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**Support or suspend? Exploring European citizens' support for democracy
in times of democratic backsliding**

An analysis on individual-level characteristics and context-level factors that shape citizens' willingness
to suspend democracy

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Abstract

The global landscape of democracy has witnessed a concerning trend of democratic backsliding in recent years. Scholars have noted signs of increasing fatigue, growing scepticism, and superficial adherence to democratic norms and principles. Paradoxically, despite the challenges faced by democratic systems, most citizens continue to express support for democracy, particularly in Western societies. This apparent paradox calls for a deeper exploration of the factors and dynamics that shape individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward democracy. Support for democracy is a critical factor in the sustainability and resilience of democratic systems. Research into support for democracy often faces the challenge of assessing "true support" for democracy. To overcome the methodological challenge of assessing "true support" for democracy, this study adopts an alternative approach by examining citizens' willingness to suspend democracy. This research will look into the factors that influence individuals' willingness to suspend democracy. The following potential explanatory variables will be examined: partisanship, socialization and deprivation. The results show that relevant factors that influence citizens' willingness to suspend democracy are: income level, authoritarian socialization and right-wing partisanship. In addition, it can be concluded that support for authoritarian alternatives such as a strong leader or experts is related to willingness to suspend democracy. Given the significance of public support for democracy in maintaining the resilience and sustainability of democratic systems, it is important to understand citizens' support for democracy and the factors influencing it. By identifying the drivers of support or lack thereof, strategies can be developed to strengthen democratic institutions and values.

Keywords

Support for democracy, willingness to suspend democracy, authoritarian socialization, partisanship, deprivation, support for a strong leader, support for experts

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List of abbreviations

UK	United Kingdom
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019

I

Introduction

In the United States, the 2020 presidential election witnessed attempts by Donald Trump to overturn the results, shaking the very foundations of democratic legitimacy. Meanwhile, in Hungary, the Fidesz government undertook a series of actions to close down multiple media outlets, effectively consolidating power and suppressing divergent voices. Similarly, Poland's Law and Justice party engaged in the controversial packing of the Supreme Court, raising concerns about the independence of the judiciary. Undemocratic leaders have risen to power in numerous European countries, challenging the established democratic order (Mechkova et al., 2017). This erosion of democratic values and institutions is not limited to isolated incidents: it has become a global phenomenon.

In recent years, the global landscape of democracy has been marked by a concerning trend of democratic backsliding, posing significant challenges to the principles and institutions that underpin democratic governance. Scholars have noted signs of increasing fatigue, growing scepticism, and superficial adherence to democratic norms and principles (König et al., 2022; Graham & Svobik, 2020; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019; Lüthmann & Lindberg, 2019; Wuttke et al., 2020). The erosion of democratic values and the rise of illiberal tendencies in various countries have raised critical questions about the state of democracy in the contemporary world.

Against this backdrop of democratic challenges, it is intriguing to observe that most citizens continue to express support for democracy (Bryan, 2023). Despite the waves of democratic turbulence experienced over the past decade, satisfaction with democracy and democratic support remain relatively high, particularly in Western societies (Martini & Quaranta, 2020). This apparent paradox calls for a deeper exploration of the factors and dynamics that shape individuals' perceptions and attitudes toward democracy.

Public support for democracy is vital for its stability and resilience (Claassen, 2020). Countries with higher levels of public support are more likely to remain democratic, even when they face challenges. Countries with higher levels of public support for democracy are more likely to

maintain their democratic status and resist democratic erosion or authoritarian transitions. Support for democracy can act as a buffer against democratic erosion and authoritarian transitions. Public support for democracy has a greater impact on democratic stability than factors like economic development or institutional design (Claassen, 2020). It mobilizes civil society to resist anti-democratic forces.

Declining support for democracy can undermine regime legitimacy and lead to democratic failure.

Support for democracy is therefore a critical factor in the sustainability and resilience of democratic systems (Claassen, 2020).

Research into support for democracy often faces the challenge of assessing “true support” for democracy. According to Inglehart (2003), there is often a discrepancy between individuals' professed beliefs in democratic values and their actual behaviour when it comes to supporting democracy. This phenomenon, referred to as "democratic lip-service," poses a significant challenge to democracy research. Simply expressing support for democracy does not guarantee active political engagement or a consistent rejection of undemocratic practices. Therefore, explicit support for democracy may not align with the rejection of anti-democratic actions (Bryan, 2023; Qi & Shin, 2011).

To overcome the methodological challenge of assessing "true support" for democracy, this study adopts an alternative approach by examining citizens' willingness to suspend democracy. The willingness to suspend democracy serves as an indicator of potential lack of support for democratic principles. By refraining from directly asking individuals if they support democracy, the aim is to prevent socially desirable responses and encourage respondents to reveal their genuine attitudes towards democracy. This approach allows for a more accurate measurement of democratic support.

Given the significance of support for democracy in maintaining democratic systems it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of citizens' support for democracy, and the factors that contribute to their (lack of) support for democracy. Gaining insights into people's beliefs regarding democracy can help draw attention to potential sources of democratic backsliding and can be used to take action and prevent further democratic backsliding. By identifying the drivers of support or lack thereof, strategies can be developed to strengthen democratic institutions and values.

This research will look into the factors that influence individuals' willingness to suspend democracy. The following potential explanatory variables will be examined: income, education, residency in urban or rural areas, socialization under an authoritarian regime, and identification as strongly left or right-wing, indicated by high partisanship scores. Additionally, the study will explore the impact of a context of crisis on willingness to suspend democracy. This leads to the following research question:

“What factors contribute to citizens' willingness to suspend democracy, and how do individual-level characteristics and context-level factors shape this willingness?”

The thesis is structured in the following way: in chapter 2, the literature review, the existing literature and theoretical frameworks related to the main research topic, support for democracy, are presented. After theorizing, the literature leads to the formulation of seven hypotheses that are introduced in chapter 2 as well. Chapter three will explain the chosen research design, data collection methods and analysis techniques to test the formulated hypotheses. The results section then presents the findings of the statistical analyses and shows which factors contribute to citizens' willingness to suspend democracy. The last chapter includes a discussion and conclusion of the findings, their broader significance and how these insights lead to recommendations for future research.

II

Literature review

What is support for democracy?

Support for democracy can be defined in many ways. One common definition, coined by Easton, is as follows: “political support is an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favourably or unfavourably, positively or negatively” (Easton 1965: 436). Early theorists Easton (1965) and Lipset (1959) both defined two dimensions of this support: Easton called these dimensions “specific support” and “diffuse/generalized support”. Easton’s “diffuse/generalized support” refers to the idea of a more long-term, stable support that is not necessarily based on the political regime’s immediate performance, but more based on norms and values. This type of support is expected to form a so-called “reservoir of good will” (Thomassen & van Ham, 2017: 5). His “specific support” is a more short-term support that is mostly influenced by the immediate regime’s performance. Lipset (1959: 86) also distinguished similar dimensions which he called the “effectiveness” dimension and the “legitimacy” dimension, where the former refers to the actual performance of a political system and the latter to “the ability of a political system to create and sustain the perception that the current political institutions are the most appropriate ones for the society” (Lipset, 1959: 86). So, overall two dimensions of support can be established: a performance-based dimension that focuses on what the system delivers to their citizens, and a normative dimension that focuses on the extent to which people find the existing political regime the most in accordance with their own norms and values.

Diffuse support helps to sustain already democratic regimes and it is independent from the specific support that a democracy might attract due to its performance. Specific support and diffuse support should therefore be seen as independent indicators of support for democracy, however, if dissatisfaction with the specific regime endures for a longer period of time, it has the potential of spilling over to citizens’ overall evaluation of the regime type (Teixeira et al., 2014; Thomassen & Van Ham, 2017). Generally, dissatisfaction with the government (i.e. lack of specific support) is thought to be less problematic than dissatisfaction with the democratic system (i.e. lack of diffuse support).

However, this dissatisfaction on the regime level might spill over to the political system level, meaning less diffuse support for democracy (Hetherington, 1998; Miller and Listhaug, 1990; Miller, 1974). This may lead to instability of the regime.

Easton (1957) describes three objects of support that are needed for a political system to handle the conflicting demands put into it: the community, the regime and the government. The political community entails the idea that in order for a political system to work well, a certain level of “mutual identification” (Easton, 1957: p. 391) among the members of the system is needed. In a political community, members are willing to use their energies to achieve peaceful resolutions that adhere to a diverse range of demands. Secondly, Easton describes the political regime. Support for the regime includes all the so-called “rules of the game” (Easton, 1957: p. 392). These rules are a set of arrangements that determine how demands are met and how decisions are made. They serve as a basis for legitimizing and accepting the actions of the members of the political system and are deemed authoritative by the majority of the members. The third object of support that Easton (1957) describes is support for the government. Support for the government is essential because the government negotiates the rules and has to effectively manage conflicting demands. So, not only do members need to agree on the rules for settling these conflicts, they also need to support the government that negotiates these settlements. The fundamental principle of democracy lies in the fact that citizens have the power to vote their government out of office in the subsequent elections if they are dissatisfied, and are thus not in support of the government. Democracy provides a mechanism to address dissatisfaction at the this third level, which is not the case for the political regime or community level.

An extended framework of these levels of support for democracy was made by Norris, in which she creates a hierarchy between 5 levels of support (Norris, 2011). These levels include: the political community (demos), (dis)approval of democracy in terms of norms and ideals, (dis)approval of democracy based on performance, confidence in political institutions and lastly, confidence in political authorities. The higher up in the hierarchy, the political support gradually becomes more diffuse rather than specific.

Why is support for democracy important?

The consensus among political scientists is that support for democracy is important, because without it, democracy is insecure and at risk of failure in the event of a crisis (Claassen, 2020). When public support for democracy is present, democracy is legitimate and stable. However, empirical findings show mixed results: some studies indicate that public support is essential for democracy to thrive, while others suggest that other factors, such as economic development (Boix 2011; Przeworski and Limongi 1997) or political culture (Inglehart and Welzel, 2005) may be more important.

In Claassen's (2020) research, using World Values Survey data on public support for democracy in 97 countries from 1995 to 2014, a clearer account is given regarding the relationship between public support for democracy and democratic stability. The author finds that countries with higher levels of public support for democracy are more likely to remain democratic, even when facing external and internal challenges. In addition, public support seems to have a stronger impact on democratic stability than economic development or institutional design, which have been traditionally viewed as key factors in determining democratic stability. Moreover, the author argues that public support can act as a buffer against democratic erosion. Specifically, Claassen (2020) finds that countries with higher levels of public support are less likely to experience democratic backsliding or transitions to authoritarianism. He suggests that this may be because public support can help to mobilize civil society and other actors to resist anti-democratic forces. However, he also emphasises that declining support for democracy can also lead to established democracies failing or becoming deconsolidated. Even established democracies, such as in the West, are not safe from democratic erosion or backsliding. Support for democracy therefore still plays an important role in sustaining democratic stability in already consolidated democracies (Claassen, 2020).

So, it is clear that support for democracy is important for democratic stability. The good news is, that democratic support is high, especially in Western societies (Quaranta and Martini, 2017; Ferrin and Kriesi, 2016). Support for democracy in Europe has remained relatively stable over the past few decades, with no clear trend of declining support for democracy (Wuttke et al., 2020). However, at the same time another development is taking place, namely the widespread backsliding of democracies

and a lack of adherence to these seemingly widely supported democratic principles (König et al., 2022; Graham & Svobik, 2020; Wuttke et al., 2020; Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). How is this democratic backsliding possible when support for democratic principles is seemingly very high? Is support for democracy measured correctly, or is there something else going on?

