

# An Unresponsive Democracy?

## Explaining the Dynamics of Italian Political Discontent: 1973–2012\*

Sergio Martini  
Universitat Pompeu Fabra, Barcelona  
[sergio.martini@upf.edu](mailto:sergio.martini@upf.edu)

Mario Quaranta  
LUISS ‘Guido Carli’, Rome  
[mquaranta@luiss.it](mailto:mquaranta@luiss.it)

### Abstract

This study focuses on responsiveness in Italy by considering changes in satisfaction with democracy over the last four decades. The first part presents the concepts employed and the main argument, suggesting that the evolution of satisfaction with democracy should be investigated in the light of economic and institutional transformations occurred in the Italian political system. In this direction, the second part shows results of a multilevel analysis conducted on several sources of data, indicating that fragmentation and polarization of the party system has been the main factors driving political dissatisfaction over time. Moreover, we assess the impact of the electoral reforms introduced during the period. This seems to have favored a recover of satisfaction between the First and the Second Republic, due to the introduction of a bipolar political competition through coalitions. However, this effect has been contained by the incapacity of the reforms of reducing the number of parties. Finally, although less importantly, bad economic performance in the form of unemployment and inflation has increased dissatisfaction; conversely public debt has reduced it. In sum, by means of compelling empirical data, this study provides systematic evidence of the macro-foundations of Italian political discontent.

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# 1 Introduction

Responsiveness to mass preferences is central to democratic theory. When political systems act accordingly to the interests and desires of their citizens, democracies are likely to be stable and consolidated. Conversely, enduring low levels of perceived efficacy may lead to an increasing distance between people and public authorities and corrode faith in democracy itself (Dahl 1971). Thus, responsiveness is a key-element in the functioning of democratic representation and it captures the complex mechanisms between citizens' preferences and policies. In brief, responsiveness is a basic dimension of democratic quality and one common procedure to measure it is to account for citizens' political support in the form of satisfaction with regime performance (Powell 2005, Morlino 2011).

In this respect, Italy has often been portrayed as a paradigmatic case for the study of negative orientations towards the functioning of its democratic system. By examining opinions and attitudes, many scholars have emphasized a chronic dissatisfaction within civil society, which has characterized Italian democracy since its beginning (Morlino and Tarchi 1996). However, a closer look at available survey data reveals that levels of satisfaction have experienced variation over time, which may be described as cycles rather than as a static phenomenon. In fact, trends in satisfaction with democracy features peaks and nadirs, which needs to be explored (Memoli 2009, 2013). Although interest on the dynamics of satisfaction with democracy in Italy is vast in the literature, it seems that a comprehensive explanation of the factors, which may account for its change has yet to be proposed.

A promising approach, which has recently gained much attention in the international literature, considers satisfaction with democracy as a rational assessment by the people about the cumulative record of successive governments and based either on normative expectations and democratic standards or on the accomplishment of specific policy outputs (e.g. Torcal and Montero 2006, Norris 2011). Adopting this view, we argue that political satisfaction towards Italian democracy should be studied more extensively, by considering the potential role of structural factors as the macro-economic conditions and the political institutional setting across time. Indeed, in the last forty years, Italy has faced massive transformations in its political system. As it is well known, the passage from the First to the Second Republic has been characterized by a widespread restructuring of the parties and the party system, the approval of two electoral laws and the change in the dynamics of political competition (e.g. Bardi 2006, Morlino 2013). In short, how has satisfaction with democracy changed in Italy? To what extent economic and institutional conditions help us in accounting for this overtime variation?

This paper tries to answer these research questions by presenting the results of a multilevel analysis on survey data carried out using the Eurobarometer series, from 1973 to 2012, and macro data coming from several sources (OECD, European Commission, ParlGov database, etc.). This family of statistical models allows us to examine two levels of analyses, the individuals and the years, including predictors at both levels. In doing so, the paper makes two important contributions to the literature on satisfaction with democracy.

First, it provides a test of alternative explanations on the satisfaction levels in Italy, while literature on satisfaction with democracy in the country has been mainly interpretative and not systematic. Contrary to previous findings (e.g. Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Morlino 1998), we demonstrate that satisfaction have been affected by economic performance. Moreover, we contribute by showing how widespread political dissatisfaction in Italy can be attributed to its party system's fragmentation and polarization. Then, we assess the impact of the electoral reforms introduced during the period. This seems to have favored a recover of satisfaction during the Second Republic, due mainly to the introduction of a bipolar political competition

through coalitions. However, this effect has been contained by the incapacity of the reform of reducing the number of parties. This brings the research to its second additional value. Speaking to a wide-ranging debate concerning constitutional engineering, Italy offers one of the few opportunities of testing how switches in some core institutional features may affect perceived efficacy. In this respect, we take advantage of a longitudinal analysis to monitor satisfaction with democracy ‘before’ and ‘after’ major constitutional reforms are introduced (Norris 2011). In brief, the Italian context turns out to be a very telling case study which contribute to the study of the macro-foundations of responsiveness more in general.

The paper proceeds as follows. Section two presents the theoretical framework employed in the study, by presenting the concept of responsiveness and how this can be captured by means of citizens’ satisfaction with democracy. Here, a brief description of the evolution of satisfaction in the Italian transition between the first and the second republic is provided. Section three describes the potential role of economics and institutions and it concludes with the main hypotheses. Section four presents the methodology employed to achieve our research goal as well as data and measures adopted. Finally, the last two sections discuss the main findings, bringing the paper to its main conclusions.

## 2 An unresponsive political system: the case of Italian democracy

This paper focuses on political responsiveness in Italy, understood as the democratic process through which the government forms and implements policies required by the public. In this concern, it involves three main components: the policy preferences held by the citizens and expressed by means of voting behavior, the selection of incumbents, and, finally, the outcome of public policies (Powell 2005). In sum, responsiveness can be represented as a reciprocal mechanism in which policymakers need to intercept public’s signals and react to its preferences, while citizens constantly revise what politicians are doing. For this reason, the dynamics of responsiveness in a political system is also conceived in terms of a ‘thermostatic model’ (Soroka and Wlezien 2010), in which a continuous interaction among the actors involved is critical to the quality of the system.

Depending on the perspective adopted, responsiveness has been measured in different ways. For instance, it has been elicited using ideological congruence on the left-right continuum between citizens and elites, in the form of either political parties in representative chambers or governments (McDonald and Budge 2005). Instead, in other studies, responsiveness has been assessed by considering the correspondence between public preferences and policy outputs in different domains (Soroka and Wlezien 2010). However, given the availability of opinion data, the most fruitful way to assess how consistently the political system responds to public preferences is to consider the diffusion of attitudes favorable to democratic institutions and the approval of their activities in terms of perceived efficacy. In this respect, a well-known measure of political support (Easton 1975), namely satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, is used as a measure of political responsiveness (Pharr and Putnam 2000, Powell 2005, Morlino 2011). In this respect, the distance between Italian citizens and state institutions is a notion that has been widely investigated in the literature. In fact, in the last five decades, political attitudes of Italians have often been described in terms of broad distrust in institutions, particularly in political parties, and high level of political alienation in the form of a lack of interest and an endemic political disaffection (e.g. Almond and Verba 1963, Sani 1980, Bardi and Pasquino 1995, Segatti 2006). Although this feeling of disillusionment and powerlessness has not gradually translated

into a rejection of democracy, dissatisfaction and criticism towards how this works in practice has been a peculiarity in the post-war period, showing through years the lowest figures among Western countries (Norris 2011). This is clearly shown by figure 1, which displays longitudinal information on the levels of satisfaction with democracy in Italy between 1973 and 2012, by using Eurobarometer data. As can be seen, dissatisfied citizens have been far more prevalent throughout the period and more recent levels of satisfaction has returned to be the same as in the 1970s. In short, this figure indicates clearly the extremely low quality of outcomes and performances achieved by the political system in Italy and the failure of decisions taken by political elites (Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Memoli 2009).

[Figure 1 about here]

Nevertheless, it is also important to notice that satisfaction has largely fluctuated over time and that it is possible to identify different cycles of satisfaction with democracy that correspond to specific phases of democratization of the Italian political system. The first phase goes from the early 1970s to the beginning of the 1990s. During this period, dissatisfaction among Italian citizens, measured as the aggregate of not very satisfied and not at all satisfied, displayed extremely high levels, reaching its peak around 1976 and 1978 (about 86% of dissatisfied), when political terrorism seriously challenged the stability of the democratic regime. Another critical point occurred around 1992 and 1993 (almost 90% of dissatisfied), when the ‘Clean Hands’ investigation, led by Milanese prosecutors, revealed a widespread system of corruption in which national party leaders were involved (Newell 2000). In these years, the combination of judicial inquiries together with the end of the two-bloc system of international relationships and the strong economic downward accelerated the pace of a crisis fed by poor performance of the political system and dominant disenchantment among citizens public, bringing the so-called First Republic to a dramatic epilogue. In a few months, the main parties that had governed the country since the post-war period collapsed, with a resulting process of partisan de-alignment (e.g. Bardi 2006, Morlino 2013). The crisis started at the beginning of the 1990s and brought the country to a new stage of transition in its democratic history which for many influential scholars still has to come to a conclusion (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2010, Morlino 2013).

