The Meaning of Democracy and its Determinants*

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Abstract

What does "democracy" mean to people? Do different individuals hold different views about what democracy is or should be? What explains those differences? This article looks into these questions and gives an account of the sources and explanations of different understandings of democracy among Europeans. We advance a basic and simple argument. Individuals that came to acquire a privileged position in society have an interest in defending the political and institutional status quo. Since "democracy" can be understood in different ways, with some understandings closer and some further from that status quo, social status and social hierarchies help determining what version of democracy people come to endorse. In other words, people who enjoy privileged positions in society are more likely than individuals with lower social status to espouse a conception of "democracy" consistent with the political status quo. We rely on the 6th round of ESS surveys from 29 European countries using multilevel models in order to test the hypotheses that result from the main theoretical argument.

Keywords: meaning of democracy, liberal democracy, direct democracy, social justice

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Introduction

What does "democracy" mean for people? Do different individuals hold different views about what democracy is or should be? What explains those differences? Many studies have been conducted about the extent to which people across the world really aspire to live in a democracy, about what explains such aspirations, and even about the extent to which they are satisfied with the way democracy works in their countries. However, most of those studies have been forced to assume that the very concept of "democracy" about which people are questioned has a univocal meaning, and that whatever explanations of support or satisfaction we happen to arrive at should be unaffected by variations in that meaning.

There is mounting evidence that these assumptions may be wrong. When asked in surveys about whether they support "democracy" as the best form of governance, most people in the world seem to answer positively (Dalton & Shin, 2006; Inglehart, 2003; Rose, Mishler, & Haerpfer, 1998). As Inglehart and Norris put it, "[I]n the last decade, democracy has become virtually the only political model with global appeal, no matter what the culture" (2003: 70). However, when those opinions are probed more deeply, we find unexpected ambivalences. In several contexts, and for some people, an overt expression of "support for democracy" is accompanied by scepticism about democracies' compatibility with "prosperity," "order," of "effective governance," and sometimes even by a less than clear rejection of dictatorial forms of government (Dalton & Ong, 2005; Mattes & Bratton, 2007; Magalhães, 2014).

More importantly for our purposes here, not all people in all contexts even seem to be thinking about the same thing when asked about whether they

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support “democracy”. Some of the path-breaking studies that have investigated this topic do suggest that, in general, the prevailing understanding of “democracy” across the world tends to be a *liberal* one, with a particular emphasis on freedoms and basic human rights, sometimes even above and beyond the notion that democracy is about elections, majority rule, or political competition (Dalton, Shin & Jou, 2007; Fuchs & Roller, 2006; Simon, 1998; Camp, 2001). However, it has also been shown that the notion of “democracy” is sometimes associated not so much (or not only) with either liberal or electoral principles, but rather with particular social and economic outcomes (McIntosh, MacIver, Dobson, & Grant, 1993; Shin, 1999). Many seem to conceive “democracy” also in terms of the realization of, say, satisfaction of basic necessities, “jobs for all,” access to education, income equality, or elimination of poverty, rather than in terms of liberal democratic rights and procedures (Crow, 2010; de Regt, 2013; Doherty & Mecellem, n.d.; Welzel, 2011; Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; Dalton, Shin & Jou, 2007; Miller, Hesli, & Reisinger, 1997). Some even argue that while there may be extensive support for democracy as a regime, such support may be superficial, as many people do not have a good or at least minimally structured understanding of democracy and its processes, and are unable to articulate *any* conception of what it might mean (Miller, Hesli, & Reisinger, 1997; Avery, 2013). Others point to the fact that democracy is oftentimes associated with Western standards of living, and thus that “support for democracy” in non-Western countries could in fact be based on the hope that it will bring economic prosperity and other social outcomes (Dalton, Shin, & Jou, 2007).

What we have seen so far in this volume confirms the importance of addressing this topic. In the previous chapters, particularly in chapter four, a detailed examination of citizens' views about a carefully selected set of elements from different theoretical models of democracy reveals three important facts about Europeans. First, there is indeed a generic *liberal democratic* model that they largely endorse, which includes equality before the law, freedom of expression and of the media, horizontal accountability, and protection of minorities (the *liberal* aspect), as well as free and competitive elections, electoral accountability, and free political deliberation (the *electoral* aspect). Second, the extent to which this model is conceptually elaborated and the kind of conditions that are seen as necessary for it to be fulfilled does seem to vary significantly across individuals and countries. Third, large groups of people make additional demands and have even greater expectations about what democracy is supposed to be, above and beyond the fundamental liberal democratic template. Some pose additional demands related to the *input* side of the political process, such as the need for *direct democratic* procedures. Others pose additional demands on the *output* side, namely about the extent to which democracy should also mean *social justice*, as concretized in policies that protect people against poverty and reduce income differentials. In other words, "democracy" is not exactly understood in the same way by all people in all contexts, even in a continent where, in most countries, democracy has been the only game in town for decades and, in some cases, for over a century.

This chapter looks into the sources and explanations of these different understandings of democracy. We advance a basic and simple argument. Individuals that came to acquire a privileged position in society have an interest

in defending the political and institutional status quo. Since “democracy” can be understood in different ways, some understandings closer and some further from that status quo, a conclusion follows: social status and social hierarchies help determining what “version” of democracy people come to endorse. In other words, people who enjoy privileged positions in society are more likely than individuals with lower social status to espouse a conception of “democracy” consistent with the political status quo. In the next section, we present this argument in detail. However, we also discuss other alternative sets of explanations: one based on a revised version of modernization theory, which focuses on the role of material and cognitive resources in shaping societal values and conceptions of democracy; and another focusing on the role of political attitudes such as ideology, trust, and interest in politics in affecting democratic demands. In section three, we analyse the ESS survey data in 29 European countries using multilevel models in order to test the hypotheses that result from our main theoretical argument. Section four concludes.

What explains the meaning of democracy for people?

In cross-national studies focusing on institutional or system support, variables capturing individuals’ socioeconomic status (class, education, and income) frequently emerge as having a positive impact on trust in government, the civil service, or the police (Newton and Norris 2000; Anderson and Tverdova 2003), on the overall satisfaction with political system performance (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson and Tverdova 2003) and even on political regime support (Huang, Chang and Chu 2008; Staton and Reenock 2010). Studies in social psychology, testing the different predictions of system justification, social

dominance, and social identification theories, have obtained similar findings. Brandt (2013), for example, shows that, in the US and elsewhere, a variety of social status indicators, particularly social class, are positively related with trust in government and confidence in political and societal institutions.

For political scientists, with their understandable emphasis on the political (rather than social) correlates of system support (Newton 2007), the fact that people with a higher social status tend to award greater legitimacy and support to features of the existing political and social order has often passed unremarked. However, this finding is of particular importance to our discussion. If high-status individuals hold more positive views about the legitimacy of social and political institutions and arrangements than low-status individuals, this may result from the fact that different groups in society – defined on the basis of their privileged or even dominant status – have different stakes in those arrangements that constitute the status quo in their societies. This is, in fact, a basic expectation of *social dominance* theory, which claims that, "subordinate groups are more likely to reject the status quo than are dominant groups, consistent with the self-interest of both" (Turner and Reynolds, 2003: 201).

