

Populist Governments and Democratic Backsliding during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Kerim Can Kavaklı¹

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The coronavirus pandemic has provided governments with an opportunity to abuse their emergency powers and weaken democratic norms and institutions, but not all incumbents have exploited this opportunity. In this paper I study this variation in democratic backsliding during the pandemic and focus on incumbent ideology as a potential explanation. Using a new dataset on incumbent ideology I analyze the determinants of democratic violations in 102 countries. My main finding is that populist incumbents have committed significantly more democratic violations during the pandemic than non-populists have. The substantive size of this effect is large and comparable to the effect of a country's pre-COVID level of democracy. Additionally, I show that populists were more likely to commit violations related to information by restricting free media and engaging in disinformation campaigns. Lastly, I find that populist incumbents in countries with weaker pre-COVID democracy and a larger number of COVID-related deaths have committed more democratic violations. These findings have important implications for debates on democratic survival, its relationship with populism, and its likelihood during periods of emergency.

¹ Bocconi University. Email: kerim.kavakli@unibocconi.it

The conditions that help or hinder democratic survival is a core research area in political science. Unfortunately, we are in a period of democratic backsliding, in which many countries around the world are becoming more authoritarian and international support for democracy is in decline (Lührmann and Lindberg, 2019; Hyde, 2020). The coronavirus pandemic, which already has taken more than one million lives and caused a deep global recession (World Bank, 2020a), threatens to accelerate this wave of autocratization. It presents an opportunity for incumbents to assume emergency powers in the name of public safety, but then abuse those powers to target their critics and cement their rule (Economist, 04/23/2020). Examining the effects of the pandemic on democracy will improve our understanding of the current era and contribute to some of the fundamental debates in political science.

In this paper I conduct a systematic analysis of democratic norm violations during the COVID-19 pandemic across a global sample of countries. I combine a new and up-to-date dataset on government ideology with data on democratic violations compiled by researchers at the Varieties of Democracy (V-Dem) (Edgell et al, 2020a). Using these data I investigate the role of incumbent ideology in democratic backsliding during the pandemic. My data on government ideology measures multiple aspects of a government's ideology including its economic and social values as well as level of populism.

The focus of my analysis is the difference between populist and non-populist incumbents. Many scholars argue that core features of populist ideology makes it incompatible with liberal democracy (Müller 2017; Rummens, 2017). Anecdotal evidence from Hungary, Philippines, and India shows that some populist incumbents have abused their emergency powers during the pandemic (Kishi, 07/21/2020). Nevertheless, there are several reasons to test this relationship systematically. Firstly, anecdotal evidence can be misleading, especially if we select our cases on the dependent variable (i.e. focus on leaders who committed many violations). Secondly, a systematic study takes into account alternative explanations such as income levels or pre-pandemic level of democracy and deals with omitted variable problem explicitly.² Thirdly, we can ask how important government ideology is (relative to other factors), and whether we can detect meaningful variation among populist incumbents in terms of their tendency to violate democratic norms.

My main finding is that there is indeed a positive and statistically significant relationship between a government's populist ideology and the level of rights violations it commits during the pandemic. Although my research design does not allow me to make causal claims, the association is robust to a variety of model specifications and controls. The relationship is

² Likewise, Halikiopoulou (2020, 371) notes that a populist leader like Orbán could exploit the crisis not because he is a populist, but because he is an autocrat, which suggests that we should consider multiple aspects of an incumbent's character and ideology.

significant in practical terms, as well. According to my estimates, the effect of populist ideology is roughly equal to the effect of the country's pre-pandemic level of democracy.

Moving beyond this unconditional effect, I explore whether populists are more likely to commit some types of violations more than others. When I analyze different types of violations separately, I find the strongest effects on media restrictions such as harassment of journalists, and disinformation campaigns by the government. I also analyze why some populists commit more violations than others. When I analyze variation among populist governments, two factors stand out. First, unsurprisingly, populists in countries with stronger (pre-pandemic) levels of development are less likely to violate democratic norms. Second, in countries that have suffered a greater number of pandemic-related deaths (adjusted for population), populist governments have committed more democratic violations. Other factors, including a country's level of income, do not seem to be related to violations either directly or as a moderator of populists' behavior.

This paper's most direct contribution is to our understanding of how the coronavirus is shaping politics around the world. Incumbents have not uniformly violated democratic norms during the crisis and my findings show that incumbent ideology, specifically populism, is one of the strongest correlates of democratic backsliding in this period. My findings also suggest that populists have targeted norms and institutions related to the control of information and even more so in countries that have suffered more deaths from COVID-19. Beyond the current crisis, this paper suggests that two global trends, the decline of democracy and the rise of populism, are more closely linked now than before the pandemic. Unless pandemic-era violations are reversed, there may be more populist and authoritarian leaders in the post-COVID world.

The paper proceeds as follows. In the next section I briefly review related research and situate my contribution in the literature. In the third section I explain the theoretical relationship between populism and democratic backsliding during the pandemic and state my main hypothesis. In the fourth section I describe my research design and, in particular, dataset on government ideology. In the fifth section I present my main finding, summarize robustness checks, and discuss some additional results. The final section discusses the limitations and broad lessons of the paper.

Related Works

This paper mainly contributes to the empirical literature on democratic survival and backsliding (for a recent review, see Waldner and Lust, 2018). Within this broad literature it speaks to debates on the relationship between populism and democracy, and democratic survival during periods of emergency.

There is a large body of work on the relationship between populism and democracy. As explained below, most scholars see populism as a threat to democracy (Rummens, 2017). Populist incumbents may be more prone to attack democracy, because they espouse an ideology in which they alone reflect the general will and their critics are illegitimate (Müller, 2017; Norris and Inglehart, 2019). Alternatively, their weak organizational ties to their supporters and volatile popularity may induce them to turn to authoritarianism (Weyland, 2018). In contrast, Kaltwasser (2011) and Ruth and Hawkins (2017) argue that populism may have a more ambivalent relationship with democracy: it may increase the inclusiveness of a regime while simultaneously making it less pluralist.

Most large-N studies find a negative relationship between populism and various indicators of democracy and liberal institutions. Houle and Kenny (2016), Kenny (2020), and Ruth-Lovell et al (2019) investigate whether having a populist incumbent improves or hurts a country's democracy indicators. The overall finding is a negative relationship between populism and democracy. I contribute to this literature is by conducting a systematic analysis during the COVID-19 pandemic, a global crisis that has the potential to affect politics for many years. Moreover, to my knowledge, this analysis has the broadest geographical scope among similar works. Previous studies have mostly focused on the Americas and Western Europe (Ruth, 2018; Houle and Kenny, 2018; Ruth-Lovell et al, 2019).³ In contrast, my sample includes more than 100 countries from all regions of the world, including Africa, which includes governments with some of the highest populism scores in my sample.⁴

A second relevant literature is on the survival of democracy and human rights during periods of emergency. In these studies the main finding is that countries in which democratic institutions are already weak are at a higher risk of democratic decline. For instance, in autocracies and unstable democracies the state is more likely to derogate from human rights treaties and violate civil and political liberties during states of emergency (Hafner-Burton et al, 2011; Neumayer, 2013). Likewise, Lührmann and Rooney (forthcoming) show that the risk of autocratization rises during states of emergency. While these studies mainly focus on the distinction between democratic and authoritarian regimes, my contribution is to highlight that government ideology, and specifically, populism, is an important factor as well. My analysis shows that the effect size of populism is comparable to the effect size of a country's pre-crisis level of democracy.

I am aware of three studies that evaluate the extent to which governments have abused emergency powers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Ginsburg and Versteeg (2020) survey

³ Kenny (2019) includes observations from Asia as well.

