



University of  
Zurich<sup>UZH</sup>

# European Social Survey: How Europeans view and evaluate democracy

Mónica Ferrín Pereira

**2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on Governance, Crime  
and Justice Statistics, Mexico City June 19-21 June**

***Session:*** 'National and international experiences in measuring  
governance and related concepts'



# The ESS (by Rory Fitzgerald)

- Chart stability and change and interpret how Europe's social, political and moral fabric is changing
- Achieve and spread higher standards of rigour in cross-national research
- Biennial hour long face-to-face interview with nationally representative samples
- Core and rotating module (open competition)

# The ESS module *on democracy*

- **Two stories about democracy** (Runciman 2013)
  - A success story
  - A story of pessimism and fear
- **A success story**
  - Democracy – a universal value
  - The third wave of democratization
- **A story of pessimism and fear**
  - Lack of consolidation in newly democratized countries
  - Even established democracies are challenged today
  - What has gone wrong with democracy? (The Economist, March 1st-7th, 2014)

# The ESS module *on democracy*

- **Challenges in Europe**

- Erosion of national democracy: shifting power to supranational agencies and other unaccountable actors
- Eurocrisis: the ‘Troika’ as an example

- **The citizens’ discontent**

- Populist mobilizations
- Withdrawal from politics
- Rampant political cynicism

# The ESS module *on democracy*

- **How about popular support for and satisfaction with democracy in Europe?**
  - **90%** of Europeans (strongly) agree that ‘democracy may have problems but it’s better than any other form of government’ (EVS 2009)
  - **only 48%** of Europeans are very/fairly satisfied with the way democracy works in their country (EB\_May2012)
- **General measures: how about a more detailed account?**

# Democracy: a multidimensional concept

ELECTORAL/DEMOCRATIC DIMENSION	
Competition	Free and fair elections
	Differentiated offer by parties
	Parties free to criticize
Vertical accountability	Retrospective accountability
	Justification by government
Deliberation	Participation in political discussion
Responsiveness	Responsibility to other EU governments

LIBERAL DIMENSION	
Rule of law	Equality before the law
Horizontal accountability	Checks and balances (courts)
Minority rights	Protection of minority rights
Freedom of press	Press freedom
	Media reliability

# Democracy: a multidimensional concept

<b>SOCIAL DIMENSION</b>	
Social Justice	Protection against poverty
	Reduction income differences
<b>PARTICIPATORY DIMENSION</b>	
Direct participation	Participation in referendum
<b>INCLUSIVENESS DIMENSION</b>	
Inclusiveness	Inclusiveness of participation rights (migrants)

# Democracy: two aspects

- **Views:** the meaning attributed to democracy, the expectations with respect to democracy – the necessary requirements of democracy
- **Evaluations:** the assessment of democracy – satisfaction with the way democracy works in one's own country

# Format - problems

- Abstract concepts
- Reference to democracy
- Stimulus of meaning items
- Scale for meaning and evaluation items
- Satisficing/ social desirability
- Pair-wise vs. List-wise
- Dichotomous items

# Views

Using this card, please tell me how important you think it is for democracy in general... ***that national elections are free and fair***

Not at all  
important for  
democracy  
in general

Extremely  
important for  
democracy  
in general

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

# Evaluations

Using this card, please tell me to what extent you think each of the following statements applies in [country]. ***National elections in [country] are free and fair***

Does not apply  
at all

Applies  
completely

0

1

2

3

4

5

6

7

8

9

10

# Views of democracy

<b>Liberal elements</b>	
rule of law	9.2
checks and balances	8.8
media reliability	8.7
minority rights	8.3
media freedom	8.2
average	8.6
<b>democratic elements</b>	
free and fair elections	8.9
explanations govt	8.8
opposition free	8.3
sanction govt	8.4
party offer alternatives	8.0
citizen deliberation	7.4
responsibility to EU govts	6.5
average	8.0

