

RURAL WORKING-CLASS ILLIBERALISM

-A quantitative analysis of material and cultural mechanisms linking the rural working class to illiberal political parties from 1970-2019

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Core Word Count: 18559

NTNU: ISS, Spring 2021

ABSTRACT

This paper uses party- and national-level data to run a regression analysis which associates illiberalism in political parties to rural working-class support. The literary review describes both material and cultural mechanisms for rural working-class support of illiberal movements, including variants of material marginalisation and cultural alienation. The hypothesis is tested per 6202 electorally viable parties in the period 1970-2019. The results show a significant and positive correlation between the rural working class and illiberalism even when controlling for alternative support groups, regime qualities, party organisation forms, economic rhetoric and policies, and cultural rhetoric and policies.

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INTRODUCTION

The past decade has been characterised by a global decline of liberal democracies; while the world is still more democratic today than it was in the 1970's and 1980's, average contemporary democracy levels are comparable to those of 1990 (Alizada, et al., 2021, p. 13). What is sometimes referred to as a "third wave of autocratisation" describes the 25 currently autocratising countries, including several major G20 nations such as Brazil, Turkey, the United States, and India (Alizada, et al., 2021, p. 18); electoral- and closed autocracies now home 68% of the global population (Alizada, et al., 2021, p. 13). Closer to home, eastern European countries such as Hungary, Serbia, and Poland in particular have also experienced democratic decline under continued assaults on the independence of the judiciary, the media, and civil societal rights (Alizada, et al., 2021, p. 19). This modern trend of democratic backsliding is characterised by incrementalism; explosive incumbent takeovers and coups d'états have gradually declined in frequency and been replaced by more incremental and sometimes discontinuous actions which gradually make elections less competitive, restrict democratic participation, and deconstruct institutions of accountability such that executive actions need not be justified to citizens or officials who are left without corrective instruments to check executive action (Waldner & Lust, 2018, pp. 94-95). Furthermore, such democratic dismantling is often brought about by elected officials (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 3).

Francis Fukuyama argues that for a liberal-democratic political order to be prosperous, democratic, secure, and well governed it needs to appropriately balance three basic institutions: a capable and competent state, a strong rule of law, and democratic accountability (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 25); the former describes the capacity of the executive while the two latter describe judicial- and legislative constraints on executive power (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 467). The US constitution reflects a long history of intense distrust of and fear for executive authority, relating ultimately to English monarchical history, by emphasising "checks" on executive power by the judiciary and the legislative branches (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 488). This is in fact emphasised to such a degree that he characterises the US as "a state of courts and parties" (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 465). This paper is interested in how parties in particular might not effectively hinder authoritarianism if they themselves become illiberal and dismissive of liberal-democratic informal and formal institutions. Furthermore, authoritarian populism has a strong rural bias in many countries (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6) which raises the central question of this paper: by which mechanisms might rural support bases make parties more illiberal?

Take for instance the case of the United States and Donald Trump. American politics have a long-standing liberal tradition of institutionally restraining executive power (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 467) and optimists might argue for an extraordinary resilience of their constitutional democracy; enforced so far by their constitutional arrangements, historic national wealth, large middle class, vibrant civil society, and importantly: the normalisation of democratic norms such as mutual toleration and institutional forbearance (Levitsky & Way, 2018, pp. 101-102). Liberal-democratic formal and informal institutions might however be challenged by anti-elitist rhetoric if it escalates to radical, fundamental distrust of liberal-democratic institutions; when parties and candidates begin portraying the opposition or system in general as an existential threat, this might be conducive to radical illiberalism (Levitsky & Way, 2018, p. 104). Donald Trump's rise as a controversial political outsider and the ensuing political climate has unfortunately demonstrated the US's susceptibility to authoritarian, white nationalist political programmes (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 225). From 2010 to 2020, the LDI-score¹ the United States dropped from 0.86 to 0.73 which reflects Donald Trump's repeated assaults on the media and opposition politicians, and the significant weakening of Congress' de facto checks and counterbalances to executive power (Alizada et al., 2021, p. 19), challenging established liberal-democratic institutions in the process. His rise seems to reflect a long-standing political-cultural tension between the liberal internationalism of metropolitan, intellectual elites, and the "Jacksonian tradition" of common Americans in rural communities; the former might be described as Lockean, secular, and cosmopolitan, while the latter reflects notions of an exclusive ethno-religious community consisting of white Christians (Cha, 2016, pp. 83-84). While the case of Trump largely inspired this paper, the assumption is that this geographical-cultural divide is not an American idiosyncrasy as comparable candidates like Marie Le Pen and Vladimir Putin are also reap rural support (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6).

Global macroeconomic trends such as increased trade, offshoring, and automation have deprived industrial workers worldwide of wages and jobs in the manufacturing sector since at least the 1970's, exacerbating existing inequalities between less populated rural areas and small towns on the one hand, and economically thriving cities on the other (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 464). This means certain sub-national communities are afflicted by declining jobs, income, and property values, the loss of a local tax base, "brain-drain" as educated inhabitants leave, and the deterioration of local public services supplies (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 465). The financial crash and global economic crisis of 2008 exacerbated the discrepancy by subjecting the already

¹ Liberal democracy index-score, ranging from 0 to 1

declining communities with deeper and longer lasting downturns than their metropolitan counterparts (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 465). These geographic inequalities in terms of material prosperity and opportunities for capital accumulation might explain the rural tendency to “protest votes” for populist parties in Western Europe (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 1). This argument attributes geographic variations in authoritarian predispositions to economic and material marginalisation. Rural communities are however deprivileged in a purely cultural sense in addition to their material insecurity.

Rurality can be said to constitute a “traditional other” to modernisation per not only its economic state, but also its less rapidly changing “peasant culture” (Calhoun, 2006, p. 1405). The salience of cultural issues has arguably outmatched that of economic issues in some countries during the 20th century which has revealed a cultural tension between traditionalism and “post-material” modernism in many countries (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Post-materialism denotes culturally liberal values associated with materially well-off “urban elites” such as environmentalism² and minority rights, resulting in a reactionary cultural backlash from materially deprived, culturally traditional “common folk” (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Per cultural capital, one could say post-materialism is a form “cultural redistribution” in its inter alia addressing of ethnic- and gender privileges, which is resisted by the presumably culturally conservative rural population who seek to maintain their social status position. This “cultural status distribution” perspective aids to explain why rurality might prefer culturally conservative authoritarians.

If material marginalisation explained authoritarian preferences, then why would the materially marginalised vote for economically deregulatory candidates such as Donald Trump when his tax-cuts are primarily to the benefit of the already economically well-off (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 455)? This seeming irrationality immediately complicates explanations based on individual self-interest. Commentators have consequently characterised the materially marginalised support for not only Trump, but also M. Thatcher and V. Putin as “against all logic”, “apparent[ly] irrational”, and in the case of Putin inferring “state propaganda and societal fears and Soviet complexes” (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). Individual “pocketbook” self-interest thus seems like an inappropriate framework to explain the rural-authoritarian connection. Times of crisis might additionally push people to vote in the interest of their collective identities rather than the individual self, and authoritarian populist leaders have been

² Materially oriented urban corporate interests might be less enthusiastic about environmentalism

described as “entrepreneurs of identity” who appeal to notions of endangered collective identities (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). To portray authoritarian supporters as simply unsophisticated and too “simple” to resist state propaganda indicate a neglect for alternative, yet equally reasonable rationales pertaining to collective identities. Considering the rural bias of authoritarian populism in many countries (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6) and the tension between material and cultural explanations, this paper’s central question is: *how is the rural working class related to illiberalism in political parties?* The rural working class seems the perfect candidate for both material and cultural mechanisms as they are related both to material marginalisation and cultural alienation. This paper uses a linear regression analysis of 6202 parties in the time period 1970-2019 to consider these mechanisms which links illiberalism in parties to the rural working class. The presented model indicates cultural issues to have the largest explanatory power.

EXISTING LITERATURE

The following section summarises existing literature related to illiberalism, first more generally on the topics of liberal-democratic sustainability and democratic backsliding, then more specifically cases of illiberal popular demand such as Brexit, Donald Trump, and the Swedish Democrats. While several articles mix the element of immigration with socioeconomic variables, the main tension in the literature is between the materially- and culturally oriented theories. Though this combines two different types of literature, they both seem relevant for the rise of illiberalism in parties, and the combined insights should strengthen the theoretical basis for constructing a model for empirical analysis.

Democratic Backsliding

In cases of democratic backsliding, qualities associated with democratic governance are gradually deteriorated via incremental and potentially discontinuous actions which make elections less competitive, restrict democratic participation, and deconstruct institutions of accountability (Waldner & Lust, 2018, pp. 94-95). Existing theoretical frameworks for explaining democratic degradation emphasise inter alia political institutions, political economics, and various cultural elements including sub-national social structures and -coalitions (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 97).

Political Institutions – Horizontal and Vertical Checks on Power

Concrete political institutions are important as they shape (i) vertical accountability and representativeness where increased responsiveness to citizens legitimates a regime and lowers

incentives for antidemocratic movements, (ii) horizontal accountability as governmental branches and agencies might varyingly be able to check democratically adverse behaviour, and (iii) the efficaciousness/performance of government, where abundant political stalemates and crises might justify antidemocratic actions (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 99). For a democratic government to function effectively, its institutional arrangements must delicately balance executive capacity with the constraining elements of rule of law and democratic accountability (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 53). While executive institutional hegemony might deteriorate democracy via either incumbent self-aggrandizement or anticipatory prophylactic measures from the opposition (Pérez-Liñan et al., 2019, p. 606), exaggerated constraints incapacitate the state to the point of becoming inefficient, potentially triggering a mutually reinforcing effect between governmental inefficiencies and governmental distrust (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 125).

Not only institutional arrangements, but also party composition matters for capacity and versus constraint. For example, moderate legislative majorities might promote governability while exaggerated dominance in the legislature might permit the altering of constitutional rules, purging of independent courts, and democratic destabilisation (Pérez-Liñan et al., 2019, p. 620). Exaggerated party dominance has also been associated with democratic decline in contributions regarding African democratic parties where dominant-party systems are presented as especially prone to non-competitiveness and executive degradation of democracy (LeBas, 2011; Riedl, 2014). Similarly, an analysis of parties in transitional democracies in the Middle East and North Africa found that in severely unbalanced party systems in relation mobilisation capacity, particularly if compounded by sharp ideological divides, the looming threat of hegemony might motivate the opposition to utilise democracy-degrading measures (Lust & Waldner, 2016). While such party dominance might happen within the *legislative*, party relations between branches also matter as split party control over the executive and legislative might lead to detrimental conflicts for political predominance (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 489). One might intuitively link poor accountability structures on central powers with backsliding, but accountability as a democracy-promoting force assumes that those who “check” governmental power, be it horizontally by competing governmental branches and agencies or vertically by the population, are sufficiently devoted liberal democrats to defend it against emerging threats; as this paper argues, this cannot be taken for granted. While elites may corrupt the system via inequality-exacerbating neopatrimonialism where economic elites buy political influence to further buttress their private economic power (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 35), increased popular

influence might also beget illiberal populism, as argued by Levitsky and Ziblatt in *How Democracies Die* (2018). They discuss how increased popular democratic influence in the United States' presidential primary nomination ironically contribute to antidemocratic candidates' electoral success and possible subsequent democratic decline. More specifically, they argue Trump's electoral victory of 2016 can partly be blamed on the lack of "insider peer review" in the US presidential primary nomination system.

Fears for the popular masses' susceptibility manipulative demagoguery motivated the founding fathers' introduction of the Electoral College which was the solution to the "dual imperative" of democratic representation versus responsible filtration (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 40-41). Both then and after the emergence of party politics, the imperative for responsible filtration has weighed most heavily; this hindered the ambitions of various politicians, including the widely popular and Nazi-affiliated Henry Ford (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 41-43). This trend was however disrupted by the political turmoil of 1968; the loss of public faith in the "old system" was palpable, the cure for the ills of democracy was assumed to be more democracy, and thus entered the binding presidential primaries which from 1972 circumvented elite gatekeeping and resulted in "the most open political process in [the US's] national history" (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, pp. 48-51). Due to the following divisive and volatile primaries, the Democratic party introduced superdelegates in the early 1980's to reemphasize elite control and inhibit ill-suited candidates from winning nomination (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 51). The GOP was less divided under Reagan, and they therefore instated no such counterbalance and maintained a far more democratic nomination system; such a system is arguably more susceptible to demagoguery and extremist candidates as the lack of party allegiance allows candidates of more divisive rhetoric and outlandish promises (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 51). This illustrates how more democratic influence does not necessarily beget democratic results.

Political Economy

The existing literature attributing democratic backsliding to the political economy typically analyses the effects of income levels, distribution of income, source of income, and short-term macroeconomic performance; it also typically distinguishes between theories of "endogenous modernization" where democracy is generated "from within" economic development with the dependent variable being democratic transitions, and "exogenous modernization" where democracy is seen as generated independently from economic development even though the latter is assumed to increase democratic stability, with democratic breakdowns as the dependent

variable (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 101). Endogenous modernisation³ studies have associated rising levels of income with both an increased probability for democratic transitions and a decreased likelihood for democratic breakdowns (Waldner & Lust, 2018, pp. 101-102). While this GDP-democracy association was strong in Europe and Latin America preceding 1925 it was weakened during the 20th century (Waldner & Lust, 2018, pp. 101-102). High growth rates are associated with a reduced probability of democratic reversions, while high inflation with increased probability for breakdowns, but the findings are conditional on a wide range of mediating variables (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 102).

The middle class' relative influence should be considered. Increased income per capita is associated with democratic stability, arguably due to the increased size and influence of this progressive "bedrock of democracy" (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 443). In contrast, low development and/or high inequality appear to be associated with weakly instituted democracies vulnerable to backsliding (Waldner & Lust, 2018, pp. 102-103) which too can be linked to the middle class. As high inequality increases the cost of power-redistributive democracy for the privileged, the middle classes may in response align themselves with authoritarian protectors of property rights; as is arguably the case in contemporary Thailand and China (Fukuyama, 2015, p.442). This inequality-democracy association was however stronger in the 19th- and early 20th century than in the late 20th- and early 21st century, perhaps due to restrictions imposed on leftist redistributive programs by international market concerns (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 102). Such cases of transitions under lower prosperity and higher inequality might result in unconsolidated democracies more susceptible to backsliding, but this remains to be empirically confirmed (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 102). There is also substantial statistical support for hypotheses linking democratic transitions and -survival to rapid economic expansions and -contractions (Bernhard et al., 2003; Burke & Leigh, 2010); a more recent study on new democracies finds high growth rates to lower the risk for authoritarian reversion while high inflation rates substantially increased the risk for democratic breakdown (Kapstein & Converse, 2008).

Cultural Heterogeneity and Political Coalitions

Cultural theories emphasise the roles of prevalent values, practices, and rituals pertaining to a national culture which affects both popular political preferences and the actions of elites. Though culture is ever-changing, its evolutionary character means that individual actors have

³ Assuming democracy to be generated "from within" (economic) modernisation

limited ability to shape it, and actors must consider the cultural structure as relatively stable (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 98). Different historic experiences shape later predisposition; take for example the rise of Tayyip Erdoğan and AKP in a Turkey. The liberal Turkish academic Mustafa Erdoğan⁴ describes Turkish culture in somewhat Hobbesian terms as its history is characterised by a fear of *fitna*⁵ and a faith in the state as the ultimate defence against internal strife and dissolution (Karaveli, 2016, p. 127). Historical strong state institutions might furthermore resist or limit the diffusion of European democratic institutions, either by rejecting colonisation efforts altogether or channelling colonisation via indirect rule (Hariri, 2012, p. 471). The authoritarianism of regimes might however be softened by state-population information asymmetries and the consequent reliance on “proto-democratic” local councils (Ahmed & Stasavage, 2020, p. 502). The polar opposite historical example would be the mentioned Anglo emphasis on limiting executive power, perhaps even to a fault (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 488).

