Political Culture in Southern Europe: Searching for Exceptionalism

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Is there a Southern European political culture? Is there something specific and distinctive about the prevailing patterns of political attitudes and values in Greece, Italy, and Portugal and Spain, that in some way distinguishes those cases among Western democracies in general, or among European democracies in particular? There are some reasons to believe that may precisely be the case. Discussions about Italian political culture have long been pervaded by assumptions of a general prevalence – in spite of North-South 'cultural dualism' (Banfield 1958; Putnam 1993) – of a syndrome of attitudes of political alienation, clientelism, particularism, discontent, and distrust (Almond and Verba 1963), which has shown signs of remarkable persistence through time (Inglehart 1988 and 2003). And in view of the literature on the Greek, Portuguese, and Spanish cases – even that which is based on modern social-scientific study of political attitudes through surveys of representative samples of the population – the same syndrome seems to prevail in the remaining Southern European democracies. This syndrome is thought to comprise a pronounced distrust vis-à-vis politicians, parties and even fellow citizens[1] as well as overall low levels of political and social engagement.[2] From this, a relatively small step seems to be required in order to conclude in favor of a 'Mediterranean' or 'Southern European' political culture, deeply rooted in particular and stable ways of life, and characterized by traditionalism and fatalism, elitism and charismatic leaderships, distance from politics and low participation (Mamadouh 1997 and 1999).

Whether the existence of such a distinctive and stable pattern of political attitudes can indeed be confirmed is an issue relevant not only for those interested with this particular part of world, but also for those concerned with the broad theoretical debate about how political attitudes (and political culture) are formed and how they can

[1] See Montero and Torcal (1990); Bruneau (1984); Maravall (1984); Bruneau and Macleod (1986); Stiropoulos (1995); Cabral (2004); and Segatti (2006).

[2] See Ester, Halmand and De Moor (1993); Mendrinou and Nicolacopoulos (1997) ; McDonough, Barnes and López-Pina (1998); and Magalhães (2005).

change. The detection of such a pattern among Southern Europeans, persisting over time despite the dramatic political and economic changes that occurred in the last decades, would suggest the existence of a powerful and enduring shared cultural legacy. In other words, it would lend plausibility to a particular theoretical approach to the formation of political attitudes: the 'traditionalist-culturalist' model (Mishler and Rose 2001 and 2007). Put forth most notably by Lerner (1958), it contends that political attitudes change extremely slowly, if at all, because they constitute cultural traits formed through long-term processes of socialization and which tend to be reproduced over time, conceiving those attitudes as being mostly exogenous to the operation of the political system itself (see Inglehart 1990 and 2003).

There is, however, a different set of descriptive and explanatory hypotheses that can be advanced concerning political attitudes in the Southern European countries. On the one hand, we must consider the possibility that some of the attitudes that the 'traditionalist-culturalist' model assumes to be stable and enduring may have, in fact, experienced important and relatively quick changes, in response, for example, to political events, institutional changes and trends in the macroeconomy. On the other hand, it may also be the case that, even if several political attitudes seem to be stable and generally shared in all Southern European countries, they also fail to constitute a regional specificity at all. Instead, such patterns may be shared with other countries and even whole regions that have previously evaded the scope of social-scientific study of political culture, and whose similarities with the Southern European countries may have much less to do with shared 'ways of life' or deeply ingrained 'cultural traits' than with similar democratic histories and paths of political and economic development.

These hypotheses call attention to the potential need to complement the 'traditional-culturalist' approach with a 'rationalist-culturalist' model of political attitude formation (Mishler and Rose 2001). From this point of view, several elements of what we commonly call 'political culture' can in fact change as a result of political or economic events, new political experiences or new conflicts, or as an outcome of performance evaluations in distinctive institutional settings, through rational adaptation and adult learning (Lane 1992; Whitefield and Evans 1999; Mishler and Rose 2001).[3] And at the very least, we must consider the possibility that while some 'thicker' dimensions of political culture can indeed be found and may be more successfully

[3] For discussions of the classical rational-culturalist models and a defence of the argument of the role of institutions in shaping political attitudes, see Barry (1970), Pateman (1971), and Eckstein (1988).

explained by a 'traditional-culturalist' approach, others display levels of fluidity and adaptation that force us to conceive them as more context- and time-bound, shaped by institutions and behaviors, and thus endogenous to the political process (Wildavsky 1987; Lane 1992; Mishler and Pollack 2003).

In the following sections, we will analyze the available and comparable survey data on Southern Europe with two main goals in mind. On the one hand, we will look for evidence of a 'regional effect' in the explanation of attitude formation (Bunce 2000 and 2003; Mainwaring and Pérez-Liñan 2004). And on the other hand, we will gauge the plausibility of different explanatory approaches as applied to the kind of attitudes that, ever since Almond and Verba's *The Civic Culture* (1963) or Inglehart's more recent classic article (1988), are commonly treated as forming the basis of a psychological approach to the study of political culture: attitudes vis-à-vis the political regime; satisfaction with democratic performance; political (dis)engagement; confidence in institutions; and interpersonal or social trust (see also Inglehart 1990). These are also, in fact, the very same attitudes that, according to the most recent literature on the subject, affect the nature of the relationship between citizens and the political authorities in representative contemporary democracies,[4] as well as the very quality of those democracies[5].

For each of these dimensions, we will be mostly concerned with examining the available survey data in three different ways. First, we will look, whenever possible, at comparative trends among Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain, in order to assess the extent to which each of these attitudes have displayed changes through time, and the extent to which such changes, if they can be found at all, can be cogently attributed to political and economic events, institutional changes or the behavior of political actors. Second, we will place the Southern European countries in comparative perspective, not only with established first- and second-wave European democracies but also, whenever possible, with 'third-wave' Eastern European and Latin American democracies, in order to assess the extent to which a specific 'Southern European pattern' can indeed be found. Finally, in the last section of the paper, we will proceed to multivariate and multilevel tests of some hypotheses concerning individual and contextual explanations of political attitudes, in order to assess the extent to which any apparent Southern

[4] See Kaase and Newton (1995); Norris (1999a); Nye (1997); Pharr and Putnam (2000); Torcal and Montero (2006).

[5] See Morlino (2004); Diamond and Morlino (2004); and Tilly (2007).

European patterns that may be emerge can be traced to specific shared cultural legacies and traditions or, instead, to political and historical factors and experiences common to countries in other regions of the world.

Democratic support

One particularly crucial dimension of political culture in any democratic regime is related to the level of legitimacy awarded to democratic rule, i.e, the extent to which citizens believe that democratic politics and representative institutions are the most appropriate (indeed, the only acceptable) framework for government. Democratic legitimacy should be regarded as an ideal type, since no system is fully legitimate in the eyes of each and every citizen (Hertz 1978: 320). However, support for democracy may at least be considered as the belief that democracy is the 'only game in town', based on an explicit, or most of the time implicit, comparison with other types of regimes. In other words, it is 'the belief that, in spite their limitations and failures, the political institutions are better than any others that could be established' (Linz 1978: 65). Of course, whether such way of conceiving of 'legitimacy' or 'democratic support' is adequate depends also from the extent to which its presence or absence ends up being politically consequential. And so it seems to be: as an increasingly large body of evidence suggests, low levels of democratic support tend to be strongly related, at the individual level, with voting for anti-system or semi-loyal parties and candidates (Gunther, Montero and Torcal 2007), while at the aggregate level, public support for democracy and explicit rejection of authoritarian rule seem to be strongly related to a vast array of indicators of the stability and quality of democratic rule (Inglehart 2003; Welzel 2006).

In the first volume of the series that this present volume concludes, Leonardo Morlino and José Ramón Montero (1995), in a seminal contribution, already pointed out something that, not many years earlier, might have seemed impossible to fathom: on the basis of the Four Nation Survey, conducted in 1985,[6] it was possible to conclude that levels of popular unconditional support for democracy in Southern Europe were already quite high: at least 'two out of three people expressed a preference for democracy (…) and only a very small minority evaluated the past authoritarian experience positively' (1995:235). This was true even for the Spanish and Portuguese democracies, which had

[6] This study was directed and coordinated by Giacomo Sani and Julian Santamaria and it contains 2,498 interviews in Spain, 2,074 in Greece, 2,074 in Italy and 2,000 in Portugal.

very recently come out from transitions out of decades-long authoritarian regimes and, in the case of the latter, remained at the time plagued by rampant governmental instability. Thus, already by the mid-1980s, 'the democratic regimes of Southern Europe were legitimate and consolidated' (Morlino and Montero 1995: 259).

Our analysis of subsequent developments can do little to disconfirm Morlino and Montero's original assessments. In table 1, using the 1994-1999 wave of the *World Values Survey/European Values Study* (WVS/EVS) as our source, we show the levels of popular support for democracy and of rejection of authoritarian forms of rule in the four countries under analysis, and compare them to levels of democratic support found in the Western and Eastern European democracies, as well as in the Latin American democracies on which we have data available.[7] As measures of aggregate support for democracy we include the percentages of sampled adult population answering that they 'agree' or 'strongly agree' with the notion that, in spite of its problems, 'democracy is better than any other form of government' and that 'having a democratic system' is 'good' or 'fairly good' for the country. As measures of rejection of authoritarian rule, we include the percentages of surveyed citizens who answer that 'army rule' and 'a strong leader that does not have to bother with parliament and elections' are 'fairly bad' or 'very bad' things. Countries are listed by descending order of the average of the four indicators. The last line in the table shows the tau-b level of association between a 'Southern European' dummy variable (coded 1 for Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain and 0 for the others) and these indicators of support for democracy and rejection of authoritarianism, in order to determine whether, at the aggregate level, any specific Southern European pattern is prima facie discernible.

[7] Source: EUROPEAN AND WORLD VALUES SURVEYS FOUR-WAVE INTEGRATED DATA FILE, 1981-2004, v.20060423, 2006. The European Values Study Foundation and World Values Survey Association. By 'democratic' we simply mean those countries rated as 'Free', at the time of the survey, by Freedom House. All surveys were conducted in 1999, except those in Norway, Uruguay and Switzerland (1996), Brazil (1997), Venezuela, Finland, and Chile (2000) and Peru (2001). Percentages are in relation to total number of survey respondents in each country, after sample weighing. 'Western Europe' includes Iceland, Norway, Denmark, Netherlands, Austria, Sweden, Malta, Germany, Finland, Ireland, France, Belgium, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Great Britain. 'Eastern Europe' includes the Czech Republic, Slovenia, Slovakia, Estonia, Hungary, Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, Bulgaria and Romania. 'Latin America' includes Uruguay, Peru, Venezuela, Argentina, Chile and Brazil.

