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**POLITICAL ATTITUDE TOWARD STRONGMAN AMONG
CONTEMPORARY EUROPEANS AND RUSSIANS: INDIVIDUAL AND
COUNTRY FACTORS OF INFLUENCE**

SUMMARY OF THE DISSERTATION

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Statement of research problem

Political and social sciences are increasingly grappling with the growing “neoconservative consensus” [Melville, 2017] and the strengthening of authoritarian tendencies which are evident not only in Russia but also in other European countries, the United States, and non-Western societies [Foa, Mounk, 2016; Foa, Mounk, 2017]. In recent years, research in political science has drawn a direct link between the rise of authoritarian political attitudes to the “crisis of democracy,” or even the “death of democracy.” Although scholars debate the extent of democratic deconsolidation, a consensus emerges: the contemporary Western model of liberal democracy is facing a fundamental crisis. The crisis is rooted in a combination of political and economic factors, including economic slowdown or decline, rising perceived and real economic inequality, a crisis of political representation and party systems, fiscal crisis, and the migration crisis [Svolik, 2023; Mounk, 2018]. As a consequence, there is a deep disappointment in the key ideas of the contemporary model of liberal democracy at the level of mass political culture in a vast majority of both established and emerging democracies [Levitsky, Ziblatt, 2018]. In a sense, the emergence of authoritarian political movements, leaders, and parties in many countries of the world can be seen as a justified response to the “crisis of democracy” [Muller, 2015]. Authoritarian elements can manifest themselves at both the electoral, institutional, and legal levels, as well as within the broader political culture.

The aim of this study is to identify and analyze the key factors that have contributed to the enduring presence of authoritarian political attitudes among Russians and Europeans in the past twenty years, rather than focusing on the root causes of the “crisis of democracy.” Emphasis is placed on the concept of a “strongman” through a comparative lens. In other words, which specific social groups in different societies are more likely to favor “strongman” political attitudes, and what are the underlying reasons for this preference? What factors are shared by Russians and other Europeans, and what distinguishes them? Several key questions remain unanswered.

A critical starting point for this dissertation research is the work of Andrei Melville, *Neoconservative Consensus in Russia...* (2017), which examines the neoconservative ideology in Russia and its characteristic authoritarian political attitudes [Melville, 2017]. Importantly, Melville offers insightful observations regarding the social groups in Russia that are more likely to support conservative attitudes: firstly, these attitudes are prevalent among older generations who lived in USSR as well as younger people; secondly, conservative attitudes are common among those who rely heavily on the state (i. e., officials and public sector workers); thirdly, less affluent residents of smaller towns and middle-class residents of major cities who seek to preserve the *status quo* tend to hold conservative views.

This study compares Russian and European societies to examine the “strongman” attitude, a component of the “ideological-political consensus” in political culture. Building on previously outlined assumptions, I empirically test them through a comparative analysis of the attitude's foundations, prevalence, and the factors shaping its evolution over the past twenty years.

While numerous studies have examined authoritarian political attitudes favoring "strongman" leadership across various societies, a comparative analysis specifically focusing on European countries remains absent. This gap is particularly significant given the traditional emphasis of political science on the European macro-region. A comprehensive study is needed to analyze individual and country-level factors that have shaped these attitudes among modern Europeans and Russians over the past two decades. This study centers on a comparative analysis of Russia and other European countries.

In the context of this dissertation research, the term "authoritarianism" is primarily understood in its socio-psychological meaning. Academic literature often uses this term to describe a type of political regime and a socio-psychological phenomenon involving specific personality traits, attitudes toward subordination, hierarchy, paternalism, and a preference for conformity, rejection of the Other, and tolerance of violence [Solt, 2012].

Drawing on Inglehart and Welzel's definition, political culture is understood as a constellation of values, norms, attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions that individuals hold about politics. Thus, political culture represents the aggregated level of these individual political categories, forming a collective understanding of political matters [Inglehart, Welzel, 2005].

The central focus of this dissertation research is the phenomenon of the “strongman.” Within the framework of this work, it is more conceptually accurate to view “strongman” as a political attitude. Political attitudes are understood as socio-psychological phenomena that reflect an individual's assessments and feelings toward significant objects, processes, events, ideas, actions, or practices within the political sphere. (For instance, this could encompass attitudes toward freedom, justice, parliament, or any other relevant political entity [Hatemi, McDermott, 2016]).

Authoritarianism is not directly measurable. However, the political attitude of the “strongman” provides an operationalization, or indirect measure, of this concept. It is one of the defining characteristics contributing to the overall understanding of authoritarianism. “Strongman” is chosen for several reasons. First, this attitude embodies key characteristics of authoritarianism consistently described in academic research. Second, this attitude effectively captures the phenomenon of authoritarianism at the everyday level through a metaphorical lens, bridging the gap between the abstract political sphere and the concrete personal realm. Third, this term mitigates the negative connotations and value judgments often associated with

“authoritarianism.” Fourth, “strongman” exhibits a negative correlation with attitudes endorsing democracy, reflecting their theoretical opposition. Fifth, this attitude also serves as an indirect measure of attitudes toward personalism in politics, a phenomenon prevalent in both modern autocracies and democracies [Foa, 2021; Frantz, 2021]. Sixth, extensive comparative empirical data from mass surveys over many years are available to analyze this attitude effectively. Lastly, this category has been consistently employed in authoritarianism research since the 1930s, featuring prominently in various authoritarianism indices (RWA, SDO, F-Scale, etc.).

Literature review

In contemporary socio-political studies, this problem is formulated in terms of “cultural backlash” [Inglehart, 2018] and “modernization losers thesis.” [Hartmann, Kurz, Lengfeld, 2022]. Indeed, political science still lacks a complete understanding of the political, economic, cultural, and other factors behind the “rise of authoritarianism” or “authoritarian reflex” [Inglehart, 2018] in contemporary Russians’ and Europeans’ values and attitudes.

