

Loser's Consent and the Partisan Press:  
The Effect of Political Parallelism on the Political Legitimacy Gap

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## **Abstract**

Recent work has explored how individual and institutional factors affect the gap in perceptions of political legitimacy between electoral winners and electoral losers. Research, heretofore, has ignored the role the political information environment plays in exacerbating or diminishing these attitudes. This study combined individual-level public opinion data in 24 countries, an expert survey on media, and a variety of country-level indicators to test whether the prevalence of partisan media in a country is associated with a larger gap in institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy between winners and losers. When the media in a country advocates for or is linked to a particular political view, the legitimacy gap tends to be higher. Furthermore, the relationship between partisan media and the legitimacy gap is slightly larger among people that pay more attention to the media than among less attentive people. If the media around the world become more fragmented vis-a-vis political viewpoints, as has been the case in the United States, this research indicates that the increasing availability of partisan news is a cause for concern.

Positive attitudes towards the political system are one indicator of a healthy democracy. Trust in political institutions and processes, in particular, bolsters a government's ability to implement policies and as well as the willingness of citizens to comply with those policies (e.g., Hetherington 2005). Past research has demonstrated that trust in government is strongly related to the result of the last election. Those that voted for the winner consistently perceive institutions as more legitimate and trustworthy than do those that voted for the loser. The present research investigates how one aspect of the political information environment—partisan media—mitigates or exacerbates these differences.

A hallmark of the modern political information environment—at least in the United States—has been the proliferation of partisan news on cable television and on the Internet. Such slanted or biased media is routinely criticized for exacerbating polarization among the electorate (for a review, see Prior 2012) . While certainly important, extreme attitudes towards policies and parties are only one set of attitudes among citizens that are related to the health of democracy. Another equally important set of attitudes relates to a government's perceived legitimacy and the belief that the government can be trusted to do what is right most of the time among the citizenry.

Partisan media, I will argue, widens the so-called legitimacy gap, wherein electoral losers lose faith in political institutions and processes while electoral winners turn a blind eye to misdeeds. While partisan media is believed to be related to a number of attitudes towards the policies and the political opposition, and political attitudes and out-party animosity are thought to be related to the legitimacy gap, no research, to date has linked these two phenomenon. A few studies have looked at differences in perceptions of trust in the opposition (e.g., Levendusky 2013a; Mutz and Reeves 2005). However, trust in the opposition is not as fundamental to democratic stability as trust in the system. The current research then expands on past work, and using a variety of cross-national data, tests whether partisan media widens the legitimacy gap between electoral winners and the electoral losers.

After discussing the legitimacy gap and its theoretical relationship to partisan media, I

present the empirical evidence. I combine several datasets to examine perceptions of legitimacy between winners and losers in European countries that vary to the degree to which partisan media is present. I find the gap in institutional trust as well as satisfaction with democracy is larger when partisan media is more ubiquitous in a country. Furthermore, the relationship between political parallelism and perceived legitimacy is contingent on individuals' political attentiveness. Finally, I test whether one variable that is also affected by political parallelism—political extremity—meets the minimal criteria necessary to serve as a mediator.

In total, this research highlights a third variable that impacts the legitimacy gap, which is measured neither at the individual-level or the traditionally-defined institutional-level, the two focuses of legitimacy gap research. More importantly, it demonstrates the importance of the political information environment, which filters how individuals respond to government, and the degree of legitimacy they confer upon it.

## **The Legitimacy Gap**

Across the electorate as a whole, elections increase trust in institutions and democratic processes (e.g., Banducci and Karp 2003; Price and Romantan 2008). Yet we know that losers are not as happy with democracy and its institutions after an election as are the winners (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson et al. 2007; Keele 2008). In the extreme case, losers pick up arms and civil war erupts, but in the more ordinary case, bitter losers may refuse to play the game and drop out of the electorate, turn to unconventional forms of political behavior, or be unwilling to compromise with the winners when necessary (Anderson et al. 2007). Some grumbling, especially aimed at the other party, is expected after an election. However, at the end of the day, all citizens must view the electoral winners as the legitimate government. As “the viability of electoral democracy depends on its ability to secure the support of a substantial proportion of individuals who are displeased with the outcome of an election” (Nadeau and Blais 1993).

While low levels of perceived legitimacy among electoral losers is problematic, so are overly positive levels among electoral winners. Governments should not be given carte blanche, even among electoral winners, as “a certain amount of rational distrust is necessary for political accountability in a participatory democracy” (Barber 1983, ,p. 166). Thus, what is of most interest is not necessarily the absolute levels of perceived legitimacy among losers, but the legitimacy gap between winners and losers (Moehler 2009).

Hence, a number of scholars have looked at factors that diminish or exacerbate the legitimacy gap. These factors are either measured at the individual-level—such as strength of party attachment or ideology (Anderson et al. 2007)—or, more frequently, at the institution-level, which “determine who becomes a loser—that is, the process by which winners and losers are created—and how losers experience the exercise of power by a government they did not help elect—that is, the outcomes of government action citizens observe” (Anderson et al. 2007, p. 9, see also Moehler and Lindberg 2009). I propose a third variable that is neither individual nor institutional which affects the legitimacy gap: Partisan Media.

## **Engines of Polarization**

Partisan media are much maligned among political communication researchers.<sup>1</sup> The reemergence of overtly partisan news in the United States in the 1990s inspired a host of studies investigating the deleterious effects of these so-called echo chambers (Sunstein 2009). Except in countries where the government censors critical information, today’s media environment facilitates a person’s ability to avoid media that conflicts with their political identity or attitudes. Past research indicates that this type of selectivity is indeed the case among the politically interested (e.g., Prior 2007, see Goldman and Mutz 2011 for a non-U.S. case), although many people just tune out of news altogether (Arceneaux and Johnson 2013; Prior 2007). Among those that do pay attention to partisan news, it serves, potentially, as

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<sup>1</sup>Although Dilliplane (2011) finds that exposure to partisan media increases political participation, which is, on its face, a benefit of partisan media

an “engine of polarization” (Mutz 2006), and a more polarized citizen is more likely to trust government when his or her party wins, and distrust government when the party loses.

On the ideological front, partisan media is believed to move media consumers to hold extreme attitudes (e.g., Levendusky 2013b; Stroud 2010; Sunstein 2009).<sup>2</sup> As voters are expected to be more satisfied with the output of government the closer their own ideal points are to the ruling cabinets (Curini et al. 2011; Huber and Powell 2011), more polarized voters are expected to be less satisfied with government when in the opposition than more moderate voters. This effect may be exacerbated by false polarization—the skewed perception among the polarized that the opposition is itself extreme (Levendusky and Malhotra 2013). If partisan media polarizes citizens, then those that pay attention to such media are more likely to believe that the ideal points of the ruling cabinet is far from their own (if they are electoral losers) or closer than reality (if they are electoral winners).

