

Strong Partisans, Conditional Democrats? Partisanship and Reactions to Electoral Outcomes in Argentina

Comparative Political Studies
2025, Vol. 0(0) 1–36
© The Author(s) 2025



Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/00104140251400343

journals.sagepub.com/home/cps



Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos¹  and Carlos Meléndez² 

Abstract

Partisans who back self-interested illiberal measures jeopardize democracy. We explore important precursors of support for backsliding using survey and focus group data from severely polarized Argentina. First, we show that partisans construct regime stereotypes, depicting “friends” as democratic and “foes” as authoritarian. This offers fertile ground for justifying exclusionary policies. Second, through an experiment with post-election scenarios describing a party’s landslide victory we study whether partisan affect exacerbates emotional reactivity and/or shapes democratic values in the face of victory/defeat. All partisan groups are emotionally reactive, whereas democratic attitudes vary more among Kirchnerists/Peronists. This difference is due to the nature of their partisanship: unlike non-Peronists, Peronists/Kirchnerists profess a strong positive creed. Elections can therefore turn into moments of existential angst and loss becomes particularly intolerable. Overall, the results illuminate the emotional and attitudinal reactions that

¹Department of Politics and international Relations & Nuffield College, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

²Institute of Social Sciences, University of Lisbon, Portugal

Corresponding Author:

Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos, Department of Politics and international Relations & Nuffield College, University of Oxford, 1 New Road, Oxford OX1 1NF, UK.

Email: ezequiel.gonzalez@politics.ox.ac.uk

Data Availability Statement included at the end of the article

render partisan affect dangerous, allowing leaders to manipulate feeble democratic commitments in the event of defeat.

Keywords

political parties, Latin American politics, elections, public opinion, experimental research, political psychology

Introduction

According to [McCoy et al. \(2018\)](#), pp. 17–18), “polarized societies make democracy vulnerable,” especially when differences “become aligned within (normally two) camps with mutually exclusive interests and identities.” Under those conditions, partisans come to see the “other” as an existential threat and the possibility of defeat renders democracy intolerably costly ([Haggard & Kaufman, 2021](#)). [Schedler \(2023\)](#) calls this “enemyopia,” a process whereby partisans turn into democratic militants of sorts: they question opponents’ character ([Iyengar et al., 2012](#)), stop considering them legitimate democratic participants, and, *in extremis*, seek to restrict pluralism to ensure rivals never get to power or are unable to implement their plans if they do.

Are partisans unreliable democrats? Despite concerns about the impact of polarization, evidence from work that looks at support for anti-democratic measures is mixed. There are those who question the link with illiberalism. After manipulating levels of polarization in the USA, for instance, [Brookman et al. \(2021\)](#) fail to detect changes in attitudes. [Voelkel et al. \(2022\)](#)’s approach is different, but the implications of their findings are similar: depolarizing interventions do not reduce anti-democratic orientations. By contrast, multi-country experimental studies suggest “voters are reluctant to punish politicians for disregarding democratic principles when doing so requires abandoning one’s favored party” ([Svolik, 2019](#), p. 26; see also [Graham & Svolik, 2020](#)) and identify cohorts who favor assaults on checks and balances, especially staunch incumbent backers ([Albertus & Grossman, 2021](#); [Sasmaz et al., 2022](#); [Simonovits et al., 2022](#); [Gidron et al., 2023](#)). For some, support for institutional vandalism is underpinned by insincere democratic commitments ([Valentim, 2024](#)). Others contend that while citizens support democracy in the abstract, elections confront “voters with a choice between two valid but potentially conflicting concerns: principles and partisan interests” ([Svolik, 2019](#), p. 23). Elites are responsible for nurturing this disdain for accountability when they signal “displeasure with norms limiting [their] power” ([Kingzette et al., 2021](#), p. 664; [Gidengil et al., 2022](#)). Leaders who frame institutional constraints as threats to ingroup dominance polarize and thus erode voter tolerance for democratic checks ([Orhan, 2022](#)).

Our paper contributes to the debate in two ways that may help appraise these contradictory findings. First, it is possible that polarization only turbocharges democratic erosion when it is also responsible for triggering specific emotional and attitudinal reactions the moment votes are counted. Empirically, this means we ought to take a step back to examine the precursors of support for backsliding. Instead of looking at the determinants of agreement with illiberal measures, as others have done, we study whether partisan affect exacerbates emotional reactions and shapes trust in democratic institutions in the face of victory or defeat. Following [Rico et al. \(2017\)](#), who argue that emotions play a crucial role in shaping populist attitudes, we think emotional reactivity combined with attitudes towards electoral institutions likely condition citizens' propensity to re-evaluate their commitment to pluralism. For example, in contexts where vanquished partisans experience intense negative emotions, and at the same time cease to think elections are clean, it may be easier for them to rationalize support for illiberalism. This is especially key if, as [Svolik \(2019\)](#) notes, partisans adhere to democratic principles in the abstract. When the mood of partisans and their faith in institutions are conditional on victory, the door may open for leaders to manipulate feeble democratic commitments and galvanize support for backsliding in the event of defeat. Indeed, Trump or Bolsonaro agitate anger and spread falsehoods regarding supposed instances of fraud to prepare the ground for direct assaults on democracy.

Second, we study Argentina, a highly resilient democratic regime ([Mainwaring & Simison, 2022](#)). Comparatively speaking, voters are more supportive of democracy than in other Latin American countries and there is a strong losers' consent tradition. This means Argentina is a case where the likelihood of detecting fickle democratic commitments is lower. Some of the conditions for observing a strong activation of the mechanisms identified in the literature are possibly weaker than in contexts where backsliding is visibly on the agenda or where leaders behave more aggressively towards opponents and institutions. Finding that victory and defeat also shape partisans' regime attitudes under these conditions should lend greater support to those who warn about the perils of polarization than to those who dispute the connection. Furthermore, combined with our focus on the emotional and attitudinal precursors of support for illiberalism, the absence of backsliding allows us to draw lessons about the ways in which polarization can create fertile ground for illiberal attacks on democracy where these are yet to materialize. A final helpful characteristic of the case is that at the time of our study Argentina featured different types of partisan identities. It is therefore possible to better explore the conditions under which partisanship can be problematic for democracy. Specifically, we show that more robust identities display greater sensitivity to electoral outcomes, and that the extent of affective and ideological distance between groups in a partisan dyad also matters.

The paper reports the results of a survey fielded in May 2023, months prior to the most recent presidential election. According to the Edleman Trust Barometer (2023), Argentina is “severely polarized.” In fact, Argentines have come up with a word to describe the identitarian and societal schism that underpins their politics: “la grieta” – the faultline (Murillo & Oliveros 2024). This division recreates the Peronist/anti-Peronist feud, which has been the main organizing cleavage since the 1940s. The word “grieta” entered the vernacular in the early 2000s as a synonym of affective polarization. Since Nestor Kirchner’s victory in 2003, Kirchnerism has controlled the Peronist machine. It took some time for non-Peronists to present a unified front and become competitive. They eventually did so under the label Cambiemos (*Let’s Change*; later Juntos por el Cambio, JxC – *Together for Change*), thus institutionalizing anti-Kirchnerism and generating a stable bi-coalitional structure. With the meteoric rise to power of liberal/libertarian Javier Milei in 2023, however, the dynamics of polarization changed. By successfully cutting across the Peronist/anti-Peronist divide with a new establishment/anti-establishment strategy and far-right appeals, Milei tensed the political context further.

At the time of our survey, the slate of presidential candidates was still in flux and polls were beginning to signal uncertainty. First, we rely on descriptive statistics to map the contours of “enemypopia” (Schedler, 2023), showing that partisans of Kirchnerism, JxC and Liberalism stereotype rivals as threats to democracy. Second, we present the results of an experiment in which participants were randomly assigned to various post-election scenarios, each describing a different party’s decisive first-round victory. The vignettes were designed to represent either a serious threat or a source of extreme jubilation, depending on respondents’ political preferences. The analysis looks at the effect of our treatments on levels of anxiety, anger, fear, hope, and happiness, as well as on satisfaction with democracy, preference for democracy, and trust in elections. In addition to high degrees of emotional reactivity among partisans, we find that they are to some extent conditional democrats, with greater signs of this among Kirchnerists. In the conclusion we offer a possible explanation for the greater sensitivity of the Kirchnerist identity, drawing a distinction between the corrosive effects of negative and “closed” partisanship.

Focusing on Argentine partisans and their differential reactions to victory/defeat expands the geographical scope of our knowledge about polarization and its consequences. To anyone familiar with Latin America, the alleged link between polarization and democratic fragility is not at all surprising. In fact, even if Latin Americanists did not come up with the term “affective polarization,” they have been writing about its implications one way or another for a long time. What Latin Americanists haven’t done, by contrast, is add significantly to the scholarship on the social roots of partisan tribalism and

there is limited data on “affective polarization.”¹ We also do not know much about the impact of rivalries on how voters process the results of elections.²

Our study is informed by comprehensive survey and focus group data on polarization in Argentina. This data – most of which we don’t report here – tells us a great deal about how partisans in Argentina think about themselves and their rivals; their preferences for inter-group distancing; how they perceive political threats and deal with them via motivated reasoning; whether they engage in in/out-group stereotyping; and the content of their ideological commitments. Anchoring the analysis in this background information is key because we can say with confidence that those we code as “strong partisans,” that is, those who according to theory could be one of democracy’s weaker links, think like their counterparts in well-studied cases like the United States (Iyengar et al., 2012; Hetherington & Weiler, 2018; Mason, 2018a), Brazil (Nunes & Traumann, 2024; Samuels et al., 2024) or Spain (Torcal, 2023). The data we do report in the paper further supports that conclusion, showing the presence of two dangerous corollaries of polarization: emotional reactivity (Mackie et al., 2000; Torcal, 2023) and “enemyopia” (Schedler, 2023). Furthermore, the experiment indicates that these attitudes may also predispose strong partisans to endorse criticisms of electoral democracy and thus become “available” for backsliding shenanigans.

In what follows we draw connections between the literatures on polarization, emotions, and loser’s consent to discuss why polarization weakens partisans’ democratic values, making those commitments conditional on electoral outcomes. We then introduce the research design and discuss the results.

Polarization, Emotions, and Democracy

Polarization and Democracy in Latin America

Latin America’s 20th century story of flawed democracies and recurrent authoritarianism is rooted in acute societal fractures, ideological disagreements, and partisan enmities. Valenzuela’s (1978) masterful account of why the center failed to hold in Chile in the 1970s obviously comes to mind. So does O’Donnell’s (1973) iconic depiction of Argentine democracy as an “impossible game” in which open elections became intolerable for some and accelerated the descent into violence. In Peru, polarization between APRA and its detractors similarly led the latter to adopt anti-democratic tactics to prevent the former from taking office (Cotler, 1978). And in the 1980s, left/right rivalries catalyzed party system collapse, enabling democratic breakdown under Fujimori (Tanaka, 1998). Finally, in Colombia and Central America the armed left waged protracted civil wars against the state, resulting in diminished pluralism or military/oligarchic rule (Hartlyn, 1988; Schwartz,

2023; Wood, 2000). Put differently, polarization between Peronists and anti-Peronists, Apristas and Anti-Apristas, Communists and anti-Communists, and so on, made the region infertile ground for democracy.

