



# Making Democratic Attitudes Work: The Effect of Institutions on Europeans' Aspirations and Evaluations of Democracy

Irene Palacios

Thesis submitted for assessment with a view to  
obtaining the degree of Doctor of Political and Social Sciences  
of the European University Institute

Florence, 19 May 2018



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**Department of Political and Social Sciences**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This thesis analyses how the institutional context of democracies shapes the way citizens evaluate, and what they do ideally expect, from their democratic systems. Although there is a long tradition in political science studying the institutional causes of democratic attitudes, the literature has been commonly focused on the effects of a small group of institutions on a set of attitudes that tap very ambiguously what the citizens actually feel about their system. From the side of institutions, these have been mainly identified with institutions of political representation—notably, electoral and party systems—while other formal arrangements equally relevant for the citizens, such as the rule of law or the welfare state, have remained fairly overlooked. As for popular attitudes toward democracy, the traditional indicators have sought to tap into individuals' overall assessments of the system but have not allowed scholars to distinguish between the diverse elements with which citizens may be differently satisfied, or to identify their ideal aspirations about the system.

By drawing on an innovative dataset that measures individuals' democratic aspirations and evaluations in a nuanced way, as well as on a large range of macro-level data on the performance of democracy, the thesis provides a comprehensive framework to understand how political institutions affect citizens' aspirations and evaluations of democracy in European countries. The thesis starts by discussing the extent to which the new empirical concepts of aspirations and evaluations are indeed sound and meaningful and can serve to elaborate a fine-grained theory on public attitudinal beliefs about the democratic system. Next, I sketch out the theoretical framework of the thesis, which develops around the multifaceted connections between institutions and democratic aspirations and evaluations within specific dimensions of democracy. The results of the three empirical studies provide positive support for the two main hypothesized effects of the framework: (i) Aspirations work as a cognitive yardstick for how citizens evaluate institutional performance; and (ii) Institutions activate the effect of aspirations on performance evaluations by connecting what citizens expect from their democratic system to what they actually gain. This approach covers thus a gap in the literature on public opinion by acknowledging the socio-psychological process underlying the formation of public attitudes toward democracy. In the conclusions, the thesis discusses how these

findings qualify much of what we know about the causes and implications of different degrees of public attachment to democracy, and draws insights into the institutional designs that really contribute to build people's positive attitudes toward democracy.





## **ACKNOWLEDGMENTS**

This thesis is the end of a journey that started more than four years ago. The journey has not been an easy one, but I have been fortunate enough to have many people by my side that have helped me in the process along the way.

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I would also like to thank my committee members Prof. Alexander Trechsel, Prof. Stephan Dalberg and Prof. Laura Morales as all of them have been important pieces of this dissertation. Alex was assigned as my first supervisor in the first year of the program at the EUI. His help was critical over that first year. He assisted me in drafting a successful prospectus, and inspired me with many useful and insightful comments that later on took shape within the dissertation. His positive outlook and support for my research gave me the necessary confidence to find my place in such a challenging institution as the EUI. Over the drafting process, I have read many papers and got inspiration from many scholars, but Prof. Dalberg's articles have been probably the ones I have read more enthusiastically. It is an honour for me to have Prof. Dalberg in my committee, and I really appreciate the fact that he agreed to serve in it even not knowing me and my work. I also would like to express a particular thanks to Laura Morales. I can safely say that Laura is the beginning of everything. I met Laura many years ago, and since then she has opened many doors to me, has offered me excellent opportunities to collaborate with her in numerous projects, and has been a mentor in my academic career. Laura suggested me to apply to the EUI program, and I am quite convinced that her support was crucial for my application to be successful. As could not have been otherwise, her very detailed and insightful comments have greatly helped to give coherence and improve my dissertation.

When I first thought of writing a dissertation on the citizens' aspirations and evaluations of democracy, I found that some brilliant scholars had already done excellent contributions to the field. Although finding a research gap to fulfil within such outstanding contributions has not been an easy task, their works have been a constant source of inspiration and stimulus for this thesis. I cannot but say that I am indebted to Enrique

Hernández, Mónica Ferrín, Hanspeter Kriesi, and all the collaborators of the ESS's rotative module on *How Europeans View and Evaluate Democracy* for their tremendous insight.

This thesis has benefited from the comments and suggestions of many other people. Among all, my deepest gratitude necessarily goes to Macarena and Enrique. Over these four years Macarena and Enrique have always been willing to answer my questions on methods at any time, to help me shape ideas, and have supported me when I did not know where my thesis was going to. Not only have they been a great help for my thesis research, but also they are the best persons and friends I could ever meet. I am deeply indebted to both. I also want to thank Adrián del Río and Oscar Smallenbroek for their support with CFA in Chapter 2, and Marta Fraile for her insightful comments on an early draft of Chapter 4. While presenting Chapter 3 at the 2016 Regional WAPOR Conference in Barcelona, Peter Esaiasson raised a point on winners and losers that inspired me for Chapter 5.

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Last, but not least, I would like to thank my family, and specially my mom, Aurora, and my partner, Carlos, for their constant support and encouragement in the distance. This thesis belongs to them as much as to me, as it would have been literally impossible to be accomplished without their hearted love. This work is dedicated to two persons who, unfortunately, could not see the end of my journey: my father, Ángel, and my grandmother, Paquita. Words are short to express how much they influenced on me, and how much I miss them.

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Florence, May 2018



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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The second decade of the twenty-first century is witnessing a renewed tide of public discontent with democracy around much of Europe. This can be seen in different attitudinal and behavioural indicators of democratic malaise sweeping European countries, such as a deep mistrust of political institutions and rising democratic dissatisfaction (Polavieja 2013; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014), a wide disapproval of political leaders (Bermeo and Bartels 2014), the rise in the support for populist and radical parties (Kriesi and Pappas 2016), and a wave of intense mass protests and social unrest (Bermeo and Bartels 2014).

Despite anxieties about a crisis of legitimacy affecting the democratic institutions since the onset of the Great Recession, this 'new' trend of democratic discontent is however far from homogeneous across the continent. For example, in Greece and Ireland, two countries similarly hit by the financial crisis, citizens reacted to the economic deprivation in dissimilar ways, the former engaging in massive, and often violent, social unrest, whereas the latter 'remained largely acquiescent and displayed a high degree of civil compliance' (Pappas and O'Malley 2014, 1-2). Feelings of political trust and satisfaction with democracy also recorded quite different levels across Europe. Thus, while countries such as Greece, Spain, Slovenia and Czech Republic experienced dramatic declines in both trust and democratic satisfaction over this period, other countries such as Hungary, Sweden, Poland and Norway even showed significant increases (Bermeo and Bartels 2014, 15; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; 432). And as Kriesi (2014) shows regarding electoral behaviour, new populist right parties gained public support in post-crisis elections only in consensus democracies, but not generally across Western Europe. How, then, can we explain the different degrees of attachment to democracy with which Europeans reacted to the convulsed times prompted by the Great Recession?

It has been commonplace in the recent post-crisis literature to attribute this variance *almost exclusively* to the scope of the economic situation. The global financial crisis that began in 2008 swept the European continent from north to south and east to west, but the impact was certainly different among countries. Thus, the depth and duration of each country's economic downturn and, most importantly, the way it was handled politically—through the adoption of more or less tough

austerity policies, a greater or lesser dismantling of the welfare state, and/or the imposition of bailout programmes from supranational organizations—have been regarded as the strongest predictors of the Europeans' differential responses to the crisis. Accordingly, the literature has widely agreed on showing that levels of political distrust and democratic dissatisfaction increased notably in bailout countries (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Polavieja 2013), mass protests spread in those countries that implemented tougher austerity policies (Della Porta 2015), and citizens disapproved widely their political leaders in those countries whose economies were hit harder (Bermeo and Bartels 2014). The combustible potential of the Great Recession fuelled citizens' attitudinal and behavioural reactions in expected directions.

Despite this widespread belief that the economy strongly influenced people's political reactions during the economic-fiscal crisis, some classical works and empirical findings of recent years invite us to question the *inevitable* character of such a relationship, especially in what refers to attitudes toward democracy. For instance, in a seminal study on support for democratization in post-communist countries, Evans and Whitefield (1995) found that there was only a weak link between economic experience and individual support for democracy when other relevant factors such as the perceived responsiveness of the electoral system and support for marketisation were controlled. More recently, studies focusing on the role of the quality of government and governance have similarly revealed that factors related to the procedural fairness of democracies (mainly in the form of transparent and impartial institutions) significantly moderate the relationship between the economy and citizens support for democracy, thus implying that economic crises have a much lower impact in highly-performing democracies (Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Burlacu 2014). Still in a similar vein, Magalhães (2016) proves that although economic evaluations matter for public satisfaction with democracy, how they matter depends largely on the procedural fairness of the system.

All these findings suggest that the way citizens come to think about democracy is to a large extent contingent on the political context in which they make judgments. When the institutional context is properly accounted for, economic



influences tend to lessen or even disappear, which indicates that attitudes of support for democracy respond more directly to how citizens experience democracy itself rather than to other external factors (Evans and Whitefield 1995, 487). All in all, democratic institutions are *what* make democratic attitudes work.

However, in this thesis I contend that the effects of institutional arrangements on popular attitudes toward democracy have not been systematically investigated so far, due to an overly limited understanding of both institutions and attitudes in the literature. On the one hand, political institutions have been mainly identified with institutions of political representation—notably, electoral and party systems, parliaments, and governments' composition—and, more recently, with output institutions such as the bureaucracy and judicial systems (Rohrschneider 2005; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014). This thesis puts these and other less explored formal devices together to elaborate a multidimensional understanding of the institutional mechanisms that contribute to building democratic support. In particular, the results of this research will show that democratic attitudes are a function of a broader 'basket' of political institutions including the rule of law, the welfare state, the electoral institutions, or the mass media, to name but a few examples, that interact with citizens' democratic beliefs in multifaceted ways.

On the other hand, the traditional items used in the literature on 'satisfaction with democracy', 'political trust', and 'democracy as the best form of government' have been proved to face diverse validity and reliability problems (Canache et al. 2001; Linde and Ekman 2003), and tell us very little about how the citizens actually see and experience their democratic regimes. For example, if an individual states she is not satisfied with democracy, we are unable to ascertain whether her dissatisfaction stems from poor functioning of the rule of law, the perception that minorities' rights are not sufficiently protected, the short supply of parties to vote for in elections, and so on. By relying on novel survey data, this study will analyse citizens' perceptions on a broad variety of democracy dimensions, distinguishing between how those dimensions work in reality (evaluations) and how important citizens think the dimensions are for democracy in the abstract (aspirations).

## **THE RESEARCH QUESTION AND ITS RATIONALE**

This dissertation aims to answer the following questions. What is the influence of political institutions on citizens' attitudes toward democracy? Specifically, what is the connection between the institutional context in which citizens live—i.e. what they actually enjoy in their democratic system—, their evaluations about how that system works, and their aspirations about their ideal democratic system?

The relationship between individuals' democratic attitudes and the macro-political context in which they live has certainly attracted scholars' attention for some time. As Anderson (2007) nicely puts it, over the past two decades the discipline has witnessed a multilevel 'revolution' that has been prompted by the confluence of two important factors. On the one hand, the expansion of electoral democracies around the world in the 1980s and 1990s came paired with the proliferation of new and more reliable survey projects at both the national and cross-national levels that turned the scholarly attention to the population's attitudes and actions in the recently democratized countries under the stimulus of a new institutional environment. On the other hand, the traditional behavioural paradigm focused on the importance of the sociological and psychological factors as determinants of individual behaviour started to be partially replaced by explanations based on the context and the interaction of the citizens with the context. In parallel to this, political science experienced a renewed interest for political institutions as part of what has been called the 'new-institutionalism', which placed institutional design at the core of the explanations of the differences between countries in major political, economic and social outcomes.

As a result of these paradigm shifts, the macro-political structure and, more particularly, the institutional setting of the country gained particular relevance in empirical explanations of people's interpretations, opinions and actions in democratic environments. Probably one of the most explored institutional mechanisms in the literature has been the influence of a country's representative structure on individual attitudes toward the democratic system and the government. Since Lijphart's (1999) pioneering contribution on the merits of consensual democratic systems, a large number of studies have shown that proportional electoral systems tend to produce more positive attitudes toward

democracy and a higher sense of representation among the electorate than majoritarian systems (e.g. Anderson and Guillory 1997; Birch 2008; Anderson 2010; Bernauer and Vatter 2011; Christmann and Torcal 2017). The rationale for this is that citizens are primarily connected to their democratic system through the representative chain, as it links the preferences of the citizens to the behaviour of the policymakers and hence it allows voters to discern how their interests are being accounted for by the system. Although less extensively, some studies have also investigated the impact of other institutional devices such as the extension of the social protection (Lühiste 2014), the performance of the judiciary and the bureaucratic system (Rohrschneider 2005; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014), or the quality of the integrity institutions (Wagner, Schneider, and Halla 2009; Anderson and Tverdova 2003), to name but some examples.

Even if the role of institutions in explaining individuals' political attitudes is widely acknowledged in the discipline, the set of institutional arrangements on which scholars has tended to focus is, as seen, quite limited. More paradoxically, most studies usually consider institutions exclusively connected to one dimension of democracy, while ignoring the potential trade-offs that may exist between different institutional areas or the multitude ways in which they are connected to each other. This, however, entails a partial definition of democracy and of the institutional complexity that characterizes it. In other words, democracy cannot be identified with one single normative dimension (in most cases, the representative one) but with a larger range of dimensions serving different normative goals. This is indeed the primary normative concern that drives this thesis: to understand democracy as a multidimensional concept.

Acknowledging that democracy is multidimensional in nature necessarily entails adopting the parallel assumption that citizens are able to make clear distinctions of the diverse dimensions that compose the democratic system. That is, citizens are not only able to display a rough evaluation of the system, but also to discriminate, say, how representative their system electoral is, the quality performance of their rule of law, or the inclusiveness of the welfare state they enjoy, to name but a few examples. Up to now, there have been few studies explicitly addressing the citizens' perceptions on a variety of elements of democracy, and the

literature has almost unanimously focused on one-dimensional indicators such as the traditional items on satisfaction with democracy and confidence in institutions. The emergence of the sixth round of the European Social Survey (ESS-6) in 2012 marked a turning point to the study of individual perceptions about democracy, as it opens the floor for a promising research agenda on Europeans' understandings and evaluations of democracy. Despite some recent innovative studies that already came out in this area of research (see Hernández 2016b; Kriesi and Ferrín 2016), we are still lacking a throughout analysis of the connection between democracy's multidimensional nature and people's multifaceted preferences and opinions on their democratic system.

Building on these insights, the aim of this thesis is to elaborate a comprehensive framework to understand how political institutions affect citizens' attitudes toward democracy in European countries. The framework adopts a novel approach that assumes that the aspirations one has about what a good democracy is are cognitively processed by the individuals to form their evaluations of performance, and that this cognitive process is in turn moderated by the institutional arrangements in the country. The framework will be illustrated through four empirical studies that address different dimensions of democracy through number of perspectives, yielding always positive evidence that institutions are more important than the economy in building people's support for democracy. But what are the theoretical foundations of such an expectation? What are the macro-micro mechanisms that underpin it?

## **INDIVIDUALS' DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS, EVALUATIONS AND POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS: THE MACRO-MICRO MECHANISMS**

Underlying institutional explanations of the origins of democratic attitudes is the assumption that the institutional context of democracies has a 'trickle-down effect' (Kaase 2015) on the democratic orientations of the mass public, as institutions define the incentives and constraints that shape individuals' political experiences and, consequently, their attitudes about the workings of the political system and their behaviours (Steinmo, et al. 1992; Hall and Taylor 1996; Anderson and Guillory

1997). Whether countries adopt, say, a majoritarian or proportional electoral system, or a universal or means-tested welfare state, makes a critical impact on the different opportunities citizens find to develop their life chances in a safe environment and to see their interests fairly administered within the system. If, as Weaver and Rockman (1993, 1) claimed long ago, how effective a democratic system is at responding to social and economic problems depends to a large extent on its choice of political institutions, it is reasonable to expect that citizens will react differently to those institutional choices.

Furthermore, it is well established that individuals not only react positively to certain formal designs, but also to how well those designs work and the kind of outputs they are able to deliver. Thus, a good deal of accumulated evidence has shown that individuals display higher levels of attachment to those formal arrangements that generate feelings of fairness and impartiality among users (Linde 2012; Uslaner 2003; Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Magalhães 2016), positive perceptions that one's interests are being seriously accounted by the system (Rohrschneider 2005) and, in more general terms, an optimistic view of the political and economic outcomes delivered (Wagner, Schneider, and Halla 2009; Sanders et al. 2014). In a model on the relationship between state institutions and democratic attitudes, this translates in a causal flow from institutions to evaluations: well-(poorly-) performing institutions prompt positive (negative) evaluations of democratic performance.

This is the mechanism on which the literature has most typically focused and which accounts for cross-national differences in levels of support for democracy. However, focusing solely on cross-national differences has left underexplored the large variation that exists *within* countries among similarly situated citizens (Anderson and Just 2013, 337). While the literature has been limited to show that certain socioeconomic characteristics—such as age, ideology, education—exert a relevant impact on political support, little attention has been paid to individuals' heterogeneity in terms of cognitive and normative predispositions (but Hakhverdian and Mayne 2012; and Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017 consider education to play such a cognitive function).

In the analytical framework proposed in this thesis, aspirations about what a good democracy is operate as a relevant characteristic of individuals that strongly determines evaluative judgements of democracy and, consequently, help to explain why institutional performance is not equally important for all sorts of individuals within a country. An early formulation of this idea was exposed by Mishler and Rose (2001, 36) who stated that ‘evaluations of performance reflect not only the aggregate performance of government but also individual circumstances and values.’ Aspirations work as a cognitive yardstick for how citizens evaluate institutional performance. Stated differently, citizens evaluate performance on the basis of how well it matches their aspirations about how democracy should work ideally. Aspirations evolve around normative values and principles that are likely to be formed at some point in the adult life course, under the influence of culture and/or education. Accordingly to these assumptions, our theoretical framework presumes a causal arrow running from aspirations to evaluations.

The inherent impact of aspirations on evaluations can take, however, two (apparently contradictory) tracks, depending on the dimension of democracy we refer to. On the one hand, aspirations act as a driver of criticalness in the evaluation of those elements that go beyond the minimal core of democracy. These deepening elements, following Kriesi and Ferrín (2016), are the social dimension and the direct democracy dimension. That is, strong aspirations regarding the social or direct democracy elements lead to **negative** evaluations of performance. This can be explained by the fact that those individuals who understand democracy primarily in terms of social outcomes or direct democracy are likely to be more demanding democrats, as they do not see democracy exclusively as a set of formal procedures, and consequently their assessments of reality tend to be tougher. Furthermore, the extension of social protection and the existence of direct democracy institutions are domains that tend to be highly contingent on the government of the moment’s behaviour, so that citizens who support these two democratic visions have random chances to see their normative aspirations fulfilled. The particular instance of the (negative) relationship between social aspirations and evaluations will be addressed in *Chapter 4* of the thesis.

On the other hand, aspirations play an acceptance-inducing function in the evaluation of the core, minimalist dimensions of democracy—i.e. the electoral and the liberal visions. This mechanism implies that strong aspirations regarding the electoral or liberal elements of democracy result in **positive** evaluations of performance. The reason for this is that holding high aspirations around the electoral and/or the liberal elements of democracy leads individuals to develop a normative attachment to the system on the basis of its procedural capacity to generate good results. That is, when an individual gives the highest value to those aspects of democracy that underpin it as a fair procedural system (by guaranteeing a fair allocation of the political resources and an equal treatment of all individuals within the political process), she is more likely to believe that democracy is a good system able to produce positive outcomes, increasing thus the chances to evaluate favourably the functioning of those dimensions. Thus, other things being equal, displaying a high support for a liberal element of democracy like, for instance, the ‘rule of law’, will generally make individuals to be more positive of its performance,<sup>1</sup> as this democratic element by nature helps to increase ‘both the perceived positivity of future outcomes and their predictability (Thibaut and Walker 1975), (and) lead(s) individuals to discount current unfavourable outcomes’ (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996, 199, cited in Magalhães 2016, 524). *Chapter 5* will explore in detail this particular track between the electoral and liberal aspirations and evaluations.

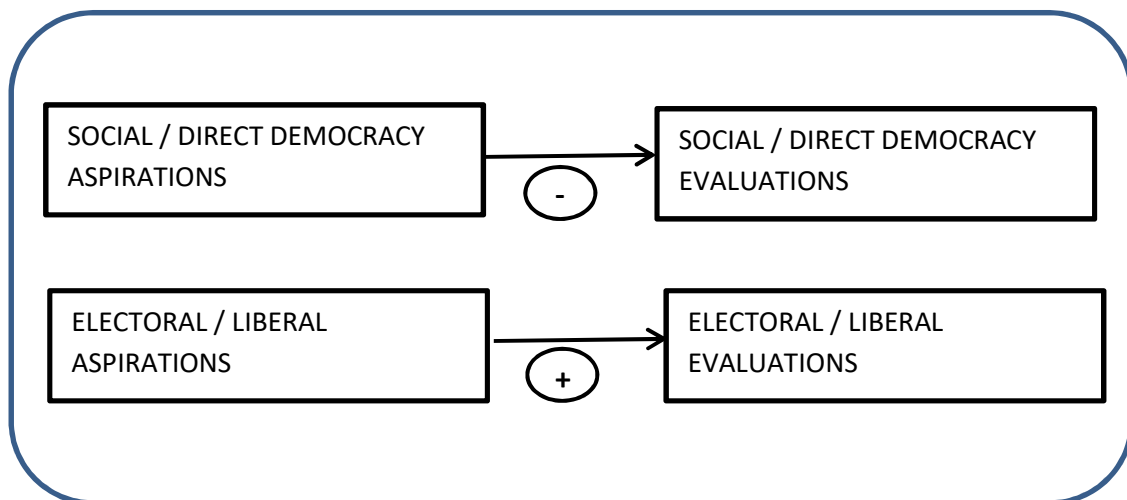
Irrespective of these hypothesized effects, one could also expect the relationship between aspirations and evaluations to be the reverse, i.e. individuals may adapt their normative aspirations about democracy to their evaluations of performance. For instance, if an individual considers that democracy never provides expected outcomes, she might end up favouring other types of regimes different from democracy. Alternatively, positive evaluations might also spill over into rising aspirations, as citizens may want to demand more of those aspects of their democratic system that work up to high quality standards.

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<sup>1</sup> The positive relation between the electoral/ liberal aspirations and evaluations is usually independent of the quality of the institutional context. I.e. even when performance is poor, those individuals with higher aspirations tend to display more positive evaluations of performance than those with lower aspirations due to the acceptance-inducing function of aspirations explained above.

Despite the plausibility of this bi-directional flow, recent evidence has shown that such a relationship operates somewhat inconsistently. Adopting an instrumental variable approach, Kriesi and Saris (2016) demonstrate that the influence of evaluations on aspirations is considerably weaker than the effect of conceptions on evaluations, and that even ‘in high-quality democracies, there is virtually no effect of evaluations on conceptions (of democracy)’ (Kriesi and Saris 2016, 201). In light of this evidence, and acknowledging the limitation of cross-sectional data to fully disentangle the direction of causal relationships, in this thesis I assume the causal arrow to run from aspirations to evaluations rather than reciprocally, or the reverse.<sup>2</sup> Notwithstanding this, it is important to bear in mind that there could be a certain degree of influence of evaluations on aspirations that is not accounted for in this thesis. Figure 1.1 represents graphically the causal relationship between aspirations and evaluations.

**Figure 1.1: The relationship between democratic aspirations and evaluations**



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<sup>2</sup> For a similar view on aspirations as directly influencing evaluations, see Torcal and Trechsel (2016). These authors also find weaker support for the argument on the causal influence of evaluations on normative expectations (Torcal and Trechsel 2016, 218).



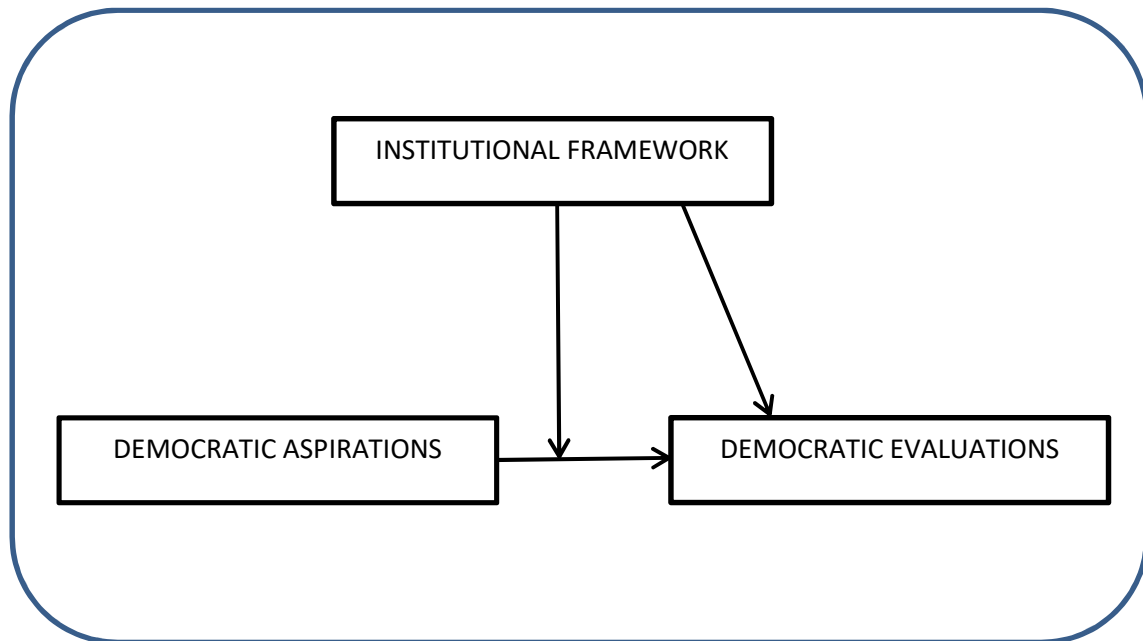
In line with these prospects, one other likely impact of democratic aspirations that is explored in the thesis is their capacity to increase or reduce the effect of institutions for the evaluative calculus. In particular, we can expect the effect of institutions on evaluations to be more pronounced among those individuals with high aspirations about the respective democratic dimension. In other words, if well-performing institutions are likely to have a positive impact on evaluations, the aspirations argument implies that institutions will have a stronger effect on those who prioritise in their normative frame of reference those democratic principles in which the specific institutions are embedded.

This mechanism should apply independently of the democratic dimensions we refer to. Well-performing social and direct democratic institutions are expected to reduce the negative evaluations of those who hold high social or direct democratic aspirations. Similarly, well-performing electoral and liberal institutions make that those who embrace electoral or liberal aspirations provide even more positive evaluations of performance. This mechanism is hypothesized in *Chapter 5* to respond to an accuracy-inducing function of the electoral and liberal aspirations over the evaluations of those same elements, in the sense that holding strong aspirations helps citizens to evaluate the performance of their democratic system in a more accurate way. Hence, individuals with high aspirations are more affected by the good/bad quality of the institutional setting than those with low aspirations.<sup>3</sup> In my theoretical framework, this implies an arrow moderating the relationship between aspirations and evaluations, with origin in institutions. Figure 1.2 provides a graphical representation of the framework.

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<sup>3</sup> Kriesi and Saris (2016) envisage a similar intermediate effect of aspirations in the relationship between evaluations and institutions which they call a “sensitivity mechanism”. In their own words: “People are motivated to hold correct attitudes, and the stronger this motivation the more people rely on systematic or elaborate information processing [...]. This means that citizens who consider a given feature of democracy as extremely important are likely to be more motivated to correctly evaluate the quality of this feature in their own country” (Kriesi and Saris 2016, 194).

**Figure 1.2: The relationship between democratic aspirations, evaluations and institutions**



### **AN OVERVIEW OF THE THESIS**

The thesis is structured in four empirical chapters that develop the theoretical framework sketched out above. Given that democratic aspirations and evaluations had never been studied as analytical concepts before, *Chapter 2* focuses on assessing the measurement equivalence of these attitudinal elements across our sample of countries in Europe. This analytical strategy seeks answers to the following question: Do the underlying constructs of ‘aspirations’ and ‘evaluations’ exist in Europeans’ minds and, if so, are they similarly understood across the continent? The analysis will lead us to conclude that both concepts are sound and valid but can only be meaningfully compared across a subset of countries in the sample. In the case of the aspirations construct, the group of comparable countries match the Western and Southern European region, while for the evaluations concept meaningful comparisons can be extended to a group of countries which display higher levels of democratic quality.

The fact that the single value constructs of aspirations and evaluations cannot be meaningfully compared across the entire range of countries included in the study

does not invalidate, however, the analyses conducted in the subsequent chapters of the thesis. Although both concepts of aspirations and evaluations can only be established in a group of countries, cross-national comparisons of their core constitutive components (the electoral, liberal, social, and direct democracy dimensions) are indeed possible and recommended. Actually, it is well known that democracy is a complex concept, a shared interpretation of which among such heterogeneous populations is fairly difficult to attain. For this reason, we are on safer ground when comparing its core theoretical components and, hence, substantive conclusions are drawn on more internally coherent concepts tapping specific dimensions of democracy. As the coming chapters will demonstrate, this is a highly fruitful, yet overlooked, research approach.

*Chapter 3* proposes and tests a theoretical framework that understands people's overall degree of satisfaction with democracy as a function of the interaction between their normative aspirations about what a good democracy is and the institutional framework in which they live. The framework is based on an original understanding of the institutions that may have an impact on feelings of democratic satisfaction, and the way those institutions mediate in the cognitive process by which individuals form their judgments on the performance of democracy. Singularly, the chapter integrates classical literature on democracy to ascertain the democratic elements and functions that may matter for citizens' evaluations of the system, with literature on expectations and political attitudes formation.

It is necessary to point out two aspects of this chapter. The first is the dependent variable used in the empirical analyses: individuals' overall satisfaction with the way democracy works (SWD). This is an indicator that, although the focus of criticism in some parts of the thesis, is utilized here mainly on practical grounds. On the one hand, the SWD item allows us to be parsimonious both in the theoretical argumentation and the empirical analysis conducted in the chapter. The alternative strategy to use the different evaluations scales would have led to overly muddled analysis, although basically with the same substantive results. On the other hand, it allows me to confront the findings of this study with those of the large existing literature that investigates the institutional causes of satisfaction with the

functioning of democracy. In doing so, the chapter sheds new light on certain aspects of the satisfaction with democracy judgement that have been so far overlooked in the scholarly accounts, contributing thus to our understanding of what determines individuals' support for the system.

The second aspect to be noted about this chapter is the fact that the direct democracy dimension is not considered in the analysis along with the other three core dimensions in which democratic aspirations and evaluations are divided—namely the electoral, liberal and social dimensions. The reason for this omission is that formal institutions of direct democracy (with which direct democracy aspirations would need to be confronted) hardly exist in European countries. Switzerland is, as is well known, a clear outsider in the implementation of this democratic dimension, since referendums in this country are held on a regular basis. According to Democracy Barometer data, in 2012—the year of the ESS-6 field work—Switzerland held 93 referendums, followed by 27 in Slovenia, but no referendum was held in the rest of the countries included in the study. This reality conflicts with the underlying idea in this thesis of testing the impact of institutions with which individuals closely interact on their democratic predispositions and evaluations of performance. Furthermore, although many citizens experience direct democracy through different mechanisms other than referendums at the national level—such as citizens' forums, participatory budgets or public councils—, these mechanisms are barely spread around Europe and hence, only few citizens are likely to have a direct experience with them. Given that in the last few years national referendums have gained a higher presence in some European states, we can expect the comparative impact of direct democracy institutions on citizens' perceptions towards democracy to be grasped in future surveys. In the meanwhile, thus, only the electoral, liberal and social democracy dimensions are analysed and interacted with their corresponding institutions in this chapter.

The remaining two chapters examine, in turn, citizens' aspirations and evaluations of specific dimensions of democracy. *Chapter 4* focuses on the public support (both normative and evaluative) for the social model of democracy, which in the last few years has been said to have undergone a major crisis in Europe. By combining people's aspirations about what the social outcomes of democracy

should be, their evaluations, and the degree of universalism of their country's welfare state, the chapter shows that a legitimacy crisis does not exist generally across Europe, but only in those countries where the welfare state has proved to be unable to protect citizens against the blow of the economic crisis, as well as to satisfy the demands of social democracy's traditional supporters.

To conclude, *Chapter 5* centres on people's aspirations and evaluations of the liberal model of democracy and examines how these attitudes are affected by a relevant category traditionally used in the literature to explain differences in political support among individuals: the status of winners and losers of the electoral contest. The chapter demonstrates that the conventional wisdom about winners and losers' differential levels of democratic satisfaction (here measured as a positive evaluation of core liberal aspects' performance) can actually be challenged if we take into account the individual aspirations about what a good liberal model of democracy should deliver: winners and losers with high aspirations evaluate democracy more similarly than their counterparts with low aspirations.

Through these analyses, this thesis contributes to the academic literature on how good democratic institutions help to build positive attitudes toward the system. Thus, the thesis deals with the long-term determinants of democratic support and disputes, to a certain degree, the importance of short-term factors, such as economic crises. But the evidence presented in this thesis has implications that transcend the debate on the institutional and contextual determinants of individuals' attitudes toward democracy. By looking at both the detailed aspirations and evaluations of democracy's many dimensions, the thesis elaborates a thorough picture of citizens' attitudinal beliefs about democracy that qualifies much of what we know about the causes and implications of different degrees of democratic attachment. These and other substantive implications will be discussed in the concluding chapter (*Chapter 6*).

## METHODOLOGICAL DESIGN

The main objective of this thesis is to provide a framework to understand cross-national differences in support for democracy by systematically linking different kinds of institutions and democratic attitudes. However, the way both institutions and democratic attitudes are conceptualized here largely differs from traditional usages in the discipline.

As noticed above, the study of democratic attitudes will discriminate between democratic aspirations and evaluations. Aspirations<sup>4</sup> can be defined as those normative values that individuals hold dear on their understanding of what a good democracy should look like. In other words, aspirations are those values to which citizens aspire to when they think of the ideal democratic system in which they wish to live. Evaluations are the assessments citizens make of the reality of their respective political systems, usually against the democratic normative aspirations held in their minds. Aspirations and evaluations are captured drawing on data from the sixth round of the European Social Survey (ESS-6), came out in 2012, which provides the most innovative set of survey items to date tapping into both types of attitudinal dimensions. Its originality resides not only in covering both aspirations about democracy and performance evaluations in a disaggregated way, but also in tapping a large range of notions on democracy that resonate in democratic theory, facilitating thus comparison with theoretical models of democracy as well as with macro-level institutions.

The sample includes 29 European societies, covering established democracies in Western and Southern Europe, more recent democracies in Central and Eastern Europe, as well as a group of countries that do not meet conventional criteria to be regarded as full democracies.<sup>5</sup> As a common practice, I will include all the countries in the analyses, with the aim of capturing as much institutional variability as possible, as well as a wider diversity of performance evaluations and

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<sup>4</sup> Although at some points I use the terms 'aspirations' and 'expectations' as interchangeable concepts, they are usually treated as different concepts in the literature.

<sup>5</sup> According to the *polity* scores for 2012 from the Polity IV Project, Albania, Kosovo and Ukraine score above 6 on a -10 to +10 scale, meaning that they are all classified as 'democracies' though do not reach the highest scores (Albania: 9; Kosovo: 8; Ukraine: 6). Russia gets a score of 4, thus being classified as an 'open anocracy'. Available at: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>

normative visions on democracy among citizens. An exception will be found in *Chapter 5*, in which Albania, Kosovo, Russia and Ukraine are excluded from the analyses. The reason to proceed in this way is that this chapter deals with the analytical category of winners and losers of the electoral contest, which in countries with poor electoral competition may prove to be biased. Furthermore, most of the data at the country level for this chapter are taken from the Democracy Barometer, which has not collected data for these four countries. Given that I am testing the impact of a set of institutions that have a tangible impact on citizens' daily lives, it has been considered relevant to include the full sample of respondents in the study for the remaining chapters.

The module is composed of 30 items divided into two blocks, plus a set of 15 questions with a trade-off format.<sup>6</sup> In the first block of items respondents were asked to rate the importance they attribute to 16 different elements or principles of democracy in general—their democratic aspirations. The question heading of these items reads as follows:

*I want you to think about how important you think different things are for democracy in general. There are no right or wrong answers so please just tell me what you think. Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general.*

Respondents were then presented with the 16 items and an 11-point unipolar scale with which they have to rate how important the concept is for democracy in general—where the 0 in the scale indicates that a given element is 'Not at all important for democracy in general' and 10 means that it is 'Extremely important for democracy in general'.

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<sup>6</sup> The trade-off items have a different question format from the aspirations and evaluations items. In a dichotomous format, these questions force respondents to choose between two clear alternatives regarding three core elements of democracy—freedom of expression, government responsiveness, and power sharing. Due to this different question format, I do not include these questions in the analyses of the thesis.

Next, through 14 items<sup>7</sup> respondents were asked to assess the extent to which they feel the above democratic concepts apply in their own country today—their democratic evaluations. The question heading of these items reads as follows:

*Now some questions about the same topics, but this time about how you think democracy is working in [country] today. Again, there are no right or wrong answers, so please just tell me what you think. Using this card, please tell me to what extent you think each of the following statements applies in [country].*

Similarly, respondents were asked to use an 11-point scale in which 0 indicates that the respondent thinks that the statement ‘Does not apply at all [in her country]’ and 10 denotes that she thinks that it ‘Applies completely’.

Evaluations will serve as dependent variables in all analyses, while aspirations will be commonly used in interaction with institutions as covariates or independent variables. All over the thesis the aspiration items will be dichotomized at their maximum value (0/9=0, 10=1), following Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta’s (2016) proposal for this. As these authors argue, democracy is an essentialist concept (as defined by Goertz 2006), because it stipulates a set of necessary conditions to exist. Minimalist individuals (or minimalist definitions of democracy) identify these necessary conditions with the minimal democratic elements, but more demanding citizens will add further elements to what they understand as necessary for democracy. Although respondents were not directly asked within the questionnaire to indicate the necessary conditions for democracy, as this is a too difficult theoretical concept, it can be considered that ‘only those who choose the maximum value of the scale for the assessment of a given element consider it a “necessary” condition for democracy.’ And, as they continue, ‘those who choose a value below the scale maximum arguably allow for exceptions and do not consider the given element as required for democracy under all circumstances’ (Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta 2016, 67). In addition to this theoretical reasoning, it is the fact that a good number of average individuals in all countries tend to choose the maximum value of the aspirations scales, so that dichotomizing the variables in this way

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<sup>7</sup> For two elements of democracy—horizontal accountability and migrants’ voting rights—democratic evaluations were not included in the final module due to high item non-response found in the pilot survey (see Kriesi and Ferrín 2016, Appendix A).



actually provides a larger variability in the distribution. The evaluation variables are kept in their original 0-10 scale.

The 16 items on aspirations and evaluations cover four core dimensions of democracy that have been historically present in democratic theory debates. Of these four dimensions, two garner the highest consensus in democratic theory as the core constitutive components of democracy: the electoral dimension and the liberal dimension. The electoral dimension involves the notion that democracy is above all an electoral procedure underpinned with strong formal guarantees, which include the holding of free and fair elections, the free competition of parties, and the capacity of elections to make politicians accountable when they have done a bad job. The liberal dimension is based on an understanding of democracy in which the existence and guarantee of individual liberties, and the absence of infringements by the state are the most important requirements for a democratic system to exist. This involves a well-functioning and impartial rule of law, the presence of mass media that provides citizens with impartial and reliable information for them to take part freely in the political process, and the protection of minorities' rights.

The questionnaire also includes references to two other dimensions of democracy that go beyond the core elements of liberal and electoral democracy: the social justice and the direct democracy dimensions. The social justice dimension is probably the most controversial, as for decades many scholars have explicitly contended that democracy is not concerned about the fair or unfair allocation of material resources among citizens, but simply about the equal distribution of power by means of fair procedures (Dahl 1989 , Ch. 6 and 7; Bobbio 1987). This argument, however, contradicts two factual historical developments of democratic states.

The first one was summarized in T. H. Marshall's (1950) pioneering work as the adoption of social rights as part of the conception of citizenship in the latter part of the 19th century. This was possible thanks to the appreciation of the fact that the formal recognition of an equal capacity for civil and political rights was not enough to fully enjoy them. Equality thus began to be understood as 'equal social worth' and to be associated with the principle of social justice, which would later become the basis of the egalitarian principles and policies of the 20th century. In this sense, this landmark in history opened the way to divide citizenship into three parts, civil,

political and social citizenship, the latter being the core idea of the modern welfare state. In relation to this, the second historical event is the development of the welfare state, which came hand by hand with the extension of social rights and the development of the democratic system. Thus, although there is not a necessary theoretical connection between democracy and the welfare state, they are difficult to separate in practice: 'Every established democracy has a system of social welfare provision' (Spicker 2008, 251).

Taken together, the claim that welfare states are intrinsically linked to the development of modern democratic states (there is no democratic system without welfare state), and the claim that social rights are also core elements of the equal intrinsic worth of all citizens provide a powerful case for the consideration of social justice in the study of democracy. Thus, the social justice dimension as conceptualized in this thesis implies the understanding that redistribute justice should be one of the core aims of democracy.

The direct democracy dimension has also been surrounded by debate due to its unrealistic character: The inclusion of all citizens in the decision-making process is impracticable in large scale systems as today's democracies. However, proponents of direct democracy hardly contend that the direct involvement of the citizens in the decision-making process should substitute the representative model but rather that it should complement the representative model. This can be done through different mechanisms such as citizens' assemblies at the local level and, more importantly due to the number of citizens involved and the nature of the issues on to decide, referendums at the national level.