<b>social justice</b>	
poverty protection	8.7
income equality	8.2
<b>direct democracy</b>	8.3
<b>inclusiveness (migrants)</b>	7.9

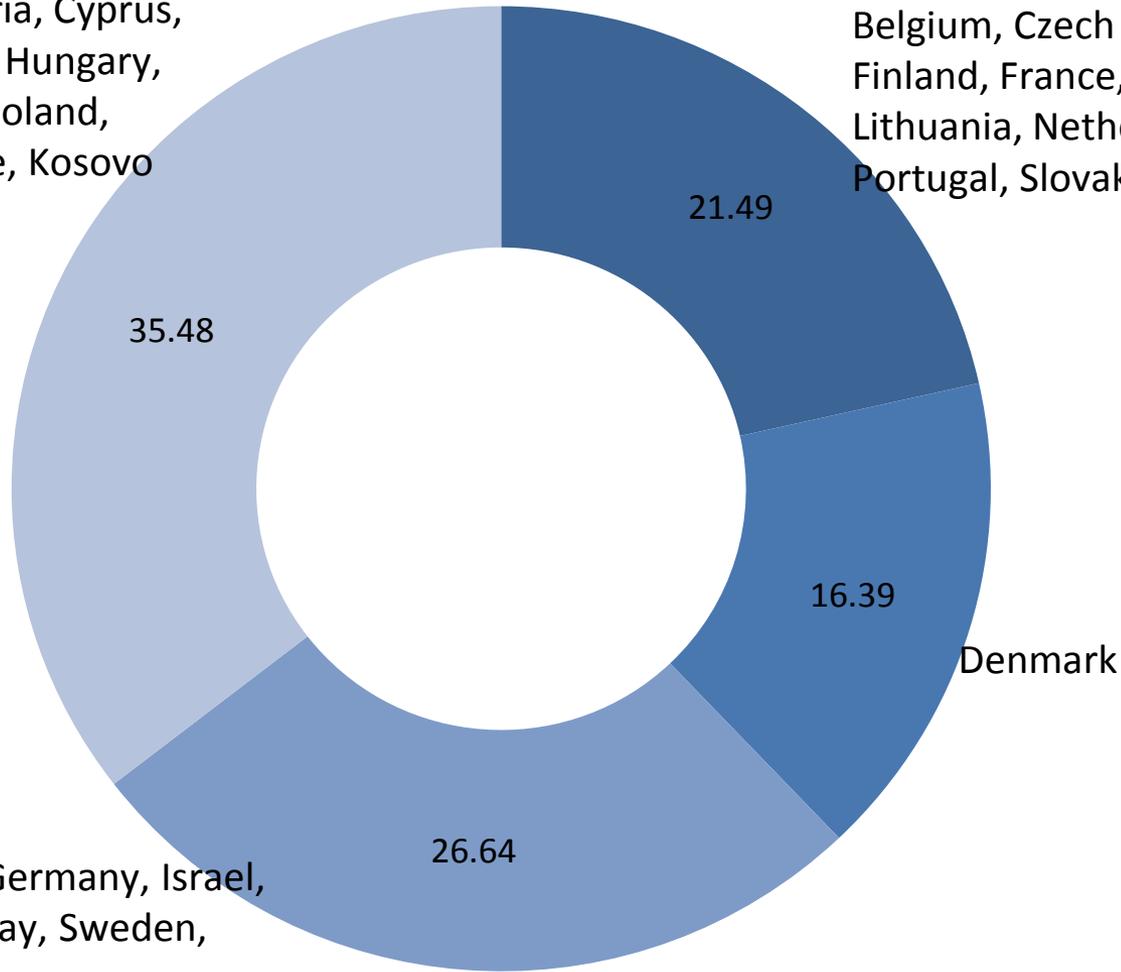
# Views of democracy

item	country-specific ranking			
	1st	top 3	last 3	last
<b>liberal dimension</b>				
<b>rule of law</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>27</b>	0	0
checks and balances	0	9	0	0
media reliability	0	4	0	0
media freedom	0	0	2	0
minority protection	1	0	2	0
<b>democratic dimension</b>				
<b>free and fair elections</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>18</b>	0	0
explanations by government	0	13	0	0
retrospective accountability	0	1	1	0
freedom of opposition	0	0	0	0
offer parties	0	0	11	0
citizen deliberation	0	0	22	4
responsibility to EU govts	0	0	28	23
<b>social justice</b>				
