Winners, losers and satisfaction with democracy: the interaction between electoral outcomes and legitimacy beliefs

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Abstract

We study the individual-level relationship between citizens’ satisfaction with democracy and electoral outcomes over time, and specifically examine stability and change in satisfaction with democracy as a cause and consequence of electoral behaviour and government composition. Data are derived from a unique panel survey in the Netherlands over the period 2007-2013. Our findings suggest that citizens’ level of satisfaction with democracy is more stable than specific evaluations of government performance but less stable than political ideology. Additionally, minority government rule appears to coincide with a greater rupture of satisfaction with democracy. We further demonstrate that voters whose party choice is selected into government twice or more in a row, and loyal party voters equally assess democracy more positively than others, and that these assessments are also responsive to the electoral context. Finally, our results show that higher levels of satisfaction with democracy significantly reduce the probability of abstention as well as vote switching. These findings imply that satisfaction with democracy as an indicator of legitimacy beliefs is not only a reflection of how content individuals are, but also impacts political behaviour that stabilises the political system.
In a well-functioning democracy, citizens translate their evaluations of how political elites and the system as a whole perform into voting behaviour and into their belief in the legitimacy of politics. On the aggregate (country) level, judgements about the performance of democracy show fluctuations but they have generally remained remarkably stable over the past decades (see Wagner et al. 2009). Previous research has already made great advances in explaining this fluctuation in overall stability through electoral outcomes, electoral contexts and the perceptions of political institutions (see, for example, Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Anderson et al. 2005; Dabros et al. 2015). Other studies have shown that satisfaction with democracy (SWD) can also influence future voting behaviour (see, for example, Ezrow and Xezonakis 2014; Hooghe et al. 2011). It appears that legitimacy beliefs and electoral outcomes interact over time at the individual level. However, the precise impact of beliefs in legitimacy on voting, and vice versa the impact of voting on beliefs in legitimacy has remained understudied.

We are filling this gap by addressing the wider issue of the nature of beliefs in the legitimacy of democracy. We focus on citizens’ SWD as an indicator that ‘taps the level of support for how the democratic regime works in practice’ (Linde and Ekman 2003, p.405; emphasis in original). Even though aggregate levels of satisfaction are rather stable over long periods of time, the measure seems to probe ‘public evaluation of democratic performance more than principles’ (Norris 1999, p. 11), and thus ranges mid-way between Easton’s (1965) concepts of specific and diffuse political support. Short-term changes in SWD are therefore less likely. The working hypothesis in this paper is that levels of SWD fluctuate in the medium-term and in particular in interaction with electoral outcomes.

We utilise a unique set of high-quality panel data collected in the Netherlands over the period 2007-2013. These allow analysing citizens’ attitudes, behaviour and the political context
simultaneously over a longer period of time. The paper studies the dynamics between democratic demand and supply, as well as the consequences of this dynamic over the course of time. In particular, we address three questions: firstly, to what extent do levels of SWD change over time? Secondly, to what extent is the change over time a result of (cumulative) electoral outcomes? And thirdly, to what extent is the change over time a cause of (cumulative) electoral outcomes? The setup of annual survey waves, covering three national elections (2006, 2010 and 2012), and a large probability sample drawn from a list of Dutch households guarantees a high internal and external validity of our findings.

The next sections provide the theoretical background of our research and introduce our precise expectations before moving over to our findings. Our analysis suggests that citizens’ level of SWD changes in meaningful ways over a seven-year period. It is more stable than specific evaluations of government performance but less stable than political ideology. Additionally, periods, in which a minority government rules seem to coincide with a greater rupture of SWD. We further demonstrate that consecutive winners and to the same degree loyal voters assess democracy more positively, and that these assessments are also responsive to the precise electoral context. Finally, our results show that higher levels of SWD significantly reduce the probability of abstention as well as vote switching. These findings mean that SWD, as one might expect from an indicator of legitimacy beliefs, is not only a reflection of how content individuals are but also impacts on political behaviour that stabilises the political system.

