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Social Capital and Quality of Democracy Revisited in a Comparative Perspective

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ABSTRACT:
To what extent, if any, does social capital contribute to the democratic formation of citizens' attitudes? Is it a major influence among several others or just a minor one when it comes to forming political attitudes? This paper provides an empirical answer to these questions, drawing from the 2010 *European Social Survey* questionnaire[1]. Its first section includes a discussion about the quality of democracy in the culturalist approach of Political Science. The following section addresses the operationalization of the concept of quality of democracy and its main dimensions, with particular attention to *social accountability*.

Introduction

Since the defeat of true socialism, the historical opposition between the two major political-ideological systems of the 20th century disappeared. In light of this event, research on democracy experienced an evolution regarding its own focus. After World War II, the comparison between democracies inevitably reflected a world of ideological warfare where the core issue was democratic stability. Comparative studies such as those conducted by Almond and Verba (1963) sought to identify the explicative factors of differences among stable and unstable democracies.

Democracy subsequently consolidated over a few peaceful decades, and today, we look at it with disenchanted eyes and find dysfunctions and deficiencies to which we show less tolerance when compared to pre-war generations. When reminded of the horrors caused by the enemies of democracy, citizens of Western democracies prove to be less prone to tolerating its 'wrinkles'.

Here, we find a *paradox*: the subject of the quality of democracy rises as the 20th century comes to a close, within a context of substantial optimism regarding the spatial spreading of democracy. The end of the century saw the rise of the oppressed and the voiceless as they brought down the Berlin wall, thus destroying the symbol of this two-block division of the world: On one side, we had the Federal Republic of Germany, supported by capitalist countries led by the USA; on the other, there was the German Democratic Republic bloc, formed by the socialist countries that sympathized with the Soviet totalitarian regime; dismantled the apartheid system in South Africa, which deprived Blacks of their citizenship and promoted segregation in the access to housing, healthcare, education and other public services; brought democracy back to the Philippines and created a world-wide wave of democratization.

During the expansion of this wave during the 1990s, there was also an increase in optimism regarding democratic processes, to the point that some authors claimed that Western-style liberal representative democracy defined the 'end of history' and eventually all of the world's nations would become democratic (Fukuyama 1992). Such sudden optimism was immediately criticized theoretically, with its main opposition coming from an article published in *Foreign Affairs* magazine (1993) and later turned into a book entitled *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (1996). Samuel Huntington, the author, actually sought to respond to Fukuyama.

It then seeks to relate the concepts of social accountability as a pivotal dimension of the quality of democracy and social capital as formulated by Robert Putnam. We used a multivariate regression analysis to test our hypotheses, which focus on whether the components that make up social capital have a differentiated impact on the formation of political attitudes, i.e. on the degree of satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions in old and new democracies.

KEYWORDS:
Quality of Democracy, Social Accountability, Social Capital, Satisfaction with Democracy, Trust in Political Institutions.

To Huntington, the post-Cold War period would be characterized not by the inevitable conversion to a Western liberal democratic model but, instead, by a replacement of the ideological conflict (communism *vs.* capitalism) by a clash of civilizations, which is essentially a cultural conflict. Huntington's main arguments were based on the idea of aversion from non-Western civilizations to Western universalism and on the conflict between the Islamic and the non-Islamic worlds. The 9/11 attacks on Washington and New York were consistent with this thesis.

On the other hand, the facts also show the vulnerabilities of the progressive spatial diffusion of Western democracy and of the thesis supporting its eventual universalization, especially in the 1990s. Why? Precisely because one of the most striking times in the 'late period' of the Third Wave has seen the unprecedented growth in the number of regimes that are neither clearly democratic nor conventionally authoritarian (Schedler 2002, 2006). Some of the 'new democracies' that fall into this 'political grey zone... between full-fledged democracy and outright dictatorship' are in real electoral democracies, despite being 'feckless' and functioning poorly. Many also fall below the threshold of electoral democracy and are likely to remain there for a very long time. If we use a very demanding standard of democracy, encompassing not only democratic elections but solid protection of civil liberties under a strong rule of law, then the proportion of intermediate regimes truly swells because so many of the new 'democracies' of the Third Wave are 'illiberal' (Zakaria 1997, 2002). This is the reason many authors consider it more useful and beneficial to adopt an approach where both *electoral democracy* in the minimalist terms used by Schumpeter, Huntington and others, and *liberal democracy* as a form of representative democracy where elected representatives who hold power are limited by a constitution that emphasizes protecting individual liberties are considered (Moller 2006; Platner 1998). Equality and the rights of minorities, as well as equality before the law, can be separately measured. Such constitutional rights, also called liberal rights, are guaranteed through various controlled institutions and statutory laws. As political scientist Philippe Schmitter has pointed out: 'Liberalism, either as a conception of political liberty, or as a doctrine about economic policy, may have coincided with the rise of democracy. But it has never been immutably or unambiguously linked to its practice" (cit. in Zakaria 1997). The truth is that the definition of democracy is far from being unanimously stabilized. The more democracy has adopted a universally recognized eulogistic meaning, the more it suffers from a 'conceptual dissipation', becoming the most indefinite tag of its kind.

Quality of democracy and the culturalist approach

On the other hand, quality of democracy appears as a theme at the end of the 20th century in advanced industrial democracies, in a context marked also by an increase in authors, journalists and other observers that not only question themselves but also rise up against the status of consolidated democracies. The high degree of mistrust that citizens feel towards the main political institutions becomes evident and the same happens with national parliaments and political parties. Together with growing cynicism and scepticism regarding political actors – common to all elected public office incumbents – these are phenomena that may damage social consensus and have an effect over the actual functioning of democracy (Pharr and Putnam 2000; Torcal and Montero 2006). This may or may not translate into more or less radical protests against the democratic political system. Furthermore, Western democracies have recently faced an extended financial and economic crisis, which deeply questions and jeopardizes illusory beliefs over the ability of globalized capitalism to regulate itself.

