

## Chapter 2

# Sources of Elite Democratic Satisfaction: How Elected Representatives Evaluate Their Political System

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It is a fragile polity that is not supported by its members. Acknowledging this fact, numerous studies have analyzed political support from the perspective of citizens (for reviews see Dalton, 2004; Levi & Stoker, 2000). However, while we know a lot about the factors that affect citizens' political support, corresponding research on elected representatives is lacking. To begin filling this gap in the research, this chapter explores various sources of elite democratic satisfaction. Precisely, we ask how elected representatives evaluate their political system, and we take as our indicator of political support the well-established survey item "satisfaction with democracy" (SWD) (Klingeman, 1999; Linde & Ekman, 2001; Anderson, 2002).

At this early stage of inquiry, we derive our hypotheses from three lines of research. The first is the theory of democratic elitism (Prothro & Grigg, 1960; McClosky, 1964; see Pefley & Rohrschneider, 2007 for a review). Democratic elitism theory proceeds from the assumption that political (and social) elites function as the guardians of democratic values in a given polity. As a consequence of their privileged position, and their high level of political sophistication, elites are substantially more democratic than the mass public. While the original theory is concerned with attitude constraints and commitment to central demo-

cratic values like “tolerance,” we rely on analogy reasoning to hypothesize that elected representatives are more satisfied with democracy than are citizens. A rare previous study on the topic suggests that this is indeed the case (Holmberg, 1996). Hence, our first hypothesis – *the democratic elitism hypothesis* (H1) – is that elected representatives, as a collective, are more satisfied with democracy than citizens.

The second line of research of interest to us relates to the literature that targets citizen democratic satisfaction. This research shows that individual characteristics, as well as the political context, affect how citizens assess their political system. Democratic satisfaction is higher among citizens who have a university education, who belong to privileged social classes, who are male, and who are supporters of established parties in government (Anderson & Guillory, 1997). Additionally, previous studies have underscored the importance of political performance and service quality when explaining citizens’ democratic satisfaction (e.g. Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2012). Our second hypothesis – *the identical sources hypothesis* (H2) – asserts that social characteristics, performance evaluations, parliamentary settings (e.g. degree of party conflict, type of ruling coalition, influence and political knowledge of top leaders, etc.), and individual political factors (such as party affiliation and support of the ruling regime), similarly predict democratic satisfaction among representatives and the general public.

The third line of research from which we derive our hypotheses is concerned with differences within the collective of elected representatives (e.g. Bowler, Donovan & Karp, 2006). Importantly, Paul Sniderman and colleagues (1991; 1996) argue that democratic elitism theory overlooks the premise that representatives hold widely different beliefs about democracy, and that these beliefs are anchored in their political position, and in their ideological values (see also Pefley & Rohrschneider, 2007). Similarly, recent surveys of local representatives demonstrate that a number of political attitudes are affected by factors like experiences in differing parliamentary settings, positions, seniority, and the quality of citizen encounters (Gilljam, Karlsson, & Sundell, 2010). Indeed, one study has specifically indicated that the top leaders in local politics are less likely than lower-level representatives to support local elites and more likely to support outsider groups (Karlsson & Erikson, 2009). Our third and final hypothesis is therefore *the political experience hypothesis* (H3), which states that that experiences of privileged positions and political influence have positive effects on rep-

representatives' democratic satisfaction, and, correspondingly, that experiences of relative powerlessness have negative effects.

### **Data, design, and modeling strategy**

In order to test our hypotheses we need data that allows us to make comparisons between elected representatives and citizens as well as comparisons among representatives in varying positions and parliamentary situations. To achieve this, we will rely on three data sources: two surveys administered to all local and regional elected representatives in Sweden in 2008 and 2012 (KOLFU) (Gilljam et al., 2011; Gilljam & Karlsson, 2013; Gilljam et al., 2010); a survey sent to all members of the Swedish parliament in 2010 (The Riksdag Survey) (Wängnerud, Esaiasson, Gilljam, & Holmberg, 2010); and two surveys of randomly sampled Swedish citizens (SOM) in 2008 and 2010 (Holmberg & Weibull, 2009; Holmberg, Weibull, & Oscarsson, 2011). To allow for systematic evaluations of contextual factors, a comparative local government approach will be applied. Precisely, we will focus primarily on representatives' and citizens' satisfaction with local democracy in the 290 municipalities of Sweden.

