

Nationalism and political support: longitudinal evidence from The Netherlands

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ABSTRACT

While a large body of empirical research has examined individuals' political support (also known as democratic support) and how it is influenced by a variety of factors, the role of nationalism has hitherto been neglected in this literature strand. This article seeks to contribute to filling this gap, as it systematically investigates how nationalism, commonly defined as a person's belief in the superiority of their own nation, affects people's political support. Drawing on the influential work of Norris, the study focuses on three types of political support: satisfaction with and confidence in democracy, satisfaction with and confidence in political institutions, and satisfaction with the government. Replying to calls for more panel-based evidence, it covers a period of over ten years (2011–2021) of data from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) in The Netherlands. The study shows that nationalism is positively associated with certain forms of political support, such as satisfaction with and confidence in democracy. Notably, this relationship is robust when different measures of nationalism are used. The article challenges existing findings and provides a more nuanced picture of nationalism, at least when examined over time in such a well-established Western European democracy.

KEYWORDS Democracy; democratic support; nationalism; national attachment; longitudinal data

In recent years, scholars have indicated that (liberal) democracy is under threat (e.g. Claassen 2020a; Claassen 2020b; Graham and Svobik 2020) and even in decline (e.g. Foa and Mounk 2017; Levitsky and Ziblatt 2019; Mounk and Foa 2018), substantiated by trends of democratic backsliding (notably, Bermeo 2016; Haggard and Kaufman 2021; for a literature review, see Waldner and Lust 2018) and autocratisation (e.g. Lührmann and Lindberg 2019; Lührmann and Rooney 2021). Thus, a large body of research on individuals' political support (sometimes also known as

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democratic support) has emerged to examine this development further (e.g. Claassen 2020a; Claassen 2020b; Graham and Svolik 2020; Inglehart 2003; Wuttke *et al.* 2022; on the conceptualisation and operationalisation of the term, see Claassen *et al.* 2024). Scholars have investigated the impact of factors such as populist attitudes (e.g. Erhardt and Filsinger 2024; Wuttke *et al.* 2023), government effectiveness (e.g. Magalhães 2014), economic crises (e.g. Cordero and Simón 2016), economic adjustments (e.g. Armingeon *et al.* 2016), electoral violence (e.g. Fjelde and Olafsdottir 2024) and democratic understanding (e.g. Cho 2014) on political support.¹ While some studies have examined the relationship between different forms of national attachments such as national pride and political support, including political trust (see Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020; see also Austers *et al.* 2024), the literature is missing a systematic analysis of how nationalism, commonly regarded as ‘the dark side of national attachments’ (Huddy 2016: 10), affects various dimensions of political support such as satisfaction with and confidence in democracy.

Likewise, in the field of political psychology, the concept of nationalism, its potential antecedents (e.g. Mußotter 2024; Osborne *et al.* 2017) and its implications for phenomena such as anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g. Ariely 2012; Huddy *et al.* 2021; Wagner *et al.* 2012), anti-Semitism (e.g. Mußotter 2024) and civic involvement (e.g. Huddy and Khatib 2007) have been intensively investigated. Its impact on various forms of political support, however, has hitherto been given little attention.

To the best of our knowledge, this article is among the first to systematically investigate the link between nationalism and political support. We seek to answer the following question: How does nationalism – understood as an individual’s belief in the superiority of their own nation – affect individuals’ political support? More specifically, and following Norris’s (2011) influential work, we investigate how nationalism is linked to three forms of political support: satisfaction with and confidence in democracy, satisfaction with and confidence in political institutions and satisfaction with the government.

Examining the relationship between nationalism and political support, we advance the empirical literature on political support and the empirical literature on nationalistic attitudes by making two major contributions. First, we go beyond previous studies that have addressed the relationship between either national identity (e.g. Erhardt *et al.* 2021; Gabrielsson 2022; Marchlewska *et al.* 2022) or different kinds of belonging (notably, Fitzgerald *et al.* 2023) and political support but not the relationship between nationalism and political support. In addition, our study is distinct from that of Kokkonen and Linde (2023), as we do not investigate nativists’ perceptions of liberal democracy but rather the impact of nationalistic attitudes on political support. Relatedly, our article differs from an

emerging literature linking nationalism, populism and democratic support from a political party perspective (i.e. party nationalism or nationalistic parties, e.g. Stroschein 2019), as it focuses on individuals' nationalistic attitudes.

Second, our article relies on panel data and thus responds to calls from recent cross-sectional studies in this field (e.g. Erhardt *et al.* 2021: 72; see also Gabrielsson 2022; Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020) to use more causal research designs to provide a nuanced understanding of nationalism and political support by focusing on intra-individual changes. Using Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel data (2010–2021) for the Netherlands, we distinguish between within- and between-person effects based on multilevel models with within-person centring (Hamaker 2023; Hamaker and Muthén 2020; Schuurman 2023) and conduct a longitudinal analysis of this relationship. Overall, drawing on LISS panel data allows us to investigate this relationship for a well-established Western European democracy, the Netherlands.

This article is organised as follows. First, following the seminal work of Easton (1975) and Norris (2011), we describe the concept of political support. Second, we present the concept of nationalism. Third, using LISS panel data, we conduct a longitudinal analysis and examine the link between nationalism and political support over time. We also carry out a number of robustness checks and replicate the findings of Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020), who also drew on the LISS data set to investigate a similar relationship. In closing, we discuss our results and offer future research avenues for empirical research on political support.

