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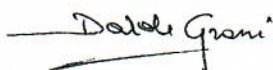
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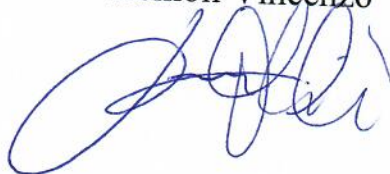
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## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# POPULIST GOVERNMENTS AND THE QUALITY OF GOVERNANCE: A Worldwide Comparison

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**ABSTRACT:** In spite of recent advances in the literature, there are still fewer empirical works, embracing different regions of the world, that analyze the impact of populist governments on the quality of governance. This paper, which covers 33 countries from five world regions from 1996 until 2019, intends to fill this gap. By using different statistical methods, our data show that periods under populist governments in power had a significantly negative effect on governance quality measured by the WGI data set. For each of the six dimensions of governance, however, (voice and accountability, political stability and the absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law, and control of corruption) we detect exceptions. In addition, exploring the data by geographical region and types of populism (exclusive, neoliberal and inclusive), crucially refines our findings, showing a great deal of differences and revealing that similar types of populism operate in different ways in separate geographical contexts. These variations are explained both by the difficulty of defining slippery concepts, and applying them consistently to historical cases, and by particular traits and historical occurrences that significantly affect the relationship we analyze. Through different fixed regression models, finally, we control for a series of potentially confounding factors and find that our major descriptive findings have been confirmed.

**KEYWORDS:** Populist governments, Quality of governance, WGI, Government effectiveness, Types of populism.

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## 1. Introduction

The phenomenon of populism is not new: it originated in Russia and the U.S. at the end of the 19th century and extended to a few European and Latin American countries during the 20th century (Damiani 2020). In the second half of the 20th century, populism decayed in Europe and the United States, but it became dominant in many unconsolidated democracies, in particular in Latin America. Recently, a new wave of populism has spread again around the world, reaching political power, both in consolidated and emerging democracies (Boeri et al. 2018). Voters have given their ballots to populist leaders in unprecedented numbers: Donald Trump was elected president of the United States, Jair Bolsonaro of Brazil and Maverick Rodrigo Duterte of the Philippines, respectively. At the same time, Narendra Modi has served as India's Prime Minister, and populist politicians have been elected to office in many European countries. Overall, the number of populist governments has jumped fivefold from 1996 to 2019 (Kyle and Meyer 2020) and some scholars portray this era as one of populist contagion (Schwörer 2019).

Most of the populist literature revolves around identifying definitions, theories, styles, strategies, and the causes for the rise of populist leaders and movements (Hawkins 2009; Laclau 2005; Mudde 2004; Taggart 1995; Weyland 2001). A critical area of research on populism investigates the implications of populists coming into power. In this vein, there is a vast literature on the effects of the rise of populists on the quality of democracy (Vittori 2021; Vittori and Morlino 2021; IDEA, 2020; Juon and Bochsler 2020; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Mounk and Kyle 2018; Huber and Schimpf 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Huber and Schimpf 2016). These studies conclude that populist governments have mostly affected democracy quality, in particular by undermining checks and balances within the branches of government: yet this dimension is not enough to prove that populist governments also harm the quality of governance. In fact, most scholars agree that the standards of good democracy and the quality of government are not identical. While the quality of democracy has to do with defining what a 'good' or 'better' democratic government implies (Diamond and Morlino 2004), the quality of governance may be referred to as the capacity a state has to perform its activities in an efficient way and without corruption (Charron and Lapuente 2010). It is evident therefore that, in order to reach their objectives, democracies must achieve high levels of governance: a country may exhibit a democratic system capable of organizing elections effectively and, at the same time, suffer from corruption and incompetence. In addition, autocratic regimes may enjoy a high quality of governance, whereas democratic ones may fail in this regard (Fukuyama 2013; 2015). Hence, the effects of populist governments on the quality of democracy may, or may not, have an impact on the quality of governance.

In spite of recent advances in the literature, however, there are still fewer comparative empirical works including different regions of the world. Our paper intends to fill this academic gap, by illustrating the effect of populist governments on the quality of governance in a broad sample of world countries. In order to assess this influence, we rely on the World Bank's six World Governance Indicators (WGI), more specifically: voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption. Since WGI indices do not measure populism, the study also depends on data sets that identify episodes of populist governments in numerous countries over the world. Our findings are that, overall, populist governments have a negative impact on the quality of governance, relative to the initial situation in which they came to power. This outcome, however, varies considerably in different world regions and for diverse types of populism: thus, to identify the impact of populist governments, we believe that the general concept of populism should be partitioned into major types and regional varieties, since these have shown to have significantly different effects on our dependent variable.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: the second section discusses the literature on our main variables, populism and quality of governance. Then, we define in more detail the relationship between

populism and the different dimensions of our dependent variable. In the following part, we introduce control variables, and explain the methodological approach used for this article, based on both descriptive and inferential statistics. The fourth section continues with a detailed data analysis, and a description and discussion of the results. We summarize, finally, the main findings as a starting point for future research.

## 2. Populism and Quality of Governance: a Literature Review.

Scholars disagree on how to define quality of governance. This concept is multifaceted and used in many different ways (Weiss 2000; Doornbos 2001; Huther and Shah, 2005; Andrews 2008; Keefer 2004; Gisselquist, 2012; Fukuyama 2013). Most definitions revolve around attributes of power exercise and management and include outcomes, associated to the quality of public goods and services people received (Keefer 2009; Gisselquist 2014). For instance, Fukuyama views governance as "a government's ability to make and enforce rules, and to deliver services, regardless of whether that government is democratic or not" (Fukuyama 2013: 3). Others emphasize the importance of democracy or voice, accountability, state capacity, and the rule of law (Sung 2004; Halperin et al. 2005; Isham, Kaufmann, and Pritchett 1997; Lake and Baum 2001; Pellegata, 2009; Holmberg and Rothstein 2012; Lee et.al. 2014; Diamond 2021).

Some scholars tend to associate the quality of governance with impartiality in exercising power (Rothstein and Teorell 2008). In this context, Huther and Shah define the quality of governance as the impact of the exercise of power on the quality-of-life citizens enjoy (Huther and Shah 2005, 40). Grindle, on the other hand, identifies quality of governance based on political views. She claims that supporters of the political right view the quality of governance as achieving order, the rule of law, and institutional conditions for thriving free markets. In contrast, left proponents define this concept through notions of equity, fairness, and a positive intervention of government, explicitly protecting the poor, women, and minorities. On the other hand, this concept also appeals to many centrists, due to its concern for order, decency, justice, and accountability (Grindle 2010).

We use the term 'quality of governance' as employed by Kaufman, Kraay, and Zoido (1999). They define the quality of governance as: "the traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised. This includes the process by which governments are selected, monitored and replaced; the capacity of the government to effectively formulate and implement sound policies; and the respect of citizens and the state for the institutions that govern economic and social interactions among them" (Kaufman, Kraay, and Zoido 1999, 1).

This definition is combined with empirical measures that are explicitly designed to compare countries, the World Governance Indicators (WGI).<sup>1</sup> More specifically they are: voice and accountability; political stability and absence of violence; government effectiveness; regulatory quality; rule of law; and control of corruption. Voice and Accountability includes indicators measuring the extent to which a country's citizens can participate in selecting their government, freedom of expression, freedom of association, and free media. Political Stability and Absence of Violence/Terrorism combines several indicators measuring perceptions of the likelihood that

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<sup>1</sup> No single indicator provides a reliable measure of any given dimension of governance quality (Kaufman and Kraay 2007). Since 1996, Kraay Kaufman, and Mastruzzi (2007, 2010) have been suggesting six governance indicators, termed the Worldwide Governance Indicators (WGI), covering over 200 countries from 1996 to 2018, to evaluate and rank countries based on governance quality. The six dimensions reflect the views of a large number of citizens, think tanks, public, private and NGO sector experts worldwide, concerning the quality of governance in developed and developing countries (Kaufman *et al.* 2010; WGI, 2020). These measures are expressed in two ways: in standard normal units, ranging from approximately -2.5 (weak) to 2.5 (strong), and in percentile rank terms, ranging from 0 (lowest) to 100 (highest) among all countries worldwide.

the government in power will be destabilized or overthrown by unconstitutional or violent means, politically-motivated violence, and terrorism. Government Effectiveness measures perceptions of the quality of public services, the quality of the civil service and the degree of its independence from political pressures, the quality of policy formulation and implementation, and the credibility of the government's commitment to such policies. Regulatory Quality measures perceptions of government's ability to formulate and implement sound policies and regulations, that enable and promote private sector development. Rule of Law captures perceptions of the extent to which agents have confidence in, and abide by, the rules of society, and in particular the quality of contract enforcement, property rights, the police, and the courts, as well as the likelihood of crime and violence. Control of Corruption, finally, measures perceptions of the extent to which public power is exercised for private gain, including both petty and grand forms of corruption, or for the "capture" of the state by elites and private interests (Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 2010). These indices provide a country coverage broader than alternative data sources on governance. Also, this data depends on aggregate indicators that acknowledge complementarities between the various kinds of indicators and increase the level of accuracy in measuring the concept. In short, the WGI Indices have become among the most widely-used indicators of governance by policymakers and experts (Arndt and Oman 2006; Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi 1999, 2007, 2010; Oman and Arndt 2010).

