

## HOW POLARIZATION, POPULIST ATTITUDES, AND CULTURAL BACKLASH AFFECT CITIZENS' SUPPORT FOR DEMOCRACY: EVIDENCE FROM SPAIN

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### ABSTRACT

In recent years, substantial scholarly attention has been devoted to understanding the consequences of three increasing phenomena on democratic legitimacy: populism, polarization, and cultural backlash. While the literature has widely acknowledged the common roots of the three phenomena and the way they mutually influence each other, little is known about their empirical relationship at the attitudinal level. Using data from Spain, this article examines whether and how affective polarization, populist attitudes, and cultural backlash values are connected to citizens' attitudes, and the extent to which they affect support for democracy as the best form of government. The results indicate that holding consistently populist views, conservative cultural values, and being affectively polarized is particularly harmful for democracy when this attitudinal pattern is maintained by younger individuals. We discuss the implications that socialization in democratic environments marked by frequent populist rhetoric and rising polarization might have on younger generations' democratic commitment.

### KEYWORDS:

affective polarization; values; democratic attitudes; populism; radical right.

## CÓMO LA POLARIZACIÓN, LAS ACTITUDES POPULISTAS Y LA REACCIÓN CULTURAL INFLUYEN EN EL APOYO DE LOS CIUDADANOS A LA DEMOCRACIA: EVIDENCIA DESDE ESPAÑA

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### RESUMEN

En los últimos años, se ha dedicado una atención académica creciente a la comprensión de las consecuencias de tres fenómenos en auge sobre la legitimidad democrática: el populismo, la polarización y la contra-reacción cultural. Aunque la literatura ha reconocido ampliamente las raíces comunes de los tres fenómenos y la forma en que se influyen mutuamente, poco se sabe sobre su relación empírica a nivel actitudinal. Utilizando datos de España, este artículo examina si (y cómo) la polarización afectiva, las actitudes populistas y los valores de la contra-reacción cultural están conectados en las actitudes de los ciudadanos y en qué medida afectan al apoyo a la democracia como mejor forma de gobierno. Los resultados indican que mantener de manera consistente opiniones populistas, valores culturales conservadores y estar afectivamente polarizado es particularmente perjudicial para la democracia cuando este patrón actitudinal es mantenido por los individuos más jóvenes. Discutimos las implicaciones que la socialización en entornos democráticos marcados por una retórica populista frecuente y una polarización creciente podría tener sobre el compromiso democrático de las generaciones más jóvenes de ciudadanos.

### PALABRAS CLAVE:

polarización afectiva; valores; actitudes democráticas; populismo; derecha radical.

## INTRODUCTION

It is widely believed that to be healthy and legitimate, democracy needs democrats, that is, citizens who want to govern themselves and believe in the fundamental values and norms of liberal democracy. Yet, in recent years, scholars have expressed growing concern about the threat that three phenomena are posing to citizens' allegiance to democracy in western consolidated democracies: populism, polarization, and the increasing configuration of political conflict along the conservative-libertarian cultural divide—the so-called 'culture war'. First, hinging on an ideational approach, recent evidence has found that citizens with stronger populist attitudes tend to reject some core underpinnings of liberal democracy such as mediated representation through political parties and institutional checks and balances, which leads them to develop higher levels of dissatisfaction and discontent with the current democratic processes than non-populist individuals (Zaslove and Meijers, 2023). Second, populist parties, particularly those of the radical-right, tend to mobilize on socio-cultural and identitarian issues, such as nativism (Kokkonen and Linde, 2023), sexism (Anduiza and Rico, 2022), and other socially conservative values closely associated with the rejection of opposing social groups, thus posing a threat to democratic coexistence (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Third, given populism's antagonistic view of social and political opponents, and their appeal to negative emotions such as anger and fear (Rico et al., 2017), both (mainstream and populist) parties and voters have become increasingly polarized against each other across most western societies, with critical consequences for social and political conflict, political compromise, and more generally, the functioning of the democratic system (Hetherington and Rudolph, 2015; Iyengar et al., 2019; McCoy and Somer, 2019; Somer et al., 2021).

While the literature on affective polarization, populism, and the conservative cultural turn is burgeoning, relatively little is known about the nature of the association between the three phenomena on the citizen level, and the impact they have on democratic legitimacy. Over the past decade, scholarly literature has provided extensive evidence about the mutual relationship that exists between populism, cultural backlash, and affective polarization. Thus, for instance, several studies have suggested that populism is an important cause of affective polarization, as populist ideas encourage an antagonistic vision of social and political life that raises the risks of political conflict (Reiljan and Molder, 2022; Stavrakakis, 2018). Another strand of research has focused on the role of cultural backlash values such as sexism (Anduiza and Rico, 2022; Christley, 2022) or nativism (Mudde, 2007; Ivarsflaten, 2008) as drivers of radical-right populist voting. Other studies have found a correlation between cultural backlash and polarization: Schaffner et al. (2018) found that the stands made by Trump

on cultural backlash issues such as racism and sexism contributed to a boost in the levels of polarization during the 2016 presidential campaign; and Inguanzo et al. (2021), using data from four well-established democracies, found that those individuals holding hostile sexist views are more likely to generate polarizing political content online.

Besides the connections between the three phenomena—populism, cultural backlash, and affective polarization—a relevant line of inquiry has focused on investigating why polarized individuals are more ready to tolerate the erosion of democratic norms (Broockman et al., 2022; Gidengil et al., 2022; Kingzette et al., 2021), whether voters who hold populist views are less supportive of some of the principles of liberal representative democracy (Wuttke et al., 2023; Zaslove and Meijers, 2023), and whether individuals with authoritarian and/or nativist values tend to be at odds with the core underpinnings of democratic self-governance (Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Kokkonen and Linde, 2023). If the three sets of attitudes correlate with each other and, at the same time, are commonly associated with diminished support for democracy, the questions arise: how are they attitudinally connected? to what extent are they all part of the same attitudinal syndrome of cynicism toward liberal democracy? and more importantly, what is the impact they have on individuals' support for the ideal of democracy as the best form of government?

In this paper we analyze citizen's attitudes toward (ideational) populism, cultural backlash, and polarization as challenges to liberal democracy. Our main interest is in analyzing how populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization are combined on the citizen level, that is, whether individuals' opinions are consistently in favour of populist principles, culturally conservative values, and affective animosity toward political opponents, and the extent to which such a combination of attitudes is associated with a higher tendency to reject democracy as the best form of government. In other words, does the prototypical conservative, populist, and affectively polarized voter exist in practice? And if so, to what extent is s/he more willing to support an unchecked leader who does not have to bother with elections than other individuals? Our study relies on novel data from a national representative survey in Spain ( $N = 1236$ ), which includes several batteries of questions to measure populist attitudes, affective polarization, and support for cultural backlash values, as well as support for democracy as an ideal form of government.

To study the attitudinal relationship between populist attitudes, affective polarization, and cultural backlash, we use Spain as a case study—a country that is well suited for our analysis due to the salience that the three phenomena have achieved in recent times. First, recent evidence has identified Spain as one of

the countries with the highest levels of affective polarization among western societies (Gidron, et al., 2020; Iyengar et al., 2019; Reiljan, 2020). Although the causes explaining affective polarization are complex, scholars have signalled the collapse of the traditional two-party system, the increasing distance between ideological blocs, and an upsurge in the centre-periphery conflict as some of the main drivers of the increasing feelings of out-group animosity within the Spanish electorate (Orriols and León, 2020; Torcal and Comellas, 2022). Second, in the past decade Spain has seen the emergence of two populist parties, from both the extreme-left (*Unidas Podemos*, Together We Can) and the extreme-right (*Vox*, Voice), which have enjoyed significant electoral success. Thus, for instance, *Unidas Podemos* has been junior partner in the coalition government headed up by the Socialist Party (PSOE) during the 2019–2023 term, and *Vox* has also entered several regional governments as junior partner, usually in coalition with the Popular Party (PP). In this sense, it is reasonable to expect a relatively high prevalence of populist attitudes among Spanish voters, whether connected to a left- or right-wing niche ideology. Third, the past few years have seen heightened confrontation in social and public debates around issues connected to the conservative-libertarian cultural divide, such as feminism, gender-based violence, and immigration. In 2018 and 2019, massive mobilizations took Spaniards to the streets all through the country to protest against sexual harassment and violence (Anduiza and Rico, 2022: 6) and seeking to establish a more feminist social and political agenda. At the same time, the populist radical-right party has voiced a discourse largely founded on (modern) sexism, by denying the existence of discrimination against women, attacking feminists, and rejecting the need for any legislation against gender violence (Ibid.). Regarding immigration, although the migration issue has traditionally received little political saliency in public discourse and amongst voters in the Spanish political arena (Encarnación, 2004), *Vox* has adopted a very hard line on immigration (Turnbull-Dugarte, 2019), which has contributed to the polarization of voters on this issue and has brought it to the forefront of political debate.

