



CONSEQUENCES OF POPULISM MEMO FOR
THE GUARDIAN'S *THE NEW POPULISM* PROJECT

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

As part of The Guardian's "[The New Populism](#)" project, we examined the consequences of populism for several economic policies and liberal democratic institutions. We focused specifically on the consequences of populists in government, using the Global Populism Database (40-country version for Team Populism/The Guardian), which measures the level of populism for chief executives across different world regions. We found a surprisingly strong negative association of populism with economic inequality, but also that this is *not* the result of progressive taxation or welfare policies — and hence, the decrease comes by some unknown mechanism. Moreover, although populists

often come into power denouncing political corruption, they fail to reduce levels of corruption once they are in office. Concerning the association between populism and liberal democratic institutions, we find that populism has a significant negative association with most of them, including press freedom, horizontal accountability ("checks and balances"), and election quality. Nevertheless, it is associated with increasing voter turnout, suggesting that it may improve democratic participation. Note that against our expectations, we find very little association between these outcomes and the ideological leanings of chief executives.

KEY INDICATORS

Populism in Power: The following analyses are based on the Global Populism Database, using the version constructed for The New Populism project, which features 180 leader-terms from 40 countries across the globe. Most countries in the database are covered from 2000 until the present. We focus on two types of chief executives, depending on the system of government: presidents (in presidential systems) or prime ministers (in parliamentary systems). We use two measures of populism for the following graphs and analyses, both based on the holistic grading procedure proposed by Kirk Hawkins (2009) and described again in *The Guardian* [here](#). For both the correlations and regression analyses below we use the *average degree* of populism within the discourse of the chief executives across each term in office. This continuous scale ranges from 0 (non-populist) to 2 (very populist). Within this sample the mean degree of populism is 0.3 (with a standard deviation of 0.4). To illustrate differences in kind, we also calculate a simple *dummy variable* based on the continuous discourse measure, with 0 indicating non-populist chief executives and 1 indicating chief executives with at least a somewhat populist discourse of 0.5 or higher (rounded to the first decimal).

System of Government: In the regression analyses below we include a control variable for the system of government. This control measure is a simple dummy variable distinguishing parliamentary from presidential systems. For simplicity and to conserve statistical power, semi-presidential systems are grouped with parliamentary ones ([for a discussion of semi-presidentialism see Elgie 2011](#)).

Ideology: For every outcome of interest, we provide bar graphs (with confidence

intervals) for non-populist and populist cases over chief executives' left-right positions. We use the left-right indicator (*dw*) from the Democratic Accountability and Linkages Project ([Kitschelt 2013](#)), with party averages split into three categories: *left* if the party is at least 0.5 standard deviation below the unweighted mean of the dataset, *right* if it is at least 0.5 standard deviation above the mean, and *centre* if the party is in-between 0.25 standard deviation above and 0.25 standard deviation below the mean. For borderline cases (parties coded between 0.25 standard deviation and 0.5 standard deviation either side of the mean), we adjudicate using either the Chapel Hill Expert Survey for European parties ([Polk et al. 2017](#); [Bakker et al. 2015](#)), or expert survey data on Latin American parties provided by Wiesehomeier and Benoit (2009). For a small number of observations not included in either of these datasets, our coding relies on online descriptions of parties and consultations with country experts. Note that the *centre* category also includes cases which cannot be classified as either left or right, for example, Giuseppe Conte in Italy. The final sample includes 63 left-wing, 33 centrist/neither, and 84 right-wing chief executives.

Note that against our expectations, we find very few direct or indirect associations between the ideological leanings of chief executives and our main variables of interest. We concede that this may be partly due to the rough, three-category coding of ideology. Nevertheless, we opted to include this measure as a control of an important factor discussed in the literature on populism (see [Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013](#); [Huber and Ruth 2017](#)). To the best of our knowledge there is no continuous measure available that could cover all of the countries in our sample.

ECONOMIC CONSEQUENCES OF POPULISM IN POWER

Economic Inequality: Cross-national time-series on inequality data has traditionally been difficult to find. Perhaps the most comprehensive dataset on inequality that currently exists is the Standardized World Income Inequality Database – SWIID (available here: <https://fsolt.org/swiid/>). The SWIID attempts to maximize “the comparability of income inequality data while maintaining the widest possible coverage across countries and over time” by combining income inequality data (and specifically the GINI) from a wide range of sources. Income inequality, or the GINI, is measured as an index running from 0, representing perfect equality to 100, representing perfect inequality. Here, we are analyzing three different measures of inequality from the SWIID database ([Solt 2016](#)):

a) Inequality in disposable (post-tax, post-transfer) income – and specifically, the estimate of the Gini index of inequality in equalized (square root scale)

household disposable (post-tax, post-transfer) income, using the Luxembourg Income Study data as the standard.

b) Inequality in market (pre-tax, pre-transfer) income – and specifically, the estimate of the Gini index of inequality in equalized (square root scale) household market (pre-tax, pre-transfer) income, using the Luxembourg Income Study data as the standard.

c) Absolute redistribution, which is simply the difference between market-income inequality and disposable income inequality.¹

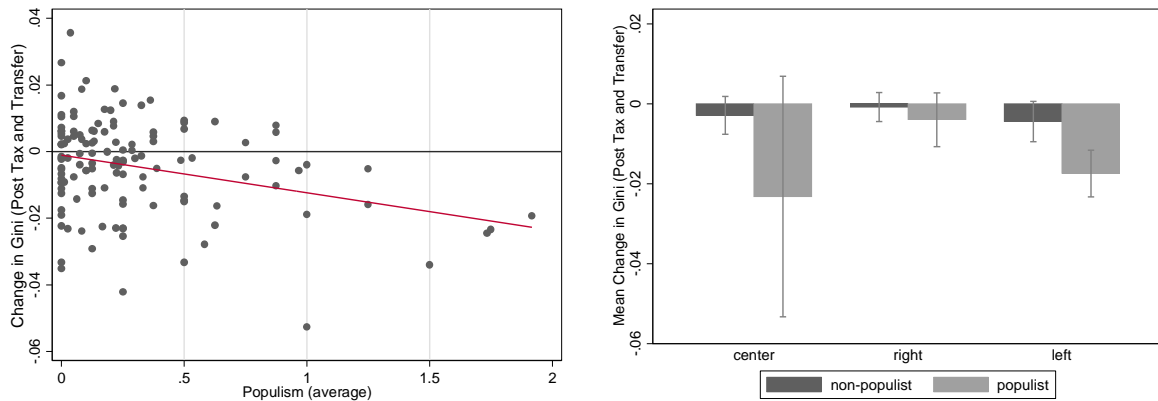
We use version 7.1 of the SWIID, where the inequality estimates and their associated uncertainty are represented by 100 draws from the posterior distribution for any given observation. We do not use the 100 draws from the posterior distribution – for our purposes here, and for the sake of simplicity, we simply take the mean level of inequality (across these 100 draws).²

