How Critical are Germans of Democracy?
The Pattern and Origins of Constitutional Support in Germany

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Abstract

Academic studies have consistently demonstrated that citizens have lost trust in democratic institutions, grown sceptical of elected leaders and become dissatisfied with how democracy works. These studies, however, neglect analysis of some of the most important objects of the democracies they analyse. A case in point is the German constitution (Basic Law), which prescribes the values of German democracy and the institutions through which they are realised. By analysing twenty-eight years of individual-level data from the German General Social Survey (ALLBUS), this article makes two important discoveries about attitudes towards the constitution. First, support for it is widespread, enduring and increasing amongst citizens in the east and west of the country. Second, generalised linear models demonstrate that this form of support is grounded in phenomena which provide it with durability. Postmaterialist values, centrist ideology and age all nurture attachments to the constitution. These effects are confirmed by post-estimation analyses of average marginal effects. By demonstrating that German democracy is underpinned by a fund of enduring support, the research challenges suggestions of a crisis of democracy and concludes that Germans are not cynically rejecting of democracy, but critically democratic: they desire a fuller expression of the constitutional ideals.
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Introduction

Support is critical to democracy. Supportive attitudes bind individuals to the structures and personnel of government, enhancing their legitimacy and creating a virtuous relationship between citizens and the state (Almond and Verba 1963: 316; Campbell 2019). But support also matters because it creates ‘collective power’ (Gamson 1968: 42). By enabling leaders to act without obtaining prior consent, it improves the effectiveness of government (Bianco 1994: 23). Despite its enormous theoretical importance, however, a significant body of research has shown increasing public scepticism about aspects of representative democracy amidst rising negativity towards politics (Martini and Quaranta 2019: 83; Mayne and Hakhverdian 2017: 832-3). According to some scholars, these trends have hardened and sharpened in countries in which the effects of the global financial and sovereign debt crises were severe (Royo 2009: 31-2; Torcal 2014: 1548; Armingeon and Guthmann 2014: 432). But if people distinguish amongst the objects of democracy, there may be parts of the system to which their support is more resilient. This study examines if this is the case with the German constitution.

Attitudes towards democracy have been a central theme in political science. At a theoretical level, distinctions are made between two types of indicators (Rose et al. 1998: 25-39). Realist indicators focus on the concrete institutions and real-life practice of democracy. They measure support for the structures and style of representation and a range of studies have uncovered widespread disaffection. Trust in democratic institutions is low and shows no signs of recovering (Dalton 2004: 38; Torcal 2014: 1554). Satisfaction with the functioning of democracy has eroded precipitously (Norris 2011: 79; Campbell 2015: 174; Martini and Quaranta 2020: 90). Attachments to political parties have diminished and weakened (Schmitt
and Holmberg 1995: 102-3). And disaffection has been a recurring theme in evaluations of the European Union (Schmitter 2008: 4; Hobolt 2012: 92). As discontent is real and long-standing, academics have suggested that representative structures should be revamped to provide more effective channels of input (Fishkin 2011: 59).

Lying behind these trends, however, is idealist support. This captures adherence to the values and goals underpinning democratic systems (Dahl 2000: 28-29). At this level, support for democratic principles – freedom of speech, dissidence, participatory and minority rights – is widespread and durable, suggesting people display broad and deep attachments to democratic values (Thomassen 1995: 399; Klingemann 1999). Sizeable proportions agree that democracy is the least worst form of government (World Values Survey, 2004). And majorities reject non-democratic forms of government, meaning that disquiet about democracy has not translated into support for its competitors (Norris 2011: 113). Inner reserves of support, then, suggest people are not cynically rejecting of democracy, but critically supportive; they are pushing institutions and elites more fully to align with their ideals (Klingemann and Fuchs 1995: 15).

These findings, however, stem from comparative surveys which omit the distinguishing characteristics of the democracies involved (Campbell 2019: 12-14). This is especially the case with the system of the Federal Republic of Germany, defining features of which derive from its status as a Rechtsstaat, a constitutional state grounded in the rule of law (Smith 1986: 44). An essential aspect of this is the constitution, the Basic Law (Grundgesetz), which establishes the ideals on which the system is founded and the institutions through which they are realised. It is immensely important to German democracy. Indeed, one would be stretched to identify an object of greater theoretical significance. The Basic Law not only sets out the underlying liberal and democratic rights but harnesses them to an intricate web of institutional counterweights (Paterson and Southern 1994: 53). It combines ideals with real-life democratic structures. And yet whilst the Basic Law has anchored the system in a stable tradition of parliamentary
government, there have been surprisingly few attempts to chart its support and pinpoint the factors from which it is conditioned.