⁴ Appendix Table A2 lists the twenty governments with the highest populism scores in my sample. Among those twenty are the African governments of the Republic of the Congo, Chad, Morocco, Eritrea, and Zambia.

COVID-19 measures in 106 countries and report that in most countries at least some constraints on the executive branch were imposed (2020, 25-27), and these were more effective in more democratic societies (2020, 47-51). Bjornskov and Voigt (2020) find that democracies and autocracies are similar in their likelihood of declaring a state of emergency against the pandemic, but democracies are less likely to repress media freedoms during the state of emergency. Lastly, Maerz et al (2020b) analyze the same dataset as the one used in the current paper and report that democratic violations were more common in more authoritarian societies (13). In all three papers the main comparison is between different regime types, which is included as a control variable in my analysis. None of the three papers study the role of government ideology in general, and populism, in particular.

Relationship between populism and democratic backsliding during COVID-19

In this paper I adopt a minimalist, 'ideational' approach to populism. Following Mudde (2004, 543) I define populism as a thin centered discourse (or ideology) that "considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be the expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people."

This discourse is potentially incompatible with democracy, because it rejects pluralism. Populism's Manichean (good versus evil) worldview marginalizes minorities and everyone else who does not conform to its idea of the collective identity as outsiders (Rummens, 2017, 9). Additionally, populism is hostile to horizontal accountability. Since the will of the people is supreme and the populist leader represents that will, actors that restrain the leader, including other branches of government, free media, and opposition figures are seen as illegitimate. This extreme majoritarian view can go even further. When populist incumbents face the risk of losing office, their belief that they are the true representative of the people can justify destroying the representative institutions that they used to obtain power (Müller, 2017, 14).

This discussion implies a supply side (i.e. leader level) and a demand side (i.e. citizen level) explanation for why democracy may weaken during populist rule. On the supply side, a populist incumbent's moral claim to be the true representative of 'the people' can justify the leader's attempts to weaken horizontal accountability, attack free media and critics, and violate individual rights. On the demand side, followers of a populist leader are more likely to perceive horizontal accountability as undesirable, and put less value on liberal democracy. For instance, in a recent study Aytaç et al (2020, 10) report that supporters of the governing AKP (a populist party) in Turkey are almost twice as likely as other people (63% vs 33%) to agree with the statement "having a strong leader in government is good for Turkey even if the leader bends the rules to get things done." Citizens' views on democracy are as important as their leader's,

because democracy and rule of law cannot survive unless most citizens agree that these features of the system are desirable and coordinate to remove leaders who attack those features (Weingast, 1997).

Populism's illiberal tendencies can intensify during periods of emergency. When a major threat to public safety emerges, it is natural for citizens to accept some restrictions on their liberties. This creates an opportunity for all leaders, regardless of their ideology, to weaken horizontal accountability (Bjornskov and Voigt, 2020). However, the risk of democratic decline may be greater under populist leaders for two reasons. One, populist leaders and their supporters are already more prone to violate checks and balances and they may take advantage of the pandemic more quickly. The Hungarian parliament granting the Orban government emergency powers without any time limit on March 30 exemplifies a quick response by a populist government (Kim, 2020, 29).

A second reason is that many populist governments have displayed a poor response to the pandemic. On average, populist governments have taken fewer containment and health system measures in early 2020 (Kavakli, 2020). Moreover, several populist governments that initially showed a strong response to the pandemic opened up too quickly and lost control of the pandemic. Mismanaging the pandemic is politically costly (Herrera et al, 2020), and populists who have shown a worse performance against the pandemic may employ coercion and restrictions on free speech to cover up their failure. The Turkish government's criminal investigations against doctors and medical chambers that question the veracity of Turkey's official COVID-19 numbers is an example of such authoritarian behavior (Human Rights Watch, 2020).

Based on these arguments I hypothesize the following.

Hypothesis: *All else equal, more populist governments have committed a higher level of violations against democratic norms during the COVID-19 pandemic relative to other governments.*

Research Design

To investigate the relationship between government ideology and democratic backsliding, I construct a country-level dataset. I use OLS to analyze my continuous dependent variable and report robust standard errors in all models. Summary statistics are presented in Appendix Table A1.

Measuring Democratic Backsliding during the COVID-19 Pandemic

Data on the dependent variable come from version 3 of the *Pandemic Backsliding: Democracy during COVID-19* dataset (Edgell et al, 2020a). This dataset, collected by researchers at the V-Dem Institute, tracks government responses to the COVID-19 pandemic and the extent to which they violate democratic standards. It includes information on policies made between 11 March 2020 and mid-June 2020 in 146 countries.

Democratic theory recognizes that in times of emergency a government can legitimately suspend some rights and procedures in order to manage the crisis more effectively, but there are also safeguards against the abuse of this power (Ginsburg and Versteeg, 2020, 14). To distinguish between legitimate use of emergency powers and their abuse, the Pandemic Backsliding dataset evaluates whether government responses are “proportionate, necessary, and non-discriminatory” (Maerz et al, 2020b, 3). For instance, the international human rights treaty International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR) lists ‘freedom from torture and cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment’ as a non-derogable right. Recently in Philippines security forces are reported to publicly humiliate people who break social distancing norms by locking them in dog cages and removing their clothes. This is an example of a violation of a non-derogable right (Edgell, 2020b, 4). The dataset codes a practice as a violation of democratic standards only if it is relatively unambiguously disproportionate, unnecessary, or discriminatory. If anything, the dataset undercounts violations and provides a conservative estimate of the level of violations in a country.

Based on the ICCPR, the dataset identifies six types of violations of democratic standards for emergency measures. The measures include, but are not limited to, formally declared states of emergency (Edgell et al, 2020a, 5). The dataset codes emergency measures at the national level, but also notes the countries in which measures have varied at the subnational level (Edgell et al, 2020a, 5). Such subnational variation may indicate limitations on executive power and, for that reason, one of my robustness checks is to show that my key results remain the same if I drop observations with significant subnational variation.

My main dependent variable, *Pandemic Democratic Violations Index (Pandem Index)*, summarizes the six types of violations. These violations and their categorical range are as follows: “no time limit on emergency measures” (0-2), “discriminatory measures” (0-3), “derogation of non-derogable rights” (0-3), “restrictions on media freedoms” (0-3), “disproportionate limitations on the role of the legislature” (0-3), and “abusive enforcement” (0-3).⁵ *Pandem Index* is calculated by taking a sum of the six types of violations and then

⁵ For details on each component, see Edgell et al (2020b) and Maerz et al (2020b).

rescaling it into the 0-1 interval by dividing the sum by the total possible additive score. While several countries receive the minimum possible score of 0 (e.g. South Korea, Denmark, Dominican Republic) for *Pandem Index*, three countries (Saudi Arabia, Oman, and Eritrea) receive the highest score in the sample: 0.53. In the dataset there is a seventh type of violation, “official disinformation campaigns,” that is not included in the *Pandem Index*, but included in alternative indices described below. This violation includes the dissemination of gravely misleading and false information by governments on key facts about COVID-19.