Theoretical framework and expectations
The stronger citizens believe in the righteousness of the political regime, their political leaders, and the political community, the higher the probability that the political system persists (Easton 1965, 1975). Following the Eastonian framework, this belief in the righteousness of political objects depends on (1) current evaluations of the system’s policy performance, and (2) the presence of a reservoir of goodwill based on past performance. The performance of the political system in terms of how its policies connect to what citizens want enhances legitimacy beliefs (Easton 1965; Scharpf 1999).

In this conceptual framework, citizens’ satisfaction with democracy (SWD) is a somewhat ambiguous concept. It includes both elements of performance-related and non-performance-related evaluation (see, for example, Linde and Ekman 2003; Norris 1999). According to Norris (1999, p.11), SWD ‘taps both support for “democracy” as a value (which might be expected to be relatively stable over time), and also satisfaction with the incumbent government (which might be expected to fluctuate over time)’. With these features the concept ranks halfway in Norris’ (1999, p.11) reconceptualization of Easton’s (1965) distinction between diffuse and specific support and is labelled an evaluation of ‘regime performance’. It is neither solely about evaluating policy performance nor exclusively about evaluating democratic structures or principles. Yet, despite the ambiguity and academics’ recurring cautionary notes, SWD remains a popular and important concept pertaining to citizens’ legitimacy beliefs (see also Blais and Gélineau 2007; Kumlin and Esaiasson 2012; Linde and Ekman 2003), not the least because of the widespread use of the survey item that is supposed to measure it. For this study we conceptualise SWD in line with Linde and Ekman (2003, p. 405) as a political attitude pertaining to individuals’ evaluation of how democracy works in practice.
Depending on the level of abstraction, political attitudes are more or less stable over time. In the past, numerous studies have argued for partisanship or political ideology as one of the most stable political attitudes (see, for example, Converse 1964). According to the Michigan school, people acquire their partisanship and political ideology during their early socialisation phase and stick to this belief throughout adulthood. Other political attitudes, on the other hand, are much more volatile. Evaluations of the incumbents, for example, or classic economic evaluations about those in power capture much more the current performance of incumbents and the individual’s personal situation in relation to that (see, for instance, Fiorina 1978; Lewis-Beck and Stegmaier 2000). Such evaluations are more susceptible to change over time. They reflect a larger portion of (unstable) opinion rather than stable attitudes. SWD ‘measures system support at a low level of abstraction’ (Anderson 1998, p. 583) and is thus located somewhere in-between more specific and more diffuse political support. This suggests that SWD is a hybrid of support measures, halfway on the ladder of abstraction, and should thus also range in-between more and less stable political attitudes.

On the aggregate level, Fuchs (1995) identified considerable fluctuations yet no over-all trend in how satisfied people are with democracy. Likewise, Wagner et al. (2009, p.32) report strong fluctuations across a large number of European countries between 1990 and 2001. What is more, when it comes to the employed Eurobarometer data, the fluctuations disappear almost altogether when certain countries are considered in isolation. In the Netherlands, for example, average levels of SWD range between 2 and 2.5 for the period 1990-2001, where a score of one refers to the category ‘very satisfied’ and four to ‘not at all satisfied’. This is not indicative of a strong fluctuation but rather suggests stability over time (Van Ham and Thomassen 2016). In a similar longitudinal analysis of SWD, Ezrow and Xezonakis (2014, p.4) observe a trend in the data. However, and analogous to the earlier study, the specific
time-trend for the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, Belgium or Ireland only suggests a pattern of long-term stability. In contrast, individual-level research on shorter periods of time, does indeed show that SWD is not the rock-solid attitude akin to political ideology, but is, in fact, subject to change (see, for example, Anderson et al. 2005; Blais et al. 2015). Holding elections, for example, is known to empower citizens and to spur optimism (Adams 2014). It means that electoral results or the electoral context affect how satisfied citizens are with democracy. This suggests that citizens report different levels of SWD not in response to every-day politics or in the long run but in response to important and defining moments in the life of a citizen, like elections. Therefore, we expect SWD to change in substantial ways yet with a considerable portion of stability, which means it should be more stable than political ideology and less stable than incumbent evaluations.

