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The technocratic side of populist attitudes: evidence from the Spanish case

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ABSTRACT

Populism and technocracy represent a challenge to pluralist party democracies. The first promotes the rule by ‘the people’, while the second demands the rule by independent experts. The literature on populism and technocracy as challenges to party democracy is burgeoning. Less is known about citizens’ attitudes towards the ideas that underpin both populism and technocracy. In this article these opinions are explored in a survey conducted in Spain using a comprehensive battery of items tapping into technocracy and populism. It is found that populist attitudes correlate with two dimensions of technocracy: anti-politics and pro-expertise sentiments. A latent-class analysis shows that the largest sample group simultaneously endorses rule by the people and the enrolment of experts in political decision making. In the article this group is named *technopopulists*. The article challenges extant views of populism and technocracy as separate alternatives and spurs works on voter demand for the involvement of experts in politics.

KEYWORDS Technocracy; populism; party democracy; technopopulism; latent-class analysis

On November 2014, 11 months after founding his party and five years before being appointed as Vice-president of the Spanish Government, the then leader of Podemos, Pablo Iglesias, declared that his party aspired to win the next general election, but that they did not ‘want a Podemos’s cabinet to be the Government of a party, but the Government of the best’ (*Público* 2014). The left-wing populist leader explained that they intended to fill Government positions with ‘the best’, not with Podemos’s personnel, and that those who make the government, and the public administration work are not the politicians but the ‘people, and

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particularly the best prepared people' (*Público* 2014). While using a rhetoric of technocratic resonance, Pablo Iglesias simultaneously introduced Podemos as an anti-establishment and populist party fighting the political and economic elite ('the caste parties and economic elite that is kidnapping democracy' (*Público* 2014)). With his rhetoric, combining both populist and technocratic themes (for other cases see Guasti and Bustíkova (2020) and Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2021)), this successful political entrepreneur epitomises the dual challenge facing contemporary democratic party governments: *populism* and *technocracy* (Caramani 2017).

The rise of populism has been one of the most important political phenomena in the last decades. Across several continents and political leanings, many radical-left, radical-right, and even centrist populist parties have attracted the support of millions of voters (Hawkins and Littvay 2019; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012, 2013). This has fostered academic research on populist parties and attitudes (see among others, Akkerman *et al.* 2014, 2017; Castanho Silva *et al.* 2017, 2018, 2020; Hawkins *et al.* 2012; Schulz *et al.* 2018; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018). Technocracy, in turn, has recently received renewed consideration. Technocracy is the exercise of political power by an elite of experts; it is a system of government, a form of representation, and a source of legitimacy of the political power based on the competence, neutrality, and expertise of the technocrats. Technocracy assumes that experts and expert knowledge are better at making and implementing decisions than elected party politicians (Caramani 2017; Centeno 1993; Dargent 2015; Fischer 1990; Meynaud 1969).

As ideal types, populism and technocracy are each based on a core set of principles. Some of those principles are common to both (Caramani 2017). Populism and technocracy share their criticism of pluralistic representative democracy and propose alternative forms of political representation and legitimisation based on the assumption of the existence of a unitary societal interest which, they argue, can be represented in unmediated ways, without the intervention of the classic representative democracy actors and procedures: parties and party politicians (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2017; Caramani 2017). Both alternatives can be thus defined as anti-party and anti-politics. Populism and technocracy, on the other hand, differ significantly in the principle of legitimisation of political decisions. Populism argues political legitimacy should be based on the primacy of the *people's will*. Technocracy obtains legitimacy from the existence of an objective knowledge, independent of people's preferences, that must be applied by experts or technocrats to identify both the political goals to be pursued and the policies to be implemented in order

to reach them. Technocracy therefore supports *elitism* and *expertise* in decision making.

In this article we study citizen attitudes towards the principles that underpin both technocracy and populism as alternatives to party democracy. We are interested in whether support for some principles is associated with support (or rejection) of others. In short: we are interested in analysing whether individuals' opinions are consistently in favour of populist principles, technocratic ones, some combination thereof, or none of them. We are motivated by previous work analysing public opinion towards technocratic principles (Bertsou and Caramani 2020a; Bertsou and Pastorella 2017; Heyne and Costa Lobo 2021) and by studies of populist attitudes (Akkerman *et al.* 2014; Castanho Silva *et al.* 2020). We contribute to this literature by focussing explicitly on the association between populist and technocratic attitudes, which were so ostensibly merged in Pablo Iglesias' discourse.

Our article is thus related to work that has analysed the links between populism and technocracy from the point of view of party strategies (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2018, 2021; Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020; Guasti and Bustikova 2020; Perottino and Guasti 2020; Piquer and Jäger 2020). That same technocracy-populism association has also been incipiently analysed from the point of view of the public's attitudes by Akkerman *et al.* (2014), Bertsou and Caramani (2020a, 2020b) and Ganuza and Font (2020). This latter interconnection, that that can be found among individuals' orientations, is precisely what we analyse in this article. Doing so, this article not only complements previous research corroborating their findings, it also adds to them by focussing on the theoretical discussion and the empirical analysis around those people who combine populist and technocratic attitudes at the same time.

Our study leverages a novel survey we fielded in Spain in 2020 which includes a comprehensive battery of items tapping both technocratic and populist attitudes. Our empirical approach is two-pronged. First, we present an analysis of how elitism, support for expertise, and anti-politics sentiments (all three of them component parts of technocratic attitudes) relate to populist attitudes. To do so, we visually explore these relationships, conduct a principal component analysis, and estimate linear probability models. Second, we implement a Latent-Class Analysis (LCA) to identify latent groups according to their attitudes towards populism and technocracy. We also explore the sociodemographic determinants of membership in these latent groups. Our empirical approach is consistent with Bertsou and Caramani (2020a).

Following theoretical work by Mair (2009, 2013) and Caramani (2017), we formulate empirical expectations about the association between

populist attitudes and the three dimensions of technocracy: elitism, anti-politics, and pro-expertise (Bertsou and Caramani 2020a). First, we expect that having populist views will correlate positively with anti-politics opinions. After all, both populism and technocracy denounce the poor outcomes of pluralistic party politics for, respectively, its lack of responsiveness and its lack of responsibility. Second, since populism postulates the primacy of the ‘common people’, we expect that endorsing elitism will correlate negatively with having populist views. Third, we expect a negative correlation between support for populism and pro-expertise views. Experts, by definition, are a minority that distinguishes itself from common citizens by having specialised and scarce knowledge and training. As such, experts might have different preferences than average voters and thus undermine responsiveness. In fact, technocracy tends to justify the enrolment of experts in that they may be impervious to short-term popular demands and instead focus on long-term societal goals.

