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The political-psychological foundations of support for the regime and its institutions

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Preface

This thesis challenges a prominent proposition about political support for democracy. Earlier research contends that specific support for incumbent authorities fluctuates with the performance of the political system, whereas diffuse support for democracy is acquired through socialization and remains stable thereafter. Adding to recent evidence that strives to overcome this clear-cut distinction, this dissertation demonstrates that the proposition should be regarded as a matter of degree rather than principle. It presents evidence for both stability and short-term fluctuations by examining the political-psychological foundations of support for the regime and its institutions. The four articles offer three key contributions to the field. First, support for democracy rests on deep-rooted big five personality traits and the conception of national identity. This provides a previously neglected explanation for why diffuse regime preferences are more stable than specific support and shows that they are not only acquired through socialization. Second, emotions and national identity determine whether external shocks strengthen or weaken democratic regime preferences. As a result, diffuse support for democracy, despite its stability, simultaneously fluctuates with individual experiences of crises. Third, emotions and cognitive processes shape how changes in representation affect performance evaluations and trust towards the political regime and its institutions. For the first time, this is demonstrated with long-term panel data exploring the temporal dynamics of this relationship. In sum, this dissertation advances our current understanding of political support by identifying the political-psychological foundations – personality, social identity, emotions and cognitive processes – at its core.

This cumulative dissertation examines the political-psychological foundations of support for the regime and its institutions. It consists of four articles: two of them have already been published in scientific journals, two are accepted for publication and currently processed for publishing. All articles have fully completed a double-blind peer review process. The statistical analyses were conducted using STATA. Data and replication files either can be accessed at the respective journal homepages or, in the case of unpublished manuscripts, are available upon request.

Article 1: Erhardt, Julian (2023): The democratic personality? The big five, authoritarianism and regime preference in consolidated democracies, Online First. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1177/02633957231172056
SSCI 5-Year Impact Factor (2021): 2.010; number of reviewers: 2

Article 2: Erhardt, Julian/Wamsler, Steffen/Freitag, Markus (2021): National identity between democracy and autocracy: a comparative analysis of 24 countries, European Political Science Review, 13:1, 59–76. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773920000351
SSCI 5-Year Impact Factor (2021): 3.683; number of reviewers: 3

Article 3: Erhardt, Julian/Freitag, Markus/Filsinger, Maximilian (2022): Leaving democracy? Pandemic threat, emotional accounts and regime support in comparative perspective, West European Politics, 46:3, 477–499. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2022.2097409
SSCI 5-Year Impact Factor (2021): 4.271; number of reviewers: 2

Article 4: Erhardt, Julian (2023): Political support through representation by the government. Evidence from Dutch panel data, Swiss Political Science Review, 29:2, 202–222. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12561
SSCI 5-Year Impact Factor (2021): 3.299; number of reviewers: 3

In addition to the articles in this dissertation, I published several related articles together with my colleagues over the past years. These works are cited several times in this dissertation.

Erhardt, Julian/Freitag, Markus/Filsinger, Maximilian/Wamsler, Steffen (2021): The Emotional Foundations of Political Support: How Fear and Anger Affect Trust in the Government in Times of the Covid-19 Pandemic, Swiss Political Science Review, 27:2, 339–352. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/spsr.12462

Erhardt, Julian/Freitag, Markus/Wamsler, Steffen/Filsinger, Maximilian (2022): What drives political support? Evidence from a survey experiment at the onset of the corona crisis, Contemporary Politics, 28:4, 429–446. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1080/13569775.2021.2010345

Filsinger, Maximilian/Freitag, Markus/Erhardt, Julian/Wamsler, Steffen (2021): Rally around your fellows: Information and social trust in a real-world experiment during the corona crisis, The Social Science Journal, Online First, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1080/03623319.2021.1954463

Wamsler, Steffen/Freitag, Markus/Erhardt, Julian/Filsinger, Maximilian (2022): The pandemic and the question of national belonging: Exposure to covid-19 threat and conceptions of nationhood, European Journal of Political Research, Online First, 1–20. DOI: https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12515

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"What about side by side with a friend?" – Legolas

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1. Introduction

> *"[W]hile performance should clearly affect specific support, directed to 'the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style of . . . authorities' (Easton 1975: 437), diffuse support, 'representing as it does attachment to political objects [such as regimes] for their own sake, will not be easily dislodged because of current dissatisfaction with what the government does' (Easton 1975: 445)." (Magalhães 2014: 77–78)*

Ever since Easton's (1953, 1965) political systems theory, support for the political system, its community, regime and authorities is regarded as vital for the persistence of the political system and its components. As Miller (1974: 951) put it, "[a] democratic political system cannot survive for long without the support of a majority of its citizens". Particularly support for democracy constitutes a key criterion for the consolidation and survival of democracies (Lipset 1959, Diamond 1999, Claassen 2020a) and ensures that democracy remains "the only game in town" (Linz/Stepan 1996a: 5). In light of ongoing developments towards democratic deconsolidation and autocratization, in particular in the form of executive aggrandizement (Bermeo 2016, Waldner/Lust 2018, Levitsky/Ziblatt 2019, Lührmann et al. 2020), a persistently high level of public support for liberal democracy becomes even more important. Although support for democracy remains fairly high in advanced democracies (van der Meer 2017), it is nevertheless worrying that some studies find a decline among a relevant part of society that is susceptible to authoritarian alternatives (Foa/Mounk 2016, 2017, Claassen 2020a, Malka et al. 2022, Wuttke et al. 2022, Svolik et al. 2023). In addition, there is an ongoing debate in the literature over the long-term decline of trust in political institutions in advanced democracies over the last decades (Norris 1999a, 2011, van der Meer 2017). Whereas earlier research worries that a long-term experience of dissatisfaction with democratic practice and institutions may gradually erode democratic values (Easton 1975) and constitutes a sign of a "crisis of democracy" (Crozier et al. 1975), newer research is more ambivalent arguing that, despite some detrimental consequences, "critical citizens" may also fuel pressure for democratic reforms (Norris 1999a, 2011, Qi/Shin 2011). Nevertheless, as populism and polarization grows more widespread (Norris/Inglehart 2019, Svolik 2019), political discontent may also channel in support for illiberal forms of democracy, which present a threat to representative democracy (Rooduijn 2018, Geurkink et al. 2020). Overall, it is thus imperative to better understand the factors that shape the formation of and changes in political support.

So why do citizens of democracies support or oppose the political regime? Under which circumstances are they satisfied with the state of democracy and its institutions in practice? An extensive literature on political support addresses these questions. It points to a variety of factors that are associated with political support such as personal predispositions, institutions, developments in society, performance of the political system or crises (for an overview, see Zmerli/van der Meer 2017, Uslaner 2018). A long-standing hypothesis in the literature on political support draws on the distinction between diffuse and specific support in the seminal works of Easton (1965, 1975). Diffuse support for the democratic regime – i.e., the general attachment to democracy as an ideal and principle vis-à-vis autocratic alternatives (Magalhães 2014) – is regarded as a "stable cognitive value" (Huang et al. 2008: 56) or "a principled affair" (Mattes/Bratton 2007: 201). As a result, it is assumed to originate primarily through socialization in a democratic regime (Dalton 1994, Sack 2017), in economic security, which lays the foundation for self-expression values (Inglehart 2003), and in a society rich in social capital, where civic organizations form schools of democracy (Putnam 1993). In contrast, the more fluctuating specific support for incumbent political authorities is believed to reflect the output and performance (economic or otherwise) of a political system and is influenced by current crises. These short-term performance factors and crises, however, should not impact diffuse support for democracy according to most earlier works on this issue. At most, performance was assumed to affect the "middle-range" (Zmerli et al. 2007: 41) evaluative support for the regime and its institutions in the form of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy or trust in political institutions (e.g., Kumlin 2004, Armingeon/Guthmann 2014, Ellinas/Lamprianou 2014, Torcal 2014, Kroknes et al. 2015, de Juan/Pierskalla 2016, van Erkel/van der Meer 2016, van der Meer 2018, Claassen/Magalhães 2022). This clear-cut distinction, however, has recently come under scrutiny. In particular, newer research finds that short-term regime performance and crises, such as government effectiveness (Magalhães 2014, although this finding is not uncontested, see, e.g., Claassen/Magalhães 2022), the state of the economy (Kotzian 2011, Teixeira et al. 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016) or the Covid-19 pandemic (Amat et al. 2020, Gidengil et al. 2022) can influence diffuse support for democracy as well.

This begs the question: Should support for the regime and its institutions be regarded as stable or does it fluctuate with short-term regime performance and crises? The four articles of this dissertation all address this debate by examining the political-psychological foundations of support for the regime and its institutions in advanced democracies. A key tenet of political psychology is that political attitudes and behaviors are driven by internal psychological processes and their interaction with the environment (Cottam et al. 2010: 7). The articles of this dissertation address both these aspects – the more stable, deeply held internal psychological factors of personality traits and group identities, as well as the more immediate interaction of psychological processes with the environment in the form of emotions and cognitive processing of information. They contribute to the aforementioned debate in three key ways.

First, they address the notion of diffuse support for democracy as a relatively "stable cognitive value" (Huang et al. 2008: 56). Literature has traditionally explained this stability by arguing that regime preferences have their roots in socialization processes (Easton 1965, Dalton 1994). The first two articles of this dissertation go beyond this traditional explanation of macro-level societal trends and argue that the stability of diffuse support for democracy also reflects stable psychological characteristics of individuals. In this regard, article 1 titled "*The democratic personality? The big five, authoritarianism and regime preference in consolidated democracies*" looks at big five personality traits as "relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (McCrae/Costa 2008: 160). It presents robust evidence that individuals with higher openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness display more democratic regime preference (Erhardt 2023b). Article 2 titled "*National identity between democracy and autocracy: a comparative analysis of 24 countries*" regards support for democracy as rooted in an individual's identity, i.e., "a deeply held sense of who a person is" (Cottam et al. 2010: 7). It finds that different conceptions of national identity based on criteria of belongingness display opposite relationships with support for democracy. A civic national identity revolving around a common language and political culture strengthens democratic regime preferences, while an ethnic national identity based on ancestry and birth is adverse to support for democracy (Erhardt et al. 2021b). In general, these two articles thus highlight the merit of characterizing regime support as a somewhat stable attitude, given that it is substantially influenced by the personality, identity and socialization of an individual.

Second, the articles of this dissertation advance the discussion of whether even relatively stable diffuse support for democracy can be affected by short-term performance factors and crises. Articles 2 and 3 of this dissertation provide new evidence that this is indeed the case, both for the state of the economy as well as the Covid-19 pandemic. Instead of a uniform relationship, however, they highlight that the influence of the economy and the Covid-19 pandemic on support for democracy differs between individuals depending on their identity and emotional reactions. In this regard, article 2 shows that the relationship between an individual's national identity and their support for democracy is moderated by economic hardship: an adverse economic situation, both at the individual and societal level, increases the negative relationship of an ethnic national identity, but also reinforces the positive relationship of a civic national identity with democratic regime support, although the latter finding is less consistent (Erhardt et al. 2021b). Article 3 titled "*Leaving democracy? Pandemic threat, emotional accounts and regime support in comparative perspective*" examines how emotions evoked by the Covid-19 pandemic threat relate to support for democracy. Drawing on the affective intelligence theory (AIT) of emotions (Marcus/MacKuen 1993, Marcus et al. 2000, Vasilopoulos et al. 2019), it finds divergent results for anger and fear, the two key negative emotions during crises. Whereas those experiencing anger when confronted with pandemic threat are more inclined to turn to autocratic alternatives to democracy, fear is associated with a modest increase in diffuse support for democracy (Erhardt et al. 2022a). Overall, then, these two articles demonstrate that diffuse support for democracy should not be conceived as entirely stable, since it can fluctuate to some extent with current events such as the state of the economy, crises or government performance.

Whereas the first three articles examine diffuse support for democracy as the dependent variable, the final article turns to the explanation of a more evaluative support for the regime and its institutions and looks at satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, external political efficacy and trust in political institutions. It touches the discussion of whether the performance of a political system in the form of satisfying citizens' demands has an effect that goes beyond the most specific support for political authorities themselves or not. In particular, previous literature has shown that those who perceive that their demands are not satisfied due to either losing an election or a lack of substantive representation (i.e., a higher ideological distance to the government and its policies) may turn more critical towards the performance of democratic processes and reduce their confidence in democratic institutions (Anderson et al. 2005, Marien 2011b, Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016, Mayne/Hakhverdian 2017). Article 4 titled "*Political support through representation by the government. Evidence from Dutch panel data*" integrates these studies on the winners-losers gap and the individual distance to the government under the common framework of representation by the government. It shows that the utilitarian, cognitive psychological and emotional explanations for the relationship can be applied to both literatures. Using panel data spanning over several electoral cycles in a least-likely case, it presents more methodologically rigorous evidence than extant research that representation by the government relates to increased support for the political system, in particular trust in political institutions. Additional analyses reveal new information on the temporal dynamic of this relationship: it unfolds rapidly upon changes in representation, dwindles slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (or out of) office, but reinforces once more when (non-)representation persists for a longer period (Erhardt 2023a). To conclude, this final article highlights that evaluative support for the political regime and its institutions as a mid-range indicator is robustly and enduringly affected by whether citizens perceive that the political system performs well with regard to satisfying their ideological demands.

The remainder of the introduction to this dissertation is structured as follows: First, I present a detailed conceptualization of political support building on the seminal works of Easton (1965, 1975) and later refinements by Norris (1999b, 2011, 2017) and Dalton (1999). Second, I summarize the literature on support for the regime and its institutions, showing its key determinants. Third, I present the framework for a political-psychological explanation of support for the regime and its institutions. Finally, a brief overview over the four articles that comprise this dissertation is given.

The concept of political support

A wide range of concepts fall under the umbrella of political support. This includes such diverse terms as system support (e.g., Sears et al. 1978), regime support (e.g., Rose/Mishler 2002), political trust (e.g., Zmerli/van der Meer 2017), external political efficacy (Campbell et al. 1954) or political cynicism (e.g., Pattyn et al. 2012). It is thus essential to first define the concept of "political support" and clearly delineate what it does and does not entail. In this regard, current research draws heavily on the seminal works of Easton (1965, 1975) and further developments by Dalton (1999) and Norris (1999b, 2011, 2017).

Support can be described as "an attitude by which a person orients [themselves] to an object either favorably or unfavorably, positively or negatively" (Easton 1975: 436). Attitudes are "an enduring system of positive or negative beliefs […], affective feelings and emotions, and action tendencies regarding attitude objects, that is, the entity being evaluated" (Cottam et al. 2010: 59). The object or target of this kind of support is the political system of a state and its various components.[1] This includes a) the community on which the political system is founded, i.e., belonging to a nation-state; b) the regime, its core principles, norms, political institutions and agencies encompassing the legislative, executive and judicial branches of government; and c) the political authorities, incumbent office-holders including the government and its members, individual legislators, parties and their leaders (Easton 1965, Norris 2017).[2] The attitudes towards the components of the political system can range from full support over some form of healthy skepticism to outright rejection. Depending on the target, this support can also take the form of pride, legitimacy beliefs, confidence, trust or, in the negative sense, cynicism. While support can also manifest in the behavior of citizens (protests against the regime, showing support for authorities through voting, active participation in parties, etc.), behavior is driven by a multitude of motivations that go beyond the underlying psychological orientations. Behavior displaying political support is thus rather viewed as a consequence of political support (as an attitude) than a manifestation thereof (Norris 2017: 20). To conclude, political support can thus be defined *a set of attitudes by which a person orients themselves either positively or negatively towards their political system and its components – the political community, the regime and its institutions as well as the political authorities in office.* Put simply, political support amounts to *positive* "*orientations towards the nation-state, its agencies, and actors*" (Norris 2017: 19; italicization added).

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[1] Support can also target political systems outside of states, such as international actors. In this vein, literature has also examined different kinds of support for the European Union and has adapted a similar framework (Boomgaarden et al. 2011, Hobolt/De Vries 2016, Weßels 2007). The focus of this dissertation, however, is on support for the political system of states, which is why I will restrict the conceptualization and the literature review to this level.

[2] Albeit occasionally also referred to as 'political support' (e.g., Boeri/Tabellini 2012), what is usually outside the scope of political support is the policy dimension, i.e., support for different types of policies that may or may not be enacted by the political system (Easton 1965).

A key distinction in the literature on political support is between *diffuse* and *specific* forms of political support. Following Easton (1965, 1975), specific support is "a quid pro quo for the fulfillment of demands" (Easton 1965: 268). If members of a political community perceive that the political system meets their (policy and other) demands and evaluate its performance positively, they reward the political authorities with favorable attitudes. This kind of specific support is considered to be more temporary and fluctuating. In contrast, diffuse support is "more fundamental in character" (Easton 1975: 437) and can be considered as a general attachment to the political community and the regime as a whole. It is more durable and unconditional in the sense that it arises from socialization and long-term experiences. Despite the far-reaching influence of this original distinction between diffuse and specific support, it can be criticized for combining slightly different interpretations of what diffuse and specific support entails as well as incorporating explanations for the development of political support into its conceptualization. In particular this clear-cut dichotomization of specific support being based on performance evaluations, while diffuse support stems from socialization has been called into question by newer literature, including parts of this dissertation (Magalhães 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016, Erhardt et al. 2021b, Erhardt et al. 2022a).

Norris (1999b, 2011, 2017) avoids these difficulties by narrowing the conceptualization of diffuse and specific political support down to the object of political support, i.e., the various concentric components of the political system. In this regard, she builds onto the three-fold categorization of Easton (1965) between the community, the regime and the authorities, but further differentiates between different aspects within the regime. Altogether, she distinguishes between five different components that align on a continuum ranging from the most diffuse to the most specific support. These include a) support for the political community, also referred to as national identity, at the diffuse end of the spectrum, b) support for core regime principles and normative values, c) satisfaction with the performance of the regime, d) support of and confidence in the institutions of a regime and, finally, e) approval of particular incumbent political actors at the specific end of the continuum. In a similar fashion, Dalton (1999) also distinguishes between these five components, with the minor difference that he more broadly refers to political processes of the regime instead of regime performance as the third category. Additionally, Dalton adds a second dimension distinguishing between diffuse and specific support within each component. For all different targets of political support, one can distinguish between diffuse support as an affective orientation and specific support as an instrumental evaluation. This distinction does not refer to how support is explained but rather to the nature of support. Diffuse support in this sense is a principled and general affective attachment to the object of political support as well as the endorsement of its values and what it stands for. Specific support, in contrast, is an evaluation of the current state of the different components of a political system and how they function or act in practice.[3]

Despite their improvements on Easton's conceptualization of diffuse and specific support, these two approaches also suffer from some difficulties. First, Norris (1999b) does not include the distinction between affective and evaluative support, which ignores the possibility of evaluative support for the community as well as affective support for institutions and particular authorities. Second, she regards regime principles and regime performance as different objects of support. In my view, a more plausible interpretation would be that both refer to the same object (the regime), but, following Dalton, the former is an affective orientation towards the regime and the endorsement of its core principles, while the latter is an evaluation of the current state of the regime in practice. Third, a similar difficulty arises with the levels of analysis in Dalton's (1999) categorization. Dalton distinguishes between regime principles, regime processes and regime institutions. What constitutes these regime processes, however, is not properly defined and has overlaps both with the regime principles and institutions. In particular, the examples that Dalton presents as affective support for regime performance – participatory norms and political rights – rather refer to core regime norms and principles, i.e., an affective endorsement of regime values. In addition, Dalton regards the question whether democracy is the best form of government as an evaluation of regime principles. However, this indicator is rather a measure of explicit democratic support (Magalhães 2014) than an evaluation of the current state of democracy. Although this measure has been criticized as being a mere lip service due to different understandings of what democracy entails (Inglehart 2003, Bryan 2023), it should rather be regarded as an affective attachment to democracy. As a result, it again makes sense to simply distinguish between affective orientations to the regime (regime principles) and evaluations of the regime in practice (regime processes). Fourth, the two-dimensional conceptualization of diffuse vs. specific political support by Dalton (1999) makes it difficult to determine how the various categories arrange themselves on a one-dimensional continuum from the most diffuse to the most specific form of political support.

In order to overcome these difficulties, an alternative perspective could be to regard these two dimensions – i.e., the object and the nature of political support – as two nested differentiations of the spectrum from diffuse to specific political support. In this sense, diffuse political support refers to broader, more general and abstract aspects of a political system, while specific political support refers to narrower, more particular and concrete aspects of a political system. Diffuse support is more systemic, while specific support is typically restricted to limited parts of the system.

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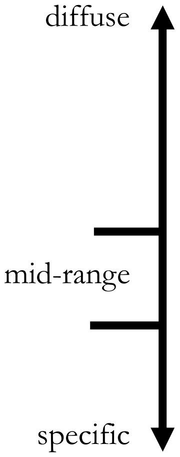
[3] The distinction between affective and evaluative support is, of course, not always entirely clear-cut. Evaluative support for the different objects is generally not only based on their current state in practice, but also reflects a certain degree of principled attachments.

The first differentiation distinguishes broadly between the three object categories of political support as introduced by Easton (1965), the community, the regime and its institutions as well as the authorities. Within these three object categories, a second differentiation can be made via the nature of political support as either more affective or more evaluative. The resulting spectrum of diffuse versus specific political support can be seen in Figure 1 below.

Figure 1: The spectrum of diffuse versus specific political support



Object	**Nature**	**Examples**
community	affective	national pride, attachment
	evaluative	constructive patriotism
regime & institutions	affective	support for democracy, support for institutional arrangements
	evaluative	satisfaction with functioning of democracy, external political efficacy, political trust
authorities	affective	party identification
	evaluative	popularity of government, parties, politicians

Before I address the various facets of political support in more detail, two aspects have to be discussed shortly. First, the regime and its institutions have been combined into a single category as originally proposed by Easton (1965). The logic behind this is that it is frequently difficult to draw the line between the regime itself and its institutions. Principled, affective support for particular institutional arrangements often also reflect support for a regime type or sub-type. Furthermore, although evaluative support for the regime in the form of satisfaction with the function of democracy can be considered more diffuse and is also more stable than political trust (van der Meer 2017), it also substantially relates to such an evaluative support for regime institutions (see, e.g., Anderson et al. 2005, Zmerli/Newton 2008, Armingeon/Guthmann 2014, Dahlberg/Linde 2018). As a result, affective support for institutions should be regarded as more diffuse than evaluative support for the regime. Nevertheless, within the categories of affective or evaluative support for the regime and its institutions, one can further differentiate some forms of support that more strongly refer to the regime and others that are more confined to particular institutions.

Second, although political support can be considered as a spectrum from diffuse to specific support (Norris 2017), most concepts frequently discussed under this umbrella term still neatly fall into one or the other category. Support for the political community and affective support for the regime and its institutions are generally regarded as diffuse, while support for particular political authorities is understood as a specific form of political support (Easton 1965, Norris 2017). In contrast, the nature of a more evaluative form of support for the political regime and its institutions, such as satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy or political trust, is more contested (Canache et al. 2001). Some authors go so far as to conflating it with democratic legitimacy (Miller 1974, Fuchs et al. 1995), but this interpretation has been refuted (Thomassen et al. 2017). When contrasting it with principled support for democracy, this more evaluative form of support is frequently regarded as specific (Feldman 1983, Linde/Ekman 2003, Magalhães 2014). Norris (2017: 30) even calls political trust "the most specific expression of political support". When juxtaposed with the support of particular incumbent authorities, however, satisfaction with democracy and political trust is usually considered to be rather diffuse (Easton 1975, Anderson/Guillory 1997, Anderson et al. 2005). Ultimately, both views have their justification – it depends on the research focus. Neither satisfaction with democracy nor political trust is fully specific or diffuse. They go beyond particular authorities and target the functioning of political processes and institutions in general. At the same time, they rather look at how the regime and its institutions work in practice instead of focusing on abstract principles. Newer research highlights that political trust is both "stable in the long-term, with potential for short-term volatility […] and for substantial changes" in adolescence (Devine/Valgarðsson 2022: 1). As a result, it can be regarded as "a middle-range indicator of support" (Zmerli et al. 2007: 41, see also Armingeon/Guthmann 2014).

With regards to the different object categories, the political community is at the diffuse end of the spectrum. The political community refers to "a group of persons who share a division of labor for the settlement of political problems" (Easton 1965: 325). This support represents feelings of belonging to a common state and draws heavily on the notion of a national identity, which can be understood as "the intensity of feelings and closeness toward one's own nation" (Davidov 2009: 65). A generalized national pride or attachment to the nation-state constitutes an affective, principled support for the political community, while constructive patriotism, where support for the nation may be withdrawn if its practices contradict fundamental values (Schatz et al. 1999), can be considered an evaluative form of support for the political community.[4] It has to be noted that the literature on national identity only loosely relates to the literature on political support and generally does not refer to this concept. To some extent, there are also some difficulties in equating national identity with support for the political community. In particular, national pride may not necessarily indicate support for the political community of the state in the case of multinational states such as the United Kingdom or Switzerland. In addition, the notions of national pride and national identity also go beyond simple support and incorporate identification with and a sense of esteem for one's nation (Smith/Kim 2006).

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[4] Whether constructive patriotism truly refers to the political community can be called into question, however. While it asks how proud respondents are in their country, constructive patriotism makes this pride contingent on the functioning of the regime, such as the way democracy works, the social security system as well as the fair and equal treatment of all groups in society. As a result, it could also be regarded as an evaluative support of the regime and its institutions.

Support for incumbent authorities represents the specific end of the political support spectrum. This form of support looks at specific individuals or specific political agents or actors that consist of a group of individuals acting collectively. The key targets of this form of political support are incumbent office holders and their challengers. Importantly, support for incumbent authorities does not encompass support for politicians as a class of political elites or support for political parties in general, but narrowly focuses on specific actors, i.e., individual parties, politicians or other actors. It includes attitudes towards the incumbent government in office and its members, particular parties and their leaders, incumbent legislators, their challengers and other public officials. Identification with a particular party can be regarded as a more affective type of support, while the popularity of the government as well as individual parties and politicians reflects a more evaluative support for authorities in office.

In between, support for the regime and its institutions lies at the core of political support. Given that it is the focus of this dissertation, I will present the individual aspects in greater detail. The most diffuse form of support for this object is the principled support for democracy – also referred to as (democratic) regime support (Mishler/Rose 2002, Rose/Mishler 2002) or democratic legitimacy (Chu et al. 2008, Huang et al. 2008) –, i.e., the preference for a democratic regime vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives. It can be regarded as a general, unconditional attachment to democracy as an ideal or principle and as the most ideal form of government (Linde/Ekman 2003, Magalhães 2014). Most commonly, diffuse support for democracy is operationalized via the democracy-autocracy-preference (DAP) scale asking respondents whether they regard certain political systems as good or bad ways of governing their country: a) a democratic political system, b) a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections, c) having the army rule the country and d) having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country (Inglehart/Welzel 2005, Ariely/Davidov 2011).[5] An alternative measure asks whether respondents agree with the statements a) democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government, b) under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one and c) for people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime (Mattes/Bratton 2007, Chu et al. 2008, ABS 2016).

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[5] Some literature argues that item a) may rather refer to a more explicit form of supporting democracy than a trade-off with autocratic forms of government and have thus excluded this item (Ariely/Davidov 2011, Magalhães 2014). Article 2 in this dissertation instead excludes item d) following earlier arguments that expert government may not necessarily be anti-democratic but occasionally occur in democracies (Ackermann et al. 2019, McDonnell/Valbruzzi 2014).

Further affective support for the regime and its institutions can be targeted at sub-types of the regime and particular institutional configurations. This may address different types of democracy or government – e.g., majority vs. consensus democracy (Lijphart 2012, Ferrín/Hernández 2021), presidential vs. parliamentary systems (Shugart/Carey 1992), representative vs. direct vs. stealth democracy (Hibbing/Theiss-Morse 2002, Donovan/Karp 2006, Coffé/Michels 2014, Ackermann et al. 2019) or other models of democracy (König et al. 2022) – or particular institutions – e.g., the electoral system (Plescia et al. 2020, Arnesen et al. 2021) or federalism (Reeves 1987, Petersen et al. 2008) –, but literature on this topic is comparatively scarce and still in its infancy.

When it comes to more evaluative support for the regime and its institutions, satisfaction with democracy addresses the performance of the regime and democratic processes in the broadest sense. Originally, satisfaction with democracy was erroneously treated as synonymous with principled support for democracy (Fuchs et al. 1995, Diamond 1999), but newer literature criticizes this interpretation and instead regards it as a specific form of support for democracy (Lagos 2003, Linde/Ekman 2003, Magalhães 2014, Norris 2017). It is frequently measured via the question whether respondents are satisfied with the way democracy works or the political system functions in their country (Linde/Ekman 2003, EVS 2020).

Another concept that captures an evaluative support for the regime and its institutions is external political efficacy, i.e., the belief that "individual political action does have, or can have, an impact upon the political process" (Campbell et al. 1954: 187) and politics is responsive to the demands of citizens (Converse 1972). It thus reflects a particular form of satisfaction with the functioning of democratic processes and confidence in political elites to act in the interest of the general public. The precise target of this belief is rather vague and addresses politics in general, politicians as a class of political elites, political parties in general or the government. It is measured as the agreement with different statements, such as a) politicians are not interested in what people like me think, b) political parties are only interested in my vote, not in my opinion, c) people like me don't have any say about what the government does and d) the average citizen has considerable influence on politics (Craig/Maggiotto 1982, Craig et al. 1990, ANES 2021, CentERdata 2021).

The most prominent measure of evaluative support for regime institutions is political trust (Levi/Stoker 2000, Zmerli/Hooghe 2011, van der Meer 2017, Zmerli/van der Meer 2017, Citrin/Stoker 2018, Uslaner 2018). Political trust is relational and domain- or situation-specific. It principally concerns expectations about how a trustee behaves in a situation of uncertainty: When citizens trust an institution, they believe that they can expect it to act in their interests with competence and care, that the institution can be held accountable and that its behavior is predictable

(Hardin 1999, van der Meer 2017, van der Meer/Zmerli 2017, Bauer/Freitag 2018, Citrin/Stoker 2018). The opposite of such trust is not always clearly defined. In the extreme, it can consist of a marked distrust and an attitude of cynicism towards political institutions, which assumes the worst of its nature. However, it can also take more moderate forms, such as the simple absence of trust or adopting a more skeptical stance and withholding judgment (van der Meer 2017, van der Meer/Zmerli 2017). Political trust can be targeted at a diverse set of institutions involved in the policy-making process, ranging from the parliament, political elites and parties in general to the government. Particularly trust in the government, however, overlaps with a more specific support for incumbent authorities (Citrin 1974, Feldman 1983). Nevertheless, given the high internal consistency and correlation between trust in these institutions, they are frequently regarded as reflecting a single factor (Hooghe 2011, Marien 2011a, Newton/Zmerli 2011). Further institutions that go beyond the core institutions of the political process include the legal system, police and international political actors. Traditionally, political trust has been measured through a series of questions asking respondents whether a) they think they can trust the government to do what is right, b) people in government waste a lot of money, c) government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or for the benefit of all the people, d) quite a few of the people running the government are crooked and e) people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing (Miller 1974, ANES 2021). In international surveys, however, the direct question how much respondents trust or have confidence in a set of institutions is more common (Zmerli/Newton 2008, Citrin/Stoker 2018, EVS 2020).

A few other concepts are also occasionally discussed in this context. This first concerns political cynicism (Agger et al. 1961, Adriaansen et al. 2010, Dancey 2012, Pattyn et al. 2012, Aichholzer/Kritzinger 2016), i.e., “the extent to which people hold politicians and politics in disrepute” (Agger et al. 1961: 477). However, conceptually, this concept can be regarded as an opposite pole to political trust and its measurement frequently overlaps with items for political trust and external political efficacy. Second, political alienation – an “attitude of separation or estrangement between the self and the polity” (Schwartz 1973: 7–8, see also Finifter 1970, Fox 2021) – and disenchantment with politics – “negative attitudes towards political objects” (Arzheimer 2002: 24) – are also closely related to political trust and external political efficacy and can be regarded as different umbrella terms that comprise in particular more evaluative forms of support for the political system and its institutions. Third, populist attitudes adhere to “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ versus ‘the corrupt elite’, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people” (Mudde 2004: 543, see also Akkerman et al. 2014, Rovira Kaltwasser et al.

2017, Mudde/Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). While the anti-elitism of populist attitudes has some overlaps with both political trust and external efficacy, it also incorporates a people-centrism and a Manichean outlook on society that go beyond these concepts (Geurkink et al. 2020).

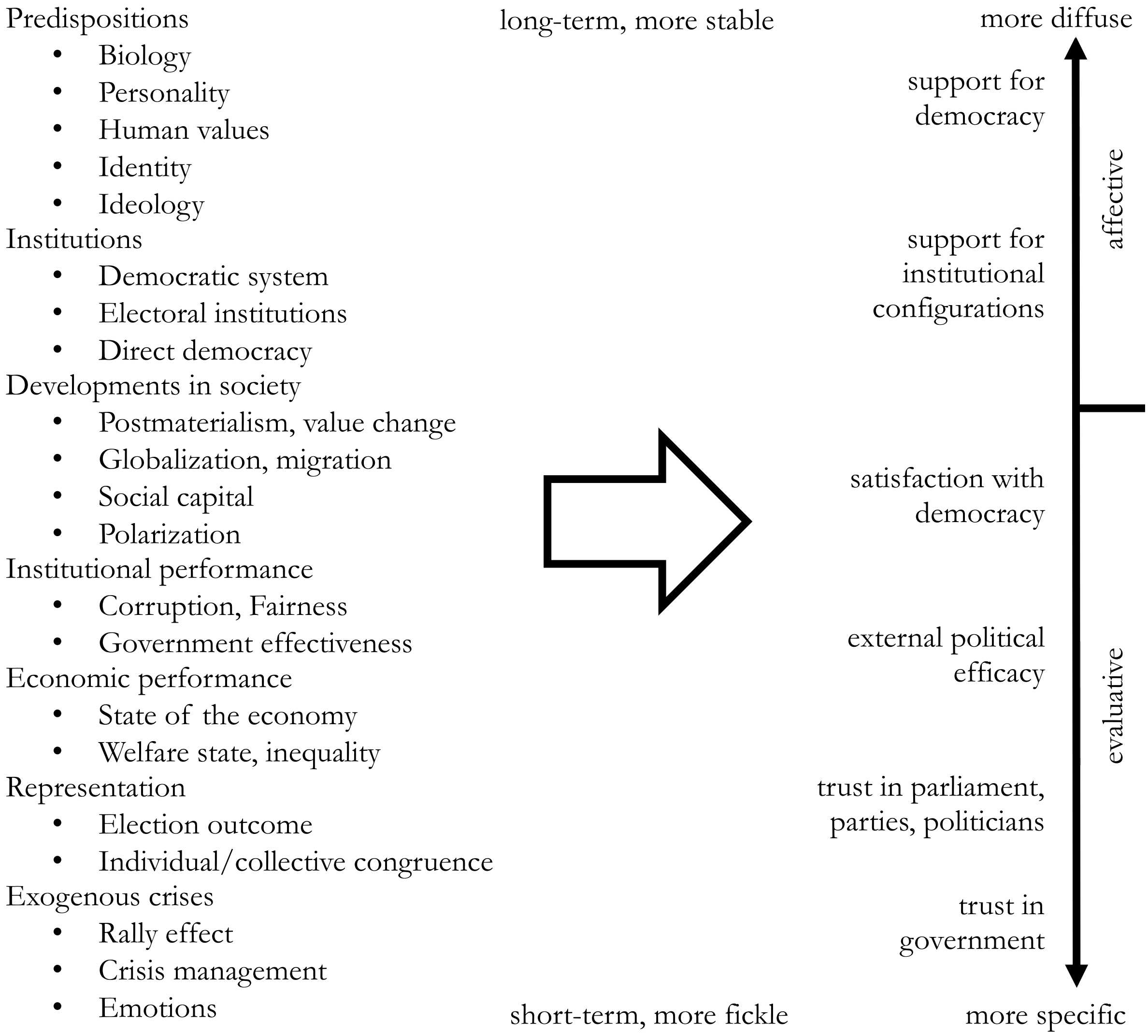
The four articles in this dissertation all focus on support for the regime and its institutions as their dependent variable. Whereas the first three articles examine the antecedents of a diffuse, principled support for democracy (Erhardt et al. 2021b, Erhardt et al. 2022a, Erhardt 2023b), the final article turns to the explanation of satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and trust in political institutions (Erhardt 2023a). In addition, two of the articles also loosely relate to political support in their predictors and thus gauge interrelationships between political support for different objects to some degree. First, article 2 looks at the relationship between a civic or ethnic national identity and diffuse support for democracy (Erhardt et al. 2021b). Civic and ethnic national identities can be regarded as principled support for different conceptions of who should belong to the political community. In this regard, a civic conception of nationhood is more in line with how liberal democracies define citizenship than an ethnic conception. In practice, all countries under study include immigrants and their descendants in their citizenry to different degrees. An ethnic conception of nationhood instead represents support for an idealized, exclusive interpretation of the political community and leaves out considerable portions of a country's non-native-born citizens. The article thus suggests that support for democracy is strengthened by a more voluntarist conception of the national community that does not exclude certain citizens based on objectivist criteria. Second, article 4 analyzes how representation by the government affects satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and trust in political institutions (Erhardt 2023a). Representation by the government in a broad sense relates to a specific support for the incumbent government in office. While it does not look at specific support directly, vote choice or intentions for the government parties, sympathy or ideological congruence with the parties in government indirectly approximate such specific support. It suggests that supporting the government in office leads to more positive evaluations of how the democratic regime and its institutions function.

Support for the regime and its institutions in the literature

In order to contextualize the articles of this dissertation in the literature on political support, the following paragraphs present an overview of key explanations of support for the regime and its institutions. Given the vast literature on this topic, I will restrict myself to the context of Western democracies and to strands of literature most relevant for the articles. Most research in this area investigates political trust and to some degree also satisfaction with democracy. In contrast, research on principled support for democracy is comparatively scarce, but has been on the rise in recent years. This also reflects the fact that political trust is the indicator included in most international surveys, followed by satisfaction with democracy, whereas diffuse support for democracy is only covered by a few surveys (EVS 2020, WVS 2020).

Looking at the key explanations of support for the regime and its institutions in extant literature, Figure 2 summarizes the dependent concepts on the right-hand side and the most relevant accounts thereof on the left-hand side. Diffuse support for the regime and its institutions is regarded as more stable, whereas more specific support is subject to substantial fluctuations. As a result, research on diffuse support tends to focus more strongly on long-term explanations (predispositions, institutions, long-term developments), whereas research on more specific support also incorporates short-term explanations (performance, representation, crises). This distinction, however, is far from clear-cut.

Figure 2: Key explanations for support for the regime and its institutions


Predispositions
• Biology
• Personality
• Human values
• Identity
• Ideology
Institutions
• Democratic system
• Electoral institutions
• Direct democracy
Developments in society
• Postmaterialism, value change
• Globalization, migration
• Social capital
• Polarization
Institutional performance
• Corruption, Fairness
• Government effectiveness
Economic performance
• State of the economy
• Welfare state, inequality
Representation
• Election outcome
• Individual/collective congruence
Exogenous crises
• Rally effect
• Crisis management
• Emotions
long-term, more stable
short-term, more fickle
more diffuse
support for democracy
support for institutional configurations
affective
satisfaction with democracy
external political efficacy
trust in parliament, parties, politicians
trust in government
evaluative
more specific

A first strand of literature considers support for the regime and its institutions to be rooted in personal predispositions. Some even present evidence using twin-studies that political trust has a biological component and is at least partly heritable (Weber et al. 2011, Ojeda 2016) and somewhat affected by hormones such as oxytocin (Merolla et al. 2013). In this vein, literature turns to personality traits, which are substantially rooted in biology (Sanchez-Roige et al. 2018), and examines the link between the big five and political trust as well as external political efficacy (Mondak/Halperin 2008, Freitag/Ackermann 2016, Mondak et al. 2017, Cawvey et al. 2018, Bromme et al. 2022). A meta-analysis reveals relatively weak relationships, with openness and agreeableness correlating positively and neuroticism negatively with political trust and external efficacy (Bromme et al. 2022). As far as principled support for the regime is concerned, however, there is little firm evidence. Looking at democratic citizenship norms in a broad sense, Dinesen et al. (2014) show that these in particular relate to openness, conscientiousness, agreeableness and neuroticism. In the Latin-American context, support for democracy was found to be higher for open and extraverted individuals, but theoretical arguments are only developed for individual personality traits (Armendáriz Miranda/Cawvey 2021, Armendáriz Miranda 2022). Beyond personality traits, political trust and support for civil liberties have also been related to basic human values (Devos et al. 2002, Morselli et al. 2012, Schwartz et al. 2014). Berg and Hjerm (2010) also relate a (collective) form of national identity to political trust, showing that such evaluative support for institutions is higher in countries with more civic and lower in countries with more ethnic conceptions of nationhood. Finally, research has shown that support for the regime and its institutions is lower among citizens with a more extreme ideology. This is true both for political trust (Söderlund/Kestilä-Kekkonen 2009, Krouwel et al. 2017, Kutiyski et al. 2021) and principled support for democracy (Torcal/Magalhães 2022). A larger openness to authoritarian alternatives to democracy, however, is particularly prevalent among the illiberal right, but also those combining cultural conservative with economic leftist attitudes (Malka et al. 2022, Svolik et al. 2023).

The institutions of a political system themselves also affect political support. Democratic institutions are generally thought to foster support for a democratic regime and its institutions. While newer democracies tend to display lower levels of trust, satisfaction with democracy and diffuse support for democracy (Mishler/Rose 2001, Rose/Mishler 2002, 2011), despite a honeymoon period after the transition (Catterberg/Moreno 2006), political support tends to increase as democracy consolidates (Rose 1994, Aarts/Thomassen 2008). This is thought to be a result of socialization in a democratic regime (Dalton 1994, Sack 2017) and the accompanying understanding of what democracy entails (Cho 2014, Chapman et al. 2023), but also of adult relearning coming from the experience of authentic democratic institution (Mishler/Rose 2007). However, Claassen (2020b) provides evidence that while improvements in electoral democracy may increase support for democracy in the long-run, the protection of minority rights instead leads to a short-term backlash against democracy. In addition, a higher quality of democratic institutions has been associated with increased satisfaction with democracy (Wagner et al. 2009, Christmann 2018). The occurrence of elections, independent of their outcome, has also been shown to raise evaluative support for democratic institutions (Clarke et al. 1993, van Erkel/van der Meer 2016). Furthermore, different institutional configurations may be relevant. In this regard, both majoritarian and proportional electoral institutions have been looked at as explanations of evaluative support for the regime and its institutions with inconclusive results (Banducci et al. 1999, Aarts/Thomassen 2008, Listhaug et al. 2009, van der Meer 2010), possibly due to a nonlinear effect with trust being highest in the most and least proportional electoral systems (Marien 2011b). Finally, direct democratic institutions have been related to increased evaluative support (Bowler/Donovan 2002, Bernauer/Vatter 2012), although their actual use seems to erode support instead (Dyck 2009, Bauer/Fatke 2014).

A further explanation of support for the regime and its institutions focuses on societal trends and developments. In this regard, the shift from materialist to post-materialist values or, more broadly, the shift from survival to self-expression values in advanced industrial democracies has received considerable attention (Inglehart 2003, Inglehart/Welzel 2005). It is argued that individuals who are socialized in a context of existential security tend to develop post-materialist values focusing on self-expression. On the one hand, these post-materialist values have been associated with an increased support for democratic principles (Inglehart 2003, Dalton 2004, Inglehart/Welzel 2005). On the other hand, individuals with more post-materialist values tend to have higher expectations of democratic institutions and value participation. As a result, the long-term decline of trust in political institutions is frequently associated with this value change (Dalton 2004, 2005, Catterberg/Moreno 2006). Furthermore, social capital is also related to political support. Coined as schools of democracy, civic organizations have been argued to foster democratic regime support (Putnam 1993). In this regard, decreasing levels of social capital (Putnam 2000) have been related with the long-term decline in political trust (Keele 2007). However, the schools of democracy proposition has been contested (van Ingen/van der Meer 2016) and overall evidence on the influence of civic organizations on political trust is more mixed, in particular when compared to the influence of social trust, which has been related to both political trust and satisfaction with democracy (Dowley/Silver 2002, Zmerli et al. 2007, Bäck/Kestilä 2009, Oskarsson 2010, Newton/Zmerli 2011, Liu/Stolle 2017). As another societal development, research has examined the consequences of globalization and migration on political support. Generally speaking, losers of globalization tend to be less satisfied with the performance of democracy (Aarts et al. 2014) and increasing socio-economic and cultural differences due to globalization are associated with an urban-rural divide in support for democracy (Zumbrunn/Freitag 2023). Concerns with immigration have also been related to lower levels of trust (McLaren 2012, McLaren 2017b, 2017a), although immigrants tend to display higher levels of political trust than natives (Röder/Mühlau 2012). As a final societal development, growing levels of (affective) polarization and partisanship in political elites, media and public opinion are argued to undermine political support (Fiorina/Abrams 2008, Prior 2013, Iyengar et al. 2019). This has been shown to lower both levels of political trust and satisfaction with democracy (Hetherington/Rudolph 2015, Jones 2015, Uslaner 2015, Robison/Mullinix 2016, Citrin/Stoker 2018, Ridge 2022a). In particular, polarization and intense partisanship are also regarded as an influential cause of democratic deconsolidation, resulting in lower levels of principled support for democracy (Svolik 2019, Graham/Svolik 2020, Kingzette et al. 2021, Armaly/Enders 2022, Torcal/Magalhães 2022). At the same time, however, perceptions of too few differences between major political contenders can also be harmful to political support (Ridge 2022b, Torcal/Magalhães 2022).

Another important explanation for support for the regime and its institutions is institutional performance. Particularly high levels and perceptions of corruption and a lack of procedural fairness robustly decrease citizen's evaluations of how the regime and its institutions function in practice. They have been related to both lower trust in political institutions and satisfaction with democracy (Mishler/Rose 2001, Anderson/Tverdova 2003, Wagner et al. 2009, van der Meer 2010, Linde/Erlingsson 2013, Magalhães 2016, Grimes 2017, Uslaner 2017). Hakhverdian/Mayne (2012) further show that this relationship is stronger with higher levels of education. This is not only restricted to wide-scale issues of corruption, but may also reflect more limited scandals, although it is contested whether this reaches more diffuse aspects of political support than trust in the government (Bowler/Karp 2004, Maier 2011, von Sikorski et al. 2020). In addition, the procedural quality of bureaucracy and the effectiveness of states to implement their policies have also been related to political support. Looking at objective measures of government effectiveness or the quality of government as well as subjective perceptions of public administration and services, research has found that this affects political trust (Christensen/Lægreid 2005), satisfaction with democracy (Ariely 2013, Magalhães 2017, Claassen/Magalhães 2022) and even diffuse support for democracy (Magalhães 2014, Boräng et al. 2017) – although this latter finding is contested (Claassen/Magalhães 2022).

Research on how economic performance affects political support primarily builds on the economic voting literature, which associates more specific support for incumbents with economic variables, both egotropic (an individual's financial situation) and sociotropic (the state of the economy) and both as subjective evaluations and objective macroeconomic outcomes (Mueller 1970, Nannestad/Paldam 1994, Lewis-Beck/Stegmaier 2000, 2013). This kind of economic voting is particularly prevalent when voters are easily capable of assigning responsibility to the government for the economic conditions, i.e., when the executive is unified and there are few institutional divisions of power (Powell/Whitten 1993, Whitten/Palmer 1999, Hobolt et al. 2013). Beyond specific support for incumbents, economic performance has also been shown to affect political trust (van der Meer 2018). In this regard, positive subjective evaluations are consistently related to higher political trust, with sociotropic evaluations being more important than egotropic ones, particularly when the economy is salient (Chanley et al. 2000, Hetherington/Rudolph 2008, Ellinas/Lamprianou 2014). For objective macroeconomic outcomes, the results are more ambivalent and contingent on controlling for corruption, but they remain substantial when looking at over-time changes in the economy within countries and when appropriate benchmark comparisons are considered (Anderson 2009, van der Meer 2011, Kayser/Peress 2012, Kroknes et al. 2015, van Erkel/van der Meer 2016, van der Meer/Hakhverdian 2017). In this regard, economic outcomes have been shown to go beyond political trust and also affect satisfaction with democracy (Armingeon/Guthmann 2014, Armingeon et al. 2016, Quaranta/Martini 2016, Christmann 2018) and even diffuse support for democracy (Kotzian 2011, Teixeira et al. 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016). The economy, however, matters less in more affluent countries as well as in countries with a high procedural fairness (Magalhães 2016, Daoust/Nadeau 2021). Next to the general economic performance, literature has also found that economic inequality and the welfare state matter for specific support for incumbents (Armingeon/Giger 2008, Hobolt et al. 2013, Goubin et al. 2020, Thurm et al. 2023), political trust and satisfaction with democracy (Anderson/Singer 2008, Kumlin 2011, Zmerli/Castillo 2015, van der Meer/Hakhverdian 2017, Kumlin et al. 2018) as well as democratic regime preferences (Andersen 2012, Krieckhaus et al. 2014).

Furthermore, evaluative support for the regime and its institutions is also contingent on issues of representation, i.e., whether politics addresses the demands of citizens both individually and collectively. In this regard, literature has particularly focused on election outcomes, which divide citizens into election winners and losers depending on whether their preferred party is represented in government. Studies on the winner-loser gap highlight that election losers are less satisfied with democracy and display a lower external efficacy and political trust, while the reverse, to a lesser extent, is true for winners (Anderson/Guillory 1997, Anderson et al. 2005, Marien 2011b, Singh et al. 2011, Dahlberg/Linde 2017, Hansen et al. 2019). There is little research on diffuse support of democracy in this area, only Singer (2018) highlights that winners in Latin America express more support for democratic rule, but also prefer infringements on democratic accountability or opposition rights. In general, the winners-losers gap is larger when there is more on the line in the election, which is the case in majoritarian democracies (Anderson/Guillory 1997, Bernauer/Vatter 2012, Martini/Quaranta 2019), in less democratic countries (Dahlberg/Linde 2016), in contexts of high polarization (Kołczyńska/Sadowski 2022), without direct-democratic institutions (Leemann/Stadelmann-Steffen 2022), with more economic inequality (Han/Chang 2016) or in close elections (Howell/Justwan 2013). Similarly, satisfaction with democracy may also decrease for citizens with a higher ideological distance to the government, its policies, the closest party or the parliament in general (Brandenburg/Johns 2014, Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016, Mayne/Hakhverdian 2017, Ferland 2021). This is also true for the collective representation of the mean voter (Ezrow/Xezonakis 2011, Mayne/Hakhverdian 2017, Linde/Peters 2020). In this regard, the ideological distance to the government can also be regarded as a mechanism of the winners-losers gap (Curini et al. 2012, Gärtner et al. 2020).

Finally, literature has also examined how exogenous crises affect political support, in particular more specific support for the government. These crises, which include international wars, terrorist attacks, natural disasters or pandemics, confront the nation as a whole, affect the nation directly and entail dramatic international events (Mueller 1970). They are generally associated with a rally-'round-the-flag effect, i.e., "people's tendency to become more supportive of their respective country's government" (Frieden et al. 2013: 136). Although this frequently addresses a more specific support for incumbents (Baker/Oneal 2001, Lai/Reiter 2005), research also relates rally events to political trust (Hetherington/Nelson 2003, Dinesen/Jaeger 2013, Erhardt et al. 2022b). Studies have found a rally effect in the immediate aftermath of international conflicts and wars (Mueller 1973, Chanley et al. 2000, Lai/Reiter 2005, Frieden et al. 2013), terrorist attacks (Chanley 2002, Schubert et al. 2002, Kam/Ramos 2008, Dinesen/Jaeger 2013), natural disasters (Bechtel/Hainmueller 2011, You et al. 2020) or pandemics (Bol et al. 2021, Esaiasson et al. 2021, Schraff 2021). This rally effect is the result of heightened patriotic sentiments in the face of threats to the (national) in-group as well as opinion leadership due to an increased focus on the government and a restraint of criticism (Baker/Oneal 2001, Kam/Ramos 2008, Murray 2017, Filsinger et al. 2021, Erhardt et al. 2022b). Beyond this immediate reaction, such exogenous crises may also reveal information on governments through crisis management and preparedness (Ashworth et al. 2018), which becomes even more relevant in the aftermath and may erode the rally effect if deemed insufficient (Healy/Malhotra 2009, Gasper/Reeves 2011, Erhardt et al. 2022b). If crisis management is viewed as appropriate, such as in the case of swift implementations of lockdowns, this can instead further enhance support for the government and contribute to the rally effect (Bækgaard et al. 2020, Bol et al. 2021, De Vries et al. 2021, Oude Groeniger et al. 2021). Emotions are a crucial driver behind these effects. Following the affective intelligence theory (Marcus et al. 2000), fear and anger have been associated with opposing consequences for political support. For terrorism, anger has been related to increased trust in government (although mostly in the more long-term aftermath of 9/11 and in relation to the Iraq War) and more authoritarian responses (Huddy et al. 2005, Lambert et al. 2010, Vasilopoulos et al. 2018, Marcus et al. 2019). During pandemic threat, fear has been related to an increased rally effect, while anger is experienced if political actors are blamed for the crisis, which lowers support and comes with a propensity towards authoritarianism. In contrast, the role of fear for authoritarian responses is more ambivalent (Albertson/Gadarian 2015, Dietz et al. 2021, Erhardt et al. 2021a, Eggers/Harding 2022, Filsinger/Freitag 2022, Gidengil et al. 2022, Vasilopoulos et al. 2022).

