Populist Discourse and Civic Culture: Insights from Latin America

Julián Martínez Ramos

University of Salamanca, Spain

Latin American Social Sciences Faculty (FLACSO España)

julian.martinez.r@gmail.com

Based on the concept of Civic Culture, the aim of this paper is to understand how the political discourse of populist leaders affects citizens' orientations towards the political system. Latin America offers some of the most representative cases of populism, as well as significant negative cases, where populism has not occurred. Using the comparative method, this paper identifies differences between the governing styles of two Latin American leaders in order to provide clues about the causes of populism. First, the study establishes a theoretical framework through a review of the links between populism and political culture. Second, it analyzes the content of the political discourses of two presidents in Latin America: Rafael Correa and Jose Mujica. The former is considered a case of a populist regime, while the latter considered is a case of the non-occurrence of populism. Quantitative discourse analysis reveals two aspects of these leaders' discourses: Correa and Mujica manage different rhetoric depending on the audience they are appealing to (the international community versus citizens of their countries), but the issues contained in the discourses are quite different. Third, in order to measure the effects of those populist discourses, the study compares citizens' political culture before and during the presidents' terms. The data used in this paper was taken from the Latin America Public Opinion Project (LAPOP). Changes in citizens' attitudes and orientations towards democracy could reveal the impact of populist frames that leaders develop in their political discourses. This suggests that interesting clues about populism's causes and effects could be located in the relationship between political discourses and political culture in similar countries.

Keywords: Populism, Civic Culture, Political Discourse, Attitudes.

Introduction and theoretical frame: Latin America's Left Turn, Populism and Civic Culture

In the late 1990s, Latin American countries experienced a widespread shift in the ideological preferences of their governments. As Levitsky and Roberts (2011) have pointed out, this 'turn' began with the election of Hugo Chavez in Venezuela in 1998 and continued over the next decade in each subsequent election of the leaders of the 'Latin American left turn'. Currently, two-thirds of Latin American presidents belong to this group. The success of leftist leaders stemmed from the financial crisis, social inequality, and the poor economic performance of the countries due to pro-

market measures implemented by right wing governments in previous decades (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 2, 9). This new left stormed onto the political scene with a discourse of renewal of the old struggles of their predecessors in the seventies. The main features of their rhetoric were equality, equity, redistribution and extensive state involvement in the economy, as well as the rejection of neoliberal policies (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). In this context, Rafael Correa and José Mujica's first elections occurred in 2006 and 2009, respectively.

Despite these similarities, not all Latin America's leftist governments can be considered equivalent. At least two elements highlight the differences among them. On the one hand, their discourses express two different types of ideological positions with respect to the political system they inherit: extreme leaderships (those who propose a break with the political system) and moderate leaderships (those who propose measured economic reforms). In a left-right spectrum, leaders like Chavez in Venezuela or Correa in Ecuador are located towards the extreme left, while Bachelet in Chile is located towards the moderate center. On the other hand, left-turn presidents show wide differences in their political styles, or the way they dramatize their political goals. Differences in their charismatic leadership are obvious. One can recognize prominent populist features in leftist leaders like Chavez in Venezuela or Correa in Ecuador, while presidents such as Morales in Bolivia, Bachelet in Chile and Mujica in Uruguay show more moderate characteristics (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). Moreover, Levitsky and Roberts (2011) propose a typology of left governments in Latin America based on two dimensions: (1) the level of institutionalization and (2) the *locus* of political authority. "The first dimension distinguishes between established party organizations and new parties or movements. […] The second dimension distinguishes between parties or movements that concentrate power in the hands of a dominant personality and those that disperse power more broadly within a party organization or social movement networks." (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 12). This implies Correa and Mujica's governments are located on opposite sides of the authors typology (*Fig. 1).*

	Establishes Party Organization	New Political Movement
Dispersed Authority	**Institutionalized partisan Left** Electoral profesional Left (PSCH in Chile, PT in Brazil) Mass-Organic Left (Broad Front in Uruguay)	**Movement Left** Mas in Bolivia
Concentred Authority	**Populist Machine** Peronism with Kirchner in Argentina, FSLN in Nicaragua	**Populist Left** Chávez in Venezuela, Correa in Ecuador.

