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# Producerist Populist Attitudes and Electoral Support for Populism in the United States and Western Europe

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## Abstract

*This paper aims to clarify the importance of producerism as a socio-economic dimension of contemporary populism. Building on existing literature on the supply of producerism by populist politicians, we adopt a demand-side perspective to investigate whether producerism is consistently manifested among the general public, and how it may affect populist voting. We draw on an original set of items and a cross-national survey conducted in Western Europe and the United States to identify clusters of citizens with distinct left-wing and right-wing producerist attitudes. Our findings show that such attitudes are no longer exclusive to American politics but also found in Western Europe, albeit with country-specific modifications. Moreover, producerist citizens show distinct socio-cultural and economic attitudes, and they are also more likely to turn to populist parties and candidates, in particular to the right of the political spectrum.*

**Keywords:** political science, attitudes, wealth, preferences, Europe, United States

**JEL Classification:** Cultural Economics; Economic Sociology; Economic Anthropology

## 1. Introduction

The rise of populism is one of the most significant political phenomena of the past decade and is apparent in many countries across the political spectrum (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, De la Torre, 2019). A vast literature emphasizes the significance of socio-economic issues for populist parties. Socio-economic issues have traditionally been identified as key factors of left-wing populism at both the party and the voter level (Charalambous and Ioannou, 2019, Öniş and Kutlay, 2020) and have become increasingly relevant for right-wing populist parties since the 2008 financial crisis (Ibsen, 2019; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020; Rodrik, 2021).

In this paper, we focus on the role of socio-economic values and norms in contemporary populism. One fruitful perspective proposed by populism research is that of producerism: An old concept that has been widely discussed in the literature on populism in the United States (Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Kazin, 2017; Berlet, 2020). Producerism typically implies a moral distinction between “makers” and “takers” that stigmatizes undeserving people and pits those “who produce society’s wealth against those who consume it without giving back” (HoSang and Lowndes, 2019: 24). Drawing on the Laclauian conceptualization of populism’s “empty signifiers” (Laclau 2005), we propose that producerism may be seen as one specific mode of interpretation of the typical populist signifiers and antagonism.

This paper aims to contribute to this burgeoning literature to further clarify the importance of the concept of producerism within the broader context of populism studies. It does so in three ways. First, while the existing scholarship on producerism has primarily focused on the “supply side” (i.e. the set of ideas, discourses and frames employed by political parties and leaders), we examine the “demand side” and investigate whether producerism may be expressed as a consistent set of attitudes among citizens, and how such attitudes may affect voting preferences. We propose a novel approach to measuring *producerist populist attitudes* among the general public by using latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify subsets of ‘producerist’ citizens based on their perceptions of socio-economic groups as ‘producers’ or ‘parasites’. The paper makes an important methodological contribution in this regard. Second, we adopt a comparative transatlantic perspective by including the United States and five West European countries – France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom – in our empirical analysis. This approach allows us to examine the nuances of producerism as it

considers the context-specific opportunities resulting from various cultural legacies, economic institutions, and welfare traditions. Third, to examine the meaningfulness of these profiles, we compare these groups on well-established attitudinal correlates of populism, and test whether producerist populist attitudes may be linked to voting preferences.

The article is structured as follows. In the first two sections, we discuss the economic dimension of populism and introduce the concept of producerism. Next, we present our framework for the comparative analysis of producerist attitudes in the United States and Western Europe, and we detail the methodology that underpins our approach. Drawing on cross-national survey data, our empirical analysis reveals that producerism is consistently expressed as a set of attitudes among the general public, and it identifies clusters of citizens with distinct left-wing and right-wing producerist populist attitudes. Our findings challenge conventional historical wisdom by demonstrating that such attitudes are no longer exclusive to American politics but also found in Western Europe, albeit with country-specific modifications. Moreover, producerist citizens show distinct socio-cultural and economic attitudes, which set them apart from other citizens. Finally, our analysis confirms the link between producerism and populism in Europe and the United States, most particularly to the right of the political spectrum.

## **2. The socio-economic dimension of populism**

The starting point of this paper is the socio-economic dimension of populism. A vast body of literature has established a link between socio-economic issues and grievances, on the one hand, and the rise of populist parties and leaders, on the other hand (see for instance Swank and Betz, 2003; Berman, 2021; Guiso et al., 2017; Guriev and Papaioannou, 2020).

Socio-economic issues have been identified as key factors of left-wing populism, in which people are constructed in socio-economic terms as those excluded by neoliberal elites and policies (de la Torre, 2019; Öniş and Kutlay 2020: 50). More recently, research has focused on the growing significance of socio-economic issues for right-wing populist parties as well (Ibsen, 2019; Rodrik, 2021; Guiso et al., 2017; Hopkin, 2020; Engler and Weisstanner, 2021; Abts et al., 2021; Gozgor 2022). More and more studies have examined these parties' socio-economic agenda, thereby offering new insights into the supply-side dimension of right-wing

populist mobilization and how it may interact with their more traditional cultural agenda (Ennsner-Jedenastik, 2016; 2018; Otjes et al., 2018; Afonso and Rennwald, 2018; Röth et al., 2018; Attewell, 2020; Rathgeb, 2021; Rathgeb and Busemeyer, 2022; Suckert, 2022).

In addition to populism research, recent studies have emphasized the role of underlying beliefs and values in shaping public attitudes towards socio-economic inequalities and redistribution (Mijs, 2021; Menasce Horowitz, Igielnik and Kochhar, 2020). This literature also highlights the relevance of “individualistic social justice norms” in contemporary societies in relation to the belief that “it is the individual’s ‘fault’ not making more efforts to exit the impoverished situation” (Lierse, 2019: 138).

