

Bringing democracy back in: When democracy matters for citizens

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1. 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 to be part of it, there is a general tendency among empirical researchers to equate democracy solely with one 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 long as they determine the distribution of power within the political system and link the preferences of the citizens to the behaviour of the policymakers. At the height of this insight 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 on 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 is how citizens perceive that the representative institutions account for their interests and demands.

Though this is good and true, it only tells a part of the story. Citizens' individual experience with democratic institutions does not take place primarily with electoral institutions, but with others more proximate to them 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 (for a similar argument, see Rohrschneider 2005). 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) they use when 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. Taking together, their normative expectations and their regular experience with a broader range of democratic institutions (other than the representative ones) help citizens to create a multidimensional image of their democratic system, which is far from straightforward.

Contrary to the extended vision on democracy uniquely focused on the representative institutions, this paper adopts a new, more complex perspective to explain different levels of citizens’ satisfaction with democracy across European countries. I argue that the different ways in which four core democratic values (political equality, freedom, interests’ representation, and social justice) are institutionalized in the democratic system originates different patterns of institutions which provide citizens with a foundation to evaluate how ‘kind and gentle’ their democratic systems are. In different words, how democracies attain their goals in these four core areas informs citizens about the extension and capacity of their democratic systems to satisfy certain ‘needs’ that are valuable to them and to the entire society, and which give democracy its normative justification. This, in turn, affects the way in which the public thinks of democratically. Despite the significance of these four values in democratic theory, we know fairly little about how they are achieved in democratic societies – through which institutional settings- and which effect they have on citizens’ democratic attitudes. Therefore, a goal of this paper 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. The second goal 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, taking democratic theory as a point of departure for the debate. And thirdly, the paper aims to examine the role played by normative expectations on individual satisfaction with the way democracy works, revealing that their effect is not only direct but also mediated by institutions.

Accordingly, the next section starts by conceptualizing democracy as a multifaceted concept composed of four core democratic principles: political equality, freedom, representation, and social justice. In the third section I define the dependent variable and show how its variance can be decomposed into cross-national and intracountry (or individual) variation. The argument that the country-level of analysis, at the core of this paper, is important for understanding attitudes of democratic satisfaction can only be supported if the variance component at this level is statistically significant. The fourth section introduces further theoretical considerations about the relationship between institutional configurations, normative expectations, and public satisfaction with the way democracy works. Specifically, I discuss the hypothesized effect of the four core democratic values (freedom, equality, representation and social justice) on normative views of democracy and on democratic satisfaction. The fifth section tests our hypotheses at both the aggregate and the individual level, adopting in the latter case a multi-level approach. In the conclusion I highlight the central implications of my results.

In order to do this, I use data on individual voters from the wave 6 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 countries¹ in 2012. Data on democratic institutions are taken from four sources: the Democracy Barometer (DB), the V-Dem Dataset, the Comparative Political Data Set, and the World Development Indicators of the World Bank; and are all measured most recently to the collection of the survey data at the micro level.

2. 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. A central focus of new institutionalism is to construct classificatory schemes of democratic systems according to how they solve the

¹ These countries are: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Great Britain, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and Ukraine.

central issue on distribution of political power,² thus awarding the representative dimension a leading role. As Lijphart himself defines it, “democracy [is] government by the people or, in representative democracy, government by the representatives of the people ...” (Lijphart 1999, 1).

In this paper I argue that this sort of classification is however 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 in which democracies may vary. Democracies differ in the nature of the citizenship policies they employ, the use they make of representative quotas for social groups, 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 with centuries of debate in democratic theory about how the word ‘democracy’ might be defined. Democracies are governments in which the people participate in policy making by choosing their representatives in competitive elections, who govern not only in response to the preferences of their voters but also to safeguard the best interests of the general public, and who are constrained by the need to deliver certain valued outcomes within a fair procedural frame. This entails that elections are not the only instruments which determine the outcomes of democracy, but that there are many other organizations and rules which serve its different ends. Both conceptually and empirically, it is therefore questionable whether the representative institutions play a unique role in defining and characterizing democratic modes.

Contrary to this limited view, this paper is explicitly driven by the theoretical concern of analysing democracy from a multidimensional perspective. Four core normative values are discussed 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 which operate at both the institutional (the so called ‘checks and balances’) and the judicial level (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

² One of the most influential classifications of democratic regimes within the new-institutionalist tradition is accredited to Lijphart (1999), who distinguishes between majoritarian and consensus regime types.

under equalized conditions, and gives all 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 four, democracy aims at establishing a chain of solidarity among citizens facilitated by the exercise of social and other democratic rights and the provision of welfare systems.

2.1. Operationalization and Data

In summary, democracy is here treated 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. To follow I discuss how these four values can be operationalized in order to find the institutional configurations that are more likely to influence people's satisfaction with the way their democratic system works.

The main institutional setting in democratic systems serving the objective of political **freedom** (understood as absence of domination from the state) is the rule of law. As Raz states: "In curtailing arbitrary power, and in securing a well-ordered society, subject to accountable, principled government lies the value of the rule of law" (1994, 361). The rule of law dimension will be measured with the 'equality before the law' indicator from the Democracy Barometer (DB), 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 bad performance (Ukraine: 2.37).

The **political equality** aspect of democracy is measured by four indicators coming from the V-Dem dataset, which gauge the extent to which members of a polity (identifiable groups within the population) possess equal political power. These four indicators rate independently 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) are able to set the political agenda, (e) influence political decisions, and (f) influence the implementation of those decisions. A 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 (results not

shown). 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 -2 to 2, entailing negative values a more unequal distribution of power (being Russia the most unequal: -2.1) and positive values a more equal one (Denmark: 1.87).

