Blinded by Out-group Hatred. Why does Radical Party Entry Reduce its Voters' Satisfaction with Democracy?

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Abstract

This paper examines why the electoral breakthrough of radical parties further reinforces democratic dissatisfaction among their voters. Against the prevailing utilitarian framework, we argue that an affective response to the out-group instead of the in-group party results better explains changes in democratic evaluations under growing affective polarisation. To evaluate our theory, we combine observational, experimental and qualitative evidence from two studies of Éric Zemmour voters, the radical right candidate who disrupted the 2022 French elections. Our findings confirm that Zemmour voters became less satisfied with democracy after their first election and provide evidence of a negative affective response to the out-group (Macron) win as the driving mechanism. The qualitative analysis confirms the causal path from negative feelings toward the winner to questioning the democratic system. Contrary to representation theories, our paper suggests that the institutional inclusion of marginalised political groups may only exacerbate dissatisfaction in highly polarised contexts.

Keywords: Winner-loser gap; democracy; affective polarisation; mixed-methods

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Introduction

Might the institutional inclusion of radical parties reconcile their voters with democracy? This old question is ever more pressing as many radical parties have entered political institutions in Western democracies in recent years. To cite but a few, in 2017, the *Alternative für Deutschland (AfD)* was the first radical right party since post-war Germany to enter the *Bundestag.* Two years later, *VOX* entered the Spanish Congress of Deputies and became the third political force. In cases like the Netherlands, even more than one radical party (*PVV* and *FvD*) hold representation in parliament. However, recent findings suggest that despite considerable electoral success, new radical party voters become more dissatisfied after elections (Canalejo-Molero, 2024; M. Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Rooduijn et al., 2016) unless they win (e.g. Cohen et al., 2022). Since institutionalisation brings manifold political benefits, from increased visibility to the capacity to condition coalition or policy agreements (Dunn, 2012; Martin & Vanberg, 2020), why radical party voters become more dissatisfied with democracy afterwards remains unclear.

A large body of research indicates that elections should boost satisfaction with democracy (SWD), even among losers of elections, through the expressive benefits of participation and the utility of their (*in-group*) party results (for a review, see Daoust & Nadeau, 2023). However, recent evidence points to the role of affective polarisation conditioning this effect (Janssen, 2023; Ridge, 2020, 2022). We expand on these findings and argue that radical party voters' strong negative affects toward the mainstream *out-group* parties (Harteveld et al., 2021; Meléndez & Kaltwasser, 2019; Wagner, 2021) will condition their evaluation of the system after elections. If a despised party wins, it will diminish SWD among new radical party voters despite their electoral breakthrough. Thus, our argument provides a concise and flexible solution to the puzzle that elections tend to boost SWD among all but radical voters.

We test our argument in the setting of the 2022 French presidential election, which witnessed the emergence of the radical right-wing candidate Éric Zemmour. While competing for the first time, Zemmour and its platform *Reconquête*, obtained an outstanding 7.07% vote share, becoming the fourth most-voted candidate and surpassing the two traditional party candidates. Despite losing the first round against the incumbent Emmanuel Macron and the traditional radical right-wing candidate Marine Le Pen, this scenario rendered Zemmour a potentially crucial actor, even in the French majoritarian institutions. First, he supported the candidacy of Marine Le Pen and could eventually become part of her government if she won. Second, he could gain representation and become a vital opposition leader in the first national parliament without a clear majority of the presidential winner. Despite its

political potential, the out-group candidate Emmanuel Macron remained the most likely winner. Leveraging electoral uncertainty before the second round of the election, this setting provides a unique opportunity to test whether changes in SWD among new radical party voters are driven by the out-group rather than the in-group party results.

Our analysis combines two studies in a novel mixed-methods design which relies on representative survey data, an experiment, and a qualitative analysis of open-ended questions with an innovative social media recruitment strategy for hard-to-reach populations (Neundorf & Öztürk, 2021a, 2021b; Schneider & Harknett, 2019). With a representative panel survey, our first study establishes that Zemmour voters become less satisfied with democracy and display the strongest negative affects towards Macron's party following the election. In an original survey experiment conducted on the field between the first and second rounds of the election, study 2 shows that raising the salience of Macron's winning potential decreases SWD and increases negative affects towards Macron's party among Zemmour voters. In contrast, priming them with Zemmour's political benefits does not affect their evaluations of democracy. Finally, we triangulate our experimental results and disentangle the causal link between out-group negative affects and growing dissatisfaction with democracy through the qualitative analysis of an open-ended question about feelings toward the election results. This analysis shows that Zemmour's voters never refer to the political benefits associated with their successful entry into the system. Conversely, they are more likely to state that elections are rigged and blame, with affectively charged comments, the winning out-group party for its control over democratic institutions. Overall, these findings suggest that polarised radical voters will become less satisfied with democracy despite successfully entering the political system, as they will be blinded by their hatred toward the out-group party winner.

This paper contributes to our understanding of the political dynamics triggered by the irruption of radical parties and bridges the gap between three commonly alleged symptoms of the liberal democracy crisis, namely, democratic dissatisfaction, affective polarisation and the rise of radical parties. First, introducing an out-group logic to explain post-electoral changes in SWD provides a parsimonious solution to the puzzling negative effect of elections among radical party voters. Second, the findings suggest a self-reinforcing mechanism leading polarised voters to further polarisation and growing dissatisfaction when losing elections, regardless of their party performance unless winning (Cohen et al., 2022; Fahey et al., 2022; Haugsgjerd, 2019; Juen, 2023; Kołczyńska, 2022; Rooduijn & Slageren, 2022). Adding to recent evidence on the negative impact of affective polarisation on democratic support, this paper shows that negative partisan identity does not only increase the likelihood of accepting

illiberal reforms when in power (Graham & Svolik, 2020) or defying the electoral results when in opposition (Kim & Hall, 2023), but also impedes new party voters to engage as a result of entering the system. Whereas it has been largely theorised that the political inclusion of marginalised political groups may have a corrective function for representative democracy (Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012), these arguments have neglected the crucial role of out-group negative feelings among affectively polarised voters.

Elections, radical parties and SWD

Since as early as 1978, scholars have theorised the role of elections on democratic support (Ginsberg & Weissberg, 1978). Over the years, the accumulated evidence has confirmed two major findings. First, winners of elections express a higher degree of satisfaction with the political system than losers (Daoust & Nadeau, 2023). Second, those who participate in the election display a higher level of satisfaction than abstainers (Esaiasson, 2011; Kostelka & Blais, 2018; Nadeau & Blais, 1993). Overall, the main implication is that elections play a legitimising role, boosting satisfaction among participants differently across levels of party success and renewing system legitimacy for the subsequent electoral cycle.

These findings are often interpreted through a utilitarian lens (see Anderson et al., 2005, pp. 23–25). According to this interpretation, winners become more satisfied than losers because of the larger benefits associated with their electoral outcomes. In line with this logic, voters of major coalition partners become more satisfied than those of minor coalition partners, and voters of parties in parliament become more satisfied than those of parties that fail to obtain representation (Blais et al., 2017). Finally, even the latter group experiences an increase in SWD compared to abstainers, even if only because of the expressive benefits of voting (Kostelka & Blais, 2018). Patterns of cross-country variation provide support to this logic. For example, the winner-loser gap in SWD tends to be larger in majoritarian than in proportional systems, arguably due to the sharper distinction between winners and losers in their access to power (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Martini & Quaranta, 2019). Conversely, the gap tends to blur in elections where the winner is not immediately clear, such as in conditions of uncertainty or high fragmentation (Halliez & Thornton, 2022; Kostelka & Blais, 2018).

Nevertheless, the utilitarian explanation falls short of explanatory power for radical party voters. For example, Hooghe and Dassoneville (2018) demonstrate that radical (protest) voters in Belgium display even lower levels of SWD after elections. Rooduijn and his colleagues (2016) find a similar pattern among populist party voters in the Netherlands. Most recently,

4

Canalejo-Molero (2024) uses post-electoral survey data from more than 70 democratic elections worldwide to show that obtaining parliamentary representation decreases SWD among radical party voters. Although none of these studies provides definitive evidence on the mechanisms, they challenge the generalizability of the utilitarian argument altogether. Since institutionalisation is associated with a series of political benefits (Dunn, 2012; Martin & Vanberg, 2020), it remains unclear why radical party voters become less satisfied following elections.

The in-group/out-group framework of changes in SWD after elections

The literature has suggested several mechanisms to explain the puzzling decrease in SWD among radical voters. For example, Hooghe and Dassoneville (2018) suggest a psychological mechanism, while Rooduijn and his colleagues (2016) suggest an anti-elitist rhetoric explanation. However, none of these hypotheses is supported by accompanying evidence. In contrast, Canalejo-Molero (2024) provides evidence that only radical party voters with strong *pre-existing* anti-establishment attitudes become more dissatisfied after elections, contrary to the earlier theories. This indicates that only voters who already disliked mainstream parties are negatively affected by the election results. Therefore, it is suggested that the victory of a disliked party causes the decrease in SWD.

