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EDMocracy: populism and democratic dissatisfaction in Europe

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Abstract

We study the link among populist vote, democratic expectations and democratic performances by using individual level data in 26 European countries in 2012 and 2020. We use a Heckman model to explain the determinants of both the decision to vote and voting for populists: both are predicted by the gap between democratic expectations and perceived performance (that we define as “ideal democracy gap”), while controlling for fixed effects, political and economic variables, and attitudes. These results confirm the expectancy-disconfirmation model (EDM) that links both expectations and ideal democracy gaps for twelve aspects within electoral, liberal, social and direct dimensions of democracy to democratic dissatisfaction. Our analysis reveals differences and similarities among voter groups and within European regions.

Keywords: populism, voting behaviour, democratic dissatisfaction, EDM

JEL Classification: C21, D72, H30, P00

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1 Introduction^{*}

Citizens in democracies pride themselves to live under the best political system, but its survival and health may be in danger because of populist parties that challenge its typical functioning. These political movements seems to be tightly related to discontent with the democratic institutions and with their outcomes, despite campaigning for diverse political goals¹. The topic of democratic discontent is crucial for the legitimacy of the system since it is tightly related to trust and effectiveness of democratic regimes. Indeed it is essential to ensure that even dissatisfied individuals maintain confidence in the overall political structure and principles to avoid dangerous discontinuities (Citrin and Luks, 2001).

In recent decades, Europe has experienced a remarkable rise in populism and a decline in voter turnout. These interrelated and multifaceted phenomena are often characterized in the academic literature as potential challenges to the legitimacy of democracy (Abts and Rummens, 2007; Müller, 2017; Sheerin, 2008). This legitimacy is fundamentally based on solid support from citizens and it is achieved when citizens' expectations are in line with the functioning of the democratic regime (Kriesi, 2013). To ensure the continuity of the democratic system and avoid regime collapsing (Powell, 1982), it is essential that there are adequate levels of satisfaction. This is considered a key factor of political mobilization and a relevant determinant of populist vote so much that literature already documents that populist voters and non-voters are less satisfied with democracy (e.g. Hadjar and Beck, 2010; Rooduijn et al., 2016; Grönlund and Setälä, 2007).

This paper answers two main questions about democratic dissatisfaction and populism. First, does democratic dissatisfaction affects the populist vote? Second, does populist vote share represent the tip of the iceberg in terms of citizen democratic dissatisfaction? Indeed if democratic dissatisfaction contributes to populist vote and at the same time non-voters are highly dissatisfied, then populist vote may increase. In other words, are populist voters independently motivated by dissatisfaction for democracy and does this dissatisfaction extend to non-voters? If this holds true, future European political scenarios may depend on the effect of increasing populist vote shares on policy outcomes, regime change (Huber and Schimpf, 2016) and quality and resilience of democracies (Lubbers et al., 2002; McLaren, 2016; Webb, 2013).

Our article examines satisfaction regarding different aspects of democracy among populist voters, other voters, and non-voters. Our conceptualization of democracy is multi-dimensional so that it extends beyond the conventional liberal-democratic model (Diamond, 1999), including dimensions such as government protection against poverty, government efforts to reduce income inequality, the citizens' possibility to voice their opinions through referendums, etc.² For each democratic feature, we evaluate one variable for the importance of ideal democratic aspect (expectation), one for practical implementation in their countries (perceived performance) and their difference that we define as "Ideal democracy gap" = Expectation - Perceived Performance. Therefore, we represent satisfaction (or dissatisfaction) with democracy as a function of both expectations and differences between expectations and perceived performance³. This approach, which allows us to link democratic dissatisfaction on different aspects and voting behavior, aligns with the expectation-disconfirmation model (EDM), originally developed in the consumer behavior and marketing literature and later extended by various scholars to the understanding of citizen satisfaction (Oliver, 1977; Zhang et al., 2021; Oliver, 2010). Respect to the classical EDM, we model dissatisfaction differently to adjust to the political environment: dissatisfaction follows an U-shaped function so that the least dissatisfaction is achieved when the ideal democracy gap is equal to zero (expectations=perceived performance). For each feature of democracy, a non-zero ideal democracy gap implies positive levels of dissatisfaction: positive (or negative) gaps represent respectively a voter that wants more (or less) of the democratic feature.

We analyze these aspects using individual-level data from the European Social Survey across 26 European countries. We leverage on the specific module for understanding democracy available in 2012 and 2020 by analyzing four dimensions: electoral, liberal, social and direct⁴. Analyzing each factor

^{*}The views expressed in this paper are those of the authors and do not involve the responsibility of the Bank of Italy.

¹Lack of satisfaction for democracy has been used as a tentative proxy for populism in Ford et al. (2012).

²Democracy has been conceived in diverse ways, first with a restricted view highlighting only certain procedural elements such as the importance of free and fair elections for democracy, while others consider a broader perspective, encompassing diverse theoretical models such as the liberal, the social and the direct democracy model (Kriesi, 2013; Morlino, 2010).

³The level of expectations matters for dissatisfaction by itself since it defines how important a feature is.

⁴The electoral dimension is divided into the presence of free and fair elections, the differentiated offer by parties, the possibility of penalizing poorly performing parties, the fact that key decisions are made by national governments rather

within these dimensions we are able to capture voters’ preferences on a wide variety of items, capturing more heterogeneity than the typical general measure of satisfaction with democracy. The reliability of self-reported information is a primary challenge, but the existing literature has demonstrated the robustness of ESS data for these purposes (Guiso et al., 2017; Hadjar and Beck, 2010; Topline, 2014). We reinforce this evidence by reporting the results in the Appendix.

Our theoretical framework consists of a theory combining assumptions from socioeconomic theories (education), socio-psychological theories (political interest, political efficacy, trust, satisfaction) and political theories (characteristics of electoral system). Indeed we run a multivariate regression in order to estimate the marginal impact of the variables of interest (expectations and ideal democracy gaps) on the probability of voting and then the probability of voting for a populist party using a Heckman model. In accordance with the literature we include as control variables both individual characteristics⁵ and contextual factors⁶ to analyze voter behavior.

We show that dissatisfaction is strongly correlated with expectations and ideal democracy gaps on the different democratic aspects considered, confirming the link with the expectancy-disconfirmation model. Dissatisfaction with democratic features is higher among populist voters, non-voters and geographically present in all European areas except for Eastern Europe (where populists are more satisfied). In addition, European citizens show high expectations for democracy, but have large democracy gaps for the social and direct dimensions and some specific features of the electoral and liberal dimensions. The importance of each democratic feature (i.e. the expectations) and the related ideal democracy gaps are significant in explaining both the decision to vote and the outcome of voting between populists, non-populists and even far-right populists. These results hold after controlling for economic variables, political ones and attitudes.

Ideal democracy gaps are positive for all the considered features thus citizens are dissatisfied with current democratic outcomes respect to expectations. Voters have positive coefficients on ideal democracy gaps for protection of minority rights and media freedom i.e. they would like more of them. On the other side, voters have negative coefficients on ideal democracy gaps for free and fair elections, consequences of poor governance and social justice i.e. they would like less of them.

Populists would like more (compared to non-populists) for national governments to make more decisions than the EU, equality before the law, and direct participation through referendums (positive ideal democracy gaps). On the other side, they have negative coefficients on ideal democracy gaps for differentiated offer by the parties and protection of minority rights i.e. they would like less of them. Finally, populists and non-voters are remarkably more similar than the non-populist voters apart from the protection of minorities feature. Thus it seems that European populists are just the “tip of the iceberg” and that non-voters may become populists in the future.

This paper makes several original contributions. First, it introduces an innovative application of the expectation-disconfirmation model (EDM) to assess citizens’ satisfaction with democracy. Second, it deepens the analysis of democratic dissatisfaction by considering expectations and the ideal democracy gap among different democratic aspects, rather than focusing only on general satisfaction with democracy, and analyzes the relationship with voting behavior. As a consequence, the results represent a new contribution to the field.

The structure of our paper is as follows. Section 2 offers a literature review highlighting what is our main contribution with respect to what already exists in the literature. Section 3 and 4 describe the data sources, variables considered for the analysis, and methodological aspects. Section 5 analyzes how expectations and disconfirmation (gap between perceived performance and expectations) affect the various democracy aspects for the different voters’ group. Section 6 provides a conclusion.

than at the European level. The liberal dimension is divided into the fact that courts treat everyone equally, freedom of expression valuing the views of ordinary people over those of the political elite and valuing the will of the people, freedom of the press and the protection of minority rights. The social dimension is divided into government protection against poverty and government efforts to reduce income inequality. The direct democracy dimension is represented by the possibility of citizens to express their views through relevant referendums.

⁵e.g. socio-demographic factors such as gender, age, education; economic factors such as unemployment status, economic uncertainty; attitudinal and cultural factors such as trust in national or European institutions, views on immigration; political interests such as political activism, political awareness, etc.

⁶e.g. perceptions of corruption in government services, a measure of economic inequality, unemployment and country fixed-effects in order to consider other country-specific variables such as electoral system, compulsory voting, etc.

2 Literature review

The extensive literature on the demand for populism and voting behavior shows the importance of considering multiple factors when analyzing these interconnected phenomena.

As detailed in Section 3, our approach to modeling the probability of voting for populist candidates takes into consideration the factors, both individual and contextual, recognized in the literature as the most crucial determinants: economic insecurity (e.g. [Algan et al., 2017](#)), trust in national and international institutions (e.g. [Ivanov, 2023](#)), income inequality (e.g. [Han and Chang, 2016](#)), cultural values and fear of immigration (e.g. [Dustmann et al., 2017](#)), socio-demographic aspect such as gender, age, education (e.g. [Hadjar and Beck, 2010](#); [Guiso et al., 2017](#)), political interest (e.g. [Denny and Doyle, 2008](#)), external shocks such as economic, financial, cultural crises (Great-recession of 2008, the sovereign debt crisis of 2012, and the refugee crisis of 2015) or globalization (e.g. [Guriev, 2018](#); [Guiso et al., 2022](#); [Rodrik, 2018](#)), country-specific contextual factors such as socio-economic factors (e.g. population stability, economic development, etc.), political factors (e.g. closeness of elections, campaign expenditures, etc.), institutional factors (e.g. electoral system, compulsory voting, etc.) and others (see [Guriev and Papaioannou \(2022\)](#) and [Geys \(2006\)](#) for a comprehensive literary review).

Our article is focused on the role of expectations and perceived performance about different aspects of democracy in explaining voting behavior, so in this section we turn our attention to related literature.

First of all, when we mention democracy, we are talking about a multidimensional concept, encompassing elements beyond the traditional liberal-democratic model ([Diamond, 1999](#)). This includes the electoral dimension and its components, such as the presence of free and fair elections and the differentiated offerings by political parties. Furthermore, it includes the liberal dimension, encompassing aspects such as the freedom of the press and the protection of minority rights. The social dimension involves government initiatives to address poverty and reduce income inequality. Additionally, the direct democracy dimension encompasses the capacity of citizens to express their views through relevant referendums ([Kriesi, 2013](#); [Morlino, 2010](#)). In Europe, there is a shared perspective on liberal democracy, enriched by facets of social and direct democracy. However, the citizens' expectations regarding democracy displays considerable variation across Europe and is intricately linked to their evaluations of the democratic system: the lower the perceived quality of democracy in a specific country, the more elevated the corresponding demands for democracy. Broadly, Europeans express notable satisfaction with liberal democracy, maintain a relatively neutral stance toward direct democracy, but harbor pronounced dissatisfaction with social democracy ([Ferrín and Kriesi, 2016](#)).

The study and understanding of democracy play an essential role within society. Examining and learning about the mechanisms around the concept of democracy involves exploring the complex dynamics that characterize societies. In order to fully understand democracy, it becomes necessary not only to identify areas that deserve improvement and adaptation to meet the evolving needs of society, but also to discern the various phenomena, such as populism, authoritarianism and absenteeism, that can potentially pose a threat to the principles of democracy, including civic participation, protection of minority rights and protection of individual freedoms, etc. In other words, a comprehensive understanding of democracy involves an examination of both its strengths and vulnerabilities in order to strengthen and sustain democratic ideals in a changing society.

The rise of populism and the decline in voter turnout, phenomena that have grown in Europe in recent decades, are often described in the academic literature as potential threats to the legitimacy of democracy.

Populism consists of political movements that share a demand for short-term protection. It can be defined by three main characteristics ([Guiso et al., 2017](#)): (i) the claim to safeguard the people from the elite, (ii) the emphasis on demand-driven policymaking, and (iii) the disregard for the future consequences of their policies. Populists perceive the people as a homogeneous entity with a “general will” and thus go against democratic pluralism and the rule of law ([Mudde, 2004](#)). The influence of populist parties can extend beyond these foundational principles, negatively affecting other aspects such as the separation of powers, the minority rights ([Huber and Schimpf, 2017](#)), and the freedom of expression ([Kenny, 2019](#)). For these reasons, too, populism is often seen as a potential threat to the stability of democracies, presenting challenges to fundamental principles of governance ([Abts and Rummens, 2007](#); [Müller, 2017](#)).

Declining voter turnout is a societal concern, as abstention from voting may be interpreted as an absence of democratic representation. The decline in voter turnout not only decreases government legitimacy, but also affects public acceptance of government decisions. This decline has the potential

to fuel the rise of political extremism and pose a threat to the stability of society. Moreover, it can also impact the overall quality of democratic civic life, creating challenges that go beyond the electoral realm. As mentioned, the decrease in electoral participation has numerous social implications, with possible consequences for the well-being and stability of democratic governance (Sheerin, 2008).

