

**Democratic Discontent in a Majoritarian Setting:
What Kind of Democracy do British Citizens Want (but Feel they are not Getting)?**

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Abstract:

Across many western democracies, citizens manifest discontent with their political rulers and institutions. One potential reason for this discontent is citizens' perceptions that their political system is not delivering the kind of democracy they desire. But what kind of democracy do citizens want, how far does the existing political system fail to match these expectations, and what kinds of democratic 'disappointment' arise as a result? This paper explores these issues, focusing on two questions. First, are people's desires, evaluations and patterns of disappointment specific to certain features of democracy, or do those attitudes instead generalise across democratic features? Second, which types of people are disappointed with particular features of democracy, and why? By answering these two questions, we are better placed to understand the nature and causes of citizen disappointment with contemporary democracy. The analysis is conducted on a sample of British citizens, using data from the 2012 European Social Survey.

Keywords:

Democracy; expectations; evaluations; disappointment; political discontent.

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Comments are very welcome!

Citizens in many advanced democracies are discontent with the political system. They distrust their political rulers, demonstrate against many policy edicts and support various anti-system or protest parties. Where the opportunity arises, they may also vote against existing political arrangements, as seen most vividly in the 2016 Brexit referendum. These phenomena raise the question of what is motivating citizen discontent? Most studies seek to explain discontent by reference to shortcomings in government policy delivery, in the behaviour of political actors or in the qualities of decision-making processes. Yet perhaps citizens are also reacting against a political system that fails to match their expectations. Particularly if citizens today have higher expectations of the political system – due to rising education standards, levels of information and methods of engaging with policy-makers – (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Dalton and Welzel, 2016), they may be less contented with political arrangements that have, perhaps, failed to develop in line with those expectations. This suggests that we need to explore the nature of citizens' expectations of the democratic system, along with their evaluations of how well the system delivers.

This paper explores the nature of citizens' democratic demands and evaluations. It explores what people desire of their democratic system, and how they evaluate the system's performance against those desires. It then considers which types of people desire particular outcomes of the democratic system, and evaluate its performance in particular ways. By placing together people's democratic desires and evaluations, I am able to compute measures of unfulfilled desires, where evaluations of performance fall short of people's democratic desires. I term such unfulfilled desires democratic 'disappointment'. Throughout the analysis of democratic desires, evaluations and disappointment, I seek to identify whether people's attitudes are specific to particular features of democracy, or whether those attitudes instead generalise across democratic features. The question underlying the analysis is therefore whether different democratic features attract similar desires, evaluations and levels of disappointment, or whether these attitudes vary between different democratic features. Identifying answers to this question will help us to understand whether citizens are disappointed only with particular aspects of the political system, or whether their disappointment stretches across that system.

The specific system explored in this paper is the British one.¹ The advantage of taking a particular country as a case study is the ability to examine in some detail the nature and determinants of people's democratic attitudes. Comparative studies (Ferrín and Kriesi, 2016) enable us to map and explain cross-national patterns of democratic attitudes, but their generalised perspective often precludes detailed exploration at the individual level. It may well be that, across Europe, democratic attitudes are highly dependent on the specific national contexts; "citizens' views of democracy are endogenous to the political process", in Kriesi and Morlino's (2016: 310) words. Focusing on these contexts may, however, compromise the ability to explore equally important variations between citizens themselves. Since country case studies hold invariant the numerous features on which countries differ, they offer greater leeway for exploring democratic attitudes among individuals.

The data for the analysis are drawn from the sixth wave of the European Social Survey (ESS), which contained a detailed and self-contained module of questions exploring what citizens desire from their democratic system alongside their evaluations of the system's performance. The analysis in this paper proceeds as follows. The first section lays out the

core research questions in greater detail, and identifies what existing studies tell us about citizens' democratic preferences and evaluations. The second section lays out the data on which the analysis rests, notably the various indicators of people's attitudes towards different features of democracy. The third section explores the structure of people's democratic attitudes, focusing on whether these are particular to specific features of the democratic system or instead generalised across those features. The fourth section considers which social groups hold particular democratic attitudes, and for which reasons. The fifth section concludes by considering what the results tell us about people's democratic attitudes in Britain, and the wider implications of these findings.

1. Research questions and literature

The first issue explored in the paper is whether British citizens are disappointed with all aspects of democracy, or only with certain aspects. Political institutions and processes are often said to relate to specific aspects of democracy: to its 'liberal' or 'electoral' or 'social' aspects, say (Held, 2006). Indeed, the survey measures on which this analysis rests were explicitly designed to tap four different elements of democracy, namely its electoral, liberal, social and direct aspects (Hernandez, 2016). If democracy can be sub-divided in this way, a question arises over whether citizens' disappointment with democracy is concentrated within one or two of these elements or, alternatively, extends across each of the elements. If we find that disappointment reflects particular aspects of the democratic system, it not only becomes easier to identify the sources of citizens' grievances, but also to design reforms to the democratic system designed to meet those grievances. If, on the other hand, citizens' grievances are broader in scope – extending across different democratic elements – it becomes trickier to identify democratic reforms likely to assuage the population.

To date, existing studies have provided a somewhat inconclusive answer to the question about the structure of citizens' democratic attitudes. When it comes to preferences for what democracy should look like, various studies have suggested a clear structure to citizens' preferences. Thus, people have been found to have distinctive desires when it comes to electoral and social aspects of democracy (Crow, 2010), or to representative, participatory and expert-based ('stealth') forms of decision-making (Font et al, 2015). Other studies suggest the existence at least of a distinctive 'procedural' or liberal form of democratic preference (Ariely, 2015). Other analysts – using the same ESS data as drawn on in this paper – have found distinctive clusters of people who emphasise either social aspects of democracy (such as economic equality) or else its civic aspects (such as fair elections and minority rights) (Hooghe et al, 2017). Yet other studies that draw on the same ESS data suggest that people's democratic preferences are either unidimensional (Pickel et al, 2016; Quaranta, forthcoming, a, b) or fail to manifest any clear structure (Kaase, 2015).

Compared to people's democratic desires, we know less about the structure of people's evaluations of democracy. In one of the few such studies, Kriesi and Saris (2016) – drawing on the same ESS data as used here – find that, while evaluations of 'liberal', 'social' and 'direct' democratic performance are inter-related, there are also significant differences between performance assessments across the three models. Hence, when it comes to identifying the interlinkages between people's democratic desires and evaluations, we have only limited guidance from previous studies, some of which proffer inconsistent results.

The task of identifying the distinctiveness of people's democratic attitudes is carried over into the second main element of the paper. This involves exploring which types of people hold particular democratic attitudes, and whether these attitudes are also shaped by people's wider views or characteristics. Pursuing this issue enables us to cast further light on the distinctiveness of democratic attitudes. Similar associational patterns between different democratic features would suggest that people's desires and evaluations are essentially similar across different aspects of the democratic system. Yet differences in those patterns would suggest variations in which types of people are disappointed with different features of democracy and for which reasons. The question of which social groups are particularly likely to hold particular democratic desires, evaluations and patterns of disappointment is addressed more fully in Section 4.

2. Data and measures

The data on which this study draws derive from a specially-designed module of questions fielded on round 6 of the ESS. The British part of the survey was conducted between September 2012 and February 2013. The sample was achieved through a stratified three-stage probability design, delivering a total of 2,286 participants, representing a response rate of 53 per cent (European Social Survey, 2016). To overcome any errors arising from sampling deficiencies and variations in survey non-response, the data used to present the distribution of attitudes (Fig 1) and the relations between attitudes (Figs 3 and 4, and Appendix 3) employ a post-stratification weight.

The relevant ESS module of questions related to how important various democratic features are seen to be and how far these features are realised in the respondent's country. The ESS began by asking respondents to indicate what importance they attached to the existence of each feature "for democracy in general", with answers recorded on a 0 (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important) scale. Respondents were then asked to indicate the extent to which they judged each feature to apply in their country, with answers recorded on a 0 (does not apply at all) to 10 (applies completely) scale. Posing questions on desires and evaluations across many democratic features does not appear to have been confusing or unduly taxing for the ESS samples. Across the twenty nine European countries covered by the ESS, the proportion of people answering 'don't know' across the full module of questions on democracy was just over 4 per cent, compared to 1.5 per cent for questions on other topics fielded on previous rounds of the ESS (Hernandez, 2016: 51). Assessments of democratic performance attracted more 'don't know' responses (4.8 per cent on average) than judgements of the importance of democratic qualities (3.9 per cent) (Gomez and Palacios, 2016: 169). Inevitably, the level of 'don't know' responses varied between desires and perceptions on different democratic features (ibid: 170).² Yet overall, while people appear to encounter somewhat more difficulty in answering questions about democracy than questions on other policy issues, the levels of non-comprehension are not substantial.³

The democratic features I draw on in this analysis are shown in Table 1. On the left are the broad models of democracy to which each of the individual features might be thought to relate to. On the right are the particular measures covered by the survey questions.⁴

