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THE SOURCES AND STRUCTURE OF LEGITIMATION IN WESTERN DEMOCRACIES: A CONSOLIDATED MODEL TESTED WITH TIME-SERIES DATA IN SIX COUNTRIES SINCE WORLD WAR II*

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Both new-left and neo-conservative theorists argue that poor state performance can lead to a legitimation crisis, but they neglect distinctions among different forms of political support and objective conditions that citizens evaluate. I propose a theoretical model that distinguishes between (a) *confidence in institutions and legitimation of democracy and* (b) *state performance and the structure of opposition (party systems, governing coalitions). I test the model with data located in an extensive new search of survey archives in six Western countries. The results show that poor state performance leads to a decline of confidence, but not a softening of support for democracy. Problems in the structure of opposition lead to a decline of both confidence and support for democracy. In the conclusion, I speculate whether state performance might affect democratic legitimacy in a less straightforward fashion.*

Among the voluminous writing on political support in Western democracies since World War II, the most dramatic were the warnings of actual or imminent "legitimation crisis," "crisis of confidence," "government overload," or breakdown of "governability." As the protest wave of the 1960s crested and the economic difficulties of the mid-1970s set in, the sharpest cries were raised symmetrically on the new left and among neo-conservatives. Many empirical indicators also showed an alarming decline in citizen support for political institutions. But in the quieter atmosphere of the 1980s, as empirical evidence showed a turnaround on some indicators, warnings of crisis became fewer.

In the meantime, critics argued that new-left and neo-conservative crisis theories improperly equated declining confidence in institutions with a delegitimation of democracy. And others argued that crisis theories focused too narrowly on state "performance" as a source of political support and neglected the structure of opposition (party systems, coalition forms). But most observers agreed that the available opinion survey data do not permit an adequate analysis of trends and that other types of data cannot completely fill this gap (see Kaase 1988, for the most comprehensive survey of data sources).

The aim of the present study is to develop and test a unified model of the structure, sources, and trends of political support in Western countries since World War II. I consolidate critiques of crisis theories by incorporating in the model distinctions between (*a*) confidence in institutions and legitimation of democracy and (*b*) state performance and the structure of opposition. I test the model with survey data (much of it previously unknown or neglected) located in an extensive new search of the archives.

THEORIES OF POLITICAL SUPPORT

Most of the crisis theories of the mid-1970s build on Schumpeter's ([1950] 1975) classical

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proposition that political support in a democracy depends on the delivery of services by the state.[1] Schumpeter characterized democracy as the electoral competition of party organizations that offer themselves as rulers to the ruled on the basis of electoral promises. Governing elites must promise only what they can deliver, and they must succeed in delivering that. Too high promises (especially) or failure to deliver result in problems in political support. The image is one of a balance between citizen demands and state capacity to satisfy the demands. A crisis consists of an overload on the state, and it can only be resolved by creating greater state capacity or persuading citizens to reduce their demands. Since, Schumpeter argues, creating greater state capacity tends to undermine civil liberties and to encourage a spiral of greater demands, his preferred solution is to hold down both demands and state capacity.

The image of political support as a balance between citizen demands and state capacity was generally accepted by crisis theorists on both the left and the right. Much of the debate centered around the extent to which a traditional sector (church, family, community, etc.) has been displaced by a state sector in providing services.

Theorists on the left argue that "late" capitalism generates increasing social and economic dislocations which must be remedied by the state (e.g., O'Connor 1973; Offe 1974, 1975; Habermas 1975; Wolfe 1977). The state must shore up a lagging private economy with investments in infrastructure; and a growing welfare state must plug the holes left by a private economy by providing social services it formerly provided. Those groups best able to protect their own interests (e.g., big business, big labor) do so at the expense of the weak, but all groups clamor for more state services. Since the state cannot keep up with the inflationary spiral of demands, it loses legitimacy, especially in the eyes of the weakest who suffer most (Thurow 1980 makes a related argument).[2]

Theorists on the right paint a similar picture, but place the blame not so much on capitalism as on the left itself for generating demands on the state which, they claim, should more properly be left to the private realm (e.g., Huntington 1975, 1981; Crozier 1975; Hennis, Kielmansegg, and Matz 1977; some not on the right make the same point: Rose and Peters 1979; Bell 1976; Janowitz 1978). This lack of traditional restraint and, especially, the accompanying protest creates conflicts which cannot be regulated by the state and demands which the state cannot satisfy. And the "revolution of rising entitlements" (Bell), in a ratchetlike fashion, prevents demands against the state from being cut back or displaced elsewhere.

Still other writers responded to the left and right primarily by denying that things have gotten so bad (e.g., Lane 1979; Dahrendorf 1980). They argue that traditional orientations have not eroded, and expectations regarding state services have not escalated, to the extent claimed. There is a much greater reservoir of support (and traditional orientations) than the left and right believe. But even these centrist formulations tend to accept the image of the balance formulated by Schumpeter and perpetuated by the left and right: of a certain quantity of demands against a certain quantity of state capacity, with crises arising from an overloaded scale.

Two problems with crisis theory have been pointed out in the literature. First, a greater distinction must be made among various levels of political support. In particular, dissatisfaction with political institutions or incumbents cannot automatically be taken as a rejection of existing democracy. Second, a demand overload is not the only source of political dissatisfaction, and possibly not even the most important one. Citizens may also be dissatisfied by an unresponsive *structure* of opposition—for instance, a party system that generates extremism, or a governing coalition that does not reflect voters' preferences. Indeed, a poorly functioning opposition structure can also block the delivery of state services. Citizens' dissatisfaction may result not from an overloaded state but from an impasse or gridlock among actors.

Easton's (1965, 1975; also Parsons 1967)

[1] Important earlier variants of this proposition include Weber (1968) and the elite theorists; later variants include Lipset ([1960] 1981). I will restrict my discussion to Schumpeter for reasons of space.

[2] Linz (1988a) inverted this argument by proposing that, with the growth of international capitalism, citizens no longer attribute economic crises to state incapacity. Thus, the political realm is more shielded from a legitimation crisis today than in the classical age of national capitalism.

distinction between diffuse system support and specific evaluation of state outputs or performance is probably the most influential typology of political support in Western democracies.[3] A large empirical literature developed that revolves around this distinction. Miller (1974) analyzed the decline in the University of Michigan's "trust in government" survey indicators from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s and argued that the legitimacy of the American political system was eroding. Citrin (1974) expressed skepticism on the basis of Easton's distinction, and claimed that the indicators were not adequate for measuring diffuse system support. Research on 1960s–1970s protest supported Citrin's argument by showing that many of those with least trust in state institutions expressed strongest support for democratic norms (e.g., Kaase 1971; Barnes and Kaase, et al. 1979). The refinement of indicators and, above all, the rebounding of trust in government in the 1980s reinforced the plausibility of the distinction (see Abramson 1983, and Dalton 1988, for literature reviews; also the later views of Miller 1983, and Citrin and Green 1986). By the time Lipset and Schneider ([1983] 1987) published their exhaustive study of the "confidence gap" which caps the literature, they could take the distinction between diffuse system support and confidence in specific institutions as essentially proven. The theoretical implication for a legitimation crisis was clear: low confidence in institutions does not necessarily entail rejection of existing democracy (see Lehman 1987).

Critics also argued that new-left and neo-conservative crisis theories focused on a state performance deficit (overload) as a source of popular disapproval, but neglected a poorly functioning structure of political opposition (impasse). The aspects of opposition structure that have most impact on political support are party-system polarization and fractionalization, the configuration of government and opposition, and cabinet stability.[4] Writers argue that the party system should present voters with clear alternatives, each capable of rotating into office, and none likely to destroy democracy. And governing coalitions should be stable and reflect voters' choices as directly as possible. These propositions follow from basic notions of representative democracy. Party systems and coalition forms comprise the subconstitutional underpinnings of democracy—the informal "rules of the game"—and their functioning affects not only confidence in the government but also the legitimation of the regime.

Extremely polarized or fractionalized party-systems are said to be "poorly-functioning" structures of opposition. Sartori's (1966, 1976; also di Palma 1977; Powell 1987) model of "polarized pluralism" is the most influential. In these systems, a large (but not majority) party governs more or less permanently in unstable coalitions with various other parties. And at least one extremist or antisystem party is in quasi-permanent opposition. Extremist parties are sufficiently unacceptable to others that they cannot form alternative coalitions, but they are strong enough to block alternative coalitions that do not include themselves. Sartori argues that this leads to stagnation and corruption at the center, frustration and radicalization at the periphery, and instability of governing coalitions. He cites Weimar Germany, Fourth-Republic France, and contemporary Italy as examples.[5] Other writers argue that party-system fractionalization also threatens political support (e.g., Rae 1971; Powell 1982; Lane and Ersson 1986). It presents voters with unclear choices, governing coalitions tend to be unstable, and voters' preferences are seldom well represented. However, Sani and Sartori (1983) argue that once polariza-

[3] Most other typologies in the literature tap the same dimension. For instance, Held (1987, pp. 181–82, 238) identifies seven levels of acceptance of political institutions, on a continuum from coercion to a belief that the institutions satisfy one's normative ideals.

[4] The literature on opposition structures is enormous and disparate, and for the sake of brevity, I have been selective. For instance, I do not discuss neo-corporatism here, although it might be relevant theoretically. Schmitter (1981) claims that neo-corporatism permits the state to handle greater loads, and Scholten (1987) argues that many instances of consociationalism (discussed below) are really epiphenomena of neo-corporatism (see also Schmitter and Lehmbruch 1979; Lehmbruch and Schmitter 1982). However, I was unable to find indicators in the literature that I could use in the empirical analyses below.

[5] The depolarization of the Italian party system in the 1970s and 1980s led some to question Sartori's theory (e.g., Daalder 1983).

tion is controlled for, fractionalization has little independent effect.

