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The Ideological Profile of the Technocratic Citizen

Abstract

A certain type of citizen holds technocratic views favouring pragmatic problem solving through non-ideological expertise, claiming to be neither left nor right, and rejecting party politics for being harmful to the common good. Yet, there is no empirical evidence on the ideological profile of these citizens. Using an original survey in Western Europe, Australia and the United States, we test predictions about the left−right alignment of citizens with technocratic attitudes. We argue that such attitudes are not antithetical to ideology and that citizens holding technocratic attitudes are not immune to ideological positions. Findings show that they are more economically left than mainstream voters and more centrist overall than populists. This undermines the anti-ideological premise of the technocratic challenge to democracy. In times of cumulative crises, which put democracies under stress with demands for competence and effectiveness, these findings offer insights about the appeal of alternative forms of representation.

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Introduction: Ideology as the Antithesis of Technocracy?

The technocratic vision of society is antithetical to ideology. It yearns for political action guided by objective certainties, based on scientific evidence, that leave no room for controversy. Ideology, by contrast, offers an interpretation of society and political choices based on preferences, often in competition with alternative programmes, which are legitimized through democratic support. Technocracy envisages problem solving in holistic terms by identifying the objective interest of the entire society. Ideology is partisan – in its simplest form as left vs. right – promoting a course of action arising from societal plurality in representative institutions. Yet, to say that technocracy and ideology are mutually exclusive is an illusion: no expert governance is exempt from choice; and no ideology can forgo competence. This connection creates a tension between the objective identification of the common good and the representation of plural subjective preferences.

The uneasy relationship between technocracy and ideology appears in regimes that espouse an ideology – whether Marxist or neo-liberal – or in international organizations and domestic institutions that are allegedly "non-majoritarian" but, in fact, display ideological tendencies (Dargent 2005, Sánchez Cuenca 2020). The contradiction also appears in the discourse of parties and leaders claiming to be above politics in a putative "neither left nor right" impartiality (Costa Pinto et al. 2017, Fischer 2009). The tension is particularly subtle in citizens admiring supposedly efficient output-driven regimes, dispensing with time-consuming democratic checks-and-balances, and questioning fellow citizens' and parties' willingness to put the general interest before the partisan one. Such views describe citizens with technocratic

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attitudes, which have only recently been studied (Bertsou and Caramani 2022, Fernández-Vázquez et al. 2023).

The technocratic vision also sits uneasily with the representative institutions that channel the plurality of preferences and the competition between ideological programmes. For this reason, the support for a technocratic management of society has been portrayed as one of the "twin" challenges to representative democracy, alongside populism (Caramani 2017). Both share the anti-ideological rejection of politics. In the case of technocracy, ideology is an obstacle to rational policy. In the case of populism, it is a betrayal of the will of the people. Both thus pose a "representational challenge" that undermines the very premise on which modern democracy is based, namely the legitimate articulation of plurality, the right to disagree and oppose, and the antagonistic nature of politics regulated by procedures for peaceful competition (Dahl 1956).

Empirical studies on populism show that the anti-ideological claim is an illusion, and that, in addition to a representational challenge, populism poses an "ideological challenge." Populist voters' preferences are polarized on the left and right.[1] Citizens with populist attitudes often have radical ideological positions (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012). But what about technocratic citizens? This is still an unknown and the goal of this study is to unveil the ideological preferences of citizens with technocratic attitudes, whose anti-ideological stance is even stronger than that of

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[1] This is often depicted as a U-shaped curve (Akkerman et al. 2014, Rooduijn 2018). It also appears in the distinction between left-wing and right-wing populism, as typical of certain geographical areas (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2012).

populists and, at the same time, more deeply concealed in a blend of attitudes that includes support for elites, belief in expertise for competent problem solving, and distrust toward electoral politics as inefficient, divisive and incompetent (Bertsou and Caramani 2020).

Are technocratic citizens a homogenous class with either left or right preferences? Or are they predominantly centrist in pursuit of the chimera of neutrality (Putnam 1977)? Or is it a composite class that accommodates contrasting ideological orientations? Using an original survey in Western Europe, Australia and the United States – where party systems are similarly structured along an established left−right ideological divide – the paper explores the ideological leanings of citizens with technocratic attitudes and compares this group to the overall electorate, as well as to citizens with party-democratic and populist attitudes. Empirical findings refute the idea that technocratic citizens are immune to ideology, showing that the representational challenge they pose to current democratic politics includes programmatic demands and is, in-fact, ideological. Results show that their ideological profile is similar to that of mainstream voters, albeit more left leaning on economic issues. Citizens with technocratic attitudes, however, have a very different profile than populist voters, who are radically more economically left and culturally right.

The next two sections address theoretically the tension between technocratic attitudes and ideological orientations with two goals: to show that such attitudes are not in contradiction with holding ideological preferences and to derive hypotheses about the profile of technocratic-oriented citizens in the one- and two-dimensional left−right space. This is followed by the research design, case selection, data from a new survey, and the indicators of technocratic attitudes and left−right placement. The

empirical section shows that, notwithstanding the shared anti-ideological stance of the two forms of representation, technocratic-minded citizens have an ideological profile closer to that of mainstream than of populist voters. The conclusion discusses normatively how this evidence demystifies fantasies about neutrality and absence of conflict in setting societal goals.

The Tension between Ideology and Technocracy

Technocracy is a form of representation whereby policy action by an elite is legitimized through its reliance on expertise and efficiency when addressing societal problems in a holistic and long-term perspective (Meynaud 1969). As a form of representation, it entails acting on behalf and in the interest of the community. It is elitist, since it is guided by expertise rather the will of the people. The reliance on scientific evidence and competence leaves no space for disagreement. Therefore, it is a vision of society without cleavages, divergent plural interests or opposition. The holistic character of technocratic representation and the problem-solving approach at a societal level also do not contemplate winners and losers. Policy is thus neither a matter of preference or choice, nor is it a matter of aggregation of competing interests in society. The type of representation is trusteeship whereby a meritocratic elite is

legitimized to independently identify problems and objective solutions to ensure long-term progress.[2]

Technocracy manifests itself at various levels: from regimes to single institutions within democratic systems – independent from politics and autonomous from "majoritarian politics" (i.e. democratic control) – and from the international level (such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund and the European Union, itself often described as an unelected technocracy) to the discourse by actors, such as leaders and parties (Bertsou and Caramani 2020b). One crucial level where technocracy manifests itself is that of individuals: elites with a technocratic mentality (Putnam 1977) and citizens, who may have attitudes more or less in favour of the technocratic management of society (Bertsou and Caramani 2022, Bertsou and Pastorella 2017, Lavezzolo et al. 2020). At all these levels, technocracy manifests itself in degrees rather than in absolute ways.[3]

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[2] This definition of technocracy in terms of political representation (Caramani 2017) brings together various contributions including, among others, Centeno (1993, 1994), Dargent (2015), Fischer (2009), Meynaud (1969) and de la Torre (2013).

[3] This appears in the degree to which the discourse by actors or organizations favours a technocratic vision or in the "technocraticness" (as opposed to the "partyness") of cabinets (Andeweg 2000, Costa Pinto et al. 2017). No system or institution can be absolutely technocratic, meaning complete absence of popular legitimacy and mobilization (see Caramani 2020), in the same way that no regime can be purely and radically democratic, deprived completely of mechanisms for efficient policy.

