

## **Populism vs. Anti-elite rhetoric.**

### **A comparison based on expert survey results.**

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Using the new 2014 Chapel Hill Expert Survey wave, in a recent publication Polak et al. (2017) find that the salience of anti-elite rhetoric is a function of party ideology. Although the authors are careful to not equate anti-elite salience with populism, they nevertheless underscore that anti-establishment rhetoric is a core element of populist parties. This research note contrasts their measure with a more full-fledged measure of populism based on the ideational approach (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser *forthcoming*) and reports findings for an expert survey of 165 political parties and 18 presidents in 18 Latin American countries. The results for this region of the world are quite similar to those reported for European countries, as anti-elite rhetoric appears to be primarily a function of party ideology. While the ideational approach emerges as orthogonal to the general left-right dimension, relying on anti-elite rhetoric as a proxy for populism runs the risk of confusing ideology with populism, something researchers should be wary about when using this measure as a stand in for populism.

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## INTRODUCTION

Recent discussions on conceptualization appear to coalesce around definitions of populism as a set of ideas and a discourse, facilitating empirical measurement and thus such comparative studies. Populism as a *set of ideas* emphasizes the antagonistic, Manichean nature of populism, “a discourse which sees politics as divided in moral terms” (Hawkins and Silva 2015: 3). Politics is presented as a conflict between the two opposing poles of “the people” vs. “the elite”. Understood as a discourse, populism is consequently a mode of political expression that allows “[redefining] the people and their adversaries” (Panizza 2005: 8, see also Laclau 2005) and for which therefore the central form of identification of the struggle over power comes in the form of antagonism, in the form of anti-establishment, anti-elite and anti-status-quo rhetoric. Although related to the purely discursive approach, the ideational definition (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser in this volume; Mudde 2004, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2011; 2013), stresses that this binary morality is the essential part of the populist tenet. Populist ideas represent “the people” as a homogenous, uniform majority with an identifiably unified will that should be the basis of all governing and “the elite” as a corrupt ruling class, as the exploitative minority that has hijacked the political process. While “populist ideas are the main driving force” (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser forthcoming: 7), the precise implications of these ideas for how populist actors understand the wider democratic system and the decision-making process is seen as context dependent and open to empirical investigation.

Anti-elite rhetoric is therefore indeed a core element of populism, but as Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (forthcoming) point out, “one cannot categorize a particular discourse as populist solely on the basis of anti-establishment rhetoric“. Although Polak et al. (2017) are careful to not equate anti-elite salience with populism, they nevertheless proceed to validate their measure with a dictionary-based approach developed to measure populism (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011). Yet, Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) acknowledge that it is simply impossible to establish a dictionary that would capture the essential component of populism, people-centrism by means of individual words, reason why they settle on terms identifying anti-elite stances. In other words, it appears that both sets of authors, although being cautious about it, proceed to equate anti-elite rhetoric with populism.

Taking the ideational definition of populism as point of departure, this research note contrasts their measure with a more full-fledged measure of populism (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser *forthcoming*) and reports findings for an expert survey of 165 political parties and 18

presidents in 18 Latin American countries. The results for this region of the world are quite similar to those reported for European countries, as anti-elite rhetoric appears to be primarily a function of party ideology. While the ideational approach emerges as orthogonal to the general left-right dimension, relying on anti-elite rhetoric as a proxy for populism runs the risk of confusing ideology with populism, something researchers should be wary about when using this measure as a stand in for populism.