This is the central task of this study. By undertaking it, the research contributes knowledge on three fronts. First, by focusing on the Basic Law it complements studies which have overwhelmingly concentrated on trust in democratic institutions and satisfaction with democracy (Dalton 2004: 29; Anderson et al. 2005: 56-64; Wagner et al. 2009; Norris 2011: 77-9; Ezrow and Xezonakis 2011: 1157; van der Meer and Zmerli 2017; Martini and Quaranta 2019: 352). These studies have made crucial insights. But a narrative of institutional discontent dominates the literature. My argument is that assessments of more fundamental parts of the system may counterbalance institutional disquiet. This is shown by: (1) evidence of widespread support for one of the basic pillars of German democracy; and (2) support which is grounded in factors which provide it with resilience and durability. This has implications for discussions about the present condition of democracy – and these extend beyond Germany. Second, the research intersects with methodological debates about measuring attitudes to democracy (Canache et al. 2001; Anderson 2002). Most analyses use comparative surveys, maximising the countries included rather than operationalising their defining characteristics. But this may limit or distort the picture. This study shows that data from national surveys may sensitise the analysis to country-specific trends that challenge the conclusions of comparative inquiries. Third, by analysing the trends and trajectory of constitutional support, it adds knowledge about attitudes towards democracy and updates assessments of the key differences between east and west Germans thirty years after the Wende (Rohrschneider 1999; Conradt 2002; Roller 2010; Pünder 2015).

The article is divided into five sections. The first sets out the theoretical spine, delineating objects of support and outlining reasons why attitudes to the constitution matter. Section two designs the research, connecting support to social and political phenomena and
drawing hypotheses to guide the empirical analyses. In total, ten hypotheses test for individual-level effects. Section three presents data from the German General Social Survey (Allgemeine Bevölkerungs Umfrage der Sozialwissenschaften, ALLBUS), showing the trends and trajectory since 1988. Section four uses generalised linear modelling and post-estimation analyses of average marginal effects (AME) to pinpoint the drivers of this form of support at the individual-level. Finally, the analysis reflects on the implications of this study for debates about the present condition and future prospects of German democracy and for research about attitudes towards democratic government.

**The meaning and properties of political support**

The starting point is to define support. Easton (1975: 436) defined it as ‘an attitude by which a person orients himself to an object either favourably or unfavourably, positively or negatively’. Democracies which are supported are believed to attract the legitimacy upon which their long-term survival depends. Scholarship, however, has uncovered symptoms of discontent, prompting concerns that a more adversarial relationship between citizens and the state is reshaping democracy (Fominaya 2017: 4). But caution is advised. These concerns have been long-running (Miller 1974: 951; Citrin 1974: 974). Crozier et al. (1975: 158-9), for example, classically interpreted disaffection as symptomatic of a ‘crisis of democracy’, arguing that as disaffection mobilises people into politics with more demanding expectations, the state increases its size and scope to the extent that government becomes overloaded and societies ungovernable. This argument was critiqued and dismissed as evidence pointed to the resilience and adaptability of democracies (Kaase and Newton 1995: 24-26). Yet public attitudes to democracy remain the subject of sharp disagreement (Canache et al. 2001: 506-7; Dalton 2004: 157; Norris 2011; Runciman 2013; van der Meer and Zmerli 2017: 4-5). Claims of cynicism,
resilience and instability may be found in equal measure. What, then, accounts for the discrepancies?

One explanation is that the importance of attitudes depends on the objects to which they are directed (Campbell 2011b: 4-5). Individuals may be dissatisfied with institutions and yet adhere to constitutional principles. To crystalise this, Easton (1965) constructed a three-fold typology distinguishing the most important parts of the system: (1) the political community; (2) the regime and (3) the authorities. The political community is the membership over which governments exercise authority, i.e., the nation. As individuals display national attachments, they support the citizenry for whom governments act. Without a shared sense of political community, it is unlikely there will be accepted governing arrangements on behalf of that community. The regime, meanwhile, refers to the values and principles underpinning the system and the ‘hardware’ in which power is exercised – the Federal and State legislatures, the judiciary and, especially in the German context, the Constitutional Court. And authorities are elite actors who represent people, make decisions and campaign for office. Narrowly, they are the Chancellor and government, but also include officials at the state or regional level – or in political parties and the bureaucracy.

These objects, however, have been periodically revised over the years, with the regime, in particular, partitioned into different components (Norris 2011: 24; Martini and Quaranta 2019: 6). Driving the revisions has been an appreciation that political systems are not static, but variable, and decision-making has transferred downwards to territorial legislatures and upwards and outwards through processes of EU enlargement and harmonisation. As the regime is no longer limited by the territorial boundaries of the nation-state, the locus of power has shifted in a system defined by multi-levelled governance. And as the regime has become a more complicated entity, the authorities are drawn from a wider pool, with decisions increasingly taken within multilateral policy networks rather than as an exercise of sovereign
power. Despite evolving, however, the framework has endured as an heuristic with which to interpret attitudes to democracy.