Consistent with this narrative, the most persuasive studies of the causes of the third wave in Latin America highlight the importance of de-polarization (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2013). Democratic viability increased when actors became less radical in their visions for change. For many on the left, the bourgeois character of democracy was no longer a reason not to support elections as the chief conflict-resolution mechanism. The experience of repression under dictatorship cemented normative commitments to proceduralist conceptions of democracy (Ollier, 2009). More generally, the triumph of the market economy reduced the space for ideological disagreement and the costs of defeat. In fact, one often overlooked feature of the 1990s was an unprecedented degree of convergence, to the extent that even labor-based parties embraced the Washington Consensus (Levitsky, 2003).

This de-polarized moment did not last. In line with historical precedent, regional trends in regime trajectories underwent concomitant changes (Anria & Roberts, 2024). Starting with Hugo Chavez's rise to power, the menu of societal blueprints diversified once again. This exacerbated the intensity of conflict. In some places, the return of maximalism triggered democratic erosion, culminating in short-lived authoritarian spells or lasting regime change (Gamboa, 2022); in others, the republican quality of political life suffered a great deal, but democracy did not wither away (Mainwaring & Pérez-Liñán, 2023).

Transformations in the scope of disagreement are far from trivial (McCoy, 2024). Indeed, several decades after the fall of the Berlin Wall, the rising stars of the Latin American far right now accuse centrist rivals of being "communist" (Rovira et al., 2024). More worryingly, the meaning of democracy is as contested as it has ever been since the 1970s. Jacobson's (2024, 1) description of the thugs that stormed the Capitol in the final days of the Trump administration could be easily adapted to talk about Maduro's supporters in the wake of the 2024 election or Bolsonarista mobs in January 2022: "in their own minds, the participants were not attacking American democracy but rather defending it from the threat posed by a stolen election, an illegitimate president, and a corrupt federal government." Such distorted invocations of the popular will to denigrate democratic outcomes resonate strongly in many quarters. In fact, partisan groups across Latin America occasionally weaponize disagreements over the nature of contemporary political regimes – most notably Venezuela's – intoxicating everyday political discourse and weakening democratic norms (Przeworski, 2024).

As part of this trend, polarization is on the rise (Anria & Roberts, 2024; Castro-Cornejo, 2023; Nunes & Traumann, 2024; Sarsfield et al., 2024; Segovia, 2022; Semán 2023). The list of era-defining antinomies has grown

significantly. It now includes Uribismo and anti-Uribismo, Chavismo and anti-Chavismo, Kirchnerismo and anti-Kirchnerismo, Petismo and anti-Petismo, Obradorismo and anti-Obradorismo, among others (Meléndez, 2022). These enmities have consequences. To mention a few examples, Brazil's led to a January 6-type moment at the end of the Bolsonaro administration (Tanscheit & Barbosa, 2022); Colombia's almost torpedoed the peace accords in 2016 (Botero and Sanchez 2024); and in Chile, polarization turned a constitutional reform process into yet another impossible game (Luna, 2024).

Why Are These Rivalries Problematic for Democracy?

For some, at the root of the problem are not necessarily voter preferences or identities, but specific elite ideologies or constitutional projects, which are deemed incompatible with liberalism. For others the problem arises with the presence of leaders who rely on “system-delegitimizing rhetoric,” such as “Donald Trump’s dark inaugural speech blaming past administrations for the ‘American carnage’” (McCoy & Somer, 2019, p. 258). To be sure, the ideological message of certain leaders and the ways in which they frame problems matter a great deal. But underlying political loyalties and hatreds among citizens can trigger difficult dynamics and reactions (including to electoral outcomes), regardless of the type of leader or the programmatic orientation of a group. Partisan attachments – and their emotional and attitudinal corollaries – are therefore the focus of our analysis.

In rational choice explanations, when democracy is the only game in town elections become routine. The “Rawlsian” version sees uncertainty about how these contests will pan out as a veil of ignorance of sorts, which “can push people into power-sharing agreements and democratic constraints” (Şaşmaz et al., 2022, 1951). Elections settle conflict because losers do not lose hope in the possibility of winning. The cost of defeat is therefore manageable. In other versions, the mechanism is informational: elections are a show of strength that deters losers from rebelling (it’s too costly to challenge a bigger “army”) and winners from abusing power (poking a non-trivial minority can be problematic too; Przeworski, 2018, pp. 117–118). Contributions to the loser’s consent literature implicitly align with these stories. While various studies document a decline in satisfaction with democracy among defeated voters (Anderson et al., 2005; Blais & Gelineau, 2007) or among those who feel inadequately represented (Blais et al., 2017), this work stops short of assuming the burden of losing is heavy enough to also have implications for regime preferences.

When polarization is on the rise, however, partisans may not come to think of elections rationally as a routine affair. Instead, elections can become moments of irrational angst. When the veil is removed, that is, when the

distribution of preferences becomes known, entrenched democratic norms may suffer, especially among partisans. Reducing ignorance about who is likely to govern can turn partisans into sore losers, who not only feel less satisfied with how the system works but also begin to harbor doubts about the integrity of the electoral process and develop weaker preferences for democracy. It may also turn them into vicious winners who see an opportunity to affirm in-group dominance. Indeed, [Castro-Cornejo and Langston's \(2024\)](#) Mexican study shows that Lopez Obrador's voters became more satisfied with democracy following the 2018 victory, but also that they were now more likely to endorse illiberal measures (see also [Singer, 2018](#)). Similarly, [Cohen et al.'s \(2023, 262\)](#) paper on Bolsonaro's rise to power shows how "democracy's discontented" get attached to illiberal candidates and experience a boost in system support when they win, but one that "countenances institutional ruptures benefiting the leader."

While studies of the loser's consent tend to focus on the reactions of the average voter, we study partisans. We know relatively little about the specific reactions of partisans to electoral outcomes.³ As we argue below, strong partisanship aggravates consent problems by inducing "enemypopia" and higher levels of emotional reactivity. It may also condition faith in democratic institutions. Understanding these changes is important. For one thing is to see average citizens become less/more satisfied with democracy. Quite another is when those who principally fuel systemic rivalries exhibit extreme reactions. After all, partisans are more likely to succumb to an illiberal leader's call to arms and mobilize to that effect. Understanding how exactly they process elections, as opposed to just looking at the average voter as previous studies do, is therefore key because partisans are the main conveyor belts of backsliding. Without their active support, backsliding is usually a non-starter.

Affective Polarization and Democratic Commitments

According to social identity theory ([Tajfel, 1970](#); [Tajfel & Turner, 1979](#)), individuals instinctively develop psychological attachments to groups, even when ascription is arbitrary ([Billig & Tajfel, 1973](#)). Scholars use the term affective polarization to refer to feuds in which participants identify strongly with their partisan in-group and hold the out-group in contempt. Partisanship is therefore a form of prejudice ([Mason, 2018a](#)): it leads citizens to process information in ways that confirm existing beliefs and build physical and informational barriers between groups. In fact, a well-documented dimension of affective polarization is the reluctance of partisans to form close social ties with members of other parties. Voters distinguish between in/out-groups via stereotyping, associating positive traits with themselves and their friends, and negative ones with their foes, incentivizing partisans to stay among the "virtuous" and away from the "vicious." In the contemporary world, this

involves stereotyping rivals as imminent threats to democracy and illegitimate competitors (Schedler, 2023).

Such divisions result from “ideological disagreements and group-centric impulses” (Iyengar et al., 2012, p. 406). This understanding of affective polarization is helpful because it allows programmatic orientations to play a role in defining tribal politics. Following Mason (2018b, p. 867), we adopt a view of ideology that includes both an issue-based (Converse, 1964) and an identity-based dimension (Levitin and Miller, 1979) characterized by “a sense of connection to like-minded others (even when this is not true in terms of actual opinion).” Our work engages primarily with the latter, assuming that contemporary partisanship is affectively charged and sometimes organized around ideological camps, including ones with weakly structured or diffuse preferences on specific policy domains. In other words, we do not treat affective and ideological polarization as wholly distinct phenomena. Instead, we conceptualize affective polarization as encompassing ideological polarization—particularly when ideology is understood as identity-based.

In this view, polarization may capture not only affective reactions to partisan difference but also the ideological imaginaries, however detailed, that give meaning and salience to group boundaries.⁴ Voters’ attachments are emotionally charged precisely because they are anchored in perceived dangers to normative visions of society and social groups. As Mason (2018b, p. 871) argues, this identitarian aspect of ideology induces a type of inter-group differentiation that is more primal and “visceral.” Indeed, when partisanship is a function of clear distinctions between the moral and sociological types that constitute each group, and their respective interests and ambitions, the other presents both an identitarian and programmatic challenge. Perceived ideological threats (e.g., to welfare policy, employment stability, or institutional norms) reinforce affective divisions; affect is therefore deeply intertwined with expectations about policy outcomes and institutional trajectories. Focusing solely on ideological polarization as issue-based, by contrast, would risk neglecting the intensity and identity-driven nature of partisan conflict.

Identity-based attachments help explain partisans’ emotional and attitudinal responses to electoral outcomes. Once group boundaries are perceived as morally, sociologically, and/or ideologically meaningful, political competition can adopt zero-sum qualities. If the “other” is so different, and should be kept at arm’s length, the prospect of losing is intolerable (Laebens & Öztürk, 2021). If, additionally, the “other” represents an existential threat and is deemed authoritarian, status anxiety spikes even further. This is particularly true when support for a political party determines an individual’s self-worth and when moral and social visions are deemed irreconcilable. The temptation to not accept defeat, and attribute it to rival foul play, looms large. Conversely, winning reinforces satisfaction with the status quo (Segovia, 2023) and in-group favoritism (Andrews & Huang, 2024). It not only solidifies status

contentment by confirming the benefits of supporting one's side and showing that others do as well; it also reaffirms the appeal of a system that can deliver partisan aspirations.

Mackie et al. (2000, p. 603) summarize these dynamics as follows:

“events that harm or favor an in-group by definition harm or favor the self, and the self might thus experience affect and emotion on behalf of the in-group [...] Individual group members do feel happy or sad depending on the success or failure of a group with which they identify, even if they do not personally contribute to that outcome.”

For this reason, partisans exhibit higher degrees of emotional reactivity in the face of salient political developments than other groups of voters (Torcal, 2023). As Huddy et al. (2015, p. 4) put it, emotions “are often most intense among the strongest group identifiers, who feel angrier than weak identifiers in response to a collective threat.” Along these lines, they find that strong partisans mobilize to fend off attacks.

