



# The Populist-Burkean Dimension in U.S. Public Opinion

M. Danish Shakeel  
Harvard University

Paul E. Peterson  
Harvard University

Scholars differ as to whether populist beliefs are a discourse or an ideology resembling conservatism or liberalism. Research has shown that a belief in popular sovereignty and a distrust of public officials are core components of populism. Its antithesis is defined as Burke's claim that officials should exercise their own judgment rather than pander to the public. A national probability sample of U. S. adults is asked to respond to six items that form a populist scale, rank themselves on a conservative-liberal scale, and state their views on education issues. The two scales are only moderately correlated, and each is independently correlated with many opinions about contemporary issues. Populism has a degree of coherence that approximates but does not match that of the conservative-liberal dimension.

VERSION: April 2021

Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series

## **The Populist-Burkean Dimension in U.S. Public Opinion**

M. Danish Shakeel and Paul E. Peterson <sup>1</sup>

PEPG 21-02

**Harvard Kennedy School  
79 JFK Street, Taubman 304  
Cambridge, MA 02138  
Tel: 617-495-7976 Fax: 617-496-4428  
[www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/)**

---

<sup>1</sup> Shakeel: Harvard University; Peterson: Harvard University and Hoover Institution/Stanford University.

**Program on Education Policy and Governance Working Papers Series**

***The Populist-Burkean Dimension in U.S. Public Opinion***

**M. Danish Shakeel and Paul E. Peterson**

PEPG 21-02

**Harvard Kennedy School  
79 JFK Street, Taubman 304 Cambridge, MA 02138  
Tel: 617-495-7976 Fax: 617-496-4428  
[www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/](http://www.hks.harvard.edu/pepg/)**

M. Danish Shakeel ([danish\\_shakeel@hks.harvard.edu](mailto:danish_shakeel@hks.harvard.edu))

Paul E. Peterson ([ppeterso@gov.harvard.edu](mailto:ppeterso@gov.harvard.edu))

**April 20, 2021**

Prior versions of this paper were presented at the 2021 International School Choice and Reform Conference and 2021 Midwest Political Science Association Political Science Conference. We received valuable feedback from Jay Greene, Robert Maranto and Fiorina Morris. We own any remaining errors.

## **Abstract**

Scholars differ as to whether populist beliefs are a discourse or an ideology resembling conservatism or liberalism. Research has shown that a belief in popular sovereignty and a distrust of public officials are core components of populism. Its antithesis is defined as Burke's claim that officials should exercise their own judgment rather than pander to the public. A national probability sample of U. S. adults is asked to respond to six items that form a populist scale, rank themselves on a conservative-liberal scale, and state their views on education issues. The two scales are only moderately correlated, and each is independently correlated with many opinions about contemporary issues. Populism has a degree of coherence that approximates but does not match that of the conservative-liberal dimension.

**Keywords:** populism; public opinion; survey; politics; education; Burkean

## Motivation

Scholars differ as to whether populism, like conservatism and liberalism, is a coherent ideology guiding opinions on contemporary institutions and issues (Mudde, 2004; Aslanidis, 2016), but the question has yet to be explored empirically in mass belief systems. Further, the antithesis to populism is left unconsidered or defined in ambiguous ways. In this paper we give populism's antipodes a clear definition and examine whether populism in the United States is as closely linked as the conservative-liberal dimension to opinions about contemporary issues and institutions.

Survey research has defined populism as belief in popular sovereignty, hostility toward corrupt elites, a Manichean belief in a good-evil dichotomy, authoritarianism, and in other ways (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Castanho Silva et al., 2018, 2019; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Hobolt et al., 2016; Oliver & Rahn, 2016; Schulz et al., 2018; Stanley, 2011). In this paper we define populism as a dimension of political thought rather than as a specific ideological category or style. We begin by defining the opposite of populism to be Edmond Burke's understanding of the proper relationship between people and those elected to govern them.

On the eve of populist revolutions in America and Europe, Burke, a British elected public official, made the classic argument against unbridled popular sovereignty. The "wishes" of the citizens of Bristol "have great weight with him," he said, but he nonetheless "ought not to sacrifice . . . to any set of men living" his own "mature judgment" and "enlightened conscience." Those "are a trust from Providence." that supersede any claim he is a mere delegate from Bristol (Burke, 1774). Populists dispute Burke's claim that elected officials are trustees of the community's interests; they insist, instead, that those in office must follow the will of the electorate. Elsewhere, this polarity has been used to contrast delegate and trustee theories of

representation (Pitkin, 1967; Rehfeld, 2009; Dovi, 2015). Here we use it to define the difference between populists and those with whom they disagree.

This interpretation of populism allows for analysis of the belief system to be treated as a dimension of political thought, along which individuals and entities can be ranked, rather than an either-or set of ideological categories into which individuals, groups and parties are classified. It also permits analysis of its coherence as a belief system held by members of the general public. In addition, this approach provides an opportunity to examine similarities and differences between the populist dimension of political thought and the well-known conservative-liberal one.

We operationalize the populist-Burkean dimension by modifying six statements expressing views concerning popular sovereignty and the trustworthiness of political elites, which are drawn from prior research. The items are questions asked of a probability sample of the U. S. adult population administered by the journal *Education Next* in May 2020. Results suggest that some degree of populist thinking is pervasive in the United States, but people nonetheless distribute themselves widely along the populist-Burkean dimension. The belief system only moderately overlaps the conservative-liberal one. It is correlated with assessments of institutions and policies, though it is not as coherent and comprehensive as conservative and liberal ideologies. But neither is it simply a discourse so thin that it has no policy implications at all.

## **Literature**

The paucity of research on populism in the United States is surprising given its robustness in the country's politics (but see Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012). Since the first tea party, populist rhetoric has found a fervent audience. Liberty poles, Shay's rebellion, anti-federalism, Know-Nothings, Douglas's "popular sovereignty," Bryan's "Cross of Gold," Huey

“Kingfisher” Long, Tea Parties, “one-percenters,” and Donald Trump’s successful campaign for the presidency all made appeals to popular sovereignty at the expense of those in positions of public responsibility.

The first-past-the-post, winner-take-all electoral system in the United States may help to account for the scant research attention given to populist belief systems. That electoral design penalizes third parties and encourages political conversations to converge within a single dimension (Gillespie, 2012). In Europe and Latin America, proportional representation systems encourage the formation of multiple parties that divide the voters along several dimensions of cleavage (Duverger, 1980), splitting voters along religious, ecological, and nationalistic lines in addition to the dominant right-left cleavage (Hawkins, Kaltwasser, & Andreadis, 2018). Third and fourth parties have had considerable success by expressing populist themes, giving scholarly researchers rich data sets to analyze.

Much of the work has involved analysis of the activities of political elites—speeches given in legislative bodies, texts of campaign speeches, newspaper commentary, and the style and actions of public officials (Hawkins 2009; Howell and Moe, 2020; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). In this literature, populism is often conceptualized as an ideology, though perhaps a “thin” one (Canovan, 2002; Freedon, 1998). Mudde (2004, p. 543) defines populism as “an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, ‘the pure people’ and ‘the corrupt elite,’” but he also says it has less internal inconsistency than a complete ideology. In the words of Hawkins, Riding and Mudde (2012, p. 4) “Whereas thick (or full) ideologies, such as liberalism, socialism, and conservatism, are collectively derived systems of thought that offer specific, practical policy solutions to a broad range of aspects of life (Mullins 1972), thin-centered ideologies like

populism . . . represent a more basic set of assumptions, an approach to the political world that has only limited applicability.” The thinness of the ideology allows it to be tagged on to thicker ones such as liberalism or conservatism. But Aslandidis (2016, pp. 88-89) disputes any claim that the concept “stands on a part with liberalism, socialism or any other fully developed –ism that connotes a series of far-ranging policy implications. . . . [Rather, it] lacks . . . the single most unchallenged dimension of ideology in the literature: coherence.” Populism is simply a “discourse” or “narrative,” consisting of expressions and styles used to mobilize support while conveying few clues to policy preferences (see also Betz, 2002; Weyland, 1996; 2001).

Whether ideology or narrative, survey researchers have explored the ideas that are embodied in the populist concept. Popular sovereignty, a belief that the people should rule, is certainly among its core beliefs, as is a dubious view of those who hold public offices of responsibility. To that core, other beliefs have been proposed. Some scholars say populist beliefs include aspects of Manichaeism, a vision of a world divided between good and evil, and/or are authoritarian, a readiness to surrender to the will of a powerful leader or deny civil liberties to those with whom they disagree. Yet neither idea seems consistent with a philosophical outlook that finds the people praiseworthy and politicians corrupt. If some of the people are evil, why would you give them unbridled authority? And if those in power are potentially corrupt, why should one bend to their will? It’s possible to square the circle by praising only a segment of the people, and identifying only with pure leaders who properly discern the general will, but one should not necessarily expect to find in the public at large a set of coherent beliefs that combine all four of the above-mentioned elements in a coherent manner. Yet a more restricted understanding of the core beliefs of populism—one that comes closer to Mudde’s definition—or,



more to the point, closer to Burke's understanding of the central issue—may still have enough capacity to guide opinions on contemporary issues.