Our comprehensive empirical approach yields several key findings. First, we validate in the Spanish setting the finding in Bertsou and Caramani (2020a) that the full set of technocratic attitudes can be split into the three dimensions of elitism, anti-politics and pro-expertise. Second, we report relevant evidence about the individual-level associations between populist and technocratic attitudes. Endorsing populism tends to go together with scepticism towards elitism, although the correlation is not significant. In line with our expectations, moreover, anti-politics views are strongly associated with populist orientations.

Surprisingly, having pro-expertise opinions correlates *positively* with populist attitudes. In other words, those who espouse populist principles also tend to demand the involvement of experts. This is confirmed by the latent-class analysis: The largest sample group is made of citizens who simultaneously support populist views while endorsing most pro-technocracy statements, as it has been previously examined in Akkerman *et al.* (2014) and Bertsou and Caramani (2020a, 2020b). We name this group ‘*technopopulist citizens*’. Crucially, the LCA does not uncover any group that supports populist views without endorsing technocratic principles. Hence, all populists in the sample are *technopopulists*. These findings raise intriguing questions about the nature of technocracy and populism as opposing alternatives to party democracies and suggest the need for follow-up work on *who* qualifies as an expert in the eyes of citizens and the *type of involvement* in politics that citizens demand from them.

Technocracy and populism, commonalities and differences

Technocracy and populism express a profound dissatisfaction with the way in which contemporary democracies actually work. They are both

reactions to the crisis of political representation (Mair 2009), and parallel challenges to representative party democracies (Caramani 2017). Populism has been the centre of an expanding research endeavour during the last two decades that has included a theoretical and conceptual effort, and the empirical analysis of the demand and supply sides of the phenomenon – i.e. the presence of populist attitudes among voters, and the use of populist claims by politicians and parties – (Rovira Kaltwasser *et al.* 2017). Despite the ongoing discussion about the most appropriate measurements and indicators, an agreement on the meaning of populism and its empirical operationalisation is gradually emerging (Hawkins *et al.* 2012; Mudde 2004). Populism is characterised by its people-centrism, the primacy it concedes to the people's sovereignty, and its Manichaean view of the political world that divides society between the good people and the evil elite, espousing a benign view of ordinary citizens and a negative view of a detached and immoral elite (Canovan 1999; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 2018; Taggart 2000). These basic traits also entail an anti-pluralist perspective and the belief in a unitary will of the people. This introduces two additional elements of the populist worldview: a distrust of politics and a rejection of party-based politics. These latter elements are key for the identification of the commonalities between populism and technocracy that we approach later.

Although the study of technocracy in contemporary democratic political systems is not new (Meynaud 1969; Fischer 1990), the analysis of technocratic attitudes is a much more recent topic of research. Technocracy, like populism, is also a form of representation, political power and legitimisation, but while populism claims for a more responsive government, technocracy expresses the need for a more responsible one (Caramani 2017). Responsibility would be guaranteed by the exercise of political power by an expert elite possessing superior competence and knowledge over party politicians. This superior expertise would give these elites the capacity to govern more efficiently. Experts transformed into technocrats would identify the best problem-solving policies with neutrality from special interests and would base their political decisions on evidence and objective knowledge (Bersch 2016; Caramani 2017; Centeno 1993, 1994; Dargent 2015).

These short sketches of their meanings already point towards the existence of some technocracy-populism commonalities (Caramani 2017). Both are a reaction to the political dissatisfaction with the actual workings of contemporary democracies, and a challenge to the representative party government (Caramani 2017; Mair 2013). They are both anti-party doctrines that reject the political mediation exerted by parties and party politicians. As Mudde (2004, 547) contends, technocracy and populism are in fact compatible creeds because the former can be easily used

against the political establishment formed by party politicians. Technocracy and populism are also an expression of anti-politics orientations because they defend the existence of a unitary and non-pluralist general interest (the populist people's will or the technocratic objective evidence-based knowledge) that should be translated into political decisions without room for sectoral interests (Caramani 2017; Mair 2013).

Despite these commonalities, there are key differences in the principles that underpin populism and technocracy. Technocracy embraces the principle of elitism, while populism does not. Indeed, technocracy enhances the political role of an elite of experts and populism promotes the political influence of ordinary citizens. In fact, in its rejection of elites that do not represent people's general interest, populism often directs its criticism towards the technocratic elite. Relatedly, by demanding that decisions be made by independent experts, technocracy seeks to promote responsibility in politics and protect it from electoral short-termism and from pandering. Populism, in contrast, aims at increasing responsiveness by leaders in charge of applying the popular will as mere people's delegates.

In our article, we explore the associations between populist and technocratic attitudes in the minds of voters. While we focus on the demand-side, it is important to note that there is already a growing supply-side literature on the overlap between populism and technocracy. Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti (2018, 2021) and Guasti and Bustíkova (2020) have recently highlighted how some leaders use populist discourses while propose technocratic solutions to political and democratic crises, how they aim at being responsive while presenting themselves also as competent technocrats. These political entrepreneurs present themselves as anti-system, anti-establishment populists but simultaneously propose a platform based on technocratic competence. In Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti's (2021) view, some politicians use a *technopopulist* political logic bringing together populist and pro-expertise appeals; in Guasti and Bustíkova's (2020) view, technocratic populism would be an output-oriented subtype of populism. In Western Europe parties and politicians as the Five Star Movement, Podemos, Renzi or Macron have been labelled *technopopulists* (see, for example, Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2021; Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020; Perottino and Guasti 2020; Piquer and Jäger 2020). In sum, many parties and politicians have been found to combine in some way or another technocratic and populist discourses. Does this supply-side offer of technopopulist discourses find its correlates in the demand-side, that is, in the public's attitudes?

A growing literature is studying the presence of populist views among the public. The key traits that are associated with populist attitudes are anti-establishment inclinations, people-centrism, anti-pluralistic views,

anti-elitism, and a Manichaeian worldview (Bertsou and Caramani 2020a). The studies aimed at measuring populism have proposed various conceptualizations, indicators, dimensions, and question wordings (Akkerman *et al.* 2014, 2017; Castanho Silva *et al.* 2017, 2018, 2020; Hawkins *et al.* 2012, Oliver and Rahn 2016; Schulz *et al.* 2018; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018). These studies have found a considerable segment of Western publics showing populist attitudes.