Fig. 1. A typology of governing left parries in Latin America, (Taken from Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 13)

Populism does not only belong to leftist governments or leaders. Nevertheless, a comparison of cases of the occurrence and non-occurrence of populism in "the same" ideological spectrum could help us to understand its causes and effects. Indeed, beyond the description of Latin American leftist governments, we are focused on the populist features its leaders express (or don't).

Literature concerned about the relation between populism and democracy can be summarized as two opposing perspectives: populism as a threat to democracy and populism as a reinforcer of democracy. These perspectives come from views of democracy as an individual's right (liberal democracy) or democracy as the rule of majority, respectively (Rivas Otero, forthcoming). For instance, De la Torre (2013: 27) notes that populism affects the relation between people and political institutions because it promotes "direct communication channels between the leader and 'his people'", rather than participative forms of democracy. Notwithstanding this discussion, Panizza (2008) points out the limits of both perspectives:

> "Those who argue that populism is fundamentally democratic because
> it gives voice to the excluded and claims for popular sovereignty,
> should consider all cases of movements and populist regimes that have
> not been democratic. On the other hand, those who argue that
> populism is a degeneration of democracy should consider the genuine
> popular support enjoyed by populist leaders" (Panizza, 2008: 83).

In the intense but inconclusive debate about the concept of populism, many authors have highlighted the confusion and disagreement about this concept in the literature (Weyland, 2001, Jansen 2011, de la Torre, 2013). This paper adopts the approach that defines populism as a political style[1] that focuses on the expressive aspects of leaders, such as their political discourse (Weyland, 2001; Laclau 2005; de la Torre, 2013; Mudde, 2004, Freidenberg, 2007, Hawkings, 2009). Thus, populism could be defined as "the top-down political mobilization of mass constituencies by personalistic leaders that challenge established political or economic elites on behalf of an ill-defined *pueblo,* or "the people"" (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011: 6). Additionally, the political style perspective underlines the "Manichean discourse that polarizes society between two antagonistic sides: people and oligarchy" (de la Torre, 2013: 26). We consider this approach effective to tackle the main object of this study: political discourse and its effects on citizens' attitudes towards democracy and institutions.

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1   For a complete discussion about the concept of populism see Weyland, 2001.

The question about how populist discourse affects citizens' attitudes still remains. Recently, an interesting experimental study of the reception of populist style and rhetoric among voters found that populist style affects citizens' attitudes (Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2012). To better understand how populism engages with citizens' attitudes and perspectives in democracies, we took a look into the main lines of Almond and Verba's classic work *The Civic Culture* (1963). This seminal study departs from a psycho-political perspective that stresses the subjective ways through which citizens relate to the political system. To be more precise, the concept of *political culture* "refers to the specifically political orientations-attitudes toward the political system and its various parts, and attitudes toward the role of the self in the system" (Almond and Verba, 1963: 12).

It is puzzling that *The Civic Culture* has not been widely exploited to understand populism at a cognitive level, even when it provides rich lines of analysis. In a few words, Almond and Verba (1963) propose three types of political culture based on cognitions, feelings and evaluations of two elements of political systems—inputs (participative institutions, political process) and outputs (administrative process). The first type of political culture is referred to as *Parochial*. It shows almost zero orientation to either political process or administrative process. In consequence, political roles are neither clear nor specialized. Religious, economic and political roles are shared across the head-members of the society. In the second type of political culture, referred to as *Subject,* the administrative process becomes clear. Citizens recognize authorities and rules in society but do not participate in the decision-making process. Finally, *Participant* political culture "is one in which the members of the society tend to be explicitly oriented to the system as a whole and to both the political and administrative structures and processes" (Almond and Verba, 1963: 18). This type emphasizes the active role of individuals in society and in decision-making processes.

These political cultures are ideal types and, according to the authors, societies display mixed political cultures. One of the mixed political cultures is particularly interesting for this study: the s*ubject-participant political culture.* In this type, one part of society is oriented toward active participation, while the other only recognizes the outputs of the authorities. This is important because the authors state that populism could be found in regimes with this sub-type of political culture. They stress that "political systems with mixed subject-participant cultures tend to have populistic overtones" (Almond and Verba, 1963: 25-26). Almond and Verba appear to perceive populism as a threat to democracy. Regardless of their perspective on this particular point, their work to link political culture and populism opens an interesting field of exploration.