In this paper, we focus on the role of such socio-economic values and norms as one specific logic underpinning the political construction of populist claims. Despite ongoing debates about its definition, populism is generally associated with a Manichean opposition between the “people” and their “enemies”, particularly the “corrupt” elites (De Cleen, Glynos and Mondon, 2018). Economic populism typically sees the people as an economic community whose well-being is in decline and under threat, and which needs to be restored (Mazzoleni and Ivaldi, 2023). However, the meaning of “the people” is ambiguous and may have multiple connotations, such as the common man, the whole nation, and the underdogs, that is, a less privileged majority of the members of the community (Canovan, 1984: 315).

### **3. Producerism and populism**

In our view, the concept of *producerism* offers a fruitful perspective for the study of contemporary economic populism. While not necessarily connected to populism, producerism has been often used by scholars of right-wing populism, especially in the United States (Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Kazin, 2017; HoSang and Lowndes, 2019; Berlet, 2020).

Producerism is typically based on the antagonism between the “productive members of society”, portrayed as “virtuous” producers and potential victims, on the one side, and “parasitical strata both above and below them in the social hierarchy”, which include both “economic and political elites” and “the poor, unemployed, and those who receive social welfare” (Shantz, 2014: 560; see also HoSang and Lowndes, 2019: 24). The producerist

rhetoric constructs producers as a threaten “good” people by various “parasitic” groups, both at the top and at the bottom of society, by judging them according to the perceived contribution to the common good. (e.g. Berlet and Lyons, 2000).

The producerist Manichean opposition between “producers” and “parasites”, that is a specific “in-group” versus “out-group” antagonism, fits the definition of populism as a logic of resentment. As Silva and Vieira (2019) suggest, resentment can be considered the “true” logic of populism, operating “within a rivalrous framework, which presupposes identification between the sections of the population and refers to a set of normative commitments” (p. 498, see also Cohen, 2019).

Producerism may be seen as a heuristic category, which is embedded in the broader populist concept. Here, we draw on the distinction between “form” and “content”, which is central to the Laclauian conceptualization of the “empty signifier” (Vulovic and Palonen, 2022; Laclau, 2005), as well as to recent holistic perspectives on populism (e.g. Ballacci and Goodman, 2023). We propose that, within the economic realm, producerism represents one specific mode of interpretation –i.e. a possible “content”– of typical populist signifiers and antagonism –i.e. the general “form” of populism.

### ***3.1. The malleability of the producerist antagonism***

The principle of producerism is, however, very malleable and may accommodate different ideologies (Angër, 2020). Historically, producerist ideas and principles have been found in various movements, including Republican thought, the French Revolution, the Chartists and among trade unions in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These ideas have also been identified in socialism, communism, left-liberalism, fascist movements, as well as the progressive wing in the United States (Abromeit, 2016, Boyle, 1998, Matsunaga, 2021, Huston, 1998, Kazin, 2012). In the United States, producerist rhetoric was originally linked to Jeffersonian ideas, according to which “the yeoman farmer, as neither a master nor a slave, was the proper subject of civic virtue, republican liberty, and self-rule”, in opposition to aristocrats (Martinez Hoseng and Lowndes, 2019: 24).

According to Kazin's historical view (2017: 1), "a producer could be a craftsman, a teacher, a small merchant, a farmer with hired hands, a homemaker. To qualify for the honour, one simply had to do something useful for society and not prosper from the labour or weaknesses of others." Typically, producers include industrial or more skilled workers, small-business owners (Shantz, 2014). At the top of society, producerism often targets so-called nonproducing "verbalists" in the political establishment, cultural elite and state bureaucracy, which evokes a populist framework in which politics is seen as a profession and a way for illegitimate access to wealth in "corrupt" democracies (Rusher, 1975).

Moreover, the groups of producers and "parasites" may take on different meanings depending on the interpretation of producerism and the main ideological orientation of the producerist claim. In right-wing producerism, hardworking and browbeaten producers may be for instance pitted against government bureaucrats and civil servants (HoSang and Lowndes, 2019; Berlet and Lyons, 2000). As Johnson (2022) points out, producerism can have also a progressive element, when it leads workers to demand fair wages for their efforts (p. 44).

Businessmen and wealthy individuals may be seen as job creators and included in the category of producers (Peck, 2014). Producerism may also be deeply suspicious of corporate power and large businesses perceived as a threat to the liberty and livelihood of the yeomanry (Jäger, 2020). Populist movements, including those located on the right of the political spectrum, might be also suspicious of big business and corporate power. In the US, for example, the Tea Party and the 2016 Trump campaign espoused "an aversion to Wall Street" by opposing government bailouts of financial firms and adopting a strong producerist message (Bainbridge, 2020: 555). It may be the case, therefore, that CEOs and wealthy individuals fall into the category of "nonproductive" elites rather than that of hardworking producers. At the bottom of society, the lower classes and the undeserving poor are accused of undermining the prosperity of the community. In some cases, the denigrated subalterns may refer to immigrants and racialized indigenous "parasites" in the right-wing interpretation of producerism (Berlet and Lyons, 2000; Betz, 2017; Lowndes, 2017).