Following Kriesi and Ferrín (2016), the 30 questionnaire items on aspirations and evaluations are classified into these four core dimensions of democracy. Very briefly, the group of *electoral elements* comprises six indicators related to the electoral process. They gauge the extent to which national elections in the country are free and fair; whether national parties offer differentiated policy proposals; the extent to which opposition parties are free to criticize the government; how well retrospective accountability performs (whether governing parties are punished in elections when they do a bad job); whether the government justify its decisions to voters; and whether voters deliberate their decisions before

deciding how to vote. There is an additional element within the questionnaire that Kriesi and Ferrín also classify in the electoral category—the extent to which national governments are responsible to other European governments before taking decisions—but given that this element is far from self-explanatory, it has been excluded from the analysis.

The group of liberal elements encompasses four indicators related to liberal principles. They measure the extent to which the law is equally applied to all citizens in the country; whether the courts treat everyone the same; whether minority groups are protected; whether the national media provide reliable information to judge the government; and whether the media are free to criticize the government. The social elements measure the extent to which citizens are protected against poverty and to which the government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels. Finally, the direct democracy element assesses the extent to which citizens have the opportunity to directly participate in the decision-making process. Table 1.1 summarizes the items on democracy included in the ESS-6 and their classification into the democratic dimensions or scales.

**Table 1.1: The elements and dimensions of democracy**

<b>Element of democracy</b>	<b>Dimension of democracy</b>
Free and fair elections	
Differentiated partisan offer	
Parties freedom	
Retrospective (vertical) accountability	Electoral
Transparency (Justification by government)	
Deliberation of the electoral choice	
Equality before the law (Rule of law)	
Horizontal accountability (by the courts)	
Protection of minorities' rights	Liberal
Press freedom	
Media reliability	
Protection against poverty	
Reduction of income differences	Social
Direct participation in referenda	Direct democracy

The support and evaluation of these dimensions of democracy at the micro-level will be compared to a series of institutions at the macro-level in which those same democratic dimensions are embedded. This innovative operationalization of the countries' institutional setting is possible thanks to the proliferation along the last decade of several new indices aimed at measuring the quality of democracy and/or the varieties of democratic institutions of countries worldwide. All these new datasets allow for the first time to measure the subtle differences in the quality of established democracies, thus overcoming the conceptual and methodological shortcomings of existing measures used traditionally such as Freedom House or the Polity IV dataset. Throughout the chapters, I will mainly rely on three macro-level datasets: the Democracy Barometer (DB), the Varieties-of-Democracy Dataset (V-Dem), and the Electoral Integrity Project.

The DB<sup>8</sup> is an index of democracy that was first launched in 2007. It was established with the aim of gauging the quality of established democracies (in 30 ‘blueprint’ countries), but in later releases the measurements were extended to cover a much wider sample of countries around the world (up to 70 countries) and a longer time period—from 1990 to 2014. The DB is based on a concept of democracy that embraces liberal as well as participatory ideas, but not social justice ones. The starting point of the DB framework is the premise that a democratic system tries to establish a good balance between the values of freedom and equality and that this requires control (Bühlmann et al. 2007). These three fundamental principles (freedom, equality, and control) are further disaggregated into democratic functions, components, sub-components, and, finally, indicators that measure the quality of democracy in each of the sample’s countries.

Throughout the thesis I use five indicators taken from the DB: the aggregated score of quality of democracy for each country (*Chapter 2*); a ‘rule of law’ indicator (*Chapters 3 and 5*); and three indicators on the freedom of the media to criticize the government, the protection of minorities’ rights, and the degree of government transparency (*Chapter 5*). Similar versions of these indicators are also available in the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI) from the World Bank, whose indicators on the ‘rule of law’ and ‘government effectiveness’ enjoy special popularity among scholars. This data source, however, has been focus of harsh criticism due to different problems of bias, lack of comparability, and construct- validity (see Kurtz and Schrank 2007; Thomas 2010) caused, mainly, by its reliance on a variety of data sources, including firms and public opinion surveys. The DB overcomes much of the problems associated to the WGI by depending exclusively on data codified by a small team of expert scholars on democracy measurement.

The V-Dem<sup>9</sup> dataset is a fairly new approach (launched in late 2015) to conceptualizing and measuring democracy, covering all countries world-wide from 1900 to the present. It rests on a broad and complex understating of democracy, which distinguishes between seven high-level democratic principles: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative, egalitarian, majoritarian and consensual. These

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<sup>8</sup> Available at: <http://www.democracybarometer.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>

high-level components are then disaggregated into dozens of lower-level components of democracy providing over 350 indicators, which makes the V-Dem Project one of the largest databases in social sciences. I use four indicators coming from the V-Dem dataset: an index of participatory democracy, which measures the extent to which the ideal of participatory democracy is achieved within a country (*Chapter 2*); an index of distribution of political power across socially differentiated groups (*Chapter 3*); an indicator tapping into the extension of the universality of the welfare state (*Chapters 3 and 4*); and an ‘opposition freedom’ index, which assess the extent to which the opposition parties are able to exercise oversight and investigatory functions against the wishes of the governing party or coalition (*Chapter 5*).

The Electoral Integrity Project<sup>10</sup>—and, more particularly, the Global Perceptions of Electoral Integrity Survey—is a global expert survey on perceptions of electoral integrity (PEI). Electoral integrity ‘refers to international standards and global norms governing the appropriate conduct of elections’ (Norris et al. 2016, 12). Experts are asked to evaluate elections using 49 indicators, grouped into eleven categories reflecting the whole electoral cycle. It covers 213 elections in 153 countries. From this dataset, I use the global summary PEI index in *Chapters 3 and 5*.

Additionally, I use a measure on Lijphart’s executive-parties index which gauges the degree of joint power in the political system, coming from the Comparative Political Data Set<sup>11</sup> (*Chapter 2*). Finally, three contextual variables will be taken from the World Development Indicators of the World Bank: the Gini index (*Chapters 3 and 4*), the country’s unemployment rate, and the GDP per capita growth rate (both in *Chapters 3, 4 and 5*). The macro-level elements of democracy included in the analyses are summarized in Table 1.2.

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<sup>10</sup> Available at: <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/>

<sup>11</sup> Available at: <http://www.cpds-data.org/>

**Table 1.2: The macro-level measures of democracy**

<b>Indicator of democracy</b>	<b>Data source</b>	<b>Chapter</b>
Quality of democracy score	Democracy Barometer	Chapter 2
Index of participatory democracy	V-Dem	Chapter 2
Rule of law	Democracy Barometer	Chapter 3
Index of equal political power	V-Dem	Chapter 3
Index of electoral integrity	Electoral Integrity Project	Chapters 3 and 5
Executive-parties index	Comparative Political Data Set	Chapter 3
Welfare state universalism	V-Dem	Chapters 3 and 4
Media freedom	Democracy Barometer	Chapter 5
Protection of minorities' rights	Democracy Barometer	Chapter 5
Government transparency	Democracy Barometer	Chapter 5
Freedom of opposition index	V-Dem	Chapter 5

## CHAPTER 2: DO WE STILL NEED EASTON? A NEW MEASUREMENT PROPOSAL

### INTRODUCTION

Over four decades ago, David Easton (1975) proposed to distinguish between two kinds of attitudes of support for the political system—specific and diffuse support. The distinction aimed to grasp the persistent puzzle in political science research on the tension between the feelings of dissatisfaction that most citizens display with different aspects of their political system (such as the political authorities, the parliament, or the political parties), and the high confidence they still profess in the regime (its underlying values and norms). According to Easton, this apparent contradiction could only be explained by acknowledging that citizens make two distinctive evaluations of their political system: one related to ‘what the political authorities do and how they do it’, and another one, ‘more fundamental in character’, directed to ‘the basic aspects of the system’ (Easton 1975, 437). This attitudinal duality, he continued, is what makes it possible for citizens to oppose the day-to-day performance of the system and yet retain respect for the system itself.

Needless to say, the Eastonian model of democratic/political support<sup>12</sup> is one of the most widely used analytical frameworks on the relationship between citizens and the political system. But despite its widespread use, or maybe as a consequence of it, in recent years increasing voices have come to question its validity both as a conceptual and an empirical tool. Regarding diffuse support, it has been argued that feelings of loyalty to democracy as the best form of government constitute a poor indicator of individuals’ attachment to the system, as long as we are uncertain what people mean by democracy (Thomassen 2007) and the extent to which those ideas are meaningful and consequential. Given the almost universal acceptance of democracy as the only game in town that emerged throughout the world after the fall of the Berlin Wall (Fukuyama 1989), overt favourable attitudes toward

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<sup>12</sup> Although Easton intentionally formulated his model to re-assess the concept of political support, empirical research has tended to use it as support for the democratic system—where diffuse support is commonly identified with support for the democratic principles and the democratic regime itself, and specific support is seen as satisfaction with the overall performance of the system.



democracy as a system tell us very little about what the actual content of such support is. For instance, we would not rate equally the abstract support for democracy expressed by an average individual living in China as that of an individual from Switzerland, as Chinese citizens have never enjoyed the experience of living in a democratic system and, most probably, are not fully aware of what the actual connotations and implications of a democratic form of government entail. In a similar way, probably the support for democracy voiced by a person who also claims not to tolerate ethnic or political minorities should be read with caution, as opposed to that expressed by an individual who is highly tolerant. In line with this concern, scholars have increasingly recognized the need to qualify the abstract measure of diffuse support for democracy with a detailed understanding of the values and meanings people attach to the democratic ideal.

As for specific support, its operationalization in an array of survey items such as those measuring satisfaction with democracy and institutional trust have put it in the focus of criticism by scholars due to the ambiguity surrounding both items, but more specially that on 'satisfaction with democracy' (SWD) (see Canache et al. 2001, Linde and Ekman 2003). Summarized in a few words, scholars argue that it is not possible to know what dimension or dimensions of political support the SWD indicator represents (Canache et al. 2001, 507), and that it can be used by students with very different interpretations. By asking citizens how much they are satisfied with their democratic system by means of a single question, we are unable to know which components of democracy the respondents have in mind: whether their dissatisfaction is the result of a lack of freedom, the poor functioning of the rule of law, or a hardly responsible government, to name but some examples. In addition, there is the problem that the interpretation of such a concept may vary between individuals and, more importantly, across countries, as 'it is quite conceivable that the question wording does not constitute the same stimulus' across different cultures (Kuechler 1991, 281).

These limitations have been explicitly acknowledged in recent survey research by the inclusion of new items aimed to capture both citizens' understandings and evaluations of democracy in a nuanced way. Among these, the sixth round of the European Social Survey (ESS-6) provides the most innovative set

of survey items tapping into both public aspirations about, and evaluations of, democracy's many dimensions in 29 European societies. For the first time in survey research, this unique data set offers the opportunity to reformulate the abstract concept of *support for democracy* (Easton 1975) in both its abstract and specific dimensions with a wider array of detailed indicators covering the multidimensionality of democracy. But the question arises: Do these innovative survey items make well their intended job? Do they capture the citizens' normative and evaluative support in a more nuanced way than the traditional Eastonian indicators?

This chapter addresses the empirical question of whether the attitudinal orientations that the ESS-6 uncovers do indeed constitute two separated but internally coherent constructs that can be meaningfully compared across societies. The question of measurement equivalence is often overlooked in the literature on value orientations by assuming that comparability issues have already been taken into consideration by survey designers to ensure that 'what is being compared is similar enough that inferences made are on firm ground' (Alemán and Woods 2015, 3). However, with such complex concepts, measurement equivalence cannot be guaranteed and needs to be empirically tested rather than taken for granted (Davidov 2009, 65).

This chapter pursues two objectives. First, it aims at exploring the extent to which aspirations and evaluations form two single latent attitudinal concepts that can be meaningful for public opinion research. Second, it focuses on the measurement equivalence of these latent constructs across different countries and contexts. In proceeding this way, I seek to answer the following question: Do the underlying constructs of 'aspirations' and 'evaluations' exist in the Europeans' minds and, if so, are they similarly understood across the continent? The chapter is structured as follows. It begins with a theoretical discussion of whether the concepts of aspirations and evaluations are suited to substitute the traditional Eastonian notions and are indeed more accurate to capture what is in citizens' minds when asked about democracy. Next, the chapter exposes the relevance of analysing equivalence in cross-national research and makes a short review of the relevant

literature. To conclude, I describe the results of the equivalence tests and discuss the implications.

### **ASPIRATIONS AND EVALUATIONS OF DEMOCRACY: HOW ARE THEY DIFFERENT FROM DIFFUSE AND SPECIFIC SUPPORT?**

Political support, in Easton's classical definition, can be described as,

an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favourably or unfavourably, positively or negatively. Such an attitude may be expressed in parallel action. In short, in its common usage support refers to the way in which a person evaluatively orients himself to some object through either his attitudes or his behaviour (Easton 1975, 436).

As known, Easton distinguishes between support at a particular level—labelled 'specific support'—and support at a more abstract level, called 'diffuse support'. Specific support accounts for the evaluations of the political authorities and of the performance of institutions, and therefore varies easily with the perceived benefits or satisfaction the citizens feel they obtain from that performance. According to Easton, such evaluations of the authorities might arise in two different ways. In the first place, the citizens engage in a rational calculus of whether the perceived output of the authorities' actions matches their expectations. To do this, they need to be aware of the political outputs and view them as pertinent to their demands. In the second place, even if the citizens are unable to identify specific actions by the authorities, evaluations might also come from perceived general performance, such as 'the kind of people the authorities are, their style of behaviour, the kinds of social conditions they are thought to have permitted to come into existence, and so on' (Easton 1975, 438-9). Both these types of support are specific since they are dependent on the authorities' behaviour.

Diffuse support instead refers to the general meaning a political object has for a person—not what it does. It can be understood, then, as a 'reservoir of favourable attitudes' or 'generalized attachment' (Easton 1975, 444) towards the

political objects. Diffuse support has three noteworthy properties. First, it is a kind of support independent from the authorities' performance and outputs, which makes it more durable than specific support and short-term fluctuations in it are less likely. Second, it is a 'basic' type of support since it underlies the regime as a whole and the political community—moving beyond the incumbent authorities covered by the specific type of support. Diffuse support is then support given to those political objects with a 'higher' theoretical status. Third, it typically arises from childhood and continuing adult socialization, which are not essentially associated with a rational assessment of the perceived benefits one gains from system performance. However, this does not mean that diffuse support is a non-rational phenomenon. It can also result from several evaluations of a series of outputs and performances over a long period of time, which afterwards spill over into generalized attitudes towards the authorities or other political objects. In this way, diffuse support may also become the consequence of rational judgements (Magalhães 2013).

The distinction between specific and diffuse support is probably one of the most important contributions to the study of democratic attitudes in political science and has been used as an explanatory conceptual tool by a multitude of scholars. Probably the main reason for its success is that it systematically integrates the cultural and rational theoretical discussions on the origins of political attitudes. These two models, traditionally regarded as opposite, offer two different visions on the sources of individuals' orientations to politics. Cultural theories see attitudes as exogenous to the political system, i.e. attitudes do not originate in the political sphere but in the national cultural norms and traditions, which are learned early in life and communicated through socialization. From this perspective, individuals relate to political institutions by their cultural traditions, which tend to be stable along their lives although can also be disrupted by relevant events in history. Rational theories, by contrast, contend that attitudes are politically endogenous, since they hinge on the rational evaluation the citizens make about the performance of the political authorities and institutions. Therefore, attitudes may change and fluctuate quickly as a result of different political and/or economic events and the

shifting performance of institutions.<sup>13</sup> Resembling these two perspectives, Easton understands specific support as rationally-based and directed to ‘the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style of [the] authorities’ (Easton 1975, 437), whereas diffuse support is seen as a cultural predisposition, insofar as it ‘represent[s] [...] attachment to political objects for their own sake’ (Easton 1975, 445).

Although Easton’s framework has constituted for decades an excellent point of reference, here I contend that it is a limited theoretical tool for accounting for the type of orientations with which citizens relate to their democratic systems in two important ways. First, it creates a false dichotomy between diffuse and specific support by placing them as two independent evaluative judgments concerning different levels of the system and originated in opposite spheres. A good instance of this misleading assumption can be found in Pippa Norris’ (1999) well-known expansion of the Eastonian framework, who places diffuse and specific support as the two ends of a continuum (see Figure 1.2 in Norris 1999, 11) in which the two supportive orientations range in opposite directions. This entails that diffuse and specific support are understood as two independent judgments that develop separately and have hardly to do with one another. As Easton himself points out, ‘the effort to distinguish specific from diffuse support suggests rather that there are two classes of support each of which may vary independently’ (Easton 1975, 444).

An alternative vision might assume that legitimacy beliefs are the result of the tension between individuals’ ideals on democracy and reality, so that democratic aspirations act as a cognitive yardstick for how citizens evaluate real-world performance. This assumption is grounded on the idea that the evaluation of politics does not take place in a vacuum, i.e. exclusively based on a rational assessment of observed performance, but against individually held ideals or benchmarks. In this view, citizens’ evaluations of performance can only be properly understood when their aspirations or expectations about what a good democracy is are considered in the equation. This explains why, even when confronting the same macro-political and economic conditions, citizens from the same country may evaluate very differently the performance of the system, ‘as they are likely to have different

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<sup>13</sup> For a detailed revision of these two perspectives, see Mishler and Rose 2001.

criteria in mind when evaluating process or performance' (Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2017, 82). Plausible as this hypothesis is, it has never been tested due to the predominance of the classical understanding of diffuse vs. specific support as mutually independent evaluative orientations.

The second argument of criticism to confront the Eastonian framework has to do with its approach to the different objects of political support as uniform conceptual blocks. Although Easton does not explicitly refer to support for democracy itself, he distinguishes support for the core regime principles from other levels of support (the political community and the authorities) but understands such attachment as a monolithic orientation: citizens either support or reject the democratic principles, but there is no room for gradations. Contrary to this idea, it is well known that democracy is an essentially contested concept, open to multiple interpretations both by scholars and by the own citizens. In the last decades a large number of empirical studies have found that democracy means different things to different people in different societies (Thomassen 1998; Baviskar and Malone 2004; Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007; Canache 2012), so it seems reasonable to expect that some individuals may support some of its fundamental principles at the same time as they reject others (Schedler and Sarsfield 2007, 640). Thus, a monolithic or one-dimensional understanding of democracy and its core fundamental values may simply produce 'an illusionary appearance of comparability' (Heath et al. 2005, 321) of the supportive attitudes across individuals that says little about the cognitive process that the individuals face when shaping their democratic orientations. Actually, as will be discussed later, the reason democratic aspirations serve as a yardstick to discriminate between individuals' legitimacy beliefs lies in the very multidimensional nature of the democratic ideal.

Building upon the above insights, the next sections aim to empirically elaborate the arguments put forward above on the weaknesses of the diffuse and specific support traditional notions by using the positive case of democratic 'aspirations' and 'evaluations'. These two concepts fulfil, in principle, our two normative requirements: (1) they rest upon a multidimensional understanding of

democracy, and (2) there is a cognitive relationship between them.<sup>14</sup> All in all, the chapter advocates for a replacement of the classical Eastonian framework with one that brings to the fore the multidimensional relationship of the citizens with their democratic systems.

But before moving to test these assumptions, we need to establish the core content of our two new democratic orientations. How can their multidimensional nature be defined? The literature has traditionally considered two types of normative beliefs that citizens may hold about democratic institutions. On the one hand, it has been argued that citizens pay attention to aspects of *procedural fairness* when evaluating their public institutions. Thus, many studies have focused on showing that citizens care about the procedures the democratic system uses to bring about outcomes (e.g. see Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Rohrschneider 2005; Wagner, Schneider, and Halla 2009; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1998). More specifically, it is said that citizens value the fact that institutions provide a fair articulation of their interests, and that they are effective, impartial, transparent, and treat everyone the same. On the other hand, it has also been shown that citizens invoke principles of *distributive fairness* when evaluating both what they receive from public service institutions and what other citizens gain. This is the case of those studies showing that the levels of inequality in a country have a negative effect on attitudes of positive involvement with democracy, either because citizens experience inequality directly or because it is a result of their normative judgments (e.g. see Anderson and Singer 2008; Solt 2008; Schäfer 2012).

Relying on these and other insights from democratic theory, Kriesi and Ferrín (2016) distinguish four types of visions on democracy that citizens may have: electoral, liberal, social, and direct democracy. The electoral and liberal visions encompass the fundamental model of liberal democracy, which clearly ‘constitutes the dominant way the democratic ideals [are] implemented in Europe and elsewhere’ nowadays (Ferrín and Kriesi 2016, 3). These visions include basic democratic standards as the holding of free and fair elections, multiparty

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<sup>14</sup> The issue of the cognitive relationship between aspirations and evaluations is not empirically addressed in this chapter, which focuses specifically on testing the multidimensional character of both attitudinal constructs. The next chapters confront more directly that theoretical claim.

competition, or the rule of law, to name but the most relevant ones, which are supposed to be valued by the individuals not only by their intrinsic sake, but also because they provide citizens with information about how the system accounts for their interests. The social democracy vision connects openly with the ambitions of distributive fairness that most citizens claim from their democratic systems. Although, according to the foremost democratic theorists, social aspects cannot be included in formal definitions of democracy, survey data from different regions of the world show that a great share of citizens have visions of democracy that include different elements of social democracy, such as social equality, fairness, or redistribution (Bratton and Mattes 2001; Dalton, Shin, and Jou 2007; Canache 2012; Kriesi, Saris, and Moncagatta 2016). Finally, the direct democracy vision also relates to the procedural concerns of voters (how political decisions are taken), to which a substantive claim for the direct involvement of the citizens in the decision-making process is added (who can participate in adopting such decisions).

As shown by Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta (2016) using data from the European Social Survey, 'the relationship between the basic liberal democratic model and the [far-reaching] models of democracy is rather more complementary than competitive' (Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta 2016, 65), i.e. citizens tend to support simultaneously more than one of these democratic visions. But to what extent is the same pattern of understanding of these four visions shared across Europe?

## **MEASUREMENT EQUIVALENCE**

Although the issue of measurement invariance has attracted less scholarly attention than it deserves, numerous voices in the discipline have nevertheless raised awareness of the need to test the comparability of the theoretical constructs we use in social sciences.

The proliferation of cross-national surveys over the last decades has made available a huge amount of data on public values, attitudes, opinions and behaviours of people around the world that have multiplied the endeavour of comparative social scientists. The availability of such data has dramatically contributed to change



the discipline by advancing our capacity of theory testing and critical inquiry. As wisely summarized by Crow (1997, 9):

As soon as we go beyond purely descriptive accounts into the realms of analysis and explanation, sociologists [social scientists] are necessarily involved in making comparisons, since it is only through comparisons that the particular characteristics of different social situations and relationships can be distinguished from their more general, universal features.

However, comparative social science also entails several risks. One very important has to do with the validity and reliability of the data we use to make comparisons, which is highly dependent on the quality of the measurement instrument—in most cases, a questionnaire. When undertaking an international survey, the same questions are asked to populations from very diverse countries, who do speak different languages and have been socialized under different economic and cultural backgrounds, so might understand certain ideas or concepts in varying ways (Davidov et al. 2014, 56). Despite important efforts made by survey programmes to develop higher standards of data collection—such as accurately translated questions or similar modes of interviewing across countries—it is difficult to fully control for cultural effects,<sup>15</sup> thus making the problem of data incomparability a potential risk that all survey researchers need to be aware of.

Another challenge associated with cross-cultural research is the use of complex theoretical constructs to make comparisons across different countries and/or time points. These constructs, usually of the kind of multifaceted concepts such as human values, political trust, tolerance or life satisfaction, are used by scholars as if they could travel uncritically across cultures and regions. In Ariely and Davidov's (2011) view, this is especially problematic when single-item scales are used, which is common procedure in the literature on attitudes toward democracy. This practice is based on the strong assumption that 'there is a one to one

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<sup>15</sup> The two most important cultural effects on survey answering have to do with the way respondents from individual countries understand survey questions differently and the dissimilar ways they answer them. According to Stegmüller, the latter can be illustrated by the tendency of respondents from some countries to consistently choose extreme ends of scales, whereas individuals from others predominantly choose the middle part of a response scale (Stegmüller 2011, 472).

relationship between the single item and the theoretical construct and that it is measured without error' (Ariely and Davidov 2011, 273). Although this supposition could hold in single-country studies (given an a priori more similar understanding of the concept under study among the population), it can find no support in cross-cultural comparisons, for two main reasons. First, it is quite unlikely that multifaceted concepts which are referred to in the question wording of the questionnaire by a single term (like democracy) are understood in a similar way by respondents from diverse countries. Secondly, the cross-national comparability of such scales can only be considered when using multiple indicator scales, which allow controlling for random and non-random measurement error. In short, the cross-national comparability of single-item scales cannot be tested and taking it for granted seems a highly risky venture. But not only single-item scales are questionable in cross-national research. Theoretical constructs measured by multiple indicators can make sense in theory, but the multiple items may actually be tapping different concepts in diverse populations, 'leading (thus) to a comparison of "apples and oranges" ' (Davidov et al. 2014, 60).

In summary, the issue of whether scales and theoretical constructs can be compared in cross-cultural research needs to be deliberately verified by empirical testing rather than taken for granted (Davidov 2009, 65). In more specific terms, what we need to determine is the extent to which individual measures of a value construct are comparable or, by contrast, there is some kind of unobserved heterogeneity among countries due to cultural—or any other—bias. If measurement non-equivalence is encountered, then comparisons across populations are meaningless. In this regard, it is important to note that this 'does not mean that there are no differences between the populations regarding a measured construct. Rather, it implies that respondents from different groups that have *the same* position on a trait of interest should provide a similar response' (Davidov et al. 2014, 58, italics in the original).

It is conventional in the literature to distinguish between three kinds of invariance, ordered hierarchically from less to more demanding, depending on the number of requirements needed to determine if the model construct is invariant. The lowest level is known as configural invariance and requires the factor structures

of the value construct to be equal across the country units. That is, configural equivalence holds when we find the same pattern of salient and nonsalient factor loadings across all groups (Davidov et al. 2014, 63), thus indicating that the concept we are seeking to grasp is at least measured by the same observed indicators in all countries. Configural invariance is however a very weak requirement by itself; it generally acts as the model baseline upon which the two more demanding equivalence assessments are tested.

The second level of invariance is called metric invariance. In addition to knowing that our value construct is measured by the same observed indicators, we need to assess whether those indicators are understood equally by respondents across all countries. This assumption is tested by constraining the factor loadings such that they are the same across groups. If the requirement holds, this means that 'the content of each item is being perceived and interpreted in exactly the same way across the samples' (Byrne 2008, 873). If, by contrast, we are confronted with evidence of non-equivalence in factor loadings, we can still pursue partial equivalence, that is, constraining only some parameters so that they are equal, while letting others vary freely. Partial invariance is supported when the loadings of at least two indicators (of the total number included in the model) are equal across groups (Davidov et al. 2014).

The third and strongest level of equivalence is scalar and requires that the cross-national differences in the means of the observed variables have the same origin, i.e. the latent factor. In other words, it entails that the differences in the means of the measurement variables are the consequence of differences in the means of the corresponding construct. Scalar equivalence is tested by constraining both the factor loadings and the intercepts so they are the same across groups. Reaching scalar equivalence of factor loadings and intercepts is a necessary condition to compare means of the latent factors across groups in a valid way. As with metric invariance, in the event of no scalar equivalence in the loadings and intercepts across groups researchers can still work to establish partial scalar invariance.

## **DATA AND ANALYTICAL STRATEGY**

The sixth round of the European Social Survey (ESS-6) is the only available instrument to date that allows testing the theoretical assumptions exposed above. It includes an innovative module of questions on 'Understandings and evaluation of different elements of democracy' that is structured in two blocks. The first block, composed of 16 questions, taps into the respondents' understandings of which aspects are important for democracy in general. In a close-ended question format, respondents were asked to rate the relevance of the 16 items on a scale from 0 ('not at all important for democracy in general') to 10 ('extremely important for democracy in general'). These items tap into citizens' aspirations about what a good democracy is at the abstract level. The second block of questions gauges how respondents evaluate the working of those different aspects of democracy in the given country. The block is composed of 14 items, which again ask respondents to rate the extent to which each of the elements apply/work in their respective countries on a scale from 0 ('does not apply at all') to 10 ('applies completely').

The analyses include 29 countries covering diverse cultural regions and experiences with democracy within Europe: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, United Kingdom, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Slovenia, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Kosovo. It is conventional practice in the empirical research on democratic attitudes to exclude from analysis those countries not considered full democracies according to international standards, such as Russia, Albania, Kosovo and Ukraine. As noted in the introduction, this decision seems to rest on the supposition that citizens from failing democracies are not familiar enough with the intricacies of democracy and, hence, their responses cannot be compared to those who live in full democracies and are thus presumed to be full democrats. Thanks to the availability of such a rich set of survey data, this is a good opportunity to test whether this is, indeed, the case.

The analytical strategy of the chapter is as follows. In the first step, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) is used to ascertain the existence of the underlying theoretical constructs of 'aspirations' and 'evaluations', each one

separately. These underlying constructs are latent variables, i.e. cannot be observed directly, but their existence is inferred from the relations that exist between them and the indicators that can be observed. CFA provides fit indices that test the strength or coherence of the latent structures and how well they fit the data.<sup>16</sup>

First, as a pre-test of the existence of the aforementioned democracy visions (electoral, liberal, social, and direct democracy), I estimate three single-factor models of the individual survey items within their respective scales. Given that the direct democracy vision is composed of a single indicator, no CFA model can be estimated for that scale. Once the fit of the individual items into the democracy scales is tested, the items are averaged into a single scale together with the other items of the corresponding vision to create the measurement variables that will be used in posterior analyses. Second, to test the existence of the aspirations and evaluations latent concepts, a two-factor model is estimated, grouping in one factor the two dimensions of democracy that tap the classical elements of liberal democracy (the electoral and the liberal visions), and in the other factor the dimensions that go beyond this basic model (namely, the social and the direct democracy visions). As Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta (2016) clearly entail, most citizens across Europe share the same basic model of liberal democracy, but this is complemented by other far-reaching visions that include the need for direct democratic procedures for the citizens' involvement in the decision making-process and the satisfaction of certain standards of social justice. Although grouped in two separate factors, these four elements can be seen as belonging to a single latent concept of 'aspirations' about and 'evaluations' of democracy, since, as already quoted above, 'the relationship between the basic liberal democratic model and the more demanding models of democracy is rather more complementary than competitive' (Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta 2016, 65).

Following in these authors' footsteps, each item on aspirations has been dichotomized at its maximum value (0/9=0 and 10=1) with the aim of measuring which elements are considered by the respondent as 'necessary' conditions for democracy, while for the evaluations items their original 0–10 scale is maintained. Then, each item is classified into the four visions of democracy: (1) the liberal vision,

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<sup>16</sup> The software used to perform the analyses is Stata 14, with Maximum Likelihood.

composed of the items on equality before the law, control of the government by the courts,<sup>17</sup> protection of minority rights, media reliability, and freedom of the media; (2) the electoral vision, composed of the items on free and fair elections, deliberation of the voter decision among citizens, electoral competition, the freedom of the opposition to criticize the government, vertical accountability, and transparency; (3) the social justice vision, measured with the items on whether governments should protect all citizens against poverty and whether they should take measures to reduce differences in income levels; and (4) the direct democracy vision, composed of one single item tapping into whether citizens should have a say in political issues by voting in referendums. Figure 2.1 provides a graphical representation of the measurement model for each vision on democracy, whereas Figure 2.2 represents the full theoretical measurement model of the aspirations and evaluations latent concepts.

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<sup>17</sup> This item is not available in the questionnaire for the battery of evaluation questions.

Figure 2.1: The measurement models of the electoral, liberal and social scales

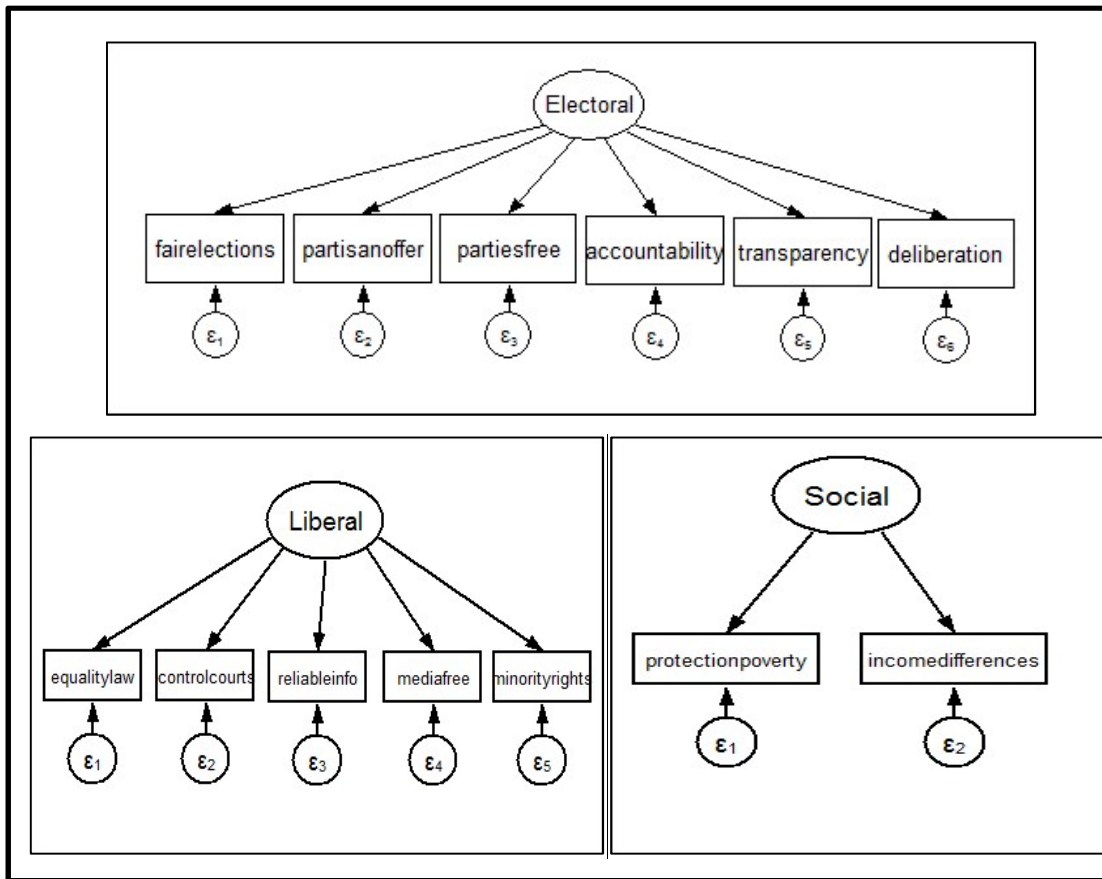
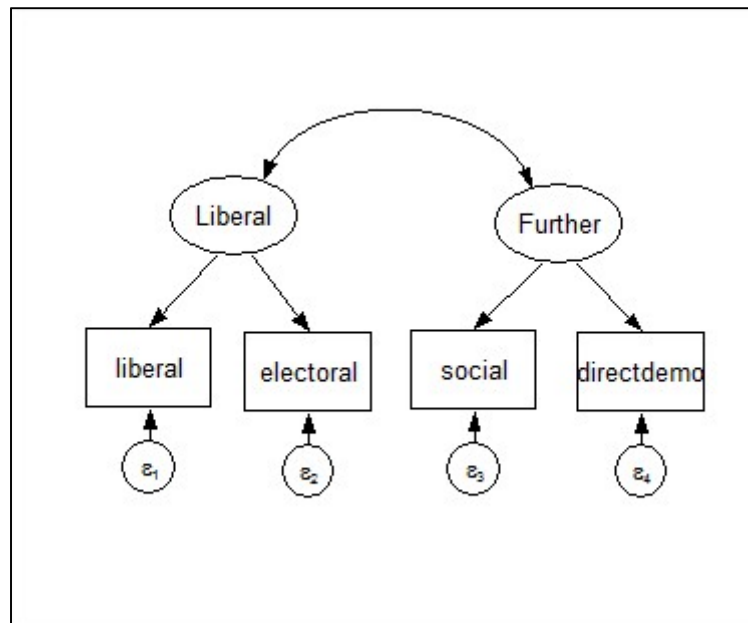


Figure 2.2: The measurement model of aspirations and evaluations



As most authoritative voices in this area (Brown 2006; Ariely and Davidov 2011; Marien 2017) suggest, I firstly show how the latent constructs on ‘aspirations’ and ‘evaluations’ fit the data in each individual country, i.e. I provide results for 29 separate CFAs for each country. Then I move to Multiple Group Confirmatory Factor Analysis (MGCFA), which allows me to test the cross-country invariance of the latent constructs following the configural, metric and scalar criteria detailed above. Next, I perform multi-level CFA and multiple indicators/multiple causes (MIMIC) models to try to account for the remaining variability in the intercepts that could not be explained by our MGCFA models. I use some additional variables for those models. At the macro level, I include the unemployment rate of each country in 2012,<sup>18</sup> and an index of participatory democracy taken from the V-Dem project, which measures the extent to which the ideal of participatory democracy—understood as public engagement in civil society organizations, direct democracy, and subnational elected bodies—is achieved within a country.<sup>19</sup> At the individual level, the respondents’ unemployment status and their ideological positioning in the left-right scale are considered.

## RESULTS

### a) The ‘aspirations’ construct

As mentioned above, I begin the analysis with a pre-test of the electoral, liberal and social democracy scales as defined by Kriesi and Ferrín (2016). The direct democracy vision cannot be tested as it is composed of one single indicator. Table 2.1 displays the results of the CFA models fitted for each of the democracy scales, including the global fit measure (Chi-Square), the root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), and the comparative fit index (CFI). The latter two are the most conventional and widely used measures of goodness-of-fit in CFA. RMSEA ‘assesses the extent to which a model fits reasonably well in the population (as opposed to testing whether the model holds exactly in the population)’ (Brown 2006, 71). Cut-off criteria for RMSEA are usually established in values close to 0.06

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<sup>18</sup> Source: World Development Indicators of the World Bank.

<sup>19</sup> Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net>.



or below, although some authors relax this criterion to 0.07 (Steiger 2007) or 0.08 (MacCallum et al. 1996). Given the complexity of the concepts we are dealing with here, I adopt the most relaxed recommendation of at least  $\leq 0.08$ , to make analysis easier. The CFI ranges between 0 and 1, where high values are desirable because they are 'symptomatic of high correlations among indicator variables, (which is) clear indication of their dimensionality' (Alemán and Goods 2015, 8). Thus, CFI good fit is operationalized by values that are close to 0.95 or greater (Brown 2006). The Chi-Square of the model is also reported in the results, but it is not considered a reliable fit measure as it is very sensitive to sample size and tends to reject solutions based on a large N (Brown 2006).

As can be seen in Table 2.1, all the measurement items display very high standardized coefficients (always above 0.6),<sup>20</sup> which indicates that all of them are a relevant manifestation of the corresponding latent scales. However, the Chi-Square, RMSEA and CFI fit statistics are very poor and do not even approximate any standard criteria of goodness of fit. This may be suggesting that although the items included in the analysis notably contribute to identifying our three latent democracy scales, there may be other omitted indicators not included in the questionnaire that are in the citizens' minds when they think of the diverse democracy dimensions. In other words, our democracy scales are not sufficiently identified with the list of indicators included in the analysis, but all these indicators do fairly contribute to measure the democracy scales as proposed. It should be noted that the fit statistics of the social scale are not calculated because models exclusively measured by two indicators can be simply identified. To proceed with the analysis of the aspirations latent construct, the indicators are averaged into a single scale together with the other items of the corresponding vision. Table A2.1 in the Appendix displays the country scores of the four democracy scales for the aspiration items.

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<sup>20</sup> Cut-off criteria for standardised estimators are established at least  $\geq 0.40$  (Brown 2006).

**Table 2.1: The measurement test of the democracy scales for the aspiration items**

Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	X2	RMSEA	CFI
Free and fair elections	0.661			
Differentiated partisan offer	0.749			
Parties freedom	0.746			
Vertical accountability	0.615			
Transparency	0.631			
Deliberation of the electoral choice	0.670			
<b>ELECTORAL VISION</b>		<b>6029.23</b>	<b>0.116</b>	<b>0.941</b>
Equality before the law	0.716			
Horizontal accountability	0.710			
Reliable information	0.800			
Media freedom	0.670			
Minority rights	0.707			
<b>LIBERAL VISION</b>		<b>4870.86</b>	<b>0.139</b>	<b>0.951</b>
Protection against poverty	1			
Income differences	0.635			
<b>SOCIAL VISION</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

To follow, I run single-country CFAs on the ‘aspirations’ value construct, which, as exposed above, is measured by a two-factor model grouping the electoral and liberal scales in one factor, and the social and direct democracy scales in another factor. The results in Table 2.2 show that the proposed measurement model provides a good approximation to reality in most of the countries but is still far from being suitable for a good number of them. In no less than twelve countries (in bold in Table 2.2) the RMSEA and CFI scores fall short of the standard cut-off points and report very large Chi-Square values. It is worth noting that almost all the countries that do

not reach adequate model fit belong to the Eastern European sample of countries in the study: Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Russia, Slovenia, Slovakia, and Kosovo. This may be indicating that the two-factor model of liberal plus far-reaching aspirations regarding democracy cannot be extended to Eastern Europe, either because their citizens do not share such a theoretical division imposed on the data (liberal plus more far-reaching elements); or because some of our four measurement indicators (the electoral, liberal, social, and direct democracy visions) are not relevant for Eastern European citizens; or even because they miss some other dimensions of democracy that are not considered in this study.