Studies have identified a significant share of the electorate in Western publics that holds technocratic attitudes, distinct from populist and party-democratic classes.[4] Specifically, survey evidence shows that technocratic attitudes entail three dimensions. First, *elitism* is at the core of technocracy as it envisions a legitimate role for an elite based on expertise, intellect and merit that is distinct from ordinary people. Elites are entitled to guide society on behalf of people who do not have the required skills. Second, *expertise* is complementary to elitism. Technocracy is based on a belief in the possibility for knowledge to objectively identify the "best solution" or "truth." It is a positivist stance that emphasizes the role of rational speculation and scientific procedures, facts and evidence. It prioritizes output and efficiency in identifying problems and providing solutions in complex and interdependent environments, especially in times of crisis and necessity of reform. Third, *anti-politics* entails several aspects, including views that politicians are incompetent and corrupt, that democratic politics binds decisions to the short-term pandering of voters, that over-responsiveness is subject to mood swings in ever shorter electoral cycles, and that media attention exposes politicians to constant accountability for immediate results. Policy is thus a function of winning elections. Procedures, such as elections and parliamentary rules, as well as debating and deliberating, are time-consuming and inefficient.

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[4] A number of studies have analysed technocratic attitudes, including Bertsou and Caramani (2022) Chiru and Enyedi (2021), Heyne and Costa Lobo (2021), Lavezzolo et al. (2021) and Fernández-Vásquez et al. (2023). This is a more recent development, unlike the more established study of populist attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2014, Castahno Silva 2019, Schulz et al. 2017).

This third dimension is also holistic and anti-pluralist. Party democracy is viewed as divisive, with parties articulating particularistic interest that are detrimental to the common good.[5] Yet, rational speculation and a reliance on facts point to solutions that as such cannot be controversial (if one disregards ignorance or ulterior motives). One cannot legitimately "oppose" the objectively established best course of action. There cannot be partisan opposition to the common good. Policies identified through expertise are not a subject to preferences. Pragmatism and necessity therefore discard different ideological visions and, ultimately, choice about society's course of action.

The distinction between the three dimensions is crucial for understanding the relationship between technocracy and ideology. Technocratic attitudes and ideology are antithetical when technocracy is taken as an aggregated construct that bundles together the three dimensions. However, of the three dimensions of technocratic attitudes, it is anti-politics that is in opposition to ideology. Elitism and expertise can be ideological without contradicting technocratic principles. Different ideologies rely on elites and expertise can serve different ideological goals. Neither is necessarily neutral. Non-ideological action does not automatically follow from expertise-based decision-making by elites. These "representational" features do not necessarily mean

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[5] This holistic goal includes future members of the community and is linked to the long-term "responsible" perspective of technocracy as opposed to the short-term "responsive" perspective of populism. On responsibility in temporal terms, see Caramani (2020) and Goetz (2014). On responsibility vs. responsiveness, see Birch (1964) and Mair (2009).

they cannot serve ideologies. They are concerned with "how" (means) but in a compatible manner with "what" (ends), namely choices on substance, "allocation of values" and distribution of resources.

But anti-politics cannot be ideological, due to its holistic, anti-pluralist vision of society. Anti-politics is incompatible with choice. Its anti-pluralist nature does not allow for ideology, i.e. alternatives and preferences. It is therefore on this specific dimension of technocratic attitudes that one can theoretically, and perhaps counter-intuitively, argue that having technocratic attitudes is compatible with having ideological preferences. The conflation of separate technocratic dimensions into one complex construct is responsible for the view that technocratic-minded citizens cannot possess ideological orientations. Unpacking technocratic attitudes resolves this apparent contradiction.

It is on the anti-politics dimension that technocracy, similarly to populism, poses the clearest challenge to representative democracy. As theoretical work has argued (Caramani 2017, 2020), and empirical work has confirmed (Bertsou and Caramani 2022, Fernández-Vázquez et al. 2023), both technocracy and populism share some features with representative democracy; elitism and popular legitimacy, respectively.[6]

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[6] One finds a depiction of this triangular relationship in Caramani (2020), which stresses the opposition between representative democracy and the common holistic element that technocracy and populism share, in spite of their radical differences on the role of elites and the people. The anti-ideological element of populism is emphasised by its frequent definition as a "thin" ideology, i.e. a vehicle for different ideological content.

In fact, representative democracy bridges people's inclusion (their will) and exclusion (their lack of expertise). Where both technocracy and populism are distinct from representative democracy is on the holistic, anti-political and anti-pluralist − and therefore anti-ideological − vision of society.

Predicting the Ideological Profile of the Technocratic Citizen

Due to the conflation of the three technocratic dimensions, the ideological orientations of technocratic-minded citizens remain hidden under a generic representational cover.[7] We therefore ask how the technocratic challenge maps onto the ideological space. Technocratic attitudes cannot simply be associated with the "rejection of ideology." Are there specific programmatic demands that are shared among citizens with technocratic attitudes? This is important, given that political competition continues to take place along a left−right ideological divide in Western democracies. Citizens with technocratic attitudes are a sizeable group, they are interested in politics and not any more likely to abstain than other citizens (see Table 1).

Yet, while research exists on the ideological leanings of populist citizens, the ideological preferences of technocratic citizens have never been investigated. Research on the technocratic attitudes of citizens has recently taken off, but we know little about the ideological profile of technocratic voters and their specificities, both

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[7] The anti-ideological claim appears clearly in the response patterns to items AP2−4 of the battery of technocratic attitudes (items are listed in Appendix 1 in the Online Appendix).

compared to populist and to mainstream voters. Specifically, we do not know the kind of *ideological* challenge that they post. It cannot simply be assumed that technocratic-minded citizens do not have any ideological orientation, just because they are not supposed to have any. The issue is not whether these citizens are ideological, but in *what way*.

What can theoretically be expected about the ideological orientation of citizens holding technocratic attitudes? Historically, technocracy has been embodied in regimes based on different ideologies, from Marxist Soviets to corporatist states such as Mexico (Centeno 1994). Technocratic discourse and clues about competence are used by many actors. On the one hand, much of the literature on technocracy in the 1970s associates it with left-wing developmentalist policies (Dargent 2020, Hoffman and Laird 1985). Expert independent agencies that were put in place to regulate different aspects of social and economic life suggest a link between technocratic governance and left-wing politics practiced by a strong state. On the other hand, since the 1980s, technocracy has often been associated with economic neo-liberalism and to bodies that follow these principles in domestic and international arenas (Clifton et al 2006, Sánchez Cuenca 2020).[8] It is therefore plausible to expect orientations in either ideological direction. Both theory and historical experience provide testable expectations about the ideological profile of the technocratic class.

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[8] On neo-liberal "adjustment" to global markets, see Centeno and Maxfield (1992), Haggard and Kaufmann (1992) and Magaloni (2006). On regulation and neutralization of conflict, see Bersch (2016), Majone (1994), O'Donnell (1994) and Schmidt (2018).

At a very basic level, the technocratic class of citizens may be *ideologically homogenous or heterogeneous*. The class of citizens holding technocratic attitudes may be *homogenously leaning toward leftist or rightist ideological positions*. The distribution of voters would be skewed to either end on the left−right scale. This is a transformational argument about state and market. On the left, intervention, redistribution, state planning and collective insurance instruments require a state and broad competences to run social and economic programmes. On the right, the market needs a legal framework to liberalize, privatise and attract investment. It relies on economic expertise to integrate the market into an international trade system to access credit. Both possibilities, i.e. that technocratic citizens follow either left or the right "centrifugally," are therefore theoretically plausible.

