

# **Conceptions of democracy, political representation and socio-economic well-being: Explaining how French citizens assess the degree of democracy of their regime**

This paper investigates the determinants of citizens' assessment of the degree of democracy in France, based on the ESS Round 6 data. A substantial share of respondents claim that France is barely democratic or not democratic at all, while still another non-negligible share give France the highest possible score on a 11-points democracy scale. We find that democracy assessment is mostly driven by political variables and by policy evaluations rather than by respondents' own social and economic status. Individuals who endorse a minimal definition of democracy are overall less critical of their political system. We also find that respondents who identify with the current government party are consistently more likely to rate France higher on the democracy scale, while voters who identify with a non-governing party do not rate France differently from those who do not feel close to any party. Respondents who consider that the government adequately fights income inequalities are much more likely to consider France democratic. Finally, results regarding the impact of respondents' socio-economic status are inconclusive.

## **1. Introduction**

Prior research has repeatedly pointed to the growing dissatisfaction with political institutions and authorities in European democracies. A quick glance at the sixth wave of the European Social Survey, 'Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy' (administered in late 2012), leads to an even more worrisome observation: many European respondents are not only unhappy with the way democracy works but also believe their country does not even qualify as democracy. In this regard, France is no exception. When French respondents are being asked to rate how democratic their country is on 11-points democracy scale, no less than 40% of them give a negative evaluation of their system with a score of 6 or below. By comparison, the widely used Polity scale, based on expert assessments, give France a score of 9 on a scale ranging from 0 to 10, making France an imperfect democracy, but still a democracy.<sup>1</sup> These strong discrepancies between the perceived and the "real" degree of democracy of France call for an empirical investigation. Equally puzzling is the large variance in citizens' evaluations of the French political system: whereas about 1 out of 8 respondents give France a score below 5, roughly 10% of the

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<sup>1</sup> See Marshall et al. (2016). Data are available at <http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>. To facilitate comparisons, we rely on the 11-points democracy scale "DEMOC" instead of Polity's composite democracy-autocracy scale.

sample still gives the French democracy the highest possible score on the scale. Why are so many respondents convinced that France could not possibly be more democratic whereas many others seem to believe that they live in a country not even worthy of the title of democracy?

The aim of this paper is to explain individual-level variations in the way French citizens assess the degree of democracy of their political regime. Our study is explorative in purpose: we build on prior research on system support in order to identify factors that may account for these variations. We discuss and test several possible explanations: first, respondents might view their political system in a different way according to whether they have more or less demanding conceptions of democracy; second, people with a low socio-economic status might have a more negative evaluation of their political system; third, respondents who identify with governing parties might be more satisfied with the quality of democracy than supporters of the opposition or non-aligned citizens; finally, satisfaction with social policies may make respondents more likely to find their system democratic. To briefly summarize our results, the empirical analysis demonstrates as expected that defining democracy in minimal (electoral) terms improves citizens' view of their current institutions. Our analysis confirms previous findings showing that identifying with governing parties fosters positive evaluations about the current political system, but in contrast to prior research, we find nonnegligible differences in evaluations between supporters of the party currently in government and supporters of former governing parties. Furthermore, we do not identify any sizeable difference between individuals with no partisan identification and those who identify with opposition parties. Finally, while respondents' socio-economic status has no discernible effect, their evaluations of economic policies influence their democracy assessment: people who think that authorities are taking effective steps to reduce income inequalities give more positive evaluations of the French political system.

The article is structured as follows. The article will come back on the existing literature, showing that three group of factors have been put forward to explain individual evaluations of the political system: visions about what an "ideal" democracy should look like, identification with governing parties, and socio-economic well-being. Section 3 presents the rationale behind the choice of focusing on France in this analysis. Section 4 presents our main expectations and the data we use for analysis. In section 5, we test our hypotheses and discuss the results. Section 6 concludes.

## 2. Prior research: What drives political support?

Our article builds on prior research on the determinants of political support (Easton 1957). Broadly speaking, three classes of explanation have been proposed to account for individual and macro-level variations in political support: the critical citizens hypothesis, the sore loser hypothesis, and the instrumental support hypothesis. We will review these approaches and findings below and briefly explain how we contribute to these strands of research.

### *The critical citizens hypothesis*

According to the critical citizens hypothesis, the progressive rise in the level of education has led to the emergence of “dissatisfied democrats” who have rising expectations about democracy and are therefore becoming more skeptical towards their political system (Klingemann 1999; Inglehart and Welzel 2005; Norris 2011). Thus, the decline in satisfaction with democracy or support for office-holders does not necessarily reflect an erosion of public support for democracy: on the contrary, people are increasingly critical towards their own political system precisely because their commitment to democracy’s core values is growing stronger. Dalton (2004, 199) makes a similar argument when he concludes that around 20 to 30% of the decline of political support registered in consolidated democracies can be attributed to the rising expectations among the young and the upper classes, who have become over time more and more demanding towards democracy. Dahl has called this phenomenon a democratic paradox, arguing: “in many of the oldest and most stable democratic countries, citizens possess little confidence in some key democratic institutions. Yet most citizens continue to believe in the desirability of democracy” (2000, 35).

This line of research is based on the premise that satisfaction with the way democracy works in practice partly depends on how citizens conceive democracy in the abstract. Yet, until recently, the relationship between conceptions of democracy and evaluations of current democratic systems was difficult to assess because of the lack of thorough data on Europe. Past research on citizens' definitions of democracy has thus overwhelmingly focused on transition societies, with the aim of investigating the consistency of public support for democracy (e.g., Bratton, Mattes, and Gyimah-Boadi 2005; Schedler and Sarsfield 2007; Jamal and Tessler 2008; de Regt 2013). But recent studies on Europeans' views of democracy provide some clues. First, there is evidence that citizens do not share a unified understanding of the meaning of democracy, and that many of them consider that democracy is more than mere electoral democracy (Webb 2013; Bengtsson

and Mattila 2009; Ferrin and Kriesi 2016). Second, the heterogeneity of Europeans' views of democracy partly accounts for the variations in their evaluations of their own political regimes: As Kriesi and Saris argue, “the citizens tend to evaluate the democracy in their own country in light of their conceptions of democracy, just as their evaluations tend to influence their conceptions” (2016, 190). They find that citizens who consider that democracy should mean more than elections and equality before the law are the most likely to give a negative evaluation of their own system. They are also more likely to be found in poorly functioning democracies: the lack of democratic performance keeps the issue of what democracy should be like on the agenda, leading citizens to develop expectations that go beyond the traditional, minimalist liberal democratic model.

### *The instrumental support hypothesis*

A second line of research focuses on the impact of economic well-being on system support: simply put, citizens evaluate their regime according to its ability to deliver economic goods. This approach explains the variation of political support both in the aggregate and at the individual level: aggregate levels of political support vary according to the state of the economy, and within each country, the more socially privileged citizens are more likely to be satisfied with their regime and to adhere to its core principles than the poor. Consequently, both cross-country and within-country variations in economic well-being have been found to affect system support (for recent evidence on Europe, see Van Erkel and Van Der Meer 2016). There is also ample evidence that the 2008 crisis and the subsequent Euro crisis have affected overall levels of political support in EU countries, albeit in a more complex way than previously thought (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Braun and Tausendpfund 2014; Teixeira, Tsatsanis, and Belchior 2016; Cordero and Simón 2016; Armingeon, Guthmann, and Weisstanner 2016).

