MINDING THE GAP BETWEEN EXPECTATIONS AND PERCEPTIONS OF DEMOCRACY

REFLETINDO SOBRE A DISTÂNCIA ENTRE EXPECTATIVAS E PERCEPÇÕES DA DEMOCRACIA

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Abstract: Studies of perceptions of democratic performance and satisfaction with democracy may over estimate effects of electoral rules on attitudes if country-level corruption and income inequality are not accounted for. We use mixed-level models to estimate evaluations of democracy using data from Wave 6 of the European Social Survey. We use new measures of democratic expectations about elections and party systems along with the 'satisfaction with democracy' item to test for effects of electoral rules on perceptions of democracy. We replicate previous studies and find multipartyism and preferential ballot structure correspond with positive evaluations of elections and parties, and greater satisfaction with how democracy is functioning in a person's country. However, these relationships dissipate when we account for corruption and income inequality. This suggests we should exercise caution when linking electoral systems and electoral reforms to democratic legitimacy and perceptions of democratic performance.

Keywords: Democracy; Elections; Corruption; European Union

Resumo: Este trabalho utilizou modelos de nível misto para estimar as avaliações da democracia a partir de dados do documento Wave 6 do European Social Survey. Estudos sobre percepção do desempenho democrático e de satisfação com a democracia podem superestimar os efeitos das regras eleitorais sobre atitudes se o nível de corrupção no país e a desigualdade de renda não forem considerados. Foram utilizadas novas medidas de expectativas democráticas acerca de eleições e sistemas partidários, juntamente com o item "satisfação com a democracia", para testar os efeitos de regras eleitorais sobre a percepção da democracia. Replicamos estudos

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anteriores e encontramos que o multipartidarismo e a maneira como os cidadãos votam (ballot structure) correspondem com as avaliações positivas das eleições e dos partidos e com a maior satisfação do funcionamento da democracia nos países dos pesquisados. No entanto, essas relações se dissipam quando se considera a corrupção e a desigualdade de renda. Tal fato sugere que se deve ter cuidado ao relacionar sistemas eleitorais e reformas eleitorais à legitimidade democrática e às percepções de desempenho democrático.

Palavras-chaves: Democracia; Eleições; Corrupção; União Europeia

Introduction

It has become commonplace in political science to claim that institutions matter (e.g. Evans et al 1985, Weaver and Rockman 1993). In the comparative study of democracy, scholars have given particular attention to the role electoral institutions play in structuring diffuse support for a democratic regime (Sartori 1997; Lijphart 1994; 1999). Research in this area is motivate by the long held assumption that dissatisfaction with the functioning of democratic processes can pose a threat to the stability and legitimacy of democratic political systems (Lipset 1959; Easton 1965; Powell 1982). It seems fitting then, that a literature of 'electoral engineering' is on hand for reference when new democracies emerge and existing ones consider electoral reform (Lijphart and Grofman 1984; Horowitz 1991; Reilly 2001; Reynolds 2002; Norris 2004). Much could be gained if things are done well when new electoral institutions are designed. Studies suggest that proportional electoral systems (e.g. Anderson and Guillory 1997; Lipjhart 1999; Klingemann 1999; Powell 2000; Karp and Banducci 2008; but see Aarts and Thomassen 2008) and candidate-centered voting (Farrell and McAllister 2006) may be associated with people viewing democratic performance more positively and with people having greater engagement with democracy.

We propose there are limits to the extent that electoral arrangements can affect how people evaluate how democracy is performing. This argument is not particularly novel - others have recognized that factors separate from electoral institutions also shape assessments of democratic performance, most notably evaluations of economic performance (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Thomassen and Van der Kolk 2009). This paper demonstrates that the capacity for electoral institutions to affect attitudes about democracy may be more limited than previously appreciated. We show that variation in electoral rules matter less to evaluations of democracy when the effects of broad social

forces are considered.

This paper makes a number of contributions to our understanding of public attitudes about democracy. First, we develop a new tool to measure how people evaluate democratic performance, one that simultaneously captures attitudes of what people expect from democracy and their perceptions of its performance. Second, we develop a theoretical basis for including income inequality and corruption as important social forces that affect how people view democratic performance. Third, we replicate models demonstrating that proportional representation and preferential electoral systems are associated with positive assessments of elections and satisfaction with democracy. Fourth, and perhaps most important, we demonstrate that these extant models are substantially underspecified if they do not account for corruption and inequality in a country. The substantive effects of electoral institutions either become insignificant or are cut in half when these social conditions are accounted for.

Attitudes about democratic performance

Support for a democratic political system is a fairly complex concept to operationalize and measure. Scholars since Easton (1965) have differentiated between specific and diffuse support, with the former reflecting attitudes about the government of the day and its outputs, while the latter reflects broader attachments to the political system, or a democratic regime. Research has determined that these two aspects of political support are likely well correlated, and that there are additional dimensions to attitudes about system support and democratic legitimacy (Harmel and Robertson 1986; Kasse 1988; Weatherford 1992; Norris 1999; Rose and Mishler 2002). Many studies (e.g. Weil 1989; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Kuechler 1991; Clarke and Kornberg 1992; Kilngemann 1999; Fuchs 1999; Karp et al 2003) have employed a widely used measures of how satisfied people are with democracy as indicating system support. Satisfaction with democracy is meant to capture an evaluative, non-affective perspective on how democracy is functioning, rather just reflecting attitudes about "particular individuals or parties holding power" (Lockerbie 1993:282).

Several scholars have noted that there is a lack of clarity as to what the satisfaction item may actually measure. Dalton (1999) notes the item cues respondents to consider evaluations of government performance, and thus may represent specific rather than diffuse support. Norris (1999) contends the satisfaction item is problematic for comparative research because the question means different things to different people

within a nation, and different things across nations. Canache et al (2001) echo Norris' concerns, and contend that the satisfaction with democracy question should be avoided since it taps seven different constructs that may have no theoretical link to political support.

