

## **The Political Turn of Citizens: What Does *Disaffection* Mean?**

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### **WORK IN PROGRESS**

#### **Abstract:**

Which is the place of citizens in societies where they appear to be so disaffected? How disaffection is compatible with systemic legitimacy? Until now, we know a lot about trends in political disaffection and about the social profiles which show it in surveys; but we know little about its meanings and contents. We present here a summary of findings of a qualitative research on the perceptions of the Spanish people about the political processes and politics itself. This research rests on focus groups developed in Spain during 2011. This work is close to previous researches in the U.S. (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, Neblo 2010, Eliasoph 1998) and Europe (Font 2012, Bengtsson 2009, Vázquez 2011). The complex phenomenon of political disaffection is not only related to the outcomes of the political system, but to the perceptions regarding the political process. It is a relation to politics full of content. By analyzing focus-groups, we argue that political disaffection is related to deep beliefs on the meaning of politics, the conditions for trusting politicians and parties, and the way people see the society as a political actor. Listening to how people talk about politics is an outstanding strategy to understand disaffection.

Key Words: disaffection, political processes, political trust, participation

## *Introduction*

When ordinary people are asked how they feel about politics, negative terms such as *dissatisfaction*, *disenchantment*, *indifference*, *apathy*, *distress* or *unrest* are brought to the conversation and frame the rest of arguments and complaints. In the popular imaginary politics is framed in a negative aura. We know this is a well established tendency in Western countries, being it a classic debate in Political Science since long time ago (1973) (Norris 1999, Pharr & Putnam 2000, Torcal and Montero, 2006, Geissel, 2008). The accumulative knowledge allows us to know the features of people who are *disaffected* and to what extent it alienates citizens from politics or what kind of political activity people engage in. We can differentiate the political attitudes behind any political activity to highlight what kind of social profiles are more inclined to engage in politics. But we still have lack of knowledge about what disaffection means for people. Colin Hay (et al, 2008) stressed the importance of this meaning to be able to understand and explain better this political processes. After the global protests in many western countries recently, the question has attracted much attention.

Disaffection unveils a paradox for western democracies. Even for radical liberals, as Sartori or Schumpeter, democracy needs public support. Against any other way of governing, democracy rest on citizens preferences, so disaffection, as a way that lead people to be outside politics, can be a political risk in case alienate citizens start to support charismatic o populist political programs (Offe, 2006). It could mean the end of democracy as it has been understood (pluralism and autonomy) From this perspective disaffection give rise a second order question, it's not only who feel or has this attitude, but to what extent disaffection impact on political institutions. Here we find ourselves with a paradox, because citizens disaffection with the main political institutions use to be accompanied by a political support of the political system, giving legitimacy to democratic regimen. Are people just pure cynic? Or does it mean that political disaffection hasn't sharp impacts on political institutions?

The revival of disaffection debate is fed by this paradox. We know more and more about political attitudes attached to disaffection (Geisel, 2008), but we know little about what kind of political process underline disaffection. Recent research has showed that disaffection is not attached to political legitimacy (Torcal and Montero, 2006), but there is no agreement about the causes and potential consequences of disaffection, actually, there is no agreement about the limits of this phenomena and the set of beliefs it covers (Offe 2006; Eliasoph, 2001). With the literature in hand, we can follow the trends and basic traits of this "negative feelings" to politics; but it is quite difficult to go in depth in its meanings and contents. The process has been black-boxed. Probably, we need *to listen* to the discourses and practices in a less mediated way (Vázquez 2012). Sometimes, to increase our knowledge of a phenomenon which has been extensively studied, we need to get back to the basics, to *sensitize the concepts* by putting them back in *their immediate social reality* (Bowen 2006). This is the main objective of this work: *to look into the black box of political disaffection* by sensitizing the concept.

The paper begins with a discussion of disaffection to frame contemporary debates about it. We follow with methodological questions to show the research done. We have followed a qualitative strategy, with eight focus groups, in the research, understanding it fits better than any other to the objective pursued: the meaning of political disaffection by citizens. Thirdly, we present the results and the way citizens give meaning to politics and disaffection. Finally we discuss the results.

### **The problem of disaffection.**

Disaffection has been widely studied, it would be difficult to bring the different studies all together. So we are not going to describe all the debates at detail, but try to give sense to the debate and sum up some of the more representative focus around the topic. We understand that the contemporary worry about disaffection has to do with the consequences came from a certain political interpretation of democratic dynamics. If democracy is based on pluralism and autonomy (Sartori, Manin, Habermas, Mouffe), it's expected that any democratic government drive its politics regarding people opinions. It's the only way to be attentive to different views at the time all of them are legitimized to be heard. The modern representative system offers a new way to translate this ancient spirit of public debate (Manin). The system lies on political parties and organizations which are expected to structure civil society demand making. At institutional level, these organizations can also act as counter-vailing powers, avoiding charismatic powers (Cohen and Arato, 1997). Protest and the defense of the own interest fed democracy with political watchers who can demand explanations of any government action and they can press political institutions to be attentive to its demand making. This process can work as a guarantee of democratic ground. What happens if people don't watch? This is the problem. Politicians can have fewer motivations to drive their politics regarding people opinions (Offe, 2006). It could give rise to charismatic politicians and regimes. The importance of disaffection unveils us a structural problem within the representative political system.

The real impact of disaffection on political institutions would give answers to a political dilemma about which quality of democracy is needed to keep democracy on going (Pwrezoski, 2010). Overall, as argued by Colin Hay (2007), we can distinguish two approaches on disaffection: those which focus on the *demand side* (attitudes and individual opinions) and those which focus on the *supply side* (structural processes and public opportunities). The research about the problem has put forward institutional or cultural explanations to embrace both the causes and the consequences of disaffection.

The classical political behavior studies explain disaffection by "citizens' evaluations of *the system performance*, its authorities, as well as the political outcomes (Bonet, and Montero 2006: 127). For the idealized "demand side" explanation, the main cause of *disaffection* would be the way institutions work. Citizens, for example, use to be more disaffected when economy fails. Disaffection, therefore, wouldn't lead to a collision of the system, because we should differentiate between legitimacy and

discontent: one person, as it is said, could be deeply disaffected with government but believe whole-heartily in democracy (Torcal and Montero, 2006). This explanation focuses on individual rationality and on people abilities to balance fails and success of political system. As the cultural drift of western society has fostered individual gaining and the self (Lasch, 1984), other studies, within “demand side” explanations, think disaffection as *a cultural and cognitive bias* (Pharr & Putnam 2000, Stoker 2006). There would be a gap between expectations and the achievement of the political system (Stoker 2006: 68). In a cultural context increasingly dominated by individualist choices, politics, defined as collective choice and action, would be unable to produce maximalist answers for everyone. Increasing disaffection would be, therefore, the result of the cultural drift of western societies. To address demand-side problems, educative-cultural policies and participation in social organizations would play an important role so that people understand the complexities of the political process (Stoker, 2006; Putnam, 2000).

