In the Mood for Democracy?
Democratic Support as Thermostatic Opinion

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Abstract

Public support is crucial for the survival of democracy. Existing research has argued that democracy fortunately appears to create its own demand: the presence of a democratic system plus the passage of time produces a supportive public as citizens learn about democracy and the freedoms and responsive government it provides. Using new panel measures of democratic mood varying over 134 countries and up to 30 years, this paper finds no such effect. Instead, it demonstrates a thermostatic effect of democracy on support: increases in democracy depress democratic mood, while increases cheer it. Moreover, it is increases in the minoritarian aspects of democracy – i.e., protections of individual and minority rights – not the majoritarian, electoral aspects that provoke this backlash from citizens. These novel results challenge existing research on support for democracy, but also reconcile this research with the literature on macro-opinion.

Keywords: democracy, support for democracy, public opinion, mood, thermostatic model, socialization

Words: 8,219

1. Introduction

After rising to hegemony in the 1990s, liberal democracy is now experiencing something of a crisis. The crisis is not (yet) one of *coups d'etat* and democratic failure: democratic institutions have largely held (Mechkova, Lührmann, and Lindberg 2017). The crisis is instead one of confidence or legitimacy. As Plattner (2017) puts it, liberal democracy has a "fading allure." Indeed, several scholars have found evidence of this fading allure: diminishing support for democracy in long-established democracies, particularly among younger generations (Denemark, Donovan, and Niemi 2016; Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017; Norris 2017; cf. Voeten 2017).

Such declines in democratic legitimacy are puzzling when viewed through the lens of existing research on public support for democracy. This research argues, firstly, that citizens in democratic societies are socialized – in their impressionable adolescent years – into a democratic political culture where support for democracy is the norm (Dalton 1994; Mishler and Rose 2007; Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). And secondly, this early support is believed to be (re)-learned over citizens' lifetimes as they experience the fruits of democratic citizenship, such as personal and political freedoms and responsive government (Bratton and Mattes 2001; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Magalhães 2014; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Mattes, Denemark, and Niemi 2016*a*; Mishler and Rose 2002; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). In sum, according to the extant literature, democracy creates its own demand (e.g., Mattes, Denemark, and Niemi 2016*b*): democratic government plus the passage of time produces high levels of support for democracy.

The notion that support for democracy might ebb as well as flow, even in long-established liberal democracies, is completely consistent, however, with a theory from another area of public opinion research – the thermostatic model (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Wlezien 1995). In the study of the opinion-policy link, macro-opinion is often found to move in opposite directions to policy outputs: when government spending increases, citizens prefer that it decrease; where policy shifts to the right, citizens' preferences move to the

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left. Applied to the opinion-democracy link, the thermostatic model would predict that publics would clamor for democracy when it is scarce, but their preference for democracy would weaken as democratic rights and institutions are supplied. If support for democracy – or democratic "mood" to adopt Stimson's (1991) coinage – obeys a thermostatic logic, then we would expect to see it fluctuating over time, even in established democracies, and particularly in response to recent changes in the level of democracy itself.

The purpose of this paper is to test whether the supply of democracy creates its own demand, or whether – in contrast – citizens turn against democracy once it is supplied. In other words, we test existing theories of democratic socialization and learning against the thermostatic model. To carry out these tests, we make use of new country-by-year measures of democratic mood and new, finely-grained measures of democracy and governance provided by the Varieties of Democracy project. With these new measures, we are able to assemble a large panel dataset that varies over 134 countries and up to 30 years. This dataset, in turn, permit the use of use dynamic models, which control for the effects of previous levels of mood, and first difference models, which control for time-invariant, country-specific factors.

We find little evidence that democracy creates its own demand. Higher levels of democracy do not have a beneficial effect on subsequent support. Instead, in a variety of dynamic models, we find a marked thermostatic effect of democracy on mood. Changes in democracy are associated with immediate and opposite public reactions: increases in democracy lead to reduced democratic support; decreases, to increased support. We moreover demonstrate that it is the minoritarian rather than majoritarian aspects of democracy that citizens find troubling. While increases in electoral democracy do not affect changes in support, increases in respect for individual and minority rights do undermine mass support. Overall, the image of the the democratic citizen that emerges from this paper is a more critical and intolerant one that the existing literature on support for democracy has suggested.

These novel results challenge existing research on support for democracy. But they also reconcile research on support for democracy with research on macro-opinion and the thermostatic

model (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Wlezien 1995), as well as research on political tolerance, which has long argued that citizens find the minoritarian aspects of democracy to be unpalatable (Gibson 1998; 1996). As such, this paper should be of interest to scholars of democratization, support for democracy, and public opinion more generally.

2.   Literature Review

2.1.   Conceptualizing Support for Democracy

If the institutions and procedures that structure the political lives of societies are the "hardware" of democracy – as Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer (1998, 8) elegantly put it – then public opinion toward democracy is the "software" that buttresses these institutions and procedures. When a democratic system enjoys widespread public support, the software and hardware are congruent (Eckstein 1966) rendering democracy legitimate (Lipset 1959), stable (Claassen 2018*a*; Qi and Shin 2011), and perhaps even consolidated (Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996).

Two major conceptualizations of this democratic "software" have emerged.[1] One approach, which we might refer to "implicit" support for democracy, focuses on broader socio-political values such as postmaterialism and egalitarianism (Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013). Here, democracy is legitimate when it is consistent with citizen's deeper values and strivings.

A second approach focuses directly on democracy and various autocratic alternatives, and is thus concerned with "explicit" support for democracy.[2] In this view, democracy is legitimate when it is preferred to some non-democratic alternative. This second conceptualization of support is consistent with Lipset's classic definition of "political legitimacy" – the "belief that existing political institutions are the most appropriate or proper ones for the society" (Lipset 1959, 83).

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[1] See Dalton and Welzel (2014) and Mattes (2018) for thorough and insightful reviews of these literatures.

[2] This conceptualization should be distinguished from "satisfaction with democracy," which has been shown to be both empirically and conceptually distinct from support for democracy (Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Canache, Mondak, and Seligson 2001; Norris 1999*a*).

It is also by far the most widely-used conceptualization in the literature. Political scientists have investigated explicit support for democracy around the world: in post-Communist Europe (e.g., Gibson 1996; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017), sub-Saharan Africa (e.g., Bratton and Mattes 2001; Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005), Latin America (e.g., Booth and Seligson 2009), Southern Europe (e.g., Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997), East Asia (e.g., Dalton and Shin 2006), as well as cross-nationally (Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996; Norris 1999*b*; 2011; Denemark, Mattes, and Niemi 2016). We focus in this paper on citizens' explicit support for democratic versus nondemocratic regimes.

2.2. The Determinants of Support

Armed with the conviction that public support for democracy is vital for democratic stability and consolidation, scholars have devoted considerable effort to understanding its determinants. Two theories have emerged to explain how citizens and societies come to support for democracy: *generational socialization* and *regime performance*.

The first of these theories holds that support for democracy is transmitted through socialization, particularly in the "impressionable" years of late adolescence and early adulthood (Jennings and Niemi 1974; Mannheim 1952). The assumption is that individuals are taught (or perhaps indoctrinated) to support the regime in which they emerge into adulthood: if this is a democracy, support for democracy is learned; if an autocracy, support for some nondemocratic regime is instead instilled (e.g., Dalton 1994; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998).

Viewed through the lens of socialization theory, the political system comes to exert a strong influence on public opinion. Following democratization, support increases with the passage of time as one generation after another becomes acculturated. Indeed, scholars sometimes speak of democracy creating its own demand (Mattes, Denemark, and Niemi 2016*b*). Finally, after several generations under a democratic system, support for democracy becomes ubiquitous. The system is then described as consolidated (Diamond 1999; Linz and Stepan 1996).

