

More (of) Democracy: European Citizens' Views and Evaluations of Democracy^{1*}

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Abstract

Social and political theory recognizes several conjunctural, as well as long-term factors that shape how citizens conceptualize democracy and what they expect from it. Based on Round 10 of the European Social Survey, we analyse how Europeans view and evaluate democracy, distinguishing liberal (basic) model and several additions, such as social-democratic, participatory and populist models (that we analyse integrated as alternative model of democracy). We explore whether liberal and alternative models of democracy are mutually complementary or exclusionary, and which model prevails, but also to what extent there are discrepancies between the normative elements and evaluated outcomes. The paper examines whether and how the length of historical experience with democracy (operationalized through different waves of democratization) influences the predominant normative of democracy, as well as evaluations of the implemented standards. Finally, in the last section, the aim of the analysis is to draw conclusions on the profile of both proponents of liberal and alternative models of democracy but also of critical citizens, who value democracy as an ideal, while remaining wary in terms of its empirical manifestations.


Keywords: liberal and alternative models of democracy, views, evaluations, Europe


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Introduction

Based on the results of the Round 10 of the European Social Survey, the aim of this paper is to explore which models of democracy prevail among European citizens, what they expect from democracy and how they evaluate it. Democracies, both established and unconsolidated, are currently facing political and normative challenges, which primarily come from two directions – from the rise of exclusionist and authoritarian tendencies in various contemporary states, on the one hand, but also from different emancipatory and radical democratic political projects, on the other. The enthusiasm that the third wave of democratization brought about in Europe and Latin America in the mid-1970s has since evaporated. It has been replaced with the era of “democratic disillusionment”: “liberal democratic regimes are being eroded and discredited, with regard to both their institutional basis and normative fundamentals, and their symbolic and ideological dimensions” (Ortiz Leroux, 2020:138). According to Turner (2021), four major “catastrophes” have shaken the world and undermined confidence in liberal democracy in the 21st century: the attack on the World Trade Centre in New York City in 2001 and the subsequent “war on terror”; the global financial crisis of 2008-2011; the intensifying of migratory trends and the 2015 European refugee crisis; and the COVID-19 pandemic. The “techno-sanitary Leviathan of therapeutic capitalism” (Fuzaro, 2022:12), which grew out of the need to curb the epidemiological crisis, with its states of emergency, expertocracy, and autocratic decision-making, further contributed to the divorce between liberalism and democracy. Even before the pandemic, the technocratic challenge (Bertsou & Caramani, 2020) has deeply transformed the conditions of democracy and turned into a source of tensions. The ever-growing concentration of power in the hands of the unelected expert elites, often unresponsive to the needs of the community, as well as the social isolation during the COVID-19 pandemic, which limited conventional political participation and encouraged the further spread of conspiracism and phantasm of “the deep state”, jointly instigated the resurgence of anti-party and anti-establishment populist sentiments in undemocratic and democratic systems alike.

For decades now, the malignant impact of business lobbies on governments’ policies and the commercialization of public services have been generating the de-democratizing developments in liberal democracies, leading some authors to define this entire process as post-democracy (Crouch, 2004). Furthermore, in many countries around the globe, democratic procedures coexist with the abuse of power and declining political and civil rights, as we can witness in Hungary – the EU member state – whose prime minister Viktor Orbán publicly embraced the concept of “illiberal democracy” (Antal, 2022). The challenge to liberal democracy also comes from the leading authoritarian political systems, such as China, suggesting that economic progress is attainable without a democratic government (Plattner, 2017).

In contrast to the growing theoretical and public criticism toward representative democracy over the last decades, empirical research provides evidence that democracy

still has a wide appeal among citizens (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016:11). Almost 89% of the citizens of the 37 countries covered by the fifth wave of European Values Study indicate a democratic system as a desirable system of governance (Fotev, 2022:52). While the acceptance of democracy as a political system remains solid over time, as well as the democratic vision of the political community, conceived around an idea of a presumed common good (diffuse or generalized support, according to Easton, 1965), the support for particular governments and political authorities (specific support, oriented towards outputs) is in decline as a result of negative evaluation of their performance. Various surveys have confirmed that citizens show strong support for fundamental democratic principles and values, while at the same time expressing dissatisfaction with how the democratic regime functions in practice, pointing to the fact that the legitimacy of democratic political order is produced on the output side of the political system and that it is largely influenced by the quality of government, i.e. the effects of the specific public policies (Klingemann, 1999; Norris, 2011). It is reasonable to expect that dissatisfaction with democracy would therefore be higher in a relatively new than in long-living democracies. As Kriesi and Saris (2016:192) notice, not only that the democratic performance is lower in young democracies, which causes dissatisfaction, but it is precisely the low performance that also keeps the issue of functioning of democracy on the public agenda and in people's minds. The constant public pointing to the failures in institutions' performances might explain why in the younger, fragile, or deficient democracies, with not such remote non-democratic history, attitudes of a majority of citizens go in the direction of the positive view of democracy on the normative level together with the high expectations of democracy. As previously shown by Kriesi and Morlino (2016), it is exactly the direct (negative) political experience that shapes the (maximalist)⁵ democratic expectations of Europeans. Even though the liberal notions of democracy are frequently combined with the illiberal notions in the states with authoritarian historical backgrounds (Kirsch & Welzel, 2019), this certainly in no way diminishes the principled dedication of citizens of these countries to democratic ideals.

Data collected in Round 6 of the European Social Survey (ESS), provided the empirical base for the examination of the concepts of views and evaluations of democracy (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016). These concepts, which have been presented as a modified version of Easton's distinction between diffuse and specific political support, will be used as a starting point for our study. According to Ferrín and Kriesi (2016a:10), views refer to the citizens' normative ideal of democracy, to their ideas about what democracy should be. Evaluations of democracy, on the other hand, refer to the assessments of the way the democratic principles and different aspects of

⁵ Minimalist conception of democracy is defined by common features shared by all conceptions of democracy (included in Dahls' or Schumpeter's visions of liberal democracy, which will be presented in more detail later), while maximalist conception encompasses all the features of the minimalist conception, plus some additional ones. As research by Kriesi et al. (2016) showed, those citizens who have a maximalist view of liberal democracy also express direct-democratic and social-democratic expectations from democracy, while citizens who do not call for such supplementary features also tend to have a minimalist view of the basic form of liberal democracy.

democracy have been implemented in specific countries. Previous studies based on ESS Round 6 data, which analysed the citizens' ideal views of democracy, i.e. their relation to various components of the three conceptions of democracy (liberal, social democratic and direct democratic), have shown that citizens of different European countries embrace a demanding conception of democracy since their democratic preferences comprise universal normative attachment to the liberal democracy model, but also include elements of the social and direct democratic concepts and views (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016). It has also been established that citizens of the newly emerging democracies in Southern, Central, and Eastern Europe have maximalist conceptions of all three visions of democracy and “the most acute awareness of what it takes to make democracy work” (Kriesi, et al., 2016:89). Following the theories of institutional learning, Heyne (2018) suggests that the question of why some citizens' expectations have gone beyond the basic liberal model of democracy can be explained by their socialization experiences: Europeans have a more performance-based view of legitimacy and are more likely to demand social outputs from democracy when they live in a post-authoritarian democracy, particularly if that democracy was under communist rule. Where European citizens are dissatisfied with the way democracy works in their own country (in Southern, Central and Eastern Europe), they tend to make greater demands on democracy and hold more maximalist understandings of it, whereas in highly performing democracies (in North-western Europe), their conceptions are more minimalist (Kriesi & Morlino, 2016:310). The European citizens' views and evaluations of democracy are shaped by specific contextual factors related to (non-)democratic history and the quality of democracy in their countries. However, they all share the tendency to react to the perceived democratic deficit in a similar manner – by adopting a broader understanding that goes beyond the basic liberal model of democracy.