Political support

In the literature on democracy, scholars commonly distinguish between support of democracy, (i.e. democratic values, also known as *democratic mood*; see Claassen 2020b) and satisfaction with democracy or satisfaction with the performance of democracy (notably, Claassen and Magalhães 2022), whereby this study primarily focuses on the latter. This distinction dates back to the seminal work of Easton (1975) on political support, which differentiates not only between three objects of support – that is, the nation or political community (as the most abstract), the regime and government and political actors (as the most concrete) – but also between two types of support: diffuse and specific. Diffuse support is defined as a 'principled affair', or the commitment to democratic values and principles and the rejection of authoritarianism and is thus considered a 'generalized attachment to political objects for their own sake' (Easton 1975: 444). In contrast, specific support is 'the satisfactions that members of a system feel they obtain from the perceived outputs and performances of the political

authorities' (Easton 1975: 437). According to Easton, specific support can be assessed by asking 'whether members do feel satisfied with the perceived governmental outputs or performances' (Easton 1975: 443). Overall, Easton holds that diffuse support is more robust than specific support, as 'outputs and beneficial performance may rise and fall while this [diffuse] support, in the form of a generalized attachment, continues' (Easton 1975: 444). In line with this argument, Claassen (2020a: 131) shows that support for democracy (diffuse support) helps democracies survive, especially in cases where democracies are well established, regardless of 'any specific support that democracy may attract due to instrumental performance evaluations'. Moreover, Claassen and Magalhães (2022) found evidence that satisfaction with democracy is influenced by the government's effectiveness and is thus affected by its economic performance and the level of corruption, while support for democracy is not. In short, citizens might be committed to democratic principles in general but simultaneously dissatisfied with how democracy works. This ambivalence is called 'democratic deficit' (Norris 2011: 19) and occurs nationwide, '[...] because many citizens today believe that it is important to live in a democratic state, yet they remain dissatisfied when evaluating how democracy works'.

In the large body of research on political support, scholars have investigated different dimensions. For instance, Fitzgerald and colleagues (2024) examined 'principle-driven support for democracy', while others such as Erhardt and colleagues (2021: 65; see also Cho 2014; Erhardt and Filsinger 2024; Fjelde and Olafsdottir 2024) have investigated citizens' regime preference, that is, 'support for a democratic regime vis-à-vis authoritarian alternatives'. In addition, scholars such as Armingeon and colleagues (2016) examined the satisfaction with and trust in democracy, whereas Wuttke and colleagues (2023) conceived of political support as a mix between respondents' satisfaction with democracy and their conceptions of it. Going one step further, Magalhães (2014) converged three different dimensions of political support: explicit democratic support, democracy-autocracy preference and democratic performance evaluation. Regardless of which dimension of democratic support has been examined, this literature strand has largely neglected the role of nationalism, understood as an individual's belief in their nation's superiority.

Inspired by the work of Easton (1975), Norris (2011) introduced a model of political support consisting of five distinct components that range from the most diffuse support (national identity) to the most specific support of individual political actors (incumbents' approval). The first component of this model involves belonging to the nation-state, encompassing 'feelings of national pride, patriotism, and identity' (Norris 2011: 24). The second component encompasses the approval of democratic values and ideals, and the third component refers to the evaluation of the overall

performance of the regime, such as satisfaction with democratic governance. The fourth component describes the confidence in the regime's institutions, followed by the fifth and most specific component: approval of incumbent officeholders. In our analysis, we regard the concept of democratic support in a broader sense, encompassing the third, fourth and fifth components of the model proposed by Norris (2011). Put differently, we investigate how nationalism is linked to three forms of political support: satisfaction with and confidence in democracy, satisfaction with and confidence in political institutions and satisfaction with the government.

In the empirical literature on political support, a few studies have investigated the link between it and different kinds of national attachment. For instance, Marchlewska and colleagues (2022) investigated the association between collective narcissism, generally understood as 'a belief in the ingroup's greatness which is contingent on external validation' (Marchlewska *et al.* 2022: 600) and political support in Poland and the US. They showed that people scoring high on collective narcissism are more likely to dismiss democracy, whereas people scoring high on national identity are more likely to support it. Similarly, Erhardt and colleagues (2021) investigated the link between national identity and citizens' regime preference in over 25 European countries. Drawing on the civic–ethnic dichotomy (for an overview, see Piwoni and Mußotter 2023), they showed that a civic national identity is associated with higher support for democracy and lower support for authoritarian regimes, whereas an ethnic national identity is associated with lower support for democracy and higher support for autocracy. While not explicitly focusing on national identity, Fitzgerald and colleagues (2023) examined a similar link. Drawing on Swedish panel data, they tested the impact of belonging (i.e. 'feeling at home in Sweden, the municipality, and the neighbourhood') on political support. They found a positive link between diverse kinds of belonging and political support. Notably, the impact of belonging on political support was stronger than the influence of other factors such as socio-economic status.

In sum, all these studies hint at a positive link between national identity, or belonging, and political support. In other words, the more respondents identify themselves with their country and feel that they belong, the more they are likely to support democracy. While insightful, none of these studies has analysed the impact of nationalism on political support. By investigating the impact of individuals' nationalism on political support over time, our study builds and expands upon this scholarship.