An additional reason for discrepant findings is that some objects attract different types of support. The community and aspects of the regime attract ‘diffuse’ support, which is independent of what the system produces and persists in the face of short-term political difficulties (Easton 1965: 273). This has enduring properties and can be drawn upon at moments of heightened stress. As a reserve of allegiance, it denotes beliefs that the system, although prone to periodic failure, is worth maintaining. Authorities and upper aspects of the regime, meanwhile, attract ‘specific’ support, which is nourished through perceived competence. This is grounded in the everyday actions of government, meaning that it ebbs and flows and may be extensive at times but lacking at others. This acts as a reminder that support cannot be taken for granted and the process of nurturing it is one of building and repairing. A related claim here is that types of support are connected (Easton 1975: 445). Discontent for one part, if sustained, generalises to others. Collapsing support for authorities is inevitable, perhaps even healthy. But an accumulating set of grievances unchanged by alterations in government not only undermines confidence in decision-makers but generalises to the framework in which they operate. Hence: ‘not all expressions of unfavourable orientations have the same degree of gravity for the political system. Some may be consistent with its maintenance; others may lead to fundamental change’ (Easton 1975: 437).

How might one establish if there is diffuse support? Although this is not an easy issue to resolve empirically, this study proceeds in two steps. It selects an object of primary importance to German democracy and analyses the pattern of its support over a thirty-year period. It then systematically tests if support for it is grounded in factors that are likely to make it endure. The reasoning behind this is straightforward. If an object of significance can be identified, and if it can be shown to have enduring support grounded in resilient stimuli, then
it may be more reasonably claimed to attract support that is diffuse in character. The following paragraphs set out why attitudes towards the Basic Law matter. Subsequently, we pinpoint stimuli that influence it.

The Basic Law: A framework for German politics

The Basic Law is foundational to German democracy. The Basic Law sources authority to the prime principle to which all others are subject: the sovereignty of the law (Sontheimer 1972: 31). The state is a constitutional and legal order where rights are inviolable and the state may act only if it has statutory authority to do so. This is manifested in human and democratic values (Grundrechte) enumerated in articles 1-5. Allegiance to them is constitutionally required and they are protected by the Constitutional Court (Bundesverfassungsgericht), which has outlawed organisations deemed antithetical to them (Paterson and Southern 1994: 57-8). This protects the system from extremism, concentrated or imbalanced power – or from its arbitrary exercise. Furthermore, the Basic Law configures the state, dispersing authority in a system with a pronounced degree of institutional pluralism. Articles 62-9, for example, regulate the relationship between the Chancellor and Parliament, balancing it against executive stability and concentrated power (Smith 1986: 56). The Chancellor, meanwhile, is heavily constrained, directing policy but within parameters with significant ministerial autonomy. And article 88 stipulates that the Federal Bank, although embedded in a European framework, should act as a custodian of the ordoliberal philosophy on which the German economy is based. Articles 83-85, meanwhile, delineate regional policy competences, providing Länder with important bargaining capacity and making them potentially powerful veto points. The argument here must be clear. Ordinary Germans may not have esoteric knowledge of all aspects of the Federal structure or the configuration of government. But they may have sufficient familiarity with aspects of the Basic Law to appreciate that it is essential to the political system.
In addition, survey questions may be especially important if they ask how proud Germans are of the Basic Law (Conradt 2002: 59-60). Pride differs conceptually and empirically from performance-based evaluations (Westle 1999). It signifies a deeper, more durable attitude that is slower to develop and harder to erode, denoting a shift from passive toleration to an active form of commitment: attachment (Conradt 1989: 222). Pride is thus a psychological orientation engendering admiration for the achievements and accomplishments of the Basic Law. This point should not be misinterpreted. This need not assume that pride is an involuntary emotion evoked through temporary feelings of togetherness or based exclusively on evaluating an immediate external reality (Campbell 2019: 128-30). Pride need not be devoid of cognition. Rather, it may be conditioned over an extended period of time through an accumulating set of experiences which reinforce positive feelings towards its object. In this sense, then, pride denotes feelings that the Basic Law has consistently exceeded certain benchmarks, standards or goals to the extent that it attracts allegiant sentiments. It signals the empathic solidarity Almond and Verba (1963: 63-4) referred to as ‘affective orientations’ – attitudes which balance instrumental views of politics.

An additional reason why questions on pride in the Basic Law matter is that they may engender aspects of ‘constitutional patriotism’ (Laborde 2002: 593; Fossum 2001). This refers to the post-national political allegiance advocated in post-war Germany (Müller 2007: 15-20). This was required due to the contested nature of nationalism. Some forms of nationalism bind individuals together, generating enduring bonds which maintain the system in equilibrium. But, as German history had shown, if framed through kinship or ascriptive criteria, nationalism could be channelled towards ethnically-defined outgroups with corrosive effects. Nationalism has the potential to create exclusive processes of other-ing which may be intolerant of minority cultures and incompatible with equal citizenship (Hayward 2007: 185). Attempts to build the post-war republic on patriotic sentiments were thus out of the question. Jürgen Habermas
(1989: 255-266) argued that an alternative linkage mechanism was required and the Basic Law’s liberal-democratic values were the most viable possibility. These values would moderate politics, avoiding fractious ideological conflict and balancing political debate. Over time, they would become part of the collective political identity of post-war Germany, as Germans became proud of the way the post-war republic was grounded in values associated with the rule of law and that these had endured. Pride in the constitution, then, is not merely an attitude directed towards an important object of the political system, but a uniquely German way of signifying political bonds of affection without the restrictiveness and antagonisms of nationalism.