The notion that SWD is affected by the out-group party outcomes resonates with recent evidence of the moderating effect of affective polarisation on changes in SWD after elections. First, Ridge (2020, 2022) uses rich cross-sectional data to show that voters with negative affects toward the winner display lower SWD than regular losers. Second, Janssen (2023) uses panel data and growth models to identify a decrease in SWD among losers of the 2015 UK election driven by affectively polarised voters. We expand on these findings to argue that the out-group party win can have a *direct negative effect* on SWD such that it counteracts the positive impact of the new (in-group) party results.

Therefore, we incorporate the role of party identity and growing affective polarisation (Iyengar et al., 2012; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021) with the utilitarian in-group logic of changes in SWD (Anderson et al., 2005; Blais et al., 2017). Our argument posits that post-electoral changes in SWD are a function of two factors. The first is the utility of the in-group party outcomes, which correlates positively with SWD. The second is an affective-based out-group factor that varies by the degree of negative affects toward the winner and negatively impacts SWD. For clarity, let us assume a simple scenario with two differentiated blocks and a di-

chotomous winner-loser status so that when group A is the winner, group B is the loser and *vice versa*. In this scenario, if the degree of affective polarisation between the blocks is low, the out-group factor would be close to zero, and changes in SWD would depend exclusively on the utility of the outcome. Hence, winners would become more satisfied than losers after elections, and losers would still become more satisfied than abstainers. However, if the degree of affective polarisation is high, changes in SWD among losers would be negatively affected by the salience of the out-group block win, so that the net change can be negative despite relative electoral success.

Since radical party voters are among the most affectively polarised (Harteveld et al., 2021; Meléndez & Kaltwasser, 2019; Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021), they will be prone to experience an SWD decrease unless winning the election. This implication is consistent with a growing body of evidence that radical party voters express stronger democratic support after entering the government coalition (Cohen et al., 2022; Fahey et al., 2022; Haugsgjerd, 2019; Juen, 2023; Kołczyńska, 2022; Rooduijn & Slageren, 2022). Whenever the in-group party wins, the utilitarian logic should prevail regardless of the strength of negative affects towards the out-group. In contrast, an out-group party win will reduce SWD among radical party voters when facing a defeat.

We draw on these implications to derive two sets of testable hypotheses. While we cannot directly manipulate the results of an election, we can leverage a period of electoral uncertainty to increase the salience of similarly likely electoral outcomes. In this way, we can introduce variation in the perceived success of the in-group while minimising the variation in the perceived success of the out-group and *vice versa*.

The first set of hypotheses tests the utilitarian in-group logic. In our setting, the in-group candidate could benefit from becoming a government coalition partner or playing a minor but potentially crucial role in parliament. Both potential outcomes should increase the utility of the election results. Therefore, we can test whether raising their salience boosts SWD. The following hypotheses[1] capture these expectations:

> **Hypothesis 1a**: Increasing the salience of the in-group party's representation potential will be associated with a positive change in SWD.

> **Hypothesis 1b**: Increasing the salience of the in-group party's coalition-making potential will be associated with a positive change in SWD.

In addition, we can provide evidence of the utilitarian mechanism by comparing the relative effect of each outcome. The utilitarian logic implies that positive changes in SWD should be larger the higher the utility of the in-group electoral results. Being in government, even

as a minor coalition partner, should allow a larger influence on policy decisions than an opposition role in parliament. Therefore, the SWD increase associated with the coalition-making potential should be higher.:

> **Hypothesis 2**: Increasing the salience of the in-group party's coalition-making potential will be associated with a larger positive change in SWD than increasing the salience of the in-group party's representation potential.

The second set of hypotheses focuses on the affective out-group logic. In our setting, the out-group candidate is a potential election winner. Given that the in-group candidate supporters are affectively polarised, increasing the salience of its likely win should decrease SWD. The following hypothesis captures this expectation:

> **Hypothesis 3**: Increasing the salience of the out-group party's winning potential will be associated with a negative change in SWD.

Furthermore, we can provide evidence of the underlying mechanism. According to our theory, the out-group candidate's win should decrease SWD by provoking a negative affective response among the supporters of the in-group losing candidate. Although we cannot test this mechanism directly, we can provide indirect evidence by testing some of its implications. Specifically, we can test whether increasing the salience of the out-group party win elicits more explicit negative feelings towards it:

> **Hypothesis 4**: Increasing the salience of the out-group party's winning potential will be associated with stronger negative feelings towards the out-group party.

The case of the 2022 French presidential election and Éric Zemmour's *Reconquête*

We test our expectations in two studies using a mixed methods approach that builds on the unique contextual setting of the 2022 French presidential elections. In particular, we focus on supporters of the emerging radical right party *Reconquête*, led by Éric Zemmour. This specific case and the study of *Reconquête* voters are particularly suited to test our in-group (utilitarian)/out-group(affective) expectations. This party made a sudden electoral and institutional breakthrough (1) but lost the presidential elections (2) and is supported by an affectively polarised group of voters, with strong negative out-group effects directed to the mainstream party winner *La République en Marche* (3).

Our study takes place in the French semi-presidential and majoritarian system in the 2022

elections[2]. Presidential and parliamentary elections are held sequentially and close to each other every five years following a two-round, first-past-the-post system, and were held last April and June 2022. The President is directly appointed via direct suffrage from voters according to a majority rule, while the "second" head of the executive, the Prime Minister, as well as the government, are appointed by the President, but subjected to the Assembly's confidence vote. In other words, in the case of an opposition majority in the Assembly, a "co-habitation" executive emerges where the opposition Prime Minister and National Assembly hold most governing powers.

Given these features, Éric Zemmour's electoral success in presidential elections made him a potentially crucial political player despite losing the first round, which should boost its voters' utilitarian considerations. Only four months after announcing his candidacy, his party successfully entered the French electoral system by obtaining about 7% of the vote share in the first round of the French presidential elections. Regardless of this short campaign and the absence of the backing of a long-standing organization, this candidate outperformed the established Socialist Party and *Les Républicains*. With Marine Le Pen's first-round victory, together with the increasing fragmentation of the French political space, Zemmour's party, therefore, had the potential to become a key partner in government or the Assembly despite his electoral loss. Hence, while the majoritarian semi-presidential system sharpens the winner-loser distinction in France, the doors to becoming a governing partner were still open for Zemmour's *Reconquête* after the first round of the elections.

In addition to these factors, Éric Zemmour's party and its supporters make a particularly well-suited case to explore the affective out-group hypotheses. As Figure 1 shows, Zemmour supporters in our sample[3] display strong *"[..] positive in-group affect and negative out-group affect towards parties"* (Wagner, 2021, p. 1), corresponding to the textbook definition of affective polarization. Following patterns of affective polarization in multi-party systems, these strong negative affects are directed not only toward the other side of the political spectrum (Mélenchon's party: *La France Insoumise (LFI)*) but mainly towards the out-group mainstream party, *La République en Marche (LREM)*, and his leader, Emmanuel Macron. Given this intense out-group hatred toward the winner, Zemmour's supporters should be particularly sensitive to the increased salience of Macron's victory.
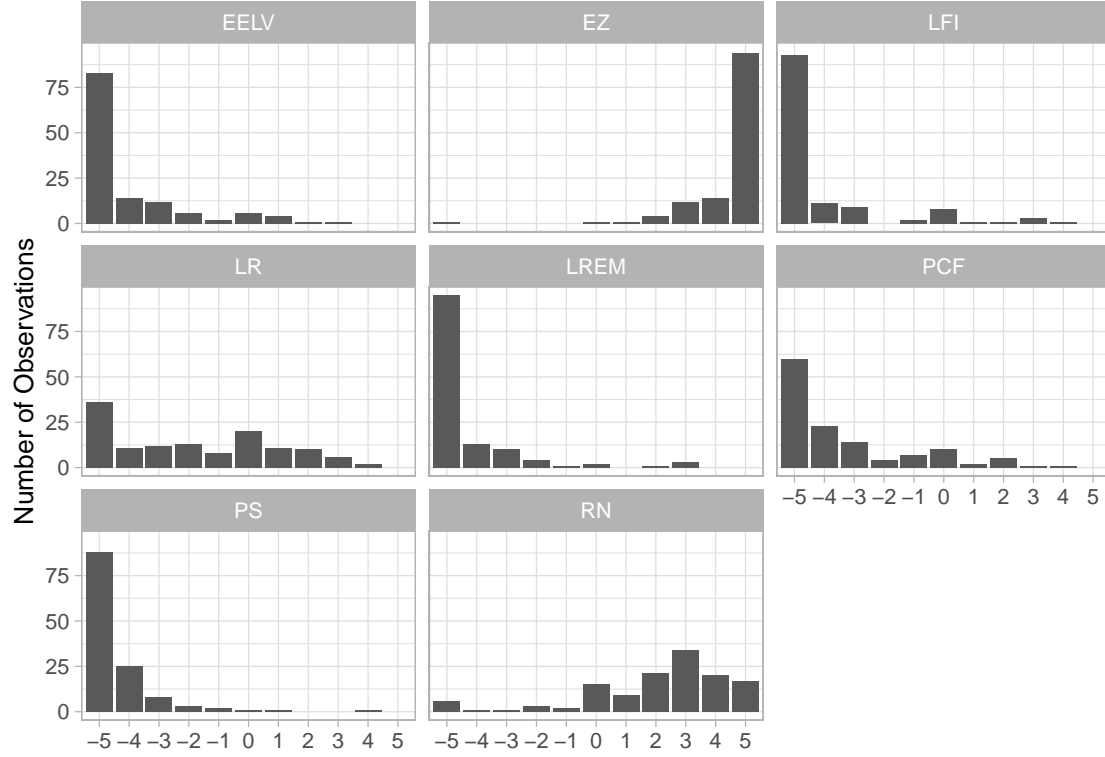
Figure 1: Zemmour Voters Like-Dislike Scales for Each Party

