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

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10 Jan 2024

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 polarization. To evaluate our theory, we combine observational, experimental and qualitative evidence from a sample of Éric Zemmour voters, the emerging radical right candidate who disrupted the 2022 French elections. Our findings confirm that Zemmour voters became the least satisfied with democracy after the elections 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 marginalized political groups may only exacerbate dissatisfaction in highly polarized electoral contexts.

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

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Introduction

Might the institutional inclusion of radical and populist parties serve to reconcile their voters with democracy? This old question is ever more pressing as radical and populist parties have institutionalized through many 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 populist and radical party voters become more dissatisfied after elections (M. Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Rooduijn, Van Der Brug, and De Lange 2016; Canalejo-Molero 2023) unless they win (e.g. Cohen et al. 2022). Since institutionalization is associated with manifold political benefits, from increased visibility to the capacity to condition coalition or policy agreements (Martin and Vanberg 2020; Dunn 2012), why radical and populist party voters become more dissatisfied with democracy remains unclear.

A large body of research indicates that elections should boost satisfaction with democracy (SWD), even among losers of elections, by highlighting the benefits of participation and the utility of their (*in-group*) party results (for a review, see Daoust and Nadeau 2023). However, recent evidence points to the role of affective polarization conditioning this effect (Ridge 2020, 2022; Janssen 2023). We expand on these findings and argue that radical party voters' strong negative affects toward the mainstream *out-group* parties (Harteveld, Mendoza, and Rooduijn 2021; Meléndez and 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 the considerable benefits brought by the *in-group* party breakthrough. Thus, our argument provides a concise and flexible solution to the puzzle that elections tend to boost SWD among all but radical and populist 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 system. 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 three 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 (Schneider and Harknett 2019; Neundorf and Öztürk 2021a, 2021b). With a representative panel survey, our first study establishes that Zemmour voters become the least 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, study 3 triangulates our experimental results and disentangles 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. It 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 polarized 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 winning elections.

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 polarization 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 populist and radical party voters. Second, the findings suggest a self-reinforcing mechanism leading polarized voters to further affective rejection and growing dissatisfaction when losing elections, regardless of their party performance if not winning (Cohen et al. 2022; Fahey, Allen, and Alarian 2022; Haugsgjerd 2019; Kołczyńska 2022; Juen 2023; Rooduijn and Slageren 2022). Adding to recent evidence on the negative impact of affective polarization on democratic support, this paper shows that negative partisan identity does not only increase

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

Elections, radical parties and SWD

Since as early as 1978, scholars have theorized the role of elections on democratic support (Ginsberg and 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 and Nadeau 2023). Second, those who participate in the election display a higher level of satisfaction than abstainers (Esaiasson 2011; Nadeau and Blais 1993; Kostelka and Blais 2018). Overall, the main implication is that elections play a legitimizing 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, 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, Morin-Chassé, and Singh 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 and 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 and Guillory 1997; Martini and 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 and Thornton 2022; Kostelka and Blais 2018).

Despite the soundness of the utilitarian explanation, it falls short of explanatory power for populist and radical party voters. For example, Hooghe and Dassoneville (2018) demonstrate that populist party 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, Canalejo-Molero (2023) 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 institutionalization is associated with a series of political benefits (Martin and Vanberg 2020; Dunn 2012), 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 populist and radical voters. For example, Hooghe and Dassoneville (2018) suggest a psychological mechanism to maintain cognitive consistency with the party's anti-elite platform. Similarly, Rooduijn and his colleagues (2016) suggest that parliamentary representation would amplify the party's anti-elitist rhetoric, eventually increasing dissatisfaction. However, none of these explanations is supported by accompanying evidence. In contrast, Canalejo-Molero (2023) provides evidence that only those radical party voters who already held strong anti-establishment attitudes *before* the election become more dissatisfied. Based on this evidence, it is suggested that parliamentary entry would increase the salience not only of the own party's success but also of the mainstream party's win, which would trigger a negative affective response. The main novelty of this argument is that it introduces an out-group logic according to which changes in SWD would also be a function of the opponent's results.

The notion that SWD is affected by the out-group party outcomes resonates with recent evidence of the moderating effect of affective polarization 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 polarized voters. We expand on these findings to argue that the out-group party win can have a *direct negative effect* on SWD, eventually counteracting the positive impact of the new (in-group) party institutionalization.

