

Conditional Satisfaction: Political Support, Congruence, and Cabinet Composition

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between citizen satisfaction with the functioning of democracy and ideological congruence. We focus on how this relationship may vary by government type, paying attention to the conditioning effects of coalition governments' ideological make-up and individual-level education. Our analyses rely on harmonized survey data covering one million respondents in 28 countries over a 40-year period. We find limited evidence that the relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological congruence is conditional on national government type. All coalitions are not, however, created equal. Comparing single-party governments to multi-party governments with different ideological compositions, we find striking differences, but only for the higher educated. While the negative relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological incongruence is similar for lower-educated citizens in single-party and multiparty coalition settings (irrespective of cabinet composition), for the higher educated, the relationship weakens as a function of the ideological diversity of the coalition cabinet.

Keywords: Ideological congruence; satisfaction with democracy; coalition government

Understanding the causes and correlates of how citizens evaluate the everyday performance of democracy has become an important topic of research for scholars of comparative political behavior. Political scientists working in this area have shown a growing interest in the role of ideological congruence, and in particular citizens' ideological proximity to their national government (Brandenburg and Johns 2014; Christmann and Torcal 2018; Curini et al. 2012; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Egmond et al. 2020; Kim 2009; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017; Singh et al. 2011). In this paper, we advance this line of research by developing and testing an argument about the conditioning effects of national government type. Specifically, we argue that the effect of ideological distance on public opinion depends on how different types of government affect citizens' sense of (un)certainty about whether their needs and interests will be represented or marginalized because of elite bargaining within national executives.

Our analyses rely on an original data set of harmonized survey data covering one million respondents in 28 countries over a 40-year period. We use these data to investigate whether the relationship between ideological congruence and citizen satisfaction with the functioning of democracy differs systematically when national governments are controlled by a single party with a legislative majority compared to when a coalition of parties with a legislative majority runs the national executive. In developing our theory, we go beyond this dichotomy between single-party versus multiparty coalitions by considering how the ideological composition of coalition cabinets might shape citizens' sense of political representation and political marginalization, thereby conditioning the relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological congruence. We also examine the role of citizen heterogeneity. Drawing on various strands of comparative political behavior research, we consider and test for the additional conditioning effects of citizens' level of education.

Consistent with prior research, we find that citizens who are more ideologically distant from their national government are less likely to be satisfied with the everyday working of democracy. We find limited evidence, however, that the relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological congruence varies by national government type. By contrast, our study provides compelling evidence that the ideological composition of coalition governments conditions the relationship between citizen satisfaction and congruence, but only among the higher educated. We find that the relationship between democratic evaluations and ideological congruence is similar for lower-educated citizens in single-party and multiparty coalition settings (irrespective of cabinet composition). For the higher educated, ideological distance from the sitting government has a similar effect on democratic evaluations in single-party settings and when national coalitions comprise parties with a low ideological diversity. However, we find that the negative relationship between citizen satisfaction and incongruence weakens as the ideological diversity of multi-party governments increases. Our analyses even suggest that when coalitions are made up of parties with a wide ideological base, higher-educated citizens may be just as likely to be satisfied with the everyday working of democracy whether they are ideologically close to or distant from the sitting government.

Our findings contribute both to existing research that focuses on ideological congruence and to the much larger literature on citizen satisfaction. To date, scholars have paid little attention to the conditioning effects of political context or micro-macro interactions when studying the attitudinal consequences of ideological incongruence. Our study addresses these gaps in the literature, and in so doing shows the analytic importance of taking context and citizen heterogeneity into account and points to new avenues of future research in this area. Our

research also contributes to the expanding body of work that examines citizen satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Scholars working on this question have long been interested in contextual factors, providing compelling evidence, for example, regarding the effects of macro-economic performance (Quaranta and Martini 2016) and democratic quality (Wagner et al. 2009). They have also studied individual-level predictors, such as the role of perceptions of representation (Aarts and Thomassen 2008), and in this area, as already noted, some work has explored the impact of ideological incongruence but much more has been written on differences in satisfaction between supporters of governing vs. non-governing parties, including how these winner-loser differences vary by context (Anderson et al. 2005). Research on citizen satisfaction has studied the conditioning effects of government type, but mainly indirectly by focusing either on national electoral rules that commonly result in more single- versus multi-party governments (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Anderson et al. 2005; Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Wagner et al. 2009) or on broader governing arrangements where single- versus multi-party governments dominate (Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Martini and Quaranta 2019; Singh 2014). Ultimately, these twin bodies of work have produced mixed evidence regarding the direct and conditioning effects of government type, albeit measured indirectly, on citizen satisfaction. By directly measuring government type, our study speaks to this empirical puzzle. Our analyses point to the ideological make-up of coalition governments as an important but understudied factor that can help explain why different electoral rules are found to create such different patterns of satisfaction among citizens. Moreover, our findings suggest that we are less likely to observe differences in citizen satisfaction between countries with majoritarian and proportional national electoral rules and governing arrangements when the latter result in coalition governments with a narrow ideological base.