Oversized governing coalitions are also said to reflect "poorly functioning" structures of opposition. they tend to generate antisystem extremism and polarization because few major prosystem parties are in opposition, available to rotate into office or to criticize the government. This undermines political support. Minority cabinets create similar problems because they involve informal cooperation of the major opposition parties, but with only one side holding cabinet posts. Governments usually survive with "floating" parliamentary majorities or Italian-style *trasformismo*. Lijphart (1977, 1984; also McRae 1974; Nordlinger 1972) points out an important exception to this pattern, where oversized coalitions are meant to *promote* political support. In "consociational democracies," plural societies with high levels of intercommunal conflict, parties are closely tied to ascriptive communities and experience little change in voting strength. Permanent opposition status in such cases could lead to radicalization and heightened intergroup conflict. Grand coalition governments of all major parties (combined with elements of federalism and proportional allocation of state services) attempt to reduce extreme underlying intercommunal conflict by building trust among opposing elites. Successful historical examples include the Netherlands, Belgium, and Austria; the most spectacular failure was the Lebanese republic.

Finally, cabinet instability is also said to undermine political support: constant turnover interferes with the representative function of elections and encourages antisystem sentiment. Yet most investigators do not measure political support directly (see the reviews in Strom 1988; Browne, Frendreis, and Gleiber 1988). Instead, cabinet stability itself is treated as an indicator of democracy (e.g., Powell 1982; Zimmermann 1987, 1988). Exceptions to this rule include Schmitt (1983) and Harmel and Robertson (1986), who find that cabinet stability has a positive effect on legitimation, as measured independently with survey data.

Thus, opposition structure may affect political support as much or more than state performance. Yet for a long time, scholars did not argue that the overload model was wrong, only that the model of impasse works in parallel. Since the mid-1970s, interpretations have shifted. Researchers noted that the new wave of transitions to democracy in southern Europe, Latin America, and elsewhere, occurred *in the midst of a performance crisis* (e.g., O'Donnell, Schmitter, and Whitehead 1986; Diamond, Linz, and Lipset, forthcoming). Others applied these observations to a reanalysis of the causes of democratic collapse or survival in the Great Depression and other times (e.g., Linz 1978; Linz and Stepan 1978; Zimmermann and Saalfeld 1988). Scholars now began to insist that the structure of opposition is the *key* variable affecting political support, and that state performance is virtually irrelevant. Democracies can survive even severe performance crises if their structures of opposition do not block attempts to address the problems. But if there is an impasse, problems in political support will escalate in a deadly spiral, until the regime itself is threatened.

A CONSOLIDATED MODEL OF POLITICAL SUPPORT

One can summarize these criticisms of new-left/neo-conservative crisis theories as a series of testable propositions. Poor state performance may lead to a crisis of confidence, but it is unlikely to lead to a legitimation crisis (a rejection of democracy). Citizens' evaluation of democracy is likely to decline only if democracy itself is perceived not to function as it should. When the structure of opposition is unresponsive, democracy is perceived to function poorly. Thus, a poorly functioning structure of opposition can cause legitimation problems.

Figure 1 consolidates these propositions in a unified model, along with several additional propositions. The model incorporates the distinctions among types and sources of political support developed above.

The *Types of Political Support* (subjective

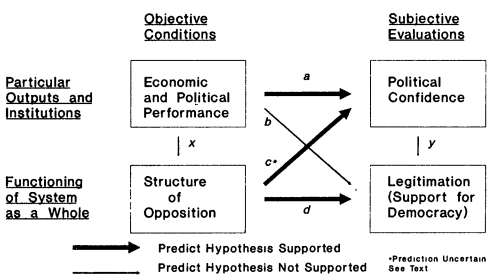

Fig. 1. Political Support: Hypotheses

evaluations) are adapted from Easton's distinctions. (1) "Political Confidence" is a positive evaluation of representative institutions: citizens trust them to represent their interests properly. (2) "Legitimation," or Support for Democracy, is a positive evaluation of the way the political realm is structured and political actors interact, even if one is not happy about outcomes. That is, citizens feel that the rules of the game and the conduct of the players are fair, even if their side does not win.

Different *Types of Objective Conditions* that affect political support can also be distinguished. (1) "Performance" is the state's output of services to the population that assure economic benefits and maintain civil order.[6] (2) The "Structure of Opposition" concerns the functioning of the political realm itself. I focus here on subconstitutional factors like the party system, coalition-forms, and cabinet stability; but other factors could also be included.

In Figure 1, I classify these elements into deeper and more superficial levels. The more superficial elements (performance and political confidence) concern particular outputs of particular state institutions. The more fundamental elements concern the functioning of the whole system: the rules of the game and the interactions among the players.

In Figure 1, I also treat political support as a dependent variable, and the objective conditions as an independent variable. Other types of causality are possible, and I speculate about several in the conclusion. The propositions summarized above are included, along with several others, as causal paths or hypotheses, labeled a-d, x and y. Heavy path lines indicate that I predict the hypothesis will be supported, light path lines that they will not be supported.[7]

- *Path "a"* corresponds to Lipset and Schneider's theory of a "confidence gap." It says that poor state performance will lead to a decline of confidence in state institutions (or incumbents). It also accepts Schumpeter's image of an overload. I predict that this will be supported.
- *Path "b"* is the new-left/neo-conservative theory of legitimation crisis, also based on the image of a demand overload. It says that if the state does not deliver the expected services, the population will turn against the existing democratic regime. I predict that it will not be supported.
- *Path "y"*, together with path "a", is an indirect form of the new-left/neo-conservative legitimation-crisis theory (path "b"). It says that low confidence in institutions will escalate into a rejection of democracy. I also predict that this will not be supported. The lack of a causal connection here underscores the distinction between deeper and more superficial levels of political support. It means that the regime has "reservoirs" of legitimacy that are not easily drained by poor performance. Whether a reservoir of legitimacy could be drained in the "long run" by persistently poor performance—as with all long runs—is virtually imponderable in theory and quite difficult to test empirically.[8]
- *Path "c"* says that a poorly functioning structure of opposition will drive down confidence in state institutions. The literature is relatively silent on this point. There are two possibilities. Deeper-level problems might lead to dissatisfaction at both the deep and superficial levels—or alternatively, this might not happen because causality would have to move across "levels." I lean toward the first proposition, but the second also seems plausible.
- *Path "d"* is a theory of legitimation crisis based on the image of a structural impasse. It says that if the opposition structure is not responsive—especially if the party system or coalition structure does not provide prosystem alternatives—support for democracy will decline. The population will abandon a game whose rules do not work. I predict that this will be supported.
- *Path "x"*, together with path "d", is

[6] Economic and political outputs can be distinguished, but I do not examine relations between them for reasons of space.

[7] The predictions follow from the theoretical discussion above, but in several cases, I cannot give full supporting arguments due to lack of space.

[8] If Reagan promoted "trust in government" only by means of deficit spending, one could argue that a future crisis would drive down confidence and—in the "long run"—support for democracy as well. This implies that citizens will think another regime-form could do better. Yet at this writing, populations of many debt-ridden Latin American democracies do not favor a reintroduction of authoritarianism, largely because earlier authoritarian regimes performed no better.

another indirect version of the new-left/neo-conservative legitimation-crisis theory (path "b"). It says that a good opposition structure will not hold up under poor state performance (e.g., if protest voting leads to polarization), and that as the structure of opposition collapses, so will support for democracy. But recent work on the Great Depression suggests that precisely this did not happen (Zimmermann and Saalfeld 1988): I predict that it will not be supported. On the other hand, a bad opposition structure might also block state outputs (path "x" in reverse), and blocked outputs might lead to reduced confidence (path "a"). This is an indirect form of path "c" and might be more plausible.

The model in Figure 1 has several clear restrictions: it does not exhaust all possible types of objective conditions or political support; it makes no predictions below the aggregate level; it excludes interaction terms; and it examines only one causal order without feedback loops. But it is parsimonious and clear. I mention other factors that I have proposed elsewhere, like the age of the regime or a "honeymoon" period for new democracies (Weil 1985, unpublished), only when they seem unavoidable in explaining the results. Otherwise, I limit the analysis to this model. If the model holds up, it will be possible to add complexity in future research. In the conclusion, I discuss one variation created by relaxing some of these restrictions. Other variations are possible.

INDICATORS OF POLITICAL SUPPORT, PERFORMANCE, AND OPPOSITION STRUCTURE

Data were collected for six countries: the United States, Britain, France, West Germany, Italy, and Spain.[9] Economic and political performance and the structure of opposition are measured at the aggregate, country level. I tried, with modifications, to employ indicators widely used in the literature. The indicators of political support are derived from opinion surveys, and are also aggregated to the country level. These data go considerably beyond those previously collected.[10]

Three indicators of economic performance were calculated. (*a*) Economic hardship is measured by a "misery index," the sum of the average annual rate of unemployment plus the annual rate of inflation. (*b*) Opinions about the national economy are measured with survey data. Some variation occurs in the question wording (see discussion below), but questions always refer to the national economy and not the respondent's personal or familial well-being. (*c*) The rate of economic growth is a three-year moving average of annual real change in gross domestic product, measured with constant currency (i.e., controlling for inflation) (OECD 1988, Table 3.1; OECD 1983; Flora et al. 1987, pp. 370–400).

Political performance is measured by an index of civil disorder, a factor score computed from annual rates of demonstrations, riots, political deaths, and governmental sanctions (Taylor and Jodice 1983). These four elements are highly intercorrelated. The first factor captures 64 percent of the variance (eigenvalue = 2.6), and the mean loading for the variables is .80. The factor analysis was conducted over all six countries in order to preserve cross-national variation.[11] Civil disorder indexes are often used in the literature as indicators of the extent of democracy (as dependent variables; e.g., Hibbs 1973; Powell 1982). I use the index mainly as an indicator of state performance (an independent variable), but for comparability to other studies, I will also examine it briefly as a dependent variable.