A larger body of literature has already made great headway in explaining individual-level change in levels of SWD through electoral outcomes. While elections generally increase SWD, especially electoral winners are boosted in their levels of satisfaction (for example Adams 2014; Anderson et al. 2005; Blais and Gélineau 2007; Blais et al. 2015; Curini et al. 2012; Singh et al. 2012). These studies argue that voting increases contentment with democracy because it promises the chance of getting one’s preferred policies implemented. It follows logically that electoral winners experience this effect more strongly than electoral losers. Hence, winners and losers differ in systematic ways in how satisfied they are with the way democracy works. Other studies have also identified how the electoral context intervenes with the relationship between electoral outcomes and SWD. Howell and Justwan (2013), for example, show that tight electoral victories affect winners’ SWD yet not losers’. Moreover, Campbell (2015) demonstrates that coalition arrangements matter for how citizens translate their victory at the ballot box into democratic sentiments. In a similar vein, other research
found that winners appreciate most absolute power in terms of being in government or even leading the governing coalition, rather than relative victories such as an increase in vote or seat share (Blais et al. 2015; Singh et al. 2012).

On the basis of these studies, we expect that electoral outcomes affect individual-level change in SWD. Specifically, we expect to find winners to be systematically more satisfied than losers, and that the effects are amplified for consecutive winners and losers, respectively. Contrary to this, Chang et al. (2014) do not report any such effect for two consecutive elections. However, the cross-sectional data used by the authors produces severe limitations due to memory effects that we seek to overcome using panel data covering three consecutive national elections.

It is not only likely that elections and electoral outcomes influence SWD but also that the reverse relationship holds. A large body of cross-sectional studies on voter turnout argues that democratic sentiments predict voter turnout and voting behaviour (see, for example, Anderson and Guillory 1997; Clarke et al. 2004; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2014; Franklin 2004; Hetherington 1999; Hooghe et al. 2011; Karp and Banducci 2008; Norris 2002). It is argued that satisfied and trusting citizens want to engage with the system through their vote; their political engagement is supporting the system. Conversely, those who are dissatisfied or distrusting of the regime’s performance send a signal by, for example, abstaining (for a discussion see Ezrow and Xezonakis 2014). Democratic sentiments are connected to precise voting behaviour in a related way. If dissatisfied and distrusting citizens are indeed turning out to vote, their vote is more likely to reflect a protest vote. Those citizens are more likely to vote for anti-establishment and challenger parties rather than mainstream parties (a.o. Bélanger 2004; Bélanger and Aarts 2006). According to Hetherington’s (1999, p. 318) results from US presidential elections, ‘as trust decreases, the probability of a vote for the incumbent
and the other major party both drop significantly, while support for the third party increases. These results suggest that the distrustful favour candidates who challenge existing political norms’. It means that democratic sentiments affect voting behaviour for challenger parties.

Hooghe et al. (2011, p. 245) have identified similar effects in the multiparty system of Belgium. They find that ‘distrust is positively associated with a preference for extreme right (Vlaams Belang) and populist (Lijst Dedecker) parties’. A similar case can be made for the Netherlands. Following the 1994 elections and especially in the 2000s, levels of electoral volatility in the Netherlands were amongst the highest in the entire Europe (Mair, 2008) and accompanied by a severe drop in levels of institutional trust (Bovens and Wille 2008). A decrease in institutional trust occurred simultaneously with an increase in electoral volatility in a political system that saw a rise in the number of anti-establishment challengers, such as, for example, Lijst Pim Fortuyn or Wilders’ Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV; Party for Freedom). These individual findings suggest that distrust and dissatisfaction might increase electoral volatility, if the political supply is conducive. Therefore, we expect that more satisfied democrats promote a more stable electoral landscape through their voting behaviour. Specifically, we anticipate that (continuously) high levels of SWD increase the probability (a) to vote at all and (b) to cast a loyal vote.