In the Swedish national context, a municipality is a complete political system with citizens, elections, elected representatives and public service responsibilities. In fact, Swedish municipalities have political responsibilities that are more extensive than in most non-Scandinavian countries (Karlsson & Johansson, 2008; Loughlin, Hendriks & Lidström, 2010). About one-third of the personal income in Sweden is paid in taxes directly to local and regional government, and municipalities have the possibility to determine the tax rate and the ambition level of local public services. Hence, a large part of the political decisions that directly affect the daily life of Swedish citizens are made at the municipal level. Consequently, local government is an essential part of Swedish democracy, and it is in local politics that citizens are most likely to engage in participatory activities between elections.

In all of the surveys, the question on democratic satisfaction was put in the following way: *On the whole, how satisfied are you with how democracy works: in the EU, in Sweden, in the county council/region where you live, and in the municipality where you live.* For each tier of government four response alternatives were offered: "very satisfied," "rather satisfied," "rather unsatisfied," and "not at all satisfied." For ease of interpretation, we have recoded responses onto a

scale ranging from 0 (not at all satisfied) to 100 (very satisfied). The mean values on this scale will serve as the measurement of democratic satisfaction among the representatives and citizens.

To test support for the democratic elitism hypothesis (H1) we will focus on the differences in democratic satisfaction between representatives and citizens. To test support for the identical sources hypothesis (H2), and the political experience hypothesis (H3), we will rely on OLS-regressions to identify factors that account for differences among representatives and citizens respectively. Four sets of independent variables will be analyzed:

1. *Individual factors*: Previous studies have concluded that individual characteristics may affect the democratic satisfaction of citizens (Anderson & Guillory, 1997). Such factors are obviously not indicators of how the democracy actually works, and effects of individual characteristics should rather be interpreted as factors that make individuals evaluate the same situation differently. In this chapter, five individual factors will be used: gender, age, ethnicity, education level and social class. These factors have been suggested as important in previous studies on democratic satisfaction and/or are associated with the political representation of social groups.

2. *Political performance*: Previous studies suggest that political performance and the performance of public authorities have effects on democratic satisfaction among citizens (e.g. Dahlberg & Holmberg, 2012). In the analysis, we rely on four indicators to illustrate the general condition of the locality (ethnic pluralism, wealth, unemployment rate, and tax rate), and four indicators of trends during the previous three years (change in refugee immigration levels, economic growth, unemployment, and tax rates).

3. *The parliamentary setting*: Previous studies have concluded that political institutions are important explanations for variations in democratic satisfaction among citizens (Aarts & Thomassen, 2008). Other studies have shown that even though the formal institutions of local government are the same within a country, variations in informal institutional settings have considerable effects on the attitudes of representatives (Karlsson, 2013).

In this analysis, seven indicators relating to the political arena in municipalities will be included. The first two relate to the parliamentary situation: type of coalition (measured as dummy variables: oversized coalition, minority rule and a minimum winning coalition as the

control group); and whether a pariah party has a parliamentary balance position (specifically if the municipality is ruled by a minority which would reach a council majority if it includes the anti-immigrant party the Sweden Democrats). Five other indicators, relating to the municipal political area, are drawn from the KOLFU-survey data: degree of party conflict, degree of leading representatives' political knowledge, and the degrees of influence of the executive board, the mayor, and the administrators. The assessment of conflict, knowledge and influence may differ among the members in a council, but their common assessment (the mean value of all council members) is a more objective indicator of the factual situation.

4. *Individual political factors*: The political factors mentioned above are all characteristics of the local political arena, but there are also political factors that could be tied to individual representatives and citizens. One such factor is party affiliation (here measured as dummy variables with Social Democrats as the reference category).

Another important factor, proven in previous research to affect democratic satisfaction among citizens, is support for the ruling regime. The literature on the winners and losers in elections has repeatedly shown that citizens who vote for the winning side in an election are more satisfied with democracy than losers (Blais & Gélinau, 2007), especially in majoritarian political systems (Anderson & Guillory, 1997). Another study has found that the negative effect on democratic satisfaction from losing an election is reduced among opposition sympathizers if they have had recent political victories (Curini, Jou & Memoli, 2012). That winning or losing an election also affects democratic satisfaction among representatives has been shown by Bowler, Donovan and Karp (2006). Whether a representative is a member of the winning, ruling majority or the losing opposition does also affect other attitudes towards democracy (Gilljam & Karlsson, 2012; Gilljam, Persson & Karlsson, 2012). In this study, the win/loss-factor is measured by a variable based on the respondents' party affiliation. A political representative can be a member of the ruling majority or the opposition in the local council, while a citizen can be a supporter of a party in the local ruling majority or of a party in opposition.

