

The meaning of young people's support for democracy and autocracy:
the role of the socio-political context

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Abstract

Scholars have stressed the importance of the political context, such as specific political and historical legacies (incl. the historical experience of democracy), in understanding the meaning of political dissatisfaction and support for democratic or autocratic political systems. Existing studies indicate that political dissatisfaction and critical citizens constitute a resource for democracy in “old“ democracies, while in post-communist countries citizens who support democracy, frequently tend to support the alternative autocratic regimes as well. However, little attention has been paid to how youth understands democratic and anti-democratic orientations, or to the historical, social and political context that could affect their determinants. This paper explores political sophistication and more specific political support variables as determinants of support for democracy and autocracy among young people in different European contexts. The analysis is based on the survey data from the EU funded MyPlace project, which involved young people aged 16-25 in 30 locations across 14 European countries ($N = 16,935$, 2012/2013). The paper will give an overview of youth attitudes towards democratic and autocratic political system and test different associations between democratic and anti-democratic youth orientations in different contexts. Secondly, it tests the hypothesis that associations between political sophistication and political support variables with democracy and autocracy support differ across different contexts. The findings strongly suggest that understandings of youth political attitudes, specifically support for democracy and autocracy, should consider contextual factors such as historical and political legacies, as well as current socioeconomic conditions. We especially emphasize the similarities and differences between two groups of post-communist countries; former-USSR countries and post-communist Central and East European countries, as well as

within three groups of European countries with a longer democratic tradition (Mediterranean, Scandinavian and Western European countries).

Keywords: support for democracy, support for autocracy, satisfaction with democracy, political trust, youth, post-communism, old democracies, MyPLACE

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Support for democracy and support for other, more autocratic alternatives, within study of political culture are regarded important for both stability of democracy and further democratization. The relevance of such public support for democracy is especially pronounced in societies which experienced regime changes, where increasing levels of non-democratic sentiments is frequently expressed as communists' nostalgia and citizens' approval of the idea of 'a return to communist rule' (Ekman and Linde, 2004; 2005). However, due to a trend of increased scepticism about political elites and searching for alternatives to liberal democracies, it became likewise relevant issue in established democracies (Foa and Mounk 2016, 2017; Fuchs and Roller, 2019).

Multidimensional understanding of political support (Norris, 1999: 2017, Klingemann, 1999; Ekman and Linde, 2004) differentiates between five levels of support; for the political community, regime principles, regime performance, political institutions, and political incumbents. For this study especially relevant is the differentiation between generalized or diffuse support (e.g., support for regime principles, or support for democracy and rejection of an autocratic alternatives) and more specific political support, such as support for 'regime performance', or attitudes towards the way democracy works in practice (Ekman and Linde, 2004; 2005). In the same time, these two levels of support for democracy should be differentiated from support for a specific normative model of democracy (see Sack, 2017).

According to the multidimensional model of political support, the public can be critical of the way that democratic governments work in practice (and characterised by low support for “regime performance”, that is political institutions and political incumbents) and can still be committed to the value of democracy and support democracy as a “regime principles” (Norris; 1999; Linde and Ekman, 2003). However, extended lack of support for ‘regime performance’ can result with eroded support for democracy as “regime principles” on the long run. Besides, there is no consensus in the literature whether acceptance of autocratic regimes represents a threat for democracy as long as they lend sufficient support for the democratic regime.

In explaining what determines diffuse or more specific political support, a plethora of individual and contextual characteristics have been investigated, although studies more frequently investigated the determinants of more specific political support (such as satisfaction with democracy or political trust) than support for democracy as “regime principles” . On a more general level, two groups of factors seem relevant; individual- and macro-level economic factors (Armingeon and Guthmann 2014; Quaranta and Martini 2016) and political outcomes or institutional quality factors (Wagner, Schneider and Halla, 2009), which are both related to regime performance or ‘system outputs’. Although there is a consensus that a regime’s economic and political performance is crucial in the development and solidification of support, there is a disagreement regarding the relative importance of economic versus political outcomes (see Finkel, Humphries and Opp, 2001; Chu, Bratton, Lagos, Shastri and Tessler, 2008).

Besides, several studies demonstrated that political support variables, as well as their correlates, depend on historical and political legacy (e.g. Ekman and Linde, 2005; Finkel et al., 2001). In the European context, one of the most frequent operationalisations of historical and

political legacy differentiates between so-called “old” and “new” democracies or Western European countries and post-communist countries. Following this distinction, several authors found remarkable differences between west and east in different dimensions of political support, as well as their determinants. For example, political trust in all political institutions is consistently higher in West European countries than post-communist (Mishler and Rose, 1997; Linde and Ekman, 2005). Moreover, studies also demonstrated that context matters in terms of relationship between the support for democracy and acceptance/rejection of autocratic alternatives: contrary to dominant empirical approach which considers support for democracy as a continuum (with preferring democracy and preferring authoritarian alternatives as the opposite ends of this continuum), Tufis (2014) demonstrated the separability of these two dimensions.

Besides, studies also demonstrated a different role of economic or political determinants of different levels of political support in East and West European countries. For example, Schäfer (2013) revealed that economic development (operationalised by GDP) is positively related to satisfaction with democracy (SWD) in all analysed European countries, however there were important differences between Western Europe and Central and Eastern (CEE) countries regarding the relationship between inequality (GINI) and SWD: in Western European countries, income inequality correlates quite strongly with democracy satisfaction, but the link is weak in post-communist CEE countries (Schäfer 2013).

However, more recent studies have been adopting a more nuanced approach to operationalising context, which goes beyond simple division on established western democracies and former communist countries (de Leeuw, Rekker, Azrout and van Spanje, 2018; Sirovátka, Guzi and Saxonberg, 2018; Tufis, 2014). For example, de Leeuw et al (2018) investigated relationship

between support for democracy and left-right orientation, and distinguished three groups of European countries based on the ideology of the country's most recent experience with authoritarianism: democratic countries, left-wing authoritarian legacy countries and right-wing authoritarian legacy countries¹. Sirovátka, et al (2018) investigated the relationship between *satisfaction with democracy* and welfare state performance based on the data from European social survey, and grouped the 24 countries in four groups based on typology of welfare regimes; conservative countries, liberal countries, social-democratic countries, Mediterranean countries (Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, and Spain) and post-communist countries². Regarding satisfaction with democracy based on ESS 6 round (2012) they demonstrated clear divide between northern and western Europe on the one hand, and southern and eastern Europe on the other. Satisfaction with democracy was on average highest in social-democratic countries, followed by conservative countries, then, liberal, while it was lower in post-communist and lowest in the Mediterranean countries.