Additionally, partisan media has an affective influence on citizens that might impact the legitimacy gap. At its most extreme, partisan media is marked by “efforts to provoke visceral responses (e.g., anger, righteousness, fear, moral indignation) from the audience through the use of overgeneralizations, sensationalism, misleading or partially inaccurate information, ad hominem attacks, and partial truths about opponents” (Sobieraj and Berry 2011). In turn, experimental (Levendusky 2013b) and observational studies (Lelkes et al. 2013b) show that those that are exposed to hostile media are more affectively polarized. Additionally, and particularly relevant to the current study, partisan media has been shown to affect trust in partisan leaders and parties and preferences for bipartisanship (Levendusky 2013b).<sup>3</sup>

As opposed to the ideologically polarized citizen, the affectively polarized citizen may be judging the legitimacy of the government based on a purely emotional basis. Those who hate one party or another may distrust any and everything associated with that party. Conversely, those that feel overly warm to one party may see anything related to its government through

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<sup>2</sup>Although Levendusky (2013b) finds that it moves only those with extreme attitudes even further

<sup>3</sup>While Levendusky does find a relationship between partisan media and trust in particular leaders and parties in the United States, he does not explore the its relationship to institutional trust.

rose-coloured glasses. This would be in line with motivated reasoning research that shows that citizens ignore or discount negative performance information about parties or politicians they like and positive information about parties or politicians they do not like (Lebo and Cassino 2007). As government performance is believed to affect legitimacy (Gilley 2006), by impacting affective polarization and triggering motivated reason, partisan media alters the way citizens judge the ingredients of legitimacy (Mutz and Reeves 2005).

Finally, partisan media may affect the legitimacy gap as loser's may not perceive those in power as the rightful winners. Partisan media often highlights the idea that the opposition is running unfair ads or cheating in other ways (Mutz 2006). As Mutz puts it,

If one believes the other side won by running deceitful ads then it is easy to villainize the opposition and thus create more extreme perceptions of the consequences of one political choice over another. At this point, it is no longer about differing political philosophies, it is about right versus wrong, trust versus deceit good versus evil.

### **Political Parallelism**

With few exceptions, recent investigations of the effect of partisan media on political attitudes and behaviors have focused on the United States. The American political information environment has dramatically changed over the past two decades, from a generally objective, mainstream press to a more fragmented system that caters to various particular group. As such, the American political information environment is fairly unique, and the generalizability of these findings outside the American context is unclear.

The notion of an objective journalist did not take hold in many non-liberal countries, and newspapers and journalists with explicit partisan leanings still exist in much of the world. In Europe, newspapers and journalists in the Ukraine, Italy, Greece, Russia, and Portugal, for example, tend to be at least somewhat partisan (Wyka 2008). Almost all political newspapers in Greece are affiliated with one party or another, for instance. Newspapers

and journalists in many other European countries tend not be connected to any partisan but rather towards one ideological direction or another (Veltmer 2000). In Germany, for instance, the Frankfurter Allgemeine represents tends to lean to the right, while Süddeutsche Zeitung tends to lean left (Hallin and Mancini 2004). Political journalists in these countries are similar to the partisan journalist of 19th century America, who

was a publicist who saw it as his or her role to influence public opinion in the name of a political faction or cause, and in many cases newspapers were established on the initiative of political parties or other political actors, or supported by them.

The degree to which newspapers mirror the partisan or ideological bent of the country is commonly referred to as political parallelism (Hallin and Mancini 2004; Seymour-Üre 1974).<sup>4</sup> Although the concept of press-party parallelism first appeared in the 1970s, little research has explored the effects that this country-level feature may have on individual level behavior. One avenue that has been looked at is political participation (Baek 2009; van Kempen 2007), wherein party parallelism is associated with participation. Additionally, party parallelism is associated with exposure to cross-cutting information (Goldman and Mutz 2011).

Since encountering partisan media is more likely in countries with higher level of political parallelism, I hypothesize that that the gap between winners' and losers' institutional trust would be greater in countries with relatively higher levels of political parallelism (*Hypothesis 1*). However, even within these countries the probability that a person runs into partisan media is contingent on how much news they watch. That is to say, political parallelism should have a much larger effect on people that pay attention to the media, and therefore, the effect of political parallelism is contingent on individual-level exposure (*Hypothesis 2*).

In sum, past research indicates that partisan media should increase institutional trust and the perceived legitimacy of government among electoral winners and weaken it among electoral losers. The study described below tests whether this is indeed the case by comparing

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<sup>4</sup>Following Hallin and Mancini, I use the term political parallelism and not press-party parallelism, as the former represents the broader connection between ideology and newspapers



the legitimacy gap between winners and losers in 24 countries that vary in their degree of political parallelism.

## Data and Measures

To test these hypotheses I utilize multiple sets of data. The individual-level data comes from 4th round of the European Social Survey, which was fielded in 28 countries 2008-2010. As the dependent variable, I use the measure of institutional trust adopted by Anderson and Singer (2008), Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012), and Klingemann (1998). Namely I take the mean response to questions about R's trust in various national institutions: parliament, the legal system, the police, politicians, and political parties ( $\alpha=.91$ ). Klingemann (1999) argues that this is a measure of trust in the political regime (rather than the specific authority in power), and fits closely with Easton's (1965) notion that legitimacy is grounded in citizen's trust in government to do what is right.

This, and all other measures in the analysis, were recoded to lie between 0 and 1, with 1 indicating the highest possible level of political trust across regimes, and 0 the lowest possible level of trust. As a second measure of political legitimacy, I use a question that asks respondents, "And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?"

At the individual-level, respondents were also sorted into members of the ruling coalition or as members of the opposition. I follow Anderson et al. (2007) and Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012) and, utilizing past vote choice, grouped respondents into those that voted for a party that was in the ruling coalition and those that voted for a party that was not.<sup>5</sup> I did not include non-voters in the analysis, as they cannot be easily grouped into either ruling or opposition category.

