

## SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY AND MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY: EQUALITY AND FREEDOM

**Abstract.** *The study deals with the micro-level factors behind the perceived legitimacy of the democratic political system. Following Lipset, we searched for evidence of evaluative support for democracy when understood as representing certain procedures and institutions, compared with the equally important and widespread support base which understands democracy in terms of egalitarian values. Using recent data from a survey of Slovenian public opinion carried out in 2011 we confirmed that support for democracy per se is largely dependent on the former "liberal" or procedural understanding, while the support it derives from those with egalitarian priorities is more ambivalent. The consequences are discussed for the prospects of resolving the conflict surrounding current cuts in social benefits spending.*

**Keywords:** *values, democracy, democratic beliefs, attitudes, ideology, egalitarian, social inequality, social crisis, World Values Survey*

### Introduction

The Slovenian sociological tradition is rich with analysis of the economic crisis. It is clear that such discussions remain timely, especially on the pressing topic of the developmental flaws which are impeding efforts to cope with the economic situation more successfully. A major difficulty with regard to Slovenia is the legacy of the past. It was frequently argued that introducing democracy to replace the former authoritarian regime would bring economic improvements, with gains in efficiency in particular. Much has been said already about the pitfalls of such expectations. Bernik and Malnar (2008) extensively examine Mason's (1995) claim that merely changing the political system in post-socialist societies would not bring about the cultural change necessary to make the new regime work. They emphasised widespread egalitarian attitudes that support the state taking a strong role

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in the economy. The following discussion takes as its entry point the well-known social fact, indeed societal constant, which distinguishes Slovenia most comparable countries: namely, the extremely common and widespread collectivist egalitarian attitudes in Slovenian society (Chart 1).

This picture is confirmed by our data. In the early years of 'soft' transition to democracy Slovenia was split fifty-fifty between support for equality as opposed to meritocratic social differences (Chart 1, SJM921), and was roughly in line with the European average. At the next measurement it equalled the European peak of support for encouraging social differences (SJM053), and soon afterwards rises to the extreme of predominant support for equality (SJM112). At such levels this stance is already close to the classic definition of the egalitarian syndrome of the 1970s (cf. Županov 1970, Vehovar, 2009), further elaborated in the form of a coalition between privileged political and economic elites, which are granted to have a popular mass support, at the expense of the majority being rendered passive with the feeling of relative equality through social security. At this descriptive level, the growing support for equality suggests that the new elites' ideological project of building a liberal democracy on principles of individual initiative were in fact stopped at the beginning, when they encountered the 'spontaneous ideology' of the Slovenian 'survival' model (cf. *Ibid.*).

We will start analysis from the premise that deeply-rooted values matter in discussions about democracy and the economy (Županov, 1970, Makarovič, 1982). Vehovar concludes resignedly that democracy in the sense of moral and more long-term stable support, which is not dependent on short-term instant rewards granted in a form of gradual economic prosperity but rather rooted in a substantial understanding of fundamental values related to democracy, is an unreachable ideal. Egalitarian values, which were obviously fundamental to the dominant socialist ideology, were already at that time being identified as obstacles to liberalising and developing the economy under the socialist order. Such reactions to the prevailing egalitarian attitudes grew stronger in all subsequent periods of economic crisis over the following four decades. Counter-reactionary arguments then reject the neoliberal ideology elaborating such views for allowing the currently rich and privileged to increase their wealth at the expense of the poor (compare Liberal, 2008). One of our aims here will be to clarify how these debates follow wider value settings in society.

Solving the problem of the role egalitarian values can take in support for democracy might show how the seemingly insurmountable difficulty of the developmental situation could yet be overcome. It is of particular importance, as mentioned above, that we connect the question of the role of egalitarian values in general to the question of the role they play more specifically with regard to what 'lay' people understand by the word 'democracy'.

Chart 1: SUPPORT FOR EQUALITY<sup>a</sup> (WVS95 AND SJM92-11)



<sup>a</sup> "Incomes should be made more equal (% sum of 1 thru 5 support score out of 10) vs. We need larger income differences as incentives". Source: World Values Survey Association, 2005/2009; Toš and group, 2011.

For if we follow a working definition of democracy as the political system which, at the level of the most general institutional frameworks, provides conditions for »societal decision-making among conflicting interests groups« under the specific conditions of a »system of beliefs, legitimising the democratic system« (Lipset, 1959: 71), then egalitarian values remain of pressing importance. How is the meaning of democracy formed, understood and reproduced in everyday life? Is this conditioned by ideological values and/or self-interest? How are the general values of democracy, such as political freedoms and human rights, compatible with the values of social equality? These are questions on which a political regime depends and its legitimacy tested, all the more urgently in times of economic crisis – when social rights taken for granted in periods of prosperity are frequently challenged. If the old political regime lost public support because of its economic inefficiency, which was at least to some extent due to the disabling effect of 'uravnilovka' on individual initiative, can we be sure that the new one can escape the same fate?

Our next step here will be to follow on from this position and test how the values sets supporting social equality as compared with the sets holding more general liberal values of freedom and citizens' equal rights are function as a background to understanding and support for democracy.

### **Beliefs about the meaning of democracy and support for democracy**

What follows is a suggestion for explaining how specific values and self-interests, which form the background of the widespread egalitarianism (Hasenfeld and Rafferty, 1989) in Slovenia, informs what democracy is taken to mean in society at large, as compared to the liberal value sets, which form the background to a more generalised understanding of democracy. The study of the problem of how the lay public understands democracy (Nevitte and White, 2008) not only has practical consequences, as stated above, for understanding the "developmental blockade" (Mason, 1995) which makes it difficult for a regime under pressure to fulfil egalitarian demands to appear legitimate, but is also interesting from a theoretical point of view for understanding the factors influencing popular support for democracy at large. The authors of a newly proposed module of the European Social Survey support this line of inquiry: »Concerning the micro-level perspective, and despite the historical evolution towards a nearly universal acceptance of democracy as the best form of government, it has not yet been empirically established what people think about their democracies, and how they evaluate them.« (Kriesi et al., 2010). A key objective here is to address that gap. Tackling questions of what democracy is seen to be, to do and to promise

by the general public also involves tackling the dynamic behind the process of building democracy (see below). This differs from studying objective criteria of how much democracy is achieved and consolidated (compare Fink-Hafner, Hafner-Fink, 2009).

As is largely accepted (Schutz, 1943), an individual's self-understanding, along with the conception of the self and his/her role in society, together with the way he or she understands the political system, shapes the way we act, and vice versa: »Democracy is not achieved by act of will alone; but men's wills, through action, can shape institutions and events in directions that reduce or increase the chance for the development and survival of democracy.« (Lipset, 1959). Even the discussions of democracy by social scientists and philosophers inevitably become part of everyday discussions by societal actors and thus also shape their behaviour. Our understanding of the social reality in which we live is not formed in a vacuum; instead it takes shape through socialisation and the ideological, social and communal groups to which we belong. It is also influenced by cultural and economic elites, etc. The key motivation in our study of beliefs about the nature of democracy is to show how they influence our behaviour as societal actors, behaviour which through 'structuration' (Giddens) builds the democratic reality in which we live (compare West and Zimmerman, 1987).

