

Political support through representation by the government. Evidence from Dutch panel data

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Abstract

Research on political support demonstrates that satisfaction with democracy is higher among electoral winners than losers, and that it is higher for citizens who are ideologically more congruent with the government. In this paper, I analyze how support for the political system is affected by representation by the government. Expanding on previous studies, I leverage long-run panel data from the Dutch LISS panel spanning over several electoral cycles. Drawing on various measures that go beyond the distinction between election winners and losers and also measure how close citizens are to the government coalition as a whole, I show that being well represented by the government has a wide-ranging positive relationship with satisfaction with democracy, external efficacy and trust in political institutions. While this relationship is mostly short-run, political support can decline substantially if non-representation persists in the long-run. This highlights the relevance of long-run panel data for studying the consequences of representation.

Zusammenfassung

Gemäss der Forschung zur politischen Unterstützung steigt die Zufriedenheit mit der Demokratie bei Wahlgewinnenden sowie bei denjenigen, die ideologisch mit der Regierung übereinstimmen. Diese Arbeit analysiert, wie die Unterstützung für das politische System von der Repräsentation durch die Regierung beeinflusst wird. Dabei geht sie über frühere Studien hinaus und nutzt Paneldaten des niederländischen LISS-Panels, die mehrere Wahlzyklen umfassen. Repräsentation wird hier anhand verschiedener Indikatoren gemessen, die über die Unterscheidung zwischen Wahlgewinnenden und -verlierenden hinausgehen, indem auch die ideologische Nähe zur Regierungskoalition insgesamt gemessen wird. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass eine höhere Repräsentation durch die Regierung einen weitreichenden,

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positiven Zusammenhang mit der Demokratiezufriedenheit, der Auffassung, dass die Politik auf die Menschen eingeht, und dem Vertrauen in politische Institutionen hat. Diese Beziehungen sind überwiegend kurzfristig, aber wenn die Nichtrepräsentation langfristig anhält, kann die politische Unterstützung erheblich zurückgehen. Dies unterstreicht die Relevanz langfristiger Paneldaten für die Untersuchung der Folgen von Repräsentation.

Résumé

Selon la recherche sur le soutien politique, la satisfaction démocratique augmente pour les gagnants des élections et les personnes idéologiquement proches du gouvernement. Cet article analyse comment le soutien du système politique est influencé par la représentation du gouvernement. Il va au-delà des études précédentes et utilise les données du panel néerlandais LISS qui couvre plusieurs cycles électoraux. La représentation est mesurée par différents indicateurs qui dépassent la distinction entre gagnants et perdants des élections et mesurent la proximité idéologique avec la coalition gouvernementale dans son ensemble. Les résultats montrent qu'une meilleure représentation par le gouvernement a une relation positive avec la satisfaction démocratique, l'efficacité externe et la confiance dans les institutions politiques. Ces relations sont principalement à court terme, mais si la non-représentation persiste à long terme, le soutien politique diminue considérablement. Cela souligne la pertinence des données de panel à long terme pour l'étude des conséquences de la représentation.

Riassunto

Secondo le ricerche sul sostegno politico, la soddisfazione con la democrazia è più alta tra i vincitori delle elezioni e le persone ideologicamente vicine al governo. Questo articolo analizza come il sostegno al sistema politico sia influenzato da quanto uno si senta rappresentato dal governo. L'articolo va oltre gli studi precedenti e utilizza i dati del panel neerlandese LISS che coprono diversi cicli elettorali. La rappresentanza è misurata da vari indicatori che esulano dalla distinzione tra vincitori e vinti delle elezioni e misurano anche la vicinanza ideologica alla coalizione di governo nel suo insieme. I risultati mostrano che essere bene rappresentati dal governo è fortemente correlato con la soddisfazione con la democrazia, l'efficacia esterna e la fiducia nelle istituzioni politiche. Nonostante questo legame fosse soprattutto a breve termine, il sostegno politico può diminuire significativamente se la mancanza di rappresentanza persiste nel lungo periodo. Ciò mette in rilievo l'importanza di dati panel a lungo termine per studiare le conseguenze della rappresentanza.

KEYWORDS

representation, elections, winners-losers gap, satisfaction with democracy, political trust

INTRODUCTION

“[T]he struggle for political office is bound to create winners and losers” (Kaase & Newton, 1995, p. 60). Whereas some citizens voted for one of the parties in the subsequent government, others did not. Studies on the winners-losers gap show that election winners perceive the political system more positively. In particular, they are more satisfied with democracy, believe that their external political efficacy is higher, and display more trust in political institutions (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Dahlberg & Linde, 2016; Dahlberg & Linde, 2017; Hansen et al., 2019). In a similar vein, studies on the congruence of citizens with their government provide evidence that ideological proximity to the government also increases satisfaction with democracy and additionally mitigates the winners-losers gap (e.g., Campbell, 2015; Curini et al., 2012; Ferland, 2021; Henderson, 2008; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Singh et al., 2011; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016).

In this paper, I strive to expand on these two strands of literature. First, the distinction between election winners or losers and the ideological congruence of citizens with their government have been conceptually regarded independently of one another, despite their inherent connection.¹ I argue that they should instead be integrated as different facets under the broader framework of individual representation by the government. Citizens can be or feel represented by their government in several ways. Whereas the distinction between winners and losers presents a more election-centric view of representation, focusing on representation by a single party in government one has voted for, the ideological congruence of citizens with their government takes a policy-oriented view, focusing on how well citizens are represented by their government in terms of policy positions. Better representation by their government in general, then, should go hand in hand with increased support for the political system.

Second, empirically, most studies rely on cross-sectional data (or repeated cross-sectional data, e.g., Loveless, 2021; Nemčok & Wass, 2021). There are a few panel studies that survey respondents in the months directly before and after an election (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Blais & Gélinau, 2007; Daoust et al., 2021; Davis & Hitt, 2016; Gärtner et al., 2020; Hollander, 2014; Singh et al., 2012; van der Meer & Steenvoorden, 2018), after a longer time span following the election (Halliez & Thornton, 2022; Hansen et al., 2019) or over an entire electoral cycle (Dahlberg & Linde, 2017). However, these panel studies do not span over several electoral cycles where different governments were in office, only measure differences between winners and losers of elections instead of more policy-oriented measures of representation by the government such as the ideological distance and only focus on satisfaction with the functioning of democracy as the dependent variable. To address these shortcomings, I leverage data of the Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel, a panel survey based on a true probability sample of households collected annually since 2007 (CentERdata, 2021). In this time span, there has been satisfactory variance in the ideology of Dutch governments, ranging from center, center-right to right-wing governments. Crucially, this rich data set allows testing the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system with a variety of indicators that yield more comprehensive conclusions than prior research.