Several scholars have endeavored to examine populism and determine its characteristics: a large number of academic publications on populism revolves around identifying definitions, theories, styles, strategies, and the causes of rising populist parties (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Moffitt 2016; Laclau 2005; Weyland 2001; Taggart 2000). Indeed, the term 'populism' is both widely used and widely contested (Caiani and Graziano 2021). One reason has to do with the fact that populism cuts across geographical borders and historical eras, but also ideological cleavages (Gidron and Bonikowski 2013). In the 1980s, an exclusionary right-wing type developed in Europe, pursuing mostly migrants and domestic minorities (Muis and Immerzeel 2017; Mudde 2007; Ignazi 1993). In Latin America, on the other hand, populism has been linked mainly with an inclusionary social project, blending diverse ethnic groups into shared political strategies (de la Torre 2017; Levitsky and Roberts 2011). In the United States, finally, populism has been associated with a range of parties and economic and political principles, from the Populist Party of the late 19th century, to current Republican orthodoxy of free-market economics (Lowndes 2017).

Three main conceptual approaches have emerged out of the literature, which define populism, respectively, as an ideology, a discursive style, and a form of political mobilization (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017).<sup>2</sup> Concerning populism as an ideology, several scholars pointed out that the ideological core of populism is not an ideology in the traditional sense. In his classical study, MacRae claims that utopia represents the central aspect of any ideology, under the guise of restoring an ideal past: a special form of primitivism that idealized the agrarian community or the good old days. Populist movements look forwards to achieving this utopia (MacRae 1969, 162). Likewise, Mudde and Kaltwasser do not consider populism as a full/thick ideology, such as socialism, fascism, or liberalism. Therefore, they define populism as a "'thin-centered' ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017, 6). The traditional elites and state institutions are corrupt and lacking in wisdom, which resides only in the people (Taggart 2000). Hence, populist movements and leaders look forward to replacing that 'corrupt elite' with representatives of the 'pure' people in state institutions, occupying all political positions and supplanting their dishonest predecessors (Crawford, Makarenko, and Petrov 2018). These movements distrust most formal institutions: representative bodies,

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<sup>2</sup> For an extensive bibliography see Gidron and Bonikowski (2013).

political parties, bureaucratic establishments of the state, universities, the media, and financial organizations (Algan, Guriev, Papaioannou, and Passari 2017; Stewart 1969).

From another perspective, Moffitt assures that scholars shall examine populism as a style or discourse rather than an ideology. He claims that populism has changed from its earlier forms, due to a rapidly shifting political and media communications scene, particularly populists' increasing reliance on new media (Moffitt, 2016). Hence, some scholars research how policy promises are made to the people by populists to win over their votes (Bos and Brants 2014). In this vein, Betz asserts that populists' rhetoric is designed to touch people's feelings and exploit them politically (Betz 2002). In this context, some scholars have argued that populism represents a deliberate strategy by skillful political leaders. For Weyland, for instance, populism is a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power directly, with unmediated, un-institutionalized support from large numbers of primarily unorganized followers (Weyland 2001). In some interpretations, finally, these two strands of research are combined. In their recent book, 'Cultural Backlash and the Rise of Populism: Trump, Brexit, and Authoritarian Populism', Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart identify two main components of populism: "(i) a rhetorical style of communications claiming that the only legitimate democratic authority flows directly from the people, (ii) and the opinion that established power-holders are deeply corrupt, and self-interested, betraying public trust" (Norris and Inglehart 2019, 65).

Finally, some scholars see populism as a form of political mobilization, often acting within the boundaries of liberal democracy. Some, for instance, emphasize that populists grant marginalized groups a legitimate voice (Brazal 2019). Laclau argues that the rise of populism is due to the insufficient capacity of democratic institutions to handle social demands. Besides, there is a gap between those demands and the prevailing official discourse (Laclau 2005). Canovan supported this perspective, considering that if democracy may be read in terms of two opposing faces, one 'pragmatic' and the other 'redemptive', it is the inescapable tension between them that makes populism a perennial possibility (Canovan 2002). Other scholars claim that populist parties, in particular those in the right-wing, have succeeded in mobilizing and winning the vote from the poor and the ill-educated, neglected by others (Rooduijn 2017). These analyses imply that there are many categories of populist leaders and parties. Some scholars categorize left-wing and right-wing populist parties as inclusionary and exclusionary, respectively. Left-wing populist parties view people as divided into social classes, rich and poor, while right-wing populist parties see the people through a cultural lens, as 'insiders' and 'outsiders' (Mudde 2004; March 2011; Huber and Schimpf 2017).

For our analysis, we depend on recent studies by Kyle and Meyer (2020) and Kyle and Gultchin (2018), which rely on the first (ideological) and third (political mobilization) of the approaches outlined above. According to them, populism is a combination of two claims: that people are locked into conflict with outsiders; and that nothing should constrain the will of the 'true' people. To measure populist governments, they focus on populist parties and leaders that attained executive office, within at least minimally democratic countries, between 1996 and 2019 (Table 1).<sup>3</sup> This restriction omits many instances of populism that have risen within semi-democratic and authoritarian settings, and crucially ensures that the cases are more comparable to each other (Kyle and Meyer 2020, 7-8). The dataset, in addition, comprises only those populists who reached the presidency or prime ministership (or the equivalent executive office), and not those who governed as minority partners in a coalition.

In addition, Kyle and Meyer identify three types of populist governments, based on their way of demarcating the people and the elite: cultural, anti-establishment and socio-economic. In cultural populism the emphasis is on race, ethnicity, religion and other identities. Thus, cultural populists claim that only members of a native

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<sup>3</sup> The BTI dataset only considers those countries that, at the moment of the election that brought to power the populist party, possessed a score of at least 6, the traditional cutoff point for measuring democracy on the Polity index.

group belong to the ‘true’ people and that cultural outsiders pose a threat to the nation state. Anti-establishment populists contend that the enemy of the people are the established elites of the country, rather than specific ethnic or social groups. In the 1990s, anti-establishment populists belonged largely to the “neoliberal” variety of populism. Leaders such as Menem, Fujimori and Wałęsa, combined political populism with economic liberalism. Finally, there are socio-economic populists. A unifying characteristic of socio-economic populism has been bringing previously excluded segments of society into politics for the first time. Evo Morales, for example, organized and activated Bolivia’s indigenous, rural farming population. Socio-economic populists see the ‘pure’ people as the common workers oppressed by more powerful social classes, as big business, state elites and international forces which support an international capitalist order. In general, the appearance of socio-economic populism materialized before the financial crisis and affected mainly countries doing fairly well economically, particularly in Latin America. Economic bonanza created the fiscal space for state-led redistributive projects, activating opportunities for socio-economic populism (Kyle and Gultchin 2018, 21-25).

We eventually decided to rephrase these categories: anti-establishment is an intrinsic feature of populism, so that it appears ill suited to identify a particular type. We prefer the label ‘neoliberal populism’, which is analytically clearer (Roberts 2006; de la Torre 2000). Likewise, following the prevailing literature, and for the reasons mentioned below, we prefer to use validated and widely accepted labels for socio-economic and cultural types of populism, namely inclusive and exclusive populism (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013; Betz 2001).