## MEASURING POPULISM

Any measurement of populism has to take into account its two central components, people-centrism and anti-elitism. For the ideational definition these two components are depicted in particular ways. Underlying any understanding of these two opposing groups is a Manichean and moral cosmology. Thus, „the people“ are considered a homogenous and virtuous community, while „the elite“ is considered as being a corrupt and self-serving group that is betraying the virtuous people. However, not only need these factors to be present to characterize an actor as populist; although scholars have started to move away from simple populist/non-populist dichotomy and instead provide us with a sliding scale of populism, the degrees uncovered in these studies are merely indicating a “more or less” of populism.<sup>1</sup> This is unsatisfactory as it remains unclear what the absence of populism means. March (*forthcoming*), for instance highlights that low scores are indicative of increasing ambiguity and vagueness in the construction of “the people” with parties using classical populist statements while at the same time trying to appeal to subgroups in society. Locating political actors on a scale to capture degrees of populism thus raises the question of how to define its opposing pole. Defining this opposite may improve our understanding of what parties and leaders actually do.<sup>2</sup>

Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that populism in fact has two opposites in elitism and pluralism (see also Hawkins 2009; Plattner 2010). While elitism effectively reverses the morality attached to “the people” and “the elite”, thereby maintaining a dualistic outlook on social order, pluralism acknowledges the inherent diversity in society. Thus, pluralist actors consider the different groups that constitute the social fabric of a country as

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of “degreeism” and the conceptualization of populism see Aslanidis (2016, pp.92-93).

<sup>2</sup> It would be equally unsatisfactory to simply measure the degree of leftism of political actors instead of either locating them on a continuous axis of left – right or providing a measure for their degree of rightism at the same time. However, nothing prevents researchers using text analysis from measuring a separate scale of for instance pluralism and to then combine these measures into one metric, similar to the Comparative Manifesto’s approach to measuring left-right party placements.

legitimate, and favor the diffusion of power, emphasizing deliberation and consensus to overcome any emerging conflicts. Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013: 153) highlight that in the context of political competition most parties adhere to the pluralist worldview as part and parcel of liberal democracy. Thus, to anchor the endpoints of the predefined scale on which experts were asked to locate given actors, populism was treated as a continuum with two opposing endpoints of populism vs. pluralism.

Thus, regarding the ideational approach, the wording needed to avoid ambiguities while making sure that it captured the essence of the two opposing camps of “the pure people” and the “corrupt elite” and their moral quality. As both function as empty signifiers (Laclau 1977, see also Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012; 2013), for the sake of parsimony and in order to avoid compromising scale comparability across countries, the wording was kept general so that experts could then interpret the endpoints as befitted their own country’s context. In its final version, therefore, the wording aimed at capturing the degree to which the pure people, the heartland of the nation (Taggart 2000), are emphasized opposite to a pluralist understanding of society.

People-centrism<sup>3</sup>:

- Identifies with the common people and celebrates their authenticity (1)
- Refers more generally to citizens and their unique interests (20)

In a similar vein, the element aiming at measuring the degree of anti-elitism in moral terms vis-à-vis the acceptance of the political elite as the legitimate representatives of divergent and dissenting opinions in society was adapted to capture populist vs. pluralist conduct. In addition the use of the term elite was avoided to prevent any ambiguity as to who constitutes the elite and to avoid triggering particular connotations.

Anti-elite: morality

- Demonizes and vilifies opponents. (1)
- Treats opponents with respect. (20)

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<sup>3</sup> The titles given to the different attributes in this section were not used in the survey itself. To avoid bias, the title indicated to respondents that the survey was eliciting judgments on political communication of political parties and presidents.

These two dimensions were used in conjunction with the Chapel Hill expert survey (CHES) item (Polk et al. 2017).<sup>4</sup> Thus, respondents were asked to judge whether for a political actor “anti-establishment and anti-elite rhetoric” was:

Anti-elite: rhetoric

- Not important at all (1)
- Extremely important (20)

In addition, country experts were asked to judge positions of political actors on up to 14 distinct policy dimensions and the general left-right ideological axis. Results of some of these items help us analyze the question of what particular issue dimensions are attached to populism across Latin America.