The articles in this dissertation all address several shortcomings of extant literature. Generally, most literature tends to focus on a more evaluative support for the regime and its institutions in the form of political trust or satisfaction with democracy. In contrast, three of the four articles examine antecedents of an affective, diffuse support for democracy in European democracies. While research on this topic has grown in recent years (Ariely/Davidov 2011, Kotzian 2011, Magalhães 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016, Claassen 2020b, Claassen/Magalhães 2022, Malka et al. 2022, Svolik et al. 2023), it still leaves many crucial question unanswered. This thesis aims to tackle some of these gaps and advance research on regime preferences, which is particularly important given their relevance for democratic survival (Linz/Stepan 1996b, Claassen 2020a).

This concerns, first, the relevance of predispositions for democratic regime preferences. Article 1 goes beyond extant literature in this field on the ideological bases of support for democracy (Malka et al. 2022, Torcal/Magalhães 2022, Svolik et al. 2023) and examines the impact of big five personality traits. These have been associated with political trust and external efficacy, but the relationship was found to be relatively weak (Bromme et al. 2022). Given the evaluative nature of political trust, it would be plausible to assume that the relationship of big five personality traits with diffuse, principled support for democracy should be stronger and more robust. In this regard, article 1 is the first study to present a comprehensive theoretical argument linking the big five personality traits to support for democracy in consolidated democracies and presents convincing evidence of a robust and fairly substantial relationship for openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness.[6]

Article 2 also addresses dispositions, but in the form of national identities. Research so far has addressed the relationship between national identity and democracy only at a theoretical level (Adorno et al. 1950, Smith 1998) or has examined whether collective forms of national identity relate to political trust (Berg/Hjerm 2010). Article 2 introduces individual-level conceptions of national identity to the study of support for democracy. It thus examines the relevance of another predisposition in the form of social identity, showing that it is a double-edged sword for democracy, with different conceptions of the national community having different relationships with support for democracy. In conjunction, articles 1 and 2 thus go beyond common society-wide explanations for different levels of support for democracy and instead highlight that differences between individuals rest on personal predispositions.

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[6] Armendáriz Miranda/Cawvey (2021) also look at this relationship, but only theorize for two personality traits and look at a diverse sample of newer democracies and autocracies in Latin America.

Beyond personal predispositions, article 2 also relates to the literature on economic performance. Hereby, research finds evidence that economic crises and the general economic performance of a country relate to support for democracy (Kotzian 2011, Teixeira et al. 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016). Article 2 adds to these findings, but instead argues for a differential impact of the economy. It follows literature on other attitudinal outcomes highlighting that economic and cultural accounts are interrelated (Hobolt/De Vries 2016, Gidron/Hall 2017) and contends that economic hardship, both at the individual and societal level, strengthens the impact of national identity on support for democracy. As a result, economic crises may not necessarily be adverse to regime support for all segments in society. This also demonstrates that the performance of the political system may interact with personal predispositions in their relationship with political support.

Article 3 ties in with the debate on the role of exogenous international crises for political support. So far, literature has primarily related such crises to specific support for incumbents or political trust and presents evidence for a rally effect (Chanley 2002, Murray 2017). In contrast, the consequences for diffuse support for democracy are less clear. In this regard, literature has turned to emotions, showing that anger is related to more authoritarian policy preferences following these events, while the role of fear is more ambivalent (Huddy et al. 2005, Vasilopoulos et al. 2018, Filsinger/Freitag 2022, Vasilopoulos et al. 2022). The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic offers a unique opportunity to analyze the consequences of infectious diseases for democracy. Article 3 adds to this discussion by examining how Covid-19 induced anger and fear relate to diffuse regime preferences. It corroborates earlier findings that these two emotions have opposite effects on political attitudes (MacKuen et al. 2010, Vasilopoulos et al. 2019) by presenting new evidence that anger negatively, while fear positively relates to support for democracy in times of the pandemic.

Finally, article 4 addresses issues of representation and links to both the literatures on the role of election outcomes as well as citizen-government congruence for evaluative support of the regime and its institutions (Anderson et al. 2005, Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016). Instead of regarding these two predictors separately, it argues that they should be integrated as different facets of representation by the government, looking either at more election- or more policy-oriented aspects thereof. Article 4 goes beyond extant research in this field by presenting methodologically more rigorous evidence for the relationship with long-term panel data stemming multiple electoral cycles.

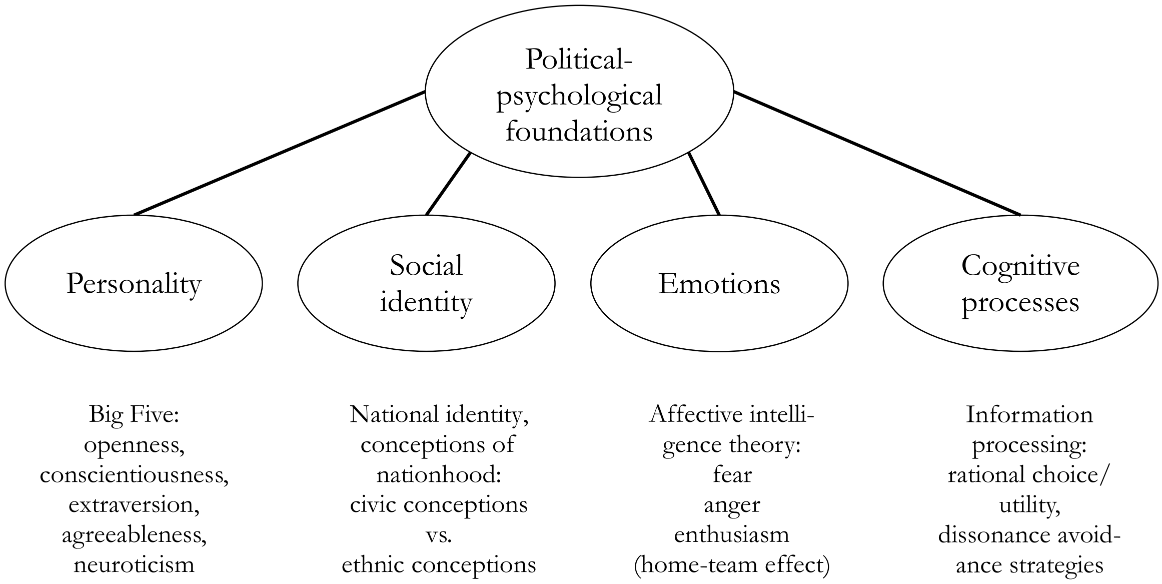
With different analytical approaches, it both addresses concerns of endogeneity and answers questions with regards to the temporal dynamic of the relationship.

Overall, the four articles also more generally relate to Easton's (1965, 1975) proposition that diffuse support is a stable, principled attachment, while specific support is performance related, which addresses the different key explanations in their entirety. On the one hand, they present new evidence that diffuse support for democracy rests on stable psychological foundations in terms of personality traits and social identities. On the other hand, they show that a crisis and the performance of the political system robustly affect mid-range indicators of political support and even have ramifications for diffuse regime preferences.

A political-psychological explanation

To address these various gaps in the literature, this dissertation examines the political-psychological foundations of support for the regime and its institutions. In its essence, political psychology deals with the psychological underpinnings of political attitudes and behavior. It argues that these can be explained by internal psychological processes and their interaction with the environment. These psychological components of an individual include their personality, social identity, affective emotions and cognitive processes, which involve both conscious and unconscious processes and both rationality and cognitive biases (Cottam et al. 2010, Huddy et al. 2013, Feldman/Zmerli 2022). The four articles comprising this thesis all relate to these different components. Figure 3 below summarizes which political-psychological foundations this thesis addresses. Whereas the more stable, deep-rooted psychological foundations of personality traits and social identities account for the stability of support for the democratic regime, fluctuations in both the affective and evaluative support for the regime and its institutions can be explained by the more immediate interaction of psychological processes with the environment through emotions and cognitive processes. In the following, I will explain these foundations and their application in the individual articles in more detail.

Figure 3: Political-psychological explanations in this dissertation


Political-psychological foundations
Personality
Social identity
Emotions
Cognitive processes
Big Five: openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness, neuroticism
National identity, conceptions of nationhood: civic conceptions vs. ethnic conceptions
Affective intelligence theory: fear anger enthusiasm (home-team effect)
Information processing: rational choice/ utility, dissonance avoidance strategies

Personality can be understood as "one's acquired, relatively enduring, yet dynamic, unique, system of predispositions to psychological and social behavior" (DiRenzo 1974: 16). Research distinguishes between psychoanalytic, motive-based and trait-based theories of personality (Cottam et al. 2010: 15) with the trait-based paradigm featuring most prominently in current political psychology (McCrae/Costa 2008, Gerber et al. 2011). Trait theory assumes that "individuals can be characterized in terms of relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (McCrae/Costa 2008: 160). Personality traits vary between individuals and shape their beliefs and behavior. They are fairly stable over time and to some extent genetically determined (Sanchez-Roige et al. 2018). Building on the work of Allport/Odbert (1936) and Eysenck (1975), literature distinguishes between different trait clusters through factor analyses and a lexical analysis of adjectives describing characteristics of individuals. This has led to a general taxonomy consisting of five overarching personality traits, the Big Five (sometimes also called OCEAN model based on the initials): openness to experience, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and neuroticism (Goldberg 1981, John et al. 2008). Those open to experience can be described as curious, creative, with diverse interests and open to new ideas. Individuals high in conscientiousness are disciplined, structured, cautious, performance-oriented and have a sense of duty. Extraverted individuals tend to be sociable, active, assertive and prone to social dominance. Those with high agreeableness are kind, empathetic, altruistic, willing to compromise and conflict-averse. Finally, neurotic individuals tend to be insecure, irritable, anxious and impulsive (Costa/McCrae 1992). These five personality factors have been applied to a diverse set of political attitudes and behaviors such as political orientations, voting behavior, political participation, political interest, political trust and democratic citizenship norms (Mondak/Halperin 2008, Gerber et al. 2011, Brandstätter/Opp 2014, Dinesen et al. 2014, Bromme et al. 2022, Freitag/Zumbrunn 2022).

Article 1 adapts this framework to the study of diffuse support for democracy and analyzes whether regime preferences rest on deep-rooted, stable personality traits (Erhardt 2023b). It is the first study to develop a comprehensive theoretical argument as to how the big five personality traits foster or jeopardize support for democracy in consolidated democracies. It connects characterizations of the big five personality traits and literature on their political consequences with characteristic differences between democratic and autocratic regime types that evoke support or opposition. Open individuals, who tend to be more liberal, post-materialist and in favor of diversity, should value democratic freedoms and the diversity of opinions (Klein 2005, Gerber et al. 2011, Ackermann/Ackermann 2015). Conscientious individuals, who are responsible, cautious and performance-oriented, should favor democracy due to entrenched citizenship norms as well as the stability, market-liberalism and lower corruption of democracies (Gerber et al. 2010, Dinesen et al. 2014). Agreeable individuals, being kind, empathetic and willing to compromise, also display democratic citizenship norms and should favor the more consensual, solidarity-based nature of democracy and the protection of democratic freedoms for their fellow citizens (Dinesen et al. 2014, Fatke 2017). The empirical analysis presents robust evidence highlighting that democratic regime preferences are associated with higher openness, conscientiousness and agreeableness.

Identity entails a "deeply held sense of who a person is" (Cottam et al. 2010: 7) and structures how one relates to the social world (Greenfeld/Eastwood 2007). Particularly relevant to an individual's identity is their attachment to social groups, their social identity. Social identity "describes those aspects of a person's self-concept based upon their group memberships" (Turner/Oakes 1986: 240). In this regard, literature draws heavily on the seminal works of Tajfel (1970, 1982) together with Turner (1979) on the social identity theory. Social identity theory posits that people compare in-groups with out-groups in order to form a positive social identity, which can also result in ethnocentrism, out-group stereotyping and discrimination. Social identities are multi-layered with different identities being salient in different contexts (Greenfeld/Eastwood 2007). Following Tajfel (1970), even seemingly irrelevant group categorizations can become relevant distinctions for discrimination between the in- and out-group. The most important political identity in today's world is the national identity, which can be defined as the "intensity of feelings and closeness towards one's own nation" (Davidov 2009: 65) and "a sense of belonging to and being a member of a geopolitical entity" (Verdugo/Milne 2016: 3). Individual-level national identity is regarded as multidimensional and includes the strength of the national identity, the distinction between various forms of patriotism (nationalism or blind patriotism vs. constructive patriotism) and different conceptions of nationhood and national belonging (Schatz et al. 1999, Davidov 2009, Kunovich 2009, Bonikowski 2016, Helbling et al. 2016, Schmidt/Quandt 2018, Wamsler 2022).

Article 2 hones in on this last dimension of national identity, which examines an individual's conception of what being a true member of a nation entails and, following the seminal work of Kohn (1939), distinguishes between a civic and an ethnic conception of nationhood (Brubaker 1992, Kunovich 2009, Reeskens/Hooghe 2010). A civic national identity is thin and voluntarist – meaning that it can be adopted by outsiders – and emphasizes a common national language and political culture. In contrast, an ethnic national identity is thick and revolves around objectivist criteria such as having national ancestry and being born in a country (Smith 1991, Ignatieff 1993, Habermas 1994, Brubaker 1999, Berg/Hjerm 2010, Lenard/Miller 2018).

Article 2 presents theoretical arguments for how these two conceptions of nationhood relate to diffuse support for democracy (Erhardt et al. 2021b). It argues that the inclusiveness of a civic national identity and its focus on a shared political culture should align well with the character of liberal democracies (Pehrson et al. 2009, Berg/Hjerm 2010). In contrast, ethnic conceptions relate to feelings of out-group threat and undue foreign influences, which leads individuals to turn away from open, democratic societies and instead follow the appeal of strong leaders to protect the in-group (Schatz et al. 1999, Blank/Schmidt 2003). The article also takes into account the interaction of identity with the environment in the form of economic performance, arguing that economic hardship may reinforce a cultural backlash and increase the negative relationship of an ethnic national identity (Inglehart/Norris 2017, Ausserladscheider 2019). These arguments are supported by the empirical analysis of 24 European democracies. For a civic national identity, the theoretical role of economic hardship was less clear, but the data tends to support the idea of critical citizens (Norris 1999a, 2011), whose democratic values are not undermined by their dissatisfaction with the economic performance of the regime.

Emotions are "a complex 'syndrome' of reactions to our circumstances that include electrochemical processes in the brain, changes in autonomic and motor systems (e.g., breathing, heart rate, muscle tension, facial expressions), and behavioral impulses" (Brader/Cikanek 2019: 203). They are motivational impulses accompanied by feeling states that are thought to have evolved as flexible adaptational systems to allow more differentiated responses than reflexes or physiological drives (Smith/Lazarus 1990, Brader/Cikanek 2019). Research on the political consequences of emotions builds on two theories: cognitive appraisal theory and affective intelligence theory. Cognitive appraisal theory (Smith/Ellsworth 1985, Smith/Lazarus 1990, Lazarus 1991) argues that different emotions arise from different appraisals, i.e., "the brain's assessment of some internal or external situation" (Brader/Marcus 2013: 172). Fear is evoked from external threats when a lack of control is perceived, while anger arises when someone can be blamed for the threat (Smith/Lazarus 1990). Affective intelligence theory (Marcus/MacKuen 1993, Marcus et al. 2000, Marcus et al. 2011) also incorporates these different appraisals, but takes a functional neuroscience perspective instead (Davidson et al. 2000). It focuses on two brain systems that constantly process information. The surveillance system scans the environment for new, dangerous threats, in which case it triggers fear (anxiety[7]). The disposition system monitors goal achievement through routines, triggering enthusiasm. Newer literature also incorporates a third system, which is considered as part of the disposition system and monitors threats to norms and practices and results in anger (aversion[8]) if normative violations take place (MacKuen et al. 2010, Vasilopoulos et al. 2018). Affective intelligence theory argues that these systems operate simultaneously and independent of each other. In contrast to appraisal theory, the adaptation strategy then does not depend on *which* emotion is experienced, but on the extent that all emotions are experienced (Marcus et al. 2000). Fear and anger in particular have received much attention in research and have been associated with diverging effects on a multitude of political attitudes and behaviors (Huddy et al. 2007, Best/Krueger 2011, Valentino et al. 2011, Rico et al. 2017, Vasilopoulos et al. 2018, Marcus et al. 2019, Freitag/Hofstetter 2022, Wamsler et al. 2022).

Article 3 applies the affective intelligence theory to the study of the Covid-19 pandemic threat (Erhardt et al. 2022a). It argues that pandemic threat can activate both neural systems, evoking anger and fear, which then lead to different functionally adaptive behaviors in the form of diffuse support for democracy. Anger attributes blame to political actors for not responding appropriately to the pandemic. Being optimistic about the controllability of the situation, less willing to compromise and in favor of punitive action, angry individuals should be more open to authoritarian alternatives to democracy (MacKuen et al. 2010, Brader/Cikanek 2019). For fear, the consequences are less clear. On the one hand, fearful individuals may prefer a flight to (authoritarian) security with strict governmental measures even at the cost of civil liberties (Oesterreich 2005, Albertson/Gadarian 2015). On the other hand, fearful individuals tend to search for new information, are more willing to compromise and display increased trust, which may lead to a rally effect behind the democratic political system (Valentino et al. 2008, MacKuen et al. 2010, Erhardt et al. 2021a). The empirical analysis provides convincing evidence for the detrimental effects of anger, while fear is associated with a moderate increase in democratic regime preferences.

Article 4 also relates to emotions, though only in its theoretical argument. One mechanism through which representation by the government in the form of belonging to the election winners has been related to increased political support is the emotional reward stemming from victory. This has been coined the 'home-team' effect (Holmberg 1999). Election winners are enthusiastic that their preferred party has won, whereas election losers feel disillusioned. The same logic should also apply to representation by the government in general. Although not explicitly linked in research, this relates to the logic of the disposition system of the affective intelligence theory, triggering enthusiasm when goal seeking is successful and sadness when it is not (Marcus et al. 2000). The empirical relevance of this mechanism is disputed, however (Gärtner et al. 2020, Daoust et al. 2021). Article 4 does not explicitly test this mechanism, but argues that it contributes to the overall effect of representation by the government on satisfaction with democracy, external efficacy and political trust, for which it finds convincing evidence with a rigorous methodological approach.

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[7] Some research distinguishes between fear and anxiety and considers fear a reaction to current events, while anxiety is a concern about future events (Renström/Bäck 2021).

[8] Aversion goes further than anger and also includes disgust, contempt and hatred (MacKuen et al. 2010), but combining these emotions may also mask their differences with regards to appraisals and behavioral consequences (Hutcherson/Gross 2011).

Finally, cognitive processes are the channels through which information from the environment is received and interpreted (Cottam et al. 2010: 9). In this regard, the assumption of rationality is often seen as the starting point, although its unbounded form can be regarded as unrealistic when applied to political attitudes and behavior. It assumes that individuals have consistent preferences that follow their self-interest, they derive a certain utility from their goals and assign probabilities to different ways of achieving their goals (Chong 2013). While this simplification of human behavior has proven useful in research, behavioral economics and psychology has also highlighted that rationality is bounded and many heuristics and biases are at work in cognitive processes (Simon 1957, Tversky/Kahneman 1974, Kahneman/Tversky 1979, Kahneman 2003). Cognitive dissonance theory is one example for such a bias (Festinger 1962, Cottam et al. 2010: 41–42). It assumes that individuals prefer some degree of consistency in their attitudes and behavior. Dissonance results in psychological tension and avoidance strategies to remove this tension such as selective attention to information. Ultimately, individuals can adjust their attitudes or behavior in order to restore consistency.

Article 4 takes this kind of cognitive processing into account in its theoretical argument. The most prominent argument why representation by the government should lead to increased support for the political system and its institutions is utilitarian or rational. Citizens evaluate the political system based on the utility they derive from its outputs. If they are represented in the government and their preferred policies are implemented, this should thus result in increasing support (Anderson et al. 2005, Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016). From a different theoretical perspective but with a similar result, cognitive dissonance theory argues that people may adapt their feelings about the political system depending on whether they like who is in power or not. Election winners are inclined to assimilate themselves with the government parties (Best/Seyis 2021), while election losers perceive the political process as less fair (Anderson/Mendes 2006, Craig et al. 2006). While these mechanisms are not explicitly tested, article 4 provides robust evidence that representation by the government has an impact on how individuals evaluate the political regime and its institutions.

Overview of the thesis

The following chapters of this dissertation contain the four articles comprising the thesis as well as a conclusion summarizing the main findings alongside their implications and limitations. In the next paragraph, I will briefly preview these articles. A detailed summary of each article can be found in the conclusion.

Article 1 is titled "*The democratic personality? The big five, authoritarianism and regime preference in consolidated democracies*" and, at the time of writing this thesis, resubmitted after major revisions in *Politics* (Erhardt 2023b). It addresses the contention of extant research that support for democracy is a relatively stable attitude and provides a new explanation for this finding that goes beyond the focus of previous literature on socialization through long-term societal factors. Looking at the deeply rooted foundations of regime preferences, it develops a theoretical argument for how big five personality traits relate to support for democracy. As previous research has turned to authoritarianism to examine the personality foundations of anti-democratic sentiments, it contrasts how big five personality traits relate to authoritarian attitudes as opposed to support for democracy. This is tested using three original surveys collected in six Western European democracies between 2020 and 2022. The results indicate that support for democracy is higher for more open, conscientious and agreeable people, but slightly lower for more extraverted and neurotic individuals, providing robust evidence that regime preferences are driven by stable personality characteristics. In addition, it is important to regard support for democracy and authoritarianism separately, given that they rest on different personality foundations. Although authoritarianism also coincides with higher openness to experience, the relationship is opposite for conscientiousness, which increases both authoritarianism but also support for democracy.

Article 2 called "*National identity between democracy and autocracy: a comparative analysis of 24 countries*", which I co-authored together with Steffen Wamsler and Markus Freitag, is published in *European Political Science Review* (Erhardt et al. 2021b). It goes beyond economic prerequisites of democratic support and takes a closer look at cultural explanations in the form of national identity. Distinguishing between civic and ethnic conceptions of nationhood, it argues that national identity has an ambivalent relationship with support for democracy: while a civic conception of national belonging increases democratic regime preferences, an ethnic conception of nationhood lowers such preferences instead. This argument is supported by European Values Study survey data from 2017 to 2018 across 24 European democracies (EVS 2019). In addition, moderation analyses reveal interactions between cultural and economic accounts of regime preferences. Both the negative relationship of an ethnic national identity as well as, to a lesser extent, the positive relationship of a civic national identity with support for democracy are reinforced by individual- and country-level indicators of economic hardship.

Article 3 titled "*Leaving democracy? Pandemic threat, emotional accounts and regime support in comparative perspective*" is co-authored with Markus Freitag and Maximilian Filsinger and is published in *West European Politics* (Erhardt et al. 2022a). Going beyond the rally effect literature on specific support, it evaluates whether and how pandemic threat relates to democratic regime preferences. Drawing on the affective intelligence theory of emotions, it argues that pandemic threat evokes different negative emotions – anger and fear – with different consequences for support for democracy. Using two original surveys in six Western European countries collected between 2020 and 2021, the results suggest that anger stemming from pandemic threat undermines democratic support. In contrast, pandemic threat-induced fear leads to a modest rally effect behind the democratic regime.

Article 4 is called "*Political support through representation by the government. Evidence from Dutch panel data*" and accepted for publication in *Swiss Political Science Review* (Erhardt 2023a). It connects research on the winners-losers gap with studies on the congruence of citizens with their government under the common framework of representation by the government. With a methodologically more rigorous approach than previous studies, it makes use of the LISS panel data (CentERdata 2021) spanning over multiple electoral cycles to show that representation by the government relates to satisfaction with democracy, external efficacy and political trust in the Dutch least-likely case. This is true for multiple indicators, which go beyond the classic winners-losers distinction and also address closeness to the government coalition on the whole. To some degree, there is a temporal dynamic in the relationship, but it unfolds rapidly, wanes during the first legislative period in (or out of) office and solidifies again if (non-)representation persists for a longer time.

This thesis ends with a conclusion, which summarizes the findings of the four articles in more depth. It evaluates how they contribute to the different strands of literature both individually and collectively. Furthermore, it discusses the important limitations of this dissertation that should be kept in mind when interpreting its results. Finally, it elaborates the broad implications of this thesis both for future research on political support as well as for society and politics.

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2. Article 1: The democratic personality? The big five, authoritarianism and regime preference in consolidated democracies

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Research frequently contends that support for democracy is a comparatively stable attitude. A previously neglected explanation for this finding is that regime preferences rest on deeply-rooted psychological foundations. This paper develops theoretical arguments how big five personality traits relate to democratic regime preferences in consolidated democracies and presents empirical evidence using original survey data for six Western European countries. The results show that democratic regime support is substantively higher for more open, conscientious and agreeable individuals, but slightly lower for more extraverted and neurotic individuals. In addition, it highlights that it is important not to conflate support for democracy with authoritarianism, which previous literature has frequently turned to for personality roots of anti-democratic sentiments. While authoritarianism also goes along with higher openness to experience, conscientiousness displays an opposite relationship, increasing pro-democratic attitudes but also individuals' levels of authoritarianism. Thus, findings on authoritarianism should not be automatically translated to regime preferences.

Keywords: support for democracy, regime preference, big five, personality, authoritarianism

Introduction

"Demand for democracy is largely a principled affair" (Mattes and Bratton, 2007: 201)

"Democracy is a stable cognitive value" (Huang et al., 2008: 56–58)

Diffuse support for democracy – defined following Easton (1965) as an unconditional, general attachment to democracy as a principle or ideal and a preference for a democratic regime vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives (Magalhães, 2014) – is generally viewed as a relatively stable attitude that mostly changes between generations as a result of long-term societal trends. Although newer literature casts doubt on the assertion that support for democracy is essentially stable, showing that it can also be affected by more short-term factors such as government and economic performance or crises (Cordero and Simón, 2016; Erhardt et al., 2021; Magalhães, 2014), it is still substantially more stable than specific measures of political support such as satisfaction with the functioning of democracy (Claassen and Magalhães, 2022). In explaining different levels of democratic support, extant literature has primarily focused on individuals' socialization through long-term societal factors, including the existence, age and quality of a democratic regime (Dalton, 1994), economic security and the accompanying value change from survival to self-expression values (Inglehart, 2003) or social capital in the form of civic organizations as schools of democracy (Putnam, 1993). Given the general stability of support for democracy within individuals, it seems likely, however, that it is not only associated with broad societal changes. It should also reflect stable psychological and ideological differences between individuals, such as ideological extremism (Torcal and Magalhães, 2022) or national identity (Erhardt et al., 2021).

An important question in this regard is whether support for democracy rests on deep-rooted psychological foundations such as personality traits. Personality traits are "relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (McCrae and Costa, 2008: 160) that characterize individuals and are at least partly heritable (Sanchez-Roige et al., 2018). The Big Five – Openness to experience, Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, Neuroticism – have become the established framework for personality traits and have been related to a wide array of political attitudes and behaviors Gerber et al., 2011; Mondak and Halperin, 2008.

Earlier literature following Adorno et al.'s (1950) seminal work *The Authoritarian Personality* and the further developments of Altemeyer (1981, 1996) has turned to authoritarianism – i.e., the preference for social conformity and collective security over individual autonomy (Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013) – to evaluate the personality foundations of fascism and anti-democratic sentiments in society. Particularly a lower openness to experience and higher conscientiousness have been related to right-wing authoritarianism (Heaven and Bucci, 2001; Nicol and de France, 2016; Perry and Sibley, 2012). However, extant studies in this literature mostly rely on the right-wing authoritarianism scale, which has come under considerable criticism for confounding authoritarianism with conservatism and prejudices (Pettigrew, 2016). In addition, it is important not to conflate authoritarianism with support for democracy. While these concepts are certainly related, authoritarianism more broadly covers the general structure of societal relations, while support for democracies addresses preferences for a system of government. It is thus crucial to evaluate how big five personality traits relate to support for democracy, which so far has only been done for individual personality traits in the Latin American context (Armendáriz Miranda, 2022; Armendáriz Miranda and Cawvey, 2021).

In this paper, I set out to evaluate the personality foundations of democratic consolidation by analyzing the relationship between individuals' personality traits and their support for democracy in long-standing established democracies. I develop a theoretical argument hypothesizing that the big five personality traits openness to experience, conscientiousness and agreeableness positively relate to democratic regime support. This is tested with three original survey data collected between late 2020 and early 2022 in six Western European consolidated democracies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK)) with roughly 1,000 respondents per country per survey. Linear regression models confirm these expectations. They also show that in addition to these relationships, more extraverted and neurotic individuals display a lower principled support for democracy, albeit the relationship is less substantive in size and less robust. Furthermore, I replicate earlier findings on the relationship between big five personality traits and authoritarianism with a more appropriate, validated measure for authoritarianism (Beierlein et al., 2015). This highlights that the overlap in terms of personality foundations with support for democracy is less clear-cut than assumed. On the one hand, higher openness to experience and extraversion also goes along with lower authoritarianism. On the other hand, conscientiousness displays an opposite relationship, increasing pro-democratic attitudes, but also individuals' levels of authoritarianism.

My study contributes to extant literature in three ways. First, I present convincing evidence that support for democracy is rooted in Big Five personality traits, which may shed light on earlier findings that regime preferences are a comparatively stable affair (Claassen and Magalhães, 2022; Mattes and Bratton, 2007). Given that these personality traits have been related to political ideology as well (Gerber et al., 2010; Sibley et al., 2012), these results imply that there is a personality foundation for democratic regime preference for the liberal (openness to experience), conservative (conscientiousness) and social democratic (agreeableness) sides of the political spectrum. This is important considering that earlier findings on authoritarianism did not consider the possibility of conservative pathways to democracy. Second, the results highlight that findings on authoritarianism should not be automatically translated to regime preferences. Despite the relation between these two concepts, they build on different personality foundations. While openness and extraversion coincide with increased support for democracy and lower authoritarianism, the same cannot be said for the other personality traits. Agreeableness increases and neuroticism decreases support for democracy, but is unrelated to overall authoritarianism – and agreeableness is even positively related to two sub-dimensions of authoritarianism, authoritarian submission and conventionalism. Crucially, conscientiousness displays opposite relationships to the two concepts, being associated with more support for democracy but also more authoritarianism. Personality traits that strengthen authoritarianism thus do not necessarily have to be a danger for democracy – they can even bolster it instead. Third, I contribute to the literature on democratic backsliding by identifying a set of personality traits that predict principled support for democracy, which plays a key role in preventing the erosion of democracy (Claassen, 2020).

Support for democracy across personality traits

What distinguishes democracies from autocracies? In order to develop a theoretical argument as to why certain personality traits foster support for democracy, it is important to first discern the characteristic differences between these regime types that may elicit support or opposition. The key difference in this regard concerns the accountability of and limitations to those in power. In democracies, access to power is contested and open to all citizens, political leaders are made accountable through fair and free elections and the right to participate in the political realm is guaranteed. Additionally, power is limited by the rule of law, various freedoms, civil liberties and checks and balances. In contrast, access to power is restricted in autocracies, if there are elections, they are neither free nor fair, and political participation rights are frequently violated. At the same time, the regime leader's power in autocracies is extensive and is frequently deployed in a repressive and arbitrary manner (Dahl, 1998; Lührmann et al., 2018; Merkel, 2010). The key threat to democratic survival for democracies in today's world is executive aggrandizement by an elected leader, who erodes the independence of the judiciary, freedom of press, checks and balances and finally political competition (Albertus and Grossman, 2021; Bermeo, 2016). In this regard, principled support for democracy has been identified as a key predictor for preventing democratic backsliding (Claassen, 2020).

So how can the big five personality traits contribute to explaining principled support for democracy in consolidated democracies? Trait theory assumes that there are personality traits that differ between individuals and shape their behavior (Gerber et al., 2011; McCrae and Costa, 2008). These personality traits are very stable and at least partly heritable (e.g., Sanchez-Roige et al., 2018). Through lexical analysis of adjectives describing characteristics of individuals and factor analysis, research has established five overarching personality traits, the Big Five, which can be regarded as a "general taxonomy of personality traits" (John et al., 2008: 116). Individuals open to experience are curious, creative, have diverse interests and are open to new ideas, actions and values. Conscientious individuals can be described as disciplined, structured, with a sense of duty, responsible, cautious and performance-oriented. Those high in extraversion are outgoing, sociable, active, assertive and inclined to socially dominant behavior. Agreeable individuals are kind, warm, empathic, altruistic, helpful, willing to compromise and tend to avoid conflict. Finally, individuals high in neuroticism can be described as anxious, insecure, nervous, impulsive, restless and irritable (Costa and McCrae, 1992). These five personality traits have been argued to cause a diverse set of political attitudes and behaviors, including amongst others ideology, partisanship, political trust, political interest, political participation, immigration attitudes, support for the EU, populism, norms of citizenship or even attitudes relating to the Covid-19 pandemic (Brandstätter and Opp, 2014; Bromme et al., 2022; Curtis and Nielsen, 2020; Dinesen et al., 2014; Dinesen et al., 2016; Fatke, 2019; Freitag and Hofstetter, 2021; Freitag and Zumbrunn, 2022; Gallego and Pardos-Prado, 2014; Gerber et al., 2011; Mondak and Halperin, 2008).

With regards to *openness to experience*, I expect a positive relationship with a democratic regime preference. While open individuals are generally open to new ideas and thus potentially also to alternatives to the current regime type, it seems very unlikely that the prospect of an authoritarian regime would entice them. First, open individuals are more liberal-minded, anti-authoritarian and in favor of diversity (Fatke, 2017; Gerber et al., 2010; Nicol and de France, 2016). They should thus support the various freedoms that are protected by a democratic system, such as the freedom of speech, freedom of movement or freedom of association. Second, open individuals with diverse interests also tend to be more tolerant (Ackermann and Ackermann, 2015), which should lead them to appreciate the difference of opinion that is cultivated in democracies (Armendáriz Miranda and Cawvey, 2021). Third, such creative individuals open to new actions are more post-materialist (Klein, 2005), more politically interested (Gerber et al., 2011) and rate their political efficacy higher (Mondak and Halperin, 2008). They should thus value the diverse possibilities to participate in the political arena that are guaranteed in democratic systems.

H_{1a}: *Openness to experience is positively related to a democratic regime preference.*

I also expect *conscientiousness* to positively relate to a democratic regime preference. This might seem counterintuitive, seeing as conscientiousness is commonly related to more traditional worldviews, an increased willingness to accept existing hierarchies, to submit to authorities and a preference for the status quo (Freitag, 2017: 103; Gerber et al., 2011; Mondak, 2010: 54). In autocracies or new democracies, these tendencies may well lead conscientious individuals to back traditional, non-democratic authorities. In the case of consolidated democracies, however, where democracy has become "the only game in town" (Linz and Stepan, 1996: 5), democratic citizenship norms are deeply entrenched in society and democratic institutions have an established history. Conscientious individuals, who can be characterised as disciplined with a sense of duty, exhibit stronger norms of citizenship (Dinesen et al., 2014) and as a result should be more likely to support the democratic status quo. In addition, conscientious individuals are responsible, cautious and tend to act prudently. This should make them wary of the uncertainty and violence that frequently accompany autocratic regime leader upheavals (Geddes et al., 2014) as well as of the oppression that is typical of authoritarian regimes. Finally, conscientious individuals are performance-oriented and hold more market-liberal positions (e.g., Bakker, 2017; Gerber et al., 2010). They should thus value democracies for their, on average, higher economic freedom, more meritocratic societies and lower corruption (Nur-tegin and Czap, 2012; Rode and Gwartney, 2012).

H_{1b}: *Conscientiousness is positively related to a democratic regime preference.*

For *extraversion*, the relationship with democratic regime preference is less clear. On the one hand, outgoing and sociable individuals are argued to be more politically active, more frequently engage in political discussion and increasingly support participation-oriented values (Klein, 2005; Mondak, 2010). As a result, they should lay importance on the political freedoms guaranteed in democracies (Armendáriz Miranda and Cawvey, 2021). In addition, extraversion is related to market-liberal orientations with regards to economic policies (Bakker, 2017). Extraverts may thus also prefer democracies for the economic freedoms they guarantee more often than autocracies (Rode and Gwartney, 2012). On the other hand, being assertive and socially dominant, extraverted individuals more often endorse hierarchical structures and strong political leadership (Schoen and Schumann, 2007), which aligns well with the leadership style and the capability to enforce decisions of autocracies. Due to these conflicting arguments, I do not expect a clear relationship between extraversion and democratic regime preferences.

As to *agreeableness*, I again expect a positive relationship with democratic regime preferences. Being kind and empathic, agreeable individuals display a strong inclination towards solidarity and care about the welfare of others (Fatke, 2017). Similarly, agreeableness is associated with universalist and humanist values (Iser and Schmitt, 2005). For these reasons, it should be important to agreeable individuals that the political rights and civil liberties of their fellow citizens are protected, which is more likely to be guaranteed in democracies. In addition, agreeable individuals are more compliant and thus conform more closely to democratic norms of citizenship (Dinesen et al., 2014), which should go hand in hand with pro-democratic orientations. They are also more willing to compromise and prone to avoid conflict and should thus favor a less conflictual style of politics. While autocratic societies may to some degree seem more uniform and depoliticized than the constant competition for power in democracies, this is achieved by suppressing political competition, to which kind and empathic individuals should be averse. Overall, agreeable individuals should favor the in comparison more consensual, cooperative and solidarity-based nature of democracies over the more hierarchical, harsh and exploitative nature of autocracies.

H_{1c}: *Agreeableness is positively related to a democratic regime preference.*

Finally, I do not expect a clear relationship between *neuroticism* and democratic regime preferences. Being anxious and insecure and generally more distrustful of their environment, neurotic individuals may place increased weight on the protection from the powerful offered by democracies. Given that neurotic individuals also tend to prefer the status quo (Fatke, 2017), they may be averse to regime change in general, which should strengthen their preference for democracy in consolidated democracies. At the same time, however, neurotic individuals may also be more easily overwhelmed by the open societies of democracies and perceive them as threatening (Gallego and Pardos-Prado, 2014). In light of these conflicting arguments, I do not formulate a hypothesis for neuroticism.

The big five and authoritarianism

Authoritarianism, defined as a preference for social conformity and collective security over individual autonomy (Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013), is generally viewed as a three-dimensional construct consisting of authoritarian submission, authoritarian aggression and conventionalism. In this regard, authoritarian submission means a general acceptance of authority figures and a willingness to follow their instructions. Authoritarian aggression involves the social control of the behavior of others through punishment and harm and can be directed against social deviants or others sanctioned by the authorities. Conventionalism is understood as a strong adherence to traditional social norms, values and morality (Altemeyer, 1996). As such, authoritarianism addresses the broad structure of societal relations. Traditionally, it has been regarded as a precursor of totalitarian, fascist or, more generally, non-democratic movements (Adorno et al., 1950; Altemeyer, 1981, 1996).

Regarding the relationship between Big Five personality traits and authoritarianism, earlier literature has pointed towards openness to experience and conscientiousness as significant predictors (Heaven and Bucci, 2001; Nicol and de France, 2016; Perry and Sibley, 2012). Individuals *open to experience*, who are curious and have diverse interests, should be less inclined to submit to authorities, reject coercive social control against norm violators and conform less to established norms, values and morality. As a result, openness to experience should not only lead to more pro-democratic orientations, but also coincide with a lower degree of authoritarianism.

H_{2a}: *Openness to experience is negatively related to authoritarianism.*

For *conscientiousness*, I expect a positive relationship with authoritarianism, in line with previous literature (Heaven and Bucci, 2001; Nicol and de France, 2016). Being disciplined and dutiful, conscientious individuals should be more prone to follow authority figures (Freitag, 2017: 103) and to control the social behavior of others. In addition, conscientious individuals tend to favor social traditional, conservative values (Gerber et al., 2010; Mondak, 2010: 54) and should thus display a higher conventionalism. Overall, I expect conscientiousness to display the opposite relationship to authoritarianism when compared to regime preferences. It should simultaneously coincide with more pro-democratic orientations, but also with a higher degree of authoritarianism.

H_{2b}: *Conscientiousness is positively related to authoritarianism.*

For the other three personality traits, I do not expect a clear relationship with authoritarianism. As for *extraversion*, being assertive and socially dominant might make them more inclined towards authoritarian aggression, but it may also make them less likely to submit to authority figures at the same time. As to *agreeableness*, the reverse might hold true. Being prone to avoid conflict, they may more readily submit to authorities and they may also be more conventional. In contrast, however, their kind and empathic nature should make them averse to authoritarian aggression. In a similar fashion, *neurotic* individuals, who are more anxious and insecure, may display an inclination to authoritarian submission and conventionalism. Their insecurity, however, may discourage them from pursuing aggressive social control. I therefore do not formulate any hypotheses relating these three personality traits and authoritarianism.

Methods and data

In order to test the hypothesized relationships between the big five personality traits, authoritarianism and support for democracy, I employ original survey data collected by the German-based survey company Survey Engine. The three surveys were conducted in six Western European consolidated democracies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) between November 2020 and January 2021, April and May 2021 as well as January and March 2022 with roughly 1,000 respondents per country per survey. Respondents were recruited by quota sampling via the SurveyEngine access panel and are representative of the general population in terms of age, sex and education. They received a small monetary incentive for completing the survey. Detailed information on the survey can be found in Table A1 in the online appendix.

For the dependent variable, support for a democratic vis-à vis an autocratic regime, I adopt a measure from the Global Barometer Surveys (ABS, 2016), which has been previously employed in literature on support for democracy (Mattes and Bratton, 2007). This item battery asks respondents whether they agree with three statements on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree: a) *Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government*; b) *Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one*; c) *For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime*. I test whether these three items can be summarized under a single factor via confirmatory factor analysis. As can be seen in Table A2, panel a) in the online appendix, the model fit is excellent. I thus aggregate the items into a single variable using the mean with items b) and c) reversed.

To measure authoritarianism, I make use of a newer, validated item battery that takes into account the three-dimensionality of the construct and employs three items to measure each dimension (Beierlein et al., 2015). This item battery also improves upon earlier measures such as the right-wing authoritarianism scale, which have come under considerable criticism for inflating authoritarianism with conservatism and prejudices (Pettigrew, 2016). Authoritarian submission includes the items a) *We need strong leaders so that we can live safely in our society*; b) *People should leave key decisions in society to leaders*; and c) *We should be grateful for leading figures that tell us exactly what we can do*. Authoritarian aggression is measured using the items d) *Troublemakers should be made to feel that they are not welcome in society*; e) *Outsiders and idlers should be cracked down on in society*; and f) *Social rules should be enforced without compromise*. For conventionalism, this item battery uses the statements g) *Traditions should be preserved without question*; h) *Tried and true methods should not be called into question*; and i) *It is always best to do things the usual way*. Agreement to these statements is measured on a scale from 1) strongly disagree to 5) strongly agree. I test the three-dimensional structure of this construct via confirmatory factor analysis. Table A2, panel b) in the online appendix demonstrates that all goodness of fit indicators show adequate model fit, aside from RMSEA, where model fit is only marginal. With a Cronbach's alpha of 0.84, the full item battery also displays high internal consistency and can thus be aggregated into a single variable. For simplicity, I employ a single variable taking the mean of all items in the main analysis. There is some degree of overlap between the two dependent variables – support for democracy and authoritarianism significantly correlate with each other, albeit the correlation is only low to moderate ($r = -0.27$ for the overall index, -0.27 for authoritarian submission, -0.21 for authoritarian aggression, -0.19 for conventionalism). In order to gauge whether support for democracy and authoritarianism form separate factors, I conduct an exploratory factor analysis with promax rotation including all items. As can be seen in Table A3 in the online appendix, the items for these two concepts clearly load on distinct factors. At the same time, however, authoritarianism loads on two factors, separating in particular the items for authoritarian submission from the other dimensions. In extended analyses, I thus use three separate measures for each dimension separately.

The key independent variable, the big five personality traits, are measured using the ten-item personality inventory (TIPI, see Gosling et al., 2003), which has performed similarly well in predicting political attitudes than more extensive item batteries (Gerber et al., 2011). This item battery asks respondents whether a number of personality traits applies to them or not. For openness to experience, this includes the traits a) *open to new experiences, complex* and b) *conventional, uncreative* (reversed). Conscientiousness is measured through the traits c) *dependable, self-disciplined* and d) *disorganized, careless* (rev.). Extraversion comprises the traits e) *extraverted, enthusiastic* and f) *reserved, quiet* (rev.). For agreeableness, the traits g) *sympathetic, warm* and h) *critical, quarrelsome* (rev.) are used. Finally, neuroticism combines the traits i) *anxious, easily upset* and j) *calm, emotionally stable* (rev.).

As to the modeling strategy, I employ OLS regression with country-survey fixed effects and robust standard errors. Hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c are tested by regressing democratic regime preference on the big five personality traits, hypotheses 2a and 2b are tested by regressing authoritarianism on the big five personality traits. All models control for the age of the respondents in years, sex as well as migration background. Summary statistics for all variables can be found in the online appendix in Table A4. For ease of interpretation, the key variables were rescaled to range from 0 to 1 for the descriptive statistics and the regressions employ standardized coefficients.

Empirical analysis

A first look at the descriptive statistics of the main variables reveals that there is a robust preference for a democratic regime in the six Western European democracies under study. Only 6.3% of the respondents are of the opinion that democracy is not always preferable to any other kind of government. Nevertheless, there is at least some support for the statement that autocracy can be preferable to a democratic regime under some circumstances (23.5%) or that it does not matter to them (15.6%). On average, preference for democracy lies at 0.68 on a scale from 0 to 1 and is highest in Germany (0.73) and lowest in the United Kingdom (0.66). Compared to a preference for an authoritarian regime type, authoritarianism is more widespread in these democratic societies at 0.56 on a scale from 0 to 1, with the highest levels in France (0.60) and the lowest levels in Spain (0.53).

Table 1: Linear regression models for the relationship between big five personality traits as well as authoritarianism and democratic regime preference

	(1)		(2)	
Dependent variable:	Democratic regime preference		Authoritarianism	
Openness to experience	0.143	(0.02)***	−0.232	(0.01)***
Conscientiousness	0.111	(0.01)***	0.075	(0.02)***
Extraversion	−0.034	(0.01)***	0.060	(0.01)***
Agreeableness	0.094	(0.02)***	0.022	(0.01)
Neuroticism	−0.038	(0.01)**	0.002	(0.01)
Age	0.159	(0.01)***	0.131	(0.01)***
Male	−0.010	(0.01)	0.044	(0.01)***
Migration background	−0.018	(0.01)	−0.019	(0.01)*
Country-survey FE	✓		✓	
N	18,395		18,395	
Adj. within-R²	0.104		0.075	

Note: Standardized linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses, * p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table 1, model (1) presents the main results of the OLS regression for the relationship between the big five personality traits and democratic regime preference. Following hypotheses 1a, 1b and 1c, I expect higher democratic regime preferences for those who are more open to experience, more conscientious and more agreeable. The empirical results lend support to the proposed arguments. Particularly openness to experience displays a comparatively strong relationship with democratic regime preferences – a standard deviation (SD) change in openness is associated with a 0.14 SD increase in democratic regime preferences. In substantial terms, support for democracy is higher for the respondents who are most open to experience (0.75) as compared to those who are least open to experience (0.58). The relationship with agreeableness and conscientiousness is a bit weaker, but still fairly substantial in size with a 0.11 and 0.09 SD increase, respectively. Agreeableness increases democratic regime preferences from 0.61 at its minimum to 0.72 at its maximum. For the least conscientious respondents, preferences for democracy are at 0.59, while they are at 0.71 for the most conscientious respondents. In contrast to expectations, I also find a significant relationship for extraversion and neuroticism, albeit the effect size is substantially weaker than for the other personality traits with a 0.03 and 0.04 SD decrease in democratic regime preferences, respectively. The results suggest that support for democracy is lower for the most extraverted individuals (0.66) than for the most introverted individuals (0.70), showing support for the argument that the more socially dominant extraverted individuals may be more open to authoritarian leadership styles. At the same time, very neurotic individuals are less supportive of democratic regimes (0.66) than very emotionally stable individuals (0.70), indicating that neurotic individuals may be more overwhelmed by the open societies of democracies. Overall, the results corroborate that personality traits impact citizens' support for democracy in consolidated democracies. The size of the relationship, however, is only moderate. As indicated by the model fit, the big five personality traits contribute to explaining democratic regime preferences, but only to some degree.[1] In general, even individuals with personality traits less favorable to pro-democratic orientations still tend to slightly prefer democracy on average. Nevertheless, considering that only a small minority of citizens display a low preference for democracy in consolidated democracies, the relationship is still fairly substantial, and if democracy is threatened by crises or attempts of executive aggrandizement, their support cannot be taken for granted.

Model (2) tests the relationships between the big five personality traits and authoritarianism. Following earlier literature on this subject (Heaven and Bucci, 2001; Nicol and de France, 2016; Perry and Sibley, 2012), I expect a negative relationship between openness and authoritarianism, but a positive one between conscientiousness and authoritarianism, as presented by hypotheses 2a and 2b. These hypotheses find support in the empirical analysis with a more appropriate, validated measure for authoritarianism. Particularly openness to experience displays a strong negative relationship with authoritarianism – an SD change in openness is related to a 0.19 SD decrease in authoritarianism. Over the range of openness to experience, authoritarianism drops from 0.69 at its minimum to 0.47 at its maximum. Open individuals thus display both lower levels of authoritarianism and are more in favor of democracy vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives. For conscientiousness, the relationship is weaker and positive with a 0.11 SD increase in authoritarianism – authoritarianism is at 0.51 for the least conscientious respondents and rises to 0.58 for the most conscientious respondents. While conscientiousness is positively related to pro-democratic orientations, it simultaneously increases rather than decreases authoritarianism. In addition, I again find an unexpected relationship for extraversion, albeit weaker with only a 0.06 SD increase in authoritarianism. Very extraverted individuals are significantly more authoritarian (0.58) than very introverted individuals (0.53), indicating again that their assertiveness and social dominance may play a key role in this regard. Finally, agreeableness and neuroticism are unrelated to authoritarianism, as predicted by the contradicting theoretical arguments. As with support for democracy, the size of the relationships and the overall model fit is moderate.

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[1] A plot displaying observed versus fitted values for the dependent variables of models (1) and (2) can be found in Figure A1 in the online appendix.

I conduct a series of robustness checks to evaluate the stability of the aforementioned main findings. In a first step, I interact the main effects with survey and country dummies in order to test whether the relationships are consistent over time and across countries. Marginal effects for all surveys and countries are presented in Figure A2 and Figure A3 in the online appendix. The results hold throughout all surveys, only neuroticism turns insignificant in the second survey. This is generally also the case across countries with a few exceptions. With regards to support for democracy, the negative relationship of extraversion is insignificant for Switzerland and the UK, the positive relationship of agreeableness is insignificant for Spain and the negative relationship of neuroticism is insignificant for France and significantly positive for Italy. As to authoritarianism, conscientiousness is insignificant in the UK and extraversion is insignificant in France.

Second, in Table A5, model (2) in the online appendix, I include additional control variables that are frequently employed in the literature on support for democracy (Erhardt et al., 2022; Magalhães, 2014), but which may be affected by personality traits. This includes education in three categories (primary, lower secondary education; upper, post-secondary education; tertiary education), income situation on a scale from (1) it is very difficult to cope on my current income to (5) I can live comfortably on my current income and can save regularly, 11-point left-right self-placement (squared), electoral winner status as well as interest in politics on a scale from (1) not at all interested to (5) very interested. The coefficients are a bit smaller in these models, which is to be expected given their potential post-treatment status, but the relationships remain consistent with the main results.

Third, I account for the fact that the survey was conducted during the coronavirus pandemic, which may potentially affect survey responses to the key variables under study. For this reason, I include several coronavirus-related controls in models (3) and (4), such as personal exposure to pathogen threat (no exposure, someone close was infected, respondent themselves was infected), attitude towards measures combatting the pandemic (are appropriate, do not go far enough, go too far), cumulative fatality incidence as well as 7-day incidence in the region the respondent lives in. Adding these controls does not alter the results in any substantive way.

Fourth, I test whether the results may be driven by respondents with values on the extreme ends of the personality traits. This is done by including a dummy for each personality trait in the model that identifies respondents with values at least one standard deviation away from the mean of the respective personality trait. As a result, respondents at the extremes are controlled for and the main coefficients of big five personality traits are based on respondents with moderate values. As can be seen in model (5), this does not affect the main results.

