Who Votes for Populist Parties in Latin America?

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Abstract

Much research has been done regarding the profile of the populist voter in Europe, however, we know less about the populist voter in Latin America. Populism can have backsliding effects on democracy Latin America, as a region has experienced populism throughout the 21st century, it is thus pertinent to understand the Latin American populist voter, i.e., know the voter's attitudes towards democracy, specifically towards the pillar norms of democracy. Following Van der Brug et al., this paper studies the attitudes of ten Latin American countries' voters towards democratic norms, dividing by populist voters, non-populist voters, and interaction between incumbent and populist voters. This study finds that, in Latin America, voting for populists does not result in lesser support of democratic norms, even if the populist is incumbent. In contrast, this research finds that voting for an incumbent (irrespective of populist status) does result in a statistically significant decrease in supporting democratic norms. This paper calls for further research into Latin America's voter profiles as well as more exhaustive datasets containing relevant information towards the study of democracy in the region.

Keywords

Populism, Democracy, Incumbency, Latin America, Backsliding

Introduction

It is known that populism can have democratic 'backsliding' effects on democracy (Ruth-Lovell and Grahn, 2022; Dussauge-Laguna, 2022; Lee, 2024; Levitsky and Loxton, 2013). Thus, it is important to know the mechanisms behind such backsliding capacity, for example if populist leader(s) drive such backsliding or whether it is the populist voters who permit such backsliding. This paper focuses on the study of bottom-up mechanisms towards populism. As such, we must first understand who votes populist, and what sort of characteristics does this voter have.

In Europe, the populist voter is known to have 'populist attitudes' (Akkerman et al., 2013, p. 1345). Populist attitudes entail, attitudes that follow the populist ideology, that is attitudes that are rooted in the "sovereignty of the people, opposition to the elite, and the Manichean division between 'good' and 'evil'" (Akkerman et al., 2013, p. 1331).

Despite having populist attitudes, the populist voters tend to have higher levels of support towards democracy in a general sense (Zalsove et al., 2021, p. 740), while supporting fewer concrete democratic norms—e.g. freedom

of speech (Van der Brug et al., 2021, pp. 138-140). As such, there is a sort of contradiction within the populist voter: a higher support for democracy in the general, and a lower support for the pillars of democracy.

Knowledge regarding the attitudes and characteristics of populist voters have mostly focused in Europe and the US, while research has been scant regarding the populist voter in Latin America, a region that has seen an increase in distinctly radical populism during the 21st century (De la Torre, 2017, pp. 200-201). The populist voter in Latin America is not homogenous (Moncagatta and Safranoff, 2013, p. 44), they can rather be divided into "convenience followers" and "hardcore supporters" (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214). Knowing that the backsliding capacity of populism in 'fragile democracies' (such as Latin American democracies) is more substantial (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013, pp. 110-112), it seems necessary to bring a fuller picture of the populist voter in Latin America.

Thus, this research aims to narrow the gap in knowledge about populist voters and their beliefs, whether they support anti-democratic norms as in Europe (Van der Brug et al., 2021, pp. 138-140) or whether the heterogenous composition in Latin America (Moncagatta and Safranoff, 2013, p. 44) also affects the appearance of a general pattern of populist voters' attitude toward democratic norms in the region.

Following Van der Brug and colleagues (2021), this research studies populist, incumbent, and incumbent populist voters' attitudes towards democratic norms in ten Latin American countries using the LatinoBarometro 2023 dataset (LatinoBarometro, 2023). No statistical significance is found between voting populists and supporting or opposing democratic norms. Voting for an incumbent does result in being opposed to one democratic norm, but not to all. Lastly, the interaction between populist and incumbent also results in no statistical significance. The findings call for further research in Latin America and the necessity of building a more extensive and exhaustive dataset representing Latin American voter beliefs.

Theoretical Framework

Populism is an ideology that divides society into two antithetical groups (a 'pure people' against 'the corrupt elite') and argues that the will of good people should be followed in politics (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). It is worth noting that other conceptualizations of populism exist, and that the concept is a contested one. This paper follows Mudde's conceptualization as this was the conceptualization used by Van der Brug and colleagues (2021), and by the available populist dataset. Using Mudde's conceptualization thus allows the present study to test the external validity. Results thus are specific to this conceptualization. Other possible conceptualizations refer to populism from a strategic point of view (see Weyland, 2021), or a form of discourse (see Katsambekis 2020).