Models of democracy - liberal, social, participatory and populist

Two of the most influential contemporary endeavours to define liberal democracy are Joseph A. Schumpeter's “minimalist” competitive elitist model and Robert A. Dahl's concept of polyarchy. The two constitutive elements of democracy, for Schumpeter, are free competitive elections and participation of citizens in electing their political representatives who are thus given a mandate to carry out their will and govern (Schumpeter, 1994). According to this understanding, “democracy is an institutional arrangement to generate and legitimate leadership”, and therefore it “has at best a most tenuous relation to the classical meaning of democracy: ‘rule by the people’” (Held, 2006:143). Dahl's pluralist conception of democracy rests on the premise that democracy is warranted by the competition among organized interest groups and on the five requirements for a democratic process – effective participation, voting equality at the decisive stage of collective decisions, enlightened understanding, control of the agenda of government decisions, and inclusiveness. In the political reality of large-scale governments, there are seven criteria of polyarchy,

i.e. seven institutions that distinguish democracy: 1) elected officials assigned with a task of control over government decisions, 2) free, fair and frequent elections, 3) eligibility for public office, 4) inclusive suffrage, 5) freedom of expression, 6) free access to alternative information, and 7) associational autonomy (Dahl, 1972, 1998).

Dahl and Schumpeter provide a model of procedural democracy, centred on the electoral process, with elections of political decision-makers at regular intervals as the main institutional pillars of representative democracy. Within this orientation, the elections are additionally seen as a means to establish a double link between the political input (the citizens' preferences) and the political output (public policies adopted by elected representatives), which assumes engagement of a "chain of responsiveness" and a "chain of accountability" (Bühlmann & Kriesi, 2013). The "chain of responsiveness" refers to the obligation of governments to acknowledge and implement preferences of the citizens through their policies, while the "chain of accountability" confronts governments with a demand to inform the public and to explain and justify their decisions. The electoral definition of democracy also requires guarantees of basic civil liberties and a developed public sphere in order to effect the mechanisms and channels that enable control and communication, which constitutes the liberal component of democracy, comprised of the rule of law, horizontal accountability (control of account-holders by the institutions and independent administrative bodies), and civil liberties (Ferrín & Kriesi, 2016a).

The mid-20th century re-examinations of theories of liberal democracy emerged from the understanding that democratic political systems face several challenges: first, from corporate interests that endanger the relative autonomy of democratic institutions; second, from declining political participation that signals the existence of deeper political inequalities; and finally, from the tension between democratic legitimation and capitalist accumulation, as well as between democracy and liberalism, which began to lean more and more toward consensual solutions, narrowing the space for political confrontation (Toplišek, 2019). This presents a challenge for contemporary democracies, as well as for theory of democracy.

One of the conceptions, which was introduced as a possible response to the crisis of electoral democracy, is the model of social democracy. It is a variant of substantive democracy, connected with the reduction of economic inequalities and the minimizing of the effects of social class, where well-being is seen as a necessary prerequisite for equalizing citizens' competencies and improving political participation. This alternative model of democracy represents the echo of the social-democratic variant of capitalism, in the post-war decades, characterized by a mixed economy, Keynesianism, and a welfare state. Although the system of social capitalism and its corporatist structure collapsed, the social partnership between unionized labour, organized business, and government was not completely dismantled. In the 1990s, it was renewed and reconfigured in the form of "national social pacts", through which the governments in crisis-hit economies agreed with trade unions about wage moderation or consulted about consolidation of public budgets, but "it remained confined to national arenas which, in the course of European integration, became embedded in supranational markets and governed by supranational imperatives of

austerity and liberalization”, and so “as a consequence its agenda was more and more set, as it were, from above” (Streeck, 2006:24).

Relics of the social-democratic model of the welfare state, present only partially in policy and institutional arrangements, today mainly serve to mitigate and legitimize painful economic decisions that produce extreme wealth imbalance. Although Sweden, Germany and France retain their welfare states, the general trend is showing that “the historical achievements of post-war social democracy in Western Europe – universal welfare, high-quality public services, the social investment state – seem imperilled as never before” (Diamond, 2012:2). The centre-left parties abandoned the core social democratic ideological principles and accepted a more pragmatic catch-all political strategy, which was clearly demonstrated in the “third way” governing policies. However, the global economic crisis of 2008 shed a new light on today’s democracies and reaffirmed the issues of social equality and economic security, both through anti-austerity movements and new movement parties that appeared on the political scene (Della Porta et al., 2017).

If the crisis of the welfare state conditioned the reactualisation of the social-democratic concept of democracy, the crisis of participation (Norris, 2011) produced the need for a stronger emphasis on the participatory and inclusive aspects of political decision-making processes, which go beyond the dominant representative model. Direct democracy is a “regime in which the population as a whole vote on the most important political decisions” (Budge, 1993:137). The central idea behind this form of government is to increase the involvement of citizens in making political decisions, whether it is carried out through referendums or plebiscites, or face-to-face, through popular assemblies. Since direct (participatory) democracy can occur within different institutional modalities (Budge, 1993; Held, 2006), direct-democratic tools are applied in many representative democracies in which a proper balance has been established between the popular will and the constitutional system of checks and balances, but these tools have also become a standard part of the repertoire within populist anti-establishment and anti-party politics. Direct democracy, in its main features and instruments, overlaps with populist democracy and could even be considered its variant, as populism can rest on direct-democratic principles, but due to the specificity of contemporary populist regimes, we will treat them as analytically separate forms, since historically direct democracy is a phenomenon that precedes contemporary populist regimes (Held, 2006; Matsusaka, 2020). Despite certain commonalities at the level of the model, it should be emphasized that in political practice, direct-democratic demands come as a result of efforts to encourage participation from below, while populism is a strategy of voter mobilization created and imposed from above, by political elites or charismatic leaders, who often respond to the “populist” criticism of the loss of popular control by offering and implementing undemocratic solutions (Matsusaka, 2020). Participatory democratic theory and populist rhetoric share a redemptive democratic trait, but unlike the latter, the former is discursive and deliberative, strongly committed to ideas of critical

thinking and empowerment (Canovan, 1999).⁶

Populist democracy is understood as the ideal of radical democracy which “aims at the closest possible approach to direct popular self-government without the intervention of a political elite” (Canovan, 1981:173). The populist conception of democracy presents three characteristics: first, it advocates direct democracy based on referendums initiated by the people; second, it defends the project of a “polarized democracy”, denouncing the non-democratic character of unelected authorities and constitutional courts, and finally, it affirms the immediate and spontaneous expression of popular opinion (Rosanvallon, 2021:21). Populist insistence on popular control of political and legislative decisions and a strong emphasis on popular sovereignty, results in a high valuation of the institutions of representative recall, people’s initiative and referendum as devices through which the “government by the people” is realized. The populist model of democracy, like the direct-democratic model, is centred around the idea of the people as sovereign, but unlike the latter, it is anti-pluralist and rests on the premise of the existence of a homogeneous and virtuous people, the assumed general will, based on the unity of the people and on a clear demarcation from those who do not belong to the *demos* (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017). It is precisely the denial of particular interests and narrow-group identifications that tear apart the collective unity of the people, that lies at the basis of internal tensions between populism and constitutional aspects of liberal democracy, whose mechanisms serve to prevent the tyranny of the majority and endangering of the rights and freedoms of minorities and groups exposed to systemic discrimination (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2017; Canovan, 1981, 1999). The populist model of democracy offers a radical understanding of responsiveness and vertical accountability, where only citizens can hold their governments accountable, while the liberal principles of horizontal accountability, resting on checks and balances, are neglected. The context of erosion of party democracy and declining importance of political partisanship, with political parties casting aside their traditional representative and mediating role and espousing their procedural role of governors (Mair, 2002), can (partially) explain why this type of democracy that prioritises agile reaction to public opinion and to citizens’ changing concerns over representation of competing interests, gains ever more popularity in different societies.