Media exposure was measured via a question which asked respondents "How interested

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<sup>5</sup>Another possible approach is going not by vote choice but by which party the respondent feels closest too (Moehler and Lindberg 2009). However, this question was not asked in several countries in the ESS

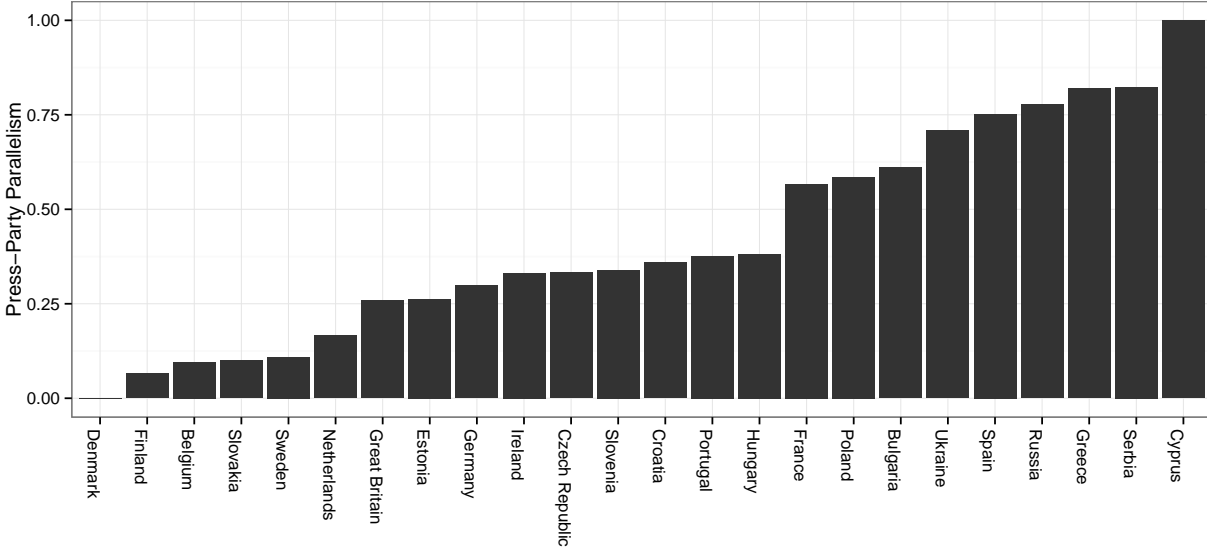
would you say you are in politics?” Those that said “Very interested” and “Quite interested” were combined into the ‘High Interest’ category, while those that said “Hardly interested” and “Not at all interested” were combined into a second category. Self-reported political interest is, admittedly, not a very good indicator of media exposure, but it is the only option, given the lack of viable alternatives in the dataset.

The country-level indicators of political parallelism comes from the 2010 European Media Systems Survey (EMSS), which asked academic experts in 24 of the 28 European countries in the ESS to evaluate individual television and newspaper outlets on a variety of dimensions. Two sets of questions explicitly tap into political parallelism. For each outlet, experts indicated how much coverage was influenced by any party or parties. Additionally, experts reported the extent to which each outlet advocates particular views or policies. Each of these questions were reported on a 0 to 10 point scale. EMSS reports reliability scores above  $\alpha=.91$  for each of these variables across countries. For each outlet, average scores on each measure were weighted according to their audience share (See Popescu et al. (2011) for a complete discussion of the weighting procedure and other technical details of the EMSS). The sum of the two measures represents the average political parallelism measure, with higher values indicative of a closer connection between political parties and the press. I also utilize two other parallelism measures—political parallelism only among newspapers and political parallelism only among television stations—to test whether the legitimacy gap is larger between those that pay attention to newspapers and television, respectively.

Values were rescaled for ease of interpretation so that lowest score of political parallelism in our dataset (Denmark) was coded as 0, and the highest values (Cyprus) was coded as 1. Political parallelism scores, by country, are plotted in Fig 1.

Figure 1 reveals some obvious patterns. Countries at the lowest ends of the political parallelism index tend to be higher in Northern Europe. This mirrors Hallin and Mancini’s mostly qualitative analysis of press-party parallelism. Countries at the upper ends tend to be less democratic. To deal with possible confounds, I include several country-level control

Figure 1: Press-Party Parallelism Score by Country



variables in multivariate analyses that have been shown to effect the characteristics of the media in a country as well as political trust.

First, countries rated higher in socio-economic development tend to have a strongly professionalized press and a higher percentage of the population that tunes into the news. Hence, I use the 2008 Human Development Index (HDI) to control for these differences. HDI is also related to a smaller legitimacy gap (Anderson and Singer 2008), in line with the argument that economic development is a prerequisite for pro-democratic attitudes (Lipset 1959).

Additionally, older democracies and democracies with more experience with fair and honest elections experience a smaller legitimacy gap than newer democracies or countries with more corrupt elections (Moehler 2009). As can be seen in Figure 1 more established democracies also tend to have lower levels of political parallelism; most of the younger democracies were part of the former Soviet Union. Hence, I include a variable that indicates whether a country is generally considered part of Central and Eastern Europe.

Finally, a country's electoral system is related to the legitimacy gap. More proportional systems alleviates the sting of losing, by making government responsive to more citizens.

As more proportional systems are associated with less political polarization, we would also expect more centrist media. Therefore, a commonly used index of electoral disproportionality (Gallagher 1991) was included in the model.

Table 1 displays the summary statistics for the dependent variables, country-level variables, and the two primary individual-level variables of interest. As can be seen in the last two columns, all variables are rescaled to lie between zero and one by subtracting the observation by the variables minimum and dividing by difference between the minimum and maximum of that variable. Two variables are dichotomous—the variable indicating whether the country was part of Central or Eastern Europe the and a variable indicating whether R voted for the ruling coalition or not. The distribution of the latter variable, which indicates that 47 percent of the sample voted for the ruling coalition in their country, closely mirrors that of Anderson et al. (2007).

Table 1: Summary Statistics

Statistic	N	Mean	St. Dev.	Min	Max
Trust	35,747	.47	.23	.00	1.00
Satisfaction w\Democracy	34,662	.49	.26	.00	1.00
Political Parallelism	35,944	.40	.27	.00	1.00
Voted for Ruling Coalition	35,944	.47	.50	0	1
HDI	35,944	.52	.25	.00	1.00
CEE	35,944	.41	.49	0	1
Disproportionality	35,944	.28	.22	.00	1.00

## Results

Figure 2 plots the mean gap between those that are part of the ruling coalition and those that are not using two measures of legitimacy—institutional trust (top panel) and satisfaction with democracy (bottom panel)—against the press-party parallelism score in each country in the dataset. A linear regression line capturing the relationship between the two variables is superimposed on each pane. Although not too much should be made of these graphs, which

are based on 24 data points, they do illustrate the positive relationship between the gap in legitimacy and political parallelism. Moving from the least politically parallel point on the index to the most politically parallel point is associated with an increased gap of 2 points in institutional trust, and a 4 point gap in democratic satisfaction. While the relationship is small—the gap in trust theoretically runs from -1 to 1—the range in the gap in political trust runs from only from .02 to .11 and -.04 to .18 with regards to satisfaction with democracy, with standard deviations of .03 and .04, respectively. Hence, the gap in legitimacy among the least politically parallel country is roughly one standard deviation smaller than the most politically parallel country.