Plenty has been written on the effects of populism and democracy (Ruth-Lovell and Grahn, 2022; Mansbridge and Macedo, 2019; Dussauge-Laguna, 2022; Pintsch et al., 2022; Lee, 2024). Some argue that it can be a corrective to democracy (Mansbridge and Macedo, 2019, p. 73). Others argue that it can be nocive to democracy for several reasons (Ruth-Lovell and Grahn, 2022; Dussauge-Laguna, 2022; Lee, 2024). Populists can shine a spotlight on sectors of a society that were previously excluded (Collier and Collier, 1991). As such, they "give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the elites" (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2012, p. 21). However, populism can push (fragile) democracies into authoritarianism because, first, populists are political outsiders that have little experience with institutions of representative democracy; second, successful populists earn an electoral mandate to bury the political establishment; third, newly elected populists generally confront hostile institutions of

horizontal accountability, that is, they fight against institutions that are in place to prevent autocratization (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013, pp. 110-112).

Despite our knowledge of populism and democracy, few have focused on the individual voter as the subject of study in populism. As Zaslove and colleagues (2021) mention, there is little data regarding the populist attitudes of people towards democracy (p. 730). Given that the democratic backsliding capacity of populism is known (Ruth-Lovell and Grahn, 2022; Dussauge-Laguna, 2022; Lee, 2024; Levitsky and Loxton, 2013), it is thus important to also understand whether voters of populist parties are unique in supporting practices that challenge democratic (liberal democratic) norms (Van der Brug et al., 2021, p. 131). One of the few studies found a significant and positive correlation between having populist attitudes and the intention to vote for a populist party (Akkerman et al., 2013, p. 1345). Another found that people holding populist attitudes are more likely to be more supportive of democracy, although minimally (Zalsove et al., 2021, p. 740). Additionally, through a study of 28 European countries, it was found that populist voters are more likely to support anti-democratic norms than non-populist voters (Van der Brug et al., 2021, p. 138). Moreover, rejection of liberal democracy's norms is stronger in populist voters whose candidate party is also incumbent as opposed to non-populist voters, and populist voters when the incumbent is not populist (Van der Brug et al., 2021, p. 140).

Current literature (as the above mentioned) focuses on Europe, while other researchers on the topic focus on regions such as the US (Castanho et al., 2023) or others (see Marcos-Harne et al., 2023, for a systemic review on the subject), research on populism in Latin America has been neglected. Populism in the 21st century in Latin America commonly took the form of radical left-wing populism (De la Torre, 2017, p. 200). The rise of populism can be explained by a crisis in political representation, widespread resistance to neoliberalism, and a perceived surrender of sovereignty to foreign elites (De la Torre, 2017, pp. 200-201). This came about only a few years into the democratization process of Latin America —the region entered a 'third' wave of democratization from the 1980s to the 2010s (Munck & Luna, 2022, p. 116). As of now, only three countries in Latin America can be understood to have a 'high quality' democracy: Chile, Uruguay, and Costa Rica (Munck & Luna, 2022, p. 179). As mentioned, populism can push 'fragile' democracies into authoritarianism (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013, p. 110). Thus, Latin America appears as a focal point of inquiry since the effects of populism on democracy could be most pernicious there. Indeed, "there is an overall negative relationship between populist rule and the quality of liberal democratic institutions" in Latin America (Lee, 2024, p. 18). This reflects an incompatibility between populist ideals and liberal democratic norms (Lee, 2024, p. 18).

Comprehensively, Latin America is adequately situated to be studied in the subject of populism because of three key aspects. First, the harmful effects of populism on democracy can be most felt in the region given the region's endemically low state capacity (Munck & Luna, 2022, p. 44; p.18). This is not exclusive to Latin America; other regions also have countries with low state capacity. What makes Latin America suitable is the abovementioned 'rise' in populism (De la Torre, 2017, pp. 200-201), in combination with the wide array of populist parties available to voters (Appendix, Table 2a). Thus there is both variation across countries and within countries which makes the statistical analysis suitable, and given the plausible effects, necessary.