### ***3.2. American exceptionalism or Western convergence?***

The significance of producerism may not only vary in relation to ideological orientations but also across historical and national contexts. Producerism has played a crucial role in mainstream national narratives in the history of the United States, which could suggest an American “exceptionalism”. Producerist ideas have been central to the “American dream” and the idea that individual effort is a promise for a successful life, reflecting a specific conception of wealth redistribution rooted in American history (Huston, 1998). In the European context, however, producerism has not played a similar role in national symbols and histories, although its origins may be traced back to the French Revolution and the original argument of the “*Tiers-Etat*” (Third Estate) against aristocratic elites. Such an argument would later be re-interpreted and given different meanings across different political traditions and orientations (Albromeit, 2016; Loeffler, 2016).

Contemporary developments in populism across both sides of the Atlantic tend to challenge the American “exceptionalism” (Levitsky and Ziblatt, 2018). The concept of producerism has been recently imported into the study of West European politics, and its heuristic utility has been demonstrated in relation to the contemporary wave of right-wing populism in Europe (Abts et al. 2021; Ivaldi and Mazzoleni, 2019; Rathgeb, 2021; Bergman, 2022). Drawing on this burgeoning literature, we may expect producerism to have found its way into European populist politics. More broadly, the recent scholarship on populism emphasizes the need for more comparative studies beyond national legacies and/or regional idiosyncrasies (Judis, 2016; Norris and Inglehart, 2019; De la Torre and Srisa-Nga, 2021).

In this paper, we take a transatlantic perspective and propose a cross-national examination of producerism in six countries: the United States, France, Germany, Italy, Switzerland and the UK. These countries have experienced significant levels of popularity and/or electoral support for both left- and right-wing populist parties and leaders, making them relevant cases for our comparative examination of producerism in contexts where populism is found (see below).

Furthermore, our selection of cases exhibits significant variance in other aspects that are relevant to our comparative analysis of producerism. The countries we examine have different economic traditions and welfare state constructions: The United States, the UK and, to some extent, Switzerland demonstrate a liberal regime characterized by low levels of state intervention, while France, Italy and Germany are traditionally seen as conservative regimes



with more generous welfare benefits (Esping-Andersen, 1990). This variation may account for different manifestations of producerism across our countries of interest. In the United States, the global impact of neoliberalism and its ethics of competitiveness has been embedded in a legacy of a weak welfare state, while in Europe, it has been mostly associated with workfare (Sayer, 2018). In Europe, immigrants are stigmatized by right-wing populists not only for cultural reasons but also based on economic and welfare-related arguments (Wells and Watson, 2005). US social policy targets the poor in a racialized manner, resulting in harsh deservingness perceptions of the unemployed and the poor. In both contexts, this may legitimize resentment against welfare recipients (Sides, Tesler and Vavreck, 2018: 215ff.). This literature also resonates with the scholarship on globalisation and the transformation of political cleavages, which emphasizes the cultural, economic, and electoral impact of globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2008).

### ***3.3. Producerism and populist voting***

Finally, one last objective of this paper is to explore the relationship between populist producerist attitudes and voting orientations. In the case of right-wing populism, recent studies emphasize the role of deservingness perceptions, fairness, and, more generally, moral judgements in relation to socio-economic conflicts (Busemeyer et al. 2021; Attewell 2021; Enggist and Pinggera 2022). This suggests that producerism may be a significant factor of voting for such parties in the European context. We therefore expect citizens with right-wing producerist views to be more likely to vote for right-wing populist parties and candidates, while simultaneously considering other traditional predictors such as welfare chauvinism, economic redistribution, attitudes towards globalization, and authoritarian attitudes.

The five countries from Europe have well-established right-wing populist parties: the *Rassemblement national* (RN) in France, the *Alternative für Deutschland* (AfD) in Germany, the *Lega* and *Fratelli d'Italia* (FdI) in Italy, the Swiss people's party (SVP) in Switzerland, the *United Kingdom Independence party* (UKIP) and the Brexit Party (now Reform UK) in the United Kingdom. Although UKIP and the Brexit Party have become electorally marginal in the post-Brexit period, Boris Johnson's leadership of the Conservative Party appropriated significant populism and thrived on popular distrust with the country's political elite (Evans et al. 2023; Ward and Ward 2023). Meanwhile, in the United States, Donald Trump's

interpretation of radical right-wing populism shares strong similarities with populist radical right in Europe (Hawkins and Littvay, 2019; Mudde, 2022).

Countries like France and Germany also have relevant left-wing populist parties, such as *La France Insoumise* (LFI) in France, and *Die Linke* in Germany. Left-leaning economic populism strongly connected with social inequalities and economic democracy has also been present in US political history (Grattan, 2016; Warren, 2020), as exemplified by Bernie Sanders's left-wing populism in the 2016 Democratic presidential nomination (Hawkins and Littvay, 2019). Recent empirical analysis of economic populist attitudes in the United States confirms that such attitudes are associated with "liberal" or "progressive" attitudes, which suggests the presence of populism on the American left (Barker and DeTamble, 2022).

While limited to a smaller number of cases, such presence of left-wing populist parties allows us to explore the relationship between producerism and populism to the left of the political spectrum, an important aspect which has not yet been addressed in the literature. The malleability of producerism renders it possible that its typical construction of the 'producers' and 'parasites' may find its way into left-wing populist politics, whereby economic elites would be targeted as 'parasites' by left-wing producerist citizens. Here, we anticipate that voters who hold left-wing producerist attitudes should be more likely to turn to left-wing populist parties.

Finally, in Italy, we examine more specifically the *Movimento Cinque Stelle* (M5S) which is seen as a case of "polyvalent populism" –that is a variant of populism that rests on concomitant ideological discordance, newness, and radicalness (Pirro 2018).