¹ Note the analyses for inequality in disposable and market income are based on 131 cases only. The following cases are missing: Argentina: Macri, 2016; Austria: Kern, 2016; Kurz, 2017; Bolivia: Morales, 2015; Brazil: Rousseff, 2015; Temer, 2016; Bulgaria: Borisov, 2014 & 2017; Canada: Trudeau, 2015; Chile: Bachelet, 2014; Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solís, 2018; Croatia: Milanovic, 2011; Plenkovic, 2016; Czech Republic: Sobotka, 2014; Dominican Republic: Medina, 2016; Ecuador: Correa, 2013; Moreno, 2017; El Salvador: Sánchez Cerén, 2014; France: Hollande, 2012; Macron, 2017; Germany: Merkel, 2013; Guatemala: Pérez Molina, 2012; Morales, 2016; Honduras: Hernández, 2014; Hungary: Orban, 2014; India: Singh, 2009; Modi,

2014; Italy: Renzi, 2014; Conte, 2018; Latvia: Kucinskis, 2016; Mexico: Peña Nieto, 2013; Netherlands: Rutte, 2012; Nicaragua: Ortega, 2012 & 2016; Norway: Solberg, 2013; Panama: Varela, 2014; Paraguay: Cartes, 2013; Peru: Kuczynski, 2016; Poland: Szydło, 2015; Russia: Putin, 2012; Slovakia: Fico, 2012 & 2016; Spain: Rajoy, 2016; Sweden: Löfven, 2014; Turkey: Erdogan, 2014; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013; Maduro, 2013. Two more cases are missing for the analyses of absolute redistribution: Racan, 2000 and Sanader 2003 in Croatia.

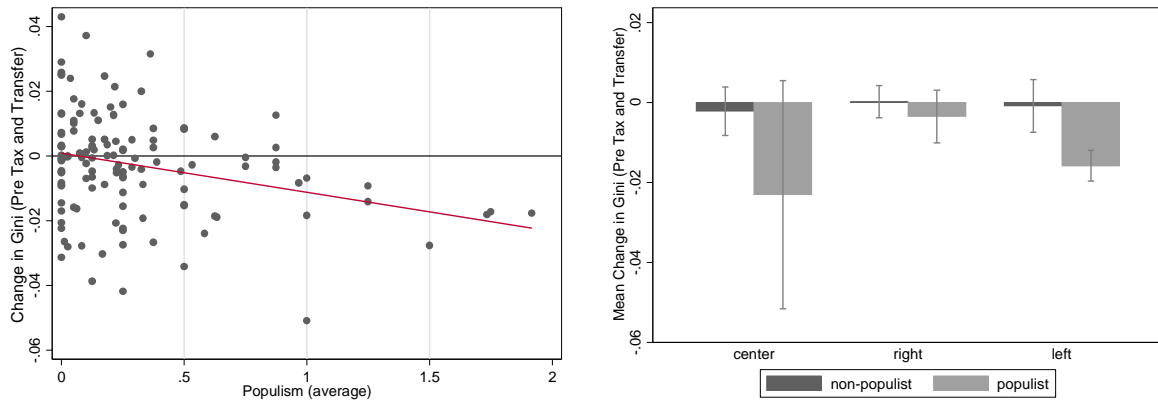
² Note that this is not the recommended method from Solt ([2016](#)).

Figure 1a: Populism and Change in Inequality in Disposable Income



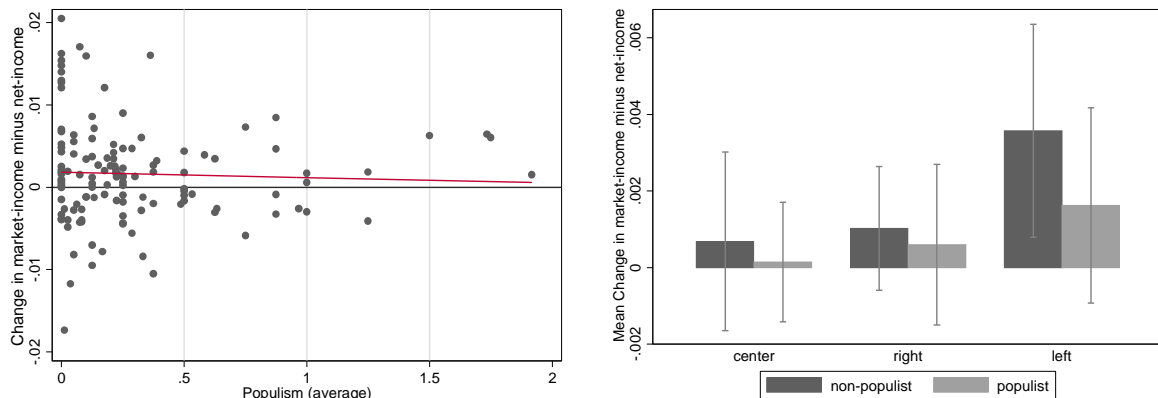
Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in inequality in disposable income (with $r=-0.307$, $p<0.001$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centrist-right).

Figure 1b: Populism and Change in Inequality in Market Income



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in inequality in market income (with $r=-0.286$, $p<0.001$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centrist-right).

Figure 1c: Populism and Change in Absolute Redistribution



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in absolute redistribution (with $r=-0.040$, $p=0.651$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with

confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centrist -right).

Interpretation: As Figures 1a and 1b show, populism is associated with decreases in inequality – both measured as post-transfer, post-tax income inequality and pre-tax, pre-transfer inequality. The right-hand side of these figures can help clarify this effect. Firstly, all leaders, both populist and non-populist are associated with decreases in the GINI coefficient over this period, so there is a temporal effect, where inequality was decreasing more generally across the countries in our sample. Centrist populists shape the overall effect of populists on both types of inequality but interestingly, we can see that left-leaning populists are significantly (at least in a statistical sense) different from left-leaning non-populists, when it comes to reductions in equality. So there is something different about reductions in inequality under left populists versus non-left populists, at least for these two types of inequality and without including other controls.