In Latin America, support for populism can be understood by dividing populist voters into "convenience followers" and "hardcore supporters" (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214). The former are those who, for some reason

(economic, views on corruption, or performance of the country), decide to, at one specific point, support a populist candidate (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214). The latter refers to those who, for multiple reasons, at different points, support a populist candidate (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214). A precise and homogenous voter profile cannot be made of Latin American populist voters, but socioeconomic dissatisfaction seems to be at least a potential explanatory variable for left-wing populist support (Moncagatta and Safranoff, 2013, p. 44). Thus, we know fairly little of what the populist voter in Latin America believes regarding democracy. As such, following Van der Brug and colleagues., it is necessary to explore the beliefs of the populist voter in terms of democratic norms while simultaneously understanding that the Latin American populist voter is not entirely convinced of the populist ideas (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214) and that hence, it is plausible that European findings do not hold for Latin America.

Van de Brug and colleagues (2021) researched 28 European countries, and by doing so established certain characteristics of the individual in Europe who votes for populists. By testing their findings on a Latin American sample, we can assess the generalizability of their findings. Furthermore, this will provide a better understanding of the Latin American case and its specificities (as mentioned, a heterogenous voter profile). Specifically, Van der Brug and colleagues (2021) find that "populist party supporters are more inclined" to support a strong leader, "they are less likely to support an independent judiciary", and find less support for independent media "although here the difference between populists and nonpopulists is small" (pp. 138-139). They, however, find no statistical significance in support of freedom of speech. These principles are important to democracy as they ensure broad power-sharing, accountability, and freedom. Thus:

> H1: Populist voters support three democratic norms less than non-populist voters —limited leader, independent judiciary, and independent media (Van der Brug et al., 2021, pp. 138-139).

They also find that when testing for incumbent vs non-incumbent votes, in all the rubrics, incumbent voters support democratic norms less than those who vote in opposition (Van der Brug et al., 2021, p. 139). Hence:

> H2: Supporters of incumbent parties will support all democratic norms less than opposition supporters.

Lastly, when testing for the interaction between the incumbent vote and the populist vote (i.e, incumbent × populist), they find the status of incumbency matters more to populist voters than to non-populist voters (Van der Brug et al., 2021, p. 140). Supporters of incumbent populist parties showed the lowest support for all forms of democratic norms. Ergo:

> H3: Supporters of governing populist parties will show the least support for democratic norms compared to populist voters for non-incumbents, and non-populist voters.

While, as mentioned, the findings are specific to Europe, and it is known that Latin American populist voters are distinct and heterogenous, the testing of these hypotheses allows us to understand, within the heterogeneity of populist voters, if all or any of the democratic norms are held less than by non-populist voters.

Design and Method

Case Selection

Our understanding of the Latin American populist voter is relatively low compared to other regions. In contrast to other regions, state capacity and democratic quality in Latin America are endemically low (Munck & Luna, 2022, p. 44 & p. 180). Thus, research is necessary. Aside from the necessity, Latin America offers a suitable ground for populist research since, throughout this century it has experienced a rise in populism (Munck & Luna, 2022, pp. 248-249 & pp. 101-103).

Since no survey or dataset exists depicting the same variables as Van der Brug et al. (2021) use, the LatinoBarometro dataset was chosen as it includes several questions relating to the present investigation and has openly available information. LatinoBarometro is one of the few cross-national public opinion datasets covering Latin American countries on a frequent basis. For the 2023 dataset, "face to face interviews in 17 countries" were carried out "between February 20th to April 18" (LatinoBarometro, 2023).

The countries studied are: Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, and Venezuela. At the time of LatinoBarometro's interviews, these ten countries represented around 75% of the Latin American population. Exactly half of them, at the time of LatinoBarometro's interviews, had incumbent populist parties, while the remaining half did not (see Appendix for Table 2). As such, ten countries represent a just distribution in incumbent populist status. All the countries had at least one populist party, so measuring support for populist parties was possible in all of the countries.