**Politics in the Netherlands, 2006-2012**

In this paper we will analyse Dutch data covering the period 2006-2012. During this time period, elections to the national parliament (Tweede Kamer) were held in November 2006, June 2010, and September 2012. These three general elections were all snap elections; each of them brought about unexpected electoral outcomes and (importantly) no single party was in
office throughout the entire period. Figure 1 summarises the parties’ vote shares across the three elections (see Döring and Manow 2015).

(Figure 1)

Following the 2006 election, the Christian-democratic CDA formed a coalition with the social democratic PvdA and the Calvinist CU under the leadership of CDA’s Jan Peter Balkenende (Balkenende-IV). The new government took over office in February 2007 and devoted its first hundred days in office to a tour of the country. The public perceived this endeavour as a sign of indecisiveness and expressed their discontent with the coalition partners in polls. At the same time, one of the main opposition parties, the liberal VVD, was shaken by the dismiss of former minister Rita Verdonk, who then proceeded to founding her own new party called Trots op Netherland (TON; Proud of the Netherlands). TON quickly accumulated the electorate’s support in polls.

Dutch politics shifted focus in the wake of the financial crisis of 2008. The government reacted with quick and effective measures to aid the sizeable Dutch financial sector. According to polling results, the public ascribed much of this successful reaction to the social-democratic Finance Minister Wouter Bos and rewarded PvdA with renewed support. As with many other countries affected by the financial and economic crisis, the Dutch ruling coalition was forced to change or even put aside a number of their policy plans in favour of austerity measures. However, it was an unrelated issue (the country’s participation in the ISAF mission in Afghanistan) that eventually resulted in a major political crisis, which made the PvdA leave the governing coalition in February 2010.
Parliamentary elections were held on 9th June 2010 and changed the political field of force considerably. As can be seen in Figure 1, CDA suffered a huge electoral loss, while most of the former opposition parties gained considerably. The liberal VVD became the largest party in parliament, though with only little over 20 per cent of the vote share. The VVD formed a minority coalition with the CDA under the leadership of Mark Rutte, and supported in parliament by Geert Wilders’ populist PVV (Rutte-I).

The minority government’s actions were largely dominated by concerns over the country’s economic debt and further austerity measures. When the PVV refused to support further financial cutbacks the governing parties VVD and CDA were forced to call for early elections in April 2012. Elections were held on 12th September 2012, in which the liberal VVD further increased its electoral support and emerged once again as the largest parliamentary party (see Figure 1). Also the social democratic PvdA was able to recover from its 2010 electoral loss and successfully formed a two-party coalition with the VVD under the leadership again of VVD’s Mark Rutte (Rutte-II). The 2012’s electoral losers were clearly once again the CDA, whose electoral support successively dropped from 26.5 per cent in 2006 to only 8.5 per cent in 2012. Additionally, Wilders’ PVV was not able to maintain its electoral victory of 2010 but remained still the third largest party in the Tweede Kamer.

Summing up, the Dutch electoral landscape showed important fluctuations during the period 2006-2012. No cabinet coalition was able to complete its full term. Parties lost and won, and new parties emerged on the scene. And during the period under consideration, no single party was in government coalitions throughout.

Data and methods
To test our expectations we use seven-wave panel data. The LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for Social Sciences) panel is administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, The Netherlands). It is a web-based panel survey derived from a probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands. Within each selected household, all persons who are of the age of 16 or older are invited to participate in the study. In this paper we analyse data from December 2007 (first Politics module, with recall questions about voting behaviour in 2006) until December 2013. The entire panel records almost 8,000 respondents. Table 1 summarises the characteristics of the data across the seven waves in our analysis.