Several explanations are possible for this puzzling situation in which there is widespread approval of democracy, yet at the same time a trend of democratic backsliding. This thesis will examine three possible explanations for this situation. The first possible explanation is that citizens have different understandings of democracy. The second possible explanation includes the idea that citizens simultaneously support democracy and autocracy. The third possible explanation suggests that people claim to support democracy, while their true level of support is lower. The following section provides a more detailed discussion of these explanations.

1: Different definitions of democracy

A first possible explanation for why support for democracy seems high, while democracy levels are decreasing is differences in definitions of democracy among citizens. There are many definitions of democracy and scholars debate about how to define democracy accurately. It is only logical that citizens also have different ideas about what democracy is or should be. Dalton et al. (2007) categorize democracy into three groups of definitions. These include: institutions and procedures, freedom and liberties, and social benefits. Defining democracy in terms of institutions and procedures means that democracy's defining elements are "free and fair elections," "multiparty competition," and "majority rule". Defining democracy in terms of freedom and liberties means that democracy's defining elements are its outcomes, specifically to what extent democracy is able to achieve freedom and liberty. Lastly, defining democracy in terms of social benefits is the social-democratic view on democracy that emphasizes the inclusion of social rights. Research into differences among different groups regarding support for these definitions, shows that these three categories are supported to differing extents (Dalton et al., 2007). Dalton et al. (2007) show that notions of democracy are widespread across the globe and cannot solely be attributed to citizens in

democratic countries. In addition, it is clear that democracy can be defined in different ways and that democracy can mean different things to different people(s).

Ferrin and Kriesi (2016) use a similar distinction regarding perceptions of democracy: the fundamental model of liberal democracy, a model of democracy that includes social justice measures, and a model of direct democracy. These three democratic ideals are used to measure citizens' assessment of the performance of European democracies and the degree to which citizens find these elements of democracy important. The basic principles of liberal democracy seem to be supported throughout Europe. Europeans view 'equality before the law' and 'free and fair elections' as the most important factors in the minimalist conception of liberal democracy. Europeans also endorse direct democratic forms of democracy. In addition, Europeans' conception of democracy often also includes substantive elements such as establishing measures of social justice (i.e. government should protect its citizens against poverty).

When we zoom in on how East-Asians specifically view democracy, a different picture is being painted from that of Europeans' perceptions on democracy. Democracy is generally perceived positively in the East-Asian region, but fundamental democratic values have fragile support (Chu et al., 2008). While East Asians value the individual freedoms, accountability and free and fair elections that come with a democracy, they often seem to have ambivalent attitudes towards democracy (Cheng & Chu, 2017; Chu et al. 2008). This seems to mostly be due to the fact that in the past, authoritarian regimes performed relatively well both economically and administratively, making it difficult for developing democracies to compete. In addition, because of this history, East Asian values are often seen as being inherently incompatible with Western-style democratic governance (Zhai, 2022; Zakaria, 1994). Moreover, new democracies in the region have witnessed stagnation or even a decline in popular legitimacy. However, it is important to note that democracy continues to hold significant appeal as an ideal among a substantial majority of East Asian citizens (Cheng & Chu, 2017).

To conclude, it is clear that there is not one set-in-stone definition of what democracy is, even though many definitions include similar aspects. If citizens have different definitions of democracy, their responses to survey questions measuring democratic support may not truly reflect their actual

views. Some individuals might endorse democracy based on their own understanding, which might be different from the definition asked about in surveys. If citizens support an illiberal type of democracy, but still perceive these illiberal ideas to be democratic, this can inflate the level of support for democracy that is measured, while in reality this is not “true” support for democracy. For example, when a country's democracy is experiencing backsliding but now aligns more closely with the “democratic” model preferred by its citizens, these citizens might support this process of democratic backsliding, without perceiving it as democratic backsliding. An illustration of this phenomenon can be observed among Hungarian citizens who support Orbán’s concept of illiberal democracy, as is evident in Fidesz’ successful re-election in both 2014 and 2018 (Scoggins, 2022). It is evident that without a universally agreed-upon definition of democracy among citizens, tests measuring this support might not be as accurate. This lack of understanding can explain why outcomes of tests measuring support for democracy can be different than support actually is in real life.

2: Democratic ambivalence

As previously mentioned, East Asians often may have ambivalent attitudes towards democracy (Cheng & Chu, 2017; Chu et al. 2008). This could be another possible explanation for seemingly high support for democratic principles while democratic backsliding is taking place at the same time. These ambivalent attitudes towards democracy might also be present in other regions of the world. According to Webb (2018), democratic ambivalence is prevalent in the political opinions of the general public. The term ambivalence is centred around the simultaneous presence of conflicting values or emotions (Webb, 2018). Democratic ambivalence encompasses those who have conflicting values or emotions in their political opinions regarding institutions, policies, or specific candidates in an election (Webb, 2018; Nai, 2014; Gold, 2015; Lavine et al., 2012). In the case of support for democracy, this can mean that citizens simultaneously support democracy and autocracy.

Webb (2017) uses the case of the Philippines to illustrate what democratic ambivalence among citizens can look like. She compares two primary indicators to assess the level of democratic support among citizens in a country. The first indicator relies on individual-level survey data collected through instruments like the World Values Survey or the Asian Barometer. The second indicator is derived

from election outcomes. Analysing survey data and comparing that to election results suggests that while people in the Philippines claim to value democracy, they do not necessarily oppose the notion of a strong authoritative leader.

Democratic ambivalence can result in the misinterpretation of citizens' democratic support. If individuals express conflicting attitudes, where their support for democracy is accompanied by underlying support towards autocracy, it may mistakenly be perceived as unwavering support for democracy. This misinterpretation can lead to an overestimation of democratic support levels among the population.

3: Democratic lip-service

Inglehart (2003) argues that despite the widespread acceptance of democratic values in post-industrial societies, there is often a significant gap between what people say they believe and how they actually behave when it comes to supporting democracy. He refers to this as "democratic lip-service" and suggests that it is one of the key challenges facing democratic societies today. Merely supporting democracy in principle does not necessarily mean that people also engage in the political process and when they are faced with undemocratic behaviour, demand more democracy (Qi & Shin, 2011). Explicit support for democracy and rejection of anti-democratic actions are thus not necessarily the same thing (Bryan, 2023).

Bryan (2023) investigates how people justify their continued lip-service to democracy while their support for anti-democratic actions has simultaneously increased. He finds that citizens' conceptualization of democracy is subject to partisan-motivated reasoning. When reasoning is partisan-motivated "individuals interpret information through the lens of their party commitment" (Bolsen et al., 2014, 235). This means that citizens are more likely to define democracy in an illiberal way when this is beneficial for their preferred political party. In the presence of an endorsement from their preferred political party, citizens may support policies that they would otherwise oppose, or oppose policies they would otherwise support. Citizens thus seem to have a fluid attitude when it comes to defining democracy, that can be changed in order to match their partisan self-interests. So,

instead of having a set idea about what is democratic and what is not, citizens seem to be influenced by what their favourite incumbent/political party defines as democratic. So, citizens do not only have a fluid understanding of what is democratic, but their understanding may be highly influenced by their partisan preferences and partisan interests. They follow elite cues about what democracy means and base their own ideas about democracy on those cues. This fluid understanding of what is democratic relates to something called (partisan) motivated reasoning. When citizens use motivated reasoning they only seek and understand information in a way that reinforces what they already believe, instead of having an open-minded engagement with issues (Dusso & Kennedy, 2015).

Krishnarajan (2023) further researched this notion of partisan-motivated reasoning, using a survey experiment. He adds that in situations in which citizens are faced with conflict between their democratic values and their political preferences, democratic rationalization can occur. This is different from partisan-motivated reasoning. Democratic rationalization can happen through democratic transmission and through democratic elevation. When rationalization happens through democratic transmission, citizens who disapprove of the content of a given statement or behaviour by politician, they will transmit their this disapproval into their democratic perception, meaning they will view the content or behaviour as undemocratic. Rationalization through democratic elevation relates to the aforementioned levels of support for democracy (Norris, 2011). When democratic elevation happens, one evaluates democracy on a level that is, according to Krishnarajan (2023), not necessarily appropriate for assessing democracy. For example, assessing how democratic a certain behaviour by a politician is based on feelings about one's own country, instead of assessing democracy in terms of procedural rules and norms.

The important thing that Krishnarajan (2023) shows is that citizens might not deliberately forsake democracy for political gains, but rather convince themselves that they are still upholding democratic values while promoting their preferred policies. They justify accepting undemocratic behaviour by redefining their understanding of what constitutes democracy. In some cases, they even consider undemocratic actions that align with their political beliefs to be more democratic than regular democratic actions that don't align with their beliefs. This phenomenon, known as democratic

rationalization, is observed not just in the US but also worldwide, and appears to be a common feature of modern democratic politics (Krishnarajan, 2023).

So, as described there are three possible explanations for the gap between observed diffuse support for democracy and the trend of democratic backsliding in several European countries, including, but not limited to: different definitions of democracy, democratic ambivalence and lip-servicing. In order to reliably assess citizens' support for democracy, in this thesis citizens will be asked directly about their willingness to suspend democracy. The following section will further discuss the concept of suspending democracy.

Suspending democracy

Conducting research on support for democracy can be challenging, because the inclusion of explicit references to democracy in survey items may elicit lip servicing that may not truly reflect a genuine dedication to democratic principles (Ceka & Magalhaes, 2020; Inglehart, 2003; Kiewiet de Jonge, 2016). This can therefore lead to higher measures of support for democracy than is truly present among citizens, and might explain the mismatch between the seemingly steady and widespread support of democracy in Europa, combined with a trend of democratic backsliding present at the same time in several European countries.

In order to avoid this methodological problem and in an attempt to measure "true support" for democracy, this research will focus on the willingness of citizens to suspend democracy. Willingness to suspend democracy is an indicator of a lack of support for democracy, or can show that while people think they support democracy, when other considerations come in, they might be willing to overlook these democratic principles. By not asking the straightforward question of "Do you support democracy?", the idea is to avoid people answering in a socially desirable manner. In doing so, citizens are pushed to show their actual, true support for democracy. This way, the methodological threat of democratic lip-service may be avoided.

In summary, this research seeks to explore the level of diffuse support for the democratic political system according to Easton's (1965) framework. To overcome the potential methodological

issue of citizens merely paying lip service to their support for democracy, it is crucial to obtain an accurate assessment of the actual level of citizen support for democracy. Given the significance of support for democracy in maintaining democratic systems it is essential to gain a comprehensive understanding of citizens' willingness to (temporarily) suspend democratic principles and identify the individuals who would be willing to do so. This leads to the following research question:

“What factors contribute to citizens' willingness to suspend democracy, and how do individual-level characteristics and context-level factors shape this willingness?”

In order to investigate the research question at hand, several hypotheses are formulated. These hypotheses are based on several explanations behind support for democracy. The first two explanations focus on partisanship and authoritarian socialisation. Next, hypotheses 3 to 5 are categorized together under the label "deprivation" which refers to individuals who experience a sense of being deprived. After the first 5 hypotheses, two more hypotheses are formulated that are linked to deprivation, particularly in relation to education level. These hypotheses also explore support for a strong leader and support for experts subsequently.

The first explanatory factor of support for democracy that will be discussed is partisanship. Research shows that citizens do not always choose democratic principles above their ideological or partisan preferences (Svolik 2018, Graham & Svolik, 2020). In some instances people are willing to trade in their democratic support for partisan preferences (Svolik, 2018; Mazepus & Toshkov, 2022). In order to get the policy that they want, citizens are willing to overlook their own democratic values.