Finally, I disaggregate authoritarianism and include the three dimensions separately in the analysis. This highlights some differences between the three dimensions when looking at the big five personality traits of conscientiousness and agreeableness. Crucially, there is no positive relationship between conscientiousness and authoritarian submission, showing that while conscientious individuals prefer social control and conventions, they are not prone to submit to authorities. In addition, while there is no overall relationship of agreeableness with authoritarianism, there is a positive relationship with authoritarian submission and conventionalism. This aligns well with the theoretical argument that these kind and conflict-averse individuals may tend to submit to authorities and favor conventional ways of doing things but do not favor aggressive social control.

Conclusion

In this paper, I examined the personality foundations of democracy. In explaining comparatively stable levels of support for democracy, previous literature has mostly focused on socialization through long term societal trends (Dalton, 1994; Inglehart, 2003; Putnam, 1993). I contend that regime preferences may go even further back and have their roots in stable personality traits. For this reason, I developed a theoretical argument and empirically tested how the big five personality traits relate to democratic regime support in six consolidated Western European democracies. The results present robust evidence for the main hypotheses, showing that democratic regime support is higher for individuals who are more open to experience, more conscientious and more agreeable.

In contrast, more extraverted and more neurotic individuals display a lower preference for democracy, but the relationship is weaker and less robust. The size of the relationship is moderate and on average, even individuals with personality traits less favorable to pro-democratic orientations still tend to slightly prefer democracy. Nevertheless, the relationship is still substantial, considering that only a small minority of citizens display a low preference for democracy in consolidated democracies.

Given that earlier literature has turned to authoritarianism to evaluate the personality foundations of fascism and anti-democratic sentiments in society (Adorno et al., 1950), I also replicate earlier findings on the relationship between big five personality traits and authoritarianism (see, e.g., Heaven and Bucci, 2001; Nicol and de France, 2016; Perry and Sibley, 2012) with a more appropriate, validated measure for authoritarianism (Beierlein et al., 2015). Authoritarianism, while indeed negatively correlated with democratic regime preferences, rests on slightly different personality traits. On the one hand, higher openness to experience also coincides with a lower authoritarianism. In addition, I also find an unexpected positive relationship between extraversion and authoritarianism. On the other hand, while conscientiousness is positively related to pro-democratic orientations, it simultaneously increases rather than decreases authoritarianism. This is only true, however, for the sub-dimensions of authoritarian aggression and conventionalism, but not for authoritarian submission. Agreeableness and neuroticism are not related to authoritarianism, but agreeableness positively relates to the sub-dimensions of authoritarian submission and conventionalism, which also contradicts the positive relationship of agreeableness with support for democracy.

There are some limitations to this study that warrant further discussion and should be addressed in future research. First, the sample is limited to six consolidated Western European democracies. Future studies should test whether the results found in this study can be generalized to other contexts. Looking at the theoretical argument, the personality foundations of support for democracy may differ slightly depending on whether individuals come from consolidated democracies, newer democracies, autocracies or regimes in transition (see, e.g., Armendáriz Miranda and Cawvey, 2021 for the Latin American context). In particular, conscientious individuals' willingness to accept existing hierarchies, agreeableness individuals' higher compliance as well as the preference for the status quo of conscientious and neurotic individuals may have divergent effects on democratic regime preferences, depending on the context. Second, big five personality traits have only been measured with a narrow inventory including two items per trait and not with more extensive item batteries such as the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 2008). Third, the research design is observational and does not allow for causal inference. In this regard, it is crucial to assess whether the relationship between personality traits and support for democracy may be confounded by genetic factors (Verhulst et al., 2012). Fourth, there are some limitations with regard to the mechanisms discussed in the theoretical argument. Further studies should disentangle them in greater detail by evaluating whether big five personality traits affect how important individuals consider different aspects or consequences of democracies. This may also provide further insights on why extraversion and neuroticism negatively relate to support for democracy. Finally, future research should go beyond dichotomous regime preferences for democracy vis-à-vis autocratic systems and also evaluate how support for different conceptions of democracy (liberal, majoritarian, etc.) rests on different personality traits.

At the same time, this study provides important insights for research on personality and regime support. It highlights that support for democracy is deeply rooted in personality traits. This may provide an explanation for the stability of pro-democratic orientations within individuals over time. Crucially, it suggests that support for democracy – an important predictor of democratic survival (Claassen, 2020) – to some extent builds on stable personality foundations that may not be easily changed by political and societal attempts to generate diffuse regime support. Besides, this study also presents crucial answers for the question why support for democracy differs between individuals in consolidated democracies even if aspects of socialization through long-term societal trends are held constant. In addition, it reiterates calls of previous studies to differentiate between the dimensions of authoritarianism (Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013) and demonstrates the merits of doing so. Finally, it cautions against treating authoritarianism and regime preferences as equivalent, given that despite their innate relatedness, their causes and consequences may differ. Personality traits that are positively related to authoritarianism do not necessarily have to be a threat to democracy – they can even be positively related to support for democracy instead. This highlights the importance of looking at indicators for regime preferences to gauge such questions.

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Online Appendix

Table A1: Description of the Surveys

a) Survey 1:

Target population	Residents aged 18 years or older in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Survey mode	Online
Sample size	6,210 respondents (target sample size: 1,000 per country)
Quotas	Age, Sex, Education
Sampling	Survey Engine Panel
Interview language	English, French, German, Italian, Spanish
Date of Interviews	24 November 2020 – 18 January 2021
Response rate	FRA: 7.66% GER: 7.59% ITA: 5.18% SPA: 15.63% SWI: 8.57% UK: 4.56% Overall: 7.03% (RR5/6 Completion Rate, The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016))
Institute	The survey was carried out by Survey Engine

b) Survey 2:

Target population	Residents aged 18 years or older in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Survey mode	Online
Sample size	6,060 respondents (target sample size: 1,000 per country)
Quotas	Age, Sex, Education
Sampling	Survey Engine Panel
Interview language	English, French, German, Italian, Spanish
Date of Interviews	22 April 2021 – 21 May 2021
Response rate	FRA: 13.50% GER: 18.93% ITA: 33.86% SPA: 24.32% SWI: 24.94% UK: 10.07% Overall: 17.83% (RR5/6 Completion Rate, The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016))
Institute	The survey was carried out by Survey Engine

c) Survey 3:

Target population	Residents aged 18 years or older in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Survey mode	Online
Sample size	6,379 respondents (target sample size: 1,000 per country)
Quotas	Age, Sex, Education
Sampling	Survey Engine Panel
Interview language	English, French, German, Italian, Spanish
Date of Interviews	25 January 2022 – 08 March 2022
Response rate	FRA: 16.56% GER: 24.95% ITA: 36.00% SPA: 28.61% SWI: 27.02% UK: 8.76% Overall: 19.16% (RR5/6 Completion Rate, The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016))
Institute	The survey was carried out by Survey Engine

Source:

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016). Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys. Available online at: https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf

Table A2: Confirmatory factor analyses for key variables

a) Democratic regime preference

RMSEA	0.000
CFI	1.000
TLI	1.000
SRMR	0.000
N	18,395

b) 3-dimensional Authoritarianism

RMSEA	0.083
CFI	0.938
TLI	0.906
SRMR	0.046
N	18,395

Table A3: Exploratory factor analysis for support for democracy and authoritarianism

Item		**Factor 1**	**Factor 2**	**Factor 3**
D.a)	Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.			-0.83
D.b)	Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one.			0.68
D.c)	For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime.			0.77
A.a)	We need strong leaders so that we can live safely in our society.	0.47	0.32	
A.b)	People should leave key decisions in society to leaders.		0.88	
A.c)	We should be grateful for leading figures that tell us exactly what we can do.		0.92	
A.d)	Troublemakers should be made to feel that they are not welcome in society.	0.76		
A.e)	Outsiders and idlers should be cracked down on in society.	0.47		
A.f)	Social rules should be enforced without compromise.	0.66		
A.g)	Traditions should be preserved without question.	0.83		
A.h)	Tried and true methods should not be called into question.	0.80		
A.i)	It is always best to do things the usual way.	0.62		

N = 18,395

Note: Factor loadings of an exploratory factor analysis with the principal-component method. For ease of presentation, only substantially relevant factor loadings (i.e., larger than 0.3) are displayed.

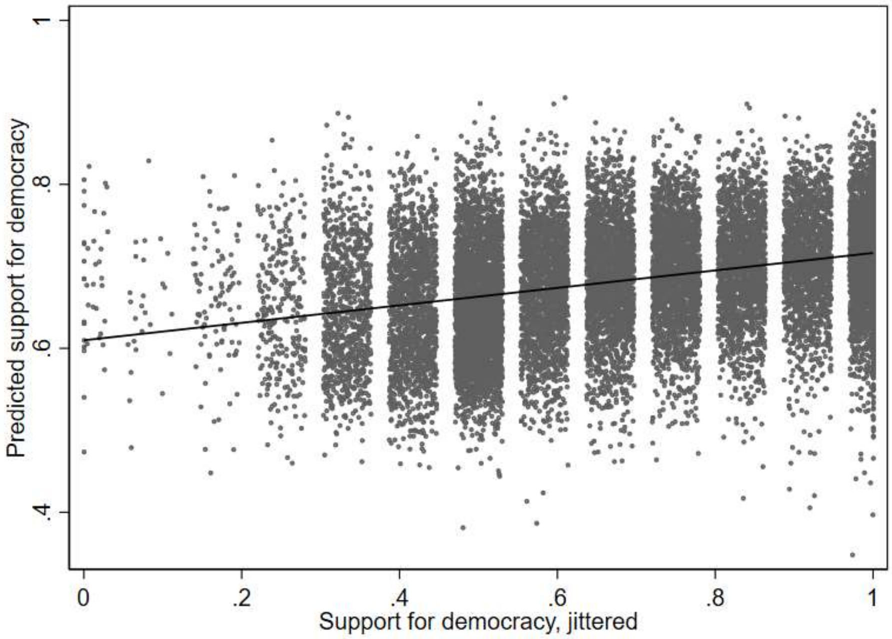
Table A4: Summary statistics

	Survey 1		**Survey 2**		**Survey 3**			
Variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Min**	**Max**
Democratic regime preference	0.68	0.22	0.69	0.22	0.68	0.22	0	1
Authoritarianism	0.57	0.18	0.55	0.19	0.55	0.18	0	1
Authoritarian submission	*0.52*	*0.21*	*0.51*	*0.21*	*0.50*	*0.21*	*0*	*1*
Authoritarian aggression	*0.60*	*0.22*	*0.58*	*0.23*	*0.57*	*0.22*	*0*	*1*
Conventionalism	*0.59*	*0.21*	*0.58*	*0.22*	*0.58*	*0.22*	*0*	*1*
Openness to experience	0.61	0.19	0.61	0.20	0.60	0.19	0	1
Conscientiousness	0.73	0.20	0.74	0.20	0.73	0.20	0	1
Extraversion	0.47	0.21	0.47	0.22	0.46	0.21	0	1
Agreeableness	0.66	0.19	0.66	0.19	0.66	0.19	0	1
Neuroticism	0.39	0.22	0.38	0.22	0.39	0.22	0	1
Age	48	16	48	16	48	16	18	91
Male	0.50		0.50		0.51		0	1
Migration background	0.17		0.16		0.15		0	1
Primary & lower sec. education	*0.25*		*0.21*		*0.26*		*0*	*1*
Upper & post secondary education	*0.39*		*0.41*		*0.40*		*0*	*1*
Tertiary education	*0.36*		*0.38*		*0.35*		*0*	*1*
Income situation	*2.97*	*1.09*	*3.07*	*1.06*	*3.00*	*1.05*	*0*	*1*
Left-right self-placement	*4.82*	*2.32*	*4.93*	*2.38*	*4.95*	*2.34*	*0*	*10*
Electoral winner	*0.36*		*0.39*		*0.39*		*0*	*1*
Interest in politics	*3.26*	*1.15*	*3.28*	*1.19*	*3.25*	*1.19*	*1*	*5*
No one close infected	*0.70*		*0.63*		*0.43*		*0*	*1*
Someone close infected	*0.22*		*0.26*		*0.36*		*0*	*1*
Self infected	*0.07*		*0.10*		*0.21*		*0*	*1*
Measures are appropriate	*0.33*		*0.40*		*0.43*		*0*	*1*
Measures do not go far enough	*0.53*		*0.43*		*0.36*		*0*	*1*
Measures go too far	*0.15*		*0.17*		*0.22*		*0*	*1*
Cumulative regional fatalities	*84.2*	*59.2*	*164.4*	*79.4*	*N/A*		*3.5*	*368.7*
Regional 7-day incidence	*215.8*	*151.5*	*109.9*	*60.6*	*N/A*		*0*	*1118.5*
Respondents	6,124		5,975		6,296			

Note: Italics: Variables not used in main regressions, but only in robustness checks and extended analyses.

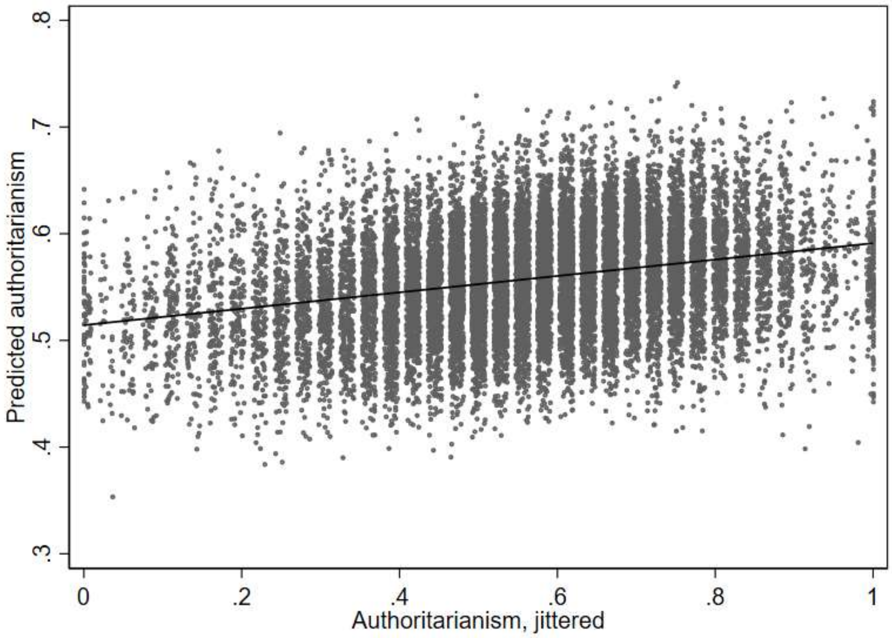
Figure A1: Predicted versus observed values for the main regression models

a) Support for democracy



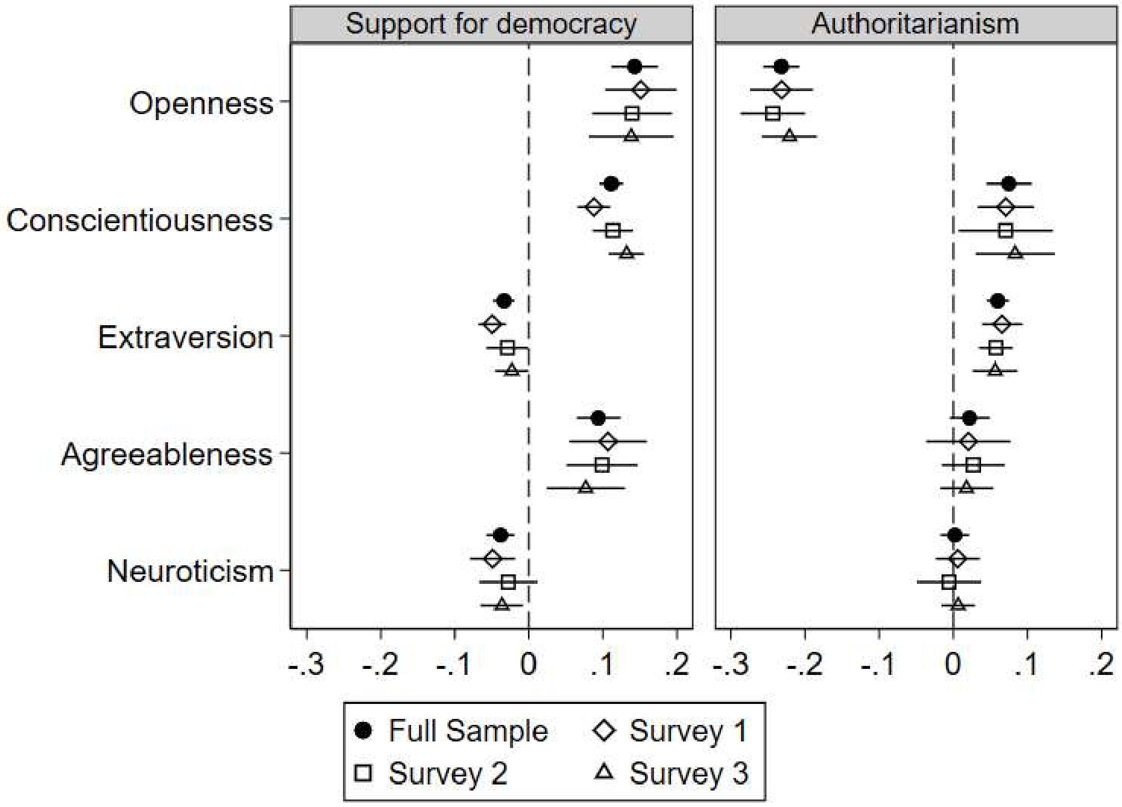
Note: Displayed are predicted versus observed values of support for democracy based on the regression of Table 1, model (1). Observed values of support for democracy are randomly jittered around their real value so that they are not stacked on top of each other.

b) Authoritarianism



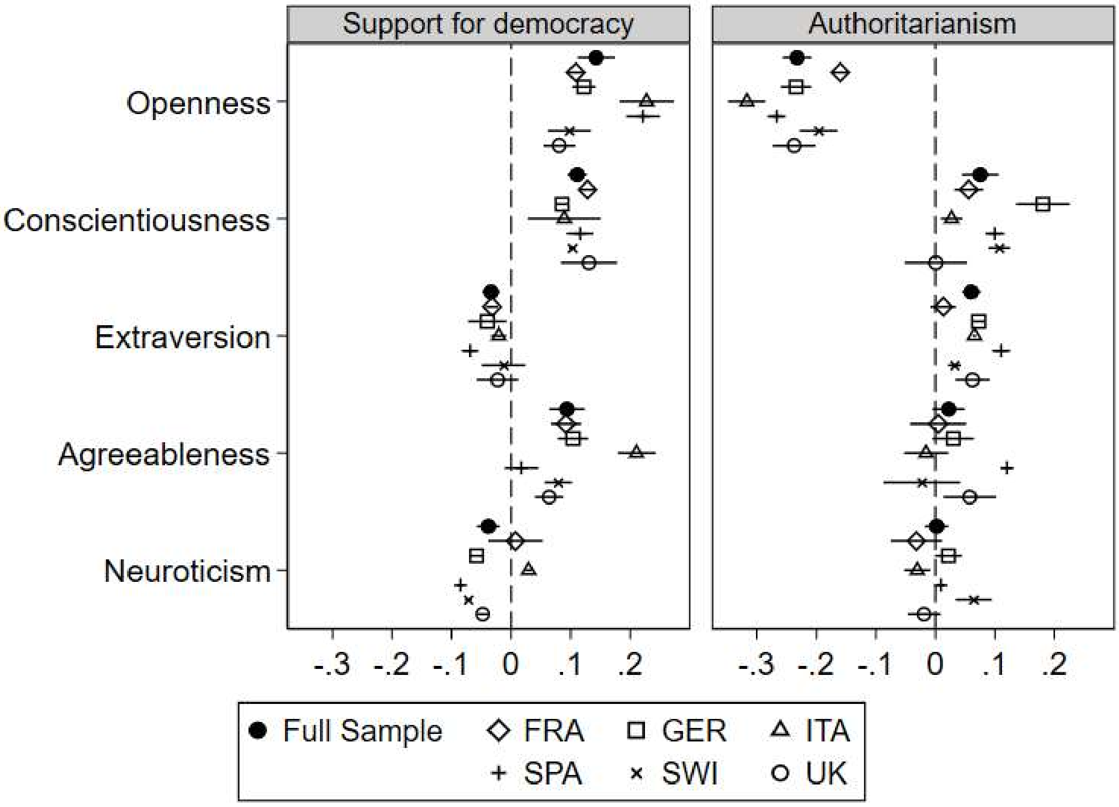
Note: Displayed are predicted versus observed values of authoritarianism based on the regression of Table 1, model (2). Observed values of authoritarianism are randomly jittered around their real value so that they are not stacked on top of each other.

Figure A2: Marginal effects of the relationships between big five personality traits as well as authoritarianism and democratic regime preference over time



Note: Displayed are standardized marginal effects with 95% robust confidence intervals of the relationship between big five personality traits as well as authoritarianism and democratic regime preferences over the three surveys, calculated from models interacting personality traits with survey dummies. Controls: age, gender, migration background, N = 18,395.

Figure A3: Marginal effects of the relationships between big five personality traits as well as authoritarianism and democratic regime preference across countries



Note: Displayed are standardized marginal effects with 95% robust confidence intervals of the relationship between big five personality traits as well as authoritarianism and democratic regime preferences across the six countries, calculated from models interacting personality traits with country dummies. Controls: age, gender, migration background, N = 18,395.

Table A5: Robustness checks for the relationships between big five personality traits as well as democratic regime preferences and authoritarianism

a) Regression of democratic regime preference on big five personality traits

	(1) Main results		(2) Additional controls		(3) Covid controls		(4) Covid controls		(5) Extreme values controls	
Openness to experience	0.143	(0.02)***	0.096	(0.01)***	0.143	(0.02)***	0.146	(0.02)***	0.138	(0.02)***
Conscientiousness	0.111	(0.01)***	0.103	(0.01)***	0.108	(0.01)***	0.095	(0.01)***	0.082	(0.01)***
Extraversion	−0.034	(0.01)***	−0.035	(0.01)***	−0.033	(0.01)***	−0.037	(0.01)**	−0.018	(0.01)*
Agreeableness	0.094	(0.02)***	0.090	(0.01)***	0.088	(0.02)***	0.098	(0.02)***	0.083	(0.01)***
Neuroticism	−0.038	(0.01)**	−0.022	(0.01)*	−0.037	(0.01)**	−0.039	(0.01)*	−0.046	(0.01)***
Age	0.159	(0.01)***	0.165	(0.01)***	0.147	(0.01)***	0.146	(0.02)***	0.159	(0.01)***
Male	−0.010	(0.01)	−0.035	(0.01)***	−0.010	(0.01)	−0.009	(0.01)	−0.005	(0.01)
Migration background	−0.018	(0.01)	−0.020	(0.01)*	−0.016	(0.01)	−0.020	(0.01)	−0.015	(0.01)
Upper secondary education			0.037	(0.01)*						
Tertiary education			0.067	(0.01)***						
Income situation			0.084	(0.01)***						
Left-right self-placement			−0.152	(0.03)***						
Left-right self-placement²			−0.051	(0.03)						
Electoral winners			0.055	(0.01)***						
Interest in politics			0.132	(0.01)***						
Someone close infected					0.021	(0.01)*	0.013	(0.01)		
Self infected					−0.056	(0.01)***	−0.063	(0.01)***		
Measures do not go far enough					−0.053	(0.02)**	−0.047	(0.02)		
Measures go too far					−0.053	(0.02)**	−0.058	(0.02)*		
Cumulative regional fatalities							0.008	(0.01)		
Regional 7-day incidence							−0.007	(0.01)		
Openness to experience extreme values									0.029	(0.01)**
Conscientiousness extreme values									−0.058	(0.01)***
Extraversion extreme values									0.088	(0.01)***
Agreeableness extreme values									−0.002	(0.01)
Neuroticism extreme values									0.053	(0.01)***
Country-survey FE	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
N	18,395		15,510		18,288		12,052		18,395	
Adj. within-R²	0.104		0.184		0.110		0.108		0.120	

Note: Standardized linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

b) Regression of authoritarianism on big five personality traits

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)		(5)	
	Main results		Additional controls		Covid controls		Covid controls		Extreme values controls	
Openness to experience	−0.232	(0.01)***	−0.171	(0.01)***	−0.231	(0.01)***	−0.234	(0.02)***	−0.230	(0.01)***
Conscientiousness	0.075	(0.02)***	0.056	(0.02)**	0.079	(0.02)***	0.075	(0.02)**	0.099	(0.01)***
Extraversion	0.060	(0.01)***	0.040	(0.01)***	0.061	(0.01)***	0.061	(0.01)***	0.047	(0.01)***
Agreeableness	0.022	(0.01)	0.029	(0.01)*	0.019	(0.01)	0.021	(0.02)	0.024	(0.01)
Neuroticism	0.002	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)	0.000	(0.01)	0.008	(0.01)
Age	0.131	(0.01)***	0.088	(0.01)***	0.128	(0.01)***	0.131	(0.02)***	0.133	(0.01)***
Male	0.044	(0.01)***	0.021	(0.01)**	0.042	(0.01)***	0.043	(0.01)**	0.040	(0.01)***
Migration background	−0.019	(0.01)*	−0.006	(0.01)	−0.021	(0.01)*	−0.014	(0.01)*	−0.022	(0.01)*
Upper secondary education			−0.026	(0.01)						
Tertiary education			−0.115	(0.02)***						
Income situation			−0.027	(0.01)						
Left-right self-placement			0.362	(0.03)***						
Left-right self-placement^2			−0.035	(0.04)						
Electoral winners			0.114	(0.01)***						
Interest in politics			−0.005	(0.01)						
Someone close infected					−0.016	(0.01)	−0.015	(0.01)		
Self infected					0.033	(0.01)*	0.043	(0.02)*		
Measures do not go far enough					−0.030	(0.03)	−0.036	(0.03)		
Measures go too far					−0.073	(0.01)***	−0.066	(0.02)**		
Cumulative regional fatalities							0.019	(0.02)		
Regional 7-day incidence							0.002	(0.01)		
Openness to experience extreme values									−0.029	(0.01)**
Conscientiousness extreme values									0.071	(0.01)***
Extraversion extreme values									−0.066	(0.01)***
Agreeableness extreme values									0.025	(0.01)*
Neuroticism extreme values									−0.022	(0.01)**
Country-survey FE	✓		✓		✓		✓		✓	
N	18,395		15,510		18,288		12,052		18,395	
Adj. within-R^2	0.075		0.198		0.081		0.082		0.086	

Note: Standardized linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses,
* $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A6: Relationship between big five personality traits and authoritarianism in its dimensions

	(1) Full index	(2) Authoritarian submission	(3) Authoritarian aggression	(4) Conventionalism
Openness to experience	−0.232 (0.01)***	−0.176 (0.01)***	−0.181 (0.01)***	−0.224 (0.01)***
Conscientiousness	0.075 (0.02)***	0.017 (0.01)	0.096 (0.02)***	0.072 (0.01)***
Extraversion	0.060 (0.01)***	0.042 (0.01)***	0.046 (0.01)***	0.062 (0.01)***
Agreeableness	0.022 (0.01)	0.033 (0.01)*	−0.026 (0.01)	0.050 (0.01)**
Neuroticism	0.002 (0.01)	0.017 (0.01)	−0.009 (0.01)	−0.002 (0.01)
Age	0.131 (0.01)***	0.017 (0.01)	0.144 (0.01)***	0.163 (0.02)***
Male	0.044 (0.01)***	0.018 (0.01)*	0.045 (0.01)***	0.047 (0.01)***
Migration background	−0.019 (0.01)*	0.004 (0.01)	−0.038 (0.01)**	−0.013 (0.01)*
Country-survey FE	✓	✓	✓	✓
N	18,395	18,395	18,395	18,395
Adj. within-R²	0.075	0.028	0.066	0.089

Note: Standardized linear regression coefficients with robust standard errors in parentheses, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

3. Article 2: National identity between democracy and autocracy: a comparative analysis of 24 countries

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Recognizing democratic backsliding and increasing support for authoritarianism, research on public preferences for democracy and its authoritarian alternatives has gained traction. Moving beyond the extant focus on economic determinants, our analysis examines the effect of national identity, demonstrating that it is a double-edged sword for regime preferences. Using recent European Values Survey data on 24 European countries from 2017 to 18, we show that civic national identity is associated with a higher support for democracy and lower support for authoritarian regimes, whereas the reverse holds for ethnic identities. Further, economic hardship moderates these relationships: it strengthens both the negative effect of ethnic national identities and, to some extent, the positive effect of civic national identities on democracy support vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives. This has important implications for the survival of democracy in times of crises and the study of a cultural backlash, since social identity matters substantively for individuals' responses to economic hardship.

Keywords: National identity, conceptions of nationhood, support for democracy, regime preference, economic hardship

Introduction

As democratic backsliding (Waldner and Lust, 2018) and substantial increases in authoritarian attitudes among the citizenry of democracies throughout most parts of the globe (Inglehart and Norris, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019) become a more and more central phenomenon, research on public preferences for democracy and its authoritarian alternatives has gained traction (e.g., Ariely and Davidov, 2011; Magalhães, 2014). While previous research has extensively dealt with economic prerequisites of democracy (e.g., Lipset, 1959b; Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Kotzian, 2011; Andersen, 2012; Teixeira *et al.*, 2014), little research has to date scrutinized cultural accounts of regime support and, most profoundly, the role of national identity therein. This is quite startling, since national identity has moved from being a bit player to center stage in contemporary political science (Schmidt and Quandt, 2018). Considering the long-standing debate whether a strong and shared national identity should be valued as a prerequisite of a well-functioning democratic system (e.g., Miller, 1995; Smith, 1998) or rather as a road to authoritarian rule (e.g., Adorno *et al.*, 1950), it is time to examine systematically to what extent national identity relates to support for democratic or authoritarian regime types.[1]

Viewing national identity as a multidimensional set of attitudes (Davidov, 2009), we differentiate between ethnic and civic conceptions of nationhood as one major aspect of national identity (Kohn, 1939; Brubaker, 1992; Kunovich, 2009). We argue that civic national identity, defining belongingness to a nation by adherence to the national political culture and respect for political institutions, is inherently linked to democracy and its promise of equal rights and an inclusive society. In contrast, ethnic national identity, which conceptualizes nationhood by ascriptive criteria such as place of birth or ancestry, is linked to more authoritarian regime types that promise protection of the in-group by means of strong leadership. Given the prevalence of economic variables in previous research, and also seeing as current research increasingly tends to view economic factors and identity or values as interrelated (e.g., Serricchio, Tsakatika and Quaglia, 2013; Gidron and Hall, 2017, 2019), we go one step further and analyze a moderating effect of economic hardship on our hypothesized relationship between national identity and diffuse support.

Comparing 24 European countries with data from the most recent European Values Survey from 2017 to 18, the results support our main argument: an ethnic national identity is indeed associated with a lower support for democracy and higher support for a strong leadership and army rule, whereas the reverse holds true for a civic national identity. In addition, we find substantial support for one of our hypothesized moderation effects: economic hardship substantially increases the negative effect of an ethnic national identity on the preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives. For individuals with a civic national identity, the results indicate a slight increase in this group's support for democracy under economic hardship.

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[1] Democracies can be defined by the existence of several institutions, including ‘a democratic electoral regime, political rights of participation, civil rights, horizontal accountability, and the guarantee that the effective power to govern lies in the hands of democratically elected representatives’ (Merkel, 2004). While there exist a variety of different autocratic regimes types, their smallest common denominator is that they do not fulfill these criteria of democracies (Linz, 2000). Our study focuses on two frequently found varieties of authoritarian regimes, in which legitimacy is based on military rule or on the rule of a single, strong leadership figure.

Our study contributes to the existing research in several respects. First, while most research in this field tends to focus on satisfaction with democracy or institutional trust (e.g., Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014; Armingeon, Guthmann and Weisstanner, 2016; Cordero and Simón, 2016), which relates to the side of *specific* support as established by Easton (1965, 1975), only a few exceptions address the *diffuse*[2] side of system support, that is the preferences for democracy and authoritarian alternatives (Ariely and Davidov, 2011; Magalhães, 2014).[3] Indeed, the notion that 'satisfaction with democratic performance and support for democracy have different etiologies' is supported by previous studies (Magalhães, 2014, but also Dalton, 2004; Bratton, Mattes and Gyimah-Boadi, 2005; Chu *et al.*, 2008). Second, we introduce cultural and identity-based explanations to the study of regime preferences. Third, analyzing a moderating effect of economic variables on our hypothesized relationship between national identity and diffuse regime support, our study is linked to the ongoing debate of a 'cultural backlash' against democratic rule stemming from a (perceived) declining material security (Inglehart and Norris, 2017; Ausserladscheider, 2019).

The remainder of our paper is structured as follows: first, we conceptualize our understanding of national identity and its likely relevance for our dependent variable in more detail. Next, we deduce a total of five hypotheses on both direct and moderated relationships between national identity and support for democracy and authoritarian regime types from this theoretical reasoning. Subsequently, we introduce the European Values Study (EVS) data set and elaborate on our empirical approach before moving to the results of our analysis. Lastly, we discuss the implications and validity of these results and conclude with a look ahead.

National Identity and Support for Democracy and Autocracy

National identity as such describes a 'deeply felt affective attachment to the nation' (Conover and Feldman, 1987 cited in Rapp, 2018, p. 3). Recent scholarly literature mostly agrees that individual-level national identity as such is a multifaceted and multidimensional construct (Blank and Schmidt, 2003; de Figueiredo and Elkins, 2003; Helbling *et al.*, 2016; Schmidt and Quandt, 2018). Beyond the strength of individual-level identity and its importance in everyday life, it is especially the content of such an identity that allows for distinguishing subconcepts like (ethnic or civic) nationalism or various forms of patriotism, such as conventional, constitutional, or constructive patriotism (Schatz et al., 1999; Blank and Schmidt, 2003; Davidov, 2009; Kunovich, 2009). However, since the meaning and understanding of such terms vary greatly across different contexts (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010; Latcheva, 2011), an individual's conception of what it takes to be a 'true' member of her nation has emerged as the major aspect of analyzing national identity across countries and cultures (Brubaker, 1992; Shulman, 2002; Kunovich, 2009; Berg and Hjerm, 2010; Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010; Bonikowski, 2016; Lenard and Miller, 2018), as 'the importance of this distinction cannot be overstated' (Helbling *et al.*, 2016, p. 746). Following the seminal work of Hans Kohn (1939), research tends to distinguish between either civic or ethnic conceptions of nationhood based on the criteria that define belongingness to the respective nation.

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[2] Whereas specific support refers to 'the perceived decisions, policies, actions, utterances or the general style of […] authorities' (Easton, 1975, p. 437), diffuse support represents 'attachment to political objects [such as regimes] for their own sake' (Easton, 1975, p. 445).

[3] This negligence can partly be explained by the long-standing postulate that support for democracy or any other regime type is 'a stable cognitive value' (Huang *et al.*, 2008, p. 56) or 'a principled affair' (Mattes and Bratton, 2007, p. 201).

A civic conception of national membership mostly revolves around a common (national) language and a shared political culture (Ignatieff, 1993; Lenard and Miller, 2018). These so-called voluntarist criteria for belongingness to a nation originate from the ideals of the French Revolution and stress the element of choice in national membership (cf. Brubaker, 1992; Habermas, 1994; Miller, 1995; Luong, 2016). An ethnic view of nationhood, however, puts a strong emphasis on ancestry and birth for defining belongingness by objectivist criteria (Lenard and Miller, 2018).[4] Importantly, these presumably biological criteria do not necessarily require actual kinship but are considered to be proxies for the belief in a common culture that includes history, myths, and values (Brubaker, 1999; Kymlicka, 2000; Larsen, 2017). This is what Berg and Hjerm (2010) refer to as a 'thick' national identity as opposed to a 'thin', civic one.

In research, these two conceptions of nationhood hardly occur as ideal types or mutually exclusive. Thus, scholars have proposed to conceptualize criteria for national membership as one continuum with civic and ethnic identities as the respective extreme points (Smith, 1991; Brubaker, 1999; Kuzio, 2002; Brubaker, 2004; Lenard and Miller, 2018). Looking deeper into the issue of mutual exclusiveness, previous research has concluded further that whereas adherence to ethnic view on nationhood does not necessarily preclude agreement with indicators like language or political norms (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010; Wright *et al.*, 2012), the reverse may be the case of civic conceptions of nationhood (Habermas, 1991; Markell, 2000; Müller, 2010). Eventually, most individuals combine elements of both civic and ethnic criteria for national membership (Wright *et al.*, 2012; Lenard and Miller, 2018). Given that these arguments also touch upon methodological issues, we return to this in the empirical section. Despite these discussions on how to conceptualize views on nationhood appropriately, the civic–ethnic framework remains widespread and is used frequently in cross-national research (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010; Helbling *et al.*, 2016; Larsen, 2017).

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[4] Although some research suggests that civic and ethnic conceptions of nationhood bear normative connotations by reflecting 'good' and 'bad' identities (Brubaker, 1999; Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010; Larsen, 2017), we contend that such ascriptions should not impede a meaningful distinction between definitions of membership that emphasize a shared political culture and those that value a 'thicker' (Berg and Hjerm, 2010, p. 390) set of criteria.

The theoretical argument that civic conceptions of nationhood are linked to support for democracy has a long history. Early scholars like Giuseppe Mazzini, John Stuart Mill or Ernest Renan have established the notion that liberal forms of nationalism as an ideology are inherently connected to and sometimes even a prerequisite of a well-functioning democracy (Smith, 1998). Others, such as Habermas (1991, 1994), argue consistently that the creation of a common political sphere in a democratic system requires a shared identity that is detached from all references to blood and ancestry (see also Miller, 1995; Markell, 2000; Müller, 2010). From an individual-level perspective, if citizens rely on language and respect of political institutions as indicators for a shared political culture, they should also be more likely to value certain characteristics of a democratic regime type, such as equal rights for all members of the nation (Berg and Hjerm, 2010). Further, the inclusiveness of a civic national identity regarding incorporating outsiders into the national community by upholding these values fits well to the participatory character of liberal, democratic societies (Kunovich, 2009; Pehrson *et al.*, 2009; Simonsen, 2016). Authoritarian regimes frequently oppose inclusive societies directly, which contradicts central premises of a civic conception of nationhood. Therefore, this group of citizens should support democratic means of governance and be less likely to desire authoritarian rule.

Hypothesis 1: *Individuals holding a civic conception of nationhood are more likely to support democracy and less likely to support authoritarian alternatives.*

Regarding ethnic conceptions of nationhood, ideologies emphasizing the necessity of national ancestry in order to be viewed as a 'true' member of a nation like ethnic nationalism or even fascism (cf. Calhoun, 2007) are mostly linked to authoritarian forms of government. Ethnic definitions of national belongingness often relate to perceptions of national superiority (Adorno et al., 1950; Blank and Schmidt, 2003; Cottam et al., 2010) and the feeling of being threatened by the immigration of out-group members into the national community, which tends to result in hostility toward them (Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989; Schatz *et al.*, 1999; Wagner et al., 2012). Rule by means of strong leadership often appeals to either the promise of increasing the nation's impact in the international arena or to the pledge of protecting the nation from undue or detrimental influences outside the nation, as can be seen in cases of democratic backsliding or (semi-)authoritarian regimes in general, such as Putin's Russia or Erdogan's Turkey (cf. Bermeo, 2016; Soest and Grauvogel, 2017; Hellmeier and Weidmann, 2020). In contrast, the openness of democratic systems to change poses a perceived threat to the nation as defined in ethnic and thus conservative terms (cf. Vincent, 2013).[5] Given how well the two resonate with each other, it seems likely that individuals holding an ethnic view on nationhood also have a more positive view on authoritarian ways of political rule.

Hypothesis 2: *Individuals holding an ethnic conception of nationhood are less likely to support democracy and more likely to support authoritarian alternatives.*

In addition to these direct relationships between national identity and the preference for democratic as opposed to authoritarian regime types, we argue that these relationships are likely moderated by economic hardship. Economic hardship on the individual or on the societal level has been a key determinant in extant studies on the support for and satisfaction with democracy. Several studies have found support for democracy to be lower for individuals with a lower income as well as in countries with a lower level of economic development, a higher level of income inequality or in an economic crisis (Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Kotzian, 2011; Andersen, 2012; Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014; Teixeira *et al.*, 2014; Armingeon *et al.*, 2016), even though democracy is arguably the only political system that provides citizens with the means to voice their discontent with economic conditions and economic policy effectively and to mobilize for political change (Kurer et al., 2019, p. 867). Further, as public support is the only means through which democratic systems ensure political legitimacy (Kotzian, 2011, p. 23), support for democracy (including diffuse support) in general should be particularly susceptible to economic hardship among members of the public, if democracy is viewed as not ensuring fulfillment of people's economic needs.

Instead of regarding economic hardship and cultural influences, such as national identity, separately, scholars in the fields of populism (e.g., Gidron and Hall, 2017; Manow, 2018), Euroskepticism (e.g., Serricchio *et al.*, 2013; Hobolt and De Vries, 2016) or income redistribution (e.g., Shayo, 2009) increasingly begin to view them as interrelated, either arguing that identity politics becomes aggravated during times of economic hardship or that identity plays less of a role and economic considerations become more relevant instead. We follow this line of thought and contend that economic hardship moderates the relationship between national identity and support for regime types. Economic hardship threatens past economic achievements and entails insecurity about one's present as well as future income leading to status anxiety. Such a declining existential security can reinforce the cultural backlash of those who feel disoriented by the erosion of familiar values (Inglehart and Norris, 2017; Ausserladscheider, 2019).

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[5] Previous research has also found that authoritarian and dominance-oriented mindsets contribute to national identity in the form of nationalism and patriotism (Osborne *et al.*, 2017). Our argument differs from such analyses on both the independent and dependent variables. Whereas right-wing authoritarianism (Altemeyer, 1996) and social dominance orientation (Pratto et al., 1994) relate to authoritarian attitudes, we depart from this by studying preferences for regime types, which are undoubtedly related to, yet still distinct from the former, given that we measure political attitudes instead of values. Authoritarianism is a 'social attitudinal or ideological expressions of basic social values or motivational goals that represent different, though related, strategies for attaining collective security at the expense of individual autonomy' (Duckitt and Bizumic, 2013, p. 842). Nationalism and patriotism reflect a dimension of national identity that is not linked to conceptions of nationhood comprehensively (Citrin *et al.*, 2001), nationalism may be defined in both civic and ethnic terms depending on the respective context (Smith, 1998; Simonsen and Bonikowski, 2019; Tamir, 2019a). The main difference between the two lies in their view of national out-groups instead of defining membership to the national in-group (cf. Davidov, 2009). Vargas-Salfate *et al.* (2020) take a similar approach and study the relationship between RWA and the *strength* of national identification, but do not go into detail regarding the content of conceptions of nationhood.

With increasing economic hardship, the negative relation between a more ethnic national identity and support for democracy should become even stronger. Those who define national membership in terms of ancestry and birth should respond to economic insecurity stemming from adverse economic conditions by calling for more protection for their 'own' people and restricting the access to public goods for those who do not conform to their conceptions of nationhood (Rickert, 1998; Dancygier and Donnelly, 2014). Under such circumstances, and given the overall propensity of authoritarian attitudes to thrive under economic adversity (Lipset, 1959a; Duckitt and Fisher, 2003; De Regt *et al.*, 2012), ethnic nationalists should be more supportive of demands to restrict democratic pluralism and the liberties of those who are not considered 'true' members of the nation, calling for a strong leader to enact such reforms.[6]

Hypothesis 3: *Economic hardship increases the negative relationship between an ethnic national identity and the support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives.*

For those holding a more civic national identity, the direction of a potential moderating effect of economic hardship is less clear and also taps into the long-standing question of whether economic conditions drive identity politics or whether attitudes, culture and identity prevail over economic concerns (cf. Mishler and Rose, 1996; Rose *et al.*, 1998; Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Kotzian, 2011; Andersen, 2012). On the one hand, the preference for democracy by those with a civic nationalist worldview may be lower under economic insecurity, as economic considerations become of paramount importance in times of economic hardship (cf. Dahl, 1998; Mair, 2013; Offe, 2013). The performance of (representative) democracy is perceived as unsatisfactory due to the prevalence of economic hardship, which may erode the trust in the institutions of democracy (cf. Kroknes *et al.*, 2015; Foster and Frieden, 2017). On the other hand, civic nationalists' diffuse support of democracy may be unfazed by economic insecurity. As 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999, 2011), they continue to value democracy as the ideal form of government. Although economic hardship may still lead to dissatisfaction with the economic performance of their political system, this only transfers to a lower regime support for those citizens who view the common political culture and institutions as less important for their national identity. In other words, economic adversity may weaken specific, but not diffuse support of democracy for those holding a civic conception of nationhood. We thus formulate two alternative hypotheses as follows:

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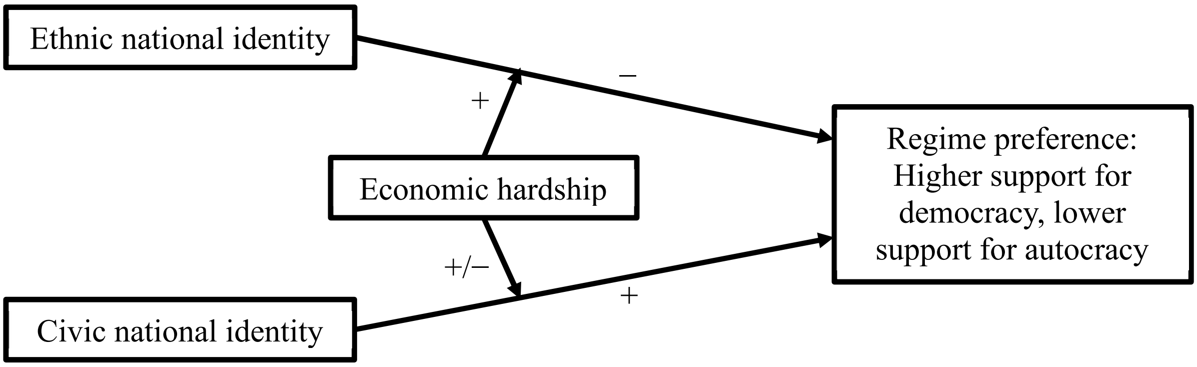
[6] In this regard, right-wing populism is a related, yet distinct phenomenon. While populism goes in hand with illiberal understandings of democracy, it is not necessarily antidemocratic (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). At the same time, national identity and populism do not necessarily have to occur together (de Cleen, 2017).

Hypothesis 4a: *Economic hardship weakens the positive relationship between a civic national identity and the support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives.*

Hypothesis 4b: *Economic hardship bolsters the positive relationship between a civic national identity and the support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives.*

Figure 1 summarizes our core arguments.

Figure 1: The hypothesized relationships between ethnic and civic national identity, economic hardship as well as the support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives


Ethnic national identity
–
+
Economic hardship
Regime preference: Higher support for democracy, lower support for autocracy
+/–
+
Civic national identity

Method and Data

In order to test the hypothesized relationships between an ethnic or civic national identity, economic hardship at the individual or societal level as well as the individual preference for democracy as opposed to autocratic alternatives, we employ cross-sectional survey data from the European Values Study 2017–18 (EVS, 2019), including over 27,000 respondents in 24 Western and Eastern European democracies[7]: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Serbia, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Kingdom. To account for the multilevel structure of our data and given that we are not interested in the direct effects of country-level variables, we run linear[8] regression models with country fixed-effects and country-clustered standard errors, which are more robust than multilevel models[9], because they control for all potential differences between the countries. In the first step of our analysis, we regress the preference for a democratic or autocratic regime $Pref_i$ on the ethnic or civic conceptions of national identity Nat_i as well as a set of control variables CV_i. Our models always include both ethnic and civic conceptions of national identity simultaneously to account for the conceptual and empirical interrelatedness of the two concepts.

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[7] We only included countries that are considered full democracies by both Freedom House (2019) and Polity IV (Marshall *et al.*, 2019).

[8] With only four response categories, one might argue that ordered logit models might be preferable. We decided to use OLS regression due to the improved applicability to fixed-effects models (Riedl and Geishecker, 2014) and the easier interpretability. The results are robust to changes in the model specification, as can be seen in Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the online appendix.

[9] Also, the number of countries is on the lower end for multilevel models (Stegmueller, 2013). As a robustness check, we also ran multilevel models, the results are substantively similar, as can be seen in Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the online appendix.

$$Pref_i = \beta_1 Nat_i + \beta_2 CV_i + \alpha_j + \varepsilon_i \tag{1}$$

For our dependent variable, we opt for a measure that distinguishes the support of respondents for a democratic regime vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives. In this regard, the democracy-autocracy preference[10] (DAP) scale has been established and has found increasing use in literature as a measure of diffuse support for democracy (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Ariely and Davidov, 2011; Magalhães, 2014). The EVS question asks respondents whether they perceive certain types of political systems to be a good way of governing their country, including (a) a democratic political system, (b) a strong leader who does not have to bother with parliament and elections and (c) having the army rule the country, with answers ranging from 1) very bad to 4) very good.[11] Even though a principal component factor analysis shows that the items load onto a single factor (factor loadings: democracy 0.65, strong leader −0.78, army −0.80), we opt for analyzing these three items separately in the first step to allow for a more fine-grained analysis and to test whether the results are in fact similar for all three items or driven by a specific item.

Our key independent variable is measured with five commonly used items for the ethnic or civic national identity (Kunovich, 2009; Berg and Hjerm, 2010; Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010; Helbling *et al.*, 2016). Respondents are asked how important they regard several aspects for being truly of the country's nationality: (a) to have ancestry from the country, (b) to be born in the country, (c) to share the country's culture, (d) to be able to speak the country's language and (e) to respect the political institutions and laws of the country, answers ranging from 1) not at all important to 4) very important. Ancestry and birth requirements have been indisputably connected to an ethnic and respecting the political institutions to a civic conception of nationhood. Language requirements also lean closer to the civic side of the spectrum, while sharing the culture positions somewhere in between the two ideal points (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010). As with our dependent variable, we decided on a more fine-grained analysis at first, adding all items individually to our model. This also allows to test the effect of the more disputed language and culture requirements (Brubaker, 1999) separately. Further, such single-item models of the proposed relationships consider that Reeskens and Hooghe (2010) found that – while loading well onto single factors – not all indicators are equally applicable in cross-national research given differences in measurement invariance. Principal component factor analysis seems to confirm the classification in literature, resulting in a two-factor solution with ancestry (0.93) and born (0.90) loading strongly on the first factor, institutions (0.88) and language (0.73) on the second factor, while the culture criterion loads weakly on both factors (0.38 on the ethnic and 0.56 on the civic factor).

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[10] This scale has been called a preference scale, because it implicitly compares support for democracy along with support for authoritarian alternatives, even though it does not directly measure a preference order of different regimes. In line with previous research (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005; Ariely and Davidov, 2011; Magalhães, 2014), we refer to the overall measure as democracy–autocracy or regime preference, while the individual items measure support for different regime types.

[11] The question also includes the item d) having experts, not government, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country. However, we exclude this item from the analysis, given that expert rule can happen in democracies and may not necessarily be undemocratic (McDonnell and Valbruzzi, 2014; Pastorella, 2016; Ackermann *et al.*, 2019). Besides, the link between an ethnic or civic conception of nationhood and a preference for expert rule is less clear compared to leader or army rule. For these reasons, it is unsurprising that the results for expert rule mostly indicate no relationship at all.

We control for a set of sociodemographic and political covariates that have been shown to affect both national identity (McLaren, 2017; Canan and Simon, 2018; Hadler and Flesken, 2018) and diffuse support of democracy (Magalhães, 2014).[12] Age (in quadratic form), sex, and education are included because younger, older, male and less educated respondents may lean stronger toward ethnic conceptions of nationhood and also display a lower preference for democracy. Several economic variables are added, including household income, work status as well as experience with unemployment and welfare dependency during the last 5 years. Economically deprived respondents are expected to be both more inclined toward ethnic conceptions of nationhood as well as stronger preferences for authoritarian alternatives to democracy. We also control for marital status, children and the frequency of attending religious services to control for the – on average – more conservative worldviews of married respondents, respondents with children and religious respondents. Finally, respondents with a migration background may be less prone to ethnic conceptions of nationhood given that they would lead to their exclusion, but a socialization in nondemocratic countries may also lead them to be more favorable of autocratic alternatives to democracy. As to the political covariates, more rightist or extremist views on the left-right scale may both be negatively related to civic conceptions of nationhood as well as support of democracy. Furthermore, more politically interested respondents as well as respondents with a higher generalized trust may favor a civic conception of nationhood and also be stronger proponents of democracy. Finally, we also include a measure of specific support of democracy operationalized as the satisfaction with the functioning of the political system in order to block potential pathways between specific and diffuse support of democracy (Easton, 1965, 1975), as we are interested in the direct effects of ethnic and civic conceptions of nationhood on diffuse regime preference. An overview of all variables, their data sources as well as summary statistics can be found in Table A1 of the online appendix.