The relationship between economic conditions and support for democracy in general is more controversial: on the one hand, there is evidence that macroeconomic performance affects overall levels of support for democracy and that commitment to democracy is weaker among the less privileged (Graham and Sukhtankar 2004; Córdova and Seligson 2009); on the other hand, empirical studies repeatedly find that citizens' evaluations of the economy only weakly affect their attitudes toward democracy (Evans and Whitefield 1995; Bratton and Mattes 2001; Chu et al. 2008). Early studies have mostly focused on new democracies or countries in transition, with the implicit belief that the economy should primarily impact superficial attitudes toward democracy and leave deeper-rooted democratic values unaffected. Yet, recent evidence suggests that even

consolidated democracies are not immune to the erosion of public support for democracy when economic performance is deteriorating (Kotzian 2011). More strikingly, economic conditions have even been found to affect conceptions of democracy among the European public: individuals with a low socio-economic status are not only more likely to reject the institutional status quo and endorse alternative visions of democracy (Bengtsson and Mattila 2009b; Webb 2013), they are also less likely to define democracy in procedural and electoral terms (Ceka and Magalhaes 2016). Interestingly, these findings stand in sharp contrast with the critical citizens hypothesis sketched above: while this latter approach expects the socially privileged to be more critical toward their own system, the instrumental support hypothesis predicts exactly the opposite – subordinate groups being more likely to reject the status quo.

Finally, there is now ample evidence that citizens' satisfaction with economic and social policies significantly affects political support (Anderson and Singer 2008; Donovan and Karp 2017; Grosfeld and Senik 2010; Rothstein and Uslaner 2005). This suggests that individuals do not only evaluate their system according to their own economic well-being but also take into account the concrete steps governments take to increase it. These results might be interpreted as evidence that individual assessments of the democratic character of political regimes are determined by the outputs of the system rather than by its institutional setup – which might either indicate that respondents misunderstand the meaning of democracy or that their commitment to democratic values is superficial (as many of them would be ready to trade individual freedoms for economic benefits). However, the relationship between satisfaction with economic policies and system support might as well reflect the fact that many respondents use public policies as a shortcut to assess whether democratic institutions work properly - assuming that well-functioning democracies are more likely to implement economic policies that are endorsed by a majority of the voters (Acemoglu and Robinson 2006). Thus, people who think public authorities are pursuing political goals incompatible with the majority's interests might simply infer that the political system does not provide sufficient incentives for elected officials to behave consistently with voters' preferences. At the same time, both the growing Europeanization of economic policies and the economic crisis have considerably reduced national governments' leeway in economic matters, which might partly explain the severe judgement Europeans give of their democratic systems (Armingeon and Guthman 2013, Torcal 2014).

### *The sore loser hypothesis*

Democracy rests on the condition that those who supported losing parties accept their defeat and do not turn against the rules of the game. Democratic theory predicts that regular elections should generate compliance from these voters: Prospects of future alternation lower losers' incentives to revolt provided that they have sufficient chances to win the next election (Przeworski 1999). While revolutions are indeed rare in established democracies, one of the most robust findings in the literature on political support is that there is yet a consistent gap in satisfaction between citizens who voted for the incumbent party and those who voted for the opposition: supporting a losing party has been found to adversely impact not only trust in authorities but also satisfaction with democracy (e.g., Anderson and Guillory 1997; Anderson, Blais, and Bowler 2005; Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2002; Bowler, Donovan, and Karp 2007; Blais and Gélinau 2007; Beaudonnet et al. 2014) and even, to a certain extent, support for democracy (Singh, Lago, and Blais 2011; Dompnier and Magni Berton 2012; however, see Jou 2009). However, the importance of the winner / loser gap varies according to the type of political system, with some institutional arrangements being able to mitigate losers' discontent while others sharpen the divide between both groups of voters. Thus, Anderson and Guillory (1997) find that losers are more satisfied with democracy in consensual system than in majoritarian ones (see also Bernauer and Vatter 2012). Relatedly, losers' discontent has been found to be sensitive to electoral variables such as margins of victory and votes-seats disproportionality (see Howell and Justwan 2013; Davis 2014; Blais, Morin-Chassé, and Singh 2015; Ferland 2015).

A more recent development in this literature is the refinement of the winner / loser dichotomy. Scholars have recently begun to differentiate between different types of winners and losers: for example, prior experience of victory matters, as “temporary” losers are less dissatisfied than permanent ones; on the winners' side, those who are ideologically more proximate to the government tend to experience a stronger boost in satisfaction (Anderson, Blais, and Bowler 2005; Curini, Jou, and Memoli 2012; S. P. Singh 2014; Delgado 2016; S. P. Singh and Thornton 2016). There is less consensus as to whether citizens who voted for a losing party behave similarly as non-aligned ones: While Anderson (2011) argues that system support shrinks among median voters because of their feeling of inadequate representation, Rich (2015) shows with the example of Asian democracies that if non-voters are more dissatisfied with democracy than voters, they still express less discontent than those who voted for a losing party. We build on this literature and make a twofold distinction within the categories of winners and losers: among the former, we distinguish between those who voted for a current government parties and those who

lost the last election but have prior experience of electoral victory; among the latter, we distinguish between those who have repeated experience with electoral defeat and those who are unable to choose a party to support.

*Measuring system support: some methodological issues*

Studies discussed above suffer from some limitations due to the measurement of political support. To operationalize system support, most studies rely on standard survey items measuring either respondents' commitment to democracy in general or their satisfaction with the way democracy works in their country. Indicators of democratic attitudes – such as the democracy / autocracy preference scale from the World Value Survey – have been subject to extensive criticism, either because of interpersonal and cross-country comparability issues (that is, the fact that “democracy” might mean different things to different people) or because of other biases such as social desirability (for recent evidence, see Ariely and Davidov 2011; Kiewiet de Jonge 2016). Furthermore, adherence to democratic principles in the abstract is not a quite valid indicator of system support, since it tells nothing about how respondents evaluate their own system. Another frequently used indicator of system support, satisfaction with democracy (SWD), has similar shortcomings. As Canache, Mondak and Seligson (2001) argue, SWD is a multidimensional indicator with an ambiguous phrasing, that may either tap: (1) adherence to democratic norms; (2) satisfaction with the particular variant of democracy respondents live in; (3) satisfaction with incumbents' performance and policy outputs; (4) overall satisfaction (SWD being a summary indicator of the satisfaction of living in a democratic system and support for current institutions and incumbents); or (5) all of these things, depending on the respondent and / or the country-specific context. A further problem with SWD is that dissatisfied respondents might either be fervent democrats (who perceive a wide gap between their own standards and the reality) or weak democrats (who wish for more authoritarian alternatives).

The ESS-6 data enable us to overcome these limitations in two main ways. First, we are able to take into account respondents' conceptions of democracy in our analysis. Second, the dependent variable we use (i.e., respondents' assessment of the democratic character of their own political system) presents several advantages over the widely used SWD. To begin, this item is less likely to be biased by respondents' attitudes toward democracy: whereas SWD implicitly assumes that respondents' satisfaction should increase when the system is more democratic, the more neutral formulation of democracy assessment allows respondents to assess the democratic character of their country regardless of whether they approve of democracy or not (which means that answers

can be interpreted in a consistent way across the whole spectrum of possible positions toward democracy). Most importantly yet, it can be interpreted in a more straightforward way because it unambiguously refers to the democratic character of a country (and not, for example, to office-holders' performance). We acknowledge, however, that the question is not completely unequivocal, as some respondents may interpret it as referring to the quality of democracy rather than its level: for example, it is unclear whether those who picked the value of 0 view France as a full-blown dictatorship or as a system that barely passes the threshold to be considered a democracy.