The paper begins with an overview of public opinion research on ideological congruence. Building on the findings of a variety of political behavior and public opinion literatures, we present an argument (and five hypotheses) for why government type and the ideological composition of multi-party governments might condition the relationship between ideological congruence and evaluations of the everyday functioning of democracy. In developing this argument, we pay attention to how the hypothesized effects may play out differently for citizens with higher and lower levels of education. We then describe the data, measures, and methods used to test our hypotheses and present the results of a series of multi-level time-series models. We conclude by discussing our findings and their implications for existing and future research.

Ideological congruence in context

Much has been written on the nature, causes, and correlates of ideological congruence (see Lefkofridi 2019 for a review). In recent years, scholars have examined congruence as an explanatory variable, with a focus on the relationship between political attitudes and citizens' ideological distance from their national government. The findings of this small but growing body of research provide broad and consistent support for the idea that ideological proximity to one's national government is positively associated with political support, mostly measured in terms of citizen satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Christmann and Torcal 2018; Kim 2009; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017). Work in this area has found similar results when congruence is operationalized in policy and process terms rather than based on ideological proximity (André and Depauw 2017; Ferland 2017, 2021; Reher 2015).

The basic hypothesis motivating this research is intuitive: people who are more ideologically congruent with their government are more likely to believe that they are being better

represented by that government and therefore more likely to be positively oriented toward it and satisfied with the functioning of democracy. This sense of being better represented may take a variety of forms. For example, citizens who are ideologically congruent with their national government may be more likely to believe officials are (to borrow the words of Hannah Pitkin (Pitkin 1967)) “standing for” or “making present again” their needs and preferences in public policy-making processes. Citizens who are more ideologically congruent with their national government may also be more likely to view it, again borrowing the words of Pitkin, as “acting for” them in terms of public spending and policy decisions. In short, underpinning the existing research on political support and ideological congruence is the idea that citizen evaluations of the functioning of democracy are shaped by whether they believe they are being represented or marginalized in national governing processes.

Studies that focus on the relationship between political support and ideological congruence have yet to model explicitly the conditioning effects of political context, including most notably the type of government with which a citizen is more or less ideologically (in)congruent. There are strong theoretical and empirical reasons for thinking that government type—namely, whether national governments are controlled by one or more than one political party—will condition the relationship between political support and ideological congruence. Regardless of government type, negotiation and compromise are key elements of governing, both of which introduce uncertainty as to the form and content of the policies that governments pursue (and legislatures support). However, depending on the party or parties involved in these governing negotiations and the nature of the compromises they reach, we expect that voters will experience different levels of (un)certainly about whether their needs and preferences are being politically represented or marginalized and that these context-induced individual-level

differences in representational (un)certainty will affect how satisfied citizens are with the functioning of democracy.

When national governments are controlled by a single, coherent, and disciplined party with a legislative majority, we expect citizens to experience high levels of certainty about how well they are being represented and how much they are being politically marginalized. Citizens who are ideologically congruent with such a single-party government are therefore more likely to be satisfied with the functioning of democracy than those who are ideologically distant from it. By contrast, the negotiations and political compromises that underpin the formation and functioning of coalition governments (Bergman et al. 2021; Martin and Vanberg 2014; Müller and Strøm 2008) are likely to generate uncertainty for citizens about how well they are being represented. With these points in mind, we postulate an initial hypothesis (*Hypothesis 1*) as follows: citizens who are ideologically close to a single-party government are more likely to be satisfied with the functioning of democracy than those who are close to a multi-party government.

It would be naïve, however, to assume that all coalition governments are created equal when it comes to the amount of representational (un)certainty they generate for the average citizen. Some coalitions comprise parties that share ideological and programmatic positions, while others are made up of parties with different ideologies and programmatic aims. Given the greater need for ongoing compromise and negotiation within more ideologically diverse coalitions (Tsebelis 2002), it is important to consider how the ideological make-up of coalition governments could (a) affect citizens' sense of (un)certainty regarding political representation

and marginalization, and (b) what effect, in turn, their sense of (un)certainty might have on their evaluation of the functioning of democracy.