The value of **representation** is operationalized by two indicators. One measures the existence of free and fair elections, i.e. the extent to which the electoral mechanism is trustworthy and hold on a constant basis, using an index on clean elections from the V-Dem Dataset. According to their definition, “free and fair connotes an absence of registration fraud, systematic irregularities, government intimidation of the opposition, vote buying, and election violence” (Coppedge et al. 2015, 52). This index has value 0 when elections do not meet adequate standards of fairness and cleanness, and 1 when they do. The variability in our sample is high enough: the lowest scores can be found in Russia (0.39) and Kosovo (0.43), whereas the highest are for Portugal, the UK, France, and Germany (all they 0.99).

The second measure 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 it 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, in which higher scores represent consensus systems and lower scores are majoritarian ones.

To finish, 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 themselves or meet their basic needs. By contrast, universal programs seek to cover the entire population throughout the different stages of life, and on the basis of 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. 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. In order 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.

3. THE DEPENDENT VARIABLE: PUBLIC SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY

The dependent variable for the analyses is public satisfaction with the way democracy works (SWD). This measure captures people's responses to the actual process of democratic governance, and has been identified traditionally with 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 to political objects at a particular level, labelled 'specific support', and support to 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.³ Despite this, the item continues to be used by multitude of scholars (e.g. Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014, Armingeon and Guthmann 2014, Cordero and Simón 2015), what allows us to confront our hypotheses and results with those of

³ 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).

previous studies.⁴ In our sample, country means of the SWD measure range empirically from 3 to 7.5. 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).

Besides noticing that country means seem systematically different among each other, we can also estimate an ANOVA model that decomposes the variance in the variable at the individual and at the country levels. The argument that both levels of analysis are important for understanding satisfaction with the democratic system can be supported if both variance components are statistically significant (Anderson and Singer 2008, 14; cf. Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Table 1 presents the results of the ANOVA model. As expected, both variance components are statistically significant, which indicates that there is significant variation in our dependent variable at both levels of analysis. Individual-level variance constitutes 77 per cent of the total variance of the model, whereas country-level variance represents 23 per cent. Given that the data are measured at the individual-level, it is not surprising that individual-level factors have a larger potential to explain democracy satisfaction than country-level variables. Despite this, the portion of the variance occurring across countries is still quite substantial to think that a model that specifies our theoretical expectations about the influence of institutional factors on satisfaction with the way democracy works could account for this variance.

Table 1
ANOVA of Variance in Satisfaction with Democracy across levels of analysis

	SWD
<i>Fixed effects</i>	
Constant	5.128 (0.232)
<i>Variance components</i>	
Country-Level (τ^2)	1.562*** (0.411)
Individual-Level (σ^2)	5.136*** (0.032)
N (Individuals)	52602
N (Countries)	29

Standard errors in parentheses
*** p<0.01

⁴ The SWD question from the ESS-6 reads literally: '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.'

4. PRIOR RESEARCH AND HYPOTHESES

In this section I specify my theoretical expectations about whether and how our four core democratic values -and their embodiment in the democratic system through the institutional settings exposed above- affect the way in which citizens evaluate the performance of their democratic system and mediate the impact of their normative aspirations. Accordingly, the central research question addressed in this paper is: Which kind of democratic values and institutions really matter for explaining the satisfaction of citizens with the way their democracy works?

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 its normative promises and ideals –i.e. democracy’s outputs. In different 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 the citizens and to the entire society, and which in turn are mediated by individuals’ aspirations about what is a good democracy. In short, the relationship between citizens and democracy lies in the multidimensional nature of the democratic systems and their capacity to satisfy the normative and evaluative aspirations of citizens.

Theoretically, as has been repeatedly accredited 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. Also by voting, electors are able to punish those representatives who made a bad job and reward those who did it 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 deeply 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:

Hypothesis 1: The procedural quality of the elections (how clean and fair they are) influences positively individuals' satisfaction with their democratic system.

Along with the existence of clean elections, another institutional feature that affects democracy support are the formal electoral rules that regulate the electoral competition. As exposed above, the big divide as regards electoral laws is between proportional and majoritarian types. Dissimilar advantages are assigned to each of these institutional models, such as a better policy performance and descriptive representation in the case of consensus systems (Lijphart 1999), and longer and more stable terms in majoritarian ones. With more frequently, however, the literature has tended to align with the idea that the higher merits of the consensus model of democracy to more accurately represent the electorates' preferences translate into more positive popular feelings toward the democratic system. As both Lijphart (1999) and Powell (2000) show, 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), which leads to a higher democratic satisfaction (Lijphart 1999) and a reduction of the gap between winners and losers of the electoral contest (Anderson and Guillory 1997). In line with this evidence, our second hypothesis is as follows:

Hypothesis 2: Citizens in proportional systems show higher levels of satisfaction with the working of democracy than in majoritarian regimes.

However, in this paper I am sceptical of the fact that a nation's representative laws are more relevant than other democratic values and rules in shaping mass support to democracy. To be sure, representation is a crucial part of the puzzle, but focusing only on it misses half of the explanation. First, there are grounds to believe that individuals' appraisals of their democratic system do not simply rest on the experience they have with the representative institutions and elections. Citizens usually do not have enough information on the electoral rules and how these translate votes into parliamentary seats; they are unaware of the diverse prospects that majoritarian or consensus regime types entail for their lives; and they are far removed from experiencing the consequences of unicameral vs. bicameral legislatures. Other institutions such as the welfare state, the protection system for immigrants and/or ethnic minorities, and the bureaucratic system, to name but a few, not only provide citizens with a more tangible experience, but also offer them clearer cues for evaluating their performance for their normative effects on society. Further and competing hypotheses regarding the impact of other institutional features (other than the electoral ones) need to be considered.