As robustness checks, I show that my findings are robust to using three alternative indices of democratic rights violations, which also come from *The Pandemic Backsliding* dataset. *The Violations and Disinformation Index* includes additional information on whether the government engaged in disinformation campaigns. *The Alternative Pandemic Democratic Violations Index* is similar to the original index, but omits information on a government’s systematic media censorship efforts, because this criterion is based on pre-pandemic coding by experts. Lastly, *the Backsliding Index* is based on the idea that semi-democratic (neither fully authoritarian nor fully democratic) countries are more vulnerable to backsliding. It weighs democratic violations in those mid-range countries more heavily.⁶

Measuring Government Ideology

To measure government ideology, I start by identifying the head of the executive (the “leader”) in each country as of 1 March 2020, and that person’s party affiliation.⁷ Then, I combine information on the leader’s party affiliation with data on political party ideologies in the Global Party Survey (GPS) (Norris, 2019). The GPS is an expert-based survey and provides information on 1043 parties in 163 countries. It is the most comprehensive and up-to-date source of information on political party ideologies around the world.⁸

If the leader is an independent or the leader’s party is not in the GPS, then I search for information on parties in the cabinet. In general, there is a strong correlation (i.e. higher than 0.85) between the ideological position of the leader’s party and the ideological mean of the

⁶ Specifically, *the Backsliding Index* is calculated as $(4 * \text{Pandem Index} * v2x_libdem * (1 - v2x_libdem))$, where $v2x_libdem$ is a country’s liberal democracy score measured in 2019. The index is multiplied by 4 to ensure that it ranges between 0 and 1.

⁷ To identify the head of the executive I use information from the V-Dem dataset (version 10) (Coppedge et al, 2020) on whether the head of government or head of state has more power over the appointment and dismissal of cabinet members. Next, I consult the CIA World Factbook (Central Intelligence Agency, 2020) and government websites to identify the individual in office and the party affiliation of that individual.

⁸ Norris (2020, 16-18) reports that GPS scores correlate highly with other well-known party ideology surveys such as the Chapel Hill Expert Survey (Polk et al, 2017) and the POPPA (Meijers and Zaslowe, forthcoming).

parties in cabinet. Based on this strong correlation, when the leader's ideology score is missing, I fill-in the missing values with the ideological mean of the parties in cabinet. In total, this procedure allows me to code the ideology of 115 governments around the world and produce the largest dataset of government ideology during the COVID-19 pandemic.

For this project, I focus mainly on a government party's scores on populist, economic and social ideology, and its stance on liberal democracy. In each dimension the scores vary continuously between 0 and 10.

The GPS conceptualizes populism as a rhetoric making two core claims: "(i) the only legitimate democratic authority flows directly from the people, and (ii) establishment elites are corrupt, out of touch, and self-serving, betraying the public trust and thwarting the popular will" (Norris, 2019, 9). This conceptualization of populism matches my conceptualization in the theoretical section. To measure populism, experts are asked to place each party's rhetoric on a scale from 0 (i.e. "strongly pluralist") to 10 (i.e. "strongly populist"). A 'strongly pluralist' expresses the belief that elected leaders should govern, constrained by minority rights, compromise, and checks and balances, while a 'strongly populist' rhetoric challenges the legitimacy of established political institutions and emphasizes that the will of the people should prevail (Norris, 2019, 10). In Appendix Table A2 I provide a list of the twenty governments in my sample with the highest populism scores.

I compared my government populism scores to the Global Populism Database (Hawkins et al, 2019) and the Populists in Power (Kyle and Gultchin, 2020) datasets. Of the three databases the GPS provides the most up-to-date data for the largest number of countries. Hawkins et al (2019) provide data for leaders who held power in 66 countries, mostly between the years 2010 and 2018. Kyle and Gultchin (2020) code only those leaders who came to power through democratic elections, which excludes authoritarian populists such as Presidents Putin and Aliyev. Comparing leaders who are found in multiple datasets, I saw that they are highly correlated, which demonstrates conceptual similarity and constitutes a validity check for my procedure.

To measure a party's economic ideology, the GPS asks the experts whether the party wants the government to play an active role in the economy (left-wing ideology) or a reduced role (right-wing ideology). To measure a party's social values, experts are asked whether it favors expanding personal freedoms on issues such as abortion rights and same-sex marriage (liberal values), or rejects these ideas in favor of order, tradition and stability (conservative values).⁹ The two variables built on these questions are called *Economically Right-wing* and *Socially Conservative*.

⁹ For the survey questions, see Norris (2019, 13).

In addition to the government's populist, economic and social ideology, I also code its stance on liberal democracy. For this item the GPS asks experts whether the party respects liberal democratic principles, norms and practices (liberal democratic), or undermines them (authoritarian).

Populism and authoritarianism are separate but related concepts. Given this paper's research question, it is useful to test whether a government's populism score has any explanatory power after we control for its past rhetoric on liberal democracy. If past rhetoric is a strong indicator of future behavior, then the association between populist governments and democratic violations should disappear once we control for authoritarian rhetoric. However, if populist leaders are prone to violate democratic norms in times of crisis despite using a more liberal rhetoric in normal times, then the association between *Populist Government* and *Pandem Index* will remain positive and significant even after we control for authoritarian rhetoric.

Control Variables

My main models include two economic variables, (logged) GDP per capita and the Gini index, which is a measure of economic inequality (World Bank, 2020b). These variables are plausibly correlated with my dependent and key independent variables. There is plenty of evidence showing a strong relationship between levels of development and inequality in a country and the likelihood of democratic survival (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997; Acemoglu and Robinson, 2006). At the same time, higher poverty and economic inequality can raise economic insecurity and help populists win office (Rodrik, 2018; Colantone and Stanig, 2018; Guiso et al, 2019).

I also control for several factors potentially related to the severity of the COVID-19 pandemic in a country. These are the number of hospital beds (per 1000 people), (logged) total population, percentage of population above the age of 65 and percentage of population living in urban areas (World Bank, 2020b). In countries with less resources to manage the pandemic, the government may be compelled to resort to more illiberal measures.

When specifying my model I consider two types of biases: post-treatment bias and omitted variable bias. Post-treatment bias can result from including controls that are themselves consequences of the key independent variable in the study (Pearl, 2009). I address post-treatment bias by showing that my results are robust to excluding control variables that could potentially be consequences of government ideology. I address omitted variable bias by showing that my results are robust to including a large set of control variables.

Two important control variables, pre-pandemic level of democracy, and recent changes in level of democracy, pose a challenge, because their inclusion and exclusion can potentially bias the results in two opposite ways. On the one hand, if stronger democratic institutions prevent

backsliding and populists are more likely to govern in unconsolidated democracies, then failing to control for the pre-pandemic level of democracy can inflate the correlation between populism and democratic backsliding. On the other hand, the strength of a country's democracy is a consequence of its government's ideology; several democratically-elected populist governments (e.g. Orban in Hungary, Erdogan in Turkey) eroded democracy before the pandemic began. Accordingly, including these variables can cause post-treatment bias and the model may underestimate the effect of populism on democracy. Data on these variables come from the V-Dem project (Coppedge et al, 2020).

The government's containment and health policies against the COVID-19 pandemic, and the number of people killed (per one million) by the COVID-19 pandemic are also potentially endogenous. Research shows that populist governments have acted more slowly and taken fewer measures in the earlier phase of the pandemic (Kavakli, 2020) and this lagged response may have resulted in more COVID-19 deaths. On the other hand, these variables can be good indicators of the scale of a crisis and necessity for harsher measures. Of course, if a government manipulates official statistics to hide the severity of the crisis, then these variables will not have explanatory power. Note that one of my robustness checks limits the sample to countries that were democratic before the pandemic and in that subsample the likelihood of manipulated statistics is lower. Data on a government's COVID-19 measures and the number of COVID-19 deaths come from Oxford COVID-19 Government Response Tracker dataset (Hale et al, 2020). As I show below, my results are not sensitive to the inclusion of these variables either

Lastly, I conduct additional robustness checks with three more controls to minimize the threat of omitted variable bias. These variables measure a country's ethnic fractionalization (Fearon, 2003), whether it experienced large-scale protests in 2019 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020) and if it had elections scheduled in 2020 (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2020). The results remain similar.