Figure 1c tells a more nuanced story, however. This captures the change in absolute redistribution and comprises market inequality minus net-income inequality; the higher the number, the greater the effect of taxes and transfers on reductions in inequality. So, in effect, the greater the impact of government policy on income inequality and the more progressive the fiscal policy. Here, we see the change in absolute distribution over the term of the leaders in our sample. Again, the larger the positive number, the greater the effect that administration has had on reductions in income inequality via tax structures and welfare transfers.

What we can see is that now, the effect of populists is more or less reversed (although not strictly in a statistical sense). It is worth looking at the left-leaning leaders only. Non-populist left governments are now much more successful at reducing income inequality as a consequence of taxes and

transfers; left-leaning populists are less successful at this. This means that *the fiscal policies of populists are less progressive than non-populists*. This is what we might have expected; they are not reducing inequality as a result of government taxation or welfare structures.

They are however, reducing overall market inequality and disposable income inequality (although post-tax and post transfer inequality for populists does not really change from the market level). As a whole, this means that populists (and particularly left populists when compared with left-leaning non-populists) are good at reducing market inequality (and overall levels of disposable income inequality), but they are not implementing very progressive fiscal policies; they are not significantly reducing income inequality via taxes and welfare transfers.

In a nutshell, this means that their effect on inequality is via another mechanism. What this is, we can't really say – maybe minimum wage policies, maybe moves towards formalization of the labour force, or limits on income generation of the very wealthy (or even possibly in the case of Venezuela, the very wealthy leaving, thereby reducing overall levels of market inequality). But they do reduce overall levels of market inequality.

When we rerun the analysis with a fourth measure of inequality, which is a measure of relative redistribution (market-income inequality minus net-income inequality, divided by market-income inequality), the results are a little more muted. Left-leaning non-populists are still more progressive than left-leaning populists (although the gap is noticeably less) and centrist populists are now more progressive than non-populist centrists. This is a useful measure in that it weighs for the extent of pre-existing inequality.

Table 1: OLS Regression Analyses (Clustered by Country) – Economic Inequality³

	Gini (disposable)		Gini (market)		Redistribution	
	1a	1b	2a	2b	3a	3b
Populism (avg.)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.01*** (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Ideology						
<i>Right-wing</i>		0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)
<i>Left-wing</i>		-0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)
Parliamentary		0.00 (0.01)		0.01** (0.00)		0.00 (0.00)
Gini disposable, t0	-0.07*** (0.01)	-0.07* (0.03)				
Gini market, t0			-0.16*** (0.04)	-0.11** (0.04)		
Redistribution, t0					0.01 (0.01)	0.00 (0.01)
Constant	0.03*** (0.00)	0.02 (0.02)	0.08*** (0.02)	0.05* (0.02)	0.00 (0.00)	0.00 (0.00)
N	131	131	131	131	129	129
R2 (adj.)	0.30	0.31	0.23	0.29	0.00	0.01
F	35.46	17.20	15.53	11.12	1.48	1.43

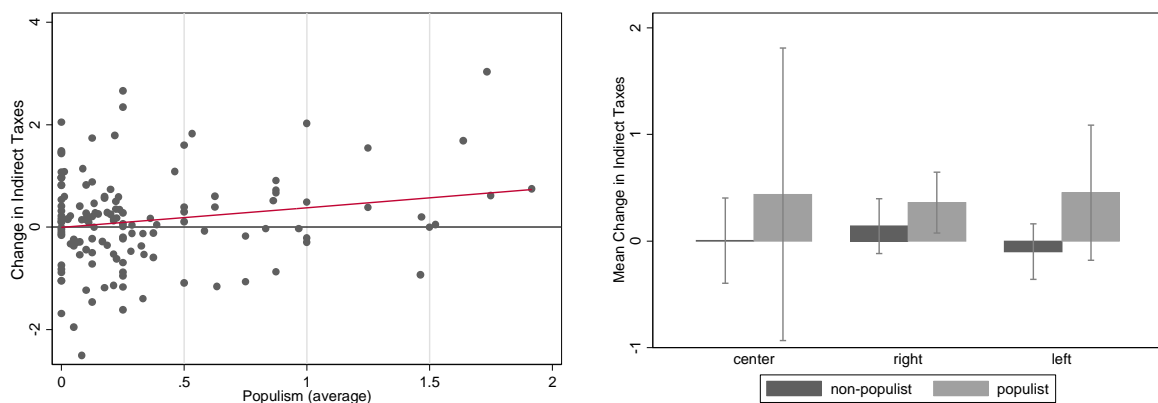
Country clustered standard errors in parentheses; ⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Reference category “Ideology”=centre/neither. Reference category “System of government”=Presidential.

³ Note that findings remain the same (in size and significance levels) with country wise exclusion of Turkey (Erdogan) or Venezuela (Chávez and Maduro).

Indirect Taxes: This indicator comes from the OECD Global Revenue Statistics Database (<http://www.oecd.org/tax/tax-policy/global-revenue-statistics-database.htm>), which has perhaps the most comprehensive coverage of national government tax revenue. It has tax data for 85 countries from 1990 onwards. Indirect taxation is based on all taxes on goods and

services (code 5000) as a percentage of national GDP for a given year. It includes all value added taxes, all sales taxes, all turnover taxes and other general taxes on goods and services, taxes on specific goods and services, and all taxes on the use of goods, or on permission to use goods or perform activities.⁴

Figure 2: Populism and Change in Indirect Taxes



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in indirect taxes (with $r=0.184$, $p<0.05$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centrist/neither-right).