The paper is structured as follows. We start by discussing the theoretical relationship between populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization. Next, we hypothesize about the effect that each of the three attitudes has on individual democratic support. Empirically, we first perform exploratory factor analysis to examine the extent to which populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization are effectively captured by our survey items and, next, we test how these latent factors affect democratic legitimacy by means of an OLS model. In the second step of our analysis, we use a latent-class analysis to identify the existing subgroups of respondents according

to their attitudes toward populism, cultural backlash, and like/dislike for out-group parties, and next we see whether any of the subgroups can be explained by their greater tendency to support an undemocratic leader. To finish, we discuss the implications of our results.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### Affective polarization, populism, and cultural battles as attitudinal orientations

How are affective polarization, populism, and cultural backlash battles attitudinally connected? A review of the literature on the three phenomena led us to identify several common roots among them at the attitudinal level. Starting with polarization, scholars warn that we are today witnessing an increased affective sorting of citizens around party lines, which is fuelling levels of polarization among voters of contending parties. As typically defined, affective polarization refers to the distance between the affection or positive feelings individuals have toward parties, leaders, and followers whose ideas or political positions they share, and the rejection of parties, leaders, and followers who advocate opposing ideas and opinions (Iyengar et al., 2019). Therefore, affective polarization has two defining components, namely “in-group” affection, i.e. the positive feelings toward their own party, its leaders, and followers, and “out-group” polarization, i.e. the negative feelings toward opposing parties, its leaders, and followers.

The literature on affective polarization has discussed two types of mechanisms that contribute to explaining increasing levels of animosity toward political opponents in consolidated democracies. The first mechanism explains affective polarization as the result of the convergence of partisan identities with many other social identities. As West and Iyengar (2022) argue, partisanship is no longer exclusively synonymous with political preferences, but has become an important social identity which, ultimately, contributes to the strengthening of affective polarization. While partisan and ideological identities have traditionally been aligned, other prominent social identities, such as race, religion, or territorial identity are also increasingly converging into partisanship (Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019; Iyengar et al., 2019). For instance, in the US, Mason (2018) shows that while white evangelicals overwhelmingly support the Republican Party, African Americans tend to identify with the Democratic Party. As the author discusses, this gradual process of alignment of social identities along partisan lines has turned partisanship into a sort of social identity (*social sorting*), thus making it easier for partisans to infer generalizations about people on the opposite side, even if such inferences are wrong. In the case of Spain, Torcal (2023) argues that citizens have built partisan mega-identities, around which several social and ideological identities



converge. These mega-identities have been shaped, firstly, around ideological identities of left and right, which have created two opposing blocks of partisans, and secondly, based on territorial identities, which also favour greater social distancing.

The second account of the rise of affective polarization identifies the perception of a growing ideological distance between parties as its main cause. Thus, recent comparative and experimental studies provide evidence that there is a relationship between ideological and affective polarization, meaning that as the parties are becoming more ideologically distant from each other, voters are too, and, hence, they are increasingly willing to display hostility toward those whom they see as ideological opponents (Rogowski and Sutherland, 2016; Webster and Abramowitz, 2017). In the same vein, in Spain, studies have found a positive relationship between both types of polarization, so that “the greater the ideological polarization of the parties (measured as the distance in ideological positions perceived by voters), the greater the affective polarization of individuals” (Orriols and León, 2020: 12).

These two accounts of the causes of (rising) polarization can indeed be helpful in understanding the emergence of populist parties in western democracies. Given that the populist agenda is typically adopted by parties located at opposite ends of the ideological spectrum, that is, radical-right and radical-left parties, they benefit from the greater ideological sorting and distancing that national electorates are experiencing today. The relationship between polarization and populism indeed works in a virtuous cycle, as the current scenario of greater ideological and social polarization paves the way for the emergence and electoral success of populist parties, and at the same time, populist parties, once on this stage, fuel and receive high levels of affective polarization against and from (mainstream) political opponents (Harteveld et al., 2022; Davis et al., 2024). Indeed, as Torcal and Comellas (2022: 12) have shown, in Spain the emergence of the populist radical-right party Vox was preceded by the existence of high levels of affective polarization that had been produced in the system by the other parties, thus proving that radical right-wing parties tend to prosper and gain visibility in contexts of high polarisation. Bischof and Wagner (2019), using data from 17 European countries between 1973 and 2016, demonstrated that radical-right parties gaining representation in parliament tends to produce a long-term impact on levels of affective polarization within the electorate. In this sense, populist parties tend to both benefit from, and produce, polarization within the political system.

The demand side of populism has also been connected to increasing levels of polarization. According to this view, populism is not only related to what populist parties offer to the public and how they behave

(the supply side), but also to the ideas and attitudes of individuals who demand populism (the demand side). In this sense, populism is defined as a set of ideas or ideology (the ideational approach), which is thin-centered, that is, populism cannot stand on its own but must be attached to left- or right-wing ideologies (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). According to Mudde (2004), populist parties, both left- and right-wing, share a common understanding of the world, democracy, and political representation, which is based on three essential components: (1) it is people-centered and anti-elite, (2) it entails a clash between the pure people and the corrupt elite, and (3) it claims that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.

This ideational vision of populism also has the effect of increasing polarization by constructing an anti-establishment political frontier and contesting some of democracy’s basic institutional and procedural norms, such as political representation through parties (Roberts, 2022: 680). As Roberts (2022) argues, populism has a “constitutive” logic vis-à-vis affective polarization, in that it is intrinsic to populism to construct an antagonistic frontier between “the people” and a power elite or establishment, which makes populism intrinsically polarizing. Thus, holding populist attitudes is also potentially connected to higher levels of affective polarization, presumably against mainstream political parties or any other body that breaks down the unified popular subject.

Polarization and populism are also closely related to the third phenomena under analysis, namely cultural backlash. A prominent explanation of the reemergence of populism in western democracies over the past decades has connected it to the conformation of a new societal conflict, which has come to substitute the traditional cleavages, between defenders of materialist or authoritarian values on the one hand, and the champions of more liberal or libertarian views on the other (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). As Norris and Inglehart (2019: 32) argue, this new cleavage has its origins in the “silent revolution” theory of values change, which contends that the levels of existential security achieved by citizens of consolidated western societies in the post-war period led to an intergenerational shift towards more post-materialist values, such as cosmopolitanism and multiculturalism, and support for new issues such as environmental protection, human rights, and gender equality. However, in recent decades, the impact of globalization in labour markets and the mobility of workers has significantly increased the economic and social insecurity of many citizens, especially those who are socioeconomically disadvantaged but who, for a long time, had enjoyed a hegemonic social status. Thus, the cultural backlash theory suggests that the so-called “losers of globalization” (Teney et al., 2014; Kriesi et al., 2012), characterized primarily as elderly, low-educated white males, have staged a backlash against the advancement of

progressive values and the displacement of traditional family values. These socially conservative values typically embrace a broad rejection of the “Other”, ranging from immigrants, Muslims, black people, LGBTQ, ethnic minorities, and feminists, among others, and advocate the maintenance of a non-egalitarian status quo by opposing any social transformation that might contribute to social change, such as gender equality or the fight against climate change.

According to Norris and Inglehart (2019), the progressive value change experienced by modern societies has led socially conservative individuals—i.e. those who feel threatened by the breakdown of the status quo—to transfer their votes to (authoritarian) right-wing populist parties, who promise to defend the old order. In this sense, the emergence of radical-right populism in most countries across western Europe and the recent success of right-wing populist leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil or Donald Trump in the US (Norris and Inglehart, 2019; Wejnert, 2023; Rennó, 2020) can be seen as the result of a socially conservative counter-revolution prompted by the expansion of cultural liberalism. At the same time, radical-right populist parties have embraced the defence of conservative values as a hallmark, thus sharpening the salience of the cultural cleavage in party competition and fostering polarization among those endorsing socially conservative and socially liberal values. To be clear, however, it is important to note that populism is not essentially connected to a right- or left-wing niche ideology, given that supply-side populism associates with radical platforms both of the left and the right, and not all populist parties advocate for conservative cultural values. Indeed, radical-left parties are advocates of radical liberal values, such as radical feminism and elimination of national frontiers, and their criticism toward democracy tends to focus on the political and/or economic elites within that system rather than the whole liberal system as such (Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017).