Two features of party systems are employed, system fractionalization and system polarization. Fractionalization is Rae's (1971) index,

$$\text{Fractionalization} = 1 - \Sigma_{i=1}^{n} p_i^2,$$

where p is the percent vote for party i, with n parties. Although its properties are debated in the literature, the index is the most widely

[9] Data were also collected for Austria, but the time series were not sufficiently long or densely populated to be included in the analyses.

[10] Data for the dependent variables are reported in the analysis section below; data for the independent variables are available from the author on request.

[11] Hibbs (1973) and Powell (1982) use similar indicators. They deal with extreme outliers either by truncating the data back to the ninetieth percentile (Hibbs) or by calculating a log transformation (Powell). Much the same effect is achieved here by using factor scores, which are measured in standard deviations.

used indicator (Pedersen 1980). In this study, fractionalization values are carried over from each election year, through off-years, to the following election year.

Scholars disagree more on how best to measure polarization of a party system. But Lane and Ersson (1987, p. 159) show that most measures are strongly correlated, and recent studies have converged on a weighted standard deviation as a suitable indicator. I use a slight modification of Powell's (1987, p. 176) index,

$$\text{Polarization} = \Sigma_{i=1}^{n} p_i(x_i - \bar{x})^2$$

where:

x_i = the mean left-right self-placement of supporters of party i,
$\bar{x}$ = the mean left-right self-placement of all party supporters,
p_i = the percent vote for party i,
n = the number of parties.

Left-right self-placement of party supporters and all voters is taken from published analyses of opinion surveys conducted from the mid-1970s to the early 1980s (Inglehart and Klingemann 1976; Sani and Sartori 1983; and Maravall and Santamaria 1985). Since these party self-placements probably did not remain absolutely constant over time, the following assumptions were incorporated (the surveys were used to anchor self-placement at the date of data collection). (*a*) Parties converged somewhat in the post-war period, 1945–1960, as right parties came to accept increased welfare-state measures and nationalization, and left parties softened demands for more radical change. (*b*) In the following period, 1960–1975, left parties moved somewhat left to capture the emerging new-left constituencies. And (*c*) since the oil crisis, 1975 to the present, all parties have generally moved moderately to the right, led by conservatives like Reagan and Thatcher.[12]

[12] The following table summarizes these assumptions.

Ideological Movements (in standard deviations)

	1945–1960	1960–1975	1975–1988
Right parties	.5 s.d. Left	0	.5 s.d. Right
Center parties	0	0	0

An index of government coalitions was calculated on the premise that no country in the sample is a consociational democracy (but see Gunther, Sani, and Shabad 1986, regarding consociational elements in Spain's transition to democracy). Oversized or minority coalitions are predicted to be unconducive to political support. A government-opposition pattern is coded 1, whether the government is a single majority party or a minimum-winning coalition of parties. Oversized and minority cabinets, where the major opposition parties govern together (formally or informally) are coded 0.[13] To apply a concept of coalition government to the Presidential systems of the United States and France, the index was adapted as follows. When the President's party is the same as the Congressional/Parliamentary majority, government is considered majoritarian and is coded 1. When the President's party differs from the Congressional/Parliamentary majority (one or both chambers in America), government is considered oversized and is coded 0. In both parliamentary and presidential systems, the coalition

Ideological Movements (in standard deviations)

	1945–1960	1960–1975	1975–1988
Left parties	.5 s.d. Right	.5 s.d. Left	.5 s.d. Right
Exceptions (see explanation below):			
West German FDP	1 s.d. Left	.5 s.d. Left	.5 s.d. Right
Spanish AP	—	—	.5 s.d. Left

The exceptions are made for the following reasons. The West German FDP changed coalition partners several times, and the literature suggests corresponding voter shifts. Empirical survey data shows substantial ideological change for the Spanish AP. No data were available for several parties. Thus, the West German Communists and Greens were coded the same as the French Communists. The West German far right was coded the same as the Italian MSI, but one standard deviation further Left. No further attempt was made to fine-tune these party movements, but the results are similar to those with an index that assumes no ideological change.

[13] The present index is a dummy variable. Coding oversized, minority, and minimum-winning coalitions ordinally produces virtually identical results.

index is calculated as a moving average of coalition forms over the previous 10 years. Data on governing coalitions are drawn from Flora et al. (1983, pp. 153–90), von Beyme (1984, pp. 484–509), and recent issues of the *Economist*).

Finally, an index of government stability was calculated as a moving average of cabinet duration (in months) over the previous 10 years. The data come from the same sources as those for coalitions.

Political support (the dependent variables) and subjective opinion on the economy (an independent variable) are measured with opinion survey data, which come from a larger compilation covering various aspects of political culture. Data collection proceeded in several steps intended to assure maximal comprehensiveness. First, I searched major published sources of survey results for relevant items: publications of the survey organizations themselves (e.g., the regular publications of the International Gallup Poll), codebooks from survey archives (mainly the ICPSR), compilations of survey results, opinion survey journals, and previous studies. Second, I commissioned several archives to search for relevant items; and I visited about 20 commercial and scholarly survey institutes and archives in six countries between March and June 1985 (listed in Appendix A). Roughly 30,000 to 50,000 pages of survey results (marginals and breakdowns) were photocopied, covering the period from 1945 to the present (earlier in some cases). The most relevant data were then selected, translated into English if necessary, coded and assigned keywords, and entered into a computer data base. The resulting political culture data base contains about 15,000 data points (survey questions asked at given times and in given countries) and is the most comprehensive one known to the author (see also Shapiro and Page 1988).

Survey questions were sought to measure the two theoretical dimensions of political support, confidence and support for democracy. Data were abundant, but they were sufficiently irregular that conventional procedures of index construction had to be modified. Few proven scales or indexes could be located as time series in different countries. Since the data were mostly available on an aggregate basis, item-to-item validity checks generally could not be conducted at the individual level. And standard dimensional analysis at the aggregate level had to be modified (see below) because many questions were asked at irregularly-spaced intervals, and the time series often did not overlap.

But if the data were too irregular for conventional methods of index construction, graphical evidence strongly suggested that summary scales would be appropriate in many cases. Items that seemed similar at face value, or that approximated scale components tested elsewhere, tended to move in parallel. The Italian Political Trust Scale in Figure 2 provides perhaps the best example. When visual inspection of the graphed data seemed to warrant the creation of a summary index, scales were created in one of two principle ways. If the index items were asked in the same years and were of similar magnitudes, the index was simply a mean score of the component time series. If the data were non-overlapping or of widely-varying magnitudes, some time-points were interpolated, and indexes were computed by adding the mean year-to-year change among items to the previous year's index value. Indexes were begun at a level that approximated the beginning levels of their component items. Interpolations in time series were made only when the gaps were two years or less, and interpolations were avoided over periods of extreme stress like the oil crisis of 1974. Finally, standard validation procedures were used to test the composition of the indexes. The scales were correlated and visually checked against their component parts; and their robustness was tested by correlating and visually checking them against indexes calculated by different methods. For example, alternative indexes were constructed by interpolating all missing data and computing

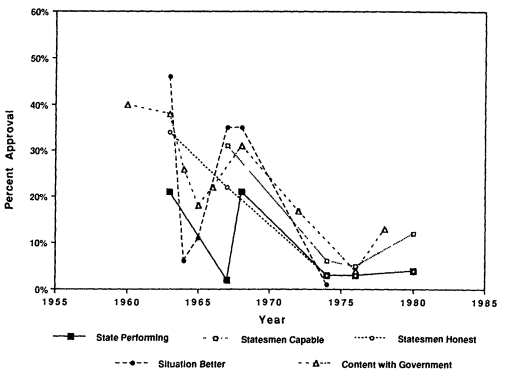

Fig. 2. Italy: Components of the Political Trust Scale

factor scores.[14] These methods of scale construction would not be appropriate for very "clean" data, but they seemed adapted to irregular data when graphs suggest that summary indicators are appropriate. Appendix B contains the texts of the scale components and other items.

Political confidence is measured by "Political Trust Indexes" in the U.S., Italy, Spain, and West Germany, and by additional individual questions repeated in various countries. The Trust Indexes are designed to approximate closely the Michigan Election Studies' "Trust in Government" scales (see, e.g., Abramson 1983). The indexes include items on trust in the government or parliament, on the honesty and competence of people in government, on the waste of tax money, and on satisfaction with the overall performance of the state. Additional indicators of political confidence are questions whether one cares who wins elections (U.S.), whether the budget is fair (Britain), whether there are important differences between the parties or whether they are all the same (Britain), whether the Parliament is doing a good job as representative of the people (Germany), and whether Members of Parliament (MPs) really represent the interests of the people as against special interests or party interests (Germany).[15] Support for democracy is measured first by a series of identical questions taken from the Eurobarometer surveys about how well democracy is functioning in the respondent's country. Additional indicators include indexes in West Germany of support for democracy and opposition to Nazism, and questions in Spain on whether one person should rule (as against elected representatives) and whether political parties should be legally permitted.

Finally, the nature of the scales imposes an important limitation on the sort of analyses that can be performed here. No absolute levels of political support are reported or analyzed, but only relative levels. This is because scales are sometimes set to arbitrary "starting points," as described above, and because scale compositions vary from country to country. For this reason, this study should not be considered to be fully historical *and* comparative, but rather a study of parallel time series in different countries. Cross-national comparisons are limited to the timing of peaks and valleys and the influence of several exogenous variables.

ANALYSES

Is/Was There a Crisis?

The decline and subsequent rise of confidence in government from the 1950s to the 1980s is well documented for the United States (Lipset and Schneider [1983] 1987; Citrin and Green 1986). But was there a crisis of confidence in other countries, as well? And was a decline in confidence accompanied by a softening of support for democracy?