Faced against this cognitive bias, other researches think that this cultural drift underlines a political openness of citizens, who demand other ways of political engagement (Norris). Disaffection would be, at the contrary, a critical position to current political system. *Critical citizens* would be widening their repertoire of political intervention and it suggests a preference for more direct and transparent relationship with rulers (Norris 1999, van Aelst 2001, Dalton 2004). The critical citizens hypothesis has opened a sharp debate linked to the real impact of political processes on disaffection. The challenge is, sometimes, presented as a paradox which we can usually see in public opinion surveys: the disaffection process is accompanied by a strong willing of citizens to increase political participation (Font et al, 2012). *The political processes*, the way decisions are made and implemented are not normally included in demand side explanations (Gunther and Montero 2006: 74), however there is evidence that the features of the political processes also matter (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, Bengtsson and Mattila 2009, Font et al. 2012). Hibbing and Theiss-Morse hold the paradox and try to give an answer. In *Stealth Democracy*, contrary to critical citizens hypothesis, disaffection could be originated by authoritarian feelings, that is, people would be disagreed with democratic political dynamics based on being attentive to differences and plurality. So it would be better to deal with disaffection as it were a negative feeling. This distance can be the symptom of a preference towards technical government (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002), so disaffection can also endanger the cycle of democratic input (Putnam 2000). *Stealth Democracy* thesis has been disputed (Neblo et al, 2010), but the debate still remains opened. Colin Hay (2007) has pointed out the consequences of representative design on possible disaffection, as an institutional arrangement that would have brought with itself political untrust. Hay stress on the importance of political opportunities to understand citizens feelings towards politics. Neblo (et al 2010) tried to answer Stealth democracy hypothesis comparing citizen preferences for two political arrangement. His research would agree with Colin Hay as citizens have preferences for other way of ruling within a deliberative framework rather than technical or authoritarian governments.

As a synthesis of the discussion, we could say that disaffection underway two opposite realities. First, disaffection can be understood as a critical position which aims to improve the political system. The second one would see the decline of political trust as an increasing detachment and disinterest from politics which aims to overwhelming representative democracy. Therefore, does disaffection imply a commitment to improve the political system in a more participatory way or, otherwise, it is just a dangerous increasing of disengagement and detachment from politics? Do people want experts governing and they want to ignore politics or they want to engage more in politics?

We think that the questions quoted above are not easy to answer following the sane methodologies have been applied to study political disaffection. We already have good explanations about who are disaffected and to what extent disaffection is related to participatory and political activities. But we don't have yet enough knowledge about why people are disaffected and what consequences it could have over political systems. This lack of knowledge has been pointed out recently by Hay (et al, 2008) and Stoker (2010): "We know a fair amount about what kinds of political activity people engage in and what factors drive that activity. We can offer some reasonable evidence-informed insights into issues such as electoral turnout and election outcomes. What political science- and the social sciences in general- is less good at understanding and explaining is *what politics means to citizens at the beginning of the 21st century*" The contribution of this paper rely on it, what disaffection means for citizens.

Research about the meaning of disaffection needs a methodology able to deal with what people think and the way they relate to. Political ethnographic studies (Eliasoph 1998, Cramer Walsh 2004) have addressed disenchantment focusing in the relationships to politics which people display. These studies imply that the relation towards politics cannot be reduced to formal institutions and that we also develop our attitudes to politics in group settings and in everyday relations (Walsh 2004). Apathy and disenchantment are made available to people in public settings and are produced in group (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003:784). Thus, political disenchantment would not be just an individual (no) voting option, an individual "cynical" position or lack of knowledge. It would not be only the result of changes in the institutions and the broader cultural drift. Neither is apathy just a separation, a vacuum towards anything related to politics. It would be *a laborious cultural work aimed at staying unhappy and away from politics in everyday interaction* (Eliasoph 1997, 1998).

Which are the content and the meaning fabric built around disaffection? We want to see the meanings of disaffection as they emerge in the public interaction of ordinary people. Political attitudes are rooted in social experiences and identities (Walsh 2004). Politics make sense in everyday situations while forging collective identities (van Wessel 2010, Walsh 2004). Given this perspective, we understand political disaffection as *a cluster of collective representations, codes and patterns of interaction by which people relate to politics and build their own identity in relation to the political process*. So our research question is "what are the features, content and forms of this

relationship to politics? How does disaffection become meaningful in the public discourse of lay citizens?"

This perspective lead us to understand disaffection beyond an individual belief settled in the heads of people by we-don't-know-which-external-actors; it would be a cluster of codes and collective representations which are played in everyday situations and made available to people in public settings. Our goal is to go beyond the two classical "demand-supply" perspectives on disaffection. We'll analyze how political disaffection is (re) produced and made available in public interactions between ordinary people.

Generalizing, we identify three approaches to disaffection. Firstly, we find the focus on the individual level, individual attitudes, feelings and opinions (Bonet, Martin & Montero 2006). Secondly, the focus on institutions, cultural drift, political opportunities, changes in institutions, the policy making, etc. (Hay 2007, Colin, Stoker and Williamson 2008). And, thirdly, and this is the way we walk, there would be a *public side* of disaffection, which tries to observe which are the meanings of disenchantment and how people make them emerge in public contexts and social interaction. We argue that the *public side explanations* can help to bridge the gap between aggregative-individualist analysis and the macro-structural ones (Eliasoph & Lichterman 2003).

### **How to deal with disaffection: the research**

To deal with research we have took as starting point *Stealth Democracy* hypothesis. We think that Hibbing and Theiss-Morse (2002) has opened the disaffection framework, taking into account new ideas and new processes to deal with. To include political processes preferences into disaffection framework allow us to ask again to what extent disaffection is a question of individual battles to exclude any politics from one's life. Neither would it be just an index of distrust to institutions and main political actors. Citizen preferences towards political processes (Hibbing and Theiss-Morse 2002, Bengtsson and Mattila 2009, Font et al. 2012) indicate that the way political processes are designed is also relevant to explain disaffection. Are people politically unhappy because they want different political processes? Stealth democracy says that people are unhappy, because they want technical governments, that is, one different way of ruling. Hibbing and Theiss-Morse based their discontent hypothesis around a process scale (from more participatory to more representative processes) and preference to different political actors. They try to analyze to what extent social and political trust, and different political attitudes usually present in political studies, affect citizens on political processes preferences.

