

# BAK10: Comparative Democratic Politics

Week 12 - Populism and Technocracy

Leonardo Carella



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# The Plan for Today

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- Populism: what's in a buzzword?

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- Technocracy: promise and perils.

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- Populism: what's in a buzzword?
- Technocracy: promise and perils.
- The relationship between populism, technocracy and democracy.

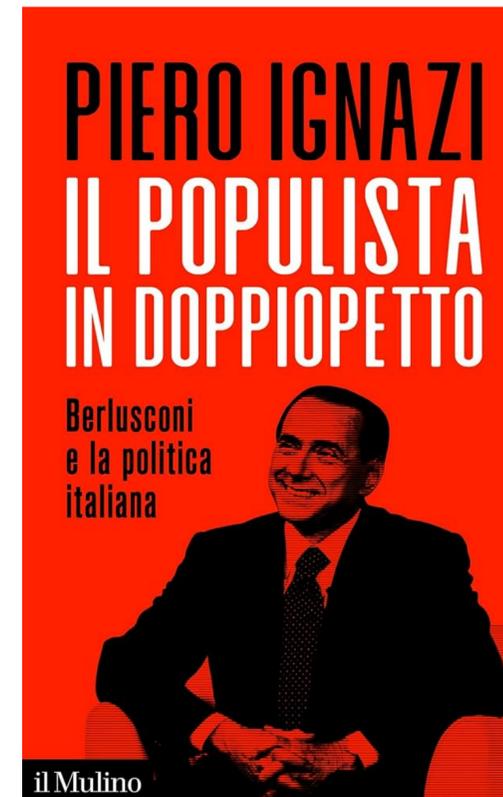
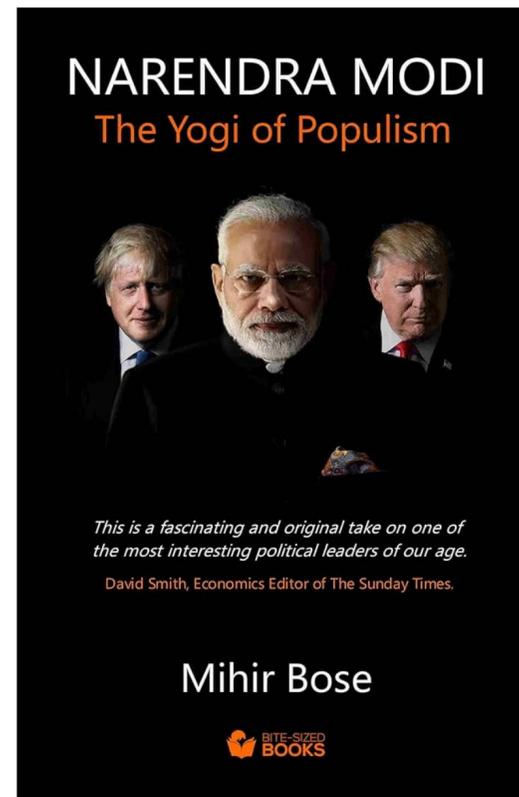
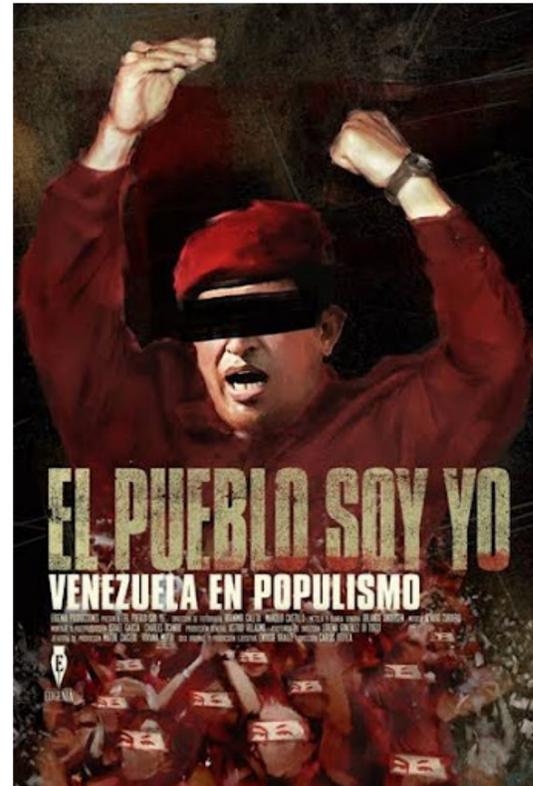
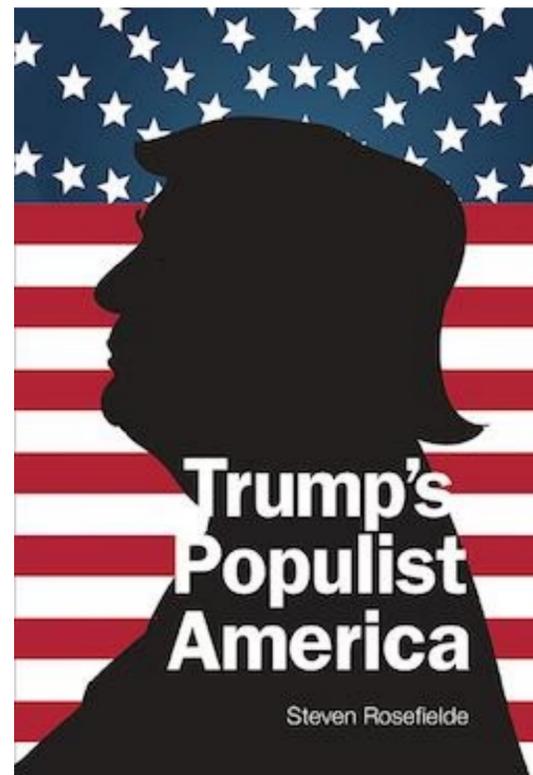
# Populism

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- Who do you think of when you think of a “populist”?

# Populism

- Who do you think of when you think of a “populist”?
- How are all these people “populists”?



## Corbyn's new party and the menace of populism

The new party should agree a pact with the Greens so as not to split the leftwing vote, says **Patrick Cosgrove**, while **Dr Chris Morris** reminds us of Corbyn's previous electoral support. Plus letters from **Ross Armstrong**, **Pamela Hope** and **Sushila Dhall**



Jeremy Corbyn and Zarah Sultana at a protest against the then Conservative government's police, crime, sentencing and courts bill on 3 April 2021. Photograph: David Cliff/NurPhoto/Shutterstock

# The buzzword of our times

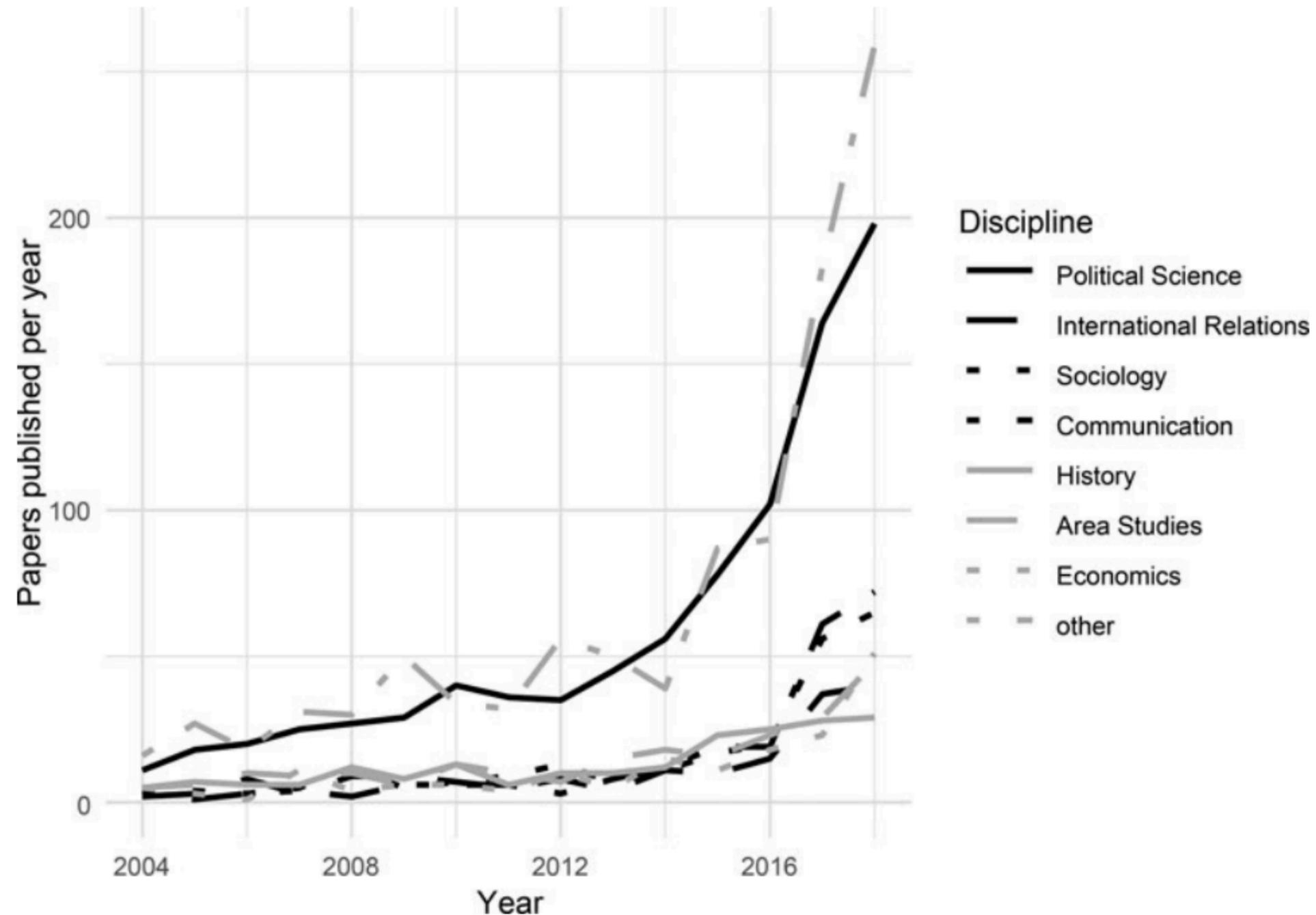


Figure 1. Yearly number of published journal articles on populism across disciplines.

# Populism

# Populism

- ...a set of policies?