Methodological Approach

This study could be considered our first approach to understanding the relationship between

populist discourse and political culture. Accordingly, it shows exploratory analyses and intends to find the key features of the problem rather than stating firm conclusions about it. The research design is based on a comparative multi-method strategy with two cases. Some authors name this research design as a case study or cross-case study (Goertz, 2013; Gerring, 2007). The logic that underlines this research design prioritizes the difference between cases and the representativeness of each case (Goertz, 2013). Gerring (2007) argues that "cases must be similar to each other in whatever respects might affect the causal relationship […], or such differences must be controlled for" (Gerring, 2007: 50).

Following this logic, we compare two different cases within the same universe (populist and non-populist leaders from leftist governments in Latin America) and measure variations (in political culture) within each case and across cases. As mentioned previously, the cases are the governments of Rafael Correa in Ecuador and José Mujica in Uruguay. Both simultaneously represent Latin America's left turn, while also demonstrating the differences in the populist discourse of its leaders and the political cultures they manifest. We aim to find clear differences on this variable. Our theoretical approach suggests that, despite being part of the same ideological spectrum, Correa is a populist leader while Mujica is not. Empirical evidence of their political discourses should allow us to assess that assumption.

In addition, we compare the political cultures of both countries to identify differences before and after the governments of Correa and Mujica, respectively. We hypothesize that populist discourse will affect citizens' political orientations and attitudes toward democracy. Accordingly, we expect to find that after many years of exposure to Correa's populist discourse, political culture in Ecuador is a close approximation to the description of the mixed *Parochial-Subject* type proposed by Almond and Verba (1963). Conversely, we expect that political culture in Uruguay does not result in changes of political orientations as far as society has not been exposed to populist discourse.

To measure political discourse, we collected presidential speeches that Correa and Mujica delivered. These speeches were taken from office web pages, independent projects and the media[2]. Due to availability and time constraints, we collected 19 of Correa's speeches across his eight years in office (10 addressed to the international community and 9 to Ecuadorian citizens) and 9 of Mujica's speeches from his five years in office (4 addressed to the international community and 5 to Uruguayan citizens)[3]. We then used a quantitative discourse analysis software[4] to observe the

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2   Rafael Correa's speeches were taken from presidencia.gob.ec/discursos/ while José Mujica's speeches were taken from the project www.beersandpolitics.com/discursos/ and from http://www.sermedico.com.uy/calidad/-/asset_publisher/yOaHEc6P1wBP/content/lea-el-discurso-completo-de-mujica
3   However is important to note that, like in quiantitative sampling, more text will not add more relevant data in favor of better inferences.

discursive features of each leader discourse. This tool allowed us to not only observe the occurrence of words, but also establish categories and "rhetorical distances" between leaders through cluster analysis and similarity analysis.

The other variation we looked for was differences in the political culture of Ecuadorian and Uruguayan citizens. To do so, we used survey data from the Latin American Public Opinion Project[5] across four points of time to observe variation in the political culture of each country. We studied two surveys before the election and two surveys after the election of Correa and Mujica, respectively. In order to assess the configuration of political culture and in line with most political culture studies based on survey data (i.e.: Silver, 2000) we observed indicators on the following topics: Political System Support, Tolerance, Positive-Negative Participation, and Democracy. Not all of the indicators of these dimensions have been processed, but we believe the most important ones are included in this study (See Appendix 1 for details about codes and questions for each indicator and the dimensions used in this study). LAPOP uses a stratified, multi-stage cluster sampling method. Stratification is based on factors such as urban/rural areas and regions to improve the quality of the data[6].