#### *The effect of affective polarization, populist attitudes, and cultural backlash on support for democracy*

There is a widespread consensus in the literature that, to some extent or other, affective polarization, populist attitudes, and appeal for cultural backlash values negatively affect individuals' support for liberal democratic ideals. Although levels of democratic legitimacy have traditionally remained high in Spain, recent evidence has identified an increase in the number of Spaniards who now more strongly support a strong leader than they did a decade ago (Wuttke et al., 2022: 442). Next to this, the existence of very high levels of affective polarization in the country (Reiljan, 2020; Wagner, 2021), the continued success of two populist parties from the extreme-right and -left (Vox and Unidas Podemos), and the salience of public debates around relevant cultural battles beg the

question, how are these three phenomena affecting support for democratic government in Spain?

Starting again with polarization, recent evidence, mostly based on the US, has shown that, in contexts of high affective polarization, partisans tend to be more willing to trade off democratic norms in pursuit of their ideological agenda and/or policy representation (Gidengil et al., 2022; Graham and Svobik, 2020; Kingzette et al., 2021). In a similar vein, Torcal and Magalhães (2022), using comparative data from eleven liberal democratic countries, demonstrated that citizens who hold more extreme ideological positions are less supportive of democracy. Furthermore, studies have found that a large proportion of individuals tend to display what has been termed as “democratic hypocrisy,” that is, they tend to disregard democratic norms when their own party is in power and they perceive a threat from the opposing party, and are more respectful of democracy when their party is in opposition, as they feel that democratic norms can protect them (Simonovits et al., 2022).

Second, it is widely believed that populism poses a threat to liberal democracy, as it challenges some of its underpinning values (Müller, 2017; Urbinati, 2019). First, according to the ideational view, populist parties adopt a homogeneous and unitary understanding of the “people,” which leans against pluralism and the protection of minorities (Galston, 2018; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Second, populism is based on the primacy of the “general will of the people,” which cannot be constrained by any other institutional center of power, including parliament or the judiciary (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). Third, populism advocates a direct relationship between the people and its political leadership and thus rejects political mediation through political parties and elites (Zaslove and Meijers, 2023).

Considering that populist parties often give rhetorical and practical critiques of liberal democracy, it is commonly assumed that populist attitudes tend to be associated with negative views toward representative democracy. However, scholars have not found conclusive evidence of the relationship between populist attitudes and diminished democratic support. Zaslove and Meijers (2023), using data from the Netherlands, found that citizens with stronger populist attitudes are no less supportive of the principle of democracy, although they reject ideas related to mediated representation through political parties and are more supportive of forms of unconstrained majoritarian rule. Drawing on data from four European countries, Wuttke et al. (2023) found that populist and non-populist citizens endorse similarly liberal-democratic institutions, yet citizens with a populist outlook more frequently express contradictory demands that political institutions cannot possibly deliver. Focusing on Spain, Guinjoan (2023) showed that the relationship between populist attitudes and support for liberal

democratic values is indeed moderated by ideology, so that right-wing populist individuals tend to display lower levels of support for the granting of civil liberties and the protection of minority rights compared to left-wing individuals who hold populist attitudes.

The third phenomena under investigation, namely support for cultural backlash, has received less attention in relation to support for democratic values and/or liberal democracy more generally. Norris and Inglehart (2019: 102–103) found evidence of a strong linear relationship between holding socially conservative and authoritarian values: individuals with authoritarian values tend to be more conservative toward moral values than other individuals with no authoritarian values. Other studies have focused particularly on the relationship between anti-immigration attitudes (characterized as nativist attitudes) and support for democracy. Kokkonen and Linde (2023) showed significant differences in support for democracy between nativist and non-nativist citizens, with strong nativist individuals granting less importance to living in a democratically governed country and displaying lower levels of diffuse support for democracy, among other negative views toward democracy.

### Hypotheses

The review of the literature above has shown that support for populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization have common attitudinal roots and display mutual connections with each other. From a cognitive perspective, the three phenomena share a common propensity to divide the world into in-groups and out-groups, fuelling a binary classification of the world which might permeate across different domains. Thus, populism hinges on the division between “the good people” and a vilified elite (Mudde, 2004); cultural backlash, and more particularly its two core manifestations of nativism and sexism concern the antagonism between natives and non-natives (Mudde, 2007), and between men and (feminist) women (Anduiza and Rico, 2022), respectively; and affective polarization reflects the tendency for an individual to strongly like their own party and strongly dislike the opposing parties (Iyengar et al., 2019). In this sense, there is a conventional assumption in the literature that the three attitudes tend to be combined at the attitudinal level.

Yet, the three attitudinal orientations are not necessarily combined *in all circumstances*. Indeed, for instance, extreme-left populists, such as supporters of Unidas Podemos, are unlikely to hold nativist or sexist attitudes. Similarly, someone who holds strong conservative values is not necessarily affectively polarized as well. Thus, we expect to find a subgroup of individuals in our sample who hold opinions consistently in favour of populist principles, cultural backlash, and affective polarization, and others some combination thereof. However, we expect only

*the combination of strong populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and strong affective polarization to be detrimental for democratic legitimacy*. Thus, we test the following hypothesis:

*H1: Individuals with strong populist attitudes, in favour of cultural backlash values, and affectively polarized are more likely to support an authoritarian form of government than individuals who do not share a combination of the three attitudes.*

### METHODS AND DATA

To analyze whether and how populist attitudes, support for reactionary culture battles, and affective polarization relate to each other at the attitudinal level, and the extent to which they have (negative) consequences for support for the ideal of self-governance, we rely on original survey data from a nationally representative survey in Spain—the second wave of the Spanish Survey on Political Polarization, administered by the CEMOP (University of Murcia, Spain). Fieldwork for this survey was carried out in April and May 2022 to a representative sample of 1,236 individuals.

#### *Independent variables*

##### 1) Populist attitudes

To measure populist attitudes, our survey included two questions that tap into two defining components of populism, as characterized by Mudde, namely the idea that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (people-centrism) and the Manichaean view of the political world that divides society between good people and a vilified political elite (anti-elite). These two items are adopted from the study by Akkerman et al. (2014), which represents one of the most influential attempts to measure populist attitudes in recent times. The first item directly uses Akkerman et al.’s question on the will of the people, whereas the second one adapts one of the items proposed by the authors (“The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people”) to capture the extent to which individuals believe society is divided between corrupt political elites and the people.<sup>1</sup>

To measure their degree of support for populist principles, respondents were asked to position themselves on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 indicated ‘complete disagreement’ and 10 ‘complete agreement’ with the statement. Respondents were asked to respond to the following statements:

- The people, and not the politicians, should make our most important policy decisions. (POP1)

<sup>1</sup> This item is used with the same wording by Cheeseman and Peiffer (2024).



- Our country is divided between the ordinary people and the corrupt political elite that exploits the people. (POP2)

## 2) Attitudes toward cultural backlash.

As commonly known, cultural backlash refers to support for ideas of resistance to progressive social change, the regression of obtained rights by certain social groups such as women, immigrants, or minority groups, and the maintenance of a non-egalitarian status quo. To measure respondents' support for socially conservative cultural values, we used two questions that tap into two key attitudes of the conservative-libertarian cultural divide, namely sexism and nativism. Sexism can be understood as a form of prejudice which broadly captures the idea that systematic discrimination against women simply does not exist and/or a tendency to maintain sex-based inequality in society (Anduiza and Rico, 2022: 2). Nativism is defined as an "ideology which holds that states should be inhabited exclusively by members of the native group ("the nation") and that nonnative elements (persons and ideas) are fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state" (Mudde, 2007: 19). Both types of attitudes thus hinge on hostile feelings toward (feminist) women and immigrants as out-groups, who are as seen as threats to individuals' patriarchal beliefs and/or their chauvinistic ideas of a homogeneous society.

