integrity (score of 70) while just above 2.5 for elections with a high score of electoral integrity (90).

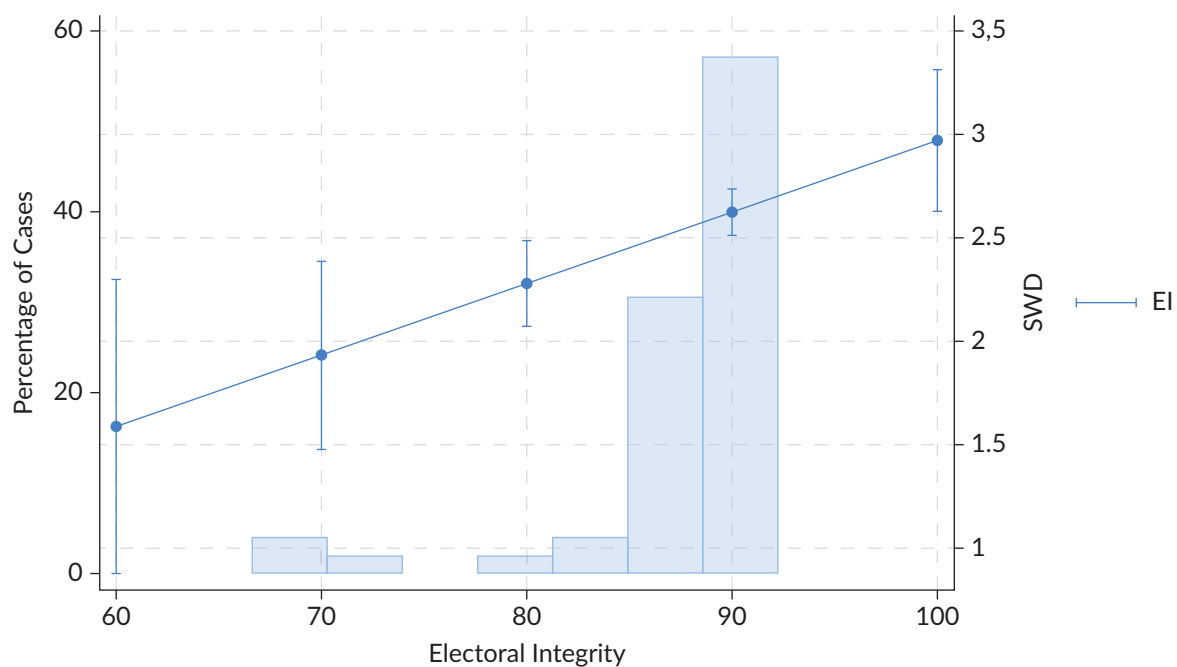


Figure 1. Predicted values of SWD across electoral integrity. Note: The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

Moving to the effects of the characteristics of EMBs on SWD, the results in column two of Table 1 indicate that EMB independence does not substantially influence politicians' SWD. While the effects of EMB independence on SWD are initially somewhat significant in column two ($p < 0.10$) when regressed individually, the effect is no longer significant once the remaining variables are added in column four. Therefore, H2 is not supported.

In contrast, the results for column three of Table 1 show that the effect of EMB capacity on politicians' SWD is positive and as expected, statistically significant ($p < 0.01$). The effect also holds when controlling for additional variables in column four ($p < 0.05$). This confirms that politicians' SWD will be higher in countries with EMBs that have greater resources (H3a).

4.2. The Conditional Effect of Winning/Losing

Next, the effects of the interaction between winning or losing on electoral integrity, and whether this interaction might influence politicians' levels of SWD (H1b) are examined. "Winners" are politicians whose

political party is part of the cabinet while “losers” are all other politicians in the sample. Two aggregate dependent variables are created to test whether the effect of electoral integrity is greater for winners than losers: the first is the mean of SWD among winners within each country-election, and the second is the mean of SWD among losers within each country-election. Each country’s average SWD for winners and losers are weighted to ensure that any political party is not over or underrepresented. This makes it possible to test for the effect of electoral integrity on the SWD of winners and losers respectively.