Support for democracy, based on what democracy is taken to mean, is related also to citizens' expectations and demands. E.g. a simple understanding of what is and is not part of democratic culture (Lukšič, 2006) helps to articulate moral demands, which includes among others an expectation of how members of political elites should behave when caught in morally delicate situations. At the same time this also entails learning about what democracy is by observing how it functions. There are then consequences, often disillusioning, for levels of support for the ideals of democracy and satisfaction with the democracy in practice.

It is of particular importance to the legitimacy of any political system, that it is judged as being just, in the sense that it allows the realisation of legitimate expectations, even if in countries such as post-socialist Slovenia doing so entails answering demands for greater social equality. Sometimes unreasonable demands will not be exceptional in a new democracy. The point has often been made (Nevitte and White, 2008; Fuchs and Klingemann, 1995) that the discrepancy between the sometimes inconsistent high demands of a postmodern public and the ability of the system to meet them leads to discontent with the political regime itself.

We can now continue with the narrower question of how the actual legitimacy of the political regime depends on the background values which lend it understanding and support. Moving on from our discussion of the importance of embedded support for values of social equality in our cultural

context, we would like to use the data gathered in the results section below to analyse and test Lipset's (1981/1984) well known thesis that the legitimacy of a political system should be assessed in terms of the evaluative and moral support it enjoys, and that citizens' identities may be determined by the congruency observed between the values of the system and those held by individuals.

Democracy is by definition a seeking of agreement about basic matters of how to resolve the conflicts in society through consensus on core principles, and by allowing the free expression of the differences that remain through support for political parties, by which the composition of the government is periodically decided. The legitimacy of political system rests on its ability to maintain »the belief of appropriateness« (ibid.: 88), independent from the perceived effectiveness of a governing administration.

A central idea to bear in mind is the following:

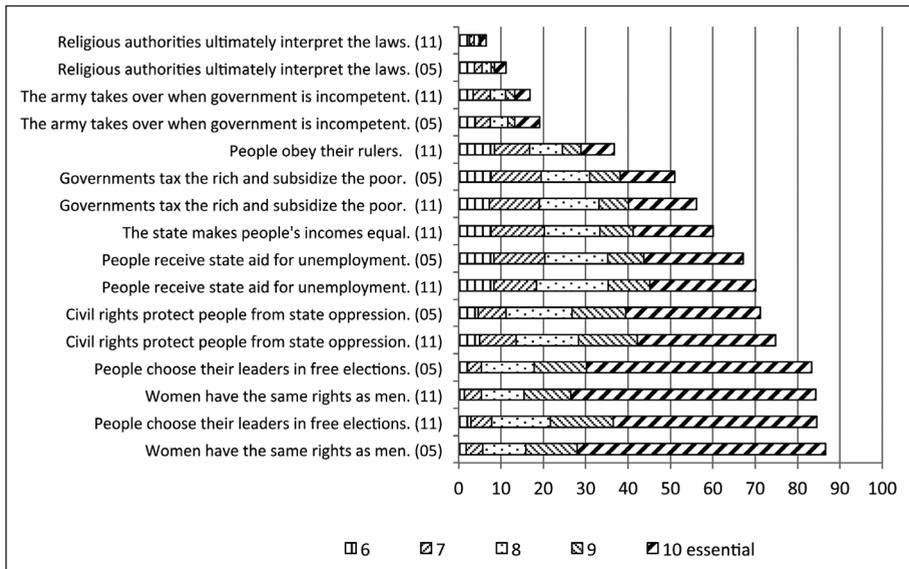
*“While effectiveness is primarily instrumental, legitimacy is evaluative. Groups regard a political system as legitimate or illegitimate to the way in which its values fit with theirs.” (ibid.)*

What Lipset wanted to say here is that evaluative support for democracy is important as a value in itself, irrespective of the ideological, religious or weltanschauung differences which otherwise shape a political space, such as left or right, views about the past etc. Democracy as a value ideal is contained in a consensus about the rules of the game. It is legitimate to seek support for one's interests, by supporting parties and a government that are as close to them as possible. The political system of democracy is a framework for peacefully resolving conflicts between interests, by giving all space to articulate and find ways of mutually respecting those interests. Any particular government is constructed from a contest of interests, yet support for the regime itself expresses what those interests have in common. This entails the admission of the winner of elections under the presupposition that next time the other party has a chance of winning.

The other dimension of support mentioned by Lipset is based on an overwhelmingly instrumental conception of the system which judges it by its practitioners and its results. Thus if the debate about inequality forms a part of what democracy is understood to mean, with further influence on levels of support for the regime, how can we predict the regime's legitimacy will be effected by cuts in spending on social benefits or other state support? In essence this is a question of how democracy is evaluated: on the basis of a congruency of values, that is, through stable moral evaluation that confirms the system's legitimacy, or in terms of instrumentally-minded support,

based on perceived effectiveness, and thus more prone to accidental oscillations, depending on the way narrow interests feel they have or have not been satisfied. The types of values underlying the prevalent understandings of the meaning of democracy determine the types of support democracy attracts, i.e. whether such support is evaluative and legitimacy-generating in nature, or whether it is instrumental.

Chart 2: PERCEIVED MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY<sup>a</sup> IN SLOVENIA, 2005 AND 2011



<sup>a</sup> Many things are desirable, but not all of them are essential characteristics of democracy. Please tell me for each of the following things how essential you think it is as a characteristic of democracy. Use this scale where 1 means "not at all an essential characteristic of democracy" and 10 means it definitely is "an essential characteristic of democracy".

Source: Toš and group, 2011.

By way of another introductory illustration let us consider what are currently considered the essential characteristics of democracy in Slovenia, our main independent variables. At the forefront is the aspect of human rights and freedom, democracy as a system that protects minorities and the less powerful; next is the procedural aspect of free elections. If we only observe the 'Essential' category of answer, the highest consensus is based on support for equal gender rights, and freedom of electoral choice. It is the latter aspect that is also the most common foundation for consensus among other countries (World Values Survey Association, 2005/2009) and on which most theoretical definitions of the essence of democracy would agree (see Kornberg and Clarke, 1994). With the exception of Muslim countries the same is

also true for equal gender rights. The regulation of inequalities, especially unemployment benefits, as a characteristic of democracy, follows closely behind the insistence on democratic procedural rights and civic freedoms. Slovenia does not stand out from European average by this equation of democracy and social rights despite the fact that social rights are guaranteed by the country's constitution. If we take, the basic emphasis on free elections at one end of a spectrum defining what is held to constitute democracy, with government support for the poor at the other end, then in 2005 in Slovenia we find a ratio of 48% against 16%, which means 4 against 1, in 2011 a ratio of 53% against 13%, which means 3 against 1. On an equivalent scale of comparison, the USA takes first place in 2005 with a ratio of 8 against 1, followed by Canada, Norway and Sweden. Slovenia is in 13th place with 4, but with 3 against 1 in 2011 it falls to 21st place, which still puts it above other European countries such as Romania, Spain, Germany and France (Our own calculation based on World Values Survey Association, 2005/2009). The European continental model of the social state achieved through corporate social dialogue is therefore discernible here. This model, we can speculate, presupposes a stronger place for social rights on the public agenda.