Research on political culture has claimed from the start that, in order for democracies to persist, they need public support from the masses (Almond and Verba 1963). However, recent evidence shows a difference in the nature of democratic political culture. While support for democracy as a regime became generalized (to the point where Claus Offe considers that normative support for the democratic regime became sheer 'commonplace', many citizens of advanced industrial democracies became increasingly dissatisfied with the way it actually functions (Klingemann 1999; Dalton and Welzel 2013). Regarding this discrepancy, Pippa Norris sees the rise of the 'critical citizen' (1999; 2011) while Dalton speaks of the affirmation of the 'sophisticated citizen' and Torcal and Montero refer to it as the arrival of the 'dissatisfied citizen'. In sum, while in the last two decades of the 20th century there has been an expansion of a variety of hybrid regimes opposed to the Western democratic model at the international level, at the national level what is at stake is the transition between two types of political culture identified by Dalton and Wezel (2013), that is, from a 'allegiant participant culture' to a 'assertive participant culture'.

Based on Inglehart's theory of post-materialism (1977), Dalton and Welzel (2013) propose a new model of assertive political culture that seeks to incorporate types of attitudes and behaviours opposed to important assumptions of the 'allegiant model'. Citizens, without contesting the democratic legitimacy of the political system, challenge the actual functioning of democracy, of its main institutions and

political actors, thus becoming more critical, dissatisfied and demanding about the processes and outputs of democracy.

Our approach focuses on the debate about the quality of democracy, always bearing in mind that there are two interpretations – pessimistic and optimistic – for this transition between two types of culture. According to some scholars, the affirmation of these new democrats with 'adjectives' constitutes proof that democracy is undergoing a crisis (Macedo et al. 2005; Wolfe 2006; Zakaria 2003). Some of them claim that excessive public demands overload governments, making it very difficult or even impossible for them to respond. Others underline that it is the discrepancy between the growth and quality of public demand and the failure of government responses that make up the basis of citizens' dissatisfaction with democracy, its processes, institutions and actors (Norris 2011).

From this perspective, current democrats with 'adjectives' ('critical, 'sophisticated' or 'dissatisfied') and their more demanding and assertive behaviour regarding the real functioning of the democratic system, could represent a historic advancement in the progress of democracy to fulfil its ideals, without jeopardizing its legitimacy. This occurs due to the fact that they are far from being a potential source of tension, turbulence and delegitimisation. These new democrats are a healthy source of pressure over those who occupy elective public offices, in a sense that it increases democratic standards and political performance, thus expanding opportunities to reform both institutional and procedural dimensions of the democratic system that are not functioning as well as they should. And it is precisely here that the current heated discussion around the quality of democracy comes in.

Quality of Democracy and its Dimensions

As previously explained, in the last thirty years and with the beginning of the 'third democratization wave' (Huntington 1991), the subject of democracy and democratization of political regimes has been at the forefront of the agenda of social sciences, especially that of Political Science and Comparative Politics. The causes and consequences of changing from autocratic to democratic regimes and the factors that allow for the sustainability of democracy were, and still are, the subject of a significant amount of academic writing. However, while a growing number of nations have started to choose their political leaders through free and fair elections, researchers have also focused on the need to find out what differentiates democracies from one another.

On the other hand, the decline in electoral participation, the increase in electoral volatility and the decrease in feelings of party identification that brings instability to electoral results (Dalton and Wattenberg 2000; Franklin 2004; Lane and Ersson 2007), the progressive loss of citizens' trust in political institutions and the quality of the political elite (Warren 1999; Newton 2000; Norris 1999; Pharr and Putnam 2000; Dalton 2004, 2008) as well as the mechanisms of power accountability are all recurring themes in the speech of political scientists, journalists and pundits. Looking at this set of factors, there are good reasons to say that there is a notion, albeit a diffuse one, that the economic, social, and cultural bases that made the appearance, stability and consolidation of democracy possible in industrialized countries, have suffered mutations in the last three decades that are so important that they might be affecting the most basic aspects of the relationship between citizens and political power.

The quality of the functioning of democracies has become an increasingly relevant topic (O'Donnell et al. 2004; Diamond and Morlino 2005). Several recent studies and international projects have pursued the elaboration of different types of dimensions and indicators, their goal being to measure the quality of democracies (Coppedge and Reinicke 1990; Gastil 1990). However, what they achieve in terms of extent (the capacity to compare a large number of countries) entails a cost in terms of depth of analysis for every democratic regime, as well as in the capacity to make subtle yet relevant distinctions between more developed democracies.

Due to these factors, it is natural for some identical projects to be developed at a national level. The most widely known project was started by David Beetham from the *Human Rights Centre* of Essex University: the *Democratic Audit*, the scope of which was to audit the 'health' of democracy in the UK (Weir and Beetham, 1999). The same model has already been employed in other countries such as Canada, Italy, New Zealand, Australia and Portugal. Our data collection methodology consists of interviews, statements by experts and objective data regarding, for instance, law-making, court functioning and electoral participation, among other aspects.

In this article we will look at the quality of democracy from a subjective dimension, assuming that, in accordance with the culturalist perspective, which states that low levels of citizen support can pose serious problems for democratic systems because both the functioning and the maintenance of democratic polities are closely connected to what and how citizens think about democratic governance. Therefore, our starting point is precisely understanding that democracies, in order

to subsist, need the public support of the masses (Almond And Verba 1963; Dalton and Welzel 2013; Klingemann 2013). However, we need to find an operational definition for 'quality of democracy'. Still, before we address that point, we must put forward some preliminary considerations.