Table 1. Support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian rule (WVS/EVS, 1999)

	Support for democracy		Rejection of authoritarian rule	
	Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government (% 'agree' + 'strongly agree')	Having a democratic system is 'good' + 'fairly good' for [country] (%)	Having the army rule is 'fairly bad' + 'very bad' for [country] (%)	Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections is 'fairly bad + 'very bad' for [country] (%)
Iceland	95	97	98	88
Norway	94	95	94	85
Greece	**96**	**97**	**88**	**90**
Denmark	95	94	97	81
Austria	94	93	95	80
Malta	89	90	94	79
Italy	**90**	**92**	**92**	**80**
Netherlands	95	96	99	72
Czech Rep.	89	89	94	77
Germany	89	89	94	76
Sweden	93	95	90	76
Estonia	75	70	90	74
Hungary	70	78	89	71
Finland	86	83	90	69
Slovenia	84	83	86	73
Slovakia	77	75	86	73
Ireland	84	85	89	68
France	87	82	93	60
Belgium	86	82	91	62
Uruguay	91	92	85	64
Great Britain	74	75	85	64
Switzerland	83	85	88	58
Spain	**85**	**81**	**78**	**68**
Poland	78	73	73	70
Peru (2001)	84	89	79	56
Luxembourg	83	79	82	46
Portugal	**85**	**81**	**75**	**50**
Argentina	85	85	73	51
Venezuela	91	92	74	49
Latvia	78	76	86	37
Chile	77	79	68	52
Lithuania	65	63	77	35
Bulgaria	67	67	66	38
Brazil	79	81	52	38
Romania	66	75	57	28
Western European average	88	88	92	71
Southern European average	89	88	83	72
Eastern European average	75	75	80	58
Latin American average	85	86	72	52
Association with SE dummy	.19	.12	-.07	.14

The main conclusion that arises from the figures in table 1 is that, although our four countries have both some things in common and some things that differentiate them, they have little that distinguishes them, as a group, from the set of others democratic regimes on which we have available data. On the one hand, by the end of the 20th century, at least four out of five citizens in each of the Southern European democracies expressed an unconditional support for democracy as a regime. These are levels of support similar to those exhibited, on average, by all Western European democracies included in the WVS/EVS, and the association between the indicators of support for democracy or rejection of authoritarianism and the SE dummy suggests are very low and statistically insignificant, showing no evidence for a particularly Southern European pattern within this broad comparative framework. Although later surveys where similar questions have been asked were not conducted in the closely comparable methodological framework provided by the WVS/EVS, their results do tend to suggest that these patterns persist until today. In the Portuguese Election Studies of 2002 and 2005, respectively, 81 and 86 percent of respondents expressed support for democratic rule.[8] In Spain, 90 percent of respondents selected democracy as 'the best political system for a country like ours' in the 2004 wave of the Comparative National Elections Project.[9] And in Greece, 93 percent of respondents selected democracy as 'appropriate as a general form of government' in the 2002 survey of the Values and Attitudes in the New European Democracies project.[10]

On the other hand, table 1 also shows differences between our countries. More specifically, although all four countries display generally high levels of both support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian solutions, such levels are lower in Portugal and Spain than in Greece or Italy. In fact, these differences within the Southern European

[8] These data comes a survey administrated in 2002 and funded with the project "Comportamento Eleitoral e Atitudes Políticas dos Portugueses em Perspectiva Comparada" (CEAPP) which is also part of the *comparative Study of Electoral Systems* (CSES), second module It contains a sample of 1303 individuals.

[9] The Comparative National Elections Project (CNEP) is a multi-year, cross national survey designed to study how citizens in democracies around the world receive information about policies, parties, candidates, and politics during the course of election campaigns. It has evolved in three distinct phases: CNEP I, CNEP II, and CNEP III. The data presented here comes from the CNEP III. For information and data go to: **http://www.cnep.ics.ul.pt/index1.asp**

[10] These data comes from the project "Values Systems of the Citizens and Socio-Economic Conditions – Challenges from Democratisation for the EU-Enlargement" funded by the EU Commission (Project HPSE-CT-2001-00062) coordinated by Detlef Pollack and Jorg Jacobs

cases seem to reflect a broader pattern, through which democracies that have had longer historical experience with democratic rule, as in the case of Greece and Italy, also tend to exhibit higher levels of regime legitimacy than countries where such history is shorter, as in Portugal or Spain.[11] Although causal and directional claims are unwarranted strictly on the basis of these data, a longitudinal study of the Spanish case (Torcal 2007) strongly suggests that, although the main overall increase in democratic legitimacy in that country, affecting all age cohorts, can be directly linked to a short but decisive period during the country's democratic transition, that support has further increased through time. Those increases can be traced to crucial events: the arrival to power of the Spanish Socialists in 1982; and the *Partido Popular's* electoral victory in 1996. In other words, citizens' experience with the continued functioning of democratic rule, and particularly with successful and peaceful alternations in power, seems to contribute to expand democratic support. [12]

Another crucial aspect of the effects of time and political alternation is how they can arguably change the very social and ideological bases of democratic support (Torcal 2007). As Morlino and Montero (1995: 245) pointed out, although, by the mid-1980s, 'no specific social group or demographic group (…) [was] differentiated from the rest of society by higher or lower levels of support for democracy', the same could not be said in what concerned political and ideological identities. It is true that, in Italy (with the exception of neo-Fascist partisans of the *Movimento Sociale Italiano*), support for democracy was by then already similar among all partisan groups, and the relationship between support for democracy and individuals' left-right self-placement was rather weak. However, in the remaining Southern European countries, unconditional support for democracy tended to be strongest among those who placed themselves to the left of the ideological spectrum and among the partisans of left-wing parties, in what seemed to constitute a legacy of the cleavages around the past authoritarian right-wing regimes that had characterized all three countries in the recent past (Morlino and Montero 1995:247-249).

[11] The correlations between the number of years of democratic rule at the time of the WVS surveys and the per country aggregate percentages listed in table 1, for all WVS European and Latin American democracies, are of .43 for rejection of 'strong leader', .47 for support for 'having a democratic system', .51 for 'democracy better' and .56 for 'rejection of army rule'. Years of democratic rule - defined as 8 or more in the Polity IV database democracy score – obtained from Polity IV Data Set, Center for International Development and Conflict Management, University of Maryland.

[12] For a similar theoretical and empirical argument based on the Russian case, see Mishler and Rose (2007).

More than a decade later, however, such legacy was already becoming hard to discern. In table 3, we show how left-right self-placement was related, at the individual level, with support for democracy and rejection of authoritarianism in out four countries by the end of the 1990s. Although all coefficients do have negative signs, the relationship between ideology and support for democracy had become almost non-existent for all four countries, while the indicators of ideology and rejection of authoritarianism were only weakly related.

Table 3. Individual level association (tau-b) between support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian rule measures and left-right self-placement (WVS/EVS, 1999)

	Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government (from 1, 'strongly disagree' to 4 'agree strongly')	Having a democratic system (from 1, 'very bad' to 4 ' very good')	Having the army rule (from 1, 'very good' to 4, 'very bad')	Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections (from 1, 'very good' to 4, 'very bad')
Greece	-.01 (N=1003)	-.05 (N=1000)	-.22*** (N=991)	-.18*** (N=1001)
Italy	-.08** (N=1531)	-.08** (N=1531)	-.16*** (N=1542)	-.17*** (N=1533)
Portugal	-.06* (N=702)	-.03 (N=677)	-.11* (N=639)	-.06 (N=604)
Spain	-.05 (N=865)	-.10* (N=826)	-.23*** (N=808)	-.21*** (N=789)

*p<.05; **p<.01;***p<.001

Thus, democratic legitimacy in Southern Europe has not only remained at high levels since the mid-1980s, but also seems to have experienced a qualitative change, becoming increasingly decoupled from the ideological and partisan identities of potential leftist opponents and rightist supporters of the preceding authoritarian regimes. From this point of view, then, the Southern European democracies became increasingly similar to their Northern neighbors. It is true that they also remain, from a different point of view, a heterogeneous group. Such heterogeneity is particularly visible in what concerns the overall levels of mass aggregate rejection of authoritarian forms of government, which are higher in Greece and Italy than in Spain or Portugal. However, rather than replacing talk of a' Southern European political culture' by any 'Iberian' proclivity for authoritarian rule (Wiarda and Mott 2001), we should note how such comparatively lower intolerance vis-à-vis non-democratic solutions is a phenomenon that, as table 1 shoes, is common to a series of other 'third wave' democracies in Eastern Europe and Latin America which have only recently come out, historically

speaking, of particularly prolonged experiences with authoritarian rule. Thus, if there's a 'Southern European political culture' syndrome, the extent to which the democratic regimes of Italy, Greece, Portugal and Spain receive unconditional support from their citizens – or the extent to which the latter reject authoritarian solutions – is certainly not the place to find it.

Satisfaction with democratic performance

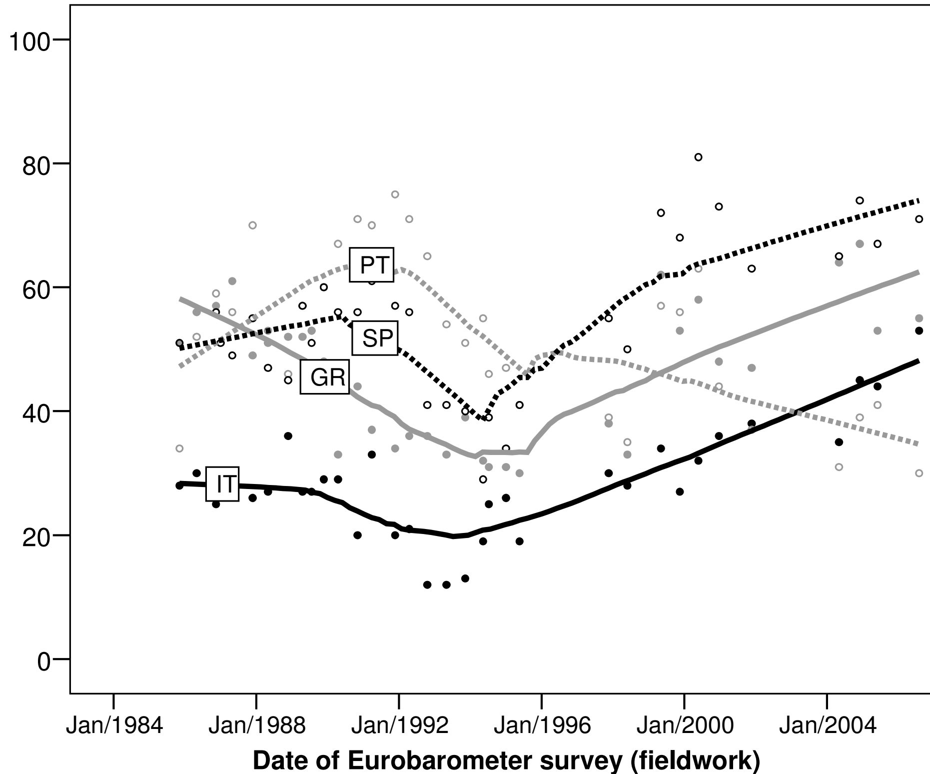
One feature of political attitudes in Southern Europe that was already visible by early 1990s (Morlino and Montero 1995) was the fact that democratic support in these countries had remained stable or even increased in spite of conditions that might be considered as unfavorable for the legitimization of democracy, including not only the economic recession of the early 1990s but also, in the Italian case, the dramatic political upheaval brought about by 'Clean Hands' and its consequences. Particularly striking was the fact that, during this period, mass publics in these countries had displayed widely different and fluctuating levels of satisfaction with democratic performance, suggesting that 'satisfaction with democracy' was much more sensitive than 'democratic support' to short-term economic and political conditions (Morlino and Montero 1995: 237).