## RESULTS

We can start our exploration by simply contrasting these different dimensions with each other. Figure 1 contrast experts’ mean placements of parties and presidents on the individual dimensions of people-centrism, anti-elitism as morality and anti-elitism as rhetoric. The individual dimensions allow for a considerable variation of actors’ placements across both, the countries in which populist appeals are salient and those in which it is not a central part of political competition, i.e where it has not been activated yet. The disaggregated information also reveals how the individual elements relate to each. As the north-west pane of Figure 1 shows, with an  $r=0.89$ , the closest fit can be found between the two dimensions aiming at measuring the ideational definition of populism as people-centrism and the moral treatment of the elite as vilifying the political opponent. In contrast, the connection between both dimensions of the ideational approach and the CHES measure of anti-elitism is less pronounced and we observe a high number off-quadrant cases. This is particularly the case for actors for whom anti-elite rhetoric is important, but who nevertheless are less inclined to vilify their opponents or do not appeal to a common people.

[FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE]

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<sup>4</sup> I would like to thank Gary Marks and Ryan Bakker from the CHES for early access to this question wording and allowing its usage in my survey.

The results of a (varimax) rotated factor analysis shown in Table 1 confirm that anti-elite rhetoric is weaker connected to the two dimensions of the ideational approach, but nevertheless reveals that one underlying factor is explaining 56 percent of the variation found in the data.

[TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE]

Because our survey also measured a general left-right position for each actor, independently from the populism components policy dimensions from Table 1, we can score each party and president from the factor analysis and then see how this scored position correlates with its independent left-right placement by the experts. The right-hand pane of Figure 2 shows that by and large the factor capturing populism emerges as orthogonal to the general left-right, as can be expected. Major exceptions are again those countries in which populism has become a central part of populism at the time of the survey – Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela – and where populist actors have a clear attachment to the ideological left.

[FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE]

How do these measures relate to policy issues and the general left-right? Before answering this question, we establish the structure of political competition and the dimensionality of the policy space throughout the region. Table 2 reports the results of a factor analysis of party positioning on eight key issues included in all countries, measured at the respondent level. These issues include the policy dimensions concerning economic policy, social policy, and environmental policy that form part of Benoit and Laver's (2006, chapter 4) "hard core" and the dimensions of regional economic cooperation (understood as a preference for the trading bloc ALBA, the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America (*Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América*)), privatization, and religious principles in politics. Positioning on these policy dimensions has been found to describe policy competition across Latin America well, forming an underlying left-right dimension (see also Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009). Furthermore, the dimension of redistribution has been added to this survey wave.

The results from the principal component analysis in the top of Table 2 quite clearly show that positioning on these eight issues explains nearly half (0.42, or 42 percent) of the variance on an underlying common dimension represented by the first factor. Together these

two factors account for more than 60 percent (0.63) of the variance in the underlying political dimensions of policy. Examining the (varimax rotated) factor loadings for the eight variables, we see clearly that all dimensions except decentralization and the environment load strongly on the first factor, whereas the second factor can be described as capturing noneconomic matters with decentralization and social issues.

[TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE]

Again we can plot the scored positions of parties and presidents on this underlying first factor against the general left-right dimension, along with a linear fit and 95% confidence interval. The results depicted in the right-hand pane of Figure 2 provide strong evidence that the first dimension may be interpreted as the left-right dimension of politics in Latin America, and that both parties and presidents differentiate their policies on this primary left-right axis, confirming previous results (Wiesehomeier and Benoit 2009).

In a next step we can explore how the components of the ideational approach and the CHES measure of anti-elite rhetoric relate to these measures, particularly to its dimensional configuration. While we would expect populism to be related to substantive content, we also would expect that a meaningful measure for populism across the region would capture its diversity and thus emerge as a second factor, in principle orthogonal to the general left-right.

[TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE]

The results of this factor analysis are shown in Table 3. Examining the (varimax rotated) factor loadings for the eight policy variables and the components measuring the ideational definition of populism and the salience of anti-elite rhetoric, we see clearly that populism emerges as a second factor, largely separate from policy issues, although the results suggest an affinity with issues regarding privatization, regional cooperation and redistribution. All policy all dimensions except decentralization load strongly on the first factor.<sup>5</sup> Most importantly, these results already hint at a fundamental difference between anti-elite rhetoric and populism as the ideational approach as the salience of anti-elite rhetoric is attached to policy dimensions that make up the general left-right, thus to ideology of the actor in question.

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<sup>5</sup> Decentralization emerges as a second factor. However, Horn's parallel analysis suggests that this factor should not be retained.

We can score we can score each party and president from the factor analysis and then see how this scored position correlates with its independent left-right placement by the experts. Again, the left hand pane of Figure 3 suggests again strong similarities in the clustering of issue positions across the region, but highlights some diversion in the form of the group of countries that already has been highlighted before – Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela. The right hand pane of Figure 3 confirms this pattern. While populism appear generally orthogonal to the left-right ideological axis, the same group of countries tilt this relationship.

In a last step we can explore the question of whether we can identify a common type of populism across the region in terms of policy appeals across irrespective of the conceptualization used. Table 4 shows the results of a series of linear regressions of positioning on people-centrism, anti-elitism as morality, a combined index for the ideational approach, and anti-elite rhetoric, pooling the countries and using as explanatory variables positioning on policy dimensions used before.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, policy issues that have been deemed to be related to populism in Latin America, but not necessarily to an underlying left-right cleavage such as anti-Americanism and fighting crime are included. Because the survey in addition asked experts to place parties and presidents on the general left-right dimension, “taking all aspects of party policy into account”, Table 4 also shows the results for linear regressions of populism and its subcomponents on positioning on the left-right ideological axis.

The results confirm that, just as Polak et al. (2017) highlight that anti-elite rhetoric is tapping into ideology. As the first column of Table 4 indicates, people-centrism, the first attribute of the ideational approach, is strongly connected to rejecting closer ties to the United States, the only substantive issue that is in fact related to all three components. A one unit change on the scale ranging from 1 (rejecting closer ties) to 20 (favoring closer ties) amounts to a change of 0.35 on the people-centrism dimension. In addition people-centrism is connected to the trade-off between the respect for individual liberties and security. Political actors at the populist end of this scale support tough measures to fight delinquency, violence and organized crime which fits the strong-men image some Latin American populists espouse. While the appeal to a homogeneous people is also weakly related to a preference for religious principles, redistribution just misses the 10 percent significance level.

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<sup>6</sup> For the exact wording of these dimensions see the appendix.



Positioning on anti-elitism in its moral version (column 3), the second attribute of the ideational approach, is also connected to anti-Americanism, but to a lesser extent. It is more strongly related to pertinent domestic issues such as a preference for lowering taxes, favoring religious principles in politics, supporting tough measures to fight crime, and most importantly to a preference of redistribution of wealth from the rich to the poor. A one unit change on the scale ranging from 1 (strongly favors redistribution) to 20 (strongly opposes redistribution) amounts to a change of 0.35 on the anti-elite (morality) dimension. The combination of the dimensions of people-centrism and anti-elite morality into a single populism index based on the ideational approach (column 5) confirms that populism across the region is linked to a weak preference for religious principles in politics, the support of crime fighting measures, a strong rejection of close ties with the United States and a clear preference for redistribution.

Anti-elitism understood as the importance of antagonistic rhetoric (column 7), on the other hand, captures mostly anti-neoliberal and anti-American stances. A one unit change on the dimension of the relationship to the United States amounts to a shift of almost half a unit (0.41) on the anti-elite rhetoric scale ranging from 1 (important) to 20 (not important at all). Anti-elite rhetoric is equally strongly connected to a preference for the trading bloc ALBA – indeed, anti-establishment rhetoric is the only dimension related to regional cooperation.

