# Love for the nation gone wrong?

Nationalism and democratic support: Longitudinal Evidence from the Netherlands

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## Abstract

The relationship between nationalism and democracy is complex and highly controversial. While some argue that nationalism might foster democracy, others hold that these concepts stand at odds with each other. Yet, the empirical evidence for these opposing assumptions is weak. To shed light on this much-understudied relationship, this article systematically investigates how nationalism, commonly defined as the belief in one's nation's superiority, impacts individuals' democratic support. Using data from the Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) in the Netherlands from different waves (2011 to 2021), we show, based on fixed effects models, that nationalism is positively associated with certain forms of democratic support. Notably, this relationship is robust when different measures of nationalism are used. Overall, we make an empirical contribution by studying the causal relationship that has received little attention to date and synthesise two research strands, i.e., literature on democracy and literature on nationalism, that have hitherto been held in isolation.

# Introduction

Throughout Western countries, liberal democracies are under attack. Many see the declining quality of democracy in the enhanced political polarisation and the radicalisation of individuals and political discourse (Kingzette et al. 2021; Orhan 2022; Waldner and Lust 2018). These developments challenge democratic solidarity between individuals, including individuals' support for democratic institutions, the rule of law, and fundamental civil liberties (Banting and Kymlicka 2017). Nationalism may lie at the heart of this development. For example, populist parties use nationalistic sentiments to distinguish between a nation's native and non-native members sharply and argue for increased cultural protectionism, which not only results in divided societies but even threatens European integration - as seen in Hungary (Johnston, 2022; Mudde 2007). Yet, Fukuyama (2018: 11) has recently argued that one's love for the nation provides solid ground for democracies because "if citizens do not believe they are part of the same polity, the system will not function". Fukuyama aligns with Charles Taylor's prominent claim (1998: 144) that a strong collective identity holds modern democratic states together. Similarly, liberal nationalists (Gustavsson and Miller 2020; Miller 2002, 2017) claim that a strong identification with one's country "provides the 'cement' or 'glue' that holds modern, culturally diverse societies together and allows them to function effectively" (Miller and Ali 2014: 237). In general, a lack of identification with one's country can lead to less support for political institutions, more polarisation, and diminished political trust and support (e.g., Gangl et al. 2016; Levendusky 2018).

This paper aims to find an answer to the direction of the relationship between nationalism and individuals' democratic support. In this context, we understand nationalism as nationalistic chauvinism, i.e. the most intense and extreme form of national attachment. It is commonly understood as a person's belief in the superiority of one's nation over all other countries. Compared to other forms of national attachments, such as national identification or pride, it includes a concrete notion of outgroup demarcation. It is often considered the most dangerous form of national attachment (Mounk 2018). By focussing on this dimension of national attachment, we try

to make the most severe test of how nationalism is related to democratic support. While the empirical literature most often addresses other dimensions of national attachment (e.g. Erhardt et al. 2012; Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020), the theoretical literature focuses on nationalism and its potential dangers and benefits (Helbling 2009). On the other hand, we take a broad understanding of democratic support based on the concept by Norris (2011), which involves dimensions ranging from the evaluation of regime institutions to confidence in these institutions and the approval of officeholders.

We test our research question with the help of LISS panel data (2010-2021) using unit and timefixed effect models, which allow us to advance the existing research in three significant ways: First, we synthesise the literature on nationalism and democracy that has hitherto been largely isolated. Systematically investigating the effect of nationalism on democracy, we go beyond existing studies in research on the consequences of different forms of national attachments that commonly focus on the effects on outgroup hostility (e.g., Ariely, 2012; Blank and Schmidt, 2003; Huddy et al., 2021; Wagner et al., 2012). Likewise, our study is distinct from a few recent ones on the civicethnic distinction that examine, among other things, whether ethnic and civic national identity leads to the support of democratic or autocratic regimes (notably, Erhardt et al., 2021). Second, using panel data to examine the relationship between nationalism and democratic support, this article replies to calls from recent studies (e.g., Erhardt et al., 2021: 72; Gabrielsson, 2021; Gustavsson and Stendahl, 2020) for drawing on a more causal research design to provide a more nuanced understanding between nationalism and democracy. While there are few panel studies in this field, they have focused on different research questions. For instance, Wagner and colleagues (2012) investigated the relationship between nationalism, patriotism and outgroup hostility in the case of Germany, while Osborne and colleagues (2017) investigated the impact of authoritarianism and social dominance orientation on nationalism and patriotism over time in the case of New Zealand. Drawing on the civic-ethic distinction, Mader and Schoen (2023) recently examined the development of civic and ethnic national identity (CED) in the case of Germany over time.