How should this play out for the theme that concerns us here? Although "democracy" may be currently seen across the world as "the only political model with global appeal" (Inglehart and Norris, 2003: 70), the specific version of "democracy" individuals happen to favour may be contingent both upon whether they have a privileged position in society and the particular institutions and practices that happen to constitute the established status quo in their context. From this point of view, high-status individuals, defined either in terms of the level of income enjoyed in relation to fellow citizens or of their skills and

knowledge in relation to others in their social environment, are likely to espouse an understanding of democracy that has been compatible with their acquired position of social privilege and does not seem to threaten the basis of their privilege. If that status quo is one where liberal democratic rights are fully established, the prevalent understanding of democracy among high-status individuals should be, precisely, a *liberal democratic* one, i.e., in accordance with the status quo. In contrast, such individuals are likely to resist other conceptions of democracy, particularly if they could potentially be transformative and thus threaten the political and institutional basis under which their positions of privilege were obtained and preserved. We should expect precisely the opposite pattern for low-status individuals. Low-status individuals living under liberal democratic democracies are less likely to see a liberal democratic understanding of "democracy" as sufficient and complete, and are more likely to espouse more demanding meanings, particularly if they serve to challenge the social and political state of affairs.

To what extent is the available evidence compatible with this broad argument? It is interesting to note, for example, that understandings of "democracy" that emphasize liberal democratic procedures over the satisfaction of material needs or other "instrumental outcomes" seem to be more prevalent among individuals with higher levels of educational attainment, more extensive media access, and higher income levels (Bratton, Mattes, & Gyimah-Boadi, 2004; de Regt, 2013; Doherty & Mecellem, n.d.; Miller, Hesli, & Reisinger, 1997; Avery, 2013). However, this is not yet definitive evidence in support of the social dominance hypothesis about the meaning of democracy. The fact that income or education emerge as correlates of liberal democratic views may be a function of a

causal mechanism rather different from the one we are advancing. For example, theories of human development suggest that "demands for political self-expression, representation, and suffrage arose (…) in response to rising socioeconomic resources that made people economically, cognitively, and socially more independent" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 166). By changing the existential conditions of people and endowing them with greater material and cognitive resources, socio-economic development is argued to produce a change in societal values in the direction of greater emphasis on autonomy, freedom of choice, and emancipation. This, in turn, should lead individuals to desire the institutionalization of the political and civil rights and freedoms that allow such values to be materialized, i.e., to espouse a *liberal* notion of democracy that sees "freedoms that empower people as democracy's defining feature" (Welzel, 2011, p. 11). Welzel (2011), for example, shows that societal development, "cognitive empowerment" and greater resources (particularly cognitive) are correlates of emancipative values. These, in turn, are linked to a greater emphasis on free elections, civil rights, political equality, and the ability to exercise political voice through direct democracy, while deemphasizing economic, social, and policy outcomes as elements of what "democracy" ought to be.

There are, however, two crucial differences in the observable implications of this human development argument and our social dominance argument. The first difference is that, in the former, it is the *absolute* level of resources (cognitive and also arguably material) that determine whether individuals enjoy the kind of existential conditions that foster the values and ideas favourable to liberal democracy. For a social dominance approach, however, what should matter is not the absolute level of resources (the amount of formal education or the amount of

income or wealth), but rather the *relative* income and education of individuals, as compared to those in their relevant social environment. Relative social status, not absolute resources, is what should matter.

The second and perhaps most crucial difference is that the human development argument operates under a logic of "developmental universalism," "a common emancipative logic that unifies modernization processes across cultures" (Welzel, 2011: 1) that should play out regardless of context.[1] As Inglehart and Welzel (2005) put it, "on this point, there is no difference between human societies. What differs is the extent to which their circumstances allow people to emphasize the universal aspiration for choice" (2005: 289). Our social dominance approach, however, starts from a fundamentally different assumption: the relationship between social status and understandings of democracy should precisely be contingent upon context, namely, upon what happens to be the social and political status quo.

More specifically, people with higher social status are more likely to conceive "democracy" in liberal democratic terms, but only insofar as liberal democracy is the political status quo in their context. Where liberal democratic rights are absent or less established, support for liberal democracy on the part of high-status individuals should not be taken for granted. Similarly, from this perspective, the establishment of referendums and initiatives as an additional requirement for "democracy" is likely to be seen less favourably by high-status individuals, unless, of course, they live in contexts where such institutions and practices are themselves part of the political and institutional status quo. In such

[1] In Welzel (2011), context is important mostly to the extent that, in countries where aggregate levels of "cognitive empowerment" and "emancipative values" are higher, their individual-level relationships with the relevant dependent variables become even stronger.

instances, direct democracy should be seen as less threatening by high-status individuals, in contrast with contexts where there is little or no direct democracy and, thus, where its introduction would imply a greater potential for disruption of the extant social and political arrangements.

Finally, social dominance theory explicitly proposes that "one's commitment to equality is likely to be related to the social status of one's group, with members of dominant groups being more resistant to the redistribution of resources" (Sidanius et al. 2000: 196). It is easy to see how understandings of democracy that stress "social justice," including protection against poverty and reduction of income of differences, besides (or instead of) liberal democratic rights, may be seen more desirable for low-status individuals then for high-status ones. Such a definition implies deeper economic redistribution of wealth, and the better off are those who are supposed to foot the bill. This fits well with findings from a variety of cross-national studies which, assuming economically self-interested motivations, show a negative relationship between levels of education and (especially) relative income and preferences for redistribution (see Aalberg 2003; Finseraas 2008; Dallinger 2010). Extending this line of argument to the very understanding of democracy held by individuals, high-status individuals should be less likely to include *social justice* – with its redistributive component – as part of that understanding.

Should this relationship also depend on the context? Several studies exploring the interaction between individual level income and system-level income inequality have shown that the negative relationship between one's relative income and preferences for redistribution, although generally pervasive, is actually weaker in contexts of higher inequality. In other words, those who are

richer in their societies are comparatively less inimical to redistribution when such societies are characterized by higher income inequality (Finseraas 2008; Dion and Birchfield 2010), a phenomenon attributed to the greater concern of the rich with social instability risks in high inequality contexts (Alesina and Perotti 1996) or to a perception of societal or personal excessive burden of taxation in low inequality contexts (Finseraas 2008).

However, following the logic of our social dominance argument, what should matter in terms of capturing the status quo is not so much the level of inequality, but rather the level of *redistribution* that is achieved through taxes and transfers. So, if the status quo is one where redistribution is high, we should expect high-status individuals to be more open to a view of democracy that precisely includes social justice and reduction of inequalities. In the same vein, we should expect greater resistance to a conception of democracy as social justice on the part of high-status individuals in those contexts where policies conducive to greater social justice would also imply a greater change in the status quo, i.e., in those contexts where redistribution is lower.