Contextual background

Much of the contemporary analyses of global democracy rest on Huntington’s conceptualization of waves of democracy (Huntington, 1991), recognizing the length of democratic experience as a factor that determines the stability of certain democratic systems and the quality of democratic institutions. In addition to the countries’ democratic traditions and prevailing patterns of political socialization,

⁶ Thomas Cronin (1989) equates self-government as a key element of direct democracy with government by discussion.

their paths to democracy also predetermine the success of democratization and the possibility of establishing an appropriate institutional configuration. Huntington distinguishes three waves of democratization. The first, long wave of democratization that lasted almost a century, from 1828–1926, saw the transition to democracy in the countries of Western Europe. In the second, short wave of 1943–1962, they were joined by Italy, West Germany and Austria. In the third wave, which began in 1974, democracy came to Portugal, Spain and Greece, and the peak was represented by the democratic transition of the former socialist countries in 1989-91⁷. Three waves of democratization were interrupted by two “reverse waves” (1922–1942, bringing fascism to Italy, national socialism to Germany, and 1958–1975, when, among European countries, Greece fell back under authoritarian rule). Modern democracies, the old and well-institutionalized as well as those new and fragile, periodically fall short of democratic ideals. As Diamond (1996) suggests, the concept of “democratic consolidation” is useful, as long as consolidation is understood as a process of improving democratic standards and creating political legitimacy that is not irreversible.

The fall of the Berlin Wall left Western democracies bereft of one of the key grounds of their legitimacy, based on self-proclaimed superiority over their socialist rivals. Western democracies have since faced heightened expectations of freedom, equality, access and participation (Schmitter, 2015:43), making them vulnerable to their own increasingly critical citizens (Norris, 2011). The crisis of democracy became more pronounced after 2008 in light of the failure of neoliberal reforms whose purpose was to remedy the economic and social consequences of the “Great Recession”, in which European countries particularly failed. Among the post-communist countries that began the democratic transition in early 1990s, some have built consolidated democratic structures, while some troubled democracies have yet to reach the level of democratic development of established democracies.

Certain structural and conjunctural factors explain the diversification of transition trajectories within post-communist Europe, as well as the similarities that have manifested. The latter can be attributed to the influence of the historical legacy, i.e. socioeconomic and political configuration before the turning point of 1989. The economic lagging of Southeastern and Eastern Europe in the 19th and the first half of the 20th century in comparison to the more developed Western economies was somewhat compensated by the accelerated socialist modernization and economic recovery after 1950, which lasted for the next two decades. This was followed by the faltering and stagnation that ended with the fall of the communist regimes in 1989-91. The systemic changes initiated after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 resulted in the unequal economic and political development of the post-communist societies of Central Eastern (CEE) and Southeast Europe (SEE). Even two decades after the regime change, the CEE group of countries showed significant economic progress, including Croatia and Slovenia, while in the SEE group Albania, Macedonia, Serbia,

⁷ Post-socialist countries can be treated as part of the fourth wave, for arguments see: Møller & Skaaning, 2013.

Bulgaria and Romania made more modest advances in economic development since 2000 (to illustrate – in 2010, Slovenia was at a 71%, while Albania was at 11% of the EU's GDP per capita) (Dolenec, 2013:59–60). The 2007-2008 financial crisis exposed the structural deficiencies of Western Balkan economies: persistent problems in the labour market, rising external imbalances, and fast deindustrialisation (Uvalić, 2019).

Divergences also showed in the sphere of politics. Periods of regime change in Southeast Europe were dominated by authoritarian parties reluctant to establish the rule of law. Because some of these political systems combine formal democracy with authoritarianism, they are often labelled as “competitive authoritarian” regimes (Levitsky & Way, 2002; Bieber, 2020) or “electoral autocracies” (Schedler, 2006; Cohen & Lampe, 2011). This, together with the rigged privatizations of state-owned assets, and the violent conflicts that followed the breakup of Yugoslavia during the 1990s, created objective conditions that undermined the capacities for democratization and its further development. The democratic stagnation of certain post-communist countries, including those that did not go through the war, such as Romania and Bulgaria, is largely due to the lack of a functional rule of law system (Dolenec, 2013). Against the background of this institutional defect, the mechanisms of party control over state resources, corruption and clientelism are strengthening.

The EU conditionality has undoubtedly had a positive impact on the democratization of post-communist countries, including the member states since 2007 like Bulgaria and Romania, that are lagging in the domain of judicial reform and corruption. The restrictiveness of the EU accession process has weakened since the first rounds of enlargement, so the EU today exhibits a more flexible approach, contributing to the maintenance of the political status quo or even authoritarian turn in the EU candidate countries (Bieber, 2020:72). Another dimension of the EU's involvement in the democratizing processes concerns the concept of democracy that the EU promotes, which is “dominantly liberal but deliberately fuzzy” (Dolenec, 2013:52). This “fuzziness” comes from a discrete liberal democratic agenda that is often combined in the EU documents and actions with social democratic and participatory democracy principles and governing practices (ibid.). This can push towards the acceptance of a broader understanding of democracy among citizens, but also in a situation of economic crisis, it can result in discrediting the idea of democracy as such. With the Great Recession (2007-2008), the challenges facing young democracies are multiplying. Economic difficulties, combined with austerity measures, significantly contributed to the decline of trust in the state and its democratic institutions in these countries, paving the way to alternative concepts and expectations of democracy. However, under the influence of the economic crisis, but also of the public health crisis (the COVID pandemic), even the consolidated European democracies are deteriorating, combining neoliberal and conservative policies, and populist mobilization and legitimization strategies.

Methodological-hypothetical Framework and Data

In order to determine which views on democracy prevail in European countries, as well as how Europeans evaluate implementation of different aspects of democracy, we have used European Social Survey (ESS) data from Round 10. The analysis has been done on data comprising the following national samples: Austria, Bulgaria, Switzerland, Czech Republic, Germany, Estonia, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Croatia, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, Montenegro, North Macedonia, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Serbia, Slovakia and Slovenia.⁸

Operationalization of different concepts of democracy (both in terms of views and evaluations) followed the items provided within the ESS survey (more on that, see in: Ferrín Pereira, Hernandez & Landwehr, 2023). Liberal, social-democratic, direct (participatory) and populist concepts of democracy were represented by the following statements⁹:

1. Liberal:

- ... that the courts treat everyone the same;
- ... that national elections are free and fair;
- ... that governing parties are punished in elections when they have done a bad job;
- ... that the rights of minority groups are protected;
- ... that different parties offer clear alternatives to one another;
- ... that the media are free to criticize the government.

2. Social-democratic:

- ... that the government takes measures to reduce differences in income levels;
- ... that the government protects all citizens against poverty.