In some research studies proposed by several scholars (but also by national and international organizations) regarding the health of contemporary democracies, several dimensions of analysis were identified and must be taken into account. We would also like to underline that the theme about the quality of democracy includes the intersection between values and empirical dimensions. In truth, any distinction between both must be made prior to the identification of the different dimensions of analysis used to analyse the quality of democracy. Nevertheless, we can begin by the minimal or procedural definitions of democracy in a Schumpeterian sense (Schumpeter 1942). 'All regimes which distinguish themselves by the real assurance of political participation by male and female population and the possibility of dissent and opposition' are democracies (Dahl 1971). Some definitions propose a few normative elements in a more explicit way. According to Sartori 'the regime which generates a polyarchy open to competition in the electoral market, giving power to the people and, specifically, imposes *the responsiveness* of incumbents before voters [is a democracy] (Sartori, 1987, p. 108). Therefore, it doesn't mention solely participation and dissent, but also competition among a plurality of individuals inside the representative mechanism, as well as the ability to give a satisfactory answer to society's demands (*responsiveness*) as a direct consequence of competing for votes.

The relationship between these two dimensions of the concept of democracy (normative and empirical) is governed by a delicate balance. There is still a controversial issue regarding the limits to which representatives can provide answers to the demands of those they represent without harming their own independent responsibility and decisional autonomy. In a similar fashion, the risks related to the abuse of the 'room for manoeuver' by incumbents are recurrent and may fall into arbitrariness and impunity.

Democracy working concept

In his empirical research over the quality of democracy, which we follow in this article, Leonardo Morlino (2003) distinguishes between five dimensions of analysis. The first two refer to the *procedural aspects* of democracy: a) *the rule of law* and

b) the *accountability*. The third dimension is related to *results*: c) *responsiveness*, which is the capacity of institutions to offer satisfactory answers to the demands from citizens and civil society. Lastly, there are two *substantive dimensions* of democracy: d) full respect for civil, political and social rights; e) the full realization of political, social and economic equality in its two distinguishable states: *formal equality* before the law, removing all discrimination, and *substantial equality,* which removes the obstacles which limit social and economic equality and, therefore, the 'full development of the person and effective participation of all citizens in the political, social and economic organization of the country'.

In this perspective, which is also ours, *accountability* is a crucial dimension in defining the quality of democracy, insofar as it allows an actual control of political institutions by social actors, surpassing a merely formal definition of citizenship while implying certain conditions in the structuring of society. In other words, 'the existence of a public dimension characterized by pluralism and independence (Morlino 2003, p. 236).

Accountability corresponds not only to political, electoral and inter-institutional responsibility, but also to *accountability* understood as *social responsibility*. Therefore, *social accountability* is related to control and assessment actions that come from civil society, actions taken by parties outside of Parliament, by the mass media, by other intermediate associations and by citizens (Schedler 1999; Schmitter 1999; Mainwering 2003; Diamond and Morlino 2005; Helms 2005).

The hypothesis of an advantageous *hybridizing* between social capital research and studies on the quality of democracy can now be outlined with greater precision, since social capital and social accountability are more than just semantically related. In our proposed interpretation, an effective *social accountability*, which is essential to the quality of democracy, empirically presupposes the existence of a social capital with the characteristics named by Putnam (1993): norms of reciprocity, trust and associative networks that favour actions undertaken by common agreement.

In fact, a quality democracy assumes the existence of 'quality political demand' associated with the existence of a high level of social capital. In order to achieve a balance, albeit difficult and fragile, between accountability and responsiveness, demands from civil society to political institutions need to be expressed in an understandable manner since social accountability is also related to institutional transparency and the ability to communicate with citizens in an intelligible man-

ner. This is why society's demands must not only be coherent but also aggregated, synthesized and formulated in terms that are acceptable to its main agents.

Social Capital and the Quality of Democracy

This section seeks to establish a connection between social capital, its elements and social accountability as an important quality in the dimensions of analysis of democracy. In other words, the activities to control the political system carried out by civil society, by its intermediate organizations and by citizens. These control efforts – or the request for social responsibility from whoever rules – will become more demanding the higher the social capital level of a society becomes. This will be necessarily reflected in the results of responsiveness (cf. Table 1). This is, in essence, Robert Putnam's main argument in *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), when he establishes the relationship between the level of social capital of a community and the performance of its political institutions.

In recovering a thought tradition that finds one of its most famous representatives in Tocqueville, Putnam considers participation in civil society organizations one of the most effective antidotes against the diffusion of opportunist behaviours and subsequent shelter in the private sector. Nevertheless, when specifying the distinctive characteristics of civicness, a conceptual novelty appears: civic culture depends on its high level of social capital. According to Putnam, social capital is: the trust, the rules of sociability and the networks of civic associativism that improve the efficiency of social organization by promoting initiatives by mutual agreement.

The institutional performance of Italian regions is assessed through a heterogeneous unit of measurement: besides the elements that concern the political process, the content of political decisions is also taken into account. Based on these units, the differences in institutional performance in favour of northern and central regions depend, according to Putnam, on the different levels of social capital and the origins of such inequality must be sought in the historical evolution of the peninsula. According to Putnam's work, we can state that social capital is: *a)* a construct through which the researcher will analyse heterogeneous aspects of a society (from moral norms to social organizations); *b)* a concept related to collectiveness and not to single individuals; *c)* a collective resource which can make reaching certain goals easier; *d)* a morally neutral notion. Nevertheless, Putnam shows an interest in the contents of social capital that feed the democratic *ethos*, understood as the availability of political participation; e) a metaphorical expres-

sion which, as a reference to Hirschmann (1987), mainly represents distancing from a utilitarian perspective.

Social capital can therefore be considered *part of political culture* – the part concerning reciprocity rules, civic norms, trust and social networks that make collective action possible – and its analysis may be regarded as an essential element of research on the health of contemporary democracies.