Extreme feelings of joy and hope when things go well (or anger and anxiety when things sour), as well as the behavioral correlates of these emotions, are also a function of cognitive biases induced by partisanship. According to Mackie et al. (2000), people tend to overestimate the size of their in-group. This is both a product of membership to media echo-chambers that distort perceptions, but also of the tendency to gravitate towards beliefs that enhance feelings of security, especially when an individual strongly prioritizes an identity. From a cognitive standpoint, holding beliefs that indicate the group's status is not secure, can be extremely discomfoting. Put differently, partisans cannot fathom the possibility that they are not in the majority because that would undermine their self-worth. Claims to the contrary are therefore emotionally unsettling and need to be explained away.

This has implications for the way in which partisans react to electoral outcomes. Since having strong ties to parties means they have a lot at stake, partisans likely experience more intense emotions than other citizens when results are announced, feeling happier or hopeful in victory and angrier or anxious and fearful in defeat. In addition, in the event of a win, a partisan reaffirms her loyalty to a democratic system that produces this source of jubilation and leads the in-group to power. Conversely, upon losing she may think: “Surely most people share my preferences; others must be able to see what I see in different parties. The result cannot be true. The count is not trustworthy, and democracy is a sham.” Because partisanship and polarization cause passions to run wild and the perceived cost of losing to shoot up, the rationalist cases for supporting democracy, namely that competition offers a chance of winning in the future and that elections reveal the futility of staging a mutiny against the majority (Przeworski, 2018), lose appeal.

Some may detect a tension between this line of partisan thinking and the feelings of “enemyopia” that tend to define contemporary partisanship (Schedler, 2023). After all, how can one stigmatize out-group members as authoritarian – and celebrate the in-group as fundamentally democratic – and simultaneously abandon democracy when things don’t work out? Interestingly, however, this person doesn’t have to stop calling herself a democrat to countenance such views. Both sets of beliefs are reconcilable. The power of “enemyopia” lies precisely in helping voters delegitimize and silence others in the name of democracy. Democratic skepticism and illiberal actions designed to safeguard the will of the people are warranted because “the other” cheats, is authoritarian, and a threat to the system.⁵

This argument yields three observable implications. If strong partisan attachments and polarization are indeed problematic for democracy, we should see the following:

- (1) *Enemyopia*: partisans think of themselves as democratic and of rival groups as threats to democracy.
- (2) *Emotional reactivity*: partisans experience comparatively more intense emotions in the face of victory and defeat. This is true for negative (e.g., anger, anxiety, fear) and positive (e.g., hope, enthusiasm) emotions.
- (3) *Conditional democratic commitments*: partisans are more likely to be conditional democrats, i.e. their (i) faith in electoral integrity, (ii) satisfaction with democracy, and (iii) preference for democratic institutions are likely to suffer comparatively more in the face of defeat and receive a boost in the face of victory.

What Can We Learn From A Study of Argentine Polarization?

In the aftermath of the 2001 economic crisis, Peronism became a dominant force in Argentina’s party system (Gervasoni, 2018). Presidents Nestor Kirchner (2003–2007) and Cristina Fernández (2007–2015) veered the party leftwards and secured control of its machine. The strength of the Kirchnerist incarnation of Peronism was partly a function of the collapse of the Unión Cívica Radical (UCR) and the balkanization of non-Peronists (Lupu, 2016). Some former Radicals formed new parties (e.g., Elisa Carrió’s Coalición Cívica – CC), as did outsiders like future president Mauricio Macri (*Propuesta Republicana – PRO*). The UCR’s gradual comeback (Maynard, 2021), coupled with the subnational electoral success of new parties, most notably PRO in the City of Buenos Aires (Vommaro, 2023), eventually incentivized non-Peronists to overcome divisions and form coalitions to challenge the Kirchners. One brought together the UCR, CC and PRO under the umbrella of *Cambiamos* (Let’s Change; later rebranded *Juntos x el Cambio*, JxC). In

2015 Cambiemos nominated Macri for the presidency, defeated Peronism, and rebalanced the system (Lupu, Oliveros and Schiumerini 2021).

Argentina seemed to have thus developed a consolidated bi-coalitional party system. Cristina Fernandez remained *primus inter pares* within Peronism, and the non-Peronist coalition underwent a process of institutionalization of sorts after having maintained unity both in government (2015–2019) and opposition (2019–2023). The system found in these two vehicles a stable way to express the country's longstanding Peronist/anti-Peronist cleavage, solidifying a programmatic and affective fault line at the elite and mass levels (Lupu et al., 2024; Oliveros & Vommaro, 2022).

Some observers indicate that the identitarian gap between the two camps crystallized in 2008 during a confrontation between the Kirchners and the farming sector over President Fernandez's decision to increase taxes (Fernandez Milmanda, 2024). The famous "grieta" forever widened after this episode despite a dismal economy under incumbents of both coalitions. On the one hand, Kirchnerism promoted a statist vision that emphasized the ethics of care via welfare and claimed to represent the poor as well as combat the perversions of business, media conglomerates, international finance, and the judiciary. Its rivals, by contrast, denounced the Kirchners' abuse of office for personal enrichment, the inflationary consequences of a bloated state, and the inefficient use of taxpayers' money.

Crucial to the identity formed by and around the non-Peronist coalition, was the emphasis on republican values and the defense of checks and balances. JxC elites deemed these to be under threat and cautioned against the Kirchners' intention to turn the country into another Venezuela. In making this argument, JxC pointed to close ties with socialist countries, as well as pieces of legislation introduced by Kirchnerism, especially judicial reform and media divestment bills (Gamboa et al., 2024). Furthermore, the proliferation of corruption scandals implicating the Kirchners boosted the centrality of ethical and institutionalist rhetoric in anti-Peronist discourse (Manzetti, 2014).

Regime concerns were also important in strengthening Kirchnerist affect. Via a tight alliance with human rights organizations, Kirchnerism championed a full-frontal repudiation of the 1976-1983 dictatorship and promoted trials against former officers and their civilian collaborators (Gonzalez-Ocantos, 2016). This allowed Kirchnerism to depict their contemporary rivals as tacit allies of bygone genocidal generals. For example, a common chant against Macri following his victory in 2015 was "Macri, basura, vos sos la dictadura!" ("Macri, piece of trash, you are the dictatorship!"). Accusations of "lawfare" and political revanchism when Cristina Fernandez began to parade through the courts charged with corruption (Smulovitz, 2022) also sought to highlight the authoritarian character of anti-Peronism.

Performance deficits, including world beating inflation rates and flatlined growth since 2011, all exacerbated by Covid-19, eventually caught up with

Argentine political elites. A country that had never seen the rise of an outsider since the return of democracy in 1983, not even during the depths of the 2001 debacle, elected an eccentric economist and television pundit to the presidency in 2023. Javier Milei rose to stardom surprisingly fast. Among other things, he led the charge against strict social distancing measures during the pandemic, characterizing them as an authoritarian affront to individual liberties. His ideas resonated strongly among young and male voters, promising to end inflation by dynamiting the central bank, slash wasteful public budgets with a chainsaw, and stop the privileges of a rent-seeking political class (Murillo & Oliveros, 2024; Seman 2023). In the process, he exploded the bi-coalitional system that had stabilized Argentine politics for about a decade, fatally dividing JxC and disorganizing Peronism.

These developments were not devoid of fears about the regime implications of a Milei presidency. These gained some salience as it became clear he had a real shot at the presidency. Milei's far-right positions on many issues; his selection of a vice-presidential candidate who made a career out of minimizing the crimes of the dictatorship; and his close affinity with the likes of Bolsonaro and Trump, all rang alarm-bells. So did his answer during an interview to a straightforward question about the desirability of democracy: "There are many things wrong with democracy...Have you heard about Arrow's impossibility theorem?"⁶

In May 2023, when we fielded our survey among 2525 respondents (Appendix A), Milei was beginning to rise in the polls.⁷ This meant that a contest initially deemed a shoo-in for JxC due to a deteriorating economy and tensions at the top of the Peronist coalition, was now much more open (Murillo & Oliveros, 2024). Partisan conflict, however, remained high. In fact, the survey suggests strong partisans constituted around 40% of the electorate. Respondents were coded as strong partisans if they scored 8 or higher in 1–10 our feeling thermometers ("Using a scale of 1–10 [...] How much do you like Kirchnerism/JxC/Liberalism?"). Based on this operationalization, partisans were distributed evenly across parties/coalitions – Kirchnerism: 11.76%; JxC: 16.44%; and Liberalism: 13.50%.

While the extent of polarization makes this a relevant context to study the impact of partisanship on democratic commitments, Argentina is different in important ways from cases that the literature looks at in depth (e.g., the USA, Turkey). Notably, Argentina is a resilient democracy that has not experienced backsliding, and there is a strong losers' consent tradition (Mainwaring & Simison, 2022). Peronists surrendered power three times since 1983 without attacking institutions. Macri did so too in 2019. To be sure, his non-Peronist predecessors either brought forward the inauguration of their Peronist successor (Alfonsín, 1989) or resigned (De La Rúa, 2001) but did so amidst social and economic unrest. Moreover, Argentines rank among the most pro-democracy publics in the region. Surveys also reveal a degree of cross-partisan repudiation of the last dictatorship not seen in other parts of the

region, and strong support for trials against military officers for the crimes they perpetrated.⁸ In sum, unlike in the USA, Brazil, Mexico or Turkey, neither have elites politicized electoral outcomes or successfully attacked liberal institutions, nor have discourses about the undesirability of existing democratic institutions or the superiority of autocratic ones become mainstream in civil society. For most citizens and politicians these views are unthinkable, or at least socially undesirable, and therefore not expressed openly.⁹

All of this means that Argentina is not a context where we would necessarily expect to see strong activation in surveys of the emotional and attitudinal mechanisms that we argue could connect partisanship and weak democratic commitments. Or indeed the open expression of illiberal preferences. In other words, it is a context that conspires against the effectiveness of our treatments. Least likely cases are useful because if the evidence aligns with the hypotheses, we are in a stronger position to positively update priors about their plausibility. In other words, the validity of the hypotheses is a priori “less obvious.” Furthermore, least likely cases help advance the claim that the empirical scope of a particular relationship is wider than perhaps previously thought, in this instance lending support to those who view in polarization a danger to democracy. Finally, because we study the emotional and attitudinal precursors of support for anti-democratic measures in a context without backsliding, we can draw lessons about whether polarization can prepare the ground for illiberal attacks where these are yet to materialize.