Now, if by populism one means worrying about how the bottom two-thirds of the population fares, then populism is not a bad thing. Two-thirds of Venezuelans were living in poverty under the old system. They gained nothing from the old economics. The GNP might have been going up, but they didn't see any of it.

Obviously, it is of concern if these new leaders of the left in Latin America pretend there are no laws of economics. If they say, "I can deliver the goods" without the resources, that is a problem. But the question is whether the IMF strictures are the only ones consistent with good economics. The answer to that is a resounding no.

(Joseph Stiglitz, NPQ interview, 2006)

# Populism

- ...a set of policies?
- ...a political strategy?

“populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (Weyland, 2001)

# Populism

- ...a set of policies?
- ...a political strategy?
- ...a communication style?

Populism, therefore, is a communication frame that appeals to and identifies with the people, and pretends to speak in their name [...] It is a master frame, a way to wrap up all kinds of issues. More concretely, populism is a conspicuous exhibition of closeness to (ordinary) citizens. (Jagers and Walgrave, 2005)

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*a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people.*

(Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2017)

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‘Thin-centred’ because it can attach to other sets of ‘host’ worldviews. But still an ideology because it provides a ***moral interpretation of politics***, prescribes how politics should function, albeit only narrowly.

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***Manicheanism:*** distinction of society in two groups, defined by morality not sociology (unlike, e.g. ‘class’). ***Homogeneity:*** rejection of pluralism, flattening of distinctions within the elite.

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**Monism:** idea from Rousseau — there exists a single “common good” that all people should want. Democracy is about implementing it (critique of the “representative” part of representative democracy, not democracy *per se*).

# Why Populism?

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  - ‘Democracy’ part: popular sovereignty + majority rule.
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- Sometimes a majority wants to do something that infringes on minority/individual rights and is not allowed due to checks and balances (e.g. courts).
- For Mudde, it is an **illiberal democratic** response to **undemocratic liberalism**: power has moved away from electoral arena to the realms of unelected institutions, neoliberal capitalism, international treaties and organisations.

# How Useful?

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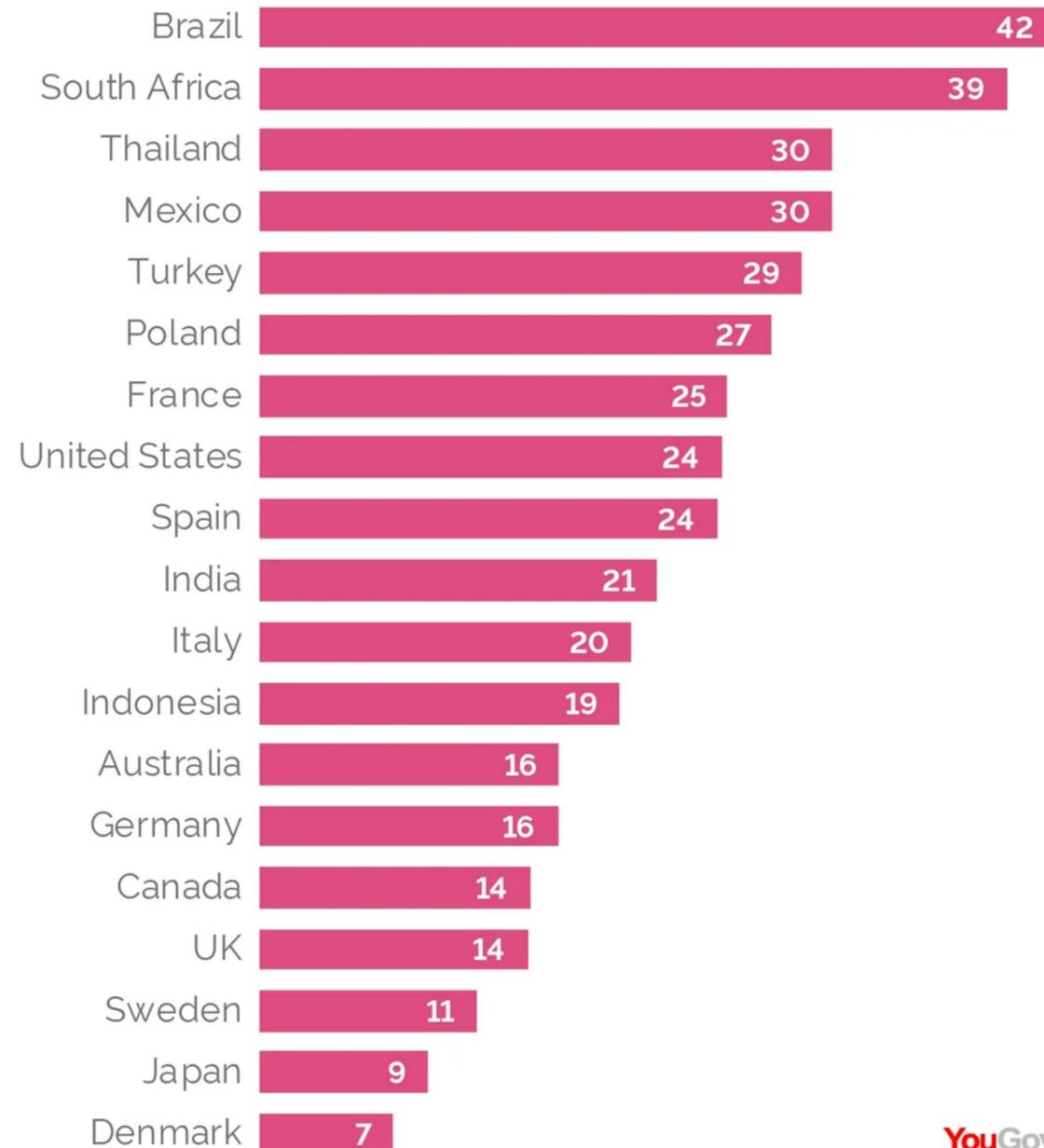
- Analytical gains:
  - A framework to understand the rationale and demand for a central feature of **democratic backsliding**: removal of checks on the executive.
  - It expresses a **very common worldview** among real-world electorates, and variation in populist beliefs is (increasingly?) associated with different policy and party preferences.

# How Useful?

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## Populist cohorts %

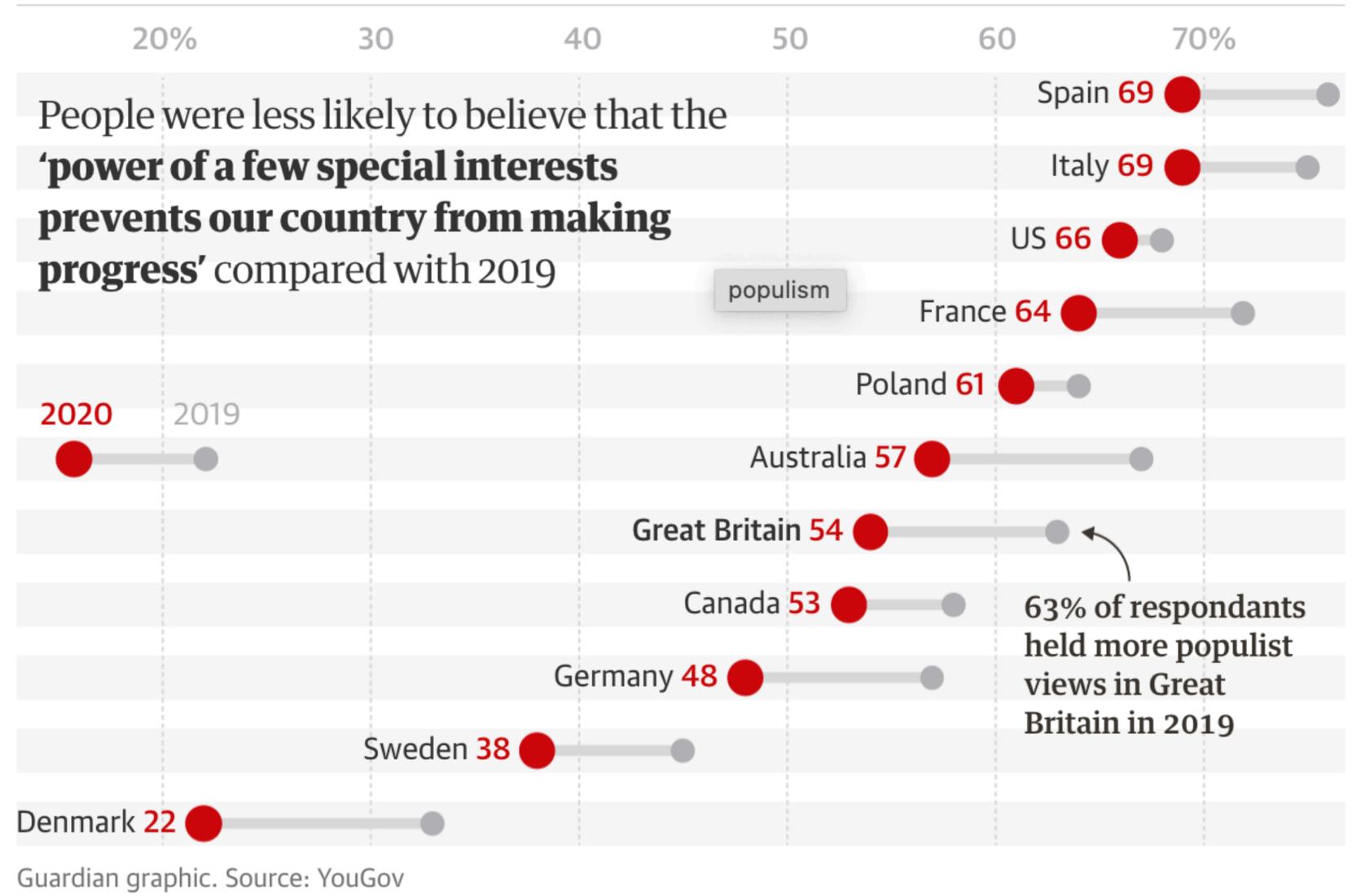
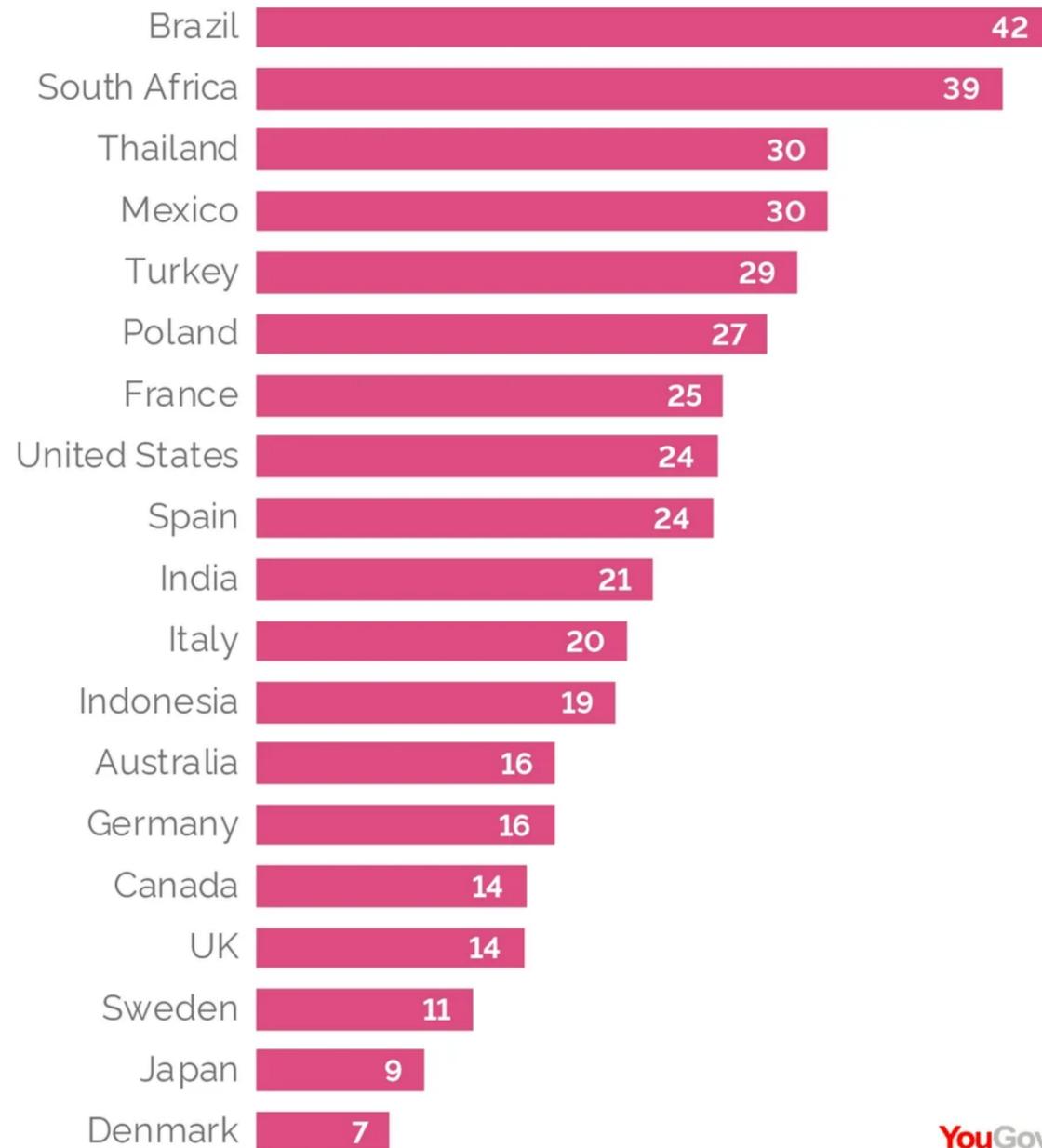
% of people in each country holding populist views. A person is considered populist if they strongly agree with both of the following statements: "my country is divided between ordinary people and the corrupt elites who exploit them" and "the will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics."