Again, the data available from the early 1990s until today again do little to disconfirm these early findings. One simple way of ascertaining the existence of secular trends in political attitudes at the aggregate level consists on regressing levels of democratic satisfaction on a variable measuring 'time', using ordinary least squares. From November 1985 – the date when a Eurobarometer (EB) survey measuring such satisfaction was conducted for the first time in all four countries – until late 2006, 33 EB surveys were conducted where levels of satisfaction with democracy were measured. A linear regression of the percentage of citizens in each EB survey who answered they were 'very' or 'fairly' satisfied with the 'way democracy works' on 'time' – measured in years elapsed from 1985 until each survey's fieldwork date – yields very different results for each country: in Greece, no linear trend can be discerned; in Italy and Spain, we find a rise in democratic satisfaction of about one percentage point per year; and in Portugal, there is a linear decline also of about one percentage point per year.[13]

[13] Data source: Eurobarometer Trend File 1970-2002 (Schmitt and Scholz 2005) and Standard Eurobarometer Reports. Percentages in relation to entire country samples, following sample weighing. All results available near the authors upon request.

Nevertheless, this sort of analysis, by assuming linearity in trends, may still underestimate the shifts in levels of democratic satisfaction that have occurred in our countries during this period. Figure 1 assesses these trends in a different way, by plotting levels of democratic satisfaction in each country against the date of the surveys' fieldwork and displaying, for each country, lines generated by applying locally weighted smooth regressions, which allow us to capture non-linear trends.[14]

Figure 1. Satisfaction with the way democracy works in each country, Eurobarometer 1985-2006 (% 'very' + 'fairly' satisfied)



Visual inspection of figure 1 shows that the trend towards a decline in levels of satisfaction with regime performance experienced in the Portuguese case has only started in the early 1990s. This decline was actually preceded by an increase during the second half of the 1980's, which, by the beginning of the following decade, had made the Portuguese, albeit briefly, the Southern Europeans who were most satisfied with the performance of their democratic regime. Conversely, the rise in democratic satisfaction experienced in Italy and Spain occurred mostly since the mid-1990s. And the absence of

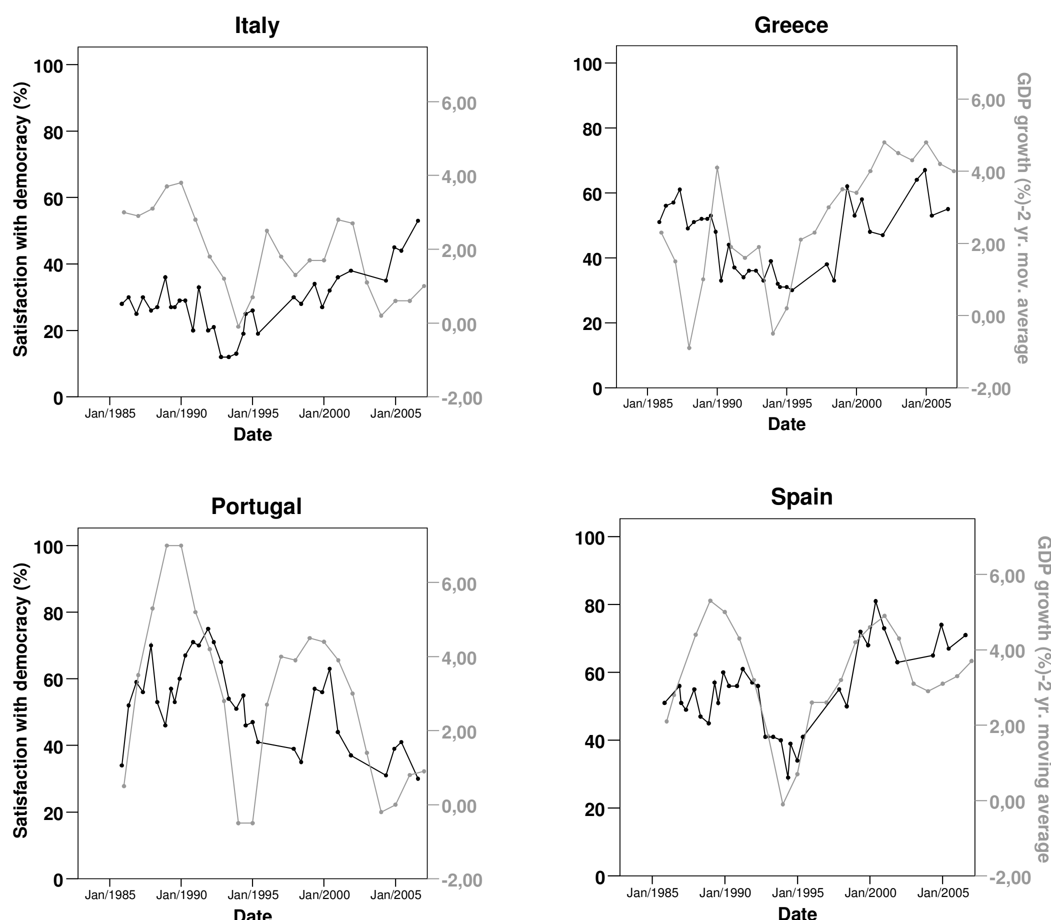
[14] Kernel function: Epanechnikov; points to fit: 50%.

a linear trend we found for Greece is most deceptive of all: in fact, satisfaction with democracy has decreased from the mid-1980s until the mid-1990s, and has been on the rise since then.

However, if we probe these data even deeper, we will be able to better see how and why satisfaction with democracy can change while support for the regime as a whole remains stable. One of the crucial aspects of the distinction between democratic support and political dissatisfaction (or 'political discontent') is that the latter, unlike regime legitimacy, should be expected 'to fluctuate over time in accord with the government's performance, the condition of the society and the economy, or the performance of key political institutions.' (Gunther, Montero, and Torcal 2007:33). And so it seems to occur in all our cases. Figure 2 contains four dual axis graphs, one per country: the black lines represent aggregate levels of satisfaction with democracy in each EB survey, while the grey lines represent a two-year moving average of GDP growth (%).[15] As we can see, in the four countries, aggregate levels of satisfaction with democratic performance appear to follow quite closely the levels of economic growth. In the case of Portugal, for example, although a decline since the early 1990s remains visible, we can see there was a brief new peak by the late 1990s, which mirrors the economic recovery that took place in the period. In fact, the reason why, in contrast with the remaining cases, there seems to be a secular decline of political satisfaction in Portugal is because the economic recovery that followed the early 1990s international recession was not sustained, giving place to a new period of economic stagnation for the most part of the present decade.

[15] Source: World Bank Development Indicators Online (World Bank 2008).

Figure 2. Satisfaction with democratic performance and GDP growth in Southern Europe (left y axis: satisfaction with democracy; right y axis: GDP growth moving average).



The fact that democratic support has remained high and stable in our four countries in spite of these widely different trends in satisfaction with democratic performance provides further confirmation of the conceptual and empirical autonomy of *regime legitimacy* in relation to *regime performance* as attitudinal objects (Montero, Gunther and Torcal 1997; Dalton 1988; Diamond 2001; Gunther, Montero and Torcal 2007).[16] Such autonomy becomes even clearer when we take a look at individual level data. Table 3 displays, for each SE country, a measure of association between respondents' level of support for democracy (and rejection of authoritarian rule) and their level of satisfaction with regime performance. Although there are statistically significant associations in several cases, significance is not the main message that

[16] For a different position and evidence on this issue in Latin America see (Sarsfield and Echegaray 2005).

comes out of these results: instead, it is how weakly measures of regime legitimacy are related to measures of regime performance. Most of the tau-b association coefficients are not significant or close to .10, reaching, at most, .20 and .23 (in Greece), still very far from the upper theoretical boundary of 1. In other words, in all SE countries under consideration, the relationship between indicators or regime legitimacy and evaluation of regime support is either weak or non-existent.

Table 3. Individual level association (tau-b) between support for democracy and rejection of authoritarian rule measures and satisfaction with the way democracy works[17] (WVS/EVS, 1999)

	Democracy may have problems but it's better than any other form of government (from 1, 'strongly disagree' to 4 'agree strongly')	Having a democratic system (from 1, 'very bad' to 4 ' very good')	Having the army rule (from 1, 'very good' to 4, 'very bad')	Having a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections (from 1, 'very good' to 4, 'very bad')
Greece	.23*** (N=1104)	.20*** (N=1103)	.09** (N=1103)	.05 (N=1102)
Italy	.14*** (N=1851)	.13*** (N=1858)	.01 (N=1858)	.09*** (N=1858)
Portugal	.04 (N=834)	.01 (N=821)	.02 (N=747)	-.01 (N=698)
Spain	.10*** (N=1045)	.12*** (N=992)	-.05 (N=975)	-.07* (N=935)

*p<.05; **p<.01;***p<.001

Conversely, table 4, using data from the 2002 wave of the *European Social Survey* (ESS),[18] shows the association between satisfaction with regime performance and satisfaction with both economic and government performance. Invariably, in all our countries, the satisfaction with democracy is more strongly associated to governmental or economic performance than with support for the democratic regime or rejection of authoritarian rule (for same argument, see Linde and Ekman 2003).

[17] All variables recoded in 4-point scales with higher values corresponding to higher support for democracy, higher rejection of authoritarian rule and higher satisfaction with democracy.

[18] Source: Jowell et al. (2003).

Table 4. Individual level association (tau-b) between satisfaction with the way democracy works and state of economy/government performance[19] (ESS 2002)

	Satisfaction with state of economy (from 0, 'extremely dissatisfied' to 10 'extremely satisfied')	Satisfaction with the national government (from 0, 'extremely dissatisfied' to 10 'extremely satisfied')
Greece	.36*** (N=2513)	.47*** (N=2513)
Italy	.36*** (N=1120)	.45*** (N=1120)
Portugal	.29*** (N=1438)	.37*** (N=2438)
Spain	.32*** (N=1742)	.34*** (N=1742)

*p<.05; **p<.01;***p<.001

Twenty years ago, in a seminal article, Inglehart had already warned that political satisfaction 'behaves like an indicator of governmental popularity, fluctuating from one month to the next in response to current economic conditions and political events' (Inglehart 1988: 1209). But he added an additional hypothesis: that 'a significant cultural component is also present underneath these fluctuations', causing that 'the publics of some countries are consistently more satisfied than others' (ibid.).[20]

Is there such a 'cultural component', and is it a specifically Southern European one? Again, the answer seems negative. Table 5 lists all European democracies included in both the in 1999 wave of the WVS/EVS and the 2004 wave of the ESS.[21] In the case of the WVS/EVS surveys, the displayed figures are the percentages of respondents in each country answering they are 'very' or 'rather' satisfied with the way democracy works. In the case of the ESS surveys, figures are percentages of respondents placing that satisfaction in the upper part of the 0-10 scale (from 6 to 10).

[19] All variables measured in 11-point scales, with higher values corresponding to higher levels of satisfaction. DK/NA answers recoded as midpoint of scales.

[20] This indicator is also very problematic taping a lot of underlying contructs. See Canache, Mondak and Seligson (2001).

[21] All data from 1999 and 2004 except, for EVS/WVS, Finland (2000) and, for ESS, Bulgaria , Latvia and Romania (2006). Source for additional ESS data: Jowell et al. (2003) (2005) and (2007). Percentages in relation to entire country samples, following sample weighing.