We are in no hurry to completely dispose of the satisfaction with democracy item, but concur that it may be a somewhat nebulous measure of how much people support democracy as a system of government. But our concern here is with how well people think democracy is functioning in their country, and the item is a decent reflection of how people view a democratic regime working in practice (Linde and Ekman 2003). In this study, we measure perceptions of democratic performance with the satisfaction question, along with to alternate measures that expand on it. We also measure evaluations of democratic performance with questions asking about the quality of elections and the party system. We make no claims as to these alternative items capturing system support, but argue that they do reflect evaluations of very basic (and crucial) procedural aspects of democracy. Our measures of attitudes about elections and parties, moreover, are grounded in a manner that facilitates cross national comparisons.

A functioning democracy requires that people are allowed to choose between political rivals (parties) in free and fair elections that are conducted with some measure of integrity (Dahl 1956; Norris 2014). We construct two measures of evaluations of democratic performance that simultaneously capture both an individual's general *expectation* about democracy and their *perception* of how democracy is performing in their country. One is based on evaluations of whether elections are free and fair, the other on evaluations of choices offered by political parties. We use questions from Wave 6 of the European Social Survey (ESS) that asked people what they expected from democracy as a concept, and what they thought democracy actually delivered in their own country. People were asked to rate on a 0-10 scale how important it is for democracy in general that elections are free and fair. After that, they were asked, 'considering things in your country, how much do you think elections are free and fair?' Another item asked them to rate how important it is to democracy in general that political parties offer clear alternatives. After that, they were asked, 'and in your country, how much do you think that parties present clear alternatives?' We subtract a person's score on the second question about performance from their score on the first question about expectations in order to measure how much people think democracy in practice is meeting or failing to meet their expectations of democracy. In effect, this

measures their level of dissatisfaction with two distinct features of electoral democracy (see Appendix for full details).

Much would be lost if we measured evaluations of democratic performance alone, without accounting for what a person expects from democracy. Individuals may have grand or minimal expectations about specific aspects of democratic performance. A person may tell us she thinks elections are working just fine, but this might not be telling us much about her view of democracy if she doesn't think free elections are a very important aspect of democracy. Put differently, two people could rate the performance of one element of democracy exactly the same, but the ratings could have different meanings depending on how much the person valued that element. By measuring the gap between what someone expects from democracy and how they perceive it to be working, we account for this bias. This method also accounts for the fact that someone in Albania or Germany may be socialized with quite different expectations about elections, parties, and democracy than someone in Bulgaria or the United Kingdom. Our 'expectations gap' items capture attitudes about democratic performance that are related to, but are richer and more specific than a question asking about satisfaction with democracy. [1]

Country-level forces and evaluations of democracy.

The literature referenced above documents that evaluations of democracy - views of the legitimacy of elections and satisfaction with democracy - are driven by individual-level and country-level traits. At the individual-level, education, economic evaluations, interest in politics, and being aligned with a party in government have been found to condition how people view democratic performance. Country-level factors have also been identified as conditioning views of democratic performance: having consensual rather than majoritarian political system (proportional representation), preferential (candidate centered) voting, longer experience with democracy, less corruption, and economic health have been shown to be associated with more positive assessments of democracy.

These country-level features are the main focus of this study. We consider these factors by posing a question: What are the systemic forces that affect how

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[1] A 0-10 satisfaction with democracy measure in the ESS is modestly correlated with our expectations-based measure about parties offering clear choices (r =-.29), and with our measure about elections being free and fair (r = -.45). The two expectations items are correlated at .44.

people might respond to questions asking about democracy in their country? Some component of responses may reflect a running tally of assessments of how a political system is functioning. But what affects this tally? By managing conflict more effectively than majoritarian systems and by enhancing representation of political minorities, consensual / proportional systems might cause individuals in those nations to view their elections and party system more positively, and cause them to be more satisfied with democracy (Lijphart 1999; Anderson and Guillory 1997). Similarly, by giving people greater ability and flexibility to express their political preferences, and by encouraging accommodation among political rivals, variants of preferential voting (as opposed to closed-list, categorical voting) may likewise cause people to have more positive assessments of elections, parties, and democracy (Reilly 2001; Farrell and McAllister 2006).

But what else affects a person's running tally of considerations about how democracy is working? The electoral system, as a causal force, likely affects perceptions over time by conditioning the voting experience and by affecting the composition of government and the legislature (and here we see how the concepts of diffuse and specific support can be blurred). But there are larger forces that we also expect people to consider, perhaps more immediately, when they are asked about how democracy is performing. To ask about democracy is to ask, implicitly or explicitly, about procedural fairness. Given the paramount role of considerations of procedural and even distributional fairness in public attitudes about democracy (Tyler 1990; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2001), questions that ask for assessments of democratic performance are likely to trigger considerations of country-level conditions such as corruption and inequality, as these forces are intricately linked to conceptions of fairness.

Corruption is the subversion of fair process, where the rule of law is not applied equally (or at all); and the corrosive effects of corruption are well documented (e.g. Rose-Ackerman 1978; Triessman 2000). Corruption has been shown to erode political trust, and it is associated with pessimism about democratic performance (Anderson and Tverdova 2003). Rose and Mishler (2002) propose that the rule of law is the single most important determinant of support for democratic or non-democratic regimes, yet empirical analysis of the effects of electoral systems on attitudes about democracy rarely, if ever, include corruption as a country-level factor. This means we do not really know the relative extent that electoral

institutions or social conditions contribute to evaluations of how democracy is working.

