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# Concentration of power and Populism's Rise in America

evidence from recent US elections

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**Abstract** What explains the recent rise of undesirable populist mobilization in US politics? In this paper, I examine the hypothesis that the rise of undesirable populist politics is related to the increased concentration of power on the US president. After presenting the main theoretical arguments, I use Cooperative Congressional Election Study (CCES) survey data from the 2008, 2012 and 2016 elections to explore whether perceived power structure can explain the rise of populism. I find that more concentrated power is indeed linked to clusters of undesirable populist mobilization. That is, concentrated power is associated with political mobilization based on constructed cleavages (e.g. identity such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, shared history, region, social symbols or language) rather than structural cleavages (e.g. class, economic goods, education, rights or security distinctions). The most significant policy implication of the paper is the insight that efforts to ameliorate populist politics, if accompanied by more concentration of political power, will be counterproductive.

**Keywords** Collective Decision-Making · Asymmetric Information · Rational Choice · Concentration of Power · Populism · American politics · Political efficacy · Nationalization of Elections

**JEL Classification:** D7 and D82 · H7 · H13 · P16

## 1 Introduction

While populist mobilization has become an area of intense public concern, there is little consensus on whether populism is a tendency to be expected in the normal working of market democracies<sup>1</sup> or a corruption of it<sup>2</sup>. Consequently, there is wide disagreement on what should or can be done about it.

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<sup>1</sup> See Posner (2004); Miguel (2004); Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013); Rickford (2016); Shrivastava and Ivanova (2015); Mishel and Bivens (2011).

<sup>2</sup> See Oliver and Rahn (2016); Judis (2016); Jardina and Traugott (2019); Langman and Lundskow (2012); Weisberg (2015).

In addition, while scholars have identified many triggers of populist mobilization<sup>3</sup> the studies have tended to assume, erroneously, that the trigger and the societal cleavage exploited by the populist movement occur on a straightforward single-axis framework. In seeking to measure the role of populist mobilization in shaping voting behavior, these studies have too often glossed over numerous gaps, paradoxes and contradictions.

Although the unexpected election of Donald Trump provided the main catalyst for the renewed academic interest in populist mobilization, Trump is the culmination of a worrying trend that became apparent after the election of President Barack Obama (Oliver and Rahn, 2016; Sides et al., 2017). Before the current upsurge, undesirable populist mobilization was often thought to be a tropical disease plaguing poor sub-Saharan African countries (see for example Easterly and Levine, 1997). Undesirable populist politics was therefore the preserve of specialist political scientists who focused on pathologies of inchoate liberal democracies. Populist mobilization has retained this stigma as a symptom of “backwardness” (Di Tella, 1997) requiring a sociological (Deutsch, 1961; Canovan, 1999) rather than a rational-scientific explanation.

For example, Berlet (2011) relied on social movement theory to argue that the emergence of the Tea Party movement after the election of President Barack Obama was the result of “increasing anxieties, fears, and anger in a predominantly White middle class and working class constituency” who resorted to “the scapegoating of liberals, people of color, immigrants, and other targets” to promote their agenda (see also Bradberry and Jacobson, 2015). This framing recurs in other depictions of populism such as the “birther movement” (Jardina and Traugott, 2019) where misinformation and conspiratorial beliefs are important.

However, by the end of 2011, the Occupy Wall Street (OWS) movement was eclipsing the Tea Party movement in media coverage (Shrivastava and Ivanova, 2015; Mishel and Bivens, 2011). If the Tea Party’s “very dark undertones” fueled by a “rabid anger and aggression toward Obama” (Langman and Lundskow, 2012, p. 589) provided an imagery of populist threat to liberal democracy, the OWS was its inverse. Often depicted as a spontaneous grassroots—the loose-knit coalition of activists was more “moment than movement” (Calhoun, 2013)—challenge to corporate excesses in a struggle between stakeholders and shareholders (Shrivastava and Ivanova, 2015), the OWS represented the depth of liberal democracy at work. Along with the Black Lives Matter (BLM) movement—the heroic struggle against racialized police misconduct—the OWS has come to represent the modern human rights struggle. Its key features, or departure from the old social movement theory, being its youthfulness, radical militancy, social media prominence, inclusiveness, globalization and a populism that repudiates materialism, respectability and electoral politics (Rickford, 2016; Tillery, 2019).