We combine two studies to test our hypotheses and a mixed-methods approach to triangulate our findings. Study 1 builds on the French Electoral Study (FES), a publicly available representative panel survey with waves conducted before and after the French presidential elections. In this first study, we establish differences in attitudes among different groups of voters after learning the results of the French presidential elections. In particular, we expect the affectively polarised group of Zemmour voters to be particularly dissatisfied with democracy and to display comparatively strong negative feelings toward Macron's party.

To formally test our hypotheses, Study 2 relies on an original panel survey with a convenience sample of Facebook users that purposefully oversamples Zemmour supporters, with the first wave conducted right before the first round of the presidential elections and the second wave between the first and second rounds. Leveraging the uncertainty of the inter-round period, we embedded an experiment in the second wave of the survey that manipulates the salience of the utilitarian in-group benefits against the out-group potential win. In addition, we included an open-ended question about feelings after the election results, which we analyze qualitatively to explore the causal path between out-group affect and lower SWD, and triangulate our quantitative findings. Figure 2 presents a timeline with the main periods

9

of data collection and key events that justify our design. We describe and proceed with the analysis of these two studies in separate sections below.
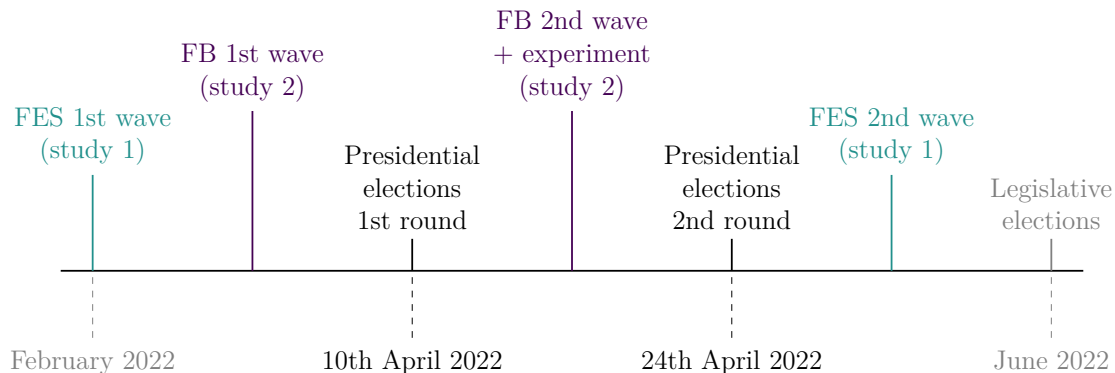

Figure 2: Timeline of studies and significant events

Study 1 - The elections effect on SWD and party affects

Radical voters were found to become less satisfied after entering democratic institutions (Canalejo-Molero, 2024; M. Hooghe & Dassonneville, 2018; Rooduijn et al., 2016). In this study, we first establish that the French case is no exception to this rule. Our argument posits that affectively polarised voters who support these parties tend to focus not only on the utilitarian benefits of their electoral results but also on the victory of a disliked out-group. Consequently, we expect Zemmour voters to dislike more the winning party and become less satisfied with democracy compared to other voters, regardless of their successful entry into the system on their first election.

We test these expectations using the 2022 FES panel. This panel data provides a representative sample of French citizens interviewed online in five waves from November 2021, when Éric Zemmour was already officially a candidate for the elections, to June 2022, following the legislative elections. We focus on the two closest waves before and after the two rounds of the presidential election, in February 2022 and May 2022, and assess the change of SWD across different groups of voters.

We use two indicators to measure our first dependent variable of SWD change. The question "*According to you, the French democracy works... [Very well-Not well at all]*" was used as the pre-election indicator, and "*In general, are you satisfied or dissatisfied with the working of the French democracy? [Very-Not at all]*" as the post-election indicator. Although the wording of the two questions differs slightly, they tap into the same concept of satisfaction

with the *working* of democracy, they correlate highly ($corr = 0.72$), and both provide an or-
dered four-category scale, alleviating potential concerns regarding the comparability of these
two indicators. We compute the change in this pre-post indicator as our dependent vari-
able. To test our expectations regarding the existence of an out-group affective mechanism,
our second dependent variable is the feeling toward the winning party, measured by a feeling
thermometer toward Emmanuel Macron's party ranging from 0 to 10 in the post-presidential
election wave.

Our main independent variable is vote choice, with each of the four first parties in the
first round, as well as abstainers and blank/null voters as a separate category, while we
group voters of other parties as the reference category. We model alternatively SWD change
or feelings toward Macron's party against vote choice, controlling for socio-demographic
variables of gender, age, education, income and employment status, and the political controls
of left-right position and political interest. We also control for pre-election levels of SWD to
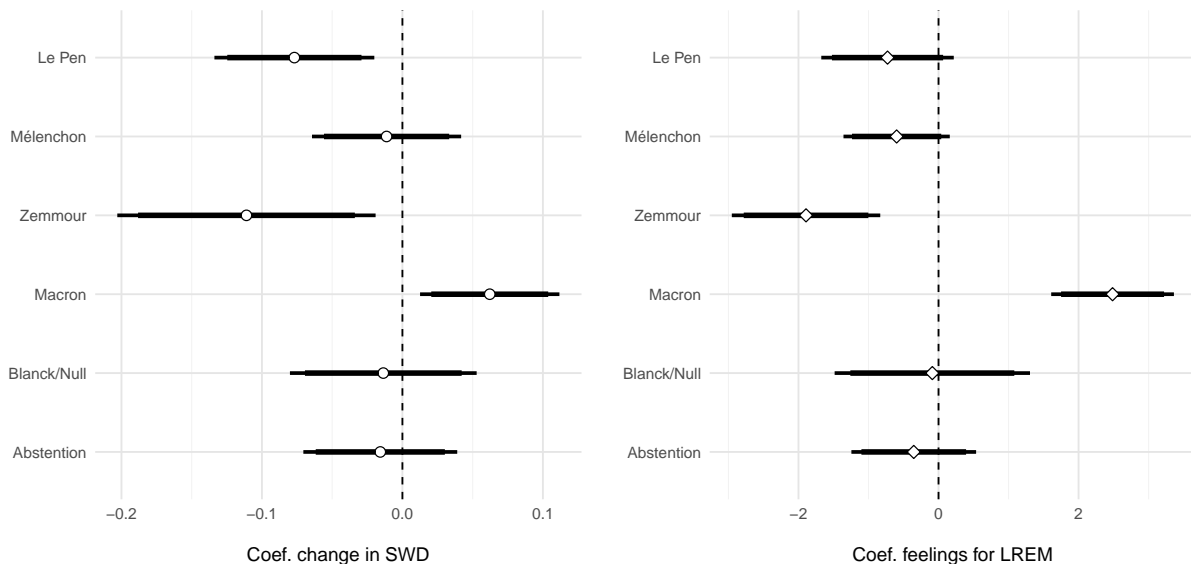cancel out potential floor and ceiling effects[4].