Some models of attitudes about democracy or democratic performance have included measures of country-level economic factors (Thomassen and van der Kolk 2009), but not, we suggest, the economic measure that directly tap a social force that could trigger evaluations of fairness and democratic process.[2] Income inequality has systemic consequences for democratic processes as it causes a country's system of political representation to be distorted, given that political and economic power are so inter-related. Where inequality is greater, it is less likely that the political interests of the many (as a socioeconomic group) are represented and more likely that the interests of a wealthy elite are given disproportionate influence (Bartles 2008; Hacker and Pierson 2010). Solt (2008) documents that higher levels of income inequality "powerfully depress political interest, the frequency of political discussion, and participation in elections among all but the most affluent citizens." As for the political relevance of inequality, majorities in all of 44 nations surveyed in 2014 by the Pew Center agreed that the gap between the rich and poor was a big problem facing their country. This sentiment was particularly pronounced in European countries hit hardest by the Great Recession, where a substantial proportion of respondents attributed the problem to their government's economic policies.[3]

In short, when compared to the country-level effects that electoral institutions might have, we expect that people are much more likely to consider (or take notice of) social conditions such as corruption and inequality when they are asked about democracy and how it is working in their country.

Individual-level hypotheses

The politically invested (electoral winners) are expected to be less likely to see parties and elections as falling short, and should be (per previous research) be more satisfied with democracy (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson et al 2005). Related to this, people who think their personal (household) finances are doing well

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[2] Anderson and Gillory (1997), Karp et al (2003), Karp and Banducci (2008); Aarts and Thomassen (2008) do not include measures of country-level economic conditions when modeling engagement with and attitudes about democracy. Farrell and McAllister (2006) found no relationship between GDP and perceptions of parties, or perceptions that elections were fair, but found it associated with greater satisfaction with democracy. These studies tend to report rather low (R^2 .00 to .10) model fit.

are also expected to be less likely to be dissatisfied with elections and parties, and should be more satisfied with the process of democracy. The literature offers contradicting expectations for the effects of education and political interest. Education and interest in politics likely covary with cognitive ability and political efficacy, both of which are related to political engagement. This could cause people to be more satisfied with their political system (Weatherford 1991), although some have found no consistent relationship between education and satisfaction with democracy (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Farrell and McAllister 2006). Conversely, cognitively sophisticated respondents may be more critical of traditional democratic political arrangements (Fuchs and Klingemann 1995; Norris 1999; Dalton 2007). Karp et al (2003) found higher education to be inversely related to satisfaction with democracy. Gender, age, and voting status (non voter) are also included as in our models as controls.

Country-level hypotheses

Electoral institutions: People who live in countries with proportional representation will be less likely to see elections and parties as failing to live up to their expectations about democracy, and should be more satisfied with democracy. Likewise, we expect that the more preferential a nation's ballot structure is, the less dissatisfied people will be with elections and parties, and the more satisfied they will be with the way democracy is working.

Corruption: Where there is more public corruption, we expect that citizens are more likely to be more disappointed with elections and parties, and to be less satisfied with democracy how democracy is working.

Inequality: Where there is greater income inequality, perceptions of fair process will be degraded such that people will be less inclined to believe that elections and parties are performing as they should, and they will be less inclined to feel satisfied with how democracy is working.

Primary hypothesis: As major social forces that condition how people perceive the fairness of democratic processes, income inequality and corruption will have larger substantive effects on evaluations of democratic performance than electoral institutions.

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[3] Pew Spring 2014 Global Attitudes survey.

Data and measures

Our country-level forces are operationalized as follows: Proportional representation is measured with Gallagher's updated indicator of the effective number of legislative parties (Gallagher and Mitchel 2008), and with Gallagher's (1991) updated least squares measure of disproportionality between the distribution of votes and seats. The preferential nature of a country's balloting is measured with Farrell and McAllister's (2006) application of a Shugart (2001) and Carey and Shugart (1995) indicator of how much a country's voting system was candidate-centered (versus closed party list).

Country-level corruption is measure with Transparency International's (TI) index, as reported at the time Wave 6 of the ESS was conducted in a country. Wave 6 of the ESS was conducted in 29 European countries between 2012 and 2013.[4] The TI measure is inverted so high scores reflect greater corruption. On this measure, the most corrupt countries amount our cases were Ukraine (75), Russia (72), Bulgaria (59) and Italy (56). The least corrupt were Denmark (9), Finland and Sweden (11), and Norway (14).

For income inequality, we use a measure of *change* in a nation's gini index, using data from the CIA. Change was calculated by subtracting the measure reported most recently prior to when the ESS was conducted in the country from the measure reported previous to that. The time interval between measures are not constant, but they generally span 11 years (2009-1998). The idea here is that increasing inequality would have more of an effect on assessments of democratic performance than absolute inequality. As for change in inequality, the highest values were recorded in Albania (7.8%) and Bulgaria (19.3%), Italy (4.6%), and Portugal (2.9); while the lowest were in Estonia (-5.0%), Switzerland (-4.4%) and Germany (-3.0%). We also conducted robustness tests (discussed below) using different measures of inequality.[5]

We obtained income inequality measures for 28 of the Wave 6 ESS countries (there was no inequality data for Kosovo), so our primary analysis is based on the 28 of the 29 countries where Wave 6 of the ESS was conducted. Given the that ESS

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[4] The ESS surveyed in these 29 nations: Albania, Belgium, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Great Britain, Hungary, Ireland, Iceland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Russia, Sweden, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine, and Kosovo.

