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# The Impact of the Global Economic Crisis on Patterns of Support for Democracy in Germany

*Hans-Dieter Klingemann*\*

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**Abstract:** »Die Auswirkungen der Weltwirtschaftskrise auf die Muster von Demokratieunterstützung in Deutschland«. Has there been a decline in support for democracy in the aftermath of the 2007/08 fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession in Germany? This is the general research question dealt with in this article. Based on a differentiated theory of support for democracy results show that levels of support are high and change over time does not support the decline expectation. We conclude that the political culture of Germany's established democratic political regime has cushioned the impact of the fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession in the time period under consideration. German democracy has weathered the crisis well.

**Keywords:** Support for democratic values, support for the German democratic regime, generalized support for political parties, impact of economic crises, partisan differences in support for democracy.

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## Introduction

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In 2007/08 a crisis has hit the world's financial system leading to the worst global economic recession the world has seen in the past 80 years (The Economist, September 7th 2013). The Lehman Brother's bankruptcy of September 2008 has become the symbolic hallmark of this event. As a consequence of this crisis the German economy suffered a contraction of the GDP by 6.8% one of the sharpest deteriorations since World War II.

A sizeable body of literature deals with the impact of economic crises on political development. Historical accounts of the breakdown of democracy in the Weimar Republic and other European states (e.g. Bracher 1955; Berg-Schlosser and Mitchell 2000, 2002) show that, in general, economic crises lead

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to a deterioration of support for democracy. The more severe the impact of the economic crisis the greater the decline of the level of support for democracy. Other studies focusing on political attitudes and behavior suggest that this proposition must be modified by cultural conditions. In this respect 'old' established democracies – such as Great Britain – are found less vulnerable to economic crises than 'younger' democracies (Lipset 1959, 1966, 1994; Almond and Verba 1963). It is argued that citizens of established democracies have accumulated positive experiences with the flexibility of democratic institutions and the proper functioning of democratic politics when earlier economic crises had to be confronted. In post-war Germany the economic miracle of the 1950s is a case in point. The greater the number of such positive experiences with the functioning of one's democratic regime the greater the probability that a general democratic culture will take roots which softens the negative impact of economic crises and contributes to the persistence of democracy.

Has there been a decline in support for democracy in the aftermath of the 2007/08 fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession? This is the general question we want to answer for the German case empirically. If we find that support for democracy has declined substantially, a classification of Germany as a shock resistant established democracy must be questioned. Some political observers argue that German political culture still struggles to digest the legacies of Nazi- and former GDR's communist ideology. Other assessments come to the conclusion that Germany has had enough time to generate a solid level of diffuse political support

a reservoir of favorable attitudes or good will that helps members to accept or tolerate outputs to which they are opposed or the effect of which they see as damaging to their wants. Outputs and beneficial performance may rise and fall while this support, in the form of general attachment, continues (Easton 1975, 444).

If levels of support for democracy are high and if we find little or no change over time on the value level we would assume that German democracy has weathered the crisis well. The final conclusion must take into account, however, that our empirical evidence is limited to the time period stretching from mid 2006 to early 2014. The situation might have changed thereafter.

We answer our general question in four steps:

- 1) We start with a differentiation of the concept of support for democracy.
- 2) Second, we describe the data base and discuss our indicators for democratic support.
- 3) Third, we present the empirical results in some detail and,
- 4) in concluding we summarize our major finding: Support for democracy shows a pattern that is compatible with the cushioning potential of the political culture of an established democracy.

We are aware of the vast number of research projects dealing with the topic of the impact of the 2007/08 economic crisis and support for democracy (e.g.

Polavieja 2012; Kroknes, Jacobsen and Gronning 2015; Cordero and Simon 2016; Ferrin and Kriesi 2016; Penning 2017). These analyses mostly confirm the expectation of negative consequences on support for democracy. It is beyond the scope of our contribution to summarize and describe the results of these studies in this context. Rather we will focus on studying the four aspects outlined above.

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## 1. Support for Democracy: A Conceptual Differentiation

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Support for democracy is a nuanced concept. It needs differentiation. In our analysis we rely on a conceptual framework proposed by Fuchs (1989, 2007) and Fuchs and Roller (2018). They distinguish three different objects of support: (1) support for democratic values, (2) support for the democratic regime of one's own country and (3) generalized support for political actors. This differentiation owes to Easton (1975) and Parsons (1951). However, the typologies combine these older approaches in a hierarchical way which is particularly helpful to understand variations in support for democracy that seem to be contradictory at first sight. For example, one can strongly support democratic values but have doubts about the institutional structure of one's own democratic regime. In addition, their taxonomy leaves enough room for an interpretation of dynamic processes especially those caused by an overflow of values (from values to structures to actors) and a generalization of experiences (from actors to structure to values). This is particularly helpful when it comes to understand and explain patterns of change in support for democracy.

Support for democratic values represents the highest level of the hierarchical model. It is also labeled 'democratic culture' narrowly defined as a commitment to basic democratic values such as democracy, sovereignty of the people, liberty or political equality. It includes support for democracy as an ideal form of government which is essential for the persistence of any democratic system.

The democratic regime of one's own country represents the next level in the hierarchy. It consists of a specific institutional structure which in most cases is enshrined in a country's constitution. Support for the democratic regime is linked to the regime's persistence the same way as support for democratic values is linked to the persistence of the democratic system as the ideal form of government.

Support for political actors or, in Easton's terms, support for political authorities, is located at the lowest level of the democratic systems hierarchy. At this level generalized support is most prominently expressed by allowing the re- or de-election of major political parties in competitive elections (see Table 1).

High levels of support for democratic values are a positive indication for democracy to persist. A similar assumption can also be made for support for

the democratic regime of one's own country. The higher it is, the greater the probability of the regime's persistence. A decline in regime support is often interpreted as a move towards an autocratic regime. However, as mentioned above, citizens may criticize their democratic regime because they feel that it does not live up fully to its own democratic norms and values or citizens may want to improve their democratic regime by changing selected institutions such as, for example, the electoral system. Thus, an evaluation of levels of support for the democratic regime in one's own country should always consider the political context. The same is true for generalized support for political parties as the major actors of a representative democracy. For example, a very high support for a specific political party could be detrimental to the proper functioning of the interplay between government and opposition (Blondel 1968).

**Table 1:** Different Levels of Support for Democracy and Consequences for the Persistence of Democracy

Levels of the democratic system	Attitudinal constructs	Systemic consequences
Democratic values (culture)	Support for democratic values	Persistence of the democratic system
Democratic regime (structure)	Support for the democratic regime of one's own country	Persistence of the democratic regime
Actors	Generalized support for political parties	Re- or de-election of political parties

Adapted from Fuchs (2007,166. A Model of System Culture).

Overflow of values and generalization of experiences have an impact on support for the next lower or higher level of the democratic system. In most of the established democracies we would expect the highest stability at the value level. Citizens supporting democracy as an ideal form of government should not show a great deal of change just because of an economic crisis. Changes in support may be more visible at the regime level caused by concerns about the adequacy of particular institutions or by the generalization of positive or negative experiences with the processes at the actor level. It is a 'normal' characteristic of competitive party systems of representative democracies that support levels for specific parties change. Under certain circumstances these changes can, however, affect support for democracy at the regime or even at the value levels. This is the case, for example, when citizens no longer hold the parties in government responsible for a negative economic or social development but blame it on their country's democratic political regime. Lipset (1959) has emphasized the importance of this type of generalization when suggesting his effectiveness theorem. This theorem refers to the

actual performance, the extent to which the system satisfies the basic functions of government as most of the population and such powerful groups within it as big business or the armed forces see them (Lipset 1966, 77, Roller 2005, Thomassen and van der Kolk 2009).

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## 2. The Data Base and Indicators of Democratic Support

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### 2.1 The Data Base

In this analysis we focus on the long-term impact of an economic crisis on support for democracy by political elites and the electorate. We make use of a unique data base that provides both survey data for members of the German parliament and for the German populace. The latter surveys represent people of voting age living in Germany. To avoid a clumsy description and ensure better readability we will refer to ‘people of voting age living in Germany’ as ‘citizens’ knowing well that some of the respondents in the WVS surveys may not hold a German passport. Their proportions are small and will not distort any general conclusions. Details of this data collection are presented in the Introduction to Part II ‘The Impact of the Economic Crisis on Democracy’ (Klingemann and Hoffmann-Lange 201x, in this issue).