Therefore, we incorporate the role of party identity and growing affective polarization (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021) with the utilitarian in-group logic of changes in SWD (Anderson et al. 2005; Blais, Morin-Chassé, and Singh 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 dichotomous 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 polarization 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 polarization is high, changes in SWD among losers would be negatively affected by the salience of the out-group block win, and the net change can be negative despite relative electoral success.

Since radical party voters are among the most affectively polarized (Harteveld, Mendoza, and Rooduijn 2021; Meléndez and Kaltwasser 2019; Reiljan 2020; Wagner 2021), they will be prone to experience an SWD decrease unless if winning the election. This implication is consistent with a growing body of evidence that populist and radical party voters express stronger democratic support after entering the government coalition (Cohen et al. 2022; Fahey, Allen, and Alarian 2022; Haugsgjerd 2019; Kołczyńska 2022; Juen 2023; Rooduijn and 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 minimizing 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 elections' 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 polarized, increasing the salience of its likely win should decrease SWD. The following pre-registered 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.

Finding support for all the hypotheses would provide strong evidence of an in-group/out-group logic of changes in SWD among affectively polarized voters. Instead, finding support only for hypotheses 1 and 2 (hypotheses 3 and 4) would suggest that electoral changes in SWD follow a single in-group (out-group) logic. We expect to find support for all the hypotheses. However, given the intense polarization of radical party voters, the potential out-group win is expected to exert a particularly strong effect.

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

We test our expectations in three 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 this group of voters are particularly suited to test our expectations for several reasons. First, it is a natural setting that saw the sudden emergence of a new and credible radical right contender. Second, Éric Zemmour successfully made an electoral breakthrough in the French system but eventually lost the elections. Third, the French semi-presidential system allows us to exploit its sharp winner-loser distinction together with the political uncertainty before the second round of the election. Finally, Zemmour supporters are among the most affectively polarized group of voters, with strong negative out-group effects directed to the mainstream party and eventual winner *La République en Marche*, and its leader, Emmanuel Macron.

The French system is semi-presidential and majoritarian. Presidential and parliamentary elections are held sequentially and close to each other every five years following a two-round, first-past-the-post system. The President is directly appointed according to the majority rule, while the "second" head of the executive, the Prime Minister, as well as the government, are appointed by the President, subjected to the Assembly's confidence vote. In other words, in the case of an opposition majority in the Assembly, a "cohabitation" executive emerges where most governing powers are held by the opposition Prime Minister.

Given the characteristics of the French majoritarian system and its electoral calendar, Éric Zemmour's electoral success in the April 2022 presidential elections made him a potentially crucial political player despite losing the first round. 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 Emmanuel Macron's (27.85%) and Marine Le Pen's (23.15%) 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 coalition partner within the government or in the Assembly 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[2] display strong *"[..] positive in-group affect and negative out-group affect towards parties"* (Wagner 2021, 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.
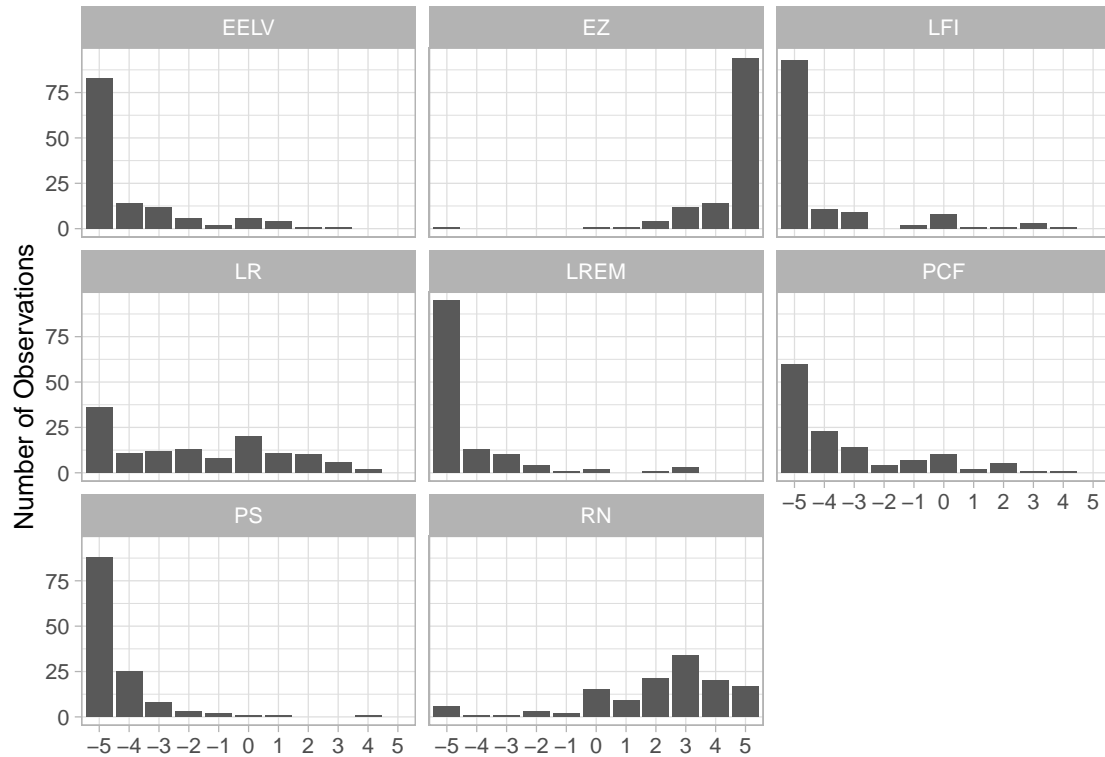