Four conventional directions, often overlapping, characterize research on the “strongman” attitude.¹

Studies of “authoritarian populism” and “authoritarian” regime transformations often consider this attitude in two ways. On one hand, it is seen as a characteristic of institutions, embodying the “strongman” rule principle. On the other hand, it is recognized as a key socio-psychological characteristic of individuals who support authoritarian populism. In this direction, greater emphasis is placed on regime transformations, where the “strongman” attitude plays a significant role. [Smith, Hanley, 2018; Scoones, 2016]. The key position of this direction can be formulated as follows: the crisis of the institutions of liberal democracy and economic insecurity can generate authoritarian populism and, as a result, the demand for a “strongman” attitude.

The “authoritarianism research” direction views the “strongman” as a defining characteristic of authoritarianism, encompassing both left- and right-wing forms. This long research tradition focuses on the psychological dimension of this attitude, its interrelationships with other authoritarian characteristics, and the individual factors that influence it [Brown, 2015].

The “electoral studies” direction primarily focuses on electoral behavior and political participation. In this context, the “strongman” attitude is seen as an indicator of adherence to non-democratic regimes. Research within this direction is often more applied and practical. Examples of such studies can be found at institutions like the Pew Research Center, the Voter Study Group,

¹ This part of the summary on pp. 5-7 uses several fragments of my article – Земцов А.О. "Сильная рука": авторитарность в политической культуре современных россиян // Полития: Анализ. Хроника. Прогноз. – 2019. – № 4. – С. 87-110.

the National Council for Eurasian and East European Research, the Public Religion Research Institute, Gallup, the American National Election Study, and others.²

The “values research” direction, exemplified by the work of Inglehart, Welzel, and others [Inglehart, Welzel, 2005; Inglehart, Norris, 2016], views the “strongman” attitude as a manifestation of traditional, materialist values. According to this tradition, authoritarian populism and associated attitudes like the “strongman” represent a conservative response, or “cultural backlash,” to the rise of post-material, pro-democratic values. This can be interpreted as an “authoritarian reaction to Modernity.”

A handful of comparative studies examine how individual and country factors combine to influence the “strongman” and how these influences are explained. These studies provide important but conflicting results about the influence of individual and country factors. In the dissertation, I continue this line of research, significantly developing the subject matter by limiting our analysis to the composition of countries, focusing exclusively on European societies. It is important to note that the samples of previous comparative works included very different societies, ranging from Central African countries to Latin America and Southeast Asia. In this dissertation, the sample is not mixed but more homogeneous regarding country composition. In addition, I extend the time horizon of the study to the last four waves of the WVS project from 1999 to 2021 and focus on Russia and its comparison with other European societies.

Now, let us briefly discuss contemporary Russian studies, which have also contributed to developing research issues.

Closely related to the research problems is a quantitative study by Andrei Shcherbak on the data of surveys of the ESS project from 2010 to 2018, dedicated to analyzing the dynamics of conservatism in the political culture of modern Russians, identifying the main conservative attitudes and factors that influence them [Shcherbak, 2023]. Shcherbak shows that a certain “upsurge” of conservatism took place, which came in 2014–2016. The author identifies a four-part structure of Russian conservatism in political culture; these are four attitudes: loyalism, conformity, religiosity, and traditionalism/security. Also, Shcherbak shows that individual factors significantly influence conservative attitudes. Thus, more conservative tend to be women, less educated people, people with high political trust and low political participation, and people who identify themselves as “right-wing” while being favorably disposed toward immigrants. Age does

² Brenan M. Trump Still Scores Highest as Strong Leader, but Less So Now. Gallop URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/216260/trump-scores-highest-strong-leader-less.aspx> (дата обращения: 23.10.2023); Wike, Simmons, Stokes, Fetterolf, 2017; Kohut A., Doherty C., Parker K., Flemming G., Dimock M., Lustig L., Samaranayake N. Voter Turnout May Slip Again. Pew Research Center. URL: <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2000/07/13/voter-turnout-may-slip-again/> (дата обращения: 21.10.2023).

not matter. As Scherbak writes, the “socio-demographic base” of Russian conservatism is generally similar to that of Europe [Shcherbak, 2023, P. 214-216].

The research of O.V. Popova focused on the conservative values and attitudes of modern Russians, is directly relevant to the proposed research [Popova, 2005; Popova, 2009]. She notes that political conservatism had already prevailed among Russians in the early 2000s. Popova argues that “in the minds of citizens, political conservatism is associated primarily with reactionary political attitudes, with fear and reluctance of reforms, any radical changes, with the declaration of the benefits of exceptionally slow and ultra-cautious changes.” [Popova, 2004, P. 204]. One of the most important conservative attitudes, according to Popova, is the orientation to “strong power” or “strongman” [Popova, 2004, P. 205]. She notes that “an individual aspires not so much to personal freedom as to ‘good’ government. At the same time, for the majority of people, ‘good’ governance is associated with a ‘strongman’ [Popova, 2004, P. 213]. The demand for a ‘strongman’ is associated with unprecedented social, economic, and political transformations, crises, and people’s feelings of insecurity in the 1990s. Among the authoritarian attitudes of Russians, Popova also identifies “security,” “legality,” “power,” and “traditionalism” [Popova, 2004, P. 214].