Nationalism

Like the ambiguous term 'democracy', which can be defined in various ways (e.g. Collier & Levitsky 1997; Davis *et al.* 2021; Schmitter & Karl

1991)² there are multiple conceptions of and thus types of nationalism among different research strands (for an overview, see, e.g. Özkirimli 2010). Drawing on the field of political psychology, we conceive of nationalism (sometimes also known as chauvinism) as an individual's belief in the superiority of their nation, accompanied by a striving for dominance over other nations (e.g. Kosterman and Feshbach 1989; Osborne *et al.* 2017; see also Mußotter 2024). Notably, nationalism, commonly regarded as 'the dark side of national attachments' (Huddy 2016: 10), must be sharply distinguished from neighbouring concepts such as national identity, commonly defined as 'a subjective or internalized sense of belonging to the nation' (Huddy and Khatib 2007: 65), or collective narcissism (for the distinction between nationalism and collective narcissism, see Federico *et al.* 2023).

A large body of research in this field has examined the concept of nationalism, including its implications. For instance, scholars have repeatedly shown that nationalism is positively associated with different kinds of out-group hostility such as anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g. Ariely 2012; Huddy *et al.* 2021; Wagner *et al.* 2012) and anti-Semitism (e.g. Mußotter 2024). Relatedly, a wide array of studies has shown that it is negatively associated with concepts such as (tolerance of) cultural diversity (e.g. Li and Brewer 2004), political and social trust (e.g. Austers *et al.* 2024; Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020) and civic involvement, that is voter turnout and political interest (e.g. Huddy and Khatib 2007), all of which are important for a democracy to function.

When delving into the empirical literature on nationalism (in the field of political psychology) and political support, one should note that these two bodies of literature have hitherto been isolated from the theoretical literature on the nationalism–democracy nexus (e.g. Helbling 2009; see also Abizadeh 2012; Calhoun 2007; Nodia 1992). That is to say, there is little to no theoretical background explaining why nationalism should affect democratic support. The literature emerging from political theory regards nationalism and democracy as macro phenomena detached from the individual level. Even though our focus purely lies on the individual conceptions of nationalism and political support, we feel that it is worth touching upon the existing theoretical discussion, in particular on the review article of Helbling (2009). Helbling thoroughly deals with the link between nationalism and democracy in a general sense and, among other things, introduces the so-called competing logic. According to this logic, nationalism is regarded as harmful for democracy, since '[n]ationalism appears to be predicated upon a doctrine of exclusivity, whereas democracy seems to be based on an inclusivist one' (Helbling 2009; for an opposing view, see the literature on liberal nationalism, e.g. Miller 1995; Tamir 1995, 2019). Mounk

(2018: 201) concurs, as ‘on both sides of the Atlantic, nationalism and democracy [...] seem at odds with each other’. One of the most prominent supporters of the competing logic is the political theorist Abizadeh (2002: 495; Abizadeh 2012), who calls for theorising democracy in ‘postnational contexts’. He criticises the so-called cultural nationalist claim, holding that ‘the nation – particularly its shared cultural core – is necessary for effecting integration in liberal democratic societies’. Moreover, he states that ‘integration in liberal democracies is not contingent upon cultural nationalist assimilation politics’; to the contrary, the ‘need for homogeneity [is] counterproductive to the goal of integration’ (Abizadeh 2002: 508).

While the competing logic and thus the negative link between nationalism and democracy is regarded on a more general and macro level in the theoretical literature, it can be transferred to assumptions on the individual level. As already stated, nationalism is understood as an individual’s belief in their nation’s superiority accompanied by a strive for dominance over other nations. Moreover, it is also characterised by features such as the belief in one’s people’s superiority. It is shaped by the striving for ethnocultural homogeneity, as evidenced by ‘the importance of ethnic membership criteria such as common descent’ (Mußotter 2024: 907). Thus, it is negatively associated with civic involvement such as voter turnout and political attention (e.g. Huddy and Khatib 2007), political and social trust (e.g. Austers *et al.* 2024; Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020) and solidarity (e.g. Ariely 2024) and positively related to authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (e.g. Mußotter 2024; Osborne *et al.* 2017) and out-group hostility (e.g. Ariely 2012; Huddy *et al.* 2021). It therefore seems plausible to assume that respondents scoring high on nationalism are unlikely to score high on political support. In line with Helbling (2009), a (liberal) democracy is based on an inclusive understanding of nationhood that stands at odds with the constitutive features of nationalism, such as ethnocultural homogeneity. In other words, respondents who tend to belief in their nation’s superiority are less likely to be content with democracy in general and its institutions in particular.

Following these theoretical considerations and the existing empirical evidence, we posit the following hypothesis:³

H: *Nationalism is likely to decrease political support.*

Data and methods

Our empirical analyses rely on an original nationally representative survey of the Netherlands. More specifically, we draw on the Longitudinal

Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS), one of the most famous panel data of the Netherlands. The LISS panel consists of core modules that include questions about political participation and values and additional studies spanning various topics and indicators. It is based on a true probability sample of households drawn from the population register by Statistics Netherlands (CBS) and consists of 5,000 households, comprising approximately 7,500 individuals of 16 years and older.⁴ In this study, we use seven waves of LISS panel data covering a period over ten years (2010–2021) to examine the link between nationalism and political support.

