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How ideology shapes the relationship between populist attitudes and support for liberal democratic values. Evidence from Spain

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Abstract: In this paper, I argue that ideology has a moderating role on how populist attitudes shape support for three liberal democratic values: the separation of powers, the granting of civil liberties and the protection of the rights of minorities. Drawing on insights gleaned from the political theory and comparative politics literature, and using an ideational approach to populism, I suggest that leftist and rightist populist individuals' different understandings of what constitutes *the people* shape their stances towards democracy. Using data from Spain (N=3,000), I show that right-wing populist individuals display lower levels of support for the granting of civil liberties and the protection of the rights of minorities than their non-populist peers. As for left-wing individuals, populist attitudes are unrelated to the rights of minorities, positively related to the granting of civil rights, and also positively related to some aspects of the separation of powers. The evidence reveals that right-wing populists endorse principles of liberal democracy less strongly compared to non-populist right-wing individuals and to left-wing individuals, and it has important implications on how to understand and tackle populism in modern democracies.

Keywords: populist attitudes, ideology, democracy, civil liberties, rights of minorities, Spain.

Introduction

In April 2010, the then President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy, declared that populism was "the biggest danger to Europe". Since the early 2000s, support for populist parties has been on the rise in several Western countries; in turn, scholarly interest in the topic has increased. Although the debate is not new, the discussion about the relationship between populism and (liberal) democracy has garnered more scholarly attention in recent years. The electoral gains made by populist parties across modern democracies have also allowed this debate to transcend a fundamentally theoretical approach and now the extensive use of case studies and cross-country analyses enriches the discussion. In fact, at this stage it is largely undisputed that, beyond aprioristic approaches declaring populism to be irretrievably good or bad for democracy (c.f. Wiles, 1969; Urbinati, 1998, 2019; Pappas, 2019), the relationship between populism and liberal democratic values is far more complex than originally posited. In this gradual evolution towards more nuanced stances, the influence of the so-called *host ideologies* has largely been considered a crucial moderating factor. For many authors, the reactionary and exclusivist views of right-wing populist parties, *vis-à-vis* the more inclusionary views of left-wing populist parties, will more likely lead democratic values to plunge (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; Huber and Ruth, 2017).

Despite this flourishing literature, to date, scholars have almost exclusively been focused on the aggregate-level of analysis. Leftist and rightist populist parties have been the centre of attention, while—mostly due to lack of data—the study of the relationship between individual-level populism and democracy has been, at best, scant. This gap in the literature opens a relevant yet unaddressed question: while it seems clear that (some) populists in government can put democratic institutions under pressure, what is the effect of widespread populist attitudes among citizens on attitudes towards democracy?

In this paper I aim to contribute to the study of the relationship between populism and some defining aspects of democracy by focusing on how *populist attitudes* are associated with a selection of three of the dimensions of liberal democracies. With this, I take a step back most current scholarly research to set out the individual-level determinants of how public opinion (populist attitudes)—beyond partisan heuristics—will affect attitudes towards democracy.

My argument hinges on the idea that it is the different conceptions sustained by right- and left-wing populist individuals about who constitutes the *people* that crucially determine how right- and left-wing populist attitudes are related to liberal democratic principles. For that reason, I expect right-wing populism to be associated with less support for liberal democratic values when compared to right-wing non-populist individuals, yet such a trend cannot be expected to exist for left-wing populism. In other words, populist attitudes are expected to jeopardise liberal democratic values for right-wing individuals, but not for left-wing ones.

The analysis is focused on three of the defining aspects of liberal democratic regimes: individuals' support for the *separation of powers*, for the granting of *civil liberties* and for the protection of the *rights of minorities*. Using data from an online survey performed in Spain in October-November 2017 (N=3,000), and an ideational approach to populism (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins and Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2019), the evidence reveals that right-wing populist individuals in Spain are less supportive—when compared to their non-populist peers—of the protection of civil liberties and the protection of the rights of minorities, while being supportive of the separation of powers to a similar extent. In contrast, comparing left-wing populist and non-populist individuals show that they both display similar levels of support for the rights of minorities, but that the former show higher support for the protection of civil liberties and for the separation of powers.

Overall, results reveal that, even though populism (and populist attitudes) both on the left and the right can be conceived as a channel for expressing one's dissatisfaction with democracy,

the consequences for attitudes towards liberal democracy are drastically divergent. I end the paper by discussing the political and normative implications of my findings, how the results can translate to other contexts, and the conditions under which political opinions (populist attitudes) can eventually turn into a menace to liberal democracy.

Theoretical arguments

The debate concerning the relationship between populism and democracy is almost as old as the concept of populism itself. Early works by Peter Wiles (1969) and Urbinati (1998, see also 2019) depict populism as a multifaceted expression of a "pathology of democracy", while Taggart (2000) conceives it as a "pathology of representative politics". Scholars who follow this sceptical line of thought consider populism to be an illiberal ideology that is at odds with the liberal democratic system (Kriesi and Pappas, 2015; Rummens, 2017; Pappas, 2019). For them, the majoritarian character of populists "puts pressure on the individual rights and the limits on public power at the heart of liberal democracy" (Galston, 2018:4; see also Rama and Casal Bértoa, 2020), while the understanding of the people as homogeneous and unitary erodes pluralism and ultimately leads to the denial and suppression of others (Pappas, 2019).

Nowadays, though, there is extensive agreement that the relationship between populism and liberal democratic values is far more complex than originally posited. The argument, however, is far from new and it is filled with many edges. In fact, most political philosophers have largely seen populism as a normative approach to radical democracy that may help overcome the intrinsic depoliticisation of liberal democratic systems and the tendency of liberalism to constrain democratic decisions. Canovan (1981, 1999) claims that populism is a challenge that feeds on the tensions at the heart of the democratic system and that, as such, it can emerge from time to time to "redeem" representative democracies from their deficiencies

(see also Vergara, 2020). Similarly, Katz and Mair (1995) argue that populism may in some instances be a rational response to systems that have been monopolised by a cartel of parties, while Mouffe (2000:116) considers that populist (right-wing) parties "are able to articulate many demands of the popular sectors scorned as retrograde by the modernizing elites and to present themselves as the only guarantors of the sovereignty of the people". Tännsjö (1992) goes even further and sees an ideal of democracy in democratic populism. Far from this unconditional support for populism as a societal stirring phenomena, most researchers—from political theorists, to political sociologists or comparativists—nowadays see in populism a multifaceted phenomenon whose consequences for democracy crucially depend on the nature of each political movement/party (Katsambekis, 2017). Hence, Mudde and Rovira-Kaltwasser (2012a, 2014), while acknowledging the tensions between the liberal and the democratic components of modern democracies, suggest that in some cases populist parties and populist individuals may be at odds with liberal democracy, although not with democracy itself. Likewise, working with individual-level data, Rovira-Katwasser and van Hauwaert (2020) have recently shown that individuals holding populist attitudes are not anti-democratic but, rather, are disgruntled with how the democratic regime functions, while Zaslove et al. (2020) have demonstrated that, in the Netherlands, populist individuals are actually more supportive of democracy than non-populist ones.