To understand how the diversity of the ideological composition of multi-party governments might condition the relationship between political support and congruence, we turn to existing research. The important initial question to answer is whether citizens are aware of and able to make sense of coalition governments. Past research on the parliamentary democracies under investigation in the current study (Fortunato et al. 2014; Fortunato and Stevenson 2013) shows that voters are indeed able to identify the party of the prime minister in multiparty cabinets and also have meaningful knowledge about the relative size of parties in coalition governments. This then begs a follow-up question about whether and how citizens' understanding and perception of coalition governments, including their ideological make-up, might affect their sense of (un)certainty regarding political representation/marginalization. While we know of no published work that directly examines this question, three strands of recent public opinion research are instructive for formulating hypotheses.

A small but growing body of work that examines how citizens attribute responsibility to parties in coalition government is the first strand of research with some useful insights for the current study. Plescia (2017), for example, finds that Italian voters are able to recognize that parties play different roles in governing coalitions and differentiate between ministerial responsibilities when attributing responsibility for policy outputs. Similarly, Angelova et al. (2016) find that German voters hold the party of the prime minister most responsible, but only for the policy areas under its ministerial control. In a recent study, Fortunato et al. (2021), using data from five European democracies, find that voters are generally able to make "sensible" inferences

about proportional policy responsibility within coalition governments. By contrast, using data from Austria, Germany, and Sweden, Bowler et al. (2020) find that citizens perceive smaller parties as exercising disproportional influence on coalition policy. It is important to emphasize that none of these studies considers ideological differences between coalition parties, focusing instead on their relative legislative strength, but collectively this research provides support for the premise underpinning this paper—namely, that citizens generally understand that not all governing parties are created equal in terms of their policy influence. That said, given that these studies do not consider ideological differences between coalition parties, it is hard to know what to do with the mixed evidence that they offer regarding whether citizens attribute greater political sway to larger parties compared to smaller parties.

A few studies exist on the question of mass perceptions of the ideological make-up of multi-party governments. Using data from 18 countries, Fortunato and Stevenson (2013) find that voters perceive parties in coalition cabinets as more ideologically similar, though this is less likely to be the case among the higher educated. In a follow-up study using data from 11 European countries, Fortunato and Adams (2015) find that voters project the left-right position of the party of the prime minister on to its junior partner(s), but not the other way round. As with the earlier study, they find though that this is less likely to be the case among the higher educated. Spoon and Klüver (2017) provide a more nuanced account of this issue by taking the ideological diversity of coalition governments into account. Using longitudinal data from 19 European countries, they show that voters are more likely to misperceive the ideological positions of parties in coalition governments compared to the ideology of single-party governments, but this is less likely to occur the more ideologically diverse a coalition is.

The findings of these various studies suggest different expectations regarding how the ideological make-up of a coalition government might condition the relationship between political support and ideological incongruence. On the one hand, we might expect to find no conditioning effect due to individual-level misperceptions that result in citizens underestimating the ideological diversity of coalition governments (*Hypothesis 2*), or at least no conditioning effect except among the higher educated, a point we will return to shortly. On the other hand, based on the findings of Spoon and Klüver (2017), we might expect only more ideologically diverse coalitions to have a conditioning effect. Still, it is not immediately obvious how the conditioning effect of a politically diverse coalition might alter the negative relationship between political support and ideological distance. We see various possibilities, all of which depend on how different groups of citizens respond to the fact that their government is made up of an ideologically diverse coalition of parties. The first group comprises citizens who are ideologically closer to the government of the day, where – it is worth reiterating – government ideology is calculated as a weighted average using each constituent party’s share of legislative seats or cabinet positions (based on the assumption that larger parties enjoy greater bargaining power and policy influence). The second group comprises citizens who are ideologically distant from the government.

One possibility is that high-diversity coalition governments are a source of political frustration and disappointment for citizens who are ideologically close to the government. Even though one or more parties to which they are ideologically aligned is dominant within the coalition (hence the low level of ideological incongruence), these citizens might believe their needs and wants are being thwarted or not fully represented due to the fact that governing power has to be shared with others with significantly different ideological agendas. The findings of Singh and

Thornton (2016) support this line of reasoning. Using post-election data from 22 countries, they find that government supporters who have positive feelings toward one party within a governing coalition but negative feelings toward another (i.e., who are ambivalent toward the coalition executive as a whole) are less satisfied with the functioning of democracy than those with less ambivalent feelings. Of particular note for our study, Singh and Thornton argue that ideologically diverse coalitions can negatively impact perceptions of democratic performance by increasing levels of partisan ambivalence. Consistent with this, they find that coalitional ambivalence is greater where governing parties are more ideologically diverse. Another possibility is that citizens who are ideologically close to their government will be little affected by the fact that it is made up of parties with different ideological agendas. Given that one or more parties with which they are aligned is numerically strong within the coalition, they might look favorably on the government as doing a good job in representing their interests (despite the occasional need for negotiation and compromise). The studies reviewed above that demonstrate how citizens attribute more policy responsibility to larger parties and the party of the Prime Minister are consistent with this second possibility.