3. Participatory:

- ... that citizens have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums.

4. Populist:

- ... that the views of ordinary people prevail over the views of the political elite;
- ... that the will of the people cannot be stopped.

The first hypothesis that we aimed to test is that in all sampled countries there is a discrepancy between views and evaluations on both liberal and alternative

⁸ The data were weighted by the variable combining population size and design weight (anweight).

⁹ The introductory question differed in items measuring views and evaluations of democracy. In the first case, it referred to the importance of the following items for democracy in general (*How important do you think it is for democracy in general...?*), while in the latter case it indicated the presence of each of the items in respondents' countries (*To what extent do you think each of the following statements applies in [country]?*).

concepts of democracy. Given the overall growth of critical citizenship towards the performances of democratic systems (Norris, 2011), we expected higher scores on the normative than on the evaluative dimensions of democracy.

The second step of the analysis was related to between-country comparison of the average scores on each of the items measuring different concepts and evaluations of democracy, followed by the formation of composite indices assessing the degree of respondents' agreement with liberal and alternative concepts of democracy (views) and evaluation of their presence in examined societies. In order to test the adequacy of the division of items into liberal and alternative concepts of democracy, we have done a factor analysis on the entire sample for items measuring the views. The factor analysis showed the consistency of the grouping of items around two factors – one clustering items related to the views on liberal democracy and the other comprising socio-democratic, participatory and populist elements of democracy (that we jointly named the alternative concept of democracy). In terms of evaluations, the grouping was not as consistent, since two items, originally belonging to liberal concept of democracy (punishing parties at the elections and equality before the courts), had higher factor loadings on factor denoting alternative democracy than on the one comprising liberal democracy evaluation. However, in order to maintain consistency between the concepts and indices, we decided to group the evaluation items in the same way as was done with normative statements (views).¹⁰ In this way we constructed four indices measuring liberal democracy views, alternative democracy views, liberal democracy evaluations and alternative democracy evaluations. The second hypothesis is that liberal and alternative conceptions of democracy are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. Instead of a basic understanding of democracy, we expect a stronger inclination towards its maximalist variant, where the current general crisis of democracy raises awareness on the importance of different components for its legitimation.

In the following step of the analysis, we have grouped the countries belonging to different waves of democracy¹¹, in order to compare their positioning on the two pairs of dimensions (liberal and alternative views and evaluations of democracy). The third, central, hypothesis was that the wave of democratization to which a country belongs determines the degree of importance that its citizens attach to liberal and alternative concepts of democracy: the shorter is the democratic experience, the lower are the scores related to the evaluation of the outcomes of liberal (basic)

¹⁰ Before constructing the index, we additionally analysed the reliability of the scales and obtained Cronbach Alpha values well above 0.7: for the scale of liberal democracy views Alpha was 0.799, for alternative democracy views scale Alpha was 0.784, for liberal democracy evaluations scale Alpha was 0.826 and for alternative democracy evaluations scale it was 0.863.

¹¹ The countries were classified in three different groups. The first group comprised first wave democracies – Switzerland, Iceland, Sweden, Finland, France, Netherlands and Norway; the second group encompassed second and third wave democracies – Austria, Germany, Italy, Spain, Greece and Portugal, while the third group distinguished post socialist countries – Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Croatia, Hungary, Lithuania, Montenegro, Serbia, Estonia, North Macedonia, Poland, Slovenia and Slovakia (i.e., the fourth wave democracies, according to Møller & Skaaning, 2013).

elements of democracy in practice; and, as a consequence, the importance of alternative normative concepts of democracy, as a complementary to the liberal elements, is growing. Or, in other words, the longer is the length of democratic tenure, the better is the performance of liberal democracy, and the weaker is the inclination to reach for additional alternative concepts of democracy on the normative level. Following this hypothesis, we will assume that there are no significant variations between respondents coming from the countries belonging to different waves of democratization when it comes to the norms of liberal democracy, but that differences appear with regards to alternative concepts of democracy, as a consequence of the weaknesses in the implementations of liberal democracy.

Therefore, we have conducted Analysis of Variance and Tukey's test of multiple comparisons in order to test whether there were statistically significant differences on four scales measuring liberal and alternative democracy views and evaluations between groups of countries belonging to different waves of democracy.

In the final step, by using Linear Regression Analysis, we tested if the same or similar factors within the three groups of countries determine the degree of citizens' agreement with the views and evaluations of democracy. The aim of the analysis was to check which factors are the best predictors of liberal and alternative views and evaluations in each group of countries belonging to different waves of democratization, so that we could draw conclusions on the structure of critically oriented citizens in terms of their age, education, gender, material status, ideological orientation, but also in terms of the level of institutional trust they display, the degree of contentment with functioning of different institutions, the importance of democracy, their interest in politics and degree of political participation.

Results of the analysis

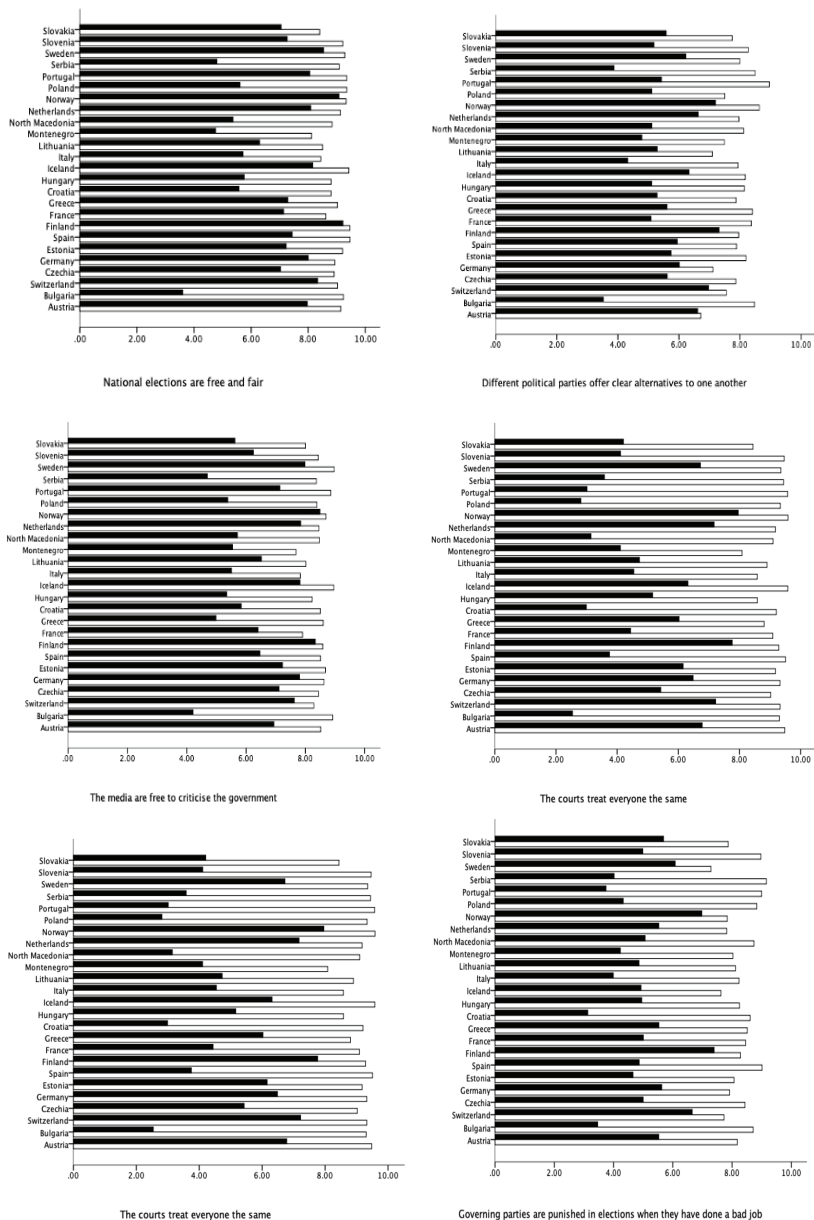
Before testing our key hypothesis on the relationship between the waves of democracy, the strength of liberal and alternative democracy norms and the assessment on their outcomes, we try to provide a descriptive overview on how Europeans, i.e. citizens of different European countries, positioned themselves on the items measuring different concepts of democracy. The aims of this descriptive part of the analysis are to determine: 1. the importance that Europeans attach to different dimensions of liberal and alternative concepts of democracy, 2. whether there are dimensions that stand out more than others, 3. if there are noticeable between-country differences in the level of importance of different items, and 4. whether there are significant between country variations in terms of views and evaluations on each of the examined items, and if so, are these differences consistent in all countries or not. Starting from these results, we will be able to conclude whether the norm of liberal democracy is still prevailing among the citizens of European countries (as it was the case a few years ago in the study of Ferrin and Kriesi, 2016.), and subsequently, whether this basic concept of democracy is joined by alternative ones – socio-democratic, participatory and populist.