Interpretation: It appears that populist leaders are much more likely to increase their reliance on indirect taxation relative to non-populist leaders. While indirect taxation is administratively efficient, it can also be highly regressive as lower income voters will consume a higher proportion of their income than those in the higher income deciles. Most interestingly, while right-leaning populists and non-populists increase indirect taxation (which is what

standard political economy models would lead us to expect), the effect for very populist leaders is driven by left-leaning populists. This is contrary to what we might expect as many left-leaning populists have a notable redistributive rhetoric and left-leaning politicians are assumed to prefer more progressive taxation (although see above). Increasing indirect taxation (depending on the specific context) would undermine the redistributive message of

⁴ Note the analyses for change in indirect taxes are based on 139 cases only. The following cases are missing: Argentina: Macri, 2016; Austria: Kern, 2016; Kurz, 2017; Brazil: Temer, 2016; Bulgaria: Simeon, 2001; Stanishhev, 2005; Borisov, 2009 & 2014 & 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solis, 2018; Croatia: all terms; Dominican Republic: Medina, 2016; Ecuador: Moreno, 2017; France: Macron, 2017; Guatemala: Morales, 2016; India: all terms; Italy: Conte, 2018; Latvia: Kucinskis, 2016; Nicaragua: Ortega, 2016; Peru: Kuczynski, 2016; Romania: all terms; Russia: all terms; Slovakia: Fico, 2016; Spain: Rajoy, 2016; United Kingdom: May, 2016; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

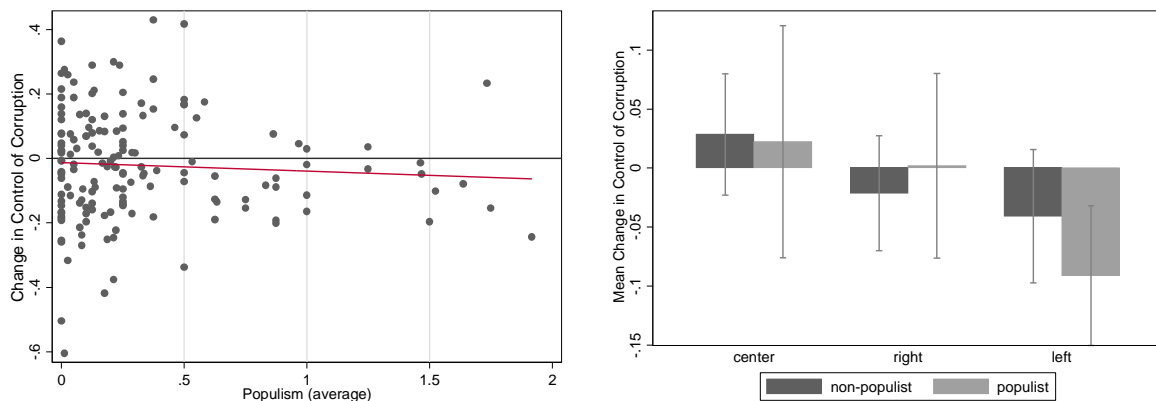
these populists ([see also Castañeda and Doyle forthcoming](#)). This effect is both statistically significant and reasonably substantive. A one standard deviation in the

level of total average populism equates to an increase in direct taxation (as a percentage of GDP) of approximately 0.14 per cent (see Model 4a and 4 in Table 2 below).

Political Corruption: To measure populism’s impact on corruption, we use the Control of Corruption index from the World Bank “World Governance Indicators” (<https://datacatalog.worldbank.org/control-corruption-estimate-0>) and the Corruption Index from V-Dem (<https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-8/>).⁵ The first indicator – control of corruption – captures perceived control of public power with respect to petty and grand forms of corruption as well as the capture of the state by elites and private interests. The indicator is an estimate in units of a standard normal

distribution that ranges between -2.5 (low control) to 2.5 (high control) (see [WBGI, Kaufmann and Kraay 2016](#)).⁶ The second indicator – degree of corruption – is an index that captures how pervasive political corruption is in a country. Its interval scaled and ranges from 0 to 1 with higher values indicating higher degrees of corruption. The index is based on averaged scores covering public sector corruption, executive corruption, legislative corruption and judicial corruption. All government spheres are weighted equally (see [V-Dem, Coppedge et al. 2018](#)).⁷

Figure 3: Populism and Change in Control of Corruption



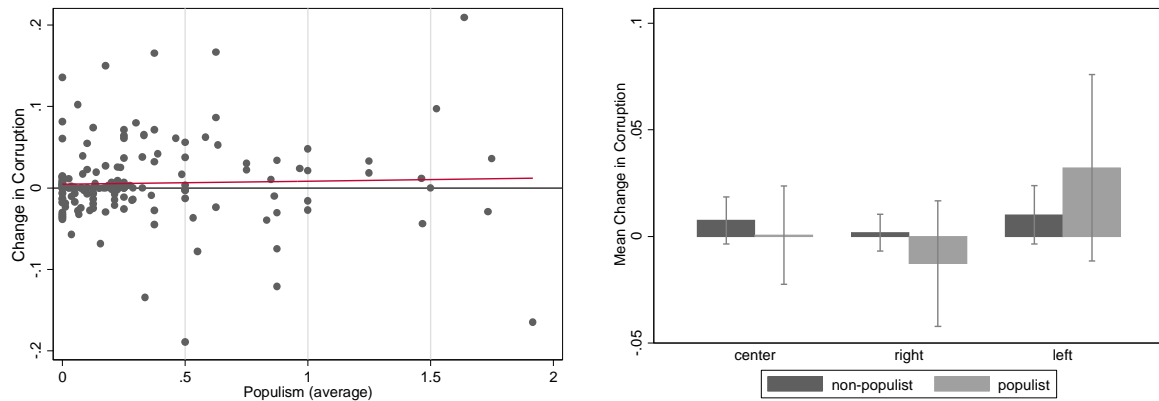
Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in control of corruption (with $r=-0.065$, $p=0.397$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

⁵ Data is available until 2017 (for both indicators), to code the indicator at t+1 we use data from 2017 for all cases with terms spanning until 2018 or 2019.

⁶ Note that the analyses for change in control of corruption are based on 159 cases only. The following cases are completely missing: Argentina: Macri, 2016; Austria: Kern, 2016; Kurz, 2017; Brazil: Temer, 2016; Bulgaria: Borisov, 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solis, 2018; Croatia: Plenkovic, 2016; Dominican Republic: Medina, 2016; Ecuador: Moreno, 2016; France: Macron, 2017; Guatemala: Morales, 2016; Italy: Conte, 2018;

Latvia: Kucinskis, 2016; Nicaragua: Ortega, 2016; Peru: Kuczynski, 2016; Slovakia: Fico, 2016; Spain: Rajoy, 2016; United Kingdom: May, 2016; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

⁷ Note that the analyses for change in corruption are based on 171 cases only. The following cases are completely missing: Austria: Kurz, 2017; Bulgaria: Borisov, 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solis, 2018; Ecuador: Moreno, 2016; France: Macron, 2017; Italy: Conte, 2018; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

Figure 4: Populism and Change in Degree of Corruption


Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in degree of corruption (with $r=0.032$, $p=0.671$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

Interpretation: The issue of political corruption figures prominent among populist chief executives around the globe. For example, many populists emphasize political corruption among the established elite as a core electoral campaign message. Moreover, we can find references to the problem of political corruption across different ideological flavours – from the left to the right. It is thus surprising that we do not find any association between populism in power and either the perceived control of corruption or the degree of political

corruption. While we find a marginally significant and negative association between populism and control of corruption (which runs counter to our expectation), this result is not robust when controlling for other factors like ideology and system of government (see Model 3a in Table 5 below) or the exclusion of highly populist cases like Chávez in Venezuela or Erdogan in Turkey. Thus, while corruption may be one of the issues that brings populists to power, populists in power do not solve corruption.