Overall, my study contributes to extant literature in several ways: First, I highlight the theoretical overlap between studies on the winners-losers gap and studies on the congruence of citizens with their government and argue that they should be viewed under a common framework of representation by the government. Second, my fixed effects models present robust evidence from panel data spanning over multiple electoral cycles with several governments in office that being well represented by the government is consistently positively related to support for the political system

¹To my best knowledge, only Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016) in their study on government-citizen congruence and satisfaction with democracy shortly address the connection between these two concepts, by arguing that the winners-losers gap is driven by policy considerations as well.

over various indicators. The winners-losers gap persists even in a consolidated, well-functioning consensus democracy like the Netherlands, which can be considered a least-likely case. Going beyond the classic winners-losers distinction, the results also show that in a context with frequent multi-party cabinets, it matters even more how close citizens are to the government coalition as a whole. Third, error correction models reveal that there is a temporal dynamic in the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system to some degree, but the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes happening instantaneously or in the subsequent time period after a change in representation. Fourth, restricting the analysis to respondents with a consistent party preference or ideology rules out potential endogeneity concerns. In dummy impact function models, I further exploit variation in the government composition to model the dynamics of changes in representation by the government. This shows that the effect of (non-)representation in government wanes slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (or out of) office, but becomes stronger again if (non-)representation continues for a longer period. Finally, detailed analyses raise an important concern about panel studies that employ only pre-election vs. post-election comparisons (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012) by highlighting that political support can in some cases already drop substantially in the last year of a cabinet as a result of citizens anticipating that a government may break down or not be re-elected.

REPRESENTATION BY THE GOVERNMENT AND POLITICAL SUPPORT

Following the seminal study by Easton (1965), literature on political support, understood as positive “orientations towards the nation-state, its agencies, and actors” (Norris, 2017, p. 19), distinguishes between diffuse and specific support. While specific support is targeted at the political authorities in office, diffuse support focuses on the more abstract, generalized support for the nation-state, its regime and its institutions. In this regard, Anderson and colleagues (Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001) highlight that diffuse support for the political system is affected by elections. The outcomes of elections inevitably divide citizens into election winners, i.e., those who voted for one of the parties in the government, and election losers, i.e., those who did not (Kaase & Newton, 1995). Whereas political support increases for winners, election losers display a lower support for the political system. The lower support of electoral losers in particular has received considerable attention, given that the losers’ consent is perceived as critical for the legitimacy and functioning of democratic systems (Anderson et al., 2005). The winners-losers gap receives substantial support in empirical research (e.g., Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Craig et al., 2006; Marien, 2011; Singh et al., 2011). While most studies focus on the winners-losers gap in satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country, some studies also show that a similar gap exists for trust in political institutions and external political efficacy – i.e., the view that politics is responsive to the people (Campbell et al., 1954).² The size of this effect is larger when more is at stake in the election, as in majoritarian compared to consensus democracies (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012; Martini & Quaranta, 2019; Wells & Kriekhaus, 2006), in worse functioning democracies (Dahlberg & Linde, 2016), when there are fewer direct-democratic institutions (Leemann

²Although these measures do not directly capture support for democratic principles, a lack of support for the general performance of the democratic political system amongst electoral losers can threaten democratic legitimacy if it persists beyond a transient post-election decline in political support (Anderson et al., 2005; Dahlberg & Linde, 2017). That losers remain supportive of the functioning of the political system is particularly important in a context in which experts warn of an ongoing disconnect from democratic institutions (Foa & Mounk, 2017), increased polarization (Svolik, 2019) or a populist backlash (Inglehart & Norris, 2017).

& Stadelmann-Steffen, 2022), in more unequal economies (Han & Chang, 2016) or when the election contest is close (Howell & Justwan, 2013).

In a similar vein to the winners-losers gap, studies assess the impact of individual ideological congruence with the government on political support. On the one hand, these studies show that a lower individual ideological distance to the government leads to increased political support also outside of the context of winning and losing an election (Ferland, 2021; Henderson, 2008; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Noordzij et al., 2021; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016). On the other hand, some studies argue that the individual ideological congruence with the government moderates the impact of winning or losing: if the government is closer to your own ideological position, the impact of winning or losing the election is less pronounced (Campbell, 2015; Curini et al., 2012; Curini & Jou, 2016; Gärtner et al., 2020; Hobolt et al., 2021; van Egmond et al., 2020).

I argue that these two literatures should be viewed under the broader lens of individual representation by government, touching upon different aspects thereof. While representation serves as an important conceptual framework for studies on the ideological congruence of citizens with their government, studies on the winners-losers gap generally do not address this topic, despite the inherent connection. Following Pitkin (1967), substantive representation means that representatives (or more precisely governments in this context) act for (i.e., in the interest of) their constituents. They resemble their constituents in terms of preferences and react responsively to their constituents' preferences. From the perspective of individual citizens, they are well represented by the government if the government and its policies align with their own preferences and thus serve their interests. Citizens can be represented by their government in several ways. Election winners are represented by the government through the party they have voted for and can thus expect the government to act in their interest. This can be regarded as an input-oriented perspective of representation focusing on elections and representation by a single party in government. If the government consists of multiple parties, however, as is frequently the case in democracies with proportional representation voting systems, representation may not only focus on the single party that one has voted for, but on the government coalition as a whole. Moving beyond the perspective of voting in elections, citizens may also be represented by the government through their congruence with the ideology of parties included in it. From an output-oriented perspective of representation focusing on policies, citizens may be more or less represented by the government depending on the policies the government implements.

Research on the individual ideological congruence with the government has generally focused on a *utilitarian/rational argument* that citizens derive utility from being represented in the government and having their preferred policies implemented (e.g., Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016). They evaluate the political system based on the utility they derive from its outputs. Similarly, research on the winners-losers gap argues that election winners and losers differ in the benefits they can expect from the government in the future (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005). While election winners are more likely to have their preferred policies implemented, electoral losers are more likely to be policy losers. As a result, election loss is argued to motivate losers to bring about change in the political system (Riker, 1983) and create a gap in the satisfaction with the political system between winners and losers. Such utilitarian arguments are most closely aligned with an output-oriented perspective of representation focusing on policies. At the same time, there is some evidence that a lower ideological distance to the government decreases the impact of winning or losing and can thus be regarded as a mechanism (e.g., Curini et al., 2012; Gärtner et al., 2020).

In addition to this utilitarian argument, studies on the winners-losers gap in political system support have put forth two psychological arguments (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Campbell, 2015; Gärtner et al., 2020). First, the *cognitive psychological argument* looks at dissonance avoidance strategies (Festinger, 1962). When election outcomes are at odds with the personal attitudes and beliefs of citizens, this can lead to post-election dissonance. As people are generally motivated to

maintain a certain degree of consistency in their beliefs and attitudes, they adapt their perceptions of the political system. Losers are thus less likely to believe that the political process is fair (Anderson & Mendes, 2006; Craig et al., 2006), while winners are more likely to ideologically assimilate themselves with the government parties (Best & Seyis, 2021). Such dissonance avoidance strategies also work well with representation by the government beyond the context of elections and should also be triggered from good or bad representation by the government in general.

