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European Political Science Review / *FirstView* Article / February 2016, pp 1 - 22
DOI: 10.1017/S1755773915000132, Published online: 25 May 2015

**Link to this article:** http://journals.cambridge.org/abstract_S1755773915000132

**How to cite this article:**
Julian Bernauer, Marc Bühlmann, Adrian Vatter and Micha Germann Taking the multidimensionality of democracy seriously: institutional patterns and the quality of democracy. European Political Science Review, Available on CJO 2015 doi:10.1017/S1755773915000132

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*European Political Science Review*, page 1 of 22 © *European Consortium for Political Research*
doi:10.1017/S1755773915000132

# Taking the multidimensionality of democracy seriously: institutional patterns and the quality of democracy

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Democracies come in all shapes and sizes. Which configuration of political institutions produces the highest democratic quality is a notorious debate. The lineup of contenders includes 'consensus', 'Westminster', and 'centripetal' democracy. A trend in the evaluation of the relationship between empirical patterns of democracy and its quality is that the multidimensional nature of both concepts is increasingly taken into account. This article tests the assertion that certain centripetal configurations of proportionality in party systems and government, and unitarism in the remaining state structure, might outperform all other alternatives both in terms of inclusiveness and effectiveness. Analyzing 33 democracies, the results of interactive regression models only partially support this claim. Proportional–unitary democracies have the best track record in terms of representation, but there are little differences in participation, transparency, and government capability compared with other models.

**Keywords:** patterns of democracy; consensus democracy; majoritarian democracy; quality of democracy; centripetalism

## Introduction

Which variety of democracy has the highest quality? A classic suggestion is the Westminster system, which ideally concentrates power in the hands of the majority and grants largely unbridled power exertion. In practice, pluralities instead of majorities often gain power (Powell, 2000), and the 'strong hand' of majoritarian democracy can rather turn into an unsteady hand (Lijphart, 2012: 257). As this potentially threatens government performance in addition to the representational record of democracy, power-diffusing 'consensus' democracy has been fielded as another ideal (Lijphart, 2012). Other (quasi-)consociational systems top this approach up and emphasize the rule of the people, regional autonomy, and power sharing, such as embodied in Swiss democracy (Lijphart, 1977; Vatter, 2014).

Yet another position is that 'centripetalism' (Gerring and Thacker, 2008) combines the best political–institutional elements, namely proportionality and consensus in

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decision making, and few hurdles in implementation due to a lack of veto players outside the parliament and the executive. Most of the time, countries such as Sweden or Norway are not associated with bad news. The negative example is the United States, where the political system is under constant fire and has just recently, after the Congressional elections in November 2014, once again produced deadlock between the houses and the president. President Obama is hence threatened to finish the remainder of his second presidential term as a 'lame duck'.

The debate appears to be far from settled. Obviously, institutions also have to fit the society they govern. Yet, some general trends can be observed. Much depends on what is meant by 'the quality of democracy'. While some systems are designed to maximize inclusiveness, defined by the proportional consideration of the preferences of the citizenry, others focus on effectiveness, meaning a strong hand on behalf of the government for effective policy implementation (Powell, 2000). Ultimately, the functioning of the 'chain of responsiveness' (Powell, 2004) characterizing representative democracy needs a minimum of both – the inclusive formation, mobilization and aggregation of preferences as well as a successful implementation process that reflects the policy preferences induced (Bühlmann and Kriesi, 2013). This article discusses alternative approaches to empirical patterns of democracy and asks whether certain configurations outperform others in terms of representing the people and effective governance.

The discussion starts with Arend Lijphart's (1984, 1999, 2012) distinction between consensus and majoritarian democracy, which is widely perceived as ground-breaking (Mainwaring, 2001; Taagepera, 2003; Schmidt, 2010) and has produced a number of follow-up studies (e.g. Armingeon, 2002; Roller, 2005; Gerring and Thacker, 2008; Vatter, 2009). In his seminal 1999 piece *Patterns of Democracy*, updated in 2012, he also assesses the empirical performance of the different types of democracy, and reports that consensus democracy outperforms its majoritarian counterpart in terms of macro-economic management and also has a 'kinder' and 'gentler' record regarding broad policy orientation (Lijphart, 2012: 274). Of special interest in our context, Lijphart (1999, 2012: 276–277) also reports that consensus democracy enhances democratic quality in many single aspects such as Dahl's (1971) *Polyarchy*, Vanhanen's (1997) democratization, the EUI democracy indices, women's representation in parliament and in cabinet, voter turnout, government–voter proximity, or citizens' satisfaction with democracy.

Despite of its prominence, Lijphart's (1999, 2012) work has been widely criticized either for the typology itself or the analysis of the effects of consensual traits on democratic quality and performance (see discussion below). In our contribution, we re-investigate the relationship between political–institutional power diffusion and the quality of democracy for two reasons. First, Lijphart's (2012) measures are rather minimalistic (Munck and Verkuilen, 2002) and do not adequately incorporate the multidimensionality of the concept 'quality of democracy' (Bühlmann *et al.*, 2013). Relatedly, the assumption that consensus democracy affects all elements of democratic quality in the same beneficial way is untenable, as a trade-off between

inclusiveness and effective implementation seems to exist (Powell, 2000). We make use of the Democracy Barometer, a theoretically well-grounded instrument that tries to more accurately measure the multidimensionality of the quality of democracy, including both of these goals (Bühlmann *et al.*, 2012).

A second reason for reconsidering the democratic quality thesis is Lijphart's (2012) factual treatment of consensus democracy as a one-dimensional concept when assessing the performance and quality of consensus democracies (Roller, 2005). This neglects the multidimensionality of the typology on the explanatory side, which features an 'executives–parties' as well as a 'federal–unitary' dimension, producing combinations such as proportional–unitary (Sweden), proportional–decentralized (Switzerland), majoritarian–unitary (United Kingdom), or majoritarian–decentralized (United States) types. Lijphart (2012) does not differentiate his expectations regarding the two dimensions or their combinations, and the empirical results focus almost exclusively on the executives–parties dimension. Following recent arguments on the potential supremacy of centripetal democracy (Gerring and Thacker, 2008; McGann and Latner, 2012), resembling the proportional–unitary type, this study assesses the effect of continuous combinations of proportional (executives–parties dimension) and decentralized (federal–unitary dimensions) power diffusion on the quality of a democracy, that is, its inclusiveness and effectiveness of implementation.[1] The results of interactive regression models, using a sample of 33 relatively developed democracies, provide only partial support for the hypothesis that centripetal democracy has the best overall record of democratic quality. While proportional–unitary systems show the highest levels of representation, majoritarian, and proportional–decentralized alternatives are not inferior in terms of participation and effectiveness.