There are, however, four exceptions to this noteworthy pattern. On the one hand, Cyprus (RMSEA=0.081, CFI=0.996) and Norway (RMSEA=0.082, CFI=0.995), which have poor model fit scores and, obviously, are not Eastern European countries; and Albania (RMSEA=0.000, CFI=1.000) and Ukraine (RMSEA=0.077, CFI=0.997), on the other hand, which being in the Eastern region display models that fit the data reasonably well. In light of these results, I proceed with the analyses excluding the full sample of Eastern European countries,<sup>21</sup> which will allow me to test the assumption on whether the abstract aspirations about democracy have their origins in the cultural differences between geographical regions in Europe—a conclusion that would resemble conventional ideas in the literature about the cultural origins of diffuse support (see Mishler and Rose 2001). If the results of the measurement invariance tests report equivalence between the countries in South and Western Europe, we could tentatively<sup>22</sup> conclude that East European cultural differences are the cause of the non-invariance in the aspirations construct. To test this, Cyprus and Norway are kept in the analysis.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Although Albania and Ukraine reach good model fit, they have also been excluded from the MGCFAs models together with the rest of Eastern European countries to test the cultural hypothesis. However, analysis including these two countries led essentially to the same results.

<sup>22</sup> Obviously, the nature of the data used, and the analysis undertaken, do not allow us to draw definite conclusions about the origins of democratic attitudes, for which the use of panel or longitudinal data would be more appropriate. Anyway, we can still point out underlying trends within our data.

<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, it should be noted that the violation of the cut-off criteria in the models for Cyprus and Norway is actually very small.

**Table 2.2: Aspirations about democracy measurement scales across countries**

Country	Standardized Factor Loadings				Fit Indices		
	Electoral	Liberal	Social	DirectDemo	X2	RMSEA	CFI
Albania	0.838	0.829	0.674	0.577	0.181	0.000	1.000
Belgium	0.903	0.872	0.725	0.578	1.611	0.018	1.000
<b>Bulgaria</b>	<b>0.856</b>	<b>0.900</b>	<b>0.610</b>	<b>0.631</b>	<b>45.413</b>	<b>0.145</b>	<b>0.986</b>
Switzerland	0.890	0.833	0.580	0.614	0.386	0.000	1.000
<b>Cyprus</b>	<b>0.910</b>	<b>0.839</b>	<b>0.691</b>	<b>0.630</b>	<b>7.845</b>	<b>0.081</b>	<b>0.996</b>
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>0.902</b>	<b>0.904</b>	<b>0.631</b>	<b>0.690</b>	<b>45.217</b>	<b>0.153</b>	<b>0.989</b>
Germany	0.950	0.766	0.694	0.628	4.058	0.032	0.999
Denmark	0.947	0.748	0.639	0.567	0.054	0.000	1.000
<b>Estonia</b>	<b>0.915</b>	<b>0.895</b>	<b>0.724</b>	<b>0.776</b>	<b>43.834</b>	<b>0.137</b>	<b>0.992</b>
Spain	0.884	0.905	0.760	0.686	9.708	0.070	0.998
Finland	0.924	0.812	0.767	0.481	3.214	0.032	0.999
France	0.918	0.891	0.675	0.606	0.468	0.000	1.000
United Kingdom	0.929	0.879	0.738	0.697	0.124	0.000	1.000
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>0.914</b>	<b>0.939</b>	<b>0.736</b>	<b>0.793</b>	<b>108.045</b>	<b>0.235</b>	<b>0.982</b>
Ireland	0.901	0.922	0.771	0.785	2.828	0.027	1.000
Israel	0.862	0.833	0.655	0.555	3.244	0.031	0.999
Iceland	0.926	0.800	0.761	0.580	5.234	0.076	0.996
Italy	0.894	0.847	0.687	0.665	3.256	0.049	0.999
<b>Lithuania</b>	<b>0.908</b>	<b>0.913</b>	<b>0.698</b>	<b>0.740</b>	<b>76.853</b>	<b>0.194</b>	<b>0.986</b>
Netherlands	0.923	0.850	0.728	0.590	0.040	0.000	1.000
<b>Norway</b>	<b>0.939</b>	<b>0.780</b>	<b>0.561</b>	<b>0.580</b>	<b>11.703</b>	<b>0.082</b>	<b>0.995</b>
<b>Poland</b>	<b>0.882</b>	<b>0.845</b>	<b>0.626</b>	<b>0.712</b>	<b>16.687</b>	<b>0.093</b>	<b>0.995</b>
Portugal	0.936	0.963	0.812	0.741	10.014	0.066	0.999
<b>Russia</b>	<b>0.894</b>	<b>0.913</b>	<b>0.721</b>	<b>0.738</b>	<b>38.430</b>	<b>0.127</b>	<b>0.993</b>
Sweden	0.942	0.777	0.683	0.553	3.129	0.034	0.999
<b>Slovenia</b>	<b>0.873</b>	<b>0.852</b>	<b>0.701</b>	<b>0.582</b>	<b>16.206</b>	<b>0.113</b>	<b>0.992</b>
<b>Slovakia</b>	<b>0.882</b>	<b>0.902</b>	<b>0.656</b>	<b>0.694</b>	<b>63.423</b>	<b>0.186</b>	<b>0.984</b>
Ukraine	0.868	0.911	0.683	0.723	13.313	0.077	0.997
<b>Kosovo</b>	<b>0.918</b>	<b>0.917</b>	<b>0.825</b>	<b>0.744</b>	<b>13.010</b>	<b>0.101</b>	<b>0.996</b>

Notes: Twenty-nine countries

Table 2.3 summarizes the results of the invariance tests for the MGCFA with the full sample of Southern and Western European countries (17 countries). The first row in Table 2.3 reports the fit indices of the configural invariance model, to which no equality constraints are imposed. The results show that this model fits the data very well (RMSEA=0.040, CFI=0.999), so we can begin to state that the latent concept of democratic aspirations can be meaningfully discussed in the 17 European countries

under study. As can be concluded from the relevant literature, the aspirations construct is valid as it represents the same individual-level pattern across countries.

But as mentioned above, configural equivalence is not sufficient to compare the scores of the latent variable across countries—that is, whether an increase of one unit on the measurement scale has the same meaning in all populations (Davidov et al. 2014, 63). To test this, the factor loadings are constrained to be the same across groups. Again, based on the model fit measures (RMSEA=0.70, CFI=0.992), we cannot reject the existence of metric invariance in our measurement model, meaning that we are on safe grounds to compare the aspirations scale across countries.

The final step inquires about the existence of scalar equivalence—i.e. the extent to which the origin of the aspirations scale is the same across groups—for which the intercepts of all indicators are constrained to be equal. This will indicate whether the means of the country groups can be compared in a meaningful way. This test leads however to a bad fitting-model (RMSEA=0.193, CFI=0.864). Despite this, we can still try to achieve partial scalar invariance, which is reached when at least two indicators have equal factor loadings and intercepts across countries (Davidov et al. 2014). Inspection of the model with all parameters free to vary (in which configural invariance was tested) suggests that the problem may lie with the intercepts of the indicator tapping the social vision of democracy.<sup>24</sup> Thus, I try a model with partial invariance in which the intercepts for the electoral, liberal and direct democracy visions are constrained to be equal but those for the social vision are allowed to vary. Unfortunately, even when removing the constraint for the social democracy indicator, the results yield still a poor model fit to the data (RMSEA=0.187, CFI=0.889), which does not improve if we further eliminate the constraints over any other of the three democratic visions. Thus, it can be concluded that our model does not reach partial scalar invariance either.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> It can be seen from the measurement model with no constraints that the intercepts for the social vision are considerably higher in Cyprus, Spain, Israel and Portugal.

<sup>25</sup> If I further exclude Cyprus and Norway, whose individual measurement models do not fit the data well as we saw above, scalar (RMSEA=0.188, CFI=0.873) or partial scalar (RMSEA=0.150, CFI=0.942) invariance are not achieved either.

**Table 2.3: Cross-national comparability of the aspirations construct**

Model Specifications	Chi-Square	df	RMSEA	CFI
Configural invariance	66.92	17	0.040	0.999
Metric invariance	482.26	49	0.070	0.992
Scalar invariance	7662.34	113	0.193	0.864
Partial scalar invariance	6276.20	98	0.187	0.889

Although this is not very surprising, as scalar and partial scalar invariance are very demanding tests, this result forces us to be very cautious when making comparisons of the aspirations construct's mean across groups. But what are the causes of such non-invariance? Rather than simply testing for non-equivalence, Davidov et al. (2016) suggest that 'measurement non-invariance may also be considered as a useful source of information as to *why* invariance is not given' (Davidov et al. 2016, 21, italics in the original). In other words, scalar non-invariance can be used as a starting point to investigate why the means of a certain item are different across groups. This can be done either at the individual or the country levels, or both. Davidov et al. (2016) suggest that there could be external variables at the contextual level that are able to account for the variability in the parameter intercepts that the MGCFA was unable to explain. Other authors (Brown 2006; Jak et al. 2011) advocate that this same function can be exerted by an external individual level variable, which can account for population heterogeneity if a significant direct effect on the latent factor is found. I explore these two possibilities here.

In both cases, the procedure involves introducing a theoretically relevant variable (either at the individual or the country level) that reduces the variance found in any of the parameter estimates. For the contextual hypothesis testing, I first conduct a two-level CFA model (at the country level) in which the indicator variables measuring the latent constructs are allowed to have between-level variability (i.e. no constraints are imposed). Then I perform a similar two-level CFA with a latent factor at the level-2 that may account for the parameter variance. I have chosen two alternative level-2 latent variables that could potentially explain the mean's non-invariance. The first of these is geographical region (Southern vs. Central/Western

Europe), to still push forward our hypothesis about the cultural origins of democratic aspirations. The second is the country's unemployment rate, which could be a relevant source of the (aforementioned) differential levels found in the intercepts of the indicator tapping the social vision of democracy. Other things being equal, we can expect higher scores on the social democracy vision in countries with higher rates of unemployment, as citizens in those societies with higher unemployment risks may tend to think that democracy should also care about social justice issues.

At the individual level, following Brown (2006), I use a multiple indicators/multiple causes (MIMIC) model to explain item bias. This approach, also known as CFA with covariates, simply entails adding one or more covariates to our original CFA model to examine their direct effects on the factors and measurement indicators, as well as the reduction in the error variance. MIMIC models also require reaching good model fit according to standards. Following the reasoning above, I have similarly chosen the respondent's unemployment status to account for the non-invariance of the social democracy parameter's intercepts.

Table 2.4 reports the results of all the models undertaken both at the contextual and individual levels. Model 1—which comes to be the equivalent of an empty variance component model at the country level—shows that the indicator on the direct democracy vision has the largest country-level variability (0.219), followed by the social democracy vision (0.179), the liberal vision (0.135) and the electoral vision (0.111). This may mean that the scalar non-invariance problems detected in the analysis above may also come from the direct democracy indicator, and not exclusively from the social indicator as initially presumed.

The level-2 latent factor on geographical region (1=Southern Europe) does not manage to reduce the unexplained country-level variance of any of the indicators. Quite the contrary, it even contributes to increase the random variance of the electoral, the liberal and the direct democracy indicators, and does not alter it for the social democracy indicator. It is worth noting that the social democratic indicator also loads very highly in Model 2, meaning that the social democracy variable is much more salient in the South European region. However, the fact that its residual variance is not accounted for by the region invites us to think that there

is more variability within that variable that may depend on other non-identified external factors. The unemployment rate latent variable introduced in Model 3 does its job, as expected, in reducing the unexplained country-level variance of the social indicator's intercept, but such reduction is certainly very slight (from 0.179 to 0.176). Although both contextual variables appeared theoretically relevant, they hardly contribute to explain the remaining variability in the social democracy indicator's intercepts.

At the individual level, the unemployment status seems initially to act as a relevant explanatory covariance as it improves the model fit quite substantially (RMSEA=0.065, CFI=0.989; from RMSEA=0.089 and CFI=0.991 of the baseline CFA). However, again it contributes only a little to the explanation of the variance of the social indicator (from 0.108 to 0.107). Thus, although there is high variability in the intercepts (means) of some of the parameters of the aspirations construct—more particularly, the social and direct democracy visions—this is not accounted for by the factor variables and the covariate considered here. These results lead us to conclude that the cultural foundations of aspirations are mainly confined to the Eastern area, but not to further differences between Southern and Western Europe. Furthermore, the fact that both the unemployment rate at the country level and the unemployment status at the individual were hardly responsible for the variability found in the social democracy parameter make us think that this variance may actually rest on a more multifaceted compound of several factors, rather than on one factor alone. Elucidating this, however, is beyond the scope of this chapter.



**Table 2.4: Multilevel CFAs and MIMIC model to account for scalar non-invariance of aspirations**

	Model 1: Two-level CFA (country level)		Model 2: Two-level CFA (latent variable: Southern Europe)		Model 3: Two-level CFA (latent variable: unemployment rate)		Model 4: CFA model		Model 5: MIMIC model (covariate: unemployment status)	
<b>Factor loadings/ Coefficients</b>	b	z	b	z	b	Z	b	z	b	z
Electoral	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
	(constrained)									
Liberal	1.164***	0.035	0.649***	0.044	1.051***	0.034	1.029***	0.006	1.029***	0.006
Social	1.290***	0.039	2.010***	0.081	1.497***	0.044	0.916***	0.007	0.917***	0.007
Direct democracy	1.025***	0.038	0.759***	0.055	0.935***	0.038	0.899***	0.008	0.899***	0.008
<b>Variance component</b>										
Electoral	0.111	0.001	0.115	0.001	0.111	0.001	0.019	0.000	0.019	0.000
Liberal	0.135	0.001	0.144	0.001	0.138	0.001	0.040	0.001	0.040	0.001
Social	0.179	0.001	0.179	0.001	0.176	0.001	0.108	0.001	0.107	0.001
Direct democracy	0.219	0.002	0.225	0.002	0.221	0.002	0.147	0.001	0.147	0.001
<b>Goodness of fit statistics</b>							Chi-Square: 492.08	Chi-Square: 648.62		
							RMSEA: 0.089	RMSEA: 0.065		
							CFI: 0.991	CFI: 0.989		

Notes: (1) Goodness of fit statistics are not provided for the multilevel CFAs as the gsem package in Stata does not calculate them.

(2) The CFA in Models 4 and 5 is specified as a single-factor model due to MIMIC models (or models with covariates) cannot be performed in two-factor models. This is not however problematic for our purposes here, which are testing the extent to which the variability found in the indicator intercepts can be explained by a population covariate. For this reason, the model fit of the CFA in Model 4 is very poor (RMSEA=0.089; CFI=0.991), as the optimal solution for our data, as proved above, is a two-factor model. The single-factor model is here presented for variance comparison with the MIMIC model (Model 5).

(3) \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Before moving to test the invariance assumptions of the evaluations construct, I will address a robustness check of the central finding in this section so far, namely the differences found between the East and the rest of Europe in the meaning the citizens assign to democratic aspirations. To what extent can we safely conclude that the non-equivalence of the aspirations concept across Europe is due to cultural differences based on the geographical region and not to the experience with democracy itself? Given that some countries in Eastern Europe are not considered full democracies according to international standards, to what extent is this experience with democracy what determines dissimilar understandings of democracy? To test this assumption, I have again performed a MGCFA using democratic status as a grouping variable, distinguishing between those countries not considered full democracies by the Polity IV project<sup>26</sup> (Albania, Kosovo, Russia and Ukraine) versus the rest of the countries.

Table 2.5 displays the global fit measures of the MGCFA based on the two country groups. Our model satisfactorily reaches configural invariance (RMSEA=0.073, CFI=0.997), metric invariance (RMSEA=0.054, CFI=0.997), but unfortunately not scalar invariance (RMSEA=0.082, CFI=0.993). However, if we allow the intercepts for the social and the direct democracy parameters to vary freely, partial scalar invariance is comfortably achieved (RMSEA=0.069, CFI=0.993). Thus, we can conclude that poorly democratic countries are not responsible for differences in democracy understandings, as could be easily presumed.

**Table 2.5: Cross groups comparability of aspirations: Democratic status**

Model Specifications	Chi-Square	Df	RMSEA	CFI
Configural invariance	283.05	2	0.073	0.997
Metric invariance	306.92	4	0.054	0.997
Scalar invariance	1399.32	8	0.082	0.987
Partial scalar invariance	755.46	6	0.069	0.993

<sup>26</sup> Available at: <http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm>.

## **b) The 'evaluations' construct**

Again, I begin here by pre-testing the existence of the three democracy visions (electoral, liberal and social) using the evaluations items. The direct democracy vision cannot be tested as it is composed of one single indicator. Looking at Table 2.6 it is evident that all the evaluation variables contribute substantially to measure the three democracy scales, as all of them display standardized coefficients above 0.5. However, the model fit measures of the electoral vision scale are very poor, meaning that although the electoral measurement indicators are important to measure this latent scale, the scale is still poorly identified as there may be other omitted indicators that could also potentially contribute to its identification. The liberal vision, by contrast, reaches good RMSEA (0.075) and reasonable good CFI (0.988) scores, which entails that the list of liberal indicators included in the analysis represents quite fairly the elements that citizens have in mind when they are asked to evaluate the liberal dimension of democracy. These results give us again green light to average the items into their corresponding scales to proceed with the analysis of the evaluations latent construct. The country scores of the four evaluations democracy scales can be found in Table A2.1 in the Appendix.

**Table 2.6: The measurement test of the democracy scales for the evaluation variables**

Items	Standardized Factor Loadings	X2	RMSEA	CFI
Free and fair elections	0.705			
Differentiated partisan offer	0.658			
Parties freedom	0.646			
Vertical accountability	0.606			
Transparency	0.654			
Deliberation of the electoral choice	0.528			
<b>ELECTORAL VISION</b>		<b>7537.90</b>	<b>0.133</b>	<b>0.904</b>
Equality before the law	0.627			
Reliable information	0.736			
Media freedom	0.669			
Minority rights	0.613			
<b>LIBERAL VISION</b>		<b>544.75</b>	<b>0.075</b>	<b>0.988</b>
Protection against poverty	1			
Income differences	0.780			
<b>SOCIAL VISION</b>		<b>0</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>

When we move to test the evaluations construct, the results reveal again serious problems of comparability. First, the single-country CFAs displayed in Table 2.7 reveal that in 10 countries the model does not fit well the data, since both the RMSEA and the CFI scores fall above/below the recommended cut-off standards. These countries are Albania, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Hungary, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Ukraine and Kosovo (in bold in Table 2.7). While it is not easy to ascertain an underlying pattern within this list of countries, the overall performance of democracy seems to stand out as a plausible explanation for such differences. The ten countries exhibit some of the lowest scores of 'objective' quality of democracy,

according to the Democracy Barometer data.<sup>27</sup> However, other countries like Russia (RMSEA=0.072, CFI=0.998), Bulgaria (RMSEA=0.064, CFI=0.996), France (RMSEA=0.059, CFI=0.998) or Spain (RMSEA=0.053, CFI=0.998) also display similarly low democratic quality scores but fit the data satisfactorily. Thus, although the quality of democracy seems initially to help to account for the differential understandings of the evaluations concept among our sample of countries, it cannot be set up as the only likely explanation.

To test whether our theoretical construct of evaluations really exists within the minds of Europeans, I proceed with the MGCFA excluding those 10 countries. The results of the invariance tests for the evaluations scale are summarized in Table 2.8. Configural equivalence, the lowest level of invariance that is achieved when all parameters are allowed to vary freely, is well accepted by the data (RMSEA=0.042, CFI=0.999). Similarly, the data fully fit the constraints for metric invariance (RMSEA=0.080, CFI=0.987). This entails that the meaning of the evaluations scale, as measured by the liberal and the more far-reaching sub-dimensions, is similar across the sample of countries considered, thus allowing covariances or unstandardized regression coefficients to be compared cross-nationally (Ariely and Davidov 2011, 277). However, scalar invariance is again rejected (RMSEA=0.298, CFI=0.602), and no model fit of partial scalar invariance is achieved when the constraints on any of the parameters intercepts are released. The results in Table 2.8 display the goodness of fit statistics when both the social and the direct democracy parameter indicators are allowed to vary freely (RMSEA=0.287, CFI=0.735).

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<sup>27</sup> Available at: <http://www.democracybarometer.org/>

**Table 2.7: Evaluations of democracy measurement scales across countries**

Country	Standardized Factor Loadings				Fit Indices		
	Electoral	Liberal	Social	DirectDemo	X2	RMSEA	CFI
<b>Albania</b>	<b>0.796</b>	<b>0.778</b>	<b>0.733</b>	<b>0.603</b>	<b>19.207</b>	<b>0.128</b>	<b>0.989</b>
Belgium	0.875	0.844	0.773	0.512	3.603	0.038	0.999
Bulgaria	0.838	0.766	0.627	0.620	9.544	0.064	0.996
Switzerland	0.840	0.838	0.599	0.640	0.089	0.000	1.000
<b>Cyprus</b>	<b>0.940</b>	<b>0.636</b>	<b>0.705</b>	<b>0.574</b>	<b>20.322</b>	<b>0.137</b>	<b>0.985</b>
<b>Czech Republic</b>	<b>0.793</b>	<b>0.853</b>	<b>0.701</b>	<b>0.668</b>	<b>70.589</b>	<b>0.198</b>	<b>0.971</b>
Germany	0.889	0.712	0.778	0.525	0.051	0.000	1.000
Denmark	0.845	0.777	0.696	0.537	0.376	0.000	1.000
<b>Estonia</b>	<b>0.929</b>	<b>0.810</b>	<b>0.728</b>	<b>0.716</b>	<b>82.357</b>	<b>0.192</b>	<b>0.980</b>
Spain	0.812	0.851	0.771	0.718	5.973	0.053	0.998
Finland	0.868	0.785	0.843	0.544	7.684	0.056	0.998
France	0.818	0.842	0.798	0.653	7.589	0.059	0.998
United Kingdom	0.904	0.830	0.823	0.691	5.819	0.048	0.999
<b>Hungary</b>	<b>0.869</b>	<b>0.815</b>	<b>0.716</b>	<b>0.786</b>	<b>225.526</b>	<b>0.347</b>	<b>0.942</b>
<b>Ireland</b>	<b>0.900</b>	<b>0.844</b>	<b>0.683</b>	<b>0.694</b>	<b>22.875</b>	<b>0.093</b>	<b>0.996</b>
<b>Israel</b>	<b>0.829</b>	<b>0.702</b>	<b>0.786</b>	<b>0.558</b>	<b>47.846</b>	<b>0.143</b>	<b>0.979</b>
Iceland	0.851	0.832	0.712	0.478	0.278	0.000	1.000
<b>Italy</b>	<b>0.844</b>	<b>0.837</b>	<b>0.749</b>	<b>0.702</b>	<b>7.478</b>	<b>0.085</b>	<b>0.996</b>
Lithuania	0.857	0.828	0.594	0.703	0.149	0.000	1.000
Netherlands	0.840	0.817	0.734	0.377	0.027	0.000	1.000
Norway	0.861	0.771	0.673	0.557	0.515	0.000	1.000
Poland	0.833	0.817	0.676	0.718	0.987	0.000	1.000
Portugal	0.780	0.819	0.816	0.760	11.488	0.073	0.997
Russia	0.826	0.917	0.730	0.811	12.678	0.072	0.998
Sweden	0.852	0.871	0.802	0.632	3.216	0.035	0.999
Slovenia	0.821	0.756	0.492	0.506	4.893	0.058	0.997
Slovak Republic	0.907	0.816	0.596	0.737	5.076	0.048	0.999
<b>Ukraine</b>	<b>0.760</b>	<b>0.925</b>	<b>0.672</b>	<b>0.774</b>	<b>22.921</b>	<b>0.105</b>	<b>0.993</b>
<b>Kosovo</b>	<b>0.945</b>	<b>0.831</b>	<b>0.782</b>	<b>0.684</b>	<b>49.535</b>	<b>0.208</b>	<b>0.980</b>

Notes: Twenty-nine countries

**Table 2.8: Cross-national comparability of the evaluations construct**

Model Specifications	Chi-Square	Df	RMSEA	CFI
Configural invariance	80.03	19	0.042	0.999
Metric invariance	699.09	55	0.080	0.987
Scalar invariance	20463.97	127	0.298	0.602
Partial scalar invariance	13640.25	91	0.287	0.735

Again, following the suggestions of Davidov et al. (2016) and Brown (2006), I first undertake a multilevel CFA in order to try to account for the intercepts variance by means of a level-2 variable, flowed by a MIMIC model, in which a covariate is included at the individual level seeking to explain any of the indicators' variance. As can be grasped from Model 1 in Table 2.9, random variance is particularly high for the direct democracy (8.732) and social democracy (5.170) indicators. Thus, in Model 2 and 3 (two-level CFA with latent variables) I will test to what extent the variance of these two parameters can be accounted for by the country's unemployment rate, which can explain differential intercepts between countries in the evaluations of the social democracy indicator, and an index of participatory democracy, which can potentially explicate cross-country differences in the means of the direct democracy indicator. Unfortunately, the reductions in the random variances are very small and only happen within the social democracy indicator: from 5.170 to 5.166 thanks to the unemployment rate, and to 5.161 thanks to the participatory democracy index.<sup>28</sup>

The MIMIC model includes the people's ideological predispositions as an individual-level covariate, since (left-right) ideology is traditionally considered to have a relevant impact on individual evaluations of democracy and may also play a

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<sup>28</sup> It could be also the case that the participatory democracy index used here is not a good indicator of direct democracy at the macro level, so that it does not contribute in any way to account for people's evaluations of direct democracy implementation in their countries. As noted in the introductory chapter of the thesis, given the scarcity of direct democracy in real world democracies, it is quite difficult to find an accurate indicator. Alternatively, I have tried an indicator coming from the DB that measures the 'effective use of direct democratic instruments', but this indicator only identifies the model (as the country-level empty model). Moreover, it does not even lead to an increase or reduction in the random variance, given the limited variance that the DB indicator presents overall.

significant role in accounting for the variance in how citizens evaluate the social and the direct democracy aspects. Other things being equal, we can expect left-wing citizens to be more critical of the performance of those two democratic dimensions, so once we introduce the ideological variable in the model the variability in the intercepts should be reduced. As can be seen from Model 5, individual ideological leanings do contribute to reduce very substantially the variance of all the indicator variables, but more especially of those of the social and direct democracy visions. Thus, with respect to the evaluations construct, we can safely argue that the differences found in the intercepts of its different components within our sample can be attributed to factors linked to individual citizens (e.g. ideological positioning) rather than to the countries.



**Table 2.9: Multilevel CFAs and MIMIC model to account for scalar non-invariance of evaluations**

	Model 1: Two-level CFA (country level)		Model 2: Two-level CFA (latent variable: unemployment rate)		Model 3: Two-level CFA (latent variable: participatory democracy)		Model 4: CFA model		Model 5: MIMIC model (covariate: ideology)	
<b>Factor loadings/ Coefficients</b>	b	z	b	z	b	Z	b	z	b	z
Electoral (constrained)	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
Liberal	1.178***	0.015	1.174***	0.016	1.179***	0.016	1.076***	0.006	1.083***	0.006
Social	1.479***	0.019	1.505***	0.020	1.504***	0.020	1.183***	0.008	1.209***	0.008
Direct democracy	1.073***	0.020	1.008***	0.020	1.013***	0.020	1.161***	0.010	1.177***	0.011
<b>Variance component</b>										
Electoral	2.721	0.020	2.747	0.020	2.745	0.020	0.779	0.011	0.735	0.011
Liberal	3.147	0.023	3.192	0.024	3.179	0.024	1.094	0.014	1.067	0.014
Social	5.170	0.039	5.166	0.039	5.161	0.039	3.135	0.029	3.051	0.030
Direct democracy	8.732	0.067	8.870	0.068	8.860	0.067	6.032	0.050	6.124	0.054
<b>Goodness of fit statistics</b>							Chi-Square: 498.73		Chi-Square: 731.05	
							RMSEA: 0.085		RMSEA: 0.069	
							CFI: 0.992		CFI: 0.987	

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## CONCLUSIONS

For more than four decades now, the Eastonian distinction between diffuse and specific support has inspired much research on the relationship between citizens and democracy. Despite the literature in this area having been prolific, two conclusions are overwhelmingly shared. First, from Africa to Asia and from East to Western Europe (e.g. see Canache 2012; Chu et al. 2008; Bratton and Mattes 2001), citizens have a great deal of diffuse support for democracy, expressed in the belief that the democratic ideal represents the best form of government. Second, citizens are however dissatisfied with the actual functioning of democracy in their countries; or put in Eastonian terms, they hardly support democracy in the specific. As Easton proclaimed, this old puzzle in democracy research can only be tackled by acknowledging that both kinds of support coexist contradictorily in the public's attitudinal belief system.

During the past decade scholars have started to raise concerns about the limitations of the Eastonian framework, as well as the traditional indicators employed to measure it. Regarding specific support, the main criticism comes from the fact that it is interpreted as a summary measure of multiple dimensions of support (e.g. the formal structure, the incumbent authorities and/or the policy outputs), thus rendering highly ambiguous which dimension or dimensions such kind of support actually represents (Canache et al. 2001, 509). Since it is quite unlikely that citizens will assign the same weight to every democratic dimension, we can expect some aspects to be more important than others in individual's summary appraisals. However, the unidimensional character of specific support leaves this weighting process fully inaccessible to the researcher's inquiries. As for diffuse support, it has been argued that overt support for democracy in the abstract—or the ideal it represents as the best form of government—may be hiding incomplete, vacuous, or very different understandings of the term 'democracy' from the citizens who declare supporting it. Some citizens may understand democracy in terms of procedures, others simply in terms of economic and policy outputs (Bratton and Mattes 2001), and others still may prove unable to assign it meaningful content. Nevertheless, quite likely all of them will still proclaim support for democracy as an ideal form of government since it constitutes a 'valence issue' that respondents tend

to give a 'politically correct answer' to (Schedler and Sarsfield 2007, 638-9). Thus, knowing whether citizens either support or reject democracy in specific and/or diffuse terms just produces 'an illusionary appearance of comparability' (Heath et al. 2005, 321) of such supportive attitudes that hardly stands up to theoretical and empirical argumentation. Is it time, then, to replace Easton's notions of diffuse and specific support for more valid measures of attachment?

This chapter has sought to provide theoretical and empirical arguments to demonstrate that the notions on 'aspirations' and 'evaluations' of democracy are more appropriate in accounting for the type of orientations with which citizens relate to their democratic systems in two important ways. Theoretically, it has been argued that aspirations and evaluations are cognitively connected, in the sense that we need to know what citizens' democratic aspirations are to understand how they will evaluate democracy. Still, from a theoretical point of view, I have provided reasons to believe that it is hardly conceivable that citizens around the world (and even within the same country) will understand the word 'democracy' in a similar way, so it is more fruitful to resort to multi-item scales with which respondents may rate their support for different aspects. The empirical analyses of the chapter have been aimed at testing this second theoretical assumption. The first claim on the cognitive connection between aspirations and evaluations will be explored in detail in the following chapters.

The tests of measurement equivalence across countries performed in the chapter revealed that neither the concept of aspirations nor evaluations are invariant across the full sample of countries under study. Aspirations proved to be very sensitive to cultural differences across geographical regions, and more particularly, to the apparently differential Eastern European understanding of democracy. All countries in that region (except for Albania and Ukraine) yielded measurement models of democratic aspirations that did not fit the data according to standards. This entails evidence that the democratic experience or the cultural context in which Eastern European respondents have been socialized matters a great deal for their abstract understanding of democracy. This result corroborates the longstanding expectations in the literature on understandings of democracy; namely, that democracy is a complex concept that can hardly be understood in a

similar way across all countries and cultures. Further evidence on the aspirations concept suggested that such non-equivalence may be caused by culture and not by the experience with democracy in itself. This is an interesting result in itself, which may indicate that the differential understanding of democracy that exists between the East and the rest of Europe may prove to be lasting, as cultural influences usually take long time to overcome—contrary to differences due to the experience with democracy, which may change in the event of improvements in the democratic setting.

To conclude, our results showed that although democratic aspirations were found to be comparable across the Southern and Western European countries, there are still differences in the intercepts of some of the measurement indicators that may make comparisons of latent means problematic. This is, indeed, a foreseeable result, as achieving full equivalence of complex constructs across cultures has been proved to be difficult. As Davidov et al. (2016) put it: ‘Whereas lower levels (i.e., configural or metric) of invariance are often supported by the data in cross-national studies, this becomes increasingly seldom when higher levels (i.e., scalar) of invariance are tested across cultures or countries’ (Davidov et al. 2016, 5). Although to my knowledge no other study to date has dealt with the equivalence of citizens’ normative ideas about democracy, earlier literature has found scalar non-invariance in scales of public support for democracy (Ariely and Davidov 2011), attitudes toward citizenship rights (Davidov et al. 2016), feelings of nationalism and patriotism (Davidov 2009), and the Schwartz human values scale (Davidov et al. 2012). Thus, in line with this previous research, the results have shown that the social democracy and the direct democracy parameters display variance that cannot be explained by the latent concept. In a sense, comparability of the aspirations concept is only partially meaningful, so that its use across a large sample of countries should be done with caution.

Regarding the concept of evaluations, we similarly found that their meaning cannot be meaningfully compared across the entire sample of countries, but only within a smaller subset of countries that seem to be characterized by higher democratic quality standards than the average. At the individual level, the ideological positioning of the individuals proved to be a relevant factor for helping

to explain why equality in the indicators' intercepts is not given. That is, differences in the means of evaluations of the four democratic visions are substantially determined by the respondent's ideology, which entails that once we have accounted for the country differences, the remaining variability within the intercepts' scales can be mainly explained at the individual level. In line with our conclusions above about the aspirations value construct, we can determine again that the evaluations are a complex concept, the cross-country comparability—and even also the comparability across individuals— of which needs to be taken with caution.

These results do not invalidate the claim made in this chapter to adopt the aspirations and evaluations concepts in substitution of the classical Eastonian framework. To be sure, both concepts have proved to be non-equivalent across all countries under study, but the empirical analyses have provided instructive evidence to understand why this is indeed the case. Testing the geographical scope of our theoretical concepts provides very important insights into the analytical strategies to adopt for hypothesis testing and, more importantly, the improvements necessary to undertake in future measurement endeavours. Furthermore, the analyses have demonstrated that democracy is not all of one piece but is composed of different dimensions that tend to operate in citizens' minds independently from one another. Thus, given that the meaning of the aspirations and evaluations concepts cannot be extended to the whole European continent—a conclusion that, on the other hand, was largely expected—cross-national research is only meaningful on its diverse subcomponents. This goes indeed in line with Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta's (2016) conclusions about the dimensional structure of the liberal democracy element. Relying on scaling techniques to test the pattern of relationships between the items, these authors show that all citizens across Europe share the same framework of the basic model of liberal democracy; that is, a model in which all the same elements are considered, but the demands individuals pose on each of its constitute elements tend to differ greatly. In sum, citizens do not either support or reject democracy as a block but partially reject or support each of its core constitutive elements. For this reason, the specific and diffuse support concepts prove unhelpful for researchers.

**APPENDIX: CHAPTER 2**

**Table A2.1: Country scores of the democracy scales**

	Electoral			Liberal			Social			Direct			Direct		
	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	aspirations	evaluations	evaluations	evaluations	evaluations	evaluations	evaluations
Albania	0.70	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.84	0.44	0.44	0.44	5.24	5.270	2.89	2.89	4.173	4.173
Belgium	0.27	0.36	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.32	0.39	0.39	0.39	6.41	6.32	5.02	5.02	4.13	4.13
Bulgaria	0.62	0.67	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.70	0.50	0.50	0.50	4.98	5.12	1.75	1.75	3.52	3.52
Switzerland	0.34	0.47	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.49	0.49	0.49	7.27	7.17	5.90	5.90	7.87	7.87
Cyprus	0.65	0.65	0.71	0.71	0.71	0.71	0.49	0.49	0.49	6.25	6.69	3.84	3.84	5.23	5.23
Czech Republic	0.38	0.44	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.36	0.48	0.48	0.48	5.62	5.69	2.80	2.80	4.40	4.40
Germany	0.46	0.64	0.46	0.46	0.46	0.46	0.49	0.49	0.49	6.65	7.16	4.36	4.36	3.73	3.73
Denmark	0.42	0.59	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.31	0.49	0.49	0.49	7.45	7.67	6.133	6.133	6.72	6.72
Estonia	0.45	0.56	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.50	5.43	5.77	2.79	2.79	4.50	4.50
Spain	0.51	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.50	0.50	0.50	5.71	5.09	3.10	3.10	3.96	3.96
Finland	0.26	0.37	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.29	0.41	0.41	0.41	7.36	7.4	5.96	5.96	6.35	6.35
France	0.37	0.41	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.46	0.46	0.46	6.24	5.85	4.42	4.42	4.50	4.50
United Kingdom	0.37	0.42	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.48	0.48	0.48	6.62	6.66	5.13	5.13	5.51	5.51
Hungary	0.55	0.58	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.57	0.50	0.50	0.50	5.79	5.72	3.42	3.42	5.28	5.28
Ireland	0.39	0.41	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.38	0.49	0.49	0.49	6.75	6.77	5.16	5.16	7.14	7.14
Israel	0.49	0.58	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.47	0.47	0.47	6.33	6.42	3.68	3.68	3.62	3.62
Iceland	0.43	0.64	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.43	0.48	0.48	0.48	6.40	6.55	4.42	4.42	6.05	6.05
Italy	0.51	0.54	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.63	0.50	0.50	0.50	4.83	4.71	2.70	2.70	3.97	3.97
Lithuania	0.34	0.41	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.42	0.49	0.49	0.49	4.79	5	2.68	2.68	4.32	4.32
Netherlands	0.26	0.33	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.19	0.34	0.34	0.34	7.01	6.88	5.53	5.53	4.77	4.77
Norway	0.40	0.54	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.33	0.46	0.46	0.46	7.54	7.78	6.28	6.28	6.77	6.77
Poland	0.52	0.66	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.61	0.50	0.50	0.50	6.09	5.88	2.98	2.98	4.91	4.91
Portugal	0.40	0.44	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.51	0.46	0.46	0.46	5.52	4.85	2.84	2.84	3.73	3.73

Russia	0.45	0.52	0.54	0.50	4.60	3.99	2.91	3.69
Sweden	0.47	0.65	0.44	0.48	7.59	7.81	6.09	6.67
Slovenia	0.42	0.55	0.62	0.49	5.77	6.01	3.08	6.39
Slovak Republic	0.31	0.35	0.36	0.46	6.23	5.68	3.43	4.96
Ukraine	0.50	0.60	0.64	0.50	4.34	3.96	1.81	3.02
Kosovo	0.54	0.61	0.66	0.50	3.95	4.73	2.27	3.25

## **CHAPTER 3: PATTERNS OF DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS AND CITIZENS' SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY**

### **INTRODUCTION**

There is a common agreement in democratic theory that democracy is a complex, multifaceted concept. According to Dahl's popular definition, democracy is an elaborate ideal based on the principles of inclusiveness, effective participation, enlightened understanding, voting equality, and control of the agenda (Dahl 1979). In another example, Beetham (1991) defines democracy in terms of political equality and popular control; and Morlino (2009) points to the values of liberty and equality as the core ideals to be maximized in democratic systems.

Despite the overwhelming amount of contributions in democratic theory on the multidimensional nature of democracy, and the number of values and principles that have been discussed as being part of it, there is a general tendency among empirical researchers to equate democracy solely with a single aspect of democratic politics; namely, the representation dimension. To a large extent, this is grounded on the idea that competitive elections are the main instruments of democracy (Powell 2000), as they determine the distribution of power within the political system and link the preferences of the citizens to the behaviour of the policymakers. Typical for this approach is Arend Lijphart's (1999) distinction between consensus and majoritarian regime types, which is derived from the perception that the most important democratic institutions that we find in democratic systems can be deduced from how democracies solve the representation dilemma, i.e. how many individual preferences are represented in the publicly elected government. In a sense, for many political scientists 'democracy begins and ends with the act of voting' (Jacobs and Shapiro 1994, 11).

The vision that democracy is above all about representation has also been dominant in studies on how citizens judge their democratic systems. The conventional view here states that 'people form [their] attitudes about politics in systemic contexts whose institutional structures mediate preferences, define the choices available, and provide citizens with opportunities to be heard in the political



process' (Anderson and Guillory 1997, 66). Thus, it is assumed that in their relations with the political system, what really counts are the citizens' perceptions of how the representative institutions account for their interests and demands.

Though this is right and true, it only tells part of the story. Citizens' individual experience with democratic institutions does not primarily relate to electoral institutions, but to other more proximate institutions such as the public service, the bureaucratic system, the judiciary, and the welfare state, to name but a few. These institutions usually involve a more direct and tangible contact with citizens than the election rules or the party system, and consequently they may have a stronger impact on how citizens form their evaluations about the working of their democratic system.<sup>29</sup> Besides this, it is also known that citizens have different normative expectations ('beliefs about what is fundamentally right and proper in politics', Easton 1975, 446) that they use to evaluate the allocation of societal benefits and outcomes delivered by their democratic institutions. Thus, if they consider that principles like equality, fairness and transparency are important, they will evaluate their institutions accordingly, which will have spill-over effects on the formation of their democratic attitudes and actions. Taken together, their normative expectations and their regular experience with a broad range of democratic institutions (other than the representative ones) induce citizens to form a multidimensional image of their democratic system, which is far from straightforward.

Contrary to the extended vision on democracy uniquely focused on representative institutions, this chapter adopts a new, more complex perspective to explain differences in citizens' satisfaction with democracy across European countries. I argue that the different ways in which four core democratic values (political equality, freedom, interest representation and social justice) are institutionalized in the democratic system originate different patterns of institutions, which provide citizens with a foundation to evaluate how 'kind and gentle' their democratic systems are. In other words, how democracies attain their goals in these four core areas informs citizens about the capacity of their democratic systems to

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<sup>29</sup> For a similar argument, see Rohrschneider (2005).

satisfy certain 'needs' that are valuable to them and to the entire society, and which give democracy its normative justification.