Indeed, during the Second Republic, which goes from 1994 to the present time, two electoral laws were approved (1993 and 2005), new political formations have come on the rise and a new pattern of political competition has been established (e.g. Morlino 2013). Moreover, during the same period, also citizens’ judgments in terms of satisfaction with democracy seemed to experience a different trend. If we look at figure 1, it can be noticed that, although the share of negative judgments by the people remained important during the period, dissatisfaction gradually declined up to 2006 (about 45% of dissatisfied), when it achieved the lowest point, before rising again with some fluctuations until 2012 (about 72% of dissatisfied). At this point, it is worth asking, what factors have influenced perceived efficacy of the system and citizens’ satisfaction with the way democracy works? Can we hypothesized a connection among structural transformation of the Italian political system and satisfaction levels of Italian citizens?

### 3 Explaining Italian political discontent: the role of structural factors

Following a well consolidated argument, Italian negative attitudes towards politics would be formed through long-term processes of socialization which tend to reproduce over time, exogenously to the political system (Putnam 1993). Therefore, political dissatisfaction would not be

related to the failure of its democratic institutions and political elites or daily political experiences, but to deeply rooted historical traditions and cultural predisposition. However, it would not be completely correct to consider Italian political culture as all one a piece. While some aspects may be hard to be influenced by specific events, others adapt contingently to characteristics of the context, in relation to time period effects. This is the case of satisfaction with democracy, which is not a stable trait. As we have already noticed, satisfaction with democracy in Italy has fluctuated across time and this might have happened according to macro-level conditions and characteristics of the political system (Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Gunther et al. 2007, Memoli 2009, Torcal and Magalhães 2010).

In the first place, a growing body of literature has focused on one set of limitations to responsiveness, namely the sources a government has at its disposal to respond to the needs of the people (Morlino 2011). As a result, scholars of political economy have commonly looked at how factors as levels of economic growth, inflation or public debt affect perceived responsiveness and efficacy. Following this view, the public is believed to react to short-term shocks in the economy and fluctuations in satisfaction would reflect macroeconomic indicators (Clarke et al. 1993, McAllister 1999, Wagner et al. 2009).

Another strand of literature has instead concentrated on the impact of elections and its outcomes, as long as they succeed in channeling popular demands into governmental outputs (Norris 2011). On the one hand, some scholars have emphasized the prodigious virtues of ‘consensual’ democracies featured mostly by proportional representation, multi-party system and coalition governments. Here, since elections outcomes are fairer and more inclusive, political minorities are represented in parliament and can influence the decision-making process. In other words, power-sharing institutions act as safety valves for discontent, giving the chance for higher perceived efficacy and support (Anderson and Guillory 1997, Lijphart 1999, Criado and Herreros 2007). Conversely, others have emphasized that ‘majoritarian’ systems characterized ideally by simple plurality election rules, a two-party system, and a single-party government are better suited to promote accountability, by reducing fragmentation and the number of institutional veto-players, increasing effectiveness of governments (Powell 2000, Aarts and Thomassen 2008). As far as empirical research is concerned, evidences are mixed and it seems that neither of each view is actually better to promote democratic satisfaction. Indeed, while proportional rules and multi-party systems are generally associated with higher levels of satisfaction with democracy (Lijphart 1999, Torcal and Magalhães 2010), when fragmentation is too high satisfaction is lowered (Weil 1989, Marien 2011). In other words, when there are too many parties which gain representation, it is difficult to aggregate their interests into stable majority coalitions in parliament, able to take decisions. Shortly, representation and accountability are two properties that should be maximized simultaneously (Listhaug et al. 2009). How can these two explanations help us in accounting for satisfaction levels of Italian citizens across time?

First, the party system of the First Republic, has often been defined as a ‘polarized pluralism’, characterized by extremely high level of party fragmentation and ideological polarization, center-located coalitions with peripheral turnover and anti-party systems represented by the right-wing party, the Italian Social Movement (MSI), and the left-wing one, the Italian Communist Party (PCI) (Sartori 1976, Sani and Sartori 1983). The center was occupied by the Christian Democrats (DC) which governed substantially for the whole period, constituting the pivot and the essential component of governments formed with smaller political formations in its orbit. Hence, for more than forty years Italy went through many coalition governments having approximately the same composition with basically no democratic alternation (Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2010). Moreover, a ‘blocked’ and unstable political system also favored a strategy of penetration by the parties in all spheres of Italian society with resulting diffusion of bureau-

cratic corruption, the pursuit of ‘exchange vote’, and the instrumental use of public spending for consensus formation (Golden 2003). The main effects consisted in the overgrowth of the public sector, the low quality of bureaucracy and the relevance of party patronage and clientelism, which became a fundamental resource in the Italian route for democratic consolidation (Morlino 1998). The public debt which remained stable during the 1970s at around 60% of the GDP ratio, rocked up in the following years, reaching around 120% in the early 1990s. On the other hand, despite the ‘oil crisis’ of the mid- and late 1970s, which led to the first post-war recession in 1975, real GDP grew at a sustained pace of around 3% per year, between 1980 and 1990 (Toniolo 2013). In brief, for the whole First Republic, Italy was an exceptional case of high prosperity and wealth and low quality public sector (Hine 1993).

However, from the beginning of the 1990s, Italy gradually lost its growth capacity and the economic crisis went hand in hand with the uncovering of political corruption in different sectors. In this gloomy scenario, the referendum campaign of 1993 forced a reluctant political class to approve a new electoral rule, which changed the former proportional representation system into a mixed electoral system, combining single-member districts with a proportional correction. The Second Republic, resulting from the collapse of the old party system and the establishment of new patterns of political competition had important aspects of innovation (D’Alimonte 2005, Chiaramonte 2007).

First, most of the parties taking part to the elections held in 1994 were completely new, anti-system parties disappeared as well as bilateral opposition. This favored the replacement of a vast majority of the political class and a more direct relationship between parliamentarians and electors, especially favored by the majoritarian component of the electoral reform. Another important aspect consisted in the increasing role of pre-electoral coalitions which became the main actor of a bipolar political competition. This produced the un-freezing of the political system making democratic alternation possible, an increase of government duration and a greater identifiability of political offer (Bartolini et al. 2004, Chiaramonte 2007, Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2010). In this context, a further element of change was the approval of a second electoral rule in 2005 which consisted in a still mixed system, based this time on a partially proportional rule with low electoral threshold and a majority premium which brought a growth of coalitional bi-polarization (Morlino 2013).

However, some important elements of continuity characterized the new political phase. The most relevant was that, despite the new electoral rules introduced higher level of disproportionality, this did not produce a reduction in party system fragmentation. Indeed, the number of parties and their ideological distance remained on average relatively intense. In brief, the role of the parties did not disappeared at all, on the contrary, small parties became even more important for coalition formation and winning the electoral competition, conditioning political life as never before. For this reason, some authors have defined the new party system in the Second Republic a case of ‘fragmented bi-polarism’ (D’Alimonte 2005). The enduring role of parties has been also testified by recent analysis on patronage, which have shown the persistent influence of parties on Italian administration, although it operates by means of different mechanisms (Di Mascio 2012). Finally, regarding economic performance while the public debt decreased between 1995 and 2005, it rose up again until 2012. Instead, the annual growth capacity was around 1.7% between 1990 and 2000, slower than most of Western European countries. This was even worse in the subsequent ten years (1.1% GDP annual rate, 2000-2011), bringing some commentators to consider it a lost decade (Toniolo 2013).

Now, what has been the role of main institutional changes for citizen’s satisfaction? What the role of economic conditions? In the light of the above, the aim of the second part of this study is to test the following expectations on the explanatory role of several structural variables.