The divergence in the normative implications of these two contrasting views on populist mobilization provide the context for the discussion in this paper. My

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<sup>3</sup> For example, (1) identity crises (Sides et al., 2017; Allen et al., 1989; Mcveigh and Maria-Elena, 2009); (2) socioeconomic grievances, discontentment and inequality between culturally defined groups (Dawson, 1994; White, 2007; Cederman et al., 2011; Houle, 2015; Houle et al., 2019; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Mishel and Bivens, 2011; Bobo and Gilliam, 1990); (3) racial backlash (Scala et al., 2015; Gimpel et al., 2004; Knuckey, 2010; Valentino et al., 2011; Bradberry and Jacobson, 2015; Weisberg, 2015); and (4) gaps in political efficacy (Oliver and Rahn, 2016).

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approach to the debate follows the appeal in Langman and Lundskow (2012) that the main goal of scholarship should be to understand the underlying drivers of episodic emergence and disappearance of populist movements.

Can power structure explain the episodic emergence and disappearance of populist movements? I use CCES survey data from the 2008, 2012 and 2016 elections to examine this question.

The analysis presented is closely related to Dawson's (1994) linked fate theory where information plays the central role in explaining the apparent dominance of constructed cleavages (i.e. race interests) over structural cleavages (i.e. class interests) in African American political behavior. In Dawson information is defined as the awareness of actual or perceived intragroup and intergroup differences; the former increases the salience of race while the latter reduces it. In Dawson, therefore, the rationality that unites the identity group is procedural (what works) rather than optimal (what is best). Dawson, therefore, provides a convenient rational choice foundation for the hierarchical relationship between structural and constructed cleavages developed in this paper.

However, unlike Dawson (1994, p. 5, emphasis in the original) for whom "African-American politics, including political behavior, is *different*", I apply the framework more generally to all socioeconomic and sociopolitical cleavages. Secondly, while Dawson examines intragroup and intergroup differences at the local community level, I focus on the national level. Finally, unlike Dawson I focus on the counter-intuitive finding that salience of race among African Americans has continued even as intragroup economic and ideological interests have diverged (see also Allen et al., 1989; Hochschild and Weaver, 2015).

Perhaps White, Laird, and Allen (2014) is closest to the central argument of this paper when they present the tradeoff between self-interest and group members common interests as an enforcement problem. The implication in White et al. is that race is dominant because "racialized social pressure and internalized beliefs in group solidarity" may be more effective at social monitoring, constraining and depressing self-interested behavior than structural class-based cleavages. In this perspective, the function of constructed cleavages is controlling the behavior and attitudes of members rather than non-members as suggested in prior research (see White, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Mcveigh and Maria-Elena, 2009).

The paper contributes to existing research in two ways. First, I theorize and empirically investigate an instrumental, or procedural, link between constructed cleavages and power structure. To the best of my knowledge, prior literature has not attempted to empirically link the rise of identity-based populist movements to changes to the power structure. Secondly, the analysis is among the first to examine constructed and structural cleavages within a normative dichotomous framework at the voter level.

The case presented in this paper has methodological limitations. The most serious being the crude proxy used to measure the perceived power structure. Consistent with prior research, I use straight-ticket voting (see Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). Consequently, straight-ticket voting explains the power structure (explanans) and is also explained by the power structure (explicandum). This problem is common to empirical analysis of instrumental variables, for example, between institutional quality and economic performance as noted in (Rodrik, 2007, p. 185). Despite the limitations, my results can provide suggestive evidence and tentative conclusions that are helpful for undertaking further research.

The rest of the paper is organized as follows. Section 2 and 3 reviews some of the most relevant literature for our question. Section 4 develops a simple model that illustrates the relationship between concentration of power and the rise of populism. Section 5 presents the empirical evidence. The last section concludes and indicates possibilities for further research.

## 2 Constructed and Structural Cleavages

Prior scholarship has assumed that a straightforward single-axis framework links the societal cleavage exploited by the populist movement and its professed goals. In these studies therefore populism is defined by its (i) distinctive manichean rhetorical style, partisanship, conflictual and antagonistic logic (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013); (ii) its collectivist language, conspiratorial thinking, lack of decorum, flaunting of established rules of engagement (Judis, 2016; Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Jardina and Traugott, 2019); (iii) repudiation of “established structures of power and the dominant ideas and values” (Canovan, 1999); instigation of “large masses of poorly organized people into action against the privileges of the better-off” (Di Tella, 1997); (iv) symbolic, or unrealistic, demands (Judis, 2016) often propelled by anxiety and anger (Langman and Lundskow, 2012; Berlet, 2011) and an appeal to popular emotions, prejudices and bigotry based on charisma rather than issues (Di Tella, 1997) alongside a “unique combination of anti-expertise, anti-elitism, and pronationalist sentiments” among its supporters (Oliver and Rahn, 2016).