Table 2: OLS regression analyses (clustered by country) – other economic indicators⁸

	Indirect Taxes		Control of Corruption		Degree of Corruption	
	4a	4b	5a	5b	6a	6b
Populism (avg.)	0.39*** (0.11)	0.40** (0.12)	-0.06+ (0.03)	-0.05 (0.04)	-0.00 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Ideology						
<i>Right-wing</i>		0.14 (0.24)		-0.03 (0.03)		-0.00 (0.01)
<i>Left-wing</i>		0.01 (0.22)		-0.06 (0.04)		0.02* (0.01)
Parliamentary		-0.01 (0.13)		0.05+ (0.03)		-0.00 (0.01)
Indirect tax, t0	-0.07** (0.03)	-0.07* (0.03)				
Corruption control, t0			-0.03** (0.01)	-0.04** (0.01)		
Corruption, t0					0.03** (0.01)	0.04* (0.02)
Constant	0.74** (0.27)	0.63* (0.27)	0.01 (0.02)	0.02 (0.03)	-0.01+ (0.00)	-0.01 (0.01)
N	139	139	159	159	171	171
R2 (adj.)	0.06	0.05	0.03	0.05	0.03	0.05
F	10.41	4.41	4.57	2.98	4.10	3.31

Country clustered standard errors in parentheses; ⁺ $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Reference category “Ideology”=centre/neither. Reference category “System of government”=Presidential.

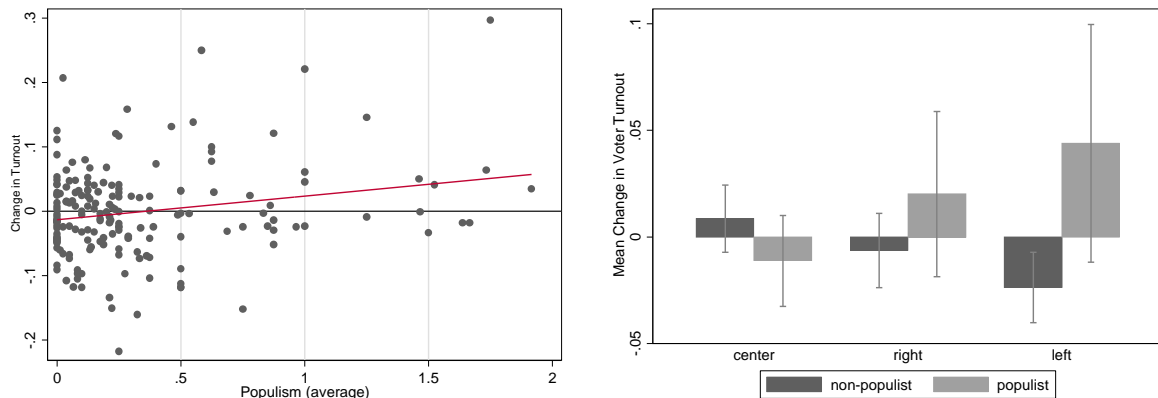
⁸ Note that findings remain mostly the same (in size and significance levels) with country wise exclusion of Turkey (Erdogan) or Venezuela (Chávez and Maduro), with the exception of Model 5a, in which the effect of Populism (avg.) falls below conventional significance levels.

POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES OF POPULISM IN POWER

Participation (Voter Turnout): Voter turnout is an essential component of political participation in a democracy. Some scholars argue that one of populism’s beneficial effects on democracy is to improve political participation, especially turnout. To measure this effect, we calculate the change in turnout using data from the International IDEA database (2018), available at <https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/voter-turnout>. Analyses are based

on turnout as the percentage of the voting age population (VAP) that voted. To calculate the change in turnout we subtract the turnout level in the present election of the respective chief executive (t0) from the turnout of the previous election (t-1). We compare presidential to presidential election turnout and parliamentary to parliamentary election turnout (even if there have been in-between or midterm elections of the other kind).⁹

Figure 5: Populism and Change in Voter Turnout



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in turnout (with $r=0.208$, $p<0.01$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

Interpretation: Even without including any additional controls, we find a positive relationship between populism and voter turnout. As the list of extreme cases shows, the increase is sometimes very large, from 16 to 30 percentage points. Exactly why populism has this effect cannot be determined merely with this data, but the

experience of countries such as Venezuela and Turkey suggests that it results from a combination of get-out-the-vote efforts by populists, especially once they are in government, and by an increasingly high-stakes situation, which serves to increase opposition turnout as well. Interestingly, we cannot fully confirm a frequent argument

⁹ Critical cases: Erdogan, Turkey: He switched from being prime minister to being president in 2014. We compare his presidential election turnout to the previous parliamentary election in 2007 (when he was elected prime minister). Putin, Russia: Although he came into office as president on December 31, 1999, in an interim capacity, his election to the presidency took place in 2000. Hence we compare this election with the previous presidential election turnout in 1996. Putin, Russia: He switches from being president to prime minister in 2008. We compare his parliamentary election turnout in 2008 to the previous presidential election in 2003.

among scholars that left populists tend to be more inclusive than populist of the centre or right (see [Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2013](#)).¹⁰

Models 7a and 7b in Table 3 below, confirm the positive association between populism and change in turnout by means of

multivariate regression analyses. All else equal, an increase in populist discourse by 1 unit leads to an increase in turnout by 4 percentage points. Note that this result remains robust even if we exclude highly populist cases like Chávez in Venezuela or Erdogan in Turkey.