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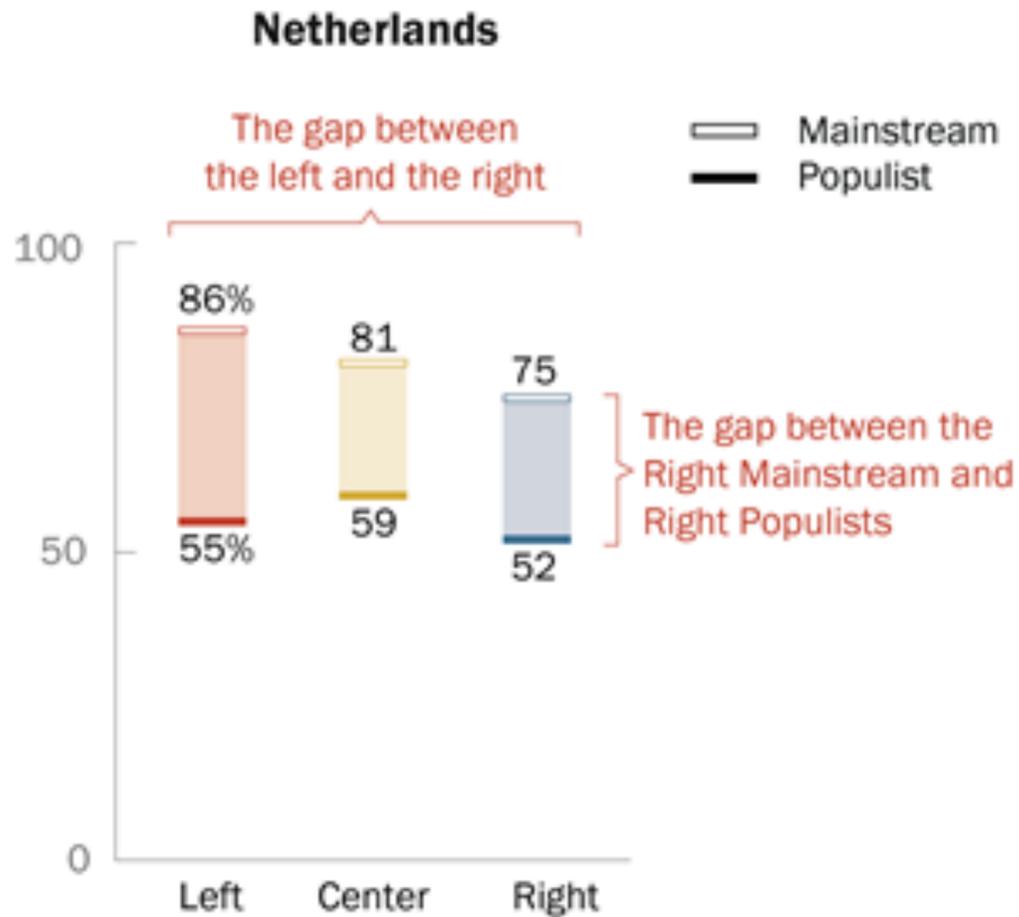


# How Useful?

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## Dutch attitudes about EU more divided by populist views than ideology

*Membership in the EU has been a good thing for the Dutch economy*

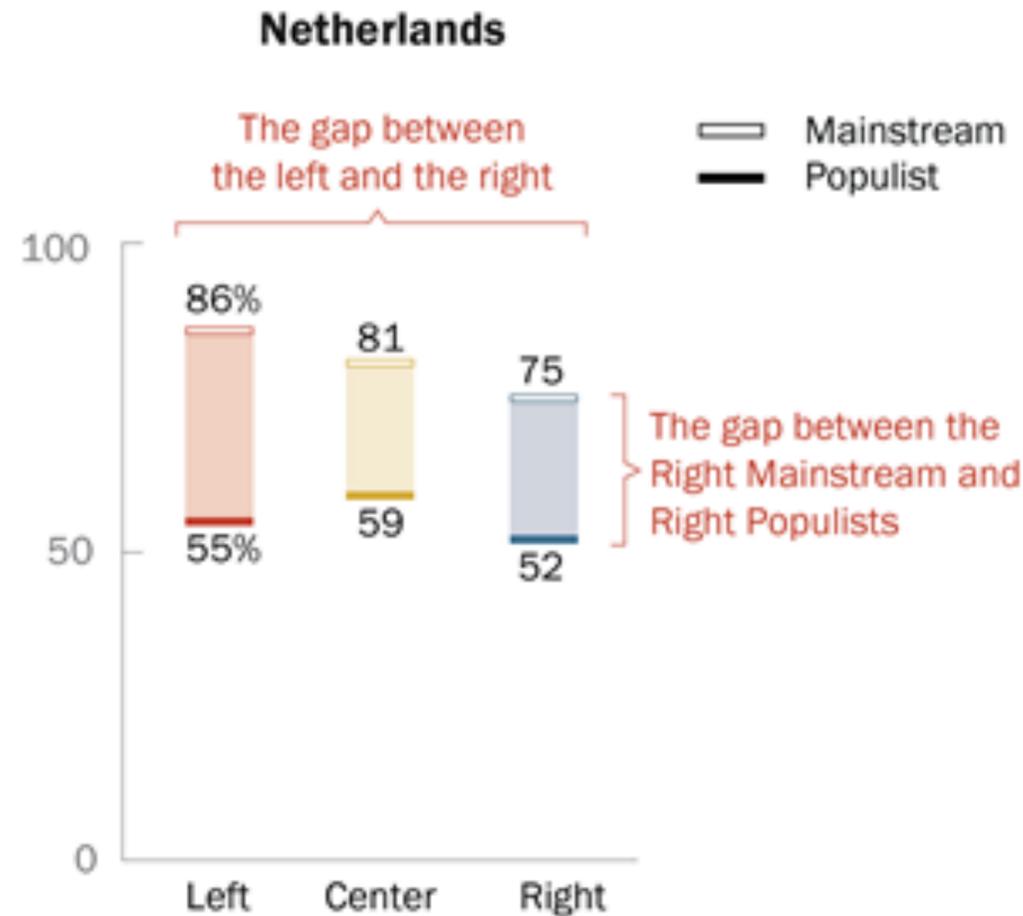


Source: Survey of eight Western European countries conducted Oct. 30-Dec. 20, 2017.