For each of these statements, respondents had to position themselves on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 represents the most liberal position and 10 the most conservative one. The two items are as follows:

- "Women are discriminated against, so that it is necessary to promote gender policies that privilege women" and "Feminism just seeks to attack men, rather than promoting equality." (BACK1)
- "The state should allow all immigrants to come and live in our country" and "The state should close borders and not allow any type of immigration." (BACK2)

## 3) Affective polarization

Affective polarization refers to the simultaneous presence of feelings of trust and affinity of partisan voters toward their own party and fellow partisans, and hostility and dislike toward others from opposing political parties and identities (Iyengar et al. 2012). To measure affective polarization, the survey included two scales of like/dislike toward the four main national political parties (PSOE, PP, Vox, and UP) and political leaders (Pedro Sánchez, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, Santiago Abascal, and Yolanda Díaz), respectively, following the feelings thermometer scales used by the American National Election Studies (ANES). In particular, the like/dislike scales read as follows:

- I'd like you to rate how you feel about the following political parties on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that party and 10

means that you strongly like that party: PSOE, PP, Vox, Unidas Podemos. (POL1)

- I'd like you to rate how you feel about the following political leaders on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 means you strongly dislike that leader and 10 means that you strongly like that leader: Pedro Sánchez, Alberto Núñez Feijóo, Santiago Abascal, Yolanda Díaz. (POL2)

In addition, the survey also included a battery of questions that tap into the social aspects of affective polarization, using the widely used social distance scale by Bogardus (1925). In particular, respondents were asked whether they would be happy or unhappy if their child (or the respondent him/herself) had married or had a romantic relationship with a supporter of an ideologically opposing party. In these responses, 0 indicated "they would be totally unhappy," and 10 indicated "they would be totally happy." The battery of questions is as follows:

- I'd like you to imagine that your child, or you yourself, had a romantic relationship with a supporter of an ideologically opposing party. I will read the names of the parties that this hypothetical person votes for, and I'd like you to rate how happy or unhappy you would be with that situation: PP, PSOE, Vox, Unidas Podemos. (POL3)

Relying on these three items, we calculated three indices of individuals' affective polarization toward parties, political leaders, and party voters. Following previous scholars, we used the formula proposed by Wagner (2021) to measure affective polarization in multiparty systems. His measurement method has two steps. In the first step we calculated the *like<sub>ip</sub>* each individual gives to every party/leader. The mean is weighted by the size of the party, and is calculated as follows:

$$\overline{like}_i = \sum_{p=1}^P (vp * like_{ip})$$

Where *i* is the voter, *p* the party/leader and *vp* the percentage of votes for every party, measured as a proportion ranging from 0 to 1. Next, we calculated the individual affective polarization score for each individual by subtracting the average feelings toward other parties from the in-party feeling evaluations, as follows:

$$Spread_i = \sqrt{\sum_{p=1}^P vp (like_{ip} - \overline{like}_i)^2}$$

## The dependent variable: support for democracy.

The main dependent variable of our study is support for the ideal of democracy as the best form of government. This indicator taps into what has been

termed in the literature as diffuse (Easton, 1975) or “idealistic” (Inglehart, 2003) support for democracy, that is, an attitudinal positive predisposition toward democracy itself, independently of its particular day-to-day performance, as opposed to supporting other non-democratic or illiberal forms of government under certain circumstances, such as a strong leader who might make his own decisions without having to resort to elections. To be sure, this way of measuring *regime preferences* could be expressing no more than lip service, as respondents might be conveying support for democracy as a valence issue—i.e. something positive and valuable—though devoid of any specific content (Schedler and Sarsfield, 2007: 638-9). In other words, respondents might express support for democracy as an abstract principle, while in practice they might reject some of its underpinning values, such as minority rights or media freedom. In this sense, in recent years, scholars have suggested that in order to better grasp what people really mean by the word “democracy” when they express support for it, more detailed batteries of questions measuring support for specific values and institutions of democracy should be used (see e.g. Classen et al., 2023; Ferrín and Kriesi, 2016, 2025). Notwithstanding the narrower understanding of democratic legitimacy that our survey indicator conveys, it is useful to understand whether individuals are indeed supportive of the principle of democracy at any time and/or under any circumstance.

To measure abstract democratic support, respondents had to position themselves on a 0 to 10 scale, where 0 represents unconditional support for democracy and 10 support for a strong leader. The survey statements read as follows:

- “Democracy is always preferable to any other kind of government” and “Sometimes it is preferable to have a strong leader who can quickly decide everything and doesn’t have to bother with parliament and elections.”

To facilitate the interpretation of the results, the variable of democratic support has been reversed, so that higher values represent support for the democratic ideal, whereas lower values represent support for a strong leader.

In terms of methods, we deploy a two-fold analysis. First, we use exploratory factor analysis to explore whether our survey items effectively measure the three underlying dimensions they seek to encapsulate, namely populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization. Next, we test the effect of the three latent factors on support for democracy as the best form of government by means of an OLS analysis. Second, beyond knowing whether the three underlying factors do exist independently from one another, we seek to analyze how they are connected at the attitudinal level, that is, how individuals can be classified according to their attitudes toward (ide-

ational) populism, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization. To this end, we implement a latent class analysis (LCA). Finally, we analyze the extent to which membership in each social subgroup identified by the LCA can be predicted by their higher level of openness to support a non-democratic form of government using OLS.

## RESULTS

### The association between populist attitudes, cultural backlash, affective polarization, and democratic support

We start our analysis by exploring whether the seven items included in our survey effectively measure the three underlying attitudinal orientations they purport to capture—namely populist attitudes, support for cultural backlash values, and affective polarization—and how they are connected to democratic legitimacy. In other words, do populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization exist as three analytically different attitudes and do they all have the same (negative) impact on democratic legitimacy?

For that purpose, we first conduct an exploratory factor analysis following principal component factoring and oblique rotation. In doing so, we include the seven individual items on populist attitudes, support for conservative cultural values, and affective polarization, without specifying to which dimension each item (theoretically) “belongs”. As can be seen from Table 1, the results show that the different items load highly (>0.6) on the corresponding factors. Furthermore, there are no cross-loadings, as none of the items load sufficiently (>0.5) on the other dimensions. We can therefore clearly conclude that our full list of items can effectively be summarized into three separate components, namely populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization.

**Table 1.**  
*Exploratory factor analysis*

| Indicators                  | Factor loadings |              |              |
|-----------------------------|-----------------|--------------|--------------|
|                             | 1               | 2            | 3            |
| <b>Populist attitudes</b>   |                 |              |              |
| Pop1 (People decisions)     | -0.024          | -0.069       | <b>0.829</b> |
| Pop2 (Politicians corrupt)  | -0.085          | 0.148        | <b>0.793</b> |
| <b>Cultural backlash</b>    |                 |              |              |
| Back1 (Feminism)            | 0.031           | <b>0.842</b> | 0.019        |
| Back2 (Immigration)         | 0.000           | <b>0.832</b> | 0.038        |
| <b>Polarization</b>         |                 |              |              |
| Pol1 (Polarization parties) | <b>0.922</b>    | 0.024        | -0.029       |
| Pol2 (Polarization leaders) | <b>0.912</b>    | 0.044        | -0.062       |
| Pol3 (Polarization voters)  | <b>0.561</b>    | -0.226       | 0.082        |

N= 1089



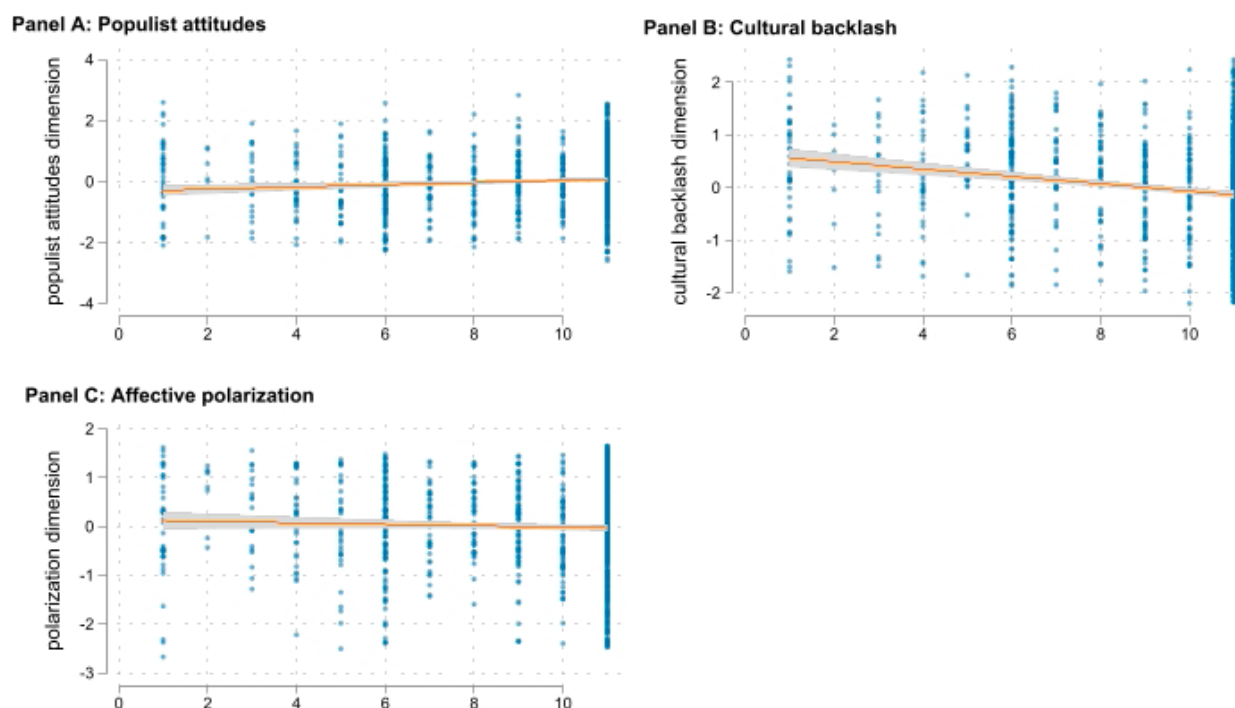
**Figure 1.***Relationship between populist attitudes, cultural backlash, affective polarization, and democratic support.*

Figure 1 evaluates graphically whether an association exists between each of the latent factors estimated from the previous analysis and democratic support. The graph plots each of the latent dimensions on populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization against the variable of democratic support and we add a linear fit with confidence intervals to the latter to better grasp the existing association between the variables. Panel A shows that, contrary to expectations, populist attitudes are positively related to respondents' support for democracy. By contrast, the latent variable of cultural backlash (Panel B) shows a negative relationship with democratic support, whereas affective polarization (Panel C) appears to be unrelated to democratic legitimacy.