Furthermore, populism and civic participation are closely interrelated and interact in complex ways. Some scholars, for example, point to a potential positive impact of populism in promoting political commitment by engaging citizens often neglected by other political agendas (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017) while others point to a counter-mobilization effect. For example, Immerzeel and Pickup (2015) show that radical-right populist parties in Western Europe motivate highly educated and politically concerned citizens to vote, that is, voters who are likely to be opponents of radical-right populist parties. However, investigations into the topic have not yet produced conclusive results (Huber and Schimpf, 2017). There is also uncertainty as to whether an increase in political participation, a crucial element for the effective functioning of a democracy, due to the success of populism can be considered indicative of a robust democracy (Huber and Schimpf, 2016).

The legitimacy of democracies is based on solid support from citizens, which is affirmed when citizens' expectations align with the actual functioning of the democratic system. In essence, the legitimacy of a democracy is closely linked to the satisfaction and responsiveness of the population with the principles and mechanisms that define its governance (Kriesi, 2013).

Empirical findings from numerous studies highlight the pivotal role of citizen satisfaction with democracy (SWD) as a determinant (Lubbers et al., 2002), exerting an influence not only on populist voting tendencies but also more generally on voter turnout. Consistent patterns within the current literature show that individuals close to populist ideologies or who choose not to participate in the electoral process tend to demonstrate reduced levels of satisfaction with democratic procedures (e.g. Webb, 2013; Rooduijn et al., 2016; Hadjar and Beck, 2010)⁷.

Satisfaction with democracy is one of the most common measures of public opinion administered in social science surveys. This measure is widely used as an indicator of political support and the political health of a democratic society. It is a complex concept that can be interpreted in two main forms (Easton, 1976): (i) specific support, influenced by the current conditions and performance of democratic institutions and leaders, (ii) diffuse support, based on a general preference for what constitutes a good democratic system, regardless of current circumstances. Nevertheless, these two perspectives coexist along a continuum ranging from more specific to more diffuse support (Norris, 2017). The maintenance of the democratic system depends on maintaining adequate levels of satisfaction, particularly with basic political principles (diffuse support): even if an individual may be dissatisfied with the current leaders, his or her general support for democratic principles can remain relatively high; without this legitimacy, there is a risk of a collapse of the democratic regime (Powell, 1982).

Satisfaction with democracy is influenced by several interrelated factors, both external to citizens such as the country's wealth and level of well-being (democracies generally provide better living conditions than non-democracies, e.g. Thomassen (1995), but assessing the impact of economic performance on satisfaction with democracy is complex)⁸, the institutional design (organizing political institutions, including rules, procedures, and power distribution) and internal to citizens such as feeling represented in government⁹, expectations and perceived performance regarding different democracy aspects.

In particular, we focus on the role of expectations and perceived performance about different aspects of democracy in explaining voting behavior. We rely on the fact that expectations and mismatches between expectations and perceived performance can influence the voting decision as they can generate higher or lower levels of satisfaction or dissatisfaction with democracy.

This approach aligns with the expectancy-disconfirmation model (EDM), initially conceived in marketing and psychology (Oliver, 1977), that has become the predominant approach to explaining citizen satisfaction, mainly for public services; for an extensive literary review see the meta-analysis in Zhang

⁷Ford et al. (2012) have also used an indicator of satisfaction with democracy as a rough proxy for populism.

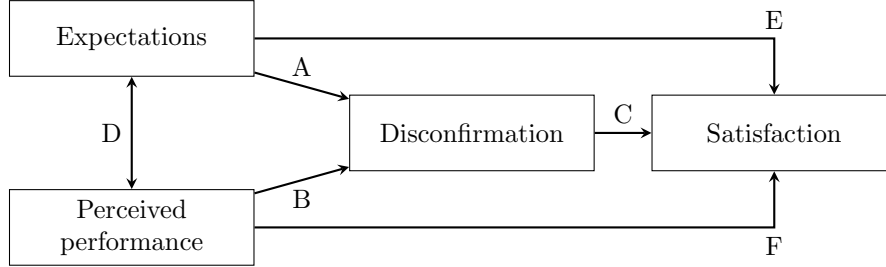
⁸Economic well-being contributes positively to satisfaction (Quaranta and Martini, 2016), while dissatisfaction arises in the presence of struggling economies (Magalhães, 2014) or lack of economic support during crises (Cordero and Simon, 2016). Economic performance influences voting behavior (Funke et al., 2016), and a bad economy can pose a threat to the survival of democracy (Przeworski et al., 2000). Other research, in contrast, asserts a weaker (or no) effect of economic performance on satisfaction with democracy (e.g. Dalton, 2004).

⁹Satisfaction is influenced by post-election perceptions of representation, with variations across electoral systems (majoritarian, proportional). In majoritarian systems, winners are more satisfied, while in proportional systems dissatisfaction of losers is reduced, linked to greater minority representation (Anderson and Guillory, 1997); in economically unequal countries the losers are more dissatisfied (Han and Chang, 2016).

et al. (2021). The main innovation of the EDM is the focus on the factors internal to the citizen that determine satisfaction. The main concept is that satisfaction or dissatisfaction is derived from both a reference (a standard for comparison, typically expectations) and perceived performance: positive disconfirmation (better performance than expected) results in satisfaction, and negative disconfirmation (worse performance than expected) results in dissatisfaction (Oliver, 2010).

The complete EDM, following Van Ryzin (2004), is depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Expectancy-Disconfirmation Model adapted from Van Ryzin (2004)



Expectations and performance jointly influence disconfirmation (links A and B), which follows directly from the definition of disconfirmation as the gap between expectations and perceived performance¹⁰, so: “positive disconfirmation” if perceived performance is equal or greater than expectations, “negative disconfirmation” if perceived performance is lower than expectations. The disconfirmation–satisfaction relationship is represented by the link C (positive disconfirmation results in satisfaction and negative disconfirmation results in dissatisfaction). There is also a potential correlation between expectations and performance (link D), without specifying the direction of this relationship. Finally, expectations affects satisfaction directly (link E, expectations anchoring), as do perceived performance (link F).

Respect to the classical EDM, we model dissatisfaction differently to adjust to the political environment: dissatisfaction follows an U-shaped function so that the least dissatisfaction is achieved when the ideal democracy gap is equal to zero (expectations=perceived performance). In this context, it makes sense that dissatisfaction is a function of the distance between expectations and perceived performance, regardless of the sign¹¹. Positive and negative gaps represent respectively a voter that wants more and less of the democratic feature. For example, if populists have the perception that the government protects minority rights more than they would ideally like, this can be interpreted as them wanting less. If populists have a perception of participating through referendums that is lower than ideal expectations, this can be interpreted as a desire to want more.

One distinct driver of satisfaction is the level of expectations, in addition to the difference between expectations and perceived performance. The specific link (E) is called “expectations anchoring”. The expectations anchoring link may occur for several reasons. First, citizens might have limited awareness of performance, leading them to rely on their expectations when prompted to assess satisfaction. Second, if citizens’ expectations are rooted in broader perspectives, a form of confirmation bias may emerge. In this scenario, citizens may modify their satisfaction judgments to align with their general views, with the goal of maintaining consistency. Both of these factors would contribute to a direct positive effect of expectations on satisfaction (Van Ryzin, 2004). Consider the comparison between expectations for a simple snack and those for a candlelight dinner (Petrovsky et al., 2017). Expectations for the snack are likely to be lower than those for the candlelight dinner. Therefore, positive disconfirmation for the former would be more likely. At the same time, the satisfaction derived from a candlelight dinner is much greater: the high expectations that accompany it provide an anchor for a much higher level of satisfaction than is derived from a snack that meets the modest expectations that

¹⁰Van Ryzin (2006) introduced a direct measure of disconfirmation, which is also used in the literature, in addition to the subtractive measure: expectations - perceived performance.

¹¹If the perceived performance is lower than expected, it is easy to guess that there will be greater dissatisfaction; for the opposite case, let’s make an example to clarify. Imagine a person who expects to receive a salary increase, but instead receives a promotion that entails a much heavier workload. Even though the promotion is considered a success and exceeds expectations, it might be perceived negatively due to the additional stress and higher commitment required, thus highlighting a negative effect of surpassing expectations.

accompany it. The literature has mainly analyzed two types of expectations: (i) “empirical expectations” which are expression of empirical predictions made by citizens and reflect how they predict performance based on past experiences; (ii) “normative expectations” which are an expression of citizens’ preferences, goals, and ideals and indicate how they believe performance should be. The latter tends to be more stable over time (James, 2011). For the purposes of this article and due to data availability, we rely on normative expectations as our reference point.

3 Data and variables

Our main source of individual-level data is the European Social Survey (ESS), the richest social science project mapping attitudes, beliefs and behavior patterns in Europe. Data has been collected every two years, since September 2002, by face-to-face interviews¹² for all European countries, although not all country participates in each wave. The questionnaire consists of a core module, constant from round to round, which collects social, economic, political, psychological, and demographic variables, and smaller rotating modules, repeated at intervals, on selected topics (e.g. understanding democracy, climate change, immigration, etc.). Respondents were selected by probability sampling of the resident populations aged 15 years and older. We focus on the specific ESS module devoted to understanding democracy, collected in 2012 and 2020, corresponding to round 6 and round 10, respectively. The module on democracy adopts a multi-dimensional concept based primarily on the works of Morlino (2010) and Kriesi (2013). Departing from the classic liberal democratic model, the concept encompasses different dimensions (and sub-dimensions) aimed at capturing various components of democracy. The first two dimensions focus on procedural elements, including the electoral process and its components (electoral dimension) and citizens’ protection against arbitrary government decisions (liberal dimension). Subsequent dimensions introduce additional models, such as the social model that emphasizes the vision of achieving certain social outcomes, like reducing inequality (social dimension) and the direct democracy model that advocates direct citizen involvement in decision-making (direct democracy dimension).

Table 1: Dimensions, sub-dimensions and factors for understanding democracy

Dimension	Factor
Electoral dimension	
Competition	Free and fair elections Differentiated offer by parties
Vertical accountability	National governments, not the EU, make key decisions* Punish governing parties if they have done a bad job
Liberal dimension	
Horizontal accountability	Courts treat everyone the same
Minority rights	Protection of minority rights
Freedom of expression	Views of ordinary people prevail over the views of elite* Will of the people cannot be stopped*
Freedom of press	Media freedom
Social dimension	
Social justice	Protection against poverty Reduced income inequality
Direct democracy dimension	
Direct participation	Citizen participation via referendum

Note: * These factors appears only in round 10.

¹²Due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic at round 10 in 2020, some countries switched to a self-completion (web and paper) approach, instead of ESS’s usual face-to-face fieldwork approach. To confirm findings robustness, we’ve reported results in the appendix, excluding countries using self-compilation in round 10.

The list of all the variables analyzed grouped by dimension and sub-dimension of democracy are reported in Table 1; the classification adopted is coherent with Ferrín and Kriesi (2016). Original variables all on a 0 to 10-point scale, have been linearly re-scaled on a 0 to 1-point scale where an higher number represents an higher importance/evaluation for the respondent.

Two questions were posed in order to explore the importance people attribute to each sub-dimension (normative expectations) and the respondent’s judgments on whether these factors are present in respondent’s country (perceived performance). For each aspect e.g. “Free-fair elections” the respondent answers to two questions: (i) “How much is important for democracy that the elections are free and fair?”; (ii) “How much the elections are free and fair in your country?”. The first represents expectation, the second perception. To prevent contamination between normative expectations and assessments of actual democracy, survey respondents were initially prompted to reflect on the significance of sub-dimensions for democracy before providing evaluations specific to their own country. It is reasonable to assume that citizens’ expectations and evaluations of democracy depend on the practical functioning of democracies (performance-related evaluations). There is a strong correlation between ESS judgements and established indicators of democratic performance¹³, suggesting that citizen responses are a reliable source for measuring democratic quality; we show these results in Appendix.

We also used the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al., 2023) to test the robustness of the data on respondents’ perceived performance on different aspects of democracy at country level. The V-Dem dataset provides a multidimensional and disaggregated dataset that reflects the complexity of the concept of democracy as a system of government that goes beyond the mere presence of elections. It distinguishes five high-level principles of democracy: electoral, liberal, participatory, deliberative and egalitarian, and reports a set of aggregated indicators that can be compared with the dimensions that we consider (electoral, liberal, social and direct). We highlight the consistency of ESS and V-Dem data; detailed results are reported in the Appendix.

To measure voting decisions, since true voting behavior is unobserved, we selected two ESS questions that ask people (i) whether they voted in the last parliamentary election in their country and (ii) which party they voted for (selecting from a list of parties)¹⁴. From the first question we construct a binary variable encoded as 1 if respondent self-reported that voted and 0 otherwise, from the second we construct a binary variable encoded as 1 if respondent self-reported that voted for a populist party and 0 otherwise. From the second question we also construct two more detailed binary variables that indicate whether the populist vote is for a far-right or far-left party.

To identify populist (far-right and far-left) parties in Europe, we rely on “the Populist” (Rooduijn et al., 2023) that report a list of populist European parties, peer-reviewed by more than 30 academics, that obtained at least 2% of the votes in at least one national parliamentary election since 1998. The definitions used are the following: (i) populist parties are parties that endorse the set of ideas that society is ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people (Mudde, 2004); (ii) far-right parties are parties that are nativist (which is an ideology that holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group and that non-native elements are fundamentally threatening to the homogenous nation-state) and authoritarian (which is the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely) (Mudde, 2007); (iii) far-left parties are parties that reject the underlying socio-economic structure of contemporary capitalism and advocate for alternative economic and power structures. They see economic inequality as the basis of existing political and social arrangements and call for a major redistribution of resources from existing political elites (March, 2012). The full list of populist, far-right, far-left parties is available at <https://popu-list.org/>.