However, there is no panel data evidence on the relationship analysed in this paper. Third, there are a few studies analysing the link between nationalism and democratic support from the perspective of parties, i.e., party nationalism or nationalistic parties (e.g., XXX). While valuable, the focus on individual nationalistic attitudes has been neglected. Additionally to that, we also go beyond existing studies that examine the effect of national identity on democracy (e.g., Erhardt et al., 2022; Gabrielsson, 2022), but not the one of nationalism.

# Nationalism and democratic support - Existing evidence

In the literature on democracy, scholars commonly distinguish between *support of* democracy, i.e., democratic values (which is also known as *democratic mood* see Claassen, 2020a) and *satisfaction with* democracy or satisfaction with democracy's performance (notably, Claassen & Magalhaes, 2022). This distinction is strongly inspired and dates back to the work of Easton (1975: pg), who differentiated "diffuse support" that is to be seen as a "principled affair", i.e., the commitment to democratic values and principles and the rejection of authoritarianism, and "specific support" which is seen as an "instrumental, performance-driven attitude". While democratic support refers to diffuse support, satisfaction with democracy refers to specific support. In the literature on democracy, it is commonly argued that diffuse support is more durable than specific support and, thus, more important for democracies to survive (Claassen, 2020a). For instance, Claassen and Magalhaes (2022) found evidence that satisfaction with democracy is influenced by the government's effectiveness and thus impacted 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.

In this paper, we rely on Norris' (2011) nested model of five distinct democratic support components inspired by Easton's binary distinction. The five components range from the most diffuse support (national identity) to the most specific support of individual political actors (incumbents' approval). According to this model, the first component, i.e., belonging to the nationstate, defined as "feelings of national pride, patriotism, and identity", depicts the most fundamental attitudes towards democracy and democratic institutions. The second component encompasses the approval of democratic values and ideals, followed by the evaluation of the overall performance of the regime, such as the satisfaction with democratic governance. The fourth component refers to the confidence in regime institutions, followed by the approval of incumbent officeholders and thus the most specific one. While Norris does not explicitly mention nationalism in her model, we assign this concept to the first component, seeing it as a specific form of national belonging. In contrast, democratic support, i.e., satisfaction with democracy, can be referred to the third, fourth and fifth components.

Looking at the rich literature on democracy, a wide array of studies has focused on support for democracy (e.g., Wuttke et al., 2020; Claasen, 2020a; Claassen, 2020b; Claassen & Magalhaes, 2022; Graham & Svolik, 2020), the (potential) decline of democracy (e.g., Foa & Mounk, 2018), manifested in democratic backsliding (Bermeo, 2016; for a literature review see Waldner & Lust, 2018) or trends of autocratization (e.g., Lührmann & Lindberg, 2019). While insightful, the role of nationalism has been ignored in this literature. Very recently, Krishnarajan (2023: 477) introduced the concept of democratic elevation, showing that (rationalising) citizens do not necessarily assess a politician's behaviour in terms of democratic principles but instead in terms of how a specific policy affects one's country. In short: "what is bad for [one's] country, is bad for [one's] democracy". In that sense, attachment to one's country trumps attachment to democratic principles, thus giving potential leeway to undemocratic behaviour. Yet, while this study touched upon the relationship between national identity and democracy, it did not go into further detail. On the other hand, when zooming in on the literature on national identity, only a few studies have studied the relationship between national attachments and democracy. Drawing on EVS data on 24 countries, Erhardt and colleagues (2021: 68) investigated the effects of ethnic and civic national identity on regime preference, indicating that an ethnic, national identity is more likely to increase autocratic regimes, while a civic national identity is more likely to increase democratic regimes.