In sum, rather than a "universal" relationship between cognitive and material resources and understandings of democracy, a social dominance approach suggests that a relationship between social status and such understandings should be contingent upon the social and political status quo, in terms of liberal democracy, direct democracy, and social justice. The hypotheses that result from a social dominance argument can therefore be explicitly stated:

H1: There is an interaction between the extent to which countries are established liberal democracies and social status, such that the positive relationship between social status and liberal democratic views should be stronger in more established liberal democracies.

H2: There is an interaction between the extent to which countries are open to direct democracy and social status, such that the negative relationship between social status and direct democratic views should be stronger where direct democracy is less established.

H3: There is an interaction between the extent to which countries redistribute income between rich and poor and views of democracy emphasizing social justice, such that the negative relationship between social status and social justice views should be stronger where redistribution is lower.

The discussion so far has sidestepped the issue of attitudes. It is quite possible that, above and beyond any effects of resources or social status on the way democracy is understood by people, particular political attitudes and predispositions acquired through socialization may make a difference too. Ideology, particularly as captured by one's self-placement in the well-known left-right ideological continuum, should also be related to the way one defines democracy. First, in what the basic liberal democratic template is concerned, there are reasons to believe that those on the right will claim fewer elements to be very important. This is so because it is more likely to find people with authoritarian and conservative social views on the right and than on the left. If this is the case, "rightists" should be less likely to view, for example, the protection of minority rights or the free expression of extreme views as crucial elements of democracy, and thus to place less emphasis on the liberal democratic template. Furthermore, people who place themselves more to the left are obviously more likely to emphasize social justice as an element of democracy than those who place themselves to the right. Finally, in what concerns direct democracy, and in the case of Europe, the end of the 'permissive consensus' with regards to European integration, the politicization of this process (Hooghe and

Marks, 2006), and the fact that the extreme-right parties have been at the forefront of asking for more referenda, suggests the possibility those to the right place particular importance on direct democracy.

Another key expectation is that the politically engaged should have different views of democracy than the politically apathetic and the politically ignorant. Specifically, we expect that citizens who are more interested in politics will espouse a notion of "democracy" that is more demanding, and that requires it to satisfy more elements not only of the basic model (i.e. liberal democracy) but also of democratic participation and responsiveness to public opinion as well.[2] That said, it is *a priori* unclear whether more active citizens will also demand social justice.

Finally, we also need to consider the importance of political trust. Political trust, understood as trust in domestic political institutions, should be related to citizens' views of democracy. It is oftentimes assumed that trust in political institutions indicates a certain basic reliance on the beneficial actions of such institutions (Freitag and Bühlmann, 2009: 1540; Armingeon and Ceka, 2014). If one claims to trust a certain political institution, one is indicating that the institution will do the "right thing" most of the time. The argument proposed here is that more trusting citizens will make fewer demands on democracy, precisely because they trust the institutions of the system to do their job properly and do not see as much need for governments to explain their decisions to the voters or a need for deliberation among citizens. We thus expect that trusting citizens will thus be generally less demanding on democracy from all points of

[2] See Donovan and Karp (2006) and Bowler, Donovan, and Karp (2007) for evidence that higher levels of political engagement are connected with support for direct democracy.

view, especially in what concerns social justice and direct democracy. In particular, we expect that more trusting respondents to also make fewer claims for social justice because they believe that the institutions of the system are working well in addressing societal ills. However, it is also likely that more trusting citizens are found in countries that have managed to successfully address issues of social justice, and therefore such citizens do not view social justice outcomes as missing crucial elements of democracy. One needs to be wary of this endogenous dynamic.

Data and analysis

Data

Our dependent variables of interest are the three scales explained in earlier chapters: *Liberal democracy*, the liberal democracy unified scale; the *Social justice* scale; and the *Direct democracy* scale. All were transformed into 0-1 scales, but given that *Direct democracy* is constructed from a single dummy variable, it contains only two values, 0 and 1. Therefore, we use linear specifications for *Liberal democracy* and *Social justice*, and a logit model for *Direct democracy*.

Our social dominance hypotheses can be tested using variables capturing the socioeconomic status of individuals and how their effect is moderated by macro-level variables capturing aspects of the social and political status quo in each country. To identify the high-status individuals from an income point of view, we use a dummy variable distinguishing respondents who live in households

earning incomes in the highest quintile (*5th Quintile*). Furthermore, we construct a variable capturing *Relative education.* From a social status perspective, what is relevant to us in this respect is not the "amount" of formal education and the kinds of cognitive resources it endows individuals with, as captured by *Years of education* (which we also add as a control variable). Instead, we need to capture education as a marker of *relative* socioeconomic status. Following established literature on the impact of social status on civic engagement (Nie et al., 1996; Campbell, 2006 and 2009), we measure *Relative education* by comparing each individual's number of years of education to the mean of his or her cohort in the country. More specifically, we calculated the mean number of years of education for five cohorts (18-24 years of age; 25 to 39; 40 to 54; 55 to 69; 70 and up) in each nation and coded *Relative Education* as 1 if the *Years of education* variable for the individual was above her cohort's mean and 0 if it was below. In other words, we measure the respondent's education relative to the people of the same cohort within the same country (Campbell, 2006, p.44).[3] Although *Years of education* and *Relative education* are correlated in the pooled sample (.69), such correlation is far from perfect and does not cause any relevant multicollinearity problems.[4] It is easy to see why. For example, five years of full-time education in a country like Portugal are clearly below the country's sample average (8.1) and represents a value in the bottom decile of the overall ESS pooled sample. However, 5 years of education is actually above the mean for the Portuguese who are 70-year and older in the sample, awarding them a higher level of skills and cognitive resources than the average of their cohort.

[3] Respondents younger than 18 are excluded from the analysis.

[4] The largest VIF for any of the main terms include in any of our models is 2.6.

The social dominance approach also implies that the effect of our status variables should be moderated by macro-variables capturing the extent to which liberal democratic rights and freedoms, direct democracy, and social justice constitute the status quo in each country. Among our cases, there is a large concentration of countries that score very highly, by all standards, in terms of protection of political rights and civil liberties. Of 29 countries, only two – Russia and Kosovo – scored below 50 in the 0 to 100 *Freedom House* aggregate score by 2012, while 25 countries scored above 80.[5] Variance in the well-known Polity IV *polity* variable, measuring the general openness of political institutions, is even smaller, with just two countries scoring below 8 (in a scale of -10 to 10).[6]

However, our countries vary significantly in the extent to which liberal democracy can be said to have been fully established for a considerable amount of time. In particular, while some countries under analysis in Southern and Eastern Europe are younger democracies (with some hardly democracies at all), others have been liberal democratic regimes for a very long time, at least since World War II, long enough to have virtually the entire population politically socialized in this regime by the time the surveys were conducted.