### 3. Why study France?

Our study is centered on France, but for several reasons, its findings have broader implications for the analysis of political support in European democracies in general. To begin with, France is a “typical case” in at least two respects. First, as in the overwhelming majority of the countries of the 6<sup>th</sup> round of the ESS survey, citizens rate the degree of democracy of their own political system much lower than experts (see Table 1 below): whereas France received a score of 9 out of 10 on the Polity IV DEMOC scale for the year 2012, respondents gave it an average score of 6.84. Second, this average is typical of the subgroup of established democracies: while French rate their system lower than Danes (8.15) or Swedes (7.78), they evaluate it more positively than Italians (5.13) or Portuguese (5.98), and in approximately the same way as Germans (6.99) or Brits (6.6).

Table 1: Mean democracy assessment (in descending order) and Polity IV DEMOC score in the 29 ESS countries

Country	Polity score	Democracy assessment (mean)	Difference	Country	Polity score	Democracy assessment (mean)	Difference
Denmark	10	8.15	-1.85	Portugal	10	5.98	-4.02
Switzerland	10	8.08	-1.92	Poland	10	5.86	-4.14
Sweden	10	7.78	-2.22	Estonia	9	5.72	-3.28
Norway	10	7.74	-2.26	Lithuania	10	5.53	-4.47
Finland	10	7.44	-2.56	Spain	10	5.51	-4.49
Germany	10	6.99	-3.01	Slovakia	10	5.48	-4.52
Israel	7	6.99	-0.1	Hungary	10	5.25	-4.75
Netherlands	10	6.86	-3.14	Italy	10	5.13	-4.87

France	9	6.84	-2.16	Slovenia	10	4.69	-5.31
Iceland		6.77		Albania	9	4.49	-4.51
Ireland	10	6.66	-3.34	Russia	5	4.41	-0.59
UK	10	6.6	-3.4	Kosovo	8	4.12	-3.88
Belgium	8	6.6	-1.4	Ukraine	6	4.06	-1.94
Czech Rep.	9	6.16	-2.84	Bulgaria	9	4	-5
Cyprus	10	6.02	-3.98				

A closer look at the data reveals another interesting pattern: among the five ESS countries that receive a score of 9 on the Polity IV DEMOC scale (the four others being Albania, Bulgaria, Estonia and the Czech Republic), France is the one in which respondents give their own political system the highest rating on the democracy assessment scale (which should lead us to put the much-discussed legitimacy crisis into perspective). Part of this discrepancy is driven by the 214 respondents (about 11% of the French sample) who give France the maximal score on the democracy assessment scale: thus, while the overall results of the survey are sobering, a substantial minority of respondents still expresses a strong enthusiasm for the system.

Moreover, France in general, and France in 2013 in particular,<sup>2</sup> presents institutional and political characteristics enabling to test empirically for the three competing explanations proposed by the literature presented above.

Regarding the critical citizens hypothesis, France has undergone major social and demographic evolutions that have been shown to affect political attitudes and voting behavior (Tiberj 2017). More importantly, France can be considered as a democracy offering little alternatives to electoral democracy. In particular, devices such as referenda are not only used infrequently, they are also very strictly controlled by political actors (Dolez, Laurent, and Morel 2003; Paoletti 2010). France is characterized by a political life very much centered only around elections, and around the presidential election in particular. Furthermore, French citizens are amongst the European citizens of Western Europe who are the most critical of their political institutions and political authorities (Grossman and Sauger 2017). In 2013, the lack of political support was particularly strong: only 19% of French citizens trusted their Parliament, 14% of them trusted the government, 7% of them trusted political parties, and less than half (48%) were satisfied with the

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<sup>2</sup> The ESS survey on which this study is based upon has been administered between January and June 2013.

way democracy works in France.<sup>3</sup> Between May 2012 and June 2013, the popularity of the Socialist President François Hollande plummeted, starting with 57% of respondents satisfied with his action to only 29%.<sup>4</sup> Such a rapid loss of popularity is unprecedented (Grossman and Sauger 2014), even in a context in which the popularity of French presidents fades ever more rapidly since 2000.

France also presents characteristics enabling to test for the instrumental support hypothesis. As most other European countries, France has been affected by the economic crisis: in 2013, the growth of the GDP was only of 0.3%, whereas debt represented 93.5% of the GDP and unemployment continued to rise (Kuhn 2014, 441). Moreover, several analyses have shown that the 2012 presidential and legislative elections have revolved very much around the state of the economy. The will to punish incumbents for the management of the economic crisis and to limit social inequalities explains to a large extent the alternation that occurred (Grossman and Sauger 2014; Sauger and Raillard 2014; Lewis-Beck and Nadeau 2015, 53–57). At the same time, the new executive's inability to bring back growth and to reduce unemployment and social inequalities has soon appeared obvious to many citizens, explaining in turn largely the fall of its popularity (Sineau and Cautrès 2013). Moreover, it has been shown that France is a country in which citizens are particularly sensitive to the matter of social inequalities, regardless of their social position (Galland, Lemel, and Frénod 2013).

Finally, France is a country particularly suited to test the sore loser hypothesis. It can be considered a majoritarian democracy in the sense of Lijphart (1984; 1999), a factor that has repeatedly been found to affect citizens' satisfaction with democracy. To sum up this line of argument, systems characterized by a bipartisan competition and single-party governments increase the satisfaction citizens derive from having voted for the government party while at the same time increasing the costs of having voted for one of the parties on the losing side, thus widening the gap between winners' and losers' evaluations of democracy (Anderson and Guillory 1997). At the same time, France also displays peculiar features that sets it apart from other, "typical" majoritarian systems such as the UK in the 1950s or New-Zealand before 1993. To begin, the electoral competition is not purely bipartisan to the extent that it involves a large number of small or medium-sized parties on each side of the left-right spectrum – including the center – besides the two main parties, many of which virtually never take part in the government. Between 1958 and 2012, the effective number of parties (Laakso and Taagepera 1979) obtaining

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<sup>3</sup> These figures come from the Eurobarometer 80 administered in November 2013.

<sup>4</sup> These figures are drawn from the TNS-Kanter barometer on the popularity of the French president: [http://www.tns-sofres.com/dataviz?type=1&code\\_nom=hollande&start=1&end=12&submit=Ok](http://www.tns-sofres.com/dataviz?type=1&code_nom=hollande&start=1&end=12&submit=Ok)

votes in the legislative elections in France has varied between 4.13 in 1981 to 6.89 in 1993, while the effective number of parties gaining seats varied between 2.26 in 2002 to 4.52 in 1973.<sup>5</sup> The least squares index (Gallagher 1991) measuring the disproportionality between votes and seats also suggests that many French citizens often vote for parties never getting into government, with an index ranging from 6.57 in 1973 to 25.25 in 1993 – a figure considerably higher than in other European democracies, including the UK where this index has never been higher than 17.45 (1983) during the same period. Thus, the French electoral system is relatively permissive with respect to the formation of political parties while still setting high entry costs to political office. To the extent that voters' party preference is influenced by the political supply, this might crucially affect their evaluation of the quality of democracy since many of them feel close to parties that are consistently unable to win elections: in a pure bipartisan system, these voters might have identified either with one of the two government parties or with no party at all. Relatedly, the French party system is characterized by a relatively high polarization, at least when compared to party systems in majoritarian democracies (Abedi 2002; Dalton 2008; Lachat 2008). Thus, a substantial number of voters who place themselves at the middle of the left-right spectrum might not feel represented by any party because of the wide ideological distance between left-wing and right-wing parties (Anderson 2011). These two peculiarities of the French party system – fragmentation and polarization – enable us to empirically distinguish two possible channels through which majoritarian institutions might breed discontent among citizens: either this is because they distort the link between public opinion and party formation (that is, the link between demand and supply) or this is because they increase the number of “permanent losers,” who identify with parties that systematically lose elections.