## The puzzle of the quality of democracy

Not one, but many theories on the empirical character of democracy exist, and the question which democratic architecture delivers the best performance and quality is an ancient yet prevailing one (Schmidt, 2010). One of the most widely received approaches claiming to solve this puzzle is Arend Lijphart's (1984, 1999, 2012). The ideal types of consensus and majoritarian democracy, described by this variant of empirical democracy research, differ in the extent to which power is concentrated or shared in the political system. In more detail, Lijphart (1999, 2012) uncovers two dimensions of democracy, finding what he labels an 'executives–parties' and a 'federal–unitary' dimension. These mainly represent types of power diffusion within institutions or (collective) actors or between them (Lijphart, 2012: 5).

[1] Our analysis further responds to some of the criticism against Lijphart's (1999, 2012) typology and his sample selection. On the one hand, we employ an improved measure of the consensual and majoritarian features of democracies (Vatter and Bernauer, 2010). On the other hand, Lijphart is criticized for his country selection because of the heterogeneity of the sample (Armingeon, 2002; Schmidt, 2010).

Each construct encompasses five politico-institutional variables, and a manifestation on a spectrum from majoritarian to consensual is possible. Consensus democracy on the executives–parties dimension ideally displays multiple parties, (oversized) multi-party government, a balance of power between executive and legislature, a proportional electoral system, and interest group corporatism. Federal–unitary consensus democracy ideally displays a federal structure, bicameralism, judicial review, a rigid constitution, and an autonomous central bank. Majoritarian democracy ideally features the opposite poles.

'Consensus' democracies, in particular as defined by Liphart's (1999, 2012) 'executives–parties' dimension, closely represent large portions of the electorate and feature multi-party systems, oversized cabinets, and other elements of power dispersion. Given the elites' willingness to play the rules the way they suggest themselves, consensus democracies should produce more bargaining and eventually compromise ('broad consensus'), and as a consequence, more inclusive and continuous policies are expected (a 'steady hand'), leading to better records regarding the inclusiveness of government action and the quality of democracy (Lijphart, 2012: 257). 'Majoritarian' democracies, resulting from more narrow (or even manufactured) majorities, the concentration of power in the cabinet, and the fewer restrictions faced by the executive, should have an ability of swift reaction and change of policy course, useful, for instance, in the face of sudden crisis (Schmidt, 2010: 334–335), and maximizing effectiveness. Lijphart (1999, 2012: 257) still maintains that consensus democracy and its deliberative, consensus- and continuity-building nature, even leads to more effective governance in aspects where majoritarian democracies could be regarded as superior, such as economic management. Notably, Lijphart (2012) does not discriminate much between the expected effects of his 'executives–parties' and 'federal–unitary' dimensions (the latter of which features a set of veto players such as second chambers or judicial review), but the empirical analyses (and in particular his findings), to the largest extent, rely on the first dimension (Lijphart, 2012: 272–273, 293–294).

The general argument on the superiority of consensus over majoritarian democracy advanced by Lijphart (1999, 2012) has quickly received critical attention. Others have developed alternative or independent arguments on the relationship between institutional configurations and government performance with direct implications for the broad quality of democracy (in particular, Armingeon, 2002; Roller, 2005; Gerring and Thacker, 2008; McGann and Latner, 2012). The essence of these contributions is that more mixed or qualified expectations are more plausible.[2]

[2] In addition, a wide range of contributions have pointed out methodological issues in Lijphart's (2012) analysis, such as the lack of suitable controls, the fusion of formal and informal, heterogeneous variables of partially questionable validity into indices, and a bias in favor of consensual democracies by the choice of countries (Armingeon, 2002; Roller, 2005; Schmidt, 2010; Bernauer and Vatter, 2012). These points will be considered in the specification of the sample studied, the choice of control variables and by providing careful operationalizations.

For instance, Armingeon (2002) expects a better record for quasi-'consociational' democracies only in the inclusion of large minorities, a better record for majoritarian democracies in controlling spending and inflation, and a draw in the field of economic outcomes, the inclusion of small minorities, and the quality of the democratic process. Others have questioned the usefulness of Lijphart's (1999, 2012) indices more fundamentally, among other reasons, for their mix of institutional and behavioral aspects such as federalism and cabinet type (Roller, 2005; Ganghof, 2005, 2012; Schmidt, 2010: 329). Alternative approaches, some of them prominently referring to the concept of veto players (Tsebelis, 2002), have proposed modifications (Armingeon, 2002; Ganghof, 2005, 2012; Roller, 2005; Gerring and Thacker, 2008; Schmidt, 2010; McGann and Latner, 2012). Roller (2005) provides a thorough critique of Lijphart (1999), before opting for alternative constitutional and partisan veto player indices, giving rise to 'informal' and 'constitutional majoritarian vs. negotiation' democracies, which resemble modified executives–parties and federal–unitary dimensions. Ganghof (2005) highlights the interaction between the two principles of democracy, electoral and legislative majorities, which jointly shape the behavior of political elites and the performance of democracies. Similarly, a set of alternative approaches (Gerring and Thacker, 2005, 2008; McGann and Latner, 2012) focuses on the interaction between elements of the executives–parties and the federal–unitary dimensions. Gerring and Thacker (2008: 23) are strongly influenced by Lijphart (1999), but propose a rivaling 'centripetal' theory of democratic governance, arguing for a combination of inclusiveness and authority (measured by closed-list PR, unitarism, and parliamentarism) as the most effective structure. Along similar lines, McGann and Latner (2012: 826) propose a 'simpler institutional theory' of 'PR-majority rule', contrasting an 'effective' district magnitude and a modified veto index of 'supermajoritarian restrictions'. Again, the combination of proportional representation and few veto players is deemed the most effective configuration.