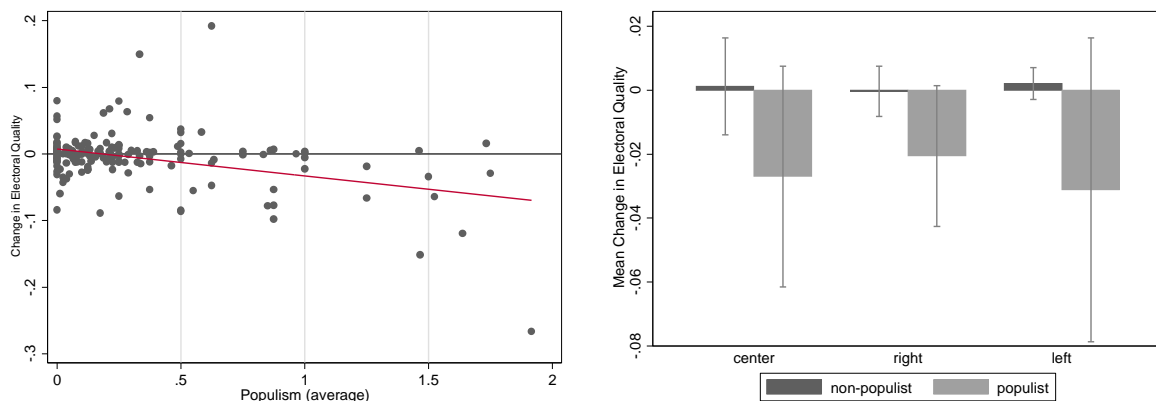
¹⁰ The bar chart suggests left populists have a stronger effect, but when we include an interaction term between ideology and populist discourse in our regression analyses, we find only a marginally significant association between left-wing populism

and turnout. Due to the nature of our ideology measure (categorical) and the low robustness of our findings across different models, these findings have to be interpreted with caution.

Electoral Quality: Populists are also thought to undermine electoral fairness. To test for this, we use the V-Dem clean elections index (Coppedge et al. 2018), which captures minimal democratic standards of free and fair elections, data is available at <https://www.v-dem.net/en/data/data-version-8/>. The index

covers aspects like electoral management autonomy and capacity, voter registry, the absence of vote buying and other irregularities, no government intimidation or electoral violence, and the freedom and fairness of elections. The index ranges from 0 (low quality) to 1 (high quality) (Coppedge et al. 2018, 44).¹¹

Figure 6: Populism and Change in Electoral Quality



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in electoral quality (with $r=-0.381$, $p<0.001$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

Interpretation: Already from Figure 6 we can see a negative association between populism and the quality of elections. Over the course of their term, populist chief executives are more likely to infringe on the freedom and fairness of the electoral process than their non-populist counterparts. This finding mirrors earlier contributions to the literature, highlighting a tendency of populism in power to skew the level playing field in subsequent elections (see, for example, Houle and Kenny 2016; Levitsky and Loxton 2013; Allred, Hawkins, and Ruth 2015). Note that among the five cases with the

most extreme negative impact on electoral quality only one (Danilo Medina) uses a non-populist discourse and three (Hugo Chávez; Nicolas Maduro; and Recep T. Erdogan) deploy a strong populist discourse.

Regression analyses confirm this general pattern, indicating that an increase in populist discourse by 1 leads to a significant decrease in electoral quality by 4 percentage points (see Models 8a and 8b in Table 3 below).

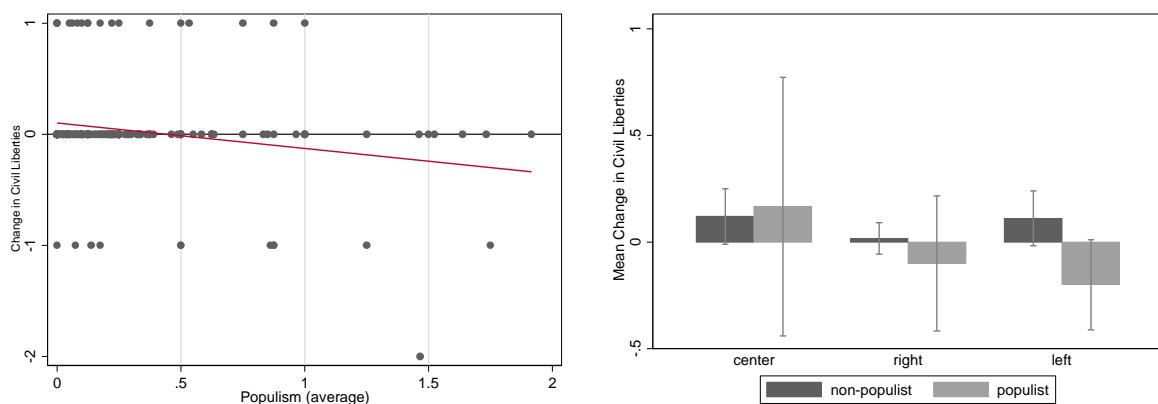
¹¹ Data is available until 2017, to code the indicator at t_{+1} we use data from 2017 for all cases with terms spanning until 2018 or 2019. Note as well that the analyses for change in electoral quality are based on 171 cases only. The following cases are completely

missing: Austria: Kurz, 2017; Bulgaria: Borisov, 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solis, 2018; Ecuador: Moreno, 2017; France: Macron, 2017; Italy, Giuseppe Conte, 2018; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

Civil Liberties: To measure the impact of populism on civil liberties, we use Freedom House’s Civil Liberties score from the Freedom in the World dataset ([Freedom House 2018a](https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2018)), see <https://freedomhouse.org/report/methodology-freedom-world-2018> for data access.

The indicator covers aspects like freedom of expression and belief, associational and organizational rights, rule of law, and personal autonomy without state interference. The indicator ranges from 1 (most free) to 7 (least free). For the purpose of the analyses below, we invert this scale – so higher values indicate higher levels of civil liberties.¹²

Figure 7: Populism and Change in Civil Liberties



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in civil liberties (with $r=-0.209$, $p<0.01$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

Interpretation: Already with these basic figures we find a negative association between populism and civil liberties. According to the right panel of figure 7, both right and left populist chief executives seem more likely to embark on a mission to cut back on civil liberties. Multivariate regression analyses, however, cannot confirm any impact of ideology on the erosion of civil liberties (see Models 9a and 9b in Table 3 below). The coefficient of

populism reaches marginally significance levels and indicates that a 1 unit increase in populism leads to a decrease in civil liberties by 0.28 points – which is substantial considering the low range of the scale from 1 (very low) to 7 (very high). This result, however, is not robust when we exclude cases from Venezuela or Turkey from the analysis, which is why we should treat them with caution.