*Table 1: PRINCIPLE COMPONENT ANALYSIS OF THE PERCEIVED MEANINGS OF DEMOCRACY<sup>a</sup>, SLOVENIA 2011*

	Component			
	1	2	3	4
Women have the same rights as men.	<b>0,81</b>	0,10	0,04	0,10
Civil rights protect people from state oppression.	<b>0,77</b>	0,32	0,13	0,01
People choose their leaders in free elections.	<b>0,72</b>	0,03	-0,05	0,41
Governments tax the rich and subsidize the poor.	0,12	<b>0,90</b>	-0,03	0,16
The state makes people's incomes equal.	0,32	<b>0,62</b>	0,44	0,05
People obey their rulers.	0,02	0,06	<b>0,95</b>	0,11
People receive state aid for unemployment.	0,19	0,17	0,13	<b>0,92</b>
Cumulative %	27	47	63	78

<sup>a</sup> See Chart 2.

Source: Toš et al., 2011.

The correlations between the meanings democracy is taken to possess yield a similar image to the one we have already seen, yielding two dominant dimensions to the current public understanding of democracy (Table 1). The major component is liberal or procedural (Nevitte and White, 2008) – encompassing rights and freedoms and the formal “institutional” structures of democracy (see Crow, 2010: 46–7). Other studies confirmed as well that political freedom and formal equality before the law were held

to be dominant prerequisites of democracy (Miller et al., 1997). Formal citizenship presupposes »freely acting subjects« (Hafner Fink, 2011, following Marshall, 1950/2009). This classical component assumes, as argued already, agreement about the rules of the game, and the creation of a consensus common to all political and societal actors before class or political-ideological cleavages are addressed.

The second component consists of meanings pertaining to social justice. This accords, theoretically, with the social equality dimension of the issue of citizenship which is also related to an ongoing search for fluid democratic identity (ibid.; also Crow, 2010: 47). This author also made an observation which will be highly relevant to a discussion to follow about the expected results on how the two current meanings of democracy's influence the ways the democratic system itself is supported: namely, that the formal liberal component is a precondition allowing the other to be expressed, while the social justice component is confined to a social class interest-bound sphere of significance. Marshall meanwhile does not see irreconcilable conflict between the two (compare also Mouffe, 1992); instead he sees the duality they create as the dynamic function of a process of building democracy through social struggle, an ongoing process working around the search for a balance between economic 'efficiency' and social justice. The binary also provides a demarcation line between the political ideologies of liberalism and social democracy. The latter harbours feelings of deprivation which are expressed when 'rights' are cut back or endangered (Hafner Fink, 2011: 1027ff).

In what follows our concern will be to learn through micro-analysis of survey data whether the two perceived meanings of democracy function divergently or in tandem in legitimising the political system. The "liberal" dimension as expressing a common ideal furnishes larger agreement, and it seems obvious that this agreement over meaning should also form a solid background of support for democracy. Meanwhile the "social" dimension is grounded in the aspirations of class and group-based interests and thus exists in ideological conflict with support for democracy per se; the support it does give is conditional and ambivalent, rising or falling according to the benefits specific interests perceive they may gain from the general values of democracy. As argued above, this position places conditions on evaluative support and thus in Lipset's view legitimacy. It also basically finds itself in a dilemma between "exit" and "loyalty" option (Hirschman, 1970).

We will study the question raised above by treating the dimensions of what people feel democracy means as the main *independent* variables effecting levels of support and satisfaction with democracy itself. The main *dependent* variable is support, as will be explained later. Satisfaction is included as a side dependent variable for the purposes of comparing how

much there is of interest bias in the two meanings assigned to democracy (liberal and social); that is, the extent to which in either conception democracy is held as being answerable to specific demands and is judged “satisfactory” on the assessment of a specific situation. Thus, following the principle component analysis results above, we have generated two additive indexes, the “liberal” ( $\alpha = 0,71$ ) and “social” meanings of democracy ( $\alpha = 0,57$ ).

### **Support and satisfaction with democracy – the dependent variables**

Various studies have already worked at the level of attitudes held by individuals towards the political system and its institutions, actors, by addressing different aspects and indicators. Is it trust, support or satisfaction that we should include as criteria? One can agree with the observation that: “Few concepts have been so confusedly used in the literature as political support. Departing from Easton’s conceptualization (1965), the same indicators have indistinctly been used both to measure different concepts and different indicators have been employed to assess the same concept. This has made research on this field particularly difficult.” (Kriesi, 2010) Similar confusion characterised decisions as what to use as a dependent variable in assessing the influence of the meanings carried by the word ‘democracy’. Most studies used satisfaction, testing the demands hypothesis to assess specific ‘achievements’ in national contexts (Kornberg and Clarke, 1994; Miller et al., 1997; Crow, 2010). A recent study used a combination of satisfaction and support to assess the gap that they call a ‘democratic deficit’ (Nevitte and White, 2008). It is generally accepted that further study is needed to provide conceptual clarity.

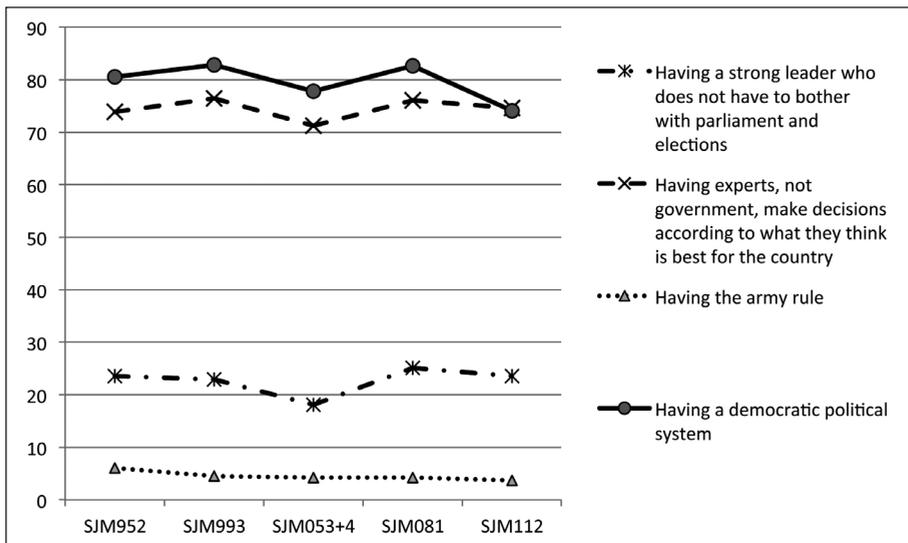
Here we shall continue from Lipset’s formulation of the basic problem of support for democracy already explicated before as a question of achieving legitimacy for a system of beliefs which is by definition based on a moral, evaluative dimension. Support for the system itself should in his view differ from the support given over specific political questions. This second category of support rests on citizens’ assessment of particular situations and their satisfaction with the activities of different political actors such as political parties, a governing administration or the functioning of a particular institution. This conceptual differentiation is also incorporated in Easton’s differentiation between general, more moral-based, and specific, more output-based support for a political regime. The parallel conceptualisation of these two dimensions of regime support is grounded in a trial test how a stable component of purely ‘evaluative’ support for a regime, of the kind Lipset stresses, might be discerned. With this one can try deducing patterns at the macro-level, where cumulative legitimacy forms a condition for the