Dependent measures

There are various ways to capture political (i.e. democratic) support (e.g. Boese 2019; Claassen 2020a; Inglehart 2003). We use measures that align with Easton's (1975) distinction between specific and diffuse support and Norris's (2011) conceptual framework of political support. While the latter encompasses five levels of support, we only focus on the levels of evaluation of regime performance (third level), confidence in specific institutions (fourth level), and approval of incumbent officeholders (fifth level).⁵

In line with specific support for democracy (Easton, 1975) and thus the evaluation of regime performance (Norris 2011), two items relate to satisfaction with and confidence in democracy. Like other studies in this field (e.g. Cordero and Simón 2016; Wuttke *et al.* 2023; Classen and Magalhães 2022; for a review of this item, see notably, Singh and Maine 2023), *satisfaction with democracy* is measured with the following item: 'How satisfied are you with the way in which democracy operates in the Netherlands?' (from 0 = *very dissatisfied* to 10 = *very satisfied*). *Confidence in democracy* is operationalised with the item 'On a scale from 0 to 10, how much confidence do you personally have in democracy?' (from 0 = *no confidence at all* to 10 = *full confidence*).

In line with the confidence in specific institutions (Norris 2011), two items refer to political institutions. *Satisfaction with political institutions* is captured with the following item: 'How satisfied are you with the way in which the following institutions operate in the Netherlands? Dutch government, Dutch parliament, Politicians, Political parties' (from 0 = *very dissatisfied* to 10 = *very satisfied*). Like Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020), *trust in political institutions* (or political trust, as they call it) is measured with the following item: 'Can you indicate, on a scale from 0 to 10, how much confidence you personally have in each of the following institutions? Dutch government, Dutch parliament, Politicians, Political parties' (from 0 = *no confidence at all* to 10 = *full confidence*).

In line with the approval of current officeholders (Norris 2011), the final item refers to the evaluation of the government's performance. Thus, *satisfaction with the government* is operationalised with the following item: 'How satisfied or dissatisfied are you, generally speaking, with what the government has done lately?' (1 = *very dissatisfied* to 5 = *very satisfied*). All democratic support items are core modules of the LISS and are measured several times per year.

Independent measures

The items measuring *nationalism* vary slightly across the seven assembled studies (from 2011 to 2021)⁶ of the LISS panel (see [Table S1 in the online appendix](#)). Five survey waves use the item 'The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like the Dutch' ('better world'), and five survey waves use the item 'On the whole, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries' ('better country'). Our reasoning for selecting these measures is twofold. First, in terms of data availability, they are included in the LISS panel data set. Second, both measures are frequently used in the literature to capture nationalism (e.g. Ariely 2012; Davidov 2009; Rapp 2022; for a further discussion, see Mußotter 2022), though some use single-item measures (e.g. Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020) and others use a two-item index (e.g. Rapp 2022). Thus, these two measures are regarded as validated and are robust indicators of nationalism. For our main models, we rely on the two-item index, comprising three-panel waves, and use the single-item measures as a robustness check (see [online appendix](#)). [Table 1](#) shows the average values and availability of these two measures, plus the additive index across the seven survey waves.

We capture our political support items for each survey wave after our nationalism items have been measured. For example, wave three was fielded in September 2011, and the dependent measures for wave three were from January 2012 (for a complete list of the surveys and the question wording, see [Table S2 in the online appendix](#)).

Table 1. Average values of the nationalism measures across the seven selected panel waves.

Wave	Year	'Better country'	'The world would be a better place...'	Additive index
1	2010		2.77	
2	2011		2.90	
3	2011	3.16	2.71	2.93
4	2013	3.06	2.72	2.89
5	2018	2.35		
6	2020	3.68	2.92	3.30
7	2021	3.76		

We implement multilevel models with within-person-centred predictors ($(x_{it} - \bar{x}_i)$) that isolate the within-person variance, resembling a fixed-effects approach (Hamaker and Muthén 2020). The multilevel model approach is generally more applicable for unbalanced data, as missing values on individual time-points are subsumed under the missing-at-random assumption (Raudenbush and Bryk 2002). We further add an incremental between-person effect (\bar{x}_i) to the models (Hoffman 2015). They account for the expected variation in outcomes (here, democratic support) observed when comparing two individuals with a one-unit discrepancy in their average nationalism levels (*within-person mean*), when both have the same current nationalism level. Essentially, it captures the effect of being the same person at one specific time while being a different person on average (also discussed in Raudenbush and Bryk 2002: 141). The model, thus, assesses both the stable between-person differences and fluctuations within persons over time (Schoorman 2023), while accounting for the unbalanced nature of our data. Given that the empirical literature relies almost exclusively on cross-sectional effects (i.e. the combination of between- and within-effects at one specific time-point), disentangling the potential effect into within- and between-person provides a more detailed picture of this relationship. For example, it could be that an increase in an individual's level of nationalism results in a higher level of democratic support by also causing their identification with the system to increase. However, the effect could still be, on average, negative, because individuals with a higher average level of nationalism are less supportive of the democratic system. Accounting for both the within-person ($\beta^{(w)}$) and the between-person slope ($\beta^{(b)}$) leads to the following model equation (see Hamaker and Muthén 2020: 368):

$$y_{it} = y_{00} + \beta^{(b)} \bar{x}_i + u_{0i} + \beta^{(w)} (x_{it} - \bar{x}_i) + e_{it}$$

Unlike fixed-effects models, this model can be used to analyse both the within- and between-person effects while accounting for the effects of time-invariant and time-variant confounders. Specifically, we control for migration background (first- and second-generation), gender (male or female), political ideology (left-right), age in years, educational level, and survey wave.