However, these narrow definitions do not explain the gap between the populist movement’s professed goals—e.g. cutting taxes, dismantling big government and the welfare state (Bradberry and Jacobson, 2015) and its most salient unifying sentiment—e.g. the racially-based rabid disdain for Obama (Bradberry and Jacobson, 2015).

Understanding how this gap develops can help to explain the episodic emergence and disappearance of populist movements. I argue that the distinction between constructed and structural cleavages can help explain the gap between unifying sentiment in the populist movement and its professed goals. The comparison between constructed cleavages and structural cleavages is shown in table 1.

**Table 1** Constructed cleavages and Structural cleavages.

Constructed <sup>1</sup>	Structural <sup>2</sup>
Sticky, substantial inertia (Green and Palmquist, 1994) often life-long (Skarbek, 2014; Houle et al., 2019).	Less Sticky (Gilley, 2004; Posner, 2004).
Mutually exclusive and jointly exhaustive, exclusionary identity markers (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013; Robinson, 1983); categorical, discrete and unordered	Continuous, indiscrete, ordered, inclusionary (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2013);
Use identity markers to construct mental, socio-psychological or political-psychological facts. Image rather than issues (Tedesco and Dunn, 2019); myths and conspiracies (Jardina and Traugott, 2019) rather than evidence	Focused on socioeconomic material facts and issues-based (Tedesco and Dunn, 2019).
Politically instrumental means to an end. Cleavage (e.g. race) is intrinsic or embodied (i.e. inseparable) from the voter's physical identity.	End of itself (Gilley, 2004); Cleavage (e.g. income, party identification) is extrinsic or disembodied (i.e. separate) from the voter's physical identity (Polanyi, 1944, p. 46) but its functional value is intrinsic to the voting decision.
Costly defection in both resources and time	Defections not costly
Hard to conceal or misrepresent	Can be dissimulated, concealed or misrepresented
Easy and cheap to identify members accurately.	Identifying members accurately is hard and expensive.

<sup>1</sup> Examples include race, gender, shibboleths, ethnicity, religion, nationality, language, tattoos, scarification and circumcision.

<sup>2</sup> Examples include party identification or ideological identification, socioeconomic status.

Constructed cleavages are associated with fixed, or “sticky”, often nonnegotiable, embodied identity markers such as race, religion, gender, shared history, region, social symbols or language. Structural cleavages, by contrast, are less “sticky” extrinsic, disembodied identity markers such as economic goods, education, rights or security distinctions.

Polanyi (1944, p. 46) was among the first modern scholars to note a distinction in value priorities between structural and constructed cleavages. Polanyi associated constructed cleavages (embodied) with noneconomic motives—such as social standing, maintenance of social ties and so forth—which then drive the value of material goods (i.e. disembodied, structural cleavages). For Polanyi, the more important point was that the tendency toward constructed cleavages was stronger in the traditional tribal society where individual interest was secondary to community interest because the society was threatened collectively, not individually.

Since Polanyi, the desire to empirically explain the salience of the societal cleavage used in the political mobilization has taken four broad directions: 1) identity-based explanations, 2) sociological explanations, 3) rational-scientific/economic explanations, and 4) psychological/emotional explanations.

## 2.1 Identity-based explanations

The major theme of identity-based explanations has been to show that identity markers are a constructed (disembodied) phenomena. Sometimes referred

to as the ideational approach—i.e. a set of ideas—this literature has tended to strip constructed identity markers of their distinctive physical characteristics. The ideational approach allowed Posner (2004) to argue that the salience of ethnicity depended on the relative sizes of the cultural groups, proximity and competitiveness of elections and economic inequality. Posner therefore views cultural differences as socio-psychological or political-psychological ethnic consciousness constructed to increase political leverage (see also Eifert et al., 2010).

Embodied aspects of our makeup are also subordinated in Houle, Park, and Kenny (2019, emphasis added) who extended membership in ethnic grouping beyond strict genealogical facts to encompass “ethnolinguistic, racial, and ethnoreligious” *beliefs* in a shared ancestry. Belief systems (rather than facts) is also fundamental to the model of black group racial identity and consciousness in Allen, Dawson, and Brown (1989, p. 421) where the belief system is thought to “help process, constrain, and bias . . . interpretation of reality and influence social and political behavior.” For Allen et al. (1989, p. 421) therefore African-American belief systems connects constructed and structural cleavages because the belief system is structured by race and influenced by “socioeconomic status, individual religiosity, and black media.” In Kendi (2019, emphasis added) the racist, and antiracist, challenge is not about fixed identities (facts) but “what we *do* about race” (actions).