Table 5. Satisfaction with democratic performance (WVS/EVS and ESS surveys)

	WVS/EVS 1999	ESS 2004
Denmark	62	80
Luxembourg	73	62
Austria	74	56
Netherlands	73	57
Finland	53	74
Spain	**57**	**61**
Iceland	60	58
Germany	69	47
Greece	**54**	**61**
Sweden	56	58
Ireland	59	52
Belgium	47	53
United Kingdom	45	41
Portugal	**72**	**14**
France	46	39
Italy	**35**	**39**
Slovenia	43	28
Czech Republic	37	33
Estonia	32	30
Poland	41	19
Hungary	32	24
Latvia	30	15
Slovakia	22	21
Romania	21	17
Bulgaria	26	9
Western European average	60	56
Southern European average	55	44
Eastern European average	32	22
Association with SE dummy	.11	.06

As we can see, albeit Southern European democracies display, on average, a slightly lower level of satisfaction with democracy than the remaining Western European cases in both surveys, such averages hide enormous internal variability. In 1999, for example, the Portuguese were among the European citizens who were most satisfied with the way democracy worked in their country. By 2004, in contrast, it was Spain and Greece that had moved above the Western European average. In both surveys, the aggregate level association between 'Southern Europe' and levels of satisfaction is extremely low and lacks statistical significance, showing no prima facie evidence for a distinctive Southern European pattern. If a pattern can be discerned at all, it is one where all Eastern European democracies display lower levels of democratic satisfaction, both in 1999 and in 2004. Overall, then, given the fluctuations observed through time, the close connection between satisfaction with democracy and with satisfaction with economic and governmental performance, and the absence of an

association between the Southern European countries and levels of democratic satisfaction, it is difficult to describe political discontent is a cultural component of Southern European political attitudes.

Political disaffection

So much, then, for Southern European exceptionalism? Not necessarily. Taking in all the data available until the mid-1980's, Morlino and Montero raised the possibility that, regardless of their findings concerning democratic support and satisfaction with democracy, there might still be a Southern European specificity after all:

> 'in one important respect, there may be a variety of Southern European exceptionalism regarding political culture. Two-thirds or more of the Italians, Portuguese and Spaniards interviewed in the Four Nation Survey expressed negative feelings towards or noninvolvement with politics. Our overall conclusion concerning widespread democratic legitimacy notwithstanding, these findings distinguish citizens of these three countries from the Northern European counterparts' (1995: 251-252).

In fact, Italy has surely been 'the country par excellence in which to study negative attitudes towards politics' (Segatti 2006: 244), particularly in what concerns the existence of a confidence gap between electors and political institutions and low levels of both external and internal efficacy (Sani 2000; Cartocci 2002; Isernia 2003). The cases of Spain, Portugal and (more recently) Greece have been the object of similar assessments by a myriad of studies, especially in what concerns their mass publics' low levels of confidence in political institutions, strong anti-party feelings, perceived lack of responsiveness on the part of public office holders, and low levels of political interest and involvement.[22] In other words, it could be argued that there is Southern European political culture characterized by a pronounced syndrome of political disaffection, a 'subjective feeling of powerlessness, cynicism, and lack of confidence in the political process, politicians, and democratic institutions' (di Palma 1970: 30; see also Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 1995; Kavanagh 1997).

Nothing that we have examined so far serves to dispel that notion, since political disaffection is a dimension of political support that is conceptually and empirically distinctive from both democratic regime legitimacy and political discontent (Torcal

[22] See, for example, Ester, Halman and de Moor (1993: 79); Maravall (1984); Bruneau (1984: 38-39); Bruneau and Macleod (1986: 152-155); Merkl (1988); Montero and Torcal (1990: 68); Gunther (1992); Montero and Torcal (1990); Moran y Benedicto (1995: 44-45); Cabral (1997); Mendrinou and Nicolacopoulos (1997: 22-29); Torcal, Gunther and Montero (2002: 263-268); Magalhães (2005); Teixeira (2007a: 6-7).; Martín and van Deth (2007). Teixeira (2007b, 8-9).

2002; Magalhães 2005; Gunther and Montero 2006; Torcal and Montero 2006; Gunther, Montero and Torcal 2007). In order to explore the extent to which we are indeed in presence of a specific and stable Southern European trait, we will examine two major aspects of political disaffection. The first is comprised of a cluster of attitudes about the perceived level of trustworthiness of political actors and institutions of the state, i.e. *institutional disaffection*. The second is related to citizens' lack of interest and involvement in the political process, i.e., *political disengagement* (Torcal and Montero 2006; Torcal and Brusattin 2007).[23]

The first problem we face when trying to address these issues is that the data necessary to make a rigorous comparative analysis are rather difficult to come by, particularly when we are interested in both cross-national and longitudinal data. In what concerns political confidence, for example, one of the most important potential sources, the WVS/EVS studies, poses immediate difficulties for our purposes. On the one hand, Greece was only included in these surveys for the 1999 wave. On the other hand, even for Italy, Spain, and Portugal (all included in both the 1989-1993 and the 1994-1999 waves), if we consider the whole gamut of political institutions and actors typically analyzed from this point of view – namely, parliament, government, parties and politicians (Gabriel, Denters, and Torcal 2007) – only in what concerns parliaments do we have comparable data in the several waves of the WVS/EVS surveys. Finally, including data from the ESS in order to expand our time span to more recent years poses a new problem: in those surveys, confidence in parliaments was measured on an 11-point scale (from 0, 'no trust at all' to 10, 'complete trust') rather than the 4-point scale used in the WVS/EVS surveys.

In spite of this, there is still something to be gained from looking at all these data. Table 6 displays results from all European democracies in which both WVS/EVS and ESS surveys were conducted and where questions about confidence in parliament were posed. For the WVS/EVS data, we present the percentage of respondents, per country and survey, who answered they had 'a lot' or 'a great deal' of confidence in their national parliament. For the ESS data, we consider the percentage of respondents who placed their confidence in the national parliament in the upper part of the scale (6 to 10) provided. We also include Greece in the table, in spite of the absence of a 1990

[23] See also Martin and van Deth (2007).

survey, but exclude it from the Southern European regional average calculated at the bottom of the table.

Table 6. Confidence in parliament (WVS/EVS, 1990 and 1999; ESS, 2004)[24]

	WVS/EVS 1990 (% 'a great deal' + 'a lot')	WVS/EVS 1999 (% 'a great deal' + 'a lot')	ESS 2004 (% from 6 to 10 in scale)
Iceland	53	71	58
Norway	59	69	49
Denmark	41	47	63
Netherlands	53	55	38
Sweden	46	50	47
Finland	33	43	63
Spain	**42**	**43**	**41**
Ireland	50	31	35
Austria	40	39	34
Belgium	42	34	36
Germany	47	36	28
Great Britain/United Kingdom	46	34	29
France	43	39	26
Italy	**33**	**28**	**35**
Poland	61	30	7
Portugal	**33**	**44**	**19**
Hungary	39	33	19
Greece	**-**	**24**	**36**
Slovakia	35	39	12
Bulgaria	48	25	10
Slovenia	36	24	23
Czech Rep.	48	12	13
Western European average	46	46	42
Southern Europe average	36	38	32
Eastern European average	44	30	14
Association with SE dummy	-.37*	-.09	.06

*p<.05

We have only three observations per country and, furthermore, the WVS/EVS and ESS results are not directly comparable, so we should be particularly careful in inferring any trends towards increasing or decreasing confidence in parliament in any particular country. However, there are two main conclusions that emerge nonetheless from these results. First, in all three periods, confidence in parliament in all Southern European democracies is below the average of the remaining Western European democracies on which we have available data. It is true that Spain displays comparatively higher levels of confidence and remains at par or even above several older established democracies, such as Austria, France, or Belgium. However, such

[24] All surveys conducted in the mentioned years, except: for WVS/EVS, Hungary and Czech Republic (1991), Slovenia (1992), Norway (1996), and Finland (2000); for ESS, Bulgaria (2006). Percentages in relation to entire country samples, following sample weighing.

levels are always below the Western European average, and the same occurs with Italy, Portugal or Greece. Thus, the proponents of the notion that there is a specifically 'Southern European' syndrome of low confidence in political institutions do find some preliminary support in these results.

However, that notion becomes harder to sustain when we expand our scope of comparison both chronologically and geographically. By the early 1990s, immediately after the fall of the Berlin Wall and as the Eastern European countries were giving their first tentative steps towards democracy, levels of confidence in parliaments in these countries were nearly as high as those found in Western Europe and decidedly higher than those found in most Southern European countries. In fact, by then, the association between aggregate levels of trust in parliament and the SE dummy variable was negative and significant, as we can see in table 6. But as the same table also shows, a 'post-honeymoon' phase of disillusionment and decline in political confidence is clearly visible in Eastern Europe (Catterberg and Moreno 2005). Confidence in parliament has declined from the early to the late 1990s in five of the six Eastern European democracies under consideration and, by the late 1990s, the average confidence in parliament in these countries had already dropped below (and in 2004, much below) that of the remaining European democracies, including the Southern European ones. Understandably, the association between levels of trust in parliament and our SE dummy variable ceases to suggest any statistically significant regional Southern European effect both in 1999 and 2004.

Something similar can be seen when we analyze confidence in political actors, i.e., politicians and political parties. Since the WVS does not provide a proper framework of comparison for confidence in political actors – as questions about political parties pertain to the 1997 wave, where few Western European countries were included – we focus exclusively on ESS 2004 data in table 7. That table displays the percentage of respondents in each country that placed their confidence in politicians and political parties in the upper-half of the 0-10 scale (from 6 to 10). Again, at the aggregate level, all Southern European countries ranked, from this point of view, below the average of the remaining Western European countries. This is particularly the case in Portugal, the only one of our four countries where the overwhelming majority of political parties (with the exception of the Communist Party) was created after democratization and lacked any significant historical roots. But again, massive distrust in political actors is far from being a specifically Southern European phenomenon.

Instead, by 2004, it was shared not only by a few older established democracies but also by all democracies in Eastern Europe on which we have available data. And in fact, low levels of institutional confidence also seem to characterize the Latin American democracies (Turner and Martz 1997: 66-70; Meseguer 1998: 999-1111; Torcal 2006: 159-163). For example, on the WVS/EVS surveys conducted in the late 1990s and in the included Latin American countries that were democratic at the time of the survey (Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru, Uruguay and Venezuela), only 27 percent of respondents, on average, placed ‘a lot’ or ‘a great deal’ of trust in their parliaments, a value somewhere between those of the Southern and Eastern European countries in the same survey wave.