Despite the significance of these four values in democratic theory, we know fairly little about how they are achieved in democratic societies—i.e. through which institutional settings—and which effect these values have on citizens' democratic attitudes. Therefore, the first aim of this chapter is to provide a richer understanding and conceptualization of the different democratic values that might affect the way in which citizens evaluate the performance of their democratic systems, taking democratic theory as a point of departure for the debate. A good deal of work in the discipline has already contributed to explaining the effects of the type of institutional arrangements that will be studied here on public democratic attitudes. However, up to now they have not been researched as part of a single theoretical framework of how democracy, understood as a whole institutional complex serving different normative goals, matters for popular support for democracy. In this sense, the chapter functions as a robustness check of previous studies, as it replicates simultaneously the empirical tests of a range of competing hypotheses that have been put forward before in the literature about the attitudinal effects of democratic institutions.

The second goal of the chapter is to extend our empirical knowledge on the mechanisms that explain the macro-micro linkage between democratic values/institutions and citizens' levels of democratic satisfaction. To do this, the chapter explores a type of causal relationship that remains both undertheorized and underexplored empirically; namely, the differential effect that institutional characteristics might have on individuals' democratic support depending on their normative aspirations about what a good democracy is. Thus, it will be shown that the individuals use their normative aspirations as a yardstick to evaluate the performance of political institutions, so that they are more satisfied with their democratic system if they find congruence between what they expect from democracy in the abstract and what they gain from it in practice. This makes the satisfaction with democracy judgment a more value-based assessment than what has been traditionally considered in the literature.

The next section starts by conceptualizing democracy as a multifaceted concept composed of four core democratic principles: political equality, freedom, representation and social justice. Then, I define the dependent variable—satisfaction with the way democracy works—and show how it is distributed across our sample of countries. The fourth section introduces further theoretical considerations about the relationship between institutional configurations, normative expectations, and public satisfaction with the working of democracy. Specifically, I discuss the hypothesized effect of the four core democratic values (freedom, equality, representation and social justice) on democratic satisfaction, as well as their conditional effects depending on the normative views one has on what a good democracy is. The fifth section tests our hypotheses, adopting a multi-level approach. In the conclusion I highlight the central implications of my results.

## **THE MULTIDIMENSIONAL NATURE OF DEMOCRACY**

It has been argued that a core political distinction among countries today ‘concerns not whether they are democratic or not but what kind of democracies they are’ (Møller and Skaaning 2011, 1). Since the rediscovery of political institutions (March and Olsen 1989) at the beginning of the 1980s, a great deal of this comparative ambition between democratic types has taken place within the new-institutionalist agenda. New institutionalism centres the explanation of the differences in performance between democratic systems on the role played by institutions. It is understood that formal political institutions determine the incentives and constraints that are available for actors within the political system and, therefore, shape their orientations and behaviours. Furthermore, institutions ‘mobilise institutional resources in political struggles and governance relationships’ (Bell 2002, 1), thus affecting the distribution and balance of political power. Therefore, institutional variation is what explains differential political outcomes between countries, and as such it has attracted the primary focus of attention among comparativists.

Probably the most influential attempt to elaborate a typology of democratic systems based on models of political institutions can be accredited to Arend Lijphart’s seminal book ‘Patterns of Democracy’ (1999). Lijphart identifies two types of

democratic systems, majoritarian and consensual, which can be differentiated according to how they solve the central issue on the distribution of political power. Thus, the majoritarian model emphasizes that democracy is majority rule and is based on a concentration of power, whereas consensus democracy disperses power so that there are multiples poles of decision making and a broader array of interests are represented (Powell 2000). As Lijphart suggests, whether democratic political systems can be classified as majoritarian vs. consensual—concentrating or dispersing political power—depends on how ten institutional dilemmas are solved in the political system. These ten indicators cluster in two separate dimensions: the executives–parties dimension and the federal–unitary one, which represent two different ways of dividing power between actors within the central executive and the legislative, and between different institutions at the territorial level.

Although Lijphart’s classification of systems is probably one of the major contributions to the empirical study of democracies in political science in the last decades, in this chapter I contend that it is a limited tool for accounting for the full variety of democratic systems, for several reasons. Empirically, it can be argued that representative institutions are by no means the only institutional configurations according to which democracies may vary. Democracies differ in the nature of the citizenship policies they employ, the use they make of referendums and other mechanisms of direct democracy, the type of welfare system that is installed and the bureaucratic system that is in place, to name but a few examples.

Furthermore, on conceptual grounds, equating democracy solely with the representation dimension implies a partial definition of democracy which does not correspond to centuries of debate in democratic theory about how the word ‘democracy’ might be defined. Actually, as Bernard Manin (1997) reminds us, the representative government was conceived originally in opposition to democracy—i.e. the self-rule of the people—and elections were devised as elitist institutions aimed to choose a body of citizens whose wisdom might best discern the true interest of the country (Manin 1997, 2). Pointing out this contradiction, democratic theorists through history have proposed different conceptions that link democracy to alternative values and institutional settings that ought to organize society, such as direct participation, deliberation, communitarianism, or cosmopolitanism, to name

but a few examples.<sup>30</sup> Both conceptually and empirically, it is therefore questionable whether the representative institutions play a unique role in defining and characterizing democratic modes.

### **Identifying patterns of democratic institutions from democratic theory**

Contrary to the new-institutionalist research agenda, much of the ample literature on transitions to democracy has benefited extensively from classical democratic theory to classify democratic vs. undemocratic types, as well as to conceptualize the great diversity of post-authoritarian regimes emerging from the last wave of democratization. A recent example of this connexion can be found in Møller and Skaaning (2011), who provide a straightforward classification of democratic systems which nicely summarizes much of the debate in democratic theory. According to these authors, most of the different conceptions of democracy found in the democratization literature can be ordered in one systematic regime typology that ranges from ‘thinner’ to ‘thicker’ definitions of democracy. Starting from the Schumpeterian tradition that treats electoral competition as the minimalist requirement for democracies, they add three complementary attributes that can be widely found in theoretical writings on democracy: political liberties (freedom of expression, association, and assembly), the rule of law, and social rights. The first attribute refers to the Dahlian political liberties that need to be included as procedural guarantees for electoral democracy to exist. The second element concerns O’Donnell’s rule of law addition, which involves horizontal accountability, judicial independence and due process. The third attribute is akin to T.H. Marshall’s concept of ‘social citizenship’, which refers to those rights that are complementary to the civil and political rights that are necessary to enjoy some kind of social equality.

As they continue, the four democratic attributes (electoral rights, political liberties, the rule of law, and social rights) can be ordered in a hierarchical scale of democracy where the world’s countries can be located. Social democracies are placed at the top of the ladder as long as they fulfil at once the respective criteria of liberal democracy (the rule of law), polyarchy (political liberties), and minimalist democracy

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<sup>30</sup> For a review of different models of democracy, see Held (2006).

(free and fair elections); descending in the ladder, we similarly find that all liberal democracies fulfil the respective requisites of polyarchy and minimalist democracy; and all polyarchies fulfil the criteria of minimalist democracy. This equals saying that the less demanding attributes are necessary but not sufficient for the more demanding attributes, or that the more demanding attributes are sufficient but not necessary for the less demanding attributes. Empirically, Møller and Skaaning show that out of the 128 analysed countries, most of them (45) are only instances of electoral or 'minimalist' democracies, that is, systems that only combine the two basic attributes of regular free and fair elections, and universal suffrage. Five countries are polyarchies, only one is an instance of liberal democracy, and four countries are social democracies.

What is, then, the case of the group of Western industrialized democracies? Unfortunately, Møller and Skaaning do not consider Western European democracies since they are not included in the Bertelsmann Transformation Index's (BTI) sample of countries, on which they rely in their analyses. But following their reasoning, it can easily be concluded that they are instances of social democracies, as long as they largely fulfil the criteria of all the less demanding attributes placed on the lower levels of abstraction. However, it can hardly be acknowledged that this is indeed the case. Actually, the main problem with Møller and Skaaning's schema is its hierarchical configuration. European democracies certainly do satisfy the conditions of minimalist democracy and polyarchy, but the way in which they institutionalize free and fair elections, as well as the range of political liberties available for citizens, differ widely among each other. They are all instances of liberal democracies, but they show huge differences in both the extent and quality of implementation of their rule of law. And they all have an institutionalized system of social protection, but they differ considerably in the type and extension of the social policies they use to reduce social and economic inequalities. All in all, a new framework for the analysis of consolidated Western democracies which further develops the idea of employing democratic values (in a non-hierarchical way) is needed.

Although I do not follow Møller and Skaaning's categorization of democratic systems, their theoretical elaboration will largely serve to set the stage for my own arguments in this thesis. Four core normative values are discussed here as relevant

dimensions of variation in the implementation of the conditions of formal democracy among advanced democratic systems: freedom, equality, representation and social justice. These four principles fulfil the most important functions democracy serves, according to mainstream democratic theory. First, democracy protects citizens against domination in the exercise of their **basic liberties** by subjecting the state to a range of constraints. These operate at both the institutional level (so-called ‘checks and balances’) and the judicial one (no one, including those who govern, should be above the law). Second, democracy allows citizens to express their interests and preferences in the political process under **equalized conditions** and gives all of them an equal consideration (equality of influence and of consideration). Third, through elections, democracy produces a legislature that is **representative** of the distribution of policy preferences among the electorate (Thomassen 2014, 3) and is sensitive to them. And fourth, democracy aims at conferring citizens an (at least minimal) ‘equal social worth’, facilitated by the exercise of **social democratic rights** and the provision of welfare systems.<sup>31</sup>

The relationship between these four core values can be seen as a virtuous cycle in which all mutually reinforce each other. Democracy is considered as a ‘latent’ variable composed at equal terms of each of the four core values—i.e. all of them are necessary (but not sufficient) conditions of democracy. Each democratic value mutually influences the others, so that there may be potential trade-offs and cancellation of the influence of some to the benefit of others. In consequence, it is reasonable to expect that citizens’ democratic satisfaction will be affected (though differently) by these four core normative values.

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<sup>31</sup> Although there is no necessarily theoretical connection between democracy and the welfare state, the two are difficult to separate in practice, as some authors argue: ‘Every established democracy has a system of social welfare provision’ (Spicker 2008, 251).

## **THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: SATISFACTION WITH THE WAY DEMOCRACY WORKS**

The dependent variable for the analyses is individuals' satisfaction with democracy (SWD).<sup>32</sup> This measure captures people's evaluations of the actual process of democratic governance, and has been linked traditionally to Easton's concept of 'specific support' (Klingemann 1999; Norris 1999). It is widely known that Easton's theoretical framework on political support distinguishes between support for political objects at a particular level—labelled 'specific support'—and support for the political community and the democratic values at a more abstract level, called 'diffuse support'. As Easton defines it, specific support refers to the 'satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performance of the political authorities' (Easton 1975, 437). This type of support is specific in the sense that it is directed to the political authorities, as well as to 'the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style of these authorities' (ibid.).

The survey item on SWD is, however, not uncontroversial, and has been focus of harsh criticism due to its validity and reliability problems.<sup>33</sup> Despite this, the item continues to be used by multitude of scholars (some recent examples are Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Cordero and Simón 2016), what allows us to confront our hypotheses and results with those of previous studies. The SWD item used for the analyses in this chapter is taken from the ESS-6, where the question reads: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]? Please answer using this card, where 0 means extremely dissatisfied and 10 means extremely satisfied.' Figure 2.1 depicts average levels of our dependent

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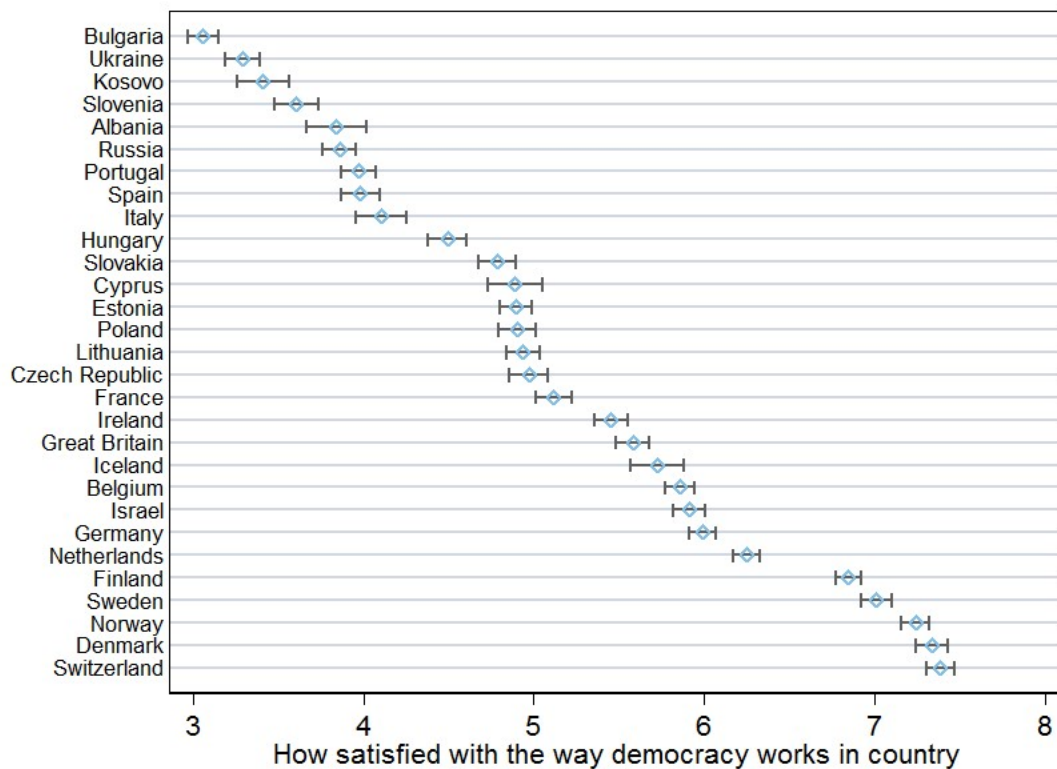
<sup>32</sup> Some could argue that the choice of SWD as dependent variable in this chapter is in contradiction with the findings in Chapter 2, which advised against the use of one-dimensional measures to capture citizens' valuations of democracy. However, I have opted here to use this indicator instead of those of the evaluations value construct (single indicator) or the evaluations democracy scales (multiple indicators) for the sake of parsimony in the analyses. Regarding the former, the results in Chapter 2 demonstrated that the evaluations value construct cannot be safely compared across our full sample of countries, so it is not advisable to be used as dependent variable. In its turn, the alternative to use the evaluations democracy scales as multiple dependent variables would have led to overly muddled analysis and massive output tables, but basically the same substantive results. Given that this chapter already tests the influence of a long list of institutional and contextual indicators and their interaction with the individuals' normative aspirations about democracy, the SWD indicator helps us to keep parsimony in the analyses, despite its intrinsic problems as an indicator.

<sup>33</sup> Specifically, it is argued that it is not possible to know what dimension or dimensions of political support the SWD indicator represents (Canache et al. 2001, 507), and that scholars may be using it with very different interpretations (Linde and Ekman 2003).



variable on SWD in the 29 countries covered in the ESS-6 sample. There is quite between-country variation, with Eastern European countries, together with Portugal, Spain and Italy displaying the lowest scores (between 3.05 and 4.1), and the Nordic and Central European democracies the highest ones (between 6.8 and 7.4).

**Figure 2.1: Average levels of public satisfaction with democracy in 29 European democracies (mean values and 95% confidence intervals)**



## PRIOR RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESES

In this section I specify my theoretical expectations about whether and how our four core democratic values affect the way in which citizens evaluate the performance of their democratic system and mediate the impact of their normative aspirations. The central theoretical argument here is that what explains different levels of public satisfaction with democracy across Europe is the varying capacity of the democratic systems to attain their normative promises and ideals: i.e. democracy's outputs. In other words, the extent to which democracies attain their goals in different core areas

provide citizens with a foundation to evaluate how 'kind and gentle' their democratic systems are. This evaluation involves a normative appraisal of the extension and capacity of the democratic system to satisfy certain 'needs' that are valuable to individual citizens and to the entire society, and which in turn are mediated by individuals' aspirations about what a good democracy is. In short, the relationship between citizens and democracy lies in the multidimensional nature of the democratic systems and in their capacity to satisfy the normative and evaluative aspirations of the citizens.

Theoretically, as has been repeatedly established above, the most common system level influence on citizens' satisfaction with their democratic system found in the literature is the *representative chain*. It is often held that democratic elections (the celebration of free and fair elections on a regular basis) are the key, primary condition to the creation of political legitimacy. Elections are the main instrument for the empowerment of the people in the decision-making process and to hold representatives accountable. Through elections, citizens choose their representatives and compel them to pay attention to their interests and demands. Additionally, by voting electors are able to punish those representatives who have made a bad job and reward those who have worked well. Thus, in incomplete democracies where elections do not fully meet high standards of competition and fairness, it is quite likely that citizens may feel disappointed with the general functioning of their democratic system since they lack the most critical instrument of democracy.

Consequently, our first hypothesis stresses the procedural integrity of electoral institutions:

*H1: The procedural quality of the elections influences positively individuals' satisfaction with their democratic system.*

Along with the existence of clean elections, another institutional feature that affects democracy support is the formal electoral rules that regulate electoral competition. As established above, the big divide regarding electoral laws is between proportional and majoritarian types. Dissimilar advantages are assigned to each of these institutional models, such as better policy performance and descriptive

representation in the case of consensus systems (Lijphart 1999), and longer and more stable terms in majoritarian ones.

Because of this, there is no consensus in the literature regarding the direction of the impact of consensus and majoritarian regime types on voters' satisfaction with democracy. On the one hand, majoritarian systems tend to produce clearer parliamentary majorities, which may make easier the adoption of political decisions. Since only one party is running the country, clarity of responsibility is also higher, as voters are able to clearly identify 'who the rascals are' and 'throw them out' in an election (Sanders et al. 2014). These two clear advantages may lead to expect that majoritarian democracies generate higher levels of support than proportional ones. However, there are other benefits than the accountability associated with consensualism that can tip the balance. Consensus models of democracy, or proportional systems, seek to maximize the representativeness of the elected parliament, thus translating the preferences of as many citizens as possible to the decision-making process. This distribution of the access to the representational institutions across a larger number of groups has a general positive effect on the whole electorate's satisfaction with democracy (Lijphart 1999). Furthermore, both Lijphart (1999) and Powell (2000) also find that proportional representation tends to produce greater congruence between the government and the public, in the sense of greater ideological match between both, as well as greater representation of minority groups (Lijphart 1999) and women (Norris 2004).

In line with this latter set of evidence, our second hypothesis is stated as follows:

*H2: Citizens in proportional systems show higher levels of satisfaction with the working of democracy than in majoritarian regimes.*

An important set of institutional characteristics recently discussed in the literature that are connected to our *freedom* dimension of democracy are output institutions, such as the bureaucratic system, the judiciary, the integrity mechanisms and the rule of law. It is argued that output institutions, which are responsible for the delivery and implementation of democratic decisions, matter more for popular satisfaction than

democratic representation per se, i.e. how citizens feel their personal interests are taken into consideration.

In line with this argument, Rohrschneider (2005) shows that public evaluations of the representation process are to a significant degree shaped by the procedural quality of a nation's arbitrating institutions—bureaucracies and judiciaries—which help to adjudicate and regulate a multitude of conflicting interests that are salient to individuals, such as a legal dispute or a bureaucratic issue. As he demonstrates, this type of experience matters more for how citizens evaluate the representative capacity of their democratic institutions than the regime type (majoritarian or consensual), which exerts little influence on representational judgments. In a similar vein, Dahlberg and Holmberg (2014) show that factors related to the output side of the democratic system, which they operationalize as government effectiveness, are of greater importance for citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy functions than factors like representational devices on the input side, measured as policy congruence and electoral devices. By the same token, it is known that a well-functioning rule of law, measured by factors such as judicial effectiveness and impartiality, reduces levels of corruption, which directly influences evaluations of the performance of the political system and political trust (Anderson and Tverdova 2003).

In the wake of this evidence, the following hypothesis will be tested:

*H3: A well-functioning rule of law system leads people to appreciate better the procedural fairness of their democratic system—how fair and impartially it treats citizens—thus increasing the overall degree of citizens' satisfaction with democracy.*

Although *political equality* is the basic norm that confers legitimacy on democracy (Dahl 1989), studies do not usually consider how different levels of it may affect public satisfaction with democracy. In general terms, scholars consider that electoral quotas and other mechanisms of special accommodation are needed to increase the political visibility and power of groups traditionally excluded or with fewer political resources, such as women and ethnic minorities.

The effect of this type of mechanisms of special accommodation has been investigated only in relation to the groups involved in the representative link, while commonly overlooking their effects in the entire society. Thus, Ruiz-Rufino (2013) shows that more inclusive political institutions generate higher levels of satisfaction with democracy among members of ethnic minority groups. Karp and Banducci (2008) find that the presence of women as candidates and office holders influences women's political engagement and attitudes about the political process, while has weak effects on men. However, there are also grounded reasons to think that more inclusive democratic systems for several social groups may potentially affect the individual representative feelings of larger sectors of the electorate, as it may serve as a powerful symbolic cue of how 'kind and gentle' the democratic system is.

In line with this, the next hypothesis is as follows:

*H4: Higher levels of equal distribution of political power across different segments of the electorate are directly related to positive levels of democratic satisfaction.*

The issue of whether and how welfare state provision has any impact on public political attitudes has quite recently come to the front of scholarly debate. As Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen (2013, 6) summarize, initially studies were focused on welfare state-related attitudes and the extent to which these conformed to Esping-Andersen's (1990) regime clusters. More recently, scholars have started to 'unpack' both attitudes and welfare regimes, by analysing diverse attitudinal reactions to specific policy areas and/or different policy outcomes.

Income inequality is probably one of the aspects of welfare policy outcomes that has attracted greater scholarly attention. Different studies have shown that higher levels of income inequality increase the tendency to express more negative attitudes toward the public institutions (Anderson and Singer 2008), reduce the degree of political interest, discussion and electoral participation (Solt 2008) as well as decrease interpersonal trust (Uslaner and Brown 2005).

Given this evidence, our fifth hypothesis is formulated as follows:

*H5: High levels of income inequality will have a negative impact on citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy.*

Evidence regarding the impact of different policy areas and the extension of welfare state provision is however less overwhelming, especially in the European case (for a summary of the literature, see Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen 2013). Regarding welfare extension, Lühiste (2014) demonstrates that the scope and quality of social protection affects positively citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in 24 European countries. Using data from different welfare programs in Sweden, Rothstein and Stolle (2003) show that citizens in universal welfare state models display much higher levels of generalized trust than citizens socialized in other welfare institutional settings.

Following Rothstein and Stolle's claim, our last institutional hypothesis is formulated as follows:

*H6: Higher levels of universalism in the welfare state will impact positively on individuals' satisfaction with democracy.*

The idea that these four core values (freedom, equality, representation and social justice) and their embodiment in institutional structures have a direct impact on citizens' support for democracy is however open to both theoretical and empirical challenge. Some would argue that different individuals within a same institutional environment may experience the performance of institutions differently. Sure, individual tastes and values largely shape people's perceptions of democracy, with the possible effect of diminishing or eliminating the relationships hypothesized here.

More specifically, in this chapter I argue that the type of aspirations one has about what a good democracy is provides a lens for how people view and evaluate their democratic institutions. As Crow puts it,

[t]he way in which citizens conceptualize democracy—their choice of which of its constituent values to emphasize in their mental construct of democracy—entails a vision about what life in a democratic society should be like. [...] They then judge the performance of their particular

democratic regime by how well it lives up to [that vision]' (Crow 2010, 43-4; see also Ferrín 2016).

To put it briefly, citizens' evaluations of democratic performance are driven by their normative conceptions of what a good democracy is. Following Kriesi and Ferrín (2016), I will distinguish between three types of visions of democracy citizens may have;<sup>34</sup> namely, the electoral view, the liberal view and the social view.<sup>35</sup> The electoral view is shared by those who emphasize the electoral aspects of democracy such as the existence of free and fair elections and other factors that ensure that the elections are, additionally, competitive and meaningful. The liberal view is held by those who give priority to the aspects linked to the concept of liberal democracy, which includes the protection of civil rights and liberties and the limitation of state power. The social view is supported when respondents accord highest relevance to the social model of democracy, linked to aspects such as the citizens' protection against poverty and the reduction of income differences by the state (for a detailed summary of the three visions, see Hernández 2016a).

Following the line of reasoning above, it is then conceivable that some institutional contexts may produce stronger individual-level effects depending on the type of democratic aspirations one has. In this sense, I will consider three individual-context interactions, related to the potential varying effects of the context on individuals with our three different conceptions on democracy.

The hypothesis related to these cross-level interactions is as follows:

*H7: The effect of the macro-level institutions on attitudes of democratic satisfaction is strengthened or weakened depending on people's normative aspirations regarding what a good democracy is.*

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<sup>34</sup> Individuals' normative aspirations or views of democracy (used as synonyms) are measured by the battery of questions on understandings of democracy from the ESS-6. This battery, composed of 16 items, taps into the respondents' understandings of which aspects are important for democracy in general. In a close-ended question format, they are asked to rate on a 0 ('not at all important for democracy in general') to 10 ('extremely important for democracy in general') scale the relevance of the 16 items.

<sup>35</sup> Although in Chapter 2 we distinguished four visions on democracy—electoral, liberal, social and direct democracy—, in this chapter the direct democracy vision is not considered as there hardly exists institutions of direct democracy in our sample of European countries with which the direct democracy aspirations of individuals can be interacted. Given that the use of this variable did not yield satisfactory results, it was finally omitted from the analysis.

## OPERATIONALIZATION AND DATA

The analysis is based on data from the sixth round of the European Social Survey (ESS-6), which contains a specific module of questions on ‘Understandings and evaluation of different elements of democracy’, collected in 29 European countries in 2012. Given that I am analysing the impact of a set of institutions that potentially have a tangible impact on citizens’ daily lives, the full sample of respondents will be included in the analyses. Although it is conventional practice in the literature to exclude countries that are not regarded as consolidated democracies in international standards (in this study: Albania, Ukraine, Russia and Kosovo), in our sample the citizens of those four countries display levels of democratic (dis)satisfaction that are comparable to those of other Eastern and Southern European folk (see Figure 2.1 above).<sup>36</sup> Furthermore, their country scores are certainly the lowest for some of our institutional variables, but not for all.

Data on democratic institutions are taken from five sources: the Democracy Barometer (DB), the V-Dem Dataset, the Comparative Political Data Set, the Electoral Integrity Project and the World Development Indicators of the World Bank. All are measured most recently to the collection of the survey data at the micro level (2012). Table A3.1 in the Appendix displays the institutional country scores for all the variables included in the analyses.

### Measuring patterns of democratic institutions

As detailed above, democracy is treated in this chapter as an institutional configuration aimed at approximating four core normative goals—namely, freedom from arbitrary power, full political equality among citizens, representation of individuals’ interests and expansion of social equality among citizens.

The main institutional setting in democratic systems serving the objective of political **freedom** (understood as absence of domination by the state) is the rule of law. The rule of law dimension will be measured with the ‘equality before the law’

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<sup>36</sup> In Chapter 2 we also saw that these four countries (Albania, Ukraine, Russia and Kosovo) do not show a differential pattern of democratic aspirations than the rest of fully democratic countries within the sample.



indicator from the DB,<sup>37</sup> which gauges the existence of constitutional provisions for impartial courts, the effective independence of the judiciary and the effective impartiality of the legal system. This indicator runs from 0 to 100, with higher values corresponding to better performance of the rule of law (Sweden: 91.5) and lower values indicating poor performance (Ukraine: 3.3). The DB has missing values for Russia and Kosovo, but these have been replaced by their respective scores in the 'Rule of Law' dimension of the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), from the World Bank.<sup>38</sup>

The **political equality** aspect of democracy is measured by four indicators coming from the V-Dem dataset,<sup>39</sup> which measures the extent to which members of a polity (identifiable groups within the population) possess equal political power. These four indicators independently rate the distribution of power according to socioeconomic position, social groups (ethnicity, language, race and religion), gender and sexual orientation. It is considered that these groups possess political power to the extent that they: (a) actively participate in politics (by voting, etc.); (b) are involved in civil society organizations; (c) secure representation in government; (d) set the political agenda; (e) influence political decisions and; (f) influence the implementation of those decisions.

An exploratory factor analysis with principal components of these four indicators shows that they produce a unique factor with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and accounting for more than 83% of the cumulative variance in the four measures.<sup>40</sup> All indicators have loadings greater than 0.88 on this dimension, meaning that all they behave very similarly in the one-factor solution. Based on this, I create a composite measure of equal distribution of political power by predicting a new variable from this optimal one-factor solution. The new factor variable ranges from approximately

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<sup>37</sup> Available at: <http://www.democracybarometer.org/>

<sup>38</sup> The WGI have come under harsh criticism in the literature due to problems of bias, lack of comparability, and construct validity (see Kurtz and Schrank 2007; Thomas 2010). To avoid these limitations, I mostly rely on the DB data, and turn to the WGI only to cover particular missing data. Given that the WGI range from -2.5 to 2.5, and Russia and Kosovo get a score of -0.82 and -0.56, respectively, in the WGI dataset, their scores have been rescaled by multiplying by -20. This rescaling gives us two new scores of 16.4 for Russia and 11.2 for Kosovo, which are in line with the scores that other countries in the region get in the DB indicator on rule of law (e.g. Albania gets 18.63, Bulgaria 9.86, or Ukraine 3.29).

<sup>39</sup> Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/en/>

<sup>40</sup> The results of the exploratory factor analysis can be found in Table A3.2 in the Appendix.

-2 to 2, with negative values indicating a more unequal distribution of power (Russia being the most unequal: -2.1) and positive values a more equal one (Denmark: 1.9).

The value of **representation** is operationalized by two indicators. One measures the overall integrity of the electoral process, using an index on experts' perceptions of electoral integrity from the Electoral Integrity Project.<sup>41</sup> Electoral integrity 'refers to international standards and global norms governing the appropriate conduct of elections' (Norris et al. 2016, 12). The index has a value 0 when the electoral process does not reach adequate standards of integrity and 100 when it does. The variability in our sample is high enough. The lowest scores can be found in Russia (44.3) and Ukraine (50.8), whereas the highest are for Finland (86.2) and Denmark (86.5). Kosovo is not yet included in this dataset, so the score for this country has been calculated with multiple imputation techniques<sup>42</sup> as there is no any other dataset covering similar data.

The second measure of representation is Lijphart's executive-parties index, which gauges the degree of joint-power in the political system and comprises the electoral disproportionality, the effective number of parties, the frequency of single-party government, the average cabinet length and the interest group system. Lijphart's first dimension represents quite accurately the majoritarian vs. consensus divide in democratic representation and is used commonly as an indicator of the type of electoral rules in the democratic system. I take this indicator from the Comparative Political Data Set,<sup>43</sup> in which higher scores represent consensus systems (Switzerland: 2.2) and lower scores are majoritarian ones (the United Kingdom: -2.4). Albania, Russia, Ukraine and Kosovo are missing cases in this dataset, so the model testing the impact of this variable is N=25.

To conclude, two variables are used here to measure the implementation of the **social justice** principle. The first one refers to the distinction between universal vs. means-tested based welfare states. Means-tested programs are those designed to deliver welfare selectively to citizens who cannot in some other way provide for

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<sup>41</sup> Available at: <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/>

<sup>42</sup> The electoral integrity score for Kosovo has been imputed from the scores of the other institutional variables: the rule of law, the equality of power, the welfare state universalism and the Gini index. The score yielded is 53.08, which fits in the range of the scores for Albania (54.67) or Ukraine (50.76).

<sup>43</sup> Available at: <http://www.cpbs-data.org/>

themselves or meet their basic needs. By contrast, universal programs seek to cover the entire population throughout the different stages of life, based on uniform rules and equal access. This distinction between these two types of welfare provision is captured by an indicator coming from the V-Dem Dataset, which taps how many welfare programs in the country are means-tested and how many benefit all (or virtually all) members of the polity. This is an ordinal measure that ranges theoretically from -3 to 3, although in our sample of countries it runs from -0.2 (Kosovo) to 3 (Sweden).

The second measure of social justice is the Gini index, taken from the World Development Indicators of the World Bank.<sup>44</sup> This index measures the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution and it is traditionally considered in academic research as a good proxy of the total inequality in a country. In the original measure, a Gini index of 0 represents perfect equality, whereas an index of 100 implies perfect inequality. To facilitate interpretation, I have reversed the measure, so that higher values will now imply higher levels of equality and lower levels are equivalent to income inequality.

### **Measuring individual aspirations about democracy**

As noted above, individuals' normative aspirations about democracy are measured by means of the battery of questions on 'understandings of different elements of democracy' from the ESS-6, which contains sixteen items asking respondents to rank the relevance they give to different aspects of democracy in the abstract. The electoral view comprises the indicators on free and fair elections, vote deliberation, clear alternatives offered by different political parties, freedom of the opposition parties to criticize the government, punishment to the governing parties when they have done a poor job, and governmental explanation of its decisions to voters. The liberal view is composed of the indicators on equality before the law, capacity of the courts to stop governmental actions, freedom of the media to criticize the government, reliability of the information offered by the media, and protection of minorities' rights. The social

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<sup>44</sup> Available at: <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>

view encompasses the indicators on protection against poverty and reduction of income differences by the state.

To construct the three indicators on the democratic visions, each item is dichotomized at its maximum value (0/9=0 and 10=1) and then averaged into a single scale together with the other items of the corresponding vision. The reasoning to proceed in this way is that only those individuals who choose the maximum value of the scale (i.e. 10) see the correspondent element of democracy as a necessary condition, while those who choose a value below the maximum arguably allow for exceptions and do not consider the given element as required for democracy under all circumstances (see (Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta 2016, 67). As a result, this gives three indices running from 0 to 1, where 1 represents a (electoral/liberal/social) maximalist vision of democracy (all items in the corresponding vision are given the maximum weight) and 0 when the respondent does not give any relevance to the particular democratic vision.<sup>45</sup>

### **Other controls**

Other individual and country-level controls are considered in the analyses. As individual-level controls, I include standard variables like age, gender, education and employment status, together with the winners vs. losers category. It is well already established that those who vote for the governing party tend to be more satisfied with the working of democracy than those supporting opposition parties (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Holmberg 1999; Anderson et al. 2005). At the individual level, I also consider two performance control variables: satisfaction with the government's and with the economy's performance, measured in a 10-point scale ranging from lower to higher satisfaction. Other things being equal, satisfaction with government and with economic performance are likely to enhance citizens' democratic satisfaction.

At the national level, I control for two economic factors: the unemployment rate for each country in 2012 and the GDP per capita growth rate in 2012 (annual

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<sup>45</sup> These are aggregated scales, so they have intermediated values representing the number of elements on the correspondent vision the respondent gives the maximum value to.

%).<sup>46</sup> These two indicators can be considered good measures of potential problems in 'rich' democracies, and as such can provide a rough idea of the extent to which a country had been hit by the crisis in 2012.

## RESULTS

How likely is it that our institutional properties (rule of law, equality of power, clean elections, electoral regime and welfare state) influence satisfaction with the way democracy works at the individual level? To gain a first, rough idea of the extent to which our hypothesized effects can take place in reality, Figure 2.2 shows the bivariate relationship between each institutional variable and satisfaction with democracy at the aggregate level. The correlation coefficient is especially high for three indicators: the rule of law, political equality and electoral integrity, which are all correlated with democratic satisfaction at a level close to 0.80.

As expected, people living in countries with a stronger rule of law system are much more satisfied with their democratic system than people within a weaker one. Countries are clustered quite tightly around the regression line, as indicated by an R-square of 0.66, with the only exceptions of Norway, Portugal, Spain, Slovenia and Slovakia. Also living in a country with a more egalitarian distribution of political power or with a more reliable electoral process entails higher public satisfaction with the way democracy works, though in both cases both the R-square and the correlation coefficient are slightly smaller than for the rule of law.

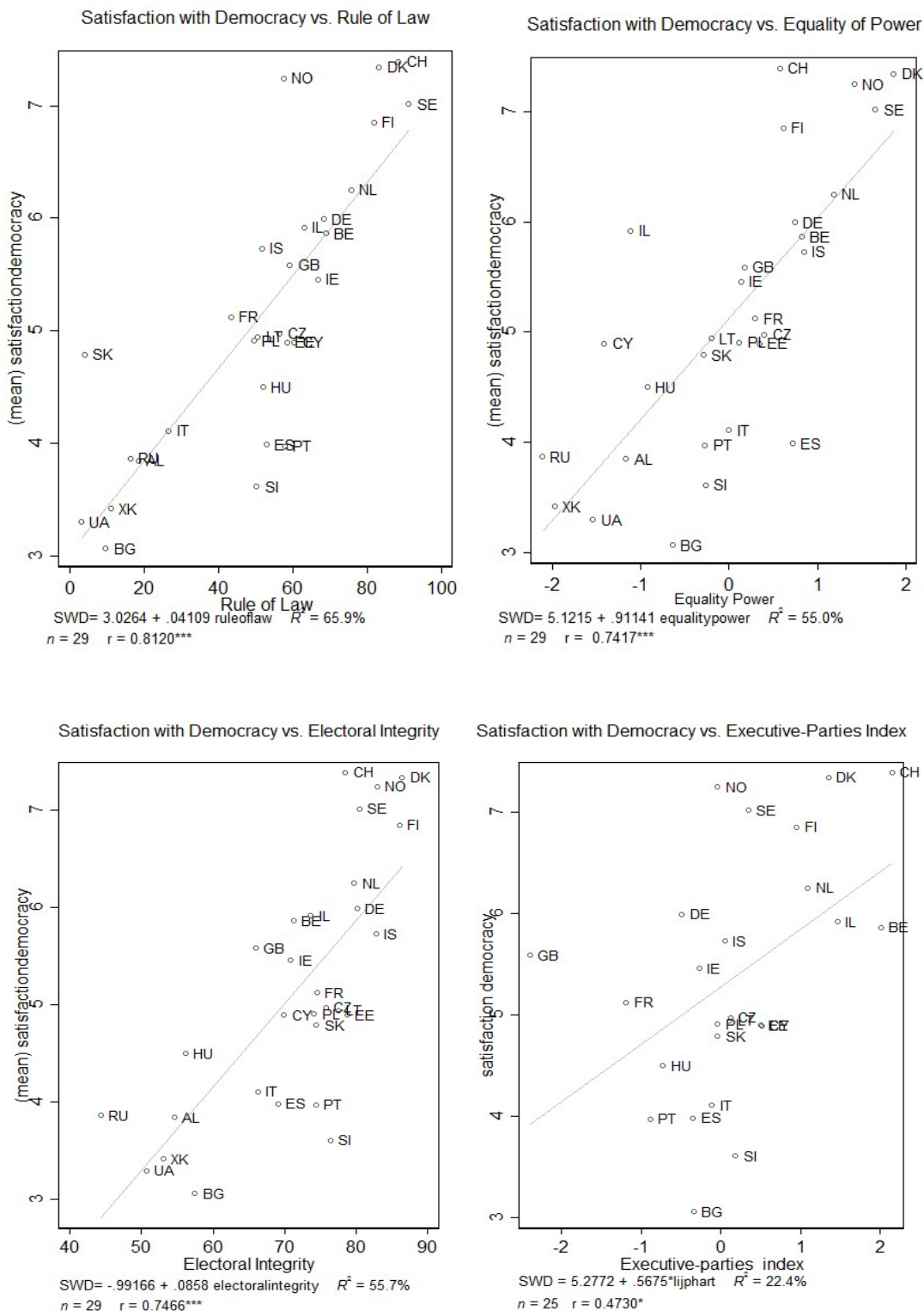
The remaining three indicators report a weaker relationship with democratic satisfaction. The positive coefficient of Lijphart's index indicates that people in consensus systems are somewhat more satisfied with their democratic systems than those in majoritarian ones, but this relationship is only statistically significant at the 90% confidence level. Thus, the type of regime in which one lives makes, in principle, little difference to satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system. To conclude, the two indicators for the welfare state display quite different results. The indicator on universalism has a fairly strong and positive relationship with the

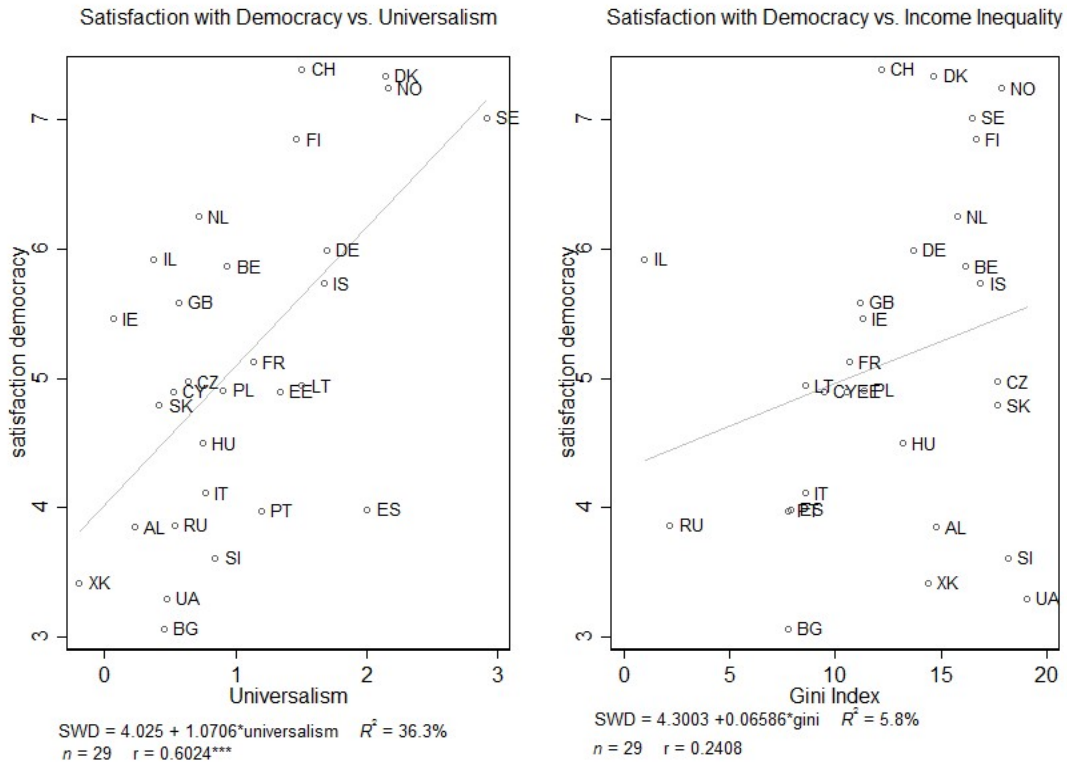
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<sup>46</sup> Source: Both indicators taken the World Development Indicators of the World Bank.

dependent variable ( $r=0.6$ ), indicating that higher levels of universal welfare state also entail higher democratic support. By contrast, the Gini coefficient is very weakly and non-significantly related to satisfaction ( $r=0.24$ ).