They concluded that "national identification is a double-edged sword for regime preference" (ibid: 71). Using ISSP data, Gabrielsson (2022) showed that an ethnic national identity is associated with lower levels of democracy and further indicated that national belonging is not associated with democracy. While not explicitly investigating the relationship between national identity and democracy, the study of Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) went in a related yet different direction. They examine the claims of the so-called national identity argument (Miller and Ali 2014) by looking at the effects of national belonging, national pride, and nationalistic chauvinism on political and social trust in the Netherlands (LISS data) and the USA (GSS data). Their findings reveal that nationalistic chauvinism is "the darker side of national identity": it significantly reduces both forms of trust in the Dutch and the US sample, while national belonging fosters generalised and political trust.

In sum, surveying studies in both research fields, i.e., national attachments and research on democracy, the relationship between nationalism and democracy in general and nationalism and democratic support in particular, has received little rigorous empirical attention. Consequently, the (causal) relationship between these concepts has been understudied in theoretical and empirical terms. Therefore, this article seeks to contribute to filling this gap and examines whether and in how far nationalism, understood as the belief in national superiority accompanied by the strive for dominance over other nations (e.g., Kosterman & Feshbach, 1989), leads to democratic support.

# Linking nationalism and democratic support theoretically

In his literature review on the relationship between nationalism and democracy, Hebling (2009) distinguished between two logics: following the *complementary 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 (1993: 394) prominently stated that

democracy can only thrive if "the boundaries of government coincide in the main with those of nationality." Similarly, proponents of liberal nationalism claim that a shared national identity is imperative for societies to work, especially regarding redistributive policies (Miller, 1995; Miller & Ali, 2014; Tamir, 1993). For instance, Tamir (2019: 6) argues that "democratic regimes require a pre-political partnership that turns citizens into a collective entity with a common past and a common future". Moore (2003: 7) concurs, holding that "a shared national identity is not necessary, but that, in certain cases, it will facilitate democratic governance." While not an explicit defender of liberal nationalism, Fukuyama (2018: 158) concurs, that national identification enables liberal democracy. In general, nationalism is the ultimate love for the nation. It puts one's nation above all other nations, demonstrating the uncritical love of a country. Compared to other forms of national attachment, such as (critical) patriotism, nationalism is blind towards the potential failures of one's country and its institutions (Huddy and Khatib 2007). From this perspective, the logical consequence of higher levels of nationalism (of individuals living in a democracy) should be more support for democracy and democratic institutions.

Yet, the empirical literature focussing on nationalism and its consequences almost undoubtedly connects nationalism with adverse outcomes, such as outgroup hostility, diminished social and political trust, and decreased solidarity and social cohesion (Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020; Huddy and Khatib 2007; Kosterman & Feshbach 1989; Rapp 2022). This is supported by the theoretical arguments presented in Helbling (2009) on the *competing logic*. The argument states that nationalism is not necessary for democracy, but quite the opposite: nationalism causes more problems for democracy than fostering it. This claim is supported by scholars such as Abizadeh (2012) or proponents of constitutional patriotism such as Habermas (1996) or Müller (2008). Mounk, who considers nationalism as "a halfwild [...] animal" that needs to be tamed" (2018: 201), claims that "on both sides of the Atlantic, nationalism and democracy now seem at odds with each other." In sum, while the complementary logic finds more theoretical support in the literature, the competing logic is primarily supported by empirical evidence. These inconclusive assumptions are

supported by Helbling's (2009) concluding remarks that "nationalism and democracy are considered to be *mutually dependent logics*; the relationship is more a matter of degree than of completely opposite positions". In line with that and similar to a classical theory test, we test the opposing claims against each other.

