



# Understanding Citizen Satisfaction with Democracy: Evidence from Latin America

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- What makes citizens feel satisfied or dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy?
- Public satisfaction with how democracy works has inspired a prolific literature in political science, yet the concept continues to be elusive.
- Confusion may come from the fact that democracy means different things to different people in different contexts and, therefore, it arouses different expectations. And satisfaction with democracy has a lot to do with how those expectations are (or are not) met.

- But confusion also comes from conceptual ambiguity: is it a form of regime support, a form of evaluation of regime performance, or a multidimension factor that covers both and more? (See Booth and Seligson 2010)
- It also comes from measurement problems: The WVS used to ask about satisfaction “with the developing of democracy”. LB asks about satisfaction “with the functioning of democracy”. On a paper about satisfaction with democracy, Norris (2011) uses as dep. var. “how democratic the country is”.

Public satisfaction with how democracy works should be a powerful indicator of a vibrant democracy, about how citizens feel about overall regime performance.

This may include but is not limited to perceptions of institutions, the rule of law, civil and political rights, the electoral process, equality, transparency, the economy, income distribution, and so on.

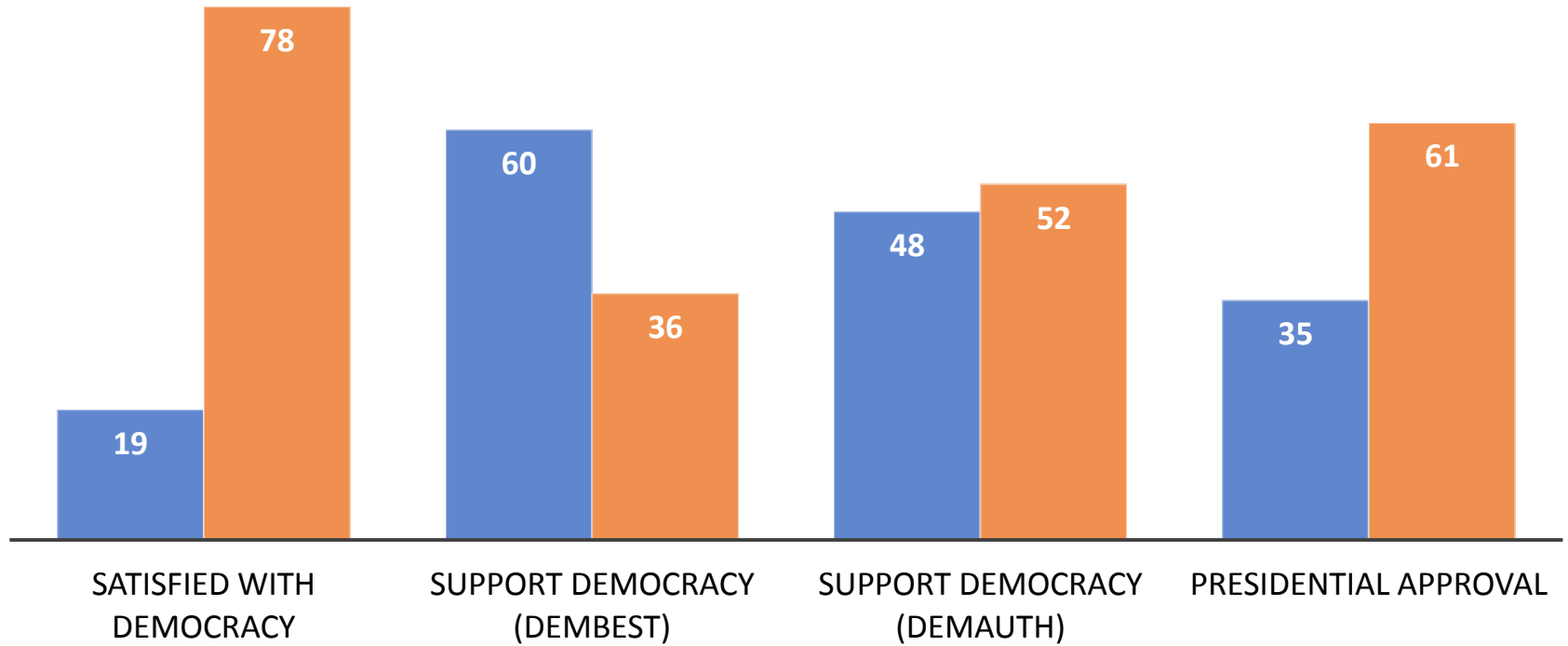
Some scholars make a distinction between political performance, policy performance, and socioeconomic performance.

It is not quite an indicator of regime support, nor is it simply an indicator of government popularity.