Method

Van der Brug et al. (2021) find that the relationships hold significance even in alternative models and thus do not control for other variables in their paper (p. 137). Since a homogeneity of populist voters in Latin America does not seem possible, controlling for other variables appears necessary in this case. Control variables will be the same as Van der Brug et al. (2021) appendix controls, aside from EU-specific variables (e.g. South Europe or EU support). Hence, before having run binary logistic regression on the variables without controls, a binary logistic regression with control was carried out that determined whether the relationships hold significance. After running such regressions and seeing their significance this research did not proceeded with uncontrolled regressions, for controls showed no statistical significance.

Measures

Populist parties were identified through the 'Votes for Populist' dataset from the *Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*. "This dataset contains all national political parties [...] classified as populist" in Latin America (Grzymala-Busse et al., 2024). Parties in the dataset are coded following Mudde's criteria for populism, ensuring coherence throughout party identification. Given that the dataset is expert coded, it may induce some subjective biases such as classifying concrete political actors as (non) populists, which may not be widely agreed. Only parties present in 2023 were selected since LatinoBarometro's surveys were conducted through the first months of 2023 (LatinoBarometro, 2023). After making a list of the populist parties within each of the countries studied, the list was cross-referenced to LatinoBarometro's individual country 'results documents' to create a list of the non-populist parties in each country present in the survey (see Table 3 in Appendix).

Having identified the populist and non-populist parties, a dummy variable for populist parties was created to study the populist vote, stemming from the variable, "If elections were this Sunday, which party would you vote for?". This was the only variable from the dataset that revealed voter preference; as such, it is the most suitable. However, this is a proxy to the variable used by Van der Brug et al. (2021), wherein they retrieve concrete votes (p. 137). A value of 1 was assigned to populist parties and a value of 0 to non-populist parties.

No dummy variable was created for supporting the incumbent's party since the dataset already includes one, it was only recoded to show incumbent as 1 and nonincumbent as 0. For the interaction between populist and incumbent, a variable was computed by multiplying the populist dummy variable and the incumbent variable. As such, only populist incumbents received a score of 1, everyone else (non-incumbent populists, incumbents who are not populist, and non-populists) a score of 0.

Van der Brug et al. (2021) measure democratic support through four norms: (1) support of an independent judiciary, (2) support of freedom of speech, (3) support for media freedom, and (4) support for the limited executive (p. 136). Four proxy variables were used to measure these norms given that the LatinoBarometro did not contain the specific questions Van der Brug et al. (2021) used in their survey.

For support of an independent judiciary, the answers to "agree/disagree: Judiciary power must be independent from executive power", measured on a four-point Likert scale, recoded as 1-2 = against independent judiciary, and 3-4 as support of independent judiciary. To measure support for media independence, the question "agree/disagree: in case of difficulties, it is alright for the president to control the media", measured in a four-point Likert scale (1 strongly agree to 4 strongly disagree) recoded as 1-2 = support of independent media, and 3-4 as oppose independent media. Hence, a higher value will denote less support for the democratic norm of media independence. This question differs from Van der Brug et al. (2021, p. 136), but it also highlights the voter's perceived importance of an independent media.

For support of freedom of speech, a dummy variable was computed from the two variables which asked what was the most important aspect to respondents. If "freedom of speech" was chosen as the most important value or as the second most important, then a value of 1 was assigned. All other answers were assigned a value of 0. It is worth noting that this variable will not tell us whether they would protect freedom of speech in all circumstances or if the voter would be 'fine' with the executive limiting freedom of speech. Thus, when analysing, the results should be understood in that sense.

Lastly, for the norm regarding 'limited' executives (i.e., having constrains on the power of the incumbent), a variable was computed from the question "most important aspect of governing". A value of 1 was assigned to responses that had as the most important or second most important "to distribute powers in several institutions". All other responses were coded as 0. This proxy variable is suitable since it allows us to see whether voters think the executive should control or distribute power, if power is concentrated or shared; power-sharing is one of democracy's tenets.

To measure general support for democracy, the variable "Democracy may have problems, but it is the best system of government", to which respondents could answer on a 4-point Likert scale, which was recoded as 1-2 = 0 (no support) and 3-4 = 1 (support).