Evidence for the theory of generational socialization has been demonstrated in studies

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from such disparate contexts as 1970s Germany (Baker, Dalton, and Hildebrandt 1981), 1980s Spain (Montero, Gunther, and Torcal 1997), and 1990s Russia (Mishler and Rose 2007). Generational effects have also been detected in more recent, pooled cross-national analyses of support for democracy (Mishler and Rose 2007; Pop-Eleches and Tucker 2017).

Nevertheless, other studies find contradictory evidence. Mishler and Rose (2002), for example, find no effect of generations in their analysis Central and Eastern European data. Foa and Mounk (2016; 2017) have argued that support for democracy has in fact *declined* among younger generations in established democracies. Although their conclusions have been disputed (e.g., Voeten 2017), at least one of their critics agrees that generational decline in support for democracy is evident in a dozen or so democracies (Norris 2017). The most serious challenge to the socialization hypothesis, however, comes from a collected volume of studies of Global Barometers data (Denemark, Mattes, and Niemi 2016). In region after region – most featuring new democracies with stark generational differences in exposure to democracy – little to no evidence of generational socialization emerges (Mattes, Denemark, and Niemi 2016*a*).

The second theoretical account of how citizens come to support or oppose democracy is the performance of the regime in which these citizens live. While regime performance and generational socialization both assume that citizens learn about the regimes through experience (Mattes and Bratton 2007; Mishler and Rose 2002), the mode of learning in regime performance theory is active rather than passive; evaluation rather than socialization. Citizens condition their support for democracy versus autocracy on how their democracy (or autocracy) functions in practice. Where a democracy performs poorly (or an autocracy performs well) support for democracy is therefore expected to be low.

Within this regime performance approach, a crucial distinction exists between intrinsic and instrumental performance evaluations (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Bratton and Mattes 2001). Intrinsic performance evaluations refer to citizens supporting democracy because they enjoy some of the essential features of a democratic system, such as personal and political freedoms and responsive government (Bratton and Mattes 2001; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). Instrumental

performance evaluations, in contrast, refer to citizens supporting democracy because they benefit from such desirable outputs of governance as economic growth and clean public administration (Dalton 1994; Magalhães 2014).

The distinction matters greatly because if support is primarily instrumental in origin, then both democracies and autocracies can become legitimate; all that is required to ensure public approval is the delivery of instrumental benefits such as economic growth. If support is primarily intrinsic in origin, however, then legitimacy can only be achieved by delivering civil liberties and responsive government. For autocracies, this effectively means transitioning to democracy. For democracies, this implies the further "deepening" of democracy. Like the theory of generational socialization, the theory of intrinsic regime performance therefore also predicts that democracy – or more precisely, democratization – creates its own demand.

Instrumental regime performance theory, in contrast, implies no such prediction. Both democracies and autocracies can deliver effective government and economic growth. As such, this theory offers a possible explanation for democracy's current "fading allure." In particular, support for democracy may have been eroded by the economic recession of 2008 to 2010 (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014). A few studies have indeed demonstrated a link between economic perfor- mance (as well as other forms of instrumental performance) and support for democracy (Dalton 1994; Krieckhaus et al. 2014; Magalhães 2014; Rose and Mishler 1996).[3] However, in studies that include measures of both instrumental and intrinsic performance, it is the latter that is more important (Diamond 1999; Evans and Whitefield 1995; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Mattes, Denemark, and Niemi 2016*a*). Indeed, Graham and Sukhtankar (2004) finds that support for democracy in Latin America increased, rather than decreased, during the economic crisis of the early 2000s.

As such, economic downturns (or some other instrumental failing) do not appear to be a particularly compelling explanation for the falling support for democracy that analysts have ob-

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[3]There is evidence that economic performance affects satisfaction with democracy (e.g., Armingeon and Guth- mann 2014). However, as already noted, satisfaction with democracy is quite distinct from support for democracy.

served. Instead, we propose adopting a theory from another area of public opinion research – the thermostatic model (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002; Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Wlezien 1995) – as an alternative explanation.

2.3. A Thermostatic Model of Democratic Mood

The thermostatic model was first developed by Wlezien (1995) to describe and explain the relationship between macro-opinion and policy outputs (see also Soroka and Wlezien 2010; Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002). It proposes that opinion shifts to the left as policy moves to the right, and *vice versa*. The result is a marked negative feedback loop between policy output and opinion.[4]

Applied to the democracy-opinion link, the thermostatic model would predict that public support for democracy begins to soften and then turn as the supply of democracy is increased; on the other hand it would also predict that support for democracy increases as the supply of democracy decreases.

There is, of course, a substantial difference between the opinion-policy link and the opinion-democracy link: the former assumes democracy in general and elections in particular as the mechanism by which opinion shapes policy (Erikson, Mackuen, and Stimson 2002). Electoral dynamics are moreover also responsible for the ebbing and flowing of opinion that is characteristic of the thermostatic model. Winning coalitions implement policies favoring their supporters, not the median voter, leading to policy outputs which are out of sync with average public opinion. Policy outputs therefore "overshoots" opinion (Soroka and Wlezien 2010). In response, opinion moves in the opposite direction, resulting in another party or coalition being favored in the next election. Should they win, policy would again shift – and again overshoot.

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[4]The policy-opinion literature, like the democratic support literature, invokes Easton's (1965) classic systems theory of politics to make the link between outputs and opinion. Indeed, the literature on democratic support has long assumed a thermostatic effect of the *consequences* of public support on democracy, i.e., support helps sustain democracy (Claassen 2018*a*).

Both of these dynamics – the overshooting of outputs, and the resulting thermostatic shift in opinion – occur also in the democracy-opinion link. First, the supply of democratic rights and institutions likely overshoots mass opinion. Autocratic elites who are under pressure to democratize may hope to manage the transition but frequently instead lose control of the process (Wood 2000). The increase in democratic rights has a compulsive quality that drives further democratization. For example, the liberalization of restrictions on civil society affords the opposition greater latitude for mobilization while the installation of freer and fairer elections allows the opposition to challenge directly for power (Gandhi and Lust-Okar 2009; Levitsky and Way 2002).[5]

The second component of the thermostatic dynamic is opinion change after policy change. Political scientists tend to assume that the masses are generally in favor of democracy, with the elites perhaps resistant (e.g., Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Yet if democratic support acts in a similar fashion to other forms of macro-opinion, it should also diminish once the policy (here, democracy) is supplied. This presents something of a puzzle: why would citizens not desire further democratic rights and stronger democractic institutions? Indeed, why would they desire *reduced* rights and *weakened* institutions?

There are two possible explanations. The first comes from the literature on authoritarianism, especially its early, psychodynamic interpretation. As Erich Fromm (1941) argued, the transition from autocracy to democracy may leave individuals unmoored and anxious. They therefore desire an "escape from freedom" and a return to the certainties of authoritarian rule (see also Arendt 1951). In a more empirical vein, studies of support for democracy in newly democratic countries have sometimes found a resurgence of "authoritarian nostalgia" after democratic transitions (see, e.g., Morlino 2010) According to this view, it is the core, majoritarian elements of democracy – the devolution of power from autocrats to citizens – that prove to be unsettling. In-

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[5]Democracy may well also overshoot opinion in the other direction, when regimes experience a *coup d'etat* or some other descent into autocracy. Here, an informational vacuum coupled with rational fear of the new autocrats produces phenomena such as the "dictator's dilemma" (Wintrobe 1998) where few are incentivized to speak out, leading the autocrat to become ever more suspicious, and therefore oppressive.

creases in *electoral democracy* therefore provoke authoritarian nostalgia and reduced support for democracy.