**Table 1 - List of Populist Leaders and Parties, Years in Office and Type**

<i>Country</i> (1996-2019)	Leader or Party	Years in Office	Type of Populism
Argentina	Carlos Menem	1989-1999	Neoliberal
Argentina	Néstor Kirchner	2003-2007	Inclusive
Argentina	Cristina Fernández de Kirchner	2007-2015	Inclusive
Belarus	Alexander Lukashenko	1994-	Neoliberal
Bolivia	Evo Morales	2006-2019	Inclusive
Brazil	Fernando Collor de Mello	1990-1992	Neoliberal
Brazil	Jair Bolsonaro	2019-	Exclusive
Bulgaria	Boyko Borisov	2009-2013; 2014-2017; 2017-	Neoliberal
Czech Republic	Miloš Zeman	1998-2002	Neoliberal
Czech Republic	Andrej Babiš	2017-	Neoliberal
Ecuador	Abdalá Bucaram	1996-1997	Inclusive
Ecuador	Lucio Gutiérrez	2003-2005	Inclusive
Ecuador	Rafael Correa	2007-2017	Inclusive
Georgia	Mikheil Saakashvili	2004-2013	Neoliberal
Greece	Syriza	2015-2019	Inclusive

Hungary	Viktor Orbán / Fidesz	2010-	Exclusive
India	Narendra Modi	2014-	Exclusive
Israel	Benjamin Netanyahu	1996-1999; 2009-	Exclusive
Italy	Silvio Berlusconi	1994-1995; 2001-2006; 2008-2011; 2013	Neoliberal
Italy	Five Star Movement /Leaguecoalition	2018-2019	Neoliberal
Italy	Five Star Movement	2019-	Neoliberal
Japan	Junichiro Koizumi	2001-2006	Neoliberal
Macedonia	Nikola Gruevski	2006-2016	Exclusive
Mexico	Andrés Manuel López Obrador	2018-	Inclusive
Nicaragua	Daniel Ortega	2007-	Inclusive
Paraguay	Fernando Lugo	2008-2012	Inclusive
Peru	Alberto Fujimori	1990-2000	Neoliberal
Philippines	Joseph Estrada	1998-2001	Neoliberal
Philippines	Rodrigo Duterte	2016-	Exclusive
Poland	Lech Wałęsa	1990-1995	Neoliberal
Poland	Law and Justice Party	2005-2010; 2015-	Exclusive
Romania	Traian Băsescu	2004-2014	Neoliberal
Serbia	Aleksandar Vučić	2014-2017; 2017-	Exclusive
Slovakia	Vladimír Mečiar	1993-1994; 1994-1998	Exclusive
Slovakia	Robert Fico	2006-2010; 2012-2018	Exclusive
Slovenia	Janez Janša	2004-2008; 2012-2013	Exclusive
South Africa	Jacob Zuma	2009-2018	Inclusive
Sri Lanka	Mahinda Rajapaksa	2005-2015	Exclusive
Sri Lanka	Gotabaya Rajapaksa	2019-	Exclusive
Taiwan	Chen Shui-bian	2000-2008	Neoliberal
Thailand	Thaksin Shinawatra	2001-2006	Inclusive
Thailand	Yingluck Shinawatra	2011-2014	Inclusive
Turkey	Recep Tayyip Erdoğan	2003-	Exclusive
United States	Donald Trump	2017-	Exclusive
Venezuela	Rafael Caldera	1994-1999	Neoliberal



Venezuela	Hugo Chávez	1999-2013	Inclusive
Venezuela	Nicolás Maduro	2013-	Inclusive
Zambia	Michael Sata	2011-2014	Inclusive

**Source:** Data elaborated by the Authors from Kyle and Meyer (2020)

### 2.1 Voice and accountability

The political remodeling of society, promoted by populists, has an ambiguous impact on democratic accountability: on the one hand, populists strive to give voice to groups that do not feel represented by the elites, and support changes in the political agenda requested by these groups. Laclau (2005) argues that the rise of populism is due to the limited capacity of the institutional system to handle social demands. Others claim that populists seek to restore real popular sovereignty and representation by granting marginalized groups a legitimate voice (Brazal 2019). For some, populist parties and leaders have succeeded in mobilizing and winning the vote from the poor and ill-educated people, neglected by other parties (Rooduijn 2017).

On the other hand, most scholars argue that populism constitutes an intrinsic danger to voice and accountability (de la Torre 2000; Ruth 2017). Populist rulers tend to dismantle institutional settings, like checks and balances, and limit minority rights. They also try to attack independent institutions such as the judiciary, the civil service, public media, and civil society (Houle and Kenny 2018; Juon and Bochsler 2020). Populists in power seek to limit the scope of competition and voice, by designing a public sphere that is favorable to their re-election, as both Correa and Orbán have done through constitutional reforms in Ecuador and Hungary, respectively. Populists, in addition, often portray their opponents as evil and restrict their access to the electoral game or the media (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017). On occasions, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) are also harshly attacked: both populist rulers in Hungary and Poland, for instance, have sought to smear NGOs as being controlled by external powers and portraying them as foreign agents (Sata and Karolewski 2020). These measures led to a decrease in voice and accountability quality (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2012).

### 2.2 Rule of law

If populist governments routinely undermine the system of checks and balances, often they also put the rule of law under pressure, even in consolidated democracies (Roznai and Brandes 2020). There is a direct analytic connection between populist politics and an annoyance with the rule of law: populist leaders aspire to express the will of the ‘pure’ people; and institutional structures which cast doubts on, or amend, that political expression, tend to place constraints on its execution and are, therefore, liable to come into conflict with these leaders (Urbinati 2014). Populism is creating significant risks to the rule of law in Europe and the United States, through the mechanisms of agenda-setting, policy impact, the shaping of discretionary decisions, and convention-trashing (Lacey 2019). Moreover, many populist rulers tend to manipulate legal institutions, in particular the Courts, to neutralize their capacity to disrupt the political will. In unconsolidated democracies, populist rulers often take this route and capture the judicial system, amend the constitution, and change electoral rules to consolidate their power, as the case is in Orbán’s Hungary (Laurent and Scheppele 2017). Also, they exploit social and political crises to justify emergency decrees that dismantle civil liberties and crush their opponents (Levitsky and Ziblatt 2018). For instance, Erdoğan used the July 2016 coup attempt to declare a state of emergency and launch a massive wave of repression that included a substantial purge of civil servants. He also took harsh measures toward the Judiciary, by arresting hundreds of judges, prosecutors, and

members of the Constitutional Court. Similarly, in Latin America Presidents Chávez, Correa, and Morales manipulated the legal system to punish critics and political opponents (de Lara and de la Torre 2020).

### *2.3 Populism and Political Stability*

Many scholars agree that populists favor a radicalization of politics and, at least in less institutionalized settings, pose a threat to the political stability of the regime (Fella and Ruzza 2013). They claim that ‘polarization is an essential component of populism political DNA’ and ‘the most important element of its rule’ (Roberts 2021: 3, Pappas 2019: 212). This polarization may assume pernicious forms when pushing the rival actors to sharply reject the commitment to the ‘rules of the game’, which negatively impact political stability, especially in less institutionalized countries, as the case was recently in Latin America (e.g., Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia).

Populists frequently seek to demonize their political opponents (Abts and Rummens 2007) and are intolerant to political pluralism and minorities (Ufen 2019). Legler (2006, 8) assures: “Populism is divisive, polarizing, intolerant, and anti-plural. It feeds on existing classes, on racial, ethnic, and rural-urban divides”. Hence, populist rulers also deliberately minimize the space for negotiation and compromise, which increases the chances for political instability. Scholars have observed that the embedded need for enemies that infuses contemporary populism, engenders a pressure for conflict that transcends actual threats and rational political calculus. Describing the rising to power of Filipino President Rodrigo Duterte, McCoy (2017, 515) argues that: “while populism might still be in its benign rhetorical phase in America and Europe, in less developed democracies, populist leaders have learned to inscribe their power on the battered and bloodied bodies of their victims” and cites similar waves of violence affecting populist governments in Thailand, Russia, Indonesia and Turkey.

Roberts (2006) also refers that the intensification of the rhetoric and actions by populist leaders against political oppositions leads to a radicalization of politics. Thus, the oppositions increasingly underestimate elections as a peaceful instrument to alternate power and become more likely to adopt undemocratic and harsh means against populist regimes in power, such as military coups, violent protests, strikes, attacks on public institutions, the creation of separatist movements, and the violent dissolution of populist parties. Finally, if populist rulers lose the elections, they seek to undermine and contest the legitimacy of elections results. They also support claims of vote fraud and of theft of the people's will (Ufen 2019). After his loss in the presidential elections, President Trump claimed that he had won the legal vote and peddled electoral fraud (Gerhart 2021). These allegations instigated the storming of the Capitol by angry mobs inspired by the populist president, who told supporters that the election was stolen. Only its robust democratic institutions avoided the US to suffer from a more dramatic political crisis.

### *2.4 Populism and Control of Corruption*

Some scholars have stressed that populists dislike and attack all state institutions (Canovan 1999). Therefore, one of the features of populist governments has been to promote mass patronage policies as a means of capturing government and civil service systems. As a result of believing that civil servants and officials keep loyal to the old and corrupt system, populist governments seek to sideline or replace those officials (Peters and Pierre, 2019). Because of this process of bureaucracy politicization, we would expect an increasing level

of patronage within the government, which may open the door to less control of corruption and favoritism (Hawkins 2010). In Latin America, populist regimes have adopted patronage policies to control the public service and reward followers. Similarly, the Trump administration has sought to politicize appointments in the federal government to weaken the autonomy of the civil service (Packer 2020). In their recent empirical study, Mounk and Kyle (2018) conclude that corruption has spread during populist governments' rule. In this vein, the report of Transparency International anti-corruption helpdesk, which examines the effects of populist leaders coming into power on anti-corruption policies in Hungary, the Philippines, and the USA, concludes that populism and corruption are inherently interlinked (Kossow 2019).