As a robustness check of the results obtained, we also used an alternative populism indicator that is based on POPPA (Populism and Political Parties Expert surveys) dataset (Meijers and Zaslove, 2021). This dataset measures the positions and attitudes of 250 parties on key attributes related to populism, political style, ideology, and party organization in 28 European countries and it’s based on a survey administered to 294 national experts. The populism indicator is obtained as the average of expert judgments and it’s a variable based on factor regression scores on several aspects underlying the dominant conceptualizations of populism (see Meijers and Zaslove (2020) for details) so the variable is

¹³According with Topline (2014)), we consider: Control of corruption; Government effectiveness; Political stability; Regulatory stability; Rule of law; Voice and Accountability. Source: Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI).

¹⁴Specifically, the questions are: (i) “Some people don’t vote nowadays for one reason or another. Did you vote in the last [country name] national election in [month/year?]”; (ii) “Which party did you vote for in that election?”.

a populism score for each party (and not a binary variable populist/no populist). The results provide consistent evidence and are reported in the Appendix.

Certainly, individuals' voting statements may not always be in line with their actions at the ballot box. However, although self-reported voting information at the individual level may suffer from problems related to social desirability and recall bias (Holbrook and Krosnick, 2010; Smets and van Ham, 2013), ESS data can be considered reliable for this purpose, as demonstrated by other work in the literature that has investigated this potential problem (e.g. Guiso et al., 2017). The use of individual data is essential to capture heterogeneities in behavior that can't be investigated at the aggregate level¹⁵.

In analyzing voter behavior, it is critical to consider both individual characteristics and contextual factors since failure to consider different aspects in the analysis can lead to problems of omitted variables. The ESS contains a large number of variables that capture different aspects: socio-demographic (e.g., gender, age, education, etc.), economic (e.g., unemployment status, economic uncertainty, etc.), cultural and attitudinal (e.g., trust in national or European institutions, relationship to immigration, etc.), political interests (e.g., being a political activist, political information, etc.) and others. We select a subset of all the information available in order to construct proxies of individual voter characteristics that influence both turnout and voting decisions. In addition, we merge country-level data on income inequality, unemployment rate and control of corruption, by countries and years available in ESS. These control variables are in accordance with the literature review and the complete list with detailed description and source of each variable is given in the Appendix.

The sample includes respondents from 26 European countries from four different geographical area (regions): Northern Europe (Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden), Western Europe (Austria, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, France and Netherlands), Central and Eastern Europe (Bulgaria, Croatia, Czechia, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland and Slovakia) and Southern Europe (Spain, Greece, Italy and Portugal). These countries demonstrate considerable differences in both democratic performance and the impact of the economic crisis. This variability offers a valuable opportunity to examine the situations in which democratic support may be tested and to understand the contributing factors behind such variations. Sample sizes vary among countries, from about 1,000 for smaller countries to 3,000 for larger ones.¹⁶ After excluding approximately 7,000 non-voters and around 5,400 respondents with typos or missing values on key variables, the final sample comprises about 80,500 respondents.

With regard to parties, considering the two periods 2012-15 and 2016-20, in order to have at least one election per country, there are 54 and 65 populist parties respectively (about 60 percent are far-right populists and 20 percent are far-left). The self-reported turnout is about 77 percent and the self-reported percentage populist voters is about 22 percent.

Table 2 shows summary statistics for voting variables and understanding of democracy variables (satisfaction with democracy, normative expectations and perceived performance regarding democratic facets¹⁷). The summary statistics for the control variables are reported in the Appendix.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: variables on voting and understanding of democracy

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Voting variables</i>				
Voted	80,586	0	0.77	0.41
Vote for populist party (given vote)	57,425	23,161	0.22	0.42
Vote for far-right populist party (given vote)	57,425	23,161	0.12	0.32
Vote for far-left populist party (given vote)	57,425	23,161	0.07	0.25

Continued on next page...

¹⁵Although aggregate-level models may offer greater explanatory capabilities by balancing individual idiosyncrasies (Matsusaka and Palda, 1999), the use of individual data remains critical to the purpose of this paper.

¹⁶The only exception is Germany in 2020, which has about 7,000 observations.

¹⁷For the sake of simplicity, the ideal democracy gap calculated as difference between expectation and perceived performance is not reported.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics: variables on voting and understanding of democracy (*continued*)

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std. Dev.
<i>Understanding of democracy</i>				
Satisfaction with democracy (SWD)	78,850	1,736	0.54	0.26
Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) for non-voters	17,052	63,534	0.47	0.26
Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) for populist voters	13,033	67,553	0.50	0.26
Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) for other voters	43,765	36,821	0.58	0.25
Normative expectation (e):				
<i>Electoral</i>	76,567	4,019	0.83	0.15
Free and fair elections	79,167	1,419	0.90	0.16
Differentiated offer by parties	78,122	2,464	0.78	0.21
Key decisions by national government, no EU*	43,382	37,204	0.75	0.22
Consequences for parties of poor governance	78,247	2,339	0.83	0.20
<i>Liberal</i>	77,743	2,843	0.86	0.14
Courts treat everyone the same	79,397	1,189	0.92	0.15
Protection of minority rights	78,683	1,903	0.82	0.20
Views of people over the elite*	43,275	37,311	0.73	0.23
Will of the people cannot be stopped*	43,650	36,936	0.78	0.21
Media freedom	79,005	1,581	0.83	0.20
<i>Social</i>	78,627	1,959	0.82	0.19
Protection against poverty	79,353	1,233	0.84	0.19
Reduced income inequality	78,984	1,602	0.79	0.22
<i>Direct democracy</i>	78,487	2,099	0.80	0.21
Citizen participation via referendum	78,487	2,099	0.80	0.21
Perceived performance (p):				
<i>Electoral</i>	75,033	5,553	0.60	0.22
Free and fair elections	78,465	2,121	0.73	0.27
Differentiated offer by parties	77,496	3,090	0.56	0.25
Key decisions by national government, no EU*	41,647	38,939	0.55	0.25
Consequences for parties of poor governance	77,181	3,405	0.54	0.30
<i>Liberal</i>	75,335	5,251	0.62	0.21
Courts treat everyone the same	78,013	2,573	0.52	0.31
Protection of minority rights	77,270	3,316	0.63	0.24
Views of people over the elite*	43,022	37,564	0.37	0.26
Will of the people cannot be stopped*	43,117	37,469	0.44	0.27
Media freedom	78,635	1,951	0.71	0.26
<i>Social</i>	77,827	2,759	0.42	0.26
Protection against poverty	79,031	1,555	0.43	0.28
Reduced income inequality	78,187	2,399	0.42	0.26
<i>Direct democracy</i>	77,494	3,092	0.48	0.31
Citizen participation via referendum	77,494	3,092	0.48	0.31

Note: * These factors appears only in round 10.

4 Methodology

According with the literature (Blais, 2000; Guiso et al., 2017, 2023), in order to analyze voting choices as a whole, it is important to take into account the fact that citizens make two decisions: a) whether to participate in elections (participation decision); b) conditional on participation, which party to support with their vote, in particular whether or not to vote for a populist (far-right, far-left) party (voting decision). We estimate a two-step Heckman model (Heckman, 1976): in the first stage we estimate the probability of voting (selection equation), in the second stage the probability of voting for a populist (far-right, far-left) party, given that the respondent has voted, adjusting for selection¹⁸.

For identification, we consider a variable that affects selection but doesn't have a partial effect on the second-stage equation: distinguishing between sample selection effect and a misspecified functional form becomes extremely challenging, if not impossible, without a variable that influences selection but not the outcome equation (Wooldridge, 2012). We use a measure of respondent's health status as an instrument that (reasonably) affects the decision to vote but not the choice of party, particularly when all other controlling factors are considered¹⁹.

We run weighted regressions using sampling weights to account for differences in sample size across countries. We estimate the following first-stage (selection) equation:

$$v_{ict} = \alpha_0 + \sum_{k=1}^{12} [\alpha_k e_{k,ict} + \gamma_k (e_{k,ict} - p_{k,ict})] + X'_{ict} \omega + M'_{ct} \delta + \lambda z_{ict} + f_c + f_t + \epsilon_{ict} \quad (1)$$

and the following second-stage (outcome) equation:

$$y_{ict} = \beta_0 + \sum_{k=1}^{12} [\beta_k e_{k,ict} + \tau_k (e_{k,ict} - p_{k,ict})] + X'_{ict} \rho + M'_{ct} \pi + f_c + f_t + \nu_{ict} \quad (2)$$

where v_{ict} denotes a the outcome binary variable vote/no vote, y_{ict} the outcome binary variable voting to a populist (far-right, far-left) party of individual i , in country c in year t , $e_{k,ict}$ and $p_{k,ict}$ are, respectively, the voters' time-varying (normative) expectations and perceived performance of the presence in respondent's country of the k -th aspect of democracy (e.g. free-fair elections). The difference $(e_{k,ict} - p_{k,ict})$ is the Ideal Democracy Gap for the aspect k . X_{ict} is a matrix of time-varying voter control variables (e.g. economic uncertainty, relationship to immigration, etc.)²⁰, M_{ct} is a matrix of time-varying country control variables (e.g. Gini index, unemployment rate, etc.), z_{ict} is the health status variable used only in the selection equation. Common trends, country context (e.g. electoral system, existing parties' reactions to major policy issues, etc.) and systematic differences across European countries are controlled by the country fixed effects f_c and wave fixed effects f_t , that are included in all the specifications. The error terms ϵ_{ict} and ν_{ict} varies across individual, countries and time.

To confirm the validity of EDM theory, we report in the Appendix the results of multivariate regressions using satisfaction with democracy as the dependent variable and controlling for country and time fixed effects and individual variables. We show that normative expectations and ideal democracy gaps for all aspects of democracies are relevant, suggesting the validity of EDM theory in this context.

Our approach is not causal, but we employed a large set of controls to limit endogeneity. Notwithstanding, we cannot rule out reverse causality, especially the effects of voter turnout on satisfaction with democracy (Kostelka and Blais, 2018). Another potential channel of reverse causality may be the influence that the presence of previous or expected populist vote share has on the individual satisfaction with democracy.

We have also reported in the Appendix alternative modeling that shows the robustness of our results and estimates of a multinomial logit model (MNL) that allows us to compare, in a single step, the probability of not voting, voting for populist or other parties (e.g. Whitten and Palmer, 1996).

¹⁸We estimated the second stage with OLS (a linear probability model) according with classical Heckman approach instead of a probit model with selection sample bias (Van de Ven and van Praag, 1981) for two main reasons: (i) the same model can be applied also using the POPPA's populist score as dependent variable (that is a continuous variable); (ii) the coefficients are more easily interpreted.

¹⁹Guiso et al. (2017) already used this measure as an instrument, demonstrating its validity.

²⁰Variables that vary with low probability or frequency over time are also included (e.g. gender, education, etc.).

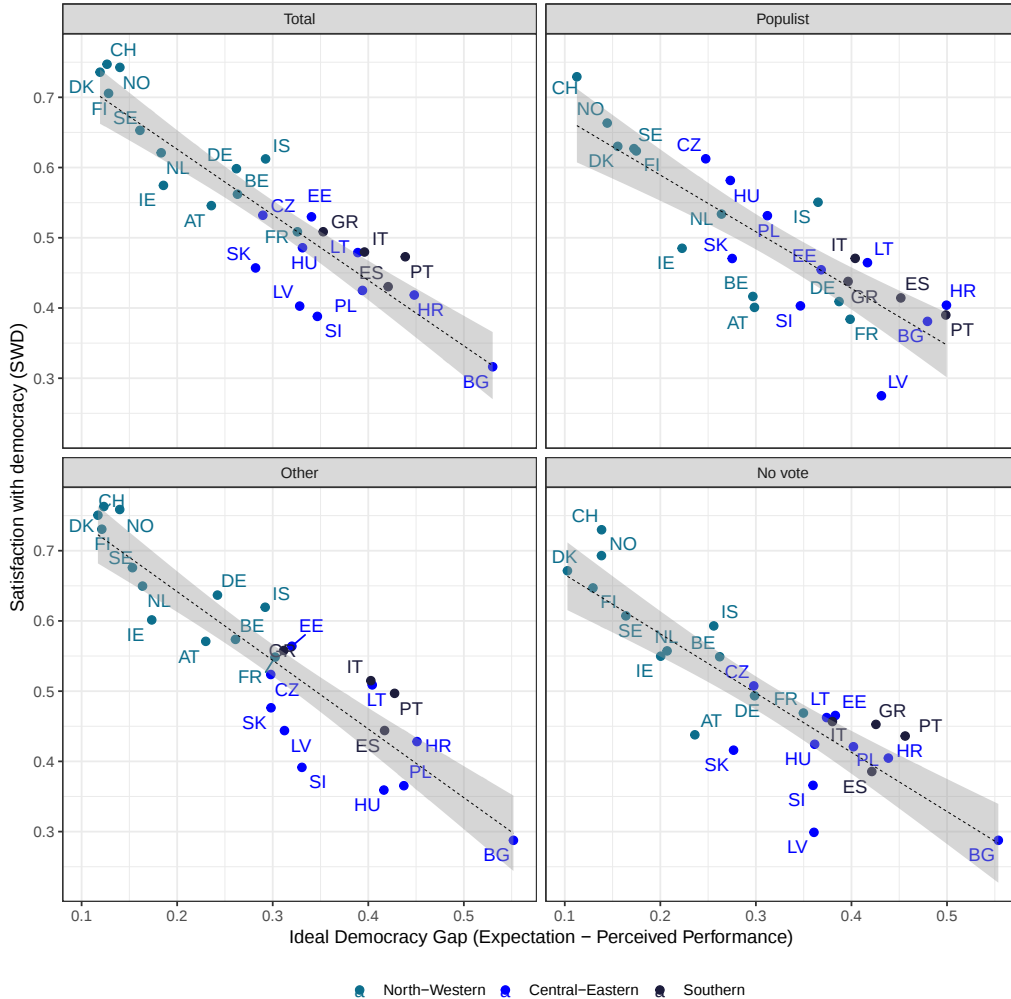
5 Empirical results

First, we examine the link between democratic dissatisfaction, expectations and perceived performance from an expectancy-disconfirmation model (EDM) perspective. We also explore European perceptions of various aspects of democracy. Next, we analyze the link between democratic expectations, perceptions and voting behavior: we examine the differences and similarities among three groups of voters (non-voters, populists and other voters) within European regions on various dimensions of democracy.