In sum, there is an ongoing debate on the best theoretical conceptualization of empirical types of democracy and the anticipated effects (Doorenspleet and Pellikaan, 2013). We develop our own theoretical argument against the backdrop of the approaches discussed. Prior research indicates that several latent dimensions of democracy exist, which have been, in alternative yet similar specifications, labeled 'executives–parties' and 'federal–unitary' dimensions (Lijphart, 1999, 2012), 'collective' and 'competitive veto points' (Birchfield and Crepaz, 1998), 'constitutional' and 'informal negotiation vs. majoritarian' democracy (Roller, 2005), or interactively give rise to continuums of the empirical type of democracy, which depends on vote requirements across the electoral and legislative arenas (Ganghof, 2005), the 'centripetal' (Gerring and Thacker, 2008), or the 'PR-majority rule' (McGann and Latner, 2012) nature of the configuration. The political–institutional context hence needs to be specified precisely. Such configurations can then be connected to the quality of democracy, where the hypotheses on the effects of empirical patterns of democracy depend on what exactly is meant by 'quality'.

We start from Lijphart (2012), but refine the argument, in particular relying on the theory of centripetalism (Gerring and Thacker, 2008) as well as Powell's (2000) notion that majoritarian and proportional democracy tend to maximize effectiveness and inclusiveness, respectively. This framework of analysis is introduced in the subsequent section.

This approach takes care of the double neglect of multidimensionality in Lijphart's (1999, 2012) analysis. On the one hand, his almost exclusive restriction to effects of the executives–parties dimension is deficient because it ignores potential interactions, which can be stylized using the four types of democracy: proportional–decentralized (e.g. Switzerland), proportional–unitary (e.g. Sweden), majoritarian–decentralized (e.g. United States), and majoritarian–unitary (e.g. United Kingdom). On the other hand, Lijphart (1999, 2012) fails to adequately incorporate the multidimensionality of the quality of democracy. Consensus democracy may not have a positive effect on every element of democratic quality. A positive impact of the executives–parties dimension on the quality of representation seems rather obvious. But why should, for instance, power-sharing among the political elite enhance transparency or foster governmental effectiveness? There may be rather different mechanisms at work, as well as alternative explanations, and we test the effects of political–institutional configurations (Gerring and Thacker, 2008) on measures of effectiveness and inclusiveness (Powell, 2000).

## An argument on empirical patterns and the quality of democracy

How are political–institutional configurations connected to the quality of democracy? The causal chain necessarily runs through actors, typically parties or political elites. Alternative accounts of actor behavior and mechanisms involved exist. Lijphart (2012: 2, 257) fields brief general arguments on the supremacy of consensus as opposed to majoritarian democracy, which cite alternative definitions of responsiveness as key defining elements distinguishing consensus and majoritarian democracy as well as the role of a steady hand in governing, while consciously focusing on empirics elsewhere.

Elaborating on a possible micro-foundation, a number of scholars rely on rational choice institutionalism (Grofman, 2000: 6; Roller, 2005: 91, 120; Ganghof, 2012: 53–55). Accordingly, given power diffusion – such as embodied in proportional electoral rules, large party systems, inclusive coalitions, and powerful oppositions – political elites have incentives (yet are not forced, see Armingeon, 2002: 86) to represent larger segments of society at the electoral stage (Golder and Stramski, 2010) and to negotiate agreements at the legislative and executive stages in order to gain or remain in power (Ganghof, 2012). Regimes of veto players, such as second chambers or judicial courts, can be used by oppositional political elites to obstruct the goals of those ruling, leading to blockage rather than further consensus (Ganghof, 2005).

In what is an alternative, and perhaps more fitting, framework for the analysis of the nexus between the broad political–institutional character of democracy and its

track record, Steiner *et al.* (2004) as well as Gerring and Thacker (2008) cite mechanisms, which can be subsumed under the notion of deliberation. Such a perspective is compatible with many elements of the older research on consociational democracy, emphasizing a 'spirit of accommodation' (Lijphart, 1968) or 'amicable agreement' (Steiner, 1974) among political elites. Along these lines, Steiner *et al.* (2004: 78) suggest that the quality of deliberation is increased by political–institutional power diffusion in the form of consensus (vs. competitive) democracy, parliamentarism (vs. presidentialism), or strong (vs. weak) veto players, but also by the non-public nature of communication or the non-polarized character of issues (Pedrini, 2014). For example, joint decision making and cooperation are encouraged by grand coalitions (Steiner *et al.*, 2004: 80). Similarly, stronger parties, have facilitated conflict mediation via face-to-face interactions, and have enhanced policy coordination under centripetalism, which are the mechanisms proposed by Gerring and Thacker (2008).

Here, we focus on the observable implications of such arguments, and in particular adopt the assumption that consensus democracy (Lijphart's executives–parties dimension), shaped by proportionality, enhances inclusiveness and deliberation. This might also translate into more effective policies. We follow Gerring and Thacker (2008) and Ganghof (2012) in expecting some rather suppressive effects of veto players or decentralization (Lijphart's federal–unitary dimension). The predictions of more rational–instrumental approaches regarding the effects of power diffusion on the quality of democracy, happen to be largely identical to those of deliberation theory.

Moving through a number of existing approaches to empirical patterns of democracy, we build up our theoretical expectations in order to derive hypotheses. This requires a more nuanced concept of the quality of democracy. In a stylized view, democratic quality and performance can be conceptualized in terms of a trade-off between effectiveness and inclusiveness (Powell, 2004; Bühlmann and Kriesi, 2013). This approach is mainly concerned with electoral rules and their consequences and, hence, the executives–parties dimension. From this perspective, depicted in Figure 1, political systems with high levels of proportional power diffusion (executives–parties dimension) are expected to maximize inclusiveness, while (majoritarian) systems concentrating power, maximize effectiveness.

Figure 2 displays what can be called the 'classic' approach proposed by Lijphart (2012), featuring a general expectation that consensus democracy outperforms

| | *Majoritarian* | *Proportional* |
|---|---|---|
| *Effectiveness* | High | Low |
| *Inclusiveness* | Low | High |

**Figure 1** Trade-offs between majoritarian and proportional visions of democracy (Powell, 2000).

| | *Majoritarian or unitary* | *Proportional or decentralized* |
|---|---|---|
| *Effectiveness* | Low | High |
| *Inclusiveness* | Low | High |

**Figure 2** Expectations in Lijphart (2012).

majoritarian democracy in terms of the quality of democracy, both in terms of effectiveness and inclusiveness. In line with this framework, Figure 2 does not feature a differentiation between the possible combinations of consensus democracy along the executives–parties (majoritarian vs. proportional) and federal–unitary (unitary vs. decentralized) dimensions, but shows uniform or rather unspecified effects.