The research of S.V. Patrushev and his co-authors is devoted to the political culture of modern Russians, its authoritarian elements, and how it changed in the process of democratic transition in the 1990s. He notes that despite radical economic and political transformations, the political culture of Russians is largely authoritarian [Grunt, 1996]. Patrushev emphasizes that the sustainability of democracy depends on the mass dissemination of appropriate values and attitudes among the country’s citizens, which after the early 1990s were in less and less demand, and there was a growing demand for “state paternalism” and a return to the pre-Perestroika era [Grunt, 1996]. The political scientist notes that Russian political culture is characterized by personalism, adherence to the “strongman,” and the fundamental importance of the figures of political leaders [Patrushev, 2006; Patrushev, Khlopin, 2007].

In more recent works, Patrushev and his co-authors emphasize the importance of polarization or the value split (“traditional” vs. “modern” political values and attitudes); this tension sets the dynamics of Russian political culture [Patrushev, Filippova, 2017]. In particular, as the authors write, there is a tension in attitudes towards “political representation”: “strong leader” vs. “democratic representation.” The value conflict is also embodied in the choice between the “declarative” (democratic) and “pragmatic” (authoritarian) attitudes of modern Russians [Patrushev, 2020].

Important for the proposed research are the works of E. B. Shestopal and her co-authors from the School of Political Psychology of Moscow State University, which partly concern the study of the phenomenon of “strongman” in the context of their quantitative and qualitative studies

of the images of power and political culture of modern Russians in general. She notes that “authoritarian demand” was already recorded in their work in the early 2000s [Shestopal, 2004], with the closer a region is to the capital, the higher the demand for a “strong” among its residents, and the farther away from the center, the lower [Shestopal..., 2004]. In another study, she notes that many respondents, for whom democracy as such is important, put into it “authoritarian-communitarian” understandings: “subordination,” “discipline,” “rigid order,” and “hierarchy” [Shestopal, 2011]. Shestopal notes that by the mid-noughties, “by the mid-noughties, an approximate parity of democrats and autocrats had been established in quantitative terms. At the same time, there was a certain clarification of positions, their clarification, which was expressed in the reduction of mixed types of consciousness” [Shestopal, 2011, P. 45].

In a recent study by Shestopal and Rogach on the perception of political leaders among modern Russians [Shestopal, Rogach, 2020], the authors note that the image of an ideal president contains traditional characteristics for Russians, which are comparable to the content of the “strongman” attitude. As the researchers conclude, the image of an ideal president is that of a “father of the nation.” [Shestopal, Rogach, 2020, P. 171]. This image is still rooted in the political culture at the “unconscious level” [Shestopal, Rogach, 2020, P. 178] and is “under” the external level of socially desirable “rational-secular” values.

In summarizing the intermediate results of this section, one can note that many Russian researchers emphasize a certain specialness, or “otherness,” of Russian political culture more often. There is also a large number of foreign and domestic studies devoted to the study of Russian authoritarian political attitudes. As a rule, foreign authors engaged in comparative studies emphasize that the “social base” of these attitudes is comparable to other European societies.

Research question

What individual (socio-demographic) and country (political, economic, value) factors influence the authoritarian political attitude toward the “strongman” among modern Europeans and Russians over the last two decades?

Research goal

This dissertation research aims to identify individual and country-specific factors that persistently influence adherence to the authoritarian “strongman” political attitude among contemporary Europeans and Russians over the past twenty years.

Research objectives

1. To study the concepts and theories that consider authoritarianism in political attitudes, particularly the “strongman” attitude, in the works of political scientists, sociologists, and social psychologists;

2. To analyze previous Russian and foreign empirical studies examining the influence of country and individual factors on the “strongman” attitude;
3. To conceptualize and operationalize dependent (authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman”) and independent country and individual variables;
4. To identify robust statistical effects for individual and country variables that influence the authoritarian political attitude towards a “strongman”;
5. To explain and interpret the stable statistical effects of individual and country variables that influence the “strongman” attitude of modern Russians and Europeans.

Research Hypothesis

Therefore, building on previous research on authoritarian political attitudes towards the “strongman,” I can propose the following four hypotheses.

H1. Socio-demographic characteristics of an individual significantly affect the authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman” in modern Europeans and Russians. Individuals with higher age, lower education, lower population density, lower levels of subjective household income, and higher religiosity tend to exhibit higher levels of authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman.” Gender generally does not have a consistent and significant effect from a comparative perspective. These effects are generally characteristic of both modern Russians and Europeans.

This assumption is based on the logic of Christian Welzel's [Welzel, 2013] evolutionary theory of modernization, as well as the theory of capitals [Putnam, 2000; Radaev, 2002]. The greater the amount and combination of different types of resources or capitals an individual possesses, the lower their authoritarianism, and in particular, the lower their “strongman” attitude on average.

H2. The type of political regime significantly affects the authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman” in modern Russians and Europeans. The lower the level of democratization of the regime, as measured by political indices such as V-Dem, the higher, on average, the level of authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman” among the inhabitants of that society.

This assumption is based on the logic of neo-institutional theory [North, Wallis, Weingast, 2009], which posits that political institutions are primary, while subjective phenomena of political culture are reflections of these institutions and practices. I also proceed from the thesis about the special significance of the popularity of political leaders in authoritarian regimes (the thesis of Geddes and Magaloni) [Geddes, 1999; Magaloni, 2006], which states that the popularity of the leader is significant for the legitimacy of the regime and the stability of its institutions.

H3. Economic development, measured by GDP per capita, significantly affects the authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman” among modern Russians and Europeans. The

lower the level of economic development, the higher, on average, the demand for an authoritarian political attitude towards “strongman” among the inhabitants of that country.

This hypothesis is based on the assumption of the theory of post-materialism and its thesis of “existential security,” [Inglehart, 2018] the emancipative theory of modernization [Welzel, 2013], and the logic of the “Lipset hypothesis” [Lipset, 1959; Treisman, 2020]. The lower the economic security of an individual, and their well-being, the higher their authoritarianism, and in particular, the authoritarian attitude towards the “strongman” [Inglehart, 2018, P. 31].

