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# Civic Culture and Support for Democracy amongst Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey

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Theories of civic culture and democratization have tended to ignore stateless nations like the Kurds. This brings up the question of what civic culture looks like for these groups and whether the status of statelessness has influenced the civic culture of Kurds in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey. Analyzing the first merged large-N dataset including Kurds from Turkey, Iran, and Iraq, this paper shows that the last hundred years of Kurdish political movements have strongly influenced the civic culture of Kurds. Being Kurdish in Turkey, Iran, and Iraq has a significant effect on levels of political trust and support as well as the correlation of these indicators with levels of support for a democratic political system. Overall, this paper finds that being Kurdish has a strong positive effect on support for democracy versus autocracy in all three countries.

Keywords: Kurds, civic culture, democratization, stateless nations

The concept of civic culture tries to explain the relationship between democratic stability on the macro level and different attitudes of constituencies on the micro-level (Almond and Verba 1963, 9). These operationalizations, however, have mostly been tested for populations that have a nation-state of their own. The Kurdish people are a constituency in their four countries of residence, Iran, Iraq, Syria, and Turkey. Their status, however, is disputed and various resistance movements, armed and unarmed, emerged seeking a political status. Therefore, the question is: Between these four very different Kurdish regions and the four different political statuses, can we see statistical differences on the micro-level in civic culture and support for democratization? In the following study Kurdish civic culture is measured through available survey data on Kurds from Iraq, Iran, and Turkey.<sup>1</sup> First, a short review of the history and present situation of

<sup>1</sup> This study worked with all survey data available that could identify Kurds and contained variables of civic culture. The data has limitations since a lot of data was missing over the survey years and was inconsistent. On top of that, although many Kurds are included and identifiable, repeatedly Kurdish people are not interviewed or not coded as such, which subsumes them under the categories of Persian, Arab, and Turkish. Representative survey data for Syrian people or Kurds from Syria is completely unavailable which also hindered the possibility to compare the present findings with a sample in Syria. Hence, a Syrian Kurdish sample is not included.

Kurdish society and politics is provided. Then the theory of civic culture will be examined critically. Based on this, two hypotheses are presented which then will be tested based on a merged pooled large-N dataset including Kurds and non-Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey to allow for comparison. The inferential analysis and comparison between the overall sample and the Kurdish subsample show that civic culture indicators like trust in different institutions do not hold up in the Kurdish sample and being Kurdish has a great significance in the tested models which indicates that being in this distinct political situation has a greater effect than the general causal path that civic culture theory assumes.

## 1 Kurdish Politics and Society in Turkey, Iraq, and Iran

### 1.1 Kurds in Turkey

With the foundation of the Turkish Republic under Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in 1923, the Turkish nation was declared the only nation present in the new state, and the Kurdish language was completely outlawed (McDowall 2004, 193). Therefore, on a social level, structural discrimination and racism<sup>2</sup> against Kurds

<sup>2</sup> This paper considers the Kemalist foundation of modern Turkey to be racist, following the assessment of Xypolia (2016) that: "Kemalism developed its reforms by blindly

became a key part of political thought in Turkey. Kurds were repeatedly displaced and deported to change the demography of southeast Anatolia (Casier 2015; Demirtaş-Milz and Saraçoğlu 2015) and were and still are marginalized on an economic level (Yadırgı 2019).

In this highly militarized context, that further escalated from the first Turkish military coup in 1960 on and that exacerbated the situation of Kurds, the PKK (Kurdistan Workers' Party; Partiya Karkerên Kurdistanê) was founded in 1978 and started the armed struggle against the Turkish state five years later. During some of the heaviest periods of fighting between the Turkish army and the PKK in the 1990s, thousands of villages were wiped out and a mass exodus started. Many also had to struggle with the economic deprivation of the southeast. This led to many families migrating to large industrial cities that could offer jobs (Kılıçaslan 2015, 157).

Nevertheless, efforts were taken to enable Kurdish parliamentary participation over the years, and with the HEP (Peoples' Workers' Party; Halkın Emek Partisi) the first pro-Kurdish party was founded in 1990. The party managed to enter the Turkish parliament in 1991. The outlawing of the HEP in 1993 would become a precedent for subsequent pro-Kurdish parties like HADEP and DTP which were successively founded and then outlawed, as Table 1 shows (Gunes 2019, 259). The Kurdish parliamentary opposition furthermore repeatedly acted as a mediator in peace talks between the Turkish state and the PKK, as HEP did in 1993 or HDP did in 2013, and strongly engaged in not only Kurdish affairs but also in broader leftist Turkish politics.

Furthermore, the situation of the Kurds seemingly got better in the 2000s, when Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's AKP (Justice and Development Party; Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi) rose to power and Kurdish identity was gradually included and admitted

for example through allowing Kurdish-language private education or establishing Kurdish-language state TV channels. A considerable percentage of Kurdish people, consequently, openly support the AKP because of these pro-Kurdish policies and because of a general political preference towards conservatism, which is not embodied by left-leaning parties like HDP. When studying Kurdish political culture in this historical context it is an incomplete assessment, therefore, to think that the Kurdish issue is only one that had to do with an ethnic group being oppressed and an armed group like the PKK engaging in a civil war. The image of modern Kurdish society in Turkey is more and more nuanced for example with many finding Islam to be more important than Kurdishness (e.g. Gurses 2019), others not even identifying as Kurdish anymore (e.g. Yeğen 2009), or even Turkish people supporting pro-Kurdish parties like the HDP (e.g. Tekdemir 2016, 659f). There are many more phenomena and contradictions showing that the Kurdish question, like many other political questions of our time, is one where ethnic identities intersect with other aspects like class or gender. Although authors like Gunes (2019) or Tekdemir (2016) rightly point out that the agenda of the HDP goes beyond ethnic questions, it is important to wonder why there is a large number of Kurds whose struggle as an ethnic group in Turkey does not hinder them from supporting figures like Erdoğan.

Research on the history of AKP's success shows that Kurdish voting decisions are fragmented and driven by different interests. Looking back at the formation of Kurdish parties and anti-state movements in the 1970s, Jongerden and Akkaya (2019) show that many emerged in the context of illegality and mainly emerged from a leftist core of students and academics that later managed to get support from the rural Kurdish population. Erdoğan, however, took advantage of the general deprivation of rural Turkey and catered to the conservative rural Kurdish voter, often through a neoliberal turn, where he pushed privatizations and helped upper-class Kurdish entrepreneurs in the southeast to prosper (Özkızıltan 2019; Yüksel 2015; Adaş 2006). In his first years in office, he furthermore changed state policies towards Kurdish people, broad-

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adopting Eurocentric racist assumptions [and] the theory and ideology of Turkism has been developed on these Eurocentric explanations for the decline of the Ottoman Empire and the assumption of the superiority of Western civilization." Furthermore, racism is taken by its definition to be an institutional setting, where not only races but "ethnic components of ... societies, usually religious or language groups" (Smedley 2021) are discriminated against, which is the case for the Kurdish population in Turkey.

**Table 1: Chronology of pro-Kurdish parties in Turkey**

	People's Labour Party (HEP)	Democratic Party (DEP)	People's Democracy Party (HADEP)	Democratic Society Party (DTP)	Peace and Democracy Party (BDP)	People's Democratic Party (HDP)
Founded	1990	1993	1994	2005	2008	2012
Banned	1993	1994	2003	2009	Ban of individual politicians	Ban demanded at Constitutional Court of Turkey since March 2021

ening the Kurdish language and cultural rights (e.g. Larrabee 2013). Erdoğan's narrative of helping the people who did not belong to the Kemalist upper class and his populist anti-establishment position did have an appeal for certain Kurdish groups in the southeast (Arat-Koç 2018). The peace process of 2013 opened negotiations with the jailed PKK leader Abdullah Öcalan and further pushed Erdoğan's image of bringing economic stability, Islamic values, and inter-ethnic peace to the forefront.