However, it is relatively rare that the differences within the group of post-communist countries are investigated (Ekman and Linde, 2003; Pop-Eleches and Tucker, 2014; Tufis, 2014). Ekman and Linde (2013), based on 2001 New Europe Barometer data demonstrated higher levels of support for autocracy alternatives to democracy in Baltic countries (the post-Soviet states;

¹ democratic countries: Belgium, Denmark, Iceland, Ireland, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom; left-wing authoritarian legacy countries: Albania, Armenia, Belarus, Bosnia Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Czech Republic, East Germany, Estonia, Georgia, Hungary, Kosovo, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Moldova, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Russian Federation, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Ukraine; and right-wing authoritarian legacy countries: Austria, Finland, France, Greece, Italy, Norway, Portugal, Spain, West Germany (de Leeuw et al., 2018).

² conservative countries: Belgium, Germany, France, the Netherlands and Switzerland; liberal countries: Great Britain and Ireland; social-democratic countries: Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden; Mediterranean countries: Cyprus, Italy, Portugal, and Spain; post-communist countries: Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Lithuania, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia (Sirovátka et al 2018).

Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania) than in CEE countries (more than 39 per cent of the respondents in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and 25 per cent in CEE countries).

Pop-Eleches and Tucker (2014) explored the variation in extent to which post-communist citizens prefer democracy to other forms of government and stressed the importance of type and duration of communist sub-regimes (Stalinist, Neo-Stalinist, Post-Totalitarian, and Reform) and pre-communist legacy. On a general level, they showed that exposure to communism contributed to weaker support for democracy robustly across post-communist countries. However, results also revealed an important differences between countries with history of different types of communism, suggesting a possible greater effect of communist legacy on support for democracy in countries with neo-Stalinist and post-totalitarian communist regimes than those of Stalinist and particularly reformist communist regimes. Tufis (2014) within post-communist countries confirmed important differences in the determinates of support for democracy and autocracy between countries that have managed the transition rather successfully (Western ex-communist countries/Central Europe) and countries that have failed to complete the transition (Eastern ex-communist countries/Eastern Europe).

This study

The paper gives an overview of youth attitudes towards democratic and autocratic political systems and tests different associations between democratic and anti-democratic youth orientations in different contexts, encompassing the difference between old and post-communist democracies, but also differences within these two group of European countries. Secondly, we test the hypothesis that the relationship between political sophistication and specific political support variables (satisfaction with democracy and political trust) with democracy and autocracy support differs in these different contexts. Finally, in line with previous findings which

demonstrate importance of economic factors for political support in Western and Eastern European countries, we checked the role of economic development (GDP) in explaining variations in correlates of democracy/autocracy support in different country groups. Based on previous literature we generally expect lower youth' political support in post-communist countries than in European countries with older democracies. However, we expected important differences in level of support, as well determinates of support, within the older democracies and within post-communist countries. Finally, regarding the role of economic macro factors in explaining political support, we expected that established differences between groups of countries can be, at least partially, attributed to differences in their economic development.

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Method

Participants

Of all the participants of MyPlace ($N = 16,935$), 14,073 provided answers to all of the relevant variables and were included into this study. Both genders were equally present in the sample (7111 men and 6962 women) and on average participants at the time when MyPLACE survey was conducted (2012/13) were 20.55 years old ($sd = 2.83$). Thus, for all participants, regardless of concrete country, most relevant political socialisation (after the age of six) occurred in a democratic political system.

Participants' distribution with respect to country of residence is shown in the table 1, indicating that each country provided an acceptable number of participants in order to get precise estimates of parameters in the upcoming multilevel analyses.

Table 1.

Measures and operationalizations of constructs

The main instrument of data collection in this study was the MyPlace survey – a relatively large questionnaire that was administered to participants from 14 European countries. Data for this study were downloaded from the MyPlace website³. Items used in operationalization of constructs of interest are shown in the table 2.

Distribution of participants with respect to country of residence		
Group	Country	<i>n</i>
Former USSR	Russia	899
	Latvia	1078
	Georgia	906
	Estonia	1033
former East Germany	Slovakia	1168
	Hungary	944
	Croatia	866
	Greece	963
Mediterranean	Spain	1048
	Portugal	1037
	former West Germany	917
Western European old democracies	United Kingdom	855
	Denmark	977
Scandinavian	Denmark	745
	Finland	637

³ <http://www.fp7-myplace.eu/data.php>

Table 2.

List of variables from the MyPlace questionnaire used in this study (except age and gender)

variable name	Meaning	higher value means	recoded
Q80	father's job when participant was 14	higher paid job	yes
Q76	mother's job when participant was 14	higher paid job	yes
Q77_ISCED	father's education	higher education	no
Q73_ISCED	mother's education	higher education	no
Q28_1	naming the prime minister	correct response	yes
Q28_2	naming the minister of foreign affairs	correct response	yes
Q28_3	naming the political party that won the elections	correct response	yes
Q2_1	personal interest in politics	more interested	yes
Q42	satisfaction with democracy	more satisfied	no
Q7_1	trust in courts	more trust	no
Q7_2	trust in police	more trust	no
Q7_3	trust in the Prime minister	more trust	no
Q7_8	trust in the parliament	more trust	no
Q7_13	trust in political parties	more trust	no
Q43_1	having a strong leader that is not constrained by parliament (is good for country)	support for autocracy	yes
Q43_2	having a democratic, multiparty system (is good for country)	support for democracy	yes
Q43_3	having the army rule (is good for country)	support for autocracy	yes
Q43_4	having an opposition that can freely express its views (is good for country)	support for democracy	yes

Criterion variables: Support for *democracy* and support for *autocracy*

Support for *democracy* and *autocracy* were measured by four items (Q43_1, Q43_2, Q43_3, Q43_4). Parallel exploratory factor analysis by principal axis factoring with oblimin rotation revealed a two-component solution, with eigenvalue of the first component being equal to 1.73 and eigenvalue of the second component being equal to 1.13. Items Q43_1 and Q43_3 loaded on the first component, named *support for autocracy*, while the other two items loaded on

the second component, named *support for democracy*. Factor scores of participants on the two newly formed components were saved in regression form and used in further analyses.

Political sophistication variables

Three variables represented different forms of political sophistication in this study. The first reflected the *social class* of participant, or his/her *socio-economic status* at the age of 14. In the first step of forming this variable, father's (Q80) and mother's (Q76) job variables, which represented ten categories of jobs grouped with respect to salary ranges, were reverse-coded, resulting in higher values representing job categories with higher salaries. Then each parent's job was multiplied by his/her education (Q77_ISCED for fathers and Q73_ISCED for mothers) and the two results were summed in order to get aggregate measure of the participant's early socio-economic status.

Political knowledge was assessed by three items (Q28_1, Q28_2, Q28_3) in the form of open-ended questions that were recoded as correct (higher value) or incorrect by representatives of the MyPlace national teams. Exploratory factor analysis by ordinary least squares parallel analysis was conducted on these items to test their representation of the same constructs, and the results have generally confirmed their belonging to a single component – political knowledge, with eigenvalue of 1.67 and saturations ranging from 0.47 for naming the minister of foreign affairs to 0.67 for naming the party/coalition that won the last elections. The factor scores were saved in the regression form and used in the upcoming analyses.