Results

Figure 1 provides an encouraging first look at the relationship between a government's populism score and the amount of democratic norms violations it committed during the pandemic. Most of the greatest violators are indeed strongly populist (e.g. Eritrea, India) and less populist governments seem to have committed fewer violations, in general. Of course, this bivariate relationship does not take possible confounders into account and for that reason I now turn to my multivariate analysis.

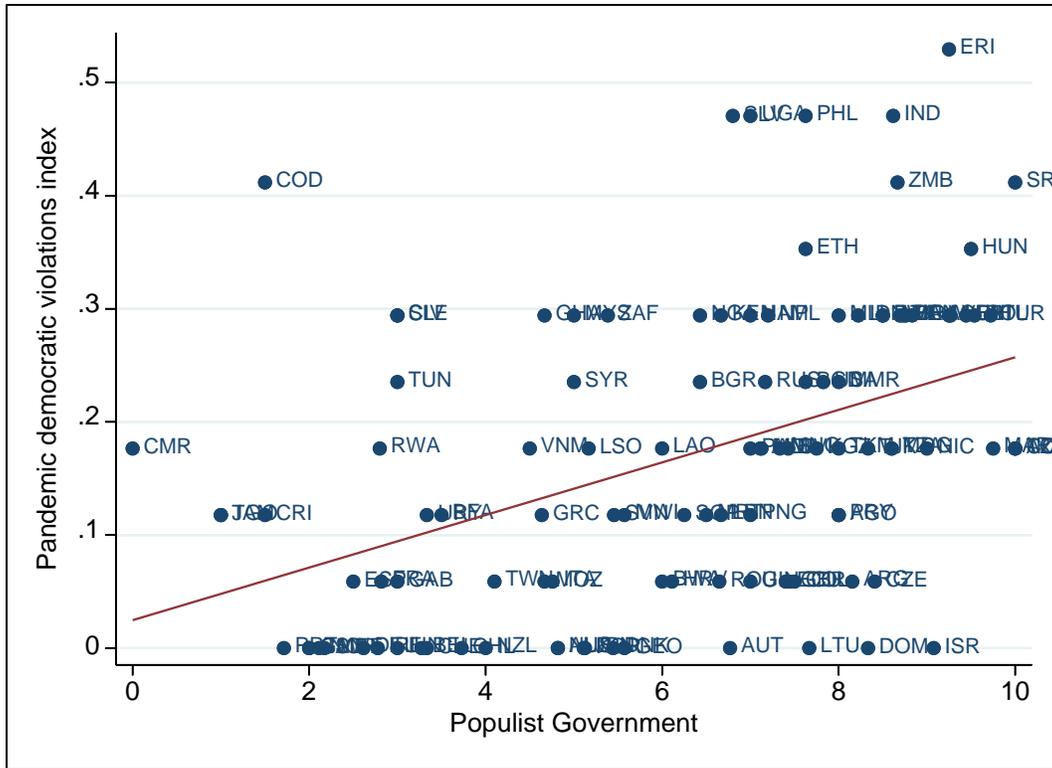


Figure 1: This figure plots governments’ populism scores against their values of the pandemic democratic violations index. The red line shows the bivariate linear regression line.

Table 1 presents the regression results. My main finding is that countries with populist governments have experienced more violations of democratic rights during the COVID-19 pandemic. Model 1 reports the bivariate correlation between a government’s populism score and *Pandem Index*. Model 2 adds measures of a government’s economic and social policy values and its authoritarian rhetoric. While estimates for a government’s social and economic values are not statistically significant, *Authoritarian Rhetoric* has a positive and significant association with the dependent variable. *Populist Government’s* estimate is halved in size, but remains statistically significant. Although *Authoritarian Rhetoric* captures some of the relationship between populist ideology and democratic violations, *Populist Government* remains highly significant in the predicted direction.

Model 3 keeps *Authoritarian Rhetoric* as a control variable and adds region dummies, country-level economic and demographic controls, and a measure of the country’s medical resources (*Hospital Beds*). Although in Model 2 the estimated effect sizes of *Populist Government* and *Authoritarian Rhetoric* were very close, once we add country and region controls, the coefficient for *Authoritarian Rhetoric* becomes much smaller, loses statistical significance and its sign becomes negative. Meanwhile, the estimate for *Populist Government* does not change.

This contrast between *Populist Government* and *Authoritarian Rhetoric* is seen in all subsequent models and shows that even expert knowledge on populist incumbents and their rhetoric underestimated their authoritarian tendencies during the COVID pandemic.

Model 4 adds four more controls. These variables measure the strength of a country's democratic institutions before the pandemic, the maximum level of containment and health measures taken by the government, and the number of COVID-19 deaths (relative to population) by June 15. According to model 4, the only control variables that are statistically significant are *Total Population* and *Pre-Pandemic Level of Democracy*.¹⁰ *GDP per capita* is significant at the 10% level in Model 3, but becomes insignificant in Model 4. Most importantly, across all models, *Populist Government* continues to have a positive and statistically significant association with *Pandem Index*.

The estimated effect of *Populist Government* is substantively significant as well. According to Model 4, an increase in *Populist Government* from its 10th percentile to 90th percentile (2.6 to 9.2) is associated with an increase of 0.09 in *Pandem Index*.¹¹ As a benchmark, an increase in *Level of Democracy* from its 10th to 90th percentile (0.09 to 0.8) is associated with a decrease of 0.10 in *Pandem Index*. In other words, the effect size of populist ideology is comparable to that of pre-pandemic level of democracy in a country.

Robustness Checks

I conduct a series of robustness checks, which show that my main finding is robust to the following: operationalizing the dependent and key independent variables in alternative ways; the exclusion of potential outliers or countries with significant sub-national variation in their emergency measures; and limiting the sample to countries that were democratic before the pandemic began. I summarize the results here and present the full regression tables in the appendix.

The results are robust to using alternative versions of the dependent variable. Edgell et al (2020a) provide three alternative indices of democratic violations that (1) include information on the government's disinformation efforts (*Violations & Disinformation Index*); (2) omit criterion coded by V-Dem experts before the pandemic began (*Alternative Violations & Disinformation Index*); (3) weight violations in semi-democracies more heavily (*Backsliding Index*). I analyze these alternative indices with the same setup in Model 4 of Table 1 and the estimates of *Populist Government* and *Authoritarian Practices* remain very similar.¹²

¹⁰ Region dummies are not significant.

¹¹ 0.09 corresponds to a 0.7 standard deviation of *Pandem Index*.

¹² These regressions are presented in Appendix Table A3.

Table 1: Determinants of Democratic Violations during the Pandemic

	Bivariate regression (1)	All measures of ideology (2)	Add country characteristics (3)	Full model (4)
Populist government	0.023*** (0.005)	0.014** (0.007)	0.015*** (0.005)	0.013*** (0.004)
Economically right-wing		-0.001 (0.007)		
Socially conservative		0.002 (0.006)		
Authoritarian rhetoric		0.014** (0.006)	-0.004 (0.005)	-0.009 (0.006)
GDP per capita			-0.037* (0.020)	-0.022 (0.019)
Economic inequality			0.003 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Total population			0.029*** (0.007)	0.032*** (0.009)
Hospital beds (per 1000)			-0.001 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)
Percentage of age 65+			-0.004 (0.003)	-0.001 (0.004)
Percentage of urban population			-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
3-year change in democracy				0.106 (0.158)
Pre-Pandemic level of democracy				-0.149* (0.083)
Max. containment measures by June 15				0.001 (0.001)
COVID-19 deaths (per 1 mil.) by June 15				-0.011 (0.009)
Constant	0.025 (0.031)	0.000 (0.045)	-0.172 (0.186)	-0.275 (0.197)
Region dummies	No	No	Yes	Yes
N	110	101	102	102
R ²	0.19	0.27	0.47	0.50

Robust standard errors are in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Dependent variable: Pandemic Democratic Violations Index. **Estimator:** OLS.