Populism is said to have less coherence than conservatism or liberalism. But these belief systems, too, are said to lack “thickness” or coherent structure among the public at large (Achen, 1975; Converse, 1964; Zaller, 1992). Admittedly, the conservative-liberal ideological dimension organizes much of the political conversation among political elites (Maddox & Lilie, 1984; McCarty, Poole, & Rosenthal, 2006). Congressional roll call votes, state legislative voting behavior, presidents, Supreme Court justices, lower court judges, think-tanks, interest groups, and news media outlets have been successfully ranked along this dimension of cleavage (Bailey & Maltzman, 2008; Bonica, 2014; Bonica, & Sen, 2020; Poole & Rosenthal, 1997). But the opinions of ordinary citizens are not as ideologically defined as those in offices of political responsibility, who must act in predictable ways if they are to negotiate successfully with others on a continuing basis.

Ordinary citizens are under no such obligation and may seldom ponder their positions on policy questions remote from their daily lives. Although they are willing to classify themselves as liberals or conservatives, that self-classification accounts for only a modest amount of the variation in their stated evaluations of policies and political institutions (Robinson & Holm, 1980). For example, Conover and Feldman (1981) show that positions taken on economic policy, a standard liberal-conservative divide, have only a 0.1 beta correlation with an individual's self-identification as a liberal or a conservative. Other research shows that the liberal-conservative divide has at least two dimensions—the classic economic one and the emergent divide over cultural issues (abortion, sexual practices, and ethnic relations (Carmines, Ensley, & Wagner, 2011; Claggett & Shafer, 2010; Shafer & Claggett, 1995). A person can be a liberal on one

dimension but a conservative on another. (Carmines, Ensley, & Wagner, 2016, 2018; Klar, 2014). Other cleavages that cut across the conservative-liberal dimension—urban-rural, religious-sectarian, regional, ecological, authoritarian, and so forth—seldom have much additional explanatory power (Ellis & Stimson, 2012). Whether the liberal-conservative dimension is more coherent than the populist-Burkean one within the belief systems of ordinary citizens is a matter to be ascertained empirically, not a matter to be assumed a priori.

Analyses of survey items that seek to measure populism emphasize the centrality of the popular sovereignty component to the populist belief system. Castanho Silva et al. (2018) have brought together more than 125 survey items used to identify populist beliefs in multiple countries. A broad range of items are classified into the following categories: praise the people, anti-elite feelings, Manichaeic outlook, strong leader, single, direct style, anything-goes attitude (authoritarianism), left-wing populism (anti-rich), and right-wing populism (nativism). Their exploratory factor analysis does not converge on any one solution, but they find four theoretically meaningful dimensions to populist ideology or discourse as it has been operationalized by the survey research literature —people-centrism, anti-elitism, Manichaeic outlook, and anti-authoritarianism. Since the first two dimensions are moderately correlated with one another, while the others barely correlate with any of the others, results lend weight to an interpretation of populism as a belief in the sovereignty of the people and the potential for corruption among the political elite. So does the work of Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove (2014) on populist opinion in the Netherlands, which extracts from a principal component analysis of multiple items three factors labeled populism, pluralism, and elitism. The first consists of items that refer to popular sovereignty and elite corruption. They validate the applicability of the populism factor by showing that those who score high on this scale also support either the right

or the left wing Dutch parties considered to be populist (p. 1338). Using a slightly revised version of the Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove scale plus two additional items, Van Hauwaert, Schimpf, & Azevedo (2019) discern three subscales in an Item Response Theory (IRT) analysis of data from probability samples in nine European countries—populism, anti-elitism, and Manichaeism. Each is distinct from the other, but the first two are correlated. Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde (2012) pose a similar set of items to U. S. and Utah probability samples that yield results consistent with the European research.

Survey researchers find it difficult to characterize the opposite pole of the populist dimension. Some resort to calling it anti-populist, which clarifies nothing. Others say elitism constitutes the antithesis of populism. But few Europeans are royalists, and hardly any U. S. citizen dares admit to elitism since the statue of King George III was yanked down on the New York City waterfront. Pluralism seem to offer a more promising antipodes to populism. Pluralists celebrate compromises among groups and interests brokered by politicians who construct broad governing coalitions. But factor analyses find pluralism to be a dimension distinct from populism (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012). Pluralists are hardly antagonistic toward the “people” nor are they willing to defend a “corrupt elite,” and it is by no means clear that populists are hostile to group politics, political bargaining, and the art of compromise.

In sum, thick or thin, the populist ideology or discourse is generally characterized as a commitment to popular sovereignty, a belief in the people’s ability to govern on their own behalf, and a distrust of political elites, often seen as self-serving. We refine this definition to focus on differences over the proper relationship between the sovereign people and those who represent them in government, the classic philosophical question posed most clearly by Edmund Burke in his address to the Bristol electorate. This is by no means the only acceptable definition

of populism, but it has certain advantages. It clearly defines the alternative to populism. It facilitates survey research by treating the concept as a matter of degree, not an either-or category. It focuses attention on the popular sovereignty doctrine, which virtually all populist scholars agree is at the core of the concept. It leaves open the extent to which the populism may be considered an ideology: Finally, it connects the populist literature to a robust philosophical tradition that continues to resonate (Pitkin, 1967).

### **Data and methods**

Six populist items are administered to a national probability sample of U. S. adults in a survey that includes numerous items asking respondents to evaluate political institutions and public policies in the education sector. A principal component analysis is extracted from a matrix of the six items, and it provides a measure of populism vs. Burkeanism. Respondent self-identification provides a measure of conservative or liberalism. The relationship between these measures and opinions on institutions and policies indicate the degree to which each belief system is correlated with these opinions.

### **Sample**

Our data come from the *Education Next* 2020 survey conducted by Harvard University's Program on Education Policy and Governance, which asks a probability sample of U. S. adults about education policies, practices, and institutions. The survey has been administered online annually since 2007 (for other scholarly uses, see Barrows, Henderson, Peterson, & West, 2016; Chingos, Henderson, & West, 2012; Houston, 2021; Shakeel & Henderson, 2019). The 2020 survey was administered through the KnowledgePanel® of the polling firm Ipsos. The KnowledgePanel® is a probability-based web panel and it comprises of more than 50,000 adults that agree to participate in various surveys. Ipsos recruits the adults through address-based

sampling from a frame of residential addresses. Participants are provided with internet and hardware if they lack them.<sup>1</sup> The 2020 poll data is comprised of 4,291 respondents. Teachers, African American adults, Hispanic adults, teachers, and parents of children in K-12 grades are over-sampled. The survey includes over-samples of teachers, parents, African Americans, and Hispanic Americans; all results are weighted to be nationally representative and to adjust for non-response.

### **Survey items**

The survey asks respondents 1) to evaluate national and local elementary and secondary institutions and public and private higher educational institutions at the state and national levels; 2) to estimate school expenditures and teacher salaries; 3) obtain opinions about school expenditures, teacher salaries, free college, Common Core standards, school choice, accountability, homeschooling, and other education policy questions; and 4) to provide information on their demographic background, ideological self-identification on the liberalism-conservatism scale, party affiliation, political participation, religious participation, and whether they have been “born again.” The survey contains several experiments in which respondents answer randomly assigned versions of questions, thereby allowing us to ascertain respondent sensitivity to information about positions taken by presidents. The survey also includes respondent’s zip code, which is used to merge data available from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).<sup>2</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> For more information on survey methodology see <https://www.ipsos.com/en-us/solution/knowledgepanel>

<sup>2</sup> Locale labels for every American school district are available at <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/SchoolLocations>. There is a lag, so we use the most recent year available i.e. 2018-2019. We use the public school district file. For a few cases that could not be matched, we matched them using zip codes <https://nces.ed.gov/programs/edge/Geographic/ZCTAAssignments>.

For many items, survey participants are given five response options after asked whether they agree or disagree with a specific position. They may strongly agree, somewhat agree, somewhat disagree, or strongly disagree. The fifth option, placed last to minimize selection as the middle category, is “neither agrees nor disagree,” an option selected 10.5 to 34.1 percent of the time (average = 18.5 percent), depending on the item (see Appendix A Part II for original wording of the survey questions).

### **Populist items**

As shown in Table 1, the 2020 survey asks six questions that have been used to identify the populist-Burkean dimension in the respondents’ belief systems. The questions are modified versions of items used by Van Hauwaert, Schimpf & Azevedo (2019), five of which were originally posed by Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014) in their study of populism in the Netherlands (see Table A.1 in Appendix A Part I). Three of the questions have been used on U. S. samples (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012). To focus on a populist or Burkean theory of representation, modifications substitute “elected officials” for “political elites” and “politicians,” which might be perceived as derogatory categories. The modifications also delete references to institutions in specific countries, such as the Dutch parliament or U. S. Congress.

A large majority of respondents gave an affirmative response to the six questions, indicating widespread support for populism. Still, less than half said they “strongly agreed” with the statements, and the remainder distributed themselves widely across the remaining four categories— “somewhat agree,” “neither agree nor disagree” or mildly or strongly disagree. Altogether, the six questions appear to tap into the latent attitudinal dimension we have classified as populist-Burkean. Standardized distributions of the six questions correlate with one another at levels that range between 0.25 and 0.41, with a median inter-correlation of 0.35. We draw the

first principal component from a matrix of responses to these six questions. The first principal component explains 44% of variance (eigen value=2.66; number of components=6). The populist-Burkean scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.75, indicating a high level of internal consistency. The unstandardized distribution has a standard deviation of 1.65. Unfortunately, agreement with the statement indicates a populist position for all six questions, a limitation discussed in our concluding section. Figure 1 displays the histogram of the standardized populist-Burkean scale. The scale is slightly skewed to the left, and it has a good coverage (range = -4.19, 1.60).