Personal interest in politics was measured by a single item (Q2_1), ranging from very interested (1) to not interested at all (4). The variable was recoded in a way that higher values reflected higher interest in politics.

Specific political support variables

MyPLACE survey covered several measures of specific dimensions of political support, namely trust in institutions, attitudes towards politicians, satisfaction with democracy and satisfaction with respecting human right. However, due to their relatively high intercorrelation, for multivariate analyses we selected only two of them: *satisfaction with democracy* and *political trust* (with differentiating between *trust in executive institutions* and *trust in national political institutions*; see below).

The first variable of specific political support was *satisfaction with democracy*, measured with a single item (Q42) on an 11-point scale ranging from extremely dissatisfied (0) to extremely satisfied (10).

The following two variables represent trust in different kinds of institutions. *Trust in executive institutions* was represented by the trust in courts (Q7_1) and police (Q7_2), while *trust in political institutions* was represented by the trust in the Prime minister (Q7_3), parliament (Q7_8) and political parties (Q7_13). All of the items were measured on an 11-point scale ranging from complete distrust (0) to complete trust (10). Sum of the appropriate trust variables represented the two constructs of interest. While the items of trust in courts and trust in police were simply summed in trust in executive institutions due to high correlation, parallel exploratory factor analysis by ordinary least squares as used to confirm the one-component solution of the trust in political institutions, with eigenvalue of the component being equal to 2.30 and all saturations above 0.7.

Control variables

Gender (Q54, assessed by the interviewer) and age of participants (Q55_Y, assessed as year of birth) were used as control variables.

Procedure

Data were downloaded from the MyPLACE website. The main instrument, MyPlace questionnaire, consisted of questions related to different domains of political life, such as political interests, understanding of democracy, violence and human rights, attitudes towards minority groups and others. The questionnaire was formed in English and translated into 13 other languages by Ask the same question (ASQ) method. Participants were informed by leaflets/letters/brochures on the upcoming interview, containing information on the MyPlace project and the phone number they could call in order to ask additional questions or refuse to participate in the study. Before the interview, participants were additionally informed on the methods of processing and storing of obtained data, as well as on their right to refuse participation or answering on any question without consequences. Data were collected during late 2012 and early 2013. In each country, data were collected on two locations (not representative for the country), by random sampling (when list of 16-25-year-olds was available) or by random route sampling (when the lists were not available). More detailed description of the questionnaire, sampling and data collection can be found elsewhere (Ellison and Pollock, 2014).

Operationalizing context

To operationalize the different context regarding political and historical legacies and historical experience of democracy, we classified MyPlace locations/countries in five groups: *Western European old democracies* (United Kingdom and Germany - former west),

Scandinavian countries (Denmark and Finland), *Mediterranean countries* (Greece, Portugal, and Spain), and additionally two groups were differentiated within post-communist countries: *former-USSR countries* (Estonia, Georgia, Latvia and Russia) and post-communist *Central Eastern European countries* (Germany - former East, Croatia, Hungary, and Slovakia).

Results

This section presents the results of analyses, grouped in several minor subsections. After exhibiting the relationship between support for democracy and support for autocracy in different countries, a table of correlations between the predictors (political sophistication and political support variables) and criterion variables (support for democracy and support for autocracy) are shown, followed by multilevel models in order to estimate which of the relationships significantly differ with respect to included country groups. Firstly, the results related to support for autocracy are presented, followed by results related to support for democracy.

Overview of youth attitudes towards democratic and autocratic political system through

MyPLACE countries

Before providing insight into the relationship between support for democracy and support for autocracy, we depicted the distributions of participants' answers on items measuring support for democracy and support for autocracy to observe potential differences based on participants' country of residence.

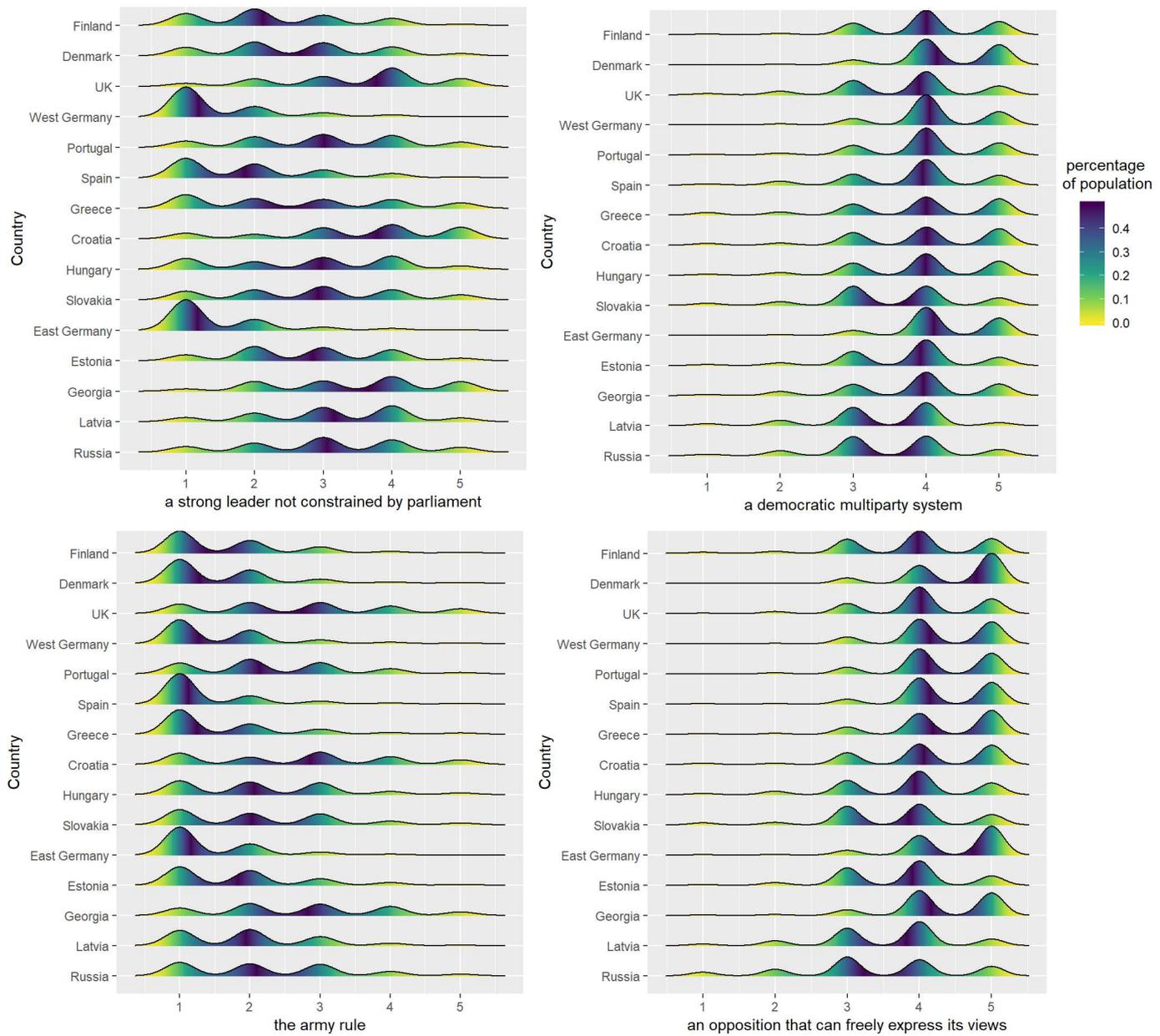


Figure 1. Distribution of participants per country with respect to the level of support for autocracy and democracy support items