Working Definition of Social Capital

We will use Putnam's definition of social capital as our working definition (1993), according to which social capital includes 'the features of social organization, such as networks, social norms and trust that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action' (Putnam 1993, p. 167). Social norms and networks 'provide defined rules and sanctions for individual participation in organizations' (Putnam 1993, p.166), and promote reciprocity and cooperation 'founded on a lively sense of mutual value to the participants of such cooperation, not a general ethic of the unity of all men or an organic view of society' (Putnam 1993, p. 168). On the whole, networks and norms provide a mechanism for such an internal mutual commitment where 'rational individuals will transcend collective dilemmas' (Putnam 1993, p. 167).

In this article, we will focus on assessing the quality of democracy in subjective terms, looking mainly to process dimensions (and not those related to results or more substantive goals – cf. Table 1). Our *research question* draws from the intersection of these two points: if and to what extent different components of social capital influence citizens' subjective perception regarding the quality of democracy in European democracies? Or, in other words: Do high levels of social capital (attending separately to each of its components) contribute to a higher social demand about the quality of democracy?

Methodology: Data, Concepts and Hypotheses

The following empirical analysis draws from the operational concept of social capital, established by Putnam in *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), to demonstrate that it is a *multidimensional* notion both theoretically and conceptually. It then develops three models of linear regression, establishing those related to the operational definition of social capital as

independent variables, and those related to the quality of democracy – degree of satisfaction with democracy in own country, degree of trust in national political institutions and degree of trust in politicians – as dependent variables. Our research comprises six European regions that correspond to countries with more consolidated democracies and countries with younger democracies. They are: 1) Northern Europe, which includes Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden; 2) Western and Central Europe, which includes Austria, Belgium, France, Germany, Netherlands and Switzerland; 3) the United Kingdom and Ireland; 4) Southern Europe, encompassing Greece, Spain and Portugal; 5) Eastern Europe, which covers the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia; and, lastly, 6) the Baltic Countries, namely Estonia and Lithuania. Here, we used data from the fifth European Social Survey (ESS), which took place in 2010-2011. This data set has several advantages for our study[2].

We thus developed a cross-national study and adopted the logic of comparative inquiry of the Most Different System Design (MDSD), since we are dealing with an approach that involves a comparison made on the basis of dissimilarity in as many aspects as possible by concentrating on commonalities across the cases (such as being a consolidated or young democracy). Therefore, and according to Mill's principles, if two or more cases of the investigated phenomenon share only one crucial variable, the circumstances where all cases match will be the phenomenon's cause or effect.

The first step in our empirical analysis presupposes operationalizing the concept of social capital right from the start. If we were to adopt Putnam's definition (1993, 2000) which, even with great criticism around it, is still the starting point of many scientific analyses, we would easily identify its components and integrate them into the structural and cognitive aspects. According to Putnam, there are three social capital components: *1)* social networks; *2)* social norms such as reciprocity and cooperation and *3)* trust. Our next step is to provide empirical evidence of the *multidimensional* nature of social capital.

Social Networks

In the fifth ESS (2010), the participation in informal social networks can be measured by the survey questions that ask people 'How often do you meet socially with friends, relatives or work colleagues?' 'Compared to other people of your age, how often would you say you take part in social activities?' and 'How important

do you think it is to be loyal to your friends and devote yourself to people who are close?' The ESS contains two survey questions that can be used to measure participation in formal social networks. People are asked 'Are you or have you ever been a member of a trade union or similar organization? If yes, is that currently or previously?' and 'During the last 12 months have you participated in an organization or association? These two questions refer to the two capital subtypes within the scope of formal social networks, namely informal-horizontal versus formal-vertical social capital, and bonding capital versus bridging capital.

Interpersonal or generalized trust

We also chose a different measure for interpersonal generalized trust. We used three survey questions from the ESS and built an index which allowed us to measure it: 1) Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people? 2) Do you think that most people would try to take advantage of you if they got the chance, or would they try to be fair? 3) Would you say that most of the time people try to be helpful or that they are mostly looking out for themselves? This four-item scale can be considered reliable, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.86.

Civic Norms and Obligations

This dimension refers neither to people's relations with others nor to their trust in others, but to specific behavioural traits they exhibit. What matters most is the reciprocity, cooperation and civic commitment of people. Social norms often facilitate more predictable or beneficial behavioural patterns in individuals. It is hard to imagine how interaction and exchange between strangers could take place without norms.

The ESS questions we found most adequate to measure this component are divided into two distinct groups. The first asks respondents whether they consider it important 'to do what is told and follow rules'; 'to behave properly'; 'to help people for the well-being of others' and 'to understand different people'. In the second block, we attempted to measure the respondents' degree of perception regarding political issues, since it often contributes to the change of existing social norms or, at least, to the understanding that members of society have of them.

To that end, we used a recurrent question in all surveys: 'Please indicate your degree of interest in politics'. Afterwards we added an index (with a Cronbach's Ð above 0.95) formed by the answers to the following questions: 'On an average weekday, how much of your time watching television is spent watching the news or programmes about politics and current affairs?' 'On an average weekday, how much of your time listening to radio is spent listening to the news or programmes about politics and current affairs?' and 'On an average weekday, how much time do you spend reading about politics and current affairs in the newspapers?'

To test the empirical validity of the multidimensionality of social capital, we used an *exploratory factor analysis*. If each of the various dimensions (or components) of social capital captures specific aspects of the concept, the initial indicators chosen to describe a particular dimension should load to the same factor (see Appendix A). The first-order exploratory factor analysis was conducted using the principal components method with varimax rotation. First, we used the Kaiser criterion to decide the number of factors. Only those with an eigenvalue greater than 1 were retained. Bartlett's test of sphericity is significant. The KMO test statistic is .0827, showing that the factor solution is good and stable. Altogether, the seven factors extracted explain 37.24% of the total variance of 14 initial indicators included in the analysis. As we can see in Table 1 of Appendix A, the associations between the factors and the variables reproduces the theoretical frame.