Second, the *emotional psychological argument* emphasizes that belonging to the election winners comes with an emotional reward associated with victory. Whereas election losers feel angry and disillusioned at the political system producing the results, election winners are euphoric, resulting in the so-called ‘home-team’ effect, similar to what people experience when their preferred football team wins (Holmberg, 1999). Although this argument is most closely connected to the context of electoral outcomes, I argue that it can be extended to representation in general. Well-represented citizens should be enthusiastic that the government is ideologically close to them and that their preferred policies are implemented, whereas less well-represented citizens become disillusioned. This final argument, however, has been challenged by empirical analyses testing the mechanism. In particular, Daoust et al. (2021) and Gärtner et al. (2020) evaluate whether subjective feelings of having won or lost an election contribute to explaining the winners-losers gap and do not find any evidence supporting this mechanism.

I thus hypothesize as follows:

H₁: Better representation by the government is positively related to political support.

I expect this relationship to be consistent over a variety of measures for the degree individual citizens are represented by their government as well as over several measures of support for the political system. For citizens’ support for the political system, it does not matter only whether their preferred party is in government, but also how they view other parties in a government coalition and how ideologically close they are to the government. In addition, while extant literature has found robust evidence for a winners-losers gap with short-term election panels directly before or after the election (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012; van der Meer & Steenvoorden, 2018) or at most over an entire electoral cycle (Dahlberg & Linde, 2017), a long-term panel analysis is missing so far. I expect intra-individual differences in the degree of representation by the government to be related with support for the political system when looking at panel data spanning over multiple electoral cycles with different governments in office as well.

Finally, due to its focus on elections, literature has so far generally assumed that the winners-losers gap materializes instantaneously following elections. However, for several reasons, citizens may not adapt their support for the political system instantaneously as soon as their representation by the government improves or worsens. First, previous experience of a government in which they were well represented may leave them with a reservoir of goodwill toward the political system that requires a longer experience of worse representation to erode. Second, the benefits from a better representation (i.e., seeing one’s preferred policies implemented) may take some time to fully come into fruition. Third, citizens follow politics to different degrees. In particular when it comes to information-heavy assessments of how close the government is to citizens’ ideological positions, less interested or less well-informed citizens may need more time to respond to changes in how well they are represented by government. I thus expect that there is instead a temporal dynamic in the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system with both an instantaneous short-run as well as a more long-run component:

H₂: There is both a short-run and a long-run relationship between representation by the government and political support.

METHODS AND DATA

I test these hypotheses with data from the Politics and Values study of the *Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences Panel* (LISS, CentERdata, 2021). The LISS panel interviews a representative probability sample of households, which were recruited offline through addresses, in the Netherlands since 2007 via online questionnaires. To ensure representativeness, respondents were recruited offline through addresses by letter and people without computer or internet access were provided with loaned equipment.³ Each wave comprises around 6,000 individuals. I make use of the up to 61,410 observations of respondents in waves 1 to 13 (2007/2008–2020/2021)⁴ for which data on all variables was available. The LISS panel is one of the only long-term representative panels with a considerable number of items to measure both support for the political system and how well respondents are represented by their government. It thus provides a unique opportunity to study the relationship under question.

Aside from data availability reasons, the Netherlands also constitutes an interesting case to study. On the one hand, it may be considered a least-likely case to find large differences between election winners and losers. The Netherlands are a consolidated well-functioning democracy and lean strongly towards the ideal type of a consensus democracy, especially on the executive-parties dimension: with no legal electoral threshold, the Netherlands has a large effective number of parties in parliament and its cabinets are always coalition governments (Lijphart, 2012). In this regard, previous research has shown that the winners-losers gap is considerably smaller in established democracies (e.g., Nadeau et al., 2021) and in consensus democracies (e.g., Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012). Studying the case of Belgium, Hooghe and Stiers (2016) even show that in such a proportional electoral system the political support of all voters increases following an election, independent of their winner/loser status. In addition, the government usually includes centrist parties and a complete turnover of all government parties generally does not occur.

On the other hand, there is substantial variation between governments over time. Government coalitions frequently change and throughout the 14-year observation period, four different government coalitions have been in office with substantial ideological differences (for an overview, see Table 1). The fourth cabinet by Jan Peter Balkenende was formed by the Christian-democratic parties Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and Christian Union (CU) as well as the social-democratic Labor Party (PvdA), leaning economically slightly towards the left and culturally slightly towards the right. The first cabinet by Mark Rutte was a right-wing minority government of the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the CDA, which was granted confidence and supply by Geert Wilders' far-right populist Party for Freedom (PVV). The second Rutte cabinet was a coalition between the VVD and PvdA, which was economically very divided and culturally leaning towards the left. Finally, the third cabinet by Rutte was a coalition of the liberal VVD, the Christian-democratic CDA and CU as well as the social-liberal Democrats 66 (D66). It was economically right-wing, but culturally very divided between the progressive D66 and the conservative Christian-democratic parties. This shows that there is not only substantial variation between the government parties in the Dutch case, but also with regards to the government coalition. Supporters of a party can find their preferred party in very different government coalitions, some closer, others further to their own ideological position.

³New households are recruited regularly to combat panel attrition (de Vos, 2009). In early years, the LISS panel also used selective recruitment to improve representativeness (de Vos, 2010). This is also reflected in the summary statistics by wave, which become more stable after the adjustments during the first three waves (see Table A2 in the online appendix). Panel attrition may still be an issue, though. As can be seen in Table A3 in the online appendix, young and unmarried respondents are often more likely to suffer from panel attrition over the waves. In order to ascertain that the results are consistent, I ran models with a balanced panel including only respondents who constantly remained part of the LISS panel and thus were not affected by attrition. As can be seen in Figure A3 in the online appendix, the results are very similar.

⁴There is a 1-year gap between wave 8 (2013/2014) and wave 9 (2015/2016).

TABLE 1 Governments in office during the observation period.

Years	Cabinet	Parties in cabinet	Position	CHES Econ	CHES Galtan
2007–2010	Balkenende IV	CDA, PvdA, CU	center	4.63	5.59
2010–2012	Rutte I	VVD, CDA (PVV support)	right-wing	7.56	5.74
2012–2017	Rutte II	VVD, PvdA	center	5.87	4.10
2017–2021	Rutte III	VVD, CDA, D66, CU	center-right	7.05	4.84

Note: Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data of the government parties' seat-weighted economic left-right scale (CHES Econ) and cultural left-right scale (CHES GAL/TAN) from 0–10 (Jolly et al., 2022).