In aiming to understand the different consequences that populism—and populist attitudes—may have for democracy, it is central to consider the party/individual's *host ideology*. Indeed, the inclusionary left-wing populism comparing the 99% to a small elite (*casta*), typical of Podemos, Bloco de Esquerda, Syriza, or Occupy Wall Street, seems more consistent with a liberal commitment than the discourse heard from right-wing exclusionary populists against immigrants or ethnic minorities, such as that of Trump, Orbán or Duterte (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Wolkenstein, 2019; Font et al., 2021). Recent cross-country studies have

validated such evidence. To mention a few, Spittler (2018) and Vittori (2021), the two of them using data from Western and Eastern Europe, show that right-wing populists in government have a negative effect on democratic quality; and Vachudova (2021), using data from the Chapel Hill Expert Survey, shows that in recent decades in Europe, while left-wing populist parties in power have tended to become more ordinary, right-wing ethnopopulist formations have usually promoted democratic backsliding in their pursuit of more power. Departing from this literature, in this paper I aim to develop an individual-level explanation of the mechanisms accounting for differences in how ideology heterogeneously shapes the relationship between populist attitudes and support for some liberal democratic values. For this, I will argue that it is the different conceptions sustained by right- and left-wing populist individuals about who constitutes the *people* that critically determine how right- and left-wing populist attitudes are related to liberal democratic principles.

Following the seminal definition from Coppedge et al. (2011:253), I understand liberal democracy —and hence, the values attached to it—as a system that judges the quality of democracy by the limits placed on government and that guarantees that the "rule by the majority does not result in the oppression of minorities or the loss of individual liberties". Coppedge et al. (2011) suggest the existence of five dimensions that characterise a liberal conception of democracy: transparency, civil liberties, rule of law, horizontal accountability (effective checks on rulers), and minority rights. When attempting to assess the relationship between liberal democracy and populist ideology, Albertazzi and Mueller (2013)—using the same definition from Coppedge et al.—consider three aspects: the separation of powers, individual rights and freedom of speech. In this research, I attempt to reconcile Albertazzi and Mueller's choices with Coppedge et al.'s original definition, by also focusing on three areas that identify different aspects of a liberal democratic conception of governance. First, the *separation of powers,* present in Albertazzi and Mueller (2013) using the same term, and

in Coppedge et al.'s work (2011) under the categories of rule of law and horizontal accountability. Second, *civil liberties*, included using the same term in Coppedge et al.'s work (2011) and under the categories of individual rights and freedom of speech in Albertazzi and Mueller (2013). Third, the *rights of minorities*, included only in Coppedge et al.'s work (2011).[1]

In what follows, I outline the different expectations that the literature has for how populism is related to these three liberal democratic values under consideration—recall, the *separation of powers,* the granting of *civil liberties* and the protection of the *rights of the minorities*. First, one of the main criticisms that populists level against liberal democracies is the existence of checks and balances anchored in the constitution. In their view, the *separation of powers* limits the capacity of the people to decide and places constraints on how those governing are allowed to implement the "will of the people" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012a; Albertazzi and Mueller, 2013). In this way, political leaders would become mere intermediaries of the *volonté générale*, rather than independent shapers of the political course. Populist rule has been reported to be connected with authoritarian drifts by left-wing governments in Venezuela, Ecuador, Bolivia, Yugoslavia or Greece—c.f. Hawkins (2010), Weyland (2013) or Pappas (2008)—as well as by right-wing governments in the US, Italy, the Czech Republic or the Philippines—c.f. Pappas (2014) or Inglehart and Norris (2017). Likewise, cross-national evidence shows that populist rule has detrimental consequences for the legal and institutional constraints on executive power (Houle and Kenny, 2018) and on

[1] Remarkably, these three are not the unique values defining neither a liberal democratic regime nor sufficient elements for a system to be considered a democracy. For instance, the V-Dem Liberal Democratic Index (Lührmann et al., 2020) provides other defining factors of a liberal democratic regime such as the presence of a rigorous and impartial public administration, transparent laws with predictable enforcement, property rights, freedom from torture, political killing or forced labour, freedom of movement and religion, compliance with judiciary, the existence of opposition parties or the executive oversight, among others. Furtherore, other conceptions of democracy make emphasis in alternative defining elements of democracy. In sum, it is important to highlight that neither democracy nor democratic values are restricted to the three components addressed in this piece.

judicial independence (Kenny, 2017:2). However, more recently Weyland (2020) has shown that the path towards authoritarianism is narrow and uncertain and requires the existence of concurrent institutional weaknesses and economic bonanza.

Second, the existence of *civil liberties* is one of the most common defining elements of liberal democracies for political scientists. Liberal democracies uphold that interference with the liberty of an individual is only justified when this prevents others from being harmed—the so-called "negative liberty" (Berlin, 1969:122). The cluster of laws that today protect such liberty include freedom of speech, of association, of assembly, of movement, of information and of the press, as well as universal suffrage and the secret ballot (Foweraker and Krznaric, 2000). Populists' potential uneasiness with civil liberties stems from their consideration of the people as homogeneous. In Albertazzi and Mueller's words, "freedom of speech dispels the myth of the people's unity, by providing a constant reminder that 'the people' are far from being homogeneous and are, in fact, constituted by a myriad of different constituencies voicing different interests" (2013:349). In other words, the extension of civil rights highlights the heterogeneous component of modern societies and calls into question the existence of the *volonté générale*. Evidence from Kenny shows that populist rule is negatively associated with the granting of political rights and civil liberties (2017), and has detrimental effects on press freedom and freedom of expression (2019).

The third and final liberal democratic characteristic under consideration is the relationship between populism and the *rights of minorities*. In addition to individual rights, several authors (c.f. Kymlicka, 1995) consider that liberal democracies need to guarantee "group-differentiated" rights for collectives that represent permanent minorities within the state, with a view to promoting equality between the minority and the majority. However, the populists' perception of societal homogeneity opposes granting rights to those who are on the margins of the system—be they ethnic or cultural minorities, immigrants, members of the elites, etc.

In other words, only those who belong to the "common people" are allowed to exercise sovereignty over the affairs of the community, while political power, in order to be exercised legitimately, needs to attend uniquely to the demands of the majority (Albertazzi and Mueller, 2013). Unsurprisingly, when populists turn the majority criterion into an absolute majority rule, the rights of minorities are circumvented and ignored (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b).