**Figure 2.2: Satisfaction with democracy according to six institutional factors in 29 democracies**





Once we know that there are several institutional characteristics that are highly correlated with support for democracy, a necessary second step is to test whether they are relevant when considered in a multivariate context and individual-level controls are included. This assumption calls for multilevel modelling, which allows to combine individual and country-level data, as well as to test interactions between the two levels. Table 3.1 shows the results of several multilevel regression analyses encompassing around 51,000 individuals in 29 countries. The models are run in several steps. The first step is the baseline model with just the individual-level variables. Next, I introduce the country-level variables in theoretically differentiated blocks, first just for the model intercept—that is, their direct, independent effects on democratic satisfaction—and last for the interactions effects between the two levels.

All the individual-level variables in Model 1 have a significant effect on support for democracy and in the expected direction, i.e. consistently with other studies on support/satisfaction with democracy. Satisfaction increases with education, being a man, being young, being employed, having voted for the governing party and being

satisfied with the government's and the economy's performance. Regarding the effect of the democratic aspirations, it is worth noting that holding an electoral<sup>47</sup> or a liberal view on democracy also increases the chances to be satisfied with the working of democracy, whereas being a social democrat decreases it.

In Models 2 to 5 I add consecutively the institutional variables discussed in the theory section of the chapter, starting with a model that tests the impact of the indicator on freedom (Model 2), continuing with the two indicators on representation (Model 3), then the indicator on political equality (Model 4) and lastly the two indicators on social justice (Model 5). The results of the bivariate analysis are largely corroborated here. Even if we include theoretically relevant individual-level controls, most of our institutional variables continue having a strong and significant impact on levels of satisfaction with democracy. Thus, the quality of the rule of law, the extension of the political equality among social groups, the integrity of the electoral process and the degree of universalism of the welfare state affect positively the citizens' satisfaction with the way their democracy works, whereas the income inequality and the regime type do not make any significant impact.

These results withstand some basic robustness tests. First, given that the measure on regime type (Lijphart's index) does not pass the conventional threshold of statistical significance in the bivariate or the multilevel analysis, Model 3 has been rerun with two alternative measures on 'representation': the Gallagher index of disproportionality between vote and seat distributions and an indicator measuring the congruence between distribution of left/right positions among voters and distribution of left/right positions among members of parliament, both taken from the DB. Again, neither of these two variables achieve statistical significance,<sup>48</sup> which means that the electoral rules are much less important for explaining public democratic support than what the literature has traditionally assumed.<sup>49</sup>

Second, although the effect of the political equality indicator has been tested in an independent model, since it is theoretically distinct from the three other

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<sup>47</sup> This relationship is only significant at the 90% confidence level.

<sup>48</sup> The results of this multi-level analysis can be found in Table A3.3 in the Appendix.

<sup>49</sup> This finding goes in line with the conclusions of recent literature (Rohrschneider 2005, Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014, Sanders et al. 2014), which demonstrates that the electoral rules exert no effect on democracy satisfaction when introducing other relevant institutional-level controls.



democratic values, one might argue that its outcome is strictly related to the electoral rules: it is known that multiparty, proportional systems tend to produce a greater representation of diverse values (Hoffman 2005), minority groups (Lijphart 1999) and women (Norris 2004), so that we could expect political equality to be higher in consensus regime types. However, if we put equality of power against the electoral rules variable, the equality variable continues being significant, while the Lijphart's index does not.<sup>50</sup> The fact that the effect of political equality is strong and significant when it is contested against the consensus model implies that its initial positive effect is independent from the type of electoral rules.

In Model 6 I introduce all the institutional variables that turned out to be relevant from the prior models; namely, the indicators on rule of law, equal distribution of political power, electoral integrity and universalism. I add as contextual controls the two economic factors: unemployment and GDP growth rates in 2012. The results show that when all the institutional variables are regressed under control for each other, only the rule of law, the integrity of the electoral process and welfare state universalism continue to matter for citizens' democratic satisfaction, while equality of power among social sectors loses its statistical significance. However, it is important to note that the impact of universalism inverts now its direction, which entails that where the rule of law and the electoral system perform highly, citizens may still coexist with poor universal welfare states to be satisfied with the performance of their democratic systems. The two economic factors turn out to be non-significant, meaning that the democratic institutions outperform the economic situation in explaining public satisfaction with democracy.

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<sup>50</sup> The results of this multi-level analysis can be found in Table A3.4 in the Appendix.

**Table 3.1: Multilevel regression analysis of the impact of individual characteristics and democratic institutional factors on SWD (MLE)**

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
<b>Individual-level variables</b>									
Age	-0.028*** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.004)	-0.025*** (0.005)	-0.028*** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.004)	-0.003*** (0.000)	-0.003*** (0.000)	-0.003*** (0.000)
Education	0.022*** (0.007)	0.022*** (0.007)	0.036*** (0.007)	0.022*** (0.007)	0.022*** (0.007)	0.022*** (0.007)	0.016** (0.007)	0.021*** (0.007)	0.018*** (0.007)
Gender (1=woman)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.056*** (0.017)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.025 (0.016)	-0.023 (0.016)	-0.026* (0.016)	-0.025 (0.016)
Employment status (1=unempl.)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.124*** (0.032)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.107*** (0.029)	-0.110*** (0.029)	-0.109*** (0.029)	-0.112*** (0.029)
Winners vs. losers (1=winners)	0.074*** (0.018)	0.074*** (0.018)	0.061*** (0.019)	0.074*** (0.018)	0.074*** (0.018)	0.074*** (0.018)	0.076*** (0.018)	0.076*** (0.018)	0.078*** (0.018)
Government performance	0.462*** (0.004)	0.462*** (0.004)	0.449*** (0.005)	0.462*** (0.004)	0.462*** (0.004)	0.462*** (0.004)	0.462*** (0.004)	0.462*** (0.004)	0.463*** (0.004)
Economy performance	0.217*** (0.005)	0.217*** (0.005)	0.210*** (0.005)	0.217*** (0.005)	0.217*** (0.005)	0.217*** (0.005)	0.215*** (0.005)	0.217*** (0.005)	0.214*** (0.005)
Electoral democracy aspirations	0.128*** (0.039)	0.129*** (0.039)	0.185*** (0.042)	0.129*** (0.040)	0.129*** (0.039)	0.129*** (0.039)	0.153*** (0.039)	0.134*** (0.039)	-1.765*** (0.148)
Liberal democracy aspirations	0.437*** (0.036)	0.436*** (0.036)	0.477*** (0.038)	0.435*** (0.036)	0.436*** (0.036)	0.436*** (0.036)	-0.040 (0.060)	0.440*** (0.036)	0.421*** (0.035)
Social democracy aspirations	-0.209*** (0.024)	-0.209*** (0.024)	-0.208*** (0.025)	-0.209*** (0.024)	-0.209*** (0.024)	-0.209*** (0.024)	-0.206*** (0.024)	-0.340*** (0.038)	-0.207*** (0.024)
<b>System-level variables</b>									
Rule of Law	0.020*** (0.003)	0.020*** (0.003)	-	-	-	0.011*** (0.004)	0.015*** (0.003)	-	-
Electoral integrity	-	-	0.040*** (0.012)	-	-	0.022** (0.010)	-	-	0.032*** (0.007)
Lijphart's index	-	-	-0.015 (0.094)	-	-	-	-	-	-
Equality of power	-	-	-	0.437*** (0.079)	-	0.180 (0.119)	-	-	-
Universalism	-	-	-	-	0.392***	-0.225*	-	0.345**	-

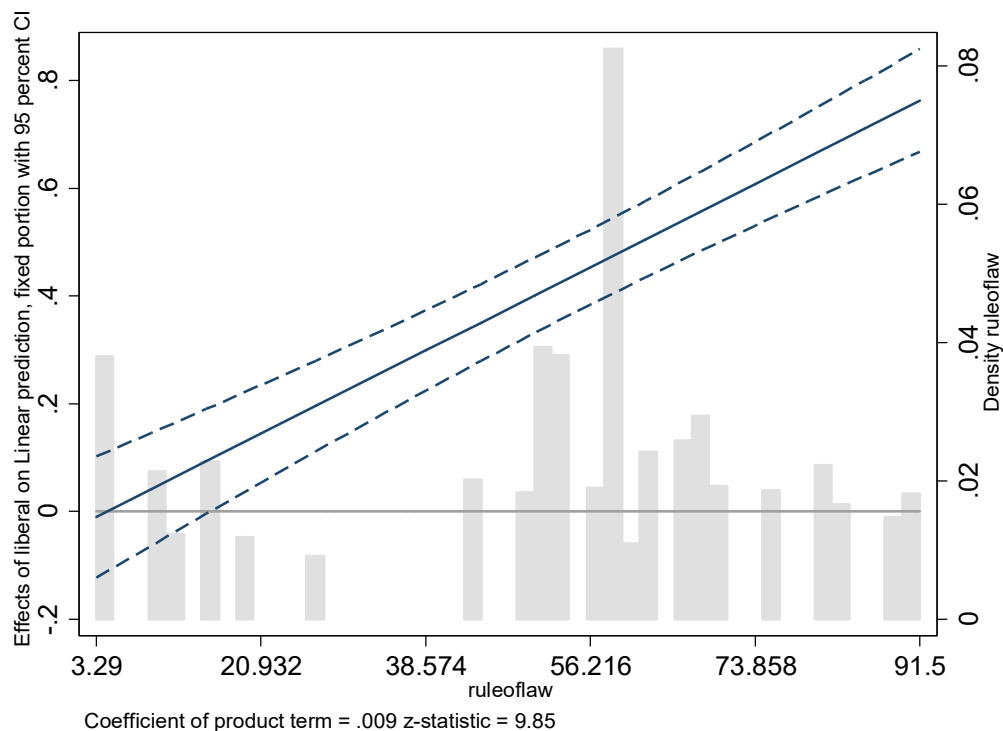
Gini	(0.147)	(0.127)	-	(0.145)	-
	0.0100	-	-	-	-
	(0.023)	-	-	-	-
<b>Control variables (economy)</b>					
Unemployment	0.005	0.005	-	-	-
	(0.011)	(0.011)	-	-	-
GDP Growth	-0.034	-0.034	-	-	-
	(0.028)	(0.028)	-	-	-
<b>Cross level interactions</b>					
RuleLaw*liberal aspirations			0.008***	-	-
			(0.001)	-	-
Universalism*social aspirations				0.123***	-
				(0.027)	-
					0.027***
ElectoralIntegrity*electoral aspirations					(0.002)
Intercept	1.763***	0.375	1.588***	1.966***	0.0798
	(0.315)	(0.699)	(0.167)	(0.185)	(0.479)
<b>Random-effects parameters</b>					
SD intercept	0.546	0.304	0.374	0.546	0.381
	(0.072)	(0.041)	(0.050)	(0.072)	(0.051)
SD residuals	1.760	1.760	1.758	1.760	1.757
	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)	(0.006)
Observations	50,486	50,486	50,486	50,486	50,486
Countries	29	29	29	29	29

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

To conclude, I test the cross-level hypothesis in three separate models. The first is an interaction between the scale of liberal aspirations about democracy and the rule of law (Model 7). As expected, this interaction term proves to have a significant positive effect on citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. Figure 3.3 plots the average adjusted predictions of the scale of liberal democratic aspirations across the observed range of performance of the rule of law. The figure shows that the positive effect of being a liberal democrat on democratic satisfaction strengthens as the performance of the rule of law improves. Furthermore, the relationship is statistically significant across the entire range of values, implying that the performance of the rule of law dimension always makes a difference in liberal democrats' satisfaction with their democratic system. That said, the intercept at zero indicates that at very low performance levels of the rule of law, liberal aspirations do not have any effect on democracy evaluations.

**Figure 3.3: Average Adjusted Predictions (AAPs) of liberal aspirations on satisfaction with democracy contingent on the performance of the rule of law (with 95% confidence intervals)<sup>51</sup>**

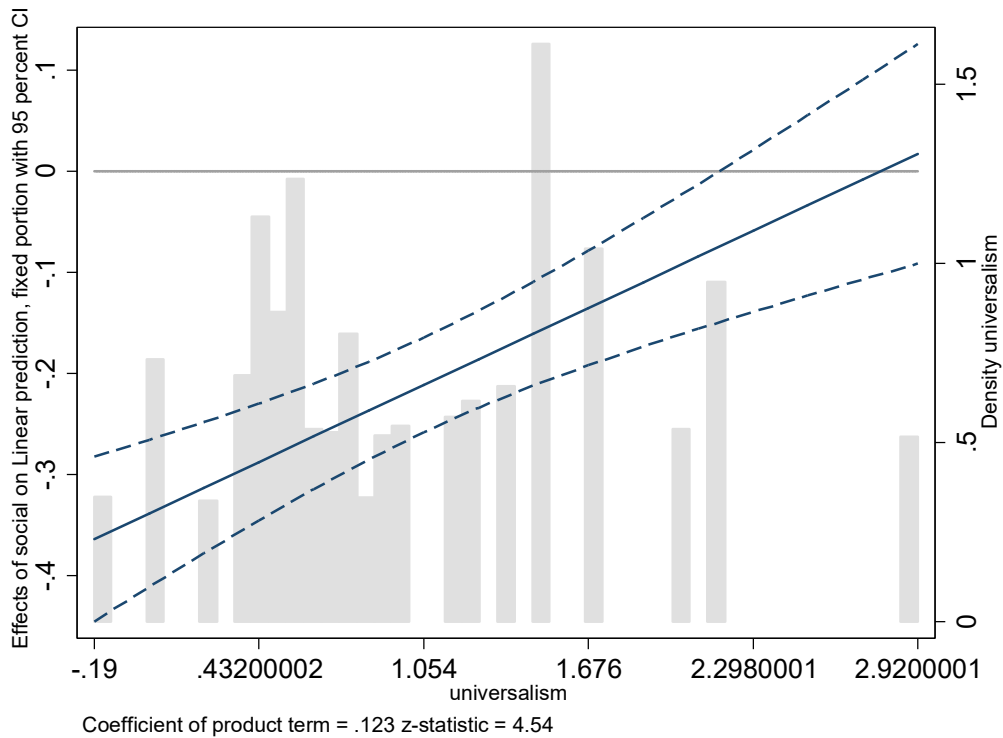


<sup>51</sup> Predicted probabilities and average marginal effects plots in Figures 4, 5 and 6 were generated with the Stata marhis command (Hernández 2016c).

The second cross-level interaction introduced in Model 8 tests the additive effect of being a social democrat and the universalism of the welfare state on satisfaction with the way democracy works. Similar to the previous interaction, the underlying logic here is that jointly the two variables will produce higher levels of democratic satisfaction, all else being equal. However, recall that the results in Model 1 showed that the social aspirations about democracy alone influence democratic satisfaction negatively: those who value a social view on democracy tend to display lower levels of democracy satisfaction than those who do not hold this view on democracy.

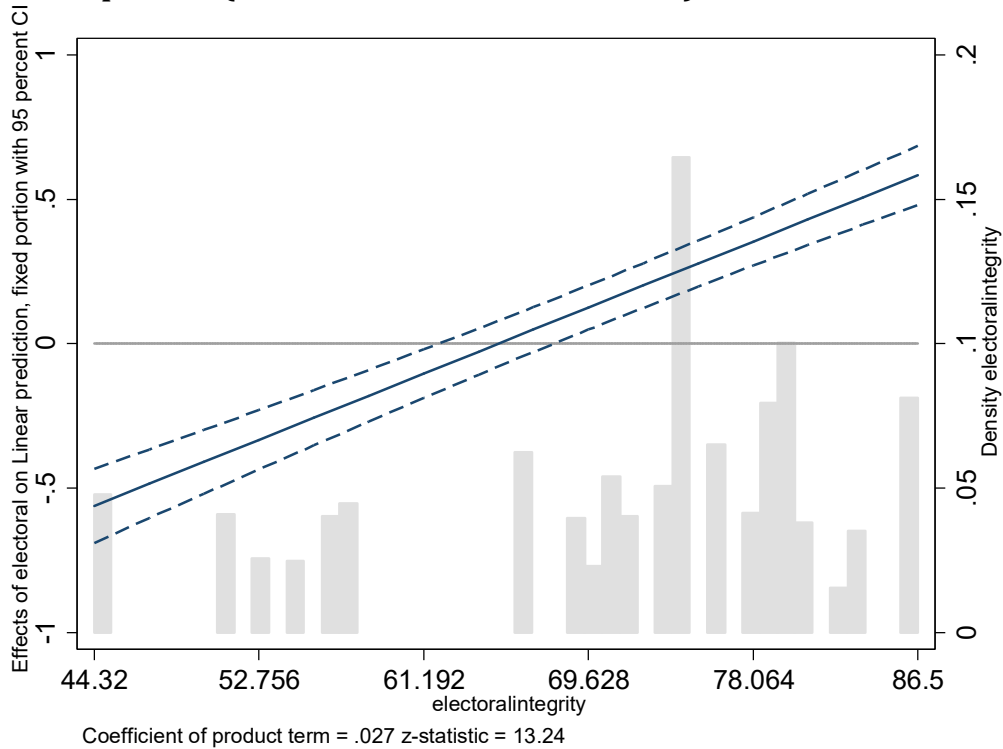
Moreover, Model 6 also highlighted the paradoxical situation that welfare state universalism may indeed decrease levels of satisfaction with democracy among citizens when other important institutional settings are accounted for, and independently of individuals' normative aspirations. The positive and significant coefficient of the interaction variable in Model 8 corroborates, however, our hypothesized expectations about the cross-level interaction between social democratic aspirations and institutions. Figure 3.4 shows the average adjusted predictions of the scale of the social democratic aspirations across the observed range of welfare state universalism. As predicted, the degree of universalism of the welfare state matters for citizens with a social view on democracy, as it contributes to reducing their negative evaluations of the democratic system. At the highest level of universalism, which represents about 6% of the cases in the dataset, social aspirations no longer have a negative effect on support for democracy. This means that social democrats in countries with the highest levels of universalism are not necessarily more satisfied with their democratic system than those in the rest of the countries in the sample, which most probably can be explained by the fact that they are well accustomed to a well-functioning welfare state and tend to take it for granted. More generally, we can conclude that the less universalist a welfare state is, the more dissatisfied aspiring social democrats are with democracy.

**Figure 3.4: Average Adjusted Predictions (AAPs) of social aspirations on satisfaction with democracy contingent on the degree of universalism of the welfare state (with 95% confidence intervals)**



The third cross-level interaction specifies the possibility that the electoral aspirations about democracy and the integrity of the electoral system have an additional, joint positive effect on how citizens evaluate democracy. Generally, it is reasonable to expect that those electoral systems that have developed higher standards of integrity will boost democratic satisfaction among those citizens who value, above all, the good performance of democracy's electoral dimension. Figure 3.5, which presents the average adjusted predictions of the scale of the electoral democratic aspirations across the observed range of electoral quality, shows that this is indeed the case. The effect of holding electoral expectations on democratic satisfaction strengthens with a higher distribution of electoral integrity, and it is statistically significant across the entire range of values. As the graph shows, only when the integrity of the electoral process reaches a reasonable standard (scores from 66 and above), electoral democrats are satisfied with their democratic system. By contrast, when the quality of the elections is poor, they prove to be indeed dissatisfied democrats.

**Figure 3.5: Average Adjusted Predictions (AAPs) of electoral aspirations on satisfaction with democracy contingent on the integrity of the electoral process (with 95% confidence intervals)**



## CONCLUSION

This chapter has sought to contribute to the rich literature in political science that understands public attitudes and behaviours as a function of the interaction between individuals and contexts.<sup>52</sup> More specifically, I have questioned to what extent different democratic values and the institutions in which they are embedded matter for explaining different levels of democratic satisfaction across European countries.

As argued in the Introduction, most of the empirical research on democratic attitudes assumes that the relationship between citizens and democracy takes place exclusively in the representative arena, where citizens are informed about how their interests are being accounted for by the system. Thus, in shaping their ideas about the democratic system ‘what counts, to a considerable degree, [for citizens] is the belief

<sup>52</sup> For a summary of this literature, see Anderson (2007).

that institutions provide a fair articulation of one's interests' (Rohrschneider 2005, 852).

Contrary to this limited view on the set of political institutions that might have an effect on the public, I have argued that citizens elaborate a rough idea of how 'kind and gentle' their democratic systems are by assessing their performance in different core areas. These assessments are connected to their normative expectations ('beliefs about what is fundamentally right and proper in politics', Easton 1975, 446), which they use to evaluate the allocation of societal benefits and outcomes delivered by their democratic institutions.

Based on this argumentation, in the present chapter I have proposed a theoretical framework that links four core democratic values to a set of institutions which greatly vary among European democratic systems. These four values are freedom, equality, representation and social justice, whereas the institutional settings in which they are embedded are the rule of law, the distribution of political power across different social groups, the integrity of the electoral process, the electoral rules and the welfare state. The core objective of the chapter has been to shed new light on the macro-micro mechanisms that link the democratic context to citizens' satisfaction with democracy by studying the role of a broader set of institutions than those traditionally considered in the literature, and by linking them to the normative aspirations citizens may have about what a good democracy is. Relative to this, it has been theorized that aspirations serve citizens as a benchmark for democracy evaluations, so that those citizens who find a correspondence between their normative beliefs about democracy and the institutional setting in which they live will tend to display higher levels of democratic satisfaction than those who do not find such a coincidence.

Broadly speaking, the empirical results have confirmed the theoretical expectations exposed above; namely, that the partial definition and conceptualization of the relevant democratic values, other than the representative one, made by the traditional literature has entailed an incomplete understanding of the ways in which democracy may affect citizens. In this sense, a key finding of the analyses has been that one of the most widely used indicators tapping into the representative dimension of democracy; namely, the electoral rules, does not make any difference in satisfaction



with the way democracy works when other relevant institutional controls are introduced in the analyses. In the public's mind, the structure of the elections does not sufficiently inform them about how their interests are being accounted for by the system.

Arguably, the most important finding of this paper has been that satisfaction with the way democracy works is mainly shaped by two important aspects of democratic life, namely the performance of the rule of law, and the integrity of the elections. The influence of these two types of institutions is consistent and independent of economic factors. Thus, it can be argued that in forming their democratic attitudes and opinions, citizens mainly care about the regulatory and integrity capacity of their democratic systems, as this setting provides citizens with a safe environment within which to develop their life experiences. Contrary to our expectations, we also saw that the extension of the welfare state's universalism has a negative influence on public satisfaction with democracy once those two important institutional settings are accounted for. In other words, when the quality of the rule of law and the integrity of the electoral process are high, citizens do not care very much about the structure of their welfare state.

A second major finding was that institutions interact with normative expectations altering initial levels of democratic satisfaction. Thus, we saw that holding a liberal view on democracy in political contexts where the rule of law dimension works well entails higher levels of support for democracy. In a similar vein, holding an electoral view on democracy in countries with a higher electoral integrity engenders more satisfaction with democracy, whereas being a social democrat and living in a universal welfare state makes citizens to attenuate their negative evaluations of the democratic system. To sum up, citizens' evaluations of democracy are not only rationally based on their daily experiences with the democratic institutions, but also meaningfully grounded on their normative aspirations about what a good democracy is.

The main implication of all these results is that institutional reforms in those societies suffering from severe legitimacy crisis should not simply be focused on the electoral rules—a view that recently has gained some popularity in many European countries affected by the political crisis consequence of the Great Recession. In the

broad debate about how to bring our democracies closer to the public, aspects as important as a fair equilibrium of power among social groups, a clean electoral process, a well-functioning rule of law system and a universal welfare state should not be forgotten. In summary, the normative aspects of democracy (in the form of both procedural and distributive fairness) matter for citizens, and scholars and policy makers need to pay more attention to them.

**APPENDIX: CHAPTER 3**

**Table A3.1: Country scores of macro-level variables**

	<b>Rule of Law</b>	<b>Electoral Integrity</b>	<b>Government -parties Index</b>	<b>Equality of power Index</b>	<b>Universalism</b>	<b>Gini Index</b>	<b>GDP per capita growth (annual %)</b>	<b>Unemployment (% of total labor force)</b>
Albania	18.6	54.7	.	-1.2	0.2	29.0	13.4	1.6
Belgium	69.1	71.3	2.0	0.8	0.9	27.6	7.5	-0.6
Bulgaria	9.9	57.5	-0.3	-0.6	0.5	36.0	12.3	0.6
Switzerland	88.7	78.6	2.2	0.6	1.5	31.6	4.2	0.0
Cyprus	60.7	70.0	0.5	-1.4	0.5	34.3	11.8	-4.6
Czech Republic	56.7	75.8	0.1	0.4	0.6	26.1	7.0	-0.9
Germany	68.6	80.2	-0.5	0.7	1.7	30.1	5.4	0.3
Denmark	83.5	86.5	1.4	1.9	2.2	29.1	7.5	-0.1
Estonia	58.7	78.8	0.5	0.3	1.3	33.2	10.0	4.7
Spain	53.1	69.1	-0.3	0.7	2.0	35.9	24.8	-3.0
Finland	82.1	86.2	1.0	0.6	1.5	27.1	7.7	-1.9
France	43.7	74.6	-1.2	0.3	1.1	33.1	9.8	-0.3
United Kingdom	59.5	66.1	-2.4	0.2	0.6	32.6	7.9	0.6
Hungary	52.2	56.2	-0.7	-0.9	0.8	30.6	11.0	-1.1
Ireland	67.0	70.9	-0.3	0.1	0.1	32.5	14.7	-1.3
Israel	63.2	73.7	1.5	-1.1	0.4	42.8	6.9	0.5
Iceland	51.8	82.9	0.1	0.9	1.7	26.9	6.0	0.7
Italy	26.8	66.3	-0.1	0.0	0.8	35.2	10.7	-3.1
Lithuania	50.8	77.6	0.1	-0.2	1.5	35.2	13.4	5.2
Netherlands	76.0	79.8	1.1	1.2	0.7	28.0	5.8	-1.4

Norway	57.7	83.0	0.0	1.4	2.2	25.9	3.1	1.4
Poland	49.7	74.2	0.0	0.1	0.9	32.4	10.1	1.6
Portugal	58.1	74.5	-0.9	-0.3	1.2	36.0	15.5	-3.6
Russia	16.4 <sup>1</sup>	44.3	.	-2.1	0.5	41.6	5.5	3.3
Sweden	91.5	80.5	0.4	1.7	2.9	27.3	8.0	-1.0
Slovenia	50.5	76.4	0.2	-0.3	0.9	25.6	8.8	-2.9
Slovakia	4.2	74.5	0.0	-0.3	0.4	26.1	14.0	1.5
Ukraine	3.3	50.8	.	-1.5	0.5	24.7	7.5	0.5
Kosovo	11.2 <sup>2</sup>	53.1 <sup>3</sup>	.	-2.0	-0.2	29.4	30.9	2.0

(1) The rule of law country score for Russia has been taken from the WGI and multiplied by -20

(2) The rule of law country score for Kosovo has been taken from the WGI and multiplied by -20

(3) The electoral integrity country score for Kosovo has been imputed from the scores of the other institutional variables: the rule of law, the equality of power, welfare state universalism and the Gini index.

**Table A3.2: Exploratory factor analysis of the equality of power items  
(V-Dem)**

<b>Items</b>	<b>Loadings</b>	<b>Uniqueness</b>
Power by socioeconomic position	0.923	0.148
Power by social group	0.859	0.262
Power by gender	0.942	0.113
Power sexual orientation	0.904	0.183

**Table A3.3: Gallagher index of disproportionality and issue congruence on SWD (MLE)**

VARIABLES	DV: SWD
<b>Individual-level variables</b>	
Age	-0.026*** (0.005)
Education	0.032*** (0.007)
Gender (1=woman)	-0.040** (0.016)
Employment status (1=unemployed)	-0.111*** (0.030)
Winners vs. losers (1=winners)	0.066*** (0.018)
Government performance	0.458*** (0.004)
Economy performance	0.210*** (0.005)
Electoral democracy aspirations	0.154*** (0.041)
Liberal democracy aspirations	0.460*** (0.037)
Social democracy aspirations	-0.198*** (0.025)
<b>System-level variables</b>	
Electoral integrity	0.044*** (0.009)
Gallagindex	-0.006 (0.006)
Issue Congruence	0.006 (0.006)
Intercept	-0.828 (0.664)
<b>Random-effects parameters</b>	
SD intercept	0.388 (0.054)
SD residuals	1.759 (0.006)
Observations	47,163
Countries	27

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

**Table A3.4: Lijphart's index and equality of power index on SWD (MLE)**

VARIABLES	DV: SWD
<b>Individual-level variables</b>	
Age	-0.025*** (0.005)
Education	0.036*** (0.007)
Gender (1=woman)	-0.056*** (0.017)
Employment status (1=unemployed)	-0.125*** (0.032)
Winners vs. losers (1=winners)	0.061*** (0.019)
Government performance	0.449*** (0.005)
Economy performance	0.210*** (0.005)
Electoral democracy aspirations	0.185*** (0.042)
Liberal democracy aspirations	0.477*** (0.038)
Social democracy aspirations	-0.208*** (0.025)
<b>System-level variables</b>	
Lijphart's index	0.047 (0.086)
Equality of power index	0.389*** (0.112)
Intercept	2.328*** (0.096)
<b>Random-effects parameters</b>	
SD intercept	0.405 (0.058)
SD residuals	1.748 (0.006)
Observations	44,190
Countries	25

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p&lt;0.01, \*\* p&lt;0.05, \* p&lt;0.1

## **CHAPTER 4: A CRISIS OF SOCIAL DEMOCRACY IN EUROPE? AN ANSWER FROM THE CITIZENS' PERSPECTIVE**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The aftermath of the Great Recession has witnessed a revival of interest in the old debate about the future of social democracy in Europe. For some observers this crisis is simply part of an adverse electoral cycle, an interpretation favoured by the fact that at the onset of the crisis, most cabinets in Europe were run by socialist parties. For others, however, the alleged crisis of social democratic politics is of a more substantive nature and finds expression in two distinctive circumstances.

One has to do with the triumph of the neoliberal agenda as the solution to overcome the ongoing economic and financial crisis, with the well-known consequences regarding the dismantling of public services and the welfare model. The second lies in the massive abandonment of its core electorate, which—either having moved to the right daunted by a scenario of increasing social insecurity, or to the left disappointed with social democracy's real capacity to solve people's problems in tough times—has mainly sought refuge in new populist and challenger parties (both of the left and right).<sup>53</sup> In this context, Giddens' query in his 1990s analysis of the (then) crisis of the left as to 'whether social democracy can survive at all as a distinctive political philosophy' remains, for many, a valid diagnosis (Giddens 1998, preface).

All the while political scientists and commentators have amply debated about the prospects for social democracy in Europe, we know very little about how it is conceived by the public. The scholarly literature has paid scant attention to questions such as whether citizens support the normative ideas that social democracy underpins, and the extent to which they are satisfied with the actual implementation of these norms in their respective countries. This is quite a remarkable omission, given that discerning whether 'social democracy is in terminal condition in Europe' (Keating and McCrone 2013) hinges, to a large extent, on the support expressed for it

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<sup>53</sup> For a summary of these and other arguments about the crisis of social democracy in Europe, see Bailey and Bates (2012); Keating and McCrone (2013).



by the citizenry. What leads some citizens to think that matters relating to social inequality and justice, the two core values of social democracy, are relevant features of democracy? And how do they connect such expectations with their evaluations of democratic performance in this area? These are the central questions I examine in this chapter.

Using novel data from the ESS-6, the chapter examines two aspects of individual attitudes toward democracy that tend to be overlooked in the literature: the perceptions and expectations of citizens concerning what the democratic system should do, and actually does, regarding social inequality. In other words, why, and under what conditions, do citizens think that it is democracy's responsibility to provide material equality for all, and to what extent do they feel that their actual democratic system is succeeding in achieving this goal? These two perceptions capture individual support for what in democratic theory and public debate is known as a *social notion* or a *social model* of democracy (Held 2006); in other words, the idea that the political system should compensate individuals for the unjust disadvantages generated by the economic system. More particularly, the chapter analyses how European citizens connect their social democratic aspirations with their evaluations, and to what extent this connection is determined by individual and country-level factors. In this way, the chapter provides for the first time a theoretical and empirical model on how the social democratic ideas are elaborated in individuals' beliefs system.

Analyses of data from 29 European democracies reveal that citizens' attitudes about the social model of democracy are strongly connected with the social predispositions traditionally discussed in the literature on welfare state attitudes: Both aspirations and evaluations for social democracy may arise from the individuals' economic self-interest and/or their ideological preferences. A third, additional factor is also considered; namely, the generalized feelings of trust in the democratic system. Consistent with our expectations, the results show that individuals with a lower socio-economic background, those who position themselves on the political left and those who are more distrustful of political institutions tend to be more supportive of the social model of democracy, while they evaluate its actual performance more negatively.

However, the data also show that the negative effect of the individuals' rising aspirations on their performance evaluations can be mitigated by a country's macropolitical context and, more specifically, by the degree of universalism of its welfare state. For example, we demonstrate that, although holding a low income is expected to lead to pro-social democratic aspirations but negative evaluations of performance, in contexts of highly universalistic welfare states, both the individual aspirations and evaluations of those low-income groups tend to be positive. Similar findings are found in relation to the moderating effect of the welfare state on the attitudes of the elderly and of those citizens who are more distrustful of the political institutions, but not of women and left-wing voters. Therefore, even when citizens are socially and attitudinally predisposed to delegitimise the social model of democracy, a good institutional configuration can potentially reverse this pattern.

Overall, the findings highlight the importance of the institutional context in shaping individual attitudes toward the democratic system, thus contributing to the large body of literature that demonstrates that people's political interpretations, opinions, and actions are shaped to a large extent by their country's structural and/or institutional setting. However, by showing that what is malleable to institutional intervention is the link between performance evaluations and individual traits, the chapter examines a type of multilevel relationship that has been substantially less explored by scholars. This is the conditional or contingent effect that the macro-level factors have on democratic attitudes through a third independent variable; in this case, individuals' social and political predispositions (for a similar case, see Anderson and Singer 2008).

Substantively, the results contribute to circumscribing the debate on the public legitimacy of the European social model at the institutional level, rather than at the level of individuals' rising aspirations. The upshot here is that measures to change conditions of inequality (through the welfare state) may be recognized by potentially all citizens, and especially by those who are more demanding. Thus, the legitimacy crisis of social democracy, where it exists, may be reversed by fostering social democratic policies and practices.

The chapter proceeds as follows. I begin by outlining the role of expectations and evaluations and by identifying how they relate to each other. On a theoretical

level, my approach assumes that the evaluative judgements of how democracy performs in a specific area (here, the social delivery) are formed through a cognitive process relating prior expectations to perceived performance. The next section introduces this theoretical assumption generally. Then, I discuss the hypothesized effect of individual and country-level factors on attitudes about social democracy. In addition, I explore the reasons that the macro-level factors actually act to condition the effect of individual predispositions on attitudinal considerations, rather than influencing them directly. Next, I expose the issues of data measurement and analysis, and then present the results. The significance and implications of the findings are considered in the concluding section.

## **THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS AND EVALUATIONS: A THEORETICAL APPROACH**

Despite the recent ‘cognitive turn’ in the social sciences, the link between democratic aspirations and evaluations remains rather under theorized—with the notable exceptions of Ferrín (2012) and Kriesi and Ferrín (2016). An early formulation of this approach can be found in social psychology work, which suggests that people use ‘prototypes’, or ideal images, to form expectations about the characteristics of the object under scrutiny and make inferences about its performance (Bem and McConnell 1970). Drawing on this line of reasoning, recent research on citizen satisfaction with government services argues that individuals’ evaluations of public agencies do not simply rest on perceptions of how the system works, but also on prior expectations of that performance (Seyd 2015; Kimball and Patterson 1997; Morgeson 2013). Thus, expectations<sup>54</sup> work as an internal mechanism that helps citizens process their perceptions and generate an overall judgement of the political objects being assessed.

Mainly from a theoretical perspective, political science scholars have likewise speculated about the central role of expectations in the formation of different political attitudes such as political trust, support and legitimacy. According to Miller’s

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<sup>54</sup> As defined by Seyd, expectations can be understood as ‘a normative or desirability judgement—a belief that a particular quality or outcome should be delivered’ (Seyd 2015, 75).

definition, political (dis)trust is ‘the belief that the government is not functioning and producing outputs in accordance with individual expectations’ (Miller 1974). Similarly, Stillman relates the concept of ‘legitimacy’ to the values held by the society, thus conceiving legitimacy as a matter of degree rather than an either/or judgment. As he illustrates, legitimacy is ‘the comparability of the results of governmental output with the value patterns of the relevant systems, that is, those affected by these results’ (Stillman 1974, 32).

As these definitions commonly hold, expectations are supposed to exist in people’s minds before their actual experiences with the political system and actors, and are used as a reference point against which those experiences are compared. That is, expectations act as ‘a baseline or “starting point” for [evaluative] judgements’ (Morgeson 2013, 292). Empirically, however, the link between expectations and evaluations is not straightforward.<sup>55</sup> On the one hand, one could expect prior expectations to have a positive impact on perceived performance, due to the willingness of citizens to adapt their evaluations of reality to their normative viewpoints. According to this view, because individuals are generally motivated to hold coherent attitudes, they will tend to evaluate more positively the performance of those attributes that they consider relevant in their conceptualizations of democracy—and therefore more negatively those aspects that are not important for them. In other words, holding high aspirations about a specific democratic element of democracy could potentially build a more positive conception of the capacity of that element to produce positive outcomes in practice.<sup>56</sup>

However, the relationship could also operate the other way around. Prior expectations might negatively influence democratic assessments, because quite often performance fails to live up to expectations. This gap between aspirations and evaluations has been interpreted in a good deal of the literature as the result of the rising aspirations that citizens in post-industrial societies hold, derived from the process of cultural modernization and the growth of ‘post-materialist’ and ‘self-

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<sup>55</sup> In general terms, I assume that aspirations about democracy evolve around universal values and principles—such as equality, participation and freedom—that the individual learns early in the life course. Evaluations, by contrast, are formed as a record of the daily experience with political institutions. In the light of this, it seems reasonable to assume that aspirations influence evaluations more than these influence normative aspirations.

<sup>56</sup> I show in *Chapter 5* that this is indeed the case for the liberal elements of democracy.

expression' values<sup>57</sup> (Inglehart 2003; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Welzel 2013). In other words, the fact that citizens do not see their aspirations fulfilled is more a matter of excessive demands over democracy rather than of poor institutional performance (Cooper 1999; Miller and Listhaug 1999; Dalton 2004). Implicit in this vision is the idea that the possibility to boost levels of mass democratic satisfaction is out of policy makers' hands, as they are unable to reduce what citizens expect from democracy.

This rising-aspirations-account overlooks, nonetheless, the fact that aspirations about democracy are, to some extent, also shaped by the political context in which citizens live, since they are not uniform across nations with similar levels of societal modernization and cultural change but differ among each other quite largely. Thus, views of democracy are not exclusively culturally determined or exogenous to the political sphere, but are also moulded by a process of institutional learning 'based on [...] recent or contemporaneous experiences with the performance of political institutions' (Mishler and Rose 2001, 37). This means that citizens learn from their direct, long-term experience with institutions how democracy works, and which is the most (least) appropriate institutional design. As pointed out by Kriesi and Saris (2016, 195), a telling illustration of this institutional learning theory can be found in the attachment of the Swiss to their direct-democratic institutions, which 'have not only become an integral part of their vision of democracy, but also a constitutive element of their national identity.' To sum up, different democratic institutions can make a difference in what can be done to cultivate higher/lower mass aspirations about democracy and, consequently, higher/lower levels of satisfaction with the democratic system.

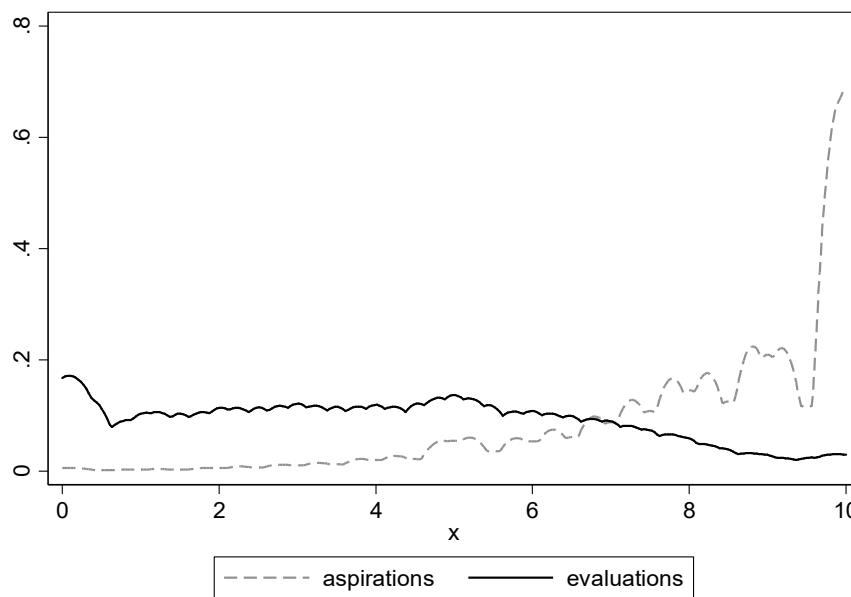
The logic of the expectations-evaluations approach is illustrated empirically in this chapter with the example of the individual attitudes toward the social model of democracy. To have a proper idea of how this relationship operates in our data, in Figure 4.1 I present the entire distribution of people's social aspirations about democracy (the dotted line) and their evaluations of the actual performance of their democratic system in these aspects (the solid line). It is obvious from the graph that

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<sup>57</sup> As Inglehart puts it: "The emergence of post-industrial society is conducive to rising emphasis on self-expression, which in turn brings rising mass demands for democracy" (Inglehart 2003, 57).

the differences between the two distributions are quite sizeable. As the graph shows, aspirations regarding social democracy are clearly skewed to the right, meaning that Europeans are fairly demanding in their expectations about what democracy should deliver, while evaluations are more homogenously distributed across the entire range but with a slight trend to the negative side.