To cross-test these bivariate relationships, we run a linear regression model (OLS) of the three latent variables on populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization on democratic support. The model controls for respondents' sex, age, level of education, and ideology. Figure 2 presents the OLS coefficients of the regression analysis.<sup>2</sup> The results show that the two latent factors on support for cultural backlash values and populist attitudes have a statistically significant effect on support for democracy as the best form of government, though in opposite directions. In line with our expectations and the bivariate analysis above, support for cultural backlash

values has a negative effect on democratic support, which means that, other socio-demographic traits being equal, those who score lower on the cultural backlash latent factor tend to display a higher level of democratic support—or, to put it another way, a greater preference for conservative cultural battles leads individuals to hold undemocratic preferences of governance. Similarly in line with the results of the bivariate analysis, the effect of the latent factor on populist attitudes on democratic support is positive, thus indicating that respondents with stronger populist attitudes tend to be more supportive of democracy than those with weaker populist ideas. While this latter finding runs counter to our theoretical expectations, it is in line with previous evidence which has found populism to have a positive effect on support for the principle of democracy (Zaslove and Meijers, 2023; Zaslove et al., 2021; Kaltwasser and Hauwaert, 2020), and/or that populism has no effect on the rejection of key tenets of liberal democracy, such as political pluralism (Ellenbroek et al., 2023), the rule of law (Wuttke et al., 2023), minority rights, and the separation of powers (Zaslove and Meijers, 2023), to name but a few. As Zaslove and Meijers (2023: 19) discuss, citizens with more populist attitudes even seem to be *better* or more passionate democrats than those with lower populist attitudes, i.e. they tend to adhere to the democratic ideal more intensely, but this can be explained by their need to highlight their despair about the way status quo practices subvert those principles and/or their willingness to profile themselves as *purer* democrats. However, as these

<sup>2</sup> Table A.1 in the Appendix presents the full regression output.

authors point out, even when individuals with stronger populist attitudes tend to strongly support democracy *in principle*, they are highly critical of mediated forms of political representation which are essential to liberal democracy, such as political parties and judges, and think that majority rule should not be constrained in any way. However, as pointed out above, this contradictory support for the ideal of democracy while rejecting some of its core underpinning institutions cannot be captured by our survey item.

To finish, we see that the effect of affective polarization is non-significant at conventional levels, so that there are no relevant differences in levels of democratic support between individuals who are affectively polarized and those who are not polarized. Thus, at least when considering individuals' support for democracy *in principle*, there are no reasons to think that the increasing levels of affective polarization that studies are identifying today are endangering democratic legitimacy in Spain.

#### Latent class analysis

In the previous section we have reported the effect that populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization have on democratic support when they are considered as analytically distinct attitudes. However, as we have seen in the theoretical section above, the three attitudes share common roots and tend to mutually influence each other, so that they are often combined in practice. In this section, therefore, we focus on exploring the social groups that exist in

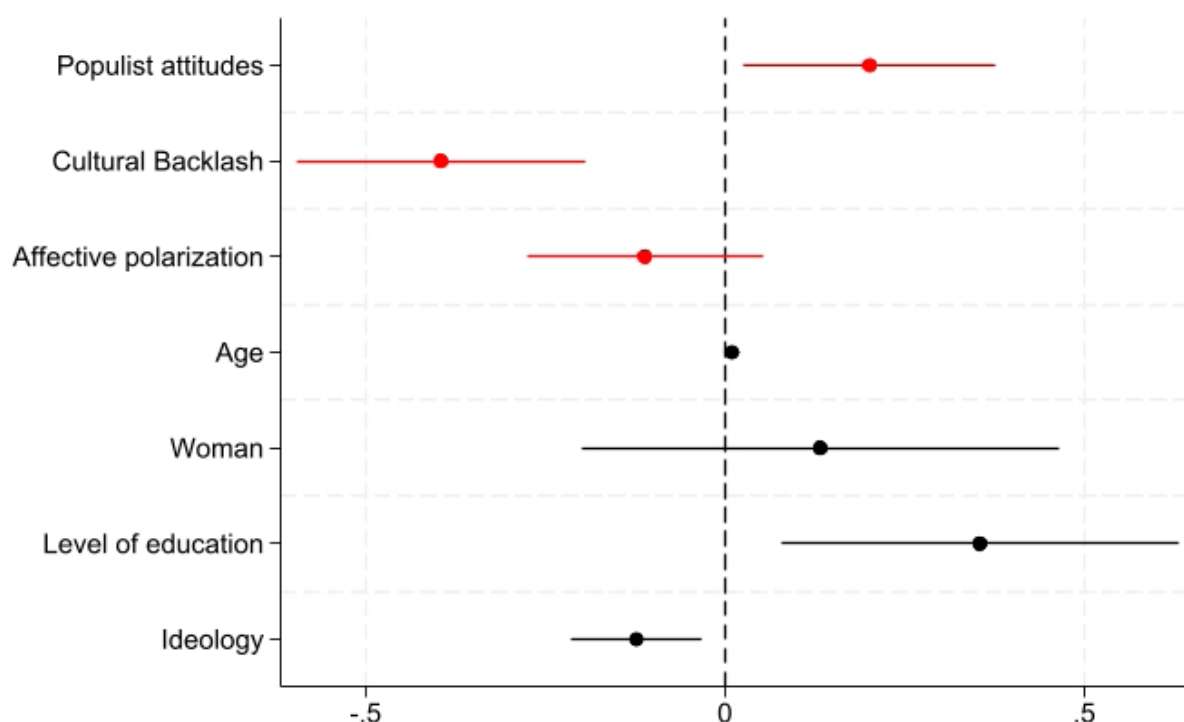
the Spanish electorate according to their attitudes toward populism, cultural backlash, and like/dislike toward out-group parties. By means of this analysis we seek to identify whether the prototypical voter who simultaneously combines strong populist views, support for conservative cultural values, and high levels of affective polarization can be clearly identified, and whether membership in this social subgroup can be predicted by their greater openness to support a non-democratic form of government.

To this end, we implement a latent class analysis (LCA) (Magidson and Vermunt, 2004; Weller et al., 2020). This technique is used to identify different subgroups within a population that share certain characteristics which are recognized based on the similarity of the subgroup's responses to the survey questions. Our latent class analysis involves two steps. First, we take the seven original survey items on populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization and identify latent subgroups of respondents that share similar responses, and then present the size of each subgroup. Next, we test whether democratic support can be a predictor of membership in any of the subgroups, particularly in the subgroup of respondents that shares favourable views toward populism and cultural backlash and is affectively polarized. We also identify other socio-demographic traits that define each subgroup.

The results of the LCA in the seven items on populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization uncover four subgroups of respondents in our

**Figure 2.**

*OLS coefficients of populist attitudes, cultural backlash, and affective polarization on democratic support.*



population. To delimit the number of groups, we have considered both the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) and the theoretical interpretability of the groups (Weller et al., 2020). Figures A1–A2 in the Appendix show that the evidence basically remains unchanged when we apply a three-class or a five-class model.