The conditional relationship between populist attitudes and ideology concerning liberal democratic values

As advanced earlier, and along the lines of recent aggregate-level research on the relationship between populist attitudes and democracy, in this paper I argue that an individual's placement on the left-right divide will play a crucial role in determining the consequences of holding populist attitudes on one's views about the three liberal democratic values under consideration. In view of this endeavour, it is worth acknowledging that a related exercise has been carried out by Heinisch and Wegscheider using data from Austria and Germany (2020). The authors show that one's placement on the left/right axis has a larger impact on an individual's trust in democracy, her stances on anti-pluralism, deliberative proceduralism and majoritarianism, than does her populist attitudes. The authors test whether ideology is able to moderate the relationship between populist attitudes and democratic outcomes, yet the evidence is not supportive of such a conditional association.

On what theoretical grounds can an individual's ideology be expected to moderate the relationship between populist attitudes and support for liberal democratic values? My argument hinges on the different understanding that left- and right-wing populists have about who the *people* are, and which—I suggest—will ultimately lead to different conceptions of how power should be exercised and also the very nature of their respective political projects. Right-wing populists draw on what Wolkenstein (2019) calls a "cultural-nationalist

conception of peoplehood". Their views are based primarily on exclusionary nativism and ethnic nationalism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Katsambekis, 2017) and, as such, the adversary is identified with immigrants (Mouffe, 2013:123) or ethnic minorities (c.f. Fallend, 2012). Despite right-wing populists perceiving the existence of inequalities and deficiencies in the functioning of democracy, they often seek to restore an oft-romanticised old order in opposition to the negative trends of the present (Rucht, 2019:67). For them, the boundaries of the people are consistent with the boundaries of the state (and, hence, their cultural nation (Abizadeh, 2008:868)) and, therefore, "the question of who belongs to that cultural nation is treated as pre-politically settled and not open to contestation" (Wolkenstein, 2019:334).

In contrast to the cultural-nationalist conception of peoplehood adopted by right-wing populists, left-wing populists tend to adopt a "contestatory conception" (Wolkenstein, 2019). Left-wing populism is critical of social inequality, systemic marginalisation and exploitation (Katsambekis, 2017) and, as such, "the people" are—implicitly or explicitly—linked to the concept of class (Laclau, 2005). Left-wing populists aim to create a new form of society and, therefore, the very same notion of peoplehood is evolving in parallel to continuous acts of political mobilisation (Rucht, 2019:67; Wolkenstein, 2019).

Drawing on these opposite conceptions of who "the people" are, I develop differing expectations of how populist attitudes should affect the liberal democratic values under consideration among left- and right-wing individuals.

First, through the praxis of the power for the people, populists reject the notion of the *separation of powers* of liberal democracy (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b) and may instead favour the presence of a strong leader who is able to implement the will of the people. Several authors have reported connections between populist parties and authoritarian drifts on the left and on the right of the ideological divide (see above). Despite this evidence, I argue

that, when it comes to evaluating individual-level support for liberal democratic values, only populist attitudes among right-wing individuals will lead to an erosion of the system of checks and balances and increased support for a strong leader (and Batory, 2016; e.g. Markowski, 2016; see also Grzymala-Busse, 2019). In fact, right-wing populism in developed countries has been characterised as an authoritarian response to the emergence of libertarian values, processes of secularisation, rising immigration and the defence of national identity against multiculturalism (de Lange, 2007; Bornschier, 2010; Heinisch and Wegscheider, 2020). Similarly, Trump's success in the Republican primary elections was partially driven by authoritarian inclinations, as well as hostility to elites, mistrust of experts and championing of the national identity (Formisano, 2016). In contrast, and despite the evidence mentioned above, I expect populist attitudes among leftist individuals in liberal democracies to be unrelated to preferences regarding separation of powers and the presence of an authoritarian leader. At least four mechanisms may account for this null effect. First, authoritarianism in developed countries has been associated with right-wing individuals (c.f. Altemeyer, 1981), while left-wing authoritarians are not only a minority but also do not often have a party that fits their preferences (Lefkofridi et al., 2014). Second, and along the same lines, most totalitarian experiences in Western countries—including Spain, where the paper's data comes from—have been led by right-wing leaders, thus potentially preventing left-wing populist individuals from supporting a structure of government typical of antagonistic regimes. Third, evidence of leftist inclusionary populist parties has been reported in Greece (2014) or in Spain (Rodríguez-Teruel et al., 2016). Consequently:

H1.1. Rightist populist individuals will support the separation of powers to a lower extent than rightist non-populist individuals

H1.2. Leftist populist individuals will support the separation of powers to a similar extent to leftist non-populist individuals

Second, I also have contradictory expectations for the *civil liberties* dimension. Earlier here, I related populists' uneasiness with the protection of civil liberties, with their own understanding of who ""the people" are. For populists, the extension of civil rights emphasises the heterogeneous component of liberal democracies, thus calling into question the existence of a unique *volonté générale*. I sustain, however, that how populist attitudes affect views on civil liberties will depend on an individual's understanding of who "the people" are and, consequently, on her ideology. Right-wing populist individuals have a cultural–nationalist conception of peoplehood. For them, the (national) language or religion establishes membership and defines "the people" against immigrants or ethnic minorities. In addition, the exercise of power needs to respect the will of these "people"—clearly defined by the preferences and values of the majority (Wolkenstein, 2019)—and, therefore, the granting of civil liberties will be perceived as a threat to the unique *volonté générale*.

This is in contrast to left-wing populists, whose conception of peoplehood is contestatory and constantly evolving through acts of political mobilisation. As a (thin-centred) ideology with transformative purposes, left-wing populists aim to protect the civil liberties that guarantee the fulfilment of their purposes (Heinisch and Wegscheider, 2020) such as the freedom of expression, of movement, of assembly, freedom to strike, etc. It is in fact through the exercise of such rights that they can reach their unattained demands. In fact, several authors have shown that the political nature of left-wing populism fosters popular empowerment (Rico et al., 2019), the socio-political inclusion of the weaker (Anduiza et al., 2019), and democratic participation and policies of redistribution (e.g. Philip and Panizza, 2011; Stavrakakis and Katsambekis, 2014). For these reasons I tend to think that all such transformative purposes of left-wing populist individuals will be able to outweigh the conception of unique *volonté générale* that populists both on the left and on the right hold—and that expectedly moves support for the protection of civil liberties downwards. In accordance—and despite the

difficulties in telling whether the expectation should be a null effect or a positive one—I uphold that left populist individuals will be more in favour of granting civil liberties than they non-populist peers. Hence:

H2.1. Rightist populist individuals will support granting civil liberties to a lower extent than rightist non-populist individuals

H2.2. Leftist populist individuals will support granting civil liberties to a higher extent than leftist non-populist individuals

Finally, I also expect different stances on the *rights of minorities* depending on ideology. From a populist perspective, political power, in order to be exercised legitimately, needs uniquely to respect the demands of majorities. Accepting the demands of minorities is perceived as a sign of submission to those on the margins of the system, be these ethnic, linguistic, or cultural minorities; immigrants; or members of the elites. For some authors, the Manichean distinction between "the pure people" and "the corrupt elite" that both left- and right-wing populists espouse leaves little space for pluralism and respect for the rights of minorities (de la Torre, 2000; Hawkins, 2010).