Kaya and Whiting (2019) argue that these developments brought forth two major blocks of Kurdish civic culture: One block that has taken the exit-option of AKP support identifies with political Islam and neoliberalism, and one that puts the ethnic and political self-identification as Kurdish first. Another such study is Çiçek (2017) who differentiates three major blocks: The Kurdish national bloc, the Kurdish religious bloc, and the Kurdish economic elite bloc (Çiçek 2017, 15f). There is an ambivalent picture of what constitutes Kurdish civic culture in Turkey but the authoritarian turn of the AKP's policies will likely have further deepened the social cleavages in Turkey.

## 1.2 Kurds in Iraq

The Kurds of Iraq have come closest to acknowledged self-rule so far. The Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KRI) that has existed since 1991 is the only *de jure* and *de facto* autonomous area under Kurdish control, as their counterpart in Syria, the Autonomous Administration of North-East Syria (AANES), is not yet legally recognized.

Kurdish history in Iraq, and consequently political culture there, has been greatly affected by geopolitical developments. Major actors like Russia, Iran, Turkey, the United States, and many more have influenced

the Kurdish question and especially the two dominant Iraqi-Kurdish parties, the Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK).

Kurdish political movements against their occupation in Iraq started parallel to those in Turkey in the 1920s in British-occupied Iraq (Silverfarb 1986) and continued with the foundation of the KDP in 1946 whose founder Mistefa Barzanî led various uprisings against the Iraqi regime from Abdul Karim Qasim to Saddam Hussein (Rubin 2007; Qadir 2007), often with foreign backing, especially from Iran at that time (Reisinezhad 2019). Internal rivalries led to the separation of various political figures from the KDP and the establishment of the PUK in 1974. After the PUK started fighting against Saddam Hussein's regime in the 1980s as well, the battle was fiercely met. During the Anfal campaign,<sup>3</sup> the Ba'ath leadership tried to end the struggle with the secessionist Kurds through deportation and ethnic cleansing with the chemical attack on Halabja in 1988 killing five thousand at once being the peak of this campaign (McDowall 2004, 339; e.g. Voller 2017).

After Saddam's invasion of Kuwait, the Kurds used this power vacuum, declaring independence in the framework of the so-called Raperîn (uprising) and soon conducting the first elections (Hassan 2017). What followed was the intra-Kurdish civil war between PUK and KDP who both claimed the majority after the elections that went out half-half, and brutally fought each other (Gunter 1996). This bloody episode of internal struggle and the power duopoly

<sup>3</sup> The Anfal campaign was a genocidal campaign conducted by Saddam Hussein from 1986 to 1989 in different Kurdish areas in Northern Iraq. The campaign peaked with the chemical gas attack on the city of Halabja that killed up to 5000 civilians on March, 16 1988.

between the two parties shape the Kurdistan Region of Iraq and Kurdish civic culture there until today.

When Saddam was ousted by the US forces in 2003, the Kurdish parties became allies of the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA), which made the unification of both parties in the institutions of the Kurdistan Region less of a priority than working with both parties separately on a military level and led to the securitization of the Kurdish question there (Katzman 2010). By 2005 the new Iraqi constitution was ratified and for the first time, a constitution specifically included the Kurdish language and acknowledged the KRI. The region became a relatively stable part of Iraq while the rest of the country faced a severe civil war. In 2009 another party separation occurred as the former PUK figure Newşîrwan Mistefa founded the oppositional Gorran (change) Movement. Widespread discontent with political inequality, the power-sharing of KDP and PUK as well as a stagnating labor market led the way to widespread protests in 2011 (Mohammad 2019, 81f). The period saw a great rise in civic activism, oppositional thought and practice, and protest mobilization.

In 2014 the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) took over major parts of Iraq, committed genocide against the Yezidi community, and displaced thousands. As authors like Al-Ali (2014) have shown, the lack of institutional strength and years of internal fighting in the Iraqi political landscape enabled this takeover. Consequently, many IDPs (internally displaced persons) fled to the KRI and therefore the regional government had to take care of both hosting these IDPs as well as fighting ISIS on the frontlines (World Bank 2015).

In September 2017 Mesûd Barzanî conducted a referendum on the independence of the Kurdistan Region, not only in the areas of the region but including the disputed territories.<sup>4</sup> The referendum sparked crit-

<sup>4</sup> The so called disputed territories are a region whose status is still disputed as to whether it belongs to the Kurdistan Region or the rest of federal Iraq. It stretches as a belt reaching from the Sinjar mountains in the North-Western Iraqi Niniveh governorate to the city of Chanaqin in the Eastern Iraqi Diyala governorate and is characterized by both a variety of ethnic and religious groups residing there as well as many oil wells being there and is therefore of great political importance. According to the 2005 constitution of Iraq, the status of the region and specifically disputed cities like Kirkuk should have been settled by referen-

icism in different parts of Kurdish society (Connelly and Jasim 2017), but in the end, a majority of Kurds voted for independence. As a reaction to that, in October 2017 the Iraqi forces, mainly consisting of the Popular Mobilization Units (PMU) took over the disputed areas and Kurdish forces withdrew (Hama and Jasim 2017).<sup>5</sup> Killings and human rights abuses were conducted by the PMU and further complicated Erbil/Baghdad relations (Human Rights Watch 2017).

Now the issue of financial instability (World Bank 2015), reliance on oil revenues, and a huge public sector (Romano 2019), and the struggle for democratization in the region show that the once clear goal of one Kurdistan has become more than complicated. Between these political battles, there are the people who are more and more critical of their local government, although they often see it as a better alternative to the much worse chaos in Baghdad or other neighboring countries. With new waves of protest breaking out against the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) since 2020 it is however questionable whether this assessment will hold. An analysis of civic culture in Iraqi Kurdistan, therefore, must consider that Kurdish self-rule is at a uniquely advanced point and that aside from the general Kurdish struggle that started as the political point of departure, the very strong protest and opposition movements of the last years are increasingly shaping what constitutes Kurdish civic culture in Iraq.

### 1.3 Kurds in Iran

Contemporary research on Kurds in Iran and their status is less conspicuous than on other Kurdish popu-

dum, which has not happened to this day, though. Under Saddam Hussein the disputed territories were the scene of many operations of the Anfal campaign and the so-called Arabization campaigns, which involved the targeted deportation of Kurds to the south and the resettling of Arabs in their homes.

<sup>5</sup> The Popular Mobilization Units, also known as Popular Mobilization Forces, is an umbrella term for several hundred mostly Shiite militias that were founded during the ISIS insurgency in 2014. Some of the strongest militias belonging to the group are the Badr organization as well as Kata'ib Hezbollah, which are both directly financed by Iran and used as military and political tools for Iran's involvement in Iraq (Steinberg 2017). Some of the groups belonging to PMU are considered to be terrorist groups and have been involved in human rights abuses and assassinations, most recently during the Iraqi youth protests in fall 2019.

lations and therefore Iranian Kurds seem to be a very silent part of the general picture. However, their struggle is one of the oldest and to this day the Kurdish political structures from Turkey and Iraq reach far into the Kurdish sphere in Iran as well, making it a highly relevant scene of Kurdish politics. The most active groups to be mentioned here are the armed groups of Kurdistan Free Life Party (Partiya Jiyana Azad a Kurdistanê, PJAK); a sister organization of the PKK, the KDP-I, which still exists after several internal splits; and the communist Komele (or Komala), which also went through some divisions (McDowall 2004, 265f).