In Mudde and Kaltwasser (2013, p. 168) existing grievances explain the salience and intensity of the dominant identity dimension. Therefore, socioeconomic inequality determined the form of populism (inclusive) in Latin American while nationalistic xenophobia determined the form of populism (exclusive) in post-material Europe.

## 2.2 Sociological-based explanations.

The major theme of sociological-based explanations has been the tradeoff between self-interest and group members’ common interests (White et al., 2014; Allen et al., 1989; Hochschild and Weaver, 2015). Therefore sociological explanations involve competition between different value priorities and a dynamic criteria for political choice: self (often directly economic) verses group (often noneconomic motives drive the value of material goods).

In sociological explanations, construction of identity markers, identity groupings and identity categories involves intense competition and struggle over socially constructed morality and civil rights (Mcveigh and Maria-Elena, 2009). This fight over identity categories is a life-long socialization process where meaning is constructed and reconstructed with every social interaction or major event. When Mcveigh and Maria-Elena examined this process within the context of initiatives proposing to ban same-sex marriage between 2000 and 2008, they found wide variation across local contexts based on perceptions of threat to traditional gender roles and family structure.

For Deutsch (1961) the privileged identity dimension in social mobilization is related to the process of change, or modernization, and the stages of economic development as countries move from traditional to modern ways of life. Modernization privileges personal identity and interest over cultural or social identity.

Inglehart (1971, 1990) rejected Deutsch (1961) when he argued that economic affluence has led to a postmaterialistic criteria for political choice which privileges noneconomic sociocultural factors over economic factors. However, when Brown and Carmines (1995) reexamined this postmaterialists hypothesis, they found little support for it. Rather, their findings suggested that “noneconomic, postmaterial concerns exerted an effect even on those voters who placed their highest priority on economic security”.

### 2.3 Rational-scientific/economist explanations.

The major theme of rational-scientific/economist explanations has been the complex nature of social mobilization. For example, the realistic group conflict theory (RGCT) which developed in response to symbolic racism theory (examined in the next subsection) sought to explain why specific racist policies persisted despite the general progress in racial equality and integration (Bobo and Gilliam, 1990). RGCT focused on important complexities in the data in its “conceptualization and measurement of racial attitudes”. Therefore, rather than “blatantly stereotypical beliefs or hostile orientations” and “subjective reactions to political actors and events”, racist policies emerged from the perceived threat to the white social world and the belief among whites that something valuable would be lost in desegregation.

Houle, Park, and Kenny (2019) argued that the interaction between ethnicity and economic inequality provides the main mechanism linking ethnic cleavages to ethnic voting. Therefore, some ethnic groups vote along ethnic lines while others do not because “ethnicity and socioeconomic inequality reinforce one another”.

Intersection is perhaps strongest in intersectionality theory which argues that constructed and structural identities might have a combined effect that is greater than the sum of the parts. Coined by the black feminist scholar Kimberl   Williams Crenshaw, intersectionality theory was first used to show that the intersectional socioeconomic experience (structural cleavage) of racism and sexism (constructed cleavages) of black women has been denied redress because racism and sexism received separate judicial treatment (Carbado et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989).

In Scala et al. (2015) the growing political and economic diversity in rural America is linked to migration. Therefore migration explains the changes in voting patterns, the content of political debates and the types of public services offered in new recreational counties which have emerged alongside the old farming counties.

### 2.4 Psychological/emotional explanations.

Psychological emotions and passions is a central theme of populist mobilization and political socialization. Populism is associated with massive eruption of popular emotions, prejudices and bigotry, often from uneducated poor masses, instigated by charismatic appeals (Di Tella, 1997) and propelled by anxiety and anger (Langman and Lundskow, 2012; Berlet, 2011), conspiratorial thinking and misinformation (Jardina and Traugott, 2019) anti-expertise and anti-elitism (Oliver and Rahn, 2016) rather than a sober contemplation of the issues.



In symbolic racism theory, underlying prejudices and intolerant attitudinal predisposition are acquired during early childhood socialization rather than from self-interested behavior (see Bobo, 1983).

Miguel (2004) associated the salience of ethnic divisions with political socialization by political leaders who use mass media and the educational system to inculcate political ideas on citizens. Eifert et al. (2010) investigated the sources of ethnic identification—relative to occupational and class identities—in Africa and found that ethnic identities were strengthened by political competition.

