

The Association Between Satisfaction with the Democratic Process and Political Ideology



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Introduction

- The American people's trust in the US governmental system has been steadily declining since its initial drop in the 1960s (Intawan & Nicholson, 2018).
- By 2020, the rage of this steady decline has shown a sharp increase; with the people's trust in the federal government declining at a rate of approximately 29% (Suhay, et. al., 2022).
- Among the many reasons behind declining trust in government, the most common is an individual's perception of the government as unable or unwilling to protect their interests; which is a common perception when one's party of choice is not in political power (Suhay, et. al., 2022).
- Given increased political visibility of both the far-right and the left, the modern decline in trust in the governmental system is accompanied by an increase in ideological polarization at both the individual and structural level (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017).
- Said ideological polarization has led to stark differences in policy preferences between Democratic and Republican voters, as well as stronger animosity and distrust between members of opposing political parties (Webster & Abramowitz, 2017).

Methods

Sample

- 8,280 individuals were drawn from the 2020 American National Election Study
- ANES is representative of a random sampling of 231 million non-institutional U.S. citizens aged 18 or older living in the 50 US states or D.C.

Measures

- Party identification was measured with the question "Does R (respondent) think of Self as Democrat, Republican, or Independent?" Possible responses ranged from 1 (Democrat), 2 (Republican), 3 (Independent) to 5 (Other Party). A variable reflecting the greater category of "Independent" (i.e., those who identify independently from the two-party system) was created by collapsing response 3 (Independent) and 5 (Other Party).
- Political Ideology was measured on a Liberal to Conservative Self-placement Scale. Possible Responses ranged from 1 (Extremely Liberal) to 7 (Extremely Conservative). A variable reflecting the greater category of "Liberal" was created by collapsing responses 1 (Extremely Liberal), 2 (Liberal), and 3 (Slightly Liberal). Likewise, the variable "Conservative" was created by collapsing responses 5 (Slightly conservative), 6 (Conservative) and 7 (Extremely conservative).
- Satisfaction with the Democratic Process was measured with the question "Satisfaction with Democratic Process." Possible responses ranged from 1 (Very Satisfied) to 5 (Not at all Satisfied).

Research Questions

- Is there an association between an individual's satisfaction with the democratic process and their party identification (Democrat, Republican, or Independent)?
- Does the relationship between these two variables differ when controlling for political ideology (Liberal, Conservative or Moderate)?

Results

Univariate

- Among respondents, 34.84% identified as Democrats, 34% as Independent, and 31.16% as Republican
- A majority of respondents (53.32%) are "Fairly Satisfied" with the Democratic Process
- 7.12% of respondents are "Not At All Satisfied" with the Democratic Process

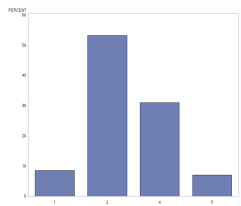


Figure 1. Percent Distribution of Mean Responses to "Satisfaction with the Democratic Process"

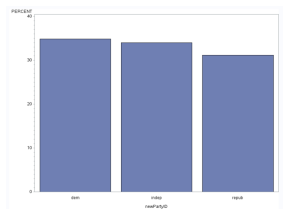


Figure 2. Percent Distribution of Respondents based on Party Identification

Multivariate

- Liberals** are significantly less satisfied with the democratic process than other political ideology groups regardless of party identification ($p < .0001$).
- Democrats are more satisfied with the democratic process than Republican and Independents across political ideologies but not to a significant degree ($p = 0.11$)
- Political Ideology does *not* significantly **confound** the relationship between Party Identification and Satisfaction with the Democratic Process, except in the case of **Liberals**.

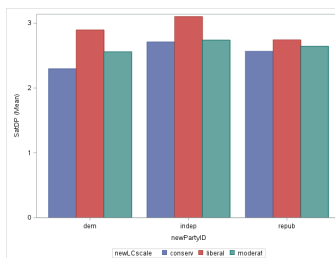


Figure 4. Satisfaction with the Democratic Process by Political Ideology

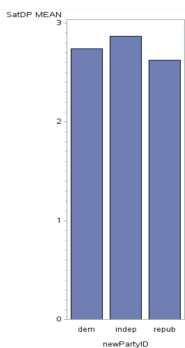


Figure 3. Satisfaction with the Democratic Process by Party Identification

Bivariate

- ANOVA analysis showed that **Liberal Independents are the least satisfied with the Democratic Process** (mean response= 3.1) compared to all other political ideology groups ($p < 0.001$, R-Square=0.21, Coefficient Variable=41.46).
- Among **Republicans** of varying political ideologies (Liberal, Moderate, Conservative), **there is no significant difference** in levels of Satisfaction with the Democratic Process ($p > .28$, R-Squared=.0001, Coefficient Variable=44.19).
- Comparatively, among **Democrats** of varying political ideologies, **there is with a significant difference** in levels of Satisfaction with the Democratic Process ($p < .0001$, R-Square=.02, Coefficient Variable=41.58). **With Liberal Democrats** being the least satisfied (mean response= 2.9).

Discussion

- In the case of **Liberals**, although political polarization across party lines plays a prominent role in modern political discussion, political ideology (Liberal, Conservative or Moderate) is also significantly associated with levels of satisfaction with the democratic process.
- Considering that **Liberals** across political parties, notably that of Democrat and Independent, are the least satisfied with the democratic process suggests a sense of Liberal misrepresentation within the greater Democratic Party.
- Furthermore, the statistically significant difference among satisfaction levels across political ideology reflects the broad-based political nature of the greater Democratic Party.
- Comparatively, the lack of significant difference across these same levels amongst Republicans implies a more cohesive perspective on the democratic process within the greater Republican Party.

References

- Intawan, C., & Nicholson, S. P. (2018). My Trust in Government Is Implicit: Automatic Trust in Government and System Support. *The Journal of Politics*, 80(2), 601-614. <https://www.journals.uchicago.edu/doi/pdfplus/10.1086/726694785>
- Webster, S. W., & Abramowitz, A. I. (2017). The Ideological Foundations of Affective Polarization in the U.S. Electorate. *American Politics Research*, 45(4), 621-647. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1532673X17703132>
- Suhay, E., Soni, A., Persico, C., & Marcotte, D. E. (2022). Americans' Trust in Government and Health Behaviors During the COVID-19 Pandemic. *RSF: Russell Sage Foundation Journal of the Social Sciences*, 8(8), 221-244. <https://doi.org/10.7758/RSF2022.8.8.10>