

Proposed title for the Module	Attitudes towards technocracy and populism
Single or repeat measurement within the panel	Single measurement
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Relevance and rationale

In recent years most societies have experienced increased socio-economic, cultural, and political polarization, as well as – and arguably connected to the latter - the rise of populist movements and parties (Mudde 2007, 2016). While populism is on the rise in many contexts, so is technocracy in decision-making processes and structures of the state, undermining accountability and contributing, amongst others, to backlashes and autocratization of modern, liberal democracies (Lührmann/Lindberg 2019). On the level of public opinion, these trends manifest themselves in the proliferation of populist attitudes and a demand for stronger leadership and expert governments (Bertsou/Caramani 2020a, b).

Both populism and technocratic leadership are challenging the idea of liberal democracy as it is practiced in European democracies. These attitudes and connected demands have changed party systems and political competition in many countries, led to a decline of the bigger catch-all parties, and can be linked to rising skepticism and cynicism *vis-à-vis* the so-called political establishment and political elites.

Despite these clear trends, we still lack exact and fully comparative knowledge about the breadth and depth of populist attitudes and the demand for technocracy amongst publics in Europe. Also, our knowledge about the connection of these attitudes to citizens’ understanding and evaluation of democracy is strongly limited. One problem for the comparative perspective is that different approaches are based on different concepts and thus on different measures. This is particularly problematic regarding measures of populism (Akkerman/Mudde/Zaslove 2014; Oliver/Rahn 2016; Elchardus/Spruyt 2016; Stanley 2011; Schulz et al. 2018; Castanho Silva et al. 2018; Van Hauwaert et al. 2020; Wuttke/Schimpf/Schoen 2020). A further gap in both data and research concerns the lack of designs which integrate measures on all three aspects - democracy, populism, and technocracy.

For the understanding of what populist and technocratic attitudes mean for democracy, and how strong these challenges have become, it is quintessential to further our knowledge about the conception and evaluation of democracy by citizens themselves. Is it a performance deficit that drives populist attitudes, caused by looming differences between what kind of democracy people desire and what type they get? Or are such attitudes the fruit of fundamentally different conceptions of democracy among the public? Or is it an anti-democratic idea that drives populist attitudes and demands for technocracy? How are the three types of political rule – representative, direct, expert – connected to each other?

A judgement on how strongly endangered democracy is or if at all, how strong democracies

in Europe may face tendencies of autocratization, and how strong the demand for changing the mechanisms of liberal representative democracy is needs determining the spread of populism and technocracy, and its relation to visions and evaluations of democracy would serve as an essential foundation.

These four elements - *populism*, *technocracy*, *visions*, and *evaluations* of democracy - will be covered by the combination of CRONOS-2 data with ESS 10 data (see table below).

	CRONOS-2	ESS 10
Populism	X	
Technocracy	X	
Meaning of democracy		X
Evaluation of democracy		X

Suitability for CRONOS-2

The proposed module has 13 questions to be fielded in wave 1 (or 2) of the CRONOS-2 panel survey. 9 questions are proposed for measuring populism and 4 questions for technocratic attitudes. This set of questions would complement the Democracy module in ESS 10. It would allow unique insights into the political belief systems of citizens combining orientations toward populism, technocracy, and the meaning and evaluation of democracy. In addition, the perspective on trust in institutions for which the ESS already has included several questions and on “Drivers of trustworthiness”, a module in the CRONOS-2 panel survey would widen the perspective to evaluative criteria on the performance of politics regarding two of its components, i.e., competence and values. Thus, in addition to the question whether the gap between the demands toward and performance of democracy drives populism and technocratic attitudes, one may consider the performance of government actions regarding responsiveness, reliability, integrity, openness, and fairness (González 2020).

Research team

Bernhard Weßels: Acting Director of the research unit “Democracy and Democratization” at the WZB Berlin Social Science Center and professor of political science at the Humboldt-University Berlin. His areas of research include comparative political behavior and comparative politics. He is or was (co-)principal investigator of the German Longitudinal Election Study (GLES) and the Manifesto Project, both long-term funded by the German Research Foundation, political representation in Europe PIREDEU and Observatory for Political Texts OPTED, both funded by the European Commission. He is part of the QDT of the ESS Module Democracy in Round 6 and Round 10. He has a broad and international publication record.