First of all, the better the overall economic performance of the country the lower the political dissatisfaction. Therefore, we anticipate positive economic conditions in the form of economic growth (Hp<sub>1</sub>), decreasing unemployment and inflation (Hp<sub>2</sub>) to decrease dissatisfaction. Moreover, given the instrumental role of public spending that has been massively used by parties to achieve political purposes we assume public debt to decrease dissatisfaction level (Hp<sub>3</sub>). Regarding the institutional conditions, we assume fragmentation (Hp<sub>4</sub>) and polarization (Hp<sub>5</sub>) of the party system to increase political dissatisfaction in the considered period. Moreover, we anticipate that a higher disproportionality of the electoral rule (Hp<sub>6a</sub>) to have a negative role vis-à-vis dissatisfaction. However, as we have noted, although disproportionality has been introduced by means of electoral reform, this has not resulted in a reduction of fragmentation. Therefore, it might be possible that a higher disproportionality has increased dissatisfaction (Hp<sub>6b</sub>). Finally, we assume the dynamics of bi-polarization to reduce political dissatisfaction (Hp<sub>7</sub>).

## 4 Research strategy

The main purpose of this study is to offer a systematic explanation of why, for such a protracted period, so many Italian citizens have felt dissatisfied with the functioning of their democratic system. One default approach to account for satisfaction level is to carry out cross-national comparative research. In this case, the main advantage is the possibility of handling a high number of countries making possible the test of broad hypothesis and the generalization of the findings. However, no relevant time-variation is introduced and constitutional arrangements within political systems are considered stable (Anderson 2007). Nevertheless, when some variation is observable due to institutional reforms, longitudinal case studies may be more appropriate to evaluate the impact of both rules and actual configurations of governments and party systems on citizens' satisfaction (Norris 2011).

In this concern, one relevant case study research has focused on New Zealand's change from a clear majoritarian to a proportional system and its impact on citizens' attitudes. While initial surveys after the first elections held with the new electoral rule showed a positive shift in perceptions of government effectiveness; satisfaction with democracy sharply decreased in the following years (Banducci et al. 1999, Karp and Banducci 2001). Building on this type of research, this paper stresses the importance of studying the role of structural factors by considering the time dimension and it aims to do this within the Italian context. As we noted, Italy provides a unique opportunity to test any connection between change in the political setting and change on satisfaction with democracy.

**Data.** To test our hypotheses we rely on the Eurobarometer series. As known, the series is the only data set that allows to analyze several opinion and attitudes across a time range of forty years. We only use the data available for Italy and select respondents who are between 18 and 85 years, which yields a dataset going from 1973 to 2012. We used all the Eurobarometer surveys in which the question measuring our dependent variable was present.<sup>1</sup>

**Dependent variable.** The dependent variable measures the extent to which a respondent is dissatisfied with the way democracy work in his or her country. The indicator is a Likert scale with four categories (very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied). With minor changes in wording and alternative scales, this question is one of the most frequently

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<sup>1</sup>We used the the Mannheim Eurobarometer Trend File, 1970-2002; EB 58.1; EB 60.1; EB 61.0; EB 63.4; EB 65.2; EB 68.1; EB 71.3; 73.4; EB 76.3; EB 77.3.

observed items in the field of political support and included in every survey covering the topic. It is one of the few indicators for which time-series information exists across a number of countries and used in numerous researches.

Although many scholars have made use of this item, there is still no consensus on the actual meaning of this indicator. So far, the indicator has been considered to tap support for democracy as a general form of government and therefore as an ideal system or, on the contrary, as an evaluation of the performance of the respective democracy, namely what the regime delivers and what it refrains from doing (Dalton 2004). In this respect, it is important to notice that, in particular for people in Southern European countries that have experienced an authoritarian regime is much easier to distinguish among questions related to regime legitimacy and perceived efficacy of the working of the democratic system (although this capacity is likely to have decreased along time). In contrast, in established democracies measures of legitimacy may more easily be confounded with evaluations of efficacy or performance. Different empirical analyses on Greece, Italy, Portugal and Spain have provided further confirmation of the conceptual and empirical autonomy of regime legitimacy in relation to regime performance as attitudinal objects (Montero et al. 1997, Morlino 1998, Torcal and Magalhães 2010). Lastly, more refined investigations have demonstrated that Italians are able to distinguish among different dimensions of political support, showing satisfaction with democracy to be a measure of support for performance of the political system (Memoli 2009). For these reasons, in the present study we consider appropriate to use this indicator as a measure of specific support able to test public evaluations of Italians of the actual working of their democratic regime in practice (Linde and Ekman 2003, Norris 2011).

**Independent variables.** The independent variables are distinguished between individual-level variables and year-level variables which capture contextual characteristics.

The variables at the individual level are selected in order to control for classical predictors of democratic satisfaction present in the literature (e.g. Dalton 2004, Norris 2011). These are the respondent's gender ('man' as reference category); age at completed education in categories ('< 15', which is the reference category, '15 – 19', '> 19', 'still studying'); age in years and age squared in years to tap a non-linear association with political discontent; satisfaction with life ('satisfied' as reference category); political discussion ('never', which is the reference category, 'occasionally' and 'frequently'); and the left-right scale ranging from 1 (left) to 10 (right). All explanatory variables at the individual level are drawn from the Eurobarometer series. The descriptive statistics for individual-level variables are shown in table A1 in the appendix.

The year-level variables allow us to measure the changes occurred in the economy and in the political institutions in Italy. We use three sets of indicators measuring the characteristics of the economy, of the parliamentary and governmental arenas over time in Italy. In particular, this latter choice is due to the fact that the last two arenas are relevant to understand Italian politics in the light of the changes occurred in the last fifteen years (Bardi 2006). First, we measure the state of the economy using the ratio between the gross government debt (European Central Bank 2013) and gross domestic product per capita (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013) in percentage.<sup>2</sup> The second measure is the Misery Index. We average the total unemployment in percentage using the EUROSTAT (2013) definition (European Commission 2013) with inflation, measured as the 'harmonised indices of consumer prices (HICPs) [which] gives comparable measures of inflation for the countries and country groups they are produced'

<sup>2</sup>For a detailed description of the measure of gross government debt visit the following web page [http://sdw.ecb.europa.eu/browseTable.do?node=9485605&REF\\_AREA=190&GOVNT\\_ST\\_SUFFIX=E&sf12=4&sf11=3&sf14=4&DATASET=0&DATASET=1&DATASET=2&SERIES\\_KEY=121.GST.A.IT.N.BOX13.MAL.B1300.SA.E](http://sdw.ecb.europa.eu/browseTable.do?node=9485605&REF_AREA=190&GOVNT_ST_SUFFIX=E&sf12=4&sf11=3&sf14=4&DATASET=0&DATASET=1&DATASET=2&SERIES_KEY=121.GST.A.IT.N.BOX13.MAL.B1300.SA.E).

(EUROSTAT 2013).<sup>3</sup> The third measure is gross domestic product growth in percentage (World Bank 2013, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development 2013).<sup>4</sup> These measures should provide a general indication of the health of the Italian economy and allows us to test the association between political dissatisfaction and the economy.

The second set of year-level variables concerns the characteristics of the Italian parliamentary arena. We measure the characteristics of the parliaments using the effective number of electoral parties (ENEP) as outlined by (Laakso and Taagepera 1979). Moreover, we use an index of party system polarization as proposed by Dalton (2008) who argues that in addition to a measure of the quantity of the party system, such as the number of parties, it is important to use a measure gauging the quality of political competition by computing the ideological distance among parties on the left-right scale. Then, we measure the disproportionality of the electoral law using the Gallagher Index (Gallagher 1991), that looks at the degree to which the allocation of seats matches the distribution of the national vote at the parliamentary elections. In this way, it is possible to capture the variation among the three rules adopted during the period. Eventually, to tap the changes occurred in the Italian party system, which moved from a polarized pluralism to a fragmented bi-polarism, we measure bi-polarism using an index which sums the proportion of seats the two largest parties or coalitions gained in an election.<sup>5</sup> We computed the four scores using the original sources provided by the Italian Ministry of Interior<sup>6</sup> and from the ParlGov database (Doering and Manow 2012).<sup>7</sup>

The last set of year-level variables measure the characteristics of the governmental arena. The first one is an adaptation of the effective number of electoral parties measure to cabinet, namely the effective number of parties in cabinet (ENPC). This measure is argued to indicate how dispersed the power of a cabinet is (Blau 2008). The second measure is a replication of the index of polarization by considering the ideological distance among parties in each relative cabinet. We created these scores using the same sources as for the parliament measures, plus information yielded from the Italian Government, which provides the composition of the cabinet.<sup>8</sup> Lastly, we calculate the proportion of seats the parties are in government or support it to tap the strength of a majority. The extent to which a cabinet has a majority it is argued to be associated with its duration and with government effectiveness. Therefore, this measures can be a proxy of how a cabinet can pursue its governmental action. The descriptive statistics of the year-level variables are reported in table A2 in the appendix.