In comparison, the analysis of technocratic attitudes presents a less developed form. Other than the embryonic analysis by Putnam (1977), it is in the work on stealth democracy attitudes by Hibbing and Theiss-More (2002) where we can find a first approach to the measurement of technocratic attitudes. More recently, several studies have deepened the analysis of technocratic attitudes (Akkerman *et al.* 2019; Bertsou and Caramani 2020a; Bertsou and Pastorella 2017). Following Bertsou and Caramani (2020a), technocratic attitudes comprise three dimensions: elitism, anti-politics and pro-expertise. Technocratic attitudes involve elitism since they assume political power should reside in expertise and academic/professional credentials. They involve anti-political and anti-party orientations because political power should not rest in party politicians prone to short-termism and guided by electoral goals. Finally, technocratic attitudes imply belief in the superiority of expertise because expertise grants efficient, neutral, non-ideological and evidence-based policies. The studies in this literature report that technocratic attitudes are significantly present in different contemporary societies.

In this article we map populist and technocratic attitudes among the public in Spain, with the specific goal of identifying associations – positive and negative – between types of attitudes and to identify profiles of individuals according to their constellation of opinions. In that, we adopt the same approach as Bertsou and Caramani (2020a), albeit with a stronger focus on identifying the possible demand-side overlaps between populism and technocracy. Our empirical expectations are based on prior theoretical work. Indeed, an analysis of the demand-side of both doctrines should find these commonalities and divergences reflected in the public's attitudes (Caramani 2017). Taking the three dimensions of technocratic attitudes posited by Bertsou and Caramani (2020a), we expect that having populist views will correlate negatively with endorsing elitist notions. Elitism and the belief in an enhanced role for experts, which constitute a social minority by definition, seem to contradict populist beliefs in the supreme relevance of people's will and in the political competence of the common citizen (Bertsou and Caramani 2020a). Regarding the anti-politics and anti-party inclinations, we should find them in individuals showing populist attitudes but also among individuals exposing technocratic attitudes. The belief in unitary political solutions (based on a supposedly

unitary people's will or in a scientific and undisputed knowledge) should foster shared technocratic-populist views as well. The shared political distrust (in parties and politicians, in conventional politics) expressed by individuals with populist and technocratic attitudes should favour and ground these commonalities too (Ganuza and Font 2020).¹ In terms of support for the involvement of experts in decision making, we expect a negative association between these attitudes and the endorsement of populist ideas. After all, experts are a social minority that stands out from ordinary citizens and may have different preferences than them. Hence, the rule by experts appears intuitively at odds with the legitimacy of the people's will.

Data and empirical methods

We have collected public opinion data using a survey questionnaire fielded in Spain in June 2020. The Spanish case is particularly relevant for the analysis of the relationship between populist and technocratic attitudes. Spain experienced a severe political and economic crisis in the mid 2010s. Satisfaction with democracy reached historically low levels after the economic and political crises following the 2008 Great Recession, and the following years were dominated by the effects of austerity policies. A combination of deep economic and political crises – the latter mainly associated with high-profile corruption scandals – negatively affected satisfaction with democracy (Christmann and Torcal 2017). Similarly, political satisfaction indicators reached their lowest levels in the 2014–15 period according to the public opinion series collected by the *Centro de Investigaciones Sociológicas* (CIS 2021). Between 2008 and 2015, political trust and evaluations of the current and future political situations all showed a negative pattern, a declining trend indicating the deterioration of political satisfaction. These indicators started to improve in 2016 and have since then slowly recovered although their values still are relatively low compared to the 1990s. In these circumstances of economic and political discontent it is logical to expect that technocratic and populist orientations will grow as a reaction to the crisis of representative and party democracy (Caramani 2017; Mair 2013), and that is what in fact has happened in Spain. Therefore, on the demand-side, there is a relatively large presence of individuals showing populist attitudes and opinions favourable to the involvement of experts in political decision making in Spain (Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018, 277; Lavezzolo *et al.* 2021, 1518; Rico and Anduiza 2019, 38). But Spain is also a relevant case because, on the supply side, the use of populist, technocratic and even *technopopulist* rhetoric by parties and politicians has not been rare. After the 2008 Great Recession and its concomitant austerity

policies, the Spanish party system fully transformed in 2015 with the rise of new and challenger parties. Podemos, on the populist radical-left, included in its left-wing populist discourse criticism to traditional political elites also on the base of the elite's supposed lack of efficiency, skills, expertise and capacity; Ciudadanos, a new centre-right party, often criticised established parties and politicians' lack of competence and aptitude while stressing the need for efficient policies (Bickerton and Invernizzi Accetti 2018; Gómez-Reino and Llamazares 2016; Lavezzolo and Ramiro 2018; Piquer and Jäger 2020; Ramiro and Gomez 2017).² Hence, supply- and demand-side technocratic and populist orientations are both present in Spain. However, in the context of the research on technocratic attitudes, the Spanish case remains under-researched despite its interest, and our analysis will allow us to fill some gaps regarding the nuanced relationship between technocratic and populist orientations. In sum, Spain allows for a new and illustrative case study that also offers the possibility to test the relation (Gerring 2004) between populist and technocratic attitudes as hypothesised by Bertsou and Caramani (2020a), thus reinforcing and deepening in a cumulative way our knowledge on these attitudes.

The questionnaire was fielded by an experienced survey firm, Netquest. This firm recruits its samples from a standing panel of potential respondents, the same type of strategy used by firms like Yougov.³ The questionnaire was administered online between June 12th and June 26th 2020. The sample included a total of 2036 respondents. Quota sampling was used to ensure that the sample was representative of the Spanish adult population in terms of age, gender, and region of origin.

The survey questionnaire included a comprehensive battery of items tapping citizens' attitudes towards technocracy and populism. This battery of items was first fielded by Bertsou and Caramani (2020a). Regarding technocratic attitudes, these authors put together a list of 12 survey items capturing its three main dimensions: *elitism*, *expertise* and *anti-politics*. Bertsou and Caramani test the validity of these 12 survey items using an exploratory factor analysis and find that 10 of them successfully capture the three dimensions of technocratic attitudes. We have included these 10 validated survey items in our questionnaire. The wording of these questions and the dimension of technocratic attitudes that they seek to gauge appears below⁴:

What is your degree of agreement with each of the following sentences?
Use a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means 'totally disagree' and 10 'totally agree'

Elitism (EL)

EL1. Ordinary people don't know what policies are good for them

EL2. Political leaders should make decisions according to their best judgment, not the will of the people

Expertise (EXP)

EXP1. Politicians should be like managers and fix what does not work in society

EXP2. The leaders of my country should be more educated and skilled than ordinary citizens

EXP3. Social problems should be addressed based on scientific evidence, not ideological preferences

EXP4. The problems facing my country require experts to solve them

Anti-politics (AP)

AP1. The best political decisions are taken by experts who are not politicians

AP2. Political parties do more harm than good to society

AP3. Politicians just want to promote the interests of those who vote for them and not the interest of the whole country

AP4. Politicians spend all their time seeking re-election instead of fixing problems

Figure 1 presents the distribution of survey responses to these technocratic items. As can be seen, the higher degree of agreement tends to arise for questions tapping into the *expertise* dimension. Opinions also tend to lean towards more *anti-politics* views. Lastly, *elitism* attitudes are less widely shared than the other two dimensions.