TABLE 1: Indicators used in analysis

Hypothesised democratic model	Survey item
Electoral	Free and fair national elections Political parties offer clear alternatives Governments are punished when they have done a bad job Government explains its decisions to voters
Liberal	Opposition parties are free to criticise the government Media are free to criticise the government Media provide citizens with reliable information Rights of minority groups are protected Courts treat everyone the same
Social	Government protects citizens against poverty Government reduces differences in income levels
Direct	Citizens have say on policy issues via referendums

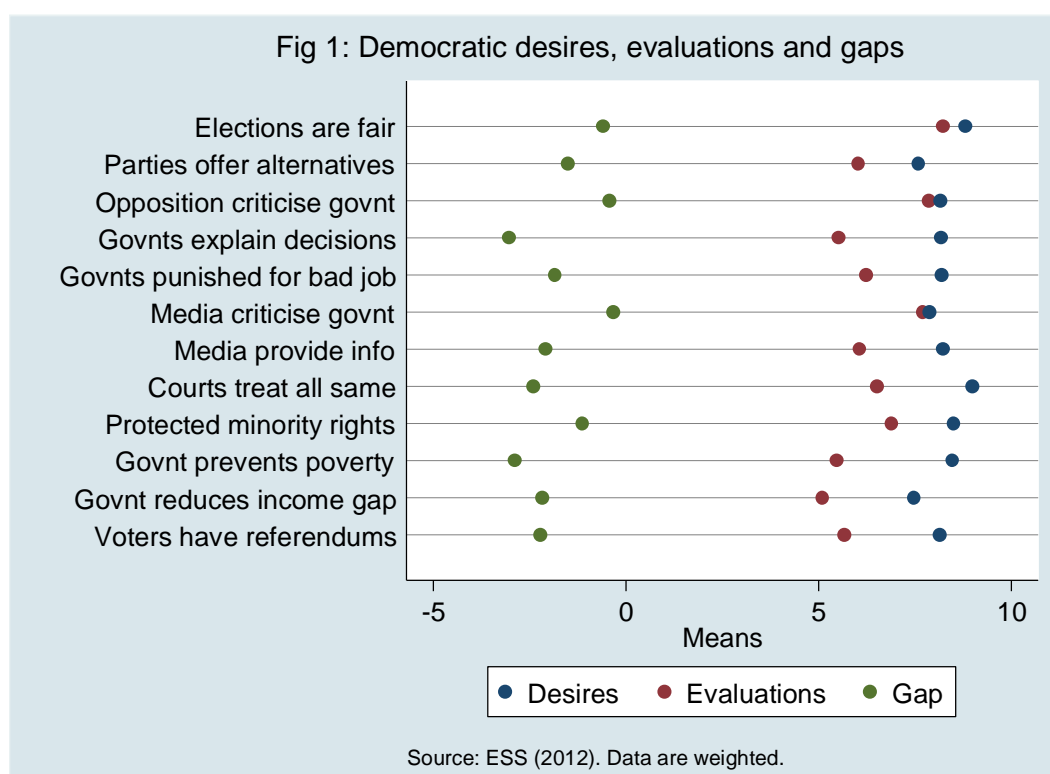
To measure people's disappointment with different features of democracy, I calculate the gap between the importance people attach to the particular feature and whether they think the feature applies in Britain. A simple approach that subtracts assessed importance from perceived performance will yield gaps at different combinations of importance and perceptions. Thus, for example, modest performance against a high expectation will yield the same overall gap as very poor performance against a modest expectation. Yet the two identical gap scores may conceal different levels of disappointment among citizens that may arise if they experience a gap on a democratic feature which they deem highly important compared to a gap on a feature deemed less important. To capture this effect of differentially important features, I follow Wessels (2016) and Butt and Fitzgerald (2014) in computing a weighted gap between desires and performance, which is then recalibrated into the original 0-10 scale by virtue of dividing the final score by 10:

$$\text{Gap} = |\text{performance} - \text{desires}| * |\text{desires}| / 10$$

To illustrate, I compute the disappointment measure for people's desires and evaluations of democracy in general. In response to the question "How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?" (0=not at all important, 10=extremely important), the mean levels of importance was 8.37 (SD=2.05). In response to the subsequent question "How democratic do you think Britain is overall?" (0=not at all democratic, 10=completely democratic), the mean evaluation was 6.66 (SD=2.09). Combined, these figures yield a negative mean balance of -1.71 (SD=1.98). Evaluations of the state of democracy in Britain thus fall some way behind the importance attached to democratic governance. Computing a weighted gap between evaluations and importance shows that for 70 per cent of the population, evaluations of democracy fall short of desires, while for just 9 per cent do evaluations exceed desires; for the remaining 19 per cent, evaluations exactly match desires.

3. The nature and structure of democratic attitudes

When it comes to the importance people attach to the twelve identified features of democracy, we unsurprisingly find desires to be high; moreover, they are consistently so. On a 0 (not at all important) to 10 (extremely important) scale, mean desires range from 7.5-7.6 (for government reducing income differentials and parties offering clear alternatives) to 8.8-9.0 (for elections being fair and courts treating everyone the same) (Fig 1). The democratic features deemed important by British citizens closely mirror those deemed important by citizens in other European countries, namely the rule of law, free and fair elections, government explanations for its actions and government protection against poverty (Hernandez, 2016).



As can also be seen in Fig 1, perceptions of how well these democratic features are realised in Britain fall below people's desires. Gauging delivery on an identical 0 (does not apply at all) to 10 (applies completely) scale, we find mean perceptions are lowest when it comes to government reducing income differentials (mean score of 5.1), protecting citizens against poverty and explaining its decisions (mean=5.5), along with giving citizens a say via referendum (mean=5.7). Only in relation to free and fair elections (mean=8.2) and opportunities for opposition party (mean=7.9) and media (mean=7.7) criticism of government are perceptions highly positive. Again, we should note that the distribution of scores when it comes to perceptions of democratic performance is similar in Britain to that across other European countries (Gomez and Palacios, 2016).

Given the high performance perceptions relating to electoral fairness and opportunities for government criticism, these areas attract only modest negative gaps between people's democratic desires and their perceptions (Fig 1). By contrast, where performance is judged

more harshly, the gap between desires and perceptions is greater. This applies in particular to governments explaining their decisions, protecting citizens against poverty and reducing income differences. There is also a large gap when it comes to citizens' ability to have a say in decisions via referendums. This is not surprising, since referendums are not an established feature of the British political system. More surprising – and perhaps worrying – is the large gap between the priority that people place on equal treatment by the courts and their perceptions of how far this feature is realised.

Overall, then, the gap between what people desire from the democratic system and what they feel it delivers is not limited to one or two particular aspects of that system. There are substantial disjunctures between people's desires and their perceptions of performance across the 'electoral', 'liberal', 'social' and 'direct' aspects of democracy (see also Butt and Fitzgerald, 2014). In citizens' eyes, Britain's democratic system appears to be falling short on a number of fronts, not on any particular front. We should note that this is a feature across Europe more widely, where gaps between desires and perceptions have been identified across a similarly wide set of democratic features (Gomez and Palacios, 2016: 164).

Having identified the descriptive nature of people's desires and assessments on a series of democratic criteria, I now turn to consider how these desires and assessments relate to one another. My concern here is to identify similarities and differences in the desires people have for various features of democracy and in their assessments of democratic performance. These similarities and differences can either be assumed *ex ante* and tested for among the population. An assumed latent structure to attitudes is the path followed by Kriesi et al (2016) in their study of citizens' democratic desires across 29 European countries. The alternative is not to assume any particular structure to people's attitudes, but to explore more inductively what latent patterns emerge from their recorded beliefs. This paper follows the latter route; instead of testing for an assumed structure among people's views on democracy, it identifies patterns that emerge from those views.

Given the uniformly high importance ratings given by British citizens to the different democratic features, we would anticipate finding some similarities across people's democratic desires. At the European level, it has been found that people's desires for 'electoral' and 'liberal' aspects of democracy are strongly inter-related. Thus, for example, items measuring the importance attached to the role of elections correlate highly with items tapping the importance of the equitable application of legal rules. Overall, these items fall on a single underlying scale, which can be thought of as tapping people's attitudes towards 'liberal democracy' (Kriesi et al, 2016). Although the importance attached to liberal democratic practices differs from the importance attached to practices ensuring social justice and direct democracy, there is also considerable overlap in people's support for these models: the liberal democracy and social justice scales correlate at 0.64, while the liberal democracy scale and direct democracy item correlate at 0.61 (*ibid*: 81). Even when it comes to evaluations of democratic performance, there are overlaps in how far people perceive 'liberal', 'social' and 'direct' democracy to be delivered in their country. Evaluations of 'liberal' democracy correlate at 0.68 with evaluations of 'social' democracy, while the correlation with 'direct' democracy is only marginally weaker, at 0.57 (Kriesi and Saris, 2016: 181).