Robinson (2007) observed that since discriminatory beliefs, symbols and meaning are constantly shown to be baseless, they need to be continuously reconstructed (see also Mcveigh and Maria-Elena, 2009). This reconstruction process, within the context of electoral competition, has been associated with emotive image advertisements and dirty personal campaign appeals, rather than issues (Tedesco and Dunn, 2019). This focus on image advertising in campaign-negative appeals is thought to undermine democracy and the ability of voters to make informed, rational, issue-based voting decisions (Tedesco and Dunn, 2019, p. 937). For example, Tesler (2012) has argued that public opinions on health care reform became racially polarized when President Obama became the face of the policy.

However, political socialization has also been depicted positively. The function of constructed cleavages has been associated with the need to build and ensure loyalty and solidarity in the behavior and attitudes of members (see White, 2007; Robinson, 2007; Mcveigh and Maria-Elena, 2009). For example, it can ameliorate ethnic divisions and thereby increase fund-raising for local public goods (Miguel, 2004).

### 3 US political power structure

The major recent trend in US political power structure has been the move toward nationalization of elections (Sievert and Mckee, 2018; Bartels, 2000). That is, the process where presidential and national politics exert greater influence over down-ballot contest (Jacobson, 2015). While the literature has suggested several explanations for how this tightening of the linkage between the White House and low-level electoral contests impacts the salience of the various societal cleavages in electoral competition, empirical support for these explanations has been ambiguous.

In particular, the explanations have not adequately addressed the many paradoxes and contradictions in observed political behavior. For example, why did so many white women, in voting for Trump, choose “a party that hates women as a matter of public policy” (Cooper, 2018, p. 172)? The explanations have not adequately addressed the paradox of why nationalization of elections is occurring at the same time that voters express great opposition and resentment to “Washington” and “big government” (Judis, 2016, p. 43). For Judis, opposition to Washington occurs because working-class and middle-class voters oppose higher taxes to support programs that they believe do not primarily benefit them but rather provide unearned benefits to minorities and the poor.

Sievert and Mckee (2018) associated the nationalization of elections with the move “toward a more responsible party system.” However, responsible party system is contradicted by the election of Donald Trump who is the first U.S. president

to hold neither elected political office nor to serve in the military or the government before coming to office (Tedesco and Dunn, 2019).

While traditional models can explain why the national unified commitment of African American voters to the Democratic Party began with the 1964 Civil Rights Act and the 1965 Voting Right Act (White et al., 2014), the models fail to explain why this national commitment has endured despite the growing political conservatism and socioeconomic divergence in the black community (Allen et al., 1989; Hochschild and Weaver, 2015).

Abramowitz and Webster (2016) have argued that negative partisanship is the driving force in nationalization and partisan voting. That is, as partisan identities become more closely aligned with social, cultural and ideological divisions, party supporters develop negative feelings about the opposing party and its candidates. However, there is good reason to believe that the country is in fact less socially, culturally and ideologically divided (see for example Mcveigh and Maria-Elena, 2009, for opinions on same-sex marriage).

#### **4 Simple model of populist mobilization**

The simple theoretical model of populism developed in this paper contains two decision stages. The first is based on concentration of power. The second is based on the importance of the electoral contest.

Concentrated power is associated with (i) information asymmetry (see Weiss, 2016; Bookman, 2017; Dawson, 1994; Carlson, 2019) (ii) distrust (Webster, 2018; Valentino, Brader, Groenendyk, Gregorowicz, and Hutchings, 2011; Anderson, 2010); and (iii) enforcement problems (White, 2007; Webster, 2018) between political leaders in government and the voters.

Therefore, when power is concentrated, political decisions appear arbitrary, discretionary and capricious and only general enforcement of political bargains is possible. In such situations, internal efficacy [(see Clarke and Acock, 1989; Kuklinski, 1978; Oliver and Rahn, 2016) for discussion of the two kinds of political efficacy] is salient: voters must have (or develop) the requisite collective skills and collective resources to influence the political system.

For these voters, the societal cleavage exploited/used for political mobilization is derived, or constructed (e.g. identity such as race, religion, ethnicity, gender, shared history, region, social symbols or language) and indirectly linked to professed goals. Therefore a gap develops between unifying sentiment and professed goals, this is the defining characteristic of undesirable populist mobilization.

Constructed cleavages become salient because membership is “sticky” and cheap to identify and therefore less susceptible to opportunistic behavior. Constructed cleavages seek to secure and ensure loyalty and solidarity within the political coalition. That is, social monitoring to control coalition members, and prevent the coalition from disintegrating, is an important intermediary step in the pursuit collective interests.

When power is dispersed, political decisions are non-discretionary, information is accessible, and enforcement of specific political bargains is possible. Dispersed power is associated with external political efficacy since voters have the perception that government institutions are responsive to them. For these voters, the soci-

etal cleavage used for political mobilization is structural ( e.g. income, ideology, occupation) and directly linked to professed goals.