A prime complication coming with the status of Kurds in Iran is that their “otherness” is very latent compared to the other cases. Kurdish is an Indo-Iranian language and therefore switching between Persian and Kurdish is not hard. Cultural similarities also wash away ethnic differences and therefore from a Persian chauvinist point of view it is easy to declare Kurds to just be part of a greater Persian ethnicity (Shalmani 1985). This is why the oppression of Kurds in Iran seems more latent than in Turkey or Iraq.

Part of their otherness vis-à-vis the Iranian majority state is their Sunni identity versus the Shia majority. While a considerable number of Kurds in the southern Iranian-Kurdish areas are Shia, those in the north are mostly Sunni. Great insight into this effect is provided by the study of Tezcür and Asadzade (2019). They created a dataset of all Iranian Kurds who joined the ranks of the PJAK and found out that coming from a majority Sunni area has a significant influence on joining the armed fight against the Iranian state (Tezcür and Asadzade 2019, 666). This can be compared to the identity of Sunni Kurds in Turkey versus Alevi or Yezidi Kurds. While the former can “pass” socially as Sunnis and therefore part of the Islamic community, the latter have another layer of otherness, isolating them from the state and even parts of their own community that have another religion (Çiçek 2017, 97f). In pre-revolutionary Iran, Kurdish groups supported progressive movements, regardless of their religious background (Entessar 2019, 400f); the otherness that became more important after the Islamic revolution was whether one is part of the Shiite community or not.

Another important factor is, as is the case in all Kurdish populations, the influence of class on Kurdish nationalist aspirations. From the beginning of the Kurdistan Republic of Mahabad on, tribal leaders opposed any republican form of leadership (Vali 2014, 70f), and to this day Kurds form a large part of the general lower class of Iran. Therefore, being alienated and even oppressed by the Iranian state is an outcome of factors like religion, class, and ethnicity (Amnesty International 2008, 7f). Furthermore, up to this day, Kurdish partisan resistance is faced with the utmost violence, in Iran and abroad, and activists, political figures, and fighters are assassinated regularly which highly influences how politics can be done by Kurds in Iran (McDowall 2004, 277f).<sup>6</sup> Being politically active as a Kurd in Iran and engaging with such movements is highly risky and therefore a lot of the work of both Komele and KDP-I is done in the diaspora. Concluding, this shows that spaces for Kurdish political action are scarce in Iran and that being Kurdish comes with various levels of discrimination that most likely influence the political culture of Kurds in Iran as well.

## 2 Theoretical Framework

Looking at the consequences of WWII and the rise of fascism in former democracies like Germany and Italy, Almond and Verba (1963) were the first to try to operationalize the cultural aspects that kept the British and the American public from supporting an authoritarian order over their existing democratic one. In their comparative analysis of the civic culture of the UK, the US, Germany, Italy, and Mexico the authors wanted to understand the cognitive, affective, and evaluative orientations of the public in these countries significantly differ and if that influences their attitudes towards democracy as a system (Almond and Verba 1963, 14). Civic culture is defined as the “attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system” (9). It seeks to address how the relation-

<sup>6</sup> Two of the best known cases of Iranian executions of Kurdish political figures abroad are the Vienna assassinations of 1989, where the late KDP-I chef Ebdurehman Qasimlo, his deputy Ebdullah Qadirî Azer as well as Fazil Resûl were killed, as well as the Mykonos restaurant assassinations of 1992, in which KDP-I leaders Sadiq Şerefkendî, Fetah Ebdulî, Humayûn Erdalan and their translator Nurî Dehkordî were killed by Iranian intelligence officers.

ship between a civic population and the democratic system ruling them stabilizes that very system. The study of civic culture has therefore been engaged with democracy and “the structures and processes” that sustain it (1) and is always one that tries to connect the macro- and micro-analysis of causalities in democratic transition and development (31).

Civic orientations can be *cognitive*, *affective*, and *evaluative*. *Cognitive* orientations are those based on knowledge, information, and also on the act and frequency of gathering information on political objects. *Affective* orientations are the feelings, the trust, and the confidence that one has towards certain institutions. The individual judgment or opinion of constituents on objects is the *evaluative* part. Objects can be both on the input and output side of the political process, but the political system as a whole can also be an object of orientation.

However, individuals can have no orientations toward their system in a democracy, too. Citizens can also be participants but have a negative view of political objects. Since Almond and Verba are interested in the roots of civic culture as a stabilizing means of democracy, this typology is expanded to look at which orientations match a particular type of system. The important issue, therefore, is about the *congruence* of political structure and culture (Almond and Verba, 1963, 20). Here, Almond and Verba (1963, 21) differentiate between the congruence or incongruence of political culture and structure to have three typologies: allegiance, apathy, and alienation.

In the typology shown in Table 2 citizens can have a positive orientation towards political objects (+), an indifferent orientation (0), or a negative one (-) on all three levels. An allegiant political culture is present when the public trusts its political objects and evaluates them positively. However, if that culture mostly consists of people who are indifferent to the system in

**Table 2: Typology of system/culture congruence**

Orientation:	Allegiance	Apathy	Alienation
Cognitive	+	+	+
Affective	+	0	-
Evaluative	+	0	-

Table based on Almond and Verba (1963, 21)

their affect or evaluation, there is no congruence, but apathy of the constituency towards the system. An alienated civic culture goes further and consists of people who mostly do have orientations towards the system but negative ones. Almond and Verba, therefore, argue that stable democracies have a “relationship of affective and evaluative allegiance between culture and structure” (1963, 33).

“The Civic Culture” and its conceptualizations can be criticized, however, and the authors themselves discussed the shortcomings of their work in *The Civic Culture Revisited* where scholars like Pateman (1989) and Wiatr (1989) voiced their critique. Among other topics, Pateman (1989, 59f), who brings in her democratic-theoretical influence, criticizes that the definition of democracy used is not problematized enough and the liberal model of democracy is taken for granted. Furthermore, she addresses the lack of an analysis that is sensitive to the intersection of gender and race as influencing variables (Pateman 1989, 86).

Wiatr (1989) joins this critique of the lack of class analysis and urges the two-way relation between culture and structure, especially when it comes to the socioeconomic status of participants in the study of Almond and Verba (1963). Furthermore, Wiatr (1989) sees a problem in the “pathologization” of partisanship and apathy. The ideal of the assertive citizen ignores the normative meaning of partisanship and its importance in the political discourse and seeing apathy as a problem simply does not represent most people’s reality where apathy might also be the result of a cost-benefit assessment.

There have since been advancements in the civic culture model in trying to include more sophisticated measures of other influencing factors. In their critique of the civic culture model, Dalton and Shin (2014) show that we see more and more variation on national-level data and see a diffusion of emancipative values in the course of globalization (Dalton and Shin 2014, 94f). Dalton and Shin (2014, 95) assessed that “the world today is much smaller than that studied by Almond, Verba and their colleagues” and show that indicators like political interest do not correlate with the human development index and people in Vietnam, for example, show way more political interest on an average than people in Norway. Comparing the confi-



**Table 3: Operationalization of civic culture**

Theoretical construct	Operationalization	Dependent variable
Affective support	Trust in government institutions - army - police - parliament - parties - government	Support in democracy as overall system minus support for authoritarian modes of rule
Evaluative support	Rating of the system <sup>i</sup>	
Cognitive support	Political interest	

<sup>i</sup> In practice it proved impossible to test the effect of rating of the political system (the evaluative part of the civic culture theory), because too much data was missing.

dence, the affective level of orientation towards political objects, between the World Values Survey waves I and V the authors see that in countries like the USA, the Netherlands, West Germany, France, and Ireland trust has consolidated on a level or even decreased and countries that transitioned into democracies like Poland, Mexico or South Korea do not show higher levels of trust in their institutions (Dalton and Shin 2014, 104f).