Political support. I use three indicators for support for the political system that have been employed in the literature: satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy, and trust in political institutions (Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Marien, 2011; van der Meer & Steenvoorden, 2018). Following Norris' (2017) conceptualization of political support, these indicators go beyond the most specific forms of support for incumbents, while also not reaching the most diffuse aspects of core regime principles such as democratic support. In particular, they touch support for the regime, its institutions and the performance of democratic processes. Trust in political institutions captures respondents' confidence in the institutions of the regime, while satisfaction with the functioning of democracy is a key measure for the more diffuse regime performance evaluations. External political efficacy falls somewhere in between, touching both the functioning of democratic processes as well as confidence in core institutions and political elites in general. Despite their conceptual differences, they thus reflect similar aspects of political support. Satisfaction with democracy is measured using the standard item asking respondents how satisfied they are with the way democracy operates in the Netherlands on a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). For external political efficacy, I use three items asking respondents whether they think the following statements are true or not: a) "parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me", b) "political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion", c) "people like me have no influence at all on government policy". I then count the number of these items that respondents believe to be false. The correlations between these three items is at least moderately strong and an exploratory factor analysis with the principal component method indicates that these items strongly load onto a single factor (see Table A4 in the online appendix). Finally, trust in political institutions is measured as an average of three items asking respondents how much confidence they have in a) the Dutch parliament, b) politicians and c) political parties on a scale from 0 (no confidence at all) to 10 (full confidence). These three items display a very high degree of correlation and strongly load onto a single factor in an exploratory factor analysis (see Table A5 in the online appendix). The three dependent variables also correlate moderately, showing that despite their conceptual differences, they reflect similar facets of political support.⁵

Representation by the government. Representation by the government is measured in four different ways, including both more election-oriented and more policy-oriented measures. First, I use the classic distinction between election winners and losers with a question on which party the respondent voted for in the last general election. Second, I employ respondents' vote intentions if parliamentary elections were held today, distinguishing whether respondents intend to vote for a government party or not. Starting in wave 9 of the LISS panel, respondents were split and half of the respondents were asked a propensity-to-vote question instead, i.e., the percentage chance that they would vote for each of the parties. In order to not lose these respondents, it was assumed that they intended to vote for one of the government parties if the party (or the

⁵External efficacy displays a weak to moderate correlation with satisfaction with democracy ($r = 0.37$) and a moderate correlation with trust in political institutions ($r = 0.48$). Satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions correlate a bit more strongly ($r = 0.65$), highlighting their similarities in reflecting performance evaluations of the regime and its institutions (see Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014).

parties) they assigned the highest likeliness to vote for included one of the government parties.⁶ In contrast to simply looking at past vote choice, this measure allows respondents to reconsider whether they consider themselves represented by the government over the full span of the electoral cycle. Third, the LISS panel includes a feeling thermometer in which respondents were asked how they feel about all relevant political parties on a scale from very unsympathetic (0) to very sympathetic (10). From this, I calculate how close respondents are to their government by averaging respondents' sympathy with the parties included in the government, weighted by the parliamentary seats of the respective government party. This is a more precise measure for how well respondents feel represented by the government. Compared to the vote intention measure, it captures representation by the entire government coalition and is independent from strategical considerations that may affect vote choice. Fourth, I calculate a measure for how well respondents are represented by their government in terms of their political positions, i.e., a measure for individual-level government-citizen congruence (e.g., Curini et al., 2012; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016). For this, I combine LISS panel questions on four important policy areas (income redistribution, multiculturalism, moral policy and European integration)⁷ and the general left-right scale with Chapel Hill Expert Survey data (Jolly et al., 2022) on the position of political parties on these topics,⁸ similarly as in Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016). Seeing as CHES data is not collected yearly, but only once during each legislative term in the observation period, I used the respective party positions for all years of a legislative term. I rescale the CHES party positions and LISS panel questions to bring them onto the same scale and then take the average of all government parties weighted by the number of seats in parliament. The policy closeness measure is then the average distance to the mean position of the government parties over all four policy fields as well as the general left-right-scale. For easier interpretation, I subtract this value from zero, so that higher values indicate lower distance towards the government, meaning better representation. This presents a congruence measure for how well respondents are represented by their government in terms of policy positions. In all calculations, I treat the PVV as not part of the Rutte I government, since they only supported the government by confidence and supply, but held no cabinet seats.⁹

Modeling approach. In order to account for the panel structure of the data, the first set of models are specified as fixed-effects models (Allison, 2009). One of the three political support indicators PS_{it} is regressed on one of four different measures for representation by the government Rep_{it} and a set of control variables CV_{it} , while allowing for individual and time specific intercepts α_i and α_t :

$$PS_{it} = \beta_1 Rep_{it} + \beta_2 CV_{it} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \quad (1)$$

As controls, I include a range of variables frequently controlled for in the literature on satisfaction with democracy, political trust and the winner-loser debate (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Newton et al., 2018). Due to the nature of the fixed-effects models, time-constant variables (e.g., age, gender) do not have to be controlled for. Several socio-demographic variables such as the highest level of education, personal net monthly income, being in education, at home, retired or unemployed, being married and having

⁶The main results are very similar when excluding the respondents who received the propensity-to-vote question, as can be seen in Figure A4 in the online appendix.

⁷The precise questions in the LISS panel are a) whether differences in income should increase or decrease, b) whether immigrants can retain their own culture or should adapt entirely to Dutch culture, c) whether euthanasia should be forbidden or permitted and d) whether European integration should go further or has already gone too far.

⁸The precise questions in the CHES are a) whether a party strongly favors or opposes redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, b) whether a party strongly favors multiculturalism or adaptation in the integration of immigrants and asylum seekers, c) whether a party strongly supports or opposes liberal policies on social lifestyle, and d) whether a party is strongly in favor or strongly opposed towards European integration.

⁹As a robustness check, I used alternative measures where the PVV was treated as if it were a full member of the Rutte I government. As can be seen in Figure A5 in the online appendix, the main results do not change substantially.

children as well as the urban character of the place of residence are added to the models. In addition, two political variables are controlled for: the left-right self-placement of the respondents (including a squared term, given that both representation and political support are likely lower at the extremes) and their interest in politics.

The key advantage of this specification is that all time-invariant heterogeneity between individuals is controlled for, which allows estimating the relationship between representation by the government and political support with less bias. At the same time, however, this specification also makes some simplifying assumptions that may not necessarily hold true. In particular, it assumes that the relationship between representation by the government and political support is instantaneous, changing as soon as representation improves or worsens.

As a second specification, I thus employ a general error correction model, regressing changes in the dependent variable on changes in the independent variables as well as lagged dependent and independent variables (see e.g., de Boef & Keele, 2008; Keele & Kelly, 2006; Plümpfer & Troeger, 2019; Wilkins, 2018).

$$\Delta PS_{it} = \beta_1 PS_{it-1} + \beta_2 \Delta Rep_{it} + \beta_3 Rep_{it-1} + \beta_4 \Delta CV_{it} + \beta_5 CV_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \quad (2)$$

In contrast to the simple fixed-effects model, this specification has the advantage of incorporating temporal dynamics into the model. This allows estimating both the short-run relationship, i.e., the immediate impact of a change in representation by the government on political support, as well as the long-run relationship, i.e., impacts over future time periods until the relationship is again in equilibrium.