#### **4. A demand-side approach using latent profile analysis (LPA)**

Our study seeks to determine whether producerism is expressed as a consistent set of attitudes among the general public, and to explore how such attitudes may be related to the support for populist parties across our six countries of interest. Aiming to measure how producerist populist attitudes matter, our goal is to identify types or groups of individuals who share distinct "producerist" attitudes as a manifestation of economic populism. To this end, we

utilize a new set of indicators selected on the basis of the theoretical discuss above and employ latent profile analysis (LPA) to identify unique subsets of producerist citizens.

Our data come from an original comparative survey conducted in June 2021 in the United States and in our five West European countries, using nationally representative samples of about 2,000 voting-age citizens per country. The online survey was conducted by YouGov and Link Switzerland and relied on quota-sampling from their national panels recruited via the internet. Participants were selected based on their age, gender and education to match the frequency of adult citizens in the most recent national census and/or community survey. Race was also included in the United States. We excluded potential “speeders” who had completed the questionnaire in less than half the median time. Our final analytical samples were 2,286 in France, 2,247 in Germany, 2,190 in Italy, 2,048 in Switzerland, 2,369 in the United Kingdom and 2,018 in the United States.

In line with our general theoretical argument, we examined producerist attitudes at the micro level and assessed a series of survey questions based on the core features identified earlier. We define producerist attitudes as a set of polarized normative judgments regarding the contribution of various socio-economic groups to society’s wealth, based on the Manichean logic that underpins the producerist principle. To operationalize this definition, we used a list of eight socio-economic groups, and for each we asked whether “they contribute through their efforts to the success of our country” or “take advantage of those who make our country successful.” All questions were seven-point Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (contribute) to 7 (take advantage). This enabled us to identify distinctive patterns of responses regarding how these groups are perceived as either “parasites” or “contributors” to the nation’s economic well-being, which is central to the producerist idea of a dual opposition between producers and “freeloaders” at both the bottom and the top of society.

As discussed earlier, the definitions of the groups of producers and “parasites” can vary across different interpretations of producerism, depending on the producerist claim’s main ideological orientation. In our study, we examined three elite groups, including economic elites (i.e. rich people and CEOs of big corporations) and political elites (i.e. politicians). We also included “public servants”, who are perceived as “parasites of government” in right-wing producerism (HoSang and Lowndes, 2019). Finally, we employed two different items to measure groups located “at the bottom” of society: immigrants and people receiving social benefits. We considered small-business entrepreneurs and workers as our typical groups of

“producers”, anticipating that businessmen and rich people may not necessarily be regarded as “true” producers.

All items were translated into the different languages of the survey (see details in Appendix A1). All items were checked by native speakers to ensure that the same stimuli and measurement properties should be provided to respondents across different national contexts and/or linguistic communities.

Descriptive statistics for the producerist items across all six countries are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics for the producerist items across all countries**

	United States		France		Germany		Italy		Switzerland		UK	
	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>sd</i>
Rich People	4.95	1.99	4.53	1.96	4.79	1.88	5.04	1.73	4.11	1.77	4.72	1.80
CEOs	5.35	1.86	4.42	2.09	4.79	1.91	4.80	1.79	4.16	1.77	5.03	1.77
Workers	1.86	1.35	2.13	1.58	2.29	1.67	2.22	1.58	2.05	1.42	2.03	1.34
Immigrants	3.43	2.11	4.86	1.96	4.77	1.86	4.54	1.89	3.94	1.76	3.71	1.92
Politicians	5.89	1.47	5.53	1.65	5.11	1.77	6.00	1.45	4.11	1.69	5.21	1.66
Soc.Benefits	4.38	1.82	5.25	1.69	5.58	1.64	5.08	1.68	5.09	1.52	4.88	1.54
Small entrepr.	2.15	1.47	2.52	1.72	2.50	1.61	2.69	1.78	2.29	1.47	2.47	1.41
Public servants	3.27	1.92	3.78	1.81	4.65	1.79	4.54	1.76	3.69	1.63	3.77	1.70
N	1,640		1,889		1,800		1,801		1,650		1,846	

All questions are Likert-type scales ranging from 1 (contribute) to 7 (take advantage)  
EPS Survey June 2021

We used latent profile analysis (LPA) to discern distinctive patterns of producerist attitudes among citizens. LPA is a statistical modelling approach that estimates distinct configural profiles of personal attributes based on continuous indicators. It makes it possible to identify clusters of individuals based on their responses to a series of continuous variables, assuming that unobserved latent profiles generate patterns of responses on the selected items. Compared with traditional cluster analysis, LPA offers more rigorous model-based criteria such as maximum likelihood (ML) or Bayesian information criterion (BIC) for helping determine the number of groups to retain. Additionally, LPA is not biased towards creating clusters of equal size and is also less dependent on the choice of a similarity measure (Hagenaars

and McCutcheon, 2002). In LPA, “the data are conceived as being sampled from a population composed of a mix of distributions, one for each cluster, with each cluster distribution characterized by its own unique set of parameters” (Pastor et al., 2007: 15). Class membership is treated as an unobserved latent categorical variable, and individuals are classified into groups based on probabilities estimated directly from the model. The relationship between cluster membership and external variables can then be examined as a next step.

#### ***4.1. Producerist citizens in Europe and America***

Accounting for potential heterogeneity across cases, we conducted an analysis of clusters across each of our six countries individually by using the *tidyLPA* package in R (Rosenberg et al., 2018). In mixture modelling such as LPA, indicators do not need to be transformed prior to analysis, and variances are constrained to be equal across classes, while covariances are fixed to zero (i.e. conditional independence of the indicators). Missing values were treated using multiple imputation (Spurk et al., 2020).