#### 4. Hypotheses and data

##### *Dependent variable*

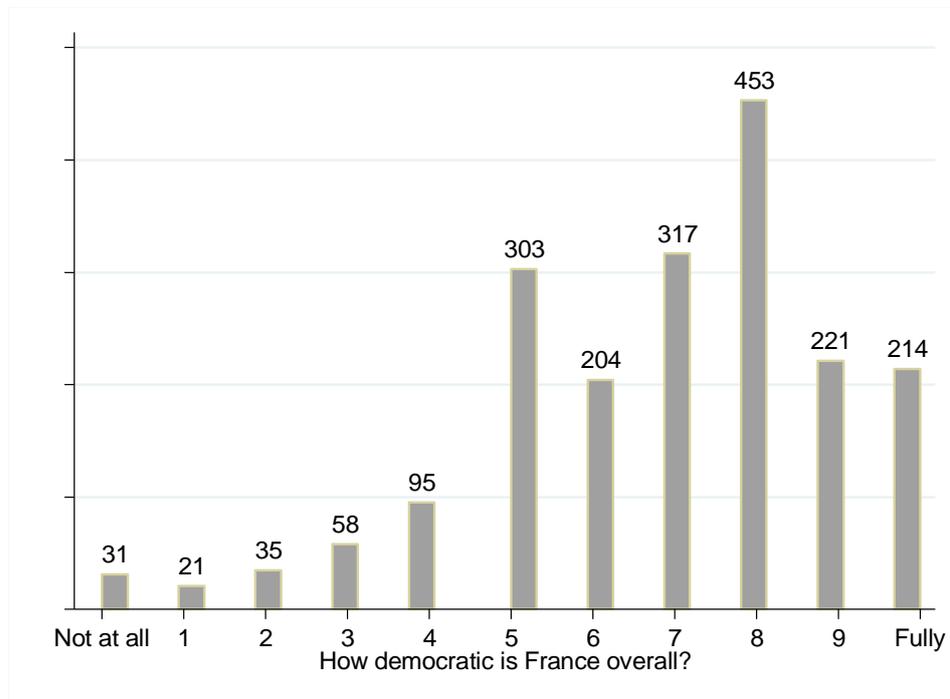
The aim of this paper is to explain how French citizens assess the democratic character of their current political system. Our dependent variable is a question drawn from the ESS Round 6 “*Europeans' Understandings and Evaluations of Democracy*”. Respondents were asked “how democratic do you think [France] is overall” and had to give a rating ranging from 0 to 10, 0 corresponding

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<sup>5</sup> These figures come from the Electoral System website of Michael Gallagher (TCD), with the complete list of indices available online: [http://www.tcd.ie/Political\\_Science/staff/michael\\_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf](http://www.tcd.ie/Political_Science/staff/michael_gallagher/ElSystems/Docts/ElectionIndices.pdf)

to “not at all democratic” and 10 to “completely democratic”.

Figure 1: Respondents' evaluation of democracy in France (valid responses only)



As can be seen in Figure 1 above, the variable is not normally distributed,<sup>6</sup> which means that we cannot use OLS procedures. Furthermore, treating the variable as a continuous one is a questionable choice, since it would assume that there is the same difference between the values of 9 and 10 as between, say, 7 and 8. Thus, we chose to treat the variable as a categorical. Since some categories comprise a small number of respondents, we recoded the variable in the following way:

- (1) We grouped together the categories of 0, 1, 2, 3 and 4, each of which includes a relatively small number of cases: This new category takes on the value of 0 and includes respondents who perceive France as barely democratic or not democratic at all.
- (2) The new variable takes on the value of 1 for respondents who picked the category of 5 on the original 11-points scale. We decided not to merge this category with others; first, because it comprises a relatively large number of respondents (about 300); second, because it has been consistently shown that with scales or questions with an odd number of answers, many respondents tend to favor the scale midpoint without necessarily

<sup>6</sup> The variable has a kurtosis of 3.44 and a skewness of -0.75: both values are significantly different from the values we would have found under normal distribution ( $p < 0.001$ ). We additionally ran a Shapiro-Wilk test, which confirms that the variable is not normally distributed ( $p < 0.001$ ).

having an informed attitude on the topic (typical examples include propensity to vote or left-right scales; see Tiberj, Denni, and Mayer 2013, 255).

- (3) The categories of 6, 7 and 8 take on the value of 2 on the new variable: This category represents respondents who perceive France as satisfactorily democratic. We take this approach because the thresholds are ambiguous from a theoretical point of view and the differences between the three values cannot be interpreted in a straightforward way, but its drawback is that the new category comprises a large number of respondents (approximately the half of the sample). Thus, for each model we will run, we will also check whether treating the values of 6, 7 and 8 as separate categories fundamentally alters our results (results of these additional tests are reported in Appendix B).
- (4) We built two separate categories for the values of 9 and 10, which take on the values of 3 and 4, respectively. The rationale behind this decision is that there is a difference in nature – rather than a difference in degree – between these two values: while a value of 9 indicates that the respondent considers France to be fairly but not perfectly democratic, a value of 10 indicates (considering that the scale is truncated and cannot take on higher values) that the respondent believes France has achieved the highest possible degree of “democraticness” and could not possibly be more democratic.

Thus, the coding is both theoretically driven and determined by the variable’s distribution. Table 2 displays summary statistics on the new variable.

Table 2: Respondents' assessment of democracy in France (old and new variable)

How democratic is France (original scores)	Frequency	Percent	How democratic is France (new scores)	Frequency	Percent
0	31	1.58			
1	21	1.07			
2	35	1.78			
3	58	2.95			
4	95	4.83	0	240	12.30
5	303	15.40	1	303	15.52
6	204	10.37			
7	317	16.11			
8	453	23.02	2	974	49.90
9	221	11.23	3	221	11.32
10	214	10.87	4	214	10.96
DK / refusal	16	0.81	<i>Excluded</i>		
Total	1,97	100		1,952	100

### *Independent variables*

Building on past research on system support, we will investigate several factors that may account

for individual-level variations in democracy assessment. These factors can be sorted in two main groups: first, we will analyze political variables (such as respondents' views of democracy and party identification) in order to assess the critical citizens hypothesis and the sore loser hypothesis. Second, economic variables such as respondents' economic well-being and their evaluations of social policies will allow us to investigate the predictive power of the instrumental support hypothesis. Descriptive statistics for each predictor – including control variables – can be found in Appendix A.

We begin with political factors. First, as discussed above, a fair share of respondents defines democracy not only in procedural terms (focusing on free and fair elections), but also include direct democracy in their definition of what democracy ought to be like (Hernández 2016; Ferrin and Kriesi 2016). Since direct democratic procedures are underdeveloped in France, we can expect that respondents whose definition of democracy goes beyond a minimalist definition give a lower rating to their political system. Thus, we will test the following hypothesis:

*H1. Having a more encompassing definition of democracy makes respondents more critical in their evaluations of the actual level of democracy in France.*

We selected two items that tap alternative definitions of democracy: respondents are asked whether they consider important for democracy in general (a) that elections are free and fair; and (b) that citizens can vote directly on issues through referenda. In each case, responses are coded on an 11-points scale that ranges from 0 (if the respondent considers this aspect of democracy unimportant) to 10 (if the respondent considers this aspect of democracy extremely important).<sup>7</sup> We expect the first of these variables to have a positive impact on the dependent variable, whereas the second one is expected to decrease France's scores on the democracy scale.