Table 2 replicates the same model of column four from Table 1, but for winners and then for losers. The model considers 44 elections instead of all 49 elections because in five country-level observations (Canada in 2008, Czech Republic in 2017, Greece in 2012, Iceland in 2016, and Romania in 2016) there were no responses from politicians whose political party formed cabinet (winners). However, even if these five observations are included, the overall effect of electoral integrity on winners’ and losers’ SWD does not change substantially (see Supplementary Materials C for the model with all 49 elections). The results in Table 2 show that while the effect of electoral integrity on winners’ SWD is not significant, electoral integrity is significant for losers ($p < 0.05$) and increases their SWD by a coefficient of 0.05. This goes against what was expected for H1b.

Table 2. The effect of electoral integrity on winners’ and losers’ SWD.

	(1) Winner	(2) Loser
Electoral Integrity	0.01 (0.01)	0.05 (0.02)**
EMB Independence	−0.08 (0.18)	−0.24 (0.24)
EMB Capacity	0.29 (0.25)	0.66 (0.29)**
Federalism	0.25 (0.11)**	0.15 (0.11)
Mixed System	−0.04 (0.11)	0.21 (0.10)**
Effective Number of Parties	−0.03 (0.03)	−0.05 (0.03)*
GDP	0.04 (0.02)**	0.03 (0.02)
Constant	1.42 (1.22)	−3.48 (1.96)*
N	44	44
adj. R-sq	0.159	0.411

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Figure 2 displays how levels of SWD for winners and losers change as the score of electoral integrity increases. When electoral integrity is low, losers are significantly less satisfied than winners on average. However, once electoral integrity is higher, losers have closer levels of SWD to winners, whereas winners’ SWD does not change substantially across electoral integrity scores. This implies that so long as politicians win, they are more satisfied with democracy, even if the elections in their country have lower electoral integrity. This finding differs from what occurs with citizens’ SWD and electoral integrity. In contrast, both citizens who won and lost value the absence of electoral fraud when it comes to their SWD (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), whereas politicians who won appear to be agnostic on electoral integrity, at least when it comes to their own SWD.