Identical questions regarding support for democracy in the detailed differentiation proposed by Fuchs are available in the surveys allowing ‘elite-mass’ comparisons within and across time. In our case the cross-time comparison capitalizes on the fact that the first round of surveys has been conducted before and the second one after the 2007/08 fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession (see Table 2). This offers the unique opportunity to empirically discuss the impact of this event on support for democracy by both members of parliament and ordinary citizens. Of course, the data at hand are not individual panel data. Thus, we are not in a position to measure change at the individual level caused by the economic crisis on attitudes and beliefs of citizens and members of parliament. However, we can present data aggregated to the level of party groupings before and after the crisis and engage in a discussion of whether support levels and change patterns point in the direction of a growing, stable or declining support for democracy.

**Table 2:** The Data Base: Surveys Included in the Analysis

	Surveys of Members of Parliament MP1 / MP2	Surveys of citizens (18 years and older) WVS1 / WVS2
T1 Begin of fieldwork	23.02.2007	02.05.2006
T1 End of fieldwork	08.08.2007	21.06.2006
T2 Begin of fieldwork	14.02.2013	22.07.2013
T2 End of fieldwork	14.02.2014	13.11.2013

In the concluding remarks we speculate about the impact of government action and policies on crisis perception and support of democracy. This section mostly relies on trend data (monthly surveys) provided by the Forschungsgruppe Wahlen (FGW) which are aggregated for the first and the second half of each year

starting in 2005 and ending in 2014. These data capture the variation of public opinion in the period between the two surveys of the members of parliament (MP T1, MP T2) and the two surveys of the German populace (WVS T1, WVS T2) for selected attitudes and beliefs important for our argument. They cover the citizens' perception of the general economic situation, satisfaction with democratic performance, and support of political parties. Finally, we use aggregate data compiled by DuPlessis and Freytag (2012) to locate the beginning (peak) and the end of the first phase of the economic recession (trough).

## 2.2 Indicators of Support for Democracy

We are not in a position to come up with a broad set of valid and reliable indicators for the three levels of support for democracy as suggested by Fuchs' taxonomy within the constraints of our data-base. In the citizen-surveys (WVS T1, WVS T2) and the surveys of the members of parliament (MP T1, MP T2) there are just seven questions measuring support for democracy. In addition, if we want to use the same indicators to compare citizens and members of parliament over time the number of questions is again drastically reduced. All questions available are documented in Table 3. Those highlighted we use as indicators to represent the three different levels of support for democracy: Support for democratic values, support for the German democratic regime, and generalized support for political parties. Each concept is represented by one indicator only. Of course, we would have preferred multiple items for each of the concepts. However, we are restricted by what is available in the four surveys. We claim that the three indicators at hand measure what they are supposed to measure and we hope that additional indicators would have generated consistent results. Moreover, all three items have already been part of well-developed multi-item indices for similar concepts in other studies (e.g. Hoffmann-Lange 2015; Berg-Schlosser and Hoffmann-Lange 2018 [2019?]).

To value democracy as the ideal form of government is most the fundamental aspect of support for democracy. In the surveys available three attempts have been made to measure this concept. The first inquires about the importance to live in a country that is governed democratically. The second takes up Churchill's statement that despite of all its shortcomings democracy is still better than any other political system as a way of governing a country. The third question asks respondents to compare a democratic system with forms of non-democratic government. For our analysis we use the last indicator because the relevant question has been asked in all four surveys. Conceptually the indicator is expected to cover a commitment to democratic values. We have checked our indicator's association with three specific democratic values: free elections (people choose their leaders in free elections), civil rights (civil rights protect people's liberty against oppression) and women's rights (women have the same rights as men). For the citizen surveys all correlation coefficients are

positive and significant at the .000 level. The MPs at both points in time agreed almost unanimously with the four items in the direction of democratic values. Given the extreme skewness of the relevant distributions it does not make sense to calculate correlation coefficients. We have looked, instead, at the proportion of MPs choosing the highest possible positive category of both indicators. The results are as follows:

- 1) Having a democratic system is ‘very good’ and *free elections* are ‘essential’: T1 92%, T2 89%.
- 2) Having a democratic system is ‘very good’ and *civil rights* are ‘essential’: T1 88%, T2 80%.
- 3) Having a democratic system is ‘very good’ and *women’s rights* are ‘essential’: T1 97%, T2 89%.

These findings support the validity of the indicator and the assumption that we can interpret ‘support for democracy as an ideal form of government’ as covering a commitment to a broader set of democratic values. We want to add that citizens inevitably associate different meanings and expectations with the term ‘democracy’ (Fuchs and Klingemann 2002, 25; Coppedge and Gerring 2011; Lindberg et al. 2014). This should not be concealed by labeling the indicator as we do.

Democratic values are differently institutionalized in different countries. There is a difference between support for democratic values and support for a specific democratic regime that has institutionalized a particular set of democratic principles. Citizens may support their country’s democratic regime because they support this set of democratic values. However, they can also be dissatisfied with their democratic regime because they feel that it is not democratic enough and in need of change (Norris 1999; Klingemann 1999, 2014). Two indicators are available to measure support for the democratic regime. The first question asks about the satisfaction with the way democracy is developing in one’s country (‘our country’). The second question solicits an evaluation of how democratically “this (our) country” is being governed today. This emphasizes the aspect of ‘democratic performance’ rather than ‘systemic performance’ (Fuchs 1998, 152; Roller 2005, 22). We rely on the second indicator because – as was the case with support for democratic values – it is the only one available in all four surveys.

Political parties are the key political actors of representative democracy. In the analysis we rely on an indicator measuring confidence in political parties which is conceptualized as generalized support for political parties. The relevant question has also been asked in all four surveys. The exact wording of the questions used for analysis is provided in Table 3.

Response categories are different for the various questions. In order to ease comparability and interpretation we have rescaled the scores to have a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1.0. 0 is the expression of the lowest possible support for democracy. 1 is the expression of the highest possible support for



democracy. Accordingly, fractions of 1 denote different degrees of support for democracy with meaningful endpoints and thresholds: 0 indicates that support of democracy is completely absent, 0.25 and 0.33 that it is mostly but not completely absent, 0.50 that it is halfway present, 0.66 and 0.75 that it is mostly but not completely present, and 1 that it is completely present (Welzel 2013, 64).

**Table 3: Indicators of Support for Democracy and their Measurement**

Type of support	Question wording
<b><i>Democratic values (culture)</i></b>	
Importance of democracy WVS T1, T2	How important is it for you to live in a country that is governed democratically? On this scale where 1 means it is 'not at all important' and 10 means 'absolutely important' what position would you choose?
Democracy is better than any other political system MP T1, T2	I am going to read a statement that people sometimes say about a democratic political system. Could you please tell me whether you strongly agree, agree, disagree or strongly disagree.  Although democracy has many shortcomings, it is still better than any other political system.
<b>Support for democracy as an ideal form of government</b> WVS T1, T2 MP T1, T2	I am going to describe various types of political systems and ask what you think about each as a way of governing this country. For each one, would you say it is a very good, fairly good, fairly bad or very bad way of governing this country?  Having a democratic system 1 very good, 2 fairly good, 3 fairly bad, 4 very bad
<b><i>Democratic Regime (structure)</i></b>	
Satisfaction with the way democracy is developing in our country MP T1, T2	On the whole are you very satisfied, rather satisfied, not very satisfied or not at all satisfied with the way democracy is developing in our country?  1 very satisfied, 2 rather satisfied, 3 not very satisfied, 4 not at all satisfied
<b>Support for the German democratic regime</b> WVS T1, T2 MP T1, T2	<b>And how democratically is this country being governed today?</b> Using a scale where 1 means it is 'not at all democratic' and 10 means 'completely democratic' what position would you choose?
<b><i>Democratic Actors (political authorities)</i></b>	
Generalized support for political parties WVS T1, T2 MP T1, T2	I am going to name a number of organizations. For each one, could you tell me how much confidence you have in them: is it a great deal of confidence, quite a lot of confidence, not much confidence or none at all?  'Political parties'

Bold face: Indicator used in the analysis.