The second possible explanation comes from research on political tolerance. This literature has long found that many citizens of established democracies favor restricting basic democratic rights – such as the freedom of expression and the right to run for office – for members of groups that hold unpopular points of view (e.g., Gibson 2008). Gibson (1998) moreover argues that while majoritarian values are widely endorsed, even in new democracies, "minoritarian" values – such as endorsing the right of a radical political group to run for office – are far more unpopular (see also Chong 1993). According to this second explanation, it is therefore the minoritarian aspects of democracy that trouble citizens. When protections for individual and minority rights are strengthened and extended by representatives, citizens may respond with diminished support for democracy in general.

2.4. Hypotheses

We have outlined a thermostatic theory of change in public support for democracy. This leads to our first testable hypothesis, **H1: changes in democracy have a negative effect on democratic mood**. This hypothesis stands in contrast with the socialization theory, which predicts that the level of democracy has a positive long run effect on support. It also can be distinguished from the theory of (intrinsic) regime performance, which predicts that changes in democracy have a positive short-run effect on public support.

We then extended the basic thermostatic theory of change by specifying two mechanisms by which increases in democracy undermine support. The first, **H2a**, posits that **increases in electoral democracy – i.e., majoritarian rights and electoral processes – have a negative effect on democratic mood**. The second, **H2b**, posits instead that **increases in minoritarian democracy – i.e., protections for individual and minority rights – have a negative effect on democratic mood**.

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3. Data and Methods

Our dependent variable is a set of country-by-year measures of *democratic mood*, varying across 134 countries and with time series of up to 30 years for each country. These measures are extracted from existing survey data tapping support for democracy or opposition to autocracy.[6] Indeed, to the best of our knowledge, our database of 1,179 polls, conducted by 14 survey projects includes *all* existing survey measures of democratic support that were gathered by cross-national survey projects. To obtain a "smooth panel" of mood from such unruly data, we use the Bayesian dynamic latent variable model developed by Claassen (2018*b*).[7]

The use of a time-varying, national-level measure of democratic mood provides several advantages over existing work on the determinants of democratic support. First, the presence of temporal variation in support and democracy (see below) allows to to separately estimate the effects of previous levels of democracy – which likely captures a long run, socialization process – from the immediate change in democracy – which we use to test the thermostatic hypothesis. Temporal variation in our data also means we can use fully dynamic models, which include lagged dependent variables. Such models allow us to rule out the confounding effects of previous levels of mood on current levels of democracy. Finally, the combination of temporal and cross-sectional variation permits the use of first-difference models, which control for all country-specific, time-invariant factors. In sum, our research design permits rigorous tests of our three hypotheses.

For our independent variables, we take advantage of new measures of democracy provided by the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project.[8] Not only do V-Dem supply a far greater variety

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[6]A list of the included survey items is included in the online supplementary materials.

[7]Although Claassen also estimates a smooth panel of support for democracy, we use a larger set of survey data that stretches back to 1988 and forward to 2017.

[8]Our data are drawn from version 8 of the V-Dem dataset (`https://www.v-dem.net`). Note that because V-Dem does not provide data for smaller countries, we drop Bahrain, Belize, and Malta (for which mood estimates are available) from our dataset.

of measures of democracy and governance than were previously available, these are measured with more rigor and nuance than any existing indices (see, e.g., Lindberg et al. 2014). First, to measure the level of *electoral democracy* in each state and year, we use V-Dem's "polyarchy index," which captures the extent to which rulers are responsive to citizens through electoral competition. This index measures respect for freedoms of expression and association, whether important officials are elected, the cleanness of elections, and the universality of suffrage. We use this variable to test hypothesis 2a. Second, to measure *minoritarian democracy*, we use V-Dem's "liberal component index," which focuses on protections for individuals and minorities. This index includes subscales tapping respect for individual rights and legal equality of citizens as well as judicial and legislative constraints on the executive. We use this minoritarian democracy variable to test hypothesis 2b. Finally, our overall measure of *liberal democracy* is V-Dem's "liberal democracy" index, which is simply a combination of the "polyarchy" and "liberal component" indices. This will be used to test the general thermostatic hypothesis, H1.

We include three time-varying control variables. First, the V-Dem "political corruption" index[9] is used to measure *corruption*, a type of instrumental performance that has been associated with lower support for democracy (Mishler and Rose 2007; Rose, Mishler, and Haerpfer 1998). Second, we include annual *growth in GDP per capita* as a second measure of instrumental performance (see Dalton 1994) and *logged GDP per capita* as a measure of socio-economic development (see Krieckhaus et al. 2014; Magalhães 2014).[10] Time-invariant factors, such as a country's electoral institutions and ethnic demography, are controlled via the use of first-difference models.

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[9]The index measures executive, legislative, judicial and public sector corruption in each country and year.

[10]Data for both were drawn from the World Bank World Development Indicators, with missing values replaced using log GDP per capita data from the IMF and Penn World Tables, adjusted using a linear regression model. See the online supplementary materials for further details on this data substitution process.

# 4. Results

4.1. Global Dynamics of Democracy and Mood

Before using dynamic and first difference models to test our hypotheses, we first present some descriptive results. In particular, we examine time-series plots for all 134 countries for which we have democracy and mood data. In doing so, we hope to ascertain whether support is falling, as some analysts have claimed, or whether it is largely stable and rising as socialization theories would suggest.

We display the time-series of democracy and democratic mood for all 134 countries in Figures 1 through 4. Countries are arranged into four groups. First are established democracies, which had experienced at least 20 years of democracy (as defined by the V-Dem "Regimes in the World" indicator) by the year their mood time-series commences. They are displayed in Figure 1. Next, in Figure 2, are new democracies, which are democratic throughout the years for which we have mood estimates but where democracy commenced less than 20 years prior to the start of the mood series. Third are stable autocracies, in Figure 3, which were autocratic in all the years for which data were available. Finally are regimes in transition, in Figure 4, which moved between democracy and autocracy at some point in the years under consideration.

We begin with established democracies. Existing theories would suggest that such regimes should exhibit high and stable support. Having long experience with democracy, even older generations in established democracies should be supportive. There is therefore little generational change. The supply of rights and freedoms would also not typically remain fairly stable over time, leading to little increase in support over the course of citizens' lifetimes.

Indeed, many of the cases are consistent with these expectations. Scandinavian countries show the high and stable levels of support that the extant literature would predict (also Switzerland and Germany). Yet other long-established democracies show different patterns. Anglophone democracies generally show modest, albeit stable support. The long-standing, non-Western democracies, of India and Japan show fairly low levels of support. Finally, while public support