However, following Huber and Schimpf (2017), I argue that this relationship is more complex than previously posited, particularly for left-wing populists. On the one hand, it is true that the homogeneous conception of peoplehood and the preferences for majoritarian decision-making processes can be expected to downgrade support for the protection of the rights of minorities, both among right- and left-wing populists. On the other hand, however, when the actors blamed are not cultural minorities but rather the economic elites, granting rights to ethnic/linguistic minorities or immigrants may not entail any contradiction for left-wing populists. In fact, left-wing populist parties usually consider ethnic minorities as part of "the people" (Huber and Schimpf, 2017; Heinisch and Wegscheider, 2020), and are well-known for giving a voice to groups that do not feel represented by the elites (Mudde and

Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012b). These arguments are aligned with work by Rucht (2019), who argues that "most contemporary left-wing populists are rather advancing than undermining a given degree of civil society—especially when it comes to upheld cultural pluralism, to tolerate ethnic and other minorities and to support marginalised groups including refugees." (2019:82). Hence, given the contradictory tensions between the majoritarian and the confrontational components of left-wing populism, I expect populist attitudes among leftist individuals to be unrelated to support for the rights of minorities. Hence:

H3.1. Rightist populist individuals will support the rights of minorities to a lower degree than rightist non-populist individuals

H3.2. Leftist populist individuals will support the rights of minorities to the same degree as leftist non-populist individuals

Finally, Table 1 summarises the expectations.

Table 1: Summary of the expected support for liberal democratic values between populist and non-populist individuals, by ideology

Liberal democratic values	**Support for liberal-democratic values. Populists, compared to non-populist individuals**	
	Right-wing	**Left-wing**
Separation of powers and checks and balances (H1)	Lower	Equal
Protection of civil liberties (H2)	Lower	Higher
Protection of the rights of minorities (H3)	Lower	Equal

Data and methods

My research is based on an online survey, conducted in September-October 2018 on a sample of adults resident in Spain.[2] This sample is selected from Qualtrics panellists and uses quota sampling to approximately match Spain's population statistics in terms of sex, age, and education level. The sample comprises 3,003 adults (1,521 male and 1,482 female; their ages range from 18 to 65, M=41.11, SD=12.11; 29.7% have at least a university education, 33.8% have another type of post-secondary education, 32.2% have completed secondary education, and 4.4% have less than a secondary education).[3]

I use four different dependent variables to tap into the three above-mentioned aspects of democratic liberalism. The first feature of liberal democracies under consideration is the *separation of powers*. I assess the impact of populist attitudes on this aspect by using a variable that identifies the extent to which the respondent considers that the country would be better governed if there were a strong leader who did not have to worry about parliament or judges. The variable combines a clear reference to the head of the executive ruling without any interference from the legislative and the judiciary powers—an illiberal principle—with a more authoritarian aspect, i.e. a need for the leader to have strong powers.

The protection of *civil liberties* is the second aspect under assessment. I tap into this principle by using two different variables that enable me to identify two complementary aspects of it. First, to ascertain an individual's support for freedom of expression, I ask respondents to place themselves along a continuum that ranges from the need to guarantee the public expression of all political opinions (even if they are radical), to the need to prevent radical political ideas from being expressed publicly. Second, I assess the freedom vs. security

[2] Replication materials can be found at https://www.dropbox.com/s/hybc07ehpuc1yfc/Replication.zip?dl=0.

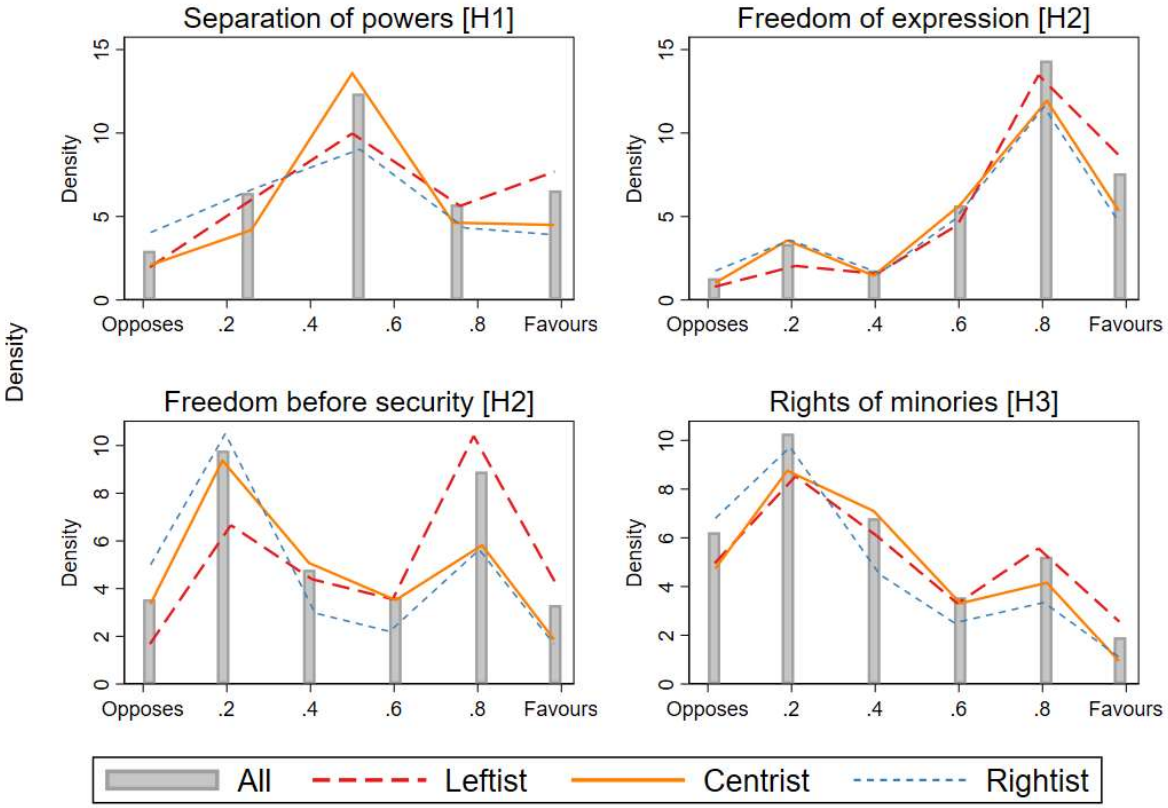
[3] The used sample is representative of the Spanish adult population until 65 years old. Nonetheless, there are good reasons to believe that the evidence had individuals older than 65 years old been included would have been similar to the one found in the paper. I discuss these arguments in Appendix F in the Online Supporting Materials.

debate by asking individuals whether it is more important to have maximum security (while losing some freedoms) or to have maximum freedom (while losing some security). Finally, I assess the *rights of minorities* aspect by using a variable that opposes the need to guarantee the will of the majority over the rights of minorities or vice versa.