The figure 1. represents variables related to autocracy on the left side and variables related to democracy on the right side of the graph. Observation of these images reveals an interesting insight: although there is a relative consensus among countries on how good it is for

the country to have an opposition that can express its views and multiparty system, the distributions of variables related to autocracy tend to be much less asymmetric. This indicates a discrepancy in attitudes on democracy and autocracy, which provides an additional argument for their separated exploration.

Regarding attitudes towards autocratic alternatives, primarily in case of *a strong leader*, depicted distributions reveals a few noticeable and interesting differences between countries, especially between countries which are usually considered as belonging to the same historical socio-political context. For example, we can observe completely different pattern of responses in UK and former West Germany, although they both belong to Western European old democracies. Moreover, distributions from both former parts of Germany (east and west) are almost identical, and at the same time noticeably different than distributions in all other countries. These findings suggest that common authoritarian legacy and/or probably common way of dealing with it (in terms of history teaching about Nazism and societal responses on it) are probably more important determinates of contemporary German youth attitudes towards autocratic alternatives (especially strong leader) than the difference between former East and West Germany in terms of communist past.

The depicted distributions suggest smaller differences between other MyPLACE countries with communist/socialist past, except Estonia (distribution looks more similar to those established in Scandinavian countries: Denmark and Finland), and Croatia (distributions are more similar to those in UK and Portugal than in other post-communist countries). Within the group of Mediterranean countries (Greece, Portugal, and Spain) it also can be seen that youth in Portugal does not have similar evaluation of a strong leader as participants in Spain and Greece.

Relationship between support for democracy and autocracy by countries

In the following step, Pearson's r correlation coefficient was calculated between participants' scores on democracy and autocracy attitudes measures, obtained by afore mentioned EFA, with results being depicted in the figure 2.

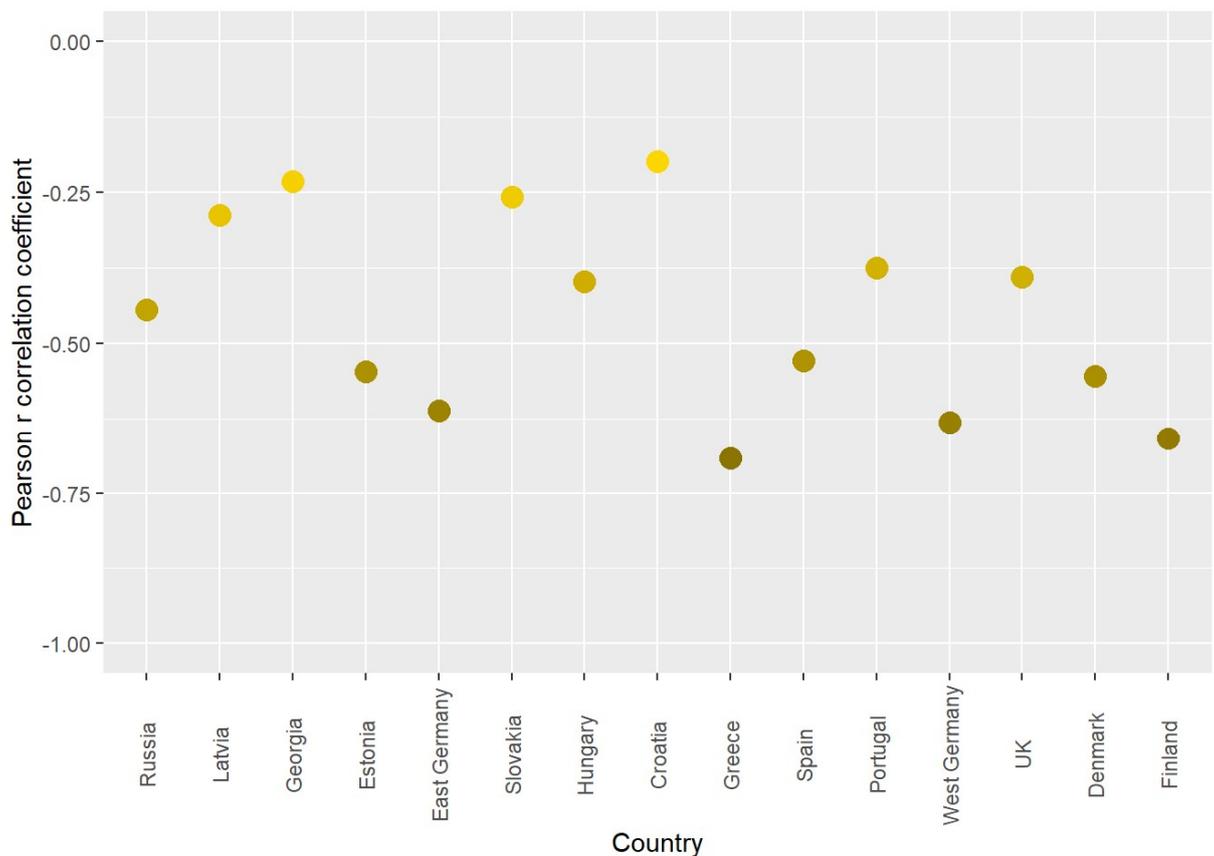


Figure 2. Relationship between support for democracy and support for autocracy in MyPLACE countries

Although the results consistently suggest that the relationship between support for democracy and support for autocracy is negative, they also exhibit its variation across countries. The negative relationship is relatively strong in Finland, Greece and the former East and West Germany, with correlations below $r = -0.60$, followed by Spain, Estonia and Denmark. However, in some countries, like Latvia, Georgia, Slovakia and Croatia, the relationship is relatively weak and below $r = -0.30$.

Thus, support for autocracy and democracy in some countries do not form a bipolar dimension of diffuse political support, implying the relevance of studying both in order to grasp a wider, more complete picture. However, the results are not completely in line with those of Tufis (2014) based on slightly differently operationalised two dimension (support for democracy and rejection of autocratic alternatives, *European values survey 2008/09* data) which showed absence of correlation between the two sub-dimensions in the Eastern post-communist countries, and relatively strong correlation in the older European democracies (except Portugal) and Western ex-communist societies.⁴

Meaning of support for autocracy and democracy: the role of political sophistication and specific political support variables across different contexts

After establishing bivariate relationships between support of democracy and autocracy by MyPLACE countries, in next section we were interested in meaning of these supports in different countries groups. More specifically, we were interested whether there are multivariate relations between political sophistication and specific political support variables as determinates of diffuse political support uniform across five group of countries: Western European old democracies Scandinavian, Mediterranean countries, former-USSR and CEE countries.