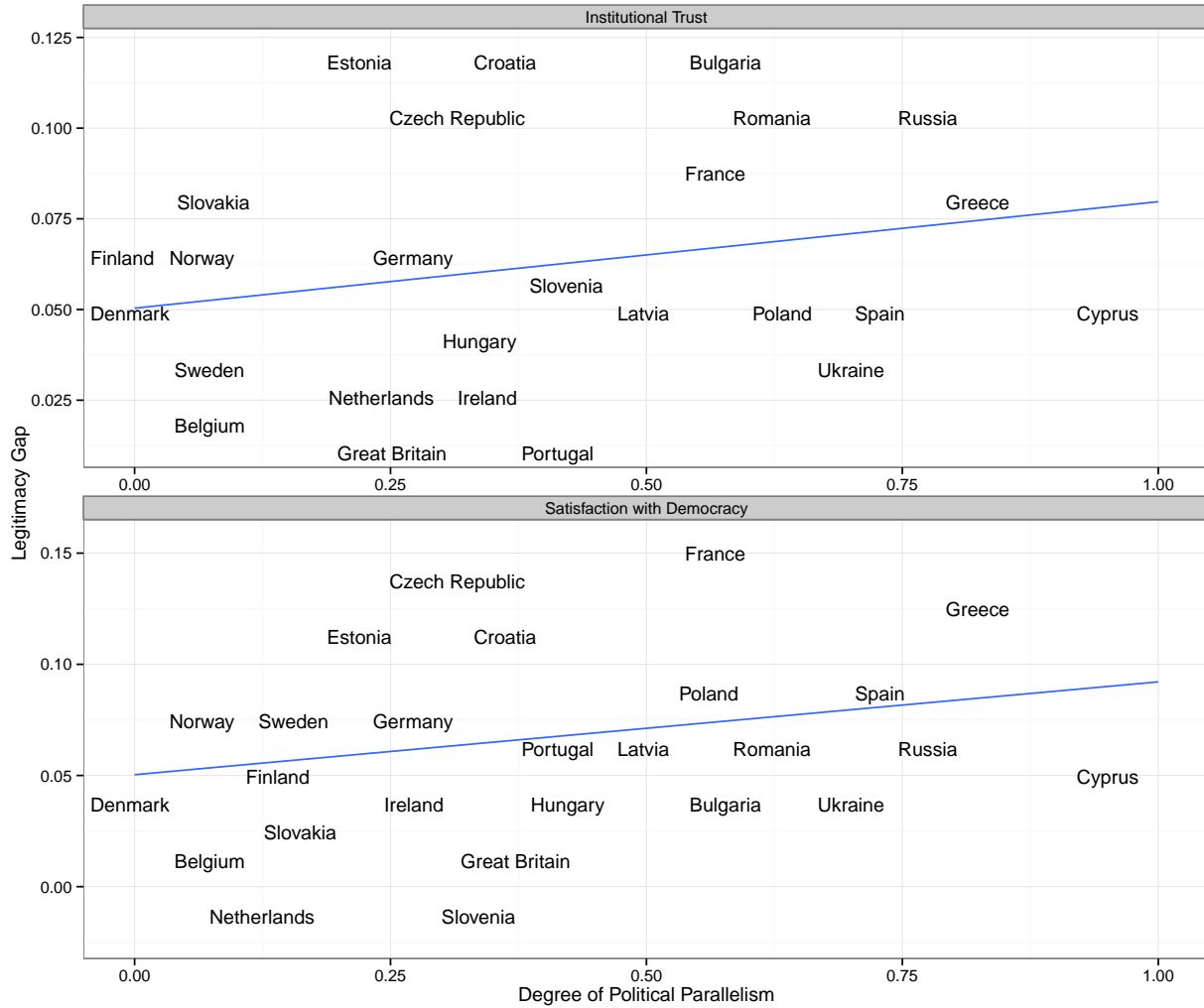
While Figure 2 is instructive, it ignores individual-level heterogeneity among respondents, and the small sample size restricts the ability to control for the aforementioned variables. To overcome these shortcomings, I estimate a Bayesian multilevel linear models for each of the legitimacy dependent variables.

The model includes the set of country-level variables: political parallelism, HDI, CEE, and disproportionality (fixed-effect predictors), and individual-level predictors that vary by country (random-effect predictors): R's country, whether or not they voted for the ruling coalition, political interest, age, education, and gender. Additionally, a cross-level interaction between cross-level interaction between political parallelism and whether the respondent voted for the ruling party or not is included in the model.

This interaction term is the main parameter of interest. If this interaction is greater than than zero, it indicates that the the difference in perceptions of legitimacy between winners and losers is greater when as the degree of political parallelism increases.

A Bayesian approach is advantageous to maximum likelihood for a number of reasons. First, I do not have to make the unreasonable assumption that the countries in the dataset represent any sort of random sample. Second, the number of countries in the dataset (N=24) barely meets the threshold wherein one can be comfortable with maximum likelihood estimates and confidence interval coverage of the country-level effects (Maas and Hox 2005;

Figure 2: Press-Party Parallelism Score by Country



Stegmueller 2013). Finally, “the problems of [maximum likelihood] estimation] are most apparent” for cross-level interactions, and the primary parameter of interest in this study is a cross-level interaction between political parallelism.

I assign large uninformative priors on all parameters. The fixed effect parameters are assumed to be multivariate Normal, the random effects variance matrix is assigned an Inverse-Wishart prior, and the residual error variance is assigned an Inverse-Gamma prior. The model is implemented with a Gibbs sample, running 5000 iterations. I present the fixed effect coefficients and their HPD intervals from this model in Figure 2.