**Figure 4.1: Aspirations and evaluations of social democracy**



In line with Figure 4.1, the basic theoretical claim of this chapter is that the relationship between citizens' aspirations and evaluations of democracy's social dimension will be **negative**. In other words, the more an individual thinks that the government should take responsibility for reducing poverty and income differentials, the worse that individual will evaluate the performance of democracy in this area.<sup>58</sup> But I continue with the premise that this relationship can be altered by a multiplicity of factors that operate at both the individual and country levels. I consider the theoretical case for these factors below.

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<sup>58</sup> Of course, the reverse also holds. Those with low expectations regarding the relevance of the social dimension will be more likely to have their expectations positively confirmed when they evaluate the actual achievements of their democratic system in that area.

## **THE DETERMINANTS OF THE EVALUATIONS AND ASPIRATIONS TOWARD SOCIAL DEMOCRACY**

As argued in the introductory section, the issue of what citizens expect democracy to do with regard to social inequality both in practice and in the abstract is theoretically connected with two types of factors: the usual social predispositions that make individuals support the normative principles of the welfare state, on the one hand, and their general attitudinal orientations toward the democratic system, on the other.

As for the first group of variables, a review of the extensive literature on public attitudes toward the welfare state leads us to identify two types of individual-level factors that dominate as accounts for why citizens support redistribution and other similar welfare policies (e.g. Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003; Linos and West 2003; Jaeger 2006; Kaltenthaler et al. 2008). These can be characterized as economic, self-interest explanations, and cultural, ideological explanations. According to the self-interest argument, individuals tend to support economic redistribution depending on the calculus they make of their own expected gains. Thus, they will hold a positive attitude toward redistribution if they are recipients, or are at risk of becoming recipients, of social benefits or programs—such as unemployment, child benefits, or sick care—whereas they will be less supportive if they are unlikely to receive such benefits and still pay high taxes. Thus, certain social categories such as women, the unemployed, the elderly, and lower-income groups are predicted to be more supportive of welfare state benefits and services, though not always necessarily of economic redistribution in more general terms.<sup>59</sup> In this view, individuals are ‘self-interested utility maximizers who undertake a rational weighing of the [available] policy options’ (Kaltenthaler et al. 2008, 223).

The second argument suggests that support for welfare policies depends on individuals’ ideological beliefs. As Hudson et al. (2015) state, social provision hinges on the answers to normative questions such as ‘why someone should care about

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<sup>59</sup> Blekesaune and Quadagno (2003) show that those who are unemployed tend to support welfare policies for the unemployed (‘themselves’), while their support for more general welfare-state intervention (policies for the sick and the old) is fully mediated by their ideological orientations. As regards to age, these same authors similarly find that the effect of age is stronger with regard to age-specific benefits (Blekesaune and Quadagno 2003, 416), while Gelissen (2000) proves that support for welfare is not uniform across cohorts: both the younger and the older cohorts are more supportive of welfare-state intervention than the middle-aged.

others?, who deserves our care? and what should be done by governments?', which reflect diverse understandings of human nature (Hudson et al. 2015, 6). Most citizens reply to these normative dilemmas with the help of the values that are expressed by political ideology. Right-wing political orientations are associated with values such as conservatism and economic openness, which tend to give a rational justification of inequality and favour minimal state intervention. Several empirical studies have found that political conservatism is strongly connected with people's propensity to resist change (or justify the status quo) and rationalize inequality, in the sense that people are seen as deserving the outcomes and treatment they receive (see Jost et al. 2003; Lane 1962; Tyler and McGraw 1986).<sup>60</sup>

This is also linked to the view that in an open, liberal economy the state is meant to stay out of the operations of the market as much as possible (Kaltenthaler et al. 2008, 221), as it prevents citizens from maximizing their effort for themselves and ends up producing suboptimal economic outcomes. In turn, left-wing orientations are linked with values such as egalitarianism and openness to change (Schwartz 1992). An egalitarian view of society entails that people recognise each other as moral equals, are inclined to in-group cooperation, and are concerned with everyone's welfare (Arikan and Ben-Nun Bloom 2015, 434). Moreover, individuals who locate themselves on the political left tend to see inequality as the result of the skewed economic opportunities generated by market economies, which can only be altered by growing state intervention and redistribution.

Drawing on the two theoretical arguments exposed above, I similarly contend that the demand for social democracy is likely to vary among voters according to their socio-economic position. Individuals in different locations of the social spectrum have varying experiences of and hold divergent expectations of the degree of social outcomes that democracy should deliver. Thus, I hypothesize that *those with a lower socio-economic position*<sup>61</sup> *will have higher expectations of the social model of democracy* (H1a), as they are more likely to benefit from a democratic system that

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<sup>60</sup> More recently, however, the literature adverts to the emergence of the ideas on welfare chauvinism and welfare populism promoted by the new right-wing populist parties, which come to support welfare policies and benefits but only if restricted to the natives of the country (see, for example, de Koster et al. 2013).

<sup>61</sup> This is measured by reference to income, gender, employment, and age.



takes responsibility in reducing poverty and income differentials. However, due to their higher social expectations, *they will tend to judge the actual performance of their democratic system in this area more negatively* (H1b).

In a similar vein, I argue that people's attitudes toward social democracy (both their aspirations and evaluations) are also shaped by their ideological view of how a just society should look like to them. Thus, the second hypothesis holds that *those individuals who are more left-wing will support a social understanding of democracy* (H2a), insofar as they endorse values such as universalism, egalitarianism, and state intervention, which are coherent with this democratic view. Also, however, *they will tend to be more critical of the performance of democracy in the social area* (H2b).

In addition to economic self-interest and ideological predispositions, people's thinking about social democracy may be driven by their attitudes toward the democratic system in more general terms. For instance, Canache (2012), in a work on public conceptualizations of democracy in Latin American countries, shows that those individuals who understand democracy in terms of social and economic outcomes tend to be less supportive of the democratic system and display more positive attitudes toward illegal protest. In a similar vein, Ceka and Magalhães (2016, 102–4) find that both interpersonal and political trust drive down the propensity of respondents to conceive the social component as a crucially important element of democracy,<sup>62</sup> or, stated differently, those who are more (socially and politically) distrustful tend to give more importance to the social justice democratic view.

Coherently with this sort of evidence, I contend that the way citizens relate to their democratic system is likely to impact on their understandings and evaluations of democracy's social dimension. Political trust is traditionally used as an important indicator that taps the basic evaluative orientations toward the democratic system, as it is associated with trust in the core institutions of political representation in contemporary democracies (i.e. parliaments, politicians, and political parties).<sup>63</sup> In a

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<sup>62</sup> The same result applies for the direct democratic component. In this case, respondent's degree of political distrust is indeed the most powerful predictor of the importance given to this component of democracy (Ceka and Magalhães 2016, 104).

<sup>63</sup> The 'political trust' item of the ESS-6 refers additionally to the legal system, the police, and international organizations such as the European Union and United Nations. Other traditional formulations of this indicator also mention private organizations and/or the incumbent authorities.

few words, trust in institutions can be defined as ‘a declaration by citizens that institutions are reliable’ (Torcal 2014, 1544). Therefore, if one claims to trust the basic representative institutions, one is basically expressing the belief that the institutions of liberal democracy are doing ‘a good job’ most of the time. In line with this, the hypothesis proposed here claims that *more distrusting citizens will be more supportive of a social model of democracy* (H3a), because they consider that the liberal model is not doing its job properly so that an alternative democratic model is desirable. Due to their higher expectations and their more critical attitude toward the democratic system in general, it is likely that *they will evaluate the performance of their democratic system in the social dimension more negatively* (H3b).

But does this presumed effect of the structural factors (economic self-interest, ideology and political distrust) on the individual aspirations and evaluations of social democracy work independently of other external influences? As the discipline has well recognized, there are reasons to think that aspirations and evaluations toward the social model of democracy will fluctuate widely across countries, given vast national-level variations in institutional and contextual settings that may influence the formation of both sorts of attitudes. Country-level factors operate as settings that constrain or facilitate citizens’ opportunities to go ahead in life and shape the frames they use to form political opinions, thus influencing their judgements about the desirability and functioning of social democracy. Among the most common national-level indicators that have been discussed in the literature as to shape people’s orientations about social inequality and redistribution are the degree of economic development and/or income inequality in the country (Dion and Birchfield 2010; Loveless and Whitefield 2011), and the type of welfare state institutions (Svallfors 1997; Linos and West 2003; Loveless and Whitefield 2011).

In this chapter, I discuss the effect of the political institution par excellence that aims to implement the principles of social democracy: the welfare state. Drawing on Esping-Andersen’s classic work on *worlds of welfare capitalism* (Esping-Andersen 1990), scholars have suggested that different types of welfare regimes produce distinct cleavages among socio-economic groups that lead to differences in popular

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Here I rely simply on the response categories referring to political institutions as they could be most closely connected with the democratic system in a broad sense.

attitudes. For example, citizens of Scandinavian universalist welfare states are found to be strongly supportive of redistribution, whereas in liberal welfare regimes, based on a social delivery system only to those who are in need, support for social welfare is low among the general population but high among the most disadvantaged (Svallfors 1997; Arts and Gelissen 2001).

The different configuration of welfare regimes in Europe is approached here by a measure tapping the extension of universalism in the welfare state. As Rothstein and Stolle (2003) observe, 'the basic principle of a universal welfare policy is not to discriminate between citizens on economic grounds, [but to deliver services] for the whole population on the principle of equal access' (Rothstein and Stolle 2003, 196). Universalism can be considered a relevant feature of welfare states as it determines how many citizens can benefit from the welfare policies and services, or—in other words—the extent to which citizens are separated, on the base of bureaucratic discretion, into 'the needy' and the rest.

In this sense, it is reasonable to expect that *a more universal configuration of the welfare state will have positive effects on both social aspirations (H4) and evaluations (H5)*, as it will tend to promote a more positive view of social democracy among citizens. However, it is important to note that the relationship between universalism and social democratic aspirations may also operate negatively, in the sense that those citizens in poor universal welfare states could wish to benefit from higher levels of social democracy, so conferring a higher relevance to a social understanding of democracy, whereas those already enjoying good levels of universalism may take it for granted.

A third central argument of this chapter is that contextual factors do not only have a direct impact on democratic attitudinal considerations (evaluations and aspirations), as conventionally assumed in the literature, but also condition the effect of individual characteristics on those attitudes. This is what Anderson and Singer (2008) denominate as an interactive effect—also called conditional or contingent effect—in multi-level relations, which occurs when some structural feature acts as an 'intervening variable ( $\gamma$ ) that helps determine the relative impact of an independent

variable ( $x$ ) on the dependent variable ( $z$ )' (Anderson and Singer 2008, 6-7).<sup>64</sup> More particularly, I speculate that the contextual factors may serve a *palliative* function in that they reduce the negative perceptions about social democratic performance among people with low socio-economic status, left-wing voters and those who are more distrustful of the political institutions (our three hypothesized independent variables).

In a nutshell, the institutional context alters the way individual characteristics shape opinion formation. To confirm this, I expect a cross-level interaction between the institutional context and the individuals' background and attitudinal characteristics to have a positive effect on the evaluations of the social model of democracy. More particularly, it is expected *that individuals with low socio-economic status, left-wing voters and politically distrustful citizens in nations with highly universal welfare states will tend to evaluate the performance of the social model of democracy positively, instead of negatively* (H1c, H2c and H3c).

However, the current context of economic and financial crisis affecting Europe makes it difficult to talk about welfare state policies, and public perceptions about them, without considering the country's economic conditions. It is widely known that the severe austerity measures adopted by many national governments as a response to their financial and debt crisis have seriously undermined their welfare provision and have contributed to generate a discontent climate among their citizenries. However, it is here posited *that those welfare states that display higher levels of universalism have the capacity to mitigate the negative consequences of the economy on citizens' attitudes* (H6). In a nutshell, the universalism of the welfare state may make citizens less vulnerable to adverse economic conditions.

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<sup>64</sup> As Anderson and Singer (2008, 6-7) discuss, it is possible to distinguish three basic ways in which macro-level structures can affect voters: directly, indirectly and interactively. Although most comparative studies claim to follow a simple direct-effects model, they are, in fact, based on theoretical patterns that presume indirect or conditional relationships.

## DATA AND MEASURES

### **The dependent variables: Citizens' aspirations and evaluations of the social model of democracy**

The two core attitudes that are the focus of this study intend to capture individuals' support for what in democratic theory is known as a *social model* of democracy. From a theoretical point of view, this entails the belief that all citizens have basic social rights, including the right to a modicum of economic welfare and security and the right to live according to prevailing social standards (Marshall 1950), which the state has the responsibility to secure. That is, civil and political rights cannot be separated from, nor given priority over, the safeguard of economic and social rights.

Public attitudes toward this democratic vision are measured by four questions taken from the sixth round of the European Social Survey, 2012, which includes a specific module of questions tapping into Europeans' understandings and evaluations of democracy's different dimensions in 29 European societies. The survey includes four items that ask respondents to identify both the extent of their preference in the abstract and their degree of satisfaction with their actual democratic system's role in promoting equality, concretized in the ideas that the government should protect people against poverty and reduce income differentials. Specifically, the respondent is asked to answer the following two questions concerning their social democratic aspirations: *'Please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general... (1) That the government protects all citizens against poverty; (2) That the government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels?'* And these other two in relation to their democratic evaluations: *'Please tell me to what extent you think each of the following statements applies in [country]: (1) The government in [country] protects all citizens against poverty; (2) The government in [country] takes measures to reduce differences in income levels?'* Using a ten-point scale, potential responses range from not at all important for democracy in general (0) to extremely important for democracy in general (10) in the case of the aspiration questions, and from does not apply at all (0) to apply completely (10) in the case of the evaluation questions.

Two indices of social democratic aspirations and evaluations are constructed from these four questions. Regarding aspirations, each item is dichotomized at the

maximum value (0/9=0 and 10=1),<sup>65</sup> and then both are combined by averaging into a single scale. This results in a 0 to 1 scale, where 1 represents a social maximalist vision of democracy (both items are accorded the maximum relevance), 0.5 captures those citizens who accord relevance to only one of the items, and 0 is when none of the items is considered relevant. As for evaluations, the two items are averaged into a single scale ranging from 0 to 10, where higher values entail more positive evaluations, and lower values poorer evaluations.

### **The independent variables**

The independent variables are measured at the level of individuals and countries. At the individual level, our variables of interest are gender, age, employment status, income, ideology and trust in political institutions. All are measured as dummy variables, indicating whether the respondent holds the intended category or not. Thus, the 'gender' variable identifies whether the respondent is a woman, 'employment status' whether the respondent is unemployed, 'income' whether the respondent earns an income below the average in her country (i.e. she is positioned within the 1<sup>st</sup> to 5<sup>th</sup> quintiles), 'ideology' whether the respondent position herself on the political left (0 to 3 on the 0–10 ideological scale), and 'trust in political institutions' measures whether the respondent distrust political institutions (0 to 5 on the 0–10 trust scale). The only exception is the variable on age, which is divided in three groups: the youngest group is composed of those respondents up to 35 years old, the middle-aged group those between the ages of 36 and 64, and the elderly those aged 65 years and above.

Our main institutional variable, welfare state universalism, is measured by an indicator coming from the V-Dem Dataset, which taps how many welfare programs in the country are means-tested and how many benefit all (or virtually all) members of the polity. According to the V-Dem project's definition, means-tested programs are those designed to deliver welfare selectively to citizens who cannot in any other way

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<sup>65</sup> Only those citizens who give the maximum value (e.g. 10) to the social elements can be considered maximalist social democrats, i.e. they deem the social aspects as necessary conditions of democracy under all circumstances. See Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta (2016, 67).

provide for themselves or meet their basic needs, whereas universal programs seek to cover the entire population throughout the different stages of life and based on uniform rules and equal access. This is an ordinal measure that ranges theoretically from -3 to 3, although in our sample of countries it runs from -0.2 (Kosovo) to 3 (Sweden). All the contextual indicators are measured most recently to the collection of the survey data at the micro level (2012).

The country's economic context is here measured by four variables. The first one is the total level of inequality, measured by the Gini index,<sup>66</sup> which taps the extent to which the distribution of income among individuals or households within an economy deviates from a perfectly equal distribution. The second measure is the *change* in inequality in the country since the onset of the economic crisis (i.e. 2007–12), as this indicator can capture more accurately citizens' perceptions of the effect of the crisis in their life chance conditions. Though the 'objective' level of inequality is traditionally used in the literature to measure crisis' effects, it might be relatively constant and hence 'unperceived' by the citizens.

The two other economy indicators are the change in the unemployment rate for each country between 2007 and 2012, and the GDP per capita growth rate in 2012 (annual %),<sup>67</sup> which can be considered good measures of potential problems in 'rich' democracies.

## **EMPIRICAL RESULTS**

The statistical analyses are based on two-level linear regression models with random intercepts at the level of individuals and nations on our two dependent variables: individual aspirations and evaluations of the social model of democracy. The models are run in several steps, starting with the individual-level variables, and adding first the contextual factors and secondly the cross-level interaction terms. Tables 4.1 and 4.2 present the results of these analyses.

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<sup>66</sup> Source: World Development Indicators of the World Bank.

<sup>67</sup> Both indicators are taken from the World Development Indicators of the World Bank.

The findings present strong evidence for the hypothesized effect of all the individual level variables on the attitudes towards social democracy (Models 1–2). In line with Hypothesis H1a and H1b, individuals with lower socio-economic status (women, the unemployed, old people, and low-income groups) tend to have higher aspirations regarding the social model of democracy than those who are better off, but, as predicted, are more critical of its actual performance in their respective countries. The same positive evidence is found in favour of Hypotheses H2a–b and H3a–b: both left-wing identifiers and politically distrustful citizens have higher pro-social democratic aspirations, but negative evaluations of performance. These effects can be seen in the opposite signs that the coefficients of the Models for aspirations and for evaluations display, and confirm our expectations about the negative discrepancy between the two attitudes when are cognitively processed by the individuals.

A puzzling finding regarding the influence of the socio- demographic factors is that the young people, who are, in principle, socially and economically worse off than (at least) the middle adults, have weaker preferences for social democracy than the two older generations, while their performance evaluations are not significantly different from those of the elderly group, meaning that they are not more or less critical of performance than that group. Two potential explanations for this might be that the social model of democracy has lost appeal among the youngest, or that this age group is taking social democracy for granted as they have grown up enjoying well-established welfare state institutions, so that they do not see social democracy as a crucially important element of democracy and, consequently, do not care about giving meaningful evaluations of its performance (either positive or negative).

By contrast, Models 3–4, which test the direct effect of the contextual-level variables, provide only mixed evidence in support of our hypotheses. First, the results show that aspirations for social democracy are quite sensitive to the country's misery conditions and, more especially, to the changing level of inequality, which is the only predictor that reaches statistical significance in the model when all the contextual-level variables are controlled among each other. Thus, *ceteris paribus*, the more pronounced the growth of inequality in the country, the more likely its citizens are to support a social democratic model. Our expectation that the degree of universalism



would have impacted significantly on individuals' social expectations (H4) is, by contrast, not met.<sup>68</sup> This makes us think that the economic crisis, and more particularly, its social effects in terms of increases in the levels of inequality, have led individuals to be very sensitive to the social aspects of democracy and, consequently, more strongly committed to them. Only the availability of new data can clarify whether this commitment of the Europeans to social democracy is stable or has been a crisis-driven phenomenon.

Regarding evaluations, the general interesting finding is that the welfare state indicator does reach statistical significance as a predictor variable, entailing that evaluations of performance are on average more positive in countries with good levels of welfare state universalism than in those with lower ones. The 'change in inequality' indicator is again a significant determinant of the attitudes toward social democracy, now entailing that the higher the growth of inequality in the country, the lower the public's evaluations of social democracy performance. The GDP growth rate is also significant but produces a somewhat counter-intuitive effect: citizens in countries where the GDP growth has been lower (i.e. negative) tend to be happier with the performance of the welfare state than those in countries with positive growth. We should note that our sample of countries includes several Eastern European countries that, at the moment of the survey, were enjoying on average quite high growth rates (like Estonia, Lithuania and Russia) but where, most presumably, the respective citizenries displayed low levels of satisfaction with the welfare system.

In general, the fact that the measure of welfare state universalism manages to beat the effect of the set of economic variables, as well as to retain its statistical significance (at the 99% level) even when contested by the indicator on inequality change can be taken as a robust result for the case of our institutional variable. Therefore, it seems reasonable to further investigate the different ways in which it may affect the individuals' attitudinal considerations over social democracy.

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<sup>68</sup> It is worth noting that the indicator on universalism makes a significant impact on social democratic aspirations when it is included alone in the model, with no further macro-level controls (results not shown). This means that, under equalized economic conditions, the welfare state is a relevant predictor of individuals' social aspirations, in the sense that lower levels of universalism lead to higher expectations regarding what democracy should deliver in the social dimension. But when an economic crisis happens, it is those societies with a higher increase of inequality, and not those with lower levels of universalism, that are more demanding of a social model of democracy.

**Table 4.1: The effect of individual and country-level factors on attitudes toward social democracy**

VARIABLES	(Model 1) Aspirations	(Model 2) Evaluations	(Model 3) Aspirations	(Model 4) Evaluations
<b>Individual-level variables</b>				
Woman	0.020*** (0.004)	-0.180*** (0.023)	0.020*** (0.004)	-0.179*** (0.023)
Age (ref.= young)				
Middle-aged	0.073*** (0.005)	-0.174*** (0.028)	0.073*** (0.005)	-0.174*** (0.028)
Old	0.081*** (0.006)	-0.003 (0.034)	0.081*** (0.006)	-0.003 (0.034)
Unemployed	0.041*** (0.008)	-0.139*** (0.044)	0.040*** (0.008)	-0.139*** (0.044)
Low income	0.047*** (0.005)	-0.096*** (0.025)	0.047*** (0.005)	-0.096*** (0.025)
Left-wing ideology	0.098*** (0.005)	-0.503*** (0.028)	0.098*** (0.005)	-0.503*** (0.028)
Low political trust	0.047*** (0.005)	-1.379*** (0.028)	0.046*** (0.005)	-1.379*** (0.028)
<b>System-level variables</b>				
Welfare state universalism			-0.050 (0.033)	0.767*** (0.242)
<b>Control variables (economy)</b>				
Gini coefficient			-0.006 (0.006)	0.002 (0.041)
Change in Gini			0.021* (0.011)	-0.144* (0.080)
Change in Unemployment			-0.004 (0.005)	-0.021 (0.038)
GDP Growth			-0.005 (0.010)	-0.132* (0.076)
Intercept	0.332*** (0.027)	5.329*** (0.207)	0.476*** (0.075)	4.537*** (0.548)
<b>Random-effects parameters</b>				
SD intercept	0.020 (0.005)	1.212 (0.319)	0.013 (0.004)	0.723 (0.191)
SD residuals	0.174 (0.001)	4.952 (0.036)	0.174 (0.001)	4.952 (0.036)
Observations	37,909	37,854	37,909	37,854
Countries	29	29	29	29

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

As argued above, in this chapter I am not only interested in the direct effect of the welfare state institutions on the attitudinal considerations, but also in their conditional effects. In particular, those effects occur when institutions moderate the

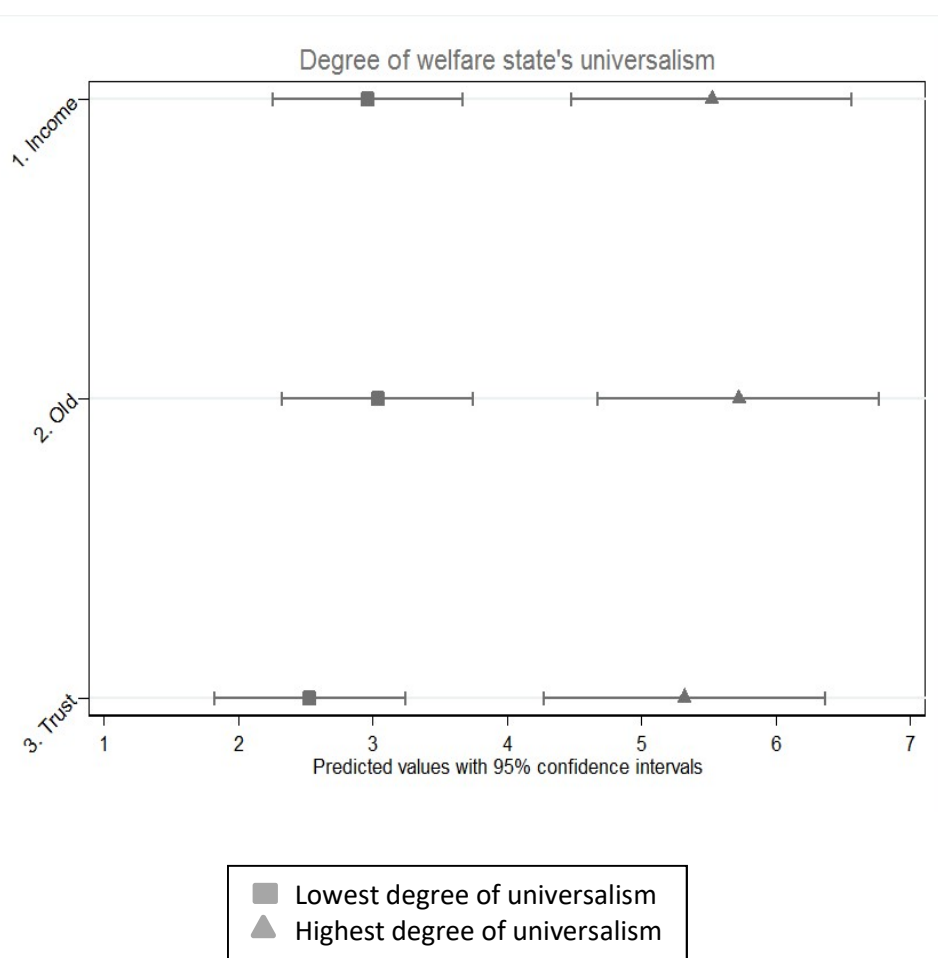
impact of the individual-level characteristics on people's views of the democratic system. In order to test this, I have run six new models of multilevel regression with the evaluations index as a dependent variable, and testing one by one the cross-level interaction between the individual-level factors and our measure of welfare state universalism. All the models are controlling for the effect of *change* in the magnitude of social inequality and the GDP growth rate, which, as shown above, act as relevant predictors of the evaluations of social democracy. Table 4.2 presents the results of these multilevel analyses.

The results show that the cross-level interaction of the welfare state universalism with the socio demographic and attitudinal factors is significant in four out of the six models, but only in three of them in the hypothesized direction. As expected, old people, low income groups, and politically distrustful citizens are all positively affected by the quality of their welfare regime, i.e. they tend to evaluate in a more positive fashion the performance of social democracy in contexts with high levels of welfare state universalism (H6). In technical terms, this means that universalism has a significantly more positive effect on the evaluations of performance among these three social groups than among the others. In the case of the elderly and low income groups, this may have to do with their more intense use of the welfare state services, which makes them more sensitive to a more universal configuration of the system. As for distrustful citizens, it is interesting to see that welfare state universalism significantly alleviates negative perceptions among this group, who, by definition, tend to be quite critical of the performance of public institutions and services. This can be taken as a robust confirmation of the central argument in this chapter: good institutions lead to more satisfied citizens, even among those who, a priori, are more demanding.

Furthermore, the results indicate that the positive effect of universalism is quite uniform across the three groups with significant explanatory power. Figure 4.2 plots the predicted values of the evaluations of the social dimension of democracy conditional on the country-level universalism at its highest (the triangle symbol, right hand) and lowest (the square symbol, left hand) levels by our three individual-level

characteristics.<sup>69</sup> All else being equal, the difference in the predicted level of support for social democracy's actual performance in the least and most universal welfare states is about 2.8 points among the elderly and the distrustful citizens, while for the low income group this difference is almost the same, about 2.6 points. All these differences are statistically significant relative to the impact that the welfare state makes on the omitted categories, i.e. middle-aged and young generations, trustful citizens and high-income groups.

**Figure 4.2: The conditional effect of universalism on evaluations of social democracy**



<sup>69</sup> A low income individual living in a country with the lowest level of universalism gives on average a score of 2.9 to the performance of the social dimension, whereas an individual with the same social background enjoying in her country the highest level of universalism gives a score of 5.5. Similarly, a respondent of the eldest generation living in a low universal welfare state rates the social dimension with a score of 3, whereas the same individual within a highest universalistic welfare state would rate it with a 5.7. Distrustful individuals would give a score of 2.5 when living in low universal welfare states, and 5.3 living in highly universalistic welfare states.

**Table 4.2: The conditional effect of welfare state on evaluations of social democracy**

VARIABLES	(Model 5) Evaluations	(Model 6) Evaluations	(Model 7) Evaluations	(Model 8) Evaluations	(Model 9) Evaluations	(Model 10) Evaluations
<b>Individual-level variables</b>						
Woman	-0.116*** (0.042)	-0.180*** (0.023)	-0.180*** (0.023)	-0.179*** (0.023)	-0.179*** (0.023)	-0.178*** (0.023)
Age (ref.=Young) Middle-Aged	-0.174*** (0.028)	-0.170*** (0.050)	-0.174*** (0.028)	-0.172*** (0.028)	-0.175*** (0.028)	-0.178*** (0.028)
Old	-0.002 (0.034)	-0.101 (0.062)	-0.003 (0.034)	-0.002 (0.034)	-0.006 (0.034)	-0.011 (0.034)
Unemployed	-0.138*** (0.044)	-0.142*** (0.044)	-0.170** (0.070)	-0.137*** (0.044)	-0.139*** (0.044)	-0.136*** (0.044)
Low income	-0.096*** (0.025)	-0.097*** (0.025)	-0.096*** (0.025)	-0.183*** (0.045)	-0.096*** (0.025)	-0.098*** (0.025)
Left-wing ideology	-0.502*** (0.028)	-0.500*** (0.028)	-0.503*** (0.028)	-0.502*** (0.028)	-0.431*** (0.052)	-0.497*** (0.028)
Low political trust	-1.379*** (0.028)	-1.381*** (0.028)	-1.379*** (0.028)	-1.380*** (0.028)	-1.380*** (0.028)	-1.767*** (0.053)
<b>System-level variables</b>						
Welfare state universalism	0.760*** (0.227)	0.714*** (0.228)	0.728*** (0.227)	0.688*** (0.228)	0.745*** (0.227)	0.517** (0.231)
Change in Gini	-0.162** (0.068)	-0.162** (0.068)	-0.162** (0.068)	-0.162** (0.068)	-0.162** (0.068)	-0.160** (0.069)
GDP Growth	-0.120* (0.072)	-0.121* (0.072)	-0.120* (0.072)	-0.120* (0.072)	-0.120* (0.072)	-0.119 (0.072)
<b>Cross level interactions</b>						
Woman*Universalism	-0.058* (0.032)	-	-	-	-	-
Middle-aged*Universalism	-0.004 (0.038)	-	-	-	-	-
Old*Universalism	0.088* (0.046)	-	-	-	-	-

Unemployed*Universalism	0.033 (0.058)	-	-	-	-
Low Income*Universalism	-	0.077** (0.034)	-	-	-
Left Ideology*Universalism	-	-	-0.065 (0.039)	-	-
Low Trust*Universalism	-	-	-	0.318*** (0.037)	-
Intercept	4.508*** (0.285)	4.544*** (0.285)	4.592*** (0.286)	4.527*** (0.285)	4.831*** (0.290)
<b>Random-effects parameters</b>					
SD intercept	0.731 (0.193)	0.732 (0.193)	0.734 (0.194)	0.731 (0.193)	0.750 (0.198)
SD residuals	4.951 (0.036)	4.952 (0.036)	4.951 (0.036)	4.951 (0.036)	4.942 (0.036)
Observations	37,854	37,854	37,854	37,854	37,854
Countries	29	29	29	29	29

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

However, as mentioned above, two of our individual-level predictors do not reach statistical significance in the analyses, and one does but in the direction opposite to our expectations. This is the case, on the one hand, of the unemployed and left-wing voters, who are not differentiated in their evaluations of social democracy from employed citizens and those on the ideological right, respectively. On the other hand, it is also the case of women, who tend to hold more negative evaluations than men even in contexts of highly universalistic welfare regimes. That is, welfare state universalism's positive effect on people's faith in the social model of democracy is muted among these three groups.

One could argue that these three groups are quite demanding users of the welfare state (either in terms of direct, frequent use, as women and the unemployed make, or for the ideological underpinning it serves for left-wing citizens) and, hence, can be seen as more affected than the rest of the groups by the recent dismantling of public services undertaken in many European countries following the Great Recession. To test this conjecture, I have re-estimated the three models with the non-significant or counter-intuitive cross-level interactions outputs (i.e. for women, unemployed citizens and left-wing voters) using in this case the change in the degree of universalism between 2007 and 2012 as the level-2 variable.

The results can be found in Figures A4.1–A4.3 in the Appendix. Only in the model that tests the cross-level interaction between positioning oneself on the ideological left and the change in welfare state's universalism is the coefficient positive and statistically significant, meaning that leftist citizens do indeed evaluate more positively the performance of social democracy where cuts in universalism have been less noticeable. Although, as Figure A4.3 shows, left-wing citizens are in general more critical evaluators of social democracy than those in the centre and right positions in any institutional setting, the change in their assessments in those contexts where welfare state universalism did not decline was sharper than among the citizens situated in other ideological spheres. In the case of the cross-level interactions with woman and unemployed respondents, the coefficient term is non-significant.

## CONCLUSIONS

As Europe has undergone an era of economic and political transformation, marked by severe austerity policies and the emergence of new parties contending in the national political arena over how and among whom to distribute (increasingly scarce) state resources, the issue of whether the social model of democracy is in a crisis has been forcefully revived in public and academic debates. Contrary to the initial optimistic expectations that the crisis triggered by ‘over-liberalized markets’ could be used as an opportunity to return to ‘keynesian policies’<sup>70</sup> (Bailey and Bates 2012, 195), the aftermath of the Great Recession has brought about a scenario of major setback for social democracy in several respects (see Bailey et al. 2014). All around Europe, social democratic parties have suffered massive electoral losses, while austerity and neoliberalism have defeated the social democratic programme as the remedy to overcome the crisis. Moreover, in many countries new competitors from the extreme left and right have come to appropriate the welfare redistribution discourse typical of social democracy, even taking over its traditional electoral constituencies. In this context, the question of ‘whether social democracy can survive at all as a distinctive political philosophy’ that Giddens posed in his 1990s-analysis of the (then) left crisis remains open (Giddens 1998, preface).

This chapter has offered an answer to this question from the citizens’ perspective. Using novel data on public expectations and evaluations of democracy’s many dimensions coming from the ESS-6, I have asked whether the social model of democracy finds normative support among those citizens who are expected to be its most ardent supporters, and the extent to which they are satisfied with its actual performance. To address this question, the chapter started by testing the effect of a series of socio-demographic and attitudinal factors related to individual-level support for the social democratic model. In accordance with our expectations, we find that individuals with lower socio-economic background (women, the unemployed, old people, and low-income groups), those who position themselves on the political left

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<sup>70</sup> As Bailey and Bates (2012, 195) recall, some authoritative voices, such as those of the Nobel Prize-winning Paul Krugman and the then UK Chancellor, Alistair Darling, claimed a need to reintroduce a ‘Keynesian era’ to counteract the neoliberal crisis.



and those who are more distrustful of political institutions are more supportive of the social model of democracy, while evaluating its actual performance more negatively.

The chapter has also sought to disentangle how much of these negative evaluations of the social democratic model come from citizens' rising aspirations about what democracy should deliver, and how much are due to the specific economic and political structures in their countries. If the macro-level context is responsible for explaining variations in the evaluations of social democracy across countries in Europe, we have grounds to believe that institutions can play an important role in moderating what people expect from democracy and, consequently, mitigating public crises or drops in legitimacy.

Contrary to our initial beliefs, the results of our models turned out to be quite sensitive to the context of economic crisis and, more particularly, to the changing conditions of inequality in the country as a consequence of the Great Recession. Thus, all else being equal, citizens in those countries in which the change in inequality has been higher tend to hold higher aspirations regarding social democracy, yet are more critical of performance. Nevertheless, despite the consistently strong role of the inequality context in shaping attitudes toward social democracy (both aspirations and evaluations), we also found support (albeit limited) for our political-institutional explanation of the effect of welfare state universalism. Although there is no evidence that universalism matters for the social normative aspirations of the citizens, it does for their evaluations. Thus, individuals living in countries with high levels of welfare state's universalism are more satisfied with social democracy than those in countries with less universal welfare states.

Finally, the chapter discussed the conditional effects of universalism and individuals' social and attitudinal traits on performance evaluations. In particular, it has been shown that universalism not only has a direct effect on attitudes, but also contributes to moderating the negative impact that certain individual-level factors have on people's evaluations of social democracy. This finding, however, does not hold equally across all social categories, since only the elderly, low-income people and those who are more distrustful of institutions are positively influenced by welfare state universalism when evaluating democratic social performance.

Overall, the results support the intuition that the social model of democracy is not undergoing a major legitimacy crisis in Europe, or at least not one that cannot be mitigated by further advancing the institutions of the welfare state. In line with this claim, it could be interpreted that the quite widespread public discontent with social service delivery that many European countries, and especially those in Southern Europe, witnessed at the onset of the financial crisis was more a consequence of (bad) welfare state institutions rather than of rising public aspirations, i.e. excessive public demands that cannot be fulfilled by the system. Therefore, the alleged crisis of social democracy affecting Europe may be overcome with more universal welfare policies.

However, this optimistic conclusion should be taken with caution. First, the results have warned us that if the inequality gap continues to grow in the European societies, welfare institutions will have a much harder time in alleviating the citizens' negative perceptions of social democracy. Secondly, it has also been seen that not all social categories are affected equally by welfare state institutions, but some of them remain quite critical even under conditions of high universalism. This is the case of women, the youngest generations and left-wing voters, who are traditionally among the strongest supporters of the social-democratic model. If social-democratic institutions do not manage to satisfy these social groups, then there could be reasons for concern about the future of social democracy in Europe.