One might argue that, under a "habituation" or "institutional learning" argument, a long experience under a liberal democracy might not only increase the prevalence of liberal democratic views among the population but also make social cleavages around liberal democracy mostly irrelevant. The social dominance approach, however, suggests that the more established liberal democracy is, the larger the positive effect of socioeconomic status in fostering a

[5] Available at: http://www.freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world-aggregate-and-subcategory-scores#.U4RjZ16_FhI.

[6] Available at: http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/polity4.htm.

liberal democratic understanding of democracy. In other words, in the more established liberal democratic regimes, the gap between high-status and low-status individuals in terms of conceiving "Democracy" according to that liberal democratic status quo should be larger. As a macro-level moderator variable capturing this, we employ *Age of democracy*, the number of years a country has had a continuous Polity score >=8, topcoded at 70. We have measures of this variable for all 29 countries. We expect the interaction between socioeconomic status variables and *Age of democracy* to be positive, and will explore the marginal effect of the socioeconomic status variables on liberal democratic views across the actual ranges of *Age of democracy.*

Similarly, the extent to which high-and low-status individuals are likely to conceive referendums and initiatives as a central element of democracy should, from this perspective, also be contingent upon the extent to which the practices and institutions of referendums and initiatives are established in their context. To measure the institutionalization of direct democracy, we use the *Direct democracy index* (DDI) (Fiorino and Ricciuti 2007), which ranges from 1 (lowest level of direct democracy) to 7 (maximum level), capturing both the availability of direct democracy instruments and their actual use. We have measures of DDI for all our countries except Kosovo and Israel. From a social dominance perspective, individuals with high social status should be less likely to support direct democracy than low-status individuals, but particularly so when the practices and institutions of direct democracy are absent (H2). In other words, the interaction between socioeconomic status variables and the *Direct democracy index* should also be positive, and here too we will explore the marginal effect of socioeconomic status across the actual ranges of the *Direct democracy index.*

Finally, as argued above, the extent to which high-status individuals will be less likely to espouse understandings of democracy that include social justice, in comparison to lower status individuals, will depend on how much redistribution takes place in a given country. We can test this using a measure of reduction from gross to net income inequality (*Redistribution*), i.e., the difference, in percentage points, between the gross and the net Gini indexes for each country at 2011, based on Solt (2009), using the latest available data from the Standardized World Income Inequality Database.[7] We have measures of these variables for all countries but Kosovo. Again, we expect the interaction between socioeconomic status variables and the *Redistribution* to be positive.

As explained in the previous section, we also consider a number of relevant political attitudes. They include the respondent's placement along the left-right scale (*Left-right self-placement*) and *Interest in politics* (the latter based on a 4-point scale ranging from "Not at all interested in politics" to "Very interested"). Furthermore, we include *Political trust*, the mean score of the survey items asking respondents to indicate on a scale from 0-10 (10 being the highest level of trust) the extent to which they trust the following domestic institutions: the national parliament, the legal system, the police, politicians and political parties.

Finally, we include a number of controls. At the country-level, these include a country's level of *Socioeconomic development*, for which we use the log of GDP per capita in $ by inhabitant in 2012, as well as *Change in unemployment 08-12*, the percentage point difference in the unemployment rate between 2008 and 2012 for each country, allowing us to take into account the

[7] Available at: http://myweb.uiowa.edu/fsolt/swiid/swiid.html.

potential consequences of the Great Recession, and how it may have affected differently the European nations in terms of people's understandings of democracy.[8] At the individual level, we include *Woman*, *Age* and *Age squared*, *Unemployed*, and *Religiosity,* as well as *Interpersonal trust*, the mean score of responses to questions (in a 0 to 10 scale) about whether most people can be trusted and whether they try to be fair and helpful.

Analysis

We use all the surveys from ESS Wave 6, or 29 national surveys, but due to data missing for key macro-level variables, only the model for *Liberal Democracy* analyzes all the 29 surveys while the *Direct Democracy* and *Social Justice* models use 27 and 28 national surveys respectively. We employ multilevel modeling with two-levels (individual and national) to test the empirical implications of our theories. We used likelihood-ratio tests to determine whether models with random slopes for *Relative education* and *5th income quintile* provide a better fit (i.e. have the lowest log likelihood), and the results strongly suggest that random slopes models are indeed more appropriate. So, all the results reported below are from models that use varying intercepts and varying slopes for the key variables of interest.

As suggested by Gelman (2008), we have standardized all the non-dichotomous independent variables by dividing them by two standard deviations, thus rendering all coefficients roughly comparable with each other, including those for untransformed binary predictors. We present the results with

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[8] Source for both variables: World Bank Development Indicators. Available at: http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators

standardized variables graphically plotting the coefficients and the 95% Confidence Intervals. The tables with the full results can be found in the appendix. However, for easier graphical presentation of the interaction effects, we use the original scales.