5.1 The EDM perspective

Dissatisfaction with democracy is a function of both expectations and perceived performance: a disconfirmation (distance performance-expectation) generate dissatisfaction. There is a robust inverse relationship (Figure 2) between (average) satisfaction with democracy (SWD) and the (average) ideal democracy gap, defined as the mismatch between expectations and perceived performance of an aggregate index that consider all the democracy dimensions²¹: considering all the respondents the correlation is above 90 percent.

Figure 2: SWD and Ideal Democracy Gap by countries (all respondents and voters group)



Source: authors elaboration on ESS (round 6 and 10) data.

²¹Satisfaction with democracy (SWD) is derived from a question explicitly asked in the ESS; the score was scaled between 0 (fully satisfied) and 1 (fully dissatisfied). The ideal democracy gap is defined as difference between the average of the expectations and the average of perceived performance on all the aspects in Table 1.

The degree of dissatisfaction is more pronounced among both populists and non-voters and it is observed in all countries except for Eastern European populists²². Consider Germany as an example: for populists satisfaction is about 0.4 in a range of 0 (totally dissatisfied) to 1 (totally satisfied), about 0.5 for non-voters, and about 0.65 for other voters; the ideal democracy gap scores are reverse-ordered and about 0.4, 0.3, and 0.25, respectively.

It is reasonable that there is a higher level of satisfaction for North-Western Europe countries (which we can call high-quality democracies, HQD) and lower for Southern and Central-Eastern Europe countries (low-quality democracies, LQD) since citizens' satisfaction is also related to the practical functioning of democracies (performance-related evaluations). Perceived performance is a reliable source of information since there is a strong 90 percent correlation between perceived performance and the functioning of democracy; these results are reported in Appendix.

We analyzed several facets of democracy: the electoral dimension and its components (the presence of free and fair elections, the differentiated offer by parties, the possibility of penalizing poorly performing parties, the fact that key decisions are made by national governments rather than at the European level), the liberal dimension (the fact that courts treat everyone equally, freedom of expression valuing the views of ordinary people over those of the political elite and valuing the will of the people, freedom of the press and the protection of minority rights), the social dimension (government protection against poverty and government efforts to reduce income inequality), and the direct democracy dimension (the ability of citizens to express their views through relevant referendums).

Figure 3 shows the average value of expectation, perceived performance and ideal democracy gap for all respondents and by voter group (non-voters, populist voters and other voters) for the aggregate dimension indices (upper part of the graph) and the specific factors²³ within them (lower part of the graph)²⁴.

In short, Europeans exhibit high expectations of democracy since the average rating on the importance scale consistently remains at 8 out of 10 or higher (in both high and low-quality democracies). Europeans view democracy beyond a purely functional definition that includes only the electoral and liberal dimensions. The perceived performance for the social and direct democracy dimensions are especially low, resulting in a large ideal democracy gap : perceived performance on these items receive average scores equal to or lower than 5 out of 10²⁵. Instead the liberal and electoral dimensions of democracy are generally rated more positively, resulting in smaller ideal democracy gaps.

The analysis of the detailed factors by electoral group (lower part of Figure 3) reveals some peculiarities. The most relevant factors for importance are “free and fair elections” and “equality before the law”, but the latter has one of the highest ideal policy gap and particularly for populists and non-voters. Two others aspects to be noted are “view people over elite” and “will not stopped” in line with the definition of populist parties adopted in this context such as parties that support the idea that society is ultimately divided into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004). The ranking of the most important factors, while differing in magnitude, is broadly consistent across groups. The most notable exception concerns government protection of minorities: this is considered a very important factor for other voters, while it is one of the last for populists (who are mainly far-right in Europe).

As a result of a multivariate regression considering the SWD as dependent variable, controlling for country and time fixed effects and individual variables, we observe a positive influence of normative expectations i.e. expectation anchoring. The ideal democracy gaps are (almost) always significantly greater than 0 (perceived performance lower than expectations): on average, the dissatisfaction it's due to a perceived under-performance of democracies. The variables of interest (expectations and ideal democracy gap) are statistically significant in explaining dissatisfaction. This highlights both the effectiveness of EDM in this scenario and the possibility of analyzing nuanced aspects among different groups of voters and their link to voting preferences. We report these results in Appendix.

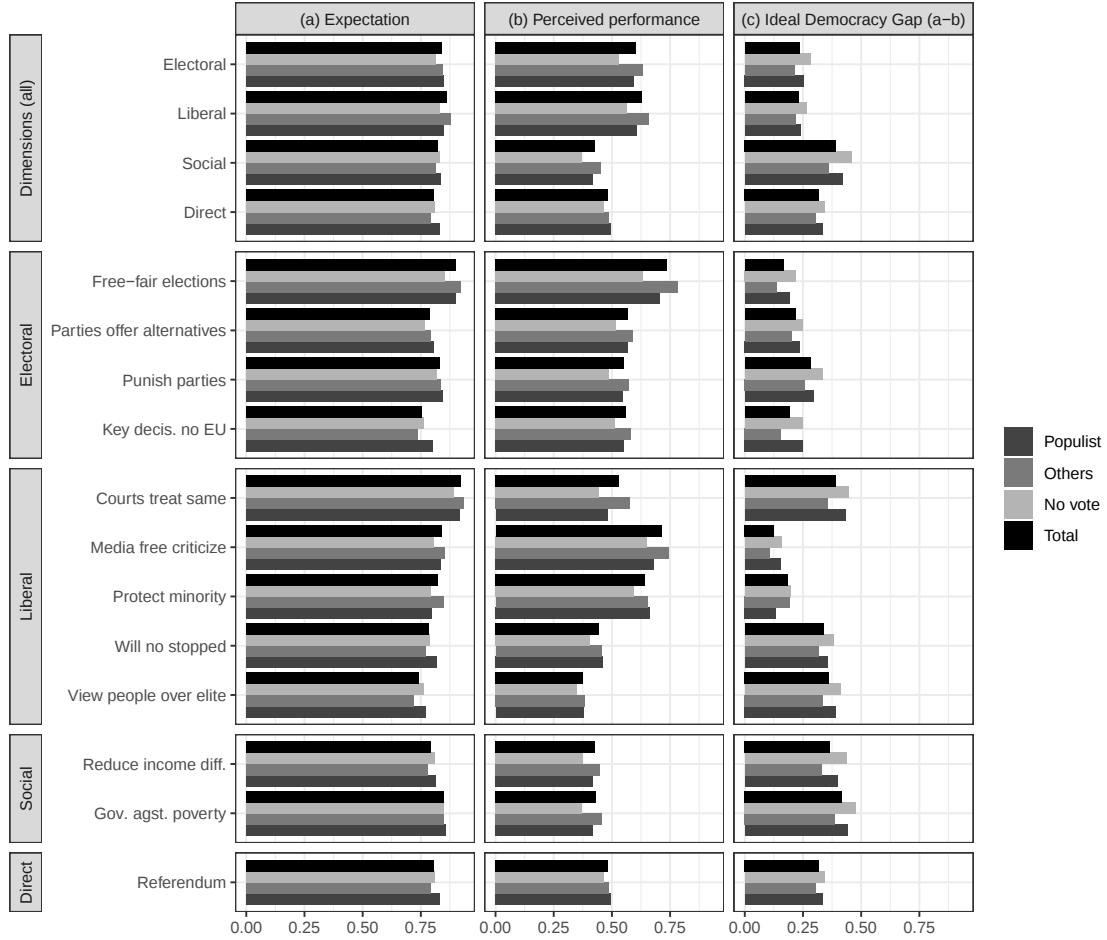
²²Some Eastern Europe populists seems to be more satisfied than their peers elsewhere in Europe.

²³The specific factors are listed in Table 1.

²⁴The results reported refer to average scores. To assess of the robustness of these results, we conducted both an analysis of the factors considered essential for democracy (i.e., those with scores of 10 in the range of 0 to 10) and sorting the scores for each individual, aggregating and ranking them, obtaining consistent results.

²⁵Around 6/10 in high-quality democracies and 4/10 in low-quality ones.

Figure 3: Expectation, perceived performance and gap by voter group and dimensions/factors



Source: authors elaboration on ESS (round 6 and 10) data.

5.2 Expectations, ideal democracy gaps and voting behavior

Table 3 reports the Heckman-model coefficients (according with the model specification detailed in Section 4) of the interest variables (normative expectations and ideal democracy gaps) for the selection equation (vote/no vote) and for the outcome equation (voting decision, given that the respondent has voted, adjusted for selection). We take into account all control variables²⁶ and fixed effects (country and year dummy variables)²⁷.

In the selection equation, the decision to participate in elections is significantly influenced by bad health status, which is the only variable not included in the outcome model. The individuals in bad health are less likely to participate, suggesting that the measure of health seems to be a strong instrument in this context. To enhance the comparability of the magnitudes of the coefficients between the selection and outcome equations, we also report OLS (linear probability model) estimates for the first-stage equation in the Appendix.

The first result is that the ideal democracy gaps (i.e. the “ID-Gap” coefficients) are significant in explaining the decision to go to vote, the populist vote and the non-populist one. A democratic feature may be not important for the individual voter (negative and statistically significant coefficient), but be perceived as under-performing (positive and statistically significant coefficient).

²⁶Results related to control variables align with existing literature. For the sake of simplicity, these results are not explicitly presented in the paper but can be made available by the authors upon request.

²⁷Several specifications are given in the Appendix, each time increasing the set of controls as robustness checks.

Individuals who consider a factor more relevant to an ideal democracy may perceive the same factor as more or less present in their country: for example, populists may view equality before the law as less relevant than other voters and simultaneously perceive it as less present or, conversely, populists may view minority protection as less relevant and perceive greater government intervention. Thus the second result is that expectations (i.e. the “Ideal” coefficients) are statistically significant in explaining the citizens’ decisions (expectations anchoring, according with EDM theory).

Table 3: Heckman estimates: Participation and populist vote

	<i>Selection</i>		<i>Outcome</i>			
	<i>Vote</i>		<i>Populist</i>		<i>Populist far-right</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>						
Free and fair elections	0.861*** (0.125)	-0.339*** (0.078)	-0.005 (0.047)	-0.037 (0.042)	0.004 (0.051)	-0.025 (0.041)
Differentiated offer by parties	0.062 (0.068)	-0.033 (0.033)	0.043** (0.020)	-0.041*** (0.014)	0.014 (0.018)	-0.013 (0.013)
Conseq. for poor governance	0.234*** (0.080)	-0.141*** (0.043)	-0.014 (0.031)	0.014 (0.011)	-0.011 (0.032)	0.007 (0.009)
Key decisions, no EU	0.114 (0.105)	-0.172** (0.079)	0.058 (0.054)	0.070*** (0.016)	0.058 (0.054)	0.073*** (0.019)
<i>Liberal</i>						
Equality before the law	0.145 (0.119)	0.048 (0.061)	-0.119*** (0.040)	0.092*** (0.034)	-0.043 (0.028)	0.023 (0.019)
Protection of minority rights	-0.198** (0.083)	0.168*** (0.059)	-0.012 (0.032)	-0.058*** (0.016)	-0.023 (0.018)	-0.042*** (0.012)
Media freedom	-0.248*** (0.091)	0.109 (0.069)	-0.027 (0.021)	0.002 (0.019)	-0.009 (0.018)	0.016 (0.018)
Will no stopped	-0.003 (0.094)	-0.058 (0.091)	0.096* (0.053)	-0.071 (0.053)	0.071 (0.051)	-0.060 (0.049)
View people over elite	-0.168 (0.121)	0.078 (0.068)	-0.031 (0.027)	0.014 (0.021)	-0.012 (0.014)	0.001 (0.014)
<i>Social</i>						
Social justice	-0.037 (0.162)	-0.100* (0.055)	0.179** (0.077)	-0.023 (0.035)	0.108 (0.083)	-0.012 (0.023)
<i>Direct democracy</i>						
Participation via referendum	-0.110*** (0.040)	0.011 (0.055)	0.041 (0.027)	0.015* (0.009)	0.022 (0.027)	0.010 (0.007)
<i>Selection instrument:</i>						
Health status	Yes		No		No	
<i>Controls:</i>						
Demographic	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Economic situation	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Attitudes and politics	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Macroeconomic	Yes		Yes		Yes	
<i>Fixed effects (FE):</i>						
Country	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Year	Yes		Yes		Yes	
Observations	56,106		43,516		43,516	
Adjusted R ²	-		0.245		0.266	

Note: Robust clustered standard error at country level in parenthesis. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01

Looking at the specific results, there are several aspects to consider. Consider first the electoral dimension of democracy. First, there are several statistically significant differences between individuals who abstain from voting and those who participate. Non-voters assign less importance to the presence of free and fair elections. At the same time, the ideal democracy gap's coefficient is greater for non-voters i.e. they are less satisfied respect to expectations. Second, non-voters have larger ideal democracy gaps compared to voters with regard to the importance of penalizing parties that performed poorly during their time in government. Third, populists give more importance to having a diverse range of parties to choose from and are more satisfied (i.e have lower ideal democracy gap). This may be due to the perception that populist parties' election manifestos are seen as innovative and alternative to those of classical parties. Fourth, populists have a large ideal democracy gap's coefficient regarding key decisions being made by national governments instead of the European Union. This is in line with the literature observing a strong correlation between the probability of voting for a populist party and distrust in political institutions. Indeed a high probability of voting for populist parties is associated with a negative view of European integration and low levels of trust in political institutions (Dustmann et al., 2017). This particular aspect is exclusive to the round 10 of ESS, is considered more important by voters and this pattern is mainly due to the substantial influence of populist voters, even though results for non-voters are similar.