In addition to indicators of technocratic attitudes, our questionnaire also includes six items tapping into populist views. These indicators were first formulated by Akkerman *et al.* (2014) and Castanho Silva *et al.* (2020) and subsequently validated by Bertsou and Caramani (2020a). Just like technocratic indicators, the pro-populism survey items are measured as the degree of agreement with specific statements, using a 0–10 scale:

POP1. Politicians need to follow the will of the people. Akkerman *et al.* (2014)

POP2. The people, not the politicians, should make our most important policy decisions. Akkerman *et al.* (2014)

POP3. I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician. Akkerman *et al.* (2014)

POP4. I take pride in being an ordinary person. Castanho Silva *et al.* (2020)

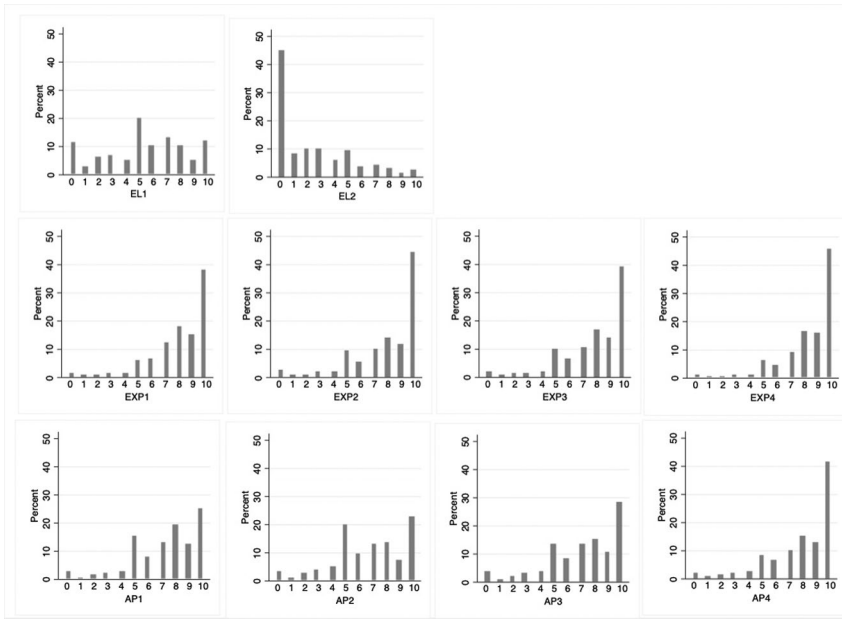


Figure 1. Distribution of responses to survey items measuring technocratic attitudes. Note: These histograms present the distribution of individual responses to the questions capturing technocratic attitudes. The first row refers to *elitism* items, the second to *expertise* items, and the third to *anti-politics*.

POP5. It's important for a political leader to be like the people he or she represents. Castanho Silva *et al.* (2020)

POP6. Politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil. Akkerman *et al.* (2014)

To summarise the information in these six items, we have created an index of populist attitudes.⁵ The index is computed by taking the respondent-level average of these items. It ranges from 0 to 10, where higher numbers indicate stronger populist sentiments. Figure 2 displays the distribution of this index within the sample. As can be seen, public opinion seems to lean in favour of populist principles. Indeed, more than 75% respondents present a populist index of 5 or higher on the scale.

In addition to technocratic and populist items, the questionnaire contains a host of sociodemographic and attitudinal variables. These indicators serve two purposes in our empirical analyses: First, we employ these indicators as control variables in our study of the correlation between populist and technocratic attitudes. Second, they also allow us to define the demographic and attitudinal traits of each subgroup that arises in the latent-class analysis. Summary statistics for all variables in the empirical analyses are available in Table A.1 in the online appendix.

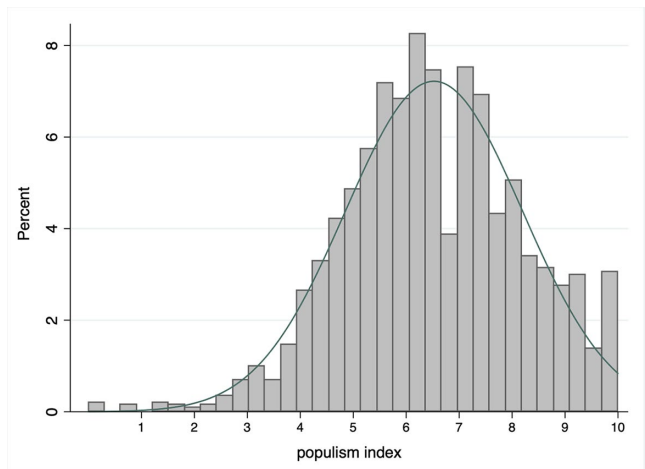


Figure 2. Distribution of the populist attitudes index.

Table 1. Factor analysis: All 10 technocratic attitudes items.

	Factor1 (Pro-experts)	Factor2 (Anti-politics)	Factor3 (Elitism)
	Eigenvalue: 3.82	Eigenvalue: 1.62	Eigenvalue: 0.96
EL1			0.7385
EL2			0.7475
EXP1	0.7603		
EXP2	0.6879		
EXP3	0.7409		
EXP4	0.789		
AP1	0.5279	0.2959	
AP2		0.8873	
AP3		0.7423	
AP4		0.7387	

Results show item loadings following principal component factoring and oblique rotation (Oblimin). Loadings below .500 are omitted for ease of interpretation except when loading on proper factor. Bold entries highlight those loadings that are considered the most important for each principal component.