Figure 1: Zemmour Voters Like-Dislike Scales for Each Party

We combine three mixed-methods studies to test our hypotheses and triangulate the findings. Study 1 builds on a representative panel analysis conducted during the French presidential elections. We first establish how different groups of voters react to winning and losing the French presidential elections, where we expect the affectively polarized group of Zemmour voters to be particularly dissatisfied with democracy and to display the most negative feelings toward Macron's party. To formally test our hypotheses, study 2 relies on an experimental

design. This study exploits the uncertainty following the election's first round's results to manipulate the salience of the utilitarian in-group benefits against the out-group potential win. Study 3 explores qualitatively the causal path between out-group affect and lower SWD and triangulates our quantitative findings through the analysis of open-ended questions on respondents' feelings towards the elections.

Out-group hatred in SWD change: a mixed-methods approach

Study 1 - The elections effect on SWD

Radical and populist voters were found to become less satisfied after entering democratic institutions (M. Hooghe and Dassonneville 2018; Rooduijn, Van Der Brug, and De Lange 2016; Canalejo-Molero 2023). In this study, we first establish that the French case is no exception to this rule. Our argument posits that affectively polarized 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 the winning party more and become less satisfied with democracy.

We test these expectations using the 2022 French election study of the ELIPSS 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 2023 and May 2023, 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 ordered 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 variable. 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

elections 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 a reference category. We model alternatively the change of SWD or feelings toward Emmanuel 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[3].
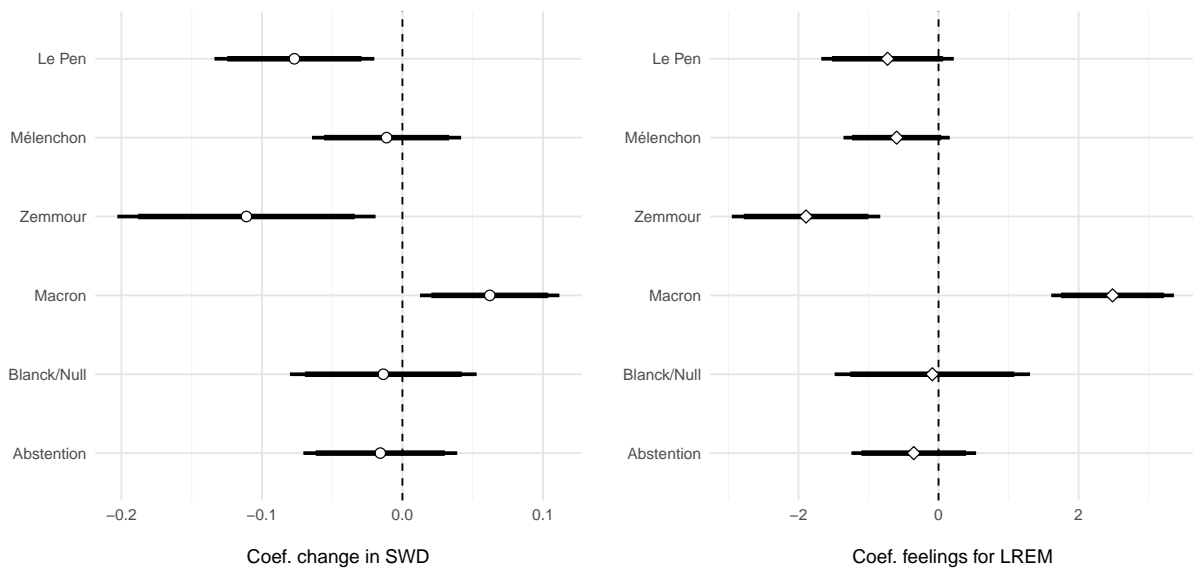