poverty protection	1	11	0	0
income equality		1	5	0
<b>direct democracy</b>	0	0	2	0
<b>inclusiveness (migrants)</b>	0	0	11	1

# Types of democrats

Albania, Bulgaria, Cyprus,  
Estonia, Spain, Hungary,  
Ireland, Italy, Poland,  
Russia, Ukraine, Kosovo

Belgium, Czech Republic,  
Finland, France, Great Britain,  
Lithuania, Netherlands,  
Portugal, Slovakia



■ Uncommitted

■ Liberal democrat

■ Social democrat

■ Complete democrat

# Evaluations of democracy

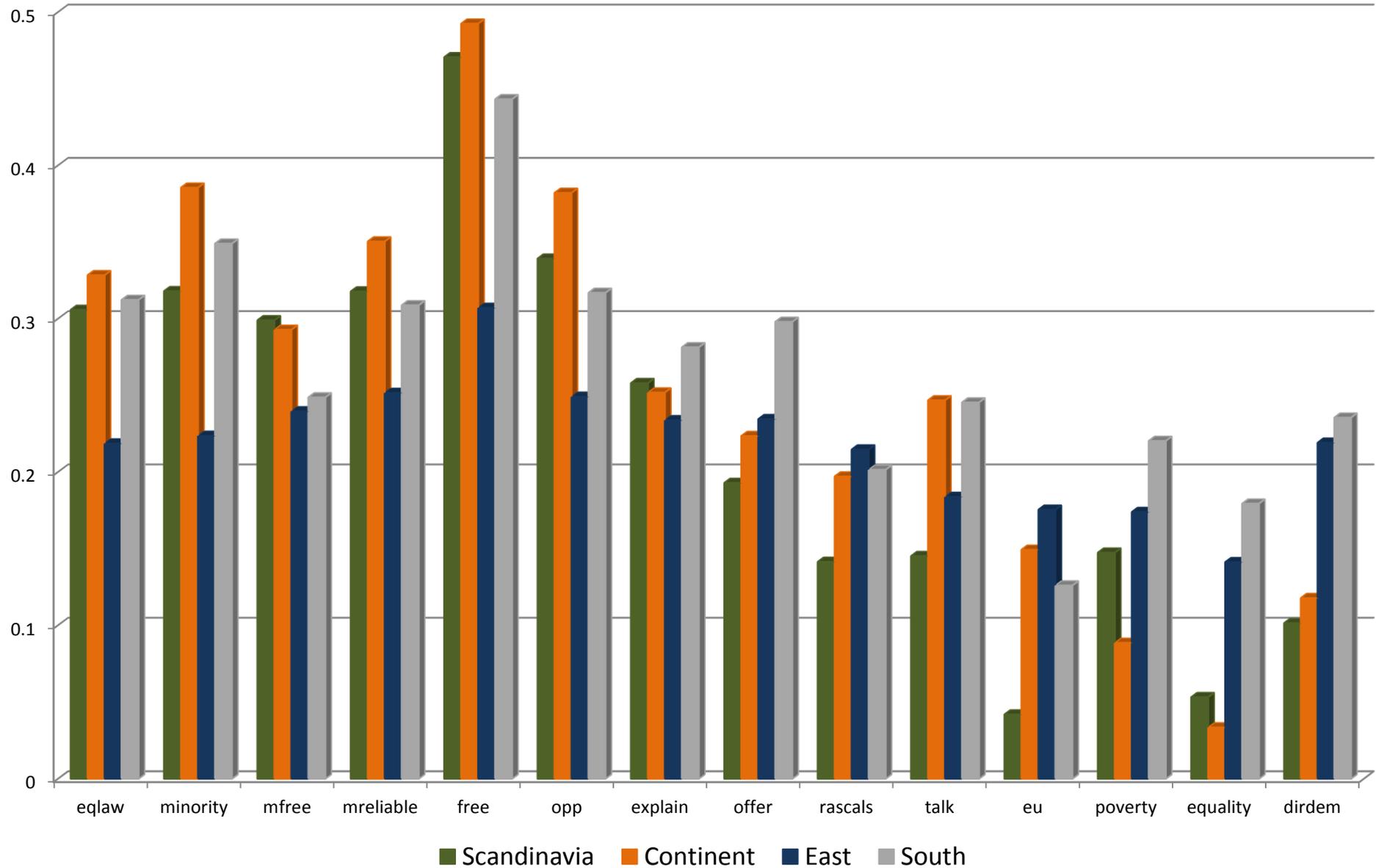
<b>Liberal dimension</b>	
Rule of law	5.2
Media reliability	6.0
Minority rights	6.3
Media freedom	7.3
Average	6.2
<b>Electoral dimension</b>	
Free and fair elections	7.1
Explanations govt	4.8
Opposition free	7.4
Sanction govt	5.6
Party offer alternatives	5.6
Deliberation	6.5
Responsibility to EU	5.6
Average	6.1