Figure 3: Vote choice effect on SWD (left) and feelings toward LREM (right) coefficient plot

Figure 3 displays the main results of this analysis. Following our expectations, we find that
Zemmour voters become less satisfied with democracy following the presidential elections
compared to voters of other candidates than the first four contenders, despite their preferred
party and leader winning 7% of the presidential election vote and that the prospects of en-
tering the National Assembly remained open. Compared to this reference group, satisfaction

11

with democracy decreased by 0.11 points on the SWD change scale that we normalised to run from -1 to 1. Interestingly, there are no discernible differences in SWD change between abstainers and voters of other parties. By contrast, Marine Le Pen voters, who faced a sharp defeat in the second round of elections, also become less satisfied with the system, although the point estimate suggests a smaller decrease than Zemmour voters. Finally, supporters of Macron became more satisfied with democracy compared to this reference group, as the winner-loser gap literature would predict.

Our expectations regarding negative affects towards the winner are equally confirmed. As the right-hand side of the figure displays, Zemmour voters seem to dislike *LREM* party the most after the presidential elections, by about a statistically significant 2-point difference on a 10-point scale compared to the reference group of other voters. It is worth noting that the first two losers of elections (Le Pen and Mélenchon voters) do not significantly differ from abstainers, or other voters in that regard. Finally, and intuitively, Macron voters like their candidate the most following his election win.

These findings support our expectations that Zemmour voters become less satisfied with democracy following a defeat compared to other voters, despite entering the system. In addition, we show that these radical voters differ significantly from other groups regarding the intensity of their negative out-group affects against the winner. These results provide preliminary evidence that an out-group affective mechanism may be at play, explaining higher SWD among radical voters. While the representative nature of this survey data strengthens the generalisability of our findings, they do not allow for the test of our argument relative to the election *activation* of out-group negative affects explaining growing dissatisfaction with democracy. Moreover, this panel data is a hard test for the in-group/utilitarian mechanism, as the second wave of our panel follows Marine Le Pen's defeat in the second round of the presidential election. Zemmour voters may, therefore, be less likely to perceive the utilitarian benefits of the system as one of the channels to become a coalition partner in the French system (via the appointment by Marine Le Pen as president) vanished following Macron's victory. To address these drawbacks, we experimentally manipulate the salience of the in-group/out-group success among Zemmour voters during the inter-round period in the following study.

Study 2 - Mixed-methods evidence of the out-group hatred mechanism

In our second study, we pre-registered a vignette experiment that manipulates the frame presenting the first round of the election outcomes[5] (Canalejo-Molero & Le Corre Juratic, 2022). This frame aims to vary the salience of the in-group (new radical right party candidate: Éric Zemmour) or the out-group (mainstream party potential winner: Emmanuel Macron) perceived success following the first round of the elections. As a reminder of our hypotheses, we expect that increasing the salience of the in-group party success should enhance satisfaction with democracy (H1), especially when focusing on the executive compared to the legislative power (H2). However, we also expect that increasing the salience of the out-group party win will decrease SWD (H3) by increasing negative feelings towards the winner (H4). We complement this experimental analysis with a qualitative analysis of an open-ended question to explore the causal mechanism between out-group affect and dissatisfaction with democracy. We start by describing our recruitment strategy before moving to the description of the design and result of each experimental and qualitative analysis sequentially.

Recruiting Éric Zemmour's supporters through the Facebook Advertisement System (FAM)

Our second study required recruiting a convenience sample of potential radical right (Zemmour) voters. However, this group falls within the category of a hard-to-reach population for at least two reasons. First, individual ideological preferences are not typically observable in any official census or public administrative registry. Second, radical ideological views are more likely to be hidden in survey responses because of social norms (Bursztyn et al., 2020; Valentim, 2021). Henceforth, we adopted a recruitment strategy to infer radical right preferences from publicly available observable characteristics.

Following previous recruiting strategies from sociological and medical research (Guillory et al., 2018; Pötzschke & Weiß, 2021), we rely on the Facebook Advertisement Management (FAM) system to gather our sample. This service offered by the Meta company enabled us to display a series of ads linking to our survey on Meta networks (Facebook and Instagram). This service's advantage is getting access to a range of Meta networks users while micro-targeting users on their self-selected publicly observable characteristics.

Our strategy followed two steps. First, we designed the ads to appeal to radical right voters, and Zemmour voters in particular, using keywords and images appealing to the national-

ist values corresponding to the political platform of these parties and their supporters[6] (L. Hooghe et al., 2002; Kriesi et al., 2008; Mudde, 2007). More specifically, all our ads mentioned the French "Nation" or strong feelings toward the "Country" 's future. In addition, all our chosen pictures accompanying the ad displayed citizens holding French flags. Figure 4 displays an example of one of our sample ads. The exact content of the message and picture varied to target different groups and increase the variability of our sample in terms of gender and age.

Second, we used the Meta targeting tool to select groups of users based on public Meta users' information on specific media outlets' interests. We designed our targeting objectives toward Meta users who liked right-leaning media outlets and TV shows, such as RTL radio, where Éric Zemmour worked as a columnist prior to his candidacy, or the TV show *"Touche pas à mon poste"*, which was shown to over-represent radical right candidates in terms of broadcasting time (Sécail, 2022).
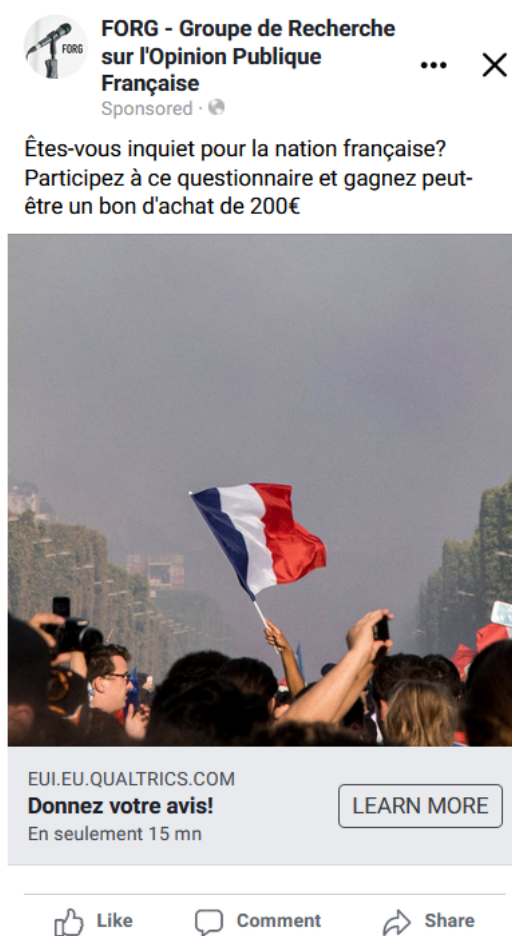

Figure 4: Facebook ad Example

One limitation of this strategy is that it focuses on self-selected social media users who may differ from the average population on a series of underlying characteristics. In addition, a specific threat to our sample is that the FB users who decide to participate in a study on social issues might be more politically interested and actively engaged than the average radical right voter. The interpretation of the results should bear this limitation in mind. Regardless, this strategy was successful, and our sample of Zemmour voters mirrors those of a distinct representative sample on observable characteristics of gender and age while slightly over-representing more educated and extreme voters[7]. In addition, our sample over-represents radical right supporters compared to the French population (52%), including 34% of prospective Zemmour voters.

Contrary to our expectations, however, a sizeable share of our sample (16%) also self-positioned on the extreme left and planned to vote for Jean Luc Mélenchon in the first round. In addition, we experienced high (non-systematic) attrition in the second wave[8], resulting in a total of 370 participants with only 123 supporters of Zemmour who were assigned to Block I. Table 1 describes the sample and the descriptive characteristics of the three blocks of voters that we distinguish[9]. As they show, our convenience sample is dominated by right-leaning male respondents, typically older and more educated than the average French citizen.

Table 1: Summary of descriptive statistics

block	Zemmour's voters			Le Pen's voters			Others		
Variable	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD
Gender	123			64			174		
... male	94	76%		44	69%		98	56%	
... female	29	24%		20	31%		76	44%	
... other	0	0%		0	0%		0	0%	
Age	123	47	19	64	55	16	176	48	17
Education	123			64			175		
... Primary school or none	1	1%		9	14%		4	2%	
... Middle School	7	6%		2	3%		3	2%	
... Professional certificate	17	14%		12	19%		22	13%	
... High School	31	25%		12	19%		26	15%	
... University first-cycle	25	20%		17	27%		31	18%	
... University second-cycle	42	34%		12	19%		89	51%	
Left-right	122	9.4	1.8	60	9.3	1.8	164	4.9	3.1

Manipulating the in-group/out-group success: the experimental design

Our vignettes presented a text describing the electoral ranking of the first four candidates and stating the two winners of the first round of the elections: Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen. While the control condition only displayed this descriptive information, our four treatments complemented it with an additional statement.