Turning to the independent variable, I explore whether the effects of populism (and authoritarian rhetoric) are linear. Adding the quadratic term (*Populist Government*)² to the model or using an ordinal version of the *Populist Government* variable (with cut-offs at 2.5, 5, and 7.5) shows that an increase in populism is associated with more democratic violations only in the upper half of the populism range (5-10). Below this range, the marginal effect of populism is not distinguishable from zero; above 5, it is mostly constant.¹³

Are the results driven by outliers? The results do not change when I exclude the 10% of the observations with the highest values on the *Pandem Index* or the *Populist Government* variables. In addition, the results are similar if I exclude from the sample countries that show significant sub-national variation in their emergency measures.¹⁴ Next, I limit the sample to countries that were democratic before the pandemic began.¹⁵ The coefficient of *Populist Government* is significantly larger in the democratic sample, which shows that the results are not driven by violations in countries that were already autocracies before COVID-19. I also show that the results do not change when I drop from the sample those countries in which the COVID-19 measures showed significant subnational variation.¹⁶

I re-run my analysis with three additional controls that may influence a government's willingness to curtail democracy during the pandemic: a dummy variable coding whether the country has an election scheduled in 2020 (International Foundation for Electoral Systems, 2020), a dummy variable coding whether the country experienced large-scale protests in 2019 (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2020), and a measure of ethnic fractionalization (Fearon, 2003). A government facing upcoming elections or recent protests may have greater incentives to curtail democratic rights and silence its critics. Likewise, in an ethnically diverse society the pandemic can trigger tensions and compel the government to react with undemocratic measures. Adding these controls (separately or together) does not change the estimated effect of *Populist Government*. Of the three variables, only *Protests in 2019* has a statistically significant and negative association with democratic backsliding.¹⁷

¹³ These regressions are presented in Appendix Table A4.

¹⁴ I use the *Subvar* variable in the Pandemic Backsliding dataset (Edgell et al, 2020a) to identify and exclude countries in which the emergency measures differ in some or across all sub-national areas.

¹⁵ I follow the procedure outlined in Lührmann et al (2018, 63-65) to distinguish democratic and autocratic countries.

¹⁶ These regressions are presented in Appendix Table A5.

¹⁷ These regressions are presented in Appendix Table A6.

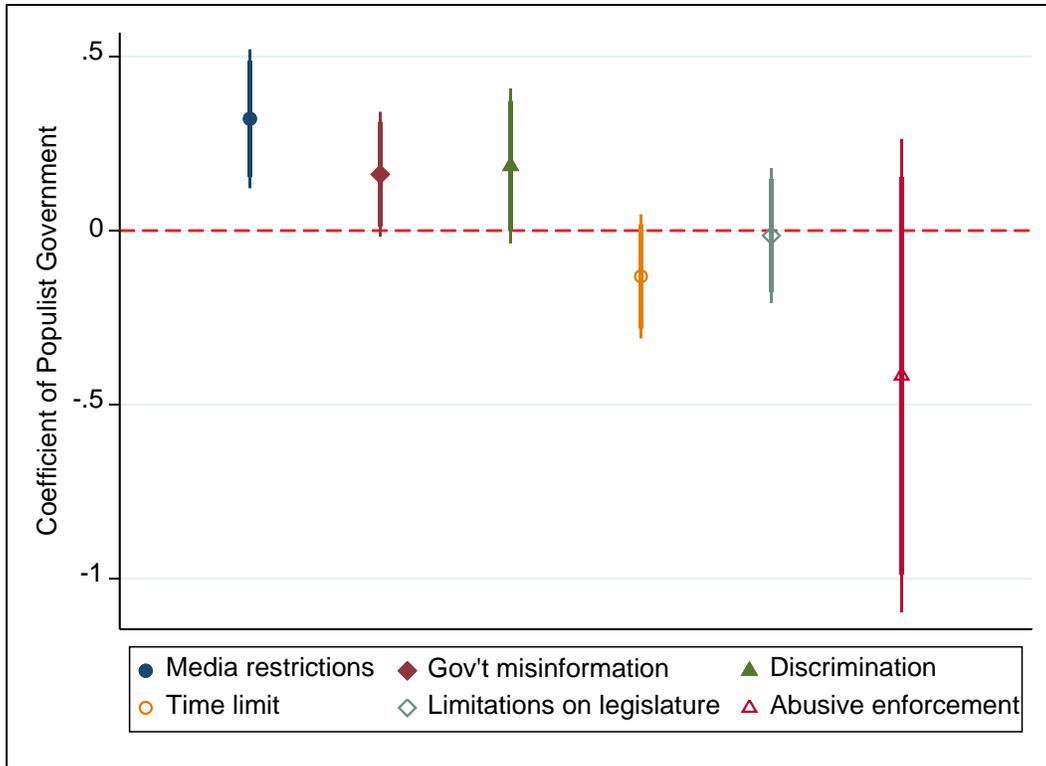


Figure 2: This figure shows the coefficients and confidence intervals (90% and 95%) of *Populist Government* when regressed on different subcomponents of the democratic violations indices. All control variables in Model (4) of Table (1) are included in the models, but not shown here.

Components of Democratic Backsliding

What types of democratic norms have populist governments violated more often? In this section, I analyze the components of pandemic violation indices separately. These components are coded originally as categorical variables with three or four categories, but there are very few observations in the top categories. For example, in the Pandemic Backsliding dataset (Edgell et al, 2020a) only 14% of countries are coded as imposing measures that are discriminating on the basis of race, color, sex, language, religion or social origin, and only 6 countries (4% of the sample) are coded as having imposing emergency measures that violate non-derogable rights. For this reason, I recode each component as a binary variable (coded 1 if a violation occurred at all, 0 otherwise) and analyze them using the Probit estimator. All the control variables in Model 4 of Table 1 are included in the models. I do not analyze the “violations of non-derogable rights” component separately, because only six countries are

coded as having committed this type of violation. In order to conserve space, I present the results graphically.¹⁸

Figure 2 presents the coefficient for *Populist Government* (with 90% and 95% CI's) for different types of democratic violations during the pandemic. According to Figure 2, countries with more populist governments have experienced significantly more restrictions on media, government misinformation, and discriminatory enforcement of rules. For these three components, the estimate of *Populist Government* is positive and significant at the 10% level ($p=0.102$ for *Discrimination*). In contrast, there does not seem to be a strong correlation between populist government ideology and unlimited emergency measures, restrictions on the legislature or abusive enforcement of COVID-19 measures.

These results are consistent with recent research showing that today's autocrats rely more on manipulation of information than violent repression (Guriev and Triesman, 2019). They are also consistent with Kenny (2020), which finds that populist rule is associated with a decline in press freedom. My findings expand on previous research by showing that, during the current pandemic, populists' restrictions on media were accompanied by misinformation campaigns and discriminatory application of the emergency powers.

To interpret substantive significance, I calculate the predicted change in the probability that a component will be violated as we increase *Populist Government* from its 10th to 90th percentile.¹⁹ I report the calculations only for the three components that have significant correlations with *Populist Government*. All else equal, increasing *Populist Government* from its 10th to 90th percentile is associated with an increase of 45 percentage points in the likelihood of media restrictions, an increase of 14 percentage points in the likelihood of discriminatory enforcement, and an increase of 18 percentage points in the likelihood of government misinformation campaigns. These calculations demonstrate that a government's populist ideology has a substantively important relationship to these three types of violations.

