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THEY CAN'T GET NO SATISFACTION

Effect and conditions of priority-congruence on satisfaction with democracy. An individual-level study of nine European countries, 2002-2018

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Introduction

Political support and representation are two crucial concepts in most theories of democracy. First, a certain level of popular support, typically measured as satisfaction with democracy, is considered vital for the legitimacy and stability of democratic systems (Easton 1965; Norris 1999; Dalton 2004; Reher 2016). Second, representation of public preferences by democratic institutions –measurable, among others, as congruence between public opinion and policy– is the defining characteristic in most conceptions of representative democracies (Dahl 1971; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). Because of the centrality of both concepts to the notion of democracy, representation and political support are often intuitively positively connected (Hobolt 2012). In fact, normative conceptions of democracy assume that higher congruence means better representation, which in turn should intuitively conduce to higher satisfaction with democratic institutions (Dageforde 2016).

However, preliminary evidence from the United Kingdom, Spain and Hungary questions the assumption that such mechanism exists or, in case it does, it applies without variation across cases. In fact, this thesis will show that, in these three country cases between 2002 and 2018, the trajectories of aggregate measures of satisfaction with democracy (computed from the Eurobarometer Standard Series) and measures of quality of democracy and representation (derived from Freedom House, Economist Intelligence Unit and Worldwide Governance Index) seem inversely related.

As explained more in-depth in the next section, such country-level trajectories represent a puzzle. In fact, the empirical evidence challenges the often-assumed universality of the normative link between representation and satisfaction with democracy, suggesting reconsidering its conditionality and even its existence. Going beyond the specific country cases, the thesis suggests that this relationship is more complex than expected and deserves deeper empirical testing of the conditions under which it varies, using a wider sample of country cases.

Taking cue from this puzzle, the thesis proposes an empirical analysis that is divided in two parts. First, it formulates a general 'effects of a cause' research question, that interrogates on the individual-level conditional effects of priority-congruence on satisfaction with democracy. Using priority-congruence between the public and legislatures as a measure of representation, the analysis intends to estimate the individual-level effect of representation on satisfaction with

democracy, as well as to test whether this effect is conditional on individual characteristics. The aim of this part is to understand individual-level dynamics between representation and political support that are as generalisable as possible. Therefore, individual-level observations are drawn not only from Spain, Hungary, and the United Kingdom, but also from Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands between 2002 and 2018.

In the second part of the thesis, the focus returns to the puzzle, which is confirmed using individual-level data from Hungary, Spain, and the United Kingdom. The aim of this part is to explain the puzzle with the diverse intensity of the effect of representation on political support between Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom. Finally, the thesis proposes a qualitative interpretation of such diversity in country-specific effects basing on the different dominant understandings of democracy observed from the European Social Survey of 2012 in the three countries at the aggregate level.

Besides the empirical analysis, this thesis represents a theoretical contribution to the debate on the determinants of satisfaction with democracy, which has particularly revived since the global rise in dissatisfaction with democracy in the aftermath of the 2008 financial and economic crisis. It departs from the purely economic and, in David Easton's terms (1965), output-side explanations of satisfaction with democracy that are dominant in the current debate, proposing an explanation that is entirely political and located in the input-side of the political system. To my view, this approach is important because it renders justice to citizens' capacity to perform normative evaluations, and because it recognises the responsibility of representative institutions in the current legitimacy crisis of democracy.

The originality of the study relies mainly in the analysis of the individual-level conditions under which better representation affects satisfaction with democracy, which have been understudied in so far. In particular, consideration of individual-level political interest and political efficacy as mediating conditions of the effect is, to my knowledge, an original perspective. Such a contribution appears particularly relevant to the general – albeit differentiated – rise in dissatisfaction with democratic institutions that has occurred in Europe over the last decade, as it underlines the importance of nourishing citizens' interest and participation in politics for democracy to be healthy. Finally, these thesis's findings contribute to the current debate shading a more optimistic light on the "general crisis of democracy". In fact, findings bring back Pippa Norris's (1999) positive acceptation of "dissatisfied democrats" and suggest that it

is not dissatisfaction *per se* that threatens democracy, but citizens' capacity to value and assess the normative quality of the democracy they live in.

The scope of this thesis's findings resides in the operationalisation of quality of representation with priority congruence. In fact, first, priority congruence *per se* does not contain information on the substantive content of legislative outputs, nor of their ideological direction. Therefore, while there are methodological advantages in using this measure, I am aware that priority congruence captures a "minimal" standard of representation. To address this limit, positional congruence between the individual and same-year national government is controlled for, but this study would benefit from measuring substantive responsiveness in the individual's preferred policy domain. Second, priority congruence is measured on same-year data on individual preferred policy domain, satisfaction with democracy and legislative outputs, because the data available is in the form of a repeated cross-sectional dataset. This type of study would benefit from testing on panel-data, where lagged observations of congruence and satisfaction with democracy would allow to measure dynamic of responsiveness and assess its effect on satisfaction with democracy. Finally, the qualitative interpretation of country-specific effects in Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom based on the dominant understandings of democracy is not systematically tested, because of the lack of longitudinal individual-level data on the topic and because the survey data available for my selected countries came from a different source, and therefore involved different individuals (ESS 2012). I think the intuition proposed in this thesis is worth testing on panel data containing individual-level information of both evaluations of representation and satisfaction with democracy, and understandings of democracy.

The thesis proceeds as following: the next section describes the puzzle in depth and explains how this is translated into a generalisable research question; the literature review section situates the study in between the literature on representation and the one on satisfaction with democracy and illustrates the benefit of connecting the two trough the notion of priority-congruence; the theory section builds on the theory of limited rationality to propose the general causal mechanism that is expected to be in action in the effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy and presents four testable hypotheses; the methodological part discusses issues of case selection, measurement and modelling, followed by presentation and discussion of results. Discussion of findings in light of the wider debate on the legitimacy crises of democracy continues in the conclusion.

From the puzzle to the research question

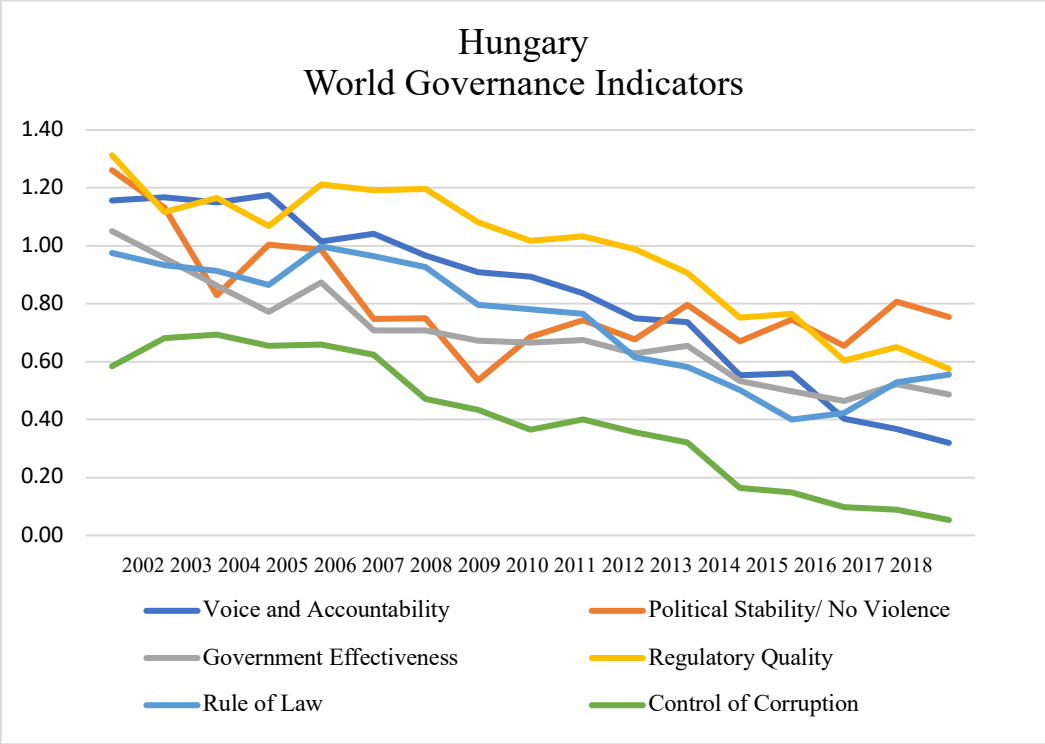
a) Satisfaction with democracy and quality of representation in Hungary, Spain, and the United Kingdom: different directions of movement, but same puzzle.

In 2018 Hungary lost the categorization of a "free" country in the Freedom House ranking, entering for the first time since its transition to democracy into the "partly free" category (FH Freedom in the World 2018). This might appear as a mere definitional change, but it actually symbolises the official acknowledgement of the deterioration of democracy that has occurred in Hungary over the last 10 years. In fact, since the elections of 2010, which brough to power the Fidesz party, democracy in Hungary has been undermined, registering the largest cumulative decline in the Freedom House Nations in Transit's history over ten consecutive years, from 2008 to 2018 (FH Nations in Transit 2018). And such deterioration involves not only freedoms, but all dimensions of democracy – such as elections, political participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and effective government (Merkel et al. 2003) – making Hungary a "diffusedly defective democracy" (Bogaards, 2018). This is clear if we look at the different dimensions of regime performance measured by the World Governance Indicators beside simple Freedom House scores: with the exception of Political Stability/No Violence, all WGI indicators have declined over the wider period 2002-2018, registering an acceleration since 2010 (World Bank, WGI 2002 – 2018) (Figure 1). And among them, the steepest decline is in Voice and Accountability which, measuring the extent to which citizens are able to participate in government and voice their opinions, can be taken as a rough measure of representation. The trajectory of Voice and Accountability is clearly declining since 2010, confirming the deterioration of the quality of representation that is also suggested by the increasing disproportionality of the Hungarian electoral system since the introduction of Fidesz's Electoral Law (Armingeon et al. 2018; Gandrud, 2015)[1]. In spite of such deterioration of democratic quality in general and the quality of representation, the aggregate level of satisfaction with democracy reached its record high exactly in 2018, with almost 60% of Hungarian respondents to the Standard Eurobarometer Series survey being "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with the way democracy works in Hungary (Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2018) (Figure 4). And this positive feedback to performance of democracy in Hungary is part

[1] With Fidesz's reform of the Electoral Law, the Gallagher Disproportionality Index increased in 2014 elections from an average of 10.15 over the period 1990-2013 to 17.37 (Armingeon et al. 2018, Gandrud, 2015).

of a progressive improvement in the aggregate levels of satisfaction with democracy registered in the country over the entire decade, from 2008 to 2018 (European Social Survey 2008; Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2009-2018). Therefore, the period in which the country has been ongoing objective deterioration of democracy, and notably a deterioration of the representation, and the one in which the overall satisfaction with democratic performance have been improving surprisingly coincide in Hungary.

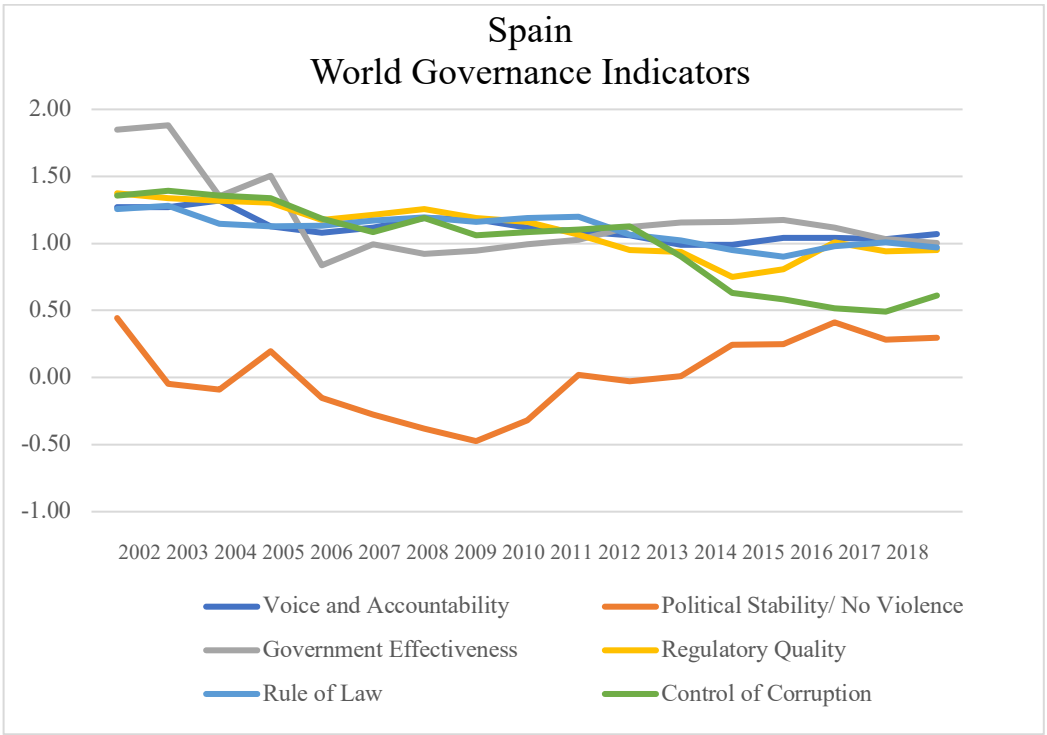
Figure 1 World Governance Index Hungary 2002-2018



The picture of democracy and public support in Spain seems to be diametrically opposite. Despite some major corruption scandals having affected Spanish politics during the last decade, the fundamental aspects of the political system and the institutional framework have remained constant since its democratic transition in 1975 (Christmann and Torcal, 2017). And not only democracy in Spain is held to be consolidated since the 1980s (Christmann and Torcal, 2017), but it has even improved its in quality in terms of freedom, equality, rule of law and performance according to several prestigious world indices over the last decade. For instance, in 2018 Spain has climbed up to the 20th and 19th positions in the rankings of the Freedom House Freedom in the World Index and the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index respectively (FH Freedom in the World 2018; Democracy Index 2018. The Economist Intelligence Unit). Also, regime performance measured by the World Governance Indicators

register stability in all indicators – except for Control of Corruption – with a particular improvement in Voice and Accountability, Rule of Law, Regulatory quality and Political Stability/No Violence since 2014 (World Bank, WGI 2002 – 2018) (Figure 2). Therefore, beside general democratic quality, also the quality of representation seems stable and even improving, as confirmed by the relatively low Gallagher Disproportionality Score (6.93) registered at the last National Legislative Elections (Gandrud, 2015). However, despite the objective consolidation of democracy and improvement in its measures of quality of representation, levels of aggregate satisfaction with democracy have significantly declined over the last 10 years (Christmann and Torcal, 2017) (Figure 4). In 2018, less than 10% of respondents to the Standard Eurobarometer Series Survey are "very satisfied with democracy" and less than 50% are "fairly satisfied", while they summed up to almost 80% in 2007 (European Social Survey 2008; Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2009-2018). Therefore, while in a reverse direction, as in Hungary also in Spain the trajectories of objective measures of democratic quality and citizens' perception of its performance seem to go in the opposite direction over the last decade.

Figure 2 World Governance Index Spain 2002-2018



Differently from the other two country cases, the United Kingdom is one of the oldest and leading liberal democracies in the world (Dunleavy, Park and Taylor 2018). The most widely recognised quantitative assessments of democratic quality, such as the Freedom House

Freedom in the World Index or the Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index, constantly rank the United Kingdom among the top democratic performers – e.g. in 16th and 14th positions respectively in 2018 (FH Freedom in the World 2018; Democracy Index 2018. The Economist Intelligence Unit). However, these quantitative assessments have a "ceiling effects" problem with advanced democracies (Dunleavy, Park and Taylor 2018, p.28), meaning that they assign very similar scores to top performing countries, and often keep reassigning them the same scores every year. This makes difficult not only to make distinctions between the top performers, but also to track changes over time. Such problem also applies to the World Governance Indicators to measure regime performance, which remain mostly invariant over the whole period from 2002 to 2018. This is especially evident for the Voice and Accountability indicator, which, while being relatively low with respect to the other indicators, is fundamentally constant in the UK since 2003 (World Bank, WGI 2002 – 2018) (Figure 3). These constant measures clearly render a picture of invulnerability of democracy in the United Kingdom that does not corresponds to reality. More fine-grained and also qualitative assessments of democracy, such as the V-Dem index, the International IDEA index or Beetham's (1999) Democratic Audit approach, reveal that the UK democracy is weaker in representation and participation-related aspects, and it is so variably over time (Dunleavy, Park and Taylor 2018). In fact, considering the traditionally high disproportionality induced by Westminster's plurality rule electoral system, not only we understand why the measures of Voice and Accountability in the UK are relatively low; we might also imagine that the quality of representation that such indicator strives to measure is actually more variable than shown in figure n. and has been going downward when disproportionality at the 2015 elections reached a new post war high (15.1) for the UK electoral system (Dunleavy, Park and Taylor 2018; Gandrud, 2015). However, in spite of the progressive weakening of UK democracy, especially in the representation and participation-related area (Dunleavy, Park and Taylor 2018), the levels of satisfaction with democracy in the UK have been fundamentally constant over time (European Social Survey 2008; Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2009-2018) (Figure 4). Over the period 2002 to 2018, the percentage of respondents to the Standard Eurobarometer Survey being "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with democracy has been constantly above 60%, with the exception of 2008, in which the proportion of satisfied fell by 10 percentage points (European Social Survey 2008; Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2009-2018). Therefore, again, also in the United Kingdom, the trajectory of democratic quality and quality of representation – which are constant according to standard indexes but weakening according to more refined

assessments – is contrary to the direction of movement of citizenship's perception of such quality, measured with satisfaction with democracy.

Figure 3 World Governance Index United Kingdom 2002-2018

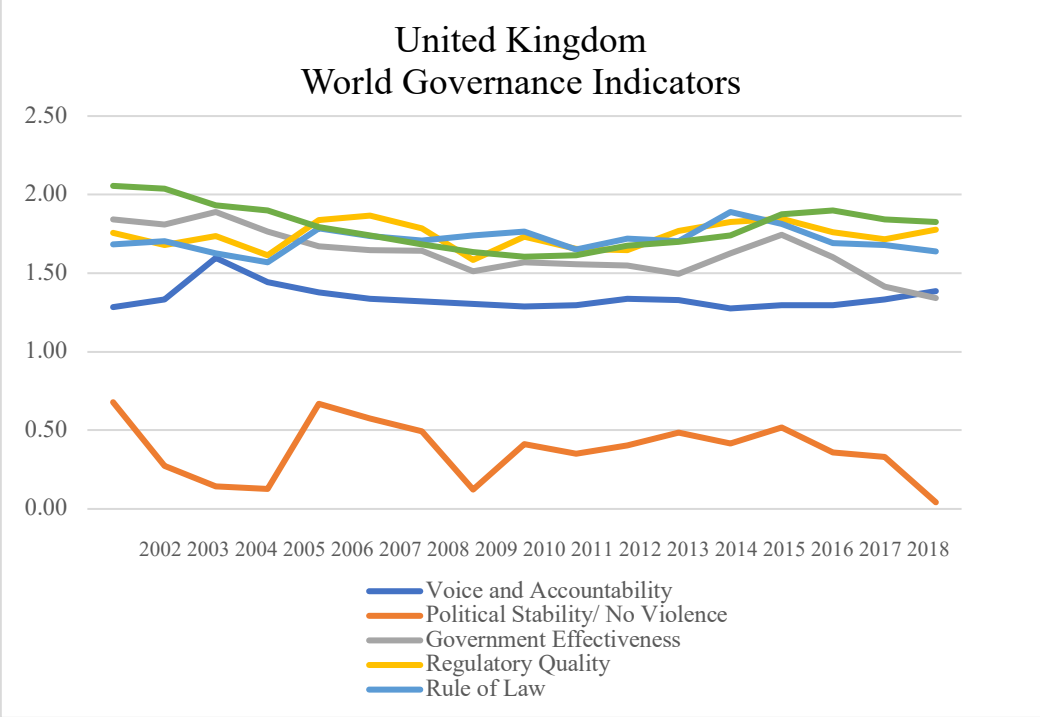
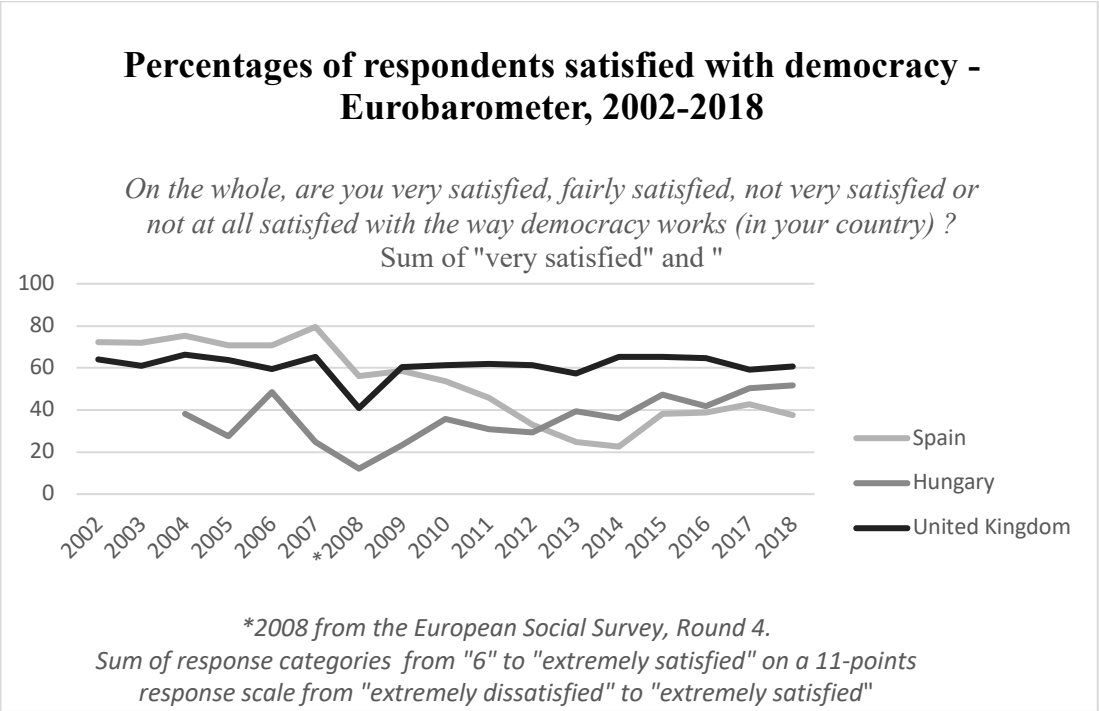


Figure 4 Aggregate satisfaction with democracy in Hungary, Spain and United Kingdom, 2002-2018



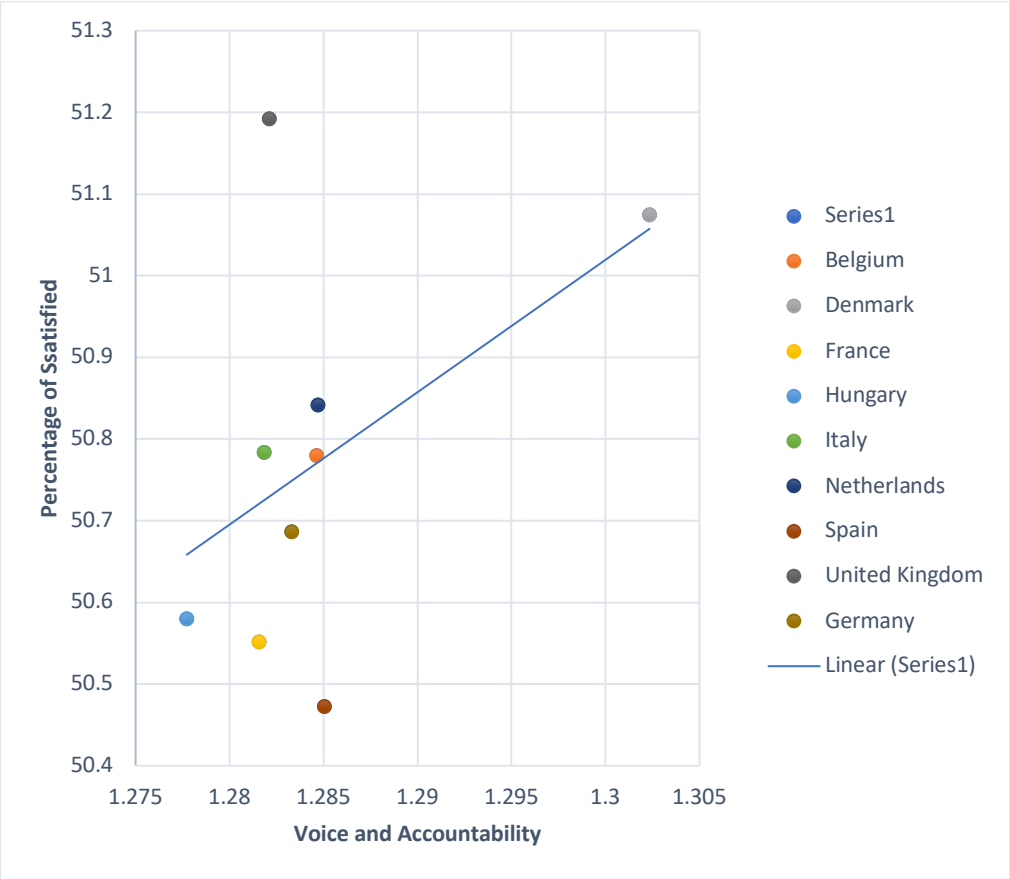
Therefore, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom represent three very different scenarios to study satisfaction with democracy. Differing both in terms of age of democratisation and quality of democracy and representation, the three country cases show levels of satisfaction with democracy moving in three different directions: they move upwards for Hungary, downwards for Spain, and they keep straight for the United Kingdom. However, they all pose the same puzzle: in all three country cases, the trajectory of satisfaction with democracy is counterintuitive to the one of the objective measures of democracy, and most relevantly for this thesis, of representation. This represents a puzzle because of two main reasons, one being theoretical, and one empirical.

From a theoretical point of view, quality of democracy – and especially quality of representation as a definitional component of it – and the political support measured by satisfaction with democracy should be intimately and intuitively connected (Hobolt 2012). In fact, both representation of public preferences by democratic institutions – measurable, among others, as congruence between public opinion and policy – and political support – typically measured as satisfaction with democracy – are crucial concepts in most theories of democracy. First, representation is the defining characteristic in most conceptions of representative democracies (Dahl 1971; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). Second, a certain level of popular

support is considered vital for the legitimacy and stability of democratic systems (Easton 1965; Norris 1999; Dalton 2004; Reher 2016). So, because of the centrality of both concepts to the notion of democracy, quality of representation and satisfaction with democracy are assumed to go in the same direction (Dageforde 2016). However, from the country pictures described above, this is not the case for Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom over the last decade, and this constitutes a research puzzle.

From an empirical point of view, using aggregate data from the Standard Eurobarometer on satisfaction with democracy and data on Voice and Accountability from the WGI for nine available European countries over the period 2003-2018, I find a positive linear association between quality of representation and satisfaction with democracy (Figure 5). However, the United Kingdom, Spain and Hungary appear to be deviant cases, as they fall far from the correlation line, confirming the counterintuitive scenarios described above: the United Kingdom falls above the line, which means that the average satisfaction with democracy is higher than expected from its average level of Voice and Accountability over the whole period; Spain falls below the line, which implies that the average satisfaction with democracy is lower than expected from the average level of Voice and Accountability over the period; Hungary falls below the line because the average value of satisfaction with democracy over the whole period 2002-2018 is still low with respect to older European democracies; however, Hungary would clearly fall above the correlation line if the average values of satisfaction with democracy and of Voice and accountability included only the values registered after 2010. Therefore, also empirically, aggregate level data from Spain, Hungary and the United Kingdom deviate from the assumed positive association between representation – here preliminary measured as Voice and Accountability – and satisfaction with democracy.

Figure 5 Correlation between satisfaction with democracy and Voice and Accountability, 2002-2018



b) The research question explained

The importance of this puzzle relies in the fact that it challenges the assumed universality of the normative link between representation and satisfaction with democracy and suggests reconsidering its conditionality. It draws attention to such relationship and suggests the formulation of a general 'effects of a cause' research question at the individual level, that also interrogates on the multi-level conditional effects of priority-congruence on satisfaction with democracy: "*Does the positive effect of quality of representation on individual satisfaction with democracy exist? And if the effect exists, is it conditional on other individual level factors, namely political interest and political efficacy? Moreover, if the effect exists, does it vary at the country-level, according to the dominant understandings of democracy in each country?*".

In fact, as found by recent studies on congruence (Reher 2016, 2015), country-level factors might mediate the effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy. However, this thesis challenges the view that these country-level factors are the only possible mediating conditions and it interrogates also on the conditionality on individual-level factors – namely political

interest and political efficacy. In order to answer the research questions, this study choses to measure representation with priority-congruence between the public and legislatures, and tests whether the individual-level effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy exists, and whether it is conditional on individual characteristics. Finally, it goes back to the puzzle and tests wether the individual level effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy varies at the country level in the three "deviant cases" according to a pattern that makes sense of the puzzle.

By establishing a valid association between representation and satisfaction with democracy, this study necessarily places in between two bodies of literature that are traditionally distinct. The next section reviews these two bodies of literature and discusses how they would benefit from an explicit connection.