Studies like Clarke et al. (2018) show that in the case of an established democracy like the UK, which was one of the two benchmarks for Almond and Verba (1963), there is no evidence that there was such a “golden era” of democracy after WWII and even the expectations towards politicians have profoundly changed. Dalton and Shin (2014, 108) show that the more developed countries tend to have way more dissatisfied citizens that show more skepticism towards their political institutions. Furthermore, Dalton and Shin (2014, 107f) show that 1/5 of the public in the least democratic countries in the world favor democracy as a system, and their number even rose in countries like Egypt, Ethiopia, Iraq, Morocco, and Vietnam. Dalton and Shin (2014) propose that the ideal of the allegiant democrat might be obsolete and that these so-called *dissatisfied democrats* are the strata that push for democratic transition in many countries.

Causalities are changing but this does not diminish the importance or validity of Almond and Verba’s operationalizations. That is why in this work the ambiguity of the term culture, as well as some of the causalities assumed, are being contextualized in a

broader sense. Jackman and Miller (2007, 2) provide a critique of this problem but conclude that the solution lies in using an institutional approach instead of a political culture approach. Their definition of culture is however very social-psychological, claiming that culture is the “configuration of attitudes across a broad group of individuals” (Jackman and Miller 2007, 8). Using their institutional approach, they leave behind this sphere of social psychology and suggest that the “institutional view specifies that people optimize, choosing from the menu of available alternatives” (Jackman and Miller 2007, 14).

Therefore what is going to be tested in this analysis is the specific differences assumed in the civic culture of Kurds in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey. Table 3 shows the operationalization.

Accordingly, the tested hypotheses are:

**Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant difference between the civic attitudes of the Kurdish and non-Kurdish populations in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.

**Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant difference in civic attitudes between the Kurdish populations in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey.

### 3 Methodology

#### 3.1 Merged Datasets

The datasets consist of the Arab Barometer (AB) waves 2, 3, and 5 (Arab Barometer 2011, 2014, 2019) and the longitudinal dataset of the World Values Survey (2015) (WVS). The merged dataset combines 25,624 observations of which 1,960 can be identified as

Kurdish through ethnic or linguistic variables.<sup>7</sup> Comparing the initial estimates of the Kurdish population by Institut Kurde (2017), Figure 1 shows that Kurds are underrepresented in all samples compared to their actual share of the population.

These surveys were chosen since they are the only ones examining civic culture variables that include identifiable Kurdish respondents. An online appendix can be provided on request where original variable names and values of the WVS and AB datasets, missing value plots, the recoding schemes, and further variable-specific information are included.

### 3.2 Models of Analysis

The following descriptive analysis will plot the results of the populations in Iraq, Iran, and Turkey with the created Kurdish dummy. The inferential analysis will be a multivariate regression with fixed effects on the countries under observation. The model was tested with fixed effects on the years, too, which did not change the significance of the predictors. Therefore, the assumed model can be described as

$$y_{it} = \mu_t + \beta X_{it} + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (1)$$

where  $y_{it}$  is the dependent variable,  $\mu_t$  is the fixed effect,  $\beta X_{it}$  are the multiple covariates,  $\alpha_i$  is the error term for all observations and  $\varepsilon_{it}$  is the error term for all

observations varying over time (Allison 2009, 6f.). Putting that in terms of the operationalization, the model tested here is

$$SupportDemocracy = CountryFE + Predictors + \alpha_i + \varepsilon_{it} \quad (2)$$

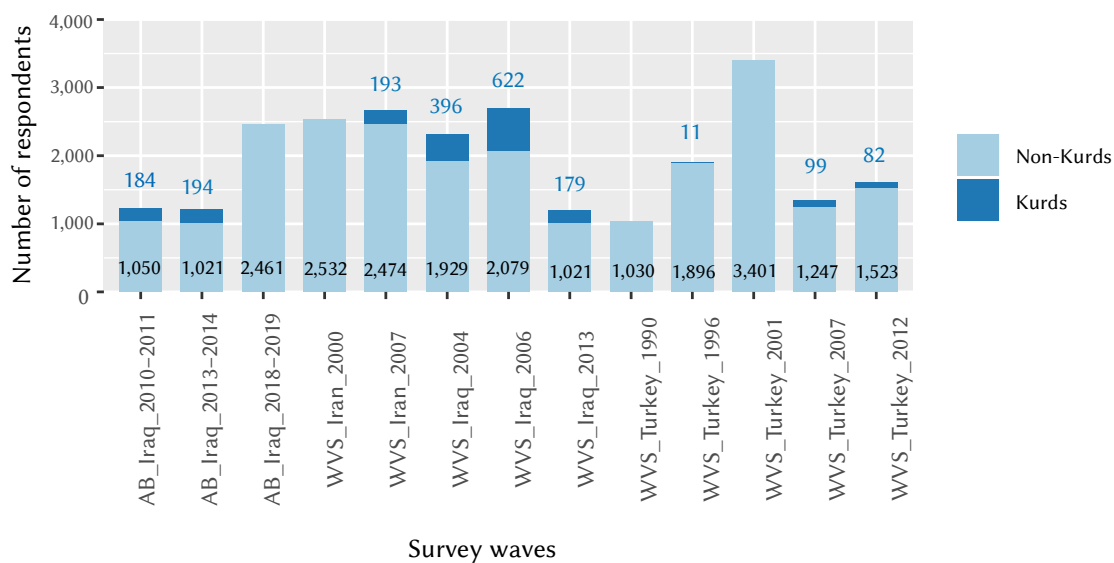
where we assume that a set of predictors influences the outcome of the index created to measure support for democracy but the effects inside the countries are stable.

The dependent variable is an index created out of the variables measuring the support for democracy, for military rule, for experts ruling, and for a strong leader ruling, similar to the index calculated by Dalton and Shin (2014). The analysis, therefore, assumes a strict measure of support of a democratic system. The index consists of

$$Index = |ProDemocracy - ProArmyRule - ProExpertRule - ProStrongLeader| \quad (3)$$

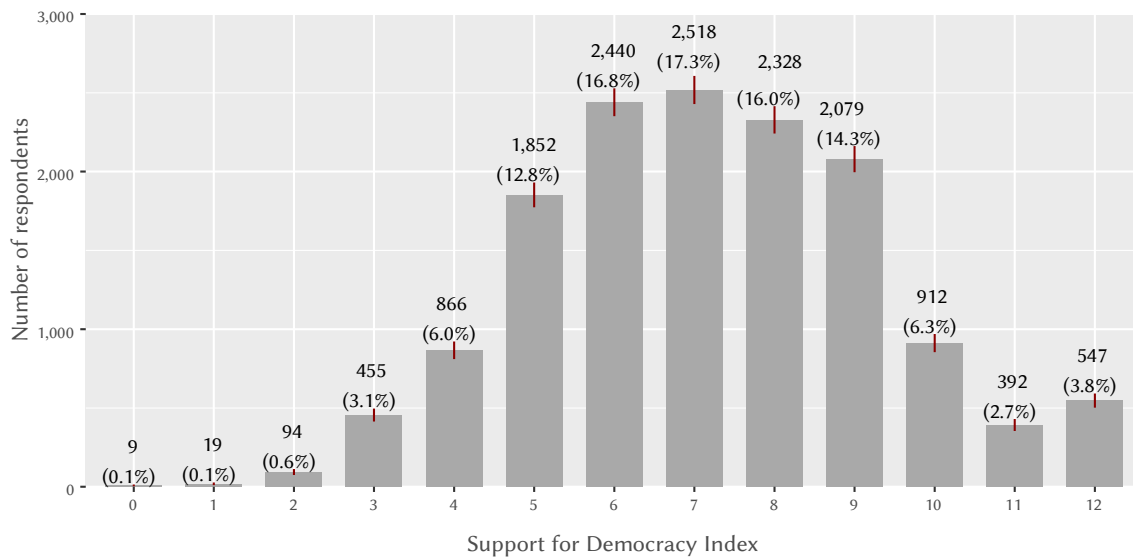
where the final index is > 0 and measures the overall support for democracy minus the support for autocratic forms of rule from least democratic (0) to most democratic (12). As Figure 2 shows, a normal distribution of the dependent variable can be seen, and therefore the index is fit for use in the model.