Consider now the liberal dimension of democracy. First, non-voters, populists and others believe that the most important factors for democracy is that the courts treat everyone equally. Populists give less importance to this factor than other voters. Moreover, there is a large and persistent ideal democracy gap-s coefficient on this dimension and it is greater for populists than the others²⁸. Second, the government's protection of minority rights is an unimportant factor for populist parties excluding far-left parties while it is more relevant for those who did not vote. In addition voters, and particularly those who voted for a populist party, have a negative coefficient on ideal democracy gap for this dimension i.e. they perceive it as less important for their vote²⁹. Third, there appears to be no distinction in the importance and performance ratings for media freedom between populists and other voters. In the literature, it has been shown that populists have a negative impact on freedom of expression and, partly because of this, are often seen as a threat to the stability of liberal democracies (Kenney, 2019). Interestingly, non-voters, when compared to voters, place greater emphasis on the media being less free to criticize the government, a factor that can be considered a reliable proxy for freedom of expression. Fourth, no statistically significant differences emerge between voters and non-voters regarding the perception that the will of the people is unstoppable and that the opinions of the common people prevail over those of the political elite. Populists place greater importance on the possibility that people's opinions may prevail over political elites, rather consistent with the populist party definition adopted (Mudde, 2004), while no differences are observed on the will of the people. In contrast, no differences are observed between far-right populists and other voters. These factors are observable only for the year 2020 (we have data available for the 10th round of the ESS), and therefore, we cannot ascertain whether they have never been relevant in voting behavior or if they are not specifically relevant for recent years.

Consider now the social and direct dimensions of democracy. First, in general the social dimension assumes greater importance, especially for non-voters and populists (excluding the far-right segment). In line with Bischi et al. (2022), both of these groups express a desire for more proactive government measures to alleviate income inequality and protect citizens from poverty³⁰. In contrast, the more conservative factions tend to place less emphasis on these social issues. Second, the direct democracy dimension has a slightly positive coefficient on ideal democracy gap for populists.

To sum up and in light of what has been said so far, it seems that a policy position is evolving that seeks to strike a delicate balance. This involves addressing economic inequality through government intervention and assistance, while maintaining a commitment to preserving cultural and social traditions. Importantly, this position seeks to avoid overly intrusive intervention in the protection of minorities. This reflects an approach that seeks to manage the complicated interaction between social, economic and cultural aspects.

As highlighted in the literature, the essence of modern democracies lies in the aspiration to inclusively represent diverse interests. However, the discontent observed among populist parties often

²⁸The coefficients for both the overall regression and the 2020 regression are significant and exhibit similar magnitudes.

²⁹This may reflect a more conservative and more skeptical view of government involvement in minority protection.

³⁰Due to their strong correlation, we combined these factors by averaging their values to represent the social dimension, thus mitigating issues with multicollinearity.

stems from their aversion to compromise and the perception that the political system is unable to authentically address the concerns of the people. Populist movements, in particular, show a preference for direct democratic mechanisms, advocating tools such as referendums and direct election of leaders. These methods are seen as powerful tools for challenging the established political elite and promoting a more direct and comprehensive representation of the collective will of the people (Mohrenberg et al., 2021). Our study aligns with this perspective, revealing that populists are most dissatisfied because they perceive fewer opportunities for citizens to have the final say on major policy issues and would like more say through direct participation via referendums. This highlights the intricate relationship between populist sentiments, dissatisfaction with the compromise-oriented nature of modern democracies and the demand for more direct forms of citizen involvement.

5.2.1 Geographical differences

The results presented in Table 3 constrain the impacts of different components on populist party participation and support to be uniform across European nations. Despite the commonality of key principles present in the platforms of all populist parties, these parties in different countries may emphasize different aspects. For example, populist platforms in Northern Europe may place more emphasis on immigration than in Southern countries, while populists in Southern Europe may place more emphasis on unemployment resulting from austerity policies (Guiso et al., 2017). Differences between countries and between populist parties in different countries may thus also impact the factors deemed most important to democracy and respondents’ perceptions of them. To test whether this has an impact and its magnitude, we have reported differentiated estimates for three European macro-regions (North-West, Central-East and South) in the Appendix.

There is a general consistency of results among voter groups for the three European macro-regions, although with differences related to specific factors. We summarize the main evidence.

On the electoral dimension of democracy, the ideal democracy gap for “free and fair elections” is significant for populists in the North-Western countries while there are no significant differences between populists and non-populists in the other countries. Moreover, for non-voters in all three macro-regions this ideal democracy gap has a positive coefficient, particularly for Southern countries. The large ideal democracy gaps’ coefficient for non-voters (compared to voters) related to the importance of penalizing parties that performed poorly during their time in government is mainly due to Central-Eastern countries, while a positive effect regarding key decisions being made by national governments instead of the European Union is observed for populist voters in the North-Western countries.

Considering the liberal dimension of democracy, there is a large ideal democracy gap’s coefficient on “equality before the law” for low-quality³¹ democracies’ populist voters while the government’s protection of minority rights generates dissatisfaction particularly for populists in high quality democracies³². For both the Northwestern and Southern European countries, populists are most dissatisfied with the fact that the media are free to criticize the government. Differently, this aspect is considered of great importance by non-voters (compared to voters) for all three macro-regions. Finally, Central-Eastern populist voters gives more importance to the fact that “the will of the people is unstoppable”.

Regarding the social dimension of democracy, non-voters in the Southern countries desire more proactive government measures to alleviate income inequality and protect citizens from poverty i.e. have an higher ideal democracy gap on this feature.

On the direct dimension of democracy, the Central-Eastern populist voters and non-voters show a higher dissatisfaction, i.e. lower perceived performance.

6 Conclusion

This paper uses individual survey level data from 26 European countries to study populism and democratic dissatisfaction. We use an Heckman model to study both the decision to go to vote and the decision to vote for populists using 2012 and 2020 data. Democratic dissatisfaction for a specific feature is captured by the level of expectations (e.g. how important is having “free and fair elections”) and by the difference between expectations and perceived performance i.e. the ideal democracy gap (how far the country is respect to the individual ideal). We obtain three main results.

³¹i.e. Central-Eastern and Southern ones. The results are especially large for Southern ones.

³²i.e. North-Western ones.

First, we show that democratic dissatisfaction is correlated with respective ideal democracy gap, confirming the EDM theory.

Second, ideal democracy gaps are significant in explaining both the decision to go to vote and the decision to vote for populists after controlling for economic variables, political ones and attitudes. These results are original since there is a distinct contributing channel to populist vote that relies on democratic dissatisfaction and we are able to dissect the specific sub-conditions under which it happens. In particular, we find that dissatisfaction with democratic aspects is particularly strong among populist voters and non-voters. While dissatisfaction is widespread throughout Europe, Eastern European countries show higher levels of satisfaction among populists, highlighting regional differences in democratic discontent. Our analysis reveals that European citizens have high expectations of democracy, but perceive significant gaps in the social, direct and specific aspects of the electoral and liberal dimensions.

Third, by comparing non voters and populists we find that they have many similarities suggesting a potential future with higher populist vote share (the “tip of the iceberg” idea). Indeed they both are highly dissatisfied with the same democratic features (except for the protection of minority rights).

In conclusion, this paper extends existing literature by offering a comprehensive analysis of democratic dissatisfaction, encompassing expectations and ideal democracy gaps across various democratic dimensions. We show the intricate relationship between democratic dissatisfaction and voting behavior, providing valuable insights into the complexities of contemporary democracies and its implications for political outcomes.

Our approach is limited by the the fact that data is available only for 2012 and 2020 through a specific module of the ESS (European Social Survey), while it would have been optimal to get more data and optimally panel data with the same respondents. Nevertheless, the data are abundant and clear: democratic dissatisfaction proxies such the ideal democracy gaps are important and useful to understand populism and voting behaviour.

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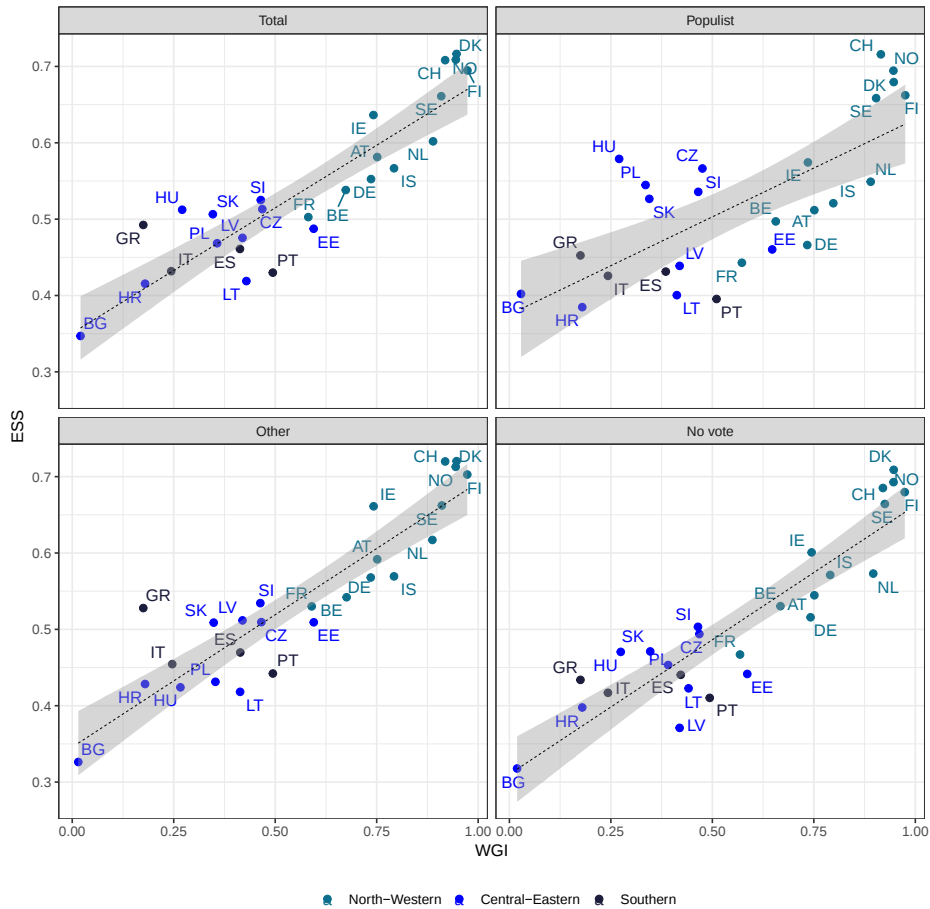
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Appendix A Validation of survey data

A.1 ESS and Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI)

It is reasonable to assume that citizens' perceived performance of democracy depends on the practical functioning of democracies (performance-related evaluations). In Figure A1 we report a scatter-plot between perceived performance and functioning of democracy differentiated by three groups: populist voters, other voters and non-voters. We construct an electoral-liberal index that averages the answers of ESS respondents to the factors of the electoral and liberal dimensions and, in accordance with [Topline \(2014\)](#), a World Governance summary index that average these six WGI indicators: Control of corruption; Government effectiveness; Political stability; Regulatory stability; Rule of law; Voice and Accountability. A strong correlation can be observed suggesting that citizen responses are a reliable source for measuring democratic quality, so they can be used to examine other aspects of democracy explored in the survey. Considering all the respondents the correlation is above 90 percent (about 75 percent for populist, 91 percent for other voters and 90 percent for non-voters)³³.

Figure A1: WGI indicators and perceived (ESS) performance



Source: authors elaboration on WGI and ESS (round 6 and 10) data.

Comparing the three groups it is observed that perceptions are consistently lower for populists and non-voters, who appear to be more pessimistic. This is valid for the same country for both high quality democracies (North-Western Europe) and low quality democracies (Southern and Central-Eastern Europe³⁴), albeit on different levels of functioning democracy.

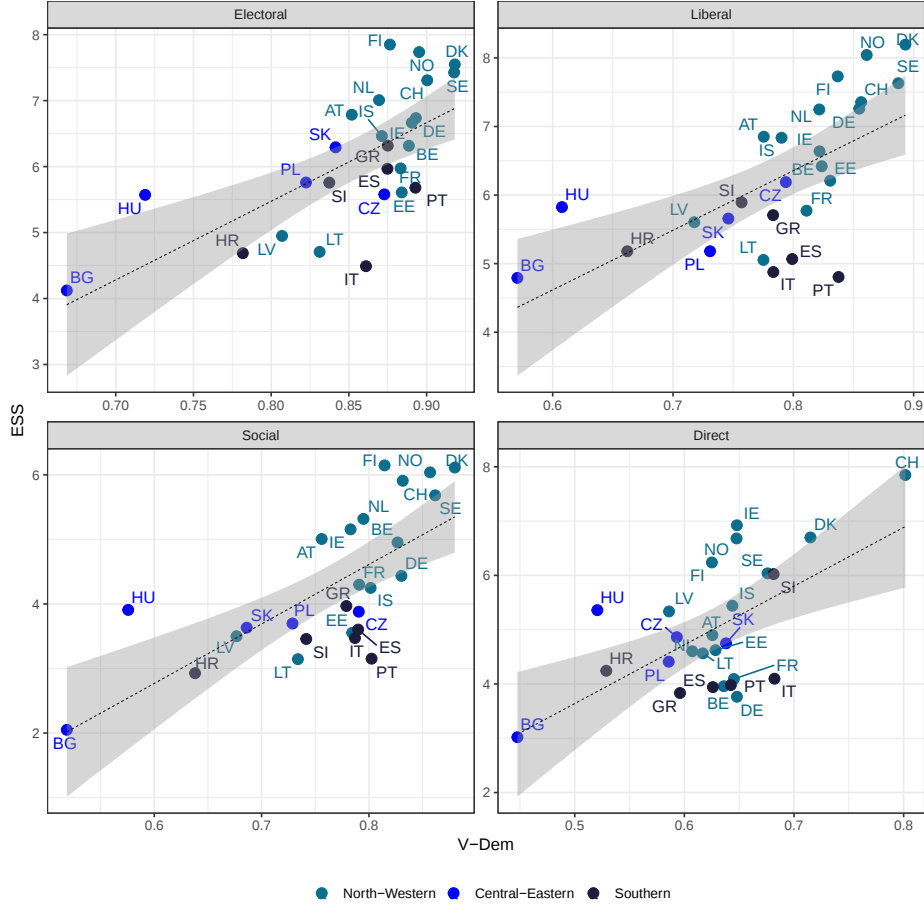
³³Considering also the social and direct democracy dimensions the correlations are respectively: 90 percent for all the respondents, 72 percent for populist, 91 percent for other voters and 90 percent for non-voters.