Literature review

Despite the intimate connection between satisfaction with democracy and representation, the two concepts have been developed by two distinct bodies of literature. Congruence between public opinion and policy decisions is central to studies of representation, which consider it to be a key criterium for well-functioning representation (Dageförde 2016). They either focus on identifying the direction of causation between public opinion and policy making (Sara Binzer Hobolt and Klemmemsen 2005; Bryan D; Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Wlezien and Soroka 2012; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Visconti 2018; Jennings and Wlezien 2015; Bevan and Jennings 2014) or they investigate the institutional determinants of congruence – such as electoral systems, the number of constitutional veto players, or the effective number of parties that might engender representational strain (Baumgartner, Jones, and Wilkerson 2011; Toshkov, Mäder, and Rasmussen 2018; Visconti 2018; Hobolt and Klemmensen, 2005.; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012). Assuming that higher congruence implies better representation, these studies typically neglect to approach congruence as an independent variable, and do not consider its effects on citizens' own evaluation of democracy (Dageförde 2016). Satisfaction with democracy instead is dealt with by studies on public opinion, which measure citizen's attitudes to parliaments, governments, parties and democracy in general, and investigate their various determinants (Sara B. Hobolt 2012; Sanders et al. 2014; Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012; Easton 1975; Linde and Ekman 2003; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Aarts and Thomassen 2008). These studies typically neglect representation – and congruence as a measure of representation – as a cause (Dageförde 2016). Few studies bridge these two bodies of literature (Reher 2016, 2015; Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016; Rosset and Stecker 20AD), and this thesis intends to fill this gap by testing to what extent and under which conditions congruence is a determinant of satisfaction with democracy. Moreover, each of these two bodies of literature is animated by theoretical and methodological debates that identify different approaches. This thesis attempts to navigate among these different approaches, retaining the elements of each one that are most functional to answer my research question.

In the following sections, I will go through the main approaches and findings that characterise each of the two bodies of literature. I will underline the shortcomings and limitations of each literatures, and propose the approach adopted in this thesis as a possible solution to these shortcomings. I will then conclude that both bodies of literature would benefit from being connected, as this thesis attempts to do.

a) Studies of representation: the reasons to choose priority congruence as a conceptualisation and measure

The system of political representation is both historically and normatively the distinctive attribute of representative democracy. Historically, Singh (1991) defines political representation as the "device for making popular control over national governmental policies" (p. 508) that has characterized "the evolution of the modern national State" and the "gradual movement from autocracy to democracy" (Singh, 1991, p. 508). Normatively, Dahl (1971), includes representation in the fundamental democratic principle, which is defined as "the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals" (p.1). This notwithstanding, the concept of political representation is still at the centre of important normative debates, the most important of which being whether the representatives should be trustees or mandated delegates (Pitkin, 1967, in Golder and Ferland 2018, eds. Herron, Pekkanen and Shugart 2018). However, for the purpose of this thesis, the normative intent of representatives would be ignored, and we will limit to observe whether there is objective correspondence between public preference and actions taken by the representatives, independent from them intending to act as trustees or mandated delegates. Still, the general literature on political representation is a huge container of different and often opposite definitions and approaches to the concept of representation itself (Golder and Ferland 2018). The following paragraphs will try to put order among those different approaches, with the aim of clearly situating this thesis within the wider literature.

Approaches to study representation fundamentally differ in terms of 1) the object of the causal question, 2) the concept of representation, 3) the arena of representation, 4) the measure of congruence, and 5) the level of analysis that they adopt.

In terms of the object of the causal question, many studies have focused on the identification of the direction of causation between public opinion and public policy (Hobolt and Klemmemsen 2005; Bryan D Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Wlezien and Soroka 2012; Soroka and Wlezien 2005; Visconti 2018; Jennings and Wlezien 2015; Bevan and Jennings 2014). As establishing causality demands a temporal consideration, these are dynamic studies that try to separate the reciprocal effects between opinion and policy, as in Wleizen's 'thermostatic model'(Wlezien 2004; Soroka and Wlezien 2005). Because of this temporal dimension, these studies use the term "responsiveness" for referring to correspondence between public preferences and subsequent policies. Other studies of representation focus instead on the effects

of different institutional settings on the opinion-policy link, either across countries or over time (Baumgartner, Jones, and Wilkerson 2011; Toshkov, Mäder, and Rasmussen 2018; Visconti 2018; Binzer Hobolt and Klemmensen, n.d.; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012). As they give up establishing causation between public opinion and public policy, their object of causation is typically referred to as 'congruence' rather than responsiveness (Dowding, Hindmoor, and Martin 2015). In this thesis, I employ the term 'congruence' as a measure of representation, for my object of analysis is not the direction of causation between opinion and policy. I rather intend to identify the conditional causal effect on satisfaction with democracy exercised by congruence, measured between co-temporal public opinion and public policies.

In terms of concept of representation, some scholars focus on congruence between preferences of the whole electorate and the whole parliament/government, with the purpose to measure collective representation(Andeweg 2011). Other scholars instead, follow the pioneering study in the field of representation by Miller and Stokes (1963), which measured 'dyadic' representation between representatives and their own constituencies (Andeweg 2011). This thesis adopts a middle-way approach: following the idea that "representation is not an activity of individuals but a systemic property resulting from all actors' behaviour" (Pitkin 1967: 216-225, in Andeweg 2011), but also taking the point that treating the electorate as a unitary actor disperses information, I will measure congruence between individuals and the legislative output of whole parliaments (Andeweg 2011).

As for the arena of representation, studies of dynamic representation measure the congruence between public preferences and actions that might take place in different institutional venues. They typically consider either the executive intentions, or the legislative outputs, or budget decisions by various budgeting institutions. (Bevan and Jennings 2014). As empirical findings show that congruence is higher in institutional venues characterized by scarce attention and lower institutional strain, this thesis measures congruence in the legislative arena of representation, which typically corresponds to that description (Bevan and Jennings 2014).

As for the measure of congruence, a key debate in the literature on representation is about using measures of ideological position or of issue priority (Bernardi and Adams 2019). Positional congruence measures the distance between voters and parties' ideological orientations on the left-right dimension (Dageförde 2016; Martin and Vanberg 2015; Rohrschneider and Whitefield 2012). Priority congruence instead compares the salience of policy issues in people's mind with the attention dedicated to the same issues in various political arenas –

executive intentions, legislative outputs and budgeting decisions(John et al. 2013; Bevan and Jennings 2014; Bevan, John, and Jennings 2011; Visconti 2018; Sara Binzer Hobolt and Klemmemsen 2005). I measure congruence in terms of issue priority because I consider it more appropriate to study the effect of congruence on satisfaction with democracy. In fact, because of attention scarcity, not all ideological preferences of political actors always translate into policy outputs, having hardly an effect on people's satisfaction with democracy ((Bryan D; Jones and Baumgartner 2004; Bryan D Jones and Baumgartner 2005)). Moreover, positional measures might be biased towards higher congruence, as they fund on subjective assessments by either experts or rank-and-file voters, who might ideologically locate parties on the basis of their voters' ideological preferences (Andeweg 2011).

It is important to notice that the measure of priority-congruence employed in this thesis is also constructed making use of a further body of the literature, which is relatively new: the studies on dynamic agenda-setting which are included in the Comparative Agenda Project. Initiated in the early 2000s, the initial purpose of the Comparative Agenda Project has been descriptive in nature – to describe and compare dynamics of political attention across time and countries (Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman, 2019). This has made the CAP insulated from other bodies of the literature, such the one on representation and the one on political support (Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman, 2019). However, the Comparative Agenda Project has recently attracted the attention of political scientists interested in dynamics of issue attention, both as *explanans* and as *explanandum* of other political phenomena (Baumgartner, Breunig, and Grossman, 2019). Following these examples, I use Comparative Agenda Project Data to build a component of my measure of representation – priority congruence – and to connect the literature on representation with the one on political support with an explanatory purpose. Therefore, this thesis also attempts a small contribution by experimenting a non-traditional use of a particularly under-utilised type of data, whose hidden potential the political science community has just started discovering.

b) Studies of satisfaction with democracy: output-side vs input-side explanations and the reasons to consider representation as an explanatory factor

Studies of political support measured in terms of satisfaction with democracy, after losing momentum at the end of the third wave of democratisation, have returned to the centre of the academic debate over the last decade (Christmann 2018). In fact, since the economic and financial crisis of 2008/2010, overall dissatisfaction with democracy has unprecedently risen

globally and notably across Europe (Curini et al. 2012; Leiter and Clark 2015; Van Erkel and Van Der Meer 2016 in Gouveˆa Maciel and De Sousa 2017; Weßels, 2015). Moreover, Europe is a particularly interesting area to study dissatisfaction with democracy, as democracy has been "the only game in town" (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. 6) in most European polities since the end of the 1990s. Furthermore, there is empirical evidence to believe that democracy is continuing to be legitimate, and its fundamental values supported by the political cultures dominant in Europe, despite the rise in dissatisfaction with its performance (Torcal and Magalhàes, 2010, in Christmann and Torcal 2017).

Because of the latter empirical evidence, most of the recent studies of satisfaction with democracy adopt a rational-institutionalist approach, for which individuals assess the functioning of the political systems in terms of self-interest, basing on their individual experience of past, current, and future regime performance (Waldron Moore 1999; in Christman 2018). This approach contrast with traditional cultural explanations of political support, for which political attitudes are exogenous to the political system and based on cultural traits deriving from long-term processes of socialization and cultural norms acquired during early life (Mishler and Rose 2001; Almond and Verba 1963, Lerner 1992 in Christman 2017). Therefore, adopting the rationalist approach, these recent studies of satisfaction with democracy focus on the drivers of political support that are related to regime performance rather than focusing on more political culture-related support for democratic principles (Christman 2018; Weßels, 2015; Torcal, 2014). However, while adopting the same approach, we can make a distinction between studies that explain political support with "input side" regime performance and those that offer explanations based on "output side" regime performance (Hobolt 2012; Linde and Ekman 2003; Dahlberg, Linde, Holmberg 2013). In fact, the terminology of this literature draws on David Easton's (1965, 1975) schematization of the political system, for which political support is an "outcome effect" of performance-related factors that are located either on the input side or on the output side of the political system (Christman 2018; Weßels, 2015).

Output-side explanations focus on the economic outcomes and political goods achieved and delivered by political authorities, which together constitute the output side of the political system. These explanations come from the idea that that regime support depends on policy outcomes or macro-economic performance measures, which are either subjective – such as evaluations of government performance and economic performance – or objective – such as

measures of economic growth, unemployment, welfare and human development (Hobolt; Sanders et al 2014; Dahlberg 2013; Linde and Ekman 2003). Among them, the most popular as well as the most obvious output-side explanation of satisfaction with democracy proposed in the last decade is based on economic performance (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Halla et al. 2013; Quaranta and Martini 2016). In fact, not only it is a common argument in comparative politics that economic conditions affect democracy (Dahl 1989; Diamond 1992; Lipset 1994, in Christman 2017), but also empirically, it is evident that the general decline in satisfaction with democracy started with the generalised impoverishment of economic performances that affected all courtiers in the aftermath of the great recession (Weßels, 2015). Moreover, the economic-based explanation is additionally confirmed by the fact that the deepest decline in aggregate levels of satisfaction with democracy have been registered in those countries that suffered the most from the consequences of the financial crisis and which have been put under the European Stability Mechanism and the IMF conditionality – i.e. Cyprus, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Portugal, Spain and Slovakia (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Cordero and Simón 2016; Linde and Dahlberg 2016; Quaranta and Martini 2016b; Sousa et al 2014; Torcal 2017; Van Erkel and Van der Meer 2016 in Christman 2017); but also Eastern and Central European countries (Linde and Dahlberg 2016 in Christman 2017). Therefore, also for the purpose of this thesis, it is impossible not to account for economic performance when explaining satisfaction with democracy, as it is widely accepted, both in academia and in the public sphere, that being in a persistent status of economic crisis for a political system means a significant source of political distress and implies facing the greatest challenge to the stability of current democracies (Christman 2018; Torcal 2014).

However, it should be also recognised that economic-only, output-side explanations have their own limits, both empirically and theoretically, in explaining satisfaction with democracy. On an empirical note, Christman (2017) highlights the fact that the empirical association between economic performance indicators, such as economic growth, price inflation and unemployment, and satisfaction with democracy, is clear and univocal only in country-specific longitudinal studies (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Halla et al. 2013; Quaranta and Martini 2016a). The same associations are instead less clear and substantiated by mixed evidence in cross-country studies. Notably, high levels of economic growth, education and high standards of living have been even associated to more critical evaluations of democratic performance (Norris 1999, 2010). Such unexpected association has been explained with the observation that higher standards of living also lead to higher standards of assessment of democracy; these in

turn, demand democracy to satisfy criteria of quality performance other than mere sufficiently positive economic outcomes, which might actually improve the nature of the democratic process itself (Norris 1999, 2010; Klingemann, 2014 in ed. Dalton and Welzel 2014). This argument, found in Norris's (1999) landmark study on public opinion "Critical Citizens", introduces the theoretical reason for considering output-only economic explanations of satisfaction with democracy limited. In fact, it would be reductive not to account for the very realistic possibility that rational individuals who assess democracy basing on performance, not only assess economic or other output side performance – such as control of corruption or implementation of public policies – but also account for aspects of the decision making process – such as the quality of democratic procedures, the fairness of elections and, notably, responsiveness and accountability of elected representatives, which are criteria of the quality of representation (Norris 2011). These are criteria of democracy evaluation that fall in the input-side of David Easton's (1965) scheme of the political system, and thus make necessary a consideration of input-based explanations.

Input-based explanations focus on the procedural aspects of democracy, from the process of appointment of authorities to power, to decision making and implementation of decisions in a democratic system (Norris 2011). Since, as mentioned above, representation of people's political preferences is a core normative attribute of representative democracy (Dahl 1971; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008), an important input-based explanation of satisfaction with democracy should the quality of representation and the procedures in place to translate people's preferences into democratic outcomes (Hobolt 2012). However, the literature that studies quality of representation as an input based causal factor of satisfaction with democracy is not extremely developed and refined, both in terms of operationalisation of measurement of the concept of representation itself, and in terms of the number of empirical studies which test this explanation.

For what concerns the operationalization and measurement, there is much heterogeneity across empirical studies that deal with the quality of representation. For example, some empirical studies employ individual-level measures of the quality of representation that are entirely subjective – such as responses to survey question about confidence in national institutions (Hobolt 2012), perception of the quality of representation with indexes such as the Voice and Accountability WGI indicator, or perceived ideological congruence between citizens' and elites on the left-right dimension (Reher 2015; Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Norris 1999). Other

empirical studies are at the individual level and adopt objective measures of quality of representation – such as individual respondent's winner/loser post-election status (Curini et al. 2012), ideological congruence between a citizen's political position and party position, derived wither from manifestos or from expert party classifications like the Chapel Hill Exper Survey (Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016). Finally, other uses procedural measures for quality of representation are systemic-level and objective – such as indicators of form of electoral system, indexes of proportionalities (Gallagher 1991), indexes of consensualism or majoritarianism in the political system (Lijphart 1984; Sanders et al 2014), indexes of the quality of institutions (Curini et al 2012; Reher 2016). Such a heterogeneity of conceptualizations for quality of representation makes it a concept with minimal extension, maximal intension and open to contextual definitions of any sort (Sartori 1970; Gerring 1999); this, in turn, makes hard to derive a single theoretical argumentation about the effect of such a loosely interpretable concept on satisfaction with democracy.

As for the number of empirical studies which test this input-based explanation, there are indeed studies on the effect of perceived quality of representation on satisfaction with democracy. For example, several empirical studies have found that an individual's satisfaction with democracy is higher if they perceive representatives as more accountable and responsible (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Ariely 2013; Bratton and Mattes 2001; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Hofferbert and Klingemann 1999; Huang et al. 2008; Kornberg and Clarke 1994 in Christmann 2017); contrarily, individually perceived corruption reduces individual satisfaction it democracy (Ariely 2013; Bratton and Mattes 2001; Mattes and Bratton 2007; Huang et al. 2008; Linde 2012; Peffley and Rohrschneider 2014in Christmann 2017). However, using some political attitudes, such as perception of the quality of representation, to explain another political attitude like satisfaction with democracy, weakens the internal validity of the causation mechanism that a study intends to establish. In fact, if the explanatory factor is as much a subjective perception as the dependent variable, it is hard to establish its exogeneity. Therefore, for reasons of causation validity, it would be desirable to verify the effect of quality of representation on satisfaction with democracy employing objective measures. Unfortunately, with few exceptions, such as Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016) and Reher (2015; 2016), to my knowledge few empirical studies have analysed the effect of objective measures of quality of representation on satisfaction with democracy, and notably, they are not conducted at the individual level of analysis. In so far, there are cross-country studies of the effect of objective measures of country governance, such as rule of law and corruption(Anderson and Tverdova

2003; Ariely 2013; Dahlberg and Holmberg 2014), but it would be conceptual stretching to consider these features as measures of quality of representation. Therefore, further empirical studies testing the effect of objective quality of representation on political support would be desirable.

This thesis intends to fill a gap in the literature in two ways: first, by bridging the literature on representation with the one on satisfaction with democracy; second, using an objective measure of quality of representation and conducing the study at the individual level of analysis. In fact, the thesis follows the input-side approach reviewed above – even if it controls for output-side alternative explanations – and proposes to measure quality of representation with priority congruence, originally computed at the individual level. Using such a measure of congruence – priority-congruence between individual most important issues and legislative outputs – makes this thesis original for several reasons, both empirical and theoretical.

Empirically, studying the effect of priority-congruence on satisfaction with democracy, it gives a different analysis from Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016), who adopt a measure of positional congruence. Moreover, measuring issue-congruence between individual priorities and legislative outputs, this thesis differs from Reher (2015; 2016), who measures priority-congruence with political elites' priorities. As elite's priorities are policy intentions that do not necessarily translate into policy outputs, I propose my measure of congruence as a more direct determinant of satisfaction with democracy. Furthermore, by being a longitudinal study of Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom from 2002 to 2018, this thesis differs both in geographical and temporal scope from Reher's (2015) case study on Germany in 2009 and Reher's (2016) cross-country study on 27 EU Member States in 2009.

Theoretically, first, priority-congruence – while being proposed as an input-side explanation of political support – does not rule out output-based evaluations. In fact, I rather propose that priority congruence precedes and potentially intensifies output-based considerations, for the intuition that individuals estimate more positively the outputs that they prioritise.

Second, measuring priority congruence at the individual level, allows me to study the effect of priority-congruence with an original focus on its individual level conditionality. In fact, and most importantly, this thesis takes an original perspective by looking at the conditioning role of individual-level factors that have been understudied in so far in political support literature– namely individual political interest and political efficacy. In fact, they are typically studied for

their independent effect on political support (Dahlberg, Linde, and Holmberg 2013; Reher 2016), rather than as mediators of the effect of measures of representation. Finally, despite the thesis follows the rational-institutionalist approach reviewed above (Lane 1992, Mishler and Rose 2001) and privileges the idea that political support is the result of individual rational evaluations of regime performance (Easton 1965), it also recognises a role for political culture-related understandings of democracy. In fact, "political attitudes [such as satisfaction with democracy] are not entirely rational phenomena, as distinct political cultures [which includes different understandings of democracy] provide the goals on which rational assessments are based (Lane 1992:374f.)" (Christmann 2017: 13). For data availability reason, the conditionality of understandings of democracy cannot be systematically tested at the individual level, but it is used to interpret more qualitatively the diversity of state-specific effects.

Having established the thesis' fit and contribution with respect to the existing literature, in-depth discussion of its theoretical assumptions and implications follows in the next section.

Theory and Argumentation

The theory section is divided in two parts, each accomplishing a different purpose. The first part refers to the general effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy (SWD) and its conditionality upon interest in politics and perception of political efficacy at the individual level. It proposes the general causal mechanism that is expected to be in action from priority congruence to satisfaction with democracy, with the purpose of establishing a generalisable association between the two concepts and its conditionalities. The second part applies the general causal mechanisms to the three country cases – Spain, Hungary and the United Kingdom – that gave input to the research question, as described in the introduction. It makes a specific proposition about the diverse effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy across the three countries, which is based on the different understandings of democracy that are dominant at the country level, as derived from the European Social Survey of 2012. The purpose of this second part is limited to demonstrating that the country-specific effects of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy vary in intensity according to a pattern that makes sense of the puzzle described in the introduction. Moreover, a deeper purpose of this second part is to suggest a cultural interpretation of the apparently deviant nature of Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom from the general causal mechanism. However, such deeper purpose is only partly absolved, as in absence of repeated cross-sectional individual level data on the understanding of democracy in the three countries, only a rough intuition based on one-year (2012) country-level data is offered.

a) Main concepts employed: definitions and scope conditions

Before describing the causal mechanism in detail, it is necessary to define the meaning of the main concepts implicated in the causal effect and the conditionalities.

The concept of satisfaction with democracy needs to be located within the more extended debate on political support. Political support is, in fact, a multidimensional concept (Norris 1999) that has progressively received greater specification in the literature (Linde and Ekman 2003). In fact, starting from the very first distinction between support for democratic principles – also known as democratic legitimacy – and support for the way in which democratic regimes work in practice – also known as democratic regime performance (Linde and Ekman, 2003), many authors have differentiated further specific levels of political support, depending on the "object" that receives support. David Easton distinguishes three objects of political support –

the political community, the regime and the political authorities – but then develops only two respective types of political support: specific support and diffuse support (Easton 1975). Specific support is directed towards political authorities, it is based on individuals' evaluations of specific outputs of authorities' decisions, actions and policies, and it varies in the short-term; diffuse support is an attitude directed towards the political regime as a whole, it is based on both on cumulated experience of input and output side performances and the legitimacy attributed to the regime as result of early-life socialisation and it is therefore more durable over time (Easton 1975). Later on, Norris has further specified five objects of political support: the political community, for which support takes the form of attachment to the nation; regime principles, for which support is a form of legitimacy for democracy as an ideal regime; regime performance, towards which support is an evaluation of how the a certain democratic political system functions in practice; regime institutions, which receive support in the form of institutional trust; and political actors, which receive specific support in the form of re-appointment (or non-reappointment) to their national offices (Norris 1999 in Linde and Ekman, 2003).

Taking Easton's and Norris's frameworks of political support, which are mostly influential, we can now locate satisfaction with democracy and delimitate the extension of its concept: satisfaction with democracy in this thesis operationalises and measures diffuse support, in Easton terms, and in Norris's more specific terminology, support towards regime performance, both on the input and output sides. Therefore, satisfaction with democracy for this thesis expresses evaluations on current regime performance that do not necessarily imply support for democratic principles: being satisfied with the way a democratic regime is working at the moment, does not exclude potential support to non-democratic alternative in times of trouble; while being dissatisfied with current performance does not necessarily imply delegitimation of democracy as such (Linde and Ekman, 2003). However, repeated evaluations of regime performances are expected to influence legitimacy over time. An in-depth discussion of operationalisation and measurement of satisfaction with democracy is in the methodological section of the thesis.

The concept of priority congruence is instead located in the broader literature on political representation. As already mentioned in the literature review, priority congruence is proposed in this study as a clear-cut, simple and objective operationalisation of the much broader and less clear concept of political representation, which so far has received heterogeneous and non-

systematic definitions (Golder and Ferland 2018). The concept of priority congruence is chosen because it has a clearly defined scope, which builds on the theory of limited rationality and limited attention developed by the literature on dynamic agenda setting (Bevan and Jennings 2014). Discussion of this theory is contained in the following theory section; for now, with only a definitional purpose, it is important to say that priority congruence measures the extent to which the allocation of attention to different policy issues by the national legislation and by the citizens match each other (Bevan and Jennings 2014; Jones & Baumgartner 2004; Jones et al. 2009; Rehr 2015). More precisely, it consists in the correspondence between issue priorities in the public realm and the selection of issues and policy solutions into the decision-making agenda of political institutions (Bevan and Jennings 2014). It is therefore a "minimal" measure of the quality or representation, in so far as it provides an objective measure for the extent to which national legislative outputs represent at least the policy domains prioritised by the citizens.

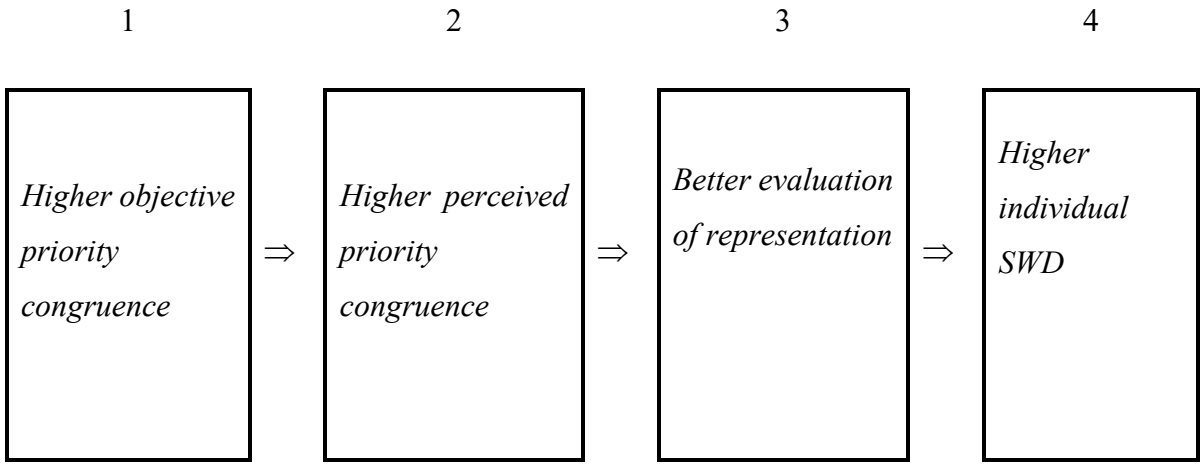
Therefore, priority congruence is clearly a limited, or "minimal" operationalisation of representation, which does not include representation of the substantive preferences of the public. In fact, the scope of the concept of priority congruence itself is definitionally limited by the concept of positional or ideological congruence, which measures the correspondence between citizens' ideological position on a given policy issue, and the actions taken by political institutions in that policy realm (Bevan and Jennings 2014). The thesis acknowledges that positional issues would provide a more substantive operationalisation of representation. However, despite being conceptually distinct, the two concepts do not exclude each other, but rather integrate logically one another, with priority congruence taking logical precedence over positional congruence. In fact, people cannot assess whether their ideological preferences on specific policy issues are matched by the representatives' legislative decisions if these policy issues are not first and foremost selected into the decision-making agenda as legislative priorities (Lindeboom 2012). Therefore, when confronted with the obligation to choose between positional or priority congruence (i.e. for data availability reasons, as explained in the methodology section), priority congruence should take precedence. In fact, it is the necessary and sufficient condition for "minimal" representation to occur, while positional congruence might be necessary for non-minimal representation, but not sufficient even for the "minimal" one. An in-depth discussion of the utility of choosing priority congruence over positional congruence follows in the next subsection.

Finally, political interest and political efficacy are the concepts employed to test the individual-level conditionalities of the effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy. Political interest is operationalised with the Cognitive Mobilisation Index (Standard Eurobarometer Series 2009-2018, replaced by the similar Political Interest Index in various years) and measures the extent to which an individual participates to politics and, indirectly, has access to information on politics (Inglehart 1977, 1990, in Alaminos and Penalva 2012). Political Efficacy instead is operationalised as the "Political Influence – My Voice Count" indicator of the Standard Eurobarometer (series of 2010, 2014-2018) and measures the extent to which an individual feel she can play a part in political and social changes or decisions in general, and indirectly the willingness to be informed of and participant into politics (Campbell, Gurin and Miller, 1954; Campbell, Converse, Miller and Stokes, 1960). By both affecting the probability that an individual in informed on politics, they are supposed to moderate the extent to which priority congruence is perceived by an individual, and therefore condition its effect on satisfaction with democracy. The mechanisms of the proposed conditional effects are further discussed in the next theory subsection.

b) Part I: the general causal mechanism and hypotheses on the general effects and conditionalities of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy (H1, H2, H3)

I propose a general causal mechanism that connects priority congruence with satisfaction with democracy in a series of logical steps. In fact, it is based on the multi-step theoretical assumption often found in the literature for which higher congruence means better representation, which in turn should intuitively conduce to higher satisfaction with democratic institutions (Dageforde 2016; Hobolt 2012; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008). Therefore, the proposed causal mechanism decomposes this assumption into four blocks, which are connected by a series of three steps, that can be all empirically tested on pooled data from the nine countries selected for this study (Figure 6). The first step assumes that higher levels of objective priority congruence allow an individual to get an higher level of perceived congruence; the second one that an higher level of perceived policy congruence is supposed to make the individual have a more positive evaluation of representation in the system; the third one expects that more positive evaluations of representation allows the individual to express higher levels of satisfaction with democracy (Dageförde 2016).