However, others notice that most of populist parties actually campaign against corruption and, not surprisingly, voters with populist attitudes do reward populist party specifically for this reason (Engler 2020; Abts and Rummens 2007). These parties tend to depend on anti-elite rhetoric, addressing the supposed remoteness, lack of consideration, and political corruption of political leaders (Pop-Eleches 2010). Thus, in the U.S., Trump promised to “drain the swamp”, specifically to get rid of corruption in Washington DC, and fight against a political and economic elite he depicted as corrupt (Arnsdorf, Dawsey, and Lippmann 2016). In Brazil, Bolsonaro vowed to free politics from corruption and clean up the administration, and nominated Sergio Moro, the judge who led the *Lava Jato* scandal investigations, as his minister of justice, thus highlighting the prominence that anti-corruption discourse played in securing his presidential election (Boadle and Stargardter 2018).

### *2.5 Populism and Government Effectiveness*

Populists have recently exploited the popularity decline of traditional parties to win elections in many countries: yet, once in government, they often did not transform their radical pledges into coherent and efficient public policies (Liddiard 2019). Some posit that these parties lack the sort of skills and knowledge associated with political professionalism, which negatively reflects on the quality of governance (Albertazzi and McDonnell 2015; Canovan 1999). Also, they frequently “recruit ill-informed persons, who do not have consistent preferences and who seek ‘emotional’ rather than programmatic satisfactions from politics” (Schmitter 2019, 78): this explains why many populist governments have a short life in power. For example, Heinisch (2003) concluded that one of the critical reasons for the failure of Austria's right-wing populist party (FPÖ) 2000-2002 governing coalition with the center-right Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) was the lack of experience in crafting adequate policies and personalizing political decisions. As a consequence, in numerous countries guided by populist governments, WGI data show significant falls in government effectiveness, as in Venezuela, since 1998 (Cachanosky and Padilla 2019) or Hungary and Poland, since the 2010s' (Ágh 2015).

Moreover, populist leaders tend to criticize professional politicians and don't rely on technocratic expertise (Bartha, Zsolt, and Szikra 2020). When in power, they often experience difficulties to tackle, and provide concrete solutions toward, urgent and complex problems. The current spread of the Covid-19 pandemic is just the latest in a series of failures of populist leaders. They have tended to accuse the Chinese government and immigrants of spreading the pandemic, while denying science and showing contempt for experts (Gugushvili, Koltai, Stuckler, and McKee 2020). For instance, President Trump eliminated several institutions and programs designed to respond to the Coronavirus pandemic crisis, like the entire global-health-security-and-biodefense unit of the National Security Council (Garrett 2020).

### *2.6 Populism and Regulatory Quality*

Populists, both on the right and on the left, do not share the main economic tenets of the liberal establishment (Gnan and Masciandaro 2020). In other words, populist governments tend to reduce economic freedom and adopt protectionist policies. In addition, they are prone to reduce freedom of trade and tighten economic regulations, favor income redistribution, promote a rise in trade barriers and tariffs, restrict immigration, and endorse a pro-nationalist or anti-global rhetoric. The private sector and business are likely to worry about the risks of the policies favored by populist governments, that negatively affect the profitability of investments and regulatory quality (de Sousa, Fernandes, and Weile 2020). More generally, populists discard restrictions on the handling of economic policies: autonomous regulatory agencies, independent central banks, and external constraints (such as global trade rules) limit their choices and therefore need to be restrained. Also, to the extent that populist political movements erode a country's institutional quality, they also adversely affect regulatory quality. Central Bank Independence, for instance, is intimately tied to the broader process of institutional development and can erode when institutional quality declines (Goodhart and Lastra 2018).

Typically, populist governments in regions like Latin America have taken harsh measures against big business, foreign investors, and privatization of the oil industry (Dornbusch and Edwards 1991). Also, populist governments in Hungary have sought to renationalize the strategic sectors of the economy: by the end of 2017, the foreign ownership of the banking sector decreased from 80 percent to just below 50 percent (Toplisek 2020). Rodrik (2018) argues that populism puts "people's interests" before the interests of autonomous regulatory agencies, thus favoring partisan and myopic political interests, rather than technical and sounder economic principles. Populists frequently accuse foreign companies or foreign governments of engaging in dumping and other forms of unfair competition. Trump's withdrawing from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP), the Paris Climate Agreement, and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces (INF) treaty, represented a serious challenge to globalization and a multilateral economy.

Based on this literature and on the observation of the actual performance of recent populist governments reported above, we submit the hypothesis that populist governments exercise a negative influence on the quality of governance. We expect this effect to show both on each component dimension of the concept and on its aggregate overall measurement.

### **3. Data Analysis, Description and Discussion of Results**

In the following section of the paper, we adopt two different statistical methods: a descriptive method, based on the analysis of means, and an inferential method, based on regression analyses. While the first offers a rich description of specific variations from the general findings and highlights interesting exceptions, the second permits to draw firmer conclusions from the data and to test our hypothesis, namely that populist governments exercise a negative influence on the quality of governance.

#### *3.1 Descriptive Statistics*

We start by comparing the mean governance values under populism with the same values prevailing in each country the year before populists came to power. Our first conclusion is that populist governments in power had significantly negative effects on all six aspects of governance quality: the average values for each dimension are lower under populist governments than they were before these governments came to power (Table 2). Only voice and accountability and rule of law, however, are statistically significant, when the relevant ANOVA tests for repeated measures are applied: in these categories the difference between populist

and non-populist rule is remarkable (-0.298 and -0.289, respectively). In short, this evidence supports the view that populism constitutes a threat to governance quality: populist governments tend to demolish checks and balances, limit minority rights and undermine independent institutions such as the judiciary, the civil service, and public media. In addition, they often limit the scope of competition and voice by political opponents and curb their access to the media and the electoral game.

**Table 2 - Impact of Populist governments on WGI's quality of governance dimensions**

	<i>No Populist governments in power</i>	<i>Populist governments in power</i>	<i>Delta (Populist-No Populist)</i>
Voice and Accountability****	0.407	0.118	-0.289
Political stability and absence of violence	-0.085	-0.177	-0.092
Government effectiveness	0.220	0.048	-0.172
Regulatory quality	0.343	0.064	-0.279
Rule of law****	0.145	-0.153	-0.298
Control of corruption	0.016	-0.144	-0.160

**Note:** The WGI's quality of governance dimensions runs from -2.5 (low quality) to +2.5 (high quality). The first two columns show the quality of governance levels, which are low when the sign is negative, while others when the sign is positive. The third column shows the differences between the values of the second and the first column. \*\*\*\*p<0.001.

**Source:** Data elaborated by the Authors from Kyle and Meyer (2020); Our elaboration on WGI (1996-2019).

A more detailed analysis of particular cases further specifies this relationship and correspondingly highlights a number of interesting exceptions (Table 3). The main hypothesis on the impact of populist governments on voice and accountability is confirmed in countries like Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega, 2007-19), and Hungary (Viktor Orbán, 2010-19), but also Thailand (Thaksin Shinawatra, 2001-06), where voice and accountability decreased substantially. However, in other instances of populism, as in Serbia (Aleksandar Vučić, 2014-17), Paraguay (Fernando Lugo, 2008-12), and Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13), this governance score did improve. Political stability has been undermined especially in Ecuador (Rafael Correa, 2007-17) and Thailand (Thaksin Shinawatra, 2001-06), while it strengthened in Serbia (Aleksandar Vučić, 2014-17) and Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13).

Likewise, populism has been associated to increased government effectiveness, especially in Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13), Serbia (Aleksandar Vučić, 2014-17) and North Macedonia (Nikola Gruevski, 2006-16). On the contrary, effectiveness declined more markedly in Mexico (Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 2018-19), Greece (Syriza, 2015-19) and Hungary (Viktor Orbán, 2010-19). In general terms, regulatory quality weakened strongly under populism. Populist governments have been linked to a robust decrease of this factor especially in Bolivia (Evo Morales, 2006-19), Argentina (Néstor Kirchner and Cristina Fernández, 2003-2015), Greece (Syriza, 2015-19), Sri Lanka (Mahinda Rajapaksa) and Hungary (Viktor Orbán, 2010-19), while in other cases, as in Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13) and Serbia (Aleksandar Vučić, 2014-17), they proved able to promote private sector development, or at least that was the perception they were able to inspire.