Pearson's r correlation coefficients between all predictors and criterion variables, calculated on the pooled sample are presented in (Table 3). Before calculation of correlations, all of the variables were standardized.

⁴ Defined as ex-communist societies with a Roman Catholic or Protestant heritage following Inglehart and Welzel (2005), as cited in Tufis (2014)

Table 3.

Correlations between political sophistication, specific political support variables and support for democracy and autocracy

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)
(1) autocracy support	1									
(2) democracy support	-0.489*	1								
(3) gender	-0.014	0.010	1							
(4) age	-0.097	0.083	0.006	1						
(5) SES	-0.204*	0.149*	-0.009	0.027	1					
(6) political knowledge	-0.235*	0.218*	-0.055	0.184*	0.169*	1				
(7) personal interest in politics	-0.215*	0.210*	-0.050	0.120*	0.163*	0.283*	1			
(8) satisfaction with democracy	-0.109*	0.179*	0.056	-0.021	0.106*	0.076	0.120*	1		
(9) trust in exec. institutions	-0.141*	0.200*	0.069	0.014	0.097	0.082	0.179*	0.456*	1	
(10) trust in pol. institutions	-0.090	0.137*	0.057	-0.006	0.116*	0.066	0.225*	0.555*	0.633*	1

* Cohen's⁵ $d > .20$

Within investigated variables, we can notice that *support for democracy* and *support for autocracy* generally have the same correlates, although their strength slightly varies, and relationships are inversed. All political sophistication (SES, political knowledge, personal interest in politics) and specific political support variables (satisfaction with democracy, trust in executive institutions, trust in political institutions) were positively related to support for democracy and negatively to support for autocracy (table 3). However, political sophistication variables were slightly more negatively correlated with *support for autocracy*, while specific political support variables have slightly stronger relationships with *support for democracy*. Regarding the relationship between predictors, the correlation matrix seems to be rather empty, thus implying absence of multicollinearity, except in case of specific political supports variables,

⁵ Due to the high number of participant, in interpretation of these results we will focus on effect sizes, thus treating everything with the Cohen's d lower than 0.20 (which would mean that less than 1% of variance is shared/explained) as non-relevant findings

indicating the need to pay more attention to their interpretation due to possible suppressions, especially in case of two measures of trust in institutions.

This section reports the results of variables of political sophistication and political support as predictors of support for autocracy and support for democracy. Firstly, the random intercept fixed slope results are shown (table 4a and b), followed by individual testing which of the slopes significantly varies across country groups (tables 5 a and b, Figures 3 and 4) followed by graphical illustrations of varying slopes. In the final part we attempted to explain the country group-related variability in slopes with differences in average *per capita* GDP.

Initially, the models with only varying intercepts were computed, which yielded an intraclass correlation coefficient of 0.045 in case of *support for autocracy* and 0.058 in case of *support for democracy*, indicating that a small amount of variance of both supports may be attributed to grouping of countries applied in this study.

Table 4a.

Political sophistication and political support variables as predictors of support for autocracy

	<i>b</i>	Std.Error	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	-0.048	0.077	14060	-0.633	0.5267
gender	-0.046	0.016	14060	-2.936	0.0033
age	-0.061	0.008	14060	-7.606	< 0.0001
SES	-0.146	0.008	14060	-18.172	< 0.0001
political knowledge	-0.136	0.009	14060	-15.758	< 0.0001
personal interest in politics	-0.111	0.009	14060	-13.043	< 0.0001
satisfaction with democracy	-0.061	0.010	14060	-6.332	< 0.0001
trust in executive institutions	-0.085	0.010	14060	-8.205	< 0.0001
trust in political institutions	0.033	0.011	14060	2.996	0.0027

Table 4b.

Political sophistication and political support variables as predictors of support for democracy					
	<i>b</i>	Std.Error	<i>df</i>	<i>t</i>	<i>p</i>
(Intercept)	0.050	0.085	14060	0.588	0.5566
Gender	0.023	0.016	14060	1.484	0.1377
Age	0.055	0.008	14060	6.950	< 0.0001
SES	0.086	0.008	14060	10.804	< 0.0001
political knowledge	0.113	0.009	14060	13.242	< 0.0001
personal interest in politics	0.105	0.008	14060	12.474	< 0.0001
satisfaction with democracy	0.126	0.009	14060	13.073	< 0.0001
trust in executive institutions	0.126	0.010	14060	12.399	< 0.0001
trust in political institutions	-0.033	0.011	14060	-3.018	0.0025

The results in the table 4a and b reveal that all of the predictors are negatively related to *support for autocracy*, and all, except gender, are positively related to *support for democracy*. However, these results should be interpreted with a dose of caution as the effect sizes of majority of predictors are very small. For instance, an effect size of Cohen's $d = 0.20$, which is considered small and indicates 1% of shared variance, on a sample this big would have a t -value of approximately 11.9, while a $d = 0.50$, indicating a medium effect size, would have a t -value of 29.7.

Thus, practically meaningful contribution to the model explaining *support for autocracy* is confirmed for SES and political knowledge, and slightly weaker contribution for third political sophistication variable – personal interest in politics, indicating that variables of political sophistication exhibiting stronger multivariable relationships with support for autocracy than variables of specific political support. In model explaining *support for democracy* practically meaningful relationships are confirmed with political knowledge, personal interest in politics, satisfaction with democracy and trust in executive institutions. It should be noted that specific political support variables tend to retain the stronger relationships with support for democracy compared to support for autocracy, suggesting that individual variations in support for autocratic

alternatives among MyPlace participant are in lesser extent results of dissatisfaction with contemporary situation in country, than variation in support for democracy.

The trust in political institutions has inverse relation with both criteria (in comparison to other predictors), probably as a consequence of previously discussed high correlations with trust in executive institutions and satisfaction with democracy. Thus, very weak positive relationship in case of support for autocracy and negative in case of support for democracy may have occurred due to a suppression among variables (table 3).

In the next step, predictors were one by one allowed to vary across country groups, with these models being compared by anova with the initial model with fixed slopes and varying intercept. The results of these comparisons are shown in the table 5a and 5b, while the slopes are depicted in the figure 3 and 4.

Table 5a.