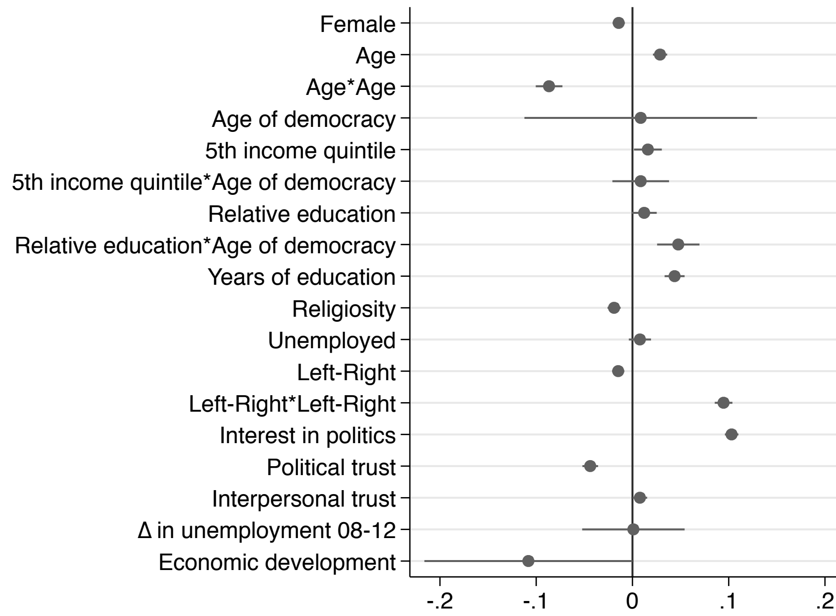

Figure 1: Regression coefficients and corresponding 95% CI for Liberal Democracy

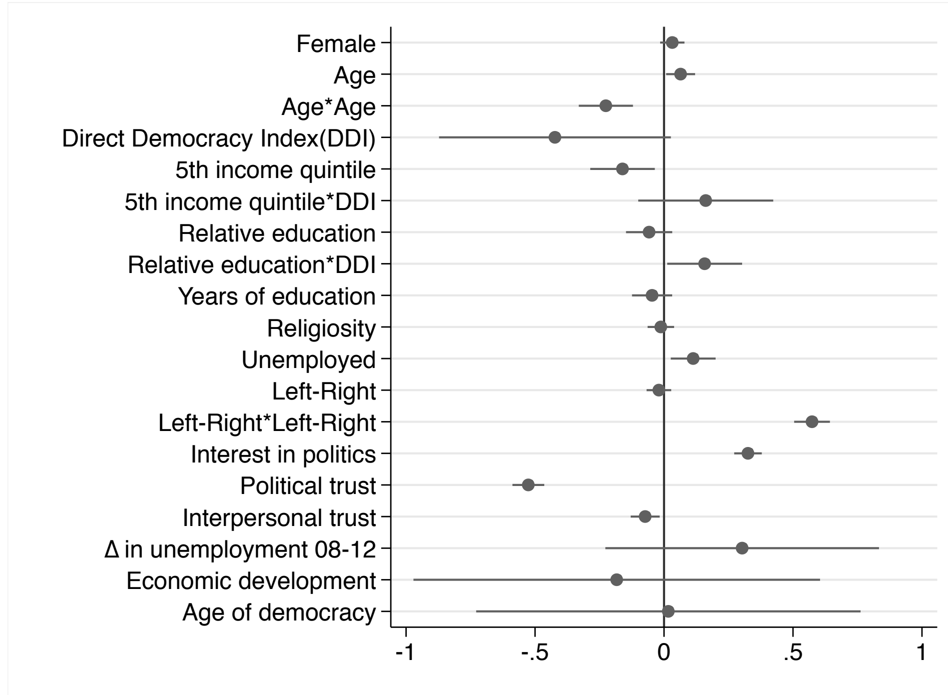

Figure 2: Regression coefficients and corresponding 95% CI for Direct Democracy

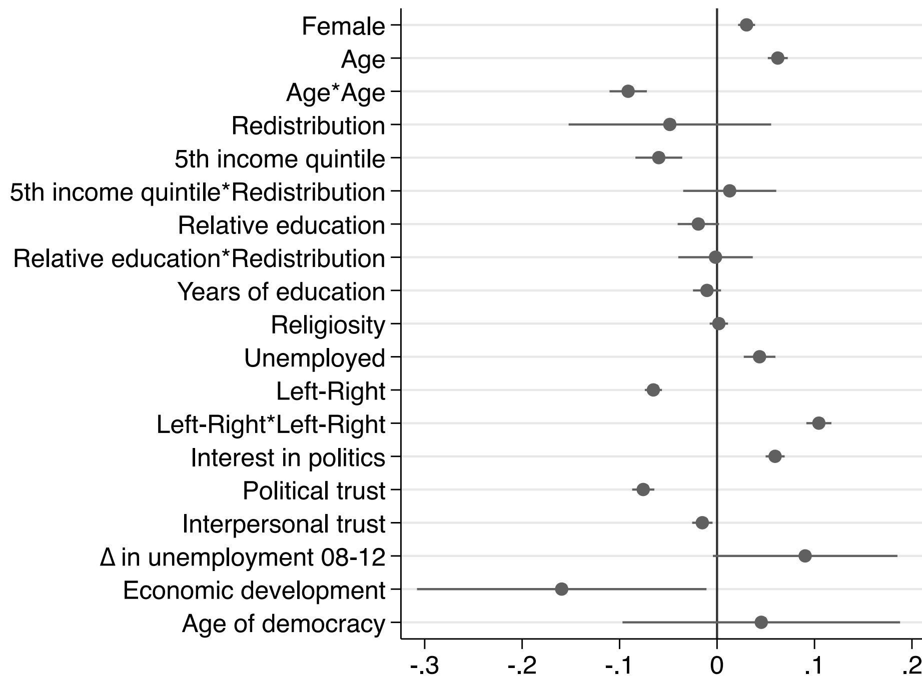

Figure 3: Regression coefficients and corresponding 95% CI for Social Justice

Figures 1, 2 and 3 present the plotted coefficients and their relative size for all three dependent variables. We start by discussing the results for our control variables. Men tend to place greater emphasis on the liberal democratic dimension than women, while the opposite seems to be the case for the social justice dimension. The effect of religiosity is to depress emphasis on all dimensions of democracy, although this effect is only statistically significant for *Liberal Democracy*. Interpersonal trust drives down the propensity to see direct democratic and social components as crucially important elements of democracy, but these effects are comparatively small. Older people are more likely to have more demanding understandings of democracy than younger people, but there is evidence for a curvilinear effect (inverted U-shape) of *Age* on the importance given to all three understandings of democracy, as shown by the negative sign of the squared age term. This suggests that the youngest and the oldest individuals are less likely to consider all three aspects of democracy as extremely important than those in the middle of this age continuum.

Unemployed individuals are more likely to stress direct democratic and, particularly, social justice elements than employed respondents, while individuals in countries that have experienced greater increases in unemployment between 2008 and 2012 tend to award greater importance to social justice, a result that deserves to be emphasized, considering the number of level-2 units (28) and how close it is to statistical significance at $p<.05$ with a two-tailed test. The length of experience with democratic rule (*Age of democracy)* is unrelated to the importance that people give to *Direct Democracy* and *Social Justice*. Similarly, *Age of democracy* is unrelated to the importance those individuals that are not

at the top of the socio-economic ladder in their societies (i.e. when *Relative education* and *5th income quintile* are equal to 0) give to *Liberal Democracy.*

Of particular interest are the results of the controls related to a "human development" approach to the meaning of democracy. Although hypotheses pertaining to that approach cannot be fully tested here, given the absence of measures of the proposed mediating variable – "emancipative values" (Welzel 2011) – it is interesting to note that *Years of education* is positively related with *Liberal Democracy*, suggesting that cognitive resources do increase one's propensity to give greater importance to basic liberal democratic principles such as civil rights, political freedoms, and elections. However, the coefficients for *Direct Democracy* and *Social Justice* are not significantly different from zero. Furthermore, while individuals living in more developed countries tend to award less importance to social justice, as expected from a "human development" point of view, the coefficient is also negative and statistically significant for *Liberal Democracy.* Taken together, these results do not give systematic support for the human development approach to the meaning of democracy.

Political attitudes

Turning to political attitudes and predispositions, several interesting findings emerge from Figures 1-3. First, as expected, people who are more interested in politics also tend to give greater importance to *all* dimensions of democracy. Second, also as expected, greater levels of political trust seem to make citizens less "demanding" of democracy in all respects. The substantive

effect is comparatively large and is actually the most powerful predictor of the importance, or lack thereof, given to direct democracy.

The findings concerning ideology are interesting too. First, we should note that all relationships are curvilinear (U-shaped curve) as can be seen from the significant Left-Right*Left-Right coefficients, meaning that people who self-identify at the extremes of the scale are more likely to emphasize all three dimensions of democracy than those in the middle of the scale. However, as one would expect, Figure 4c shows that those who place themselves further to the left are more likely to see social justice as extremely important for democracy than those further to the right.