Secondly, importance of the electoral contest matters in populist mobilization. Weber and Franklin (2018) argued that the criteria for political choice may be different between important national executive office and less important local, regional, or supranational contests. For Weber and Franklin, the former is associated with structure—“coordinated behavior emerging from objective aspects of party preference”—while the latter with entropy—“idiosyncratic voting behavior guided by subjective evaluations”.

This theoretical model can provide a rational choice foundation (see Dawson, 1994), that also incorporates insights from information and institutional economics (Stiglitz, 2002), to the problem of populism. This approach departs from predominant models where sociological explanations, based on an optimal decisions criteria (what is best)—rather than procedural decisions criteria (what works)—are generally used.

The model has three advantages. First, it can help explain the numerous contradictions in the choice of societal cleavage used in political mobilization. Secondly, allows normative lessons to be drawn from the analysis. Third, it provides a tentative remedy to the problem of undesirable populism.

To summarize:

H1: Voters have a dynamic criteria for political choice. The criteria is driven by power structure and determines the societal cleavage used in political mobilization;

H2: Empirically, the dynamic criteria presents as stable clusters of structural and constructed cleavages in voter behavior;

H3. Since structural cleavages are best (optimal), constructed cleavages should only present in special situations where structural cleavages do not work;

H4. The problem of populism is one of these special situations.

## 5 Data and Methods

To see what populist mobilization looks like to voters, I relied on CCES data from the 2008, 2012 and 2016 US elections (Ansolabehere, 2006). CCES seeks to provide sufficiently large national stratified samples to measure and study, with a reasonable degree of precision, the American voters preferences and how those preferences are reflected in voter choices during elections. CCES employs computational algorithms to allow for demographically representative samples to be drawn within each state and congressional district.

Before turning to the empirical analysis, it is important to review the research problem in light of available data. I want to use the available data to explain the recent rise of populist mobilization. I want to test the hypothesis that power structure matters. Finally, I want to find out whether normative lessons can be drawn from this explanation.

The simple model of populism suggested that empirical evidence can be obtained by looking for stable clusters of voting behavior. Voting behavior between and within clusters can help support the hypothesis that power structure is the decisive factor.

Similar to prior investigation of political efficacy (Clarke and Acock, 1989; Kuklinski, 1978; Oliver and Rahn, 2016) and political psychology (Blankenship

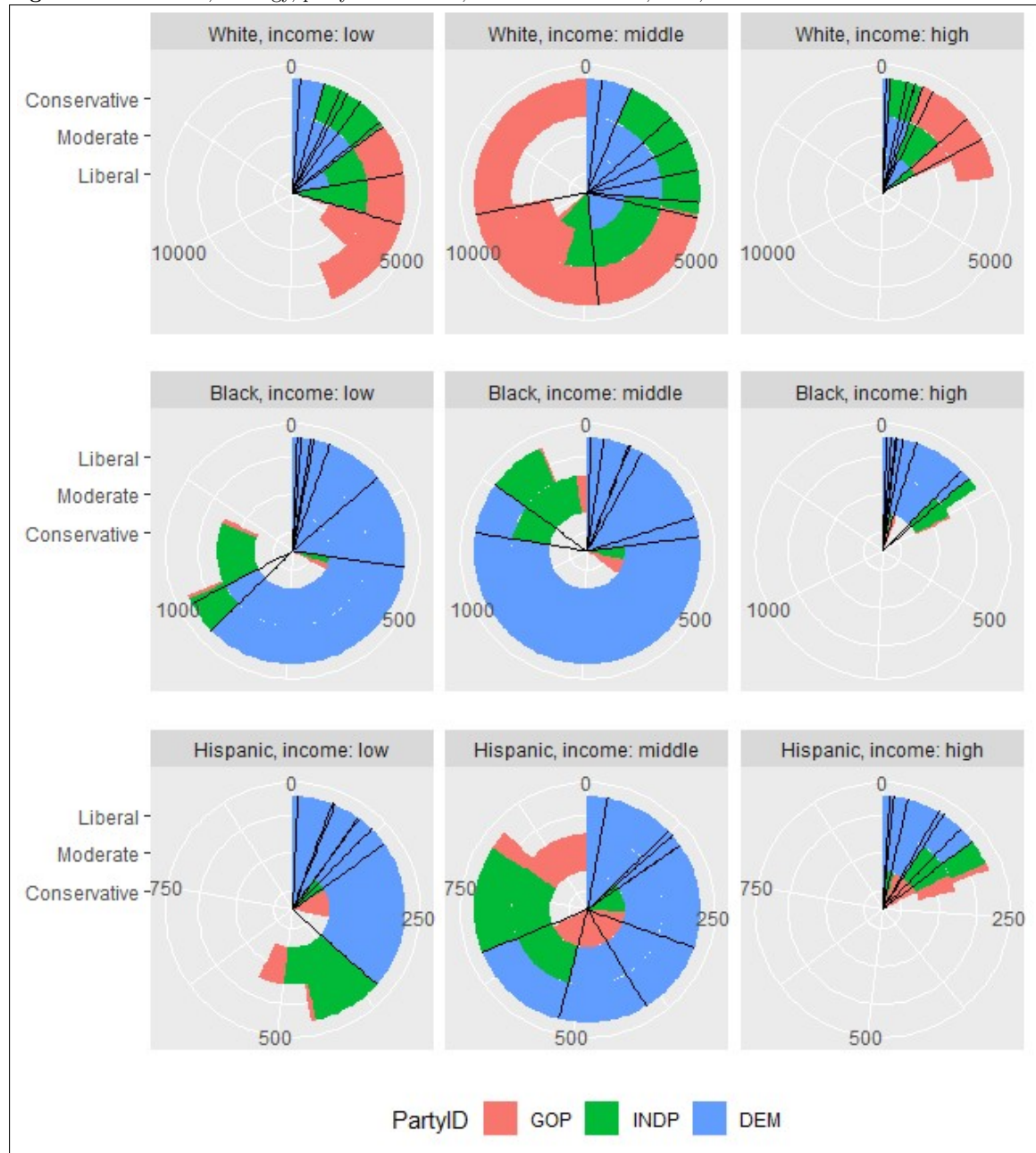
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et al., 2018), I use factor analysis to investigate the relationship between power structure and the choice of political cleavage. Factor analysis is generally used to measure a single latent variable through the relationships it causes in a set of categorical variables. Factor analysis is based on the idea that multiple items may be combined to produce clusters which are both stable and predictive of voting behavior in a way that single items cannot (Blankenship et al., 2018).