An important set of institutional characteristics recently discussed in the literature that are connected to our *freedom* dimension of democracy are the 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 proves, this type of experience matters more for how citizens evaluate the representative capacity of their democratic institutions than the regime type (majoritarian or consensus), which exerts little influence on representational judgments. In a similar vein, Dahlberg and Holmberg (2014) demonstrate 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. The "Equality before the law" indicator used here (taken from the DB), which gauges more specifically the functioning of the rule of law in the country -the existence of constitutional provisions for impartial courts, the effective independence of the judiciary, and the effective impartiality of the legal system- might provide evidence in a similar vein. It is known that judicial effectiveness and impartiality reduce levels of corruption, which directly influences evaluations of the performance of the political system and political trust (Anderson and Tverdova 2003). Furthermore, it informs citizens about how equally they are being treated by their judiciaries, which might well be an important component of satisfaction with democracy. Following these expectations, the following hypothesis will be tested:

Hypothesis 3: A well-functioning rule of law leads people to appreciate more neatly 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 to 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 in order 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 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. The V-Dem indicator used in this paper to gauge political equality can help us to extend the argument of how the increased presence of candidates from socially-unrepresented groups also translates into higher levels of democratic support generally in the entire population. There are 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, and may serve as a powerful symbolic cue of how 'kind and gentle' the democratic system is. In line with this, hypothesis 4 is as follows:

Hypothesis 4: 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 come to the front of scholarly debate quite recently. As Kumlim and Stadelmann-Steffen (2013, 6) summarize, studies initially 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 more 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 hypothesis 5 is formulated as follows:

Hypothesis 5: 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 Kumlim 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. As for the degree of universalism, the key indicator used in this study to measure welfare provision, Rothstein and Stolle (2013), using data from different welfare programs in Sweden, show that citizens in universal welfare states display much higher levels of generalized trust than citizens socialized in other welfare institutional settings. Following Rothstein and Stolle's claim, and considering that the V-Dem indicator I use for the analyses is a continuous variable, our last institutional hypothesis is the following:

Hypothesis 6: Higher levels of universalism in the welfare state will impact positively on public satisfaction with democracy.

The idea that these four core values and their embodiment in institutional structures have a direct impact on public support to democracy is however open to both theoretical and empirical challenge. Some would argue that different individuals within a same institutional environment may experience differently the performance of institutions. 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, it can be argued that the type of aspirations one has about what is a good democracy provides a lens for how people view and evaluate their democratic institutions. Following Kriesi and Ferrin (2016), I will distinguish between two types of visions on democracy citizens may have,⁵ namely the liberal view and the social view. The liberal view is shared by those who give the highest relevance to the aspects linked to the concept of liberal democracy, when they are asked about what it is important for democracy in general.⁶ The social view is held when respondents give the highest relevance to two dimensions of the social model of democracy: the citizens' protection against poverty and the reduction of income differences by the state.

⁵ This indicator is created using 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.

⁶ More specifically, here it is understood that a citizen holds a liberal view on democracy when she gives the highest importance (10 in a 0 to 10 scale) to 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, freedom of the media to criticize the government, reliability of the information offered by the media, protection of minority rights, equality before the law, capacity of the courts to stop governmental actions, punishment to the governing parties when they have done a bad job, governmental explanation of its decisions to voters, and the extent to which politicians take into account the views of other European governments before making decisions.

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 two individual-context interactions, related to the potential varying effects of the context on individuals with our two different conceptions on democracy. The two hypotheses related to these cross-level interactions are as follows:

Hypothesis 7: The individual calculus of democratic satisfaction for individuals who value the liberal aspects of democracy is affected by the performance of macro institutional aspects like the rule of law.

Hypothesis 8: The individual calculus of democratic satisfaction for individuals who hold a social view on democracy is affected by the performance of macro institutional aspects like the degree of universalism of the welfare state.

As individual-level controls, I include standard variables like age, gender and education, together with the winners vs. losers category. We know already that those who vote for the established governing party tend to be more satisfied with the working of democracy than those supporting opposition parties (Anderson and Guillory 1997, Holmberg 1999). Also at the individual level, I consider two performance control variables, the satisfaction with the government's and with the economy's performance. Other things being equal, satisfaction with government and with economic performance are likely to build people's democratic satisfaction.

5. EMPIRICAL TESTS

The influence of our five institutional properties (rule of law, clean elections, electoral regime, equality of power, and welfare state) on specific support to democracy will be tested in two steps. First, I will start with aggregate analyses among the 29 countries in the sample, in which all the institutional variables are regressed under control for each other. Proceeding firstly in this way we are able to discern which institutional variables are relevant for democratic support and which are not, so that we can move on to the second stage of the analyses with a lower number of variables. As Dahlberg and Holmberg (2014, 533) warn, when we have a restricted number of cases (countries), we can include only a limited number of variables on the system level. I follow here this two-step approach as suggested by these authors (see Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014). In a second step, I introduce micro-level data in order to study simultaneously the impact of individual characteristics and institutional factors on citizens'

satisfaction with democracy. The results of the multilevel analysis are shown in the next section.