³⁴Some exceptions are reported for Eastern Europe populists who seems to be more satisfied.

A.2 ESS and V-DEM indicators

We also used the V-Dem dataset (Coppedge et al., 2023) to test the robustness of the data on respondents' perceptions on different aspects of democracy at country level. In Figure A2 we report a scatter-plot between the aggregate indexes on four dimensions of democracy: electoral, liberal, social and direct which shows a strong correlation between the perceived performance of the ESS and the V-DEM data. The correlations are about 70 percent on electoral and social dimension, 65 percent on liberal dimension and 60 percent on direct.

Figure A2: V-DEM indicators and perceived (ESS) performance



Source: authors elaboration on V-Dem and ESS (round 6 and 10) data.

Although the two data sources appear to be fairly aligned, there are some differences that are likely due to the different detailed indicators considered to represent the dimensions of democracy. The V-DEM indexes considered are: “v2x_polyarchy” for the electoral dimension includes freedom of expression, freedom of association, share of population with suffrage, clean elections and elected officials; “v2x_libdem” for the liberal dimension includes equality before the law and individual liberty, judicial constraints on the executive and legislative constraints on the executive; “v2x_egaldem” for the social dimension includes equal protection, equal access and equal distribution of resources; “v2x_partipdem” for the direct dimension includes civil society participation, direct popular vote, local and regional government (for further details on the contents of the variables, see Coppedge et al., 2023). The ESS indexes are the averages of respondents' responses to the factors of the electoral, liberal, social and direct dimensions (see the full list of variables included in each dimension in the main text).

Appendix B Robustness checks

B.1 Controls variables

In Table B1 are reported the descriptive statistics of all the control variables included in the multivariate regressions; in Table B2 we report the description and source of each control variables. We include also country and year fixed effects in all the specifications as control variables; the source of these information is the ESS.

Table B1: Descriptive statistics of controls variables

Variable	N	Missing	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
<i>Demographic</i>						
Gender (Female=1)	80,150	436	0.52	0.43	0.00	1.00
Age	79,686	900	50.48	15.39	15.00	103.00
Education	79,715	871	2.02	0.68	1.00	3.00
Big city	79,972	614	0.29	0.39	0.00	1.00
Household grid: live alone	80,180	406	0.17	0.32	0.00	1.00
Household grid: live in 4 or more	80,180	406	0.09	0.25	0.00	1.00
Household grid: child under 10 yrs	79,786	800	0.06	0.20	0.00	1.00
Foreign	80,324	262	0.02	0.13	0.00	1.00
Parents foreign	80,246	340	0.08	0.23	0.00	1.00
Religious	79,698	888	0.46	0.27	0.00	1.00
Discriminated for racism	79,661	925	0.03	0.14	0.00	1.00
Discriminated for other reason	79,661	925	0.06	0.21	0.00	1.00
Bulgary/assault victim	80,198	388	0.15	0.31	0.00	1.00
<i>Economic situation</i>						
Social benefit	78,609	1,977	0.04	0.17	0.00	1.00
Economic insecurity	79,989	597	0.56	0.60	0.00	3.00
<i>Attitudes, politics</i>						
Feel unsafe in the dark	79,812	774	0.24	0.37	0.00	1.00
No accept gays/lesbians	78,482	2,104	0.09	0.25	0.00	1.00
Immigration negative	73,884	6,702	-0.11	0.99	-2.37	2.84
National institutions	80,199	387	0.39	0.19	0.00	1.00
International inst.	77,275	3,311	0.47	0.20	0.00	1.00
Interested in politics	80,360	226	0.48	0.26	0.00	1.00
Political participation	80,586	0	0.44	0.43	0.00	1.00
Left-right scale	73,188	7,398	0.51	0.24	0.00	1.00
<i>Macroeconomic</i>						
Gini index	80,586	0	31.78	2.68	23.20	40.50
Unemployment rate	80,586	0	8.93	5	3	25
Control of corruption	80,586	0	1.15	0.58	-0.32	2.38

Table B2: Controls variables: description and sources

Variable	Description	Source
Demographic		
Gender	Binary variable: 1 if female, 0 otherwise	ESS
Age	Logarithm of age	ESS
Education	Respondent's highest level of education : low (ISCED 0-2), mid (ISCED 3-4), and high (ISCED 5-6)	ESS
Big city	Binary variable: 1 if respondent lives in a big city, outskirts or suburbs 0 if town, small city, village, farm or countryside	ESS
Household grid	Three binary variables that indicate if respondent's : (i) live alone; (ii) has child under 10 years old; (iii) live in 4 or more	ESS
Foreign	Binary variable encoded as: 1 if respondent is not born in the interview country, 0 otherwise	ESS
Parents foreign	Binary variable encoded as: 1 if at least one of the parents' respondent is not born in the interview country, 0 otherwise	ESS
Religious	Respondent's answer to the question how religious are you (0 to 10-point scale: 0=not religious, 10=very religious).	ESS
Discriminated	Two binary variables that indicate if respondent's has been discriminated for at least one of: (i) race, language, ethnic group, nationality; (ii) religion, age, gender, disability, sexuality; other	ESS
Bulgary/assault victim	Binary variable : 1 if the respondent or family member declares to be victim of bulgary/assault in the last 5 years, 0 otherwise	ESS
Economic situation		
Social benefit	Binary variable: 1 if the main source of the respondent's income is unemployment/other social benefit, 0 otherwise	ESS
Economic insecurity	Index of insecurity (Berloff et al. (2019); Ivanov (2023)): 3 = finding hard or extremely hard to survive on current income, has experienced long-term unemployment (3 months or more) and is an unskilled worker (skills classification according to Erikson et al. (1979)), 2 = at least two of the above-mentioned elements are true, 1 = at least one, 0 = none.	ESS
Attitudes, politics		
Feel unsafe in the dark	Binary variable: 1 if the respondent feel unsafe of walking alone in local area after dark, 0 otherwise	ESS
No accept gays/lesbians	Binary variable: 1 if the respondent disagree with: "Gay/lesbians should be free to live as they wish", 0 otherwise	ESS
Immigration negative	Constructed index based on a factor analysis of 6 variables that capture the respondent's attitudes with immigration: immigration bad or good for country's economy, country's cultural life undermined or enriched by immigrants, immigrants make country worse or better place to live , allow many/few immigrants of same race/ethnic group as majority ,about people of a different race or ethnic group from most , about people from the poorer countries outside Europe.	ESS
National institutions	Mean of items: trust in politicians, parties, parliament, legal system (0 to 10-point scale: 0=no trust, 10=high trust).	ESS
International inst.	Mean of items: trust in European Parliament and in United Nations (0 to 10-point scale: 0=no trust, 10=high trust).	ESS
Interested in politics	Respondent's answer to the question how interested in politics (0 to 4-point scale: 0=no interest, 10=high interest).	ESS
Political participation	Binary variable: 1 if the respondent has participated in politics in the last year (petition, public demonst.etc.), 0 otherwise	ESS
Left-right scale	Respondent's placement on left-right politics scale (0 to 10-point scale: 0-3=left, 4-6=center, 7-10=right)	ESS
Macroeconomic		
Gini index	Gini index measures income (or consumption) inequality in an economy, showing how far it deviates from perfect equality among individuals or households (0=perfect equality, 1 = perfect inequality)	WDI
Unemployment rate	Percentage of unemployed over labour force 15-64	OECD
Control of corruption	Corruption Index measures how public power is used for private gain, covering various forms of corruption and state capture by elites (country score in units of standard normal distribution, i.e. range from -2.5 to 2.5)	WGI

B.2 Selection equation: Probit vs OLS

In Table B3 we compare the Probit and a Linear Probability (OLS) model coefficients: the results are essentially consistent. The main advantage of presenting the OLS coefficients for the selection equation is that the magnitudes are comparable with those in the second-stage equation. Therefore, in the OLS scenario we are also able to sum the coefficients of the ideal and ideal democratic gap to obtain the total contribution of the ideal coefficient.

Table B3: Heckman estimates: Participation to vote (yes/no) - Probit vs OLS estimates

	<i>Probit</i>		<i>OLS</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>				
Free and fair elections	0.861*** (0.125)	-0.339*** (0.078)	0.238*** (0.025)	-0.083*** (0.018)
Differentiated offer by parties	0.062 (0.068)	-0.033 (0.033)	0.008 (0.015)	-0.003 (0.007)
Consequences of poor governance	0.234*** (0.080)	-0.141*** (0.043)	0.042** (0.019)	-0.026*** (0.005)
Key decisions, no EU	0.114 (0.105)	-0.172** (0.079)	0.038 (0.024)	-0.033* (0.019)
<i>Liberal</i>				
Equality before the law	0.145 (0.119)	0.048 (0.061)	0.029 (0.037)	0.008 (0.012)
Protection of minority rights	-0.198** (0.083)	0.168*** (0.059)	-0.055** (0.022)	0.039*** (0.015)
Media freedom	-0.248*** (0.091)	0.109 (0.069)	-0.064*** (0.021)	0.028* (0.016)
Will no stopped	-0.003 (0.094)	-0.058 (0.091)	-0.024 (0.020)	-0.009 (0.022)
View people over elite	-0.168 (0.121)	0.078 (0.068)	-0.014 (0.020)	0.006 (0.013)
<i>Social</i>				
Social justice	-0.037 (0.162)	-0.100* (0.055)	-0.014 (0.032)	-0.017 (0.011)
<i>Direct</i>				
Participation via referendum	-0.110*** (0.040)	0.011 (0.055)	0.005 (0.014)	-0.002 (0.012)
Observations	56,106		56,106	
Adjusted R ²	-		0.188	

Note: All controls included. Robust clustered standard error at country level in parenthesis.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

B.3 Different sub-samples

We test the robustness of our results selecting three sub-samples for different reasons.

First, we exclude countries that did not use face-to-face interviewing in 2020 (Austria, Germany, Spain, Latvia, Poland, and Sweden) from the full sample. In fact, due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Round 10, some countries switched to a self-completion approach (web and paper) instead of the usual ESS face-to-face fieldwork approach.

Second, we consider two sub-samples related to more restrictive conditions on election-ESS interviews timing. The repeated cross-sectional data of the ESS have an important feature: each participant is asked about their vote in the last parliamentary elections. Since ESS interviews are conducted every two years, some problematic situations may arise: (i) cases where multiple waves are associated with the same election and (ii) cases where elections occurred too early in relation to the survey. In the following Table B4, are reported the list of the countries considered where “*N*” indicates a national election in that year, “*E*” indicates an ESS wave in that year and “*N;E*” indicates both national election/ESS wave in that year. The blue color indicates the ESS surveys with these characteristics: no repeated ESS wave for each national election with a time distance of maximum two years; the green color indicates the others ESS surveys in the years of interest (2012 and 2020). The first option (blue), that is more restrictive, is available for 9 countries (Estonia, Finland, Ireland, Lithuania, Switzerland, Poland, Slovakia, Spain and Portugal); the second option (adding the green) for 21 countries.

Table B4: Elections and ESS waves by country considering the years of interest (2012 and 2020)

EU Region	Country	Years (20xx)									
		08	09	10	11	12	17	18	19	20	
North-West	AT-Austria	<i>N</i>					<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	BE-Belgium	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	CH-Switzerland	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	DE-Germany	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	DK-Denmark	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>		
	FI-Finland	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	FR-France	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	IE-Ireland	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>	
	IS-Iceland		<i>N</i>			<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	NL-Netherlands	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>N;E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	NO-Norway	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	SE-Sweden	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	
Central-East	BG-Bulgaria	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	CZ-Czechia	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	EE-Estonia	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	HR-Croatia	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>			<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>	
	HU-Hungary	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	LT-Lithuania	<i>N</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>	
	LV-Latvia	<i>E</i>		<i>N</i>	<i>N</i>			<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	PL-Poland	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	SI-Slovenia	<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	SK-Slovakia	<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>	
South	ES-Spain	<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	GR-Greece	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>N</i>			<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	
	IT-Italy	<i>N</i>				<i>E</i>		<i>N;E</i>		<i>E</i>	
	PT-Portugal	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>		<i>E</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>E</i>	

In Table B5 and B6 we report, respectively for both selection (voted yes/no) and outcome (vote for populist party yes/no), the results for the three sub-samples: (1) only face-to-face interview; (2) first option for election dates-ESS interview timing; (3) second option for election dates-ESS interview timing.