The structure of the components of social capital would be further clarified by a second-order factor analysis using the individual factor scores obtained initially as inputs (or independent variables). This approach enables the validation of the measurement model of social capital, showing whether empirical data confirm the theoretically-derived structure of social capital (see table 2, Appendix A).

These are the associations between the factors and variables:

1. Social Networks: Factor 1, related to the variables:
   1.1. Informal socializing
   1.2. Formal engagement
2. Interpersonal or Generalized Trust: Factor 2
3. Civic and Political Awareness: Factor 3, related to the variables:
   3.1. Civic norms
   3.2. Political Interest and Awareness

While the independent variables to be used in the regression models are a result of breaking down the structure of the concept of social capital in its different components – which are identical and unchanging in the European countries studied – dependent variables related to the quality of democracy derive from the following 2010 ESS answers:

And on the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in [country]?

Please tell me on a score of 0-10 how much you personally trust each of the institutions I read out.

…[country]'s
parliament?

…[country]'s
government?

…the legal
system?

…political
parties?

After the operationalization of our working concepts and identification of dependent and independent variables, we can now present our *research hypotheses:*

Hyp. 1 Different social capital components, *despite being invariable in all considered countries*, have distinct effects at the level of citizen satisfaction regarding the functioning of democracy in old and new European democracies.

Hyp. 2 Different social capital components, *despite being invariable in all considered countries*, have distinct effects over the degree of trust citizens place on democratic institutions in old and new European democracies.

Findings

Table 1 shows that, in the Nordic countries in our sample and in Western European countries, there is a positive and statistically significant relationship between the membership and density of formal and informal social networks and the degree of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy. In other words, the higher the density of existing social networks in society, the higher the degree of satisfaction with the way democracy works in practice. In Southern European countries, we

see a negative and statistically significant relationship, since the density of social networks has a negative impact on the way citizens assess the functioning of the democratic system.

We must highlight that civil society is weaker in the new democracies of southern Europe – born after long periods of authoritarianism – in contrast to the rest of established western European democracies, where authoritarianism never existed (e.g., the United Kingdom and Norway) or lasted only a few years (e.g., Germany and Italy). It is in Spain and Portugal where we find the lowest levels of membership in voluntary associations among the adult population. On the other hand, we find no statistically significant positive or negative relationship between networks of formal and informal sociability and citizens' perceptions regarding the functioning of democracy in Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries.

Perhaps this happens because more than two decades after the (re)emergence of democracy, Eastern and Central European civil society is still too weak and vulnerable in terms of associativism and social activism. While it is true that the development of organizational structures in civil society underwent, during the decade right after 1989, a remarkable upsurge accompanied by a significant pluralization of its organizational type (contrasting sharply with the monolithic structure of social organizations of state-socialism), the fact is that, in the decades that followed, that number either declined or stagnated despite differences between countries. Many scholars stress that the optimistic scenario of civil society's potential in Central and Eastern Europe gave place to a far more realistic or even pessimistic description.

These scholars gathered a set of empirical evidence against the perspective of a 'vibrant civil society', which marked the early days of the (re)establishment of democracy, namely the subject of nominal vs. actual organizational strength, the existence of an important structural legacy inherited after the previous regime and the embeddedness of civil society within its broader social environment. The low levels of membership in organizations point to a significant fragility regarding its anchoring as, depending on the country, a majority of the population are not members of any organization.

The main explanation for this weakness lies in the fact that, under the previous regime, membership in a range of social organizations was essentially mandatory for every individual. The end of this requirement after 1989 became, for many sectors of the population, an aversion to any formal commitment to organiza-

tions. Moreover, this aversion was expressed through a mass exodus of people from the organizations to which they had belonged until then and also through a generalized refusal to join any new organizations. From this, we can draw that this re-conquered freedom of to create and join associations was also interpreted as a freedom not to do so and this was observed to a large extent.

As stated before, recent theory on social capital argues that general or interpersonal trust is an important and central element in a complex and virtuous circle of political attitudes, behaviour and institutions and can act as the foundation for a democratic government that is stable and effective. Trust is said to support a co-operative social climate, to facilitate collective behaviour and to encourage care for the public interest. Trust between citizens makes it easier, less risky and more rewarding to participate in community and civic affairs, and helps to build and maintain the social institutions of civil society upon which peaceful and stable democracy is based.

Therefore, we can expect that the bigger the level of interpersonal or general trust in a society, the more positive citizen satisfaction with the functioning of democracy will be. As for this, Table 1 shows that there is a strong, positive and statistically significant relation between interpersonal or general trust and the way citizens assess the way democracy functions in Northern Europe, Western Europe, the UK and Ireland. These are precisely the countries which fall into the old European democracies and where the levels of interpersonal trust are higher in 2013 (see Table 4, Appendix A).

In turn, Southern European, Central and Eastern European and Baltic countries show a statistically significant and strong relationship between interpersonal or general trust and citizens' assessments of democratic functioning. Nevertheless, this relation shows more moderate causality. We can thus argue that it is in the context of new democracies, where interpersonal trust levels are lower (see Table 4, Appendix A), that citizens' attitudes regarding the actual performance of the democratic system may be less optimistic. Here, the impact of such a low level of trust among fellow citizens is associated to a higher level of dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy.

In recent literature, it is not surprising to see that trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy are tightly connected. However, the fact that social trust is related to satisfaction with democracy adds further weight to what social capital theory suggests: social trust matters for democracy. According to

the data in Table 1, we can state that in old democracies, where general social trust is higher, citizen satisfaction and the way democracy works also tends to be higher. However, in new democracies, where levels of social trust are lower, the degree of satisfaction also tends to be lower.