So, citizens are willing to choose outcome favourability above procedural fairness. Graham & Svolik (2020) show that when, during an election, citizens are confronted with the decision between a candidate aligned with their own party, but whose positions undermine democratic principles, and a candidate who adheres to democratic principles, but lacks policy-based appeal, a considerable portion of the electorate is willing to compromise their commitment to democratic ideals in order to support a candidate who advocates for their party or personal interests. This tendency is heightened when the political landscape is polarized (Graham & Svolik, 2020), since it raises the stakes of elections. Voters

with more radical or extreme policy preferences are more willing to compromise democratic principles compared to moderate and centrist voters (Graham & Svobik, 2020), therefore the expectation is that those citizens who are on the extreme ends of the political spectrum, are also most willing to suspend democracy, since they have already shown their willingness to compromise democratic principles in exchange for personal gain. Could this trade-off of democratic principles in exchange for personal gain also translate into more willingness to suspend democracy?

In addition, there might be a difference in the effect of high partisanship on willingness to suspend democracy for those identifying with the left side of the spectrum and the right side of the spectrum. Ideological rigidity theories suggest that individuals with less democratic tendencies possess specific psychological traits such as intolerance and dogmatism, that tend to steer them towards certain (extreme) ideological beliefs. This is called the “rigidity-of-the-extremes model” (De Leeuw et al., 2021, 413, 416; Foa & Mounk, 2017; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2019). Another model emerging from this idea is the alternative model called “rigidity-of-the-right model” (De Leeuw et al., 2021; Mounk 2018, Rokeach, 1956). This model emphasizes that individuals with rightist beliefs exhibit greater cognitive rigidity and therefore have less democratic tendencies. To see whether partisanship plays a role in willingness to suspend democracy, the following hypothesis is formulated:

- (1) *Those who have high partisanship, meaning they place themselves on the high ends of the left/right spectrum (extreme), are more willing to suspend democracy.*

The second possible explanation for differences in support for democracy between citizens refers to their political socialization. Democratic experience is often seen as one of the aspects predicting support for democracy, through Dalton et al.’s (2007) logic of learning. This logic of learning suggests that ideas about democracy are simply learned through experiencing democracy. In addition, having an understanding about what democracy entails is generally associated with political support for democracy (Cho, 2014). Having a well-informed idea of how democracy operates can create a, so-called, biased framework that will automatically favour democracy over authoritarianism. This biased framework can strengthen individuals’ political leanings towards democracy while opposing authoritarianism (Cho, 2014). Those with limited experience with democracy face challenges in

formulating and openly expressing supportive attitudes towards democracy. In contrast, citizens who have had more democratic experience find it easier to articulate their supportive attitudes, which in turn solidifies these attitudes (Cho, 2014). Social learning theories posit that the relationship between democratic understanding and support for democracy becomes stronger when a country has a prolonged experience of democracy.

Neundorf (2010) also suggests that the context of political socialization matters for support for democracy. Her study explores public satisfaction with the democratic system in several post-socialist countries, specifically looking at different ages and cohorts. She finds support for the so-called socialist socialization hypothesis. This hypothesis poses that “the generations socialized during the Cold War period evaluate the democratic system more negatively than the pre- and post-Cold War generations” (Neundorf, 2010: 1099). This outcome emphasizes the importance of political socialization in democratic consolidation and public support for democracy.

So, citizens undergo unconscious socialization, in which they learn to support and accept the system they grew up in. During early adulthood, they will develop political ideas and attitudes, that align with and endorse the existing system. If grown up in an established democracy, citizens will often believe that democracy is the only viable form of governance in their country (Neundorf, 2010, Mishler & Rose, 1996). These supportive attitudes, formed during early adulthood, will then serve as a foundation for continued support for democracy throughout life (Easton, 1965). This shows the impact that socialization under an (socialist) authoritarian regime can have on the evaluation of democracy.

To conclude, theories suggest that generations socialized under an authoritarian regime who have had, compared to those not socialized under an authoritarian regime, less democratic experience might be less supportive of democracy. Therefore, the expectation is that in these countries, willingness to suspend democracy will be higher among those generations who were socialized under an authoritarian regime compared to those not socialized under an authoritarian regime. However, it is important to note that the effect of being socialized under an authoritarian regime might depend on whether these citizens maintain a positive or a negative reading of the past (De Leeuw et al., 2021). If citizens have a negative reading of the past, they might actually be troubled by the regime’s past

authoritarian practices, such as repression and violence. This may lead to the greater support for democratic systems in opposition to the previous regime.

As the data used in the study was collected from four specific countries - Spain, UK, Germany, and Poland – each with a different authoritarian past - it is anticipated that the observed generational effect is limited to those nations with relatively brief democratic experience, namely Spain, Poland and (East-)Germany. The older generations from countries with a Soviet past might also be affected by the aforementioned socialist socialization. In Poland, Spain and Germany a generational effect on the willingness to suspend democracy is expected. Those who have had less experience with democracy, and still have memories of the previous regimes, are more willing to suspend democracy. Conversely, a generational effect on the willingness to suspend democracy in the UK is not expected, because no recent authoritarian regime has been in place. After theorizing, the hypothesis is the following:

(2) Older generations, who have had less democratic experience, in Spain, Poland and Germany will be more likely to be willing to suspend democracy compared to younger individuals in these countries. No generational effect on support for democracy is expected in the UK.

The following three hypotheses are grouped together as "deprivation," encompassing individuals who experience a sense of being deprived. Research on deprivation focuses on the role of income, education and on citizens area of residence, for example, whether they live in more urban or rural areas. The notion of feeling deprived can be associated with the concept of winners and losers of globalization. Individuals who perceive their life chances reduced due to modernization (Lipset, 1959) and globalization are commonly referred to as the "losers" of globalization (Teney et al., 2014: 575). Conversely, the "winners" of globalization are those who believe they have gained benefits from the process (Teney et al., 2014: 575). The group of "losers" of globalization tend to include individuals with lower levels of education, belonging to lower social classes, and possessing lesser wealth (Bornschiefer, 2010; Kriesi et al, 2006; 2008; 2012; Rama & Cordero, 2018; Teney et al., 2014). The expectation is that this group will be less supportive of democracy, because they might view this system as not benefitting them. This leads to the following hypothesis:

- (3) *Individuals with a lower income are more willing to suspend democracy than individuals with a higher income.*

In most countries, individuals with higher levels of education tend to display greater trust in political institutions compared to those with lower levels of education (Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). Moreover, empirical data shows that educational attainment makes people more supportive of democracy. When the amount of years of schooling increases, support for liberal moral values, such as equality and tolerance, increase as well (Bobo & Licari, 1989; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017; Shafiq, 2010). The higher educated, especially in established democracies are also more likely to support democratic values and principles (Dalton, 1994; Hibbing & Theiss-Morse, 2002; Mayne & Hakhverdian, 2017). Moreover, individuals who are lower educated tend to participate less in politics and generally have less trust in democratic institutions (Tsatsanis & Belchior, 2023). This tendency to have lower trust in politics, combined with the idea of feelings of deprivation due to globalization, leads to the expectation that this will translate into more willingness among the lower educated to suspend democracy. However, because it is also clear that technocratic authoritarian attitudes are higher among citizens with higher education (Bertsou & Caramani, 2022), a contrast hypothesis is added stating that the high educated ones are actually more willing to suspend democracy. Consequently, the second hypothesis of the deprivation hypotheses can be formulated as follows:

- (4) *a. Individuals with lower education are more willing to suspend democracy than individuals with higher education.*
- b. Individuals with higher education are more willing to suspend democracy than individuals with lower education.*

The last of the three indicators of the grouped hypotheses labelled ‘deprivation’ refers to where citizens live. People in rural areas tend to have lower political trust than those living in urban areas (Mitsch et al., 2021). Since satisfaction with democracy is generally lower in those individuals living in rural areas (Lago, 2022), the expectation is that those individuals living in rural areas will also be more willing to suspend democracy compared to their counterparts living in urban areas. So, this leads to the following hypothesis:

(5) *Individuals living in rural areas are more willing to suspend democracy than individuals living in urban areas.*

So, the above hypotheses are based on the literature regarding support for democracy. To further examine support for democracy, two more hypotheses are formulated that are linked to education levels, but that also include the context of a crisis. Firstly, the context of a crisis will be discussed and afterwards the hypotheses that include two mediator variables, namely support for a strong leader and support for experts, will be further explained.

What role can a crisis play in citizens' willingness to suspend democracy? What happens in such a context? Will support for democracy or support for authoritarianism change in a new context of crisis compared to normal? A crisis that posed a possible threat to the foundations of democracy is the recent COVID-19 pandemic (Amat et al., 2020). Managing a crisis like this involves various complex democratic dilemmas, including reconciling public health with civil liberties, and determining the appropriate balance between democratic and technocratic governance (Amat et al., 2020; Engler et al., 2021; Zwitter, 2012). An example of democratic backsliding during the COVID-19 pandemic, is the case of Hungary, where the passing of a bill by parliament has granted Viktor Orbán and his government the power to rule by decree with no constraints and no time limit (Amat et al., 2020). In addition, to what degree did citizens' preferences regarding democratic or technocratic governance evolve during this crisis? (Amat et al., 2020). Amat et al. (2020) found that citizens' preferences regarding technocratic governance and strong leadership shifted following the COVID-19 outbreak. Citizens were willing to sacrifice their individual freedoms and ideological representation in exchange for protection against the virus. Citizens expressed significantly more support for rule by experts. A widespread willingness to relinquish fundamental civil liberties to mitigate the spread of the virus and an increase in support for strong leadership, show the change in citizens' preferences regarding way of governance. It seems that in a public health crisis, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, the public may be willing to prioritize strong leadership and technocratic governance over civil liberties and democratic procedures (Amat et al., 2020; Murray et al., 2013; Parry et al., 2021).

With crises, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, a call for more expert-led decision-making often follows. Instead of looking at representatives, citizens prefer strong leadership and expert-led decision-making (Amat et al., 2020; Lavezzolo et al., 2022; Murray et al., 2013; Parry et al., 2021). This expert-led decision-making is generally referred to as technocratic governance. A technocratic system can be defined as: “a government or social system that is controlled or influenced by experts in science or technology” (Cambridge Dictionary, 2023). Technocrats, those supporting a technocratic way of governing, do not necessarily share one set of unique characteristics (Heyne & Lobo, 2021). Support for technocracy should be seen more like a thin-centred ideology, that can be combined with many different political backgrounds and attitudes (Heyne & Lobo, 2021). Generally, citizens who have low political trust are more likely to support a technocratic system than those who have higher political trust (Bertsou & Carmani, 2022).

Research earlier discussed in the deprivation section shows that support for democracy might be influenced by citizens' level of education. In addition, research also suggests that technocratic attitudes are higher among citizens with higher education and income (Bertsou & Caramani, 2022). The expectation would therefore also be that citizens with higher education and income are more willing to suspend democracy in times of crises. However, Lipset (1959) argues that the working class is more likely to hold authoritarian attitudes due to their economic position and lack of education. He suggests that these individuals may feel a sense of insecurity and economic vulnerability, leading them to support strong leaders and authoritarian policies as a means of protecting their economic interests. “Their economic insecurity and lack of education make them more susceptible to authoritarian appeals, particularly in times of stress.” (Lipset, 1959, p. 483). Empirical data on exactly this idea shows that social class is indeed a significant factor in determining authoritarian attitudes (De Regt et al., 2012). Specifically, individuals from lower social classes are more likely to hold authoritarian attitudes than those from higher social classes. This relationship is consistent across different countries, suggesting that class plays a universal role in shaping authoritarian attitudes. So, the idea that working class people, so those who have a low income and little education, are more prone to

support authoritarian leaders and policies, combined with the idea that technocratic attitudes are higher among the highly educated, leads to the following hypotheses:

(6) *In the context of a crisis, low educated citizens will be more likely to be willing to suspend democracy because of a need for strong leadership*

(7) *In the context of a crisis, high educated citizens will be more likely to be willing to suspend democracy because of a need for expertise*

III

Data and methods

Data

The data used for this research was collected by YouGov. The data collection was carried out in four countries: Germany, Spain, Poland and the UK. The survey was conducted between February 25th and March 3rd, 2022, utilizing the YouGov panel as a source of respondents. To ensure a representative sample, sampling quotas were employed, with specific quotas tailored to each country.