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[12] As robustness checks, we also ran models that included only sociodemographic control variables as well as models, in which more control variables were added (whether respondents regard their political system as democratic; attitudes towards immigrants; particularized trust; club membership; national pride to ensure that our relation is not contingent on the general level of national pride; liberal vs. traditional values in the form of believing that homosexuality, abortion, divorce, and euthanasia can be justified to ensure that our results are not a by-product of a conservative/traditional ideology; authoritarian attitudes measured as deeming a greater respect for authority a good thing). The results are robust to such changes, as can be seen in Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the online appendix.

In the second step of our analysis, we strive to test how the direct effects of ethnic or civic conceptions of nationhood on regime preference are moderated by economic hardship. We thus adapt our models as follows:

$$Pref_i = \beta_1 Nat_i + \beta_2 Nat_i * EconHard_{ij} + \beta_3 CV_i + \alpha_j + \varepsilon_i \qquad (2)$$

DAP is measured as above, but for simplicity, it is now combined to a single scale as the average of the three items (with leader rule and army rule reversed, so that higher values indicate a preference for more democratic systems). Similarly, ethnic and civic conceptions of national identity are recoded into two indices, with ethnic national identity as the mean score of the importance of ancestry and born requirements and civic national identity as a mean of respect for institutions and language requirements.[13] All other control variables are included as before. In addition, the model now includes interaction terms between the two indices of national identity and one of several economic hardship variables, measured through both individual-level and country-level[14] indicators. We decided to test our hypotheses with a diverse set of variables (see Table 1) to substantiate the reliability and validity of our measurement, seeing as economic hardship is a multifaceted concept affected by income levels, unemployment as well as social security. At the individual level, economic hardship can be produced by a low household income or recent experiences of unemployment or welfare dependency. We take into account the country level as well because the perceived individual risk of economic hardship or the likelihood of overcoming economic hardship might crucially hinge on the economic situation of the country as a whole. At the country level, the risk of individual economic hardship can be increased by a low level of economic development, a high unemployment rate, and a low degree of social security (measured by the degree of income inequality[15] as the Gini index).[16]

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[13] The culture requirement was excluded because it did not clearly fit into either category. As the results will show, it is situated closer to the other two civic criteria. As a robustness check, we included the culture item in our civic national identity index. This has no substantial effect on the results, as can be seen in Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the online appendix. Further robustness checks also address alternative specifications regarding the dimensionality and mutual exclusiveness of the civic–ethnic framework. First, we subtract the civic national identity index from the ethnic national identity index to arrive at a single index going from an exclusively ethnic to an exclusively civic national identity, as some authors conceptualize this distinction on a continuum. Second, we weighted the civic national identity index by an inverse of the ethnic national identity index in order to account for the idea that accepting ethnic conceptions of national identity could be considered a contradiction to civic conceptions of national identity.

[14] For country-level economic hardship variables, the base term of the interactions is not included because it is collinear with the country fixed effects.

Table 1: Economic hardship variables

	Individual-level	**Country-level**
Income	household income	GDP per capita
Unemployment	unemployment experience	unemployment rate
Social security	welfare dependency experience	income inequality

Empirical analysis

A first look at descriptive statistics of our key dependent and independent variables[17] shows that, as suggested by previous work (e.g., Norris, 2011), diffuse support for democracy is fairly high in European democracies. Only 5% of the respondents consider democracy as a bad way to run their country. Nevertheless, 10% still consider army rule, a potential authoritarian alternative, as a good way to run their country and support for the rule of strong leaders who do not have to bother with parliament and elections is substantial, with 28% of the respondents deeming it a good way to run their country. At the same time, we also observe some differences between the items measuring the respondents' conception of nationhood. On the one hand, a large majority of roughly 95% of the respondents considers respecting the institutions and being able to speak the country's language – the two civic membership criteria – as important for being a national, with sharing the country's culture following closely. On the other hand, the quintessential ethnic membership criteria of having common ancestry and being born in the country are split more evenly between supporters and opponents, with 50% of the respondents regarding a common ancestry and 59% being born in the country as important criteria.[18]

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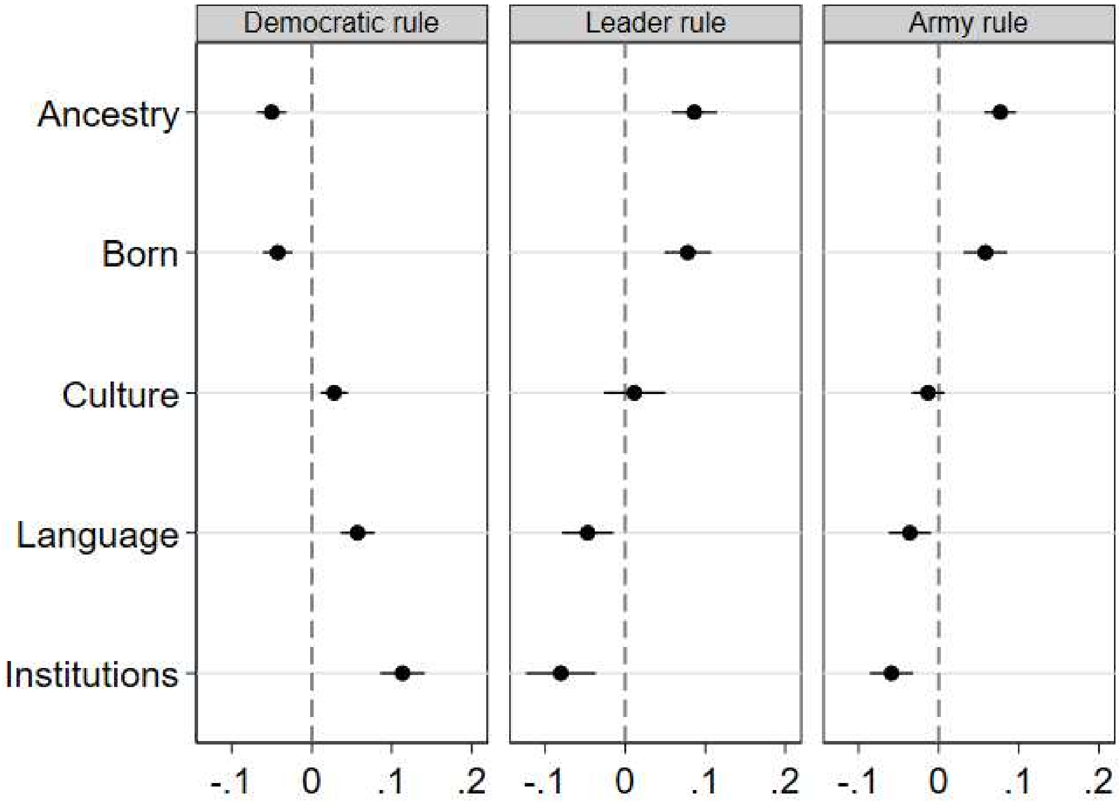
[15] As a robustness check, an alternative measure of social security in the form of the average replacement rates for unemployment, sickness, and minimum pensions was tested (Scruggs *et al.*, 2017). The data, however, was only available for the year 2010 and is missing for Croatia, Iceland, and Serbia. Nevertheless, the results are similar, although some of the results are only significant at the 10% level with this alternative measure, as can be seen in Figure A1 and Figure A2 in the online appendix.

[16] Even though a few studies highlight the effect of a subjective evaluation of the country's economic situation (Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014; Teixeira *et al.*, 2014), we focus on the objective economic situation, as no subjective evaluations of the economy were collected in the EVS.

[17] See Table A1 in the online appendix for summary statistics and Table A2 for frequency tables of the key variables.

[18] These cross-country averages do not express, of course, that there is substantial variation in both regime support and national identity between the countries. For instance, support for a strong leader ranges from 13% (Norway) to 78% (Romania) and considering ancestry as an important criterion ranges from 15% of the respondents (Sweden) to 88% (Bulgaria). In particular, there are differences between the older Western European and the newer Eastern European democracies. In our analysis, we control for such differences through fixed effects and by conducting sensitivity analyses through jackknifing and separate sample analyses of Western and Eastern European countries.

Figure 2: *Regression coefficients of the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives*



Note: Displayed are linear regression coefficients with 95% confidence intervals.

Figure 2 presents the results of the linear regression models testing the direct effect of an ethnic or civic national identity on the three items measuring support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives such as a strong leader or having the army rule the country. As discussed in the previous section, we do not combine our independent and dependent variables into indices but analyze the items separately in a first step. All models include a set of control variables, and the full regression results can be found in the online appendix in Table A3.

Overall, we find clear support for our hypothesized relationships: the more ethnic conceptions of nationhood (ancestry and born) are negatively related to support for democracy and positively related to support for leader and army rule, while the more civic conceptions of nationhood (institutions and language) are positively related to support for democracy and negatively related to support for leader and army rule. The order of the coefficients is also as expected, with ancestry as the most ethnic criterion displaying a slightly more negative relationship than the birth criterion and the respect of institutions criterion displaying a slightly more positive relationship compared to the language criterion (Reeskens and Hooghe, 2010). The culture criterion is in between, but leans somewhat closer to the civic items: it has a positive effect on support for democracy, but is insignificant for support for leader or army rule.

The effect size is substantive and one of the strongest predictors of DAP.[19] A change in the ancestry criterion from the minimum to the maximum reduces support of democracy (on a scale from 1 to 4) by 0.15 and increases leader and army support by 0.26 and 0.23, respectively. At the same time, the same change in the respect for institutions criterion increases support of democracy by 0.34 and decreases leader and army support by 0.24 and 0.18. This also shows that a civic national identity has a stronger effect on support for a democratic regime, while an ethnic national identity has a slightly stronger effect on support of authoritarian alternatives. Jackknifing robustness checks show that the results are not contingent on individual countries.[20] The results also hold when using combined indices instead of the individual items. In addition, we performed several robustness checks, as alluded in the previous section. We replicated the models with a more narrow set of covariates including only sociodemographic control variables as well as a more broad set of covariates, including measures of whether respondents regard their political system as democratic, attitudes toward immigrants, particularized trust, and club membership as a measure of structural social capital. Next, we also selected alternative modeling strategies such as ordered logit regression with country dummies as well as multilevel models with several country-level control variables (GDP per capita, GDP growth, unemployment rate, Gini index, KOF globalization index, net migration rate, WGI government effectiveness, and FH democracy index). Finally, we also replicated our models with the EVS 2008 data set (EVS, 2008) using the same country set in order to ensure that our results are comparable across time. The results of these robustness checks can be found in Figure A1 in the online appendix. Overall, they do not have any substantive effects on our results and the results are very similar in the EVS (2008).

The effects of other covariates are largely as expected. Support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives increases with age, education, income, political interest as well as general trust and is higher among the part-time employed, self-employed and students. In contrast, authoritarian alternatives are more popular among those with welfare dependency experiences, married or widowed respondents, respondents with children, religious and right-wing respondents as well as respondents with first-generation migration background.

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[19] The strongest ethnic and civic national identity variables (ancestry and institutions respectively) amount to a change of roughly 0.07–0.08 in the regime preference if these variables are increased by one standard deviation. In comparison, an increase of education, the most consistently powerful control variable, by one standard deviation changes regime preference by in between 0.05 and 0.11.

[20] The models were, however, also run separately for Western and Eastern Europe to test whether the results are different for the comparably younger democracies of Eastern Europe with a postcommunist legacy (Rose *et al.*, 1998) – results can be found in Figure A1 in the online appendix. In comparison, Western European and Eastern European countries are fairly similar, with three exceptions: first, the ordering of the ancestry and born criteria is reversed in Eastern European countries: regarding being born in the country as an important criterion for belongingness to the nation has a much stronger effect than ancestry. The effect of ancestry is even insignificant in the models of support for democracy and leader rule, and it only has a positive effect on the support for army rule. Second, the effect of the culture criterion is mostly driven by Eastern European countries, where the effect is considerably stronger. Culture only has a significant effect on support for democracy (at the 10% level) but no effect at all on support for leader or army rule in Western European countries. Third, although the coefficients of the language and institution requirements are almost the same in both Western and Eastern European countries, the variance is higher in Eastern Europe – both are insignificant for leader rule and language is also insignificant for army rule.

Table 2: *Regression coefficients of the moderating effect of economic hardship on the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives*

Ethnic national identity

Economic hardship variables	Interaction term coefficient	Effect of ethnic NI at the min	Effect of ethnic NI at the max
Individual level			
Household income	0.007 (0.00)***	−0.162 (0.01)***	−0.102 (0.01)***
Unemployment experience	−0.025 (0.01)**	−0.128 (0.01)***	−0.154 (0.01)***
Welfare dependency experience	−0.053 (0.02)**	−0.127 (0.01)***	−0.180 (0.02)***
Societal level			
GDP per capita	0.027 (0.01)*	−0.182 (0.02)***	−0.112 (0.01)***
Unemployment rate	−0.008 (0.00)***	−0.104 (0.01)***	−0.224 (0.02)***
Income inequality	−0.005 (0.00)*	−0.104 (0.01)***	−0.181 (0.02)***

Civic national identity

Economic hardship variables	Interaction term coefficient	Effect of civic NI at the min	Effect of civic NI at the max
Individual level			
Household income	−0.007 (0.00)*	0.172 (0.02)***	0.104 (0.03)***
Unemployment experience	−0.008 (0.02)	0.139 (0.02)***	0.131 (0.02)***
Welfare dependency experience	0.008 (0.02)	0.137 (0.02)***	0.145 (0.03)***
Societal level			
GDP per capita	−0.022 (0.03)	0.178 (0.05)***	0.121 (0.02)***
Unemployment rate	0.012 (0.00)*	0.092 (0.02)***	0.268 (0.06)***
Income inequality	0.002 (0.01)	0.129 (0.04)**	0.155 (0.05)**

Note: Column 1 displays fixed-effects regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, columns 2 and 3 display the marginal effect of ethnic or civic national identity at the minimum or maximum of the respective economic hardship variable, $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Moving on to the second part of our analysis, Table 2 displays the results of our interaction models. The first column shows the fixed-effects regression coefficient of the interaction term between the ethnic or civic national identity index and one of the economic hardship variables. In order to compare how much economic hardship moderates the effect of an ethnic or civic conception of nationhood, column two and three display the marginal effect of ethnic or civic national identity at the minimum or maximum of the respective economic hardship variable. The full results of our interaction models can be found in the online appendix in Table A5.

With regard to an ethnic conception of nationhood, all economic hardship variables support our Hypothesis 3. At the individual-level, ethnic national identity is more negatively related to preferences for democracy for respondents with a lower income as well as unemployment and welfare dependency experiences. At the societal level, ethnic conceptions of nationhood are more strongly related to lower preferences for democracy in countries with a lower GDP per capita, a higher unemployment rate, and higher economic inequality. The effects are significant at the 5%, 1%, or 0.1% significance level and substantial, in particular for economic hardship at the societal level. At the lowest level of unemployment (Iceland), an increase in the ethnic national identity index by 1 unit only decreases the preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives by 0.10 on a scale from 1 to 4, whereas at the highest level (Spain), the DAP is decreased by 0.22.

The moderating effects are less coherent for civic conceptions of nationhood: only two of our economic hardship indicators have a significant moderating effect, both showing that economic hardship slightly reinforces the positive effect of civic national identity on preferences for democracy. Respondents with a lower income and respondents in countries with a higher unemployment rate have a more positive effect of a civic national identity on preferences for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives. The effects are significant at the 5% level and, again, in particular substantial for economic hardship at the societal level: at the lowest level of unemployment, an increase in the civic national identity index by 1 unit only increases the preference for democracy by 0.09, while at the highest level, it is increased by 0.27. Overall, Hypothesis 4a clearly has to be refuted; however, there is at least some support for Hypothesis 4b, although only two of the six interaction terms turn out significant.

As in the first step, we again perform several robustness checks (see Figure A2 in the online appendix for detailed results). Jackknifing again shows that the results generally do not hinge on certain countries being included in the sample.[21] With the exception of the ordered logit models, the results are also robust to a different selection of control variables, different modeling approaches as well as civic national identity being measured with three instead of two items (i.e., including the culture criterion). As to our robustness check using the EVS (2008) (see Table A5 in the online appendix), the coefficients generally point into the expected direction, but only the interaction term for welfare dependency experience is significant for an ethnic national identity and only the unemployment rate for a civic national identity. However, the EVS (2008) may very well be a special case in this regard, as it was conducted at the height of the Great Recession 2007–09.

Conclusion

Is democracy still 'the only game in town' (Linz and Stepan, 1996, p. 5) in European societies? While there is widespread support for democracy, support for authoritarian alternatives such as army rule or a strong leader is far from negligible and may threaten democratic rule particularly in less-consolidated (Eastern) European countries but also in supposedly established democracies. In this paper, we set out to explain variation in regime support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives using cross-sectional survey data from 24 Western and Eastern European democracies included in the EVS 2017–18 (EVS, 2019). While existing research has primarily examined the economic determinants of diffuse (and specific) support for democracy (e.g., Kotzian, 2011; Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014; Teixeira *et al.*, 2014), our analysis focuses on the content of national identity. Tying in with the discussion whether national identification and democracy are complementary or competing logics (Calhoun, 2007; Helbling, 2009; Tamir, 2019b), we show that national identity is a double-edged sword for regime preference. On the one hand, a national identity that emphasizes civic conceptions of nationhood (i.e., respect for the country's institutions and laws, being able to speak the language) is positively related to support for democracy and negatively related to army or leader rule; on the other hand, the reverse holds true for a national identity that highlights ethnic conceptions of nationhood (i.e., a common ancestry, being born in the country). Considering that ethnic conceptions of nationhood are held by roughly half of the respondents in our sample, this may be an important contribution in explaining why a substantial share of citizens in European democracies expresses support for authoritarian alternatives to democracy.

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[21] The interaction effects are generally less robust in Eastern Europe, as can be seen in models restricting the sample to Eastern European countries (see Figure A2 in the online appendix). However, this may also be due to the small number of countries left (11) in combination with country-level variables being used as moderators.

However, economic explanations are not to be neglected, either. Economic hardship entails existential insecurity and status anxiety and reinforces the cultural backlash of those who feel disoriented by the erosion of familiar values (Inglehart and Norris, 2017). While economic hardship generally decreases support of democracy (e.g., Teixeira *et al.*, 2014), it also further strengthens the negative effect of an ethnic conception of nationhood on support for democracy vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives. This means that it is the economically deprived citizens with an ethnic conception of nationhood who are particularly vulnerable to authoritarian promises. On a more positive note, however, economic hardship also strengthens the positive effect of a civic conception of nationhood on support for democracy in some of our models. As 'critical citizens' (Norris, 1999, 2011), those with a civic national identity may thus continue to value democracy as the ideal form of government despite their dissatisfaction with the current economic performance of their democratic system.

This has important implications for understanding at least two crucial issues in contemporary European (if not global) societies. One is the relationship between the economy and identity/culture in driving diffuse system support. Economic crises and other performance-related crises of the political system are bound to occur every now and then in democracies. It is thus of vital importance for the survival of democracy that such crises or individual economic hardship do not substantially weaken diffuse support for democracy and reinvigorate support for authoritarian alternatives uniformly across all members of society. An individual's social identity substantially shapes how she responds to economic hardship when evaluating her support for a democratic regime type. Therefore, our study shows that the often postulated primacy of economic concerns over values and culture is not as stable as it is frequently postulated. The second vital implication of our results is that democracies in which a large majority of citizens holds a civic conception of nationhood are decisively less in danger of 'democratic backsliding' (Bermeo, 2016; Waldner and Lust, 2018) than those where an ethnic conception prevails. Thus, our results show two ways in which democracies can strengthen support for a democratic regime: first, by ensuring that they perform well economically and citizens are protected from economic hardship and insecurity, democracies can weaken the negative effects of an ethnic national identity and potentially even strengthen the positive effects of a civic national identity. Second, by promoting a permeation of a civic as opposed to an ethnic definition of national membership criteria through their citizenry, democracies can strengthen preferences for a democratic regime and also dampen the negative impact of economic crises. The latter point touches upon recent discussions on citizenship laws and immigration as well. In this regard, Tamir (2019b) stresses the promotion of liberal nationalism with respect and empathy for foreigners in education and public discourse and the need to distribute social risks and opportunities in fair and transparent ways. Other authors also point to the role of education as well as the political discourse in shaping people's position on the civic–ethnic continuum (Hjerm, 2001; Hadler and Flesken, 2018).

Naturally, we have to acknowledge certain limitations of our study. Unfortunately, our data set is restricted to exclusively European democracies. We thus cannot test whether our results can be generalized to a broader set of non-European democracies. In addition, our moderation analyses focus on objective measures of the economic situation, even though several studies emphasize that, in particular, a subjective evaluation of the country's economic situation contributes to explaining support for democracy (Bratton and Mattes, 2001; Armingeon and Guthmann, 2014; Teixeira *et al.*, 2014). Alas, our data set includes no measure for subjective evaluations of the economy. Finally, our research design is purely cross-sectional and thus not causal in nature. While we do believe that there are sound theoretical reasons for a causal influence of national identity on diffuse support for democracy, (quasi-)experimental evidence is needed to ascertain the causal nature the relationships found in our study.

Nevertheless, our conclusions allow for insights into determinants of diffuse system support in general and the role of identity therein that have been lacking in previous research. People with an ethnic national identity portray substantially lower support for a democratic regime than those holding a civic national identity, while the reverse is the case for authoritarian regime types.

Additionally, we shed further light on the relationship between economic hardship and identity by showing that they profoundly interact with each other instead of looking at both separately. Economic hardship decisively strengthens the negative relationship between an ethnic national identity and support for democracy. For individuals with civic national identity, the results are less robust but they indicate a slight increase in this group's support for democracy under economic hardship. These all in all consistent and robust findings yield crucial implications for both scholarly research as well as everyday politics and call for further endeavors in analyzing the relationship between other aspects of individual-level social identity and support for regime types.

Supplementary material.

To view supplementary material for this article, please visit https://doi.org/10.1017/S1755773920000351.

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Online Appendix

Table A1: Variables, data source and summary statistics

Variable	**N**	**Mean**	**SD**	**Min**	**Max**	**Data source**[a]
Support for democracy	41,454	3.6	0.6	1	4	Q43, v148
Support for strong leader	40,770	1.9	1.0	1	4	Q43, v145
Support for army rule	41,242	1.5	0.7	1	4	Q43, v146
Democracy-autocracy preference index	39,202	3.4	0.6	1	4	Q43, v145, v146, v148
National identity: ancestry	42,987	2.6	1.0	1	4	Q53, v191
National identity: born	43,080	2.7	1.0	1	4	Q53, v189
National identity: culture	43,052	3.3	0.7	1	4	Q53, v193
National identity: language	43,269	3.6	0.6	1	4	Q53, v192
National identity: institutions	43,127	3.6	0.6	1	4	Q53, v190
Ethnic national identity index	42,817	2.6	0.9	1	4	Q53, v189, v191
Civic national identity index	43,063	3.6	0.5	1	4	Q53, v190, v192
Civic national identity index (3-item)	*42,837*	*3.5*	*0.5*	*1*	*4*	*Q53, v190, v192, v193*
Alternative civic national identity index	*42,622*	*1.6*	*1.1*	*1*	*4*	*Q53, v189–v192*
Ethnic-Civic combined index	*42,433*	*2.0*	*0.4*	*1*	*4*	*Q53, v189–v193*
Household income	39,564	5.3	2.8	1	10	Q98, v261
Unemployment experience	44,741	0.17	0.38	0	1	Q96, v259
Welfare dependency experience	45,140	0.10	0.29	0	1	Q97, v260
GDP per capita	24	10.2	0.7	8.7	11.3	World Bank, 2019, NY.GDP.PCAP.CD
Unemployment rate	24	6.8	3.5	2.7	17.2	World Bank, 2019, SL.UEM.TOTL.ZS
Income inequality	24	31.4	4.0	25.4	39.6	World Bank, 2019, SI.POV.GINI
Mean replacement rate	*21*	*58.2*	*10.6*	*31.0*	*78.9*	*Scruggs, Jahn and Kuitto, 2017, US100, UC1000, SS100, SC1000, MPS100, MPC1000*
Age	45,752	50	18	18	82	Q64, age
Sex (1: male)	46,009	0.46	0.50	0	1	Q63, v225
Education	45,493	3.9	1.9	0	8	Q81, v243_ISCED_1
Work status: full-time employed	45,480	0.43	0.50	0	1	Q82, v244 = 1
Work status: part-time employed	45,480	0.07	0.26	0	1	Q82, v244 = 2
Work status: self-employed	45,480	0.06	0.23	0	1	Q82, v244 = 3
Work status: unemployed	45,480	0.05	0.21	0	1	Q82, v244 = 8
Work status: retired	45,480	0.28	0.45	0	1	Q82, v244 = 5
Work status: student	45,480	0.05	0.22	0	1	Q82, v244 = 7
Work status: other	45,480	0.07	0.25	0	1	Q82, v244 = 4;6;9;10
Marital status: single	45,646	0.25	0.44	0	1	Q72, v234 = 6
Marital status: married/reg. partnership	45,646	0.54	0.50	0	1	Q72, v234 = 1;2
Marital status: widowed	45,646	0.09	0.29	0	1	Q72, v234 = 3
Marital status: divorced/separated	45,646	0.11	0.32	0	1	Q72, v234 = 4;5
Children	45,604	0.71	0.45	0	1	Q77, v239_r > 0
Religious attendance	45,632	2.9	1.9	1	7	Q15, v54
Migration background: none	45,453	0.83	0.37	0	1	Q65, v227; Q68, 0 v230; Q70, v232 recoded
Migration background: 1st gen.	45,453	0.09	0.29	0	1	
Migration background: 2nd gen.	45,453	0.07	0.26	0	1	
Left-right self-placement	39,156	5.4	2.2	1	10	Q31, v102
Interest in politics	43,326	2.5	1.0	1	4	Q29, v97
Generalized trust	44,880	0.44	0.50	0	1	Q7, v31
Specific support for democracy	44,738	5.3	2.6	1	10	Q42, v144

Regarding pol. system as democratic	*42,025*	*6.6*	*2.4*	*1*	*10*	*Q41, v143*
Attitudes towards immigrants	*44,299*	*3.0*	*1.0*	*1*	*5*	*Q51, v184*
Particularized trust	*43,173*	*3.3*	*0.6*	*1*	*4*	*Q8, v34*
Club membership	*43,016*	*0.60*	*0.49*	*0*	*1*	*Q4, v9–v20*
National pride	*42,409*	*3.3*	*0.75*	*1*	*4*	*Q47*
Liberal vs. traditional values	*38,141*	*6.4*	*2.6*	*1*	*10*	*Q44, v153–v156*
Authoritarian attitudes	*40,607*	*2.3*	*0.8*	*1*	*3*	*Q37, v114*
GDP growth	*24*	*3.3*	*1.4*	*1.6*	*7.0*	*World Bank, 2019, NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG*
KOF globalization index	*24*	*84.5*	*4.6*	*72.9*	*91.2*	*Gygli et al., 2019, KOFGI*
Net migration rate	*24*	*6.9*	*19.2*	*−57.9*	*36.9*	*World Bank, 2019, SM.POP.NETM, SP.POP.TOTL*
WGI Government Effectiveness	*24*	*1.1*	*0.5*	*1*	*2.5*	*World Bank, 2019, Worldwide Governance Indicators, gee*
Freedom House index	*24*	*1.3*	*0.5*	*1*	*2.5*	*Freedom House, 2019*

Note: [a] unless specified EVS (2019); Italics: Variables not used in main regressions, but only in robustness checks.

Sources:

EVS, 2019. *European Values Study 2017, Integrated Dataset (EVS 2017), ZA7500, Data file Version 2.0.0.* [online] Available through: https://dbk.gesis.org/dbksearch/sdesc2.asp?no=7500&db=e&doi=10.4232/1.13314 [Accessed 27 April 2020].

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Gygli, S., Haelg, F., Potrafke, N. and Sturm, J.-E., 2019. Publisher Correction to: The KOF Globalisation Index – revisited. *The Review of International Organizations*, 14(3), p. 575.

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World Bank, 2019. *World Bank Open Data: Free and open access to global development data.* [online] Available through: https://data.worldbank.org/ [Accessed 27 April 2020].

Table A2: Frequency tables for the key variables

	Democracy	**Strong leader**	**Army rule**
Very bad	1.3	44.8	66.3
Fairly bad	3.8	27.2	23.8
Fairly good	32.4	20.4	7.6
Very good	62.5	7.6	2.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0

	Ancestry	**Born**	**Culture**	**Language**	**Institutions**
Not at all important	15.2	11.6	1.2	0.8	1.0
Not important	34.8	29.8	4.0	4.0	4.0
Quite important	28.8	31.9	43.6	32.1	30.5
Very important	21.2	26.8	45.7	63.0	64.4
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Table A3: *Regression models of the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives*

Full sample:

Democracy-autocracy preference	**Democracy**		**Leader rule**		**Army rule**	
National identity: ancestry	−0.050	(0.01)***	0.086	(0.01)***	0.077	(0.01)***
National identity: born	−0.042	(0.01)***	0.078	(0.01)***	0.058	(0.01)***
National identity: culture	0.028	(0.01)**	0.012	(0.02)	−0.013	(0.01)
National identity: language	0.057	(0.01)***	−0.047	(0.02)**	−0.036	(0.01)**
National identity: institutions	0.113	(0.01)***	−0.080	(0.02)***	−0.059	(0.01)***
Age	0.006	(0.00)**	−0.013	(0.00)***	−0.019	(0.00)***
Age^2	−0.000	(0.00)*	0.000	(0.00)*	0.000	(0.00)***
Sex (1: male)	0.009	(0.01)	0.047	(0.01)**	−0.030	(0.01)*
Education	0.029	(0.00)***	−0.059	(0.00)***	−0.031	(0.00)***
Household income	0.009	(0.00)***	−0.014	(0.00)***	−0.012	(0.00)***
Work status: part-time employed	0.033	(0.01)*	−0.050	(0.02)*	−0.000	(0.01)
Work status: self-employed	0.033	(0.01)*	−0.061	(0.02)*	−0.014	(0.02)
Work status: unemployed	0.008	(0.02)	−0.033	(0.03)	−0.013	(0.02)
Work status: retired	0.003	(0.01)	−0.006	(0.03)	−0.034	(0.02)$^{+}$
Work status: student	0.066	(0.02)**	−0.169	(0.03)***	−0.057	(0.03)$^{+}$
Work status: other	0.017	(0.02)	−0.025	(0.03)	0.023	(0.02)
Unemployment experience	−0.012	(0.01)	−0.015	(0.02)	−0.010	(0.02)
Welfare dependency experience	−0.030	(0.02)$^{+}$	0.057	(0.01)***	0.065	(0.02)**
Marital status: married/reg. partnership	−0.026	(0.01)*	0.063	(0.01)***	0.015	(0.01)
Marital status: widowed	−0.029	(0.02)	0.065	(0.03)*	0.022	(0.02)
Marital status: divorced/separated	0.006	(0.01)	0.017	(0.02)	−0.002	(0.02)
Children	−0.023	(0.01)$^{+}$	0.028	(0.02)	0.029	(0.01)*
Religious attendance	−0.006	(0.00)*	0.015	(0.00)**	0.016	(0.00)***
Migration background: 1st gen.	0.007	(0.01)	0.036	(0.01)*	−0.004	(0.01)
Migration background: 2nd gen.	−0.018	(0.02)	0.164	(0.02)***	0.095	(0.02)***
Left-right self-placement	−0.019	(0.01)*	0.003	(0.01)	−0.001	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement^2	0.001	(0.00)	0.003	(0.00)*	0.002	(0.00)*
Interest in politics	0.066	(0.01)***	−0.082	(0.01)***	−0.047	(0.01)***
Generalized trust	0.084	(0.01)***	−0.132	(0.02)***	−0.069	(0.01)***
Specific support for democracy	0.028	(0.00)***	−0.005	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)
Constant	2.510	(0.09)***	2.653	(0.16)***	2.268	(0.09)***
Respondents	28,392		28,145		28,313	
Countries	24		24		24	
adj. Within-R^2	0.099		0.096		0.090	

Note: Fixed-effects regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, base categories: Sex: female, Work status: full-time employed, Marital status: single, Migration background: none
$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Table A4: *Robustness checks for the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives using combined indices*

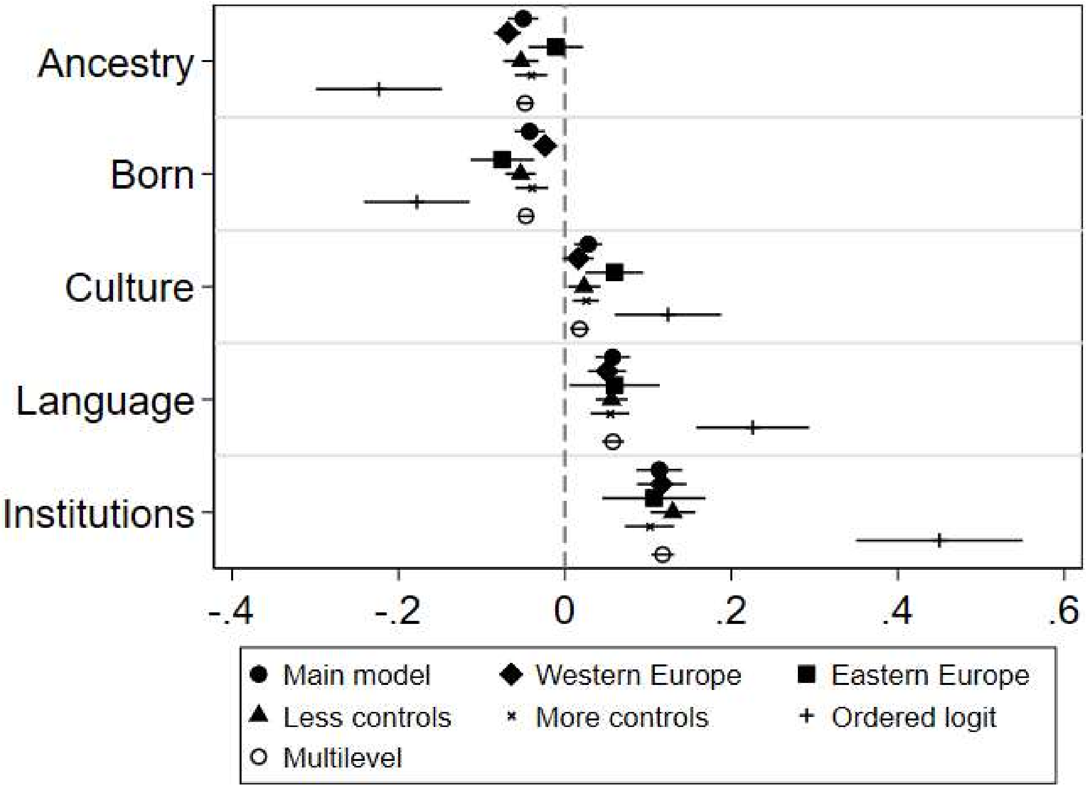
	Democracy		**Leader rule**		**Army rule**	
Ethnic NI	−0.091	(0.01)***	0.168	(0.01)***	0.134	(0.01)***
Civic NI	0.187	(0.02)***	−0.122	(0.03)***	−0.102	(0.02)***
Ethnic-Civic	−0.275	(0.02)***	0.322	(0.03)***	0.272	(0.03)***
Civic NI – alternative	0.069	(0.00)***	−0.130	(0.01)***	−0.101	(0.01)***

Note: Displayed are regression coefficients for the effect of combined indices of national identity on support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives with 95% confidence intervals.

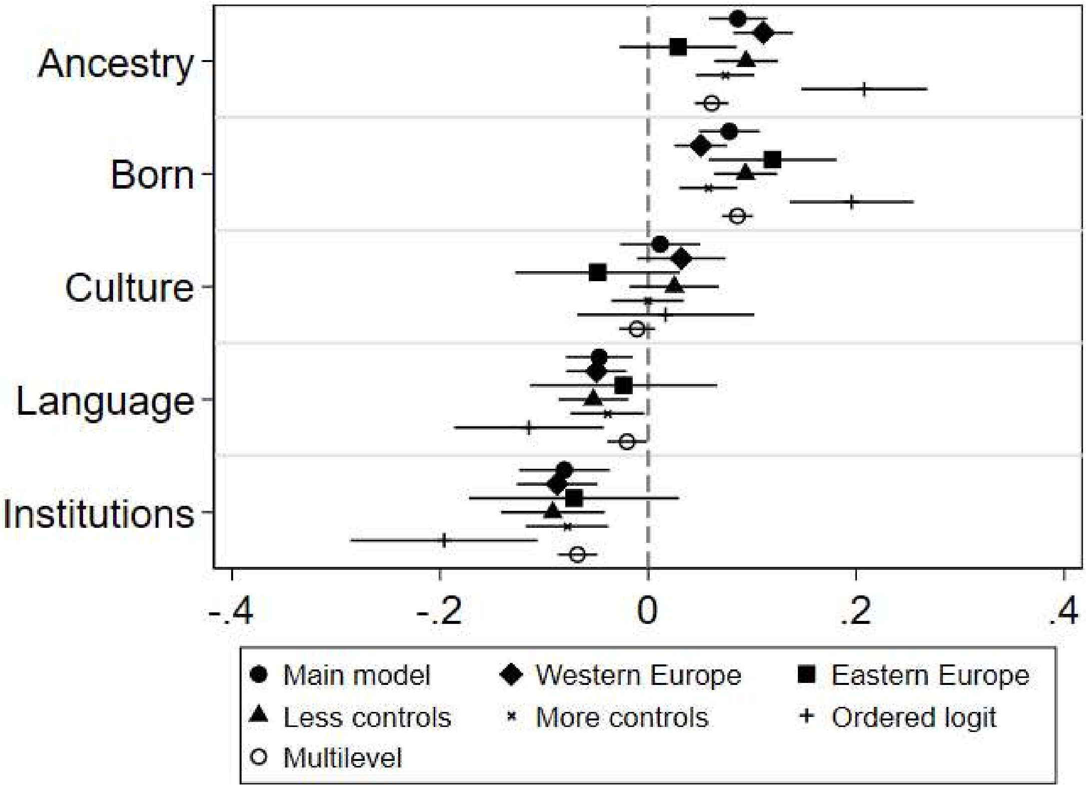
1) Ethnic NI: Mean of ancestry and born
2) Civic NI: Mean of institutions and language
3) Ethnic-Civic: Subtracts the civic NI index from the ethnic NI index
4) Civic NI – alternative: Weights the civic NI index by an inverse of the ethnic NI index in order to account for the idea that accepting ethnic conceptions of national identity could be considered a contradiction to civic conceptions of national identity.

Figure A1: Robustness checks for the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives

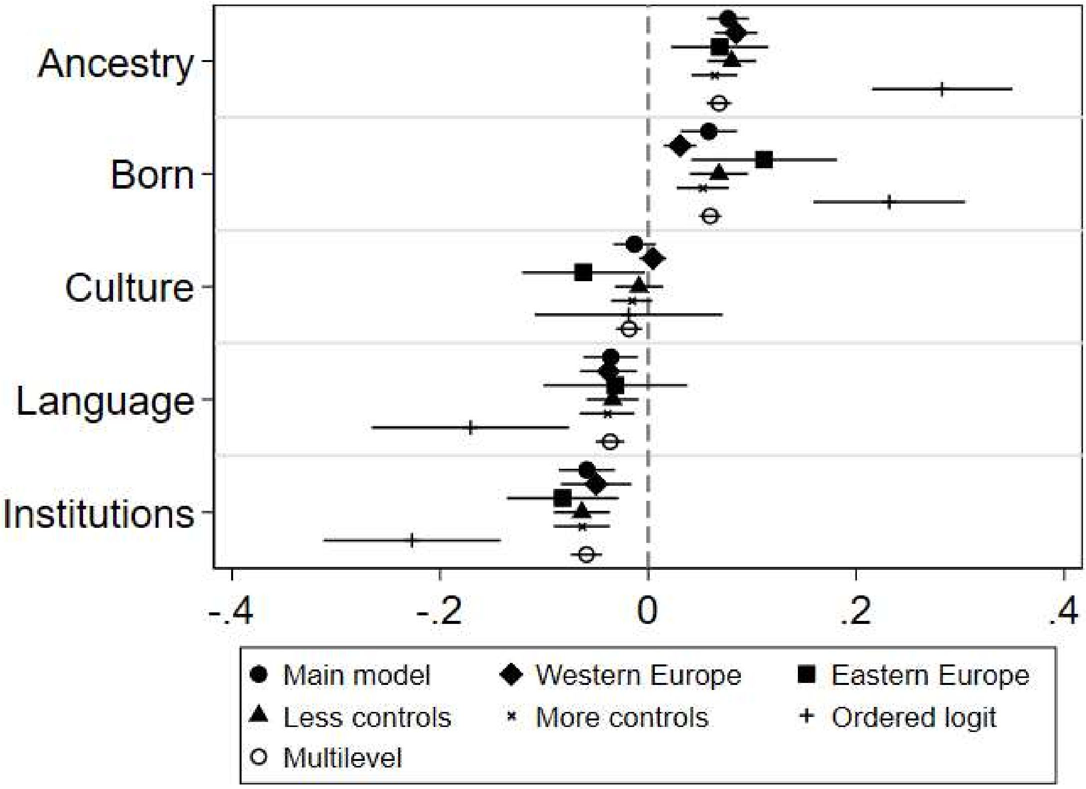
Democratic rule



Leader rule



Army rule



Note: Displayed are regression coefficients for the effect of national identity on support for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives with 95% confidence intervals.

1) Main model: Coefficients as in the models of the main text
2) Western Europe: Sample restricted to West European countries
3) Eastern Europe: Sample restricted to East European countries
4) Less controls: Only socio-demographic control variables (excluding left-right self-placement, interest in politics, generalized trust and specific support for democracy)
5) More controls: Including additional control variables (regarding the political system as democratic, attitudes towards immigrants, particularized trust, club membership, national pride, liberal vs. traditional values and authoritarian attitudes)
6) Ordered logit: Ordered logit regression with country dummies instead of FE-OLS regression
7) Multilevel: Multilevel regression instead of FE-OLS regression, including several country control variables (GDP per capita, GDP growth, unemployment rate, GINI index, KOF globalization index, net migration rate, WGI government effectiveness, FH democracy index)

EVS 2008 Replication

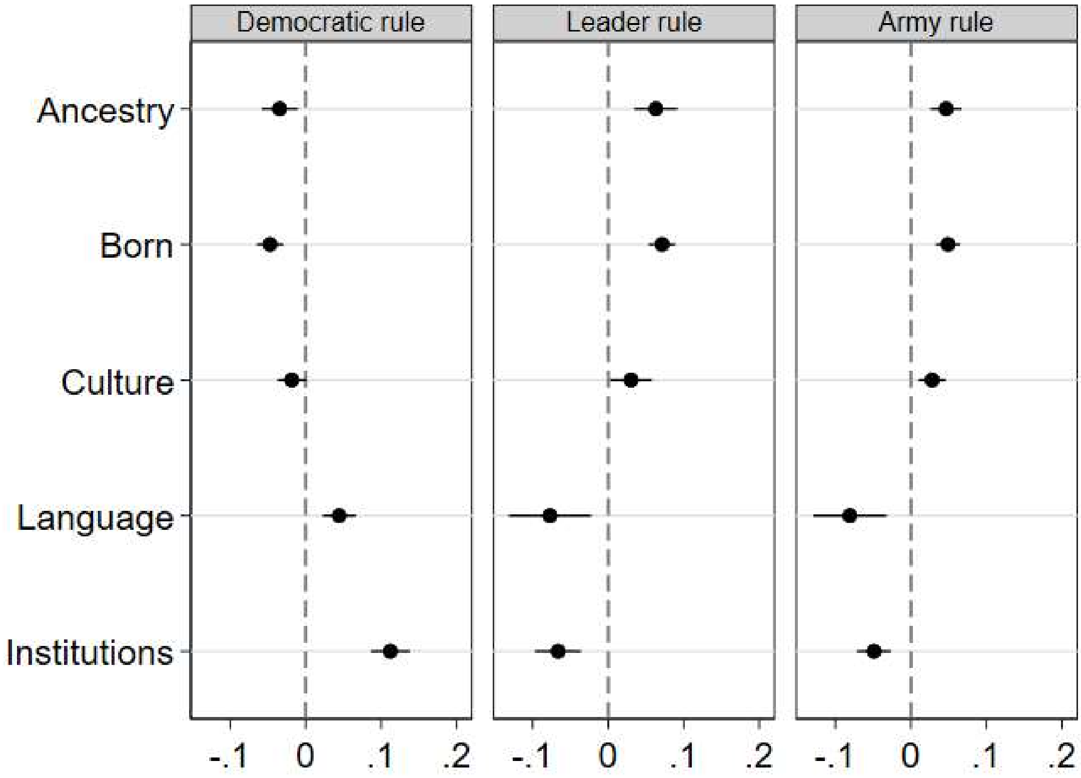


Table A5: Regression models of the moderating effect of economic hardship on the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and the preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives

Economic hardship at the individual level:

Democracy-autocracy preference	**Household income**		**Unemployment experience**		**Welfare dependency experience**	
National identity: ethnic	−0.169	(0.01)***	−0.128	(0.01)***	−0.127	(0.01)***
National identity: civic	0.179	(0.02)***	0.139	(0.02)***	0.137	(0.02)***
NI: ethnic*Economic hardship	0.007	(0.00)***	−0.025	(0.01)**	−0.053	(0.02)**
NI: civic* Economic hardship	−0.007	(0.00)*	−0.008	(0.02)	0.008	(0.02)
Age	0.013	(0.00)***	0.013	(0.00)***	0.013	(0.00)***
Age^2	−0.000	(0.00)***	−0.000	(0.00)***	−0.000	(0.00)***
Sex (1: male)	−0.003	(0.01)	−0.003	(0.01)	−0.003	(0.01)
Education	0.039	(0.00)***	0.039	(0.00)***	0.039	(0.00)***
Household income	0.022	(0.01)	0.012	(0.00)***	0.012	(0.00)***
Work status: part-time employed	0.027	(0.01)*	0.028	(0.01)*	0.028	(0.01)*
Work status: self-employed	0.034	(0.01)*	0.035	(0.01)*	0.036	(0.01)*
Work status: unemployed	0.018	(0.02)	0.017	(0.02)	0.016	(0.02)
Work status: retired	0.014	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
Work status: student	0.098	(0.02)***	0.100	(0.02)***	0.100	(0.02)***
Work status: other	0.006	(0.02)	0.005	(0.02)	0.006	(0.02)
Unemployment experience	0.004	(0.01)	0.098	(0.08)	0.003	(0.01)
Welfare dependency experience	−0.050	(0.01)***	−0.051	(0.01)***	0.060	(0.08)
Marital status: married/reg. partnership	−0.032	(0.01)**	−0.033	(0.01)***	−0.032	(0.01)***
Marital status: widowed	−0.032	(0.02)$^{+}$	−0.036	(0.02)*	−0.035	(0.02)*
Marital status: divorced/separated	−0.002	(0.02)	−0.001	(0.02)	−0.001	(0.02)
Children	−0.028	(0.01)*	−0.028	(0.01)*	−0.029	(0.01)*
Religious attendance	−0.012	(0.00)***	−0.012	(0.00)***	−0.012	(0.00)***
Migration background: 1st gen.	−0.011	(0.01)	−0.011	(0.01)	−0.011	(0.01)
Migration background: 2nd gen.	−0.096	(0.01)***	−0.095	(0.01)***	−0.095	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement	−0.005	(0.01)	−0.005	(0.01)	−0.005	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement^2	−0.001	(0.00)*	−0.001	(0.00)*	−0.001	(0.00)*
Interest in politics	0.011	(0.01)$^{+}$	0.011	(0.01)$^{+}$	0.011	(0.01)$^{+}$
Generalized trust	0.066	(0.01)***	0.066	(0.01)***	0.066	(0.01)***
Specific support for democracy	0.096	(0.01)***	0.095	(0.01)***	0.095	(0.01)***
Constant	2.468	(0.09)***	2.508	(0.09)***	2.513	(0.09)***
Respondents	27,608		27,608		27,608	
Countries	24		24		24	
adj. Within-R^2	0.162		0.161		0.162	

Note: Fixed-effects regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, base categories: Sex: female, Work status: full-time employed, Marital status: single, Migration background: none

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

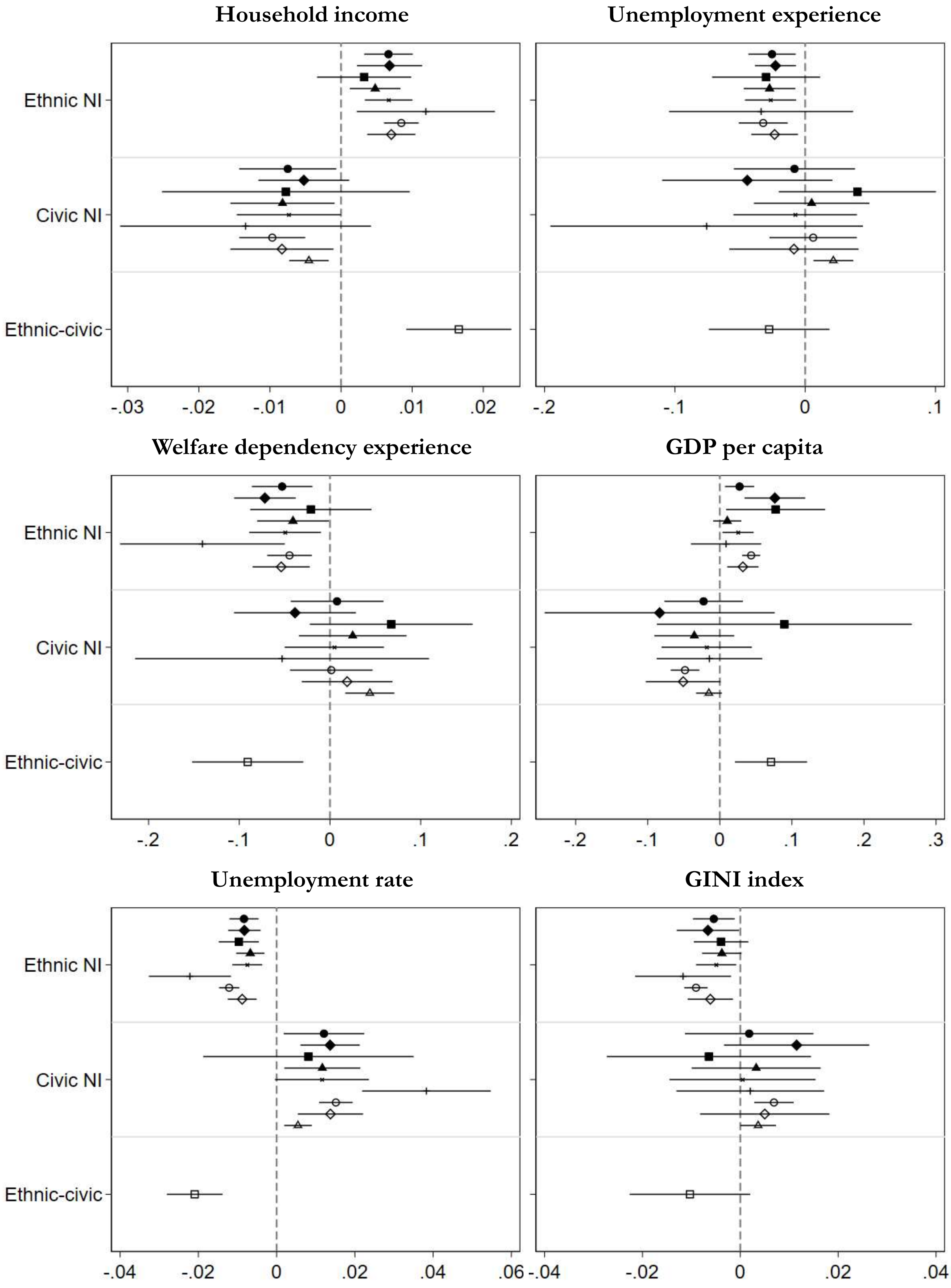
Economic hardship at the societal level:

Democracy-autocracy preference	**GDP per capita**		**Unemployment rate**		**Income inequality**	
National identity: ethnic	−0.422	(0.10)***	−0.081	(0.01)***	0.034	(0.06)
National identity: civic	0.375	(0.28)	0.059	(0.03)*	0.083	(0.20)
NI: ethnic*Economic hardship	0.027	(0.01)*	−0.008	(0.00)***	−0.005	(0.00)*
NI: civic* Economic hardship	−0.022	(0.03)	0.012	(0.00)*	0.002	(0.01)
Age	0.013	(0.00)***	0.013	(0.00)***	0.013	(0.00)***
Age^2	−0.000	(0.00)***	−0.000	(0.00)***	−0.000	(0.00)***
Sex (1: male)	−0.003	(0.01)	−0.002	(0.01)	−0.003	(0.01)
Education	0.039	(0.00)***	0.039	(0.00)***	0.039	(0.00)***
Household income	0.012	(0.00)***	0.012	(0.00)***	0.012	(0.00)***
Work status: part-time employed	0.028	(0.01)*	0.029	(0.01)*	0.028	(0.01)*
Work status: self-employed	0.036	(0.01)*	0.036	(0.01)**	0.036	(0.01)**
Work status: unemployed	0.016	(0.02)	0.018	(0.02)	0.015	(0.02)
Work status: retired	0.015	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)	0.015	(0.01)
Work status: student	0.100	(0.02)***	0.100	(0.02)***	0.100	(0.02)***
Work status: other	0.006	(0.02)	0.008	(0.02)	0.006	(0.02)
Unemployment experience	0.004	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)
Welfare dependency experience	−0.051	(0.01)***	−0.052	(0.01)***	−0.051	(0.01)***
Marital status: married/reg. partnership	−0.033	(0.01)***	−0.033	(0.01)***	−0.032	(0.01)***
Marital status: widowed	−0.035	(0.02)*	−0.036	(0.02)*	−0.035	(0.02)*
Marital status: divorced/separated	−0.002	(0.02)	−0.002	(0.02)	−0.001	(0.02)
Children	−0.028	(0.01)*	−0.028	(0.01)*	−0.028	(0.01)*
Religious attendance	−0.012	(0.00)***	−0.011	(0.00)***	−0.012	(0.00)***
Migration background: 1st gen.	−0.010	(0.01)	−0.010	(0.01)	−0.011	(0.01)
Migration background: 2nd gen.	−0.093	(0.01)***	−0.094	(0.01)***	−0.096	(0.02)***
Left-right self-placement	−0.006	(0.01)	−0.004	(0.01)	−0.005	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement^2	−0.001	(0.00)*	−0.001	(0.00)*	−0.001	(0.00)*
Interest in politics	0.011	(0.01)$^{+}$	0.011	(0.01)$^{+}$	0.011	(0.01)$^{+}$
Generalized trust	0.066	(0.01)***	0.066	(0.01)***	0.066	(0.01)***
Specific support for democracy	0.096	(0.01)***	0.095	(0.01)***	0.095	(0.01)***
Constant	2.534	(0.08)***	2.539	(0.08)***	2.531	(0.08)***
Respondents	27,608		27,608		27,608	
Countries	24		24		24	
adj. Within-R^2	0.162		0.163		0.162	

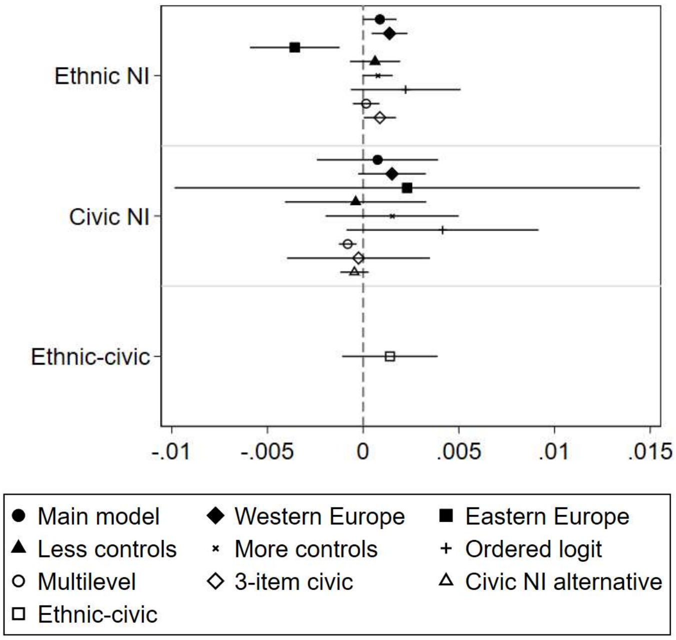
Note: Fixed-effects regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, base categories: Sex: female, Work status: full-time employed, Marital status: single, Migration background: none

$^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A2: Robustness checks for the moderating effect of economic hardship on the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and the preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives



Replacement rate



Note: Displayed are regression coefficients for the moderating effect of economic hardship on the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and the preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives with 95% confidence intervals.