### **Liberal-conservative self-identification**

Respondents' self-identification as a liberal or a conservative on a seven-point scale is used to estimate their position on this traditional measure of political ideology. As can be seen in Table 2, the variable does not distribute itself equally across categories, but is concentrated on the middle category (35 percent), conservative (20 percent) and liberal (16 percent) categories. Only 4 percent of respondents subscribe to either the extremely liberal or extremely conservative position. The unstandardized distribution has a standard deviation of 1.55, nearly identical to that of the populist-Burkean scale (Table 3). In other words, voters are not concentrated at the extremes of the conservative-liberal dimension, giving ample opportunity for the populist-Burkean variable to reveal itself to be an extreme version of either ideology. Histogram of the standardized conservative-liberal scale is uniformly distributed across a range that varies from -1.99 to 1.88. See Figure 1.

To simplify the presentation that follows, we shall refer to the liberal-conservative dimension as conservatism and the populist-Burkean dimension as populism. We shall

provisionally refer to each as ideologies, though the extent to which that appellation is appropriate needs to be shown, not assumed.

### **Analytical strategy**

We first analyze the demographic correlates of populism in Table 3. In model 1 the simple relationships between populism and other variables are displayed. Model 2 indicates the relationship between conservatism and the same variables. Model 3 displays the OLS regression between populism and the other characteristics. The controls include conservatism and other potentially endogeneous variables (party identification, and political participation). Populism, conservatism, republicanism, political participation, and religious participation have been standardized in the first three models. In model 4, the unstandardized mean and standard deviation for each variable is shown.

In table 4, we present results from an OLS regression that estimates whether populism and conservatism are associated with taking positions on policies rather than remaining neutral by saying they neither agree nor disagree. For these estimations, we code the outcome categories as dichotomous (1= a positive or negative policy position and 0= neutral).

To assess the ideological range of populism and conservatism in mass belief systems in the United States, we estimate for each its relationship with institutional evaluations and policy positions after controlling for covariates. To assess the distinctiveness of each ideological dimension, we together estimate their relationship with evaluations and policy positions with controls for covariates (we exclude republicanism and political participation from the list of



controls due to their significant potential endogeneity with populism and conservatism).<sup>3</sup> For example, it can be seen in column 4 of first row in Table 5 that the relationship (-0.01) between conservatism and respondent evaluations of the nation's schools is insignificant once covariates are controlled, but the negative relationship (-0.10) between populism and school evaluations shown in column 3 is significant. In row one of column 5 the Chi-square test of the difference between the two estimates is displayed, with asterisks indicating the level of significance. In the third row, the results of estimates when populism and conservatism are jointly estimated together with controls for covariates to see whether each is significant when the other is introduced. The value in row three of column five indicates whether the standard error of the estimates for the two variables overlap; asterisks indicate the level at which the F-statistic is significant. The results reported in the third row thus indicate whether the populism is significantly different from conservatism. Unless otherwise specified, correlations between populism and other variables presented in the text below are mentioned before those between conservatism and the same variables.

For ease of interpretation all reported estimates are obtained from OLS regressions and are given in standard deviations. Ordered probit analyses reveal qualitatively similar results.

---

<sup>3</sup> It might be argued that there is no need—or that it is even misleading—to control for covariates when estimating the correlation between populist beliefs and other opinions. But if controls were not introduced, one would not be able to estimate the importance of ideological commitments separate and apart from the interests generated by a person's place in the social structure. Fortunately, results are qualitatively similar regardless of whether controls are employed. For example, the coefficients for conservatism, republicanism, and political participation are qualitatively similar whether or not controls are introduced (compare models 1 and 3 of Table 3).

## Results

### Correlates of populism

Populism is not a mere recapitulation of conservatism. As is shown in model 1 of Table 3, the simple correlation between populism and conservatism is only 0.15, a statistically significant relationship but one below the inter-correlation between any two items within the populism scale itself (0.25 to 0.41). Nor is populist orientation merely a disguise for party identification. The correlation between the conventional seven-point party identification scale and the populism scale is just 0.12.

Populists have less income and fewer years of education. They are more likely to be male. They are older, come from rural or more suburban parts of the country, participate more frequently in religious services, and more likely to say they have been “born again.” Hispanic Americans give more populist responses than either African Americans or White Americans. However, blacks and whites are equally likely to more populist and populists are not concentrated in any one of the four major regions of the United States.

In model 2, conservatism shows stronger correlations than populism with party identification, political participation, religious participation, and respondents identifying themselves as “born again.” Like populists, conservatives are likely to be older, male, and have low income and fewer years of education. Conservatives are more likely to be comprised of white Americans than other ethnicities. Respondents in south, parents, and those living in town and rural areas are more likely to be conservatives.

The adjusted R-square for model 3 is 0.07, thereby indicating that much of the variance in populism remains unexplained by social correlates.

## **Populism, opinion formation, and political participation**

Populists are more likely than Burkeans to hold definite opinions on one or another side of an issue. On 15 items, the *Education Next* survey provided respondents with the opportunity to say they “neither support nor oppose” the policy described. On all but one (setting same state standards for student achievement) populism is significantly correlated with taking a policy position rather than maintaining a neutral stance (Table 4). Or, to put it another way, on all but this one issue, Burkeans are more prepared to remain neutral, perhaps because they are ready to allow elected officials decide the question according to their best judgment. On 5 of the 15 items, same state standards, teacher unions, school spending, teacher salaries, and free college, conservatives are more likely than liberals to take a policy position. But on the remaining ten the degree of conservatism is unrelated to position-taking. In other words, populism, more than conservatism, identifies the more openly opinionated.

Populists are also more likely to say that they vote in local school board elections than Burkeans (0.03), an indication that they are ready to translate their opinions into electoral influence. In this respect they differ sharply from conservatives, who are less likely than liberals to say they vote on school elections (-0.02) (Table 4). However, populists report lower levels of other forms of political participation than Burkeans. Respondents were asked to place themselves on a five-point scale ranging from “never” to “often” in response to a question that asked how frequently they participated in political activities such as making phone calls, canvassing or distributing leaflets. As can be seen in Table 3, populism has a negative correlation with political participation (-0.08 without controls, -0.05 with controls). Similarly, conservatives are less likely than liberals to participate in these ways (-0.09), as shown in model 2 in Table 3. The contradiction between greater opinion formation and readiness to vote in elections, on the one

hand, but less political participation, on the other, may be due to greater populist alienation from existing institutions, a question we explore next.

### **Assessments of institutions**

Populists are skeptical of governmental institutions. Just as anti-federalists campaigned against the establishment of a strong national government under the Constitution, so, today, populists, as compared to Burkeans, are reluctant to give either federal or state institutions a high evaluation. When respondents are asked to grade the nation's schools on a five-point scale that ranges from A to F, the populist scale has a significant negative correlation (-0.10) while the conservatism scale (-0.01) does not (Table 5).

When asked about schools in their local community, populists (-0.07) handed out more negative evaluations than Burkeans, and conservatives were more negative than liberals (-0.09). These relationships remain after adjusting for the quality of local schools, as measured by average student achievement performance and average student achievement growth on standardized state tests.<sup>4</sup>

When asked to rank the nation's public colleges and universities, the populism (-0.14) and conservatism (-0.08) scales both have significantly negative correlations that do not differ significantly in size. The same is true when respondents are asked to rank the colleges and universities in their state (-0.14). However, conservatives (-0.09) are more skeptical of the nation's private colleges and universities than liberals, but populists are not significantly more skeptical than Burkeans (-0.03). Populists seem to save their ire for public entities.

---

<sup>4</sup> Average school district growth and average school district achievement levels in grades 3–8 from 2008–09 through 2017–18 is available from Stanford Education Data Archive (SEDA) 4.0 dataset (Reardon et al., 2021). Respondent's district is estimated in Education Next survey from the census blocks of respondent's residence.

## **Curricular standards**

When curricular standards are set, populists seem to prefer that policies be set at the state level. Both populism (0.09) and conservatism (0.07) are positively correlated with support for states setting the “same state standards” in reading and math to “hold public schools accountable for their performances.” Yet populists (-0.05) are less supportive (though not significantly so) of Common Core state standards than Burkeans, perhaps because the name “Common Core” has acquired the connotation of federal interference with state and local education. Conservatives are even more clearly opposed to Common Core state standards (-0.11), possibly since they were backed by Barack Obama and criticized by Donald Trump.

## **School choice**

Possibly because populists are skeptical of governmental institutions, they embrace alternatives to the public school. They favor charter schools (0.08), tax-credit scholarships (0.11), low-income vouchers (0.06), universal vouchers (0.10), and homeschooling (0.10), though they think homeschoolers should notify the local school district (0.05) of that decision (Table 6). Conservatism is also associated with these policy preferences, but, importantly, the populist dimension remains significantly associated with support for charter schools, low-income and universal vouchers, even after a control for conservatism has been introduced (the significance test for joint models yields statistically significant results). In general, the relationship with these policy preferences do not differ for the two dimensions, though the populist dimension discriminates the level of support for choice for low-income vouchers more sharply than does the conservative one, and the opposite is true for charters and universal vouchers.