<b>Social dimension</b>	
Poverty protection	4.2
Income equality	4.2
<b>Direct democracy</b>	5.0

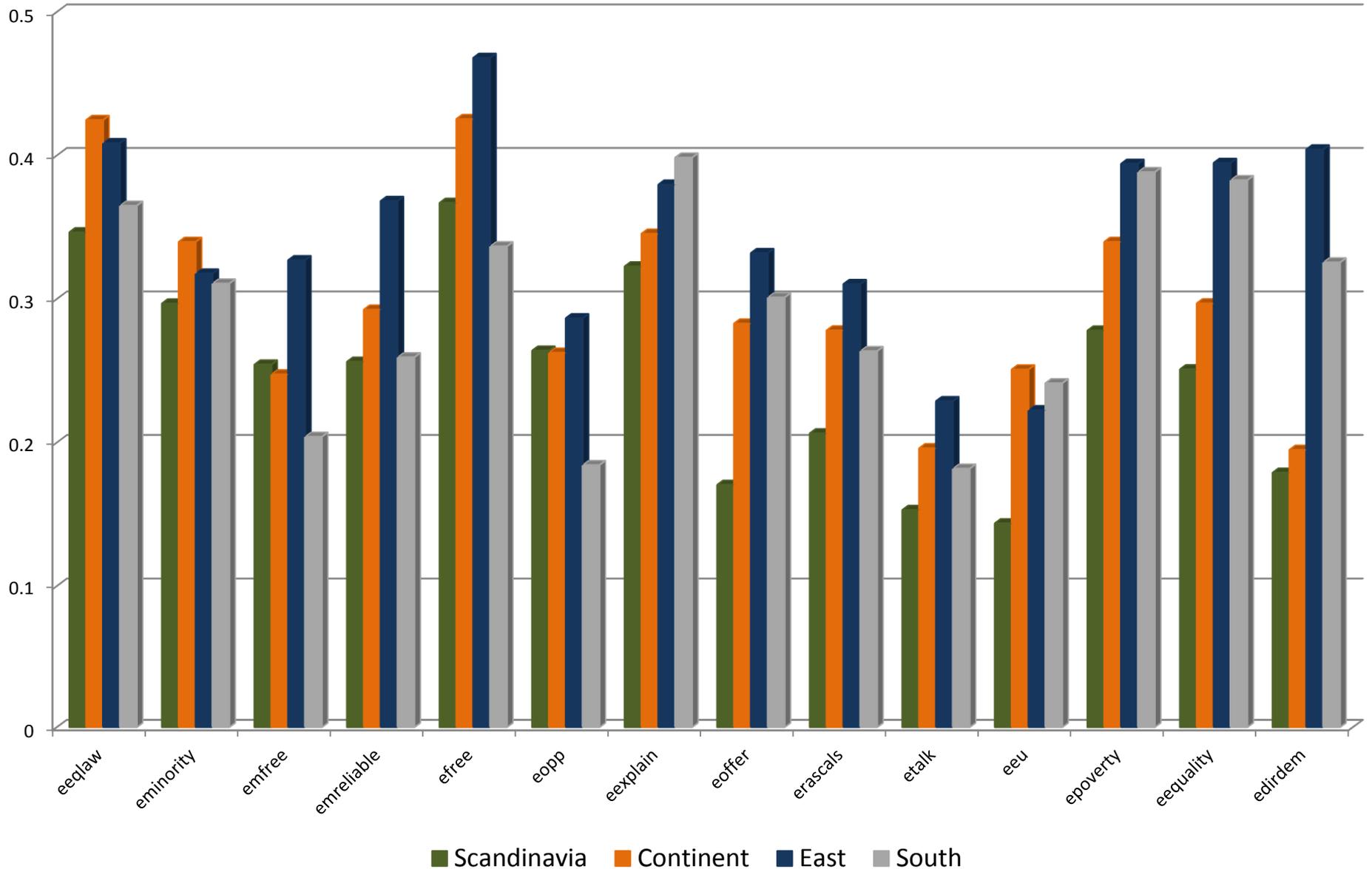
# Evaluations of democracy

item	country-specific ranking			
	1st	top 3	last 3	last
<b>liberal dimension</b>				
media freedom	3	22	0	0
minority protection	2	2	0	0
media reliability	0	4	0	0
<b>rule of law</b>	0	0	10	4
<b>democratic dimension</b>				
<b>free and fair elections</b>	10	7	0	0
freedom of opposition	10	19	0	0
citizen deliberation	3	5	0	0
responsibility to EU govts	1	1	0	2
retrospective accountability	0	0	0	1
offer parties	0	0	0	1
explanations by government	0	0	9	0
<b>social justice</b>				
poverty protection	0	0	18	13
income equality	0	0	19	10
direct democracy	0	1	0	3