Figure 3 plots the marginal means of the seven observed variables, conditional on being in the four classes identified. Table 2, below, displays the proportion of respondents in each latent subgroup. The first group (G1) presents strong support for the two populist attitudes and moderated adherence to cultural conservative values, although they are not affectively polarized against other parties and leaders and display only a minor opposition to their children getting married to someone from the out-party group. A potential explanation for the (almost) nonexistent levels of affective polarization of this group could be that the members of this group have a lower level of party identification; hence, we have named G1 '*Non-partisan conservative populists*.' This group constitutes 15% of the sample, as Table 2 shows. The second group (G2) shares the same views as the first group, but more intensely in all the variables and quite particularly in the items on affective polarization. We have named G2 '*Polarized conservative populists*,' and this group accounts for 47% of the sample.

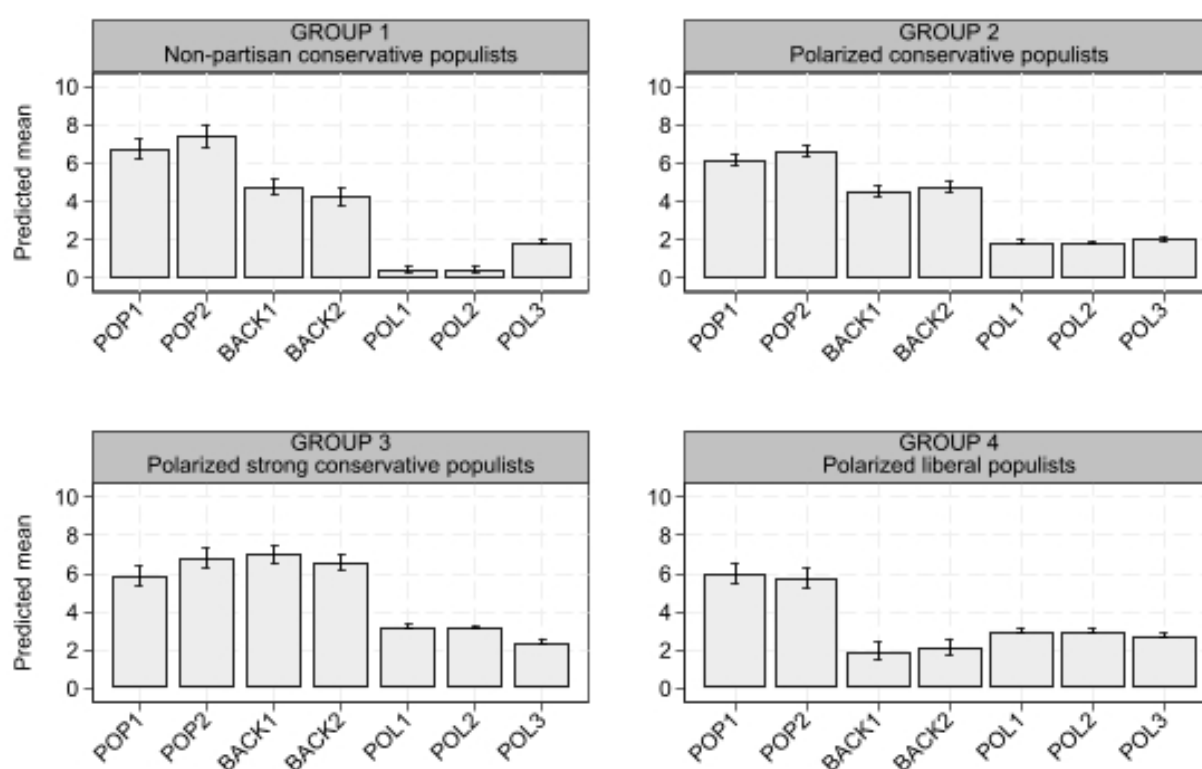
The third group (G3), which constitutes 19% of the sample, displays the clearest profile: they present strong favorable opinions toward the two items

on populism, are highly supportive of the two cultural conservative values—quite a lot more strongly than the respondents in G1 and G2—and are affectively polarized against out-group parties, leaders, and voters. This group thus reflects very well the profile of citizens sharing populist principles, support for cultural backlash values, and high levels of affective polarization that we seek to identify in this paper. We have named G3 '*Polarized strong conservative populists*.' Finally, the fourth group (G4) presents strong support for the two populist attitudes and is affectively polarized against out-group parties, leaders, and voters, but is not in favor of backlash values. This group represents 19% of the sample and we have named it '*Polarized liberal populists*.'

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

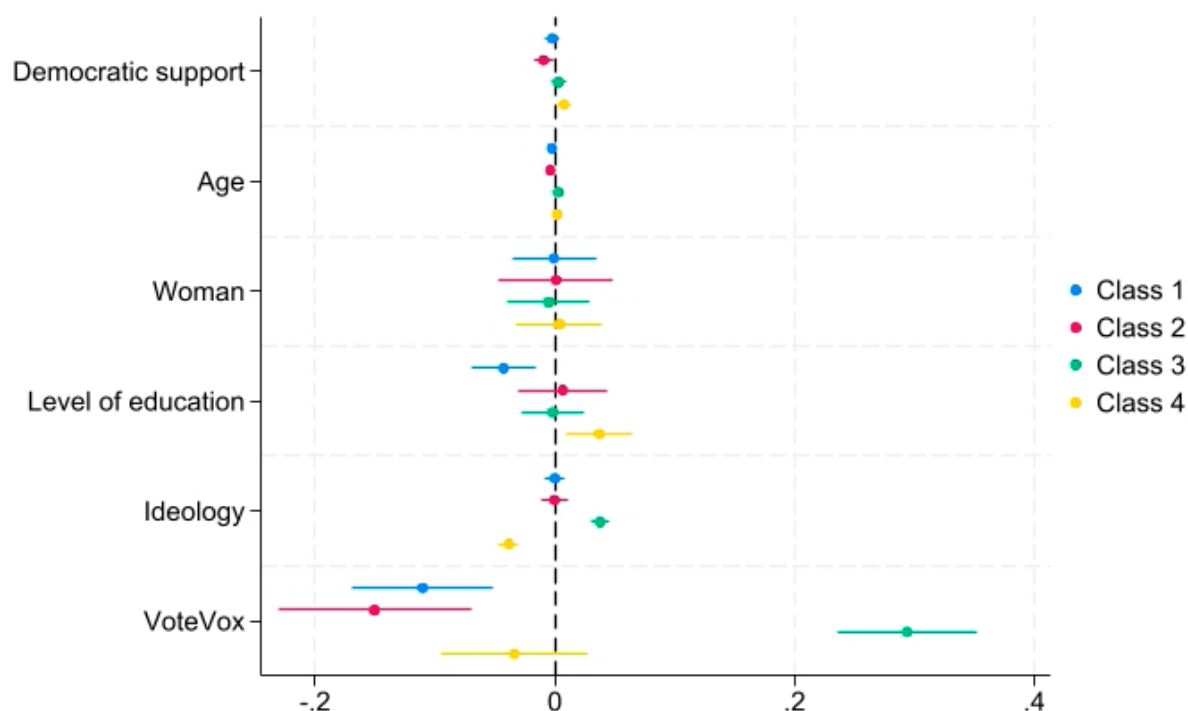
| Latent class                                 | Size (As proportion of the total survey sample) |
|----------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| G1 – Non-partisan conservative populists     | 15%                                             |
| G2 – Polarized conservative populists        | 47%                                             |
| G3 – Polarized strong conservative populists | 19%                                             |
| G4 – Polarized liberal populists             | 19%                                             |

**Figure 3.**  
*Latent class analysis. Marginal means of the 7 survey items conditional on being in the 4 classes.*





**Figure 4.**  
Probability of membership in each latent group (OLS models)



Once we have identified the four classes that best capture the different combinations of populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization in our sample of respondents, we then explore the level of democratic support and the socio-demographic characteristics that best predict being in each of the classes. In LCA, every individual is assigned a probability<sup>3</sup> of being part of one group, which can be used as the outcome or dependent variable in a regression analysis. Therefore, we estimate four separate OLS models—i.e. one for each subgroup or class—using the probability of membership in each class as the dependent variable, and as predictors we include the variable of democratic support and several socio-demographic variables, namely sex, age, level of education, ideology, and vote for the main radical-right party in Spain, Vox.

Figure 4 presents the coefficients of the four OLS models.<sup>4</sup> The evidence suggests that our main independent variable, respondents' support for democracy, is only a clear predictor of being a *polarized conservative populist* (G2) and a *polarized liberal populist* (G4), but not a *polarized strong conservative populist* (G3) as anticipated. Indeed, the coefficients show that supporting democracy as the best form of government has a positive and statistically significant impact on the probability of being a *polarized liberal*

*populist* (G4), whereas having a greater preference for a strong leader is a predictor of being a *polarized conservative populist* (G2). This means that individuals in the group of *polarized liberal populists* are identified by their stronger support for a democratic regime as an ideal form of government, whereas individuals in the group of *polarized conservative populists* are characterized by their tendency to support a strong leader. In turn, membership in the other two classes (namely the *non-partisan conservative populists* and the *polarized strong conservative populists*) is not associated with differential levels of democratic support.