Our empirical results also show that during periods of populist governments the rule of law was generally undermined. Cases of egregious decline are those of Ecuador (Rafael Correa, 2007-17), and Bolivia (Evo Morales, 2006-19). The positive exceptions namely populist governments that experienced an improvement of this dimension of governance, occurred in Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13), Serbia (Aleksandar

Vučić, 2014-17), the Slovak Republic (Robert Fico, 2006-10), Romania (Traian Băsescu, 2004-14) and North Macedonia (Nikola Gruevski, 2006-16). Finally, in Hungary (Viktor Orbán, 2010-19), South Africa (Jacob Zuma, 2009-18) and Mexico (Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 2018-19) a significant backsliding in the control of corruption took place under populist governments. Ironically, while populists often used popular discontent with corruption to win elections, they frequently ended up even more corrupt than non-populist governments. On the other hand, in Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13), Paraguay (Fernando Lugo, 2008-12) and North Macedonia (Nikola Gruevski, 2006-16) populists in power promoted a reduction in levels of corruption.

**Table 3 - Most Positive and Negative Cases of Impact of Populism on Governance**

<i>WGI Dimensions</i>	<i>Most Negative Cases</i>		<i>Most Positive cases</i>	
Voice and Accountability	Nicaragua (2007-19)	-0.541	Serbia (2014-19)	0.319
	Hungary (2010-19)	-0.514	Paraguay (2008-12)	0.235
	Thailand (2001-06)	-0.350	Georgia (2004-13)	0.235
Political Stability and Absence of Violence	Italy (2001-06)	-0.512	Serbia (2014-19)	0.923
	Thailand (2001-06)	-0.835	Georgia (2004-13)	0.531
	Ecuador (2007-17)	-1.269	North Macedonia (2006-16)	0.412
Government Effectiveness	Hungary (2010-19)	-0.320	Georgia (2004-13)	0.779
	Greece (2015-19)	-0.336	Serbia (2014-19)	0.542
	Mexico (2018-19)	-0.366	North Macedonia (2006-16)	0.499
Regulatory Quality	Greece (2015-19)	-0.389	Georgia (2004-13)	0.91
	Argentina (2003-15)	-0.455	Serbia (2014-19)	0.558
	Bolivia (2006-19)	-0.814	North Macedonia (2006-16)	0.481
Rule of Law	Greece (2015-19)	-0.592	Georgia (2004-13)	0.790
	Bolivia (2006-19)	-0.640	Serbia (2014-19)	0.631
	Ecuador (2007-17)	-2.077	Slovak Republic (2006-10)	0.164
Control of Corruption	Mexico (2018-19)	-0.423	Georgia (2004-13)	1.097
	South Africa (2009-19)	-0.450	Paraguay (2008-12)	0.483
	Hungary (2010-19)	-0.457	North Macedonia (2006-16)	0.423

**Source:** Our elaboration on WGI (1996-2019) and from Kyle and Meyer (2020).

Overall, the cases that best exemplify the typical relationship between populism and the quality of governance are found especially in Latin America, such as Ecuador (Rafael Correa, 2007-17), Nicaragua (Daniel Ortega, 2007-19), Mexico (Andrés Manuel López Obrador, 2018-19), and Bolivia (Evo Morales,

2006-19).<sup>4</sup> The most relevant exceptions, on the other hand, are represented by countries like Georgia (Mikheil Saakashvili, 2004-13), and Serbia (Aleksandar Vučić, 2014-19).<sup>5</sup> In short, although the general relationship among our variables is strong, and significant in all but one case, there is still a great variety of exceptions. Thus, other relevant factors, beside those already discussed, may be at work and a meaningful explanation of the effects of populism may require additional and more specific accounts. Accordingly, we introduced in the analysis another variable, centered on different varieties of populism (Table 4).

The differences among groups means in Table 4 were all statistically significant. Our initial hypotheses are fully met only in the case of inclusive populism, which is associated to a worsening quality of governance for all six dimensions, while neoliberal populism only worsens two (rule of law and control of corruption), and exclusive populism one (political stability and the absence of violence). The latter finding is somehow surprising, given the negative fame surrounding this type of populist government. The definition of exclusive populism, however, includes a ‘law and order’ subvariety, “in which criminals are cast as the primary enemies of the people who are threatening the character of the country, such as is being seen with the rise of Bolsonaro in Brazil and Duterte in the Philippines” (Kyle and Gultchin 2018, 23). If the policies of a populist government are especially aimed at curbing crime and restore public order, it is possible that rule of law and control of corruption may be eventually reinforced, although the questionable methods often employed for this purpose in practice may, in the long run, undermine or greatly dilute this outcome. In Turkey, for instance, after nineteen years of Justice and Development Party rule, the initial pledges of democratic reforms have been replaced by authoritarian politics and procedures that undermine the rule of law (Kirişçi and Sloat 2019, 1). Yet, in his first decade in power, Erdoğan had presented himself as a leader capable of reconciling Islam and democracy, willing to respect minority rights, and looking forward to joining the EU and acknowledge its principles. However, he eventually renounced his law-abiding policies in favor of autocratic ones, and used the coup attempt of 2016 to crush and systematically dismantle the rule of law (Human Rights Foundation 2019).

The only form of populism that harms regulatory quality, on the other hand, is the inclusive one. Given the clear laissez-faire and capitalist bent of this indicator, the outcome comes as no surprise. The same happens for government effectiveness: the tense social conflict that often accompanies the rise of inclusive populism accounts, at least partially, for the poor results in policy formulation and implementation and for the politicization of civil service employees, as well as for the negative impact on another governance indicator, namely political stability and the absence of violence. Voice and accountability, finally, also suffer visibly under this type of populism: the authoritarian temptations of a few left-leaning executives, and their attempts to retract from democratic power alternations, electoral rules, and separation of powers, justify this outcome.

**Table 4 - Impact of Populist typologies on WGI’s Quality of Governance Indicators from 1996 to 2019 (mean values: -2.5/+2.5)**

	<i>Voice and Accountability***</i> *	<i>Political stability and</i>	<i>Government effectiveness</i> ****	<i>Regulatory quality***</i> *	<i>Rule of law****</i>	<i>Control of corruption***</i> *
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<sup>4</sup> These governments appear respectively two (Ecuador) and one (Nicaragua, Mexico and Bolivia) times as the most egregious cases of negative impact of populism on all the major indicators of governance. All of these governments are of the inclusive variety.

<sup>5</sup> These governments appear respectively four (Georgia) and two (Serbia) times as the most glaring cases of positive impact on all the major indicators of governance. Saakashvili’s populist government is of the neoliberal type, while Gruevski’s belongs to the exclusive variety.

		<i>absence of violence****</i>				
Populism-Neoliberal	0.081	0.161	0.099	0.230	-0.057	-0.028
Populism Inclusive	-0.141	-0.488	-0.463	-0.609	-0.771	-0.626
Populism Exclusive	0.368	-0.193	0.471	0.527	0.330	0.199

**Note:** The WGI's quality of governance dimensions runs from -2.5 (low quality) to +2.5 (high quality). \*p<0.10, \*\*p<0.05, \*\*\*p<0.001, \*\*\*\*p<0.001.

**Source:** Our elaboration on WGI (1996-2019) and from Kyle and Meyer (2020).

Geographical region is another variable that affects varieties of populism and their impact on socioeconomic indicators (Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, and Ostiguy 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2011). In this case, however, our data showed less useful: only voice and accountability, in both Latin America and Europe, reached statistical significance. In Latin America, the advent of populist governments implied a radical decrease of this dimension, while in Europe the fall is equally clear, but less remarkable. To better determine the extent of regional variations, we eventually resolved to combine geographical data with types of populist governments, and analyze how these regimes performed in different world regions (Table 5).<sup>6</sup>

In Latin America, under populism, most dimensions of governance show a negative sign, (except for voice and accountability under exclusive populist governments, while regulatory quality does not reach significance). In this subcontinent, inclusive populism exercises the most powerful influence on quality of governance (namely on political stability and absence of violence, government effectiveness, regulatory quality, rule of law and control of corruption), while neoliberal populism (negative sign) and exclusive populism (positive sign) have the strongest impact on voice and accountability. In both Europe and Asia, finally, results are not significant, with the exception of rule of law in the latter continent, which shows a positive impact for all types of populist government.