# ESS items and Support for ideal democracy

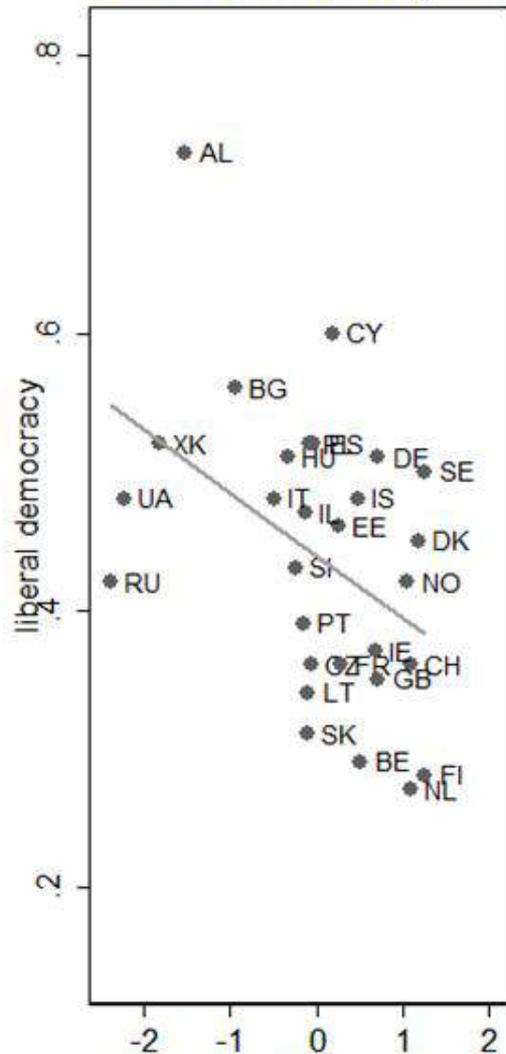


# ESS items and Satisfaction with democracy



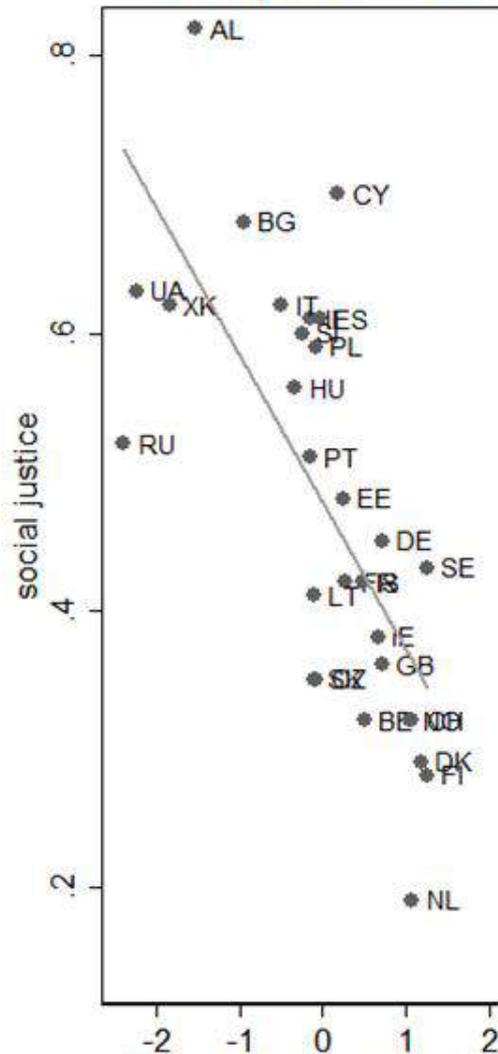
# ESS items and objective measures (WB)