Figure 2: Vote choice effect on SWD (left) and feelings toward LREM (right) coefficient plot

Figure 2 displays the main results of this analysis. Following our expectations, we find that Zemmour voters become the least satisfied with democracy following the presidential elections, despite their preferred party and leader winning 7% of the presidential election vote and that the prospects of entering the National Assembly remained open. Compared to those who voted for candidates other than the first four contenders in the first round, satisfaction with democracy decreased by 0.11 points on the SWD change scale that we normalized to run from -1 to 1. Interestingly, there are no discernible differences in SWD change between abstainers and voters of other parties. The only other exception is Marine Le Pen voters, who faced a sharp defeat in the second round of elections but still display a smaller decrease than Zemmour voters. Finally, supporters of Macron became the most satisfied with democracy, as the winner-loser gap literature would expect.

Our expectations regarding negative affects towards the winner are equally confirmed. As the right-hand side of the figure displays, Zemmour voters dislike LREM party the most after the presidential elections, by about 2 points higher on a 10-point scale compared to other voters. It is worth noting that other losers of elections 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 despite entering the political system. In addition, we show that these radical right voters differ significantly from other groups of voters regarding the intensity of their negative out-group affects against the winner. While the representative nature of this survey data strengthens the generalizability 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, Zemmour voters may be less likely to perceive the utilitarian benefits of the system entry following the defeat of Marine Le Pen after the second round of the election. To address these drawbacks and formally test our hypotheses, in study 2, we experimentally manipulate the salience of the in-group /out-group success among Zemmour voters by taking advantage of the uncertainty between the two rounds of the presidential election.

Study 2 - Experimental evidence

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

In our second study, we pre-registered a vignette experiment that manipulates the frame presenting the first round of the elections outcomes[4] (Canalejo-Molero and 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).

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 emphasizing the prospecting success of the in-group candidate (Zemmour) and the utilitarian benefits of his entry. While both vignettes positively emphasized his result, the first focused on the government coalition potential (T1a). In contrast, the other emphasized the representation potential in the assembly following the upcoming legislative elections (T1b). As the French electoral system is majoritarian and semi-presidential, we test twice the in-group hypothesis to strengthen the efficiency of our experiment by making more explicit the type of representation and power control accessible to losers of the presidential elections. 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 hypotheses, underlining the likelihood of out-group candidate (Macron) victory in the second round of the elections. Finally, our fourth treatment (T3) serves as a placebo test 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 (Valentim 2021; Bursztyn, Egorov, and Fiorin 2020), the placebo condition emphasizes 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 1 displays the vignettes of the control and the first treatment condition[5] as an illustration.

Table 1: Vignettes' example

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 M*é*lenchon and the candidate *É*ric Zemmour were the third and fourth most voted candidates, respectively.
Treatment 1a	+ 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**.