# A BRIEF EXAMPLE

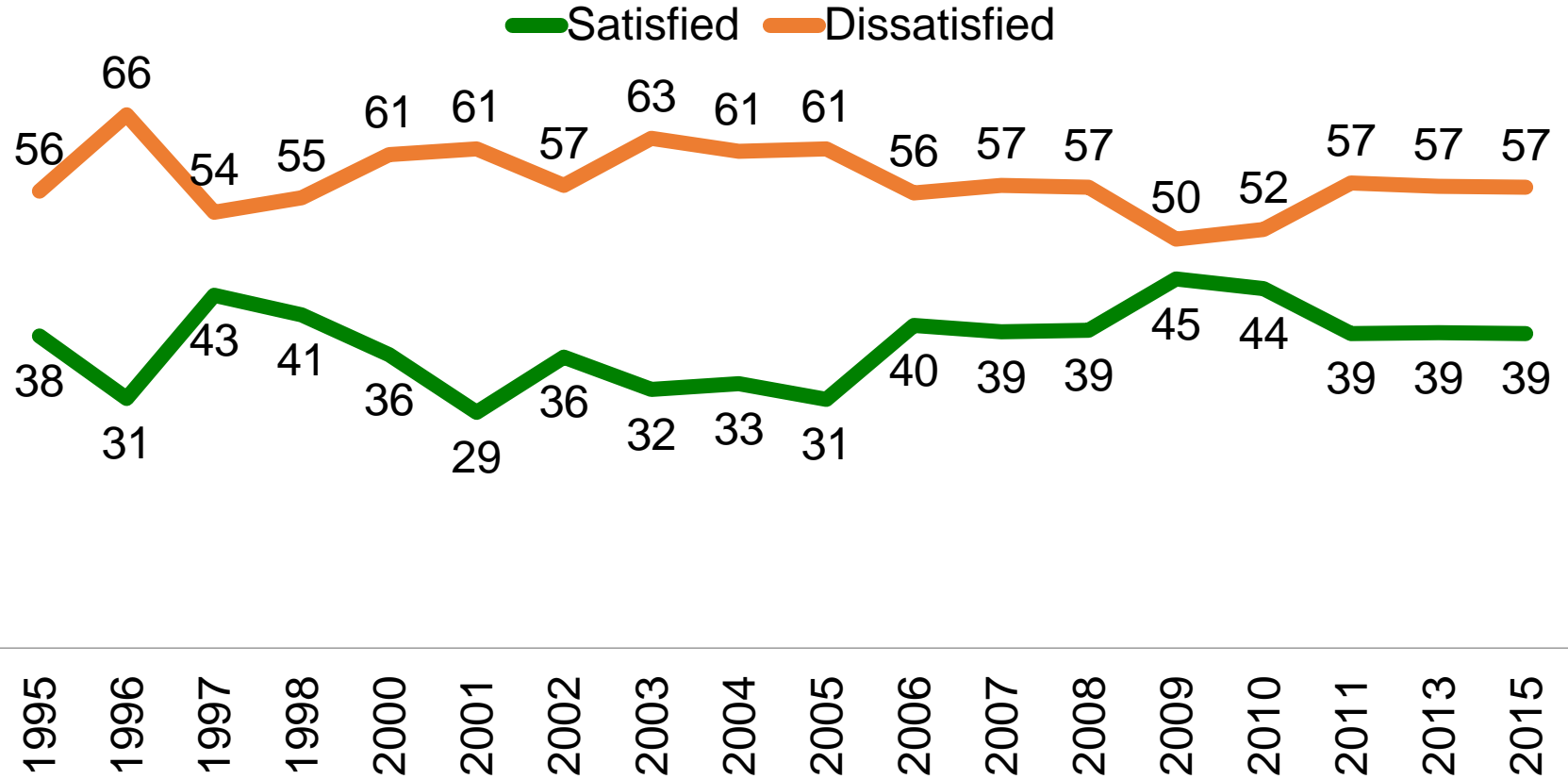
## Latinobarometro 2015: Mexico

■ Yes ■ No