**Missing values.** Our data present two types of missing data problems. The first is the classic problem of missing values due to respondent's refusal to answer the question or skipped the question. As known, this is common issue in survey research (Groves et al. 2001) and ignoring it could lead to serious results bias (King et al. 2001). This is because the standard approach

<sup>3</sup>For a detailed description of the measure of unemployment visit the following web page [http://ec.europa.eu/economy\\_finance/ameco/user/serie/ResultSerie.cfm](http://ec.europa.eu/economy_finance/ameco/user/serie/ResultSerie.cfm).

<sup>4</sup>For a detailed description of the measure of GDP growth visit the following web page <http://data.worldbank.org/data-catalog/world-development-indicators>.

<sup>5</sup>The index is computed using parties before 1994 and coalitions after 1994. See Chiamonte (2007).

<sup>6</sup>We used the election results for the *Camera dei deputati* (the Lower chamber).

<sup>7</sup>For the period between 1994 to 2001 computed the scores using the proportional part of the electoral rule. However, we also run the models using the majoritarian part of the electoral rule and the averaged scores using both parts of the electoral rule. No substantial differences in the models were found. See also Bardi (2006) for the changes in the parliamentary dynamics and electoral rules in Italy.

<sup>8</sup>The scores for the technical governments are calculated considering the parties supporting them. See <http://www.governo.it/Governo/Governi/governi.html>. The reason of this choice is because the measure 'assumes that all cabinet portfolios are equally important and that non-cabinet ministers are irrelevant' (Blau 2008, 174). Therefore, supporting the cabinet means holding a share of its portfolio.

to missing values, list-wise deletion, can be used only if the values are missing completely at random. The second type of missing values has a different source: the values are missing because in some surveys the questions are not asked (Gelman et al. 1999). In the Eurobarometer series some individual-level variables were not asked in some years.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, a solution to this missing question problem would be either avoid the use of that variable or avoid the use of a year of the Eurobarometer series. It is obvious that both solutions have drawbacks. If we follow the first one we would lose very important individual-level control variables, such as the left-right scale, which has been shown to be a very important predictor of satisfaction with democracy in comparative studies (Dalton 2004) and in studies on the country of interest, i.e. Italy (Morlino and Tarchi 1996). If we followed the second solution we would lose information about some years, therefore shortening the time period to be analyzed, and, more importantly, reducing the number of level-2 units.

A way to overcome these issues is using an approach to fill the missing values. The general framework for handling missing data problem is multiple imputation (Rubin 1987). Multiple imputation consists of creating, through a probabilist mechanism, several datasets in which the missing cells are filled with credible values. In particular, we use a multiple imputation approach based on chained regression equations (Raghunathan et al. 2001, Van Buuren 2007). Imputing missing values when the question is not asked has the advantage that missingness is not caused by the respondent's characteristics with lead him to, for instance, refuse to answer a question, but by the fact the he could not answer the question. Therefore, the imputation of missing values does not depend on the unobserved respondent's characteristics, but it is carried out using the relationship between asked and not asked questions (Gelman et al. 1999). We apply the multiple imputation to the pooled dataset stratified by year and we produced three imputed dataset which take into account the possible uncertainties, and on which we rely to carry out the analysis (Rubin 1987).<sup>10</sup> The descriptive statistics of the variables pre- and post-imputation are shown in table A1 in the appendix. As it can be noticed the estimates do not differ substantially.

**Model.** As our dependent variable is an ordinal one and the independent variables are measured on two levels of analysis, the individual- and the year-level, we employ an ordinal multilevel model, also known as proportional odds model (Agresti and Natarajan 2001, Agresti 2002).<sup>11</sup> According to a latent representation, we use a model that has the following measurement equation for the dependent variable:

$$y_{ij} = c \text{ if } \alpha_{c-1} \leq y_{ij}^* < \alpha_c, \text{ for } c = 1, \dots, C, \quad (1)$$

where  $y_{ij}^*$  is the latent trait underling dissatisfaction with democracy for the  $i$ -th individual in the  $j$ -th year, which goes from  $-\infty$  to  $+\infty$  and it is measured using the observed variable  $y_{ij}$ , which is the indicator of dissatisfaction with democracy and  $\alpha$  are the cut points or thresholds. As the dependent variable has four categories  $C$ , going from 1, very satisfied, to 4, not at all satisfied, the relationship between latent and observed variable is determined by:

<sup>9</sup>Satisfaction with life is missing in 2004, political discussion is missing in 2009, the left-right scale is missing in 2011 and 2012.

<sup>10</sup>The imputation procedure was not applied to the years in which the question measuring the dependent variable was not asked.

<sup>11</sup>Multilevel models are becoming increasingly popular. This is not the place to illustrate their advantages and properties. For further details on this family of statistical models see Gelman and Hill (2006).

$$y_{ij} = \begin{cases} \text{Very satisfied} & \text{if } -\infty \leq y_{ij}^* < \alpha_1 \\ \text{Fairly satisfied} & \text{if } \alpha_1 \leq y_{ij}^* < \alpha_2 \\ \text{Not very satisfied} & \text{if } \alpha_2 \leq y_{ij}^* < \alpha_3 \\ \text{Not at all satisfied} & \text{if } \alpha_3 \leq y_{ij}^* < \infty \end{cases} \quad (2)$$

When  $y_{ij}$  falls into the category  $c$ , the model is:

$$P(y_{ij} \leq c|x) = F(\alpha_c - \mathbf{x}_{ij}\boldsymbol{\beta}' + \mathbf{z}_j\boldsymbol{\theta}' + \epsilon_{ij} + u_j), \quad (3)$$

where  $F(\bullet)$  is the inverse of the logistic function,  $\alpha_c$  is the cut point for category  $c$ ,  $\mathbf{x}_{ij}$  is the vector of data for the  $i$ -th observation in the  $j$ -th year,  $\boldsymbol{\beta}'$  is the vector of coefficients,  $\mathbf{z}_j$  is the vector of data for the  $j$ -th year,  $\boldsymbol{\beta}'$  is the vector of coefficients of the individual-level variables,  $\boldsymbol{\theta}'$  is the vector of coefficients for the year-level variables,  $\epsilon_{ij}$  is the individual-level error with standard deviation  $\sigma_\epsilon$ , and  $u_j$  is the year-level error with standard deviation  $\sigma_u$ . As the coefficients of a logistic proportional odds model are difficult to interpret, we calculate the predicted probabilities for each category of the dependent variable at different values of the independent variables using the following equation:

$$P(y = c|x) = F(\alpha_c - \bar{\mathbf{x}}\boldsymbol{\beta}' + \bar{\mathbf{z}}\boldsymbol{\theta}') - F(\alpha_{c-1} - \bar{\mathbf{x}}\boldsymbol{\beta}' + \bar{\mathbf{z}}\boldsymbol{\theta}'), \quad (4)$$

where  $\alpha_c$  is the estimated cut point for category  $c$ ,  $\bar{\mathbf{x}}$  is the vector of the individual-level variables set to their means,  $\bar{\mathbf{z}}$  is the vector of the year-level variables set to their means except for the variable for which we calculate the quantity of interest, and  $\boldsymbol{\beta}'$  and  $\boldsymbol{\theta}'$  are, respectively, the vectors of the estimated coefficients for the individual- and the year-level.<sup>12</sup> For each category of the dependent variable we present plots showing the predicted probabilities.<sup>13</sup>

We run a series of models. At first we estimate a null model which serves as reference and then we include the individual-level variables only. To avoid model misspecification we do not include all the year-level variables simultaneously, because this would reduce the number of degrees of freedom and because correlational pattern may exist among them. Therefore, we include in the models the macro-economic variable with, first, the parliamentary and with, second, the cabinet variables.<sup>14</sup>

To better show how the model explains unobserved heterogeneity we also present the Intraclass Correlation Coefficient (ICC), which tells us how much of the variance, at the year-level, is due to year-level characteristics.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, we also present the proportion of variance explained at the year-level, to illustrate how the year-level variables explain the variation in the levels of dissatisfaction with democracy across the years.<sup>16</sup>

## 5 Findings

Table 1 reports the estimates for the null model, model 1, which we use as a reference model to evaluate the subsequent models. What it should be noted by looking at the ICC is that about 6%

<sup>12</sup>For further details on the estimation of predicted probabilities see Agresti (2002).

<sup>13</sup>Predicted probabilities are estimated using a simulation method based on bayesian inference and are calculated at the means of the variables. For details see Gelman and Hill (2006).

<sup>14</sup>All models are checked for variance inflation factor and no multicollinearity is found.