[5] The World Bank also reports gini values for countries, but the most recent measure they have for

Wave 6 coverage might be seen as overly broad and extending beyond European democracies (Albania, Russia, and Ukraine were included) all of our analysis is also replicated with cases that are limited to nations that were members of the European Union. The overlap between EU countries and the Wave 6 ESS coverage results in 21 countries that could be used for robustness tests. In addition, we have a static measure of income inequality from the European Union circa 2010 as reported by the EU/ Eurostat. This measure did not have inequality data for Ireland, leaving 20 EU countries for robustness replications when the EU's inequality measure is used. For the EU countries that overlap with the ESS, the highest income inequality recorded by the Eurostat was in Portugal (gini = 34.2), Spain (32.6), Lithuania (32.4) and Great Britain (32.4); the lowest was Sweden (23.8) and Slovenia (23.8), Netherlands (24.8), Switzerland (25.1) and Slovakia (25.4).

Our measures of opinions about elections, parties, and democracy are drawn from the European Social Survey (ESS). Satisfaction with democracy was measured a bit differently than the item used on the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES). Rather than using the 4-point 'very satisfied - very dissatisfied' response scale in the CSES, ESS respondents were asked to rate "how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]" on a 0 - 10 scale, where 0 represented extremely dissatisfied and 10 represented extremely satisfied.

As noted above, we use ESS items to construct complementary measures of attitudes about democratic performance, one that captures expectations and perceptions of elections being free and fair, and another captures expectations and perceptions of the party system in a country. Both of these also range from 0 - 10,[6] with higher scores reflecting that a respondent expected more from democratic performance.

Belgium is 2000, and they report no data for Cyprus or Portugal.

[6] On each item, there were respondents with negative scores. Two percent had values less than -2 on the elections measure, and 3.8% did on the parties item. These values reflect people who reported they thought free elections [party choices] were not at all important for democracy, but that as far as democracy was working in their own country, elections [parties] were doing very well. We consider these responses to reflect indifference about the importance of a particular aspect of democratic process, and recode negative scores at zero.

Table 1 - Evaluations of Democracy in Europe

	Elections don't meet expectations	Parties don't meet expectations	Satisfied with democracy
Switzerland	1.07	1.53	7.39
Denmark*	0.48	2.23	7.34
Norway	0.61	1.81	7.24
Sweden*	0.57	1.62	7.01
Finland*	0.43	1.29	6.85
Netherlands*	0.92	1.46	6.25
Germany*	0.85	2.09	5.98
Israel	1.59	2.63	5.91
Belgium*	1.31	2.05	5.85
Iceland	1.67	2.52	5.72
United Kingdom*	0.87	2.03	5.58
Ireland*	1.07	2.17	5.45
France*	1.36	3.05	5.12
Czech Republic*	1.73	2.45	4.97
Lithuania*	3.95	3.66	4.94
Poland*	2.04	2.44	4.90
Estonia*	2.73	2.74	4.89
Cyprus*	1.33	4.23	4.89
Slovakia*	1.60	2.16	4.76
Hungary*	2.67	3.08	4.49
Italy*	3.13	4.97	4.10
Spain*	2.45	3.21	3.98
Portugal*	1.62	3.40	3.97
Russia	4.31	3.33	3.86
Albania	5.93	3.44	3.84
Slovenia*	2.26	3.18	3.61
Ukraine	5.72	4.61	3.29
Bulgaria*	5.42	4.69	3.05
Overall	**2.18**	**2.74**	**5.20**

Source: ESS Wave 6, 2012-13.
Note: The first two items represent the difference between expectations about democracy and perceptions of its performance, higher values = less satisfaction. See Appendix for item design.
* = EU nations where ESS 6 was conducted

Table 1 displays country-level variation in these measures of how dissatisfied and satisfied people were about democratic performance. On average (across the 28 country sample) the gap between the expectation that democracy requires free and fair elections, and perceptions that they are fair, was 2.18 points (on the 0-10 scale). It might not be surprising that this gap was highest in less established democracies (or non-democracies) such as Albania (5.93), Ukraine (5.72), Bulgaria (5.42), and Russia (4.31), and lowest in Finland

(0.43), Denmark (0.48), Norway (0.61), and the Netherlands (0.92). But there is meaningful variation here: The measure of (unmet) expectations about free and fair elections is relatively high in Spain in (2.45) and Italy (3.13).

Counties are ranked in Table 1 according to their aggregate level of satisfaction with democracy (per Column 3), in order to illustrate that the satisfaction item and our democratic expectations (or dissatisfaction) measures are only modestly correlated.[7] Consider the midpoint of this distribution where nations are ranked according to levels of satisfaction with democracy - the country-level aggregate scores for satisfaction with democracy are fairly similar in the Czech Republic, Lithuania and Poland. At this level of satisfaction with democracy Czechs and Poles would appear to be fairly sanguine about their elections - in aggregate, there is a relatively small gap between the importance for democracy that they ascribe to free and fair elections, and their observations of how fair and free elections are in their country. Yet the gap between expectations and perceptions of elections is twice as much in Lithuania, despite the fact it has a level of satisfaction with democracy quite similar to Poland and the Czech Republic. Portugal, meanwhile, scores low on the elections perceptions gap (similar to France), suggesting that expectations and perceptions of elections there mostly match up. But Portugal ranks very low in terms of satisfaction with democracy.

Somewhat different patterns occur with the gap between democratic expectations about parties and perceptions that parties offer clear alternatives. Danes rate high on satisfaction with democracy, but closer to the median in evaluations of parties. Cyprus and Lithuania are near the median for satisfaction with democracy, but both relatively rate high in terms of dissatisfaction with choices offered by parties. In the sections below, we present models that estimate these three measures of perceptions of democracy

Method

Tests of our hypotheses - particularly our primary hypothesis about the relative impact of country-level factors - require the use of multi-level (mixed) regression models. Standard OLS estimates of individual opinions conducted with large sample surveys collected across a relatively small cluster of higher-level (country) cases would likely bias estimates of standard errors such that the likelihood of Type I errors would increase. Null hypotheses would be more likely to be rejected when they should, in fact, be retained (Steenbergen and Jones 2002). Multi-level models account for this, while also allowing us to identify an intra-class

correlation value that identifies the amount of variance explained by country-level (contextual) factors versus individual-level variables.