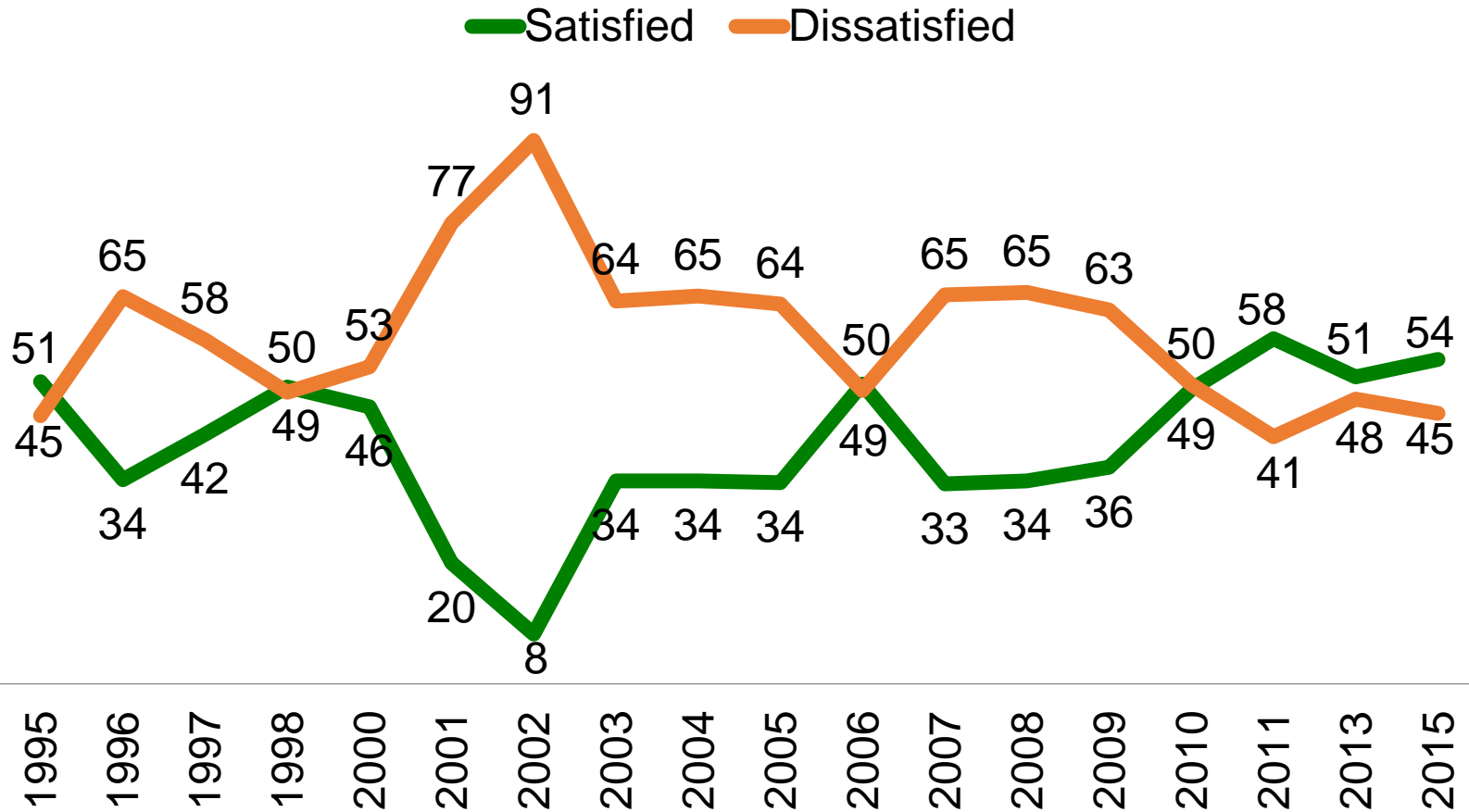
# Satisfaction with democracy in Latin America, 1995-2015.

A stable Pattern of Dissatisfaction?