For robustness checks, we implement two-way fixed-effects models with unit- and time-fixed effects (see [Figure S1 in the online appendix](#)). These models capture how the intra-individual change in nationalism affects different dimensions of democratic support given the specific year, helping us to circumvent problems with the unbalanced data structure. Furthermore, it is likely that elections and government changes influence individuals equally, justifying the inclusion of time-fixed effects.

Results

Figure 1 presents the findings for our five dependent measures of political support, with the two-item nationalism index as the explanatory variable. The model shows the coefficients for the within-person and between-person slopes. Each coefficient estimate represents a separate model estimate. The entire model estimate is presented in Table S3 in the online appendix. Figure 2 shows the results, including all control variables.

Figure 1 reveals that both the within- and between-person slopes for nationalism point in a positive direction for all five dependent measures. However, only two effects reach statistical significance for the within-person effect: an increase in nationalism from one time-point to another increases one's satisfaction with democracy and confidence in democratic institutions. Specifically, the effect for nationalism is around 0.11 (see Table S3 in the online appendix), meaning that a one-unit increase in nationalism results in a 0.11 increase on a scale from 0–10. All the between-individual effects reach statistical significance. In general, and contrary to our hypothesis, the data indicates that individuals who score higher on average for nationalism tend to score higher for democratic support. The results for the within-effects can be replicated by a time- and unit-fixed effects model that controls for political ideology (see Table S4 in the online appendix).

Figure 2, which presents the full model results, including all control variables, shows that individuals tending more to the right on political

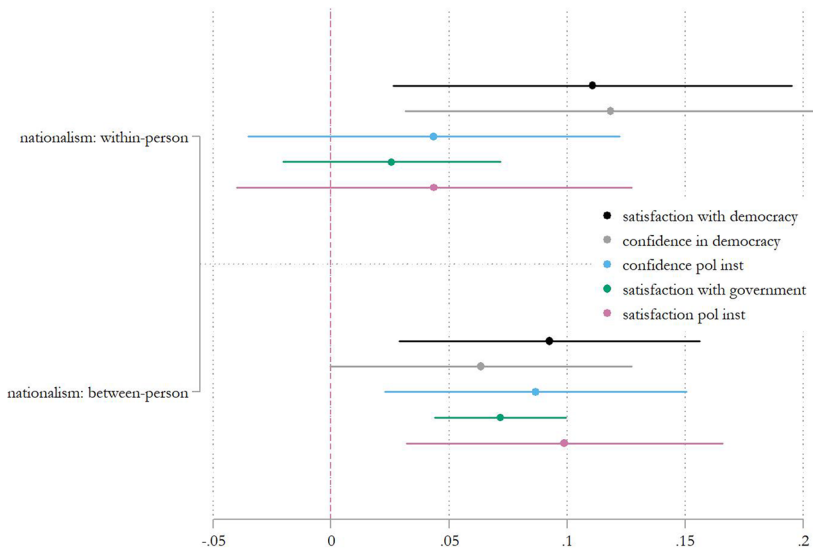


Figure 1. Model results – two-item nationalism index, three time-points.

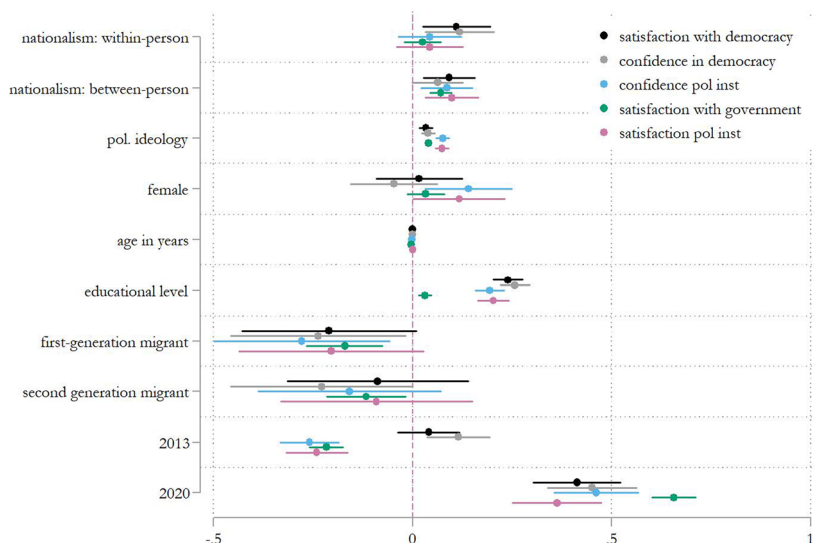


Figure 2. Full hierarchical model results – two-item nationalism index, three time-points.

ideology (which is measured on a scale from 0–10) show more democratic support.⁷ The same is true in terms of levels of education and gender. However, the effect of education is close to zero for ‘satisfaction with the government’, indicating that higher education might also increase the likelihood of a critical stance on the government. Regarding migrant background, first- and second-generation migrants tend to express lower democratic support than Dutch natives. Lastly, there seems to be an essential time effect: in comparison to the first period covered by the data (2011), there is a negative effect for 2013 and a relatively strong positive effect for 2020.