Lastly, what can we mention the existence of a strong civic and political conscience and the assessment citizens make of democratic performance in each country featured in Table 1.

TABLE 1. Social Capital and Satisfaction with the Way Democracy Works (2010)

	Pooled Sample				Nordic				Western and Central Europe				United Kingdom-Ireland			
	b	B	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p
Social Capital																
1. Social Networks	.016	.041	3.461	.001	.039	.076	3.350	.001	.039	.096	4.150	.000	.001	.002	.043	.965
2. Interpersonal or General Trust	.584	1.469	124.95	.000	.495	1.326	43.009	.000	.520	1.527	55.551	.000	.484	1.420	24.040	.000
3. Civic and Political Awareness	.020	.050	4.156	.000	.032	.062	2.622	.009	.002	.005	.230	.818	.058	.136	2.862	.004
Socio-demographics																
Gender (male)	.035	.177	7.476	.000	.029	.117	2.585	.010	.050	.242	5.420	.000	.041	.197	2.050	.040
Age	.009	.001	1.886	.059	-.027	-.003	-2.214	.027	.032	.004	3.285	.001	.082	.011	3.822	.000
Highest Level of Education (ES – ISCED)	-.025	-.035	-4.971	.000	-.002	-.002	-.123	.902	.022	.030	2.186	.029	.027	.032	1.162	.245
Net household income (All Sources)	.047	.043	9.151	.000	.012	.009	1.024	.306	.055	.050	5.450	.000	.068	.056	3.066	.002
Social Capital																
R^2	0.390	.	.	.	0.277				0.329				0.330			
Adjusted R^2	0.390				0.276				0.328				0.329			
Socio-demographic																
R^2	0.303	.	.	.	0.201				0.106				0.111			
Adjusted R^2	0.303				0.201				0.105				0.109			
N	28872				5837				8044				1741			

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010). NOTES: Table entries are the results of multiple regression analyses prediction of dimensions of political support. b = standardized regression coefficients; b = unstandardized regression coefficients; p = p-value (if < 0.050 the variable is significant to the model).

TABLE 1. Social Capital and Satisfaction with the Way Democracy Works (2010) (cont.)

	Southern Europe				Eastern and Central Europe				Baltic			
	b	B	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p
Social Capital												
1. Social Networks	.063	.140	2.646	.008	.003	.007	.240	.811	.034	.080	1.477	.140
2. Interpersonal or General Trust	.475	1.393	20.528	.000	.508	-1.385	42.282	.000	.509	1.295	22.492	.000
3. Civic and Political Awareness	.048	.123	2.010	.045	.044	.113	3.658	.000	.005	.013	.229	.819
Socio-demographics												
Gender	.001	.005	.048	.962	.010	.049	.840	.401	.079	.362	3.457	.001
Age	.070	.009	2.725	.007	.013	.002	1.057	.291	-.028	-.003	-1.040	.299
Highest Level of Education (ES – ISCED)	-.009	-.009	-.310	.757	-.004	-.007	-.350	.727	.046	.061	1.964	.050
Net household income (All Sources)	-.019	-.016	-.713	.476	.041	.038	3.072	.002	-.086	-.073	-3.424	.001
Social Capital												
R^2	0.235	.	.	.	0.309				0.279			
Adjusted R^2	0.233				0.308				0.277			
Socio-demographic												
R^2	0.206	.	.	.	0.201				0.120			
Adjusted R^2	0.204				0.201				0.118			
N	1439				5108				1432			

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010). NOTES: Table entries are the results of multiple regression analyses prediction of dimensions of political support. b = standardized regression coefficients; b = unstandardized regression coefficients; *p* = *p*-value (if < 0.050 the variable is significant to the model).

Respect for fundamental civic norms, which make citizens behave not like 'rational fools' but instead like 'effective co-operators', on the one hand, and interest for the political issues expressed by exposure to political information in the media, on the other hand, are related to the assessment citizens make of the functioning of democracy in both old and new ones. As we can see in Table 1, there is a statistically strong or moderate, yet positive, relationship between the level of civic and political conscience of citizens and their degree of satisfaction with the correct functioning of the democratic system, both in old Northern European democracies (Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden) and in the UK and Ireland b =.058 and *p.* = .004), but also in new democracies in Southern Europe (Greece, Spain and Portugal) (b = .048 and *p.* = .045) and Central and Eastern Europe (Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia) (b = .044 and *p.* = .000).

We can see that our first hypothesis is completely confirmed by the empirical evidence. Each component of social capital – social networks, social or generalized trust, civic norms and political conscience – has a differentiated effect over the level of satisfaction with democracy, regardless of whether we look at old or new democracies.

On the other hand, we can argue that social capital matters in citizens' positive or negative assessments of democracy. We just have to compare the explicative weight of Social Capital's adjusted R^2 in the countries that are part of each of our considered regions, which varies between 24% and 33%, and the adjusted R^2 related to the socio-demographic control variables that are usually integrated in regression models which, in this case, have a merely residual explicative weight.

Let's now move on to Table 2, which shows the relationship between the three components of social capital and citizens' trust in their country's political institutions, namely the government, parliament, courts and parties. As we mentioned in previous sections, optimism regarding the spread of democracy, during the time of the third wave of democratization (1990s), was marked by a paradox from the start: while, on the one hand, democracy spread to new parts of the globe – such as ex-communist regimes in Eastern and Central Europe – on the other hand, we saw a kind of democratic 'fatigue' or even 'sickness' in advanced industrial societies of the West, expressed mainly through a crisis of citizen trust regarding the main institutions and political actors.

This has been explained both through the demand side – using the thesis of the emergence of critical (Norris 1999) or sophisticated (Dalton 2008) citizens and the growth of their expectations regarding the functioning of democracy and its agents or by a decline in social capital, translated into a return to the private sphere and a decline of associativism and social activism – or through the supply side, through the theses connected to bad or insufficient performance of governments, institutions and democratic processes, given the higher complexity of citizen demands on an increasingly globalized environment and in a period marked by the crisis of globalized capitalism in the USA and Europe.

