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The Development of Political Support in Eastern Europe since 1991

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Abstract

This thesis investigates the development of political support in post-communist Eastern Europe since 1991, focusing on the factors that shape citizens' trust in democracy, political institutions, and governmental performance. Drawing on data from the World Values Survey (WVS) and the European Values Study (EVS) across ten Eastern European countries and five survey waves, the study applies an Ordinary Least Squares (OLS) regression framework with country-fixed effects to test three theoretical perspectives: modernization theory, socialization theory, and cultural theory.

The results only partially support modernization theory, as no consistent effect of economic growth on approval for democracy was found. However, there is evidence that education increases approval for democracy while reducing confidence in political institutions. Additionally, evidence was found for a reversing cohort effect: in the early survey waves, older cohorts expressed higher approval for democracy, whereas in later waves, younger cohorts expressed more support for democracy. Finally, there is evidence of an increasing effect of interpersonal trust on political support, indicating a change in political culture in Eastern Europe.

Overall, the findings suggest that political support in Eastern Europe has evolved from initial post-transition euphoria through phases of disillusionment toward a more stable yet differentiated form of democratic commitment. The analysis highlights that modernization, socialization, and cultural legacies jointly shape political support in new democracies and that the consolidation of democracy depends not only on economic progress but also on the gradual internalization of democratic norms and interpersonal trust. Additionally, there is evidence that a cohort shift has taken place over the past 30 years: while in the early phases of democratic transition older cohorts were particularly euphoric about democracy, in the later stages younger cohorts express higher approval rates for democracy.

Zusammenfassung

Diese Masterarbeit untersucht die Entwicklung politischer Unterstützung in den postkommunistischen Ländern Osteuropas seit 1991 und konzentriert sich dabei auf die Faktoren, die das Vertrauen der Bürger in die Demokratie, politische Institutionen und die Leistungsfähigkeit der Regierung beeinflussen. Auf Grundlage von Daten der World Values Survey (WVS) und der European Values Study (EVS) über fünf Erhebungswellen in zehn osteuropäischen Ländern wird ein Ordinary-Least-Squares-(OLS-)Regressionsansatz mit Länderfixeffekten angewendet, um drei theoretische Perspektiven zu prüfen: Modernisierungstheorie, Sozialisationstheorie und kulturelle Ansätze.

Die Ergebnisse stützen die Modernisierungstheorie nur teilweise, da kein konsistenter Effekt wirtschaftlichen Wachstums auf die Zustimmung zur Demokratie festgestellt werden konnte. Es zeigt sich jedoch, dass Bildung die Zustimmung zur Demokratie erhöht, gleichzeitig aber das Vertrauen in politische Institutionen verringert. Zudem wurde ein sich umkehrender Kohorteneffekt nachgewiesen: Während in den frühen Erhebungswellen ältere Kohorten eine höhere Zustimmung zur Demokratie äußerten, sind es in späteren Wellen eher die jüngeren Kohorten, die mehr Unterstützung bekunden. Schließlich zeigt sich ein zunehmender Einfluss interpersonales Vertrauens auf politische Unterstützung, was auf einen Wandel der politischen Kultur in Osteuropa hindeutet.

Insgesamt deuten die Ergebnisse darauf hin, dass sich die politische Unterstützung in Osteuropa von einer anfänglichen Euphorie nach dem Systemwechsel über Phasen der Ernüchterung hin zu einer stabileren, aber differenzierteren Form demokratischer Bindung entwickelt hat. Die Analyse verdeutlicht, dass Modernisierung, Sozialisation und kulturelle Prägungen gemeinsam politische Unterstützung in jungen Demokratien formen und dass die Konsolidierung von Demokratie nicht nur wirtschaftlichen Fortschritt erfordert, sondern auch die schrittweise Verinnerlichung demokratischer Normen und interpersonales Vertrauens. Zudem gibt es Evidenz dafür, dass in den vergangenen 30 Jahren ein Kohortenwandel stattgefunden hat: Während in den frühen Phasen des demokratischen Übergangs insbesondere ältere Kohorten besonders euphorisch gegenüber der Demokratie waren, zeigen in den späteren Phasen jüngere Kohorten höhere Zustimmungswerte zur Demokratie.

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I. List of abbreviations

EVS	European Value Study
IVS	Integrated Value Survey
NBB	New Baltic Barometer
NDB	New Democracy Barometer
OLS	Ordinary-Least-Squares
WVS	World Value Survey

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1. Introduction

Following the collapse of communist regimes around 1990, Eastern Europe experienced profound political, economic, and social transformations. Democratic institutions were established almost overnight, while market liberalization and integration into the European and Global economy had a profound impact on everyday life. More than three decades later, these states represent a valuable laboratory for examining as to how political support develops under conditions of rapid systemic change. The question arises how the political cultures of Eastern European countries have developed and how support for democratic principles, institutions, and governments has evolved, considering the legacy of decades of authoritarian rule.

Political support is crucial for the stability of a political system. Without a basic level of citizens' trust and support for political actors, governments struggle to implement new policies and the ability of political institutions to enforce laws may be compromised. Low levels of political support are therefore not only a sign of dissatisfaction with political actors, but can also endanger the stability of political systems (Easton, 1975). A central conceptual distinction in this thesis is between diffuse and specific support. Diffuse support refers to a general endorsement of the political system and the values it embodies - for example, democracy and citizen participation. Specific support, by contrast, concerns confidence in particular political projects, institutions, or officeholders and in their capacity to fulfil their obligations.

This thesis applies three different theoretical approaches to explain recent developments in political support in Eastern European countries after democratization in 1990: modernization approaches, socialization approaches and cultural approaches.

Modernization approaches predict that rising levels of education and economic growth will lead to a spread of post-material values among the population, which strengthens diffuse support for

democracy, but will also result in a more critical evaluation of political actors, leading to declining specific support.

Socialization approaches suggest that generations raised in democratic systems internalize democratic values and therefore display higher levels of diffuse support for democratic political systems than older generations, which were socialized under authoritarian rule.

Finally, cultural approaches emphasize the importance of political culture—shaped by historical legacies—in determining the distribution of political support. They predict that societies with higher levels of interpersonal trust and social capital tend to be more willing to extend this trust to their political institutions and to the political system as a whole.

This thesis aims to examine to what extent the different approaches can explain developments in political support in Eastern European countries over the past 35 years. To this end, an OLS-analysis with country fixed effects will be conducted using World Value Survey (WVS) and European Value Study (EVS) data covering ten Eastern European countries and five survey waves. In doing so, it contributes to a more nuanced understanding of how structural conditions, historical experiences, and cultural factors jointly shape the development of political support in new democracies. The central research question is:

How did political support change over time in post-communist societies in Eastern Europe, and what are the key drivers of this change?

2. Political Support

The concept of political support has been the subject of extensive research in political science. This chapter provides a comprehensive overview of the existing academic literature on the topic, focusing on the conceptual frameworks developed by David Easton and Pippa Norris. In particular, it discusses their distinction between diffuse and specific political support.

Political support is an extensively defined concept. It refers to the attitudes, feelings and actions individuals or groups express or perform in relation to the political system they live in. In general, the notion of support can be defined through both actions and attitudes towards someone or something. Thereby, actions need to be backed by positive underlying attitudes towards the supported object - e.g., because something is seen as valid, right, or just. Therefore, support can be defined as a positive attitude that a person holds towards an object or an action (Easton, 1975).

In political science, one of the first attempts to define the term “political support” was made by David Easton in 1965. His definition forms a well-established foundation, as it is part of a broader framework and offers an initial conceptual differentiation between different forms of political support. Consequently, Easton’s definition has gained significant traction within the academic discourse on political support.

In this theoretical framework, the political system is conceptualized as a core surrounded by a shell. It was posited that a political system (referred to as the ‘core’) is in a constant state of balancing the demands of its citizens (referred to as the ‘environment’). These demands consist of expectations, needs, interests and desires directed towards the political system by individuals or groups (e.g. by interest groups). These demands can cause stress, given that not all demands can be met, either due to limited resources or because demands are not addressed quickly enough. This may result in a state of disillusionment and alienation between the environment

and the core. Nevertheless, political systems often persist even in times of crisis or after unpopular decisions. Therefore, another force must connect the system to its environment when demands are not met: support (Easton, 1965). Based on the observation that political systems can survive times of crisis even when support for political actors is low, Easton concludes that there must be two different forms of political support: specific and diffuse support.

Specific support is granted by citizens when they are satisfied with the outputs generated by the political system. In other words, people support current political projects implemented by political authorities - e.g. stricter environmental policies or good economic policies. Specific support can be granted for political actions that align with the preferences of citizens. Moreover, specific support may also be granted towards political incumbents, parties or governments. In this case, specific support does not necessarily reflect approval for the respective political views, but a more general feeling of trust in the person's or institution's capability to fulfil their obligations. Since incumbents, governments or current political projects change constantly, specific support is considered a short-term indicator for the evaluation of political authorities' performance. However, since the capacities of any political system and every political institution are limited and cannot fulfil all citizens' expectations, every citizen will inevitably experience disappointments regarding their political demands or trust. Thus, no political system can rely solely on specific support to maintain stability.

To explain the durability of political systems, Easton introduced the concept of diffuse support. Diffuse support is defined as political support for what the system represents rather than how it performs. Unlike specific support, diffuse support is not tied to the immediate actions of political authorities' performance or short-term benefits (Easton, 1965). Instead, it reflects a deeper connection between citizens and their political system, often based on shared values and identity. Diffuse support is thus more durable than specific support, as it remains stable across changes in government and day-to-day politics (Fuchs, 1989). This distinction explains why

citizens may vote against incumbents out of dissatisfaction and yet still support fundamental principles of democracy and its institutions such as parliament or the police (Easton, 1965). In contrast to specific support, diffuse support can be applied in different forms: legitimacy and trust.

Legitimacy means the belief that it is “right and proper” to accept the authorities and the rules of the regime (Easton, 1965). A political system is seen as legitimate when citizens view it as consistent with their own moral values and norms. Trust, on the other hand, refers to the expectation that the political system will deliver beneficial outcomes, even if citizens cannot directly observe or influence its processes (Easton, 1965; Gamson, 1971). Trust and legitimacy can be applied on two different levels: to the regime itself and to its authorities, meaning that people can see the regime as legitimate and/or trustworthy, and/or its authorities. However, the levels of regime and authorities cannot be equated: Think of a political regime which contains highly corrupt authorities. People might be willing to see the political system itself as legitimate and trustworthy but refuse to trust its authorities.

Additionally, diffuse support can be granted on the abstract level of political community, which is the sum of people that live in a political system and are subject to its laws and values and accept its authorities. Easton argues that for a political system to be stable, diffuse political support must be granted on all three levels: political community, regime and authorities.

Easton’s distinction in diffuse and specific is capable to explain how political systems can survive times of crises and why citizens may vote against incumbents out of dissatisfaction and yet still support fundamental principles of democracy and its institutions such as parliaments or the police (Easton, 1965). However, diffuse and specific support are not entirely independent. Persistent dissatisfaction with political performance (low specific support) may also lead to the erosion of diffuse support, as frustrations about political action can translate into alienation

from the political system when people feel that it is incapable of producing the desired outcomes. Likewise, sudden political disappointment may undermine loyalty and trigger frustration leading to declining diffuse support (Davies, 1962; Easton, 1975).

To summarize, in Easton's framework specific support describes the satisfaction with political outcomes and political actors, while diffuse support reflects a general attitude toward the political system. Diffuse support may be based on legitimacy, the belief that procedures are morally justified and appropriate, and/or on trust - the belief that institutions act in the public interest and produce good political outputs. Combining these two forms of support with the different political entities they may target produces Easton's matrix of political support (see Table 1).

Table 1: David Easton's concept of political support adopted from Fuchs (1989)

Kind of support	Source	Political community	Regime	Authority
diffuse	Legitimation	Identification with political community	Legitimacy of regime	Legitimacy of authority
	Trust		Trust into regime	Trust into authority
specific	Short-term benefit			Satisfaction with daily outputs

However, Easton's concept has been subject to criticism in academic literature. Scholars criticized the blurred separation between specific and diffuse support: For example, since trust—like specific support—appears to depend on satisfaction with political outputs, Dieter Fuchs (Fuchs, 1989) questioned how these two dimensions can be distinguished, given that Easton (1965, p. 273) explicitly defines diffuse support as being independent of outputs. Although Easton argues that trust, as a form of diffuse support, is rooted in a general sense of satisfaction with the system's performance—whereas specific support reflects short-term satisfaction with particular political outputs—Fuchs criticizes that the boundaries between diffuse support and specific support remain vague (Fuchs, 1989).

Another inconsistency in Easton's theory lies in the incoherent definition of diffuse support. When first defining it, Easton emphasizes that the emotional attachment between the political system and its members is generated "*at an early stage of maturation process [...]*" (Easton, 1965, p. 272). In this definition, diffuse support appears to be something irrational, and emotionally grounded. However, as discussed before, when Easton differentiates the two dimensions of diffuse support - legitimacy and trust – he describes legitimacy as a moral feeling towards the political system while trust as based on a rational evaluation of system outputs. It therefore remains unclear whether and to what extent diffuse support consists of rational feelings towards system outputs. Although the separation in diffuse and specific support is meaningful, the strict distinction between the two dimensions seems to be incoherent.

The incoherencies in Easton's theory were addressed by Pippa Norris (2011) in her book *Democratic Deficit*, where she revisits Easton's concept and further develops his framework. Unlike David Easton, Norris does not maintain a sharp distinction between diffuse and specific support. Instead, she acknowledges that the two concepts may overlap and the boundaries between them might be fluid. Moreover, she elaborates Easton's concept in more detail. Her concept of political support includes five levels: national identity, approval of core principles and normative values, evaluation of regime performance, confidence in regime institutions and approval of incumbent officeholders (see Figure 1). In this model, national identity represents the most diffuse form of support, while approval for incumbents' officeholders is the most specific.

