

Losers' Consent and Democratic Stability: Experimental Evidence from Chile and Estonia

Hector Bahamonde

University of Turku, Finland

Inga Saikkonen

Åbo Akademi University, Finland

Mart Trasberg¹

Tecnologico de Monterrey,
Mexico

March 29, 2024

Words: 5031

ROUGH DRAFT PREPARED FOR THE MPSA 2024 CONFERENCE.
PLEASE DO NOT SHARE.

Abstract: This paper investigates the erosion of “losers’ consent” in two established democracies. Leveraging experimental data from Estonia and Chile, our study explores the extent of commitment to democracy among electoral losers. In particular, we examine citizens’ reactions to candidates proposing anti-systemic protests against the current government. We focus on Chile and Estonia, considering them “least likely cases” for finding support for anti-democratic candidates due to their democratic stability and consistent record of electoral integrity, while varying in institutional context (Presidentialism vs. Parliamentarism). Our findings reveal a significant inclination among electoral losers in Estonia, but not in Chile, to support candidates proposing anti-systemic actions. Additionally, we find that in the Estonian case, these findings are largely driven by anti-liberal Extreme Right voters.

Key words: democratic backsliding; protests, presidentialism; parliamentarism; electoral systems; Chile; Estonia; experimental methods

¹ **Authors are listed in alphabetical order. All contributed equally to this paper.** We thank Giancarlo Visconti, Carolina Segovia, Miguel Angel López and the participants and organizers of the Chilean Political Science Association ACCP conference (Santiago, 2023) and the Midwest Political Science Association MPSA conference (Chicago, 2024). This research was funded by Research Council Finland (grant 316897) and the INVEST Research Flagship Centre.

1 Introduction

Political elites in established democracies have until recently largely abided by the democratic norm of “losers’ consent”—that is, they have not challenged the electoral results or the legitimacy of electoral institutions (Nadeau and Blais 1993, 533). However, Donald Trump broke this norm glaringly by refusing to accept his defeat in the U.S. 2020 presidential elections. He subsequently incited an insurrection that led to hundreds of his supporters storming the Capitol, aiming to reverse the election outcomes. In fact, an important number of Republican party supporters believe that the 2020 presidential election was “stolen” from Trump. Similarly, in 2023 some of Jair Bolsonaro’s supporters refused to accept his electoral loss in the Brazilian presidential elections and stormed the presidential palace, the Congress, and Supreme Court.

Therefore, it is no longer safe to assume that all politicians, even in well-established democracies, will accept the legitimacy of election results when these results are not in their favor. Moreover, although the concept of “losers’ consent” is crucial for democratic stability, we still have limited understanding of the commitment to the democratic system (referred to as “systemic support” by Easton, 1965) among *citizens* who supported the losing side in elections. Existing research on “losers’ consent” among citizens has explored other important topics, such as democratic satisfaction, political trust and political efficacy among the winners and losers of elections (Esaiasson 2011; Anderson 2005; Singh, Karakoç, and Blais 2012). Others have examined the readiness of electoral losers to support institutional changes to the democratic system (Bowler and Donovan 2019; Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007; Pilet et al. 2023). Unfortunately, current studies have mostly focused on *democratic institutional change*. Indeed only a few studies have examined the extent of losers’ “system support” (that is, their commitment to the democratic regime itself), and their empirical findings are not conclusive (Esaiasson 2011; Anderson 2005).

The examples of Brazil and the U.S. demonstrate that even in well-established democracies, leaders on the losing end have called their supporters to protest in the streets against the system, contesting election outcomes through demonstrations. While the “losers’ consent” literature has explored outcomes such as support for the electoral system and democratic institutions in general, only a little has been yet given to *citizens’ reactions* to political candidates who call for protests against electoral outcomes they do not like.

Thus, we explore citizens reactions to such anti-democratic candidates in this paper. In democracies with well-functioning elections and absent fraud, such provocations by losing

candidates that could be seen as anti-democratic and condemned by citizens wanting to uphold democratic norms. Building on the “losers’ consent” literature, we argue that citizens’ support for anti-system mobilizations varies between electoral winners and losers. We hypothesize that “enraged” losers may also be more willing to support anti-systemic politicians, while electoral winners (who draw instrumental benefits from the system) should be unlikely to choose a (hypothetical) candidate supporting anti-systemic actions. (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007). Lastly, we also expect these loser effects to be stronger in Presidential systems as opposed to Parliamentary systems, given that in majoritarian systems, electoral losers can have little input in the political system.

To test these hypotheses, we conducted conjoint experiments in two consolidated Third-wave democracies: Estonia and Chile. We explored if hypothetical political candidates who support anti-systemic protests receive different levels of support from actual election winners and losers. We specifically selected Estonia and Chile due to their comparable wealth, democratic stability, and consistent record of electoral integrity, positioning them as “hard cases” for finding support for anti-democratic candidates. By focusing on these “least likely” cases, our aim was to study the interaction between actual electoral statuses (e.g., “winners” and “losers”) and their backing of (hypothetical) anti-democratic candidates within heterogeneous institutional contexts.