On the other hand, research on the transition of countries in post-communist Europe towards democracy mostly shows that there is more political and institutional trust in Western democratic countries than in post-communist countries of Central and Eastern Europe. Questions about citizens' trust and distrust in the newly formed institutions and about the trustworthiness of these institutions seem to be

just as compelling today as they were in the early 1990s. In the context of rapid socio-political and economic changes that influence citizens' daily lives, political trust and distrust appear to fluctuate alongside the rise and fall of optimism and pessimism, much due to the strength of incompetence, scandal, dishonesty and corruption of politicians, but also of distrustful citizens, untrustworthy institutions, discordance between citizens and government and difficult periods.

The question that is hereby posed is one of knowing whether the different components of social capital do or do not influence and, if so, in what sense, political trust in new and old democracies. In Table 2, we see a strong, positive and statistically significant correlation between all social capital components and citizens' trust in political institutions, which is generalizable to old and new democracies.

TABLE 2. Social Capital and Trust in Political Institutions (2010)

	Pooled Sample				Nordic				Western and Central Europe				United Kingdom- Ireland			
	b	B	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p
Social Capital																
1. Social Networks	.074	.629	34.702	.000	.003	.022	.606	.545	.048	.356	10.796	.000	.065	.553	6.934	.000
2. Interpersonal or General Trust	.923	7.937	437.73	.000	.903	7.804	158.66	.000	.911	8.095	206.03	.000	.895	8.421	96.009	.000
3. Civic and Political Awareness	.033	.288	15.524	.000	.074	.465	12.358	.000	.023	.169	5.091	.000	.063	.471	6.637	.000
Socio-demographics																
Gender	.005	.081	2.229	.026	.014	.181	2.495	.013	.002	.025	.397	.691	.035	.546	3.801	.000
Age	.025	.012	11.071	.000	.012	.004	1.927	.054	.023	.010	4.978	.000	-.013	-.005	-1.267	.205
Highest Level of Education (ES – ISCED)	-.013	-.062	-5.770	.000	-.022	-.078	-3.693	.000	-.012	-.049	-2.534	.011	.014	.054	1.299	.194
Net household income (All Sources)	-.015	-.047	-6.521	.000	-.022	-.050	-3.693	.000	-.016	-.044	-3.349	.001	-.005	-.012	-.453	.650
Social Capital																
R^2	0.871	.	.	.	0.820				0.849				0.849			
Adjusted R^2	0.871				0.820				0.849				0.848			
Socio-demographic																
R^2	0.102	.	.	.	0.104				0.123				0.212			
Adjusted R^2	0.102				0.103				0.122				0.212			
N	29739				5929				8127				1845			

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010). NOTES: Table entries are the results of multiple regression analyses prediction of dimensions of political support. b = standardized regression coefficients; b = unstandardized regression coefficients; *p* = *p*-value (if < 0.050 the variable is significant to the model).

TABLE 2. Social Capital and Trust in Political Institutions (2010) (cont.)

	Southern Europe				Eastern and Central Europe				Baltic			
	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p	b	S.E.	t	p
Social Capital												
1. Social Networks	.065	.460	6.120	.000	.154	1.278	27.902	.000	.135	1.088	12.414	.000
2. General or interpersonal trust	.917	8.630	89.811	.000	.939	8.268	170.54	.000	.915	8.112	86.297	.000
3. Civic and Political Awareness	.012	.099	1.145	.252	.022	.186	4.059	.000	.078	.654	7.338	.000
Socio-demographics												
Gender	.006	.086	.572	.568	-.011	-.167	-1.932	.053	.010	.155	.899	.369
Age	.064	.026	5.678	.000	.046	.020	7.895	.000	-.001	-.001	-.098	.922
Highest Level of Education (ES – ISCED)	.004	.014	.350	.726	-.008	-.039	-1.310	.190	.002	.007	.137	.891
Net household income (All Sources)	-.049	-.129	-4.089	.000	-.012	-.035	-1.935	.053	-.011	-.032	-.906	.365
Social Capital												
R^2	0.843	.	.	.	0.848				0.837			
Adjusted R^2	0.843				0.848				0.837			
Socio-demographic												
R^2	0.207	.	.	.	0.202				0.000			
Adjusted R^2	0.206				0.202				0.000			
N	1461				5263				1516			

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010). NOTES: Table entries are the results of multiple regression analyses prediction of dimensions of political support. b = standardized regression coefficients; b = unstandardized regression coefficients; p = p-value (if < 0.050 the variable is significant to the model).

The only noteworthy exception are the Nordic countries, in terms of social networks, where there is no statistically significant relationship with institutional trust (b =.003 and p. =.545), and Southern European democracies in the case of civic and political conscience, where there is also no statistically significant relationship with public trust in the main political institutions (b =.012 and p. = .252).

It should be noted that not only is there a statistically strong and positive relationship between the three components of social capital and trust in institutions that practically does not change in new and old democracies, thus not confirming our second hypothesis, but the explicative power of social capital is also very high in this mode while the explicative power of socio-demographic control variables is irrelevant or void. Again, there are good reasons to state that social capital matters in the quality of democracy, namely in the subjective support for the system

and its main institutions by the masses, considered essential to the stability and improvement of any democratic government.

Concluding Remarks

In this article, we attempted to establish a connection between social capital, its elements and social accountability as an important quality in the dimensions of analysis of democracy. In other words, the control activities of the political system carried out by civil society, its intermediate organizations and by citizens. This control activity – or request for *social responsibility* from whoever rules – will become more demanding the higher the level of social capital in a society becomes. This will necessarily be felt in the result of responsiveness. This is, in essence, Robert Putnam's main argument in *Making Democracy Work. Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (1993), where he establishes the relationship between the level of social capital (networks, trust and norms) in a community and the performance of its political institutions.