Second, we will explore the effect of the winner-loser gap in France. Majoritarian systems such as France have been found to widen the winner-loser gap in terms of satisfaction with democracy (Anderson et Guillory 1997), but there could be several mechanisms behind this general tendency. First, discontent may come from the fact that majoritarian systems reduce party supply by raising the entry costs to the political market, meaning that many respondents are unable to find any party that adequately represents them (Anderson 2011). Alternatively, we can expect

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<sup>7</sup> The ESS also asks respondents whether they think each of these democratic criteria are actually fulfilled in their own country. Yet, we decided not to use these items and to rely solely on the importance respondents assign to these aspects of democracy, in order to minimize endogeneity issues. Even if respondents who describe their own system as nondemocratic are also more likely to evaluate the state of direct and social democracy in their country as very bad, we cannot ascertain if the former really is a consequence of the latter or if respondents respond similarly to all items for reasons of consistency or because they are generally dissatisfied with the whole system.

respondents who identify with a small or extreme party to be dissatisfied because their preferred party is never in government (Anderson et al. 2005).

The variable we use measures whether respondents' political preferences are represented at the government level. The variable distinguishes between four categories of respondents and takes on the value of 0 if the respondent does not identify with any party, 1 if s/he identifies with a party that never took part in the government during the past 20 years, 2 if s/he identifies with a former governing party, and 3 if s/he identifies with one of the current governing parties.<sup>8</sup> Our main expectation is straightforward: Generally, we expect “winners” (that is, respondents who get a score of 2 or 3) to give France higher ratings on the democracy scale than “losers” (that is, respondents who get a score of 0 or 1). Yet, which category of losers is the most dissatisfied remains an open question: if majoritarian systems breed discontent because they lead to a contraction of the party supply, we should find that respondents who do not feel close to any party consistently give France the lowest ratings on the democracy scale. If, by contrast, majoritarian systems make voters unhappy because they create permanent losers – that is, voters who identify with parties that always lose elections – respondents who get a score of 1 should be the most likely to perceive their system as nondemocratic. Likewise, it is not clear whether we should expect respondents whose favorite party previously participated in the government to be satisfied to the same extent as those who identify with a party currently in office. We will thus test the following general hypothesis:

*H2. Respondents who identify with a government party rate France higher on the democracy scale.*

Prior work on losers' consent relies almost exclusively on voting behavior rather than party identification. We opted for party identification for three reasons. First, voting behavior might significantly diverge from party identification because of strategic voting, and we want to capture “sincere” party preferences. Second, this measure allows us to identify voters who feel that no existing party adequately represents their own political positions or priorities. This is not the same as abstention: for example, individuals who do not feel close to any party might nevertheless vote to prevent another party from accessing office; conversely, some non-voters might feel close to a

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<sup>8</sup> In order to know which parties have been in power in France in the last 20 years (since 1992), we have used the ParlGov database, taking into account the fact that several of the parties mentioned in the list did not exist in 1992 and are the result of mergers, splits or changes of party labels: Döring, Holger and Philip Manow. 2016. Parliaments and governments database (ParlGov): Information on parties, elections and cabinets in modern democracies. Development version. The parties in government in 2012 (coded 3) are the following: *Parti Socialiste* (PS), *Europe Ecologie les Verts* (EELV), *Parti Radical de Gauche* (PRG). Parties that have been in the government within the last 20 years (coded 2) include *Nouveau Centre* (NC), *Parti Radical Valoisien*, *Union des démocrates et indépendants* (UDI), *Union pour un mouvement populaire* (UMP), *Mouvement démocrate* (MODEM), *Parti communiste français* (PCF). Parties that have never been in government (coded 1) include *Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste* (NPA), *Lutte ouvrière* (LO), *Parti de gauche* (PG), *Mouvement pour la France* (MPF), autres.

party but still abstain from voting because they believe this party has no reasonable chance of winning. Third and relatedly, while abstention is consistently underreported in surveys, we can reasonably expect that party identification is less subject to potential social desirability biases.

We now turn to economic factors. First, we expect citizens' evaluations of redistributive policies to affect the extent to which they view France as democratic. We thus build on prior research showing that satisfaction with public policies influences evaluations of the political system: first, because outputs generally contribute to the legitimacy of a given institutional system (Scharpf 1999); second, because – as argued above – people may rely on policy outputs to assess the democratic character of a country. To put it otherwise, individuals who perceive that the system is not able to protect the weak against the strong might not only cease to support incumbents but also start inferring that something is wrong with political institutions themselves.

*H3. Respondents who consider that France takes appropriate measures to fight income inequalities rate France higher on the democracy scale*

To measure perceptions of redistributive policies, we rely on a 11-points scale asking respondents whether the current government takes appropriate measures to reduce differences in income levels, 0 corresponding to “does not apply at all” and 10 to “applies completely”. Overall, the perception of the ability of the French government to fight income inequalities is rather low, with a mean of only 4.41.

Turning to respondents' individual economic well-being, we expect that people with a low socio-economic status generally tend to perceive the status quo in a more negative light (see Ceka and Magalhaes 2016). As a consequence, individuals who perceive their own social position as lower might have a more negative evaluation of the degree of democracy of their country.

*H4. Respondents with a lower social and economic position give a lower rating to the degree of democracy of France than respondents who are better off.*

In order to evaluate whether individuals who feel more socially or economically excluded tend to give a lower evaluation of the degree of democracy of France, we rely on two items. The first one asks respondents the following question: “There are people who tend to be towards the top of our society and people who tend to be towards the bottom. Where would you place yourself on this scale nowadays?” The variable ranges from 0 (“bottom of our society”) to 10 (“top of our society”). The second item is the household's total net income ordered by decile: we thus take into account both respondents' objective and subjective economic well-being.

### *Control variables*

In addition to the main independent variables, we include several control variables. First, we include the standard socio-demographic controls: age, gender, and education (in years). Second, we add respondents' self-placement on a 11-points left-right scale, recoded as follows: respondents who position themselves at the far left (i.e., who pick the values of 0 or 1 on the original scale) are coded 0; left-wing respondents (values of 2, 3 or 4) are coded 1; those who position themselves in the middle of the left-right continuum (5 on the original scale) are coded 2; right-wing respondents (values of 6, 7 or 8) are coded 3; and far-right voters (9 or 10) are coded 4. The rationale for including this variable is that respondents' position on the left-right scale might drive the relationship between representation and democracy assessment, left-wing respondents being more likely to identify with one of the current government parties (as the survey was administered in 2013) and median voters being generally less likely to identify with any party (on this latter point, see Anderson 2011). Furthermore, we expect left-right placement to impact the dependent variable on its own: for example, far-left and far-right voters should be more likely to be dissatisfied with their political regimes; likewise, we can expect left-wing respondents to put higher demands on democratic regimes than right-wing respondents, and thus to be more critical in their assessment of the quality of democracy.