Results

Quantitative discourse analysis of Correa and Mujica's speeches confirms that both presidents demonstrate differences in their political styles. We note that they adjust the content of their speeches depending on whether the audience is the international community or the citizens of their respective countries. Beyond the obviousness of this fact, quantitative discourse analysis shows that these differences depend not just on the audience, but also the preferences of the leaders themselves. For example, the 12 most frequent words each leader uses establish large distances among their political styles (*Fig. 2)*. For instance, when Correa talks to an international audience, his most frequent words are: 'capital', 'international', 'ours', 'America', 'regional', 'unite', 'bank'. When he talks to his fellow citizens, in contrast, the most frequent words are: 'law', 'remove', 'Ecuadorian', 'revolution', 'public', 'salary', 'family', 'homeland', among others. In turn, when Mujica talks to an international audience he frequently uses the following words: 'life', 'civilization', 'man', 'world', 'struggle', 'planet', 'capable', 'History', 'power', 'science'. However, when he talks to Uruguayans his

most frequent words are: 'nonconformity', 'intellectual', 'go', 'Uruguayan', 'intelligence', 'pleasure', 'party', 'go around', 'people', among others. Moreover, the words utilized most frequently by each president are unlikely to be utilized by the other.

Furthermore, quantitative discourse analysis seems to confirm the "material" component of populist political discourse (Hawkins 2009). It is possible to argue that 'real' actions and topics are used by populist discourse to provide a basis for polarization and confrontation. In other words, populist discourse works better with real issues to fight for (or against). This is observed in Correa's speech to the international community, in which he regularly refers to 'capital', 'banks', and 'development'. In contrast, Mujica talks about 'life', 'civilization', and 'History'. In turn, Correa's speeches to a national audience Correa focus on 'law', 'revolution', and 'salary', while Mujica's refer to 'nonconformity', 'intellect', and 'pleasure'. We can link these differences in rhetoric to 'material' and 'abstract', or non-material issues, respectively. These differences in content highlight more nuanced details of the political discourse of each president.
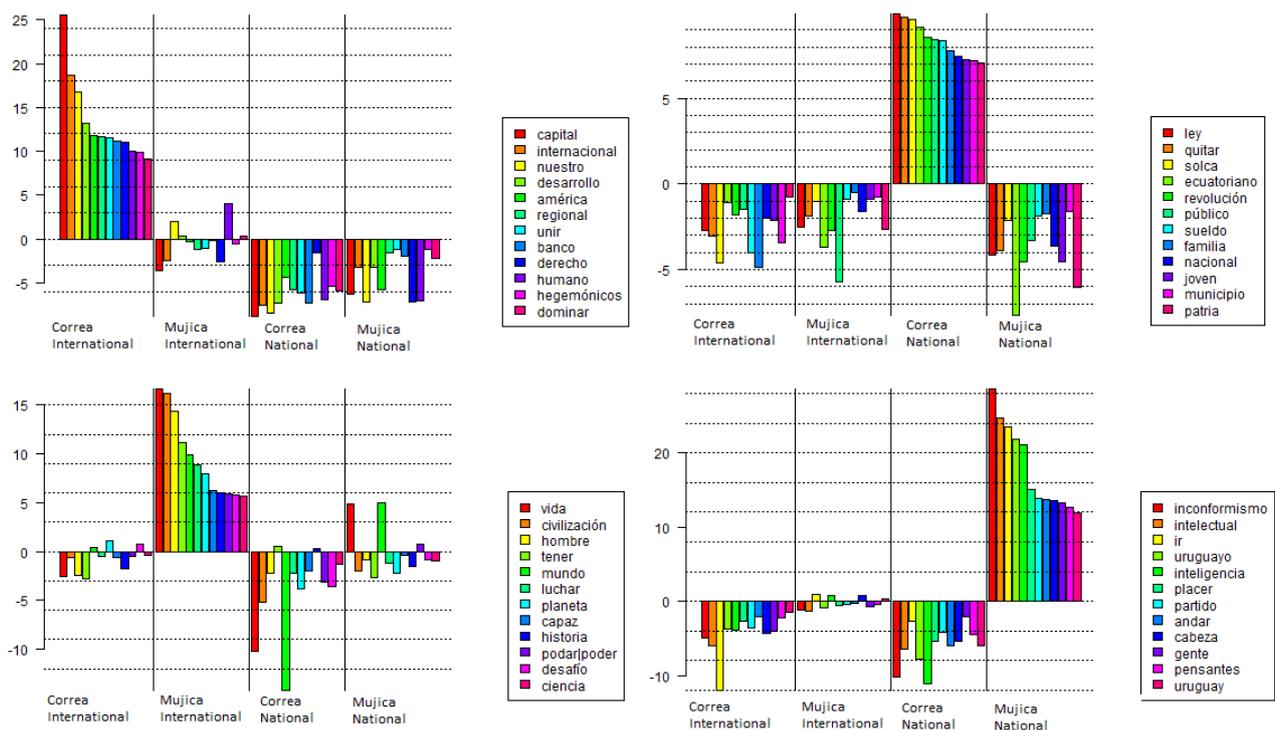

Fig. 2. Frequency of words of each president speeches to International and national audiences.