Gerring and Thacker (2008) add the notion of configurations of majoritarian vs. proportional and unitary vs. decentralized democracy. 'Centripetal' democracy, in essence the combination of proportional and unitary features, accordingly outperforms all other types of empirical democracy (Figure 3). At the theoretical level, this involves its benefits in terms of inclusion and – as Gerring and Thacker (2008) put it – authority (and hence effective implementation), while the dependent variable is framed in terms of governance and outcomes.

The focus of this article is the multi-dimensional nature of both patterns of democracy and the quality of democracy. The hypotheses derived consider, on the one hand, that all of majoritarian–unitary, majoritarian–decentralized, proportional–unitary, and proportional–decentralized political systems exist, and that these variants can either maximize the inclusiveness or the effectiveness of democracy. The analytical scheme of the study is depicted in Figure 4, displaying our revised approach to patterns and the quality of democracy.

Contrasting these expectations with Figures 1–3, three aspects are noteworthy. First and foremost, the interaction between the executives–parties (majoritarian vs. proportional democracy) and the federal–unitary (unitary vs. decentralized democracy) is expected to matter for the quality of democracy (Gerring and Thacker, 2008). Second, trade-offs between inclusiveness and effectiveness are acknowledged (Powell, 2000). Third, the executives–parties dimension is assumed to be somewhat more central to democracy (Powell, 2000), or, conversely, the federal–unitary dimension to be rather detrimental to the quality of democracy (Gerring and Thacker, 2008) or at least problematic theoretically, which is also reflected by its rather unimpressive stand-alone empirical record (Lijphart, 2012).[3]

As a consequence, the expectations shown in Figure 4 follow Gerring and Thacker (2008) in that the combination of proportional and unitary democracy

[3] It should be noted, though, that not all elements of the federal–unitary dimension can be considered as being of the same kind of potentially policy-blocking veto players. For instance, in ethnically heterogeneous societies, federalism can be used as a means of conflict resolution (Lijphart, 1977).

| | *Majoritarian* | *Proportional* |
|---|---|---|
| *Unitary* | Subpar governance | Good governance |
| *Decentralized* | Subpar governance | Subpar governance |

**Figure 3** Expectations in Gerring and Thacker (2008).

| | *Majoritarian* | *Proportional* |
|---|---|---|
| *Unitary* | Medium effectiveness and low inclusiveness | High effectiveness and inclusiveness |
| *Decentralized* | Low effectiveness and inclusiveness | Medium effectiveness and inclusiveness |

**Figure 4** Analytical scheme applied.

should outperform all other forms of democracy both in terms of inclusiveness and effectiveness (compare upper right vs. lower left cell). At the theoretical level, we differentiate the expectations for the other combinations, though, and introduce the refining argument (see upper left cell) that majoritarian democracy (of the executives–parties type) in unitary systems might increase effectiveness (but not inclusiveness) to a certain extent. In other words, while a steady and free hand might work best, a strong and free hand is still expected to be better than a strong but blocked hand. Given the special status of proportionality compared with decentralization, we also do not expect that decentralization in proportional systems removes all of its effects on both effectiveness and inclusiveness, expecting medium levels instead (lower right cell).

The primary focus of the empirical analysis is on the interaction between proportional and unitary democracy. A full test of the further, nuanced expectations is not possible using the regression model with interaction effects required to test the focal expectation.[4] The qualifications on potential trade-offs, and the lesser role of decentralization, likely imply reduced effects of proportional–unitary democracy on both effectiveness and inclusiveness. Still and in sum, the focal interactive hypothesis on the expected net effect of combining proportional and unitary democracy is:

HYPOTHESIS 1A: The combination of proportional and unitary democracy maximizes effectiveness.

HYPOTHESIS 1B: The combination of proportional and unitary democracy maximizes inclusiveness.

[4] We refrain from using dummies for different types, as these reduce the available information drastically and force borderline cases arbitrarily into categories.

To illustrate, and in terms of effectiveness, we expect Sweden to outperform Switzerland as well as the United Kingdom, which should in turn top the United States. In terms of inclusiveness, the ranking changes slightly, with Sweden expected to outperform Switzerland, which should show a better record than both the United States and the United Kingdom. In a further step, the concepts of majoritarian vs. proportional, as well as unitary vs. decentralized democracy, inclusiveness and effectiveness are operationalized.

## Measuring empirical patterns and the quality of democracy

This section introduces the database of the analysis, requiring an operationalization of empirical patterns as well as the quality of democracy. We start with the dependent variable of this study, the quality of democracy. As discussed above, we are interested in measures of both the effectiveness and the inclusiveness of democracy. The Democracy Barometer is a recently introduced instrument aiming at measuring the quality of democracy shaped by all of institutional, policy, and outcome factors as well as the behaviour of citizens (Bühlmann *et al.*, 2011a, b, 2012). It is based on liberal as well as participatory ideas of democracy and deducts the fundamental elements of representative democracy in three strictly theoretical steps (compare Figure 5).

Dividing the quality of democracy into the principles 'equality', 'freedom', and 'control' the Democracy Barometer accounts for conceptual multidimensionality. Freedom refers to the absence of heteronomy and, hence, requires the protection and guarantee of individual rights under a secure rule of law. Equality, particularly understood as political equality, aspires to equal treatment of the citizens in the political process and to equal access to political power. It is argued that freedom and equality interact and can constrain each other, and that optimizing and balancing freedom and equality are the core challenges of any democratic system. To maintain a dynamic balance between freedom and equality, a further fundamental principle of democratic rule is needed: control. Control is not seen as a simple auxiliary for

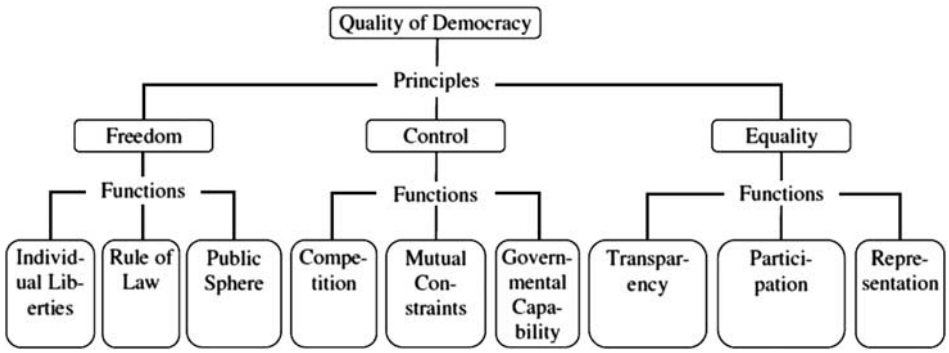


**Figure 5** Concept tree of the Democracy Barometer. *Source*: Bühlmann *et al.* (2012).

the balance of the two other principles but an important basis of democracy itself; it is a means by which citizens maintain the accountability and responsiveness of their representatives. To guarantee and functionally secure freedom, equality, and control, a democratic regime must fulfill several functions. The Democracy Barometer defines three democratic functions for each principle, related to individual liberties, rule of law, public sphere, competition, mutual constraints, government capabilities, transparency, representation, and participation. These functions are operationalized using single indicators.

