



Europeans' Democratic Aspirations and Evaluations: Behavioral Consequences and Cognitive Complexity

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Abstract

This thesis is a collection of four empirical studies that analyze Europeans' democratic aspirations and evaluations and their behavioral implications.

It is well established that most citizens support democracy in the abstract but that a substantial proportion of them are not fully satisfied with the way democracy works. However, we know significantly less about the specific type of democracy citizens aspire to, about the extent to which they evaluate that their democracies meet these democratic aspirations, and about how these aspirations and evaluations relate to their political behavior.

Drawing on an innovative dataset that provides a detailed account of individuals' democratic aspirations and evaluations I first assess the availability and structuration of these attitudes towards democracy in the belief systems of Europeans. Next, I analyze how democratic aspirations and evaluations and the imbalance between the two relate to political participation and party choice decisions. The empirical analyses reveal that: (i) these attitudes towards democracy are widely available and coherently structured in the belief systems of most individuals; (ii) that democratic aspirations and evaluations, and the imbalance between the two, are significantly related to the likelihood of turning out to vote and demonstrating, but that, at the same time, their impact is contingent on a series of individual- and macro-level factors; (iii) that the imbalance between democratic aspirations and evaluations that individuals perceive for specific elements democracy is significantly related to their likelihood of defecting from mainstream parties and voting for different types of challenger parties. In the conclusion to this dissertation I discuss the potential implications of these findings for the quality and stability of democracies, and how these findings qualify some aspects of the prevailing optimistic outlook about the behavior of those who are critical or dissatisfied with the functioning of their democracies.



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Bio

Enrique Hernández is a Ph.D. candidate at the European University Institute SPS department. He is interested in the study of electoral behavior, political attitudes, public opinion and political participation. His dissertation focuses on the way in which Europeans understand and evaluate democracy, and its behavioral implications. His research has been published in the European Journal of Political Research, Comparative European Politics, and Electoral Studies.