Robustness checks

Following studies testing the so-called national identity argument (e.g. Ariely 2024; Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020; Miller and Ali 2014; Rapp 2022) and thus the effect of national attachments on concepts such as political trust, one may argue that our findings are artefacts of our measure and the missing control for different dimensions of national attachments. That is, the effect of nationalism may depend on respondents’ level of national belonging. We use several robustness checks to counter these concerns, including single-item and multiple national attachment measures. First, Figure 3 presents the results using a single-item measure for nationalism: ‘better country’ and ‘better world’. Both items have been used as a single indicator of nationalism. More importantly, the data set covers

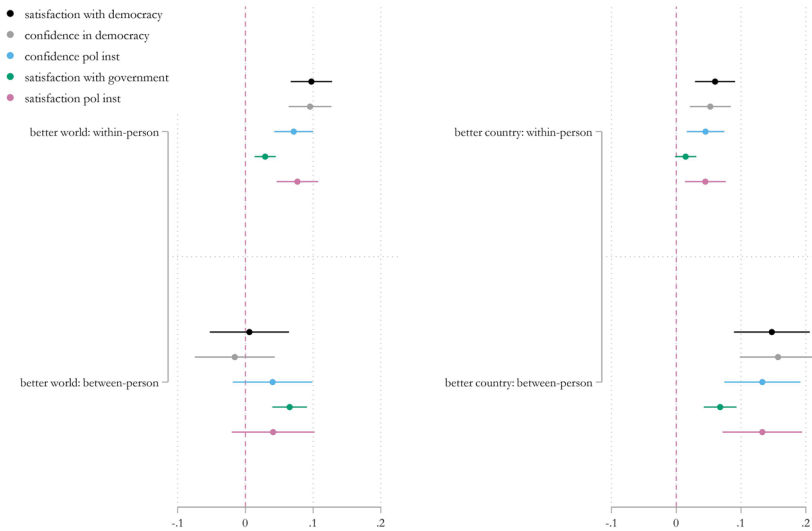


Figure 3. Hierarchical models with single-item measures of nationalism (five time-points).

Notes: Hierarchical models with within- and between-individual effects.

five time-points for both measures: in effect, while we use precision based on the measurement, we increase precision concerning the development over time.

Overall, the findings in Figure 3 support those presented in Figure 1: both the within-person and between-person effects of nationalism point in a positive direction, refuting our hypothesis again. The between-person slope estimates for the 'better country' measures also show slightly stronger effects. Aside from that, however, the coefficients are smaller.

For another robustness check, we replicate the study by Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020), who found that national belonging and being proud of one's own nation positively affect political trust, while nationalism significantly reduces trust in political institutions.⁸ They tested their models with LISS data from 2013. While they integrate multiple measures of national attachment in their study, they fail to use the longitudinal data structure. We replicate their analysis with data from 2013 and 2011 (*Nationalism and the National Dimension of Cultural Consumption Wave 1 and Wave 2*). In the first step, we replicate their findings based on the 2013 data, including all control variables from their paper.⁹ We do the same with the 2011 data. Ultimately, we re-estimate their models using the two wave panels with unit-fixed effects and estimate a hierarchical model separating the between- and within-individual effects. Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) use a single-item measure of nationalism based on the 'better world' item. The presented models are based on the one-item

measure, but we estimate the same models with the ‘better country’ and the two-item index (see [Figure S3 in the online appendix](#)). [Figure 4](#) shows the results of this replication (more details on the measures are given in the [online appendix](#)).

For both survey years, national attachment and national pride show a positive and significant relationship to political trust. At the same time, nationalism, measured with the ‘better world’ item, has a negative effect, which corresponds to the findings in their paper. However, when we combine the 2011 and 2013 data and estimate a unit-fixed effects model, the influence of nationalism changes from negative to (significantly) positive, independent of how we measure nationalism (see [Figure S4 in the online appendix](#)). This finding indicates that the average relationship between nationalism and political trust differs when intra-individual change from one period to another is taken into account. Given the results from the hierarchical model with within-person centring, we replicate the within-person effect from the fixed effects and add an estimate for the between-person slope. The latter exhibits a negative effect: individuals with higher-than-average levels of nationalism show lower political trust, which contradicts our main finding of a positive effect of the between-persons slope. This could be an artefact of the single-item measures plus the limited period over the two panel waves from 2011 to 2013.