As we shall see, Argentina also offers useful variation in the types of partisanship that constitute the “grieta.” Insights derived from surveys and focus groups with strong partisans,¹⁰ show that out-group rejection plays a weaker role in anchoring Kirchnerist identity. More important is their strong positive identification with Peronism and Cristina Fernandez, coupled with a coherent set of progressive commitments. Support for JxC and Liberalism is certainly also a function of distinct ideological imaginaries, in these cases conservative and pro-market ones. Overall, however, these two partisan identities are mostly expressions of a residual category (anti-Kirchnerism) as opposed to a robust sense of in-group belonging. Additionally revealing of this contrast are the results of an adapted version of [Huddy et al.’s \(2015\)](#) social identity battery included in the survey, which quantifies the strength of attachment to parties/party families ([Appendix C](#)). Average attachment to Kirchnerism is stronger than average attachment to JxC or Liberalism. This variation in identitarian strength across partisan groups, coupled with the fact that two of the three identities (JxC and Liberalism) are closer to each other affectively and ideologically than they are to the third (Kirchnerism), allows us to probe whether identitarian robustness and distance shape the emotional/attitudinal sensitivity of partisans to electoral results. In line with the literature that warns

about the perils of polarization, we find that the more robust identity is more sensitive, and that inter-group distance matters too.

Do partisan rivalries harbor latent threats to Argentina's democratic integrity? Do different types of partisans and of dyadic relationships shape the connection? In what follows we rely on survey data to probe the complicated relationship between polarization and democratic norms.

Enemyopia Among Argentine Partisans

As we saw, Argentine elites often question their rivals' democratic credentials. We begin by investigating whether these discursive trends translate into "enemyopia" among voters (Hypothesis 1). Voters are affectively polarized when they strongly identify with their group, distinguishing between in/out-group via stereotyping. These stereotypes may carry normative or sociological connotations, associating positive traits with the in-group and negative ones with out-groups. More worrying, however, is when polarization leads partisans to think of the other as an enemy of the democratic system (Schedler, 2023). Rhetoric of this kind poisons political discourse and can be used to justify illiberal measures that exclude rivals. "Enemyopia" is thus a core attitudinal micro-foundation of backsliding.

In a series of focus groups organized in August 2022 with strong partisans, we detected signs of "enemyopia." For instance, JxC partisans contrasted their democratic worldview with what they saw as Kirchnerism's plan to emulate autocratic countries:

I'm sorry but I think there are two blueprints for this country. Kirchnerism's is Venezuela, and if they could take us there now, devouring the Supreme Court and doing whatever it takes, they would do it tomorrow. They don't because there is strength on the other side (FG1_JxC)

I have a teenage son. When his friends come home, I often hear they think I'm a fascist. I tell them that if they don't like it, they shouldn't come. Their families are very Kirchnerist and they love Cuba. You ask them what it is they like about it, and they tell you they like the culture, the political regime. One has to swallow a lot of saliva... (FG1_JxC)

Some JxC and Liberal partisans even characterized the 2019–2023 Peronist government as a dictatorship:

My best friend is super Kirchnerist and she talks a lot about democracy, about feminism. I'm in favor of feminism, but there is nothing more antidemocratic or antifeminist than this government! (FG2_JxC)

I would like to see if we can [...] change this dictatorship (FG5_Liberals)

Among Kirchnerists, “enemyopia” emerged when referring to the authoritarian roots of anti-Peronism and its hatred for governments that represent the poor:

I think the “grieta” always existed. Someone told me it started in hair salons, when domestic workers started to go to the same ones as their Recoleta bosses. Those ladies where like, ‘what are they doing here!’ Disdain for the poor has always existed. Hatred of Peronism has always existed, hence the division between “gorilas” and “descamisados.” (FG4_Kirchnerists)

The survey also reveals “enemyopia.” We presented respondents with pairs of traits and asked them to associate the typical supporter of each partisan group (Kirchnerism, JxC, and Liberalism) with one of the items in the pair. Respondents also had the option to not choose a trait, indicating the absence of stereotyping on that dimension. We included personality traits (hardworking/lazy, intelligent/ignorant, honest/dishonest, open minded/closed minded, generous/selfish), sociological traits (old/young, poor/rich), and a regime trait (democratic/authoritarian). To see if stereotyping extends to non-political or moral domains, we also asked whether respondents associated the typical member of each group with the largest football clubs – Boca and River. It is possible, for instance, that affiliation with a club has class connotations that respondents connect with the sociological traits of partisans.

Table 1 shows some of the results of the exercise; the full set is available in Appendix B. For reference, in addition to the “democratic/authoritarian” pair, we report figures for the “Boca/River,” “poor/rich,” and “open minded/closed minded” pairs. The table shows what each “typical voter” looks like according to the three groups of strong partisans. We also compare their views to those of the rest of the sample and the full sample. The numbers in the cells indicate the percentage choosing a trait within a particular pair to characterize a typical voter. When the sum of percentages is close to 100, this shows high levels of stereotyping on that dimension. For example, when it comes to football clubs, only 20.5% of Liberals associate the typical Kirchnerist voter with either Boca Jrs. (15.5%) or River Plate (5%), which means there isn’t a dominant stereotype. By contrast, 88.9% of Liberals categorize Kirchnerists as either open or closed-minded. This shows a high degree of stereotyping, with most Liberals (84.8%) thinking Kirchnerists are closed-minded.

When it comes to measuring partisan affect, we focus on the strength of attachment to the in-group. To do so, we created dummies for the three main political groups in which those scoring 8–10 in the relevant feeling thermometers are considered “strong partisans.” There are several reasons for this. First, while affective polarization is usually operationalized as the difference between in-group “love” and out-group “hate,” US-focused (Lee et al., 2022) and cross-national (Gidron et al., 2023, pp. 30–36) research shows that

Table 1. "Enemyopia" in Argentina.

Selected pairs of traits	Democratic	Authoritarian	Open minded	Closed minded	Poor	Rich	Boca	River
Typical Kirchnerist voter according to...								
Strong_Kirchnerist	78.8	3.0	72.7	2.7	27.3	2.7	9.1	7.4
Rest of the sample	16.1	42.1	10.8	66.1	56.3	6.3	13.2	4.8
Strong_JxC	4.8	67.2	3.4	85.1	59.3	7.5	18.8	4.6
Rest of the sample	27.2	31.7	21.0	53.5	51.7	5.6	11.5	5.2
Strong_Liberal	7.3	59.8	4.1	84.8	68.6	5.6	15.5	5.0
Rest of the sample	26.0	34.0	20.2	54.6	50.5	5.9	12.2	5.1
Full sample	23.5	37.5	18.1	58.7	52.9	5.9	12.7	5.1
Typical JxC voter according to...								
Strong_Kirchnerist	8.1	66.7	6.4	72.1	6.4	61.3	14.5	8.4
Rest of the sample	42.0	18.2	37.4	24.5	8.7	35.4	8.6	9.9
Strong_JxC	80.5	4.8	77.6	3.9	6.8	21.0	6.3	14.0
Rest of the sample	29.7	27.6	25.1	35.3	8.8	41.9	9.9	8.9
Strong_Liberal	54.8	17.0	47.2	24.3	8.8	36.7	11.1	11.4
Rest of the sample	35.4	25.0	31.6	31.0	8.4	38.7	9.0	9.5
Full sample	38.0	23.5	33.7	30.1	8.4	38.5	9.3	9.7
Typical liberal voter according to...								
Strong_Kirchnerist	4.0	66.3	7.7	62.6	13.1	30.0	5.7	7.1
Rest of the sample	26.9	27.2	36.8	24.6	11.1	21.0	4.6	6.0
Strong_JxC	36.9	29.6	46.0	21.0	10.4	24.1	2.9	8.4
Rest of the sample	21.7	32.2	30.9	30.6	11.6	21.7	5.1	5.6
Strong_Liberal	64.2	9.7	82.1	3.8	10.9	17.6	7.3	6.2
Rest of the sample	18.0	35.2	25.7	33.0	11.5	22.8	4.4	6.1
Full sample	24.2	31.8	33.4	29.0	11.4	22.1	4.8	6.1

“in-group” love is the primary driver of the phenomenon. In addition, psychologists argue that inter-group discrimination is fundamentally a function of positive identification with one’s own side (Andrews & Huang, 2024; Balliet et al., 2014). Second, in the presence of two main partisan groups, we could have relied on the standard measurement strategy, but things get messier in multiparty settings. While adaptations exist for these contexts (Wagner, 2021), they capture affective polarization at the individual level and do not allow us to classify respondents into specific affect groups. This is central for our purposes, especially when it comes to the experiment. Third, the data suggests positive affect correlates with negative affect for outgroups. Among Kirchnerist partisans, 88.89% strongly dislike JxC and 82.49% strongly dislike Liberalism, that is, they score 1–3 on those feeling thermometers. Similarly, Kirchnerism is severely disliked by 92.05% of JxC partisans and 93.26% of Liberals. The exception are feelings of dislike between JxC and Liberal supporters: only 27.71% of JxC partisans severely dislike Liberals, and 29.03% of Liberals severely dislike JxC.

In line with Hypothesis 1, the results reveal the presence of “enemyopia” among strong partisans of Kirchnerism, JxC and Liberalism. This mirrors elite depictions of rival politicians as serious threats to democracy, allies of past dictatorships, and so on. Interestingly, in every case stereotyping is more pervasive among partisans than in the full sample. Large percentages of strong Liberals and JxC supporters think the typical Kirchnerist voter is authoritarian (59.9% and 67.2%, respectively). Kirchnerists, by contrast, overwhelmingly think of themselves as democratic (78.6%). When it comes to the typical JxC voter, 66.7% of Kirchnerists and 54.8 % of Liberals describe it as authoritarian, whereas 80.5% of JxC strong partisans choose the democratic trait. Finally, strong Liberals see themselves in a positive light (64.2% democratic). Kirchnerists hold diametric views: 66.3% see Liberals as authoritarian. JxC supporters, by contrast, don’t have a clear view of their Liberal counterparts. This could be due to ideological proximity between JxC and Liberalism or the relative novelty of the brand, which makes it harder to establish what the typical supporter looks like.

Emotional and Attitudinal Reactions to Victory and Defeat: Experimental Design

In a highly polarized context where partisans tend to think of members of other groups as threats to democracy, how do voters react to the results of elections? To probe Hypotheses 2 and 3 we designed a scenario-based experiment (for a similar approach, see Simonovits et al., 2022). Participants were invited to situate themselves at 10:00 PM on October 22, the day of the first round of the 2023 presidential election. They were also told to imagine that all major television channels had already called the race. Those randomly selected into

the control group received no further information. Participants allocated to the three treatment arms of the experiment were additionally told that *either* Kirchnerism, JxC or Liberalism had been declared victorious with 41% of the vote, avoiding a run-off and securing high levels of congressional support. In other words, we invited respondents to entertain the idea of a categorical first-round victory by one of the three main parties or coalitions.¹¹ In all cases the text was accompanied by an image of politicians celebrating and the winning coalition's logo (Appendix A).