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### 3. Design of the Empirical Analysis

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In this analysis we describe levels of support for democracy of ordinary German citizens as well as members of the German parliament before and after the fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession. More specifically, we compare relevant political attitudes and beliefs of citizens and political elites at two points in time as well as across time.

Average levels of support will be reported both for results obtained by the citizen and the MP surveys. Average levels of support for democracy will also be presented for groups of party supporters (vote intention) and for parties in parliament. This opens the possibility to relate citizens and political elites at each of the two time-points as well as across time at the party level.

Why choose parties as the level of comparison? Political parties are particularly suited for such a comparison because they function as the major link between citizens and their representatives. Thus, partisanship is a theoretically meaningful concept to relate political attitudes and beliefs of citizens and their representatives in parliament. Political parties are arguably the most important actors in representative democracy. They are expected to be responsive to the demands of citizens and to propose policies to deal with the major issues on the political agenda. As a rule, political parties present their goals and policy positions to the electorate by issuing programs for which they seek support in competitive elections. If in government, political parties are assumed to live up to their promises (Fuchs 1993; Mueller 2000; Dalton et al. 2011).

It is widely believed that political parties have lost much of their importance in the current political process. Turnout in elections has been on the decline in many countries and confidence in political parties seems to be low. However, in spite of all these observations the political party remains the most important actor in representative democracy. Parties compete for votes in elections to gain legitimate political power. They are still the key intermediaries between citizens and the state. Mueller (2000) argues that political parties exist because they reduce transaction costs in the electoral, parliamentary and governmental arenas and help to overcome the dilemma of collective action. Fuchs (1993) has proposed a process model of representative democracy that accords political parties a prominent status. In this model political parties turn citizen demands into political issues, “bundle” demands into political programs which subsequently guide the decisions of their representatives in parliament and government.

These are the reasons why party support has been selected as the common denominator to relate members of parliament and citizens. The concept is defined broadly and meant to cover party membership as well as all other modes of partisanship such as party identification, party leaning, vote intention or voting behavior. Party attachment is easy to identify for members of parlia-

ment. As far as citizens are concerned party support is measured by the following question:

“If there were a national election tomorrow, for which party on this list would you vote?”

In the pre-crisis survey (WVS T1) the interviewer was advised to say: Just call out the number on this card. If you are uncertain, which party appeals to you most?

If respondents said ‘don’t know’ in the post-crisis survey (WVS T2) interviewers were advised to follow-up with: Which party appeals to you most?

The political parties listed in Table 4 have been represented in the German national parliament during the time period under consideration. They command enough support in the populace that standard survey samples generate a sufficiently large number of interviews to allow statistical analysis. This is not the case for partisans of very small political parties. These respondents are represented in our analysis as supporters of ‘other’ political parties. However, there still is the large group of citizens who do not support any political party. All respondents who did not mention a political party when asked which party they would vote for in a national election jointly form the group of ‘no party supporters’. This group also includes respondents who refused or did not answer the question for some reason.

**Table 4:** Number of Party Supporters in the World Values Surveys (WVS) and of the Parties Represented in the Bundestag in the MP Surveys

Party support	WVS T1	MP T1	WVS T2	MP T2
Party of Democratic Socialism / The Left	94 (188)*	9 (11)	117 (202)	12 (16)
Alliance 90 / The Greens	166 (127)	8 (10)	168 (154)	14 (15)
Social Democratic Party	477 (456)	37 (31)	478 (419)	26 (29)
Free Democratic Party	86 (87)	10 (13)	49 (44)	17 (17)
Christian Democratic Union / Christian Social Union	550 (509)	37 (36)	601 (652)	43 (35)
National Democratic Party	29 (36)		16 (20)	
Alternative for Germany			33 (34)	
Supporters of ‘other’ political parties	14 (21)		26 (25)	
No party support	647 (640)		553 (494)	
Total	2064	101	2041	112

\*Unweight Number of Cases in brackets.

The official name of the German leftmost party has changed in June 2007 when the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), successor party to the east German communist Socialist Unity Party (SED), joined forces with the West German ‘Work & Social Justice – The Election Alternative (Arbeit & soziale Gerechtigkeit – Die Wahlalternative, WASG)’ to found the party currently labeled ‘The Left’. This name change took place after the first MP survey (23.02.2007) and the first citizen survey (02.05.2006) went to the field. While the name ‘The Left’ is well established by now, we decided to label the party ‘PDS/The Left’.

Table 4 documents the number of interviews available for analysis both for the World Values Surveys and the surveys of the members of parliament.

As far as the surveys of the members of parliament are concerned the number of respondents is rather small for some parties in parliament. Thus, survey estimates have rather high error terms. We use these small numbers of cases anyway to aggregate attitudes and beliefs at the party level. In this case we conceptualize groups of respondents not as part of a probability sample but as the best experts we can get to generate data about support for democracy of the various parties in parliament.

The analysis pays particular attention to the time period stretching from September 2002 to September 2013. As far as the parties and their governments are concerned this period has seen the same five parties in the four national parliaments elected in 2002, 2005, 2009 and 2013. We count the Christian Democrats and the Christian Socials of Bavaria as one party grouping which can be justified because these two so-called ‘sister’ parties act as one party in the national parliament. Three different coalition governments were formed after these four elections. A “red-green” SPD - Alliance’90/The Greens coalition with Gerhard Schroeder as the chancellor held power from 2002 to 2005, followed by a CDU/CSU-SPD Grand Coalition (2005 to 2009), a “Christian-Liberal” coalition of CDU/CSU and FDP (2009 to 2013), which in turn was followed by another CDU/CSU-SPD Grand Coalition governing from 2013 to 2017. The three latter coalitions saw Angela Merkel as the chancellor at the helm. This means between 2002 and 2013 Germany has experienced three different coalition governments. Thus, all parties represented in the national parliament – with the exception of PDS/The Left – have held government positions. The first Grand Coalition suffered the brunt of the fiscal and economic crisis but it also had the opportunity to try its policies to successfully tackle the challenges of the crisis. In 2013 the survey revealed that members of parliament were under the impression that the CDU/CSU in particular but also the SPD as the coalition partner, had benefited and not suffered from the crisis. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means that a party has suffered and 10 means that a party has profited, on average the CDU/CSU reached a score of 7.6 and the SPD scored 5.0 while the PDS/The Left and the A’90/The Greens (both 4.7) and the FDP (4.6) trailed behind.

While focusing on the party level we want to emphasize that citizens who do not support a political party represent a sizeable part of the electorate we must not ignore. Considering the four elections mentioned above the average proportion of non-voters amounts to 23 percent of those entitled to vote.

**Table 5: Votes and Seats of Governing and Opposition Parties in the National Parliamentary Elections**

	SPD	A'90-Greens	CDU/CSU	FDP	PDS / The Left
2002					
Votes*	38.5	8.6	38.5	7.4	4.0
Seats	41.6	9.1	41.1	7.8	0.3
	Gov't	Gov't	Opposition	Opposition	Opposition
2005					
Votes*	34.2	8.1	35.2	9.8	8.7
Seats	36.2	8.3	36.8	9.9	8.8
	Gov't	Opposition	Gov't	Opposition	Opposition
2009					
Votes*	23.0	10.7	33.8	14.6	11.9
Seats	23.5	10.9	38.4	15.0	12.2
	Opposition	Opposition	Gov't	Gov't	Opposition
2013					
Votes*	25.7	8.4	41.5	4.8	8.6
Seats	30.6	10.0	49.3	0	10.1
	Gov't	Opposition	Gov't	Opposition	Opposition

\*second votes.