In a third and final step of the analysis, I address potential concerns with endogeneity and employ a subsample analysis. In particular, respondents' alignment with parties and ideological positions may not be stable over time. This may be problematic if respondents self-select into being (less) well-represented by adapting their preferred parties and ideological positions. In order to rule out this concern, I restrict the sample to those respondents with a consistent party preference and policy position over time.¹⁰ For these respondents, it can be plausibly argued that the only aspect of representation that has changed over time was the government coalition in power. In a more detailed analysis honing in on those respondents with a consistent party preference, I fully exploit the variation in the government composition to model the dynamics of changes in representation by the government and how they affect political support in different time periods after representation starts or ends. This is done via a dummy impact function following the approach by Allison (1994), which allows estimating the time-varying effect of an event on an outcome of interest (see also Ludwig & Brüderl, 2021). In this modeling approach, it is also possible to distinguish between transitions into and transitions out of being represented in government by one's preferred party. The FE models include a) respondents whose preferred party was never represented in government as the baseline, and b) the relevant years for respondents whose party either transitioned into or out of being represented during the observation period. The key independent variables are a set of dummy variables *RepYears_{it}* and *NonrepYears_{it}* for the year of the transition as well as the five years after. For years five or greater after the transition, the years were grouped, because they would otherwise hinge on supporters of the few specific parties which have experienced long periods in (or out of) government. Table A6 in the online appendix presents in detail how these key variables were coded.

$$PS_{it} = \beta_1 RepYears_{it} + \beta_2 CV_{it} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \quad (3a)$$

¹⁰To be precise, I only include respondents if they were part of the LISS panel in a time frame in which at least two different governments were in power. For consistent party preferences, I restricted the sample to those who intended to vote for the same party in all waves. For consistent policy positions, I restricted the sample to those whose answers in the four policy questions differed only by one (on a scale from 1 to 5) over all waves and whose answers in the general left-right scale differed only by two (on a scale from 0 to 10) over all waves.

$$PS_{it} = \beta_1 NonrepYears_{it} + \beta_2 CV_{it} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \quad (3b)$$

Compared to the other specifications, this allows estimating precisely how changes in representation by the government in both directions affect political support over time while avoiding issues of self-selection. In return, the drawback is that it requires a restricted sample and is only possible for vote intention as a measure of representation by the government.

All models use robust standard errors clustered by respondents. A full list of all variables, their operationalization as well as descriptive statistics can be found in Table A1 in the online appendix.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Figure 1 presents the results of the fixed-effects regression models. In order to make the results comparable, standardized regression coefficients were calculated. Each coefficient displays a separate model regressing one of the three dependent variables (satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and political trust) on one of the four representation measures (having voted for a government party in the previous election, intending to vote for government parties if an election were held, average sympathy for government parties and average policy closeness to the government parties) as well as several control variables. For ease of presentation, the coefficients for the control variables were not displayed. The full regression tables can be found in the online appendix in Table A7.

In general, hypothesis 1 is fully supported. Better representation by the government is consistently positively related to support for the political system. Representation by the government portrays stronger relationships with the three dependent variables than any of the other variables frequently controlled for in the literature. The relationship is particularly strong for political trust. In addition, there is some variation in the strength of the relationship between the four

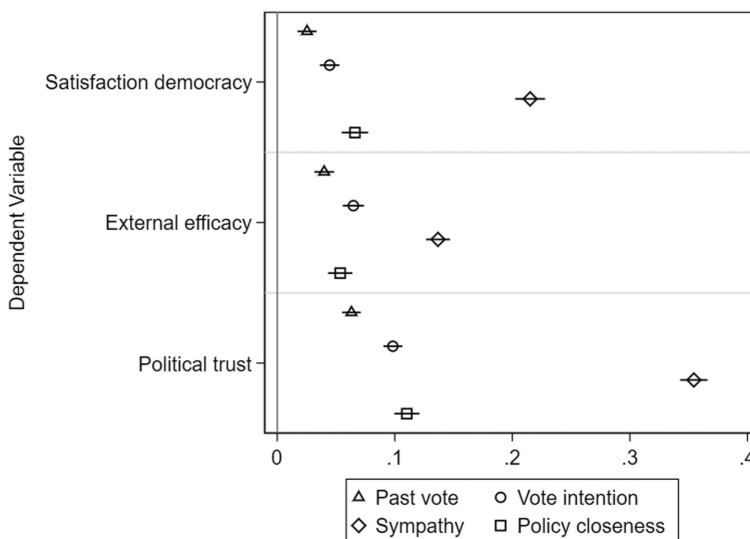


FIGURE 1 FE regression coefficients of the relationship between representation by the government and political support. *Note:* Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. Each coefficient is from a separate model regressing one of the three dependent variables on one of the four representation measures as well as several control variables.

measures of representation by the government. While a past vote for a government party, a vote intention for a government party and the policy distance to the government perform fairly similarly (and this despite potential noise coming from the comparison of expert assessments with voter opinions on different scales), sympathy with the government parties has a substantially stronger relationship with the three political support measures.

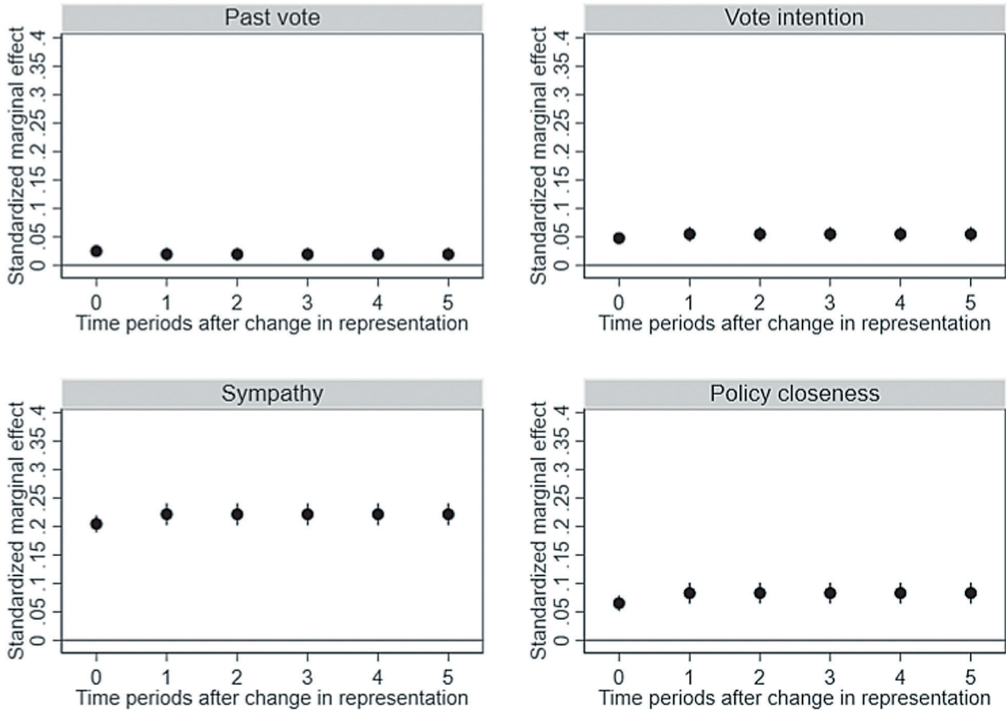
In order to get a better idea of the effect size, it is worth looking at the non-standardized coefficients. For easier comparison with satisfaction with democracy and political trust, external efficacy was rescaled to range from 0 to 10. Having voted for one of the government parties is associated with an increase in the satisfaction with democracy by 0.10, external political efficacy by 0.32 and political trust by 0.24. Intending to vote for one of the government parties is associated with an increase in satisfaction with democracy by 0.18, external political efficacy by 0.55 and political trust by 0.39. An average sympathy for the government parties that is higher by two points (roughly the difference in the sympathy for a government including the party that one intends to vote for as compared to one that does not include that party) is associated with an increase in the satisfaction with democracy by 0.43, external political efficacy by 0.58 and political trust by 0.69. Finally, a policy distance to the government that is closer by 0.2 (which is roughly the difference in the policy distance to a government including the party that one intends to vote for as compared to one that does not include that party) is associated with an increase in satisfaction with democracy by 0.06, external political efficacy by 0.11 and political trust by 0.11.¹¹ All coefficients are significant at the 0.1% level.