The first two treatment conditions (T1a, T1b) included a statement emphasising the prospecting success of the in-group candidate (Zemmour) and the utilitarian benefits of his entry. While both vignettes positively emphasised his result, the first focused on the government coalition potential (T1a). In contrast, the other emphasised the representation potential in the assembly following the upcoming legislative elections (T1b). As the French electoral system is majoritarian and semi-presidential, we test the in-group hypothesis twice to strengthen the efficiency of our experiment by making the type of representation and power control accessible to losers of the presidential elections more explicit. Differentiating between these two types further allows disentangling whether voters are sensitive to the variation in the utility associated with each outcome.

The third treatment condition (T2) tests our out-group hypothesis. It underlines the likelihood that the out-group candidate (Macron) will win the second round of the elections, which would make him the head of the government. Finally, we added a placebo condition to rule out alternative explanations for the negative effect of elections on SWD among radical party voters. The goal of the placebo is twofold: to rule out the possibility that any negative frame could lead to negative changes in SWD and to rule out a "normative" alternative hypothesis. Drawing upon the literature on social norms and the radical right (Bursztyn et al., 2020; Valentim, 2021), the placebo condition emphasises the mainstream censorship of the new radical right candidate. The underlying expectation is that elections might decrease SWD among radical right voters because they increase the salience of the social norm against them. Table 2 displays the specific text in the control condition, followed by the statements presented for each treatment group[10].

Table 2: Description of the vignettes by treatment condition

Condition	Text
Control	The results of the first round of the presidential elections were known already the 10th of April. Among the competing candidates, Emmanuel Macron and Marine Le Pen passed to the second round. The candidate Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the candidate Éric Zemmour were the third and fourth most voted candidates, respectively.
T1a In-group Government *(Zemmour version - Blocks I and III)*	+ Some people highlight that the candidate **Éric Zemmour** obtained particularly **good** results, especially because **the winner of the second round may include him in the new government**.
T1a In-group Government *(Le Pen version - Block II)*	+ Some people highlight that the candidate Marine Le Pen obtained particularly **good** results, especially because **she has a great chance of becoming the winner of the second round**.
T1b In-group Parliament *(Zemmour version - Blocks I and III)*	+ Some people highlight that the candidate **Éric Zemmour** obtained particularly **good** results, especially because **with the confirmation of these results in the legislative elections, he could play a central role in the National Assembly**.
T1b In-group Parliament *(Le Pen version - Block II)*	+ Some people highlight that the candidate **Marine Le Pen** obtained particularly **good** results, especially because **with the confirmation of these results in the legislative elections, she could play a central role in the National Assembly**.
T2 Out-group Government	+ Some people highlight that the candidate **Emmanuel Macron** obtained particularly **good** results, especially because **he has a great chance of becoming the winner of the second round**.
Placebo Social Norm	+ Some people highlight that the candidate **Éric Zemmour** obtained particularly **worrying** results, **especially because of his controversial opinions during the campaign**.

The experiment was conducted within the second wave of a panel survey. The first wave of the panel enabled us to collect data on the respondents' socio-demographic characteristics, their baseline level of attitudes towards democracy and institutions, partisan identification and affective polarisation, and vote intention in the two weeks prior to the first round of the elections. Voluntary participants were then contacted by email to participate in the second survey wave. Using the vote intention indicator, we blocked the randomization into three groups of party supporters: Zemmour, Le Pen, and other party supporters. Within each block, respondents were exposed either to the control or one of the four treatment conditions.

Blocking on the voting preferences maximizes the number of respondents per treatment condition to secure sufficient power of analysis for our population of interest. In addition, we use the two other blocks as placebos, where we do not expect a similar effect of our treatments on SWD and out-group negative affects. In the first placebo group of "other"

party supporters, voters are heterogeneous, including a minority of supporters of the potential winner, Emmanuel Macron, and are not as polarized as the group of Zemmour voters[11]. This block was presented with the same vignettes as the "Zemmour" block as a pure placebo. By contrast, Le Pen's voters differ because their party won the first round of the elections. This group, as opposed to Zemmour's supporters, should not be as affected by the out-group win due to the larger utility derived from their victory. We thus modified this block's vignettes to replicate the experiment on a group of radical right *potential winners.* The in-group government condition (T1a) emphasizes Marine Le Pen's potential to win the second round of the election (instead of becoming a coalition partner), while in the in-group parliament condition (T1b), we replace any reference to Zemmour with Le Pen. A diagram of the experimental design is displayed in Figure 5.
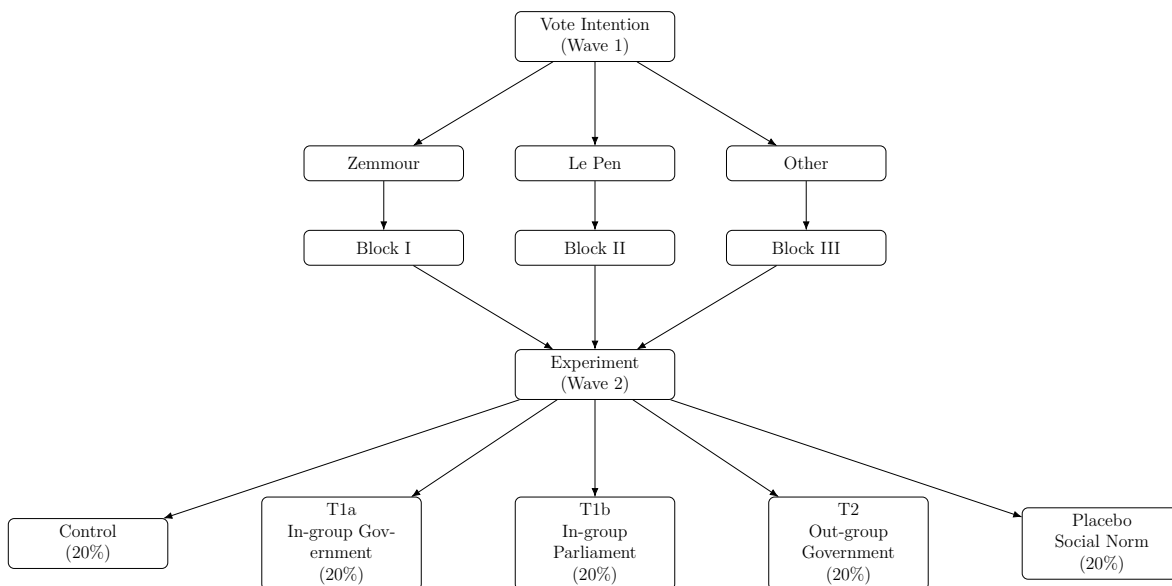

Figure 5: Experimental design diagram

The vignette was followed by the measure of our two dependent variables: SWD and party affects[12]. SWD is measured with the answer to the question 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in France?', whose answer ranges from 0 to 10, 0 means 'not satisfied at all' and 10 means 'completely satisfied'. Change in SWD measures the difference between the post-treatment score and the first wave response (*range = -10 to 10*). Our second dependent variable measures changes in out-group affects. Given that our expectation regarding the effect of electoral outcomes on party affects concerns the in-group-loser and out-group-winner division and not the overall changes in party affects within a multi-party system (Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021), our dependent variable is the change on a 10-point (-5 to 5) like-dislike feeling thermometer for the mainstream out-group party

(Emmanuel Macron's *LREM*). Again, change in affects measures the difference between the second and first wave score (*range = -10 to 10*).

Experimental results and discussion

We test our hypotheses with two main models. The first model tests hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 by regressing the change in SWD on a categorical treatment variable. The second model tests hypothesis 4 by regressing the change in feelings towards Macron's party, *LREM*, on the treatment. We use OLS regression to estimate the Average Treatment Effect (ATE), with the control group's average change serving as the baseline. Figure 6 plots the coefficients and confidence intervals associated with each treatment condition. The left-hand side figure shows the ATE on the change in SWD, while the right-hand side figure shows the ATE on the change in feelings towards *LREM*.