Stealth democracy's results are counter-intuitive regarding the deliberative turn of political studies. They put forward a strong interrogation about the feasibility of deliberative framework as we can't expect citizens to behave in deliberative grounds.

Neblo (et al 2010) has said that Stealth democracy research misunderstood the way citizens shape their preferences as they are strongly inclined towards deliberative processes faced to technical ones. The aim of the research is go further in the meaning that different political processes have for citizens, what politics means and the reasons behind disaffection attitudes.

In this paper, we address disaffection in a comprehensive way and we include the political dimensions usually related to disaffection. We first looked at the positions built around the political system. People have an idea of the preferred political system in abstract terms. They also point to the reasons why they feel *dissatisfied with the system*; this is, they evaluate the performance. As a second dimension, we analyze the logic of public discourse regarding political and social trust. Nevertheless, these categories still say little about the real content and meanings of political apathy, and to fill this gap we need a more inductive research strategy where discourses emerge less mediated by precise academic devices. As it is obvious, we will reach profundity at the expense of statistical representation.

This paper draws on a qualitative strategy based on focus-groups to explore how people make sense of politics. In the search for sense, we found, firstly, that disaffection is not a vacuum, a separation from politics without anything in between. It implies a relationship full of content and meaning. Consequently, we understand that disaffecting politics is *a hard cultural work* (Eliasoph 1998). Secondly, we believe -and our analysis of group discourses puts it clearly- that disaffection is made by a dense fabric of codes and collective representations which emerge, are elaborated and circulate in groups. People take their political ideas from direct or indirect interaction with other social actors, so group talking bring light to *the codes and collective representations* which circulate in the relation to politics. Political positions depend on structural individual positions, a variety of resources and political architectures, formal rules and informal opportunities (*habitus* and *fields* in Bourdieu's terms). However, political attitudes are also elaborated by people's interaction in public contexts. Social interaction shapes the bonds among people, their identities (Walsh 2004). Thus, listening group interaction gives us clues about the "unspoken rules" (Baiocchi 2003), the "grammars" (Talpin 2011) which configure popular politics. By working at the group level, we approach the informal rules of political relation, but also the creativity breaking assumed rules.

In our case, the group or the public meetings has been emulated through the technique of focus-groups. The groups had no directive moderation and, as we will see, they reflected different political, social and demographical profiles. Therefore, the variety of groups introduced variety in the settings and, we assume, in the unspoken rules of interaction in each groups. We start from a set of focus groups conducted between February and April 2011 in Spain<sup>1</sup>. It is seven discussion groups distributed

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<sup>1</sup> In the Spanish case, trust on political institutions have decreased in the period 1980-2008, while the support to democracy have increased (Bonet, Martin and Montero 2006, Klingemann 2013). Popular distrust facing political institutions followed an upward trend in the period 1980-2002 (Bonet, Martin & Montero: p. 113). Moreover, levels of interest in politics remained low and only 20% of respondents

along the Spanish geography (Getafe, Madrid, Alicante, Seville, Cordoba, Conil and Zaragoza). These groups consist of 6/8 people from different profiles: age, sex, socioeconomic status, occupation, political ideology and party identification. Groups are more or less homogeneous internally (at least in terms of geographical origin, socioeconomic position and ideology). The sample selection and composition of the groups were made attending representativeness criteria of social positions and discourses articulated in them, reaching a fairly high degree of discursive saturation. Sampling also took into account the political attitudes considered influential variables in the object of study: membership in associations or political parties, not militants or not activists, socioeconomic and education levels.

City		Focus Group Profile
Zaragoza	ZGZ	No activists. Adults with good jobs or small business
Alicante	ALI	Activists of conservative political party. Adults
Cordoba	COR	Activists of neighbourhood associations. Adults.
Madrid	MAD	Non activist, university students, young people (20-25 years old).
Getafe	GET	Activists of left wing parties. Adults
Sevilla	SEV	Non activist, job training students, young people (17-20 years old)
Conil	CON	Non activist, retired people (over 65)

When designing the focus groups, activist was understood by a person who belonged to an organization and actively participated in it. No activist would be the person who does not belong or participate. The political party activists were those who either were members of any of them or sympathized and supported them more sporadically. The two groups of students sought to collect different youth social profiles. The collected profiles correspond to two of the main features that the literature on political participation has raised to explain the constraints and limits of participation. The first and most important is the socioeconomic and educational bias of citizenship. This (*SES*) explain much of the probability that a person participate. The group performed in Zaragoza (professionals and small businesses) and Madrid (university students) would contrast this logic with the groups performed in Seville (vocational students) and Conil (retired), apart from political activist groups with opposite ideologies. The second feature would be the degree of citizens' political socialization. This has usually been understood as differences in political interest, trust in institutions or society and participation in a social or political organization. Our groups also draw a sociopolitical division from that cleavage. Alicante groups (conservative activists and

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showed interest in politics up to 2002 (p. 118). The Spanish show a profile of low interest in politics and a relatively low perception of internal and external political efficacy. In contrast, the preference for democracy seems to be very high (up to 90% of respondents in 2002) and the satisfaction with the performance of the political system suffers ups and downs, but it is still high in the European context (p. 127). In sum, distrust over institutions and political actors have increased since 1980, while the preference for democracy as a political system has increased among Spanish people.



militants), Getafe (leftists activists) and Cordoba (members of social organizations) would contrast with groups made in Seville (vocational students), Madrid (college students), Zaragoza (Professional and small business) and Conil (retired)<sup>2</sup>

The performance of the groups was made following a script (see Appendix I) with questions related their opinion and positioning with respect to the political system, their preferences for decision making in it (if the decisions had to take them all citizens, political representatives, experts, interest groups), whether the government should run like a business or what his perspective on decentralization. In line with previous research (Hibbings and Theiss-Morse, 2002) the debate took place on the political system in general and with respect to the characteristics of the political processes in particular. However, the script raised pursued only encourage discussion between participants of different groups about a common problem for all of them.

Regarding the data collection technique, the focus group brought a number of advantages. As noted by cognitive theories, groups bring main public discourses and social interactions with little mediation of the researcher (Callejo 2001). Focus groups, being a public setting (in which there is a mediator taking notes), has a series of conditions: the speeches emerging are public interactions and are issued in reference to a dominant discourse within the group, and external references in the society. Groups are able to disclosure public discourses, specifically, "hegemonic" or "legitimized" discourses, but also resistant counter-discourses (Callejo 2001). In sum, focus groups allow us to see how hegemonic discourses and counter-discourses are displayed in an experimental public stage where people come with their own argumentative tools. In regard to the coding and analysis, we developed thematic analysis (Boyatzis 1998). Our unit of analysis was each focus group (which has a number of ideological conditions, socio-professional status, age and territory).