For each country, we tested a range of models for two to six classes and examined the classification accuracy of each solution on both theoretical and model fit criteria. The BIC was used to compare models with different numbers of clusters, as it is commonly considered the most appropriate criterion. Additionally, we examined the entropy statistics to assess the classification utility of different models and to determine the optimal number of classes. Entropy is a marker of the clarity of class delineation, ranging from 0 to 1, with values closer to 1 indicating greater classification accuracy and more precise assignment of individuals to latent profiles (Celeux and Soromenho, 1996). Finally, we examined the interpretability of response patterns to determine whether the classes truly represented different categories, rather than being an artifact of a nonnormal distribution (Hipp and Bauer, 2006).

Appendix A2 shows the model fit, entropy statistics and average posterior probabilities for all six countries individually. In each case, we retain a four-class model based on low values of BIC and good entropy values above 0.7. In line with our research objectives, such selection is also based on model parsimony and interpretability. Models with 5 and 6 classes essentially show clusters with values around the means of the main four classes, which are more difficult to interpret (see an illustration in Appendix A3). Average posterior probabilities in the selected models range from approximately .7 to .95 across all countries (see Table 2).

Response patterns for each national sample are shown in Figures 1 to 6. Across all six countries, the confidence intervals in the 4-class solution confirm that respondents vary little from one another in each cluster, while statistically significant differences between clusters are observed across most items.

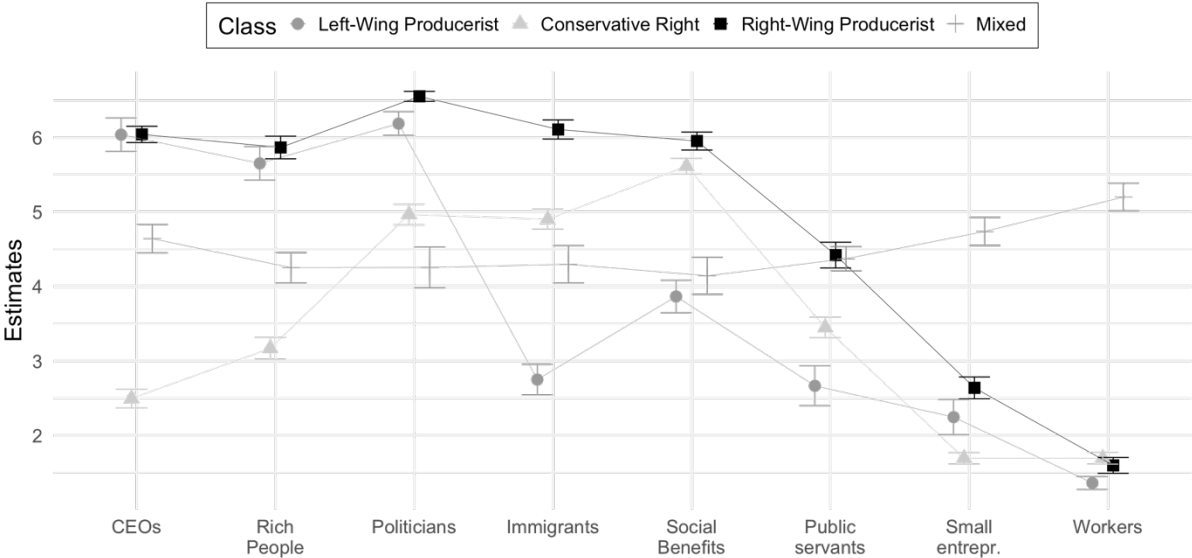
**Table 2. Summary of LPA 4-Class model fit, entropy statistics and average posterior probabilities in the individual countries**

Country	N	Model	BIC	Entropy	Prob.Min.	Prob.Max
France	2,232	4-Class	68106	0.82	0.804	0.944
Italy	2,156	4-Class	64583	0.79	0.857	0.919
Germany	2,189	4-Class	66133	0.77	0.746	0.935
Switzerland	1,998	4-Class	57625	0.78	0.703	0.952
United Kingdom	2,334	4-Class	67675	0.79	0.826	0.914
United States	1,975	4-Class	58541	0.83	0.804	0.941