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**Figure 1.** The Dynamics of Democracy and Mood: Established Democracies
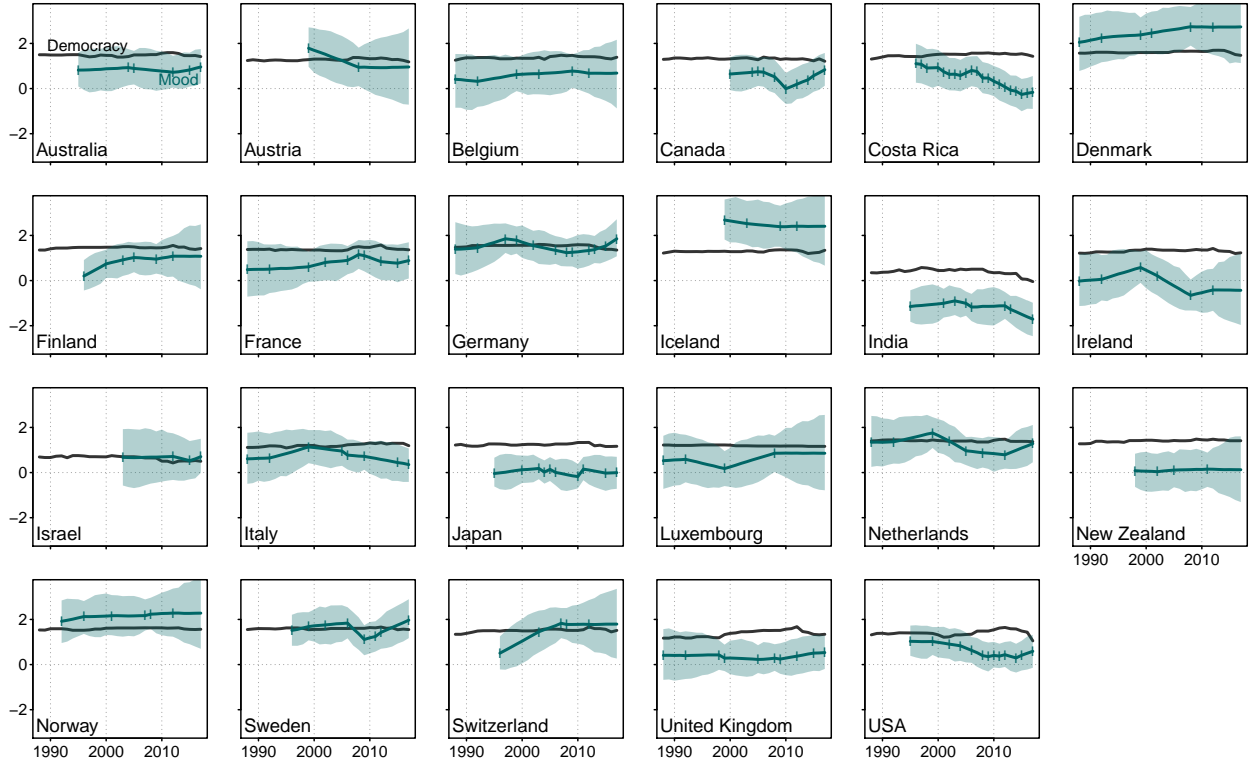
Each plot shows V-Dem Liberal democracy (plotted using a dashed black line) from 1988 to 2017 and estimates of democratic mood (plotted using a solid blue line). The shaded regions around the mood estimates indicate 90% uncertainty intervals. Vertical bars on the mood estimates indicate years in which survey data were available.

for democracy did decline in the early 2000s in Western democracies such as Canada, the Netherlands, Germany, and the U.S. – as Foa and Mounk (2016; 2017) in particular, have argued – it has rebounded somewhat in recent years.

In newer democracies, socialization and performance theories would predict a more mutable pattern of support, featuring an rising trend from varying initial levels. The impact of formative years socialization would be expected to lead to a substantial generational gap, with younger generations being more supportive of democracy. With the passage of time, and ensuing generational replacement, we should therefore observe increasing levels of support.

As Figure 2 shows, democratic mood in this large group of cases is indeed more varied than that seen in the long-established democracies. The earlier-established of these new democracies

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Figure 2. The Dynamics of Democracy and Mood: New Democracies
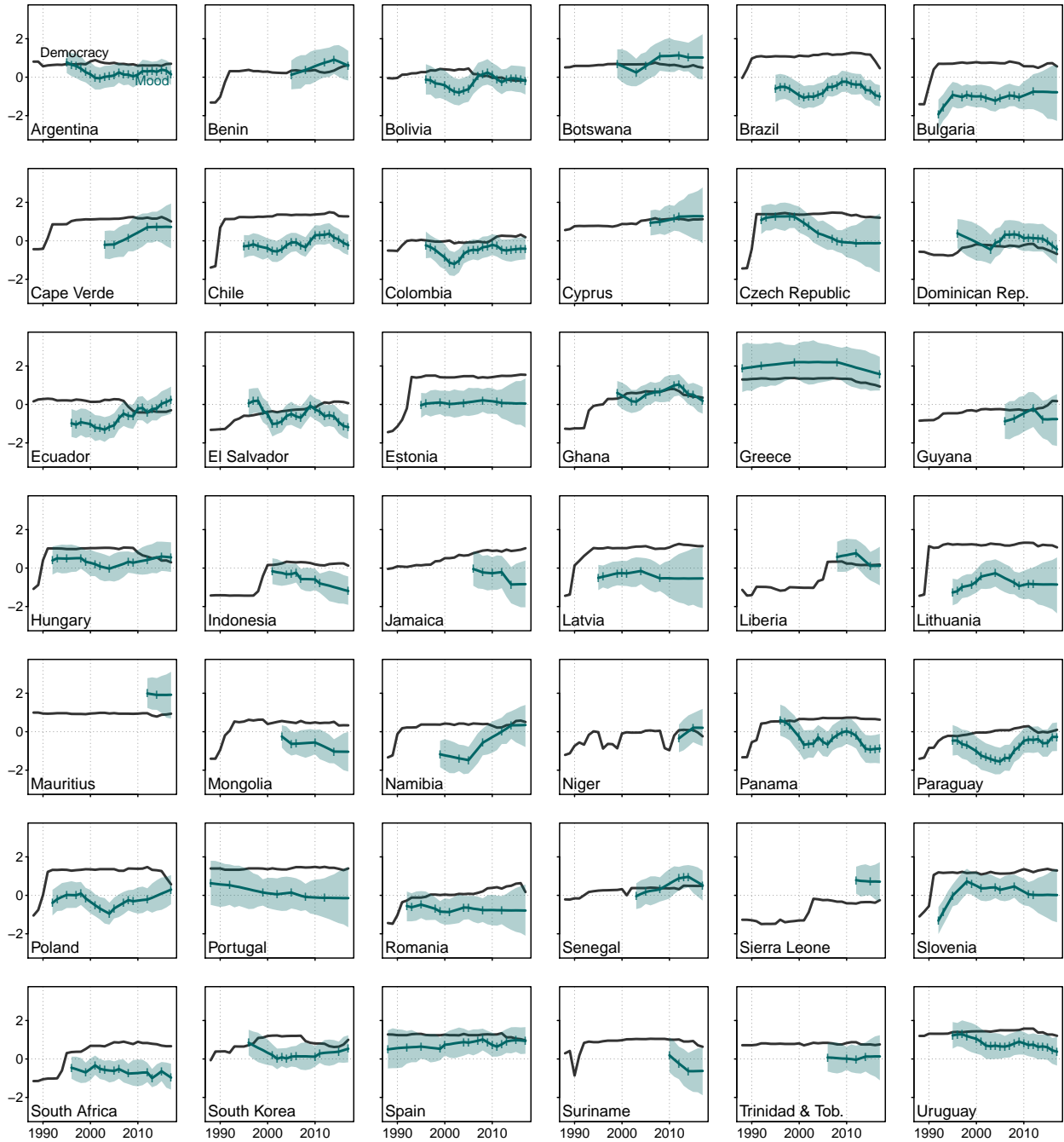
(e.g., Greece and Spain) show the high and stable levels of support that we observed earlier in many established democracies. Elsewhere, change is the norm, with many cases exhibiting fairly marked increases and decreases in democratic mood. In certain African countries (e.g., Botswana, Ghana, and Senegal) democratic support reaches the level of established democracies. In other countries