Results

The association between populist and technocratic attitudes

Here we explore the associations between technocratic and populist attitudes. [Figure 3](#) evaluates graphically whether this association exists by plotting each of the technocratic items against the populism index and adding a locally weighted scatterplot smoothing (lowess) of the latter. The plot shows that, contrary to expectations, elitism (EL) items appear to be largely unrelated to respondents' populist inclinations. Also at odds with expectations, pro-expertise items (EXP) are positively related to populist orientations. On the other hand, those items that capture the anti-political dimension of technocratic attitudes (AP) show a positive relationship with populism.⁶

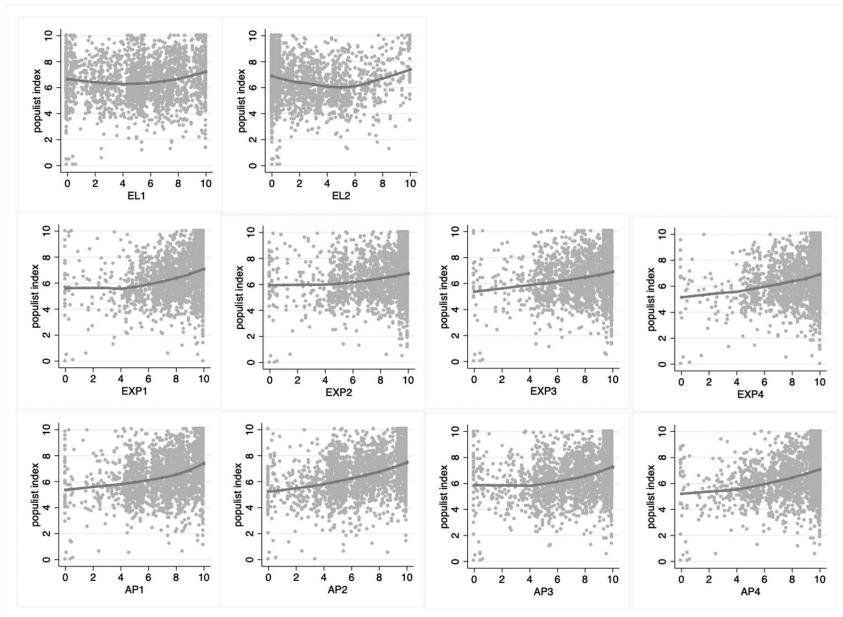


Figure 3. Relationship between technocratic and populist attitudes.

In the next step, we take the full battery of questions about technocracy and implement some dimension reduction. Following Bertsou and Caramani (2020a), we have conducted an exploratory factor analysis (Fabrigar and Wegener 2012) to examine to what extent the survey items effectively measure the three underlying dimensions they purport to encapsulate. Namely, *elitism*, *pro-expertise* and *anti-politics* attitudes.

Table 1 presents the result. It shows item loadings following principal component factoring and oblique rotation. We omit loadings below 0.5 except when loading on the proper factor. The evidence suggests that the full battery of technocratic questions can effectively be summarised into three separate components. The first dimension (Factor 1) captures positive opinions about experts making decisions. Indeed, all four *expertise* items load substantially onto this dimension. The first *anti-politics* item also has a high and positive correlation with this factor (0.52), probably because its statement (*‘The best political decisions are taken by experts who are not politicians’*) also values the involvement of experts in decision making favourably. In any case, the weight of this indicator does not load as high as the other items. We have named this first factor: *‘pro-experts’*. A second dimension that emerges (Factor 2) is one where three out of four *anti-politics* items load high (≥ 0.73), and no other type of item loads onto it. These two components explained 50% of the variation. Lastly, the third underlying dimension (Factor 3) is one that emerges from the

two *elitism* statements. Both item loadings are above 0.73, and no other survey item shows a high correlation with this last factor. However, the incorporation of this last component adds to the cumulative explained variance 9 percentage points. Together, the three factors explain 59.6% of the variance.⁷ In sum, this analysis confirms the analysis in Bertsou and Caramani (2020a) that the set of technocratic attitudes' items captures three underlying dimensions: elitism, pro-expertise, and anti-politics.

We now examine how the three dimensions of technocracy relate to populist orientations. Figure 4 presents a direct test of the expectations regarding the technocratic correlates of populist attitudes. We first specify a model with the three factors uncovered in the previous analysis as independent variables, and the populism index as outcome. Regression coefficients are represented by circle symbols.

Results indicate that pro-expertise inclinations are positively associated with support for populism, which runs contrary to the theoretical expectation (Caramani 2017). Indeed, the coefficient for *Pro-Experts* is positive and statistically significant. The coefficient for *Anti-Politics* is also positive and statistically significant, but in this case, this is consistent with the prediction. The sign of the coefficient for *Elitism* is also in line with expectations: it seems to suggest that elitist views are negatively associated with support for populism, although in this case the coefficient is not statistically different from 0. The magnitude of coefficients for variables that arise from principal component analysis is hard to interpret. However, in relative terms we do observe that the association between anti-politics and populism is somewhat stronger than the relationship between the latter and the two other factors.

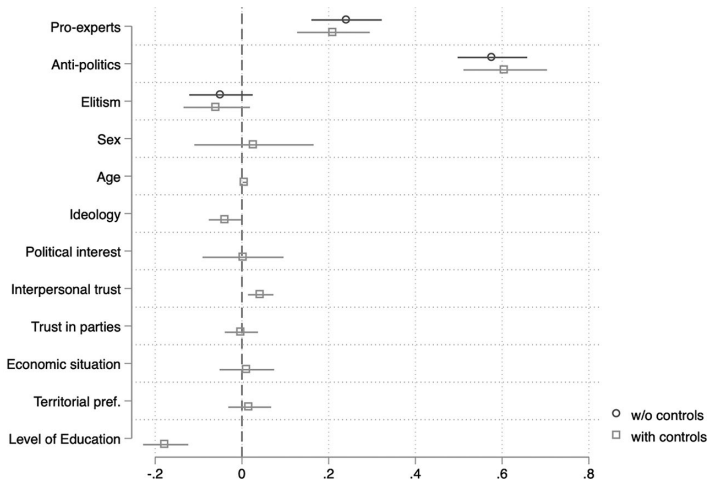


Figure 4. The three dimensions of technocracy as correlates of populist attitudes. OLS Regression results. Model with control variables

In [Figure 4](#), we also explore whether this statistical association holds after controlling for confounding factors of populist attitudes. We present regression results specifying a model with control variables (coefficients represented by a square symbol), i.e. interviewee's age, sex, ideology, level of education, political interests, interpersonal trust, trust in political parties, personal economic situation, territorial preferences and vote in 2019 election.⁸ The Pro-Experts factor and the Anti-Politics factor maintain the relationship found above, that is, a positive and statistically significant association. We can also corroborate that Elitism has a negative relationship with the populism index, although with no statistical relevance. Regarding the control variables we find that an individual's ideology, interpersonal trust, and level of education exert some impact on the populist orientation that is statistically different from 0 according to standards of hypothesis testing. We take the fact that the principal components of technocratic attitudes hold the sign and strength of the statistical association even when controls are introduced into the model as an indication of robustness of the evidence regarding the technocratic correlates of populist attitudes.⁹