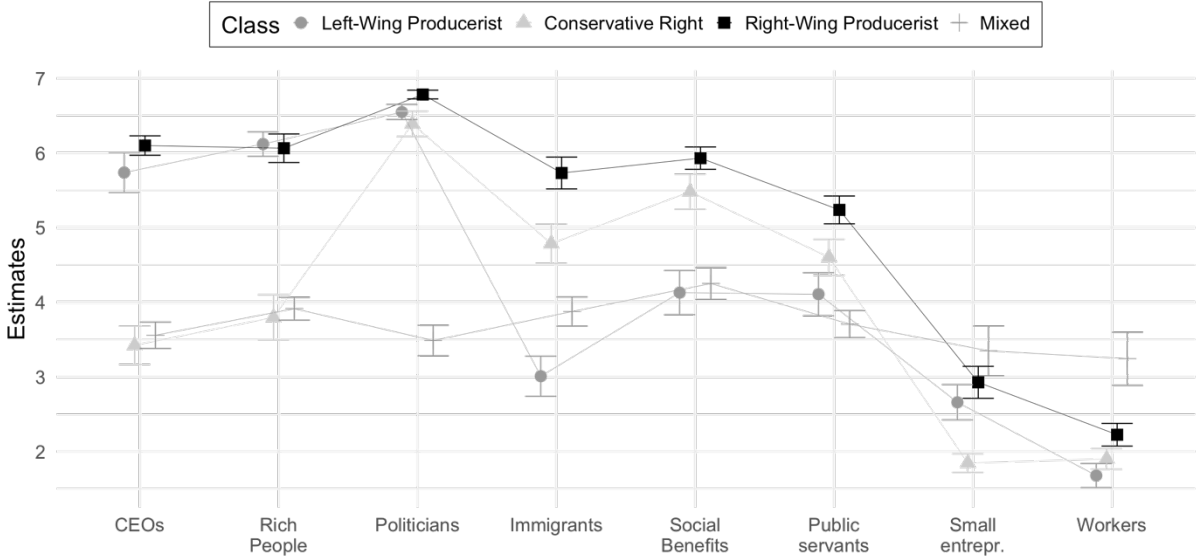
EPS Survey June 2021

The series of country-level LPA confirm that it is possible to identify subsets of left-wing and right-wing producerist citizens based on their normative evaluations of socio-economic groups. We show all response patterns in Figures 1 to 6 and examine the characteristics of each cluster below. Additional country-level multinomial regressions are conducted to look at the sociodemographic characteristics of the different clusters across all six countries (see Appendix A4).