Table 7. Confidence in political actors (ESS 2004)[25]

	Political parties (% from 6 to 10 in scale)	Politicians (% from 6 to 10 in scale)
Denmark	51	51
Finland	43	42
Netherlands	41	39
Iceland	36	40
Luxembourg	32	37
Switzerland	28	33
Belgium	30	30
Cyprus	30	30
Sweden	29	28
Norway	25	26
Ireland	22	22
Spain	**20**	**19**
Greece	**18**	**19**
United Kingdom	18	19
Austria	15	15
France	13	16
Germany	12	14
Estonia	9	13
Czech Rep.	10	9
Slovakia	12	7
Slovenia	8	11
Italy	**-**	**17**
Hungary	8	8
Romania	12	12
Latvia	10	11
Bulgaria	6	6
Portugal	**4**	**4**
Poland	3	3
Western European average	28	29
Southern European average	14	15
Eastern European average	9	9
Association with SE dummy	-.12	-.11

And what happens with political (dis)engagement? Here, too, the 1985 Four Nations Survey showed that, with the exception of Greece, low levels of political involvement tended to prevail in these countries (Morlino and Montero 1995: 251). And later studies suggested that the Greek exception to this general Southern European pattern was short lived: according to Mendrinou and Nicolacopoulos (1997: 3), the percentage of Greek who were 'very' or 'somewhat' interested in politics decreased

[25] All data from wave two (2004) of ESS (Jowell et al. 2005 and 2007), unless in the cases of Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania and Latvia (2006). Italy's 2004 results only included in cumulative 1 and 2 waves dataset, where 'trust in parties' is not included. Percentages in relation to entire country samples, following sample weighing.

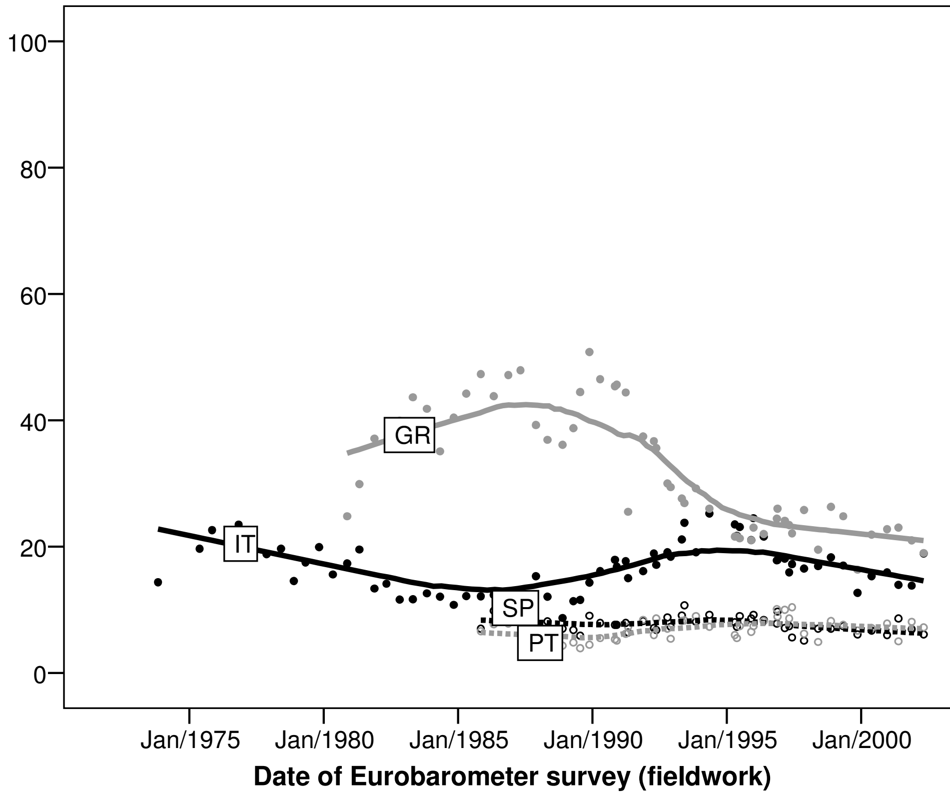
from 61 percent in 1985 to 47 percent in 1996, in an apparent convergence with the remaining SE democracies.[26]

Figure 2 provides a first confirmation of this pattern. As Van Deth and Elff (2000: 3) note, data on subjective political interest allowing both cross-national and longitudinal analyses are, again, in short supply. Thus, like them, we resort to an indicator present in almost all EB surveys: the frequency with which respondents engage in political discussions. Figure 3 plots the percentage of respondents who answered they engage 'frequently' in political discussions against the date of the surveys' fieldwork, and displays, for each country, trend lines generated by applying locally weighted smooth regressions.[27] As we can see, the frequency of political discussion has experienced only small fluctuations in Portugal, Spain and Italy, and there is indeed a visible decline in the Greek case since the late 1980s, leading to a convergence with the remaining Southern European cases.

[26] Surveys conducted by the National Centre of Social Research in 1985 and the National Centre of Social Research in 1996, by OPINION.

[27] Kernel function: Epanechnikov; points to fit: 50%. Data source: Eurobarometer Trend File 1970-2002 (Moshner 2005). Percentages in relation to entire country samples, following sample weighing.

Figure 2. Frequency of political discussion, Eurobarometer surveys (% engage 'frequently')



The same notion is confirmed when we look at the data resulting from the last two waves of WVS/EVS and the 2004 wave of the ESS on subjective political interest. Table 9 returns to the list of European democracies on which data is available for those surveys. Contrary to what occurred in what concerns confidence in parliament, question wording and answering options provided are the same in the different surveys. Thus, we can see in table 9 the decline of political interest in Greece and its convergence with the remaining Southern European countries. Furthermore, such convergence takes place at a level of political interest that is well below that found, on average, not only in the remaining Western European democracies but also in Eastern Europe. It is true that, like in what concerned political confidence, Eastern European democracies also seem to have experienced a 'honeymoon effect', as well as a 'post-honeymoon decline' in political engagement (Inglehart and Catterberg 2002), a phenomenon common to several Latin American democracies.[28] But in all three survey waves examined in table

[28] In 1990, the share of respondents who reported to be 'very' or 'somewhat' interested in politics in Argentina, Brazil and Chile in the WVS survey was, respectively, 30, 46 and 37 percent, invariably above

9, a strong negative correlation between our SE dummy and the aggregate levels of interest in political remains negative, relatively strong and statistically significant.

Table 9. Subjective interest in politics (WVS/EVS and ESS)[29]

	% 'very' or 'somewhat/quite interested in politics'		
	WVS/EVS 1990	WVS/EVS 1999	ESS 2004
Germany	75	63	56
Netherlands	63	67	61
Norway	72	68	49
Denmark	54	60	65
Austria	54	67	51
Czech Rep.	74	69	19
Bulgaria	72	49	46
Iceland	47	50	62
Sweden	47	51	58
Hungary	52	50	40
Slovakia	48	58	36
Slovenia	57	42	42
Great Britain/United Kingdom	49	37	47
Poland	48	42	38
Ireland	37	43	44
Finland	47	28	46
France	37	36	37
Belgium	29	38	43
Greece	**-**	**41**	**33**
Italy	**28**	**32**	**35**
Portugal	**31**	**29**	**28**
Spain	**25**	**27**	**29**
Southern European average	28	29	31
Western European average	51	51	52
Eastern European average	58	52	37
Association with SE dummy	-.50**	-.47*	-.50**

*p<.05; **p<.01

However, we should be careful about jumping into conclusions about a distinctive Southern European pattern of political disengagement. First, this again disappears when look at another commonly used indicator of political disaffection, 'internal efficacy', measured by the percentage of ESS respondents who answered that they 'never' or seldom find politics too complicated to understand. As table 10 shows, the average values for our four cases are only slightly below the average of the remaining Western European countries and similar to the Eastern European average.

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the levels found in the Southern European countries. But by 1999, they had dropped to 18, 31 and 25 percent, values similar or below those found in our countries.

[29] See footnote 21 for details.

Table 10. Internal political efficacy (ESS 2004)[30]

	% 'never'/'seldom' find politics 'too complicated to understand'
Cyprus	38
Iceland	35
Ireland	35
Denmark	34
Sweden	33
Austria	33
Hungary	33
Germany	32
Norway	31
Luxembourg	30
Greece	**30**
Netherlands	29
Belgium	27
Switzerland	27
Bulgaria	27
Slovakia	27
Spain	**26**
Slovenia	25
Romania	25
Estonia	24
Italy	**23**
Poland	23
France	21
United Kingdom	21
Portugal	**21**
Latvia	21
Finland	20
Czech Rep.	19
Southern European average	25
Western European average	30
Eastern European average	25
Association with SE dummy	-.17

Second, the behavioral consequences of the apparent Southern European specificity in terms of subjective political interest are also difficult to discern. One of the alleged consequences of political disaffection concerns political involvement and participation: the prevalent claim is, of course, that attitudes of political disengagement are associated to lower levels of actual involvement and participation in politics. It is not our purpose to investigate this claim in this chapter,[31] but simply to assess whether the sort of national and regional patterns we have uncovered so far concerning political attitudes also emerge when analyzing indicators of actual participatory behavior. Table

[30] See footnote 24.

[31] Although we have done it elsewhere, either in country case studies on Spain (Ferrer, Medina and Torcal 2006) or Portugal (Magalhães 2005) or in a comparative framework (Torcal and Lago 2006; Gunther, Montero and Torcal 2007).

11 displays aggregate levels of political participation in Europe. We use indicators pertaining to five different dimensions of participation: engaging in contacts with politicians; signing petitions; participating in lawful demonstrations; working for political parties; and voting. For all indicators except voting, we resort again to ESS 2004 survey data.[32] For voting, we resort to actual electoral turnout results pertaining to the first-order election that took place immediately before the 2004 survey.[33] This choice of participatory activities is not casual, since each of them epitomizes on particular mode of participation defined on the basis of two dimensions (Teorell, Torcal, and Montero 2007): whether it is ‘voice-based’ (protesting, working for parties and contacting politicians) or ‘exit-based (voting and petitions); and whether it is ‘representational’ (voting, working for parties and contacting politicians) or ‘extra-representational (signing petitions or protesting).

[32] ESS 2006 for Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania and Latvia. The questions asked respondents whether they had engaged in any of these activities for the past 12 months.

[33] Source: IDEA voter turnout data (www.idea.int).

Table 11. Political participation in Europe (ESS 2004)[34]

	Contacted politician	Signed petition	Participated in lawful demonstration	Worked for political parties	Turnout
Iceland	30	48	15	14	88
Norway	23	39	11	9	75
Spain	**13**	**25**	**34**	**7**	**69**
Sweden	14	48	8	3	80
Switzerland	14	38	9	7	45
France	15	32	13	5	80
Luxembourg	21	21	15	5	87
Austria	19	24	7	10	84
Denmark	19	29	5	5	87
UK	15	35	4	2	59
Germany	11	32	9	3	79
Ireland	22	22	6	5	63
Finland	22	26	2	4	67
Belgium	13	22	7	4	92
Netherlands	14	23	4	4	80
Italy	**14**	**13**	**12**	**4**	**81**
Cyprus	20	10	3	10	92
Slovakia	7	25	4	3	70
Czech Republic	17	13	3	3	58
Romania	16	5	4	6	59
Greece	**14**	**3**	**5**	**6**	**75**
Latvia	11	8	4	1	61
Slovenia	11	6	2	3	70
Poland	7	9	2	3	46
Hungary	10	6	2	1	74
Estonia	9	4	2	2	58
Portugal	**6**	**5**	**4**	**2**	**63**
Bulgaria	3	5	2	4	56
Southern European average	12	12	14	5	71
Western European average	18	31	8	6	75
Eastern European average	10	9	3	3	61
Association with SE dummy	-.19	-.24	.23	.06	.05

The results suggest, again, the need for some skepticism in what concerns inferring the existence of a particular Southern European pattern of political culture and its behavioral consequences. Although Southern European countries do display comparatively low levels of participation in what concerns contacting politicians and, especially, signing petitions in comparison with most of the remaining Western European countries, they are joined by most Eastern European democracies in this respect. Furthermore, no discernible difference between the Southern European democracies as a group and the remaining Western European democracies can be found concerning working for parties, protesting or voting. For example, while the Portuguese

[34] In the calculation of regional turnout averages and association of turnout with SE dummy, countries with compulsory voting (Greece, Cyprus and Belgium) excluded.

display low levels of participation across the board – confirming previous studies on the Portuguese case (Freire, Magalhães and Santo 2003; Magalhães 2005) – Italians and (particularly) Spaniards display remarkably high levels of involvement in protest activities (see also Teorell, Torcal and Montero 2007: 349). And overall, there is no significant association between our SE dummy and the aggregate levels of any type of participatory behavior measured in these 26 countries.