But what about citizens who are ideologically incongruent with a government that is itself made up of ideologically diverse parties? That they are ideologically distant from the government means that any parties with which they are ideologically aligned are numerically weak within the coalition (or absent from the coalition entirely). If ideologically incongruent citizens focus on the policy power of the larger parties in the coalition with which they are ideologically unaligned, we might expect them to feel as unrepresented (and in turn dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy) as they would be under a single-party government or non-ideologically-diverse coalition government. However, given the high ideological diversity of

the coalition, the party or parties with which they are more aligned are not without policy influence. Rather than feeling marginalized from the governing process, they may see an ideologically diverse coalition as offering opportunities for their needs and wants to be represented, and perhaps even disproportionately (Bowler et al. 2020). Moreover, the findings of work by Spoon and Kanthak (2019) suggest that they may even take comfort in knowing that the interests of their ideological outgroup are being checked and balanced given the diversity of the coalition.

Taken together, the different conditioning effects described above result in three additional hypotheses, visualized as scenarios in the form of stylized marginal effects in Figure 1. For ease of reference, we include the hypothesized relationship between political support and ideological incongruence when the government is controlled by a single party with a legislative majority. All three scenarios involve a weakening of the negative relationship between political support and ideological incongruence under high-diversity coalitions, but with different observable implications. In scenario (a), the strength of the negative relationship between political support and incongruence weakens due to a drop in satisfaction among those closest to the government who view the ideological diversity of government as frustrating their political interests (*Hypothesis 3a*). By contrast, in scenario (b), the relationship weakens because of a boost in satisfaction among citizens who are ideologically distant from the government who view the ideological diversity of government as creating opportunities for the representation of their political interests (*Hypothesis 3b*). If scenario (c) holds (*Hypothesis 3c*), we would expect to observe the weakest relationship between political support and incongruence because citizens who are closer to the government feel frustrated at the same time as those further from it feel hopeful.

INSERT FIGURE 1

As the already noted findings of Fortunato and Stevenson 2013 and Fortunato and Adams 2015 regarding the conditioning effects of education suggest (see also Spoon and Klüver 2017), there is good reason to take citizen heterogeneity seriously when considering the impact of government type and cabinet composition on political support. In a similar vein, though without focusing on government type, Mayne and Hakhverdian (2017) also provide evidence of education's conditioning effects, showing that ideological incongruence has a stronger negative relationship with satisfaction with democracy among the higher educated. Rather than hypothesizing about the conditioning effects of ideological diversity on the *average* citizen, as we have done thus far, in the remainder of this section, and following these existing studies, we consider the potential additional conditioning effects of education.

Using data from a variety of contexts, many studies have shown a strong relationship between education and political interest, political news consumption, and political knowledge (see, e.g., Althaus 2003; Alvarez and Brehm 2003; Enns and Kellstedt 2008; Görtz 2021 Grönlund and Milner 2006; Lambert et al 1988; Shehata and Strömbäck 2011).¹ These findings, coupled with those of other work (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013; Fortunato and Adams 2015; Spoon and Klüver 2017) suggest that a person's level of education will likely be positively associated with how knowledgeable they are of the type and ideological makeup of their national government, including the balance of bargaining power within governments that are made up of a coalition of parties. If this is true, we would expect the conditioning effect of governments' ideological diversity to be itself conditional on citizens' level of education. Put differently, we should

¹ Understanding whether these relationships are causal in nature has become an important topic of study in recent years (see, e.g., Highton 2009; Weinschenk et al. 2021).

expect to observe a more pronounced weakening of the negative relationship between political support and ideological incongruence under more ideologically diverse coalition among the higher educated compared to the lower educated. Moreover, as already noted in our prior discussion, this weakening of the negative relationship between political support and ideological incongruence could take one of three forms (as visualized in Figure 1), depending on how higher-educated citizens who are ideologically closer to and further away from the government view their prospects of representation when the coalition is ideologically diverse.