Figure 3. The Dynamics of Democracy and Mood: Autocracies
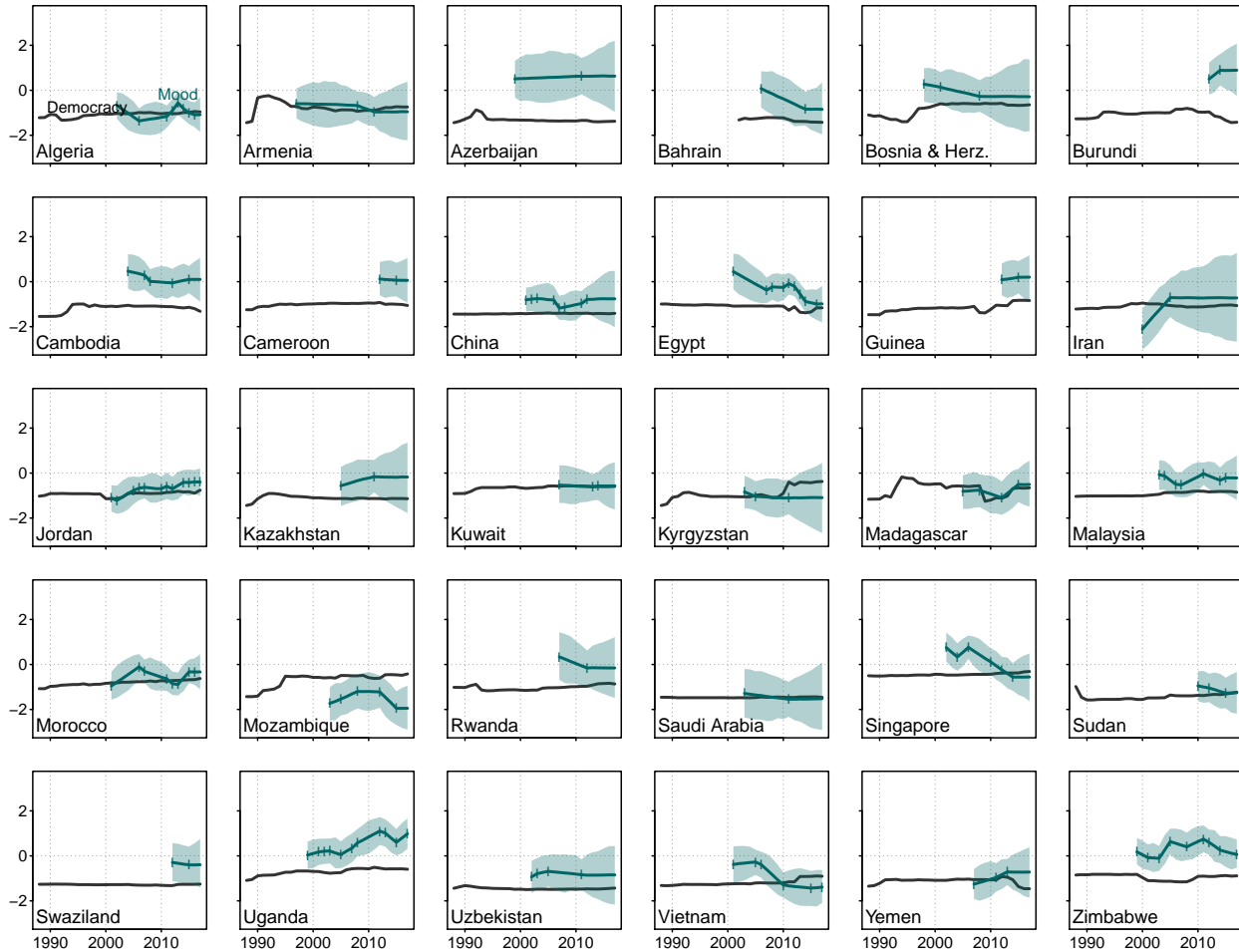
(e.g., Brazil, Panama, Poland), support ebbs and flows at a fairly low level. There are also cases with fairly stable but low support (e.g., Bulgaria, Mexico, South Africa), and others – all in Eastern Europe (e.g., the Czech Republic, Slovakia) – where support has fallen markedly. The evidence from these new democracies therefore provides mixed support for the existing socialization and performance theories. On the one hand, support is rising in some newer democracies, and already fairly high in those moving towards consolidation. On the other hand, support is stubbornly low in other new democracies, and even falling in yet others.

Moving on to our third group of countries, stable autocracies (Figure 3), socialization theory predicts that such regimes should exhibit low support for democracy as their citizens have not been exposed to a democratic political culture. Indeed, this appears to be the case for several of the

autocracies for which we have data (e.g., China, Algeria, Vietnam, and Saudi Arabia). However, other countries (e.g., Azerbaijan, Uganda, and Zimbabwe) display a different pattern: despite being autocratic, they have high and perhaps even increasing support for democracy. In conclusion, although the evidence from some of our autocratic cases are consistent with existing accounts of support for democracy, evidence from others is inconsistent, with citizens showing support for democracy despite having little to no experience with it.

Finally, we consider regimes that experienced a transition between autocracy and democracy during the period of the study. These provides us with greater insight into the immediate effects on mood when the supply of democracy changes, which, of course, is where we would expect to see a thermostatic effect, if one exists. In some of these regimes in transition we observe patterns consistent with socialization theory. Support increases after Ukraine's experiments with democracy, for example, and perhaps after Malawi's too. Yet in many other cases, we observe a very different pattern: increases in democracy that are accompanied by decreases in support (e.g., Croatia, Kenya, and Peru) and decreases that are accompanied by increases in support (e.g., Venezuela, Belarus, and Thailand). Such patterns of negative feedback between opinion and output are the hallmark of a thermostatic process. Indeed, in Venezuela, the dynamics of democracy and support display a classically thermostatic relationship. Soon after Chavez was elected in 1998, the mood turned towards democracy. As he began dismantling democratic institutions and procedures in the ensuing years, support increased further. It is hard to avoid interpreting these dynamics as a message sent by the Venezuelan public to their rulers: like someone continually turning up the thermostat in a freezing apartment, Venezuelans were demanding more democratic rights and stronger democratic institutions.

In sum, this descriptive analysis of mood and democracy reveals patterns, in certain countries, which are consistent with existing socialization and performance theories of democratic support. In other countries, however, the patterns are clearly inconsistent with these theories. These include democracies (new and established) with falling support for democracy and autocracies with high (or rising) support. Particularly telling are the regimes in transition. In many of these