#### 4. The Time-Line of the Analysis

For the analysis it is important to know when exactly the fiscal crisis hit the German economy and when, thereafter, the German economy started to recover. This information will help us to gauge the crisis' visibility for the respondents of the two post-crisis surveys. DuPlessis and Freytag (2012) have made a systematic attempt to determine the exact dates of the beginning of the crisis and the first turning point based on economic cycle theory. In line with classical conceptualizations they define cycles as successive periods of relative expansion and decline in aggregate economic activity. The turning points - called troughs and peaks - separate periods of relative increase and relative decline in aggregate economic growth. The algorithm used by DuPlessis and Freytag to determine these dates was developed by Bry and Boschan (1971). It identifies local minima (troughs) and local maxima (peaks) in a single time series. The time series used to calculate the beginning of the recession consists of inflation adjusted quarterly GDP data starting with the first quarter of 1990 and ending with the first quarter of 2012. Relying on this methodology the recession in Germany began in the first quarter of 2008 (peak); the recovery (trough) started in the second quarter of 2009 (see Table 6).

**Table 6:** Time Distance between the Beginning of the Crisis and the Beginning of the Fieldwork of the Post-Crisis Surveys

Post-crisis surveys	Begin of crisis (peak)*	Begin of fieldwork	Number of days
T2 WVS	01.02.2008	22.07.2013	1998
T2 MP	01.02.2008	14.02.2013	1385

Having determined the beginning of the crisis we can place the periods of fieldwork for our surveys in their historical context. By definition the pre-crisis surveys were in the field before the crisis started. As shown in Table 6, the respondents of the post-crisis surveys answered our questions more than five years after the crisis started. This means that – if asked about the crisis – they evaluated an event that had happened in the past. Details may no longer be readily present. On the other hand, respondents had ample opportunity to think about it and to observe how political actors, parties and their governments in particular, have responded to and handled the economic crisis and its socioeconomic consequences. The post-crisis survey of members of parliament asked the following question:

Please evaluate the impact of the global financial and economic crisis on Germany, using a scale from 1 to 10. ‘1’ means that it has no negative impact at all and ‘10’ means that the crisis has had a severe negative impact.

Results show a differentiated picture. In the eyes of the MPs the impact of the crisis on the country in general was rated 5.3 on average. A higher impact was assumed for the country’s banking system (6.0) followed by the country’s economy in general (5.2). That the crisis had a negative impact on the people’s standard of living (4.6) and the quality of democracy in Germany was believed to a lesser degree (4.2).

**Figure 1:** The Structure of the Time Line of the Analysis

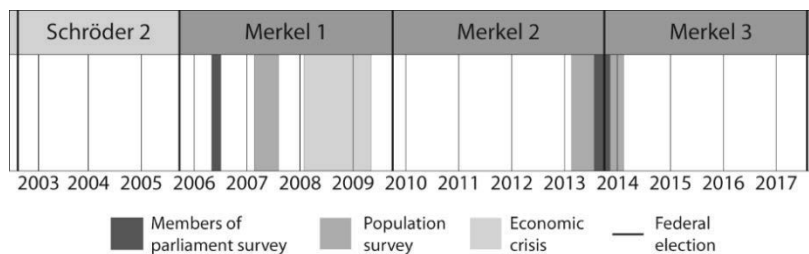


Figure 1 presents the time line of our analyses. It shows the date for the beginning of the crisis, the time frames for the generation of the survey data as well as the dates for the parliamentary elections and the resulting national governments.

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## 5. Expectations

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We propose four hypotheses. The first three are in line with what is argued in most of the literature mentioned above.

- (H1) First we expect that the fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession has had a negative impact on support for democracy.
- (H2) The second expectation emphasizes the importance of a democratic political culture. The more established a democratic political regime, the greater the probability that the impact of the fiscal crisis and the economic recession will be cushioned and leave support for democracy relatively unharmed.
- (H3) Third we assume that members of parliament should display higher levels of support for democracy than citizens of the general populace.

Democratic values are deeply engrained. They are obtained by political socialization dating back to early childhood (Easton and Dennis 1969), living in a democratic country and the experience of its problem-solving capacity. Citizens who were brought up in families adhering to democratic values and have lived in an established democracy are expected to have developed a commitment to democratic values that does not suddenly change when the economy is hit by a fiscal and economic crisis (Inglehart 1977; Inglehart and Welzel 2005). If supported by our empirical results this would speak for the validity of the political culture thesis.

In ‘normal times’ this argument should also hold for support for the democratic regime because democratic values are needed to legitimize the structure of a democratic regime. However, ‘normal times’ also assume an ‘acceptable’ performance of the political actors (Roller 2005). If – as has been argued by Lipset in particular – performance of political authorities continuously fails to meet public expectations levels of support for the democratic regime can be affected. Under these circumstances negative experiences with the policy performance of the major political actors are likely to be generalized and may reach the regime level.

In the analysis we compare ordinary citizens and members of parliament. We assume that support for democracy should generally be higher for members of parliament than for the populace because all MPs belong to democratic political parties and have reached their political power positions as party members in the institutional context of a representative democracy.

The fourth hypothesis tests a particular pattern of support for an established democracy. As suggested by the conceptual distinctions between the different objects of support, we expect to find different levels of support for democratic values, the German democratic regime, and for the political parties as the major political actors. Fuchs’ taxonomy posits a hierarchy of these three objects which implies differing degrees of importance for the democratic system. Thus,

support for democratic values should be higher than support for the specific German democratic regime or this regime's key political authorities. Changes over time should be lowest at the value level and highest at the actor level. This pattern-hypothesis is the fourth and last expectation we want to test.

(H4) The typical support pattern of an established democracy should show a ranking. The highest levels of support should be for the value level (culture) level and the lowest for the actor level (process) with the regime level (structure) in between. It should also show that if there is change over time the degree of change should be lowest at the value level and highest at the actor level.

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## 6. Empirical Analysis

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We present the empirical analysis in two major sections. First, we describe levels of support for democracy and degrees of 'change' for citizens and political elites (H1, H2). Averages of support levels and their respective changes will be presented for each of the three indicators in general as well as for party supporters and parties in parliament. In that context we also consider the expectation that levels of support for democracy should be higher for members of parliament than for ordinary citizens (H3). Second, we discuss (H4) the particular pattern of levels and degree of change of support for democracy.

As was already mentioned we have rescaled scores of the variables to a minimum of 0 and a maximum of 1. Responses are measured at an ordinal level. Thus, it is assured that an original score of 4 is higher than a score of 1, or a score of 1 is lower than a score of 4. We don't know, however, whether or not the distances between the scale values are meaningful (equal) as would be the case for an interval level of measurement. Despite this shortcoming our analyses mostly rely on calculating means to describe support levels. Means reliably indicate the central tendency of a distribution. Averages or means capture a major essential of a distribution. They are easy to understand and to communicate. However, we have to assume that the respondents perceive equal distances between the scores.

### 6.1 Support for Democratic Values

To measure support for democratic values respondents were asked to indicate their preference for a democratic system as a good way of governing a country in comparison to non-democratic systems of government.

Table 7.1 shows a very high level of support for democracy as an ideal form of government both for the populace and for the members of parliament at both periods of time. 95 percent of citizens and all MPs prefer having a democratic system ('having a democratic system' is good or very good) at T1 and T2. On



average we find support levels higher by 14 (T1) and 13 (T2) points for members of parliament. Results demonstrate that support for democracy as an ideal form of government is (1) very high and (2) stable over time. This finding does not support the assumption of a negative effect of the fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession on support for democracy. H1 is not confirmed. Rather, the finding speaks for the cushioning effect of an established ('old') democratic culture as assumed by H2.

**Table 7.1:** Support for Democratic Values

Having a democratic system	WVS T1 Citizens	WVS T2 Citizens	MPs T1	MPs T2
0.00 very bad	1.1	1.7	-	-
.33	3.6	3.1	-	-
.67	34.0	29.7	2.3	1.7
1.00 very good	61.3	65.5	97.7	98.3
Mean	.852	.864	.993	.994
Std. dev.	.206	.212	.050	.043
Missing	3.2	1.3	3.1	-
Total N	2064	2041	101	112

See question text in Table 3 (0 very bad to 1 very good way of governing).