stability of support despite short-term economic fluctuations. As previous studies have shown (Thomassen and van der Kolk, 2009), short experiences with democracy are not sufficient to form a buffer preventing cyclic and sometimes permanent economic and social crisis from influencing support for the democratic settlement itself.

Our thesis is that a relatively new democracy, and in particular one in a context of ‘velvet’ transition, where there no agreement exists about whether a former political system should be condemned (Štebe, 2002), dispute about what democracy actually means is still taking place at the level of principle and not only over matters of detail and application, as one would expect for older democracies. In such cases the values that underpin the substantial meaning of democracy are particularly important, as is their role in actively sustaining a democratic culture by building on the basic agreement of what its ideals are. This is also an exercise in learning to recognise and respect the elements that are basic to democracy.

Let us explore some intermediate results on variables of support for democracy:

Chart 3: SUPPORT (% VERY GOOD+FAIRLY GOOD) FOR POLITICAL SYSTEMS<sup>a</sup> BY YEARS, SLOVENIA.



<sup>a</sup> I'm going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country?  
Source: Toš and group, 2011.

From the trends in aggregate support we can observe that although people here have grown slightly more sceptical about democracy in recent

years, yet support for it remains overwhelmingly high, and relatively stable, at up to 80%. Support for the option of autocratic rule is also still relatively stable, attracting up to a quarter of the population. Again we used a principle component analysis<sup>1</sup> to discern one general dimension dominated by two indices of positive support, namely saliency and positive moral judgement. We will use this result to form an index of support for democracy, excluding the “military” and “expert” elements as irrelevant in our context, but including indicators of saliency of democracy<sup>2</sup> and support for autocracy with a negative sign as constituting the opposite to support for democracy. Despite a low reliability coefficient (Cronbach Alfa = 0,37), we may argue that this is outweighed by the increase in validity we gain by including this tendency. Meanwhile, pessimism in recent years about the way democracy functions, as measured by satisfaction, has also grown slightly, that from the average of above 30% for the whole period from 1991 to 2008, fall to the bottom of 20% in most recent years<sup>3</sup>.

### Other factors influencing support for democracy

From these baselines for the demarcation between support and satisfaction with democracy we are able to set forward some more specific hypothesis about the factors influencing both. Firstly, as already stated, it would be desirable to study the consequences of the two beliefs, liberal freedom and social equality, which underpin two separate perceptions of what democracy means. To understand better the effect of these meanings, we have also included other factors affecting support and, for contrast, of satisfaction with democracy. These factors include various other aspects of identity, not only citizenship, but also class, social role and group membership, which might be interpreted as holding values that are based more in self-interest. They could thus be related to a support for democracy founded not on a congruency of values, but particular situational factors, such as the extent to which one's position in society is privileged – whether as a result of one's gender, educational and cultural capital privileges; one's association with an ideological camp dissatisfied by the current functioning of the entire system, or, conversely, one's support for or disapproval of ruling government coalition parties on the basis of particular policies or actions. These other factors will serve as a background for judging how much perceived meanings and the values informing them in themselves effect the legitimacy of

<sup>1</sup> Results are available upon request from the author.

<sup>2</sup> “How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically?”

<sup>3</sup> “On the whole, how satisfied are you with the way democracy works in Slovenia?”; sum of positive scores of 0 to 10 category scale. Together with the assessment of ‘And how democratically is this country being governed today?’ this two indicators form a satisfaction with the democracy index used later.

the democratic system, and allow us to test the alternative hypothesis that particular social identities matter.

Regarding the role of values, we have already mentioned that the majority of authors tried to prove a simple equation, that when different values related to democracy are not fulfilled, dissatisfaction results, owing to a perceived incongruence between the beliefs people hold and the way they assess the political system they inhabit (Crow, 2010, Miller et al., 1997). However this does not tell us anything about the aforementioned theoretical backgrounds of those variables, as it more or less generalises the specific features democracy assumes and the circumstances it must cope with in different countries (Kornberg and Clark, 1994). Against those interpretations it has already been argued here, following Lipset, that when support for a regime is at stake, the order is reversed: values themselves come to the fore in explanation.

We differ also from Nevitte and White (2008) who interpret the meaning and values of democracy in a narrow framework of demands and satisfactions. We argue instead that especially in relation to the general values and meanings of democracy (procedural, liberal) unanimous support for it can only follow from congruence between the values enshrined in the system and those held by individuals. Meanwhile the meaning and values democracy is assigned by those who understand it in “social” terms should be regarded as being instrumental in nature, and thus comprising a permanent source of conflict between demands and their satisfaction. As we argue below, the ‘public’ articulation of demands and a critical stance toward their fulfilment is a rational choice strategy adopted by actors to maximise their gains, both in questioning and even withdrawing their support for democracy – for a political system will always be judged harshly if it fails to satisfy demands which can in effect be limitless. The “liberal” understanding of democracy to the contrary is not expected to adopt an a priori critical stance, but to grant unconditional and non-circumstantial support for democratic ideals. In this it is obvious that conflict will ensue between support for democracy when understood as carrying a particular, instrumental source of meaning, and being answerable to demands for regulating inequality, and the liberal support established on basic principles which entail common advantages by promoting a consensus which lies beyond particular interests.