Alternatively, the class of citizens holding technocratic attitudes may be *homogenously gravitating around centrist ideological positions*. The distribution of voters would be peaked at the centre of the left−right scale. This argument is about pragmatism. In the centre, citizens are ideologically moderate. It is a vision of adjustment rather than radical transformation. Pragmatism, output legitimacy, problem solving and efficiency are the closest features of technocratic neutrality and objectivity, in avoidance of harsh choices.[9] Moderation is the openness to blend "whatever works" from either ideological side without principled prejudice. This third

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[9] In this perspective, centrism is ideological and involves societal choices. It reflects moderate ideological positions, which do entail a vision of the world, but not such as to require radical transformation.

possibility, i.e. that technocratic citizens place themselves "centripetally" on the left−right spectrum, is therefore also theoretically plausible.

Moving to the possibility of *ideological heterogeneity*, citizens holding technocratic attitudes may be *scattered across all ideological positions*. The distribution of voters would be evenly flat along the left−right scale. In this case the argument is about eclecticism. It is an ideologically composite class that has no unique common denominator. Heterogeneity can also mean that the class of citizens holding technocratic attitudes may be *divided over their ideological positions*. The distribution of voters would be bipolar (two peaks) on the left−right scale. The argument is about confrontation. The left or right ideological positions coexist within the class and oppose one another. It is not to be expected that this confrontation is radical, as technocratic attitudes tend to be moderate, pragmatic and refractory to radical choices. That is, one would not expect a U-shaped curve along the left−right curve.[10]

To further unpack the ideological preferences of these citizens, our study explores their attitudes beyond a single left−right dimension by extending it to "sub-domains" of the policy space. There is a growing understanding that the ideological landscape of many established democracies is best described by two dimensions. In particular, empirical analyses have identified an economic and a cultural dimension structuring the ideological positions of both voters (Inglehart 1977, Thomassen 2012, Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009) and parties (Hooghe et al. 2002, Kitschelt 1995,

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[10] In support of this expectations, analyses of the voting behaviour of the technocratic class of citizens does not detect any conclusive party preference, neither left nor right (Bertsou 2021, Heyne and Costa Lobo 2021).

Kriesi et al. 2012). The former concerns inequality, redistribution, and government intervention in the market economy; the latter concerns immigration, authoritarianism, and traditionalism about social values.

In addition to providing a firmer understanding of citizens' substantive ideological preferences, there are other reasons for adopting a multidimensional lens. First, although the two dimensions are often correlated, this relationship is not fixed. Research suggests that the left-authoritarian quadrant is one of the most populated in the two-dimensional landscape (Lefkofridi et al. 2014, Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). Second, and more importantly for this paper, the nature of the two dimensions is arguably distinct (Tavits 2007). The economic domain is associated with pragmatism, adaptability and performance (MacKuen et al. 1992, Stevenson 2001). Economic policies are a means to an end, i.e. an instrumental toolbox to achieve material outcomes. The cultural domain, on the other hand, is value-based and rooted in one's sense of identity – be it religious, national, or otherwise (Domke et al. 1998, Goren and Chapp 2017). Ideological positions in this realm tend to be rigid, categorical, and principled, leaving little room for rational calculation.

From this perspective, the economic domain might be more suited for technocratic reasoning. Yet, alternatively, what is principled or pragmatic is in the eye of the beholder. Purity in economic positions (for example, a strong belief in what is right and wrong on inequality) should similarly leave little room for pragmatism. Moralized attitudes, which debilitate compromise, can be found on economic and cultural issues alike (Ryan 2017). Given the predictive power of education (Bertsou and Caramani 2022) and the growing educational structuration of the cultural divide (Marks et al. 2022), one might expect a culturally progressive leaning among

technocratic citizens. As with the general left−right divide, we might therefore observe different voter distributions. The technocratic class could be homogenous or heterogeneous, centrist or ideologically leaning on both economic and cultural issues.

Empirical Strategy and Data

This study relies on survey data from nine Western democracies: seven West European countries (France, Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Sweden), Australia and the US. Having defined ideology in terms of left and right means that the selection of countries must include institutionalized party systems where this distinction makes sense. These countries are structured similarly along left−right economic and cultural dimensions. The left−right ideological position of citizens has been a feature of these political system for decades and is well understood. At the same time, this case selection allows us to cover majoritarian and consociational polities, liberal and coordinated market economies (with corporatist decision making), some of which have had recent experiences of technocratic cabinets.[11]

In order to assess the scope and what type of ideological challenge technocratic attitudes pose to representative democracy, and to what extent it mirrors or differs from the challenge posed by populist attitudes, the analysis is based on survey items that

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[11] Data were collected through an online survey administered by Dynata in December 2020. It consists of samples of approximately 1,000 respondents per country that are representative of the national population in terms of age, gender and geographical location.

capture the latent dimensions of expertise, elitism, anti-politics and populism.[12] Using the questionnaire developed in Bertsou and Caramani (2022), the items allow us to identify respondents with technocratic attitudes in our sample. Replicating their Latent Class Analysis (LCA), the items of the survey battery are used to assign respondents to technocratic, party-democratic and populist classes. Once we have identified the three classes of interest, we describe the *distribution of their ideological preferences along the left−right dimension* in comparison with one another and with the overall sample.

Technocratic-minded citizens are respondents in the survey that have been assigned to the "technocratic class" as opposed to other classes. In particular, we are interested in comparing the ideological profile of citizens with technocratic attitudes to those of populist and party-democratic citizens. LCA clusters respondents into classes (or profiles) based on their responses to items tapping into (i) expertise in politics, (ii) anti-politics, (iii) elitism, and (iv) populist attitudes.[13] This method identifies the three classes through different combinations of the latent dimensions: (1) in the *technocratic class*, respondents score high on expertise, anti-politics and elitism but low on populism; (2) in the *party-democratic class*, scores are low on anti-politics

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[12] We rely on existing research to measure populist attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2014, Castanho Silva et al. 2019). For the detailed presentation of the survey items, their sources, and debates around measurement and interpretation, see Appendix 1 in the Online Appendix.

[13] LCA calculations and the full set of classes for the 7-class model used in the paper are presented in Appendix 2 in the Online Appendix.

and populism; (3) in the *populist class*, we find high scores on populism and anti-politics, but low scores on elitism. LCA estimates the probability of class assignment for each respondent. Using the modal posterior probability of class assignment, we can assign each respondent to a class and investigate the three profiles of interest.[14]

Table 1 shows the size of the classes both in the total sample and in each of the nine democracies included in the study. To best bring out the contrast between the three sets of attitudes, the analysis focusses on the three distinct classes, as well as the total sample, leaving out the classes that display mid-range or inconsistent values (see the Online Appendix, Appendix 2, for the full 7 class model and detailed figures for all classes). To investigate the ideological profile of respondents, the analysis focuses on the *general left−right axis*, as well as in a disaggregated way on the *economic and cultural dimensions*. The general left−right ideological position is operationalized through a single item that asks respondents to place themselves on a 10-point scale from left to right. For the economic and cultural dimensions, we employ a novel battery of items intended to capture different features of the left−right ideological spectrum. Its items are designed to convey both the core element of the left−right distinction and, at the same time, apply to a variety of policy issues  (economic, socio-cultural

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[14] Class assignment by modal posterior probability allows us to assign each respondent to one class and compare the ideology distributions between the classes of interest. As a robustness check, we have replicated all analyses with a single continuous variable that presents the probability of being assigned to the technocratic class. Results remain the same and this analysis is presented in the Online Appendix (Appendix 5).