Figure 1: Ethnicity variable over study years



<sup>7</sup> For this study, respondents speaking Kurdish as their first language or classed as Kurdish in the ethnicity variable are coded as 1, others are coded as 0.

**Figure 2: Distribution of dependent variable (democracy index)**



**4 Analysis**

**4.1 Descriptive Comparison**

The covariates that are going to be tested in 5.2 shall be presented for the populations pooled in the sample. The following plots will give a first insight on whether there is a difference between countries and Kurdish/non-Kurdish populations.

Figure 3 shows that being Kurdish has an effect on the correlation of political interest and overall support for a democratic system in the Turkish ( $R=0.28$ ), the Iranian ( $R=0.14$ ) and Iraqi sample ( $R=0.11$ ), while the effect is, however, smaller in the Iraqi sample and less significant in the Iranian sample ( $p=0.052$ ). This supports the assumption that the more representation an ethnic group has in a polity, the less their ethnicity is a relevant factor in their overall political attitudes, as in the Iraqi case.

In the Iranian case, it supports the assumption that Kurdishness is a weaker explanatory factor than factors as religiosity for example. In Turkey, this supports the assumption that the policies towards Kurds and their political movements in the last decades have strongly supported polarization in society.

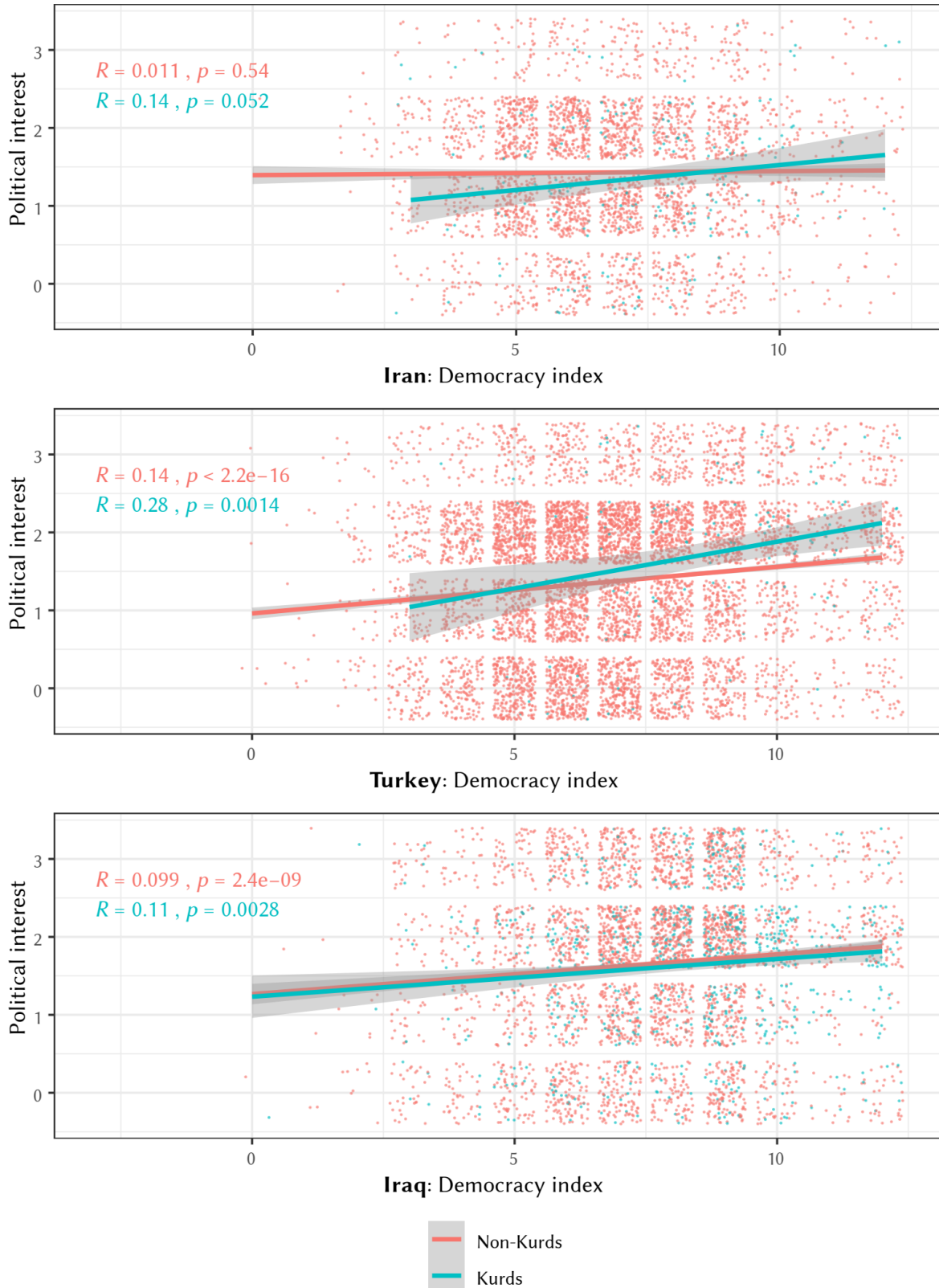
Looking at the correlation between levels of trust in institutions and the support for a democratic system, the difference between Kurds and non-Kurds is more polarized, as assumed. In the Turkish subsample, the difference between Kurds and non-Kurds is strongest when it comes to the correlation between confidence in armed forces, police, and courts and support for a

democratic system, which means that the less people trust these institutions the more they support democracy as a system. The significance levels for those three correlations range between a p-value of 0.019 and 0.024. Although less significant, the effect of being Kurdish is also strong when comparing trust in government, parliament, and parties in their correlation with the democracy index. The effects are furthermore all negative, therefore someone who is Kurdish and has less trust in different political institutions has significantly higher levels in support for democracy over autocracy than a non-Kurd.

As Figure 5 shows, confidence in institutions and support for a democratic system in Iran have an overall negative relationship so people who have less confidence in their institutions support a democratic system more. The difference between the Kurdish sample and the rest of the population is not as big as in the Turkey sample, though. The strongest effects lie in the correlations between respectively trust in the courts ( $R=0.2$ ) and trust in government ( $R=0.2$ ) and the democracy index, which both have a significance level  $< 0.006$ .