In comparison to Easton, institutional trust plays only a subordinate role in Norris's model for conceptualizing diffuse support. Instead, she places greater emphasis on ideals and values such as national pride and democratic principles. Unlike Easton, Norris does not distinguish between political community, regime, and authority as separate dimensions of political support, but integrates them into a unified, single-dimensional framework. The absence of multiple

dimensions simplifies empirical operationalization, which is why Norris's model is frequently used in academic literature when addressing questions of diffuse and specific support.

In summary, both Easton and Norris offer valuable frameworks for understanding political support. They distinguish between a diffuse form, which reflects general approval of the political system and a specific form, referring to confidence in political institutions and office holders. However, other than Easton, Norris denies a strict separation between diffuse and specific support. The flexibility in Norris' model provides a more practical and applicable basis for empirical research. This thesis therefore adopts her model to explore contemporary dynamics of political support in Eastern Europe. Her idea of fluid boundaries between diffuse and specific support will be central, as it offers the opportunity to operationalize the concept of political support with multiple variables that capture more diffuse or more specific dimensions, without being forced to make a sharp distinction between the two concepts. Consequently, her model will serve as the theoretical foundation of this thesis when empirically examining the development of political support in Eastern Europe later.

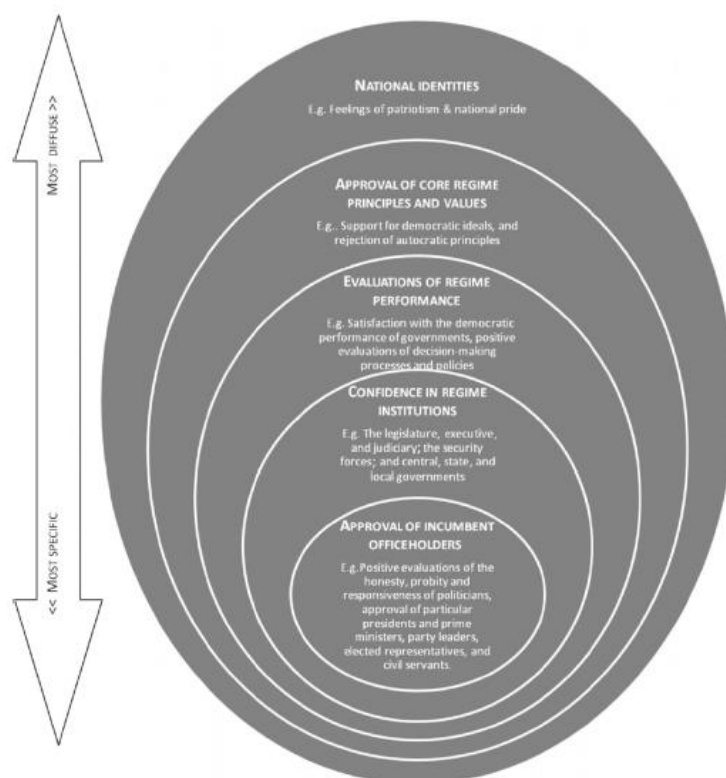


Figure 1: System support adopted from Norris (2011, p.24)

3. Theories on Origins of Political Support

In the previous chapter, the concept of political support was discussed and defined. In this chapter, two theories on the origin of political support will be introduced: (1) Modernization Theory and (2) Culture Theory. In the introduction, the socialization approach was mentioned as well. However, the socialization approach does not constitute an independent theoretical framework but is derived from other theories, such as modernization theory and cultural theory. For this reason, a detailed discussion of the socialization approach is omitted. Rather, it is presented in Chapter 4.3. with the derived hypotheses.

Modernization Theory argues that with modernization, economic development, rising economic prosperity and especially with increasing education, citizens will become more interested in political participation. This development may lead to more support for democratic principles. However, since citizens become more critical, trust in political institutions may decline. This can result in rising diffuse support but shrinking specific support.

Cultural approaches, on the other hand, argue that political support arises from interpersonal trust: people who are inclined to trust other people are also willing to trust and support the political system, its institutions and politicians. Since the ability to trust other people develops in childhood, supporters of cultural approaches claim that historic experiences are passed on over generations and affect the ability of individuals to develop political support.

3.1. Modernization Theory

The modernization theory represents a broad group of theories that address the process of modernization and its consequences for society, politics and economic development. When examining the effects of modernization on political support, supporters of modernization theory argue that economic welfare promotes democratic values and, therefore, increases support for democratic political systems in the population.

The first scholar who addressed the question of how modernization affects political systems was Seymour Martin Lipset (1959). He argued that modernization is accompanied by rising GDP per capita, increasing literacy rates, industrialization and urbanization. Since longstanding stable democracies like the United Kingdom, the United States of America and Scandinavian Countries were leading in all these categories ahead of unstable or young democracies, Lipset concludes that this social structure, which is caused by economic development, must result in democracy. This has become known as the Lipset hypothesis or stabilization hypothesis:

“The more well-to-do a nation, the greater the chances that it will sustain democracy.” (Lipset, 1959, p. 75)

However, Lipset fails to provide a clear causal relationship in respect of the question, whether economic development promotes democracy or whether democracy promotes economic development. Additionally, the Lipset-Hypothesis has been criticized for being Eurocentric since multiple examples prove that economic development and democracy do not necessarily go in hand, e.g. Saudi Arabia (Huntington, 1971).

In 1977, Robert Inglehart revised Lipset’s modernization theory and focused particularly on individual value changes among citizens living in democracies, rather than on the broader social structures that emerge during periods of economic modernization, as Lipset did. Inglehart argues that as people have different needs and desires, they tend to value the scarcest things the most. For example, in poorer societies where economic security is not guaranteed, people tend to prioritize material values such as income and stability (Inglehart, 1977).

However, as modern developments like rising incomes, education, division of labor and social security systems promote overall life security, they allow individuals to focus less on materialistic concerns (income, housing, employment, etc.) and more on post-material desires like self-fulfillment, equality, environmental protection or social participation. This shift from

materialistic to post-materialistic values encourages greater personal engagement. Furthermore, Inglehart argues that modernization additionally promotes a shift from traditional to rational and secular values. The combination of these value shifts – away from traditional and material values towards secular and post-material values – supports individual autonomy and a stronger desire for political participation, resulting in an increasing interest in democracy, respectively a desire for democracy. In Western societies, post-materialist values are particularly evident among younger generations, especially those born after World War II, who were raised in economically secure environments. Inglehart (1977) argues that the wealthier a household is, the more likely it is to prioritize post-materialistic values.

In a subsequent study, Inglehart & Welzel (2005) identified a strong relationship/correlation between self-expressionist values and democratic norms/values. This relationship is even more robust than other, more established variables in the political science literature, such as interpersonal trust or social commitment (see Chapter 4.2).

While Inglehart (1977) identified a shift towards post-materialistic values as a driver of democratization, Dalton (1999) found evidence for declining specific political support in Western democracies since the late 1960s. Using the country-specific survey data, Dalton observed that trust in political authorities—such as politicians and incumbents—declined between the early 1970s and early 1990s across nearly all surveyed countries, including Austria, Canada, USA, Japan and Sweden. Statements like *Minister Presidents do not care about country or politicians waste taxes* were significantly more approved by respondents in the 1990s than in the 1970s. Additionally, confidence in political institutions across the 17 participating industrial countries dropped in average from 59% in 1980 to 53% in 1990.

Despite this decline in specific support for state authorities and institutions, support for democratic principles remained high. Data from the World Values Survey shows that in the 17

industrial countries analyzed, over 90% of respondents supported the idea of democracy, and more than three-quarters agreed that democracy is the best form of government (Dalton, 1999).

This development of stable diffuse but declining specific support in the second half of the 20th century represented a challenge for classical modernization theory, which would predict that increasing democratization, driven by the spread of post-material values, should lead to general increase of political support. Inglehart (1999) responded to this contradiction by refining modernization theory. He argued that post-materialist values are associated with a more critical stance toward hierarchical authorities—such as religious institutions, the military, or the state in general—regardless of whether their institutions are democratically legitimized or not.

This decline in support for authorities and authoritarian values is particularly evident across different generations, as shown in Figure 2. While the approval for authorities in economically less developed countries remains intergenerationally constant, approval declines in economically developed countries in younger generations, which carry higher levels of post-material values due to financial security.

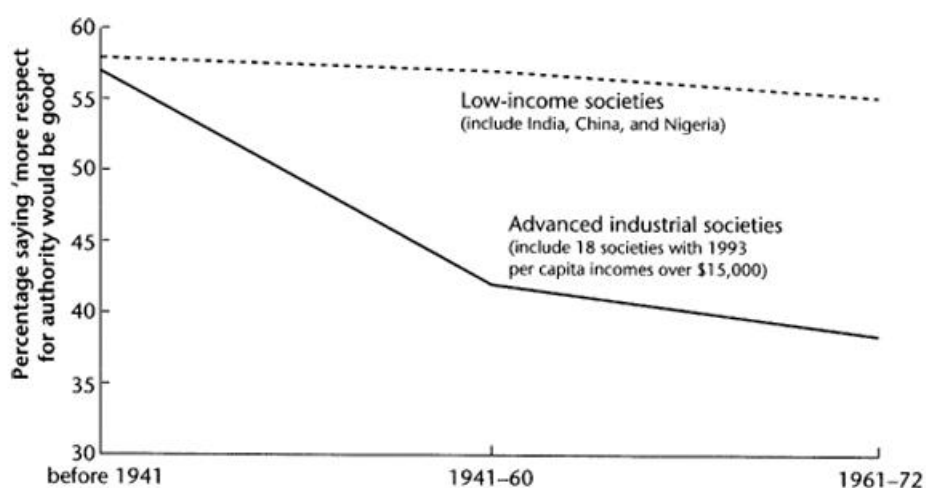


Figure 2: Support for authoritarian values in %, by birth cohort. World Value Survey 1990. Adopted from Inglehart (1999, p. 244.)

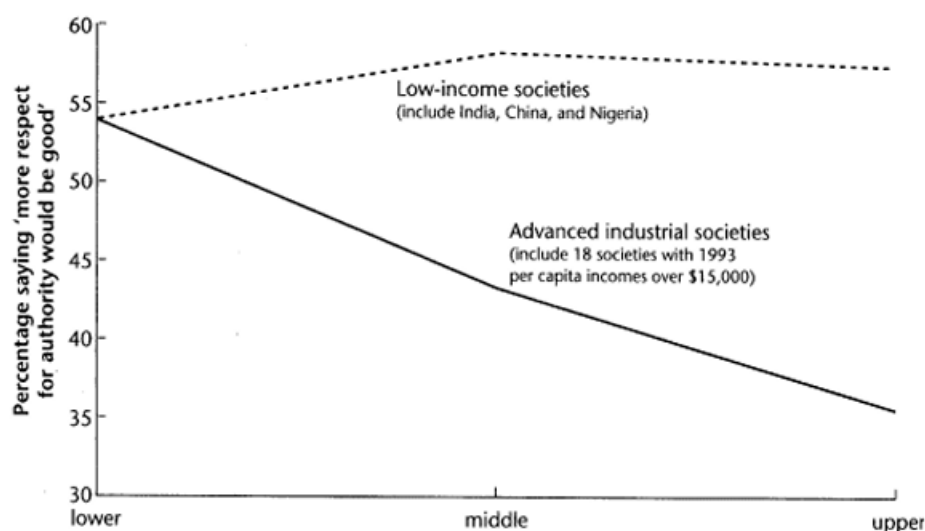


Figure 3: Support for authoritarian values in %, by education level. World Value Survey 1990. Adopted from Inglehart (1999, p. 244.)

However, it is not only financial security that promotes post-material values. Inglehart also argues that higher levels of education lead to an increase in post-material values by broadening individuals' knowledge, critical thinking, and openness to diverse perspectives, making them more likely to embrace progressive and participatory values.

At the same time, skepticism concerning authoritarian leaders is highly correlated with post-materialistic values. Inglehart finds that citizens living in societies with a high share of post-materialistic values tend to evaluate political institutions and officeholders more critical, leading to a decline in specific support.

Applied towards the young democracies of Eastern Europe, modernization theory would suggest that with increasing economic prosperity and rising educational levels, diffuse support should increase while specific support should decrease. However, other approaches suggest that economic development and favorable economic expectations would promote satisfaction with political authorities either because their own financial situation is seen as fair and appropriate or because economic development enhances people's economic security (Chanley et al., 2000; Van Der Meer, 2017).

Thus, economic development appears to influence institutional confidence (respectively, specific support) in two divergent ways: on the one hand, it fosters the spread in post-materialist values, which leads to more critical evaluations of political authorities; on the other hand, it enhances satisfaction with political actors by strengthening people's economic security.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Eastern European democracies have served in numerous studies as a research field for examining the effects of economic development and education on political support, finding mixed results. Lühiste (2006) found a strong correlation between both the own economic satisfaction and the general economic evaluation and institutional trust in the Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia using data from the New Baltics Barometer (NBB) 2001, while the effect of education on institutional trust was significantly negative.

Kunioka & Woller (1999) tested the effect of citizen's economic evaluation of parliamentary democracy (dimension of diffuse support) using survey data from the NDB III (New Democratic Barometer) carried out between 1993 and 1994 in Belarus, Bulgaria, Czechia, Hungary, Poland, Slovakia and Ukraine. While they found significant positive effects for education on diffuse support, they found little or no effect of the own or general economic and financial situation on diffuse support. Although the authors do not neglect the hypothesis that economic development and citizen's evaluation of their economic situation can influence diffuse support in general, they argue that other variables, like social capital, have more explanatory power for diffuse trust. Mishler & Rose (1994) discovered comparable results as they found significant effects of positive economic evaluation on specific support but no significant effect on diffuse support using survey data from the first NDB 1991 from Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania and Slovenia. Additionally, they found positive effects of education on diffuse support. Andrew Roberts (2008) argues that citizens' economic evaluations were the central criterion for voting decisions, meaning that political officeholders were primarily assessed based on their ability to generate stable economic conditions.