Table 1 Class assignment as percentage of the entire sample in each country and pooled sample

| Countries | Technocratic class | Party-Democratic class | Populist class |
|---|---|---|---|
| Australia | 12.5 | 12.6 | 12.5 |
| France | 14.4 | 10.6 | 17.8 |
| Germany | 14.4 | 16.3 | 12.9 |
| Great Britain | 15.8 | 14.8 | 11.0 |
| Greece | 22.6 | 9.1 | 18.9 |
| Italy | 22.6 | 8.6 | 16.4 |
| Netherlands | 17.5 | 28.0 | 5.4 |
| Sweden | 14.6 | 26.6 | 12.9 |
| United States | 12.1 | 10.9 | 19.1 |
| Total | 16.3 | 15.3 | 14.1 |

and political) and a variety of cleavages (based on gender, class, ethnicity and geographical area among others).

The items presented in Table 2 allow us to disaggregate the analysis in an economic and a cultural dimension on the basis of the theoretical considerations above. That is, an economic dimension centred on redistribution and public service provision, and a cultural dimension capturing traditional, authoritarian attitudes on marriage, social diversity, and law and order (for similar approaches, see, e.g., Lefkofridi et al. 2014, Van der Brug and Van Spanje 2009). The two-dimensional space for political orientations is confirmed by the fact that the two indices (both 0−10 point scales) are weakly correlated.

Table 2 Items used to measure the economic and cultural dimensions of ideological positions

| Items | Index | Phrasing |
|---|---|---|
| ID1 | Economic | The state should intervene to reduce income differences between citizens. (R) |
| ID2 | | The state should take full care of basic services for everyone, such as education, health care, pensions and unemployment benefits. (R) |
| ID3 | | It is unfair to tax rich people more in order to pay for public services. |
| ID4 | Cultural | Marriage should be allowed only between a man and a woman. |
| ID5 | | Employers should give priority to hiring natives over immigrants. |
| ID6 | | Tough measures are justified to maintain public order even if they violate civil liberties. |

Notes: The correlation (Pearson's r coefficients) between the general left−right scale and the economic and cultural dimensions are r=.293*** and r=.414***, respectively. The economic and cultural indices correlate weakly with a Pearson's correlation coefficient r=.159***. ID1 and ID2 have been recoded so that higher values correspond to more conservative/authoritarian cultural positions and more capitalist/neoliberal economic positions. R refers to a reverse scale.

Knowing that technocratic attitudes are a representational challenge to pluralist democracy, what follows addresses the question of whether they also pose an ideological challenge. This is done by *comparing the distribution of the technocratic class to that of the party-democratic class* of citizens. The more different they are, the stronger the ideological challenge. Such a finding would allow us to say that technocratic attitudes are not only a representational challenge, but also an ideological one.

In addition, knowing that technocratic attitudes pose a representational challenge to populism as well, the analysis addresses the question of whether this distribution constitutes an ideological challenge to populism and in what way. This is done by *comparing the distribution of the technocratic class to that of the populist class* of

citizens. We know that populists are distributed in a U-shaped curved on the left−right dimension. Finding that the two differ would allow us to say that the two "challenges" to representative democracy oppose one another ideologically. This ideological opposition would reinforce the representational oppositions between expertise and popular will, and between elitism and people centrism.

The Empirical Analysis of the Ideological Profile of Citizens with Technocratic Attitudes

*Technocratic Attitudes and the General Left−Right Dimension*

What is the ideological profile of citizens with technocratic attitudes? We first examine this question using the left−right ideological self-placement variable. Based on the density plot in Figure 1 (left panel), the technocratic class does not appear to deviate from the other respondents in its left−right ideological profile. The distribution approximates a normal distribution without any clustering at the extreme ends of the ideological scale.

Comparing the technocratic, party-democratic and populist profiles offers a more nuanced picture of this first result. In Figure 1 (right panel), one see that on the one hand that the ideological profile of technocratic-minded citizens resembles that of the party-democratic class of citizens. On the other hand, however, it also appears that the profile of the populist class deviates from this picture, insofar as it shows a multi-peaked distribution with respondents clustering in the middle, the extreme-right and (to a lesser extent) the extreme-left end of the left−right scale. Therefore, based on the

left−right dimension, the first descriptive evidence shows that the technocratic and the party-democratic citizens are normally distributed, as is the sample as a whole. It is the populist class that stands out, with additional peaks at the opposing ends of the left-right continuum.

To directly compare the ideological profile of the three classes, we carry out multinomial logistic regressions using left−right ideological self-placement as an independent variable to

Figure 1 Distributions across the ideological spectrum for entire sample, and technocratic, populist and party-democratic classes
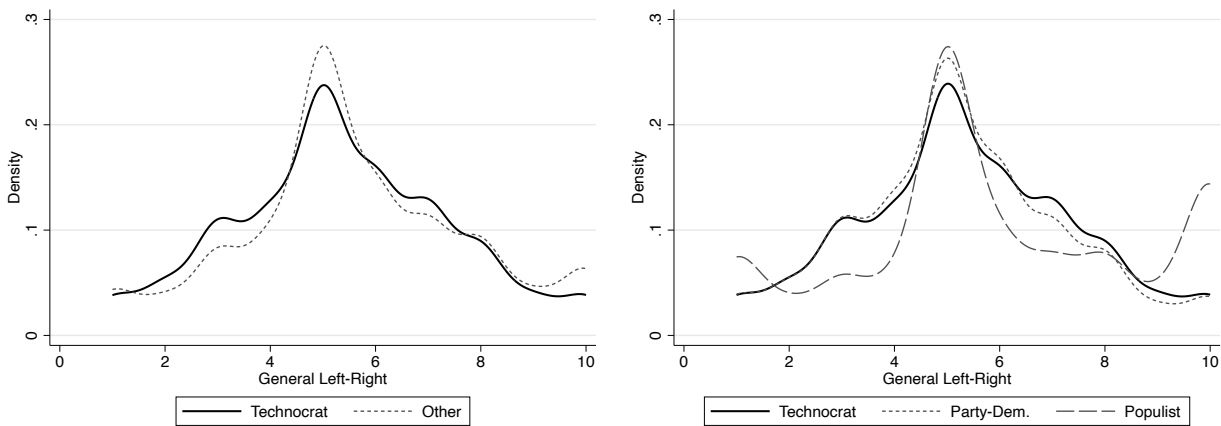


predict class assignment, controlling for other key political characteristics that have been found to influence the propensity of holding technocratic attitudes, such as education, political trust, political interest and demographics (Bertsou and Caramani 2022). Table 3 presents results from the comparisons between assignment to the technocratic class as opposed to the party-democratic (Model 1) and the populist class (Model 2), respectively. Figure 2 plots fitted values for the effect of left−right ideological self-placement on the probability of class assignment. Figure 3 presents

the predicted probabilities of assignment to the technocratic, party-democratic and populist classes, as opposed to all remaining respondents using the entire sample.[15]

These analyses confirm the above descriptive finding. The technocratic (and the party-democratic) citizen profiles are distinct from the populist profile in terms of left−right ideology.