What can be said, therefore, about institutional disaffection and political disengagement in Southern Europe? First, Italy, Greece, Portugal, and Spain do tend to display lower levels of political confidence and subjective political interest than their remaining Western European neighbors, a phenomenon that is also reflected in lower levels in some modes of political participation. This is not so say that all Western European countries rank consistently high in this regard either: Austria, Germany, France, Belgium, and the United Kingdom repeatedly appear in comparative surveys as countries where few citizens see political actors as trustworthy or responsive, a feature that, in France and Belgium, is combined with low levels of subjective political involvement. But all Southern European countries have consistently shared all these features at least since the early-1990s, and previous surveys suggest this syndrome of attitudes to have characterized at least Italy, Portugal and Spain in the more distant past.

However, it is not clear whether we can describe political disaffection as a stable and specifically Southern European cultural trait. In what concerns confidence in political institutions, notions of Southern European exceptionalism seem to be simply a function of the particular geographical and temporal scope for comparison used in previous studies than anything else. When we expand that scope outside the Western European democracies, the notion of a 'Southern European exception' is undermined on the basis of the most recent and comparable survey data. Low levels of confidence in political actors and institutions are as pronounced (or even more pronounced) in the Eastern European and Latin American democracies than in Southern Europe. In fact, only one particular Southern European pattern seems to emerge and to remain resilient in time: lower levels of political interest in comparison with both Eastern Europe and the remaining Western European countries. But even here we should be careful. On the one hand, such peculiarity is not matched by indicators of political efficacy and disappears when we focus on actual behavior. On the other hand, we have not yet asked a crucial question: is that peculiarity a function of a distinctive 'regional effect', or instead of particular features of the socio-demographic characteristics of these countries

or their social and political structures that can be identified? We will address this question in a later section.

Social trust

Social trust is allegedly the central element in a complex virtuous circle, in which the prevalence of attitudes and norms of reciprocity and generalized morality among individuals in a given political system tends to facilitate collective action and favor good governance, which in turn create favorable conditions for social and political trust to flourish (Almond and Verba 1963; Coleman 1990; Putnam 1993, 1995a and 1995b; Fukuyama 1995; Kumlin and Rothstein 2005). A large number of studies has found social trust to be positively correlated with indicators of democracy and of its quality (Inglehart 1988 and 1990; Muller and Seligson 1994; Kaase 1999; Putnam 1993 and 2000; Brehm and Rhan 1997; Mishler and Rose 2001; Uslaner 2002; Delhey and Newton 2005; Welzel and Inglehart 2006), although the issue of whether we should conceive of social trust primarily as affecting institutions and institutional performance or being affected by them remains debated (Nannestad 2008: 423-25).

Our aim is not to enter this debate but simply to address the issue of whether, again, any Southern European exceptionalism can be said to exist in this regard. In fact, low levels of social trust have been very explicitly treated as a defining feature of Southern European countries in a large part of the literature. Since the work by Banfield (1958), Italy – and particularly Southern Italy – is thought to be characterized by a cultural and historical legacy of low levels of generalized trust, a perception has been remarkably reinforced more recently by Putnam's regional study (Putnam 1993). And similar findings have recurrently emerged in studies of the Greek (Stiropoulos 1995), Spanish (Torcal and Montero 1999) and Portuguese cases (Cabral 2004).

Despite the controversy about the nature and meaning of the concept of social trust, most survey research settles on the same question to measure it (Uslaner 2001: 575; 2002: 54): 'Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted or that you can't be too careful in dealing with people?' Invented by Elisabeth Noelle-Neumann and first used in Germany in 1948, the question was picked up by American researchers (Rosenberg 1956) and has spread around the globe from there as a measure of general social or interpersonal trust, namely in the WVS/ EVS surveys.[35] More

[35] For a discussion of the measurement problems of this question and the contaminating presence of the trust-versus-caution dimension in the measurement see Miller and Mitamura (2003).

recently, the ESS has moved from a dichotomous measure to an 11-point scale, where 10 means that 'most people can be trusted' and 0 that 'you can't be too careful'. As we did early on in the chapter for confidence in parliament, we compare in table 12 the aggregate levels of interpersonal trust in three points in time (1990, 1999 and 2004) for all countries encompassed both by the WVS/EVS and the ESS studies.

Table 12. Interpersonal trust (WVS/EVS and ESS)[36]

	WVS/EVS 1990 (% 'most people can be trusted')	WVS/EVS 1999 (% 'most people can be trusted')	ESS 2004 (% from 6 to 10 in scale)
Norway	61	65	73
Denmark	56	64	72
Finland	60	57	72
Sweden	60	64	61
Netherlands	59	59	63
Iceland	42	39	68
Ireland	47	35	57
Switzerland	27	38	54
Great Britain/United Kingdom	42	29	43
Spain	**34**	**36**	**39**
Austria	28	31	44
Germany	27	36	38
Belgium	31	29	40
Italy	**33**	**32**	**31**
Estonia	28	22	42
Czech Republic	30	23	29
Bulgaria	29	25	19
France	21	21	29
Hungary	24	21	25
Greece	**-**	**21**	**23**
Slovenia	16	21	28
Poland	26	18	18
Slovakia	23	15	20
Portugal	**21**	**10**	**22**
S. Europe average (excluding Greece)	29	25	29
W. Europe average (excluding S. Europe)	43	44	55
Eastern Europe average	25	21	26
Association with SE dummy	-.07	-.18	-.25

Again, we should be careful in comparing the results of the WVS/EVS surveys with those conducted under ESS, as both question and answer formats were not the same. However, it is possible to see the main difference between the patterns that emerge from the results in table 12 and those that pertained to indicators of political support, satisfaction or disaffection: *the remarkable stability of interpersonal trust as a social attitude in each country*. As we had seen, all other dimensions of political culture

[36] See note 21.

had shown signs of significant malleability in the short-run: increases in democratic support brought about by regime changes and political alternation; abrupt shifts in democratic satisfaction brought about by changes in economic performance; and even honeymoon and post-honeymoon effects in levels of institutional disaffection and political engagement. Nothing of the sort, however, is visible in what concerns interpersonal trust (see Nannestad 2008). With the exception of Switzerland (which appears to be moving from low to above average levels of social trust in this period), countries with low levels of social trust – namely, those in Southern and Eastern Europe, as well as France, Belgium, Germany or Austria – remain so throughout the entire 1990-2004 period. In fact, if we went back to the subsample of Western European cases in which the EVS was conducted in the early 1980s, such impression would be reinforced: by then, France, Italy, Spain and Belgium already displayed lower percentages of individuals saying that 'most people can be trusted' – in the 20's or low 30s – than all the Scandinavian countries, Ireland, the UK or the Netherlands.

Having said this, we reencounter in interpersonal trust the same sort of cross-national variation we had found previously. On the one hand, levels of interpersonal trust tend to be lower in Southern Europe than in most remaining Western European countries. But on the other hand, Eastern European democracies also tend to display low levels of social trust. When the scope of comparison is expanded to the Latin American democracies, we find that in those countries surveyed between 1997 and 2001 through the WVS project and where this question was included –Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Peru and Venezuela – the average percentage of respondents who declared that 'most people can be trusted' was 13 percent, with Chile obtaining the highest value (22 percent). And similar findings emerge when we resort to other indicators that have been used to measure 'generalized trust', 'generalized morality' or 'faith in people' (Rosenberg 1956; Zmerli, Montero and Newton 2007; Tabellini 2007).[37] In other words, albeit Italy, Greece, Spain and Portugal do seem to display lower levels of social trust than most other Western European democracies, lack of generalized trust does not seem to be a specifically Southern European phenomenon.

[37] See table A1 in appendix.

A deeper look at the 'Southern European' exceptionalism

So far, we have relied on a mostly descriptive and exploratory cross-national comparison of the available survey data on the most fundamental political attitudes that prevail in the Southern European countries. It is necessary, however, to subject the notion of a 'Southern European effect' to a more systematic scrutiny.

First, we need to examine whether whatever cross-national differences we have detected are primarily attributable to systemic factors – of which the 'Southern European' regional effect may be one – or, instead, mostly to differences between individuals in those countries. In their classic work on the political culture in five nations, *The Civic Culture,* Almond and Verba (1963) distinguished between two sorts of political orientations. Some of those orientations, particularly those related to norms of political behavior, feelings about politics and levels of allegiance to or alienation from the political system, did seem to be largely uniform within nations. In these cases, talk of a 'national political culture', rooted in historical or geographical differences between countries, or in stable social, political and institutional factors, would seem to make sense. However, other attitudes, particularly those related to political engagement and feelings of political efficacy, seemed to be mostly explained by the same kind of individual-level factors in all countries under examination – namely, education – making individuals with the same level of education across countries more similar to each other than to their less educated compatriots (1963: 317-323). In other words, in these cases, differences between individuals are more important than (and are at the root of) differences between countries. Second, if we do confirm that cross-national differences are indeed profound and related to macro-level factors, the second step should be to evaluate what factors are those. Can whatever cross-national variations emerging from the analysis be attributed to clearly identifiable social, political or institutional factors? Or is it the case that such differences can only be plausibly assigned to long-standing cultural, historical, geographical or other particularities of the Southern European region?

One way to address these questions is by thinking about our data as having a hierarchical structure, i.e., by conceiving individual-level attitudes as being clustered within national contexts. Individuals in a particular country share a common institutional, political, macro-social and macro-economic environment, and it may be the case that observations of their social and political attitudes are more similar than observations from individuals in different countries. Hierarchical linear models (HLM)

take this structure of the data into account. They allow us to estimate effects of individual-level variables on the political attitudes under examination in a way that takes into account between-groups differences while simultaneously estimating the impact of higher-level contextual variables on individual-level attitudes (Bryk and Raudenbush, 1992).