An understanding of democracy based on attitudes to social inequality and related values, as mentioned at the outset of this paper, is important to understanding the support available to the democratic system itself. It is not uncommon to explain the ‘dominant ideology’ of equality (Lewin-Epstein, 2003) found frequently in Europe and which, as we saw, is extremely common in Slovenia, as being the result of median voters’ wish to promote their

own interests: »The great majority is 'interested' in lowering inequalities, since they see themselves as potential winners of redistribution. Interest under the 'mask' of norm of equality is thus one possible explanation for 'a priori' attitudes of Slovenian public toward reducing differences, especially as we know that level of differences is overestimated.« (Malnar, 2011: 961). A culture of safety thus prevails, and in that sense support for equality could be seen as insurance against an insecure future, even if today one is still in a good position. Similarly Toth (2008) see a tendency for risk aversion in post-socialist countries. Among the values related to inequality we again for the purpose of analysis section discern, following the principle component analysis, those who promote the efforts of the individual (Merit)<sup>4</sup>, general values of redistribution as an indicator of an ideological, egalitarian orientation<sup>5</sup>, and finally attitudes to inequality that relate it to economic prosperity and free economic activities<sup>6</sup>. This specification is in line with theoretical arguments about the general dimensions of attitudes to inequality (ibid.). Among other independent variables we have mentioned already the 'under-represented' status which results from being a woman, being younger, or being less educated.

It is necessary to be sensitive to the ideological characterisation of effects of variables, as this is one condition Lipset saw for preventing one's particular interests from bounding support for democracy. Yet ideological characterisation is important in other respects as well: as with the dominant ideology whereby Slovenia is characterised by somewhat extreme social equality valuations, as with 'bricolage' where a seemingly irrational cluster of demands and interests appears, e.g. related to an authoritarian personality syndrome (cf. Makarovič, 1982). "Ideological" could be also characterised as an extremely consistent expression of attitudes which exceeds the situational bounding, but in a form of values this could rather mean orientation toward long-term goals, as in our case would be a more proper characterisation of the values typical of democratic culture. Related to this are broader political and social ideological orientations with a stronger tradition and history, such as conservative or liberal, left or right. To test the background values underlying what democracy is taken to mean we shall include also some

<sup>4</sup> "Differences in income necessary for prosperity"; "Incomes should be made more equal vs. We need larger income differences as incentives for individual effort".

<sup>5</sup> "Responsibility of government to reduce differences in income"; "People with high income should pay a larger / same / smaller share of income in taxes than those with low incomes"; "Government should take more responsibility to ensure that everyone is provided for vs. People should take more responsibility to provide for themselves".

<sup>6</sup> "Private ownership of business and industry should be increased vs. Government ownership of business and industry should be increased"; "Competition is good. It stimulates people to work hard and develop new ideas vs. Competition is harmful. It brings out the worst in people".

questions which generally reveal a liberal or conservative morality<sup>7</sup>, such as those concerning abortion and the rights of women<sup>8</sup> (Toš et al., 2011).

## Analysis and results

It was suggested in the introduction to examine, if support for democracy is not based on assessment of specific political situations and conditions, but is based rather on evaluative, value-moral factors, those that are congruent with the general meaning of democracy. Dependency on the situational, instrumental aspects of values, would be interpreted as meaning that those values are not directly compatible with support for democracy in its legitimacy dimensions, but rather express self-interested judgements of the current situation. We tested that hypothesis by introducing different sets of factors: the set of two meanings of democracy (liberal and social equality), then a set of general social values and attitudes such as attitudes to inequality, liberal/conservative moral values, and attitudes regarding gender equality, then a set of factors related to various aspects of social identity, and finally a set of assessments of the conditions in various sectors in society, from the economy to corruption. First we introduced those factors in explaining support for democracy, and later compared the same sets with respect to levels of satisfaction with democracy. A basic assumption is, following Lipset, that the political system of democracy which regulates decision-making to resolve interests conflicts in society, can only be stable if the basic values by which it functions are supported, and this means attaining Lipset's concept of evaluative legitimacy.

Results in the Table 2 show clear consistency between support for democracy and an understanding of democracy on the liberal model. The standardised regression coefficient shows exceptionally powerful causal effect, showing congruency between the liberal meaning of democracy and its support. This confirms a thesis derived from Lipset about the evaluative character of support for democracy, which is almost self-evident, since the more someone holds formal-liberal democratic values and images of society, the more intensive is their support.

It is not the same with beliefs that view regulating social inequality as one of the purposes of democracy. Rather, the direct effect has an opposite sign, after we control and thus account for interrelations with the otherwise dominant liberal understanding of democracy, which indicates that the net effect is a moderate but still statistically significant shift towards support for

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<sup>7</sup> "Positive/negative feeling about: right to abortion"; "Please tell me for each of the following actions whether you think it can always be justified, never be justified, or something in between, using this card: Homosexuality"; "Abortion".

<sup>8</sup> "Positive/negative feeling about: equality of the genders".

autocracy! Whereas in the former case we have a transparent equation of liberal values with support for democracy, in the latter we find a conditional and ambiguous allegiance, hovering between the regimes which best serve its aim of regulating inequality. Support for democracy is only granted on condition, that (rather extreme) social equalities are sustained. It seems that supporting social equality reflects a certain authoritarian orientation, highly reminiscent of the former regime, if we recall Županov's and Makarovič's specification of a coalition between the authoritarian elite and egalitarian masses. What we can at least claim from the results is that the more egalitarian expectations are placed on the political regime, the more doubt is expressed about the ability of democracy to serve socially good ends. When support is withdrawn, this gives additional weight to the demands for social equality. An exit option is more attractive for the less powerful in society since these are people with little to lose if the stability of the current regime is not sustained.

It is still not resolved if both of the above results are indeed to be interpreted as showing a long-term value-moral congruency in proximity to the object of evaluation, that is democracy and its opposite, autocracy, or whether we are seeing the short-term effect of self-interest. Let us consider first whether the twofold effect of the meanings democracy is understood to carry on support for the system may be explained through a set of variables of general values. We will see that lowering of the coefficient of liberal and social meanings on support, when variables are introduced that presumably contain the values and attitudes that lie behind the two meanings of democracy. One of those is the attitude to equality expressed in a general tendency towards the redistribution of wealth, next equality in opposition to individual responsibility, and third is the attitude of not supporting liberal-capitalist entrepreneurship and competition. The first and partially the second idea of social equality display negative signs in relation to support for democracy, similar to that observed with the equation of democracy to social equality (Table 2, Model 2). We can also claim that by lowering the effect of the social meaning when values are introduced, those attitudes and values indeed explain a large part of its effect. Other variables from the values set also co-act there in a direction of reversed effect. Liberal morality is not as strong as the gender equality variable, and this is also significant. The latter is thus an important additional component in explaining support for democracy. Equality in gender rights compares interestingly with social equality values, as both are similarly concerned with protecting socially weaker groups, yet the first sees a guarantee for this in supporting democracy, while the latter is sceptic about the capability of democracy in itself, to deliver the desired goals. Yet the liberal understanding of democracy remains strong even after a set of values variables has been introduced, which confirms that it remains

a distinct and powerful component that attracts support even beyond liberal – conservative ideological values.