## **Educational expenditure and conventional left-right issues**

When it comes to spending the taxpayers' dollars on educational services, the populist coefficient has a sign that points in the opposite direction from the conservatism one. As can be seen in Table 7, in joint estimations that include measures of both ideological dimensions, populists are more likely than Burkeans to favor increases in expenditures per pupil (0.05), increases in teacher salaries (0.07), and covering the tuition for students pursuing a college degree (0.05). Meanwhile, conservatives, as compared to liberals, are much more likely to oppose all three policies (-0.34, -0.31, -0.40). In other words, populism is not necessarily a more extreme version of conservatism; on spending public resources populists sharply differentiate themselves from the other ideological dimension.

Two questions in the survey asked respondents to estimate per pupil expenditures in their school district and public school teacher salary in their state. As the survey has respondent's geolocation, their responses were linked to actual pupil expenditures in their school district and public school teacher salary in their state. These actual values were subtracted from the respondents' estimates and the resulting variable was standardized, thus proving us with overestimates of these two measures. Both populists and conservatives are likely to overestimate the two variables, but the results are statistically significant only for populist overestimates of teacher salaries (0.05).

Other than spending, populism does not add all that much to an understanding of public opinion on core issues that are staples of the conservative-liberal cleavage. On opinions about teacher unions, merit pay for teachers, and in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants, populists do not differ from Burkeans to anywhere near the degree that conservatives differ from liberals. The correlation between all three issues and the conservative ideological dimension

ranges between 0.16 and 0.45, whereas their correlation with the populist-Burkean dimension ranges between 0.04 and 0.10. On these left-right issues, the primary dimension of cleavage is the well-known conservative-liberal divide.

### **Information impacts**

The *Education Next* survey conducted several information experiments. On school spending, the survey provided to half the sample information on per pupil expenditures in the respondents' home school districts before they were asked if they favored additional spending. On teacher salaries, half were told average salaries in the state. On college tuition, they were told the earnings of those who received a four-year degree as compared to those who did not have a college education.

Surprisingly, we found no consistent relationship between the provision of this information and the positions taken by either populists or conservatives (table 8). The value of the information-populism interaction term was modestly positive for school expenditure, insignificant for teacher salaries and modestly negative for free college tuition. For conservatives it was moderately positive for school expenditure and insignificant for the other two items.

### **Trump influence**

Nor were populists particularly influenced by positions taken by President Donald Trump. In another series of survey experiments on several issues—charters, merit pay for teachers, tax-credits for private school scholarships, Common Core, and in-state tuition for undocumented immigrants—a randomly selected segment of respondents were told Trump's stance on the issue before being asked to give their own, while another random segment was simply asked the respondent's opinion. In four of the five cases, Trump's stance shifted conservative (as distinct from liberal) opinion quite substantially toward the position taken by the

president, but the views of populists (as distinct from Burkeans) were in all cases unaffected by information about the president's views (table 9).

The survey was administered in May 2020 before the Democratic nominee had been chosen, so it did not include a question on respondent's presidential voting preferences. However, the availability of county information on the respondent's place of residence allowed us to estimate the political preferences of the area in which the respondent resided.<sup>5</sup> We found no correlation between populism and the majority of votes cast for Trump in 2016 within the respondent's county. However, we found a strong correlation between vote of the county and respondent's location on the conservatism scale.

### **Liberal and conservative populists**

When the sample is split among liberals, moderates, and conservatives, noticeable differences between liberal populists and conservative ones are apparent (table 10). But both conservative and liberal populists (as distinct from conservative and liberal Burkeans) are significantly more likely to be critical of many of the country's educational institutions (conservative correlations presented first), whether they be the nation's schools (-0.09, -0.10), the schools in their local community (0.05, -0.07), or public colleges and universities at the national (-0.15, -0.12) and state (-0.11, -0.11) levels. Also, both liberal and conservative populists are more likely to favor allowing homeschooling (0.08, 0.10) and allowing tax credits for scholarships to attend private schools (0.11, 0.12).

---

<sup>5</sup> Voting data available from <https://electionlab.mit.edu/data>



## Discussion

Populism has been defined as a belief system that celebrates the will of the people and questions the trustworthiness of their political representatives, a position opposed by those who accept Burke's claim that elected officials should be granted the flexibility to deliberate and decide policies as long as they keep the well-being of the people in mind. This is not the only useful definition of the concept, but it treats populism as a dimension rather than a category, facilitates empirical investigation of the coherence of populist beliefs within the mass public, and connects the concept to a long-standing and theoretically rich political tradition (Pitkin, 1967).

## Limitations

This analysis is little more than an early exploration of the topic within the U. S. context. For one thing, the *Education Next 2020* survey, though the first national probability sample to include both a measure of populism and opinions on contemporary issues, has certain limitations. The populist point of view is indicated by agreeing with all six statements, which creates the potential for an agree bias. Further, all six questions are displayed on the same survey webpage, which could increase the size of correlations among items. To enhance validity, future surveys should incorporate items with the opposite valence. Still, there is little reason to believe that populists are simple-minded folk who mindlessly agree to any observation. Rather, they are critical observers, who find fault in schools and colleges at both the local and national level. They are more likely to say they participate in school board elections, and they are also more likely to take an explicit position on a policy issue than Burkeans, who more frequently retreat to the "neither agree nor disagree" response. And any agree bias is not so extensive that it narrows the variance of the scale to the point that it cannot differentiate opinions; on the contrary, its standard deviation is roughly identical to that of conservatism.

The measure of conservatism used here is based on respondent's self-identification. An alternative strategy would be to ask a set of six questions that could be used to construct a conservative-liberal index much as was done for the populist index. Such a scale would need to be distinct from those used to obtain policy positions, but, conceivably, it might be a better measure of that concept than the conventional self-identification question used here. However, the conservatism variable has, as we have said, roughly the same standard deviation as the populist measure. Any difference in correlations between these measures and other variables cannot be attributed to differences in their variance, an important consideration when comparing the discriminatory power of two dimensions.

The *Education Next* survey explores opinion only within the education policy domain. This fact obviously limits inferences that can be made for populist influences on opinions about other social, economic, and foreign policy issues. However, the policy questions covered by the survey include taxes, spending, the role of unions, the rights of undocumented immigrants, accountability of public institutions, and choice in public services – highly contested issues not unlike those found in other domestic policy domains. Although generalization to other issues cannot be assumed, neither are the topics obviously unrepresentative of the major sources of cleavage in contemporary politics.

The survey does not include items measuring Manichaeism or authoritarianism, so it is unknown whether a conception of populism that incorporates these beliefs would alter the understanding of the concept. But prior research shows these beliefs to be distinct from beliefs in popular sovereignty and skepticism of public officials. Further research may wish to explore these issues in the U. S. context more fully than is possible here.

## **Ideology?**

Populism is said by some to be only a discourse or narrative (Aslanidis, 2016) or, at best, a thin ideology easily attached to more enduring ideological cleavages such as one between liberals and conservatives (Freedman, 1998; Canovan, 2002; Mudde, 2004). That interpretation may exaggerate the coherence of belief systems conventionally characterized as ideological. Our evidence shows the populist-Burkean dimension to be less well-correlated than the liberal-conservative one with opinions on many contemporary issues, but on other items it has a stronger relationship. Further, the populist dimension is independently correlated with many issue positions and institutional evaluations even after controls for the conservatism dimension have been added. More than Burkeans, populists are critical of both the nation's schools and the schools in their community. They are also critical of the nation's and their own state's public colleges and universities. They favor homeschooling and most forms of school choice. In contrast to conservatives, populists favor free college, higher salaries for teachers, and higher levels of school expenditure. Both liberal and conservative populists are skeptical of many institutions and would give greater options to the people.

Surprisingly, populism appears to be less connected to Donald Trump's political coalition than conservatism. Although we have no direct information on support for his candidacy in either 2016 or 2020, populists are no more likely to reside in counties where he ran well in 2016, and, further, *Education Next's* survey experiments indicate that information about Trump's positions on issues do not shift opinions toward a Trumpian point of view. By contrast, conservatives do reside in pro-Trump counties and are influenced by Trump's positions on issues. In other words, conservatives, not populists, respond favorably to Trumpian rhetoric.

The discussion of populism as an ideology or a discourse, at least as it applies to the belief systems of the general public, is best resolved by thinking of the question as a matter of degree rather than one to be decided by categorization. Nothing in this paper supports the conclusion that populism and Burkeanism are tightly knit, highly constrained belief systems. But results indicate both belief systems have enough coherence to give guidance to assessments of contemporary institutions and policies. The populist-Burkean divide seems to have less coherence than the conservative-liberal one, but populism cannot be reduced to a simple extension of the left-right dimension but, instead, makes its own, independent contribution to political differentiation among the U. S. public.