“National culture” is often separated into different sub-cultures which entail potential for inter-group conflict per either socioeconomic or sociocultural structures (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 103). The liberal-democratic replacement of the antidemocratic monarchic-aristocratic hegemony in post-feudal Europe required counterbalancing from both the economically autonomous bourgeoisie class and the organised prodemocratic industrial class; the latter depending on the development of industrial capitalism (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 104). This development involved a power shift disadvantaging the antidemocratic landed interests in favour of prodemocratic urban interests (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 104). Ethnic models instead emphasise ethnic identities’ overwhelming political salience in plural societies, such that politicians appeal directly to their in-group, undermining multi-ethnic coalitions in the process. The expected consequences are ethnic chauvinism, polarisation, deteriorating democratic institutions, and potential interethnic political violence (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 104).

The mentioned middle class is linked to both increased political involvement⁶ and subscription to progressive “post-material” values regarding democracy, equality, and tolerant identity politics (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 441). This appears true for rural middle classes as well as not all rural interests are inherently antidemocratic. Different rural classes have varied interest per the rural inter-class power balance and what classes have to gain on political participation.

⁴ No relation to the President

⁵ Civil strife, anarchy; describing situations of civil upheaval

⁶ Middle classes have more time and resources to spare for participation, and are protective of property rights

Peasants' reliance on subsistence farming makes them resilient to economic shocks, in turn reducing incentives for political inclusion and making them the least prone to support democratic movements historically (Mamonova, 2018, p. 10). Rural proletariats are relatively prodemocratic if they are able to mobilise themselves via other working-class organisations⁷ (Mamonova, 2018, p. 10). The most prodemocratic group is various "individual family farmers" specifically in small-holding countries as they compete in an economic market which requires liberal-democratic government and regulation (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). On the other hand, countries of mostly large agricultural holdings might inspire calls for repressive states to aid in agricultural domination and surplus extraction (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). These descriptions are simplified but still aid in explaining different rural constituents' political leanings.

Per the reasoning of sub-cultural conflict, democratic backsliding indicates that initially victorious prodemocratic forces are challenged and overcome by an opposing authoritarian camp (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 98). Materially, modern industrialised agricultural production may outcompete prodemocratic individual family farmers, which in Russia removed this prime promoter of capitalist liberal-democracy (Mamonova, 2018, p. 10). A more cultural explanation comes from Inglehart & Norris (2017) who point out how varied material security and status in the population combined with the increased salience of cultural- over economic issues in Western European political platforms post-WWII caused a political tension between authoritarian traditionalism and post-materialist progressivism. This paper argues these authoritarian forces are related to rural populations. Seeing as governments in general must maintain their appeal to the rural population to ensure a sustainable political order (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 104), understanding any links between authoritarianism and rural material marginalisation and cultural alienation is vital. The following section presents existing literature which describes predictors of support for illiberal movements and candidates such as the Brexit-movement, Donald Trump, and the Swedish Democrats. They variously emphasise material versus cultural variables pertaining to material insecurity and cultural status loss.

Connecting Democratic Backsliding, Illiberalism, and Populism

The literary review has so far described various institutional and structural conditions which might determine liberal democracies' resilience to antidemocratic forces and ultimately democratic backsliding. Effective democratic governance relies not only on state capacity and horizontal checks on power, but also the nominally central element of democratic accountability

⁷ It makes intuitive sense for the more spread rural proletariats to have less organisational capacity than the more compactly situated urban proletariats.

(Fukuyama, 2015). Democratic accountability is meant to coordinate make political elites⁸ per popular preferences and ensure legitimacy, but democratic accountability only counteracts democratic backsliding if constituents and parties defend liberal-democratic institutions. It is therefore fruitful to consider literature which more specifically explains the rise and popularity of illiberal parties and movements; what general conditions trigger demand for illiberalism among constituents?

Much attention has been paid to supporters of *populism* while there is less focus on the more directly democratically detrimental aspect of *illiberalism* specifically. Populism's "thin ideological core" pits "the people" against allegedly corrupt elites (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 352), often demanding the popular sovereignty to be respected "at any cost" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1669). If any attempt to bypass the will of the people is seen as illegitimate, populists may favour a "minimal" or "procedural" democracy based on popular sovereignty and majority rule over considering minority rights, rule of law, and the separation of powers (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). If the tenets of liberalism are taken to be prohibitive of popular sovereignty, populism is reasonably linked to illiberalism. "Populist outsider" candidates such as Trump, A. Fujimori, Hugo Chávez, and Rafael Correa all ended up weakening democratic institutions; more specifically by rejecting established norms, denying opponent's legitimacy, tolerating- and possibly encouraging violence, and being willing to curtail the civil liberties of among others the media (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 22). This is why populist research is seen as relevant for democratic sustainability.

Regardless of this populist track record it is important to keep the concepts separate as populism is not categorically illiberal and certainly not necessarily anti-democratic. Populism might even be construed as an appropriate response to undemocratic yet liberal development towards oligarchy or technocracy (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). Imagine for example rurally oriented parties in liberal democracies reacting to elite-driven centralisation via appropriate democratic channels and following reasonable democratic norms; it would clearly be unreasonable to compare this scenario with the far more alarming examples of institutional deterioration. With this distinction in mind, studies on support for populism which at the very least is potentially illiberal are still relevant to the overall theme of democratic backsliding. The following section summarises existing studies linking support for radical populist movements

⁸ Individual candidates and collective parties

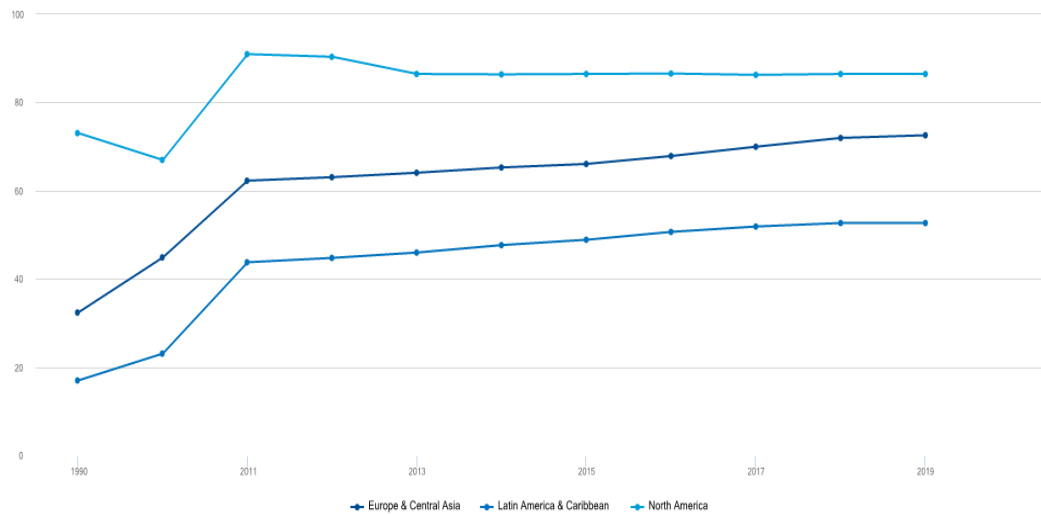
from both the right and the left. Low socioeconomic status is frequently linked to radical support, but not all cases display the same level of illiberalism.

Studies on Illiberal Populism

Populism is akin to a chameleon with its ability to “take on the colour of the environment” which explains the very varied ideological forms populism adapts in different cultural contexts. Populism might therefore be based on very varied ideological frameworks, from the class oriented, materially redistributive programs and progressivism of the left to the culturally oriented, ethnocentric programs and conservatism of the right (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 354). This ideological ambiguity complicates the matter as supporters of such substantially varied political programs might certainly themselves vary per illiberalism, general identities, and support groups.

S. M. Lipset described populist authoritarianism and ethnocentrism as “flow[ing] more naturally from the situation of the lower classes than from that of the middle and upper classes in modern industrial society” (Lipset, 1959, p. 482) The egalitarian and progressive predispositions of the working class during the 19th century gradually transformed into a struggle *against* minority rights and multicultural immigration (Lipset, 1959, p. 483; Inglehart & Norris, 2017). The authoritarian predispositions of the less educated are connected to their “simplistic and chiliastic” political perspectives which favour the easy and quick social solutions of intolerant extremists while their higher educated counterparts are associated with more complex and gradualist notions (Lipset, 1959, p. 483). This classic explanation does however seem somewhat “one the nose”; the past 30 years have somehow increased the relevancy of populist authoritarianism to a point few would have predicted (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 445) and the *direct* cognitive-analytical benefits of education for the individual in isolation cannot explain rising authoritarian support as it implies declining education levels. The trends of relevant regions and countries such as the US, the UK, France, and Sweden show at worst a slight decline in tertiary enrolment in the past 10 years.

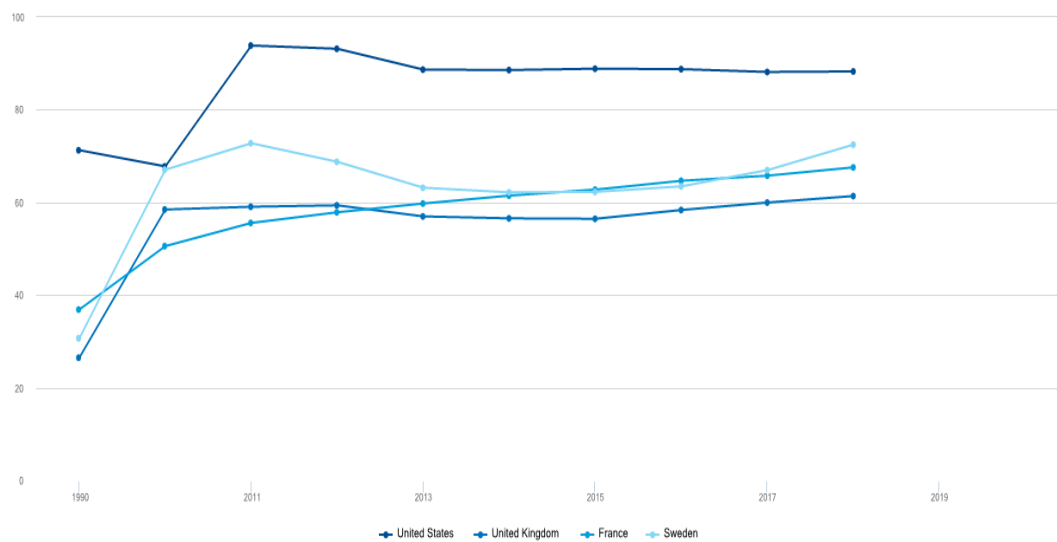
Tertiary School Enrolment Percentage per Region



Series : School enrollment, tertiary (% gross)
 Source: World Development Indicators
 Created on: 06/22/2021

(World Bank, 2021)⁹

Tertiary School Enrolment Percentage per Selected Countries (USA, GBR, FRA, SWE)



Series : School enrollment, tertiary (% gross)
 Source: World Development Indicators
 Created on: 06/22/2021

(World Bank, 2021)

⁹ The coding of the world bank website makes citing the exact “databank” table URL impossible. The included URL is the general page for the displayed variable.

Education is related not only to individual analytical skills but also job opportunities and labour market demands. Lipset's description of ethnocentric authoritarianism relates well to culturally oriented right-populism, but what of other types of populism? Seeing as all populist movements regardless of their ideological anchoring claim to stand up for "ordinary citizens" against the political/economic/cultural elites (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 355), should not the "losers of globalisation" generally support all types of populism? Especially the materially redistributive programs of leftist populism should intuitively attract a materially deprived working class and this intuition is supported empirically; unemployment and lower income have been associated with radical left support in Europe (Visser et al., 2014), as has self-identification with the working class (Ramiro, 2016), and one study found those of low-class positions to be more likely to vote for radical left parties than any other party (Lubbers & Scheepers, 2007). A contradictory relation is found between education and radical left support however, as high education is typically found to correlate *positively* with radical left support; this is related to the tendency of the highly educated to subscribe to leftist values such as solidarity and egalitarianism (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 355). This challenges the notion of radicalism in general being supported by material "left-behinds". Per this argument, one would somewhat confusingly expect populist support from both those plagued by unemployment and low income *and* the highly educated, but Rooduijn fails to confirm any such commonalities among populist voters in his sample (2018, p. 364). This might be due to the vague and general qualities of populism's "thin ideology" which complicates studying it as an independent object. The following section describes various studies which are largely centred on illiberal populism oriented towards the political right in particular, including the Brexit vote, Donald Trump, and the Swedish Democrats.

Globalisation and Material Deprivation – "Left behinds" or "Squeezed Middle"?

A common theme for studies on the upsurge of populism in Western democracies is how an increasingly skill-intensive economy drives a wedge between the "winners and losers of globalisation", particularly those with- and without higher education. Globalisation in the form of international trade, offshoring, plus the added process of automation have all reduced the wages and available jobs for industrial workers since the 1970's (Broz et al., 2021, p. 464). The so-called "losers of globalisation" are of low socioeconomic status, more dissatisfied with both domestic and EU-politics, therefore harbour more political distrust and prefer more radical, elite-bypassing forms of democracy (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 352). While the highly educated might profit from international competition, those with little education who might additionally work

in traditionally protected sectors feel threatened by the economic transformations and cultural diversity of globalisation (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 354).

In Western European countries, it is mostly the radical *right* which has managed to formulate attractive ideological packages for the so-called “losers of globalisation” and several studies affirm this association between radical right support and lower social strata (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 354), including numerous studies of Euroscepticism and Brexit (Hobolt, 2016; Antonucci et al., 2017; Lee et al., 2018). Though disagreeing on some details and exact mechanisms, they all variously find the highest educated to be the least likely Eurosceptics. Hobolt (2016) finds lower education, poverty, the elderly, and those concerned by immigration and multiculturalism to all be associated with “Leave” (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1259). Such concerns are in turn most pronounced among “the losers of globalisation”; that is those with lower education and who find themselves in a vulnerable position in the labour market, and geographically they are concentrated in the English countryside or post-industrial north-eastern towns with large working-class populations (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1273). A lack of political trust clearly impacted the vote per their analysis, as did economic and immigration concerns (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1270) The Brexit vote thus reveals a divided nation along class, education, generations, and geography.

Antonucci (et al., 2017) challenges the typical dichotomy of the low-educated “left behinds” versus the highly educated “winners” as they find support for the “squeezed middle”-hypothesis per their measures of education, objective income, and self-identified class. This “the squeezed middle” consists of “ordinary workers” struggling to cope with increased costs of living and inflation (Antonucci, et al., 2017, p. 214). Defining this middle as “voters with GSCE with high grades and A-levels”, they find this group to be more likely to vote “Leave” than the bottom; defined as those either completely lacking formal education or those with GSCE with low grades (Antonucci, et al., 2017, p. 221) while finding no discernible differences between the bottom and the middle levels (Antonucci, et al., 2017, p. 225). In sum, their findings emphasise the potential significance of intermediary classes per educational achievements, income levels, and class-identification, while “feeling left out of society” does not hold as a sufficient condition for voting Leave unless combined with perceptions of worsening personal finances.