Variation of slopes of predictors of support for autocracy across MyPlace country groups						
slope that varies compared to random intercept fixed slopes model	<i>df</i>	AIC	BIC	LL	L.ratio	<i>p</i>
random intercept fixed slopes	11	37741.49	37824.57	-18859.75		
Gender	13	37731.42	37829.60	-18852.71	14.072	0.0009
Age	13	37741.32	37839.49	-18857.66	4.177	0.1239
SES	13	37740.15	37838.33	-18857.08	5.339	0.0693
political knowledge	13	37465.18	37563.35	-18719.59	280.319	< 0.0001
personal interest in politics	13	37572.01	37670.19	-18773.01	173.478	< 0.0001
satisfaction with democracy	13	37532.39	37630.56	-18753.19	213.106	< 0.0001
trust in executive institutions	13	37646.73	37744.91	-18810.37	98.764	< 0.0001
trust in political institutions	13	37561.97	37660.15	-18767.99	183.522	< 0.0001

Table 5b.

Variation of slopes of predictors of support for democracy across MyPlace country groups						
slope that varies compared to random intercept fixed slopes model	<i>df</i>	AIC	BIC	LL	L.ratio	<i>p</i>
random intercept fixed slopes	11	37462.35	37545.43	-18720.18		
Gender	13	37466.34	37564.52	-18720.17	0.012	0.9948
Age	13	37433.15	37631.32	-18703.57	33.206	< 0.0001
SES	13	37449.51	37547.69	-18711.76	16.843	0.0002
political knowledge	13	37332.26	37430.43	-18653.13	134.098	< 0.0001
personal interest in politics	13	37374.42	37472.60	-18674.21	91.933	< 0.0001
satisfaction with democracy	13	37339.74	37437.92	-18656.87	126.613	< 0.0001
trust in executive institutions	13	37401.43	37499.60	-18687.71	64.925	< 0.0001
trust in political institutions	13	37411.95	37510.13	-18692.98	54.402	< 0.0001

The results of comparisons (Table 5a and b) indicate that all of the models differ significantly from the original models, meaning that their slopes vary across country groups for both criterion variables. However, in case of support for democracy (in comparison with support for autocracy, as well as in comparison to the variation of other predictors in both cases) it seems like SES is more stable across country groups (Table 4a and 4b).

In terms of control variables, it can be observed that there is no significant variation for gender in case of both criteria, while the age slopes vary across country groups in case of support for democracy (Table 4a, 4b and figure 3a).

In terms of understanding of *support for democracy* (figures 3a and 3b), it seems that relationship with all investigated predictors (except gender) differs between Mediterranean and former USSR with very weak (and in case of trust in political institutions contrary) relationships on one side and other three countries group (WE democracies: UK and Germany - former west, Scandinavian countries: Denmark and Finland, and CEE countries) that exhibit stronger and positive relationships with democracy.

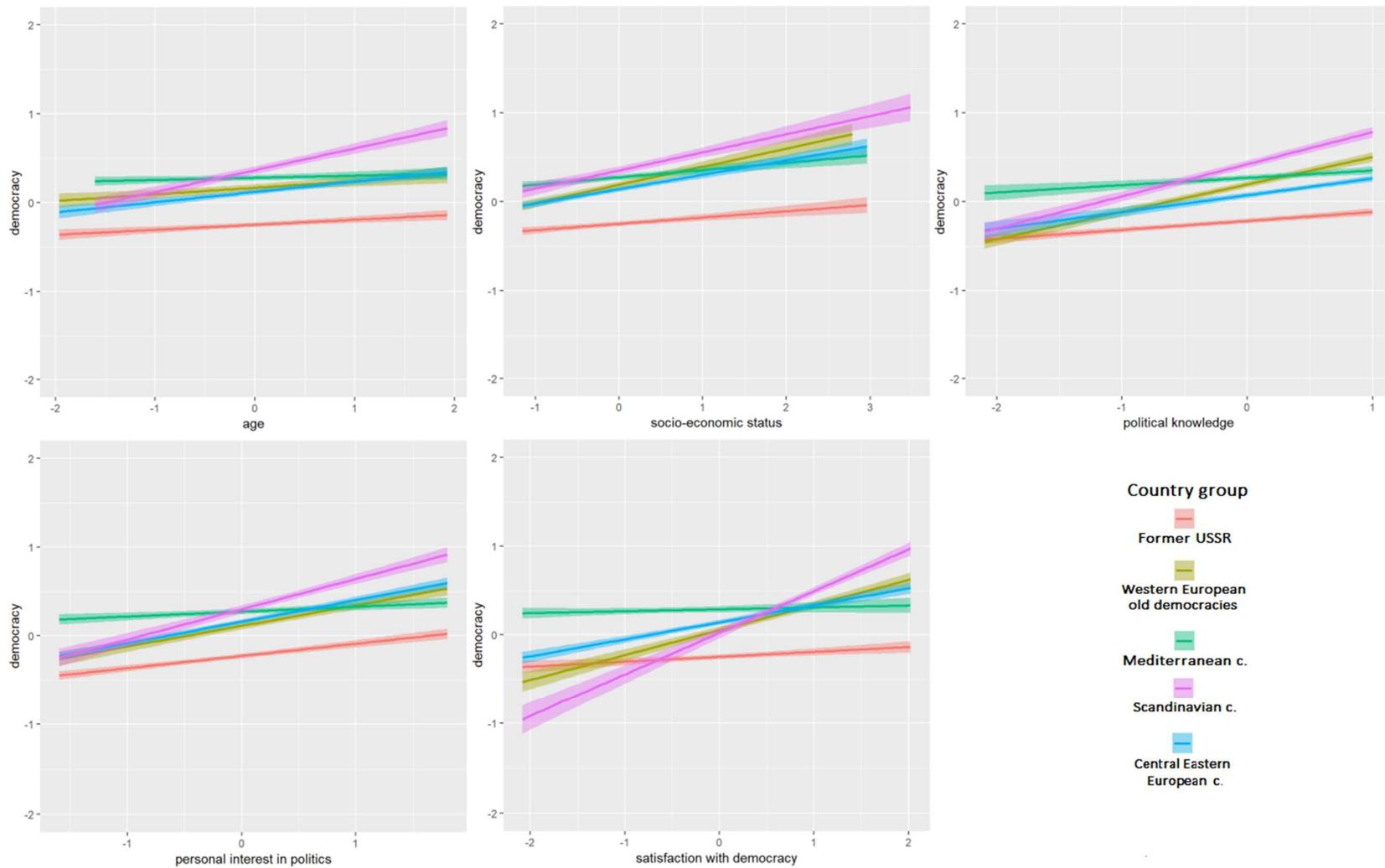


Figure 3a. Slopes of age, SES, political knowledge and interest in politics and satisfaction with democracy as predictors of support for democracy