<sup>15</sup>Its formula is:  $\rho = \sigma_u^2 / (\sigma_u^2 + \pi^2/3)$ . See Hox (2010) for a discussion on ICC.

<sup>16</sup>Its formula is:  $(\sigma_e^2 - \sigma_u^2) / \sigma_u^2$ , where  $\sigma_e^2$  is the variance of the year-level error of null model and  $\sigma_u^2$  is the variance of the year-level error of the model for which we want to compute the proportion of variance explained. See Gelman and Pardoe (2006) for details.

of the variance in the levels of dissatisfaction across the years is due to the years characteristics. This means that the individual-level predictors only cannot explain this variance.

The second model, model 2, includes the individual-level variables only. We can see that the estimates are in line with the literature on political support and satisfaction (Dalton 2004, Norris 2011). Women have not statistically significant levels of dissatisfaction compared to men. Only those who are still in the educational system are less dissatisfied compared to those who have the lowest level of education. Respondents who are employed tend to be less dissatisfied than those who are not employed. Age does not show a curvilinear association with dissatisfaction. Satisfaction with life has a negative association with political dissatisfaction and the frequency of political discussion has a positive association with it. Finally, left-wing respondents are more critical towards the way democracy works in practice than right-wing, showing a higher level of dissatisfaction. Despite the individual-level variables are useful to understand the micro-level patterns of dissatisfaction, they tell little about the difference in dissatisfaction across the years. In fact, we can see that the ICC does not get much lower and that the amount of variance explained by model 2 is very small. As it has been already noted, the individual component of dissatisfaction in Italy seems to be marginal or very marginal (Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Morlino 1998), confirming our expectation of looking at macro-level conditions in order to explain individual satisfaction levels of Italian citizens over time.

[Table 1 about here]

As a result, a better assessment of the dynamics of dissatisfaction in Italy from 1973 to 2012 calls for a model in which year-level variables are included. Models 3a and 3b add the macro-economic indicators.<sup>17</sup>

In model 3a we add to the model the ratio between public debt and GDP in percentage and GDP growth. We can clearly see that public debt has a negative and significant association with dissatisfaction ( $\beta$  -0.008,  $p < 0.05$ ), while the GDP growth is not statistically significant. Model 3b, instead, include GDP growth and the Misery Index. GDP growth is still not significant and it also changes sign, becoming positive. However, what is strongly and positively related to dissatisfaction is the Misery Index. In fact the coefficient is 0.124 and significant at 99.9%. This means that the worsening of the economic conditions, i.e. the raise in inflation and unemployment, are associated with higher levels of dissatisfaction.

As the estimates produced by a multilevel ordinal logistic models are not straightforward to interpret, we computed the predicted probability of being very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied with democracy against public debt and the Misery Index in figure 2. The two panels show how the changes in the levels of public debt and Misery Index are associated with different levels of dissatisfaction. The left-hand panel shows that when public debt is around 45% of the GDP, at the beginning of the 1970s, a respondent has a probability of being fairly dissatisfied of about 0.2, while when the public debt overcomes 120% of the GDP, around 2000 and 2010, the probability grows as well to about 0.3. On the other hand, at low levels of public debt the probability of being not at all satisfied is more than 0.3 and it decreases to 0.2 when the public debt increases. Instead, the right-hand panel shows that at low levels of the Misery Index the likelihood of being fairly satisfied is about 0.35, while at high levels of the independent variable is around 0.13. The probability of being not at all satisfied increases dramatically as the Misery Index increases: from 0.18 to about 0.44. What is interesting to underline is that two categories, very satisfied and not very satisfied do not change significantly.

<sup>17</sup>We split the variables in two models as the public debt and the Misery Index showed a certain degree of correlation, therefore to avoid the presence of multicollinearity we included the variables one at the time.

This means that the two groups that drive dissatisfaction or satisfaction are, respectively, the very dissatisfied and the fairly dissatisfied. The other two categories appear to be much less sensitive to the change in the economic conditions. The models including the variables measuring the state of the economy appear much more informative than model 2. In fact, the ICC decrease relevantly, in particular for model 3b, and the proportion of explained variance reaches 30% in the same model. Therefore, it seems that the Misery Index (together with the other variables) explains at least a part of dissatisfaction variance at the year-level.

In this respect, it is important to notice that these results seem to challenge at least partially previous research (Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Morlino 1998), shedding new light on the role of economy in explaining dissatisfaction levels of Italians towards their democratic system. Indeed, while the irrelevance of economic growth is confirmed, unlike former investigation, our findings emphasize the substantial role of public debt in affecting satisfaction levels, as well as other indicators of bad economic performance as unemployment and inflation. At this point, it is important to recall that public spending has been widely used as an instrument for clientelism both in the First and in the Second Republic, although by different mechanism of patronage. Many jobs in public administration have been filled according to partisan and not meritocratic criteria, which as consequence an increase in the number of public employees, the absence of post-monitoring, and the spread of political corruption (Golden 2003, Di Mascio 2012). Therefore, it might be fair to conclude that consensus at the mass-level for how the democratic system has worked in Italy has reacted more remarkably to the levels of public spending than to real economic development. To sum up, our set of hypotheses concerning economic variable seems to be corroborated, with the exception of the impact of growth.

[Figure 2 about here]

However, economic conditions are not the only factors that influence Italian judgments in relation to the functioning of their democratic system. As it is going to be argued next, institutions seem to play an even more important role. In this respect, table 2 reports the models including the year-level variables measuring the characteristics of the parliamentary arena. Models 4a and 4b add the effective number of parties, disproportionality and bi-polarism.<sup>18</sup> We notice that the effective number of electoral parties has a strong and positive association with dissatisfaction. In fact, the estimates are in both models significant at least at 99%. This means that even controlling for economic year-level variables, the effective number of parties plays a substantial role in explaining the variance of dissatisfaction across the years. The association between the effective number of parties and dissatisfaction is depicted in the left-hand panel of figure 3. Using the estimates from model 4b, we can see that when the number of parties is around three the probability of being fairly satisfied and not at all satisfied is about 0.25 and the probabilities are not statistically different. However, as the number of parties increases we see that the probability of being not at all satisfied increases up to more than 0.3, while the probability of being fairly satisfied decreases to 0.2. Additionally, by looking at the middle-panel in figure 3, it can be seen that the level of disproportionality has a positive and significant association with dissatisfaction. Indeed, the more the level of disproportionality of the electoral rule the more the probability of being not at all satisfied. Conversely, the probability of being fairly satisfied decreases significantly.

[Table 2 about here]

<sup>18</sup>The effective number of electoral parties and polarization are included separately in the models as they show some degree of correlation.

The last variable we included, bi-polarism, has a negative and very significant association with dissatisfaction in both models 4a and 4b. The right-hand panel in figure 3 illustrates the very strong impact of bi-polarism on the two categories that are more sensitive. In fact, when the largest two parties or coalitions half of the seats in the parliament the probability of being not at all satisfied is 0.4, while it becomes 0.2 when a full bi-polarism is achieved. Instead, the probability of being fairly satisfied is about 0.15 when bi-polarism is low and it becomes slightly higher than 0.3 at high levels of bi-polarism. Finally, models 4a and 4b well explain the variance in dissatisfaction in Italy. In fact, the ICC in model 4b is 1%, meaning that only a small part of the variance in dissatisfaction is due to year-level characteristics. Furthermore, the proportion of variance explained by the two models is, respectively, about 43% and 60%.

Models 5a and 5b add to the ‘economy’ models, instead of the effective number of parties, the extent to which the parliament is polarized. We can see that only in model 5b polarization is positively and significantly associated with dissatisfaction at 90%. Predicted probabilities are quite similar to those based on model 4b.<sup>19</sup> The other variables, disproportionality and bi-polarism, have the same association as in models 4a and 4b. This means that the association of these two variables with dissatisfaction are robust to different model specifications. Also these models better explain the variance in dissatisfaction across the years in Italy. In fact, we can see that the ICC becomes smaller compared with the models including only the economic variables and that the proportion of explained variance increases, despite less than in models 4a and 4b.

These findings may already suggest us some important conclusions. First of all that institutions have an additive and more important role in explaining dissatisfaction levels than the economic conditions, confirming that politics matters the most, at least for Italy (Morlino 1998). Then, there is a confirmation that fragmentation and polarization have had a very important role in increasing citizens’ satisfaction with democracy, although estimates for polarization are less precise. By hindering efficient policies, they have impacted substantially Italian democratic quality and their effect has persisted throughout the Second Republic (Piana and Raniolo 2013, Morlino 2013). Therefore, as we have already anticipated, it is not surprising that the higher levels of disproportionality of the two electoral reforms introduced in the last twenty years have had a positive role, increasing political dissatisfaction. Indeed, they have largely failed in reducing the number of parties and simplifying the party system (Morlino 1997, Chiaramonte 2007). However, the level of dissatisfaction has decreased on average during the Second Republic. As suggested by our findings, this might be due to the fact that the new rules of the game have changed the dynamics of political competition, introducing bi-polar competition and making democratic alternation possible (Bartolini et al. 2004, Pasquino and Valbruzzi 2010).