Pavlović (2015) addressed the question, how post-material values developed in Eastern European countries between 1990 and 2010. The study finds mixed results: in some countries – for example Czechia and Hungary – the share of people expressing post-materialist values increased significantly; in others, such as Estonia, Ukraine, and Serbia, it remained relatively stable, whereas in Bulgaria and Lithuania, it declined significantly. The study also shows that especially young, well-educated, urban people carry post-material values, proving Inglehart's (1977) modernization theory.

Data from the World Value Survey suggests that the share of citizens carrying mixed or post-material values increased significantly in Eastern European Democracies and has almost reached the level of more established Western democracies like the UK or Finland. In contrast, in the authoritarian and hybrid regimes of Russia, Belarus, and Ukraine, the prevalence of mixed or post-material values remained relatively stable over time. Modernization theory suggests that the strong increase in post-material values goes in hand with an increase in diffuse support and a decline in specific support. However, little research has gone into the question of how modernization affected political support in Eastern Europe over a longer period.

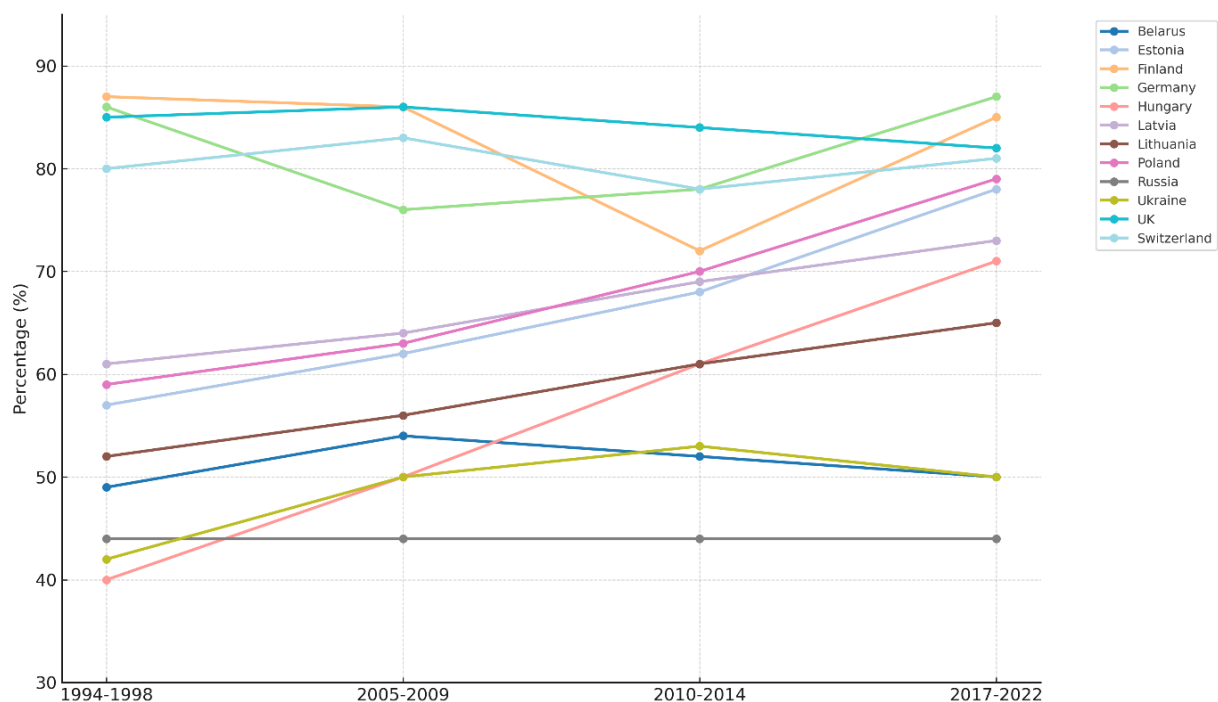


Figure 4: Share of respondents expressing mixed or post-material values per country. Own representation using WVS/EVS-Data (1994-2022)

3.2. Cultural Theory

While modernization theory focuses on the spread of post-materialist values as a predictor for political support, cultural theory stresses the importance of country-specific cultural influences in explaining different levels of political support. Its core assumption is that political support does not depend solely on short-term indicators such as economic or political performance but is profoundly shaped by the social norms and values that define a society's political culture, which in turn has effects on political support within the population. These social norms and values themselves are shaped by the historical experiences of its members. Societies in which interpersonal trust, civic engagement and democratic norms are well established tend to produce citizens who project their trust and norms onto the political institutions and therefore view the political system and its institutions as legitimate. Since characteristics like interpersonal trust are learned in early socialization – in the family, at school and in the community – individual characteristics change little over the lifetime. Even more, they are likely to be passed on to the

next generation. For that reason, political cultures are very sustainable and change slowly as historical legacy still affects today's presence.

One of the first scholars to deal with the question of how political cultures affect political support and political engagement were Almond & Verba (1963). They addressed the question of why some democracies collapsed before the 2nd World War, while others with similar institutional design and comparable socioeconomic states of economic development remained stable. In their study, they focused on the relationship between citizens' participation and their attitudes towards their political system using survey data collected between 1959-1961 from the United States, United Kingdom, West Germany, Italy and Mexico. Indeed, they found substantial differences between the countries' political cultures explainable through their historic legacy. E.g. after the end of World War II West Germans political culture was characterized by a passive civil society. Although participation rates in votes and membership rates in political parties as well as in associations were high, political engagement often remained passive. Almond & Verba described West Germany as a subject political culture, characterized by people's awareness of the political system and governmental authority. However, citizens did not view themselves as active and participating members of the political system, but rather as objects governed by it. The authors explain this passive understanding of political engagement by pointing to Germany's historical legacy: the bad experiences made with intense political mobilization during the Weimar Republic and the Nazi era led to a more reserved and distanced approach to politics in the newly founded Federal Republic.

Italy's political culture was characterized by political alienation, distrust and social isolation. There was little sense of national pride and recognition of any obligation to engage in local political issues among the Italian population. Almond & Verba argue that these tendencies are rooted in Italy's historic experiences: throughout Italian history, nationalism was often associated with humiliation. Moreover, Italians rarely experienced politics as something in which they

could actively participate. As a result, political and civic engagement, as well as interpersonal and institutional trust within society, remained low after the end of World War II.

On the other side, Great Britain and the United States can look back on a long democratic history. Therefore, in both states there is a high sense for politics, involvement and engagement, making them in the author's eyes the prime example of a lively and stable political culture.

Almond's & Verba's study marked the starting point for numerous further investigations into the importance of cultural influences on political support and democratic stability. Putnam et al. (1994) investigated the different institutional performances in Northern and Southern Italy. Although all local governments in Italy shared the same institutional structures, Northern Italy was characterized by efficient and transparent state institutions, whereas South Italian struggled with inefficient and clientelistic state institutions. The authors argued that institutional performance does not solely depend on rules and laws, but also on the social capital in which these institutions are embedded, and they emphasize that social capital is not only necessary for efficient political institutions but also suggest that it is a well-working predictor for evaluating the political culture within a country as social capital goes in hand with higher political support. Social capital is thereby defined by Putnam as "feature of social organization, such as trust, norms, and networks, that can improve the efficiency of society by facilitating coordinated action" (Putnam et al., 1994, p. 167). Social capital can thereby be seen as a broad concept, which is often operationalized through interpersonal trust and civic engagement like club work and voluntary work.

To summarize, cultural approaches emphasize the relevance of historic backgrounds for understanding today's political cultures and their effects on political support. These theories argue that social capital is not only a necessity for efficient political institutions but has a strong positive impact on political support.

Like the modernization theory, also cultural approaches have been applied to post-communist Eastern European democracies to explain the effect of communistic and authoritarian legacy on the young democracies' development. However, the literature is ambiguous on the effect of social capital (mostly operationalized through interpersonal trust) on political support in post-communist societies. Lühiste (2006) found that interpersonal trust is the strongest explanatory variable for institutional confidence in the Baltic States, again using data from New Baltic Barometer (NBB) 2001. Mishler & Rose (2001), on the other hand, did not find any correlation between interpersonal trust and institutional confidence in post-communist countries of Bulgaria, Czechia, Slovakia, Hungary, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, Belarus, Ukraine and Russia using data from the New Democratic Barometer (NDB) V and the New Russia Barometer VII from 1998. They view interpersonal trust as completely exogenous to the political process.

The different effects found for interpersonal trust on institutional trust in Eastern Europe after democratization are thereby in no way individual cases. Academic Literature indeed found very diverse effects of interpersonal trust on institutional trust in young democracies: Some studies found no significant effect at all (Rohrschneider & Schmitt-Beck, 2002), others found significant positive effects (Bargsted et al., 2023) and still others even report negative effects (Kim, 2005) which emphasizes the fact that political cultures and historic legacies differ between countries, depending on what experiences they have had in the past.

The mixed results found by Lühiste (2006) and Mishler & Rose (2001) indicate that political cultures between the Baltic States and the other group of states differs fundamentally in their relationship between civil society and political elites.

An explanation for the absent effect of interpersonal trust on institutional trust found by Mishler & Rose might be found in the deep-rooted low levels of interpersonal trust and a general distrust in political elites caused by experiences of corruption, surveillance and mismanagement before

and after democratic transition (Lühiste, 2006; Mishler & Rose, 1997, 2001). Additionally, multiple studies suggest that social capital in post-communist societies of Central and Eastern Europe after democratization was weak, since there was no cultural history in voluntary work or political engagement (Howard, 2002; Silló, 2016). Since social work was compulsory for elderly people during times of Communism in Eastern Europe, voluntary activities and civil society were under strict state control (Silló, 2016). Influenced by the experiences made during times of communism, social work (now voluntarily) declined after democratization among the population, indicating that the level of social capital during that time was low.

A study from Voicu & Voicu (2009) using WVS/EVS data shows that the share of people doing voluntary work slightly increased in Eastern Europe between 1990 and 2005. The authors argue that this development was mainly driven by economic development and the increase in education, indicating that economic development promotes volunteer work. However, the study also emphasizes that the level of voluntary work remains far below that of Western European countries, even after controlling for income, education, and interpersonal trust, indicating that the communist legacy has negatively affected the development of social capital. A study from Voicu & Voicu (2009) analyzing data from 2004 thereby indicated that voluntary work was significantly stronger consolidated in better developing Eastern European democracies like Poland, Baltic States and Czechia in comparison to hybrid regimes like Russia, Belarus or Ukraine.

Cultural approaches also suggest that democratic transition had varying degrees of effect on the different generations and had particular effect on the political socialization of the younger generation. Although there has been little research generational differences during and after the process of democratic transition, literature suggests that frustration about the bumpy democratization processes and the severe economic turndown was particularly strong among younger people as they experienced the comeback of old political elites, corruption and weak institutions (Schwartz & Winkel, 2016). Data also shows that economic transition hit especially young

generation hard; for example, unemployment rates were higher among younger generations shortly after 1990 (K. Roberts, 2003). Studies also discuss a feeling of identity crises, as especially young adults are torn between new western forms of consumer lifestyle and traditional and national identities (Walker & Stephenson, 2010). It seems likely that this loss of identity in combination with disappointment about democratization and lacking economic recovery resulted in low approval rates among younger generations in early stages of democratization. On the other side, Rose & Mishler (1996) argued that excitement about democracy was particularly strong among older age cohorts before and shortly after 1990. They argue that this excitement was not so much fueled by a real euphoria about democracy, but more about the perspective of escaping authoritarianism and communism. Democracy was seen as the lesser evil, which is why Rose & Mishler referred to this observation as the “Churchill-Effect”.

3.3. Additional influencing factors on political support

Additional to the discussed theories about the roots of political support, academic literature has identified several other factors that influence individuals’ amount of political support. These aspects are shortly presented and discussed below.

3.3.1. *Unemployment & Income*

A substantial body of empirical and theoretical research has shown that economic insecurity is often associated with lower levels of institutional trust. Unemployment, in particular, can undermine confidence in democratic institutions and government performance (Azzollini et al., 2025; Giustozzi & Gangl, 2021). Additionally, economic insecurities are often associated with lower levels of political participation.

Similar effects as for unemployment were observed in relation to income. Individuals with higher incomes are generally more likely to feel empowered by democracy and perceive it as beneficial for their personal and financial security. In contrast, individuals with lower incomes often feel excluded from political processes and believe their voices are not heard, which may

lead to lower levels of trust in the abilities of democracy. In academic literature, these observations are also referred to as “winners-losers” hypothesis (Almond & Verba, 1963; Lipset, 1960).

Thereby, it is important to distinguish between income and economic development: income refers to the relative economic position of individuals within society, whereas economic development denotes a broader societal process. Consequently, the functional relationship between income and economic development on political support differs. While economic development fosters post-materialist values and tends to increase diffuse but decrease specific support, higher individual income generally promotes both diffuse and specific forms of political support (Azzolini et al., 2025; Ceka & Magalhães, 2019; OECD, 2024).

3.3.2. *Sex*

Previous research has consistently demonstrated that gender plays an important role in shaping political attitudes, including levels of political support. Although the overall gender gap in political participation has narrowed over time (Inglehart & Norris, 2003), women still tend to report lower levels of institutional trust in political institutions compared to men (Coffé & Bolzendahl, 2010). This discrepancy is partly attributed to persistent structural inequalities and differences in political socialization, both affecting women's perceptions of the responsiveness and fairness of institutions. Comparative country studies also reveal that women have significant lower access to political knowledge than men due to the effect of traditional adult roles (Ferrín et al., 2019). However, the lower institutional trust among women does not imply a lower valuation of democracy itself (Burns et al., 2001).