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Figure 4. The Dynamics of Democracy and Mood: Transitioning Regimes
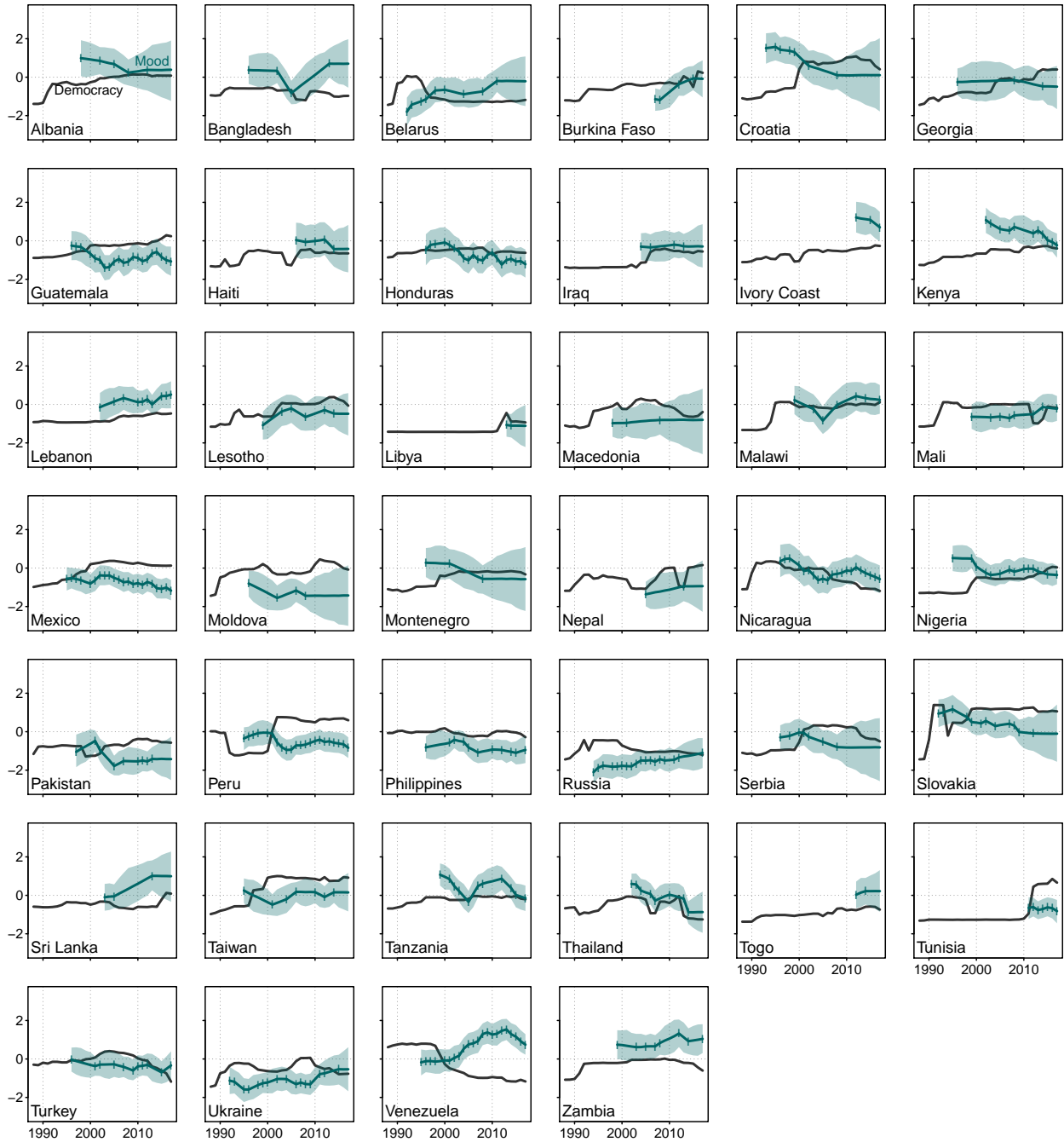
cases, there appears to be a thermostatic effect where changes in supply produce an immediate and opposite reaction in citizens' opinions.

With some descriptive evidence in favor of existing theories of support, and other evidence against, we now turn to our dynamic models, which offer more dispositive tests of our hypotheses.

5. Testing the Thermostatic Model of Democratic Mood

5.1. Empirical Strategy

Our primary modeling specification is the general error correction model. This model allows us to examine both the lagged effects of levels of an independent variable, as well as immediate effects of its change, on changes in the dependent variable. This provides an ideal modeling framework for our hypotheses. Including immediate changes in democracy allows us to test our three thermostatic hypotheses. And the inclusion of a lagged level of democracy allows us to control for the alternative processes of socialization and intrinsic performance.

However, the error correction model requires that all time-series be either stationary or co-integrated (De Boef and Keele 2008). We therefore run two tests of stationarity for panel data (the Im-Pesaran-Shin and Levin-Lin-Chu tests) on all of our variables. The results of all tests indicate stationarity (see the supplementary materials), permitting the use of error correction models.

Next, we include two lags of democratic mood to model dynamic, enduring effects of democracy on mood. These lagged dependent variables also remove serial correlation in the mood series.[11] They also have the additional benefit of controlling for the possibility that previous levels of mood influence current levels of the independent variables (e.g., democracy). Indeed, such an effect of support on subsequent democracy is widely assumed by comparative political scientists.

More formally, for i countries and t years, we model the change in mood ($\Delta m_{it} = m_{it} - m_{it-1}$) as a function of two lags of mood, immediate change in democracy (Δd_{it}), the lagged level of democracy (d_{it-1}), and k additional covariates, both their changes and lagged levels:

$$\Delta m_{it} = \alpha + \phi_1 m_{it-1} + \phi_2 m_{it-2} + \beta_1 \Delta d_{it} + \beta_2 d_{it-1} + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \gamma_{1k} \Delta x_{kit} + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \gamma_{2k} x_{kit-1} + \varepsilon_{it}$$

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[11]Breusch-Godfrey test of serial correlation for panel models, with two lags of mood included: $\chi^2 = 0.037$, df $= 1$, $p = 0.84$. We also include Arellano robust standard errors, clustered by country, in all models, which allow for heteroskedasticity and serial correlation.

The effect of changes in democracy on concurrent changes in mood is given by β_1 while the effect of previous levels of democracy is given by β_2. The former is the estimate of the thermostatic effect; the latter captures both socialization and intrinsic performance processes. These effects are, moreover, short-run estimates. Since we are specifying dynamic models, with lagged dependent variables, both changes and levels of support have long run effects that accumulate over time (De Boef and Keele 2008). These long run effects can be calculated using formula such as $\frac{\beta_2}{\phi_1+\phi_2}$, but also – as we demonstrate below – using simulation methods.

5.2. Results of the General Thermostatic Test

In Table 1 we present the results from four models, all of which test hypothesis 1: that changes in democracy have a negative effect on public support. The first two of these models are general error correction models. The estimated effect of immediate changes in democracy are negative and significant. Increases in democracy are therefore associated with decreases in support, and *vice versa*. In other words, we find evidence that democratic mood behaves thermostatically in response to changes in the supply of democracy.

In Model 1.1, the lagged level of democracy also has a significant and positive effect on subsequent change in democratic mood. Such positive feedback is consistent with the theories of socialization and intrinsic regime performance. Yet this effect is not particularly robust. In Model 1.2, which also includes corruption, the positive effect of lagged democracy vanishes. There is therefore little evidence, in our national-level data, that democracy creates its own demand.[12] To demonstrate the long run effects of changes in, and lagged levels of democracy, we plot the predicted effects of a one standard deviation increase in democracy in Figure 5. Such a plot is not straightforward when using dynamic models, because the predicted effects at time t feed forward to become lagged independent variables at time $t+1$. To do so, we set all independent variables

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[12]As Model 1.2 shows, lagged levels of corruption also appear to dampen democratic mood (but economic growth has no effect). In the supplementary materials we demonstrate that corruption has this deleterious effect only for democracies, not autocracies, as Magalhães (2014) argues it should.

Table 1. Dynamic Models of the Effects of Democracy on Change in Mood

	General Error-Correction Models		First-Difference Model	Arellano-Bond Model
	(1.1)	(1.2)	(1.3)	(1.4)
Intercept	−.037	−.006		
	(.020)	(.024)		
Democratic mood$_{t-1}$	.472*	.468*		
	(.026)	(.026)		
Democratic mood$_{t-2}$	−.486*	−.483*		
	(.025)	(.025)		
Δ Democratic mood$_{t-1}$				1.225*
				(.056)
Δ Democratic mood$_{t-2}$				−.328*
				(.059)
Δ Liberal democracy	−.057*	−.066*	−.073*	−.062*
	(.022)	(.023)	(.028)	(.026)
Liberal democracy$_{t-1}$	.006*	−.001		
	(.003)	(.004)		
GDP growth rate	.001	.001		
	(.000)	(.000)		
Log GDP per capita$_{t-1}$	.003	−.000		
	(.002)	(.002)		
Δ Log GDP per capita			.013	−.068*
			(.049)	(.023)
Δ Corruption		−.022	−.004	.006
		(.022)	(.025)	(.025)
Corruption$_{t-1}$		−.011*		
		(.004)		
Residual standard error	.098	.098	.113	
Adjusted R^2	.252	.254	.005	
N countries	134	134	134	134
N observations	2290	2290	2423	2290