So far, all variables under discussion are potentially relevant for both representatives and citizens. To specifically test the political experience hypothesis (H3), we focus on factors relating to the unique ex-

periences of being elected to office. We hypothesize that the following factors will affect satisfaction with democracy among representatives: seniority (measured as the number of years in political office); political position (measured by whether the representative is a top leader – which we define as being chair of the council, executive board or council committee – or whether the representative is a member of the executive board). Finally, we expect that conflictual interactions with citizens will undermine democratic satisfaction among representatives (our measure is self-reported in the KOLFU-survey and shows whether the individual representative was threatened or harassed by citizens at least once in the past twelve months).

### **General and tier-specific democratic satisfaction**

Practically all democracies in the world are organized in a multilevel government system. In the case of Sweden, there are four tiers: the EU, the state, the county/region and the municipality. Elected representatives at each tier are chosen in separate elections, and each tier is responsible for different kinds of public services. Even if politics at the four tiers of government are to some extent intertwined, each tier has its own distinct democratic processes for making political decisions. Over time, Swedish citizens have made different assessments of how democracy works at different tiers, and normally, citizens are most satisfied with national democracy, followed by democracy at the local and regional levels. Swedes have always been least satisfied with democracy at the EU-level (e.g. Holmberg & Weibull, 2005).

However, while a citizen is a citizen of all four tiers, representatives are strongly associated with the particular tier of government where they are elected. As representatives have specific experiences and responsibilities at one particular tier, they could be expected to perceive distinctions in democracy among the different tiers. Citizens, on the other hand, have less motivation, and are perhaps generally less equipped, to make clear distinctions between the tiers of government. Therefore, citizens can be expected to make a general assessment on how democracy works across the various tiers of government. Previous studies have shown that the local authorities' service performance predicts citizen satisfaction with democracy on the national level (Weitz-Shapiro, 2008). If these assumptions are correct, we would expect general democratic satisfaction to be a better predictor of tier-specific democratic satisfaction among citizens than among representatives.

The main dependent variable in our analysis is satisfaction with local democracy. Preliminary results indicate that both representatives' and citizens' democratic satisfaction, at a specific tier of government, to a considerable extent is influenced by their general assessment of democracy for the whole, multilevel government system. This general factor could potentially be so strong that the local factors included in our models would not significantly influence attitudes towards local democracy at all. Therefore, we will use the respondents' democratic satisfaction at the national level as an indicator of general satisfaction when analyzing democratic satisfaction at the local level.

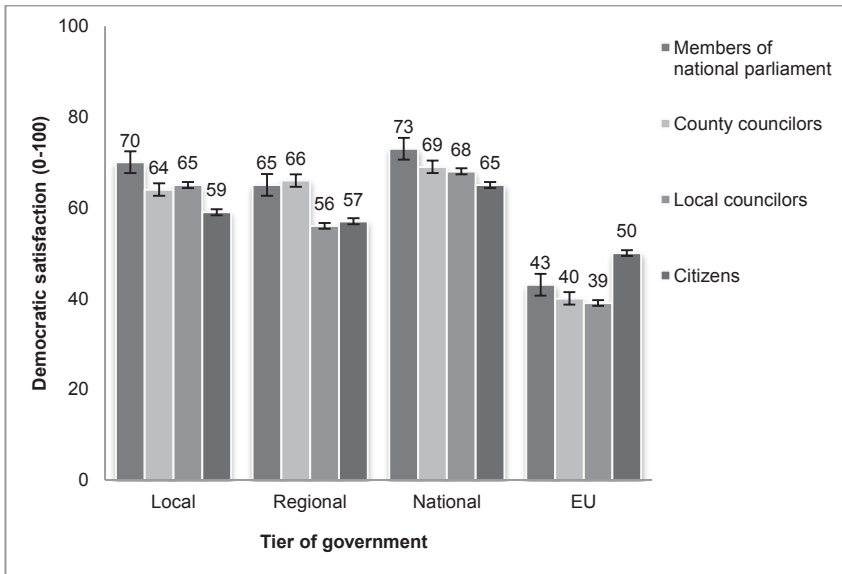
**The democratic elitism hypothesis (H1): Are representatives more satisfied with democracy than citizens?**

We can determine the differences in democratic satisfaction between elected representatives and citizens by comparing survey responses relating to the democracy at the EU, the national, the regional and the local tiers of government. In these comparisons we are also able to compare the democratic satisfaction of all elected representatives at the national, the regional and the local levels in Sweden. The results from this comparison are presented in Figure 1.