Conversely the social understanding is mostly explained by the newly introduced set of values. The value supporting equal redistribution also has a 'critical' and negative effect in relation to satisfaction, as we shall see later, not only to support. As observed in the introduction, much of the strong attitudes toward greater equality sprang from critiques of unjustly or accidentally generated social differences, which brought support for redistribution. This is then a prevailing factor also behind negative attitudes to democracy. These attitudes are connected more to the disappointment of past experiences than with democracy per se. But at the same time they are not oriented constructively towards the future, as they are also in conflict with support for meritocratically generated individualistic differences stimulating greater attainment.

We can observe only weakly indicated effects of the third set of variables – denoting various social identities. We expected those to act according to socially privileged positions in supporting democracy. A positive sign of the effect on the edge of statistical significance has education, support for parties in the government coalition, but is negative if they are of right-wing political orientation. The first two we can interpret as being expected to reflect a privileged situation in supporting the regime. The last, of right-wing political orientation once the status of opposing the government has been taken into account, could also be interpreted as being parallel to the opposite of the liberal value –moral orientation from a second set of variables.

Equally weak is the last set of variables<sup>9</sup>, as together they explain only five percent of the variation of the dependent variable. If weak nevertheless the signs are as expected, the measures of how the conditions of individual well-being and in society in general are assessed show support of a purely

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<sup>9</sup> List of stimuli for the situation variables is as follows: Alienation: "Some people feel they have completely free choice and control over their lives, while other people feel that what they do has no real effect on what happens to them. Please use this scale where 1 means 'no choice at all' and 10 means 'a great deal of choice' to indicate how much freedom of choice and control you feel you have over the way your life turns out."; Generalised trust: "Do you think most people would try to take advantage of you if they got a chance, or would they try to be fair? Please show your response on this card, where 1 means that 'people would try to take advantage of you,' and 10 means that 'people would try to be fair'"; Individual material condition: "How do you assess material conditions in which you and your family live?"; Sociotropic conditions improved: "How do you assess freedom, democracy, rule of law and conditions of living in general, did Slovenia improved a lot or worsened a lot?"; Individual conditions improved: "What about you and your family? Did you lost or gain in the period from independence until today?"; Corruption: "What do you think, how widespread is corruption in public services in Slovenia?"; Human rights: "How much respect is there for individual human rights nowadays in this country?"; Assessment of living conditions: "Comparing life in our country with the conditions about ten years ago, would you say that conditions improved a lot, somewhat, roughly equal, worsened, or worsened a lot? A place you live in."; Assessment of employment conditions: "Possibility to gain employment."; Assessment of rule of law: "Rule of law"; Pride in social welfare: "How proud are you of Slovenia in each of the following? Its social security system"; Pride in political participation: "Possibilities of political participation in Slovenia".

instrumental kind for democracy. The better conditions are deemed to be, the stronger is support for the system. The effect of assessments that are substantially related to democracy include satisfaction regarding respect for human rights and pride in the possibilities of political participation. Also after including those factors the effect of support for government opposition parties diminishes, which is a clear sign that political dissatisfaction is still also a factor in the disillusionment with the political system felt by opposition supporters. One of the key indicators of content with the functioning of democracy is that the opposition sees chances of fulfilling their goals, at least in the long run.

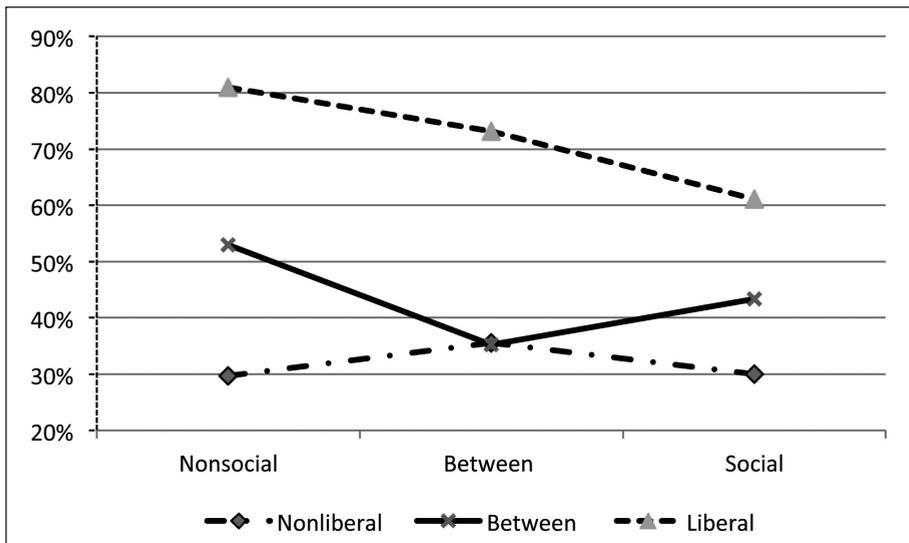
*Table 2: PREDICTORS<sup>a</sup> OF THE SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY (OLS REGRESSION, STANDARDISED COEFFICIENTS)*

	Model 1	t	Model 2	t	Model 3	t	Model 4	t
Meaning of democracy								
Liberal	0,39	9,7	0,33	8,3	0,32	7,9	0,30	7,5
Social	-0,12	-2,9	-0,06	-1,5	-0,05	-1,3	-0,06	-1,5
Values								
Equality (redistribution)			-0,09	-2,3	-0,09	-2,4	-0,06	-1,4
Equality (vs. Merit)			-0,06	-1,7	-0,04	-1,2	-0,00	-0,1
Equality (vs. liberal-capitalist)			-0,02	-0,5	-0,02	-0,6	-0,00	-0,0
Liberal morality			0,05	1,2	0,02	0,5	0,06	1,4
Gender equality			0,18	4,8	0,15	4,1	0,12	3,4
Social identities								
Gender (male)					-0,01	-0,3	0,01	0,3
Age					0,04	0,7	0,09	1,7
Education (university)					0,07	1,8	0,06	1,4
Retirement (not)					-0,08	-1,6	-0,08	-1,5
Subjective social class (Upper)					0,00	0,1	-0,02	-0,6
Voting (government parties)					0,07	1,7	0,03	0,7
Political orientation (right)					-0,07	-1,7	-0,06	-1,7
Assessments of the conditions								
Alienation (high power)							0,03	0,9
Generalised trust							0,02	0,7
Individual material condition							0,04	0,9
Sociotropic conditions improved							0,08	1,9
Individual conditions improved							0,06	1,5
Corruption (better)							0,00	0,0
Human rights (respected)							0,10	2,5
-living conditions							0,01	0,1
-employment conditions							-0,03	-0,6
-rule of law							-0,02	-0,4
Pride in social welfare							-0,06	-1,4
in political participation							0,14	3,6
R2 /F	0,12	49,0	0,18	21,6	0,21	13,0	0,26	9,1

<sup>a</sup> See footnotes in the introduction for the operationalization of dependent and independent variables. Source: Toš et al., 2011.