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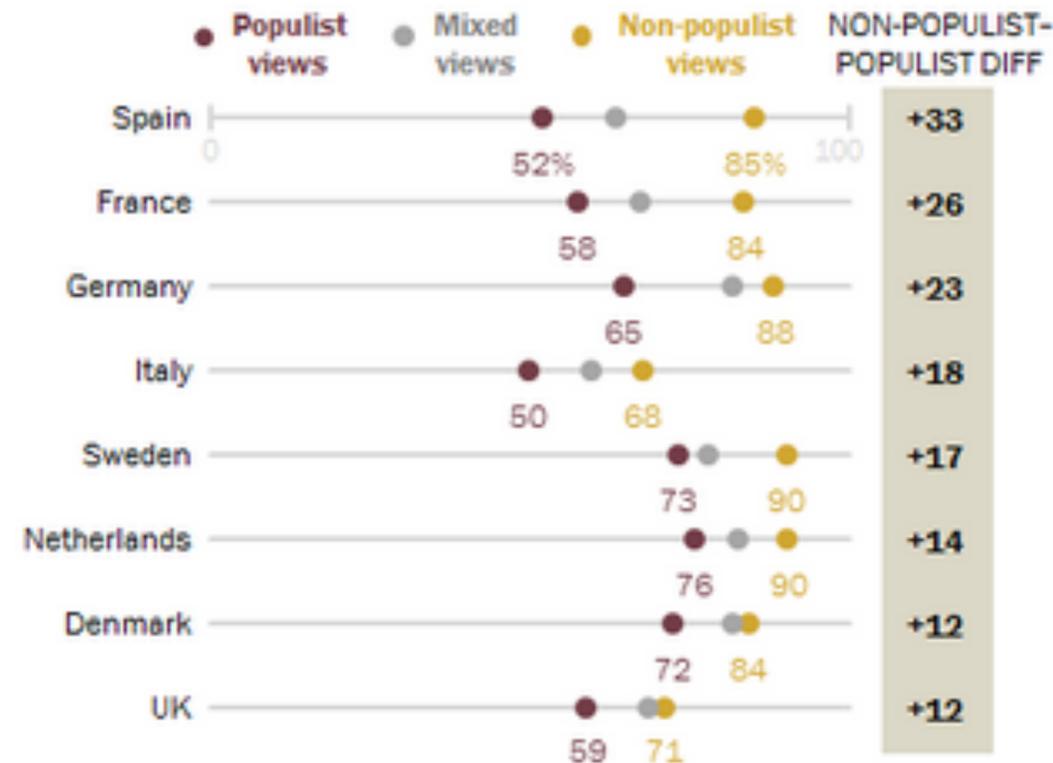
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Membership in the EU has been a good thing for the Dutch economy



## Wide gap between Western Europeans with populist views and those without in how well the news media cover the economy

% of adults in each country who hold \_\_\_ and say the news media do a very/somewhat good job covering the economy



Note: Statistically significant differences are in **bold**. Respondents are classified as holding populist views if they answered: "Most elected officials don't care what people like me think" and "Ordinary people would do a better job solving the country's problems than elected officials." See Appendix C for details on classification.