Table 3 Multinomial logistic regression models predicting assignment to the profiles of interest (pooled country sample)

|  | Technocratic (1) vs. party-democratic (0) | Technocratic (1) vs. populist (0) |
|---|---|---|
|  | Model 1 | Model 2 |
| Left−right | .0003 | .534** |
|  | (.119) | (.102) |
| Left−right squared | .005 | -.059** |
|  | (.009) | (.008) |
| Political interest | .200** | .056 |
|  | (.046) | (.051) |
| Political trust | -.219** | .425** |
|  | (.045) | (.086) |
| Education | .096* | .147** |
|  | (.041) | (.043) |
| Age | .009+ | .003 |
|  | (.005) | (.004) |
| Female | -.063 | .202** |
|  | (.102) | (.073) |
| Constant | .625 | 3.095** |
|  | (.400) | (.497) |
| Observations | 2,834 | 2,728 |

[15] Appendix 3 in the Online Appendix presents the full multinomial logistic regression results across all seven classes, which show that the populist class is also significantly different from the party-democratic class in its ideological profile. In that appendix, we also present the probability plots for the remaining four classes.

When looking at the left−right ideological self-placement of citizens with technocratic attitudes, one sees that they occupy the middle ground of the scale and avoid the extremes. Self-placement on the left−right axis does not help differentiating the technocratic class from the party-democratic class. Neither the main nor the squared terms for ideological self-placement are statistically significant in Model 1 (Table 3). The technocratic and party-democratic class are highly similar, distinguishable not by their ideological preferences on general left−right but by their levels of political trust and education. As pointed out in previous analyses, higher education is associated with the technocratic class, and political trust is higher when comparing the technocratic to the populist class but lower when comparing the technocratic to the party-democratic class (Bertsou and Caramani 2022).

Plotting the effect of ideological self-placement on the predicted probability of assignment to the technocratic as opposed to the party-democratic class produces a rather flat line (Figure 2, left panel). This is true when comparing citizens with technocratic attitudes to the general sample as well (Figure 3, see left panel). This suggests that respondents' self-placement on the left-right scale does not entail a great deal of information about their likelihood of holding technocratic attitudes, beyond the fact that they are not clustered at the ends of the left-right spectrum.

However, comparing the technocratic to the populist class presents a very different picture. Citizens with technocratic attitudes differ from those with populist attitudes on their ideological self-placement. We find that both the linear and squared left−right variables have a significant effect in predicting assignment to the technocratic as opposed to the populist class (Model 2). The right panel of Figure 3 indicates that this significant effect is due to a large share of the populist class'

clustering around the extremes of the ideological space, especially the extreme right. For this reason, comparing the probability of belonging to the technocratic relative to the populist class shows a curvilinear effect, especially on the right-end of the ideological spectrum (Figure 2, right panel). Holding all other variables at observed values, a self-placement on the left-right axis from 1 to 3 increases the probability of assignment to the technocratic class from 44 to 59 percent, while moving from a position of 7 to 9 lowers the probability from 54 to 35 percent.

We therefore note that, using self-placement on the single left−right ideological spectrum, citizens with technocratic attitudes are normally distributed and cannot be distinguished from citizens with party-democratic attitudes. The technocratic class' normal distribution suggests a low level of heterogeneity among the class and can be taken as evidence is favour of the moderation hypothesis. Citizens with technocratic attitudes gravitate around centrist ideological

Figure 2 Effect of left−right ideological self-placement on class assignment
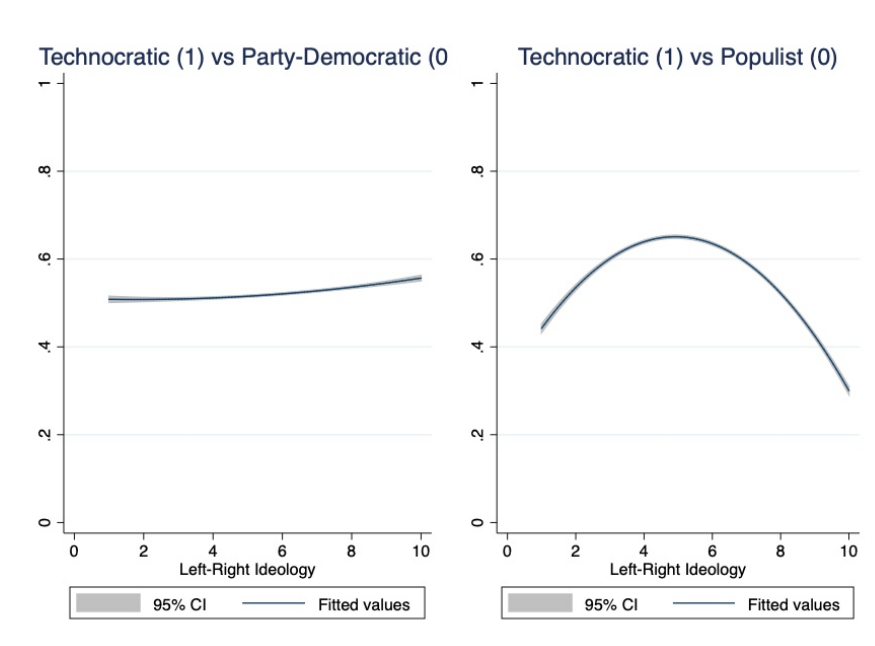


Note: Models 1 and Model 2 in Table 3.

positions in a quite homogenous way. Nevertheless, they are not more centrist than the general sample, and the small curvilinear effect observed in Figure 3 is driven by the presence of citizens with populist attitudes clustering at the extreme ends of the scale.

A clear finding is that technocratic-minded citizens are distinct from respondents with strong (or moderate) populist attitudes. The populist class displays a multi-peaked distribution on the left−right scale, with a sizeable number of respondents placing themselves at the extreme right and extreme left (albeit to a lesser degree) of the ideological spectrum. It is important to highlight this contrast, since the technocratic and populist challenges to party-based representative democracy are often discussed in unison. The empirical evidence in this section shows that many citizens who espouse these two different visions of representation also occupy different places in the ideological space and would therefore articulate different programmatic demands. While both pose a representation challenge, it is the populist voters who also pose an ideological one, whereas this is not the case for voters with technocratic attitudes.

Figure 3 Effect of left−right ideological self-placement on class assignment (1) versus all other respondents (0)
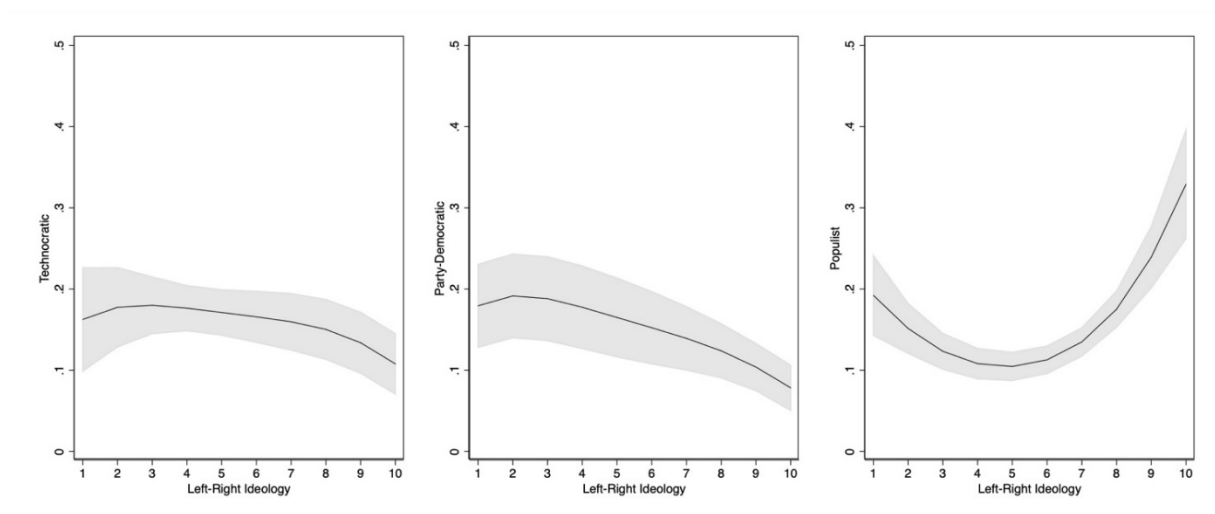
*Technocratic Attitudes in the Two-Dimensional Ideological Space*