For simplicity reasons and for the sake of having the same N in every analysis, participants who answered “I don’t know” or “Other” to the following questions: income, education, support for a strong leader, support for experts and urban/rural, were removed. This results in a total of participants of N=6099. Of these participants, 3041 are male (49.9%) and 3058 female (50.1%). The number of participants from Germany was 1601, while the UK had 1304 participants. Spain had 1606 participants, and Poland had 1588 participants.

Determining the dependent variable

The dependent variable is individuals’ willingness to suspend democracy. This construct will be operationalized using the following question from the YouGov survey: ‘Which of the following statements comes closest to your own opinion?’ Participants have to choose between the following two statements: (1) “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government.” And (2) “Under some circumstances, it can be acceptable to suspend democracy.” If participants choose the second statement they will be labelled as willing to suspend democracy. Of the 6099 participants in total, 4998 answered that democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government and 1101 participants were willing to suspend democracy under some circumstances. Table 1 shows the descriptive statistics of the variables.

Determining the independent variables

The following independent variables are included: partisanship, age, income, education, rural/urban and authoritarian and technocratic attitudes.

Partisanship

The independent variable ‘partisanship’ will be measured using the following question from the YouGov survey: “In politics, a distinction is often made between “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on the scale below, where 0 means left and 10 means right?” Participants either choosing 0 or 1, meaning the participant views themselves as very left-wing, or 9 or 10, meaning the participant views themselves as very right-wing, are labelled as ‘extreme’ and therefore scoring high on partisanship. A new variable was created in which everyone scoring a 0 or 1 gets a score 1, meaning they are extreme on the left side of the spectrum, and everyone scoring a 9 or 10 gets a score 2, meaning they are extreme on the right side of the spectrum. All the participants answering something other than 0,1,9 or 10 get a score of 0, meaning they do not have high partisanship. The answer ‘I don’t know’ was included in the non-partisan category (=0), because the assumption is that those with high partisanship would feel strongly about this question and therefore would not answer ‘I don’t know’. It is an indicator of not having high partisanship.

Age

The independent variable ‘authoritarian socialization’ will be measured using the following question from the YouGov survey: “In what year were you born?”. In order to research different generations’ differences in their willingness to suspend democracy, new variables have to be created. For Germany, Spain and Poland generational groups were created in accordance with their subsequential democratic history. Those who have experienced a non-democratic regime and have therefore less experience with democracy, are expected to be more willing to suspend democracy. Political attitudes are usually assumed to solidify during the pre-adult period (between the ages of 10 and 17) and remain relatively stable throughout adulthood (Voicu & Peral, 2014; Sears & Valentino, 1997). The start of the formative years, in which individuals are most receptive to political learning (i.e. political socialization), is debated to range from the ages of 14 to 17 (Fuks et al., 2018). Literature

shows that it is difficult to choose a specific cut-off point that marks the beginning of this developmental phase (Jennings et al., 2009; Fuks et al., 2018). However, in order to define different generations that have different experiences with democracy, choosing a cut-off point is necessary. For the analysis, the age of 16 is chosen. So, in order to determine who was socialized under an authoritarian regime per country, specific years have been selected based on the contextual circumstances of each respective country.

After being subjected to Franco's fascist regime for almost 40 years, Franco's death in 1975 kickstarted the Spanish transition to democracy (Voicu & Peral, 2014; Encarnación, 2001). This period stretched from 1975 to 1987 (Montero et al., 2008), the year in which the constitution was passed (Aguilar, 1997). The first democratic elections were held in 1977 (Sánchez-Cuenca & Aguilar, 2009). Therefore, the people who were 16 years old in that year are assumed to have been socialized under a democratic regime. This means that everyone with birthyear 1961 and later are the generation socialized under a democratic regime, and therefore scoring a 0 on the newly computed variable 'socialized under authoritarian regime' (=0). Those born before 1961 are assumed to have been socialized under an authoritarian regime and therefore they score a 1 on the newly computed variable 'socialized under authoritarian regime' (=1).

The Polish transition started in 1989, the year in which the first democratic elections were held (Jakubowska & Kaniasty, 2014; Kotwas & Kubik, 2022; Martin et al., 2023). Therefore, the individuals who were 16 years old in the year 1989 are assumed to have been socialized under a democratic regime. This means that everyone with birthyear 1973 and later are scored a 0 on the variable 'socialized under authoritarian regime' (=0). Those born before 1973 are assumed to have been socialized under an authoritarian regime and therefore they score a 1 on the newly computed variable 'socialized under authoritarian regime' (=1).

Germany presents a unique and somewhat more complex case due to its dual history. While former West-Germany had been democratic since the end of World War II, individuals living in former East-Germany lived in a communist system until the reunification of the two Germanies in 1989-1990 (Dale, 2006; Fuchs & Roller, 2006). The process of democratic transition in East Germany primarily

involved the integration of its citizens into an already existing and functioning democracy (Fuchs & Roller, 2006). Since it is not possible to differentiate between West and East Germans in this study, the year 1990 has been selected as a reference point. In this year the first all-German democratic elections, following the unification of East Germany and West Germany, took place (Von Beyme, 1990). Starting from this year onward, all Germans lived in a democratic state and therefore were not socialized under an authoritarian regime. So, the individuals who were 16 years old in the year 1990 are assumed to have been socialized under a democratic regime. This means that everyone with birthyear 1974 and later are scored a 0 on the variable 'socialized under authoritarian regime' (=0). Those born before 1974 are assumed to have been socialized under an authoritarian regime and therefore they score a 1 on the newly computed variable 'authoritarian socialization' (=1).

Since the UK has no recent experiences with authoritarian regimes, no generational effect is expected for this country. All individuals from the UK therefore score a 0 on the variable 'socialized under authoritarian regime' (=0).

Income

The independent variable 'income' will be measured using questions regarding income from the YouGov survey. Participants are asked to give an indication of their household income. Since this question was designed in a different manner in all four of the countries, a new variable is created classifying income in three different categories: low, medium, high. Based on the country-specific income information, income thresholds are calculated that define the low, medium, and high categories for each country separately. This distinction is first made based on the mean and median income levels per country (See Table 7 in Appendix 3). Categories were then made using one standard deviation above and one standard deviation below the mean. After determining the three categories per country, one variable was created including all four of the countries, in order to examine the effect of income comparatively. Participants answering 'other', 'I don't know' or 'I prefer not to say' have not been included in the newly created income variable. See appendix for more information on how exactly income categories were created (Appendix 3).

Education

The independent variable 'education' will be measured using the following questions from the YouGov survey: "What is the highest level of education you have achieved?". Since this question was designed in a different manner in all four of the countries, due to differences in education systems in these countries, a new variable is created in order to be able to analyse the data comparatively (See Appendix 4). Three new categories were created, namely, low educated, medium educated and high educated. The category low educated are those respondents with no education until those who completed high school. The category medium educated includes those respondents with a vocational education and comparable forms of education. The high educated category consists of respondents who went to higher education, including degrees at (applied) universities. See Appendix 4 for more information on how exactly education categories were created.

Rural/urban

The independent variable rural/urban will be measured using data from three of the four countries. No data for the living situation of participants in Spain were available. Therefore, the sample size for this question is different than the other analyses, namely N=4493. The different categories were recoded into one variable where score 0 = urban and score 1 = rural. See appendix for more information on how exactly the categories were created (Appendix 5).

Table 1: Descriptives variables

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Variables</i>					
Partisanship		.21	.53	.00	2.00
Left	514				
Right	369				
Age	6099	48.44	15.58	18.00	91.00
Income		2.07	.66	1.00	3.00
Low	1111				
Medium	3441				
High	1547				
Education		2.11	.88	1.00	3.00
Low	2066				
Medium	1283				
High	2750				
Rural/urban		.26	.44	.00	1.00
Urban	3317				
Rural	1176				
Support for strong leader	6099	2.09	1.78	1.00	7.00
Support for experts	6099	2.75	1.95	1.00	7.00
Willingness to suspend democracy:		1.18	.39	1.00	2.00
Not willing	4998				
Willing	110761				

Mediator effects

The last hypotheses (6-7) include mediator variables. The expectation is that the occurrence of a crisis raises the willingness for people to suspend democracy for both the high and the low educated. Specifically, this willingness takes the form of authoritarian strong leader rule sympathies among the less educated and authoritarian technocratic attitudes among the highly educated. Since the data used in this analysis was collected during/after a worldwide health crisis (covid-19), the context was one of crisis. Therefore, the expectation is that during times of crisis, the higher educated are more likely to

be willing to suspend democracy due to having more technocratic attitudes. In addition, the lower educated are expected to be more likely to be willing to suspend democracy due to having more support for an authoritarian strong leader.

Participants had to indicate to what extent they agreed with the following statements: ‘We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader who decides things’, ‘We should get rid of parliament and elections and have experts decide things’. The former question is used to measure authoritarian strong leader attitudes and the latter is used to measure authoritarian technocratic attitudes. Participants had to indicate a number between 1 and 7, where 1 indicates ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 indicates ‘strongly agree’. So, the higher the score on these variables the higher the support for a strong leader or experts, respectively.

Methods

Since the dependent variable willingness to suspend democracy is measured in a binary way, logistic regression analyses will be conducted to test hypotheses 1 through 5. To test hypotheses 6-8 a mediator analysis that also includes linear regression techniques, will be conducted. For hypotheses 1 until 5 a separate binary logistic regression is conducted (model 1-5). Each test includes the country dummies to control for between country differences. In model 6 all of the variables are included. The overall model shows all the effects of the predictors on willingness to suspend democracy, controlled for each other and including country dummies to control for between-country differences.

To account for the lack of precision in some of the data regarding authoritarian socialization, separate tests will be conducted for each country to test the robustness of these results. In addition, to check the robustness of the mediator effects, the variables support for a strong leader and support for experts are tested again, but then as categorical variables. More information about these robustness checks can be found in appendices 2, 8 and 9.

Assumptions logistic regression

In order to utilize logistic regression, several assumptions must be met. These include the following. Firstly, the dependent variable should be dichotomous. This requirement is evident as this

type of regression is specifically employed because the dependent variable of interest has only two categories.

The next assumption that has to be met is independence of errors. The data that will be used to test these hypotheses is structured hierarchically, with individuals nested within countries. Therefore, it is likely that values of Y are similar within groups, which can lead to possibly biased coefficients and downwardly biased standard errors. This can in addition lead to an increased probability of making type 1 errors. To solve this problem, country-dummies are used to explicitly control for differences between countries. Country dummies are used instead of using multi-level modelling analyses, because the hypotheses tested and data used in the analysis is all on the individual-level and the data includes only four different countries.

The third assumption of logistic regression is that there is no multicollinearity. Multicollinearity occurs when the independent variables that explain the dependent variable are highly correlated with one another. If that is the case, these independent variables do not provide unique information. If the correlation is too high, this can cause problems when fitting and interpreting the model. To detect whether there is multicollinearity in the data, variance inflation factors (VIF) are used. These VIF-scores measure the correlation and strength of the correlation between the independent variables. Through conducting a linear regression VIF-scores and tolerance values are extracted for all of the predictor variables: partisanship, authoritarian socialization, income, education and rural/urban. Tolerance values less than 0.1 (Field, 2018; Menard, 1995), and VIF scores greater than 10 (Field, 2018; Myers, 1999) indicate a problem. Fortunately, no tolerance values less than 0.1 were found and no VIF scores greater than 10 were found. The correlation matrix shows no high correlations between the independent variables (Appendix 1). This indicates there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables.