It is argued that the quality of a given democracy is high when these nine functions are fulfilled to a high degree. Yet, a simultaneous maximization of all nine functions is impossible. Democracies are seen as systems whose development is perpetually negotiated by political and societal forces. Hence, democracies weigh and optimize the nine functions differently. Still, the degree of fulfillment of each of these nine functions can be measured. This requires a further conceptual step: the various functions are based on constitutive components. Each function is further disaggregated into two components, which, finally, lead to several subcomponents and indicators. Given space limitations, we do not discuss each Democracy Barometer indicator, but it is worth noting that the Democracy Barometer consists of a total of 100 indicators, each of which was selected from a large collection of secondary data.[5]

As a compound measure, the Democracy Barometer captures both aspects of inclusiveness and effectiveness as well as issues beyond the scope of this research, or captured by the explanatory variables. To put our theoretical expectations to an empirical test, we rely on four functions, which closely relate to these concepts. The functions of participation and representation[6] are taken as operationalizations of inclusiveness, while the functions transparency and government capability are used to measure effective implementation. We, hence, do neither rely on the aggregate scores of overall democratic quality nor on single indicators, but take advantage of the theoretical constructs at an intermediate level introduced and measured by the Democracy Barometer.

For a justification of the selection of the four functions, consider that a key element of representative democracy linking preferences and outcomes is the chain of responsiveness (Powell, 2004; Bühlmann and Kriesi, 2013: 58), featuring the mobilization, aggregation, and implementation of preferences. In a condensed form, responsiveness is about achieving inclusiveness in terms of political preferences as well as their effective implementation. In this model, democratic functions – such as representation, participation, transparency, and government capability – are requirements for the achievement of inclusiveness and effectiveness.

[5] For an extensive description of the concept, the data, and the method, see Bühlmann *et al.* (2011a, b, 2012) and www.democracybarometer.org.

[6] To avoid endogeneity, we remove the Gallagher index of disproportionality between vote and seat distributions from the 'representation' function.

In a high-quality democracy, all persons affected by a political decision should have the right to *participate* in shaping this decision. This implies that all citizens in a state must exercise suffrage rights and that these rights are used in an equal manner. Equal respect for, and consideration of, all interests by the political representatives are possible only if participation is as widespread and as equal as possible. In representative democracies, the possibility of co-determination is ensured by means of *representation* agencies. Responsive democracies, thus, must ensure that all citizens' preferences are adequately, that is, descriptively and substantively, represented in elected offices. Responsive implementation, that is, 'doing what the citizens want' (Powell, 2004: 94) requires *governmental capability*. The Democracy Barometer measures this concept by analyzing the availability of resources for the government as well as conditions for efficient implementation. *Transparency* also is crucial for effective implementation. To act responsively, a government must be controlled. Of course, such evaluation is only possible if the political process is transparent: policy-makers are induced to keep their promises and implement their programs only if they are monitored (Bühlmann and Kriesi, 2013: 5).

Turning to the measurement of empirical patterns of democracy, we require measures of majoritarian vs. proportional, as well as unitary vs. decentralized democracy, to capture the intuitions of Gerring and Thacker (2008), Lijphart (2012), as well as Powell's (2000). Despite often well-taken critical evaluations, we stay close to Lijphart's (1999, 2012) original approach, which captures these concepts well.[7] Thus, we rely on what closely resembles his executives–parties and federal–unitary dimensions using additive index building with standardized scores of both institutional and behavioral indicators.

We refrain from the full incorporation of direct democracy (Vatter, 2009) or presidentialism (Roller, 2005: 109–110) into the typology, and keep the rather remotely associated central bank independence and corporatism (Armingeon, 2002; Taagepera, 2003). We rely on a more up-to-date time frame, ranging from 1997 to 2002, and improve several measurements, including executive–legislative relations and cabinet type (Vatter and Bernauer, 2010). Furthermore, federalism and decentralization are now considered equal aspects in their own right. This does not fundamentally change the concepts and the positions of countries, though.

In analogy to Lijphart (1999, 2012), we conduct a principal factor analysis with 11 initial indicators (his original 10 plus decentralization, see Table 1), taking

[7] The two-dimensional typology proposed by Lijphart (1999, 2012) has received a fair share of criticism (for reviews see Bormann, 2010; Schmidt, 2010). This touches upon virtually every theoretical, conceptual, and methodological aspect, ranging from the lack of a micro-foundation (Roller, 2005; Schmidt, 2010), the mixture of institutional and behavioral elements (Ganghof, 2005, 2012; Roller, 2005; Schmidt, 2010: 329), the differential logic of the executives–parties and the federal–unitary dimension (Taagepera, 2003), the choice and measurement of indicators (among others, see Taagepera, 2003; Ganghof, 2005; Roller 2005; Schmidt, 2010), or the robustness of the patterns (Shikano, 2006).

Table 1. Factor loadings of nine political–institutional variables in 33 countries, 1997–2002

| | Factor 1 | Factor 2 |
|---|---|---|
| Effective number of legislative parties | | **0.71** |
| Oversized and minority cabinets | | **0.46** |
| Executive–legislative relationship | | **0.74** |
| Electoral disproportionality | | **0.64** |
| Interest group corporatism | | 0.49 |
| Federalism | **0.88** | |
| Decentralization | **0.76** | |
| Bicameralism | **0.67** | |
| Judicial review | 0.38 | |

Principal factor analysis; factors with Eigenvalues over 1.0 extracted; varimax orthogonal rotation; factor loadings above 0.3 reported; loadings above 0.5 bold. Central bank independence and constitutional rigidity excluded.

averaged values from 1997 to 2002.[8] This analysis shows that in our sample of 33 democracies (see footnote 11), central bank independence does not load substantively on any dimension, whereas constitutional rigidity loads on the executives–parties dimension – contrary to theoretical expectations. Consequently, both are excluded from the final factor analysis. The final model features two dimensions with no split loadings that correspond to Lijphart's (2012) dimensions (see Table 1). The executives–parties dimension comprises the effective number of parliamentary parties, cabinet type, executive–legislative relationship, the degree of electoral disproportionality, and interest group system. The (slightly varied) federal–unitary dimension consists of the degree of federalism, fiscal decentralization, bicameralism, and the strength of judicial review.