1) Main model: Coefficients as in the models of the main text
2) Western Europe: Sample restricted to West European countries
3) Eastern Europe: Sample restricted to East European countries
4) Less controls: Only socio-demographic control variables (excluding left-right self-placement, interest in politics, generalized trust and specific support for democracy)
5) More controls: Including additional control variables (regarding the political system as democratic, attitudes towards immigrants, particularized trust, club membership, national pride, liberal vs. traditional values and authoritarian attitudes)
6) Ordered logit: Ordered logit regression with country dummies instead of FE-OLS regression
7) Multilevel: Multilevel regression instead of FE-OLS regression, including several country control variables (GDP per capita, GDP growth, unemployment rate, GINI index, KOF globalization index, net migration rate, WGI government effectiveness, FH democracy index)
8) 3-item civic: Civic national identity measured as an average of three items (including culture) instead of two
9) Civic NI – alternative: Weights the civic NI index by an inverse of the ethnic NI index in order to account for the idea that accepting ethnic conceptions of national identity could be considered a contradiction to civic conceptions of national identity.
10) Ethnic-Civic: Subtracts the civic NI index from the ethnic NI index

Table A6: *Robustness checks for the moderating effect of economic hardship on the relation between ethnic or civic national identity and the preference for democracy as opposed to authoritarian alternatives, EVS 2008 replication*

Economic hardship variables	**Ethnic NI**		**Civic NI**	
Individual level				
Household income	0.003	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)
Unemployment experience	−0.027	(0.01)$^{+}$	−0.033	(0.03)
Welfare dependency experience	−0.055	(0.01)**	0.019	(0.04)
Societal level				
GDP per capita	0.005	(0.01)	−0.000	(0.03)
Unemployment rate	−0.002	(0.00)	−0.013	(0.01)*
Income inequality	−0.002	(0.00)	0.002	(0.01)

Note: Displayed are fixed-effects interaction regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, $^{+}$ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

4. Article 3: Leaving democracy? Pandemic threat, emotional accounts and regime support in comparative perspective

Julian Erhardt, Markus Freitag & Maximilian Filsinger

This chapter is identical with the following article published in West European Politics:

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As a response to the COVID-19 pandemic, governments even in consolidated democracies have adopted drastic measures, temporarily constraining individual freedoms and expanding executive political decision-making. In light of this trade-off between public health measures and democratic norms, it becomes crucial to assess the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic on public support for democratic versus authoritarian regimes. Following insights of the affective intelligence theory, emotions, and not only rational considerations, are key to understanding behavioural and attitudinal responses to crises. In the article it is argued that the pandemic threat of COVID-19 affects regime preferences by evoking distinct negative emotions, in particular anger and fear. Using original survey data in six European countries, it is shown that COVID-19-induced anger and fear have divergent effects on regime preferences. While democratic regime preference has declined for angry respondents, there is also a message of hope: fearful respondents display increased support for a democratic regime.

Keywords: Support for democracy, Regime preference, COVID-19 pandemic, Emotions, Affective intelligence theory

For quite some time, pundits have been warning of an ongoing democratic deconsolidation and a trend towards authoritarian rule (e.g., Foa and Mounk 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Lührmann *et al.* 2020b). Events such as the Brexit vote in the United Kingdom, the election of Donald Trump in the United States and the general trend towards ideological polarisation have created the impression that the foundations of liberal democracy are being systematically challenged and weakened even in established democracies. This development seems to be further amplified by the emergence of COVID-19 and its rapid spread across the world. Following the rising number of infections and deaths, governments across the world have taken extraordinary measures that have not only reduced economic and social activities but more importantly restricted civil liberties (e.g. Maerz *et al.* 2020). This safeguarding of collective security at the expense of individual liberty and democratic principles was supported by the population (Bol *et al.* 2021; De Vries *et al.* 2021; Devine *et al.* 2021). In this vein, Lührmann *et al.* (2020a) show that many countries worldwide face a risk of democratic decline during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Ever since Almond and Verba (1965), culture is a key criterion for a country not to fall at risk of democratic backsliding and to ensure that democracy is 'the only game in town': it crucially matters whether an overwhelming majority of citizens regard democracy as the best regime type or whether a significant portion of the population is open to authoritarian alternatives to democracy (Claassen 2020, see also Norris 2017a; Diamond 1999; Easton 1965; Linz and Stepan 1996; Lipset 1959).[1] In this regard, Malka *et al.* (2020) raise concerns that even in consolidated Western democracies, openness to authoritarian governance is not negligible and particularly prevalent among those with a protectionist attitude combining leftist economic attitudes with cultural conservatism. In light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, this may have further deteriorated: Amat *et al.* (2020) report a switch in mass public preferences towards authoritarian government in Spain. Similarly, Roccato *et al.* (2021) speculate that the threats associated with the pandemic have negative effects on people's support for democracy in the US in the long run (see also Aksoy *et al.* 2020), showing that pandemic threat might be detrimental even to consolidated democracies.

This is the starting point of our investigation.[2] Taking a comparative perspective, we evaluate how the pandemic threat has affected public support for democratic vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes and which mechanisms underlie this relationship. To date, a large amount of work has systematically related different kinds of threat to increasing authoritarianism, although authoritarian *regime preferences* have almost never been in the forefront of these (e.g. Feldman and Stenner 1997; Sales 1973). In addition, only few studies have addressed the underlying mechanisms. In this vein, recent research highlights the important role of emotions in guiding orientations and attitudes in times of crises and external threat (e.g. Huddy *et al.* 2005; Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2018; Wagner 2014). Emotions, in particular anger and fear, run high in such times, when reasoning and deliberation are taking a back seat. We follow the insights of the most prominent model of emotional processing, Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT), which takes a functional neuroscience perspective (e.g. Davidson *et al.* 2000) and argues that various preconscious appraisals are constantly active, monitoring the environment for violations of norms and practices as well as new, unknown and potentially dangerous events, arousing anger and fear if present (e.g. Marcus *et al.* 2000; Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2019).

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[1] Of course, culture is not the only criterion—the key actors in the state must also reflect democratic norms and practices (constitution) and no significant groups should attempt to overthrow the regime (behavior) (Linz and Stepan 1996). For the purposes of our article, however, we focus on the culture criterion.

[2] This article was written as part of a research project on 'The Politics of Public Health Threat' that is financially supported by the Swiss National Science Foundation (SNSF) and the Berne University Research Foundation. In this context, reference should also be made to the contributions by Filsinger and Freitag (2022), Freitag and Hofstetter (2022) and Wamsler *et al.* (2022), who are elaborating theoretically and empirically similar designs in a coherent research program.

Against this background, we contend that anger and fear are prompted by the perception of pandemic threat-indicating cues, and these emotional states in turn enable engagement in functionally adaptive behaviours, e.g. public support for democratic vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes. To explore the relationship between pandemic-elicited emotions on regime preference, we analyse data of two original surveys conducted during the second and third COVID-19 waves (November 2020 to January 2021 and April to May 2021) using 12 samples from six European countries strongly affected at the onset of the pandemic (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom (UK), overall N = 12,017). Our analyses show that people can respond to pandemic threat in two ways: Those reacting to pandemic threat with anger are more open to authoritarian alternatives to democracy, while those experiencing fear regarding a possible infection with COVID-19 are more likely to prefer a democratic regime.

Overall, our study contributes to the literature in several respects. First, our study adds to the ongoing debate about a consistent democratic deconsolidation in established democracies and the debate about the democratic ramifications of the COVID-19 pandemic by showing that angry citizens are at risk of turning away from democracy and towards authoritarianism. Second, we go beyond extant studies linking pandemic threat with authoritarianism by looking at actual regime preferences for democracy vis-à-vis autocracy. In doing so, our analyses provide additional empirical evidence for the emotional underpinnings of politics. In particular, our study complements previous research on emotions (Erhardt *et al.* 2021a; Rico *et al.* 2017; Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2018; Vasilopoulou and Wagner 2017) by showing that anger is not only linked to authoritarian, eurosceptic and populist attitudes as well as lower political trust, but also shifts citizens away from democratic and towards authoritarian regimes. Furthermore, the results show that fear, albeit also a negative emotion like anger, strengthens democratic regime orientations. This is a message of hope, because globalisation boosts the threat of pandemic emergence and accelerates global disease transmission in the future. Moreover, this finding goes hand in hand with insights from emotional accounts indicating that anger and fear display opposing effects on political attitudes and political support (e.g. MacKuen *et al.* 2010; Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2019). Third, while most studies referring to emotional responses to threatening stimuli rely on single country studies, we provide a comparative perspective examining the effects of COVID-19 in six European countries that have all been severely affected by the pandemic. Consistent with cautious comments about drawing conclusions based on current COVID-19 research, as well as lessons from the 'replicability crisis' in the social sciences, identifying robust, replicable, and generalisable evidence is critical (Zettler *et al.* 2022).

Pandemic threat, emotional responses, and regime preferences

Literature on democratic legitimacy and regime preferences builds on Easton's (1965, 1975) classical distinction between diffuse and specific support. Whereas specific support stems from citizens being satisfied with the outputs of a political system, diffuse support is more unconditional and refers to a general attachment to the political system for its own sake. In this regard, research distinguishes between citizens' satisfaction with the functioning of democracy as an expression of specific support for democracy and their preference for a democratic regime vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives as an expression of diffuse support for democracy (e.g., Linde and Ekman 2003; Magalhães 2014). Drawing on this conceptualization, literature frequently contends that diffuse regime preferences are 'stable cognitive value[s]' (Huang *et al.* 2008: 56) or 'a principled affair' (Mattes and Bratton 2007: 201), which is mostly driven by socialisation in a democratic regime (Dalton 1994; Sack 2017), while specific support for democracy instead hinges on the performance of the democratic regime, in particular economic performance (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Claassen and Magalhães 2022). At the same time, there are also several studies that break down this clear distinction and show that diffuse regime preferences are substantially affected by short-term performance factors and crises (Amat *et al.* 2020; Cordero and Simón 2016; Erhardt *et al.* 2021b; Magalhães 2014)—such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

To this end, we examine how pandemic threat relates to regime preferences. Although it has been argued for decades that threats increasingly lead to authoritarian orientations (e.g. Feldman and Stenner 1997; Sales 1973), two critical questions remain open. First, it has not been theorised or tested whether threat also affects democratic vis-à-vis authoritarian regime preferences and not only authoritarian orientations. Second, it still remains open how pandemic threat translates to authoritarianism. In times of crisis and threat, it seems obvious to look at psychological reactions (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Huddy *et al.* 2005). In particular, emotions have moved from bit player to centre stage in the analysis of threatening events (Marcus *et al.* 2019; Vasilopoulos *et al.*

2018, 2019; Wagner 2014). Emotions are 'a complex syndrome of reactions to our circumstances that include electrochemical processes in the brain, changes in automatic and motor systems (e.g. breathing, heart rate, muscle tensions, facial expressions), and behavioral impulses' (Brader and Cikanek 2019: 203). They have diagnostic power in that they tell the brain what is going on around us and whether or how we should be concerned with it (Bonansinga 2020). Thus, emotions allow us to tailor our thinking to the needs of particular situations (Brader and Cikanek 2019). Against this background, we argue that specific negative emotions are prompted by the perception of pandemic threat-indicating cues, and these emotional states in turn enable engagement in functionally adaptive behaviours, e.g. public support for democratic vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes.

One of the most well-known accounts in the literature, the theory of affective intelligence (AIT), states that emotions are the expression of feelings that arise from the interaction between our personal goals and the environment (Marcus *et al.* 2000; Marcus and MacKuen 1993). Drawing on the insights of neuroscience (e.g., Davidson *et al.* 2000), the AIT posits that in the face of a threat, two brain systems operate constantly and routinely to sort information we are confronted with. The first system is focussed on anger signalling that a threat detrimental to familiar norms and practices of thought and action exists (Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2018, 2019; Vasilopoulou and Wagner 2017; Wagner 2014). A second system relies on fear (anxiety) to signify the extent to which circumstances are novel or uncertain.[3] Anger signals that a threat is harmful to familiar norms and practices of thought, fear is usually associated with a novel and unknown threat (Marcus *et al.* 2019). One important implication of the AIT is that both these appraisals are executed simultaneously and largely independently. Thus, when confronted with a threat individuals feel both angry *and* fearful rather than one or the other (Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2018). These emotions then take on a functional role by motivating individuals to do something (Albertson and Gadarian 2015: 5). Which adaptation strategy to the pandemic threat an individual pursues depend on the extent he or she experiences *both* emotions at any given moment (Marcus *et al.* 2000).

We argue that threat resulting from COVID-19 can activate both brain systems, triggering anger and fear. On the one hand, the novelty of the COVID-19 pandemic is particularly likely to cause fear, as the unknown is often dangerous and disrupts security while inducing uncertainty (Taylor 2019). Fear 'occurs when individuals appraise a situation as being unpleasant, highly threatening and uncertain', in particular when the threat is external and not under the control of other people (Albertson and Gadarian 2015: 8). On the other hand, pandemic threat is multi-layered and includes not only health-related concerns but also financial hardship and loss of social relationships. An infection with the virus not only poses health risks but also has other negative implications for citizens, including quarantine and accompanying negative social and financial externalities. In this vein, as the pandemic prevents individuals from achieving personal goals relating to these various aspects and challenges familiar norms and practices, anger is elicited. A principal component of anger is that the threat is not perceived to be out of control of others, but that others cause harm or regulate the sources of a harmful event or threat. Thus, anger can develop when individuals attribute blame for the pandemic threat and its consequences on their health, economic and social life on their fellow citizens (Bor et al. 2022) or their political decision-makers, because they have not taken the appropriate actions.

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[3] A third system evaluates how well goal-seeking through habits and routines is working, triggering enthusiasm (Marcus *et al.* 2000). Due to our focus on negative emotions triggered by threat, we do not include this in our analysis.

AIT posits that once anger and fear are evoked, these emotions motivate individuals to engage in different functionally adaptive behaviour (Marcus *et al.* 2000). Anger 'serves to launch defenses against challenges to extant core norms by those who threaten' (Marcus *et al.* 2019: 119). When individuals are dissatisfied with the measures taken by the government to combat COVID-19, they blame the government and other political actors for not taking the, in their view, appropriate actions and thus thwarting them from achieving their goals. This is exacerbated by the fact that angry individuals tend to be more confident of their own convictions, more readily reject political information contrary to their views and display increased optimism with regards to the controllability of the situation (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Lerner and Keltner 2001; MacKuen *et al.* 2010). Their disapproval of the political management of the pandemic undermines trust in the responsible political actors (see, e.g., Erhardt *et al.* 2021a) and may even erode their support of the (democratic) political system. Considering that angry individuals are less willing to compromise (MacKuen *et al.* 2010), they may be more open to authoritarian alternatives to democracy if their own views are likely to prevail. They may perceive that the pluralism, deliberation and compromise inherent in democracies prevent taking the appropriate action and lead to selling out of one's own interests. Similarly, their inclination towards punitive action against those they blame for the threat (Brader and Cikanek 2019) may transgress the limitations of democratic rule of law. Thus, we delineate hypothesis 1 as follows:

H_1: *COVID-19-related anger is negatively related to democratic regime preference.*

Regarding pandemic threat induced fear, the interpretation of the AIT allows for two alternative arguments. Fear stimulates people to remove themselves from the threat by turning to risk-averse behaviour and isolationism in general (Lerner and Keltner 2001). In addition, people who are fearful are in favour of actions that mitigate or eliminate the danger by establishing security (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Brader and Marcus 2013). Put differently, fearful people prefer a *flight* to security over a *fight* for security (Oesterreich 2005). To that end, authoritarian forms of governance might offer more security with strict governmental measures to contain the virus compared to the democratic system with its institutionalised insecurities (Nelson 2021; Przeworski 2019). While authoritarian regimes advocate conformity and sanction deviant behaviour, democratic structures allow for the pluralism of interests that can be identified as potential hotspots in times of pandemic. Thus, authoritarian governance is regarded as a disease-controlling strategy due to the focus on the strict observance of traditional norms and the submission to (state) authorities (Murray *et al.* 2013). Particularly in times of uncertainty, fearful citizens tend to favour positions and policies that satisfy their need for protection and safety even at the cost of civil liberties (Albertson and Gadarian 2015). Besides, research has shown that fear inclines people to disregard traditional practices that are ill-suited to novel circumstances but rather consider alternative options to the status quo (Marcus *et al.* 2019: 120). Consequently, fear should induce citizens to favour authoritarian forms of government that are different from the liberal democratic practices of normal times but potentially facilitate dealing with the current threat. Thus, we formulate our first hypothesis 2 as follows:

H_2: *COVID-19-related fear is negatively related to democratic regime preference.*

However, a contrary conjecture can also be developed from literature following the AIT. Research in psychology has shown that fearful citizens tend to search for information about the source of the threat (e.g., Marcus *et al.* 2000; Valentino *et al.* 2008; Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2019). While an authoritarian regime allows the enforcement of strict government measures to contain the virus, it is in no way guaranteed that the autocratic government will do so, as can be seen by the wide variance of pandemic management in autocracies (Hale *et al.* 2021; McMann and Tisch 2021). Despite prominent exceptions such as China, research has shown that authoritarian regimes overall perform worse in preventing COVID-19 infections and deaths and also underreport cases (Cassan and van Steenvoort 2021; McMann and Tisch 2021). To that end, fearful citizens searching for information might come to the conclusion that the risk of losing freedoms and suppression by governmental authorities when turning towards an authoritarian regime instead of the current democratic system is much higher than the benefits provided by such a shift. Additionally, fear is said to increase an individual's preference for deliberative decision-making and compromise (MacKuen *et al.* 2010). As a result, fearful individuals may be unlikely to abandon democratic governance for a system that is characterised by harsh decision making without a consultation of different opinions. Given that fear can also undermine action when precautionary measures provoke further anxious thoughts (Knight and Elfenbein 1996; Huddy *et al.* 2005), fearful respondents may not be keen to support a regime change towards autocracy. Finally, fear has been linked to a lower confidence in one's own preferences and increased trust in external actors, such as scientific authorities or the (democratic) governments (Albertson and Gadarian 2015). In particular, fear is regarded as a crucial factor in explaining the rally effect during the COVID-19 pandemic, unifying societies behind their nation, its government and its democratic institutions (Erhardt *et al.* 2021a; Esaiasson *et al.* 2021; Schraff 2021). As such, fear may contribute in creating the impression of a community of shared fates whose problems are best addressed by rallying behind the democratic political system and its elites. Thus, we formulate the competing hypothesis 3 as follows:

H_3: *COVID-19-related fear is positively related to democratic regime preference.*

Methods and data

In order to test our hypothesised relationships between COVID-19-related anger and fear as well as principled support for democracy, we conducted two online surveys in six Western European countries—France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom—with around 1,000 respondents per country per wave (i.e. around 12,000 observations in total). The first survey wave was conducted at the height of the second wave of the pandemic between 24 November 2020 and 18 January 2021, when 7-day incidence rates were reaching new, unprecedented heights in all of the countries under study (Johns Hopkins University 2021). The second survey wave took place between 22 April and 21 May 2021 at a time when the number of infections was slowly receding from the height of the third wave of the pandemic. The survey was carried out by the German-based survey institute SurveyEngine, respondents were recruited using quota-sampling (representative of the population with respect to age, sex and education) through the SurveyEngine access panel. Table A1 in the online appendix shows detailed information on the survey.

The six countries under study offer an excellent opportunity to examine the relationship between emotions and regime preference in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. In terms of the pandemic, all six countries were severely hit by the pandemic during the second and third wave of the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, they also exhibit substantial variation—the United Kingdom for instance was hit particularly severely during the second pandemic wave with the Alpha variant emerging, while the third pandemic wave was comparatively mild for Switzerland and the UK. In addition, the countries also vary in their measures enacted to combat the spread of COVID-19. France, Germany, Italy and Spain enacted stringent lockdown measures during the whole period of investigation, the UK enacted the most stringent measures starting with the Alpha outbreak. In contrast, Switzerland followed a different path with more lenient measures (Hale *et al.* 2021). Overall, using surveys in six countries at two time points during the pandemic enables us to assess whether the proposed relationships are stable across countries, over time and across different levels of pandemic threat and government interventions. With regards to the democratic institutions, all of the countries in our sample are consolidated democracies. While this excludes newer or even defect democracies, this allows us to examine the potential support for democratic backsliding in the most consolidated democracies in times of the COVID-19 pandemic. In this regard, it is important to note that the countries under study have experienced a growth in radical right-wing parties that express positions at odds with liberal democracy. Some of these parties even were an established government party (SVP in Switzerland), obtained governmental power (Lega in Italy) or only fell short of obtaining a majority in presidential elections (LePen in France). While the six countries under study are established democracies, recent developments suggest that at least a part of the population might be open to alternative illiberal or even authoritarian forms of government. The admiration of many of these parties for Viktor Orban's idea of illiberal democracy in Hungary is just one indication. Still, the electoral strength of these parties varies between the six countries under study. Furthermore, we also include six countries with different historical legacies regarding authoritarianism. Our sample includes two countries without any recent history of authoritarian governance (UK and Switzerland), three countries with experience of authoritarian governance in recent history (Germany, Italy and Spain) and France, which occupies a middle ground given its imposed authoritarian history under Nazi occupation.

For our main measure of support for democracy, we use an item battery adapted from Global Barometer Surveys (see, e.g. ABS 2016; Norris 2017b) measuring regime preference for democratic vs. autocratic systems, which has seen wide use in literature on support for democracy (e.g. Chu *et al.* 2008; Mattes and Bratton 2007): We measure agreement with the following three items on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree: (a) democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government; (b) under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one; (c) for people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime. Using exploratory factor analysis with the principal component method, we test whether these three items form a single factor. Table A3 in the online appendix displays the factor loadings of the full sample as well as each survey wave in each country. Results indicate that all three items consistently load onto a single factor, we thus combine the three items into a single variable using the average with items (b) and (c) reversed.

For our two key independent variables, COVID-19-related anger and fear, we employ an adapted version of the positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS, see Watson *et al.* 1988) questionnaire. Such a measure has been suggested to study political affect by Marcus *et al.* (2000: 152–74) and has been applied study threatening events before (see, e.g. Marcus *et al.* 2019). Respondents were asked the following: 'Thinking back to the last weeks and months: How often have you felt the following emotions in relation to a possible infection with the coronavirus?', with answer categories on a scale from (1) never to (5) very often. Seeing as this question explicitly focuses on a possible COVID-19 infection, this allows us to adequately capture emotional reactions to the pandemic threat.[4] Respondents were then presented with various adjectives in randomised order. Following previous research (Albertson and Gadarian 2015; Marcus *et al.* 2000, 2019), we take the average of the two items 'angry' and 'hostile' for our measure of anger and the two items 'anxious' and 'worried' for our measure of fear.[5] As it is crucial for our analysis that we can empirically discern these two factors, we use confirmatory factor analysis to test whether a two-factor solution distinguishing between anger and fear is empirically preferable over a one-factor solution. Table A4 in the online appendix compares the AIC between a one-factor and a two-factor solution, showing that a two-factor solution is consistently supported by the data in each survey wave in each country.

In addition, we control for a set of variables that have been related to support for democracy (see, e.g. Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Erhardt *et al.* 2021b; Magalhães 2014) and may also affect emotional reactions to pandemic threat. These include the respondents' age (squared), gender, education (three categories: (1) primary, lower secondary education; (2) upper, post-secondary education; (3) tertiary education), income situation (on a scale from (1) it is very difficult to cope on my current income to (5) I can live comfortably on my current income and can save regularly), type of community (on a scale from (1) rural area or village to (5) large city), self-reported health (on a scale from (1) very bad to (5) very good), 11-point left-right self-placement (squared) as well as their interest in politics (on a scale from (1) not at all interested to (5) very interested). Support for democracy in established democracies tends to be more prevalent among older, female, higher educated, wealthier, less ideologically extreme and more politically interested respondents as well as in urban communities. At the same time, pandemic threat differs depending on these socio-demographic characteristics. Literature on the emotional processing of information has also found differences depending on political ideology (e.g., Inbar *et al.* 2012). Summary statistics for all variables across all countries and waves can be found in Table A2 in the online appendix.

As to our modelling strategy, we regress support for democracy on COVID-19-related emotions and the aforementioned set of control variables using linear regression models with country-survey wave fixed effects and region[6] clustered standard errors, seeing as pandemic threat may be clustered within subnational regions of a country.[7] We calculate both overall regression coefficients for the full sample as well as marginal effects for each country and survey wave using interaction effects.

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[4] As a robustness check, we test whether the results are similar when using a measure of general emotions, asking respondents how they feel at the moment on a scale from (1) not at all to (5) extremely, with 'upset' and 'hostile' for general anger and 'afraid' and 'nervous' for general fear. While this measure asks respondents about their general emotions, the pandemic and its consequences were still on the forefront of people's minds at this point in time. The results hold even when using this general measure of emotions, as can be seen in Table A5, model (1) in the online appendix.

[5] These adjectives, among others, cover the more general dimensions of anger/aversion and fear/anxiety with different degrees of intensity. Other adjectives employed by literature in this context include 'upset', 'disgusted' or 'resentful' for anger/aversion and 'uneasy', 'scared' or 'nervous' for fear/anxiety (see Marcus *et al.* 2000: 152–74).

[6] We use subnational regions of comparable size and population for which subnational data was available (France: Régions; Germany: Bundersländer; Italy: Regioni; Spain: Comunidades autónomas + Ciudades autónomas; Switzerland: Cantons; United Kingdom: Government Office Regions (Regions) + Country).

Empirical analysis

Taking a first look at the summary statistics of our key variables, we can observe that democratic regime preference is fairly high in these Western European democracies, as suggested by previous work (see, e.g. Norris 2011). Only 5.6 percent of the respondents disagree with the statement that democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government. At the same time, however, there is a little more support for the statement that an authoritarian government can be preferable under some circumstances (24.5 percent of the respondents) and that the regime does not matter (15.4 percent). On a scale from 1 to 5, democratic regime preference is highest in Germany (3.90) and lowest in Italy (3.61). It did not change significantly between the two survey waves. With regards to anger, 46.8 percent of the respondents report feeling angry and 27.2 percent of the respondents report feeling hostile at least some of the time. COVID-19-related anger on a scale from 1 to 5 is highest in Italy (2.45), the country most severely hit at the onset of the pandemic, and lowest in Germany (2.00), the country with the lowest number of Covid-19 fatalities in our sample. It is also marginally higher in the first survey wave (2.19) than in the second (2.13). Finally, with regards to fear, 51.7 percent of the respondents report feeling anxious and 70.7 percent of the respondents report feeling worried about a possible infection with COVID-19 at least sometimes. As with anger, COVID-19-related fear on a scale from 1 to 5 is highest in Italy (3.21), but it is lowest in Switzerland (2.54), the country taking a more lenient approach in its measures. It again is slightly lower in the second survey wave (2.78) than in the first survey wave (2.89) when the second pandemic wave was reaching new heights.

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[7] As a robustness check, we use region-survey wave fixed effects instead and survey weights adjusting for the population size of regions within each country. This enables ruling out potential concerns about heterogeneity between subnational regions and differences in the selection probability between regions driving the effect. In addition, we also run a model including date of interview dummies to control for heterogeneity over the observation period. The results are essentially identical, as can be seen in Table A5, models (2) and (3) in the online appendix.

Table 1: Linear regression model for the relationship between COVID-19-related emotions and democratic regime support

DV: Democratic regime preference	(1)		(2)	
COVID-19-related anger	**−0.112**	**(0.01)*****	**−0.095**	**(0.01)*****
COVID-19-related fear	**0.063**	**(0.01)*****	**0.054**	**(0.01)*****
Age	0.013	(0.00)***	0.014	(0.00)***
Age^2	−0.000	(0.00)	−0.000	(0.00)
Male	−0.081	(0.02)***	−0.087	(0.02)***
Education: Upper, post-secondary	0.090	(0.02)***	0.092	(0.02)***
Education: Tertiary	0.161	(0.03)***	0.160	(0.03)***
Income situation	0.065	(0.01)***	0.052	(0.01)***
Type of community	0.001	(0.01)	−0.002	(0.01)
Self-reported health	0.052	(0.01)***	0.048	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement	−0.058	(0.01)***	−0.071	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement^2	−0.002	(0.00)	−0.001	(0.00)
Interest in politics	0.103	(0.01)***	0.098	(0.01)***
Satisfaction with democracy			0.069	(0.01)***
Political trust			−0.020	(0.01)*
Government cannot solve problems			−0.019	(0.01)*
Country-survey wave FE	✓		✓	
N	12,017		12,017	

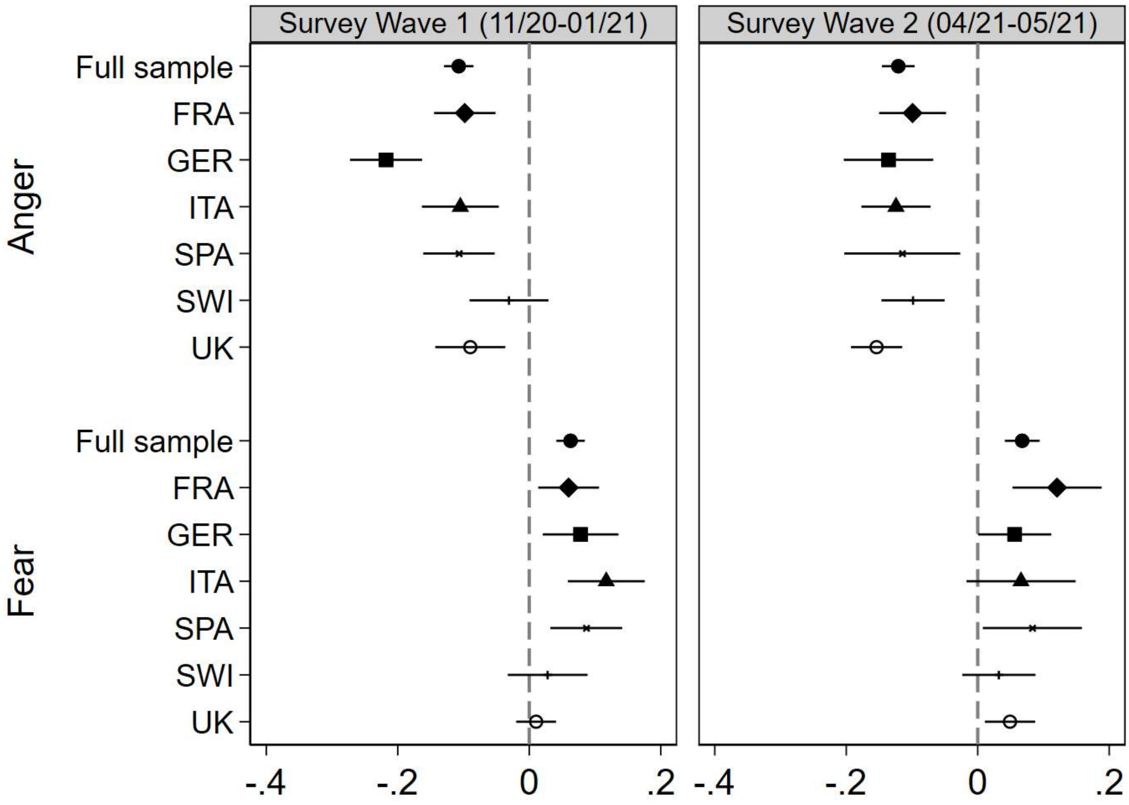
Note: Linear regression coefficients with region-clustered standard errors in parentheses, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

Table 1, model (1) presents the main results of our OLS model regressing democratic regime preference on COVID-19-related anger and fear as well as our set of socio-demographic and political control variables. Since AIT posits that emotional states are experienced simultaneously, we test the emotions jointly in each regression model as they are correlated rather than orthogonal to each other. Looking at COVID-19-related anger, we expect a negative relationship with democratic regime support. We find clear empirical support for our first hypothesis: Respondents who are angrier with regards to a possible infection with COVID-19 are less supportive of a democratic regime and more open to authoritarian alternatives. Those who have never felt anger regarding a possible infection with COVID-19 display a democratic regime preference at 3.87, while the democratic regime preference of those who very often felt anger drops to 3.42. With regards to COVID-19-related fear, we had two competing hypotheses (H_2 and H_3), with some literature arguing for a negative, other literature for a positive relationship. Our empirical analysis clearly refutes the idea of fear leading to a flight into (authoritarian) security (Oesterreich 2005)—the exact opposite seems to be the case. Respondents who are more afraid with regards to a possible infection with COVID-19 are more supportive of a democratic regime and more opposed to authoritarian alternatives, supporting our third hypothesis. Those who have never felt fear regarding an infection with COVID-19 exhibit a democratic regime preference at 3.62, while the democratic regime preference of those who very often felt fear is at 3.87. The effects of our other covariates conform to our expectations. In general, democratic regime support increases with age, female gender, education, a better income situation, self-reported health, a more leftist ideology and a higher interest in politics. In terms of the substantiveness of our results, the effects of COVID-19-related anger and fear are comparable in size to that of political interest and education, two important predictors of democratic regime support. The effect sizes are modest, reflecting the fact that regime preference is to some extent 'a principled affair' (Mattes and Bratton 2007: 201) that is not easily undermined by current events. While emotions related to pandemic threat certainly do not turn democracy-supporting societies into authoritarian ones, they nevertheless contribute to the erosion (or, in the case of fear, strengthening) of democratic regime support.

Model (2) additionally controls for three measures of specific support for political institutions to ascertain that emotional reactions to pandemic threat have directly impacted diffuse democratic regime support and not only indirectly through a more specific, performance evaluation-oriented support for political institutions. This includes, first, a measure of satisfaction with the way democracy works (on a scale from (1) extremely dissatisfied to (7) extremely satisfied), second, the mean of political trust in politicians, the federal as well as the local government (on a scale from (1) do not trust at all to (7) trust completely) and third, whether respondents believe that the government is incapable of solving their country's most crucial problems (on a scale from (1) strongly disagree to (5) strongly agree). Overall, the size of the coefficients have decreased only marginally, suggesting that our results are not driven by performance evaluations of the political system, but by more fundamental differences in democratic regime preferences.

In order to take a more detailed look at the different countries and time points in our sample, we interact our key independent variables with country-survey wave dummies. Figure 1 reports the results of such an analysis. It presents marginal effects of our key independent variables for each country in each survey wave. Overall, the results of our analysis are robust across most of our countries and for both survey waves. The most notable exception is the case of Switzerland, where we observe no relationship between COVID-19-related emotions and democratic regime preference in our first survey wave and only a negative relationship of anger and democratic regime preference, but not a positive one for fear, in our second survey wave. This may well be due to the more lenient approach in containing the spread of COVID-19 of Switzerland. Those experiencing fear with regards to a possible infection with COVID-19 may view the government measures as insufficient, which may inhibit the positive relationship of fear with democratic regime support observed in other countries. Aside from Switzerland, the relationship between fear and democratic regime preference is also insignificant in the UK in our first survey wave and in Italy in our second survey wave, but not in the respective countries' other survey wave. For the UK, a similar argument could be made as for Switzerland, seeing as UK has reacted very late to the Alpha wave at the end of 2020 (Hale *et al.* 2021). However, fearful people seem to reward the UK government's success in pandemic control (especially the rapid deployment of vaccination) between winter and early summer 2021. Meanwhile, Italy has observed a switch towards a (semi-)technocratic government between the two waves, which may explain why we do no longer observe a positive relationship of fear with democratic regime support in the second wave. Nevertheless, fear is still consistently related to a more democratic regime preference in three of our six countries under study. In addition, anger not only portrays a stronger relationship than fear, it is also very consistently related to a more authoritarian regime preference, with only Switzerland turning insignificant in the first survey wave. Interestingly, the negative relationship between anger and democratic regime preference is more pronounced in Germany in the first survey wave. This was at a time when Germany, which managed to contain the first pandemic wave comparably well, was for the first time hit more severely by the pandemic with high numbers of infections and fatalities, leading to very stringent lockdown measures (Hale *et al.* 2021; Johns Hopkins University 2021).

Figure 1: Marginal effects of COVID-19-related emotions on democratic regime preference by country-survey wave



Note: Marginal effects calculated from a linear regression model with region-clustered standard errors, 95% confidence intervals, N = 12,017.

Overall, our results suggest that pandemic threat does not portray a uniform relationship with democratic regime preference—it crucially depends on whether people emotionally react with anger or fear to the pandemic threat. This finding aligns well with previous literature on emotions during the pandemic showing that anger and fear have divergent effects on trust in the government (Erhardt *et al.* 2021a), support for the restriction of civil liberties (Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2022), compliance with public health measures (Brouard *et al.* 2020), anti-immigrant sentiments (Freitag and Hofstetter 2022) and conceptions of nationhood (Wamsler *et al.* 2022). At the same time, it seemingly conflicts with recent findings of Vasilopoulos *et al.* (2022), Filsinger and Freitag (2022) or Gidengil *et al.* (2022) that fearful individuals more readily accept civil liberty restrictions and are more open to executive aggrandisement during the pandemic. In an additional analysis in Table A6 in the online appendix, we similarly find that fearful respondents tend to prioritise public health over the economy and are less likely to think that the government measures go too far, while the reverse holds true for angry respondents. Two potential explanations for this counterintuitive result come to mind. First, fearful individuals also display an increased trust in governmental actors (Erhardt *et al.* 2021a; Schraff 2021). As a result, they may more readily trust that their democratically-elected government will not overstep its authority and lift the temporary restrictions once the pandemic threat has passed. Contrary to angry individuals, they blame the pandemic, not the government, for restricting their freedoms. In this regard, fearful individuals may view the harsh measures as a way to more swiftly overcome the pandemic threat and to guarantee the country's stability and democratic order in the long run. They thus temporarily support more restrictive measures as a way to fight the pandemic within a democratic order. Second, angry individuals may not necessarily reject harsh measures out of pro-democratic orientations. Radical opposition against governmental measures was frequently most pronounced among extremist and populist parties, which stylised themselves as 'defender[s] of freedom' (Lehmann and Zehnter 2022: 1, see also Wondreys and Mudde 2022). In this regard, angry individuals may turn against the political procedures that have restricted their way of life and consequently seek an alternative regime in which they do not have to compromise with vulnerable segments of the population. Put differently, the relationship between the measures to combat the pandemic and democracy is more complex as evidenced by the wide variety of measures taken by democracies and autocracies alike. Disentangling these relationships is a task for future research.

Conclusion

How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected preferences for a democratic regime? Following the insights of the Affective Intelligence Theory (AIT), we argued in this study that anger and fear are prompted by the perception of pandemic threat-indicating cues, and these emotional states in turn enable engagement in functionally adaptive behaviours, e.g. public support for democratic vis-à-vis authoritarian regimes. We tested this relationship between pandemic-elicited emotions on regime preference using data of two original surveys conducted during the second and third COVID-19 waves in six European countries. Our results show that, while on average still supportive of democracy, those experiencing anger are more prone to supporting authoritarian alternatives to democracy. At the same time, fear regarding a possible infection with COVID-19 is related to a modest increase in democratic regime support. These relationships are robust across most of our countries and for both survey waves and also hold when controlling for additional measures of specific support.

Naturally, there are certain caveats to our analysis. While we go beyond extant single-country studies on the political ramifications of emotional responses to threats, our sample is still restricted to consolidated Western European democracies. In addition, our research design is strictly cross-sectional and observational and thus does not allow for causal inference. Future studies should test whether our arguments travel beyond the Western European context and can be confirmed by experimental evidence. In particular, experimental evidence may also discern more precisely through which mechanisms anger and fear affect democratic regime support, which is something that we could only theorise on, but not test in this study. Finally, our analysis is limited to the attitudinal level of democratic regime support. For a thorough understanding of how pandemic threat affects the stability of democratic regimes, further studies should examine whether it also translates into regime-strengthening or regime-undermining behaviour.

Nevertheless, our results have crucial implications for the study of the political ramifications of emotional responses to threat. They suggest that democratic regime support is not entirely stable, but may be affected by current events, such as a pandemic. In addition, they corroborate earlier findings that anger, not fear, represents a threat to the principles of liberal, pluralist democracy (Rico *et al.* 2017; Vasilopoulos *et al.* 2018, 2019). Contrary to earlier assumptions that fear would lead to a flight into authoritarian regimes, fear instead seems to alleviate this threat and reinforce democratic support. This also shows that pandemic threat does not have a uniform effect on support for democracy and highlights the key role of appraisals for how individuals respond to pandemic threat. If people view the pandemic as external and do not blame political elites, people respond to pandemic threat with fear, strengthening their support for democracy. However, if they instead regard the pandemic as controllable and attribute blame to the political elites for not taking the appropriate action, people respond to pandemic threat with anger, weakening their democratic regime support. How pandemic threat affects overall support for democracy may thus change over the course of the pandemic. At the onset of the pandemic, when it is viewed as novel, unknown and highly threatening, fear may trigger a rallying effect behind the democratic institutions of a country. Over the course of the pandemic, when discussions over how to control the pandemic develop, anger may become more prominent, weakening democratic regime support. Regardless, our analysis presents a message of hope in that pandemic threat, which may become more frequent in our globalised world, does not necessarily erode democratic support, but may even strengthen it if fear prevails over anger as an emotional response to the crisis.

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Ethics declaration

The research design was approved by the Research Ethics Committee at the Faculty of Business, Economics and Social Sciences of the University of Bern (approval number 092020).

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the OSF data repository at https://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/N865R.

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Online Appendix

Table A1: Description of the Surveys

Wave 1:

Target population	Residents aged 18 years or older in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Survey mode	Online
Sample size	6,210 respondents (target sample size: 1,000 per country)
Quotas	Age, Sex, Education
Sampling	Survey Engine Panel
Interview language	German, French, Italian, Spanish, English
Date of Interviews	24 November 2020 – 18 January 2021
Response rate	FRA: 7.66% GER: 7.59% ITA: 5.18% SPA: 15.63% SWI: 8.57% UK: 4.56% Overall: 7.03% (RR5/6 Completion Rate, The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016))
Institute	The survey was carried out by Survey Engine

Wave 2:

Target population	Residents aged 18 years or older in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom
Survey mode	Online
Sample size	6,060 respondents (target sample size: 1,000 per country)
Quotas	Age, Sex, Education
Sampling	Survey Engine Panel
Interview language	German, French, Italian, Spanish, English
Date of Interviews	22 April 2021 – 21 May 2021
Response rate	FRA: 13.50% GER: 18.93% ITA: 33.86% SPA: 24.32% SWI: 24.94% UK: 10.07% Overall: 17.83% (RR5/6 Completion Rate, The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016))
Institute	The survey was carried out by Survey Engine

Source:

The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016). Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys. Available online at: https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf

Table A2: Summary Statistics

	All waves				**Mean Wave 1**						**Mean Wave 2**					
Variable	**Mean**	**SD**	**Min**	**Max**	**FRA**	**GER**	**ITA**	**SPA**	**SWI**	**UK**	**FRA**	**GER**	**ITA**	**SPA**	**SWI**	**UK**
Democratic regime preference	3.74	0.87	1	5	3.66	3.91	3.56	3.82	3.80	3.64	3.58	3.88	3.67	3.89	3.76	3.67
COVID-19-related anger	2.16	0.99	1	5	2.24	1.99	2.51	2.20	2.05	2.16	2.21	2.02	2.39	2.14	2.02	2.01
COVID-19-related fear	2.84	1.04	1	5	3.05	2.58	3.26	2.90	2.62	2.95	2.98	2.55	3.15	2.77	2.46	2.78
Age	48	16	18	91	48	48	48	48	49	47	48	48	49	48	49	47
Gender: Male (1)	0.50		0	1	0.51	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.52	0.52	0.49
Education: Primary, lower secondary (1)	0.23		0	1	0.20	0.14	0.38	0.37	0.11	0.33	0.20	0.14	0.27	0.30	0.07	0.29
Education: Upper, post-secondary (2)	0.40		0	1	0.42	0.57	0.43	0.25	0.45	0.21	0.43	0.57	0.47	0.29	0.47	0.23
Education: Tertiary (3)	0.37		0	1	0.38	0.29	0.20	0.38	0.44	0.46	0.37	0.29	0.26	0.41	0.46	0.48
Income situation	3.02	1.08	1	5	2.88	3.18	2.66	2.84	3.12	3.12	2.93	3.21	2.81	2.92	3.13	3.39
Type of community	2.81	1.48	1	5	2.70	3.00	2.67	3.04	2.47	2.94	2.69	3.01	2.71	3.13	2.48	2.95
Self-reported health	3.69	0.93	1	5	3.69	3.62	3.67	3.49	3.93	3.61	3.74	3.61	3.77	3.50	3.90	3.74
Left-right self-placement	4.88	2.35	0	10	5.17	4.55	5.16	4.26	4.93	4.83	5.34	4.64	5.05	4.41	4.99	5.18
Interest in politics	3.27	1.17	1	5	3.21	3.56	3.22	3.04	3.40	3.13	3.17	3.57	3.26	3.09	3.37	3.25
Satisfaction with democracy	4.01	1.68	1	7	3.60	4.28	3.62	3.27	4.67	4.04	3.73	4.21	3.81	3.51	4.85	4.50
Political trust	3.39	1.53	1	7	3.13	3.91	3.13	2.70	4.21	3.34	3.05	3.59	3.08	2.71	4.26	3.57
Government cannot solve problems	3.52	1.11	1	5	3.47	3.40	3.95	3.58	3.15	3.70	3.36	3.61	3.88	3.51	3.10	3.59
General anger	1.73	0.92	1	5	1.67	1.56	2.22	1.92	1.60	1.69	1.62	1.56	1.95	1.84	1.51	1.65
General fear	1.97	1.00	1	5	2.00	1.72	2.47	2.27	1.78	1.94	1.91	1.62	2.25	2.18	1.66	1.82
Measures go too far	0.16		0	1	0.21	0.20	0.08	0.07	0.20	0.11	0.17	0.31	0.11	0.07	0.25	0.11
Priority on economy	3.13	1.74	1	7	3.36	2.87	3.39	2.92	3.15	2.88	3.29	3.00	3.50	2.95	3.17	3.04
Observations	12,017				1,020	985	974	995	1,101	1,019	981	986	974	1,015	982	985

Note: Italics: Variables not used in main regressions, but only in robustness checks

Table A3: *Exploratory factor analysis for democratic regime preference*

	All waves	**Factor loading Wave 1**						**Factor loading Wave 2**					
Item		**FRA**	**GER**	**ITA**	**SPA**	**SWI**	**UK**	**FRA**	**GER**	**ITA**	**SPA**	**SWI**	**UK**
a) Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government	−0.70	−0.70	−0.76	−0.64	−0.67	−0.67	−0.70	−0.72	−0.76	−0.69	−0.71	−0.71	−0.57
b) Under some circumstances, an authoritarian government can be preferable to a democratic one	0.80	0.75	0.83	0.81	0.82	0.78	0.80	0.76	0.80	0.79	0.81	0.77	0.84
c) For people like me, it does not matter whether we have a democratic or a non-democratic regime	0.81	0.83	0.83	0.83	0.81	0.77	0.84	0.82	0.81	0.82	0.79	0.79	0.86
N	12,017	1,020	985	974	995	1,101	1,019	981	986	974	1,015	982	985

Note: Factor loadings of an exploratory factor analysis with the principal-component method

Table A4: *Confirmatory factor analysis for COVID-19-related emotions*

	All waves	**AIC Wave 1**						**AIC Wave 2**					
Model		**FRA**	**GER**	**ITA**	**SPA**	**SWI**	**UK**	**FRA**	**GER**	**ITA**	**SPA**	**SWI**	**UK**
One-factor solution	136,078	11,708	10,950	11,045	10,663	12,192	11,144	11,409	11,110	10,989	10,973	10,807	10,690
Two-factor solution	**134,184**	**11,634**	**10,744**	**10,873**	**10,636**	**12,000**	**10,934**	**11,338**	**10,890**	**10,760**	**10,938**	**10,655**	**10,455**
N	12,017	1,020	985	974	995	1,101	1,019	981	986	974	1,015	982	985

Note: AIC of a confirmatory factor analysis comparing a one-factor solution including all items for COVID-19-related emotions with a two-factor solution distinguishing between anger and fear, better model in bold indicated by lower AIC value

Table A5: *Robustness checks – General emotions, region-survey wave FE and region weights, date of interview FE*

DV: Democratic regime preference	(1)		(2)		(3)	
General anger	**−0.130**	**(0.02)*****				
General fear	**0.034**	**(0.01)****				
COVID-19-related anger			**−0.111**	**(0.01)*****	**−0.111**	**(0.01)*****
COVID-19-related fear			**0.062**	**(0.01)*****	**0.064**	**(0.01)*****
Age	0.013	(0.00)***	0.015	(0.00)***	0.015	(0.00)***
Age^2	−0.000	(0.00)	−0.000	(0.00)	−0.000	(0.00)
Male	−0.084	(0.02)***	−0.070	(0.02)**	−0.078	(0.02)***
Education: Upper, post-secondary	0.096	(0.02)***	0.086	(0.03)**	0.098	(0.02)***
Education: Tertiary	0.167	(0.03)***	0.163	(0.03)***	0.169	(0.03)***
Income situation	0.060	(0.01)***	0.065	(0.01)***	0.066	(0.01)***
Type of community	0.001	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)
Self-reported health	0.042	(0.01)***	0.052	(0.01)***	0.050	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement	−0.059	(0.01)***	−0.057	(0.01)***	−0.057	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement^2	−0.002	(0.00)	−0.002	(0.00)	−0.002	(0.00)
Interest in politics	0.108	(0.01)***	0.103	(0.01)***	0.104	(0.01)***
Country-survey wave FE	✓				✓	
Region-survey wave FE			✓			
Region weights			✓			
Date of interview FE					✓	
N	12,017		12,012		12,017	

Note: Linear regression coefficients with region-clustered standard errors in parentheses,
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Table A6: *Robustness checks – Measures go too far, priority on economy*

DV:	Measures go too far		Priority on economy	
COVID-19-related anger	**0.071**	**(0.01)*****	**0.266**	**(0.02)*****
COVID-19-related fear	**−0.081**	**(0.01)*****	**−0.306**	**(0.02)*****
Age	0.001	(0.00)	0.004	(0.01)
Age^2	−0.000	(0.00)	−0.000	(0.00)*
Male	−0.025	(0.01)**	0.000	(0.05)
Education: Upper, post-secondary	0.015	(0.01)	−0.056	(0.04)
Education: Tertiary	0.023	(0.01)*	−0.000	(0.05)
Income situation	−0.015	(0.00)***	−0.023	(0.02)
Type of community	0.000	(0.00)	0.009	(0.01)
Self-reported health	0.016	(0.00)***	0.080	(0.02)***
Left-right self-placement	−0.016	(0.01)*	0.210	(0.03)***
Left-right self-placement^2	0.003	(0.00)***	−0.005	(0.00)
Interest in politics	−0.001	(0.00)	0.046	(0.02)*
Country-survey wave FE	✓		✓	
N	12,017		12,017	

Note: Linear regression coefficients with region-clustered standard errors in parentheses,
* p < 0.05, ** p < 0.01, *** p < 0.001

Measures go too far: "How do you assess the government's actions to combat coronavirus" (1) Go much too far, Go too far, (0) Appropriate, Don't go far enough, Don't go nearly far enough

Priority on economy: "In your opinion, what should take priority in the fight against a pandemic: public health or economic activity?" (1) Prioritise public health – (7) Prioritise economic activity

5. Article 4: Political support through representation by the government. Evidence from Dutch panel data

Julian Erhardt

This chapter is identical with the following article published in Swiss Political Science Review:

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Abstract: Research on political support demonstrates that satisfaction with democracy is higher among electoral winners than losers, and that it is higher for citizens ideologically more congruent with the government. In this paper, I analyze how support for the political system is affected by representation by the government. Expanding on previous studies, I leverage long-run panel data from the Dutch LISS panel spanning over several electoral cycles. Drawing on various measures that go beyond the distinction between election winners and losers and also measure how close citizens are to the government coalition as a whole, I show that being well represented by the government has a wide-ranging positive relationship with satisfaction with democracy, external efficacy and trust in political institutions. While this relationship is mostly short-run, political support can decline substantially if non-representation persists in the long-run. This highlights the relevance of long-run panel data for studying the consequences of representation.