To operationalize the dependent variables, first we measured the intensity of respondents' emotional reactions to the news: "using a scale between 1 and 10, where 1 means 'a little' and 10 means 'a lot,' please indicate to what extent you would feel each of the following emotions upon learning the result of the election." The emotions included *anxiety, anger, fear, hope and happiness*. The order in which they were listed was fully randomized. Second, participants were asked questions designed to evaluate the strength of their democratic commitments. We asked about their level of *satisfaction with democracy* ("How satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Argentina?" – ranging from 1 = very dissatisfied to 5 = very satisfied); *trust in elections* ("How much do you agree with the with the following statement: 'In Argentina, the results of elections are always reliable' – ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree); and *preference for democracy* ("How much do you agree with the with the following statement: 'Democracy is preferable to any other form of government' – ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). While declining scores in all three attitudes should ring alarm bells, it is the latter two that present more serious problems. If faith in electoral integrity and preference for democracy change because of victory or defeat, loyalty to the system is likely opportunistic.

The design allows us to isolate the effects of victory and defeat on emotional and attitudinal responses. In an ideal world one would of course try to randomize both real electoral outcomes and partisan preferences, but doing so is impossible. Our treatments are a reasonable alternative. First, by comparing the reactions of partisans across control and treatment groups via interaction terms, we can study whether they process results differently than other voters, and whether trust in democratic processes is contingent on their party winning or losing. In this sense, one way to think of the comparison is as follows: one the one hand, a control group scenario in which respondents do not have results in mind when they make emotional and attitudinal judgements about elections and democracy, and on the other, a scenario in which they make those same judgements aware of an electoral result that may or may not align with their preferences.

Second, all scenarios involve real parties in a real election. This means they likely benefit from high levels of face validity. Crucially, because the election looked wide open at the time of the survey, the three scenarios were also

relatively credible.¹² This is what we found when we asked those assigned to the treatment arms to rate the plausibility of the scenarios. Very few deemed the scenarios “highly improbable” (Kirchnerist victory = 13.3%; JxC victory = 6.2%; Liberal victory = 11.7%). Further indication that the election was considered wide open at the time of the survey can be found in [Figure 1](#): between 32.1–43.3% of respondents deemed the scenarios “highly” or “somewhat” probable.¹³ Interestingly, the figure also shows that partisans assigned to the different treatment groups judged their own side’s victory as “somewhat probable” or “highly probable” more frequently than a scenario featuring a rival’s victory. This is fully in line with social identity theory, and underscores how voters’ expectations are often shaped by their political loyalties (despite general electoral uncertainty). Members tend to overestimate the size of their group to boost ontological security and minimize cognitive discomfort ([Mackie et al., 2000](#)). They also suffer from optimism bias or “desirability in foresight” ([Krizan & Windschitl, 2007](#); [Windschitl et al., 2010](#)). While in principle this could attenuate the impact of victory scenarios on the dependent variables among our theoretically relevant subgroups (priced in) and disproportionately inflate the impact of defeat scenarios (not priced in), it is not what we find. This is especially the case for emotional reactivity, which is high both for positive and negative emotions in the directions expected under each scenario.

Third, while the scenarios are relatable, they do not consist of vignettes that cue participants so strongly that it guarantees confirmatory results. In fact, our treatments are quite light. Consequently, the design could be seen as a “hard” test for the argument. After all, we asked participants to react to scenarios that had not yet materialized. Why would they become systematically overexcited or less democratic? Moreover, some of the outcome questions, especially those about satisfaction with and preference for democracy, are prone to social desirability bias as individuals can be pressured to “comply with social norms pertaining to core liberal democratic values” ([Valentim, 2024](#)). Any differences between partisans and non-partisans due to hypothetical victories/defeats are therefore likely conservative estimates.

Partisans Feel Electoral Outcomes More Intensely and Show Signs of Being Conditional Democrats

To probe Hypotheses 2 and 3, we ran separate models interacting treatment assignment and one of the three measures of strong partisanship (Kirchnerists, JxC and Liberals), thus exploring the differential impact of victory/defeat on emotions and democratic attitudes.¹⁴ [Figure 2](#) plots the marginal effects for the emotions models, and [Figure 3](#) does the same for democratic attitudes. In each case, we plot estimates for a specific partisan group and the rest of the sample (the reference category).

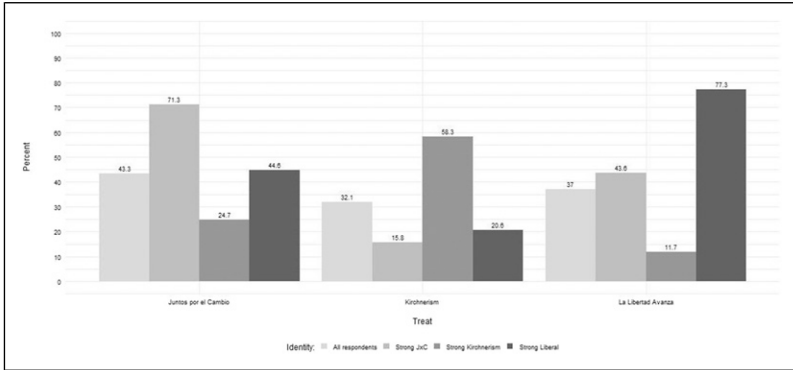


Figure 1. Plausibility of scenarios according to respondents - % choosing “somewhat/highly probable” by treatment arm and partisan subgroup.

In most cases, there is a statistically significant shift in partisans’ positive/negative emotions due to electoral outcomes. The results also suggest partisans tend to react more intensely than the reference category. In line with Mackie et al.’s (2000) theory of group emotions, this is because any good or harm done to their group impacts partisans’ sense of self. Whether the status of the group is threatened or boosted feels personal and consequential.

Strong Kirchnerists (triangles) react emotionally under all scenarios: defeat boosts negative emotions and dampens positive ones, and victory has the opposite effects. Interestingly, the strongest effects are the slumps in happiness and hope under defeat scenarios (panels B and C), and the weakest, the spike in happiness and hope under the victory scenario (panel A).

JxC partisans (circles), react to victory (panel B) with higher levels of positive emotions and lower levels of negative ones. Conversely, levels of happiness and hope are considerably dampened when Kirchnerists win (panel A). While JxC partisans also experience greater negative emotions in this scenario, the effects are weaker. They do not, however, seem particularly troubled by the prospect of a Liberal victory (panel C). This makes sense considering the proximity between JxC and Milei. Data from the same survey (not shown here), shows they have similar right-wing preferences regarding security, morality and economic policies. Members of both groups also tend to place themselves more to the right of the ideological spectrum, on average. They are therefore bound to derive some satisfaction from a Kirchnerist loss, regardless of who inflicts it. In fact, nearly all of those who voted for JxC in the first round of the 2023 presidential race went on to vote for Milei in the November 2023 run-off. Our results help us understand why: they were not emotionally troubled by the idea of a Milei presidency.

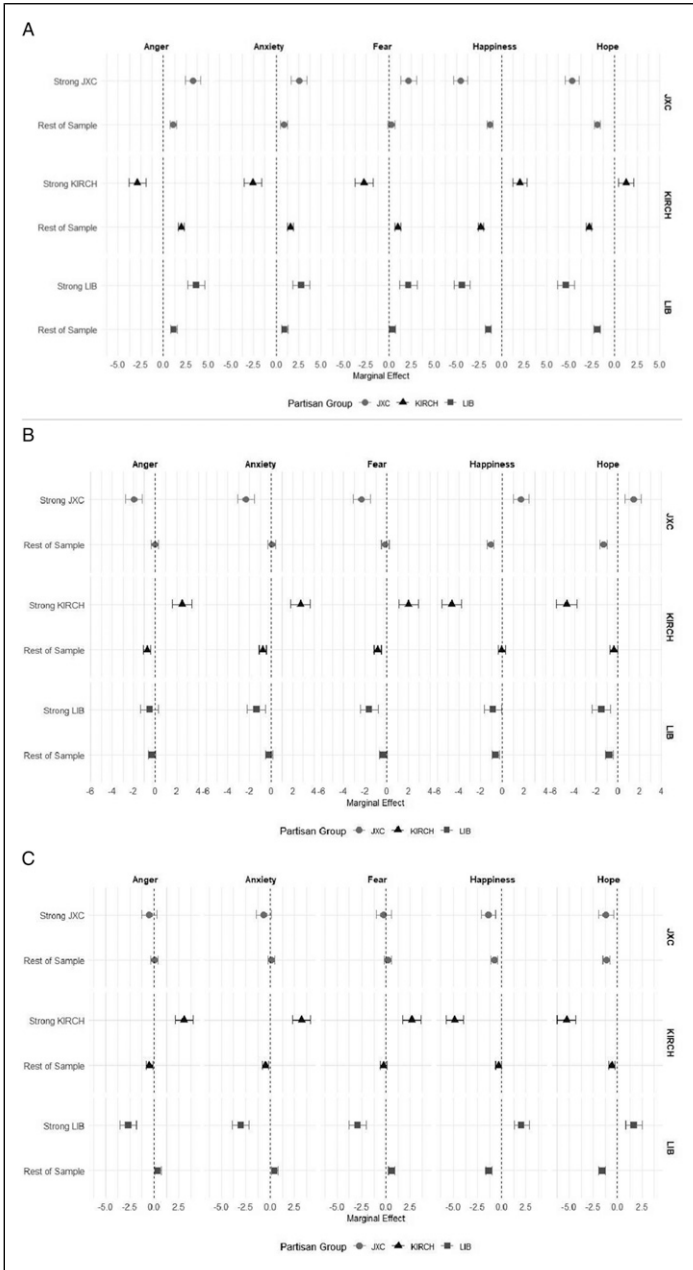


Figure 2. Marginal effects of the interaction terms on emotions. (a) Panel A: Kirchnerist victory; (b) Panel B: JxC victory; (c) Panel C: Liberal victory.