Figure 6 The General Causal Mechanism

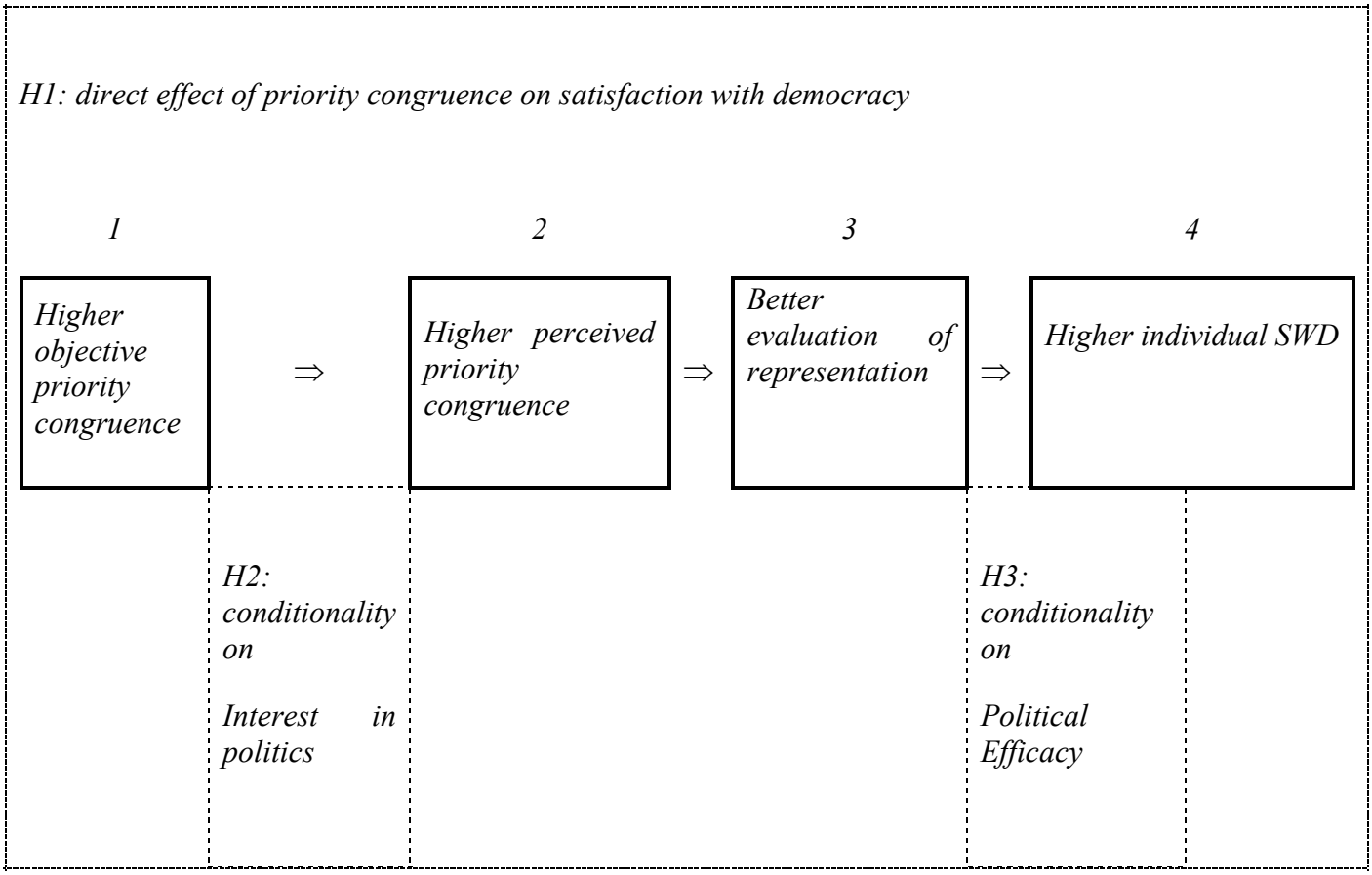


The theory which underlies this general causal mechanism proposition builds on the model of limited rationality developed in the agenda-setting literature (Baumgartner et al. 2001; Jones and Baumgartner 2005; 2015). It assumes that the legislative agenda space is limited by several constraints – i.e. time, institutional rules, interactions between majority and oppositions, or incoming information –, such that only selected policy issues get legislatures' attention for translation into policies (Carammia, Borghetto, and Bevan 2020). It also assumes that voters' attention to policy issues is limited by certain constraints – i.e. time, political knowledge and information –, such that each individual comes to identify few policy priorities (Bryan D. Jones and Baumgartner, 2001). Because of this reciprocal attention scarcity, individual satisfaction with democracy is expected to be affected by the degree of congruence between voters' issue priorities and issues selected into the legislative agenda, independently from the effect of ideological congruence. In fact, individual ideological preferences cannot become represented if their issue-content is not on the legislative agenda in first place (Bryan D. Jones and Baumgartner, 2001). Moreover, individuals cannot draw satisfaction from ideological congruence on issues that are non-existing or non-salient in their minds, either because of limited information or limited attention (Dageförde 2016).

While relying on a single theory of limited rationality, the causal steps of this general mechanism lead to three hypothesis that are independently testable on my data. Moreover, they

suggest two additional implications that can be tested to provide further theoretical validity to the causal mechanism (Figure 7).

Figure 7 Causal Mechanism with Hypotheses: Direct effect (H1) and Conditions (H2 and H3)



The first hypothesis collapses the three causal steps in the single causal process going from priority congruence to satisfaction with democracy. It is therefore a hypothesis on the existence of a direct effect of representation – the explanatory factor measured as priority congruence – on individuals' assessments of democratic performance in their own country – measured as satisfaction with democracy, the dependent variable. It is formulated as follows:

- *H1: higher levels of objective priority congruence are associated with higher levels of satisfaction with democracy at the individual level.*

The rationale of this first hypothesis is based on the input side of Easton's framework of diffuse political support (Easton 1965; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Weßels, 2015; Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Linde and Ekman 2003; Dahlberg, Linde, Holmberg 2013; Norris 1999), for

which the degree to which people feel satisfied with how democracy works depends on evaluations of a regime input and output side performance. In fact, in this theoretical framework, citizens' political support is an "output effect" (Gamson, 1968; Easton, 1965 in Weßels, 2015) of political experiences with authorities and institutions' performance both on the output side – the capacity to deliver political goods, such as policy performance and economic outcomes – and on the input side – the quality of the democratic process and the quality of representation, consisting in the ideological and priority congruence of such delivered political goods with the public preferences (Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Linde and Ekman 2003; Norris 1999; Christmann 2018). Without excluding the crucial role of the output side factors of this framework, this first hypothesis is specifically limited to the assumed effect of quality of representation – measured with priority-congruence – on the input side. The reason for specifically testing this hypothesis is that, despite supporting both normatively and empirically the proposition that good performance in democratic representation automatically implies positive assessments of democracy (Easton 1965; Norris 1999; Dalton 2004; Reher 2016; Hobolt 2012; Dahl 1971; Hobolt and Klemmensen 2008; Dageforde 2016; Anderson and Guillory 1997), preliminary aggregate-level evidence from Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom challenge that proposition. The apparent discrepancy between objective measures of democratic quality and quality of representation such as the Voice and Accountability index, and citizens' assessment of democratic performance justify proposing a hypothesis that specifically questions the very existence of the effect of one concept over the other. However, to make justice of the complete Easton framework of political support, output-side factors – such as economic performance – and the other component of the input side – ideological congruence – are accounted for in the hypothesis testing with the appropriate control variables.

The first hypothesis and the causal process that it implies suggest a direct link between representation (in terms of priority congruence) and satisfaction, which actually relies on several assumptions. It assumes that individuals are universally capable to perceive objective congruence, convert it into evaluations of representation and finally translate those evaluations into assessments of democracy invariably across individuals, over time and within different countries. However, as suggested by the counterintuitive trends in indexes of satisfaction with democracy and representation in the cases of Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom, the strength of the link between quality of representation and satisfaction with democracy might vary across cases. I propose that the effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with

democracy is at least moderated by two individual-level factors that intervene in the first and third steps of the aforementioned causal mechanism (*Figure*).

First, I propose that objective priority congruence could become perceived congruence depending on the degree of information on the legislative activities available to the individual, as well as their capacity to recognise and assess congruence between their own priorities and actual legislative outputs (Stecker and Tausendpfund 2016). While the capacity to recognise congruence should be a standard easily achievable for all respondents in the sample, because of the policy priorities chosen for this study are "niche" policy domains for which there is clear correspondence between the issue in people's mind (the MIIs coded in the Eurobarometer) and the CAP codification of policies, the degree of information instead might significantly vary across individuals and deserves a specific test. I propose to consider the individual degree of information on the legislative outputs as approximated by the interest in politics expressed by each individual, available from the Eurobarometer Standard Series 2003-2018. Therefore, the second hypothesis is as follows:

- *H2: The effect of priority congruence and satisfaction with democracy is stronger for an individual who shows higher political interest than respondents with lower interest in politics.*

The rationale of this second hypothesis is that political interest, by being operationalised with the "cognitive mobilisation index" (Inglehart, 1977, 1990) in the Standard Eurobarometer Series, differentiates the individuals selected in my sample for their degree of engagement with politics in general, but also with legislative outputs. As from the hypothesis, being more or less interested in politics is a conditionality of the effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy, as it might accentuate or inhibit the very perception of priority congruence by an individual, independently from the objective degree of priority congruence. However, I acknowledge that the concept of political interest is ambiguous and might exercise a non-univocal conditional effect on satisfaction with democracy. In fact, individuals that are particularly interested in politics might be also more critical on political authorities, either because they have higher standards of satisfaction (Norris 1999), or because they "got hooked on politics" because they are dissatisfied with the way political authorities are dealing with political issues that they consider particularly important (Prior, 2018). Therefore, testing this second hypothesis also requires more understanding of the nature and motivations underneath

interest in politics. Testing the relationship between interest in politics and trust in political authorities, such as political parties, will provide additional insight to interpret results from H2. Finally, I propose that the third step of the causal mechanism, for which the extent to which an individual translates a better evaluation of representation in their country resulting from perceiving congruence, would be conditional on her level of perceived political efficacy. Therefore, hypothesis three is as following:

- *H3: If priority congruence has an effect on individuals' satisfaction with democracy because it is perceived as a measure of the quality of representation, such an effect must be stronger for those individuals who believe to have more political efficacy within representative democracy systems.*

The rationale behind this third hypothesis is that the political efficacy differentiates individuals upon their view of representation. I suggest that those individuals who think to have efficacious voice in political decisions, conceive representation according to the "mandate model of representation", using Mansbridge terms (2003; in Visconti, 2018). This means that they think to delegate a mandate to governments to reflect their policy priorities when voting (Visconti 2018); this reasonably increases the sense of responsibility perceived when seeing that their most important issues are taken on by national legislation, such that they might derive an even higher egotropic sense of satisfaction with the whole democratic system. Instead, individuals who do not think to have voice and efficacy in politics, likely conceive representation according to the "anticipatory model of representation", Mansbridge terms (2003; in Visconti, 2018). This means that they think political authorities take decisions based on maximization of utility in outcomes, only to ensure that they will be re-elected in the subsequent elections (Visconti 2018). Therefore, even if they perceive priority congruence in legislative outputs, they might think that the authorities choose those policy issues only because they are objective priority in terms of outcomes at that point in time. With no positive sense of responsibility for priority congruence, it is reasonable to expect that also the degree of satisfaction derived from it will be less intense. So, it is important to also test whether political efficacy is a conditionality of the effect of quality of representation on satisfaction with democracy.

c) Part II: the casual mechanism applied to Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom and hypothesis on the pattern of country specific effects (H4)

The general causal mechanism relates political support to input-side performance evaluations of a democratic political system and expects that on average, across countries, the relationship follows the (positive) direction assumed in most literature on political support (Easton 1965a; Anderson and Guillory 1997; Weßels, 2015; Aarts and Thomassen 2008; Linde and Ekman 2003; Dahlberg, Linde, Holmberg 2013; Norris 1999). However, as suggested by preliminary aggregate level evidence from Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom, the intensity of such a relationship might vary at country-level with country specific effects. There can be a plethora of performance-related sources of country-level variation in the effect of priority congruence on political support, such as macro-economic performance or, on a more institutional side, ideological differences in the political actors that embody institutional roles. These types of performance related country-level effects are already accounted for the general mechanism, as they are included as control variables in the models that test the general hypotheses (H1, H2, H3).

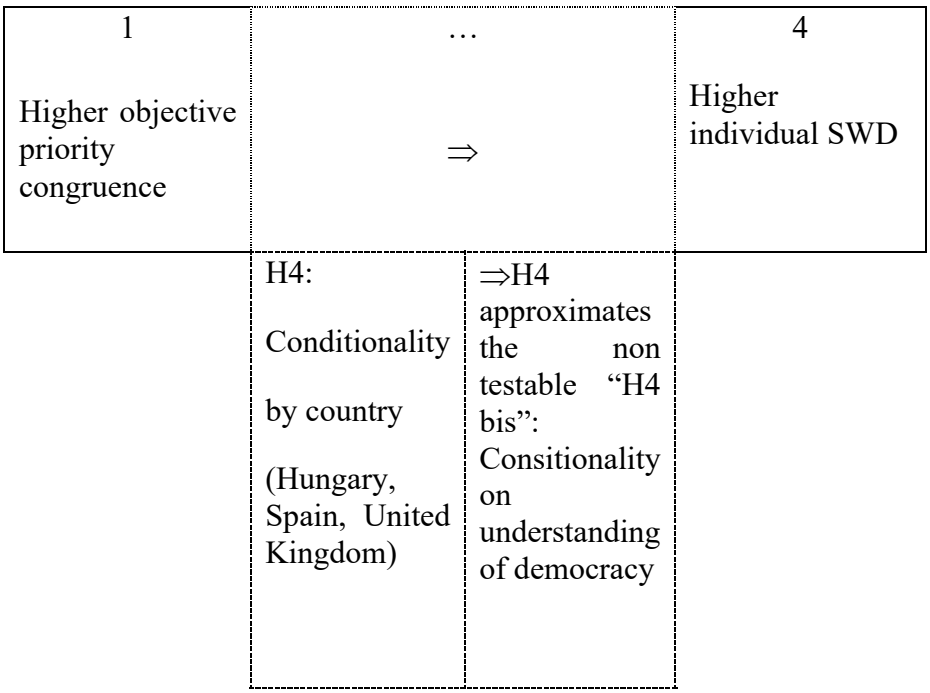
However, regime performance is only half of the story in citizens' evaluations of the political system in which they live (Weßels, 2015). The other half is the type of democratic political culture dominant in the political system in which they have been socialised, and in particular, the relative importance of representation (expressed as congruence or alternatives) in citizens' understanding of democracy (Weßels, 2015). And while there is longitudinal empirical evidence from the European Social Survey series conducted from 2002 to 2018 that the fundamental principles of democracy – equality and freedom – are dominant in all understandings of democracy across all countries and points in time, this does not seem to be the case for the relative importance of the attributes of democracy. In fact, as from the European Social Survey on democracy of 2012, there seems to be cross-country variation in the relative importance of various attributes of democracy, such as representation/congruence (Weßels, 2015; European Social Survey 2012). Therefore, different understandings of the attributes of democracy might introduce an important source of country-specific variation in the effect of representation – measured as priority congruence – and satisfaction with democracy.

I propose that this additional type of country-level conditionality might help explain the puzzling cases of Hungary, Spain, and the United Kingdom, in which, at least at the aggregate level, there seems to be a discrepancy between objective measures of representation – such as

the Voice and Accountability WGI index – and citizens' evaluation of democracy. In fact, from the European Social Survey of 2012, the three countries show three different dominant understandings of democracy: in Hungary representation/congruence is overall unimportant (less than 60% of respondents consider it important); in the United Kingdom representation/congruence is discretely important (almost 70% of respondents consider it important) but competes with other attributes of democracy, such as freedom of expression and single coalition governments; in Spain is extremely important (more than 80% of respondents consider it important) and it dominates on any other attributes of democracy (European Social Survey 2012). From this empirical observation, I propose that such cultural differences affect the general causal mechanism at the individual level. My expectation is that the more an individual considers important representation/congruence, the more intense will be the effect of quality of representation measured as priority congruence on their evaluation of democracy (Figure). Unfortunately, there is no available repeated cross-sectional data on individual understandings of democracy, except for the European Social Survey of 2012. Therefore, this individual-level proposition is not immediately testable, and doing so with aggregate-level data on the understandings of democracy would be faulty of ecological fallacy. However, it is possible to test a country-level hypothesis that predicts a specific pattern of country-specific effects of representation/congruence on satisfaction with democracy, which is based on that rationale. The country level hypothesis is formulated as follows:

- *H4: Given the different importance of priority congruence in the dominant understandings of democracy in the three countries and the trends of aggregate satisfaction with democracy relative to subjective measures of voice and accountability, the effect of priority congruence on individual satisfaction with democracy is smaller in Hungary, medium in the United Kingdom and stronger in Spain.*

Figure 8 Country-specific effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy



Results from the country-specific models testing this hypothesis will be interpreted qualitatively, considering the cultural differences in understandings of democracy observed at aggregate level in 2012 (Figure 8).

Methodology & Analysis

a) Data

In order to test the hypotheses, I have combined individual-level survey data from different waves of the Standard Eurobarometer Series (2003-2018) into a repeated cross-sectional dataset containing 149,253 observations for 16 periods from 9 distinct countries. I have only selected the Standard Eurobarometer Survey editions in which both satisfaction with democracy (the dependent variable of this study) and the Most-Important-Issue facing the nation (the main component of the independent variable of this study) appeared on the questionnaire. With the exception of year 2008, the two question items appeared together on the Eurobarometer Standard series at least once a year, consistently in the second semester of each year from 2003 to 2018. This practical consideration motivates the specific selection of the time frame of this study. I have then merged these individual-level data with aggregate national-level indicators of legislative outputs from the Comparative Agenda Project (CAP). The CAP is an international project that classifies data such as laws, media, party manifestoes or budgets into 19 major (and 240 micro) policy issues for the purpose of comparative study of agenda-setting and policy dynamics (Visconti 2018). Classification of textual data into policy categories is based on the relative frequency of all coded words and quasi-sentences corresponding to the list of policy issues (Hobolt and Klemmemsen, 2005). Therefore, CAP codification does not measure policy content, but the relative salience of policy issues on the legislative agenda. These data allow the construction of an innovative individual-level measure for priority-congruence that links citizen's issue priorities with the relative policy issue attention in the national legislation. This is particularly facilitated by the intuitive correspondence between the Eurobarometer Most Important Issues selected for this study – Education, Healthcare, Environment, and Immigration – and the CAP's unified issue coding scheme. I have also added to my dataset measures of cabinet ideology on the left-right dimension contained in the ParlGov Parliaments and governments database (Döring, Holger and Philip Manow. 2020) to build a control variable for positional congruence. Moreover, I have merged into the dataset indicators from the World Bank National Accounts Data 2002-2018 to control for macroeconomics stability. Finally, I have drawn on the European Social Survey 2012 to compute aggregate national-level measures of responses about the attributes of democracy, to have a proxy of the dominant understanding of democracy in each country.

b) Case Selection

The first set of hypotheses (H1, H2 and H3) questions the general relationship between satisfaction with democracy and congruence and the way it is conditioned by political interest. Therefore, in order to maximize the external validity of the test, this set of hypotheses is tested on the largest possible sample of countries for which both CAP and Eurobarometer data sources are currently available. At the time of writing (2021), there are nine countries that have been both regular participant of the Standard Eurobarometer Survey and part of the Comparative Agenda Project: Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, The Netherlands, Spain and the United Kingdom. However, despite the fact that the selection has been strictly motivated by data availability reasons, the country cases selected constitute an interesting sample on several respects. First, they are all advanced industrialised democracies and members of the OECD. While there is some unneglectable variation in terms of national macroeconomic stability – which is accounted for in the study by controlling for the fundamental macroeconomic indicators – this similarity ensures that the variation driven by different stages of economic development is minimized.

Second, while all these countries are established democracies, each case represents a very different type of democracy in terms of institutional setting. Using Lijphart's (1984) vocabulary, the United Kingdom represents the 'majoritarian democracy' type, where the electoral system is based on simple plurality and primary legislation is mainly the enactment of single-party governments' policy agenda (Bevan et al. 2019). The Netherlands represents the opposite 'consensus democracy' type, where the electoral system is based on proportional representation without any electoral threshold and legislation results from negotiation in large coalition governments (Timmermans and Breeman 2017). The other selected countries are located between these two extremes, often at different points over time. For example Hungary has become increasingly majoritarian over the time period of this study (Boda and Sebok 2021) , while Italy has shifted repetitiously from proportional to majoritarian electoral systems (Borghetto, Carammia, Russo 2019). Such institutional variation should increase the external validity of the analysis and assure that the existence of a relationship between congruence and satisfaction with democracy is not limited to a particular set of institutions.

Third, while a democratic political culture is dominant in all the selected countries, there is evidence for supposing that the dominant understanding of the fundamental attributes of democracy varies across these countries. This emerges clearly from the European Social

Survey of 2012, which included specific questions on the understandings of democracy: while living in a democratic country is considered important by more than 80% of the respondents in all the nine selected countries (Figure 9), there is much more variation in aggregate responses to the questions about the attributes of democracy (figures 10 - 13). For example, it is interesting that prevention of expression of extreme political opinions, while being overall infrequent, is a discretely popular attribute of democracy in Hungary, Belgium and the Netherlands, relative to the other countries (Figure 10). Also, the fact that government is formed by a single party is valued more positively in the United Kingdom, Italy and Spain, which probably reveals that government's timeliness and effectiveness in decision-making and action is an important attribute of democracy in these countries (Figure 11).

Furthermore, a particularly relevant feature of these country cases is the variation in responses to the question on the importance of government responsiveness to what people think, which approximates the importance of my independent variable – priority congruence – in a given understanding of democracy. This seems to be especially important in Spain, Italy and Germany, while in Denmark, the Netherlands and Belgium, government's policy continuity seems to be more important relative to other countries (**Error! Reference source not found.**). Considering such pattern of responses as revealing cultural attitudes which are reasonably valid for the entire period under study (2003-2018), variation in the dominant understandings of democracy across the country cases further increases the external validity of the test. Finally, although cases should never be selected on the dependent variable, the very fact that the average level of satisfaction with democracy over the period 2003-2018 varies significantly across the selected countries makes this sample interesting to study (Figure 13).

Figure 9 Proportion of responses to the question "How important is for you to live in democratically governed country" – European Social Survey, 2012

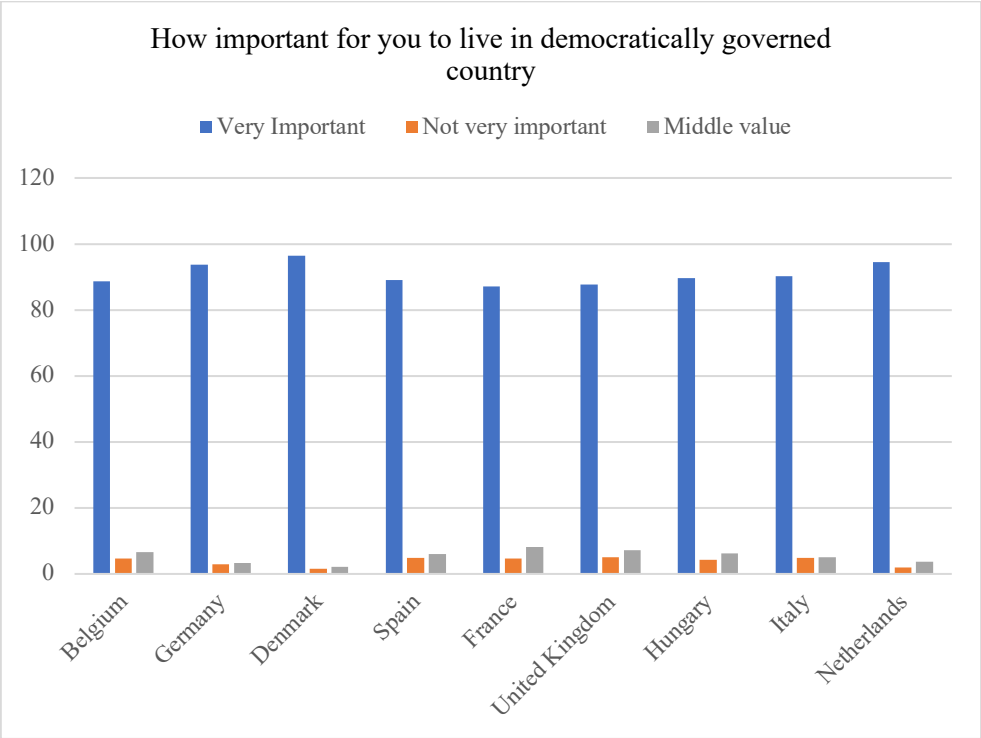


Figure 10 Proportion of responses to the question "It is best for democracy that everyone is free to express their own political views, even extreme ones" – European Social Survey, 2012

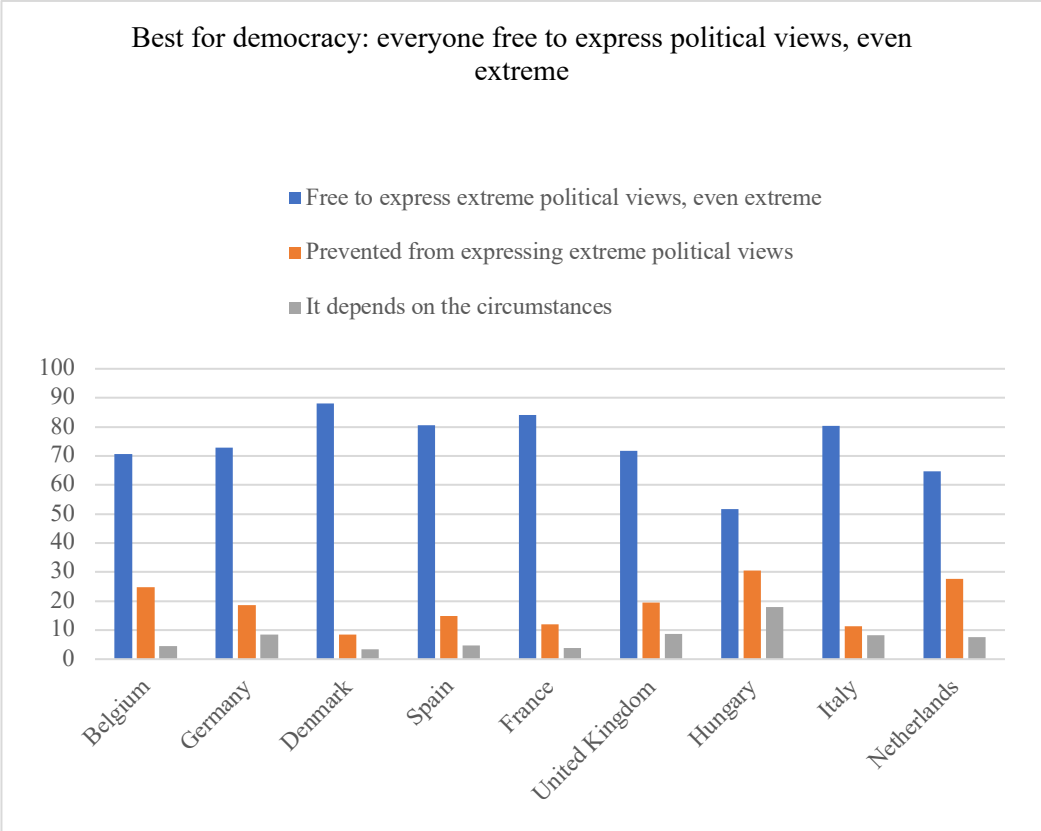


Figure 11 Proportion of responses to the question "It is best for democracy that the government is formed by a single party" – European Social Survey, 2012

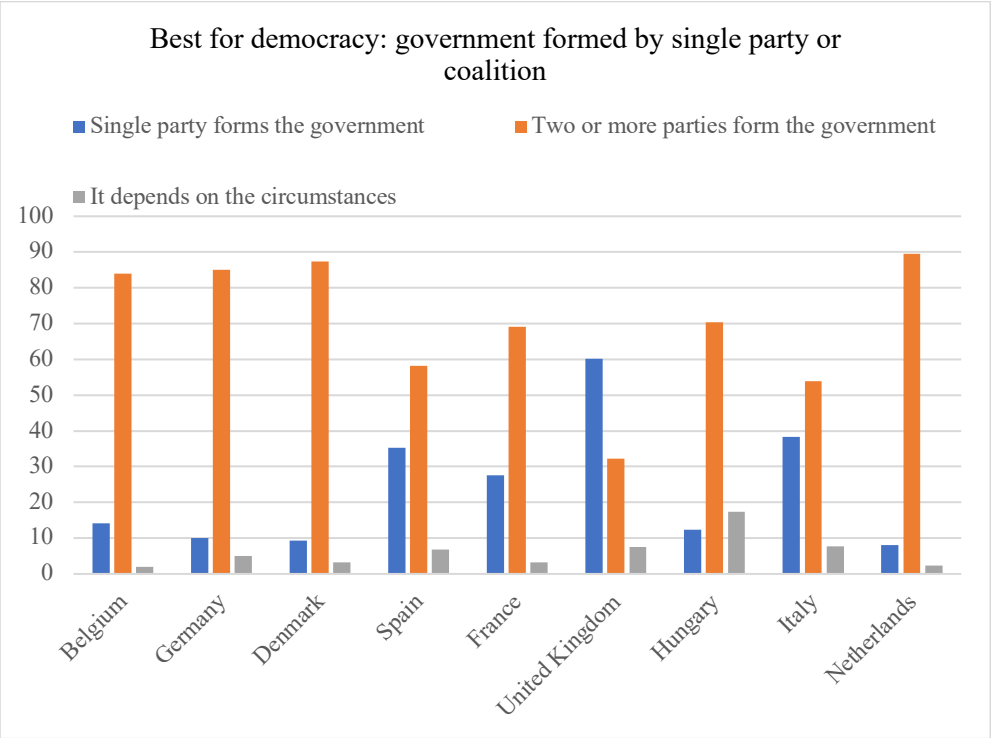


Figure 12 Proportion of responses to the question "It is best for democracy that the government changes policies in response to what most people think" – European Social Survey, 2012

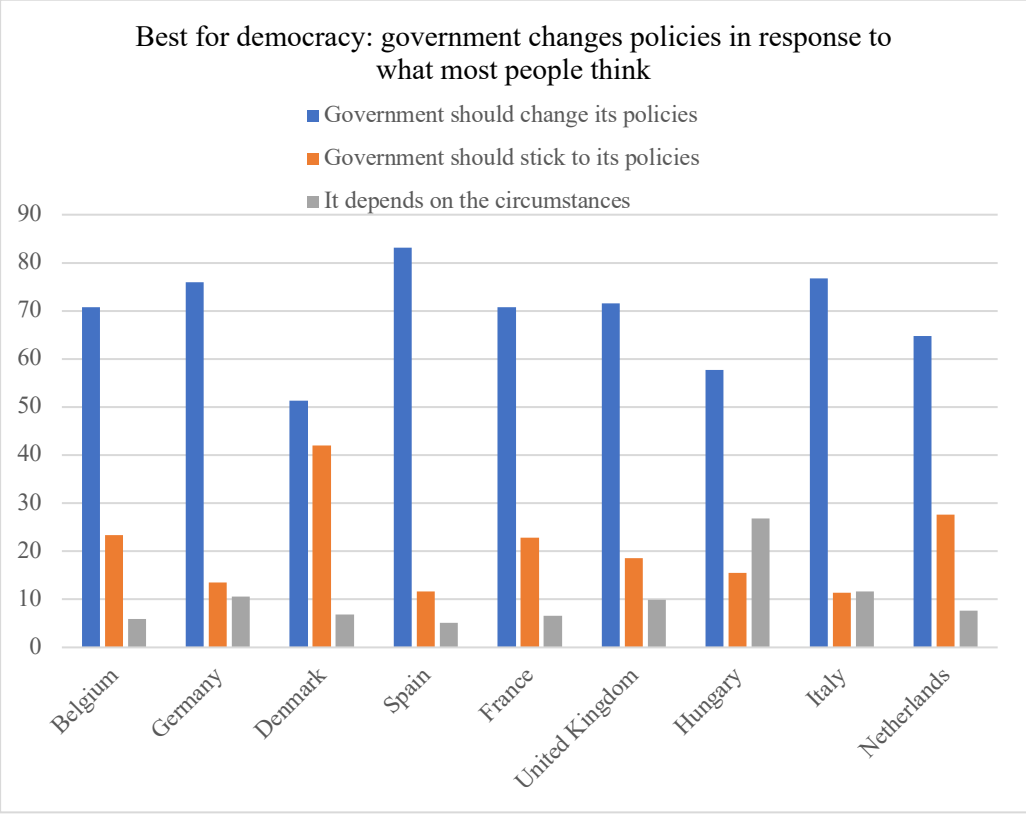
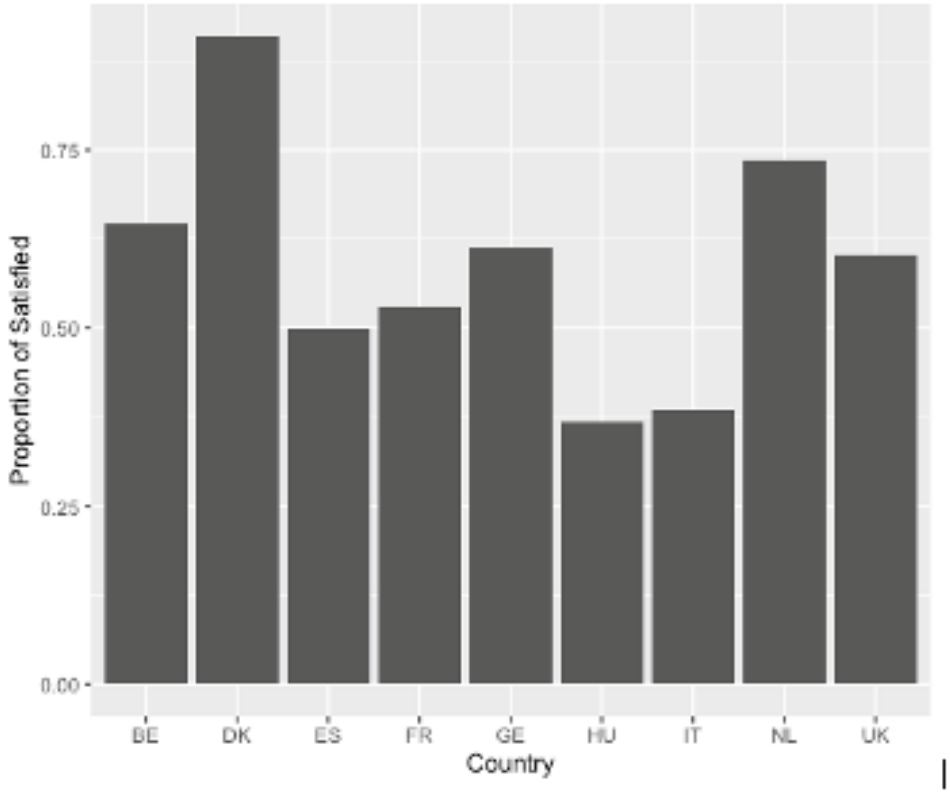


Figure 13 Average proportion of respondents satisfied with democracy ("Very satisfied" and "Fairly satisfied" response categories combined) – Standard Eurobarometer Series, 2003-2018



The third hypothesis focuses instead on the country-specific conditional effect of congruence on satisfaction with democracy in the separate cases of Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom, and how that effect is different across the three countries. Therefore, the second part of the analysis draws on Eurobarometer and CAP data on these three country-cases only. Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom have been chosen to study the country-specific effect for a series of motivations that make them particularly interesting cases.