I test the hypothesis that this single latent variable is the perceived power structure. This variable is measured by frequency of votes that each individual voter cast for the two main political parties in presidential or sub-presidential contests (see Abramowitz and Webster, 2016). The available categorical variables from the CCES data include race ("White", "Black", "Mixed", "Hispanic"), Education ("No HS", "HS", "college", "Post-grad"), Ideology (10 point scale from "very liberal" to "very Conservative"), family income (17 different ranges, scaled by ideology in the factor analysis) and Party ID ("GOP", "DEM", "INDP").

Figure 1 shows the frequency distribution of votes for democratic and republican party candidates grouped by structural (i.e party identification, ideology and attitudes on abortion) and constructed (i.e. race) cleavages.

**Fig. 1** Plot of income, ideology, party ID and race, Source: CCES 2008, 2012, 2016.

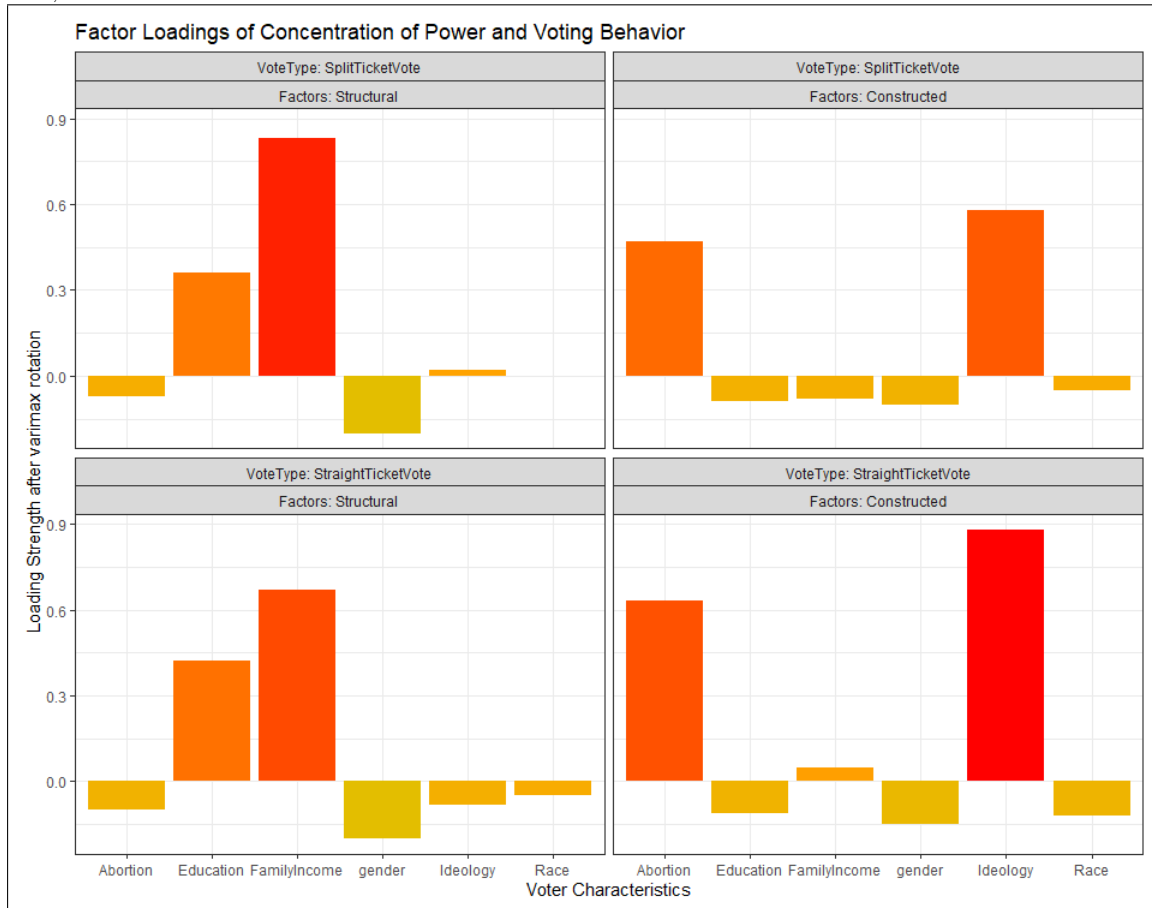


The data confirms the partisan voting and nationalization of election in previous research (see Sievert and Mckee, 2018) and the prominence of identity (racial) voting among all racial groups.

## 6 Results and Conclusion

The results of the maximum-likelihood factor analysis are shown in figure 2. The factor analysis (using factanal function from the psych package of the R programming language and software environment) extracted two factors. The two factors were associated with constructed and structural cleavages as discussed below<sup>1</sup>.

**Fig. 2** Factor Loadings of Concentration of Power and Voting Behavior, Source: CCES 2008, 2012, 2016.



The results of factor analysis can be analyzed by comparing the factor loading between structural and constructed cleavages (left and right columns) and then between split-ticket voters and straight-ticket voters (top and bottom rows). The loadings are correlations with the voter characteristics. We are looking for high bars (red) and only reported value above 0.1. This is a subjective exercise, however.

Comparing structural (left column) to constructed (right column) cleavages, the most salient voter characteristics in structural bar charts (left side) are educa-

tion and family income while the most salient voter characteristics in constructed bar charts (right side) are ideology and abortion. The existence of these stable clusters is consistent with the hypothesis that different value priorities and decision criteria are used by different types of voters.