In short, regional variations and types of populism matter, and these more refined results show a great deal of differences in the major areas of the world (Kaltwasser et al. 2017, for a detailed discussion): populism appears particularly negative for governance in Latin America, in its socioeconomic variety, while its impact is better in Asia, in its exclusive kind. In Asia, exclusive populism is represented by cases as diverse as India (Narendra Modi), Israel (Benjamin Netanyahu) and Sri Lanka (Mahinda and Gotabaya Rajapaksa): unlike their Latin America counterparts, during the period considered, this type of populism had a beneficial effect on governance. Historically, inclusionary populism has been more prevalent in the region than exclusionary forms, and several populist leaders (as Modi in India) have been active in pushing through long-needed economic reforms, which may account for the positive results (Kyle and Gultchin 2018).

**Table 5 - Impact of populist governments on WGI's Quality of Governance Indicators in five World Regions from 1996 to 2018 (mean values: -2.5/+2.5)**

Latin America						

<sup>6</sup> North America and Africa were excluded from this table since, due to insufficient information, no reliable results could eventually be calculated.



	Voice and Accountability****	Political stability and absence of violence****	Government effectiveness*	Regulatory quality	Rule of law*	Control of corruption****
Populism-Neoliberal	-0.942	-0.048	-0.530	-0.707	-0.833	-0.475
Populism Inclusive	-0.283	-0.588	-0.699	-0.891	-1.051	-0.790
Populism Exclusive	0.344	-0.547	-0.187	-0.178	-0.181	-0.334

## Europe

	Voice and Accountability	Political stability and absence of violence	Government effectiveness	Regulatory quality	Rule of law	Control of corruption
Populism-Neoliberal	0.542	0.197	0.269	0.668	0.188	0.059
Populism Inclusive	0.764	0.008	0.310	0.348	0.162	-0.077
Populism Exclusive	0.422	0.179	0.441	0.574	0.275	0.165

## Asia

	Voice and Accountability	Political stability and absence of violence	Government effectiveness	Regulatory quality	Rule of law***	Control of corruption
Populism-Neoliberal	0.785	0.466	0.846	0.831	0.770	0.601
Populism Inclusive	-0.180	-0.644	0.312	0.278	0.046	-0.302
Populism Exclusive	0.205	-1.004	0.467	0.367	0.358	0.194

**Note:** \*p<0.10, \*\*p>0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*\*p<0.001

**Source:** Our elaboration on WGI (1996-2019) and from Kyle and Meyer (2020).

In Latin America, on the other hand, populists such as Peru's Fujimori and Argentina's Menem privatized in the 1990s, state-owned industries, opened their economies to commerce and implemented austerity measures: after an initial success, these policies collapsed. By the mid-2000s, with neoliberal programs out of favor and a commodity boom under way, populism took a new form across the continent: fiscal largesse funded big patronage projects and strengthened populists' acceptance. These strategies, however, faced recent setbacks: in Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro experienced a period of severe economic and social freefall, and allied

populist leaders were defeated in Ecuador, Peru, Argentina and Bolivia. In Brazil, finally, a new brand of exclusive populism was inaugurated by far-right President Jair Bolsonaro (Ibid., 40-1).

These data suggest that similar types of populism operate in very different ways in separate geographical contexts. Neoliberal populism, for instance, is associated with negative changes in the six indicators of quality of governance in Latin America, while in Asia with positive and substantial gains (-0.942, -0.048, -0.530, -0.707, -0.833, -0.475 against 0.785, 0.466, 0.846, 0.831, 0.770 and 0.601, respectively). According to Kyle and Gultchin (2018, 6) these varied outcomes may be explained, at least initially, by the fact that: “some populists rise to power in countries with long histories of social exclusion and use their popular appeal – and a strongman governing style – to point the way to more inclusive societies. Others rise to power and dismantle democratic checks and balances and ruthlessly subjugate any opposition from the get-go. Others still thwart independent institutions and democratic processes but deliver economic growth”<sup>7</sup>. In addition, while inclusive populism reflects closely the general negative results illustrated above, neoliberal varieties promoted, along with political stability, also government effectiveness and regulatory quality. The exclusive version, surprisingly, has shown especially effective in supporting, beside these latter outputs, also control of corruption and the rule of law, mostly in cases where it emerged on the basis of law-and-order appeals.<sup>8</sup>

### *3.2 Inferential Statistics*

Our analysis, however, is still incomplete. Unless we regress the quality of governance score (DV) on a series of institutional variables that may explain why populists affect negatively the quality of governance, we are unable to disentangle the net effects of these governments. Among other factors, there are: presidential and parliamentary systems of government, majoritarian and proportional electoral laws, young and old democracies, poor and rich countries, Gini index, Gdp growth, time, and countries.

These are variables that do impact in the governance output and are usually included in systematic analyses of the relationship between populism and quality of governance. In order to estimate the effects of these relationships, we use different OLS regression models whose dependent variable is measured by an index that summarizes the six dimensions employed by the WGI.<sup>9</sup> We obtained this index through a factor analysis (FA; Table 6) based on a principal component factors method, that allows to decrease the attributes (the governance’s six dimensions) into a smaller set of factors: the result shows to be reliable (Cronbach’s alpha

<sup>7</sup> This investigation is further complicated by the presence of slippery concepts, such as populism and its features, which are often contested, vary in time and are likely to yield incoherent empirical classifications and inaccurate historical descriptions: for instance, Saakashvili’s governments (2004-2013) have been classified as populist throughout, under the claim that the ‘true people’ were hard-working victims of a state run by special interests, i.e., the elites empowered by the former Communist regime. However, this was true in particular during his first years in power, but much less so in the following periods, when bold reforms of the public administration and a determined struggle against corruption were enacted.

<sup>8</sup> Another element, that explains the efficacy of exclusive populism, for instance in Europe, is the growth of immigration, which populist parties exploited politically by ascribing to foreign settlers increasing law-breaking and social strife, which they were able to make up for.

<sup>9</sup> As known, panel data models allow to examine group and/or time-series effects, which can be fixed or random. We performed two specific tests to identify which model to use: the F test and the Breusch-Pagan Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test. The first test refers to the possible use of a fixed-effects model, while the second of a random-effects model. Thus, we have first applied a regression model containing all the dependent and independent variables shown in the table 7. Later, on the base of the p-values obtained (fixed effects model - F test - Prob> F = 0.000; random-effects model - Breusch-Pagan Lagrange Multiplier (LM) test. - Prob> chibar2 = 1.000), we rejected the null hypotheses of each test and, consequently excluded the possibility to apply a fixed-effects or a random-effects model. We eventually decided to use an OLS regression model, including a country variable that allows for a statistically significant improvement in the fit.

test=0.951). The main independent variable is categorical and represents three different types of populism: inclusive, exclusive and neoliberal.

The relationship among dependent and independent variables, finally, is controlled through a series of additional factors, such as income (Hung et al. 2020),<sup>10</sup> age of democracy (Bahur and Grimes 2021),<sup>11</sup> electoral and government systems (Menocal, 2011),<sup>12</sup> time and countries. We have also considered additional socio-economic factors, such as the Gini index<sup>13</sup> (Perera and Lee 2013) and GDP growth (Hung et al. 2020)<sup>14</sup>.

**Table 6 - Factor Analysis**

	<i>Quality of Government</i>
Voice and accountability	0.896
Political stability	0.685
Government effectiveness	0.950
Regular quality	0.929
Rule of law	0.966
Corruption	0.943
Eigenvalue	4.860
Variance explained (%)	81.0
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test	0.897
Barlett test	0.000
Cronbach's alpha test	0.951

Prior analyses conclude that income and wealth are critical determinants of the quality of governance (Garcia-Sanchez and Ballesteros 2013, Duho, Amankwa, and Surugu 2020). Given the strength of wealth as an explanation of governance quality, countries with lower economic income face critical challenges and problems. In their empirical studies, Brewer and his colleagues deduce that wealth and income factors are the most likely determinants of the effectiveness of Asian governments from 1996 to 2005 (Brewer, Choi, and Walker 2007). Many scholars agree that raising public revenue is key to providing a better quality of public goods and services, besides enhancing governments' capacity to design and implement effective policies (Besley and Persson 2008; Cingolani 2013).

<sup>10</sup> Source: World Development Indicators.

<sup>11</sup> Source: Polity IV

<sup>12</sup> Source: Idea Electoral Systems Design Handbook (<https://www.idea.int/data-tools/data/electoral-system-design>); Anckar and Fredriksson, 2018 (updated by authors).