We find that respondents identified as “losers” (those who voted for an *actual* candidate that did not win the most recent election) are more inclined to support a *hypothetical* candidate who advocates for anti-systemic actions against the current government in Estonia, but not in Chile. We argue that this disconfirming finding in the Chilean case is driven by the legacy of the 2019-20 social protests against Sebastián Piñera’s Right-wing government (2018-2022), which made current electoral losers (right-wing voters) very skeptical against protest action more broadly.

Exploratory analysis also allows interesting conclusions about the mechanisms that drive loser effects in the Estonian case. Reflecting the recent literature on the anti-democratic attitudes of the Extreme Right in Europe, we show that the “losers’ effect” is largely driven by the voters of the anti-migrant and anti-LGBT Extreme Right. Additionally, it seems that disengaged (non-voting) citizens display similar attitudes to electoral losers in Estonia. Respondents who did not report voting in the last Parliamentary elections favor candidates proposing destabilizing anti-government protests.

Our paper proceeds as follows ...

2 Losers' Consent and Democratic Stability

According to Adam Przeworski's famous dictum "[d]emocracy is a system in which parties lose elections" (Przeworski 1991, 10). Modern representative elections thus always generate both electoral winners and losers. Electoral winners' commitment to electoral outcomes is understandable—they gain instrumental benefits from their interests being represented by the winning government. However, "losers' consent" (Nadeau and Blais 1993, 533) to both the electoral results *and* the political system that might have produced potentially undesirable outcomes is much less obvious (Przeworski 1991, 14). Yet, it is a crucial precondition for democracy's stability and survival.

Electoral losers can react to an electoral loss "in three different ways: they can abide by the results and accept defeat; they can challenge the results but accept the rules of the game; or they can turn against democracy" (Lago and Martinez I Coma 2017, 413). Until now, it has been almost unthinkable that political elites in established democracies would question the legitimacy of electoral results. Thus, the existing literature on losers' consent in established democracies has rarely studied *citizens' reactions* to the third option: anti-systemic actions (that is, the extent of citizens' "system support" (Easton 1965)). However, after the events on January 6th, 2021, in the United States we are increasingly having to ask whether we can take losers' "system support" for granted, even in established democracies.

We study these questions in this paper. First, building on the findings of the previous literature, we examine whether electoral losers are more likely to support a politician proposing anti-systemic actions than the electoral winners. Previous literature has found clear evidence of significant discontent among the electoral losers (Anderson 2005; Tilley and Hobolt 2023; Singh, Karakoç, and Blais 2012). Several studies have also found that losers' anger can translate into a willingness to support changes to democratic institutions, such as electoral systems (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007; Bowler and Donovan 2019), as well as alternatives to representative democracy such as deliberative mini-publics (Pilet et al. 2023). Moreover, Anderson et al. found that democratic system support was lower among electoral "losers" than among the "winners" (Anderson 2005, 103). (For contrasting findings, see (Esaiasson 2011)).

On many occasions, losers challenge electoral results via protests. In some instances, leaders of the losing side call their supporters to the streets for such (anti-systemic) mobilizations. Such protests frequently turn violent, occasionally with major repercussions for political stability and democratic institutions (Bunce and Wolchik 2010, Chernykh 2014). While the "losers' consent"

literature has explored outcomes such as support for the electoral system and democratic institutions in general, it has yet to explore citizens' *attitudes (reactions)* to political candidates who call for anti-systemic protests against undesirable electoral outcomes.

Previous literature on anti-systemic protest has mostly focused on the causes and consequences of post-electoral protests in electoral autocracies and hybrid regimes (Chernykh 2014, Smidt 2016). It is intuitive to think that such actions by opposition leaders elicit citizens' support in electoral autocracies, especially in cases where elections are openly fraudulent. These protests oftentimes constitute democratizing pressure on the regime conducting electoral manipulation or otherwise limiting opposition opportunities to compete.

Yet, recent cases in Brazil and the United States have demonstrated that anti-systemic protests also occur in countries with clean elections. These protests often cause considerable physical damage and harm the legitimacy of democratic institutions. In democracies with well-functioning elections and absent fraud, such provocations by candidates who lost elections could be seen as anti-democratic and condemned by citizens respecting democratic norms. Therefore, it is expected that anti-systemic post-electoral protests could harm candidates that promote mobilizations of that kind.

However, the "losers' consent" literature also predicts that citizens' support for anti-system mobilizations varies between electoral winners and losers. Based on the previous findings, we could expect that the "enraged" losers (Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007) may also be more willing to support anti-systemic politicians. Conversely, electoral winners (who draw instrumental benefits from the system) should be unlikely to choose a hypothetical politician supporting anti-systemic actions. To what extent electoral losers actually condemn these anti-systemic protests (post-elections and otherwise) is an open question not yet answered by the literature, which we intend to investigate in this paper. We therefore hypothesize that electoral "losers" would be more open on supporting an anti-systemic politician than electoral "winners": We therefore propose the following hypotheses:

H1: Respondents who voted for the candidate/party that lost the last election are more likely to choose a candidate who supports anti-systemic actions against the current government than respondents in the "winning side."