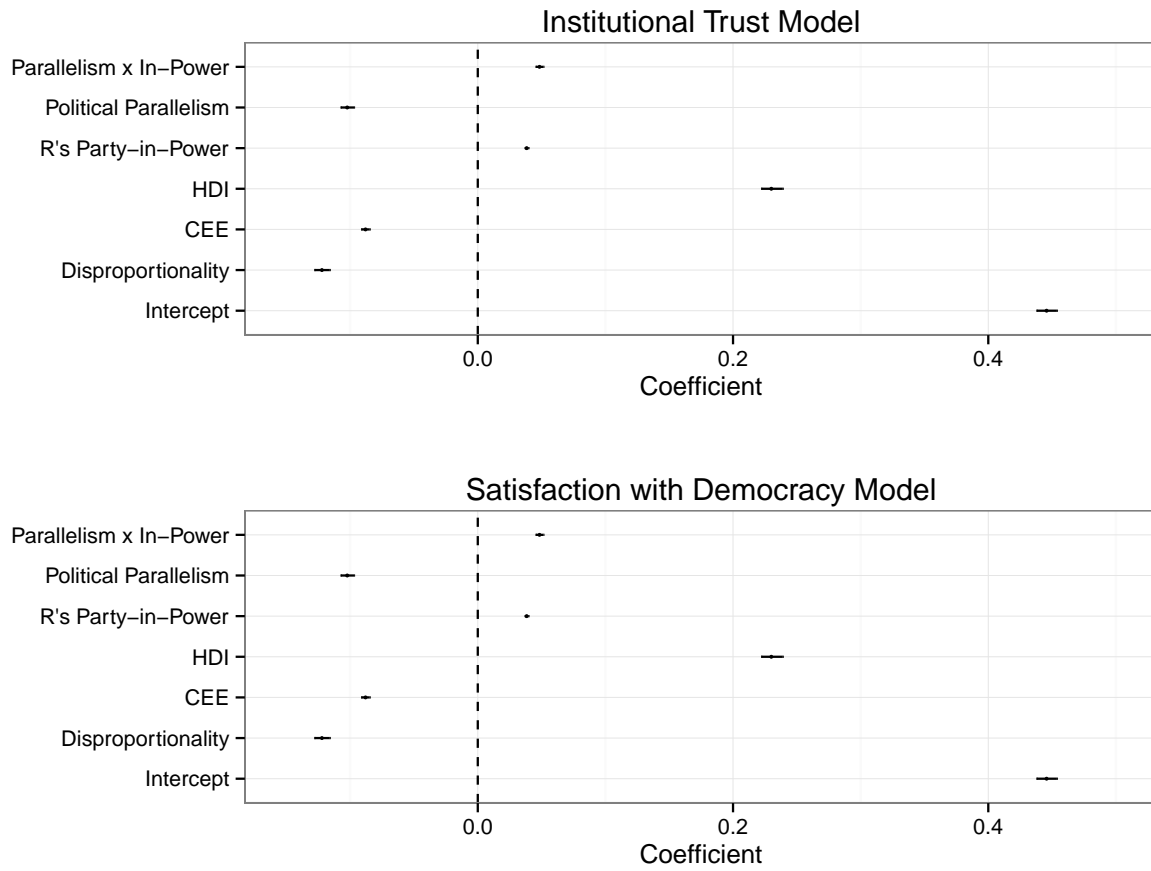
As can be seen in the top and bottom panels of Figure 2, support was found in favor of hypothesis 1. The cross-level interaction between political parallelism and being a member of the in-party indicates that the gap between winners-and-losers on the political trust measure is roughly 5 percent bigger in the most politically parallel country than in the least politically parallel country ( $b=.048$ ,  $HPD=.045-.050$ , Row 1, Panel A, Figure 3). Similarly, the gap between winners and losers in the most politically parallel country is roughly 6 percent larger in the most politically parallel countries than the least politically parallel countries ( $b=.059$ ,  $HPD=.054-.063$ , Row 1, Panel B, Figure 3).

Rows 3-5 in Panel A and B in Figure 3 display the fixed effect coefficients from these models. In line with past results, higher levels of HDI are associated with greater levels of overall government legitimacy, being a member of Central or Eastern Europe is associated with lower levels of overall government legitimacy, and higher levels of disproportionality is related to lower levels of overall government legitimacy.

The second hypothesis in this study posits that the effect of political parallelism on the legitimacy gap is conditioned by exposure to the media. To test this idea, I re-estimate the model twice, subsetting the data sets to include respondents that reported low levels of political interest and high levels of political interest, respectively.

As can be seen in the top row of Figure 4 the interaction effect between political parallelism and the variable indicating whether the respondent voted for a member of the ruling

Figure 3: Multilevel Regression Estimates and HPD Intervals for Legitimacy Models





coalition was larger among those with high political interest than among those with low political interest ( $b=.040$ , HPD: .038-.042 vs.  $b=.038$ , HPD: .033-.042, respectively). That is, the gap in political trust between those that voted for the ruling coalition and those that did not was larger among the more politically interested than the less politically interested. This result replicates with the second dependent variable: satisfaction with democracy. Political parallelism was more impactful among the more politically interested ( $b=.079$ , HPD: .073-.084) than the less politically interested ( $b=.062$ , HPD: .057-.069). These differences are not large, but the measure of media exposure is fairly crude, and the results are in line with hypothesis 2.