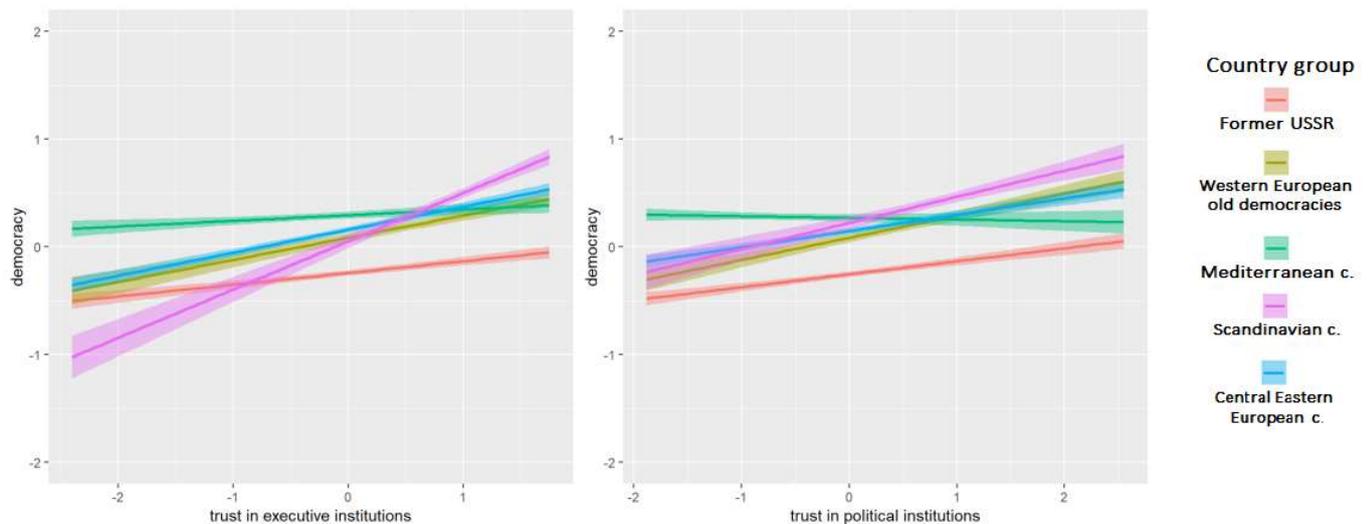


Figure 3b. Slopes of trust in executive and political institutions as predictors of support for democracy

Similar findings can be observed in case of *support for autocracy* (figure 4), although differences between countries are more pronounced and consistent in case of specific political support variables than political sophistication variables. Regarding specific political support variables, the pattern of relationship is clearly different in Mediterranean and Former USSR countries in comparison to other three group of countries (WE old democracies, Scandinavian and former CEE countries). Relationship between specific political support variables and support for autocracy is negative and of similar strength in WE old democracies, Scandinavian and CEE countries, but it seems that satisfaction of democracy and trust in institutions are not so related to support for autocracy in Mediterranean countries and former USSR countries. Relations between political knowledge and interest in politics with support for autocracy are most pronounced in Western old democracies, and least in former USSR, Mediterranean and Scandinavian countries.

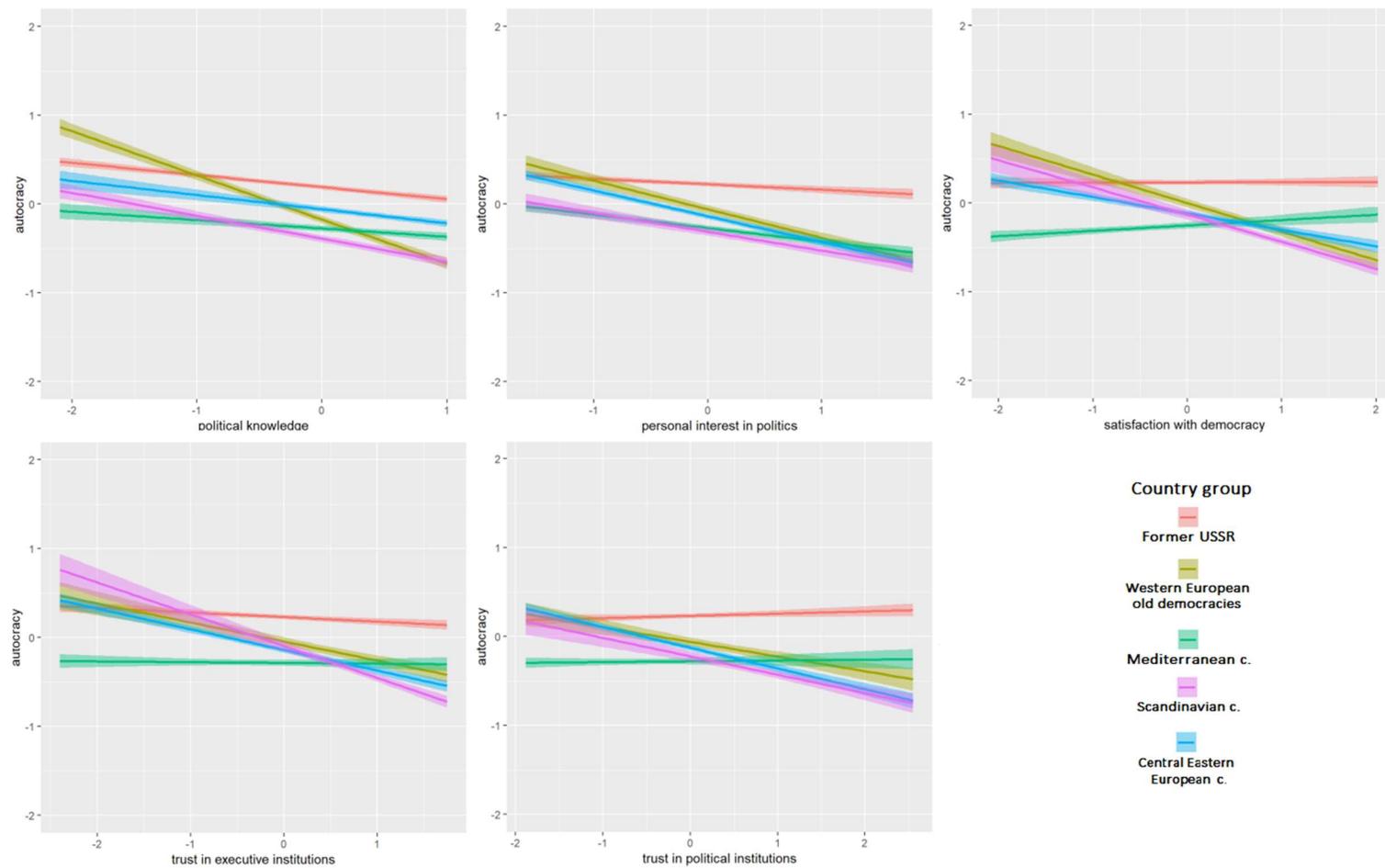


Figure 4. Slopes of political sophistication and political support variables as predictors of support for autocracy

Role of economic development: GDP *per capita*

In order to test if previously established variations in the effect of primarily specific political support variables (satisfaction with democracy and political trust) between different group of countries can be attributed to differences in economic status, average value of *per capita* GDP as a macro-level variable was calculated for each group and tested as a predictor of both supports.