Data, measurement, and estimation

We test our hypotheses using data from the Eurobarometer survey series. Building off existing comparative political behavior research on ideological congruence (e.g., André and Depauw 2017; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Kim 2009; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017), our study's dependent variable is citizen satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. This variable captures citizens' attitudinal orientation toward the everyday working of democracy (see; Linde and Ekman 2003 for a critical account of the use of this variable). For our analysis, we merged 27 survey-waves of Eurobarometer (that included data on respondents' satisfaction with democracy and their individual left-right self-placement), covering 2002-2018, with 47 survey-waves from the Eurobarometer Mannheim Trend File spanning 1976-2001. The resultant data set includes information on one million respondents covering 28 countries.

Following other work (Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017), we measure satisfaction with the functioning of democracy as a dummy variable (where 1 refers to respondents who are very or fairly satisfied, and 0 refers to respondents who not or not at all satisfied). We measure ideological congruence based on a mean of expert surveys collected by

ParlGov (Döring and Manow 2018) combined with individual-level information on respondents' left-right self-placement.² Using the ParlGov data, we estimate the ideological composition of the national governing cabinet at the time each survey is fielded.³ For cabinets made up of more than one parliamentary party, the ideological score is a weighted average calculated using each party's national legislative seat share.⁴ To measure government type, we draw on information from ParlGov to code each cabinet as belonging to one of four different government types, depending on the number of governing parties with parliamentary representation and their combined legislative seat share. This includes: single-party cabinets with a legislative majority; multi-party cabinets with a legislative majority; minority cabinets (i.e., single- and multi-party governments that do not enjoy a legislative majority); and a small number of other cabinet types.⁵ We capture a cabinet's ideological diversity by calculating the maximum ideological distance between governing parties (Sørensen 2014).⁶ Education is coded using the self-reported age of respondents when they completed full-time education.⁷

Our models include individual- and macro-level controls based on the findings of the large body of existing work that examines satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Given the strong

² Even though there are intrinsic problems with comparing citizens' left-right self-placement in a survey and expert-coded party-placement, Powell (2009) finds that alternative approaches, such as citizen perception of party position, expert surveys, and manifesto data, generate similar congruence scores. Since we are interested in within-country congruence, this eliminates some of the problems with this approach. See Lo et al. (2014) for a detailed discussion.

³ See Appendix for more information on the procedure used to match surveys and cabinets using survey field dates.

⁴ We also calculate ideological congruence in two other ways as (1) an unweighted average, and (2) using the left-right position of the party of the prime minister. The predicted probabilities estimated on the basis of the models using these alternative measures (see Figures A4-A7 in Appendix) are substantively very similar.

⁵ In our sample, respondents fall into these government types as follows: single-party majority governments (16.2%); multi-party majority governments (57.1%); single- and multi-party minority governments (26.7%), and other government types (0.1%).

⁶ We also ran our models using a weighted measure of cabinets' ideological diversity using government parties' legislative seat share. See Appendix for more information.

⁷ See Appendix for more information on education coding.

association between democratic satisfaction and institutional quality (cf. Wagner et al. 2009), we include a measure of corruption (using V-Dem's index of political corruption, Coppedge et al. 2020). We also control for the relationship between citizen satisfaction and economic performance and economic conditions (cf. Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Quaranta and Martini 2016) using data on national unemployment and real GDP growth rates (which we use to code years of recession). Recent studies have pointed to how satisfaction with democracy relates to the timing of survey data collection relative to national elections (Nemčok and Wass 2020). We therefore include dummy variables to control for a (three-month) post-election honeymoon effect. At the individual level, we control for respondents' age, self-reported gender, and labor-market position (using dummies capturing whether respondents are in work, unemployed, retired, a homemaker, or in full-time education). Finally, all models include a time-trend (beginning in the first year a country appears in the data set and increasing by one in each subsequent year) that controls for simultaneous but unrelated trends over time in satisfaction with democracy and our explanatory variables (see Wang & Maxwell, 2015).

To test our hypotheses, we fit a series of multilevel models to account for non-independence arising from the hierarchical structure of our data. Individual respondents are nested in time (based on the survey, year, and election period in which the survey is fielded) and in place (based on the country in which each respondent lives) resulting in a five-level model.⁸ The multilevel structure of the model allows us to test the context-specific relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological congruence. In addition, the random slopes allow for the

⁸ Following Fairbrother (2014), all macro-contextual variables are group-mean centered. All models are estimated using MLwiN.

possibility that these conditional relationships vary over time and across space as a function of a person's ideological distance from their government as well as their level of education.