Levente Littvay: Professor of Political Science at Central European University, head of Team Survey at Team Populism and Academic Convenor at ECPR Methods Schools. Member of the ESS Round 10 Democracy and COVID-19 Module Teams. Part of two CSES country teams (Hungary & Tunisia) and the CUPESSE FP7 11-country multi-generation survey study. Awards include EUI’s 2019-20 Fernand Braudel Fellowship and Social Justice Research’s Morton Deutsch Award.

Alexander H. Trechsel: Is professor of political science and political communication at the University of Lucerne, after having served for over a decade as the Swiss Chair on

Democracy and Federalism at the European University Institute. He currently runs several Swiss National Science Foundation projects on political communication, voting behavior, political parties and public opinion in the digital age. He was actively involved in the ESS Module Democracy in Round 6 and currently in Round 10. He has a broad and international publication record.

Feasibility of implementation

The concept of populism and how to measure the latter has triggered a longstanding debate in the literature. Currently, studies evaluating different aspects of the many measurements regarding internal coherence, cross-national validity, conceptual breadth, and external validity conclude that the items proposed by Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) clearly show conceptual advantages over other approaches (Castanho Silva et al. 2018; Wuttke/Schimpf/Schoen 2020). Despite its clear advantages over other attempts, the approach proposed by Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslova (2014) suffers from lacunae linked to cross-regional comparisons. Indeed, for the measurement of attitudes towards political elites – arguably at the core of any reflection on populism – Akkerman et al. very specifically ask respondents about government and political elites which is appropriate in contexts where populist parties are in the opposition. However, this becomes more problematic when populists are in power, as it is the case in several Central and Eastern European countries. To tap the broader concept of elites and include the duality of anti-elitism and people-centrism, Littvay has tested additional questions in a design study in Hungary. This study incorporates the points discussed at an ESS Democracy Module meeting at CEU Budapest in summer 2019. The items are tested together with the instruments proposed by Akkerman et al. (2014) and results show that these items strongly reduce the bias in attitudes towards elites, introduced by not differentiating between government and opposition support among voters. With these new findings from Littvay (2021), combined with the Akkerman et al. instrumentation, we have identified nine items measuring populism by considering the multi-dimensionality of the concept and providing cross-cultural validity. Measuring technocratic attitudes is much less controversial, not least because there is not as much research on it as on populism. Currently, the most convincing set of items is put forward by Bertou and Caramani (2020b). It consists of 4 items that tap into the category “Expertise”, covering manager ability, education and skills, scientific evidence, and expertise. The survey by Bertou and Caramani ran in 9 European countries (7 Western and 2 Eastern European countries) and showed quite some reasonable variation in the degree of support for technocracy (see box “Suggested Module”).

Suggested Module on “Attitudes toward technocracy and populism”

Answer categories and scale for all items

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 Strongly agree 88 99
 DK NA

Populism Items:

1. The politicians in the [National] Parliament need to follow the will of the people.
2. The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.
3. The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people.
4. I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician.
5. Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.
6. What people call “compromise” in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.
7. Only those seek power who, contrary to the ordinary people, are anything but decent.
8. The influential always exploit the common people.
9. Most decision makers are driven by good intentions like me.

(Items 1 to 6 from Akkerman et al. 2014; items 7 to 9 Littvay 2021)

Technocracy items:

1. Politicians should be like managers and fix what does not work in society.
2. The leaders of my country should be more educated and skilled than ordinary citizens.
3. Social problems should be addressed based on scientific evidence, not ideological preferences.
4. The problems facing my country require experts to solve them.

Dissemination plans

The plans for dissemination are twofold. One target arena for dissemination is the social sciences. For the Democracy module of ESS 10 we plan to publish a follow-up book to the publication based on ESS 6 with Oxford University Press (Ferrin/Kriesi 2016). In addition, several journal articles will be published by the group. This includes preparatory presentations at international conferences like the ECPR, EPSA, MPSA or APSA. The second field of dissemination is addressing the wider audience of the interested public. This includes analyses for the ESS Topline Findings series. Research results will also be presented at the blog of “Democracy and Democratization” at the WZB as well with the press office of the WZB. Two or three articles are planned to be published in the WZB-Mitteilungen, a journal for the wider public presenting research of the WZB with a distribution to parliaments, parties, interest groups and citizens of more than 15.000 issues. In addition to this, meetings with politicians and journalist will be organized discussing the syndrome of populism and technocracy and possible counter measures.

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