Even though the main results and those of the robustness checks convincingly show a positive effect between nationalism and democratic support, a reversed causality issue might be present. Theoretically, it is

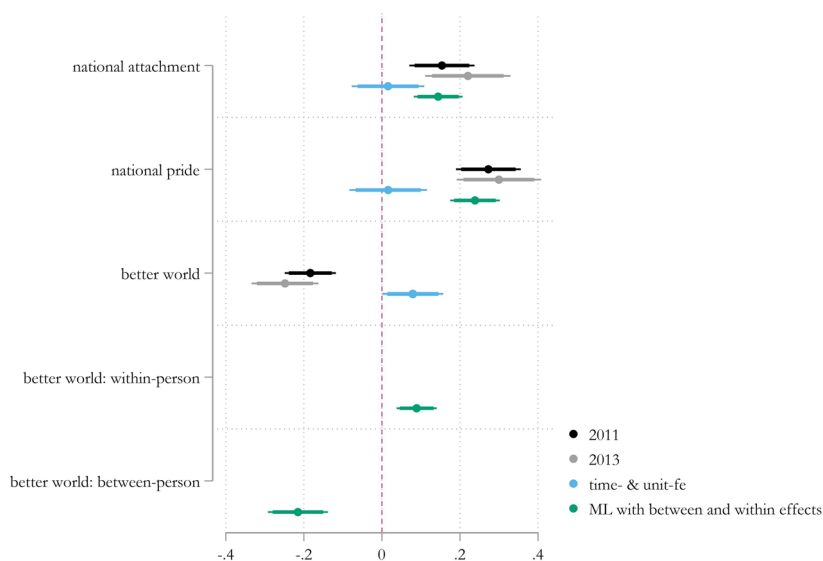


Figure 4. Replication of Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) with 2011 and 2013 data.

possible that more satisfaction with the current government and political institutions could result in closer national attachment and a belief in the superiority of one's own nation. To address this issue, we tried to estimate cross-lagged panel models with fixed effects that test both the influence of nationalism on democratic support and the effect of democratic support on nationalism (Allison *et al.* 2017). However, some models did not converge, partly due to our highly unbalanced data. Moreover, cross-lagged panel models rest on the assumption of stationarity and synchronicity (Kearney 2017), which our data and data structure do not fulfil. Nevertheless, we present the results for the cross-lagged panel models with fixed effects in [Table S5 in the online appendix](#) and show additional estimates based on standard cross-lagged structural equation models. The latter supports the idea of causal dominance from nationalism towards democratic support, but the described issues make it difficult to rely on these findings.

Discussion and conclusion

In order to advance the empirical literature on political support, we systematically investigated the impact of nationalism – understood as an individual's belief in the superiority of their nation – on three types of political support: satisfaction with and confidence in democracy, satisfaction with and trust in political institutions, and satisfaction with the government. Drawing on longitudinal data from the Dutch LISS panel covering a period of over ten years (2011–2021), we implemented hierarchical models that simultaneously estimated within- and between-person effects and extended the traditional fixed effects approach with estimates for the average effect of nationalism on political support (between-person slope). In contrast to our hypothesis, our longitudinal study shows that nationalism has a positive effect on different types of political support, such as satisfaction with or confidence in democracy – at least in the case of the Netherlands. In short, respondents scoring high on nationalism are more likely to be satisfied with the democratic system and have more confidence in its institutions. Overall, our longitudinal study challenges previous cross-sectional studies that indicate a negative relationship between nationalism and concepts such as civic involvement, (e.g. voter turnout or political attention see Huddy and Khatib 2007), political and social trust (e.g. Austers *et al.* 2024; Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020) and solidarity (e.g. Ariely 2024), adding a more nuanced picture of nationalism.

Two points are noteworthy. First, our study underlines the need to investigate complex relationships like these over time, as such studies, in contrast to cross-sectional studies, provide a deeper insight into the impact of nationalism. Second, it seems plausible to assume that if one

believes in the superiority of one's nation, one might also be likely to glorify the democratic system one lives in and be content with it. While items for measuring nationalism such as 'On the whole, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries' are rather general (see Mußotter 2022) and do not hint at democracy in any way, the result suggests that several respondents might associate the term 'country' with various aspects such as the democratic system. In other words, if one is convinced that 'the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries', one can also be convinced that the Dutch democratic system is better than those in other countries, as one is content with the way it works and has trust in its institutions (see also Holtug 2020). In addition, this item does not include any other constitutive features of nationalism, such as ethnocultural homogeneity, that stand at odds with the inclusive idea of liberal democracy and its institutions.

While our study indicates a positive impact of nationalism on political support over time, our findings should be treated with caution and considered in the context of this study. We do not claim that nationalism *per se* should be seen as the main driver of political support or even as a remedy for the lack of it, as its impact highly depends on how it is conceptualised and measured and the context in which it is examined. It is therefore worth making a few remarks on our analysis and its implications to highlight the scope of this work. First, there are various divergent notions of 'nationalism' in political psychology and beyond (e.g. Mußotter 2024). Thus, the effect of nationalism highly depends on how it is defined, and which core features are included. In this study, we relied on political psychology research that commonly defines nationalism as a belief in the superiority of one's own nation (e.g. Kosterman and Feshbach 1989; Osborne *et al.* 2017). Closely related to this, the manner in which nationalism is operationalised is also key. This article measured nationalism using a two-item index (with single-item measures as robustness checks) that is frequently used in political psychology and beyond (e.g. Ariely 2012; Bahna 2019; Davidov 2009; Rapp 2022). As already noted, however, items such as 'The world would be a better place if inhabitants of other countries were more like us' and 'On the whole, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries' are admittedly broad and thus allow for many different interpretations, as it is not clear from these alone in which regard one's people or country are said to be 'better' (see also Mußotter 2022).