### **Data and Methods**

We rely on Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences (LISS) panel data to answer our research question. The LISS panel consists of core modules that include questions about political participation and values and additional studies spanning various topics and indicators. We identified seven assembled studies that include measures of nationalism (see Table 1) ranging from 2011 to 2021.<sup>1</sup> The items measuring nationalism vary slightly across the seven studies. We have five survey waves using the "the world would be a better place" measure (better world), five survey waves using the "On the whole, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries" (better country) and four waves using the "I would rather be Dutch than belong to any other nationality in the world" (rather be). All three measures are frequently used in the literature to capture nationalism in terms of nationalistic chauvinism. Others rely on single-item measures (e.g. Gustavsson and Stendahl 2020), whereas others use a two-item index (e.g. Rapp 2022). We make use of the whole range of measures, meaning we run our models with four different nationalism measures: (1) better world, (2) better country, (3) rather be, (4) combined two-item measure. This gives us five, four and three-panel waves for the respective measures. Table 2 shows the average values and availability of these four measures across the seven survey waves.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> The assembled studies are suggested by reserachers and vary laregely in the topic they address, as can be seen from Table 1.

Study name	month/year	item wording	
Control for Terrorism I	03/2010	bu10a092 I prefer to be an inhabitant of the Netherlands than of any other country in the world. [better world]	
		bu10a093 The world would be a better place if inhabitants of other countries were to be more like Dutch people. [rather be]	
Control for terrorism II	03/2011	bu11b 092 I prefer to be an inhabitant of the Netherlands than of any other country in the world.	
		bu11b 093 The world would be a better place if inhabitants of other countries were to be more like Dutch people.	
Nationalism and the national dimension of cultural consumption Wave 1	09/2011	fd11a042 It would be a better world if people in other countries were more like Dutch people	
consumption wave r		fd11a043 On the whole, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries	
Nationalism and the national dimension of cultural consumption Wave 2	09/2013	fd13b042 It would be a better world if people in other countries were more like Dutch people	
		fd13b043 On the whole, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries	
Social and Cultural Report Part 1	06-08/2018	or18a297 I would rather be Dutch than belong to any other nationality in the world	
		or18a298 Generally speaking, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries	
Political and Social Attitudes in the Netherlands	01/2020	pu20a062 The world would be a better place if people from other countries were more like the Dutch.	
		pu20a063 Generally speaking, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries.	
Experiment on populism and anti-immigrant views	03/2021	so21a043 I would rather be Dutch than belong to any other people in the world	
		so21a044 Generally speaking, the Netherlands is a better country than most other countries.	

Table 1: Overview over nationalism measures

There are multiple ways to capture democratic support. Following the conceptual discussion, we use measures that align with Easton's (1975) idea of specific and diffuse support and Norris's

(2011) conceptual framework encompassing five different levels of support, whereby we only focus on the levels of evaluations of regime performance (third level), confidence in specific regime institutions (fourth level), and approval of incumbent officeholders (fifth level).<sup>2</sup> We capture the overall satisfaction with the current system with items asking for the overall satisfaction with democracy in the Netherlands and an item about the confidence level in the democratic system. Similarly, we use two additive indexes based on items on the satisfaction with different political institutions. Political institutions, thereby, are the government, parties, politicians and the parliament. Lastly, we capture satisfaction with what the current government is doing, which comes closest to Norris' dimension of approval with current officeholders. All democratic support items for each survey wave after our nationalistic chauvinism items were measured. For example, wave three was fielded in September 2011, and the dependent measures for wave three were from January 2012. The OA has a complete list of the surveys and the question-wording.

wave	year	NL better country	World would be a better place	I'd rather be Dutch	Add. index (better country + better world)
1	2010		2.77	3.60	
2	2011		2.90	3.62	
3	2011	3.16	2.71		2.93
4	2013	3.06	2.72		2.89
5	2018	2.35		2.46	
6	2020	3.68	2.92		3.30
7	2021	3.76		3.49	