We therefore have strong hints that there may be inter-linkages among British citizens' desires for democracy and among their assessments of democratic performance. To identify the structure of attitudes to democracy among our sample, I employ Mokken scale analysis. This is a data reduction technique that allows the identification of one or more constructs that underlie responses to different survey items. For the current analysis, we assume that people's attitudes towards different aspects of democracy are not either random or else wholly differentiated. Instead, those attitudes are likely to cluster, depending on the unobserved or latent trait that defines them. Mokken scale analysis is particularly valuable when we believe that people's attitudes towards a phenomenon – such as democracy – show some form of hierarchy or ordering. In this case, this would mean that evaluations of certain democratic features are more common or popular than attitudes towards other features. When it comes to democratic desires, say, people are likely to place a premium on certain 'basic' democratic conditions, but less importance on other conditions. People who desire those other conditions are likely also to desire the basic conditions; but people who favour the basic conditions may not also desire the other conditions.

If the structure or dimensionality of attitudes are tested on the assumption that survey items are equally popular, this may lead analysts to (erroneously) conclude that people's responses to the relevant survey items are not homogenous and instead fall on distinctive dimensions or scales. The common use of factor analytical techniques – which assume the items share equal frequency distributions – thus risks over-dimensionalising the structure of people's attitudes. Techniques which assume a hierarchical structure to the data, rather than a 'parallel' structure in which items share a frequency distribution, are more prone to (correctly) identify the unidimensional structure of a set of items (Van Schuur, 2003, 2011).

For a given set of items, Mokken scale analysis works by first calculating the overall scalability of those items. If the scalability of the individual items and the cumulative scale falls below a minimum level (coefficient of homogeneity for item i (H_i) and scale s (H_s) = ≤ 0.35), the analysis then searches for a scale among a subset of items. It does this by first taking the two items that form the best scale (based on the coefficient of homogeneity for items i and j ; H_{ij}), then adding other individual items to that scale if they meet minimum criteria (such as $H_i = \geq 0.30$). Once items can no longer be added to this scale, a second scale can be searched for, and so on. By the end, the analysis yields a set of one or more scales, plus any individual items which do not fit any of the identified scales.

Applying a Mokken scale analysis to expressed democratic preferences among British citizens reveals a reasonably strong single scale ($H_s=0.44$) underlying the twelve individual features, with all coefficients for individual items being >0.33 (full results appear in Appendix 1). British citizens thus have a singular preference for different features of the democratic system in that, in the main, their desires extend across those features rather than applying to particular features. We can therefore refer to people's generalised 'democratic preferences', as opposed to their preferences for specific aspects of the democratic system.

When it comes to people's assessments of how well those features are delivered, we find rather more distinction among people's attitudes. A Mokken scale analysis shows the twelve items form a reasonably strong single scale ($H_s=0.42$), although the coefficients for the items on free/fair elections and media freedom to criticise the government fall below the 0.3 level,

while that for opposition party criticism of the government only just exceeds 0.3 (see Appendix 1). The analysis suggests the existence of two scales covering democratic performance: the first, a scale ($H_s=0.51$) of nine items, the second a scale ($H_s=0.56$) of three items covering free/fair elections and opposition party and media criticism of government. This scale clearly captures evaluations of the accountability aspects of democracy, and the resulting scale is labelled as such. The first scale is broader, and is simply labelled as democracy.

When it comes to the gap between people's democratic desires and their perceptions, we would anticipate some distinctions among citizens' attitudes; the results in Fig 1 showed significant variation in the size of the gap between different democratic features. Drawing on those results, we might anticipate some similarity in attitudes when it comes to opposition and media freedom to criticise the government (since the gap on these two features is low), and similar assessments when it comes to governments explaining themselves and acting against poverty (where the gap is high). A Mokken scale analysis of the weighted gap measure of disappointment corroborates this supposition. The full twelve items yield a weak overall scale ($H_s=0.16$), indicating no unidimensionality in people's democratic disappointment. Instead, three distinct scales are identified: the first scale covers opposition party and media criticism of government ($H_s=0.48$), the second scale covers governments explaining their actions, being punished for mistakes and acting against poverty ($H_s=0.35$) and the third scale covers fair elections and equal treatment by the courts ($H_s=0.35$) (Appendix 1). No other item fits onto one of these three scales or forms an additional scale.

Summarising the analysis, across the British population we appear to have a singular set of democratic desires, a twofold set of democratic evaluations, and a variegated pattern of democratic disappointment. We draw on this information in the subsequent section, which seeks to explain people's democratic attitudes. To do this, we form scales that capture our empirically-determined structure to people's attitudes towards the various democratic features. Ideally, we would be able to form identical scales covering democratic desires, evaluations and gaps, so as to explore the effects of a battery of explanatory variables on each. However, as we have seen, the structure of peoples' democratic desires and evaluations is very different to that of their disappointment. This means constructing a different set of scales to tap the former and the latter. However, the structure of people's democratic desires and their democratic evaluations do not differ that much. Here, then, we are empirically justified in constructing scales for each that tap the same democratic features. This enables us to explore the effects of the same explanatory factors on people's democratic desires and their evaluations.

4. Explaining democratic disappointment

This section considers who is disappointed with the various features of democracy in Britain, and for what reasons. The overarching question explored in this section is whether different types of people are disappointed with different aspects of democracy, and for different reasons, or whether the causes of disappointment are more evenly distributed across different democratic features. To borrow a term from studies on public opinion

(Krosnick, 1990), are there multiple democratically disappointed ‘publics’, or instead is there a singular disappointed ‘public’?

It is a tricky task to identify which groups of people are likely to experience a gap between their democratic desires and their democratic perceptions. It is simpler to identify which groups are likely to hold particularly high democratic desires, and which groups are likely to judge democratic performance in a particularly critical way. When it comes to desires, we would anticipate more extensive demands for democracy among better educated citizens than among their lesser educated counterparts (Miller et al, 1997; Kotzian, 2011; Butt and Fitzgerald, 2014; Quaranta, forthcoming, a). This should apply in particular to certain democratic features. Thus, we would expect higher levels of cognitive resources to translate into preferences for direct citizen participation (Bowler et al, 2007); education is also associated with tolerance towards minority groups (Bobo and Licari, 1989), and so we would expect more educated groups to hold stronger desires for rights protection than less educated groups. We would also anticipate differences in democratic desires by age, with younger cohorts more likely to favour direct forms of democracy, but older cohorts more favourable to electoral or liberal forms of democracy (as some studies have indeed found; Butt and Fitzgerald, 2014; Ceka and Magalhães, 2016).

People holding left-wing values are more likely to hold extensive democratic desires – encompassing social and direct features in particular – than people holding right-wing values (Butt and Fitzgerald, 2014; Ceka and Magalhães, 2016). In addition, people who gain materially from the political system are more likely to favour maintaining its basic features, while people who lose out materially are more likely to favour changing those features (Ceka and Magalhaes, 2016). In Britain, this means that people in higher income groups are more likely to favour liberal or electoral aspects of democracy, while people in lower income groups are more likely to favour social aspects of democracy, for example government action to address citizen poverty and income differences. We would also expect people holding liberal values to favour rights-protecting aspects of democracy, as would people from minority groups within the population (Wenzel et al, 2000).

When it comes to democratic evaluations, we might anticipate lower evaluations among people who have gained less from the existing system, such as those in low income groups. Evaluations might also be shaped by people’s attitudes. In particular, we might surmise a role for assessments of government performance; negative assessments of the performance of the economy or health service might contribute towards negative judgements about the functioning of democratic practices. At the same time, such policy assessments should not affect people’s democratic desires; there is no reason to link perceptions of policy performance with the type of democracy desired by citizens. By contrast, other factors may shape both democratic desires and evaluations. Thus, people who distrust political actors and institutions are likely to favour new modes of political decision-making – in particular direct forms of democracy – and also to evaluate negatively existing decision modes – in particular electoral and liberal forms of democracy (Hooghe et al, 2017). We might also anticipate that people who ‘win’ electorally will be more likely to favour the existing democratic system and less likely to desire alternative democratic processes; they are also more likely to assess democratic performance in a favourable light. Electoral losers, by

contrast, will be likely to desire alternative democratic processes and to evaluate democratic performance in an unfavourable way.

These hypothesised relationships are summarised in Table 2. Most of these relationships relate to the kind of democracy people desire, with some relating to their evaluations of democratic performance. Where we have anticipated effects on both desires and evaluations, we are also able to hypothesise a likely effect on democratic disappointment. For other features, however, the impact on disappointment remains, *ex ante*, unclear.

TABLE 2: Hypothesised determinants of democratic attitudes

Feature	Anticipated impact on democratic:		
	(a) Desires	(b) Evaluations	(c) Disappointment
Attitudes			
Ideology	Desires for participation and social features among those with left ideology		
Liberal values	Desire for rights among liberals.		
Political trust	Desire for participation among low trusters.	Lower evaluations among low trusters.	Higher among low trusters, particularly on liberal features.
Policy performance	(No effect)	Higher evaluations among those judging policy performance positively	Higher among those with positive performance assessments
Demographic status			
Minority status	Desire for rights among minorities.	-	-
Electoral winner/loser status	Desires for liberal among winners	Higher among winners	Lower among winners
Education	Higher desires among educated, in particular for participation and rights protection	-	-
Age	Desire for participation among young. Desire for liberal among old.	-	-
Income	Desire for social among poor; desire for liberal among rich	Negative evaluations among poor; positive evaluations among rich	Higher among poor; lower among rich (except on liberal features)

The various explanatory variables are measured through the following indicators (variable codings and descriptive statistics can be found in Appendix 3):

Ideology: self-placement on 0-10 left-right scale.