APPENDIX: CHAPTER 4

Figure A4.1: Average marginal effects of being a woman on evaluations of social democracy contingent on the change in welfare state universalism (with 95 % confidence intervals)

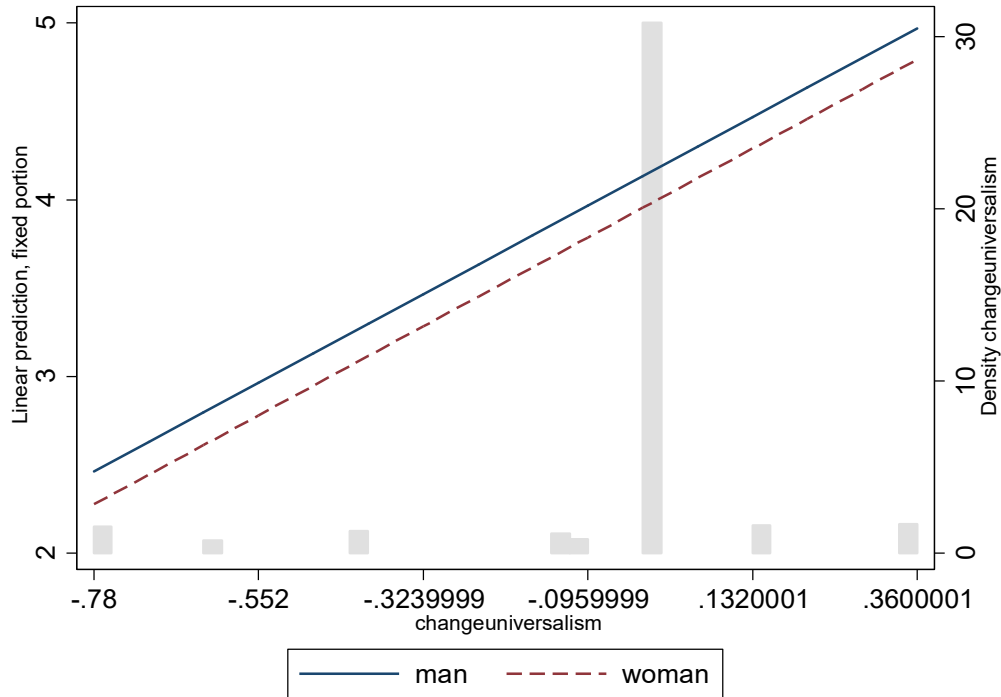
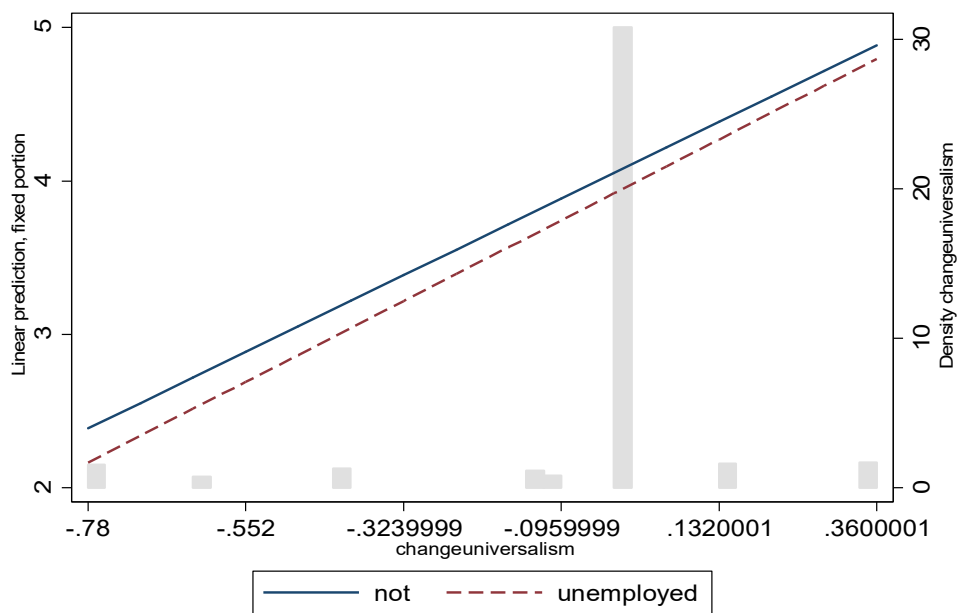
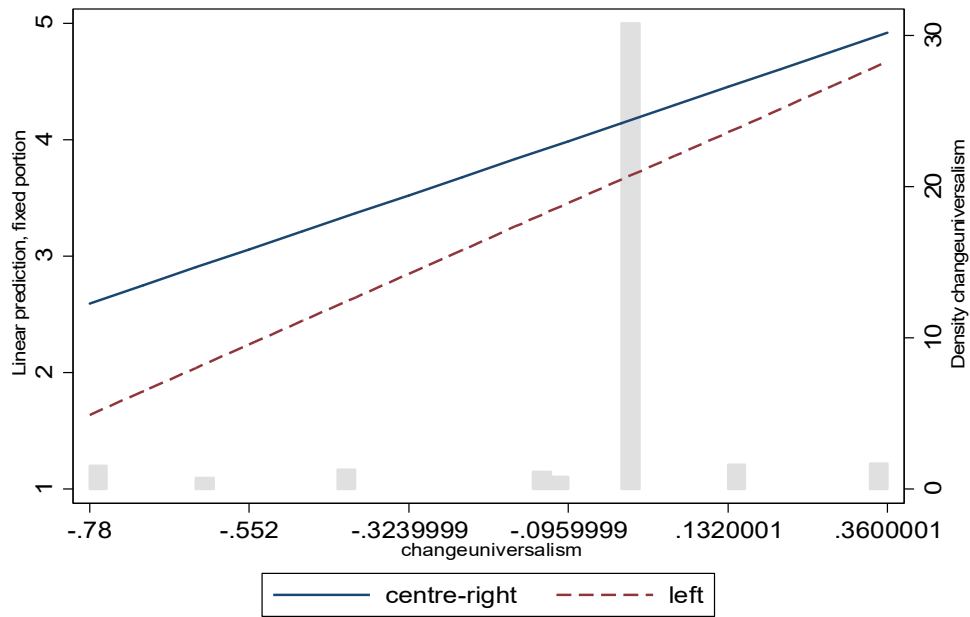


Figure A4.2: Average marginal effects of being unemployed on evaluations of social democracy contingent on the change in welfare state universalism (with 95 % confidence intervals)



**Figure A4.3: Average marginal effects of left-wing ideology on evaluations of social democracy contingent on the change in welfare state universalism (with 95 % confidence intervals)**



## **CHAPTER 5: REVISITING THE WINNERS/LOSERS DEBATE: THE ROLE OF DEMOCRATIC ASPIRATIONS IN REDUCING THE GAP**

### **INTRODUCTION**

For decades, there has been some intuitive appeal for political scientists in the idea that citizens endorse a univocal understanding of democracy, which is indeed a liberal one. With the expansion of the liberal institutional architecture around the globe and the (almost) universal acceptance of democracy as the only game in town (Linz and Stepan 1996), scholars have tended to assume that citizens stand unequivocally for a liberal-democratic view. Thus, it has been suggested that when questioned about democracy, ordinary people automatically identify it with the essential elements of the liberal-democratic model, such as political rights, civil liberties, the rule of law, universal suffrage, and multiparty competition. As Fuchs (1999) puts it, 'it is hardly conceivable that reasonable individuals can oppose such principles' (Fuchs 1999, 129).

The substance or content of citizens' support for democracy not being up for debate, public opinion surveys have been limited to including a generic question designed to measure its intensity, thus fostering comparability of the extent to which individuals adhere to the democratic ideal both within and across countries. This basic question has been referred to in the literature as 'overt' or 'idealistic' support for democracy (Inglehart 2003; Mishler and Rose 2001), as it simply covers support for the democratic system in the abstract, without further qualification.

However, more recently a new generation of survey items tapping into the public's understandings of democracy has opened the possibility to qualify some of those widespread assumptions. Making use of a more nuanced set of indicators, a large body of comparative literature over the last decade has confirmed that most citizens around the world still endorse a liberal understanding of democracy, yet the support they profess for its core constitutive values is not as univocal as proclaimed. For example, survey evidence from different non-democratic world regions points to the fact that individuals almost universally adhere to fundamental principles of liberal-democratic politics such as free and fair elections or political freedoms, while

tending to reject other more demanding aspects such as the rule of law or multi-party competition.<sup>71</sup> Even in regions where democracy enjoys a long tradition, like the European continent, only a minority of citizens uniformly accepts *all* of the liberal democracy's principles,<sup>72</sup> and quite often citizens prove to have problems in reconciling the democratic ideal with core liberal standards, such as political tolerance or freedom of opinion (Gibson 1992; Thomassen 2007). Contrary to what Fuchs expected, a good deal of [unreasonable] individuals around the world oppose, or do not sufficiently support, the liberal democratic principles.

Given the relevance that support for the principles of liberal democracy entails for the legitimacy and stability of our liberal democratic systems (Lipset 1960; Easton 1975; Norris 1999), it is surprising that few studies to date have explored the effects of how strongly citizens endorse such fundamental values on the fate of democracy. If some citizens place high demands on liberal democracy and others weaker ones, are these differences consequential? Do individuals' differential orientations toward the basic elements of the system affect how people evaluate democracy? Can these core aspirations challenge what we already know about the way people evaluate democracy?

This chapter sets out to investigate the political implications of the differential support citizens attach to the core values of liberal democracy. The central argument of the chapter is that the extent to which the aspirations around the liberal democratic ideal are embedded in individuals' belief systems matters a great deal for how citizens evaluate liberal democratic performance. Aspirations work as a lens through which citizens observe political reality and help them to create an image of what to expect from the democratic system. Thus, those with weak aspirations regarding the liberal-democratic view are more inclined to believe that democracy is an incomplete system that has difficulty bringing about favourable outcomes. Consequently, they tend to develop more negative attitudes toward the system and are more critical of its performance than what the 'objective' reality suggests. By contrast, people who strongly embrace the ideals of liberal democracy are likely to be more truth-oriented

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<sup>71</sup> See Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi (2005); Shi (2008); and Chu et al. (2008) for detailed analyses on popular understandings of democracy in Africa, China and Asia, respectively.

<sup>72</sup> Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta (2016, 86) set the share of individuals who support all liberal principles—whom they call 'maximalist liberal democrats'—at 8.5% of the total sample in the ESS-6.

democrats and, hence, to evaluate the working of the system more accurately. In short, individuals with limited expectations about liberal democracy are expected to be in general more 'irrational' than the truly liberal supporters, which brings about differential consequences for regime legitimacy.

The chapter provides empirical support for this argument by using the example of the winners–losers gap in evaluative beliefs. It is well established that voters who cast a vote for the party ending up holding the reins of power tend to display higher levels of political support and institutional trust than those who voted for a losing party (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Anderson et al. 2005; Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012; Esaiasson 2011; Dahlberg and Linde 2016). The rationale behind this is that winning the elections produces a series of positive psychological and cognitive effects that greatly boost evaluations of democracy, whereas losing makes people feel disillusioned and, consequently, think that the system is working poorly. However, most of the research in this area has also found that electoral losers tend to be happier in some contexts than in others, and depending on certain individual characteristics. In other words, there exist important moderators of the winners–losers gap that operate both at the macro and micro levels.

In this chapter I investigate the extent to which the winners–losers gap can also be mitigated by the different aspirations individuals may have regarding the ideal of liberal democracy. The result of the analyses will demonstrate that aspirations matter for the winners–losers gap in a twofold way. At the individual level, our general expectations about the role of predispositions are confirmed by showing that electoral winners and losers with high expectations of how liberal democracy should work are more satisfied with the performance of democracy than their counterparts with low aspirations. At the macro-level, the analyses also demonstrate that political institutions matter for closing the winners–losers gap to a larger extent among voters with high than among voters with lower expectations. In other words, high aspirations in good institutional settings tend to override the differences between winners' and losers' evaluations.

The chapter is structured as follows. In the theory section, I start by sketching out the core expectations about the effects of differential levels of aspirations on

democracy evaluations, from which I derive the two core research hypotheses. Next, I review the main literature on the winners–losers gap and link it to my theoretical expectations about the differential effects of democratic aspirations. In the third section, I present the data and methods, which are followed by multilevel regression analysis techniques. The last section discusses the practical implications of the analyses.

## **THEORY**

### **The role of differential aspirations about core liberal principles**

The question of what determines public support for democracy is a perennial issue and an ongoing debate in political science. Yet, despite the extensive research in this area, some ideas about system support are still ‘muddied in the literature’ (Norris 2011, 19) and conceptual clarification is needed. This is, for instance, the case for the concept of attachment to the core democratic values and principles, which has usually been conflated in the popular literature with support for democracy in the abstract.

Drawing upon Eastonian ideas, democratic values are often seen to be at the highest level in the hierarchy of the objects of support (Fuchs 1999, 131; see Easton 1975, Norris 1999). That is, they represent the kind of diffuse or generalized support that citizens profess towards the democratic regime that helps them to accept its legitimacy even when they are highly critical about the day-to-day performance of the political system, specific policy outcomes or the incumbent party leaders. The legitimacy of a democratic system hinges, thus, on the extent to which its citizens share the normative principles upon which the regime is founded, which commonly include such values as freedom, participation, tolerance, protection of individual rights and the rule of law (Beetham 1994), to name but the most relevant. Putting it in Easton’s own words, legitimacy can be defined as ‘the conviction that [...] in some vague or explicit way a person sees [the regime] as conforming to his own moral principles’ (Easton 1975, 451).

Quite commonly this dimension of support is equated to what has been termed in the literature as ‘idealist’ or ‘overt’ support for democracy (Mishler and Rose 2001,



Inglehart 2003), assuming that agreement with the general idea of democracy as the best form of government encompasses that of support for its core constitutive values. This issue, however, is far from self-evident. For instance, Schedler and Sarsfield (2007), using data from Mexico, show that while a majority of citizens in the country support democracy in the abstract, most of them tend to reject some other core principles of liberal democracy such as political tolerance, freedom of expression or pluralism of opinion. As the authors conclude, citizens are not simply ‘democrats’ but ‘democrats with adjectives’, i.e. individuals who ‘qualify’ the kind of support they profess for the abstract concept of democracy. Even in mature democracies, support for the core liberal values is not a uniform reality. In a recent analysis of data coming from the ESS-6, Alonso (2016) demonstrates that there is a quite weak (though positive) relationship between the European citizens’ commitment to democracy in the abstract<sup>73</sup> and the support they profess for the liberal democratic aspects, the relationship being particularly weak for values such as accountability, judicial independence, electoral competition, or freedom of expression.

These findings are in line with recent warnings in the literature about the possibility that the abstract preference for democracy that people express overwhelmingly in surveys could be no more than lip service. As democracy has turned into a universal value, respondents may simply convey support for it as a valence issue—i.e. something positive and valuable—though devoid of any specific content (Schedler and Sarsfield 2007, 638–9). Hence, when they are tested on more specific values of democracy and their implications, a good deal of this abstract commitment may simply evaporate (Thomassen 2007, 421). Moreover, even if respondents have a clear understanding of what democracy represents, it is quite likely that this idea will be very different among each other. As a wide array of studies have already shown, citizens around the world attach meanings as diverse as ‘freedom’, ‘security’, ‘good governance’ or ‘general welfare’ to the notion of democracy (e.g. see Canache 2012, Chu et al. 2008, Bratton and Mattes 2001), rendering thus quite inconceivable that a single, abstract question can be used to compare democratic commitment across individuals around the world.

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<sup>73</sup> Alonso (2016) measures support for democracy in the abstract by the question on how important is it for the respondent to live in a democratically governed country.

All these limitations point to the conclusion that the indicators tapping into the abstract preferences for democracy tell us very little about which are the actual democratic orientations of the citizens. Since it is quite unlikely that 'citizens either embrace or reject liberal democracy in consistent ways' (Schedler and Sarsfield 2007, 642), support for the different democratic values instead would capture the broad variety of democratic ideas citizens may hold, as well as the strength with which they embrace such ideas. Essentially, these democratic aspirations are likely to act as a lens through which citizens look at the democratic reality in which they live and, consequently, to guide their evaluations of performance. More specifically, I contend that citizens will assess and react differently to the performance of the various aspects of their democratic system depending on the strength of the support they attach to the core values of the liberal democratic model. These values are likely to matter for the evaluations of democracy in two important ways.

First, democratic values may play an acceptance-inducing role. When citizens judge that values such as free and fair elections, multiparty competition, minority rights and media freedom (to name but some of them) are essential conditions of democracy, they are more likely to develop an attachment to the democratic system founded on its intrinsic procedural worth.<sup>74</sup> Procedural fairness has been discussed to be important for citizens in several respects, as it contributes to increase the predictability of future outcomes and helps to satisfy people's needs for recognition and self-esteem when they feel have been treated fairly by others (Brockner 2002). As Brockner and Wiesenfeld put it, these judgements may induce a more favourable evaluation of the system's capacity to produce positive outcomes:

When procedures are fair, for example, when people have input into a decision (Cropanzano & Folger, 1989), when they are given a good explanation of why a decision was rendered (Folger et al., 1983), or both, it is more difficult for them to imagine alternative outcomes that exceed the ones they received; that is, outcomes resulting from fair procedures are more likely seen as justified. Thus, people should

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<sup>74</sup> The basic liberal values are at the core of a procedural understanding of democracy as they underpin its moral foundation as a system aimed at taking good political decisions on the basis of an equal treatment and consideration of all citizens (Dworkin 1987; Estlund 2009).

respond relatively favorably when procedures are fair, regardless of the outcome (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996, 193).

Given that procedures are perceived to be relatively stable and enduring (Brockner and Wiesenfeld 1996, 193), people who support the importance of such procedures (and the values that underpin them) for democracy may tend to be more optimistic about their capacity to bring about favourable outcomes, even when they can go through periods of poor performance. In line with this line of reasoning, it is contended that a stronger support for the core liberal values should increase the chances to evaluate positively the performance of the democratic system.

Second, democratic values may also play an accuracy-inducing function.<sup>75</sup> Those individuals who support the core liberal values more strongly will not only tend to develop a more positive view of the liberal democratic institutions, but also a more accurate one, i.e. one that is more faithful to 'reality.' Support for the core liberal ideas helps citizens to be more aware of the democratic reality in which they live and, therefore, to develop a more accurate evaluation of their actual performance. In this sense, I envisage that while the stronger liberal supporters will develop a more optimistic view of the liberal democratic institutions, the size of this positive effect will increase in those contexts where the democratic institutions perform 'objectively' better. Obviously, the opposite mechanism can be expected in poorly performing democracies: more committed democrats will evaluate democracy more negatively than the weaker supporters.

### **The winners–losers gap in evaluations of democracy's many dimensions**

The acceptance- and accuracy-inducing functions of the liberal democratic aspirations for the evaluations of performance will be tested by paying particular

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<sup>75</sup> Van der Meer and Hakhverdian (2016) envisage a similar effect of education on political trust. Following Hakhverdian and Mayne (2012), these authors suggest that education has both a norm-inducing and an accuracy-inducing role. The higher educated are more likely to be concerned by poor institutional quality than the lower educated, as well as are more likely to accurately assess their particular country's institutional performance (Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016, 86). I adopt these terms from these authors to develop a similarly oriented theory on the role of aspirations to shape performance evaluations.

attention to a relevant category traditionally used in the literature to explain differences in political support among individuals: the status of winners and losers of the electoral contest. It is widely believed that elections are a key instrument of democracy, insofar as they shape government composition and link the preferences of the citizens to the behaviour of the policymakers (Powell 2000). However, elections produce winners and losers—i.e. voters who supported the winning party or did not—and who, consequently, exert different degrees of influence on the nation's political configurations and policy outputs. As a consequence of this, those who cast their vote for the losing side have been found to express systematically more negative attitudes toward the democratic system than the winners, illustrated in a lower satisfaction with democracy and political trust, lower political efficacy and lower perceived fairness of the electoral process, among other negative feelings (see Anderson and Guillory 1997; Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012; Esaiasson 2011; Bernauer and Vatter 2012; Cantú and García-Ponce 2015; Dahlberg and Linde 2016).

In a seminal study on the winners–losers gap in contemporary democracies, Anderson et al. (2005, 23-9) identify three mechanisms that might explain the conflicting views of the political system that election outcomes produce in the two categories of voters. First, election outcomes generate among electors a utilitarian response, determined by the benefits they envisage they will gain from that outcome. Due to the basic behavioural mechanism that people prefer winning to losing, the utility of winning is expected to be higher than that of losing and, consequently, winners should display higher levels of positive attitudes toward government than losers do. In turn, losers tend to react to losing in specific ways, mainly lobbying for changes in the political system through different repertoires.

The second mechanism associated with people's reactions to the election outcomes is psychological, and has to do with the affective or emotional responses winners and losers are likely to develop. Similar to the feelings of victory experienced in sports, winning an election may result in a variety of pleasant emotions such as greater self-confidence and individual capacity to influence the political system. Voting for the losers, in contrast, is likely to make people feel gloomy and despondent about the future.

Third, election outcomes may induce people to engage in a cognitive process of dissonance avoidance, aimed at adapting their beliefs to previously undertaken actions. Since people are motivated to maintain consistency in their beliefs and attitudes, they tend to develop more or less favourable evaluations of the political system, filtering their opinions through the lens of the position they held in the electoral process. Their views will thus be more negative if they voted for the losing side, and more positive if they cast a ballot for the winners.

As Anderson and his colleagues continue, these three mechanisms suggest that winning and losing work, therefore, as important 'mental constructs people use to understand the political environment' (Anderson et al. 2005, 27). As such, they have a causally prior impact on subsequent political attitudes and behaviours. Despite this fundamental capacity of the winners–losers gap to predict how people see the political system, most of the literature has focused exclusively on the effect of elections on people's abstract legitimacy beliefs—i.e. political trust and democratic satisfaction—ignoring the actual evaluations of democracy performance in specific areas. But are losers more critical of democracy in consequential ways? In other words, do they tend to articulate more pessimistic evaluations of democracy's different aspects, consistent with their abstract, negative response to the outcome of the election?

There are good reasons to think this could indeed be the case. Some earlier studies have found that electoral losers tend to develop more negative opinions about the performance of specific democratic institutions such as the government or the parliament (Anderson and Tverdova 2003; Martini and Quaranta 2016), as well as of core elements of the democratic system, in particular the electoral mechanism (Anderson et al. 2005, Cantú and García-Ponce 2015). For example, using data from the 2012 Mexican presidential election, Cantú and García-Ponce (2015) show that the electoral losers have consistently more negative opinions about the integrity of the electoral process, such pessimistic perceptions being even worse among those voters who supported a candidate who had previously expressed concerns about electoral corruption.

A similar loser effect could be then expected regarding the evaluations of the democratic process in its core liberal dimensions. Since losers stand behind parties

that were unsuccessful in promoting their political ideas among the majority of the electorate, it would come as no surprise that they will express greater dissatisfaction with the democratic administration of the country both in abstract and specific terms. For example, it is quite likely that the supporters of a losing party will discredit the independence of the media in the country, consider that the government is hardly accountable as their fellow citizens have proved to be unable to make a wise decision, or will explain their defeat as a consequence of a poor performance of the electoral mechanism.

Thus, following this argument and the theoretical considerations sketched out above, the first hypothesis to be tested states as follows:

*H1.* There is a gap between winners and losers in their evaluations of the core aspects of liberal democracy, expressed in more negative evaluations of democracy's different dimensions on the part of the losers.

Despite the widely-documented picture of dissatisfied losers, a good deal of the literature has recognized that the experience of being on the losing side in politics is not the same for all voters. In other words, although citizens' reactions to loss usually translate into negative feelings toward the system, the strength of this effect may vary across voters as a function of a range of factors, mainly the political predispositions of the citizens and the institutional context in which they live. At the individual level, certain characteristics such as partisanship, ideology and the previous experience of victory/defeat have been shown to play a mediating effect in how winners and losers evaluate the system. For instance, Anderson et al. (2005) demonstrate that ideological extremism—i.e. placing oneself on the extremes of the ideological scale—makes losers feel more dissatisfied with the system, while it boosts winners' satisfaction. As for the effect of partisanship, Curini, Jou and Memoli (2011) demonstrate that winners who are strongly attached to their political party express more positive appraisals of the political system's performance than other winners.

A particular aspect among the individual factors affecting the magnitude of the winners–losers gap in political support that has not been considered up to now is the aspirations voters may have regarding the ideal of liberal democracy. As noted in the previous section, aspirations are an accurate indicator of individuals' actual

normative feelings toward democracy, as they gauge how supportive respondents are of specific core democratic values. This allows us to classify voters as ‘stronger’ or ‘weaker’ democrats, according to the *depth* of their support for such values.

The argument I make is that democratic aspirations may have a relevant moderating effect on the winners–losers gap similar to that of other political predispositions, such as ideology or partisanship. Insofar as aspirations work as a yardstick for how citizens evaluate institutional performance, they are likely to moderate how voters perceive the functioning of the democratic system, independently of the side of the partisan divide on which they sit. It follows that losers and winners with high democratic aspirations may express more similar appraisals of the democratic system’s performance among themselves than other winners and losers with low levels of aspirations.

Thus, according to the acceptance-inducing function of aspirations for performance evaluations sketched out above, the second hypothesis that will be tested is:

*H2.* Aspirations contribute to reduce the gap between winners and losers making that both the electoral winners and losers with high aspirations about the core aspects of liberal democracy will be more positive in their evaluations of performance than their counterparts with low aspirations.

Political institutions may also condition the effect of losing on attitudes toward the democratic system. The logic behind this argument is that formal institutions can mute or amplify the impact of losing—i.e. institutions may make losers more or less happy with the system by determining how losers experience the exercise of power from a government they did not help to elect. As Anderson et al. (2005, 120-40) summarize, this may happen in three different ways: by the type of electoral rules that produce winners and losers, by adapting in some way the substance of the government policy to the preferences of the losers and by constraining the ability of the winners to bring about policy change. These mechanisms translate in practice into three institutional arrangements: proportional electoral rules, veto players and power sharing at the territorial level. Other authors have found that it is not only the formal institutional arrangements that matter for mitigating the effect of losing, but

also other factors that are related to the performance of the institutions or the democratic system more generally, such as the level of corruption (Anderson and Tverdova 2003), the degree of democratic consolidation (Chang et al. 2014) and the quality of government (Dahlberg and Linde 2016).

In line with this set of evidence, the framework I propose here considers the quality of political institutions that surround individuals to matter for building more positive feelings of consent among electoral losers. However, as anticipated by the accuracy-inducing function of democratic aspirations, I expect the effect of the institutional context to be stronger among those voters with high aspirations, independent of their electoral status. Individuals with high aspirations about the liberal aspects of democracy tend to evaluate reality in a more *accurate* way (in the sense of closer to ‘reality’), so that they will be more affected than their counterparts with low expectations by the palliative impact of good institutions.

Accordingly, the following hypothesis will be tested:

*H3.* Well-performing institutions have a stronger mitigating effect on the winners–losers gap in evaluations of performance among highly demanding citizens, while the effect is smaller among citizens with low expectations about democracy.

## **DATA AND METHODS**

This chapter seeks to test the impact of holding different degrees of aspirations about the liberal democratic ideal on the evaluations of performance, controlling for a series of individual-level variables of interest like the winners–losers divide and others at the macro level tapping into the quality of diverse institutional arrangements in the country. The only survey to date that allows measurement of both citizens’ aspirations and evaluations of different aspects of democracy in a nuanced way is the sixth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS-6), which includes a module of questions on ‘Europeans’ understandings and evaluations of democracy’. The sample covers 29 European countries, but given that we are dealing with the analytical category of winners and losers of the electoral contest, I will exclude from the



analyses four of them that do not meet international standards for being considered liberal democracies.<sup>76</sup> The remaining 25 countries include old, established democracies in Southern and Western Europe, as well as younger democracies in Eastern Europe.

### **The dependent variable: Evaluations of different aspects of liberal democracy**

As dependent variables, the chapter will analyse the evaluations citizens make of six core values of liberal democracy: the cleanness and fairness of elections, the freedom of the opposition to criticize the government, the freedom of the media to criticize the government, the protection of minorities' rights, the accountability of governments in elections, and the degree of transparency of the government.<sup>77</sup> The question heading introducing the battery of aspirations items reads as follows: 'Using this card, please tell me to what extent you think each of the following statements applies in [country].' Respondents were then asked to rate on a 0 (the statement does not apply at all) to 10 (it applies completely) scale the performance of the aforementioned norms and institutions in their respective countries.

Measured in this way, these indicators help to overcome some of the validity and reliability problems associated in the literature to the widely used indicator on 'satisfaction with democracy' (SWD). As Canache et al. (2001, 507) state in an already seminal work on the meaning and measurement of this indicator, 'no consensus exists [among scholars] regarding what dimension or dimensions of political support SWD

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<sup>76</sup> These countries are: Albania, Russia, Ukraine and Kosovo. Another practical reason to exclude these countries from the analyses in this chapter is that most country-level data are taken from the Democracy Barometer, which does not cover these four countries.

<sup>77</sup> There are five more liberal democratic elements included in the ESS-6's battery of questions: political deliberation (that voters discuss politics with people they know before deciding how to vote), differentiated partisan offer (that different political parties offer clear alternatives to one another), media reliability (that the media provide citizens with reliable information to judge the government), equality before the law (that the courts treat everyone the same), and responsibility towards other European governments (that politicians take into account the views of other European governments before making decisions). Since the analytical strategy of the chapter consists in assessing the extent to which the institutional arrangements of different dimensions of democracy help to reduce the winners-losers gap in the evaluations of those same dimensions among individuals with high and low aspirations, the remaining elements have not been included in the analyses since there are no clear-cut indicators tapping into the same dimension at the macro level. The 'equality before the law' element has not been included as its equivalent macro-level indicator (the rule of law) is used as a level-2 control variable in all the analyses.

represents.' Since the SWD item suggests no comparable frame of reference, respondents are left on their own to elaborate their answer using their preferred basis of comparison. Consequently, we are unable to trace which point of reference is being used by the citizens or which components of democracy they are evaluating, thus rendering their responses scarcely comparable.

By contrast, by using separate items tapping into the evaluations of different aspects of democracy we can capture more meaningful and consequential opinions on how the citizens see the actual performance of their democratic system. In other words, these types of indicators allow us to appreciate which specific aspects citizens like/dislike about their respective democracies, and to trace how these judgements are formed. More specifically for the purposes of this chapter, these items allow us to test the extent to which the evaluations are affected by: (1) the subjective aspirations individuals might have as regards how the specific dimensions of democracy should work, and; (2) the 'objective' performance of those norms and institutions in their respective countries.

### **The independent variables**

As independent variables, the study includes a host of factors at both the individual and country level that cover individuals' democratic aspirations, the winner/loser status, a series of institutional arrangements, and other additional controls at both levels.

#### ***Individual level: Aspirations regarding different core aspects of liberal democracy***

The ESS-6 similarly contains a detailed battery of questions on citizens' aspirations about good democracy. The question heading for the aspirations' battery states as follows: 'Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general...?.' Again, respondents were asked to use an 11-point scale to

rate how important elements on a list are for them, where 0 means the element is not at all important for democracy in general and 10 means it is extremely important. To test how aspirations serve as a yardstick for evaluations of performance, the same list of elements will be considered, namely the cleanness and fairness of elections, the freedom of the media to criticize the government, the protection of minority rights, the accountability of governments in elections, the degree of transparency of the government, and the freedom of expression.<sup>78</sup>

Following Kriesi, Saris and Moncagatta (2016), each item related to the democratic aspirations has been dichotomized at its maximum value (0/9 = 0 and 10 = 1). According to these authors, the reason to proceed in this way is that those who choose a value below the scale maximum (10) “arguably do not consider the given element as required for democracy in all circumstances” (2016, 66) and, hence, can be grouped separately from those who consider that element to be a ‘necessary’ condition for democracy, rating it at 10.

This way of classifying the respondents according to the *level* of their demands not only perfectly resembles our theoretical discussion on democratic aspirations above, but also finds enough variability in our sample. On average, there are as many ‘fully committed’ democrats as ‘partially committed’ ones for almost all the elements of democracy: around 40 per cent of respondents display ‘full’ support for the freedom of opposition, media freedom, protection of minorities’ rights, and accountability values;<sup>79</sup> 52 per cent of them fully support the value on transparency; and 60 per cent the value on free and fair elections.

### ***Individual level: Winner/loser status***

The second most relevant independent variable at the individual level for our analysis is the winners–losers divide. This is a classical indicator that has been used in a multitude of studies, albeit with slight variations in the way it is constructed.

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<sup>78</sup> The formulation of the aspirations items in the questionnaire was exactly the same as for the evaluations. The only change was the battery question headings and the scale respondents were provided with to rate the aspirations and evaluations.

<sup>79</sup> Consequently, around 60% show weaker support for those values. The same applies for the rest of the values.

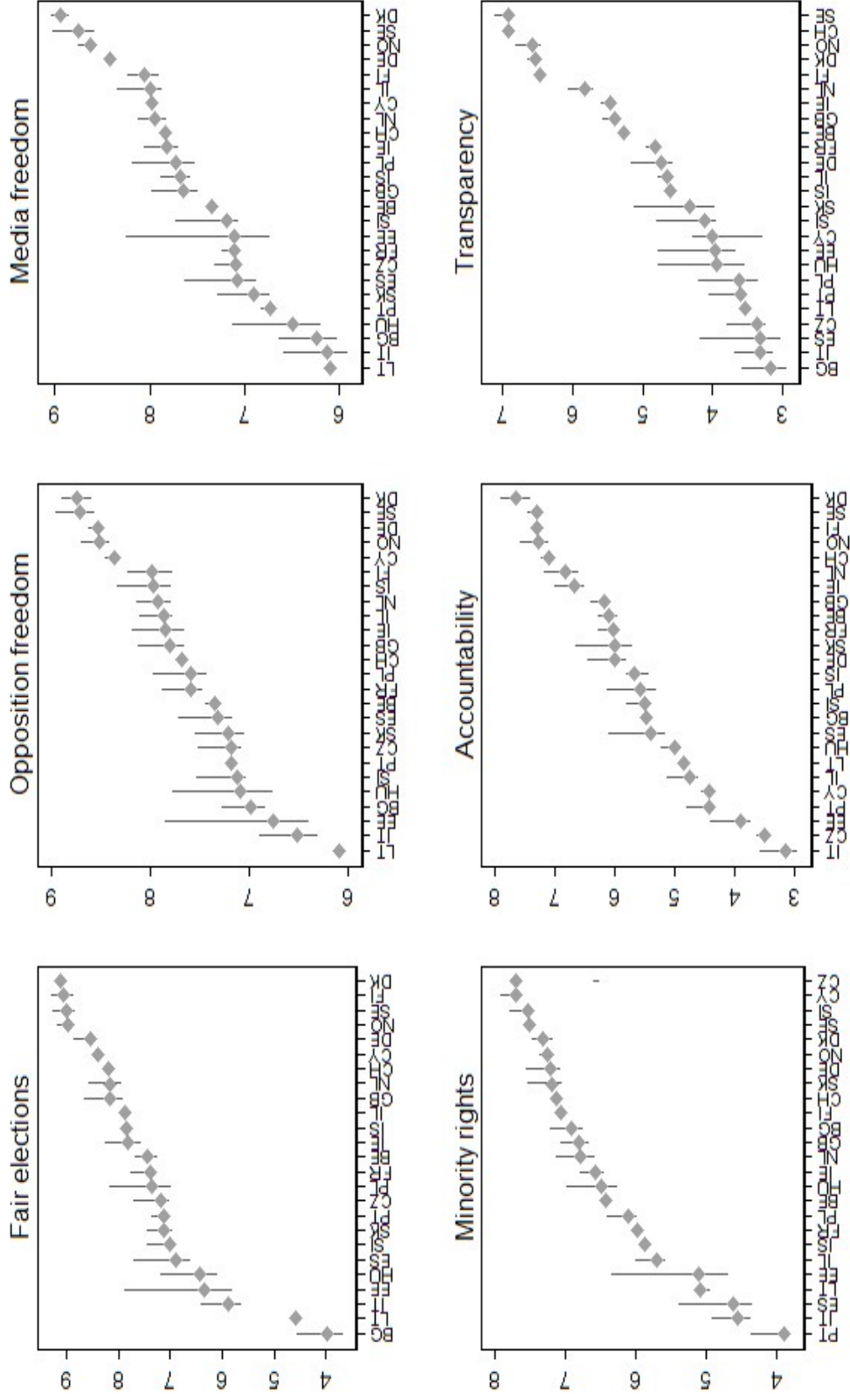
Following the simplest formulation, I define winners as those who voted for a party that ended up in power (either as single governing party or part of a governing coalition), whereas losers are everything else in the sample. This means that all respondents that report either having voted for a party not entering the government after the election, having cast a blank vote, or giving no answer to the vote recall question are classified as losers, since they clearly lack winning status. Thus, I construct a dummy variable, which takes the value 1 if the respondent is a 'winner' and 0 if the respondent is a 'loser'.<sup>80</sup>

Although the winners–losers gap has been investigated mainly in relation to feelings of democratic satisfaction and political trust, a preliminary glance at our data at the aggregate level reveals that there are also significant differences in the evaluations of different aspects of democracy, as anticipated in the theoretical section. Figure 5.1 shows the winners–losers gap in the evaluations of each liberal aspect for all the countries in the sample. The vertical lines represent the differences in the evaluations between winners and losers, whereas the dots are the average evaluation of each element in each country. As can be seen from the figure, the gap in evaluations between winners and losers tends to narrow in countries with higher popular satisfaction with the performance of the respective liberal elements. The only exception seems to be on the evaluations of the value on 'freedom of opposition to criticise the government', where differences maintain even under high ratings of popular evaluations. This seems notwithstanding a reasonable result, as it may come associated with the pure nature of losing to think that opposition parties do not enjoy enough manoeuvring against the government.

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<sup>80</sup> I would like to thank Macarena Ares and Enrique Hernández for sharing the codification of this variable.

Figure 5.1: The winners-losers gap ordered by mean level of evaluations of the core liberal elements



### ***Individual level: Other control variables***

At the individual level, I additionally control for a series of factors that the literature has traditionally shown to be important for other dimensions of democratic support like political trust or satisfaction with democracy. These are three socioeconomic variables (education, gender and age), and three attitudinal factors (ideology, political trust and political interest). In general, political trust, political interest, education and age are expected to have a positive effect on performance evaluations. Similarly, it is anticipated a positive impact of being a man and being situated on the right of the ideological scale on the evaluations of the different democratic elements.

### ***Macro level: Institutional and contextual variables***

To conclude, a number of context-level variables are considered to test for our hypothesis regarding the accuracy-inducing function of aspirations. If, as has been hypothesized, both winners and losers with higher aspirations will evaluate the performance of the democratic elements more accurately than those voters with low aspirations, we need to compare their evaluations with an 'objective' yardstick of performance. This mechanism will be tested by means of a three-way cross-level interaction between the support for the core liberal values, the winner/loser status and institutions, checking thus whether democratic institutions close the gap between winners and losers to a greater extent among 'strong supporters' than among 'weaker supporters'.

The institutional indicators included tap into our six elements of the liberal-democratic model under analysis: the cleanness and fairness of elections, the freedom of the opposition to criticize the government, the freedom of the media to criticize the government, the protection of minority rights, the accountability of governments in elections, and the degree of transparency of the government. The first element, the degree of free and fair elections, is measured by an index of expert perceptions of electoral integrity from the Electoral Integrity Project.<sup>81</sup> Electoral integrity 'refers [to the extent to which the electoral process in a country responds] to international

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<sup>81</sup> Available at: <https://www.electoralintegrityproject.com/>

standards and global norms governing the appropriate conduct of elections' (Norris et al. 2016, 12). The index has a value 0 when the electoral process does not meet adequate standards of integrity and quality, and 100 when it does so. Another liberal element, the accountability of governments in elections (the fact that governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job), will also be contrasted with the electoral integrity index, since it is understood that for governments to be held accountable, elections need to be clean and free.

The democratic aspects on the freedom of the media to criticize the government, the protection of minority rights, and the degree of government transparency are all taken from the Democracy Barometer (DB),<sup>82</sup> a project designed to measure the quality of established democracies. All the DB's indicators are standardized to range in a 0 to 100 scale. In order to tap the freedom of the media to criticize the government, I use the DB 'informational openness' index, which consists of two indicators tapping into the political and the legal environment of press freedom – both are aggregated and given equal weight in the overall index. Under the political environment category, the degree of political control over the content of news media is assessed, while the legal category measures the laws and regulations that could influence media content. The protection of minority rights element is captured by an index of 'political discrimination of minority groups', which calculates the role of public policy and social practice in maintaining or redressing political inequalities (an average of all minority groups in a country is considered). The degree of government transparency is compared to an assessment of the transparency of government policy by the DB, which measures how often the government communicate its intentions to citizens.

To conclude, the freedom of opposition parties aspect is measured by an indicator coming from the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) project,<sup>83</sup> which produces longitudinal indicators of democracy for all countries worldwide since 1990. This dataset contains a suitable 'opposition freedom' index, which assess the extent to which the opposition parties (i.e. those not in the ruling party or coalition) are able to

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<sup>82</sup> Available at: <http://www.democracybarometer.org/>

<sup>83</sup> Available at: <https://www.v-dem.net/>

exercise oversight and investigatory functions against the wishes of the governing party or coalition.

I also include an additional measure to control for the performance of the liberal institutional context in broad terms; namely, the rule of law. This indicator is taken again from the DB and consists of three indicators tapping into the existence of constitutional provisions for impartial courts, the effective independence of the judiciary, and the effective impartiality of the legal system. Also at the national-level, I control for two economic factors: the unemployment rate for each country in 2012, and the GDP per capita growth rate in 2012 (annual %).<sup>84</sup> The country scores of the all six institutional variables can be found in Table A5.1 in the Appendix.

## RESULTS

To test these hypotheses, I have run a series of multi-level regression models with random intercepts on the six dependent variables: the cleanness and fairness of elections, the freedom of the opposition to criticize the government, the freedom of the media to criticize the government, the protection of minority rights, the accountability of governments in elections, and the degree of transparency of the government.

The models are run in two steps. First, I introduce the individual-level variables alone, to test for the acceptance-inducing function of aspirations: a high standard of aspirations should induce citizens in general, and both winners and losers in particular, to make more positive evaluations of the different democratic elements than those with low aspirations. This assumption is tested first in a model with no interactions (to analyse the direct effect of aspirations on evaluations), and then in a model with an interaction between the status of being an electoral winner/loser and the dummy variable tapping the individuals' degree of attachment to each democratic element. To account for the accuracy-inducing role of aspirations, in the second step I introduce the contextual variables, which are interacted with the winner/loser

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<sup>84</sup> Source: Both indicators are taken from the World Development Indicators of the World Bank.



status and the strength of the aspirations for each democratic element. Tables 5.1 and 5.2 present the results of these analyses.

The first twelve models presented in Table 5.1, with the full battery of individual-level variables alone, corroborate, in general terms, our expectations. Concerning the socio economic control variables, we find a significant positive effect of education, gender (with women being less satisfied), age, right-wing ideology, political trust and political interest in evaluations of performance. A reverse effect can be found, however, in the relationship between education and the evaluations of the accountability and transparency elements, where less educated respondents tend to be more satisfied with the performance of those democratic dimensions than the highly educated. In line with the bulk of literature in this area, we also find that winners evaluate the performance of the different democratic elements more positively than losers, which gives support also to the idea that citizens evaluate democracy in a quite consistent way (H1).

The analyses also yield important evidence in support of our hypothesized effect of aspirations on performance evaluations. First, the positive effect of the aspirations variable in the models without interactions terms demonstrates that holding high expectations prompts generally more favourable evaluations of the different elements of liberal democracy. Furthermore, the interaction of aspirations and the winner/loser status (almost) always yields a statistically significant positive coefficient, indicating that high aspirations help to strengthen the positive evaluations of the winners. That is—although electoral winners are on average more satisfied with the different dimensions of democracy—among them, individuals with high demands are even happier. There is, however, an exception to this in the model that tests the evaluations of the transparency element, for which people with lower aspirations grant on average higher scores than the fully committed democrats (as displayed by the negative coefficient in Model 11).