However, the democratic political system type should significantly affect how the losers react to electoral results (Anderson et al. 2005, Anderson and Guillory 1997). In his classic work, Arend Lijphart outlines how power sharing institutions in consensus and majoritarian

democracies can affect the responsiveness and representativeness of political systems (Lijphart 2012). In majoritarian systems the losers can have little input in the political system outside of the electoral cycle. In more consensual systems losers' interests can be represented through a variety of power sharing institutions. This could lead to electoral losers being less open to anti-systemic actions as they have both instrumental and intrinsic motivations to support the system (see also (Linz 1970, 56)). Indeed, previous studies have found that the political system type significantly affects losers' reactions to the electoral loss (Anderson 2005, 151), and that "losers evaluate all aspects of electoral democracy more positively in countries more proportional parliamentary systems" (Anderson 2005, 160). Accordingly, we would expect losers in presidential systems would be more likely to support a politician proposing anti-systemic actions than losers in parliamentary systems. Therefore, we propose a second hypothesis:

| |
|---|
| H2: This effect is stronger in presidential systems than in parliamentary systems. |
|---|

3 Research Design

We conducted an experimental study in two advanced democracies, Estonia and Chile, to explore if (hypothetical) political candidates who support anti-systemic protests are treated differently by those who won or lost (actual) elections. We chose Estonia and Chile specifically because they are affluent, stable democracies with a strong record of electoral fairness (see **Error! Reference source not found.**, Coppedge et al., 2022). This makes them "least likely" examples among newer democracies for finding backing for anti-democratic candidates. As such, these countries are considered "hard cases" for uncovering support for such candidates. By examining these "least likely" cases (Levy, 2008) our goal is to better understand the dynamics between electoral "winners" and "losers" in relation to their support for anti-democratic candidates.

Prior literature suggests that losers are more likely to accept electoral defeat "in economically more developed countries, especially when elections are free" (Lago and Martinez, 2017, p. 413; see also Anderson et al., 2005, p. 160). Therefore, if we observe effects in these contexts, it is highly probable to find similar effects in less economically developed countries with lower quality of elections.

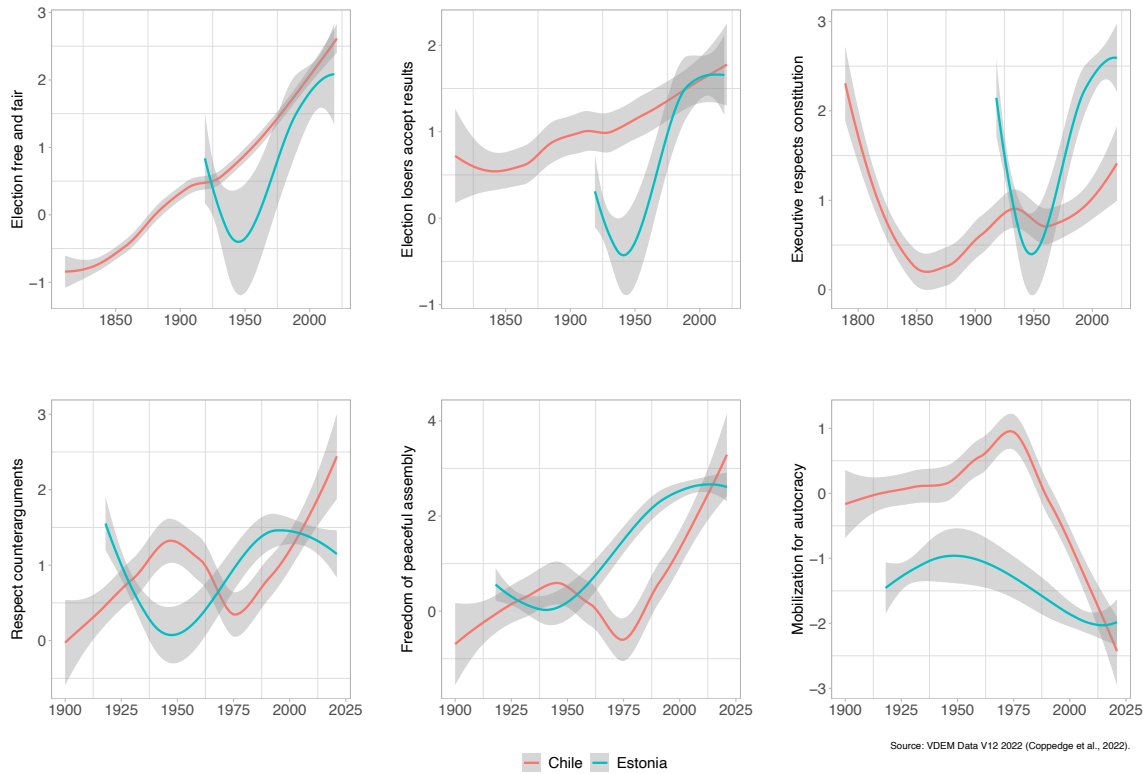


Figure 1: VDEM Indicators: Chile and Estonia (Data source: Coppedge et al., 2022)