Liberal values: responses to a survey item that asks whether gay men and lesbians should be free to live their own life as they wish

Political trust: summed scale of trust in five institutions: parliament, the legal system, the police, politicians and political parties ($H_s=0.60$).

Policy performance: summed scale of satisfaction with the economy, how well the government is doing its job, the state of education and the state of the health service ($H_s=0.41$).

Minority status: responses to a survey item asking whether respondent would describe themselves as part of a group that is discriminated against.⁶

Electoral winner/loser: reported vote at last national election, plus party respondent feels closest to.⁷

Education: age when completed FT education

Age: Age categories. Also age squared, since previous analyses have shown that democratic desires fit a curvilinear pattern with respect to age, with young and older people holding lower democratic desires than people in the middle of the age range (Ceka and Magalhaes, 2016).

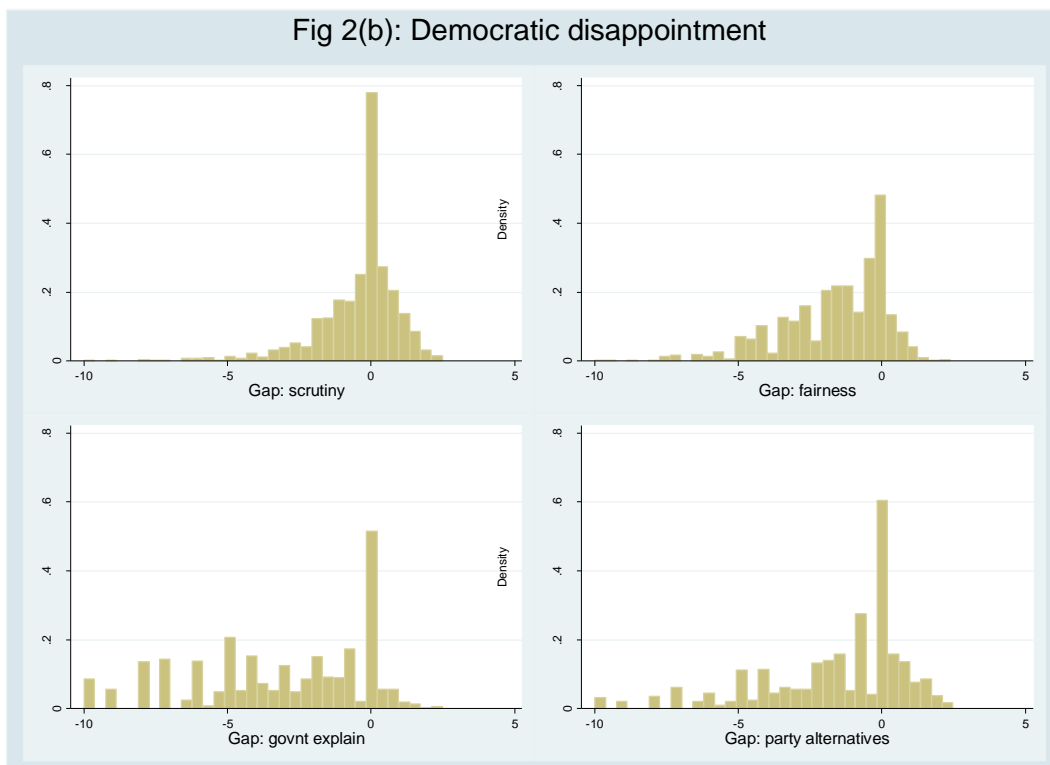
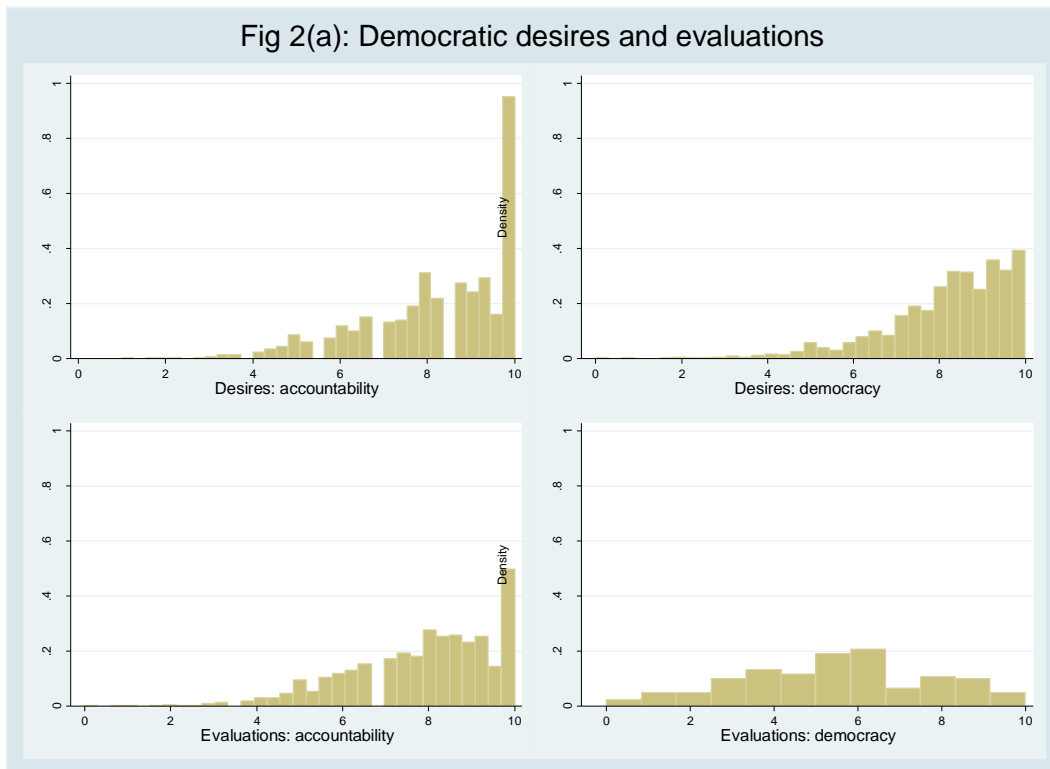
Income: household total income.

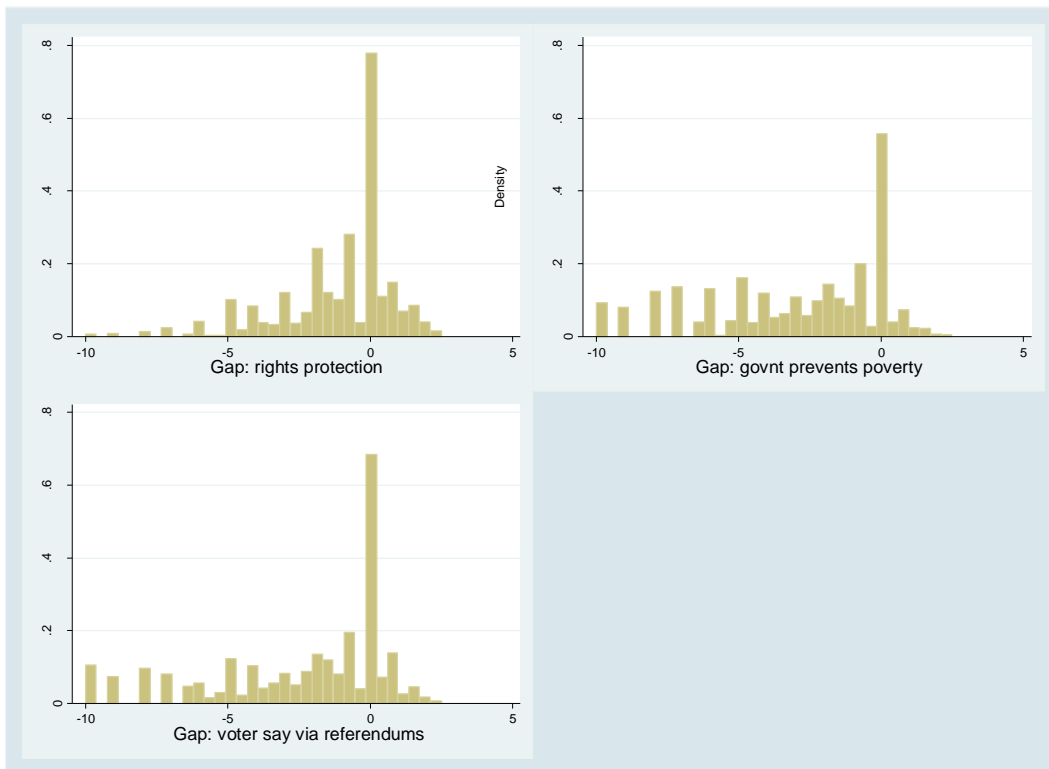
The democratic attitudes to be explained cover three groups. Of principal interest are different forms of democratic disappointment. Here, as noted above, we find a fairly fragmented structure, with disappointment showing little consistency of distribution across the different democratic features. There is some consistency to the distribution of attitudes when it comes to media and opposition criticism of government, and thus for these measures a two-item additive scale is formed to capture the 'scrutiny' aspect of democracy. There is also some consistency when it comes to free and fair elections and equal treatment by the courts, and so a similar two-item scale is produced to capture 'fairness'. The Mokken scale analysis identified one additional scale, covering the items relating to government explanation, punishment for mistakes and action against poverty. However, it is unclear what links the first two features with the third, and so the scale lacks much conceptual clarity.⁸ Given this, I ignore this scale, instead exploring these democratic features through single-item measures. All in all, I select five features for assessment via single-item measures: accountability (government explanation for its decisions), party representation (party offering choices to voters), minority safeguards (protection of minority rights), economic equality (government action to reduce poverty) and direct democracy (citizen voice via referendums).⁹ I omit from the models the items tapping punishment of government, the informational role of the media and government activity on income differentials.¹⁰

When it comes to democratic desires and evaluations, I noted above the fairly similar structures that emerged from the Mokken scale analysis. Given this, I form two scales tapping democratic desires and two for evaluations, each comprising the same democratic features. The first scale comprises the three items on free/fair elections and opposition party and media criticism of government (scale labelled 'accountability'), while the second scale comprises the remaining nine democratic features (labelled 'democracy').