Results

In Model 1, controlling for individual- and macro-level variables, we find clear evidence, consistent with past research, that citizens' ideological distance from their national government affects the likelihood that they are satisfied with how democracy is working.⁹ Without taking government type into account, citizens who are an average distance from their government (i.e., approximately 2 points on the left-right scale) are 6 percentage points less likely to be satisfied with the functioning of democracy than those who are perfectly congruent with it. Model 2 tests whether the relationship between citizen satisfaction and congruence varies across different government types. The results indicate that the probability of satisfaction for citizens who are perfectly congruent is lower when that government is a multi-party majority coalition than a single-party majority government. This result supports H₁. We estimate the gap in the predicted probability of satisfaction among citizens who are perfectly congruent with a single-party vs. a multi-party government at 7 points. In addition, the coefficient on the interaction term involving the coalition government dummy is positive and statistically significant, indicating that ideological distance has a greater negative relationship with citizen satisfaction under single-party governments compared to multi-party governments. This also implies that the gap in satisfaction between citizens living under single-party and multi-party governments narrows as they become more ideologically distant from that government. To better understand this changing relationship, Figure 2 plots the estimated probability of satisfaction across the full empirical range of ideological congruence for the average citizen living under single-party and

⁹ See Table A1 in Appendix for the main regression output discussed in the text. Table A6 displays the full regression model. Table A2 reports the predicted probabilities related to individual- and macro-level covariates.

multi-party majority governments.¹⁰ Doing so reveals that the difference in the estimated probability of being satisfied between the two government types is, in fact, only statistically significant for those who are ideologically very close to the government (congruence < .5). This clearly suggests a limited impact of government type on altering the relationship between political support and ideological distance.

INSERT FIGURE 2

As we argued earlier in this paper, it is important to go beyond the simple distinction between single- and multi-party governments given variations in the ideological diversity of coalition cabinets. We also made the case for taking citizen heterogeneity into account. Model 3 therefore includes interaction terms that allow us to examine whether the ideological composition of coalition governments conditions the relationship between citizen satisfaction and congruence, while Model 4 includes additional interaction terms to examine the potential further conditioning effects of education. Given the challenges of interpreting the combined substantive and statistical significance of these interaction terms, we rely on the predicted probabilities estimated based on these two final models. Model 3 results in predicted probabilities (visualized in Figure A3 in Appendix) that demonstrate a weakening of the negative relationship between political support and ideological incongruence as a function of the ideological diversity of the national government. Specifically, we find that the relationship between support and incongruence under low-diversity coalitions is statistically

¹⁰ Our predicted probability figures use 84-percent confidence intervals. An overlap in the 84% confidence intervals of two point estimates indicates that they are not statistically different from one another at the 5% level in a two-sided test (MacGregor-Fors and Payton 2013).

indistinguishable from that under single-party governments.¹¹ However, under coalitions with a very high level of ideological diversity, we find evidence in line with H_{3c} (scenario c). Among citizens who are perfectly congruent with the government, we estimate that those living under a single-party government are 9 percentage points more likely to be satisfied with the functioning of democracy than those living under a coalition with a very high level of ideological diversity. At the other end of the observed range in incongruence, levels of satisfaction drop regardless of government type, but the relationship between support and incongruence is significantly weaker under coalitions with a very high ideological diversity than low-diversity coalitions or single-party governments. In fact, the predicted probabilities estimated on the basis of Model 3 indicate that citizens living under coalitions with a very high ideological diversity are 10 percentage points more likely to be satisfied than those living under a single-party government.

Our final model tests whether this weakening of the negative relationship between political support and ideological distance varies across citizens depending on their level of education. The predicted probabilities estimated on the basis of this model, plotted in Figures 3a (for lower-educated citizens) and 3b (for higher-educated citizens), show the importance of taking both education and the ideological diversity of coalition governments into account for understanding the relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological congruence.¹²

¹¹ For this, we set cabinet ideological diversity at -1, +1, and +2 standard deviation(s) below/above the sample mean for multi-party governments. A low-diversity coalition has a maximum ideological distance between governing parties of approximately 1 point on the 10-point left-right scale. The ideological distance between governing parties in a coalition with very high diversity is approximately 5 points on the same scale.

¹² Predicted probabilities are estimated based on citizens with a level of education two standard deviations below/above the mean.

INSERT FIGURE 3a

Our analyses indicate that the relationship between citizen attitudes toward the functioning of democracy and ideological congruence weakens as a function of the ideological diversity of coalition governments, but only among higher-educated citizens. For lower-educated citizens, we estimate that a two-standard deviation increase in ideological distance is associated with a similarly-sized drop in the probability of satisfaction regardless of how narrow or broad the ideological base of the national government (-8.2 for low-diversity coalitions vs. -7.4 for coalitions with very high ideological diversity). Also noteworthy, and as indicated by the overlapping confidence intervals in all three plots in Figure 3a, is our finding that the relationship between political support and ideological incongruence is statistically the same for lower-educated citizens living under single-party and multiple-party majority governments and is also unaffected by the ideological composition of coalition cabinets.