(1)

Measures of SWD and electoral outcomes are central to our hypotheses tests. SWD is operationalized through a single survey item. In all seven waves respondents were asked to state on an eleven-point scale: ‘How satisfied are you with the way in which the following institutions operate in the Netherlands?’, where ‘democracy’ was one of the institutions to be evaluated. The variable shows an approximately normal distribution in each of the waves. Electoral outcomes are measured with two questions. In all panel waves respondents were presented with the following re-called turnout question: ‘Nowadays, for one or another reason, some people do not vote. Did you vote in the most recent parliamentary election, held on…?’. Likewise, respondents were also asked to re-call their voting behaviour. For our analysis we only use the voting questions in waves following the three national elections, which means wave 1 (2007), wave 4 (2010), and wave 6 (2012). As with other surveys, voter
turnout is over-reported also in the LISS panel by about 10 percentage points in each election (see Selb and Munzert 2013). However, re-called voting behaviour is remarkably accurate: across the three elections the average absolute deviation ranged between 0.63 (2010) and 0.83 (2006) percentage points with the highest party-vote deviations recorded, as expected, for the populist PVV (between 2.3 and 2.6 percentage points, unweighted data).

For the period of the Balkende-IV cabinet (2007-2010), the PvdA, CDA and CU are coded as winning parties. The Rutte-I cabinet (2010-2012) consisted of two straightforward governing parties, namely the VVD and the CDA. In addition, we treat the PVV as a winning party, although it was not formally in government. However, it was officially supporting the minority government in parliament and also caused the falling of the government in 2012. Finally, the Rutte-II cabinet (2012-present) includes the VVD and PvdA as the governing parties.

Listwise deletion was used to handle missing data. Depending on the variables used, sample sizes differ. The smallest panel data contain 1,329 respondents. Compared to the sample drawn for the very first panel wave in 2007, these 1,329 respondents are slightly more politically interested; the data also contain more men (53.5 per cent versus 48.7 per cent), with a higher average age (51.77 years versus 37.3 years, partly due to the lapse of time) but they are roughly the same in terms of educational attainment and almost identical with regards to average political left-right selfplacements.

**Stability over time**

First, SWD’s means are computed for all seven waves; a total of 2,016 respondents are available for all measurement points. The results are shown in Figure 2 and illustrates that
respondents were quite satisfied during the period of time with averages ranging between 5.9 and 6.3 on a ten-point scale. The over-time pattern generally suggests a downward trend in SWD, and especially a steeper dip during the time when the country was governed by the minority coalition (2010-2012). The figure also shows considerable fluctuations around the 2010 and 2012 elections. Levels of SWD were remarkably higher in the 2010 survey wave, six months after national elections were held. Similarly, the 2012 survey results illustrate the expected optimism effects following national elections, albeit to a much lesser degree than two years before.

(Figure 2)

To assess the attitude’s degree of stability and change we inspect inter-temporal correlations and means tests. Results of both are evaluated in comparative perspective. As mentioned above, we expect that SWD is less stable than political ideology but more stable than evaluations of the incumbents. Political ideology is measured with the survey question ‘In politics, a distinction is often made between “the left” and “the right”. Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 0 means left and 10 means right?’ while incumbent evaluations are operationalized through the following survey item: ‘How satisfied or dissatisfied are you, generally speaking, about what the government has done lately?’, measured on a five-point scale. The results are shown in Table 2.

(Table 2)
The table summarises the correlations across paired measurement occasions per survey item. They can be interpreted as an indicator for stability. As can be seen, responses to the ideology question correlate at a higher level compared to SWD (on average 0.828), while incumbent evaluations are to a lesser degree associated over time compared to SWD (on average 0.467 versus 0.658). Additionally, the table also reports the p-values of the paired samples t-tests across respective measurement occasions as an indicator of change. According to the results in Table 2, paired political ideology scores only differ significantly on two occasions (2009-2010 and 2010-2011) while incumbent evaluations differ significantly on all occasions. It means that people, on average, seldom changed their political ideology over the course of a year, but always changed their incumbent evaluations between 2007 and 2013. Compared to the stability and change found in SWD, these findings are supportive of our expectations. Mean levels in SWD almost always differed significantly across measurement occasions. While respondents showed a stronger baseline in their SWD compared to incumbent evaluations, they also reported meaningful change between measurement occasions. Over a period of seven years SWD shows signs of some stability, random error as well as change.