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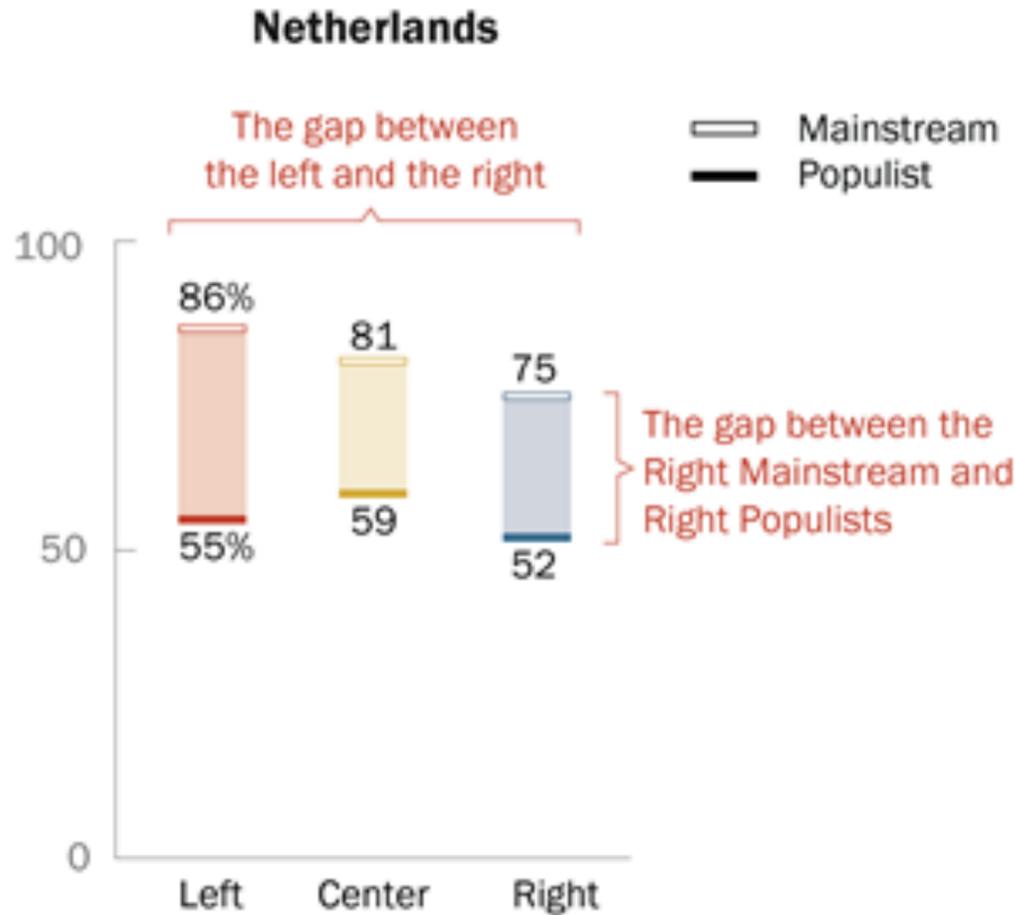
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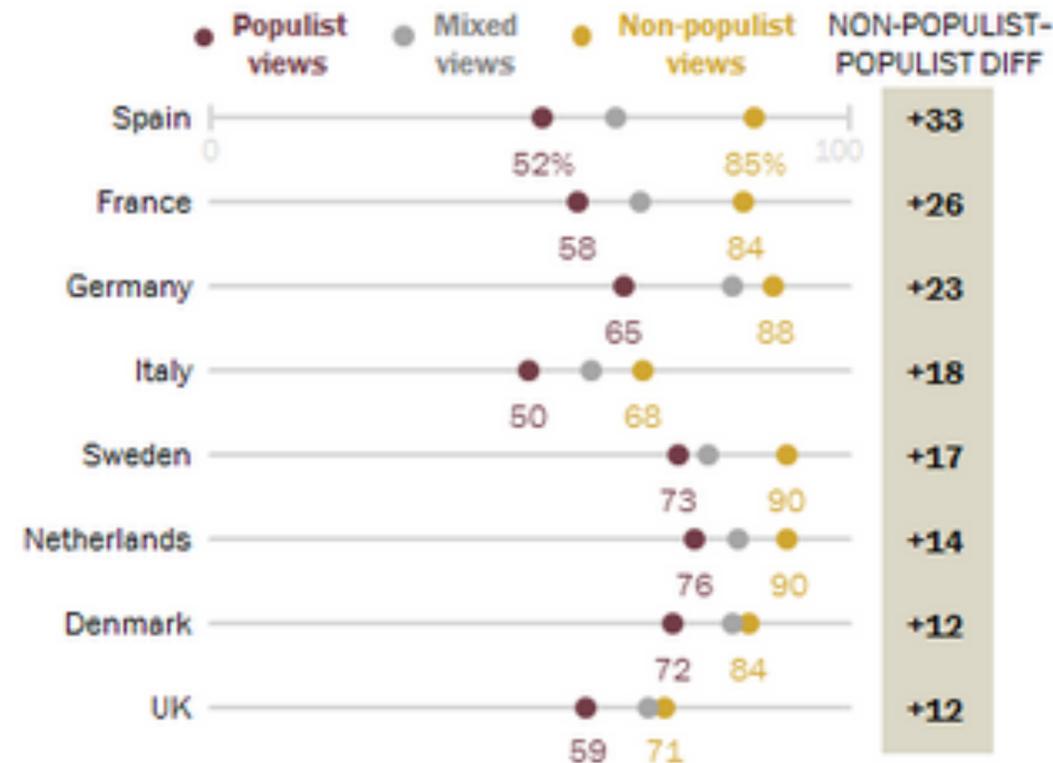
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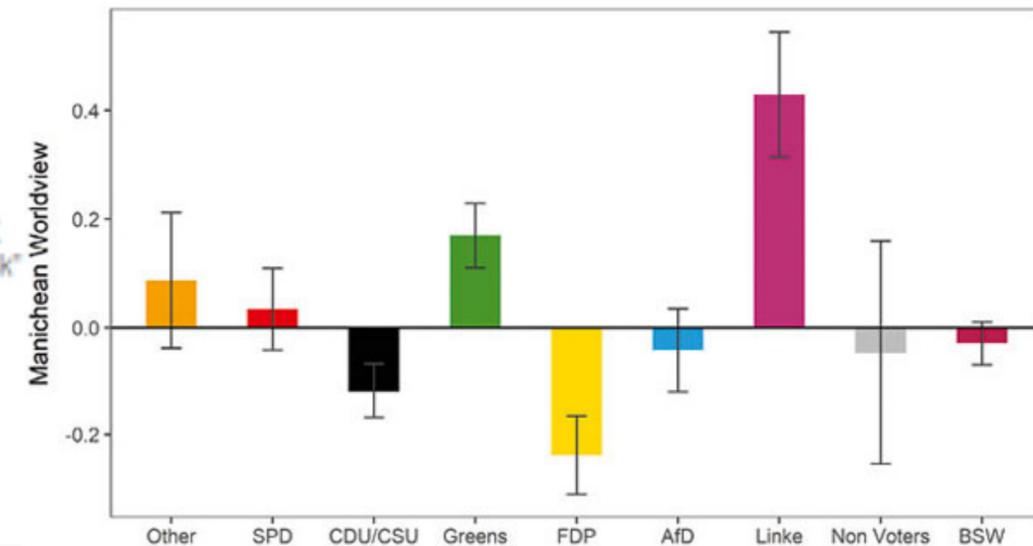
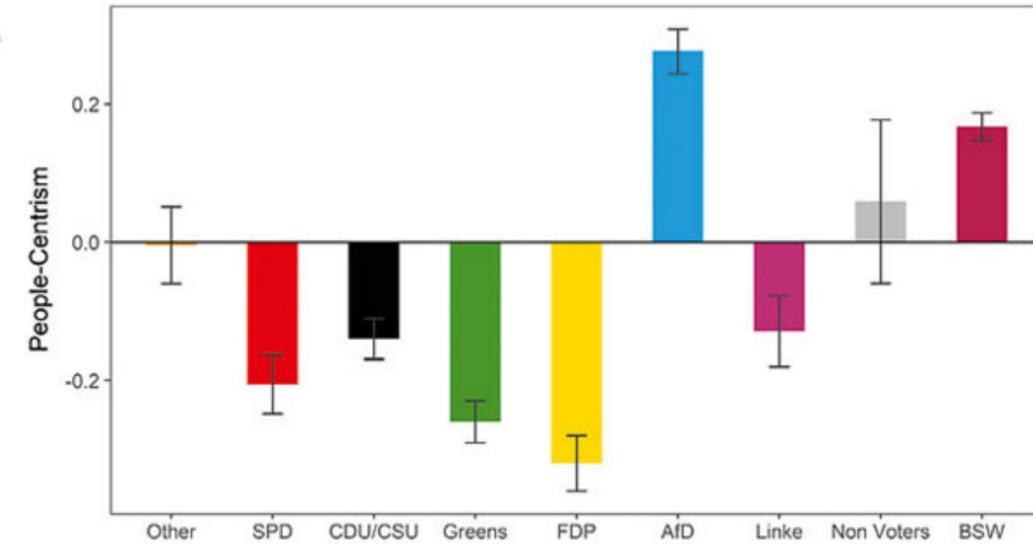
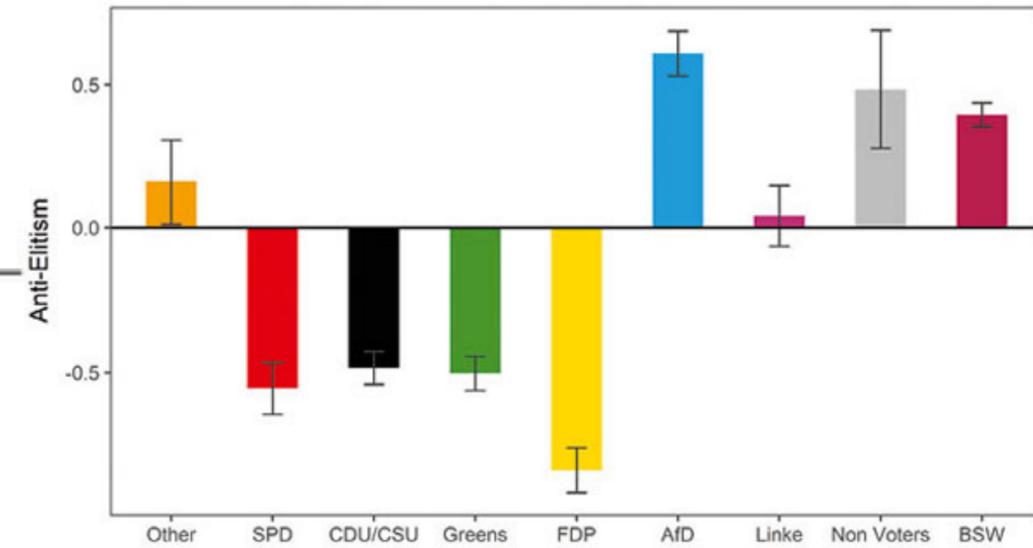