First, as anticipated in the introduction, among the nine countries considered in the thesis, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom show more evidently the motivating puzzle because their patterns of satisfaction with democracy are counterintuitive to the theoretical expectations formulated by the existing literature on public opinion. From descriptive evidence, it appears that over the period 2003-2018, the trend of satisfaction with democracy is positive in Hungary, almost constant in the United Kingdom and negative in Spain (cf. Figure 4 in the introduction),

while the trends in indicators of democratic quality, such as the World Governance Indicators, are clearly opposite for Hungary and Spain (cf. Figure 1 and Figure 2) This is especially the case of the 'Voice and Accountability' indicator which, as a subjective measure of the quality of representation, is often considered a determinant of the perceived legitimacy of democracy and therefore citizen's satisfaction with it (figure 7). This raises questions on the typically assumed positive relationship between the quality of representation and satisfaction with democracy and justifies the study of this thesis.

Second, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom represent three very different scenarios for testing the relationship between responsiveness and satisfaction with democracy. Beyond the World Governance Indicators, they differ both synchronically (at any point in time) and diachronically (in their trends). These features are relevant to the test of hypothesis n. 3, because they might either condition or introduce sources of bias in the relationship between congruence and satisfaction with democracy. In fact, among the three countries there is variation in the average levels of political interest (Hungary = 1.81, Spain = 1.54, United Kingdom = 1.61, cf.Figure 15), which is the main conditionality tested in this study. Besides, the three countries differ for the relative importance of policy congruence in the dominant understanding of democracy, which helps interpreting the variation of the strength of the effect of congruence across the three (Figure 16).

Moreover, there is variation in the indicators of macroeconomic stabilities, which are important sources of biased controlled in the analysis. It is noticeable that Hungary has been on average the fastest growing but most instable economy, while Spain has presented, on average higher levels of unemployment over the period (Figure 17). Therefore, the choice of Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom in order to test the country-specific effect of congruence on satisfaction with democracy maximizes variation and therefore the robustness of the effect.

Finally, on the practical side, Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom have been chosen to test the country-specific hypotheses because they are the three countries for which the CAP data on legislation cover the entire period under study (2003-2018 for Hungary and Spain, 2003-2015 for the United Kingdom).

Figure 14 Country Trends in Voice and Accountability as a measure of Representation – WGI, 2003-2018

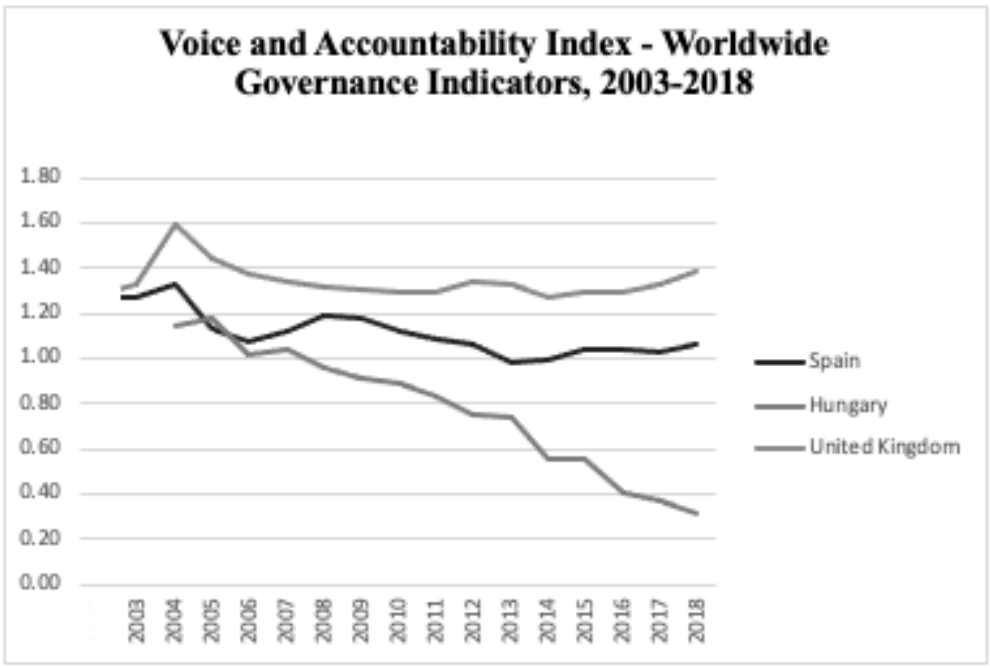


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Figure 15 Average level of the Political Interest Index (measured on a 4-points scale) over the period 2003-2018 – Eurobarometer Standard series

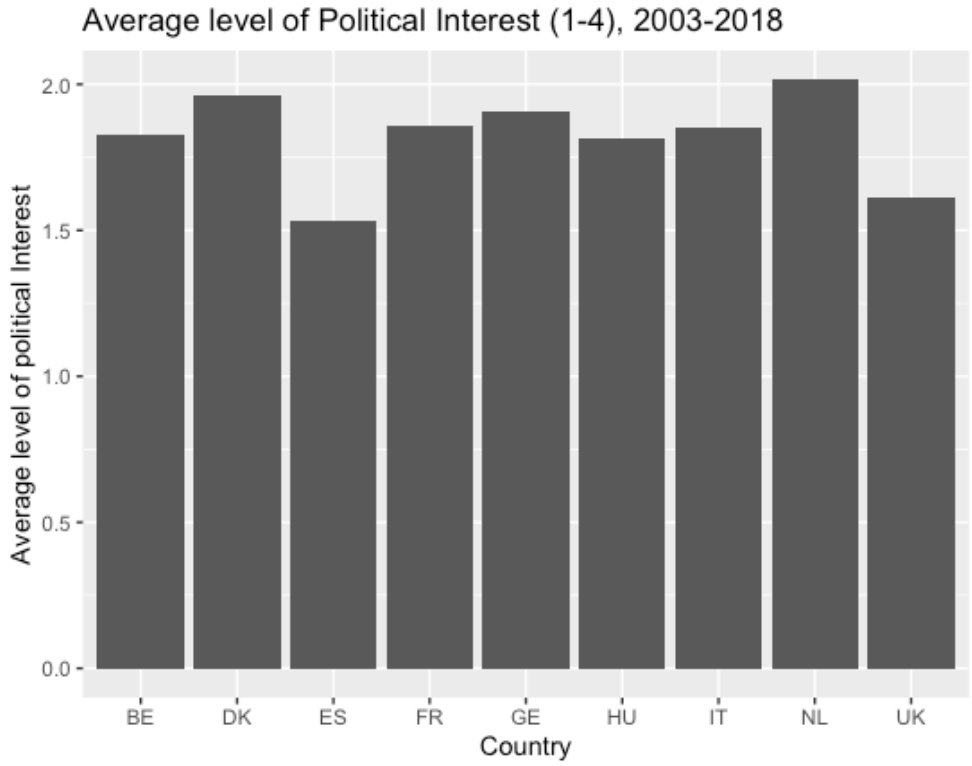


Figure 16 Proportion of responses to questions on the most important attributes of democracy – European Social Survey, 2012

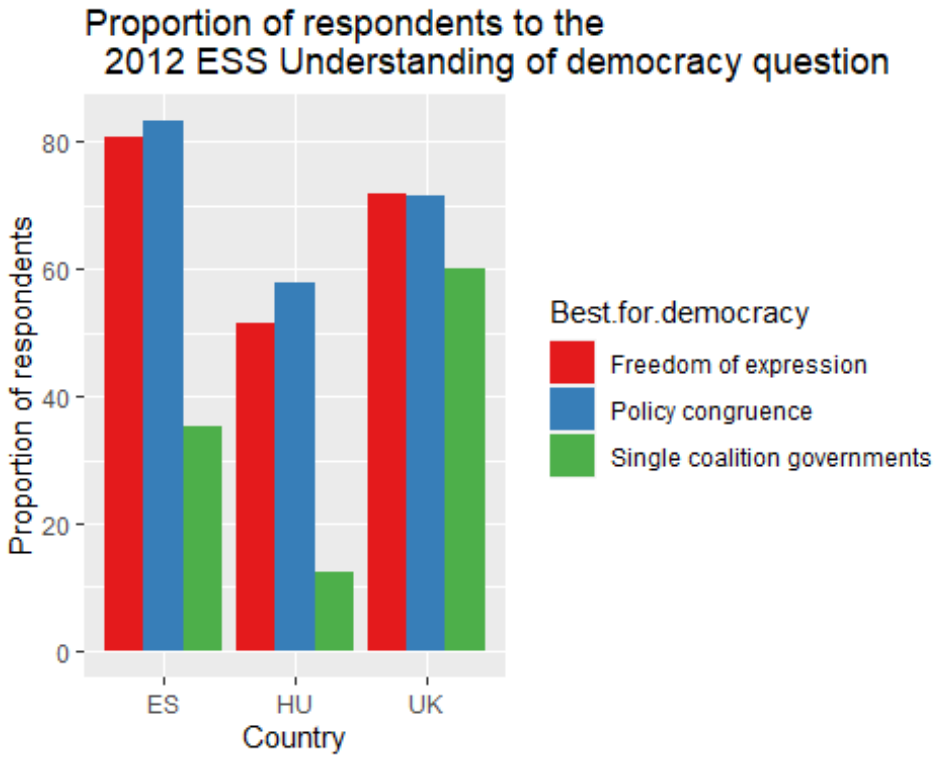
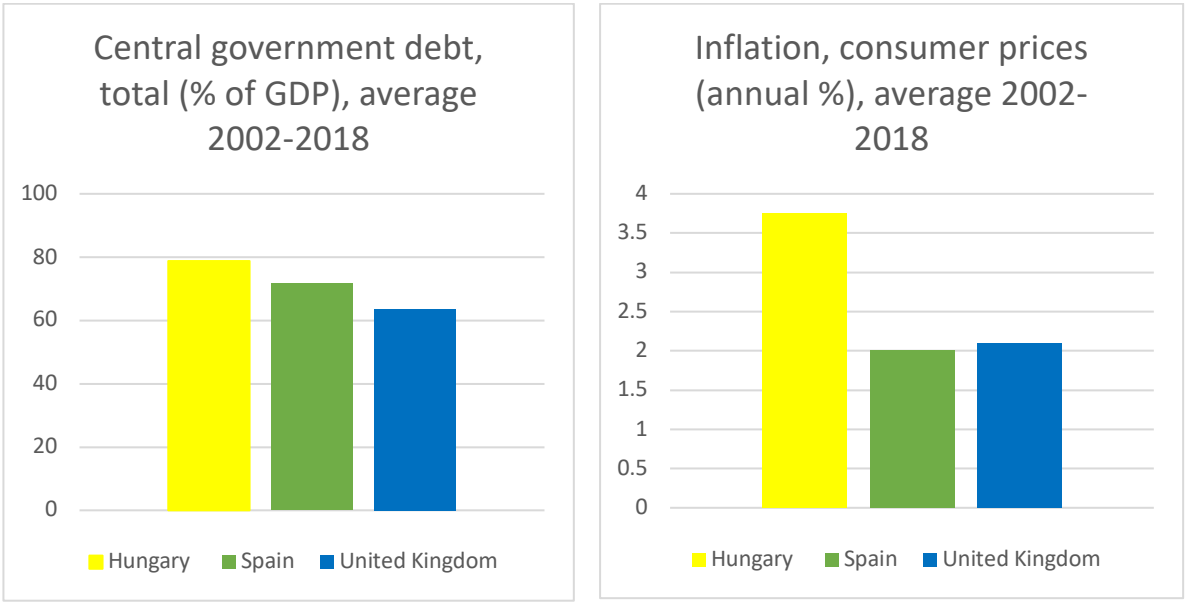
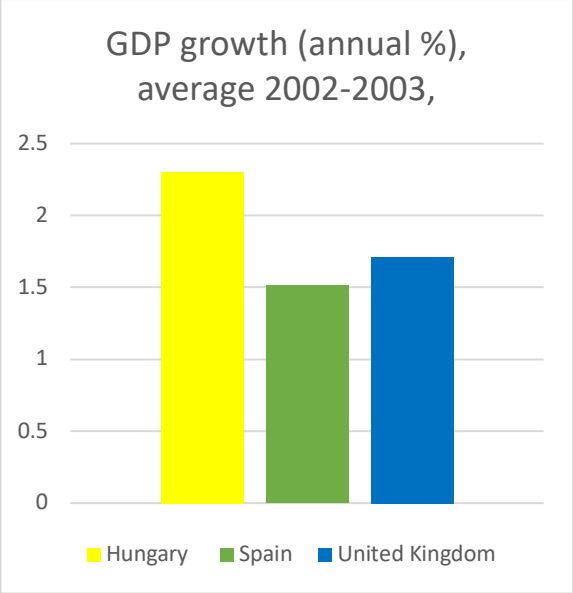
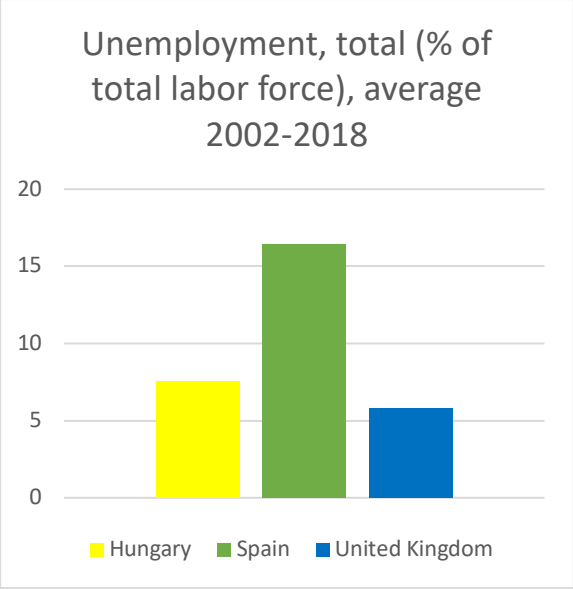


Figure 17 Average levels of macroeconomic indicators over the period 2002-2018 – National Accounts Datasets, World Bank National Accounts







c) Concepts' operationalisation and measurement

- *Priority Congruence*

The independent variable in this study is priority congruence in four selected policy issues: health, education, environment, and immigration. The concept of priority-congruence indicates how salient each survey respondent's policy priorities were in the national legislation in a given year, relative to the total legislative output (Rehr 2015). It is therefore constructed on two other concepts: the individual policy priorities, measured with the Most-Important-Issue question in the Standard Eurobarometer survey, and the annual volume of legislative outputs in each policy domain, identified by the CAP codification. I have operationalised this constructed concept at the individual level considering the annual share of legislative output devoted to a given policy issue, conditional on given individual prioritising that specific issue. From this operationalisation, I have built both a binary and an ordinal measure of priority congruence.

The binary measure considers the annual change in the share of legislative output, and it takes the value of zero if the change in the volume of legislation from year t-1 in each respondent's 'Most Important Issue' is negative, and 1 if the change in legislative volume is positive.

The ordinal measure considers instead the annual share of legislative output by topic, relative to the total distribution of annual shares over the entire period (2002-2018). Hence, this is a four-levels variable in which 1 indicates the lowest level of priority congruence and 4 the

highest one. Levels' thresholds are empirically defined based on the distribution of volumes of legislation by topic across the 9 countries. Using quartiles measures as reference points, priority congruence for each topic takes the value 1 when the yearly volume of legislation is below the average 25% of the distribution; it takes the value 2 between 25% and 50%; it is 3 between 50% and 75%; it takes 4 above 75% of the average legislative volume in that topic.

As it emerges from the distributions of the two measures, the binary measure sets a stricter threshold for identifying congruent cases than the ordinal measure: while congruent cases under the binary measure are a minority of respondents (Figure 18), under the ordinal measure low congruence (level 1) is still the most frequent category, but higher levels of congruence are relatively frequent too (levels 3 and 4, cf. Figure 19). In order to increase the robustness of findings, the analysis tests the hypotheses employing both measures of priority congruence, to ensure results are coherent under both the broader (ordinal) operationalisation of the concept and the stricter one (binary).

Figure 18 Frequency of individual Congruent cases defined by the Binary measure of congruence – Standard Eurobarometer Series 2003-2018

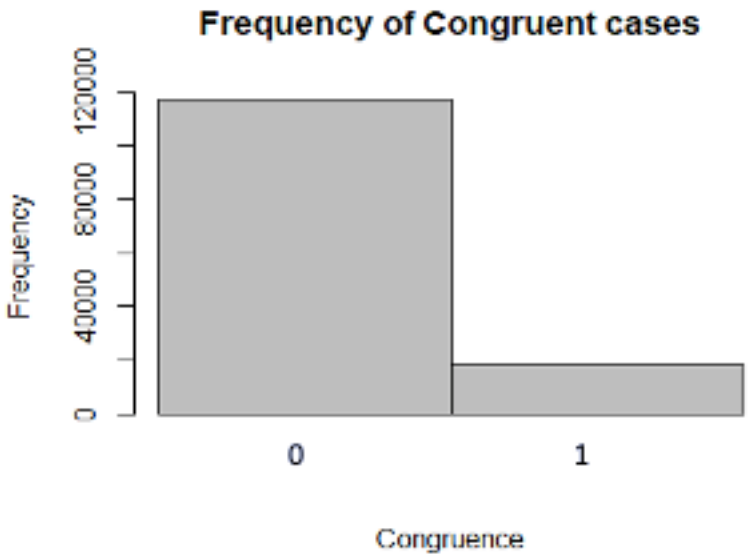
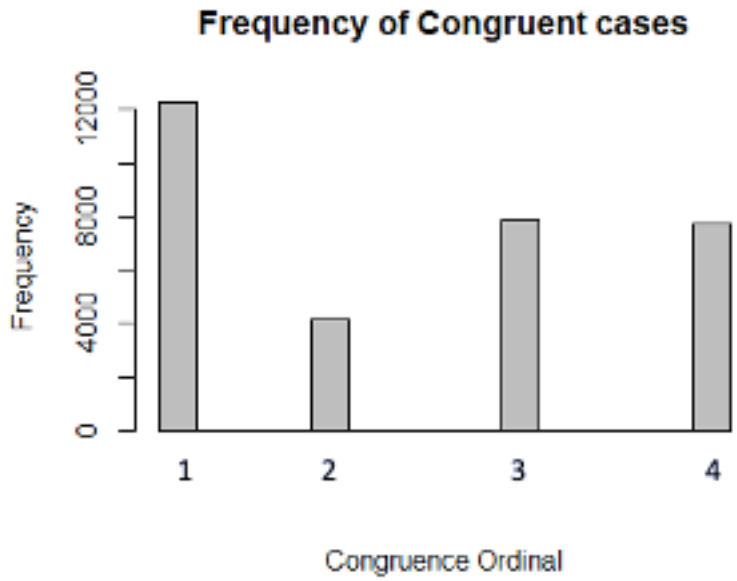


Figure 19 Frequency of individual Congruent cases defined by the Binary measure of congruence – Standard Eurobarometer Series 2003-2018



Finally, it is important to note that, for the purpose of this study, priority congruence is measured only upon four policy issues – health, education, environment, and immigration. This also means that the scope of this study is limited to the effects of congruence on the satisfaction with democracy of respondents regarding these four priority issues. This is an important limitation, as these four policy domains are relatively niche issues, both in the public attention, and in the legislative agenda, which might affect the dynamics between congruence and satisfaction with democracy.

The niche nature of the policy domains is evident from the aggregate distributions of the MIIs – the areas in which the people want the government to take action – and the annual volumes of legislation. In fact, across all nine country cases, the percentage of respondents selecting one of these four policy priorities is never higher than 60%, both on average over the period and over time (except for concern for immigration in Germany, 2015) (Figure 20 and Figure 21). Also, the share of legislation in these four policy domains is never larger than 10%, both on average and across years (Figure 22 and Figure 23). This is consistent with the literature based on the full domains of CAP data, which finds that issues related to the economic and financial situation are typically the most salient in both public attention and political agendas (Reher 2015).

However, I consider this to be a limitation in scope but not in the validity of the study, for several reasons. First, while the salience of economic and financial concerns is mostly driven by the economic situation (Reher 2015), which in turn affects satisfaction with democracy, the salience of issue priorities that are not strictly related to the economic condition is more likely to be – at least in a part – exogenous to satisfaction with democracy, such to exercise an independent effect on it. Second, the fact that the selected MIIs are niche policy interests, makes the causal mechanism behind the hypothesised effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy only more realistic. In fact, people selecting more niche policy priorities are reasonably more likely to have a more intense concern for those issues; intense issue concern makes respondents more realistically aware of the legislative outputs in those issues domains; awareness of the legislative actions allows respondents to make an assessment on priority congruence, that might be reflected in their satisfaction with democracy. Finally, on a more practical side, the selection of health, education, environment, and immigration policy domains ensure that there is clear correspondence between the issue in people's mind (the MIIs coded in the Eurobarometer) and the CAP codification of policies. This is important not only for the validity of the measure of priority congruence, which is built on the other two measures, but for the plausibility of the proposed causal mechanism, requiring individuals' capacity to perceive and evaluate congruence. This mechanism would be less plausible if considering MIIs that require much more expertise for the individual to evaluate congruence – i.e. inflation, taxation, economic situation, unemployment or defence.

Figure 20 Average proportion of responses to the Most-Important-Issue question (Education, Environment, Health, Immigration) – Standard Eurobarometer Series, 2003-2018

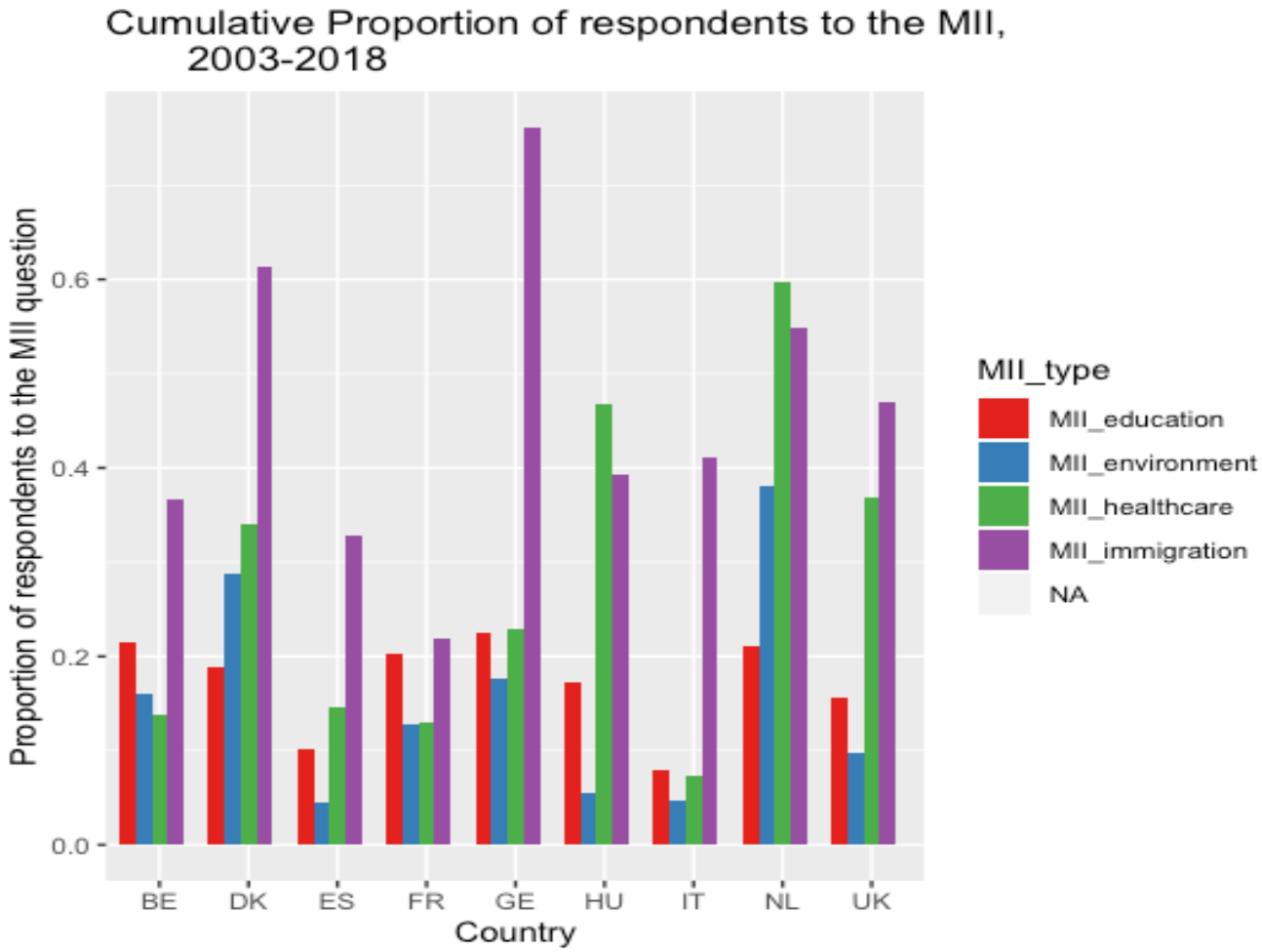


Figure 21 Proportion of responses to the Most-Important-Issue question over time (Education, Environment, Health, Immigration) – Standard Eurobarometer Series, 2003-2018