Research design

It is proposed to test a number of hypotheses (H1-10) predicated on what particular factors might influence support for the constitution. Modernisation answers this question with reference to the structure of capitalism and the value profiles it generates. The core claim is that the values individuals hold shape the ways in which they evaluate the political world (Scarbrough and Van Deth 1995: 21; Campbell 2011a: 365-9; Campbell 2012: 649-50). Modernisation contends that the evolution of capitalism has reshaped political values in ways that have altered support for democracy (Inglehart 1997: 160). Rising levels of education have raised individuals’ capabilities, generating greater cognitive sophistication and more demanding expectations of the institutions of political authority (Inglehart 1979). In particular, disjunctures in the formative conditions in which individuals were socialised led to the acquisition of generationally distinctive value profiles (Inglehart 1981: 881-2). Generations raised prior to the Second World War acquired materialist values driven by the acute shortages of that era, whilst those raised in the relatively affluent post-war era acquired postmaterialist values. According to the theory, postmaterialists discriminate between ideals and reality, and
if these are out-of-sync press authorities and institutions to align more closely with democratic ideals. The corollary of this is that postmaterialism engenders criticism of authority but increases support for the system of democracy (Inglehart 1999: 236). Postmaterialists should support the constitutional framework:

H1: Postmaterial values increase pride in the constitution.

Yet other values may explain the foundations of constitutional support. Individuals’ placement on the left-right spectrum may be especially important. This is so for two reasons. First, a socioeconomic dimension purportedly arrays individuals on a pole between support for market-based prosperity and support for state regulation and economic intervention (Knutsen 1995: 160). Extreme preferences lead to placement at the ends of the scale, whilst moderate positions fall within the centre (Inglehart 1979: 350). Aspects of the Basic Law led to a ‘social market’ economy, which attempted to reconcile conflict over production by granting private ownership but underpinning it with a welfare state. Market-based inequalities are balanced by social protections. As a consequence, those placing themselves in the centre of the scale should be more supportive of the Basic Law’s moderate approach compared with those who take more extreme positions. A second dimension of the left-right spectrum measures ‘rigidity’. This captures the strength of ideological adherence, with the extremes denoting those ‘who cling to their ideology, seeing it as absolutely right and seeing alternatives as absolutely wrong’ (Greenberg and Jonas 2003: 380), whilst the centre consists of those with more malleable views who are open to questioning their beliefs. More extreme positions thus clash with the consensus-seeking ethos which lies at the heart of the Basic Law. Centrists, therefore, should be more supportive of the Basic Law compared with those at the ends of the pole:

H2: Centrist ideological values increase pride in the constitution.
A second approach explains support with reference to ‘civil society’ (Edwards 2014: 20). The argument is that support stems from attitudes which underpin social engagement and civic connectedness (Newton and Zmerli 2008: 706-8). There are, however, two distinct theoretical claims proposed. The first is that civil society is a space where citizens engage with one another in a rich structure of voluntary associations which foster secondary skills referred to as ‘social capital’ (Putnam 2000: 20-22). Democracies are thus supported by vigilant citizens attentive to civic affairs and endowed with an interest in politics (H3). A second claim is that social trust facilitates engagement and contributes to supportive attitudes (Newton 1999: 173). An underlying belief in the benevolence of others spurs engagement in social structures which, if reinforced, permeates to other attitudes and creates a positive syndrome of support (H4).

H3: Political interest increases pride in the constitution.

H4: Social trust increases pride in the constitution.

A third approach links support to political-economy (Mishler and Rose 1995: 553-55). The argument is that if the economy performs well, or is perceived to perform well, people will be supportive (Kornberg and Clarke 1992: 34-44; Clarke et al. 1993: 999-1000). Antipathy, by contrast, stems from those who are less sanguine about the performance of the national economy (H5) – or those upon whom perceived disadvantage has fallen (H6). Testing this line of argument enables us to go further than merely adjudicating on whether or not economic optimism stimulates support. If pride in the Basic Law is insulated from the economy, it would strengthen the evidence that it is a form of support with diffuse properties. If, by contrast, it is linked to evaluations of the economy, then it may be more conditional than has been theorised.

H5: Perceptions of the national economy (current and future) increase pride in the constitution.

H6: Perceptions of personal economic circumstances (current and future) increase pride in the constitution.
A fourth approach draws on research about east-west differences in political attitudes (Rohrschneider 1999: 217; Roller 2010: 599). Writers have uncovered evidence of significant and politically influential differences between easterners and westerners, which underpin electoral behaviour, core values and evaluations of democracy (Neller 2006: 185). Since these have been subject to extensive monitoring in political science, this study tests if differences continue to exist in attitudes towards the Basic Law – and if these differences remain net of the impact of the other theoretical variables examined (H7).