Figure 1 shows the bivariate relationship between each institutional variable and satisfaction with democracy. The correlation coefficient is especially high for two indicators: the rule of law and political equality, which are both 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 0.62, with the only exceptions of Norway, Portugal, Spain, and Slovenia. Also living in a country with a more egalitarian distribution of political power entails higher public satisfaction with the way democracy works, though in this case both the R-square and the correlation coefficient are slightly smaller than for the rule of law.

Both the indicators on clean elections and regime type report a much weaker relationship with democratic satisfaction. The positive coefficient of the Lijphart's index indicates that people in consensus systems are somewhat more satisfied with their democratic systems than 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 for satisfaction with the functioning of the democratic system. To finish, the two indicators for the welfare state display quite different results. The indicator on universalism has a fairly strong and positive relationship with the 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 insignificantly related to satisfaction ($r=0.24$).

Figure 1

Satisfaction with democracy related to six democratic institutional factors in 29 democracies

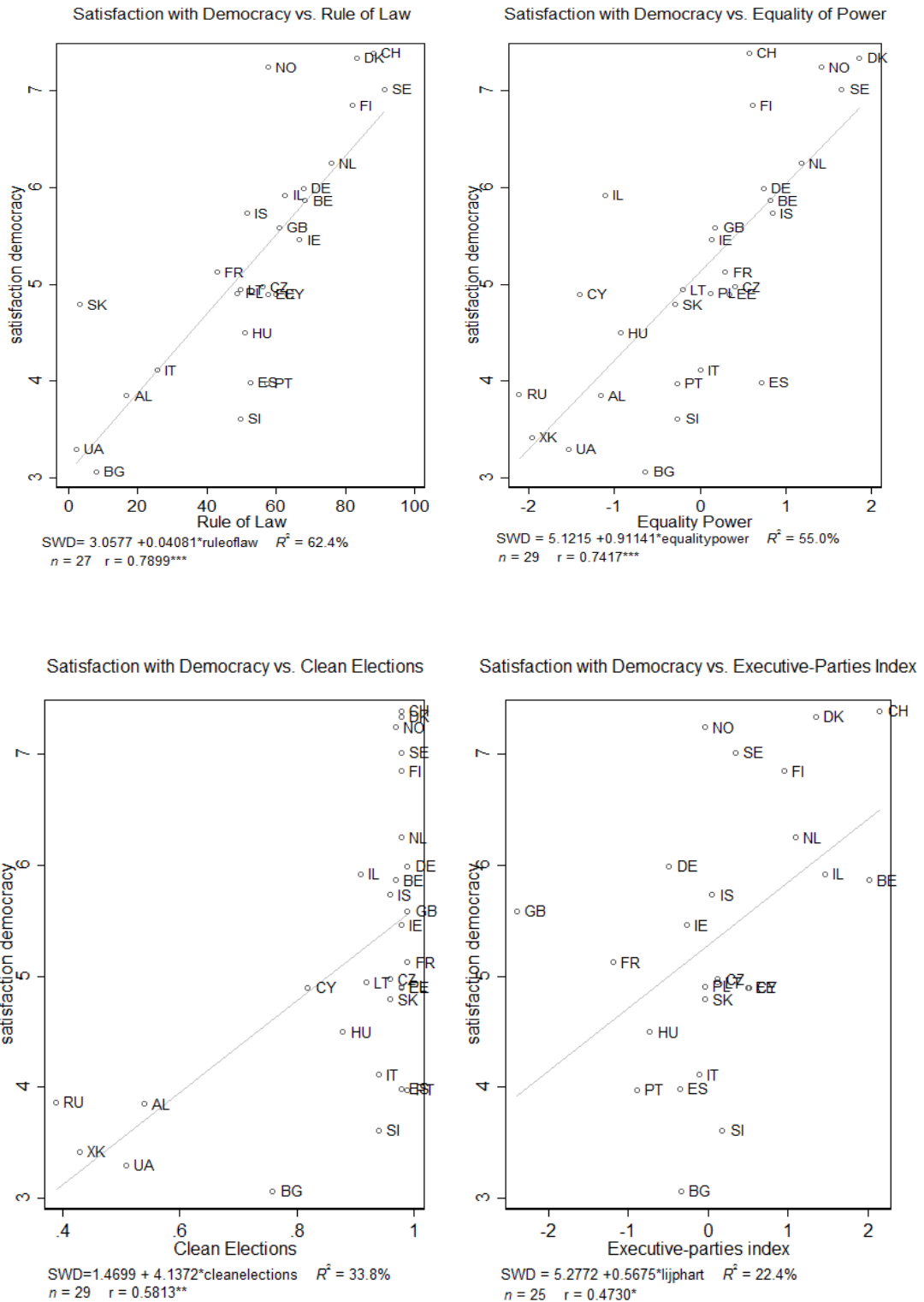
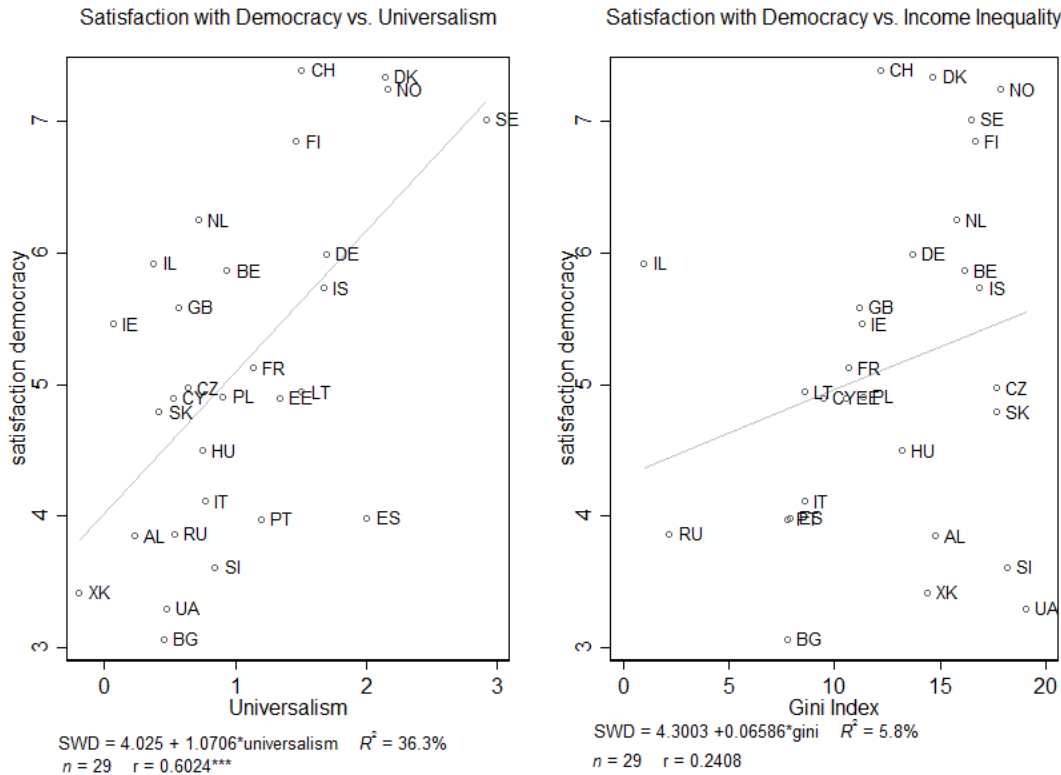