H4. Emancipative values significantly influence the authoritarian political attitude towards the “strongman” of modern Russians and Europeans. The lower the level of emancipative values in society, the higher, on average, the level of authoritarian political attitude towards the “strongman” among the inhabitants of that country.

This latter hypothesis is based, on the one hand, on the logic of Schwartz's [Schwartz, 1994] theory of values, where values are more general categories that affect narrower categories—attitudes, in particular. On the other hand, this assumption is based on the theory of post-materialism [Inglehart, Welzel, 2005] and the emancipative theory of modernization [Welzel, 2013]. Emancipative values, with their emphasis on universalism, egalitarianism, participation, and caring for others, are anti-authoritarian in their content, so they—as more general goals and imperatives—can influence private authoritarian attitudes, including the “strongman.”

Methodology, methods, selection of empirical data, scope and limitations of research

This dissertation research is grounded in the premises and logic of neo-positivist trend in the social sciences in general, the dominant approach within the framework of quantitative socio-political research. The work utilizes individual data arrays from public opinion polls conducted on representative samples of dozens of European countries across the last four waves of the World Values Survey (WVS) and European Values Survey (EVS) over the past 20 years—from 1999 to 2021. The study sample includes several dozen countries, some of which are present in all waves. The first wave of research includes 32 countries, the second 43, the third 17, and the fourth 37. The scope of the study is limited to this period, as it allows for a long-term perspective on the authoritarian political attitudes of Russians and Europeans. The work also draws on data from the World Bank and the Varieties of Democracy project over the same years.

In this paper, I adopt the understanding of democracy developed by the researchers of the Varieties of Democracy project, who define democracy through its five key characteristics: the quality of elections (the “electoral” dimension of democracy); the degree of pluralism (the “liberal” dimension); the degree of participation of different social groups in politics (the “participatory”

dimension); the degree of access and political equality (the “egalitarian” dimension); the degree of freedom of discussion (the “deliberative” dimension) [Coppedge..., 2020].

It is important to note that V-Dem is not an ideal data source, there may be claims to it, which we do not ignore, we are critical of it. This is only one of the sources of empirical expertise, and not the truth. We use this data for pragmatic reasons, since, firstly, they are theoretically founded, secondly, they have strict methodological grounds, the creators use the latest statistical methods and huge arrays of political characteristics of countries, and finally, thirdly, only V-Dem has a sufficient amount of data on the countries of interest to us for the required period of time. Unfortunately, there are no available domestic databases for the period we need yet.

It is also important to note here that this work critically examines the conventional dichotomy of "democracy-autocracy", which has become stable over the past 40 years. There are reasons to believe that it is outdated, that is, this dichotomy does little to help understand the modern political dynamics of societies; regime studies need to be reconceptualized. Also critically examined are all sorts of quantitative databases (in our case, this is V-Dem), which measure the degrees of democracy and authoritarianism of regimes. Often this conditional dichotomy and schematic measurements, classifications of regimes, which simplify and engage political analysis, complex political phenomena. However, simplification, a certain unification and construction of analytical models also provide beneficial opportunities for, firstly, comparing different societies, secondly, studying political dynamics, thirdly, strict quantitative analysis and searching for internal and external connections between different political phenomena, interrelations between institutional and non-institutional factors in politics.

This dissertation research employs a variety of data analysis methods, including: multi-level regression analyses with mixed effects and ordinal regression analysis (for investigating the impact of individual factors on Russian data); contingency matrix; analysis of mean; one-factorial analysis of variance; correlation analysis, and factor analysis.

The key **dependent variables** are two authoritarian political attitudes: support for a “strongman” and disapproval of democracy, both measured using indicator questions from the WVS political culture block. The latter attitude is used to validate and recheck the effects of the “strongman” attitude, as they correlate with each other, effectively measuring the same phenomenon of authoritarianism. **Independent variables at the individual level** include socio-demographic characteristics such as gender, age, level of education, size of the settlement, subjective household income, and religiosity. At the country level, **the independent variables** are seven political indices from the V-Dem project, GDP per capita in dollars according to the World Bank, and the Index of Emancipative Values according to WVS, developed by Christian Welzel.

Contribution to the discussion of the problem in existing literature

This dissertation offers a novel scientific contribution by investigating the interplay between individual (socio-demographic) and country-level (political, economic, value) factors in shaping the authoritarian political attitude towards a “strongman” with a focus on a limited sample of European countries alongside Russia. Previous comparative studies have encompassed countries from various parts of the world, characterized by significant historical, cultural, political, economic, and social disparities. Notably, no prior studies have specifically explored the factors influencing the “strongman” attitude from a purely European perspective. This comparative approach enables the identification of both “common” factors driving this attitude across Europe and the “particular” characteristics of Russia over the past 20 years. By deconstructing the phenomenon of authoritarianism through this lens, the study provides analytical and verifiable methods for understanding and explaining it.

The work also offers a critical historiography of classical and modern studies of authoritarianism in political culture, providing a comprehensive overview of key foreign and domestic research on authoritarianism and the “strongman” attitude. Notably, the study introduces numerous significant foreign works on authoritarianism and the “strongman” attitude into the field of Russian political science. By attempting to bridge the gap between Russian studies of authoritarianism and the attitude to a “strongman” in political culture, the dissertation aims to facilitate an “exit from the ghetto” [Melville, 2020] and integrate the Russian context adequately into a broader international research perspective.