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 polarization, 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[6]. 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 outcome. We thus modified this block's vignettes to replicate the experiment on a group of radical right potential winners. The government potential 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 assembly condition (T1b), we replace any reference to Zemmour with Le Pen. A diagram of the experimental design is displayed in Figure 3.
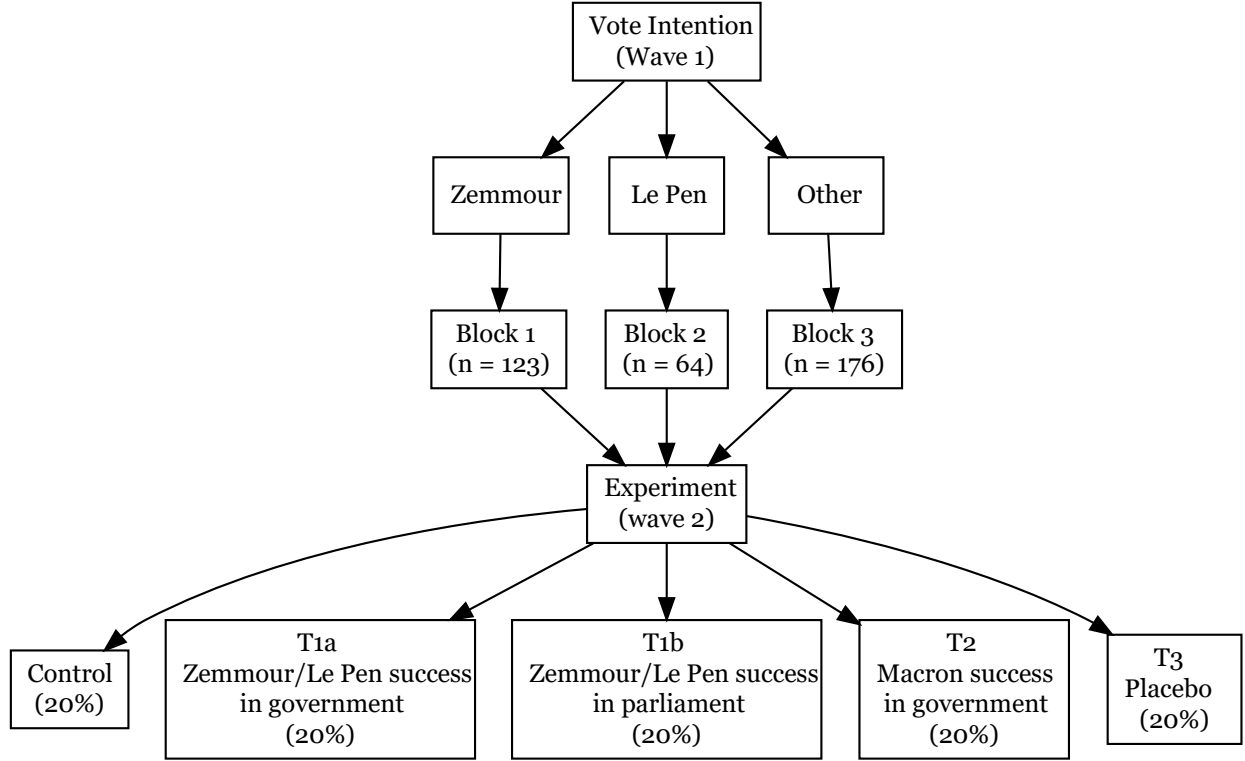
Figure 3: Experimental design diagram

The vignette was followed by the measure of our two dependent variables: satisfaction with democracy and party affects[7]. Satisfaction with democracy 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 (Wagner 2021; Reiljan 2020), 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*).

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

The implementation of the study required that we recruit 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, Egorov, and Fiorin 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 (Pötzschke and Weiß 2021; Guillory et al. 2018), 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 the wide 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 nationalist values corresponding to the political platform of these parties and their supporters[8] (Kriesi et al. 2008; L. Hooghe, Marks, and Wilson 2002; 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' interest. 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).
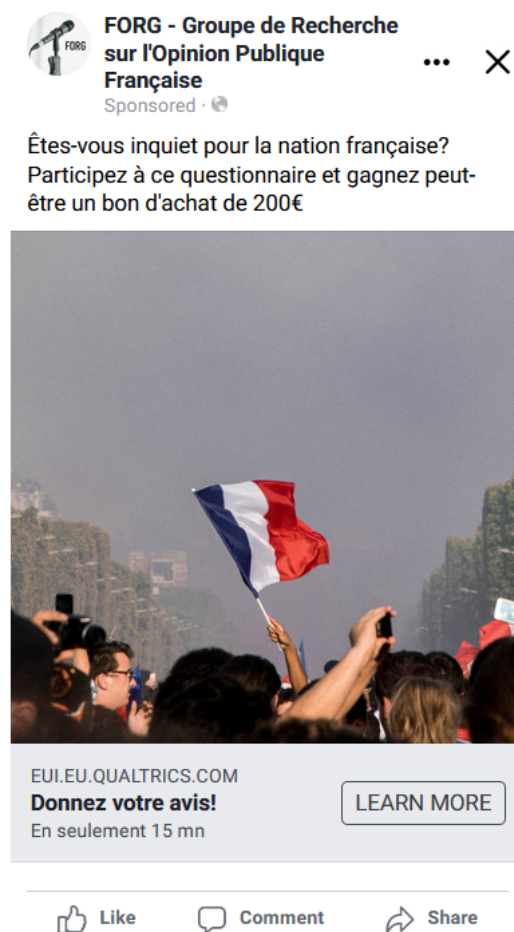
Figure 4: Facebook ad Example