Descriptive data for each of the scales and items are shown graphically in Figs 2a and 2b. Fig 2a shows the high levels of democratic desires, with the distributions skewed to the right-

hand side of the graph. Evaluations of performance on the accountability features of democracy (free elections, opposition and media criticism of government) are fairly positive, and hence the gap for scrutiny (Fig 2b) is quite evenly distributed around the value of 0, the point where evaluations match desires. However, the evaluations for the other democratic features (Fig 2a) are less positive and so, aside from scrutiny, these democratic features attract more negatively-skewed gaps (Fig 2b).



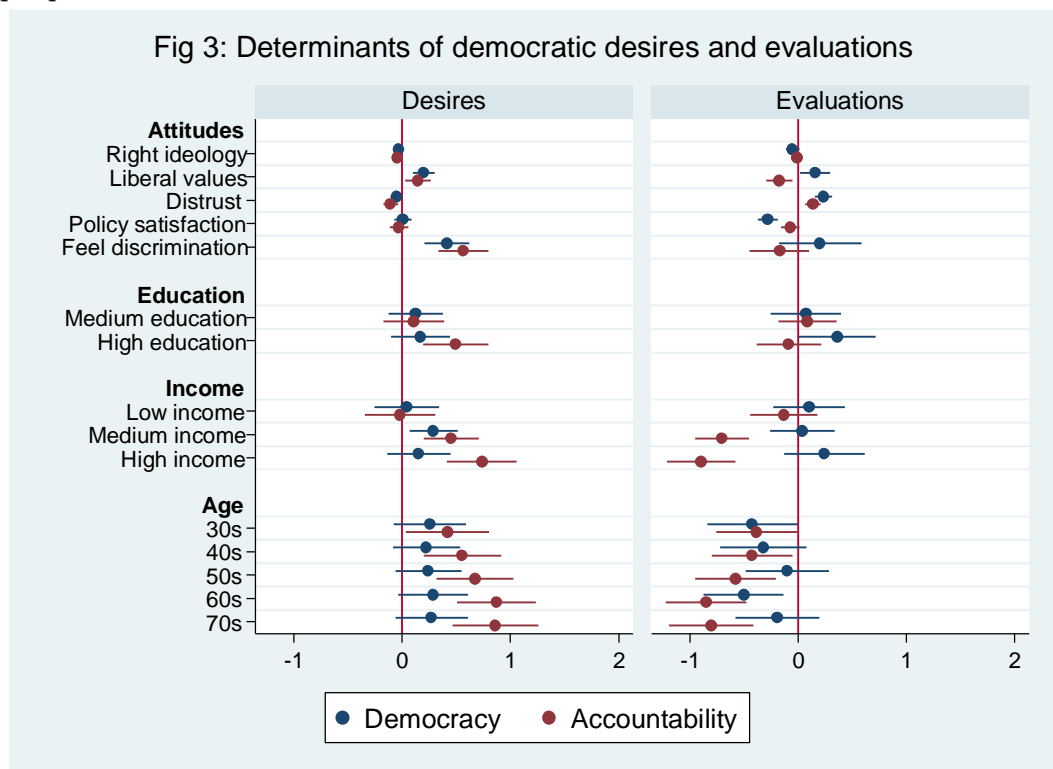


If I were only concerned to identify levels and types of democratic disappointment among groups, I could employ an approach focusing on the classification of individuals, such as cluster analysis (see, for example, Hooghe et al, 2017). Yet since I am also concerned to identify the reasons for different types of democratic disappointment, I also need to take account of attitudes held across the population. For this reason, I employ a regression-based approach to the analysis. As the variables I am seeking to explain (the various forms of democratic disappointment, desires and evaluations) approximate interval-level measures, the regression models are estimated using ordinary least squares. The dependent variables are ordered in such a way that they capture the effects of the explanatory variables on democratic disappointment or the factors that contribute to disappointment (namely high desires and low evaluations).

The results of these models can be found in Appendix 2; graphical summaries are shown in Figs 3 and 4 (which show regression coefficients and 95 per cent confidence intervals). I start by considering the factors associated with people's desires for democracy, moving on to the factors associated with their democratic evaluations, before finally considering the factors associated with democratic disappointment.

When it comes to democratic desires, we saw earlier that people's preferences were generally high across different democratic features. Hence it is not very surprising that, when it comes to general democratic desires, we find few differences by social group or political attitude (Fig 3, left panel). Rather more variation appears when we focus on desires for the 'accountability' features of democracy (which, recall, involve free elections and media and opposition party criticism of government). Here, the results show significantly higher desires among older people than younger people, among the well-educated than the poorly-educated, among the rich than the poor, among those who feel discriminated against

and among those of a liberal disposition (as measured by support for gay rights). People's evaluations of how well government is performing have no impact on their democratic desires. All these findings are in line with our original suppositions. The only surprising result is that people who distrust existing political actors and institutions hold lower desires for the accountability features of democracy than people with higher levels of trust. We might have supposed distrusters to favour any opportunities to criticise government, but perhaps this feature is, by virtue of its perceived current prevalence (see Fig 1), both celebrated and desired more by people who trust existing political arrangements than by people who do not.