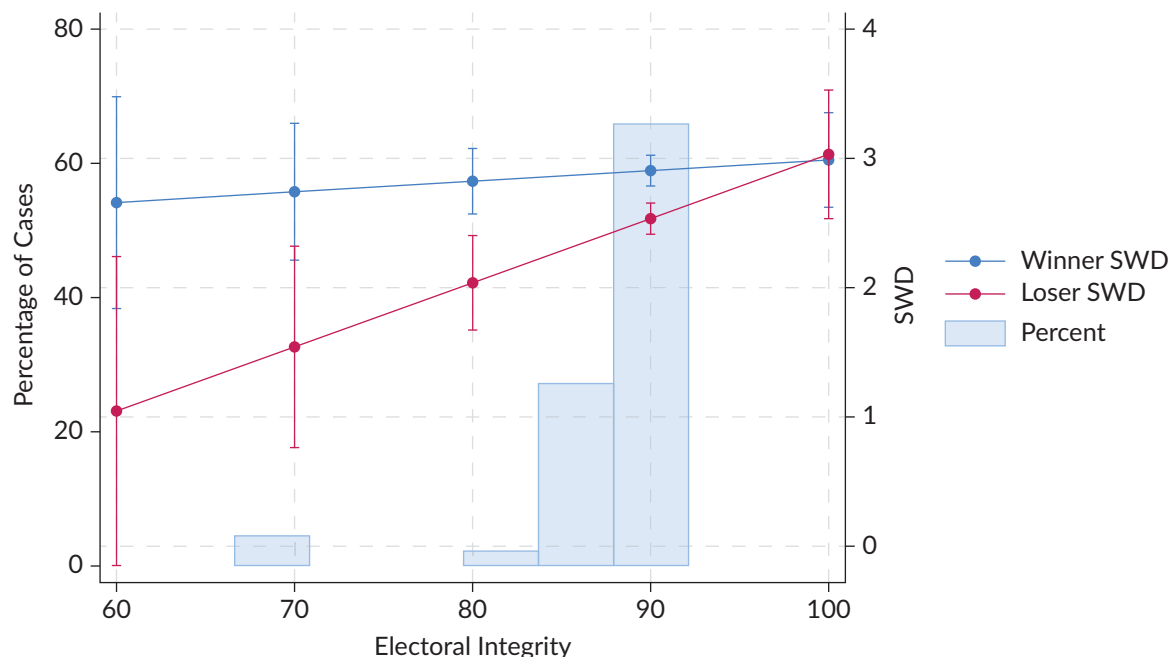


Figure 2. Predicted values of SWD across electoral integrity (for winners and losers). Note: The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

4.3. The Conditional Effect of Left-to-Right Political Ideology

The final model examines whether politicians' position on the left-to-right ideological spectrum influences the effect of EMB capacity on politicians' SWD. Politicians self-rank their ideological position on a scale from 0 (left) to 10 (right), with 5 being the ideological centre. This expectation is tested using the same method that was used for the conditional role of winning or losing. For these models, two aggregate dependent variables were calculated: the first is the mean level of SWD for politicians on the left (0–4), and the second is the mean level of SWD for politicians on the right (6–10). Because the rank of five is the exact cutoff point on the scale, politicians who self-placed at five were excluded from both measures since they represent the centre of the ideological spectrum. Even if politicians who self-placed at the rank of five are included, the results do not change substantially (see Supplementary Materials D for this model). Each country's averages are once again weighted to ensure any political party is not over or underrepresented. The model only contains 47 out of the 49 elections since political ideology is excluded from the surveys for Finland in 2007 and New Zealand in 2011. The effect of EMB capacity on SWD for left-wing and right-wing politicians is subsequently regressed.

The results in Table 3 indicate that while EMB capacity is not significant for politicians on the ideological left, it is significant ($p < 0.05$) for politicians on the ideological right. These findings reject the article's final expectation (H3b). Interestingly, this means that we should instead expect that in countries with EMBs that have greater resources, SWD will be greater for politicians on the ideological right. Figure 3 displays how levels of SWD change across the score of EMB capacity for politicians on the ideological left and right. When EMB capacity is lower, levels of SWD for leftist and rightist politicians are similar. While SWD increases for both politicians on the left and right as EMB capacity increases, it does not increase at a significant rate for politicians on the left, whereas it does for politicians on the right.

Table 3. EMB capacity on SWD for politicians on the ideological left and right.

	(1) Left SWD	(2) Right SWD
EMB Capacity	0.20 (0.32)	0.67 (0.31)**
Electoral Integrity	0.04 (0.02)**	0.02 (0.01)*
EMB Independence	−0.21 (0.24)	−0.12 (0.22)
Federalism	0.12 (0.10)	0.20 (0.11)*
Mixed System	0.15 (0.10)	0.15 (0.11)
Effective Number of Parties	0.01 (0.02)	−0.09 (0.04)**
GDP	0.03 (0.02)	0.04 (0.02)**
Constant	−1.39 (1.78)	−1.30 (0.86)
N	47	47
adj. R-sq	0.237	0.305

Notes: Standard errors in parentheses; * $p < 0.10$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