Focusing on the two classes that are better predicted by their distinct level of support for democracy, it is interesting to note that age represents a relevant predictor with, again, an opposing effect in the two subgroups. Thus, as the graph shows, the *polarized conservative populists* (G2) are more likely to be younger voters, whereas the *polarized liberal populists* (G4) are more likely to be the elderly. This indicates that holding populist views, conservative cultural values, and being affectively polarized is particularly harmful for democracy when this attitudinal pattern is maintained by younger individuals. This is consistent with the fact that the group of *non-partisan conservative populists* (G1) is also associated with younger age groups, and the group of *polarized strong conservative populists* (G3) is associated with older age groups, although, as already noted, neither of these two groups are predicted by their differential level of democratic support.

3 This probability is a continuous variable that ranges from 0 to 1.

4 Table A.2 in the Appendix presents the full regression output.

Other sociodemographic characteristics are also of interest. For instance, the *polarized conservative populists* (G2) are not distinguished from the rest of the sample by any particular ideological leaning, and they show a lower tendency to support Vox. This sociodemographic profile is indeed shared with the group of *non-partisan conservative populists*, who are also more likely to be from younger age groups. The *polarized strong conservative populists* are the only group with a higher tendency to vote for Vox and, in line with this, are situated further to the right of the ideological scale than any other social group. To finish, the *polarized liberal populists* are more left-wing and highly educated than the rest.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This paper has focused on analyzing three phenomena that, in recent years, have been putting European liberal democracies under strain: polarization, populism, and cultural backlash. Accounts of the three phenomena tend to highlight the multiple connections and mutual effects they have on each other. Across western democracies, polarization has been on the rise due to increased social sorting along partisan lines and greater ideological distance between parties. This scenario of increasing social and ideological polarization has ultimately paved the way for the success of populist parties all over Europe. At the same time, populist parties advocate extreme policy positions, thus contributing to the divisions between political camps growing deeper. Thus, populist parties benefit from existing societal polarization, and at the same time they fuel and receive high levels of affective polarization. In turn, according to one widely quoted account (Norris and Inglehart, 2019), the emergence of radical-right populist parties is also connected to the socially conservative counter-revolution, which has brought the advocacy of old social values to the forefront of political confrontation. Some of these social conservative values, such as sexism and nativism, have indeed been identified as core drivers of radical-right populist voting (Anduiza and Rico, 2022; Mudde, 2007).

Given the connection between the three phenomena, and the negative effects they are said to have on democratic principles, in the preceding pages we have raised the question of the extent to which populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization are connected at the attitudinal level, and how they affect individuals' support for democracy as an abstract value. In particular, our main interest has been to analyze whether populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization are combined at the level of attitudes, as the literature conventionally assumes, and whether those individuals who consistently hold strong populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and are affectively polarized tend to be less supportive of democracy than other

individuals. To do so, we have used an original survey conducted in Spain which contains several batteries of questions that tap into our theoretical attitudinal attributes of interest.

We started our analysis by exploring whether our survey items effectively measure the three underlying factors they seek to encapsulate and what the connection of the three dimensions with democratic legitimacy is. The results of the multivariate analysis (OLS model) have shown that cultural backlash is the most serious concern for democratic legitimacy when the three attitudinal orientations are examined as analytically distinct phenomena and are all controlled for each other.

Our main interest in this study has been to identify social groups in our sample according to their combination of attitudes toward populism, cultural backlash, and like/dislike toward out-group parties. Applying LCA, the results confirmed our expectation that there is a (sufficiently large) subgroup of respondents who have strong populist attitudes, support conservative cultural values, and are affectively polarized, which we have named *polarized strong conservative populists*. Along with this group, the LCA identified three other social subgroups who share different combinations of the three attitudinal orientations, and we named these groups *non-partisan conservative populists*, *polarized conservative populists*, and *polarized liberal populists*. Next, we analyzed whether membership in the subgroup of *polarized strong conservative populists*, which accounts for around 20% of the sample, can be better predicted by their lower tendency to support democracy as the best form of government than membership in the other groups.

Contrary to the theoretical expectations, we found that the *polarized strong conservative populists* do not display significantly higher undemocratic leanings than the other subgroups, at least when asked about their abstract support for democracy as the best form of government. By contrast, the group of *polarized conservative populists*, who share a similar profile with our group of interest, though with slightly weaker support for cultural conservative values, is the only group that displays stronger preferences for an unchecked leader who does not have to bother with elections. Given that one of the main sociodemographic determinants of membership in this latter group is being from younger age groups, we can reasonably conclude that it is the combination of the three attitudinal characteristics—namely populist attitudes, cultural backlash values, and affective polarization—and being of a young age which leads individuals to question democratic legitimacy.

Whether this finding should be seen as a matter of concern for the future of democracy, however, remains an open question. Some could argue that these young citizens with undemocratic leanings will end up turning their negative affections toward democracy into

positive affections as a result of the normal life cycle, thus resembling the group of *polarized strong conservative populists*. Others could claim, however, that our young citizens are socializing today in democratic environments marked by frequent populist rhetoric—including sexist and anti-immigrant discourses—and increasing political and affective polarization, which might have a significant impact on their democratic commitment in the long run. Only new longitudinal evidence could help answer this critical question for the future of our democratic systems.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors of this article declare that they have no financial, professional or personal conflicts of interest that could have inappropriately influenced this work.

## AUTHORSHIP CONTRIBUTION STATEMENT

**Irene Palacios Brihuega:** Conceptualization, Formal analysis, Investigation,

Methodology, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – review & editing.

**Antonio Garrido Rubia:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Writing – original draft, Writing – editing.

**Antonia Martínez Rodríguez:** Conceptualization, Project administration, Writing – original draft.

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## APPENDIX

This Appendix presents the results of the robustness checks of the latent class analysis and displays the full regression outputs of the performed OLS models. First, Figures A1–A2 present the main results of the latent class analysis adopting a 3- and a 5-class solution, respectively. Second, Tables A1–A2 show the full regression outputs of the OLS models displayed in Figures 2 and 4 in the main text.

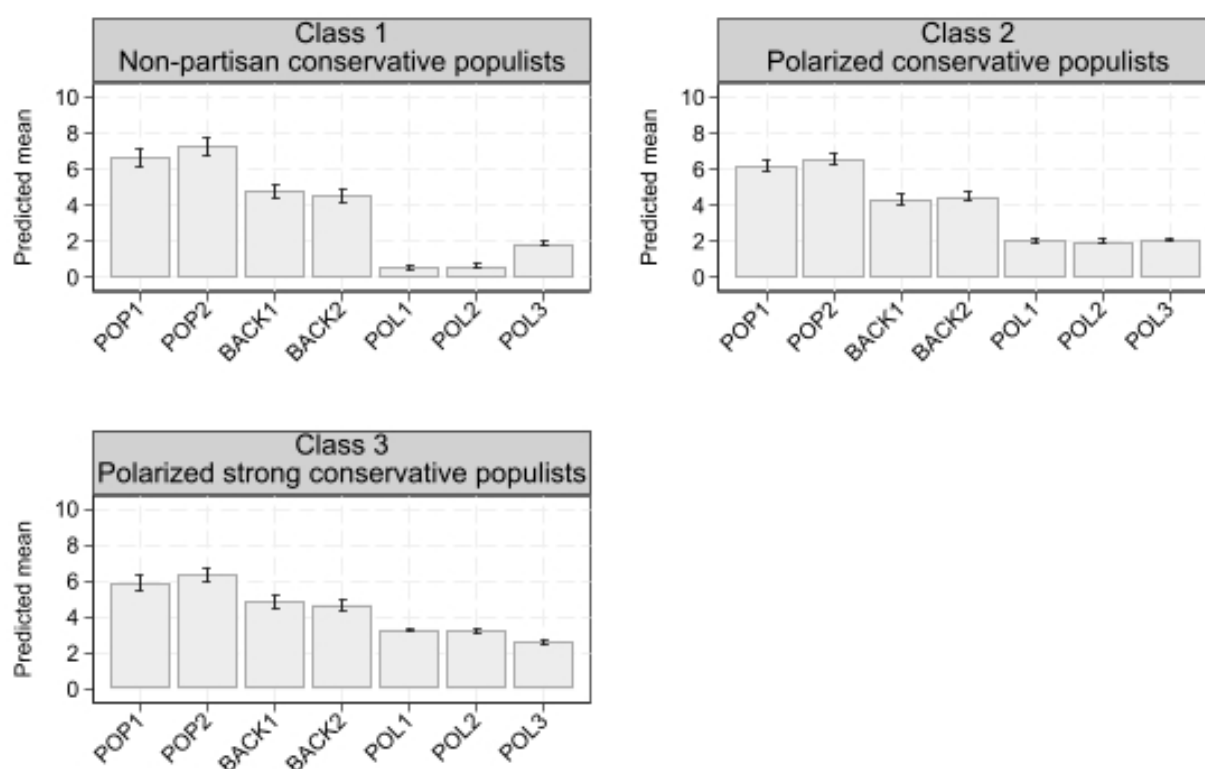
### ROBUSTNESS CHECKS. LATENT CLASS ANALYSIS WITH 3 AND 5 LATENT GROUPS

The main text presents a latent class analysis with four latent social subgroups. The reason to use a 4-class analysis is that the Bayesian Information Criterion (BIC) for 4 classes was significantly higher than for the 2 and 3 classes groups, and only slightly