Geography: Spill-over effects, Mobility, Public Service Supply, and Immigration

The urbanization process has resulted in continuously increasing demographic and socio-economic disparities between urban and non-urban regions; simultaneously, far-right populist parties and candidates like the Sweden Democrats, Le Pen, and Trump have had significantly higher support in non-urban than urban areas in recent Western European elections

(Rickardsson, 2021, p. 2). This geographic pattern of populist support motivates an interest for local, communal marginalisation. The structural decline of the manufacturing sector has lasted for more than 40 years in wealthy countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and France (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 468). In the United States, real wages of unskilled and semiskilled workers began stagnating and even falling in relative and absolute terms in the early 1970's, having remained stagnant ever since (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 470). The declining manufacturing sector might reflect both technological innovation and economic integration as low-skill tasks are both automated and offshored in the name of economic efficiency (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 470). Regardless, the central mechanism is macroeconomic transformations which add competitive pressure on traditional low-wage manufacturing jobs in industrial countries, in turn disadvantaging less skilled workers who suffer from declining wages and layoffs (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 468). Considering local spill-over effects, even a single plant being shut down might also affect local suppliers and downstream producers with comparable job losses and wage cuts (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 470). The mirror image to local manufacturing decline is how “agglomeration effects” result in a concentration of successful high-wage-, high-skill service sector activities in certain major cities, which have largely benefited from globalisation (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 470). Generalised and simplified, major cities appear as the geographic centres of prosperity and opportunity for high-skilled service sector workers while the periphery suffers from material deprivation. The Brexit movement was for example geographically divided as the “Leave”-side was particularly supported by the English countryside and post-industrial north-eastern towns with large working-class populations (Hobolt, 2016, p. 1273). It therefore appears worthwhile to consider local frustrations such as poor job opportunities and, multicultural influence in previously culturally homogenous communities (Lee, et al., 2018, pp. 143-144), or poor public service supply (Rickardsson, 2021).

Like Hobolt (2016) and Antonucci (et al., 2017), Lee (et al., 2018) focuses on socioeconomics, education, and globalisation-induced frustrations (Lee et al., 2018, p. 144). Lee et al. (2018) however introduces the immaterial element of geographically specific- versus general identities. They argue socioeconomic variables such as education and resulting employment shape one's identity as either a cosmopolitan “anywhere” or a locally oriented “somewhere”; the former is socioeconomically privileged with higher education, tend to end up either studying or working elsewhere from their place of origin, and consequently develop “portable, achieved identities” which are international and cosmopolitan rather than local in character (Lee, et al., 2018, p. 144). The less privileged immobile have location-specific human- and social capital

which results in a less pluralistic and more place-bound identity; these “somewheres” are expected to be more opposed to the EU and vote “Leave”. Individual values and psychological states are thought to be mutually related to mobility as psychologically open people are more likely to move and those who move become more open as a result (Lee, et al., 2018, p. 151). While controlling for various individual-, psychological-, and value-based variables related to mobility, they find mobility to only matter under circumstance of local frustrations such as economic decline or the relative demographic decline of the ethnic majority; the “plagued” immobile still reside in their place of origin and are around 7% more likely to vote in favour of Brexit (Lee et al., 2018, p. 159). The immobile are only significant and non-negligibly more likely to vote for “leave” in areas undergoing such developments (Lee, et al., 2018, p. 156).

Rickardsson (2021) similarly analyses local decline by testing to which degree the rural-urban divide of populist voting stands to various individual and municipal control variables which are ultimately found to largely negate the differences between the urban and the rural (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 1). Societal centralisation in the form of urbanisation results in socioeconomically marginalised rural areas characterised by high unemployment, low education, lower income, and lower share of immigrants; corresponding to what the majority of prior literature¹⁰ on radical right populist support has related to voting behaviour (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 2). To explain the rise of the right populist party Sweden Democrats, Rickardsson considers if urbanity is still related to political behaviour when considering (1) individual employment, education, and income, (2) municipal immigration levels and trends, and (3) municipal provision of public services. Summarized, the paper suggests individuals who remain in an area with a declining population and low public service supply; regardless of if its urban or rural, are likely to grow dissatisfied with society and are more likely to “protest vote” for a far-right populist party as a response to the deterioration of their local area (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 23). The rural-SD association was weakened when unemployment, education, and income were controlled for, furthermore when controlling for local immigrant proportion, and rendered insignificant once local public service supply was included (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 3). The negative correlation between public service supply satisfaction and SD-voting was interestingly the strongest in rural areas which is by the author connected concretely to the preschool- and elementary school sectors (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 23).

¹⁰ Hobolt (2016), Antonucci et al. (2017), and Lee et al. (2018) included

These material perspectives contain a seeming paradox: why would the economically marginalised support Trump's deregulatory financial policies, including tax-cuts for the super-wealthy (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452)? It was previously argued that the tendency for the highly educated to support radical left parties is due to their valuing of solidarity and egalitarianism (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 355) which does not seem to reflect material self-interest as this argument incorporates the factor of sub-cultural values in the population. This seen in tandem with the potential significance of locally anchored predispositions (Lee, et al., 2018) illustrates the potential significance of rurality's cultural position vis-à-vis urbanity.

Culturally Alienated Rurality, Post-Materialism, and Subjective Status Threat

The globalisation-oriented explanatory models emphasise material decline as the most proximate explanation for populist voting, yet immigration concerns are consistently a key issue for (right) populist parties (Margalit, 2019, p. 159). The association between low education and xenophobia are often attributed to class conflict concerns as the working class fear competitive pressures (Margalit, 2019, p. 159) but economic explanations of populist voting may be problematic as: (1) they might be conflating explanatory significance with outcome significance, (2) recent studies have failed to connect populist immigration concerns with real or perceived threats to economic standing, and (3) treating cultural anxieties as a by-product of economic grievances underplays the potentially independent role of cultural issues for populism (Margalit, 2019, pp. 153-154). While immigration is connected to economic class structures and economic conflict, there is some confusion between economic and cultural variables in the literature seeing as several articles mention economic decline and cultural anxieties related to immigration in tandem (Hobolt, 2016; Lee et al., 2018; Rickardsson, 2021). These phenomena challenge a narrow focus on material distribution, and it therefore appears worthwhile to consider the more subjective aspects of culturally defined social statuses and groups. Drawing on M. Weber, the culturally defined subjective social statuses can be treated as a distinct variable from mere material conditions (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 61). Such explanations emphasise the tension between modern progressivism and traditional conservatism and ethnic tensions which might nonetheless reflect socioeconomic cleavages. What is then the cultural relation between rurality and urbanity?

Rurality can be said to constitute a "traditional other" to modernised urbanity per rural areas' less rapidly changing "peasant culture" and economy (Calhoun, 2006, p. 1405). Pierre Bourdieu's concept of social "habitus" describe how different "social fields" value different types of capital, including not only material capital but also cultural-, social-, and symbolic

capital; cultural capital like educational credentials and linguistic style, and social capital based on social relations both involve longer-term social engagements like attending higher education, various employment, family relations, and marriage and capital becomes “symbolic capital” once it is recognised as legitimate by others (Calhoun, 2006, p. 10). While advantageous cultural capital such as education and linguistic abilities might shape material capital per job opportunities, the opposite might also be true as the materially deprived tend to also feel culturally distant and opposed to the culture of dominant societal groups (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 59). This may be related to the cultural tension between traditionalism and “post-materialism” as described by Inglehart and Norris (2017).

The Post-Material Silent Revolution, its Authoritarian Backlash, and Rurality

The salience of cultural issues has arguably outmatched that of economic issues in Western European countries during the 20th century (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). The original “Silent Revolution” makes the argument that the material security of the post-WWII generation fostered new leftist, “post-material” political programmes in many countries which promoted tolerance for outgroups. Over time, the relative salience of economic issues diminished in Western political platforms, being surpassed by non-economic issues by the early 1980’s (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 447). This “post-material” shift could also be described as a shift from “survival values to self-expression values” (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452). Assuming post-materialism to stem from material security, the less materially secure working class would naturally reject programmes which neglect their economic issues; analogous to Maslow’s classic hierarchy of needs, those who fail to have their more basic material needs met reject appeals to “higher” progressive values. The reverted argument argues for the combination of material insecurity, an influx of foreign-cultured immigrants from low-income countries, and the political negligence of economic issues to stimulate an “Authoritarian reflex” among the working class, promoting strong leaders, in-group solidarity, and the rejection of outsiders (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 443).

The “Silent Revolution” and its reverse caused a major political-cultural shift which fundamentally challenged the classic class-based politics of old; during most of the 20th century, party politics largely reflected the class structure such that the working class supported economic egalitarianism via redistributive policies while middle- and upper-classes tended to be conservative (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 447). The new-found emphasis on cultural- over material issues means the tension between economic redistribution and liberalism was replaced by a tension between post-materialism and authoritarianism. Sub-national material security then

pushes the working class from the political left to the right while the middle class increasingly supported leftist parties (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 447). The increased salience of cultural issues explains the seemingly paradoxical phenomenon of deprivileged working class individuals voting for libertarian tax policies which first and foremost benefit billionaires; it reflects a spiritual reaction to rapid cultural change and immigration which makes them feel like “strangers in their own land” (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452), not material self-interest.

“Overall [,] we conclude that cultural values, combined with several social and demographic factors, provide the most consistent and parsimonious explanation for voting support for populist parties; their contemporary popularity in Europe is largely due to ideological appeals to traditional values which are concentrated among the older generation, men, the religious, ethnic majorities, and less educated sectors of society. [...] Older white men with traditional values- who formed the cultural majority in Western societies during the 1950s and 1960s - have seen their predominance and privilege eroded. The silent revolution of the 1970s appears to have spawned an angry and resentful counter-revolutionary backlash today” (Norris & Inglehart, 2016, pp. 4-5)

So how does this relate to the urban-rural dichotomy? As rurality appears both materially marginalised and culturally traditional (Calhoun, 2006, p. 1405), the “post-material”, liberal cultural emphasis of minority rights might better resonate with the materially well-off “urban elites” than materially deprived, culturally traditional “common folk” (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). To reiterate it in terms of cultural capital, one could say that the hegemonic and arguably urban-elitist “post-materialist” culture is a form of “cultural power redistribution” in its inter alia addressing of ethnic- and gender privileges, and these values in which reflect the general urban experience of economic prosperity and multiculturalism are rejected by the presumably culturally conservative rural population. This cultural perspective aids to explain why materially deprived rurality might prefer illiberal candidates with deregulatory material programmes such as D. Trump (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452) as his economic policies were perhaps not their prime concern. Cultural conservatism is not categorically neither problematic nor antidemocratic, but once it evolves into radical, authoritarian populism it arguably poses a threat to liberal democracy.

Quantitative Studies on Cultural Status Threat and Populism

These cultural models explain populism as stemming most proximately from a cultural backlash to subjective status decline; subjective social statuses are seen not only as a product of material conditions but also contextual societal values (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 61). Material conditions

might nonetheless shape cultural belonging, not only due to the identity effects of socioeconomic mobility (Lee et al., 2018) but also because of the tendency of those who perceive themselves as economically deprived to also feel culturally distant and opposed to the culture of dominant societal groups (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 59). Populist movements are assumed to appeal to such “left behinds” of contemporary society (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 61). According to psychological literature, threatening a person’s personal status evokes out-group hostility, particularly if the latter can be associated with the threat (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 63) and right-populist references to (ethno-)national greatness might therefore be particularly appealing to those of low or decreasing subjective status (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 62). Referring to the United States and France as cases, one might even argue that the working-class place particular importance on socially differentiating between themselves and African Americans or North African migrants (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 63).

This illustrates the impact of material conditions for these cultural models. Gidron and Hall (2017) analyse economically triggered cultural developments within developed democracies to explain rising right-populist support, particularly among working-class men (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 57). The paper utilizes cross-national survey data from 20 developed democracies to argue: (i) lower levels of subjective social status is associated with support for right populist parties, (ii) how economic and cultural developments likely depress the status of men without college education, and (iii) that the relative status of said men has declined since 1987 in many of the included developed democracies (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 57). In sum, low subjective social status is presented as one pathway through which economic-cultural developmental interaction might increase populist support in the population (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 78).

Mutz (2018) also finds cultural status threat variables to better explain Trump support than economic “left behinds”-theses. Mutz uses a nationally representative panel survey held both in October 2012 and 2016 to compare economic explanations¹¹ with the cultural aspects of personal- and national status threat. The expectation is that those experiencing personal economic decline, alternatively a relative deprivation perceived as insufficient, are expected to vote for Trump in 2016. Using both an ordinary fixed effects regression and an ordered logit fixed effects model they find those who felt a self-serving cultural hierarchy to be under threat; whites, Christians, and men feeling disadvantaged and increasingly discriminated against vis-

¹¹ Including change over time in family income, employment, subjective perception of family finances, perceptions of trade’s effect on oneself, and zip code-specific data on income and employment (Mutz, 2018, p. 4332).

à-vis blacks, Muslims, and women, were most likely to vote for Trump in 2016 (Mutz, 2018, p. 4338). Their analysis reflects anxiety about dominant groups' status trajectory, not retrospective nor prospective economic voting (Mutz, 2018, p. 4336) as the inclusion of the status threat variables severely limited the potency of the socioeconomic variables (Mutz, 2018, p. 4337).

Literary Summary and Contributions of this Thesis

This literary review has briefly described a selection of existing literature on democratic backsliding and populist voting. Democratic backsliding is described as a process of gradually deteriorating liberal-democratic institutions (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 94), often by elected officials (Levitsky & Way, 2018, p. 4). Democratic sustainability is linked to a wide variety of institutional and structural factors, including discussions of sub-national conflict potential between both socioeconomic- and sociocultural groups. Democratic accountability institutions will only sustain democracy to the degree constituents and parties are dedicated to liberal-democratic institutions. This relates to sub-national patterns in voting behaviour which in the case of illiberal populism might reveal democratic backsliding's democratic support base. Democratic backsliding must therefore be understood in tandem with studies on support for the Brexit-movement, Swedish Democrats, and Donald Trump.

These studies on populist support however fail to capture the essence which constitutes a threat to liberal-democratic sustainability, namely illiberalism. The attention paid to populism is nonetheless understandable seeing as populist convictions that any attempt to bypass the will of the people is illegitimate might favour "minimal" or "procedural" democracy formats based on popular sovereignty and majority rule (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). Populism which turns "absolutist" might therefore be at odds with liberal values such as protecting minority rights, the rule of law, and the separation of powers (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2018, p. 1670). This is however not a necessity by any means. While anti-establishment sentiments in liberal regimes such as the United Kingdom and the United States might be opposing established liberal institutions, it makes no sense to assume anti-establishment sentiments would mean illiberalism in authoritarian regimes such as Russia or China¹². Vladimir Putin's relation to "the people" confuses the "populist" term per his ambiguous relation to societal elites and the "de-politicisation" of ordinary Russians; while clearer cases of populism emphasise the mobilisation and politicisation of their support groups, populism "à-la Rus" endorses popular

¹² Liberal-democratic scores 2021: UK (0.8), USA (0.73), Russia (0.1), and China (0.04) (Alizada, et al., 2021, pp. 434-435).

“non-interference” in the affairs of elites, but the Russian regime is nonetheless clearly authoritarian (Mamonova, 2018, p. 9) This paper therefore focuses on the specifically relevant factor for democratic backsliding and authoritarian regimes: illiberalism.