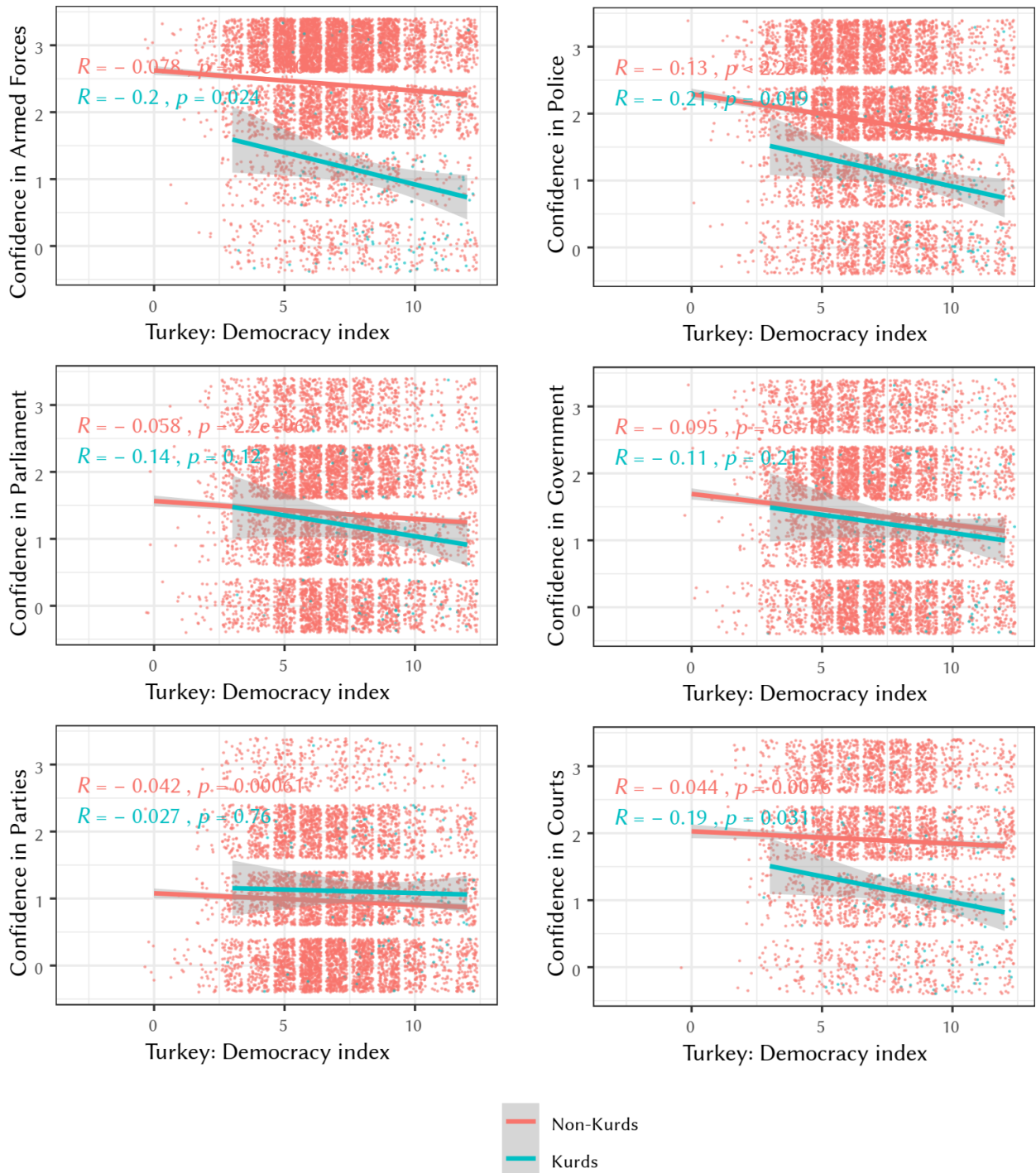
Confidence in armed forces and parliament make a difference between Kurds and non-Kurds but are not that significant ( $p 0.02$  and  $p 0.18$ ). All in all, being Kurdish is not making that big of a difference in the Iranian case.

Figure 3: Correlation between political interest and democracy index by countries



The graphs show the correlation between the political interest of respondents in Iran, Turkey, and Iraq and their overall support for democracy versus autocracy. The correlations are divided into the Kurdish sample (blue) and the non-Kurdish sample (red).

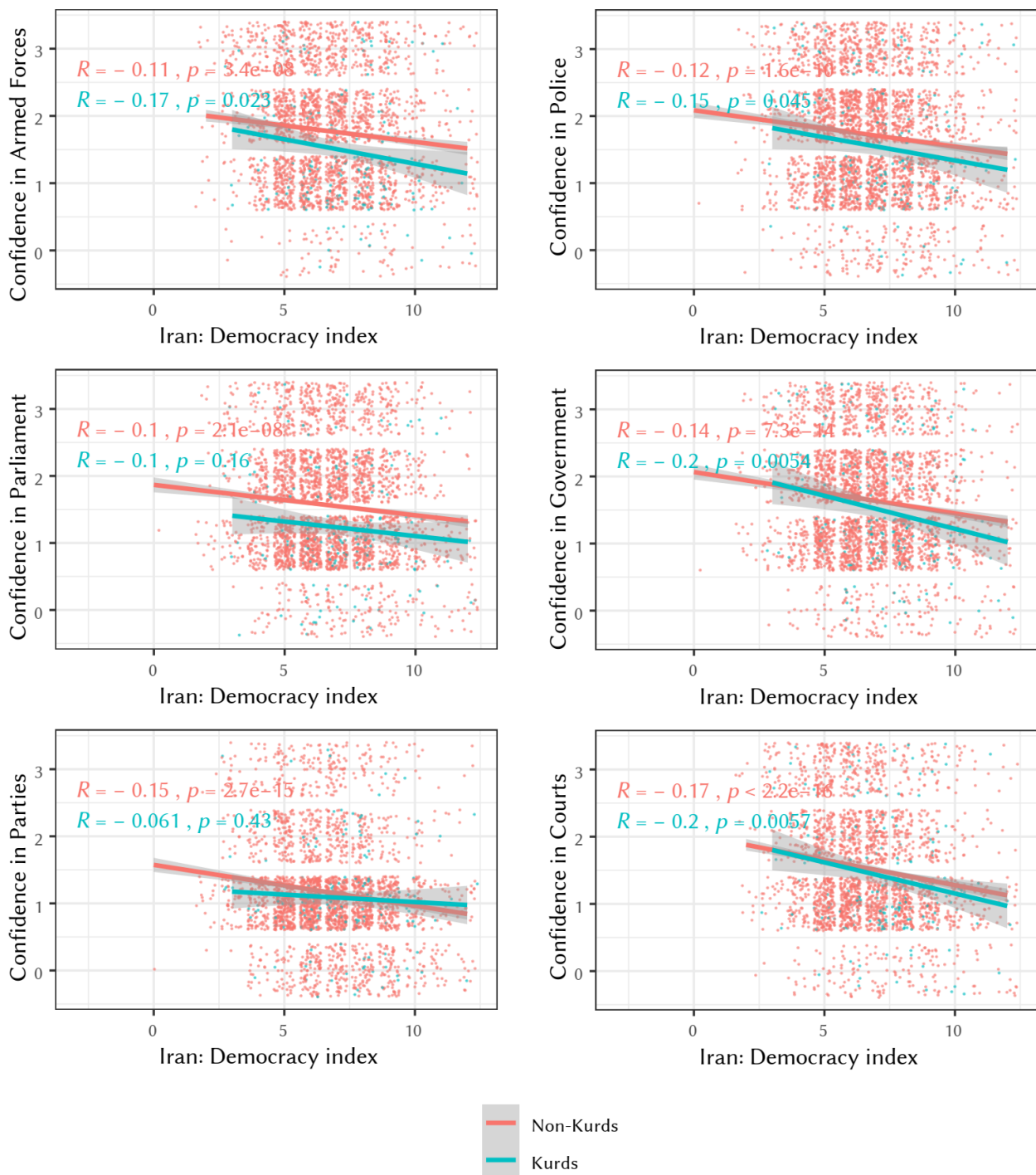
**Figure 4: Turkey: Correlation between confidence in institutions and democracy index**



The graphs show the correlation between the confidence of respondents in Turkey in different state institutions and their overall support for democracy versus autocracy. The correlations are divided into the Kurdish sample (blue) and the non-Kurdish sample (red).