In accordance with the information found in the annex of the Van den Brug (2021) study we used the following control variables, the following variables were included as controls: satisfied with Democracy, Satisfied with Economy, Support Same-Sex Marriage, Upper Class, Middle Class, Unemployed, Religious, Female, Age, Secondary Education, Tertiary Education. All of these variables, except for age, were recoded as binary. That is, in the case of all (except for age) a 1 denotes a 'yes', for example, satisfied with the economy: 1 = yes.

Results and Analysis

Table 1 depicts support for democratic norms, as well as for democracy in general by all three independent variables, including control variables. Regarding H1: hypothesizing that populist voters support three democratic norms (limited executive power, independent judiciary, and independent media) less than non-populist voters—this research finds no statistical significance for the populist vote variable across all five models of democratic support. That is, voting for a populist candidate has no relationship to supporting an independent judiciary, nor on opposing media independence, nor in supporting free speech, nor in favouring a limited executive. Voting for populist is not significant with general support of democracy.

It is worth noting that the dataset used did not account for actual votes, but rather by voting preference. Hence, from the data and the findings it can be said that populist vote preference bears no relation to democratic norms. Given the lack of statistical significance with all models, H1 is rejected.

Regarding H2: hypothesizing that supporters of incumbent parties will support all democratic norms less than opposition supporters, statistical significance is found on one of the four democratic norms, opposing independent media (Model 2), and in the general support for democracy (Model 5). Voting incumbent has a positive and statistically significant relationship with opposing media freedom. This suggests that voting for an incumbent makes it more likely that the incumbent voter will be more receptive with the government meddling with the media in times of crisis than an opposition voter. This seems coherent since voters of a party are expected to show more confidence in such a party's ruling. Moreover, voting for incumbents also has a positive and statistically significant relationship with general support of democracy. Voting for incumbents makes it more likely to show general support of democracy. Hence, H2 is rejected. Voting for an incumbent does not make the voter less supportive of all democratic norms. From the data set it appears to only affect opposing media independence and supporting democracy in general, while not affecting support for an independent judiciary, for free speech or for a limited executive.

Turning to the interaction between populist and incumbent, and to H3: hypothesizing that supporters of governing populist parties will show the least support to democratic norms, there is no statistical significance across models. This suggests that voting for a populist incumbent does not affect support or opposition for any of the four democratic norms.

Table 1: Support for democratic norms and democracy in general by all three independent variables (including control variables)

	Model 1 Support Independent Judiciary	Model 2 Oppose Independent Media	Model 3 Support Free Speech	Model 4 Support Limited Executive	Model 5 Support for Democracy
Constant	.804(.23)***	-1.271 (.21)***	-.163 (.20)	.188 (.20)	-.676 (.023)**
Voted for Populist	.123 (.21)	.178 (.19)	.041 (.17)	-.230 (.18)	-.072 (.019)
Voted for Incumbent	.144 (.12)	.763 (.10)***	-.171 (.10)	-.045 (.10)	.657 (.013)***
Interaction Populist and Incumbent	-.308 (.25)	-.180 (.22)	-.160 (.21)	.035 (.21)	-.233 (.24)
Satisfied with Democracy	.259 (.11)*	.432 (.10)***	-.102 (.09)	.037 (.10)	1.17 (.12)***
Satisfied with Economy	.104 (.13)	.345 (.11)**	.111 (.10)	.020 (.11)	.414 (.15)**
Support Same Sex Marriage	.197 (.10) *	-.288 (.08)*	.242 (.08)**	.350 (.09)***	.588 (.10)***
Upper Class	-.312 (.24)	.835 (.24)***	.277 (.22)	-.469 (.23)*	-.515 (.024)*

Middle Class	.322 (.12) **	.101 (.11)	-.082 (.10)	.137 (.11)	.140 (.12)
Unemployed	-.191 (.12)	.011 (.10)	-.143 (.10)	.017 (.10)	.233 (.12)*
Religious	.009 (.12)	.474 (.12) ***	-.165 (.11)	-.170 (.12)	.087 (.13)
Female	-.128 (.1)	.458 (.10)***	-.015 (.08)	-.178 (.09)*	-.065 (.10)
Age	.002 (.003)	-.003 (.003)	.001 (.003)	.003 (.003)	.011 (.003)***
Secondary Education	-.130 (.10)	-.419 (.09)***	.136 (.09)	.185 (.09) *	.238 (.10)
Tertiary Education	.210 (.14)	-.910 (.12)***	.149 (.11)	.613 (.12)***	.590 (.14)***
N	2623	2733	2701	2604	2727

Notes: Table entries are logit coefficients with standard errors in parentheses; *** denote $p < 0.001$, ** denote $p < 0.01$, * denote $p < 0.05$.