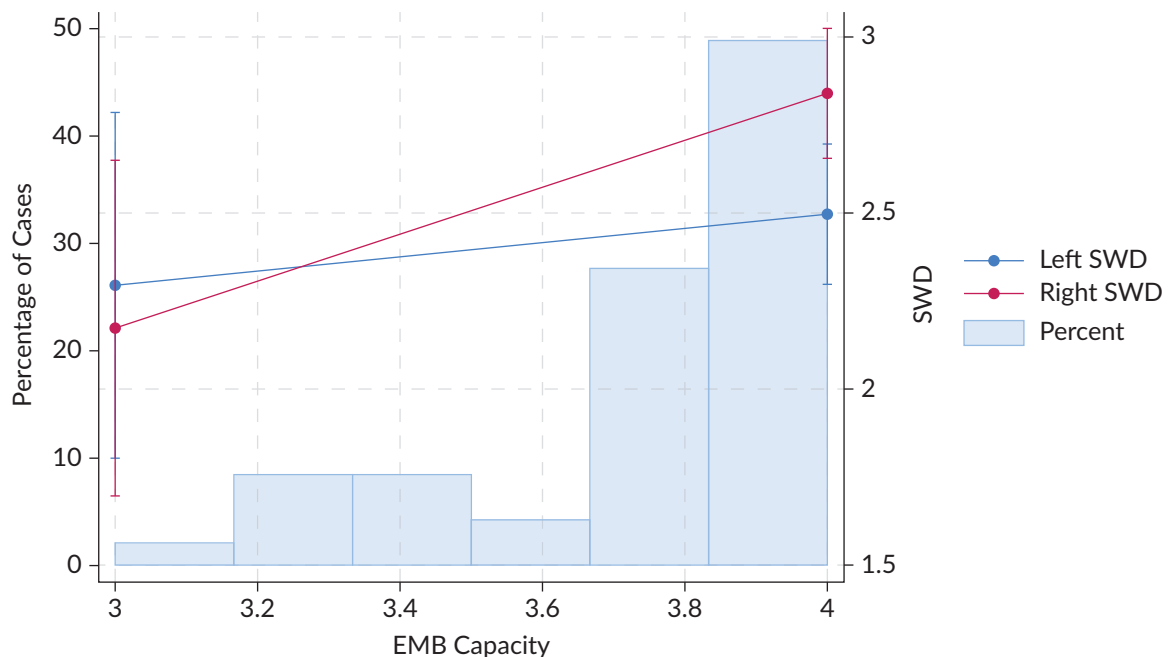


Figure 3. Predicted values of SWD across EMB capacity (for left-to-right ideology). Note: The rectangular bars represent the percentage of cases along the x-axis, while the vertical lines at each point represent 95% confidence intervals.

These findings are in direct contrast to what was expected. James's (2012) argument about politicians and voter turnout states that politicians on the right attempt to restrict voting procedures that increase turnout, while those on the left attempt to expand procedures that increase turnout. Because more resources result in better election procedures (which helps to expand voting procedures or access to the vote), it would be expected that those interested in having lower turnout would be more satisfied when EMBs have fewer resources. Interestingly, electoral integrity is significant ($p < 0.05$) for politicians on the left (coefficient: 0.04) while only somewhat significant ($p < 0.10$) for politicians on the right (coefficient: 0.02). While both electoral integrity and EMB capacity are important for free and fair elections, future work should continue to examine

the relationship between a politician's political ideology and which part(s) of the election process concerns them most.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This article serves as a starting point for developing theories about the relationships between politicians' SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs. It examined whether electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs affect cross-national levels of politicians' SWD. Overall, it finds that electoral integrity and at least one characteristic of EMBs influence cross-national levels of politicians' SWD. Because of the limited available data on politicians' perceptions of electoral integrity and the characteristics of EMBs, future research should build on this article by surveying politicians about these topics in conjunction with questions about SWD, to deepen our understanding of the mechanisms at work. These findings therefore serve as a starting point to help address a major gap in the SWD literature and have important implications for discussions on democratic stability. Both topics are highlighted by the article's key three findings.