In case of *support for autocracy*, the analyses yielded non-significant results ($t(3) = -2.169, p = 0.1186$). However, this lack of significance may be attributable to the relatively low number of degrees of freedom ($df = 3$), which may have undermined the significance of results. Therefore, cross-level interactions with variables of specific political support were calculated. In the initial three models, each of the fixed predictors was included into the equation in interaction with *per capita* GDP, respectively. In the subsequent models, these interactions were also allowed to vary across country groups. The pairs of models were then compared by anova in order to assess if the interaction with *per capita* GDP annulled the need for slope variation per country group. The models of *satisfaction with democracy* ($\chi^2(2) = 85.9526, p < 0.0001$), *trust in political institutions* ($\chi^2(2) = 110.1957, p < 0.0001$) and *trust in executive institutions* ($\chi^2(2) = 60.6789, p < 0.0001$) emerged significant, indicating that variation in slopes could not be attributed entirely to GDP. However, the χ^2 difference values were almost halved for models with varying *satisfaction with democracy* and *trust in political institutions*, indicating that a significant portion of variability in slopes may be attributed to GDP.

Additionally, averaged *per capita* GDP across groups as a macro-level variable was tested as a macro level predictor of *support for democracy*, which yielded a similar results ($t(3) = 2.767, p = 0.0698$). The cross-level interactions, however, yielded three significant results ($\chi^2(2)$

= 23.8415, $p < 0.0001$ for variation of satisfaction with democracy, $\chi^2(2) = 41.9249$, $p < .0001$ for trust in executive institutions and $\chi^2(2) = 49.4499$, $p < 0.0001$ for trust in political institutions). However, if the χ^2 change in these comparisons and χ^2 change in comparisons that provided a conclusion that slopes vary across groups are compared, an especially large drop in χ^2 difference is noticeable for the variation of slopes of satisfaction with democracy. These results imply that although differences in *per capita* GDP are not the source of variation in regression slopes of satisfaction with democracy, a certain amount of this variation can still be attributed to GDP.

Conclusions

The findings of this study suggest that understandings of youth political attitudes, specifically support for democracy and autocracy, should consider contextual factors such as historical and political legacy, as well as current socioeconomic conditions. More specifically, the findings suggest that neither groups of post-communist countries (former-USSR countries and post-communist CEE countries), nor groups of European countries with longer democratic tradition (Mediterranean, Scandinavian and Western European countries) are uniform regarding the prevalence of youth support for democracy and support for autocracy, relationship between these two dimensions, and the role of political sophistication and specific political support variables as their determinants.

Regarding the relation between support for democracy and autocracy, findings of this study empirically demonstrated separability of these two dimensions of diffuse political support, suggesting that democracy and autocracy support are not a part of the same dimension.

Moreover, the study demonstrated lesser variability between countries in support for democracy than in support for autocracy. Additionally, findings regarding the meaning of youth support for democracy and autocracy on general level suggest that both dimensions are related to political sophistication and (dis)satisfaction with current situation in country (in terms of satisfaction with how democracy works in a country and trust in its institutions). However, more specific findings suggest that specific political support variables are less important predictors of autocracy support than political sophistication variables, and at the same time are slightly less important as predictors of autocracy than as predictors of democracy support. Namely, while satisfaction with how democracy works in a country and trust in institutions are positively and substantively important predictors of support for democracy, on a general level they are not substantively related to support for autocracy. All together, these findings suggest that in future studies about determinates and consequences of diffuse political support it is worth to capture both dimensions, or it could be even more fruitful to focus on support for autocratic alternatives.

Regarding the role of the context for understanding determinants of support for autocracy and democracy, the results clearly indicate a divide between Mediterranean and former USSR countries on one side, and Scandinavian and WE old democracies on the other side, with CEE countries showing similar patterns to the latter group. More specifically, relationships between *support for democracy* and investigated predictors are generally strongest in Scandinavian countries (e.g. higher age, political knowledge, interest for politic, political trust and greater satisfaction with democracy are predictive for higher support for democracy), in WE old democracies and CEE countries these relations (except in case of age at lesser extent trust in political institution) are in the same direction, but weaker, while in Mediterranean and CEE countries democracy support is not substantially related to any of investigated predictors. In case

of *support for autocracy*, differences between Scandinavian, WE old democracies and CEE countries regarding relationship with investigated predictors are generally smaller (while in general lower SES, lower political knowledge, lower interest for politics, dissatisfaction with democracy and lower political trust are predictive for greater autocracy support), while again in Mediterranean and former USSR countries autocracy support is only very weakly related to political sophistication variables, and not at all related to satisfaction with democracy and trust in institution. Final part of the conducted analyses suggests that at least some part of the observed differences between countries in determinants of autocracy and democracy support can be partially attributed to differences in the level of economic development.

In the evaluation of the findings and implications of this study several limitations should be considered. Firstly, the study relies on cross-sectional data (from the 2012/2013), thus lack a longer time perspective which can be irreplaceable for understanding more long-term differences in the meaning of youth support for autocracy and democracy in general, as well as between countries. Besides, the MyPLACE samples are not representative for countries, but are based on two contrasting locations in each country in line with the project case study approach. At the same time, MyPLACE data encompass data from relatively limited number of countries (all together 14, with separate samples from former East and West Germany). Such a limited number of countries does not enable examination of differences between multilevel predictors of autocracy and democracy support between specific countries (which can result with more nuanced findings about the role of different country context). Thus, we grouped available countries in smaller number of groups, with some of the groups encompassing only two countries (not necessarily similar regarding political support, e.g. WE old democracies: UK and

former West Germany). With classification in five groups we tried to go beyond usual division between old democracies and post-communist countries. However, in conducted ML analyses intraclass correlations for both dependent variables (support for democracy and support for autocracy) were relatively low, which could indicate that the applied categorisation is too crude. Additionally, findings generally indicate that CEE countries (Croatia, Slovakia, Hungary, former East Germany) are (regarding the support for democracy and autocracy and their predictors) are not very similar to Mediterranean and former USSR countries and much closer to Scandinavian and WE old democracies, being the most similar to WE old democracies. It would be worth to check in future analyses if such findings will be robust in analyses which exclude data from former East and West Germany, or they are (at least partially) consequence of categorisation of former east Germany in the group of CEE countries, and former west German in group of WE old democratic countries. Thus, in the context of MyPlace data, further analyses could reveal does some other grouping of the countries can be more useful as sources of cross-country differences in meaning of support for democracy and autocracy, and their relationship with political sophistication and specific political support variables. On a more general level, future studies investigating political support could use more nuanced operationalisations of context. Such operationalisations could be based on type authoritarian past, thus distinguishing between countries with right-wing and left-wing authoritarian legacy or, in case of communist legacy, could takes into account type and duration of communist sub-regimes and pre-communist legacy, as well. Besides, future analyses in addition to economic development as possible source of established differences in determinates of support for democracy and autocratic alternatives in

different contexts could comparatively test additional economic, as well as more political macro factors.

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