Figure 1 (continuation)

Specific support to democracy related to six democratic institutional factors in 29 democracies



Obviously, we need to test how all these variables compete simultaneously for explaining popular democratic support. In addition to this, there is also the possibility that different combinations or patterns of institutional characteristics might influence democratic support differently. For this reason, I also test the potential differential effects of two interaction terms in the models. Since one of the major advantages associated to consensus systems is that they are ‘kinder and gentler’ states (Lijphart 1999), it is reasonable to expect that better policy outcomes would interact positively with the consensus model generating higher levels of democracy satisfaction. In order to avoid introducing too many variables in the models, I will use our rule of law indicator as a proxy for ‘kind and gentle’ policy performance. Thus, our model of satisfaction with the working of democracy with this interaction term can be specified as follows:

$$\text{DemocracySatisfaction} = b_0 + b_{1-6} \text{InstitutionalCharacteristics} + b_7 \text{LijpartIndex} * \text{RuleofLaw} + e$$

And it tests the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 9: Citizens in consensus systems with well-developed levels of rule of law will show higher levels of democratic satisfaction than in majoritarian regimes.

The second interaction variable included in the model is between our two indicators on social justice, i.e. universalism and the gini index. Though in principle we would expect both measures to be correlated, there is no significant linear relationship between them ($r= 0.19$). This means that universalism not always brings about higher levels of social equality, or that means-tested systems are not necessarily more unequal. However, it is expected that those universal welfare states that really manage to produce higher degrees of social equality will satisfy citizens to a greater extent than those that do not. The model and hypothesis regarding this interaction term are as follows:

$$\text{DemocracySatisfaction} = b_0 + b_{1-6}\text{InstitutionalCharacteristics} + b_7\text{Universalism*Gini} + e$$

Hypothesis 10: Citizens in universal welfare states with higher levels of social equality will be more satisfied with their democratic systems than those in universal welfare states that produce high levels of inequality.

Table 2 summarizes the results from eleven multivariate OLS regressions run in three blocks. In the first block (models 1 to 6), the rule of law and the two variables on representation (clean elections and the majoritarian-consensus index) are regressed under control for each other, together with the interaction term between the Lijphart's index and the rule of law –which, as stated in H_9 , specifies the possibility that consensus systems and rule of law together have an additional positive effect on how citizens evaluate democracy. In the second block (model 7), I regress the equality of power indicator under control for the rule of law, our most powerful predictor. I proceed similarly in the third block (models 8-11), where I regress the two indicators on welfare state under control for the rule of law measure. In this block I also include the interaction term between universalism and the gini coefficient, as specified in H_{10} .

The results across the eleven aggregate multivariate regressions show that the rule of law indicator always displays a fairly strong and significant impact on democratic satisfaction. This confirms the results from the previous bivariate analysis. Focusing on the first block of regression models, we can see that neither the electoral indicators nor the interaction variable manage to reach statistical significance when they are controlled for the rule of law. This finding goes in line with the conclusions of recent literature (Sanders et al. 2014) which

demonstrates that the electoral rules exert no effect on democracy satisfaction when introduced relevant controls.⁷

Turning to the second block of models, where I put the political equality indicator against the rule of law, we can see that political equality turns out to be an important predictor of democratic support, though it does not cancel out the influence of the rule of law. Though I have tested the effect of political equality in a separate block, since it is theoretically distinct from the democratic values on representation and social justice, 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, controlling again for the rule of law, the equality variable continues being significant, while the Lijphart's index does not (results not shown). 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.