Zusammenfassung: Gemäss der Forschung zur politischen Unterstützung steigt die Zufriedenheit mit der Demokratie bei Wahlgewinnenden sowie bei denjenigen, die ideologisch mit der Regierung übereinstimmen. Diese Arbeit analysiert, wie die Unterstützung für das politische System von der Repräsentation durch die Regierung beeinflusst wird. Dabei geht sie über frühere Studien hinaus und nutzt Paneldaten des niederländischen LISS-Panels, die mehrere Wahlzyklen umfassen. Repräsentation wird hier anhand verschiedener Indikatoren gemessen, die über die Unterscheidung zwischen Wahlgewinnenden und -verlierenden hinausgehen, indem auch die ideologische Nähe zur Regierungskoalition insgesamt gemessen wird. Die Ergebnisse zeigen, dass eine höhere Repräsentation durch die Regierung einen weitreichenden, positiven Zusammenhang mit der Demokratiezufriedenheit, der Auffassung, dass die Politik auf die Menschen eingeht, und dem Vertrauen in politische Institutionen hat. Diese Beziehungen sind überwiegend kurzfristig, aber wenn die Nichtrepräsentation langfristig anhält, kann die politische Unterstützung erheblich zurückgehen. Dies unterstreicht die Relevanz langfristiger Paneldaten für die Untersuchung der Folgen von Repräsentation.

Résumé: Selon la recherche sur le soutien politique, la satisfaction démocratique augmente pour les gagnants des élections et personnes idéologiquement proches du gouvernement. Cet article analyse comment le soutien au système politique est influencé par la représentation du gouvernement. Il va au-delà des études précédentes et utilise les données du panel néerlandais LISS, qui couvrent plusieurs cycles électoraux. La représentation est mesurée par différents indicateurs qui dépassent la distinction entre gagnants et perdants des élections et mesurent la proximité idéologique avec la coalition gouvernementale dans son ensemble. Les résultats montrent qu'une meilleure représentation par le gouvernement a une relation positive avec la satisfaction démocratique, l'efficacité externe et la confiance dans les institutions politiques. Ces relations sont principalement à court terme, mais si la non-représentation persiste à long terme, le soutien politique diminue considérablement. Cela souligne la pertinence des données de panel à long terme pour l'étude des conséquences de la représentation.

Riassunto: Secondo le ricerche sul sostegno politico, la soddisfazione della democrazia aumenta tra i vincitori delle elezioni e le persone ideologicamente vicine al governo. Questo articolo analizza come il sostegno al sistema politico sia influenzato dalla rappresentanza del governo. Il va oltre gli studi precedenti e utilizza i dati del panel olandese LISS che coprono diversi cicli elettorali. La rappresentanza è misurata da vari indicatori che esulano dalla distinzione tra vincitori e vinti delle elezioni e misurano anche la vicinanza ideologica alla coalizione di governo nell'insieme. I risultati mostrano che una maggiore rappresentanza del governo ha un’ampia relazione positiva con la soddisfazione della democrazia, l'efficacia esterna e la fiducia nelle istituzioni politiche. Queste relazioni sono principalmente a breve termine, ma se la mancanza di rappresentanza persiste nel lungo periodo, il sostegno politico può diminuire significativamente. Ciò sottolinea l'importanza di dati panel a lungo termine per studiare le conseguenze della rappresentanza.

Keywords: representation, elections, winners-losers gap, satisfaction with democracy, political trust

Introduction

"[T]he struggle for political office is bound to create winners and losers" (Kaase & Newton, 1995, p. 60). Whereas some citizens voted for one of the parties in the subsequent government, others did not. Studies on the winners-losers gap show that election winners perceive the political system more positively. In particular, they are more satisfied with democracy, believe that their external political efficacy is higher, and display more trust in political institutions (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Dahlberg & Linde, 2016; Dahlberg & Linde, 2017; Hansen et al., 2019). In a similar vein, studies on the congruence of citizens with their government provide evidence that ideological proximity to the government also increases satisfaction with democracy and additionally mitigates the winners-losers gap (e.g., Campbell, 2015; Curini et al., 2012; Henderson, 2008; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Singh et al., 2011; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016; Ferland, 2021).

In this paper, I strive to expand on these two strands of literature. First, the distinction between election winners or losers and the ideological congruence of citizens with their government have been conceptually regarded independently of one another, despite their inherent connection.[1] I argue instead that they should be integrated as different facets under the broader framework of individual representation by the government. Citizens can be or feel represented by their government in several ways. Whereas the distinction between winners and losers presents a more election-centric view of representation, focusing on representation by a single party in government one has voted for, the ideological congruence of citizens with their government takes a policy-oriented view, focusing on how well citizens are represented by their government in terms of policy positions. Better representation by their government in general, then, should go hand in hand with increased support for the political system.

Second, empirically, most studies rely on cross-sectional data (or repeated cross-sectional data, e.g., Loveless, 2021; Nemčok & Wass, 2021). There are a few panel studies that survey respondents in the months directly before and after an election (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Blais & Gélineau, 2007; Singh et al., 2012; Daoust et al., 2021; Gärtner et al., 2020; Hollander, 2014; van der Meer & Steenvoorden, 2018; Davis & Hitt, 2016), after a longer time span following the election (Hansen et al., 2019; Halliez & Thornton, 2022) or over an entire electoral cycle (Dahlberg & Linde, 2017). However, these panel studies do not span over several electoral cycles where different governments were in office, only measure differences between winners and losers of elections instead of more policy-oriented measures of representation by the government such as the ideological distance and only focus on satisfaction with the functioning of democracy as the dependent variable. To address these shortcomings, I leverage data of the Dutch Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel, a panel survey based on a true probability sample of households collected annually since 2007 (CentERdata, 2021). In this time span, there has been satisfactory variance in the ideology of Dutch governments, ranging from center, center-right to right-wing governments. Crucially, this rich data set allows testing the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system with a variety of indicators that yield more comprehensive conclusions than prior research.

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[1] To my best knowledge, only Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016) in their study on government-citizen congruence and satisfaction with democracy shortly address the connection between these two concepts, by arguing that the winners-losers gap is driven by policy considerations as well.

Overall, my study contributes to extant literature in several ways: First, I highlight the theoretical overlap between studies on the winners-losers gap and studies on the congruence of citizens with their government and argue that they should be viewed under a common framework of representation by the government. Second, my fixed effects models present robust evidence from panel data spanning over multiple electoral cycles with several governments in office that being well represented by the government is consistently positively related to support for the political system over various indicators. The winners-losers gap persists even in a consolidated, well-functioning consensus democracy like the Netherlands, which can be considered a least-likely case. Going beyond the classic winners-losers distinction, the results also show that in a context with frequent multi-party cabinets, it matters even more how close citizens are to the government coalition as a whole. Third, error correction models reveal that there is a temporal dynamic in the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system to some degree, but the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes happening instantaneously or in the subsequent time period after a change in representation. Fourth, restricting the analysis to respondents with a consistent party preference or ideology rules out potential endogeneity concerns. In dummy impact function models, I further exploit variation in the government composition to model the dynamics of changes in representation by the government. This shows that the effect of (non-)representation in government wanes slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (or out of) office, but becomes stronger again if (non-)representation continues for a longer period. Finally, detailed analyses raise an important concern about panel studies that employ only pre-election vs. post-election comparisons (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012) by highlighting that political support can in some cases already drop substantially in the last year of a cabinet as a result of citizens anticipating that a government may break down or not be re-elected.

Representation by the government and political support

Following the seminal study by Easton (1965), literature on political support, understood as positive "orientations towards the nation-state, its agencies, and actors" (Norris, 2017, p. 19), distinguishes between diffuse and specific support. While specific support is targeted at the political authorities in office, diffuse support focuses on the more abstract, generalized support for the nation-state, its regime and its institutions. In this regard, Anderson and colleagues (Anderson et al., 2005; Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001) highlight that diffuse support for the political system is affected by elections. The outcomes of elections inevitably divide citizens into election winners, i.e., those who voted for one of the parties in the government, and election losers, i.e., those who did not (Kaase & Newton, 1995). Whereas political support increases for winners, election losers display a lower support for the political system. The lower support of electoral losers in particular has received considerable attention, given that the losers' consent is perceived as critical for the legitimacy and functioning of democratic systems (Anderson et al., 2005). The winners-losers gap receives substantial support in empirical research (e.g., Craig et al., 2006; Singh et al., 2011; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Marien, 2011; Anderson & Tverdova, 2001). While most studies focus on the winners-losers gap in satisfaction with the functioning of democracy in their country, some studies also show that a similar gap exists for trust in political institutions and external political efficacy – i.e., the view that politics is responsive to the people (Campbell et al., 1954).[2] The size of this effect is larger when more is at stake in the election, as in majoritarian compared to consensus democracies (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012; Martini & Quaranta, 2019; Wells & Krieckhaus, 2006), in worse functioning democracies (Dahlberg & Linde, 2016), when there are fewer direct-democratic institutions (Leemann & Stadelmann-Steffen, 2022), in more unequal economies (Han & Chang, 2016) or when the election contest is close (Howell & Justwan, 2013).

In a similar vein to the winners-losers gap, studies assess the impact of individual ideological congruence with the government on political support. On the one hand, these studies show that a lower individual ideological distance to the government leads to increased political support also outside of the context of winning and losing an election (Ferland, 2021; Henderson, 2008; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016; Noordzij et al., 2021). On the other hand, some studies argue that the individual ideological congruence with the government moderates the impact of winning or losing: if the government is closer to your own ideological position, the impact of winning or losing the election is less pronounced (Curini et al., 2012; Gärtner et al., 2020; Curini & Jou, 2016; Hobolt et al., 2021; van Egmond et al., 2020; Campbell, 2015).

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[2] Although these measures do not directly capture support for democratic principles, a lack of support for the general performance of the democratic political system amongst electoral losers can threaten democratic legitimacy if it persists beyond a transient post-election decline in political support (Anderson et al., 2005; Dahlberg & Linde, 2017). That losers remain supportive of the functioning of the political system is particularly important in a context in which experts warn of an ongoing disconnect from democratic institutions (Foa & Mounk, 2017), increased polarization (Svolik, 2019) or a populist backlash (Inglehart & Norris, 2017).

I argue that these two literatures should be viewed under the broader lens of individual representation by government, touching upon different aspects thereof. While representation serves as an important conceptual framework for studies on the ideological congruence of citizens with their government, studies on the winners-losers gap generally do not address this topic, despite the inherent connection. Following Pitkin (1967), substantive representation means that representatives (or more precisely governments in this context) act for (i.e., in the interest of) their constituents. They resemble their constituents in terms of preferences and react responsively to their constituents' preferences. From the perspective of individual citizens, they are well represented by the government if the government and its policies align with their own preferences and thus serve their interests. Citizens can be represented by their government in several ways. Election winners are represented by the government through the party they have voted for and can thus expect the government to act in their interest. This can be regarded as an input-oriented perspective of representation focusing on elections and representation by a single party in government. If the government consists of multiple parties, however, as is frequently the case in democracies with proportional representation voting systems, representation may not only focus on the single party that one has voted for, but on the government coalition as a whole. Moving beyond the perspective of voting in elections, citizens may also be represented by the government through their congruence with the ideology of parties included in it. From an output-oriented perspective of representation focusing on policies, citizens may be more or less represented by the government depending on the policies the government implements.

Research on the individual ideological congruence with the government has generally focused on a *utilitarian/rational argument* that citizens derive utility from being represented in the government and having their preferred policies implemented (e.g., Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016). They evaluate the political system based on the utility they derive from its outputs. Similarly, research on the winners-losers gap argues that election winners and losers differ in the benefits they can expect from the government in the future (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005). While election winners are more likely to have their preferred policies implemented, electoral losers are more likely to be policy losers. As a result, election loss is argued to motivate losers to bring about change in the political system (Riker, 1983) and create a gap in the satisfaction with the political system between winners and losers. Such utilitarian arguments are most closely aligned with an output-oriented perspective of representation focusing on policies. At the same time, there is some evidence that a lower ideological distance to the government decreases the impact of winning or losing and can thus be regarded as a mechanism (e.g., Curini et al., 2012; Gärtner et al., 2020).

In addition to this utilitarian argument, studies on the winners-losers gap in political system support have put forth two psychological arguments (e.g., Anderson et al., 2005; Campbell, 2015;

Gärtner et al., 2020). First, the *cognitive psychological argument* looks at dissonance avoidance strategies (Festinger, 1962). When election outcomes are at odds with the personal attitudes and beliefs of citizens, this can lead to post-election dissonance. As people are generally motivated to maintain a certain degree of consistency in their beliefs and attitudes, they adapt their perceptions of the political system. Losers are thus less likely to believe that the political process is fair (Anderson & Mendes, 2006; Craig et al., 2006), while winners are more likely to ideologically assimilate themselves with the government parties (Best & Seyis, 2021). Such dissonance avoidance strategies also work well with representation by the government beyond the context of elections and should also be triggered from good or bad representation by the government in general.

Second, the *emotional psychological argument* emphasizes that belonging to the election winners comes with an emotional reward associated with victory. Whereas election losers feel angry and disillusioned at the political system producing the results, election winners are euphoric, resulting in the so-called 'home-team' effect, similar to what people experience when their preferred football team wins (Holmberg, 1999). Although this argument is most closely connected to the context of electoral outcomes, I argue that it can be extended to representation in general. Well-represented citizens should be enthusiastic that the government is ideologically close to them and that their preferred policies are implemented, whereas less well-represented citizens become disillusioned. This final argument, however, has been challenged by empirical analyses testing the mechanism. In particular, Daoust et al. (2021) and Gärtner et al. (2020) evaluate whether subjective feelings of having won or lost an election contribute to explaining the winners-losers gap and do not find any evidence supporting this mechanism.

I thus hypothesize as follows:

H_1: *Better representation by the government is positively related to political support.*

I expect this relationship to be consistent over a variety of measures for the degree individual citizens are represented by their government as well as over several measures of support for the political system. For citizens' support for the political system, it does not matter only whether their preferred party is in government, but also how they view other parties in a government coalition and how ideologically close they are to the government. In addition, while extant literature has found robust evidence for a winners-losers gap with short-term election panels directly before or after the election (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012; van der Meer & Steenvoorden, 2018) or at most over an entire electoral cycle (Dahlberg & Linde, 2017), a long-term panel analysis is missing so far. I expect intra-individual differences in the degree of representation by the government to be related with support for the political system when looking at panel data spanning over multiple electoral cycles with different governments in office as well.

Finally, due to its focus on elections, literature has so far generally assumed that the winners-losers gap materializes instantaneously following elections. However, for several reasons, citizens may not adapt their support for the political system instantaneously as soon as their representation by the government improves or worsens. First, previous experience of a government in which they were well represented may leave them with a reservoir of goodwill toward the political system that requires a longer experience of worse representation to erode. Second, the benefits from a better representation (i.e., seeing one's preferred policies implemented) may take some time to fully come into fruition. Third, citizens follow politics to different degrees. In particular when it comes to information-heavy assessments of how close the government is to citizens' ideological positions, less interested or less well-informed citizens may need more time to respond to changes in how well they are represented by government. I thus expect that there is instead a temporal dynamic in the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system with both an instantaneous short-run as well as a more long-run component:

H_2: *There is both a short-run and a long-run relationship between representation by the government and political support.*

Methods and Data

I test these hypotheses with data from the Politics and Values study of the *Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social sciences Panel* (LISS, CentERdata, 2021). The LISS panel interviews a representative probability sample of households, which were recruited offline through addresses, in the Netherlands since 2007 via online questionnaires. To ensure representativeness, respondents were recruited offline through addresses by letter and people without computer or internet access were provided with loaned equipment.[3] Each wave comprises around 6,000 individuals. I make use of the up to 61,410 observations of respondents in waves 1 to 13 (2007/2008–2020/2021)[4] for which data on all variables was available. The LISS panel is one of the only long-term representative panels with a considerable number of items to measure both support for the political system and how well respondents are represented by their government. It thus provides a unique opportunity to study the relationship under question.

Aside from data availability reasons, the Netherlands also constitutes an interesting case to study. On the one hand, it may be considered a least-likely case to find large differences between election winners and losers. The Netherlands are a consolidated well-functioning democracy and lean strongly towards the ideal type of a consensus democracy, especially on the executive-parties dimension: with no legal electoral threshold, the Netherlands has a large effective number of parties in parliament and its cabinets are always coalition governments (Lijphart, 2012). In this regard, previous research has shown that the winners-losers gap is considerably smaller in established democracies (e.g., Nadeau et al., 2021) and in consensus democracies (e.g., Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Bernauer & Vatter, 2012). Studying the case of Belgium, Hooghe and Stiers (2016) even show that in such a proportional electoral system the political support of all voters increases following an election, independent of their winner/loser status. In addition, the government usually includes centrist parties and a complete turnover of all government parties generally does not occur.

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[3] New households are recruited regularly to combat panel attrition (de Vos, 2009). In early years, the LISS panel also used selective recruitment to improve representativeness (de Vos, 2010). This is also reflected in the summary statistics by wave, which become more stable after the adjustments during the first three waves (see Table A2 in the online appendix). Panel attrition may still be an issue, though. As can be seen in Table A3 in the online appendix, young and unmarried respondents are often more likely to suffer from panel attrition over the waves. In order to ascertain that the results are consistent, I ran models with a balanced panel including only respondents who constantly remained part of the LISS panel and thus were not affected by attrition. As can be seen in Figure A3 in the online appendix, the results are very similar.

[4] There is a 1-year gap between wave 8 (2013/2014) and wave 9 (2015/2016).

On the other hand, there is substantial variation between governments over time. Government coalitions frequently change and throughout the 14-year observation period, four different government coalitions have been in office with substantial ideological differences (for an overview, see Table 1). The fourth cabinet by Jan Peter Balkenende was formed by the Christian-democratic parties Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA) and Christian Union (CU) as well as the social-democratic Labor Party (PvdA), leaning economically slightly towards the left and culturally slightly towards the right. The first cabinet by Mark Rutte was a right-wing minority government of the liberal People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) and the CDA, which was granted confidence and supply by Geert Wilders' far-right populist Party for Freedom (PVV). The second Rutte cabinet was a coalition between the VVD and PvdA, which was economically very divided and culturally leaning towards the left. Finally, the third cabinet by Rutte was a coalition of the liberal VVD, the Christian-democratic CDA and CU as well as the social-liberal Democrats 66 (D66). It was economically right-wing, but culturally very divided between the progressive D66 and the conservative Christian-democratic parties. This shows that there is not only substantial variation between the government parties in the Dutch case, but also with regards to the government coalition. Supporters of a party can find their preferred party in very different government coalitions, some closer, others further to their own ideological position.

Table 1: Governments in office during the observation period

Years	Cabinet	Parties in cabinet	Position	CHES Econ	CHES Galtan
2007–2010	Balkenende IV	CDA, PvdA, CU	center	4.63	5.59
2010–2012	Rutte I	VVD, CDA (PVV support)	right-wing	7.56	5.74
2012–2017	Rutte II	VVD, PvdA	center	5.87	4.10
2017–2021	Rutte III	VVD, CDA, D66, CU	center-right	7.05	4.84

Note: Chapel Hill Expert Survey Data of the government parties' seat-weighted economic left-right scale (CHES Econ) and cultural left-right scale (CHES GAL/TAN) from 0–10 (Jolly et al. 2022).

Political support. I use three indicators for support for the political system that have been employed in the literature: satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy, and trust in political institutions (Anderson & Tverdova, 2001; Marien, 2011; van der Meer & Steenvoorden, 2018). Following Norris' (2017) conceptualization of political support, these indicators go beyond the most specific forms of support for incumbents, while also not reaching the most diffuse aspects of core regime principles such as democratic support. In particular, they touch support for the regime, its institutions and the performance of democratic processes. Trust in political institutions captures respondents' confidence in the institutions of the regime, while satisfaction with the functioning of democracy is a key measure for the more diffuse regime performance evaluations. External political efficacy falls somewhere in between, touching both the functioning of democratic processes as well as confidence in core institutions and political elites in general. Despite their conceptual differences, they thus reflect similar aspects of political support. Satisfaction with democracy is measured using the standard item asking respondents how satisfied they are with the way democracy operates in the Netherlands on a scale from 0 (very dissatisfied) to 10 (very satisfied). For external political efficacy, I use three items asking respondents whether they think the following statements are true or not: a) "parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me", b) "political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion", c) "people like me have no influence at all on government policy". I then count the number of these items that respondents believe to be false. The correlations between these three items is at least moderately strong and an exploratory factor analysis with the principal component method indicates that these items strongly load onto a single factor (see Table A4 in the online appendix). Finally, trust in political institutions is measured as an average of three items asking respondents how much confidence they have in a) the Dutch parliament, b) politicians and c) political parties on a scale from 0 (no confidence at all) to 10 (full confidence). These three items display a very high degree of correlation and strongly load onto a single factor in an exploratory factor analysis (see Table A5 in the online appendix). The three dependent variables also correlate moderately, showing that despite their conceptual differences, they reflect similar facets of political support.[5]

Representation by the government. Representation by the government is measured in four different ways, including both more election-oriented and more policy-oriented measures. First, I use the classic distinction between election winners and losers with a question on which party the respondent voted for in the last general election. Second, I employ respondents' vote intentions if parliamentary elections were held today, distinguishing whether respondents intend to vote for a government party or not. Starting in wave 9 of the LISS panel, respondents were split and half of the respondents were asked a propensity-to-vote question instead, i.e., the percentage chance that they would vote for each of the parties. In order to not lose these respondents, it was assumed that they intended to vote for one of the government parties if the party (or the parties) they assigned the highest likeliness to vote for included one of the government parties.[6] In contrast to simply looking at past vote choice, this measure allows respondents to reconsider whether they consider themselves represented by the government over the full span of the electoral cycle. Third, the LISS panel includes a feeling thermometer in which respondents were asked how they feel about all relevant political parties on a scale from very unsympathetic (0) to very sympathetic (10). From this, I calculate how close respondents are to their government by averaging respondents' sympathy with the parties included in the government, weighted by the parliamentary seats of the respective government party. This is a more precise measure for how well respondents feel represented by the government. Compared to the vote intention measure, it captures representation by the entire government coalition and is independent from strategical considerations that may affect vote choice. Fourth, I calculate a measure for how well respondents are represented by their government in terms of their political positions, i.e., a measure for individual-level government-citizen congruence (e.g., Curini et al., 2012; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Stecker & Tausendpfund, 2016). For this, I combine LISS panel questions on four important policy areas (income redistribution, multiculturalism, moral policy and European integration)[7] and the general left-right scale with Chapel Hill Expert Survey data (Jolly et al., 2022) on the position of political parties on these topics,[8] similarly as in Stecker and Tausendpfund (2016). Seeing as CHES data is not collected yearly, but only once during each legislative term in the observation period, I used the respective party positions for all years of a legislative term. I rescale the CHES party positions and LISS panel questions to bring them onto the same scale and then take the average of all government parties weighted by the number of seats in parliament. The policy closeness measure is then the average distance to the mean position of the government parties over all four policy fields as well as the general left-right-scale. For easier interpretation, I subtract this value from zero, so that higher values indicate lower distance towards the government, meaning better representation. This presents a congruence measure for how well respondents are represented by their government in terms of policy positions. In all calculations, I treat the PVV as not part of the Rutte I government, since they only supported the government by confidence and supply, but held no cabinet seats.[9]

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[5] External efficacy displays a weak to moderate correlation with satisfaction with democracy (r = 0.37) and a moderate correlation with trust in political institutions (r = 0.48). Satisfaction with democracy and trust in political institutions correlate a bit more strongly (r = 0.65), highlighting their similarities in reflecting performance evaluations of the regime and its institutions (see Armingeon & Guthmann, 2014).

[6] The main results are very similar when excluding the respondents who received the propensity-to-vote question, as can be seen in Figure A4 in the online appendix.

[7] The precise questions in the LISS panel are a) whether differences in income should increase or decrease, b) whether immigrants can retain their own culture or should adapt entirely to Dutch culture, c) whether euthanasia should be forbidden or permitted and d) whether European integration should go further or has already gone too far.

[8] The precise questions in the CHES are a) whether a party strongly favors or opposes redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor, b) whether a party strongly favors multiculturalism or adaptation in the integration of immigrants and asylum seekers, c) whether a party strongly supports or opposes liberal policies on social lifestyle, and d) whether a party is strongly in favor or strongly opposed towards European integration.

Modeling approach. In order to account for the panel structure of the data, the first set of models are specified as fixed-effects models (Allison, 2009). One of the three political support indicators PS_{it} is regressed on one of four different measures for representation by the government Rep_{it} and a set of control variables CV_{it}, while allowing for individual and time specific intercepts α_i and α_t:

$$PS_{it} = \beta_1 Rep_{it} + \beta_2 CV_{it} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \qquad (1)$$

As controls, I include a range of variables frequently controlled for in the literature on satisfaction with democracy, political trust and the winner-loser debate (e.g., Newton et al., 2018; Anderson & LoTempio, 2002; Clarke & Acock, 1989; Anderson et al., 2005). Due to the nature of the fixed-effects models, time-constant variables (e.g., age, gender) do not have to be controlled for. Several socio-demographic variables such as the highest level of education, personal net monthly income, being in education, at home, retired or unemployed, being married and having children as well as the urban character of the place of residence are added to the models. In addition, two political variables are controlled for: the left-right self-placement of the respondents (including a squared term, given that both representation and political support are likely lower at the extremes) and their interest in politics.

The key advantage of this specification is that all time-invariant heterogeneity between individuals is controlled for, which allows estimating the relationship between representation by the government and political support with less bias. At the same time, however, this specification also makes some simplifying assumptions that may not necessarily hold true. In particular, it assumes that the relationship between representation by the government and political support is instantaneous, changing as soon as representation improves or worsens.

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[9] As a robustness check, I used alternative measures where the PVV was treated as if it were a full member of the Rutte I government. As can be seen in Figure A in the online appendix, the main results do not change substantially.

As a second specification, I thus employ a general error correction model, regressing changes in the dependent variable on changes in the independent variables as well as lagged dependent and independent variables (see e.g., Keele & Kelly, 2006; Plümper & Troeger, 2019; de Boef & Keele, 2008; Wilkins, 2018).

$$\Delta PS_{it} = \beta_1 PS_{it-1} + \beta_2 \Delta Rep_{it} + \beta_3 Rep_{it-1} + \beta_4 \Delta CV_{it} + \beta_5 CV_{it-1} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \tag{2}$$

In contrast to the simple fixed-effects model, this specification has the advantage of incorporating temporal dynamics into the model. This allows estimating both the short-run relationship, i.e., the immediate impact of a change in representation by the government on political support, as well as the long-run relationship, i.e., impacts over future time periods until the relationship is again in equilibrium.

In a third and final step of the analysis, I address potential concerns with endogeneity and employ a subsample analysis. In particular, respondents' alignment with parties and ideological positions may not be stable over time. This may be problematic if respondents self-select into being (less) well-represented by adapting their preferred parties and ideological positions. In order to rule out this concern, I restrict the sample to those respondents with a consistent party preference and policy position over time.[10] For these respondents, it can be plausibly argued that the only aspect of representation that has changed over time was the government coalition in power. In a more detailed analysis honing in on those respondents with a consistent party preference, I fully exploit the variation in the government composition to model the dynamics of changes in representation by the government and how they affect political support in different time periods after representation starts or ends. This is done via a dummy impact function following the approach by Allison (1994), which allows estimating the time-varying effect of an event on an outcome of interest (see also Ludwig & Brüderl, 2021). In this modeling approach, it is also possible to distinguish between transitions into and transitions out of being represented in government by one's preferred party. The FE models include a) respondents whose preferred party was never represented in government as the baseline, and b) the relevant years for respondents whose party either transitioned into or out of being represented during the observation period. The key independent variables are a set of dummy variables $RepYears_{it}$ and $NonrepYears_{it}$ for the year of the transition as well as the five years after. For years five or greater after the transition, the years were grouped, because they would otherwise hinge on supporters of the few specific parties which have experienced long periods in (or out of) government. Table A6 in the online appendix presents in detail how these key variables were coded.

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[10] To be precise, I only include respondents if they were part of the LISS panel in a time frame in which at least two different governments were in power. For consistent party preferences, I restricted the sample to those who intended to vote for the same party in all waves. For consistent policy positions, I restricted the sample to those whose answers in the four policy questions differed only by one (on a scale from 1 to 5) over all waves and whose answers in the general left-right scale differed only by two (on a scale from 0 to 10) over all waves.

$$PS_{it} = \beta_1 RepYears_{it} + \beta_2 CV_{it} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \tag{3a}$$

$$PS_{it} = \beta_1 NonrepYears_{it} + \beta_2 CV_{it} + \alpha_i + \alpha_t + u_{it} \tag{3b}$$

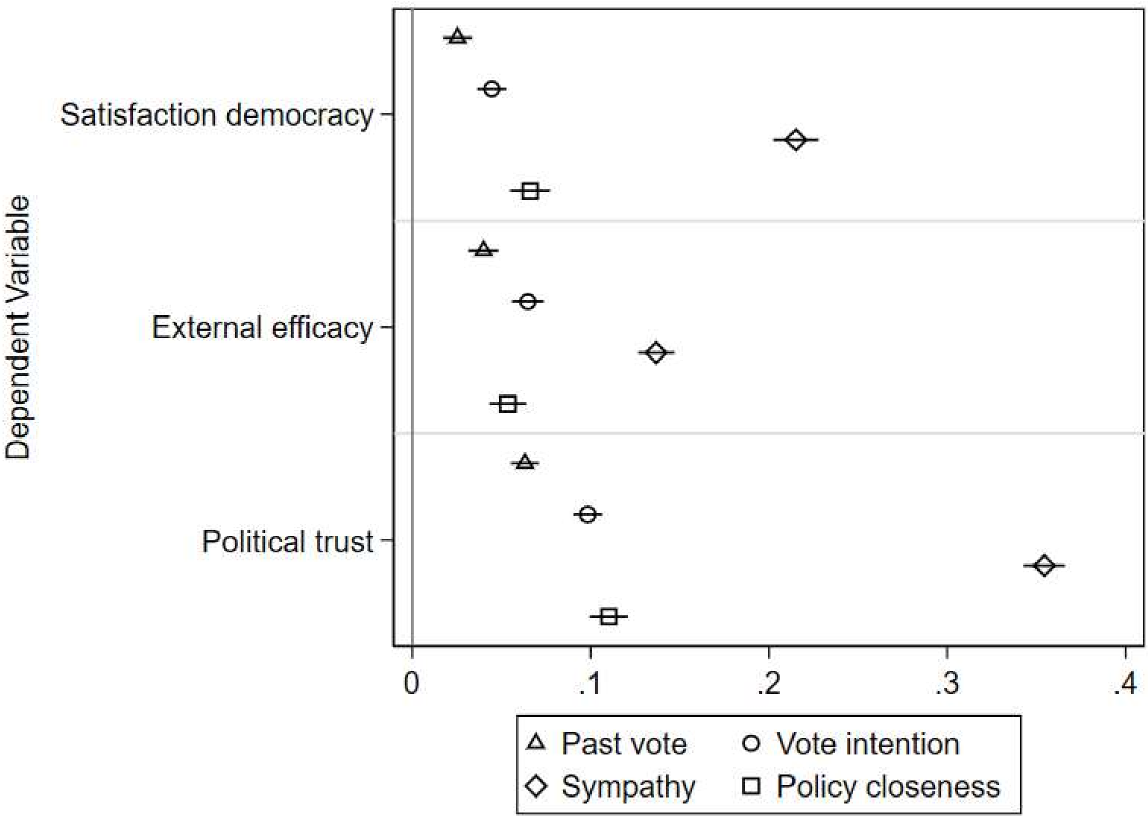
Compared to the other specifications, this allows estimating precisely how changes in representation by the government in both directions affect political support over time while avoiding issues of self-selection. In return, the drawback is that it requires a restricted sample and is only possible for vote intention as a measure of representation by the government.

All models use robust standard errors clustered by respondents. A full list of all variables, their operationalization as well as descriptive statistics can be found in Table A1 in the online appendix.

Empirical Analysis

Figure 1 presents the results of the fixed-effects regression models. In order to make the results comparable, standardized regression coefficients were calculated. Each coefficient displays a separate model regressing one of the three dependent variables (satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and political trust) on one of the four representation measures (having voted for a government party in the previous election, intending to vote for government parties if an election were held, average sympathy for government parties and average policy closeness to the government parties) as well as several control variables. For ease of presentation, the coefficients for the control variables were not displayed. The full regression tables can be found in the online appendix in Table A7.

Figure 1: FE regression coefficients of the relationship between representation by the government and political support



Note: Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. Each coefficient is from a separate model regressing one of the three dependent variables on one of the four representation measures as well as several control variables.

In general, hypothesis 1 is fully supported. Better representation by the government is consistently positively related to support for the political system. Representation by the government portrays stronger relationships with the three dependent variables than any of the other variables frequently controlled for in the literature. The relationship is particularly strong for political trust. In addition, there is some variation in the strength of the relationship between the four measures of representation by the government. While a past vote for a government party, a vote intention for a government party and the policy distance to the government perform fairly similarly (and this despite potential noise coming from the comparison of expert assessments with voter opinions on different scales), sympathy with the government parties has a substantially stronger relationship with the three political support measures.

In order to get a better idea of the effect size, it is worth looking at the non-standardized coefficients. For easier comparison with satisfaction with democracy and political trust, external efficacy was rescaled to range from 0 to 10. Having voted for one of the government parties is associated with an increase in the satisfaction with democracy by 0.10, external political efficacy by

0.32 and political trust by 0.24. Intending to vote for one of the government parties is associated with an increase in satisfaction with democracy by 0.18, external political efficacy by 0.55 and political trust by 0.39. An average sympathy for the government parties that is higher by two points (roughly the difference in the sympathy for a government including the party that one intends to vote for as compared to one that does not include that party) is associated with an increase in the satisfaction with democracy by 0.43, external political efficacy by 0.58 and political trust by 0.69. Finally, a policy distance to the government that is closer by 0.2 (which is roughly the difference in the policy distance to a government including the party that one intends to vote for as compared to one that does not include that party) is associated with an increase in satisfaction with democracy by 0.06, external political efficacy by 0.11 and political trust by 0.11.[11] All coefficients are significant at the 0.1% level.

Overall, I thus find a consistent relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system even in the Netherlands, a country leaning strongly towards the consensus model of democracy. However, there is some variance in the size of the relationship. In general, the election-focused distinction between winners and losers of the previous election is comparably weak in substantial terms when looking at long-run panel data. If more precise measures of representation by the government are taken into consideration, which allow for variation in the quality of representation between different government coalitions, the size of the relationship increases considerably. In particular for sympathy with the government parties, it becomes substantial in size. This highlights a shortcoming of the winners/losers distinction in the context of consensus democracies with frequent multi-party cabinets.

So far, the modeling strategy has assumed that the effect of representation by the government on political support is instantaneous, changing as soon as representation improves or worsens. In the following, error correction models are presented, which estimate both the short-run and the long-run relationships between the variables of interest. Of particular interest here is how the relationship unfolds over future time periods if representation by the government changes. On the one hand, there is a short-run effect, which is the immediate impact of a change in representation by the government on political support, measured by the coefficient of the first differenced independent variable in the error correction model. On the other hand, the long-run multiplier designates the overall impact of a change in representation by the government on political support after the relationship is again in equilibrium, which is estimated as $\frac{\beta_3}{\beta_1}$, standard errors estimated by the Bewley (1979) transformation. Figure 2 displays graphically for each measure how a change in representation by the government by one standard deviation impacts political support instantaneously (i.e., the short-run effect) and in the five subsequent time periods (given that the relationship generally reaches equilibrium after 5 years, the final coefficient is equivalent with the long-run multiplier). The full regression tables can be found in the online appendix in Table A8.

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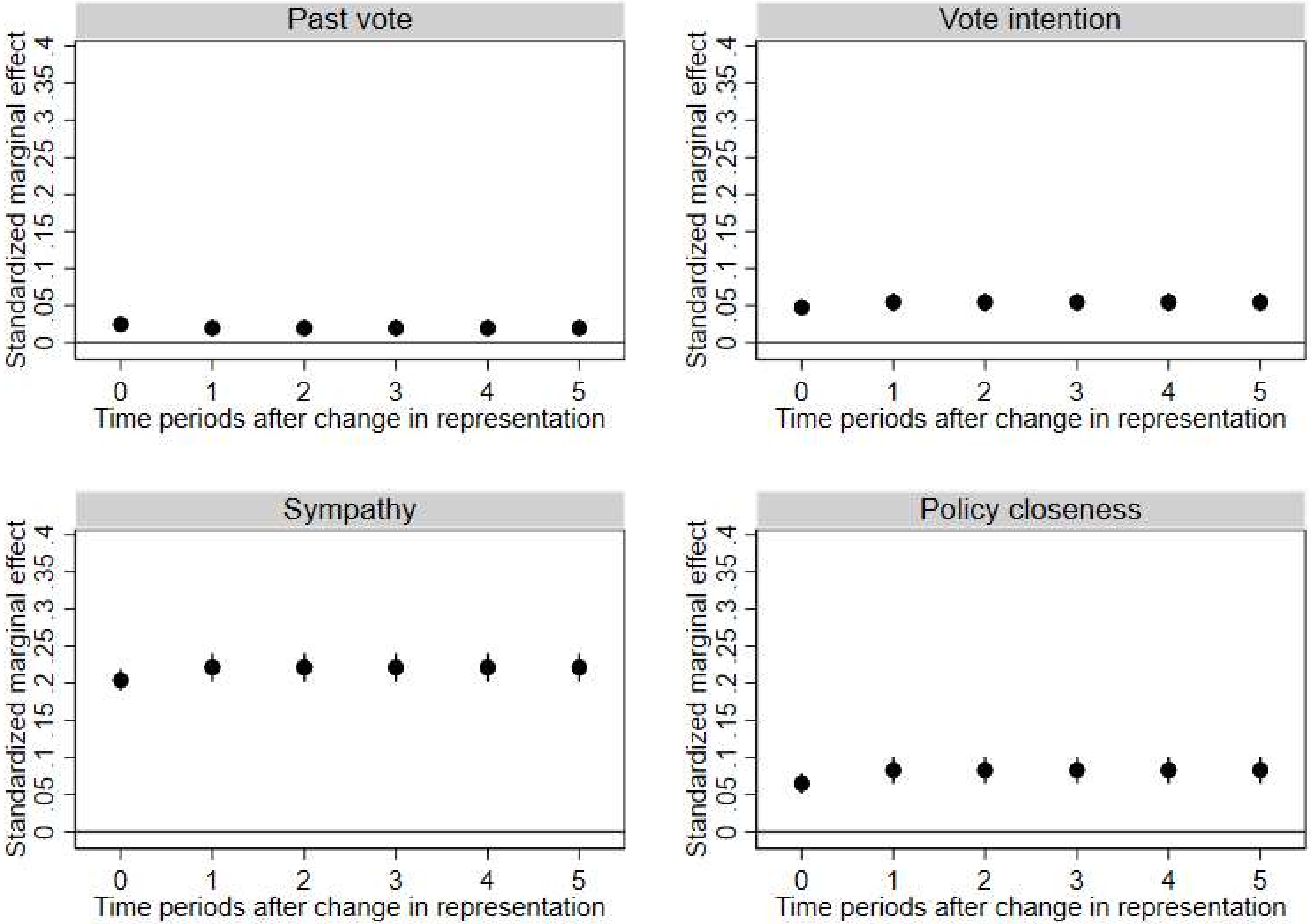
[11] Figure A1 in the online appendix further disentangles the relationship between the policy distance to the government and political system support by looking at policy distances in the general left-right scale as well as the four policy fields separately instead of taking the average. Overall, policy distance in the general left-right scale as well as European integration show the strongest relationship. Policy distances in multiculturalism and redistribution are also significant, albeit weaker in size. In contrast, policy distances in moral policy show no relationship at all.

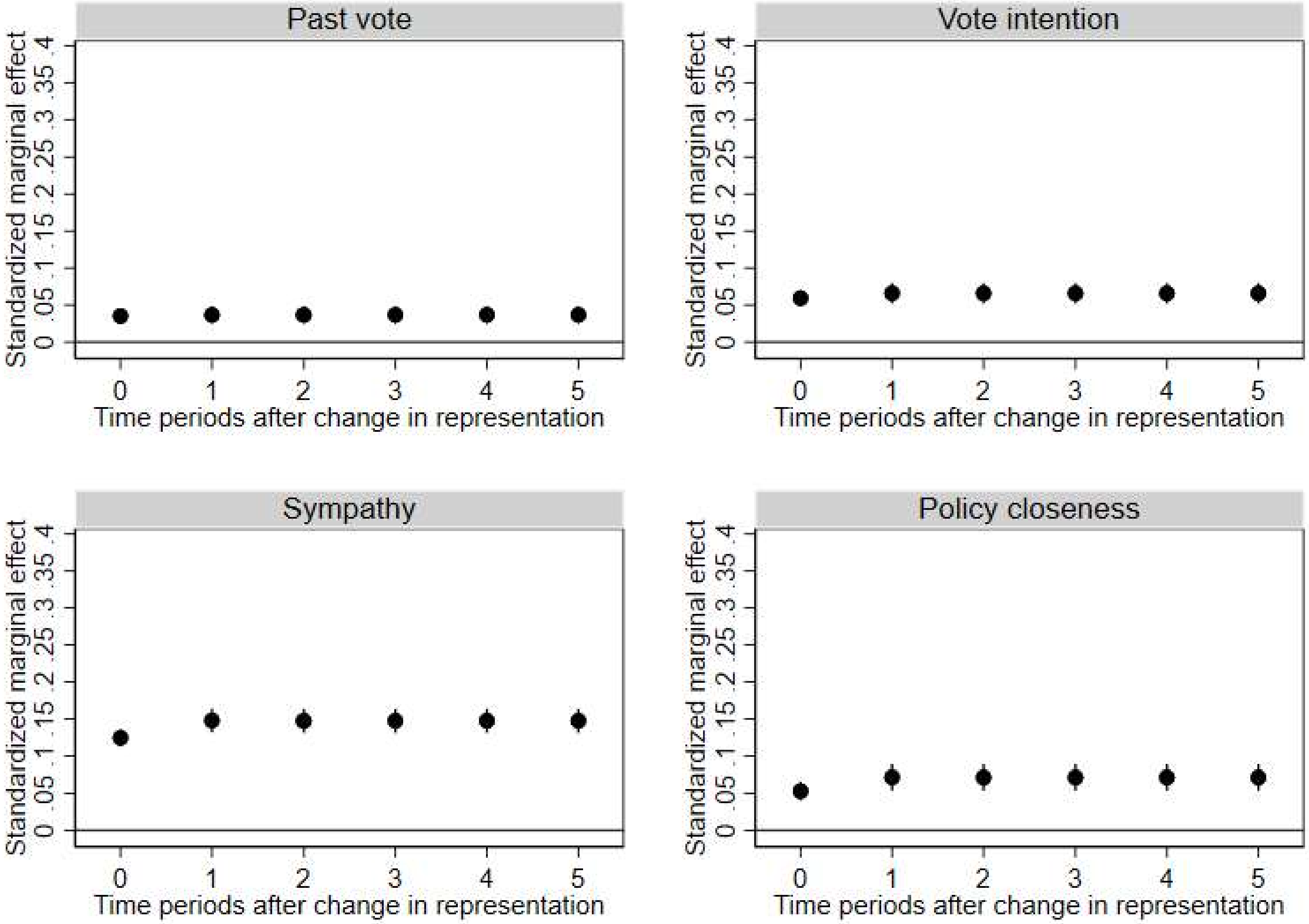
The results of the error correction models indicate that the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes happening within two time periods. The short-run relationships, i.e., the marginal effects at time period 0, are comparable with the fixed-effects models presented above. Beyond that, there are some additional adjustments until the relationship reaches the long-run multiplier, but these are much smaller than the immediate short-run relationship. The long-run relationship is generally significant for trust in political institutions and for the sympathy and policy closeness measures. For the past vote and vote intention indicator, however, there is no significant long-run relationship with satisfaction with democracy and external political efficacy. This fits well with the argument that for the more complex forms of representation through policies, it may take a slightly longer time for citizens to fully adjust their political support. Interestingly, for the relationship between the traditional past vote indicator and satisfaction with democracy as well as political trust, the long-run multiplier is even slightly below the short-run relationship. A plausible explanation for this may be that the 'home-team effect' of having won the election (Holmberg, 1999), which is particularly relevant for the classic winner-loser distinction, is strongest at the onset and may wear off afterwards. Overall, hypothesis 2 is thus only partially supported by the data.

Figure 2: Marginal effect of representation by the government on political support over several time periods

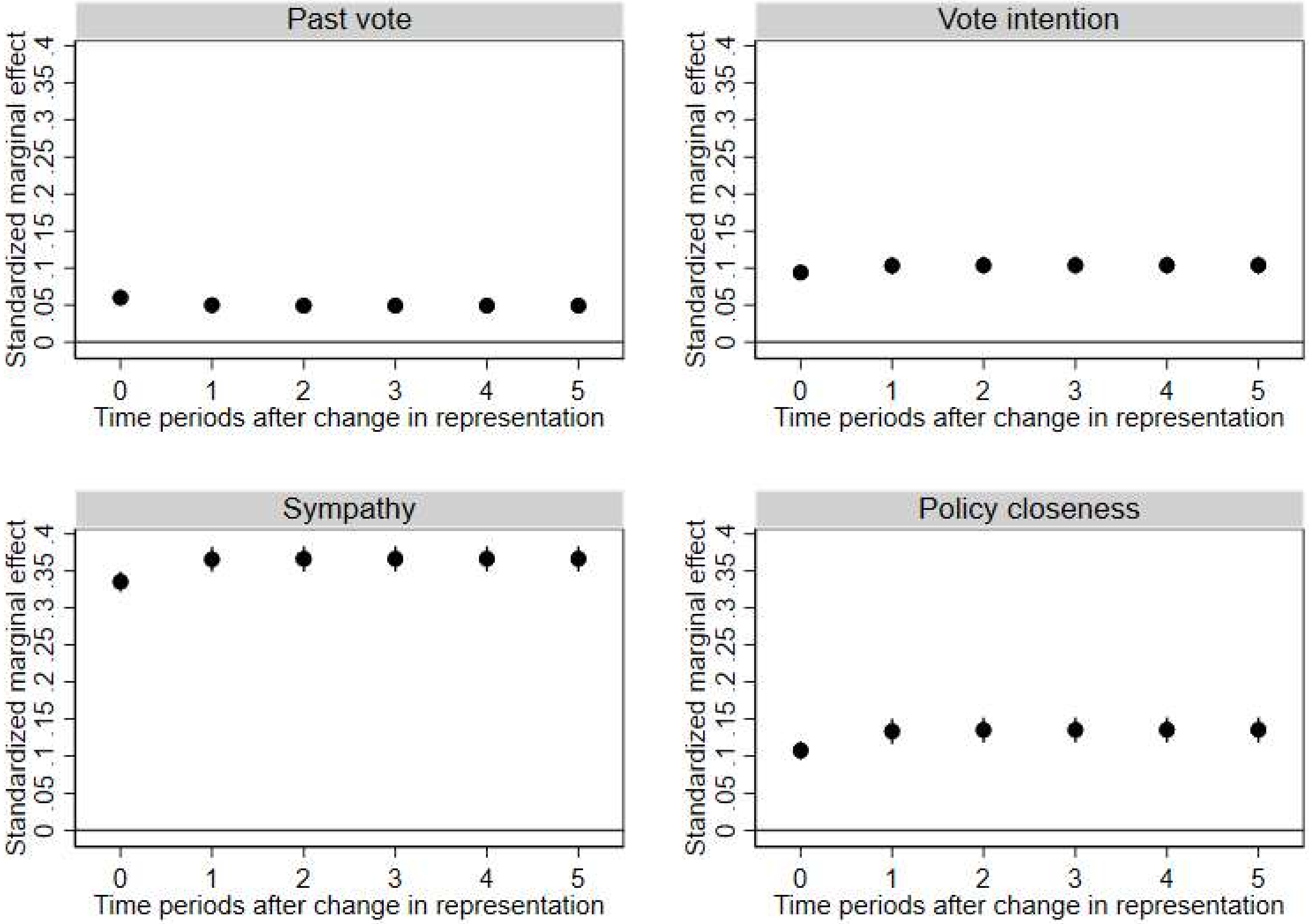
a) Satisfaction with democracy



b) External political efficacy



c) Trust in political institutions

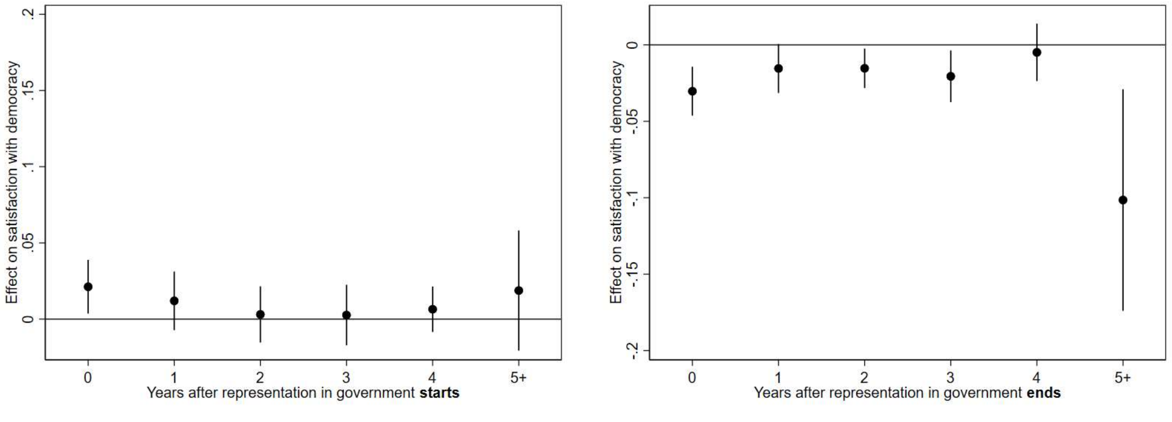


Note: Displayed are the standardized marginal effects of a change in one of the measures for representation by the government on one of the political support measures after n time periods with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. The marginal effects were calculated from error correction models as displayed in equation (2).