All the questions, except the one about separation of powers (H2), present two opposing poles in a political continuum. After selecting one of them, respondents are asked the extent to which they agree with the option selected—a little, quite a lot, and a lot. This double question enables us to build a continuous measure that contains six possible responses: agrees with one of the choices a lot, quite a lot or a little, or with the other a little, quite a lot or a lot. The question on the separation of powers uses a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree. All the dependent variables are coded so that higher values indicate that an individual's political stance is closer to the liberal democratic values under consideration (more favourable to freedom of expression, the rights of minorities, and against a strong leader).

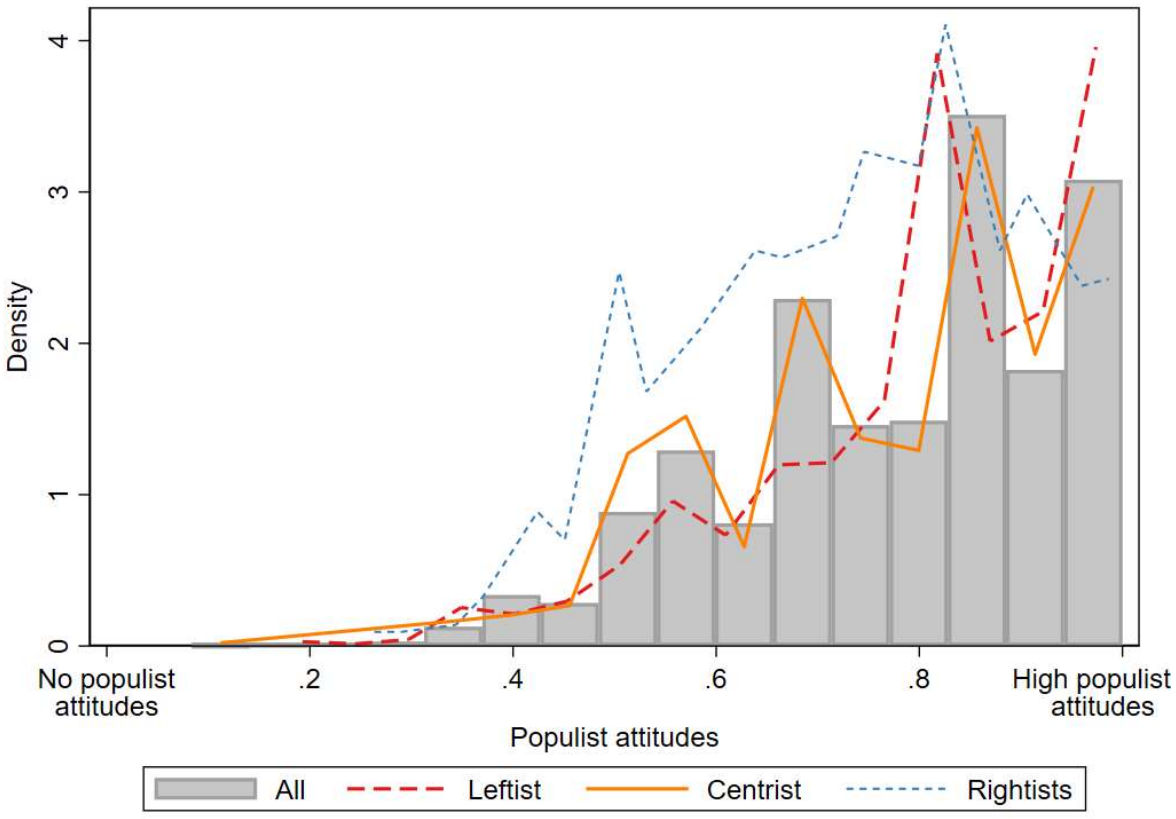
Figure 1 plots the distribution of the dependent variables for the entire sample (bar), along with the kernel density distribution for each ideology group (from 0 to 4, left; 5, centre; from 6 to 10, right. Values recoded to range from 0 to 1).

Figure 1: Histogram of the dependent variables, by ideology



I measure the ideational approach to populist attitudes by using the battery proposed by Castanho Silva et al. (2019). Six statements, measured using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree, identify the people-centrist and anti-elitism dimensions of populism. The internal consistency of the resulting composite scales (mean of scores) is acceptable for the whole sample, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.689. The main moderation variable, ideology, is measured on an 11-point scale ranging from 0 (left) to 10 (right). Figure 2 plots the histogram of the level of populist attitudes (bar), along with the (kernel) distribution of the level of populist attitudes by ideology.

Figure 2. Histogram of populist attitudes, by ideology



Finally, all the models include controls for political knowledge (an additive index based on four factual questions), ideological radicalism (values 0 and 1, and 9 and 10 in the ideology scale are coded as 1, 0 otherwise), individual deprivation (an additive index tapping different 11 different aspects of economic and personal deprivation, Cronbach's alpha 0.722), education (nine levels, following a standardized coding scheme from primary education to PhD), gender (female) and age (coded in years). I also include a control for national-regional identity using the Linz-Moreno question (Moreno, 1995) that accounts for the conflated relationship between ideology and territorial identity in Spain (Galais and Serrano, 2020; Liñeira et al., 2020). All variables except age (in years) have been coded to run from 0 to 1, and the national-regional identity has been treated as categorical as suggested by Guinjoan and Rodon (2016). The exact wording of the questions used in the analyses can be found in Appendix A of the Online supporting information; descriptive statistics and a correlation

matrix of the different liberal democratic values, populist attitudes and ideology can be found in Appendix B of the Online supporting information.

I estimate the moderating effect of ideology on populist attitudes by running a series of OLS regression models for each of the four dependent variables, where I interact an individual's composite measure of populist attitudes with his or her ideology.