H7: Easterners will have lower pride in the constitution compared with westerners.

Age has also been connected to forms of support (Jennings and Niemi 1974: 140-7). The claim tested here is that attachments to the constitution stem from ongoing processes of experiential learning (Mishler and Rose 2007: 823). They accumulate gradually and are a function of a series of conscious and unconscious experiences processed in a lifetime of political learning. As time enables people more fully to appreciate the role of the Basic Law in the system, attachments to the constitution reflect an aggregation of experiences that it works and is qualitatively superior to its alternatives. This does not assume that experiences of the Basic Law will be uniformly positive. But the weighted sum is more likely to be positive later on in the life-cycle, as deficiencies are contextualised across a wide expanse of time. Two empirical effects are thus tested. Attachments should be stronger amongst older compared with younger westerners (H8). Older westerners have comparatively greater opportunity to witness the constitution in action and appraise its effects on political life. But a different effect is posited in the east. As younger easterners have the least experience of the pre-1989 arrangements, they may be more likely to develop stronger attachments compared with older easterners (H9).

H8: Older westerners will have higher pride in the constitution compared with younger westerners.
H9: Younger easterners will have higher pride in the constitution compared with older easterners.

Finally, the research tests a proposition from the Easton framework. Easton theorised that forms of support are linked, leading to expectations that favourable attitudes towards democratic institutions should nurture constitutional support. This is tested by examining if trust in democratic institutions and satisfaction with democracy influence constitution support (H10). Testing this claim enables the research design to incorporate system-level properties into the study. If confirmed, it would suggest that institutional and constitutional support are empirically-reinforcing, and that an erosion of institutional support, if sustained, would reduce support for the constitutional framework. This would be consistent with the view that Germans do not view the components of the system in isolation, but as connected parts of a constitutionally defined relationship.

H10: Satisfaction with democracy and trust in democratic institutions increase pride in the constitution.

Data and Methods

To test these hypotheses we need data. This study uses the German General Social Survey (Allgemeine Bevölkerungs Umfrage der Sozialwissenschaften, ALLBUS), a standardised survey conducted biennially on a random sample of the German population since 1980. As it uses fixed and rotating questions, not all of the surveys contain relevant data. Periodically, however, it has asked questions of political life of which respondents are proud and the Basic Law is one of the response options. The item has been dichotomised such that respondents are scored with a 1 if they mentioned the Basic Law and 0 if they did not. ALLBUS
surveys also contain data on the independent variables and the full question wording, technical details and recoding procedures are contained in Appendix A.

The hypotheses are tested in two stages. The first stage is descriptive, focussing on the levels, distribution and east-west differences. Since the data precede unification in 1990, the pattern of support can be examined over a lengthy time-frame and more secure conclusions drawn about its levels and trajectory. The second stage is analytical and uses generalised linear (GLM) modelling to test for multivariate relationships. As discussed, the dependent variable is dichotomous, meaning that logistic regression procedures are appropriate and logit coefficients will be reported. Logits, however, are not easily interpreted; and research has questioned the appropriateness of relying upon them exclusively for reporting statistical results (Mood 2010: 63). Average marginal effects (AME) are thus used to visualise and interpret the results. The particular approach taken is to report marginal effects at the mean. These provide the change in the predicted probability for each value of the independent variable whilst the remaining predictors are held at the arithmetic mean. This provides a firmer basis from which to posit relationships. AME are calculated using the ‘effects’ package in R (Fox and Weisberg 2015: 229) and visualised using ggplot2 (Wickham 2017: 235).

Results

The first step examines the distribution of support (table 1).

--Table 1 here please--

The data challenge some of the prevailing assumptions about attitudes to democracy in Germany. First, the recent levels suggest there is support. In 2016, fully 59 percent of Germans were proud of the Basic Law, which were the highest recorded all-German levels and suggest that the constitution is supported by a majority of its citizens. Second, the resilience of this form of support is evident from the levels in the west prior to and following unification. During
1988-1991, when unification precipitated far-reaching change, westerners’ support remained firm. This is worth reinforcing. Some forms of support are swift to collapse, but pride in the constitution endured amidst substantial upheaval – a finding which surely points to its diffuse properties. Third, the trajectory of support is upward. In the west, it increased from 51 percent in 1988 to 68 percent in 2016, a rise of 17 points. In the east, meanwhile, despite beginning from low levels (21 percent in 1991), support increased to 41 percent in 2016, a rise of 20 points. Rather than dwindling reserves dominating the time series, the evidence points to its development. Fourth, there is a substantial east-west gulf. The differences in 1991 were 30 percentage points – a sizeable (but perhaps anticipated) difference. Yet the degree to which these have endured is remarkable. In 2016, the east-west differences were 27 percentage points, confirming that there is some way to go before they will recede altogether.