3.1 Description of the Cases.

Estonia. Estonia has maintained its status as a stable multi-party democracy since 1991, with well-administered parliamentary elections and a generally high level of trust in democratic institutions among its citizens, albeit lagging behind Western European countries. Notably, post-electoral protests have been absent from the Estonian political landscape since its independence. However, challenges persist, particularly concerning the integration of the Russian minority, which comprises 26% of the population. The failure to effectively integrate this minority has led to frustration and political alienation among Russian speakers, resulting in lower levels of trust in democracy and political institutions within this demographic.

A concerning development for Estonian democracy has been the emergence of the populist radical right since 2015. The Estonian Conservative People's Party (EKRE), characterized by its anti-migration and anti-LGBT rhetoric, promotion of traditional family values, and Euroscepticism, has experienced a significant rise in popularity. EKRE has garnered between 8% and 18% of the vote in Parliamentary Elections between 2015 and 2023, signaling a shift towards more populist and nationalist sentiments within the Estonian political landscape (Saarts et al., 2023). This trend poses challenges to Estonia's democratic stability and underscores the

importance of addressing issues related to minority integration and societal cohesion in order to maintain the integrity of its democratic institutions.

Chile. The political system in Chile is characterized for its historically stable party, featuring a well-defined ideological spectrum that spans from the left to the right. According to Kitschelt et al. (2010), this arrangement allows political parties to distinguish themselves through consistent policy positions. Economic policy serves as a primary axis of differentiation among parties. As a result, the political competition in Chile is more predictable and focused on issues, rather than personal politics or other non-policy factors (e.g., clientelism; see Oliveros, 2021). In general, parties on the left advocate for increased state intervention in the economy and more robust social welfare policies, while centrist and right-wing parties generally favor market-oriented approaches. This ideological divide over economic policy has significantly shaped electoral competition and contributed to the programmatic structuration of the Chilean party system.

However, this stability has been challenged by various economic and political transformations over the decades, particularly following the country's transition back to democracy in the late 20th century. Structural neoliberal reforms were introduced during the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet, effectively ending democracy and the Chilean welfare state (Reid, 2009; Roberts, 2015). Furthermore, recent years have seen a progressive deterioration of the Chilean party-mass linkages. For example, Visconti (2021) explains that voter's ideological stances do not fully explain electoral choices in Chile as they used to, leading to a crisis of political representation. These issues, combined with declining political participation and a marked decrease in public trust in political institutions, contributed to the severe social unrest that occurred in October 2019 (Morales Quiroga, 2020).

Despite these challenges, Chilean parties still differentiate themselves based on coherent policy positions, leading to more predictable and issue-driven political competition. For example, social issues, including reforms in education, healthcare, and pensions, still influence party competition. Therefore, despite showing signs of democratic deterioration, Chile remains a robust and well-established democracy. For example, while Chile's transition to democracy was marked by authoritarian and elitist origins (Albertus & Menaldo, 2017), there has been consistent progress in reducing military influence and enhancing legal safeguards. This includes appointing civilian defense ministers, increasing civilian oversight over military budgets, and even prosecuting those responsible for crimes committed during the dictatorship (Haggard & Kaufman, 2016, p. 313).

3.2 Conjoint Experimental Design

We investigate our hypotheses with a novel dataset from two conjoint experiments. Conjoint experimental approach is suitable for our purposes as it can mitigate potential problems with social desirability bias (Horiuchi, Markovich, and Yamamoto 2022). In addition, conjoint experiments have been shown to perform well in terms of external validity (Hainmueller, Hangartner, and Yamamoto 2015), and have been using to study other related questions, such as voter preferences (Abramson et al., 2022), elite transgressions of democratic norms (Saikkonen & Christensen, 2023), clientelism (Gherghina & Saikkonen, 2023), influence of party labels (Kirkland & Coppock, 2018) and gender (Ono & Yamada, 2020).

Table 1: Attributes and Attribute Levels in the Conjoint Experiment

| | Attribute | Attribute Levels |
|-------------------------------|-----------------------------|--|
| Anti-Systemic Position | Political Position 1 | The candidate SUPPORTS demonstrations in the streets to destabilize the current government. The candidate IS AGAINST demonstrations in the streets to destabilize the current government. |
| Policy Position | Political Position 2 | The candidate SUPPORTS raising pensions. The candidate IS AGAINST increasing pensions. |
| Background | Gender | Male Female |
| | Age | Under 35 35-50 Over 50 |

We use data from two novel conjoint experiments embedded in two original novel surveys carried out in Chile (n=811) and Estonia (n=639) with statistical quotas for age and gender.² The data were collected between October 2023 and February 2024 via an online panel recruited