Do groups of party supporters show different patterns? Taking into account the generally high level of support for democracy as an ideal form of government we cannot expect to find large differences. This expectation is confirmed by Table 7.2 and it is particularly true for the parties in parliament. Between groups of party supporters the picture is one of high support levels and little change over time, too. There is a somewhat lower level of support by the small group of supporters of the right-wing National Democratic Party (NPD). However, even the supporters of this party – as well as the newly emerging right-wing Alternative for Germany (AfD) – show average support levels above .70. 'Other' partisans and citizens with no party affiliation (no party supported) also support democracy as an ideal form of government very strongly. In any case we do not find a sharp decline or increase of support levels. Thus, both for party groups of citizens and for parties in parliament there are no indications that democracy is under threat at the value level.

**Table 7.2: Support for Democratic Values by Party Support**

Party support	WVS T1 Citizens		WVS T2 Citizens		MPs T1		MPs T2	
	PDS/The Left	.84	(.227)*	.82	(.216)	1.00	(.000)	1.00
AL'90/The Greens	.89	(.184)	.88	(.225)	1.00	(.000)	.98	(.086)
SPD	.86	(.221)	.84	(.246)	.99	(.060)	1.00	(.000)
FDP	.84	(.232)	.90	(.159)	1.00	(.000)	.98	(.081)
CDU / CSU	.86	(.192)	.89	(.187)	.99	(.058)	1.00	(.000)
NDP	.74	(.311)	.71	(.286)	-	-	-	-
AfD	-	-	.82	(.233)	-	-	-	-
Supporters of other political parties	.83	(.230)	.93	(.136)	-	-	-	-
No party supported	.84	(.196)	.86	(.197)	-	-	-	-
Missing values %	3.2		1.3		3.1		-	
Total	2064		2041		101		112	

\*in brackets: Standard deviation.

## 6.2 Support for Germany's Democratic Regime

Support for the German democratic regime was measured by asking how democratically the country is being governed today. Respondents could express their opinion using a ten-point scale ranging from 'not at all democratic' to 'completely democratic'.

**Table 7.3: Support for the German Democratic Regime**

How democratically is the country governed?	WVS T1 Citizens	WVS T2 Citizens	MPs T1	MPs T2
0.00 not at all democratic	1.8	0.5	-	-
0.11	1.9	1.0	-	0.8
0.22	3.2	2.9	-	1.6
0.33	4.7	4.1	1.6	1.8
0.44	9.5	9.6	0.8	3.9
0.56	11.9	10.3	1.6	6.5
0.67	21.3	20.6	16.1	6.6
0.78	25.6	28.5	25.2	39.1
0.89	13.9	12.6	33.0	27.5
1.00 completely democratic	6.2	9.9	21.7	12.3
Mean	.661	.691	.832	.779
Std. dev.	.220	.201	.137	.174
Missing	1.7	1.7	1.0	0.8
Total N	2064	2041	101	112

See question text in Table 3.

Results presented in Table 7.3 show that average support levels of citizens for the German democratic regime reach .66 at T1 and .69 at T2. As expected score values are again higher for MPs. On average they are in the range of .83

at T1 and .78 at T2. Change over time signals an increase of support in the populace and a small decline at the level of the MPs. This means that more than two-thirds of both citizens and MPs think that Germany is governed democratically. While there is on average a 5 point decrease among members of parliament we observe a 3 point increase at the citizen level. These results are also not in support of H1. They do not reflect a dramatic impact of the fiscal crisis and the economic recession on support for the German democratic regime. Findings are in line with those reported for support for democratic values and strengthen a political culture interpretation.

What is the picture when considering party groupings? Table 7.4 presents the results. Not surprisingly a large majority of MPs of all parliamentary parties are of the opinion that Germany is democratically governed – with MPs of the PDS/The Left showing the lowest mean values of .59 (T1) and .52 (T2) respectively. As far as citizens are concerned, the lowest support levels at T1 are measured for the small group of ‘other’ parties (.41), for supporters of the PDS/The Left (.48) and for the right-wing NPD (.51). This picture is mirrored at T2 for the NPD (.53), the newly emerging AfD (.59) and the ‘other’ parties (.57). Contrary to the development of their parliamentary party we observe a large increase in support for the German democratic regime (14 points) for the PDS/The Left at the citizen level.

**Table 7.4:** Support for the German Democratic Regime by Party Support

Party support	WVS T1 Citizens		WVS T2 Citizens		MPs T1		MPs T2	
	PDS/The Left	.48	(.229)*	.62	(.203)	.59	(.160)	.52
AL'90/The Greens	.66	(.230)	.71	(.212)	.83	(.079)	.75	(.125)
SPD	.69	(.198)	.68	(.226)	.85	(.130)	.78	(.143)
FDP	.63	(.219)	.71	(.165)	.82	(.098)	.84	(.176)
CDU / CSU	.70	(.189)	.75	(.184)	.88	(.095)	.84	(.146)
NPD	.51	(.273)	.53	(.310)	-		-	
AfD	-		.59	(.192)	-		-	
Supporters of other political parties	.41	(.297)	.57	(.247)	-		-	
No party supported	.65	(.230)	.66	(.182)	-		-	
Missing values %	1.7		1.7		1.0		0.8	
Total	2064		2041		101		112	

\*In brackets: Standard deviation.

See question text in Table 3 (0 not at all democratic to 1 completely democratic).

Change patterns at the level of party supporters signal a substantial increase in the belief that Germany is governed democratically. Supporters of the SPD are the only group that does not share this trend but shows stability (T1 .69; T2 .68). That the SPD has been in opposition at the time of the second survey (WVS T2) could be a possible explanation. Parties in parliament display an

opposite pattern. Support levels decline between 4 and 8 points with the FDP as an exception. This party gained 2 points. Their participating in government in that period of time may again be in line with the government vs. opposition explanation we have attempted above. The opposite development of support for the German democratic regime of citizens and the MPs deserves further attention. We suspect that the MPs lower evaluations in 2013 may have been influenced by the electoral campaign, the election and the fact that the formation of a new government took much longer than usual. In any case we have observed change between the two points in time which is not congruent between citizens and their representatives. However, these changes are not dramatic for any of the relevant political parties. They would not justify a modification of our conclusions regarding the first two hypotheses.

### 6.3 Generalized Support for Political Parties

Support for political parties is measured by the confidence placed in political parties in general. This generalization is an important qualification. In Germany we normally find a relatively high willingness to support a particular political party. However, people are much more reluctant once it comes to trust political parties in general. It has been suggested that citizens in countries which have experienced a totalitarian party state are particularly hesitant to have generalized confidence in political parties. This is an issue that needs further investigation. Generalized trust in political parties is important because it ensures the interplay of government and opposition. Voters who are dissatisfied with the party they had voted for most of the time must have enough confidence in any of the other parties to be able to vote for an alternative.

We argue that political parties and their governments are among the most important actors of a representative democracy (Castles and Wildenmann 1986; Gabriel, Niedermayer and Stoess 1997; Dalton, Farrell and McAllister 2011; McAllister 2018). As a rule, political parties present their goals and policy positions to the electorate by issuing programs for which they seek support in competitive elections. If in government, political parties are assumed to live up to their promises and solve problems in their role as government or opposition. The more they contribute to problem solving the more they generate acceptance and support. If they don't the opposite is the case.

The average level of confidence of members of parliament in political parties is lower than support for democratic values or support for the German democratic regime (Table 7.5). MPs show mean values of .54 at T1 and .60 at T2. Citizen support reaches mean values of .29 at T1 and .37 at T2. Results signal an upward move of 6 and 8 points respectively. These results are, again, not in line with the expectation of a negative impact on support for democracy because of the fiscal crisis and the economic recession as expressed in H1.

Generalized support for political parties increases over time and does not decrease.

**Table 7.5: Generalized Support for Political Parties**

Confidence in political parties	WVS T1 Citizens	WVS T2 Citizens	MPs T1	MPs T2
0.00 no confidence at all	30.7	16.2	–	1.2
0.33	53.2	59.3	39.5	24.2
0.67	15.4	21.8	59.4	69.6
1.00 a great deal of confidence	0.7	2.7	1.1	5.0
Mean	.287	.370	.539	.595
Std. dev.	.228	.230	.170	.181
Missing	4.1	2.5	6.9	5.9
Total N	2064	2041	101	112

See question text in Table 3 (0 no confidence at all to 1 a great deal of confidence).