A glance at the time series of political support indicators in Table 1 suggests several straightforward answers (also see Figures 3–7). Most political confidence indicators dip sometime in the late 1960s and 1970s in most countries. Yet most indicators of support for democracy rise or show no clear trend. Thus, the answer seem to be "yes and no": there was a decline of confidence, but it has risen again. And the decline of confidence did not lead to a rejection of democracy.

The data are fairly consistent on these points. The American Political Trust Index declined steadily from the mid-1960s to 1980 and then rose again (Table 1, Column A). The trend in the Spanish Political Trust Index (C) was almost exactly parallel, and its course in Italy (B) was similar. Political Trust in Germany (D) did not decline much, but an otherwise steady rise flattened out in this period. Most of the single-question indicators of political confidence followed roughly similar courses: caring who wins elections in the U.S. (E), believing that the parties are not all the same in Britain (G), and saying that politicians act in the interest of the country in Germany (I). Two additional questions did not follow the same pattern. Belief that the budget is fair in Britain (F) showed no clear trend, and approval of Parliament in Germany (H) rose.

In contrast, support for democracy tended

[14] The factor-based indexes gave stronger results than did the year-to-year change indexes. I did not use the factor-based indexes because I was uncomfortable with so much interpolation and because their trend curve did not visually approximate those of the component items as well.

[15] The additional indicators are less validated in the literature as measures of confidence. They may also tap elements of anomie or efficacy, but they differ from validated indexes of the latter.

Table 1. Indicators of Political Support: Percentages or Index Values

	Indicators of Political Support[a]																
YEAR	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	J	K	L	M	N	O	P	Q
1946															30		
1947															22		
1948															22		
1950				21										35			
1951				21			71	35	25					43			
1952				28	67		59		33					49	24		
1953				32				46	39					48	26		
1954				34				49	39					55	31		
1955				36		50		57	42					59	30		
1956				31	63	43		46	38					58	32		
1957				33		42	74	55	36					60	32		
1958	63			29	53	62	40	37	41					60	33		
1959				45		56	58	56						60	34		
1960		40		41	65	41		52						62	36		
1961				46		33	54	55						59	37		
1962						48	46							57	37		
1963		35		39		59	50	46						62	36		
1964	65	16		38	66	41	62		51					66	36		
1965		14				51	59	52						69	37		
1966	59	22	67		65	60									39	35	
1967		23		44		56	50	58							42		
1968	56	29		36	65	43	51	50						68	42		
1969						59	43								48		
1970	48				60	66	40	53							54		
1971						61											21
1972	47	17			60	64	47		43								
1973				29		55			36	44	41	60	27	74	53		37
1974	37	3			57	56	52							78	51	60	
1975			52	26		51				31	36	64	15	82	49		56
1976	35	4		43	57	63	48			51	42	79	14	86	50	56	59
1977						36	42			59	49	78	12	85	51	78	
1978	34	13			43	68			55	51	49	76	26	87	56		
1979			23			44				53	41	80	21	91	60	76	
1980	30	7	17			57				51	36	73	21	84	63	77	
1981			16	40		22				49	53	70	20	81			
1982	31		19	37	56	56				60	44	68	21	79		82	
1983				52		53		67		64	46	71	20	82			
1984	44		50	44	64	60				60	41	71	20	82			74
1985	49					41				52	44	73	25	84			73
1986	38									51	49	75	30	86			
1987										58	52	75	30	86			

[a] Indicators of Political Support:
A. U.S.: Political trust index
B. Italy: Political trust index
C. Spain: Political trust index
D. Germany: Political trust index
E. U.S.: Care who wins elections (% agree)
F. Britain: Budget is fair (% agree)
G. Britain: Differences between parties (% agree)
H. Germany: Approve of Parliament (% agree)
I. Germany: MPs represent the people (% agree)
J. Britain: Democracy "works" well (% agree)
K. France: Democracy "works" well (% agree)
L. Germany: Democracy "works" well (% agree)
M. Italy: Democracy "works" well (% agree)
N. Germany: Support for democracy index
O. Germany: Opposition to Nazism index
P. Spain: More than one person should rule (% agree)
Q. Spain: Permit political parties (% agree)

to grow or remain relatively stable. The German Democracy and Anti-Nazi Indexes (N and O) and the Spanish indicators of support for democracy (P and Q) all rose with little interruption over the entire period. Satisfaction with the way democracy works (J–M) generally rose in all countries, but the trends are weak. (The mean of regression slopes across countries is 0.7 percent per year, but the trend is significant at the .05 level only in Britain.) On the other hand, levels of satisfaction vary considerably from country to country.

These findings are consistent with the

notion that reservoirs of legitimacy prevent a decline of confidence from leading to a rejection of democracy (Figure 1, path "y"). This hypothesis is tested more directly by correlating political confidence indicators with support for democracy indicators (Table 2). The results for the whole period (first column) seem at first glance to be ambiguous. The British and Spanish results support the hypothesis. When falling confidence does not lead to a decline of support for democracy, the correlations are statistically insignificant. And when support for democracy rises despite falling confidence, the correlations are significantly negative.

The German and Italian correlations in the first column of Table 2 seem at first to contradict the hypothesis, but a closer inspection reveals that they do not. In both cases, positive correlations indicate that political confidence and support for democracy were both *rising* at the same time—in Germany during the 1950s and early 1960s, and in Italy during the 1980s. The German result is clear when the data are disaggregated by time in the last two columns of Table 2 (the Italian data are more recent and cannot be disaggregated). The positive German correlation is limited to the earlier part of the time series: after the mid-1960s, no significant positive correlation appeared between the two dimensions of political support. One could argue that until the first party rotation in office in the mid-1960s, Adenauer's Christian Democrats partially succeeded in identifying their own popularity with legitimation of democracy. But by the time the opposition took office, this link had been broken, and support for democracy became independent of political confidence. Analyses of individual-level survey data support this interpretation (Weil 1981).

Table 2. Political Support: Relation of Political Confidence to Support for Democracy (Pearson's r) (Path "y" in Figure 1)

	All Years	Until 1965[a]	After 1965[a]
	Political Trust Index		
Germany: Democracy index $N = 27, 16, 11$	.47**	.76**	.11
Germany: Anti-Nazi index $N = 23, 16, 7$	.25	.86**	−.65^{+}
Germany: Democracy "works" well $N = 8$	.77*	—	—
Italy: Democracy "works" well $N = 8$	.61^{+}	—	—
Spain: More than one person should rule $N = 6$	−.97**	—	—
Spain: Permit political parties $N = 4$	−.28		
	Approval of Parliament		
Germany: Democracy index $N = 19, 15, 4$	.74**	.57*	.90^{+}
Germany: Anti-Nazi index $N = 29, 15, 5$	.52**	.56*	−.30
	MPs Represent the People		
Germany: Democracy index $N = 12, 9, 3$	.74**	.84**	.90
Germany: Anti-Nazi index $N = 13, 9, 4$	.61*	.80**	.54
Germany: Democracy "works" well $N = 3$	.78	—	—
	Budget is Fair		
Britain: Democracy "works" well $N = 13$	−.02	—	—
	Differences Between Parties		
Britain: Democracy "works" well $N = 5$	−.85*	—	—

** $p < .01$ * $.01 < p < .05$ $^{+}.05 < p < .10$

[a] No entry indicates that data were available only after 1965.

Thus, there has been no significant tendency for a decline of political confidence to soften support for democracy. But in Italy in the 1980s and Germany before the mid-1960s, support for democracy sometimes rose at the same time that confidence was also rising. If there was a crisis, it was limited to a decline of political confidence: a reservoir of goodwill for democracy prevented the "confidence gap" from turning against the regime itself.

The Determinants of Political Support

If political confidence and support for democracy rose and fell independently, are they determined by separate factors? the hypotheses state that political confidence is affected mainly by state performance, and that support for democracy is affected mainly by the structure of opposition. They further state that state performance does not have much effect on support for democracy, and that opposition structure may or may not affect political confidence. I discuss the effects of the two clusters of independent variables separately in the following sections.

Economic and political performance. The effects of the performance indicators (Table 3), for the most part, strongly confirm the

Table 3. Relation of Economic and Political Performance to Political Support (Pearson's *r*) (Paths "a" and "b" in Figure 1)

	Misery[a] Index	Opinion on Economy	Ave. Growth of GDP	Civil[a] Disorder Index
	Political Confidence			
U.S.: Political trust index $N = 14, 13, 14, 8$	.83**	.88**	.54*	−.49
Italy: Political trust index $N = 18, 14, 18, 15$	.76**	.91**	.89**	.37^{+}
Spain: Political trust index $N = 7, 6, 7, 2$	.71*	.97**	.92**	—
Germany: Political trust index $N = 26, 18, 27, 23$	.40*	.24	−.40*	.52**
U.S.: Care who wins elections $N = 14, 14, 13, 11$	.68**	.58**	.44^{+}	−.35
Britain: Budget is fair $N = 29, 26, 31, 23$	−.04	.00	.14	−.41*
Britain: Differences between parties $N = 22, 18, 23, 23$	.16	.48*	−.03	.33^{+}
Germany: Approve of Parliament $N = 21, 14, 21, 20$	.32^{+}	.62**	−.56**	.45*
Germany: MPs represent the people $N = 13, 7, 13, 12$	.65**	.01	−.56*	.62**
	Support for Democracy			
Britain: Democracy "works" well $N = 12, 13, 14, 5$	.27	.25	.26	.57
France: Democracy "works" well $N = 12, —, 13, 4$	.11	—	−.10	.87^{+}
Germany: Democracy "works" well $N = 12, 11, 14, 5$	.30	.16	.46*	.39
Italy: Democracy "works" well $N = 13, 9, 14, 5$	.31	−.01	.31	.18
Germany: Support for democracy index $N = 30, 22, 34, 24$	−.05	.36^{+}	−.87**	.51**
Germany: Opposition to Naxism index $N = 30, 22, 31, 30$	.04	.20	−.80**	.45**
Spain: More than one person should rule $N = 9, 9, 9, 4$	−.96**	−.93**	−.92**	−.68
Spain: Permit political parties $N = 9, 6, 9, 5$	−.98**	−.99**	−.86**	−.92*

** $p < .01$ * $.01 < p < .05$ $^{+}.05 < p < .10$

[a] Sign of indicator reversed: positive correlation indicates support for hypotheses.