3.3.3. *Political Interest*

Political interest is one of the most important control variables in studies on political support, as it is closely related to institutional trust, political knowledge, participation and political socialization (Niemi et al., 1991). Individuals with a high level of political interest are generally better informed and more actively involved in political life. Consequently, they tend to

participate more frequently in political activities and exhibit higher levels of trust in political systems and institutions (Bromme & Rothmund, 2021). Political interest is thereby considered a relatively stable individual characteristic (Prior, 2010).

3.3.4. Post-Material Values

As discussed before, post-material values are a crucial variable in explaining political support on both diffuse and specific level (Inglehart, 1977). Robert Inglehart observed that with increasing economic wealth in Western Post-War societies and rising levels of education, people prioritized values like self-expression, environment protection and participation over material concerns. The spread of post-material values led to a more critical evaluation of political actors, while the valuation of democracy increased, which led to a rise in diffuse support but a decline in specific support.

4. Hypothesis

In this chapter, the examined hypotheses are represented. Giving a short literature review, it is shown how the hypotheses were derived. Three hypotheses are presented: the modernization hypothesis, the cultural hypothesis and the socialization hypothesis.

4.1. Modernization Hypotheses

It was shown above that the modernization theory suggests that economic modernization and increasing levels of education led to the spread of post-materialist values in Western societies during the post-war era. This shift in values contributed to a rise in diffuse trust, as people came to value the existence of democracy more highly. At the same time, citizens became more skeptical of authorities such as politicians, parties, and the police, which resulted in a decline in specific support for Western democracies during the post-war period (Inglehart, 1977).

Since the fall of communism, Eastern European countries have run through similar development steps like Western Societies after the 2nd World War: While unemployment rates increased

strongly in the 1990s, the 2000s were characterized by declining unemployment rates and steady economic growth in Eastern Europe. Additionally, the share of people with tertiary education increased significantly (OECD, 2017).

Given the comparability between post-war developments in Western democracies and post-communist developments in Eastern European countries, it is worthwhile to apply Inglehart's observations on Eastern European countries. Although reliable empirical data on political support during the communist period is not available, academic literature generally assumes that both diffuse and specific support for the political system were very low, as communist regimes relied primarily on coercion rather than on genuine trust or voluntary support (Kornai, 1992).

However, as discussed in Chapter 4.1., the Honeymoon effect suggests, that excitement about democratization and the expected economic development among the population had strong positive effects on specific support but little effect on diffuse support shortly after democratization (Mishler & Rose, 1994). Given these insights, the first hypothesis sets out to test the Honeymoon effect:

H1a: In early years after democratic transition in Eastern Europe economic modernization will have positive effects on specific support and no significant effect on diffuse support, while the effect of education is positive on diffuse support, but negative on specific support.

Modernization theory would suggest that after reaching a certain point of economic development, further economic development should relate to a decline in specific support, but an increase in diffuse support.

However, since the literature suggests that political performance evaluation is deeply connected with economic satisfaction in Eastern Europe after time of economic mismanagement, I propose, deviating from modernization theory, that economic modernization promotes the rise of

diffuse trust **and** specific support over time in East Europe in later time phase. The effect of education, I suggest, should remain constant.

Therefore:

H1b: In a later period, economic modernization will have positive effects on both diffuse and specific trust. The effect of education does not change in comparison to the earlier period.

4.2. Cultural Hypothesis

As discussed before, cultural approaches emphasize the importance of political cultures and historic experience in explaining varying levels of regime support and institutional trust between countries (Almond & Verba, 1963). As Putnam et al. (1994) elaborated, these historic experiences shape the development of social capitals – such as interpersonal trust, social networks, social commitment, political engagement etc. The authors also found evidence that this social capital is crucial for a well-functioning democracy as it promotes efficient political institutions, trust into state institutions and therefore also support for the political system (Putnam et al., 1994).

Interpersonal trust is therefore considered a key variable in explaining political support in established democracies (Brehm & Rahn, 1997; Cole, 1973). As shown above, the effect of interpersonal trust on institutional trust is highly diverse depending on the historic legacy in the respective country. Given the very inconclusive findings in existing literature, it is worth exploring the effect of interpersonal trust on both diffuse and specific support over time in the young democracies of Eastern Europe. Since the cited literature focuses only on trust in political institutions in early stages of democratization and little research has examined how the effect of interpersonal trust changed over time, it is worth exploring the effect on both diffuse and specific support and additionally, investigating how the effects changed over time. Although literature cannot provide an unambiguous suggestion on how interpersonal trust affects political support in young democracies, I suggest that the effect will be positive. As social capital

develops and democracy becomes more institutionalized in Eastern Europe, I also suggest that the effect of interpersonal trust on both diffuse and specific support will increase. Therefore, the cultural hypotheses tested in this study are:

H3a: Interpersonal trust positively affects both specific support and diffuse support.

H3b: The effect of interpersonal trust on specific and diffuse increases over time.

4.3. Socialization Hypothesis

The socialization hypothesis is derived from multiple theoretical approaches addressing the sources of political support. Easton (1975) suggests, that political norms and values are shaped during times of childhood through experiences made within the family, at school, and in society. Similar ideas can be found in cultural approaches (Putnam et al., 1994). Therefore, it seems plausible that younger generations who were at least partly socialized after the democratic transition would hold higher democratic values.

Inglehart (1977) observed a similar pattern in *The Silent Revolution*, where he noted that democratic values in Western democracies were particularly evident among the first post-war generations, as they were raised and socialized in economically stable circumstances and democratic political systems. Indeed, he found that younger generations displayed a greater prevalence of post-material values resulting in a higher feeling of diffuse support (Inglehart, 1977). This observation aligns with socialization hypotheses proposed of other scholars (see Almond & Verba, 1963; Easton, 1975; Eckstein, 1966).

As discussed before, Rose & Mishler (1996) found that the euphoria over democracy during the period of democratic transition was particularly strong among older generations, as they were particularly excited about the perspective of escaping communism (Churchill-Effect). This led to high values of diffuse trust among the older citizens. According to the authors, this excitement was not rooted in genuine democratic values but in the perception of democracy as

the lesser evil. However, classical socialization approaches suggest that the gap between older and younger generation in terms of diffuse trust should narrow or completely disappear over time, as younger generations should develop a real appreciation of democracy over time leading to a stronger increase among younger generations than among older generations.

Like before, two hypotheses are examined. The first will test the Churchill-Effect, while the second explores the time effect on different generations' diffuse trust:

H3a: Diffuse support in Eastern European democracies is stronger among older generations in comparison to younger generations in early periods after democratic transition.

H3b: This gap between older and younger generation's diffuse support narrowed in later survey waves.

5. Research Design

5.1. Data & Countries

The hypotheses outlined above will be tested using survey data respondents residing in former Warsaw Pact member states that transitioned toward democracy following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. To ensure data consistency, only countries that regularly participated in the World Values Survey (WVS) or the European Values Study (EVS) were included. Since both surveys use similar questions, their data can be combined to create the Integrated Values Surveys (IVS) (Haerpfer et al., 2024). In total, respondents from ten countries were selected for analysis: Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Czechia, Estonia, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Hungary, and individuals born in the former German Democratic Republic. Across the five survey waves utilized, approximately 63,000 individuals were interviewed (see Table 2), providing a robust empirical basis for the analysis.

However, the quality and completeness of the data differ across the survey waves. For instance, during the 2011–2014 wave, only four of the ten chosen countries participated. Moreover, not all respondents completed the entire questionnaire, leading to fluctuations in the number of

valid cases both across and within the applied models depending on the dependent variable used. Since a respondent can only be included in a regression analysis if they have provided complete responses to all relevant questions, cases with missing data were necessarily excluded from the respective analyses. For this thesis, only survey waves conducted after 1990 are relevant, meaning that five survey waves were included:

3rd wave (1994-1998)

4th wave (1999-2004)

5th wave (2005-2009)

6th wave (2010-2014)

7th wave (2017-2022)

Table 2: Total number of respondents per country and survey wave (WVS/EVS-Data)

Coun-try	Wave	1994-1998	1999-2004	2005-2010	2011-2014	2015-2023	Total
Czechia		1147	1908	1821	0	3011	7887
Estonia		1021	1005	1518	1533	1304	6381
Germany		1009	0	1023	914	250	3196
Hungary		650	1000	2520	0	1514	5684
Latvia		1200	1013	1506	0	1335	5054
Lithuania		1009	1018	1500	0	1448	4975
Poland		1153	1095	2510	966	1352	7076
Romania		1239	1146	3265	1503	2870	10023
Slovakia		1095	1331	1509	0	2632	6567
Bulgaria		1072	1000	2501	0	1558	6131
Total		10595	10516	19673	4916	17274	62974

5.2. Variables

In the following, the used independent and dependent variables are presented. For a detailed presentation, please see Appendix Table 9.

5.2.1. Dependent Variables

To address the question of how diffuse and specific support developed in Eastern Europe since the 1990s, the first step is to identify variables in the IVS which represent these entities and are included in all survey waves used. However, as discussed in Chapter 2, diffuse and specific support cannot be sharply distinguished (Norris, 2011). To do justice to this circumstance, three dependent variables were selected to provide a more nuanced picture of developments in diffuse and specific support. These dependent variables capture either more diffuse or more specific forms of political support.

To capture the most diffuse question of system support, the statement “*Having a democratic political system is...*” was chosen, with respondents needing to answer on a 1-4 scale ranging from “very good” to “very bad”. The more specific forms of political support were queried by asking for respondents’ confidence in parliament and government, respectively. Both items used a four-point response scale, which eases comparisons between the three dependent variables.

For the testing of one theoretical approach, the same statistical model was applied on all dependent variables.

5.2.2. Independent variables

5.2.2.1. Modernization hypothesis

To test the modernization hypothesis, it will be investigated how modern developments like economic development and education affect system support. For this purpose, for each survey year and country, the logarithmic and purchasing power-adjusted GDP per capita was included as variable, using data from the World Bank database (World Bank, 2025).

To capture differences in educational levels between the respondents, the question “*What is the highest educational level that you attained?*” was used, offering eight answer options. Since the scale is standardized across all participating countries, respondents’ educational levels can be compared directly. A comparison between models with and without a quadratic term for education showed a significantly better fit for the non-linear specification, indicating that the relationship between education and the dependent variables deviates from linearity.

To test the effect of time sufficiently, the survey waves were divided into two periods: an early phase (Waves 3–4, 1994–2004) and a later phase (Waves 5–7, 2005–2023). This division reflects the distinction discussed in the academic literature between the immediate post-democratization period and a subsequent phase of democratic consolidation in Eastern European countries (Dawisha & Parrott, 1997). The early phase captures the initial years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when democratic institutions were still being established and citizens’ expectations of democracy were shaped by the transition experience. The later phase corresponds to a period marked by EU accession for many countries’ integration into globalization and relative political stability.

5.2.2.2. Socialization hypothesis

To operationalize the socialization hypothesis, respondents were grouped into three birth cohorts representing different formative experiences with democratization: those born before 1940, who were socialized entirely under communist regimes; those born between 1941 and 1966, who experienced their formative political years during the transition to democracy; and those born between 1967 and 1980, who were politically socialized to a high amount in the post-communist societies. Age cohorts born after 1980 were not included in the analysis, as the minimum age for participating in the survey is 14 years. Including later birth years would have meant that some cohorts were not represented in the early survey waves but appeared only in the later ones, which would have introduced an omission bias.

To track turning points of political support within the age cohorts, a squared age variable was used.

5.2.2.3. *Cultural hypothesis*

To test the cultural theory hypotheses, it is necessary to identify variables that measure interpersonal trust. Since many questions on social capital and interpersonal trust were introduced only in later survey waves, the selection of suitable variables proved challenging. In the end, one dummy variable included in all relevant waves was chosen:

Question: “*Generally speaking, would you say that most people can be trusted, or that you need to be very careful in dealing with people?*”

The response options are “Most people can be trusted” and “Need to be very careful.” The limited range of answer options entails certain drawbacks: reducing a complex construct such as interpersonal trust to just two categories oversimplifies the phenomenon. Moreover, the question does not differentiate between various forms of trust (e.g., trust in family, neighbors, or strangers). Consequently, the operationalization of the cultural hypothesis remains incomplete. Nevertheless, given the available datasets—which include all dependent and independent variables—and the consistency across survey waves, this operationalization of interpersonal trust is regarded as the best possible compromise. This aspect is further discussed in the Chapter 7.4.

5.2.3. Control Variables

As discussed in Chapter 3.3., academic literature has identified additional factors that influence individuals’ amount of political support. However, since this thesis focuses primarily on the aspects of modernization, socialization and culture, these aspects are not examined in detail. Nonetheless, to ensure the robustness of the regression results and to account for potential confounding influences, they are included as control variables in the analysis. These variables capture individual-level characteristics and contextual factors that may influence the dependent variable independently of the main explanatory variables. By controlling for these factors, the

analysis aims to isolate the specific relationship between the key independent variables and the outcomes of interest, thereby enhancing the internal validity of the findings.

5.2.3.1. Unemployment & Income

As argued above, unemployment and low incomes diminish confidence in democracy and its institutions. Since the functional relationship of income differs from that of economic development (see Chapter 3.3.1), neglecting these factors could introduce omitted variable bias.

Therefore, controlling for income and unemployment is essential.

To capture the effects of these two dimensions, the following questions from the International Values Survey (IVS) were employed:

- *Q: Are you employed now or not?*
- *Q: On this card is an income scale, on which 1 indicates the lowest income group and 10 the highest income group in your country. We would like to know in which group your household falls. Please specify the appropriate number, including all wages, salaries, pensions, and other sources of income.*

Since this thesis compares multiple countries, absolute income values are not suitable due to differences in levels of economic development across nations. Therefore, a relative income scale within each country is used as variable. This approach avoids distortions caused by cross-country income disparities. Thus, the risk of centrist tendencies in self-assessment is mitigated by explicitly presenting the income decile scale of the respective country to the respondents.