Heterogeneity among Populist Governments

So far, I have shown that there is a robust and positive relationship between populist governments and democratic backsliding during the COVID-19 pandemic. Next, I explore variation among populist governments and the factors have made some of them more likely to violate democratic rights than other populists. Specifically, I test for interaction effects between

¹⁸ The full regression results are in Appendix Table A7.

¹⁹ I hold other variables at their observed values (Hanmer and Kalkan, 2013).

Populist Government and GDP per capita, Pre-Pandemic Level of Democracy, Authoritarian Practices and the COVID-19 Deaths (per 1 million).

Given the small sample size, in these regressions I limit the controls to *GDP per capita, Total Population, Hospital Beds (per 1000), Percentage of Age 65+, and Pre-Pandemic Level of Democracy*.²⁰

I interact *Populist Government* with the potential moderators and test whether its marginal effects are different at different values of the moderator. To detect nonlinear interaction effects and lack of common support for the moderator, I use the method proposed by Hainmueller et al (2019). This method splits a continuous moderator into three categories (by default) and reports the main variable's marginal effect at each category separately.

I analyze each interaction in a separate regression, but present the four sets of results together graphically in Figure 3. I begin by testing whether a country's level of development and pre-pandemic level of democracy moderate the effect of *Populist Government*. Democracy is more likely to survive in countries that are more developed (Przeworski and Limongi, 1997) and, according to Mudde and Kaltwasser (2012, 22-23), "populists will be more effective when democracy is weak; or to put it in another way, the strength of democracy influences the depth of the populism's impact on democracy."

The top-left panel in Figure 3 shows the moderating effect of *Pre-Pandemic Level of Democracy*. The gray band, which depicts the estimate from the conventional linear interaction model suggests a constant marginal effect for *Populist Government* at all levels of democracy. However, when we relax the linearity assumption,²¹ the red bars suggest that the marginal effect of *Populist Government* is positive and significant at low and mid-levels of democracy, but becomes indistinguishable from zero at high levels of democracy. The difference between the marginal effects at mid- and high-levels of democracy are statistically significant from each other. This provides some evidence that democracy moderates the effect of having a populist government in office.

The top-right panel, however, does not show any evidence that the marginal effect of *Populist Government* varies with *GDP per capita*. Therefore, we cannot say that there is a significant interaction between the two variables.

²⁰ None of the control variables included in Model 4 of Table 1 but omitted here (*Authoritarian Practices, Economic Inequality, Percentage of Urban Population, 3-Year Change in Democracy, Maximum Containment Measures by June 15, and COVID-19 Deaths (per 1 million) by June 15*) have a statistically significant correlation with the dependent variable.

²¹ The Wald test rejects the null hypothesis of linear interaction effects at $p < 0.00$.

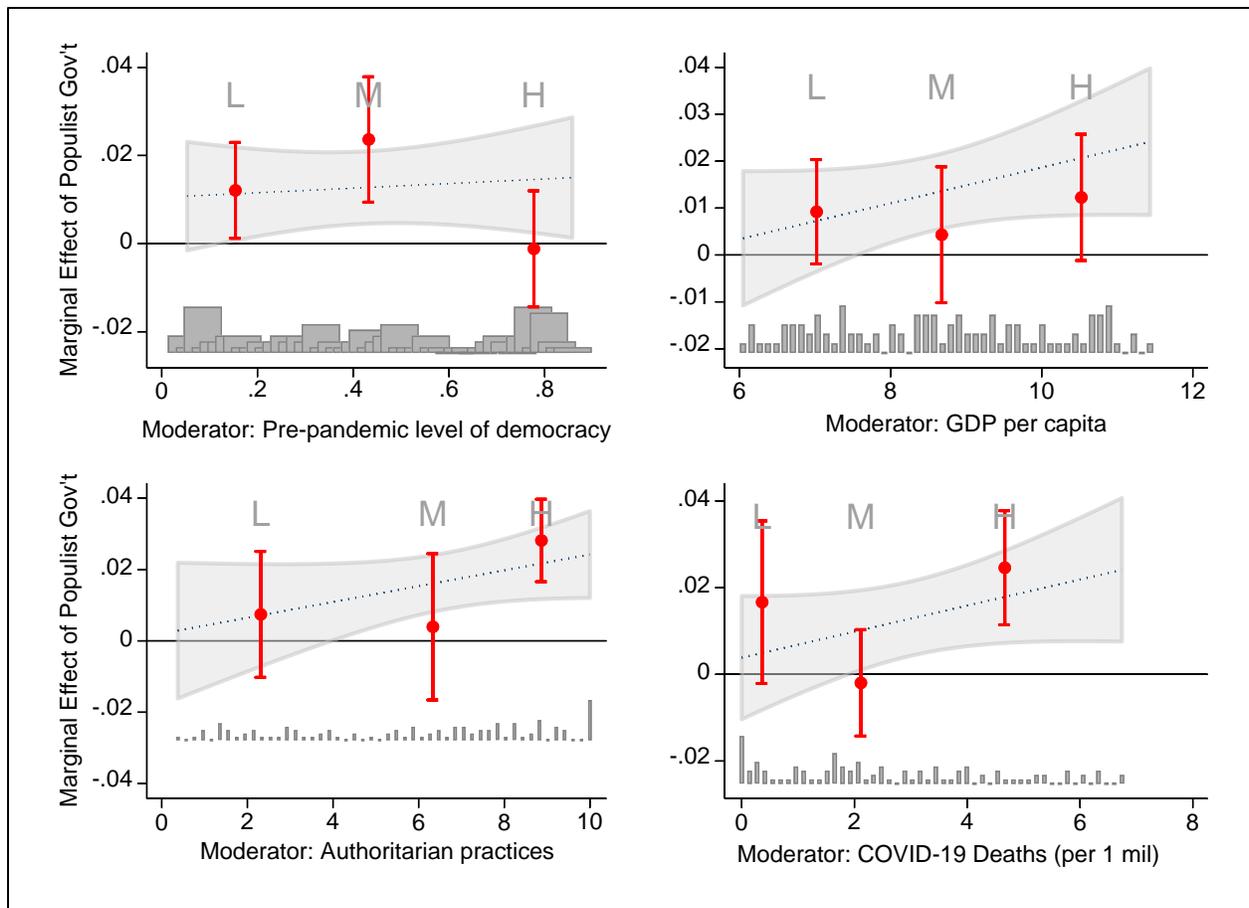


Figure 3 shows the marginal effect of *Populist Government* (and the 95% CI) obtained from four separate regressions with four different moderator variables. The light gray bands show the estimates from linear interaction models. The red bars show the estimates calculated using the method proposed in (Hainmueller et al, 2019) at “low”, “medium” and “high” values of the moderator. The dark bar graphs at the bottom are histograms of the moderators.

In the bottom-left panel, we see the interaction between *Populist Government* and *Authoritarian Practices*. The marginal effect of populism is positive and significant only for high levels of *Authoritarian Practices*; at other levels it is indistinguishable from zero. This pattern would suggest that authoritarian-populists are particularly prone to violate democratic norms (Norris and Inglehart, 2019). However, the difference between these marginal effects is not statistically significant. Of course, absence of evidence (of an effect) is not the same as evidence of (its) absence. The small sample size could be the reason for the overlapping confidence intervals. Still, we cannot say with confidence that populists that have used more authoritarian discourse in the past have been more likely to violate democratic norms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Lastly, in the bottom-right panel, I present the interaction between *Populist Government* and *COVID-19 Deaths (per 1 million)*. The results strongly suggest that populist incumbents in countries that suffered more COVID-19 deaths have violated democratic norms more than populist governments elsewhere. Clearly, this correlation does not imply causation. The causal effect could go in either direction or the relationship could be spurious. However, considering that the most common violations by populists are media restrictions and misinformation campaigns, the evidence is consistent with at least some populist incumbents violating democratic norms to cover up their responsibility for large numbers of COVID-related deaths. If this interpretation is correct, future studies using more fine-grained data should find that populist governments become more likely to commit violations as the death toll increases and their policy failures become more apparent.