# Satisfaction with democracy in Argentina, 1995-2015.

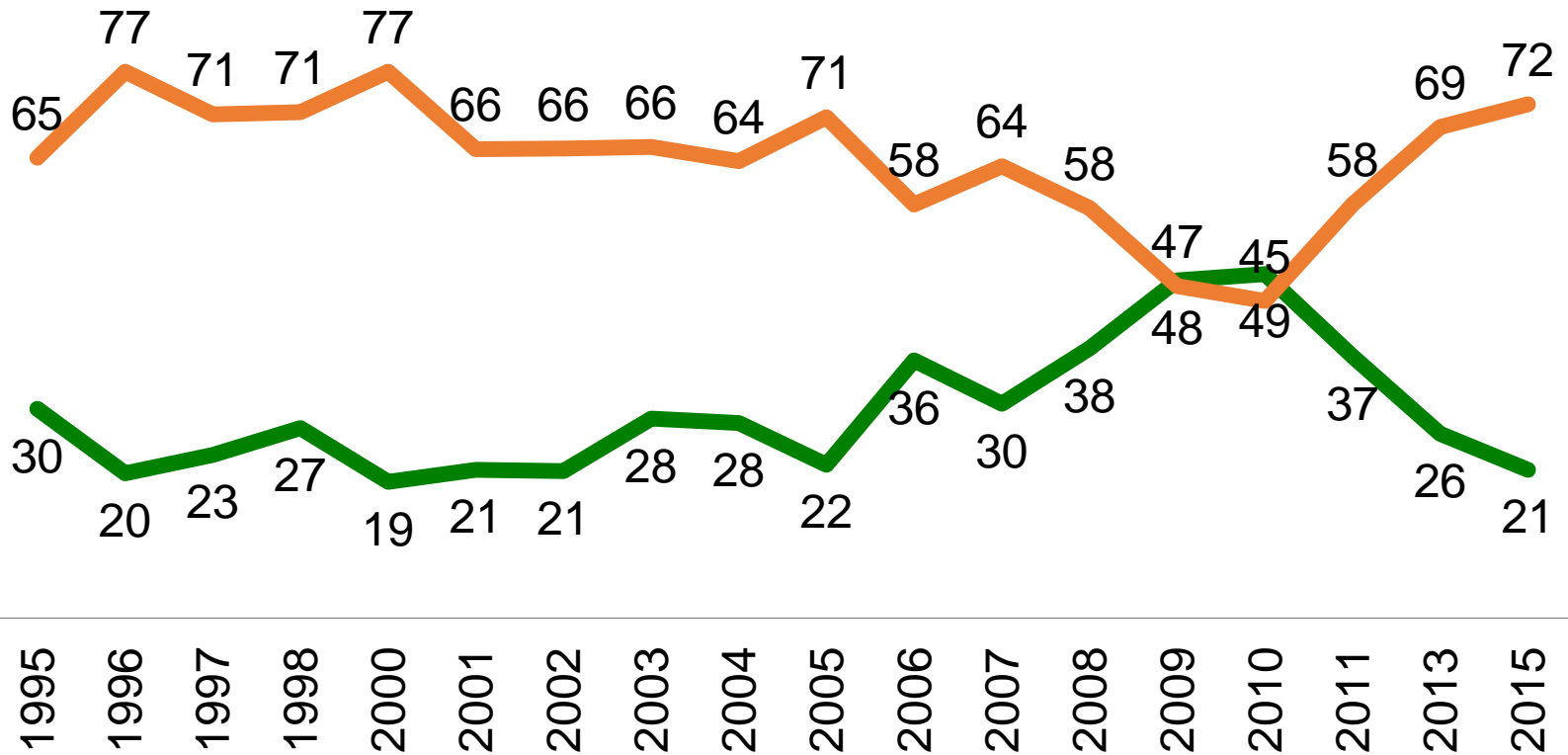
## Leadership Effects?