The question about unemployment is coded as a dummy variable, while the question on relative income offers ten answer categories.

5.2.3.2 Sex

Like discussed in Chapter 3.3.2. women tend to express lower amounts of institutional confidence due to poorer access to political education and experiences of structural discrimination e.g. lower incomes (see Appendix Figure 11). However, since women on average have a better

education (see Appendix Figure 10), sex intercorrelates with two independent variables (income and education) controlling for sex is essential to avoid systematic bias.

The sex is queried by a binary dummy variable in the dataset.

5.2.3.3. Political Interest

As argued before, political interest is correlated with higher forms of both diffuse and specific political support. Additionally, literature shows that well-educated individuals carry higher levels of political interest. Since the functional relationship between political interest and education differs as it was suggested by the literature that higher education diminishes institutional trust, controlling for political interest helps to isolate the effects of education.

In the IVS, political interest is measured by the following question:

- *Q: How interested would you say you are in politics?*

Respondents can choose from four answer options, ranging from “very interested” to “not at all interested”.

5.2.3.4 Post-Material Values

As Inglehart postulates in his modernization theory, post-materialist values play a central role in explaining political support. However, including post-materialist values in the regression model poses the risk of absorbing the effects of education and GDP growth. Nonetheless, it is crucial to examine whether post-material values have the same effect in Eastern Europe as Inglehart suggested for Western societies. Therefore, the variable on post-materialist values is included only in an additional model presented in the Appendix (see Table 7), where the model applied in Chapter 6.2 is extended by this variable.

In the IVS data, post-materialist values are measured using the standard four-item index, with each respondent categorized on a three-point scale (1–3). This approach ensures cross-country comparability and consistent inclusion across survey waves.

5.3. Method

The empirical analysis is based on linear regression models estimated using ordinary least squares (OLS). Given the structure of the data, which consists of repeated cross-sectional surveys across multiple countries and years, country fixed effects were included in all models to control for unobserved, time-invariant heterogeneity between countries, such as historical legacies and cultural factors. In selected specifications, interaction terms were introduced to test theoretical expectations about changes in effects over time (e.g., early vs. late survey waves) and across subgroups (e.g., birth cohorts). Standard errors were calculated using robust estimators to account for heteroscedasticity. As discussed above, all models control for a set of individual-level covariates known to influence political support, including income, employment status, gender, political interest and post-materialist values. This approach allows the isolation of the relationships between the key independent variables and both diffuse and specific forms of political support, while minimizing the risk of omitted variable bias.

Since observations within the same country cannot be considered as independent of each other, since respondents from the same country share the same economic structure, institutional frameworks and historical experiences, conventional estimators would underestimate standard errors because intra-country correlation of error-terms violates the assumption of independently distributed standard errors. By clustering standard errors at the country-levels, the estimators consider these correlations and produce appropriate standard errors.

The full model is specified as following:

$$Y_{it} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 D_{it} + \beta_2 (D_{it} \times WaveLate_t) + \beta_3 D_{it}^2 + \gamma' Z_{it} + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it}$$

Where:

- Y_{it} is the respective dependent variable (approval democracy, confidence parliament, confidence government)
- D_{it} is the respective explanatory variable (e.g. Log (GDP PPP), Education, Interpersonal Trust, Cohort Group, etc.)
- $WaveLate_t$ is the time variable
- Z_{it} is a vector of control variables (e.g. unemployment, sex, income, etc.)
- α_i denotes country fixed effects
- ε_{it} is the error term

5.4. Ethical considerations

In this thesis, AI was used solely for correcting grammar and spelling errors, as well as for verifying the correctness of programming code. However, the substantive content of this thesis was written independently by me. I therefore take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of all ideas and arguments presented in this work.

6. Results

6.1. Descriptive statistics

Table 3: Mean approval among respondents for democracy and confidence in its institutions, scaled from 1 to 4.

Wave	Approval of Democracy (n=55.341)	Confidence in Parliament (n=60.129)	Confidence in Government (n=50.295)
1994-1998	3.29 [3.27-3.31] (90%)	2.10 [2.08-2.12] (29%)	2.24 [2.21-2.26] (38%)
1999-2004	3.18 [3.16-3.20] (88%)	2.02 [2.00-2.05] (25%)	.
2005-2010	3.13 [3.12-3.15] (85%)	1.91 [1.90-1.93] (21%)	1.97 [1.95-1.99] (25%)
2011-2014	3.25 [3.23-3.28] (88%)	2.02 [1.99-2.05] (27%)	2.15 [2.12-2.18] (34%)
2015-2023	3.37 [3.35-3.38] (91%)	1.97 [1.96-1.99] (25%)	2.05 [2.03-2.06] (29%)

Note: 4=Full approval/confidence, 1=no approval/confidence at all

In square brackets: 95% Confidence Intervals

In parentheses: share of people expressing full or much approval/confidence

Data: WVS/EVS using data from 10 countries

Table 3 presents the mean values for approval of democracy and for confidence in parliament and government among all respondents. As can be observed, approval of democracy has remained at a significantly higher level than confidence in both government and parliament in the respective countries over time.

While all three indicators started from relatively high levels in 1994, they all declined significantly until 2010. This effect has already been discussed in academic literature as Honeymoon effect, respectively as post-honeymoon effect. According to this interpretation, expectations and euphoria towards democracy in Eastern Europe were particularly high at the beginning of democratic transition, leading citizens to express strong diffuse and specific support. Additionally, there is evidence that citizens' perception of the national economy was more favorable than what economic empirical data would support (Tverdova, 2012)¹, indicating that people may have integrated normative values into their evaluations of their economic situation and political satisfaction. However, economic and political expectation were quickly disappointed, as economic shock therapy led to recession and high inflation rates, political institutions were unstable, and perception of corruption was high. The sense of disappointment and disillusionment led to a sharp decline in both diffuse and specific political support, as people blamed not the former regime, but rather the new political order and its representatives (Gibson, 1996; Pop-Eleches & Tucker, 2017; Tverdova, 2012).

After 2010, trends diverged. While approval of democracy has steadily increased in the two most recent waves, confidence in parliaments and governments initially rose after 2010 but declined again in the following wave. Although this development has not been examined by

¹ Tverdova (2012) shows that shortly after democratization in Eastern Europe, evaluations of the current economic situation were shaped primarily by respondents' attitudes toward markets, the new political system, and their satisfaction with democracy. The effect of objective economic variables on people's macro-economic evaluations (such as inflation, unemployment rates or economic growth) was limited.

academic literature yet, the increase in approval for democracy hints at a consolidation of democratic values in Eastern Europe and the end of the post-honeymoon phase.

6.2. Modernization hypothesis

H1a: In early years after democratic transition in Eastern Europe economic modernization will have positive effects on specific support and no significant effect on diffuse support, while the effect of education is positive on diffuse support, but negative on specific support.

H1b: In a later period, economic modernization will have positive effects on both diffuse and specific trust. The effect of education does not change in comparison to the earlier period.

It has been argued that economic development and rising education levels can promote democratic values and trust in political institutions over time. To test these hypotheses, regression analyses with interaction terms were conducted across several time waves, pooling the early and later waves in one dummy variable. Country-specific effects were controlled using fixed effects. The marginal effects of income and education on approval for democracy, confidence in parliament, and confidence in government are shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Models on political support using countries fixed effects and time interactions for education and GDP

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Approval for Democracy	Confidence in Parliament	Confidence in Government
Log (GDP p.C.) PPP	-0.318	0.288	0.0810
	(0.353)	(0.229)	(0.213)
Late Survey Waves	-3.776	-6.324**	-5.694**
	(3.268)	(2.287)	(1.888)
Late Survey Waves ## Log (GDP p.C. PPP)	0.372	0.629**	0.575**
	(0.323)	(0.224)	(0.180)
Education (8 levels)	-0.0389**	-0.0446**	-0.0801***
	(0.0172)	(0.0152)	(0.0160)
Education (8 levels) ## Education (8 levels)	0.00703***	0.00333**	0.00615***
	(0.00148)	(0.00125)	(0.00131)
Late Survey Waves # Education (8 levels)	0.00584	-0.00785	-0.00854
	(0.00778)	(0.0112)	(0.0111)
Sex (female)	-0.00968	0.0435**	0.0394***
	(0.00645)	(0.0143)	(0.0104)

Unemployed	-0.0628**	-0.105***	-0.129***
	(0.0267)	(0.0285)	(0.0391)
Interpersonal trust	0.0803***	0.160***	0.176***
	(0.0121)	(0.0227)	(0.0234)
Interest in politics	0.0870***	0.101***	0.120***
	(0.00493)	(0.0146)	(0.0149)
Survey Year	0.00744	-0.0266	-0.0226
	(0.0242)	(0.0172)	(0.0130)
Country-specific In- come (decile)	0.00886**	0.00746**	0.00384
	(0.00283)	(0.00312)	(0.00388)
Constant	-8.838	51.87	46.26*
	(44.94)	(32.37)	(24.11)
Observations	34601	37390	34151
Number of Clusters	11	11	11
R ²	0.0734	0.0668	0.0872

Clustered Standard errors by country in parentheses

* p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01

The models in Table 4 featuring the dependent variables of approval for democracy, confidence in parliament and confidence in government all find no significant correlation between GDP development and any form of political support in the early survey waves between 1994 and 2010. However, in the later survey waves the effect of GDP growth becomes significant on confidence in parliament and governments, while the effect on approval for democracy does not change significantly. The marginal effects of GDP on all three dependent variables are presented in Figure 5.

The linear terms for education are all significantly negative, implying that with increasing education, both specific and diffuse support decline. However, since quadratic terms of education are significant as well, the relationship between education and political support seems to be quadratic rather than purely linear: for approval for democracy, individuals with little or only primary education exhibit similar levels of support, but among those with secondary and tertiary education, diffuse support increases with higher educational attainment (see Appendix Figure

7). For confidence in parliament and government, by contrast, approval declines as education rises through the secondary level, with tertiary-educated respondents showing trust levels that are roughly stable rather than continuing to fall (see Appendix Figure 8 & 9). An additional regression including an interaction term between squared education and the survey wave did not yield significant results for any dependent variable, indicating that the quadratic relationship between education and all forms of political support has not changed significantly over time (see Appendix Table 8).

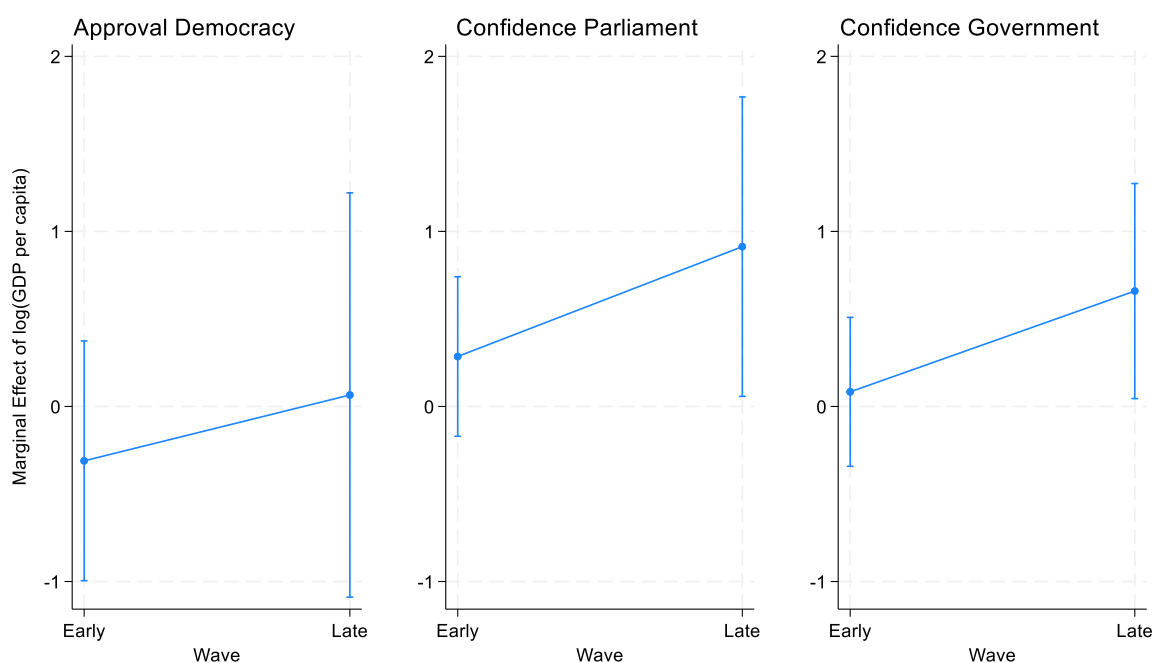


Figure 5: Marginal effect of GDP p.C. on dependent variables in early and late survey waves

Among the control variables, the results are consistent with the existing literature: female respondents report lower levels of specific support than men. There is also evidence that unemployed respondents display significantly lower levels of all forms of political support, particularly specific support. Individuals who are generally trusting others are likewise more likely to exhibit higher levels of political support, with the effect being stronger for specific than for diffuse support. Similar patterns are observed among politically interested citizens. In contrast,

individuals with higher incomes demonstrate greater diffuse support, while the effect on specific support is smaller and not significant for confidence in government.

Although the model identifies the expected relationship between education and both diffuse and specific support in the early survey waves, H1a cannot be fully accepted, as there is no significant relationship between economic growth and specific support at that time.

The same applies to H1b: although in later survey waves there is indeed a significant effect of economic growth on specific support, there is still no significant effect on diffuse support. Since the effect of education did not change as expected, this hypothesis can only be partially accepted.

6.3. Cultural Hypothesis

H2a: Interpersonal trust positively affects both specific support and diffuse support.