We again follow Lijphart (2012) and build additive indices for the two dimensions, representing the standardized sums of each of the standardized indicators.[9] The values on the two dimensions mirroring these two additive scores generally vary between around –2 and 2.[10] The exact location of the countries on the two mutually independent dimensions of democracy can best be depicted graphically on a conceptual map of democracy (see Figure 6).

[8] Lijphart (1999, 2012) uses a principal component extraction method, whereas we rely on the principal factor method. As the goal is to identify underlying dimensions, hence latent variables, we argue that factor analysis is more appropriate. Results are most often the same for both methods (also see Vatter and Bernauer, 2010).

[9] Measurement theoretical questions regarding the appropriateness of factor analysis and additive indices exist. We calculated our analysis with factor scores, too, which allow for a more nuanced consideration of the relevance of single indicators. The substantial results remain the same. Extensions should consider the measurement levels of indicators more fully and could perceive patterns of democracy as a latent variable, which considers the uncertainty of country scores as well (see Treier and Jackman, 2008).

[10] In Lijphart's (1999, 2012) two-dimensional map, the signs of the factors are reversed.

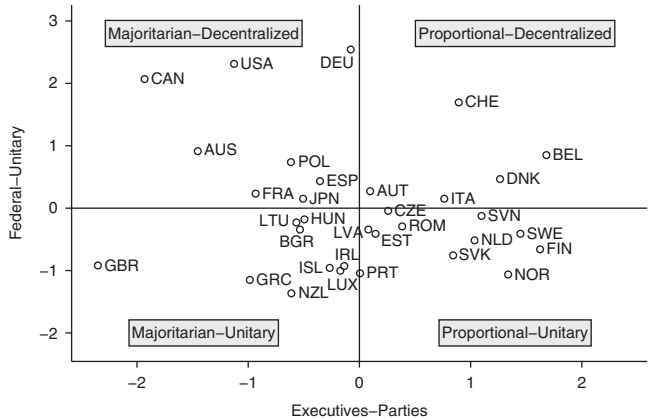


**Figure 6** Two dimensions of democracy, 1997–2002. See footnote 11 for country labels. Additive indices using the variables associated with each dimension shown in Table 1. Positive values = consensus democracy; negative values = majoritarian democracy. Executives–parties dimension = consensus democracy on the executives–parties dimension. The variable is constructed adding up the standardized scores of the number of parties, cabinet type, executive–legislative relations, electoral disproportionality, and corporatism. The signs of executive–legislative relations and electoral disproportionality are reversed so that higher values always indicate consensus democracy. Federal–unitary dimension = consensus democracy on the federal–unitary dimension. The variable is constructed adding up the standardized scores of federalism, decentralization, bicameralism, and judicial review. In both cases, average values over the period 1997–2002 are used, and the results are standardized once again for comparison between dimensions.

Some face validity of the measurement arises from the location of some well-known political systems. For instance, The United Kingdom is shown to occupy a majoritarian–unitary position in the period covered, the United States is majoritarian–decentralized, Switzerland is confirmed as an example of the proportional–decentralized type, and Sweden as a proportional–unitary country.

## Empirical analysis: the multidimensionality of patterns and quality

The empirical evaluation centers on the analytical scheme are presented in Figure 4. In particular, the goal of the analysis is to pit majoritarian–decentralized variants of democracy against proportional–unitary ones, following the logic of centripetalism (Gerring and Thacker, 2008). An empirical test of the conjecture that centripetal democracies outperform majoritarian–decentralized ones in terms of democratic quality requires a careful sample selection, adequate measures of the character as well as the quality of democracy, and a fitting statistical model.

Instead of a strongly heterogeneous sample such as the one featured in Lijphart (1999, 2012) (see Armingeon 2002; Schmidt 2010), we concentrate on economically relatively developed, established democracies. The sample consists of 33 countries,

which are mainly European but also covers Australia, Canada, Japan, and the United States.[11] Being based on the case selection of the Democracy Barometer, all of the cases included show values above 8 on the Polity scale, which ranges from −10 to 10. Hence, we can assume a minimum of constancy in the democratic context within which we study the effects of democratic architecture on quality, such as basic rights and freedoms or the absence of a massive erosion of democracy by corruption.

We incorporate both the multidimensionality of democratic quality as well as of empirical patterns of democracy in the analysis. In particular, we analyze the interactive impact of proportional vs. majoritarian, and unitary vs. decentralized democracy, on the quality of democracy in terms of inclusiveness and effectiveness, measured using four functions from the Democracy Barometer. Two continuous indices of the character of democracy are used (see above). The first captures proportional power diffusion, whereas the second captures centralization. The dependent variables are government capability and transparency to operationalize the effectiveness and representation, and participation to operationalize the inclusiveness of governance. For the indices measuring empirical patterns of democracy, mean values for 1997–2002 are used, assessing their effect on the quality of democracy (mean value between 2002 and 2007) with a certain lag allowing effects to unfold. Linear regression models are used to study the relationship between democratic architecture and quality, specifying an interaction between proportional and decentralized power diffusion to analyze the focal hypotheses. In all models, we control for socio-economic macro factors (Li and Reuveny, 2003; Inglehart and Welzel, 2005).[12] See Table A1 for the detailed results of the regressions.