INSERT FIGURE 3b

As for the higher educated, our analyses show that they are significantly more sensitive to ideological distance compared to the lower educated, but their sensitivity depends on the ideological make-up of the cabinet. When coalition governments comprise parties with similar ideologies, we estimate that a two-standard deviation increase in ideological distance is associated with a 14-point drop in the predicted probability of satisfaction. We observe a similar drop in the predicted probability of satisfaction among higher-educated citizens living under single-party governments. However, our analyses indicate that when coalition governments are made up of parties reflecting a very high level of ideological diversity, the

negative relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological distance weakens substantially. We find suggestive evidence that citizen satisfaction drops modestly as a function of ideological distance when governments include parties with very different ideologies. However, the confidence intervals in Figure 3b indicate that higher-educated respondents might in fact be just as likely to be satisfied with the everyday working of democracy whether they are ideologically close to or distant from the government. This flattening of the relationship between political support and ideological distance is driven by group responses consistent with H_{3c} . Specifically, we observe a drop in the predicted probability of satisfaction among higher-educated citizens close to the government (compared to single-party and low-diversity coalition governments) but a boost in the predicted probability of satisfaction among the higher educated who are further away ideologically from the government.

INSERT TABLE 1

Discussion and conclusion

This paper advances research on the attitudinal effects of ideological congruence. Covering more than one million respondents over a 40-year period in 28 countries, our study – like other research in this area (see Christmann and Torcal 2018; Kim 2009; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017) – focuses on citizen attitudes toward the functioning of democracy. It adds to this body of work by presenting and testing an argument about how government type conditions the relationship between citizen satisfaction and congruence. We grounded this argument in the premise that levels of (un)certainly regarding political representation and marginalization vary by government type. In developing our argument, we underscored the importance of not just distinguishing between single-party and multi-party governments but also recognizing the role

that the ideological diversity of coalition cabinets can play in shaping the relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological congruence. Finally, we also pointed to the potential additional conditioning effects of education.

Confirming prior work, we find that citizens are less likely to positively evaluate the everyday working of democracy the more ideologically distant they are from their government. As for the central animating question of this study, our analyses show that the conditioning effects of government type are far from straightforward. Without probing beyond the simple interaction of congruence and government type, our findings suggest that citizens' political evaluations are shaped in very similar ways by their ideological distance from government regardless of whether it is controlled by a single party or a coalition of parties. The role that government type plays in shaping citizen attitudes only becomes clear, however, after modeling for the conditioning effects of cabinet make-up and education.

Our analyses indicate that for citizens with lower levels of education the relationship between political support and ideological incongruence is very similar under single-party and multi-party governments, regardless of the ideological make-up of coalition cabinets. By contrast, the evaluations of higher-educated citizens are more sensitive to ideological distance and this heightened sensitivity is also context dependent. Under single-party majority governments, where legislative power is concentrated in the hands of politicians sharing the same ideological base, ideological distance from the government has a substantially more negative bearing on citizen satisfaction among the higher educated compared to the lower educated. Interestingly, our study shows that the relationship between political support and ideological distance is statistically the same for higher educated citizen under coalition governments with low

ideological diversity as it is in single-party government settings. However, as the ideological diversity of coalition cabinets increases, so the relationship between political support and ideological distance decreases among the higher educated. So much so that our analyses suggest that the relationship between citizen satisfaction and ideological distance may even become statistically insignificant when coalitions include parties with a very high ideological diversity. It is worth noting that this flattening of the relationship among the higher educated results from a drop in satisfaction (compared to single-party governments) for those who are ideologically close to the sitting government combined with a boost in satisfaction among citizens who are ideologically further away from it.

These findings contribute to prior scholarship and ongoing debates within comparative public opinion research on “losers’ consent” (Anderson et al. 2005). As a measure, ideological distance from one’s national government provides a meaningful way of capturing the likelihood that one’s needs and interests will be represented in governing processes. While our analyses clearly underscore how, generally speaking, ideological distance (and therefore losing politically) substantially depresses citizen evaluations of democratic performance, they also reveal the context under which and a group of individuals for which ideological distance has a much less damaging impact on their views of the functioning of democracy. The fact that we find that ideologically diverse coalition cabinets are associated with a loss in satisfaction among higher-educated citizens who are ideologically close to government while at the same time producing an even larger gain in satisfaction among higher-educated citizens at an ideological distance from government raises interesting questions about system legitimacy, at least for this population subgroup. It is worth noting that our findings indicate that higher educated citizens are, as a group, more likely than not to be satisfied with the functioning of democracy regardless

of their ideological distance from a diverse coalition cabinet. Single-party and low-diversity coalition governments are associated with very different patterns of perceived political performance that strongly suggest starker divides between (higher-educated) citizens who feel democracy is working for them versus those who do not.