The limited predictive power of the general left−right dimension in differentiating between the technocratic and party-democratic class of citizens warrants further exploration of the technocratic class's ideological preferences. Moreover, the difference in the ideological profiles of technocratic and populist citizens raises the question of what specific policy demands drive this contrast. Given the increasing evidence of multidimensionality in today's politics, as discussed in the theoretical section of this paper, we are interested in better understanding what programmatic demands, if any, technocratic-minded citizens share, and how these contrast to populist and party-democratic citizens. With the emergence of an ideological divide over cultural issues, which either overlap or cut across existing economic divisions, mass and elite preferences have become more complex.

In this step of the analysis, we unpack the evidence for the economic and cultural dimension. Both dimensions are measured on a 0−10 points scale, where higher values signal greater preference for economic neo-liberal and capitalist principles (less state

Figure 4 Deviation from sample mean on economic and cultural dimensions (0−10) for technocratic, party democratic and populist classes
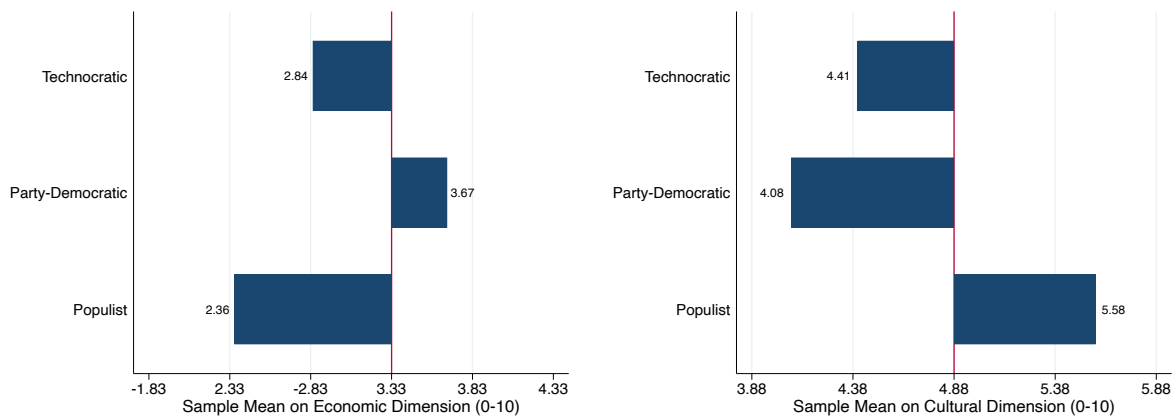
intervention, provision of services and redistribution) and preference for culturally conservative and authoritarian values (more support for public order, traditional family values, preference for native over migrant citizens). Figure 4 shows the mean scores of the technocratic, populist and party-democratic profiles on the two dimensions and their deviation from the sample mean overall. This evidence clarifies how the initial differences in the results compare to the preceding analyses of respondents' self-placement on the left–right ideological spectrum.
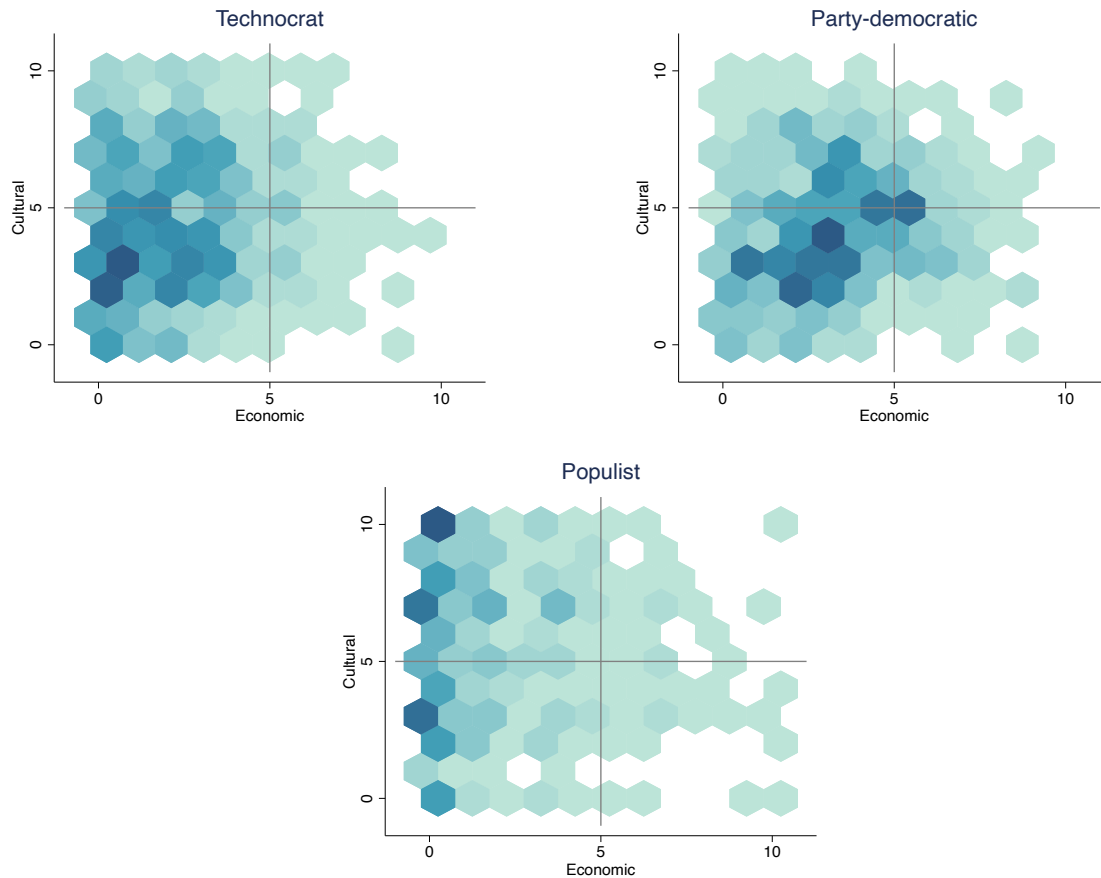
Both on the economic and on the cultural dimension, technocratic citizens are more left leaning than the general sample. Comparing the density distributions between the overall sample and technocratic profile in Figure 5, it appears that citizens with technocratic attitudes are more left wing on economic issues than the overall electorate. The entire sample for the nine Western democracies holds rather left-wing economic views. It is therefore surprising to see that those who fall in the technocratic class are more left-wing than the general sample and even more so than those who hold party-democratic attitudes. While in recent decades technocracy has been associated with neo-liberal right-wing economic policies and pro-market interventions, this does not seem to be reflected consistently across the countries under study. These differences are less pronounced on cultural issues. Again, we see that the respondents belonging to the technocratic class tend to occupy culturally liberal positions to a larger extent, and culturally conservative positions to a lesser extent, than the remaining respondents.