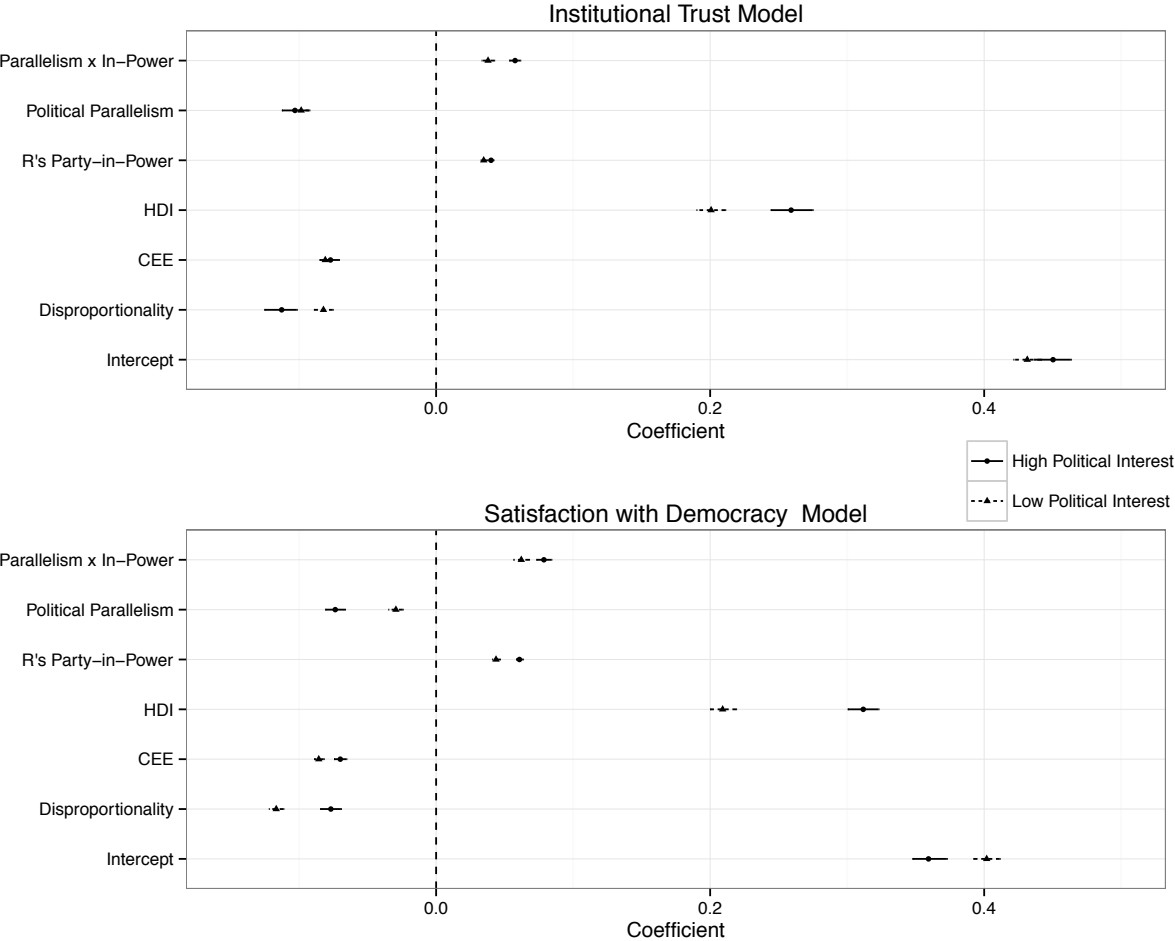
## Ideological Extremity as a Mechanism

The mechanism by which political parallelism increases the legitimacy gap is still unclear. Without, at minimum, manipulating the proposed mediators, the mechanism by which political parallelism impacts perceived legitimacy will remain unclear (e.g., Imai2013). However, it is still a worthy exercise to lay the foundation for future research and explore the relationship between the political parallelism, proposed mediators, and the legitimacy gap.

The dataset allows for an exploration of one of the proposed mechanisms—ideological polarization—although, unfortunately not the other measures. The presumptions follows from a sets of findings. First, as previously discussed, the ideological distance to the winner of an election is related to political trust (Curini). In addition, those those that are politically extreme perceive out-groups as more extreme and in-groups as less extreme (Van Boven et al. 2013).

In turn, I offer three related hypotheses. First, political parallelism is associated with more extreme attitudes (*Hypothesis 3*). Additionally, the impact of political parallelism on extreme attitudes should be a larger among those that pay more attention to the media than those that pay less attention. Finally, in each country, those with more extreme attitudes

Figure 4: Fixed-Effect Coefficients and HPD Intervals for Legitimacy Models, by Political Interest



will perceive the government as more legitimate when the party they voted for is in power and less legitimate when the party they voted for is out of power (*Hypothesis 3*). Evidence in favor of these propositions offers necessary conditions needed to untangle these mechanisms, although they are certainly not sufficient.

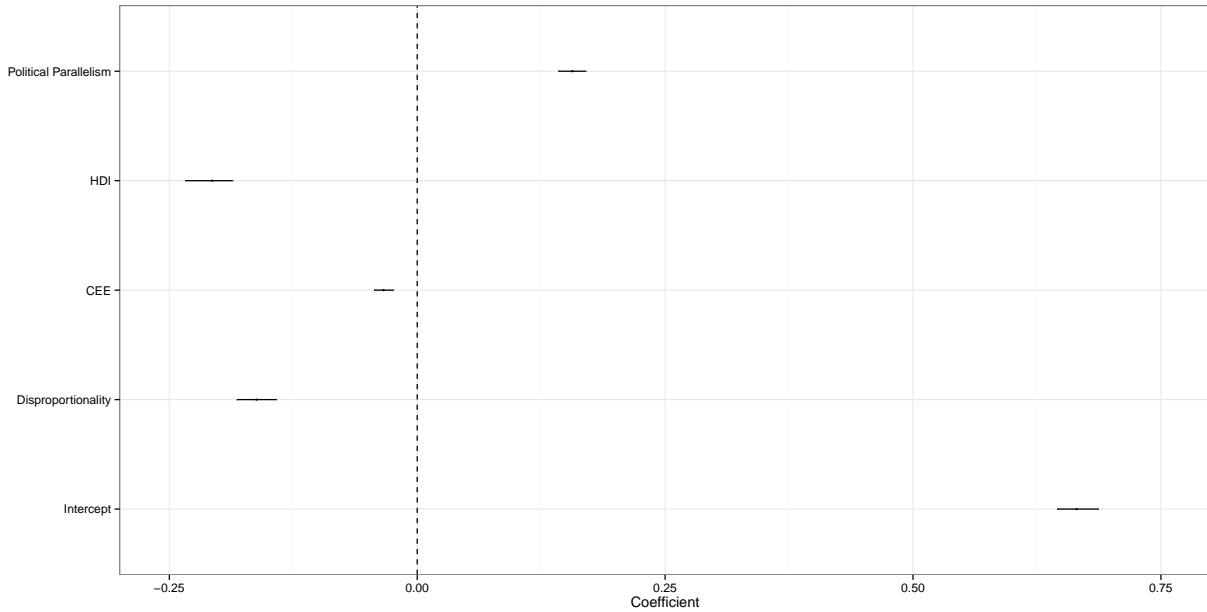
## Measures

Attitude extremity is measured on the dominant policy cleavage in Western Europe—the social welfare agenda. The ESS asked respondents to report, on an 11-point scale, whether they believed it was the government’s responsibility or not to provide a variety of services: a job for everyone, healthcare for the sick, a reasonable standard of living for the old, a reasonable standard of living for the unemployed, childcare services for working parents, and paid leave to care for sick family members. As these items were highly related ( $\alpha=.82$ ), the average response across these social welfare items was computed. I computed attitude extremity as the absolute difference between a country’s mean position on the social welfare scale and the respondents attitude. For ease of interpretability, responses were recoded to lie between 0 and 1, where 1 indicated a respondent with attitudes that are consistently at either end, while 0 indicated a respondent that consistently chose the midpoint.

## Results

As expected, political parallelism predicts attitude extremity. As can be seen in the first row in Figure 5, which plots the attitudes of those in the most politically parallel countries are about 16 percent more extreme on the social welfare dimension than those in the least politically parallel countries. Additionally, high levels of human development is associated with less attitude extremity. Respondents living in central and eastern europe are slightly less extreme than other respondents. Finally, and in line with recent work (Matakos et al, 2013), higher levels of disproportionately is associated with lower levels of attitude extremity.