# Satisfaction with democracy in Brazil, 1995-2015.

## Lula Effect?

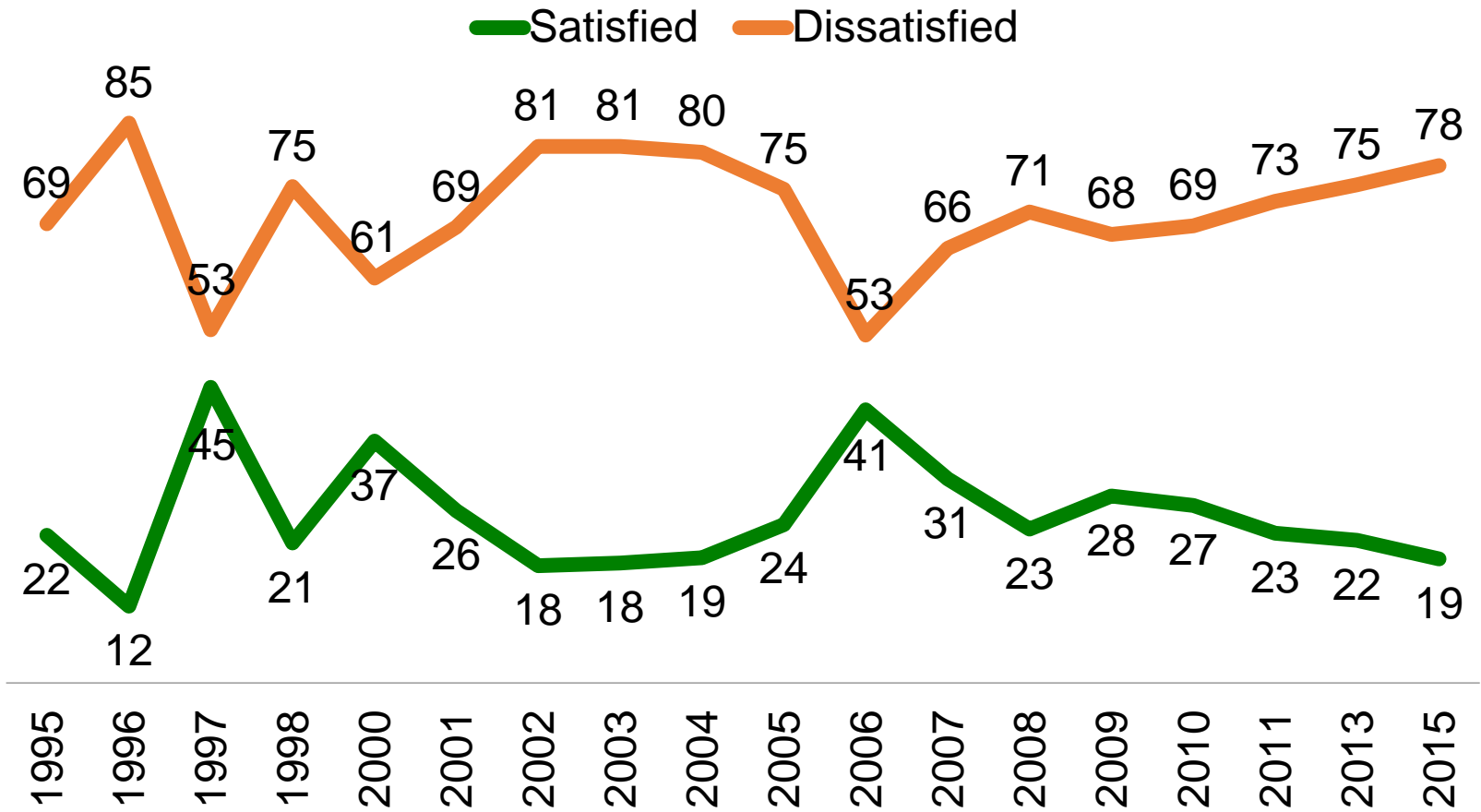
— Satisfied — Dissatisfied





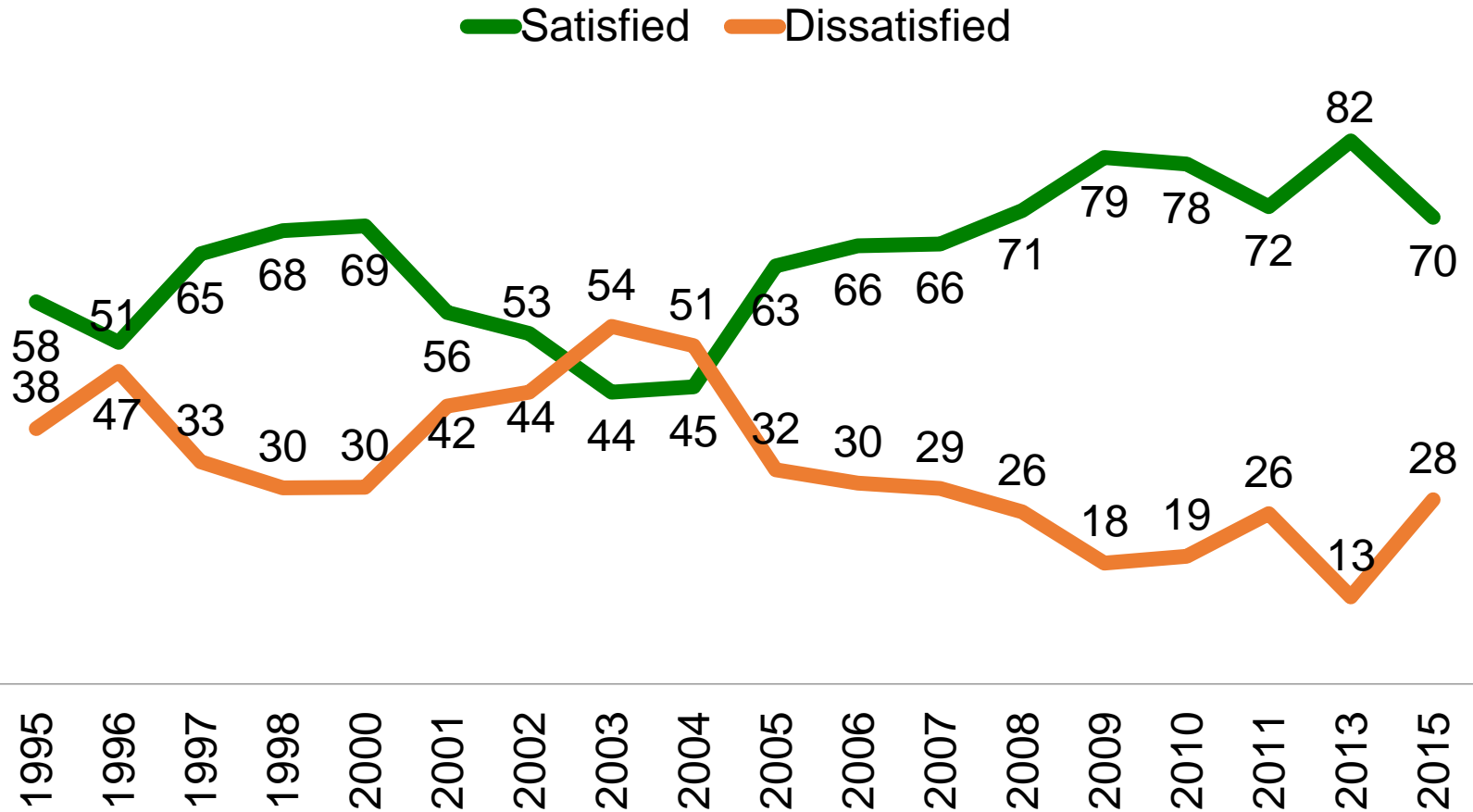
# Satisfaction with democracy in Mexico, 1995-2015.