<sup>13</sup> Source: World Development Indicators

<sup>14</sup> Source: World Development Indicators

Scholars engaged in debate to determine to what extent the parliamentary or presidential system of government has a better effect on the quality of governance. Gerring, Thacker and Moreno (2009, 28-29) view parliamentary systems as promoting the quality of governance, since these systems encourage democratic accountability and governmental effectiveness through: "stronger political parties, corporatist interest organization, tighter principal-agent relationships within the various arms of the bureaucracy, centralized (national-level) electoral accountability, the capacity for flexible policymaking, a more institutionalized political sphere, and decisive leadership". Other scholars also assure that parliamentary systems allow the formation of coalition cabinets, which are likely to be much less dominant and enhance the quality of governance (Lijphart 1999; Doorenspleet 2005). On the other hand, for others the presidential system supports the quality of governance through pluralism, in contrast to parliamentary systems, based on corporatism. Furthermore, it enhances accountability through a better practice of "checks and balances" (Laffont and Meleu 2001; Persson, Roland, and Tabellini 1997). They claim that presidential systems make policy-making more transparent and create a stronger connection between lawmakers and citizens (Shugart and Carey 1992). However, many conclude that presidential systems produce lower welfare spending, lower productivity, and inferior macroeconomic results (McManus and Ozkan 2018; Persson and Tabellini 2003).

There are differences of views among scholars also on the impact of the type of electoral systems (proportional or majoritarian) on the quality of governance. Supporters of PR systems assure that such systems enhance a fair representation of minority parties and back social diversity and rights (Foweraker and Landman 2002; Doorenspleet, 2005). Empirical studies show that PR electoral systems increase voter turnout more than majoritarian ones (Blais and Carty 1990; Lijphart 1999). In his seminal study, Lijphart assures that PR systems promote the quality of governance more than majoritarian systems: he recommended PR systems, mainly in divided societies. On the other hand, others claim that countries that apply a majoritarian system enjoy effective governance, political stability, and accountability. This system is likely to generate a single party government, rather than a coalition government, and to enhance its performance by formulating and implementing concrete policies, and passing legislation fast and smoothly. Besides, majoritarian systems support political stability by avoiding conducting early elections (Lardeyret 1993; Norris 1997). Hence, majoritarian systems would promote accountability to the general public, in contrast to the PR systems, which tend to sink in barraging and secret deals among political players (Schmidt 2002).

Others, finally, connect the level and age of democracy with political accountability and combating corruption (Sung 2004). They conclude that well-established democratic institutions reflect positively on the quality of governance, by undermining the actions of corrupt officials. Empirical studies show that mature democracies tend to be more effective, also in combating corruption (Brewer et al. 2007). In other words, the longer is the length of experience with democracy, the better the quality of governance (Polterovich and Popov 2007; Saha 2008). In his empirical study, Pellegata (2009) concludes that countries with a higher level of democracy and accumulated democratic experience are less corrupt. Similarly, Bäck and Hadenius (2008) find that countries in the initial phases of democracy suffer from a lack of government effectiveness, while this increases in more mature democracies. Yet, Rothstein (2019) views that democracy is not a guarantee against corruption. He observes that levels of corruption are high in some mature democracies, such as Italy, Greece, Spain, and the US.

When the empirical relationship is assessed through regression analysis, and further control variables are introduced, our previous descriptive findings are confirmed (Table 7a). Since the relationship between

populism and quality of governance raises questions concerning reciprocity, we also run a two-stage least squares regression that confirmed that our model does not present endogeneity problems.<sup>15</sup>

Populism continues to show a negative impact on quality of governance. However, only the inclusive type is statistically significant ( $b=-0.091$ ): its impact is considerably stronger than for the exclusive type (model 1). We recall here the arguments used above to explain the poor governance results of inclusive populism: the anti-capitalist and laissez-faire bent of these government and the social tension that often accompanies their establishment played a crucial role. In addition, the authoritarian proclivities of a number of few left-leaning populist leaders, and their attempts to prevent their political adversaries to get to power democratically, by restricting and manipulating electoral rules and the separation of powers, made things worse.

In addition, we find that the effects of the different types of populism persist when we check for per capita income, which is positively related to governance quality, as expected ( $b=0.197$  and  $0.233$  for upper-middle and high incomes, respectively, see model 2). The same holds for age of democracy, as indicated by a majority of scholars ( $b=0.207$ , model 3).

**Tab. 7a Regression models**

	Model 1		Model 2		Model 3	
	Beta (Sig.)	Std. Err.	Beta (Sig.)	Std. Err.	Beta (Sig.)	Std. Err.
<i>Populism (no populism)</i>						
neoliberal	0.008	0.039	-0.003	0.038	-0.009	0.037
inclusive	-0.103****	2	-0.089****	0.041	-0.091****	0.040
exclusive	-0.001	0.041	-0.003	0.040	-0.002	0.038
<i>Income per capita (low income)</i>						
lower middle income			0.063	0.097	0.055	0.094
upper middle income			0.197****	0.108	0.178***	0.105
high income			0.233****	0.126	0.207****	0.121
<i>Age of democracy (Log)</i>					0.207****	0.034
<i>Electoral System (mixed)</i>						
proportional						

<sup>15</sup> When we tested for the endogeneity of populist governments (the null hypothesis being that they are exogenous), results - Robust regression  $F(3,30) = 2.636$  ( $p = 0.068$ ) - show that the hypothesis is not rejected. We thus cannot reject the exogeneity of populism in the model.

majoritarian

*Political System*  
(*semi\_presidential*)

presidential

parliament

Gini index	0.327**	0.016	0.358**	0.016	0.314**	0.014
Gini index*Gini index	-0.290*	0.000	-0.294**	0.000	-0.267*	0.000
Gdp growth	0.018*	0.003	0.018*	0.002	0.014	0.003
Years	-0.031***	0.002	-0.080****	0.002	-0.147****	0.003

*Country* (Argentina)

Belarus	-0.201****	0.110	0.182****	0.111	-0.093****	0.129
Bolivia	-0.088****	0.077	-0.41**	0.082	-0.035**	0.079
Brazil	0.024	0.081	0.033**	0.079	0.041***	0.076
Bulgaria	0.078****	0.085	0.114****	0.086	0.135****	0.085
Czech Republic	0.308****	0.104	0.312****	0.103	0.294****	0.100
Ecuador	-0.135****	0.072	-0.107****	0.072	-0.106****	0.070
Georgia	0.040***	0.092	0.090****	0.101	0.146****	0.113
Greece	0.214****	0.079	0.200****	0.087	0.168****	0.088
Hungary	0.285****	0.103	0.290****	0.100	0.310****	0.098
India	-0.021	0.108	0.023	0.128	0.003	0.126
Israel	0.209****	0.087	0.200****	0.092	0.177****	0.091
Italy	0.232****	0.086	0.224****	0.094	0.193****	0.094
Japan	0.257****	0.099	0.246****	0.106	0.224****	0.105
Mexico	-0.013	0.074	-0.009	0.072	0.043***	0.081
Nicaragua	-0.058****	0.116	-0.030**	0.125	-0.019*	0.122
North Macedonia	-0.040**	0.088	-0.004	0.090	0.050***	0.097
Paraguay	-0.188****	0.074	-0.14****	0.078	-0.117****	0.079
Perù	-0.057****	0.074	-0.026*	0.075	-0.006	0.074

Philippines	-0.046****	0.104	-0.015	0.1008	-0.007	0.105
Poland	0.253****	0.089	0.256****	0.087	0.262****	0.084
Romania	0.046***	0.088	0.079****	0.088	0.124****	0.092
Serbia	0.001	0.098	0.014	0.096	0.063****	0.107
Slovak Republic	0.245****	0.111	0.249****	0.108	0.280****	0.107
Slovenia	0.345****	0.107	0.339****	0.110	0.364****	0.108
South Africa	0.123****	0.146	0.118****	0.142	0.145****	0.140
Sri Lanka	-0.035***	0.101	0.010	0.107	-0.010	0.104
Thailand	0.028**	0.071	0.062****	0.074	0.098****	0.077
Turkey	-0.012	0.090	0.005	0.088	-0.014	0.087
United States	0.440****	0.075	0.425****	0.084	0.369****	0.092
Venezuela	-	0.073	-0.219****	0.070	-0.231****	0.069
Zambia	-0.085****	0.098	-0.039**	0.130	0.006	0.136
Constant	8.387**	3.516	22.667****	4.098	-42.390****	0.388
R-square	0.951		0.951		0.954	
Adjust R-square	0.947		0.947		0.951	
F (sig.)	0.000		0.000		0.000	
N	587		587		587	

**Note:** \*p<0.10, \*\*p>0.05, \*\*\*p<0.01, \*\*\*\*p<0.001

**Source:** World Bank, WGI, Polity V, Stiftung Bertelsmann (various years), CIA (various years), Kyle and Meyer, (2020).