Individual attitudes and opinions, and institutional changes happen in the context of public opinion. We understand with Eliasoph (1996), that the problem of "political concern" is linked to the characteristics of the public sphere and the transversal rules presiding it. Group meetings are a micro piece of the kaleidoscope which is the public sphere. Our focus-groups represent temporal, non-stable mini-publics where people came to talk about some political issues. Looking at how people relate and talk about politics in these public settings is a way to understand disaffection. Looking at the rules which make the public sphere and its translation to different groups is a strategy to see the patterns of disaffection. Or maybe, disaffection and apathy are a central mast of public sphere as it exists.

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<sup>2</sup> The cities were chosen because they were characteristic or emblematic of some political positions. For example, Getafe was chosen because it was a traditionally a working-class city with a solid leftist tradition, the same for Alicante as conservative city.

### ***Opening the black box: Looking at the political system.***

To the question "What do you think about the political system?" The immediate reaction is negative, critical signs of dissatisfaction or proposals to reform specific institutions. In this regard, groups discussed their subjective position and the general position of the society, "the people", before the political system. Positions are described using a number of negative categories: apathy, dissatisfaction, frustration, anger, fatigue, etc.

"P1: We are frustrated because there is anxiety, but no way to channel it.

E: Are you all frustrated?

P2: I am not frustrated.

P3: I'm pissed, tired...

P4: We wish it was different, that is, the political character of politicians, politicians who were at the Transition. That is, the current character of the political class is so low. We can claim that anyone can become a professional in politics, but with minimal criteria. Minimum training, spirit of leadership, etc.. That is, a politician is a politician; he or she is not man who sells fruit in the market...

E: You were not pissed...

P4: Man, I'm pissed because the political profession is a mess. I see in my neighborhood there are so many problems. Many problems and they give no solution. "

Group No. 7, p. 9.

This negative frame is heterogeneous and occurs in a variety of intensities, with different referents. It is projected over several objects: *a) certain political institutions; b) the political class as a social group; c) political class-society relationship; and d) the society as a whole and its values.* The critical judgment on politics, under certain conditions, emerges as a powerful social convention: the key to be heard in a public setting is to stay on the side of dissatisfaction and criticism. Politics and the political system evoke, as a first reaction, negative feelings, a frame in which complaint is at the center of discourses. *This negative frame is how one must talk politics in a public.*

For political disaffection we understand, "a cluster of attitudes related to a general distrust in politics and the lack of engagement with the political process. We have called this *political disengagement*, or political disaffection 'tout court'. The other sub-dimension consists on beliefs about the lack of responsiveness of political authorities and institutions, and citizens' lack of confidence in the political institutions" (Montero and Torcal 2006:7). Thus, *political disaffection* would be different from *political alienation*, another set of beliefs capturing a potential crisis of legitimacy. Disengagement, institutional disaffection and legitimacy would be three packages of beliefs which are related in a complex way in theoretical appraisals (Stoker, 2006), but

also in the popular discourse. Nevertheless, beliefs are not closed and totally stable but worked in public and social interactions (Eliasoph 1998).

In our focus groups, it was difficult to catch politically disconnected/disengaged discourses. This is, people who do not want to know anything about politics, and who do not feel interested or linked in some way. The fact that no clear positions of disinterest and disengagement were reflected suggests two main interpretations. Obviously, the reactive nature of groups, though weak, induces people to talk politics. But, what is more important, participants identified disinterest with *the other*, being this “other” the rest of society. This *other not interested in politics* suggests that indifference is an extended practice but it is *not socially acceptable as good*. Total disconnection from politics does not seem politically correct, at least talking in a public setting. Nobody wants to assume the etiquette of “disinterested” or “indifferent” and nobody seems to be proud of it. Talking politics in a negative way is the norm, but saying that you do not care publicly... it is not a good belief. The good citizen should care, because politics and political organization frame the way “we” live.

If politics matters, people are engaged in a debate about why people hate politics (Hay, 2007) or why politics doesn’t work. The discussion brings together the problems people point out with current political system, once nobody wants to be outside.

### ***Why are we so unhappy when looking at politics?***

What is the content of these negative beliefs articulated around politics? What meanings and social representations does this attitude bring with it? Offe (2006:25) has referred to (a) *dissatisfaction* when my interests are violated by the system or my personal situation is perceived as disadvantaged; (b) *illegitimacy*, when the underlying reasons and justification of the political order are not accepted, and (c) *disaffection*, when we are outside the political community, bored, distant and hostile to it. These three packages undoubtedly help us to unravel the tangle of political disenchantment, though this split seems artificial. How do these interact in the social reality?

The disaffection puzzle can lead us to mistake. It’s right that the most are dissatisfied and almost no one accepted politicians’ reasons and justifications of political order. But nobody has illegitimated feelings towards political order and it’s difficult to face disaffected positions. Everybody think that it could be other way, it foster people to talk for searching reasons and arguments to fit with this political puzzle. We are going to draw the arguments underlie this puzzle. Even if they seem to be linear and clear, they appear disordered in talks.

Most participants in the groups believe that they live in a democracy but, in general terms, "it is not working properly". The paradox is that, while groups widely consider the political system as democratic, the dominant discussion is that "the people"

are not able to put their demands and needs into the political system. The desire to have democratic processes is indisputable; however, criticism emerges when participants specify what they mean by democratic attributes. The public debate refers to the operation of certain systemic elements, while democracy, as an ideal type is a commonplace non debatable (Offe 2006). The idea of democracy appears as an unquestionable topic in public, this is a basic cultural code.

"P1: This is democracy.

P2: Yeah... but he [the moderator] has said how it would be a more perfect system, and I think it's impossible.

P3: But you say that the perfect system would be that everyone wanted the same thing.

P2: No, I didn't say that we all want the same thing, but that we could agree on most things. Although we attempt to be democratic, apparently, in this country and now, it is not possible.