Concerning our dependent variable, it is important to mention that our measures of political support do not indicate how nationalism is related to basic liberal democratic principles and values. In contrast, we focused on three specific forms of political support taken from the Norris (2011) model (e.g. satisfaction with and confidence in democracy). That

is to say, we assessed specific support for democracy (Easton 1975). While we showed that nationalism positively influences these concepts, we did not provide any evidence that nationalists are likely to embrace democratic values or, alternatively, liberal democracy.

Moreover, our data is limited to three periods between 2011 and 2018 (until 2021 for the single-item measures). A more extended period with more measurement points is necessary to fully assess the volatility between nationalism and democratic support. Furthermore, some of our additional cross-lagged panel results point towards a potential negative or positive effect of nationalism, depending on the measurement time (see [Table S5 in the online appendix](#)). Thus, it is possible that the concept of nationalism has changed over time or are highly dependent on their political context.

How do we proceed from here, and what are the implications for future research? First, in terms of study design, researchers focusing on the effects of nationalism on political support are recommended to conduct longitudinal analyses in countries other than the Netherlands. In contrast to cross-sectional studies, we analysed intra-individual changes over a comparatively large time span (2011 to 2021) and found that nationalism has a positive impact on political support. Relatedly, experimental studies would be a promising avenue for further investigation of the causal relationship between nationalism and this kind of support.

Second, it would be useful to conduct more detailed qualitative studies such as cognitive interviews and focus group discussions that thoroughly explore how individuals understand items such as ‘On the whole, the Netherlands is better than most other countries’, which are frequently used for measuring nationalism. Future researchers could detect how respondents perceive this item, whether these items are also associated with the democratic system they live in or democratic institutions and whether they regard these as nationalistic statements.

Third, it would be valuable to investigate this relationship with measures of nationalism that consist of more than two items. For instance, the novel validated measure of Mußotter (2024) captures not only the belief in the superiority of one’s nation, but also more core features such as an exclusionary ethnic notion of nationhood. Such measures could be interesting to employ, especially because Mußotter (2024) found a negative link between nationalism and democratic patriotism (i.e. attachment to democratic values). Future research should also dive more deeply into the relationship between nationalism and the support of liberal democratic values.¹⁰

Overall, our study can be seen as the first step towards empirically exploring the relationship between nationalism and political support, which has hitherto been overlooked. It serves as a point of departure for future research and calls for more attention to this intricate link,

especially in times when liberal democracy is globally under threat and nationalism appears to be on the rise.

Notes

1. Drawing on the framework of Norris (2011) whose work is strongly inspired by the one of Easton (1975), we stick to the concept of political support as both scholars have used it. In empirical literature, however, many scholars follow Easton (1975) but speak of democratic support that is seen as a synonym for political support. Note, that scholars used a different terminology for examining the same concept, democratic support. For instance, Cho (2014) aims to investigate the “political support for democracy”, while others such as Cordero and Simón (2016; see also Fjelde and Olafsdottir 2024) speak of “citizen’s support for democracy”.
2. Please note, that most scholars in empirical research on democracy rely on the prominent definition of “polyarchy” provided by Dahl (1971), which encompasses a set of procedures such as control over government by elected officials and free and fair elections.
3. The theoretical literature also engages with arguments supporting a *complementary logic*. According to supporters of this logic, nationalism is necessary for a democracy to function. Scholars such as Lind (1994: 94) support this view, arguing that “far from being a threat to democracy, nationalism – the correspondence of cultural nation and state – is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for democracy in most places today.” Likewise, in his seminal book *Considerations on Representative Government*, Mill (1865: 120f) hold that “[...] the sentiment of nationality [...] is a prima facie case for uniting all the members of the nationality under the same government [...]”. Further, he claimed that “[...] it is in general a necessary condition of free institutions that the boundaries of the governments [...] coincide with those of nationalities”. However, these scholars mainly consider nationalism as a feeling of being attached to a nation, i.e. commonly understood as national identity, and not the feeling of one’s nation’s superiority. More importantly, empirical evidence by, for example, Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) shows that while national identity relates positively to political and social trust, the opposite is true for nationalism, in terms of nationalistic chauvinism.
4. For further information on the panel and the data collection see www.lissdata.nl/how-it-works; see also Scherpenzeel and Das (2010).
5. The LISS panel also includes measures of democratic values that capture the second level of the framework by Norris (2011). Here, respondents are asked about the most important goal to achieve in a democratic system. We estimated additional models including this measure (see [online appendix](#)).
6. The assembled studies are suggested by researchers and vary primarily in the topics that they address, as can be seen in [Table S1 in the online appendix](#).
7. Note, that we also examined whether nationalism is linked to populist attitudes, as often posited in the literature, especially on the one on populist parties and their rhetoric (e.g., Brubaker 2020). Yet, we did not find a link to populist attitudes; see [Table S7 in the online appendix](#).

8. We use the same measure of political trust as the authors used in their paper, and this measure is slightly different to our measure in [Figures 1–3](#).
9. We do not include religiosity in the models, as this variable is only available for the 2013 data. A comparison of the Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) model including religiosity with our estimates shows that the coefficients in the models do not differ.
10. Democratic values were measured at two time-points in the LISS panel, but we could not find an effect of nationalism on these values (see [Table S6 in the online appendix](#)).

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No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

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