## References

- Achen, C. H. (1975). Mass political attitudes and the survey response. *The American Political Science Review*, 69(4), 1218-1231.
- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., & Zaslove, A. (2014). How populist are the people? Measuring populist attitudes in voters. *Comparative political studies*, 47(9), 1324-1353.
- Aslanidis, P. (2016). Is populism an ideology? A refutation and a new perspective. *Political Studies*, 64(1\_suppl), 88-104.
- Bailey, M. A., & Maltzman, F. (2008). Does legal doctrine matter? Unpacking law and policy preferences on the US Supreme Court. *American Political Science Review*, 369-384.
- Barrows, S., Henderson, M., Peterson, P. E., & West, M. R. (2016). Relative performance information and perceptions of public service quality: Evidence from American school districts. *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, 26(3), 571-583.
- Betz, H. G. (2002). Conditions favoring the success and failure of radical right-wing populist parties in contemporary democracies, in Y. Mény and Y. Surel (eds), *Democracies and the populist challenge*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 197–213.
- Bonica, A. (2014). Mapping the ideological marketplace. *American Journal of Political Science*, 58(2), 367-386.
- Bonica, A., & Sen, M. (2020). *The Judicial Tug of War: How Lawyers, Politicians, and Ideological Incentives Shape the American Judiciary*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Burke, E. (1774). Speech to the electors of Bristol, on his being declared by the sheriffs duly elected one of *the representatives in Parliament for that city, on Thursday, the 3d of November, 1774*. In *The Project Gutenberg E-Book. The Works of the Right Honourable*

*Edmund Burke vol. 2 (of 12)*. Retrieved from:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/15198/15198-h/15198-h.htm>

- Canovan, M. (2002). Taking politics to the people: Populism as the ideology of democracy. In Y. Mény and Y. Surel (eds). *Democracies and the populist challenge* (pp. 25-44). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, London.
- Carmines, E. G., Ensley, M. J., & Wagner, M. W. (2011). Issue preferences, civic engagement, and the transformation of American politics. In P. M. Sniderman & B. Highton (Eds.), *Facing the challenge of democracy: Explorations in the analysis of public opinion and political participation* (pp. 329-354). Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Carmines, E. G., Ensley, M. J., & Wagner, M. W. (2016, December). Ideological heterogeneity and the rise of Donald Trump. In *The Forum* (Vol. 14, No. 4, pp. 385-397). De Gruyter.
- Carmines, E. G., Ensley, M. J., & Wagner, M. W. (2018). The role of populists in the 2016 U.S. presidential election and beyond. In J. C. Green, D. J. Coffey, & D. B. Cohen (Eds.), *The state of the parties 2018: The changing role of contemporary American political parties* (pp. 198–209). Rowman & Littlefield.
- Castanho Silva, B., Andreadis, I., Anduiza, E., Blanuša, N., Corti, Y. M., Delfino, G., Rico, G., et al. (2018). Public opinion surveys: A new scale. In Kirk Hawkins, Ryan Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser (eds). *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Theory, Method & Analysis*, 150-178. London: Routledge.
- Castanho Silva, B., Jungkunz, S., Helbling, M., & Littvay, L. (2019). An empirical comparison of seven populist attitudes scales. *Political Research Quarterly*.doi:10.1177/1065912919833176

- Chingos, M. M., Henderson, M., & West, M. R. (2012). Citizen perceptions of government service quality: Evidence from public schools. *Quarterly Journal of Political Science*, 7(4), 411–445.
- Claggett, W.J. M., & Shafer, B. E. (2010). *The American public mind*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Conover, P. J., & Feldman, S. (1981). The origins and meaning of liberal/conservative self-identifications. *American Journal of Political Science*, 617-645.
- Converse, P. E. (1964). The nature of belief systems in mass publics. In D. E. Apter (Ed.), *Ideology and discontent*. New York, NY: Free Press of Glencoe.
- Dovi, S. (2015). Hanna Pitkin, the concept of representation. In: Jacob T. Levy (ed) *The Oxford Handbook of Classics in Contemporary Political Theory*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 1–14.
- Duverger, M. (1980). A new political system model: Semi-presidential government. *European Journal of Political Research*, 8(2), 165–87.
- Elchardus, M. & Spruyt, B. (2016). Populism, persistent republicanism and declinism: An empirical analysis of populism as a thin ideology. *Government and Opposition: An International Journal of Comparative Politics* 51(1), 111–133.
- Ellis, C., & Stimson, J. A. (2012). *Ideology in America*. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Freeden, M. (1998). Is nationalism a distinct ideology? *Political Studies*, 46(4), 748–765.
- Gillespie, J. D. (2012). *Challengers to duopoly: Why third parties matter in American two-party politics*. Univ of South Carolina Press.

- Hawkins, K. A. (2009). Is Chávez populist? Measuring populist discourse in comparative perspective. *Comparative Political Studies* 42(8): 1040–1067.
- Hawkins, K. A., Kaltwasser, C. R., & Andreadis, I. (2020). The activation of populist attitudes. *Government and Opposition*, 55(2), 283-307.
- Hawkins, K. A., Riding, S., & Mudde, C. (2012). Measuring populist attitudes. *Political Concepts Committee on Concepts and Methods Working Paper Series*, 55, 1-35.
- Hobolt, S., Anduiza, E., Carkoglu, A., Lutz, G., & Sauger, N. (2016). Democracy Divided? People, Politicians and the Politics of Populism. CSES Planning Committee Final Report. Retrieved from: [https://cses.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CSES5\\_ContentSubcommittee\\_FinalReport.pdf](https://cses.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/CSES5_ContentSubcommittee_FinalReport.pdf)
- Houston, D.M. (2021, in press). Polarization and the politics of education: What moves partisan opinion? *Educational Policy*.
- Howell, W. G. & Moe, T. M. (2020). *Presidents, populism, and the crisis of democracy*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Klar, S. (2014). A multidimensional study of ideological preferences and priorities among the American public. *Public Opinion Quarterly*, 78(S1), 344-359.
- Jagers, J. & Walgrave, S. (2007). Populism as political communication style: An empirical study of political parties' discourse in Belgium. *European Journal of Political Research* 46(3), 319–345.
- Maddox, W. S. & Lilie, S. A. (1984). *Beyond liberal and conservative: Reassessing the political spectrum*. Washington, DC: Cato Institute.
- McCarty, N., Poole, K. T., & Rosenthal, H. (2006). *Polarized America: The dance of ideology and unequal riches*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.



- Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition* 39 (4): 542–563.
- Mullins, W. A. (1972). On the concept of ideology in political science. *American Political Science Review*, 66(2), 498-510.
- Oliver, J. E., & Rahn, W. M. (2016). Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 667(1), 189-206.
- Pitkin, H. F. (1967). *The concept of representation*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- Poole, K. T., & Rosenthal, H. (1997). *Congress: A political-economic history of roll call voting*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.
- Reardon, S. F., Ho, A. D., Shear, B. R., Fahle, E. M., Kalogrides, D., Jang, H., & Chavez, B. (2021). Stanford Education Data Archive (Version 4.0). Retrieved from <http://purl.stanford.edu/db586ns4974>.
- Rehfeld, A. (2009). Representation rethought: On trustees, delegates and gyroscopes in the study of political representation and democracy. *American Political Science Review*, 103, 214-230.
- Robinson, J., & Holm, J. (1980). Ideological voting is alive and well. *Public opinion*, 3, 52-58.
- Rooduijn, M. & Pauwels, T. (2011). Measuring populism: Comparing two methods of content analysis. *West European Politics* 34(6), 1272–1283.
- Rooduijn, M. (2014). The mesmerising message: The diffusion of populism in public debates in Western European media. *Political Studies* 62(4), 726–744.
- Schulz, A., Müller, P., Schemer, C., Wirz, D. S., Wettstein, M., & Wirth, W. (2018). Measuring populist attitudes on three dimensions. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 30(2), 316–326.

- Shafer, B. E., & Claggett, W. J. M. (1995). *The two majorities: The issue context of modern American politics*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press.
- Shakeel, M. D., & Henderson, M. (2019). Fertile soil? How information does (and does not) shape attitudes toward school choice in rural America. *Journal of School Choice*, *13*(4), 467-508.
- Stanley, B. (2011). Populism, nationalism, or national populism? An analysis of Slovak voting behaviour at the 2010 parliamentary election. *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, *44*(4), 257-270.
- Van Hauwaert, S. M., Schimpf, C. H., & Azevedo, F. (2019). The measurement of populist attitudes: Testing cross-national scales using item response theory. *Politics*, 026339571985930. doi:10.1177/0263395719859306
- Weyland, K. (1996). Neopopulism and neoliberalism in Latin America: Unexpected affinities. *Studies in Comparative International Development*, *31*(3), 3-31.
- Weyland, K. (2001). Clarifying a contested concept: Populism in the study of Latin American politics. *Comparative Politics* *34*(1), 1-22.
- Zaller, J. (1992). *The nature and origins of mass opinion*. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press.

Table 1: Correlations between the six populism questions, eigen values and their distribution in 2020 Education Next survey.

<b>Correlations</b>							
	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Eigen values
Q1	1						2.66
Q2	0.41	1					0.83
Q3	0.26	0.39	1				0.76
Q4	0.29	0.35	0.36	1			0.63
Q5	0.28	0.35	0.38	0.39	1		0.57
Q6	0.26	0.27	0.25	0.33	0.39	1	0.55
<b>Percentage of responses for each outcome category</b>							
Strongly agree	40	27	23	27	47	43	
Somewhat agree	37	37	32	38	36	34	
Neither agree nor disagree	10	13	18	18	10	12	
Somewhat disagree	10	17	19	14	6	8	
Strongly disagree	3	6	8	3	1	4	
<b>Survey questions</b>							
Q1	Elected officials should always follow the will of the people.						
Q2	The people, not the elected officials, should make our most important policy decisions.						
Q3	I would rather be represented by an ordinary citizen than by an experienced elected official.						
Q4	The political differences between the people and the elected officials are larger than the differences among the people.						
Q5	Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.						
Q6	Elected officials always end up agreeing when it comes to protecting their privileges.						

Notes: Table displays correlations between the six populism questions (Cronbach's alpha=0.75). The rightmost column displays the eigen values on the six principal components. The first principal component explains 44% of variance. Table also displays the percentage of responses for each outcome category for the six populism questions. Estimates used survey weights.