Thirdly, we include political interest as a proxy both of the degree of political sophistication (Luskin 1990) and of the perceived political competence of the respondents (Gaxie 1990). Indeed, as several of the items used in this analysis rely on scales and on complex, normative questions, it is necessary to control for the cases in which respondents position themselves randomly just for the sake of providing an answer. Although interest in politics is not an ideal measure, it allows us to control for this possible bias. Fourthly and finally, we have controlled for a possible “optimism bias” in the evaluations of democracy, by using the item asking respondents about their level of happiness. Indeed, subjective, self-reported levels of happiness are only weakly linked with objective measures of well-being (Huppert et al. 2008) and respondents who have a particularly positive vision of life are also likely to have a more positive view of their regime than others.

## **5. Results and discussion**

We now turn to the empirical analysis. Since our dependent variable is ordinal, we first run an ordered logistic regression: results can be seen in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Determinants of democracy assessment in France (ordered logistic regression, displaying odds ratios)

Dependent variable: democracy assessment	
Definition of democracy	
Direct democracy	0.954 (0.0255)
Electoral democracy	1.419*** (0.0460)
Representation	
No party identification	<i>Reference category</i>
Non-governing party	0.944 (0.160)
Former governing party	1.377* (0.199)
Current government party	1.733*** (0.237)
Ability to fight income inequalities	1.252*** (0.0285)
Place in society	0.983 (0.0320)
Income	1.007 (0.0194)
Happiness	1.171*** (0.0350)
Left-right self-placement	
Far left	1.364 (0.257)
Left	1.152 (0.157)
Center	<i>Reference category</i>
Right	1.073 (0.151)
Far right	1.022 (0.210)
Gender (female)	1.287** (0.123)
Education years	0.999 (0.0146)
Age	1.003 (0.00295)
Political interest	
Very interested	1.195 (0.179)
Quite interested	<i>Reference category</i>
Hardly interested	1.061 (0.125)
Not at all interested	0.812 (0.126)
Cut 1	16.93 (7.559)
Cut 2	55.22 (24.87)
Cut 3	804.4 (379.2)
Cut 4	2,125 (1,017)
Observations	1,639

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

Consistently with H1, the more importance respondents attach to free and fair elections, the more positively they evaluate the current regime: for a 1-point increase, respondents become about 42% more likely to move to a higher category of the dependent variable. This effect (which is significant at the 0.1% level) is quite strong considering the item's response scale. As expected, valuing direct democracy makes respondents' evaluations more severe. However, the effect is weak and only marginally significant (with a p-value slightly below 0.1), and seems to be partly driven by the correlation between Direct democracy and Electoral democracy ( $r=0.3$ ). When Electoral democracy is removed from the model, the effect of Direct democracy becomes positive and significant at the 5% level. Adding or removing control variables affects the statistical significance but not the direction of the effect, which remains consistently positive.

Thus, support for H1 is mixed and our results so far do not clearly confirm the critical citizens hypothesis.

Results regarding Representation are less ambiguous and lend support to H2. Table 3 displays estimates for three groups of respondents (namely those who identify with one of the current government parties, those who identify with a former governing party, and those who identify with a non-governing party, respectively), the reference category being 0 (i.e., respondents who do not identify with any party). The first finding that stands out is that being able to identify with a party does not significantly improve respondents' evaluation of the level of democracy in their country. On the contrary, the coefficient associated with respondents who identify with a non-governing party is negative, albeit not significant. This result, while tentative, indicates that the contraction of the party supply induced by majoritarian systems is less detrimental to system support than the unequal representation of mainstream and small parties. Furthermore, as expected, identifying with a former governing party makes respondents significantly more likely (37%) to pick higher values of the democracy assessment scale. Supporters of the current government party are clearly the least critical in their evaluations, with a 73% probability of choosing higher values than non-aligned voters: thus, our results highlight nonnegligible differences in the evaluations of current and former winners.

We also find strong support for H3: the government's perceived willingness to reduce income inequalities significantly improves citizens' evaluations of the level of democracy, with a 25% increase of the odds of giving a better evaluation for each additional point on an 11-points scale. This result confirms what has been repeatedly highlighted by prior research (that system support is partly determined by satisfaction with economic policies), but helps qualifying the interpretation of this finding: economic policy outputs impact system support not only because they enhance citizens' mere satisfaction with the system, but also because they help them assess whether current political institutions are actually conducive to decisions that are preferred by a majority of voters (regardless of whether they are favorable to redistribution themselves).

By contrast, H4 is clearly disconfirmed: neither Place in Society nor Income have any discernible effect on democracy assessment.

Regarding control variables, feeling happy and being female make respondents more likely to give positive evaluations of democracy in France (the former effect being quite strong). The remainder of the control variables does not reach statistical significance: neither demographic (age) nor attitudinal (left-right self-placement and political interest) indicators play any notable

role for democracy assessment. The fact that education years do not make evaluations significantly more severe casts further doubts on the critical citizens hypothesis.

To sum up, these first results indicate that democracy assessment in France is mainly driven by election outcomes (H2) and redistributive policies (H3), to a lesser extent by conceptions of democracy (H1), but not by respondents' socio-economic status (H4). Yet, these findings are only preliminary and need further confirmation. Indeed, ordered logistic regression rests on the assumption that the difference between each pair of outcomes on the dependent variable is the same, i.e., that predictors have the same effect across all levels of the dependent variable. In our case, a Brant test indicates that the proportional odds assumption is violated ( $p < 0.001$ ). Thus, in order to examine whether some of our variables have a different effect across categories of democracy assessment, we complement our analysis with a multinomial logistic regression: results are displayed in Table 4 below.<sup>9</sup> Since the value of 9 on the original democracy assessment scale corresponds to France's score on the Polity IV DEMOC scale, we use the corresponding value on our new dependent variable (i.e., 3) as baseline category, in order to examine why respondents' evaluations diverge from experts' assessments. Table 4: Determinants of democracy assessment in France (multinomial logistic regression, displaying relative risks ratios; base outcome = 3)

	Outcome: 0 (not democratic)	Outcome: 1 (partly democratic)	Outcome: 2 (moderately democratic)	Outcome: 4 (perfectly democratic)
<i>Definition of democracy</i>				
Direct democracy	1.121 (0.073)	1.087 (0.066)	1.004 (0.046)	1.011 (0.059)
Electoral democracy	0.516*** (0.046)	0.511*** (0.44)	0.699*** (0.054)	0.934 (0.093)
<i>Representation:</i>				
No party identification	<i>Reference category</i>			
Non-governing party	0.844 (0.313)	0.825 (0.305)	0.711 (0.219)	0.708 (0.285)
Former governing party	0.455* (0.153)	0.706 (0.226)	0.695 (0.177)	0.951 (0.309)
Current government party	0.172*** (0.066)	0.386** (0.117)	0.571* (0.134)	0.664 (0.204)
Fight income inequalities	0.724*** (0.038)	0.774*** (0.038)	0.901** (0.034)	1.151** (0.056)
Place in society	0.999 (0.073)	0.971 (0.069)	0.984 (0.057)	0.93 (0.069)
Happiness	0.833** (0.057)	0.906 (0.06)	0.957 (0.053)	1.261** (0.094)
Income	0.939 (0.043)	0.906* (0.039)	0.937 (0.031)	0.903 (0.039)
<i>Left-right position:</i>				

<sup>9</sup> We also ran a likelihood-ratio test in order to see which of the two procedures fits the data better. The test confirms that the multinomial logit is more adequate ( $p < 0.0001$ ).