H2b: The effect of interpersonal trust on specific and diffuse increases over time.

Table 5: Regression with interactions between early/late survey waves and interpersonal trust using country fixed effects

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Approval for Democracy	Confidence in Parliament	Confidence in Government
Interpersonal Trust	0.0865***	0.150***	0.161***
	(0.0183)	(0.0212)	(0.0198)
Late Survey Waves ## Interpersonal Trust	-0.00526	0.0610**	0.0602*
	(0.0331)	(0.0250)	(0.0283)
Education (8 levels)	-0.0278	-0.0571**	-0.0888***
	(0.0225)	(0.0183)	(0.0164)
Education (8 levels) ## Education (8 levels)	0.00618**	0.00409**	0.00639***
	(0.00206)	(0.00164)	(0.00128)
Sex (female)	-0.00699	0.0422***	0.0434***
	(0.00771)	(0.0132)	(0.0114)
Unemployed	-0.0579**	-0.0957***	-0.109**
	(0.0233)	(0.0288)	(0.0398)
Interest in politics	0.0847***	0.104***	0.121***
	(0.00463)	(0.0128)	(0.0130)
Survey Year	-0.00927**	-0.0132	-0.0213**
	(0.00402)	(0.00741)	(0.00720)
Country-specific Income (decile)	0.0102***	0.00875**	0.00579
	(0.00257)	(0.00361)	(0.00423)
Constant	21.38**	28.05*	44.38**
	(8.029)	(14.86)	(14.40)
Observations	38854	42259	38144
Number of Clusters	11	11	11
R ²	0.0671	0.0639	0.0831

Clustered Standard errors by country in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

The model indicates highly significant positive correlations between interpersonal trust and all three dependent variables, with the notable finding that the effect is stronger for specific forms of political support and weaker for diffuse forms of political support. The interaction term between interpersonal trust and the later survey waves shows that the effect of interpersonal trust becomes stronger for specific support - namely, confidence in parliament and government - while no significantly changing effect is found for diffuse support. Among the control variables, the same effects emerge as in the model used to test modernization theory. GDP per capita was excluded from this specification to avoid excessive model complexity and an overly large number of interaction terms.

Since significant effects of interpersonal trust on all dependent variables were found in the early survey waves, H2a can be accepted. However, while the effect of interpersonal trust on confidence in parliament and government increases significantly in the later survey waves, no significant time effect was found for approval of democracy; therefore, H2b can only be partially accepted.

6.4. Socialization hypothesis

H3a: Diffuse support in Eastern European democracies is stronger among older generations in comparison to younger generations in early periods after democratic transition.

H3b: This gap between older and younger generation's diffuse support narrowed in later survey waves.

Table 6: Regression with interaction term between Survey Year and Age cohort using country fixed effects

	(1)
	Approval for Democracy
Cohort group (1941-1966)	-0.153***
	(0.0232)
Cohort group (1967-1980)	-0.298***
	(0.0475)
Late Survey Waves	-1.387***
	(0.225)
Cohort group (1941-1966) # Late Survey Waves	0.296***
	(0.0514)
Cohort group (1967-1980) # Late Survey Waves	0.588***
	(0.0641)
Age	-0.0137***
	(0.00340)
Age # Age	0.0000722**
	(0.0000282)
Late Survey Waves # Age	0.0298***
	(0.00837)
Late Survey Waves # Age # Age	-0.000134*
	(0.0000721)
Education (8 levels)	0.0331***
	(0.00436)

Sex (female)	-0.0118
	(0.00912)
Unemployed	-0.0463**
	(0.0184)
Interest in politics	0.0843***
	(0.00584)
Interpersonal trust	0.0809***
	(0.0118)
Country-specific Income (decile)	0.0143***
	(0.00214)
Constant	3.325***
	(0.142)
Observations	33419
Number of clusters	11
R ²	0.0755

Clustered Standard errors by country in parentheses

* $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Base cohort group: Born 1940 and before

The regression analysis reveals clear cohort and time effects in approval for democracy. Younger cohorts (born 1941–1966 and 1967–1980) initially show significantly lower approval of democracy compared to the pre-war generation (born before 1941). However, their attitudes become more positive in later survey waves, as indicated by the positive interaction effects between cohorts and time variable. This suggests that younger generations have become more supportive of democracy over time (see Figure 6).

Independent of cohort differences, approval for democracy slightly decreased with age in the early survey waves. Nevertheless, the positive quadratic component indicates that this decline slows at older ages. At the same time, the age effect changed over time: the positive interaction between age and later survey waves suggests that diffuse support increased with age in more recent survey periods. The significant negative interaction involving squared age and the time variable further indicates that this age-related increase weakens again at higher ages.

Among the control variables, education, income, political interest, and interpersonal trust all have significant positive effects on democratic approval, while unemployment has a negative impact. Gender does not show a significant effect.

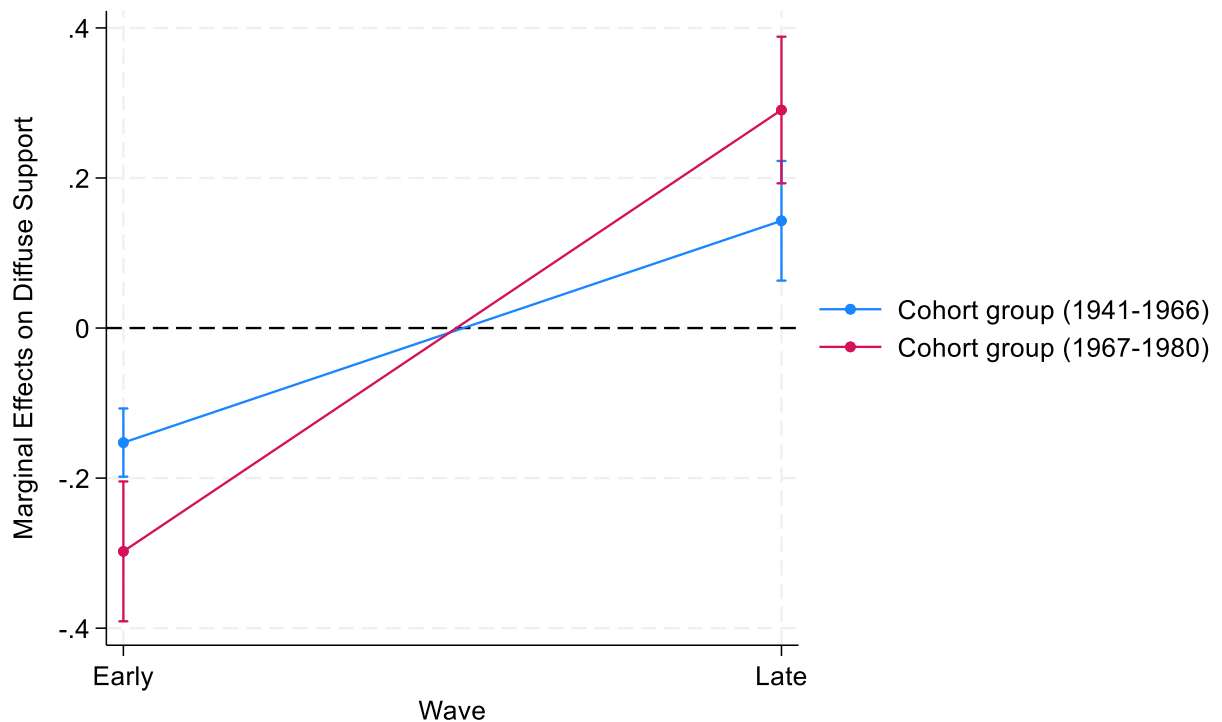


Figure 6: Marginal effect of Cohorts on diffuse support in Early and Late Survey Waves
Note: Baseline cohort group born before 1941

Since the older cohort groups expressed higher levels of diffuse support than the younger cohorts in the early survey waves, H3a can be accepted. As the gap between older and younger cohorts not only narrowed in later survey waves, but younger cohorts even expressed significantly higher levels of diffuse support, H3b can be accepted as well.

7. Discussion

In this thesis, common (Western) theories of political support were applied to Eastern Europe and its emerging democracies, and the derived hypotheses were tested. The focus was placed on how the effects of certain variables changed over time. In this chapter, the results are contextualized within the existing academic literature. Additionally, the strengths and weaknesses of the applied methods and models are discussed.

7.1. Modernization Theory

The modernization theory proposes that rising economic development in combination with increasing levels of education among the population leads to higher valuation of democracy and a spread of democratic values. Furthermore, it also leads to a more critical evaluation of political actors like office holders and political institutions themselves (Inglehart, 1977).

Like in Chapter 6.2. shown, the applied model was met with mixed results on the modernization theory. First, no significant correlation was found between GDP growth and any form of political support in early survey waves. In fact, however, the model finds significant correlations between education and political support in all survey waves: Higher education increases democratic values while reducing confidence in office holders. Thereby, the applied model found a quadratic relationship between education and diffuse support: especially, people with tertiary education carry significantly higher levels of diffuse support into democracy (see Appendix Figure 7). In this aspect, the suggested functional relationship by Inglehart's modernization theory was supported by the applied model. The effect of education in later survey waves did not change significantly in comparison to the earlier waves.

In later survey waves between 2011 and 2023 the model finds evidence that GDP growth is associated with higher levels of confidence in governments and parliaments, while there remains no significant effect on diffuse support. This observation is not predicted by the

modernization theory, as it suggests that economic modernization would promote post-material values and therefore lead to decline in confidence in political institutions but an increase in democratic values.

Interestingly, when adding post-materialism as an independent variable to the model (see Appendix, Table 7), the analysis reveals the functional relationship suggested by Inglehart: post-materialist values promote democratic values but lead to a more skeptical evaluation of political actors such as governments and officeholders. The negative effect of post-materialist values on skepticism toward political actors increases significantly in later waves, while the positive effect on democratic values remains stable. A further discussion of possible explanations for the diverging effects of economic growth on political support, as suggested by modernization theory, is provided in the conclusion.

7.2. Socialization Theory

As shown in Section 6.4. cohort effects have shifted significantly over time. While in the early survey waves older cohorts expressed higher levels of diffuse support, in the later waves younger cohorts exhibited higher levels of diffuse support. Overall, these results align with the literature discussed: euphoria about democratization was initially stronger among older generations, who were enthusiastic about escaping communism and authoritarianism — a phenomenon known as the Churchill Effect, in which democracy is perceived as the “lesser evil” (Rose & Mishler, 1996). However, as socialization theory suggests, over time cohorts socialized within a democratic system develop higher levels of diffuse support. Thus, empirical evidence for both the Churchill Effect and socialization theory can be observed.

7.3. Cultural Theory

As shown on 6.3., correlations between interpersonal trust and all forms of political support were found. Therefore, the cultural theory in general is applicable for explaining both diffuse and specific support. The differing effect sizes across the dependent variables suggest that

interpersonal trust has a stronger influence on specific support than on diffuse support. This is intuitive: parliaments and governments are concrete institutions closely associated with identifiable officeholders, whereas democracy is a more abstract concept, which is detached from individual office holders. It is therefore plausible that social capital and interpersonal trust strengthen support for parliaments and governments more strongly than they do support for democracy as an abstract ideal. Additionally, the effect of interpersonal trust on confidence in parliament and government increased significantly in the later survey waves, while its effect on support for democracy did not change significantly.

This development suggests that the political cultures in Eastern European countries changes over time: while the political cultures in Eastern Europe before, during, and shortly after democratic transition were characterized by distrust towards fellow citizens, political elites and a weak civil society (Howard, 2002; Lühiste, 2006; Mishler & Rose, 2001), the increasing effect of interpersonal trust on specific support hints at the emergence of a more trusting society—one that is willing to project this trust onto political institutions and engage more actively in the democratic system.

7.4. Strength & Limitations

The development of diffuse and specific support in Eastern Europe is a widely discussed topic in academic literature, with many aspects and proposed theories. This thesis focused on three theoretical dimensions and their effect on political support over time: modernization, socialization and cultural aspects. In contrast to most existing studies, which have often concentrated on the period immediately following democratic transition in Eastern Europe, this thesis has examined these effects over a longer time span, bringing to light interesting developments, like the reversing cohort effect discussed in Section 6.2. However, multiple aspects were excluded in the analysis, mostly because of insufficient data availability.

For instance, institutional theories suggest that specific support is strongly influenced by the perceived institutional performance. This includes perception of corruption, freedom, fairness and political influence. Indeed, Mishler & Rose (2001) found very strong explanatory power for institutional trust in post-communist societies. However, the Integrated Value Survey did not offer data about any of these dimensions, which is why the theory was not included in the analysis. Moreover, institutional theories generally posit that institutional performance affects confidence in political institutions but does not directly influence diffuse support. It does not suggest any direct effect on diffuse support, which is why it was not considered central to the aims of this thesis.

The lack of data also affected the operationalization of the tested hypothesis: In his modernization theory, Inglehart (1977) stresses that it is not economic modernization itself that leads to a rise in post-material values with the discussed consequences on political support, but rather the secure provision of basic needs. Only once these needs are fulfilled are individuals able to devote greater attention and resources to political participation, thereby fostering post-materialist values. To better operationalize the modernization theory, the applied model could therefore have included a measure of individuals' satisfaction with their financial situation as an indicator of their capacity to develop post-materialist values. Although this question is included in the IVS, it is not available for all survey waves used, making a comparison overtime impossible. Similar problems led to the exclusion of *town size* as an independent variable, even though modernization theory suggests that urbanization leads to a spread of post-material values.

Similar data problems occurred when operationalizing the cultural theory: the existence of social capital is operationalized very vaguely with the dummy variable of *interpersonal trust*. A more differentiated scale of interpersonal trust would have been desirable. Additionally, the operationalization of social capital could have been enriched by including variables on voluntary work and club memberships. However, also these data were not consistently available over all

survey waves. Despite this limitation, the significant baseline effect on all three dependent variables — and the significant time effects on two of them — indicate that the chosen operationalization was sufficient.