Table 2: Seven-item self-identified conservative-liberal scale.

Conservatism	Percent
Extremely liberal	4.25
Liberal	15.5
Slightly liberal	8.91
Moderate, middle of the road	35.21
Slightly conservative	11.63
Conservative	20.05
Extremely conservative	4.44

Notes: Table displays summary statistics in percentages. Estimates used survey weights.

Table 3: Social correlates of populism and summary statistics.

	(1)		(2)		(3)		(4)	
	Simple correlations				Regression		Unstandard.	
Variables	Populism	s.e.	Conserv.	s.e.	Populism	s.e.	Mean	SD
Populism*			0.152**	(0.015)			0.02	1.65
Conservatism*	0.148**	(0.015)			0.081**	(0.021)	4.12	1.55
Republicanism*	0.123**	(0.015)	0.651**	(0.012)	0.046*	(0.021)	3.76	2.12
Pol. Participation*	-0.078**	(0.015)	-0.092**	(0.015)	-0.052**	(0.016)	1.60	0.89
Rel. participation*	0.047**	(0.015)	0.283**	(0.014)	-0.006	(0.018)	2.42	1.42
Born again	0.038**	(0.007)	0.121**	(0.007)	0.089*	(0.038)	34	0.47
Age (18-29)	-0.018**	(0.006)	-0.055**	(0.006)			20	0.40
(30-44)	-0.039**	(0.007)	-0.020**	(0.007)	-0.048	(0.050)	25	0.43
(45-59)	0.009	(0.007)	0.035**	(0.007)	0.103*	(0.049)	25	0.43
(>60)	0.048**	(0.007)	0.040**	(0.007)	0.214**	(0.048)	30	0.46
Male	0.028**	(0.008)	0.027**	(0.008)	0.135**	(0.031)	48	0.50
Female	-0.028**	(0.008)	-0.027**	(0.008)			52	0.50
Edu. (< high school)	-0.011*	(0.005)	-0.002	(0.005)			10	0.30
(High School)	0.039**	(0.007)	0.041**	(0.007)	0.283**	(0.058)	28	0.45
(Some college)	0.032**	(0.007)	0.022**	(0.007)	0.297**	(0.060)	28	0.45
(>=Bachelor)	-0.060**	(0.007)	-0.061**	(0.007)	0.098	(0.064)	33	0.47
House. Inc. (<25k)	0.001	(0.005)	0.005	(0.005)	0.130*	(0.062)	13	0.34
(25k-50k)	0.018**	(0.006)	0.018**	(0.006)	0.178**	(0.052)	18	0.39
(50k-75k)	0.024**	(0.006)	-0.005	(0.006)	0.211**	(0.051)	17	0.38
(75k-125k)	-0.007	(0.006)	0.001	(0.007)	0.067	(0.044)	24	0.43
(>125k)	-0.035**	(0.007)	-0.018**	(0.007)			27	0.44
White	0.003	(0.007)	0.084**	(0.007)			63	0.48
Black	-0.008	(0.005)	-0.036**	(0.005)	0.028	(0.054)	12	0.33
Hispanic	0.015**	(0.006)	-0.031**	(0.006)	0.192**	(0.047)	17	0.37
Other race	-0.010*	(0.004)	-0.016**	(0.004)	0.021	(0.060)	8	0.27
Household size*	-0.076**	(0.024)	0.044	(0.024)	-0.020	(0.012)	2.81	1.57
Homeowner	0.015*	(0.007)	0.053**	(0.007)	0.019	(0.040)	73	0.44
Northeast	-0.008	(0.006)	-0.025**	(0.006)	-0.002	(0.049)	17	0.38
Midwest	0.004	(0.006)	-0.001	(0.006)	0.038	(0.048)	21	0.40
South	0.012	(0.007)	0.031**	(0.007)	0.007	(0.042)	38	0.49
West	-0.008	(0.006)	-0.005	(0.007)			24	0.43
Parent	-0.022**	(0.006)	0.019**	(0.006)	0.026	(0.047)	22	0.41
Teacher	-0.004	(0.003)	-0.002	(0.003)	0.018	(0.094)	3	0.17
Urban	-0.033**	(0.007)	-0.058**	(0.007)			32	0.47
Suburban	0.015*	(0.008)	-0.009	(0.008)	0.122**	(0.037)	44	0.50
Town	0.003	(0.005)	0.031**	(0.005)	-0.008	(0.058)	10	0.30
Rural	0.015**	(0.005)	0.037**	(0.005)	0.114*	(0.051)	14	0.35
Constant					-0.546**	(0.100)		
Adjusted R-squared					0.067			

Notes: Models 1 and 2 separately carry out regressions for each individual variable on populism/conservatism, so the coefficients provide the simple correlation between the two variables. Model 3 represents regressions of all variables on populism. Model 4 displays unstandardized mean and standard deviation (SD) for all variables. Populism variable has been constructed from the first principal component of the six populism questions in Table 1. Variables marked with an asterisk \* (Populism, conservatism, republicanism, political participation, and religious participation) have been standardized in models 1-3. Conservatism is coded as strongly liberal=1 to strongly conservative=7. Republicanism is coded as strongly Democrat=1 to strongly republican=7. Political participation is coded as never=1 to often=5. Religious participation is coded as 1=never to 5=more than once a week. Household size ranges between 1 and 10. Information on locale has been derived from NCES. Estimates used survey weights. N = 4,291. Standard errors (s.e.) in parentheses \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05.

Table 4: Position-taking and voting behavior.

Outcome	Populism	s.e.	Conservatism	s.e.	Sig. test
Charter schools	0.046**	(0.008)	-0.012	(0.010)	12.24**
Tax credit scholarships	0.039**	(0.008)	0.001	(0.009)	7.67**
Low-income vouchers	0.034**	(0.008)	-0.002	(0.008)	6.12*
Universal vouchers	0.022**	(0.007)	0.005	(0.008)	1.38
Homeschooling	0.032**	(0.006)	-0.006	(0.006)	14.58**
Homeschoolers need to notify district	0.029**	(0.008)	-0.015	(0.009)	8.80**
Homeschoolers need district approval	0.029**	(0.008)	-0.001	(0.009)	4.22*
Same state standards	0.010	(0.010)	0.034**	(0.011)	1.66
Common Core	0.034**	(0.010)	0.002	(0.011)	3.04
In-state tuition for undoc. immigrants	0.064**	(0.007)	0.002	(0.008)	24.28**
Merit pay	0.045**	(0.012)	-0.021	(0.012)	13.54**
Teacher unions	0.047**	(0.007)	-0.016*	(0.007)	29.40**
Increase in public school spending	0.028**	(0.011)	-0.096**	(0.011)	50.23**
Increase in teacher salaries	0.030**	(0.010)	-0.088**	(0.011)	46.52**
Free college tuition	0.037**	(0.007)	-0.017*	(0.007)	19.75**
Voted in local school board elections	0.028**	(0.008)	-0.021*	(0.009)	11.29**

Notes: Coefficients in column two (except in the last row) show correlation between populism and taking a non-neutral position on the issue. Column four displays the same results for self-identified conservatism. Coefficients in the last row show respondents' likelihood to say that they voted in local school board elections. Results are from OLS regressions. Estimates control for covariates listed in table 2 (republicanism and political participation are excluded because of potential endogeneity with populism). Estimates include survey weights. A Chi-square test presents the significant difference between estimates for populism and conservatism. Standard errors in parentheses \*\* p<0.01, \* p<0.05. For this table, the position-taking outcome categories were recoded as 1= a positive or negative policy position and 0= neutral. Vote in local school board elections is dichotomous.

Table 5: Assessment of institutions.

Outcome	Estimation	Populism	Conservatism	Sig. test
National schools (n=4,152)	Separate	-0.095** (0.015)	-0.012 (0.017)	8.95**
	Joint	-0.092** (0.015)	-0.002 (0.017)	14.19**
National public colleges/universities (n=2,084)	Separate	-0.136** (0.022)	-0.081** (0.024)	2.08
	Joint	-0.131** (0.023)	-0.063** (0.024)	3.79
Local schools (n=4,153)	Separate	-0.074** (0.015)	-0.094** (0.017)	0.48
	Joint	-0.065** (0.015)	-0.086** (0.017)	0.77
(control: SEDA achievement growth)	Separate	-0.095** (0.017)	-0.095** (0.019)	0.00
(control: SEDA achievement levels)	Separate	-0.090** (0.017)	-0.090** (0.019)	0.00
State public colleges/universities (n=2,079)	Separate	-0.137** (0.023)	-0.137** (0.024)	0.00
	Joint	-0.125** (0.023)	-0.120** (0.025)	0.02
National private colleges/universities (n=2,065)	Separate	-0.032 (0.022)	-0.086** (0.025)	1.60
	Joint	-0.027 (0.022)	-0.082** (0.025)	2.53
State private colleges/universities (n=2,065)	Separate	-0.008 (0.022)	-0.081** (0.025)	2.74
	Joint	-0.003 (0.022)	-0.080** (0.025)	4.98*
Same state standards (n=1,339)	Separate	0.089** (0.027)	0.065* (0.029)	0.24
	Joint	0.085** (0.027)	0.055 (0.029)	0.50
Common Core (n=1,427)	Separate	-0.046 (0.026)	-0.114** (0.028)	2.32
	Joint	-0.035 (0.026)	-0.108** (0.028)	3.34

Notes: See table 3.