Statements to be defended

The first statement asserts that socio-demographic characteristics (at the individual level) exert a significant and consistent influence on the authoritarian political attitude towards the “strongman” among modern Russians and Europeans. Specifically, gender, age, education, population, subjective household income, and religiosity impact both authoritarian political attitudes, including support for a “strongman” and disapproval of democracy. While the authoritarian political attitude towards a “strongman” (and disapproval of democracy, in particular) among modern Russians shares common features with the pan-European sample, the effects of age differ. For the pan-European sample, younger individuals, compared to older cohorts, are more likely to endorse the “strongman” attitude. Conversely, in Russia, young people exhibit a lower adherence to this attitude.

The second statement argues that the type of political regime, as measured by V-Dem data, significantly impacts the authoritarian political attitude towards the “strongman” within the sample of countries participating in the study. The lower the level of democracy in a regime, the

higher the indicators of authoritarian political attitudes—both support for a “strongman” and disapproval of democracy—among the inhabitants of that country.

The third statement proposes that economic development, as measured by GDP per capita, influences authoritarian political attitudes, including both support for a “strongman” and disapproval of democracy. Specifically, lower economic development correlates with higher levels of authoritarian political attitudes. This conclusion aligns generally with Ronald Inglehart's theory of post-materialism and his hypothesis of “existential security.”

The fourth statement states that the values measured by the Welzel emancipative Values Index demonstrate a significant and stable effect on authoritarian political attitudes, encompassing both support for a "strongman" and disapproval of democracy. Lower levels of emancipative values correlate with higher levels of authoritarian political attitudes. Therefore, the value system of a society plays a crucial role, capable of influencing the reduction of authoritarianism or serving as fertile ground for its formation, depending on the dominance of specific values.

Analysis of data and findings

This dissertation research is structured with an introduction, three chapters, a conclusion, and an appendix. The introduction establishes the research design, outlines the main conception of the work, and characterizes the current state of knowledge concerning the research problem.

The first chapter explores theoretical approaches and critically examines the historiography of authoritarianism research. It then focuses on the authoritarian political attitude towards the “strongman,” a central category within the framework of the dissertation. This section provides an overview of key findings from Russian and foreign studies investigating the influence of both country and individual factors on the “strong man” attitude, offering interpretations of these results.

The second chapter focuses on the methodological foundations of the research. It presents the databases utilized, the overall methodology employed, and the specific analytical methods used. The chapter also delves into the conceptualization and operationalization of both dependent and independent variables, at both the individual and country levels.

The third chapter presents a comparative empirical analysis examining the influence of both country and individual factors on the installation of a “strongman” attitude. The chapter begins with descriptive data analysis, followed by a section presenting the results of a multi-level regression analysis with mixed effects. This analysis investigates the influence of individual and country factors on two key attitudes: support for the “strongman” and disapproval of democracy.

Quantitative analysis of data from four waves of the European Values Study (EVS) and World Values Survey (WVS) over the past twenty years has identified significant and stable effects of both individual and country-level factors on two authoritarian political attitudes, with the

“strongman” as the central focus. Key tables 1 through 5 present the primary analysis results for this investigation. The analysis revealed that six key socio-demographic characteristics (individual factors)—gender, age, education, population size of residence, subjective household income, and religiosity—influence authoritarian political attitudes, impacting both support for the “strongman” and disapproval of democracy. Notably, four common effects were observed to operate similarly across both authoritarian attitudes: lower age, lower education level, smaller population size of residence, and lower subjective household income were all associated with higher levels of authoritarian political attitudes. These consistent statistical effects were replicated across the majority of measurements for both authoritarian attitudes. This finding provides further indirect confirmation that these two attitudes measure a shared socio-psychological phenomenon.

However, notable differences were also observed. While gender has almost no effect on support for the “strongman” (with men exhibiting slightly higher levels of authoritarianism, but only in the final measurement out of four), it demonstrates a distinct and consistently reproducible effect on disapproval of democracy. In three out of four measurements, women expressed a slightly lower appreciation for democracy than men (with men showing slightly higher authoritarianism in 2010–2014). Similarly, religiosity exhibits a contrasting pattern. Higher religiosity consistently increases the likelihood of supporting a “strongman” across all measurements but simultaneously reduces disapproval of democracy in most survey waves. These contradictory results will be further interpreted in the following sections.

The research findings demonstrate that the authoritarian attitude toward the “strongman” in Russia (particularly disapproval of democracy) is generally influenced by the same factors observed in the pan-European sample. Specifically, lower levels of formal education, smaller population size of residence, lower subjective income, and higher religiosity are all associated with higher levels of authoritarian political attitudes towards the “strongman.” Therefore, **the first hypothesis**, based on Christian Welzel's evolutionary theory of modernization, is confirmed, though only partially [Welzel, 2013].

Why is the first hypothesis only partially confirmed? This is primarily due to the contradictory influence of age. It was expected that, according to our hypothesis, the lower the age, the lower the authoritarianism since older individuals tend to be more conservative, including in the political sphere. Younger people, on the contrary, are more likely to take risks, novelty, and active political actions; they are generally less dogmatic — democracy is a more profitable tool for them, a legal mechanism for meritocratic struggle, the change of old elites and generations to new ones.

What can be the reason for this paradoxical effect when, in the framework of the European sample, younger people are, on average, more authoritarian, and in Russia, on the contrary? A

combination of reasons may work here. Firstly, the “crisis of democracy” first of all, can affect younger people — they can clearly see its costs, but they do not notice the benefits that they have not yet been able to achieve or the benefits have gone away for them, or they are not so obvious when the democratic regime has long been established. In the political culture of young people, it is given for which one does not have to sacrifice anything; it is devalued (the logic of the “deficit hypothesis”— when there is little good, a person values it more highly; when there is enough or excessive good, it may lose its significance). Secondly, as a consequence of the first reason, young respondents see the costs of democracy and strive to find more suitable political alternatives to it, and democracy is no longer “the only game in town.” The energy of young people, their orientation toward change, revision of the *status quo*, and a completely pragmatic orientation toward succeeding in life can work against democracy because, for most European countries, such a *status quo* is democracy. Thirdly, young people in general may feel the social, economic, and political costs of democracy more strongly, and many of the benefits from it go to older people with a greater combination of resources and capital.