Table B5: Heckman estimates: Participation to vote (yes/no) - comparison of sub-samples

	Baseline		Face-to-face		Elections-ESS (1)		Elections-ESS (2)	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>								
Free and fair elections	0.861*** (0.125)	-0.339*** (0.078)	0.853*** (0.135)	-0.375*** (0.100)	0.673*** (0.088)	-0.299*** (0.036)	0.860*** (0.128)	-0.344*** (0.080)
Differentiated offer by parties	0.062 (0.068)	-0.033 (0.033)	-0.015 (0.091)	0.013 (0.040)	0.026 (0.142)	0.037 (0.056)	0.045 (0.069)	-0.018 (0.033)
Conseq. for poor governance	0.234*** (0.080)	-0.141*** (0.043)	0.295*** (0.102)	-0.192*** (0.054)	0.252** (0.111)	-0.053 (0.035)	0.234*** (0.083)	-0.144*** (0.044)
Key decisions, no EU	0.114 (0.105)	-0.172** (0.079)	0.289*** (0.061)	-0.121* (0.064)	0.185** (0.077)	-0.273*** (0.077)	0.111 (0.111)	-0.177** (0.083)
<i>Liberal</i>								
Equality before the law	0.145 (0.119)	0.048 (0.061)	0.183 (0.122)	-0.001 (0.073)	-0.039 (0.098)	0.145 (0.098)	0.156 (0.124)	0.052 (0.063)
Protection of minority rights	-0.198** (0.083)	0.168*** (0.059)	-0.142 (0.121)	0.127* (0.071)	-0.097** (0.041)	0.202** (0.097)	-0.204** (0.084)	0.167*** (0.060)
Media freedom	-0.248*** (0.091)	0.109 (0.069)	-0.291*** (0.101)	0.091 (0.082)	-0.014 (0.059)	0.051 (0.134)	-0.256*** (0.092)	0.115 (0.070)
Will no stopped	-0.003 (0.094)	-0.058 (0.091)	0.125 (0.131)	-0.254*** (0.060)	-0.232*** (0.067)	0.181*** (0.058)	-0.017 (0.098)	-0.043 (0.090)
View people over elite	-0.168 (0.121)	0.078 (0.068)	-0.252** (0.126)	0.207*** (0.068)	0.213*** (0.077)	-0.160*** (0.027)	-0.160 (0.126)	0.069 (0.070)
<i>Social</i>								
Social justice	-0.037 (0.162)	-0.100* (0.055)	-0.009 (0.221)	0.013 (0.055)	-0.242** (0.096)	-0.180*** (0.056)	-0.027 (0.167)	-0.105* (0.056)
<i>Direct</i>								
Participation via referendum	-0.110*** (0.040)	0.011 (0.055)	-0.146*** (0.057)	0.017 (0.070)	-0.091 (0.097)	-0.099 (0.114)	-0.117*** (0.042)	0.010 (0.056)
Observations	56,106		43,944		19,672		50,256	

Note: All controls included. Robust clustered standard error at country level in parenthesis. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table B6: Heckman estimates: Vote for populist party (yes/no) - comparison of sub-samples

	<i>Baseline</i>		<i>Face-to-face</i>		<i>Elections-ESS (1)</i>		<i>Elections-ESS (2)</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>								
Free and fair elections	-0.005 (0.048)	-0.037 (0.043)	-0.070** (0.032)	-0.006 (0.034)	0.030 (0.023)	-0.055*** (0.018)	0.001 (0.048)	-0.041 (0.042)
Differentiated offer by parties	0.043** (0.021)	-0.041*** (0.014)	0.065*** (0.019)	-0.048* (0.026)	0.058*** (0.018)	-0.056*** (0.011)	0.042* (0.021)	-0.039*** (0.014)
Conseq. for poor governance	-0.014 (0.032)	0.014 (0.011)	-0.001 (0.026)	0.014 (0.015)	-0.090* (0.052)	0.029** (0.013)	-0.016 (0.033)	0.014 (0.011)
Key decisions, no EU	0.058 (0.055)	0.070*** (0.016)	0.078** (0.032)	0.080** (0.039)	0.204*** (0.075)	0.046* (0.027)	0.065 (0.057)	0.062*** (0.015)
<i>Liberal</i>								
Equality before the law	-0.119*** (0.040)	0.092*** (0.035)	-0.088** (0.042)	0.060 (0.043)	-0.190*** (0.035)	0.120*** (0.013)	-0.122*** (0.041)	0.096*** (0.035)
Protection of minority rights	-0.012 (0.033)	-0.058*** (0.016)	-0.011 (0.036)	-0.041*** (0.013)	-0.069*** (0.019)	-0.044*** (0.014)	-0.012 (0.034)	-0.064*** (0.015)
Media freedom	-0.027 (0.022)	0.002 (0.019)	-0.011 (0.014)	0.018 (0.027)	-0.105*** (0.019)	0.026*** (0.004)	-0.025 (0.022)	-0.001 (0.021)
Will no stopped	0.096* (0.054)	-0.071 (0.054)	0.003 (0.045)	-0.026 (0.030)	0.138* (0.072)	-0.100 (0.080)	0.097* (0.054)	-0.074 (0.055)
View people over elite	-0.031 (0.028)	0.014 (0.022)	-0.019 (0.067)	-0.016 (0.053)	0.004 (0.010)	-0.042 (0.026)	-0.031 (0.028)	0.013 (0.022)
<i>Social</i>								
Social justice	0.179** (0.079)	-0.023 (0.036)	0.077** (0.037)	0.025 (0.030)	0.333*** (0.082)	-0.091*** (0.018)	0.193** (0.080)	-0.025 (0.037)
<i>Direct</i>								
Participation via referendum	0.041 (0.028)	0.015* (0.009)	0.076*** (0.026)	0.029** (0.013)	-0.005 (0.030)	0.036** (0.014)	0.040 (0.027)	0.015 (0.009)
Observations	43,516		33,127		14,255		38,700	
Adjusted R ²	0.245		0.276		0.266		0.251	

Note: All controls included. Robust clustered standard error at country level in parenthesis. *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

B.4 Dependent variable and model specification

We test the robustness of our results running different model specifications.

First, we use an alternative populist indicator (populist score) based on POPPA (Populism and Political Parties Expert surveys) for the outcome equation of the Heckman model.

In Table B7 we report OLS estimates.

Table B7: Heckman estimates: Vote for populist party - “The Populist” flag vs “POPPA” score

	<i>The Populist flag (yes/no)</i>		<i>POPPA score</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>				
Free and fair elections	-0.005 (0.048)	-0.037 (0.043)	-0.275 (0.373)	-0.071 (0.364)
Differentiated offer by parties	0.043** (0.021)	-0.041*** (0.014)	0.080 (0.199)	-0.066 (0.076)
Conseq. for poor governance	-0.014 (0.032)	0.014 (0.011)	-0.316 (0.264)	0.202** (0.084)
Key decisions, no EU	0.058 (0.055)	0.070*** (0.016)	0.477 (0.451)	0.569*** (0.145)
<i>Liberal</i>				
Equality before the law	-0.119*** (0.040)	0.092*** (0.035)	-0.553* (0.282)	0.581*** (0.218)
Protection of minority rights	-0.012 (0.033)	-0.058*** (0.016)	-0.228 (0.198)	-0.299* (0.160)
Media freedom	-0.027 (0.022)	0.002 (0.019)	-0.204* (0.118)	0.168 (0.117)
Will no stopped	0.096* (0.054)	-0.071 (0.054)	0.610 (0.400)	-0.405 (0.446)
View people over elite	-0.031 (0.028)	0.014 (0.022)	-0.144 (0.182)	-0.007 (0.131)
<i>Social</i>				
Social justice	0.179** (0.079)	-0.023 (0.036)	1.512** (0.592)	-0.307 (0.254)
<i>Direct</i>				
Participation via referendum	0.041 (0.028)	0.015* (0.009)	0.373 (0.235)	0.191** (0.085)
Observations	43,516		35,104	
Adjusted R ²	0.245		0.333	

Note: All controls included. Robust clustered standard error at country level in parenthesis.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Second, we run a multinomial logit model (MNL) that allows us to compare, in a single step, the probability of not voting, voting for populist parties, eventually differentiating in far-right and other populists, or voting for other parties (baseline category)³⁵. The results are reported in Table B8.

Third, we progressively increase the set of controls included in the model by (1) including only the variables of interest (normative expectations and ideal democratic gap); (2) adding socio-demographic variables; (3) adding economic situation variables; (4) adding attitude variables; and (5) adding macroeconomic variables. The results are reported in Table B9 and B10, respectively for both selection (voted yes/no) and outcome (vote for populist party yes/no).

³⁵Critiques of the multinomial logit model’s “independence from irrelevant alternatives” (IIA) assumption are widely known. However, these criticisms are generally not significant for most applications. Few distinctions exist between the multinomial logit model (MNL) and the alternative multinomial probit (MNP) model, which poses identification challenges and may lead to arbitrary or misleading inferences (Dow and Endersby, 2004).

Table B8: Multinomial logit - non-voters, populist (far-right, others) and other voters

	Multinomial logit (1)				Multinomial logit (2)			
	Non-voters (NV)		Populist (P)		Non-voters (NV)		Populist far-right (P-FR)	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>								
Free and fair elections	-1.729*** (0.122)	0.570*** (0.074)	-0.588*** (0.134)	-0.091 (0.078)	-1.666*** (0.121)	0.582*** (0.073)	-0.933*** (0.177)	0.144 (0.106)
Differ. offer by parties	-0.078 (0.111)	0.006 (0.075)	0.401*** (0.116)	-0.356*** (0.076)	-0.061 (0.110)	0.010 (0.074)	0.505*** (0.157)	-0.360*** (0.103)
Conseq. poor gov.	-0.482*** (0.107)	0.306*** (0.063)	-0.267** (0.113)	0.253*** (0.065)	-0.448*** (0.106)	0.295*** (0.063)	-0.311** (0.153)	0.235*** (0.090)
Key decisions, no EU	-0.160 (0.157)	0.499*** (0.105)	0.398*** (0.153)	0.503*** (0.099)	-0.116 (0.156)	0.516*** (0.104)	0.938*** (0.211)	0.732*** (0.129)
<i>Liberal</i>								
Equality before the law	-0.444*** (0.142)	0.081 (0.072)	-1.039*** (0.154)	0.673*** (0.073)	-0.462*** (0.140)	0.067 (0.071)	-0.831*** (0.200)	0.309*** (0.099)
Protect. of minority rights	0.463*** (0.131)	-0.485*** (0.079)	-0.080 (0.133)	-0.425*** (0.081)	0.378*** (0.130)	-0.453*** (0.078)	-0.155 (0.176)	-0.570*** (0.112)
Media freedom	0.394*** (0.100)	-0.189*** (0.068)	-0.192* (0.105)	0.028 (0.070)	0.410*** (0.099)	-0.235*** (0.068)	-0.116 (0.139)	0.081 (0.096)
Will no stopped	0.103 (0.173)	0.059 (0.120)	0.623*** (0.166)	-0.429*** (0.111)	0.119 (0.172)	0.038 (0.119)	0.272 (0.224)	-0.380*** (0.151)
View people over elite	0.374** (0.173)	-0.169 (0.124)	-0.153 (0.161)	0.008 (0.116)	0.387** (0.173)	-0.199 (0.123)	-0.250 (0.213)	0.058 (0.154)
<i>Social</i>								
Social justice	0.390*** (0.142)	0.174** (0.089)	1.417*** (0.147)	-0.179** (0.090)	0.392*** (0.141)	0.219** (0.088)	1.196*** (0.195)	0.005 (0.122)
<i>Direct</i>								
Partic. via referendum	0.308*** (0.106)	-0.016 (0.066)	0.721*** (0.111)	0.054 (0.067)	0.235** (0.105)	-0.033 (0.065)	1.182*** (0.159)	-0.085 (0.094)
Observations	53,483 (NV: 9,849; P: 9,663; Others: 33,971)				53,483 (NV: 9,849; P-FR: 5,262; P-OT: 4,401; Others: 33,971)			

Table B9: Heckman estimates: Participation to vote (yes/no) - the role of the controls variables

	(1): <i>Interest vars</i>		(2): (1) + <i>Demogr.</i>		(3): (2) + <i>Econ. situat.</i>		(4): (3) + <i>Att., polit.</i>		(5): (4) + <i>Macroec.</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>										
Free and fair elections	1.443*** (0.099)	-0.531*** (0.090)	1.188*** (0.124)	-0.434*** (0.084)	1.131*** (0.125)	-0.402*** (0.082)	0.881*** (0.117)	-0.347*** (0.087)	0.861*** (0.125)	-0.339*** (0.078)
Differ. offer by parties	0.106 (0.065)	-0.009 (0.046)	0.157*** (0.060)	-0.063* (0.038)	0.168*** (0.060)	-0.066* (0.037)	0.036 (0.062)	-0.031 (0.035)	0.062 (0.068)	-0.033 (0.033)
Conseq. poor gov.	0.431*** (0.074)	-0.160** (0.074)	0.200*** (0.068)	-0.101* (0.054)	0.206*** (0.070)	-0.106* (0.059)	0.233*** (0.084)	-0.148*** (0.045)	0.234*** (0.080)	-0.141*** (0.043)
Key decisions, no EU	0.053 (0.077)	-0.245*** (0.084)	0.026 (0.106)	-0.223*** (0.076)	0.027 (0.110)	-0.212*** (0.081)	0.020 (0.090)	-0.121 (0.081)	0.114 (0.105)	-0.172** (0.079)
<i>Liberal</i>										
Equality before the law	0.289*** (0.112)	0.039 (0.072)	0.233** (0.101)	-0.010 (0.048)	0.217* (0.114)	-0.013 (0.047)	0.162 (0.111)	0.024 (0.073)	0.145 (0.119)	0.048 (0.061)
Protect. of minority rights	-0.097 (0.142)	0.039 (0.065)	-0.141 (0.129)	0.109* (0.065)	-0.122 (0.133)	0.099 (0.067)	-0.215** (0.106)	0.168*** (0.063)	-0.198** (0.083)	0.168*** (0.059)
Media freedom	-0.110* (0.057)	0.059 (0.050)	-0.218*** (0.071)	0.126*** (0.049)	-0.224*** (0.066)	0.123** (0.049)	-0.274*** (0.089)	0.121** (0.062)	-0.248*** (0.091)	0.109 (0.069)
Will no stopped	0.158** (0.067)	-0.082 (0.120)	0.207** (0.085)	-0.147 (0.127)	0.198** (0.097)	-0.159 (0.121)	0.149 (0.105)	-0.112 (0.115)	-0.003 (0.094)	-0.058 (0.091)
View people over elite	-0.400*** (0.089)	0.187** (0.084)	-0.283*** (0.099)	0.168** (0.084)	-0.293*** (0.109)	0.168* (0.091)	-0.256* (0.137)	0.166 (0.103)	-0.168 (0.121)	0.078 (0.068)
<i>Social</i>										
Social justice	-0.252* (0.147)	-0.084 (0.121)	-0.057 (0.129)	-0.173* (0.099)	-0.026 (0.137)	-0.150 (0.107)	-0.016 (0.165)	-0.148* (0.083)	-0.037 (0.162)	-0.100* (0.055)
<i>Direct</i>										
Partic. via referendum	-0.240*** (0.059)	0.098*** (0.033)	-0.154*** (0.060)	0.067* (0.040)	-0.159*** (0.058)	0.067 (0.042)	-0.092* (0.050)	0.012 (0.059)	-0.110*** (0.040)	0.011 (0.055)
Observations	66,159		63,512		62,573		56,109		56,106	