liberal democracy-WB



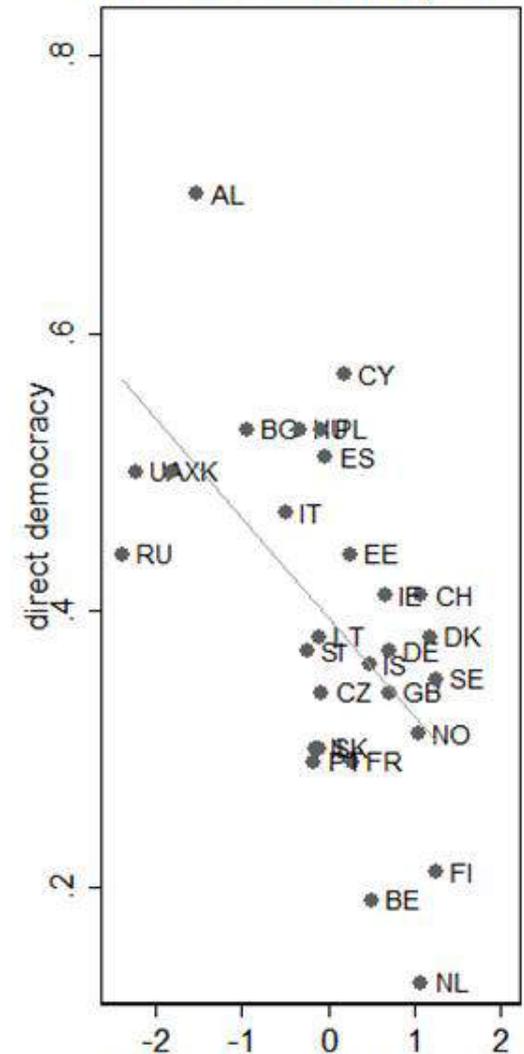
WB indicators

social justice-WB



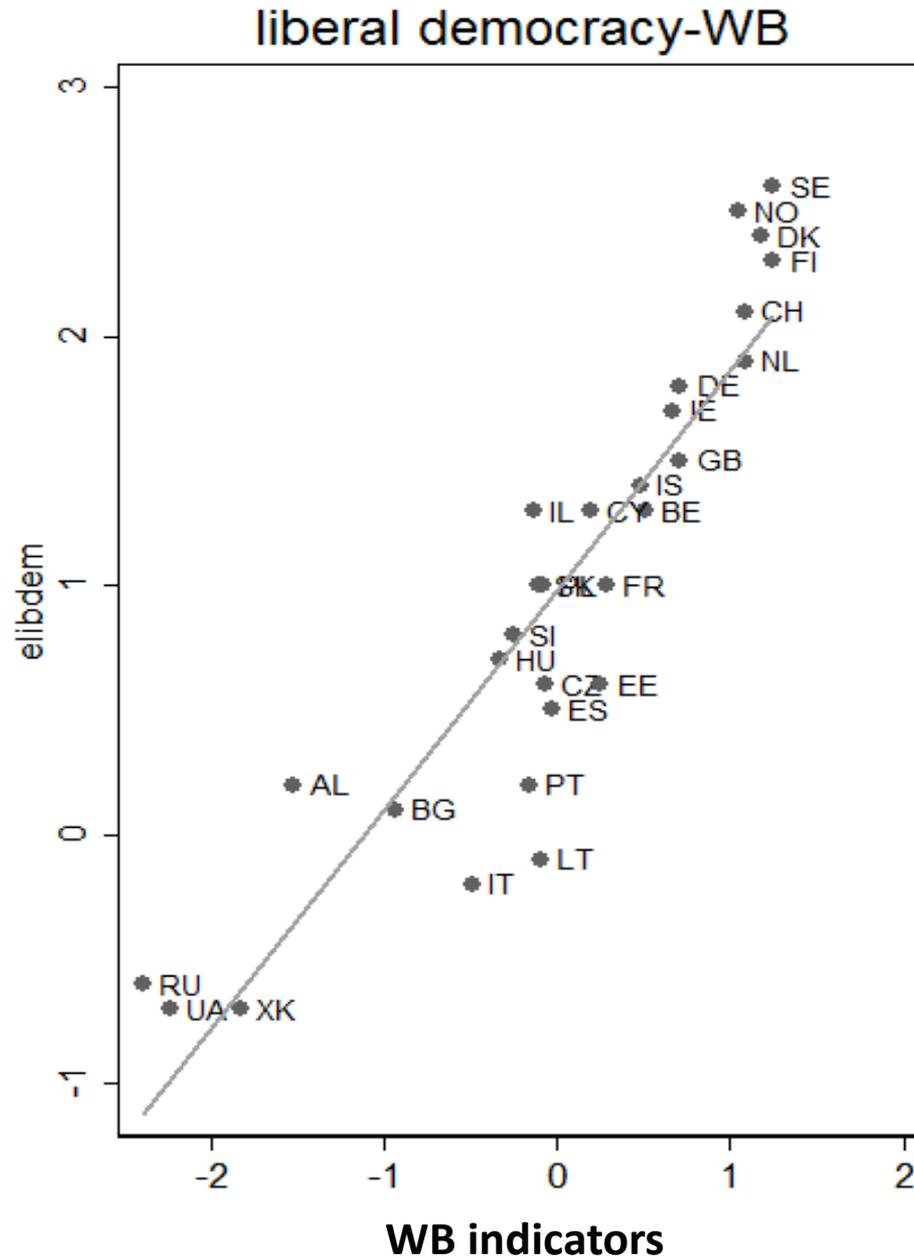
WB indicators

direct democracy-WB



WB indicators

# ESS items and objective measures (WB)



# Concluding remarks

Europeans are not “one and the same”

ESS data:

- Provide a more precise account of ‘how democracy should be’ according to Europeans
- Allow for a more precise qualification of European democracies (citizens as the *true* experts)