The correspondence factor analysis[7] shows that more 'distance' exists among Correa's speeches (international versus national) than among Mujica's speeches (international versus national). Moreover, there is a clear distance between the two leaders in general (*Fig. 3*). This

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7   This analysis associates texts with variables or modes, and allows to analyze texts according to characterization of the variables or modes (Camargo and Justo, 2016). For instance, modes are national an international, and texts corresponds to presidents. More information available in http://www.iramuteq.org/documentation

evidence seems to suggest that Mujica's political discourse is more coherent than that of Correa, and also provides empirical support of their classification as different types of leaderships (Levitsky and Roberts, 2011). Nevertheless, is not clear that the content of their political discourses reflect the features that other authors have pointed to as the main characteristics of populism: society polarization between the 'good' and the 'evil', and challenges to the elites. This particular finding could be related to Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese (2012) suggestion about the different effects of political rhetoric and style. In consequence, it appears that what defines a leader as a populist, at least from a discursive perspective, is not just what he or she says, but also how he or she expresses what they say. Beyond this discussion, we have enough evidence to suggest that Correa is a populist leader with respect to political discourse, while Mujica is not.
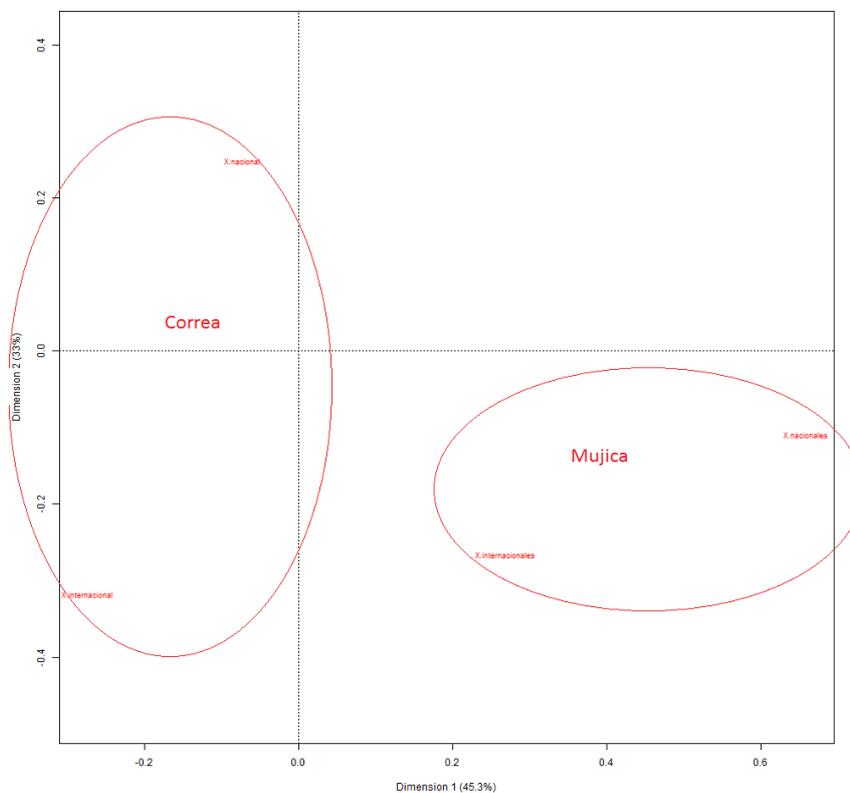
Fig. 3. *Correspondence Factor Analysis of Correa and Mujica discourses.*
Forms correctly classified: 78,3%.

With respect to variations in political culture, the results seem to disprove our hypothesis. (although they are not conclusive). As stated above, the measurement of political culture is based on the dimensions of Political System Support, Political Participation, Tolerance, and Support of Democracy from the LAPOP surveys (see Appendix 1 for detailed information). For the first three dimensions, the data show almost no changes across the whole period. Namely, there is almost no variation in political culture before and after the elections of Correa and Mujica, respectively.