Figure 6 indicates that, in line with the out-group hypothesis (H3), increasing the salience of the potential mainstream party's win negatively affects SWD. Respondents primed with the high likelihood of Macron—the out-group—winning the election display an average change in SWD close to -1.5. This is a substantive effect, comparable in size to the winner-loser gap in SWD in low-quality democracies (Nadeau et al., 2021). Furthermore, this effect is consistent and statistically significant at a 90% confidence level across a wide range of specifications[13]. The effect of a potential Macron win also holds when controlling for the perceived likelihood of Zemmour winning the second round. In fact, this variable has a non-significant coefficient with a positive sign, suggesting that voters who believed Zemmour could win the election are not more dissatisfied with democracy after the first round results. Therefore, we can rule out concerns that electoral expectations are driving the effect[14]. The estimates are noisy due to the small sample size (*n=123*). However, the robustness of the effect despite the small sample size reinforces our confidence that the effect size is genuine and substantially large. To further alleviate underpowering concerns, we ran an out-of-sample replication using the pilot study, which produced similar conclusions[15]. Bearing these considerations in mind, we confidently conclude that priming Zemmour's voters with Macron's potential victory reduces SWD.
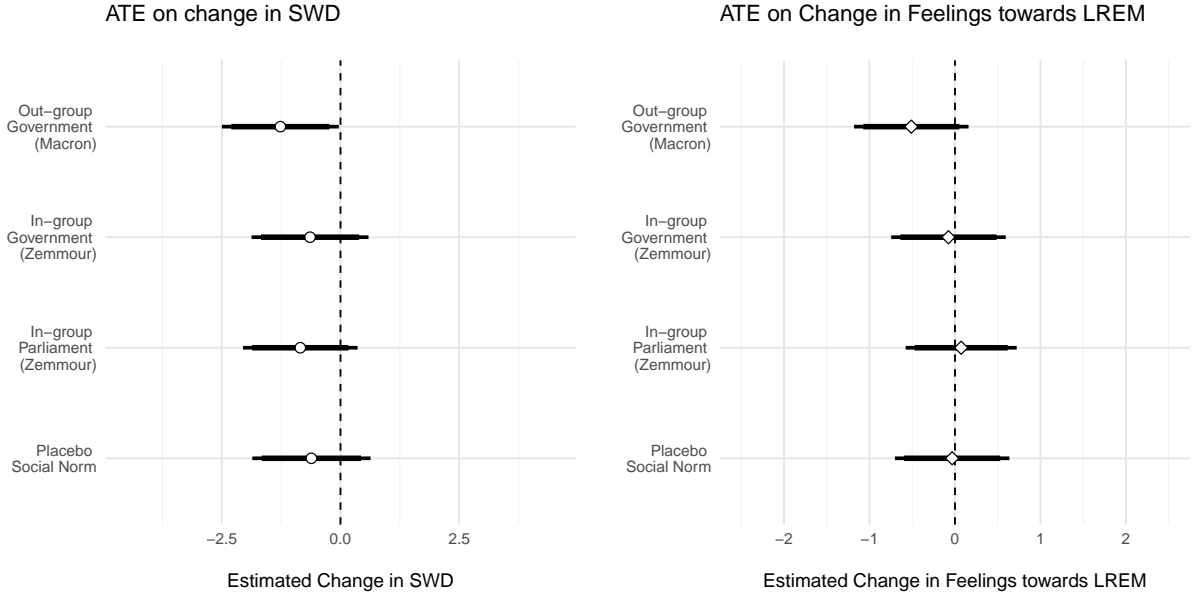
Figure 6: ATE on change in SWD (left) and in feelings towards LREM (right)

Turning to the out-group negative affect mechanism, we find that priming Zemmour's voters with Macron's potential win also has an effect of almost -0.5 points on feelings towards Macron's party (H4). While not statistically significant at conventional statistical thresholds in this model specification, the estimate remains consistent across models and is statistically significant at a 90% confidence level when controlling for socio-demographic variables[16] and adding robust standard errors. Again, the results must be interpreted with caution due to the low precision of the estimates, but the consistent and sizeable effect increases our confidence in its robustness. This is particularly striking when considering that the pre-treatment average affect towards Macron's party is -3.24 on a scale from -5 to 5.

Conversely, none of the utilitarian hypotheses (H1a and H1b) receives any empirical support. Respondents primed with either the potential of Zemmour to be part of the government or to play a decisive role in parliament do not report statistically significant differences in SWD change. Furthermore, the estimated coefficients are always negative, meaning in the opposite direction of our expectations, which speaks against the possibility that the lack of statistical significance is due to underpowering. While the manipulation checks suggest that these two treatments increased the perception of Zemmour as a winner, this is not enough to boost SWD. Thus, we can conclude that priming in-group success does not boost SWD for Zemmour voters, contrary to the utilitarian hypothesis. Overall, these results lend support to an affective-driven out-group mechanism explaining the decrease of SWD among radical party voters. The victory of a party towards which they hold strong negative feelings

seems to reduce their satisfaction levels despite their own party's electoral breakthrough and further reinforces their negative feelings towards it.

Three more pieces of evidence reinforce our confidence in our interpretation of the findings and help to set out the scope conditions of the argument. First, the placebo condition has no significant effect on change in SWD or feelings towards *LREM*. Although the coefficients associated with this condition are always negative, the potential negative effect of displaying a normative reaction censoring the *Reconquête* platform is not strong enough to significantly reduce SWD. Altogether, this evidence suggests that the cause of the seemingly negative effect of elections on democratic satisfaction is the mainstream win itself.

Second, the replication of the experiment on Le Pen's voters suggests that the negative effect of the potential out-group win is not strong enough to reduce SWD among potential radical party *winners*. It must be acknowledged that this sample is significantly smaller (*n=64*), and some of the pre-treatment socio-demographic characteristics are not wholly balanced[17]. Therefore, only the specifications that include the control variables arguably identify the ATE and are presented here[18]. Despite these limitations, the replication provides suggestive evidence about the scope conditions of the argument. As displayed in the left-hand side plot in Figure 7, neither the in-group nor the out-group success treatments significantly affect change in SWD among Le Pen's voters. These results suggest that affectively polarised voters do not experience any significant change in SWD because of utilitarian reasons unless they clearly win. Similarly, the out-group win does not significantly affects change in SWD unless facing a defeat.
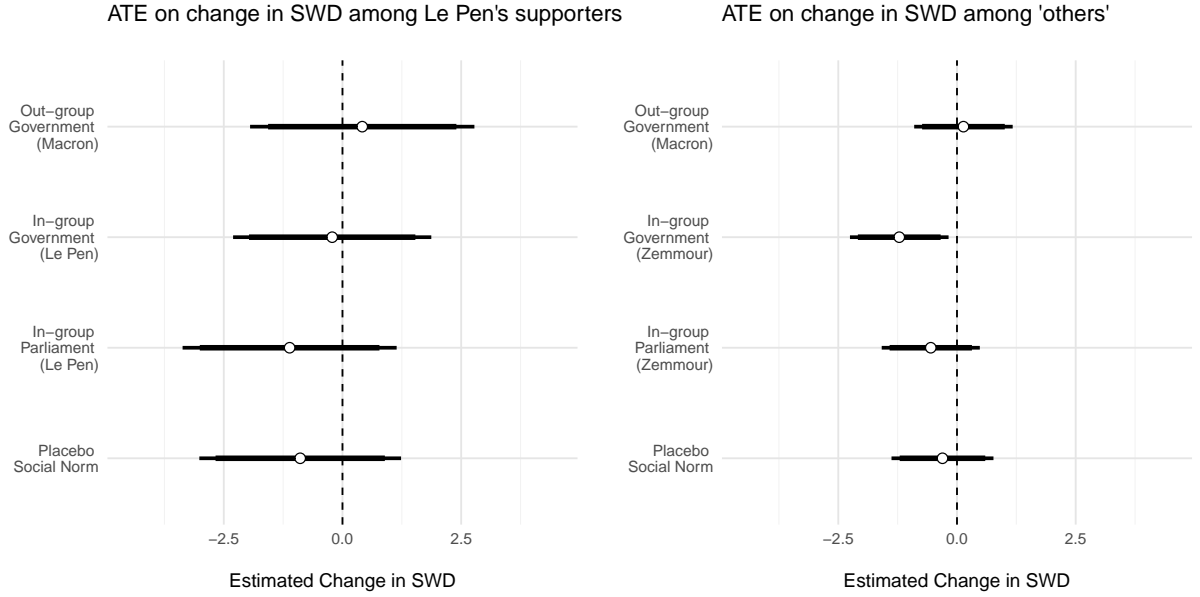
Figure 7: ATE on change in SWD among Le Pen's supporters (left) and 'others' (right)

Finally, the replication of the experiment on the "others" group provides an even stronger case for the prevalence of the affective out-group logic among polarised voters, even beyond radical parties. This group is mainly composed of Melenchon (35.79%) and Macron supporters (18.18%) that share one feature in common: strong negative feelings against the out-group Éric Zemmour and his party[19]. The right-hand side plot in Figure 7 displays the coefficients associated with each treatment condition for this block. In this group, the respondents primed with the potential win of Macron's party, the controversial takes of Zemmour, or the possibility that he plays a crucial role in parliament do not experience any significant effect either. However, those respondents primed with the possibility that Zemmour becomes part of a future coalition government display a consistently significant negative effect on change in SWD.

Overall, the quantitative analysis of the experiment points to two main conclusions. First, the utilitarian in-group logic fails to predict changes in SWD in a context of electoral uncertainty, at least in majoritarian systems. Second, an affective out-group logic plays a substantially bigger role than utility on changes in SWD under electoral uncertainty and high affective polarisation. In order to triangulate our experimental findings, in particular regarding the prevalence of the out-group affect causal mechanism, we rely on the qualitative analysis of an open-ended question that follows the experimental intervention. This strategy also allows us to move beyond SWD as our main dependent variable and disentangle its meaning in the context of Zemmour voters after the 2022 French election. The following section details our

approach.