Overall, I thus find a consistent relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system even in the Netherlands, a country leaning strongly towards the consensus model of democracy. However, there is some variance in the size of the relationship. In general, the election-focused distinction between winners and losers of the previous election is comparably weak in substantial terms when looking at long-run panel data. If more precise measures of representation by the government are taken into consideration, which allow for variation in the quality of representation between different government coalitions, the size of the relationship increases considerably. In particular for sympathy with the government parties, it becomes substantial in size. This highlights a shortcoming of the winners/losers distinction in the context of consensus democracies with frequent multi-party cabinets.

So far, the modeling strategy has assumed that the effect of representation by the government on political support is instantaneous, changing as soon as representation improves or worsens. In the following, error correction models are presented, which estimate both the short-run and the long-run relationships between the variables of interest. Of particular interest here is how the relationship unfolds over future time periods if representation by the government changes. On the one hand, there is a short-run effect, which is the immediate impact of a change in representation by the government on political support, measured by the coefficient of the first differenced independent variable in the error correction model. On the other hand, the long-run multiplier designates the overall impact of a change in representation by the government on political support after the relationship is again in equilibrium, which is estimated as $\frac{\beta_2}{\beta_1}$, standard errors estimated by the Bewley (1979) transformation. Figure 2 displays graphically for each measure how a change in representation by the government by one standard deviation impacts political support instantaneously (i.e., the short-run effect) and in the five subsequent time periods (given that the relationship generally reaches equilibrium after 5 years, the final coefficient

¹¹Figure A1 in the online appendix further disentangles the relationship between the policy distance to the government and political system support by looking at policy distances in the general left-right scale as well as the four policy fields separately instead of taking the average. Overall, policy distance in the general left-right scale as well as European integration show the strongest relationship. Policy distances in multiculturalism and redistribution are also significant, albeit weaker in size. In contrast, policy distances in moral policy show no relationship at all.

(a) Satisfaction with democracy



(b) External political efficacy

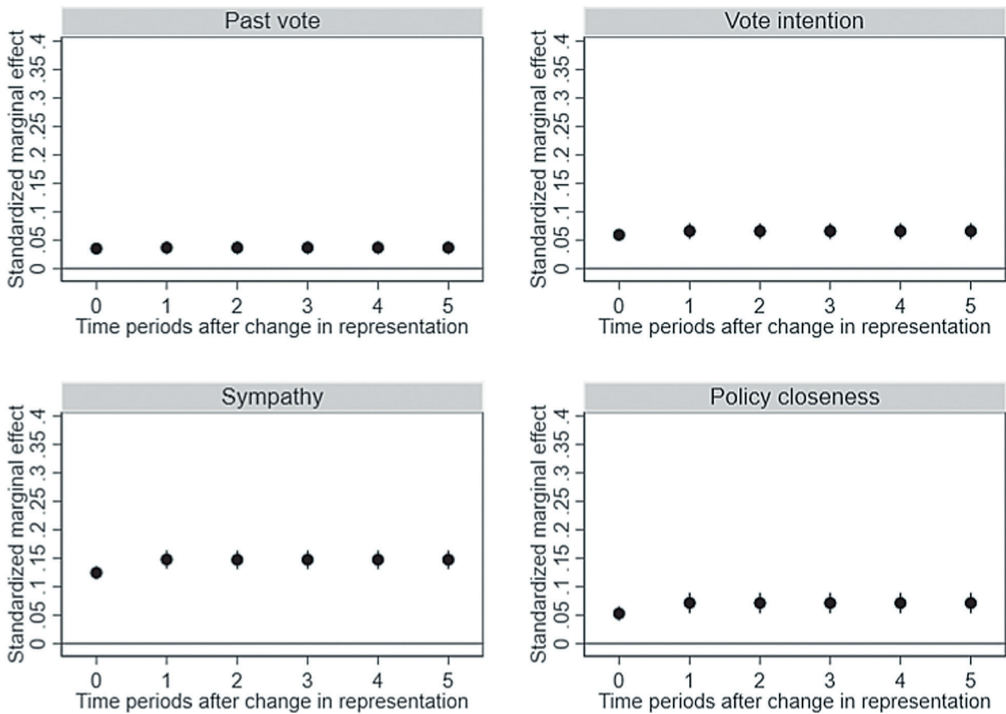


FIGURE 2 (Continues)

(c) Trust in political institutions

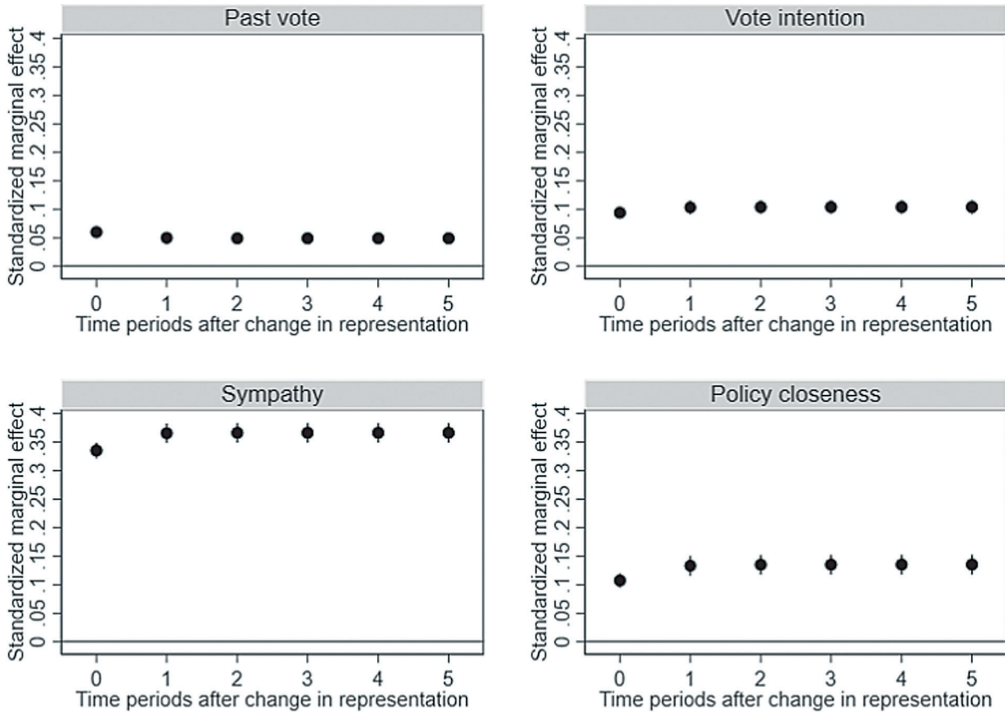


FIGURE 2 Marginal effect of representation by the government on political support over several time periods. *Note:* Displayed are the standardized marginal effects of a change in one of the measures for representation by the government on one of the political support measures after n time periods with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. The marginal effects were calculated from error correction models as displayed in equation (2).

is equivalent with the long-run multiplier). The full regression tables can be found in the online appendix in Table A8.