For Russia, the situation is reversed. That is, the same reasons are significant, but they work the other way around. Younger Russians are keenly aware of the possible imperfections of a social order. Therefore, they are interested in alternatives to this social order. In their political consciousness, the democratic alternative may be more effective; it provides, according to their logic, more profitable opportunities for implementation. The logic of the “deficit hypothesis” also works here — the less a good is, the more a person values it. The second reason also works, but in the opposite way — that is, young respondents see possible imperfections of the political order and, as a result, are more interested in its alternatives. In this sense, the energy of the young, their orientation toward transformation, and a completely pragmatic desire to succeed financially in life work for the greater value of democracy. The third reason also works, but also somewhat differently — younger people see more possible imperfections for themselves in the current *status quo* because many benefits, resources, and capital go to older people.

Let us move on to conclusions and interpretations of country-level effects. It was found out that the type of political regime significantly affects the authoritarian political attitudes of individuals (except for the wave of 2010-2014). The lower the democracy of the regime, the higher the authoritarian political attitudes of its citizens, both the “strongman” and the disapproval of democracy. Thus, **the second hypothesis** of our study is confirmed. This confirms the logic of the neo-institutional theory and the thesis of the popularity of political leaders in authoritarian regimes on which this assumption was based.

However, we would like to emphasize once again that the data of the V-Dem political indices, as well as any other similar projects, are not ideal, they have their limitations, which

include, first of all, the conventionality of measurement, “quantification” of political phenomena that sometimes cannot be reduced to static laws. Also, measuring regimes from more democratic to less democratic using indices is very problematic. We believe that democracy and autocracy can be umbrella concepts, and within these “large” categories there are very different qualitative types of democracies and autocracies that are difficult to place on one or another scale from “greater” to “lesser”. We see and understand these limitations and use the corresponding scales carefully, as purely analytical tools, which, however, also have their strengths.

The results of our study also show that economic development, measured by GDP per capita, produces significant statistical effects in three out of four waves of research (except 2010–2014) over the past two decades. The lower the economic development, the higher the level of authoritarian political attitudes, both attitudes toward a “strongman” and attitudes towards disapproval of democracy. Thus, **the third hypothesis** of our study is confirmed. This hypothesis was based on a number of assumptions from the theory of post-materialism (its thesis on existential security), the evolutionary theory of modernization, and the “Lipset hypothesis.”

Here, another important conclusion comes—values (according to the Welzel index of emancipative values) have significant effects. The lower the level of emancipative values, the higher the “strongman” attitude and disapproval of democracy. Thus, the results of the empirical analysis confirm our fourth hypothesis. It was based, on the one hand, on Shalom Schwartz's theory of values, its assumption that values (as more general categories) influence attitudes (narrower categories). This hypothesis was also based on Christian Welzel's evolutionary theory of modernization, which is able to explain specifically our attitude—the influence of values on the authoritarian attitude to the “strongman.”

The phenomenon of authoritarianism is influenced by both the country level and the individual level. This is evidenced by the inter-class correlation (IC) tests conducted for all working regression models. The factor of country affiliation consistently demonstrates significance, explaining an average of 12–18% of variations. Nevertheless, the individual level remains more impactful. In other words, personal resources hold greater importance than insurance resources. This suggests that personal well-being carries more weight than the general well-being of the country when it comes to influencing support for a “strongman.”

Approbation of results

The results of the dissertation research were tested at six international conferences.

- VI Russian Sociological Congress-2020, Russia, Tyumen, November 10-12, 2021, «The value of democracy in the political consciousness of the population of post-socialist countries and factors influencing its significance»;

- XXI April International Scientific Conference on Problems of Economic and Social Development, Russia, Moscow, April 13-29, 2020, «The End of Democracy? The Value of Democracy in the Political Consciousness of the Population of Post-Socialist Countries and Factors Affecting its Significance»;
- XX April International Scientific Conference on Problems of Economic and Social Development, Russia, Moscow, April 9-12, 2019, «“Strong Hand” in the Political Consciousness of Modern Russians: Quantitative and Qualitative Measurement»;
- XIII Russian scientific conference in memory of Yuri Levada «Modern Russian society and sociology», Russia, Moscow, April 23, 2019, «"Strong hand" in the political consciousness of modern Russians: the influence of socio-demographic factors on its demand»;
- XIX April International Scientific Conference on Problems of Economic and Social Development, Russia, Moscow, April 10-13, 2018, «The influence of socio-demographic characteristics on authoritarian political ideas»;
- XII Russian scientific conference in memory of Yuri Levada «Modern Russian society and sociology», Russia, Moscow, April 24, 2018, «Authoritarian political ideas of modern Russians: qualitative measurement».

The results were published in leading peer-reviewed scientific journals, including those recommended by the HSE University.