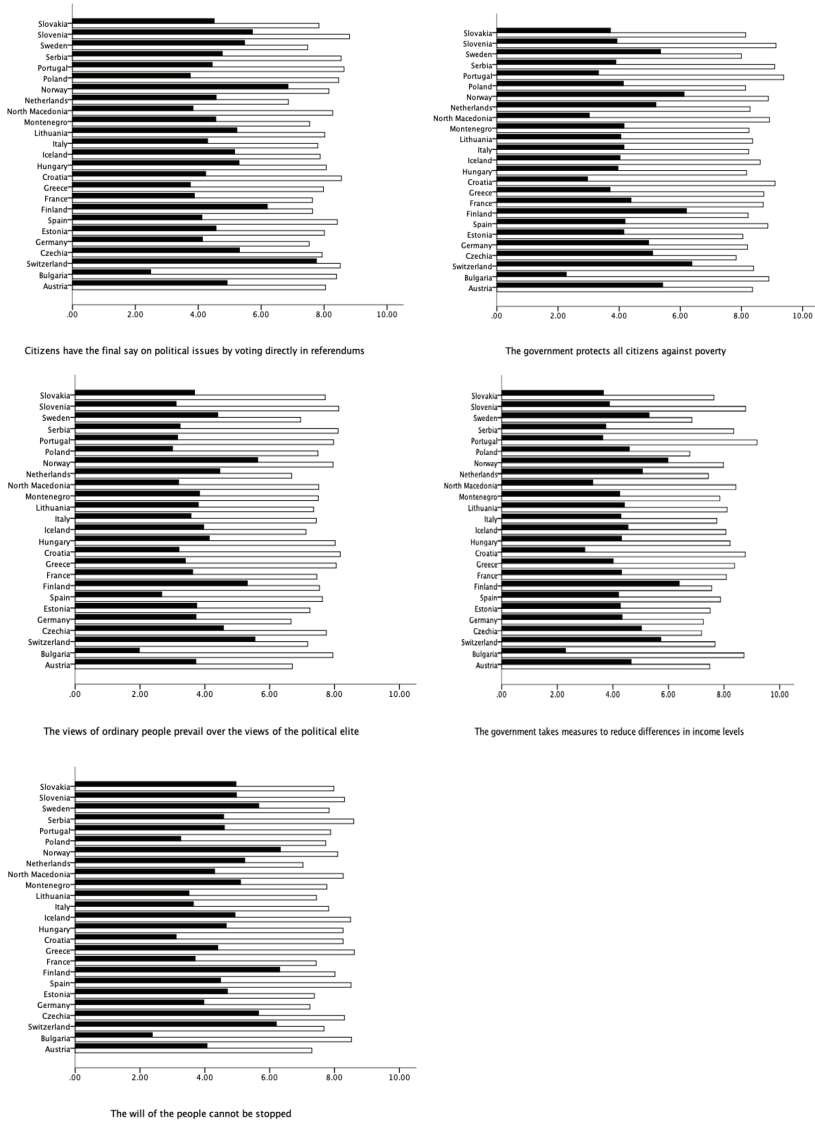
Average scores on items measuring views on different concepts of democracy testify to the strong importance citizens of European countries attach to both liberal democracy – equality before the law, free elections, media freedom, minority rights protection, plurality of interest representation and accountability of the governments – and to direct, social-democratic and populist concepts of democracy (see Graph 1). In general, these results also demonstrate that in citizens' perceptions the norms of liberal and alternative democracy are not mutually exclusive, even in the case of populist democracy, but, on the contrary, complementary. Furthermore, it also reveals that citizens of Europe go beyond the basic concept of democracy demanding not only that the procedural elements of representative democracy be fulfilled, but also a stronger role of the citizens in decision-making processes, and stronger level of protection of vulnerable social groups by the state. In addition, although there are minor variations between countries in the degree of attachment to these elements (which will be discussed later), they are not large (on all items, average scores go well beyond theoretical mean in all individual country samples).

On the other hand, when we look at the findings related to the evaluations of the implementation of these concepts in specific countries, the situation changes dramatically (Graph 1). First of all, on almost all items and in all countries, we note a discrepancy between the normative and evaluation aspects (on several items evaluation scores are well below theoretical mean within some of the country samples). Secondly, items related to liberal democracy score better than alternative models: discrepancy between norms and evaluations is more pronounced when it comes to socio-democratic, populist and direct democracy, than in the case of liberal democracy elements. This is supported by the fact that, on average, European citizens' perception is that the government's role in protection against poverty and the representation of the will of ordinary people are poorly executed and thus these two items are scoring the worst. Thirdly, the variations between countries are now more pronounced than in the case of views (with the item measuring the implementation of equality before the law displaying the highest inter-country variation) testifying to the perceived differences in achieved democratic standards between the countries. In other words, European citizens understand the importance of not only liberal but also supplementary elements of democracy, but they also tend to be critical when assessing what was achieved.