Figure 5 Distribution of the technocratic class and remaining sample across economic and cultural ideological positions
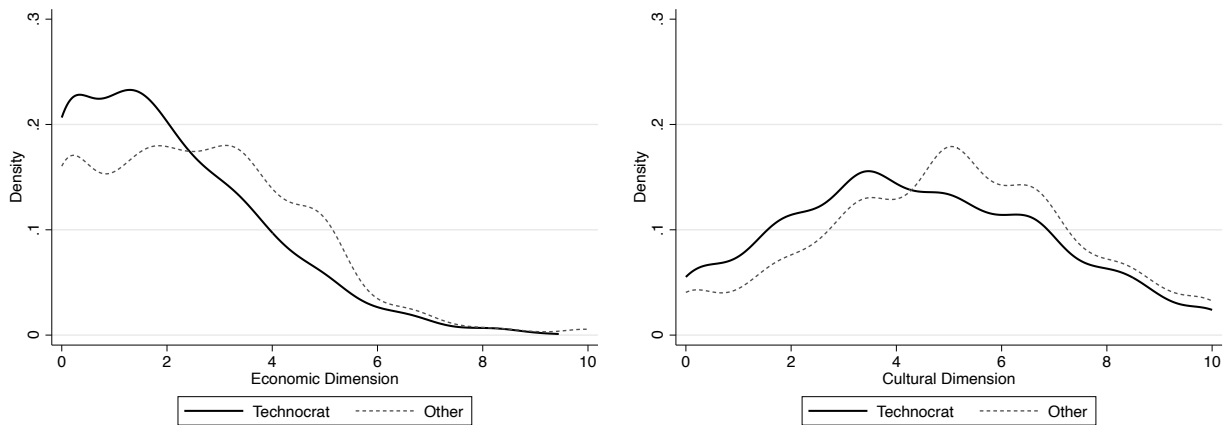


Using the economic and cultural scales, we can explore the distribution of respondents in the two-dimensional space. The heat maps in Figure 6 show how citizens in the technocratic, party-democratic and populist classes map onto this space. Darker shades correspond to more populated spaces. Technocratic citizens tend to cluster in the middle of the culturally liberal and economic left-wing quadrant of the two-dimensional space. They differ slightly from citizens in the party-democratic class, who are closer to the midpoint on both scales. Looking at the heat map of the populist class, we see that the right-wing effect on populist class assignment, found in the preceding analysis using the left−right ideological self-placement, is driven by the cultural dimension, while the effect on the left-end of the spectrum is driven by the economic dimension. In our study, the populist class exhibits predominantly left-wing economic views and right-wing cultural views. This is in line with existing research on the relevance of the left-authoritarian quadrant of the multidimensional space, which is increasingly pursued by populist radical right parties (Lefkofridi et al. 2014, Van der Brug and Van Spanje

Figure 6 Location of respondents on the two-dimensional space for the technocratic, party-democratic and populist classes



2009). In addition, there is a cluster on the culturally liberal and economic left-wing quadrant, which is in line with left populist positions popular in Southern Europe.

Breaking down ideological positioning to the economic and cultural components helps to distinguish the technocratic class from the party-democratic class and the remaining sample in a more informative way than when we rely solely on left−right placement. As before, we calculate multinomial regression models with class assignment as the predicted variable to test how individual economic ideology influences the probability of belonging to the technocratic class, as opposed to other classes, controlling for political interest, trust and key demographics (the full

regression results are presented in the Online Appendix, Appendix 3). Two observations stand out in this regard.

First, it is possible to better separate the technocratic from the party-democratic citizens when examining economic views. On average, the former are more leftist than the latter (see Figure 7, left two panels). A one-unit shift to the right end of the economic ideology scale increases the odds of belonging to the party-democratic as opposed to the technocratic class.[16] In most countries under study, we also find a significant effect for the squared term, driven by the differences in the middle part of the economic scale, where respondents of the party-democratic class tend to cluster. Therefore, when plotting the effect of economic ideology on the probability of belonging to the technocratic as opposed to the party-democratic class, we find a U-shaped curve (Figure C3 in Appendix 3, left panel).

Second, the economic dimension also helps to distinguish the technocratic from the populist class, in line with the earlier analysis. Although populist citizens register on average more left-wing economic views than technocratic-minded citizens, the linear effect is not significant at standard levels of statistical significance.[17] However, we do find the squared term to be significant, with more centrist scores on the economic ideology scale increasing the likelihood of being assigned to the technocratic as opposed to the populist class (Figure C4 in Appendix 3, see left panel). This effect is particularly driven by the U-shaped curve that describes the probability of belonging

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[16] The relative risk ratio is 1.25 for Model 1 (Table C3 in Appendix 3, Online Appendix).

[17] See Model 1 (Table C2 in Appendix 3, Online Appendix).

to the populist class, as opposed to the remaining total sample of respondents (Figure 7, see right panel).

Therefore, on the economic dimension, one does indeed detect a more left-leaning technocratic class, compared both to the general sample and to those citizens who hold party-democratic attitudes. In most of the countries under study, it appears that the technocratic

Figure 7 Predicted probabilities of being assigned to the class of interest (1) as opposed to all other classes (0): economic dimension
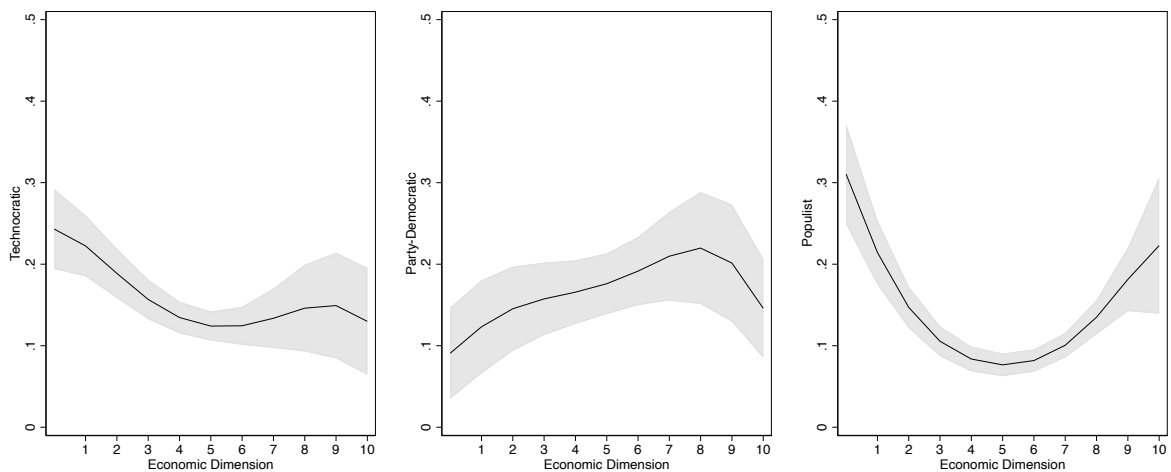


vision of political representation is combined with an important role for the state, the provision of public services and government intervention to correct inequality. A striking finding is that, in the comparative analysis, Greece and Italy show a significant linear effect, with more leftist economic positions leading to a higher probability of being assigned to the technocratic as opposed to the party democratic class (Figure D6, Table D3 in Appendix 4). These two countries have had direct experience of technocratic interventions in recent years, in the form of technocratic cabinets and severe austerity packages imposed by the technocratic institutions of the European

Central Bank and European Commission. Nevertheless, we find that technocratic attitudes among citizens are not in line with these policy programs and that those individuals tend to occupy a more leftist position on the economic dimension of ideology than mainstream voters.