The intermediary between democratic structure and its constituents, that is the political parties themselves, are also paid less direct attention to in the literature. There is a difference in perspective between considering a party’s policy positions and seeing who they attract, versus considering a party’s support group and seeing how it shapes party policies over time. Additionally, several of the studies are limited to concrete cases or regions while this paper’s regression analysis will consider a wide selection of countries [XX] of very different regime types in the time span [XX-XX]. This means one can control for the temporal and geographical heterogeneities argued for by Waldner & Lust (2018) which might be caused by both contemporary and historical particularities. The rural tendency to support anti-establishment sentiments in liberal democracies such as the Brexit movement, the Swedish Democrats, and Donald Trump (Hobolt, 2016; Rickardsson, 2021; Cha, 2016) motivates this thesis’ focus on the *rural* support groups’ relation to illiberalism. The general emphasis of socioeconomic marginalisation and low education (Broz, et al., 2021; Hobolt, 2016, Lee, et al., 2018, Rickardsson, 2021), which is relevant for both socioeconomic- and sociocultural explanations (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Inglehart & Norris, 2017), makes the rural *working class* particularly interesting. To explain the rural working class’ relation to illiberalism first requires a definition of the dependent variable.

THEORY: DEFINITIONS AND HYPOTHESES

The following section details the key dependent variable “Illiberalism” and the material- and cultural qualities of the independent variable “rural working class” as a support group.

Distinguishing Illiberalism from Populism – Antidemocratic Sentiments

Though “populist outsiders” have a reputation for weakening democratic institutions (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 22), the ambiguity of populist movements mean they are not all equivalently antidemocratic or illiberal¹³. The most central contribution of this paper is the concrete emphasis on *illiberalism in parties* specifically, which is related to its constituent support groups’ motivations and how the overarching theme of democratic backsliding. The threat to liberal democracy is not any and all forms of anti-elitism but a disregard for basic liberal-

¹³ V-DEM’s party dataset’s indices for populism and illiberalism correlate at (+0.1418)

democratic norms such as mutual toleration and forbearance (Levitsky & Way, 2018, pp. 101-102). A more extensive “litmus test” for identifying illiberal candidates includes the degree to which candidates: (i) reject or show weak commitment to democratic “rules of the game”, (ii) deny the legitimacy of political opponents, (iii) tolerate or encouraging the use of violence, and (iv) curtail the civil liberties of opponents, including media (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 24). While this is not inherently linked to populism, populist rhetoric and authoritarianism may be combined. Authoritarian candidates like these are associated with “strongman” leadership, coercive state power, traditionalist- and often xenophobic appeals in domestic and foreign policies, and in populist cases: demonstrative attacks on various elites (Mamonova, 2018, p. 8). The rural bias of authoritarianism (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6) may be explained per material and cultural mechanisms.

The Rural Working Class – Materially Marginalised and Culturally Alienated

The Sweden Democrats, Marie Le Pen, Donald Trump, and the Brexit movement all reaped strong support from rural areas in recent elections (Rickardsson, 2021, p. 2; Hobolt, 2016, p. 1273). In fact, illiberal populism is biased towards rurality in many countries, including Russia, which is connected to the rurally disadvantaging effects of neoliberal policies and the emphasis of rural interests in such parties programmes (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). The combination of “rural” and “working class” carries cultural and material connotations.

Global macroeconomic trends which include offshoring and automation has exacerbated existing material inequalities between urban and less populated rural areas (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 464). Rural areas more specifically experience declining job opportunities, wages, property values, local tax basis, public service supply, and the “brain-drain” of educated inhabitants (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 465). While the highly educated might profit from international competition, those with little education who might additionally work in traditionally protected sectors feel threatened by the economic transformations of globalisation (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 354). These “losers of globalisation” are of low socioeconomic status and harbour more potentially disruptive political distrust (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 352) while the highly educated are associated with egalitarianism (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 355) and gradualist notions (Lipset, 1959, p. 483). The less privileged are additionally characterised by place-bound, immobile identities which exacerbate the impact of local, communal frustrations (Lee, et al., 2018).

Rurality is not only materially marginalised, but also the “traditional other” to modernity per its less rapidly changing culture (Calhoun, 2006, p. 1405). These material factors facilitate increased cultural tension between urban, cosmopolitan progressivism on one hand, and the

rural, traditional “Jacksonian tradition” on the other (Cha, 2016, pp. 83-84). The materially deprived tend to feel culturally distant to the culture of dominant societal groups (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 59), which in this case would be the more prestigious *urban* cultural elements (Gidron & Hall, 2017, p. 78). The cultural tensions between urbanity and rurality are described extensively by among other sociological contributions Pierre Bourdieu, who describes rural men’s “devaluation” vis-à-vis dominant urban cultural forms (Bourdieu, 2004, p. 579) in what constitutes cultural alienation under increasing urban influence. Urban versus rural “social fields” have different cultural values, including preferences for linguistic styles and education (Calhoun, 2006, p. 10). Varied material security combined with political “post-materialist” neglect of economic issues trigger an “Authoritarian reflex” among the materially insecure which favours strong leaders, in-group solidarity, and the rejection of outsiders (Inglhart & Norris, 2017, p. 443). This explains the potential impact of a skill-demanding economy on low-skilled working-class individuals’ illiberal demands in the population.

Rurality can be further distinguished between different historical classes with different democratic predispositions, such as peasants, proletariats, individual family farmers, and larger agricultural landholders. Peasants’ are the least prone to support democratic movements, rural proletariats are relatively prodemocratic if they are able to mobilise themselves via other working-class organisations¹⁴, and “individual family farmers” in small-holding countries favour liberal-democratic government and regulation (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). On the other hand, countries of mostly large agricultural holdings might inspire rural elite calls for repressive states to aid in agricultural domination and surplus extraction (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). The data in this paper has no measure for peasantry, but separates the rural- working class, middle class, and elite class.

Hypothesis: Rural Working-Class Support is Associated with Illiberalism

While the cited studies mostly regard western cases of late-/post-industrial social tensions, the idea is that any country will contain a basic material and cultural tension between the urban and rural where urban areas are more prosperous and progressive while rural areas are more materially marginalised and traditional. This reveals how the rural working class might be supportive of antidemocratic illiberalism via two mechanisms: material frustration and cultural

¹⁴ It makes intuitive sense for the more spread rural proletariats to have less organisational capacity than the more compactly situated urban proletariats.

alienation. The regression model will include both elements in an attempt to test their relative importance and impact on the main association.

METHODOLOGY

Two different “Varieties of Democracy”-datasets are utilised in this paper: the ordinary, national-level (Coppedge, et al., 2021) and a party dataset describing inter alia parties’ ideological characteristics and support groups (Lührmann, et al., 2020). The unit of analysis is parties observed within countries, running for a specific election in particular year. Sweden for example contains 7 party units from the 19th of September 2010 and largely the same parties again from the 14th of September 2014. The dataset offers expert-coded assessments of party organisational capacity, policies, and identities for parties achieving at least 5% parliamentary seats in a given election from 1970-2019, resulting in 1955 unique parties observed across 1560 elections in 169 countries in the total dataset, amounting in total to 6330 party-election year units (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 4). The final model used in this paper includes 6202 electorally viable parties in the timespan 1970-2019. These parties are confined within countries of varied regime types, including closed autocracies (N=507, 8.17%), electoral autocracies (N=1832, 29.54%), electoral democracies (N=1754, 28.28%) and liberal democracies (N=2121, 34.01%). The model of this thesis is admittedly biased towards more liberal and democratic regimes as it analyses electoral parties, which open regimes per definition have more of than single-party dictatorships or absolute monarchies.

Dependent Variable: Illiberalism of Political Parties

Party illiberalism is operationalised via the variable “v2xpa_illiberal” from the V-DEM party dataset. It describes the degree to which a given party shows commitment, or lack thereof, to democratic norms prior to an election (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 19). The calculation of this variable is based on four underlying variables which describe pre-electoral party behaviour: (i) a party’s propensity for subjecting political opponents to personal attacks and tactics of demonization, (ii) party leadership’s commitment to free and fair elections with multiple parties, freedom of speech, media, assembly and association (iii) party leadership’s willingness to implement the will of the majority even when doing so violates minority rights, and (iv) the degree to which party leadership explicitly discourages the use of violence against domestic political opponents (Lührmann, et al., 2020, pp. 25-26). These variables correspond well to the behavioural warning signs for authoritarians presented in *How Democracies Die*, where weak commitment to democratic “rules of the game”, denying the legitimacy of political opponents,

tolerating/encouraging violence, and a readiness to curtail liberties of opponents such as the media are listed (Levitsky & Way, 2018, pp. 23-24). For technical reasons pertaining to linearity prerequisites¹⁵, the model was transformed by its square root, resulting in the range 0.1095-1.

Main Independent Variable: Rural Working Class

The independent variable “v2pagroup” describes a given party’s core support group with a wide range of alternatives. Ranging from 0 through 14, the alternatives are: (0) no clearly identifiable group, (1) the aristocracy, including high status hereditary social groups and castes (2) agrarian elites including rich peasants and large landholders, (3) business elites, (4) the military, (5) an ethnic or racial group(s), (6) a religious group(s), (7) local elites such as customary chiefs, (8) urban working classes, including labour unions, (9) urban middle classes, (10) rural working classes like peasants, (11) rural middle classes like family farmers, (12) regional groups or separatists, (13) women, and (14) a blank variable for other specific groups. Each party may be assigned up to three simultaneous support groups, and each type of support group has its own respective variable, resulting in varied values per support group ranging from zero to one (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 31). The values are coded by multiple country-specific experts, usually five or more (Lührmann et al., 2020, p. 31). The rural working classes are the core independent variable. Per the ordinary V-DEM dataset, areas are defined as urban if they meet the following set of conditions: the population density exceeds a threshold of 150 persons per square kilometre and there is access to a sizeable settlement of 50.000 people or more within some reasonable travel time, e.g., 60 minutes by road (Coppedge, et al., 2021, p. 209). Rural areas are those which do not match this description.

Control Variables

The control variables will draw on literature regarding both democratic backsliding and populist voting. Any variables which might theoretically be associated with illiberal parties with rural support bases must be kept constant to avoid confoundment.

National: Liberal Democracy Index and Executive-Legislative Party Composition

It is vital to control for different types of political regimes and their underlying institutional arrangements as they directly pertain to all the central variables of the model. The liberal democracy index (v2x_libdem) variable describes the degree to which a given regime is based on the principles of liberal democracy, including both its liberal and electoral components

¹⁵ A regression model (II) with the ordinary illiberal index variable is included in the appendix which did not disrupt the main association.

(Coppedge, et al., 2021, p. 44). In other words, it describes both institutions of restraint and accountability. The liberal component (v2x_liberal) reflects a “negative” view of political power’s effect on liberty as it judges the quality of democracy by the limits put on government power, including constitutional civil liberties, strong rule of law, an independent judiciary, and effective checks and balances, which, in sum, restrain the exercise of executive power (Coppedge et al., 2021, p. 44). By including the electoral democracy index (v2x_polyarchy), the liberal democracy index also considers if and to which degree elites are responsive to citizens per extensive suffrage and electoral competition, more specifically reflecting freedoms of assembly for political- and civil society organisations, “clean” elections not tampered by fraud or systematic irregularities, and whether elections affect the composition of the chief executive (Coppede et al., 2021, p. 43).

Firstly, the development of executive-restraining, broadly enfranchised liberal democracies might be related to urbanisation and modernisation (Waldner & Lust, 2018, p. 104; Liptset, 1959; Boix, 2003). A less modernised, non-liberal-democratic regime might thus have a larger relative rural population, in turn increasing the possibility for rural support groups. Secondly: while this paper discusses liberalism’s inegalitarian potential, liberal democracies tend to be more egalitarian than their autocratic counterparts¹⁶, with the crucial difference being the relatively unaccountable institutions of the latter. The *liberal* part of liberal democracies might therefore not beget egalitarianism, but the democratic institutional inclusion of and accountability to “the common man” nonetheless argue for its mainly egalitarian effect upon resource distribution while autocrats’ depend less on expensive public goods and approval ratings to retain power (Mesquita & Smith, 2011). Finally, the possible links between liberal regimes and adherence to liberal formal- and informal institutions is pretty much self-explanatory; illiberal rhetoric is more to be expected in illiberal than liberal contexts. In sum, regime types might possibly confound relations between modernisation- and urbanisation rates which determine the available pool of rural electors, material inequalities per varied accountability systems, and the prevalence of illiberal rhetoric. Illiberal parties supported by rural populations in highly unequal societies might thus largely reflect regime type which is added as a control variable. It ranges from 0.005-0.891, from less to more liberal-democratic.

Competitive relations between governmental branches may hinder may check authoritarian power. This is the reason for the US constitutional emphasis on checks on executive central

¹⁶ “In the used data, the “inequality of resource distribution index” and “liberal democracy index” correlate negatively (-0.69)

power such as the basic division between the executive, legislative and judiciary (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 488). The point of the executive-legislative divide is to hinder authoritarian ambition, but the ensuing inter-party competition might constrain powers too much (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 488). Parliamentary systems arguably better balance the restraining elements of law and accountability with state capacity as they have fewer governmental agencies, write more coherent legislation, and are less susceptible to detrimental interest group influence (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 501). Parliamentary systems have consequently sustained higher trust in government, resulting in less adversarial and more consensus-based public administrations which better manage to adapt to the consequences of globalisation (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 501). This all relates well to the topics of globalisation- and governmental inefficiency-induced frustrations and “protest votes”. The variable “v2x_divparctr1” from the country-level dataset describes to which degree control of the executive and legislative branches are split between parties and groups. Low values mean “unified party control” where a single party controls both, intermediary values signal “unified coalition control” of the branches by a multi-party coalition, and high values mean “divided party control” where different parties or party-unaffiliated individuals control the two branches (Coppedge, et al., 2021, p. 312). The effective differences between presidentialism and parliamentarism is largely captured by this variable as both majority single-party governments and majority multi-party governments in parliamentary systems almost by definition fit the low and intermediary values, respectively (Coppedge, et al., 2021, p. 312). The variable is named “Split EL” as in “split executive-legislative control” where higher values are expected to largely constrain parties’ illiberal potential, despite the argument for decreased political efficiency political distrust in extreme cases.

Party Level: Local Organisation, Popular Nomination, and Support Groups

These variables variously capture party organisational qualities associated with illiberal parties and the rural working class. This includes political elite presence in local communities, the inclusiveness of candidate nominations, and finally support groups which might systematically support or not support those supported by the rural working class while simultaneously affecting their illiberalism in some way. This includes business elites, rural elites, the rural middle class, and the urban working class.

Candidate nomination forms may also be related to illiberalism. Firstly, inclusive nomination is a form of democratic accountability mechanism which limit elite abuse of power. Contrary to this, Levitsky and Way argue lacking elite-filtering and more populist candidate nomination forms might facilitate demagoguery and extremist candidates as the lack of “insider peer

review” lets candidates of more divisive rhetoric and outlandish promises win nominations (Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018, p. 51). Such “outsiders” may appeal to those who feel distant from cultural/political/economic elites, potentially like rural populations, but this link is once again less clear. The opposite argument is that centralised nomination structures allow for authoritarian power preservation. The control for populist nomination is based on “v2panom” and named “PopNom” where the lowest values indicate very centralised, elite-oriented nomination forms in the hands of party leadership or even unilaterally the leader, while the highest values indicate broad inclusion of all registered voters in the nomination process. (Lührmann, et al., 2020, pp. 32-33).