Furthermore, for operationalizing diffuse support, it would have also been an option to form a Likert scale that combines several items, such as the rejection of authoritarian statements and the general satisfaction with the development of democracy in the respondent's country. Again, however, the IVS did not include these data points for all used waves.

One might therefore ask why the IVS was used despite these data limitations. Indeed, other datasets such as the European Social Survey (ESS) or the New Democracies Barometer (NDB) would have been suitable alternatives. However, their use would have entailed other drawbacks. The NDB was collected only between 1991 and 1998 and therefore covers a relatively short time period. The ESS, on the other hand, has been conducted biennially since 2000, offering higher data quality, larger sample sizes, and more precise response scales. Nonetheless, the ESS would have presented two major disadvantages. First, because data collection only began in 2000, the crucial period of democratic transition is not covered, which would have made it difficult to analyze phenomena such as the honeymoon effect and the Churchill effect. Second, although the ESS includes questions on confidence in officeholders and state institutions, it does not consistently include items measuring democratic values, which would have complicated the operationalization of diffuse support. While one might argue that institutional confidence (e.g., in parliament) represents a more diffuse form of political support, the pronounced differences found in almost all models between *approval of democracy* and *confidence in parliament* as dependent variables confirm that these items capture distinct forms of political support. For that reason, I believe that one strength of this thesis lies in its precise and differentiated operationalization of political support, which could not be achieved with the ESS.

Finally, this thesis can only analyze some general trends in political support across Eastern Europe. Although the models employ country-level fixed effects, they are not designed to explain developments within a specific country. As Putnam et al. (1994) emphasize in their cultural theory, the development of political support largely depends on a country's historical experiences and the type of political culture that has emerged from them. I therefore want to stress that the countries analyzed in this thesis do not form a homogenous group but differ in their political cultures, which are difficult to depict in a statistical model.

8. Conclusion

In this chapter, I want to discuss possible explanations for the limited explanatory power of modernization theory regarding political support in the context of economic development in Eastern Europe. After that, I will present my final remarks.

8.1. Modernization Theory

As discussed in Chapter 7.1, modernization theory can only partly explain the developments of political support in Eastern Europe. Although the functional relationship between education and political support suggested by modernization theory was confirmed, GDP growth did not produce the expected effect on diffuse and specific support. Although other scholars have reported similar results (Kunioka & Woller, 1999; Mishler & Rose, 1994), I want to highlight some points that should be considered when interpreting these findings. The regression model presented in Appendix Table 7, which extends the modernization model by including a variable for post-materialist values, shows effects consistent with the predictions of modernization theory. This raises the question of why Table 4 reports a significant positive effect of GDP growth on specific support but finds no effect of GDP growth on diffuse support, even though modernization theory would suggest otherwise.

One possible explanation lies in the particular political and economic context of Eastern Europe after the democratic transitions. After the honeymoon effect had worn off, political actors were largely evaluated by their ability to create stable economic conditions (A. Roberts, 2008). Given the severe economic difficulties - hyperinflation and high unemployment - following democratic transition, it seems logical that citizens assessed political actors primarily by their capacity to ensure economic stability and financial security and that GDP growth has a positive effect on specific support. This economic effect appears to outweigh the more critical evaluations

expected to result from the rise of post-materialist values (see Figure 4) suggested by modernization theory.

However, additionally modernization theory suggests that economic development should promote diffuse support. Such an effect was not found, neither in early nor in later survey waves after democratic transition in Eastern Europe. I therefore want to stress two points, for the explaining the non-existence of a significant effect of GDP growth on diffuse support: First, the modernization theory stresses that not economic modernization itself promotes post-material values, but financial and social security. The development of post-materialist values, however, takes time. For that reason, GDP growth may be unable to capture the long-term effect of economic development on diffuse support, as discussed in Chapter 7.4.

Second, the literature shows that citizens in young democracies are often unable to distinguish clearly between political actors and the political system itself (Katz & Levin, 2018; Kornberg, 1990; Waldron-Moore, 1999). For that reason, it seems plausible that the distrust in political actors following the democratic transitions in the 1990s and 2000s, due to poor economic performance, spilled over into diffuse support for democracy and may be another explanation for the absence of a significant positive effect of GDP growth on diffuse support.

To conclude, while economic modernization did foster higher levels of specific support in the later stages of transition, it did not significantly influence democratic values, which contradicts modernization theory. However, both methodological and regional aspects need to be considered when interpreting these results. Although the expected link between post-materialist values and both forms of support was observed (see Appendix Table 7), other contextual factors appear to have influenced the effect of GDP growth on diffuse support.

8.2. Final remarks

This thesis set out to examine how political support has evolved in Eastern Europe since the collapse of communist regimes in 1991 and to assess whether the principal theories developed in Western political science - modernization, socialization, and cultural approaches - can adequately explain these developments. Drawing on five waves of World Values Survey and European Values Study data covering ten post-communist societies, the study explored both diffuse support and specific support. The strength of this thesis lies in the long time period it covers and in the precise operationalization of political support that was applied.

The empirical analysis provides only partial support for Inglehart's (1977) modernization theory, which posits that the spread of post-material values induced by citizens' financial security, caused by economic growth, and higher education should promote diffuse trust while reducing specific support. The applied models indeed revealed a positive correlation between education and diffuse trust, coupled with a negative correlation between education and specific support—precisely the ambivalent relationship Inglehart anticipated. However, in the early survey waves, no significant relationship emerged between economic growth and any form of political support. Only in later survey waves, economic growth exerted a significant effect on specific support, while its impact on diffuse trust remained insignificant. These results suggest that the political institutions and officeholders were mainly evaluated by citizens by their ability to guarantee economic stability and prosperity, while support for democracy itself was granted independently of its ability to produce economic prosperity. In any case, a significant relationship between economic modernization and diffuse support, like Inglehart suggests, was not found.

On the other hand, the socialization theory received strong empirical support. The models revealed lower levels of diffuse trust among younger cohorts than among older cohorts in the early survey waves. This finding aligns with the argument of Mishler and Rose (1996), who introduced the so-called Churchill effect: shortly after the democratic transition, older

generations—eager to escape authoritarian rule—expressed strong enthusiasm for democracy as the least bad alternative to their previous system. In later waves, however, the cohort effect reversed, with the youngest cohort expressing the highest levels of diffuse support—precisely the development predicted by socialization theory.

Finally, the thesis found a strong and significant effect of interpersonal trust on all forms of political support, with significantly increasing impact on specific support over time. This observation suggests that citizens' interpersonal trust is increasingly projected onto political institutions and officeholders. Whereas Eastern Europe's political culture was once characterized by widespread distrust, the rising impact of interpersonal trust on political support indicates a gradual cultural shift toward greater civic engagement and confidence—an observation further supported by growing levels of voluntary work and social capital as shown by Voicu & Voicu (2009). These developments are in line with Putnam's (1994) cultural approach, which argues that political support and trust depend heavily on the cultural legacies of a society.

Taken together, these results raise caution against viewing the development of political support in Eastern Europe as a straightforward replication of Western trajectories, where economic modernization after WWII and the spread of post-material values lead to a high valuation of democracy but a critical evaluation of political actors (Dalton, 2004). In Eastern Europe, evaluation of political actors seems to depend on their ability to create stable economic circumstances, as the statistical model in 6.2. revealed. However, although diffuse support for democracy in Eastern Europe has proved resilient and has even strengthened in recent years, it is not merely a by-product of modernization, as the missing effect of GDP on diffuse support indicates. Instead, the results of this thesis show that both diffuse and specific support in Eastern Europe have been shaped by an interplay of economic modernization, education, socialization, historical legacies, and unmet expectations into democracy. To answer the research question, the data does not identify a single driving force behind the developments in diffuse and specific

political support in Eastern Europe since 1991. Rather, the results show that socialization, social capital, and economic modernization all influence political support in the region.

The broader contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that democratic consolidation is not a single linear process driven solely by economic modernization as Eastern European democracies – other than western democracies after World War II - had to deal with high expectations into democracy and market-based economies which they were only able to fulfill partially.

Future research might apply these insights to detailed regional case studies, since political cultures vary across countries. It could also combine the examined theories - for example, by testing how interpersonal trust influences political support across generations - or explore the effects of recent political crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic or renewed geopolitical tensions. Additionally, future research might investigate how the effects of social capital, education, and economic modernization differ between Eastern and Western Europe, taking into account their distinct historical legacies and the differing durations of democracy in the two regions.

To improve the testing of the applied theories, future research could look for tipping points in the data, for example by using more precise time variables. This could provide insights into whether economic growth began to have a positive effect on diffuse support at a certain point, or whether the effect of economic growth on specific support has declined, since economic conditions stabilized over the past decades.

In addition, future studies could employ alternative operationalizations of economic modernization and social capital to examine whether the findings hold across different measurement strategies.

In sum, the evidence presented in this thesis confirms that while the classic theories of modernization, socialization, and cultural capital each illuminate important aspects of the Eastern European experience, none of them is sufficient on their own. Political support in the region emerges as a dynamic, multilayered phenomenon shaped by both structural conditions and historically contingent legacies.

IV. Literature

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V. Appendix

Table 7: Model used in 6.2. extended with post-material value variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Approval for Democracy	Confidence in Parliament	Confidence in Government
Log (GDP p.C. PPP)	-0.320	0.293	0.0985
	(0.357)	(0.226)	(0.199)
Late Survey Wave	-3.664	-6.225**	-5.654**
	(3.304)	(2.251)	(1.780)
Late Survey Wave ## Log (GDP p.C. PPP)	0.361	0.620**	0.573***
	(0.326)	(0.220)	(0.169)
Education (8 levels)	-0.0448**	-0.0438**	-0.0800***
	(0.0169)	(0.0136)	(0.0161)
Education (8 levels) ## Education (8 levels)	0.00732***	0.00351**	0.00649***
	(0.00144)	(0.00114)	(0.00142)
Late Survey Wave ## Education (8 levels)	0.00603	-0.00815	-0.00987
	(0.00783)	(0.0118)	(0.0114)
Sex (female)	-0.00684	0.0419**	0.0371***
	(0.00651)	(0.0141)	(0.0109)
Unemployed	-0.0669**	-0.105***	-0.123***
	(0.0275)	(0.0276)	(0.0365)
Interpersonal Trust	0.0748***	0.159***	0.176***
	(0.0104)	(0.0227)	(0.0245)
Interest in politics	0.0828***	0.104***	0.124***
	(0.00531)	(0.0141)	(0.0138)
Survey Year	0.00737	-0.0268	-0.0233*
	(0.0244)	(0.0171)	(0.0124)
Income (country-specific)	0.00829**	0.00825**	0.00550
	(0.00278)	(0.00300)	(0.00375)
Post-Materialist index	0.0709***	-0.0452***	-0.0766***

	(0.0152)	(0.0122)	(0.0230)
Constant	-8.747	52.45	47.43*
	(45.24)	(32.12)	(22.96)
Observations	33723	36280	33173
Number of Clusters	10	10	10
R ²	0.0762	0.0682	0.0914