Latent class analysis

The previous analyses have reported the correlations between populist and technocratic attitudes. In the current section we explore which citizens hold populist views, technocratic ones, or some combination thereof. For that purpose, we implement a Latent-Class analysis (LCA) (Hagenaars and Halman 1989; Magidson and Vermunt 2004). This technique examines the patterns of responses to a set of questions to uncover distinct groups of respondents based on the similarity of their responses to the survey questions -and the dissimilarity of their answers to those of respondents in other groups-. Our latent-class analysis proceeds as follows: (1) we take all ten technocratic attitudes questions and the six items on populism and identify subsamples of respondents that share similar responses. (2) We characterise and 'name' these groups according to their pattern of responses. (3) We present the size of each group. (4) Having identified a large set of respondents that share favourable views towards both populism and (most) technocratic items, we identify the socio-demographic and attitudinal traits that predict membership in this group.

Applying a latent-class analysis to the full set of questions on technocracy and populism, we uncover six distinct groups of respondents. To delimit the number of groups, we have considered both the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and our own judgement.¹⁰ To define the characteristics of each of these groups, we have computed the within-group

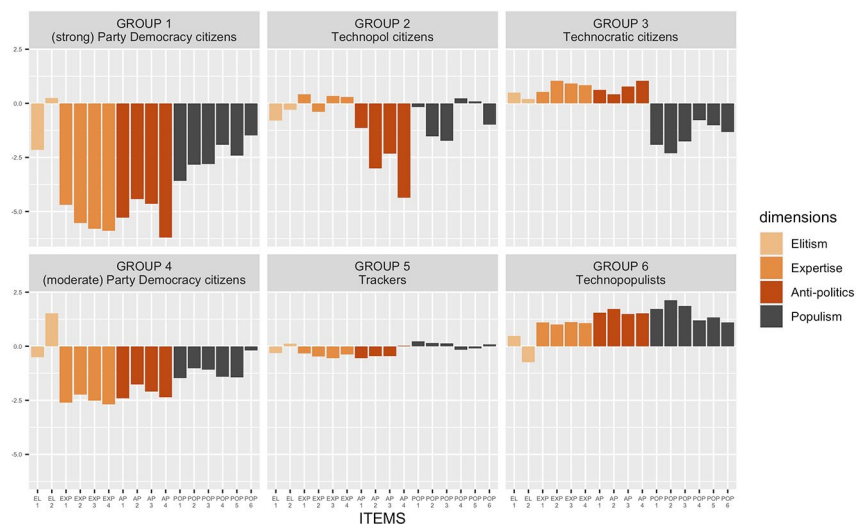


Figure 5. Latent-class analysis. Difference between within-class average and the full-sample average for the 16 survey items.

Table 2. Proportion of respondents in each latent group. 6-class analysis.

Latent class	Size (As proportion of the total survey sample)
GROUP 1 – ‘(strong) Party Democracy citizens’	2%
GROUP 2 – ‘Technopol citizens’	7%
GROUP 3 – ‘Technocratic citizens’	19%
GROUP 4 – ‘(moderate) Party Democracy citizens’	12%
GROUP 5 – ‘Trackers’	29%
GROUP 6 – ‘Technopopulists’	32%

average for all 16 questions. Figure 5 plots the difference between the within-group average and the full-sample average for each item. These differences make it possible to identify how each group distinguishes itself from the sample as a whole.¹¹ Table 2 complements the figure by displaying the proportion of the respondents in each latent group.

Bars represent the difference between the within-class average for the survey item and the full-sample average. Colours represent the three dimensions of technocratic attitudes, elitism, expertise and anti-politics, as well as populism. The title of each plot indicates the group number and the ‘name’, based on the pattern of responses in each group (colour online only).

The first group (GROUP 1) presents very sceptical attitudes to all populism items and 9 out of 10 technocracy questions. They eschew views in favour of expertise or those that are anti-politics. They also refuse to support the primacy of the people’s will. Given that these respondents reject technocratic and populist views, we have named this

latent class ‘(strong) *Party Democracy citizens*’ since the traditional party-mediated representative democracy is the institutional setting that both technocracy and populism pit themselves against. The *strong* characterisation reflects the fact that GROUP 4 shares qualitatively the same views as the first group, only less intensely. Hence, we have denominated this GROUP 4 as ‘(moderate) *Party Democracy citizens*’. Together, groups 1 and 4 constitute 14% of the sample, as Table 2 shows.

GROUP 2, which accounts for 7% of the sample, distinguishes itself by strongly rejecting anti-politics and anti-party views. They are not in favour of populism or elitism either. On the other hand, their views on the importance of expertise are more favourable than the global average. Hence, they could very well endorse rule by *technopol* politicians, those that combine a partisan affiliation with solid expert knowledge (Joignant 2011; Alexiadou 2020). Hence the name we have given to this latent class of respondents.

GROUP 3, ‘*Technocratic citizens*’, displays a clear preference profile. They present higher-than-average support for all three dimensions of technocratic attitudes: elitism, pro-expertise, and anti-politics. At the same time, they squarely reject all six populist statements. They thus clearly reflect the traits of technocracy as an ideal type that Caramani (2017) discussed. This *technocratic* group of respondents amounts to almost one in five respondents (19% of the sample). GROUP 5 is of lesser scholarly interest: These respondents essentially mimic average attitudes on all 16 items. We have thus called them ‘*trackers*’ following the example of Bertou and Caramani (2020a).

Last but not least, GROUP 6 is the one that best embodies the correlations reported in the previous section. These respondents present strong favourable opinions towards populism, all of them higher than the global average. Their opinions on two dimensions of technocracy, *anti-politics* and *expertise*, are also heavily supportive. In contrast, their views of *elitism* are more ambiguous. Their opinions thus reflect very well the results of the analyses presented in Figure 4. We have named this group ‘*Technopopulist citizens*’ since they demand responsiveness to the will of the people but support that decisions be made by competent experts. Interestingly, this is the largest group in the sample, almost one in three respondents (32%). Crucially, the analysis does not recover a latent class of ‘pure’ populists, i.e. respondents that endorse the populist items but reject all technocratic statements. The LCA suggests that all populists in the sample are actually technopopulists.