Comparing straight-ticket voting with split-ticket voting (top row with bottom row) shows that education and family income are important for split-ticket voters in the structural cleavages dimension (left column). For constructed cleavages dimension (right column), race, abortion and ideology are slightly more important for straight-ticket voters while family income and education are more important for split-ticket voters.

In conclusion, the results us allow to tentatively accept the hypothesis that undesirable populist voting behavior is procedural and derived (what works) rather than optimal and direct (what is best).

The analysis was based on a relatively simple model. The model assumed a heuristic voting behavior whereby the value criteria for political decisions shifted based on political efficacy. In environments with high political efficacy, voters pursued their individual self interest directly while in environments of low political efficacy, voters first sought to increase their efficacy by coordinated collective action. Self-interested voting behavior favored structural cleavages while collective behavior favored constructed cleavages. Therefore, the analysis confirmed that the reemergence of populism is rooted in perceived changes to the American political power structure.

Oliver and Rahn (2016) attributed this power structure to American political party nomination process and the electoral collage system where minorities belonging to important swing states exert outsized pressure on the political system. This viewpoint is supporter by Sides et al. (2017) who observed that Trump actually lost the popular vote by 2.1 points but won the presidency due mostly to white voters in the Obama coalition with anti-immigrant attitudes who defected to Trump in 2016.

The results of the study provide suggestions for political institutions in other countries where identity politics are an enduring problem. While the findings of this study show an interesting relationship between powers structure and populism, further research is needed.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup>I performed the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) factor adequacy tests to ensure that partial correlations close enough to zero in at least one latent factor. h2 and u2 are the communality and specific variance, respectively, of the standardized loadings obtained from the correlation matrix

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## Conflict of interest

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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