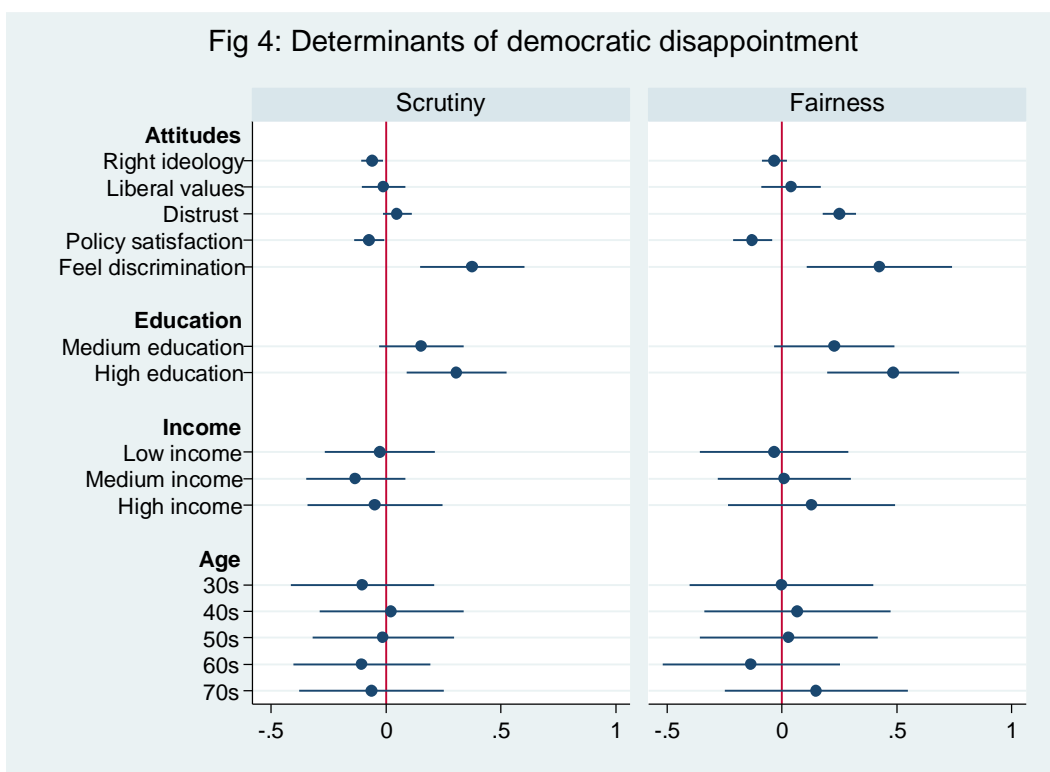


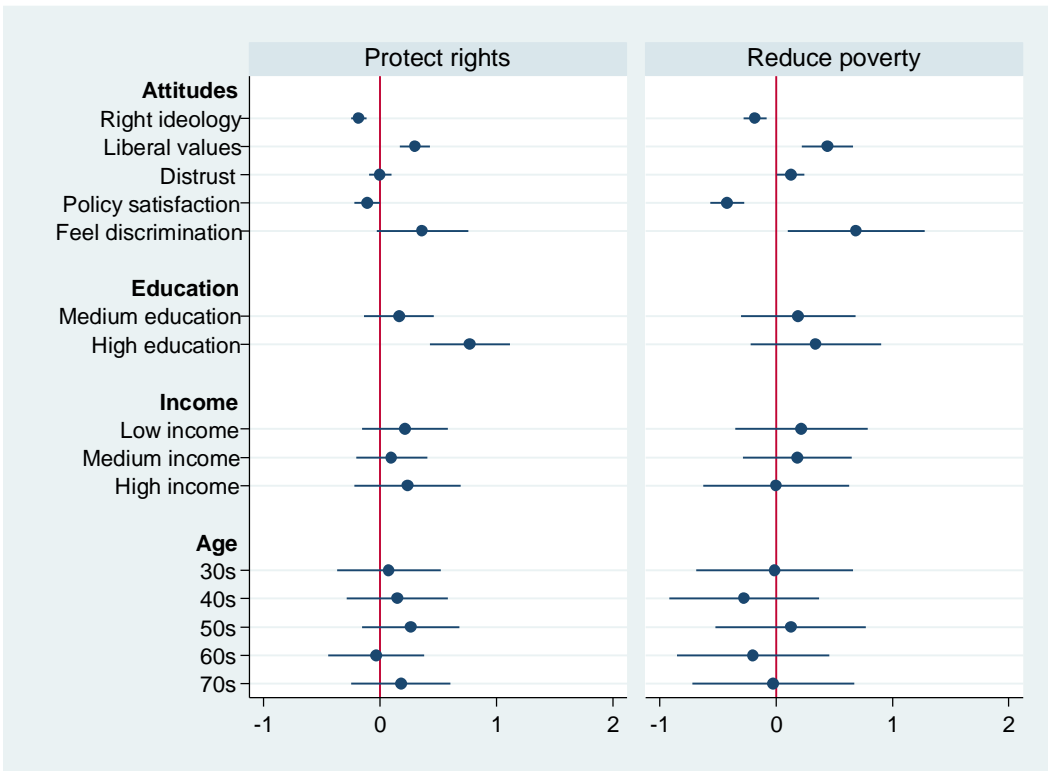
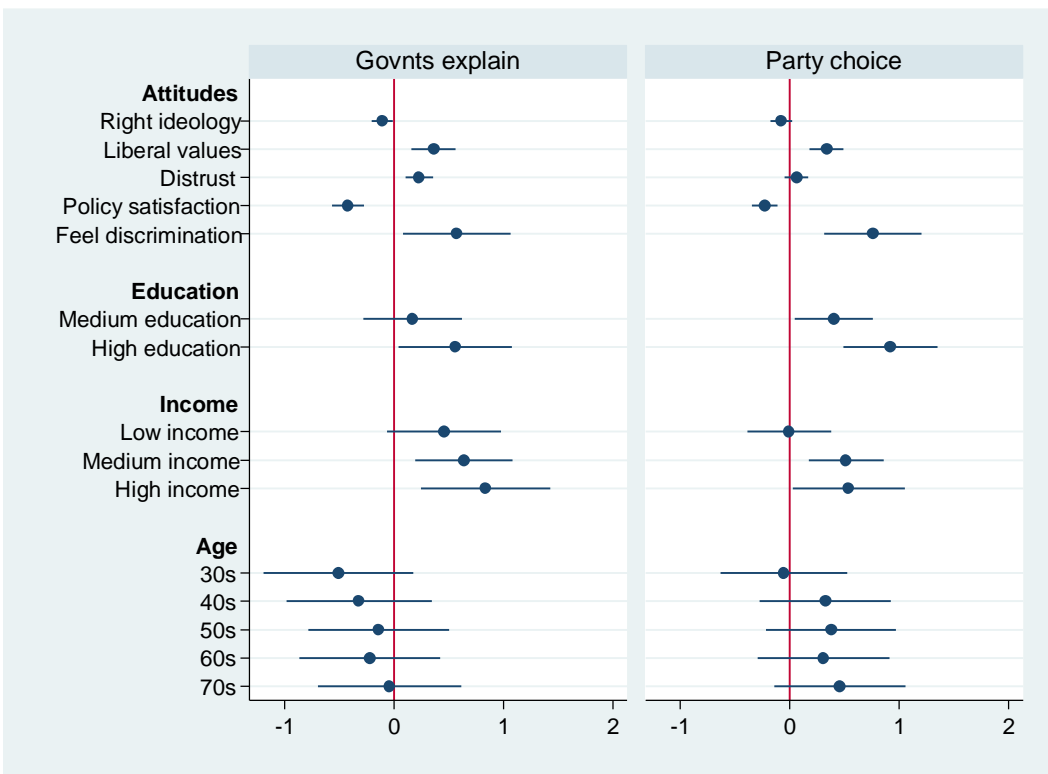
As can be seen from the right panel in Fig 3, however, people who distrust the existing political system evaluate democratic performance more negatively than their trusting counterparts (recall that evaluations are coded negatively, so that high values equate to poor evaluations and low values to good evaluations). People taking a negative view of public service delivery are also more negative when it comes to evaluating democratic performance. Yet people who feel discriminated against do not take a similar dim view of democratic performance. Nor do people from lower income groups relative to their more affluent counterparts. Only when it comes to the accountability features of democracy are those from higher income groups noticeably more favourable towards the existing system than their poorer counterparts. The same is the case with older people relative to younger people.

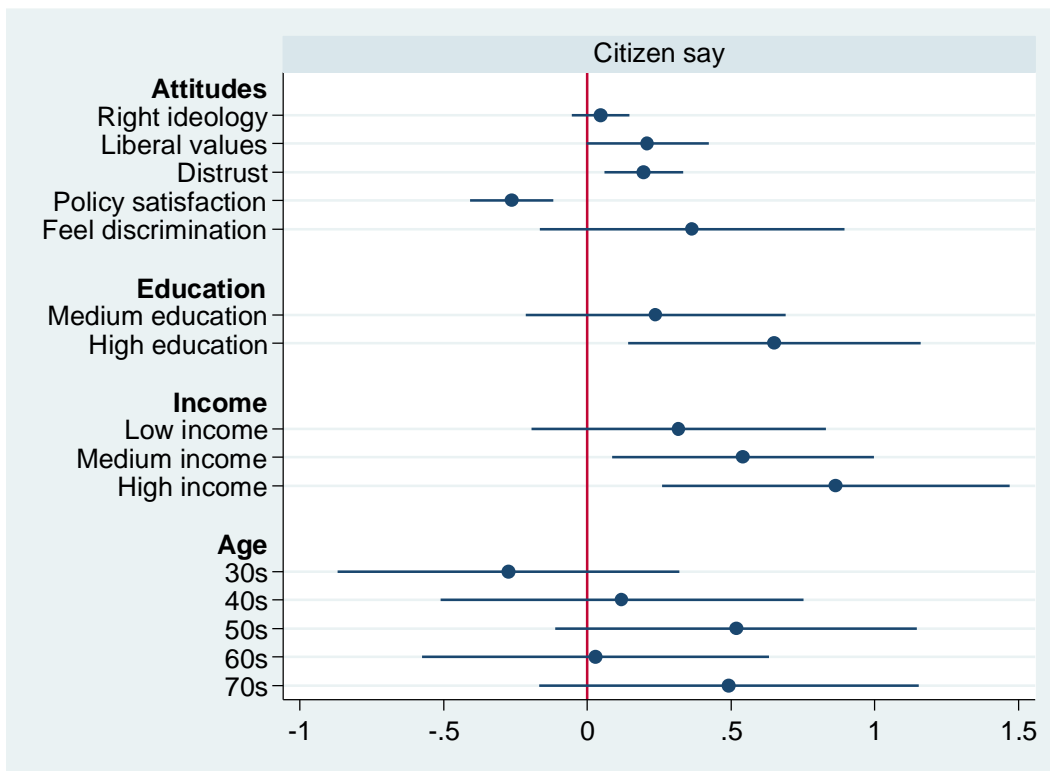
Hence, when it comes to democratic performance, there is some resilience within the political system. This is manifested most clearly among people who either see themselves as discriminated against or who form part of a disadvantaged group by virtue of their lowly income position. In neither case do people within these groups judge democratic performance more negatively than their more 'advantaged' counterparts. Losing out from

the political system does not necessarily translate into more critical attitudes towards the democratic performance of that system.