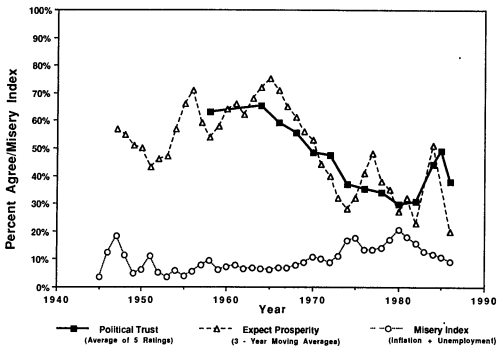

Fig. 3. United States: Economic Performance and Political Trust

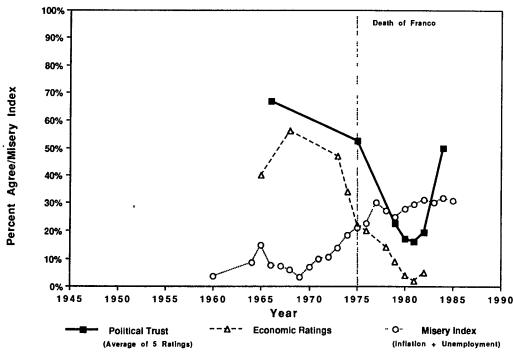

Fig. 5. Spain: Economic Performance and Political Trust

hypotheses: performance positively affects political confidence but not support for democracy. Most of the correlations in the upper panel of Table 3 (effects on confidence) are strong, significant, and in the predicted direction. And most of the correlations in the lower panel (effects on support for democracy) are weak, insignificant, and/or opposite the predicted direction. Figures 3–5 dramatically show the effects of the misery index and subjective opinion on the economy on the Political Trust Indexes in the U.S., Italy, and Spain. Confidence rises and falls with economic conditions, and the tracking is uncommonly close for this sort of data.

Although several exceptions to the overall pattern appear, most can be incorporated into the hypotheses with little adjustment. The most important of these are the negative correlations between performance and support for democracy in Spain. But these results actually provide strong support for the hypotheses. For they indicate that support for democracy grew in Spain *despite* severe and growing problems of performance—rising unemployment (over 20 percent), slowing growth, and serious levels of terrorism.

Figure 6 displays these trends dramatically. The growth of support for democracy in the face of poor performance is especially impressive because political confidence *plummeted* at the same time (see Figure 5). Yet it makes little sense to speak of a reservoir of democratic legitimacy in this case because democratic sentiment grew around the time of the transition to democracy. It seems more appropriate to speak of an extension of credit to democracy or of a honeymoon period.

The negative effects of GDP growth on political support in Germany constitute a second exception to the main pattern. Disaggregating the time-series shows that the negative effects are restricted to the earlier period (disaggregation not shown). In the later period, with one exception, the correlations become insignificant. Thus, political support appears to rise with falling economic growth rates shortly after the transition to democracy. One might be tempted to speak again here of a honeymoon period. But this would not be appropriate because conditions in Germany were actually improving rapidly. GDP growth fell from an extraordinary 11 percent in 1950 to 7 percent in 1960—still a

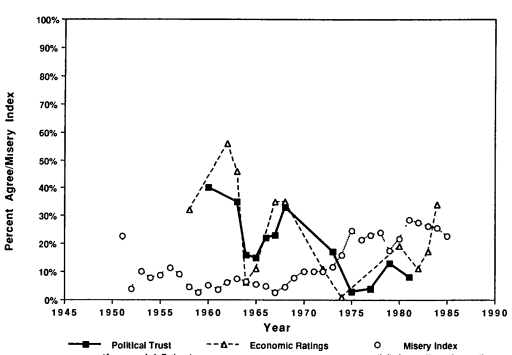

Fig. 4. Italy: Economic Performance and Political Trust

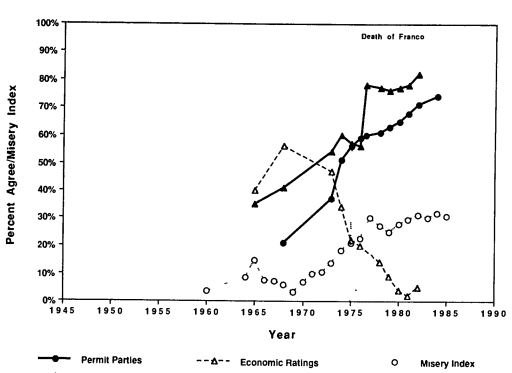

Fig. 6. Spain: Economy and Support for Democracy

very high rate of growth. The misery index and the civil disorder index both showed improvement in the same period. Thus, growing political support in the early decades of the Bonn Republic did not come in the face of poor performance, but of rapid improvement, even if the *rate* of improvement fell somewhat. In this respect, the negative correlation of political support with GDP growth is something of a statistical artifact.

A similar explanation applies to the negative correlation between the civil disorder index and political confidence in America. Figure 7 reveals the cause. The civil disorder curve in the U.S. resembles a mountain, centering on the racial conflicts and opposition to the Vietnam War of the 1960s and 1970s—the same period that confidence declined. But the civil disorder curve peaked in the mid-to-late 1960s. While it remained high by international standards in the 1970s, it was now dropping. In a mirror image of the previous German example, American conditions were not good, but they were becoming less bad. The improving curve produces the negative correlation with confidence, but once again, the result is something of a statistical artifact.[16] Rather, the data suggest that civil disorder was an important *catalyst* in spurring the decline of confidence in government (see also the debate in Miller 1974; Citrin 1974).

Finally, five significantly positive correlations between state performance and support for democracy were not predicted. Two of them, involving judgments of the functioning of democracy in France and Germany, stand as exceptions to the main pattern. But the three positive correlations involving the Democracy and the Anti-Nazi indexes in Germany can be explained by disaggregating the time series by period. In the earlier part of the Bonn Republic (until 1965), support for democracy or opposition to Nazism rose at the same time that state performance improved. But in the later period, the correlations became insignificant—or in one case, even mildly significantly negative.

Thus, with only a few exceptions that cannot be explained, the results in Table 3 support the hypotheses in Figure 1 (paths "a" and "b"). The state's political and economic performance affects the level of political confidence. But poor performance does not weaken support for democracy. On the contrary, support for democracy grew in Spain *despite* poor state performance, and *despite* the fact that confidence fell in response to poor performance. Thus, we again find no evidence that a confidence gap caused by poor state performance necessarily leads to a weakening of support for a democratic regime. Ordinarily, one would argue that this limitation is due to reservoirs of legitimacy. But Spain suggests an amendment to this proposition, for new democracies are unlikely to have accumulated such reservoirs. In such cases, a honeymoon period may serve as a functional equivalent to the reservoir of regime support and prevent poor performance from leading to a deeper legitimation crisis.

The structure of opposition. The hypotheses in Figure 1 state that an unresponsive opposition structure will lessen support for democracy and may reduce political confidence (paths "d" and "c", respectively). The results in Table 4 broadly support the hypotheses, but at first glance, less convincingly than was the case for state performance (see Table 3). The structure of opposition affects support for democracy as predicted in most cases, but there are exceptions. And opposition structure often has a positive effect on political confidence, although it was unclear whether this should be expected.

The German results account for many of the apparent disconfirmations, especially the

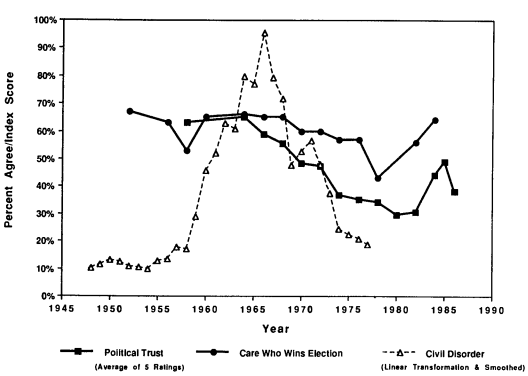

Fig. 7. United States: Civil Disorder and Political Confidence

[16] In cases where extreme (good or bad), but moderating, levels of performance produce an unpredicted correlation, causation might be better modeled as a cumulative process. This is not done here, but the substantive findings underscore the importance of examining graphical representations of the data.