Table 2: Average values of different nationalism measures across the seven selected panel waves

We implement two-way fixed effects models with unit and time-fixed effects. This way, we capture how the intra-individual change in nationalistic chauvinism affects different dimensions of system

 $<sup>^{2}</sup>$  The LISS panel also includes measures of democratic values that capture the second level of the democratic support framewoek by Norris (2011). Here, respondents are asked about the most important goald to achieve in a democratic system. We estimated additional models including this measure (see OA).

support given the specific year; this helps us circumvent problems of the unbalanced data structure. Further, it is likely that, for example, elections and government changes influence individuals equally, justifying the inclusion of time-fixed effects. Given that we have different nationalism measures over the waves, we only estimate models with the same measures. Hence, we estimate four models for each of our dependent measures. The models cover three (nationalism index), four (rather be Dutch) and five-panel waves (better country & better world measures). As robustness checks, we further implement hierarchical models to test the effects of time-invariant confounders, such as gender and migration background (from different waves of the background variables module - see a complete list of surveys in the OA).

## Results (*in progress*)

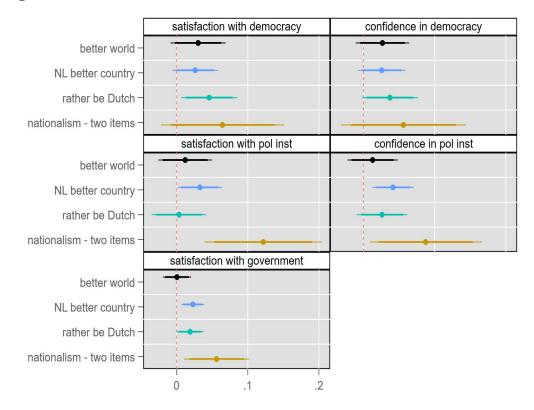
Figure 1 presents the findings for our five dependent measures of democratic support, with the four measures of nationalistic chauvinism as explanatory variables. Each coefficient estimate represents a separate model estimate. The entire model estimates are in the OA.

→ Description of results to be added!

# **Robustness checks**

Following the claim by Miller and Ali (2014) and more recent publications testing the effects of national attachments, 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 national chauvinism may depend on respondents' level of national belonging or patriotism. While our fixed effects design controls for these potential confounding factors, we estimate several robustness checks, including multiple measures of national attachments to counter these concerns. The results are depicted in Figure 2 and Figure 3.

## Figure 1



Notes: Twoway fixed effects models with clustered standard errors

Moreover, our findings from Figure 1 speak against the results by Gustavsson and Stehndahl (2020), who find that national belonging and being proud of one's nation positively affect political trust, while nationalistic chauvinism significantly reduces trust in political institutions. They tested their models with LISS data from 2013. Yet, they fail to make use of the longitudinal data structure. To robustness check our findings, 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. We do the same with the 2011 data. Ultimately, we reestimate their models using the two wave panels with unit fixed effects. We test these fixed effects models with different measures for the nationalistic chauvinism variable: Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) use a single-item measure based on the *better world* item. We estimate the same models with the better country and the two-item

index. Figure 2 depicts the results of this replication (more details on the measures are given in the

OA).

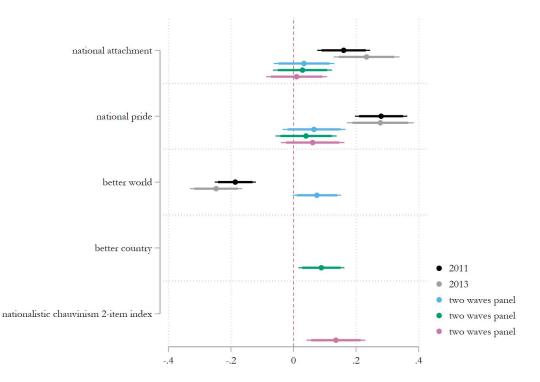


Figure 2: Replication of Gustavsson and Stendahl with 2011 and 2013 data and different nationalistic chauvinism measures