Our three measures of attitudes about democratic performance (elections being fair, parties offering choices, and satisfaction with democracy) are estimated with random intercept models at the country-level. In the estimations reported below, we begin with a baseline model random effects model (Model 1) that determines the proportion of variance attributed to country-level factors, and then build upon this. Model 2 builds on this by adding individual-level covariates and two country-level electoral system covariates. This replicates standard OLS models that show proportional representation and preferential voting are associated with greater satisfaction with democracy. Model 3 adds the country-level social conditions we expect to be most consequential for assessments of democracy: corruption and income inequality. Model 4 adds an interaction term to the equation in order to replicate the Anderson and Tverdova (1997) specification, where corrosive effects of corruption on attitudes are expected to be attenuated among people who supported a winning party. Our primary hypotheses about the effects of electoral rules versus social conditions can be tested by comparing results of Model 2 to Model 3 and Model 4.

Results

Table 2 displays multi-level estimates of evaluations of democracy. To be clear, higher values on the dependent variable here reflect that a respondent's democratic expectation about elections being free and fair was not being met. The intra-class correlation (ICC) estimated from Model 1 indicates that over 30% of variation in these attitudes can be explained by contextual, country-level forces, leaving the remaining 70% attributable to individual-level factors and random error. This is rather substantial value for the country-level effects.

Significance tests for the individual-level and country-level covariates included in models 2, 3 and 4 in Table 2 offer insight about which country-level forces are most relevant to public assessments of democracy. Model 2 illustrates that respondents in countries with proportional representation and preferential voting appear significantly less likely to perceive that their country's elections failed to meet their expectations. And, consistent with previous studies on satisfaction with democracy, Model 2 demonstrates that electoral winners, the politically engaged, and people satisfied with their economic circumstances were less likely to see elections as failing to meet their expectations.

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[7] See note 1.

Table 2 - Elections don't meet expectations of democracy. Europe

(0-10 scale, high = larger gap between expectations and perceptions that elections are free and fair)

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Intercept	2.13**	4.01**	-1.09	-.774
	(.30)	(.855)	(.669)	(.657)
Winner		-.420**	-.419**	.041
		(.092)	(.092)	(.091)
Age		-.0001	-.0001	.001
		(.0016)	(.0016)	(.001)
Education		.029*	.029*	-.003
		(.013)	(.013)	(.013)
Political interest		-.042+	-.041+	-.088**
		(.022)	(.022)	(.023)
Non-voter		-.020	-.020	.010
		(.085)	(.085)	(.088)
Female		.035	.036	.022
		(.043)	(.043)	(.040)
Finances doing well		-.270**	-.269**	-.284**
		(.035)	(.035)	(.035)
Effective number of parties		-.400**	.043	.047
		(.132)	(.083)	(.081)
Preferential voting		-.209**	.038	.056
		(.081)	(.057)	(.056)
Corruption			.062**	.063**
			(.010)	(.010)
Income inequality ($\square$)			.085**	.079**
			(.031)	(.030)
Winner * corruption				-.012**
				(.002)
Random effects				
Intercept	2.49**	1.64**	.507**	.473**
	(.76)	(.46)	(.13)	(.12)
Residuals	5.12**	5.01**	5.01**	4.87**
	(.64)	(.63)	(.63)	(.56)
Number of cases	50,703	49,584	49,584	49,584
Wald Chi^2	n/a	148.1**	342.1**	334.5**
Countries	28	28	28	28
ICC	.33			
R^2 (over Model 1)	n/a	.13	.28	.27

Source: European Social Survey 6.
Note: Multi-level models estimated with Stata 13 mixed, with weights. Standard errors in parentheses.
** = p . <. 01 (two-tail); * = p. < .05 (two-tail).

Table 3 - Parties don't meet expectations of democracy. Europe

(0-10 scale, high = larger gap between expectations and perceptions that parties offer alternatives).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Intercept	2.78**	3.43**	1.01*	1.39**
	(.189)	(.443)	(.471)	(.387)
Winner		-.223**	-.223**	-.109
		(.059)	(.058)	(.104)
Age		.0009	.0009	.0014
		(.0013)	(.0013)	(.0013)
Education		.136**	.136**	.108**
		(.015)	(.013)	(.013)
Political interest		.110**	.109**	.076**
		(.028)	(.028)	(.025)
Non-voter		-.074	-.075	-.071
		(.063)	(.063)	(.057)
Female		-.007	-.007	-.032
		(.038)	(.038)	(.033)
Finances doing well		-.172**	-.170**	-.183**
		(.035)	(.035)	(.033)
Effective number of parties		-.315**	-.092+	-.083+
		(.073)	(.054)	(.048)
Preferential voting		-.130**	.002	.010
		(.049)	(.036)	(.031)
Corruption			.028**	.027**
			(.007)	(.006)
Income inequality (□)			.072**	.063*
			(.097)	(.017)
Winner * corruption				-.003
				(.003)
Random effects				
Intercept	.97**	.62**	.32*	.24*
	(.23)	(.15)	(.09)	(.07)
Residuals	6.71**	6.60**	6.60**	6.05**
	(.39)	(.39)	(.39)	(.35)
Number of cases	49,246	48,193	48,193	48,193
Wald Chi^2	n/a	192.0**	280.1**	380.9**
Countries	28	28	28	28
ICC	.13			
R^2 (over Model 1)	n/a	.06	.10	.xx

Source: European Social Survey 6.