*Generalised linear modelling*

These findings are developed through multivariate modelling. Results are presented from three multivariate logistic regression models (table 2). Model one was conducted for Germany as a whole, with separate models run for the west (model 2) and east (model 3).

--Table 2 Here Please--

The all-German model confirms that the foundations of support are complex and varied. Rather than discuss the results exhaustively, they are condensed into six main points. First, values matter: postmaterialists are more likely to express pride in the Basic Law compared with materialists. The coefficient is sizeable and has surpassed the significance threshold (B = .580). In addition, ideological centrists are more supportive compared with those at the ends of the left-right scale. Second, civil society matters, but inconsistently. Politically interested
respondents are more likely to express pride in the Basic Law compared with those who are less attentive. But social trust does not have the same effect. The coefficient for the trusting response has failed to exceed the significance threshold, casting some doubt on whether or not it permeates to supportive attitudes. Third, assessments of the economy appear to be less important. Evaluations of the future condition of the German economy are negative and significant – a somewhat counterintuitive finding. But this does appear to be an aberration, for irrespective of whether respondents are focusing on the national economy or their own economic situation, they generally appear to be no more nor no less proud of the Basic Law. Fourth, easterners appear to be less likely to express pride compared with westerners (B = - .968). Net of statistical controls, pride remains lower amongst easterners. Fifth, the effect of age is quite striking: older respondents are noticeably more likely to express pride compared with younger respondents. Sixth, other forms of support matter. Satisfaction with democracy and trust in democratic institutions boost pride in the constitution, confirming that individuals’ appraisals of the actual workings of democracy and its core structures influence attachments to the constitution.

--Figure 1 here please--

Analysing the average marginal effects (AME) may be a more intuitive guide to the presence or absence of relationships. Figure 1 contains plots which show the predicted probability for each independent variable, whilst the remaining predictors are held at the mean. These plots enable us to understand the relationships more fully and supplement the statistical findings. The plots confirm, for example, the presence of values-based effects. Postmaterialists appear to be more likely to express pride compared with materialists; the probability rises quite appreciably between those with materialist and postmaterialist values. The relationship between postmaterialism and pride is thus not only statistically significant but substantively
important. Similarly, ideological values operate in the suggested manner; those placing themselves in the centre of the left-right scale are more likely to express pride in the constitution compared with those who do not. The probability rises and the confidence interval narrows. And the plot for political interest demonstrates that cognitive engagement with politics stimulates pride in the Basic Law.

Yet other factors are at work. The spillover from other forms of support is quite striking, confirming that pride rises amongst those more satisfied with democracy and more trusting of democratic institutions and thereby demonstrating that forms of support are linked and cumulative. Equally, older respondents are more likely to express pride compared with those that are younger, suggesting that pride is durable, but also difficult to cultivate. And this is reinforced in the plot about the east and west. Easterners are noticeably less likely to express pride compared with westerners.

At this stage, then, there is sufficient evidence with which to accept the hypotheses about postmaterial and ideological values (hypotheses 1 and 2), along with political interest (hypothesis 3), east-west differences (hypothesis 7) and attitudes to democracy (hypothesis 8). The statistical models and analyses of marginal effects confirmed these relationships. Although the evidence is less compelling on other factors, further evidence is examined before definitively rejecting or accepting these hypotheses.

*east-west findings*

By conducting separate models for the east and west, the analysis casts additional light on the mechanisms through which this form of support develops. The results (table 3) draw out some clear east-west contrasts. First, comparatively fewer mechanisms condition pride in the east (model 3) compared with the west (model 2). In the eastern model, three variables have surpassed the significance threshold: postmaterialist values, satisfaction with democracy and
trust in democratic institutions. The eastern model is thus more limited in that pride has fewer drivers. In the west, these three variables remain significant, but are supplemented by effects from centrist ideological values, political interest and age, all of which positively influence western pride in ways that they do not in the east. On this evidence, then, the eastern findings suggest that pride is not yet steeped in ideological political values, attitudes and social structure. The eastern drivers are few, whilst those of the west stem from a wider range of theoretical factors and thus suggest that pride is anchored in a more diverse range of social and political phenomena.

--Figure 2 here please--

Given the importance of these contrasts, they are visualised in figure 2. The plots show the average marginal effects for the variables which are significant in the west, but not the east, illustrating the degree to which the relationships differ. The contrasts between centrist ideology, for example, are striking. In the west, pride increases as respondents place themselves in the centre of the left-right scale. The slope increases and the confidence interval narrows, indicating that net of the effect of controls, there is an important relationship between pride in the constitution and centrist ideological placement. In the east, however, the increase in the slope is minimal and is surrounded by a sizeable confidence interval, which makes it difficult to claim that the relationship is statistically or substantively important. Similar points apply to political interest: the western relationship is more linear than that of the east and the narrow confidence interval enables us to draw more secure conclusions about its effects. And the relationship between age and pride appears noticeably different between the west and east. Older westerners are more likely to express pride compared with those that are younger, whilst in the east there is little difference between younger and older respondents. Whilst age conditions pride in the west, its effects are largely absent in the east.
Reviewing the findings overall, two core points should be reinforced. First, the all-
German model confirmed that attachments to the constitution stem from a wide variety of
theoretical factors. As the evidence from three separate models suggested weak links to
economic evaluations and social trust, hypotheses 4-6 are rejected. As shown, the
foundations of constitutional support encompass postmaterial and ideological values, cognitive
interest in politics and attitudes towards the functioning of democracy. There are also important
effects from age and differences between easterners and westerners. These were confirmed in
the multivariate model and the analyses of marginal effects. Second, given the differences
uncovered between easterners and westerners, separate models probed more deeply into the
drivers of pride between the two regions and confirmed that western pride is conditioned by a
wider set of factors. Ideological values, political interest and age all positively influence pride
in ways that they do not in the east. In the east, these relationships are weaker and pride is driven
by comparatively fewer factors. The implications of this are discussed in the conclusion.