These differences point to important differences in measurement. The item measuring anti-elite sentiment in moral terms avoided the use of the word “elite”, instead referring to an opponent, while the CHES measure aiming at capturing populism via one single item based on the discursive approach incorporated it. It appears that at least in the case of Latin America, in experts’ minds anti-elite rhetoric is predominantly associated with international actors, while anti-elite sentiment in terms of vilifying an opponent appears to be linked to internal actors. In this sense the relationship between the preference for redistribution of wealth and anti-elite rhetoric as measured by the CHES item is also much weaker.

Aggressive rhetoric in the form of criticism of neoliberal politics, verbal confrontations with the United States, and a rejection of the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) is of course best epitomized by prototypical left populist presidents such as Néstor and Cristina Kirchner in Argentina, the late Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, who established ALBA as an alternative to the FTAA, and Evo Morales in Bolivia, who due to his background as coca peasant unionist entered politics with a clearly developed anti-neoliberal and anti-American stance. The CHES item then captures a substantive part of populism in the region; however, it only captures a very specific subtype. With its emphasis on the antagonistic

nature, the CHES item misses an important part of the conceptualization of populism as a set of ideas, while the term “elite” may simply carry strong ideological connotations.

This is confirmed by the measures’ strong relationship to positioning on the general left-right ideological axis, as highlighted in column 6 of Table 2. A one unit change on the left-right scale ranging from 1 (left) to 20 (right) amounts to a 0.71 change on the CHES item of antagonistic rhetoric ranging from 1 (important) to 20 (not important at all). As columns (2), (4) and (6) show, both dimensions aiming at measuring the ideational approach and their combination also reveal a left variant of populism in Latin America. Yet, their relationship with the general left-right ideological axis is much weaker compared to the salience of anti-establishment rhetoric, with people-centrism showing the weakest relationship. In other words while people-centrism and anti-elitism in its moral form capture a left tendency, they also detect pertinent domestic issues that go beyond simplistic left-right distinctions. Thus, they provide us with an insight into policy issues without confounding populism with ideology as is the case with a narrow discursive approach.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Testing for a curvilinear relationship between the different conceptualizations of populism and ideology to detect extreme right and extreme left populists confirms the patterns detected here. Anti-elite rhetoric shows a strong left bias and a quasi linear relationship (for a similar problematic pattern in the European case see Polk et al. 2017), while the relationship between the items measuring the ideational approach rather uncovers a left tendency. Informality, on the other hand, confirms its presence on both, the left and the right. These results are available upon request.

Policy Dimensions	People-centrism		Anti-elite (morality)		The ideational approach		Anti-elite (rhetoric)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)
Taxes vs. Spending	-0.14 (0.17)	-	-0.23* (0.13)	-	-0.19 (0.14)	-	-0.16 (0.12)	-
Social Policy	-0.10 (0.12)	-	0.04 (0.11)	-	-0.03 (0.10)	-	0.05 (0.11)	-
Environment	-0.16 (0.12)	-	-0.10 (0.11)	-	-0.13 (0.10)	-	0.16* (0.09)	-
Religion	-0.16* (0.09)	-	-0.14* (0.08)	-	-0.15** (0.07)	-	-0.19** (0.08)	-
Privatization / Deregulation	0.17 (0.20)	-	0.27 (0.20)	-	0.22 (0.19)	-	-0.17 (0.13)	-
Decentralization	0.07 (0.11)	-	0.10 (0.10)	-	0.08 (0.10)	-	-0.06 (0.08)	-
Regional Cooperation	0.13 (0.12)	-	0.06 (0.11)	-	0.09 (0.10)	-	0.43*** (0.09)	-
Individual Liberties / Security	-0.22* (0.12)	-	-0.28** (0.11)	-	-0.25** (0.10)	-	0.01 (0.09)	-
Relationship with the USA	0.35*** (0.11)	-	0.20** (0.10)	-	0.28*** (0.09)	-	0.41*** (0.10)	-
Redistribution	0.21 (0.15)	-	0.35** (0.15)	-	0.28* (0.14)	-	0.23** (0.10)	-
The general left-right		0.35*** (0.05)		0.42*** (0.05)		0.38*** (0.05)		0.71*** (0.04)
Constant	7.84*** (1.41)	6.17*** (0.66)	7.25*** (1.30)	5.72*** (0.55)	7.55*** (1.23)	5.95*** (0.58)	2.07** (1.05)	3.65*** (0.52)
Observations	172	172	172	172	172	172	172	172
R-squared	0.48	0.19	0.51	0.34	0.53	0.29	0.79	0.60