It is worth remembering that voting for incumbents (regardless of being populist or not) is associated with the voter being more likely to oppose independent media in times of crisis. In this model, when the incumbent is populist, voters are not more likely to oppose independent media. This represents an area of great interest, as it could mean that trust decreases in the incumbent controlling the media in some people when the incumbent is populist, although this was not tested. The same is true for general support of democracy. As such, H3 is rejected as well. Indeed, incumbent effects on democratic support are not stronger on populist incumbents in Latin America, in this data set.

The constants in the five models represent the baseline log odds of supporting each democratic norm when all predictors are set to their reference values (0 in the case of all, e.g. Support same sex variable, reference is No = 0). In three out of the five models (Model 1: Independent Judiciary, Model 2: Independent Media, and Model 5: General Support of Democracy), the constants are statistically significant. Suggesting that, even in the absence of the predictors, there is a meaningful baseline likelihood of supporting these democratic norms. Interestingly, the variable voting incumbent shows opposing values to those of the constant, in the statistically significant models for it (Model 2 and Model 5). This further consolidates the findings of this paper regarding H2. Interestingly, general democratic support in Latin America appears to be low, while support for judicial independence, and opposition to controlled media is high. In addition, the constant is not statistically significant in Models 3 and 4 (supporting free speech, and supporting a limited executive respectively), indicating that the baseline likelihood of both dependent variables = 1 when all predictors are at their reference values is not clearly different from zero. Thus, support for these norms seem to be reliant on other predictors.

Turning to control variables, the variable ‘supporting same sex marriage’ has statistical significance across all models. Supporting same sex marriage has a positive relationship with supporting independent judiciary, a negative relationship with opposing independent media, a positive relationship with supporting free speech (and it is the only variable holding statistical significance), and a positive relationship with supporting a limited executive. As such, across all models, the strongest predictor for supporting all democratic norms is supporting same sex marriage. The strongest predictor for Model 1 (independent judiciary) was belonging to the middle class, although the strength of the relationship is not too high. For Model 2 (opposing independent media) the two strongest predictors were: having tertiary education, with a significant and negative relationship, and being upper class, with a significant and positive relationship. That is, those who are educated to the tertiary level will be more likely to oppose government meddling in the media, whereas those in the upper class will be more likely to support the government doing so. Model 4’s strongest predictor was also having tertiary education. As such, having attained tertiary education results in a higher likelihood of supporting a limited executive power.

Since the models are not statistically significant, uncontrolled models were not included, although they showed statistical significance. Furthermore, their standard deviations were close to zero, perhaps because of the small number of cases compared to the dataset used by Van der Brugge and colleagues (2021). Given the small number of cases, interval plotting was futile since they depicted no useful insights.

Having presented the findings and returning to the overarching knowledge gap this paper sought to narrow, the profile of the populist voter in Latin America does appear to continue being heterogeneous (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214), also in terms of their democratic support. It may be possible that disaggregating the populist voter variable

into “hardcore” and “convenience” voters (Azpuru, 2024, p. 214), may result in diverging attitudes towards democratic norms. However, in general, the profile of the populist voter in Latin America is complex.

Moreover, it cannot be said that Van der Brug et al. (2021) findings can be generalized outside of Europe. Latin American particularities regarding populism may be relevant to the relationship populism has to democracy in the region. Populism sprung from a crisis in political representation, widespread resistance to neoliberalism, and a perceived surrender of sovereignty to foreign elites (De la Torre, 2017, pp. 200-201). As such, the anti-establishment capitalized by populists in the region is not grounded against its democratic institutions. The findings also have important implications regarding the backsliding capacity of populism in Latin America. Since the voters for the populist party are not more likely to support anti-democratic norms, the democratic erosion process of populism in Latin American countries would seem to be principally top to bottom. As such, this calls for further research on the processes of elite-driven democratic backsliding.