Note: Multi-level models estimated with Stata 13 mixed, with weights. Standard errors in parentheses.

** = p . <. 01 (two-tail); * = p. < .05 (two-tail); + p. < .10 (two-tail).

Table 4 - Satisfaction with democracy in Europe (0-10, high = very satisfied).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Intercept	5.20**	3.46**	6.34**	6.42**
	(.237)	(.091)	(.517)	(.510)
Winner		.648**	.649**	.329**
		(.091)	(.091)	(.113)
Age		-.0048**	-.0048**	-.0046**
		(.0016)	(.0016)	(.0016)
Education		.013	.014	.015
		(.016)	(.016)	(.016)
Political interest		.149**	.148**	.148**
		(.033)	(.033)	(.033)
Non-voter		.117	.117	.130
		(.066)	(.066)	(.068)
Female		-.034	-.034	-.013
		(.038)	(.038)	(.019)
Finances doing well		.429**	.427**	.430**
		(.033)	(.033)	(.033)
Effective number of parties		.422**	.174**	.172**
		(.076)	(.066)	(.067)
Preferential voting		.166**	.034	.032
		(.064)	(.047)	(.046)
Corruption			-.038**	-.040**
			(.006)	(.006)
Income inequality (D)			-.027+	-.027+
			(.016)	(.016)
Winner * corruption				.010**
				(.001)
Random effects				
Intercept	1.56**	.595**	.23*	.23*
	(.42)	(.18)	(.08)	(.08)
Residuals	5.08**	4.78**	4.78**	4.77**
	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)	(.23)
Number of cases	51,394	50,221	50,221	50,221
Wald Chi^2	n/a	397.2**	812.1**	949.5**
Countries	28	28	28	28
ICC	.23			
R^2 (over Model 1)		.19	.24	.24

Source: European Social Survey 6.
Note: Multi-level models estimated with Stata 13 mixed, with weights. Standard errors in parentheses.
** = p . <. 01 (two-tail); * = p. < .05 (two-tail).

There is a similar pattern when we model perceptions about political parties

offering choices (Table 3), and when we model satisfaction with democracy (Table 4). The ICC in Table 3 indicates that 13% of variance in attitudes about whether parties offered meaningful alternatives was due to country-level factors. Again, we find significant effects of proportionality and preferential voting on perceptions that parties offer clear alternatives (Table 3, Model 2). We also find these same electoral rules to be associated with satisfaction with democracy (Table 4, Model 2). The ICC from Table 4 demonstrates that 23% of variance in attitudes about satisfaction with democracy are explained by country-level factors (Table 4, Model 1). All of this suggests that our expectation-based measures of perceptions of democratic performance behave similarly to a satisfaction with democracy item. Results from Model 2 in tables 2, 3, and 4 also suggest that the effects of electoral arrangements demonstrated in previous studies that used OLS, with different sets of countries, appears to hold when attitudes are estimated with mixed-level models in these countries.

This is where several previous studies of perceptions of democracy have concluded. However, results from Model 3 and Model 4 in tables 2, 3 and 4 (and similar models in the Appendix) challenge the idea that these electoral rules are robust forces that affect how people evaluate how democracy is performing in their country. As Table 2 indicates (Model 3), when we introduce country-level measures of corruption and income inequality, proportionality and preferential voting are no longer significant predictors of attitudes about democratic elections, and our model fit more than doubles.[8] Model 3 in Table 3 likewise illustrates that when inequality and corruption are introduced into estimates of attitudes about a country's party system, the effect or PR on attitudes is reduced by two-thirds (and is only nominally significant), the effect of preferential voting becomes null, and model fit increases. Likewise, Model 3 in Table 4 demonstrates that any effect of proportionality on satisfaction with democracy is cut by more than half, that the effect of preferential voting on satisfaction with democracy dissipates, and that model fit increases when we account for country-level corruption and income inequality. This is consistent with our assumption that higher levels of corruption and inequality are likely to trigger considerations of (a lack of) procedural fairness that color how a respondent views democratic performance.

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[8] Models were also estimated with a least squares measure of disproportionality, and other electoral system features that were never significant when included in these models.

Robustness tests

These substantive results are robust across several different estimations - with alternate dependent variables[9], with a different set of European countries used for analysis, and with alternate measures of income inequality. The Appendix contains results where we constrain the analysis to include only the 21 EU nations where Wave 6 of the ESS was conducted (omitting cases such as Albania, Israel, Norway, Russia, and Ukraine), and displays results based only on EU nations with alternate measure of income inequality.[10] The 21 EU nations in the ESS sample are identified in Table 1 with asterisks.[11] In Appendix tables 1, 2 and 3 we re-estimate our models for EU nations using the measure of change in income inequality (Model 2 and Model 3 in each table), as well as using the static EU measure of inequality from 2010. We find the same pattern of substantive results as reported above. Across the EU, people in countries with more parties in the legislature and people in countries with voting systems that were more candidate-centered (preferential) appear less likely to have seen elections and parties as falling short of their expectations of democracy (Appendix Table 1 and Table 2, Model 2), and these country-level features of elections are both associated with greater satisfaction with democracy (Appendix Table 3, Model 2).

But again, when our key social conditions are accounted for, the potential effect of these electoral institutions is substantially altered - effectively driven to zero with relation to our first two (expectations) measures of democratic performance, and having significantly smaller effects on satisfaction with democracy. Model fit also increases notably when social conditions are added. It is important to note that even within the EU, income inequality (regardless of how it is measured) and corruption have demonstrable, adverse effects on how people evaluate democracy.