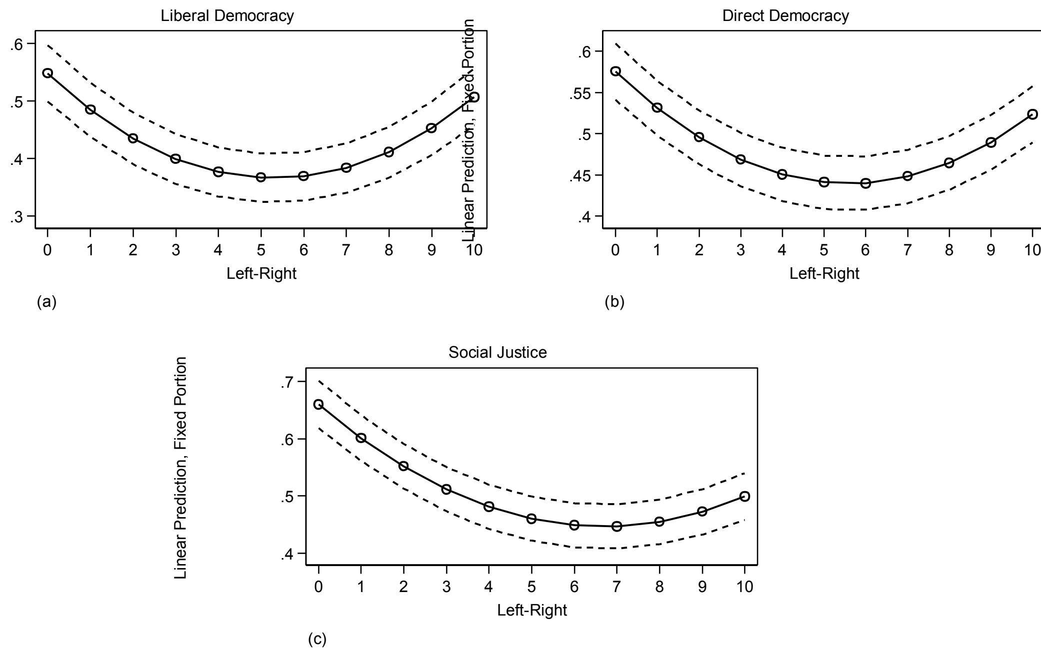

Figure 4: The relationship between left-right ideology and the importance awarded to Liberal Democracy (a), Direct Democracy (b), and Social Justice (c)

Cross-level interactions

In the theory section, we suggested that a key implication of our "social dominance" approach to the study of the meaning of democracy is that the strength of the relationship between markers of socioeconomic status and views of democracy should be contingent upon national contexts. This is particularly true for those contextual aspects that help define what constitutes a "political status quo" in a given country. The more a particular conceptualization of democracy is aligned with the status quo, the more we should expect the most privileged members of a society to deem it important in comparison with those with a lower socioeconomic status. Conversely, the more such conceptualization challenges the status quo, the less support we expect to find from people with higher status in comparison to those with lower status.

What does this mean for the "liberal democratic" understanding of democracy? It is conceivable that a long experience under a liberal democracy might increase the prevalence of liberal democratic views among the population, or that, at least, such longer experience would render social cleavages around liberal democracy mostly irrelevant. Regarding the former argument, we already saw earlier that it does not hold empirically: *Age of democracy* is unrelated with the importance awarded to liberal democratic meanings of democracy. What about the latter argument? Is support for a liberal democratic understanding more "diffuse", in the sense of being less anchored in social divisions, in the older democracies? Or is the opposite true, as we suggest in H1? Are individuals divided along socioeconomic status lines *more* divided about their "liberal democracy" views in more established regimes, with privileged individuals making a stronger defense of that political status quo than the underprivileged?

We tested that hypothesis and, given the two cross-level interactions, interpret the results graphically (see Appendix for the full table). Figure 5 shows the marginal effects of our income and relative education variables under different values of our age of democracy variable.

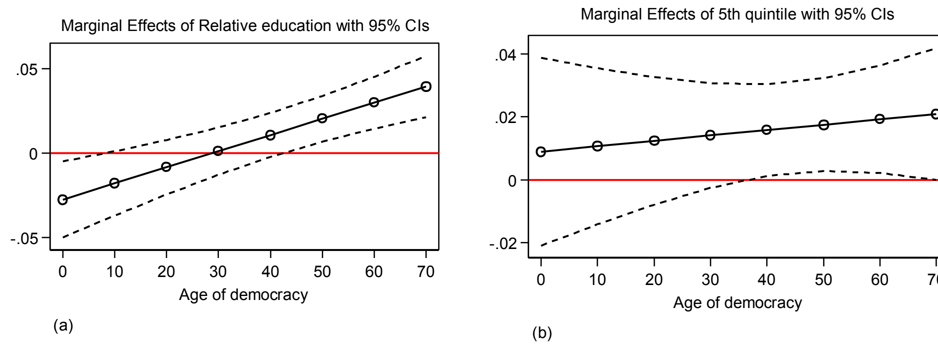

Figure 5: Marginal effects on Liberal Democracy of Relative Education (a) and of belonging to the top 5th household income quintile (b) contingent on Age of Democracy

The two graphs in Figure 5 show the same basic pattern: the positive effects of higher social status markers on holding stronger liberal democratic views are not equally large across all countries in the sample. In fact, they are only positive and statistically significant in the older democratic regimes, where democracy has been the only game in town for at least 40 years (such as in France, Italy, Norway, Switzerland, and others). In countries where liberal democracy has never fully taken hold or where has been established more recently, no statistically significant differences exist between those in the top income quintile and the rest in what regards to the importance they give to *Liberal democracy.* Even more striking is the fact that individuals with relative

higher levels of education living in the countries where democracy is either very young or deeply flawed (Albania, Kosovo, Russia and Ukraine) award a *lower* importance to the liberal democratic components of "democracy" than the less educated citizens in their social environment.

This is a clear illustration of how the effects of social status on the understanding of democracy, in this case as *Liberal Democracy,* are contingent upon context. Where liberal democracy has been the political status quo for a longer period of time, privileged social groups tend to be more protective, in comparison to others, of an understanding that is aligned with that status quo. For the rest of those countries of Europe where liberal democracy is less established (i.e. all the Central Eastern European countries plus Cyprus, Spain, and Portugal) there is no relationship between belonging to a higher status group and the importance one gives to *Liberal Democracy.* And in the countries with a shorter experience with democratic rule, those with more education than the average of their cohorts are actually less supportive of liberal democratic principles than their lower status peers.

What about direct democracy? We hypothesized earlier on that people with higher social status tend to be less inclined than others to see direct democracy as essential, because of its unpredictable and disruptive potential that could threaten the status quo. However, that should only be the case where mechanisms of direct democracy are indeed *not* part of that status quo. In contrast, in countries where elements of direct democracy are commonplace, high-status individuals might see them as less threatening.

As discussed earlier, we ran a multilevel logit random intercept model for "direct democracy" as a dependent variable, adding random slopes for the 5th

income quintile and for relative education, and interacting these two variables with a measure of constitutional provisions for direct democracy (*DDI*). The full results are presented in the appendix, but Figure 6 tells a clear story: the negative effects of socioeconomic status markers on *Direct Democracy* are limited to those countries where direct democracy is absent or weakly established in the constitutional order.