Limitations

While this study provides valuable insights into the relationship between populist voting and democratic norms in Latin America, several limitations must be acknowledged. This research relied on LatinoBarometro’s dataset, and not on a specific survey for this research as did Van der Brug et al. (2021). As such, it is plausible that proxy variables do not represent the totality of the findings. Moreover, when creating the dummy variable of voting for populist parties, 60.5% of the cases appear as missing, because “would not vote” and “do not know” were coded as missing values in order to only represent actual vote intention in terms of populist vote or non-populist vote, and incumbent vote or non-incumbent vote (as opposed to populist vote or any other voter intention, and incumbent vote or any other voting intention). Imputation of missing cases was carried out, and results did not vary greatly. This results in a considerably smaller pool of cases in comparison to Van der Brug et al. (2021) who have around 21000 cases for each model, in comparison to 2 500 cases in this research. Using a similar number of cases could result in different, and more precise results. This research does not test for causation, but merely looks at the likelihood of an event happening as variables are binary. As such, the research does not distinguish between the strength of support in the democratic norms and voting populist, incumbent, or their interaction.

Conclusion

More research is needed on the Latin American voter, but shining a light on the populist voter in Latin America has allowed this research to assert that the populist voter in Latin America is not in general more likely to be less supportive of democracy as measured by democratic norms. This research finds distinct considerations of the populist voter in Latin America. Based on the data, it is not possible to say that voting for populists is *associated* with lesser support for democratic norms. This is also true for the incumbent-populist voter. In contrast, voting merely for the incumbent does show a higher likelihood of supporting one of the four democratic norms less; specifically, voting incumbent represents a higher likelihood of opposing media independence in times of crisis. In addition, voting for incumbents represents a higher likelihood of supporting democracy in general. The strongest overall predictor for all models was supporting same-sex marriage. Having attained a tertiary education appeared to also be a strong predictor in Models 2, 4, and 5 in support of democracy. Contrarily, being upper class was a strong predictor for supporting democracy less according to models one and five.

Several limitations are present in the research, but the most important or necessary revisions are the use of proxy variables and the number of respondents. Since no survey was available targeting each specific variable, the present research needed to use proxy variables; however, it is noted that proxy variables do not necessarily reflect the same relationships as the variables used by Van der Brug et al. (2021). Results may shift when (or if) a dataset targeting the specific questions becomes available. Moreover, this research's number of cases was significantly lower than that of Van der Brug et al. (2021) —as mentioned, a difference of 21,000 cases against 2,000. Nonetheless, the research presents valid insights with the available data.

Similarly, to using proxy variables, the LatinoBarometro dataset was the only available data source, representing the most accurate findings within the current data. It is possible that having a higher number of respondents would result in different findings; however, since LatinoBarometro offers high-standard representative samples, it is not expected that a higher number of respondents will result in different findings. As was also mentioned, imputation of missing cases was done, and even after imputing the results remained similar. Since imputable results do not represent actual people, they were not included.

This research highlights the need for large data sets reporting on Latin American voters' perceptions of democratic norms. A thorough survey is necessary to conclude Latin American voters' values concretely. Moreover, as is the case for multiple topics in political science, further research is also necessary regarding the populist voter profile in Latin America. In addition, further research should set to investigate the populist voter at different levels of analysis (e.g. municipal level and state level) to make the findings of this paper applicable to the Latin American region more profoundly. Moreover, given that LatinoBarometro offers datasets for other years, further research could consider studying the populist voter across different years.

In conclusion, the present research serves to further highlight the differences between populism in Europe and the US and populism in Latin America. While the phenomenon of populism has seen a worldwide presence, its concrete appearance across different setting is varied. The Latin American populist voter does not hold the same likelihood of (not) supporting democratic norms as do the European populist voters. Hence, this shows the need for further studies in the Latin American populist voter to discern its specificities. Such necessary investigations may be able to provide normative guidance towards curtailing the populist trend and its likely consequences on the, still young and unconsolidated, Latin American democracies.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Appendix