To test whether the main results gained so far of how differences between what democracy is taken to mean effect support for the democratic regime are not spurious statistical side-effects of regression equation, we produced a simple multidimensional table. Both perceived dimensions of meaning, associating democracy with a liberal model on one hand and social equality on the other, are controlled by one another, so that we can observe the net effect of each separately. The descriptive bivariate results are misleading due to an existing positive correlation between the two meanings. Indeed, each sphere of meaning behaves differently in relation to support for democracy. It is interesting that among those who share the liberal understanding of democracy (the dashed line on the Chart 4) a relatively strong negative correlation to support is shown, while on other lines of liberal understanding only a moderately negative correlation is shown. At the same time an extremely strong correlation between liberal understanding and support for democracy is shown again, as in the previous results of regression equation. The conflicting nature of both meanings is thus confirmed.

Chart 4: SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY (%) BY LIBERAL AND BY SOCIAL MEANING



<sup>a</sup> Extremes of positive or negative values on indexes, see Table 2.  
Source: Toš and group., 2011.

### Results for satisfaction with democracy

For a better evaluation of the results gathered so far let us compare the same independent variables in relation to another dependent variable, that

is, satisfaction with democracy. The results show (Table 3) that the order of factors with regard to the strength of their influence is here reversed: the general values and the liberal meaning of democracy are the least important in explaining satisfaction. Results differ from similar studies in countries such as Canada, Russia and Mexico, where meanings of democracy which were most compatible with the prevailing image of the country, resulted in positively expressed satisfaction with the functioning of the system. We regard the prevailing image of Slovenia as a country where social rights are highly respected. Yet we can observe a negative effect, which is to be interpreted as 'dissatisfaction' also with the realisation of social rights through the functioning of democracy. It is thus critical of the system on both levels, of support and satisfaction generated through the social meaning of democracy. These results could not be relativised through a thesis of 'critical democrats', or the high and sometimes not realistic conflicting demands of postmodern citizens that criticize the functioning of the system yet support the ideal. We mentioned in the introduction that demand for greater equality itself in principle could not be satisfied, unless 'reason prevails', as it now has in a contexts of cuts in government spending, and unless various interests-based demands are not balanced upon common values and understandings of democracy.

While the liberal meaning of democracy prevails in terms of support, it is not at all so important in the assessment of satisfaction with democracy. Here a "critical citizens" thesis would be more in place, as high support does not transfer into equally high satisfaction. The latter coefficient is still slightly positive ( $B = 0,04$ ; not statistically significant) but compared to the effect (0,39) of support of democracy it is negligible. Nevertheless one of our expectations, that it is more relevant to observe democracy gaining legitimising support through the variables underlying what it is taken to mean, is also now largely confirmed when we compare our earlier results with the latter effect the perceived meanings of democracy are seen to have on satisfaction with the system.

The set of values variables also shows pronounced self-interest-based assessments of how well the political regime is functioning in relation to demands, where demands attributable to values and attitudes in favour of equality in the first variable, measuring general values of support for redistribution, as well as the second, balancing equality and individual responsibility, are negatively related to satisfaction. They are attitudes about inequality that are related to injustice and bad luck, which are expressions of alienation and lack of power, marginalisation in social status and position. These backgrounds obviously act in parallel in relation to support for and satisfaction with the regime, as part of instrumental support in general. The negative sign shows that the democratic system itself does not seem to guarantee the security that is on the priority list for the less well off.

Except for age and gender, which both unexpectedly show negative levels of satisfaction among the male and more elderly population, the effects of other variables can be interpreted as being situational, with respect to the better or worse position a particular group occupies in society. This is also confirmed when assessments of situational factors are explicitly introduced. The better off people are in material terms under democracy, the more they also express satisfaction with it.

To sum up, assessments of how well the regime is functioning are usually much more interest-based than expressions of support for democracy on the basis of essential values. Measurements of “satisfaction” thus record a social expression more closely bound up with social status and circumstances. Those working from values in favour of equality, both on a general level and in relation to their understanding of what democracy means, are not assessing the political system itself, that is, what democracy ought to be, but balancing the options presented by different political systems from the perspective of maximal gains. The mentality from this perspective is thus that “if democracy is not fulfilling demands, we can search for alternatives”. Even if, as we saw, the autocratic option is currently not gaining popular aggregate support yet, the extreme right is on the rise in many countries, so the threat is at least potentially present.

Under the category of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy as dependent on assessment of current conditions in society – the last set of variables – we find a critical stance being expressed, which is not only generated through criticism of the current economic situation, which is nevertheless dominant in particular in the sociotropic dimension, but also more general assessments of trust, and also assessments of other phenomena and issues with an impact on the quality of civic life, such as corruption and human rights – the latter has the second largest coefficient – followed by assessments of the rule of law, and possibilities for political participation. This in an indirect way shows that democracy is not seen only in a narrow self-interest-based framework, but that expectations and critical orientations are related to other more substantive aspects of functioning. This we can hardly see as evidence of anomic alienation, a feeling of lack of a power, or despair of things changing for the better, but even more important as a positive critical component oriented towards improving the political system according to its ideal. It remains for later studies to consider how such an attitude may affect the more positively participatory political activities of citizens (Nevitte and White, 2008). It is the residual component of the meaning of democracy associated with the ideology of the equality syndrome which seems to be narrowly based on self-interests – since all of the coefficients of the corresponding values and meanings are almost totally explained when the remaining variables behind situational assessments are introduced into model.

*Table 3: PREDICTORS<sup>a</sup> OF THE SATISFACTION WITH DEMOCRACY (OLS REGRESSION, STANDARDISED COEFFICIENTS)*

	Model 1	t	Model 2	t	Model 3	t	Model 4	t
Meaning of democracy								
Liberal	0,04	1,0	0,02	0,5	0,03	0,7	0,04	1,1
Social	-0,10	-2,3	-0,03	-0,7	-0,01	-0,2	-0,04	-1,1
Values								
Equality (redistribution)			-0,14	-3,3	-0,12	-2,9	-0,00	-0,0
Equality (vs. Merit)			-0,17	-4,3	-0,16	-4,1	-0,04	-1,3
Equality (vs. liberal-capitalist)			-0,01	-0,3	0,00	0,1	0,04	1,4
Liberal morality			-0,05	-1,2	-0,15	-3,5	-0,02	-0,6
Gender equality			0,07	1,8	0,03	0,9	-0,05	-1,5
Social identities								
Gender (male)					-0,10	-2,7	-0,04	-1,4
Age					-0,13	-2,3	-0,02	-0,4
Education (university)					0,06	1,5	0,02	0,6
Retirement (not)					-0,03	-0,5	-0,01	-0,2
Subjective social class (Upper)					0,08	2,1	0,03	1,0
Voting (government parties)					0,12	3,1	0,03	1,0
Political orientation (right)					-0,09	-2,2	-0,08	-2,6
Assessments of the conditions								
Alienation (high power)							0,01	0,2
Generalised trust							0,06	2,2
Individual material condition							0,10	3,1
Sociotropic conditions improved							0,24	7,2
Individual conditions improved							-0,01	-0,4
Corruption (better)							0,09	2,9
Human rights (respected)							0,17	5,1
- living conditions							-0,05	-1,4
- employment conditions							-0,02	-0,5
- rule of law							0,15	4,4
Pride in social welfare							0,10	2,9
Pride in political participation							0,25	7,9
R2 /F	0,01	2,7	0,07	7,5	0,13	7,2	0,48	24,3

<sup>a</sup> See footnotes in the introduction for the operationalization of dependent and independent variables.