[Figure 3 about here]

Now, are results for fragmentation and polarization confirmed also at the cabinet level? A high fragmentation of the party system may translate into coalition government involving a high number of political formations. This in turn may lead to cabinet instability, favoring political dissatisfaction. Furthermore, this was a peculiarity of Italy during the First Republic and it has been an element of continuity during the Second one. In fact, while government durability has increased in the latter one, the relevance of parties in coalition formation has remained basically the same, or even increased (Sartori 2001, Chiaramonte 2007). Lastly, the functioning and effectiveness of government are also related to the ideological distance between the coalition partners and whether coalitions are homogenous or not. Table 3 reports the models including the variables measuring the characteristics of the cabinets. Models 6a and 6b add to

<sup>19</sup>Not shown but available upon request.

the ‘economic’ models the effective number of parties in cabinet and the proportion of seats held by the parties supporting the cabinet.<sup>20</sup> In both models the effective number of parties in cabinet shows a positive and statistically significant association with dissatisfaction. Based on model 6b, figure 4 shows that when the number of parties in cabinet is one the probability of being not at all satisfied is 0.2, while it increases up to almost 0.4 when the number of parties is 3.5. Instead, the probability of being fairly satisfied with democracy is around 0.3 when there is only one party in cabinet and it decreases to 0.15 when the number of parties is 3.5. The other variable included in the models, cabinet seats, shows a negative association with dissatisfaction, despite being not significant. However, this variables has the expected sign. As the majority supporting the cabinet is larger, it may be reasonable to think that the cabinet would be eased in its governmental action and this, in turn, would reduce dissatisfaction since the government is more effective.

[Table 3 about here]

In models 7a and 7b we include cabinet polarization, instead of the effective number of parties in cabinet. We can notice that polarization is positively associated with dissatisfaction, as expected. However, the estimates do not reach a significance levels; being not very precise we cannot be sure if the association is indeed positive. In brief, this result confirms the importance of fragmentation in hindering political dissatisfaction and this is true also when considering the cabinet level. On the other hand, although polarization seems to follows our expectations, its role should be assessed with caution. Finally, the models in table 3 also add some information to our understanding of dissatisfaction in Italy compared to the ‘economic’ models. In fact, the proportion of explained variance at the year-level is higher compared to models 3a and 3b and also the ICC becomes small. However, these models are less informative than those including the parliamentary variables. Therefore, it appears that the models which best explains the year-level variation in political dissatisfaction in Italy are those including both the economic and the parliamentary variables.

[Figure 4 about here]

## 6 Concluding remarks: Italy lost in transition

Responsiveness is considered a key dimension of the quality of democracy, as it represents the output of political system and defines the extent to which a regime is legitimized (Morlino 2011). Italy has often been described as an illustrative case of a highly dissatisfied society (Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Morlino 1998), which still stuck in a never-ending process of transition towards a new model of democracy (Morlino 2013). This paper argued that the dynamics of dissatisfaction in this countries are yet to be explained, as it appears that across almost forty years there has been substantial changes in the citizens’ evaluation of the democracy performance that seem to be dependent on some structural factors, rather than to an endemic and chronic feeling of discontent in the Italian civil society. While some authors suggest that the diffuse dissatisfaction origins from the historical and cultural traditions (Putnam 1993), we argue that these factors, supposedly static, cannot explain the changes in the levels of democratic dissatisfaction. In fact, Italy has gone through a process of crisis and transition since the early 1990s in which there has been a complete restructuring of the party system, two electoral law reforms, an increase

<sup>20</sup>The effective number of parties in cabinet and polarization are included separately in the models as they show some degree of correlation.

in alternation and competition, a change in the relationship between the parliament and the government, and the difficulties of the economic system and state finances (Piana and Raniolo 2013). Therefore, a promising strategy to account for the variation of dissatisfaction is the inclusion in the scenario of political and economic structural factors that change contingently with it.

We looked at alternative, yet additive, structural explanations able to explain a large part of the overtime variation in dissatisfaction. Previous research has indicated that individual components of dissatisfaction are only marginal (Morlino and Tarchi 1996, Morlino 1998), therefore we investigated the potential impact of macro-level variables, using both the comparative and the case literature on political dissatisfaction. Some economic factors, such as unemployment and inflation, seem to be positively associated with dissatisfaction, while others, such as public debt, has an opposite association with it. Factors measuring the changes in the political system also provided useful information concerning the dynamic of dissatisfaction. We found that the number of political actors and their ideological dispersion, both in the parliaments and in the cabinets, and which should be the consequences of different electoral systems, are positively associated with dissatisfaction, while the emergence of bi-polarism is negatively associated with it.

This paper makes two contributions to the literature. The first is that we proposed a systematic framework for the explanation of the cycle of political dissatisfaction in Italy, using quantitative data spanning over a period of almost forty year. We used political and economic macro-level factors that have been never considered simultaneously and that have proven to provide a complete, yet not full, account of the macro-foundations of responsiveness in this country. The second contribution of this paper concerns the debate on the institutional reforms, that is a *leitmotiv* in the Italian political arena (Bull and Pasquino 2007). In fact, our findings may indicate the possible ‘solutions’ to the high levels of dissatisfaction in Italy. An electoral law which would produce a simplified, de-polarized and bi-polar parliamentary arena accompanied by good economic performances may seem a simple cocktail to cure or limit dissatisfaction. Notwithstanding, the outcomes of institutional reforms are not always predictable, as the previous electoral law reforms show (D’Alimonte 2005, Chiaramonte 2007). This is because another factor to be taken into account, and a potential limitation of the paper due to the impossibility of controlling in the statistical model for it, is how political actors react to institutional changes. In fact, the transition from the First to the Second Republic witnessed the introduction of some institutional changes accompanied by great expectations in the Italian civil society, which however did not produce the expected outcome. For instance, the last electoral reforms increased the level of disproportionality, but did not reduce the party system fragmentation. Therefore, it can be argued that the Second Republic enjoyed a ‘capital’ of satisfaction due to the great expectations of change in the Italian public which contributed to the decrease in dissatisfaction until 2006. Nonetheless, this decrease has not lasted likely because of the lack of consolidation of the ‘new’ political system and the emergence of the economic crisis (Piana and Raniolo 2013), making the proportion of dissatisfied citizens to become the same as the one in 1973. Thus, we could argue that a ‘cycle’ of dissatisfaction with democracy has ended and a new one might begin. However, it is not possible to argue that Italy is entering, as several political commentators held, in the Third Republic (Masseti 2009). To do so, there would an agreement between the major political actors on the fundamental rules of the new political system, which however has not been reached so far, making the Italian democracy an anomalous case (Bull and Newell 2009).

For these reasons, the Italian democracy appears to be lost in a transition and far from finding the way to end it. Our findings tell that citizens are sensitive to the changes in the institutional

setting and the economic conditions. Therefore, one direction to end the transition would be some reforms to improve efficiency and effectiveness in order to make the Italian democracy more stable and legitimized (Morlino 2013).

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### Figure and tables

Figure 1: Percentage of respondents who declared to be very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, and not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Italy from 1973 to 2012. Percentages are reported with 95% simulated confidence intervals, which are smoothed using spline interpolation.