In this section, we perform a multilevel analysis of data from 26 countries included in the European Social Survey. From the 2004 round, we include Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Germany, Denmark, Spain, Finland, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Sweden, Slovenia, Switzerland, United Kingdom, Estonia, and Slovakia.[38] Furthermore, we merged these survey data with data from Bulgaria, Cyprus, Romania and Latvia in the 2006 round. These countries constitute our higher-level units of analysis in which we conceive individuals to be clustered. We consider five individual-level dependent variables that we have discussed exhaustively and analyzed descriptively in the preceding sections. In what concerns satisfaction with democracy and confidence in parliament, we use respondents' placement in 0-10 scales on the ESS survey. In what concerns social trust, we built an average index of individual responses to three questions measuring interpersonal trust and perceptions of fairness and helpfulness of other people, also using 0-10 scales.[39] Finally, internal efficacy and interest in politics are measured in ordinal scales, from 'frequently' to 'never' in what concerns the statement 'politics is too complicated to understand' and from 'not at all' to 'very' in what concerns interest in politics.

The first step of our analysis was to fit a null (also called unconditional) model to the data, in order to obtain estimates that allowed us to determine what is the proportion of variance in each dependent variable that can be attributed to variation *within* countries or, instead, that can be accounted for by the grouping structure in the population, i.e., by variation *between* our level-2 units (the European countries included in the 2004/2006 ESS wave). Using the estimated variance components into which the total variance is decomposed, we can calculate intraclass correlation coefficients (ICC), reflecting the proportion of the total variance in each dependent variable that is due to

[38] We excluded Luxembourg and Iceland for lack of data on several macro-level independent variables. Furthermore, we excluded all countries with Polity IV's Democ score below 7 at the time of the survey, i.e., all non-democracies.

[39] For a full discussion of the validity and reliability of this scale to measure social trust see Zmerli, Newton and Montero (2007).

differences among countries. The results, presented in table 13, clearly differentiate our dependent variables in two groups. On the one hand, indicators of political disengagement – political interest and internal efficacy – reveal low ICC's, respectively, .06 and .02. This means that only 6 and 2 percent of the variance in the levels of interest and efficacy is over countries, while 94 and 98 percent is over individuals. Conversely, in what concerns social trust, confidence in parliament and satisfaction with democracy, the ICC value ranges from .18 to .22. This means that, if we exclude the variables measuring political engagement – interest and internal efficacy – the proportion of the variance in the remaining dependent variables that is accounted for by the macro (country) level of analysis is comparatively high.[40] In other words, as Almond and Verba had already suggested, uniformity within nations is much lower for political engagement than it is for other political attitudes: variations in political interest and internal efficacy occur mostly within countries rather than between countries. Let us then turn our attention first to those attitudes where differences between countries are largest – social trust, satisfaction with democracy and confidence in parliament – and look for the correlates that account both for its macro- and micro-level variance.

Table 13. Intraclass correlation coefficients for the five dependent variables

	Social trust	Satisfaction with democracy	Confidence in parliament	Political interest	Internal efficacy
Null model					
Intercept variance component (τ_{00})	0.87	1.35	1.11	0.05	0.02
ICC	0.22	0.22	0.18	0.06	0.02

We start with social trust. There are several reasons to treat it separately from all other attitudes. First, as we have seen, it is the only one that exhibits general stability in terms of aggregate values through time, making it, arguably, one of the "thickest" social attitudes observable on the basis of social-scientific surveys. Second, it plays a different theoretical role from all the other political and social attitudes under examination: generalized trust has been treated both as a relevant dependent variable on its own – influenced by participation in voluntary associations, institutions, cultural values or socio-economic features of societies – but also as a relevant independent variable in the study of other political attitudes and outcomes (Nannestad 2008).

[40] Snijders and Bosker (1999: 46).

As potential determinants of social trust, we will consider several different contextual-level and micro-level variables. In what concerns the former, we include an indicator of the quality of governance in each political system. The World Bank's Governance Indices provide annual measure six dimensions of governance in 212 countries since 2002, on the basis of evaluations by business firms, NGO's and other independent agents and citizens about the performance of political, legal and economic institutions in each country (Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastuzzi, 2007). Following previous studies (Rohrschneider, 2005; Geissel 2008), we concentrate on four of those indicators to assess the quality of governance: voice and accountability; government effectiveness; control of corruption; and rule of law. Our 'quality of governance' index is just the average score of these four indicators. We expect it to be positively related to social trust, although a possible positive and significant coefficient needs to be interpreted cautiously. It would certainly be congruent with the notion that social trust is fostered by particular contemporary institutional arrangements that diminish risks of social cooperation, establish fair treatment of different social groups and reduce incentives and opportunities for political and administrative corruption (Jackman and Miller 1998; Letki and Evans 2005; Delhey and Newton 2005; Kumlin and Rothstein 2005; Seligson 2006). However, it would also be congruent with the notion that social capital, linked to long-term institutional legacies, fosters better institutional performance (Putnam 1993 and 1995a; Fukuyama 1995; Tabellini 2007), or even with the notion that there is a reciprocal relationship between generalized trust and the quality of governance (Sides, 1999; Hooghe and Stolle 2003, 240-45).

Second, we also include a dummy for the "third wave democracies" in the sample, testing the hypothesis that a shorter experience with democratic rule should contribute to lower levels of interpersonal trust (Muller and Seligson 1994). Furthermore, we include two macro-level control variables: socio-economic development, using the United National Human Development Index for each country at the time of the survey (United Nations, 2008);[41] and economic growth, measured by the percentage growth in real GDP experienced by each country in the year before the survey (World Bank 2008). Last but not least, we include in the model a Southern European dummy variable, with value 1 for Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain, to test if

[41] For the countries in which the surveys were conducted in 2006, we use the 2005 value of HDI, the latest available at the time of this writing.

a Southern European 'regional effect' remains while controlling for other social, political and economic contextual variables.

Our individual-level variables include a set of socio-demographic controls (gender, age, years of education, marital status, size of locality and religiosity), two variables capturing political predispositions (identification with the incumbent party – or parties – and left-right ideology) and variables measuring whether the respondent had worked for an association or a party, as well as frequency of attendance of social meetings with friends, in order to test hypotheses linking social participation, civic activities and sociability with generalized trust.[42] Table 15 presents the results.

Table 15. Multilevel random intercept and fixed slopes models of social trust (standardized regression coefficients)

Respondent (level 1) Country (level 2)	25,172 respond. 26 countries
Country-Level Intercept Effects	
Southern European dummy	-.01
Quality of governance	.47***
Human Development Index	-.11
GDP growth (%) y-1	.14
Third wave democracy	-.17
Individual-Level	
Identification with incumbent	-.01
Left-right self-placement	.00
Gender (female)	.02**
Age	.06***
Habitat	-.03
Years of education	.11***
Married/living with partner	.02**
Religiosity	.06***
Work for party	.00
Work for organization	.02*
Frequency of social meetings	.08***
Level-2 R^2	.81
Level-1 R^2	.09

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

As we can see in table 15, our model does a relatively poor job in explaining differences in levels of generalized trust between individuals, as attested by the value of the level-1 r-squared (.09). However, it does quite a good job in explaining variance between countries, accounting for more than 80 percent of it.[43] Individuals with higher levels of education and higher frequency of social meetings tend to display higher levels of social trust, just to mention the two individual-level variables whose impact is

[42] [Explain coding for all these variables]

[43] For calculation of these r-squared estimates, we follow Singer (1998).

largest. None of these findings is particularly surprising (Delthey and Newton 2003, 111-13; Delthey and Newton 2005, 322-23; Newton 2006). However, no individual-level variable provides more than a modest contribution to the explanation of social trust, as can be ascertained by the values of the standardized coefficients. Instead, the strongest correlate of social trust in our model is located not at the individual level, but rather at the macro-level: quality of governance, confirming extant findings in the literature (Delhey and Newton 2005; Kumlin and Rothstein 2005; Seligson 2006). Social trust is indeed, among the attitudes under analysis, the one that is closest to emerging as a "social and collective property" (Newton 2006: 98).

Do these results emerge because democratic regimes with higher quality of governance foster greater interpersonal trust among the citizens who live under them, or should the relationship be conceived in the opposite direction? Again, our research design and the use of cross-sectional data do not allow us to make any strong claims concerning causal priority. However, there is at least a strong claim that follows from the results: low social trust is clearly not a specifically 'Southern European syndrome'. On the one hand, as we had seen before, although Southern European countries may display, on average, lower levels of social trust than most Western European countries, that specificity disappears once Eastern European countries are include in the comparison. Second, as we realize now, there is nothing of consequence to social trust that is captured by our 'Southern Europe' dummy variable once individual-level variables and the quality of democratic governance in our set of European countries are controlled for (as well as socio-economic development, economic performance and the shorter democratic experience of some countries). Instead, what seems to be behind most of the relevant variation between European countries – and thus the broadly lower levels of social trust in both Southern and Eastern Europe – is the quality of their democratic institutions.

We proceeded to a similar analysis of the remaining political attitudes where variation between countries was largest: confidence in parliament and satisfaction with democracy. The models employed are very similar to the one used for social trust, with just four differences. First, we include social trust itself as an individual-level independent variable. Second, we exclude the independent variables related to social participation, civic activities and sociability, which were of theoretical relevance only to the explanation of social trust. Third, we include the individual level of satisfaction with economic performance as an independent variable, given extant findings about

satisfaction with democracy and institutional trust (Anderson and Guillory 1997; Linde and Ekman 2003; Denters, Gabriel, and Torcal 2007).[44] And finally, we add a new contextual variable: the average disproportionality of the last three elections in each country before the ESS survey took place, measured by Gallagher's least square index (Gallagher 1991; 2008). We include it in light of research showing a relationship between electoral system (dis)proportionality (and more generally between consensual democracy) and both satisfaction with democracy and political confidence (Anderson and Guillory, 1997; Norris, 1999c; Magalhães, 2006).

Table 16. Multilevel random intercept and fixed slopes models of confidence in parliament and satisfaction with democracy (standardized regression coefficients)

	Confidence in parliament	**Satisfaction with democracy**
Respondent (level 1) Country (level 2)	24,819 respond. 26 countries	24,692 respond. 26 countries
Country-Level Intercept Effects		
Southern European dummy	.05	.00
Quality of governance	.23	.16
Human Development Index	.35	.59*
GDP growth (%) y-1	.15*	.23*
Third wave democracy	.05	.08
Electoral disproportionality	-.08	-.10**
Individual-Level		
Identification with incumbent	.06***	.06***
Left-right self-placement	-.01	.03
Gender (female)	-.03	-.03***
Age	.01	-.01
Habitat	.02*	.03*
Years of education	.06***	.02*
Married/living with partner	.00	.00
Religiosity	.06***	.03**
Satisfaction with economy	.32***	.43***
Social trust	.20***	.15***
Level-2 R^2	.70	.70
Level-1 R^2	.22	.29

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Table 16 summarizes the results. Again, as expected, our 'Southern European dummy' is irrelevant in what concerns accounting for different levels of political confidence or satisfaction with democracy among individuals of different countries. Instead, we find a series of common correlates for both variables, which do a very good job in accounting for variance between countries (r-squared of .70) and a reasonably good one, at least comparing with what occurred with social trust, in accounting for

[44] [Explain coding.]

individual-level variance (r-squared above .20). First, at the individual-level, identification with the incumbent matters, confirming the 'home-team' hypothesis put forward by Holmberg (1999: 117-18). Second, economic performance, both objective and subjectively perceived, seems to powerfully drive these attitudes: GDP growth has a positive and similarly sized effect in both cases, while the evaluation of economic performance is the single most powerful explanation of both attitudes at the individual level. Finally, social trust also has a positive relationship with both variables, reflecting the presence of a 'thicker' component in both political attitudes (Levi and Stoker 2000; Denters, Gabriel and Torcal 2007). The only main difference between the two models is that, while the coefficients for electoral disproportionality and economic development have the same signs in both cases (respectively, negative and positive), they only reach conventional levels of statistical significance in the case of satisfaction with democracy.