The effects of electoral outcomes on satisfaction with democracy

Previous research concurs on the positive effects of electoral victories for SWD (see, for example, Anderson et al. 2005). This can also be validated with our data in Figure 3 where we report mean levels of SWD for winners and losers of the three elections separately over time. We too find a winner-loser gap: winners were more satisfied during each electoral cycle. Beyond that, two things are particularly noteworthy. Firstly, average SWD generally declines for both groups in years following the election, thereby sustaining the winner-loser gap. In
December 2009, more than three years after the last parliamentary election, losers were still significantly less satisfied than winners of the 2006 election. The winner-loser effect does not wash out over time. Secondly, the winner-loser gap was considerable smaller during the time of the minority government, when the governing parties held jointly only 34.1 per cent of the vote share and only survived with the parliamentary seats of the PVV. According to the results pictured in Figure 3, minority governments really do not return clear winners and losers, also in the minds of citizens. To what extent the steep drop in both groups’ satisfaction in 2011 can be attributed to the ruling of the minority government is difficult to say since parliament also had to deal with the widely unpopular decisions of austerity measures.

(Figure 3)

In contrast to the general agreement on the impact of one election, the literature seems inconclusive as to the cumulative effects. According to Chang et al. (2014) winning twice does not translate into higher levels of SWD than only winning once. Curini et al. (2012), on the other hand, argue that two-times winners are happier democrats than one-time winners, where having won the last election produces higher satisfaction for one-time winners than having won the previous election. To test the cumulative effects of winning and losing on our panel data, we conduct a series of tests.

First we compare averages in pre- and post-election SWD across the two consecutive elections 2010 and 2012 fully covered by our data. This involves a comparison of five groups as to their change in SWD between 2009 and 2012: consecutive abstainers (AA), two-times winners (WW), two-times losers (LL), winners-turn-losers (WL), and losers-turn-winners
(LW). According to Chang et al. (2014) WW, WL and LW should be indistinguishable in their change rate but more positive than LL. However, this is not what our data show, graphically displayed in Figure 4. First of all, all five groups show a negative change rate between 2009 and 2012, meaning that everyone lost some level of satisfaction during this time period. Beyond that, LW have the smallest change rate, followed by WW, WL, LL and AA. The differences between LW (-1.10 per cent) and WW (-1.43 per cent) are, however, very small. Change rates for the other groups are even more negative WL = -3.14, LL = -4.37 and AA = -9.45 per cent. Therefore, these findings corroborate Curini et al. (2012) more than Chang et al. (2014) with regards to consecutive winning and losing: winning is better than losing but on a cumulative record the last election counts more.

(Figure 4)

In a second test of the cumulative effects of electoral outcomes on SWD, we add another election and treat electoral participation as a repeated game. Respondents are grouped depending on how many elections they won. We conduct an ANOVA for the four different groups of consecutive voters that emerge. It returns statistically significant differences (df = 3; F-value = 5.623; p-value = 0.001) as to their SWD at the end of the entire period of study in 2013. As expected, those respondents who won all three elections (all-times winners) report the highest level of SWD with an average of 6.4, followed by two-times winners (6.21), one-time winners (6.03) and all-times losers (5.95). Tukey’s HSD measure shows, however, that not all differences between the groups are different in statistically significant ways. Aside from a strong all-times winner/all-times loser gap, the results show that three- and two-times
winners are happier than one-time winner. It suggests that winning once is not enough but rather winning more often than losing makes a difference.