Source: Toš et al., 2011.

## Conclusions

In summary the descriptive results shows Slovenia is an exception to the other countries in the higher support it manifests for social equality. Comparison of the meanings of equality and democracy is on aggregate on about the same level as in other comparable countries. Both support and satisfaction with democracy are not critically low, showing the fact that the

relative economic stability of the post-transition period in Slovenia gained more positive evaluations than in many other democratic countries going through the transition process in “Eastern” Europe (World Values Survey Association, 2005/2009; Toš and group, 2011).

Yet the results on the question of democracy’s perceived legitimacy do indicate the prospects for the future stability of the democratic system. We have, following Lipset, demonstrated that a value-related interpretation of democracy being in essence a field in which freedoms and procedural decision-making may be protected, is more closely related to support for it. We can see those results as process of making the democracy through the ascription of substantial meanings. The continuing existence of democracy is largely based on positive liberal-oriented beliefs about the system on its own terms, even after we take account of other factors such as social identity and assessments of situation in a country. The strong effect of a liberal procedural understanding, together with gender equality values, which all also have high aggregate popular support, thus also in the Slovenian context serves as a stabilising factor for the functioning of the regime.

Almost equally widespread, and supported by still more common values of equality, is the understanding of democracy as a system guaranteeing social equality in a state. Yet values and cultural congruency with respect to evaluative support of democracy were not as unanimous for the egalitarian as they were for the liberal position. We assumed this to be part of the legacy of the past, where equality expectations were generated by the dominant ideology, and which has carried over into democratic culture today. Support for democracy is in the latter respect conditional, more to be understood as a critical ideologically self-interested stance rather than reflecting a congruency of cultural and moral values in support of a political system that is not to be questioned at all. Two interpretations of democracy, liberal and social, are thus competing with each other, the first one granting support, the second distrusting formal democratic principles insofar as they fail to realise demands for social equality. It is a syndrome of egalitarianism, that in a background of insecurity and uncertainty about the future is also expressed as negative support, scepticism and doubt about the current system delivering what is demanded, and also poses the threat of seeking solutions outside the current democratic system.

If one has nothing to lose, occupying a less privileged social position, which is in particular expressed in assessments of the functioning of democracy, then it is the negative evaluation of democracy as a common framework for resolving conflicting demands, that gives additional weight to such demands. This together with the popularity of egalitarian attitudes and values puts additional stress on the regime. Regardless of who is in government, a minority ‘political elite’ is held to blame for trying to introduce

certain measures and spreading 'neoliberal' ideology contrary to the dominant egalitarianism. The debate over ideological values thus extends to areas of 'national interests' and finally to areas where agreements are needed about the most basic questions of political regime orientation. Perhaps the main conclusion regarding the differences of the two meanings of democracy is that the egalitarian understanding is more strategic, and grants support only temporarily, as long as benefits are provided. This is reflected in a priori criticism of the functioning of the system, which is simultaneously reflected also in support for it.

What consequences does this have for understanding the nature of support for democracy? One conclusion could be that the egalitarian expectations of democracy also generate sharper social cleavages in relation to the developmental orientations following the social class divisions in society. Elites are interested in non-conflict resolution of differences between interests, for democracy as regulating the articulation of interests and respecting them in a framework of political representation. It is the cultural and economic elite that is introducing democracy as innovation in most modern developed countries. We saw this from the moderate effect of education and social status variables on evaluations of democracy. The developmental blockade that has been confirmed when the questioning of the legitimacy of social inequality is reflected in a questioning of the legitimacy of democracy.

As observed by many theorists (Mouffe, 1992, Marshall, 1950/2009), the two tendencies at the root of the two understandings of democracy and democratic citizenship identity, based respectively on freedom and social equality, are also in an interrelated and unresolved conflict with regard to supporting democracy. It is yet another paradox of democracy, that an extreme demand for equality also requires giving up freedom, giving up one's own initiative and giving up the responsibility for one's wealth to an abstract state, or its representatives in more or less popular political elites, which are in extreme consequences allowed to rule undemocratically, so long as they promise to retain egalitarian principles. The egalitarian syndrome as identified by Županov still survives under the present democratic political regime, as shown in ambivalent attitudes of conditional support, granted so long as ideological egalitarian demands are being fulfilled.

Where egalitarian ideology is present to the extent it is in Slovenia, ideological disputes about inequality are not without effect on evaluations of the political system. Negative evaluations of democracy related to equality priorities are making even more social protest activities likely, while constructive criticism within the functioning of the system would mean more participation in the political system, such as voting etc. (Kriesi, 2010; Nevitte and White, 2008).

Understanding democracy in particular with regard to the self-interested dimension probably requires more time for reindoctrination measures to take hold, before people reach a level of agreement on positive functioning which might then be transferred into positive evaluative support. Trust in political institutions needs to be built up, particularly with regard to how their stable functioning benefits citizens, which is then reflected in diminishing levels of personal and systemic corruption. Then productive individual energy could be oriented not towards finding a particular advantage, as in the case of gaining social benefits, for one self, but to be oriented towards finding solutions for getting oneself out of troubles, and knowing that social benefits exist only as insurance for cases of failure.

There is a well-established theoretical differentiation between the general evaluative, more moral-based, and specific, more output-based support for the political regime which we used as a background for discussion. Parallel conceptualisation of these two dimensions of regime support is grounded in an effort to discern a stable component of evaluative orientation in regime support. From there on one can try to deduce also to the macro-level, to assess whether the cumulative belief in the legitimacy of the regime forms enough of a buffer for stability of support to be maintained above and in spite of short-term economic fluctuations. Experiences with democracy, and also knowledge and beliefs accumulating as a result, are slowly forming a foundation on which democracy may be consolidated. Expectations which equate the meaning of democracy with social egalitarianism are more dangerous for consolidation than demands for human rights and formal democracy. Yet even the former position could through social education be reversed from a negative to positive value, to the extent that the basic meaning of democracy as conflict resolution is accepted not only at the level of belief, but also in the way the various actors in society pursue their own interests. That is, the conditions for formal and liberal democratic ideology to dominate must be set up, in place of sectoral ideological cleavages and critical reasoning that still by and large dominate the political scene, where public goods are seen as prey for each and every ruling garniture. The specific question also exists of how to make interests-based equality demands more productive in a sense of building democracy through acting and meaning. How can individual and collective constructive energy, otherwise rendered passive by dependency on state-regulated redistribution, come to the fore for the common good?

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