Table 6: Opinion on school choice.

Outcome	Estimation	Populism	Conservatism	Sig. test
Charter schools (n=2,089)	Separate	0.080** (0.021)	0.193** (0.023)	8.71**
	Joint	0.063** (0.021)	0.186** (0.023)	14.39**
Tax credit scholarships (n=2,085)	Separate	0.108** (0.021)	0.081** (0.023)	0.50
	Joint	0.100** (0.021)	0.068** (0.023)	0.93
Low-income vouchers (n=2,079)	Separate	0.057** (0.021)	-0.028 (0.023)	5.17*
	Joint	0.058** (0.021)	-0.035 (0.023)	8.15**
Universal vouchers (n=2,086)	Separate	0.095** (0.020)	0.177** (0.022)	5.98*
	Joint	0.082** (0.020)	0.168** (0.022)	7.67**
Homeschooling (n=4,167)	Separate	0.096** (0.015)	0.128** (0.016)	1.38
	Joint	0.084** (0.015)	0.119** (0.016)	2.18
Homeschoolers need to notify district (n=2,035)	Separate	0.045* (0.022)	-0.121** (0.024)	18.26**
	Joint	0.056* (0.022)	-0.131** (0.024)	28.05**
Homeschoolers need district approval (n=2,130)	Separate	-0.016 (0.021)	-0.210** (0.023)	25.35**
	Joint	-0.010 (0.021)	-0.210** (0.023)	40.05**

Notes: See table 3.

Table 7: Opinion on educational expenditure and conventional left-right issues.

Outcome	Estimation	Populism	Conservatism	Sig. test
Increase public spending (n=2,040)	Separate	0.011 (0.021)	-0.329** (0.022)	89.77**
	Joint	0.049* (0.021)	-0.336** (0.022)	145.56**
Increase teacher salaries (n=2,087)	Separate	0.041 (0.022)	-0.301** (0.023)	74.36**
	Joint	0.070** (0.021)	-0.309** (0.023)	135.49**
Free college tuition (n=2,036)	Separate	0.052* (0.021)	-0.393** (0.021)	169.01**
	Joint	0.093** (0.019)	-0.404** (0.021)	273.50**
Overestimate public spending (n=3,943)	Separate	0.022 (0.016)	0.025 (0.017)	0.01
	Joint	0.021 (0.016)	0.022 (0.017)	0.00
Overestimate teacher salaries (n=4,035)	Separate	0.053** (0.015)	0.030 (0.016)	0.67
	Joint	0.049** (0.015)	0.023 (0.016)	1.26
In-state tuition for undoc. immigrants (n=2,106)	Separate	-0.092** (0.021)	-0.445** (0.020)	95.9**
	Joint	-0.055** (0.019)	-0.440** (0.020)	173.9**
Merit pay (n=1,028)	Separate	0.043 (0.032)	0.156** (0.033)	4.38*
	Joint	0.026 (0.032)	0.155** (0.033)	6.96**
Teacher unions (n=4,157)	Separate	-0.096** (0.015)	-0.406** (0.015)	146.11**
	Joint	-0.060** (0.014)	-0.400** (0.015)	252.02**

Notes: See table 3.

Table 8: Information impacts.

Outcome	Info	Populism	Conservatism	Info* populism	Info* conservatism
Increase in public school spending (n=4,165)	-0.306** (0.030)	-0.000 (0.022)		0.061* (0.029)	
	-0.307** (0.029)		-0.358** (0.021)		0.128** (0.028)
Increase in teacher salaries (n=4,171)	-0.265** (0.030)	0.040 (0.021)		0.002 (0.030)	
	-0.286** (0.029)		-0.323** (0.022)		0.047 (0.029)
Free college tuition (n=4,194)	0.067* (0.028)	0.053** (0.020)		-0.074** (0.028)	
	0.041 (0.026)		-0.385** (0.020)		-0.038 (0.026)

Notes: See table 3. Table displays the interaction effects between populism/conservatism and the dummy variable for the provision of financial information. Base category is without information.

Table 9: Trump influence.

Outcome	Type of info	Info	Populism	Conservatism	Info* populism	Info* conservatism
Common Core (n=2,823)	Trump's opposition	-0.095** (0.036)	-0.037 (0.025)		0.006 (0.036)	
		-0.098** (0.036)		-0.112** (0.026)		-0.142** (0.036)
In-state tuition for undoc. immigrants (n=4,188)		-0.008 (0.029)	-0.089** (0.021)		0.016 (0.028)	
		-0.024 (0.027)		-0.433** (0.019)		0.037 (0.026)
Tax credit scholarships (n=4,183)	Trump's support	-0.035 (0.029)	0.091** (0.021)		0.020 (0.029)	
		-0.048 (0.029)		0.078** (0.022)		0.154** (0.029)
Charter (n=4,181)		0.028 (0.029)	0.071** (0.020)		0.021 (0.029)	
		0.019 (0.028)		0.178** (0.021)		0.176** (0.028)
Merit pay (n=4,190)		0.056** (0.013)	0.061 (0.031)		0.064 (0.042)	
		0.061** (0.013)		0.164** (0.030)		0.222** (0.041)
2016 vote cast for Trump (n=4,200)	None		0.001 (0.004)			
				0.011** (0.004)		

Notes: See table 3. Table displays the interaction effects between populism/conservatism and the dummy variable for the provision of political information. Base category is without information. 2016 vote cast for Trump (dichotomous vote of the county) is regressed on the covariates with county fixed effects.

Table 10: Conservative, moderate, and liberal populists.

Outcome	Conservative	s.e.	Moderate	s.e.	Liberal	s.e.
National schools	-0.092**	(0.026)	-0.093**	(0.027)	-0.096**	(0.027)
National public colleges/universities	-0.146**	(0.041)	-0.059	(0.041)	-0.120**	(0.037)
Local schools	-0.054*	(0.027)	-0.075**	(0.026)	-0.072**	(0.027)
State public colleges/universities	-0.111**	(0.042)	-0.055	(0.041)	-0.113**	(0.037)
National private colleges/universities	-0.047	(0.039)	0.038	(0.036)	-0.089*	(0.042)
State private colleges/universities	-0.034	(0.039)	0.084*	(0.036)	-0.101*	(0.041)
Same state standards	0.103*	(0.047)	0.117**	(0.045)	-0.002	(0.049)
Common Core	-0.018	(0.048)	-0.029	(0.042)	-0.044	(0.044)
Charter schools	0.111**	(0.037)	0.045	(0.032)	0.024	(0.039)
Tax credit scholarships	0.106**	(0.038)	0.063	(0.035)	0.118**	(0.039)
Low-income vouchers	0.046	(0.037)	0.027	(0.033)	0.105**	(0.038)
Universal vouchers	0.040	(0.036)	0.014	(0.033)	0.152**	(0.035)
Homeschooling	0.081**	(0.026)	0.051*	(0.025)	0.100**	(0.026)
Homeschoolers need to notify district	0.120**	(0.039)	0.079*	(0.038)	0.011	(0.038)
Homeschoolers need district approval	0.049	(0.041)	-0.018	(0.034)	-0.046	(0.036)
Increase in public school spending	-0.042	(0.038)	0.087**	(0.034)	0.072*	(0.036)
Increase in teacher salaries	0.016	(0.035)	0.166**	(0.036)	0.049	(0.039)
Free college tuition	-0.025	(0.034)	0.164**	(0.032)	0.159**	(0.031)
In-state tuition for undocumented immigrants	-0.028	(0.032)	-0.040	(0.036)	-0.028	(0.031)
Merit pay	0.079	(0.050)	-0.104	(0.055)	0.101	(0.064)
Teacher unions	-0.126**	(0.024)	0.003	(0.023)	0.010	(0.024)

Notes: See table 3.