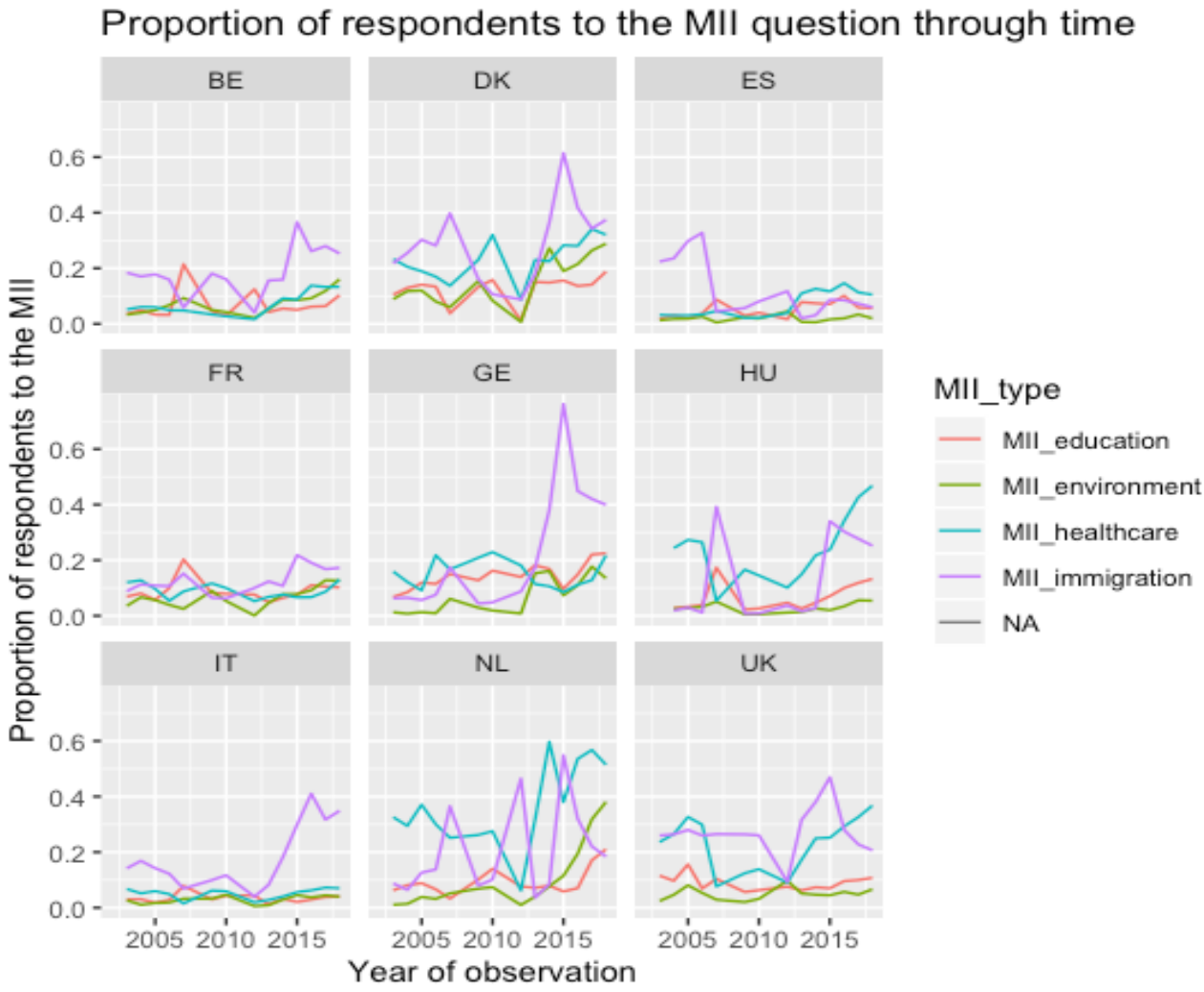


Figure 22 Average proportion of annual volumes of legislation in Education, Environment, Health, Immigration policy domains, relative to the annual total legislative output (average over the period 2002-2018) – Comparative Agenda Project Datasets on national laws

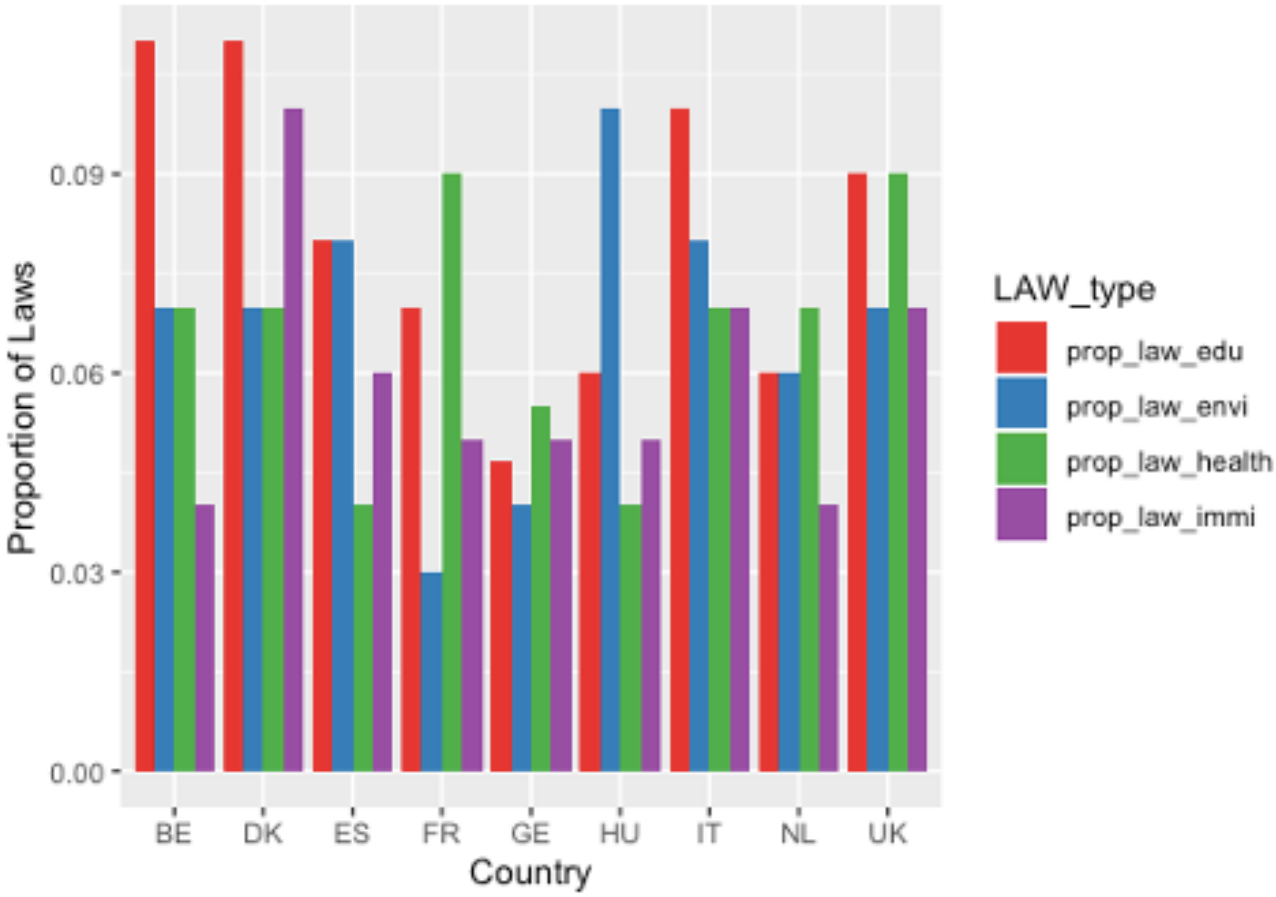
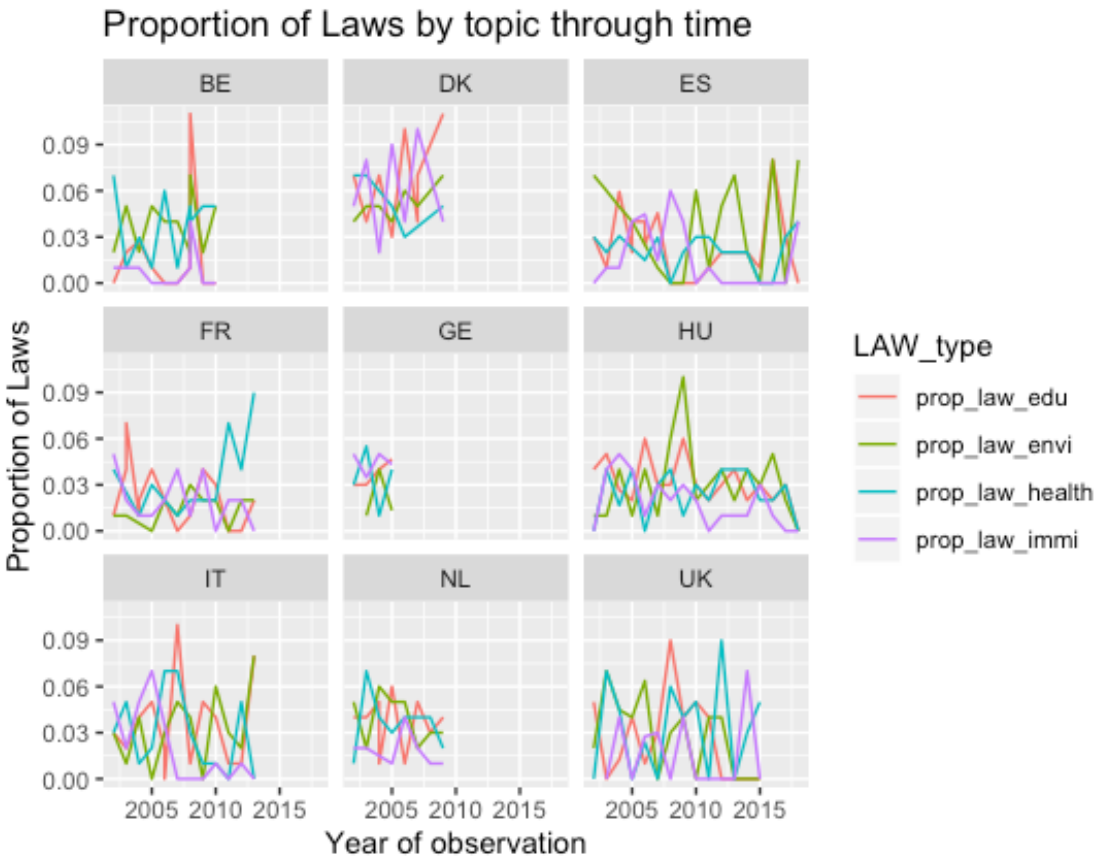


Figure 23 Proportion of annual volumes of legislation in Education, Environment, Health, Immigration policy domains, relative to the annual total legislative output over time (2002-2018) – Comparative Agenda Project Datasets on national legislation



- *Satisfaction with Democracy*

The dependent variable in this analysis is satisfaction with democracy (SWD), which is a subjective measure of the perceived legitimacy of democratic institutions. Data are responses to the Standard Eurobarometer survey question: 'On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]? Very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, or not at all satisfied?', which has been asked in the Standard Eurobarometer Series at least once per year from 2003 (2004 for Hungary) to 2018 (with the exception of 2008). For the purpose of this study, responses to this question are recoded both as an ordinal five-level variable (where 1 is the lowest level of satisfaction, 4 the highest and zero collects the "Don't Know" and empty responses) and a binary variable (which takes the value of 1 when the respondent is "Very" or "Fairly" satisfied, and zero in all other cases). Using both types of measurement, distribution of responses from pooled country cases shows that the majority of respondents are satisfied with democracy, and "Fairly Satisfied (level 3)" is the most frequent category of response (Figure 24 and Figure 25). The analysis tests the hypotheses on both measures of satisfaction

with democracy, as they give two slightly different pieces of information: the binary measure allows to compare the probability of being satisfied with democracy in the event of congruence to the one in absence of congruence; the ordinal measure allows to compare the probability of each level of satisfaction with democracy at different levels of congruence. Finding a coherent direction of the effect using both measures is a way to make results more robust.

Figure 24 Frequency of aggregate responses to Satisfaction with democracy measured as a binary variable – Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2003-2018

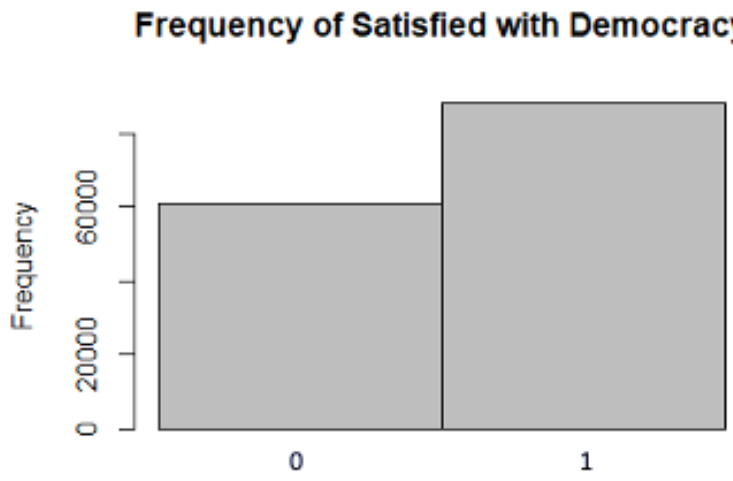
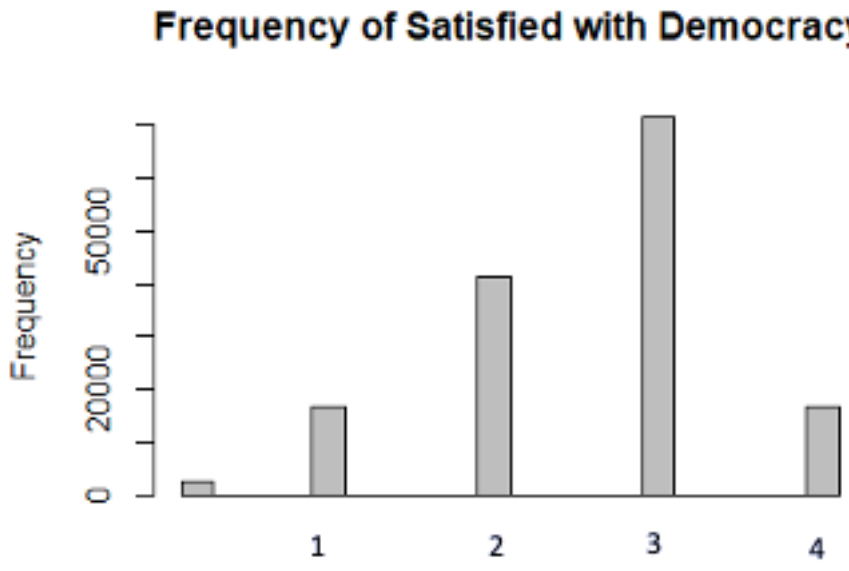


Figure 25 Frequency of aggregate responses to Satisfaction with democracy measured as an ordinal variable – Eurobarometer Standard Series, 2003-2018



- *Political interest*

Political interest is supposed to be the main variable that conditions the general effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy (hypothesis n.2). Evidence on political interest is composed by the combination of responses to the "Cognitive Mobilisation Index" – included in the Standard Eurobarometer Survey series from 2003 to 2018 (except 2009 and 2013) – and the "Political Interest Index" – which is part of the Standard Eurobarometer Survey since 2010. The rationale for combining these two indexes in a single measure of political interest is that they are based on very similar survey questions. The Cognitive Mobilisations Index is derived from the following questions: 1) *"When you, yourself hold a strong opinion, do you ever find yourself persuading your friends, relatives or fellow workers to share your views? If so, does this happen often, from time to time or rarely?"* and 2) *"When you get together with your friends, would you say you discuss political matters frequently, occasionally or never?";* The Political Interest Index is based instead on a single question: *"When you get together with friends or relatives, would you say you discuss frequently, occasionally or never about (national/European/local) political matters?".* For the purpose of this study, I have therefore treated the two indexes as equivalent, and recoded them in a single binary measure of political interest that takes the value 1 when the indexes indicate high political interest (Eurobarometer indexes' response categories: "Moderately Interested" and "Strongly Interested"), and zero indicates low levels of political interest (Eurobarometer categories: "Not at all interested", "Slightly interested" and "Don't Know"). The two indexes have been transformed into a binary variable because this facilitates the interpretation of political interest as an interaction term in the models.

- *Political efficacy*

Political efficacy is also supposed to condition the general effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy (hypothesis n. 3). Evidence on political efficacy is made of responses to the survey question *"Please tell me whether you tend to agree or tend to disagree with the following statement: My voice counts in (OUR COUNTRY)".* This *"Political interest – My Voice counts"* question has been included only in the Eurobarometer Standard Series of 2010 and 2014-2018, so it does not cover the whole period analysed in this study. However, considering that individual observations from each country are pooled in the models which test

the conditionalities, evidence from 6 years should provide a large enough sample to test the hypothesis n.3. Moreover, being the original variable a categorical, it has been recoded into a binary variable where the positive response category ("Tend to agree") takes value 1, and the negative ones ("Tend to disagree" and "Don't Know") take value 0.

- *Controls and other variables*

The main control variables included in the analysis are positional congruence and indicators of the macroeconomic condition, which not only constitute potential sources of bias, but also represent alternative explanations of satisfaction with democracy in the existing literature. The concept of positional congruence is defined as the degree of ideological congruence between year-t government and year-t respondents on the left/right dimension, and it accounts for the well-documented fact that election winners tend to be more satisfied with democracy (Anderson & Guillory 1997; Blais & Gelineau 2007; Singh 2014). Government ideology is measured with the ParlGov left-right index, which is a 10-point scale based on data from Castles/Mair 1983, Huber/Inglehart 1995, Benoit/Laver 2006 and CHES 2010 (Döring, Holger and Philip Manow. 2020). Respondents' ideology is measured with the responses to the Standard Eurobarometer Survey question item which demands self-placement on a 10-levels ideological spectrum. For the purpose of this analysis, the two ten-levels ideological scales are considered compatible and positional congruence is operationalised as the arithmetical distance between individual self-placement and government position. Therefore, the resulting measure of positional congruence is a continuous variable raging from -10 to 10.

The economic situation instead is measured through traditional macroeconomic indicators from the World Bank National Accounts Data, that have been found to drive differences in satisfaction with democracy (Borre 2000; Dalton 2004; Kim 2009). I control for the annual growth of GDP per capita, which accounts for a country's direction of economic development with respect to the previous year (Bernauer & Vatter 2012); the annual unemployment rate, that accounts for the non-pecuniary effects on well-being and general life satisfaction of stagnating economies (Winkelmann and Wilkenmann 1997); inflation based on the Consumer Price Index, that accounts for macroeconomic stability. The Consumer Price Index is preferred to alternative inflation measures (e.g. the GDP deflator) as it particularly affects the economic conditions of individual consumers, which are the units of analysis of this study (Church 2016).

Furthermore, I include some demographic variables contained in the Standard Eurobarometer series that might constitute a source of bias by systematically affecting the selection of the Most Important Issue. I control for age, as older age might be reasonably associated with the choice of healthcare as a respondent's priority issue concern; gender and marital status, because, following the well-known effect of gender and fertility on the size of government (Lott and Kenny, 1997; Cavalcanti and Tavares 2003), being female and married with children might be systematically associated with the preference for education as a policy domain; education, as, following its well-documented association with environmental awareness and tolerance for foreigners (Inglehart 1977, 1990), it might bias the selection of environment and immigration policy priorities.

Finally, to increase the robustness and to support the interpretation of the results, I also include measures of life satisfaction, importance of democracy as a personal value, and trust in political parties from the Standard Eurobarometer Series. I test the effect of priority congruence on life satisfaction to verify that the hypothesized mechanism of causation between priority congruence and satisfaction with democracy is realistic. I also test the moderating effect of importance of democracy as a personal value to strengthen the plausibility of the causal mechanism connecting priority congruence with satisfaction with democracy, as the perceived importance of democracy reasonably conditions the capacity of an individual to perceive priority congruence and attribute it some value. Trust in political parties instead, is only included when analysing the moderating effect of political interest, to disentangle the apparent contradictory effects of political interest *per se* and political interest in interaction with priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy.

d) Models employed in the analysis

In order to test the general direct effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy I construct logit regression models first, and then multilevel ordered logistic regression models on data from all nine countries pooled together. These models are chosen for the nature of the dependent variable of this study – satisfaction with democracy – which, being originally categorical, has been operationalised for the purpose of this analysis in two ways: as a binary and ordinal variable, respectively. The logit models predict the log odds of binary satisfaction with democracy taking the value 1 when the binary measure of congruence also takes the value 1. From these log odds, I then calculate the predicted probabilities of an individual respondent being satisfied with democracy when the annual volume of legislative output in their issue

priority is increasing with respect to the previous year – which is the way binary congruence is operationalised. The ordered logit models instead predict the log odds of one-level increase in the four-levels ordinal measure of satisfaction with democracy when the ordinal measure of congruence increase by one level. From the log odds, I then calculate the predicted probabilities of an individual respondent selecting each level of satisfaction with democracy for any level of congruence, defined as the percentile position of the share of annual legislation in their issue priority relative to the distribution of legislative outputs by topic through the whole period 2002-2018. I use both types of models to verify if the direction of the effects is congruent between the two types of SWD measures, so to increase the robustness of the results.

First, I estimate three logit models and three ordered logit models respectively. The first model of both types is the direct effect without controls; the second ones add the "strictly necessary" control variables; the third ones include the whole list of control variables. The "strictly necessary" control variables are identified using the R extension DAgitty.net as the ones that minimize bias in the model, according to a causal diagram that I have built following the existing literature. Specifically, the "strictly necessary" control variables are the macroeconomic indicators, political interest and positional congruence; the other demographic variables are not identified as strictly necessary controls because they should be systematically associated with the ideology component of positional congruence and political interest, and therefore they should already be implied by the necessary controls. However, I have included these additional demographic controls in the third types of models to ensure that the whole variance in SWD introduced by the individual demographic factors is accounted for, even for the part that is not explained by the "strictly necessary" controls.

Secondly, I include in each logit and ordered logit model the interaction term for political interest, and then for political efficacy. These models predict the log odds of satisfaction with democracy for any level of congruence – either binarily or ordinally measured – and how they differ for high or low political interest and political efficacy. From these models, I also compute the predicted probabilities of an individual respondent's level of satisfaction with democracy for any level of congruence, whether they are strongly interested in politics or not, and whether they think to have voice in politics or not. Therefore, these models test whether the general effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy is conditional on political interest and political efficacy, as proposed in the hypotheses. In order to understand the mechanism behind the effect of political interest, I also estimate logit and ordered logit regression models

to test the relationship between trust in political parties and political interest. Trust in political parties in fact, while not included in the main regression models because it is too much correlated with satisfaction with democracy, is a crucial variable to understand the psychology of the individual respondents with strong political interest and suggest an interpretation of their reaction to priority congruence.

Finally, I estimate additional logit and ordered logit regression models to prove how realistic and robust is the causal mechanism behind the hypotheses. In fact, the proposed causal mechanism is that individuals derive a sense of satisfaction with democratic institutions from perceiving that their priorities are represented in the legislative agenda and translated into legislative outputs. This sense of satisfaction should be directed specifically towards democratic institutions rather than towards the personal life condition if is it is really the case that it derives from the perception of congruence. Therefore, I build models to predict the effect of congruence on general life satisfaction, expecting such an effect to be null. Moreover, this sense of satisfaction towards democratic institutions driven by the perception of congruence should exist only as long as the individual attributes importance to democracy. I therefore build models that predict the effect of congruence on satisfaction with democracy conditional on democracy being the most important personal value. For the proposed causal mechanism to be realistic, I expect the effect of congruence to be stronger for individuals who consider democracy as their most important personal value with respect to respondents having different personal value priorities.

In order to test the country-specific hypotheses, I first construct the same logit and multilevel ordered logistic regression models on data from Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom separately, to estimate the different direct effects of congruent on satisfaction with democracy in these three countries. I then plot the log-odds against the average scores of the Voice and Accountability Index from the WGI Indicators to verify whether the strength of the direct effects in the three countries are ordered in the expected sequence, given their respective quality of representation. Secondly, I interpret these results in light of the different dominant understandings of democracy from the European Social Survey of 2012 and the conditional effect of importance of democracy as a personal value. I build for each of the three countries the logit and multilevel ordered logistic regression models with the interaction term for importance of democracy and I expect that, despite the different intensities of the effect of congruence across the three countries, the effect is still stronger for the respondents who place

more value on democracy across the three countries. Finally, to improve the robustness of results, I also build three country-specific models to estimate the effect of congruence on satisfaction with democracy, which is expected to be null in all three country cases.

e) Findings:

- *H1: higher levels of objective priority congruence are associated with higher levels of satisfaction with democracy.*

The first hypothesis seems confirmed by evidence across all regression models employed: individual-level priority congruence has a significant (at the 99% level of confidence) positive effect on satisfaction with democracy, independently from the particular measure employed for both the dependent and the independent variable (Table 1).

Using binary measures, results show that when the volume of legislation in the issue priority of the respondent increases with respect to the previous year (meaning that binary priority congruence takes value 1), the log odds that the same respondent is either "very satisfied" or "fairly satisfied" with democracy (so that the binary measure for SWD takes value 1) increase by 0.425 without control variables (model 1), and by 0.392 by the necessary control variables defined above (model 2). Controlling for these variables significantly improves the model, assessed through the McFadden pseudo R-squared score, which increases by 6 times. In model n. 3, additional demographic variables are included, without such an improvement in the fit of the model, but with a loss of statistical significance for the estimated effect.

Using ordinal measures, results show that when the volume of legislation in the issue priority of the respondent in a given year shifts to a higher quartile of the distribution of legislation by topic over the whole period, the log odds that the same respondent's satisfaction with democracy shifts to a higher level increase by at least 0.160 (model 5). Moreover, between the ordered logit models, the fit is noticeably improved by the additional variables in model n.6, while the estimated effect remaining significant. The fact that results are coherent across types of measure improves the internal validity of the causal relationship being tested.

Finally, I have used the log odds from models n.2 and n.5 – the ones with the necessary control variables – to calculate the predicted probabilities of the respective measures of SWD. From model n.2, the probability that a respondent is satisfied with democracy increases by 10% when priority congruence goes from zero to 1 (Figure 26**)**. From model n.5, the probability that a

respondent presents higher levels of satisfaction (categories 3 and 4) increases at higher levels of priority congruence, while the probability of lower levels of satisfaction (categories 1 and 2) decreases (Figure 27**)**.

Table 1 Direct effect of Priority Congruence on Satisfaction with Democracy

	SWD binary			**SWD ordinal**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Congruence	0.425*** (0.017)	0.392*** (0.036)	0.123 (0.078)	0.218*** (0.009)	0.160*** (0.024)	0.298*** (0.043)
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
(3) Controls for: gender, age, occupation, age of education, marital status, positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
Observations	135,689	31,918	5,533	32,026	5,039	1,437
McFadden	0.004	0.036	0.046	0.008	0.010	0.023
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					
	*in SWD binary models, Congruence is measured as binary; in SWD ordinal models, Congruence is measured as ordinal					

Figure 26 Predicted Probabilities of Satisfaction with Democracy (binary) from Logit regression model n.2

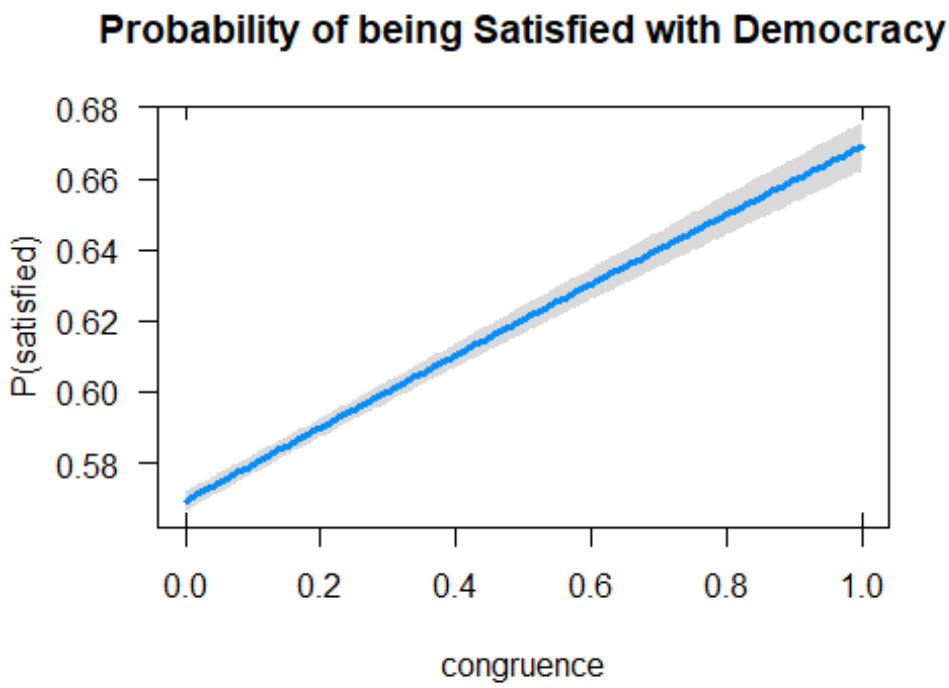
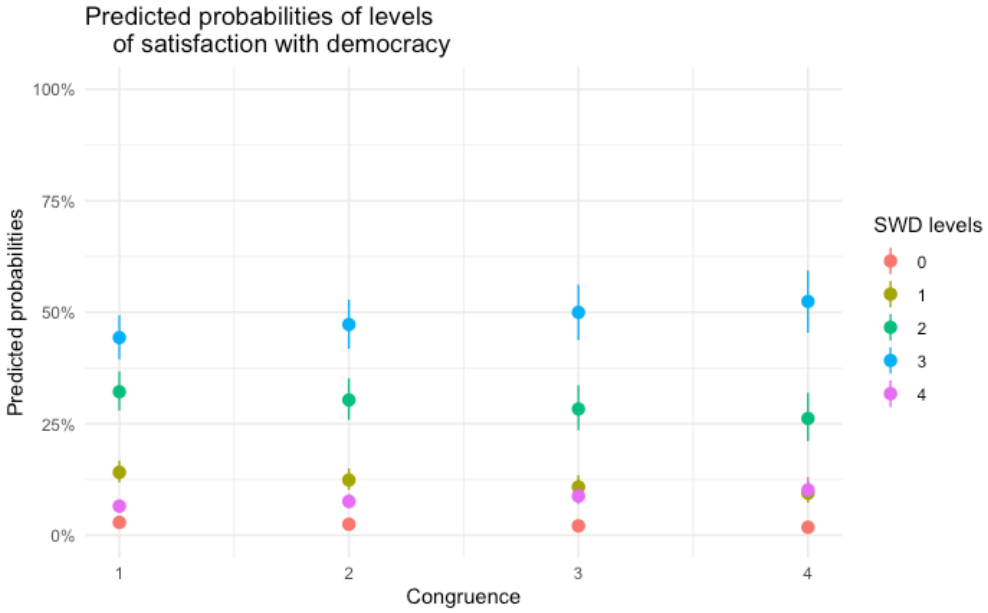


Figure 27 Predicted Probabilities of Satisfaction with Democracy (ordinal) from Ordered Logit regression model n.5



- *H2: The effect of priority congruence and satisfaction with democracy is stronger for an individual who shows high political interest than respondents with lower interest in politics.*

Results from all types of logit regression models employed confirm the hypothesis, while revealing an ambiguous nature of political interest and its effects (Table 2). In fact, all models show that political interest in interaction with congruence has a positive sign, and in three out of six models the interaction term is significant. This means that priority congruence is conditional on political interest, which amplifies its effect on satisfaction with democracy for individuals interested in politics by at least 0.141 with respect to those non interested. Therefore, as in the hypothesis, the effect of priority congruence on a respondent's satisfaction with democracy is stronger the more they are interested in politics. This is also clear from the predicted probabilities computed from the log odds of models n.2 and n.5: in model n.2, the line representing the relationship between congruence and SWD is higher and steeper for high political interest (Figure 28); in model n.5, the line shifts lower for high political at low levels of congruence, while it shifts upper at high levels of congruence (Figure 29). This means that the satisfaction with democracy of individuals with high interest in politics is affected more by priority congruence, negatively when congruence is low, and positively when congruence is high.