Robust standard errors in parentheses. Standard errors are clustered on parties and presidents

\*\*\* p<0.01, \*\* p<0.05, \* p<0.1

## **CONCLUSION**

**To be developed. apologies**

## TABLES AND FIGURES

	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Uniqueness</b>
<i>Principal components results</i>		
Eigenvalue	2.26	
Adjusted Eigenvalue	0.99	
Cumulative Variance explained	0.56	
<i>Variable and rotated factor loadings</i>		
Common people	<b>0.85</b>	0.28
Vilify	<b>0.84</b>	0.30
Anti-establishment	<b>0.76</b>	0.42
<i>N</i>	1513, 4 parameters	

Note: Eigenvalues are adjusted based on Horn's Test of principal components (using Stata library paran), criterion: retain adjusted factors > 0

**Table 1. Factor analysis with populism components.**

	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Uniqueness</b>
<i>Principal components results</i>			
Eigenvalue	3.38	1.67	
Adjusted Eigenvalue	2.63	0.34	
Cumulative Variance explained	0.42	0.63	
<i>Variable and rotated factor loadings</i>			
Deregulation/Privatization	<b>0.88</b>	0.03	0.23
Regional Cooperation	<b>0.84</b>	-0.12	0.28
Redistribution	<b>0.84</b>	0.21	0.25
Taxes vs. Spending	<b>0.64</b>	0.22	0.54
Social	<b>0.56</b>	<b>0.59</b>	0.34
Religion	<b>0.53</b>	0.42	0.55
Environment	0.31	<b>0.69</b>	0.43
Decentralization	-0.30	<b>0.77</b>	0.27
<i>N</i>	1085, 15 parameters		

Note: Eigenvalues are adjusted based on Horn's Test of principal components (using Stata library paran). criterion: retain adjusted factors > 0

**Table 2. Factor analysis, policy dimensions**

	<b>Factor 1</b>	<b>Factor 2</b>	<b>Uniqueness</b>
<i>Principal components results</i>			
Eigenvalue	4.38	1.91	
Adjusted Eigenvalue	3.29	0.85	
Cumulative Variance explained	0.33	0.54	
<i>Variable and rotated factor loadings</i>			
Social	<b>0.73</b>	-0.00	0.34
Deregulation/Privatization	<b>0.78</b>	0.37	0.23
Redistribution	<b>0.78</b>	0.37	0.25
Taxes vs. Spending	<b>0.69</b>	0.02	0.52
Regional Cooperation	<b>0.68</b>	0.39	0.29
Religion	<b>0.65</b>	0.01	0.55
Environment	<b>0.57</b>	-0.12	0.44
Anti-Establishment	<b>0.42</b>	<b>0.64</b>	0.39
Vilify	0.13	<b>0.85</b>	0.25
Common People	0.07	<b>0.86</b>	0.23
Decentralization	-0.04	-0.05	0.19
<i>N</i>	992, 30 parameters		

Note: Eigenvalues are adjusted based on Horn's Test of principal components (using Stata library paran). criterion: retain adjusted factors > 0