In representative democracy levels of support for political parties and their governments are likely to be reflected in party election results and subsequent government formation. Supporters of parties that are doing well in the elections and are in a position to participate in government are expected to display higher levels of generalized support than those who are doing less well. We will check this assumption by comparing groups of party supporters.

Before we start we will shortly sketch out the fortunes of the political parties in the periods of time when our surveys were fielded. The pre-crisis citizen survey (WVS T1) was in the field from May to June 2006. Members of parliament were surveyed for the first time from February to August 2007 (MP T1). Thus, both citizens and MPs were interviewed in the days of a stable CDU/CSU-SPD Grand Coalition with Angela Merkel as the chancellor (Merkel I, 22.11.2005 - 27.10.2009). The political context of the second round of surveys is more complex. The post-crisis citizen survey started in July and ended in November 2013 (WVS T2). When half of the interview period was over voters had to go to the polls (22 September 2013). This means that a sizeable number of respondents did not know the election result and its consequences for government formation. The MP interviews started in February 2013 and ended a full year later in February 2014 (MP T2). There are many reasons for this unusually long period of fieldwork which we do not want to discuss in detail. It is sufficient to say that many MPs were simply not in a position to grant an interview during the hot phase of the election campaign or during the process of government formation. Taking into account the context of the fieldwork we have to consider that respondents experienced (a) the election campaign leading up to the 22 September 2013 federal election, (b) the subsequent breakdown of the Christian-Liberal coalition and (c) the talks and negotiations culminating in the 17 December 2013 formation of the Merkel III government. However, we should add that the CDU/CSU served as the leading party from September 2005 to September 2013 with Angela Merkel as the

chancellor – an anchor of stability. The SPD, in turn, was needed as a junior coalition partner to form the federal government in September 2005 and 2013 with Franz Müntefering and Frank Walter Steinmeier as vice-chancellors. The FDP became the junior partner of a CDU/CSU coalition government in September 2009 with Guido Westerwelle as the vice-chancellor.

Election results differ a lot for the parties in government. While the SPD suffered a dramatic loss of votes from 2005 to 2009 of more than 11 percent points (34.2% – 23.0%), the CDU/CSU's share declined only slightly (35.2% - 33.8%) with the FDP celebrating its best result ever in any federal election after 1949. Four years later, however, the Liberals were unable to overcome the five-percent-hurdle and disappeared from the federal parliament that was newly elected in September 2013. In that election the Christian Democrats gained 7.7 percent points while the Social Democrats could improve their vote share by 2.7 percent points.

We expect that these developments had an impact on the generalized confidence in political parties. After all at least three parties could gain government positions (counting CDU/CSU as one). In this situation MPs and citizen supporters of these parties should display the highest degrees of generalized support in political parties. This should be particularly true for the CDU/CSU. Not only did the CDU/CSU best in all national elections under consideration. It was also the undisputed leading force in forming the three coalition governments with Angela Merkel as chancellor. The Liberals had been the preferred coalition partner in the 2009-2013 Merkel II government. When the FDP failed to enter the federal parliament in September 2013, the CDU/CSU had to look out for another partner. The SPD had governed with the Merkel I Grand Coalition from 22 November 2005 to 27 October 2009 and could expect to be asked to enter another Grand Coalition in 2013. Thus, if the parties' recent participation in government plays a role for generalized support of political authorities we would expect high levels for CDU/CSU, the FDP and the SPD (that had governed with the CDU/CSU from 2005 to 2009).

As far as the populace is concerned Table 7.6 shows the highest confidence levels at T1 for CDU/CSU (.33) and SPD (.32). At T2 the CDU/CSU and FDP are in the lead (both .41) narrowly followed by the SPD (.40). Parties in parliament mirror this pattern. At T1 the MP's of the CDU/CSU and the SPD show the highest confidence level of .58 each. At T2 this was the case for the MP's of the SPD (.63), CDU/CSU (.61) and the FDP (.60). This pattern is in line with the expectation that MPs that have entered parliament as candidates of political parties also believe that parties are the key actors in a representative democracy.

**Table 7.6: Generalized Support for Political Parties by Party Support**

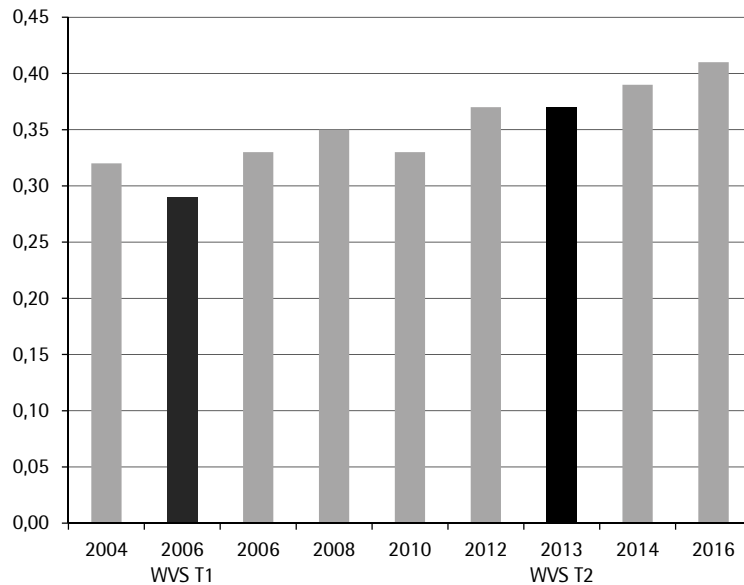
Party support	WVS T1 Citizens		WVS T2 Citizens		MPs T1		MPs T2	
PDS/The Left	.22	(.219)*	.33	(.220)	.36	(.102)	.47	(.171)
AL'90/The Greens	.29	(.224)	.32	(.209)	.46	(.175)	.59	(.147)
SPD	.32	(.227)	.40	(.232)	.58	(.150)	.63	(.169)
FDP	.30	(.240)	.41	(.244)	.46	(.171)	.60	(.181)
CDU / CSU	.33	(.218)	.41	(.221)	.58	(.169)	.61	(.191)
NDP	.10	(.170)	.22	(.307)	-	-	-	-
AfD	-	-	.25	(.266)	-	-	-	-
Supporters of other political parties	.10	(.195)	.18	(.169)	-	-	-	-
No party supported	.24	(.225)	.33	(.225)	-	-	-	-
Missing values %	4.1		2.5		6.9		5.9	
Total	2064		2041		101		112	

\* in brackets: Standard deviation. See question text in Table 3 (0 no confidence at all to 1 a great deal of confidence)-

What about the parties that have not governed recently? Among the citizens, the A'90/The Greens, the coalition partner of Schroeder's Red-Green government, reach generalized confidence levels close to the parties discussed above (citizens T1 .29, T2 .32; MPs T1 .46, T2 .59). Of the parties that had entered parliament at the time of our study the PDS/The Left harbored the lowest level of support. Among citizens, the supporters of the right-wing NPD (T1 .10; T2 .22), the newly emerging AfD (T2 .25) and the group of 'other' political parties showed the lowest levels of confidence in political parties. As a matter of course these partisans did not mean their own party when expressing low confidence levels. They most certainly thought of the parties of the 'old system'. This may be regarded as an early indicator signaling a challenge from the populist right which Germany is experiencing in the times to come. The positive news is that citizens not mentioning a party they would vote for in the next general election show generalized support levels close to the overall averages (T1 .24; T2 .33).

All in all we are in a position to report that confidence in political parties has grown. This warrants the conclusion that political parties command enough generalized support in the populace to keep the government-opposition mechanism intact. And this, as has been mentioned above, is not in support of the hypothesis that the impact of the fiscal crisis and the economic recession has had a long-term negative impact on generalized support for political parties as the major actors of the German democratic regime. The European Social Survey provides time series data which show that these estimates are well in line with our cultural 'normality' hypothesis (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Generalized Confidence in Political Parties



Source: European Social Survey (2-8), WVS T1, T2.