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[9]. In addition, and despite the issue of high (non-systematic) attrition in the second wave[10], 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. Table 2 describes the sample and the descriptive characteristics of the three

blocks of voters that we distinguish[11]. As they show, our convenience sample is dominated by right-leaning male respondents, typically older and more educated than the average French citizen.

Table 2:   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

Results and discussion

We estimate two different models to test our hypotheses. The first model tests hypotheses 1, 2, and 3 by regressing change in SWD on a categorical treatment variable. The second model tests hypothesis 4 by regressing change in feelings towards Macron's party *LREM* on the treatment. The main specifications use OLS regression to estimate the average treatment effect (ATE). The baseline is the control group's average change. Figure 5 plots the coefficient and confidence intervals associated with each treatment condition. The left-hand side figure plots the ATE on change in SWD while the right-hand side figure plots the ATE on change in feelings towards *LREM*.

Figure 5 shows that, in line with the out-group hypothesis (H3), increasing the salience of the potential mainstream party's win affects SWD negatively. Respondents primed with the high chances that Macron - the out-group - would win 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, Daoust, and Dassonneville 2021). Furthermore, this effect is consistent and statistically significant at a 90% confidence level across a wide

range of specifications[12]. The potential Macron win effect also holds to controlling for the perceived likelihood of Zemmour passing to the second round. Therefore, we can rule out concerns of electoral expectations driving the effect[13]. 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 true and substantially large. To further alleviate concerns of underpowering, we run an out-of-the-sample replication using the pilot study, which draws similar conclusions[14]. Bearing these considerations in mind, we confidently conclude that priming Zemmour's voters with Macron's potential victory reduces SWD.
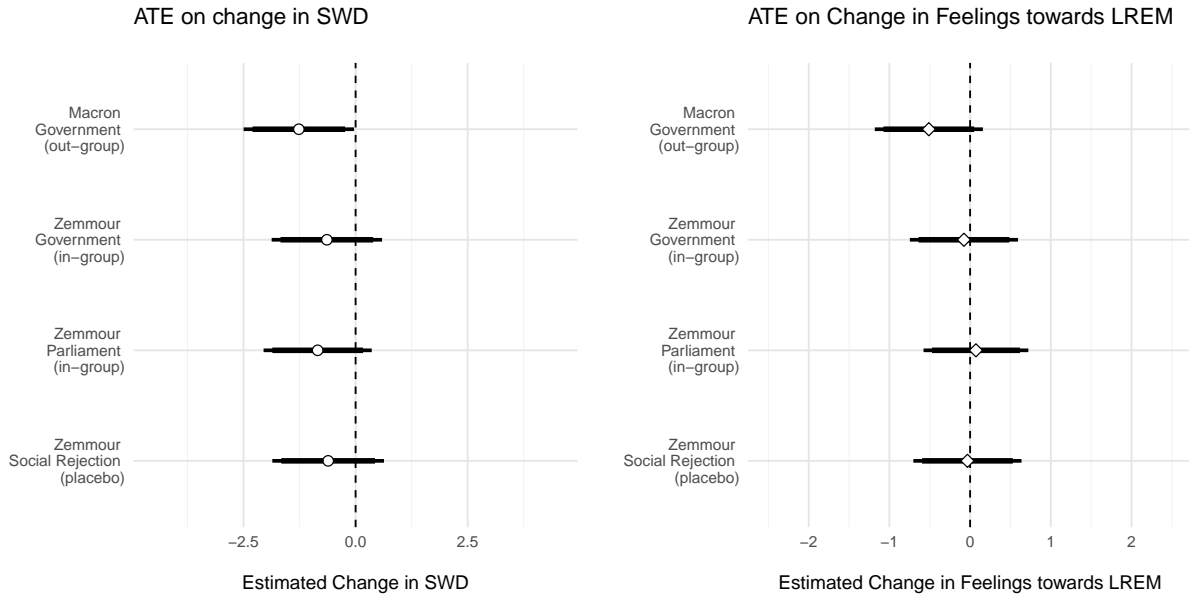