When it comes to disappointment with various features of democracy (Fig 4), it is not surprising to find no significant effects of age. After all, different age groups showed no variation in general democratic desires and evaluations (Fig 3) and, while older people were found to hold stronger desires for the accountability aspects of democracy, these were balanced by more positive evaluations of performance. There is an association between people's wealth (measured by income) and disappointment, but contrary to expectations it is the more affluent who tend to be disappointed, not the poor.¹¹ Yet this association only appears in disappointment with certain aspects of democracy, namely over whether governments explain their actions, whether parties provide a choice to voters and whether citizens have opportunities for a say in policy decisions. Strikingly, though, income is not associated with disappointment when it comes to whether governments alleviate poverty. A fairly similar picture arises with education, where we find disappointment to be higher among the well-educated than among the poorly-educated. However, this relationship is more consistent across democratic features than is the case with income. Overall, then, democratic disappointment is higher among people holding resources – both financial and cognitive – compared to their less resourced counterparts.







When it comes to people's attitudes, we find higher rates of disappointment among people holding left-wing values than among right-wingers, particularly when it comes to the protection of rights and government reduction of poverty. Disappointment is also higher among people holding liberal values (measured by support for gay rights¹²); moreover, their disappointment covers not only the protection of individual rights but also aspects of 'social' democracy, such as government action on poverty. Disappointment is even more widespread among people who feel discriminated against except, surprisingly, in relation to the protection of individual rights (the relevant coefficient here is positive, but only significant at the 10 per cent level).¹³ People who distrust politicians are also more disappointed with democracy, largely as a result of their low evaluations of democratic performance (see Fig 3, right panel).

The models run thus far do not include a term distinguishing electoral 'winners' and 'losers'. The reason for this is that construction of a variable to measure electoral status is problematic. As noted in endnote 7, only 69 per cent among our sample reported having voted at the previous general election, in 2010. A further 8 per cent reported not voting but feeling closer to one of the parties. Thus, for 77 per cent of our sample we have data on party support or feeling of closeness, which we can use to distinguish between people who 'won' at the election and those who 'lost'. These figures mean, however, that we lack data on almost one quarter of our sample, and this significantly reduces the number of cases in our models, opening up the risks of identifying misleading (ie. unrepresentative) results and of failing to detect associations between variables. For this reason, the electoral winner/loser term is omitted from the regression models. However, to gain a sense of whether this factor is important in shaping democratic desires, evaluations and disappointment, I included it in a separate set of models (run on a concomitantly reduced sample). The results show that electoral winning/losing has no statistically significant impact on people's democratic desires. When it comes to evaluations of democratic performance, electoral winners (ie.

Conservative and Liberal Democrat voters and supporters) appraise the accountability aspect of democracy more positively than do electoral losers (ie. Labour and other party voters and supporters), although when it comes to democratic performance as a whole, the electoral losers are more positive (although the relevant coefficient is only significant at the 10 per cent level). When it comes to explaining disappointment, electoral winning/losing is unimportant for five of the seven democratic features. Only for 'party choice' and 'citizen say' is winner/loser status a significant predictor, and in both cases levels of disappointment are higher among the electoral winners, not the losers.

Conclusion

We know that people are distrustful of politicians. We suspect that part of this distrust lies in the frustration that arises when people compare how the political system performs with what they would like it to deliver. (The relationship between democratic disappointment and various outcome variables like trust remains to be analysed.) Yet how widespread is such democratic disappointment? In particular, is disappointment generic across the various features of democracy, or is it more specific to particular features?

The evidence presented here suggests that disappointment is more general than specific. When it comes to the way disappointment is distributed, we find large gaps between people's desires and evaluations across the 'electoral', 'liberal', 'social' and 'direct' aspects of democracy. Granted, when it comes to the structure of people's democratic disappointment, we find little consistency in the distribution of people's attitudes. Yet this does not seem to indicate a real distinctiveness in levels of disappointment. This is best seen by considering the associations between various forms of disappointment and people's social groupings and attitudes. While the modelling highlighted some variations in disappointment with different democratic features among social groups, the impact of people's attitudes and values on disappointment tended to be largely consistent across the different democratic features. In other words, people manifesting a particular attitude or value tended to be disappointed (or not) across the different democratic features rather than with just one or two specific features. Across the population, then, there appears to be more consistency than distinctiveness when it comes to disappointment with democracy. To return to the public opinion terminology, we have a predominantly disappointed *public* rather than disappointed *publics*. This presumably complicates the task of policy-makers, since their response to disappointed citizens appears to necessitate improved performance across the political system – to better align what citizens experience with what they desire – rather than in only one or two particular areas.

APPENDIX 1: Results of the Mokken scale analyses

The scales for evaluations and disappointment are formed from running a Mokken scale analysis on all twelve items. The scales for desires are formed from running Mokken scale analyses on subsets of the twelve items (hence the number of cases included in each analysis varies). Figures reported in the tables represent homogeneity (H) coefficients for each item (Hi ... Hj) and for the scale as a whole (Hs).

(a) Desires

	All items	Democracy	Accountability
Free elections	0.45		0.51
Parties offer alternatives	0.41	0.40	
Opposition criticise	0.46		0.63
Governments explain	0.53	0.56	
Governments punished	0.39	0.39	
Media criticise	0.41		0.58
Media provide information	0.48	0.45	
Courts treat equally	0.50	0.50	
Minority rights protected	0.44	0.42	
Government acts on poverty	0.49	0.53	
Government reduces inequality	0.33	0.38	
Voters have say	0.41	0.44	
Scale coefficient (Hs)	0.44	0.45	0.57
N (unweighted)	1941	1952	2133

(b) Evaluations

	All items	Democracy	Accountability
Free elections	0.29		0.47
Parties offer alternatives	0.31	0.47	
Opposition criticise	0.43		0.61
Governments explain	0.54	0.63	
Governments punished	0.44	0.48	
Media criticise	0.28		0.58
Media provide information	0.45	0.49	
Courts treat equally	0.49	0.55	
Minority rights protected	0.38	0.37	
Government acts on poverty	0.50	0.58	
Government reduces inequality	0.47	0.56	
Voters have say	0.42	0.51	
Scale coefficient (Hs)	0.42	0.51	0.56
N (unweighted)	1869	1869	1869

(c) Disappointment

	All items	Scrutiny	Government	Fairness
Free elections	0.16			0.35
Parties offer alternatives	0.20			
Opposition criticise	0.15	0.48		
Governments explain	0.20		0.36	
Governments punished	0.12		0.31	
Media criticise	0.17	0.48		
Media provide information	0.15			
Courts treat equally	0.19			0.35
Minority rights protected	0.16			
Government acts on poverty	0.19		0.39	
Government reduces inequality	0.12			
Voters have say	0.14			
Scale coefficient (Hs)	0.16	0.48	0.35	0.35
N (unweighted)	1778	1778	1778	1778

The Mokken scale analysis identified no further scales for the disappointment measures.

APPENDIX 2: Regression models predicting (a) democratic desires, (b) democratic evaluations and (c) democratic disappointment

	(a) Desires				(b) Evaluations			
	Democracy		Accountability		Democracy		Accountability	
Ideology: right-wing	-0.03	(.02)	-0.04	(.03)	-0.05	(.03)	-0.01	(.03)
Liberal: favour gay rights	0.20	(.05)**	0.15	(.06)*	0.16	(.07)*	-0.18	(.06)**
Distrust of politicians	-0.05	(.03)	-0.10	(.03)**	0.24	(.04)**	0.14	(.04)**
Positive policy evaluations	0.01	(.04)	-0.03	(.04)	-0.28	(.05)**	-0.07	(.04)
Feel discriminated against	0.41	(.10)**	0.57	(.12)**	0.20	(.19)	-0.17	(.14)
Age finished education (ref: <16 years)								
16-18 years	0.13	(.13)	0.11	(.14)	0.07	(.17)	0.09	(.14)
>19 years	0.17	(.14)	0.50	(.15)**	0.36	(.18)*	-0.09	(.15)
Household income (<£13,000)								
£13-20,000	0.04	(.15)	-0.02	(.17)	0.10	(.17)	-0.13	(.16)
£20-54,000	0.29	(.11)**	0.46	(.13)**	0.04	(.15)	-0.70	(.13)**
>£54,000	0.16	(.15)	0.74	(.16)**	0.24	(.19)	-0.89	(.16)**
Age group (<29 years)								
30s	0.26	(.17)	0.42	(.20)*	-0.42	(.21)*	-0.38	(.16)*
40s	0.23	(.16)	0.56	(.18)**	-0.32	(.20)	-0.42	(.19)*
50s	0.24	(.16)	0.67	(.18)**	-0.10	(.19)	-0.58	(.19)**
60s	0.29	(.16)	0.87	(.19)**	-0.50	(.19)**	-0.85	(.19)**
>70	0.27	(.17)	0.86	(.20)**	-0.19	(.20)	-0.80	(.20)**
Constant	7.27	(.50)**	7.53	(.55)**	3.84	(.64)**	3.34	(.52)**
F	4.53		10.56		15.74		8.87	
Prob > F	0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	
Adjusted R ²	0.05		0.11		0.18		0.12	
N (weighted)	1442		1452		1418		1455	