² See Appendix 1 in the Supplementary Information for a survey/population comparison. Chile data: 18-24 (N=115), 25-34 (N=170), 35-44 (N=146), 45-54 (N=152), older than 55 (N=228); Man (N=388), Woman (N=420), Other (N=3). Estonia data: 18-24 (N=76), 25-34 (N=134), 35-44 (N=125), 45-54 (N=115), older than 55 (N=189); Man (N=303), Woman (N=333), Other (N=3).

by Qualtrics. The study was preregistered when it comes to hypotheses, data collection, variables, and methods.³

Our conjoint experiments presented respondents in both countries with a table containing profiles of two hypothetical political candidates vying for the highest political office in the country. In the Chile survey, respondents chose between two profiles of hypothetical candidates running for President. In the Estonian survey, the conjoint profiles depicted hypothetical candidates vying for seats in the national parliament, known as the *Riigikogu*.

The respondents were shown a table of two hypothetical candidates with varying attributes that were expected to affect the respondents' candidate choices. Table 1 shows the full set of attribute levels. The first attribute concerns respondents' willingness to support a candidate supporting or opposing anti-systemic actions: street demonstrations to destabilize the current government. The attribute had two values: the hypothetical candidate would either support or oppose street demonstrations to destabilize the current government.⁴ In addition, we included other background characteristics to make the profiles realistic to respondents. First, we included an attribute on a typical campaign promise used by politicians both Chilean and Estonian elections related to increasing monetary benefits to pensioners. This attribute has two values: the candidate would either support or oppose raising pensions for the elderly. Finally, we included two background characteristics to make the profiles realistic to respondents: candidates' gender and age. The attribute combinations were not restricted in any way. Each respondent was presented with eight randomized comparison tables, meaning that the respondents evaluated in total 16 candidates.⁵

The dependent variable was measured using a "forced-choice" design, where the respondents choose one of the candidate profiles shown. After this, the respondents were presented with an option to indicate whether they would have voted for the given hypothetical candidate or not.

³ <https://osf.io/u72z4>

⁴ The wording of the attribute was pre-tested with Estonian and Chilean respondents to make sure that it worked as intended. These observations were discarded before performing the statistical analyses.

⁵ As a loose proxy indicator of external validity, respondents were also asked if they would have voted for the candidates they were asked to choose from. In average, 66% of all respondents would have voted for the (hypothetical) candidates they voted for (Chile data: mean = 63%, min = 57%, max = 69%; Estonia data: mean = 69%, min = 66%, max = 73%).