**Table 3. Factor analysis, policy dimensions, people-centrism and anti-elitism (morality and rhetoric)**

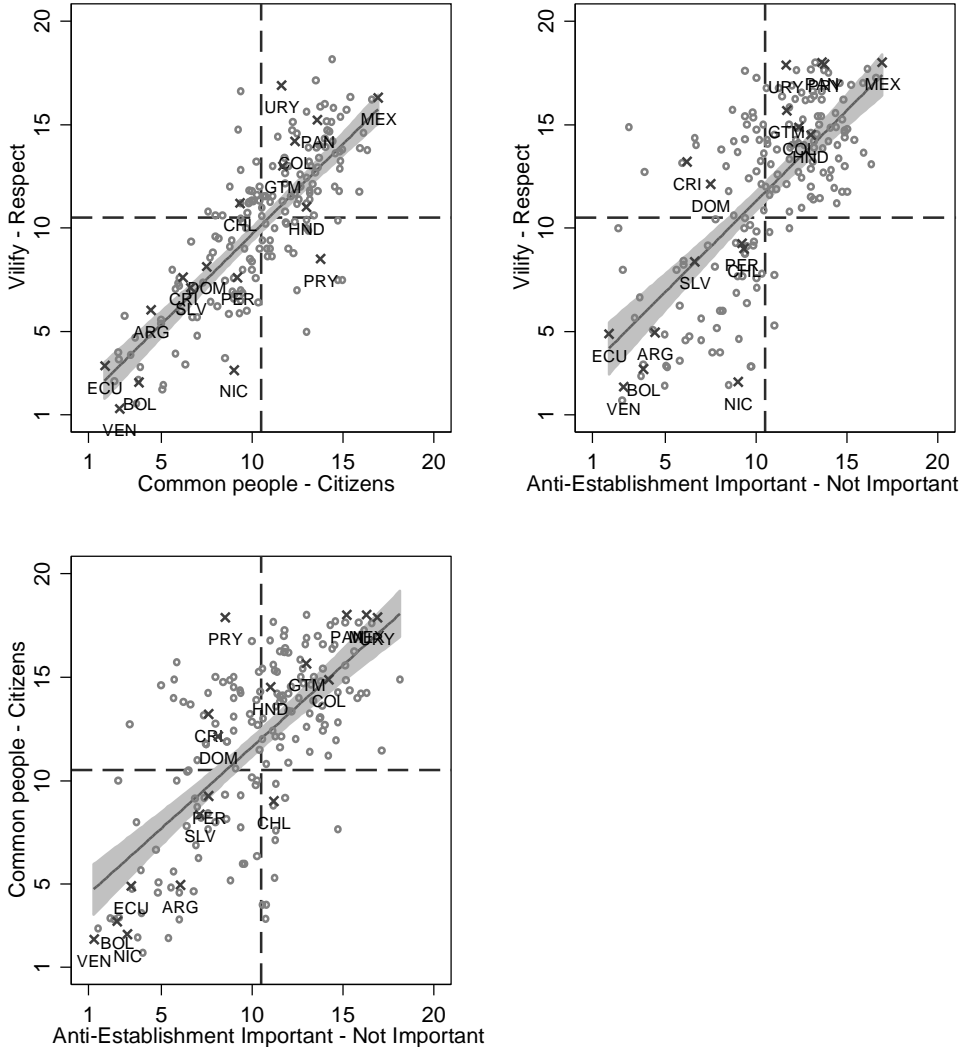
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Regional Cooperation	0.13 (0.12)	-	0.06 (0.11)	-	0.09 (0.10)	-	0.43*** (0.09)	-
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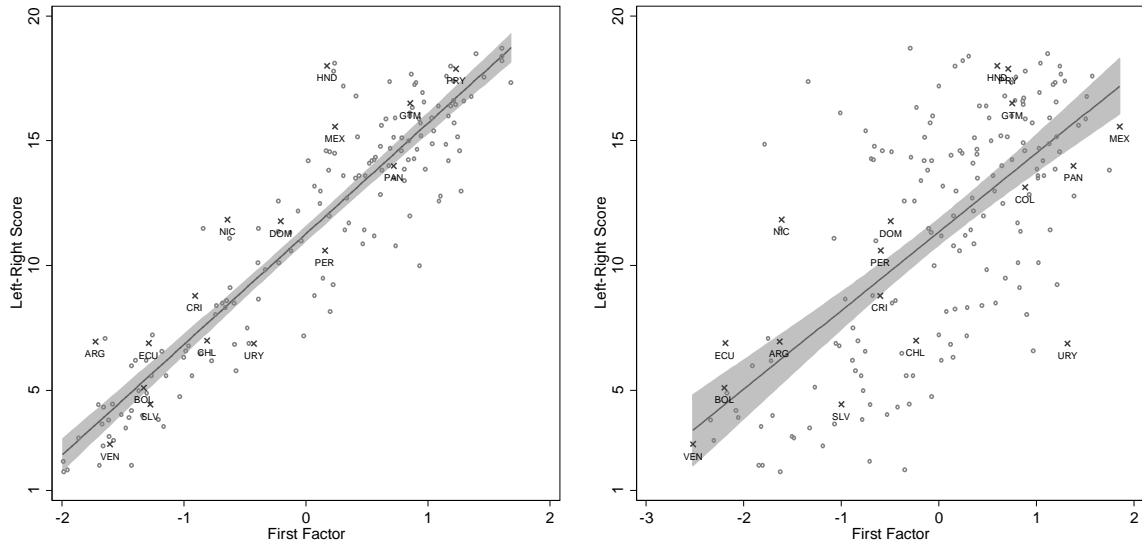
**Table 4. Regression results**