2 Effect of Priority Congruence on Satisfaction with democracy conditional on Political Interest

	SWD binary			**SWD ordinal**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Congruence	0.521*** (0.035)	0.345*** (0.039)	0.076 (0.078)	0.546*** (0.031)	0.379*** (0.034	0.172** (0.069)

High Political interest	0.038 (0.026)	-0.044 (0.031)	0.392*** (0.144)	0.054** (0.024)	-0.043 (0.028)	0.297*** (0.115)
Congruence | High Political interest	0.103 (0.085)	0.216** (0.093)	0.320 (0.477)	0.141* (0.074)	0.242*** (0.081)	0.164 (0.329)
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
(3) Controls for: gender, age, occupation, age of education, marital status, positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
Observations	41,314	31,918	5,533	41,314	31,918	5,533
McFadden	0.005	0.034	0.040	0.004	0.023	0.027
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Figure 28 Predicted probabilities of Satisfaction with democracy (binary) conditional on political interest, from Logit regression model (2)

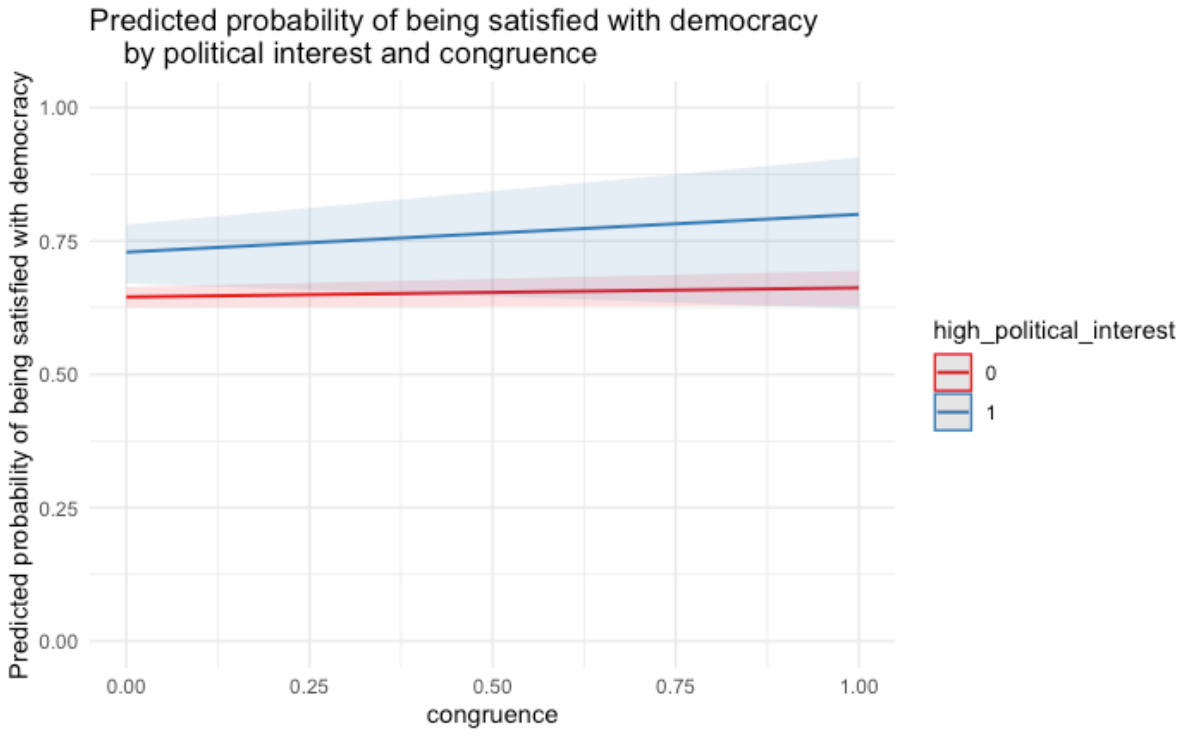
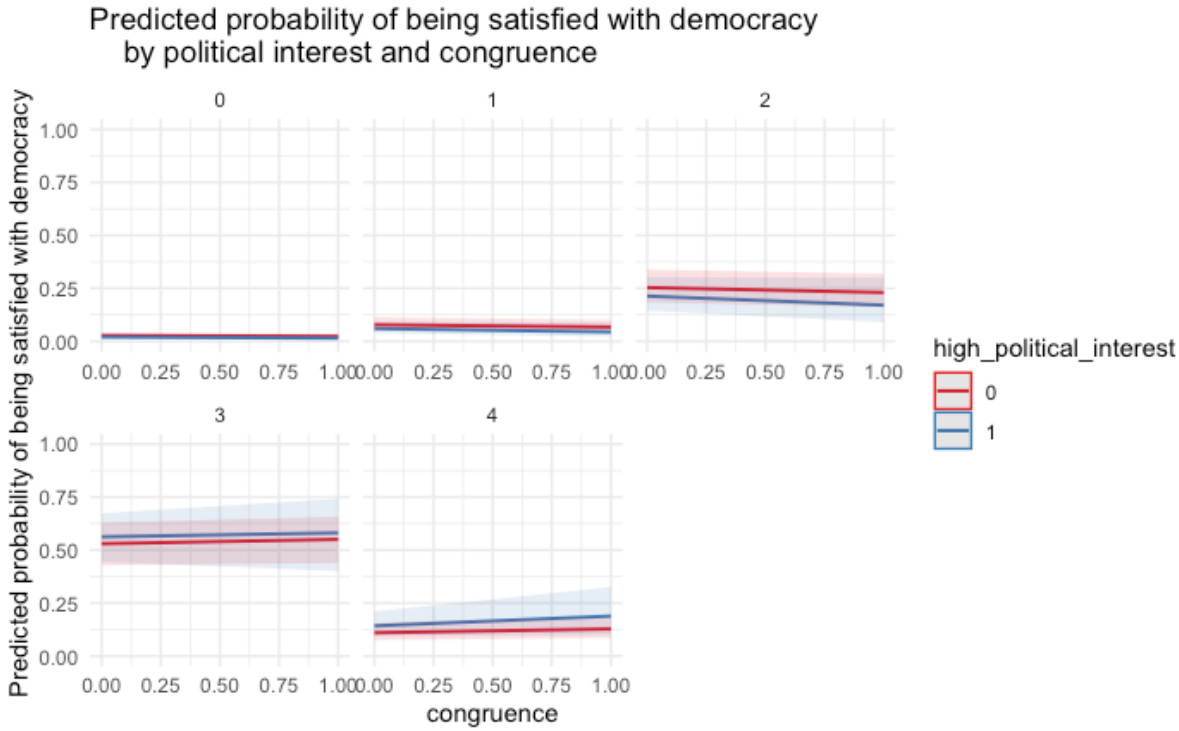


Figure 29 Predicted probabilities of Satisfaction with democracy (ordinal) conditional on political interest, from Ordered Logit regression model (5)



Differently, the effect of political interest per se on satisfaction with democracy is ambiguous. In fact, it is close to zero in models n.1 and n.4, it is negative in models n.2 and n.5, and positive only in models n.3 and 6. This shows that, independently from priority congruence, the individuals more interested in politics are not necessarily more satisfied with democracy and potentially even less satisfied with democracy. This might depend on the nature of the political interest itself, which could be motivated by more or less positive attitudes towards politics and politicians. It might also depend on other factors that deserve investigation but fall outside of the scope of this thesis.

However, I propose that the apparently contradictory results on the effect of political interest per se on SWD - non-clear and potentially negative – and on the effect in interaction with congruence – clearly positive – can be reconciled in a single theoretical justification. I hypothesise that the individuals being more interested in politics are also more concerned with political issues, either because they are more critical of the way politicians treat existing problems or because they are more sensitive to certain issues, or often a combination of both. This combination of criticism and sensitivity might result in a general condition of less satisfaction with the *status quo*, but it might also exacerbate the perception of congruence and the sense of satisfaction derived from it.

To support this hypothesis, I have tested on my data the relationship between interest in politics and trust in political parties, as a proxy of political criticism. From the Eurobarometer survey question, I have derived a binary and an ordinal measure of trust in political parties, on which I test the effect of political interest, measured as both binary and ordinal. In the two logit regression models built to test the effects across the two measures of political interest, political interest reduces the probability of having high trust in political parties (Table 3). This supports the hypothesis that political interest is associated with higher political criticism and justifies the unclear and partially negative effect of political interest *per se* on satisfaction with democracy. Such critical attitude might also contribute to a degree of awareness of political issues that also explains the clear positive sign of the interaction of political interest and congruence. In fact, we can reasonably expect that individuals with a more realist take on politics, have a better perception of congruence and more cognitive and emotional resources to derive from it a sense of satisfaction with democracy.

This is only an attempted interpretation of the dynamics between political interest and satisfaction with democracy, which falls outside of the purpose of this study on priority

congruence, and which would require wider supportive evidence than a mere association with distrust in political parties. However, for the purpose of this thesis, I think that this finding sufficiently enriches the test of hypothesis n.2 with a more nuanced understanding of political interest as a mediator for priority congruence.

3 Effect of Political Interest on Trust in Political Parties

	Trust in Political Parties	
	(1)	(2)
High Political interest	-0.279** (0.132)	-
Political interest 2	-	-0.343*** (0.090)
Political interest 3	-	-0.304* (0.157)
Political interest 4	-	-0.459* (0.240)
Constant	-1.482*** (0.173)	-1.542*** (0.174)
(2) Controls for: Gender, Age, Occupation, Age of education, Marital Status		
Observations	5,860	5,860
McFadden	0.003	0.005
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01	

Figure 30 Predicted probabilities of high-level trust in political parties given high political interest (binary measure) – from Logit regression model n.1

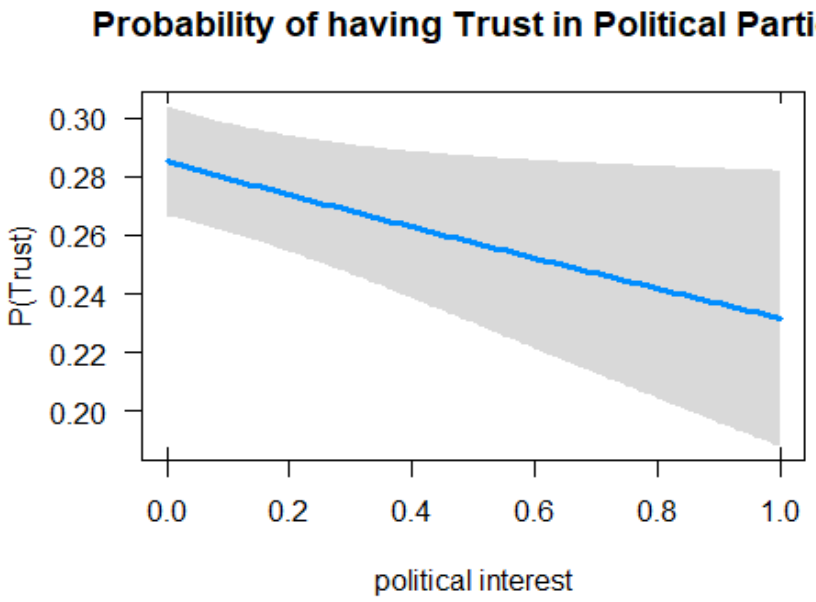
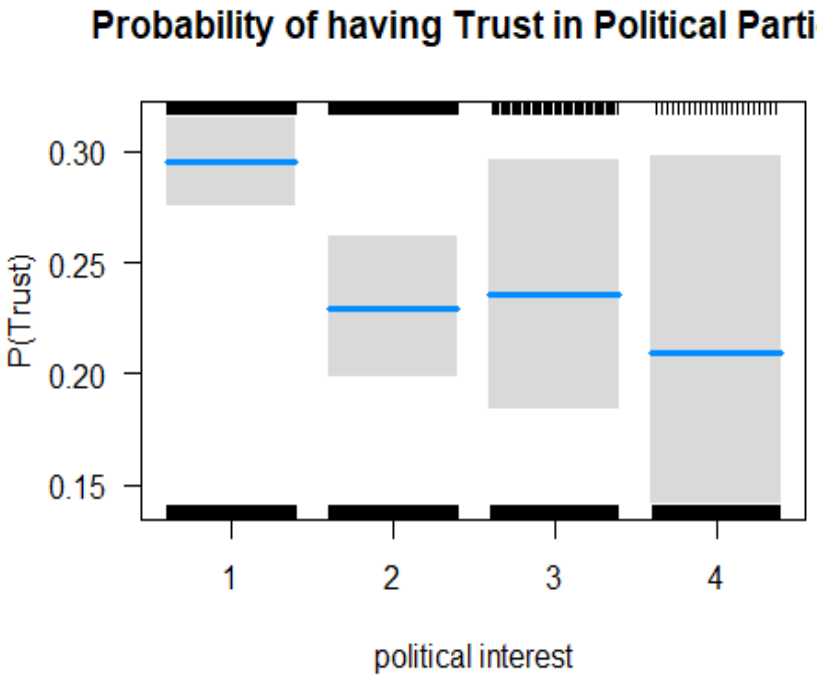


Figure 31 Predicted probabilities of high-level trust in political parties at any level of political interest (ordinal measure) – from Logit regression model n.2



- *H3: If priority congruence has an effect on individuals' satisfaction with democracy because it is perceived as a measure of the quality of representation, such an effect must be stronger for those individuals who believe to have more political efficacy within representative democracy systems.*

The rationale behind this third hypothesis is that political efficacy increases the individual sense of responsibility perceived when seeing that one's own most important issues are addressed by the national legislation. This sense of responsibility for what they believe to be a good political choice should in turn make the individuals with higher sense of political efficacy more intensely satisfied by priority congruence than those individuals who do not think to have played any influence in priority congruence. Therefore, I have tested the conditionality of the effect of priority congruence on SWD on the measure of Political Efficacy derived from the Standard Eurobarometer Survey Series. Both logit regression and ordered logit regression models confirm that the perception of political efficacy has a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy, both per se, and in interaction with congruence, confirming the direction of direct and conditional effects expressed in the hypothesis (Table 4).

4 Effect of Priority Congruence on Satisfaction with democracy conditional on Political Interest

	SWD binary		**SWD ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence (binary)	0.519*** (0.042)	0.285*** (0.048)	0.503*** (0.036)	0.289*** (0.041)
Political Efficacy	0.554*** (0.024)	0.554*** (0.029)	0.718*** (0.021)	0.725*** (0.025)
Congruence (binary) | Political Efficacy	0.154** (0.073)	0.184** (0.081)	0.192*** (0.056)	0.271*** (0.062)

(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth				
Observations	43,142	32,798	43,142	32,798
McFadden	0.019	0.044	0.019	0.038
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Figure 32 Predicted probabilities of the probability of Satisfaction with democracy (binary) given priority congruence, conditional on political efficacy – from Logit Regression Model n.2

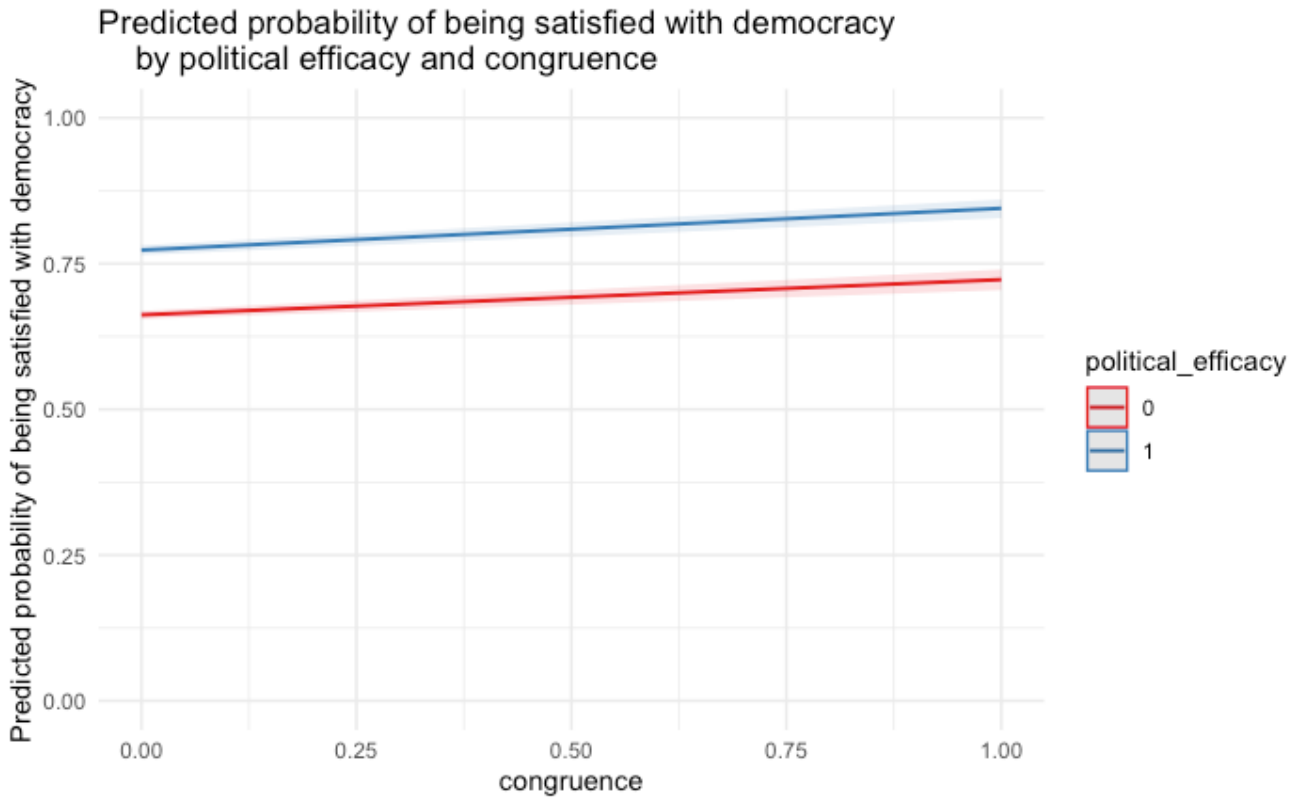
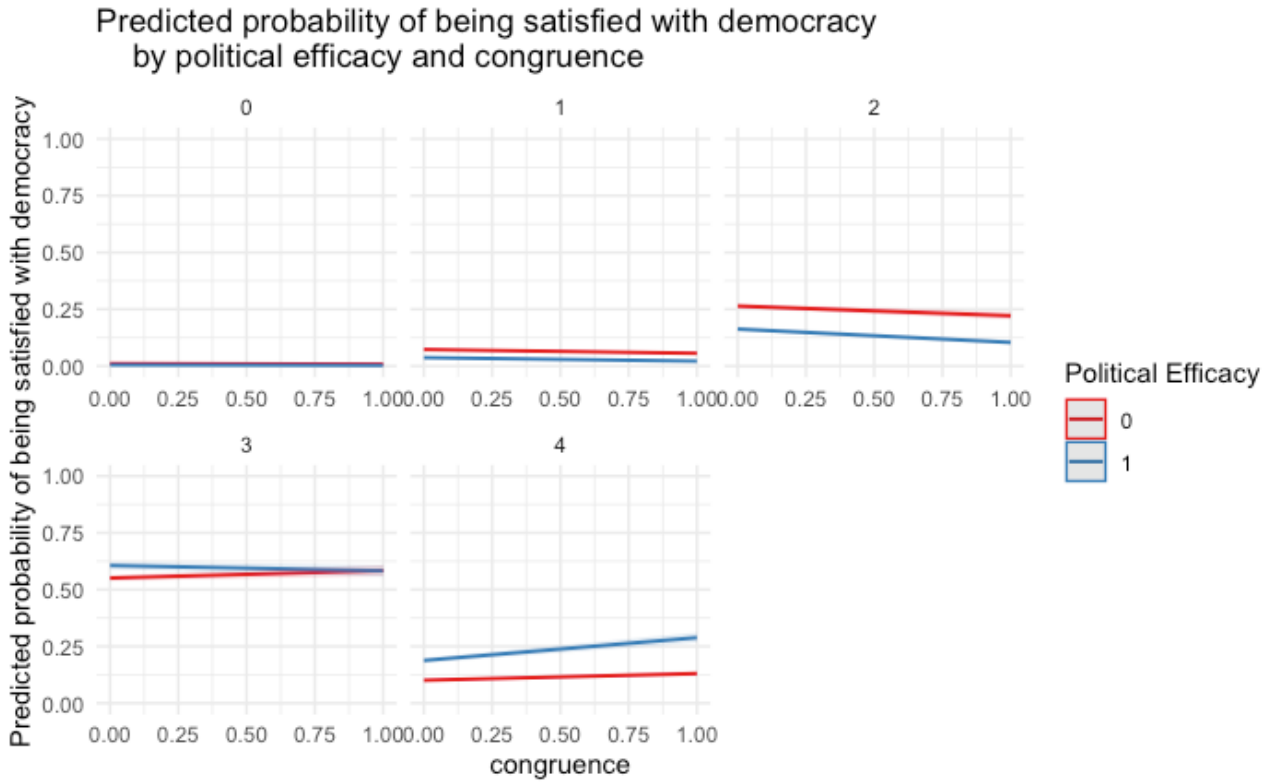


Figure 33 Predicted probabilities of the probability of Satisfaction with democracy (ordinal) given priority congruence, conditional on political efficacy – from Ordered Regression Model n. 5



- *Testing the robustness of the causal mechanism between priority congruence and SWD*

To further support the hypothesis that priority congruence increases individuals' satisfaction with democracy I have tested two logical implications that should be true if the mechanism that supports the hypothesis is true.

1st Implication: If priority congruence has an effect on individuals' satisfaction with democracy because it is perceived as a measure of the quality of democracy itself, such an effect must be stronger for those individuals who attribute more importance to democracy relative to other personal value priorities.

The rationale behind this implication is that, being congruence a trait of democracy, the more important is the value of democracy to a person, the higher the effect of congruence on SWD should be, if this effect ever exists. I have therefore tested the conditionality of the effect of priority congruence on SWD on the binary measure of Importance of Democracy constructed

from the Eurobarometer survey question on the Most Important personal Values. In both logit regression and ordered logit regression models, the importance of democracy as a personal value has a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy both *per se* and in interaction with congruence, which again reinforces the validity of the effect of priority congruence on SWD (Table 5).

5 Effect of Priority Congruence on Satisfaction with Democracy conditional on Importance of Democracy as a Personal Value

	SWD binary			**SWD ordinal**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Congruence	0.484*** (0.030	0.428*** (0.059)	0.166 (0.128	0.481*** (0.027)	0.420*** (0.051)	0.279** (0.113)
Importance of Democracy (Personal Values)	0.557*** (0.021)	0.534*** (0.038)	0.782*** (0.109)	0.579*** (0.019)	0.540*** (0.033)	0.691*** (0.088)
Importance of Democracy (Personal Values)	0.205*** (0.061)	0.205*** (0.112)	0.084 (0.259)	0.277*** (0.051)	0.224** (0.087)	0.165 (0.195)
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
(3) Controls for: gender, age, occupation, age of education, marital status, positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						

Observations	56,881	18,887	3,051	41,314	31,918	5,533
McFadden	0.018	0.061	0.083	0.013	0.043	0.055
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					

Figure 34 Predicted probabilities of the probability of Satisfaction with democracy (binary) given priority congruence, conditional on Importance of democracy as a personal value – from Logit Regression Model n.2

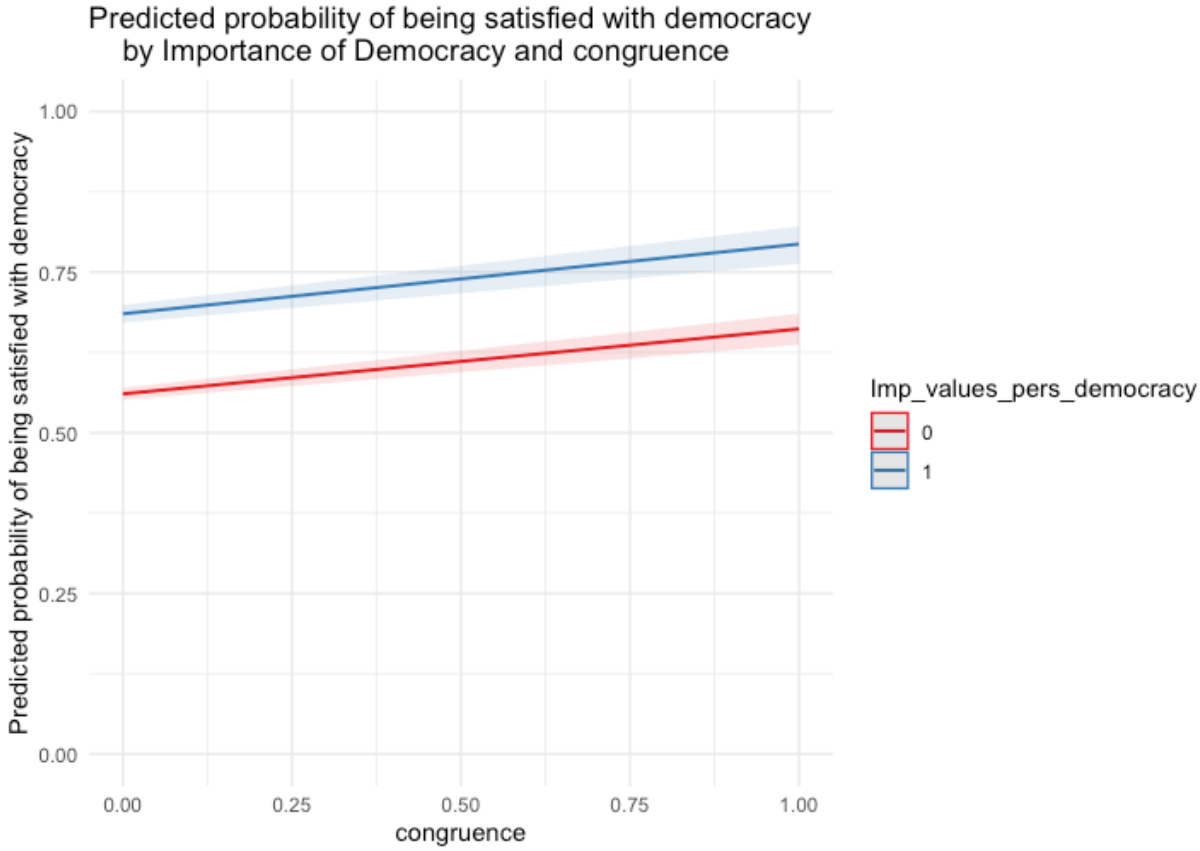
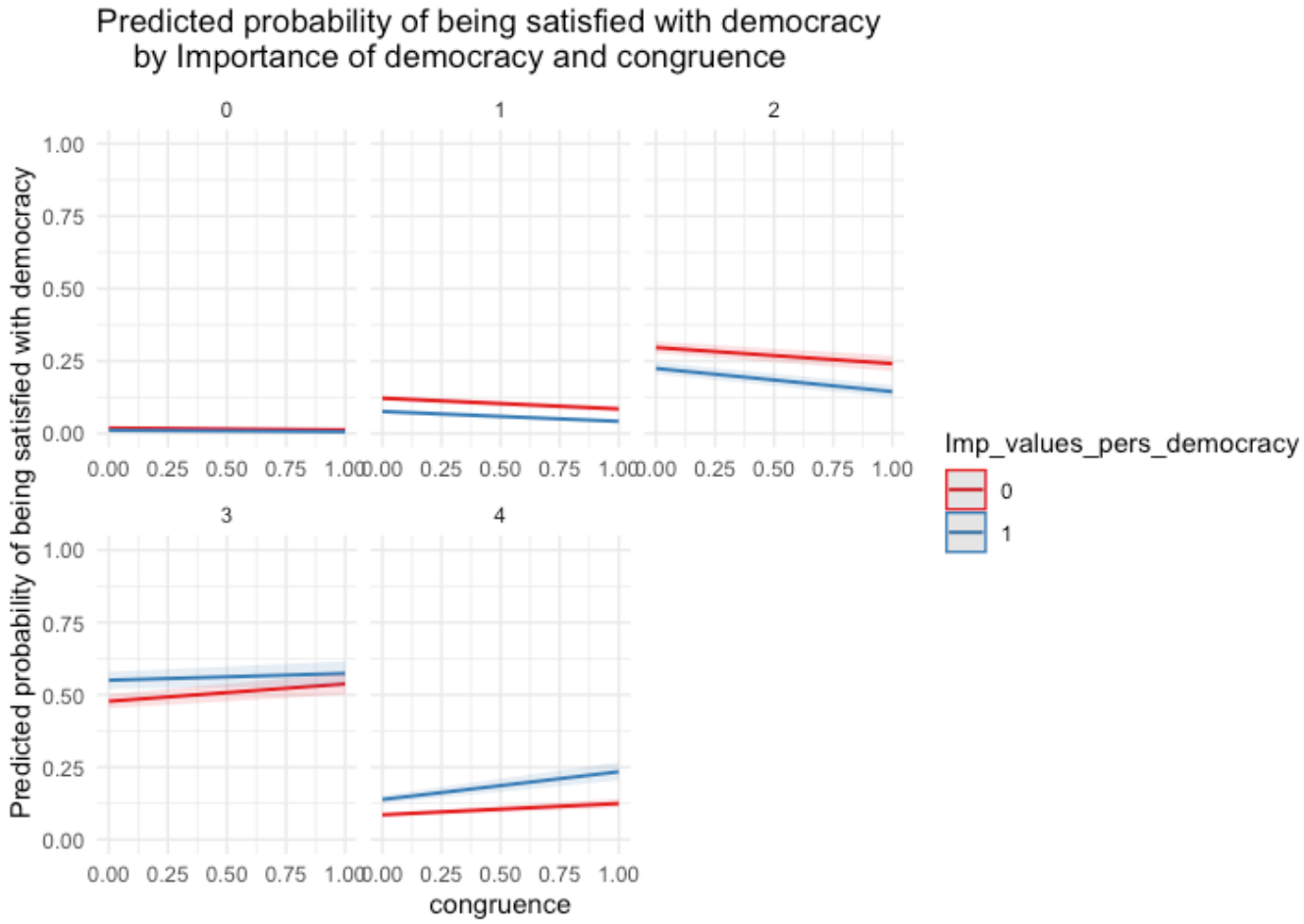


Figure 35 Predicted probabilities of the probability of Satisfaction with democracy (ordinal) given priority congruence, conditional on Importance of democracy as a personal value – from Ordered Logit Regression Model n.5



2nd Implication: If priority congruence has an effect on individuals' satisfaction with democracy because it is perceived to be a measure of representation in the political system, it should not exercise such an effect on general life satisfaction.