Regional and local democratic responsiveness to peripheral demands should inspire support and political trust among less central constituents. This strategy has *inter alia* been used by the Chinese government who since 1989 have permitted local village elections and granted limited local powers as such formal and informal feedback mechanisms improve central authorities’ ability to provide satisfactory public services (Fukuyama, 2015, p 381). Historically, the use of “proto-democratic” local councils due to state-population informational asymmetries is also related to later lower rates of authoritarianism (Ahmed & Stasavage, 2020, p. 502). Political elites’ and parties’ relation to peripheral communities might therefore confound rural support and illiberalism. It might also indicate an institutional importance of local and regional constituents. The variable “v2paactcom” describes to what degree party activists and personnel are permanently active in peripheral regions and local communities, ranging from low to high presence (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 32).

The level of illiberalism in parties supported by the rural working class might potentially have their illiberalism increased or decreased due to other simultaneous influences, namely the rural middle class, rural elites, business elites, and the urban working class. Per the material perspective, local frustrations such as shut-downs of industrial activity (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 464) and poor public service supply (Rickardsson, 2021) should frustrate all rural constituents, including elites and the middle class. Additionally, if rural communities in general identify with more traditional cultural values (Calhoun, 2006), rurality might in general be biased towards the right-wing variety of illiberal populism which favours preserving traditional hierarchies (Rooduijn, 2018). The general rural bias of authoritarian populist support (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6) illustrates the point. Both the material and cultural argument imply the rural working classes should be more illiberal than the middle classes as they have lower socioeconomic status. This means they are often immobile “somewheres” (Lee, et al., 2018) and the

“authoritarian reflex” depends on material security (Inglehart & Norris, 2017), in turn implying the rural middle class¹⁷ and -elites should be more culturally liberal than the working class of both the urban¹⁸ and rural varieties. Powerful, large agricultural holders are however largely associated with antidemocratic sentiments (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). If rural middle classes, rural elites, and the urban working class are systematically associated with different democratic sentiments, their support might confound any interpretation of the rural working class’ influence on rurally and/or working class-oriented parties. They are named “Rural MC”, “Rural Elites”, and “Urban WC” in the model.

The inclusion of business elites (“Business”) is less obvious seeing as both the material and cultural perspectives expect the materially marginalised to be most illiberal, so why would economic elites vote for illiberal parties and how would said parties simultaneously attract support from the rural working class? The arguments for this per material and cultural frameworks are based on right-wing illiberal populists like Donald Trump and the GOP who combine traditional and nationalist cultural appeals with deregulatory domestic economic policies including tax-cuts for the well-off (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452).

Per material deprivation, the association is relatively straight forwards seeing as the globalisation- or perhaps even environmental regulation-induced industrial decline which frustrates industrial low-skilled labourers would reasonably also frustrate any economic elites invested in the same domestic sectors. The “post-material” cultural framework necessitates a slightly more cynical argument to link economic elites to illiberal parties which are simultaneously supported by the rural working class. Though the perspective generally assumes the salience of cultural issues to exceed that of economic issues (Inglehart & Norris, 2017), economic elites might be both better organised and more aware of their own material interests than the culturally alienated, non-elite population (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 28). Well-organised economic self-interest might corrupt politics as via “reciprocally altruistic” relations where the extraction of private benefits from the system is prioritised over the public good (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 481). Well-organised interest groups’ increasing influence on US candidates is illustrated by the explosion of professional lobbying firms¹⁹ and such economic actors’ influence on Donald Trump might partly explain his tax-cuts and economic policies. He thus

¹⁷ Related to the prodemocratic influence of both market-competitive individual family farmers (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). Antonucci et al. (2017) counters this take on the middle class by arguing for the importance of the *relatively declining* middle class and Brexit-support.

¹⁸ Overall related associated with prodemocratic sentiments (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6).

¹⁹ 175 registered in 1971, 2500 in 1981, and over 12000 today (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 479).

reaps support from the culturally alienated rural working class per his ethnocentric appeals while simultaneously being supported by economic elites per his domestic tax-cuts in a form of neopatrimonialism. This is not in accordance with the notion that the materially well-off become “post-material” but the argued decreased salience of cultural issues vis-à-vis economic issues might make it easier for such authoritarian “libertarian populism” to underemphasise its libertarian economic traits and its consequences for their more marginalised supporters. If this combination of cultural conservatism and (domestic) economic libertarianism is somewhat common, and if its illiberal rhetoric functions more as a “distraction” from its patrimonial dynamics to avoid redistributive demands from the population²⁰, one could say the illiberalism and emphasis on cultural conservatism in a sense stems from the demands of economic elites. “Business” as a support group is therefore added as controls.

Economic Issues, Extremism, Welfare, and Party Finance

The salience of economic issues might hint at material insecurity or a non “post-material” party. The variable “v2pasalie” dichotomously define whether certain key issues were prominent in parties’ campaigning, including focusing on economic issues such as infrastructure and taxes (“v2pasalie_10”) which is included as “Economic issues” in the model. The idea is that if illiberal parties’ ability to attract rural working-class support is not due to cultural appeals but material insecurity and economic issues, this will be controlled for.

Parties economic extremism is controlled for per the variable “v2pariglef” which defines parties’ economic policies as ranging from far-left policies with active governmental involvement in the economy to economically far-right, liberal, and deregulatory laissez-faire policies (Lührmann, et al., 2020, pp. 28-29). Though material matters primarily pertains to the populist left (Rooduijn, 2018), deregulatory “laissez-faire” policies may also be a part of the populist, illiberal right; demonstrated by figures such as Donald Trump (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). While illiberalism is not inherently linked to either the economic left or right, it is reasonably expected to reject the central tendency of the political establishment; those far to the left might reject state incapacity while the far right might reject bureaucratic inefficiencies. The centralised nature of this variable is therefore advantageous; it ranges from -4.284 to (+)4.173, meaning that a squared term will indicate economic extremism of any kind without differentiating between the two sides as negative values are inverted. The

²⁰ The aim of interest groups is often to hinder policies which are unfavourable to them (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 480).

original variable is therefore squared and renamed “Extremism” where higher values signal a larger deviation from economic centrism.

Parties’ varied particularistic- versus universalistic approaches to welfare is controlled for (“v2pawelf”). This might immediately seem closely related to L-R economic positioning, but not the transformed “extremism” variable. High values of the variable “Universal” denote parties which promote universalistic welfare policies while low values increasingly emphasise means-tested policies instead, with 0 denoting parties which reject both universalistic- and means-tested welfare policies (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 29).

The already discussed connections between business interests and “libertarian populism” argues for an additional economic control: corporate donations²¹. A value of 1 in the variable “v2pafunds_2” means a party has received large-scale donations from companies (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 34). It is named “Corp. Sponsors” in the model. Donations might push candidates towards illiberal policies which favour the interests of donors, e.g., tax-cuts and deregulation, combined with ethnonationalist appeals as a rhetorical “distraction”.

Cultural Progressivist Controls

These variables describe parties specific positions on cultural relativism and religion, plus whether the topics “gender equality” and “the leader” came up prominently during mobilisation efforts. These variables are more cultural in character and more traditionalist support should be gathered from lower secularism, less cultural relativism, assumedly less attention paid to gender issues, and an emphasis on the leader.

The religious and cultural relativist variables are both continuous measures ranging from approximately 0-4 where higher values are more progressive. They are accordingly named “Secular” (v2parelig_osp) and “Cult. Relativism” (v2paculsup_osp). High values of “Secular” means parties never invokes God or religion to justify its positions while low values means they almost always do the same (Lührmann, et al., 2020, pp. 27-28). High scores on cultural relativism means the party “strongly opposes the promotion of the cultural superiority of a specific social group or the nation as a whole” while low scores indicate strong opposition to such sentiments (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 27).

The presence of gender equality issues (v2pasalie_8) is renamed “Feminism” while “the leader” (v2pasalie_14) is renamed Leader (Lührmann, et al., 2020, p. 30). The leader

²¹ Corporate donations and business support’s correlation = (+)0.4577

emphasis is contained by the calls for “strong leaders” by the post-material authoritarian reflex (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Party support might be due to personal identification with a leader’s mannerisms and language²² rather than material rationales. Perhaps (s)he is perceived as “one of the people”, e.g., Putin’s attempt to appear close to ordinary Russians using shirtless pictures from fishing trips (Mamonova, 2018, p. 8), or Trump’s cultural appeal to common rural Americans of the “Jacksonian tradition” which reflects notions of an exclusive ethno-religious community of white Christians (Cha, 2016, pp. 83-84). Trump’s explicit xenophobia is easy to identify with and more comforting for traditionalists than being dismissed as bigots by liberal intellectuals (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452). The same argument works for any other identity group like women identifying with H. Clinton or African-Americans voting for B. Obama. These all relate more to “self-expression values” than “survival values” (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 452).

Dropped Due to Technical Issues

A less urbanised country is intuitively less modernised in general and more likely to have illiberal parties with rural support groups, assuming modernisation to shape both political culture and demographics. The plan was therefore originally to include a variable describing the relative proportion of the urban population per the total population, but this dropped for two reasons: firstly, if urbanisation generally is related to political-economic modernisation, this is already covered by the regime type variable; secondly: there variable only extends to year 2000. Far stranger is Mexico’s urbanisation rate values from 1948 through 1997 which all exceed 100%, both per the existing urbanisation variable and a self-generated variable per urban population/total population. This assumedly reflects some simple formatting error solved by a transformation and one could simply drop Mexico from the equation, but the limited available years is too problematic to justify further inquiry.

Other variables planned to be included caused multicollinearity problems. Governmental efficiency in general²³ were considered as a general material control but was omitted because of its correlation with regime type (0.749) and limited time range from 1996-2019 (Coppedge, et al., 2021, p. 348) which reduced the observations in the models by several thousand. It is nonetheless proxied somewhat though distantly by the split executive-legislative variable and regime type where cohesive control and liberal democracy are presumed to entail governmental efficiency. Public service supply and other variables denoting rural material

²² In multilingual societies perhaps literally, but this is meant more in the sub-cultural sense.

²³ “e_wbgi_gee”

access²⁴ were also problematically correlated to liberal democracy, as was GDP/capita²⁵ and general education levels. The discussed links between political and economic modernisation contained by the liberal democracy index are assumed to proxy these variables.

The following tables (I and II) describe the included variables in their included form per the observations in the model (N=6202) and the resulting regression analysis with increasing controls and adjustments detailed below.

Table (I): Descriptive Statistics

Variable	Obs.	Mean	Std.Dev.	Min	Max
Illiberal(sqrt)	6202	.563	.284	.11	1
Rural W.C.	6202	.183	.276	0	1
Business	6202	.249	.324	0	1
Rural Elite	6202	.11	.217	0	1
Rural M.C.	6202	.175	.266	0	1
Urban W.C.	6202	.256	.332	0	1
Lib. Dem.	6202	.487	.273	.005	.891
Split E-L	6202	.007	.936	-1.709	1.612
Pop. Nomination	6202	1.371	.694	.041	3.775
Local Org.	6202	2.146	1.048	.086	3.958
Ec. issues	6202	.448	.344	0	1
Extremism	6202	2.135	2.64	0	18.353
Universal Welfare	6202	3.06	1.143	.075	4.98
Corp. Sponsors	6202	.276	.334	0	1
Cult. Relativism	6202	2.08	.918	.043	3.896
Feminist issues	6202	.067	.179	0	1
Secular	6202	2.991	.888	.173	3.958
Leader	6202	.177	.262	0	1
Country	6202	96.8	60.097	3	236
year	6202	1998.40	13.51	1970	2019

²⁴ Access to state jobs and state business opportunities

²⁵ “e_migppch” from the ordinary dataset

Table (II): Regression Composition

	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
	Illiberal	Illiberal	Illiberal	Illiberal	Illiberal	Illiberal
Rural WC	0.095*** (0.013)	0.199*** (0.015)	0.102*** (0.010)	0.086*** (0.010)	0.065*** (0.009)	0.044*** (0.008)
Business		0.058*** (0.012)	0.062*** (0.008)	0.058*** (0.009)	0.057*** (0.008)	-0.002 (0.007)
Rural Elite		0.169*** (0.018)	0.052*** (0.012)	0.029*** (0.011)	0.003 (0.010)	0.017* (0.010)
Rural MC		-0.193*** (0.015)	-0.041*** (0.010)	-0.023** (0.010)	-0.046*** (0.009)	-0.060*** (0.008)
Urban WC		-0.084*** (0.012)	-0.009 (0.008)	-0.008 (0.008)	0.042*** (0.007)	0.020*** (0.007)
Lib. Dem. Index			-0.678*** (0.010)	-0.657*** (0.009)	-0.529*** (0.009)	-0.304*** (0.017)
Split Exec-Legis.			-0.003 (0.002)	-0.003 (0.002)	-0.005** (0.002)	-0.006*** (0.002)
Pop. Nomination			-0.075*** (0.004)	-0.071*** (0.004)	-0.047*** (0.003)	-0.051*** (0.004)
Local Org.			0.020*** (0.002)	0.021*** (0.002)	0.006*** (0.002)	0.019*** (0.002)
Economic issues				-0.095*** (0.007)	-0.043*** (0.007)	-0.060*** (0.006)
Extremism				0.013*** (0.001)	0.012*** (0.001)	0.016*** (0.001)
Universal Welfare				-0.006*** (0.002)	0.009*** (0.002)	0.010*** (0.002)
Corp. Sponsor				0.082*** (0.008)	0.059*** (0.007)	0.055*** (0.007)
Cult. Relativism					-0.081*** (0.003)	-0.105*** (0.003)
Secular					-0.038*** (0.003)	-0.018*** (0.003)
Feminist issues					0.020* (0.011)	-0.038*** (0.012)
Leader					0.109*** (0.008)	0.128*** (0.008)
_cons	0.546*** (0.004)	0.549*** (0.006)	0.923*** (0.007)	0.919*** (0.009)	1.053*** (0.010)	0.932*** (0.024)
Obs.	6202	6202	6202	6202	6202	6202
R-squared	0.008	0.062	0.599	0.626	0.716	0.829

Standard errors are in parenthesis

Table (II) shows the gradual adjustments made to the basic model, its effects, and the final basic output of the ordinary regression, beginning with (1) only the central independent variable, then adding (2) alternative support groups, (3) regime- and party variables, (4) economic controls, (5) cultural controls, and finally (6) the fixed country- and year-effects²⁶. Significant findings ($p < 0.05$) are presented with **bold font**.

Analysis

The main association between illiberalism in parties and the rural working class remained positive and significant (***) throughout all iterations, with a weakened coefficient. This indicates some omitted variables and mechanisms connecting the two which are not accounted for, assuming material and cultural mechanisms to mediate the relation. The model does not contain very specific controls for *local* material deprivation which is associated with support for Brexit (Lee, et al., 2018) and the Swedish Democrats (Rickardsson, 2021). The model exchanges these variables with proxies such as “economic issues”, which might be prevalent in times of general economic despair, and welfare policies, which should gather support from the materially marginalised, but these are at best *distant* proxies for local public service supply deprivation (Rickardsson, 2021) and declining job opportunities for low-skilled labourers (Broz, et al., 2021). If this model lacks control for these local factors, then the regression analysis might simply reflect these variables. The concrete measures for urban-rural disparities in terms of public services, job opportunities, and business opportunities were dropped due to multicollinearity problems, as were GDP-growth rates. These variables would complicate interpreting the independent variables’ relative influence and potentially result in inaccurate standard errors (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 146). It however seems unfair to the material mechanism, including the possible significance of local decline, to drop them. A version of the model which includes these measures is therefore included in the appendix. Their inclusion did not render the main association insignificant.