Conclusion

During the last twenty years, studies have repeatedly pointed to symptoms of democratic
ill-health and have argued that modern democracies are suffering from major legitimacy
deficits. Writing in the German context, meanwhile, has concluded that democracy is already
languishing in the midst of crisis (Pünder 2015: 714-5).

This study rejects this view. Democracies are undoubtedly experiencing challenges, but
this need not denote widespread and basic discontent. Three empirical findings from this study
reinforce this point. First, it has shown the extent of support, not its absence. A majority of
Germans are proud of the Basic Law, suggesting that disquiet about the competitive parts of
the system has not undermined allegiance to the democratic framework (Campbell 2019: 225-
6). Second, this form of support has durability. The persistence over unification – when the
system was subjected to its most searching test – amply demonstrates this. Third, in both parts of Germany the trajectory is upwards rather than depleting, which challenges claims of irreversible erosions of support.

By sensitising the analysis to the distinguishing characteristics of German democracy, then, substantially different conclusions have been reached. This has implications for future research. Existing studies have presented compelling evidence of institutional disquiet (Campbell 2004). But this is one part of a broader picture. And the implications of this are that people may not be as cynical as has been assumed. They may be ‘critically democratic’; i.e., they criticise elected representatives whilst supporting the constitutional framework. They may be dissatisfied with the initiating and legislating aspects – which depend heavily on partisan competition – whilst supporting the constitution. Low trust in democratic institutions, whilst important, should not be generalised too far; it may exist in balanced tension with more allegiant sentiments.

Multivariate analyses reinforced that this support is slow to develop but enduring in nature. A connecting thread in the empirical analyses is that nurturing support may be a lengthy process, for the factors shaping it tend not to ebb and flow. Centrist political values, for example, anchor support in ideological phenomena that have longevity. Connections to postmaterialism, meanwhile, ground it in values that tend not to change. And the findings about age also pointed to a durable form of support. This requires careful discussion. Effects were present in the west but not the east; and they were also found amongst older compared with younger westerners. As theorised, one interpretation of this is that age functions as a proxy for ‘political learning’. Age brings exposure to how the constitution works. This exposure may not necessarily be direct or exclusively political, nor need it imply that the Basic Law is viewed without fault. But indirect exposure to how it disperses authority, protects democratic values, along with the benefits it provides to German citizens, may gradually nurture normative
appreciation for it. And this, in turn, may explain the differences in the findings. Older western respondents may be more likely to express pride in the constitution because they have had greater time to witness it in action and appreciate the role it has played in deepening German democracy. This may also explain the comparative under-development of support in the east: easterners need more time to build up positive appreciation for it.

Although this study provides grounds for optimism, some areas invite caution. Linkages between trust in democratic institutions, satisfaction with democracy and pride in the constitution are a case in point. These overlaps were discovered in all of the models in which they were tested, confirming that these attitudes are closely-related and empirically-reinforcing. Whilst this has been a longstanding theoretical assumption, this study has presented evidence that Germans do not view the objects of the political system separately, but as connected parts of a democratic framework. The practical implications of this are double-edged. If democratic institutions nurture trustworthiness or satisfaction, they may generate higher-order support; but a sustained collapse of trust and pervasive dissatisfaction may detrimentally effect attachments to the constitution, creating a descending spiral of support. Despite its resilient qualities, then, this form of support is not wholly unconditional and should not be taken for granted.

Finally, this study is presented in a context in which there are profound challenges sweeping across the Germany. These encompass electoral volatility, the fragmentation of party systems, difficulties of government formation and the rise and persistence of the populist right. These are real and are a microcosm of broader challenges engulfing European polities. Yet it has often been assumed that the context in which they exist is dominated by a more adversarial relationship between citizens and state. Aspects of this may be correct. But strong and growing support for the constitution not only demonstrates that people have not rejected democracy wholesale, but that the system may be more supported than has hitherto been appreciated.
Bibliography


Appendix A

This appendix provides the full information about the variables used in the analyses and the recoding procedures.