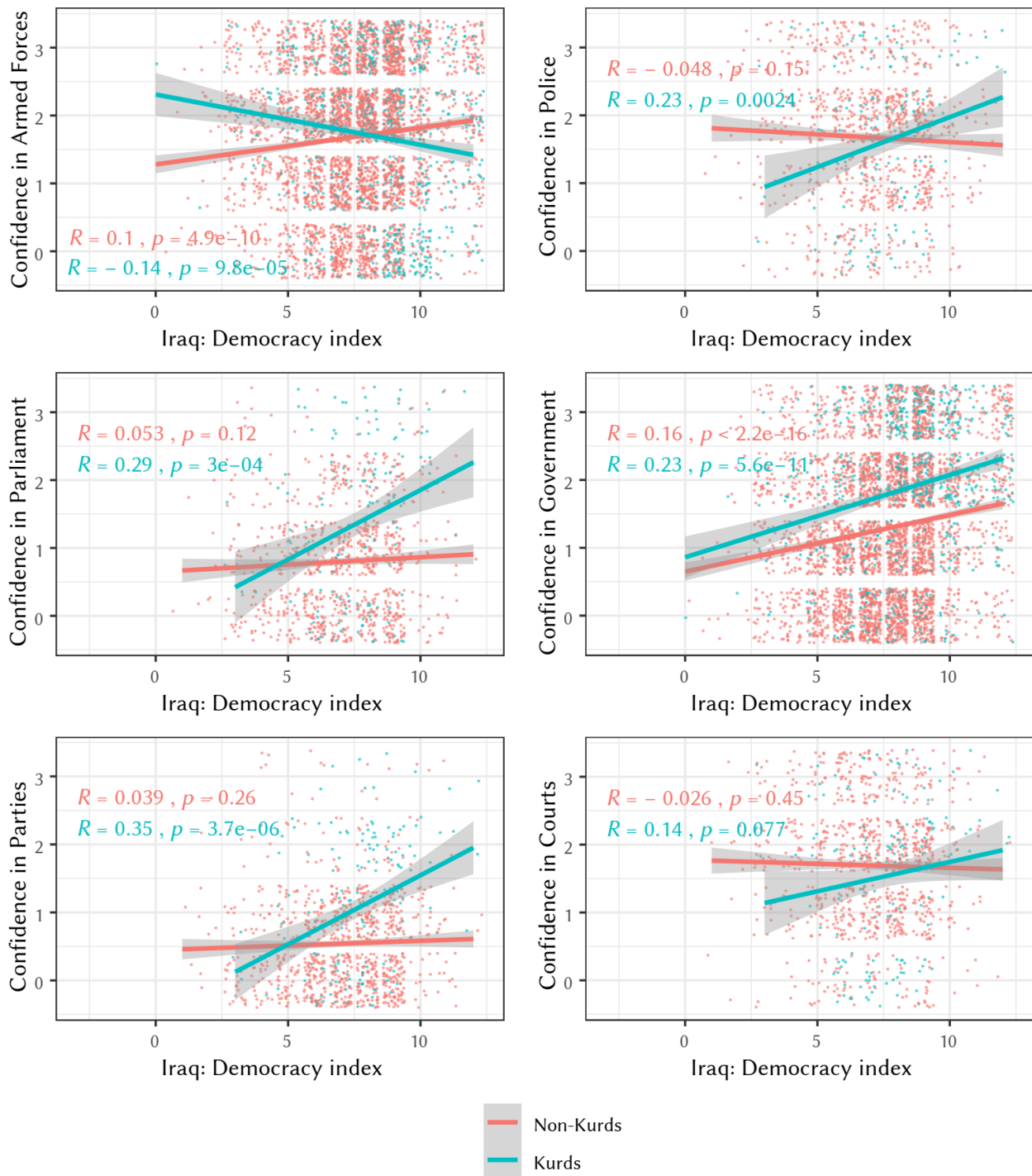


**Figure 5: Iran: Correlation between confidence in institutions and democracy index**



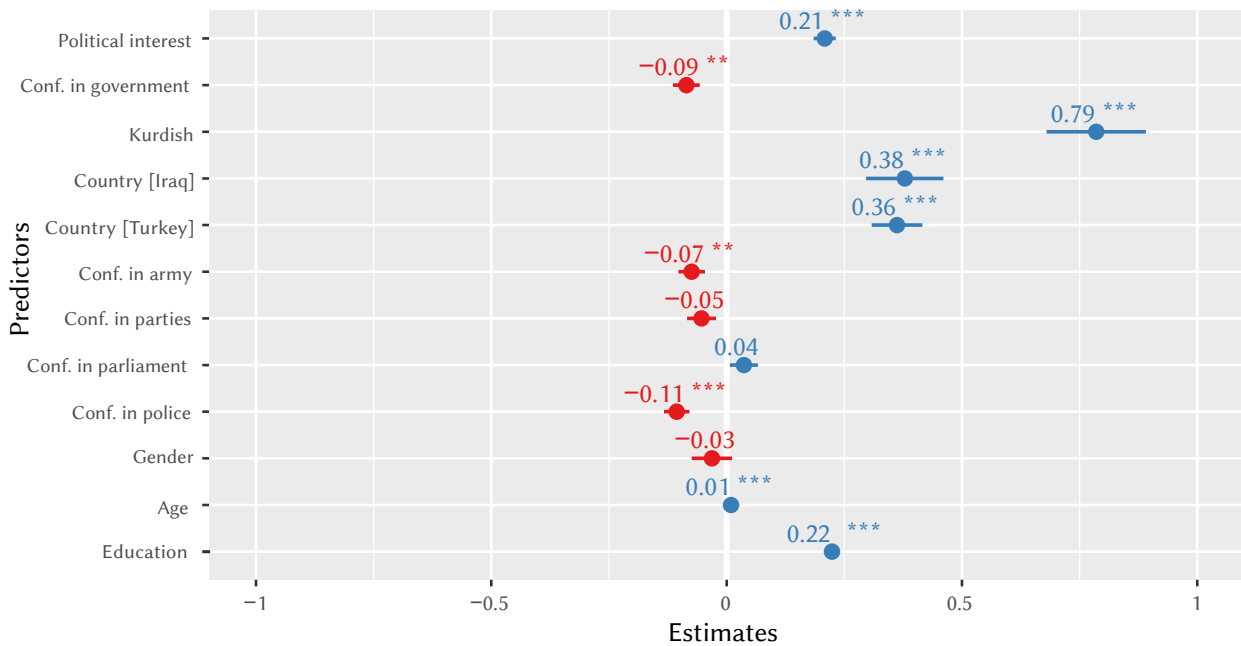
The graphs show the correlation between the confidence of respondents in Iran in different state institutions and their overall support for democracy versus autocracy. The correlations are divided into the Kurdish sample (blue) and the non-Kurdish sample (red).

**Figure 6: Iraq: Correlation confidence in institutions and democracy index**



The graphs show the correlation between the confidence of respondents in Iraq in different state institutions and their overall support for democracy versus autocracy. The correlations are divided into the Kurdish sample (blue) and the non-Kurdish sample (red).

**Figure 7: Model for overall population**



The plot shows the strength, direction, and significance of the different independent variables, as indicated on the Y-axis, on the dependent variable, the support for democracy index.