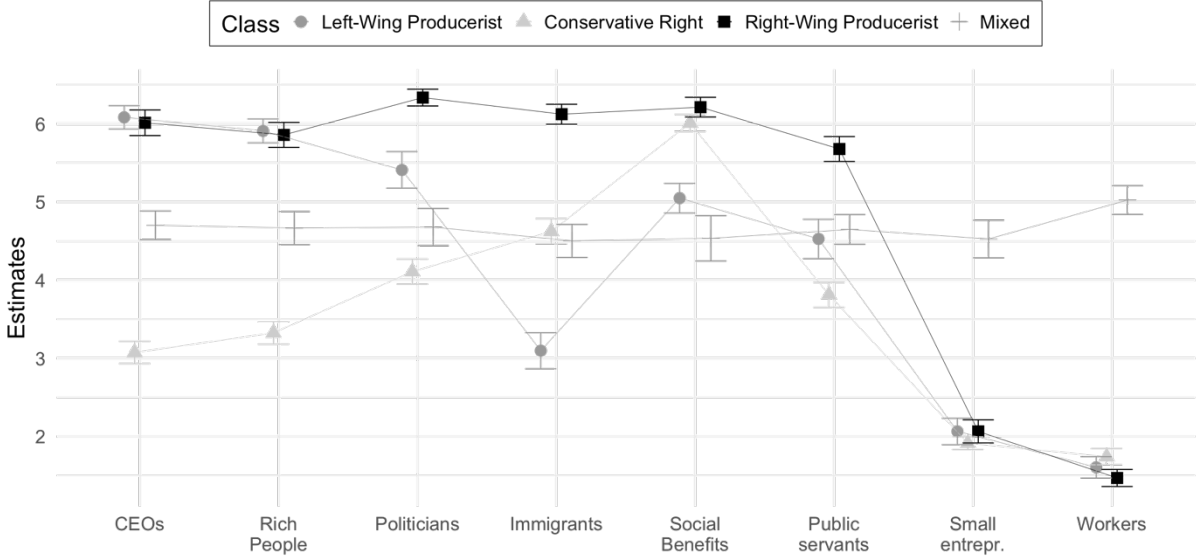
**Figure 1. France**



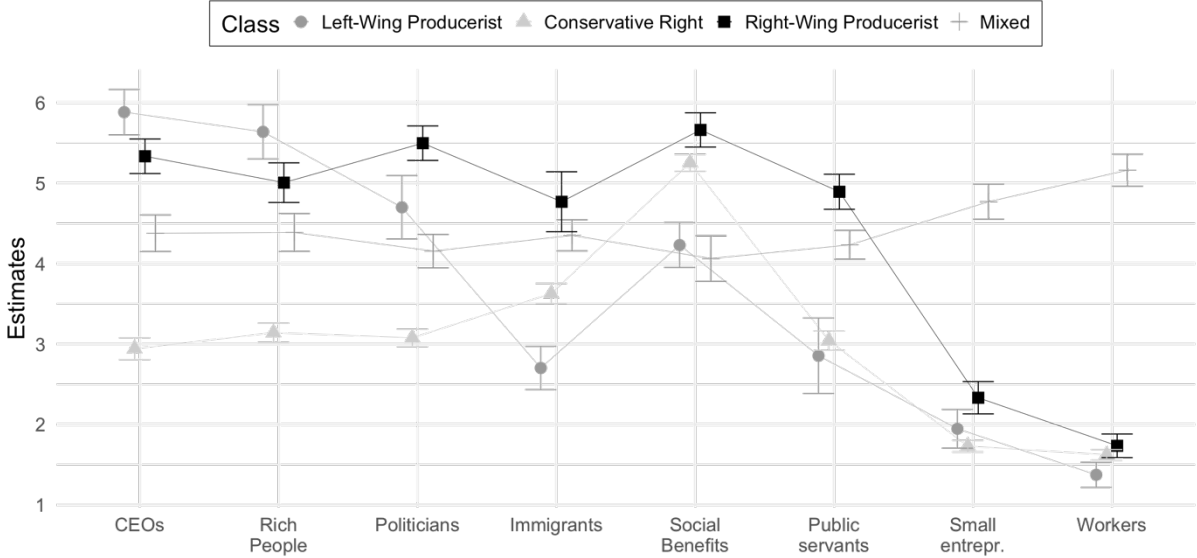
**Figure 2. Italy**



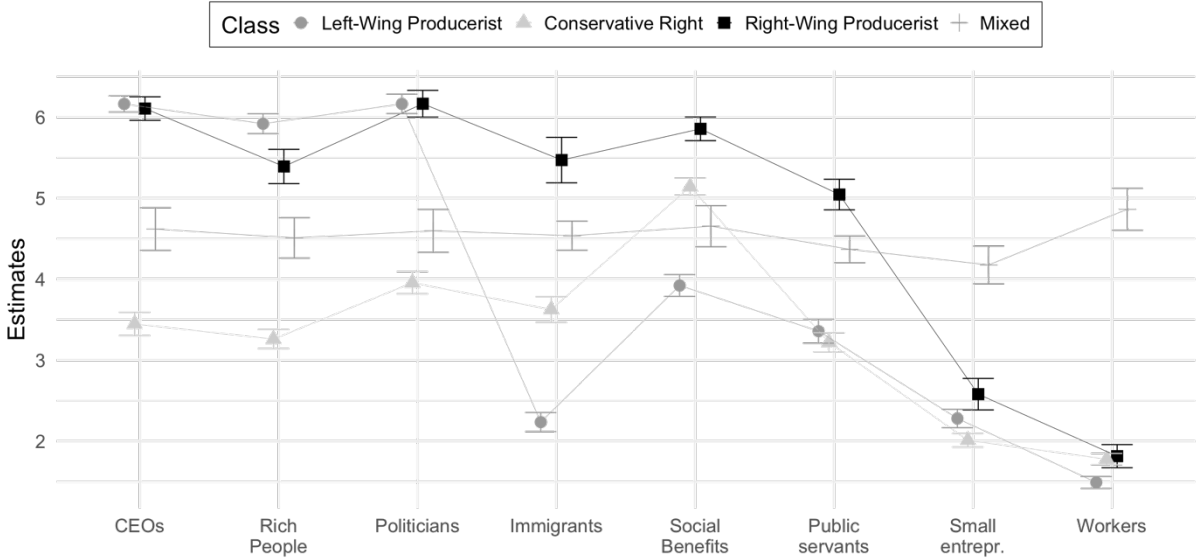
**Figure 3. Germany**



**Figure 4. Switzerland**

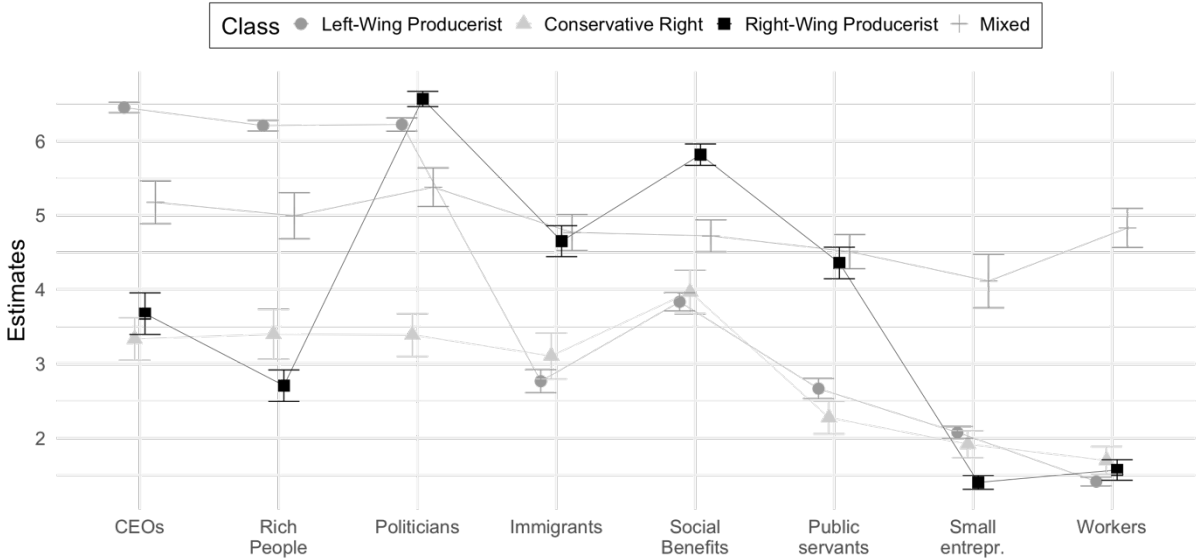


**Figure 5. United Kingdom**





**Figure 6. United States**



In each country, we first find a cluster that represents a class of citizens with distinctive “left-wing producerist” attitudes. Respondents in this cluster have the highest mean on items related to the economic elite, such as “rich people” and “CEOs”, and strongly reject these groups as parasitic while simultaneously acknowledging the lowest mean on groups at the bottom of society, namely “immigrants” and “people on social benefits”, as “makers”. Additionally, individuals in this cluster have more positive views of “public servants”, whom they regard as contributors to the country’s success. Politically, these respondents place themselves the most to the left on the European political spectrum; in the American sample they predominantly see themselves as ‘strongly liberal’ (see Appendix A4).

Second, the analysis confirms the “right-wing producerist” hypothesis and finds a specific cluster in each country. Respondents in this class are characterized by a significantly higher mean on social groups at the bottom of society, which are seen as “taking advantage” of the country’s hardworking producers. In line with the specification of right-wing producerism, “parasitic” groups here include “people on social benefits” and, to a lesser extent, “public servants”. Respondents in this group are also significantly more likely to reject “immigrants” as freeloaders, which aligns with the hypothesis that right-wing producerism is related to a nativist ideology. Except for Italy, individuals in the right-wing producerist cluster have significantly lower levels of education compared with all the other groups (see Appendix A4).