## An Election Cycle?



# Satisfaction with democracy in Uruguay, 1995-2015.

An overall performance effect?



## Time Series on Satisfaction with Democracy

The data show that this indicator reflects not only economic conditions but also, and at times much more clearly, political events.

These macro trends help us understand the dynamics of aggregate satisfaction with democracy, but I am interested in how people understand it and how this affects their personal satisfaction or dissatisfaction. (Not yet convinced about what contextual effects should be tested in a multi-level model, suggestions welcome).

# An Individual-Level Model of Satisfaction with Democracy

Different explanatory factors into various conceptual categories:

Views about democracy (support for and assessment of democracy)

Economic performance (evaluation of the economy)

Policy performance (income distribution, public services)

Political performance (trust in govt., political rights, pres. approval, govt. transp.)

Electoral performance (electoral integrity, voted for incumbent in last election)

Demographics-Social status (education)

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b (se)

Wald

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## DEMOCRATIC BELIEFS

Support for democracy

0.58 \*\*\*  
(0.03) \*\*\*

363.7

How democratic is your country

0.15  
(0.01)

272.8

## ECONOMIC PERFORMANCE

Satisfaction with the economy

1.05 \*\*\*  
(0.03)

1222.0

Country's economic situation

0.17 \*\*\*

36.4

## POLICY PERFORMANCE

Income distribution in your country

(0.03)  
0.24 \*\*\*  
(0.03)

64.2

Satisfaction with public services

0.06 \*\*\*  
(0.01)

59.8

## (CONT.)

### POLITICAL PERFORMANCE

|                                       | b (se)             | Wald |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------|------|
| Trust in government                   | 0.31 ***<br>(0.05) | 43.1 |
| Political rights are guaranteed       | 0.09 ***<br>(0.01) | 41.3 |
| Presidential approval                 | 0.22 ***<br>(0.05) | 22.1 |
| Perception of government transparency | 0.09 ***<br>(0.03) | 10.8 |