Table 4. Relation of Structure of Opposition to Political Support (Pearson's r) (Paths "c" and "d" in Figure 1)

	Polariz.[a] Index	Fraction.[a] index	Coalit. Index	Cabinet Stabil.
	Political Confidence			
U.S.: Political trust index N = 8, 9, 14, 14	.88**	−.01	.66*	−.37+
Italy: Political trust index N = 18, 18, 18, 18	.84**	−.14	.42*	.44*
Spain: Political trust index N = 5, 5	.73+	.61	—[b]	—
Germany: Political trust index N = 27, 27, 27, 27	.52**	.50**	.05	−.19
U.S.: Care who wins elections N = 11, 12, 14, 14	.29	.44+	.57+	−.36
Britain: Budget is fair N = 31, 31, 31, 31	−.08	−.05	—	.01
Britain: Differences between parties N = 23, 23, 23, 23	−.23	.37*	—	.03
Germany: Approve of Parliament N = 21, 21, 21, 21	.38*	.63**	−.16	−.46*
Germany: MPs represent the people N = 13, 13, 13, 13	.68**	.67**	−.16	−.48*
	Support for Democracy			
Britain: Democracy "works" well N = 15, 15, 15, 15	.09	−.10	—	.11
France: Democracy "works" well N = 15, 15, 14, 14	.44+	.50*	−.48*	.12
Germany: Democracy "works" well N = 15, 15, 15, 15	−.21	−.04	.53*	.61**
Italy: Democracy "works" well N = 15, 15, 15, 15	.62**	−.53*	−.15	.76**
Germany: Support for democracy index N = 34, 34, 34, 34	.21	.86**	−.30*	−.82*
Germany: Opposition to Naxism index N = 32, 32, 32, 32	.47**	.87**	−.63**	−.86**
Spain: More than one person should rule N = 5, 5	.06	.86*	—	—
Spain: Permit political parties N = 4, 4	.89+	.95*	—	—

** $p < .01$ * $.01 < p < .05$ + $.05 < p < .10$

[a] Sign of indicator reversed: positive correlation indicates support for hypotheses.

[b] Dash indicates Insufficient Variance.

negative and insignificant effects of the coalition index and cabinet stability. Yet as before, disaggregating the data helps explain the exceptions. The coalition index did not vary in Germany before the mid-1960s because the only oversized coalition was the Grand Coalition government of 1966–1969: but after the mid-1960s, almost all correlations are positive.[17] Likewise, German cabinet stability did not vary much in the earlier period, but all the negative correlations turn positive when measured in the later period alone (most, significantly). With these factors taken into account, the structure of opposition's effect on political support is considerably stronger than it first appeared.

The Spanish results again highlight these findings. While support for democracy rose despite poor state performance, it is *positively* correlated with a reduction of polarization and fractionalization in the party system. These are precisely the features that Juan Linz (1979, 1988b) has long stressed in his analyses of Spain's transition to, and its consolidation of, democracy. A democratic regime may survive poor economic conditions

[17] The three insignificant correlations with political confidence all become significantly positive, and one of the two negative correlations with support for democracy becomes (insignificantly positive.

and social unrest, but if the party system is unresponsive, there is a danger that the population may look to nondemocratic alternatives.

Two additional pieces of evidence support the proposition that the structure of opposition affects support for democracy. First, respondents in several countries were asked whether they saw any danger of Nazism regaining strength in West Germany (Figure 8). Since 1945, increasing numbers have said there is no such danger, but the otherwise rising curve dipped during the West German Grand Coalition government of 1966–69. (The dip appears to come later in Germany, but this may be due to the lack of data in key years.) This dip corresponds to a resurgence of neo-Nazi voting at that time. Although some analysts attributed the resurgence to the mild economic recession of the mid-1960s (e.g., Liepelt 1967), neo-Nazi voting did not rise again in the deeper recessions of the mid-1970s and early 1980s. Rather, one can argue that it was a protest vote whose direction was determined by the structure of opposition: with both major parties in office, there was no responsible opposition to vote for besides the Free Democratic Party (which was too small to form a government). If the Grand Coalition had not ended fairly quickly, it might have set in motion a deeper cycle of polarization and weakening of support for democracy.

A series of questions concerning support for democracy in France suggest similar conclusions (Figure 9). Fourth Republic France (1945–58) has long been cited as an example of the evils of the polarization and fragmentation of the party system and of cabinet instability (e.g., Sartori 1966, 1976). And DeGaulle's Fifth Republic has been cited as an example of a successful democracy,

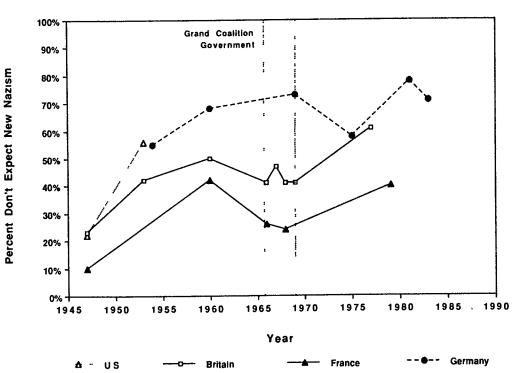

Fig. 8. No Danger of a New German Nazism

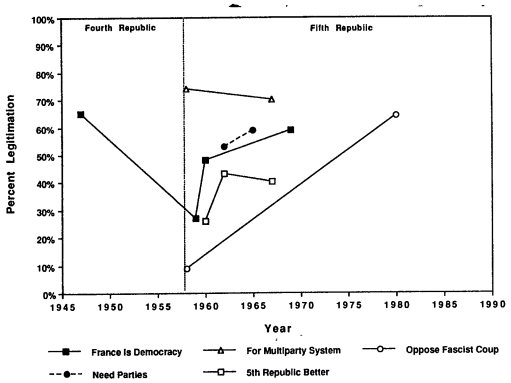

Fig. 9. France: Support for Democracy (Before and After Regime Crisis of 1958).

despite some tendencies toward centralization of power in the Presidency (e.g., Parodi and Platone 1985). The survey data are rather thin, but most time series suggest that evaluation of democracy and support for democracy fell during the Fourth Republic (before 1958) and rose during the Fifth Republic.

Thus, while state performance has little effect on support for democracy (Figure 1, path "b"), the structure of opposition does (path "d"). Polarization or fractionalization of the party system drive down support for democracy most.[18] But oversized or minority government coalitions and unstable executives also depress support for democracy. These findings fit the hypotheses well. If democracy is a game among players, the players are unlikely to reject the game solely because of its outcome, but rather because its rules are not working as designed. Although it was not necessarily predicted, opposition structure affected political confidence (path "c") almost as strongly as it did support for democracy ("d"). This finding implies that one should take the "systemic level" of the variables seriously More superficial objective conditions like state performance only affect more superficial evaluations like confidence. But more fundamental objective conditions, like opposition structure, affect both deeper *and* more superficial subjective evaluations: support for democracy *and* confidence.

[18] Sani and Sartori's (1983) argument that polarization is more important than fractionalization is not supported here. However, I analyze time series within countries, while they analyze comparative cross sections.

Does State Performance Affect Support for Democracy Indirectly?

An indirect version of new-left/neo-conservative theories posits that poor state performance depresses support for democracy by disrupting the structure of opposition. It is difficult to test such a multivariate hypothesis because the available data are so sparse. Still, an investigation of the bivariate links should give us a hint whether it is true.

Table 5 shows the correlations between state performance and opposition structure.[19] The pattern is so complex that no simple answer emerges. Of 74 correlation coefficients, only about half (38) suggest that poor state performance contributed to a breakdown of a "good" opposition structure. The rest show either no significant relationship (20) or a disconfirmation of the proposition (16). And the only country in which the results are especially consistent is Britain, but opposition structure did not vary much there. If state performance has an indirect effect on democratic legitimation, it must be shown that it has a direct effect on opposition structure. This cannot be definitely shown here.

The correlations in Table 5 are based on times series within countries, not cross-national comparisons. Cross-national studies in the literature do not obtain completely consistent results either. Yet most find neither indirect effects of state performance on democracy nor strong direct effect of state performance on opposition structure (e.g., Harmel and Robertson 1986; Powell 1982, pp. 102–3). European historical evidence is somewhat stronger in showing that state performance had little direct or indirect effect on the survival of democratic regimes. Zimmermann and Saalfeld (1988) summarize the first author's studies of the collapse of democracies in the 1930s. They show that economic crisis led to electoral volatility, and that polarization and a failure to form a democratic national consensus led to the collapse of democracy. But there was no link between electoral volatility and polarization (except in Germany). Therefore, there was no link, direct or indirect, between economic crisis and the collapse of democracy. Nor was there a direct link between economic crisis and polarization. It appears that the effects of state performance on the survival of democracy in the 1930s were largely absorbed by variation in the structure of opposition.

Thus, the proposition that state performance affects support for democracy indirectly through the structure of opposition remains plausible but undemonstrated. The weight of the evidence so far suggests that it is not true.

DISCUSSION: RESERVOIRS OF LEGITIMATION AND THE SURVIVAL OF DEMOCRACY

This article criticizes legitimation crisis theories proposed by both new-left and neo-conservative writers. They argue that the state is unable to satisfy rising demands for more services or for more input in decision making. As a result, support for the state is eroded: a legitimation crisis occurs that threatens democracy itself.

I argued that this scenario is logically improbable and historically rare because it neglects distinctions that must be made among both the sources and types of political support (objective conditions and subjective evaluations). When these are made, the likely outcomes look much different. In this study, I distinguished state performance from the functioning of the system as a whole, especially the opposition structure in the party system and government coalitions. And I distinguished political confidence from legitimation of democracy. On this basis, I proposed that poor performance can lead to a decline of confidence, but not to a softening of support for democracy. Yet problems in opposition structure *can* lead to a decline of support for democracy. And poor performance does not necessarily lead *indirectly* to rejection of democracy—not because it undermines a responsive opposition structure, nor because a confidence gap escalates to a legitimation crisis.

Broadly speaking, the empirical analyses supported the hypotheses. Support for democracy depends less on good state performance than on low party-system polarization of

[19] As noted earlier, the disorder index is sometimes used as an indicator of political support (a dependent variable). Table 5 shows correlations between the disorder index and all other independent variables. Cabinet stability and the misery index affect the disorder index as the literature predicts in most, but not all, cases. Otherwise, no strong patterns emerge: correlations tend to be either insignificant or inconsistent.

fractionalization and (to a lesser extent) minimum-winning coalitions and long-lived cabinets. Citizens judge democracy less by what it "gives" them than by whether it presents them with real (but not polarized) alternatives and responds to their choices. But political confidence depends on both performance and a responsive opposition structure. Citizens lose confidence if their representatives consistently fail to deliver the goods, but also if the rules of the game do not work. Indirect links in the model could not be tested adequately because the data were too thin to use multivariate methods. Still, it seems unlikely that state performance has an indirect effect on support for democracy. The intermediate links are not strong: lack of confidence is mainly unrelated to rejection of democracy, and state performance is only inconsistently related to opposition structure.