Graph 1

Average scores on individual items measuring views and evaluations of democracy by countries



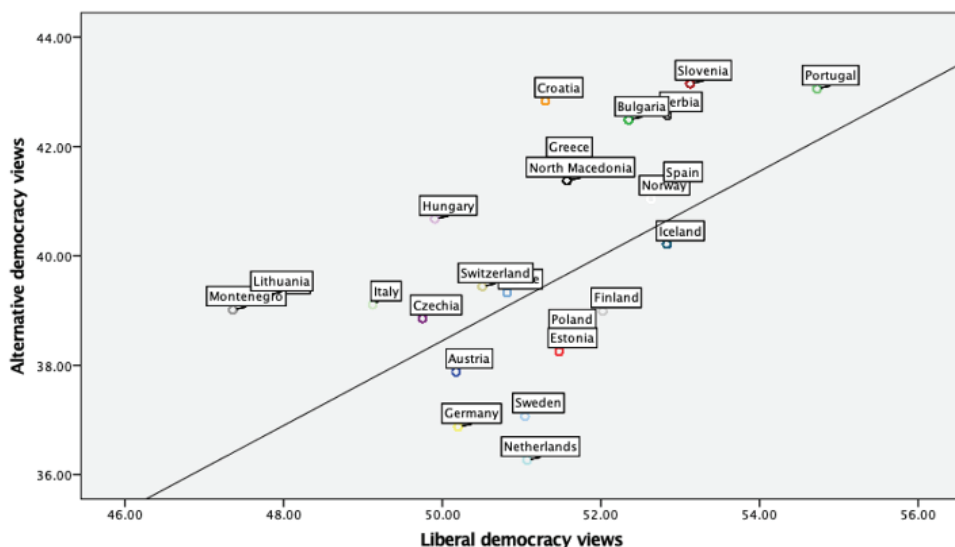


With the aim to get more synthetic indicators on different concepts of democracy, we have made two scales comprising items measuring liberal and alternative concepts of democracy. Two graphs (Graph 2 and Graph 3) show distribution of the average country scores on the two axes (liberal and alternative democracy) and indicate patterns of the grouping of different countries. First of all, as was clear from the previous segment of the analysis, inter-country variation is smaller when it comes to views than in the case of evaluations, indicating ongoing tendency of universalization of standards and expectations from the institutions of representative democracy in Europe. However, despite relatively small variations, there are certain patterns of country groupings that are observable: for example, SEE countries

(Slovenia, Serbia, North Macedonia, Croatia and Bulgaria) are placed relatively high on both axes, together with South European countries (Portugal, Spain or Greece), revealing that the highest appraisal of both the elements of liberal and alternative democracy is present among respondents coming from the countries that have the least experiences with democratic institutions. It would not be wrong if we name them democratic optimists, who, despite the weaknesses of modern democracy, still have high expectations from it. The weakest representation of elements of liberal democracy, with a moderate appraisal of alternative ones, is recorded in Lithuania and Montenegro (the cautious alternatives), while on the contrary, the Netherlands, Germany and Sweden record the lowest results in terms of the importance they attach to alternative concepts of democracy, with moderately high standards of liberal democracy (cautious liberals). Citizens of other countries are placed somewhere in between in the triangle bordered by these three groups, granting relatively moderate importance to both liberal and alternative elements of democracy.

Graph 2

Views on liberal and alternative democracy by countries

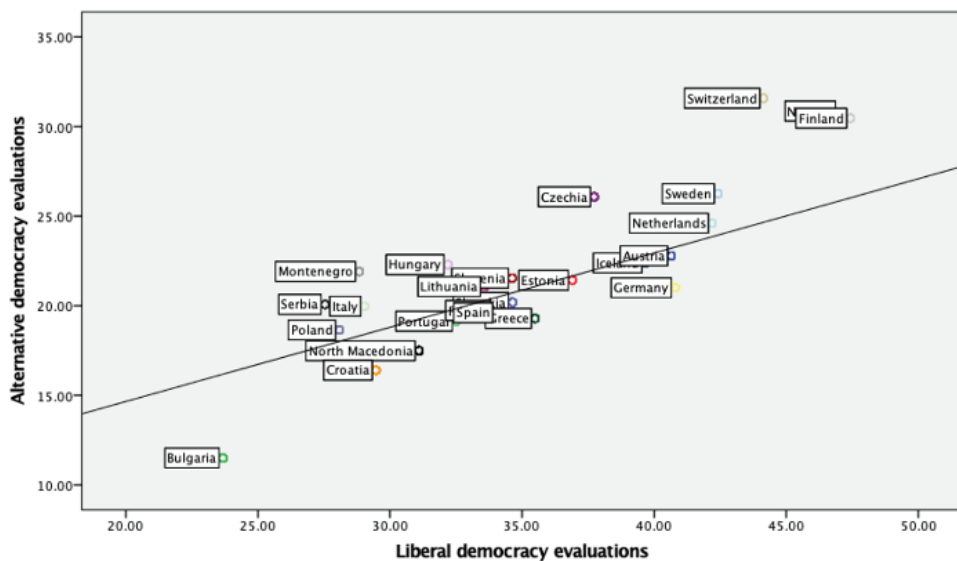


Patterns of grouping of the countries drastically change when it comes to evaluations of the implementation of democratic norms in individual countries. Respondents that assess the scope of liberal and alternative elements of democracy implementations as high are now coming from Switzerland, Norway and Finland, followed by the citizens of Sweden and the Netherlands, countries that have the longest history of the institutions of representative democracy. Besides, these are also countries characterized with the rich experiences in citizens' participation in decision-making processes (Switzerland, for example), as well as with strong welfare

states (Scandinavian countries). On the other pole of the overall grouping are those countries whose citizens' estimates of the outcomes of liberal and alternative models of democracy are the lowest – Bulgaria, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia, Croatia and Slovenia. With the exception of Montenegro, these are also the countries that are ranked the highest when it comes to the normative aspect. Finally, a slightly better ranking is recorded for the countries of Southern Europe – Portugal, Spain, Italy and Greece, which are joined by the rest of the former socialist countries (with the exception of the Czech Republic, which deviates from this grouping pattern). To summarize, similar to as shown by earlier research (Kriesi et al., 2016), societies that have a long historical experience with democratic institutions and that have reached certain standards of liberal democracy, do not display such strong propensity to evaluate the importance of liberal elements of democracy as high (and even less so when it comes to its social justice outcomes or participatory and populist demands), while newly emerging democracies are being more aware of what is essential for democracies to function.

Graph 3

Evaluations on liberal and alternative democracy by countries



Considering the observed patterns of grouping of the countries on two axes with regards to both views and evaluations of democracy, in the next step of the analysis we tried to test the hypothesis that the shorter the country has historical experience with the institutions of representative democracy, the weaker are performances of liberal democratic institutions in practice, and consequently, the stronger is proclivity to embrace a supplementary, alternative model of democracy. In other words, the weaker are the performances of liberal democracy, more resolute

is commitment to supplement the concept of liberal democracy with elements that embrace increased participation and the inclusion of wider sections of the population in democratic decision-making processes, but also more compelling is the demand towards the state to represent the interests of deprived social categories. The other side of the coin of this hypothesis is that the longer countries have been democratic, the better are evaluated performances of liberal democracy, which in turn reduces the need to devise alternative correctives.

In order to test this hypothesis, we classified countries according to different waves of democratization and ran ANOVA and post-hoc tests for scales of liberal and alternative views and evaluations of democracy as dependent variables and waves of democratization as a factor in each of the models (Table 1). Only in the case of views on liberal elements of democracy we did not record statistically significant differences between countries, indicating that regardless of the length of historical experience with democratic institutions, the norm of liberal democracy was universally accepted all over Europe and highly appraised in old as well as in newly emerging democracies. Conversely, when it came to alternative elements, the difference between groups of countries was registered, signalling that the shorter the historical experience with democracy, the stronger was the emphasis on alternative correctives to liberal democracy. This result also reveals that countries that have recently fought for democratic institutions showed a stronger tendency towards nurturing the maximalist ideal of democracy, as well as that their citizens were aware of the fragility of democratic institutions, especially in the situation of ongoing institutional democracy crisis at the global level. On the other hand, in terms of evaluations of both liberal and alternative elements, the situation was quite different, with the citizens of the first wave democracies displaying the highest scores in assessing the implementation of liberal, direct, socio-democratic and even populist elements of democracy, while respondents from the fourth wave democracies (post-socialist countries) recorded the lowest. Although the results were not straightforward in terms of the linear relationship between the length of historic experience with democratic institutions and views on democracy, there were grounds to accept as a valid hypothesis that the shorter the historical experience with democratic institutions the worse the performances of democracy were evaluated, and thus the need to supplement the liberal democratic institutions was more strongly expressed. This corrective transcends the basic concept of democracy in the direction of socio-democratic, participatory and populist additions.