The rural coefficients all adhere to Mamonova (2018, p. 6). Rural elites are positively related with illiberalism while the rural middle class is negative. Only the rural middle class is significantly correlated throughout all iterations as rural elites are rendered insignificant by the inclusion of regime- and party qualities, economic variables, and cultural variables (5). The urban working class is more confusing as the coefficient goes from negative to insignificant to significantly positive once cultural variables are included. The variable is however rendered

²⁶ Output omitted

insignificant in the final model which adds technically motivated adjustments, meaning this might be a false reading.

Liberal democracy's negative coefficient is more or less per definition. Illiberalism in political parties is inter alia defined by (ii) "free and fair elections with multiple parties" and freedoms of association, assembly, speech, and the media. The liberal democracy scale includes both individual civil liberties and electoral specifications which make this association expected.

The negative coefficient of split executive-legislative party control reflects its power-dividing effects and how this hinders either incumbent self-aggrandizement or anticipatory prophylactic measures from the opposition (Pérez-Liñan et al., 2019, p. 606). It does not reflect Fukuyama's argument for potentially detrimental effects on governmental efficiency (2015) which describes more extreme situations rather than the overall norm for the variable.

Popular inclusion in candidate nomination is also negative, reflecting its overall power-sharing effects and increased democratic accountability rather than the fear for authoritarian populist outsiders expressed by Levitsky & Ziblatt (2018). It may also be a case of reversed causality as more liberal parties might be inherently more democratically inclusive. This is confusingly combined with "Local organisation" and personnel presence's positive coefficient. This may reflect inherent illiberal preferences in peripheral constituencies, or how local responsiveness inspires political trust and peripheral constituents' public service supply satisfaction *in illiberally dominant contexts* as is the case in China (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 381). This might offset opposition and calls for liberal reform from populations.

Rhetoric centred on "economic issues" such as taxes and infrastructure is negatively correlated, which seems to indicate that illiberal candidates do not emphasise material issues, lending support to the post-material "authoritarian reflex" argument (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Economic extremism from the right and left is also as expected positively associated with illiberalism, relating to the different types of radical populism described by Rooudijn (2018). Radical-left material redistribution and radical-right cultural traditionalism combined with economic libertarianism are both captured by this variable, the latter may also explain corporate sponsors' positive coefficient. The positive coefficient of universalist welfare is surprising as this seems more related to consensual, broadly inclusive liberal-democratic norms than illiberal sentiments. It might reflect leftist illiberalism, but it is rendered insignificant in the final, technically adjusted model.

The negative coefficients of cultural relativism and secularism make sense as they represent modern cultural values which trigger the opposing “authoritarian reflex”, including favouring of strong leaders (Inglehart & Norris, 2017), which relates to the positive coefficient of “Leader”. The positive coefficient of feminist issues is more surprising as gender equality is related to post-material “self-expressionist” values (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Though the variable makes no distinction between those supporting and opposing gender equality, the expectation is that mainly progressive parties discuss the topic. This and other confusing coefficients may be due to technical problems which are analysed in the following section.

Prerequisites for Linear Regression

Mehmetoglu and Jacobse, (2017, p. 134) describe certain prerequisites pertaining to (i) the specifications of the ordinary least-squares model and (ii) the residuals. The greater the extent to which these assumptions are met, the more reliable the results are. The assumptions for the model’s specifications are: (i-a) it includes only relevant x-variables and none which are irrelevant, (i-b) it describes a correlation which is in fact linear, (i-c) the correlation of the independent and dependent variables is consistent regardless of other X-values, and (i-d) it contains no extreme multicollinearity (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, pp. 135-146). The assumptions for the residuals are: (ii-a) the error term has a conditional mean of zero, (ii-b) the variance is homoscedastic; that is similarly spread from low- to high predicted values, (ii-c) the errors are uncorrelated with each other per different observations and with the X-variables, and (ii-d) normally distributed (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, pp. 148-151).

Model Specifications

The issue of relevant x-variables (i-a) is first and foremost a theoretical question, but data access limitations often make it difficult to fully accommodate (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017, s. 135). If one includes irrelevant explanatory- or control variables, one runs the risk of producing false significant results, and this is therefore tested for in Stata using the “linktest” which tests for misspecification problems; in other words, whether any wrong forms of variables have been included or any relevant variables have been excluded (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 135). The command tests the linearly defined regression (“_hat”) against a squared version of the same model (“_hatsq”); a positive linktest would return a significant squared model, indicating the model suffers from misspecifications of variables (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p 135). The issue of omitted variables is tested for using the “ovtest” command which runs two versions

of “Ramsey’s regression specification error test for omitted variables”; the null hypothesis for this test is that we have no omitted variables, and significant results are therefore undesirable (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 136).

The assumption of linearity (i-b) states the correlation between the independent and dependent variables are constant across various X-values; if not true, one runs the risk of getting incorrect slope coefficients, biased standard errors, and as a result invalid t- and F-statistics (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 137). In strongly associated instances, curvilinearity might simply be identified by inspecting diagram a basic spread diagram (Skog, 2017, s. 239). In any case, suspicions for such misspecifications are addressed by testing various transformations such as quadratic equations and checking the transformed variable’s significance (Skog, 2017, p. 283).

The assumption of additivity (i-c) requires that the relation between the dependent- and independent variables is constant regardless of the other x-variables’ values; if not, one addresses this by including an interaction term consisting of the relevant variables (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 146). One must also limit multicollinearity between x-variables (i-d) as too strong correlation between them complicates interpretations of coefficients where variables “steal” explanatory power from each other, resulting in difficulties interpreting the relative importance of the respective variables and inaccurate standard errors (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 146). One must therefore either avoid including variables which statistically or theoretically describe the same phenomenon, or alternatively collapse them into a common scale or index (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 146). When using interaction- and squared terms, one accepts multicollinearity to a larger degree for these and their constitute terms, but there are no clear rules on exactly what is too much; a heuristic rule of thumb suggested by Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen is to keep correlations under 0.8 (2017, pp. 146-147).

Residuals

The error term should have a conditional mean of zero (ii-a) given any values of the independent variables; in other words, the distances between actual data points and the regression line are randomly spread above and beneath the line, and the two directions should be equivalent in strength (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 148). This is nonetheless not going to be directly tested for as the qualities of the ordinary least-squares method and the constant term “absorbs” any non-zero mean (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 148).

The error term should have constant variance across varied predicted values, that is “homoscedastic”; in the opposite instance of heteroscedasticity, the model would more

accurately predict high Y-values than low, or vice-versa, which causes a bias in the estimation of standard errors (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 149). A concrete test for significant and problematic heteroscedasticity is the Breusch-Pagan/Cook-Weisberg test via the command “hettest” which estimates the variance of Y from the average of the squared values of the residuals; the null hypothesis of this chi-squared test is homoscedastic residuals in the model, and significant results therefore indicate problematic heteroscedasticity (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 150). If this is the case, one could introduce “robust standard errors” such as the “heteroscedasticity-consistent standard errors”; the use of robust standard errors will not reap new coefficients, but one will get reasonably accurate p-values (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 235) which will be used in the final model of this paper. The use of such “robust” techniques is however not completely uncontroversial as some argue differing robust- and classical standard errors signal uncorrected model misspecifications and warn against trusting their results (King & Roberts, 2015, p. 159).

The assumption of non-autocorrelating errors (ii-c) essentially means that observations must be independent from each other. This might be breached as parties in the same elections and/or countries are reasonably affected by their common context and strategical interactions. As this additionally is time series data over several time units, this might be breached as an observational unit’s values in a given year certainly might affect the same unit in the following year (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 150). Within-group autocorrelation can be addressed with the “cluster”-option which adjusts for expected in-group autocorrelation while maintaining the assumption of no autocorrelation between groups or “clusters”; robust standard errors are implied when using this cluster-option (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 235). Time-series autocorrelation is commonly addressed by using for example lagged independent variables where associations are measured between an X-variable at “time” and the Y-variable at “time minus one unit” (Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 253).

In addition, the errors should not correlate with the X-variables as it would indicate an underlying variable which correlates with both the dependent- and independent variable; this “z-variable” would then cause a spurious relationship which might be misinterpreted as correlation between X and Y (Skog, 2017, s. 253). This is why one must control for possibly confounding variables. So-called “fixed effects” are relatedly used as “all-encompassing” control variables in the model; variable-associations might be contingent on many different country-specific cultural qualities or time-specific historical “waves”. By including “fixed effects” for countries and years, the regression will include a dummy variable for each

respective unit and associations are measured strictly within a given unit (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017, s. 242) such that any omitted trend variables pertaining to a particular culture or a particular point in time are accounted for. This can be used in combination with the robust standard errors and cluster options described above, as is recommended when using fixed effects estimators for linear regressions (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 235).

To which degree the errors deviate from a normal distribution (ii-d) is measured by generating a residual variable, summarising the variable to check its skewness and kurtosis which should ideally be close to 0 and 3; this is followed by a “skewness test” where significant results indicate significant deviations from a normal distribution (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017, ss. 151-153). Finding significant skewness in the latter instance does not necessarily call for panic; a large sample size both contributes to the test being significant and lessens its impact, and one should therefore also rely on a simple visual analysis via the command “histogram, res, normal” which displays a histogram of the residuals compared to a normal distribution (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017, ss. 151-153).

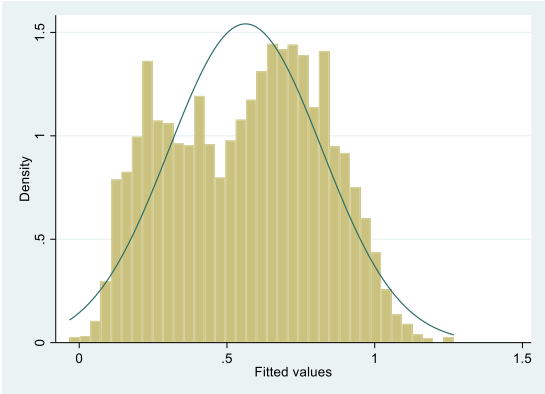
Diagnostics

Table (III): Linearity Test

Il liberal_~t	Coef.	Std.Err.	t	P>t	[95% C.	Interval]
_hat	0.970	0.025	38.150	0.000	0.920	1.020
_hatsq	0.027	0.022	1.210	0.226	-0.017	0.070
_cons	0.007	0.006	1.010	0.313	-0.006	0.019

Table (IV): Description and Skewness Test for Residuals with Graph

Variables	Obs	Mean	Std.D..	Min	Max	p1	p99	Skew.	Kurt.
res	6202	.563	.259	-.032	1.268	.092	1.061	-.045	2.004



Diagnostics: Linearity, Heteroscedasticity, Low Kurtosis, and Autocorrelation

The linearity test returns a significant linear model (0.970 at p-value 0.000) while the squared model's coefficient is weak and insignificant (0.027 at p-value 0.226). The Breusch-Pagan / Cook-Weisberg test for heteroskedasticity rejects the null-hypothesis of constant, homoscedastic variance with a chi2(1)-value of 64.24 (p=0.000). The RESET-test also rejects the null-hypotheses of no omitted variables per $F(3, 5966)=250.29$ with a p-value of 0.0000. The test for normally distributed residuals also rejects the null-hypothesis (***) due to low kurtosis (2.004) while they are not significantly skewed (-0.045, p=0.152). Additionally, it is reasonable to expect autocorrelating as the data measures of the same parties several times in different elections.

The heteroscedasticity in the models might disrupt the accurate calculations of standard errors and significance levels (Skog, 2017, p. 257). Heteroscedasticity can indicate problematic misspecifications, omitted relevant variables such as including conditional relationships and transformations, and residuals correlating with X-variables (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017, s. 231). While this certainly is problematic, this may be handled by running “robust standard errors” which eases the assumption of heteroscedasticity (Mehmetoglu & Jakobsen, 2017, s. 235). This is implied when using the cluster option which is detailed below.

The assumptions of residuals not correlating with either each other is assumed to be breached as the data observes parties clustered within elections in countries' elections across time. Autocorrelation might result in inaccurate standard errors and p-values (Skog, 2017, p. 252-257). The model arguably contains clustered autocorrelation per country as parties within a country are seen as interacting with each other and their political context, and time-based autocorrelation as party's illiberalism in year “t+1” will naturally correlate with its value in year “t”, and so will the model's residuals. Time-series autocorrelation can be addressed by using a time-lagged dependent variable. This was attempted with this model, but it reduced observations from 6202 to 4271²⁷. Additionally, this approach is criticised for possible causing estimation problems and biases stemming from lagged variables in multilevel models (Allison, 2015). Two lagged dependent variable models are nonetheless included in the appendix for comparison. The “cluster”-option with country as the cluster unit is added to communicate an expectation for within-group autocorrelation. This is run in combination with the already included fixed country- and year-effects, and the cluster option also includes the

²⁷ See the appendix for models with lagged illiberalism, both in its square-root- and ordinary formats. The lost observations are the earliest observations of parties as they lack a reference point (year-1).

forementioned robust standard errors option. Though significantly non-normally distributed residuals can result in inaccurate p-values, a large number of observations makes this prerequisite less critical (Skog, 2017, p. 250; Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen, 2017, p. 153). Mehmetoglu & Jacobsen explicitly refer to 1902 as sufficiently large while this paper relies on 6202 observations. The non-normally distributed residuals are assumed to be compensated for per the large N of the model. The model appears to suffer from multicollinearity issues, specifically due to the liberal democracy index ($VIF=8.87$, $1/VIF=0.11$). This appears to be related to some of the fixed effects for countries and years, but no other variables' values are noteworthy. The mean VIF (2.08) does not raise any concerns. The following table (V) shows the complete model from above (Table II: 6) adjusted for heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation.