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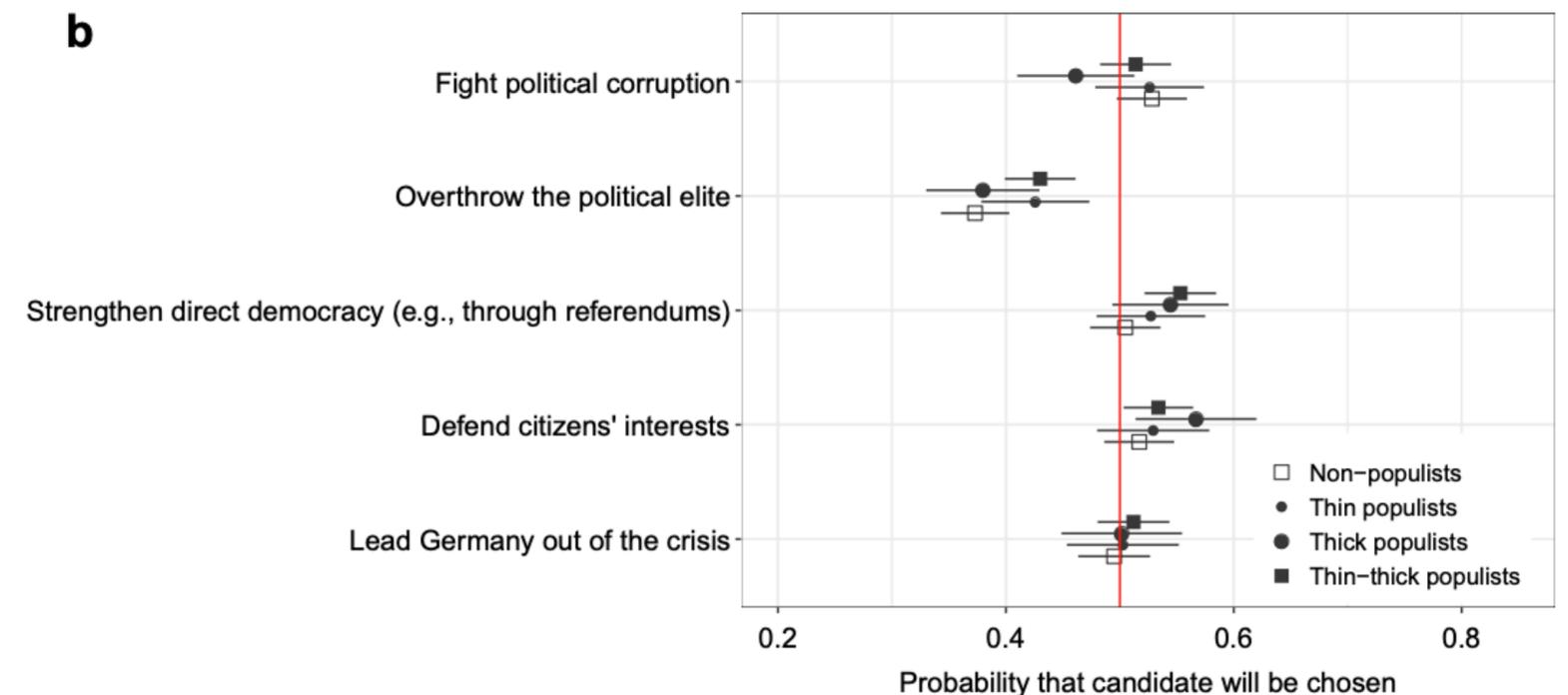
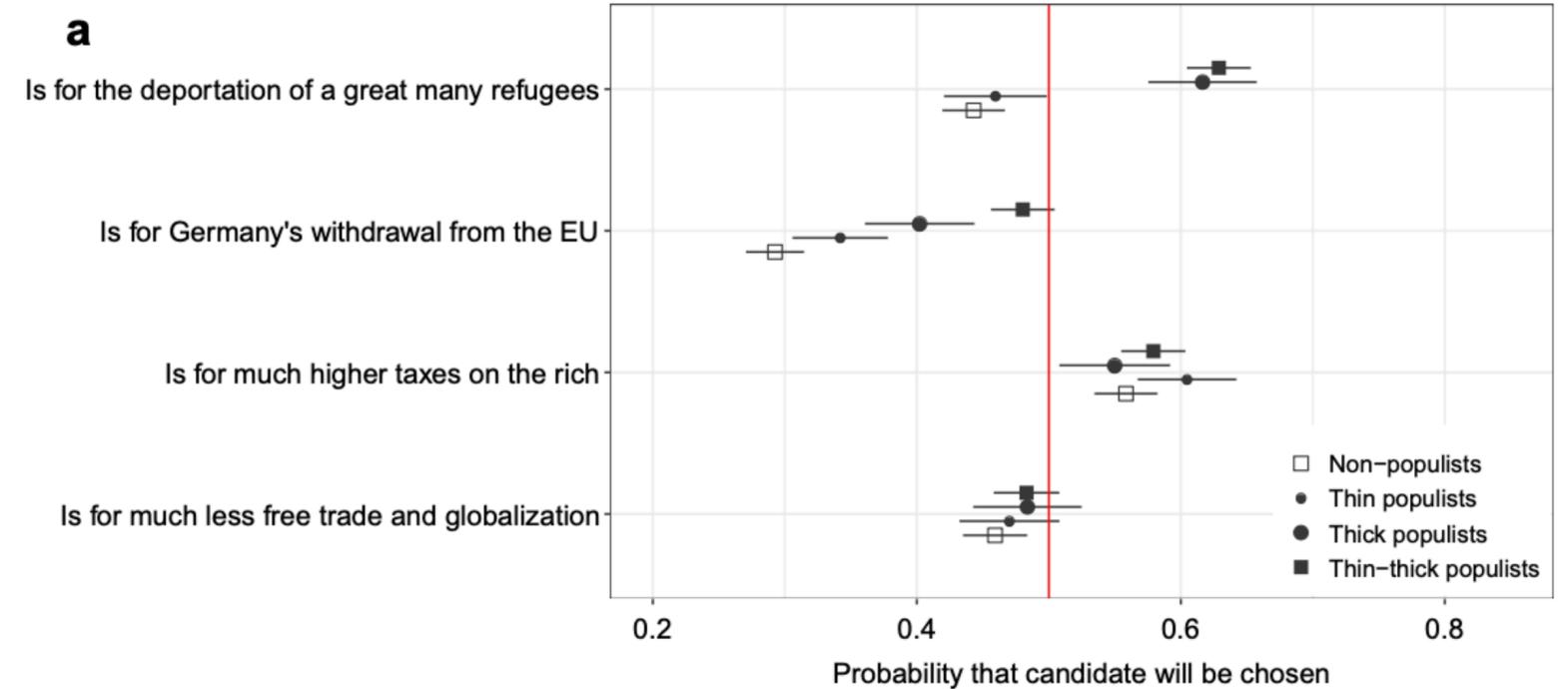
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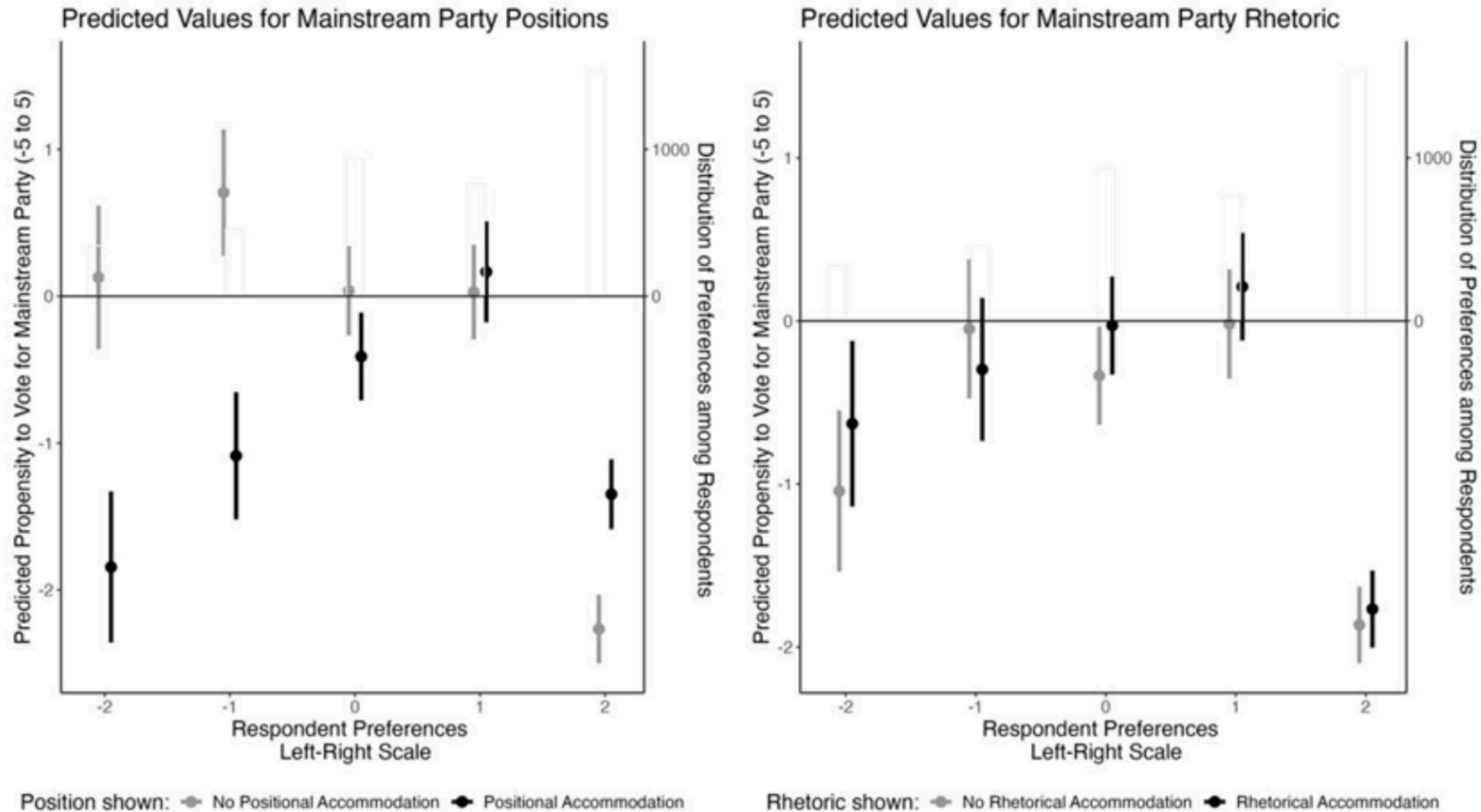
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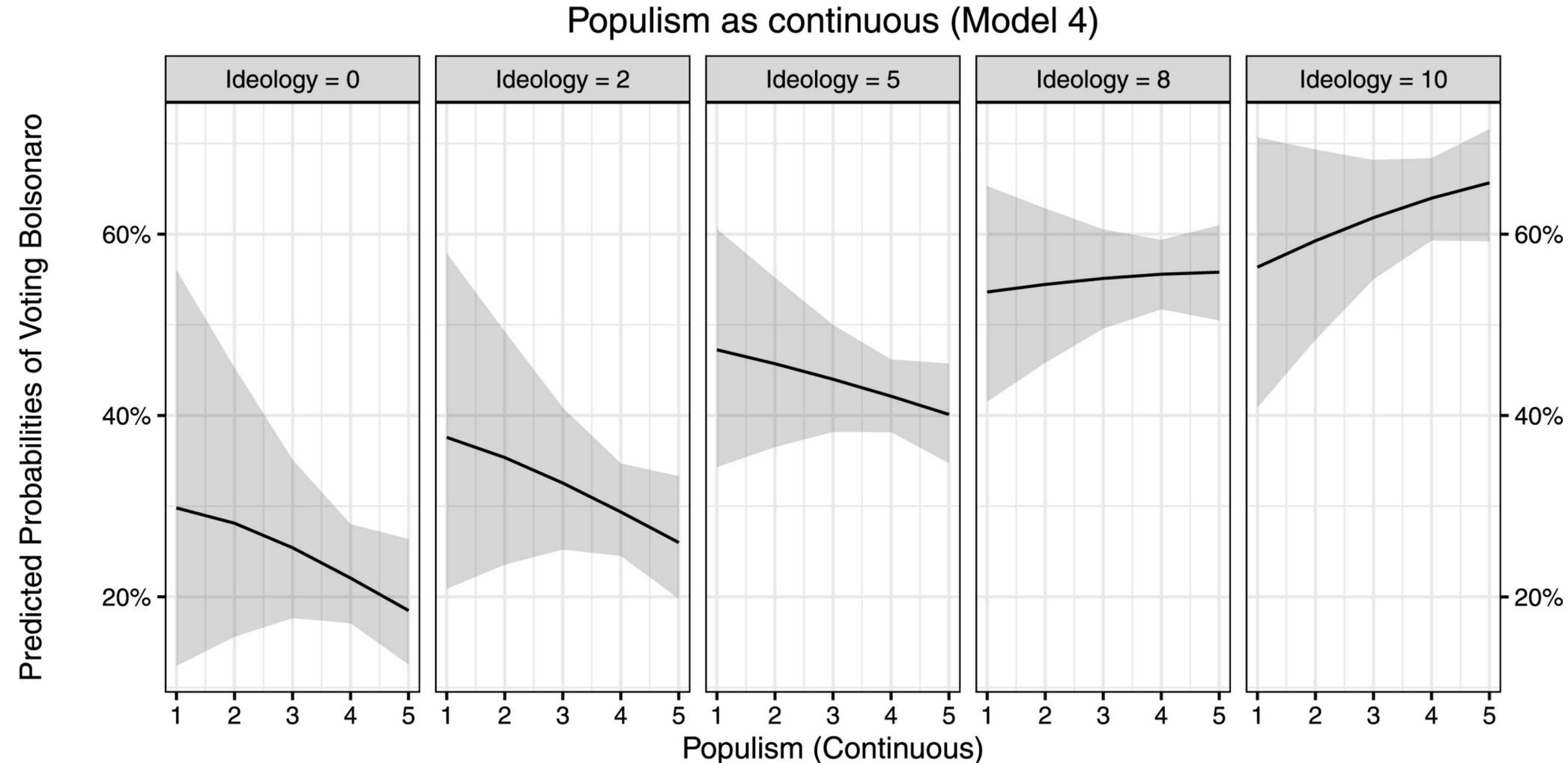
- Kollberg (2024) Does mainstream populism work? Populist rhetoric and the electoral fortunes of mainstream parties, *PSRM*.