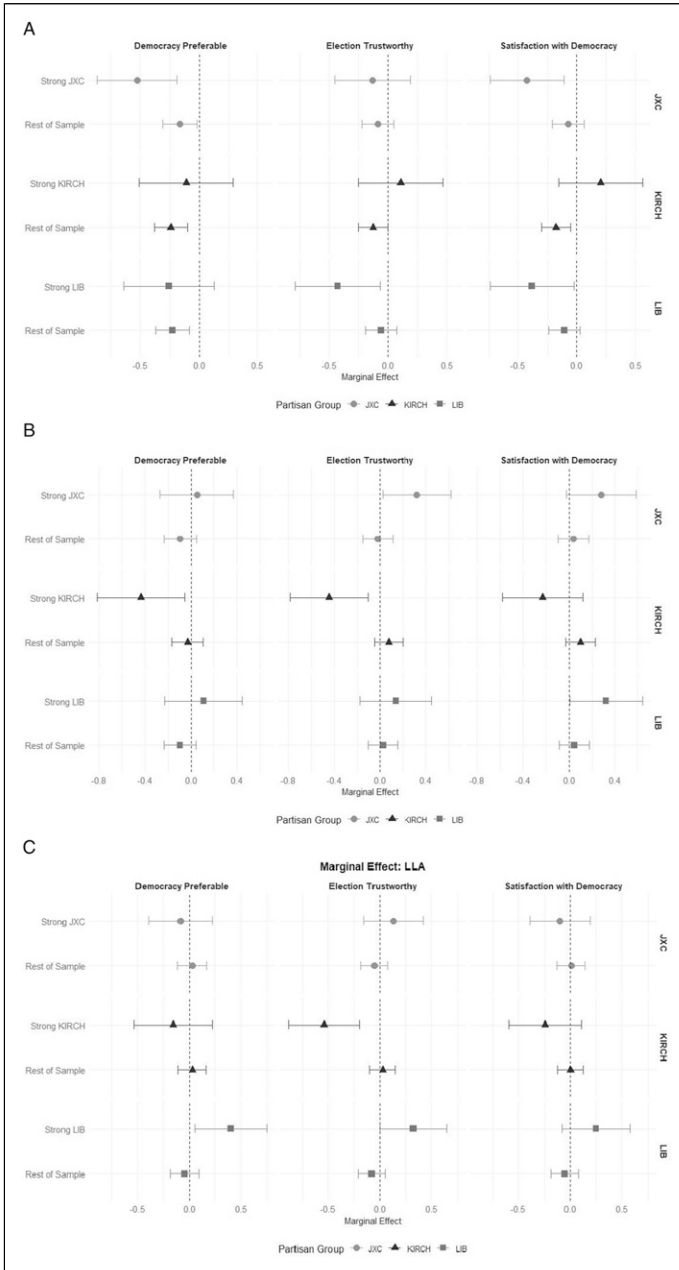


Figure 3. Marginal effects of the interaction terms on democratic attitudes. (a) Panel A: Kirchnerist victory; (b) Panel B: JxC victory; (c) Panel C: Liberal victory.

Finally, strong Liberals (squares) “feel” as expected in the face of victory (panel C). They are also emotionally reactive to the idea of a Kirchnerist win (panel A). As in previous cases, this is especially true for positive emotions, which suffer substantively. By contrast, reactions to a JxC victory (panel B) are more subdued, with the coefficient for anger, for instance, not reaching conventional levels of statistical significance. As with JxC supporters in the event of a Milei victory, this is likely due to ideological proximity. After all, many of Milei’s supporters in 2023 voted for JxC in 2015 and 2019.

Three patterns stand out. One is the sensitivity of positive emotions under defeat scenarios. It is not immediately obvious why, but a possibility is that rather than ringing alarm bells about the future, electoral losses principally depress partisans’ self-worth, damaging happiness and hope. The second pattern relates to comparable levels of emotional reactivity for both approach (anger) and retreat (fear, anxiety) negative emotions in defeat scenarios. This contrasts with an argument found in the literature, which suggests that whether approach and retreat emotions are the ones triggered in response to threats depends on individuals’ beliefs about group strength. Mackie et al. (2000, p. 603) write: “[w]hen the self is strong, or has resources, anger is more likely to be experienced, whereas when the self is relatively weak, anxiety or fear are the more likely emotional experience.” Mason (2018a, 83) adds: “A strong group is in a powerful position to react to a threat with anger and offense, while a weak group is not. A weak group is expected to react to the same threat with anxiety.” As reported in [Figure 1](#), partisans rate the plausibility of in-group victories quite highly, indicating high levels of self-esteem and strong beliefs in group strength. Yet, our results suggest differential expectations for approach and retreat emotions might be overly specific. A simpler distinction between positive and negative emotions perhaps makes more sense. Thirdly, while Argentine partisans are prone to positive emotional reactivity when they win, in the case of hypothetical losses they are mostly sensitive to the threat of ideologically and affectively distant groups. In fact, we only observe strong negative emotional reactions when the winner is diametric. Partisans seem to be able to cope with defeat just fine when the victorious candidate is not too distant from their preferred party. This seems important because it suggests that the type of tribalism we observe in the data is not devoid of programmatic content, and that some degree of platform convergence could make elections feel less of a life-or-death moment.

The results for democratic norms (satisfaction with democracy, trust in elections, and preference for democracy) are more mixed. They do indicate the presence of conditional democrats among partisans, but weaker and inconsistent effects suggest the link between emotions and regime attitudes is perhaps more tenuous than anticipated. It is also possible that socially desirability bias blocks more sincere expressions of democratic aversion ([Valentim, 2024](#)), especially in a context like Argentina.

Kirchnerists' democratic attitudes (triangles) are not affected by victory (panel A). By contrast, we detect attitudinal shifts in defeat scenarios (panels B and C). Specifically, they experience a declining preference for democracy when JxC wins and develop doubts about the integrity of the electoral process when both JxC and Liberals emerge victorious. These estimates, which are statistically different from those of the reference category, reflect strong disbelief in official results when their party does poorly. It is possible that the defeat scenarios described in the vignettes are so at odds with Kirchnerists' partisan priors that they need to explain them away by questioning the accuracy of the vote count. Given that a preference for democracy and trust in elections are arguably central attitudes when it comes to mobilizing the masses in favor of backsliding, the findings warrant the overall conclusion that Kirchnerists may well be conditional democrats.

In the case of JxC partisans (circles), a Kirchnerist victory leads to lower levels of preference for and satisfaction with democracy, but not necessarily more so than the among voters in rest of the sample (panel A). In contrast to Kirchnerists, they are not driven to question the integrity of the electoral process – although their faith in the vote count increases marginally when JxC wins (panel B). Furthermore, in line with the emotional reactivity models, this group of partisans is indifferent to a Liberal win on all attitudinal dimensions (panel C).

Finally, when their side is set to win, strong Liberals (squares) experience a boost in their preference for democracy and confidence in elections (but not more so than the rest of the sample); satisfaction with democracy levels, by contrast, remain statistically unchanged (panel C). In defeat, while they are indifferent to a JxC victory (or even satisfied with democracy; panel B), their democratic commitments creak when presented with the possibility of Kirchnerist success (panel A). Satisfaction with democracy and faith in elections seem compromised. It is worth noting, however, that the confidence intervals overlap with those around the estimated reaction of the comparison group.

Conclusion

Standard accounts of the functions of political parties, including influential theories of party system institutionalization (Mainwaring 2018), see parties as schools of democracy. Elites and voters who are invested in a party and its fortunes acquire a stake in the continuity of the electoral game and are keen to champion the sustainability of the regime. Moreover, to the extent that parties nurture robust feelings of belonging, they root themselves in society. Channels of representation thus become more stable, and the quality of democracy improves. Yet, what we and others find is that polarization complicates the picture. Partisan voters can be one of democracy's weaker links. Their strong

identification with a party means that elections are moments of existential angst, seen less as means to an end and more as a potential identitarian threat. If, as a result, democratic commitments become contingent on electoral outcomes, the likelihood of supporting or rationalizing anti-democratic measures increases. These attitudinal shifts provide fertile ground for politicians seeking to exploit partisan divisions to undermine accountability institutions. It follows that understanding how strong partisans think and feel is of utmost importance. When a vanquished leader's grievances find echo among their staunchest supporters, backsliding attempts stand a chance to amass the manpower needed to succeed. Decentering politics from individuals' sense of self-worth without fostering political cynicism or stifling civic virtue, is therefore a key challenge of our time.¹⁵

Building on the literatures on polarization and the loser's consent, we explored important precursors of bottom-up support for regime erosion: "enemyopia," emotional reactivity, and attitudes towards democratic institutions in the face of victory and defeat. Original data from Argentina, a severely polarized nation but one that is yet to experience backsliding, shows that partisans rely on regime stereotypes to characterize in and out-group voters. Fellow partisans are overwhelmingly depicted as democratic, and rivals are seen as authoritarian. Such views about who is a legitimate competitor and belongs in the political community, should ring alarm bells: they set the foundations for a kind of democratic militancy that may increase the odds of "constitutional hardball" (Tushnet, 2003) and reduce the possibility of practicing forbearance (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018).

The experimental results shed further light on the relationship between partisanship and democratic viability. The findings suggest that Argentine partisans exhibit significant emotional reactivity to electoral outcomes. When the in-group wins, hope and happiness intensify, and anger, anxiety and fear are in retreat. When the in-group loses, anger, anxiety and fear spike, whereas we observe a strong depressing effect on happiness and hope. For all three partisan groups, emotional reactivity is greater when the winner is affectively and ideologically distant. This points to the importance of aspiring to political systems that offer enough breadth so that voters feel properly represented, but that also protect consensus in core areas. This may avoid the danger of having disgruntled partisans who feel overly threatened in defeat. The experimental data further reveals that regime attitudes vary among partisans as a function of victory and defeat. Overall, such attitudes are not as sensitive as emotions. This reflects the degree to which partisan identities are intertwined with individual perceptions of regime legitimacy. The fact that large mood swings are not consistently accompanied by equally strong changes to democratic norms under highly realistic scenarios, may point to an intermediate position between those who affirm and those who question the link between polarization and regime erosion. But because Argentina is not a country where

illiberal backsliding discourses are mainstream, the fact that we do detect some democratic conditionality is a cause for concern. One could argue the effect is likely stronger in less resilient contexts, where such views occupy a more central place in public discourse.

Interestingly, Kirchnerists seem to be more emotionally reactive and “conditionally democratic” under more scenarios. What may account for this difference? In addition to facing multiple ideological and affective threats (for JxC and Liberals the main threat comes from Kirchnerism), a different possibility stems from the nature of Kirchnerist partisanship. As we argued, JxC and Liberalism are primarily negative forms of partisanship (Meléndez, 2022; Samuels & Zucco, 2018), that is, they are centrally defined by what the group is against rather than by what it is for. Kirchnerism, by contrast, resembles what Rose and Mishler (1998) call *closed* partisanship, an identity in which in-group favoritism and out-group rejection overlap, with the former serving as a stronger anchor. This makes sense. While JxC was a programmatically heterogeneous and relatively new coalition (formed in 2015) and Milei only emerged as nationally relevant politician in 2021, Kirchnerism is rooted in a longstanding political movement and has been around since 2003.

To be sure, some could argue that robust forms of partisanship like Kirchnerism lead to greater identitarian security in the event of defeat and therefore provide more certainty that the group is safe and capable of fighting back. This should, in turn, produce less visceral reactions to electoral outcomes. This view aligns well with rationalist understandings of the loser’s consent (Przeworski, 2018). Our findings, however, highlight an emotional layer that overrides the expectation of a “cooler” reaction. The distinction between types of partisanship is potentially crucial to understand why. When political attachments are primarily the product of negative affect, it is conceivable that voters may find alternative partisan avenues for expressing that type of affect and therefore be less troubled by some defeat scenarios – namely those in which their main rival loses to a party different from their own. We see this in the more subdued reactions observed when JxC and Liberal partisans are exposed to the possibility of an out-group defeating Kirchnerism. By contrast, for those with a stronger sense of in-group belonging and for whom partisanship is a more central aspect of their identity, there are no partisan half-way houses or functional equivalents. Only one electoral vehicle that can satisfactorily represent them: their own party. Elections therefore become more of a life-and-death matter. Kirchnerists’ closed partisanship thus exerts a more powerful conditioning effect on emotional reactions and trust in the reliability of the official count.