P1: But the fact that it does not work properly, does not mean that democracy is wrong. "

Part of the disaffection stands on fundamental institutions, e. g. political parties, but it does not cause the articulation of systemic alternatives, at least in the public dominant discourse. Criticism can indeed *be systemic* (can affect the foundations of the political order) but not result in anti-system political positions. Probably, anti-system alignments require an active part, identifiable frames and accessible counter-hegemonic public discourses circulating (Laclau, 2005). Looking at our groups, most of dissatisfaction does not go beyond the current political system: "This system does not satisfy me at all, but it is not completely wrong because I see elsewhere people are in a worse situation than we're here" Legitimacy, sometimes, is produced by default. This scheme offers us an explanation why political extremist discourse has always found place in democracy, as they can present a new frame and counter-hegemonic public discourse.

Extremist discourses are not, anyway, a real threaten. When people discussed in groups, they talked actually about the limits of discontent –assuming it is normal- and how far it goes. Transversal to all groups were the beliefs of unhappiness with the current situation of politics. Unhappiness use to take most people to discuss the design of the political system, as Colin Hay (2007) has already pointed out. For example, in a group of left-wing voters, they discussed how institutions were deficient, particularly the party system which was seen as non democratic<sup>3</sup>. We find these arguments in all focus groups, but it's more sophisticated in groups with political profile from right to

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<sup>3</sup> "The party system... I see it irreplaceable. But, of course, within parties there is no democracy, in any of them. I speak from my experience. From there I think we are treated as non-adult citizens. Parties fear, at this stage of democracy, open lists, they fear to be linked the territory. They are linked to above, to the priests who make the electoral lists. This is my idea"

left. Besides dissatisfaction, people want to preserve the basic institutions but reforming them and giving them a coat of paint.

The lack of systemic alternatives takes popular imagination to handle with singular political mechanisms. As the member of a right-middle-class group explained, “If I choose my representatives to govern on the behalf of all the people, but then, they will rule on the behalf of what the lobbyist want... what is my vote useful for? You [*representatives*] are not taking me into account because I am a simple citizen. But you are going to take into account the bankers, the pharmaceutical industry, etc.” Thus, there is something structural which *does not work properly*, communicative channels between state and society are broken.

It's difficult for people to identify clearly alternative communicative channels, but everyone think about it. From a political order build up around particular interests, which avoids democratic dialogue, not searching agreements among political actors, people imagine political talks in public, searching agreements, transparency. They are the opposite sides of politics for citizens. People use to face agonistic politics, as the current system, to one close to deliberative framework. Some groups make proposals such as participatory politics (Norris 1999). For example, in the group of neighborhood activists, there was an abstract idea somehow shared by most of them, as Pepe tried to explain “I think there is, for such a long time, a lack of real democracy in most of institutions. There is no notion of reception from below; the level of participation of people from the street is really low”. This frame is a group code, a reference in the left-wing & activist groups, and it also appears among young students. But the rest of groups stress all the time the need to reform the communicative channels between state and society, as this right-wing person said: “the important things, those which affect everyone, had to be decided by all, not only by political parties”

When people think about new channels they used to be related with current political institutions (mainly political parties), but all focus groups put social values behind. There is a diffuse general idea of moral deterioration of society. If *others* don't participate, if *others* are disaffected is because they are selfish, if *politicians* are corrupt and they rule guided by particular interests is because no one pay attention, it's because... society. The structural deterioration of society is the cornerstone of the nature of current political *disorder*. This is why the problem of politics is not the system, but the way it works.

Negative positions on the political system are transversal to all groups, being them from the left to the right, and different socio-economic profiles. But it is also transversal the moral deterioration of society. In the end, there will be always a person, a lack moral person, who will pervert the institution. This *personalization*, as a code for the presentation of politics, reflects an anthropological pessimism which, in the last instance, is an obstacle to the thinking of alternatives and reforms. As one participant in the professional-higher class group said, “In any political system, even in those which

are not very extreme, in theoretical terms, they have very good things. What happens is that *people* put them into practice, right? That's the problem in the end.” In the group of neighborhood activists, someone concluded, “I still think we're not disenchanted by politics, by we are disenchanted by some politicians, who are those who have damaged the overall image of something as magnificent as politics, isn't it?”. For an old man, it was just a matter of “removing the bad rotten apples, and leaving the good in the basket”. The moral deterioration of society makes it really difficult to take the imagined political ideas into pragmatic proposals; these will always face individual narrow mind. But it contributes to legitimacy by default.

What we can learn from the focus groups is that people's political beliefs are framed in a critical and concerned schema. But this code is not formed by negative irrational emotions and feelings of detachment, but it is formed by beliefs and debates about the performance of the political system and how institutions are designed. Results (policies) and political processes are both contested. The public debate is passionate and it meets the policies, the institutions and... above all, the “society”. Disaffection is full of content and it harbors an exciting popular debate on institutional reform and policing. Nevertheless, public deliberation finds the limit of society, it's a cultural problem. To change the way politics works mean to change social structure. It opens a way to see collective problems as the responsibility of individuals. Contrary to Hibbing and Theiss-Morse ideas, people don't think everybody thinks and behave in the same way about collective problems. Any structural solution will have to face these individual differences; the political system can't rely entirely on individuals, that is, the political alternative is far of participatory democratic ideals.

### ***Imagining Bridges.***

The channels between citizens and the political system were generally perceived as clogged and ineffective, including representation. For example, the group of young students discussed that “the institutions were formed by too many layers” and “it was really difficult to reach the politicians who make decisions”. For another group of university students, “politicians do not take into account the people” and “representatives just follow their interests and they just do whatever they want”. In the group of old men, Manolo was also clear in this respect, “And after of having voted, you shut your mouth, you do not heard anything back, and you will hear again four years later”. *Institutional disaffection* takes different contents depending on the ideological profile of the group, their participatory background and the socio-economic status. But the general perception is that, despite suffrage, governments "do not listen", the channels produce distortions and do not conduct properly people's demands. Representative institutions “do not listen”. Nevertheless, channels of political representation are understood as necessary and inevitable in all groups.

"P1: I see that political representation is organized by layers, where workers communicate their demands as ... And it rises, let's say, the messages. Because these layers would be in charge of gathering the petitions of a smaller group of users, and they want to view their needs collected. And so, they are already doing a bit of filter. But it is also negative because you have a direct connection with the powers that could change that... And the problem with that is that you might have some interests involved in the process, we, the low people, cannot question this communication. Since you have a problem or since you identify a problem, until it comes to fruition... it has passed by millions, by ten hands.

P2: It's what he says; it is *the difficulty in reaching the political class*. To launch your complaints...

P3: You give your vote but when they have to listen... they do not listen to it the way they should listen. When you have given the vote...

P1: I mean, there is always an intermediate, let's say, there is always burdens to reach the government with your complaints."

Group No. 5, p. 8.