Extreme outliers also have the potential to bias results. After checking the data set in SPSS, no extreme outliers were found. Finally, when conducting a logistic regression a linear relationship between the independent variables and the logit of the dependent variable is assumed. For hypotheses

1 through 6 the included predictor variables are categorical, for which testing for the linearity of the logit is not necessary.

To test the mediator analyses multiple analyses have to be conducted. For this first mediator analysis that tests hypothesis 6, four different models are tested (Figure 1). In the first model the effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy is tested using binary logistic regression. In the second model the effect of education on authoritarian attitudes is measured using a linear regression analysis. The third effect that has to be measured is the effect of authoritarian attitudes on willingness to suspend democracy. In the last model the effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy is tested when controlling for authoritarian attitudes. In all of the models country dummies are included to control for between-country differences. The following conditions are necessary to establish support for the 6th (mediation) hypothesis:

- 1) The effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy should be significant. Mediation namely implies that there is an effect that can be explained through the mediator variable.
- 2) The effect of education on authoritarian attitudes should be significant.
- 3) The effect of authoritarian attitudes on willingness to suspend democracy should be significant.
- 4) The effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy when the mediator variable authoritarian attitudes is also in the model, should be smaller than the simple effect of high education on willingness to suspend democracy.

To examine the mediating role of support for authoritarian technocratic attitudes (support for experts) in the association between education and willingness to suspend democracy, the same analytical procedures are conducted as those used to assess the mediating effect of support for authoritarian attitudes (support for a strong leader). The only difference is that the variable measuring support for authoritarian strong leader attitudes is replaced with the variable measuring support for authoritarian technocratic attitudes (Figure 2).

Assumptions linear regression

The assumptions for linear regression are largely similar to the assumptions that have to be met for logistic regression. As previously mentioned, in order to solve the problem of dependence of observations, country-dummies are used to explicitly control for differences between countries. In addition, there is no multicollinearity between the independent variables.

The assumption of homoscedasticity has to be met for conducting a linear regression. This means that the variance of the residuals should be constant across all levels of the predictors. In order to examine whether there are any patterns in the spread of the residuals, the standardized predicted values and standardized residuals are plotted against each other. This was done for both the linear regression analysis of education on support for a strong leader, as for the analysis of education on support for experts. After visually inspecting the scatterplot no clear pattern was found, indicating homoscedasticity. The last assumption that has to be met is linearity: the relationship between the dependent variable and independent variables should be linear. This assumption is also met (Appendix 6 and 7).

Figure 1: Mediation analysis pathways for support for a strong leader

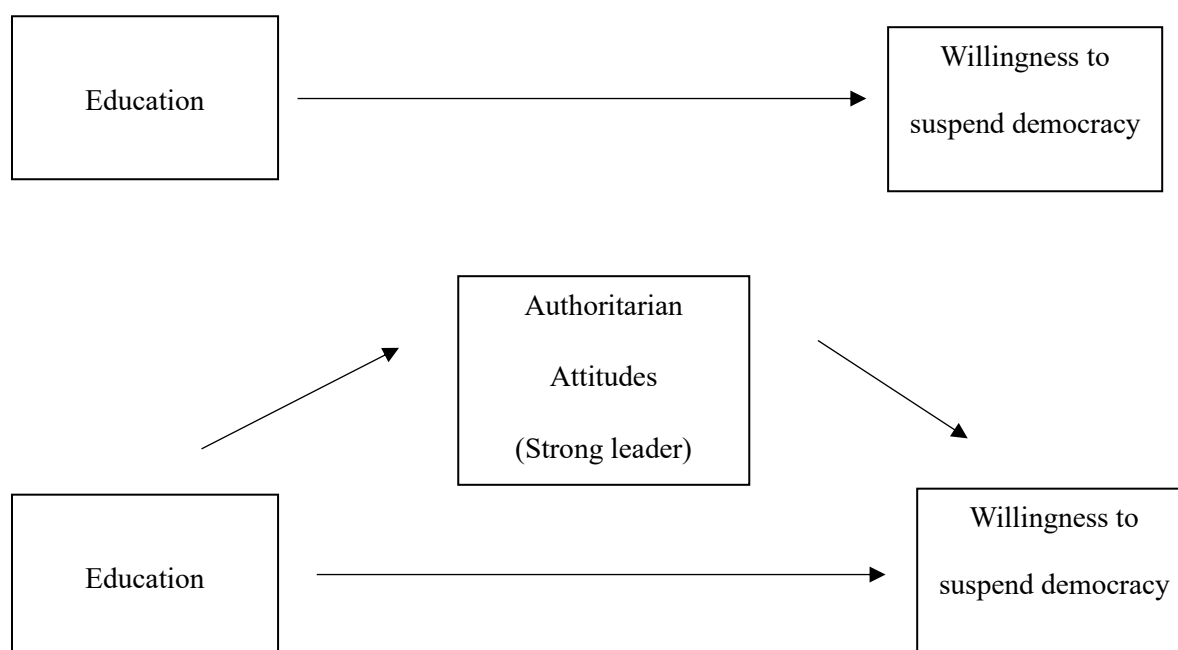
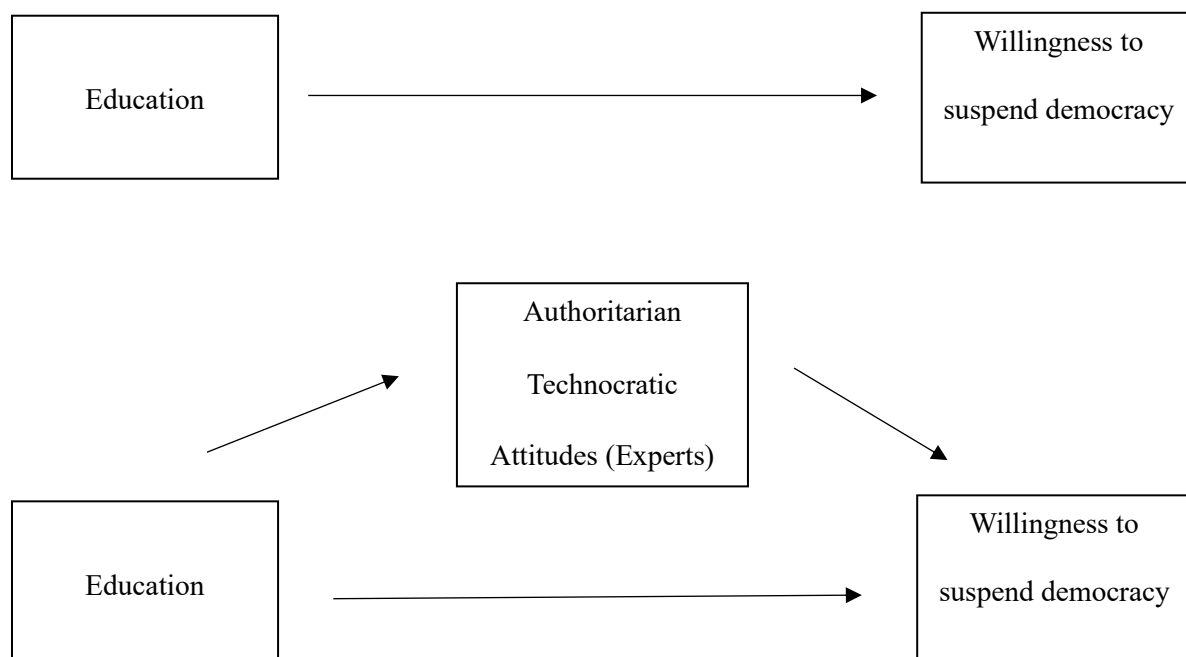


Figure 2. Mediation analysis pathways for support for experts



IV

Results

Partisanship: model 1

The results of the binary logistic regression to test the effect of partisanship on willingness to suspend democracy are shown in table 2. The explained variance in willingness to suspend democracy by partisanship is Nagelkerk's $R^2 = .024$ (2.4%). Both the effect of extreme left-wing partisanship and extreme right-wing partisanship were tested. The reference category was no partisanship, i.e. being moderate on the left-right scale. Country dummy variables are included in the model to control for between-country differences. There is no significant effect found for left-wing partisanship on willingness to suspend democracy. However, a positive significant effect was found for right-wing partisanship on willingness to suspend democracy. This means that belonging to the right-wing partisanship group increases the chances of being willing to suspend democracy.

Authoritarian socialization: model 2

The results of the binary logistic regression to test the effect of authoritarian socialization on willingness to suspend democracy are shown in table 2. The explained variance in willingness to suspend democracy by partisanship is Nagelkerk's $R^2 = .027$ (2.7%). The reference category was individuals not socialized in an authoritarian regime. Country dummy variables are included in the model to control for between-country differences. A negative significant effect was found for authoritarian socialization on willingness to suspend democracy. This means that people who have been socialised in authoritarian regimes are *less* likely to be willing to suspend democracy. This is the opposite of what was expected in the hypothesis.

The separate tests that were conducted to account for the lack of precision in some of the data (e.g. West/East Germany) and to check for the robustness of the results, showed that the results still hold for Germany and Poland. A separate test for Spain showed no significant effect of authoritarian socialization on willingness to suspend democracy for Spanish participants (Appendix 2).

Table 2: Results logistic regression

Hypotheses	1	2	3	4	5	1-5
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Partisanship ^a						
Left	.001 (.126)					-.004 (.126)
Right	.494*** (.126)					.511*** (.127)
Age ^b						
Authoritarian socialization		-.394*** (.081)				-.420*** (.082)
Income ^c						
Medium			-.207* (.088)			-.214* (.089)
High			-.219* (.099)			-.235* (.102)
Education ^d						
Medium				.136 (.097)		.117 (.098)
High				.042 (.079)		.047 (.081)
Rural ^e						
Rural					.002 (.085)	-.102 (.088)
Germany	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference	Reference
United Kingdom	-.057 (.099)	-.259 (.107)	-.035 (.099)	-.079 (.102)	-.063* (.100)	-.316** (.112)
Spain	-.428*** (.101)	-.540*** (.104)	-.367*** (.101)	-.407*** (.101)	-.420*** (.103)	-.593*** (.111)
Poland	.354*** (.089)	.369*** (.088)	.403*** (.088)	.414*** (.088)	.407*** (.088)	.327*** (.091)
N	6099	6099	6099	6099	6099	6099
Nagelkerke R ²	.024	.027	.022	.021	.020	.033
Constant	-1.541	-1.320	-1.370	-1.572	-1.389	-1.157

Notes:

Logistic regression. Reported coefficients are b-coefficients. Standard errors in parentheses. P-values: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

a. No partisanship is reference category. b. No authoritarian socialization is reference category.

c. Low income is reference category. d. Low education is reference category. e. Urban is reference category.

Income: model 3

The effect of income on willingness to suspend democracy is shown in table 2. Income levels medium and high are compared to reference category low level income. Country dummy variables are included in the model to control for between-country differences. The variance explained by income, controlled for between-country differences, is Nagelkerke $R^2 = .022$ (2.2%). There is a negative effect of income on willingness to suspend democracy, meaning that the higher one's income is, the less likely one is to be willing to suspend democracy and vice versa. The output also gives us the Wald-statistic, from which a p-value can be computed. If the coefficient is statistically significant, it indicates that the predictor is making a significant contribution to the prediction of the outcome (Field, 2018). All three levels of income have a significant negative effect on willingness to suspend democracy (Table 2). This means that as income level increases from low to medium to high, there is less willingness to suspend democracy. These findings are in line with the expected effect and direction of the effect, so hypothesis 3 is supported.