Disentangling utility and affect qualitatively: methodological approach

To further explore the mechanisms at play and to triangulate our findings, we conducted a qualitative analysis using respondents' answers to an open-ended question. At the end of the survey, respondents were asked: *"Finally, in one or two sentences and using your own words, could you describe your feelings regarding the results of these elections?".*

Triangulating our findings qualitatively is particularly well-suited for identifying mechanisms. Using an open-ended question with a broad scope of respondents' "feelings" enables strengthening the validity of the results. Through their answer, respondents can freely express anything they consider most salient and relevant to them, including elements not related to our expectations. In other words, if the out-group affective mechanism is prevalent in these answers, this would support our out-group hypothesis as opposed to alternative mechanisms. Finally, as both party affects and satisfaction with democracy are treated as dependent variables and located after the treatment vignette, the experiment can only provide evidence of the co-occurrence of post-treatment changes, while our theory suggests a mediating relationship. A qualitative analysis has the potential to uncover the full causal path that links both phenomena. Hence, by exploring whether and how the different concepts are related in our respondents' answers, a supplementary qualitative analysis permits us to overcome the limitations implicit in the experimental design. Finally, it allows us to explore the substantive meaning of decreasing democratic satisfaction in voters' own words.

Our analytical strategy builds upon the following three expectations. First, if an affective out-group logic holds, we would expect to find more answers mentioning the out-group party and its leader (Macron and *La République en Marche*) charged with negative affects, rather than positive evaluations of the in-group party (Zemmour's *Reconquête*) and references to his performance as expected by the utilitarian logic. Second, if Zemmour voters become more dissatisfied with democracy because of this affective mechanism, we would expect that some of this expression of out-group negative affects should be related to negative evaluations of the democratic system.

To explore whether these open answers are in line with these two expectations, we adopted a systematic coding approach of all 370 open survey answers using three coding categories. A "feeling" code (1) is used to describe the main feeling(s) expressed by respondents in their answers. This code included pre-defined subcategories of feelings and emotions associated with

out-group negative affects according to the literature, such as "anger", "disgust-loathing", and "fear-anxiety" (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2018; Reiljan, 2020). A "group" code (2), within which any party reference and its associated evaluation or affects (positive or negative) tone was included. Finally, we included a "democracy evaluation" code (3), gathering all answers mentioning the working of democracy. This deductive codebook was complemented iteratively during the qualitative coding process using an inductive approach to allow alternative mechanisms to emerge from the qualitative data. Practically speaking, other feelings (such as "fatalism" or "hope") and non-party groups (in particular "the media", "French people", or "the extremes") mentioned by respondents were integrated into the codebook as subcategories. The resulting final version of the codebook and the corresponding number of answers to each of these codes can be found in the supplementary materials[20].

To analyse these coded segments, we qualitatively compare the answers of the Zemmour supporters block to the two placebo groups. We expect Zemmour voters to focus their answers and feelings towards the mainstream out-group and express more clearly negative evaluations, feelings and affects towards them compared to the two placebo blocks. The following section describes our findings.

Qualitative triangulation of the affective mechanism: results and discussion

Our experimental findings showed that regardless of the relative electoral success of Éric Zemmour's party, neither his coalition nor representation potential increases SWD among his supporters. In contrast, the emphasis on the out-group party victory leads to more dissatisfaction with democracy and stronger negative feelings towards the mainstream party leader. Overall, the qualitative evidence provides further support for these findings.

The most striking evidence speaking against a utilitarian mechanism is the absence of any satisfaction regarding these elections and the overwhelmingly negative feelings expressed by Zemmour voters. The most commonly expressed feelings (present in about 30% of Zemmour supporters' answers) are a form of disappointment, as well as a form of fatalism, given that the upcoming second round of these elections reproduced the outcome of the 2017 presidential elections. When looking at the sources of these feelings, the most often cited cause of these feelings among Zemmour supporters is Macron's victory, as this series of answers illustrates[21]:

Q1: *"A great frustration to find a duel Macron Le Pen in the second round. The absence of a sanction vote against Macron."*

Q2: *"Disappointed not to see Reconquête in the 2nd round and to see Macron*

qualified"

Q3: *"Deeply disappointed that more than 25% of the voters voted for Macron after 5 terrible years for France"*

By contrast, over the 123 open answers, none mentions Zemmour's results as an electoral success, and none but one answer mentions the 1st round victory of Marine Le Pen and her party as a promising result for *Reconquête*'s weight in the political system. While some may mention Zemmour and his party in a positive light when mentioning his ideas or his campaign, the lack of utility derived from his electoral performance is particularly visible through the absence of "hope" or "satisfaction" regarding the results. This is especially striking when compared to Le Pen supporters' answers, which also display very negative feelings but comprise more hopeful and satisfied comments compared to Zemmour voters.

Beyond being almost exclusively negative, some specific feelings and evaluations of these elections tap more directly into the concept of out-group negative affects as identified by the literature (Iyengar et al., 2012; Mason, 2018). For instance, many respondents also express feelings of disgust, anger, or anxiety regarding the out-group party leader and his victory, as the following excerpts show:

Q4: *"I am disgusted that Macron is in the second round of the presidential election after all the dirty deals he has done."*

Q5: *"Disappointing, Macron is in the second round, 9 million French people vote for this sinister character. They should be made to pay for it, and make them pay dearly."*

Q6: *"Scary, after 5 years of violence and lies to a level like never known so many people vote for Macron"*

To be sure, the mainstream party out-group and their leader, Macron, are not the only source of these negative feelings and targets of negative affects. Zemmour supporters occasionally mention another out-group and its electoral success is associated with worry or disgust: the radical left out-group represented by Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party. However, as the coding table in Appendix C1 shows, these references are less frequent in Zemmour supporters' answers compared to the overwhelming mentions of Macron and his party. Respondents, therefore, focus on the out-group party who won the elections.

In addition to parties and leaders, other groups were mentioned in respondents' comments on elections. The most important alternative source of negative feelings and evaluations comes from blaming "the media" and their "polls". While this might not seem to relate to our

expectations immediately, the more fine-grained qualitative analysis of these answers reveals that these references often connect negative evaluations of the winning mainstream party and general criticism of the democratic system, opening the black box of lower SWD. These open answers support our expectation that Zemmour voters tie together dissatisfaction with democracy and the out-group party victory. About 30% of Zemmour supporters make some criticism of the democratic process[22]. Among those, many criticise the result, the electoral process, and the existence of - at least- a bias advantaging the mainstream party winner with media help. At worst, respondents suggest that the democratic electoral process is "rigged" and illegitimate, which is the main criticism of democracy made by Zemmour supporters.

> Q8: *"Rigged non-democratic election confiscated by the media subjected to the billionaire friends of Macron"*
>
> Q9: *"A media lockdown orchestrated by the outgoing president"*
>
> Q10: *"Given the fervor of the meetings of Éric Zemmour I thought he would be in the second round and I wonder if the results are not manipulated to make Macron elected."*
>
> Q11: *"Considering the media pressure and the pro"Macron" polls I am very bitter because everything is truncated and not at all unbiased"*

Overall, this qualitative analysis supports the experimental findings and shows how an affective response against the out-group win overcomes any utility gain from the electoral results. Respondents tie an out-group negative feeling to dissatisfaction with democracy, notably through perceived control of the system via the media. This may seem paradoxical to some, as Zemmour himself gained his own notoriety by his numerous appearances as a journalist and columnist in the French media.

Comparing these answers to the other two blocks of respondents confirmed this distinctive pattern among radical, polarised and losing voters. As mentioned earlier, even if showcasing almost as many negative affects toward Emmanuel Macron, the answers from Marine Le Pen supporters display more hopeful and enthusiastic statements about her candidate and the elections, in accordance with her greater winning potential in the upcoming second round. Second, they do not link the out-group party negative affects, with his control of the media, "rigged" elections, or expressions of general dissatisfaction with democracy as much as Zemmour voters do. Regarding the other parties' supporters block, composed in great part by *LREM* and *LFI* party supporters, they express some polarised feelings toward the radical right out-group, especially in terms of feelings of fear and anxiety given their electoral success. Focusing on Mélenchon's supporters, another radical loser group, shows that they

also express negative feelings about the electoral process and the working of democracy. Unlike Zemmour voters, however, this criticism rarely spills over to claims that the overall system is rigged, while more focus is put on more specific constitutional and electoral rule criticisms in accordance with the *LFI*'s campaign for a new Constitution.