However, variation is clearly evident across the other dimension and will be discussed below.

Based on the dimensions of Political System Support, Tolerance and Participation, we found modest variations in political culture in both countries across time. For example, the variance of Political System Support in Ecuador is 0.22, 0.07 for Tolerance, and 0.12 for Participation. In Uruguay the variances for the same dimensions are 0.05, 0.13, and 0.06, respectively. Standard deviations show the same pattern. These results could be strong evidence against our hypothesis. Indeed, if there is no variation in political culture after a period of exposure to populist discourse, then the discourse has no effect on citizen's attitudes.
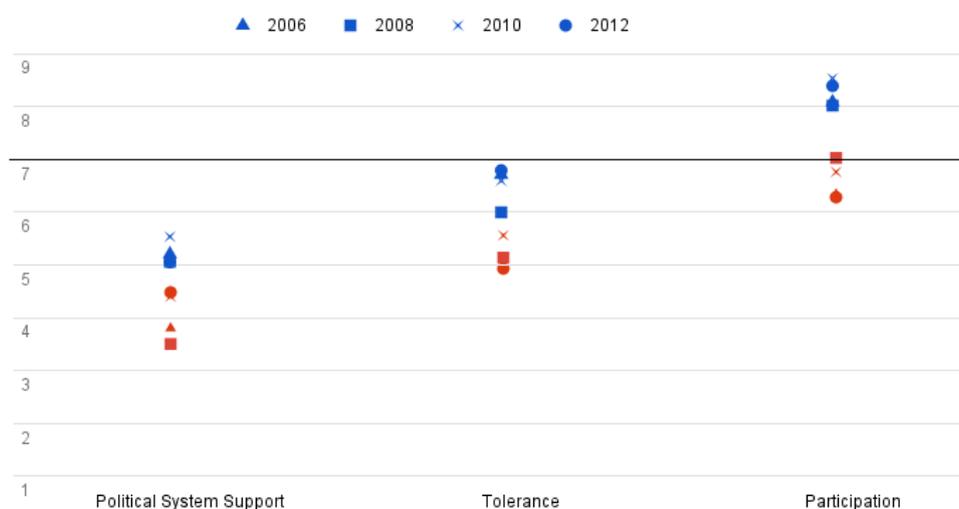

Fig. 4. Variations of political culture in two countries (Ecuador -red- and Uruguay -blue-) Each point is the result of the arithmetic mean of all of the indicators included on each dimension for a determinate year. Note that Political System Support is measured in a 1 – 7 scale, while Tolerance and Political Participation are measured in a 1 – 10 scale.

However, when we focus the remaining dimension, the data appears to show something different. We analyze separately the dimension of Support for Democracy because its response options are measured with dichotomous or ternary options rather than with a scale (i. e.: 1-7). In other words, the Support for Democracy dimension provides respondents with two or three mutually exclusive options for each question *(Fig. 5)*. This indicator reveals the proportion of people in a country that have chosen one option over others (usually respondents have to choose between democratic and non-democratic options). Thus, it is not possible to compare this dimension with those that ask for the degree of agreement or disagreement with respect to an affirmation.

The interesting insight from this data is the wide variation in Ecuador as compared to Uruguay. Standard deviations confirm that while Support for Democracy remains almost the same in Uruguay across the last decade, it has experienced important changes in Ecuador. A brief