The Appendix also demonstrates that these results hold regardless of whether we use change in income inequality (as reported in the main tables), or levels of inequality (as in Model 4 in each Appendix table). We conducted additional tests (available from the authors) that further establish these results are not likely to be due to an artifact of model specification or measurement. Two points about this are noteworthy. First, we

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[9] Results we report are substantively the same regardless of whether or not negative values on our expectations measure were included, or translated to absolute values, or set to zero, or omitted.

[10] Gini measures of inequality (rather than measures of change) are used in Model 4 in the Appendix. From the European Union Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. Research findings - Social Situation Monitor, Table 3. There was no data reported for Ireland on this measure.

[11] Wave 6 of the ESS was not conducted in the following EU nations: Austria, Croatia, Greece, Latvia, Luxembourg, Malta, and Romania.

included additional country-level measures of institutions (a least squares indicator of disproportionality, a measure for presidential systems, and measures of assembly size) and found these unrelated to attitudes about democracy in these nations. Second, we re-estimated our models with a measure of democratic experience (years as a democracy since World War II). Despite being well correlated with our measure of corruption, our estimates are unaffected by the inclusion of age of democracy.

Discussion

Electoral institutions do matter as a factor affecting perceptions of how well democracy is functioning. We find systems with more parties and preferential ballot structure were associated positive evaluations of how elections and parties were doing in a respondent's country, and both were associated with greater satisfaction with the way democracy was working. But these institutional effects are likely much limited than what previous studies might have us expect, and they appear to be quite fragile when compared to the broader forces corruption and income inequality. Our results should serve as a reminder as to what much of the earlier 'institutions matter' literature was emphasizing, such as the maturity of political institutions, state capacity, and state institutions that have some autonomy from private economic interests. These are features of a democratic political system that are closely related to the rule of law, something that is undermined where there is greater corruption. Where income inequality is great or growing, and where corruption challenges the rule of law, the proportionality of a party system or the method of voting for candidates may be to subtle of a force to affect perceptions of how democracy is working. The former may be much more visible and immediate to people than the latter.

There are many political scientists who value the idea that electoral institutions matter, in some small part because this establishes a sort of relevance and importance for our section of the discipline. Institutions, by definition, are rather static, but electoral institutions may be more malleable than other political institutions, particularly when elites are motivated to change them (Bowler et al 2003; Bowler et al 2006). This malleability in established democracies (Bowler and Donovan 2013), as well as the emergence of new democracies, has likely enhanced the relevance of political science as source for informed advice on electoral arrangements and electoral engineering. Results presented here suggest we should exercise a great deal of caution when linking potential electoral system reforms to enhanced perceptions of democratic performance and democratic legitimacy.

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Appendix - Table 1 - Elections don't meet expectations as free and fair. EU
(0-10 scale, high = larger gap between expectations and perceptions that elections are free and fair).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Intercept	2.06**	3.13**	-.217	-5.75*
	(.26)	(.777)	(.871)	(2.30)
Winner		-.349**	-.349**	-.368**
		(.085)	(.085)	(.090)
Age		.0003	.0004	.0007
		(.0020)	(.0020)	(.0020)
Education		-.010	-.010	-.010
		(.013)	(.013)	(.014)
Political interest		-.117**	-.117**	-.120**
		(.024)	(.024)	(.025)
Non-voter		.105	.106	.109
		(.094)	(.095)	(.100)
Female		.038	.038	.024
		(.040)	(.040)	(.041)
Finances doing well		-.281**	-.280**	-.291**
		(.037)	(.038)	(.039)
Effective number of parties		-.193+	.077	.259*
		(.109)	(.097)	(.114)
Preferential voting		-.151+	.031	.101
		(.088)	(.059)	(.089)
Corruption			.044**	.055**
			(.013)	(.013)
Income inequality ($\square$)			.089*	
			(.041)	
Income inequality, 2010				.147**
				(.059)
Random effects				
Intercept	1.31**	.936**	.359**	.34**
	(.55)	(.40)	(.12)	(.09)
Residuals	4.58**	4.45**	4.45**	4.50**
	(.56)	(.55)	(.55)	(.58)
Number of cases	39,112	38,367	38,367	35,914
Wald Chi^2	n/a	201.3**	345.0**	211.9**
Countries	21	21	21	20
ICC	.22			
R^2 (over Model 1)		.09	.18	.18

Source: European Social Survey 6.
Note: Multi-level models estimated with Stata 13 mixed, with weights. Standard errors in parentheses.
** = p . <. 01 (two-tail); * = p. < .05 (two-tail).

Appendix - Table 2 - Parties don't meet expectations about offering clear alternatives. EU (0-10 scale, high = larger gap between expectations and perceptions that parties offer alternatives).

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Intercept	3.06**	3.77**	.64*	-2.06
	(.199)	(.542)	(.649)	(1.15)
Winner		-.223**	-.224**	-.252**
		(.056)	(.056)	(.054)
Age		.0002	.0002	-.0002
		(.0015)	(.0015)	(.0015)
Education		.109**	.108**	.108**
		(.015)	(.016)	(.016)
Political interest		.061**	.062**	.066**
		(.023)	(.023)	(.024)
Non-voter		-.087	-.087	-.090
		(.072)	(.072)	(.076)
Female		-.029	-.029	-.031
		(.034)	(.035)	(.037)
Finances doing well		-.202**	-.201**	-.218**
		(.039)	(.039)	(.038)
Effective number of parties		-.278**	-.104	.018
		(.086)	(.069)	(.062)
Preferential voting		-.128*	-.010	.029
		(.062)	(.038)	(.067)
Corruption			.027*	.035**
			(.013)	(.010)
Income inequality (D)			.062**	
			(.023)	
Income inequality, 2010				.099**
				(.036)
Random effects				
Intercept	.79**	.53**	.28*	.28*
	(.24)	(.14)	(.08)	(.09)
Residuals	5.96**	5.88**	5.89**	5.88**
	(.37)	(.36)	(.37)	(.39)
Number of cases	38,262	37,557	37,577	35,159
Wald Chi^2	n/a	114.5**	186.8**	152.3**
Countries	21	21	21	20
ICC	.12			
R^2 (over Model 1)	n/a	.05	.09	.09

Source: European Social Survey 6.