Far left	0.989 (0.456)	1.175 (0.5)	1.764 (0.603)	2.444* (1.015)
Left	0.801 (0.256)	0.996 (0.291)	1.267 (0.309)	1.413 (0.456)
Center	<i>Reference category</i>			
Right	1.238 (0.394)	0.687 (0.215)	1.417 (0.356)	1.075 (0.356)
Far right	1.134 (0.517)	0.972 (0.425)	1.292 (0.48)	1.205 (0.549)
Gender: female	0.624* (0.14)	0.768 (0.16)	0.904 (0.151)	1.151 (0.248)
Education years	0.952 (0.032)	0.973 (0.031)	0.994 (0.024)	0.942 (0.03)
Age	0.99 (0.007)	0.996 (0.006)	0.989* (0.005)	0.998 (0.007)
<i>Political interest:</i>				
Very interested	1.028 (0.352)	0.465* (0.166)	0.726 (0.169)	1.098 (0.319)
Quite interested	<i>Reference category</i>			
Hardly interested	0.936 (0.271)	0.999 (0.265)	1.029 (0.22)	1.044 (0.284)
Not at all interested	0.786 (0.27)	0.737 (0.24)	0.506* (0.041)	0.375* (0.15)
Constant	15,345*** (18,233)	8,430*** (9,649)	847.43*** (838.7)	0.735 (0.95)
Observations	1,639	1,639	1,639	1,639

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Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.01$ , \*  $p < 0.05$

The results of the multinomial logistic regression broadly confirm our previous findings: again, we find no evidence that valuing direct democratic procedures makes citizens more critical toward their own regime; by contrast, attaching importance to the electoral component of democracy makes respondents less likely to give more severe ratings than experts. This latter effect is large given the response scale of the variable, and strongly significant except for the last outcome category: in other words, attitudes toward free and fair elections explain why some citizens are more severe than experts, but not why some of them are more charitable.

As previously, we find that being able to identify with a party does not improve respondents' ratings: there is overall no statistically significant difference between respondents who do not identify with any party and those who feel close with a party that never took part in the government. Yet, the multinomial logit model adds some information on the link between representation and democracy assessment: respondents who identify with a former governing party do not consistently rate France better than those who do not identify with any party.<sup>10</sup> The relative risks ratios associated with this group of respondents are negative for all categories of the

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<sup>10</sup> Switching the reference category from 0 to 2 indicates that there is also no statistically significant difference in evaluations between respondents who identify with a permanently losing party and those who identify with a former government party.

dependent variable, but these coefficients almost never reach statistical significance except for the first outcome category: respondents are about 55% less likely to rate France as nondemocratic when their preferred party was ever able to win an election in the past. On the whole, the only group that is clearly distinguishable from the reference category is the subset of respondents who identify with a current government party. Relative risks ratios associated with this group are negative and significant for the three first categories of the dependent variable, and the effect size is sometimes substantial: feeling close to the incumbent parties makes respondents about 60% less likely to evaluate France as partly democratic, and about 80% less likely to deem it nondemocratic. Hypothesis 2 is therefore confirmed.

We also find strong evidence that the government's perceived ability to fight income inequalities affects democracy assessment (H3). Considering that the variable is coded on an 11-points scale, its effects are considerable: for each additional point, respondents are 28% less likely to rate France as non-democratic, 23% less likely to rate it as partly democratic, and 10% less likely to rate it as moderately democratic. Interestingly, this is one of the few variables that significantly affects respondents' probability of giving better ratings than experts: each additional point makes respondents 15% more likely to consider France as perfectly democratic rather than fairly democratic.

Again, we find no support for H4. Respondents' perceived social position never reaches statistical significance; increasing respondents' income only makes them less likely to rate France as partly democratic, without impacting their propensity to choose any other outcome category.

Regarding control variables, the multinomial logit model allows us to uncover two interesting tendencies regarding political interest, which did not appear in our previous estimations: first, very interested respondents are, as expected, significantly less likely to label France partly democratic (recall that this corresponds to the midpoint of the original democracy assessment scale); second, broadly speaking, respondents who profess no interest in politics at all are more likely to evaluate France in the same way as experts. Happiness impacts democracy assessment, as previously; yet, the new estimates indicate that the effect is not linear, as coefficients are only statistically significant for the first and the last outcome categories. Results regarding other control variables are less conclusive: women tend to be (as previously) less critical in their evaluations, but the effect reaches statistical significance only for the first outcome category (i.e., they are about 40% less likely to deem France undemocratic). Age does not reach statistical significance for any category but one: the older respondents are, the less likely they are to

consider France moderately democratic, although the effect is very low. Again, education has no effect whatsoever. Regarding left-right position, the multinomial logit reveals a somewhat odd pattern: far-left respondents are significantly more likely to rate France as perfectly democratic than median voters. This result is hard to explain given that we control for party identification and that it is robust to the inclusion or removal of supporters of the Socialist Party.

Finally, in order to check whether our results are sensitive to the coding of the dependent variable, we rerun both the ordered logistic regression and the multinomial logit model treating the original values of 6, 7 and 8 as separate categories instead of grouping them together. The estimates can be seen in Appendix B. In short, our main results hold: both models confirm that valuing direct democracy has virtually no impact on democracy assessment,<sup>11</sup> while valuing free and fair elections makes respondents' evaluations more positive. They also confirm that identifying with a government party improves ratings, but that the effect is much stronger for current than former governing parties. Finally, perceptions of redistributive policies have – as previously – a strong effect on the dependent variable. The only notable difference that appears in the multinomial logit is that income has a marginally significant and negative impact on the probability of giving ratings different from those of experts.

## Conclusion

The legitimacy crisis that supposedly affects contemporary democracies has been subject to numerous investigations but so far, researchers have mostly focused either on satisfaction with democracy (e.g., Anderson and Guillory 1997), preference for democracy over authoritarian regimes, or, to a lesser extent, on citizens' views of democracy (e.g., Ferrin and Kriesi 2016). In this paper, we focus on a topic that has rarely been investigated: how do citizens assess the democratic character of their country, and why do individuals living under the same regime and submitted to the same rules perceive those in a completely different way?

The aim of this article was to understand the individual-level variations in democracy assessment in France. To do so, we built on prior research on system support and identified several possible factors that may account for these variations. Some of these factors are economic (objective and subjective economic well-being and evaluations of social policies) while some others are political

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<sup>11</sup> We do find a slight negative effect of direct democracy in the ordered logit model, but the coefficient switches sign when Electoral democracy is removed from the model.

(views of democracy and identification with governing parties). Our results suggest that democracy assessment is driven by political variables rather than economic ones; among the latter, only policy evaluations play a consistent role.

As expected, we find some evidence that diverging views of democracy lead to different assessments of the quality of democracy in France: respondents who define democracy in purely electoral terms give more positive assessments; yet, endorsing direct democracy does not have any effect on respondents' evaluations. Political representation has a more consistent effect: respondents give France higher ratings if they identify with one of the current government parties; conversely, identifying with a party that lost the last election consistently decreases respondents' satisfaction with the current political system. Thus, we find strong evidence that the “sore loser” effect goes beyond mere satisfaction with democracy and also affects whether respondents define their system as democratic. Furthermore, given that the survey was administered shortly after the 2012 elections in France, our results suggest that these evaluations are volatile rather than stable over time, as voters' evaluations become more critical as soon as their favorite party loses office.

While we find that political factors consistently affect the way people evaluate their political system, we find contrasted evidence for the “instrumental support” hypothesis: respondents' perceptions of economic policies clearly affect their assessments of the degree of democracy of France, while their perceived and actual socio-economic status does not. On the one hand, respondents who consider that authorities fail to fight against income inequalities are more likely to rate France lower on the democracy scale. On the other hand, poor people are not consistently less likely to consider France democratic than more privileged ones; and viewing oneself at the bottom of the society does not lead to a more critical view of the political system.