discussion of the first indicator, which asks if a government that rules with an iron fist or with everyone's participation is preferable, illustrates this divergent pattern. In Ecuador, the standard deviation of responses in Ecuador is 7.19, while in Uruguay it is 2.91. In the indicator with three excluding options ("For people like me it doesn't matter whether a regime is democratic or non-democratic"; "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government"; or "Under some circumstances an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one"), Ecuador has standard deviations of 6.09, 7.49 and 4.37, while Uruguay 0.92, 2.13 and 1.46, respectively. Finally, for the last pair of options (if a "strong leader that does not have to be elected" is preferable or if "electoral democracy, or the popular vote, is always best") Ecuador shows a standard deviation of 4.41 and Uruguay 0.55. It is clear that all of the indicators on this dimension show higher levels of variation in Ecuador than in Uruguay.
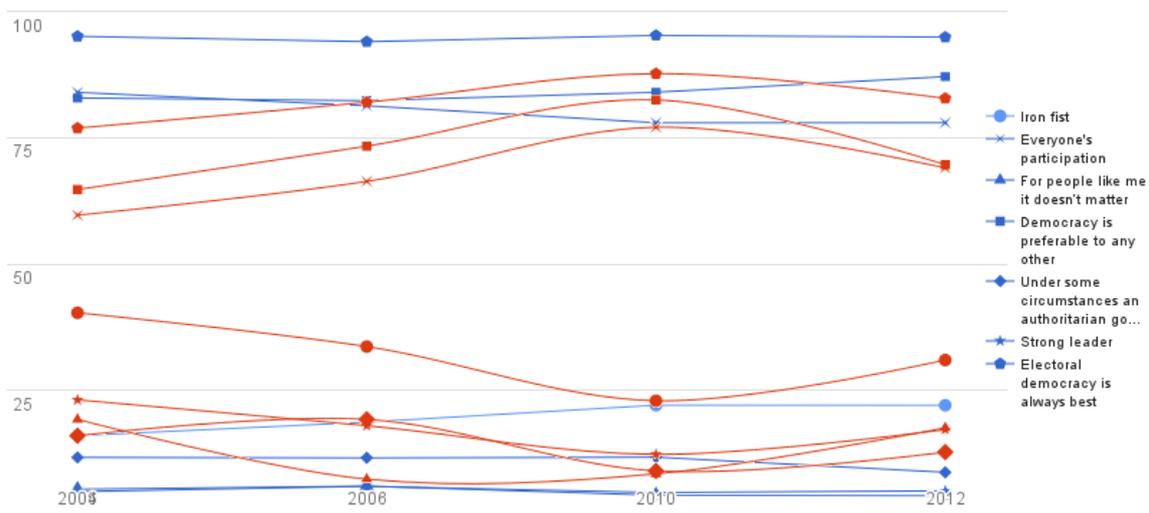
Fig. 5. *Variations in Support to Democracy indicators in two countries (Ecuador -red- and Uruguay -blue-). Note that the two first affirmations in the legend are paired within the same dichotomous indicator (i.e.: Iron fist versus everyone's participation), as well as the two last. Likewise, the three middle affirmations correspond to one indicator.*

In fact, it is interesting to note that before the election of Correa in Ecuador, almost 40% of the population preferred "a government that ruled with an iron fist" rather than "everyone's participation". This number decreased to 22.94% after Correa was first elected in 2006 and increased again to 31% in 2012. Similarly, 64,73% of Ecuadorians said that "Democracy is preferable to any other form of government" in 2004. This number increased to 82.47% in 2010, and then decreased to 69.64% in 2012. By contrast, Uruguayans show strong agreement over time across almost all indicators on Support to Democracy, particularly when asked if electoral democracy is better than strong leaders. The implications of thses results will be discussed in the

next section.

Conclusions

The partial refutation of our hypothesis suggests new questions about the relation between populist discourse and political culture. First, it is not clear that political discourse affects political culture in a particular society. On the contrary, it seems that a particular configuration of political culture is a necessary condition for the success of populist discourse. The question that arises is to what extent a particular configuration of political culture defines the features of the political system. Is this particular configuration of political culture a necessary condition for a more or less democratic political regime? Almond and Verba (1963) suggested that democratic stability rests on the correspondence between characteristics of political culture and political system.

Second, the unit of aggregation to measure political culture could be important. If we understand political culture as a particular configuration of people's attitudes, we should inspect as many different aggregations as possible, such as ethnic, class, education, ideology, etcetera (some studies on this perspective are Silver, 2000; Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2012). Further study along this line could consider variations in political culture, with special attention given to these "cleavages".

Third, as far as we followed a particular definition of populism, we didn't go into detail about the discussion of populism's casual mechanisms, yet we made an interesting approach through the concept of political culture. Our data analysis suggests rhetoric is not a defining feature of populist discourse. Namely, if we understand populist discourse defined by its polarizing and challenging features, these features are not present in the content of discourses. This finding corroborates the distinction between populist rhetoric and populist style (Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese, 2012). In any case, we believe further analyses of the micro level explanations of populism should explore the causal mechanisms focusing on psycho-political features like framing and social representations, among others.