Education: model 4

The results of the binary logistic regression to test the effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy are as follows: the explained variance in willingness to suspend democracy by education is Nagelkerk's $R^2 = .021$ (2.1%). Education levels medium and high were both compared to reference category low level education. Country dummy variables are included in the model to control for between-country differences. There is no significant effect found for education on willingness to suspend democracy. Therefore, no support is found for hypothesis 4a and 4b.

Rural/urban: model 5

The results of the binary logistic regression to test the effect of living in a rural area on willingness to suspend democracy are shown in table 2. The explained variance in willingness to suspend democracy by rural is Nagelkerk's $R^2 = .020$ (2.0%). Living in an urban area is the reference category. Country dummy variables are included in the model to control for between-country

differences. There is no significant effect found for living in a rural area on willingness to suspend democracy. Therefore, no support is found for hypothesis 5.

Overall model: model 6

By including all the dependent variables in one model, all variables are controlled for, including between-country differences. The overall model that includes all the predictor variables explains 3.3% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .033$. In addition, of the full model's predictions, approximately 21.6% of the cases are assigned to the correct category. The statistical analysis revealed that there were no differences in terms of significance when incorporating all individual variables into the overall model while controlling for their interrelationships and for the between-country differences. The coefficients and significance levels for each variable controlled for the others are shown in table 2.

Support for a strong leader: model 7

Analysing a mediator effect requires four steps. First, the total effect of education (X) on willingness to suspend democracy (Y) is calculated using binary logistic regression and controlling for between-country differences with country dummies. This effect was already calculated in hypothesis 4, but is again included in table 3. The findings show that education explains 2.1% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .021$. No significant effect was found between the two variables. Then the direct effect between education (X) and support for a strong leader (M) is calculated. Since support for a strong leader is not a categorical variable, a linear regression was conducted. To include the different education levels in the analysis, dummy variables for education were included. The findings show that education explains 3.5% of the variance in support for a strong leader: adjusted $R^2 = .035$. A significant negative effect of high education, compared to the reference category low education, on support for a strong leader was found. This means that high educated people are less likely to support a strong leader compared to low educated people.

Next, the effect of support for a strong leader (M) on willingness to suspend democracy (Y) is calculated. The findings show that support for a strong leader explains 6.8% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy: Nagelkerke $R^2 = 0.68$. A significant positive effect of support for a

strong leader on willingness to suspend democracy was found. This means that people who are supportive of a strong leader are also more willing to suspend democracy. Lastly, the effect of education (X) on willingness to suspend democracy (Y), controlled for support for a strong leader (M) is calculated. The findings show that in this overall model 6.9% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy is explained: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .069$. The coefficients (Table 3) show that the effect of education is now bigger compared to the simple effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy.

The following conditions are necessary to establish support for a mediation hypothesis: all the four analyses above should be significant. This is not the case. Only the effect of (high) education on support for a strong leader and the effect of support for a strong leader on willingness to suspend democracy were found to be significant. In addition, the coefficient associated with the measure that incorporates the mediator variable should be smaller than the coefficient associated with the simple effect. However, since the observed coefficient is not smaller, this indicates no support for the existence of a mediator effect. To conclude, no support is found for the mediation analysis.

To verify the results obtained from the mediation analysis, which indicated no support for the mediation analysis but did show significant effects of education on support for a strong leader and support for a strong leader on willingness to suspend democracy, a robustness check was performed. In this check, a categorical variable was created for support for a strong leader. The findings of the robustness check, presented in appendix 8, demonstrate consistent results with the initial analysis.

Table 3: Mediation analysis with willingness to suspend democracy as dependent variable and authoritarian attitudes as mediator

Direct path (N=6099)	Coefficient	Significance
Education ^a → willingness to suspend democracy		
Medium	.136 (.097)	.160
High	.042 (.079)	.592
Indirect path (N=6099)	Coefficient	Significance
Education ^a → support for strong leader		
Medium	-.007 (.065)	.918
High	-.335*** (.053)	<.001
Support for strong leader → willingness to suspend democracy	.235*** (.017)	<.001
Education ^a → willingness to suspend democracy (controlled for support for strong leader)		
Medium	.141 (.099)	.152
High	.140 (.081)	.083

Notes:

Reported coefficients are b-coefficients. P-values: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

a. Low education is reference category.

Support for experts: model 8

For hypothesis 7 the following effects were measured: firstly, the effect of education (X) on willingness to suspend democracy (Y) was calculated, which was already done for hypothesis 2 and hypothesis 6. The findings (Table 4) show that education explains 2.1% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .021$. No significant effect was found between the two variables. Then the direct effect between education (X) and support for experts (M) is calculated. Since support for experts is not a categorical variable, a linear regression was conducted. To include the different education levels in the analysis, dummy variables for education were included. The findings (Table 4) show that education explains 2.8 % of the variance in support for experts: adjusted $R^2 = .028$. A significant negative effect of high education, compared to the reference category low education, on support for experts was found. This mean that high educated people are less likely to support experts compared to low educated people.

Next, the effect of support for experts (M) on willingness to suspend democracy (Y) is calculated through a binary logistic regression. The findings show that support for experts explains 3.9% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .039$. A significant positive effect of support for experts on willingness to suspend democracy was found. This means that people who are supportive of experts are also more willing to suspend democracy. Lastly, the effect of education (X) on willingness to suspend democracy (Y), controlled for support for experts (M) is calculated with a binary logistic regression analysis. The findings show that in this overall model 3.9% of the variance in willingness to suspend is explained: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .039$. The coefficients (Table 4) shows that the effect of education is now bigger compared to the simple effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy.

The following conditions are necessary to establish support for a mediation hypothesis: all the four analyses above should be significant. This is not the case. Only the effect of (high) education on support for experts and the effect of support for experts on willingness to suspend democracy were found to be significant. The findings show that in this overall model 6.9% of the variance in willingness to suspend democracy is explained: Nagelkerke $R^2 = .069$. The coefficients (Table 3) show

that the effect of education is now bigger compared to the simple effect of education on willingness to suspend democracy. This indicates no support for the existence of a mediator effect. To conclude, no support is found for this mediation analysis.

To ensure the reliability of the mediation analysis results, a robustness check was performed. This check aimed to verify whether the observed effects of education on support for experts and support for experts on willingness to suspend democracy remained consistent. A categorical variable was created to represent different levels of support for a experts. The outcomes of this robustness check, presented in appendix 9, demonstrate that the initial analysis findings are corroborated, further strengthening the validity of the conclusions. In addition, the findings show that education level medium compared to education level low now also has a significant effect on support for experts, which was not the case for the initial analysis.

Table 4: Mediation analysis with willingness to suspend democracy as dependent variable and authoritarian technocratic attitudes as mediator

Direct path (N=6099)	Coefficient	Significance
Education ^a → willingness to suspend democracy		
Medium	.136 (.097)	.160
High	.042 (.079)	.592
Indirect path (N=6099)	Coefficient	Significance
Education ^a → support for experts		
Medium	-.092 (.071)	.200
High	-.259*** (.058)	<.001
Support for experts → willingness to suspend democracy	.217*** (.017)	<.001
Education ^a → willingness to suspend democracy (controlled for support for experts)		
Medium	.165 (.099)	.094
High	.109 (.081)	.176

Notes:

Reported coefficients are b-coefficients. P-values: * p < 0.1, ** p < 0.05, *** p < 0.01.

a. Low education is reference category.

V

Conclusion and discussion

This research's main focus was on support for democracy, specifically whether citizens are willing to suspend democracy which indicates a lack of support for democracy. In order to avoid the methodological problem of lip-servicing and in an attempt to measure "true support" for democracy, this research focused on the willingness of citizens to suspend democracy as an indicator of (a lack of) support for democracy. In doing so, citizens were pushed to show their actual, true support for democracy. This different way of measuring gives insights into whether people are willing to trade off democratic principles for alternatives. By identifying individuals willing to suspend democracy, attention can be drawn to potential sources of democratic instability or democratic backsliding.

Moreover, this study researched what characteristics determine whether individuals are willing to suspend democracy. The following possible explanatory factors were researched: partisanship, socialisation and deprivation (income, education, living in an urban or rural area). In addition, the context of crisis was researched since the expectation was that in a context of crisis, high educated citizens would be more drawn to support experts (i.e. have technocratic authoritarian attitudes) and low educated citizens would be more supportive of a strong leader (i.e. have strong leader authoritarian attitudes). The main findings of this study will be discussed below.

Firstly, a relationship was found between identifying as right-wing (i.e. having high partisanship on the right side of the political spectrum) and willingness to suspend democracy. When respondents identified themselves as having high partisanship on the right-side of the scale, they were more willing to suspend democracy. This is in line with theories about partisanship that voters with more radical or extreme policy preferences are more willing to compromise democratic principles for personal or partisan gain (Graham & Svobik, 2020). So, this trade-off of democratic principles in exchange for personal or partisan gain indeed seems to translate into more willingness to suspend democracy. Partisanship seems to play a role in citizens' willingness to suspend democracy. However, given that the observed effect on willingness to suspend democracy was limited to individuals

identifying as right-wing, it may suggest that the willingness to suspend democracy is more closely linked to inherent right-wing ideological beliefs than to partisanship in general. In addition, it may relate to the “rigidity-of-the-right model”, meaning that individuals who place themselves on the right side of the political spectrum show less democratic tendencies because they exhibit greater cognitive rigidity (De Leeuw et al., 2021; Mounk 2018, Rokeach, 1956). No prior expectation was formulated regarding which side of the political spectrum, left or right, would be more willing to suspend democracy. Therefore, it is not possible to determine whether the observed outcome supports or rejects the hypothesis. However, the general expectation was that partisanship would have an effect. In this regard, the findings support the notion that partisanship influences the willingness to suspend democracy, but only for right-wing partisanship.

Secondly, another finding of this study is the negative relationship between being socialized in an authoritarian regime and willingness to suspend democracy for participants from Poland and Germany. This means that respondents from both these two countries who were socialized in an authoritarian regime are, opposite to what was expected, less likely to support suspending democracy. This rejects the idea that having less democratic experience and being socialized under an authoritarian regime leads to more willingness to support democracy. This confirms the theory that a negative experience with an authoritarian regime may lead to extra appreciation of a democratic one (De Leeuw et al., 2021). So, limited experience with democracy does not necessarily hinder individuals from formulating or expressing supportive attitudes towards democracy. The findings indicate that generations socialized under an authoritarian regime might actually have a greater appreciation for democratic values and therefore a lower willingness to suspend democracy. This suggests that democratic experience does not play such a big role in public support for democracy as was expected and that a negative reading of the authoritarian past might actually prevent authoritarian notions from prevailing.

Thirdly, the outcomes regarding the three ‘deprivation’ hypotheses showed that a relationship between income level and willingness to suspend democracy was found. This relationship looks like this: as income level increases from low to medium to high, there is less willingness to suspend

democracy. This supports the idea that as people benefit more from the system, namely receiving more income, they are more supportive of a democratic system. The inverse relationship, so lower income levels being more willing to suspend democracy may imply that individuals facing economic hardship may become disillusioned with democratic systems and seek alternative systems. This is in line with theories about losers and winners of globalization and modernization (Lipset, 1959; Teney et al., 2014; Bornschier, 2010; Kriesi et al, 2006; 2008; 2012; Rama & Cordero, 2018) and supports the idea that deprivation may lead to less support for democracy.