Table 2: Incumbent and Incumbent Type for Countries in Latin America

Country	Incumbent	Incumbent Type
Argentina	Alberto Fernández*	Populist
Bolivia	Luis Arce	Populist
Brazil	Lula da Silva	Non-populist
Colombia	Gustavo Petro	Non-populist
Costa Rica	Rodrigo Chaves+	Non-populist
Dominican Republic	Luis Abinader	Non-populist
Ecuador	Guillermo Lasso	Non-populist
México	Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador*	Populist
Paraguay	Mario Abdo Benitez	Populist
Venezuela	Nicolás Maduro	Populist

Notes:

***** Indicates that the incumbent at the time the dataset's interviews were undertaken is no longer incumbent.

\+ Indicates that the incumbent was elected during the dataset's interviews period.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Freeman Spogli's 'Votes for Populist' Dataset cross referenced with research on executive leaders during the months of LatinoBarometro's 2023 survey.

Table 3: Populist and Non-Populist Parties by Incumbent Status Across Countries

Country by Incumbent States	Populist Parties	Non-Populist Parties
Populist Incumbent		
Argentina	Unión por la Patria[1] Partido Justicialista, Frente Renovador, Frente para la Victoria, Todos	Unión Cívica Radical, Propuesta Republicana, FIT, Juntos por el Cambio, Avanza Libertad
Bolivia	Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS)	Unidad Nacional, MNR, ADN, Verdes, Partido Verde de Bolivia, TC, Poder autonómico nacional, Comunidad Ciudadana, CREEMOS, Libre21-Libertad y Democracia, JUNTOS, SUMATE
México	Morena	Partido del Trabajo, PRI, PAN, PRD, Movimiento Ciudadano
Paraguay	Partido Colorado (PC) y Partido Cruzada Nacional	PLRA, Partido Encuentro Nacional, PMAS, Partido Democrático Progresista, UNACE, Partido Patria Querida, Partido HAGAMOS!, Movimiento independiente, Nueva República

Cont. Of Table 3

Cont. Of Table 3

Venezuela	PSUV & Gran Polo Patriótico Coalition[2] (Tupamaro and Alianza para el Cambio)	UNT, Primero Justicia, Acción Democrática, Copei, Voluntad Popular, Avanzada Progresista, Vente Venezuela, El Cambio, NUVIPA, Primero Venezuela, LÁPIZ, Compromiso País, Fuerza Vecinal, Frente Amplio Venezuela, Piensa en Democracia
Non-Populist Incumbents		
Brazil	Podemos, UNIÃO, PDT, MDB, PRP	PT, PCdB, Partido Verde, Partido Progressista, PSDB, PSOL, PTdB, Partido Liberal, Partido Social Democrático, NOVO, PPS
Colombia	Centro Democrático	Partido Social de Unidad Nacional, PCR, PCC, PLC, PDA, Movimiento MIRA, AICO, PVC, MAIS, HUMANA, Pacto histórico
Costa Rica	Restauración Nacional	PLN, PAC, PUSC, PNR, Progreso Social Democrático, PLP, Costa Rica Justa, PUP, PRSC, Partido Encuentro Nacional

Dominican Republic	Partido de la Liberación Dominicana & Partido Revolucionario Dominicano	PRSC, PUN, PRM, PFDP, Movimiento Democrático Alternativo, PRSD, DXC, PPT
Ecuador	Partido Social Cristiano, MOVER (or Alianza País)[3], Partido Sociedad Patriótica	Movimiento Pachakutik, Izquierda Democrática, PSE, CREO, SUMA, Partido Avanza, Movimiento Centro Democrático Nacional, Movimiento Unidad Popular, Fuerza Compromiso Social

Notes:

(1) Unión por la Patria is labelled as populist in the dataset. However, it is a coalition, and not a party. Thus, the parties included in the coalition were added to the list of populist parties.

(2) Gran Polo Patriótico is labelled as populist in the Stanford dataset. However, it is a coalition, and not a party. Thus, the parties included in the coalition were added to the list of populist parties.

(3) Before 2022, Mover was called Alianza País, however, Latinobarometro includes answers labelled as Alianza País.

Source: Author's elaboration based on Freeman Spogli's 'Votes for Populist' Dataset cross referenced with LatinoBarometro's 'Who Would You Vote For' variable values.