Moving on to the cultural dimension, while differences do exist between the various classes, this dimension is first and foremost the domain of the populist voters (see Figure 8). While not all respondents that belong to the populist class hold culturally conservative views, they populate the strongly conservative part of the ideological space, setting them apart from the other two classes (and the remaining sample of respondents). One sees both a strong increase in the likelihood of being assigned to the populist class as one moves toward the conservative end of the cultural scale, and a large drop in the probability of holding technocratic or party-democratic attitudes, controlling for demographics, trust and political interest.

Figure 8 Predicted probabilities of being assigned to the class of interest (1) as opposed to all other classes (0): cultural dimension
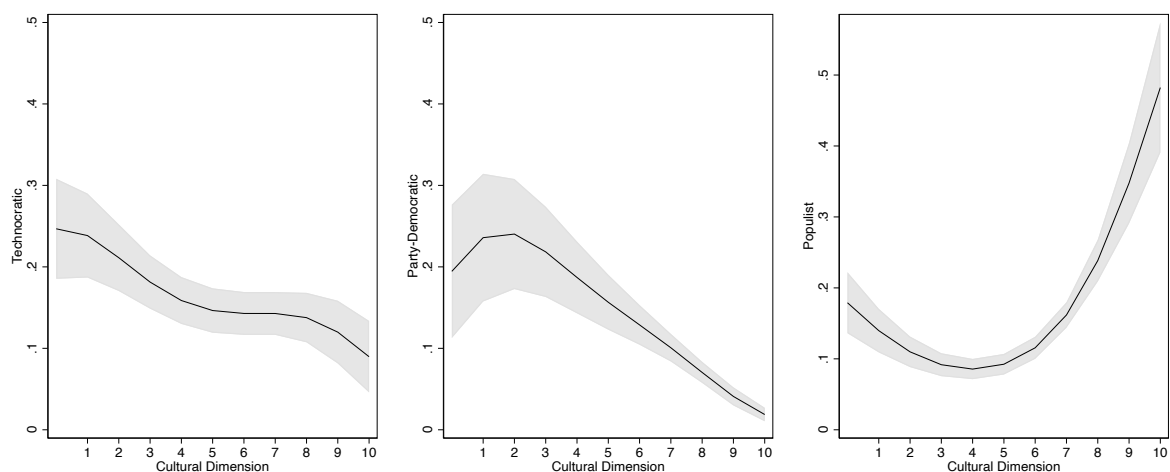
Figure 8 shows that on average the technocratic class is more liberal than the populist class.[18] More right-wing cultural orientations decrease the likelihood of belonging to the technocratic as opposed to the populist class. The probability of belonging to the technocratic class is above 50% in the left and middle parts of our scale, but decreases sharply as one moves toward the conservative end of the scale. Going from a position of 7 to 8 on the 0-10 scale reduces the probability of assignment to the technocratic as opposed to populist class from 48 to 38 percent.

Differences between the technocratic and party-democratic classes are small. Multinomial logistic regressions, which compare the two classes for the pooled sample of nine countries, show a significant effect of cultural positions on class assignment, driven mainly by differences on the right end of the scale, where respondents are more likely to belong to the technocratic as opposed to the party-democratic class (Figure 8, left panel). Nevertheless, these results are only present in France, the UK, the Netherlands, and, to a lesser extent, the US. Overall, there is a limited number of observations on the right end of the cultural scale, both for the technocratic and the party-democratic class.

Conclusion: Representational Challenge to Democracy vs Its Ideological Support

Both technocratic and populist visions of society pose a representational challenge to modern democracies. Both contest the core elements of plural competition between

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[18] See Models 6 and 8 in Table C2 and Figure C4 in Appendix 3, Online Appendix.

societal interests through electoral procedures and partisan actors. The former bases the challenge on the superior knowledge of an elite to identify the true interest of society; the latter on the will of the people. Part of this representational challenge entails an anti-ideological component. Ideology pollutes what should be the evident interest (in the case of technocracy) or will (in the case of populism) of the whole of society. Ideology implies choice where there should be none. Both are thus alternative forms of representation to party democracy.

Yet, no society is immune to ideology and no regime, institution or actor can claim pure impartiality and avoid choice. Ideology is a multidimensional and complex interpretation of society and a project for change. It involves a narrative of the world and the identification of problems, and a plan about how to navigate corrections—such as liberalism, nationalism and socialism, among others. In the process of democratization and structuring of party systems, the left−right axis imposed itself as the main ideological dimension. The anti-ideological claims coming from technocratic and populist actors and citizens are therefore illusory.

There is no question of whether or not they have ideological preferences. Rather, the question is, first, how are the ideological profiles of technocratic and populist groups shaped? Second, do they pose a challenge to the ideological profile of the electorate as a whole and, specifically, to the electorate that identifies with representative democracy? In other words, do they pose an "ideological challenge" in addition to a "representational challenge"? We know from previous research that populist leaders do so through their right-wing and left-wing radicalism. Indeed, it has been argued that populism is responsible for the re-politicization of systems that, through market, welfare, and supra-national integration (in Europe), had been de-

politicized. Populist attitudes, as seen above, are much more left than mainstream voters on the economic dimension and much more right on the cultural one.

How do results about the technocratic class of citizens relate to this pattern? On the one hand, in being more economically left than party-democratic citizens, technocratic-minded voters join populist ones. This is a rather surprising result that does not support the intuition that the economic dimension is the realm of more pragmatism, or the alternative, currently popular, assumption that technocracy is associated with free-market capitalist and neoliberal views at the level of citizens. On the contrary, we find that in most countries in our study, citizens with technocratic attitudes believe in the benefits of a stronger state with the capacity to redistribute, correct inequalities and provide social services. This finding also points to a chance for left-wing actors to attract technocratic-minded citizens, who were long assumed to be have economically right-wing positions. On the other hand, in being more culturally left and moderate than populist citizens, technocratic-minded voters join party-democratic ones. In this regard, they counter the populists' extreme ideology. Overall, citizens with technocratic attitudes, which in the nine country samples range from 12 to 22 percent, display ideological features that make them interesting for both mainstream and populist parties of the left.

The fact that they couple these ideological positions with representational claims leads to additional implications for electoral competition, which can be driven by perceptions of elite competence and ideology. Our findings show that claims about de-politicization and objectivity are discursive instruments and that the ideological stances of citizens with technocratic attitudes add to the representative challenge, i.e. demands for competence and effectiveness, the role for elites and expertise, and much

less for participation and inclusion. This has implications not only for party competition, but also for debates around reforming representative institutions, as witnessed in recent democratic experiments through citizens assemblies at local and supra-national level in the regions covered by this paper.

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