But just how large are these effects really? Voters, who voted for the same party in all three elections, and are therefore very loyal voters, show the same change in SWD in 2012 as all-time winners. According to regression results (not shown here), both exert estimated effects of .047 on SWD that are also statistically significant. It means that loyal voters obtain the same democratic joy as consecutive electoral winners, even though it is not very large. It is nonetheless quite interesting because these two groups are mutually exclusive. As mentioned above, no party was in office throughout the entire period.

The effects of satisfaction with democracy on electoral outcomes

After describing stability and change in SWD, we have argued that SWD can to some extent be explained by focusing on people’s post-electoral experience: did the party they voted for get into government or not? In this third part of the analysis we evaluate the extent to which (cumulative) SWD affects voter turnout and loyal voting with a series of tests. To this end, we operationalize electoral outcomes somewhat differently. We are interested in whether or not respondents were loyal voters and voted for the same party again (=1) or conversely switched party votes (=0). But we are also interested in whether or not people voted at all (=1) or abstained (=0).

(Table 3)
In two binary logistic regressions we estimate the effects of average levels of SWD over a six-year period on voter turnout and behaviour in 2012, controlling for important confounders. The results are shown in Table 3.

The dependent variable in model 1 in Table 3 is voting in the 2012 election, as opposed to non-voting. The average level of SWD in the years preceding this election has a significant positive effect on the likelihood of voting. A one-unit increase in SWD averaged over six years increases the odds of turning out to vote in 2012 by an estimated 22 per cent. In model 2, the dependent variable is party loyalty in 2012 when compared to voting behaviour in 2010. Average SWD also increases the odds of casting a vote in 2012 for the same party as 2010 by an estimated 22 per cent. These findings mean that higher average SWD over a longer period of time also translates into citizen behaviour that contributes to the stability of the political system.

**Summary and conclusion**

In this paper we examined the dynamics between citizens’ SWD and electoral outcomes more closely over the course of seven years. We used a unique set of high-quality panel data collected in the Netherlands over the period 2007-2013 to test the interaction between SWD and voting behaviour as two important outlets for citizens’ evaluations of those in power.

Our findings suggest that citizens’ level of SWD changes in meaningful ways over a seven-year period. It is more stable than precise evaluations of government performance but less stable than political ideology. Additionally, periods, in which a minority government rules seem to coincide with a greater rupture of SWD. We further demonstrated that consecutive winners and to the same degree loyal voters assess democracy more positively. Finally, our
results show that higher levels of SWD significantly reduce the probability of abstention as well as vote switching. These findings mean that SWD as an indicator of legitimacy beliefs is not only a reflection of how content individuals are, but it also impacts real citizen behaviour that stabilises the political system.

In a next step we need to conduct further analysis to fully exploit the panel characteristics of our data and to validate our initial findings. For example, it is clear that individual instability in SWD may be due to (a) systematic factors like elections, or (b) non-systematic fluctuations. While our research above supports the former, it is unclear how large the portion of non-systematic fluctuations is. In fact, with only one survey question directly translating the concept of SWD into the world of measurement, non-systematic fluctuations should be considerable. We will consider this issue in the next version.
References


Figures

Figure 1. Election results for the Dutch parliament per party, 2006-2012.

Figure 2. Mean level of satisfaction with democracy and confidence intervals, 2007-2013.
Figure 3. Winner-loser gap in satisfaction with democracy for three elections, 2007-2013.

Figure 4. Percentage change in mean levels of SWD after consecutive elections, 2007-2013.
Tables

Table 1. Panel wave characteristics.

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Table 2. Stability and change in political ideology and incumbent evaluations, 2007-2013.

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Table 3. Average satisfaction with democracy, voter turnout and voting behaviour.

Note: Cells contain odds ratios obtained from binary logistic regression. **p < .05 (two-sided).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model 1</th>
<th>Model 2</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Vote/Abstain</td>
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<td>gender</td>
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<td>age</td>
<td>1.027**</td>
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<tr>
<td>Nagelkerke R square</td>
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<td>N</td>
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