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Appendix

Table 1 — Results of multi-level regression analyses, 1999, dependent variable — answers of respondents to the question about strongman, EVS

Independent variables	Dependent variable					
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Individual level (social-socio-demographic characteristics)						
Sex (men — 0, women — 1)	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02
Age (control group: 55 years and older)						
18-24 age	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
25-39 age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.02	0.01
40-54 age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Образование (Контрольная группа: Образование 4: Высшее образование, ученая степень)						
Education 1	0.81***	0.81***	0.81***	0.81***	0.81***	0.81***
Education 2	0.56***	0.56***	0.56***	0.56***	0.56***	0.56***
Education 3	0.36***	0.36***	0.36***	0.36***	0.36***	0.36***
Education (Control group: Education 4: Higher education, academic degree)						
Up to 5000 people	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***	0.13***
5000-20000 people	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***
20000-100000 people	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***
100000-500000 people	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***
Subjective household income on the scale from 1 (poorest) to 8 (richest)	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***	-0.03***
Religiosity on the scale from 1 (God is absolutely unimportant in life) to 10 (absolutely important)	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***
Country level						
Person of the Leader Index	0.05					
Neopatrimonial Rule Index	1.69**					
Democracy Index					-0.44***	-0.06
GDP (nominal) per capita in current US dollars (log)					-0.46***	-0.42**
1 2	0.15	0.07	0.48**	0.15	-4.01***	-3.67*
2 3	1.62***	1.55***	1.96***	1.63***	-2.53**	-2.20
3 4	3.14***	3.06***	3.47***	3.14***	-1.02	-0.68
N (first level — number of respondents)	28998	28998	28998	28998	28998	28998
N (second level — number of countries)	31	31	31	31	31	31
logLik	-34146.66	-34146.55	-34142.57	-34141.58	-34137.70	-34137.64
AIC	68327.31	68329.09	68321.15	68319.15	68311.40	68313.27
BIC	68467.99	68478.04	68470.10	68468.10	68460.35	68470.50
Variance	0.67	0.67	0.52	0.48	0.38	0.37
Adjusted ICC	0.170	0.169	0.136	0.128	0.103	0.102
Conditional R ²	0.199	0.199	0.198	0.199	0.196	0.197
Marginal R ²	0.035	0.036	0.071	0.081	0.104	0.105

*p-value < 0,05; **p < 0,01; ***p < 0,001

Table 2 — Results of multi-level regression analyses, 2008, dependent variable — answers of respondents to the question about strongman, EVS

Independent variables	Dependent variable					
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6
Individual level (social-socio-demographic characteristics)						
Sex (men — 0, women — 1)	-0.02	-0.02	-0.00	-0.02	-0.01	-0.01
Age (control group: 55 years and older)						
18-24 age	0.03	0.03	-0.00	0.03	0.03	0.03
25-39 age	-0.00	-0.00	-0.02	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00
40-54 age	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***	-0.08***
Education (Control group: Education 4: Higher education, academic degree)						
Education 1	0.61***	0.61***	0.66***	0.61***	0.61***	0.61***
Education 2	0.49***	0.49***	0.53***	0.49***	0.49***	0.49***
Education 3	0.28***	0.28***	0.29***	0.28***	0.27***	0.27***
Population (Control group: 500.000 people and more)						
Up to 5000 people	0.14***	0.14***		0.14***	0.14***	0.14***
5000-20000 people	0.15***	0.15***		0.15***	0.15***	0.15***
20000-100000 people	0.08*	0.08*		0.08*	0.08*	0.08*
100000-500000 people	0.05	0.05		0.05	0.05	0.06
Religiosity on the scale from 1 (God is absolutely unimportant in life) to 10 (absolutely important)	0.02***	0.02***		0.02***	0.02***	0.02***
Country level						
Person of the Leader Index	0.37***					
Neopatrimonial Rule Index	2.61***					
Democracy Index	-0.71***					
GDP (nominal) per capita in current US dollars (log)	-0.67***					
1 2	-0.28	-0.76***	0.13	-0.29**	-6.83***	-3.57
2 3	1.13***	0.66***	1.54***	1.12***	-5.41***	-2.16
3 4	2.85***	2.38***	3.25***	2.84***	-3.69*	-0.43
N (first level — number of respondents)	51097	51097	52632	51097	51097	51097
N (second level — number of countries)	42	42	42	42	42	42
logLik	-61511.43	-61506.12	-63368.65	-61495.80	-61496.46	-61494.08
AIC	123054.86	123046.23	126761.30	123025.61	123026.91	123024.16
BIC	123196.33	123196.54	126867.76	123175.91	123177.22	123183.30
Variance	0.95	0.73	0.55	0.45	0.46	0.41
Adjusted ICC	0.223	0.182	0.144	0.120	0.123	0.120
Conditional R ²	0.235	0.234	0.236	0.238	0.239	0.171
Marginal R ²	0.015	0.063	0.107	0.134	0.133	0.058
*p-value < 0,05; **p < 0,01; ***p < 0,001						

Table 3 — Results of multi-level regression analyses, 2010-2014, dependent variable — answers of respondents to the question about strongman, WVS