A key focus of the literature on losers' consent has been on understanding how variations in institutional arrangements affect satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Many studies in this area have examined the impact of legislative voting rules, comparing first-past-the-post rules that ordinarily produce single-party governments to more proportional rules that frequently result in coalition governments. Other studies use composite measures that capture the horizontal and vertical dispersion of power away from national executives, but a central element of these broader indices remains the distinction between systems dominated by single-party versus multiparty majority governments. Interestingly, these twin bodies of work have produced mixed evidence in support of the relationship between citizen satisfaction and national governing arrangements (cf. Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Anderson et al. 2005; Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011; Wagner et al. 2009). Our findings suggest a potentially important factor that could be contributing to these contradictory results and one that has been understudied in the existing research; namely, the ideological make-up of coalition governments. Our findings show that when multiparty majority governments have a narrow ideological base, attitudes toward the everyday operation of democracy are extremely similar to those under single-party governments. It is only when coalitions have a broader ideological base that we observe differences, driven mainly by context-dependent variations among the higher educated. With this in mind, an important topic of future study is to understand whether the inconsistent findings in the existing literature examining the

relationship between political support and electoral rules is driven by variations in the mix of coalition cabinets in the countries under investigation.

Our study also speaks to extant work that explores how citizens perceive policy responsibility and ideological positions within coalition governments (Angelova et al. 2016; Fortunato and Adams 2015). We drew on this literature to develop our theory and hypotheses, but as our review revealed, the findings that have emerged from this small body of research lead to different expectations. Our own findings point to the need for more research in this area to better understand the micro-mechanisms that explain variations in mass perceptions of different kinds of coalitions, including their ideological composition. Why are the democratic evaluations of lower-educated citizens insensitive to the ideological composition of coalition cabinets? Is this mainly driven by how they access and process information, by ideological misperceptions, or misattributions of policy responsibility? And why the democratic evaluations of the higher educated so much more sensitive to the ideological composition of coalition cabinets? Is this attributable to lower levels of negative affect (Ridge 2020) or partisan ambivalence (Singh and Thornton 2016) among the higher educated? Could it even be explained by their views on negotiation and compromise or their ability to cope with political uncertainty?

In our analyses, we focused on the conditioning effects of education, based on the findings of closely-related research (Fortunato and Stevenson 2013 and Fortunato and Adams 2015; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017; Spoon and Klüver 2017) as well as the much larger literature that demonstrates the strong relationship between education and political interest and political knowledge. This is not to suggest that a person's level of formal education is causally related

to the individual-level attributes motivating our hypotheses, most notably how politically aware or informed a person is (Weinschenk and Dawes 2019; Weinschenk et al. 2021). We hope that future research can build on our findings using more direct measures of political awareness and knowledge. Future studies might also explore if and how the conditioning effects of education that we reveal here are attributable to psychological and cognitive traits related to how individuals perceive and cope with political uncertainty or value political compromise, and not just their level of political knowledge. Our study also lays the groundwork for others to consider the potential conditioning effects of other individual-level characteristic, such as partisanship and partisan strength or even age and gender.

Another important line of future inquiry will be to examine whether the dynamics revealed by the current study are also observed when congruence is measured differently. In our analyses, we used the accepted measure of ideological congruence based on governments' ideology calculated as a weighted average using each constituent party's share of legislative seats. We ran additional models measuring ideological congruence as distance from the party of the Prime Minister, which produced substantially similar results. It will be worth testing whether our findings hold when congruence is measured not ideologically but instead using information on elite-mass matching on issues and policies (André and Depauw 2017; Ferland 2017, 2021; Reher 2015).

As the first study to examine the combined conditioning effects of cabinet composition and education on citizen satisfaction, we have used our original dataset to estimate average cross-sectional and longitudinal marginal effects. Understanding how these conditioning effects might vary in strength over time and across space is a final potentially interesting avenue of

future research. In this regard, it is worth considering how taking into account different societies' experiences of coalition governments and single-party governments, including the electoral weakening of the major parties of the left and right over the past quarter century (Berman and Snegovaya 2019; Gidron and Ziblatt 2019) and the increasing occurrence of ideologically diverse coalitions in some countries compared to other (Bergman et al. 2021), could add further nuance

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