The results of the error correction models indicate that the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes happening within two time periods. The short-run relationships, i.e., the marginal effects at time period 0, are comparable with the fixed-effects models presented above. Beyond that, there are some additional adjustments until the relationship reaches the long-run multiplier, but these are much smaller than the immediate short-run relationship. The long-run relationship is generally significant for trust in political institutions and for the sympathy and policy closeness measures. For the past vote and vote intention indicator, however, there is no significant long-run relationship with satisfaction with democracy and external political efficacy. This fits well with the argument that for the more complex forms of representation through policies, it may take a slightly longer time for citizens to fully adjust their political support. Interestingly, for the relationship between the traditional past vote indicator and satisfaction with democracy as well as political trust, the long-run multiplier is even slightly below the short-run relationship. A plausible explanation for this may be that the ‘home-team effect’ of having won the election (Holmberg, 1999), which is particularly relevant for the classic winner-loser distinction, is strongest at the onset and may wear off afterwards. Overall, hypothesis 2 is thus only partially supported by the data.

In a third step, I restrict the sample following the logic that if respondents have a consistent ideological position or party preference over time, then changes in representation by the government reflect only changes in the government composition and in the political position of

parties. For this reason, I repeat the initial fixed-effects models including only respondents with a) a consistent ideology and b) a consistent vote intention for the same party.¹² As can be seen in Figure A2 in the online appendix, the results are comparable with those of the full sample. All models remain significant at the 5%-level and in most models, the coefficients only vary marginally, sometimes increasing, sometimes decreasing slightly. This shows that the results are robust to potential concerns of endogeneity.

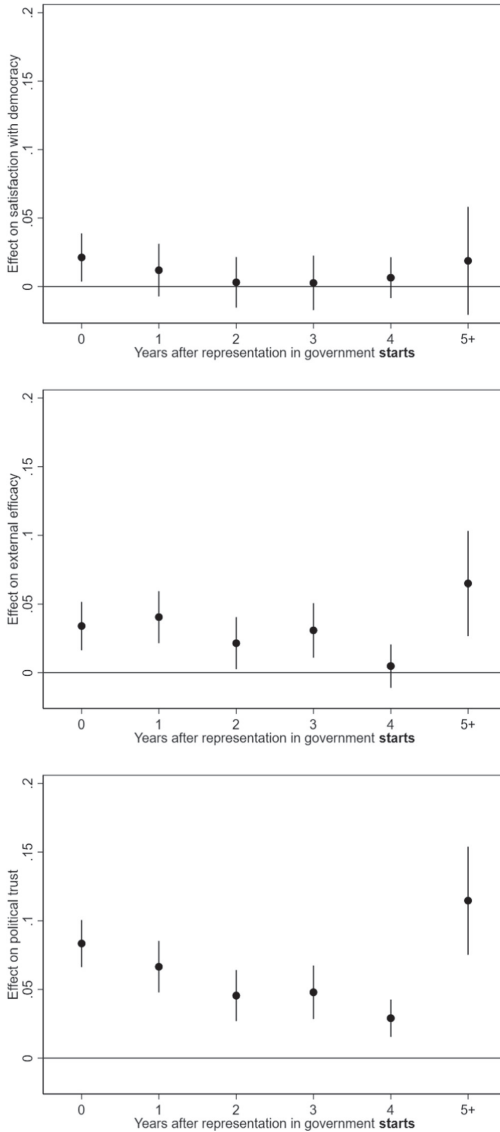
Going beyond, I distinguish between transitions into and out of being represented in government for those respondents with a consistent party preference. This allows modelling the dynamics of changes in the government and how such a representation (or the lack thereof) affects political support in different time periods after representation starts or ends. Figure 3 presents the results of such an analysis (the detailed models can be found in Table A9 in the online appendix). It displays the standardized regression coefficients of dummies for the years after a respondent's preferred party enters or leaves government in comparison to years in which respondents either were not or were represented in government by their preferred party. It has to be noted that the fourth year (and to some extent the second year as well) after representation starts or ends is estimated with greater uncertainty because there was a one-year gap in the panel survey in the Rutte II government and because the first two governments in the observation period only lasted three and two years respectively.

The results of this more causally rigorous analysis are generally consistent with the error correction models in that political support adjusts rapidly when representation in government changes. As in the previous models using the winner-loser distinction, the results are strongest for the more specific measure of political trust and weakest for the more diffuse measure of satisfaction with democracy. In the case of transitions into being represented, the results for satisfaction with democracy are significant only in the survey wave immediately after the transition and turn insignificant thereafter. In addition, the results allow for some further observations. First, with the exception of satisfaction with democracy, there seems to be no asymmetry between transitions into being represented and transitions out of being represented. Whether the preferred party of a respondent enters or leaves government has opposite effects on political support of similar magnitude. Second, the positive (negative) effect of (non-)representation seems to wane slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (out of) office, but becomes stronger again if (non-)representation continues for a longer period. The effect of representation may thus weaken when continued (non-)representation becomes uncertain towards the end of a legislative term and strengthen when (non-)representation persists.

Finally, for the five parties that were part of governing coalitions as well as the PVV, which supported the Rutte I government, I differentiate how political support for those who consistently intended to vote for them developed over time (see Figure A6 in the online appendix). Even though this further reduces the number of respondents per model, it is reassuring to observe that for political trust, the coefficient of representation in government is still significant for all parties. In addition, the detailed view on how political system support has developed over waves allows making two additional observations: First, looking at supporters of the PvdA and CU in the fourth Balkenende government as well as supporters of the CDA or the PVV in the first Rutte government, one can see that political system support already dropped substantially in the last year of the cabinet in which they were in government and not only in the first year in which they were no longer part of the government. This can be explained by difficulties in the government coalition or opinion polls leading respondents to anticipate that their preferred party may not be in government anymore following the election. Crucially, this observation raises concerns

¹²Of course, this leads to a substantial reduction of the sample: instead of a total of 13,384 respondents and 61,410 observations for which data is available, this reduces the sample to 1,450 respondents and 6,674 observations if restricted to those with a consistent ideology and 2,028 respondents and 11,992 observations if restricted to those with a consistent vote intention.