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## 7. Patterns of Support for Democracy

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Fuchs has proposed three hierarchically ordered levels of a democratic system. It is implicit that the highest level, support for democratic values, is also the most important for the persistence of a democratic system. There is little argument that high levels of support are a precondition for the persistence of a particular democratic regime, too, although there should be some room for institutional change. And, finally, generalized support for political parties should be high enough to ensure the interplay of government and opposition.

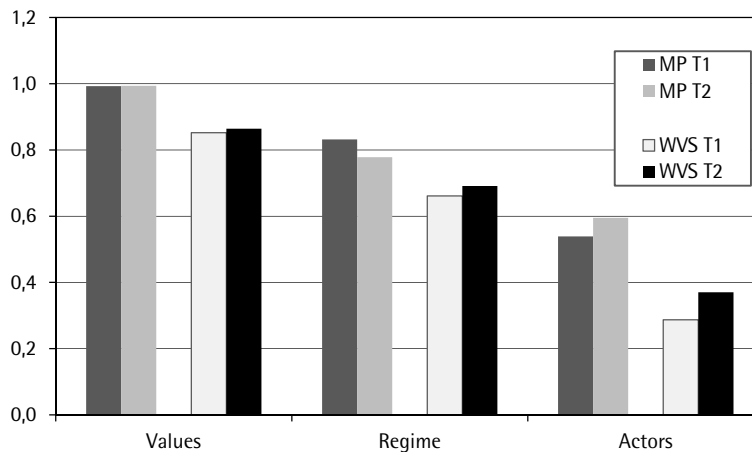
For an established ('old') democracy we would expect a support pattern that shows a large consensus regarding democratic values and a solid majority in favor of the country's democratic regime. It is more difficult to specify the appropriate level of generalized support for political parties. In a pragmatic sense we could argue that current levels of generalized support of political parties are compatible with a competitive party system. Our population surveys show confidence levels of .29 (WVS T1) and .37 (WVS T2) on average. Support for specific parties reaches 69 percent in 2006 (WVS T1) and 73 percent in 2013 (WVS T2). Official turnout figures for the federal elections closest to our fieldwork are 77.7 (2005) and 71.5 percent (2013) respectively. Needless to say



that this inductive reasoning does not relieve us from developing theoretically grounded criteria to specify the upper and lower boundaries of the ideal generalized support levels for political parties.

As far as *levels* of support for democracy are concerned we assume that the pattern described above should be characteristic for an established democracy. In addition we expect that *change* of support levels increases as we move from values to actors. And this is, indeed, what we find. As documented in Figure 3 both rank orders of support levels and degrees of change confirm hypothesis four.

Figure 3: Patterns of Support for Democracy (averages, scale values 0-1)



Values: Having a democratic system is a good way of governing this country.

Regime: How democratically is this country being governed today?

Actors: How much confidence do you have in political parties?

MP T1: Members of parliament survey 1, fieldwork: February to August 2007

MP T2: Members of parliament survey 2, fieldwork: February 2013 to February 2014

WVS T1: Population survey 1, fieldwork: May to June 2006

WVS T2: Population survey 2, fieldwork: July to November 2013

We have not specified any expectations regarding the relative *distance* between support for democratic values, the democratic regime and generalized support for political parties. Empirically we find that for the population the difference between support for democratic values and support for the German democratic regime is smaller than the difference between the support for the German democratic regime and generalized support for political parties. The respective figures for the population are .19 and .37 at T1 and .17 and .32 at T2; for members of parliament we find .16 and .29 at T1 and .22 and .18 at T2. Institutions of the democratic regime need legitimation in terms of democratic values. This may explain the smaller distance between these two levels. A theoretical effort

is needed to generate sound expectations regarding appropriate distances between the various support levels.

We assume that the general pattern found for levels and degree of change may be characteristic for an established democracy. It would be in support of the expectation that German democracy did not experience a decrease of support for democracy as a consequence of the fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession because of a robust democratic political culture. However, the national averages may hide the fact that political parties emerge that propagate anti-democratic ideas and propose anti-democratic procedures. Tables 8.1 and 8.2 present the relevant figures at the party level for the population and the members of parliament respectively.

**Table 8.1:** Patterns of Support for Democracy by Groups of Party Supporters in 2006 (WVS T1) and 2013 (WVS T2)

Party supporters	Culture			Structure			Actors		
	Democratic values			Democratic regime			Political parties		
	T1	T2	Diff.	T1	T2	Diff.	T1	T2	Diff.
PDS/The Left (4.6/5.7)*	.84	.82	-.02	.48	.62	+0.14	.22	.33	+0.11
A90/The Greens (8.0/8 A.2)	.89	.88	-.01	.66	.71	+0.05	.29	.32	+0.03
SPD (23.1)/23.4)	.86	.84	-.02	.69	.68	-.01	.32	.40	+0.08
FDP (4.2/2.4)	.84	.90	+0.06	.63	.71	+0.08	.30	.41	+0.11
CDU/CSU (26.6/29.4)	.86	.89	+0.03	.70	.75	+0.05	.33	.41	+0.08
NPD (1.4/0.8)	.74	.71	-.03	.51	.53	+0.02	.10	.22	+0.12
AfD (-/1.6)		.82		.59				.25	
Other parties (0.7/1.3)	.83	.93	+.10	.41	.57	+0.16	.10	.18	+0.08
No party support (31.3/27.1)	.84	.86	+0.02	.65	.66	+0.01	.24	.33	+0.09
Population mean	.85	.86	+0.01	.66	.69	+0.03	.29	.37	+0.08
Std. dev.	.21	.21		.22	.20		.23	.23	
Missing values	.032	.013		.017	.017		.041	.025	
Total N	2064	2041		2064	2041		2064	2041	

Proportion of party supporters (WVS T1, WVS T2, weighted).

We consider eight groups of party supporters in the populace, seven at T1 and eight at T2. The general pattern described for the populace as a whole repeats itself in all 15 instances. This is also true for respondents who don't support a political party both for levels and changes of support for democracy. There is a high commitment to democratic values well above an average of .80 at both periods in time with the exception of the right-wing National Democratic Party that scores about ten points lower. When acknowledging that supporters of the NPD do command just one percent of the electorate at that time there is little reason to be concerned. However, both their belief systems as well as their electoral fortunes may change.

Support for the German democratic regime is lower than support for democratic values by about 18 points. While we observe larger increases in support

for the German democratic regime by the smaller ‘other’ parties (+.16), the PDS/The Left (+.14) and the FDP (+.08) the general picture shows levels of regime support around .69 and signals little change. Change figures are generally in the direction of a higher support for democracy with the exception of the SPD supporters who display a stable picture (-.01). Generalized confidence in political parties does increase even more. The same pattern shows for the parties in parliament although levels of support are generally higher.

**Table 8.2:** Patterns of Support for Democracy by Parties in Parliament in 2007 (T1) and 2013 (T2)

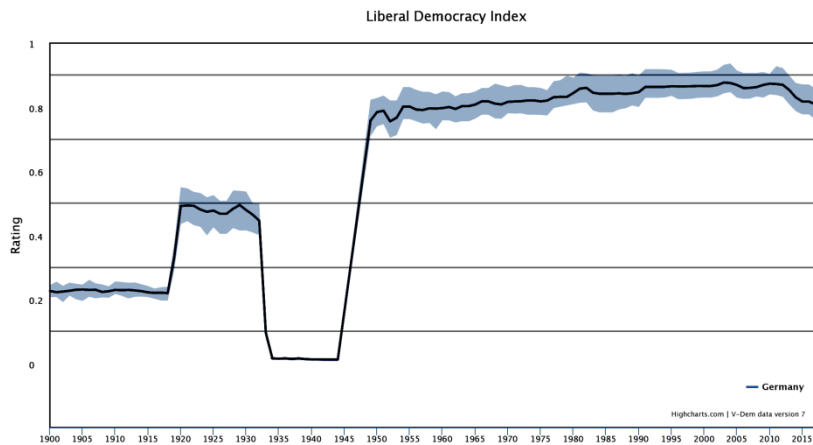
Party supporters	Culture			Structure			Actors		
	Democratic values			Democratic regime			Political parties		
	T1	T2	Diff.	T1	T2	Diff.	T1	T2	Diff.
PDS/The Left	1.00	1.00	00	.59	.52	-.07	.36	.47	+.11
A90/The Greens	1.00	.98	-.02	.83	.75	-.08	.46	.59	+.13
SPD	.99	1.00	+.01	.85	.78	-.07	.58	.63	+.05
FDP	1.00	.98	-.02	.82	.84	+.02	.46	.60	+.14
CDU/CSU	.99	1.00	+.01	.88	.84	-.04	.58	.61	+.03
Population mean	.99	.99	00	.83	.78	-.05	.54	.60	+.06
Std. dev.	.05	.04		.14	.17		.17	.18	
Missing values	.031	-		.010	.080		.069	.059	
Total N	101	112		101	112		101	112	