We now explore the socio-demographic and attitudinal characteristics that predict being in the *technopopulist class*, the group that best embodies the correlation between populist attitudes and anti-politics and pro-expertise views that we reported above.¹² We leverage the fact that

the LCA provides estimates, for each individual, of the probability of being part of the group. Using this probability as the outcome, we estimate a linear regression model.¹³ The set of predictors include demographic variables like sex and age, socioeconomic indicators like educational attainment and personal economic situation, and opinion indicators such as ideology, political interest, trust, and views on the optimal level of regional devolution in Spain.

Figure 6 presents this regression analysis.¹⁴ The evidence suggests that respondents' gender is not a clear predictor of being a technopopulist. The impact of age, on the other hand, is moderate in magnitude but positive and statistically significant (see left-hand plot in Figure 7). Unlike previous work (Bertsou and Caramani 2020a), the level of educational

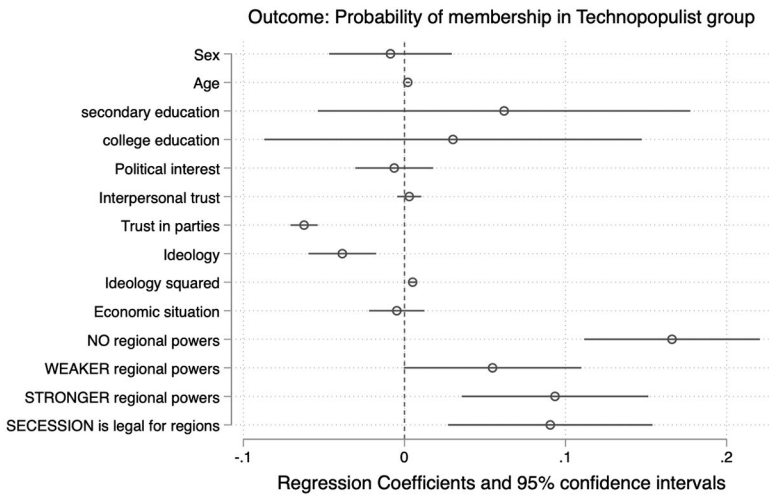


Figure 6. Predicting membership into latent class 'Technopopulist citizens'. Regression coefficients and 95% confidence intervals.

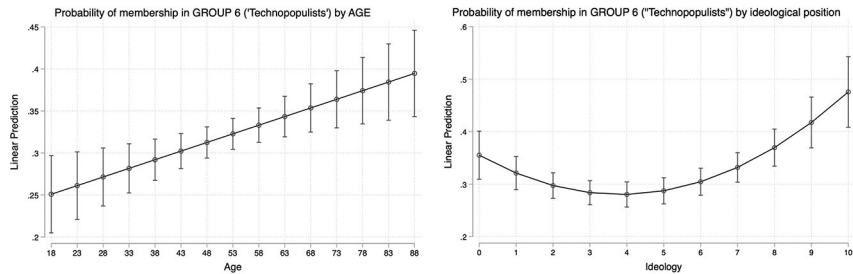


Figure 7. The effect of age and ideology on the probability of membership in the Technopopulist group. Predicted values of the outcome variable and 95% confidence intervals.

achievement is not associated with the probability of being a technopopulist. Education enters the regression as two dummy variables – secondary education and college education – where the baseline category is primary education or less. Neither education coefficient is statistically distinguishable from zero due to the large size of the standard errors.

Neither political interest nor interpersonal trust is a predictor of membership in the *technopopulist* group. Trust in parties, however, is the lower the level of trust, the higher the likelihood of being a *technopopulist*. This is consistent with the fact that this group presents strongly favourable views of all anti-politics items. Interestingly, the personal economic situation of the respondent, in turn, has no independent effect on the probability of having technopopulist views. Views on federalism in Spain, on the other hand, strongly predict membership in the group. The 5-point scale is split into dummies, four of which are specified in the model, where the baseline category is support for the current level of regional devolution – the status quo. Respondents who favour shifts from the status quo in either direction, are much more likely to be technopopulist. Ideology also has a relevant effect on the probability of espousing *technopopulist* views. Ideology is specified both in its original variable and squared to allow for non-linear effects. Indeed, that is what the evidence indicates the coefficient for ideology is negative and significant, while the effect of its squared value is positive and significant. The resulting marginal effect of ideology appears on the right-hand plot of [Figure 7](#): Technopopulist are least likely among centrist voters. Indeed, the more extreme the ideology of the respondent, the more likely she is of being a technopopulist. This pattern is particularly strong among right-wing voters.

In summary, the latent-class analysis has uncovered a large group of respondents, almost a third of the sample, who simultaneously combine strong populist views with the endorsement of most technocratic items, particularly pro-expertise and anti-politics ones. There is no group in the sample who espouses populist principles while clearly rejecting technocratic views. In that sense, our analysis shows that *all populists are technopopulists*. Citizens with populist leanings are also very much in favour of the enrolment of experts in decision making. Interestingly as well, we have found that these technopopulists tend not to be ideologically centrist, they lean towards the right of the spectrum, and they are older than average.

Discussion

Populism and technocracy are two forms of political organisation and legitimisation that are challenging pluralistic party democracies. This article has sought to study citizens' attitudes towards the principles that underpin

both populism and technocracy. We have also identified social groups according to their combination of views towards these principles. To do so, we have leveraged an original survey recently fielded in Spain. Our analysis builds on previous work by Akkerman *et al.* (2014), Bertsou and Caramani (2020a, 2020b) and Ganuza and Font (2020).

The evidence partially confirms the expectations from the conceptual analysis of populism and technocracy (Caramani 2017; Mair 2009, 2013). Distinguishing three dimensions of technocratic attitudes – elitism, pro-expertise, anti-politics – (Bertsou and Caramani 2020a) we find that support for populist principles tends to be associated with anti-politics and anti-party sentiments. This is consistent with the definition of both populism and technocracy as alternatives that denounce party politics. Indeed, the technocratic aversion towards the politicisation of social problems and the role of parties as intermediaries of sectoral interests seems to be closely related to the anti-pluralist postulates of populism that also hold that parties hinder the representation of a general will. Also consistent with the theory, we find that populist attitudes correlate negatively with having elitist views, although in this case the association is not statistically significant. The lack of strong statistical evidence for this relationship may be due to the fact that this dimension of technocratic attitudes is probably the one measured with less precision.