In block 3, I regress our two measures on social justice under control again for the rule of law measure and the interaction term (universalism*gini). The results partially confirm our expectations. As can be seen in Model 9, people who live in more egalitarian countries (higher scores of the gini coefficient, reversed from the original) tend to be more trusting of their democratic system than citizens from more unequal countries. By contrast, enjoying a more universal welfare state system does not exert a significant effect on democracy satisfaction. The interesting result from this block of models comes from the interaction variable, which, accordingly to our expectations, has a positive and significant relationship with the dependent variable. This means that individuals in universal welfare states might have stronger expectations as regards the outcomes of the social service delivery than those in means-tested systems. We will see more on this in the next section.

⁷ The models have 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 from the DB. None of these two variables are statistically significant in the models (results not shown), which means that the rule of law is always more important for explaining democracy satisfaction than any measure of the electoral dimension we might take.

Table 2
Aggregate regression analysis of the impact of democratic institutional factors on satisfaction with democracy (OLS Regression)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
Rule of law	0.041***	0.039***	0.030***	0.037***	0.036***	0.028***	0.029***	0.036***	0.041***	0.037***	0.032***
Clean elections		0.501	4.733	-	-	4.817					
Lijphart			0.293	0.229	-0.784	-0.748					
RuleLaw*Lijphart					0.015	0.016					
Equity of power							0.493**				
Universalism								0.328	-	0.242	-1.491*
Gini									0.060*	0.053	-0.061
Universalism*gini											0.129**
Constant	3.058***	2.687**	-0.897	3.211***	3.207***	-0.974	3.605***	2.969***	2.277***	2.304***	4.041***
R-squared	0.624	0.625	0.624	0.587	0.609	0.647	0.699	0.648	0.668	0.680	0.753
N	27	27	25	25	25	25	27	27	27	27	27

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

Multilevel Analysis

Once we know that there are several institutional characteristics that exert a powerful impact on feelings of democratic satisfaction, a necessary second step is to test whether they continue being relevant when we include individual-level controls. Multilevel models allow us to check this assumption, as well as to test the two individual-level hypotheses posed in Section 4 referred to cross-level interactions.

Table 3 shows the results of five multilevel regression analyses encompassing around 51000⁸ individuals in 29 countries. The first model tests the influence of the individual characteristics alone, and includes the standard individual-level control variables like age, gender and education, together with the satisfaction with the economy's and with the government's performance, the voters' winners-losers status (having voted for the incumbent government), and the liberal and social justice aspirations on democracy's scales. With the exception of age, all the individual-level variables in Model 1 have a significant effect on specific support and in the expected direction, i.e. consistently with other studies on support/satisfaction with democracy: satisfaction increases with education, being a male, having voted for the governing party, and being satisfied with the government's and the economy's performance. Regarding the democratic aspirations, it is worth noting that holding 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 Model 2 I add the institutional variables that turned out to be relevant from our aggregate analysis before, namely the indicators on rule of law, equal distribution of political power, universalism, and the gini index. The results of the aggregate analysis are largely corroborated here: even when we include theoretically relevant individual-level controls, the rule of law and equality of power indicators continue having a strong and significant impact on levels of satisfaction with democracy. By contrast, the two variables on social justice -universalism and gini- have an insignificant effect, a result that we already saw in our analysis at the aggregate level.

Model 3 reproduces the same model but adding as contextual controls two economic factors: the unemployment rate for each country in 2012,⁹ and the GDP growth rate in 2012 (defined as the quarterly GDP growth rate at the time of the survey compared with the corresponding

⁸ The *N* (number of individuals) of the different models varies depending on the macro independent variables we introduce, as we do not have data available for all the cases (countries) in the survey.

⁹ Source: Eurostat. Unemployment rates by sex, age and citizenship (%) [lfsq_urgan]

quarter of the previous year).¹⁰ 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. Even when we control for economic factors, our results are consistent and stay the same: the rule of law and equal distribution of political power are significant and their coefficients are not altered, while universalism and gini continue being insignificant. The two economic factors turn out to be insignificant, meaning that the democratic institutions outperform the economic situation in explaining public satisfaction with democracy. This result conflicts with recent accounts in the literature that fully attribute the deterioration of the democratic attitudes in European countries to the economic conditions generated as a consequence of the Great Recession (Cordero and Simón 2015, Armingeon and Guthmann 2014, Polavieja 2013).

To finish, I test the two cross-level hypotheses in two separate models. The first is an interaction between the scale of liberal aspirations on democracy and the rule of law (Model 4). As expected, this interaction term proves to have a significant effect on citizens' satisfaction with the way democracy works, meaning that the rule of law and the liberal aspirations on democracy together have an additional effect on democratic satisfaction. Figure 2 presents the marginal effect 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 becomes higher. Furthermore, the relationship is statistically significant across (almost) the whole 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.

The second cross-level interaction introduced in Model 5 tests the additive effect of being a social democrat and the quality of the welfare state on satisfaction with the way democracy functions. Similarly to the previous interaction, the underlying logic here is that both variables working in tandem would produce higher levels of democratic satisfaction, all else being equal. However, we shall remind here that the results in Model 1 showed that the social aspirations on democracy alone influence negatively on satisfaction: 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.