¹² Data is available until 2017, to code the indicator at t_{+1} we use data from 2017 for all cases with terms spanning until 2018 or 2019. Note the analyses for change in civil liberties are based on 171 cases only. The following cases are completely missing:

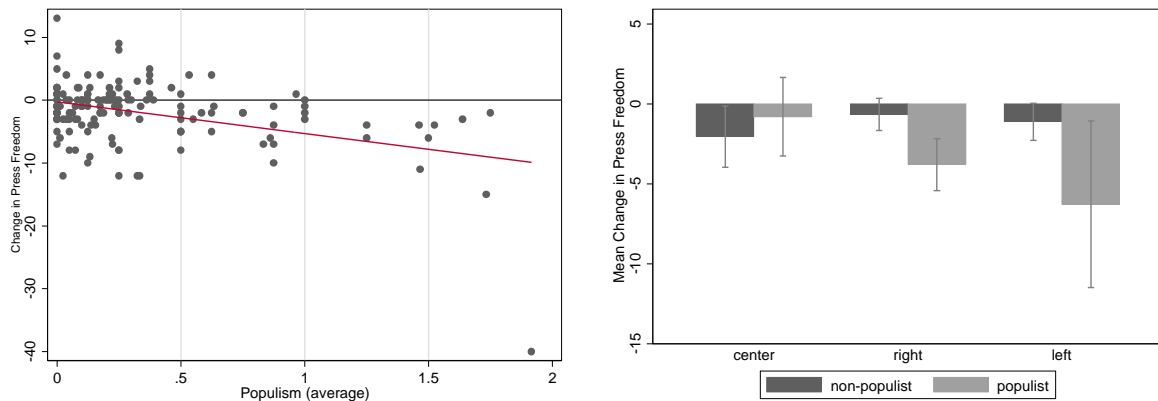
Austria: Kurz, 2017; Bulgaria: Borisov, 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solis, 2018; Ecuador: Moreno, 2017; France: Macron, 2017; Italy: Giuseppe Conte, 2018; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

Freedom of the Press: While the overall effects of populism on civil liberties are mixed, there is one civil liberty where populism is seen as having a consistent, negative effect: press freedom. Populists often attack the news media. While independent news media sometimes help populists rise to power through their reporting on past governments, their continued reporting quickly runs afoul of populists’ Manichaeian tendency to reject criticism of the popular will and to demonize opponents.

To measure this effect, we use Freedom House’s Freedom of the Press index

([Freedom House 2018b](https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2017-methodology)), data available at (<https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-press-2017-methodology>). This index gives each country a score between 0 (best) and 100 (worst) and covers the legal environment, the political environment and the economic environment of press freedom. We calculate the change in the index from the beginning of the leader’s term (t_0) to the end (t_{+1}). For the purpose of the analyses, we invert the resulting scale, so negative values indicate declines in press freedom. Because data are only available until 2016, to code the indicator at t_{+1} we use data from 2016 for all cases with terms spanning until 2017, 2018 or 2019.¹³

Figure 8: Populism and Change in Press Freedom



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in press freedom (with $r=-0.409$, $p<0.001$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

¹³ Note the analyses for change in press freedom are based on 159 cases only. The following cases are completely missing: Argentina: Macri, 2016; Austria: Kern, 2016; Kurz, 2017; Brazil: Temer, 2016; Bulgaria: Borisov, 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solis, 2018; Croatia: Plenkovic, 2016; Dominican Republic: Medina, 2016; Ecuador:

Moreno, 2016; France: Macron, 2017; Guatemala: Morales, 2016; Italy: Conte, 2018; Latvia: Kucinskis, 2016; Nicaragua: Ortega, 2016; Peru: Kuczynski, 2016; Slovakia: Fico, 2016; Spain: Rajoy, 2016; United Kingdom: May, 2016; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

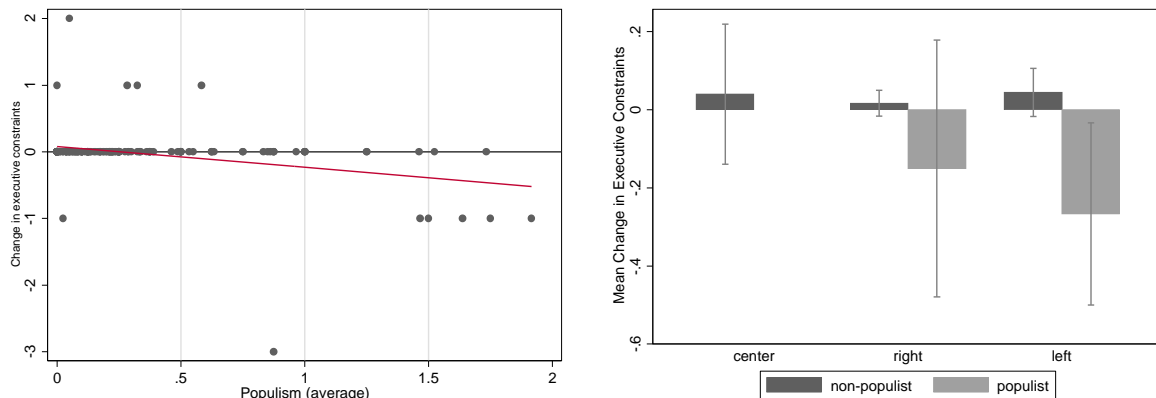
Interpretation: We confirm a strong, negative effect of populism on press freedom. Not every decline can be attributed to populists, but almost every strong or moderate populist registers some decline. The largest decline by far is in Venezuela under Chávez (40 points), but other cases of populism still register large

declines of 12-15 points. Note that these are per term—the cumulative effect across consecutive terms for some populists is much larger. As the case of Chávez suggests, this consequence of populism is felt equally across leaders of the left and right—populists of all ideological stripes undermine press freedom.

Executive Constraints: Finally, populism in government is often associated with the centralization of power under the chief executive (Ruth 2018; Levitsky and Loxton 2013; Allred, Hawkins, and Ruth 2015; Houle and Kenny 2016). Populist leaders portray themselves as the embodiment of the collective will and (if possible) cultivate a charismatic linkage with their followers. In their struggle against the (allegedly) corrupt elite, their supporters are willing to tolerate the concentration of power in the hands of the chief executive. Controls on the executive branch are one of the core features of liberal democracy, and most of the time, parliaments as well as the judiciary branch are controlled by established elites. This

incentivises the tendency of populists in power to erode executive constraints, when possible. To test for this, we use Polity IV's executive constraints data (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2017), data available at (<http://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html>). The item 'Executive Constraints' is measured on a 7-point scale with higher values indicating higher degrees of constraints on executive power. The indicator ranges from (1) 'unlimited authority' with no regular limitations on executive actions to (7) 'parity or subordination' with other groups having effective authority equal or greater than the executive (Marshall, Jaggers, and Gurr 2017, 24-25).¹⁴

Figure 9: Populism and Change in Executive Constraints



Note: The left panel (scatter plot) shows the correlation between populism and change in executive constraints (with $r=-0.345$, $p<0.001$). The right panel shows group differences (bar graph with confidence bands) between non-populist and at least somewhat populist chief executives according to their ideological leaning (left-centre-right).