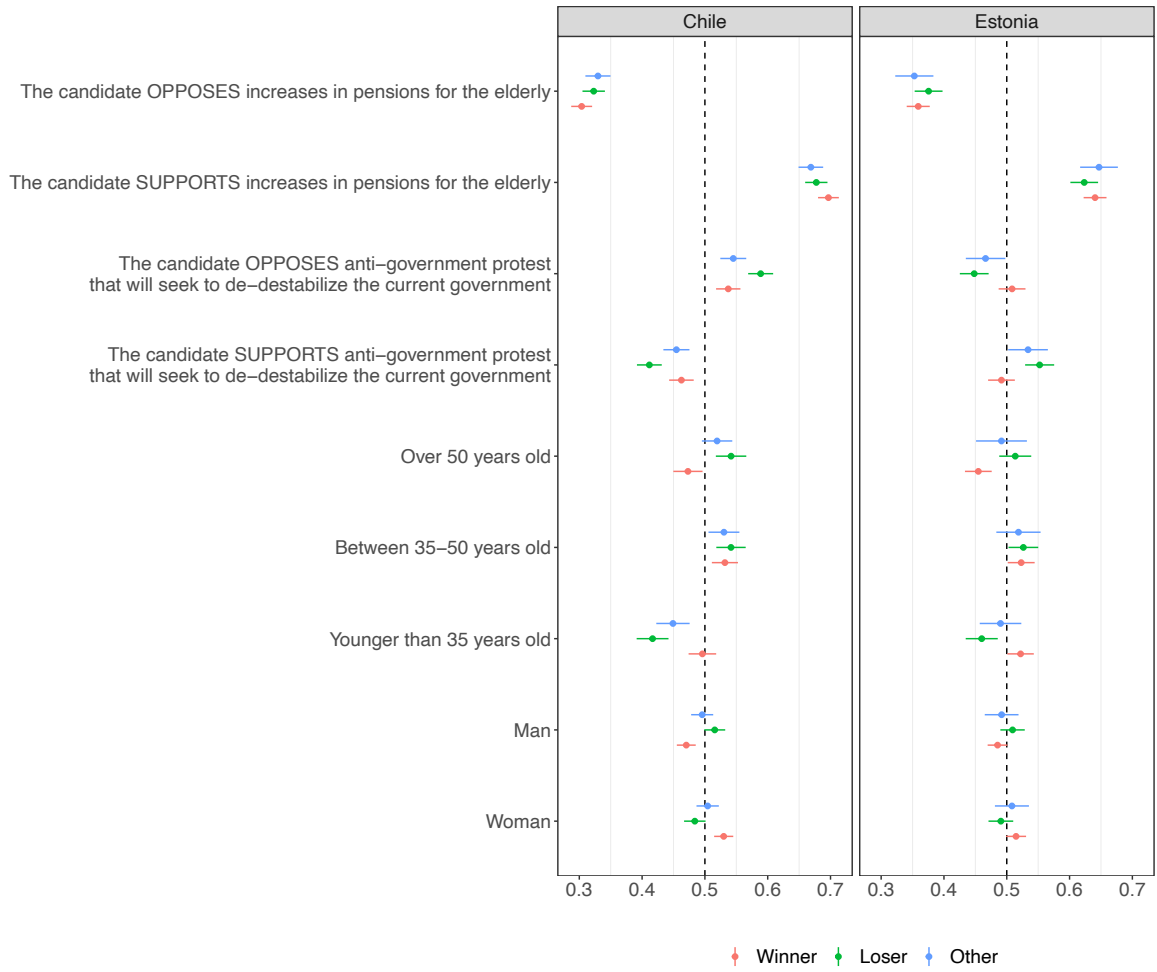


Figure 2: Losers Consent: Marginal Means by Sub-group

To examine Hypothesis 1 we investigate sub-group differences between respondents whose preferred party had either won or lost the last highest level national elections that were conducted before our survey. These respondent characteristics were measured with survey questions placed before the conjoint experiment. In the Chile survey we asked respondents: “Which candidate did you vote for in the 2nd round of the December 2021 presidential election?”. Survey participants were then presented with the following options: “Gabriel Boric Font,” “José Antonio Kast Rist,” “Blank/Spoiled,” “I did not vote” or “Prefer not to say.” The order of the choices was fully randomized for each respondent. Accordingly, we coded the respondents who had backed the winning candidate, Gabriel Boric, as “electoral winners” (N=300). Respondents who answered that they had supported José Antonio Kast were coded as “electoral losers” (N=268). The rest of the respondents were coded as “Other” (N=243).⁶

⁶ “Blank/spoiled ballots” (N=81), “I did not vote” (N=97), “Prefer not to say” (N=65).

In the Estonia survey we asked the respondents: “Which political party did you vote for in the last elections?” The respondents were presented with a list of Estonian political parties that participated in the last parliamentary election on March 2023, the option “Other” (to represent very minor parties), as well as the option to answer, “Prefer not to say” or “I did not vote”. The order of the choices was fully randomized for each respondent too. Based on this we coded the respondents who voted for the parties that form the current Estonian government as “electoral winners” (*Eesti Reformierakond, Eesti 200, Sotsiaaldemokraatlik Erakond*).⁷ Respondents that had supported parties not in government were coded as “electoral losers” (N=228)⁸, and the rest of the respondents as “Other” (N=122).

3.3 Method of Analysis

To test Hypothesis 1, we examine descriptive differences in the effects between the different respondent sub-groups: electoral “winners” and “losers”. We estimate the conditional AMCE or the AMCE for a sub-group of respondents (Bansak et al. 2021). However, since the AMCE sub-group estimates can be sensitive to the reference category chosen (Leeper, Hobolt, and Tilley 2020), we focus on presenting marginal means estimates between the different sub-groups. To test Hypotheses 2, we compare the effect sizes in a presidential system (Chile) and a parliamentary system (Estonia).

4 Empirical Results

Conjoint Experimental Results

Error! Reference source not found. shows the estimated marginal means between respondents who voted for the winner or loser candidate in both Chile and Estonia. The figure illustrates that the results diverge between the Chilean and Estonian cases. We only find support for our H1 in the Estonian case. In Estonia, candidates who favor protests against the current government receive support from those who voted for the current electoral losers, while respondents on the winning side tend to reject such candidates. By contrast, in the case of Chile, our analysis indicates that candidates favoring protests aimed at destabilizing the current government face widespread rejection from both winners and losers. While it is intuitive (and in line with the results from Estonia) that current electoral winners reject candidates associated with anti-

⁷ N=128, N=60, N=101, respectively.

⁸ Supporters of *Eesti Keskerakond, Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond, Isamaa Erakond, Eestimaa Ühendatud Vasakpartei, Erakond Eestimaa Rohelised, Erakond Parempoolsed*, and supporters of smaller parties who chose the “Muud” (i.e., “Others”) option.

government protests, it is puzzling that Chilean electoral losers show even stronger disapproval of such candidates.

What explains this phenomenon in the Chilean case, where even the losers oppose destabilizing protests against the government? We argue that this effect might be driven by the legacies of the 2019-20 protest wave (the so-called *Estallido Social*). Starting with high school students protesting against a rise in subway fares in Santiago de Chile, the demonstrations quickly spread throughout the country. These protests revealed a profound dissatisfaction with economic and political institutions, especially from the political left (Pallacios-Valladares, 2020). These protests targeted the Right-wing government of Sebastián Piñera (2018-22), which represented many Chileans who voted against the current Left-wing President Gabriel Boric in the 2021 elections. It is plausible that many of the Right-wing respondents (losers at the time of our survey) saw the 2019-20 protest cycle as harmful to their interests. Given the recency and enormous salience of *Estallido Social*, these respondents are likely to have negative views on protests in general. Therefore, they interpret *any* anti-government protests as negative, even if targeted against their enemies, the current Left government. This is triggered by the recent experience of mass protests, which explains their high punishment of protest-promoting candidates.