Figure 5: ATE on change in SWD (left) and in feelings towards LREM (right)

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[15] 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. Overall, these two pieces of evidence together 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.

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, it seems 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.

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[16]. Therefore, only the specifications that include the control variables arguably identify the ATE and are presented here[17]. 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 6, 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 polarized 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.
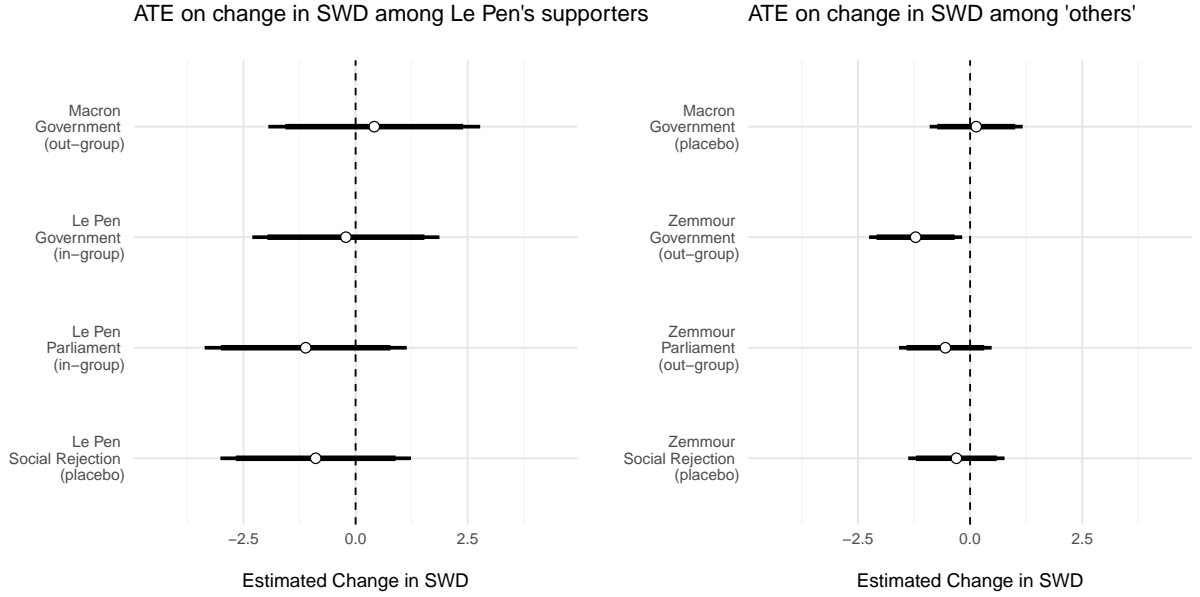
Figure 6: ATE on change in SWD among Le Pen's supporters (left) and 'others' (right)

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 polarized 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[18]. The right-hand side plot in Figure 6 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 polarization. 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 intervention. This approach 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 in

further detail.

Study 3 - Qualitative evidence

Disentangling utility and affect qualitatively: the methodological approach

To further explore the mechanisms at play and to triangulate our expectations regarding the role of out-group affects in explaining growing dissatisfaction, 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 using such types of questions is particularly well-suited for identifying mechanisms. Using an open-ended question with a broad scope on respondents' "feelings" enables to strengthen the internal 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 in these two variables, 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 423 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, Sood, and Lelkes 2012; Mason 2018; Reiljan 2020). A "group" code (2), within which any party mentions and its associated tone of evaluation or affects (positive or negative) are noted, was included. Finally, we included a "democracy evaluation" code (3), gathering all answers mentioning the working of democracy. This deductive codebook was complemented 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[19].