Table 1
ANOVA and Tukey Test. Factor: Waves of Democracy

Dependent variable	F	Factor: waves of democracy	1	2	3
Liberal democracy views	2.853	Second and third	50.7710		
		Fourth	50.9715		
		First	51.0022		
Alternative democracy views	43.557**	First	38.7241		
		Second and third		39.0196	
		Fourth			39.8756
Liberal democracy evaluations	876.360**	Fourth	30.1114		
		Second and third		35.4645	
		First			38.1583
Alternative democracy evaluations	244.236**	Fourth	19.5638		
		Second and third		20.3157	
		First			23.0344

Note. ** $p < .01$.

Finally, if the citizens of the fourth wave countries have somewhat higher expectations of democracy, precisely due to the fact that they are aware of the fragility of democratic institutions, it is clear that their experience makes them more critical of the way democratic institutions function. Therefore, we tried to check whether there are differences in terms of social, demographic and other features of citizens coming from the three groups of countries when it comes to their opinions on normative aspects but also to the assessments of the functioning of democracy. We have made several linear regression models testing the effects of socio-demographic variables (age, education, gender and income category), but also different context-related traits, such as ideological orientation, contentment with the current functioning of different national institutions, institutional trust, general interest in politics and importance of democracy, on the scales measuring views and evaluations of liberal and alternative democracies.

In terms of socio-demographic characteristics that affect the views on liberal and alternative democracy, we have singled out several specificities. Regarding liberal views, the strongest socio-demographic predictor (Table 2) in the first wave democracies is education (the more educated respondents are, they tend to cherish more liberal components of democracy), whilst age, gender and income display relatively low (although significant) effect; education remains the strongest predictor in the second/third wave democracies, even though its effect declines in comparison to the first wave democracies; and finally, in the fourth wave democracies, the prime predictor is age (the older respondents are, they tend to emphasize the importance of liberal democracy more), followed by the income categories (wealthier respondents are more inclined to support liberal democracy than those of lower economic status), whilst education, although significant, is not the most important factor that determines the attitude towards the liberal normative.

The models for the alternative concept of democracy also indicate the existence of certain similarities between the countries of the first and the second/third waves of democracy, and deviations within the countries of the fourth wave: in the first two groups of countries the most significant, and negative, predictor is income (with an increase in the level of income, the support for alternative model of democracy decreases), while in the countries of the fourth wave, age is still the strongest positive predictor. Furthermore, in all three groups of countries, in addition to income, education also has a negative effect. In other words, those who have more cultural and material resources, which could serve as proxies for representatives of the ruling social classes, show a stronger tendency towards liberal democracy and more critical stance towards its socio-democratic, participatory and populist elements (these results were previously confirmed in: Coffé & Michels, 2014; Ceka & Magalhães, 2020; König, 2022).

If we control for the effect of socio-demographic predictors and observe the effects of context-related variables (Model 2), in all three groups of countries the most important predictor of liberal democracy is the subjective importance of democracy. However, if we now look at alternative democracy models, we see that the effect of the importance of democracy, although still being the most important predictor, declines when compared to regression models for liberal democracy. Models for alternative democracy also reveal another set of differences between groups of countries: while contentment with current functioning of institutions represents negative predictor of alternative democracy in the first and the second/third wave democracies, its effect in the fourth wave democracies is positive (and probably represents an indicator of support for the ruling political elites). In addition, the difference is also noticeable when it comes to political participation: in the countries of the first and the second/third wave democracies, stronger involvement in political processes has a positive effect on attitudes about the necessity of supplementing liberal democracy with alternative elements, while in the countries of the fourth wave, its effect is negative.

When it comes to the profile of citizens who value the liberal concept of democracy positively, it is very similar in the countries of the first and the second/third wave democracies: they are mostly older men, with a higher level of education, left-wing political orientation, who are politically active and emphasize the importance of democracy; in the countries of the fourth wave democracies, these are older citizens, with higher incomes, more politically active and also those who stress the importance of democracy. Similarities are somewhat more pronounced among all three groups of countries when it comes to the profile of respondents who positively value alternative elements of democracy: they are less educated, women, of low income, right-wing leaning (primarily in the first and the second/third wave countries), those who value democracy and express low trust in institutions. On the other hand, differences are manifested in terms of satisfaction with the current functioning of institutions – in the first and the second/third wave democracies, those who are dissatisfied with the state of affairs and who are politically active are more strongly inclined towards alternative models of democracy, while in the fourth wave countries, alternative democracy advocates are mostly those who are satisfied with the functioning of the system and are not politically active.

Table 2

Standardized Regression Coefficients for Scales of Liberal and Alternatives Views and Evaluations of Democracy, by Waves of Democratization

	Liberal democracy, views					
	First Wave		Second/Third Wave		Fourth Wave	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.024*	.002	.099*	.067*	.133*	.079*
Female	-.051*	-.072*	-.018*	-.045*	-.024	-.026
Education (years)	.218*	.096*	.146*	.063*	.104*	.028
Income (deciles)	.073*	.047*	.050*	-.004	.112*	.070*
Left-right scale		-.090*		-.065*		-.016
Political contentment		-.017		-.003		-.071*
Importance of democracy		.427*		.376*		.421*
Political participation		.101*		.144*		.048*
Institutional trust		.003		-.036		-.037
Interest in politics		.037*		-.004		.010
R Square	.063	.28	.03	.204	.037	.23
	Alternative democracy, views					
	First Wave		Second/Third Wave		Fourth Wave	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	-.020	-.017	-.004	-.001	.131*	.073*
Female	.079*	.068*	.054*	.024*	.019	.010
Education (years)	-.061*	-.136*	-.007	-.031*	-.105*	-.134*
Income (deciles)	-.136*	-.125*	-.157*	-.162*	-.065*	-.096*
Left-right scale		-.127*		-.122*		-.008
Political contentment		-.039*		-.051*		.063*
Importance of democracy		.194*		.178*		.284*
Political participation		.048*		.025		-.076*
Institutional trust		-.071*		-.149*		-.067*
Interest in politics		-.008		-.024		-.012
R Square	.034	.099	.029	.106	.048	.129
	Liberal democracy, evaluations					
	First Wave		Second/Third Wave		Fourth Wave	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.125*	.098*	.159*	.091*	.101*	.048*
Female	-.089*	-.073*	-.050*	-.046*	-.054*	-.042*
Education (years)	.086*	.007	.074*	.018	-.081*	-.016
Income (deciles)	.116*	.025*	.150*	.063*	.027	-.002
Left-right scale		.025*		-.007		.056*
Political contentment		.322*		.212*		.446*
Importance of democracy		.084*		.095*		.045*
Political participation		.002		-.027*		-.043*
Institutional trust		.336*		.351*		.235*
Interest in politics		.049*		.065*		.028*
R Square	.044	.46	.052	.354	.02	.465
	Alternative democracy, evaluations					
	First Wave		Second/Third Wave		Fourth Wave	
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2	Model 1	Model 2
Age	.050*	.054*	.008	-.019	.057*	.020