4.1 Exploratory Analysis

Respondent's Partisanship⁹

In addition to the hypotheses, we also pre-registered a set of exploratory analysis of sub-group effects based on the extant literature. First, we explored sub-group effects based on respondents' partisan ideology. Anderson et al. (2005: 157) find no clear patterns of support for the democratic system and norms among losers from different party families. Yet, recent literature on the rise of the Extreme Right in Europe has shown that voters of the Extreme Right have a particularly high tolerance for the erosion of democratic institutions and anti-democratic

⁹ For Estonia, we use the results from Parliamentary elections of 5 March 2023. The most recent legislative election in Chile was held on November 21, 2021, nearly two years before we started the data collection process. Since voters have a hard time recalling past political events (Miller, 2013), we decided to focus on the Chilean respondents' voting choices in the May 7, 2023, Constitutional Council election, a temporary body tasked to draft a new constitution in 2023. In this election, traditional parties competed for seats in the Council (Heiss & Suárez-Cao, 2024) using a voting system similar to that used for senatorial elections, which included a D'Hondt system, compulsory voting, and open lists. Practically the same parties that run during the 2021 election also run in this election. Lists, ideologies, and seats were as follow: "Unity for Chile" (Left, 16), "Safe Chile" (Right, 11), "Everything for Chile" (Center, 0), "Republican Party" (Far-Right, 23) and the "Party of the People" (Right, 0). We mostly follow Heiss & Suárez-Cao (2024) in their ideological coding of the lists.

actions. For instance, Svolik et al. (2023: 15) document, via a similar candidate choice conjoint experiment focusing on the cases of Germany, Spain, Sweden, Estonia, Serbia, and Ukraine, that citizens tend to reject political candidates who encourage their supporters “to violently disrupt campaign rallies” at high rates. However, voters of the illiberal right parties in these countries rejected such candidates at a rate that was 30 percent lower than the rate among mainstream voters. In contrast, in the Latin American context, voters of the Extreme Left might have a stronger disposition to support anti-systemic protest action.

Error! Reference source not found. displays the sub-group effects by respondents’ supported party. It provides clear evidence in the Estonian case that is in line with the findings of Svolik et al. While the previous section demonstrated that electoral losers overall demonstrate support for candidates proposing destabilizing protests in Estonia, this group masks considerable heterogeneity. Electoral losers in Estonia are composed of three parties: the moderate nationalist right Pro Patria (*Isamaa*), the leftist Center Party, and the Extreme Right (anti-immigration and anti-LGBTQ Estonian Conservative People’s Party (EKRE)). **Error! Reference source not found.** shows that EKRE voters (violet coefficient) are highly likely to both support candidates that propose anti-government protests and also oppose candidates that are against them. Therefore, the loser effects are largely driven by the Extreme Right EKRE.

Voters of other opposition parties do not show a particular sympathy towards candidates supporting destabilizing protests. This aligns well with Svolik et al. (2023), showing that voters of the Extreme Right have a particularly high tolerance for anti-systemic action, compared to citizens voting for other parties. Intuitively, winners effects are driven by the supporters of the liberal Reform Party (yellow coefficient), while supporters of other coalition partners do not show a particular antipathy nor sympathy towards candidates supporting destabilizing protests. Given that the Reform Party is the largest and dominant coalition partner, its voters might have particularly high expectations of the implementation of their policy agenda and therefore might see anti-government protests as especially harmful to their interests.

In the Chilean case, the differences between different parties associated with the presidential coalition and opposition are weaker. Results of the previous section suggested that voters across the board reject candidates favoring protests aimed at destabilizing the current government in office. Yet, it seems that voters of the Extreme Right (Republican Party) in Chile (light green coefficient) are especially likely to condemn candidates associated with anti-government protest, despite not being in the presidential coalition. As explained in the previous section, this

is a legacy of the 2019 protests, which were especially likely to be perceived as harmful for Right-wing voters.