Contrary to the theoretical expectations, however, we find that endorsing populist principles correlates positively with demanding that experts take an active role in political decision making. This latter finding is counterintuitive, at odds with the ideological analysis of populism and technocracy and deserves a closer look. That populism-expertise association might be based on the common anti-politics ground shared by those who believe in expertise and those with populist orientations described before. However, such common ground around favourable opinion towards experts could also be motivated by an enhanced role populist supporters might give to the most prepared ones to implement the wishes of the people, i.e. a government ‘of the people’ but ‘by the best’.

Our Latent-Class analysis recovered several groups of individuals with distinct preference profiles. Five of the six latent classes represent well the different alternatives raised by the supply-side literature: supporters of *party democracy* (groups 1 and 4); supporters of *technopols* (group 2); supporters of *technocracy* (group 3) and finally, a group of individuals (group 6) that simultaneously display populist attitudes and two out of three sets of orientations that conform technocratic attitudes: anti-politics and pro-expertise. We have named this latter group ‘*technopopulist citizens*’. The relevance of this group is such that it is in fact the largest group in the sample. Additionally, we have characterised the demographic profile of this group. *Technopopulists* citizens tend to be older and

ideologically extreme. This is particularly on the right-hand side of the ideological spectrum: as we move closer to the extreme, the probability of being a technopopulist increases notably. Crucially, we do not find any group of ‘pure populists’, individuals that endorse populist views but most of the pro-technocracy principles. In other words, all populists in the sample are actually *technopopulist*.

This key empirical finding regarding technopopulist voters links our article to the growing literature on technopopulist parties (Bickerton and Invernizzi Acetti 2021; Guasti and Bustíkova 2020). It offers a plausible explanation for why some parties may decide to campaign on an anti-establishment discourse that simultaneously supports recruiting experts for political decision making. Indeed, the evidence in our article, together with that in Bertsou and Caramani (2020a), suggests that technopopulist attitudes are particularly frequent in some of the countries – Spain, Italy, France – where technopopulist parties have emerged (Castaldo and Verzichelli 2020; Perottino and Guasti 2020; Piquer and Jäger 2020). This may reflect a political equilibrium in which supply-side strategies and demand-side attitudes reinforce each other. The crisis of democratic governance may be a driving factor behind the emergence of both voter attitudes and political strategies (Guasti and Bustíkova 2020). Interestingly, the decline of the new parties in Spain, Podemos and Ciudadanos, coincides with their strategic repositioning. These parties initially stressed their outsiders’ features through a combination of criticisms of varying tone towards mainstream, established, traditional parties and politicians, with the emphasis on the need to promote policies that solve the country’s problems through regenerating, evidence-based ‘better policies’. This clearly matched technocratic and populist inclinations among the public. These themes lost saliency in the rhetoric of both parties when Podemos and Ciudadanos repositioned themselves on the traditional left-right divide (Podemos clearly on the radical left; Ciudadanos on the centre-right allying itself to the Conservative PP), and that strategic repositioning coincided with their electoral decline. A proper analysis of the roots of this political equilibrium lies beyond the scope of this article, however.

A potential criticism that might be raised about our article is that the empirical findings we report could be an artefact of the COVID-19 context in which the survey was fielded. In other words, it could be argued that the correlation between populist opinions and two dimensions of technocratic attitudes as well as the existence of a *technopopulist* latent group are only a by-product of the extraordinary circumstances surrounding the pandemic. Studies conducted before the pandemic show that this is not the case. Bertsou and Caramani (2020a, table 4 & figure 6) and Bertsou and Caramani (2020b) already showed that the latent

class they named ‘populist’ scores high on the *pro-expertise* and the *anti-politics* dimensions. Likewise, the factor analysis that Akkerman *et al* (2014, table 2) apply to a set of populist, pluralist and elitism items uncovers a factor that combines most populist items with one that explicitly demands that decisions be made by independent experts.

This brings us back to the intriguing puzzle that arises from our article. Both citizens with technocratic leanings – latent class 3 – and those who support populist principles – latent class 6 – fervently demand the involvement of experts in decision making. This is intriguing since the two groups of citizens are otherwise rather different: For starters, pro-technocracy respondents eschew all populist notions. Do both latent groups really want the same thing vis-a-vis experts in politics? Follow-up studies should address whether this apparent commonality survives once we define the role of experts and their identity more precisely. Indeed, populists and technocrats might disagree as to *who* qualifies as an expert. What is more, they may also differ regarding the *type* of involvement in decision making they want from experts (Bertsou 2021). Do they want experts in an advisory role, implementing decisions made by politicians, or as the ultimate political decision-makers? The implications for democratic representation are profoundly different.

Notes

1. The literature on cognitive mobilization (see Dalton 1984, 2000, 2007,), by describing how sophisticated apartisan voters rely less on partisan identification and party cues, and more on candidates’ qualities and competence prefigured some of these commonalities.
2. By way of two illustrative examples, the drafting of the first economic programme of Podemos was commissioned by the party leadership to two relatively well-known academic economists (La Vanguardia 2014), and Ciudadanos frequently proposed policies that weakened the intervention of parties and the executive in favour of the role of experts (see, for example, Sáinz 2016).
3. These survey panels are large databases of opted-in participants who take surveys regularly on a wide variety of topics.
4. The Online appendix includes the original question wording in Spanish, as well as summary statistics in both survey waves (see Table A.1).
5. A Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficient of 0.71 suggests that the internal consistency of the set of populism questions is relatively high.
6. A correlation matrix confirms these results as regards the sign and the strength of the relationships. The Pearson’s correlation coefficients for the expertise and anti-politics items hover between 0.2 and 0.3. For the elitism dimension, they lie below 0.1. Correlation matrices can be found in the online appendix (Table A.2).
7. Summary statistics for the three principal components are added to the online appendix (Table A.3).

8. Coefficients for vote choice (2019) are not reported in Figure 4 due to space limits.
9. See Table A.4. for full regression results for both models.
10. In the Online appendix we show that the evidence remains qualitative unchanged when we apply a five-class or a seven-class model rather than the six-class model that we present in the main text. See Figures A.9-A.10 and Tables A.7 and A.8 in the online appendix.
11. Figure A.7 in the Appendix presents the within-group averages for each latent class.
12. The Online appendix analyses membership in the other key latent classes: ‘technocratic citizens’, ‘technopols’ and ‘party democracy citizens’. See Figures A.1–A.6 in the online appendix.
13. The outcome in the regression model is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 1. In addition to this model, we have estimated an alternative one with a dummy variable as outcome. Evidence is reported in Figure A.8 and Table A.6 in the online appendix.
14. Table A.5 in the online appendix presents the full regression output.

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