Conclusion

In this paper I conduct the first systematic analysis of the relationship between populism and democratic violations during the COVID-19 pandemic. I use a new dataset that covers more than 100 countries and measures government ideology along several dimensions. My main finding is that, all else equal, countries with populist governments have experienced significantly more violations of democratic norms during the pandemic than other countries have. The substantive significance of populist ideology is comparable to that of a country's pre-pandemic level of democracy. This association is mostly driven by restrictions on the media, government misinformation, and discriminatory application of government measures. I also present evidence that populists in countries with weaker democratic institutions and more COVID-19 deaths have violated a greater number of democratic norms.

Together these findings speak to several important debates in political science. From the beginning of the pandemic, scholars have noted that COVID-19 may lead to more autocratization, but governments have not uniformly taken advantage of this opportunity. I show that the risk of autocratization during the pandemic is significantly higher in countries ruled by populist governments. Regarding how populists have exploited the crisis, my findings indicate that they have tried to sabotage accountability by restricting free media and engaging in disinformation campaigns. Considering the positive interaction between COVID-19 deaths and violations by populists, one possible explanation is that the poorer a populist incumbent's pandemic performance, the more violations he or she commits to cover up this policy failure. Beyond the current crisis, my findings suggest that the global decline in democracy and trend toward populism are closely tied. If these violations are not reversed, more countries may emerge from the pandemic with authoritarian populist governments than before. This would

realize Müller's prediction that the pandemic will strengthen "smart" populists (Müller, 07/19/2020).

Although this paper's findings are important, we must also note its limitations. Firstly, data on democratic violations cover only abuse of emergency powers; other violations such as repression of ethnic minorities or arrests of opposition figures are not included. For a fuller understanding of democratic decline during the pandemic, we must repeat this analysis for a broader set of democracy indicators. Secondly, these data cover only the period between March and June 2020. The lasting legacy of COVID-19 will depend on how long the crisis lasts and whether the public pushes back against democratic violations. This means that my findings are tentative and the patterns may change over time. Most importantly, the findings reported in this paper are only correlations, not causal relations. In the future, as researchers collect more quantitative and qualitative evidence on democratic violations, our knowledge will grow and we can be more confident about the causal mechanisms.

This study opens several avenues for future research. As discussed above, it should be repeated with more fine-grained data and a broader set of democracy indicators to get a better sense of how COVID-19 has affected political institutions around the world. Secondly, existing analyses on democratic violations focus on undemocratic policies of governments, but whether these policies will last depends on the reaction of the public. Future research investigating when the public is able to resist a government's undemocratic encroachments will make a big contribution to the study of democratic survival. Lastly, similar studies on the effect of other factors such as political polarization, alongside government ideology, on democratic survival during periods of emergency will be relevant to research and policy.

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Appendix for
**“Populist Governments and Democratic Backsliding during the COVID-19
Pandemic”**

(Not for Print Publication)

This appendix includes summary statistics of my data, a list of the twenty most populist governments in my sample, full regression tables for the analyses reported graphically in Figure 2, and robustness checks mentioned in the main text.

Table A1: Summary statistics

Table A2: List of the twenty governments with the highest *Populist Government* scores

Table A3: Regression table showing that the key result is robust to using alternative versions of the dependent variable.

Table A4: Regression table showing that the marginal effect of *Populist Government* is indistinguishable from zero in the (0-5) range, and positive in the (5-10) range.

Table A5: Regression table showing that the key result is robust to excluding extreme values of *Pandem Index*, extreme values of *Populist Government*, countries that were autocracies before the pandemic began, and countries in which emergency measures display significant subnational variation.

Table A6: Regression table showing that the key result is robust to including additional controls (*Ethnic Fractionalization, Elections Scheduled in 2020, Large Protests in 2019*).

Table A7: Regression table for Figure 2 in the main text, which shows the association between *Populist Government* and different components of the *Pandem Index*.

Table A1: Summary statistics

	N	Mean	Std Dev	Min	Max
Populist government	115	6.127	2.512	0	10
Authoritarian rhetoric	114	5.744	2.85	.375	10
Economically rightwing	108	4.859	2.194	0	10
Socially conservative	112	6.21	2.455	0	9.8
GDP per capita	192	8.695	1.46	5.338	12.19
Total population	194	15.604	2.215	9.351	21.06
Economic inequality	164	38.473	7.929	24.2	63
Hospital beds (per 1000)	192	3	2.518	.1	13.8
Percentage of age 65+	183	8.721	6.311	1.085	27.6
Percentage of urban pop.	194	59.111	23.23	13.25	100
3-year change in democracy	175	-.013	.076	-.261	.23
Pre-pandemic level of democracy	146	.391	.255	.012	.86
Max. containment by June 15	170	79.309	13.508	16.67	100
COVID-19 deaths (per 1 mil) by June 15	113	2.526	1.866	0	6.74

Table A2: Twenty governments with the highest populism scores

COUNTRY NAME	LEADER NAME	POPULISM SCORE	RANK
REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO	Denis SASSOU-Nguesso	10	1
CHAD	Idriss DEBY Itno	10	2
AZERBAIJAN	Ilham ALIYEV	10	3
SERBIA	Ana BRNABIC	10	4
MOROCCO	Saad-Eddine al-OTHMANI	9.75	5
TURKEY	Recep Tayyip Erdogan	9.722222	6
POLAND	Mateusz Morawiecki	9.538462	7
HUNGARY	Victor Orban	9.5	8
BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA	Zoran Tegeltija	9.444445	9
VENEZUELA	Nicolas MADURO Moros	9.266666	10
CUBA	Raúl Castro	9.25	11
ERITREA	ISAIAS Afwerki	9.25	12
ISRAEL	Binyamin NETANYAHU	9.076923	13
NICARAGUA	Jose Daniel ORTEGA Saavedra	9	14
CAMBODIA	Hun Sen	8.833333	15
BRAZIL	Jair BOLSONARO	8.757576	16
PAKISTAN	Imran KHAN	8.727273	17
MEXICO	Andres M. LOPEZ OBRADOR	8.695652	18
ZAMBIA	Edgar LUNGU	8.666667	19
INDIA	Narendra Modi	8.617647	20

Table A3: Use alternative dependent variables

	DV includes government disinformation (1)	DV excludes pre-pandemic criterion (2)	DV weighs violations in semi-democracy more heavily (3)
Populist government	0.014*** (0.004)	0.017*** (0.005)	0.018*** (0.005)
Authoritarian rhetoric	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.011 (0.007)	-0.007 (0.006)
GDP per capita	-0.028 (0.019)	-0.035* (0.020)	-0.040** (0.019)
Total population	0.030*** (0.009)	0.030*** (0.009)	0.023** (0.009)
Economic inequality	0.002 (0.002)	0.001 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Hospital beds (per 1000)	-0.000 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)
Percentage of age 65+	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
Percentage of urban population	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)
3-year change in democracy	0.109 (0.136)	0.134 (0.144)	0.023 (0.171)
Pre-pandemic level of democracy	-0.149* (0.087)	-0.116 (0.090)	0.126 (0.079)
Max. containment by June 15	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Covid-19 deaths (per 1 mil) by June 15	-0.008 (0.008)	-0.005 (0.009)	-0.003 (0.008)
Constant	-0.124 (0.191)	-0.087 (0.203)	-0.202 (0.201)
N	102	102	102
R ²	0.497	0.463	0.370

Robust s.e. are in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$

Table A4: Allow for nonlinear effect of *Populist Government*

	Add quadratic terms (1)	Use categorical variables (2)
Populist government	-0.006 (0.019)	
(Populist government) ²	0.002 (0.002)	
Pluralist		0.002 (0.029)
Populist		0.077** (0.036)
Strongly populist		0.090*** (0.033)
Authoritarian rhetoric	-0.019 (0.021)	
(Authoritarian rhetoric) ²	0.001 (0.002)	
Liberal		-0.007 (0.036)
Authoritarian		-0.090** (0.044)
Strongly authoritarian		-0.047 (0.045)
Constant	-0.205 (0.205)	-0.265 (0.176)
Controls in Model 1 Table 4	Yes	Yes
Region dummies	Yes	Yes
N	102	102
R ²	0.508	0.521

Robust s.e. are in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

“Strongly pluralist” and “Strongly liberal” are the omitted categories.