	(c) Disappointment													
	Scrutiny		Fairness		Gov explain		Party choice		Protect rights		Govt poverty		Citizen say	
Ideology: right-wing	-0.06	(.02)*	-0.03	(.03)	-0.10	(.05)*	-0.08	(.05)	-0.18	(.03)**	-0.18	(.05)**	0.05	(.05)
Liberal: favour gay rights	-0.01	(.05)	0.04	(.07)	0.36	(.10)**	0.34	(.08)**	0.30	(.07)**	0.44	(.11)**	0.21	(.11)
Distrust of politicians	0.05	(.03)	0.25	(.04)**	0.23	(.06)**	0.06	(.05)	0.00	(.05)	0.13	(.06)*	0.20	(.07)**
Positive policy evaluations	-0.07	(.03)*	-0.13	(.04)**	-0.42	(.07)**	-0.23	(.06)**	-0.11	(.06)*	-0.42	(.07)**	-0.26	(.07)**
Feel discriminated against	0.37	(.12)**	0.42	(.16)**	0.57	(.25)*	0.76	(.23)**	0.36	(.20)	0.69	(.30)*	0.36	(.27)
Education (ref: <16 years)														
16-18 years	0.15	(.09)	0.23	(.13)	0.17	(.23)	0.40	(.18)*	0.16	(.15)	0.19	(.25)	0.24	(.23)
>19 years	0.31	(.11)**	0.48	(.15)**	0.56	(.26)*	0.92	(.22)**	0.77	(.18)**	0.34	(.29)	0.65	(.26)*
Income (<£13,000)														
£13-20,000	-0.03	(.12)	0.03	(.17)	0.46	(.27)	-0.01	(.20)	0.21	(.19)	0.22	(.29)	0.32	(.26)
£20-54,000	-0.13	(.11)	0.01	(.15)	0.64	(.23)**	0.52	(.18)**	0.10	(.16)	0.18	(.24)	0.54	(.23)*
>£54,000	-0.05	(.15)	0.13	(.19)	0.84	(.30)**	0.54	(.26)*	0.23	(.23)	-0.00	(.32)	0.86	(.30)**
Age group (<29 years)														
30s	-0.10	(.16)	-0.00	(.20)	-0.51	(.35)	-0.05	(.29)	0.08	(.23)	-0.01	(.34)	-0.27	(.30)
40s	0.02	(.16)	0.07	(.21)	-0.32	(.34)	0.32	(.31)	0.15	(.22)	-0.27	(.33)	0.12	(.32)
50s	-0.01	(.16)	0.03	(.20)	-0.14	(.33)	0.38	(.30)	0.26	(.21)	0.13	(.33)	0.52	(.32)
60s	-0.10	(.15)	-0.13	(.20)	-0.22	(.33)	0.31	(.31)	-0.03	(.21)	-0.20	(.33)	0.03	(.31)
>70	-0.06	(.16)	0.15	(.20)	-0.04	(.33)	0.46	(.31)	0.18	(.22)	-0.02	(.36)	0.49	(.34)
Constant	4.23	(.40)**	3.95	(.53)**	5.94	(.89)**	3.70	(.68)**	4.32	(.64)**	6.70	(.92)**	4.05	(.90)**
F	3.57		11.30		13.61		8.93		9.45		11.05		6.14	
Prob > F	0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00		0.00	
Adjusted R ²	0.05		0.14		0.15		0.10		0.10		0.13		0.07	
N (weighted)	1,451		1,428		1,450		1,424		1,417		1,451		1,428	

Figures show unstandardized regression coefficients and associated standard errors. Where categorical variables are used, the reference categories are shown in brackets.

* p<0.05, **p<0.01

Source: *European Social Survey 2012*

APPENDIX 3: Core measures – coding and descriptive statistics

Feature	Variable	Coding/range	Mean	SD	N (weighted)
Dependent variables					
(a) Disappointment					
Accountability	Media/opposition criticism of government	-10 to +2.5	-0.41	1.41	2,100
Fairness	Fair elections/courts treat people equally	-10 to +2.4	-1.52	1.79	2,074
Openness	Government explains its decisions	-10 to +2.5	-3.12	2.99	2,118
Representation	Parties offer alternatives to voters	-10 to +2.5	-1.53	2.48	2,076
Minority protection	Rights of minority groups are protected	-10 to +2.5	-1.16	2.01	2,050
Economic equality	Government protects citizens against poverty	-10 to +2.5	-2.94	3.05	2,133
Direct democracy	Citizens have a say in decisions through referendums	-10 to +2.5	-2.33	3.05	2,038
(b) Desires					
Democracy	Nine items	0 to 10	8.18	1.47	2,094
Accountability	Three items	1 to 10	8.24	1.68	2,134
(c) Evaluations					
Democracy	Nine items	0 to 10	5.87	2.00	2,030
Accountability	Three items	0 to 10	7.89	1.70	2,124
Independent variables					
Ideology	Left-right scale	0=left, 10=right	5.04	1.82	1,913
Liberal values	Gay men/lesbians free to lead life as they wish	0=disagree/neither 1=agree/strongly agree	0.84	0.36	2,245
Trust	Summed scale of trust in five institutions	0=high trust 10=low trust	5.23	1.82	2,125
Policy performance	Summed scale of satisfaction with economy, health, education and government	0=low satisfaction 10=high satisfaction	5.02	1.60	2,239
Minority status	Are you a member of a group discriminated against?	0=no, 1=yes	0.12	0.32	2,274

Electoral winner or loser	Reported vote plus party feel close to	Voted for/feel close to: 0=Conservatives/Liberal Democrats 1=Labour/other party	1,609
Education	Age when completed FT education	1=<16 years 2=17-18 years 3=>18 years	2,266
Age	Age group	1=under 29 2=30s 3=40s 4=50s 5=60s 6=above 70	2,270
Income	Estimated annual household income	1=up to c£13,000 2=c£13,000-c£20,000 3=c£20,000-c£54,000 4=c£54,000 upwards	1,734

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¹ I use 'British' as a familiar descriptor, although the sample of research participants extends to Northern Ireland and thus the geographical coverage is of the United Kingdom.

² Among the measures drawn on in this analysis, the highest level of don't know responses when it came to democratic desires was for parties to offer clear alternatives (4.0 per cent don't know), and for democratic evaluations for the protection of minorities' rights (6.9 per cent) (Gomez and Palacios, 2016: 170). Overall, levels of 'don't know' responses tended to be higher among the British sample than the European average (compare Ferrin and Kriesi, 2016: tables A3.1 and A8.1 with Table 8.5), but not markedly so.

³ Beyond the issue of non-comprehension, an additional area of concern may be whether people can be asked about democratic preferences in generalised terms. People may not hold such preferences independent of contextual factors such as the nature of the policy issue being decided or how strongly people feel about the issue (Wojcieszak, 2014).

⁴ I do not include all the measures included in the ESS battery of questions on democracy. I exclude measures relating to people's discussion of politics, immigrants' voting rights and consultation with other European governments. These measures either fail to relate to democratic institutions or procedures or else fail to relate clearly to any of the identified models of democracy.

⁵ Homogeneity represents the degree of error (namely violations of the items' cumulative ordering) experienced in the data as compared to the degree of error that is expected given the distributions on each item.

⁶ This item was followed by a question asking about the grounds for discrimination; however, given that only 270 respondents in total felt discriminated against, I have avoided further sub-division. By a small margin, the most common reason for feeling discrimination was religion.

⁷ Many respondents (69 per cent of our sample) reported not voting, so using this measure alone would reduce the number of cases in our models. I therefore supplemented these cases with a measure of people who reported not voting but feeling close to a particular party.

⁸ The item on government action on poverty shows the strongest link with the latent scale, suggesting it cannot simply be removed.

⁹ The computation of the disappointment/gap measure $([P-E]*E)$ means that negative values equate to high disappointment ($E > P$), while positive values equate to low disappointment ($E < P$). In order that the models capture disappointment – rather than its obverse, elation – I reverse the order of the disappointment variables. Hence the disappointment variables used in the regression models (see

Appendix 2) run from low values (=elation) to high values (=disappointment), although the descriptive data presented in Fig 2 and Appendix 3 retain the original coding (ie. negative values=disappointment, positive values=elation). In the regression models, I also reverse the order of the evaluation variables, so that low values equate to high evaluated performance, and high values to low evaluated performance.

¹⁰ These items are omitted as they appear close to other, selected, items. The item on government punishment is omitted as this appears to capture an accountability feature close to the item on government explanation. The item on media information is omitted as this appears close to the scale on scrutiny. The item on income differentials is omitted as this appears close to the item on government action to reduce poverty.

¹¹ I checked this finding by employing a different, subjective, measure of wealth, namely feelings about household income. Contrasting those who reported finding things difficult on their household income with people who reported living comfortably yielded similarly directed relationships. The subjective wealth measure, however, yielded fewer significant relationships with democratic attitudes than the objective income measure.

¹² I also tested the effects of an alternative measure of liberal values contained in the ESS, namely upholding the rights of all to express their views irrespective of the extremity of these opinions. In all cases, this measure produced a weaker relationship with democratic attitudes than support for gay rights.

¹³ I also tested the effects of respondents self-designating as a member of a minority ethnic group, in place of feeling discriminated against. However, the latter measure tended to have a stronger effect on democratic disappointment than the former.