Surprisingly, no support was found for the expected relationship between education and willingness to suspend democracy. While categorization of education into comparable categories across the four different countries, which each have their own education system, has been done carefully, this categorization is still an arbitrary one and may have led to not finding the expected results. Perhaps results would have been different if these variables had been measured on the same scale or using a continuous variable. However, it might also just mean that education is simply not an indicator of support for democracy. In order to gain a deeper understanding of this relationship and unravel the reasons behind the absence of an observed effect the outcomes of the mediator analysis in the context of a crisis will now be discussed.

While again no relationship was found of education on willingness to suspend democracy in the mediator analysis, some interesting information did emerge from this analysis. The findings indicate that individuals who are part of the high educated group are less supportive of both a strong leader and of experts, compared to low educated citizens. So, this indicates that education does relate to support for democracy in some way, especially because both support for a strong leader and support for experts are positively related to willingness to suspend democracy, meaning that when support for a strong leader/for experts increases, willingness to suspend democracy also increases. However, because no effect of education on willingness to suspend was found and the mediation analysis found no support for the expected relationship, it is difficult to say something definitive about the role education plays in support for democracy.

While it was theorized that due to lower levels of political trust and lower levels of satisfaction with democracy among individuals living in rural areas, these citizens would also be more willing to suspend democracy, the findings do not support this expectation. It looks like it does not seem to matter whether citizens reside in an urban or rural area when it comes to their willingness to suspend democracy. Perhaps suspending democracy is a step too far for those with low political trust and low satisfaction with democracy. The rural/urban dimension, combined with the education and income dimension were grouped together as “deprivation”, encompassing individuals who experience a sense of being deprived. This notion is often associated with the concept of winners and losers of globalization and modernization (Lipset, 1959; Teney et al., 2014). However, out of the three dimensions included in this deprivation group, only one, namely income, was supported by the data from this study. This means that only partial support is found for the idea that feelings of deprivation, of not benefitting from the system, can influence individuals’ support for democracy. Perhaps, the distinction between winners and losers of globalization or modernization is not as relevant, or this dissatisfaction does not translate into being open to alternative political systems i.e. the willingness to suspend democracy. An alternative explanation could be that the distinction between winners and losers is only visible through income differences.

So, to answer the main research question: *“What factors contribute to citizens’ willingness to suspend democracy, and how do individual-level characteristics and context-level factors shape this willingness?”*, this study has shown that relevant factors that influence citizens’ willingness to suspend democracy are: income level, authoritarian socialization and right-wing partisanship. In addition, it can be concluded that support for authoritarian alternatives such as a strong leader or experts is related to willingness to suspend democracy.

Limitations

Several limitations warrant attention. First of all, while the chosen way of measuring support for democracy, pushing people to show whether they are willing to suspend democracy, can be seen as a key strength of this study, as it aims to avoid democratic lip-servicing, it is important to consider its possible limitations. The down-side to this kind of measurement is that it simplifies citizens’ complex

and nuanced view on democracy into a binary choice, and it may fail to capture the intricacies of their beliefs. In addition, since willingness to suspend democracy is a single-item measurement, it will inevitably be less reliable and conceptually complete compared to using multiple indicators. It remains unclear how individuals define democracy and which aspects of democracy they might consider suspending. Both of these questions are covered in the YouGov survey, however, due to the constraints of this thesis, they could not be further explored. In general, it is important to acknowledge the inherent challenge of assessing whether this different approach to measuring support for democracy has indeed resulted in a more accurate representation of citizens' true democratic support. While the use of willingness to suspend democracy as an indicator attempts to avoid social desirability bias and encourage individuals to reveal their genuine attitudes, it remains hard to claim definite improved accuracy. Future research is needed to further evaluate the quality of this measurement.

Secondly, as mentioned in the Data and Methods chapter, income, education and the rural/urban variable were measured in different ways in the four different countries. To make the answers of all respondents comparable, this research put the answers into three categories for income and education, namely low, medium, and high. For the rural/urban variable two categories were created. Then this research made dummy variables for these categories. This made the answers of the respondents easier to compare and to interpret, but less specific to interpret. In addition, the results could only say something about belonging to a category in contrast to not belonging to this category. While this categorization was made for good reasons this categorization may still have led to loss of information and should be kept in mind when reading about the findings of this research.

Lastly, the Nagelkerke R^2 is a measure of how well a model explains the variance in a dependent variable. This measure has been relatively low for all the models tested in this study, meaning that the independent variables included in the model have limited explanatory power in relation to the dependent variable. However, it is important to note when conducting a logistic regression this pseudo R^2 measure provides an estimation of the model's goodness of fit. Despite this low model fit, significant effects of some independent variables on the outcome variable were still found. To add to this, the overall model has correctly predicted 21.6% of the cases in the dataset.

Therefore, the significant effects and the interpretation of these significant effects can still provide valuable insights and contribute to the study of support for democracy.

Despite these shortcomings, this study has contributed to the comprehensive understanding of citizens' support for democracy which is crucial for maintaining democratic systems and preventing democratic backsliding. The outcomes of this research highlight the need for democratic institutions and political actors to be responsive to the needs of all income groups, including individuals with low income. It also underlines the importance of economic performance in sustaining democratic support. Having high partisanship on the far-right of the political spectrum might be considered a threat to (support for) democracy. This finding raises concerns about the potential erosion of democratic values within societies where right-wing partisanship is prevalent. It highlights the need for careful monitoring of political ideologies and their potential impact on democracy stability. These findings should serve as a reminder to uphold democratic principles and foster a society in which diverse perspectives can coexist while at the same time respecting fundamental principles. On a more hopeful note, the findings about authoritarian socialization may bring hope and possibilities to those countries with an authoritarian past. Citizens being socialized under an authoritarian regime can actually play an important role in defending democratic principles in countries with limited democratic experience, because these citizens know what it is like to live under the terrors of an authoritarian regime.

Recommendations for future research

As mentioned previously in the limitations section, there is a need for future research to assess the robustness of the measurement of support for democracy and its effectiveness in circumventing social desirability bias in participant responses. In addition, this study did not include differences in how people define democracy and how this relates to their willingness to suspend democracy. This study merely looked at whether there is willingness to suspend democracy. However, much more information can be gained if the specific aspects of democracy that people are willing to suspend and under which specific circumstances they are willing to do so are included in a study. This data is already available from the YouGov survey, so future research could analyse these definitions of democracy and these specific aspects of democracy further.

The current study has shown that there is an effect of high partisanship on the willingness of individuals to suspend democracy, specifically high partisanship on the far-right. One suggestion for future research would be to create a vignette experiment, similar to that created by Graham and Svulik (2020). This way, respondents are pushed even further to make choices between their democratic principles and partisan or personal gains. This approach would provide additional insights and further minimize the influence of social desirability bias. This vignette experiment could include the role of elite cues and look into how elite cues impact citizens' perceptions of democracy and what role the left-right political distinction plays in this. From Krishnarajan (2023) and Graham and Svulik (2020) we know that citizens' perceptions of democracy and their support for democracy subsequently, is influenced by their partisanship and by elite cues. This current study affirmed that partisanship indeed plays a role, specifically for those citizens who identify with the right-side of the political spectrum. The mechanisms through which elite cues affect individuals' partisan affiliations in relation to their support for democracy and potential variations between the left and right sides of the political spectrum in terms of their responsiveness to these cues could be researched. Further research could explore how far citizens are willing to go. Looking into different aspects of democracy that citizens are willing to suspend and linking this to whether this is endorsed by their favourite politician, could give insights into the limits of citizens' willingness to suspend democracy. It would be interesting to see to what extent citizens are willing to trade in their democratic principles for personal or partisan gain and figure out where exactly that line is. Is there a base-level of democratic support that cannot be changed by an endorsement from a citizen's favourite politician?

Another crucial area for future research lies in investigating democratic ambivalence, as the current existing literature on this topic remains remarkably limited. The phenomenon of holding mixed feelings towards democratic principles and governance remains an under researched area, especially in the European context. Shedding light on this phenomenon can give deeper insights into the complexities of support for democracy. Research could employ experimental methods, for instance through designing tests that present conflicting democratic principles or policy choices, eliciting

participants to show their ambivalent attitudes. This would contribute to a more nuanced understanding of public support in relation to democratic stability and resilience.

Moreover, this research looked at the context of a crisis when it comes to support for authoritarian alternatives. To further research this context, future research could involve using longitudinal data to assess the impact of a crisis on support for democracy. Longitudinal studies offer the opportunity to examine changes in individuals' attitudes and perceptions over an extended period of time. This allows researchers to track how support for democracy evolves in response to various crises and challenges. By collecting data at multiple time points before, during, and after a crisis, dynamic shifts in citizens' attitudes towards democracy can be captured.

Lastly, the conducted mediator analysis showed that support for a strong leader and support for experts were both positive related to willingness to suspend democracy, which is not surprising, because both are assumed to be indicators of a lack of support for democracy. Future research could explore whether these are indeed measuring the same underlying construct, such as authoritarian notions or attitudes. Education seems to be related to support for a strong leader and support for experts, however education is not related to willingness to suspend democracy, which could indicate that they do measure different things. However, support for a strong leader and support for experts were both positive related to willingness to suspend democracy. It would be valuable to figure out how these authoritarian attitudes (i.e. support for a strong leader and support for experts) are related to willingness to suspend democracy. Researching this could also enhance clarity regarding the found relationship between education levels and support for a strong leader and education levels and support for experts. One potential method to do that could be through the use of a factor analysis.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 Multicollinearity

Table 5: Multicollinearity: correlations between independent variables

	Income	Education	Rural/urban	Partisanship	Authoritarian socialization
Income	1	-.20	-.02	.04	.04
Education	-.20	1	.03	.03	.08
Rural/urban	-.02	.03	1	-.01	.05
Partisanship	.04	.03	-.01	1	-.02
Authoritarian socialization	.04	.08	.05	-.02	1

Appendix 2 Robustness check authoritarian socialization

Table 6: Results separate logistic regressions

	Germany	Spain	Poland
Authoritarian socialization ^a	.436***	.250	.464***
N	1601	1606	1588
Nagelkerke R ²	.034	.014	.017
Constant	-.847	-1.368	-1.055

Notes:

Logistic regression. Reported coefficients are b-coefficients. P-values: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$.

a. No authoritarian socialization is reference category.

Appendix 3 Recoding of the variable income

Table 7: Descriptives income variables before recoding

	N	Mean	Standard deviation	Minimum	Maximum
<i>Variables</i>					
Income Germany	1500	6.09	2.91	1.00	12.00
Income UK	1214	7.72	3.78	1.00	15.00
Income Spain	1537	6.58	2.12	1.00	11.00
Income Poland	1461	3.78	1.52	1.00	6.00

Table 8: Recoding income Germany

Category	Original possible answers for German respondents
Low	under 500€; 500€ up to 1,000€; 1000€ up to 1,500€
Medium	1,500€ up to 2,000€; 2,000€ up to 2,500€; 2,500€ up to 3,000€; 3,000€ up to 3,500€; 3,500€ up to 4,000€
High	4,000€ up to 4,500€; 4,500€ up to 5,000€; 5,000€ up to 10,000€; 10,000€ and more

Notes: net income per month in Euros.

Table 9: Recoding income UK

Category	Original possible answers for UK respondents
Low	under £5,000 per year; £5,000 to £9,999 per year ; £10,000 to £14,999 per year
Medium	£15,000 to £19,999 per year; £20,000 to £24,999 per year; £25,000 to £29,999 per year; £30,000 to £34,999 per year; £35,000 to £39,999 per year; £40,000 to £44,999 per year ; £45,000 to £49,999 per year
High	£50,000 to £59,999 per year; £60,000 to £69,999 per year; £70,000 to £99,999 per year; £100,000 to £149,999 per year; £150,000 and over

Notes: gross income per year in British pounds.