Note: Multi-level models estimated with Stata 13 mixed, with weights. Standard errors in parentheses.

** = p . <. 01 (two-tail); * = p. < .05 (two-tail); + p. < .10 (two-tail).

Appendix - Table 3 - Satisfaction with democracy in the EU (0-10, high = very satisfied). Multilevel models.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
Fixed effects				
Intercept	5.16**	3.55**	6.32**	7.56**
	(.247)	(.458)	(.594)	(1.44)
Winner		.612**	.613**	.644**
		(.107)	(.107)	(.111)
Age		-.0041*	-.0041*	-.0049**
		(.0019)	(.0019)	(.0019)
Education		.024	.024	.017
		(.018)	(.018)	(.018)
Political interest		.170**	.169**	.189**
		(.034)	(.035)	(.033)
Non-voter		.113	.114	.105
		(.078)	(.079)	(.083)
Female		-.086*	-.087*	-.073
		(.034)	(.034)	(.034)
Finances doing well		.442**	.440**	.434**
		(.040)	(.041)	(.043)
Effective number of parties		.358**	.148*	.093*
		(.082)	(.069)	(.045)
Preferential voting		.180*	.054	.115*
		(.074)	(.045)	(.050)
Corruption			-.042**	-.041**
			(.011)	(.009)
Income inequality (D)			-.017	
			(.017)	
Income inequality, 2010				-.043
				(.048)
Random effects				
Intercept	1.22**	.477**	.20*	.18
	(.32)	(.17)	(.08)	(.10)
Residuals	5.03**	4.76**	4.76**	4.66**
	(.25)	(.25)	(.25)	(.24)
Number of cases	39,76	38,976	38,976	36,521
Wald Chi^2	n/a	420.5**	1558.8**	2673.0*
Countries	21	21	21	20
ICC	.195			
R^2 (over Model 1)		.16	.21	.22

Source: European Social Survey 6.
Note: Multi-level models estimated with Stata 13 mixed, with weights. Standard errors in parentheses.
** = p . <. 01 (two-tail); * = p. < .05 (two-tail).

Appendix - Variables and codings

Age of democracy: Cumulative number of years a country scored a 6 or higher from 1946-2012 on the Polity IV Project Individual Country Regime Trends. Range 6-66, mean 42, sd. 23.2.

Age: Years. Range 17 - 103, mean 48.4, sd 18.6.

Corruption: Country's corruption score from Transparency International, for year that ESS was conducted in country. Scores are inverted so high values reflect more corruption. Range 9-75, mean 36.6, sd. 18.5.

Education: Seven ranked categories (1-7). Mean 3.88, sd. 1.85.

Effective number of parties: Effective number of legislative parties in a country at the time the ESS was conducted. Updated by Michael Gallagher, as per Appendix B in Gallagher and Mitchel (2008). Range 2.01 to 7.82, mean 4.2, sd 1.49.

Elections as free and fair: (Expectations) "Now some questions about democracy. Later on I will ask you about how democracy is working in [COUNTRY]. Please tell me how important you think different things are for democracy in general...please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general that elections are free and fair." 0 = not at all important for democracy in general, 10 = extremely important for democracy in general. (Perceptions) "Now some questions about the same topics, but this time about how you think democracy is working in [COUNTRY] today... please tell me to what extent you think the following statements apply in [COUNTRY] - national' elections in [COUNTRY] are free and fair." 0 = does not apply at all, 10 = applies completely. Calculated as Expectations - Perceptions (with values below 0 at set at 0). Range 0-10, mean 2.18, sd. 2.82.

Female: Coded 1 if female, 0 if male. 54.4% coded as female.

Finances doing well: Responses to the item, "Which of the descriptions on this card comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?" Coded 4 = living comfortably on present income, 3 = coping on present income, 2 = finding it difficult on present income, 1 = finding it very difficult on present income.

Income inequality (change): Country-level gini measures from CIA World Factbook. ((Country's most recent gini value closest to time of survey minus country's previous gini value) *100). Range -5.7 to 19.3, mean 0.59, sd. 4.6.

Income inequality, EU: European Union Employment, Social Affairs & Inclusion. Research findings - Social Situation Monitor. Table 3

Non-voter: Coded 0 if respondent reported not voting or not being eligible to vote in recent election. 29.87% coded as nonvoters.

Parties offer clear alternatives: Same method and coding as above, but with respondents asked (Expectations) how important for democracy in general was it "that different political parties offer clear alternatives to one another" and (Perceptions) if "different political parties in [COUNTRY] offer clear alternatives to one another." Calculated as Expectations - Perceptions (with values below 0 at set at 0). Range 0-10, mean 2.74, sd. 2.78.

Political interest: Response to the item "How interested would you say you are in politic?" Coded 4 = very interested, 3 quite interested, 2 hardly interested, 1 not at all interested. Mean 2.3, sd. .91.

Preferential voting: Index ranking electoral systems on intra-party dimension ranging from most-candidate centered to most party-centered. From Farrell and McAllister 2006, *European Journal of Political Science*, and authors calculations. Range 1.4 - 10, mean 3.4, sd 2.14.

Satisfaction with democracy: "And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?" Extremely dissatisfied = 0, extremely satisfied = 10, mean 5.20, sd, 2.56.

Winner: Coded 1 if respondent voted for party winning most votes in most recent election and/or voted for largest party in governing coalition formed after most recent election; 0 if otherwise. 23.7% coded as winners.