The expectation that the level of the welfare state's universalism might alter how satisfied social democrats are with their democratic system is connected to the results of the positive

¹⁰ Source: Eurostat. GDP and main components—volumes [namq_gdp_k]

interaction effect of universalism and the gini index we already saw at the aggregate level of the analyses (Table 2, Model 11). I suggested there that the fact that these two variables only affect democratic support when they are interacted among each other might entail that universal welfare states are prone to generate stronger expectations among citizens regarding the outcomes of the social service delivery than means-tested systems. The positive and significant coefficient of the interaction variable in Model 5 (Table 3) corroborates this expectation. Figure 3 shows the marginal effect of the scale of social democratic aspirations across the observed range of welfare state's universalism. As predicted, the degree of universalism of the welfare state matters for citizens with a social view on democracy in making them supportive of their democratic system. This relationship is however insignificant at low levels of universalism (0.8 and below, in a -2 to 3 scale), which represent around 50% of the cases in the dataset. This makes that this positive result should be interpreted with caution.

Figure 2

Average marginal effects on democratic support of liberal aspirations contingent on the performance of the rule of law (with 90% confidence intervals)¹¹

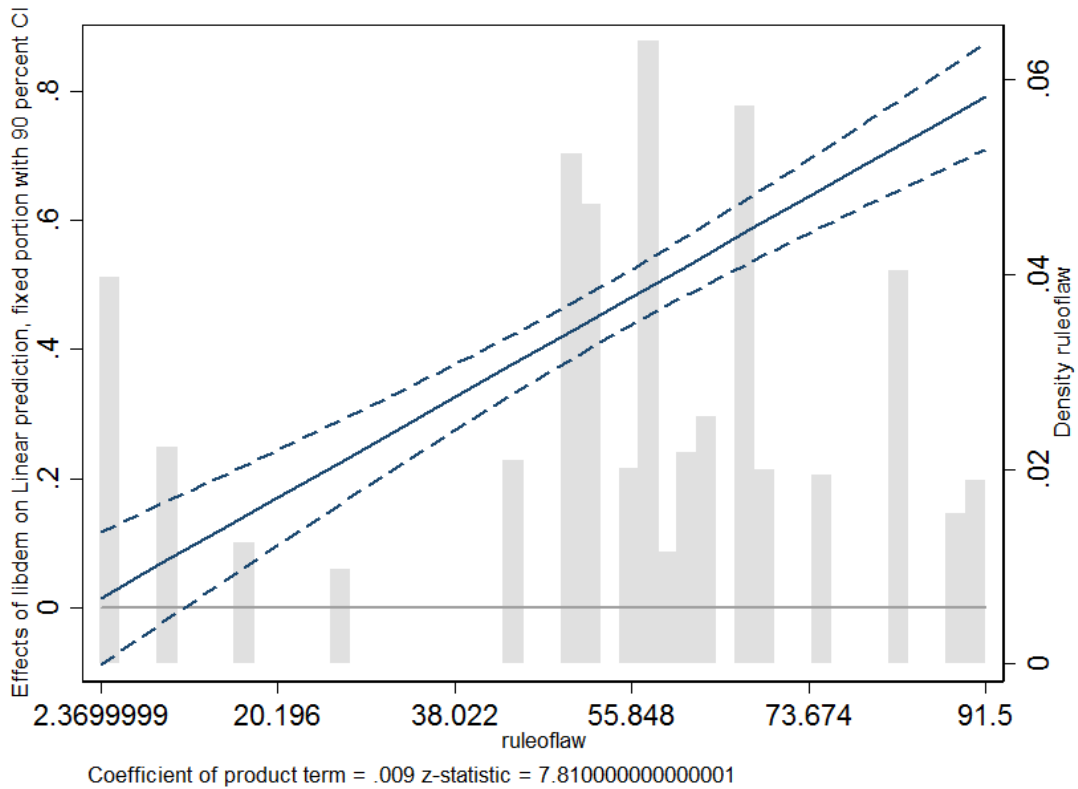
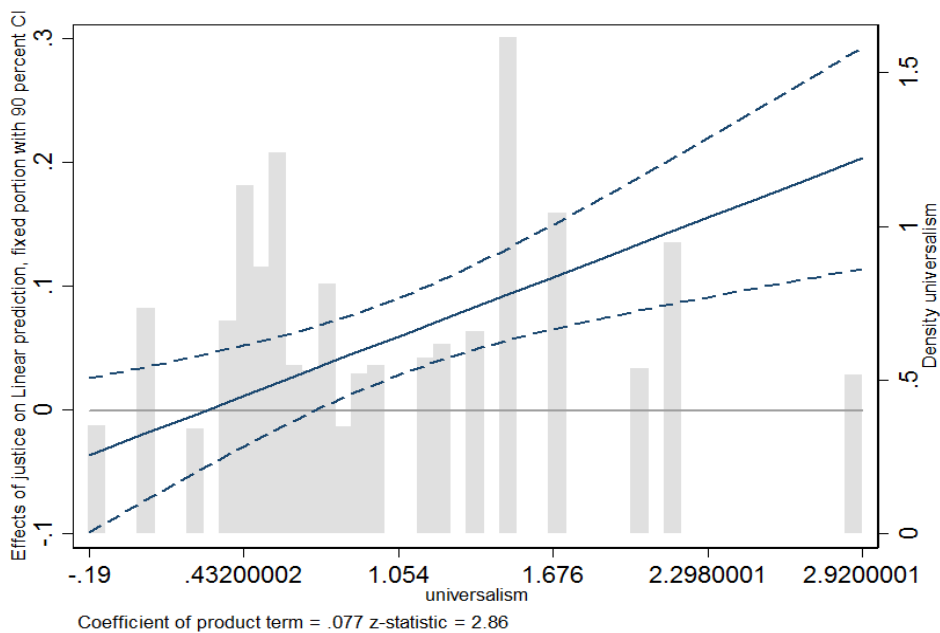


Figure 3

Average marginal effects on democratic support of social aspirations contingent on the degree of universalism of the welfare state (with 90% confidence intervals)



¹¹ Predicted probabilities and average marginal effects plots in Figures 2 and 3 were generated with Stata marhis command (Hernández, 2016).