The rationale behind this implication is that priority congruence is an indicator of the quality of the political system, and therefore its effect should be limited to satisfaction with the political system. Life satisfaction instead should be determined by multiple factors, which might include the quality of the political system, but in a reasonably non-central way.

I have therefore tested the effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy building both logit and ordered regression models. Out of six models, two show that the effect is negative, two that it is almost zero and non-significant, two that it is positive. Overall, the effect of priority congruence is less clear and less consistent across alternative measurements than the effect on satisfaction with democracy, which reinforces this thesis (6).

6 Effect of Priority Congruence on Life Satisfaction

	Life Satisfaction binary			**Life Satisfaction ordinal**		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
Congruence	0.435*** (0.027)	0.529*** (0.059)	-0.005 (0.111)	-0.154*** (0.009)	-0.017 (0.026)	-0.210*** (0.045)
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
(3) Controls for: gender, age, occupation, age of education, marital status, positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth						
Observations	124,271	30,605	5,264	30,478	4,779	1,350
McFadden	0.003	0.042	0.077	0.005	0.027	0.054
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01					
	*in SWD binary models, Congruence is measured as binary; in SWD ordinal models, Congruence is measured as ordinal					

Figure 36 Predicted Probabilities of Satisfaction with democracy (binary) given priority congruence – from Logit regression model n2

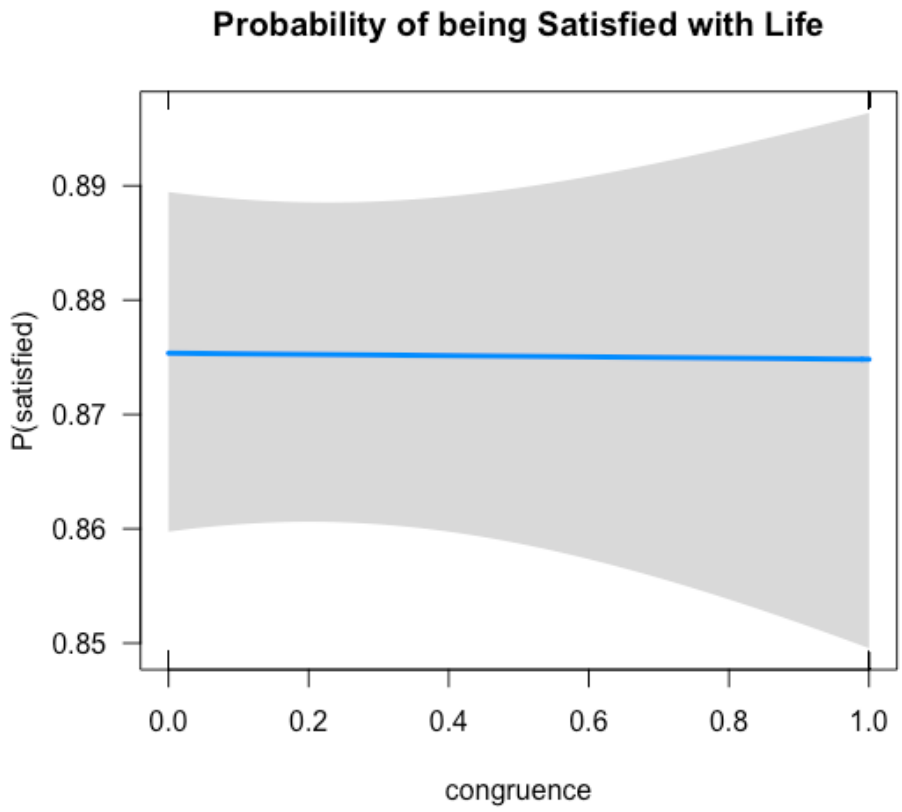
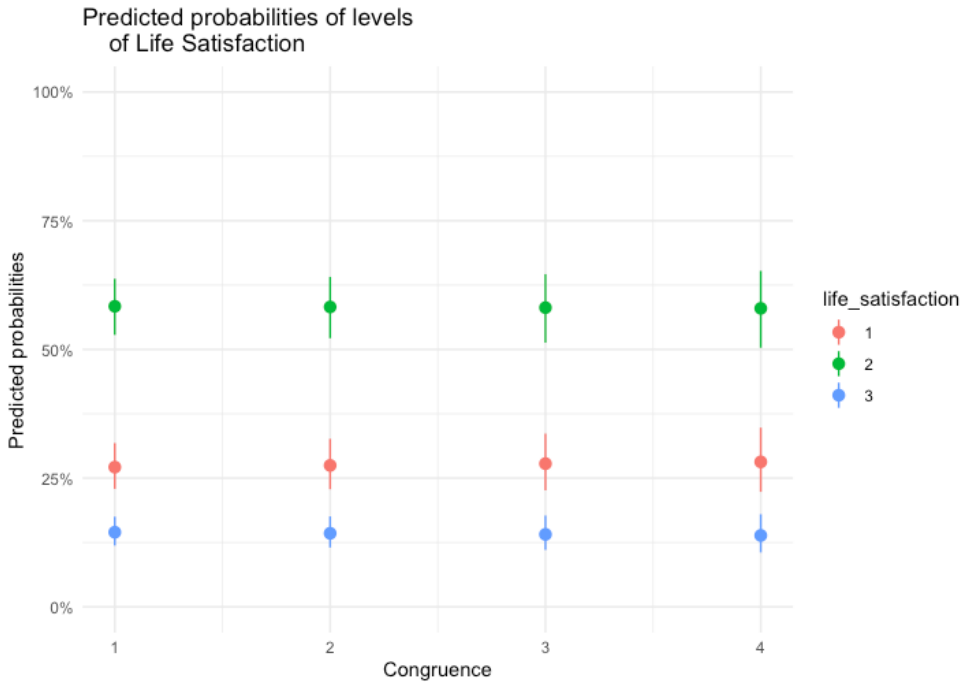


Figure 37 Predicted Probabilities of Satisfaction with democracy (ordinal) give ordinal priority congruence – from Ordered Logit regression model n.6



H4: Given the different importance of priority congruence in the dominant understandings of democracy in the three countries and the trends of aggregate satisfaction with democracy relative to subjective measures of voice and accountability, the effect of priority congruence on individual satisfaction with democracy is smaller in Hungary, medium in the United Kingdom and stronger in Spain.

Results across all models unequivocally confirm the hypothesis above. In Hungary, congruence has a negative effect on satisfaction with democracy in almost all estimated models, and only one out of four gives a significant estimate. This is evident also computing the predicted probabilities from the estimated log odds: from model n. 2, using the binary measure for satisfaction with democracy, congruence has an almost null effect on the probability of a respondent to be satisfied; from model n. 5, the predicted probabilities of level 2 and 4 of satisfaction with democracy stay almost constant at any level of congruence, while the predicted probability of level 3 decreases and that of level 1 increases at higher levels of democracy, which reflects the negative log odds estimated in the model.

In the United Kingdom, the effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy is close to zero in three out of four models, and even negative and statistically significant in one.

Computing the predicted probabilities of satisfaction with democracy from the estimated log odds, we see that that the probability of being satisfied only slightly increases with congruence under model n. 2 and the probability of the different levels of SWD is almost constant at any level of congruence under model n. 5.

In Spain, priority congruence has a positive effect on satisfaction with democracy consistently across all models, which is stronger than the general effect found across all nine countries. Moreover, two out of four models give estimates which are significant at the 99% confidence level, and the fit of the models, assessed with the McFadden pseudo R-squared score, is much higher than the fit of the models for Hungary and the United Kingdom (Table 7).

7 Country-Specific effects of Priority Congruence on Satisfaction with Democracy in Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom

	Hungary				**United Kingdom**			
	SWD binary		**SWD ordinal**		**SWD binary**		**SWD ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence	-0.005 (0.059	0.013 (0.164)	-0.031 (0.021)	-0.132* 0.073)	0.0217 0.039)	0.038 (0.086)	-0.037** (0.018)	0.016 (0.048)
Observations	13,848	2,844	5,504	1,316	16,768	3,391	7,470	1,246
McFadden	00000	0.030	0.0002	0.019	0.0002	0.003	0.0002	0.020
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth								
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01							
	*in SWD binary models, Congruence is measured as binary; in SWD ordinal models, Congruence is measured as ordinal							

	Spain			
	SWD binary		**SWD ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence	0.476*** (0.077)	0.251 (0.173)	0.426*** (0.025)	0.078 (0.075)
Observations	14,704	3,469	3,567	856
McFadden	0.002	0.067	0.031	0.054
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth				
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			
	*in SWD binary models, Congruence is measured as binary; in SWD ordinal models, Congruence is measured as ordinal			

Figure 38 Predicted probabilities of Satsfaction (binary) with democrcay given priority congruence in Hungary – from Logit regression model n.1

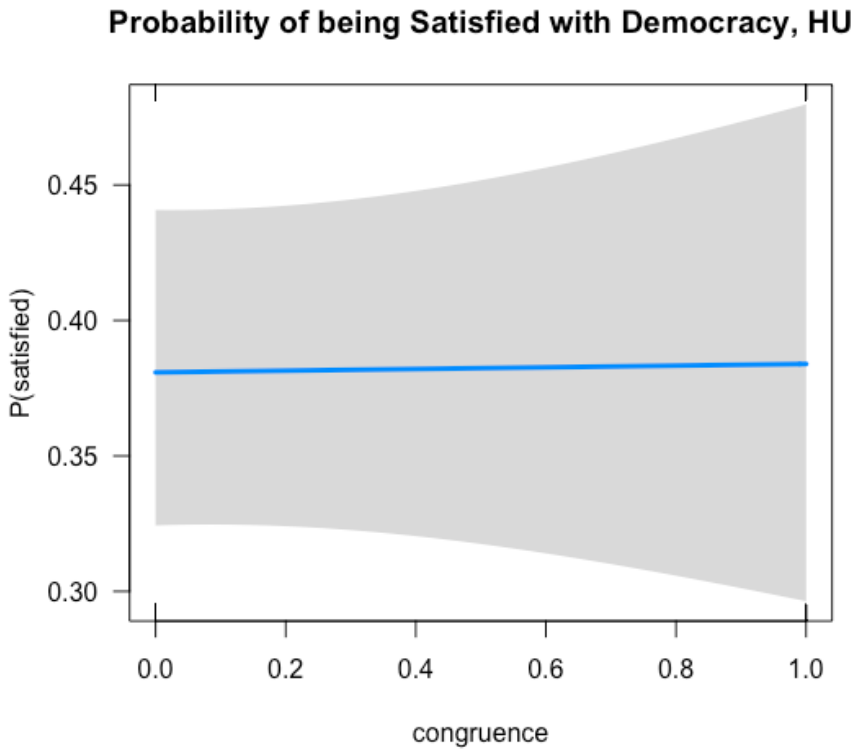


Figure 39 Predicted probabilities of Satisfaction (ordinal) with democrcay given ordinal priority congruence in Hungary – from Ordered Logit regression model n.2

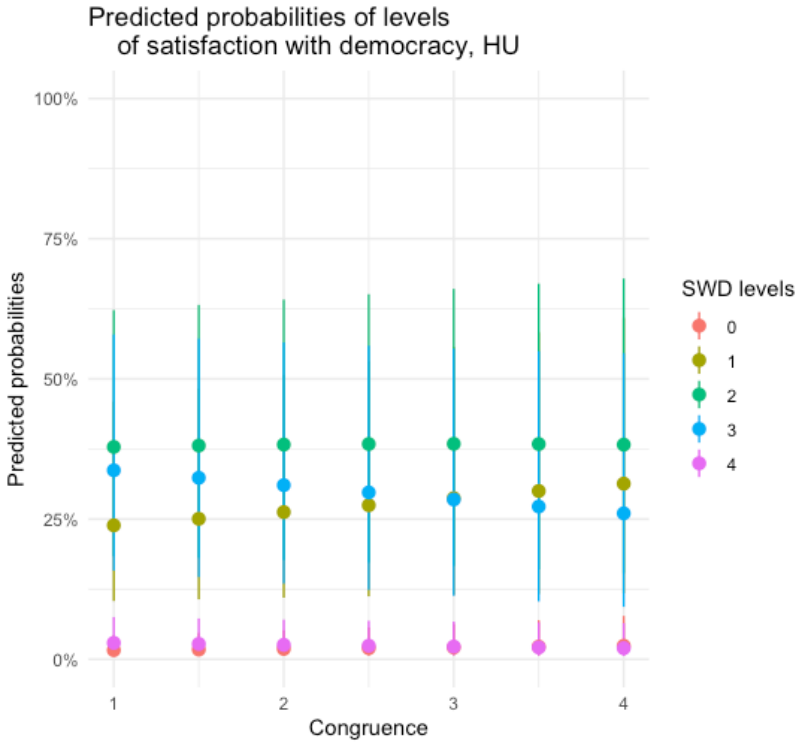


Figure 40 Predicted probabilities of Satsfaction (binary) with democrcay given priority congruence in the United Kingdom – from Logit regression model n.1

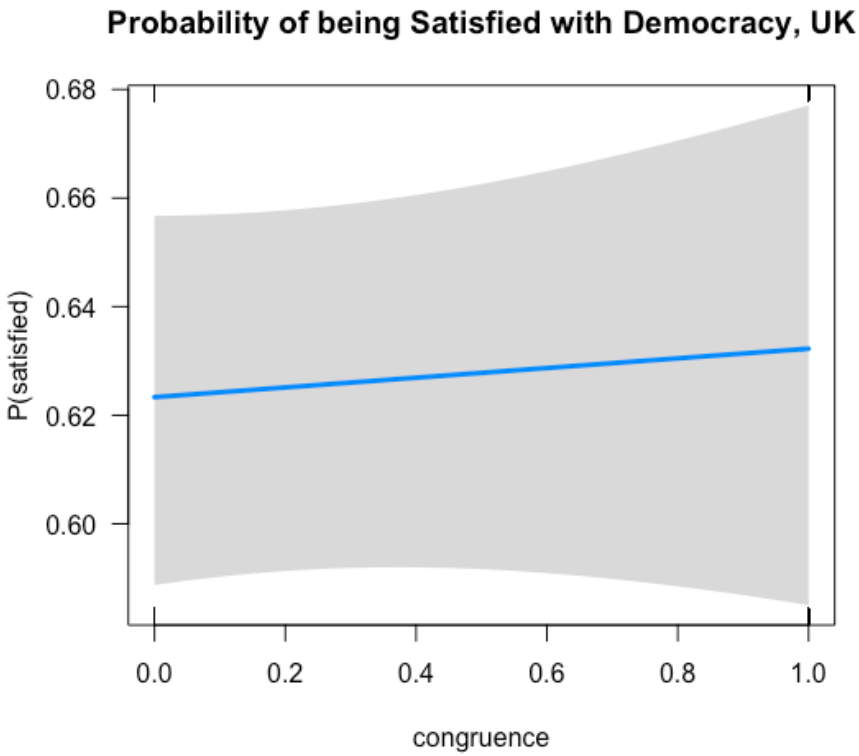


Figure 41 Predicted probabilities of Satisfaction (ordinal) with democrcay given ordinal priority congruence in the United Kingdom – from Ordered Logit regression model n.2

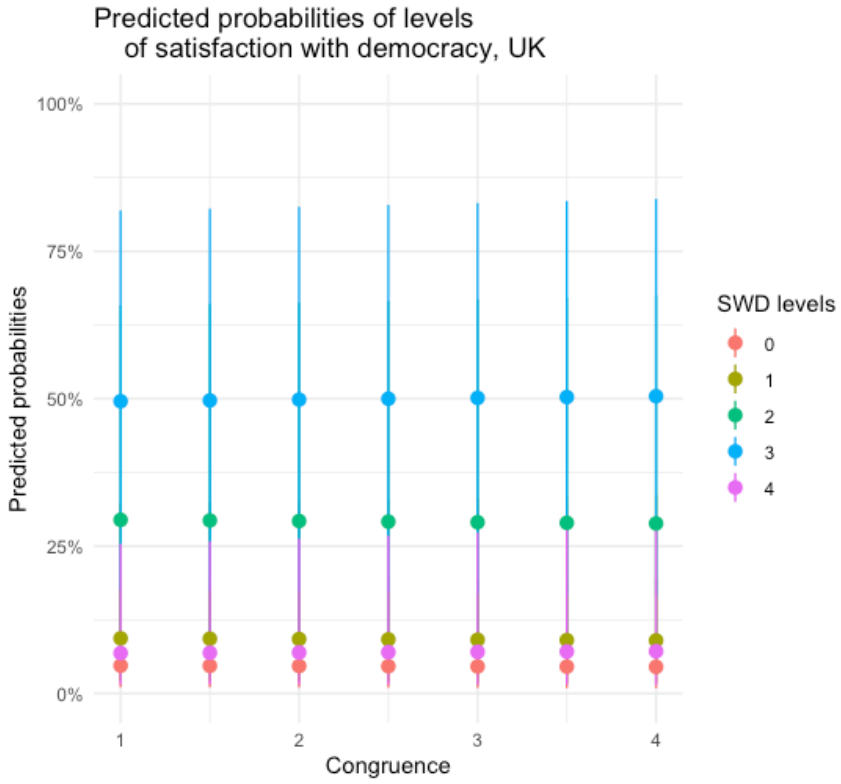


Figure 42 Predicted probabilities of Satsfaction (binary) with democrcay given priority congruence in the Spain – from Logit regression model n.1

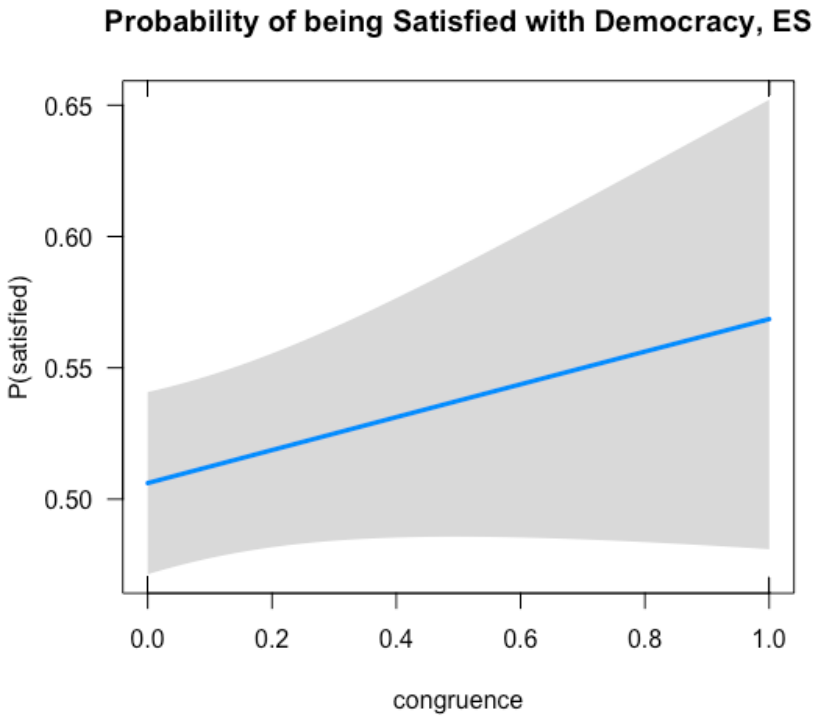
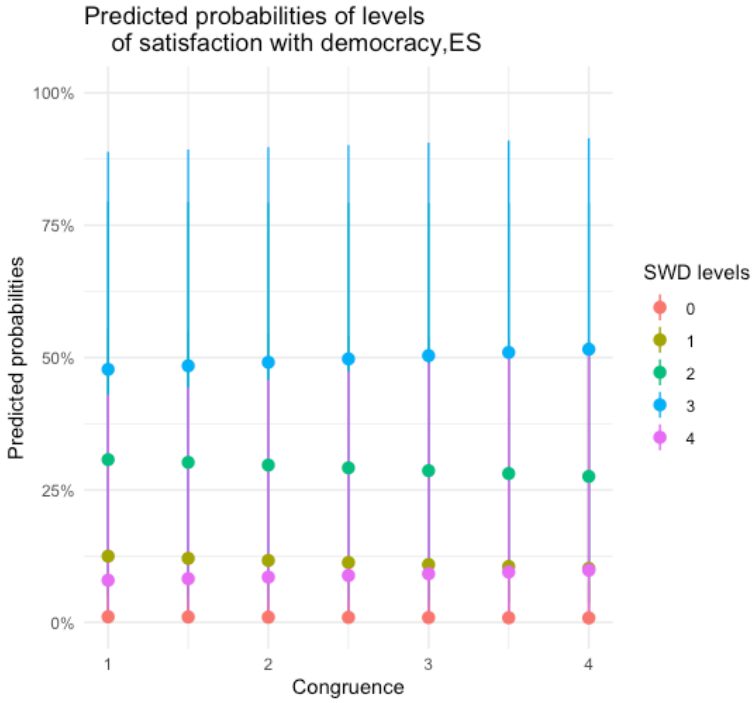


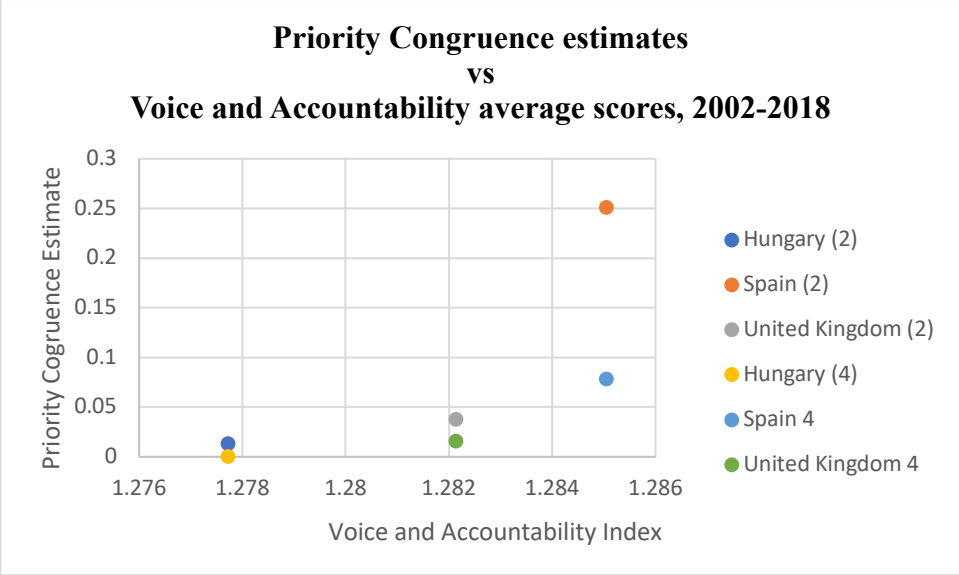
Figure 43 35 Predicted probabilities of Satisfaction (ordinal) with democrcay given ordinal priority congruence in Spain – from Ordered Logit regression model n.2



These results mean than the general positive effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy found in the tests above only applies clearly to Spain, while it is weak and ambiguous in the United Kingdom, and it does not apply in Hungary.

This finding confirms hypothesis n. 4 and makes sense of the puzzle that has given input to this thesis: the observation that the United Kingdom and Hungary have higher average aggregate levels of satisfaction with democracy than expected from their Voice and Accountability score in the Worldwide Governance Indicators while Spain had lower levels, relative to all other countries in the sample (Figure 44). The effects of priority congruence found in this test instead are coherent with the respective values of Voice and Accountability, of which priority congruence is an objective proxy measure. This supports an explanation of the high levels of aggregate satisfaction in Hungary and the United Kingdom despite relatively low Voice and Accountability with the almost null effect of priority congruence of SWD, while the low levels of aggregate satisfaction in Spain despite higher Voice and Accountability might be explained by the extreme importance of congruence to individual respondents.

Figure 44 Plot of Country-Specific effects of Priority congruence on Satistaction with democracy & Voice and Accountability



However, while finding the expected diversity of the effects of priority congruence on SWD in the three countries might make sense of the puzzling trends of aggregate SWD vs. average Voice and Accountability scores and confirm hypothesis n.3, this diversity itself needs an interpretation. I propose that the different effects of congruence on satisfaction with democracy in Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom – controlling for macroeconomic aspects and positional congruence – can be interpreted considering the interaction with democracy as a personal value, as well as the popular understandings of democracy in each country. In fact, the idea that priority congruence has an effect on satisfaction with democracy relies on two assumptions: that priority congruence is considered a measurement of the good functioning of democracy (the understanding of democracy) and that the people care about the good functioning of democracy (democracy as a personal value).

The first assumption cannot be tested properly, as the Eurobarometer does not contain a question on the understanding of democracy. However, the aforementioned study of the European Social Survey on the understandings of democracy in 2012, and its country-level aggregate figures, can be used to suggest a rough intuition of which understanding of democracy might inspire the individuals who choose 'democracy' as a personal value in the Eurobarometer, according to their nationality (figure 2). These aggregate data suggest that priority congruence is perceived as the most important attribute of democracy in Spain, where more than 80% of respondents say *"It is best for democracy that the government changes*

policies in response to what the most people think"; priority congruence is still the relative most important attribute for democracy, but with a very much smaller public agreement (less than 60%) in Hungary; in the United Kingdom there is public agreement that priority congruence is important (more than 70%), but it is almost as important as freedom of expression, and also the effectiveness of single coalition governments, often at the cost of representation, is considered very important for democracy. These descriptive statistics can help understanding why the effect of priority congruence is stronger in Spain than in the other two country cases.

As for the second assumption (democracy as a personal value), I have used the individual-level information available from the Eurobarometer survey question on the most important personal values, which include democracy. First, I have computed average aggregate statistics of the most important personal values over the period 2002-2018, which can give a rough intuition of the dominant personal priorities in the three countries. Democracy is an infrequent category of personal value chosen across the three countries relative to the other values, but is clearly more frequent in Spain and Hungary (10%) than in the United Kingdom, which is reasonable as these countries have relatively recently completed their democratic transition.

Secondly, I have tested the conditionality of the country-specific effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy on the importance of democracy as a personal value (8). This works also as a robustness test of causation, as explained in the general causal mechanism.