People talks don't overcome representation as a key function of modern democracy. According to our focus groups would be obstacles so that political representation would fulfill its systemic role. This discussion is present thorough all ideological positions with distinctive nuances, but it can be considered a shared code. The first general obstacle, as identified by participants, is the remoteness and perception of distance between people and politicians/representatives. This separation is conceived as separation from the territory, from the social group one is part of, distance in the life style and life conditions of representatives ("the cars" and luxuries), but it is also a distance in terms of political positions. Secondly, participants bring light to the filters which might *block* the relation people/representatives: the electoral system, the frequency of elections ("every four years"), the qualities of the political elite (they would be "self-interested", "egoistic" and just looking at their own interests), the lack of identity with political parties, the bureaucratic nature of political organizations, the connection to "economic interests", and the social bias and inequality between the social majorities and the political elite. Thirdly, there would be a set of obstacles to the relation citizens/politicians which would blame the people itself: groups discuss the weakness of civic engagement, passivity and the lack of protest of people. As someone said in the group of old men, "There should be much more protest right now..."

This set of obstacles to the fluent relationship society/political institutions does not produce any global alternative opposed to liberal-representative government (or, at least, it does not have a relevant role in our discussion groups). However, the critical position towards politicians put into question its structural feature. As stated in several

groups, "They do not represent us"<sup>4</sup>. In the dominant public discourse, we find the recognition that political elites should be elected by the people, but it's stressed the risk of isolation: "after voting, they do what they feel like ..." That is, the perception is that representatives do not represent popular demands as they should. Representation as a political mechanism is not called into question, but the way political representation is currently performed is perceived as conflictive and distorted. *Representativeness of the main political actors is called into question, but representation is not.*

***"The Public Enemy": politicians and political parties.***

Essentially the problem of disaffection covers a vibrant debate on the qualities of politicians and political parties. Vertical trust towards the political class and parties is severely damaged, and they are the visible "face" of the political system. The political class/elite would be identified as the group of people holding elected offices at the national, regional or local level. A series of evils appear in groups as their attributes:

- Lack of training and qualification ("they do not know English");
- Opulence and waste ("too many official cars" "double/triple salaries");
- Corruption and favoritism as their privileges ("they give their friends public positions" "they rob public money");
- Lack of charisma and leadership ("Transition politicians were popular leaders, but current politicians are not leaders");
- Alienated from citizen demands and necessities ("they do not listen" "they live outside of reality" "they are locked in their offices");
- Selfish and interested ("just look for their own benefit" "they only look at themselves").

Politicians, before the participants in our groups, do not reach the *principle of distinction* which Manin (1997) noted as one of the justification of representative government. Politicians should be qualified and distinguished, that would justify their authority. According to the discussion in focus-groups, those in representative posts must be more educated, exemplar, intelligent, virtuous, honest and vocational. Politics is a complex matter, so elected politicians should be ready to deal with.

The discussion around this sense of distinction involves a paradox, pointed out by Hibbing and Theiss-Morse. As one member of the right-wing voters described this belief, "The important thing would be that the politician was the expert, it's what we talked, excellence and qualification. If one is an expert in economics, I do not want him

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<sup>4</sup> The focus groups were made before massive Spanish protest in may 2011. The success of the protest can be seen from the discourse of our groups, we could say that "indignados" were able to frame people imagination about politics: "They don't represent us" was one of the main brands of indignados protests.



to be minister of education. I want him to be the finance minister.” Participants in the focus-groups stressed the need of technical knowledge to perform political functions. For example, a member of the left voters argued that, “I think that politics is one of the profession which requires more expertise in all aspects, this is, in politics, just the most wise people should govern”. The question emerges quickly: If government should be ruled by experts, what kind of democracy people are thinking about? Hibbing and Theiss-Morse says that what really people want is an expert not to be involved in politics, but it’s necessary a good one, that is, a good manager, out of ideologies.

It is right that people in our focus groups, all of them, talk about this sense of political distinction, but the discussion was always guided by a confrontation between necessary technical knowledge to rule and people’s right to be elected for ruling. The tension was strong, but people used to give priority to the latter, even if most agree that merit is central in the political career. The problem for them is that politics many times require political decisions, not technical, so political decisions should be made by a political logic. Far from reject politics, people think that current politicians are the enemies of politics. A good politician is someone who knows to do his job well. One of his tasks would be make decisions but it should be go along with people opinions and debates. To deal with is a cornerstone in citizen political imagination.

Contrary to *Stealth democracy* thesis, citizens don’t think that everyone has similar ideas about political issues. These differences are in the backstage of the technical/political debate about politicians’ profile. People talk about the target of politics, that is, what for politics is. From right to left, high or low socioeconomic status, politics’ target is the common. But it doesn’t open a normative discussion about the common, because no one supports a singular ideal. The common is the space in-between individuals. This space had to be ruled dealing with political differences. The only way to do that is opening public debates.

We have said that political parties are recognized as one of the main institutions of modern representative government. But people seem to claim for a different political grammar. Parties are perceived as the machinery in which the political class is organized, they boost and reproduce their self-interested action. According to the groups’ general discussions, the logic of parties would aim the reproduction of the political elite as a social group, so they are unable to perform its main task: the “solution of the country’s problems”. As a participant in the old men group stated, “they all look to their business, because we are governed by a party, but the one which will govern after can be much worse and much more thief (..) Neither right, nor left. They are all equal. They are all corrupt.”

The competition between parties does not make much sense in the public opinion. This competition is perceived as a competition of the ruling class, fighting for the public resources and customers. At the same time, this does not imply a desire to suppress political parties. In fact, in two groups we also found feelings of sympathy. These feelings were rooted in the idea that political parties could be oriented to the

community service. Juan, a leftist voter brought to the discussion that, “at the political level, at the local level, in unions, all of this, I think that there are people working and working very well, who see politics as a service to the public. They are a lot! But, unfortunately, the *Gürtel case* [a corruption case], or those cases of corruption in Andalusia, outweighs more in the public opinion.” From the right higher class, a participant let also some place for good politics when “as in the Transition, there was people who was seeking the common good.” In general, practical orientation towards the community is identified as a good political quality across the ideological spectrum.