Table 10: Recoding income Spain

Category	Original possible answers for Spanish respondents
Low	No income; Less than or equal to 300 €; 301 a 600 €
Medium	601 a 900 €; 901 a 1.200 €; 1.201 a 1.800 €; 1.801 a 2.400 €; 2.401 a 3.000 €
High	3.001 a 4.500 €; 4.501 a 6.000 €; More than 6000 €

Notes: net income per month in Euros.

Table 11: Recoding income Poland

Category	Original possible answers for Polish respondents
Low	<2000 zloty monthly; 2001-3000 zloty monthly
Medium	3001-4000 zloty monthly; 4001-6000 zloty monthly
High	6001-8000 zloty monthly; 8001+ zloty monthly

Notes: net income per month in zloty.

Appendix 4 Recoding of the variable education

Table 12: Recoding of the variable education for Germany

Category	Original possible answers for German respondents
Low	I did not complete any formal education, Early childhood education, Primary education, Lower secondary education (GCSEs or equivalent level), Upper secondary education (A-Levels or baccalaureate).
Medium	Post-secondary, non-tertiary education (generally vocational/ professional qualification of 1-2 years, e.g. college), Short-cycle tertiary education (vocational education and training, studying towards a non-academic degree, e.g. nursing).
High	Bachelors or equivalent level degree, Masters or equivalent level degree, Doctoral or equivalent level degree.

Table 13: Recoding of the variable education for the UK

Category	Original possible answers for UK respondents
Low	No formal qualifications, Youth training certificate/skillseekers, Recognised trade apprenticeship completed, Clerical and commercial, City & Guilds certificate
Medium	City & Guilds certificate – advanced, ONC, CSE grades 2-5, CSE grade 1, GCE O level, GCSE, School Certificate, Scottish Ordinary/ Lower Certificate, GCE A level or Higher Certificate, Scottish Higher Certificate
High	Nursing qualification (e.g. SEN, SRN, SCM, RGN), Teaching qualification (not degree), University diploma, University or CNAA first degree (e.g. BA, B.Sc, B.Ed), University or CNAA higher degree (e.g. M.Sc, Ph.D), Other technical, professional or higher qualification

Table 14: Recoding of the variable education for Spain

Category	Original possible answers for Spanish respondents
Low	No formal education, Basic school education, Secondary school education or school graduate, High school graduate
Medium	Professional school graduate (Level 2), University studies (not finished)
High	University Bachelor graduate (3-years degree, pre 2009 law), University Bachelor graduate (5-years degree, pre 2009 law), Master degree, Professional school graduate (Level 1), PhD, University Bachelor graduate (4-years degree, post 2009 law)

Table 15: Recoding of the variable education for Poland

Category	Original possible answers for Polish respondents
Low	Primary/gymnasium, High school/college
Medium	Vocational
High	University, PhD or higher scientific degree

Appendix 5 recoding of the variable urban/rural

Table 16: Recoding of the variable urban/rural for Poland

Category	Original possible answers for Polish respondents
Urban	Urban, Mixed
Rural	Rural

Table 17: Recoding of the variable urban/rural for UK

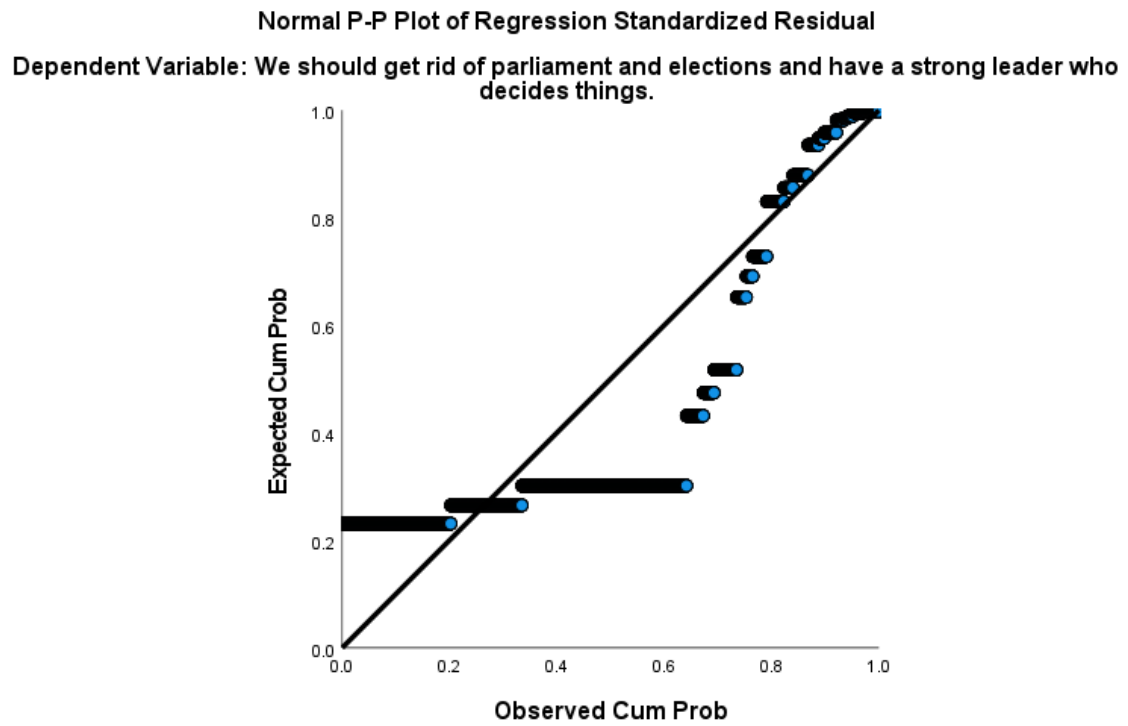
Category	Original possible answers for UK respondents
Urban	Urban, Town and fringe
Rural	Rural

Table 18: Recoding of the variable urban/rural for Germany

Category	Original possible answers for German respondents
Urban	City, Suburban
Rural	Rural

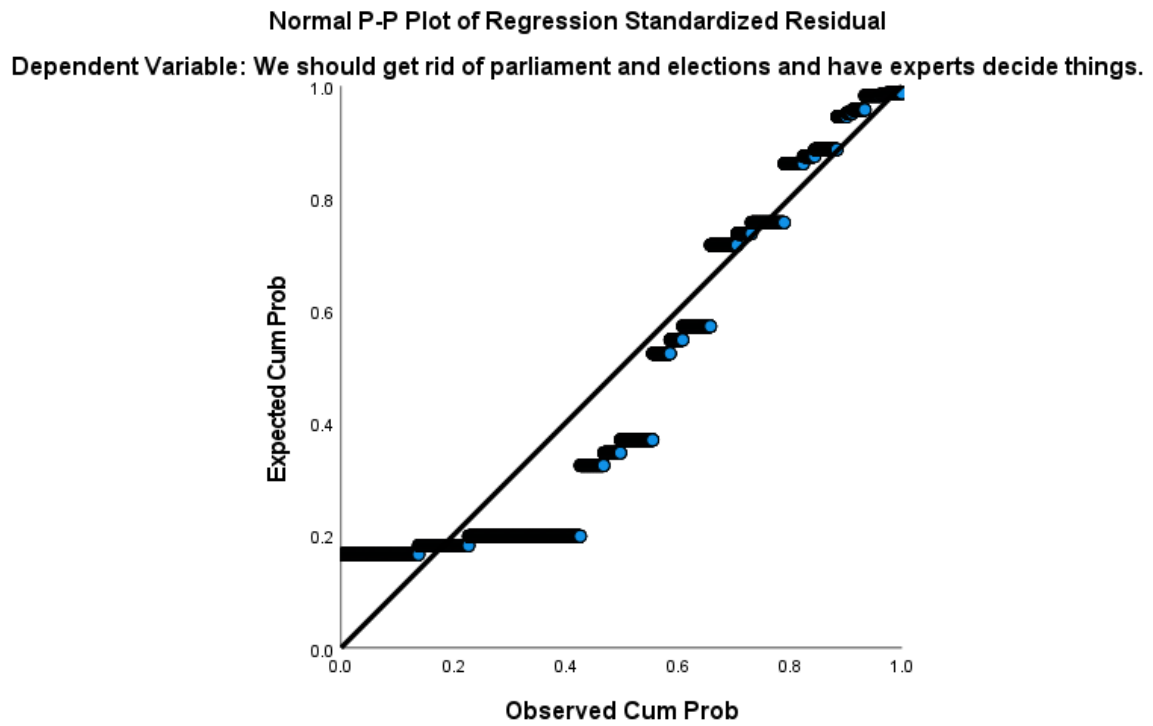
Appendix 6 Linearity model 7

Figure 3: Linearity assumption for linear regression analysis in model 7



Appendix 7 Linearity model 8

Figure 4: Linearity assumption for linear regression analysis in model 8



Appendix 8 Robustness check support for strong leader

In order to check the results from the mediation analysis, a robustness check was conducted. This check aimed to verify whether the observed effects of education on support for a strong leader and the effect of support for a strong leader on willingness to suspend democracy remained consistent. A categorical variable was created to represent two levels of support for a strong leader. As discussed in the data and methods chapter, the question from the survey that is used as an indicator for this support is the following: “We are going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing. For each one, please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements, where 1 indicates ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 indicates ‘strongly agree’.”. The statement used in this question is: “We should get rid of parliament and elections and have a strong leader who decides things”. A new variable was created in which everyone scoring a 1 through 4 gets a score 0, meaning they do not support a strong leader, and everyone scoring a 5 through 7 gets a score 1, meaning they are supportive of a strong leader (Table 19). The ‘no support’ group consists of 5293 participants and the ‘support’ group of 806. The results of the logistic regression analyses of the categorical variable support for a strong leader are shown in table 20.

Table 19: Recoding of the variable support for a strong leader

Category	Original possible answers
No support	1-4
Support	5-7

Table 20: Results robustness check mediation analysis support for a strong leader

Indirect paths (N=6099)	Coefficient	Significance
Education ^a → support for a strong leader		
Medium	-.193 (.101)	.055
High	-.469** (.086)	<.001
Support for a strong leader → willingness to suspend democracy	.585*** (.096)	<.001

Notes:

Reported coefficients are b-coefficients. P-values: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

a. Low education is reference category.

Appendix 9 Robustness check support for experts

In order to check the results from the mediation analysis, a robustness check was conducted. This check aimed to verify whether the observed effects of education on support for experts and the effect of support for experts on willingness to suspend democracy remained consistent. A categorical variable was created to represent two levels of support for experts. As discussed in the data and methods chapter, the question from the survey that is used as an indicator for this support is the following: “We are going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing. For each one, please indicate to what extent you disagree or agree with the following statements, where 1 indicates ‘strongly disagree’ and 7 indicates ‘strongly agree’.”. The statement used in this question is “We should get rid of parliament and elections and have experts decide things.”. A new variable was created in which everyone scoring a 1 through 4 gets a score 0, meaning they do not support experts, and everyone scoring a 5 through 7 gets a score 1, meaning they are supportive of experts (Table 21). The ‘no support’ group consists of 4818 participants and the ‘support’ group of 1281. The results of the logistic regression analyses of the categorical variable support for a strong leader are shown in table 22.

Table 21: Recoding of the variable support for experts

Category	Original possible answers
No support	1-4
Support	5-7

Table 22: Results robustness check mediation analysis support for experts

Indirect paths (N=6099)	Coefficient	Significance
Education ^a → support for experts		
Medium	-.188** (.086)	.029
High	-.281*** (.071)	<.001
Support for experts → willingness to suspend democracy	.499*** (.084)	<.001

Notes:

Reported coefficients are b-coefficients. P-values: * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

a. Low education is reference category.