In support of the democratic elitism hypothesis, elected representatives report a higher level of satisfaction with democracy than citizens in the three tiers of government within Sweden; the only exception being satisfaction with regional democracy, where citizens are about as satisfied as local councilors. In absolute terms, the differences between the citizens' degree of democratic satisfaction, and the category of representatives that scores the highest, are 8-11 points on the 0-100 scale. However, a result clearly in conflict with our expectations concerns assessments on how democracy works in the EU. In this case, representatives in all three tiers of government are less satisfied than citizens. Citizens are 7-11 points more satisfied with EU democracy than the representatives.

Then, are elected representatives more satisfied with democracy on the tier of government where they have been elected and less satisfied with the tiers where they are not active?

Figure 1. Democratic satisfaction (0-100) of representatives and citizens at the EU, national, regional and local tiers of government.



**Comments:** The figure illustrates the degree of democratic satisfaction at four different tiers of government (mean value 0-100) for members of the national parliament (2010, N=309), county and local councilors (2012, N= 1,215 and 9,186) and citizens (2010, N=4,767). 95 percent confidence intervals are displayed.

This assumption has some support as members of the national parliament are the representatives most satisfied with democracy at the national level and county councilors are the representatives most satisfied with democracy at the regional level. However, national representatives are somewhat more satisfied with local democracy than local councilors.

The conclusions so far are that while the democratic elitism hypothesis receives some support, the differences between citizens and representatives are modest, and the results on EU democracy are in conflict with expectations. This latter result is especially surprising since Swedish elected representatives are traditionally seen as being more supportive of the EU than citizens. An interpretation in favour of the democratic elitism hypothesis is that the representatives in our study differ between the EU on the one hand and the three tiers within Sweden on the other, and their “elitist system support” only relates to the latter.



Generally, members of the national parliament show the highest degree of democratic satisfaction and local councilors the lowest. This difference between representative categories does not support the idea that the representatives are a uniform elite, but rather that there are degrees of elitism. The professional, national politicians are the elite of the elite and the local councilors, who in most cases are layman politicians, are closer to the citizens.

**The identical sources hypothesis (H2): Do representatives and citizens rely on the same sources of democratic satisfaction?**

When testing support for our second hypothesis, the dependent variable is satisfaction with democracy at the local level (“in the municipality where you live”). The determinants at the system level (factors relating to political performance and parliamentary settings) relate to the situation in each municipality. We use OLS-regression to estimate two models for citizens and local representatives respectively, where Model 2 includes a control for general democratic satisfaction (as measured by SWD at the national level). The results are presented in Table 1. The results in Table 1 show that factors relating to parliamentary settings affect representatives to a higher degree than they affect citizens. Two factors have similar effects on both groups: party conflict is negatively associated with democratic satisfaction and political knowledge among leading representatives is positively associated with democratic satisfaction. Three factors have significant effects only among representatives: A strong mayor decreases democratic satisfaction; strong administrators increases satisfaction; and an oversized ruling coalition decreases democratic satisfaction.

The two most important determinants of democratic satisfaction are support of the ruling majority and party affiliation. Among representatives, the effect of representing a majority party is 19 points on the 0-100 scale. Even though we did expect this result (c.f. Bowler et al., 2006), the size of the effect is surprisingly large. The corresponding effect among citizens is smaller (4 points) but it is still one of the most important determinants in this group.

Turning to party affiliation, supporters and members of the Social Democrats and the Left Party are the most satisfied with local democracy while supporters and members of local parties are the least satisfied.

Table 1. Determinants of democratic satisfaction among citizens and local elected representatives in 2008 (OLS-regression, b-values)