¹⁴ Data is available until 2017, to code the indicator at $t+1$ we use data from 2017 for all cases with terms spanning until 2018 or 2019. Note the analysis are based on 171 cases only. The following cases are completely missing: Austria: Kurz, 2017; Bulgaria:

Borisov, 2017; Chile: Piñera, 2018; Costa Rica: Solís, 2018; Ecuador: Moreno, 2017; France: Macron, 2017; Italy, Giuseppe Conte, 2018; United States: Trump, 2017; Venezuela: Chávez, 2013.

Interpretation: Both Figure 9 and Table 3 confirm populism's tendency to erode executive constraints. This relationship holds in multivariate regression analyses as well. Models 11a and 11b in Table 3 below indicate a negative and significant association of populism and change in

executive constraints. A one unit increase in populist discourse of a chief executive is associated with a substantial decrease of 0.38 points on a 7point scale, ranging from unlimited authority to parity or subordination.

Table 3: OLS Regression Analyses (Clustered by Country) – Political Indicators¹⁵

	Turnout		Electoral Quality		Civil Liberties		Press Freedom		Executive Constraints	
	7a	7b	8a	8b	9a	9b	10a	10b	11a	11b
Populism (avg.)	0.04*** (0.01)	0.04*** (0.01)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.04* (0.02)	-0.28* (0.14)	-0.28+ (0.15)	-5.34** (1.75)	-5.36** (1.75)	-0.39** (0.14)	-0.39* (0.15)
Ideology										
<i>Right-wing</i>		-0.01 (0.01)		0.00 (0.01)		-0.09 (0.09)		0.77 (1.05)		-0.01 (0.05)
<i>Left-wing</i>		-0.01 (0.01)		0.01 (0.01)		-0.01 (0.11)		0.50 (1.02)		0.02 (0.05)
Parliamentary		-0.02* (0.01)		-0.01 (0.01)		0.00 (0.09)		0.53 (0.98)		-0.01 (0.06)
Turnout, t0	-0.21*** (0.05)	-0.21*** (0.04)								
Electoral quality, t0			-0.02 (0.03)	-0.01 (0.03)						
Civil liberties, t0					-0.05 (0.04)	-0.05 (0.04)				
Press freedom, t0							-0.02 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.04)		
Executive const., t0									-0.09+ (0.05)	-0.09 (0.05)
Constant	0.12*** (0.03)	0.14*** (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.02 (0.03)	0.43+ (0.24)	0.46 (0.28)	1.27 (2.78)	0.99 (3.11)	0.68* (0.32)	0.67* (0.33)
N	180	180	171	171	171	171	159	159	171	171
r ² _a	0.17	0.18	0.14	0.13	0.05	0.04	0.16	0.15	0.14	0.13
F	14.63	9.82	3.16	1.83	2.39	1.02	11.39	3.98	4.72	2.19

Country clustered standard errors in parentheses; + $p < 0.10$, * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$. Reference category “Ideology”=centre/neither. Reference category “System of government”=Presidential.

¹⁵ Note that findings remain mostly the same (with respect to coefficient size and significance levels) with country wise exclusion of Turkey (Erdogan) or Venezuela (Chávez and Maduro), with the exception of Model 9a (only if Venezuela is excluded) and Model 9b (both if Turkey or Venezuela is excluded), for which the effect of Populism (avg.) falls below conventional significance levels in both analyses.

APPENDIX
Table A1: Summary statistics

Variable	Obs	Mean	SD	Min	Max	Scale
Populism (average)	180	0.32	0.41	0.00	1.92	0-2
Populism (dummy)	180	0.24	0.43	0	1	binary
<i>Control variables</i>						
Left-Centre-Right	180	0.12	0.90	-1	1	categorical (-1, 0, 1)
Parliamentarism	180	0.43	0.44	0	1	binary
<i>Economic indicators</i>						
Gini, disposable income (t0)	131	0.38	0.09	0.24	0.53	0 to 1
Gini, disposable income (t1)	131	0.38	0.08	0.24	0.53	0 to 1
Gini, market income (t0)	131	0.48	0.04	0.36	0.61	0 to 1
Gini, market income (t1)	131	0.48	0.04	0.36	0.60	0 to 1
Absolute redistribution (t0)	129	0.10	0.08	-0.01	0.24	-1 to 1
Absolute redistribution (t1)	129	0.10	0.08	-0.01	0.25	-1 to 1
Indirect taxes (t0)	139	9.98	2.53	4.24	16.64	0 to 100
Indirect taxes (t1)	139	10.10	2.50	4.24	16.64	0 to 100
Control of corruption (t0)	159	0.35	1.04	-1.39	2.30	-2.5 to 2.5
Control of corruption (t1)	159	0.32	1.03	-1.39	2.30	-2.5 to 2.5
Degree of corruption (t0)	171	0.39	0.29	0.01	0.92	0 to 1
Degree of corruption (t1)	171	0.39	0.29	0.01	0.91	0 to 1
<i>Political indicators</i>						
Voter Turnout (t0)	180	0.67	0.13	0.28	0.96	0 to 1
Voter Turnout (t1)	180	0.67	0.12	0.38	0.97	0 to 1
Electoral Quality (t0)	171	0.83	0.16	0.36	0.99	0 to 1
Electoral Quality (t1)	171	0.82	0.17	0.28	0.99	0 to 1
Civil Liberties (t0)	171	5.84	1.13	3	7	categorical (1-7)
Civil Liberties (t1)	171	5.87	1.19	2	7	categorical (1-7)
Press Freedom (t0)	159	65.66	16.62	19	92	0 to 100
Press Freedom (t1)	159	63.77	17.73	17	92	0 to 100
Executive Constraints (t0)	171	6.50	0.84	3	7	categorical (1-7)
Executive Constraints (t1)	171	6.49	0.91	3	7	categorical (1-7)

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