**Figure 3.** Predicted values for rhetorical and positional accommodation conditional on voters' left-right preferences using a discrete binning of the moderator (see Appendix Table 6); the distribution of preferences being shown in the underlying histogram.

# How Useful?

“Populist attitudes may be no more than a flamboyant but ultimately irrelevant packaging to explain the global rise of the far right.”

(Castanho-Silva et al., 2022)





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# Technocracy



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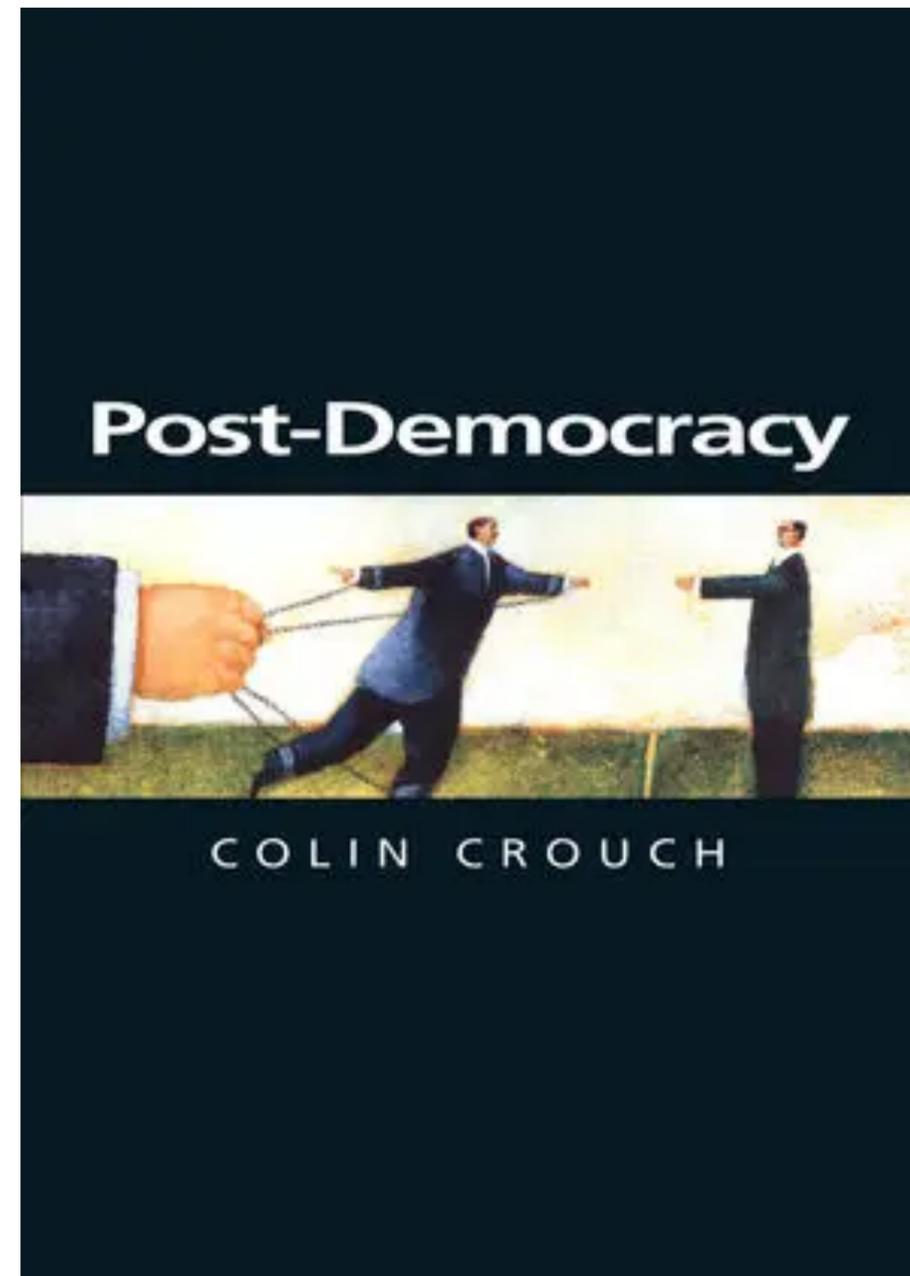
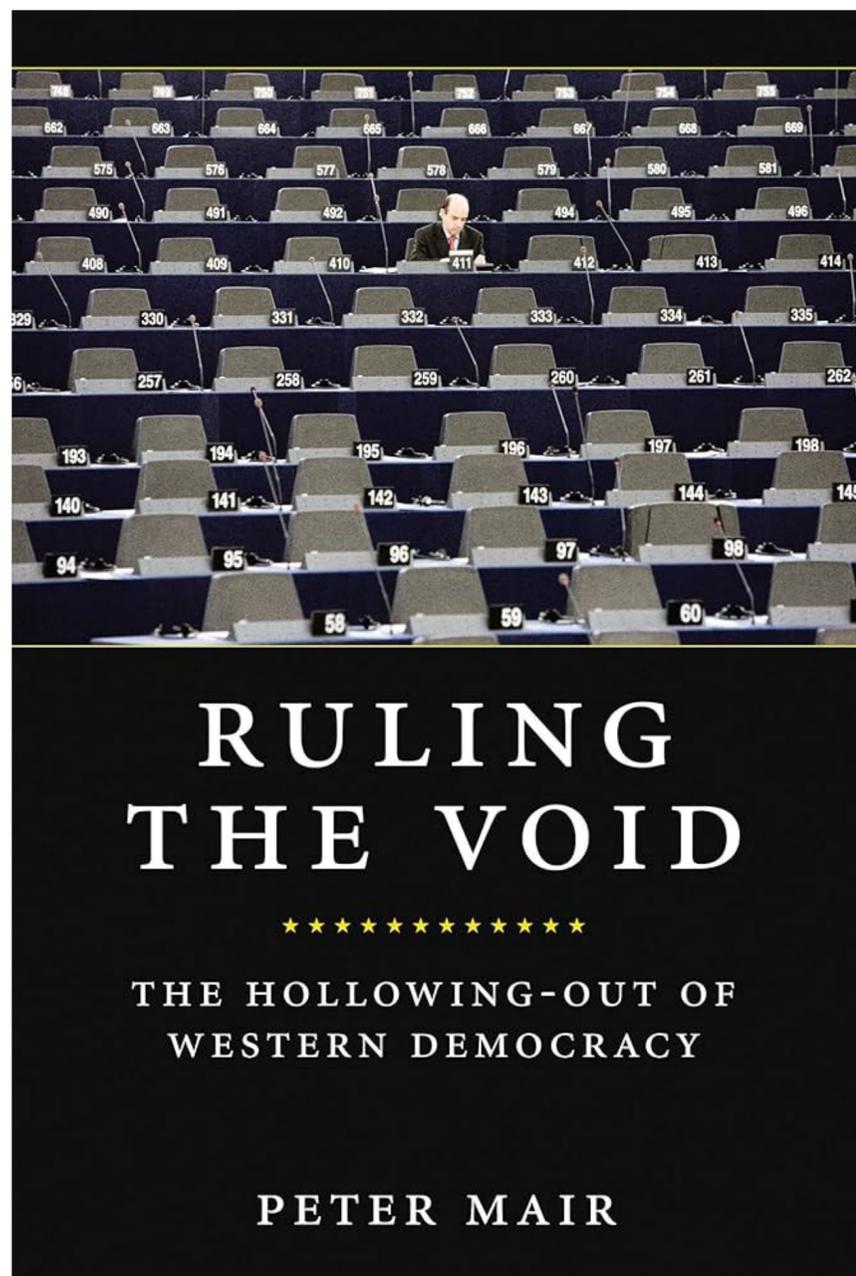
Any examples you can think of?



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***Elitism/meritocracy:*** access to policy-making power is based on professional authority, knowledge. But this is real power, not just an advisory role: even if they claim objectivity technocrats cannot escape value/distributive choices.



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***Non-Electoral Modes of Legitimacy:*** Technocratic bodies are legitimate by virtue of their neutrality, expertise, or because they constrain power (‘negative legitimacy’), not because they embody popular sovereignty.



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**Holism:** technocratic rule is about finding solutions in a non-conflictual, depoliticised way implies that the “whole” takes precedence over the “part”. Like populism, there is an implicit discounting of pluralism.



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# Technocracy



# Technocracy

- **Technocratic biases:** ideological preferences in expertise's clothing?





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The Delors Committee (1988)



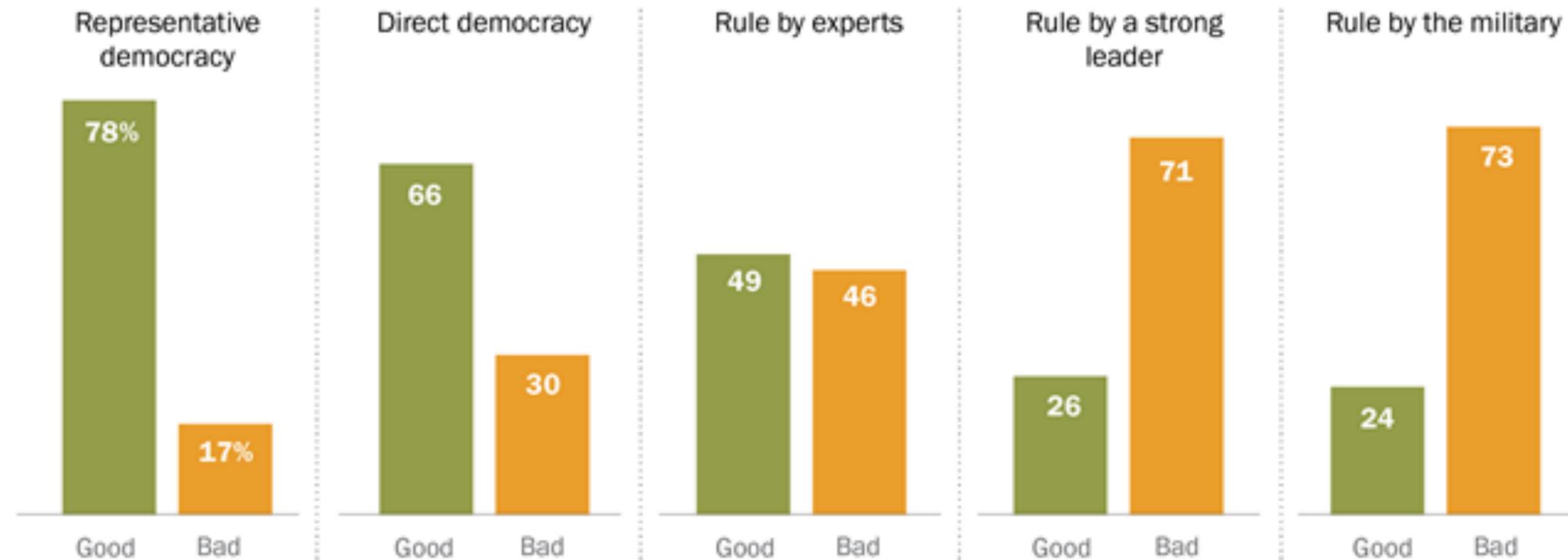
The “Basic Structure” Doctrine

# The Lure of Technocracy

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## Widespread support for representative and direct democracy, but many are also open to nondemocratic alternatives

Would \_\_\_ be a good or bad way of governing our country?