The results seem to imply that a "reservoir" of regime legitimation simply depends on a long history of responsive opposition structure. Much of the evidence points in this direction. West German support for democracy grew over the early decades of the Bonn Republic as the party system became less polarized and fractionalized. But Spain does not follow this pattern. To be sure, as in West Germany, support for democracy grew as the party system became less polarized and fractionalized. But support for democracy was already strong and growing *before* the transition to democracy. Many observers argue that the electorate, despite its desire to express dissatisfaction with poor government performance, avoided voting for extremist parties because it feared the polarization that had torn apart Spanish democracy in the 1930s (Maravall and Santamaria 1986; Gunther, Sani, and Shabad 1986). Something like a reservoir of support for democracy seems to have existed in Spain even before the factors that usually contribute to it emerged.

I suggested earlier that a "honeymoon period" might sometimes serve as a functional equivalent to a reservoir of legitimacy. But why should citizens extend credit to an unproven regime or make an "advance payment" to the reservoir? One possibility (not tested here) is that citizens might take opposition structures in *foreign* democracies as models, even before they experience them in their own country (see Weil 1987, unpublished). In such cases, the prestige of democracy abroad is already high at a country's own point of transition. Such

Table 5. Relation of Political and Economic Performance to Structure of Opposition (Person's r)[a] (Path "x" in Figure 1)

		U.S.	Italy	Spain	Germany	Britain	France
Misery Index	Polarization	.46**	.67**	−.40	.81**	.30*	.41**
	Franctionaliz.	.29*	−.03	−.69*	.28+	.77**	−.50**
	Coalitions	.62**	.43**	—	−.06	—	—
	Govt length	−.23+	.68**	—	.06	.52**	.82**
Econ Satisf.	Polarization	.66**	.66**	−.83*	−.26	.77**	—
	Fractionaliz.	.10	.17	−.29	.28+	.69**	—
	Coalitions	.41**	.14	—	−.17	—	—
	Govt length	−.34*	.33+	—	−.44*	.80**	—
Growth in GDP	Polarization	.48**	.05	.60*	−.27*	.44**	−.27*
	Fractionaliz.	.07	.06	.32	−.81**	.25+	−.12
	Coalitions	.13	−.77**	—	.26+	—	.29+
	Govt length	−.32*	−.61**	—	.77**	.24+	.68**
Disorder Index	Polarization	−.58**	.57**	—	.60**	−.08	−.15
	Fractionaliz.	.09	−.72**	—	.54**	.56**	.15
	Coalitions	.01	.72**	—	−.19	—	—
	Govt length	.41*	.78**	—	−.26+	.34*	.03
Disorder Index	Misery index	−.13	.48**	.79**	.40*	.58**	.18
	Econ satisf.	−.46**	.25	.89**	−.12	.42*	—
	Growth in GDP	−.53**	−.45**	.48**	−.44**	.02	.02
Mean N of observations		30	31	10	31	31	31

** $p < .01$ * $.01 < p < .05$ + $.05 < p < .10$

[a] The signs of the indicators have been adjusted so that a positive correlation indicates that good performance is correlated with a "good" structure of opposition.

"demonstration effects" might be restricted to "reference groups" of countries that believe their conditions are comparable. Thus, the Spanish population might have taken the successful construction of democracy in West Germany after Nazism as a model, even if Anglo-American models were regarded with distaste for other reasons. (Demonstration effects within reference groups of countries may have proceeded in a chainlike manner in recent years, as Latin Americans and the Filipinos took the Iberian peninsula as a model, and South Koreans looked to the Philippines.)

Do the present findings mean that state performance has absolutely no effect on democratic legitimation—or the survival of democracy? Do they constitute a disproof of legitimation crisis theories? Not necessarily. My model does not include every possible relationship between performance and legitimation. Two additional channels of influence can be considered by relaxing model restrictions. First, while performance has no direct or indirect *additive* effect on democratic legitimation, there may be *interaction* effects. Performance and legitimation might covary under an unresponsive opposition structure, but be unrelated under a responsive opposition structure. For instance, the Great Depression might not have "caused" the collapse of democracy in all Western countries because a responsive opposition structure shielded some of them from legitimation problems. Yet even in countries like Germany and Austria, which probably had low levels of legitimation[20] and did have unresponsive opposition structures, democracy might have survived and grown if not for the jolt of the economic crisis (Bracher 1970, and Zimmermann and Saafeld 1988 each suggest elements of this proposition). Analyses of post-1945 survey data might shed further light, but my own results are still preliminary. The disaggregated time series discussed earlier tend to support the hypothesis, but cross-national time series, like the "functioning of democracy," show no clear patterns. Interaction effects seem possible, but the evidence is not all in.

A second factor could be added to interaction effects: causal feedback loops. On one side, low legitimation and an unresponsive opposition structure might *reinforce each other* during a performance crisis as citizens become increasingly indifferent to democracy and cast ever more protest votes for antisystem parties. The performance crisis might aggravate an already vicious circle of delegitimation and unresponsive opposition structure. On the other side, high legitimation and a responsive opposition structure might reinforce each other during a performance crisis as citizens pull together to support democracy, voting only for *loyal* oppositions to "throw the bums out," not the regime. The performance crisis might not be able to penetrate a "virtuous circle" of legitimation and responsive opposition structure.

The model with interaction effects and feedback loops is considerably more complex than the one I tested, though my findings seem broadly consistent with it. Historical research on the Great Depression again supports it more clearly (e.g., Lepsius 1978; Zimmermann 1987). The economic crisis of the 1930s set in motion two identifiable dynamics. In democracies that collapsed (see Figure 10), the crisis prompted calls for a change in administration, and governing parties lost elections. Loyal opposition parties were not strong enough to form stable alternative coalitions; and low legitimation predisposed citizens to vote for antisystem parties, who thereby acquired veto power in forming new governments. The antisystem parties also controlled state performance by "controlling disorder." If they were excluded from government, they could "deliver disorder" on the streets, and endanger democracy. But if they were taken into government (their price for "withholding disorder") democracy was doomed. Thus, a vicious circle was formed. Performance crises led to new elections. Because democratic legitimation was low and prosystem parties were unable to form alternative coalitions, citizens voted for antisystem parties. The antisystem parties further blocked the formation of prodemocratic coalitions able to address the performance crisis—and a new cycle was initiated. Democracy was perceived not to have "worked" and was further delegitimated. In the second dynamic, in democracies that survived, the crisis also prompted calls for a change in administration, and the

[20] All propositions about legitimation and confidence before the advent of opinion surveys must be speculative. However, elite statements, the popular press, and literature suggest that support for democracy in Germany *was* weak in the 1920s and 1930s (see, e.g., Baum 1982).

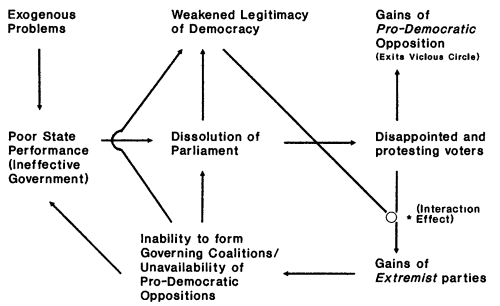

Fig. 10. Vicious Circle of Democratic Regime Collapse. A Modification of Zimmermann's (1987) Model

parties in government also lost elections. But with a responsive opposition structure and higher levels of democratic legitimation, citizens could cast their protest votes for loyal oppositions. A rotation in office occurred, an alternative prodemocratic coalition addressed the problems, and the system was perceived to have "worked." Regime legitimation was reinforced, and citizens felt encouraged to continue to choose among "system" alternatives.

At the current stage of research, this complex model cannot be verified. Research on the 1930s cannot measure mass legitimation directly, and my analysis is based on a simpler model. Indeed, data on postwar Western societies—already stretched thin to test the simple model—may not be sufficiently complete, or cover periods of sufficient strain, to test the more complex model. Perhaps data from other countries would help. But my findings from the simpler model do reduce the scope of the question. They indicate that opposition structure affects democratic legitimation directly. State performance hardly affects legitimation at all, or if it does, only in a bounded and indirect fashion.

APPENDIX A. SOURCES OF SURVEY DATA: SURVEY ORGANIZATIONS AND ARCHIVES.

Britain—(*a*) Social Surveys Limited (the Gallup Poll), London. (*b*) Market & Opinion Research International (MORI), London. (*c*) National Opinion Poll (NOP) Market Research Limited, London. (*d*) ESRC Data Archive, University of Essex.

France—(*a*) Institut Français d'Opinion Publique (IFOP-ETMAR), Paris. (*b*) Centre d'etude de la vie politique française (Cevipof) Archive, Paris.

Italy—(*a*) DOXA (Italian Gallup), Milan. (*b*) Demoskopea, S.R.L, Milan. (*c*) Eurisko, Milan. (*d*) GPF & Associati, Milan. (*e*) Archivio Dati e Programmi per le Scienze Sociali, Milan.

Spain—(*a*) Centro de Investigaciones Sociologicas (CIS), Madrid. (*b*) Instituto Gallup, S.A, Madrid.

United States—(*a*) Roper Center Archive, Storrs, CT. (*b*) Inter-University Consortium for Political and Social Research Archive, Ann Arbor. (*c*) Data and Program Library Service, Madison.

West Germany—(*a*) Institut für Demoskopie (IfD), Allensbach am Bodensee. (*b*) EMNID-Institut GmbH (West German Gallup), Bielefeld. (*c*) INFRATEST Forschung KG, Munich. (*d*) Zentralarchiv, Cologne.