Table 3
Multilevel regression analysis of the impact of individual characteristics and democratic institutional factors on citizens' support to democracy (MLE)

VARIABLES	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5
Individual-level variables					
Age	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	0.000 (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)	-0.000*** (0.000)
Education	0.032*** (0.007)	0.042*** (0.007)	0.054*** (0.007)	0.046*** (0.007)	0.054*** (0.007)
Gender (1=woman)	-0.029* (0.016)	-0.043*** (0.016)	-0.067*** (0.017)	-0.053*** (0.016)	-0.051*** (0.019)
Winners vs. losers (1=winners)	0.061*** (0.017)	0.055*** (0.018)	0.046** (0.019)	0.056*** (0.018)	0.070*** (0.018)
Government performance	0.463*** (0.004)	0.458*** (0.004)	0.450*** (0.005)	0.458*** (0.004)	0.461*** (0.004)
Economy performance	0.219*** (0.005)	0.211*** (0.005)	0.220*** (0.005)	0.214*** (0.005)	0.217*** (0.005)
Liberal democracy aspirations	0.584*** (0.032)	0.629*** (0.033)	0.719*** (0.035)	-0.005 (0.065)	-
Social democracy aspirations	-0.217*** (0.024)	-0.203*** (0.025)	-0.243*** (0.026)		-0.022 (0.034)
System-level variables					
Rule of Law		0.014*** (0.004)	0.015*** (0.005)	0.0143*** (0.003)	-
Equality of power		0.304** (0.130)	0.367** (0.154)		-
Gini		-0.014 (0.017)	0.002 (0.026)		-
Universalism		-0.199 (0.142)	-0.222 (0.150)		0.392*** (0.145)
Control variables (economy)					
Unemployment			0.015 (0.021)		
GDP Change			0.015 (0.018)		
Cross level interactions					
RuleLaw*liberal aspirations				0.009*** (0.001)	-
Universalism*social aspirations					0.077*** (0.027)
Intercept	2.183*** (0.120)	1.868*** (0.355)	1.372** (0.603)	1.465*** (0.177)	1.865*** (0.183)
Random-effects parameters					
SD intercept	0.621 (0.082)	0.330 (0.046)	0.333 (0.049)	0.359 (0.050)	0.546 (0.072)
SD residuals	1.762 (0.006)	1.762 (0.006)	1.735 (0.006)	1.762 (0.006)	1.768 (0.006)
Observations	50,632	47,298	42,001	47,486	50,642
Countries	29	27	24	27	29

6. CONCLUSION

This paper 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 (for a summary of the literature, see Anderson 2007). More specifically, we 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 empirical research on democratic attitudes assumes that the relationship between citizens and democracy takes exclusively place 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 that institutions provide a fair articulation of one’s interests” (Rohrschneider 2005, 852). However, I have claimed that this view makes the strong assumption that voters have enough information to discern the diverse prospects that majoritarian vs. consensus regime types entail for their lives; how different electoral rules translate their votes into parliamentary seats; and what are the political consequences of unicameral vs. bicameral legislatures, to name but a few examples. Since this is not commonly the case, it is therefore quite unrealistic to assume that representative institutions play a unique and strong role in shaping citizens’ democratic orientations.

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 gazing at their performance in different core areas. These are connected to their normative expectations (“beliefs about what is fundamentally right and proper in politics”, Easton 1975, 446), which they use when evaluate the allocation of societal benefits and outcomes delivered by their democratic institutions.

Based on this, in this paper I have proposed a theoretical framework that links four core democratic values to a set of institutions that 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, the existence of free and fair elections, the electoral rules, and the welfare state. In line with this, the core objective of the paper has been to shed new light into 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 by the literature.

Broadly speaking, the empirical results have confirmed the theoretical expectations exposed above: 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 the electoral institutions (the existence of free and fair elections and the electoral rules) do not make any difference in public specific support to democracy, as they do not pass the conventional threshold of statistical significance in any of the multivariate models –either even when the executive-parties index is interacted with the rule of law indicator. If, as we saw in the bivariate analyses, there is a weak but statistically significant relationship between each of the two electoral measures and democratic satisfaction,¹² but this relationship disappears when we introduce additional variables, this indicates that in the publics' minds the quality and structure of elections do 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 extension of the political power across diverse social groups –which are an expression of the democratic principles of freedom and political equality, respectively. The influence of these two types of institutions is consistent and independent of economic factors and electoral institutions. Thus, it can be argued that in forming their democratic attitudes and opinions, citizens mainly care about the outputs the democratic system produces. This does not equal to say that input institutions are not important to them. However, the performance of institutions other than the representative ones generates a broader range of societal outputs and experiences that affect citizens' daily lives more directly and that are more connected to their normative expectations about democracy and politics. Consistently with this, we also saw that the extension of the welfare state's universalism only matters for citizens when it produces the desired outcomes, in the sense of cutting levels of social inequality among citizens.

A second major finding was that institutions also 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 specific

¹² $r=0.57^{**}$ for clean elections; $r=0.45^*$ for the executive-parties index.

support to democracy. In a similar vein, being a social democrat and living in a universal welfare state also engenders more satisfaction with democracy, although here the relationship was less strong than in the previous interaction.

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 system –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 well-functioning rule of law, and a universal welfare state that fulfil its promises should not be forgotten. In summary, 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.

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