|   | Citizens |         | Local representatives |          |
|---|----------|---------|-----------------------|----------|
|   | Model 1  | Model 2 | Model 1               | Model 2  |
| <b>Constant</b>   | 47.1     | 13.9    | 35.0*                 | 2.6      |
| <b>General satisfaction</b>   |          |         |                       |          |
| Satisfaction with national democracy (0-100)                            | NI       | 0.5***  | NI                    | 0.5***   |
| <b>Individual factors</b>   |          |         |                       |          |
| Gender ( female = 1)  | -0.5     | 0.4     | -2.9***               | -1.2*    |
| Age: Young (-29 =1)   | 5.3***   | 3.4**   | 0.3                   | -1.1     |
| Age: Old (65+ =1) (Control group:30-64)                                 | 2.2      | 2.6**   | 2.6***                | 2.8***   |
| Ethnicity (immigrant = 1)   | 0.6      | 0.8     | -4.4***               | -4.0***  |
| Education (high = 1)  | 2.6**    | 0.4     | -0.2                  | -0.7     |
| Social class (worker = 1)   | -1.8     | 1.1     | 1.4                   | 2.2**    |
| <b>Political performance</b>  |          |         |                       |          |
| Unemployment rate, 2008 (percent)                                       | -1.1     | -0.2    | -0.2                  | 0.2      |
| Unemployment rate, 2005-08 (relative change)                            | -0.4     | -1.1    | -0.4                  | -0.5     |
| Tax rate, 2008 (percent)  | -0.6     | -0.6    | -0.2                  | 0.1      |
| Tax rate, 2005-08 (relative change)                                     | -6.5*    | -3.6    | 0.6                   | 0.7      |
| Wealth (mean income, 2008, 1000 SEK)                                    | 0.0      | 0.0     | 0.0                   | 0.0      |
| Economic Growth, 2005-08 (percent)                                      | 0.4      | 0.2     | 0.5***                | 0.3*     |
| Ethnic pluralism (percent foreign born, 2006)                           | 0.1      | 0.0     | 0.1*                  | 0.1      |
| Refugee immigration, 2005-08 (arriving refugees per 10,000 inhabitants) | 0.0      | 0.0     | 0.0                   | 0.0      |
| <b>Parliamentary settings</b>   |          |         |                       |          |
| Type of coalition A: Minority rule = 1                                  | -0.3     | 0.8     | 0.2                   | 0.3      |
| Type of coalition B: Oversized coalition = 1 (Control group: MWC.)      | 0.0      | 0.2     | -2.0**                | -1.4*    |
| Pariah party in balance position = 1                                    | 0.1      | -1.3    | 0.1                   | 0.8      |
| Degree of party conflict (0-10)   | -1.0*    | -0.9**  | -1.6***               | -1.8***  |
| Political knowledge of executive board (0-10)                           | 3.8**    | 3.6***  | 6.8***                | 5.6***   |
| Influence: Strong executive board (0-10)                                | 1.9      | 0.7     | 0.0                   | 0.1      |
| Influence: Strong mayor (0-10)  | -0.7     | -0.9    | -3.0***               | -2.8***  |
| Influence: Strong administrators (0-10)                                 | -1.5     | -0.4    | 1.1                   | 1.1*     |
| <b>Individual political factors</b>                                     |          |         |                       |          |
| Party: Left party =1  | -3.8     | 0.1     | -7.9***               | -2.9**   |
| Party: Green party =1   | -2.6     | -2.8    | -12.6***              | -7.6***  |
| Party: Centre party =1  | 2.0      | -0.7    | -3.2***               | -4.0***  |
| Party: Liberal party =1   | -1.4     | -4.7**  | -6.4***               | -8.2***  |
| Party: Christian democrats =1   | -2.1     | -3.0    | -6.1***               | -7.0***  |
| Party: Moderate party =1  | -1.3     | -4.0*** | -3.8***               | -6.5***  |
| Party: Sweden democrats =1  | -10.6*** | -2.5    | -22.6***              | -5.7*    |
| Party: Others/unaffiliated =1 (Control group: Social democrats)         | -16.3*** | -8.8**  | -15.7***              | -10.4*** |
| Supporting the ruling majority =1                                       | 5.0***   | 4.4***  | 19.1***               | 18.6***  |
| Adj. R <sup>2</sup>   | .06      | .30     | .22                   | .34      |

**Comments:** Data sources are Riks-SOM, 2008 (for citizens, N=2,734) and KOLFU, 2008 (for local elected representatives, N=7,849). A test for collinearity shows that the unemployment indicators (year 2008 and the change from 2005-08) are strongly intercorrelated. However, the two indicators remain in the models as further controls show that neither of the two have a significant effect when the other is excluded, and an exclusion of one indicator does not significantly affect the effects of any other variable in the analysis. NI = variable not included, p-values: \* <.05; \*\*<.01; \*\*\*<.001.

The local parties are often founded as populist protest organizations against the local elites (c.f. Wörlund, 1999), and it is not surprising that supporters and organizations of such parties are unsatisfied with local democracy. The difference between those affiliated with the most and least satisfied party is only slightly larger among representatives than among citizens. The differences between supporters of different parties are generally larger when democratic satisfaction at the national level is the dependent variable.<sup>1</sup> Controlling for general satisfaction and support/opposition of the local ruling majority, the party effects on local democratic satisfaction are substantially weaker.