Figure 5: Issue Extremity



No evidence was found in favor of the second hypothesis, however. The effect of political parallelism was the same size for low ( $b=.14$ ,  $HDI=.12-.17$ ) and high political interest respondents, respectively ( $b=.15$ ,  $HDI=.13-.17$ ). Again, I do not put too much faith into a single-measure of political interest as a robust indicator of media exposure, but it does raise the question of whether political parallelism actually is at the root of extreme attitudes.

Neither do I find strong evidence for the proposition that political extremity mediates the effect of political parallelism on the legitimacy gap is to demonstrate. In each country, I regress each of the legitimacy scores on a variable indicating whether a respondent was a member of the ruling coalition or not, the respondent's social welfare extremity score, and the interaction between the two. A positive interaction would indicate that extreme respondents are more trusting when they voted for the ruling party or less trusting when the party they voted for is not part of the ruling coalition. The interaction effects for each within-country regression when institutional trust (top panel) and satisfaction for democracy (bottom panel) appears in Figure 7

While the interaction effects were greater than zero in 18 of the countries for both de-

Figure 6: Issue Extremity

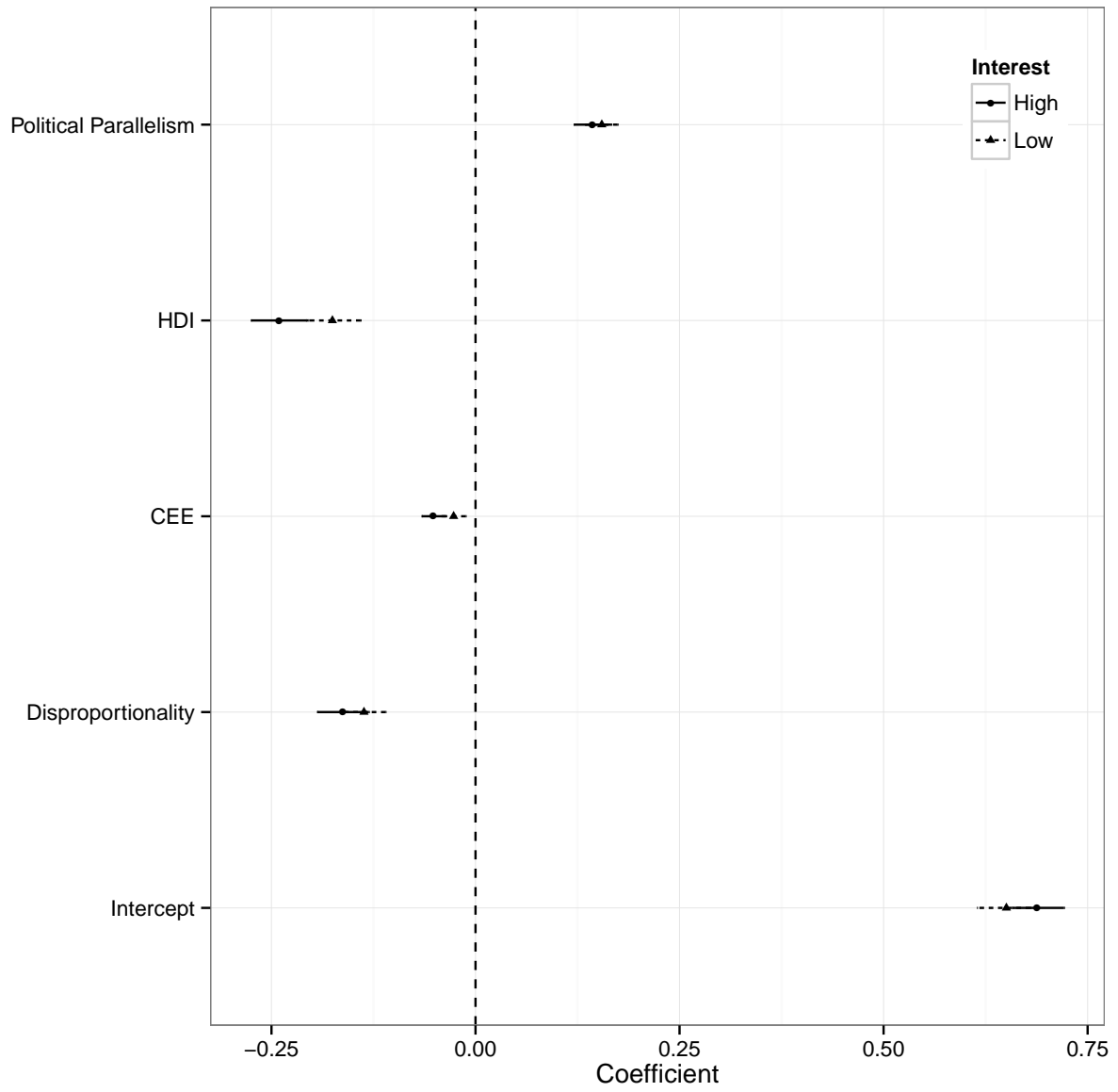
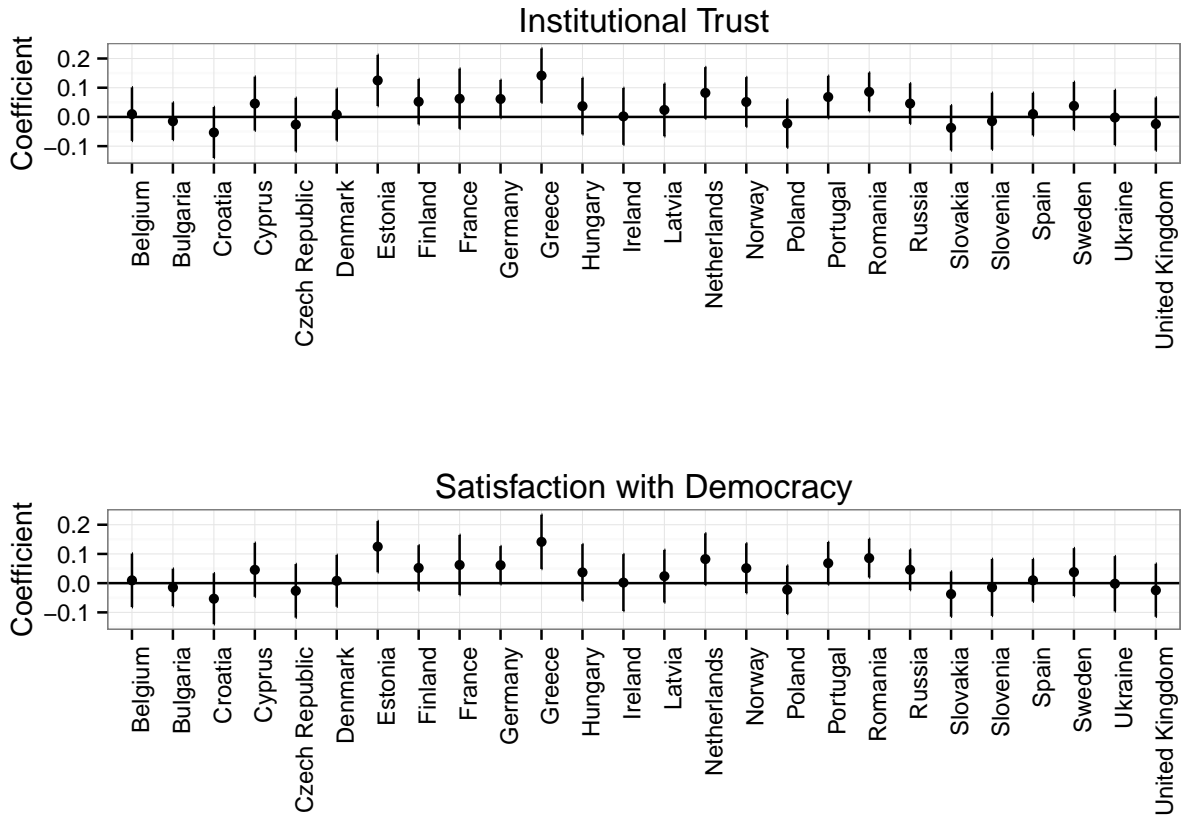