**Table 5.1: The effect of holding different levels of aspirations on evaluations of democracy (OLS regression)**

VARIABLES	Fair elections			Opposition			Freedom of media			Minority rights			Accountability			Transparency		
	No inter. (M.1)	Interaction (M.2)	No inter. (M.3)	Interaction (M.4)	No inter. (M.5)	Interaction (M.6)	No inter. (M.7)	Interaction (M.8)	No inter. (M.9)	Interaction (M.10)	No inter. (M.11)	Interaction (M.12)						
Education (5 cat.)	0.047*** (0.010)	0.048*** (0.010)	0.083*** (0.009)	0.084*** (0.009)	0.063*** (0.010)	0.064*** (0.010)	0.100*** (0.010)	0.101*** (0.010)	-0.062*** (0.012)	-0.060*** (0.012)	-0.088*** (0.010)	-0.086*** (0.010)						
Gender (female=1)	-0.225*** (0.023)	-0.225*** (0.023)	-0.210*** (0.021)	-0.210*** (0.021)	-0.184*** (0.023)	-0.184*** (0.023)	-0.316*** (0.024)	-0.315*** (0.024)	-0.212*** (0.029)	-0.213*** (0.029)	-0.142*** (0.025)	-0.142*** (0.025)						
Age (years)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.008*** (0.001)	0.009*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.006*** (0.001)	0.013*** (0.001)	0.013*** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)	0.002** (0.001)						
Left-wing ideology	0.044*** (0.006)	0.043*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.005)	0.023*** (0.005)	0.047*** (0.005)	0.046*** (0.005)	0.070*** (0.005)	0.069*** (0.005)	0.029*** (0.006)	0.028*** (0.006)	0.052*** (0.005)	0.051*** (0.005)						
Political trust (0-10)	0.378*** (0.005)	0.378*** (0.006)	0.172*** (0.005)	0.172*** (0.005)	0.224*** (0.005)	0.223*** (0.005)	0.246*** (0.006)	0.246*** (0.006)	0.390*** (0.007)	0.390*** (0.007)	0.535*** (0.006)	0.535*** (0.006)						
Political interest (4 cat.)	0.114*** (0.014)	0.114*** (0.014)	0.197*** (0.013)	0.198*** (0.013)	0.118*** (0.014)	0.119*** (0.014)	0.103*** (0.015)	0.104*** (0.015)	0.103*** (0.018)	0.104*** (0.018)	0.017 (0.015)	0.018 (0.015)						
Electoral winner = 1	0.207*** (0.025)	0.185*** (0.039)	0.170*** (0.023)	0.104*** (0.029)	0.170*** (0.024)	0.104*** (0.031)	0.163*** (0.026)	0.029 (0.033)	0.266*** (0.031)	0.154*** (0.040)	0.221*** (0.026)	0.068* (0.037)						
Aspirations (high=1)	1.073*** (0.024)	1.060*** (0.030)	1.174*** (0.022)	1.115*** (0.027)	0.884*** (0.024)	0.824*** (0.029)	0.250*** (0.025)	0.134*** (0.031)	0.400*** (0.030)	0.305*** (0.037)	-0.162*** (0.025)	-0.269*** (0.031)						
Winner/loser*Aspirat.		0.036 (0.049)		0.161*** (0.044)		0.166*** (0.048)		0.323*** (0.051)		0.264*** (0.060)		0.299*** (0.051)						
Constant	4.860*** (0.061)	4.868*** (0.062)	5.321*** (0.055)	5.342*** (0.055)	5.372*** (0.060)	5.393*** (0.059)	4.287*** (0.064)	4.336*** (0.064)	3.367*** (0.076)	3.400*** (0.076)	2.819*** (0.065)	2.869*** (0.065)						
R-squared	0.190	0.190	0.141	0.141	0.101	0.102	0.084	0.085	0.108	0.109	0.215	0.215						
N	39,812	39,812	39,548	39,548	39,919	39,919	38,965	38,965	38,925	38,925	39,881	39,881						

Standard errors in parentheses  
 \*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

To facilitate the interpretation of these effects, Figure 5.2 presents the predictive margins of the evaluations of the six democratic dimensions contingent on the winners and losers categories and the level of aspirations. All the models predict that the average citizen with high aspirations about the different elements evaluates more positively the corresponding democratic dimensions than those citizens with lower aspirations, either be they electoral winners or losers. Actually, the predicted value of the evaluations made by the winners and by the losers with high aspirations—holding at their means the other categories—is about the same when evaluating the performance of the different democratic elements: the fairness of the elections (7.9 for losers and 8.2 for winners),<sup>85</sup> the freedom of opposition (8.3 and 8.6, respectively), the freedom of the media (8.0 and 8.3, respectively), and the protection of minority rights (6.5 and 6.8, respectively). For the evaluations of transparency, winners and losers with low expectations tend to be closer in their evaluations (4.9 and 5, respectively) than their counterparts with high aspirations (4.6 and 5). Despite this, we find substantial support for the hypothesized acceptance-inducing role of aspirations for evaluations of performance.

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<sup>85</sup> It is important to note that the interaction term between winner/loser status and aspirations regarding the fair elections element is non-significant. However, the predictive margins of these categories over the performance evaluations yield very similar results than to the other democratic dimensions.

Figure 5.2: Average Adjusted Predictions (AAPs) of performance evaluations by winner/loser status and democratic aspirations

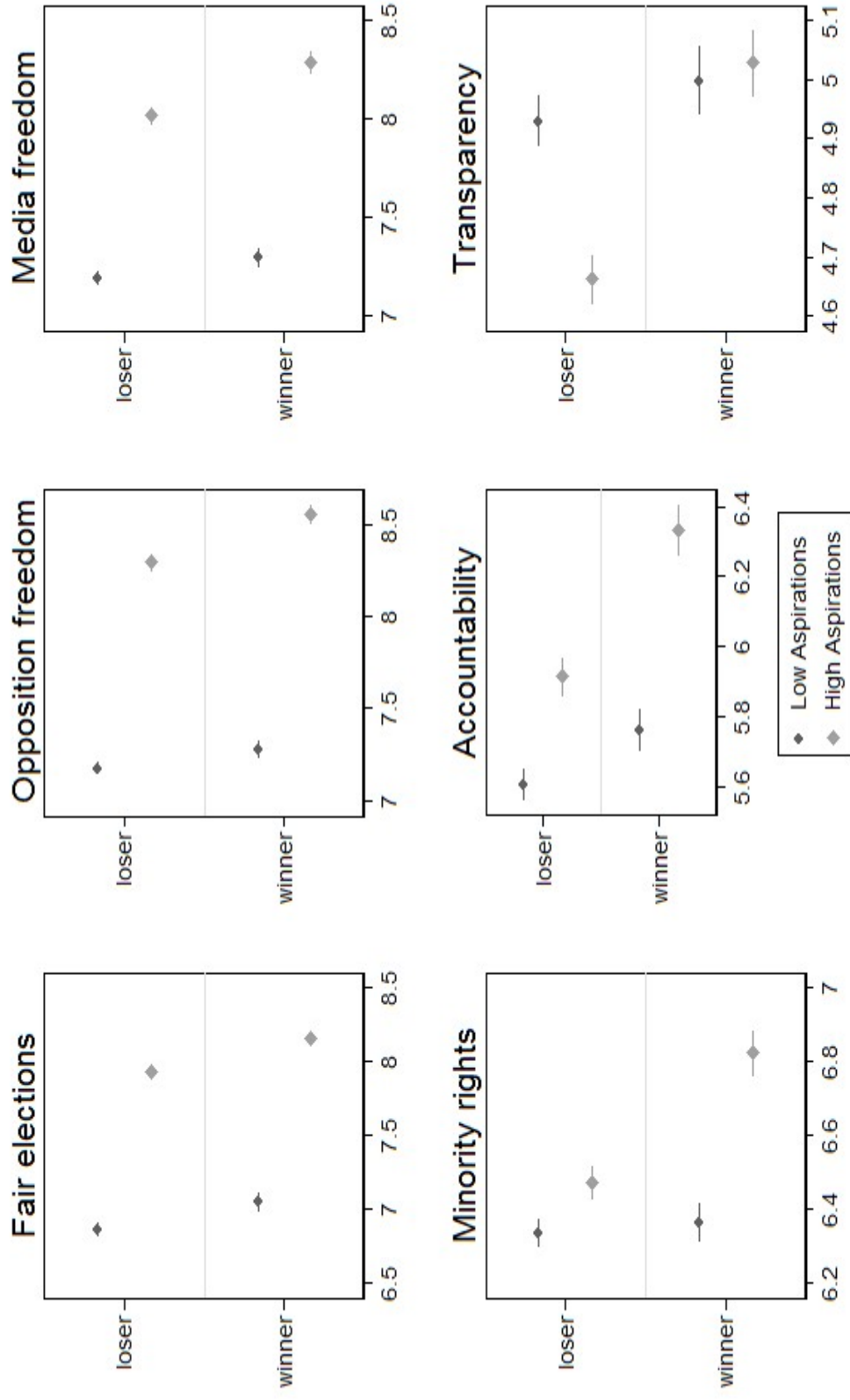


Table 5.2 summarizes the results of six hierarchical models that include the full battery of individual- and system-level variables, together with two-way interactions between the different combinations of winner/loser status, the democratic aspirations and the diverse institutional settings, and a three-way cross-level interaction between the three indicators.

Starting with the results of the three contextual variables that are introduced alone in the equations – namely the rule of law, the unemployment rate, and the GDP per capita growth rate –, it can be appreciated that they are not especially relevant predictors of democratic evaluations, since their significant effect hardly stands in a few models. Two results attract particular attention. The unemployment and GDP growth rates are negatively related at significant levels to the evaluations of the minority rights and of the integrity of elections aspects, respectively. This means that where the unemployment rate is lower and where the GDP growth rate is negative (rather than positive), citizens tend to be more optimistic regarding the performance of these two democratic elements. The former is a curious result that seems to indicate that citizens tend to consider social rights (in this case, the right to work) as part of the conception of minority rights in a broader sense. That is, when citizens' exposure to unemployment risk is lower, there is a widespread feeling that the rights of minorities are protected. By contrast, the latter may seem a contradictory result, but is actually quite meaningful. We should bear in mind that the GDP per capita growth rate (measured at the time of the survey in 2012 compared with the previous year) was higher, and even positive, in Eastern European countries generally, where both objective and subjective rates of electoral integrity usually fall below the mean. This explains why negative GDP growth rates (found in Southern and Western Europe) tend to produce more positive evaluations of the electoral mechanism.

In turn, the rule of law element plays a very residual role in predicting evaluations of democracy, not managing indeed to cancel out any of our hypothesized effects in any of the models. In sum, neither economic performance nor the rule of law alone are more important for democratic evaluations than the performance of the respective democratic elements themselves. When evaluating democracy, citizens seem to value institutions individually by their own merits (Van der Meer and Hakhverdian 2016, 83).

Our main interest here, again, is to test the extent to which democratic aspirations also play an accuracy-inducing role for evaluations, that is, whether holding high expectations of good democracy induces individuals to evaluate performance more positively in those contexts where performance is ‘objectively’ higher. In practical terms, this is tested with a three-way cross-level interaction between the winner/loser status, the degree of democratic aspirations, and the institutional macro-level variables defined above. In line with the previous literature, I expect well-performing institutions to close the gap between winners and losers (Dahlberg and Linde 2016), but such a mitigating effect should be stronger among highly demanding citizens than among individuals with low expectations about democracy. The models also test the magnitude and significance of different interactions between the three independent variables that are part of the three-way interaction.

The results of the multilevel analyses largely confirm this expectation in four out of the six models, while in the other two the mechanism operates less consistently. Thus, for the models that test the evaluations of the fairness of elections, the freedom of the opposition, the freedom of the media and the protection of minority rights (Models 13–16), the three-way interaction terms yield a statistically significant, negative coefficient. This indicates that the differences between winners and losers with high and low aspirations decrease when the performance of the institutions improves. The direction of this effect can be more easily discerned from the two-way interaction terms in the models. Thus, in all the four models we find that aspirations interact positively with the winners/losers status and with the institutional setting, while the interaction between winners/losers and institutions is negative. This implies that high aspirations increase the chances that democracy will be evaluated positively among both winners and losers; high aspirations prompt more positive evaluations of performance in good institutional settings; and well-performing institutions help to close the gap in evaluations between winners and losers.

In the remaining two models the results are, however, less promising. In Model 17 the three-way coefficient term is positive and significant, while in Model 18 it is non-significant. For the first of these models—the evaluations of the accountability

element—we can see that, when the institutional context is accounted for, aspirations do not tend to make a difference in the evaluations between winners and losers, nor do they contribute to boost more positive evaluations of performance among those citizens enjoying good electoral institutions. For the evaluations of the transparency element, the effect of aspirations tends to shrink when the institutional context is considered, so that there are no further differences in the evaluations between voters with high and low aspirations.

These effects are further illustrated in Figure 5.3, which shows the predicted values of the performance evaluations contingent of being a winner vs. loser and distinguishing between individuals according to their level of democratic aspirations, across the observed spectrum of performance of the political institutions. The Figure shows that good institutional performance contributes to reduce the gap between winners and losers to a larger extent among the voters with high aspirations than those with lower aspirations when they evaluate the integrity of the elections, the freedom of opposition, and the freedom of the media. Furthermore, all the slopes are much steeper for both winners and losers with high aspirations than for those with low aspirations, meaning that highly committed citizens tend to be more affected by the performance of good quality institutions than the poorly committed voters. Thus, although for the evaluations of the minority rights element the gap between winners and losers with high aspirations does not close completely, the sharp slope still suggests that those voters who are highly demanding on rights for minorities tend to be more positively affected when the institutional functioning reaches top standards.

The exception to this general pattern comes, as already seen, from the evaluations of the accountability element, for which the quality of the electoral mechanism contributes largely to close the winners–losers gap among voters with low aspirations rather than those with high.<sup>86</sup> As for the transparency element, the differences between winners and losers with high and low aspirations are negligible, as the non-significant coefficient displayed in Model 18 suggested already.<sup>87</sup> These

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<sup>86</sup> Actually, the gap between winners and losers with high aspirations tends to broaden in contexts characterized by high quality electoral institutions.

<sup>87</sup> For instance, an electoral loser with low expectations regarding the transparency aspect of democracy living in a country with the highest rate of transparency of government policy (95 on a 0-100 scale) gives on average a 5.37 score to the performance of the transparency element in her country, while a similarly situated electoral winner gives a 5.26.

results may be indicating that both accountability and transparency are not regarded by the citizens as core, minimalist demands to democracy but as 'second generation' or maximalist demands, on which highly committed democrats pose even higher expectations of performance. If citizens expect those two dimensions to perform with particularly high standards, it is then reasonable to expect that their expectations will be harder to fulfil.



**Table 5.2: The winners-losers gap in evaluations of democracy contingent on the institutional setting and levels of democratic aspirations (Multi-level analysis)**

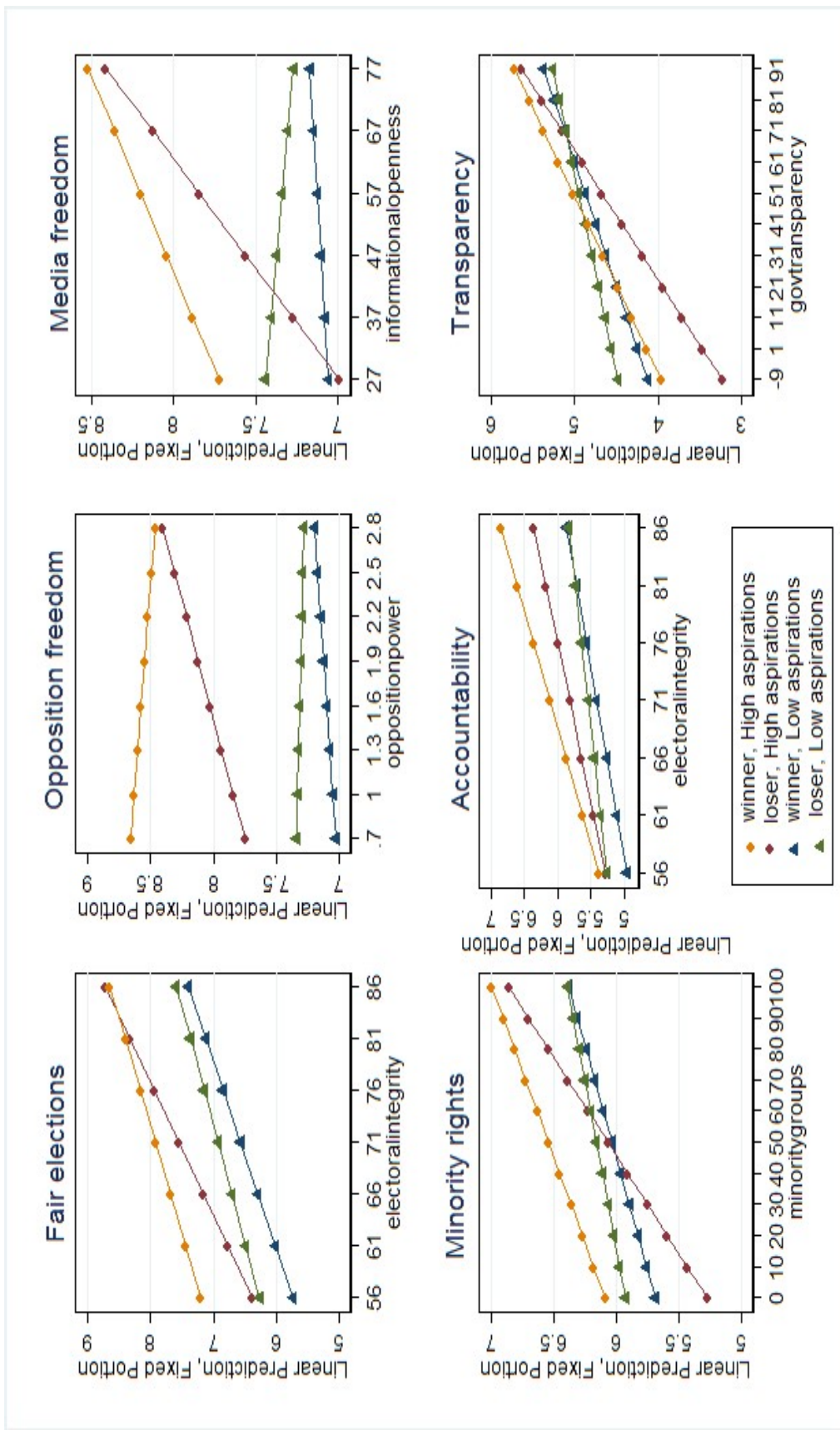
VARIABLES	Fair elections (Model 13)	Opposition (Model 14)	Freedom of media (Model 15)	Minority rights (Model 16)	Accountability (Model 17)	Transparency (Model 18)
Education (5 cat.)	0.100*** (0.009)	0.104*** (0.009)	0.057*** (0.009)	0.035*** (0.010)	-0.033*** (0.012)	-0.079*** (0.010)
Gender (female=1)	-0.186*** (0.021)	-0.195*** (0.021)	-0.148*** (0.022)	-0.286*** (0.023)	-0.194*** (0.027)	-0.130*** (0.023)
Age (years)	0.004*** (0.001)	0.010*** (0.001)	0.008*** (0.001)	0.005*** (0.001)	0.013*** (0.001)	0.002*** (0.001)
Left-wing ideology	0.041*** (0.005)	0.024*** (0.005)	0.039*** (0.005)	0.074*** (0.005)	0.039*** (0.006)	0.049*** (0.005)
Political trust index (0-10)	0.263*** (0.005)	0.121*** (0.005)	0.141*** (0.006)	0.202*** (0.006)	0.283*** (0.007)	0.414*** (0.006)
Political interest (4 cat.)	0.047*** (0.013)	0.138*** (0.013)	0.041*** (0.014)	0.058*** (0.014)	0.005 (0.017)	-0.057*** (0.015)
Electoral winner = 1	1.156*** (0.372)	0.389*** (0.110)	0.544*** (0.121)	0.237** (0.095)	0.930** (0.390)	0.315*** (0.077)
Aspirations (high=1)	-0.597** (0.279)	0.565*** (0.101)	-0.772*** (0.107)	-0.412*** (0.077)	0.025 (0.357)	-0.790*** (0.063)
INSTITUTIONS	0.055** (0.022)	0.081 (0.141)	0.002 (0.007)	0.007 (0.006)	0.030 (0.031)	0.012*** (0.005)
Winner/loser*Aspirations	1.310*** (0.455)	0.802*** (0.167)	0.528*** (0.174)	0.574*** (0.141)	-1.566*** (0.562)	0.357*** (0.105)
Winner/loser*INSTITUTIONS <sup>1</sup>	-0.011** (0.005)	-0.109** (0.048)	-0.006*** (0.002)	-0.002** (0.001)	-0.011** (0.005)	-0.005*** (0.001)
Aspirations*INSTITUTIONS	0.022*** (0.004)	0.230*** (0.044)	0.026*** (0.002)	0.009*** (0.001)	0.005 (0.005)	0.011*** (0.001)
Winner/loser*Aspirations*INSTITUTIONS	-0.018*** (0.006)	-0.295*** (0.072)	-0.007** (0.003)	-0.004*** (0.002)	0.024*** (0.007)	-0.002 (0.002)
Rule of law	0.013 (0.008)	0.010** (0.004)	0.012** (0.006)	-0.007 (0.008)	0.012 (0.011)	0.004 (0.007)
Unemployment	-0.029 (0.008)	-0.023 (0.004)	-0.033 (0.006)	-0.104*** (0.008)	-0.002 (0.011)	-0.045* (0.007)

GDP Growth	(0.034)	(0.020)	(0.022)	(0.038)	(0.047)	(0.024)
	-0.212***	-0.071**	-0.038	-0.046	0.003	-0.032
Constant	(0.062)	(0.035)	(0.040)	(0.074)	(0.087)	(0.044)
	0.409	4.956***	5.221***	5.622***	0.894	2.979***
SD intercept	(1.630)	(0.527)	(0.481)	(0.847)	(2.282)	(0.458)
	0.405	0.138	0.172	0.549	0.798	0.213
SD residuals	(0.115)	(0.040)	(0.050)	(0.157)	(0.227)	(0.061)
	4.287	4.021	4.561	4.923	7.008	5.310
Observations	(0.030)	(0.029)	(0.032)	(0.035)	(0.050)	(0.038)
	39,812	39,548	39,919	38,965	38,925	39,881
Countries	25	25	25	25	25	25

Standard errors in parentheses

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

Figure 5.3: Average Adjusted Predictions (AAPs) of performance evaluations contingent on being a winner/loser and holding high/low aspirations



## CONCLUSIONS

It is a political science tenet that the legitimacy of a democratic system rests on the supportive attitudes of its citizens towards its core constitutive values. From early public opinion studies (Lipset 1960; Linz and Stepan 1978), scholars have found that democratic regimes emerge and survive where most of the population believes in the core liberal ideas that inspire democracy—such as free and fair elections, political rights, or multiparty competition. By contrast, when the public does not really value the democratic freedoms and rights, anti-democratic forces may find more chances to be voted into office and to compromise the democratic freedoms while confronting little opposition from the public (Diskin et al. 2005). As Thomassen (2007) puts it, ‘the extent to which people in a particular polity share these basic principles is essential for the democratic quality of a political regime’ (Thomassen 2007, 419).

Given the relevance of public support for democracy’s stability and survival, over the decades the discipline has devoted significant effort to uncovering why and how citizens develop such supportive orientations toward the system. However, up to now the literature has tended to conflate support for the different democratic values that compose the democratic ideal with the overt support or preference for democracy in the abstract, assuming that both can be used as interchangeable indicators. Citizens who support democracy in the abstract, the assumption goes, support—by extension—its core constitutive values. This is, as discussed above, a mistaken assumption, as measures of abstract support for democracy as the best form of government tend to ‘overlook the mass values that make people appreciate democracy for the freedoms that define it’ and, in most cases, ‘overrate people’s actual demand for democracy’ (Welzel and Klingemann 2011, 90).

The aim of this chapter has been to show that uncovering the support that citizens display towards specific core components of liberal democracy provides a greater insight into the individuals’ genuine commitment to the ideals that define democracy, which has important consequences for the way democracy evaluations are modelled. This entails the assumption that evaluations of democracy have a value-based nature—or, in other words, that different orientations toward the system induce to different levels of democracy evaluations among otherwise similarly situated individuals. I have theorized that aspirations play a two-fold role. On the one

hand, they play an acceptance-inducing function, which makes individuals with high aspirations more likely to be satisfied with the performance of democratic institutions; and, on the other hand, an accuracy-inducing role, which makes highly committed citizens to evaluate institutions more positively in contexts of good institutional quality.

The value-based character of evaluations has been illustrated by using a relevant category traditionally employed in the literature to explain differences in political support among individuals: the status of winners and losers of the electoral contest. Although with some exceptions, the results have broadly demonstrated that winners and losers with high aspirations tend to evaluate democracy more positively than their counterparts with low aspirations. Furthermore, we have seen that the differences in evaluations between winners and losers with high aspirations tend to disappear in contexts of high institutional performance. That is, as earlier evidence has shown (Anderson and Tverdova 2001, Anderson et al. 2005, Dahlberg and Linde 2016), the type and quality of the country's institutions moderate the winners–losers gap in performance evaluations, but this moderating effect tends to be larger among voters with high expectations about democracy than among those with lower. These effects are, however, contingent on the type of institution we refer to: when institutions transcend the core, minimalist elements of democracy (i.e. free elections, freedom of opposition, media freedom, and minority rights) and are connected to 'second generation' or maximalist democratic aspects (i.e. transparency or accountability), the strongly committed citizens seem to pose higher demands on those elements and hence, their expectations are harder to fulfil.

In general, the evidence in this chapter challenges much of the conventional wisdom about winners and losers' differential levels of democratic satisfaction and, more generally, about the way democracy evaluations are formed. Two insights can be highlighted. First, genuine commitment to the core values of democracy works as an important predictor of how citizens see and, therefore, evaluate the performance of the democratic system. Second, institutions activate even further the effect of normative aspirations, by making the effect of these on democracy evaluations to be stronger in contexts that enjoy good quality institutions. These results may also conflict with the excessively optimistic outlook about critical citizens (e.g. Norris

1999) that have proliferated in the literature in the last decades: When criticism to democracy comes from poorly committed citizens—who, as we have seen, tend to be systematically more critical of the performance of democracy than what the ‘objective’ reality suggests—it seems quite unlikely that their attitudinal and behavioural reactions could work as a healthy force for democratic regeneration rather than as a potential threat to the system. Disentangling the extent to which this is, indeed, the case may prove to be a fruitful avenue for future research.

Table A5.1: Country scores of macro-level variables

	Electoral Integrity	Opposition Freedom Index	Informational Openness	Discrimination of minorities' groups	Government's Transparency	Rule of Law	GDP per capita growth (annual %)	Unemployment (% of total labor force)
Belgium	71.34	2.08	83.33	100	34.26	69.06	-0.59	7.5
Bulgaria	57.52	2.24	27.78	87.5	17.27	9.86	0.61	12.3
Switzerland	78.57	1.36	80.56	50	92.29	88.69	-0.02	4.2
Cyprus	70.02	2.46	61.11	100	47.74	60.69	-4.62	11.8
Czech Republic	75.85	2.44	66.67	62.5	24.52	56.69	-0.94	7.0
Germany	80.19	2.99	63.89	75	72.42	68.63	0.30	5.4
Denmark	86.5	2.74	80.56	100	82.97	83.46	-0.15	7.5
Estonia	78.81	2.07	69.44	0	58.39	58.66	4.68	10.0
Spain	69.12	1.65	50.00	83.25	41.33	53.12	-2.99	24.8
Finland	86.16	2.3	83.33	100	91.44	82.10	-1.89	7.7
France	74.62	2.24	52.78	62.5	49.47	43.67	-0.30	9.8
United Kingdom	66.07	2.86	55.56	75	63.93	59.46	0.61	7.9
Hungary	56.19	0.89	30.56	75	-8.53	52.15	-1.09	11.0
Ireland	70.94	0.94	72.22	100	68.29	66.97	-1.32	14.7
Israel	73.72	2.09	38.89	0	50.6	63.24	0.51	6.9
Iceland	82.9	1.72	77.78	100	10.51	51.82	0.68	6.0
Italy	66.34	2.62	33.33	75	45.5	26.79	-3.08	10.7
Lithuania	77.59	2.75	61.11	100	37.94	50.78	5.24	13.4
Netherlands	79.82	2.46	77.78	100	75.36	75.99	-1.42	5.8
Norway	83.03	2.87	83.33	100	92.77	57.75	1.41	3.1
Poland	74.23	2.12	50.00	100	38.53	49.72	1.61	10.1
Portugal	74.46	2.77	69.44	100	49.85	58.06	-3.64	15.5

Sweden	80.5	2.79	83.33	100	94.43	91.50	-1.02	8.0
Slovenia	76.43	2.43	50.00	100	16.16	50.52	-2.89	8.8
Slovakia	74.49	1.79	61.11	87.5	10.72	4.25	1.48	14.0



## CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSIONS

Twenty years ago, in a seminal article, Anderson and Guillory (1997, 69) asserted:

To date, a country's political context rarely has been incorporated explicitly into explanations of system support or satisfaction with democracy and political institutions. In fact, much of the research on the determinants of system support in Western democracies is notably institution-free..." (p. 69).

Today, this no longer the case. There is an overwhelming amount of studies dealing with the influence of different aspects of the political process such as the quality of government institutions (Wagner, Schneider and Halla 2005), the performance of the bureaucratic and the judicial systems (Rohrschneider 2005), the ballot structure (Farrell and Mcallister 2006), electoral rules (Norris 1999; Anderson 2010), regime type (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Lijphart 1999), and the welfare state (Rothstein and Stolle 2003; Kumlin and Stadelmann-Steffen 2014), to name but a few.

Despite this extensive literature, in this thesis I have argued that the evidence yielded from existing studies in the field is scattered and, most importantly, has systematically ignored important pieces of the explanation. Typically, multilevel models on the impact of institutions on political support assume that 'individual citizens are nested in larger and cross-nationally variable macro environments' (Anderson and Singer 2008, 3) that interact uniformly with individuals and help us to explain why citizens in some countries are more supportive of their democratic systems than in others. However, the assumption of such a linear relationship between citizens and democracy may prove to be misleading if we consider the highly plausible propositions that individuals: 1) may care more about some aspects of democracy than about others; 2) that not all individuals care the same about the same democratic aspects and; 3) that individuals understand democracy (and good democracy) in very dissimilar ways. These may have important consequences for how they see and experience democracy itself.

The main contribution of this thesis has been to propose an analytical framework that integrates these three elements: individuals' evaluations of democracy performance, their normative aspirations about what a good democracy is, and the various aspects of the institutional context in which they live. The framework relies on the—largely underexplored—assumptions that citizens are able to make distinct evaluations of the diverse dimensions and institutions that compose the democratic system, and have correspondingly sound preferences about how these diverse aspects should work in the abstract. In other words, that individuals are aware of how, for instance, the rule of law actually works in their democratic system, and have clear preferences about how they wish it would work in an ideal democracy.

To analyse this, I have adopted a novel approach assuming that the aspirations one has about what a good democracy is are cognitively processed by the individuals to form their evaluations of performance, and that this cognitive process is in turn moderated by the political context in which they live. This approach has sought to cover a gap in the literature on public opinion by acknowledging the socio-psychological process underlying the formation of public attitudes toward democracy.

To tackle these assumptions, this thesis has abandoned the traditional unidimensional measures on democracy support—such as 'satisfaction with the way democracy works',<sup>88</sup> 'political trust' and 'democracy as the only game in town'—in favour of the multifaceted indicators on 'evaluations' and 'aspirations' about different dimensions and areas of democracy. This has only been possible thanks to the availability of the module of questions on 'Understandings and evaluation of different elements of democracy' of the ESS-6, which has smoothed the elaboration of a rich and multifaceted theoretical framework. At the level of institutions, the broad conceptualization of democracy adopted in the thesis, together with the wide availability of contextual data from different data sources, has also enabled the analysis of a larger number of institutional arrangements than conventionally examined.

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<sup>88</sup> But SWD is used as dependent variable in *Chapter 3* for the reasons detailed in the introductory chapter of the thesis.

The analyses displayed along the four empirical chapters that compose the thesis have largely confirmed the suitability of our theoretical frame. *Chapter 2* aimed precisely at testing whether the two new notions on ‘aspirations’ and ‘evaluations’ can indeed be used with the intended meaning as proposed in this thesis. That is, it sought to uncover whether they can be used as proper substitutes of the traditional Eastonian measures of *specific* and *diffuse* support by tapping into similar facets of democracy attachment and whether ‘aspirations’ and ‘evaluations’ do form separate, coherent attitudinal constructs within individuals’ beliefs system. The analyses in *Chapter 2* provide a positive answer to both questions, yet with certain reservations.

First, we have learnt that our two new attitudinal constructs—aspirations and evaluations—are well reflective of the four dimensions of democracy defined by Kriesi and Ferrín (2016): the liberal, electoral, social, and direct democracy dimensions. Though there could be still room for other aspects of democracy not covered in the questionnaire, these four dimensions capture quite neatly what is in citizens’ minds when they think of and evaluate democracy. However, and very importantly, the two attitudinal constructs are not comparable across the full sample of countries included in the analyses.

Regarding aspirations, the results of the measurement invariance tests show that these can only be meaningfully compared among the group of Central/Western and Southern European democracies, but not among the group of Eastern countries. In the case of evaluations, the exceptions to the extension of meaningful comparisons come from a group of countries which display lower levels of quality of democracy – from all the three geographical regions. This implies acknowledging that, contrary to the conventional practice in the literature, we need to be cautious when comparing overarching theoretical constructs that enfold the word ‘democracy’. As the coming chapters of this thesis resolve, comparisons are more safely done within democracy’s constitutive dimensions.

*Chapter 3* tested the ‘null’ model of our theoretical framework by exploring the effects of a broad range of institutional arrangements and attitudinal predispositions toward democracy on the people’s overall degree of satisfaction with the way democracy works. The chapter makes two important contributions at both the theoretical and empirical levels. Theoretically, it departs from the conventional

distinction between 'input' and 'output' institutions and adopts the core concept of 'democracy,' from which the principles, and then the institutions, that may have an influence on citizens' views of democracy are derived. Despite empirical studies commonly invoke *democracy* when analysing the structural characteristics of the political system that may matter for popular democratic beliefs, so far no study has explicitly taken 'democracy' itself as *the* explanatory factor in the equation. Starting from the debates and definitions found in classical democratic theory, democracy is divided in four core normative values that are embedded in the system through different institutional settings. This operationalization proves successful in capturing cross-national differences in levels of satisfaction with democracy, and provides an innovative—and arguably also more realistic than is conventionally the case—framework to understand what the citizens really grasp about their systems.

At the empirical level, the chapter demonstrates that the politico–institutional context interacts with citizens' beliefs about democracy in important ways that have been traditionally overlooked in the literature. The institutional setting helps citizens to connect the reality with their normative predispositions on democracy and to transform this into an overall evaluative judgement about the system. Overall, the chapter sheds new light into the macro–micro linkage that exists between democratic values/institutions and citizens' levels of satisfaction with the way democracy work.

*Chapter 4* moves the focus from the overall framework to the analysis of one specific dimension of democracy; namely, the social justice dimension. The chapter addresses two questions so far overlooked in the literature: To what extent do citizens wish a social model of democracy? And how do they evaluate the performance of such a model in their respective democratic systems? Although in the last few years the social model of democracy has been said to go through a major crisis of legitimacy in Europe, the results of the empirical analyses indicate that it still can count on its traditional supporters—namely, left-wing voters, women, and low-income groups—so its essence and organizing principles seem to remain attractive for an important part of the population. But in line with the most pessimistic voices, it is demonstrated that social democracy largely disappoints its core supporters in the practice, as all them are unhappy with its actual performance. This chapter bridges the literatures on social preferences toward redistribution and satisfaction

with welfare state delivery by showing that these two aspects – what the citizens wish their democratic system to do as regards social inequality and how they do evaluate what the system actually does – is moderated by the institutional context. Thus, the alleged crisis of social democracy does not exist generally across Europe, but only in those countries where the welfare state has proved to be unable to close the gap between aspirations and evaluations. In this way, the chapter works as a robustness check of our general theoretical framework for the case of the social attitudes toward social democracy.

*Chapter 5* focuses on the interest on the political implications of holding differential levels of aspirations about the core aspects of the liberal model of democracy. Although the literature has implicitly assumed core liberal aspirations to be constant (and high) among citizens, it has been demonstrated that this is hardly the case – even in European consolidated democracies. Some citizens are strong believers in the core foundational aspects of liberal democracy – such as free and fair elections, media freedom or freedom of opposition – while others display a weaker support for such principles, but this differential support is far from being trivial. It has been hypothesized that stronger attachment to the liberal principles helps citizens to be more optimistic about democracy's performance, especially in those contexts where democracy performs 'objectively' better (the acceptance and accuracy-inducing functions). By contrast, individuals who do not support or support only weakly the core democratic values are more likely to be critical of democracy, even when institutional quality is high. The chapter documented those theoretical expectations by resorting to a relevant category traditionally used in the literature to explain differences in political support among individuals: the status of winners and losers of the electoral contest. The results corroborated that winners and losers with high aspirations evaluate democracy more positively than their counterparts with low aspirations, and that their evaluations tend to be even closer (more proximate among them and more positive) in contexts of good institutional performance. In this way the chapter sought to bring attention to the role of aspirations, which may prove to be a relevant category when analysing citizens' political leanings that may transcend the example examined here.

## WHAT HAVE WE LEARNT FROM THIS THESIS?

Four insights can be extracted from this thesis. First, aspirations and evaluations have proved to be suitable concepts to capture the actual orientations of the European citizens toward democracy. In origin, the ESS-6 module of questions on democracy was intended to respond to the increasing claims made in the academic community along the past decades to develop more nuanced measures on democracy support that could capture what it is really in the citizens' minds when thinking of democracy. As expressed by Canache and her collaborators in their widely cited study on the validity problems of the 'satisfaction with democracy' item, 'the most prudent course is for researchers to rely on those scales that constitute pure measures of particular dimensions of political support' (Canache et al. 2001, 526). Up to now, these claims for more valid measures of democracy were simply in the wish list of scholars, so we were still uncertain about the extent to which the new indicators could actually play their intended role in political support research. This thesis, together with the works of Kriesi and Ferrín (2016) and Hernández (2016b), has contributed to demonstrate the significance of employing nuanced measures of both citizens' understandings and assessments of democracy when we aim at investigating into public attitudes toward democracy.

Second, aspirations and evaluations are cognitively connected. While earlier research has discussed the mediating role of some individual characteristics (such as age, sex or education) and/or political predispositions (such as ideological leaning or party identification) on people's views of the system, up to now models including the role of aspirations/expectations have remained fairly underexplored (but see Ferrín 2012). What we have learnt from the use of aspirations in equations of democracy evaluations is that they constitute essential elements to understand the citizens' degree of criticality. As the results of both *chapters 4* and *5* have shown, the strength of individuals' democratic aspirations is what distinguishes the substance of their evaluations. With respect to the non-core elements of democracy (i.e. the social dimension), we have seen that high aspirations trigger more negative assessments of performance, i.e. critical social democrats are the product of high aspirations. Although citizens with little concern for social justice may also be critical of the functioning of the social dimension and even be supportive of an eventual reform

agenda of the welfare state, it is more likely for individuals with higher aspirations to be eager to mobilize for pursuing improvements in this area of democracy.

Regarding the core aspects of democracy (i.e. the liberal and electoral dimensions), the results in *chapter 5* demonstrated that high aspirations are matched by positive evaluations, as aspirations build the citizens' confidence in the essence and capacity of democracy to perform favourably. However, the fact that high aspirations about the core aspects of democracy strengthen people's satisfaction with democracy does not necessarily entail that trustful citizens are more permissive or uncritical of bad performance. Quite to the contrary, we can expect those citizens to be more motivated to denounce systemic deficits and to mobilize for preserving the democratic values and essence when being challenged. The critical evaluations of the little committed citizens may paradoxically engender reactions that are counter beneficial to democracy, such as 'exiting' the system (by abstention and/or development of cynical attitudes) or supporting anti-system or populist parties. Therefore, building solid and genuine aspirations toward a good democratic system (either on core or non-core elements) helps to improve the conditions for democratic quality.

Third, institutions make democratic attitudes work. The connection between aspirations and evaluations does not take place in a vacuum, but within a certain institutional environment. Institutions moderate the relationship between aspirations and evaluations mainly by altering the effect of initial predispositions. That is, when the citizens see their aspirations fulfilled by the system, the impact of their democratic aspirations on the evaluations gains an added boost. In other words, institutions reinforce what the citizens believe about democracy, leading them to be more/less satisfied with perceived performance. Thus, institutions, both in the form of certain institutional *designs* – such as electoral laws or welfare regimes – and the *quality* with which they work are a crucial source of variation of Europeans' satisfaction with their democratic systems.

Furthermore, the effect of institutions on popular democratic beliefs is genuine because it does not disappear when we control for other macro-level external factors like the economy. In light of this, it can be concluded that the economic situation plays a fairly subsidiary role when the institutional setting of a country is

properly accounted; i.e. when all the institutions that matter for citizens are included in the equation of popular satisfaction with democracy.

These two core ideas (i.e. that institutions affect the way aspirations impact on evaluations, and that the economy is less important for democracy satisfaction than institutions) would obviously benefit from the use of panel or longitudinal data. This thesis only provides a snapshot of a fixed point in time (2012) regarding how democratic attitudes (aspirations and evaluations) were elaborated under the influence of certain individual and contextual factors. The analyses displayed here are, then, unable to capture the extent to which such attitudes may have changed as a consequence of the economic crisis, a highly likely—and already documented—output. But despite this limitation, the thesis has demonstrated that even when confronting the toughest economic setting in decades, the European citizens paid more attention to the democratic ‘reality’ than to the economic situation of their countries when asked to evaluate democracy.

Fourth and finally, if high aspirations and good institutions are both preconditions for more satisfied citizens, our efforts should be then directed to uncover how to create the conditions for building both better democracies and democrats. While the literature has proved to be rich on ideas for quality of democracy (O’Donnell et al. 2004; Diamond and Morlino 2005), the issue of how to make stronger democrats (and not only critical citizens) is still largely unresolved. This, indeed, may constitute a fruitful avenue for future research.



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