Note: Controls progressively included from specif. (1) to (5). Robust std. error clustered at country level in parenthesis. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

Table B10: Heckman estimates: Vote for populist party (yes/no) - the role of the controls variables

	(1): <i>Interest vars</i>		(2): (1) + <i>Demogr.</i>		(3): (2) + <i>Econ. situat.</i>		(4): (3) + <i>Att., polit.</i>		(5): (4) + <i>Macroec.</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>										
Free and fair elections	-0.069 (0.049)	-0.006 (0.046)	-0.068 (0.051)	-0.008 (0.048)	-0.074 (0.050)	-0.006 (0.047)	-0.032 (0.056)	-0.024 (0.041)	-0.005 (0.047)	-0.037 (0.042)
Differ. offer by parties	0.029 (0.020)	-0.031* (0.016)	0.029 (0.020)	-0.029* (0.017)	0.029 (0.020)	-0.029* (0.017)	0.036* (0.020)	-0.040*** (0.014)	0.043** (0.020)	-0.041*** (0.014)
Conseq. poor gov.	0.020 (0.024)	0.009 (0.014)	0.016 (0.027)	0.011 (0.015)	0.013 (0.027)	0.014 (0.014)	-0.017 (0.032)	0.018 (0.013)	-0.014 (0.031)	0.014 (0.011)
Key decisions, no EU	0.085 (0.078)	0.115*** (0.022)	0.086 (0.073)	0.111*** (0.020)	0.084 (0.073)	0.114*** (0.020)	0.044 (0.055)	0.077*** (0.020)	0.058 (0.054)	0.070*** (0.016)
<i>Liberal</i>										
Equality before the law	-0.151*** (0.052)	0.130*** (0.045)	-0.151*** (0.048)	0.126*** (0.045)	-0.151*** (0.047)	0.123*** (0.043)	-0.123*** (0.041)	0.092*** (0.033)	-0.119*** (0.040)	0.092*** (0.034)
Protect. of minority rights	-0.066* (0.034)	-0.087*** (0.020)	-0.059* (0.032)	-0.086*** (0.018)	-0.059* (0.031)	-0.087*** (0.019)	-0.011 (0.035)	-0.061*** (0.016)	-0.012 (0.032)	-0.058*** (0.016)
Media freedom	-0.047 (0.036)	0.010 (0.020)	-0.044 (0.030)	0.008 (0.018)	-0.039 (0.030)	0.004 (0.019)	-0.025 (0.023)	0.002 (0.017)	-0.027 (0.021)	0.002 (0.019)
Will no stopped	0.101* (0.052)	-0.063 (0.056)	0.097* (0.051)	-0.063 (0.054)	0.096* (0.052)	-0.063 (0.054)	0.110** (0.046)	-0.072 (0.048)	0.096* (0.053)	-0.071 (0.053)
View people over elite	-0.036 (0.033)	0.023 (0.028)	-0.034 (0.032)	0.023 (0.028)	-0.033 (0.032)	0.022 (0.026)	-0.035 (0.030)	0.028 (0.027)	-0.031 (0.027)	0.014 (0.021)
<i>Social</i>										
Social justice	0.135 (0.083)	-0.037 (0.037)	0.137* (0.077)	-0.039 (0.037)	0.133* (0.077)	-0.041 (0.037)	0.190** (0.080)	-0.037 (0.037)	0.179** (0.077)	-0.023 (0.035)
<i>Direct</i>										
Partic. via referendum	0.067** (0.031)	0.021*** (0.008)	0.063** (0.030)	0.020** (0.009)	0.062** (0.030)	0.020** (0.009)	0.043 (0.028)	0.017** (0.009)	0.041 (0.027)	0.015* (0.009)
Observations	43,543		43,529		43,525		43,519		43,516	
Adjusted R ²	0.211		0.215		0.218		0.243		0.245	

Note: Controls progressively included from specif. (1) to (5). Robust std. error clustered at country level in parenthesis. * p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01.

Appendix C Results by geographic area

In Table C1 and C2 are reported, respectively for both selection (voted yes/no) and outcome (vote for populist party yes/no), differentiated estimates for three European macro-regions (North-West, Central-East and South).

Table C1: Heckman estimates: Participation to vote (yes/no) - geographical areas

	<i>North-West</i>		<i>Central-East</i>		<i>South</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>						
Free and fair elections	1.091*** (0.157)	-0.391*** (0.131)	0.676*** (0.113)	-0.256*** (0.040)	0.608*** (0.186)	-0.535*** (0.204)
Differ. offer by parties	0.062 (0.040)	-0.100*** (0.019)	0.009 (0.208)	0.067 (0.072)	0.086 (0.193)	0.008 (0.050)
Conseq. poor gov.	0.166*** (0.059)	-0.181*** (0.052)	0.313*** (0.119)	-0.087*** (0.018)	0.425 (0.288)	-0.144 (0.135)
Key decisions, no EU	-0.061 (0.153)	-0.018 (0.133)	0.066 (0.086)	-0.134 (0.100)	0.277*** (0.058)	-0.118 (0.177)
<i>Liberal</i>						
Equality before the law	-0.043 (0.080)	-0.067 (0.071)	0.033 (0.150)	0.090* (0.051)	0.442** (0.179)	0.175*** (0.056)
Protect. of minority rights	-0.294** (0.119)	0.169** (0.079)	-0.029 (0.077)	0.121 (0.106)	-0.023 (0.087)	0.133* (0.076)
Media freedom	-0.206*** (0.050)	0.054 (0.079)	-0.013 (0.109)	-0.146** (0.062)	-0.386 (0.272)	0.263*** (0.077)
Will no stopped	0.060 (0.170)	-0.088 (0.083)	-0.032 (0.191)	0.039 (0.114)	-0.119 (0.208)	0.008 (0.208)
View people over elite	-0.364*** (0.099)	0.186** (0.092)	0.049 (0.238)	-0.045 (0.117)	0.182 (0.207)	-0.056 (0.166)
<i>Social</i>						
Social justice	0.121 (0.279)	-0.092 (0.065)	-0.177 (0.111)	-0.141** (0.064)	-0.076 (0.066)	-0.129*** (0.027)
<i>Direct</i>						
Partic. via referendum	-0.137*** (0.041)	0.009 (0.026)	-0.105** (0.047)	0.139*** (0.024)	-0.251* (0.139)	0.010 (0.219)
Observations	30,747		17,509		7,749	

Note: All controls included. Robust standard error clustered at country level in parenthesis.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Table C2: Heckman estimates: Vote for populist party (yes/no) - geographical areas

	<i>North-West</i>		<i>Central-East</i>		<i>South</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>						
Free and fair elections	-0.116*** (0.044)	0.110** (0.047)	0.045 (0.051)	-0.069** (0.033)	-0.067** (0.034)	-0.020 (0.024)
Differ. offer by parties	0.043* (0.023)	-0.030 (0.019)	0.073*** (0.023)	-0.037 (0.031)	0.058*** (0.018)	-0.058*** (0.005)
Conseq. poor gov.	0.010 (0.014)	0.030** (0.014)	-0.061 (0.054)	0.003 (0.039)	-0.044 (0.040)	0.035 (0.022)
Key decisions, no EU	-0.026* (0.015)	0.062*** (0.016)	0.262*** (0.057)	-0.027 (0.027)	0.106** (0.043)	0.059 (0.041)
<i>Liberal</i>						
Equality before the law	-0.023 (0.017)	0.007 (0.019)	-0.137*** (0.049)	0.067*** (0.014)	-0.216*** (0.060)	0.217*** (0.060)
Protect. of minority rights	-0.013 (0.014)	-0.058*** (0.008)	-0.070** (0.032)	-0.040 (0.043)	0.089 (0.071)	-0.032 (0.031)
Media freedom	-0.012 (0.008)	0.057*** (0.018)	-0.107*** (0.012)	-0.009 (0.023)	-0.079*** (0.011)	0.027* (0.014)
Will no stopped	0.016 (0.034)	-0.00002 (0.016)	0.190*** (0.073)	-0.211*** (0.058)	-0.008 (0.019)	0.001 (0.020)
View people over elite	-0.011 (0.028)	0.027 (0.031)	-0.018 (0.025)	-0.039** (0.018)	-0.090** (0.041)	0.017 (0.030)
<i>Social</i>						
Social justice	0.062 (0.048)	0.024 (0.031)	0.316*** (0.039)	-0.084*** (0.018)	0.123*** (0.047)	-0.061*** (0.011)
<i>Direct</i>						
Partic. via referendum	0.069*** (0.021)	0.012 (0.008)	-0.035 (0.025)	0.050* (0.029)	0.075* (0.044)	0.016 (0.015)
Observations	23,549		12,054		6,012	
Adjusted R ²	0.141		0.319		0.334	

Note: All controls included. Robust standard error clustered at country level in parenthesis.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01.

Appendix D Satisfaction with democracy as dependent

We analyze the determinants of satisfaction with democracy for the full-sample, for non-voters, populists, and other voters. Specifically, we run a multivariate regressions (OLS) using satisfaction with democracy (SWD) as the dependent variable and controlling for country and time fixed effects and individual variables. The explanatory variables of interests are expectations and ideal democracy gaps for the different factors of the electoral, liberal, social and direct dimensions of democracy; the results are report in Table D1.

We observe a positive influence of normative expectations i.e. expectation anchoring. The ideal democracy gaps are (almost) always significantly greater than 0 (perceived performance lower than expectations): on average, the dissatisfaction it's due to a perceived under-performance of democracies. The variables of interest (expectations and ideal democracy gap) are statistically significant in explaining dissatisfaction. This highlights both the effectiveness of EDM in this scenario and the possibility of analyzing several aspects among different groups of voters and their link to voting preferences.

Table D1: Satisfaction with democracy determinants: OLS estimates

[-1.8ex]	<i>Total</i>		<i>Non-voters</i>		<i>Populist</i>	
	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap	Ideal	ID-Gap
<i>Electoral</i>						
Free and fair elections	0.287*** (0.026)	-0.186*** (0.024)	0.250*** (0.023)	-0.147*** (0.027)	0.256*** (0.022)	-0.166*** (0.021)
Differ. offer by parties	0.027*** (0.009)	-0.028** (0.013)	0.033* (0.019)	-0.033* (0.020)	0.037*** (0.013)	-0.045*** (0.014)
Conseq. poor gov.	-0.024 (0.014)	-0.037*** (0.006)	0.005 (0.029)	-0.033** (0.016)	-0.050*** (0.017)	-0.034*** (0.010)
Key decisions, no EU	0.062*** (0.013)	0.030 (0.021)	0.073 (0.062)	-0.009 (0.031)	0.056 (0.035)	-0.004 (0.018)
<i>Liberal</i>						
Equality before the law	0.041** (0.021)	-0.043*** (0.012)	0.043 (0.045)	-0.046*** (0.017)	0.016 (0.022)	-0.002 (0.026)
Protect. of minority rights	0.075*** (0.016)	-0.045*** (0.016)	0.067* (0.034)	-0.028 (0.018)	0.013 (0.032)	-0.004 (0.026)
Media freedom	0.054*** (0.018)	-0.079*** (0.012)	0.020 (0.025)	-0.032*** (0.009)	0.121*** (0.028)	-0.118*** (0.015)
Will no stopped	0.033* (0.018)	-0.065*** (0.020)	0.027 (0.028)	-0.061** (0.026)	-0.004 (0.024)	-0.005 (0.018)
View people over elite	-0.004 (0.010)	-0.018 (0.017)	-0.051 (0.044)	0.002 (0.039)	0.031 (0.023)	-0.041* (0.022)
<i>Social</i>						
Social justice	0.091** (0.044)	-0.105*** (0.022)	0.069** (0.032)	-0.104*** (0.016)	0.167*** (0.063)	-0.158*** (0.039)
<i>Direct democracy</i>						
Partic. via referendum	-0.074*** (0.017)	-0.022** (0.010)	-0.081* (0.045)	-0.027 (0.020)	-0.055* (0.033)	-0.013 (0.020)
Observations	53,292		9,742		9,553	
Adjusted R ²	0.474		0.454		0.467	

Note: All controls included. Robust clustered standard error at country level in parenthesis.

*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01