Figure 7: Marginal effect of education on democratic values

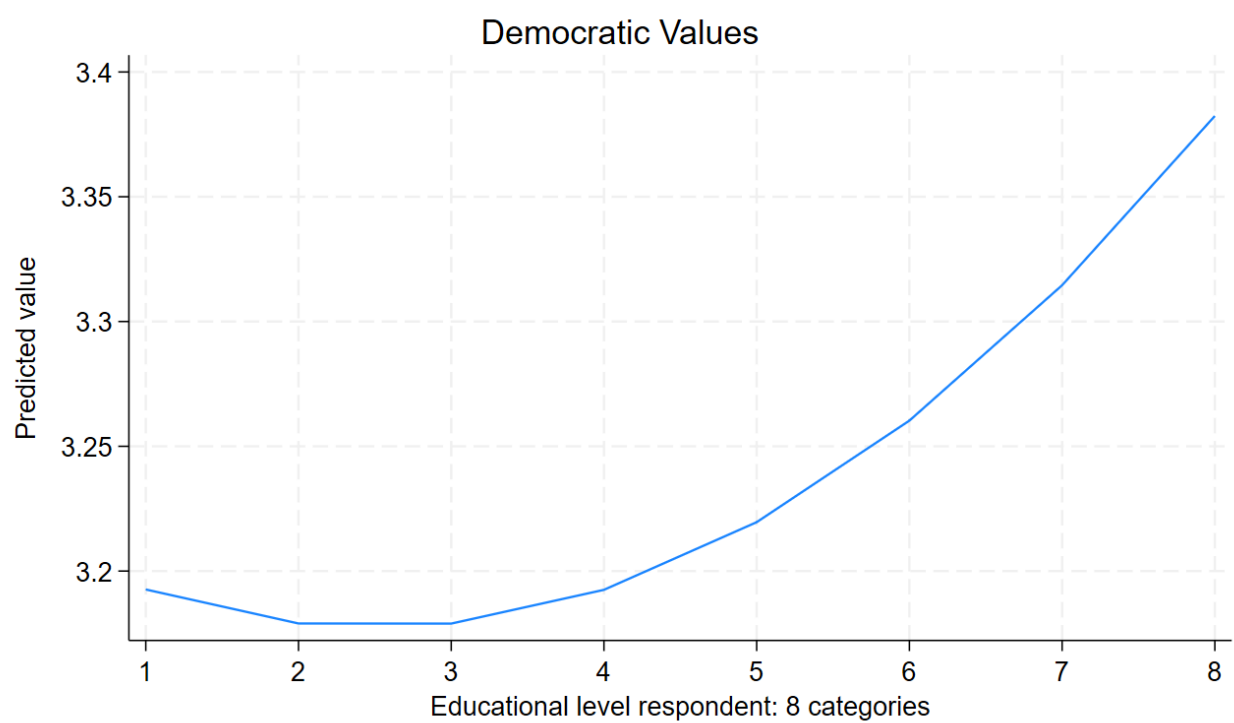


Figure 8: Marginal effect of education on confidence in parliament

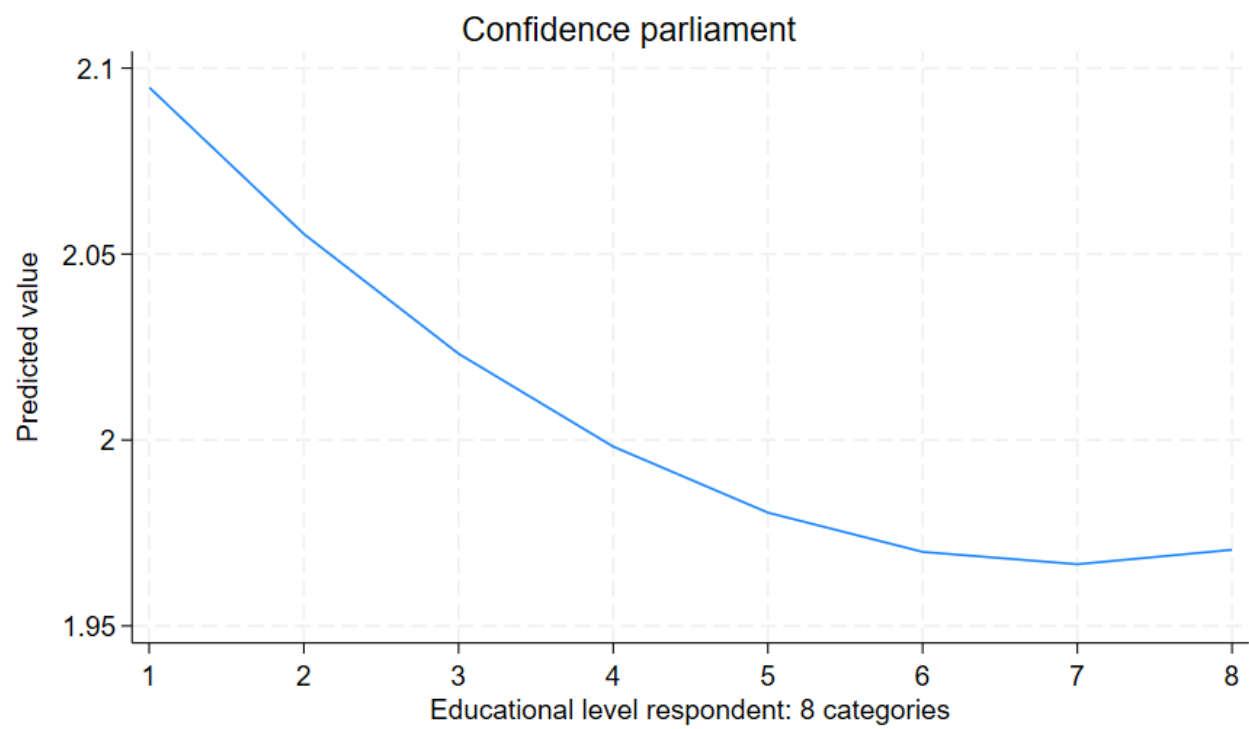


Figure 9: Marginal effect of education on confidence in government

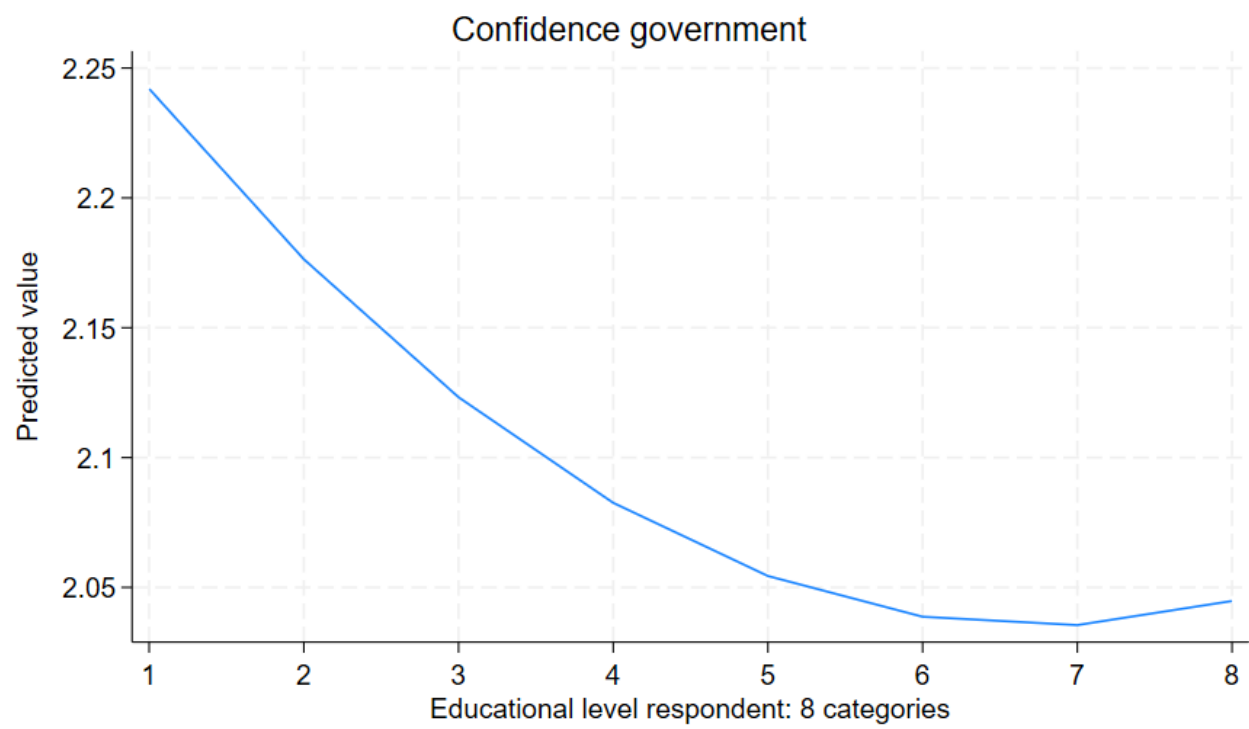


Table 8: Model used in 6.2. extended with interaction term between squared education and time variable

	(1)	(2)	(3)
	Approval for Democracy	Confidence in Parliament	Confidence in Government
Log (GDP p.C. PPP)	-0.310	0.285	0.0835
	(0.349)	(0.232)	(0.217)
Late Survey Waves	-3.905	-6.276**	-5.730**
	(3.155)	(2.367)	(1.966)
Late Survey Waves ## Log (GDP p.C. PPP)	0.376	0.627**	0.576**
	(0.315)	(0.226)	(0.182)
Education (8 levels)	-0.0500**	-0.0401	-0.0836***
	(0.0183)	(0.0286)	(0.0234)
Education ## Education	0.00819***	0.00285	0.00652**
	(0.00150)	(0.00266)	(0.00209)
Late Survey Waves ## Education	0.0464	-0.0255	0.00371
	(0.0272)	(0.0738)	(0.0603)
Late Survey Waves ## Education ## Education	-0.00401	0.00175	-0.00122
	(0.00284)	(0.00687)	(0.00588)
Sex (Female)	-0.00976	0.0435**	0.0394***
	(0.00642)	(0.0143)	(0.0104)
Unemployed	-0.0620**	-0.105***	-0.129***
	(0.0268)	(0.0279)	(0.0388)
Interpersonal Trust	0.0804***	0.160***	0.176***
	(0.0122)	(0.0226)	(0.0233)
Interest in politics	0.0870***	0.101***	0.120***
	(0.00499)	(0.0145)	(0.0148)
Survey Year	0.00700	-0.0264	-0.0228
	(0.0239)	(0.0175)	(0.0134)
Country-specific Income (Decile)	0.00893**	0.00743**	0.00387
	(0.00281)	(0.00317)	(0.00384)

Constant	-8.006	51.59	46.52*
	(44.43)	(32.89)	(24.80)
Observations	34601	37390	34151
Number of Clusters	10	10	10
R ²	0.0735	0.0668	0.0872

Table 9: Variable Description

Variable	Early Survey Waves (1994-2009)					Late Survey Waves (2011-2023)				
	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max	N
Approval democracy	3.183	0.720	1.00	4.00	34884	3.341	0.722	1.00	4.00	20487
Confidence Parliament	1.989	0.781	1.00	4.00	38786	1.983	0.809	1.00	4.00	21343
Confidence Government	2.063	0.818	1.00	4.00	28948	2.069	0.838	1.00	4.00	21347
Log (GDP p.C. PPP)	10.049	0.374	9.31	10.88	36211	10.532	0.185	10.19	11.04	20632
Education (8 levels)	4.717	2.023	1.00	8.00	40425	5.408	1.807	1.00	8.00	18128
Sex (female)	1.547	0.498	1.00	2.00	40784	1.578	0.494	1.00	2.00	22190
Unemployed	0.078	0.267	0.00	1.00	40784	0.048	0.215	0.00	1.00	22190
Interpersonal Trust	1.229	0.420	1.00	2.00	38968	1.245	0.430	1.00	2.00	21706
Interest in politics	2.373	0.903	1.00	4.00	34842	2.269	0.918	1.00	4.00	22044
Survey Year	2002.590	4.797	1996.00	2009.00	40784	2016.979	3.151	2011.00	2022.00	22190
Country-specific Income (Decile)	4.406	2.419	1.00	10.00	35556	4.749	2.393	1.00	10.00	19590
Post-Materialist index (4-item)	1.684	0.585	1.00	3.00	38956	1.822	0.604	1.00	3.00	21381
Observations	40784					22190				

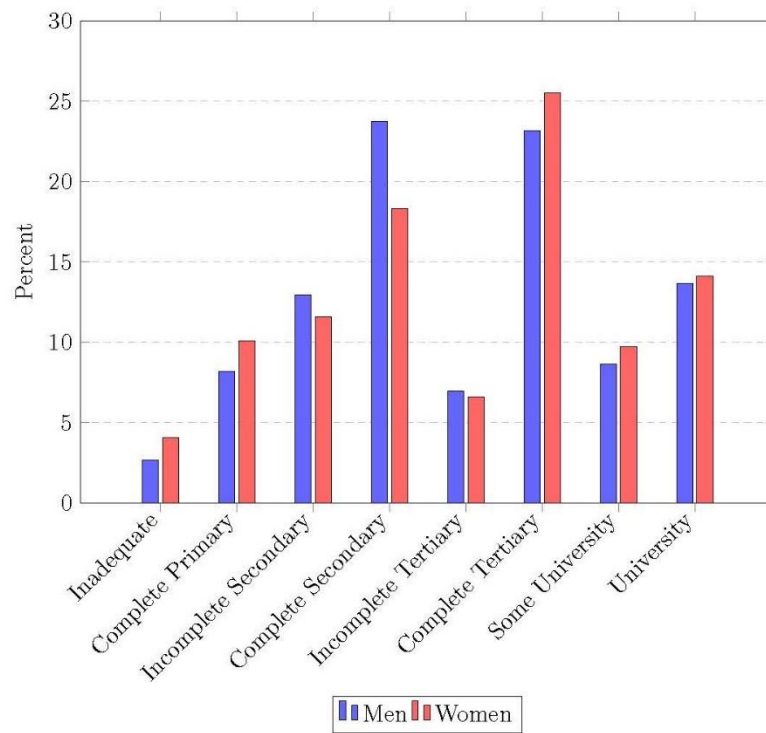


Figure 10: Educational Level of Respondents by Gender using WVS/EVS-Data (1994-2023)

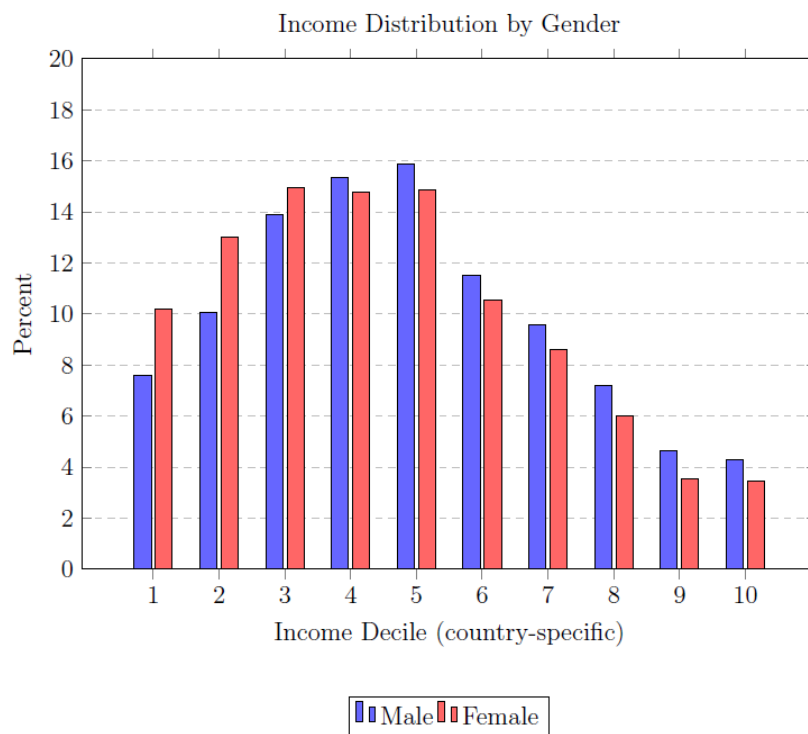


Figure 11: Income Distribution of Respondents by Gender using WVS/EVS-Data (1994-2023)