**Figures**

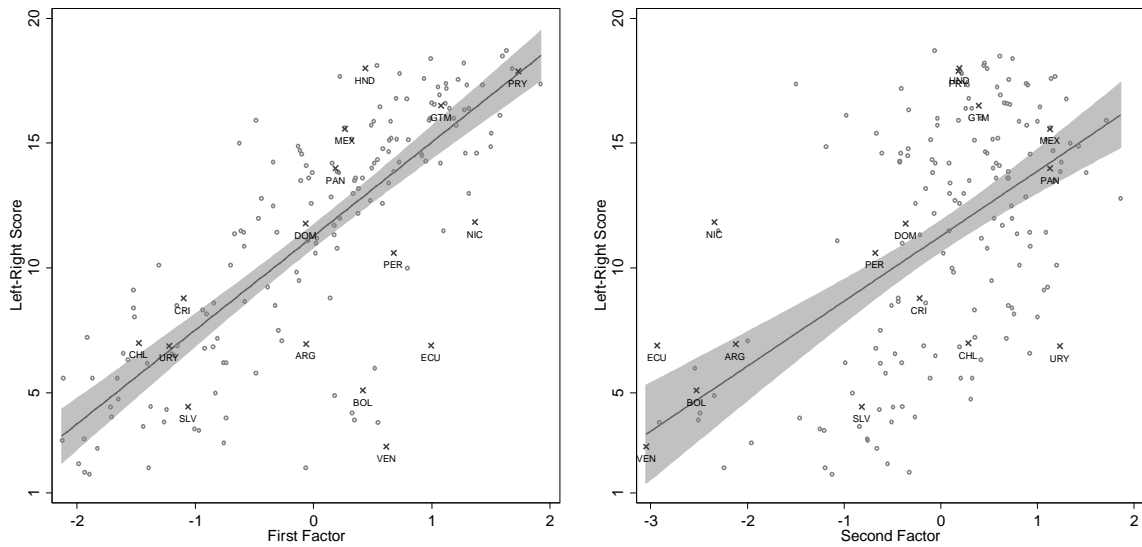


**Figure 1. Contrasting dimensions: people-centrism and anti-elitism (morality and rhetoric)**





**Figure 2. Results from factor analyses. Left-hand pane: policy dimensions, right-hand pane: ideational approach and anti-elite rhetoric**



**Figure 3: Results from factor analysis, policy dimensions, people-centrism, anti-elitism (morality and rhetoric), first and second factor.**

**Appendix**