Figure 7: Issue Extremity



pendent variables, the 95 percent confidence interval did not include zero in only 8 of the countries. If the countries are pooled into a multilevel model (with a random intercept for countries), the interaction effect is greater than zero for the institutional trust model ( $b=.03$ ,  $se=.01$ ) and satisfaction with democracy model ( $b=.04$ ,  $se=.01$ )

Considering the sum total of the evidence, however, it seems unlikely that ideological extremity, although related to political parallelism, is the mechanism that links partisan media to perceived legitimacy.

## Discussion

Democratic stability is contingent on the perceived legitimacy of a system's institutions and processes. It is well established that perceptions of legitimacy, at the individual-level are contingent on a person's vote and the outcome of the last election. Winners are consistently more trusting of the institutions and satisfied with the processes than are losers. This study is the first to consider the impact of the political information environment in exacerbating or diminishing this gap. Additionally, this study is one of only a small handful that explore the effects of partisan media in a comparative perspective.

Political parallelism, one of many aspects of the political information environment, increases the gap between winners' and losers' institutional trust and satisfaction with democracy. However, the legitimacy gap can be driven by two processes that cannot be parsed without panel data—decreased perceptions of legitimacy among electoral loser's and increased perceptions of legitimacy among electoral winners. Partisan media may be linked to one and not the other. To figure out which process is at work, individual that differ in exposure to partisan media must be tracked before and after elections.

The validity of these findings is strengthened by the second primary result of this study. Reported political interest, a proxy for media exposure, moderates this effect. Political parallelism has a smaller effect among those that report less exposure political news than among those that report higher levels of exposure. Of course, political interest is a poor measure of exposure,<sup>6</sup> but measurement error makes finding an effect, in this case, less likely. Hence, these results are probably conservative estimates of the three-way interaction between vote choice, political parallelism, and media exposure.

The extant data only permit testing whether one of the proposed variables—ideological extremity—meets the necessary conditions to serve as the mechanism tying political parallelism and perceived legitimacy. The available evidence indicates that while increased levels political parallelism is positively related to ideological extremity, the ideological extreme are

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<sup>6</sup>Some argue that any self-reported measure of exposure are invalid (e.g., Prior 2009)

not substantively less trusting of government or satisfied with the democratic process when a party they did not vote for is in office.

One alternative mechanism that may be more fruitful is affective rather than ideological polarization (Iyengar et al. 2012). Within the United States, recent research has demonstrated a reliable relationship between exposure to partisan news and interparty animosity (Lelkes et al. 2013b; Levendusky 2013a). According to this line of research, partisan media highlights and strengthens political identities and spreads invectives and misinformation, thereby increasing positive feelings towards favored political groups and negative feelings towards disfavored ones. Whether partisan news exacerbates affective polarization in countries outside of the United States is an open question, however. American partisan news may have a particular noxious effect on democratic attitudes, and more cross-national work on the relationship between affective polarization and partisan media is needed. Presuming that political parallelism does influence affective polarization the first condition needed to demonstrate that affect links links political parallelism and trust is met.

Another necessary condition—that affective polarization increases the legitimacy gap—has been shown in other research. In a 10-country study, Lelkes et al. (2013a) show that the legitimacy gap is higher among the more affectively polarized than the less affectively polarized. Much more would need to be done to support the hypothesis that political parallelism increases affective polarization, which then exacerbates the legitimacy gap. Suffice it to say, affective polarization cannot be ruled out as the mechanism.

While this study takes the the role of the media seriously in explaining the legitimacy gap, political parallelism is only one aspect of the political information environment. Other aspects of a country’s media may be equally or more important. For instance, recent work has emphasized the importance of broadcast versus commercial media in predicting citizen attitudes, knowledge, and behavior (e.g. Iyengar et al. 2010; Soroka et al. 2013; Tworzecki and Semetko 2012). A independent broadcast outlet is more likely to provide balanced coverage of political actors than a commercial one, which may be more affected by the views



of its audience or its owners. Additionally, broadcast media is associated with higher levels of political knowledge (Iyengar et al. 2010; Soroka et al. 2013), which is related to other democratic attitudes. Broadcast media, therefore, may diminish the legitimacy gap.

This study is not without its limitations. First, while we controlled for a variety of country-level variables that may both impact political parallelism and the legitimacy gap, I cannot of course be certain that spuriousness was ameliorated completely. Additionally, the measure of media exposure was incredibly coarse, and only hinted at differences between respondent exposure to news. Furthermore, while political parallelism is most likely exogenous to political trust, an argument could be made that the elements that the two are intertwined.

The form and contents of the media within a country are constantly changing. Less than 10 years ago, some predicted a decline in the availability of partisan media, and a movement across the globe to a media environment akin to that of mostly mainstream, commercial environment of the United States. However, while the American system is certainly still commercial, the media there has become fragmented and the availability of partisan outlets has increased. It is possible, then, that as news outlets become commercialized across the globe, that we actually see an overall increase in partisan channels, not less, and with it, a larger legitimacy gap. In turn, it is important that future research considers the role of the political information environment and the way it affects democratic legitimacy.

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