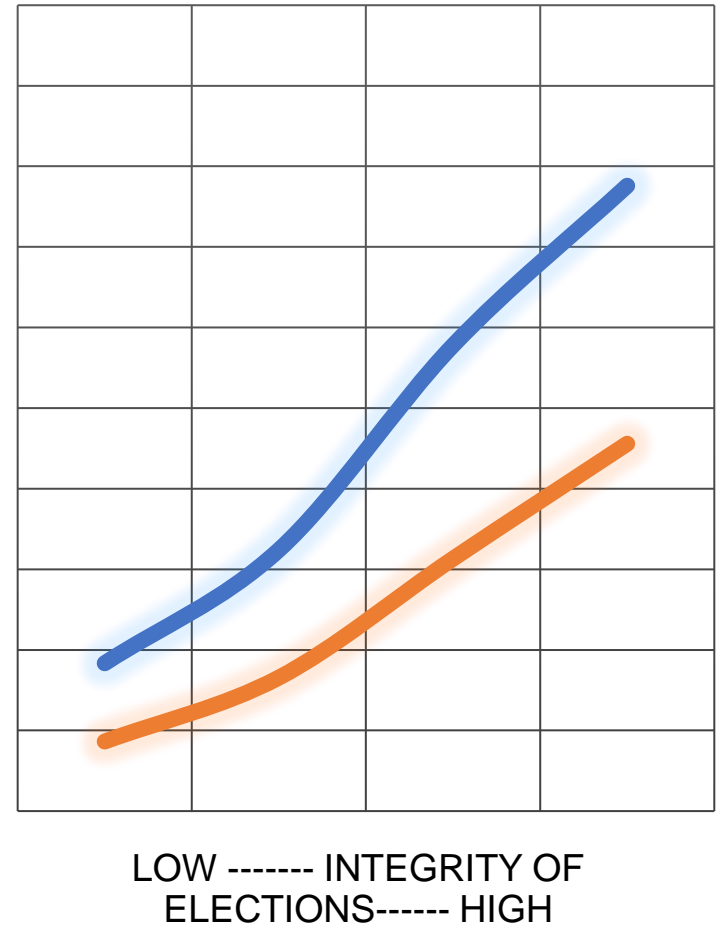
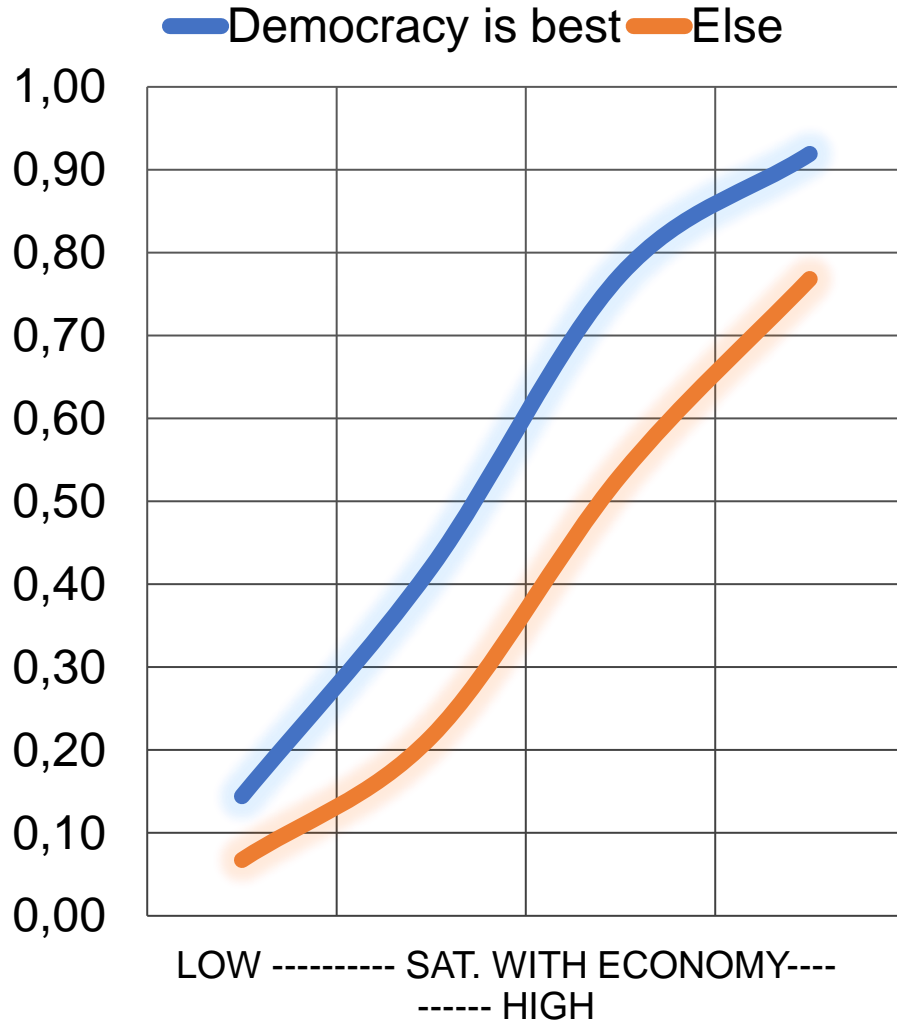
### ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE

|                                      |                    |      |
|--------------------------------------|--------------------|------|
| Perception of electoral integrity    | 0.36 ***<br>(0.04) | 66.7 |
| Voted for incumbent in last election | 0.19 ***<br>(0.05) | 14.2 |