To summarise, the qualitative evidence shows further support for an out-group, affective mechanism. Without prompt, the Zemmour block spontaneously expresses negative out-group feelings toward Macron and his party in an open-ended question about the election results. More importantly, many respondents link these negative affects with the idea that elections and the system are rigged. Their underlying shared understanding of the election was that Macron had full control of the system and the election outcome by controlling and manipulating the media. Other groups of party supporters do not link these ideas together, including other radical and polarised voters who lost elections, such as Mélenchon's supporters. However, our findings also suggest that Marine Le Pen voters may be subject to similar mechanisms in the case of defeat. Her block of supporters displays almost as much negative affect towards Macron as Zemmour's block and surprisingly little positive evaluation of her or the system's performance, even after winning the first round of presidential elections. Overall, both the experimental and qualitative evidence in our second mixed-methods study points toward the importance of the out-group negative affects in shaping satisfaction with democracy for radical voters following elections.

Conclusion

Polarised voters of radical parties are more dissatisfied with democracy after successfully breaking into the system. Our findings from two mixed-method studies provide a consistent explanation for this puzzle: what matters for these voters is that their most hated opponent wins elections - not that the democratic process successfully integrates them into the system. Using the sudden emergence of the radical right party *Reconquête* in the 2022 French presidential election, we show that its already polarised supporters display even more negative feelings towards the winner Emmanuel Macron after the election. As a result, they primarily focus on these negative affects while evaluating the functioning of the democratic system and reflect them in their overall degree of satisfaction. By contrast, experimental and qualitative evidence reveals that the political benefits brought by their breakthrough are not taken into consideration when evaluating democracy in the electoral context.

In line with a growing body of evidence (Cohen et al., 2022; Fahey et al., 2022; Haugsgjerd, 2019; Juen, 2023; Kołczyńska, 2022; Rooduijn & Slageren, 2022), our analysis also suggests

that only winning the election may serve to reconcile radical voters with the democratic system. Le Pen voters, who by the time of our experiment were still likely to win the contest, do not express higher dissatisfaction when primed with the likely victory of Macron. In contrast, our panel data analysis reveals decreasing SWD after losing the second round of the election, too. Finally, "other" voters, whose main common feature is strong negative affects towards Zemmour's *Reconquête*, also express higher dissatisfaction when framed with the possibility of Zemmour integrated into a radical right winning coalition in government. Further research should explore the scope conditions of our argument beyond polarised radical party losers. One raising concern is that, for highly polarised voters beyond radical parties, election defeats always decrease democratic satisfaction, regardless of their own party results.

By providing consistent evidence of an out-group affective mechanism shaping the effect of electoral outcomes on SWD, our findings align with recent evidence that calls the utilitarian logic into question (e.g., Tilley & Hobolt, 2023). Still, we must highlight some limitations. First, the French political context is a specific majoritarian and semi-presidential system, which may reduce the perceived utility of entering the political system without winning the elections, eventually affecting the credibility of our treatment manipulation. In particular, the prospect of coalition-making or significant weight within the national assembly may seem too optimistic or far in time for voters of a loser party. Still, the inter-round uncertainty has provided us with some leverage to manipulate the perceived success of each party. Furthermore, the sharp winner-loser distinction of the French majoritarian system has allowed us to test the out-group effect in a parsimonious manner.

Another limitation is the specificity of the qualitative data we rely on for our third study, which does not enable us to take a full-fledged interpretative or comparative approach across groups of voters. The open answers were constrained in terms of length, limiting the possible linkages and mechanisms more elaborate answers from our respondents would have allowed. However, the short length of these answers invited respondents to focus on their more salient feelings, reinforcing the strength of our conclusions. Thus, despite their limitations, our combined qualitative and quantitative studies offer robust and comprehensive evidence supporting our argument of an out-group affective-based effect on SWD.

Overall, this paper contributes to the literature on democratic support by emphasising the role of out-group identities in moderating more utilitarian considerations about the corrective role of representation for disengaged voters (Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). While affective polarisation has been argued to enact support for illiberal policies among winners (Graham & Svolik, 2020) and defiance of the electoral results among the opposition losers (Kim & Hall, 2023), this paper proposes another channel through which

dissatisfaction with democracy and affective polarisation reinforces each other, namely, impeding new party voters to engage after breaking into the system. Thus, the integration of emerging radical parties may not be the cure to this vicious circle. On the contrary, it may feed further affective polarisation and threaten the legitimacy of democratic systems in the long run. Ignoring entirely the benefits of entering the political system democratically on your first elections and questioning its legitimacy because of hatred toward your political opponent could weaken democratic stability, as accepting electoral (mis)fortunes is an unconditional element of the democratic game (Anderson et al., 2005). Our findings thus urge us to find tools to reduce negative partisan affects and enhance the visibility of the political benefits brought by political representation alone, reducing the political weight of winning and governing in voters' minds.

Acknowledgements

Funding

Notes

[1]Table A1 in the supplementary materials summarises our hypotheses and expectations. Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 3 are preregistered while hypotheses 2 and 4 are exploratory and were not part of our pre-analysis plan.

[2]Table A5 in the appendix summarises the 2022 presidential election candidates and scores.

[3]Our data collection strategy is explained below in the Study 2 section "Recruiting Éric Zemmour's supporters through the Facebook Advertisement System (FAM)". A summary of descriptive statistics of our sample of Zemmour supporters is in Table B1 in the supplementary materials.

[4]Detailed results of all the model specifications are displayed in Appendix F.

[5]The pre-analysis plan of the experiment is registered in EGAP through OSF and is available at https://osf.io/a4fby.

[6]Table A2 in the supplementary materials summarises our micro-targeting strategy.

[7]See the descriptive statistics of our sample across blocks in Appendix B1.1 and the representative sample of Zemmour supporters in the 2022 French Electoral Survey (FES) in Appendix B1.2.

[8]Our novel approach led to a large attrition of participants in the second wave. Despite a financial incentive for participants of both waves (via a voucher lottery), only 370 out of the 1199 first-wave participants completed the second wave and participated in the experiment. We identify at least three reasons behind our large attrition rate. First, some respondents did not provide the email necessary for recontact. Second, among those who were contacted by email, many categorized our message as spam. Finally, we forcefully restricted the survey completion period of the second wave to less than two weeks to match the period spanning between the first and second rounds of the election. Despite concerns of underpowering, an *ex-post* power analysis in Appendix D7 suggests that we only fell by half of the necessary respondents to identify the true effect of our main treatment 80% of the time.

[9]These groups correspond to the three experiment blocks: self-reported Zemmour supporters (block I), self-reported Le Pen supporters (block II), and self-reported supporters of any other party or abstainers (block III).

[10]All the vignettes are displayed in Table A4 in the supplementary materials.

[11]See the like-dislike distribution of the other two blocks in Figure B1 in the supplementary materials.

[12]Following the treatment vignettes, we also included questions measuring the vignettes' comprehension and the perceived success of each party as a manipulation check. The text comprehension check shows no significant differences in respondents' perceived difficulty. The manipulation check showed that the two pro-in-group treatment conditions increased the perception of Zemmour as "one of the winners of the election", thus raising its perceived success. Instead, the out-group treatment fails to pass the manipulation check. A deeper exploration of this variable ("Macron is among the winners of the election") reveals that most respondents answered affirmatively to this question regardless of their experiment condition (mean = 3.69 in a scale from 1 to 5), suggesting ceiling effects that hide the true effect of our manipulation. See Appendix A5 for the exact wording of these questions and Appendix D3 for their analysis.

[13]Detailed results of all the model specifications are displayed in Appendix D4 and plotted in Appendix D5.

[14]In addition, Figure B2 in the supplementary materials shows that, even though Zemmour supporters are more likely to believe that Zemmour will pass the first round of the election compared to the rest of the respondents, more than 60% of Zemmour supporters in our sample still hold correct beliefs about the possibilities of Zemmour winning. Additionally, we replicated all the specifications controlling for this variable to mitigate any remaining concerns about the possibility of an indirect effect of our treatment through disconfirming expectations. The results in Table D4 of the supplementary materials reassure us that the ATE of priming Zemmour's supporters with the potential of Macron winning is independent of pre-electoral expectations and holds either way.

[15]Appendix E displays a description of the pilot study and the estimated ATE of our treatment on SWD using the pilot study sample. The main result is that priming about Macron's win, even if hypothetical, reduces Zemmour's SWD.

[16]Detailed results of all the model specifications are displayed in Appendix D4.

[17]Figure D2 in the supplementary materials plot The covariate balance across experiment blocks.

[18]Detailed results of all the model specifications are displayed in Appendix D4 and plotted in Appendix D5.

[19]See the like-dislike distribution of the other two blocks in Appendix B2.

[20]For more information on the qualitative codebook schema, see Appendix C1.

[21]Selected quotes always show the full answer. The authors' translation from French was assisted by the DeepL software.

[22]See Appendix C1.

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