The focal results of the models, namely the interactive effects of the two dimensions of power diffusion on democracy, are visualized in Figure 7. Marginal effects (along with 90% confidence intervals) of the executives–parties dimension (where higher values indicate proportional vs. majoritarian democracy) are displayed on the $y$-axis, conditional on the values of the federal–unitary dimension (higher values indicate decentralized vs. unitary democracy) shown on the $x$-axis. This allows an evaluation of Hypotheses 1a and 1b, stating that democratic architectures maximizing proportionality and centralization should outperform others both in

[11] In detail, the sample covers Australia (AUS), Austria (AUT), Belgium (BEL), Bulgaria (BGR), Canada (CAN), the Czech Republic (CZE), Denmark (DEN), Estonia (EST), Finland (FIN), France (FRA), Germany (DEU), Greece (GRC), Hungary (HUN), Iceland (ISL), Ireland (IRL), Italy (ITA), Japan (JPN), Latvia (LVA), Lithuania (LTU), Luxembourg (LUX), the Netherlands (NLD), New Zealand (NZL), Norway (NOR), Poland (POL), Portugal (PRT), Romania (ROM), the Slovak Republic (SVK), Slovenia (SVN), Spain (ESP), Sweden (SWE), Switzerland (CHE), the United Kingdom (GBR), and the United States (USA).

[12] Due to the small number of cases, we only included those two controls per model that showed to be the strongest factors in unconditional models (not reported). Alternatives tested are economic wealth, economic crisis, quality of life, and access to education. The wealth of a country is measured by its gross domestic product per capita in constant US$ (source: World Bank, 2010). Economic crisis is measured by the rate of inflation (consumer prices; source: IMF, 2010). The ease of access to education and the quality of life is measured with the respective indices in the Human Development Report (UNDP, 2010). All measures represent mean values over the period of 2000–2002. Details are available from the authors.

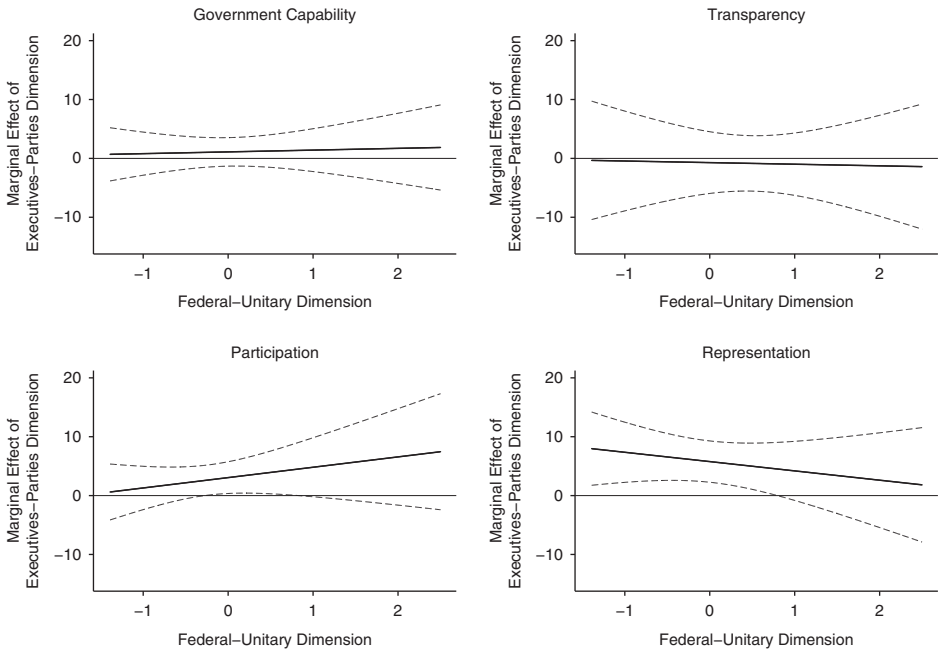


**Figure 7** Interactive effects proportional vs. majoritarian and decentralized vs. unitary democracy. Marginal effect of the executives–parties dimension in dependence of the federal–unitary dimension. Higher values indicate proportional and decentralized democracy, respectively. Dashed lines indicate 90% confidence intervals.

terms of effectiveness and inclusiveness (compare Brambor *et al.*, 2006). An ascending slope indicates an increasing effect of proportional democracy, the more pronounced veto structures in a country are, whereas a descending slope indicates that the strength of the effect of the executives–parties dimension decreases with growing values on the federal–unitary dimension. In other words, proportional–unitary (centripetal) democracies show the highest quality of democracy if the effect of proportional power diffusion takes a maximal positive value somewhere in the upper-left area, while majoritarian–unitary systems (the Westminster model) perform best if a minimal negative effect of proportional power diffusion is observed in the lower left area. Proportional–decentralized democracies (resembling Lijphart's 2012 consensus democracies) emerge as 'winners' if a positive effect is maximized in the upper-right area, and majoritarian–decentralized ones (like the United States) when it is minimized in the lower right area.

The four panels of the graph illustrate the conditional effect of the executives–parties dimension on the two measures each for effectiveness (government capability and transparency) and inclusiveness (participation and representation). Starting with effectiveness, no statistically significant effects of proportional vs. majoritarian democracy are found for both capability and transparency, and the degree of

decentralization does not alter this diagnosis. Substantively, this implies that Hypotheses 1A cannot be confirmed, as centripetal configurations do not have a better record in terms of effectiveness. Notably, proportional democracy is not associated with lower levels of transparency as well, which could be suspected given its tendency towards non-public settings of communication (Steiner *et al.*, 2004: 88).

The results shown in Figure 7 reveal a different pattern for the two indicators of inclusiveness, namely participation and representation, lending partial support to Hypothesis 1B. Proportionality, in other words stronger consensus democracy on the executives-parties dimension, increases the quality of democracy, but this effect diminishes given higher levels of decentralization, or stronger consensus democracy on the federal–unitary dimension. For participation, the relationship is less clear-cut, and only the combination of proportionality and intermediate levels of decentralization displays a statistically significant positive effect. Hence, participation appears to be encouraged by power diffusion in parties and executives, but only in combination with additional veto players (such as federal institutions), unless these are abundant.

Four cases have been cited before to illustrate the expectations and are also used to make more sense of the findings: Sweden as a specimen of the proportional–unitary type, the United States as a prototype of the majoritarian–decentralized type, the United Kingdom as a majoritarian–unitary example, and Switzerland representing a proportional–decentralized architecture of democracy. Do the results confirm the ranking anticipated by centripetalism, where Sweden should come out on top before Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the United States in terms of democratic quality? The answer is mixed. Inferring from the models and their predictions (instead of actual country scores of democratic quality), which incorporate control variables, centripetal democratic architectures, such as implemented in Sweden, display a higher level of representation compared with all other variants. Given that the Democracy Barometer's measure of representation, that was used, contains descriptive and substantive elements such as the gender balance in politics, policy congruence, or the absence of restrictions on the inclusion of minorities, this effect is interpreted as indicative of a relationship between centripetalism and democratic inclusiveness. In line with expectations on power diffusion and inclusiveness, countries with a proportional–decentralized architecture such as Switzerland still have a slight advantage over majoritarian–unitary countries such as the United Kingdom in terms of representation, but the difference is not statistically significant (see right-hand side of Figure 7, panel 'Representation'). Majoritarian–decentralized democracies such as the United States finish last in the model prediction for representation.

