

- What is a political discontent
 - The significance of public political discontent for the sustainability of a political system is frequently highlighted in the literature. Lipset (1959) claims that the public’s belief in the suitability of the existing political system is a key “requisite” for the survival of a democratic regime. Similarly, Arthur H. Miller (1974) argues that a democratic political system cannot endure without majority public support, as growing political discontent increases the potential for revolutionary changes to the political and social system. Additionally, widespread political discontent can complicate effective governance (Hetherington 1998). These theoretical perspectives have prompted numerous analyses of the content, sources, and implications of political discontent. However, scholars have proposed various conceptualizations or dimensions of political discontent, ranging from the lack of diffuse support for the political system to perceptions of low responsiveness, democratic deficit, low political trust, and dissatisfaction with the current government (Easton 1975; Norris 2011; Jennings, Stoker, and Twyman 2016; Muller and Jukam 1983). These differences in conceptualization reflect varying analytical purposes, theoretical motivations, and the available opinion survey items at the time.
- How we define it?
 - This paper specifically defines political discontent as dissatisfaction with, or the lack of, diffuse support for the political system. The primary theoretical motivation for this approach lies in Easton’s (1965) well-known distinction between diffuse and specific political support. Specific support, being object-specific, refers to individuals’ satisfaction with the perceived outputs or performance of the incumbent political authorities. In contrast, diffuse support is a generalized attachment or support for the political system, serving as a “reservoir of favorable attitudes or goodwill” toward the political system and is not object-specific in nature. The theoretical and analytical importance of this distinction is frequently noted in previous research, which found that people with low political trust or negative attitudes toward the government often do not reject the political system and prefer the existing political system to remain unchanged (Citrin 1974; Arthur H. Miller 1974; Jennings et al. 2017). Furthermore, the literature shows that specific support is variable and less likely to pose a systemic threat to the regime’s survival (Muller and Jukam 1983; Craig and Maggiotto 1981). Democracy allows people to express their political dissatisfaction at the ballot box and change politicians in power without fundamentally altering the system. On the other hand, Muller and Jukam (1983) point out that diffuse political discontent provides the public with a normative incentive to participate in radical changes to the political system as a whole.
- What are the dimensions of diffuse political discontent?
 - Diffuse political discontent comprises several related yet distinct elements: external efficacy (evaluation of the responsiveness of political authorities in general), evaluation of the trustworthiness and integrity of political authorities, and perceptions of political corruption (Muller and Jukam 1983; Craig and Maggiotto 1981; Park 2011). These components are interrelated and collectively contribute to the broader construct of diffuse political discontent. One of the main sources of this discontent is the perception that the political system is unresponsive to the public and prioritizes its own or special interests, which increases the likelihood of the public participating in or endorsing regime-challenging activities that threaten the social and political order (Jennings, Stoker, and Twyman 2016; Craig 1980). Recent studies of populism have highlighted that the feeling of being unheard by the political system is a significant source of support for anti-system populist messages (Mudde 2004). Political trust, often used as a measure of political discontent, is conceptually associated with external efficacy but operates on a different dimension. While external efficacy focuses on whether the political system functions according to public demands, political trust concerns whether political authorities work for the public good (Craig 1979). Additionally, the implications of political trust can vary depending on the specific referents of trust (T. Van

der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017). For instance, trust in political institutions in general, such as the political party system or politicians or the parliament in general, differs from trust in the incumbent government, which is a measure of specific support, or trust in apolitical institutions such as the judiciary or the police. In this context, we consider only distrust in general political institutions as a component of political discontent. Similarly, dissatisfaction with political parties or national officeholders in general is also used as a component of political discontent. Lastly, recent literature emphasizes the perception of political corruption as a primary source of political discontent, as people perceive political authorities working for their own interests without addressing public demands (Busby et al. 2018; Hawkins, Kaltwasser, and Andreadis 2020; Park 2011).

- What are *not* the dimensions of diffuse political discontent?
 - It is also worth discussing what is not considered a dimension of diffuse political discontent. Specifically, we exclude political trust in the incumbent government or apolitical institutions, as trust in the government is a type of specific support that fluctuates over time and does not pose a serious threat to the political system (Norris 1999). Additionally, unlike previous studies that use support for democracy in the abstract as a predictor for the survival of democratic regimes (Claassen 2020), we do not include it as a component of political discontent. This is because support for democracy in the abstract is too prevalent in every country to be a meaningful or analytically useful measure of political discontent (Russell J. Dalton, Sin, and Jou 2007; Inglehart 2003). Lastly, we exclude satisfaction with democracy (SWD) in the abstract because the literature shows that the SWD measure functions more as a type of specific support. People tend to have much higher democratic satisfaction when their preferred politicians or parties win elections, while electoral losers tend to have lower democratic satisfaction (Singh and Mayne 2023; Van Egmond, Johns, and Brandenburg 2020). Moreover, Quaranta and Martini (2016) indicate that various economic indicators, such as the unemployment rate, GDP growth, inflation, or subjective economic evaluation, are strongly associated with the public’s satisfaction with democracy, suggesting that it is a product of the government’s economic performance.
- Implications of this approach
 - The conceptualization of political discontent as a lack of diffuse support for the political system has important implications. First, by focusing on the systemic dimension of political discontent and excluding types of specific support or abstract support for democracy, this conceptualization aligns closely with discussions about the erosion of public confidence in the political system as a whole, beyond mere dissatisfaction with specific authorities or policies. This understanding is crucial for identifying the underlying causes of political disaffection and developing targeted interventions to address them. Moreover, this conceptualization of political discontent can contribute significantly to recent discussions about democratic backsliding. The literature on democratic backsliding has yielded mixed findings regarding whether public opinion can influence the possibility of backsliding. However, previous studies often use abstract public support for democracy as a measurement, which is less satisfying because abstract support for democracy is notoriously affirming. In this context, political discontent, defined as a lack of diffuse support for the system (Claassen 2020), can serve as a better conceptual tool for discussing how public opinion relates to democratic backsliding. Additionally, previous studies have shown that diffuse political discontent is strongly associated with citizens participating in or endorsing regime-challenging activities, which ultimately pose a threat to the social and political order (Craig 1980). A clearer understanding of the nature and consequences of diffuse political discontent can thus inform efforts to strengthen democratic resilience and responsiveness in the face of growing public disaffection with political systems worldwide.

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