First, levels of politicians' SWD are higher in countries with higher electoral integrity. However, the impacts of electoral integrity on politicians' SWD are not the same among all politicians. Specifically, when electoral integrity is lower in a country, politicians who lost the election have significantly lower levels of SWD than winners. When electoral integrity is higher in a country, losers' SWD increases. Politicians that won therefore have much higher levels of SWD relative to losers when electoral integrity is low. This result should concern readers: politicians care more about electoral integrity (in relation to their own SWD) when they lose, while politicians who win are not as substantially concerned about the way democracy is working in relation to the integrity of the election. Since low levels of electoral integrity negatively effects SWD for citizens regardless of winning or losing (Fortin-Rittberger et al., 2017), these results highlight a key difference between citizens' and politicians' SWD in the context of elections. Interestingly, this finding about politicians matches Fortin-Rittberger et al.'s (2017, p. 353) original rationale about winning being more important than electoral fairness for SWD. While this rationale is rejected when examining citizens, it holds for politicians, inferring that when politicians win, their commitments to electoral fairness are weaker than their equivalent citizens. This is important because politicians can influence institutional processes in their country (Friedman & Wong, 2008), yet winners in elections are less supportive of changes to institutions (Bowler et al., 2006). If politicians are less concerned about electoral integrity so long as they win, then they might (further) lack the incentive to change electoral processes when electoral integrity is low. This is not an issue when electoral integrity in a country is high but could make maintaining democratic stability more difficult when electoral processes are weaker since politicians that won would be less concerned about issues of electoral integrity.

The second key finding is that after considering the article's control variables, EMB independence from the government does not significantly influence the average level of SWD of politicians in the surveyed countries. Because there are contradictory theories in the literature about how an EMB's independence might affect politicians' confidence or trust in the election process (Estévez et al., 2008; Rosas, 2010), it may not be surprising that there are no significant results about the relationship between EMB independence and politicians' levels of SWD. Yet, there is also a convention among both practitioners and academics that having an independent EMB is part of the ideal of election management since it better enables election officials to impartially and neutrally administer elections (Garnett, 2022, p. 148; Mozaffar & Schedler, 2002,

p. 15). While the independence of EMBs may still be important administratively, it seems to matter less for SWD once other factors are considered. However, it is difficult to provide definitive reasoning to explain the lack of significant results given the available data. Future studies could therefore assess politicians' perceptions of their country's EMB(s) independence to better understand this relationship.

The third and final key finding of this article is that the level of politicians' SWD increases in countries with EMBs that have a higher capacity (greater resources) to administer elections. EMB capacity may significantly influence politicians' levels of SWD (in contrast to EMB independence) because the relationship between an EMB's capacity and the quality of the election processes is clearer (more resources means that the EMB has a higher capacity to prevent malpractice or electoral fraud). However, it is important to note that a politician's position on the left-to-right ideological spectrum influences the degree to which EMB capacity has a positive effect on their SWD. In contrast to what was expected from the literature, the effect of EMB capacity on SWD is greater for politicians on the ideological right than those on the ideological left (since the effect is not significant for politicians on the left). Future work could assess why EMB capacity might be more important for politicians' SWD on the right than those on the left.

In conclusion, while these findings serve as a starting point for examining the relationships between politicians' SWD, electoral integrity, and the characteristics of EMBs, more work must be done by assessing the individual opinions of politicians about these electoral determinants. More broadly, understanding these relationships is important for the study of democratic stability, especially as more countries experience some form of democratic decline. Because politicians can influence the views of citizens and the processes of democratic institutions, it is crucial that we better understand their attitudes towards both the electoral process and the way that democracy works in their country. Future research might also consider whether other democratic-related determinants like legislative processes, political institutions, and party politics, influence politicians' SWD. While these attitudes may not be concerning when representative democratic systems are working as intended, they can become harmful in cases where democratic processes begin to weaken or fail. In this critical moment for democracy, it is imperative that researchers (re-)examine the processes and institutions of democratic countries—this must also include a better understanding of the politicians that lead these systems.

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Conflict of Interests

Valere Gaspard is a part-time employee at Elections Canada. His views do not reflect those of his employer.

Data Availability

Replication files are available in the Harvard Dataverse: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/VUWCLV>

Supplementary Material

Supplementary material for this article is available online in the format provided by the author (unedited).

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