Results

Table 2 presents the results of a series of OLS regression models that tap into the different aspects that I use to identify support for liberal democratic values. As already indicated, higher values imply greater support for these liberal democratic values. In the additive models, the coefficient for ideology is always negative—meaning that right-wing individuals are less supportive of the rights of minorities; evidence that is aligned with Huber and Schimpf's (2017) work. A first glance at the interaction results shows that, of the four terms displaying the moderating effects of ideology on populist attitudes, two of them—corresponding to the freedom before security aspect of the civil liberties (column 6) and the rights of minorities (column 8)—, are statistically significant and run in the expected direction (more negative for rightist individuals). As for the control variables, as individuals become older they support liberal democratic values to a lower extent, while support for such values increases as individuals register identities more close to the region than to Spain.

Table 2: Populism, ideology and support for liberal democratic values

	Sep. powers	Sep. powers	Freedom express.	Freedom express.	Free.vs. security	Free.vs. security	Rights min.	Rights min.
Populist attitudes	0.09*	0.15*	0.02	0.10	-0.12***	0.22**	-0.12***	-0.01
	(0.03)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.07)
Ideology	-0.18***	-0.08	-0.12***	0.01	-0.32***	0.26*	-0.16***	0.03
	(0.02)	(0.10)	(0.02)	(0.09)	(0.02)	(0.11)	(0.02)	(0.10)
Pop.att*Ideol		-0.13		-0.17		-0.75***		-0.25+
		(0.13)		(0.12)		(0.13)		(0.13)
Age	-0.00***	-0.00***	0.00**	0.00**	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***	-0.00***
	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)	(0.00)
Female	-0.00	-0.00	0.01	0.01	-0.08***	-0.08***	0.04***	0.04***
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Education	0.05**	0.05**	-0.02	-0.02	0.03	0.03	-0.03+	-0.03+
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Pol.know	0.08***	0.08***	0.03+	0.03+	0.03	0.03	-0.00	-0.00
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Deprivation	-0.02	-0.02	-0.00	-0.00	0.02	0.02	0.05+	0.05+
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Identity								
Only Spanish	[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]	[Ref.]
More Spanish	0.04+	0.04+	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	-0.02	0.02	0.02
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Dual	0.04*	0.04*	0.02	0.02	-0.01	-0.01	0.02	0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
More regional	0.07***	0.07***	0.09***	0.09***	0.07***	0.06**	0.05**	0.05**
	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.02)
Only regional	0.05*	0.05+	0.10***	0.10***	0.12***	0.10***	0.07**	0.06*
	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.02)	(0.02)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Extreme ideology	-0.05***	-0.05***	0.01	0.00	0.02	0.02	-0.01	-0.02
	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)	(0.01)
Constant	0.56***	0.52***	0.65***	0.59***	0.80***	0.53***	0.65***	0.56***
	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.06)
Observations	3020	3020	3014	3014	3014	3014	3020	3020
R^2	0.054	0.054	0.046	0.047	0.118	0.127	0.067	0.068

Standard errors in parentheses
+ p<0.1, * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001

To better understand the results in Table 2, I plot the evidence found in two complementary ways. First, in Figure 3, I show the predicted support for the different aspects of liberal democracy under consideration, for leftist (straight line, using the value 0, corresponding to extreme-left individuals) and rightist individuals (slashed line, value 1, extreme-right individuals) across the different levels of populist attitudes. The histogram in the background displays the distribution of the populist attitudes. Due to the highly skewed distribution of the populist attitudes variable (skewness -0.632) I start plotting the results at the value of 0.2.

This figure allows for a good understanding of the quantity of support for the three liberal democratic values among leftist and rightist non-populist and populist individuals, as well as identifying the differences between leftist and rightist individuals at each level of populist attitudes (x-axis). Nonetheless, Figure 3 it is not perfectly suited to testing the three groups of hypotheses set out above. To remedy this, in Figure 4, I plot the marginal effects of moving from a non-populist to a populist individual for liberal democratic values across the different values of ideology (now on the x-axis). This figure allows identifying the extent to which changing the degree of populist attitudes is associated with changes in support for liberal-democratic values among individuals of different ideological profiles. The horizontal continuous line in the value 0 marks the boundary of a statistically significant versus a not statistically significant association. Positive values indicate that increasing populist attitudes is positively associated with support for these liberal democratic values, negative values otherwise.

The upper-left panel in Figure 3 displays a reverse measure of the support for a strong leader that can govern without the interference of the parliament and the judiciary. Higher values correspond to more support for the separation of powers and the rejection of a strong leader. According to hypotheses 1.1 and 1.2., I was expecting rightist (leftist) populist individuals to reject separation of powers to a higher (the same) extent. The evidence, however, is not entirely consistent with my hypotheses. First, the flat line for right-wing individuals shows that populist attitudes are unrelated to stances regarding the separation of powers among conservatives. Second, left-populist individuals show slightly more support for the separation of powers than non-populist ones (0.12, $p<0.05$). Figure 4 shows that this positive impact of populist attitudes on the separation of powers holds for populist individuals placed between the value 0 (extreme-left) and 0.5 (centre). Overall, this evidence rejects both H1.1 and H1.2,

yet it supports the idea that, among left-wing individuals, populist attitudes are able to drive stances towards the separation of powers.

The upper-right and the bottom-left panels in Figure 3 address the relationship between populist attitudes and support for civil rights. Recall that in H2.1 and H2.2 I was expecting rightist (leftist) populist individuals to support limiting civil liberties to a higher (lower) extent than their non-populist counterparts. The upper-right figure shows support for freedom of expression. The evidence shows that, as left-wing individuals become more populist, support for freedom of expression seems to increase (0.08), yet Figure 4 shows that this association is not statistically significative across the board. Similarly, despite the evidence for right-wing individuals seeming to drop as they become more populist (-0.05), the relationship is not statistically significant either. In fact, what we can uniquely tell from this figure is that while ideology is not a determinant of support for freedom of expression among non-populist individuals, it is crucial among populist individuals. The bottom-left panel in Figure 3 shows support for freedom before security by ideology (also H2). The evidence shows that as left-wing individuals become more populist, support for freedom before security increases (0,18, $p<0.001$). Instead, as rightist individuals become more populist, the security dimension becomes more prominent (-0.42, $p<0.001$). As displayed in Figure 4, the positive impact of populist attitudes on the freedom before security debate is statistically significant between the ideology values of 0 and 0.2, while from the value 0.5 upwards, the slope becomes negative and statistically significant. Overall, evidence from the previous two figures—freedom of expression, and freedom before security—is partially supportive of H2.1 and H2.2.