The dependent variable on pride in the Basic Law was measured through the following question:

- “On these cards you will find a number of things one can be proud of as a German, Please select the three things you are most proud of. The Basic Law, The German Parliament (“Bundestag”), The achievements of German athletes, Economic successes, German art and literature, scientific achievements, social welfare achievements.

Independent variables:

Political values (Modernisation)

- This was measure “Looking at the list below, please tick a box next to the one thing you think should be Germany’s highest priority, the most important thing it should do. Highest priority Germany should… (1) Maintain order in the nation (2) Give people more say in government decisions (3) Fight rising prices (4) Protect freedom of speech. And which one do you think should be Germany’s next highest priority, the second most important thing it should do? Next highest priority should… (1) Maintain order in the nation (2) Give people more say in government decisions (3) Fight rising prices (4) Protect freedom of speech.

Centrist ideology.

- This was measured through the standard left-right spectrum scaled between 1-10. Many people use the terms “left” and “right” when they want to describe different political views. Here we have a scale which runs from left to right. Thinking of your own political views, where would you place these on this scale?” 1 denotes right and 10 left. This item was recoded to create a five-point scale in which higher values denote individuals with placement in the centre of spectrum. In the recoded variable 1 denotes those who opted for scores 1 and 10 on the original scale; 2 denotes those who opted for 2 and 9 on the original scale; 3 denotes those who opted for scores 3 and 8 on the original scale; 4 denotes those who opted for scores 4 and 7 on the original scale; and 5 denotes those who opted for scores 5 and 6 on the original scale.

Civil society

- The question on political interest used was: “How interested in politics are you? (4) Very strongly? (3) Strongly? (2) Middling? (1) Very little? (0) Or not at all?”

- The question on social trust is: “Some people think that most people can be trusted. Others think that one can’t be careful enough when dealing with other people. What do you think?”

The variable was recoded: 0 “one can’t be careful enough; (1) “it depends”; and (2) “most people can be trusted.”

Political-economy

- Perceptions of current personal economic circumstance. How would you rate your own current economic circumstance? Responses were: very good, coded 1; good, coded 2; part good, part bad, coded 3; bad, coded 4; and very bad, coded five. The polarity of this variable was reversed.
• Perceptions of future personal economic circumstance. ‘How would you rate your economic circumstances in one year’s time?’ Responses were: considerably better, coded 1; somewhat better, coded 2; the same, coded 3; somewhat worse, coded 4; and considerably worse, coded five. The polarity of this variable was reversed.

• Perceptions of current macroeconomic circumstance. ‘How would you rate the current economic situation in Germany?’ Responses were: very good, coded 1; good, coded 2; part good, part bad, coded 3; bad, coded 4; and very bad, coded five. The polarity of this variable was reversed.

• Perceptions of future macroeconomic performance. ‘How would you rate the economic situation in Germany in one year’s time?’ Responses were: considerably better, coded 1; somewhat better, coded 2; the same, coded 3; somewhat worse, coded 4; and considerably worse, coded five. The polarity of this variable was reversed.

**West-East**

• Dichotomous variable measured from the region in which respondents live. west coded 0, east coded 1.

**Political learning**

• Based on respondent’s self reported age in years. To capture differences between age groups, the variable was recoded into five age groups: 18-29; 30-45; 46-59; 60-74; 75 and over.

**Political support**

• Trust in democratic institutions. This variable was obtained from the following question: ‘I am now going to read out a number of public institutions and organisations. Please tell me for each institution or organisation how much trust you place in it. Please use this scale. 1 means you have absolutely no trust at all 7 means you have a great deal of trust. You can differentiate your answers using the numbers in between. German Constitutional Court, German Parliament, Judicial system, German government’. The scale for each item was recoded 0–6 with higher values indicating more trust and an additive index created ranging from 0-24.

• Satisfaction with democracy. ‘How satisfied are with democracy as it is practised in the Federal Republic of Germany?’ Responses: 1: very satisfied; 2: fairly satisfied; 3: somewhat satisfied; 4: somewhat dissatisfied; 5: fairly dissatisfied; 6: very dissatisfied. The polarity of the variable was reversed and recoded 0–5, with 0 denoting very dissatisfied and 5 denoting very satisfied.

**Controls**

• Gender: Male coded 1, female coded 2.

• Education: Recoded dummy variable in which respondents with a university degree were coded 1, respondents without a university degree were scored 0.
Table 1: Pride in the Basic Law 1988-2016

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Notes:
1. Entries are percentages. Figures have been rounded.
2. German citizens only.

Table 2: GLM: Pride in the Basic Law

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Notes: entries are logits. Standard errors in parentheses.

<sup>a</sup> sig at .001; <sup>b</sup> sig. at .001; <sup>c</sup> sig. at .05

population weights applied to all-German model.

German citizens only.

Figure 1: Average Marginal Effects with 95 percent Confidence Intervals, Pride in the Constitution.

Source: Table 2, model 1.
Figure 2: Average Marginal Effects with 95 percent Confidence Intervals, Pride in the Constitution.

Source: Table 2, models 2 and 3.