8 Country-Specific effects of Congruence on Satisfaction with democracy, conditional on Importance of Democracy as a personal value

	Hungary				**United Kingdom**			
	SWD binary		**SWD ordinal**		**SWD binary**		**SWD ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence	0.012	0.355**	-0.012	0.019	0.017	-0.038	0.028	0.009
	(0.124)	(0.143)	(0.112)	(0.278)	(0.067)	(0.082)	(0.061)	(0.154)

Importance of Democracy (Personal Values)	0.168*** (0.060)	0.145** (0.065)	0.158*** (0.055)	0.005 (0.115)	0.418*** (0.074)	0.410*** (0.078)	0.399*** (0.067)	0.590*** (0.147)
Congruence | Importance of Democracy (Personal Values)	0.313 (0.254)	0.139 (0.288)	0.236 (0.235)	0.493 (0.501)	0.052 (0.163)	0.060 (0.171)	0.094 (0.145)	-0.435 (0.320)
Observations	6,212	5,633	6,212	1,441	6,862	6,112	6,862	1,447
McFadden	0.001	0.056	0.001	0.013	0.005	0.006	0.003	0.009
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth								
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01							
	*in SWD binary models, Congruence is measured as binary; in SWD ordinal models, Congruence is measured as ordinal							

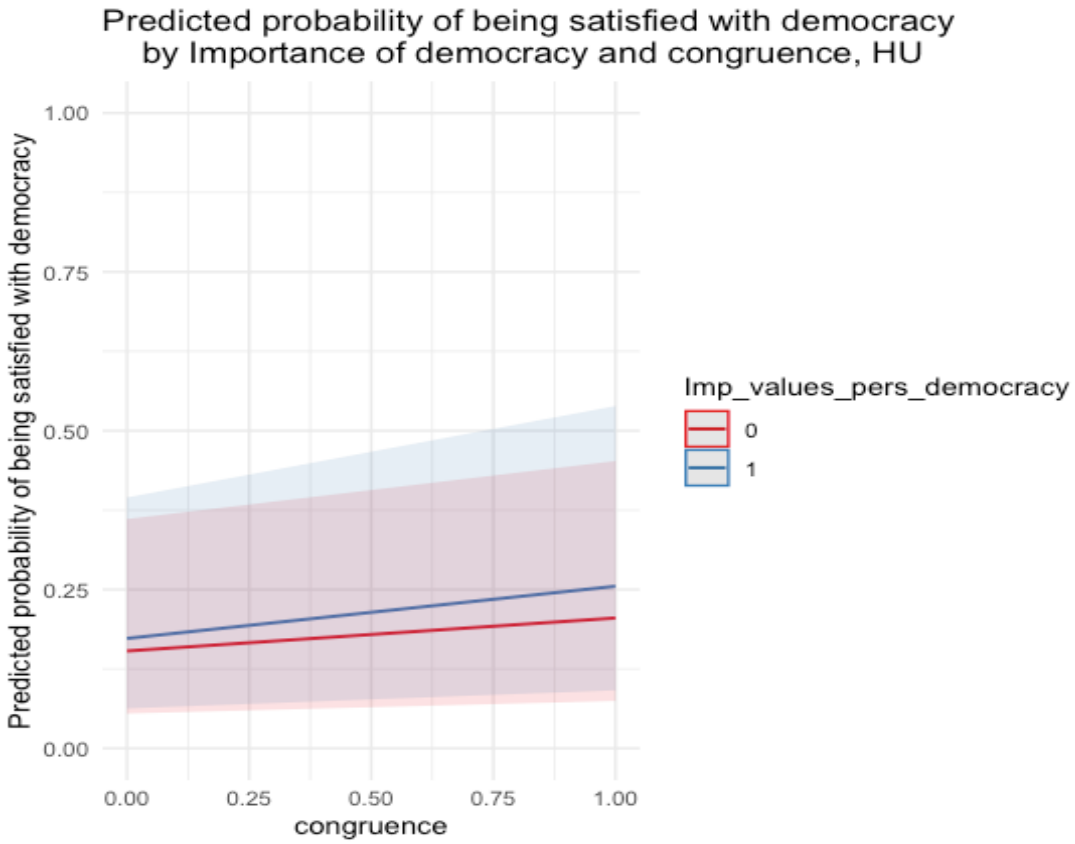
	Spain			
	SWD binary		**SWD ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence	0.943*** (0.124)	0.441*** (0.143)	0.883*** (0.112	0.762*** (0.239)
Importance of Democracy	0.365*** (0.055)	0.378*** (0.060)	0.319*** (0.051)	00.313*** (0.171)

(Personal Values)				
Congruence | Importance of Democracy (Personal Values)	-0.413* (0.029)	-0.475* (0.320)	-0.248 (0.227)	-0.475 (0.434)
Observations	7,115	6,393	7,115	1,857
McFadden	0.011	0.059	0.006	0.024
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth				
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

In Hungary, while congruence *per se* has a negative effect on SWD, the interaction with democracy as a personal value is positive. This means that for those individuals who have selected democracy as their most important personal value, congruence does increase the probability of being satisfied more than for those who do not care about democracy. So, despite the fact that the analysis on Hungary's data apparently falsifies the theory (because the direct effect of congruence is negative), at further inspection this country's performance actually seems to corroborate it. In fact, accounting for the interaction with importance of democracy confirms that, in Hungary, the theory applies: when the individual cares about the functioning of democracy, the effect exists and goes in the expected direction (Figure 45). Moreover, this finding is even more significative when it is interpreted in light of the aggregate responses to the European Social Survey question on the understanding of democracy. As the most popular understanding of democracy in Hungary is policy congruence, it is reasonably likely that those

individuals who care about democracy do consider congruence an important measure of it. And in fact, only for this group of respondents, congruence has a positive effect on their SWD.

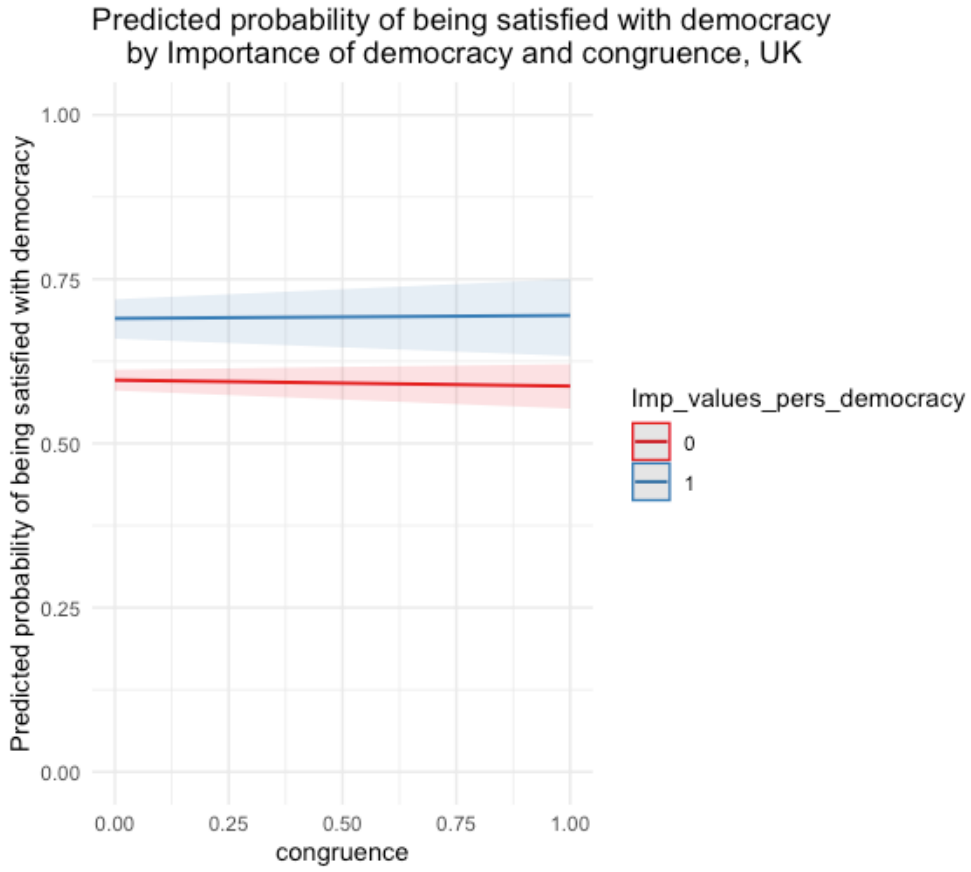
Figure 45 Predicted probabilities of satisfaction with democracy given priority congruence, conditional on importance of democracy as a personal value in Hungary – from Logit regression model n.2



In the United Kingdom, the effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy *per se* is almost null and invariant between the group of individuals who do not choose democracy as their most important personal value and the group of the (relatively few; see Figure 46) individuals who do. This unexpected finding becomes even more significant and clear when looking at the most popular understandings of democracy in the UK. As already mentioned, freedom of expression is almost as much as important for democracy as policy congruence, and having a single party government that 'sticks to policies regardless of what most people think' is also a very popular understanding of democracy. Therefore, it might be that those individuals who value democracy the most, do not necessarily consider congruence as a good measurement of it, such that the difference between the two groups is almost null. Therefore,

the UK case does in fact confirm the theory expectations: as anticipated, the effect of congruence on satisfaction with democracy is not clearly verified when either representative democracy is not highly valued (relative to other personal values) or when congruence is not conceived as the only way to assess democracy.

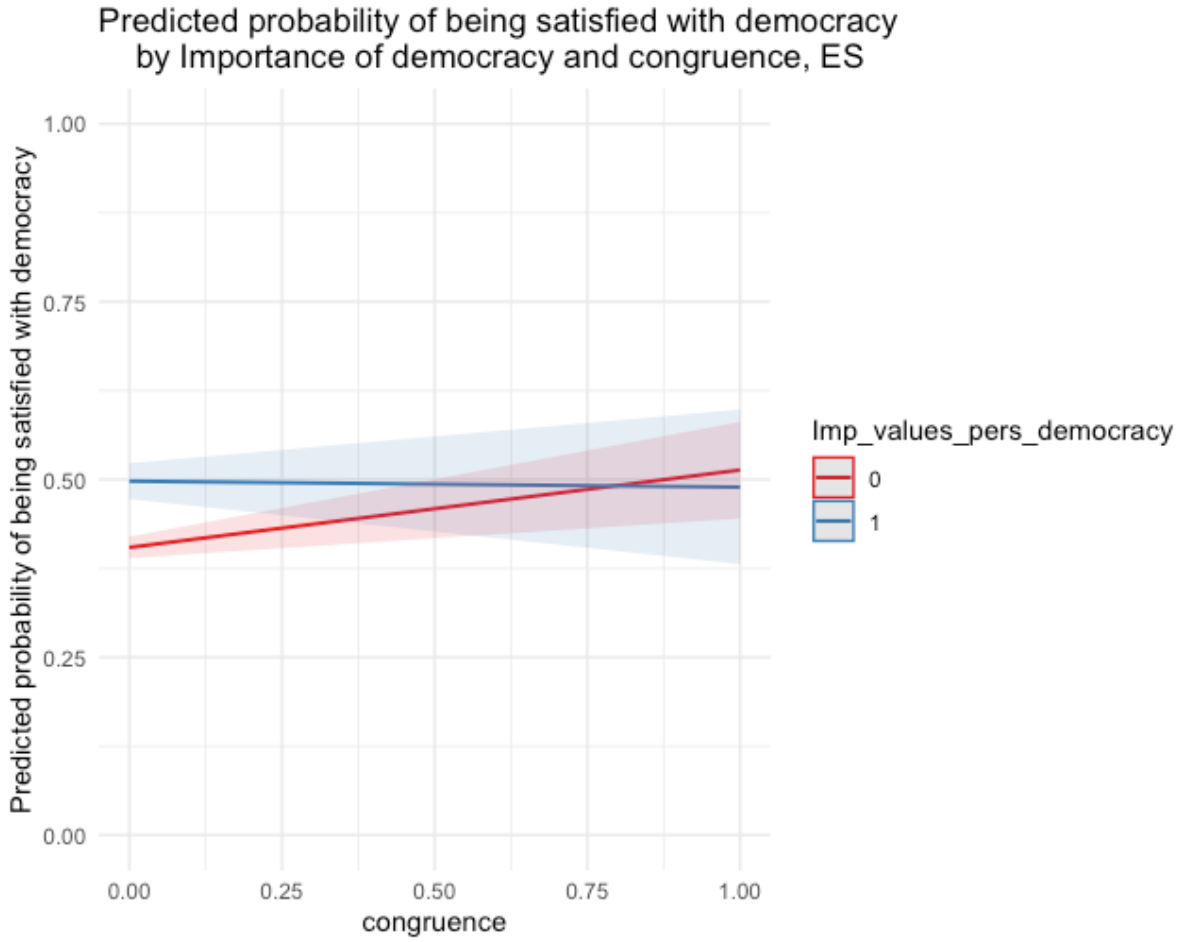
Figure 46 Predicted probabilities of satisfaction with democracy given priority congruence, conditional on importance of democracy as a personal value in the United Kingdom – from Logit regression model n.2



In Spain, both congruence and democracy as personal value have individually a strong, significant and positive effect on individual level satisfaction with democracy. However, the coefficient of the interaction term is negative across all models employed, meaning that the odds of being satisfied with democracy when congruence is high increases more for those who care less for democracy than those who care the most (Figure 47). This finding apparently seems to violate the second assumption of the theory, and it is particularly puzzling because the most popular understanding of democracy is indeed policy congruence. However, as visible from the predicted probabilities of satisfaction with democracy computed from the log odds estimated in model n. 2, the negative sign of the interaction term is not due to democracy as a

personal value diminishing the effect of congruence, but rather to the effect of congruence being stronger for those not choosing democracy as their favourite personal value. This might be interpreted as a robust proof of the direct effect of congruence, in a society where policy congruence is considered the most important character of democracy, reasonably also by the ones not choosing democracy as their personal value. We can imagine that perceiving legislative congruence to ones' own most important policy issue is valued so much in the Spanish political culture, that the effect overtakes the preference for democracy, relative to other personal values.

Figure 47 Predicted probabilities of satisfaction with democracy given priority congruence, conditional on importance of democracy as a personal value in Spain – from Logit regression model n.2



To conclude the country-specific analysis, I test the country-specific effect of priority congruence on general satisfaction with life (Table 9). As explained in the *Implications* section above, the effect of priority congruence should be limited to satisfaction with the political

system for the causal relationship to be realistic. Therefore, the effect of congruence on general life satisfaction should be null. Regressing the indicator of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy (both in binary and ordinal models), I find that in the United Kingdom and in Spain the effect is close to zero across all models, while in Hungary it is positive and significant only in the models without control variables (models n. 1 and n. 3). However, because of the lack of control variables, this association is very likely to be spurious on missing variables. Therefore, this additional analysis appears to further support the validity of the hypotheses tested so far.

9 Country-Specific Effects of Priority Congruence on Life Satisfaction

	Hungary				**United Kingdom**			
	Life Satisfaction binary		**Life Satisfaction ordinal**		**Life Satisfaction binary**		**Life Satisfaction ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence	0.306*** (0.109)	-0.101 (0.131)	0.112* (0.059)	-0.218 (0.171)	0.076* (0.040)	-0.064 (0.046)	0.064* (0.038)	-0.058 (0.082)
Observations	12,256	8,664	12,256	2,501	16,364	11,592	16,364	3,322
McFadden	0.0001	0.013	0.0002	0.027	0.0002	0.003	0.0001	0.006
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth								
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01							
	*in SWD binary models, Congruence is measured as binary; in SWD ordinal models, Congruence is measured as ordinal							

	Spain	
	Life Satisfaction	**Life Satisfaction**

	binary		**ordinal**	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Congruence	0.032 (0.095)	0.101 (0.116)	0.020 (0.078)	0.076 (0.161)
Observations	14,133	10,008	14,133	3,335
McFadden	0.00001	0.005	0.00000	0.002
(2) Controls for: positional congruence, political interest, total unemployment, consumer price inflation, annual GDP per capita growth				
Note:	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Figure 48 Predicted probabilities of general life satisfaction give priority congruence in Hungary – from logit regression model n. 2

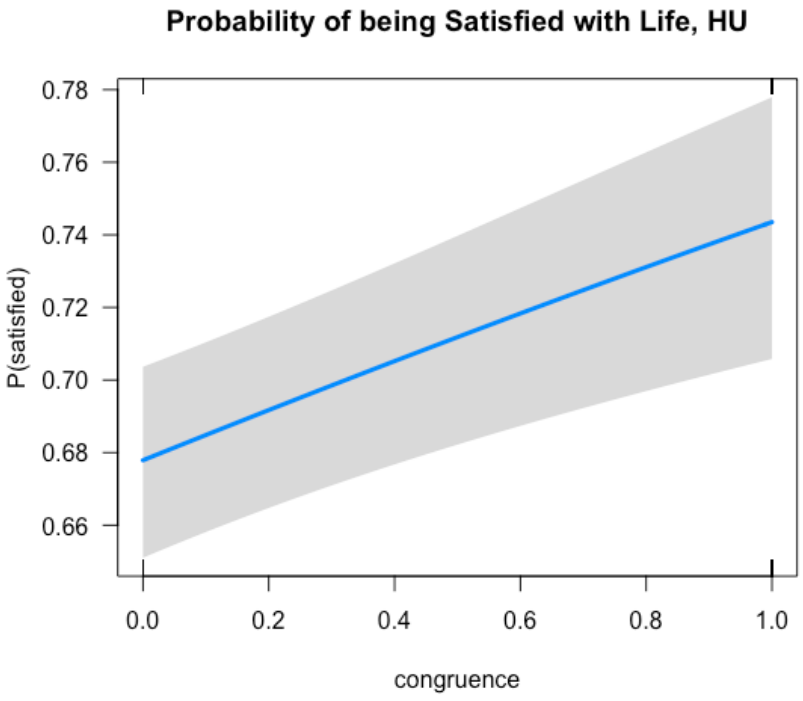


Figure 49 Predicted probabilities of general life satisfaction give priority congruence in the United kingdom – from logit regression model n. 2

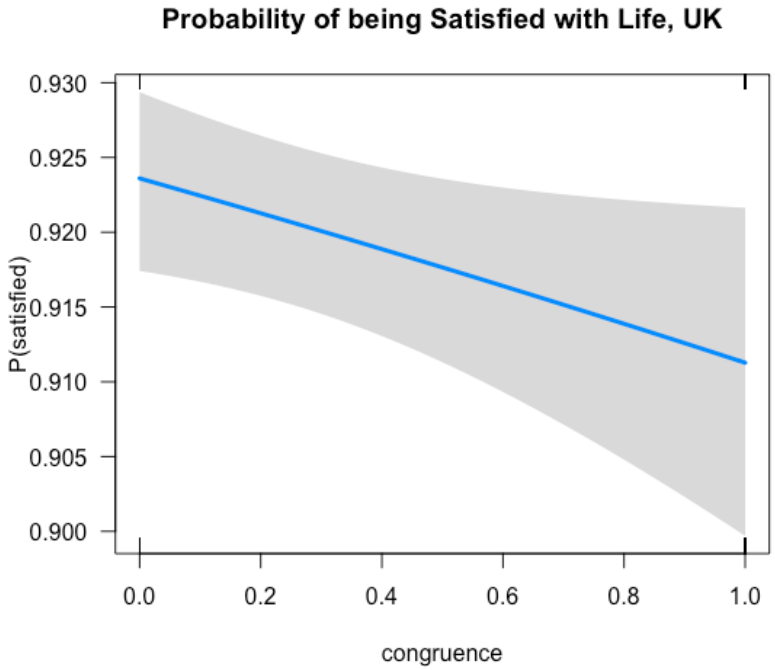
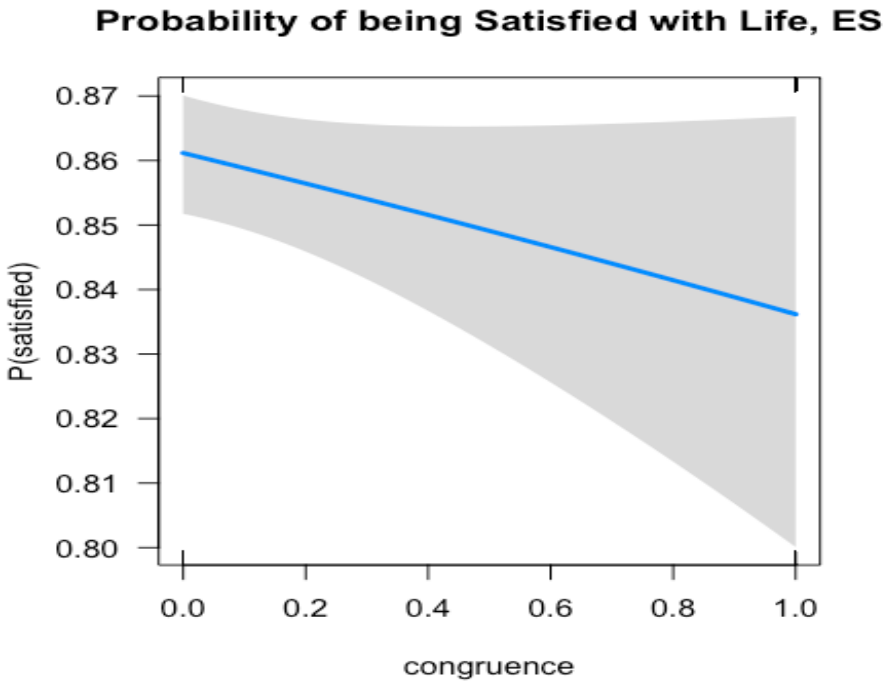


Figure 50 Predicted probabilities of general life satisfaction give priority congruence in the United kingdom – from logit regression model n. 2



Conclusion

This thesis has empirically investigated the relationship between satisfaction with democracy and the quality of political representation, which has often been too simplistically assumed in comparative politics literature. In fact, a positive direct effect of quality of representation on citizens' evaluations of democratic performance has been taken for granted by many authors in both theoretical and empirical works. One influential example is Dahl (1971, p.1), whose definitional criterium of the best form of democracy possible – polyarchy – is the "continuing responsiveness of government to the preferences of its citizens", which is the highest quality of political representation possible.

However, preliminary descriptive evidence collected on Hungary, Spain and the United Kingdom at the aggregate level in the period from 2002 to 2018 challenges the universality of such assumption and suggests that the relationship might be more complex and worthy of deeper investigation. In fact, it seems that the people in Spain "can't get no satisfaction" despite a relative high and improving quality of representation in the political system; in Hungary, instead, it seems that the people "can get satisfaction" despite very low and decreasing quality of representation; finally in the United Kingdom people seem to keep "getting satisfaction", as representation maintains only apparently constant levels expressed in rough quantitative indexes, while deeper analysis reveal significant weakening of representation and participation over the last decade. Therefore, albeit representing different scenarios from one another, these three countries are all deviant cases from the canonical assumption, as they present a discrepancy between the trajectories of satisfaction with democracy and quality of political representation. This empirical observation was the originating puzzle of this thesis, which has questioned the universality, if not the very existence, of the canonical positive association between the two measures.

However, while the thesis has taken cue from this specific country-level puzzle, the research question has been formulated at the individual-level on a wider sample of country cases. Moreover, the research question has been formulated in terms of a specific operationalisation and measurement of quality of representation, i.e. priority congruence. Hence, the following research question(s) have been addressed: "Does the positive effect of priority congruence on individual satisfaction with democracy exist? And if the effect exists, is it conditional on other individual level factors, namely political interest and political efficacy? And if the effect exists,

does it vary at the country-level, according to the dominant understandings of democracy in each country?".

The research question has been specified into four testable hypotheses, three of which regarding the generalizable effect of priority congruence on satisfaction with democracy and its conditionalities, and one regarding the country-specific effects in the three countries that have posed the initial puzzle. The hypotheses have been formulated as follows:

- *H1: higher levels of objective priority congruence are associated with higher levels of satisfaction with democracy.*
- *H2: The effect of priority congruence and satisfaction with democracy is stronger for an individual who shows high political interest than respondents with lower interest in politics.*
- *H3: If priority congruence has an effect on individuals' satisfaction with democracy because it is perceived as a measure of the quality of representation, such an effect must be stronger for those individuals who believe to have more political efficacy within representative democracy systems.*
- *H4: The effect of priority congruence on individual satisfaction with democracy is country-specific: it is smaller in Hungary, medium in the United Kingdom and stronger in Spain.*

As explained in the theory section, the hypotheses rely on a single casual mechanism which is guided by a theory of limited rationality that draws on Easton's (1965) framework of the political system, Norris's (1999) notion of regime performance, and the notion of limited attention developed in the dynamic agenda-setting literature (Baumgartner et al. 2001). In such a theory, the units of analysis are rational individuals that assess the political system in which they live by evaluating regime performance, both on the input and output side of the political system. However, when assessing input side performance, they end up evaluating only performance in those policy issues that are already salient in their mind, because they have limited attention and limited information. This approach justifies the adoption of priority congruence as a measure of representation and the decision to test the conditionality for political interest and political efficacy, that determine the extent to which individual attention and information is actually limited. Moreover, despite rationally evaluating regime performance basing on their own experience of regime outputs, individuals make these evaluations depending on the criteria of assessment contained in the understanding of

democracy they have acquired through socialization. This justifies interpreting country-specific effects with the country-dominant understandings of democracy.

In order to increase the external validity, the first three hypotheses have been tested on individual-level survey data from a wider sample of 9 distinct European countries – Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom – which have been selected with the purpose of maximizing internal variation on both the dependent and independent variables, institutional setting and political culture, conditional on the availability of data. In fact, data come from the combination of different waves of the Standard Eurobarometer Series (2003-2018) and national legislative outputs from the Comparative Agenda Project into a repeated cross-sectional dataset containing 149,253 observations for 16 periods from 9 distinct countries. The fourth hypothesis has been tested only on Hungary, Spain, and the United Kingdom, to explain the pattern of deviance preliminarily observed from rough aggregate data on representation at the individual level, using a more precise and objective measure of representation, and to interpret it in light of country-dominant understandings of democracy.

All empirical tests have employed both logit and ordered logit regression models, because the dependent variable – satisfaction with democracy – has been measured both in binary and in ordinal terms, in order to exclude that results were only driven by measure selection. Findings have answered affirmatively to all parts of the research question, as all hypotheses have been verified. In fact, from all tests of H1, it has resulted that priority congruence increases the probability of 1 unit shift in satisfaction with democracy by at least 0.16 points. Therefore, the assumed direct effect of quality of representation on individual satisfaction with democracy is found to exist, on average, across all countries in the sample.

Testing H2 and H3 not only has confirmed the direct effect, but it has also found that the intensity of the effect is, on average, significantly moderated by individual-level conditions affecting the degree of interest and attention dedicated to politics – namely political interest and political efficacy. This means that the relationship between representation and satisfaction with democracy assumed in the literature is valid on average, but still, it is not universally valid across individuals that live and approach politics in different ways. Finally, also H4 has been confirmed, finding that the country-specific effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy is strong and significant in Spain, negative in Hungary and almost null in the United Kingdom. These results are shown to be coherent with the aggregate data on the dominant

understandings of democracy, reporting the highest level of importance of representation in Spain, and then in the United Kingdom and Hungary in declining order.

The combination of results to tests of H4 and descriptive data on dominant understandings of democracy has been used to make sense of the initial puzzle. Excess of dissatisfaction with democracy relative to quality of representation in Spain has been explained with citizens' higher sensitivity to political representation; slight excess in the United Kingdom and significant excess in Hungary of satisfaction with democracy relative to the level of representation instead has been explained with the lower intensity of the country-specific effect and lower public sensitivity to representation as an attribute of democracy.

The main contribution of this thesis consists in the study of the individual-level conditionalities of the effect of representation on satisfaction with democracy, upon political interest and political efficacy. These have been particularly understudied in the literature, with only few recent studies on the determinants of democracy considering the conditioning effects of certain system-level factors, such as government effectiveness and age of democracy (Reher 2016, 2015), but ignoring the also potentially mediating role of individual-level factors. Moreover, a small but still original contribution of this thesis is also the consideration of understandings of democracy as a conditionality of the effect of political representation on satisfaction with democracy. Unfortunately, for data availability constraints, this conditionality could not be properly tested, but it would definitely represent a more substantive contribution worth pursuing when longitudinal individual-level data on understandings of democracy will be available.

Finally, the scope of this study is limited by the very nature of the 'cause' of which I have decided to study 'the effects'. In fact, I have chosen to measure the effects of representation on support for democracy using priority-congruence, which is a partial approach. Priority congruence in fact, is not a complete criterium for evaluating representation, for it does not consider citizens' ideological preferences nor policy content and direction, which intuitively matter in individual evaluations of representation and of democracy. Moreover, an additional limitation of my measure of representation is due to the type of data available. In fact, in absence of a real panel data, I built a repeated cross-sectional individual level dataset. This type of dataset forced me to use same-year priorities, legislative outputs and satisfaction with democracy in order to test the effect of individual's priority congruence on same individual's satisfaction with democracy. I acknowledge that the contemporaneity of the explanatory and

the output variable might weaken the validity of the causation mechanism. Therefore, an extension of the present study would benefit from an operationalisation of representation with a substantive and temporally lagged measure of responsiveness, built on panel data.

To my view, this thesis speaks in an interesting way to the recently revived debate on the alleged "general crisis of democracy" in Europe (Merkel 2018, p. 1). In fact, it is a dominant view in both the empirical democracy research and the theoretical discourse of democracy, that the series of "sub-crises" (Merkel 2018, p. 2) that have hit European polities especially since 2008 – such as the crisis of trust in parties, in political elites and representative institutions, and most importantly, the general rise of dissatisfaction with democracy – have summed up to a crisis of democracy as such, that even threatens a rollback of democracy (Weßels 2015; (Merkel 2018). Moreover, the common view is particularly desolating because, as already discussed in the literature review, most of the recent empirical studies on support for democracy take an economic, output-side approach, and explain the crisis of attitudes towards representative institutions with the impact of the financial and economic crisis of 2008 on macroeconomic conditions, personal economic situation, and individual wellbeing (Weßels 2015; Christmann and Torcal 2017; Christmann 2018, Torcal 2014). Apart from underestimating the normative component in citizens' evaluation of regime performance, these explanations render a very cynical image of European citizens. They are imagined as capable of trading their normative values with good economic performance and efficient policy outcomes, and being totally indifferent to procedural performance, on the input side of the political system, such as quality of representation. This thesis's findings, instead, oppose such approach and render a much more optimistic picture of European citizens and the status of democracy in European polities. In fact, demonstrating that quality of representation, measured as priority congruence, on average does explain at least part of satisfaction with democracy means that European citizens' attitudes towards democracy are not entirely based on outputs' evaluations, but also on normative assessments of political procedures. It also means that the average individual across European countries in the sample gives values to political representation, is capable of recognizing it, and uses it as a criterium to set her level of satisfaction with political system. And from the findings on country-specific effects, it becomes even clearer that dissatisfaction *per se* in not as much a threat for democracy as the incapacity to assess procedural aspects of democracy, such as representation, when evaluating democracy. In fact, democracy is much more at risk in Hungary, where citizens are increasingly satisfied with democracy but are indifferent to quality of representation, than in Spain, where citizens

are increasingly dissatisfied with democracy also because they are attentive to quality of representation and let it affect their regime evaluations. So, these thesis's findings confirm the famous but now relatively outdated Pippa Norris's (1999) notion of 'dissatisfied democrats' and the optimistic idea that dissatisfaction is positive if it derives from a critical and vigilant attitude towards institutions and authorities (Norris 1999 in Merkel 2018).

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