Variation in experimental results across groups therefore supports the view that partisan affect can be problematic for the robustness of democratic commitments. While all types of Argentine partisans display a degree of democratic opportunism, opportunism seems higher among

those who profess the most robust partisan creed in the system, i.e., Kirchnerism. This may sound counterintuitive. Since the return of democracy parties across the divide have refrained from openly mobilizing against electoral results or expressing preferences for non-democratic rule. For instance, Argentina has never seen anything like AMLO's protests in Mexico in 2006 and 2012 or Bolsonaro's shenanigans in 2021/22. If anything, the historical record prior to the 1983 transition points to greater conditionality in the non-Peronist camp. And post-1983, these voters have also been more active in questioning the transparency of elections with reference to clientelism (Oliveros, 2021) or denouncing illiberalism. Similarly, one might also intuitively associate partisans of radical right candidates such as Milei with democracy's most imminent danger, not progressive voters. While Kirchnerists' conditionality may be counterintuitive from these two perspectives, it is less so from the vantage point of social identity theory. What matters is not the ideological content of partisanship or historical precedents, but the type of affect structuring political identities, namely closed or negative affect. It goes without saying that the distinction between the effects of negative and closed partisanship we propose here requires further empirical investigation. For example, if Milei's presidency strengthens identitarian ties among Liberals, thus leading to less reliance on anti-Kirchnerism as the main binding agent, our conjecture would predict conditional democratic attitudes among these partisans too.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Jesus Guzman and Viviana Baraybar for superb research assistance. Luis Schiumerini, Natasha Wunsch, and three anonymous reviewers gave us excellent comments on earlier versions.

Declaration of Conflicting Interests

The authors declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The authors disclosed receipt of the following financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article: This research was supported by the Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia (FCT), under the project "*Populist appeals and negative partisanship. A cross-regional comparison between Latin America and Southern Europe*" (Grant reference: 2023.08788.CEE-CIND/CP2882/CT0006, DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54499/2023.08788.CEECIND/CP2882/CT0006>)

ORCID iDs

Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9617-478X>

Carlos Meléndez  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8394-7045>

Data Availability Statement

Meléndez and Gonzalez Ocantos (2025), “Replication Data for: Strong Partisans, Conditional Democrats? Partisanship and Reactions to Electoral Outcomes in Argentina”, <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/L4GZAE>, Harvard Dataverse, V1.

Supplemental Material

Supplemental material for this article is available online.

Notes

1. But see [Castro-Cornejo \(2023\)](#); [Lupu et al. \(2024\)](#); [Nunes and Traumann \(2024\)](#); [Sarsfield et al. \(2024\)](#); [Seman \(2023\)](#); [Samuels and Zucco \(2018\)](#); [Segovia \(2022\)](#).
2. Exceptions include [Castro-Cornejo \(2024\)](#), [Castro-Cornejo and Langston \(2024\)](#) and [Cohen et al. \(2023\)](#).
3. Exceptions include [Mason \(2018a\)](#) and [Segovia \(2023\)](#).
4. Affective polarization can exist independently of issue-based ideological polarization. In contexts where actual policy divergence between parties is modest or unstable, voters can still develop strong group attachments/hostility based on sociological, historical, or identitarian cues. Our framework therefore also applies to cases where affective polarization exists despite objective programmatic convergence.
5. This contrasts with the view that polarized voters have an interest in becoming more supportive of democracy upon losing because they have a stronger incentive to defend minority rights protections ([Segovia, 2023](#); [Simonovits et al., 2022](#)).
6. <https://jacobinlat.com/2023/11/arrow-y-milei/>.
7. Replication materials and code can be found at [Meléndez and Gonzalez Ocantos \(2025\)](#).
8. <https://www.pagina12.com.ar/diario/elpais/1-295597-2016-03-28.html>.
9. A less helpful way in which Argentina might be deemed different, is that polarization and frequent alternation since 2015 led to sharp policy oscillations. This may increase the stakes of elections compared to macro-economically stable countries. First, however, Argentina is not unique when it comes to sharp U-turns (e.g., Mexico under AMLO). Second, even if we consider it relatively unique in terms of policy shifts, Argentina is not unique in terms of elections representing moments of deep anxiety about what the future might bring. In contexts where incumbents do not introduce drastic changes, voters still harbor fears about the direction of policy under specific electoral scenarios. In fact, given the value placed on stability, anxiety may be even higher in these contexts. Examples

- include Peru prior to the election of Humala and Castillo; Brazil prior to the first election of Lula da Silva and later when Bolsonaro won the presidency; and Colombia in the wake of Petro's victory.
10. We organized 6 focus groups, two with strong partisans of each party/coalition. To be selected, participants had to score 8–10 in the thermometer measuring affect for a party and 1–2 in the thermometers measuring affect for the other two. See [Appendix F](#).
 11. According to the Argentine constitution, a candidate needs either 45% of the vote or 40% plus a 10% difference with the runner-up to avoid a run-off. Given candidate dispersion and uncertainty about the winner at the time, 41% is a more realistic figure than 45% or more, but it still conveys that the victory was categorical. It is of course possible that a narrow loss could be more heart-breaking, but our goal was to signal out-group threat or in-group dominance.
 12. In fact, only the Liberals had a clear candidate (Milei). In our May 2023 survey, 22.2% declared they would vote for him. Voting intention for the other two camps showed dispersion. Within JxC, Patricia Bullrich attracted 16% of the vote and Horacio Rodriguez-Larreta 6.9%. Among the various Kirchnerist/Peronist hopefuls mentioned at the time in the press, Wado de Pedro was the front-runner with 8.7%. 27.6% of the sample didn't declare a preference.
 13. Respondents attribute a lower plausibility to a Kirchnerist victory. This could cut both ways. On the one hand, because it is deemed less realistic, it could be a less effective treatment. On the other, precisely because it is deemed less realistic it could induce higher emotional reactivity due to a shock effect and modify attitudes towards democracy, especially among losers.
 14. Models reported below do not include controls. [Appendix D](#) reports full regression tables. In [Appendix E](#) we present marginal effects plots for models with controls. One set of models control for education (the only socio-demographic variable that appears unbalanced) and the other controls for income, education, age and gender. Results are substantively identical.
 15. Polarisation and partisanship are of course not the only drivers of weaker consent to electoral results among losers. Mexico, a case that according to the literature features a low level of polarization, is an example. We thank one of the reviewers for pointing this out.

References

- Albertus, M., & Grossman, G. (2021). The americas: When do voters support power grabs? *Journal of Democracy*, 32(2), 116–131. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2021.0023>
- Anderson, C. J., Blais, A., Bowler, S., Donovan, T., & Listhaug, O. (2005). *Losers' consent*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Andrews, J., & Huang, Y.-S. (2024). Winners, losers, and affective polarization. *Party Politics*. Online First.

- Anria, S., & Roberts, K. (2024). Latin America's new polarization: A multidimensional approach. *Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.*
- Balliet, D., Wu, J., & De Dreu, C. (2014). Ingroup favoritism in cooperation: A Meta-analysis. *Psychological Bulletin*, *140*(6), 1556–1581. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0037737>
- Billig, M., & Tajfel, H. (1973). Social categorization and similarity in intergroup behaviour. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *3*(1), 27–51. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ejsp.2420030103>
- Blais, A., & Gelineau, F. (2007). Winning, losing, and satisfaction with democracy. *Political Studies*, *55*(2), 425–441. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9248.2007.00659.x>
- Blais, A., Morin-Chassé, A., & Singh, S. (2017). Election outcomes, legislative representation, and satisfaction with democracy. *Party Politics*, *23*(2), 85–95. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068815583200>
- Botero, S., & Sanchez, M. (Eds.). (2024). *Paz y opinión pública en Colombia*. Bogota: Universidad El Rosario/Ediciones Uniandes.
- Brookman, D., Kalla, J., & Westwood, S. (2021) Does affective polarization undermine democratic norms or accountability? Maybe not. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Castro-Cornejo, R. (2023). The AMLO voter: Affective polarization and the rise of the left in Mexico. *Journal of Politics in Latin America*, *15*(1), 96–112. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1866802x221147067>
- Castro-Cornejo, R. (2024). Who believes in fraud in the 2006 Mexican presidential election? Election denialism, partisan bias and affective polarization. *Latin American Research Review*, *59*(3), 588–609. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lar.2024.11>
- Castro-Cornejo, R., & Langston, J. (2024). Anti-democratic attitudes, the winner-loser gap, and the rise of the left in Mexico. *Revista Latinoamericana de Opinión Pública*, *12*(2), 179–202. <https://doi.org/10.14201/rlop.31414>
- Cohen, M., Smith, A. E., Moseley, M. W., & Layton, M. L. (2023). Winners' consent? Citizen commitment to democracy when illiberal candidates win elections. *American Journal of Political Science*, *67*(2), 261–276. <https://doi.org/10.1111/ajps.12690>
- Converse, P. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. *Critical Review*, *18*(1–3), 1–74.
- Cotler, J. (1978). A structural-historical approach to the breakdown of democratic institutions: Peru. In J. Linz & A. Stepan (Eds.), *The breakdown of democratic regimes*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Fernandez Milmanda, B. (2024). *Agrarian elites and democracy in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gamboa, L. (2022). *Resisting backsliding*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gamboa, L., García-Holgado, B., & Gonzalez-Ocantos, E. (2024). Courts against backsliding: Lessons from Latin America. *Law & Policy*, *46*(4), 358–379.