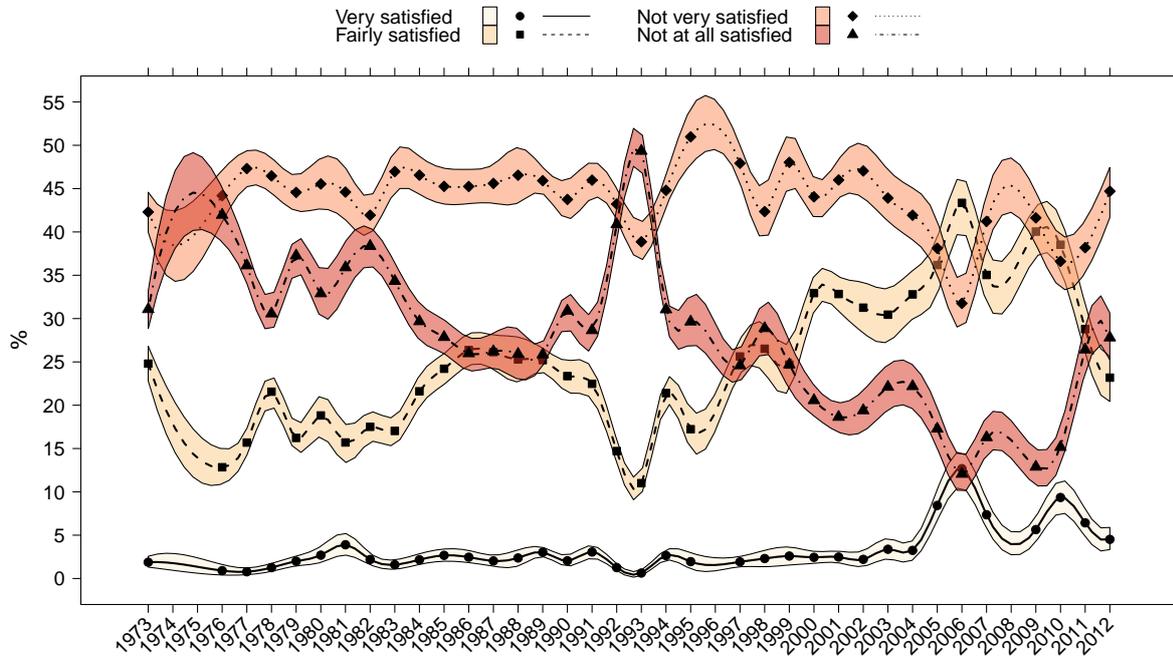


Figure 2: The probability of being very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied with democracy against the public debt and the Misery Index, with 95% simulated confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are based, respectively, on models 3a and 3b and are computed holding the variables at their means.

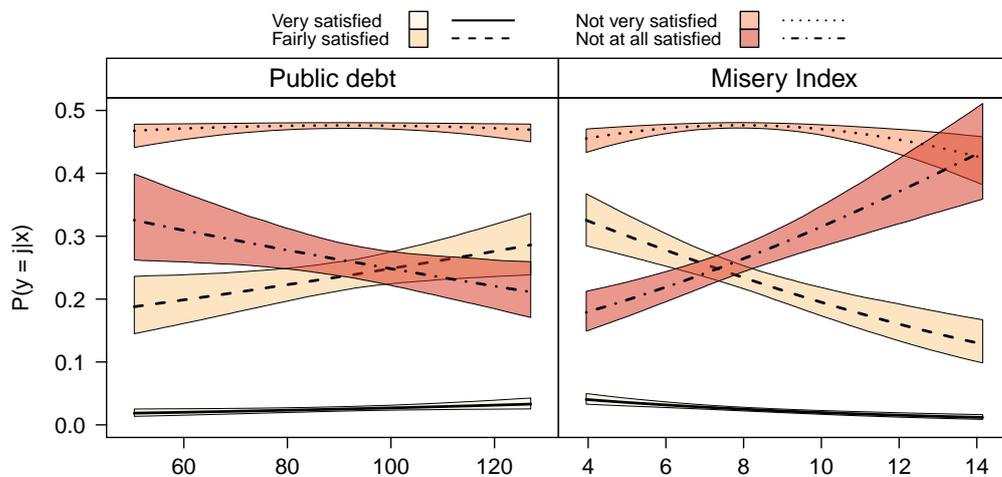


Figure 3: The probability of being very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied with democracy against the the effective number of electoral parties, disproportionality and bi-polarism, with 95% simulated confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are based on model 4b and are computed holding the variables at their means.

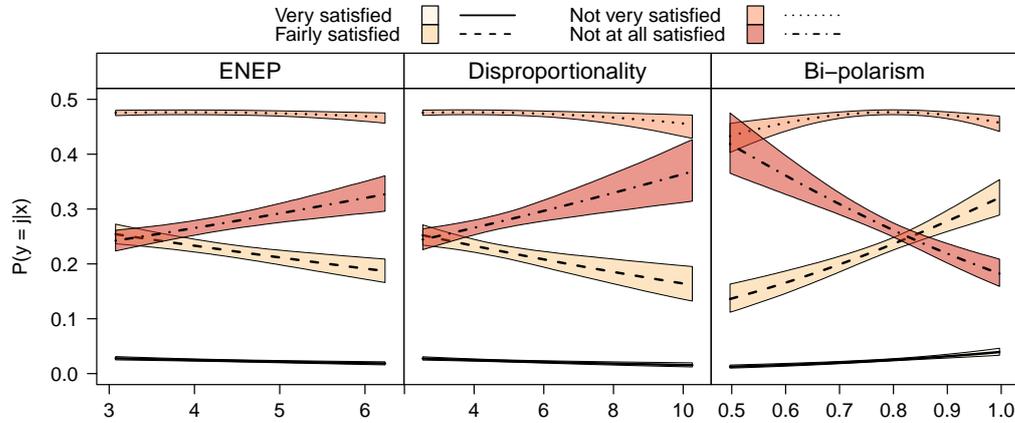


Figure 4: The probability of being very satisfied, fairly satisfied, not very satisfied, not at all satisfied with democracy against the the effective number of parties in cabinet, with 95% simulated confidence intervals. Predicted probabilities are based on model 6b and are computed holding the variables at their means.

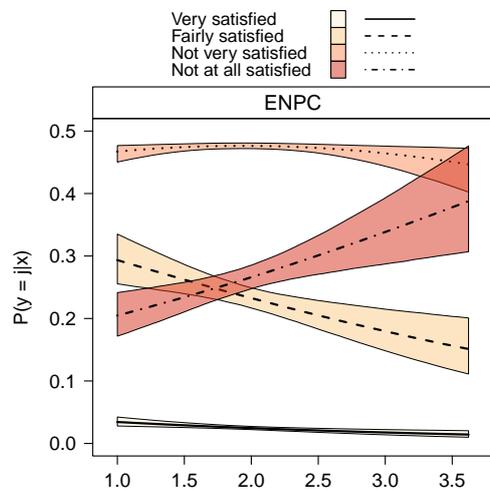


Table 1: Multilevel ordinal logistic models: empty, individual-level and economy models.

	Model 1 Null		Model 2 Individual		Model 3a Economy		Model 3b Economy	
	$\beta$	s. e.	$\beta$	s. e.	$\beta$	s. e.	$\beta$	s. e.
<i>Thresholds</i>								
$\alpha_1$	-3.543	0.082***	-4.462	0.108***	-5.174	0.377***	-3.513	0.196***
$\alpha_2$	-0.968	0.079***	-1.843	0.105***	-2.554	0.376***	-0.894	0.195***
$\alpha_3$	1.013	0.079***	0.231	0.105*	-0.480	0.376	1.181	0.195***
<i>Individual-level predictors</i>								
Woman			0.027	0.017	0.028	0.017	0.028	0.017
Education (r. c. < 15):								
15 – 19			0.023	0.020	0.024	0.020	0.025	0.020
> 19			-0.038	0.025	-0.037	0.025	-0.036	0.025
Still studying			-0.117	0.039**	-0.115	0.039**	-0.115	0.039**
Employed			-0.088	0.020***	-0.088	0.020***	-0.088	0.020***
Age			0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003
Age-squared/100			-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*
Satisfied with life			-0.879	0.018***	-0.879	0.018***	-0.878	0.018***
Political discussion (r. c. Never):								
Occasionally			0.131	0.018***	0.131	0.018***	0.131	0.018***
Frequently			0.428	0.026***	0.429	0.026***	0.429	0.026***
Left-right scale			-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***
<i>Year-level predictors</i>								
Public debt/GDP (%)					-0.008	0.003*		
GDP growth (%)					0.002	0.036	-0.007	0.026
Misery Index					0.002	0.036	0.124	0.024***
<i>Random components</i>								
$\sigma_{year}$	0.471		0.451		0.413		0.329	
Diff. BIC	-		3195.0		3179.6		3195.6	
Diff. AIC	-		3293.7		3296.2		3312.2	
ICC	0.063		0.058		0.049		0.032	
$R_{year}^2$	-		0.041		0.123		0.300	

Note: number of level-1 observations 58035; number of level-2 observations 36. The estimates are based on 3 imputed datasets of the Eurobarometer series according to Rubin (1987);  $\beta$  = log-odds; s. e. = standard errors; sig.: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.010$ , \*  $p < 0.050$ , °  $p < 0.100$ ;  $\sigma_{year}$  = intercept standard deviation; Diff. BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) = Difference with null model; Diff. AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) = Difference with null model.

Table 2: Multilevel ordinal logistic models: parliament models.