To sum up, evaluations are partly driven by economic considerations but these considerations are sociotropic rather than egotropic, to the extent that democracy assessment depends on the provision of public goods rather than respondents' own living conditions. This stands in contrast to politically-driven evaluations, which display a strong superficial and egotropic component to the extent that democracy assessment is determined more consistently by election outcomes than by sophisticated conceptions of democracy.

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## Appendix A: Descriptive statistics

Table A.1: Definitions of democracy (valid responses only)

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. deviation	Min.	Max.
Electoral democracy	1,938	8.50	1.79	0	10
Direct democracy	1,936	8	1.9	0	10

Table A.2: Representation

Label	Value	Frequency	Percent
Does not identify with any party	0	891	47.12
Identifies with non-governing party	1	207	10.95
Identifies with former governing party	2	387	20.47
Identifies with current government party	3	406	21.47
Total		1,891	100

Table A.3: Governments' perceived willingness to fight income inequality (valid responses only)

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. deviation	Min.	Max.
Measures against income inequalities	1,938	4.41	2.29	0	10

Table A.4: Place in society (valid responses only)

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. deviation	Min.	Max.
Place in society (0=bottom, 10=top)	1,950	5.2	1.63	0	10

Table A.5: Income by deciles

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. deviation	Min.	Max.
Income	1,785	4.59	2.73	1	10

Table A.6: Control variables (continuous)

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std. deviation	Min.	Max.
Age	1,968	51.82	18.48	15	101
Education (years)	1,961	12.36	4.01	0	30

Table A.7: Control variables (categorical)

Variable	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender:</i>		
Male	881	44.77
Female	1,087	55.23
<i>Political interest:</i>		
Very interested	279	14.18
Quite interested	660	33.54
Hardly interested	661	33.59
Not at all interested	368	18.7
<i>Left-right self-placement:</i>		
Far left	173	9.32
Left	507	27.32
Center	517	27.86
Right	505	27.21
Far right	154	8.30

## Appendix B: Additional estimates

Table B.1: Determinants of democracy assessment (ordered logistic regression, displaying odds ratios; dependent variable recoded in seven categories)

Dependent variable: democracy assessment	
Definition of democracy	
Direct democracy	0.952* (0.0241)
Electoral democracy	1.422*** (0.0438)
Representation	
No party identification	<i>Reference category</i>
Non-governing party	0.920 (0.147)
Former governing party	1.306* (0.175)
Current government party	1.709*** (0.218)
Ability to fight income inequalities	1.238*** (0.0265)
Place in society	0.992 (0.0304)
Income	1.014 (0.0182)
Happiness	1.151*** (0.0325)
Left-right self-placement	
Far left	1.272 (0.224)
Left	1.132 (0.144)
Center	<i>Reference category</i>
Right	1.046 (0.137)
Far right	1.040 (0.203)
Gender (female)	1.196* (0.107)
Education years	0.990 (0.0136)
Age	1.004 (0.00275)
Political interest	
Very interested	1.113 (0.157)
Quite interested	<i>Reference category</i>
Hardly interested	0.994 (0.108)
Not at all interested	0.768 (0.112)
Cut 1	13.51*** (5.699)
Cut 2	43.94*** (18.69)
Cut 3	80.86*** (34.68)
Cut 4	175.4*** (76.04)
Cut 5	616.8*** (272.5)
Cut 6	1,625*** (730.0)
Observations	1,639

Standard errors in parentheses. \*\*\* p<0.001, \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05

Table B.2: Determinants of democracy assessment (multinomial logistic regression, displaying relative risks ratios; dependent variable recoded in seven categories)

Outcome:	0	1	2	3	4	6
Direct democracy	1.123 (0.0728)	1.089 (0.0659)	1.061 (0.0657)	0.980 (0.0531)	1.000 (0.0501)	1.011 (0.0591)
Electoral democracy	0.512*** (0.0455)	0.507*** (0.0436)	0.614*** (0.0554)	0.672*** (0.0577)	0.767** (0.0641)	0.934 (0.0937)
<i>Representation</i>						
No party identification	<i>Reference category</i>					
Non-governing party	0.847 (0.314)	0.829 (0.306)	0.745 (0.288)	0.777 (0.280)	0.661 (0.223)	0.708 (0.285)
Former governing party	0.455* (0.153)	0.707 (0.227)	0.649 (0.212)	0.770 (0.228)	0.671 (0.186)	0.951 (0.309)
Current government party	0.170*** (0.0653)	0.383** (0.116)	0.474* (0.147)	0.504* (0.142)	0.650 (0.166)	0.664 (0.203)
Fight income inequalities	0.722*** (0.0378)	0.771*** (0.0376)	0.861** (0.0433)	0.886** (0.0405)	0.929 (0.0387)	1.151** (0.0565)
Place in society	0.997 (0.0734)	0.969 (0.0688)	0.921 (0.0688)	1.024 (0.0699)	0.985 (0.0622)	0.929 (0.0687)
Happiness	0.834** (0.0569)	0.907 (0.0600)	0.971 (0.0684)	0.964 (0.0628)	0.944 (0.0568)	1.261** (0.0939)
Income	0.937 (0.0428)	0.905* (0.0389)	0.915* (0.0401)	0.920* (0.0362)	0.958 (0.0347)	0.904* (0.0389)
<i>Left-right position</i>						
Far left	1.001 (0.464)	1.188 (0.506)	2.187 (0.956)	1.662 (0.662)	1.705 (0.637)	2.451* (1.019)
Left	0.798 (0.257)	0.992 (0.289)	1.510 (0.483)	0.980 (0.282)	1.398 (0.374)	1.416 (0.458)
Center	<i>Reference category</i>					
Right	1.249 (0.398)	0.691 (0.217)	1.886 (0.615)	1.162 (0.338)	1.470 (0.406)	1.077 (0.357)
Far right	1.134 (0.518)	0.970 (0.424)	1.389 (0.677)	1.014 (0.440)	1.483 (0.587)	1.207 (0.550)
Gender (female)	0.631* (0.141)	0.770 (0.162)	1.104 (0.243)	0.909 (0.180)	0.835 (0.152)	1.151 (0.248)
Education years	0.954 (0.0325)	0.975 (0.0313)	1.008 (0.0331)	1.022 (0.0298)	0.971 (0.0262)	0.942* (0.0303)
<i>Political interest</i>						
Very interested	1.045 (0.358)	0.472* (0.169)	1.121 (0.361)	0.537* (0.161)	0.727 (0.186)	1.100 (0.320)
Quite interested	<i>Reference category</i>					
Hardly interested	0.949 (0.274)	1.011 (0.268)	1.413 (0.389)	1.011 (0.251)	0.930 (0.215)	1.046 (0.284)
Not at all interested	0.795 (0.273)	0.745 (0.242)	0.589 (0.217)	0.573 (0.187)	0.440** (0.136)	0.376* (0.150)
Age	0.990 (0.00686)	0.996 (0.00649)	0.983* (0.00662)	0.989 (0.00600)	0.992 (0.00554)	0.998 (0.00650)
Constant	16,333*** (19,451)	8,900*** (10,210)	461.2*** (550.3)	348.0*** (388.7)	189.3*** (201.4)	0.737 (0.953)
Observations	1,639	1,639	1,639	1,639	1,639	1,639