Figure 6 shows significant differences between Kurds and non-Kurds in Iraq for some variables. The more Kurds support the armed forces, for example, the lower is their support on the pro-democracy index, while the opposite is the case for the non-Kurdish (mostly Arab) sample. As the Arab Barometer questions are asked in Arabic, the question here is whether the Kurdish sample mainly interprets the Arabic term for “armed forces” as representing the Iraqi armed forces and has an antipathy towards them in general, or whether they understand it to mean their own Pêşmerge. For the relation between confidence in parliament, parties, and government the differences between the samples are also very large and highly significant. While trust levels in institutions are quite low in the non-Kurdish Iraqi sample, they are on average higher in the Kurdish sample but have a lot of variance. This might make a case for the assumed positive correlation between trust in institutions and support for democracy of the classic civic culture theory in that Kurds as having formally democratic institutions and representation of their own have institutional ownership. Having this ownership, the argument here can be that the more they trust their institutions, the more they overall support democracy.

**4.2 Inferential Analysis and Hypothesis Testing**

The descriptive insights are put in a larger picture through the fixed effect models presented in this chapter.<sup>8</sup> Table 4 shows the models for the overall population in columns 1 to 4 and the calculation for the Kurdish sample in columns 5 to 7. The models can overall hardly explain the general variance with their  $R^2$  ranging between 4 and 17 percent explained variance. Due to a lot of missing values and variables that were not included in specific survey years and countries, the numbers of observations also differ a lot between the models.

<sup>8</sup> Here the dependent variable is the democracy index explained in 3.2. The different models presented in the seven columns, therefore, show the strength of effect of the independent variables on the democracy index, i.e. how much higher political interest influences support for democracy. If the effect is >0 and significant (indicated as \*, \*\*, and \*\*\*), for example, higher political interest on average brings higher support for democracy.



**Table 4: Fixed effect model for pooled sample (Model 1–4) and Kurdish subsample (Model 5–6)**

	Total sample				Kurdish sample		
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7
(Intercept)	6.77*** (0.04)	6.44*** (0.05)	6.87*** (0.07)	5.98*** (0.13)	6.53*** (0.19)	6.69*** (0.25)	6.15*** (0.50)
Interest in politics	0.27*** (0.02)	0.24*** (0.02)	0.27*** (0.02)	0.21*** (0.02)	0.28*** (0.07)	0.44*** (0.10)	0.33*** (0.11)
Confidence in government	-0.07*** (0.02)	-0.05** (0.02)	-0.12*** (0.03)	-0.09** (0.03)	0.23*** (0.06)	-0.07 (0.13)	-0.04 (0.13)
Kurdish origin	1.12*** (0.07)	0.86*** (0.07)	0.71*** (0.11)	0.79*** (0.11)			
Fixed Effect: Iraq		0.81*** (0.05)	0.34*** (0.08)	0.38*** (0.08)	0.94*** (0.16)	0.37 (0.22)	0.47* (0.22)
Fixed Effect: Turkey		0.25*** (0.05)	0.32*** (0.05)	0.36*** (0.05)	1.32*** (0.23)	1.02*** (0.23)	1.15*** (0.23)
Confidence in armed forces			-0.08** (0.03)	-0.07** (0.03)		-0.22 (0.12)	-0.17 (0.12)
Confidence in parties			-0.06 (0.03)	-0.05 (0.03)		0.33* (0.13)	0.34* -0.13
Confidence in parliament			0.04 (0.03)	0.04 (0.03)		0.06 (0.13)	0.00 (0.13)
Confidence in police			-0.15*** (0.03)	-0.11*** (0.03)		-0.05 (0.13)	-0.10 (0.13)
Gender				-0.03 (0.04)			-0.13 (0.18)
Age				0.01*** (0.00)			0.01 (0.01)
Education				0.22*** (0.02)			0.23*** (0.06)
R							
Adj. R <sup>2</sup>	0.04	0.05	0.04	0.06	0.07	0.12	0.15
Num. obs.	14049	14049	10040	9757	1058	436	432
RMSE	2.11	2.09	2.10	2.08	1.96	1.81	1.78

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$ , \*\* $p < 0.01$ , \* $p < 0.05$

The table shows the strength, direction, and significance of the different independent variables, as indicated on the Y-axis, on the dependent variable with the effects of the countries held fixed. Each model, therefore, shows a different combination of independent variables and their influence on the overall support for democracy.

As model 4 shows, these effects are constant even if control variables are added. In the pooled model, confidence in parties and parliament is not significant and gender is not either. Confidence in government, armed forces, and police have a negative significant effect on the democratic index. Therefore, respondents in the whole of Iran, Iraq, and Turkey who have confidence in their government, their armed forces, and their police have a significantly negative rating on their support for democracy scale. As the dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is Kurdish or not is highly significant in the overall samples, the outcome shows that being Kurdish in all three countries has a positive effect on support for democracy versus autocracy which supports previous comparative findings by Belge and Karakoç (2015) and this effect stays significant, even with other variables included in Model 2, 3 and 4.

Table 4 shows the effects of the models for the Kurdish subsample. The model itself strongly changes and adding control variables also changes the overall distribution of significance strongly. The fixed effect of being a Kurd from Turkey is the strongest one and adding control variables completely eradicates the significance of the predictor of confidence in the government. Being a Kurd from Iraq strongly lost significance when other variables were added. Education and political interest stay quite significant over the models. Interestingly, in model 5 without control variables confidence in the government even has a positive effect on the democracy index. Predictors lose significance in this model and the overall  $R^2$  is a little higher, which is likely related to the overall number of observations being much smaller than for the pooled models 1,2, and 3 with more than 10,000 observations.

In the overall model of all pooled data, Figure 7 compares the strength of effects, and the strongest effects are the Kurdish dummy variable as well as the country fixed effects with Iran being the reference category. They also have the biggest standard errors, so we have to assume that being a Kurd or not being a Kurd and being such in Turkey, Iran or Iraq makes a big difference.

## 5 Conclusion

The outcomes strongly support the initial hypotheses. Hypotheses 1 and 2 can be accepted since Kurdishness as a predictor constantly stayed significant but also the country fixed effects stayed significant which shows: being Kurdish makes a great difference when all samples are taken together and tested with the described models. When we look at the Kurdish samples alone, however, we see that there are fewer clear effects. We can therefore say: compared to the rest of the population, Kurds are much more likely to be supportive of democracy instead of autocracy but analyzed alone, the intra-Kurdish variance still poses a complicated puzzle.

Being Kurdish in Iran has an added but not very strong negative effect on trust in institutions. In general low trust in institutions is correlated with high support for democracy as a system in the overall Iranian population, which supports the “dissatisfied democrats” idea of Dalton and Shin (2014). Being a Kurd from Turkey has a very strong influence on attitudes. Especially when it comes to armed forces, police, and courts the Kurdish population in Turkey statistically show much lower levels of trust and a much stronger negative correlation, meaning that the less they trust those institutions the more they are pro-democracy. For the Kurds in Iraq, we see a much more varied pattern which supports the notion that this constituency, having had a de facto autonomy for the last thirty years has developed more varied political preferences that go beyond the Kurdish question. In fact, one can even argue that the correlations support the original thought of Almond and Verba that support in institutions has a positive effect on support for democracy, precisely because Iraqi Kurds do have their own polity.

Overall, the models suggest that being Kurdish and more specifically being from one of the different backgrounds of Kurdish politicization in Iran, Iraq, and Turkey makes the largest difference. The model of the traditional civic culture variables hardly explains the overall variance of the model, though. The difference, therefore, lies in other nuances of political attitudes that might not always be directed towards the state but other institutions.

Generally, for future research asking the right questions is more and more important. Collecting representative and accessible data on such hard-to-reach populations to conduct reproducible research is one of the most pressing challenges of research in political science and sociology today and should be taken seriously to have a more robust overview of what moves these societies.

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