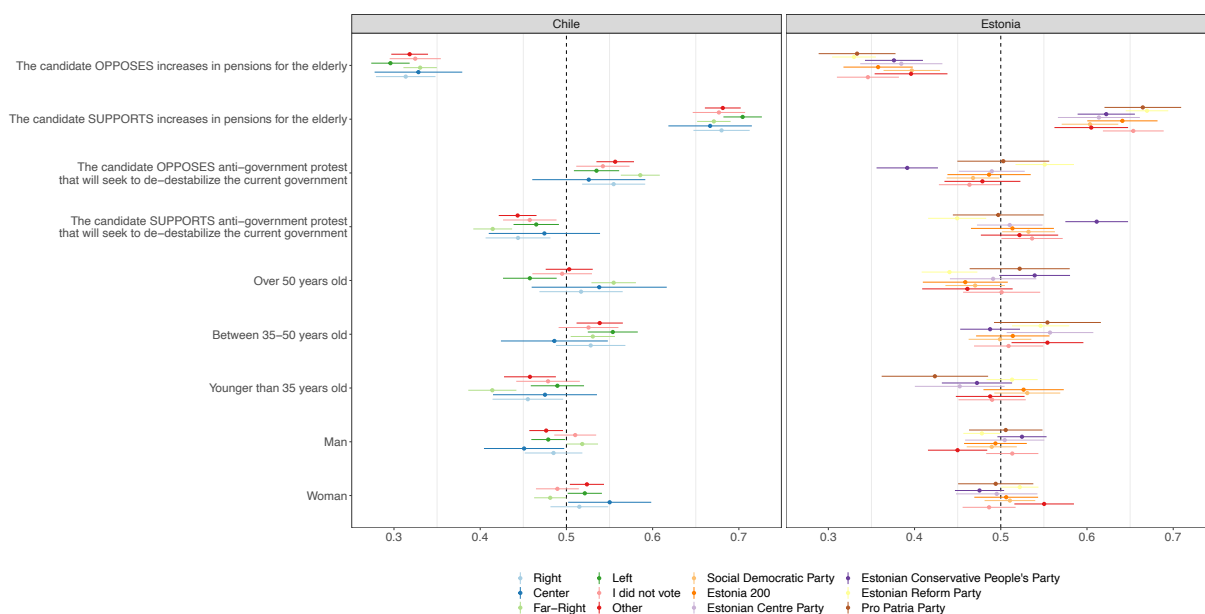


Figure 3: Sub-group Differences (Partisanship)

3.2.2 Disengaged Citizens

Previous literature has created an expectation that disengaged citizens, aside from winners and losers, represent another distinct group that may also exhibit a lack of concern about candidates advocating for anti-system protest action or openly supporting such actions. These individuals, disengaged from politics, are dissatisfied with existing political parties, and it is probable that those who abstain from voting gravitate towards the attitudes of the losers within the political system. As suggested by Svulik et al. (2023), disaffection with specific parties or politicians tends to coincide with a disregard for democratic institutions in general. This disillusionment might prompt these voter groups to lend support to protests that are detrimental to democratic stability. We would therefore also expect that disengaged citizens would be more open to supporting anti-systemic politicians compared to electoral winners.

Error! Reference source not found. also provides a test for that expectation. In the Estonian case, it seems that respondents who did not report voting in the 2023 election (pink coefficient) display similar attitudes to electoral losers, favoring candidates proposing destabilizing anti-government protests. Yet, the coefficient for disengaged respondents is considerably smaller in magnitude compared to citizens reporting voting for EKRE. That indicates that in the Estonian case, disengaged respondents indeed behave like electoral losers. In the Chilean case, however,

it seems that respondents who did not report voting in 2023 displayed attitudes rather similar to citizens who reported turning out to vote. However, in the Chilean case voting was compulsory.

5 Discussion

A considerable literature has explored the effects of losers' consent in democracies. For instance, scholarship has compared democratic satisfaction, political trust, and political efficacy among the winners and losers of elections (Esaiasson, 2011; Anderson, 2005; Singh, Karakoç, and Blais, 2012). Other studies have examined the readiness of electoral losers to support institutional changes to the democratic system (Bowler and Donovan, 2019; Bowler, Donovan, and Karp, 2007; Pilet et al., 2023).

In this paper, we study citizens' reactions to anti-democratic candidates who support potentially destabilizing anti-government protests. It could be expected that in democracies with well-operating electoral integrity, provocations such as calling for anti-systemic protests by losing candidates could be seen as anti-democratic and condemned by citizens committed to upholding democratic norms. Yet, we argue that electoral losers have incentives to support such types of politicians to destabilize the ruling government.

We test these hypotheses with two conjoint experiments in two consolidated Third-wave democracies: Chile and Estonia. The candidate choice experiment allows us to investigate whether hypothetical political candidates who support destabilizing protests receive different levels of support from actual election winners and losers. We specifically selected Estonia and Chile due to their comparable income levels, democratic stability, and consistent record of electoral integrity, positioning them as “hard cases” for finding support for anti-democratic candidates.

We find support for our hypothesis in the case of Estonia, but not for Chile. Respondents who voted for the candidate that did not win the most recent election are more inclined to support a candidate who advocates for anti-systemic actions against the current government in Estonia. We show that the “losers’ effect” is largely driven by the voters of the anti-migrant and anti-LGBT EKRE party. Additionally, we show that disengaged (non-voting) citizens display similar attitudes to electoral losers in Estonia. Lastly, we argue that this disconfirming finding in the Chilean case is driven by the legacy of the 2019-20 social protests against Sebastián Piñera's Right-wing government (2018-2022), which made current electoral losers (right-wing voters) very skeptical against protest action more broadly.