Finally, the bottom-right panel in Figure 3 addresses the relationship between populist attitudes and support for minority rights. In H3.1 and H3.2 I expected rightist (leftist) populist individuals to support to a lower (the same) degree the rights of minorities compared to their

non-populist counterparts. Results show that left-wing individuals support minority rights to the same degree, irrespective of whether they have populist attitudes or not. In contrast, among right-wingers, populist individuals are much less supportive of the rights of minorities (-0.21, $p<0.001$). As displayed in Figure 4, the negative effect of populist attitudes on support for minority rights starts being statistically significant at the value 0.4 of ideology. Overall, this evidence is consistent with H3.1 and H3.2.

Figure 3. Populist attitudes, ideology and support for liberal democratic values

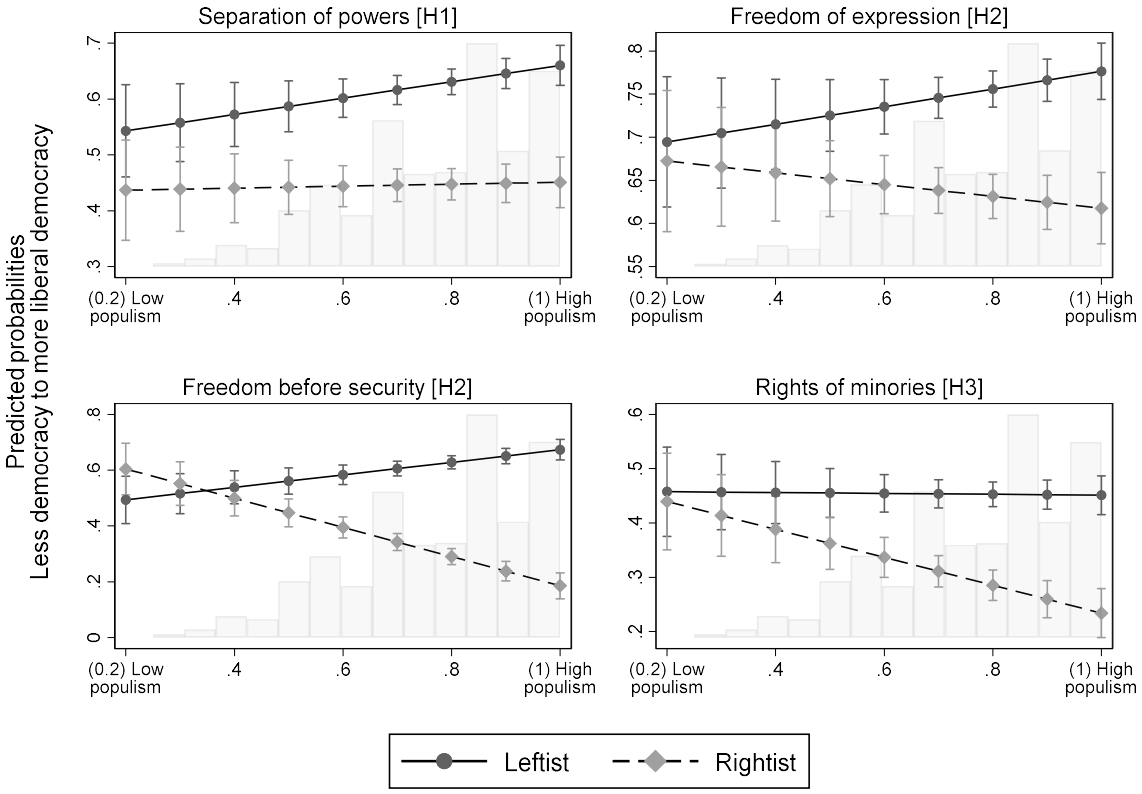
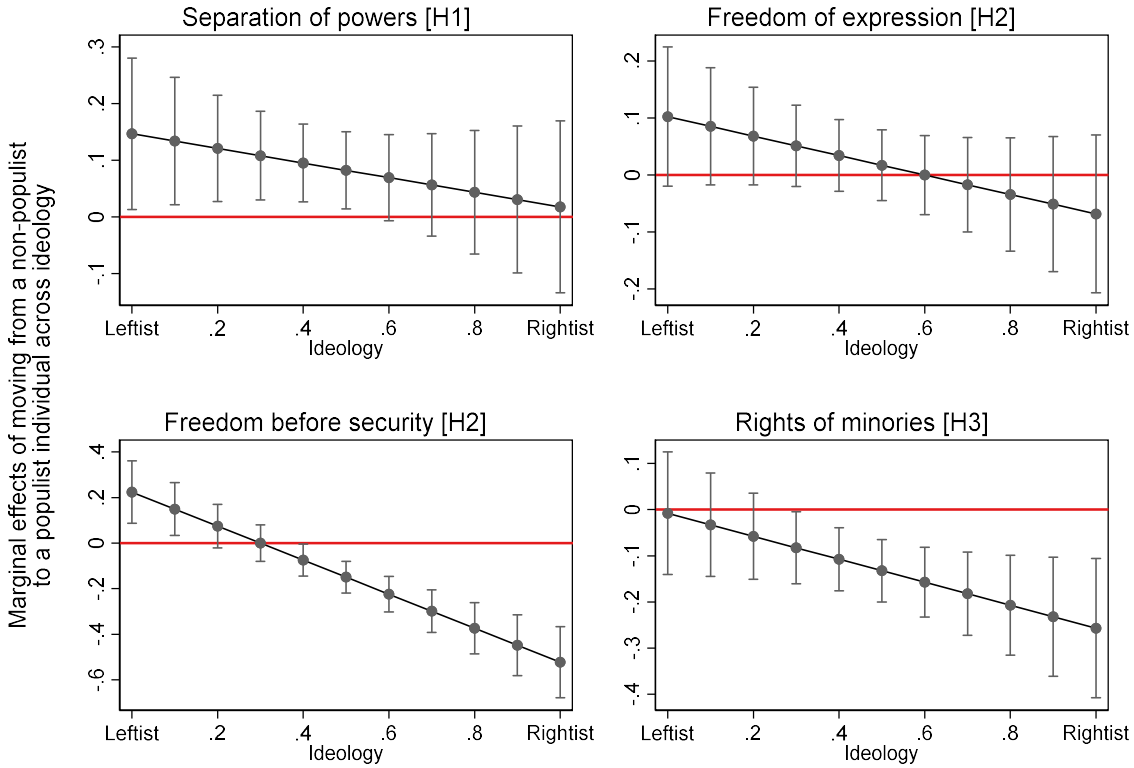


Figure 4. Marginal effects of populist attitudes on liberal democratic values across different ideology values