To analyze 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 analysis of the open-ended question: triangulation of the affective polarization mechanism

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[20]:

> 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 127 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, Sood, and Lelkes 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 his electoral success is associated with worry or disgust: the radical left out-group represented by Jean-Luc Mélenchon and his party, as the following answer illustrates:

Q7: *"Disappointed by the score of Éric Zemmour, and very worried to see that LFI + LREM cumulate 50% of the votes of the voters while they want to destroy*

France."

However, as the coding table in Appendix C1 shows, these references to Mélenchon and *La France Insoumise* 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.

Indeed, the qualitative analysis of these open answers supports 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[21]. Among those, many criticize 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 a distinct pattern. 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 polarized 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 summarize, 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. Our qualitative data enables us to be more precise about how these two ideas are linked together in the eyes of these voters. Many of Zemmour's supporters share the idea that Macron had full control of the system and the outcome of elections by controlling and manipulating the media. Other groups of party supporters do not link these ideas together, including other radical and polarized voters who lost elections, such as Mélenchon's supporters. However, our qualitative 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 point toward the importance of the out-group negative affects in shaping satisfaction with democracy for radical right voters following elections.

Conclusion

Polarized voters of radical parties are more dissatisfied with democracy after successfully breaking into the system. Our findings from three 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 ensures them institutional representation. Using the sudden emergence of the radical right party *Reconquête* in the 2022 French presidential election, we show that its already polarized 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, Allen, and Alarian 2022; Haugsgjerd 2019; Kołczyńska 2022; Juen 2023; Rooduijn and 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 only 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 boundaries of our scope conditions to test our argument beyond polarized radical party losers. One raising concern is that, for highly polarized voters, election defeats always decrease democratic satisfaction, regardless of their own party results and whether they are supporters of radical parties.

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 and 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. In contrast, the short length of the answers invited the 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 emphasizing the role of out-group identities in moderating more utilitarian considerations about the corrective role of representation for disengaged voters (Kaltwasser 2012; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012). While affective polarization has been argued to enact support for illiberal policies among winners (Graham and Svolik 2020) and defiance of the electoral results among the opposition losers (Kim and Hall 2023), this paper proposes another channel through which dissatisfaction with democracy and affective polarization 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 just feed affective polarization 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

politics panel of the 2022 APSA Annual Meeting, the Aarhus University Political Behaviour Workshop, the Sciences Po Grenoble 2022 "Research Label" Seminar, the MPSA 2023 Conference, the JCPOP Barcelona 2023, and the DPSA 2023 Conference for their feedback on earlier versions of this article. All the remaining errors and omissions are our own.

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]Our data collection strategy is explained below in the section "Study 2 - Experimental evidence". A summary of descriptive statistics of our sample of Zemmour supporters is in Table B1 in the supplementary materials.

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

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

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

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

[7]Following the treatment vignettes, we also included a question to ensure that differences in our dependent variables were not due to text comprehension differences. After the dependent variables, we also included a question measuring the perceived success of each party as a manipulation check. The text comprehension check shows that most respondents found it easy to understand the vignettes, and there are no significant differences in their 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.

[8]Table A2 in the supplementary materials summarizes our micro-targeting strategy.

[9]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.

[10]Our novel approach led to a large attrition of participants in the second wave. To incentive participation, we proceeded as follows: first, we asked respondents to share their email to complete a second questionnaire. Second, we informed them that only those respondents who completed both questionnaires would participate in the lottery of a 200€ Amazon voucher. Despite this additional incentive, 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 their email. Second, among those who provided their email, many were categorized as spam and rejected by our email distribution platform (Qualtrics). 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 underempowering, 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.

[11]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).

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

[13]One potential concern is that priming about the out-group win reminds Zemmour's supporters about their disconfirmed expectations of passing to the second round. Indeed, Figure B2 in the supplementary materials shows that Zemmour supporters are more likely to believe that Zemmour could be one of the winners of the first round compared to the rest of the respondents. Although more than 60% of the respondents in our sample of Zemmour supporters still hold correct beliefs about the possibilities of Zemmour winning, we replicated all the specifications controlling for this variable to mitigate 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.

[14]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.

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

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

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

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

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

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

[21]See Appendix C1.

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