What do we learn from these empirical results? We claim to have found for the general public and for political elites a support pattern which is congruent with a differentiated concept of support for an established democracy. This support pattern also shows itself, without any exception, for party voters, non-voters and for parties in parliament:

- 1) Levels of support for democracy follow the hierarchy of the democratic system as proposed by Fuchs. They are highest for support for democratic values; (b) followed by support for the democratic regime, and (3) by generalized support for political parties.
- 2) Degrees of change at lower levels in the hierarchy: They are lowest at the highest and smallest at the lowest level.

The findings are congruent with the evaluation of Germany as an established liberal democracy measured by the liberal democracy index generated by the V-Dem Institute (Coppedge et al. 2011; Maxwell, Marquardt and Lührmann 2018). Figure 4 shows that scores for Germany remained stable at high levels. van Beek et al. (2018, 326) report a score of .808 in 2016 (Rank 12 of 174 countries) and stability in the period of 2006 to 2016. The detailed pattern, broken down by the components of the liberal democracy index, is discussed in a comparative context by Berg-Schlösser and Hoffmann-Lange (2018, 50-61).

**Figure 4: The Development of V-Dem's Liberal Democracy Index for Germany 1900-2017**



Source: V-Dem Data (version 7).

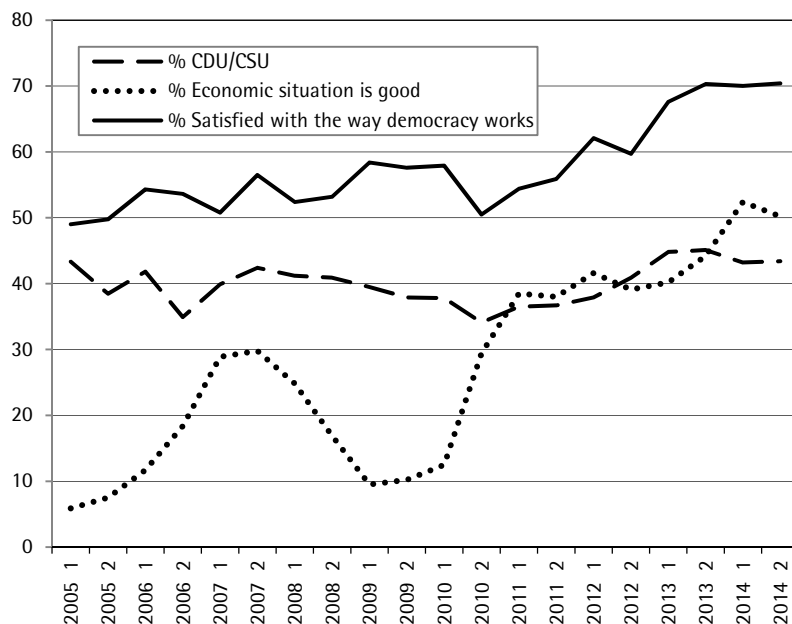
We are well aware that our results signaling high levels and a differentiated pattern of change of support for democracy rest on observations at two points in time only. A more detailed series of observations with the appropriate indicators could provide a better empirical base to explain the mechanisms that produce, reinforce or change the political culture of an established democracy. Although some efforts have been made to locate time series data (Fuchs 1999) we are not aware of any data sets that would allow such analysis today.

After completion of this analysis we have learned that preliminary data of the German leg of the new wave of the World Values Survey have become available. Christian Welzel was kind enough to share the distributions of our three key support indicators. Fieldwork for the most recent World Values Survey extended from October 2017 to April 2018 that is roughly four years from the 2013 survey considered in our study. Average scores for the 2017/18 sample of the German populace are as follows: Democratic values .92, German democratic regime .70, generalized trust in political parties .36. More detailed analyses are necessary to draw differentiated conclusions. However, the overall picture of levels of support for democracy is well in line with the pattern found for an established democratic culture in Germany.

To help speculate about the short-term interplay between government policies and support of the democratic regime we provide a graph showing the development of positive perceptions of success of government policy (% perceiving the economic situation as 'good'), the vote intention for the leading government party (% vote intention for the 'CDU/CSU') and support for the democratic regime (% 'satisfied' with the way democracy is developing in

(our) country). The general picture displayed in Figure 5 seems to support Lipset's (1959, 1966) effectiveness theorem (see also Roller 2005; Fuchs and Roller 2018). It suggests that the specific structure of the German democratic regime enables successful political decision-making and that the various political actors have been capable and prepared to make such decisions most of the time. If this assumption is correct there is reason to assume a process of generalization of such positive experiences to higher levels of democratic support. This process, we propose, has created diffuse support (Easton 1975) and fed the reservoir of positive attitudes towards the regime, shielding it against the disappointments of day-to-day politics and increasing its legitimacy (Wessels 2016).

**Figure 5:** The Generalization of Political Experiences. A Potential Mechanism to Generate Support for the Democratic Political Regime



Source: Forschungsgruppe Wahlen, Politbarometer 2005-2014, data available at: <https://www.gesis.org/en/elections-home/politbarometer/>.

## 8. Conclusions

Has there been a decline in support for democracy in the aftermath of the 2007/08 fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession? This is the gen-

eral question we wanted to answer for the German case empirically. The surveys allowed for a comparison of pre- and post-crisis results for a selected set of indicators of support for democracy. The analysis relied on a conceptual framework proposed by Fuchs who distinguishes three objects of support for democracy which are hierarchically ordered: democratic values, the democratic regime and democratic actors. We tested the analytical power of this framework by considering levels of support for democracy and degrees of change regarding the three objects mentioned above.

What did we find empirically? First (H1), we did not find a substantial negative effect of the fiscal crisis and the subsequent economic recession for any of the three indicators for the population at large and the members of parliament at both points in time. This is also true for groups of party supporters and members of the various parties in parliament.

Second (H2), we propose to explain this important but unexpected finding by a cushioning effect of Germany's established democratic political culture. It is true that the contraction of the German economy was one of the sharpest deteriorations since World War II. In a comparative perspective other economies – those of the Baltic countries in particular – had suffered even more so. Competent and concerted efforts led by the governments of the established democracies of the European Union helped to keep the financial crisis and the subsequent economic recession in check.

Third (H3), members of parliament for each and every indicator display a higher level of support for democracy than ordinary citizens. This is well in line with the assumption that members of parliament perceive quite clearly that they have achieved their power positions within the institutional framework of the German democratic regime. This does not preclude the emergence of 'anti-system' parties. However, in the period of our empirical observation no anti-system party had made it into parliament.

Our last hypothesis (H4) predicts a pattern of support for democracy typical for an established democracy. It should show:

- 1) a very high support for basic democratic values;
  - 2) a high support for the democratic regime of one's own country that, however, leaves room for institutional reform;
  - 3) and a degree of generalized support for the major political actors of a representative democracy such as political parties to allow proper electoral competition.
- 4-6) It should also show patterns of change over time that are lowest at the value level and highest at the actor level with the regime level in between.

As documented above (Tables 8.1 and 8.2) we have found this pattern of support for democracy at both points in time and for all groups considered in the analysis, citizens, members of parliament, groups of party supporters as well as non-party supporters and parties in parliament. Based on the empirical analysis we propose to explain the fact that the fiscal crisis and the subsequent econom-

ic recession had no impact on support for democracy to a large part by Germany's established democratic political culture.

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