In a third step, I restrict the sample following the logic that if respondents have a consistent ideological position or party preference over time, then changes in representation by the government reflect only changes in the government composition and in the political position of parties. For this reason, I repeat the initial fixed-effects models including only respondents with a) a consistent ideology and b) a consistent vote intention for the same party.[12] As can be seen in Figure A2 in the online appendix, the results are comparable with those of the full sample. All models remain significant at the 5%-level and in most models, the coefficients only vary marginally, sometimes increasing, sometimes decreasing slightly. This shows that the results are robust to potential concerns of endogeneity.

Going beyond, I distinguish between transitions into and out of being represented in government for those respondents with a consistent party preference. This allows modelling the dynamics of changes in the government and how such a representation (or the lack thereof) affects political support in different time periods after representation starts or ends. Figure 3 presents the results of such an analysis (the detailed models can be found in Table A9 in the online appendix). It displays the standardized regression coefficients of dummies for the years after a respondent's preferred party enters or leaves government in comparison to years in which respondents either were not or were represented in government by their preferred party. It has to be noted that the fourth year (and to some extent the second year as well) after representation starts or ends is estimated with greater uncertainty because there was a one-year gap in the panel survey in the Rutte II government and because the first two governments in the observation period only lasted three and two years respectively.

Figure 3: Marginal effect of transitioning into or out of being represented in government



a) Transition into being represented:

b) Transition out of being represented:

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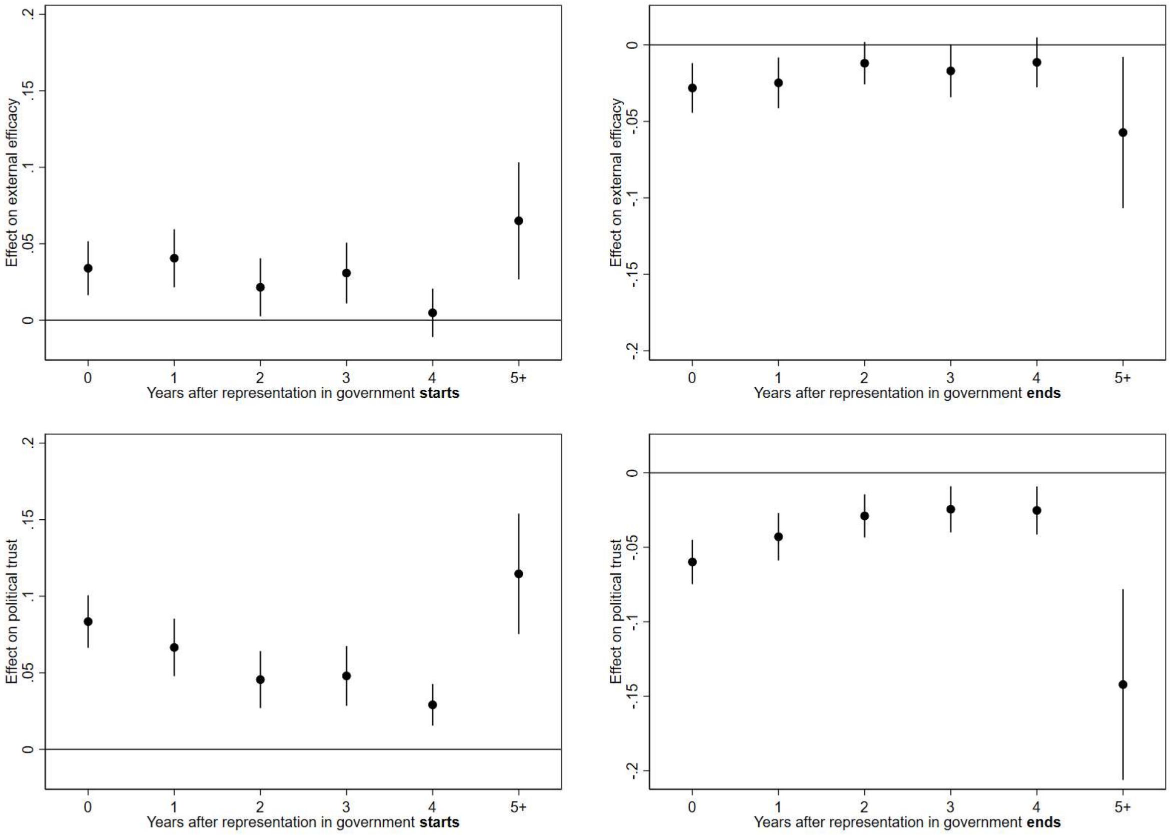
[12] Of course, this leads to a substantial reduction of the sample: instead of a total of 13,384 respondents and 61,410 observations for which data is available, this reduces the sample to 1,450 respondents and 6,674 observations if restricted to those with a consistent ideology and 2,028 respondents and 11,992 observations if restricted to those with a consistent vote intention.



Note: Displayed are standardized regression coefficients of dummies for a) the years after a respondent transitions into being represented in government and b) the years after a respondent transitions out of being represented in government, both with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. The reference categories are a) years in which respondents were not represented in government and b) years in which respondents were represented in government. All models only include respondents consistently intending to vote for the respective party.

The results of this more causally rigorous analysis are generally consistent with the error correction models in that political support adjusts rapidly when representation in government changes. As in the previous models using the winner-loser distinction, the results are strongest for the more specific measure of political trust and weakest for the more diffuse measure of satisfaction with democracy. In the case of transitions into being represented, the results for satisfaction with democracy are significant only in the survey wave immediately after the transition and turn insignificant thereafter. In addition, the results allow for some further observations. First, with the exception of satisfaction with democracy, there seems to be no asymmetry between transitions into being represented and transitions out of being represented. Whether the preferred party of a respondent enters or leaves government has opposite effects on political support of similar magnitude. Second, the positive (negative) effect of (non-)representation seems to wane slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (out of) office, but becomes stronger again if (non-)representation continues for a longer period. The effect of representation may thus weaken when continued (non-)representation becomes uncertain towards the end of a legislative term and strengthen when (non-)representation persists.

Finally, for the five parties that were part of governing coalitions as well as the PVV, which supported the Rutte I government, I differentiate how political support for those who consistently intended to vote for them developed over time (see Figure A6 in the online appendix). Even though this further reduces the number of respondents per model, it is reassuring to observe that for political trust, the coefficient of representation in government is still significant for all parties. In addition, the detailed view on how political system support has developed over waves allows making two additional observations: First, looking at supporters of the PvdA and CU in the fourth Balkenende government as well as supporters of the CDA or the PVV in the first Rutte government, one can see that political system support already dropped substantially in the last year of the cabinet in which they were in government and not only in the first year in which they were no longer part of the government. This can be explained by difficulties in the government coalition or opinion polls leading respondents to anticipate that their preferred party may not be in government anymore following the election. Crucially, this observation raises concerns about studies within the winners-losers-debate that use two-wave panels surveying respondents directly before and after an election (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Blais & Gélineau, 2007; Singh et al., 2012). If respondents anticipate their preferred party leaving government following the election and react accordingly by decreasing their political support already well before the election, such studies may substantially underestimate the true difference between election winners and losers. Second, looking at supporters of the VVD, one can observe substantial differences in political system support between the different government coalitions. In particular, political system support was lower in the second Rutte government, where the VVD ruled together with the social-democratic PvdA, two parties with very different economic policy profiles. In contrast, political system support was higher in the third Rutte government coalition, which was closer to the ideal point of VVD supporters. This further highlights the limitations of only looking at formal representation in the government through a party one has voted for or supports. Instead, depending on the composition of the government coalition and its policy portfolio, representation can still vary substantially.

Conclusion

In this paper, I set out to examine the relationship between representation by the government and support for the political system using panel data from the *Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences Panel* (LISS, CentERdata, 2021), a representative Dutch online panel survey that spans over several electoral cycles where different governments were in office. I employ several measures for the representation by the government that not only include the common distinction between election winners and losers, but also more precise measures such as how respondents view all parties in a government coalition and how ideologically close they are to the government in substantive terms. The results highlight that representation by the government is consistently positively related to political support across all indicators, the relationship is robust to potential concerns with endogeneity, unfolds rapidly after representation changes and becomes particularly substantial if (non-)representation persists for more than a legislative term.

Naturally, there are certain limitations to this study. First, the counter side to employing panel data is that only data for a single country, the Netherlands, is examined. This begs the question whether the results can be generalized to other countries. In this regard, the size of the relationship found may be on the lower end of the spectrum, as the Netherlands are a prototypical consensus democracy on the executive-parties dimension (Lijphart, 2012) and an established democracy, where previous research has found less pronounced winner-loser gaps (Anderson & Guillory, 1997; Nadeau et al., 2021). Another reason why the relationship may be lower is that the Dutch governments vary more in their economic positions, but economic considerations tend to play less of a role for political support in established democracies (Daoust & Nadeau, 2021). As a result, the estimate can be considered as rather conservative. Simultaneously, my study highlights that a considerable relationship between representation by the government and political support can be found even in such a least-likely case. Second, as other studies before, I only look at satisfaction with democracy instead of diffuse support for the principles of democracy (Linde & Ekman, 2003). In order to assess whether differences between winners and losers of elections and those who are better and less well represented by the government are harmful to democracies or just a symptom of dissatisfied democrats (Norris, 1999), measures for the support for democratic principles would be preferable (Ariely & Davidov, 2011). Finally, while this study includes a variety of measures for representation by the government, the most precise measure – ideological distance to the government parties – compares expert positions with voter attitudes from different data measured on different scales, which may introduce measurement error. Besides, future studies should also assess the effect of policy congruence (Ferland, 2021), i.e., congruence with the policies the government adopts, over a longer time period.

Nevertheless, this study presents more nuanced evidence for the winners-losers gap. It argues, theoretically, that extant findings on elections winners and losers as well as the congruence between citizens and their government should be viewed under the broader context of how well citizens are individually represented by their government. Empirically, it presents robust evidence from panel data spanning over multiple electoral cycles with several governments in office that various indicators of representation by the government are related to satisfaction with democracy, external efficacy and trust in political institutions. Judging from these indicators, it is not only important whether citizens' preferred party is in office, but also how satisfied with and close they are to the government coalition as a whole. Besides, detailed analyses reveal that anticipation effects exist: political support can already drop substantially in the last year of a cabinet as a result of citizens anticipating that a government may break down or not be re-elected following the election. This raises concerns about extant panel studies using comparisons between a short time period before and after elections (e.g., Banducci & Karp, 2003; Blais et al., 2017; Singh et al., 2012). Finally, this study fully exploits variation in the government composition over time to evaluate if there is any asymmetry in the relationship and how it develops over time. For satisfaction with democracy, there is indeed some asymmetry: only transitions out of being represented display a negative relationship, while there is no relationship for transitions into being represented by government. However, no such asymmetry can be found for the other two political support indicators. With regards to the dynamic over time, this study highlights that the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes instantaneously or in the subsequent time period after a change in representation by the government. Additionally, the relationship wanes slightly over the course of the first legislative period in (or out of) office, but becomes stronger again if (non-)representation continues for a longer period, which presents a more nuanced picture than previous analyses.

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Data availability statement

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in the OSF data repository at http://doi.org/10.17605/OSF.IO/ZKT5F.

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Online Appendix

Table A1: Variables, operationalization and descriptive statistics

Variable	Operationalization	N	Mean/ Share	SD	Min	Max
Political support						
Satisfaction with democracy	“And how satisfied are you with the way in which the following institutions operate in the Netherlands? – democracy” Very dissatisfied (0) – Very satisfied (10)	59,807	6.2	1.9	0	10
External political efficacy	“What is your response to the following statements? – a) Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me. b) Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion. c) People like me have no influence at all on government policy.” That is true (0) That is not true (1) (sum of the three items)	61,393	1.1	1.2	0	3
Political trust	“Can you indicate, on a scale from 0 to 10, how much confidence you personally have in each of the following institutions? – a) Dutch parliament, b) politicians, c) political parties” No confidence at all (0) – Full confidence (10)	59,779	5.2	1.8	0	10
Representation						
Having voted for government parties	“For which party did you vote in the parliamentary elections of …?” Government party (1), Other party, did not vote (0)	54,678	0.40		0	1
Vote intention for government parties	“If parliamentary elections were held today, for which party would you vote?” Government party (1), Other party, would not vote (0)	49,906	0.34		0	1
Sympathy for government parties	“How sympathetic do you find the political parties? You can assign each party a score between 0 and 10. 0 means that you find the party very unsympathetic, and 10 means that you find the party very sympathetic. If you are not familiar with a party, you can indicate this using the button ‘I don't know’.” Very unsympathetic (0) – Very sympathetic (10) (parliamentary seats weighted average of government parties)	57,452	5.0	1.9	0	10
Policy distance to government parties	Redistribution: LISS: “Some people believe that differences in income should increase in our country. Others feel that they should decrease. Still others hold an opinion that lies somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means that differences in income should increase and 5 means that these should decrease?”; CHES: “position on redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor” Strongly favors redistribution (0) – Strongly opposes redistribution (10) Multiculturalism: LISS: “In the Netherlands, some people believe that immigrants are entitled to live here while retaining their own culture. Others feel that they should adapt entirely to Dutch culture. Where would you place yourself on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means that immigrants can retain their own culture and 5 means that they should adapt entirely?”; CHES: “position on integration of immigrants and asylum seekers (multiculturalism vs. assimilation)” Strongly favors multiculturalism (0) – Strongly favors assimilation (10) Moral policy: LISS: “Some people believe that euthanasia should always be forbidden. Others feel that euthanasia should be permitted if the patient expresses that wish. Still others hold an opinion that lies somewhere in between. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means that euthanasia should be for-	56,861	-1.12	0.38	-2.69	-0.13

	bidden and 5 means that euthanasia should be permitted?"; CHES: "position on social lifestyle (e.g. homosexuality)" Strongly supports liberal policies (0) – Strongly opposes liberal policies (10) European integration: LISS: "Some people and political parties feel that European unification should go a step further. Others think that European unification has already gone too far. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 means that European unification should go further and 5 means that it has already gone too far?"; CHES: "overall orientation of the party leadership towards European integration" Strongly opposed (1) – Strongly in favor (7) General left-right scale: LISS: "In politics, a distinction is often made between 'the left' and 'the right'. Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 0 means left and 10 means right?" Left (0) – Right (10); CHES: "position of the party in terms of its overall ideological stance" Extreme left (0) – Extreme right (10) (parliamentary seats weighted average position of government parties, rescaled to scale from 1 to 5, subtracted from each other, subtracted from zero)					
Control variables						
Age	Age of the household member	61,410	51	17	16	103
Gender	Gender: Female (0), Male (1)	61,410	0.49		0	1
Education	Level of education in CBS (Statistics Netherlands) categories: Primary (1), Intermediate secondary (vmbo) (2), Higher secondary (havo/vwo) (3), Intermediate vocational (mbo) (4), Higher vocational (hbo) (5), University (wo) (6)	61,410	3.7	1.5	1	6
Married	Civil Status: Married (1), Else (0)	61,410	0.56		0	1
Children	Number of living-at-home children in the household, children of the household head or his/her partner: At least one (1), Zero (0)	61,410	0.31		0	1
Occupation	Primary occupation: Paid work, self-employed or family business (1)	61,410	0.52		0	1
	In education (2)	61,410	0.08		0	1
	At home (3)	61,410	0.08		0	1
	Retired (4)	61,410	0.27		0	1
	Unemployed (5)	61,410	0.06		0	1
Income	Personal net monthly income in categories: No income (0) – More than EUR 7.500 (12)	61,410	3.5	2.1	0	12
Urban	Urban character of place of residence: Not urban (1) – Extremely urban (5)	61,410	3.0	1.3	1	5
Left-right self-placement	"In politics, a distinction is often made between 'the left' and 'the right'. Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 0 means left and 10 means right?" Left (-5) – Right (5)	61,410	0.2	2.2	-5	5
Interest in politics	"Are you very interested in political topics, fairly interested or not interested?" Not interested (1) – very interested (3)	61,410	2.0	0.6	1	3

Note: For metric variables, the column "Mean/Share" displays the arithmetic mean of the variable. For categorical variables, the column "Mean/Share" displays the share of respondents in the respective category (for dichotomous variables, only the share of respondents in the 1-category is displayed).

Table A2: Summary statistics by survey wave

Variable	**All Waves**	**W1 07/08**	**W2 08/09**	**W3 09/10**	**W4 10/11**	**W5 11/12**	**W6 12/13**	**W7 13/14**	**W8 15/16**	**W9 16/17**	**W10 17/18**	**W11 18/19**	**W12 19/20**	**W13 20/21**
Satisfaction with democracy	6.2	6.3	6.2	6.2	6.3	6.0	6.1	6.1	6.2	6.1	6.3	6.3	6.4	6.6
External political efficacy	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.0	0.9	1.0	1.1	1.1	1.1	1.2	1.3
Political trust	5.2	5.1	5.4	5.2	5.5	5.1	4.8	4.8	5.0	5.1	5.3	5.2	5.1	5.6
Having voted for government parties	0.40	0.44	0.43	0.40	0.31	0.32	0.46	0.42	0.32	0.35	0.47	0.44	0.40	0.44
Vote intention for government parties	0.34	0.35	0.36	0.28	0.33	0.30	0.31	0.22	0.19	0.28	0.46	0.40	0.41	0.52
Sympathy for government parties	5.0	5.2	5.4	5.1	5.3	5.0	5.0	4.7	4.7	4.8	4.9	4.6	4.8	5.2
Policy distance to government parties	-1.12	-1.04	-1.03	-1.03	-1.22	-1.24	-1.03	-1.04	-1.03	-1.05	-1.22	-1.22	-1.25	-1.21
Age	51	46	47	49	51	51	51	52	52	52	52	53	54	53
Gender	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.50	0.49	0.50	0.50	0.50	0.49	0.49	0.49	0.48
Education	3.7	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.5	3.6	3.6	3.6	3.8	3.8	3.9	3.9	3.9	3.9
Married	0.56	0.62	0.61	0.58	0.59	0.59	0.59	0.59	0.55	0.54	0.52	0.53	0.52	0.50
Children	0.31	0.40	0.36	0.31	0.30	0.31	0.30	0.31	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.28	0.27	0.29
Occupation: Paid work, self-employed	0.52	0.60	0.58	0.54	0.52	0.52	0.51	0.49	0.50	0.49	0.49	0.48	0.49	0.50
Occupation: In education	0.08	0.09	0.09	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.08
Occupation: At home	0.08	0.10	0.09	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07	0.07
Occupation: Retired	0.27	0.17	0.20	0.23	0.26	0.27	0.27	0.28	0.28	0.29	0.30	0.31	0.32	0.31
Occupation: Unemployed	0.06	0.04	0.04	0.05	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.07	0.07	0.06	0.06	0.05	0.06	0.05
Income	3.5	3.3	3.3	3.3	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.7	3.8	3.9	4.0
Urban	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.0	3.1	3.1	3.1	2.9	2.9	2.9
Left-right self-placement	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.2	0.4	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.1	0.1	0.2	0.2
Interest in politics	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.0	2.2	2.2
Observations	61,410	5,613	4,942	5,035	4,375	4,706	4,680	4,520	4,827	4,459	4,863	4,337	4,274	4,779

Note: Number of observation reflects the maximum number available in each wave (due to missings, it may be slightly lower for non-sociodemographic variables).

Table A3: Multivariate analysis of panel attrition

Variable	**W1**	**W2**	**W3**	**W4**	**W5**	**W6**	**W7**	**W8**	**W9**	**W10**	**W11**	**W12**
	07/08	**08/09**	**09/10**	**10/11**	**11/12**	**12/13**	**13/14**	**15/16**	**16/17**	**17/18**	**18/19**	**19/20**
Satisfaction with democracy	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
External political efficacy	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Political trust	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Having voted for government parties	$-^{*}$	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Vote intention for government parties	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Sympathy for government parties	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Policy distance to government parties	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$+^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$+^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Age	n.s.	$-^{*}$	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Gender	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Education	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Married	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.
Children	$+^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Occupation: In education	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Occupation: At home	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Occupation: Retired	$-^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Occupation: Unemployed	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Income	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Urban	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$+^{*}$	$+^{*}$	$+^{*}$	n.s.	n.s.
Left-right self-placement	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	$-^{*}$	n.s.
Interest in politics	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.	n.s.
Observations	3,579	3,016	3,463	3,288	3,322	3,634	3,163	3,513	3,093	3,381	2,936	2,925
Attrition	673	296	496	312	291	326	403	300	337	291	184	218

Note: DV: Attrition (0: respondent in panel in the subsequent wave, 1: respondent not in panel in the subsequent wave), n.s. denotes no significant relationship with attrition, $+^{*}$ a positive relationship with attrition at the 5% significance level, $-^{*}$ a negative relationship with attrition at the 5% significance level.

Table A4: Exploratory factor analysis and correlations for external efficacy

Item	Factor loading
a) Parliamentarians do not care about the opinions of people like me.	0.85
b) Political parties are only interested in my vote and not in my opinion.	0.85
c) People like me have no influence at all on government policy.	0.77
N	61,393

Note: Factor loadings of an exploratory factor analysis with the principal-component method

Item	**a)**	**b)**	**c)**
a)	1.00		
b)	0.62	1.00	
c)	0.47	0.48	1.00

Table A5: Exploratory factor analysis and correlations for trust in political institutions

Item	Factor loading
a) Confidence in the Dutch parliament	0.91
b) Confidence in politicians	0.96
c) Confidence in political parties	0.95
N	59,779

Note: Factor loadings of an exploratory factor analysis with the principal-component method

Item	**a)**	**b)**	**c)**
a)	1.00		
b)	0.80	1.00	
c)	0.78	0.90	1.00

Table A6: Coding of the years before and after transitions into and out of being represented in government for each party

a) Transition into being represented in government

Party	**W1** **07/08**	**W2** **08/09**	**W3** **09/10**	**W4** **10/11**	**W5** **11/12**	**W6** **12/13**	**W7** **13/14**	**W8** **15/16**	**W9** **16/17**	**W10** **17/18**	**W11** **18/19**	**W12** **19/20**	**W13** **20/21**
CDA						ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	2	3
PvdA				ref.	ref.	0	1	3	4				
CU				ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	2	3
VVD	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	2	3	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+
D66	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	2	3
PVV	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1								
Others	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.

Note: ref.: Reference category – years in which respondents were not (yet) represented in government. Data starts in the first year in which a respondent was not (yet) represented in government. Years before were set to missing. Data ends either in the final year in which the respondent was represented in government or with the observation period. Years after the final year of representation in which the preferred party of respondents was (again) out of government were set to missing.

b) Transition out of being represented in government

Party	**W1** **07/08**	**W2** **08/09**	**W3** **09/10**	**W4** **10/11**	**W5** **11/12**	**W6** **12/13**	**W7** **13/14**	**W8** **15/16**	**W9** **16/17**	**W10** **17/18**	**W11** **18/19**	**W12** **19/20**	**W13** **20/21**
CDA	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	3	4				
PvdA	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	2	3
CU	ref.	ref.	ref.	0	1	2	3	5+	5+				
VVD				ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
D66										ref.	ref.	ref.	ref.
PVV				ref.	ref.	0	1	3	4	5+	5+	5+	5+
Others	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+	5+

Note: ref.: Reference category – years in which respondents were represented in government. Data starts in the first year in which a respondent was represented in government or with the observation period if the respondent prefers a party that was never represented in government. Years before were set to missing. Data ends either in the final year in which the respondent was not represented in government or with the observation period. Years after the final year of non-representation in which the preferred party of respondents (again) became part of the government were set to missing.

Table A7: Fixed-Effects regression models of the relationship between representation by the government and political support

Having voted for the government:

Dependent variable	Satisfaction with democracy		External political efficacy		Political trust	
Having voted for the government	**0.025**	**(0.00)*****	**0.040**	**(0.00)*****	**0.063**	**(0.00)*****
Education	0.008	(0.02)	0.044	(0.02)**	0.013	(0.02)
Married	0.015	(0.01)	0.030	(0.01)**	-0.008	(0.01)
Children	-0.009	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	-0.017	(0.01)
In education	-0.003	(0.01)	-0.010	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)
At home	0.004	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.013	(0.01)
Retired	0.019	(0.01)*	-0.006	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)
Unemployed	0.001	(0.01)	-0.002	(0.00)	-0.002	(0.00)
Income	-0.000	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)
Urban	-0.007	(0.01)	-0.011	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement	0.026	(0.01)**	0.012	(0.01)	0.045	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement^2	-0.017	(0.01)**	-0.007	(0.00)	-0.017	(0.01)**
Interest in politics	0.009	(0.01)	0.026	(0.00)***	0.028	(0.01)***
Observations	53,405		54,662		53,431	
Respondents	11,899		12,057		11,911	

Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Voting intention for the government:

Dependent variable	Satisfaction with democracy		External political efficacy		Political trust	
Voting intention for the gov.	**0.045**	**(0.00)*****	**0.065**	**(0.00)*****	**0.098**	**(0.00)*****
Education	0.020	(0.02)	0.063	(0.02)***	0.017	(0.02)
Married	0.016	(0.01)	0.029	(0.01)**	-0.002	(0.01)
Children	-0.010	(0.01)	0.000	(0.01)	-0.020	(0.01)*
In education	-0.004	(0.01)	-0.008	(0.01)	0.009	(0.01)
At home	0.010	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)	0.015	(0.01)
Retired	0.022	(0.01)*	-0.006	(0.01)	-0.007	(0.01)
Unemployed	-0.001	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.00)	0.000	(0.01)
Income	-0.005	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)
Urban	-0.010	(0.01)	-0.018	(0.01)	-0.005	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement	0.021	(0.01)*	0.002	(0.01)	0.037	(0.01)***
Left-right self-placement^2	-0.016	(0.01)*	-0.010	(0.01)*	-0.015	(0.01)*
Interest in politics	0.006	(0.01)	0.029	(0.01)***	0.024	(0.01)***
Observations	48,830		49,896		48,894	
Respondents	11,507		11,691		11,538	

Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Sympathy for the government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Sympathy for the government	**0.215**	**(0.01)*****	**0.137**	**(0.01)*****	**0.354**	**(0.01)*****
Education	-0.014	(0.01)	0.075	(0.01)***	0.008	(0.01)
Married	0.012	(0.01)	0.030	(0.01)**	-0.006	(0.01)
Children	-0.005	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)	-0.013	(0.01)
In education	-0.000	(0.01)	-0.005	(0.01)	0.013	(0.01)
At home	0.009	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)	0.020	(0.01)**
Retired	0.026	(0.01)**	-0.002	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)
Unemployed	0.001	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.00)	0.001	(0.00)
Income	0.001	(0.01)	0.008	(0.01)	0.009	(0.01)
Urban	-0.004	(0.01)	-0.010	(0.01)	-0.003	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement	0.001	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement^2	-0.013	(0.01)*	-0.007	(0.00)	-0.015	(0.01)**
Interest in politics	0.009	(0.01)	0.030	(0.00)***	0.029	(0.00)***
Observations	56,361		57,438		56,342	
Respondents	12,494		12,645		12,489	

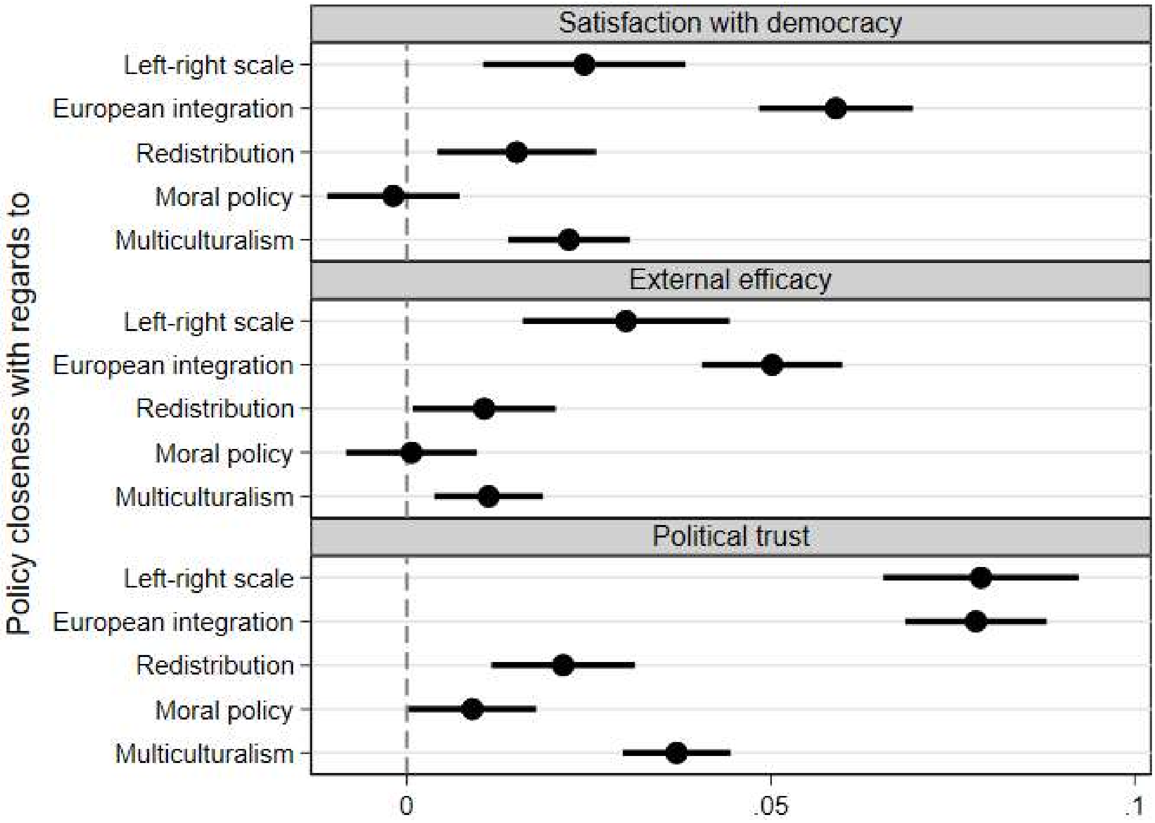
Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Policy closeness to the government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Policy closeness to the government	**0.066**	**(0.01)*****	**0.054**	**(0.01)*****	**0.110**	**(0.01)*****
Education	-0.011	(0.02)	0.069	(0.01)***	0.002	(0.01)
Married	0.011	(0.01)	0.027	(0.01)*	-0.005	(0.01)
Children	-0.009	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	-0.011	(0.01)
In education	-0.002	(0.01)	-0.007	(0.01)	0.010	(0.01)
At home	0.011	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.017	(0.01)*
Retired	0.017	(0.01)	-0.005	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)
Unemployed	-0.005	(0.01)	-0.000	(0.00)	-0.002	(0.00)
Income	0.003	(0.01)	0.008	(0.01)	0.011	(0.01)
Urban	-0.006	(0.01)	-0.008	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement	0.015	(0.01)	0.009	(0.01)	0.023	(0.01)**
Left-right self-placement^2	0.004	(0.01)	0.005	(0.00)	0.013	(0.01)*
Interest in politics	0.011	(0.01)	0.029	(0.00)***	0.024	(0.01)***
Observations	55,727		56,847		55,722	
Respondents	12,559		12,730		12,566	

Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A1: Relationship between policy closeness and political support disentangled by policy field



Note: Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals.

Table A8: *Error correction models of the relationship between representation by the government and political support*

Having voted for the government:

Dependent variable	Satisfaction with democracy		External political efficacy		Political trust	
Dependent variable$_{t-1}$	-0.988	(0.01)***	-1.009	(0.01)***	-0.925	(0.01)***
ΔHaving voted for the government	**0.025**	**(0.00)*****	**0.035**	**(0.01)*****	**0.060**	**(0.00)*****
Having voted for the government$_{t-1}$	0.019	(0.01)***	0.037	(0.01)***	0.045	(0.01)***
ΔEducation	0.027	(0.02)	0.033	(0.02)	0.021	(0.02)
ΔMarried	0.037	(0.02)*	0.028	(0.02)	0.007	(0.01)
ΔChildren	-0.011	(0.01)	0.007	(0.01)	-0.017	(0.01)
ΔIn education	0.008	(0.01)	-0.002	(0.01)	0.012	(0.01)
ΔAt home	0.002	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)	0.007	(0.01)
ΔRetired	0.012	(0.01)	-0.000	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)
ΔUnemployed	0.003	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.000	(0.01)
ΔIncome	-0.009	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)
ΔUrban	-0.018	(0.01)	-0.011	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)
ΔLeft-right self-placement	0.081	(0.03)*	0.055	(0.02)*	0.095	(0.03)***
ΔLeft-right self-placement^{2}	-0.060	(0.03)	-0.042	(0.02)	-0.050	(0.03)
ΔInterest in politics	0.005	(0.01)	0.019	(0.01)**	0.025	(0.01)***
Education$_{t-1}$	-0.015	(0.03)	0.023	(0.03)	0.015	(0.03)
Married$_{t-1}$	0.013	(0.02)	0.027	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)
Children$_{t-1}$	-0.012	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)	-0.020	(0.01)$^{+}$
In education$_{t-1}$	-0.008	(0.01)	-0.007	(0.01)	0.013	(0.01)
At home$_{t-1}$	-0.011	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)	0.012	(0.01)
Retired$_{t-1}$	0.019	(0.01)	-0.005	(0.01)	-0.013	(0.01)
Unemployed$_{t-1}$	-0.005	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)
Income$_{t-1}$	-0.013	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
Urban$_{t-1}$	-0.001	(0.01)	-0.020	(0.01)	-0.006	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement$_{t-1}$	0.080	(0.05)	0.121	(0.03)***	0.126	(0.04)**
Left-right self-placement$^{2}_{t-1}$	-0.071	(0.05)	-0.107	(0.03)**	-0.082	(0.04)*
Interest in politics$_{t-1}$	0.006	(0.01)	0.033	(0.01)***	0.033	(0.01)***
Long-run relationship	**-0.005**	**(0.00)**	**0.002**	**(0.00)**	**-0.011**	**(0.00)***
Long-run multiplier	**0.019**	**(0.01)*****	**0.037**	**(0.01)*****	**0.049**	**(0.01)*****
Observations	37,017		38,245		37,033	
Respondents	7,744		7,941		7,755	

Note: Error correction model standardized regression coefficients with respondent fixed-effects and cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were omitted, long-run multiplier with SE calculated via Bewley transformation, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Voting intention for the government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Dependent variable$_{t-1}$	-1.005	(0.01)***	-1.018	(0.01)***	-0.943	(0.01)***
ΔVoting intention for the gov.	**0.047**	**(0.01)*****	**0.059**	**(0.01)*****	**0.094**	**(0.00)*****
Voting intention for the gov.$_{t-1}$	0.055	(0.01)***	0.067	(0.01)***	0.098	(0.01)***
ΔEducation	0.042	(0.02)	0.043	(0.03)	0.020	(0.02)
ΔMarried	0.026	(0.02)	0.017	(0.02)	0.014	(0.02)
ΔChildren	-0.010	(0.02)	-0.004	(0.01)	-0.018	(0.01)
ΔIn education	0.010	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)	0.017	(0.01)
ΔAt home	0.005	(0.01)	-0.002	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)
ΔRetired	0.014	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.000	(0.01)
ΔUnemployed	0.001	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)
ΔIncome	-0.005	(0.01)	-0.003	(0.01)	0.009	(0.01)
ΔUrban	-0.028	(0.02)	-0.017	(0.01)	-0.011	(0.01)
ΔLeft-right self-placement	0.077	(0.03)*	0.073	(0.02)**	0.084	(0.03)**
ΔLeft-right self-placement^2	-0.064	(0.03)*	-0.069	(0.02)**	-0.048	(0.03)
ΔInterest in politics	0.002	(0.01)	0.023	(0.01)***	0.025	(0.01)***
Education$_{t-1}$	-0.014	(0.03)	0.047	(0.03)	0.008	(0.03)
Married$_{t-1}$	0.018	(0.02)	0.020	(0.02)	0.002	(0.02)
Children$_{t-1}$	-0.018	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)	-0.018	(0.01)
In education$_{t-1}$	-0.006	(0.01)	0.000	(0.01)	0.016	(0.01)
At home$_{t-1}$	0.003	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.016	(0.01)
Retired$_{t-1}$	0.033	(0.01)*	0.004	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)
Unemployed$_{t-1}$	-0.002	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)	0.011	(0.01)
Income$_{t-1}$	-0.012	(0.02)	0.001	(0.02)	0.017	(0.01)
Urban$_{t-1}$	-0.005	(0.01)	-0.030	(0.01)*	-0.011	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement$_{t-1}$	0.071	(0.05)	0.134	(0.04)***	0.109	(0.04)**
Left-right self-placement$^2_{t-1}$	-0.070	(0.05)	-0.132	(0.04)***	-0.080	(0.04)*
Interest in politics$_{t-1}$	0.003	(0.01)	0.039	(0.01)***	0.035	(0.01)***
Long-run relationship	**0.007**	**(0.00)**	**0.006**	**(0.01)**	**0.010**	**(0.00)***
Long-run multiplier	**0.054**	**(0.01)*****	**0.066**	**(0.01)*****	**0.104**	**(0.01)*****
Observations	32,185		33,119		32,223	
Respondents	7,296		7,451		7,284	

Note: Error correction model standardized regression coefficients with respondent fixed-effects and cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were omitted, long-run multiplier with SE calculated via Bewley transformation, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Sympathy for the government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Dependent variable$_{t-1}$	-1.009	(0.01)***	-1.018	(0.01)***	-0.979	(0.01)***
ΔSympathy for the government	**0.204**	**(0.01)*****	**0.124**	**(0.01)*****	**0.335**	**(0.01)*****
Sympathy for the government$_{t-1}$	0.223	(0.01)***	0.150	(0.01)***	0.359	(0.01)***
ΔEducation	0.009	(0.02)	0.042	(0.02)*	0.003	(0.02)
ΔMarried	0.018	(0.02)	0.022	(0.02)	-0.001	(0.01)
ΔChildren	-0.003	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	-0.008	(0.01)
ΔIn education	0.004	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	0.016	(0.01)
ΔAt home	0.007	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	0.010	(0.01)
ΔRetired	0.017	(0.01)	0.000	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)
ΔUnemployed	0.001	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)
ΔIncome	0.003	(0.01)	0.010	(0.01)	0.013	(0.01)
ΔUrban	-0.017	(0.01)	-0.008	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)
ΔLeft-right self-placement	-0.008	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)
ΔLeft-right self-placement^{2}	-0.013	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)	-0.010	(0.01)
ΔInterest in politics	0.006	(0.01)	0.022	(0.01)***	0.030	(0.01)***
Education$_{t-1}$	-0.031	(0.02)	0.049	(0.02)*	-0.003	(0.02)
Married$_{t-1}$	0.006	(0.02)	0.030	(0.01)*	-0.002	(0.01)
Children$_{t-1}$	-0.013	(0.01)	-0.006	(0.01)	-0.019	(0.01)
In education$_{t-1}$	-0.006	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)	0.019	(0.01)
At home$_{t-1}$	-0.005	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
Retired$_{t-1}$	0.027	(0.01)*	-0.002	(0.01)	-0.005	(0.01)
Unemployed$_{t-1}$	-0.009	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	0.003	(0.01)
Income$_{t-1}$	-0.007	(0.01)	0.006	(0.01)	0.020	(0.01)
Urban$_{t-1}$	0.002	(0.01)	-0.021	(0.01)	-0.005	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement$_{t-1}$	-0.024	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)	-0.008	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement$^{2}_{t-1}$	-0.019	(0.01)	-0.021	(0.01)*	-0.017	(0.01)*
Interest in politics$_{t-1}$	0.006	(0.01)	0.036	(0.01)***	0.041	(0.01)***
Long-run relationship	**0.017**	**(0.01)****	**0.023**	**(0.01)*****	**0.031**	**(0.01)*****
Long-run multiplier	**0.221**	**(0.01)*****	**0.147**	**(0.01)*****	**0.366**	**(0.01)*****
Observations	39,618		40,693		39,614	
Respondents	8,308		8,459		8,303	

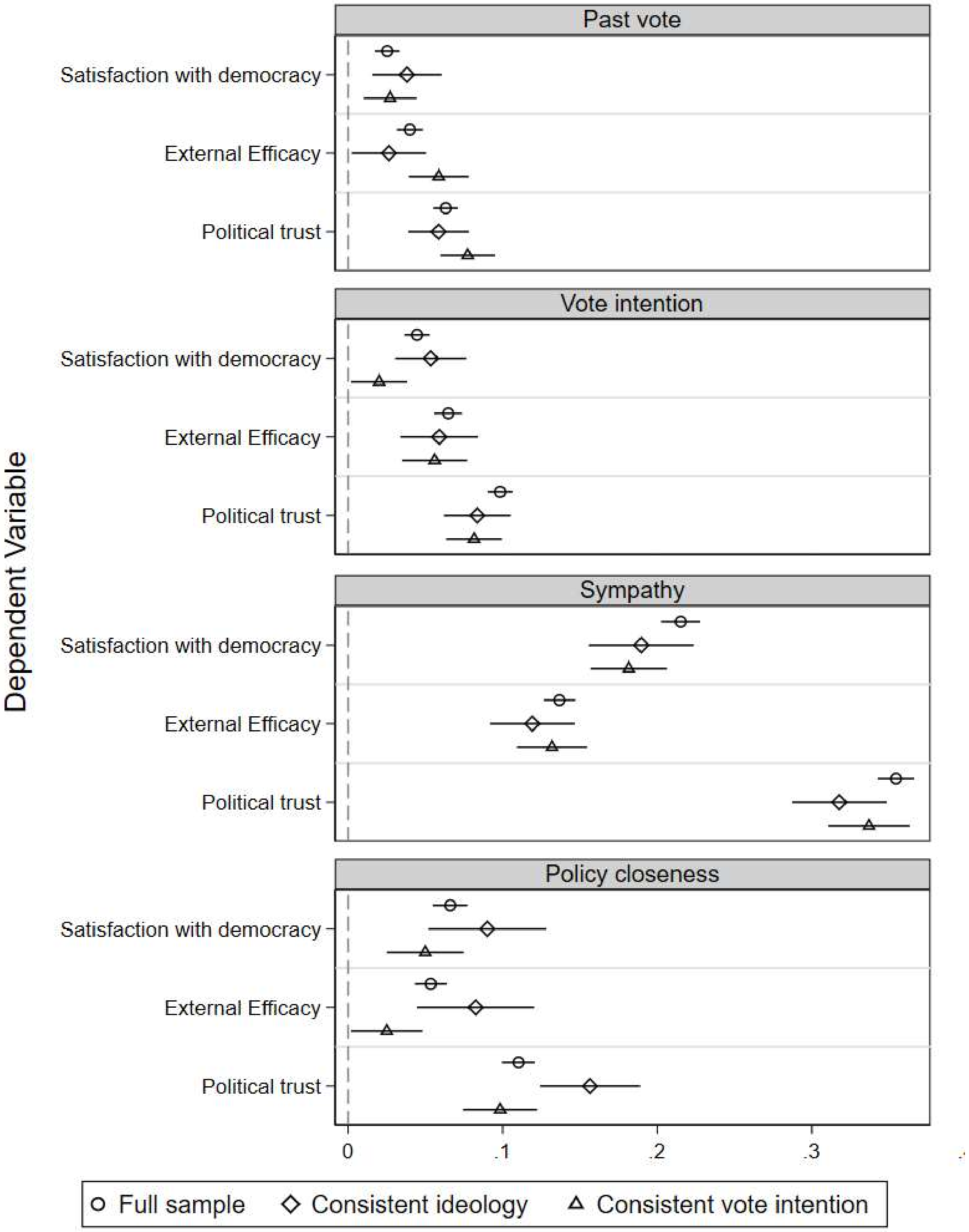
Note: Error correction model standardized regression coefficients with respondent fixed-effects and cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were omitted, long-run multiplier with SE calculated via Bewley transformation, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Policy closeness to the government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Dependent variable$_{t-1}$	-0.995	(0.01)***	-1.010	(0.01)***	-0.930	(0.01)***
ΔPolicy closeness to the gov.	**0.065**	**(0.01)*****	**0.053**	**(0.01)*****	**0.107**	**(0.01)*****
Policy closeness to the gov.$_{t-1}$	0.082	(0.01)***	0.072	(0.01)***	0.126	(0.01)***
ΔEducation	0.008	(0.02)	0.025	(0.02)	0.009	(0.02)
ΔMarried	0.025	(0.02)	0.022	(0.02)	0.005	(0.01)
ΔChildren	-0.012	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	-0.013	(0.01)
ΔIn education	0.002	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
ΔAt home	0.001	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)
ΔRetired	0.006	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)
ΔUnemployed	-0.003	(0.01)	0.001	(0.01)	-0.001	(0.01)
ΔIncome	0.000	(0.01)	0.005	(0.01)	0.017	(0.01)
ΔUrban	-0.010	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)	-0.007	(0.01)
ΔLeft-right self-placement	0.002	(0.03)	0.005	(0.02)	-0.026	(0.03)
ΔLeft-right self-placement^2	0.002	(0.03)	-0.001	(0.02)	0.047	(0.03)
ΔInterest in politics	0.007	(0.01)	0.022	(0.01)***	0.025	(0.01)***
Education$_{t-1}$	-0.020	(0.02)	0.044	(0.02)	0.005	(0.02)
Married$_{t-1}$	0.005	(0.02)	0.023	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)
Children$_{t-1}$	-0.012	(0.01)	-0.006	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)
In education$_{t-1}$	-0.002	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)	0.017	(0.01)
At home$_{t-1}$	-0.006	(0.01)	0.013	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
Retired$_{t-1}$	0.023	(0.01)	-0.003	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)
Unemployed$_{t-1}$	-0.011	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)	0.002	(0.01)
Income$_{t-1}$	-0.011	(0.01)	-0.002	(0.01)	0.014	(0.01)
Urban$_{t-1}$	0.005	(0.01)	-0.019	(0.01)	-0.003	(0.01)
Left-right self-placement$_{t-1}$	-0.006	(0.05)	0.052	(0.03)	-0.023	(0.04)
Left-right self-placement$^2{}_{t-1}$	0.002	(0.05)	-0.041	(0.03)	0.042	(0.04)
Interest in politics$_{t-1}$	0.007	(0.01)	0.040	(0.01)***	0.033	(0.01)***
Long-run relationship	**0.018**	**(0.01)****	**0.018**	**(0.01)****	**0.028**	**(0.01)*****
Long-run multiplier	**0.083**	**(0.01)*****	**0.071**	**(0.01)*****	**0.135**	**(0.01)*****
Observations	38,445		39,493		38,445	
Respondents	8,307		8,473		8,293	

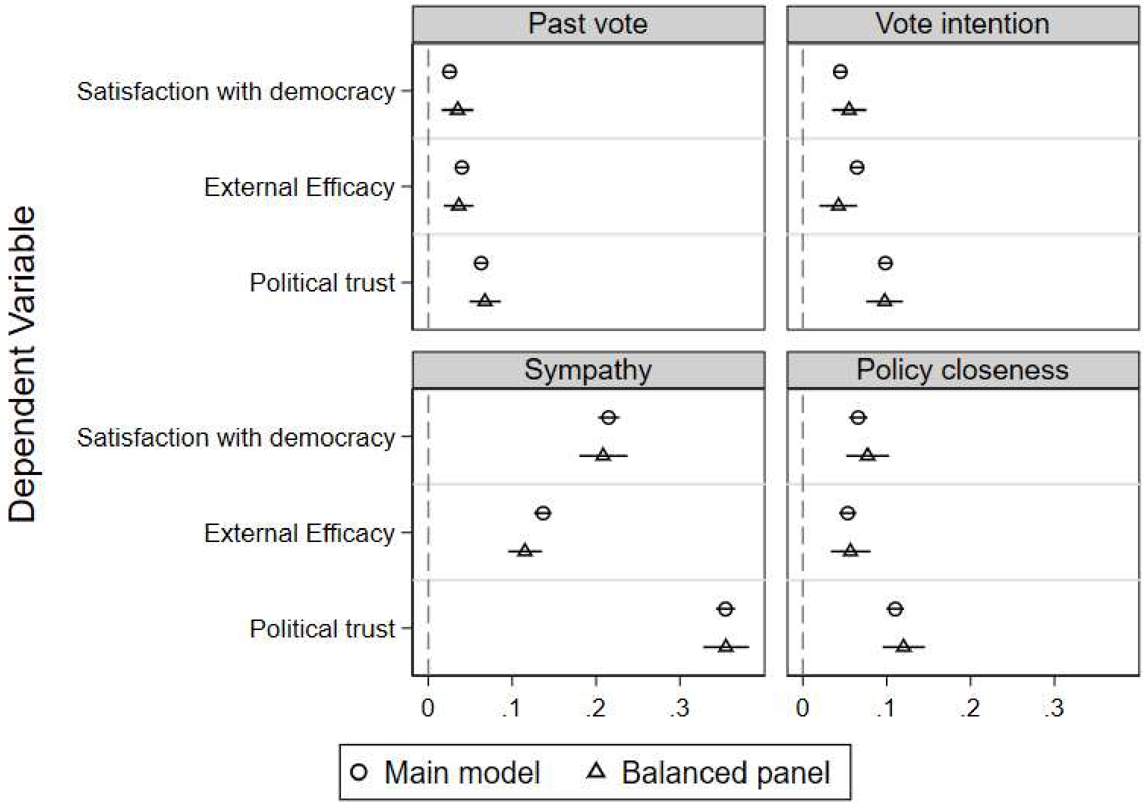
Note: Error correction model standardized regression coefficients with respondent fixed-effects and cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were omitted, long-run multiplier with SE calculated via Bewley transformation, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A2: Robustness checks restricting the sample to respondents with a consistent ideology or vote intention



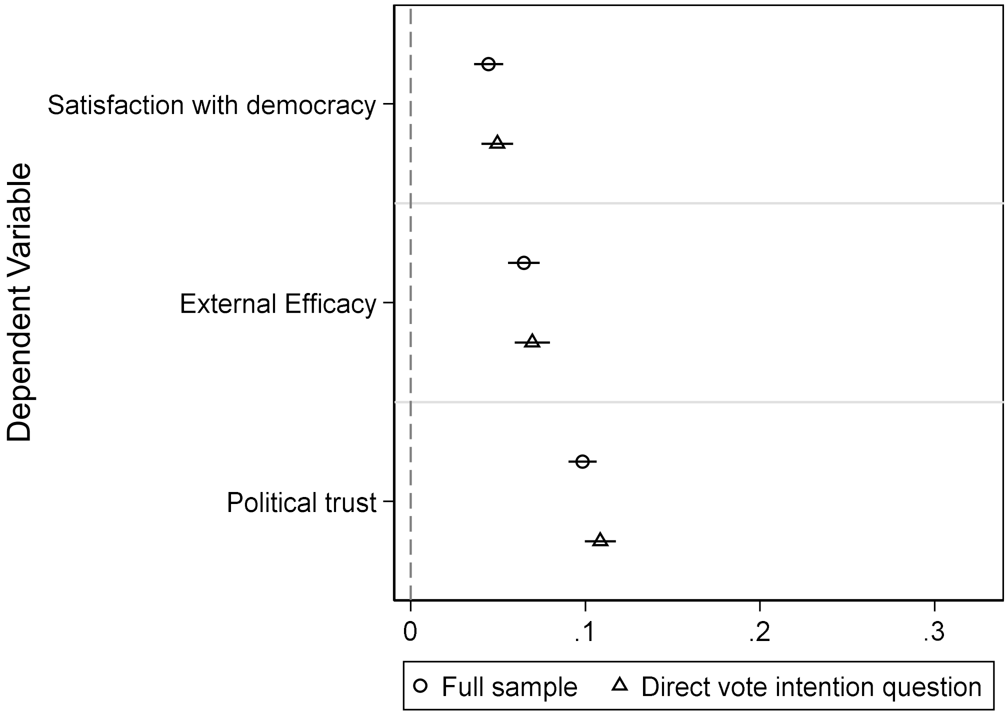
Note: Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. The LISS panel includes 1,450 respondents with a consistent ideology and 2,014 respondents with a consistent vote intention (full sample: 13,384 respondents).