*$p < .05$. Arellano robust standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. Liberal democracy and mood are unit-normal standardized.

to some moderate value and allow the system to run for 100 years, until equilibrium is reached. We then increase the level of democracy from half a standard deviation below to half a standard deviation above the mean, and allow the system of equations to run for 30 years. To capture the uncertainty inherent in the model, we use a method of dynamic simulation outlined by Williams

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Figure 5. Predicted Effects of Change in Democracy on Mood
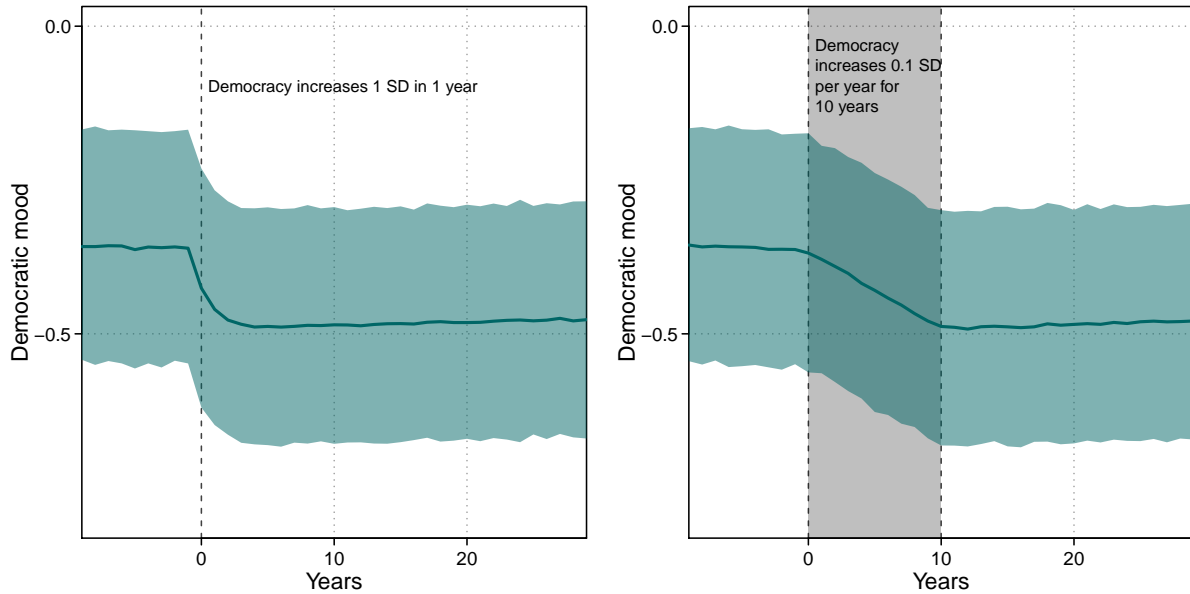
Predicted effects are estimated using coefficients from model 1.2. The solid lines indicate the mean predicted effect; the shaded regions indicate the 95% confidence intervals of these predicted effects.

and Whitten (2012). In particular, we create 5,000 perturbed vectors of model coefficients by taking 5,000 draws from a multivariate normal distribution with expectation being the vector of model coefficients and variance being the robust covariance matrix: $\tilde{\Theta} \sim MVN(\Theta, \Sigma)$. When predicting effects using each of the $i = 5,000$ simulated vectors of k coefficients, we add additional noise as estimated by the regression standard error: $\tilde{Y}_i \sim N(X_k \tilde{\Theta}_{ki}, \sigma)$. Finally, we use the mean value of $\tilde{Y}_i$ as the point estimate for that year, and the 0.025 and 0.975 quantiles of $\tilde{Y}_i$ as the lower and upper confidence bounds.

The first panel in Figure 5 shows the predicted effects on democratic mood (note, not change in mood) when the level of democracy increases by one standard deviation, which implies a moderate but not dramatic increase in democracy (the model used is Model 1.2). Immediately as democracy increases, mood drops by 0.066 on the standardized scale (which of course is the coefficient of change in democracy in Model 1.2). Democratic mood continues to weaken over the next six years, falling by a total of 0.13 from its initial level, before stabilizing at this lower level.

In the second panel of Figure 5, we show the effect of the same standard deviation increase

in democracy but now spread over a decade. Such a gradual increase in democracy mirrors the post-transition experience of new democracies such as South Africa, Romania, and Paraguay in the 1990s and 2000s (see Figure 2). These ten years of gradual but sustained increase in democracy are matched by a commensurately gradual but sustained decrease in democratic mood. Mood then remains at its newer, lower level.

How robust is our finding that changes in democracy produce a significant and opposite effect on mood? In Table 1 we employ two additional model specifications. First, model 1.3, shows the results of a first difference model, which focuses only on annual changes in all variables. Like the closely-related fixed-effects specification, the first difference model restricts its attention to variance across time and within country. This removes the possible confounding effects of country-specific time-invariant factors that may be thought to influence both dependent and independent variables.[13] Democracy and political culture, for example, might be jointly determined by such country-specific key moments, or "critical junctures," as a nation's experience under colonial rule (Rueschemeyer, Stephens, and Stephens 1992).[14]

However, when using a first difference (or indeed, fixed effects) specification, one must be cautious about including lagged dependent variables. These create a correlation between the first-differenced effects and the first-differenced error term, known as Nickell bias, especially when the number of time periods is small, as it is here. We therefore include another specification in Model 1.4, which uses further lags of the differenced dependent variable as instruments for the first lag. This is the Arellano-Bond Generalized Methods of Moments (GMM) model, which both removes all between country variances in all variables, and controls for lagged changes in democracy.

Results from both the first difference and Arellano-Bond models are consistent with the error correction specification. The effect of change in democracy remains significant and negative

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[13]While the fixed effects models is slightly more efficient under typical circumstances, the first difference model is an appealing alternative. It is a special case of the error correction model where the independent variables in levels are discarded and only changes in independent variables (and of course, the dependent variable) are retained.

[14]The first difference version of our model is $\Delta m_{it} = \alpha^* + \beta_1 \Delta d_{it} + \sum_{k=1}^{K} \gamma_k \Delta x_{kit} + \varepsilon_{it}^*$.

on subsequent change in mood. These findings also hold if we use a multilevel specification including country and regional random effects, and if we include additional time-varying covariates such as education and income inequality (results in online supplementary materials).

In sum, in this section, we have shown that changes in democracy generate sharp and opposite reactions from the public: increases depress support, and decreases revitalize it. This is the well-known thermostatic effect of public opinion, here demonstrated on democratic mood for the first time. We have also found little evidence that democracy generates its own demand. Whether by socialization or intrinsic performance evaluations, there is no robust effect of previous levels of democracy on subsequent changes in mood.

We are left, of course, with the paradox we discussed earlier. Although it seems intuitive that in countries that have experienced significant democratic backsliding (such as Venezuela), citizens may increasingly come to support democracy, why would the reverse be true? Why, in other words, would people favor reduced democratic rights? We turn to an analysis of these questions – and tests of hypotheses 2a and 2b – in the next sub-section.

5.3. Why Do Citizens Desire Less Democracy?

In Table 2, we include four models that offer tests of hypotheses 2a and 2b. These models parallel those in Table 1 in all ways but one. Instead of the general measure of liberal democracy, we now include its two disaggregated components: electoral democracy and minoritarian democracy (i.e., protection of individual and minority rights).