Where practices of direct democracy are more strongly established, such as in Switzerland, Denmark, Ireland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Slovenia and Slovakia (i.e. *DDI*>=6), the relationship between belonging to the higher income quintile and the importance awarded to direct democracy is not significantly different from zero (Figure 6b). In the rest of the countries for which we have data and where institutions of direct democracy are less established (19 countries), top earners are less likely than others to espouse a view of democracy that includes referendums and routinized public participation in decision-making. A very similar story emerges if we look at *Relative education* as a marker of status. In countries with lower institutionalization of direct democratic practices, those with higher relative education are less likely to see *Direct Democracy* as important than those with relative lower levels of education. Where institutions of direct democracy are more commonplace (*DDI*>=5), there is no difference between the more educated and the less educated when it comes the importance they give to *Direct Democracy* (Figure 6a).

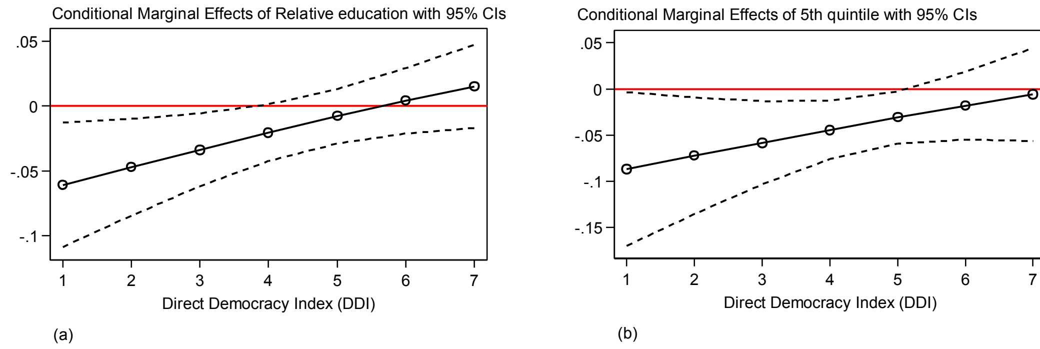

Figure 6: Marginal effects on Direct Democracy of Relative Education (a) and of belonging to the top 5th household income quintile (b) contingent on Direct Democracy Index

Finally, we expect individuals with higher social status to be less likely to consider social justice as an essential part of democracy. However, our general approach suggests the possibility that these effects may also vary depending on context. Once more, we ran a multilevel random intercept model for "social justice" as a dependent variable, with random slopes for our markers of social status, and interacting them with a measure of aggregate income redistribution. Our hypothesis is that, in those countries where the established taxation and welfare regimes are characterized by a stronger redistributive effort through taxes and transfers, individuals with higher social status should see the social justice component of democracy as less threatening, thus diminishing the differences of views in this respect in comparison with lower status individuals. In turn, in countries where the state's redistribution effort is weaker, we expect higher status individuals to display greater resistance to a definition of democracy that focuses on "social justice". Figure 7 shows how our social status markers affect support for a social justice definition of democracy under different redistribution effort.

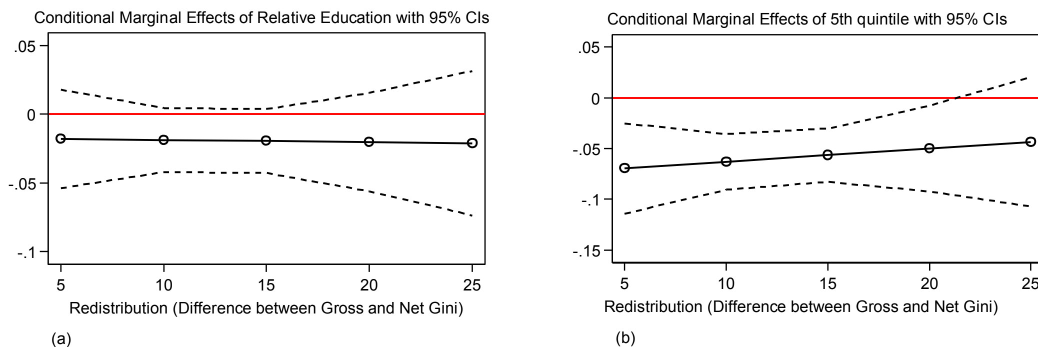

Figure 7: Marginal effects on Social Justice of Relative Education (a) and to belonging to the 5th household income quintile (b) contingent on Redistribution

The results partially support our hypothesis that the current effort of redistribution moderates the relationship between socioeconomic status and adherence to a "social justice" view of democracy, particularly when social status is measured using household income quintiles (Figure 7b). Namely, top earners are less likely to see social justice as important for democracy than the rest in society in all but the most redistributive countries, Sweden and Denmark, where belonging to the top quintile does not affect the importance one gives to social justice (i.e. *Redistribution*>22). It should be noted, however, that the moderating effect of *Redistribution* is relatively small as can be seen by the rather gentle slope in Figure 7b. When status is measured using *Relative education*, there is no statistically significant difference between the more educated and the less educated in how important social justice outcomes are for the meaning of democracy, and *Redistribution* seems to have no moderating effect as can be seen by the flat slope in Figure 7a.

Conclusion

Most Europeans, and arguably most people in the world, seem to be able to endorse "Democracy" while, at the same time, emphasizing in their definition of "Democracy" different institutional arrangements and practices. To explain these differences, modernization and human development theories have focused on what it is argued to be a universal process. As their existential conditions improve, people in all sorts of contexts become more likely to acquire and be socialized into the values of freedom, human empowerment, and autonomy, which in turn foster the demand for liberal democracy. In other words, this approach contains the promise that, assuming the transition from industrial to post-industrial societies progresses and development remains "the dominant trend" (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 21), the cultural change towards self-expression and emancipation – and, thus, towards a liberal democratic understanding of democracy – will itself become dominant (Inglehart and Welzel 2005: 21).

Our findings suggest a different take on this phenomenon, one in which different institutional arrangements and practices have different distributional consequences, creating winners and losers, and thus being the object of *conflict.* As Tyler (2006: 391) puts it, "[g]roups within society are in conflict over valued resources and favored identities (…), with the result that institutional arrangements and legitimizing ideologies favoring one group are often not beneficial to those within other groups." This is certainly true of the choice between democracy and autocracy, and how it evokes different preferences and strategies on the part of political elites and masses (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). However, "democracies" are not all alike either. There are many reasons to

believe that similar conflicts exist around choices between different ways to organize a democratic society and polity, i.e., ways to allocate resources and power.