Table A5: Analyze subsamples

	Exclude obs. in top 10% of <i>Pandem Index</i>	Exclude obs. in top 10% of <i>Populist Government</i>	Exclude countries if autocratic before COVID	Exclude observations w/ significant subnational variation
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Populist government	0.011 ** (0.005)	0.011 *** (0.004)	0.021 ** (0.009)	0.014 *** (0.005)
Authoritarian rhetoric	-0.012 * (0.006)	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.010 (0.010)	-0.012 (0.008)
GDP per capita	-0.018 (0.021)	-0.006 (0.018)	-0.044 * (0.025)	-0.022 (0.023)
Total population	0.037 *** (0.009)	0.027 *** (0.008)	0.039 *** (0.013)	0.030 *** (0.011)
Economic inequality	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.000 (0.003)	0.003 (0.003)
Hospital beds (per 1000)	-0.003 (0.005)	-0.001 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.006)	0.003 (0.007)
Percentage of age 65+	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.006 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.005)
Percentage of urban population	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.002 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)
3-year change in democracy	0.124 (0.154)	-0.057 (0.140)	-0.003 (0.216)	0.060 (0.198)
Pre-pandemic level of democracy	-0.096 (0.087)	-0.094 (0.074)	0.036 (0.229)	-0.135 (0.097)
Max. containment by June 15	0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)	-0.003 * (0.002)	0.001 (0.001)
Covid-19 deaths (per 1 mil) by June 15	-0.011 (0.010)	-0.010 (0.008)	-0.013 (0.014)	-0.009 (0.011)
Constant	-0.303 (0.211)	-0.218 (0.186)	0.221 (0.343)	-0.263 (0.225)
Region dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	92	93	58	80
R ²	0.563	0.517	0.615	0.468

Robust s.e. are in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A6: Control for additional factors

	Add Elections (1)	Add Protests (2)	Add Ethnic Frac'n (3)	Add all (4)
Populist government	0.014*** (0.005)	0.016*** (0.005)	0.012** (0.005)	0.014** (0.005)
Authoritarian rhetoric	-0.009 (0.006)	-0.008 (0.006)	-0.010 (0.007)	-0.010 (0.007)
GDP per capita	-0.021 (0.020)	-0.031 (0.021)	-0.022 (0.020)	-0.029 (0.022)
Total population	0.033*** (0.009)	0.034*** (0.009)	0.033*** (0.009)	0.035*** (0.009)
Economic inequality	0.002 (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)	0.003* (0.002)	0.002 (0.002)
Hospital beds (per 1000)	-0.002 (0.005)	-0.003 (0.005)	0.001 (0.006)	0.002 (0.006)
Percentage of age 65+	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
Percentage of urban population	-0.000 (0.001)	0.000 (0.001)	-0.001 (0.001)	-0.000 (0.001)
3-year change in democracy	0.088 (0.157)	0.106 (0.162)	0.109 (0.167)	0.087 (0.169)
Pre-pandemic level of democracy	-0.150* (0.082)	-0.115 (0.081)	-0.149* (0.088)	-0.125 (0.084)
Max. containment by June 15	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)	0.001 (0.001)
Covid-19 deaths (per 1 mil) by June 15	-0.011 (0.009)	-0.013 (0.009)	-0.013 (0.010)	-0.017* (0.010)
Elections scheduled in 2020	-0.023 (0.023)			-0.026 (0.024)
Large protests in 2019		-0.051* (0.027)		-0.045 (0.029)
Ethnic fractionalization			0.022 (0.061)	0.040 (0.059)
Constant	-0.260 (0.200)	-0.234 (0.195)	-0.284 (0.217)	-0.270 (0.221)
Region dummies	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
N	102	102	96	96
R ²	0.504	0.521	0.506	0.538

Robust s.e. are in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$.

Table A7: Regression table for components of democratic violations

	Media restrictions (1)	Gov't disinfo. (2)	Discrimination (3)	Time limit (4)	Limits on legislature (5)	Abusive enforce't (6)
Populist government	0.321*** (0.102)	0.162* (0.091)	0.185 (0.113)	-0.132 (0.091)	-0.014 (0.099)	-0.417 (0.347)
Authoritarian rhetoric	-0.253** (0.124)	-0.041 (0.121)	-0.259** (0.132)	0.055 (0.098)	-0.048 (0.107)	0.561 (0.373)
GDP per capita	-0.395 (0.342)	-1.087** (0.497)	-0.092 (0.382)	-0.040 (0.292)	-0.739** (0.311)	-1.951* (1.075)
Total population	0.047 (0.173)	0.199 (0.157)	0.463* (0.243)	0.031 (0.170)	-0.035 (0.160)	2.396* (1.418)
Economic inequality	0.030 (0.027)	0.001 (0.030)	0.066* (0.034)	0.016 (0.028)	0.116*** (0.038)	-0.100 (0.120)
Hospital beds (per 1000)	0.327*** (0.109)	0.172 (0.111)	-0.005 (0.107)	0.066 (0.121)	0.022 (0.094)	-0.480 (0.555)
Percentage of age 65+	-0.152 (0.107)	-0.088 (0.086)	0.077 (0.094)	-0.024 (0.071)	-0.003 (0.071)	-0.882** (0.427)
Percentage of urban pop.	-0.001 (0.016)	0.063*** (0.022)	-0.025 (0.022)	0.026* (0.015)	0.023 (0.015)	0.094 (0.069)
3-year change in democracy	-0.300 (2.514)	1.888 (1.934)	3.033 (2.639)	1.857 (2.396)	-5.442* (2.790)	-12.732* (6.657)
Pre-pandemic level of dem.	-1.363 (1.543)	-0.777 (1.526)	-2.058 (1.630)	-0.225 (1.601)	1.530 (1.440)	-0.823 (2.856)
Max. containment	0.081*** (0.025)	-0.033* (0.017)	0.040** (0.018)	0.052*** (0.019)	0.036*** (0.014)	0.446* (0.266)
Covid-19 deaths	-0.049 (0.158)	0.131 (0.141)	-0.030 (0.238)	0.096 (0.151)	-0.159 (0.150)	1.463** (0.713)
Constant	-6.056 (3.791)	2.772 (3.791)	-13.355*** (4.045)	-4.934 (3.552)	-0.490 (2.870)	-61.909 (39.131)
N	102	102	94	91	102	51
Log-likelihood	-34.998	-32.043	-20.793	-35.945	-37.870	-10.584

Robust s.e. are in parentheses. * $p < 0.1$, ** $p < 0.05$, *** $p < 0.01$