We concluded that the elements that constitute social capital have a differentiated impact on citizens' degree of satisfaction with democracy in old and new democracies, confirming our first hypothesis. The higher organizational density is, the higher the degree of satisfaction with democracy tends to be; the higher the level of social or interpersonal trust is, the higher the satisfaction with the way democracy works becomes. We can also find this where there is higher political and civic conscience (older democracies).

However, our second hypothesis is partially rejected by empirical evidence. If, on the one hand, the elements that compose social capital have a positive and statistically significant impact on the degree of trust citizens place in political institutions and it varies between old (strong) and new (moderate) democracies, the circumstance is that there are no differential effects between the distinct elements of social capital over the degree of trust. This analysis shows that the forms of social capital emphasized by Putnam are important in forming political attitudes regarding the functioning of the democratic system and its main institutions. However, we cannot forget the 'problem of circular causality' or, in other words, that what matters for the formation of political attitudes in a democracy is social capital or democracy and its quality that determines the importance of social capital and its elements.

Appendix A

Figure 1. Quality of Democracy Dimensions

Dimensions	**Definitions**	**Contents**
Procedural	1. Rule of law	- The existence of a valid legal system *erga omnes* - Absence of corruption - Competent bureaucracy - Police is efficient and respects rights and liberties - Citizen access to justice - Reasonable duration of legal proceedings - Magistrates are independent from political power
	2. Political accountability - Electoral accountability: relationship between elected officials and voters - Inter-institutional accountability: relationship between rulers and other institutions - ***Social accountability***: between rulers and different types of associations in civil society	Political leaders answer for their decisions: information justification punishment or reward
Of result	3. Responsiveness	Rulers' ability to respond: public policy services material benefits symbolic goods
Substantive	4. Full respect of rights	- Civil rights - Political rights - Social rights
	5. Progressive realization of greater political, social and economic equality	Two states: Formal equality Substantial equality

SOURCE: adapted from Morlino (2003).

Table 2 First-Order Exploratory Factor Analysis

	1	2	3	4	5
1.1.1. How often meets socially with friends, relatives or colleagues	.017	.067	-.063	**.806**	-.031
1.1.2. Takes part in social activities compared to others of same age	.050	.036	.063	**.792**	.085
2.2.1. Member of a trade union or a similar organization	.049	.108	-.028	-.133	**.658**
2.2.2. Worked in an organization or association: voluntary work	.043	.006	.120	.174	**.650**
3.1.1. Most people can be trusted or you cannot be too careful	.020	**.763**	.037	.053	.100
3.1.2. Most people try to take advantage of you, or try to be fair	.024	**.794**	.042	.057	.063
3.1.3. Most of the time people are helpful, or mostly looking out for themselves	.047	**.778**	.028	.024	.009
4.1.1. Important to do what is told and follow rules	**.512**	-.094	.099	-.139	-.339
4.1.2. Important to help people and care for the well-being of others	**.725**	.087	-.022	.095	.126
4.1.3. Important to behave properly	**.633**	-.074	.070	-.160	-.269
5.1.1. How interested in politics	.095	.009	**.568**	.058	.361
5.1.2. TV watching, news/politics/current affairs on an average weekday	.027	.000	**.727**	-.055	-.035
5.1.3. Radio listening, news/politics/current affairs on an average weekday	.012	.042	**.594**	-.029	-.067
5.1.4. Newspaper reading, politics/current affairs on an average weekday	-.009	.031	**.638**	.058	.069
Variance explained %	9.30	8.81	7.28	6.23	5.62
Total variance explained %	37.24				

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010)

TABLE 3. Second-Order Exploratory Factor Analysis

	1	2	3
1.1. Informal socializing	**.532**	.016	.061
1.2. Formal engagement	**.612**	.239	-.056
2.1. General Trust	-.369	**.647**	.005
3.1. Civic norms	.036	-.041	**.617**
3.2. Political Interest and Awareness	.032	-.036	**.783**
Variance explained %	14.3	14.3	14.3
Total variance explained %	42.9		

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010)

TABLE 4. Mean Comparison of Second Order Components of Social Capital

		N	Mean	Std. Dev.	ANOVA F (6.34078)	p
1. Social Networks	Nordic	6502	0.22	1.02	295.862	<0.001
	Western and Central Europe	9798	0.18	0.98		
	United Kingdom - Ireland	2422	0.15	0.91		
	Southern Europe	4035	0.02	0.96		
	Eastern and Central Europe	7101	-0.22	0.95		
	Baltic	1793	-0.58	0.97		
2. Interpersonal trust	Nordic	6502	0.90	0.75	2474.517	<0.001
	Western and Central Europe	9798	0.22	0.82		
	United Kingdom - Ireland	2422	0.13	0.82		
	Southern Europe	4035	-0.42	0.82		
	Eastern and Central Europe	7101	-0.38	0.89		
	Baltic	1793	0.08	0.90		
3. Civic and political awareness	Nordic	6502	0.19	1.02	72.301	<0.001
	Western and Central Europe	9798	0.15	0.98		
	United Kingdom - Ireland	2422	0.14	1.02		
	Southern Europe	4035	-0.08	0.96		
	Eastern and Central Europe	7101	-0.14	0.95		
	Baltic	1793	-0.26	0.96		

SOURCE: European Social Survey (2010)

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[1] Data from the European Social Survey include only the wave of 2010-2011, for which at the time of article submission to your prestigious Journal, data from the European Social Survey 2012 were not yet available to the public, what would happen some time later. However, the analytical model used in this article may provide an incentive to study the new data (2012) within a similar theoretical and methodological framework, enabling the advantages of comparability.

[2] See please the footnote n.º 1.