In this chapter, rather than the increasing prevalence of one particular conception of democracy among the more developed countries and among the individuals with greater cognitive resources, we show something rather different: understandings of democracy are socially structured in a way that suggests the permanence of conflicting views about what democracy ought to mean. Individuals with high and low socioeconomic status do not conceive democracy in the same way: the former are more likely to espouse meanings that conform to status quo; the latter are more likely to espouse meanings that challenge it. Thus, in young democracies and in countries where practices of direct democracy have not taken root, individuals with higher social status do not seem to be the champions of "freedom" or "choice". Instead, they are less supportive of both liberal democracy and direct democracy than lower status individuals. At the same time, in established liberal democracies, low-status individuals are less sanguine about the centrality of liberal democratic rights and freedoms than higher status individuals. Finally, in most countries, an understanding of democracy that is intrinsically concerned with social justice is clearly more espoused by lower status individuals than higher status ones. The telling exceptions where this does not happen are, precisely, those countries where the status quo is one where a substantial redistribution of income between rich and poor takes place. Views about what democracy should be, even if just in the snapshot provided by these cross-sectional data, do not seem to converge towards

any sort of “consensus.” Instead, they bear the hallmarks of perennial social and political conflict.

A further implication of these results is that the increased “dominance” of a strictly liberal democratic understanding of democracy does not seem to be taking place either. Indeed, it is true that most citizens in Europe value, albeit in different degrees, freedoms, rights, elections, and other democratic procedures. However, “democratic minimalists”, those who clearly place a greater emphasis on democratic rights and procedures over “social justice” and “direct democracy”, can be found only in a relatively narrow and well localized segment of the European mass publics. Namely, those are the individuals located at the highest socio-economic status levels, particularly in the more developed/longer established liberal democracies and, in what concerns direct democracy, where extant institutions offer little opportunities for referendums and initiatives. For the rest of the Europeans, especially so for individuals with lower status and for those living in younger and more unequal democracies, democracy tends to be understood in a more “maximalist” way, which includes “social justice” and “direct democracy” components.

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Appendix

Table A1. Variables employed

Country-level	Description	Min-Max	Mean	Stdev
Economic development	Log of GDP per capita, in $ by inhabitant, 2012, World Bank.	8.1 (Kosovo) to 11.5 (Norway)	10.07	0.88
Age of democracy	Number of years that country had continuous Polity score >=8, topcoded at 70.	0 (Russia, Ukraine) to 70 (Ireland, Sweden)	41.41	25.20
Change in unemployment	Change in p.p. from 2008 to 2012 in unemployment rate (World Bank)	-16.6 (Kosovo) to 13.7 (Spain)	2.82	4.98
Redistribution	Difference in p.p. between net Gini index (post-taxes and transfers) and gross Gini index (pre taxes and transfers) for 2011 (Solt, Standardized World Income Database).	4.54 (Ukraine) to 23.22 (Sweden)	12.49	4.89
Direct democracy index	Based on Fiorino and Ricciuti (2007)	1 (Ukraine) to 7 (Switzerland)	4.73	1.37

Individual-level	Description	Min-Max	Mean	Stdev	N
Gender	1 (Male)/2(Female). Dummy variable.	0/1	.54	.50	52,953
Age	Age of respondent in years, equal to agea	18-103	49.35	17.95	52,820
Fifth quintile	Dummies for highest income quintile, based on hinctnta	0/1	.16	.36	43,041
Years of education	Years of full-time education completed, from eduyrs	0-51	12.62	4.05	52,525
Relative education	More years of education than subsample mean of cohort in country. Cohorts: 25-39; 40-54; 55-69; 70up. Dummy var.	0/1	.44	.50	52,953
Unemployed	Unemployed, based on uempla and uempli. Dummy var	0/1	.08	.29	52,953
Religiosity	Religiosity ("How religious are you?"), scale 0-10, equal to rlgdgr	0-10	4.78	3.08	52,408
Interest in politics	Interest in politics, from 1 (Not at all) to Very (4), based on polintr	1-4	2.35	.91	52,699
Interpersonal trust	Summative scale for ppltrst pplfair pplhlp (Cronbach's α=0.781)	0-10	5.09	2.01	54607
Left-right self-placement	Left-right self-placement, from 0 (Left) to 10 (Right), equal to lrscale	0-10	2.34	45,235	45,235
Political trust	Summative scale for trstprl trstlgl trstplt trstplc trstplt (Cronbach's α=0.873)	0-10	4.40	2.297	54,307
Liberal democracy	Liberal democracy scale	0-1	.43	.33	52,953
Social justice	Social justice scale	0-1	.47	.45	52,953
Direct democracy	Direct democracy scale. Dummy variable.	0/1	.41	.49	50.929

Table A2. Multilevel random intercept and random slopes models.

Independent variables	Liberal Democracy	Direct Democracy	Social Justice
Female	-0.014***	0.032	0.030***
	(0.003)	(0.024)	(0.004)
Age	0.029***	0.064*	0.062***
	(0.004)	(0.029)	(0.005)
Age*Age	-0.087***	-0.225***	-0.091***
	(0.007)	(0.054)	(0.010)
Direct Democracy Index (DDI)		-0.423	
		(0.229)	
5th income quintile	0.016*	-0.161*	-0.060***
	(0.007)	(0.064)	(0.012)
5th income quintile*DDI		0.162	
		(0.133)	
Relative education	0.012	-0.058	-0.019
	(0.007)	(0.046)	(0.011)
Relative education*DDI		0.157*	
		(0.074)	
Years of education	0.044***	-0.046	-0.010
	(0.005)	(0.040)	(0.007)
Religiosity	-0.019***	-0.012	0.002
	(0.003)	(0.026)	(0.005)
Unemployed	0.008	0.113*	0.044***
	(0.006)	(0.044)	(0.008)
Left-Right	-0.015***	-0.020	-0.065***
	(0.003)	(0.024)	(0.004)
Left-Right*Left-Right	0.095***	0.574***	0.104***
	(0.005)	(0.035)	(0.007)
Interest in politics	0.103***	0.326***	0.060***
	(0.004)	(0.027)	(0.005)
Political trust	-0.044***	-0.526***	-0.076***
	(0.004)	(0.031)	(0.006)
Interpersonal trust	0.008*	-0.073*	-0.015**
	(0.004)	(0.029)	(0.005)
Δ in unemployment 08-12	0.001	0.303	0.090
	(0.027)	(0.271)	(0.048)
Economic development	-0.108*	-0.183	-0.159*
	(0.055)	(0.402)	(0.076)
Age of democracy	0.009	0.017	0.045
	(0.062)	(0.380)	(0.073)
5th income quintile*Age of democracy	0.009		
	(0.015)		

Relative education*Age of democracy	0.048***		
	(0.011)		
Redistribution			-0.048
			(0.053)
5th income quintile*Redistribution			0.013
			(0.024)
Relative education*Redistribution			-0.002
			(0.019)
Constant	0.434***	-0.504***	0.463***
	(0.018)	(0.095)	(0.023)
Observations	37,043	34,319	36,353
Number of groups	29	27	28
Random effects parameters			
sd(5th income quintile)	0.029	0.259	0.053
sd(Relative education)	0.024	0.140	0.045
sd(Constant)	0.096	0.458	0.118

Standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.001, ** p<0.01, * p<0.05