At the same time, the locally restricted effects of proportional and decentralized power diffusion on participation points to a complicated relationship. Apparently, consensus democracy on the executives–parties dimension does not necessarily increase political participation, but its combination with a moderate number of access points (decentralization) might lead to the highest levels of turnout and

the like. This result tends to favor more 'average' democratic architectures over the rather pure or extreme cases of centripetal, proportional–decentral, majoritarian–unitary, or majoritarian–decentral democracy.

Furthermore, the results yield little evidence on the dominance of any model of democracy regarding what we have broadly defined as the effectiveness of democracy and measured using aggregated variables of government capability and transparency from the Democracy Barometer. Hence, from this analysis, we cannot infer that democracies such as Sweden are superior to others such as the United States, Switzerland, or the United Kingdom in this respect. The finding on transparency can partly be explained by sample selection and the focus on more developed democracies, as the measure captures corruption and basic information freedom, in addition to the transparent communication of government policies, which might suffer from consensual decision making behind closed doors. Government capability also has some elements, which vary more strongly between unstable or young and consolidated democracies, such as intervention by the military.

In sum, and drawing on the models presented, proportional–unitary types of democracies appear to fare best with regard to representation, in line with the general expectation that veto players curb the effects of the executives–parties dimension. At the same time, variants of majoritarian as well as proportional–decentralized democracy are not outperformed in terms of effectiveness (government capability and transparency) or participation. Further research is needed to judge these results, which are at odds with those reported by Lijphart (2012) or Gerring and Thacker (2008), most likely due to the sample and dependent variables studied. In particular, the relationship between democratic architectures and government performance or effectiveness might be more clearly visible in certain areas or for outcomes such as economic inequality, where developed democracies also vary more strongly. The findings on participation and transparency can also be read as a reminder of the pitfalls of strong proportional power diffusion.

## Conclusion

This study re-evaluates the question of which democratic architecture provides the best quality. Moving through the line-up of alternative contenders, we improve upon the general expectation that consensus democracy leads to the highest levels of democratic quality (Lijphart, 2012). This involves two areas of improvement, both concerned with conceptual multidimensionality. On the side of the dependent variable, we differentiate between democratic quality in terms of inclusiveness and effectiveness, and expect that alternative democratic architectures face a trade-off between these goals (Powell, 2000). On the explanatory side, we fully consider alternative configurations of relatively independent political–institutional pillars of democracy, concerned with the proportionality of party systems and executives (executives–parties dimension) and the level of decentralization of the state structure (federal–unitary dimension), respectively. In theoretical terms, the argument in

particular draws on the centripetal model of democratic government, stating that proportional–unitary democracy maximizes both authority and inclusion (Gerring and Thacker, 2008). This involves institutions that integrate political interests, for instance, through proportional electoral system, grand government coalitions and corporatism, whereas centralized structures ensure an effective mechanism for reaching and implementing political decisions. The argument proposes that *voices, not vetoes* guarantee the highest quality of democratic governance (Gerring and Thacker, 2008).

The results of interactive regression models relying on a sample of 33 relatively developed democracies only partially supports the expectations formulated. The centripetal model maximizes levels of representation, and a combination of proportionality and intermediate levels of decentralization is associated with the highest levels of the quality of participation. Simultaneously, there is little evidence that the proportional–unitary type of democracy outperforms all others in terms of the effectiveness of government. This is reminiscent of the refined expectations shown in Figure 4, indicating that alternative ways to achieve a high quality of democracy and in particular effective government might exist, such as the strong and unconstrained majoritarian–unitary hand or proportional–decentralized practices.

In sum, political–institutional configurations matter, in line with previous research on the benefits of 'centripetalism' or 'PR-majority rule' (Gerring and Thacker, 2008; McGann and Latner, 2012), and different models of democracy maximize different aspects of the quality of democracy (Powell, 2000). While producing a draw on effectiveness and participation, the results largely support the claim that democracies which combine the characteristics of broad-based multiparty coalition government with centralized structures such as Sweden, Norway, and the Netherlands can perform better than pure, proportional–decentralized consensus democracies in terms of representation and, also likely, inclusiveness more generally.

Future research should hence take into account the double multidimensionality in empirical patterns and the quality of democracy (Bühlmann *et al.*, 2013). It should also shed more light on the nuances of the relationship, and in particular look into the alternative causal pathways to effective government. The mechanisms involved also deserve further attention. For instance, is there fine-grained evidence that grand coalitions increase the quality of deliberation and hence more favorable outcomes (Steiner *et al.*, 2004)? Here, a quantitative–comparative test of the centripetal model has been provided, demonstrating the relevance of a differentiation between alternative democratic architectures as well as aspects of democratic quality.

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## Appendix

**Table A1.** Regression results

| | Government capability | Transparency | Participation | Representation |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Executives–parties | 1.11 [–1.91;4.12] | – 0.71 [–7.24;5.81] | 3.06 [–0.30;6.41] | 5.78 [1.41;10.14] |
| Federal–unitary | –0.35 [–2.84;2.13] | –0.11 [–6.01;5.78] | –1.18 [–6.79;4.43] | –3.14 [–7.07;0.78] |
| Executives–parties × federal–unitary | 0.30 [–3.10;3.70] | –0.27 [–6.16;5.62] | 1.76 [–2.56;6.08] | –1.58 [–6.12;2.96] |
| GDP | 29.92 [22.05;37.79] | | | |
| Education | 13.40 [4.93;21.88] | 26.95 [1.48;52.42] | 16.66 [0.20;33.12] | 11.36 [–7.02;29.75] |
| Inflation | | –35.46 [–54.46;–16.46] | | 8.82 [ –12.25;29.88] |
| Quality of life | | | 25.83 [7.28;44.38] | |
| Probability > *F* | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.00 | 0.03 |
| $R^2$ | 0.71 | 0.29 | 0.45 | 0.26 |
| *N* | 33 | 33 | 33 | 33 |

OLS regression models with robust standard errors. Coefficients and 95% confidence intervals reported.