Table (V): Linear Regression (5) with Robust Standard Errors and Clustered Countries

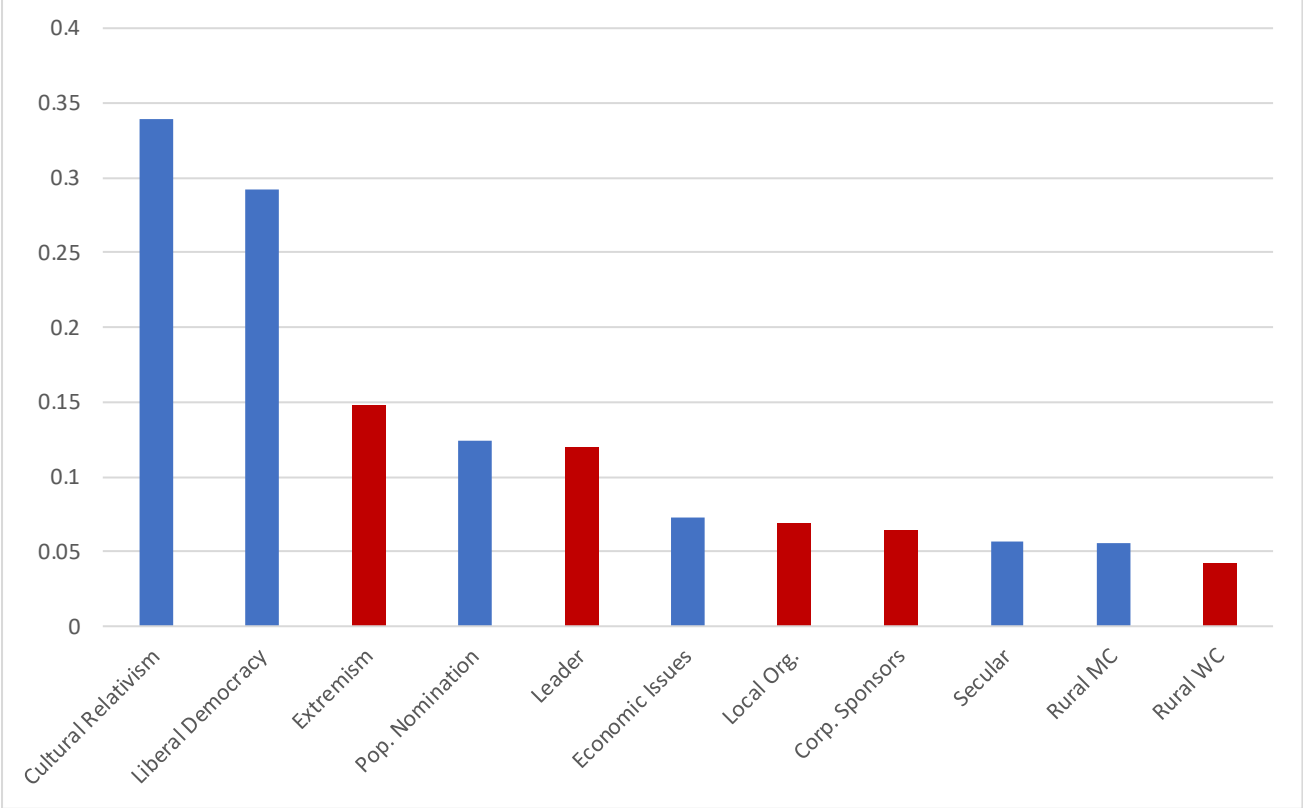
Illiberal (sqrt)	Coef.	St.Err.	t	p	[95% C.	Interval]	Sig
Rural W.C.	0.044	0.018	2.39	0.018	0.008	0.080	**
Business	-0.002	0.017	-0.13	0.897	-0.036	0.031	
Rural Elite	0.017	0.019	0.91	0.365	-0.020	0.055	
Rural M.C.	-0.060	0.019	-3.10	0.002	-0.098	-0.022	***
Urban W.C.	0.020	0.017	1.14	0.255	-0.014	0.054	
Lib. Dem. Index	-0.304	0.034	-8.83	0.000	-0.371	-0.236	***
Split Exec-Legis.	-0.006	0.003	-1.71	0.090	-0.013	0.001	*
Pop. Nomination	-0.051	0.012	-4.29	0.000	-0.074	-0.027	***
Local Org.	0.019	0.005	3.70	0.000	0.009	0.029	***
Economic issues	-0.060	0.017	-3.64	0.000	-0.093	-0.027	***
Extremism	0.016	0.002	9.91	0.000	0.013	0.019	***
Universal	0.010	0.006	1.62	0.108	-0.002	0.023	
Corp. Sponsors	0.055	0.020	2.80	0.006	0.016	0.094	***
Cult. Relativism	-0.105	0.009	-11.62	0.000	-0.123	-0.087	***
Secular	-0.018	0.007	-2.55	0.012	-0.032	-0.004	**
Feminist issues	-0.038	0.026	-1.45	0.149	-0.089	0.014	
Leader	0.128	0.019	6.83	0.000	0.091	0.165	***
Constant	0.932	0.033	28.03	0.000	0.866	0.997	***
Mean dependent var		0.563	SD dependent var			0.284	
R-squared		0.829	Number of obs			6202	
F-test		.	Prob > F			.	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		-8838.856	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			-8394.503	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

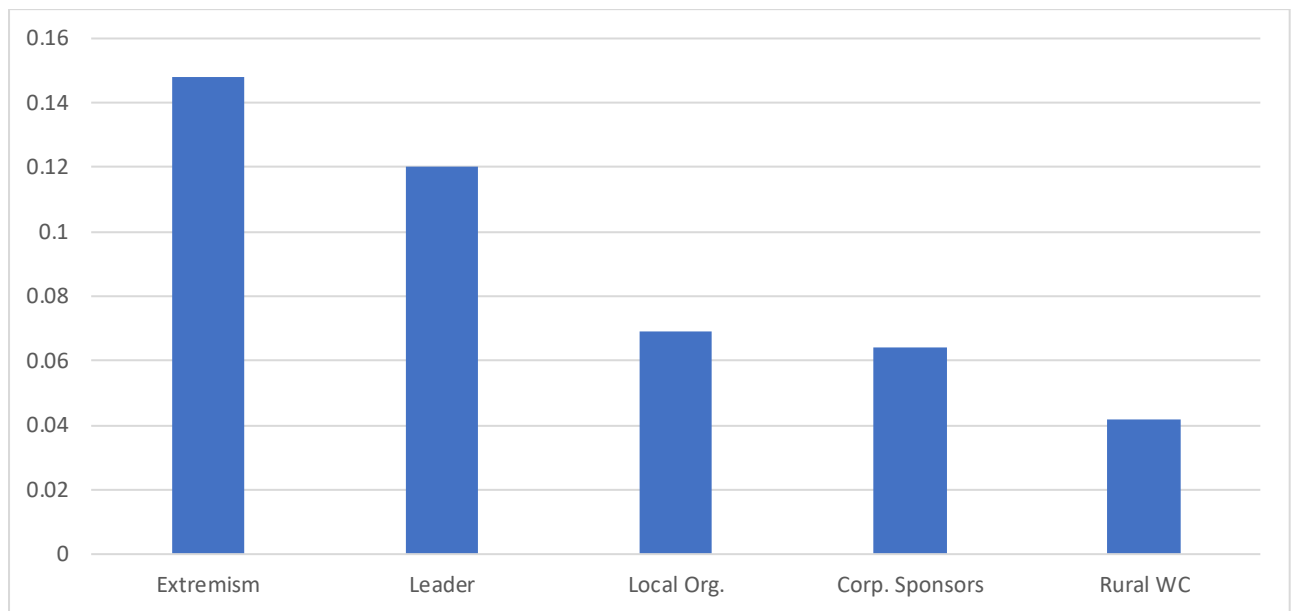
Effects of Adjustments on Significance and Final β -Coefficients

The use of robust standard errors and country clusters does not change any coefficients, but standard errors and p-values now take model’s heteroscedasticity and autocorrelation into account. The main variable, that is the rural working class, remained significant ($p < 0.05$). “Rural middle class” also remained significant, as did the liberal democracy index, popular nomination, local organisation, economic issues, economic extremism, corporate sponsors, cultural relativism, secularism, and leader emphasis. “Urban Working Class” ($p=0.255$), split executive-legislative party relations ($p=0.09$), universal welfare policy, and feminist issues (0.149) were all rendered insignificant. The rest remained significant and the relative influence of each variable on illiberalism in parties is presented here per their standardised β -coefficients. The blue variables were negatively correlated while red indicates positive correlation with illiberalism.

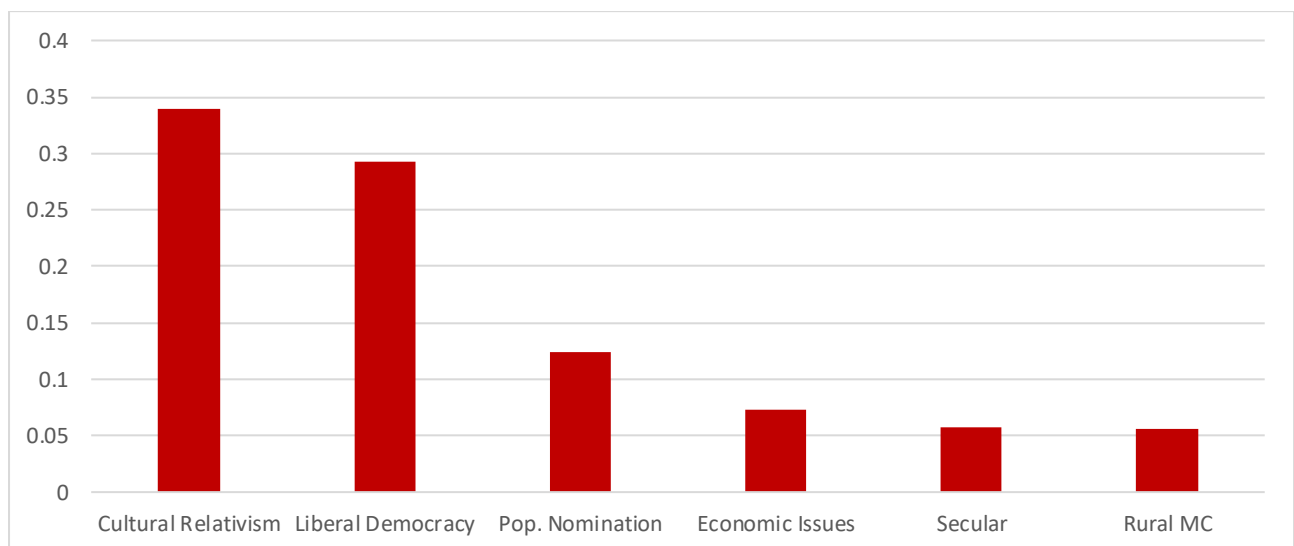
Relative Influence of Independent Variables per β -Coefficients



Relative Influence of Positive Correlations per β -Coefficients



Relative Influence of Negative Correlations per β -Coefficients



DISCUSSION

As a reminder, the dependent variable illiberalism is defined by: (i) a party's propensity for subjecting political opponents to personal attacks and tactics of demonization, (ii) party leadership's commitment to free and fair elections with multiple parties, freedom of speech, media, assembly and association (iii) party leadership's willingness to implement the will of the majority even when doing so violates minority rights, and (iv) to which degree party leadership explicitly discourages the use of violence against domestic political opponents (Lührmann, et al., 2020, pp. 25-26).

The Rural Working Class and Illiberal Parties

The main independent variable describing rural working-class constituents is positively and significantly associated with illiberalism throughout all presented iterations. This means that even when controlling possibly confounding factors such as alternative support groups, regime type, executive-legislative party division, party organisational qualities describing local presence and nomination type, and both economic- and cultural issues and rhetoric, the association holds true, though it has the weakest overall influence of all the significant variables. As the model includes fixed-country and -year effects, cultural particularities and time-specific shocks or waves are accounted for as well.

Demand or Supply of Illiberalism?

Rural support for authoritarian candidates is often portrayed as stemming from the former's "irrationality" and lacking sophistication which makes them susceptible to vote against self-interest (Mamanova, 2018, p. 6) and for the "simple and chiliastic" solutions of intolerant extremists (Lipset, 1959, p. 483). As all the model proves is an empirical association, it does not by any means prove the causal direction of the relationship. This paper has generally presented illiberalism as something which is demanded by the population per material and cultural mechanisms, but the model cannot disprove the opposite. A lagged dependent variable would therefore strengthen the argument for supply-driven illiberalism. This was considered but dropped as discussed in the diagnostics, but an alternative regression model (I) with a lagged version of dependent variable is found in the appendix. This lagged alternative not only affirms the association but strengthens the argument for popular demand resulting in party adjustments. Assuming the rural working class to demand illiberal parties, the format of their demands is separated between material and cultural mechanisms in the literature.

Material and Cultural Demands

Illiberal demands may be construed as expressions of both material marginalisation and cultural alienation, though the two are tightly connected in the literature. The material perspectives argue that an increasingly skill-intensive economy, offshoring, and automation reduce material security of low-skilled individuals due to lost job opportunities and stagnant wages (Broz, et al., 2021, p. 464). Not only individuals but also communities experiencing both labour market-related decline (Broz, et al., 2021) and public service supply dissatisfaction (Rickardsson, 2021) might grow frustrated, harbour political distrust, and as a result display a form of liberal-democratic fatigue by demanding more elite-bypassing forms of democracy (Rooduijn, 2018, p. 352). Times of material insecurity might further inspire appeals to collective selves over

individual selves, related to authoritarian populist's roles as "entrepreneurs of identity" (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). Arguments which describe these proverbial "losers of globalisation" do however often relate the materially marginalised to concerns for immigration and multiculturalism (Hobolt, 2016; Lee, et al., 2018; Rickardsson, 2021).

The cultural frameworks instead emphasise the tension between modern "post-material" self-expression values and traditional and potentially authoritarian "survival values" (Inglehart & Norris, 2017), but this is also connected to socioeconomic standing and material security where security fosters "higher" political issues. Times of insecurity might however also inspire "higher" appeals to collective selves over individual selves, which is related to authoritarian populist's roles as "entrepreneurs of identity" (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6). The crisis might be simultaneously material and cultural. Subjective perceptions of lowered social status (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Mutz, 2018) might be such a crisis. Traditionally dominant demographics preserving the self-serving cultural hierarchies which are challenged by progressivism. This shows how both frameworks cannot help but rely somewhat on each other. This paper does not untangle this complex causal web of potential interactions but considers their relative strengths both theoretically and empirically.

Theoretically Irrational Materialism versus Rational Culturalism

If any perspective presents rural working-class support for illiberal parties as stemming from lacking "sophistication", it would be the individually self-interested material one. Why would the economic policies of Thatcher and Trump gather support from the working class (Mamonova, 2018, p. 6)? Inferring cultural capital, collective selves, and cultural power "rationalises" the support more convincingly. It appears rational to defend a traditional and self-serving hierarchy and its power distribution when it is challenged by "cultural redistribution" in the form of post-material support for previously marginalised groups.

Empirical Strength of Cultural Variables

The model does not contain very specific controls for *local* material deprivation which is associated with support for Brexit (Lee, et al., 2018) and the Swedish Democrats (Rickardsson, 2021). The concrete measures for urban-rural disparities were dropped due to multicollinearity problems, as were GDP-growth rates. This fact does not do the material mechanisms justice, but a version of the model which includes these measures appendix (IV). Their inclusion did not render the main association insignificant.

There are however also cultural variables not included in the model. Internal processes describing subjective perceptions of one's social status' trajectory (Gidron & Hall, 2017; Mutz, 2018) are not captured directly, though proxied on a general level by the cultural relativism variable which has the greatest explanatory power in the entire model. Economic extremism is the third strongest variable but notions of "post-materialism" might mean this is not what attracts support. "Economic issues" is for example negatively related, indicating authoritarian parties do not infer these topics much. Leader emphasis is also heavily associated with illiberalism, and the main association was weakened more by the inclusion of cultural variables than the economic ones, though this may also reflect the omitted material variables.

Class Politics Under the Cultural Zeitgeist

Class-determined political preferences might reflect pure material interests and competition, as is the case for the described class-based rural political interests (Mamonova 2018, p. 11). The "post-material" argument states that the relative salience of material issues declined and were exchanged for progressive cultural issues and "self-expression" values (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). This shifted the traditional class division in politics where the working class used to support economic redistribution while middle- and upper classes were conservative (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 443). The working class reacted to the negligence of economic issues and material insecurity with a preference for authoritarian and traditional cultural programmes (Inglehart & Norris, 2017, p. 443). The two remaining support group variables, that is the rural working class and -middle class, affirm this pattern of the materially deprived being more illiberal and the rural middle class' prodemocratic orientation (Mamonova, 2018, p. 11). The corporate sponsor variable rendered the "Business" variable insignificant, which seems to indicate that the effective variable for illiberal business elites is via donations. As discussed, a cynical explanation for business elites' support for authoritarian candidates may be in favour of their economic policies, while the accompanying authoritarian sentiments are either accepted as a necessary evil or seen as a helpful mobilisation tool and distraction from material distribution. In other words, "post-material" political cultures might stem from not only leftist "neglect" of economic issues and fragmentation due to identity politics (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 438), but also a willing ignorance for material issues from authoritarian candidates and their supporters. Economic issues are negatively related to illiberalism in the model, illustrating the point. This is more of a "demand-oriented" explanation, but both supply and demand may reinforce each other.