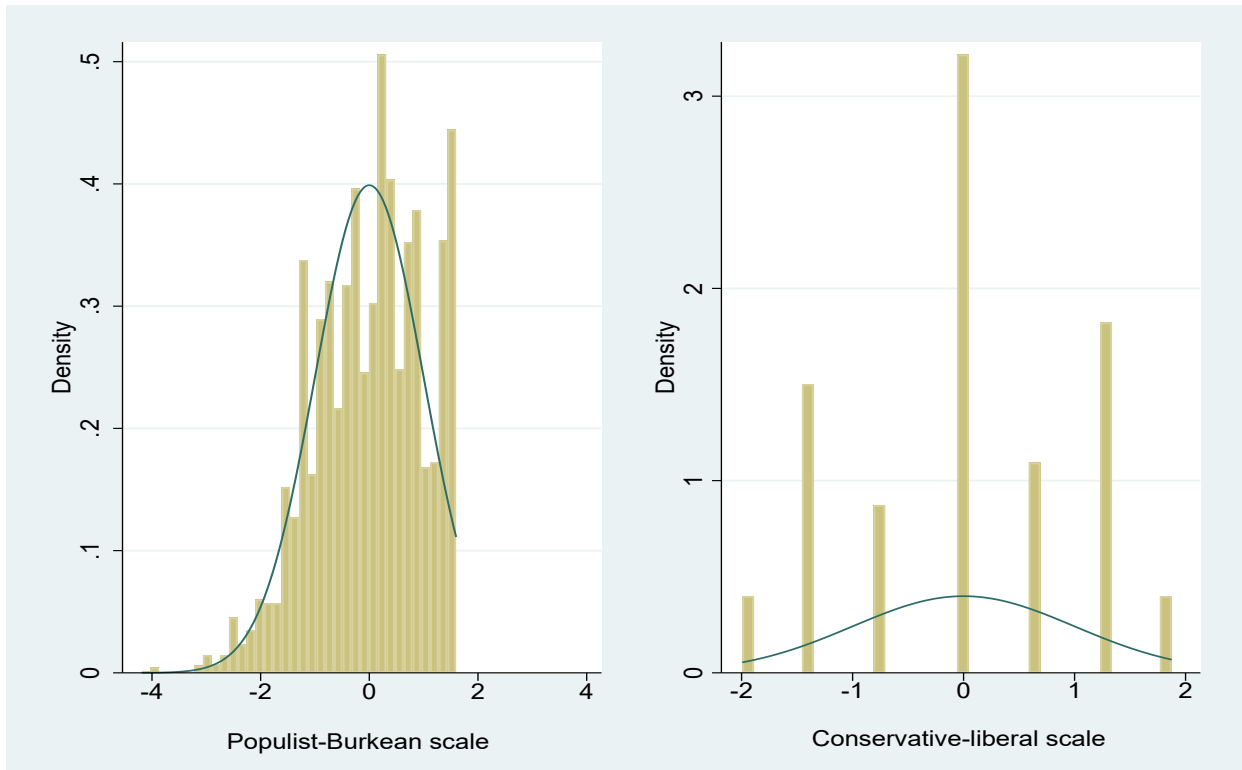


Figure 1. Distribution of standardized Populist-Burkean scale and Conservative-liberal scale.

Notes: Each graph also displays the line for normal distribution. The range for these scales is (-4.19, 1.60) and (-1.99, 1.88).

## Appendix A:

### Part I: Origins of populist questions

Table A.1: Original wording of six populism questions as appeared in Van Hauwaert, Schimpf & Azevedo (2019).

Question wording	Correspondence in Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014)	Correspondence in Van Hauwaert, Schimpf & Azevedo (2019)
Q1 The politicians in Congress need to follow the will of the people.	POP1	populism_1
Q2 The people, not the politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.	POP2	populism_2
Q3 I would rather be represented by an ordinary citizen than an experienced politician.	POP4	populism_4
Q4 The political differences between the people and the elite are larger than the differences among the people	POP3	populism_3
Q5 Politicians (elected officials) talk too much and take too little action.	POP5	populism_5
Q6 Politicians always end up agreeing when it comes to protecting their privileges.		populism_8

Note: Table displays original wording of six populism questions as appeared in Van Hauwaert, Schimpf & Azevedo (2019). Q1-Q5 had slightly different wording in the original source Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014). The two rightmost columns display the corresponding question number in each source.

## Part II: Survey questions

Note: Alphabet versions of the questions were randomly assigned.

### **Voted in local school board elections**

Outcomes (1=Voted, 2=Did not vote, 3=Ineligible, 4= Don't know, can't remember)

**Q32** Many school board elections are held at a time different from other elections, and very little information is easily available about the candidates in most school board elections. As a result, only a small fraction of the American public tends to vote in these elections. Do you remember for sure whether you voted in the last school board election?

### **Evaluation of institutions**

Outcomes (1=A, 2=B, 3=C, 4=D, 5=Fail)

#### ***Local schools***

**Q1** Students are often given the grades A, B, C, and D, and Fail to denote the quality of their work. Suppose the public schools themselves were graded in the same way. What grade would you give the public schools in your community?

#### ***National schools***

**Q2** How about the public schools in the nation as a whole? What grade would you give them?

#### ***National public and private colleges/universities***

**Q33A** What grade would you give the ***public*** four-year colleges and universities in your state?

**Q33B** What grade would you give the ***private*** four-year colleges and universities in your state?

#### ***State public and private colleges/universities***

**Q34A** What grade would you give the ***public*** four-year colleges and universities in the nation as a whole?

**Q34B** What grade would you give the ***private*** four-year colleges and universities in the nation as a whole?



## **Same state standards and Common Core**

Outcomes (1=Strongly support, 2=Somewhat support, 3=Somewhat oppose, 4=Strongly oppose, 5= Neither support nor oppose)

**Q9A** As you may know, in the last few years states have been deciding whether or not to use the Common Core, which are standards for reading and math that are the same across the states. In the states that have these standards, they will be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance. Do you support or oppose the use of the Common Core standards in your state?

**Q9B** As you may know, in the last few years states have been deciding whether or not to use standards for reading and math that are the same across the states. In the states that have these standards, they will be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance. Do you support or oppose the use of these standards in your state?

**Q9C** As you may know, in the last few years states have been deciding whether or not to use the Common Core, which are standards for reading and math that are the same across the states. In the states that have these standards, they will be used to hold public schools accountable for their performance. President Donald Trump has expressed opposition to the Common Core. Do you support or oppose the use of the Common Core standards in your state?

## **In-state tuition for undocumented immigrants**

**Q36A** Do you support or oppose allowing undocumented immigrants to be eligible for the in-state college tuition rate if they graduate from a high school in your state?

**Q36B** President Donald Trump opposes the idea of allowing undocumented immigrants to be eligible for the in-state college tuition.

## **School choice**

### ***Tax credit scholarships***

**Q12A** A proposal has been made to offer a tax credit for individual and corporate donations that pay for scholarships to help low-income parents send their children to private schools. Would you support or oppose such a proposal?

**Q12B** A proposal has been made to offer a tax credit for individual and corporate donations that pay for scholarships to help low-income parents send their children to private schools. President Donald Trump has expressed support for this idea. Would you support or oppose such a proposal?

### *Vouchers*

**Q10A** A proposal has been made that would give all families with children in public schools a wider choice, by allowing them to enroll their children in private schools instead, with government helping to pay the tuition. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

**Q10B** A proposal has been made that would give low-income families with children in public schools a wider choice, by allowing them to enroll their children in private schools instead, with government helping to pay the tuition. Would you support or oppose this proposal?

### *Charter schools*

**Q11A** As you may know, many states permit the formation of charter schools, which are publicly funded but are not managed by the local school board. These schools are expected to meet promised objectives, but are exempt from many state regulations. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?

**Q11B** As you may know, many states permit the formation of charter schools, which are publicly funded but are not managed by the local school board. These schools are expected to meet promised objectives, but are exempt from many state regulations. President Donald Trump has expressed support for charter schools. Do you support or oppose the formation of charter schools?

### *Homeschooling*

**Q18** Do you support or oppose allowing parents to educate their children at home instead of sending them to school in ordinary circumstances when schools are open?

**Q19A** Do you support or oppose requiring parents to receive approval from their local school district if they want to homeschool their children in ordinary circumstances when schools are open?

**Q19B** Do you support or oppose requiring parents to notify their local school district if they want to homeschool their children in ordinary circumstances when schools are open?

### **Teacher merit pay**

Note: Q15D and 15E were randomly assigned within the fourth randomized subsample. We combined the two questions for our analysis.

**Q15A** Do you support or oppose basing part of the salaries of teachers on how much their students learn?

**Q15B** President Donald Trump has expressed support for the policy of basing teachers' salaries on how much their students learn. Do you support or oppose this policy?

**Q15C** Former President Barack Obama has expressed support for the policy of basing teachers' salaries on how much their students learn. Do you support or oppose this policy?

**Q15D** Both President Donald Trump and former President Barack Obama have expressed support for the policy of basing teachers' salaries on how much their students learn. Do you support or oppose this policy?

**Q15E** Both former President Barack Obama and President Donald Trump have expressed support for the policy of basing teachers' salaries on how much their students learn. Do you support or oppose this policy?

### **Teacher unions**

Outcomes (1=Strongly positive effect, 2= Somewhat positive effect, 3= Somewhat negative effect, 4= Strongly negative effect, 5= Neither positive nor negative effect)

Note: We combined the two questions Q20A and A20B for our analysis.

**Q20A** Some people say that teacher unions are a stumbling block to school reform. Others say that unions fight for better schools and better teachers. What do you think? Do you think teacher unions have a generally positive effect on schools, or do you think they have a generally negative effect?

**Q20B** Some people say that teacher unions fight for better schools and better teachers. Others say that unions are a stumbling block to school reform. What do you think? Do you think teacher unions have a generally positive effect on schools, or do you think they have a generally negative effect?

### **Public spending on education**

Outcomes (1= Greatly increase, 2= Increase, 3= Stay about the same, 4= Decrease, 5= Greatly decrease)

#### ***Increase in public school spending***

**Q13A** According to the most recent information available, \$[INSERT PPS] is being spent each year per child attending public schools in your district.

Do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

**Q13B** Do you think that government funding for public schools in your district should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

***Increase in teacher salaries***

**Q14A** Public school teachers in your state are paid an average annual salary of \$[INSERT PAY]. Do you think that public school teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

**Q14B** Do you think that public school teacher salaries should increase, decrease, or stay about the same?

***Free college tuition***

**Q35A** Do you support or oppose making all public four-year colleges in the United States free to attend?

**Q35B** According to the most recent information, about 50% of students attending public four-year colleges are from households with incomes above the national average.

Do you support or oppose making all public four-year colleges in the United States free to attend?

**Estimating public school spending**

Outcome (RANGE 0-99999)

**Q3** Based on your best guess, what is the average amount of money spent each year for a child in public schools in your local school district?

**Estimating public school teacher salary**

Outcome (RANGE 0-99999)

**Q4** Based on your best guess, what is the average yearly salary of a public school teacher in your state?