Independent variables	Dependent variable						
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Individual level (social-socio-demographic characteristics)							
Sex (men — 0, women — 1)	0.01	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	-0.00	0.08**
Age (control group: 55 years and older)							
18-24 age	0.07	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.08	0.18***
25-39 age	0.02	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.09*
40-54 age	-0.07	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.07*	-0.07*	0.00
Education (Control group: Education 4: Higher education, academic degree)							
Education 1	0.70***	0.69***	0.69***	0.69***	0.70***	0.70***	0.45***
Education 2	0.44***	0.44***	0.44***	0.44***	0.44***	0.44***	0.33***
Education 3	0.36***	0.37***	0.37***	0.37***	0.37***	0.37***	0.26***
Population (Control group: 500.000 people and more)							
Up to 5000 people	0.14**						
5000-20000 people	0.12*						
20000-100000 people	0.21***						
100000-500000 people	0.09						
Subjective household income on the scale from 1 (poorest) to 8 (richest)	-0.02*	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01	-0.01
Religiosity on the scale from 1 (God is absolutely unimportant in life) to 10 (absolutely important)	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.04***	0.02***
Country level							
Person of the Leader Index	0.13						
Neopatrimonial Rule Index	1.27**						
Democracy Index	-0.47**						
GDP (nominal) per capita in current US dollars (log)	-0.59***						
Index of Emancipative Values	-0.46*						
	2.27***						
1 2	-0.62*	-0.78***	-0.24	-0.72***	-6.32***	-5.07**	-1.81***
2 3	0.86***	0.67**	1.21***	0.73***	-4.87***	-3.62	-0.33
3 4	2.57***	2.40***	2.95***	2.47***	-3.13*	-1.88	1.43***
N (first level — number of respondents)	17466	19715	19715	19715	19715	19715	
N (second level — number of countries)	14	16	16	16	16	16	
logLik	-21726.85	-24706.20	-24703.66	-24703.44	-24702.14	-24701.89	-24392.82
AIC	43487.69	49440.40	49435.33	49434.89	49432.28	49433.79	48813.64
BIC	43619.75	49550.85	49545.78	49545.34	49542.72	49552.12	48924.06
Variance	0.73	0.58	0.42	0.41	0.35	0.34	0.45
Adjusted ICC	0.181	0.149	0.113	0.110	0.095	0.093	0.120
Conditional R ²	0.198	0.179	0.181	0.182	0.184	0.184	0.178
Marginal R ²	0.021	0.035	0.076	0.080	0.098	0.100	0.066
*p-value < 0,05; **p < 0,01; ***p < 0,001							

Table 4 — Results of multi-level regression analyses, 2017-2020, dependent variable — answers of respondents to the question about strongman, EVS/ WVS

Independent variables	Dependent variable						
	M1	M2	M3	M4	M5	M6	M7
Individual level (social-socio-demographic characteristics)							
Sex (men — 0, women — 1)	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06***	-0.06***	0.07***
Age (control group: 55 years and older)							
18-24 age	0.13***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.14***	0.30***
25-39 age	0.18***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.20***	0.29***
40-54 age	-0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.08***
Education (Control group: Education 4: Higher education, academic degree)							
Education 1	0.76***	0.85***	0.85***	0.85***	0.85***	0.85***	0.60***
Education 2	0.55***	0.61***	0.61***	0.61***	0.61***	0.61***	0.48***
Education 3	0.21***	0.23***	0.23***	0.23***	0.23***	0.23***	0.18***
Population (Control group: 500.000 people and more)							
Up to 5000 people	0.16***						
5000-20000 people	0.17***						
20000-100000 people	0.22***						
100000-500000 people	0.03						
Religiosity on the scale from 1 (God is absolutely unimportant in life) to 10 (absolutely important)	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	0.05***	
Country level							
Person of the Leader Index	0.27**						
Neopatrimonial Rule Index	2.22***						
Democracy Index	-0.69***						
GDP (nominal) per capita in current US dollars (log)	-0.78***						
Index of Emancipative Values	-0.24						
	-0.57***						
	-2.69***						
1 2	0.06	-0.26	0.63***	-0.03	-7.60***	-5.64***	-1.64***
2 3	1.40***	1.07***	1.96***	1.30***	-6.27***	-4.31***	-0.25
3 4	3.12***	2.80***	3.69***	3.04***	-4.54***	-2.58*	1.53***
N (first level — number of respondents)	54028	59473	59473	59473	59473	59473	51186
N (second level — number of countries)	36	38	38	38	38	38	38
logLik	-64323.53	-70645.02	-70638.31	-70637.74	-70635.10	-70634.52	-59491.96
AIC	128679.06	141316.03	141302.62	141301.48	141296.21	141297.05	119007.92
BIC	128821.42	141432.94	141419.53	141418.39	141413.12	141422.95	119114.04
Variance	1.04	0.82	0.57	0.56	0.48	0.47	0.71
Adjusted ICC	0.240	0.199	0.149	0.145	0.128	0.125	0.178
Conditional R ²	0.260	0.260	0.273	0.273	0.280	0.280	0.251
Marginal R ²	0.026	0.076	0.146	0.150	0.174	0.177	0.089
*p-value < 0,05; **p < 0,01; ***p < 0,001							

Table 5 — Results of multi-level regression analyses, data from four waves in Russia, dependent variable — answers of respondents to the question about strongman, EVS/ WVS

Independent variables	Dependent variable			
	M1-1999	M2-2008	M3-2010-2014	M4-2017-2020
Individual level (social-socio-demographic characteristics)				
Sex (men — 0, women — 1)	-0,16	-0,25*	0,10	-0,00
Age (control group: 55 years and older)				
18-24 age	0,07	-0,26	-0,41**	-0,32**
25-39 age	-0,04	-0,30*	-0,26*	-0,13
40-54 age	-0,10	-0,07	-0,06	-0,19*
Education (Control group: Education 4: Higher education, academic degree)				
Education 1	0,68***	0,59	0,73	-0,07
Education 2	0,40***	0,33**	0,47***	-0,25**
Education 3	0,29*	0,22	0,37*	0,14
Population (Control group: 500.000 people and more)				
Up to 5000 people	0,08	0,29	-0,04	0,17
5000-20000 people	0,02	0,56**	-0,36*	0,39***
20000-100000 people	0,40**	0,34*	0,08	0,28**
100000-500000 people	0,12	0,44**	0,23	-0,08
Subjective household income on the scale from 1 (poorest) to 8 (richest)	-0,09*		0,03	
Religiosity on the scale from 1 (God is absolutely unimportant in life) to 10 (absolutely important)	0,05***	0,06***	0,018	0,04***
N (first level — number of respondents)	1874	1212	1945	3029
Pseudo-R-squared				
Cox-Snell	0,037	0,041	,030	,022
McFadden	0,014	0,016	,013	,008
Nagelkerke	0,040	0,044	,033	,024
*p-value < 0,05; **p < 0,01; ***p < 0,001				