	Model 4a		Model 4b		Model 5a		Model 5b	
	$\beta$	s. e.						
<i>Thresholds</i>								
$\alpha_1$	-6.512	0.380***	-4.507	0.365***	-6.116	0.588***	-4.528	0.541***
$\alpha_2$	-3.892	0.379***	-1.887	0.364***	-3.497	0.587***	-1.909	0.540***
$\alpha_3$	-1.818	0.379***	0.187	0.364	-1.422	0.587*	0.165	0.540
<i>Individual-level predictors</i>								
Woman	0.028	0.017	0.028	0.017.	0.028	0.017	0.028	0.017.
Education (r. c. < 15):								
15 – 19	0.024	0.020	0.025	0.020	0.024	0.020	0.026	0.020
> 19	-0.037	0.025	-0.036	0.025	-0.037	0.025	-0.036	0.025
Still studying	-0.114	0.039**	-0.113	0.039**	-0.115	0.039**	-0.113	0.039**
Employed	-0.087	0.020***	-0.087	0.020***	-0.087	0.020***	-0.087	0.020***
Age	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003
Age-squared/100	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*
Satisfied with life	-0.880	0.018***	-0.880	0.018***	-0.879	0.018***	-0.879	0.018***
Political discussion (r. c. Never):								
Occasionally	0.132	0.018***	0.132	0.018***	0.132	0.018***	0.132	0.018***
Frequently	0.430	0.026***	0.430	0.026***	0.430	0.026***	0.430	0.026***
Left-right scale	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***
<i>Year-level predictors</i>								
Public debt/GDP (%)	-0.010	0.003**	-0.014	0.016	-0.004	0.003	-0.021	0.020
GDP growth (%)	-0.025	0.026	0.120	0.017***	-0.008	0.029	0.103	0.019***
Misery Index	0.159	0.056**	0.133	0.034***				
ENEP								
Parliament polarization					2.095	1.586	2.448	1.303°
Disproportionality	0.072	0.029*	0.077	0.021***	0.067	0.031*	0.084	0.024***
Bi-polarism	-2.642	0.487***	-2.339	0.368***	-3.153	0.586***	-2.892	0.448***
<i>Random components</i>								
$\sigma_{year}$	0.269		0.190		0.293		0.219	
Diff. BIC	3176.8		3200.5		3171.0		3191.1	
Diff. AIC	3320.3		3344.0		3314.5		3334.7	
ICC	0.022		0.011		0.025		0.014	
$R_{year}^2$	0.428		0.596		0.378		0.534	

Note: number of level-1 observations 58035; number of level-2 observations 36. The estimates are based on 3 imputed datasets of the Eurobarometer series according to Rubin (1987);  $\beta$  = log-odds; s. e. = standard errors; sig.: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.010$ , \*  $p < 0.050$ , °  $p < 0.100$ ;  $\sigma_{year}$  = intercept standard deviation; Diff. BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) = Difference with null model; Diff. AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) = Difference with null model.

Table 3: Multilevel ordinal logistic models: cabinet models.

	Model 6a		Model 6b		Model 7a		Model 7b	
	$\beta$	s. e.						
<i>Thresholds</i>								
$\alpha_1$	-5.141	0.480***	-2.977	0.359***	-5.366	0.573***	-3.465	0.392***
$\alpha_2$	-2.522	0.479***	-0.357	0.359	-2.747	0.572***	-0.846	0.391*
$\alpha_3$	-0.448	0.479	1.717	0.359***	-0.672	0.572	1.228	0.391**
<i>Individual-level predictors</i>								
Woman	0.028	0.017	0.028	0.017	0.028	0.017	0.028	0.017
Education (r. c. < 15):								
15 – 19	0.024	0.020	0.025	0.020	0.024	0.020	0.025	0.020
> 19	-0.036	0.025	-0.036	0.025	-0.037	0.025	-0.036	0.025
Still studying	-0.115	0.039**	-0.114	0.039**	-0.115	0.039**	-0.115	0.039**
Employed	-0.087	0.020***	-0.088	0.020***	-0.088	0.020***	-0.088	0.020***
Age	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003	0.004	0.003
Age-squared/100	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*	-0.007	0.003*
Satisfied with life	-0.879	0.018***	-0.879	0.018***	-0.879	0.018***	-0.878	0.018***
Political discussion (r. c. Never):								
Occasionally	0.131	0.018***	0.131	0.018***	0.131	0.018***	0.131	0.018***
Frequently	0.429	0.026***	0.429	0.026***	0.429	0.026***	0.429	0.026***
Left-right scale	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***	-0.069	0.004***
<i>Year-level predictors</i>								
Public debt/GDP (%)	-0.013	0.003***	-0.002	0.025	-0.009	0.004**	-0.004	0.028
GDP growth (%)	-0.016	0.034	-0.002	0.025	-0.002	0.037	0.127	0.024***
Misery Index	0.484	0.145***	0.343	0.104**				
ENPC								
Cabinet polarization					1.264	0.962	0.795	0.743
Majority seats	-0.674	0.676	-0.431	0.549	-0.411	0.842	-0.191	0.706
<i>Random components</i>								
$\sigma_{year}$	0.359		0.287		0.402		0.323	
Diff. BIC	3167.6		3183.2		3159.5		3175.0	
Diff. AIC	3302.1		3317.8		3294.0		3309.6	
ICC	0.038		0.024		0.047		0.031	
$R^2_{year}$	0.238		0.390		0.145		0.313	

Note: number of level-1 observations 58035; number of level-2 observations 36. The estimates are based on 3 imputed datasets of the Eurobarometer series according to Rubin (1987);  $\beta$  = log-odds; s. e. = standard errors; sig.: \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ , \*\*  $p < 0.010$ , \*  $p < 0.050$ , °  $p < 0.100$ ;  $\sigma_{year}$  = intercept standard deviation; Diff. BIC (Bayesian Information Criterion) = Difference with null model; Diff. AIC (Akaike Information Criterion) = Difference with null model.

## Appendix

Table A1: Pre- and post-imputation descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations). The number of observations is reported in the column  $N$ .

	Pre-imputation			Post-imputation			Measurement
	Mean	SD	$N$	Mean	SD	$N$	
Satisfaction with democracy:							Categorical
Very satisfied	0.029	0.166	56634	0.028	0.166	58035	
Fairly satisfied	0.238	0.426	56634	0.239	0.426	58035	
Not very satisfied	0.443	0.497	56634	0.443	0.497	58035	
Not at all satisfied	0.290	0.454	56634	0.290	0.454	58035	
Gender:							Categorical
Man	0.477	0.499	58035	0.477	0.499	58035	
Woman	0.523	0.499	58035	0.523	0.499	58035	
Education:							Categorical
< 14	0.451	0.498	56756	0.453	0.498	58035	
15 – 19	0.316	0.465	56756	0.315	0.465	58035	
> 19	0.157	0.364	56756	0.156	0.363	58035	
Still studying	0.076	0.264	56756	0.076	0.265	58035	
Occupation:							Categorical
Employed	0.514	0.500	56281	0.514	0.500	58035	
Not employed	0.486	0.500	56281	0.486	0.500	58035	
Age	44.589	16.851	58035	44.589	16.851	58035	Continuous
Satisfaction with life:							Categorical
Dissatisfied	0.289	0.453	51670	0.293	0.455	58035	
Satisfied	0.711	0.453	51670	0.707	0.455	58035	
Political discussion:							Categorical
Frequently	0.164	0.370	53519	0.166	0.372	58035	
Occasionally	0.498	0.500	53519	0.501	0.500	58035	
Never	0.338	0.473	53519	0.332	0.471	58035	
Left-right scale	4.790	2.226	43784	4.833	2.215	58035	Continuous

Note: the post-imputation descriptive statistics are based on 3 imputed datasets. Own calculation on the Eurobarometer series.

Table A2: Descriptive statistics of the macro-level variables measuring the state of the economy, and the parliaments and the cabinets characteristics in Italy from 1973 to 2012.

	Mean	SD
<i>Economy</i>		
Public debt/GDP (%)	93.497	23.798
GDP growth (%)	1.992	2.317
Misery Index	7.718	2.575
<i>Parliament</i>		
ENEP	4.243	1.057
Parliament	0.449	0.038
Disproportionality	4.945	2.805
Bi-polarism	0.785	0.136
<i>Cabinet</i>		
ENPC	1.968	0.529
Cabinet polarization	0.160	0.096
Cabinet seats	0.550	0.106
<i>N</i>	36	

Note: the mean values and standard deviations are computed excluding the years 1974, 1975, 1996 and 2008, as those are the years in which the variable asking the respondents' level of satisfaction with the way democracy works is missing from the Eurobarometer series. Own calculation on several sources. See text for details.