Governance quality, in addition is negatively related to proportional electoral systems (b = -0.108, model 4, Tab. 7b), while Parliamentary systems of government appear to assist governance (b=0.980, model 5), following the contention that these systems of government facilitate the formation of less dominant coalition cabinets, and encourage democratic accountability and governmental effectiveness. Finally, governance quality levels tend to diminish over time (b = -0.147), probably due to the financial crisis of 2007-2008 and the migration emergency of 2015, especially in those regions where income inequalities (b = -0.267) are more evident (see fig. 1).

**Tab. 7b Regression models**

	Model 4		Model 5	
	Beta (Sig.)	Std. Err.	Beta (Sig.)	Std. Err.

*Populism (no populism)*

neoliberal	-0.009	0.037	-0.009	0.037
inclusive	-0.091****	0.040	-0.091****	0.040
exclusive	-0.002	0.038	-0.002	0.038

*Income per capita (low income)*

lower middle income	0.055	0.094	0.055	0.094
upper middle income	0.178***	0.105	0.178***	0.105
high income	0.207****	0.121	0.207****	0.121

<i>Age of democracy (Log)</i>	0.207****	0.034	0.207****	0.034
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*Electoral System (mixed)*

proportional	-0.108***	0.081	-0.108***	0.081
majoritarian	-0.066	0.122	-0.066	0.122

*Political System (semi\_presidential)*

presidential			0.042	0.104
parliament			0.980****	0.129

Gini index	0.314**	0.014	0.314**	0.014
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Gini index*Gini index	-0.267*	0.000	-0.267*	0.000
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Gdp growth	0.014	0.003	0.014	0.003
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Years	-0.147****	0.003	-0.147****	0.003
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*Country (Argentina)*

Belarus	-0.102***	0.152	-0.102***	0.152
Bolivia	-0.035**	0.079	-0.035**	0.079
Brazil	0.041***	0.076	0.041***	0.076



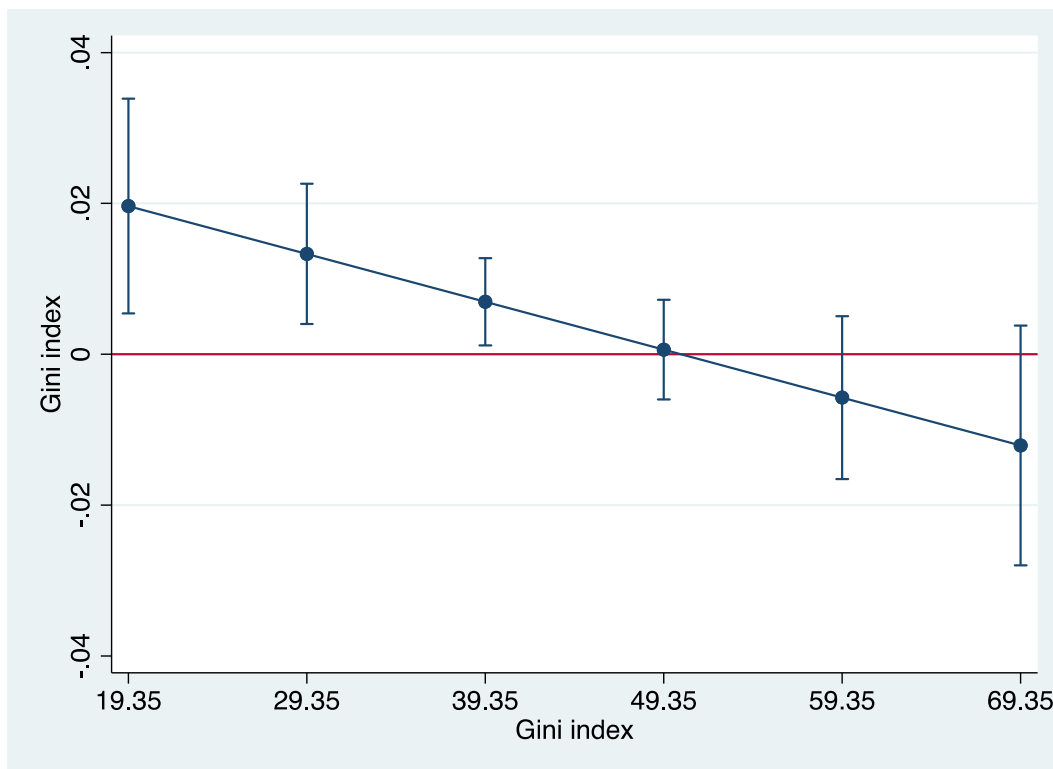
Bulgaria	-0.228****	0.090	-0.228****	0.090
Czech Republic	-0.069****	0.075	-0.069****	0.075
Ecuador	-0.106****	0.070	-0.106****	0.070
Georgia	0.146****	0.113	0.146****	0.113
Greece	-0.196****	0.091	-0.196****	0.091
Hungary	-0.063**	0.151	-0.063**	0.151
India	-0.220****	0.168	-0.220****	0.168
Israel	-0.129****	0.099	-0.129****	0.099
Italy	-0.216****	0.134	-0.216****	0.134
Japan	-0.049**	0.145	-0.049**	0.145
Mexico	--	--	--	--
Nicaragua	-0.019*	0.122	-0.019*	0.122
North Macedonia	-0.298****	0.095	-0.298****	0.095
Paraguay	-0.117****	0.079	-0.117****	0.079
Perù	-0.006	0.074	-0.006	0.074
Philippines	-0.032***	0.107	-0.032***	0.107
Poland	-0.102****	0.077	-0.102****	0.077
Romania	0.140****	0.112	0.140****	0.112
Serbia	-0.202****	0.103	-0.202****	0.103
Slovak Republic	-0.076****	0.070	-0.076****	0.070
Slovenia	--	--	--	--
South Africa	0.157****	0.174	0.157****	0.174
Sri Lanka	--	--	--	--
Thailand	-0.303****	0.125	-0.303****	0.125
Turkey	-0.329****	0.111	-0.329****	0.111
United States	0.361****	0.170	0.361****	0.170
Venezuela	-0.272****	0.093	-0.272****	0.093
Zambia	--	--	--	--
Constant	-42.532****	5.048	-45.532****	5.048
R-square	0.954		0.954	
Adjust R-square	0.951		0.951	

F (sig.)	0.000	0.000
N	587	587

**Note:** \* $p < 0.10$ , \*\* $p > 0.05$ , \*\*\* $p < 0.01$ , \*\*\*\* $p < 0.001$

**Source:** World Bank, WGI, Polity V, Stiftung Bertelsmann (various years), CIA (various years), Kyle and Meyer, (2020).

**Fig. 1 Marginal effect of Gini index on Gini index (with 90 % confidence interval)**



#### 4. Conclusions

This article aims to fill an academic gap in populist studies, by illustrating the effect of populist governments on the quality of governance in a broad sample of world countries. Our paper employs the World Bank's World Governance Indicators, which provide a quantitative measurement for the quality of governance under populist governments from 1996 until 2019. Since WGI indices do not measure populism, the study also depends on data sets that identify episodes of populist governments in numerous countries over the world.

In this vein, we sought to lay an analytic framework to examine the influence of populist governments on the quality of governance. The study hypothesizes that populist governments harm governance quality for a variety of reasons: their members lack experience, skills, and knowledge associated with political professionalism: as a result, they are not capable of designing and converting their electoral platforms into coherent and efficient public policies. Moreover, most populist governments adopt mass patronage policy as a

means of occupying government and civil system services, which opens the door to corruption and favoritism. Finally, our study agrees with the previous literature that most populist governments undermine the check and balances system, limit minority rights and political pluralism and frequently seek to demonize political opponents which, in turn, threatens democracy. Hence, populism raises the chances of harming the quality of governance.

Our empirical results are reached through different statistical methods and confirm our main hypotheses: overall, populist governments have a negative impact on the quality of governance, relative to the initial situation in which they came to power. The descriptive data support the conclusion that periods under populist governments in power had a significantly negative effect on all six aspects of governance quality, measured by the WGI data set. In five out of six cases, these results were corroborated by a statistical significance test. This outcome, however, varies considerably in different world regions and under diverse types of populism. While the general hypotheses hold in Latin America, better than expected results were recorded elsewhere: in Asia, populist governments were able to promote the rule of law. A series of regressions confirmed these results by adding control variables that ensured that the impact of populist governments was not blurred by other factors, such as wealth, age of democracy, democratic forms of government, electoral rules and time.

In this vein, we suggest that future studies should focus more explicitly on two research directions: on the one hand, identifying and adequately testing key control variables that may interfere in the main observed relationship and, on the other, examining, and explaining the internal and external conditions and circumstances that are likely to have an impact on government effectiveness under populist governments in particular cases, such as historical trajectories, levels of development, the role of key democratization processes or the presence of powerful external actors. A diversified and more nuanced methodological approach is most likely to provide further valuable insights, as well as new important empirical results in this field of research.

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