The concern and critique around politics focused on the political elite and parties. When talking about politics, participants in focus groups mainly talked about these two elements. They articulate an identity based on “they” vs. “us”, politicians vs. “we”, the people, citizens, etc. The field politics is identified with the ruling class’ self-interest and self-interested action. In the Spanish case, the problem of apathy do not seem to be related to people’s lack of knowledge about the task of govern complex societies (Stoker XXXX). In our groups, participants do not find attach to current politics because it –in the form of the political class and political parties- do not meet popular expectations. The perception of disconnection, separation, superfluous alternation between parties, mediocrity, patronage & clientele... give us some evidence about how people perceive politics, as a sort of battle among political elites looking for their own sake at the expense of the community and the common good. As van Wessel finds in her research, people find politics disconnected from the “world of everyday life” (van Wessel XXXX). But, as well, do people understand politics as a way to make reality their ideals of social justice? Do people see politics as the space for collective action and the persecution of collective aims? To explore further this question we will address now how people see themselves and their neighbors as political actors.

### ***Thinking about “the equals”.***

The perception of the rest of society as a political actor is also negative. For example, Marta, a member of the university students group, argued that people were not prepared to decide directly in politics, because “in Spain we do not have a sense of organization, of respect, we do not listen. Do you know? In other countries... maybe they would better carry with it. But I think Spaniards have difficulties to reach agreements and respect each other.” The groups show deep doubts about the civic skills and competences of people. Beyond ideology and class identities, participants discussed how ordinary people were not competent enough to intervene in the political process. Thus, the transversal code in groups is that ordinary people, in the face of political participation, would be unable to work together for the common good and to reach political agreements at the expense of particularistic interests.

Many of the problems which targeted the political elite are also dumped on the society as a whole. The point is the lack of education, information and civic competence which Spanish people are supposed to show in the political arena. For the group of old

men, it seems clear that “*The people are not ready to make decisions*, no. Because there is not education and culture. And that's what happens to people. Now, you say, the youth are more educated, but this is not true. They have less decency too.” For younger people, the perception is similar, thus, “as people lacks knowledge, they [politicians] conceal relevant issues to us”. Even in the group of neighborhood activists which are the most political confident, they share the code of underestimation of people’s political skills and capabilities:

"P1: The strength *is the level of education*...

E: Is it a current strength or should be?

P1: *It should be. We must invest in education, because that gives you the ability to compare what you choose*, then, you have several cards and you choose from several options. But to choose ... you need the ability, you have to take risks.

E: That means... are people now educated enough to make good decisions?

P2: *I think they do.*

P3: *I think you are educated enough, we are. It is true that we can improve more. We do not have the same level as our representatives may have (...).* For me it is enough, when taking decisions ...

P4: Yes, but the level *of citizen competence, that is still very low. We are talking of civic competence ...*

Group 7, p. 18.

For most of groups there is still a lack of education and information so that people are able to make political decisions by themselves. For those from the left & engage side, which questioned the education argument, the problem is mainly of civic competence. Along the groups, the society is represented as incapable of reaching political agreements, pledged of conflict. As depicted in groups, “ideologies”, “particularistic and egoistic interests”, “particular identities” make the society a permanent fight which burdens political decision among people. This argument justifies the role of representation. This is the *neighbor’s council syndrome*<sup>5</sup>, as a metaphor of direct democracy in assemblies. For Mariano, a member of the high class group, “If you have the opportunity to go to a meeting of a neighbor’s community... People go there with two lawyers! And they just insult: it is a hot show. That's what would happen in this country if we all could have a say in politics.” As well, in the group of left voters Juana references the neighbors’ syndrome, “Look, we are already few and there are just two who speak more than others. I would invite you to a meeting of my neighbors’ community, which is amazing! Imagine with 100 people deciding. I think we need representatives, we must have some delegation.” The code is that the quarrelsome, egoistic and the low civic competence of people make them, somehow, not skilled enough as to have a central role in politics.

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<sup>5</sup> *Neighbors councils* are a typical Spanish form to manage horizontal property, this is, buildings with many flats. The building has, normally, a council a couple of times per year to decide about the needs and problems of the building and, specifically, the common parts of the building.

There is an underlying view that the society is partly responsible for the degradation of the political system. In public speech prevails the ultimate blaming of the entire society. While political parties and politicians were subject to the harshest criticism, there is ultimately a “self-incrimination”, a *socialization of political responsibility*: “it is the people who are ill and corrupt”, as Manolo said in the old men group gaining the assent of the rest. Therefore, in the popular mind, it circulates a *sense of collective guilt, the socialization of political responsibility*. It counteracts placating the criticism to the political class. Again as we see, legitimacy sometimes is got by default.

However, this public code has different expressions leading to practical conclusions. On the one hand, collective self-incrimination refers, sometimes, to the individual human nature, a *Hobbesian view of society* according to which the individual is just guided by her/his egoistic passions. The rephrase “In the end what corrupts all political systems are people, right? That is the problem in the end” (Group 2) is a constant. Or: “The problem is not the system but the people who form it” (Group 1). There is a *negative anthropological concept of the human (invariable) nature*. This leads to *political fatalism*, to disaffection to the political community at large. But, there is a second version of this socialization of guilt code which might be called the *pedagogical/ transformative approach*. It is based on the belief that society *can and must change mainly by education*. This anthropological optimism argues that the fundamental problem of the political system is a cultural issue embodied in a crisis of values, of civic competence. This crisis affects the values of community, solidarity, good neighborliness and collective action against injustice. For Carmela, in the left voters group, “I do not know we can distinguish the political system from the overall social system. The deactivation of participation, individualism and such, I think it is a consequence of the norms of society in general, of wild capitalism”. This community nostalgia is also evoked in the neighborhood activists groups when two people commented that, “Free man cannot live apart, they have to live together with the people, but that requires dedication and sacrifice”, “Yes, but the level of citizen competence, is still very low”. The “political crisis” would fit, therefore, into a wider crisis of values and civic practices in society. This reference appears clearly in leftist groups, which included people engaged in associative movements. Within this transformative approach, we found a public desire for setting up new institutions or a new political grammar, based in public dialogue, to foster citizen civic skills.

In the public discussion which emerges in our focus groups, we can identify a desire for enlarging the opportunities of popular participation. There is a general view that important decisions need some involvement of the society. Surprisingly, in the group of right voters a vibrant debate happened and Carmela explained “are we in a *real democracy* or a democracy where we vote ... chose only some representatives who govern us for four years following their ideals? Ideally, I would make constant plebiscites to come out the laws. For me, it would be the ideal government.” A peer in the group replied that “in the big issues, when reforming big laws... they should have

consulted the people”. For Pedro, a technical student, it was clear, “Relevant decisions? By urban referendum”; and Paco, fifty years older, proposed the same in the senior house, “Why don’t you ask the people? By referendums or in meetings...” Thus, open lists, changes in the electoral system, the bonding of representatives to the territory and population, limitation of terms, referenda on key issues, internal democracy in political parties, etc... These proposals showed a code-desire for greater popular control over the political processes and a desire for embedded types of political representation. Representation should be entrenched in the life experience of “ordinary people” (van Wessel 2010). At the same time, participatory budgeting, citizen assemblies and councils appear in the discussions as new forms of political participation. In the groups of Getafe and Córdoba, activists & left voter analyzed the ‘for and against’ of participatory budgeting. In the rest of groups, participants just imagine how it would be, paying more attention to aggregative participation (referenda, for example).