Female	-.044*	-.016	-.005	.015	-.057*	-.029*
Education (years)	-.043*	-.064*	-.038*	-.047*	-.080*	-.018
Income (deciles)	.043*	-.050*	.053*	-.010	.016	-.002
Left-right scale		.100*		.040*		.048*
Political contentment		.372*		.307*		.512*
Importance of democracy		-.042*		-.047*		-.048*
Political participation		-.028*		-.033*		.019
Institutional trust		.266*		.209*		.178*
Interest in politics		.021		-.004		.046*
R Square	.008	.366	.003	.218	.013	.463

Note. ** $p < .05$

Touching on the positive evaluations of the effects of liberal democracy, in all three groups of countries it is mostly related to the older respondents, and in the first and the second/third wave democracies they are additionally joined by those with higher incomes. In those societies where the evaluation of the functioning of democracy is higher, this satisfaction is strongly predicted by the material position of respondents, but also their age. On the other hand, in the fourth wave democracies, where evaluations of the functioning of liberal democracy are significantly weaker (see Table 1), income is no longer a significant predictor, while the negative effect of education grows (the more educated respondents are, they tend to develop a more critical view of the implementation of liberal democracy standards). When it comes to the additional (alternative) components of democracy, education now appears as relatively significant predictor in all three groups of countries, while the positive effects of age (for the first and the fourth wave countries) and income (for the first and the second/third wave countries) remain present here as in the models for liberal democracy.

Satisfaction with the current functioning of institutions and institutional trust in all three groups of countries appear as the most important predictors in the positive evaluation of the achievements of liberal and alternative standards. However, in all three groups, subjective importance of democracy now displays a negative effect on the assessment of the implementation of alternative democracy elements. In other words, in all three groups of countries there is a core of citizens whose expectations from democracy are high and maximalist and who are thus also critical towards the way in which it is implemented.

A profile of the critical citizens on how liberal democracy is functioning comprises mostly younger respondents, females, low-income categories, left-leaning citizens who are not satisfied with the current state of affairs and tend to be politically active. This profile is, more or less, similar in all three groups of countries. Citizens critical on how alternative elements of democracy function are also more likely to be younger, well educated, left-leaning, politically active, dissatisfied with the current state of affairs, while, at the same time aware of the importance of democracy.

Conclusions

The aim of this analysis was to test several hypotheses about the prevailing model(s) of democracy among European citizens. As demonstrated, our initial expectations were justified. First of all, in all European countries the overall evaluations of democracy models fell short of the expectations dictated by the ideals citizens developed on democracy. Deteriorating performances of democratic regimes in Europe and elsewhere, a tendency that was particularly noticeable in the last decade, made Europeans more demanding in terms of democratic standards and conceptions, opening the gap between the expectations (views) and the evaluations. What came as a paradox was that the response to democratic backsliding was embodied in the appeals towards more complex and enriched democracy, consolidating democracy both at normative level and at the level of expectations. Citizens want more democracy, but also more of democracy.

Secondly, when conceptualizing democracy, Europeans are inclined to integrate socio-democratic, direct and populist elements, alongside the fundamental liberal arrangements. A number of factors, related to the recent multiple global crises contributed to the fact that citizens reach out to alternative concepts of democracy. The reactions of European governments to the challenges induced by the Great Recession or by the COVID-19 health crisis, for example, certainly allotted to the relatively weaker assessments of both procedural and substantive outcomes of democratic regimes and to the rising attentiveness to additional dimensions of democracy. To this should be added long-term factors, such as the global tendency of a declining trust in liberal democracies due to the concentration of power in the hands of business lobbies or expert elites that were neither elected nor responsive to the needs of the citizens.

We also demonstrated that the length of countries' experience with democracy plays an important role in both conceptualisation of preferable democracy models and in evaluations of their outcomes. (Semi-)peripheral status of post-socialist countries and lower quality of democracies within these societies certainly contributed to the overall modest ranking of the effectiveness of liberal elements of democracy and to their disappointment in how democracy works when compared to the established democracies. Therefore, the acceptance of alternative visions of democracy is on the rise here, while commitment to the basic (liberal) model of representative democracy is still significant, and at the same level as in older democracies. Democratic preferences in these countries, on the other hand, require and deserve additional investigations since, based on our data, we can only indirectly conclude about where they come from.

Finally, post-socialist countries distinguished themselves compared to the older democracies (countries of the first three waves of democratization) in terms of the profile of citizens when it comes to preferred conceptions of democracy and, to a lesser extent, evaluations. In emphasizing the importance of the liberal conception of democracy, the effect of (higher) material position contributes more

significantly within post-socialist countries than in the older democracies, in which the importance of cultural capital (education) and the left ideological orientation tend to be more pronounced. Furthermore, although in all countries the advocates of alternative conceptions of democracy are often less educated, of lower social status and right-wing oriented citizens, differences appeared in terms of their political engagement: namely, in post-socialist countries, those who are less politically active and are satisfied with the current functioning of institutions reach more often for alternative concepts of democracy, while in the older democracies the situation tends to be the opposite. On the other hand, when it comes to evaluations, the profile of critical citizens shows more between-country similarities, but also indicates the congruence between the features of those negatively assessing the outcomes of both basic, liberal, and complementary, alternative, models of democracy. Both in the old and new democracies, younger citizens, those more prone to left political programs, politically engaged and dissatisfied with the current functioning of institutions, form the core of citizens critical of democratic performances.

Conclusively, despite the ongoing processes of political disaffection and disengagement, especially expressed in post-socialist and certain South European countries (Pešić, Birešev & Petrović Trifunović, 2021), a significant part of European citizens still sees democracy as a desirable form of political governance, demonstrating readiness to overcome the fallacies in the outcomes of the basic model with additions that go in the direction of increased participation of citizens in the decision-making process, stronger interventions by the state in order to protect vulnerable social categories, but also in terms of contention against estranged elites who disregard needs of the citizens. These additions are part of the specific historical legacies of individual countries, which further lays the imperative to study alternative components of democracy separately, particularly in the case of the SEE countries, in which they tend to be paired with fragility of democratic institutions.

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Više (od) demokratije: koncepcije i evaluacije demokratije kod građana Evrope

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Sažetak

Društvena i politička teorija prepoznaje nekoliko konjunkturnih, kao i više dugoročnih činilaca koji oblikuju način na koji građani koncipiraju demokratiju i njihova očekivanja u tom pogledu. Polazeći od 10. ciklusa Evropskog društvenog istraživanja, istražujemo kako Evropljani vide i ocenjuju demokratiju, razlikujući liberalni (bazični) model i nekoliko dodatnih, poput socijaldemokratskog, participativnog i populističkog (koje smo u analizi podveli pod alternativni model demokratije). Ispitujemo jesu li liberalni i alternativni modeli demokratije uzajamno komplementarni ili isključujući, kao i koji model preovlađuje, te postoje li odstupanja između normativnih elemenata i ocene učinaka. U radu se proučava uticaj dužine istorijskog iskustva sa demokratijom (operacionalizovane kroz različite talase demokratizacije) na dominantne normative o demokratiji, kao i na evaluacije implementiranih standarda. Na kraju, u poslednjem odeljku, nastojimo da izvedemo zaključke o profilu pristalica liberalnog i alternativnih

modela demokratije, te kritičkim građanima koji vrednuju demokratiju kao ideal, ali iskazuju rezerve u odnosu na njena empirijska ispoljavanja.

Ključne reči: liberalni i alternativni modeli demokratije, koncepcije, evaluacije, Evropa

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