### DEMOGRAPHICS

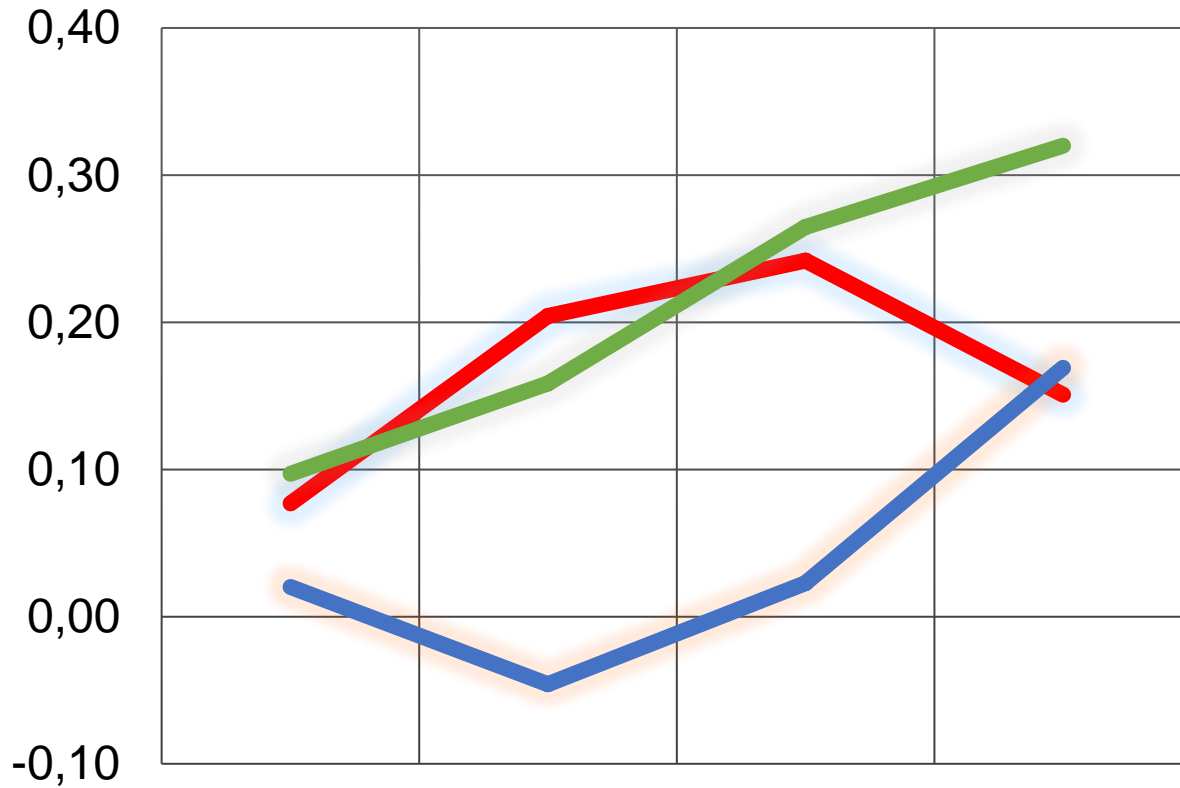
|                 |                         |      |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------|
| Education level | -0.06 ***<br>(0.01) *** | 27.2 |
|-----------------|-------------------------|------|

# Satisfaction with democracy (Probabilities)



# SATISFACTION GAP BY PERFORMANCE

**ECONOMIC**   **POLITICAL**   **ELECTORAL**



WORSE ----- PERFORMANCE ----- BETTER



# Model Comparison

|                              | SATDEM | DEMBEST | PRESAPPROVAL |
|------------------------------|--------|---------|--------------|
| How democratic country is    | 0.17   | 0.11    | 0.08         |
| Satisfaction with economy    | 1.06   | 0.29    | 0.22         |
| Country's economic situation | 0.17   | 0.01    | 0.23         |
| Income distribution          | 0.21   | -0.10   | 0.12         |
| Satisfaction with services   | 0.05   | 0.00    | 0.06         |
| Trust in government          | 0.39   | 0.38    | 0.68         |
| Political rights             | 0.11   | 0.07    | 0.11         |
| Government transparency      | 0.11   | 0.02    | 0.51         |
| Electoral integrity          | 0.33   | 0.27    | 0.39         |
| Voted for incumbent          | 0.25   | 0.06    | 1.35         |
| Education                    | -0.04  | 0.07    | -0.05        |

ALL COLORS SIGNIFICANT AT P<.001, WHITE NON SIGNIFICANT. DARKER HIGHER IMPACT.

# CONCLUSIONS

- Satisfaction with democracy is a composite measure of political performance, policy performance, electoral performance and, of course, economic performance.
- It is distinct from regime support and also from government popularity. (Its main individual-level predictors are different from those of presidential approval, for example).
- Although economic performance has a stronger impact, the gap in regime support created by political and electoral performance is higher, which means that democrats express higher levels of satisfaction when political performance is good.
- Rather than put it aside, satisfaction with democracy should be a common measure in political surveys about how citizens evaluate the functioning of the political system.

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