(a) Transition into being represented:



(b) Transition out of being represented:

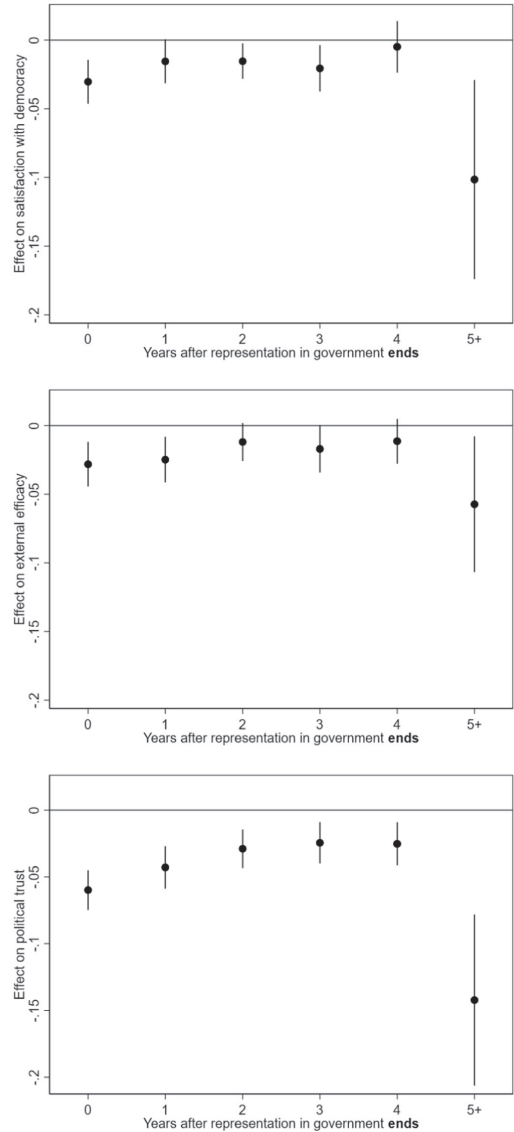


FIGURE 3 Marginal effect of transitioning into or out of being represented in government. *Note:* Displayed are standardized regression coefficients of dummies for a) the years after a respondent transitions into being represented in government and b) the years after a respondent transitions out of being represented in government, both with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. The reference categories are a) years in which respondents were not represented in government and b) years in which respondents were represented in government. All models only include respondents consistently intending to vote for the respective party.

about studies within the winners-losers-debate that use two-wave panels surveying respondents directly before and after an election (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Blais & Gélinau, 2007; Singh et al., 2012). If respondents anticipate their preferred party leaving government following the election and react accordingly by decreasing their political support already well before the election, such studies may substantially underestimate the true difference between election winners and losers. Second, looking at supporters of the VVD, one can observe

substantial differences in political system support between the different government coalitions. In particular, political system support was lower in the second Rutte government, where the VVD ruled together with the social-democratic PvdA, two parties with very different economic policy profiles. In contrast, political system support was higher in the third Rutte government coalition, which was closer to the ideal point of VVD supporters. This further highlights the limitations of only looking at formal representation in the government through a party one has voted for or supports. Instead, depending on the composition of the government coalition and its policy portfolio, representation can still vary substantially.

CONCLUSION

In this paper, I set out to examine the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system using panel data from the *Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences Panel* (LISS, CentERdata, 2021), a representative Dutch online panel survey that spans over several electoral cycles where different governments were in office. I employ several measures for the representation by the government that not only include the common distinction between election winners and losers, but also more precise measures such as how respondents view all parties in a government coalition and how ideologically close they are to the government in substantive terms. The results highlight that representation by the government is consistently positively related to political support across all indicators, the relationship is robust to potential concerns with endogeneity, unfolds rapidly after representation changes and becomes particularly substantial if (non-)representation persists for more than a legislative term.

Naturally, there are certain limitations to this study. First, the counter side to employing panel data is that only data for a single country, the Netherlands, is examined. This begs the question whether the results can be generalized to other countries. In this regard, the size of the relationship found may be on the lower end of the spectrum, as the Netherlands are a prototypical consensus democracy on the executive-parties dimension (Lijphart, 2012) and an established democracy, where previous research has found less pronounced winner-loser gaps (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Nadeau et al., 2021). Another reason why the relationship may be lower is that the Dutch governments vary more in their economic positions, but economic considerations tend to play less of a role for political support in established democracies (Daoust & Nadeau, 2021). As a result, the estimate can be considered as rather conservative. Simultaneously, my study highlights that a considerable relationship between representation by the government and political support can be found even in such a least-likely case. Second, as other studies before, I only look at satisfaction with democracy instead of diffuse support for the principles of democracy (Linde & Ekman, 2003). In order to assess whether differences between winners and losers of elections and those who are better and less well represented by the government are harmful to democracies or just a symptom of dissatisfied democrats (Norris, 1999), measures for the support for democratic principles would be preferable (Ariely & Davidov, 2011). Finally, while this study includes a variety of measures for representation by the government, the most precise measure – ideological distance to the government parties – compares expert positions with voter attitudes from different data measured on different scales, which may introduce measurement error. Besides, future studies should also assess the effect of policy congruence (Ferland, 2021), i.e., congruence with the policies the government adopts, over a longer time period.

Nevertheless, this study presents more nuanced evidence for the winners-losers gap. It argues, theoretically, that extant findings on elections winners and losers as well as the congruence between citizens and their government should be viewed under the broader context of how well citizens are individually represented by their government. Empirically, it presents robust evidence from panel data spanning over multiple electoral cycles with several governments in office that

various indicators of representation by the government are related to satisfaction with democracy, external efficacy and trust in political institutions. Judging from these indicators, it is not only important whether citizens' preferred party is in office, but also how satisfied with and close they are to the government coalition as a whole. Besides, detailed analyses reveal that anticipation effects exist: political support can already drop substantially in the last year of a cabinet as a result of citizens anticipating that a government may break down or not be re-elected following the election. This raises concerns about extant panel studies using comparisons between a short time period before and after elections (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012). Finally, this study fully exploits variation in the government composition over time to evaluate if there is any asymmetry in the relationship and how it develops over time. For satisfaction with democracy, there is indeed some asymmetry: only transitions out of being represented display a negative relationship, while there is no relationship for transitions into being represented by government. However, no such asymmetry can be found for the other two political support indicators. With regards to the dynamic over time, this study highlights that the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes instantaneously or in the subsequent time period after a change in representation by the government. Additionally, the relationship wanes slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (or out of) office, but becomes stronger again if (non-)representation continues for a longer period, which presents a more nuanced picture than previous analyses.

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OPEN RESEARCH BADGES



This article has earned an Open Data badge and Open Materials badge for making publicly available the digitally-shareable data necessary to reproduce the reported results. The data is available at <http://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/ZKT5F>.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the OSF data repository at <http://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/ZKT5F>.

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SUPPORTING INFORMATION

Additional supporting information can be found online in the Supporting Information section at the end of this article.

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