Four, the different patterns of variation in the political cultures of Ecuador and Uruguay could be related to at least two facts. First, Ecuador experienced an economic and political crisis preceding Correa's election. A similar crisis did not occur before Mujica's election in Uruguay. This element suggests that stability of a democracy (economic and political) impacts the political culture and rise of populist leaders, appearing to confirm the medium level explanations about the causes of populism. Namely: "repeated economic crises and the worsening of economic inequality in the world has turned voters against mainstream parties for their failure to implement the necessary reforms and contain crisis. This argument has a particular resonance for the rise of

populism in developing countries, where democratic governance is relatively weak and corruption is both widespread and systematic. These conditions provide fertile ground for populist movements, which appear in cyclical fashion once democratic culture becomes the norm (de la Torre 2000, Hawkins 2010)" (Pappas and Hawkins, 2016: 2).

On the other hand, time has different effects in the two countries. Ecuador shows an interesting pattern of increase and decrease of democratic values across time, while Uruguay shows almost no changes. Among other causes, this variation could reflect different levels of satisfaction with political and economic outcomes in each country. If so, it is possible to argue the political system's stability does not explain everything about populism, but could be a necessary condition for its existence. Moreover, if we put together all these arguments, we could say that political stability and a participant political culture are necessary conditions for the non-occurrence of populism. To illustrate, the success of populist discourse seems very difficult in a country with strong institutions and with a people who share strong democratic values at the same time. Further research should explore this idea across more cases.

Finally, we subscribe to the methodological approach and tradition expressed by Hawkins (2009). "After all […] this is still an attempt to quantify what some may see as unquantifiable, and it glosses over important qualitative distinctions that we can only see by closely analyzing particular speeches". We maintain a positivist methodology to empirically assess the features and reasons of political phenomena. One last question remains after this discussion. If populist discourse succeeds only when it corresponds with a particular configuration of political culture, do we have the leaders we deserve?

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Appendix

Dimension	Code	Question	Scale
Political System Support	b2	To what extent do you respect the political institutions of (country)?	1 - 7
Political System Support	b3	To what extent do you think that citizens' basic rights are well protected by the political system of (country)?	1 - 7
Political System Support	b6	To what extent do you think that one should support the political system of (country)?	1 - 7
Political System Support	n3	To what extent would you say the current administration promotes and protects democratic principles?	1 - 7
Political System Support	ing4	Democracy may have problems, but it is better than any other form of government. To what extent do you agree or disagree with this statement?	1 - 7
Tolerance	d1	There are people who only say bad things about the (country) form of government, not just the incumbent government but the system of government. How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people's right to vote?	1 - 10
Tolerance	d2	How strongly do you approve or disapprove that such people be allowed to conduct peaceful demonstrations in order to express their views?	1 - 10
Tolerance	d3	Still thinking of those who only say bad things about the (country) form of government, how strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people being permitted to run for public office?	1 - 10
Tolerance	d4	How strongly do you approve or disapprove of such people appearing on television to make speeches?	1 - 10
Political Participation	e11	Of people working for campaigns for a political party or candidate. How much do you approve or disapprove?	1 - 10
Political Participation	e5	Of people participating in legal demonstrations. How much do you approve or disapprove?	1 - 10
Political Participation	e8	Of people participating in an organization or group to try to solve community problems. How much do you approve or disapprove?	1 - 10
Support to Democracy	dem2	With which of the following statements do you agree with the most: (1) For people like me it doesn't matter whether a regime is democratic or non-democratic. (2) Democracy is preferable to any other form of government. (3) Under some circumstances an authoritarian government may be preferable to a democratic one.	0-2
Support to Democracy	dem11	Do you think that our country needs a government with an iron fist, or that problems can be resolved with everyone's participation?	0-1
Support to Democracy	aut1	There are people who say that we need a strong leader that does not have to be elected. Others say that although things may not work, electoral	0-1

		democracy, or the popular vote, is always best. What do you think?	

Table 1. Dimensions of political culture. Taken from Latin American Public Opinion Project (2016)