- Gervasoni, C. (2018). Argentina's declining party system: Fragmentation, denationalization, factionalization, personalization, and increasing fluidity. In S. Mainwaring (Ed.), *Party systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, decay, and collapse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Gidengil, E., Stolle, D., & Bergeron-Boutin, O. (2022). The partisan nature of support for democratic backsliding: A comparative perspective. *European Journal of Political Research*, 61(4), 901–929. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12502>
- Gidron, N., Margalit, Y., Sheffer, L., & Yakir, I. (2023). Who supports democratic backsliding? Evidence from Israel. Unpublished Manuscript.
- Gonzalez-Ocantos, E. (2016). *Shifting legal visions: Judicial change and human rights trials in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Graham, M., & Svobik, M. (2020). Democracy in America? Partisanship, polarization and the robustness of support for democracy in the United States. *American Political Science Review*, 114(2), 392–409. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055420000052>
- Haggard, S., & Kaufman, R. (2021). *Backsliding: Democratic regress in the contemporary world*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hartlyn, J. (1988). *The politics of coalition rule in Colombia*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Hetherington, M., & Weiler, J. (2018). *Prius or pickup? How the answers to four simple questions explain America's great divide*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt.
- Huddy, L., Mason, L., & Aarøe, L. (2015). Expressive partisanship: Campaign involvement, political emotion and partisan identity. *American Political Science Review*, 109(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0003055414000604>
- Iyengar, S., Sood, G., & Lelkes, Y. (2012). Affect, not ideology: A social identity perspective on polarization. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 76(3), 405–431. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfs038>
- Jacobson, G. (2024). *The dimensions and implications of the public's reactions to the January 6, 2021, invasion of the US capitol*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Kingszette, J., Druckman, J. N., Klar, S., Krupnikov, Y., Levendusky, M., & Ryan, J. B. (2021). How affective polarization undermines support for democratic norms. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 85(2), 663–677.
- Krizan, Z., & Windschitl, P. (2007). The influence of outcome desirability on optimism. *Psychological Bulletin*, 133(1), 95–121. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-2909.133.1.95>
- Laebens, M., & Öztürk, A. (2021). Partisanship and autocratization: Polarization, power asymmetry and partisan social identities in Turkey. *Comparative Political Studies*, 54(2), 245–279.
- Lee, A.H.-Y., Lelkes, Y., Hawkins, C. B., & Theodoridis, A. G. (2022). Negative partisanship is not more prevalent than positive partisanship. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 6(7), 951–963. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01348-0>

- Levitin, T., & Miller, W. (1979). Ideological interpretations of presidential elections. *American Political Science Review*, 73(3), 751–771.
- Levitsky, S. (2003). *Transforming labor-based parties in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Levitsky, S., & Ziblatt, D. (2018). *How Democracies Die*. Crown.
- Luna, J. P. (2024). Disjointed polarization in Chile's enduring crisis of representation. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 66(2), 72–101. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.19>
- Lupu, N. (2016). *Party brands in crisis: Partisanship, brand dilution, and the breakdown of political parties in Latin America*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lupu, N., Oliveros, V., & Schiumerini, L. (Eds.), (2021). *Campaigns and voters in developing democracies: Argentina in comparative perspective*. Michigan University Press.
- Lupu, N., Oliveros, V., & Schiumerini, L. (2024). Social identity or policy preferences? Affective polarization in Argentina. Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Political Science Association.
- Mackie, D., Devos, T., & Smith, E. (2000). Intergroup emotions: Explaining offensive action tendencies in an intergroup context. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 79(4), 602–616. <https://doi.org/10.1037//0022-3514.79.4.602>
- Mainwaring, S. (Ed.). (2018). *Party systems in Latin America: Institutionalization, decay, and collapse*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2013). *Democracies and dictatorships in Latin America*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Mainwaring, S., & Pérez-Liñán, A. (2023). Why Latin America's democracies are stuck? *Journal of Democracy*, 34(1), 156–170. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2023.0010>
- Mainwaring, S., & Simison, E. (2022). Economic crises, military rebellions, and democratic survival: Argentina, 1983-2021. In S. Mainwaring & T. Maoud (Eds.), *Democracy in hard places*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Manzetti, L. (2014). Accountability and corruption in Argentina during the kirchners' era. *Latin American Research Review*, 49(2), 173–195. <https://doi.org/10.1353/lar.2014.0030>
- Mason, L. (2018a). *Uncivil agreement: How politics became our identity*. University of Chicago Press.
- Mason, L. (2018b). Ideologues without issues: The polarizing consequences of ideological identities. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 82(S1), 866–887. <https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfy005>
- Maynard, S. (2021). *Political party survival after collapse: The Argentine radical party in comparative perspective*. Doctoral Dissertation. University of Oxford.
- McCoy, J. (2024). Latin America's polarization in comparative perspective. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 66(2), 161–178. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.17>

- McCoy, J., Rahman, T., & Somer, M. (2018). Polarization and the global crisis of democracy: Common patterns, dynamics, and pernicious consequences for democratic polities. *American Behavioral Scientist*, 62(1), 17–18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764218759576>
- McCoy, J., & Somer, M. (2019). Toward a theory of pernicious polarization and how it harms democracies: Comparative evidence and possible remedies. *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 681(1), 234–271. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716218818782>
- Meléndez, C. (2022). *The post-partisans*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Meléndez, C., & Gonzalez Ocantos, E. (2025). Replication data for: Strong partisans, conditional Democrats? Partisanship and reactions to electoral outcomes in Argentina. Harvard Dataverse, V1. <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/L4GZAE>
- Murillo, M. V., & Oliveros, V. (2024). Argentina 2023: La irrupción de Javier Milei en la Política Argentina. *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 44(2), 162–185.
- Nunes, F., & Traumann, T. (2024). *Biogradia do abismo: Como a polarização divide famílias, desafia empresas e compromete o futuro do Brasil*. Harper Collins.
- O'Donnell's. (1973). *Modernization and bureaucratic-authoritarianism*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Oliveros, V. (2021). Perceptions of ballot integrity and clientelism. In N. Lupu, V. Oliveros, & L. Schiumerini (Eds.), *Campaigns and voters in developing democracies: Argentina in comparative perspective*: Michigan University Press.
- Oliveros, V., & Vommaro, G. (2022). Argentina 2021: elecciones en contexto de crisis. *Revista de Ciencia Política*, 42(2), 153–173.
- Ollier, M. M. (2009). *De la revolución a la democracia*. Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI.
- Orhan, Y. E. (2022). The relationship between affective polarization and democratic backsliding: Comparative evidence. *Democratization*, 29(4), 714–735. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2021.2008912>
- Przeworski, A. (2018). *Why bother with elections?* Cambridge: Polity.
- Przeworski, A. (2024). Who decides what is democratic? *Journal of Democracy*, 35(3), 5–16. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2024.a930423>
- Rico, G., Guinjoan, M., & Anduiza, E. (2017). The emotional underpinnings of populism: How anger and fear affect populist attitudes. *Swiss Political Science Review*, 23(4), 444–461. <https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12261>
- Rose, R., & Mishler, W. (1988). Negative and positive party identification in Post-communist countries. *Electoral Studies*, 17(2), 217–234. [https://doi.org/10.1016/s0261-3794\(98\)00016-x](https://doi.org/10.1016/s0261-3794(98)00016-x)
- Rovira, C., Espinoza, G., Meléndez, C., & Zanotti, T. T. Y L. (2024). *Apoyo y Rechazo a la Ultraderecha. Un estudio comparado sobre Argentina, Brasil y Chile*. Friedrich Ebert Stiftung.
- Samuels, D., Mello, F., & Zucco, C. (2024). Partisan stereotyping and polarization in Brazil. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 66(2), 47–71. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2023.38>

- Samuels, D., & Zucco, C. (2018). *Partisans, Anti-Partisans, and Non-Partisans: Voting behavior in Brazil*. Cambridge University Press.
- Sarsfield, R., Moncagatta, P., & Roberts, K. (2024). Introduction: The new polarization in Latin America. *Latin American Politics and Society*, 66(2), 1–23. <https://doi.org/10.1017/lap.2024.15>
- Şaşmaz, A., Yagci, A., & Ziblatt, D. (2022). How voters respond to presidential assaults on checks and balances: Evidence from a survey experiment in Turkey. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(11), 1947–1980. <https://doi.org/10.1177/00104140211066216>
- Şaşmaz, A., Yagci, A., & Ziblatt, D. (2022). How voters respond to presidential assaults on checks and balances: evidence from a survey experiment in Turkey. *Comparative Political Studies*, 55(11), 1947–1980.
- Schedler, A. (2023). Rethinking political polarization. *Political Science Quarterly*, 138(3), 335–359. <https://doi.org/10.1093/psquar/qqad038>
- Schwartz, R. (2023). *Undermining the state from within*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Segovia, C. (2022). Affective polarization in low-partisanship societies: The case of Chile 1990–2021. *Frontiers in Political Science*, 4, 928586. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2022.928586>
- Segovia, C. (2023). Affective polarization, support for democracy, and the mediating role of the winner-loser status. *Estudios Internacionales*, 205, 45–64.
- Seman, P. (Ed.). (2023). *Esta entre nosotros: ¿De dónde sale y hasta dónde puede llegar la extrema que no vimos venir?* Buenos Aires: Siglo XXI Editores.
- Simonovits, G., McCoy, J., & Littvay, L. (2022). Democratic hypocrisy and Out-group threat: Explaining citizen support for democratic erosion. *The Journal of Politics*, 84(3), 1806–1811. <https://doi.org/10.1086/719009>
- Singer, M. (2018). Delegating away democracy: How good representation and policy success can undermine democratic legitimacy. *Comparative Political Studies*, 51(13), 1754–1788. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414018784054>
- Smulovitz, C. (2022). Del ‘descubrimiento de la ley’ al ‘lawfare,’ o cómo las uvas se volieron amargas. *Revista SAAP*, 16(2), 231–259.
- Svolik, M. (2019). Polarization versus democracy. *Journal of Democracy*, 30(3), 20–32. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jod.2019.0039>
- Tajfel, H. (1970). Experiments in intergroup discrimination. *Scientific American*, 223(5), 96–102. <https://doi.org/10.1038/scientificamerican1170-96>
- Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. (1979). An integrative theory of intergroup conflict. In W. G. Austin & S. W. Monterey (Eds.), *The social psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 33–47). Brooks/Cole.
- Tanaka, M. (1998). *Los espejismos de la democracia*. IEP.
- Tanscheit, T., & Barbosa, P. (2022). Una batalla de dos presidentes: Lula vs. Bolsonaro en las elecciones brasileñas de 2022. *Revista Chilena de Ciencia Política*, 43(2), 167–191.

- Torcal, M. (2023). *De votantes a hooligans: La polarización política en España*. Catarata.
- Tushnet, M. (2003). Constitutional hardball. *The John Marshall Law Review*, 37(2), 523–554.
- Valentim, V. (2024). Norms of democracy, staged democracies, and supply of exclusionary ideology. *Comparative Political Studies*. Online First.
- Valenzuela, A. (1978). *The breakdown of democratic regimes, Chile*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Voelkel, J., Chu, J., Stagnaro, M. N., Mernyk, J. S., Redekopp, C., Pink, S. L., Druckman, J. N., Rand, D. G., & Willer, R. (2022). Interventions reducing affective polarization do not necessarily improve anti-democratic attitudes. *Nature Human Behaviour*, 7(1), 55–64. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41562-022-01466-9>
- Vommaro, G. (2023). *Conservatives against the tide: The rise of the Argentine PRO in comparative perspective*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Wagner, M. (2021). Affective polarization in multiparty systems. *Electoral Studies*, 69, 102199.
- Windschitl, Smith, A. R., Rose, J. P., & Krizan, Z. (2010). The desirability bias in predictions: Going optimistic without leaving realism. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 111(1), 33–47. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.08.003>
- Wood, E. (2000). *Forging democracy from below*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Author Biographies

Ezequiel Gonzalez-Ocantos is Professor of Comparative and Judicial Politics in the Department of Politics and International Relations at the University of Oxford, and Professorial Fellow of Nuffield College. His most recent book is *Prosecutors, Voters, and the Criminalisation of Corruption in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press).

Carlos Melendez is a researcher at the Institute of Social Sciences at the University of Lisbon. His most recent book is *The Post-Partisans: Anti-Partisans, Anti-Establishment Identifiers, and Apartsans in Latin America* (Cambridge University Press).