Furthermore, the results of Table 1 show that variables relating to individual characteristics and political performance affect both citizens and representatives, but to a much lesser extent than political factors. In both groups, people over the age of 65 are significantly more satisfied than others. And citizens under 30 are also more satisfied than middle-aged citizens (this youthful satisfaction is not mirrored among representatives). Female and immigrant representatives are less satisfied with local democracy than male and native representatives, but these effects are not mirrored among citizens.<sup>2</sup>

Performance factors have surprisingly weak effects on democratic satisfaction among both citizens and representatives. The only significant determinant on local democratic satisfaction is a changed tax rate, showing that raised taxes lower satisfaction. But this effect is no longer significant when controlling for general satisfaction.<sup>3</sup> Among representatives, economic growth in the locality seems to be the only factor that increases local democratic satisfaction.

1 In an analysis where national democratic satisfaction is the dependent variable, Sweden Democrats are the most dissatisfied while supporters and representatives of the parties included in the national government are the most satisfied. This result is valid both among citizens and among representatives, and validates the position of the Sweden Democrats as the most anti-establishment oriented party at the national level. The result also maintains the role of the political winner-loser factor in general.

2 A control analysis shows that traditional explanations of democratic satisfaction among citizens, such as education and social class, show the expected effects on democratic satisfaction at the national level, but there are no separate effects of these factors on local democratic satisfaction when controlling for general satisfaction. This indicates that these factors may have an effect on local democratic satisfaction, but only indirectly via general satisfaction.

3 A follow-up analysis shows that the negative effect of raised taxes is substantial and significant among citizens supporting opposition parties, while the local democratic satisfaction of supporters of the local ruling majority is not at all affected.

The overall result of Table 1 is that the identical sources hypothesis receives support. The main impression is that the factors that affect democratic satisfaction among representatives are basically those affecting citizens. In no case does a factor show opposite effects among representatives compared to among citizens. Even the effect of general democratic satisfaction is identical among representatives and citizens. This is surprising since we expected representatives to make more crystallized evaluations of the democracy at different tiers of government. However, the results also show that the factors included in the model generally have stronger effects on representatives than on citizens, especially the political factors.

**The political experience hypothesis (H3): Does the experience of political office affect democratic satisfaction among representatives?**

In the final step, we add the representatives' unique experiences of political office to the analysis: seniority, formal position within the political hierarchy, and the experiences of citizen interaction. Because being in majority or in opposition is a major divide, the analysis also tests whether effects of these experiences differ depending on representatives' parliamentary position.

All models in Table 2 below estimate the additional effects of experience-based factors while controlling for the variables in Model 2 above. The effects among all representatives are analyzed in Model 3, while Models 4 and 5 focus on representatives in majority and in opposition, respectively.

The results confirm the expectation that representatives' democratic satisfaction is affected by their experience in political office. A general finding is that representatives in privileged positions (top leaders and members of the executive board) are more satisfied with democracy than backbenchers. The results also indicate that seniority increases democratic satisfaction among representatives. It is perhaps not surprising that those who have personally benefitted from the rules and practices of an established system are more satisfied with how the system works than the system's "losers." The effect of seniority could also be interpreted as another example of this "privilege effect", since senior representatives informally have a leadership role in the political hierarchy, independent of their formal position. However, the seniority effect might also be a result of self-selection, that is: unsatisfied representatives leave politics while the content representatives stay on.

Table 2. Effects of parliamentary settings and experience of political office on representatives' local democratic satisfaction, results by majority and opposition (OLS-regression, b-values)

|  | All represen-<br>tatives<br><i>Model 3</i> | Majority<br>parties<br><i>Model 4</i> | Opposition<br>parties<br><i>Model 5</i> |
|--|--|---------------------------------------|---|
| General satisfaction, individual and economic factors, party affiliation | CF   | CF                                    | CF                                      |
| Type of rule: minority =1  | 0.3  | -2.2                                  | 2.9                                     |
| Type of rule: oversized =1 (Control group: MWC)                          | -1.4*                                      | -1.3                                  | -2.9**                                  |
| Type of rule: pariah party in balance position =1                        | 0.4  | 3.0                                   | -1.1                                    |
| Degree of political conflict (0-10)                                      | -1.7***                                    | -0.7***                               | -3.1***                                 |
| Political knowledge: Executive board (0-10)                              | 5.6***                                     | 4.6***                                | 6.8***                                  |
| Political power: Executive board (0-10)                                  | 0.4  | -1.5                                  | 2.4                                     |
| Political power: Mayor (0-10)  | -2.9***                                    | 1.4*                                  | -7.0***                                 |
| Political power: Administrators (0-10)                                   | 1.0  | 0.5                                   | 2.1*                                    |
| Seniority, years in political office                                     | 0.1***                                     | 0.1                                   | 0.2***                                  |
| Top leader (chair of council, board, committee =1)                       | 3.9***                                     | 3.6***                                | 17.0***                                 |
| Member of executive board =1   | 2.1***                                     | 2.2***                                | 2.4**                                   |
| Threats (threatened at least once the past 12 months =1)                 | -4.4***                                    | -2.4*                                 | -6.8***                                 |
| Members of the ruling majority =1  | 17.6***                                    | NI                                    | NI                                      |
| Adj. R2  | .35  | .24                                   | .26                                     |