The results of all four models show that changes in electoral democracy have positive but insignificant effects on mood. Increases in majoritarian rights and institutions therefore neither depress nor cheer democratic mood. The results are starkly different for the other measure of democracy included here – changes in minoritarian democracy – which produce a negative, thermostatic effect on changes in mood. These thermostatic effects are significant in three of the four models presented here, falling short of significance at the 95% level in the Arellano-Bond model. Increased protections of minority and individual rights therefore dampen democratic mood, while

Table 2. Dynamic Models of the Effects of Electoral and Minoritarian Democracy on Change in Mood

	General Error-Correction Models		First-Difference Model	Arellano-Bond Model
	(2.1)	(2.2)	(2.3)	(2.4)
Intercept	−.045*	−.005		
	(.019)	(.023)		
Democratic mood$_{t-1}$	.472*	.467*		
	(.025)	(.026)		
Democratic mood$_{t-2}$	−.486*	−.482*		
	(.025)	(.025)		
Δ Democratic mood$_{t-1}$				1.227*
				(.056)
Δ Democratic mood$_{t-2}$				−.322*
				(.059)
Δ Electoral democracy	.015	.013	.014	.022
	(.029)	(.029)	(.032)	(.032)
Electoral democracy$_{t-1}$	.002	.001		
	(.005)	(.006)		
Δ Minoritarian democracy	−.052*	−.058*	−.075*	−.046
	(.021)	(.022)	(.024)	(.026)
Minoritarian democracy$_{t-1}$	.003	−.004		
	(.005)	(.005)		
GDP growth rate	.001	.000		
	(.000)	(.000)		
Log GDP per capita$_{t-1}$	.004*	−.000		
	(.002)	(.002)		
Δ Log GDP per capita			.011	−.074*
			(.049)	(.023)
Δ Corruption		−.018	−.004	.004
		(.021)	(.024)	(.027)
Corruption$_{t-1}$		−.012*		
		(.004)		
Adjusted R^2	.251	.253	.005	
Residual standard error	.098	.098	.113	
N countries	134	134	134	134
N observations	2290	2290	2423	2290

*$p < .05$. Arellano robust standard errors, clustered by country, in parentheses. Mood and democracy and support (electoral and minoritarian) are unit-normal standardized.

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Figure 6. Predicted Effects of Changes in Electoral and Minoritarian Democracy on Mood
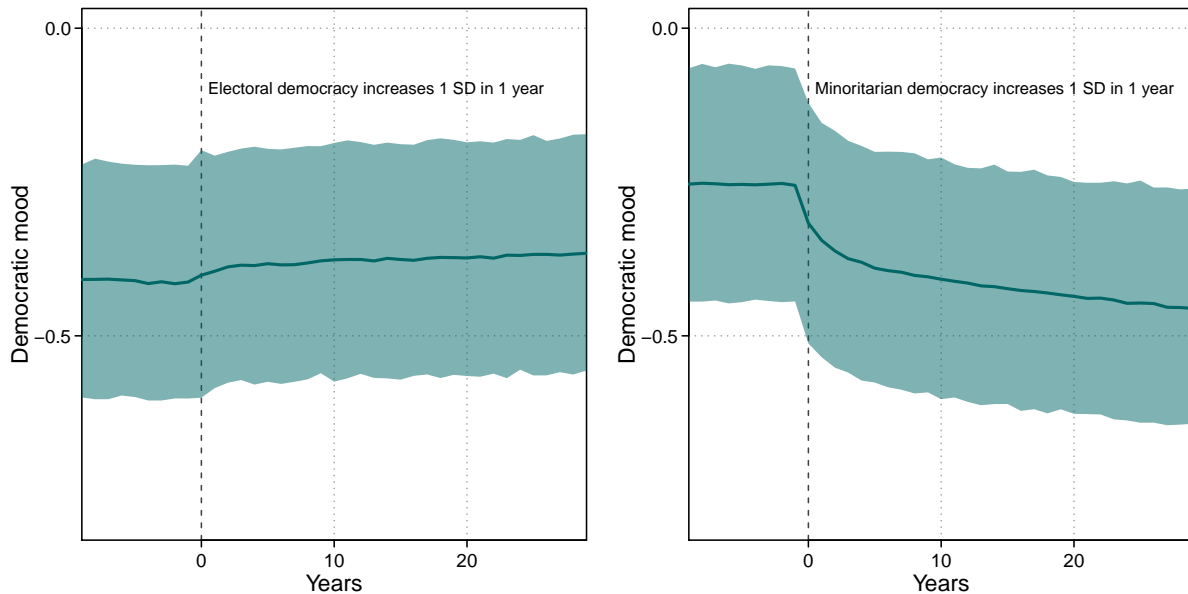
Predicted effects, estimated using coefficients from model 2.2. The solid lines indicate the mean predicted effect; the shaded regions indicate the 95% confidence intervals of these predicted effects.

diminished protections of these rights revitalize mood, leading to increased public demand for democracy.

The coefficients reported in Table 2 represent the short-run effects of change in, and levels of, minoritarian and electoral democracy. As in the previous section, we therefore include plots showing the predicted long run effects of these dynamics as they unfold over decades. These are plotted in Figure 6.

The first plot depicts the long run effects of a standard deviation increase in electoral democracy (holding minoritarian democracy constant). As one would expect from the results already presented, electoral democracy exerts little effect on democratic mood, even over the long run. In the second plot, we show the effects of a standard deviation increase in minoritarian democracy (holding electoral democracy constant). There is an immediate drop of 0.058 in mood, which continues to weaken over the long run.

In sum, this analysis has demonstrated that the thermostatic effect of changes in democracy can be traced back to the minoritarian, liberal components of democracy. It is not increases in

majoritarian and electoral rights that damage democratic mood, but, instead, increased protections of individual and minority rights that provoke the backlash.

6. Conclusion

Using new national-level measures of democracy and democratic mood for 134 countries, ranging back from 2017 to as early as 1988, this paper revisits the question of why the public support or oppose a democratic system. Existing theories suggest that the presence of democracy plus the passage of time produces higher levels of support as generation after generation learns about democracy and comes to value the freedoms and responsive government it provides. Yet such positive feedback between democracy and mood stands in contrast with emerging narratives of democracy's fading allure (Plattner 2015) and declining support (Foa and Mounk 2016; 2017). Indeed, as we show in our descriptive analysis of the dynamics of democratic mood in our sample of 134 countries, support can ebb as well as flow, even in long-established democracies.

Thus, in contrast to existing theories, which propose that democracy creates its own demand, we propose a thermostatic model of democratic mood. The evidence supports this thermostatic model: increases in democracy dampen public mood, while decreases cheer it. We then push further in an attempt to unpick the puzzle of why citizens would favor diminished democracy. We find that it is not increases in majoritarian and electoral rights that damage democratic mood, but, instead, increased protections of individual and minority rights that provoke the backlash.

These findings resonate with the literature on political tolerance, which has long shown that extending democratic rights and protections to minorities is the most difficult and unappetizing aspect of democracy for many citizens (Gibson 2008). This stands in contrast to majoritarian values such as "rule by the people," which are readily and widely endorsed by publics in autocratic and democratic societies alike (Gibson 1998). Our results also strike a chord with recent work by Svolik (2017), which argues that high levels of partisan polarization threaten support for democracy because partisans would rather elect an autocratic of their own ideological color than a democrat from the opposition.

Our findings also have implications for theory of democratic consolidation, echoing the work of Foa and Mounk (2016; 2017). One of the key pillars of a consolidated democracy is that "the overwhelming majority of the people" are committed to a democratic form of government (Linz and Stepan 1996, 5). Yet if democratic mood can weaken even in long-established democracies, then we cannot be certain that any democracy will retain majority support in future. And without a reasonable certainty that the majority will continue to support democracy in the future, we cannot be certain that any democracy is consolidated. Indeed, because democracy does not appear to create its own demand, an equilibrium of "consolidated democracy," where high levels of democracy both promote, and are sustained by, high levels of public support, may not exist.

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