Figure A3: Robustness check restricting the sample to respondents who took part in all waves



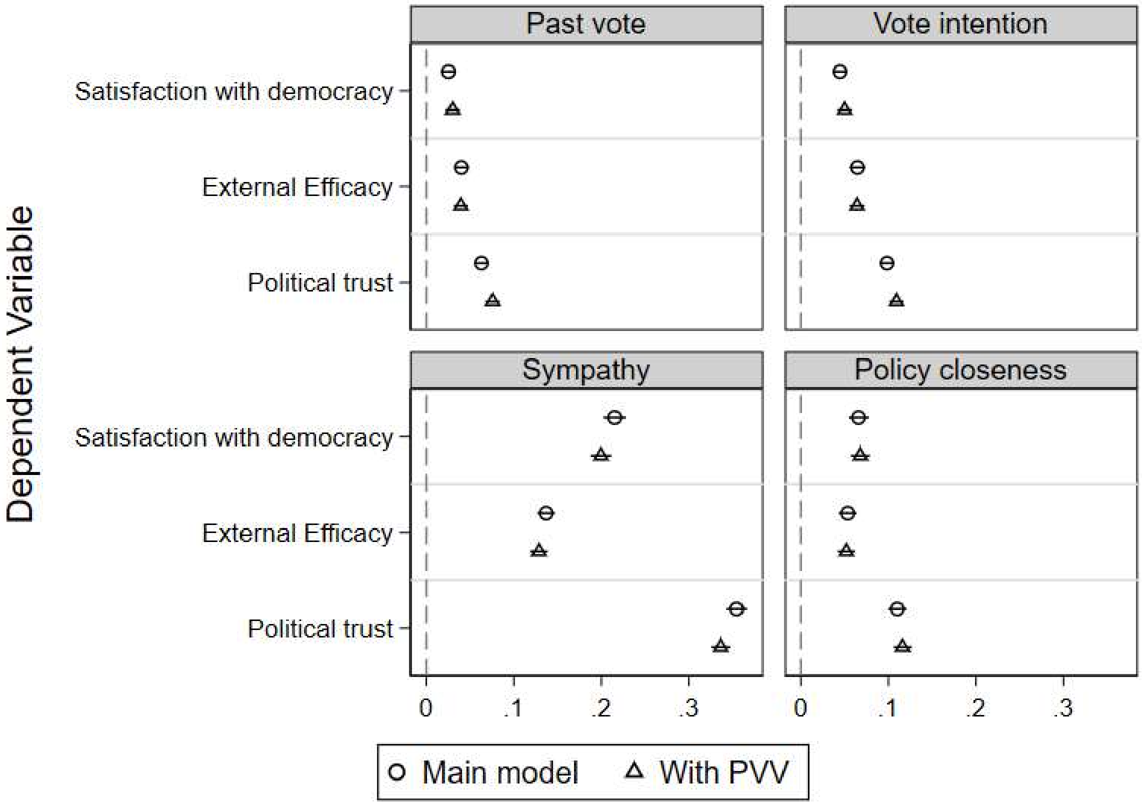
Note: Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals. The LISS panel includes 867 respondents who were constantly surveyed (full sample: 13,384 respondents).

Figure A4: *Robustness check restricting the sample to respondents who received the direct vote intention question*



Note: Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals.

Figure A5: Robustness check treating PVV as fully part of the Rutte I government



Note: Displayed are fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with 95% cluster-robust confidence intervals.

Table A9: FE dummy impact function model for transitioning into or out of being represented in government

Transitions into being represented in government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Year after transition: 0	**0.021**	**(0.01)***	**0.034**	**(0.01)*****	**0.083**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 1	**0.012**	**(0.01)**	**0.040**	**(0.01)*****	**0.067**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 2	**0.003**	**(0.01)**	**0.022**	**(0.01)***	**0.046**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 3	**0.003**	**(0.01)**	**0.031**	**(0.01)****	**0.048**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 4	**0.006**	**(0.01)**	**0.005**	**(0.01)**	**0.029**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 5+	**0.019**	**(0.02)**	**0.065**	**(0.02)*****	**0.115**	**(0.02)*****
Education	-0.008	(0.04)	0.034	(0.04)	-0.025	(0.03)
Married	0.030	(0.03)	0.027	(0.03)	0.008	(0.03)
Children	-0.009	(0.02)	-0.023	(0.02)	-0.022	(0.02)
In education	-0.001	(0.02)	-0.022	(0.02)	0.015	(0.02)
At home	-0.005	(0.02)	0.001	(0.02)	0.023	(0.02)
Retired	0.011	(0.02)	0.013	(0.02)	-0.004	(0.02)
Unemployed	0.006	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)
Income	0.000	(0.02)	0.028	(0.03)	-0.009	(0.02)
Urban	-0.006	(0.02)	-0.054	(0.02)*	-0.012	(0.02)
Left-right self-placement	0.065	(0.02)**	0.002	(0.02)	0.067	(0.02)**
Left-right self-placement^{2}	-0.002	(0.02)	-0.027	(0.01)*	-0.009	(0.02)
Interest in politics	0.004	(0.01)	0.023	(0.01)	0.026	(0.01)
Observations	9,214		9,458		9,165	
Respondents	1,866		1,883		1,856	

Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Post transition	**0.023**	**(0.01)**	**0.061**	**(0.01)*****	**0.125**	**(0.01)*****
Education	-0.007	(0.04)	0.036	(0.04)	-0.022	(0.03)
Married	0.030	(0.03)	0.029	(0.03)	0.009	(0.03)
Children	-0.010	(0.02)	-0.022	(0.02)	-0.021	(0.02)
In education	0.000	(0.02)	-0.022	(0.02)	0.015	(0.02)
At home	-0.005	(0.02)	-0.000	(0.02)	0.022	(0.02)
Retired	0.011	(0.02)	0.012	(0.02)	-0.005	(0.02)
Unemployed	0.006	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)	0.004	(0.01)
Income	0.001	(0.02)	0.031	(0.03)	-0.004	(0.02)
Urban	-0.007	(0.02)	-0.055	(0.02)*	-0.014	(0.02)
Left-right self-placement	0.065	(0.02)**	0.001	(0.02)	0.069	(0.02)**
Left-right self-placement^{2}	-0.002	(0.02)	-0.027	(0.01)*	-0.009	(0.02)
Interest in politics	0.004	(0.01)	0.022	(0.01)	0.024	(0.01)
Observations	9,214		9,458		9,165	
Respondents	1,866		1,883		1,856	

Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Transitions out of being represented in government:

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Year after transition: 0	**-0.030**	**(0.01)*****	**-0.028**	**(0.01)*****	**-0.060**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 1	**-0.015**	**(0.01)**	**-0.025**	**(0.01)****	**-0.043**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 2	**-0.015**	**(0.01)***	**-0.012**	**(0.01)**	**-0.029**	**(0.01)*****
Year after transition: 3	**-0.021**	**(0.01)***	**-0.017**	**(0.01)**	**-0.024**	**(0.01)****
Year after transition: 4	**-0.005**	**(0.01)**	**-0.011**	**(0.01)**	**-0.025**	**(0.01)****
Year after transition: 5+	**-0.101**	**(0.04)****	**-0.057**	**(0.03)***	**-0.142**	**(0.03)*****
Education	-0.021	(0.04)	0.054	(0.04)	-0.014	(0.03)
Married	0.064	(0.04)	0.030	(0.03)	0.043	(0.03)
Children	0.003	(0.02)	-0.015	(0.02)	-0.037	(0.02)
In education	-0.026	(0.02)	-0.017	(0.02)	0.014	(0.02)
At home	-0.009	(0.02)	0.002	(0.02)	0.033	(0.02)
Retired	0.011	(0.02)	0.037	(0.02)	0.009	(0.02)
Unemployed	-0.010	(0.01)	-0.003	(0.01)	-0.009	(0.01)
Income	-0.025	(0.02)	0.032	(0.03)	0.009	(0.02)
Urban	0.020	(0.02)	-0.048	(0.02)*	-0.013	(0.02)
Left-right self-placement	0.043	(0.02)*	-0.014	(0.02)	0.049	(0.02)*
Left-right self-placement^{2}	0.017	(0.02)	-0.026	(0.01)*	-0.016	(0.02)
Interest in politics	-0.002	(0.01)	0.037	(0.01)**	0.017	(0.01)
Observations	9,459		9,728		9,430	
Respondents	1,851		1,867		1,844	

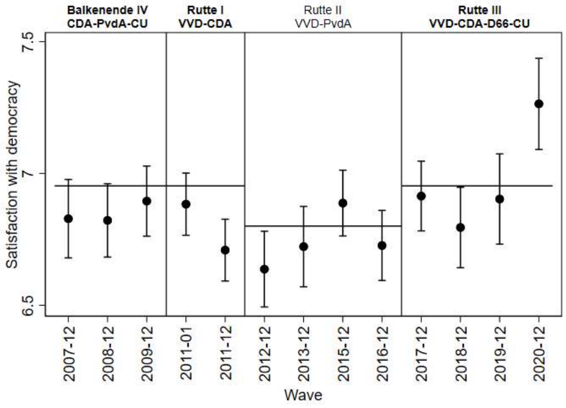
Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Dependent variable	**Satisfaction with democracy**		**External political efficacy**		**Political trust**	
Post transition	**-0.047**	**(0.01)*****	**-0.063**	**(0.02)*****	**-0.098**	**(0.01)*****
Education	-0.022	(0.04)	0.066	(0.04)	-0.014	(0.03)
Married	0.062	(0.04)	0.036	(0.04)	0.039	(0.03)
Children	0.003	(0.02)	-0.019	(0.03)	-0.037	(0.02)
In education	-0.024	(0.02)	-0.021	(0.03)	0.016	(0.02)
At home	-0.007	(0.02)	0.003	(0.02)	0.034	(0.02)
Retired	0.012	(0.02)	0.046	(0.03)	0.010	(0.02)
Unemployed	-0.009	(0.01)	-0.004	(0.01)	-0.008	(0.01)
Income	-0.024	(0.02)	0.040	(0.04)	0.009	(0.02)
Urban	0.018	(0.02)	-0.060	(0.03)*	-0.014	(0.02)
Left-right self-placement	0.043	(0.02)*	-0.018	(0.02)	0.049	(0.02)*
Left-right self-placement^{2}	0.016	(0.02)	-0.032	(0.01)*	-0.016	(0.02)
Interest in politics	-0.001	(0.01)	0.046	(0.02)**	0.018	(0.01)
Observations	9,459		9,728		9,430	
Respondents	1,851		1,867		1,844	

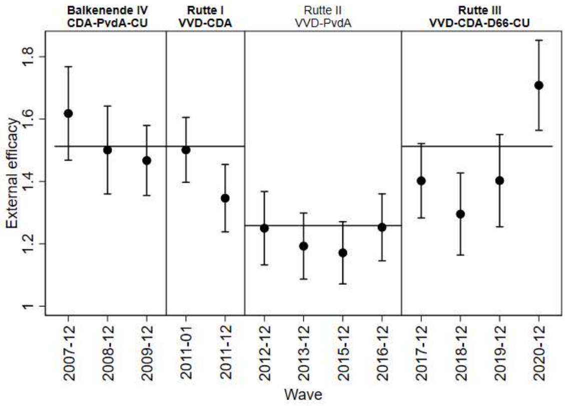
Note: Fixed-effects standardized regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, panel wave dummies were ommitted, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$

Figure A6: Results for respondents with a consistent vote intention by party

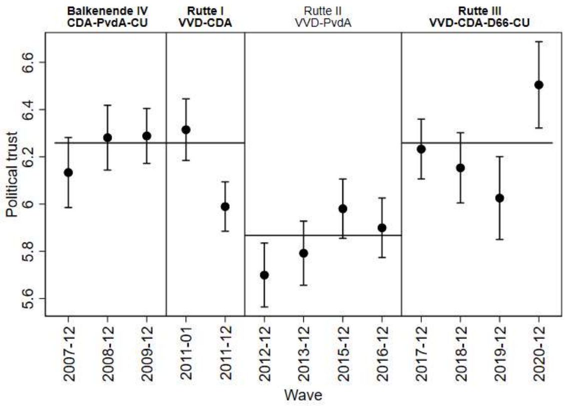
CDA:



Coefficient: 0.154 (0.06)**
Observations: 1,800
Respondents: 297

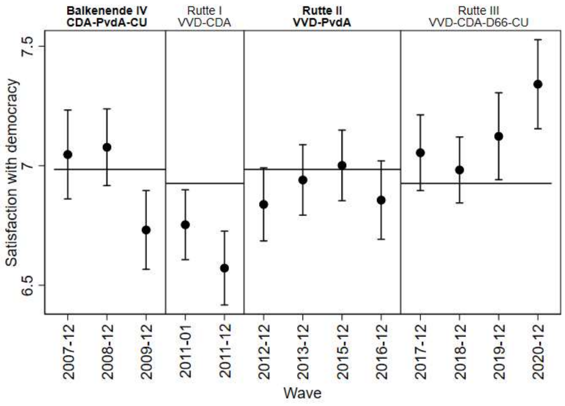


Coefficient: 0.257 (0.05)***
Observations: 1,851
Respondents: 302

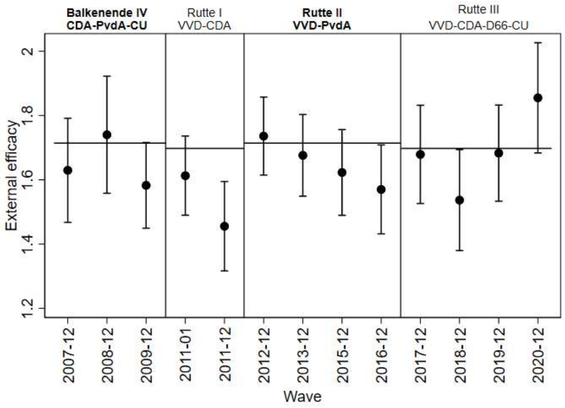


Coefficient: 0.390 (0.07)***
Observations: 1,817
Respondents: 297

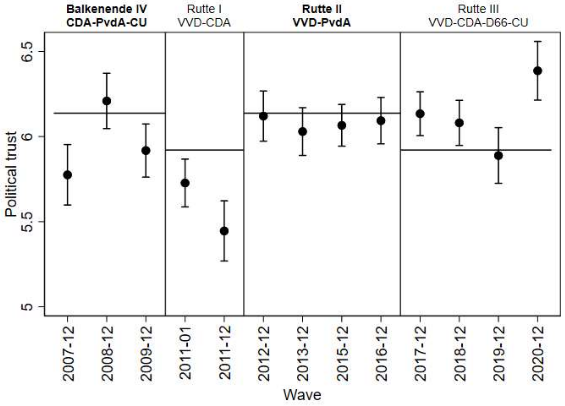
PvdA:



Coefficient: 0.061 (0.06)
Observations: 1,408
Respondents: 253

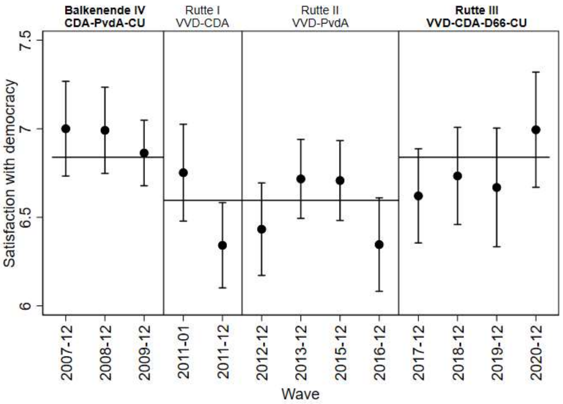


Coefficient: 0.013 (0.05)
Observations: 1,429
Respondents: 256

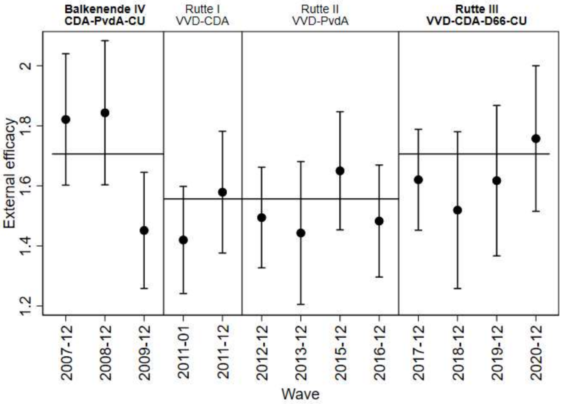


Coefficient: 0.213 (0.05)***
Observations: 1,403
Respondents: 252

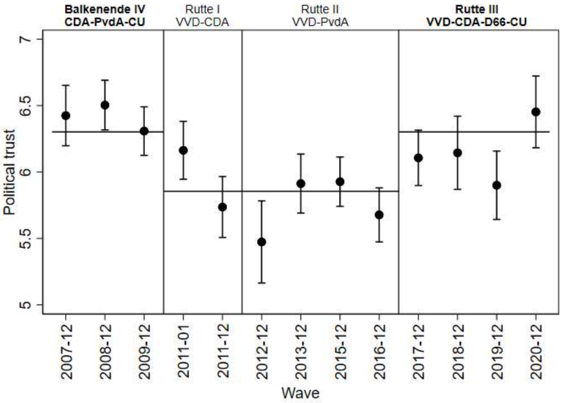
CU:



Coefficient: 0.243 (0.08)**
Observations: 695
Respondents: 130

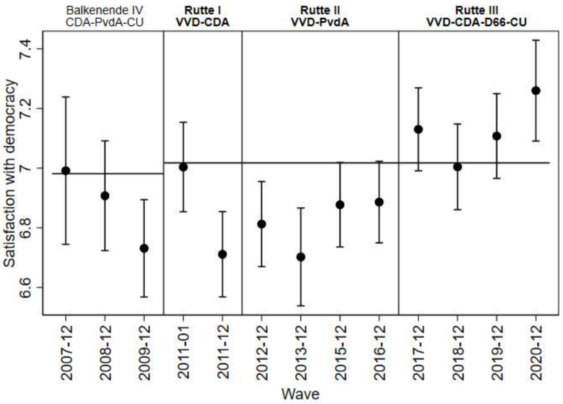


Coefficient: 0.150 (0.08)
Observations: 721
Respondents: 132

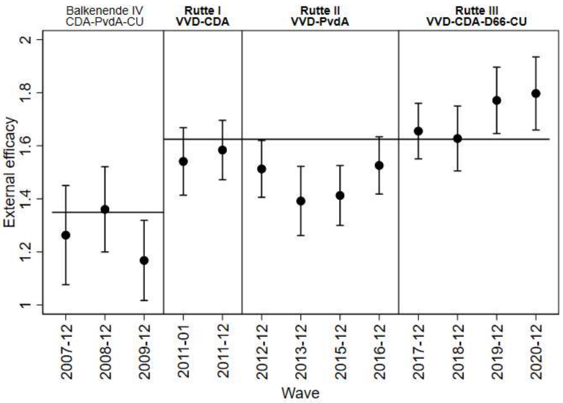


Coefficient: 0.447 (0.08)***
Observations: 699
Respondents: 129

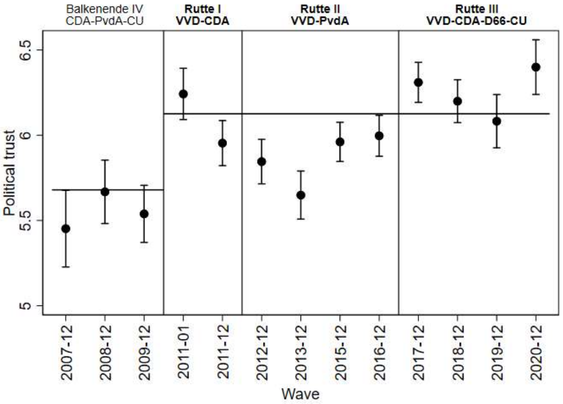
VVD:



Coefficient: 0.036 (0.09)
Observations: 1,779
Respondents: 364

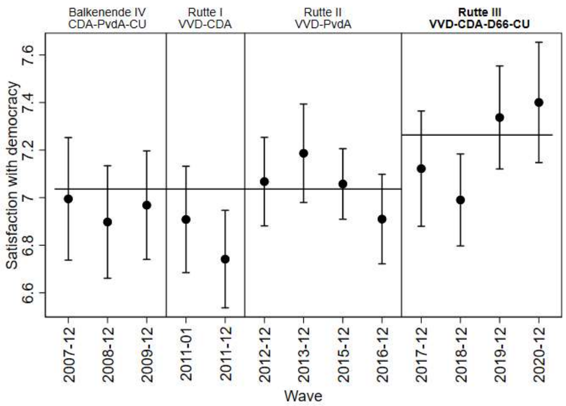


Coefficient: 0.275 (0.08)**
Observations: 1,806
Respondents: 365

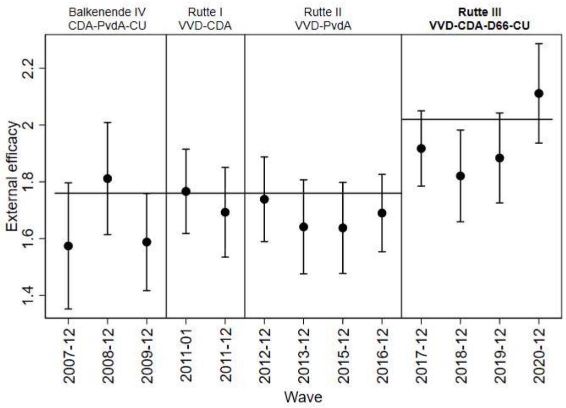


Coefficient: 0.446 (0.09)***
Observations: 1,780
Respondents: 363

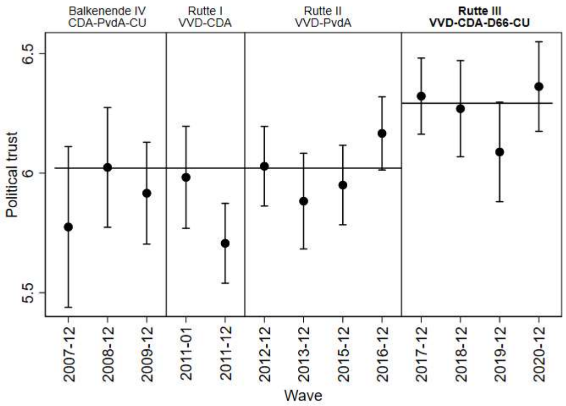
D66:



Coefficient: 0.224 $(0.11)^{*}$
Observations: 990
Respondents: 242

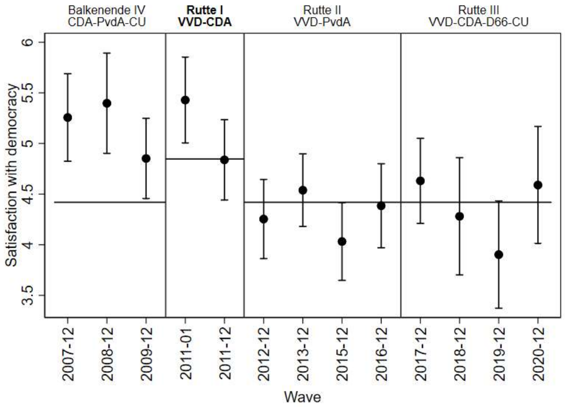


Coefficient: 0.258 $(0.08)^{**}$
Observations: 1,007
Respondents: 248

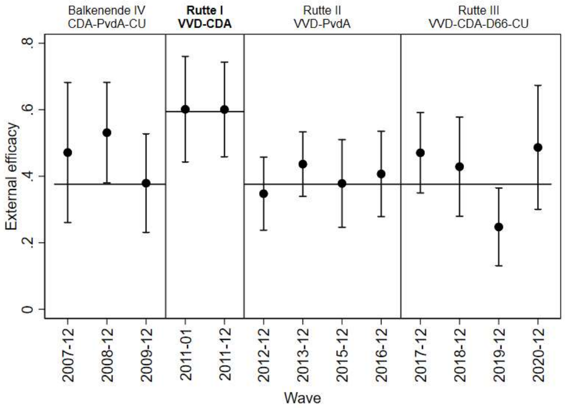


Coefficient: 0.260 $(0.07)^{***}$
Observations: 988
Respondents: 239

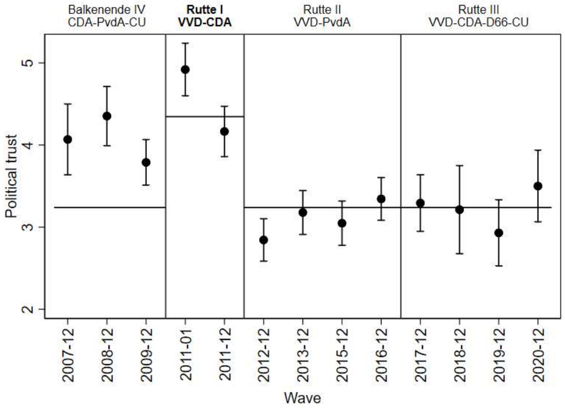
PVV:



Coefficient: 0.427 $(0.20)^{*}$
Observations: 731
Respondents: 179



Coefficient: 0.218 $(0.08)^{**}$
Observations: 754
Respondents: 183



Coefficient: 1.107 $(0.17)^{***}$
Observations: 728
Respondents: 178

Note: Displayed are marginal effects of wave dummies with 95% cluster-robust confidence levels. Horizontal lines are marginal effects of being represented in government or not. Displayed below the graphs are fixed-effects regression coefficients with cluster-robust standard errors in parentheses, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$, models only include respondents consistently intending to vote for the respective party.

6. Conclusion

Should support for the regime and its institutions be regarded as stable, while specific support fluctuates with the performance of the political system? In their entirety, the four articles in this dissertation offer a nuanced answer to this question, highlighting both the value and the limitations of this proposition from early political support literature (Easton 1965, 1975). For this, they look at the political-psychological foundations of support for the regime and its institutions, both in the form of deeply held psychological characteristics (personality traits, social identities) and the more immediate interaction of psychological processes with the environment (emotions, cognitive processes). They suggest that the proposition should be regarded as a matter of degree rather than principle. On the one hand, diffuse support for democracy is more stable than more specific forms of political support (Claassen/Magalhães 2022). Next to traditional accounts dealing with socialization processes (Putnam 1993, Dalton 1994, Inglehart 2003), articles 1 and 2 show that this can be explained by big five personality traits and how an individual conceives their national identity (Erhardt et al. 2021b, Erhardt 2023b). On the other hand, even the most diffuse forms of support for the regime and its institutions are subject to short-term fluctuations. In this regard, articles 2, 3 and 4 build on earlier literature (Anderson et al. 2005, Cordero/Simón 2016, Vasilopoulos et al. 2018) to show that on-going crises and performance factors in the form of economic hardship, emotional reactions to the Covid-19 pandemic threat and being well-represented by the government can affect both diffuse support for democracy and more mid-range (van der Meer/Zmerli 2017) indicators of political support – satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and trust in political institutions (Erhardt et al. 2021b, Erhardt et al. 2022, Erhardt 2023a).

This final chapter of the dissertation summarizes the findings of the four articles in detail and reflects both on their contribution as individual articles and in the greater context of this thesis. It then discusses the limitations of this thesis that could not be addressed by the four articles. Finally, I dwell on the implications of this thesis both for future research and for society in general.

Findings and contribution

Article 1 titled "*The democratic personality? The big five, authoritarianism and regime preference in consolidated democracies*" examines the deep-rooted personality foundations of diffuse support for democracy (Erhardt 2023b). It develops a comprehensive theoretical argument linking big five personality traits as "relatively enduring patterns of thoughts, feelings, and actions" (McCrae/Costa 2008: 160) to regime preferences in the context of consolidated democracies. It argues that the different natures of big five personality traits and their political consequences can elicit support or opposition for different characteristics of democratic or autocratic regime types. Individuals open to experience are more liberal, post-materialist and pro-diversity, which aligns well with democratic freedoms and the diversity of opinions guaranteed in democracies (Klein 2005, Gerber et al. 2011, Ackermann/Ackermann 2015). Conscientious individuals are characterized as responsible, cautious and performance-oriented, which should make them favor the democratic status quo with its entrenched citizenship norms as well as the stability, market-liberalism and lower corruption of democracies (Gerber et al. 2010, Dinesen et al. 2014). Being kind, empathetic and open to compromise, agreeable individuals should prefer the more consensual, solidarity-based nature of democracy and support the protection of democratic freedoms for their fellow citizens (Dinesen et al. 2014, Fatke 2017). Given that previous literature has examined the personality foundations of anti-democratic sentiments by looking at authoritarianism (Adorno et al. 1950, Nicol/de France 2016), article 1 also addresses the link between the big five and authoritarianism. Open individuals are curious and have diverse interests, which should disincline them from submitting to authority, coercive social control and conventions. In contrast, conscientious individuals, who are disciplined and dutiful, may rather follow authority figures, favor social control and traditional norms (Gerber et al. 2010, Freitag 2017).

These arguments are tested with three original surveys collected in six Western European democracies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) between late 2020 and early 2022. The linear regression analyses with country fixed effects show that, in line with the hypotheses, democratic regime preferences are higher for open, conscientious and agreeable individuals. Furthermore, extraverted and neurotic individuals display slightly lower support for democracy. For authoritarianism, article 1 finds the expected negative relationship for openness and positive relationship for conscientiousness, while extraversion is also positively related to authoritarianism. Overall, article 1 has four important implications. First, it presents robust evidence that support for democracy is rooted in personality traits, which explains stable differences in regime preferences between individuals when the influence of socialization in societal trends is held constant. Second, it adds to the literature on democratic backsliding, showing that, at least to some extent, support for democracy can be regarded as fixed and unfazed by political and social influences. Third, it warns against conflating authoritarianism with regime preferences, seeing that they do not rest on the same personality traits. In particular, conscientiousness positively relates to both authoritarianism and democratic regime support. Fourth, it uses a more appropriate, validated measure of authoritarianism (Beierlein et al. 2015) than previous research, which also highlights the merits of differentiating between the three dimensions of authoritarianism (Duckitt/Bizumic 2013).

Article 2 called "*National identity between democracy and autocracy: a comparative analysis of 24* *countries*" evaluates how different conceptions of national identity relate to diffuse regime preferences, both directly and in interaction with economic hardship (Erhardt et al. 2021b). These different conceptions of national identity rest on criteria of belonging to the national community and align on a continuum from a civic conception, which focuses on a common language and political culture, and an ethnic conception, which revolves around ancestry and birth. A civic conception should be linked to support for democracy, given that its inclusiveness and focus on a shared political culture resonates well with key characteristics of liberal democracies (Pehrson et al. 2009, Berg/Hjerm 2010). In contrast, an ethnic conception is argued to lower support for democracy due to its relation to perceptions of out-group threat and detrimental foreign influences (Schatz et al. 1999, Blank/Schmidt 2003). Following arguments that economic and cultural accounts are interrelated (Hobolt/De Vries 2016, Gidron/Hall 2017), we contend that a decline in existential security may reinforce a cultural backlash (Inglehart/Norris 2017, Ausserladscheider 2019). As a result, economic hardship should strengthen the negative relationship of an ethnic national identity. In contrast, it is less clear how economic hardship moderates the relationship of a civic national identity. In times of hardship, economic considerations could either supersede culture (Mair 2013), diminishing the positive relationship, or culture could prevail as critical citizens continue to support democracy through their civic national identity even in the face of dissatisfaction with the economic performance (Norris 1999a).

We test these arguments with survey data from the European Values Study 2017/18 in 24 European democracies (EVS 2019). Relying on linear regression models with country fixed effects, we corroborate our expectations, showing that a civic national identity relates positively, while an ethnic national identity relates negatively to democratic regime preferences. Six indicators for economic hardship at both the individual and societal level further show that economic hardship aggravates the negative relationship of an ethnic conception of nationhood. For civic conceptions of nationhood, the results are less coherent, showing either no moderation or, for two indicators, an increase in the positive relationship. Overall, article 2 contributes in several ways to the study of regime support. First, we introduce an identity-based explanation to the study of regime support going beyond previous socialization (Inglehart/Welzel 2005) and economic (Cordero/Simón 2016) accounts. Second, we add to the long-standing macro-level debate whether national identity should be seen as a prerequisite of democracy or a path to authoritarian rule (Adorno et al. 1950, Smith 1998) and highlight that individual-level national identity is a double-edged sword. Depending on how inclusive the national community is conceived, it may either harm or foster democratic support. Third, it presents further evidence that cultural and economic accounts should be regarded as interrelated, given that economic hardship may reinforce a cultural backlash. Finally, it emphasizes the importance for democracies that a large share of their citizens follow a civic rather than an ethnic national identity, as this both strengthens democratic support directly and indirectly dampens the detrimental consequences of economic crises.

Article 3 titled "*Leaving democracy? Pandemic threat, emotional accounts and regime support in comparative perspective*" analyzes the relationship between negative emotions induced by the Covid-19 pandemic threat and support for democracy (Erhardt et al. 2022). Drawing on the affective intelligence theory of emotions (Marcus/MacKuen 1993, Marcus et al. 2000, Vasilopoulos et al. 2019), it argues that pandemic threat can activate different neural systems depending on how it is appraised, which then triggers anger and fear. Anger arises from threats to familiar norms and practices, in particular when the threat is perceived to be controllable and concrete actors can be blamed for the norm violation. As a result, those responding with anger, who tend to be more optimistic, less willing to compromise and favor punitive actions, should be more inclined towards autocratic alternatives to democracy (MacKuen et al. 2010, Brader/Cikanek 2019). Fear is associated with an unknown, novel threat that is perceived as out of control by others. Its consequences for regime preferences are less clear. On the one hand, it may lead to a flight to (authoritarian) security, favoring strict governmental measures at the cost of civil liberties (Oesterreich 2005, Albertson/Gadarian 2015). On the other hand, those experiencing fear are more likely to search for new information, favor compromise and increasingly trust political actors, which may rally them behind the democratic institutions of a country (Valentino et al. 2008, MacKuen et al. 2010, Erhardt et al. 2021a).

We test these arguments with two original surveys collected in six Western European democracies (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland and the United Kingdom) between late 2020 and mid-2021. Linear regression models with country fixed effects present consistent evidence in favor of our hypothesis for anger, showing that it is associated with lower democratic regime preferences. The results for fear indicate a modest positive relationship with support for democracy, lending support to the rally hypothesis. Overall, article 3 has five key implications. First, it goes beyond extant studies linking threat to authoritarianism (Feldman/Stenner 1997) by looking at regime preferences and addressing the underlying mechanisms through emotions. In doing so, it highlights, secondly, that democratic support is not immune to current events in the form of a pandemic, showing that regime preferences are malleable. Third, it complements earlier findings that anger can endanger the principles of liberal, pluralist democracy through authoritarianism, Eurosceptic and populist attitudes as well as lower political trust by showing that anger also erodes support for democracy (Rico et al. 2017, Vasilopoulou/Wagner 2017, Vasilopoulos et al. 2018, Erhardt et al. 2021a). Fourth, given the prevalence of fear during a pandemic, its positive relationship with support for democracy presents a message of hope, which is in line with other studies arguing that fear has produced a rally effect during the Covid-19 pandemic (Erhardt et al. 2021a, Schraff 2021). It also indicates that while fear may temporarily increase support for authoritarian policies (Filsinger/Freitag 2022, Gidengil et al. 2022, Vasilopoulos et al. 2022), this does not contradict a pro-democratic orientation. Finally, its results corroborate previous studies showing that anger and fear have diverging political consequences (MacKuen et al. 2010, Vasilopoulos et al. 2019).

Article 4 called "*Political support through representation by the government. Evidence from Dutch panel data*" examines how representation by the government relates to support for the political system (Erhardt 2023a). It connects studies on the winners-losers gap (Anderson et al. 2005, Dahlberg/Linde 2017), which show that election winners display more positive attitudes towards the political system and its institutions than election losers, with research on the congruence of citizens with their government (Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016, Ferland 2021), which presents evidence that a higher ideological proximity of citizens to their government similarly improves their satisfaction with democracy. Given their theoretical overlap, article 4 integrates these two strands of literature under the broader framework of individual representation by government. Following earlier literature, it argues that representation should positively relate to political support for three reasons (Anderson et al. 2005): First, there is the rational choice argument that citizens evaluate their political system based on the utility they derive from it, which should be higher when they are well represented (Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016, Gärtner et al. 2020). Second, cognitive dissonance theory argues that citizens prefer consistency in their beliefs (Festinger 1962), which leads them to adapt their perceptions of the political system based on whether they are well represented by the government or not (Campbell 2015). Third, due to the 'home-team' effect, winning an election or being represented by the government in general should come with an emotional reward (Holmberg 1999, Gärtner et al. 2020). In addition, I also expect that citizens should not fully adapt their support for the political system instantaneously, but that there may be a temporal dynamic in the relationship. Citizens may have a reservoir of goodwill toward the political system, they may not be fully attentive to politics and it may take some time until the full benefits of a better representation are realized.

These arguments are tested with LISS panel data from 2007/2008 to 2020/2021 (CentERdata 2021) spanning several electoral cycles with different government coalitions in office. Fixed effects models, general error correction models and a dummy impact function approach present robust evidence that being well represented by the government is positively related to satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and trust in political institutions. With regards to temporal dynamics, the relationship unfolds rapidly with most changes happening instantaneously. Additional analyses reveal that the winners-losers distinction tends to wane over the course of an electoral cycle but becomes stronger again if (non)-representation persists for a longer period.

Overall, article 4 contributes to the literature in several ways: First, it integrates two strands of literature under the common framework of individual representation by the government, showing how their arguments and findings relate to each other. Second, it presents robust evidence that representation by the government, measured through various indicators, positively relates to political support even in a least-likely case such as the Netherlands, which is a consolidated, well-functioning consensus democracy. The different indicators highlight that representation by the government coalition as a whole matters even more than the classic winners-losers distinction in such a system with frequent coalition cabinets. Third, by using long-term panel data and various modeling approaches to rule out endogeneity concerns, it methodologically improves on previous research using cross-sectional data (Anderson et al. 2005, Stecker/Tausendpfund 2016) or short-term panel data focusing on a single election or electoral cycle (Blais et al. 2017, Dahlberg/Linde 2017). Fourth, the possibility of an anticipation effect suggests that previous studies relying on short-term comparisons before and after an election (Banducci/Karp 2003) should be treated with caution. Finally, it reveals information about the temporal dynamic of the relationship and the long-term implications of the degree to which citizens are represented by their governments.

Beyond these contributions of the individual articles, this dissertation as a whole also presents further advances to the literature on political support. First, unlike most research, which focuses on evaluative support for the regime and its institutions in the form of political trust or satisfaction with democracy (Anderson/Guillory 1997, Aarts/Thomassen 2008, Zmerli/van der Meer 2017, Uslaner 2018), three of the four articles in this thesis look at affective, principled support for democracy. Despite some progress in recent years (Inglehart 2003, Ariely/Davidov 2011, Kotzian 2011, Cho 2014, Magalhães 2014, Teixeira et al. 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016, Sack 2017, Graham/Svolik 2020, Claassen/Magalhães 2022, Malka et al. 2022, Torcal/Magalhães 2022, Wuttke et al. 2022, Svolik et al. 2023), research on diffuse support for democracy in consolidated democracies is still underdeveloped in comparison. This is problematic, given that earlier research warns against viewing satisfaction with democracy or political trust as measures of democratic legitimacy (Linde/Ekman 2003, Thomassen et al. 2017) and considering its relevance for democratic survival (Linz/Stepan 1996b, Claassen 2020a).

Second, it allows for a nuanced interpretation of how stable support for democracy is and which factors affect it. In this regard, it echoes previous research that support for democracy should be regarded as considerably more stable than satisfaction with democracy or political trust (van der Meer 2017, Claassen/Magalhães 2022). The reason for this lies not only in how individuals grow up under different societal circumstances (Inglehart 2003, Sack 2017). Articles 1 and 2 show that it also reflects deep-rooted psychological differences between individuals such as personality traits or social identities. At the same time, even diffuse support for democracy is far from immune to current events. It is subject to short-term fluctuations with economic crises (Cordero/Simón 2016) and government performance (Magalhães 2014). Articles 2 and 3 present further evidence for this, but also show that the economy and crises may not affect all individuals in the same way. Economic hardship reinforces the opposing relationships between different conceptions of national identity and support for democracy, while the consequences of the Covid-19 pandemic threat differ depending on how individuals emotionally react to it. As a result, support for democracy may increase for some individuals due to current events but decrease for others.

Third, this thesis highlights the relevance of political-psychological explanations for support for the regime and its institutions. In this regard, relatively stable internal psychological characteristics such as personality traits and social identities are important but previously neglected drivers of differences in the support for democracy between individuals. Article 1 presents a comprehensive theoretical argument linking big five personality traits with support for democracy, which is supported by empirical data. Article 2 offers an identity-based account of support for democracy, which develops arguments for the conflicting relationship of different conceptions of the national community. At the same time, support for the regime and its institutions can also be affected by the more immediate interaction of psychological processes with the environment through emotions and cognitive processing of information. Article 3 builds on a neuroscientific perspective of affect, showing that different appraisals of threat in times of a crisis have contrasting consequences for democratic regime preferences. Article 4 links arguments of the winners-losers gap in evaluative support for the regime and its institutions with the literature on the congruence of citizens with their government and posits that the rational, cognitive psychological and emotional explanations apply to both literatures to different degrees.

Fourth, two of the articles provide insights into the interrelationship between different objects of political support. Article 2 presents evidence that support for different conceptions of who should belong to the political community affects support for a democratic regime. Support for a civic conception of the national community is more in line with how open, liberal democracies define citizenship. In contrast, an ethnic conception stands for an idealized, exclusive version of the political community that leaves out considerable portions of a country's citizens. The results suggest that democratic legitimacy requires a voluntarist conception of the national community that does not exclude certain citizens based on objectivist criteria. Article 4 relates specific support for incumbent governments in a broad sense to evaluative support for the regime and its institutions. Representation by the government through vote choice or intentions, sympathy or ideological congruence can be argued to approximate such specific support. As a result, this highlights that mid-range indicators of political support can be affected by who is in power and whether an individual supports them or not.

Finally, this thesis offers a new perspective on how to conceptualize political support on a continuum from specific to diffuse support. Building on Easton's (1965, 1975) original conceptualization as well as further developments by Norris (1999b, 2011, 2017) and Dalton (1999), it attempts to overcome the difficulties associated with their conceptualizations by regarding the broad object categories and the nature of political support as two nested differentiations of the spectrum from diffuse to specific political support. With respect to support for the regime and its institutions, it also presents a comprehensive overview of the literature, summarizing findings of research on the various important explanations for this kind of support. Given the conceptualization of diffuse vs. specific support, research examining short-term explanations (performance, representation, exogenous crises) tends to focus on more specific forms of support, while research on long-term explanations (predispositions, institutions, socialization) also examines their influence on diffuse forms of support. However, it becomes evident that this distinction is far from clear-cut and the works of this thesis contribute to establishing a more nuanced picture.

Limitations

Naturally, there are important limitations to this thesis across all four articles that have to be acknowledged in the interpretation of the results. First, regarding the geographic scope of this thesis, all articles restrict themselves to European democracies. Article 4 is most narrow in this regard, looking only at a single country for which long-term panel data with the relevant indicators is available, the Netherlands. While studying this country has its merits as a least-likely case of an established consensus democracy with frequent multi-party cabinets, it remains uncertain whether the results regarding the different indicators and the temporal dynamics of the relationship can be translated to other contexts. Articles 1 and 3 take a comparative approach looking at six Western European high-income consolidated democracies. In international comparison, these countries are relatively similar in that a large share of its citizens are socialized in existential security and in a democratic regime, which leads to a rather informed understanding of what democracy entails (Inglehart 2003). While this holds important contextual factors constant, it restricts generalization to other consolidated democracies. Some of the theoretical arguments explicitly refer to a democratic context and may need to be adjusted when looking at authoritarian countries, for instance when it comes to preferences for the status quo or traditional practices. As a result, the personality roots of support for democracy and the consequences of emotional reactions to pandemic threat may differ somewhat between consolidated democracies, newer democracies and autocracies (see, e.g., Armendáriz Miranda/Cawvey 2021). Future research should thus evaluate whether the same theoretical arguments hold in these different contexts. Article 2 examines the broadest sample of

24 Western and Eastern European democracies, which include both consolidated and newer democracies as well as countries with a stronger tradition of civic and ethnic conceptions of nationhood. Nevertheless, whether this relationship holds outside of the European context and whether different conceptions of the national community also drive demand for democracy in autocratic regimes remains to be seen.

Second, all articles in this thesis employ observational research designs and thus do not allow for causal inference. While the theoretical arguments are causal in their nature, the estimates of the empirical analyses should be interpreted as relationships instead of causal effects, despite the best efforts at articulating a plausible identification strategy for the concept of interest (Keele et al. 2020). Articles 1, 2 and 3 use (repeated) cross-sectional data and thus fully rely on the inclusion of relevant confounders. For the personality traits examined in article 1, this issue may not have as much weight as with other predictors, given that personality traits are regarded as stable psychological constructs rooted in genetics (Sanchez-Roige et al. 2018). As such, many common predictors of regime support are post-treatment rather than confounders. Nevertheless, the role of genetics needs to be considered. While personality traits could be argued to be the expression of genetics and transmit their influence to political attitudes, it is also possible that genes affect support for democracy independently of personality traits, in which case they could confound the relationship (Verhulst et al. 2012). With regards to national identity, certain psychological tendencies, such as an openness to experience or a social dominance orientation (Pratto et al. 1994), may underlie both preferences for an ethnic conception of nationhood as well as support for democracy. Similarly, it cannot be entirely ruled out that both conceptions of national identity and the prevalence of support for democracies have jointly arisen from nation-building processes. When it comes to emotional reactions to pandemic threat, these are argued to arise from different appraisals of the threat. However, it is uncertain whether all factors that influence how individuals appraise pandemic threat and independently affect their regime preferences at the same time are accounted for. Article 4 employs long-term panel data and employs a research design that goes further with regards to causal inference than previous studies. It employs a fixed-effects approach that controls for all stable differences between individuals. Additionally, extended analyses restrict the sample to respondents with a consistent ideology or party preference in order to rule out endogeneity concerns. Nevertheless, this still does not ascertain causal inference as other time-variable confounders may have been omitted. Future studies on all of these topics should employ (quasi-)experimental research designs to allow for causal estimates of the quantities of interest.

Third, none of the articles in this thesis explore the mechanisms discussed in the theoretical arguments in detail. With regards to the personality foundations of regime preferences, future studies should evaluate if big five personality traits truly influence whether individuals deem certain qualities or consequences of democracies, such as democratic freedoms or their lower degree of corruption, important or not. For different conceptions of nationhood, it may be important to test whether they truly align with certain characteristics of regime types such as the inclusive nature or equality of democracies. Concerning the political ramification of emotions, it should be scrutinized in greater detail how they relate to perceptions regarding the controllability and the management of the threat. For representation by the government, it should be tested whether the cognitive psychological and emotional mechanisms not only work for input-oriented perspectives of representation focusing on elections (although the emotional mechanism is disputed, see Gärtner et al. 2020, Daoust et al. 2021), but also for output-oriented perspectives of representation focusing on policies.

Fourth, relatedly, articles 1, 2 and 3 only look at general regime preferences between a democratic and autocratic regime, but do not discriminate between different aspects or sub-types of these broad regime types. This is also a consequence of the more abstract measures used for distinguishing between democratic and autocratic regime preferences, which do not address support for certain characteristics of these regime types in more detail. Liberal democracy consists of both majority rule and minority rights, and given previous findings that support may differ between these two principles (Claassen 2020b), it would be fruitful to evaluate these differences in more detail. Furthermore, research has begun to differentiate between support for various conceptions of democracy (König et al. 2022). In light of the discussion on democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016, Waldner/Lust 2018, Haggard/Kaufman 2021), a deeper understanding of illiberal conceptions of democracy and support for various versions of defective democracies (Merkel 2004) needs to be developed in future research. Given that executive aggrandizement by frequently populist leader figures has become the most prevalent threat to liberal democracy, research needs to delve deeper into public support for this form of democratic backsliding (Bermeo 2016, Foa/Mounk 2016, Schafer 2021, Gidengil et al. 2022).

Finally, given the focus of this thesis on political support defined as an attitude (Norris 2017: 20), it has neglected to answer the question whether the political-psychological explanations of support for the political regime and its institutions also have behavioral consequences. While anti-democratic sentiments and discontent with the functioning of democratic institutions may be problematic themselves (Rooduijn 2018, Claassen 2020a), they can only become a threat to democracy or a pressure to reform institutions if they translate to political (in-)action. Future studies should thus dig deeper into whether the explanations for political support examined in this thesis also lead to regime undermining behavior, protest or other political action.

Implications for future research and society

Despite these limitations, this thesis has important implications both for future research and for democratic societies in general. This particularly concerns the nature of diffuse support for democracy. In conjunction with previous research on this topic (Magalhães 2014, Cordero/Simón 2016, van der Meer 2017, Claassen/Magalhães 2022, Wuttke et al. 2022), this thesis has argued that affective support for a democratic regime should be regarded as an inherently more stable form of support than satisfaction with democracy, political trust or specific support for incumbent authorities. Nevertheless, it is still subject to short-term fluctuations with government performance and crises. As a result, earlier literature may have somewhat overstated the stability of support for democracy. In future research, the extent to which support for democracy is stable or can be altered by current events needs to be gauged more precisely. Given the rather modest effect sizes of current events (Cordero/Simón 2016, Erhardt et al. 2022), it seems likely that regime preferences are not easily undermined and that even in crises, a large segment of society stands firmly behind democratic principles. At the same time, it would be dangerous to discount or downplay such modest fluctuations in the support for democracy. In light of recent findings that diffuse support for the regime is declining slightly in some countries and in some parts of society (Foa/Mounk 2016, 2017, Claassen 2020a, Malka et al. 2022, Wuttke et al. 2022, Svolik et al. 2023), such modest fluctuations could bring democratic societies to a tipping point where support for democracy is not broad enough to prevent attempts of executive aggrandizement (Graham/Svolik 2020).

When it comes to the reasons for the stability of democratic regime preferences, this thesis implies that further attention needs to be paid to personal predispositions. Previous research has emphasized that democratic institutions, economic security and social capital can foster stable support for democracy in the long run through socialization (Putnam 1993, Dalton 1994, Inglehart 2003) and to some extent also through adult relearning (Mishler/Rose 2007). This, however, neglects the existence of considerable differences between individuals who grow up in the same society where these factors are similar to some degree. Personal predispositions contribute to explaining these differences. Given the findings that big five personality traits shape support for democracy, these differences between individuals may to some extent even be genetic (Sanchez-Roige et al. 2018). This suggests that there may be some limits on how much political interventions can influence regime support. Some individuals may be more inclined or disinclined to support democracy based on their predispositions no matter how much politics and society attempt to promote democracy among their citizens. Future research needs to address this genetic component and estimate its precise influence on regime preferences. At the same time, however, while personality traits are rather stable across cultures, their influence adapts to the environment (Schmitt et al. 2007, McCrae/Costa 2008): being slightly predisposed towards authoritarian regimes compared to the average citizen means something different in a consolidated democracy, where democracy is "the only game in town" (Linz/Stepan 1996a: 5), than in a regime in transition. As a result, developing strong democratic institutions, affluent economies and a society rich in social capital still remains crucial for the overall levels of support for democracy in society.

In this regard, another mechanism through which politics is able to foster support for democracy is the conception of a national identity. Article 2 has highlighted that national identity should not be viewed lopsidedly as a threat or a necessity to democracy, but that it rather depends on how the national community is conceived. To promote democratic principles and values, political education should emphasize a civic, voluntarist conception of the national community that allows outsiders to take part if they learn the language and adapt to the political culture of a country. In contrast, political education should not endorse an ethnic conception of the national community restricting membership to people born in a country or with national ancestry. Although this is a first step into examining the ramifications of an individual-level national identity for democracy, national identity is not a unidimensional concept (Helbling et al. 2016, Wamsler 2022). Future research should investigate whether the strength of the national identity and nationalist as opposed to patriotic sentiments also relate to support for democracy.

In terms of the malleability of democratic regime preferences through performance and crises, this thesis highlights that support for democracy is subject to short-term fluctuations. An important implication of this thesis, however, is that the economy or a pandemic may have different effects between individuals, depending for instance on their identity or emotional reactions. This is an important refinement of previous findings that have to a large part assumed a uniform influence. Future studies should address this and take a closer look at the heterogeneous effect of current events. For society at large, this also has crucial implications. On the one hand, the threat of crises to democracy may be more limited if support for democracy only erodes for certain segments of society. On the other hand, crises may affect particularly those segments of society who were already disillusioned with democracy and push them over the edge towards supporting authoritarian alternatives.

Finally, research has argued a long-term experience of political discontent may also undermine regime support in consolidated democracies (Easton 1965). In this regard, article 4 considers the temporal dynamics of representation by the government for such discontent in the form of lower levels of satisfaction with democracy, external political efficacy and political trust. It implies that losing an election and not being represented by the government in the beginning only lead to a short-term discontent with how the political system functions in practice. If non-representation persists for a longer time, however, this discontent reinforces and grows substantially. Alternation between governments of different ideological spectrums should thus be considered crucial to ensuring that a large segment of society does not continuously feel underrepresented by its government. Future research should delve deeper into the relationship between dissatisfaction with democratic practice and institutions and diffuse support for democracy. In this vein, it is important to assess under what circumstances the two go hand in hand and nurture the formation of critical citizens (Norris 1999a, 2011) and under what circumstances a long-term experience of dissatisfaction with the political system erodes support for democracy, particularly in a context of rising populism and polarization (Norris/Inglehart 2019, Svolik 2019).

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Ich erkläre hiermit, dass ich diese Arbeit selbständig verfasst und keine anderen als die angegebenen Quellen benutzt habe. Alle Koautorenschaften sowie alle Stellen, die wörtlich oder sinngemäss aus Quellen entnommen wurden, habe ich als solche gekennzeichnet. Mir ist bekannt, dass andernfalls der Senat gemäß Artikel 36 Absatz 1 Buchstabe o des Gesetzes vom 5. September 1996 über die Universität zum Entzug des aufgrund dieser Arbeit verliehenen Titels berechtigt ist.

Bern, 09.03.2023

Ort, Datum

Julian Erhardt

Name in Reinschrift und Unterschrift