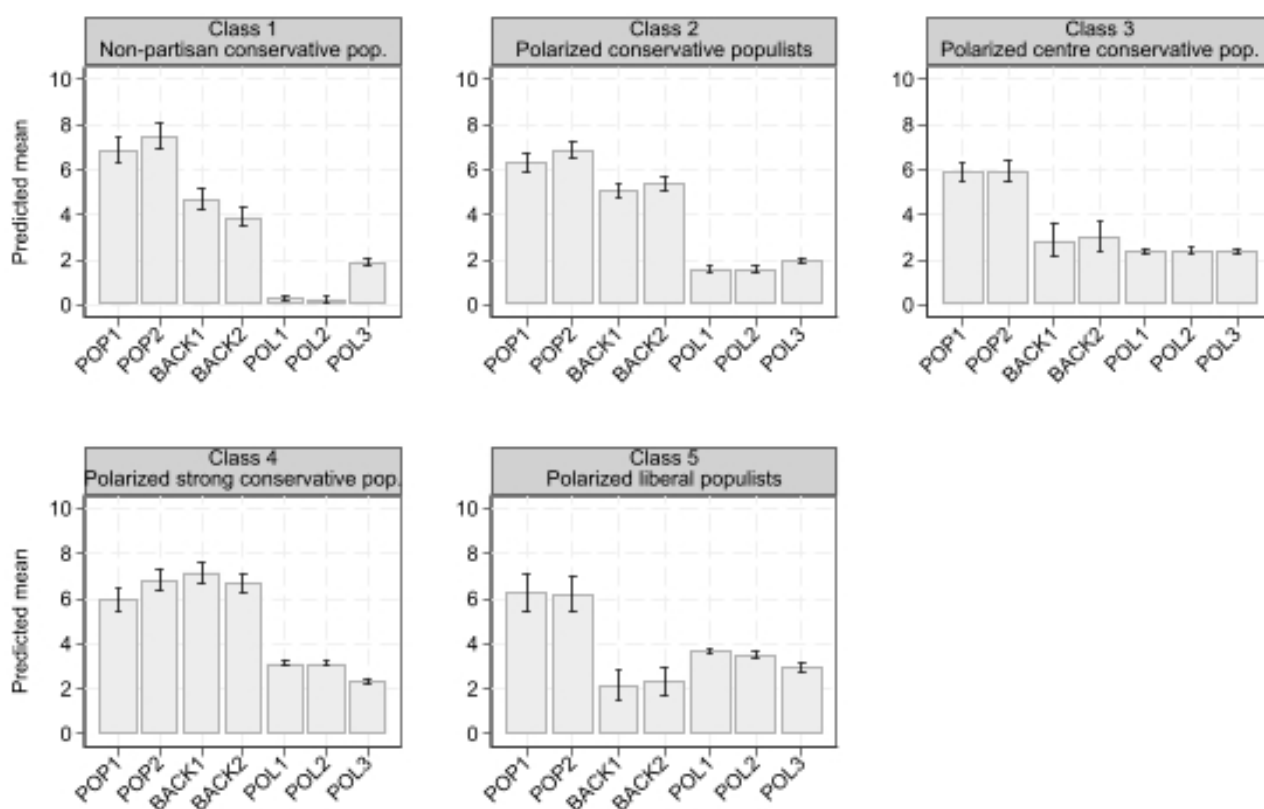
smaller than the 5 classes group. Furthermore, the 4 classes group was more parsimonious than the 5 classes group. As we show below, in both the 3- and the 5-class groups we see the appearance of the same subgroups of *polarized strong conservative populists*, which is the focus of our study, and the *polarized conservative populists*, who are similar to the previous group but younger.

Figure A.1 presents the main results of the 3-group latent class analysis. Just as in Figure 3 in the main text, the bars represent the marginal means of the seven observed variables, conditional on being in the three classes. The results demonstrate that the 3-class analysis uncovers the same three first groups (G1–G3) identified in the 4-class analysis, though the group of *polarized liberal populists* (G4) disappears. Another difference is that the group of *polarized strong conservative populists* (G3) does not display

**Figure A1.**  
3-group latent-class analysis.



**Figure A2.**  
5-group latent-class analysis.



such strong support for conservative cultural values as in the 4-class analysis.

Figure A.2 presents the main results of the 5-group latent class analysis. The main difference with the 4-class analysis is that the 5-class analysis uncovers an additional group which could be classified in-between the groups of *polarized conservative populists* and the *polarized liberal populists*. We have named this group *polarized centre conservative populists*, as they show a stronger support for conservative cultural values than the *polarized conservative populists* but weaker support than the *polarized liberal populists*. The rest of the groups remain very similar.

#### FULL OLS MODELS FROM FIGURES 2 AND 4.

Tables A1-A2 present the full regression outputs of the models graphed in Figures 2 and 4 in the main text. Table A1 shows the OLS coefficients of the three latent variables on populist attitudes, cultural backlash and affective polarization from the exploratory factor analysis regressed on democratic support. Table A2 shows the OLS coefficients of the models that predict membership in the 4 groups identified in the LCA.

**Table A1.**

Full output from Figure 2. OLS coefficients of populist attitudes, cultural backlash and affective polarization on democratic support.

| VARIABLES                      | Democratic Support |
|--------------------------------|--------------------|
| Factor: Populist attitudes     | 0.20**<br>(0.09)   |
| Factor: Cultural battles       | -0.39***<br>(0.10) |
| Factor: Affective Polarization | -0.11<br>(0.08)    |
| Age                            | 0.01*<br>(0.01)    |
| Woman                          | 0.13<br>(0.17)     |
| Level of education             | 0.36**<br>(0.14)   |
| Ideology                       | -0.12***<br>(0.05) |
| Constant                       | 8.31***<br>(0.50)  |
| Observations                   | 1,046              |
| R-squared                      | 0.06               |

Robust standard errors in parentheses

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

**Table A2.**  
*Full output from Figure 4. Probability of membership in each latent group (OLS models).*

| VARIABLES          | Class 1<br>Non-partisan conservative<br>populists | Class 2<br>Polarized conservative<br>populists | Class 3<br>Polarized strong conser-<br>vative populists | Class 4<br>Polarized liberal populists |
|--------------------|---------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------|
| Democratic support | -0.00<br>(0.00)                                   | -0.01**<br>(0.00)                              | 0.00<br>(0.00)                                          | 0.01**<br>(0.00)                       |
| Age                | -0.00***<br>(0.00)                                | -0.00***<br>(0.00)                             | 0.00***<br>(0.00)                                       | 0.00***<br>(0.00)                      |
| Woman              | -0.00<br>(0.02)                                   | 0.00<br>(0.02)                                 | -0.00<br>(0.02)                                         | 0.00<br>(0.02)                         |
| Level of education | -0.04***<br>(0.01)                                | 0.01<br>(0.02)                                 | -0.00<br>(0.01)                                         | 0.04***<br>(0.01)                      |
| Ideology           | 0.00<br>(0.00)                                    | -0.00<br>(0.01)                                | 0.04***<br>(0.00)                                       | -0.04***<br>(0.00)                     |
| Vote Vox           | -0.11***<br>(0.03)                                | -0.15***<br>(0.04)                             | 0.29***<br>(0.03)                                       | -0.03<br>(0.03)                        |
| Constant           | 0.38***<br>(0.06)                                 | 0.73***<br>(0.08)                              | -0.21***<br>(0.05)                                      | 0.10*<br>(0.06)                        |
| Observations       | 1,173                                             | 1,173                                          | 1,173                                                   | 1,173                                  |
| R-squared          | 0.03                                              | 0.03                                           | 0.24                                                    | 0.11                                   |

Robust standard errors in parentheses

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