Notwithstanding, the public discussion around horizontal trust moves in the margins of a contradiction: a demand for greater participation of people in the political process (either through aggregative mechanisms as the referendum or in assemblies), and mistrust to society to make *good political decisions* (information and training) or *viable decisions* (disagreement, division, etc.). The inclination towards greater participation, taking different meanings according to the ideology of groups, is not a second best option against politicians and lobbyists, as it is argued in *Stealth Democracy* (2002). This participatory mild tendency fits into a political sketch which claims for more flat political processes, for a renewal of political arena, not only approaching political processes to people, but fostering a different political grammar based on public dialogue about political issues. This “democratic turn” is not antagonistic with political representation, but it imagines other scheme for representativeness.

## 5. Conclusions

Listening to lay people while talking politics is not an easy task, it obliges the researcher to pay attention and take seriously the typical topics which one can hear in the park bench. From the experience of our focus-groups it seems that people love talking politics, at least when they are given the opportunity. They take the group as a chance to have their say... and we talked a lot! For the researcher, it is an exercise of modesty and an extraordinary source to understand how politics work as they work. Public opinion, people’s beliefs, collective representations and codes also frame the institutional actions and decisions and, dialectically, it influences the public opinion. A distinct and no less interesting would be to analyze how this is formed and the field of powers in this critical social enterprise (Noelle-Newman 1974). For our purpose here was that of Colin Hay (2008), “to understand how citizens think about politics at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century”.

When asked how citizens saw the political system the first reaction is a negative statement expressing feelings of deception, reflections about a general political problem and, sometimes, very specific proposals of reforms as is they were the key to change

everything. Changing institutions and things is a general code shared even if you are in the conservative party. But, of course, this is a symptom of low vertical trust in institutions, focused mainly in politicians and political parties, as the visible face of the State, they are, let's say, the "public enemy", as the main object of critiques. Politics is understood as politicians working for the own self-interest and self-reproduction as social group. The arguments that participants bring with them to the focus-groups show a desire for flattering politics, for approaching them to the life of lay citizens. Though this enraged call for *institutional closeness* seems not contradictory with a claim for merit.

Politics is something which bring politicians into mind and which brings also too many negative feelings. Despite this, we cannot say that institutional disaffection is a cognitive problem (Stoker, 2006) since it evokes vibrant debates and it produces complex discussions about how institutions should be, how to communicate people and institutions, how far and close from citizens, and how decisions should be made. *Institutional disaffection* cannot be understood as a vacuum, mere detachment between people and political institutions, but as a vibrant debate in public opinion which, nevertheless, find its limit in *democratic references* (*political parties and neighbor's councils*) and the imagined *deterioration of society*.

The negative feelings towards politicians don't seem to unveil a preference for technocratic administrations or expert ruling, neither is an inclination for governments of the one. Democracy implies always, in citizen political imagination, plurality and popular sovereignty. The negative feelings come from a distrust founded in the way politics work. Citizens are frustrated by it. The problem, why they are frustrated, arises because it's not just due to political actors, but society: "it is not only politicians; it is the society as a whole". Disaffection problems open therefore a complex paradox.

Citizens can't rule because most people is not ready to do it. So, it's necessary representative procedures to elect people ready to do it. The argument here turns over, but if society fails (neighbor's council), we can't expect good politicians (political parties). The negative political system finally became a problem of individuals, who has not the ideal civic skills. It seems that participants in our groups do not only feel disempowered: they have assumed the classical justifications of this disempowerment, people is not educated, informed and civic enough.

The solution to this vicious circle will be based on two different tracks. First, meritocracy. Second, public deliberation. Contrary to hypothesis that link political disaffection to a confusion about what politics is (plurality, differences, conflict), our focus group build their political imagination around the complexity. Their inclination for meritocracy reveals the importance given to politics. It has to do with the common and it's not easy to deal with. While politicians today are dealing with their own interests, as a mirror of society, our participants imagine politicians educated, well informed and transparent.

Meritocracy will take political debate into the political system, discussion about the best way to solve a problem, the best way to deal with a political issue and differences. At the contrary, as if they were talking about their neighbors, citizens see current political debates as a joke. The political historic references are all built around the myth of deliberation, as democratic transition recently or old politicians in the Second Republic<sup>6</sup>. The public debate will bring common sense, decisions argued, far from particular interests. Because politics matters and it's complex, citizens think that they can't be left outside. The debate had to take place in political institutions (from political parties to parliament), but it shouldn't forgotten the state/society links. If people doesn't want to be involved in everyday politics, they support the idea of citizen debates about key political issues. The idea of referendum about important issues is widely shared, while specific participatory procedures as participatory budgeting, participatory councils, etc, are shared by left wing groups.

Deliberations in focus-groups are not intended to make a decision, so contradictions and tensions in the deep beliefs of people emerge and they are not necessarily solved. Actually, they do not usually have an easy solution but indicate trends, hegemonic and counter-hegemonic ideas. For the case of disaffection to politics, the apparent clash among the desire for more participation and closeness in political institutions with the horizontal distrust is illustrative. This collision shows *disaffection as an umbrella for frustrated desires on how institutions and political actor should be*. *Disaffection* hides a frustration regarding how the political order must be, but also who must put it in practice, which the political subject is. That is why we often listened at our focus groups that she/he was not disenchanted to politics, but to politicians. Citizens still had a bit of faith regarding the capabilities of people as a political actor. Grammars for talking politics include a negative frame open to express complaints but also reform proposals, so disaffection is not irrational feelings but strategic political position. However, this controversial space which is politics, find strong walls in the individualization of issues and the socialization of civic deterioration. Horizontal trust is central to understand not only the contents of institutional disaffection, but the limits of political imagination.

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<sup>6</sup> The political activist focus groups (right and left voters), surveyed the same week in april of 2011, mentioned the attitude and deliberative profile of politicians in the Second Republic, regarding the same tv serie played at the moment. That week, the tv serie chapter was about Clara Campoamor, a politicians who fighted for women's right to vote. She got to introduce the issue in Parlament and she saw the law approved.

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