First, we can replicate the findings by Gustavsson and Stendahl (2020) with the data set from 2013 and replicate these findings with the 2011 wave. For both survey years, national attachment and national pride show a positive and significant relation to political trust. At the same time, nationalism, measured with the 'better world' item, reveals a negative effect, which corresponds to the findings in their paper. However, as soon as we add the 2011 wave to the models and estimate a unit fixed effects model, the influence direction of nationalism changes from negative to (significantly) positive, independent of how we measure nationalism. This finding indicates that the average relationship between nationalism and political trust differs from the relationship when taking intra-individual change from one time period to another into account.

## → More needs to be added here!

Notes: estimated without time-fixed effects

As an additional test of our results in Figure 1, we estimate the two-wave panel model controlling for national attachment and national pride for our five dependent measures (see Figure 3). The estimates do not differ in a meaningful way from the ones presented in Figure 1.

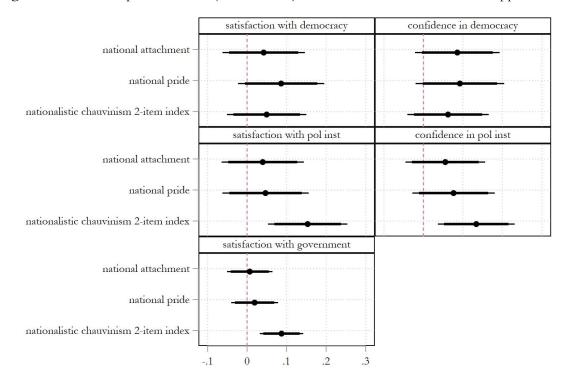


Figure 3: Two-wave panel estimate (2011 & 2013) on five measures of democratic support

Notes: Two-wave panel 2011 and 2013 with unit fixed effects.

Even though these results convincingly show a positive effect between nationalistic chauvinism and democratic support (specifically, political trust and system satisfaction), a potential reversed causality issue might be present. Theoretically, it is possible that, in particular, more satisfaction with the current government and political institutions can result in closer national attachment and the thought that one's nation is better than others. To address this issue, we estimated cross-lagged models that test both the influence of nationalism on democratic support and the effect of democratic support on nationalism. The first differences model is another possibility to address this issue, yet they underperform for unbalanced data (citation). The results for the first differences models are in the OA. Figure X presents the findings for the five cross-lagged panel models for the three-panel waves, including the nationalism index measure. The results, however, must be handled with caution as cross-lagged panel models underperform in unbalanced. panel data

#### FIGURE X needs to be added!

#### Discussion and Conclusion (in progress)

Our findings challenge existing research on nationalism as we paint a more nuanced picture and add a novel perspective on nationalism. In light of our findings, a few remarks are essential to make: Conceptually, we are well aware that there are various and, in part, divergent notions of nationalism. Thus, it depends on how nationalism is *defined*. In this study, we relied on research in political psychology that commonly defines nationalism as the belief in one's nation's superiority (e.g., Kosterman and Feshbach, 1989). Empirically and closely related to how nationalism is *defined*, it also depends on how nationalism is *operationalised*. This article measured nationalism based on single items and a two-item index, frequently used in political psychology and beyond. At this point, it is essential to note that items such as "*The world would be a better place if inbabitants of other countries were more like us*" are admittedly very broad and thus allow for many different interpretations as it is not clear in which regard one's people are supposed to be better (Rapp 2022). In short, the findings should not be generalised but be treated with caution as we relied on a specific definition and employed one item to measure nationalism. Thus, we do not intend to claim that nationalism *per se* is to be seen as *the* remedy for satisfaction with democracy, as it depends on how it is defined and measured.

Other things to discuss:

- $\rightarrow$  Experimental evidence?
- → Heterogeneous effects?
- → Relation between nationalism and other concepts?
- → Implications of the findings?

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