**Comments:** Data source is KOLFU, 2008 (Model A: N=7,849, Model B N=4,249, Model C N=3,450). In all models, local democratic satisfaction (0-100) is the dependent variable. CF = controlled for, NI = not included. P-values: \* <.05, \*\*<.01, \*\*\*<.001.

Another result in Table 2 is that representatives who have recently been threatened or harassed by citizens are less satisfied with democracy than their colleagues. The fact that representatives, when evaluating their political system, weigh citizen encounters, further underlines the result that personal experiences affect satisfaction with democracy.

Perhaps the most important result in Table 2 is that several factors affect majority representatives and opposition representatives differently (Models 4 and 5). This suggests that political strategy significantly affects the judgment of representatives. The ruling majority and the opposition are two political counterparts that have different political goals: The ruling majority wants to secure its privileged position and the opposition wants to replace the majority, or at least to make its rule unsuccessful. If a political factor has different impacts on demo-

cratic satisfaction among majority and opposition representatives, the assessments are likely to be affected by strategic calculations in relation to these goals.

This is most notable in the way majority and opposition representatives are affected by the political strength of the mayor (i.e. the chair of the executive board). A strong mayor makes majority representatives more satisfied with local democracy and opposition representatives more dissatisfied. A strong mayor is an important asset for the majority and a disadvantage for the opposition. The individualized leadership of the majority's leader reduces the relative influence of the collective bodies where the opposition is present (i.e. the council and the executive board) and possibly affects their chances to do well in coming elections.

Above we saw that influential administrators affect democratic satisfaction positively, which was a bit surprising. One would perhaps expect that politicians saw it as a democratic problem if administrators – and not elected representatives like themselves – had political power. However, the results of Table 2 reveal that the positive effect is only significant on the opposition side of the aisle. Perhaps the opposition views a strong bureaucracy as an ally against the majority, or at least an impediment for the ruling majority which the opposition appreciates.

Furthermore, the results of Table 2 show that oversized ruling coalitions – which earlier was identified as a negative factor for representatives' democratic satisfaction – in fact only have a negative effect among opposition representatives. In a situation where more parties than necessary have been included in the ruling majority, those who in the end were left out are especially unhappy and marginalized.

The degree of party conflict is a negative factor for democratic satisfaction on both sides of the aisle, but to a higher degree among opposition representatives. A culture of party conflict is often a result of the relationship between the majority and the opposition going sour. And when the relations are hostile, opposition members are likely weakened and hence more discontent.

Top leaders are rare among opposition representatives, as such positions are generally assigned to majority members. However, there are exceptions and the few top leaders who are in the opposition are much more satisfied with democracy than other opposition representatives. Additionally, the top leader effect is much stronger among opposition

than majority representatives. Seniority, i.e. the number of years a representative has held political office, is a positive factor for democratic satisfaction among opposition representatives, but not significantly so among majority representatives. As most formal top leader positions are awarded to majority representatives, perhaps informal hierarchy factors are more important among opposition representatives.

### **Conclusions: Elitism and political strategy**

This chapter evaluates support for three broad hypotheses. The democratic elitism hypothesis predicts that elected representatives, as defenders of the system, will be more satisfied with democracy than citizens. In this study, we have found that even though representatives are generally more satisfied with democracy than citizens, the differences between the two are relatively small and in one case (attitudes towards democracy at the EU-level) citizens are more satisfied than are representatives. The hypothesis is thus only partly confirmed.

Other results in the chapter add to the elitism theory. Elected representatives are not a coherent group when it comes to system support, and a general pattern seems to be that there are grades of elitism: privileged representatives are more satisfied than less privileged; professional representatives at the national level are more satisfied than laymen representatives at the local level; majority representatives are more satisfied than opposition representatives; senior representatives are more satisfied than junior representatives; and representatives with higher positions within the political hierarchy are more satisfied than backbenchers. All of these results support the democratic elitism theory if we recognize that there are elites within the elite.