That satisfaction with democracy has a strong 'short-term' component is not new, but it is striking to note how institutional confidence is also driven by performance evaluations. However, we cannot exclude the possibility that these attitudes are substantively different in nature. The influence of the economic evaluations and incumbency on satisfaction with democracy confirms the notion that the latter taps mostly the level of discontent with the outputs of the system (Canache Mondak and Seligson 2001; Linde and Ekman 2003; Gunther, Montero and Torcal 2007). However, although institutional confidence can also be influenced by performance, particularly in what concerns the economy (Listhaug and Wiberg 1995; Miller and Listhaug 1999, Levi and Stoker 2000, 480), it may also contain a cumulative information and perception on each succeeding set of authorities and their decisions. In other words, institutional trust also taps a general level of trustworthiness of all political authorities in general (Levi and Stoker 2000, 489). As Miller (1984: 840) says, people "lost confidence because time after time political authorities…demonstrated through their decisions and actions that they were not competent, not efficient, not honest, not fair, and certainly not to be trusted to make the right policy decisions." This is why some scholars have shown the reciprocal relationship between institutional trust and incumbent support and/or evaluations (Hetherington 1988; Sigelman *et al.* 1992; Anderson and Yuliya 2001; Anderson and LoTempio 2002; Banducci and Karp 2003; Anderson *et al.* 2005).

Finally, we look into the variables capturing political engagement, i.e., interest in politics and internal efficacy. As we can see in table 17, the 'Southern European

dummy' is again irrelevant. Instead, what emerges is a striking contrast between these variables and both confidence in parliament and satisfaction with democracy. Variables measuring economic performance or proximity to the government of the day are either irrelevant (GDP growth and identification with incumbent) or have much weaker effects (satisfaction with economic performance), while social trust also plays a much more modest role. In turn, as Almond and Verba (1963) had suggested all along, political engagement is an attitude whose variation seems to derive more from fundamental differences between individuals, regardless of the context in which they are inserted: differences in their levels of education, their gender, and, in the case of political interest, their age.

Table 17. Multilevel random intercept and fixed slopes models of interest in politics and internal efficacy (standardized regression coefficients)

	Interest in politics	**Internal efficacy**
Respondent (level 1)	25,010 respond.	24,840 respond.
Country (level 2)	26 countries	26 countries
Country-Level Intercept Effects		
Southern European dummy	-.04	-.06
Quality of governance	.08	-.08
Human Development Index	-.08*	.04
GDP growth (%) y-1	-.04	.02
Third wave democracy	-.17**	-.05
Electoral disproportionality	-.07***	-.08***
Individual-Level		
Identification with incumbent	.01	.01
Left-right self-placement	-.01	.01
Gender (female)	-.14***	-.16***
Age	.17***	.03**
Habitat	.05***	.05***
Years of education	.24***	.21***
Married/living with partner	.03***	.01
Religiosity	.00	-.03**
Satisfaction with economy	.03*	.07***
Social trust	.06***	.04***
Level-2 R^2	.62	.11
Level-1 R^2	.19	.16

*p<.05; **p<.01; ***p<.001

Three additional results deserve to be mentioned. First, we find a negative relationship between electoral disproportionality and both political interest and internal efficacy. In other words, the results suggest that the well-demonstrated detrimental effects of electoral disproportionality for electoral participation (Lijphart 1999) may also take place by affecting citizens' affective orientations vis-à-vis politics. Second, the model explaining political interest includes a negative and statistically significant coefficient associated to the 'third wave democracy' variable, suggesting that a longer

experience with democracy tends, in general, to raise the levels of political interest we are likely to find among that population (Torcal 2006). Finally, somewhat more surprisingly, once individual-level factors are held constant, poorer countries and those where economic growth is lower seem to be characterized by higher levels of political interest. This finding was not theoretically anticipated and the size of the standardized regression coefficients is small, so it would be unwise to make much of this result. However, this does resonate well with extant research suggesting that poor economic conditions may actually increase political mobilization (Radcliff 1992; Aguilar and Pacek 2000).

Conclusion

Is there a 'Southern European political culture'? Throughout this chapter, we used a broad array of survey-based indicators to look for an answer to this question. Our best answer is that, in most instances, the case for Southern European exceptionalism in what concerns political attitudes and values is exceptionally hard to make. In some dimensions, such as the level of support for democracy as a regime, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain do not seem different from the remaining Western European democracies. In other dimensions – such as these countries' lower levels, on average, of both confidence in political authorities and social trust – they present patterns that resemble those that also prevail in the new Eastern European democracies. And in others still, differences between Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain seem much more relevant than any alleged similarities: this is the case in what concerns the levels of rejection of authoritarian alternatives, the highly mutable levels of satisfaction with democracy and the reported levels of political participation.

The single apparent exception in this regard concerned subjective political interest, where Southern European democracies do appear to have in common persistent and comparatively low level of subjective engagement in the political realm when compared to the remaining European democracies. However, a more detailed investigation of the macro- and micro-determinants of subjective political interest showed no specific 'Southern European effect' in political interest. Variations in this respect are mostly at the individual-level, not the country level. And the single most powerful explanation of political interest is found in the individuals' level of educational attainment. Thus, the Southern European exception finds a potentially more trivial explanation than one that would focus on long-term cultural legacies: among our

26 countries, Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain display the lower levels of educational attainment overall.[45] Talk of a 'thick' cultural legacy also seems to stand on a shaky basis from this point of view.

In a widely cited work on regional aspects of democratization, Bunce notes that 'regional differences can arise, not because of empirical validity but because few studies cross regional divides and the divides themselves may very well manufacture interregional contrasts' (Bunce 2000: 721). We hope to have shown that the discourse about the 'Southern European exceptionalism' in what concerns several of the most fundamental traits of political culture has also suffered from problems deriving from selection bias. We should think about this selection bias in two ways. First, there has been a selection bias in terms of the temporal scope of comparison used in previous analyses. As we saw early on in this chapter, indicators such as satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliamentary institutions seem to be highly affected both by economic performance and by individual perceptions of such performance, as well by quick changes following 'honeymoon' periods of democratic transition. In fact, even attitudes as fundamental as the public legitimacy of democratic rule or the rejection of authoritarian alternatives seem to be pliable to the passage of time, political alternation and the continued stable functioning of democratic rule. Second, there has also been a selection bias in terms of the specific geographical scope of comparisons that were made when available comparative data was scarcer. As we have shown, only the absence of data on the new Eastern European or Latin American democracies seemed to justify, in many instances, the notion that Greece, Italy, Spain or Portugal were indeed 'exceptional'. When the geographical scope of comparison is expanded, we find commonalities with other countries, and also that such commonalities can be largely attributed to similarities that cross regional boundaries. All this also calls attention to the notion that, as assumed by a 'rationalist-culturalist' view of political culture (Mishler and Rose 2001 and 2007), several of its basic elements can change more quickly that often assumed, and that a single cross-sectional picture in time of such attitudes is likely to be highly deceptive in this regard. Not only do most of these traits show little persistence over time, but they also seem to be shaped by variations in

[45] By 2004, the percentage of the population having attained at least the secondary level of education in our four countries ranged from 25.2 percent (Portugal) to 59 percent (Greece). All remaining 22 countries in our ESS sample display higher levels, from 63 percent in Ireland to 89.1 percent in the Czech Republic (source: Eurostat).

economic and institutional performance and the prevailing institutional rules in each country.

This does not mean, of course, that all elements of mass political culture in these countries are 'thin', or that they can be explained merely on the basis of short-term developments or by factors pliable to political fiat. Social trust is an interesting case in point. At the aggregate level, differences between countries are particularly persistent in this regard. While individuals seem to be able to shed many supposedly stable values, norms and attitudes as they move to different social, economic and political contexts, as Barnes and Sani reminded us long ago in their study of the 'Mediterranean political culture' (Barnes and Sani 1974), the fact is that do seem to carry with them – and to transmit to their descendants through socialization – the legacy of their country of origin in what social trust is concerned (Tabellini 2007). The link of generalized trust with institutional quality, which we observed once again in our analysis, is one where a reciprocal or even spurious causation cannot be excluded. And even in the cases of satisfaction with democracy and trust in parliament, which we showed to be largely driven by performance, incumbency and institutional factors, individual levels of social trust plays a relevant role in the explanation.

This calls attention to how some 'thicker' dimensions of political culture may be related to particular historical paths of political and social development. An increasingly large body of literature has now begun to refocus our attention on the deep and remote causes of things we know tend to characterize, both as dependent or independent variables, our cases – or at least to some regions in the countries under examination – in comparison with most of remaining Western democracies: low social trust, comparatively late democratization, lower levels of both economic development and long-term economic growth and lower quality of democratic governance (Putnam 1993; Acemoglu and Robinson 2006; Acemoglu et al. 2007; Tabellini 2007). However, our general point is not that all elements of political culture, their alleged causes or their alleged consequences are all 'thin' and 'short-term' in nature. Instead, it is that the proper search for explanations should probably cease assuming that there is a uniquely 'Southern European syndrome' or 'exceptionalism' to be found. In other words, we subscribe for the issue of 'political culture' to what, in an earlier volume of this series, ended up being the unexpected conclusion of a comparative study of Southern Europe's contemporary political institutions, party systems and political behaviors: 'the absence of the southern European exceptionalism that until recently plagued the comparative

study of the region', underlining 'the intellectual cogency of the concept of a new southern Europe and the convergence within the broader universe of advanced industrial democracies that it implies' (Bruneau et al., 2001).

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Appendix

Table A1. Other indicators of generalized morality/trust[46]

	WVS/EVS 1999 (% choosing 'tolerance and respect' as important quality to teach children)	ESS 2004 (% from 6 to 10 in scale on 'most people try to be fair')	ESS 2004 (% from 6 to 10 in scale in scale on 'most people try to be helpful')
Denmark	87	79	56
Iceland	84	75	61
Sweden	93	69	57
Finland	83	78	55
Netherlands	91	70	50
Norway	66	79	59
Ireland	75	60	63
Switzerland	79	67	48
Great Britain/United Kingdom	83	50	52
Austria	71	55	44
Belgium	83	52	30
France	85	50	29
Germany	72	54	35
Luxembourg	78	49	34
Spain	**82**	**45**	**29**
Estonia	71	45	31
Czech Republic	63	43	27
Italy	**75**	**34**	**24**
Slovenia	70	34	29
Poland	80	29	14
Hungary	65	32	22
Portugal	**65**	**34**	**20**
Bulgaria	59	29	15
Slovakia	57	26	18
Greece	**52**	**19**	**15**
S. Europe average	69	33	22
W. Europe average (excluding S. Europe)	81	63	48
Eastern Europe average	66	34	22

[46] For WVS/EVS: Norway (1996), and Finland (2000); for ESS, Italy (2002) and Bulgaria (2006). Percentages in relation to entire country samples, following sample weighing.