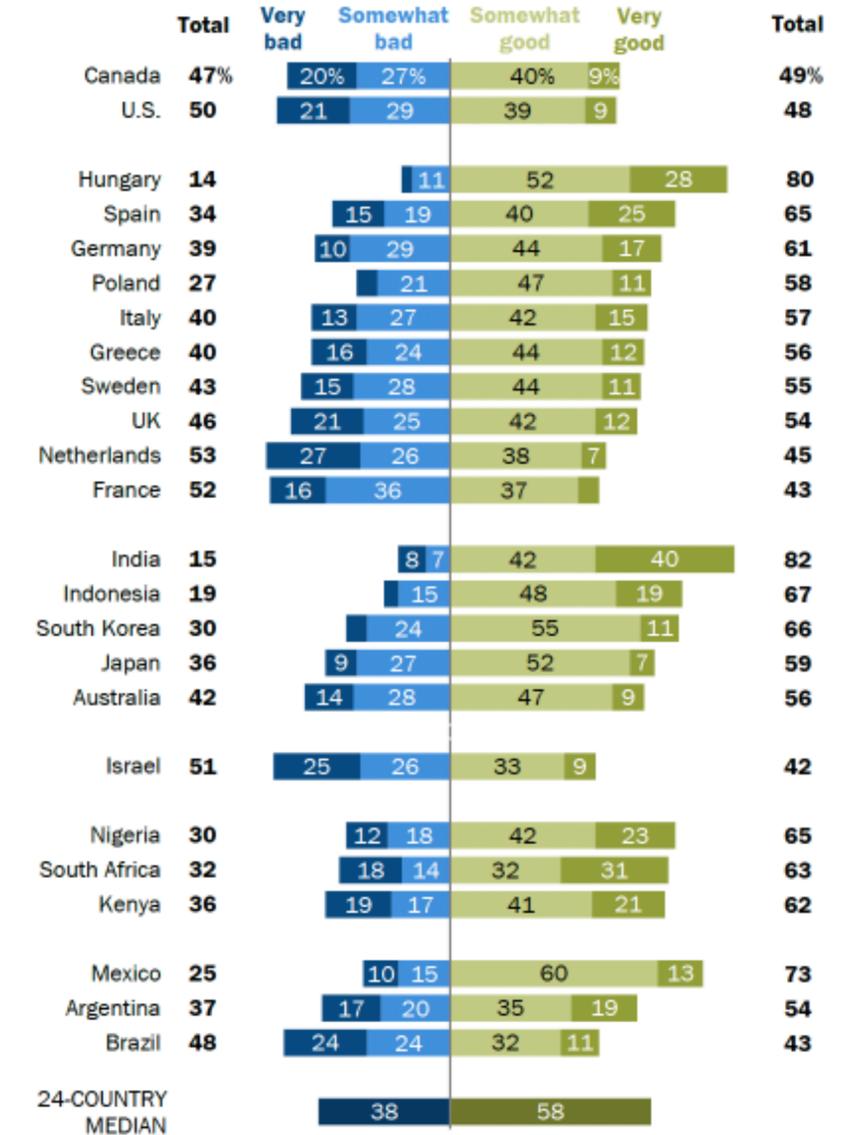


Note: Percentages are global medians based on 38 countries. Full question wordings for political systems: Representative democracy, "A democratic system where representatives elected by citizens decide what becomes law"; Direct democracy, "A democratic system where citizens, not elected officials, vote directly on major national issues to decide what becomes law"; Rule by experts, "Experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country"; Rule by a strong leader, "A system in which a strong leader can make decisions without interference from parliament or the courts"; Rule by the military, "The military rules the country."

Source: Spring 2017 Global Attitudes Survey. Q29a-e.

## Considerable support for rule by experts

% who say a system in which experts, not elected officials, make decisions according to what they think is best for the country would be a good/bad way of governing their country



Note: Those who did not answer are not shown.

Source: Spring 2023 Global Attitudes Survey. Q42d.

"Representative Democracy Remains a Popular Ideal, but People Around the World Are Critical of How It's Working"

# Questions for You

- In what ways are technocracy and populism similar?
- In what ways are they different?



# Dual Challenge

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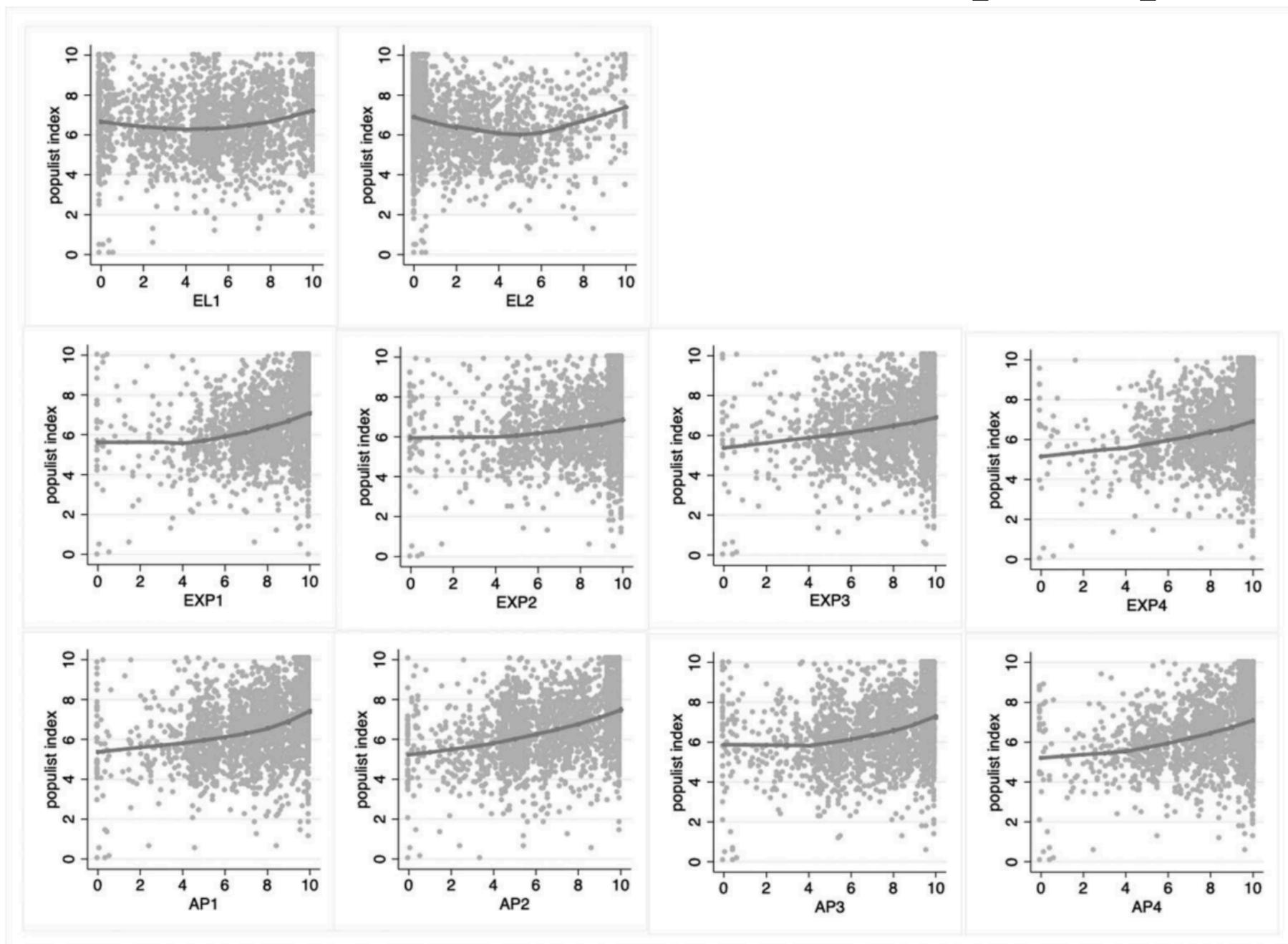
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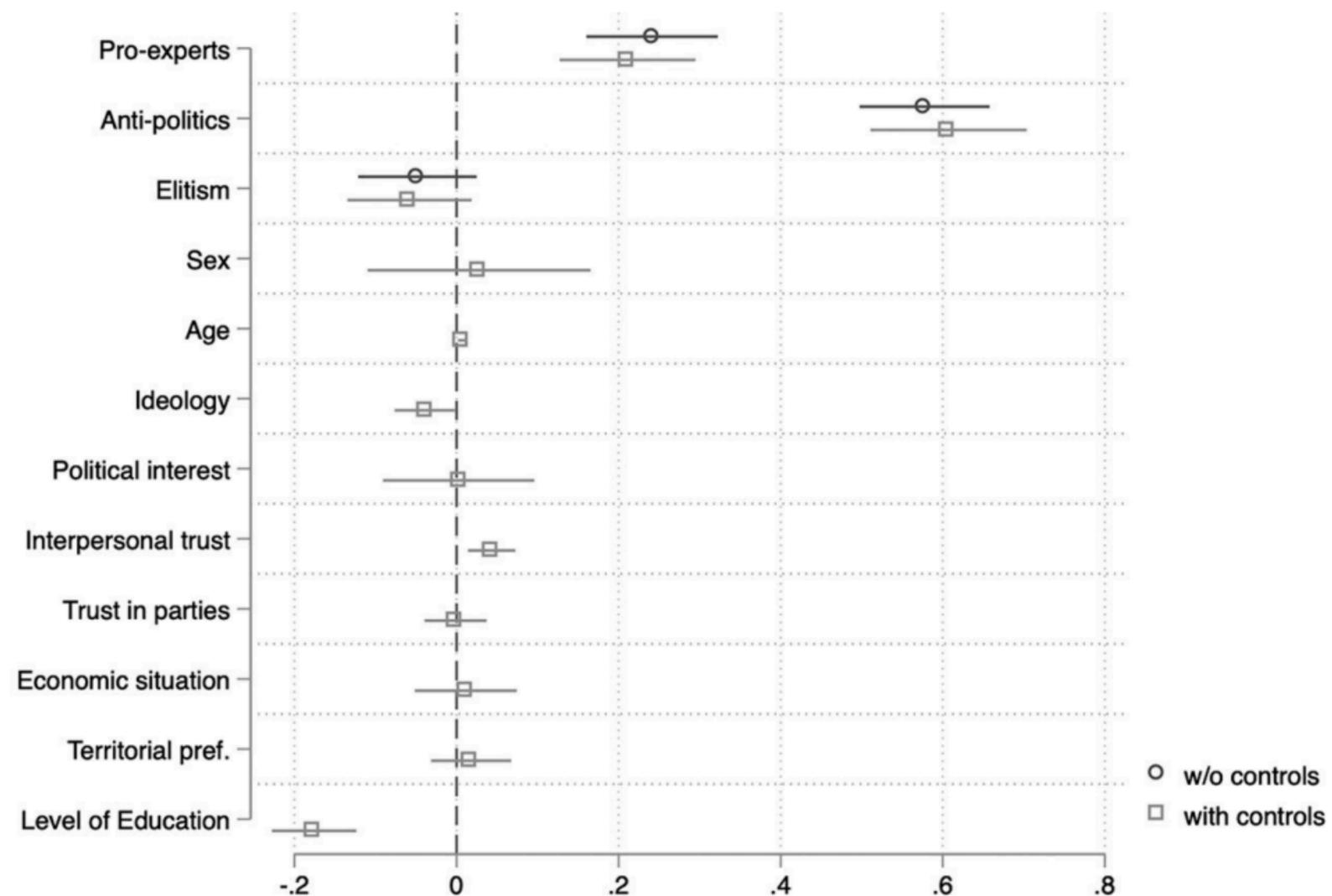
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# Technopopulism?



**Figure 3.** Relationship between technocratic and populist attitudes.

# Technopopulism?



**Figure 4.** The three dimensions of technocracy as correlates of populist attitudes. OLS Regression results. Model with control variables

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- Populism: it's *a thing*. But is it *the* thing?
- Technocracy: if you ask people, their favourite alternative to democracy.
- Populism as a reaction to technocracy, or two criticisms of party democracy?

**Thank you very much for  
your kind attention!**