APPENDIX B

Texts and Components of Political Support Indicators

I. Political Trust Indexes

A. *United States*

1. How much of the time do you think you can trust the government in Washington to do what is right—just about always, most of the time, or only some of the time? [None of the time.] (1958, 64, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 80, 82, 84, 85, 86)
2. Would you say the government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves or that it is run for the benefit of all people? (1964, 66, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 82, 84)
3. Do you think that people in the government waste a lot of money we pay in taxes, waste some of it, or don't waste very much of it? (1958, 64, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 82, 84)
4. Do you feel that almost all of the people running the government are smart people who usually know what they are doing, or do you think that quite a few of them don't seem to know what they are doing? (1958, 64, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78)
5. Do you think that quite a few of the people running the government are a little crooked, not very many are, or do you think hardly any of them are crooked at all? (1958, 64, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 84)

B. *Italy*

1. Do you think that in Italy today things are faring well or poorly with regards the working of the state (ministries, public offices, etc.)? (1963, 67, 68, 74, 76, 80)
2. Do you think that in Italy today things are faring well or poorly in regard to the capability and competence of statesmen? Very well, Fairly well, Neither good nor bad, Fairly badly, Very badly. (1967, 74, 76, 80)
3. Do you think that in Italy today things are faring well or poorly in regard to the honesty and seriousness of statesmen? Very

well, Fairly well, Neither good nor bad, Fairly badly, Very badly. (1963, 67, 74, 76, 80)

4. Compared to a year ago, do you think the situation in Italy today is better, the same, or worse? Much better, A bit better, Same, A bit worse, Much worse. (1963, 64, 65, 67, 68, 74)
5. Personally, are you content or discontent with what the government has done this year? [More or less content, Neither content nor discontent, Somewhat discontent] (1960, 63, 64, 65, 66, 68, 72, 76, 78)

C. *Spain*

1. Do you think the people that govern Spain are capable and know what they are doing, or does it seem to you that a lot of them are not sufficiently capable? (1975, 80, 81, 82, 84)
   (variant:) Do you think the people that run the government are capable or not capable? (1966)
2. Do you think the government administers the majority of the taxes we Spanish pay wisely, that it wastes some money, or that it throws a large part of it out the window? (1966, 80, 81, 82)
   (variant:) Do you think that the government spends our tax money well, that it wastes some, or that it throws a large part of it away? (1975)
3. Speaking in general terms, would you say that the present political situation in Spain is very good, good, so-so, bad, or very bad? (1975, 79, 80, 81, 81)
4. Do you think that the political situation [in Spain] is better, the same, or worse than a year ago? (1975, 79, 80, 81, 82)
5. And do you think that in one year that this political situation [in Spain] will be better, the same, or worse than now? (1975, 79, 80, 81, 82)

D. *Germany*

1. How much of the time do you think one can trust the government in Bonn to do what is right? Almost always, most of the time, only some of the time, almost never. (1974, 85)
   (variant) One can generally trust the government and be sure that it will do the right things. (1969)
   (variant) I am going to read a list of public institutions and organizations. Please tell me if each one gains your trust or not: the Parliament. (1979, 81, 82, 83, 84)
2. Do you a lot of money is wasted in Bonn, or do you think this is greatly exaggerated by the newspapers? (1951, 52, 57, 60, 79)
3. Do you think that one must have great ability to become a representative in Bonn? (1951, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 64, 72, 79)
4. Do you think that officials in Germany generally cannot be influenced and cannot be bribed? (1950, 64, 74, 75, 76)
   (variant) Do you think that the officials in Germany generally take action uninfluenced by relatives, personal relationships, or party connections? (1958)

II. Additional Political Confidence Items

A. *United States*

1. Generally speaking, would you say that you personally care/cared a good deal which party wins/won the Presidential election (elections to the Congress in Washington) this Fall, or don't you care very much which party wins/won? (1952, 56, 58, 60, 64, 68, 70, 72, 74, 76, 78, 82, 84)

B. *Britain*

1. Do you think that there is any really important difference between the parties, or are they all much of a muchness? (1951, 52, 57, 58, 59, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 67, 68, 69, 70, 72, 74, 76, 77)
2. Do you think the budget is a fair one or not? (1953, 1955–85 annually)

C. *Germany*

1. What do you think of the Parliament in Bonn as the representative of the people? Excellent; Basically good; Fair; Bad. (1951, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 63, 65, 67, 68, 70, 83)
2. Do you believe that the Representatives in Bonn first and foremost represent the interest of the populace, or do they have other interests which are more important to them? (1951, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 64, 72, 73, 78)

III. Support for Democracy Indicators

A. *Functioning of Democracy*

1. Are you satisfied with the way democracy is functioning in [country]? Very satisfied, Fairly satisfied, Not very satisfied, Not at all satisfied. (1973, 1975–87 annually)

B. *Germany: Democracy Index*

1. Do you think it is better for a country to have one party, to obtain the greatest possible unity, or several parties so that the various opinions can be freely represented? Several parties, Not more than two or three parties, One party, No parties. (1950, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 67, 68, 72, 77, 78)
2. Two men are discussing how a country should be governed. The one says: "I like it best when the people place the best politician at the top and gives him complete

governing power. He can then clearly and quickly decide with a few chosen experts. Not much talking is done and something really happens!" The other says: "I prefer that a number of people have to determine something in the country. They do sometimes go round and round until something is done, but it is not so easy for abuse of power to occur." Which of these two opinions is closest to your own view—the first or the second? (1956, 57, 58, 60, 61, 67, 72)

3. If you think about the difficulties which fact us: The scarcity of raw materials, food and sources of energy, caused by the rapid growth of the population, and the growth of the economy.—Do you believe that we can control these difficulties with our democratic form of state with several parties in the Parliament, or do we need a single-party system with a strong government at the top to take care of these difficulties in the future? (1975, 77, 78, 82)
4. Which form of government do you feel is best for us as Germans? Democracy; Monarchy; Dictatorship/Nazism. [Democracy] (1953, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60, 62, 64, 65)
5. Do you believe that the democracy which we have in the Federal Republic is the best form of state or is there another form of state which is better? (1967, 74, 75, 77, 78)
6. Many say: The democratic relationships established in the Basic Law are not satisfactory in our state. In order to achieve a true democracy, we must change the whole system and write a new Basic Law. Do you also want this or are you against this? (1972, 74, 75, 78)
7. Once again about our Constitution, the Basic Law: The Basic Law was in fact created almost 30 years ago under the supervision and control of the Western Powers. Therefore, many feel that we Germans should write a new Basic Law for ourselves and thus make it correspond better to our needs and interests. Others say, on the other hand, that the current Basic Law has lasted this long so well that we do not need a new one. Which is your opinion? (1968, 74, 78)
   (variant) What do you really have to say about our present constitution—I mean our Basic Law? Do you find it to be good or not good, all in all—or have you not yet become so interested in it? [Don't know the Constitution] (1955, 56)
8. What do you think of the form of government in the Federal Republic? Is there much to object to; is there only a little bit to object to; or is everything in order? (1977, 78, 81)
9. Considered completely for a moment from the pragmatic view: do we actually need a Parliament with all those Representatives in Bonn or would it also work without them? (1956, 57, 58, 59, 62, 72, 77, 78, 82)

C. *Germany: Anti-Nazi Index*

1. Do you think National Socialism was a good idea that was badly carried out? (1945, 46, 47, 48, 68, 70, 77, 80)
2. Everything that was built up between 1933 and 1939 and much more was destroyed by the war. Would you say that Hitler would have been one of the greatest statesmen without the war? [No] (1955, 56, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 67, 72, 75, 77, 78)
3. Now a question about Hitler and National Socialism: Some say that aside from the war and the persecution of the Jews, the Third Reich was not really so bad. Others say that the Third Reich was unconditionally wrong. Which of these do you agree with? (1975, 77, 78, 79)
4. If someone were to say that the National Socialist state was an unjust state, a criminal regime: According to what you know today about or experienced during the Hitler era—would you say that this is right, no that is wrong, or that not everyone was a criminal? (1964, 77, 78, 79)
5. Assuming a new Nazi Party were to try to come to power: How would you react? Do everything in power to prevent it; Oppose it but not do anything in particular; Wouldn't care; Support but not do anything in particular; Welcome and support it. (1953, 56, 62, 66, 67, 72)
6. If there were the opportunity now, like in 1933, to vote again for or against a man like Hitler, how would you decide? (1953, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60, 61, 63, 65, 67, 78)
7. Which form of government do you feel is best for us as Germans? Democracy; Monarchy; Dictatorship/Nazism. [Against Dictatorship/Nazism] (1953, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 60, 62, 64, 65)
8. In your opinion, who was responsible that the war broke out in 1939? Germany (Hitler, Nazi Party, we); The other states (England, France, USA, Poland, Churchill, Versailles); Both sides (all statesmen, all administrations, Versailles and we); International capitalism; It was fate that the war came. (1951, 55, 56, 59)
   (variant) Who was responsible for the war: National Socialist Germany, Both sides, or the Other side alone? (1964)
   (variant) Who do you think was mainly responsible for 1939 war? Hitler, Germany, Britain, Other. (1969)

D. *Spain: Democracy Items*
1. Do you think it is better for one person to have all the authority and make all the decisions for us, or for a group of people elected by all citizens to make the political decisions? (1966, 74, 76, 77, 79, 80, 82)
2. Think that the existence of political parties would be good, or neither good nor bad. (1971)
(variant) Agree with freedom for political parties. (1973)
(variant) Believe that political parties should be permitted to exist in Spain. (1975)
(variant) Believe that one of the reforms should be the legalization of political parties. (1976)
(variant) Democracy is not just parties, but democracy cannot exist without parties [agree]. (1984, 85)

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