Finally, two main concerns arise when empirically addressing the relationship between populist attitudes and liberal democratic values conditional on an individual's ideology: the operationalisation of populist attitudes and the meaning of ideology. Appendix C of the online supporting information shows the robustness checks for the populist attitudes measure: a sensitivity test where low populist attitudes are estimated at a value of 0.4 (C1), a Goertzian operationalisation of populist attitudes (C2) and the disaggregation of populist attitudes between their main dimensions (C3). A second matter of concern was to address the role of alternative measures for ideology. Appendix D performs robustness checks on the moderator, by replacing the ideology variable with a measure that taps into support for improving public services (D1) and a new politics dimension (GAL/TAN, D2). Finally, table E1 in Appendix E

of the online supporting information presents a summary of the findings regarding support for liberal democratic values, by ideology (or its substitutes), when moving from a non-populist to a populist individual. The results are largely consistent with the evidence thus far set out. Finally, the table also reveals whether the difference between left and right-wing individuals widens (in a significant way) when individuals become more populist. The evidence reveals that—irrespective of the specific slope observed for each ideological group—as individuals become more populist the gap between leftist and rightist individuals systematically broadens in the case of the protection of the rights of minorities. In the case of the granting of civil liberties, the gap also broadens when considering the freedom versus security dimension, and in several instances it does so in the freedom of expression dimension. Finally, the gap does not seem to systematically widen in the liberal democratic dimension of the separation of powers.

Conclusions

In addressing the relationship between populist attitudes and support for liberal democratic values, I have argued that an individual's ideology is the missing link required to explain existing conflicting evidence. The different conceptions of who "the people" are by leftist and rightist populist individuals are able to shape their stances towards three liberal democratic values that I have analysed in the present research. Using data from Spain, my results reveal that right-wing populist individuals are less supportive—when compared to their non-populist peers—of the protection of civil liberties and the rights of minorities, and supportive of the separation of powers to a similar extent. In contrast, when compared to their non-populist counterparts, left-wing populist individuals show equal support for the rights of minorities and higher support for the protection of civil liberties and the separation of powers. The general reading of the results reveals that, beyond the specific trend observed for rightist and

leftist individuals, many right-wing populists endorse the liberal democratic values of respect for civil rights and protection of the rights of the minorities less strongly compared to non-populist right-wing individuals, as well as to left-wing individuals. The evidence for the separation of powers reveals, instead, that right-wing individuals endorse such principle less strongly than left-wing individuals, and populist attitudes in this case do not seem to act as a moderator of the said relationship.

The evidence displayed in this paper aligns with the perspective of those scholars who understand that populism can be both a challenge and an opportunity for democracy, and it discloses that the ideological divide argument that had been hitherto tested mostly at the aggregate-level can also translate to the individual-level. By pointing to the different conceptions that right- and left-wing populist individuals have about who the *people* are, this paper is able to signal a potential mechanism accounting for why populism may have divergent consequences for democracy depending on the hosting ideology.

These results may have both political and normative implications. From a public policy perspective, if left-wing populism turns out to be chiefly a matter of dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy, liberal democratic regimes need to work out how to find a better balance between the space given to citizens to speak with their own voices and the self-control and delayed gratification necessary for peaceful coexistence (Rico et al., 2019). However, for right-wing populists, the problem does not seem to stem from a lack of adequate democratic governance, but rather from the perceived threats posed by modern multicultural societies. In this case, it seems less obvious what public policies to implement, and their effects are possibly more uncertain. From a normative point of view, right-wing populists' rejection of liberal democratic values is supportive of Mudde, Rovira-Kaltwasser or Wolkenstein's recent works, who see left-wing populism as much less harmful to liberal democracies than right-wing populism.

Last, this paper also raises some questions that future scholars will need to address. The first of these questions concerns the selection of Spain as a case of study. Despite the country having medium-high levels of populist attitudes in comparison to other European countries (Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018; Wuttke et al., 2020), Spain had a populist party on the left (Podemos) but not on the right at the time of the survey—Vox, which achieved political representation only after the survey was performed, has been categorised as a populist radical right-wing party by some authors (Turnbull-Dugarte et al., 2020). Results presented in this paper suggest that the presence or absence of a populist party seem to be neither a crucial determinant for populist attitudes to emerge—evidence that it is aligned with recent work from Hawkins et al. (2020)—, nor a triggering factor of the relationship between populist attitudes and ideology on support for liberal democratic values. A second matter of concern is related to the presence of potential confounder variables affecting the conditional relationship between populist attitudes and ideology on support for liberal democratic values. In fact, in the empirical analysis, the inclusion of a control for an individual's national-regional identity softened the moderating role of ideology. This evidence is supportive of previous research showing that, in Spain, ideology and territorial identity are likely conflated (Galais and Serrano, 2020; Liñeira et al., 2020); but it also shows that ideology, once net of identity matters, is still able to moderate how populist attitudes are related to support for liberal democratic values.

A third question is associated with the capability of the argument to travel to other contexts. There are good reasons to believe that the found relationship between populist attitudes and ideology on support for liberal democratic values may well function in other Western democratic countries. For instance, there is empirical evidence relating support for the rights of minorities and leftist populist parties (Huber and Schimpf, 2017). Likewise, several left-wing populist parties are committed with the defence of other liberal democratic values such

as the separation of powers and the protection of civil liberties. This is the case of Die Linke in Germany; the Rød-Grønne or the Alternativet parties in Denmark; the Left Alliance in Finland; the Sinn Féin in Ireland; or the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, to mention a few. All these (populist) parties hold strong stances in what relates to the defence of liberal democratic values—while right-wing populist parties all around the Western world do not. If this party-level argument holds at the individual level, the evidence found on this paper could well travel outside Spain.

A fourth aspect to be taken into consideration for future research is the different levels of political attainment of populist goals and their consequences for the acceptance of liberal democratic values (c.f. Aytaç and Çarko, 2020). Left-wing populist individuals in Spain, but also elsewhere, are highly mobilised to fight for the (unachieved) demands of more democracy and transparency, in contrast to right-wing populists, who, despite being critical of how the system works, are more supportive of the status quo. This could help to explain the higher levels of support for civil rights displayed among left-wing populists. Hence, further research should consider whether gaining power will change (populist) individual's and parties' stances towards liberal democracy. As Wolkenstein suggests, once political goals have been achieved (e.g. gaining power), there is a risk of "unduly overstating preferential homogeneity" to "create a heavy anti-liberal pull akin to that of cultural–nationalist conceptions of the people" (2019:338).

One last concern is related to the micro-macro connections in populism. This paper has shown that ideology crucially shapes how individual-level populist attitudes are linked to support for liberal democratic values; other papers using aggregate-level data point to the populist parties' host ideology as a determinant of the extent to which these can pose a real threat to democracy. A main takeaway from this is that the study of the within-level mechanisms (micro-micro, macro-macro) needs to take further steps to assess how the micro-

macro elements of populism interact by fuelling one another (c.f. Slothuus and Bisgaard, 2021), to ultimately understand the complex dynamics of the threat that populist attitudes and populist parties may pose to liberal-democratic regimes.

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