Our second hypothesis was that representatives and citizens evaluate the political system through similar sources. This hypothesis was generally supported, as most factors that affected representatives also affected citizens in a similar way. But we also noted that representatives were affected by more factors, especially those relating to local parliamentary settings. However, the fact that elected representatives are more affected by political factors than citizens does not mean that citizens are unaffected. The factors that influence democratic satisfaction among both representatives and citizens are membership/support of the ruling party, party affiliation, the degree of party conflict, and the competence of political leaders.

The unique experiences of representatives were the focus of our third hypothesis, which stated that such experiences would explain variation in democratic satisfaction among representatives. This hypothesis was clearly confirmed. As mentioned above, seniority and formal positions affect the degree of satisfaction. We also found that threats and harassment from citizens negatively affect the democratic satisfaction of the representative victim.

Perhaps the most important result of the analysis was the discovery of party political strategy as an explanation of democratic satisfaction among representatives. It was expected that majority representatives would be more satisfied with democracy than opposition representatives, but the difference we found was large and remarkably consistent across indicators.

Our major findings on the elitism factor and the importance of political strategy are illustrated in Figure 2, where the diverging levels of democratic satisfaction between majority and opposition supporters/members, among citizens and local elected representatives, are compared.

Figure 2. Democratic satisfaction among representatives and citizens by support/membership of local ruling majority and (among representatives) political position. Predicted mean values.

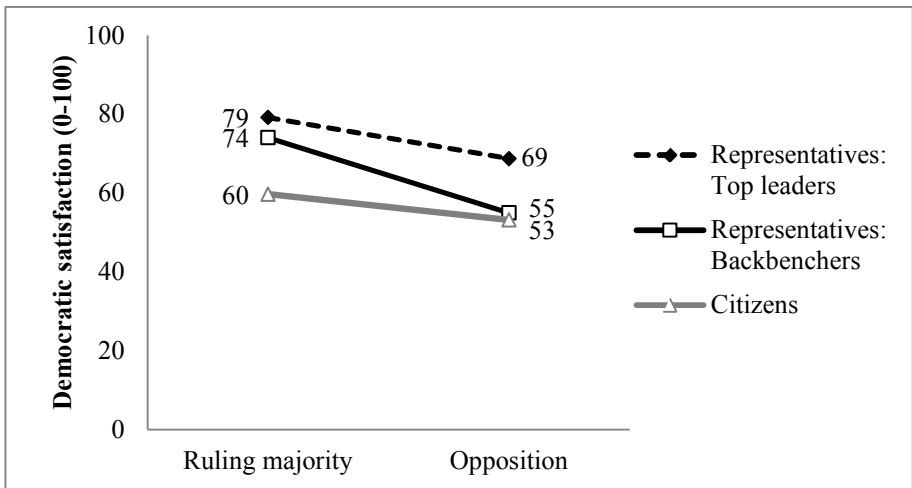


Figure 2 illustrates that representatives are more satisfied with their democratic system than citizens, but it also qualifies this result by



showing the important implications of political self-interest. In fact, the difference between majority and opposition representatives is larger than the difference between representatives and citizens. Furthermore, the levels of democratic satisfaction among citizens who support the local opposition, and representatives who are opposition backbenchers, are almost the same, and hence opposition representatives are less satisfied than citizens who support parties in the ruling the majority. We might also see some signs of co-optation among opposition members, where opposition representatives with top leadership positions are almost as satisfied with democracy as majority members without such positions. Being in opposition does decrease a representative's democratic satisfaction considerably, but the negative effect of being in an outsider position could to a high degree be compensated by promotion into high political offices. The opposition backbenchers are the least satisfied of all, and it may be that this group is extra sensitive to further political humiliation.

When the effect of factors relating to parliamentary settings on majority and opposition representatives was compared, the strategic dimension became even more apparent. Some of the differences between majority and opposition representatives could only be interpreted in the light of their different roles and differing political self-interest due to parliamentary position. Opposition members generally face an uphill battle when trying to influence policy decisions. Our results indicate that the presence of a strong mayor adds to the opposition's troubles, while strong administrators might serve as allies. A high degree of political conflict is possibly a result of the ruling majority's intention to keep their political opposition at bay.

The theory of democratic elitism builds on a view that the responsibilities of political office ennoble the representatives into supporting important democratic values. Political strategy on the other hand is a political self-interest-based explanation where representatives' views on the political system are coloured by their ambition to keep or attain political power.

Determining which of the two explanations is most valid must be a task for future research. But awaiting this research we can conclude that irrespective of what their actual incentives are, the political elite are more supportive of the democratic system than citizens, and most supportive of all are the elites within the elite.

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