What is to be Done?

What practical lessons can be learned from this? If cultural salience has overtaken economic issues in many countries, does this mean ethnic conflicts are the inevitable new form of politics? Any material marginalisation-induced support for illiberalism is relatively easy to address with redistributive and materially inclusive policies to reduce political distrust. It seems far more difficult, however, to address ethnocultural conflict as the latter is not so easily solved by compromise. The interethnic political conflicts of Kenya and Nigeria are very different in character from the neighbouring Tanzania, demonstrating that ethnic conflict is not an inevitability (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 532). Cases like Tanzania and Indonesia show how elite-driven constructions of national identity can offset ethnic tensions (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 532). Cultural and religious appeals effectively mobilise, perhaps even better than class-based appeals, which is demonstrated by the contemporary Middle East (Fukuyama, 2015, p. 532).

Bringing Labour back to Labour Parties

The political left has throughout the world become fragmented and lost its appeal to working class populations due to the emergency of progressive cultural values. The leadership of many of these movements were economically well-off (Fukuyama, 2015, p 438) and after a while gained support from urban middle classes (Inglehart & Norris, 2017). Though the cultural framework emphasises cultural statuses threats, such perceptions and distance from dominant cultural traits are linked to material security (Inglehart & Norris, 2017; Gidron & Hall, 2017) which means one should not neglect growing material inequalities, especially regarding the less educated. Leftist material redistribution might however be constrained in countries integrated in international markets (Waldner & Lust, 2018). Leftist identity politics might however repel traditionally culturally dominant but economically underprivileged. They might not identify with neither its tenets, or the language in which it is communicated, if it represents economically well off, urban cultural elites. The positive correlation between local organisational presence of parties and illiberalism might indicate that illiberal parties are better at seeking out peripheral areas and appealing to their interests. Perhaps leftist parties must increase attention to both the working class and rural interests who per cultural politics opt for the traditionalist right. While the topic is not considered concretely by this paper, it would be interesting to see if consensual, broad coalition-based multiparty systems, e.g., proportional parliamentary systems, handle such tensions better if they allow for more specialised parties and clear communication of preferences.

Conserving Liberalism and Deflecting Interest Group Influence

The powerful mobilisation potential of cultural issues makes it a powerful tool. This paper has discussed the influence of business interests and corporate donations, the latter of which is significantly positively related to illiberalism in the paper. If “libertarian populists” do in fact employ cultural rhetoric in a ploy to distract from material policy sponsored by powerful interest groups, this must be resisted at some level. While neither cultural conservatism nor economic libertarianism is inherently illiberal, candidates displaying problematic antidemocratic tendencies must be rejected by constituents and elites alike. If, however, antidemocratic candidates due to harsh material conditions manage to gather support from marginalised constituents, parties and elites may very well be the last-instance “gatekeepers of democracy” as described by Levistky & Way (2018). This amounts to a prisoner’s dilemma: if a party or grander coalition reaps support and ensures seats via a problematic candidate, should (s)he be rejected or kept as a “necessary evil” for the sake of gaining political power?

Once a problem has manifested, it might be hard to get rid of. What is for example the future of the GOP? Modern-day communication technology including the internet takes away “framing”-powers from political elites and grants it to variously anonymous and low-regulated digital spaces. The added component of potentially radicalising, “echo-chamber producing” algorithms might imply these spaces are not an appropriate agora for constructing moderate world views, but these topics must be revisited in a later paper.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This paper has analysed the material and cultural mechanisms linking the rural working class to illiberal candidates which might contribute to democratic backsliding and deterioration. The regression model affirms the strong salience of cultural issues over economic issues, and illiberal support might to a degree reflect both leftist neglect of economic “survival” issues in favour of cultural “self-expression” issues. Though not to say the latter does not matter, cultural tensions might be off-set by redistribution in favour of marginalised individuals and communities. The findings also connect corporate sponsors to illiberalism, buttressing the need for considering which interest groups in fact control party policies and its detrimental effects on democratic quality. This paper does not seek to prioritise one explanatory model over the other as material marginalisation and cultural alienation are complimentary. Further studies on party-level dynamics are needed which should incorporate local-level data and/or subjective status perceptions in their models to fully explain illiberal support.

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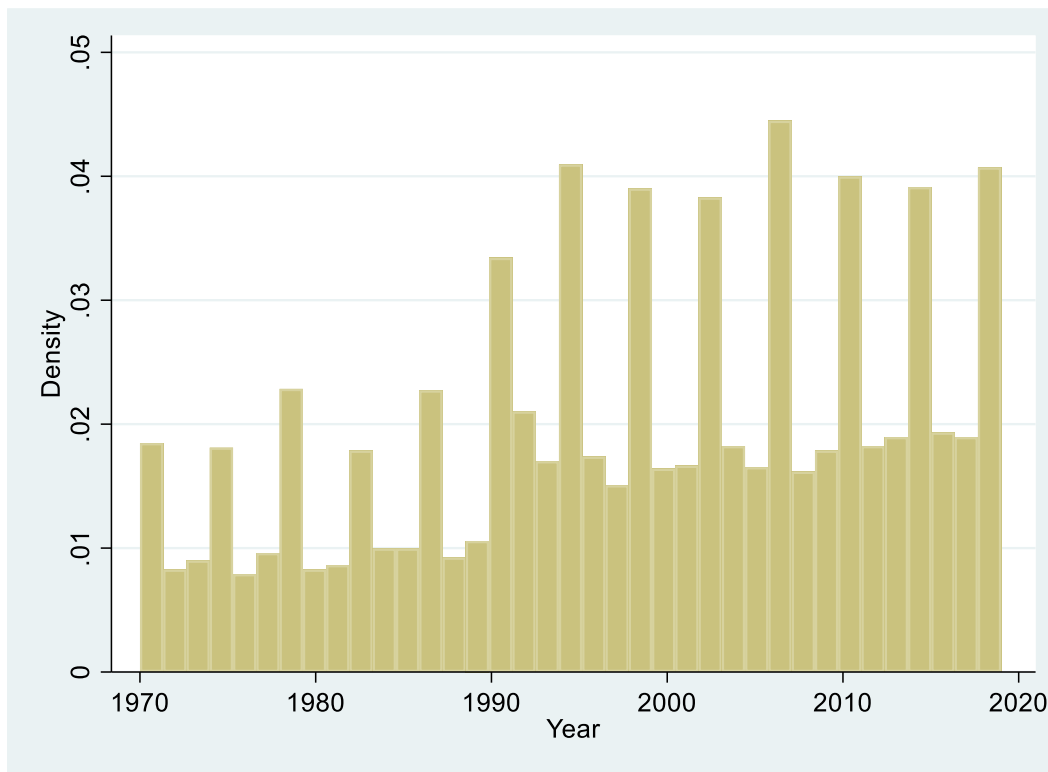
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APPENDIX

Party Frequency Per Year



Party Frequency per Regime Type

Regimes of the world -- the RoW measure	Freq.	Percent	Cum.
Closed Autocracy	507	8.17	8.17
Electoral Autocracy	1832	29.54	37.71
Electoral Democracy	1754	28.28	65.99
Liberal Democracy	2109	34.01	100.00

Alternative Regression (I) with Lagged Dependent Variable

Illiberal_sqrt_lag1	Coef.	St.Err.	t-value	p-value	[95% C.	Interval]	Sig
Rural WC	0.044	0.021	2.09	0.038	0.003	0.086	**
Business	-0.008	0.019	-0.39	0.700	-0.046	0.031	
Rural Elite	0.017	0.020	0.85	0.396	-0.022	0.056	
Rural MC	-0.053	0.023	-2.31	0.022	-0.098	-0.008	**
Urban WC	0.021	0.021	0.98	0.326	-0.021	0.063	
Lib Dem Index	-0.375	0.043	-8.77	0.000	-0.460	-0.291	***
Split EL	-0.009	0.003	-2.62	0.010	-0.015	-0.002	**
Pop. Nom	-0.050	0.014	-3.67	0.000	-0.076	-0.023	***
Local Org	0.019	0.006	2.86	0.005	0.006	0.031	***
Economic Issues	-0.056	0.018	-3.10	0.002	-0.092	-0.021	***
Extremism	0.017	0.002	8.60	0.000	0.013	0.020	***
Universal	0.011	0.006	1.68	0.095	-0.002	0.023	*
Corp. Sponsors	0.054	0.023	2.33	0.021	0.008	0.100	**
Cult. Relativism	-0.097	0.009	-10.41	0.000	-0.115	-0.078	***
Secular	-0.011	0.009	-1.32	0.188	-0.028	0.006	
Feminism	-0.033	0.028	-1.21	0.227	-0.088	0.021	
Leader	0.129	0.023	5.66	0.000	0.084	0.174	***
Constant	0.837	0.036	23.39	0.000	0.766	0.908	***
Mean dependent var	0.542	SD dependent var			0.294		
R-squared	0.854	Number of obs			4271		
F-test		Prob > F					
Akaike crit. (AIC)	-6434.973	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			-6021.598		

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Alternative Regression (II) with Ordinary Dependent Variable

Illiberal	Coef.	St.Err.	t	p	[95% C	Interval]	Sig
Rural WC	0.046	0.023	1.98	0.049	0.000	0.092	**
Business	0.001	0.022	0.04	0.972	-0.043	0.044	
Rural Elite	0.018	0.024	0.74	0.458	-0.030	0.065	
Rural MC	-0.080	0.023	-3.41	0.001	-0.126	-0.034	***
Urban WC	0.006	0.022	0.25	0.803	-0.038	0.049	
Lib Dem Index	-0.411	0.045	-9.05	0.000	-0.500	-0.321	***
Split EL	-0.009	0.004	-2.07	0.040	-0.018	0.000	**
Pop. Nom	-0.062	0.015	-4.11	0.000	-0.091	-0.032	***
Local Org.	0.035	0.007	5.32	0.000	0.022	0.049	***
Economic Issues	-0.071	0.021	-3.46	0.001	-0.112	-0.031	***
Extremism	0.019	0.002	10.11	0.000	0.016	0.023	***
Universal	0.014	0.008	1.78	0.077	-0.002	0.029	*
Corp. Sponsors	0.076	0.025	3.05	0.003	0.027	0.126	***
Cult. Relativism	-0.116	0.012	-9.83	0.000	-0.140	-0.093	***
Secular	-0.025	0.010	-2.63	0.009	-0.044	-0.006	***
Feminism	-0.022	0.037	-0.60	0.548	-0.095	0.051	
Leader	0.167	0.025	6.79	0.000	0.118	0.215	***
Constant	0.793	0.043	18.42	0.000	0.708	0.878	***
Mean dependent var		0.398	SD dependent var			0.329	
R-squared		0.799	Number of obs			6202	
F-test		.	Prob > F			.	
Akaike crit. (AIC)		-5984.597	Bayesian crit. (BIC)			-5540.244	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Alternative Regression (III) with Lagged Ordinary Dependent Variable

Il liberal_lag1	Coef.	St.Err.	t	p	[95% C	Interval]	Sig
Rural WC	0.046	0.027	1.70	0.092	-0.008	0.100	*
Business	-0.006	0.025	-0.26	0.794	-0.055	0.042	
Rural Elite	0.015	0.025	0.61	0.542	-0.034	0.064	
Rural MC	-0.070	0.028	-2.52	0.013	-0.125	-0.015	**
Urban WC	0.005	0.026	0.18	0.858	-0.047	0.057	
Lib Dem Index	-0.544	0.056	-9.77	0.000	-0.654	-0.434	***
Split EL	-0.013	0.004	-3.23	0.001	-0.021	-0.005	***
Pop. Nom	-0.060	0.017	-3.52	0.001	-0.094	-0.027	***
Local Org	0.036	0.009	4.25	0.000	0.019	0.053	***
Economic issues	-0.070	0.022	-3.22	0.002	-0.113	-0.027	***
Extremism	0.020	0.002	8.42	0.000	0.015	0.025	***
Universal	0.013	0.008	1.76	0.081	-0.002	0.029	*
Corp. Sponsors	0.075	0.029	2.57	0.011	0.018	0.133	**
Cult. Relativism	-0.104	0.012	-8.57	0.000	-0.128	-0.080	***
Secular	-0.016	0.011	-1.39	0.166	-0.038	0.007	
Feminism	-0.014	0.038	-0.36	0.716	-0.088	0.060	
Leader	0.164	0.030	5.45	0.000	0.105	0.223	***
Constant	0.658	0.044	14.83	0.000	0.570	0.746	***
Mean dependent var	0.380	SD dependent var				0.339	
R-squared	0.828	Number of obs				4271	
F-test		Prob > F				.	
Akaike crit. (AIC)	-4504.440	Bayesian crit. (BIC)				-4091.066	

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$

Alternative Regression (IV) with Rural-Urban Disparity and GDP-Growth Included

Illiberal_sqrt	Coef.	St.Err.	t	p	[95% C.	Interval]	Sig
Rural WC	0.051	0.020	2.48	0.014	0.010	0.091	**
Business	-0.019	0.018	-1.03	0.306	-0.055	0.017	
Rural Elite	0.020	0.020	1.00	0.318	-0.019	0.059	
Rural MC	-0.056	0.021	-2.65	0.009	-0.098	-0.014	***
Urban WC	0.014	0.019	0.75	0.455	-0.023	0.052	
Lib Dem	-0.301	0.040	-7.52	0.000	-0.380	-0.222	***
Split EL	-0.008	0.004	-2.14	0.034	-0.015	-0.001	**
Pop. Nom	-0.051	0.012	-4.22	0.000	-0.075	-0.027	***
Local Org	0.017	0.005	3.17	0.002	0.006	0.027	***
Extremism	0.016	0.002	9.76	0.000	0.013	0.019	***
Universal	0.012	0.006	1.96	0.052	0.000	0.025	*
Corp Sponsors	0.038	0.021	1.81	0.072	-0.004	0.081	*
Cult. Rel	-0.107	0.009	-11.93	0.000	-0.125	-0.090	***
Secular	-0.018	0.007	-2.57	0.011	-0.032	-0.004	**
Feminism	-0.036	0.029	-1.25	0.212	-0.094	0.021	
Leader	0.136	0.020	6.69	0.000	0.096	0.177	***
PSS_RU	-0.007	0.013	-0.54	0.591	-0.033	0.019	
State Jobs RU	-0.013	0.018	-0.73	0.466	-0.048	0.022	
Business RU	-0.012	0.021	-0.57	0.566	-0.054	0.030	
GDP-Growth	0.035	0.036	0.98	0.327	-0.036	0.106	
Constant	0.961	0.039	24.33	0.000	0.883	1.039	***
Mean dependent var		0.561	SD dependent var		0.286		
R-squared		0.834	Number of obs		5793		
F-test		.	Prob > F		.		
Akaike crit. (AIC)		-8322.763	Bayesian crit. (BIC)		-7869.584		

*** $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.05$, * $p < 0.1$