Moreover, these results suggest some convergence between the left-wing and right-wing clusters of producerism identified in our survey (see summary of response patterns for the left-wing and right-wing producerist clusters alone in Appendix A5). Both producerist clusters exhibit low means on the groups of “small entrepreneurs” and “workers”, which are viewed as typical “makers” in both manifestations of producerism. The two producerist clusters also show the highest averages for “politicians”, setting them apart from all the others and confirming the link between producerism and populism. Interestingly, we find that economic elites such as “rich people” and “CEOs of big corporations” tend to be rejected by both clusters of producerist individuals, who view them as taking advantage of the country’s true producers. Although these results are consistent with the broad characterization of left-wing producerism as primarily targeting economic elites, they contradict the conventional notion of right-wing producerism, which is traditionally seen as more “pro-business” in the literature. This is an important finding that suggests right-wing populism has become more suspicious of corporate power and large businesses in recent years, converging with the populist left in this respect.

In addition to our two groups of producerist citizens, we find a third cluster which may be interpreted as more traditionally conservative/liberal right. Respondents in this class essentially place themselves to the right of the European political spectrum; in the United States they predominantly see themselves as ‘conservatives’. They exhibit notably lower means on the two items relative to economic elites, namely “rich people” and “CEOs of big corporations”, which indicates that these groups are primarily seen as strong contributors to the country’s wealth. At the same time, they display higher means on “people on social benefits”, whom they consider to be economic “parasites”, albeit to a lesser degree than in the right-wing producerist cluster. Individuals in this cluster also show moderately low means on the “politicians” and “public servants” items, distinguishing them from the right-wing producerist group. They also differ from the latter in terms of their more positive views of “immigrants” as contributors to the country’s success. However, they are more like producerist citizens in their perceptions of “small entrepreneurs” and “workers”.

Finally, the analysis identifies a fourth cluster which comprises about 15% of each national sample (see Table 3). However, this cluster is less homogeneous than the others, and respondents in it show no particular sociological profile in terms of their gender, age, and educational level. Individuals in this cluster exhibit mixed attitudes and are primarily

characterized by means that are relatively close to the national average on most items, making it more difficult to interpret. Nevertheless, we may suspect the presence of citizens with moderate left-wing or centre-right political orientations in this cluster. Politically, these respondents are found around the country mean on the European left-right continuum; in the American sample, they mostly define themselves as left-leaning ‘liberals’ or ‘moderates’ (see Appendix A4).

While all country-level analyses confirm the two classes of producerist citizens, we see however some cross-national variation. First, the relative size of the two producerist groups varies across countries (see summary Table 3). The left-wing producerist cluster is much larger in the UK (31.2%) and, most significantly, in the United States, where it constitutes no less than 54.6% of the total sample, which confirms that producerist populism may be associated with “liberal” or “progressive” values on the contemporary American left (Barker and DeTamble, 2022). In both cases, this may also reflect the two-party systems found in the UK and the United States, with no left-wing populist party and the dominant Labour (UK) and Democratic (USA) parties occupying most of the space to the left of the political spectrum. In France and Italy, the right-wing producerist group is the largest cluster, accounting for 31.4% and 31.3% of the national samples, respectively, which may reflect the stronger presence of well-established right-wing populist parties in these two European countries.

**Table 3. Summary of cluster membership in the individual countries**

%	France	Italy	Germany	Switzerland	United Kingdom	United States
Left-Wing Producerist	14.8	22.2	16.6	15.5	31.2	54.6
Conservative Right	38.9	28.8	33.5	47.0	35.4	9.5
Right-Wing Producerist	31.4	31.3	29.9	26.1	22.5	23.3
Mixed	14.9	17.7	20.0	11.4	10.8	12.6

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The United States exhibits significant differences from the European cases regarding the views of right-wing producerists towards CEOs and rich people (see Figure 6). In the American case, these groups are much less likely to be perceived as “parasites” than in West European countries. This difference may be attributed to the stronger relevance of a free-market and more business-oriented economic culture in the United States. The model for

Switzerland also supports the contextual effect of a more liberal economic tradition, with a relatively lower mean on economic elites compared with the other European countries. Interestingly, we find no such effect in the British case, despite the country's culture of economic liberalism.

Finally, some country-specific features are worth noting (see country-specific profiles in Figures 1 to 6). In Switzerland, producerist citizens, both left and right, are relatively less critical of politicians than in the other countries, which may partially reflect the institutionalization of populism in the country, particularly the SVP's participation in federal government. In Italy, on the other hand, most clusters share strongly negative views of politicians and public servants as "parasites", which may be linked to long-standing problems of clientelism, patronage and corruption associated with the country's "partocracy" (Kitschelt, 1995: 175). Lastly, the German case shows some variation across the two producerist clusters in terms of their attitudes towards politicians: Left-wing producerists are less likely to reject politicians than their right-wing counterparts. This may be attributed to the stronger anti-system orientation stance of the populist right in Germany (Arzheimer, 2019), while populism is less prominent on the radical left in Germany (Hough and Keith, 2019).

#### ***4.2 Producerism and socio-cultural attitudes***

In this part of the analysis, we seek to validate our producerist clusters by examining their relationship with the socio-cultural attitudes typically associated with populism. Although primarily exploratory, this helps us further validate our measurement of producerism.

We examine the relationship between producerism and well-established attitudinal correlates of populism that are particularly relevant to this study: welfare chauvinism, authoritarianism, and individual preferences regarding economic redistribution (Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018) (see Table 4; see Appendix A6 for detailed summary statistics).

According to Betz (2019), welfare chauvinism is centred on the notion that native citizens should be accorded absolute priority when it comes to social benefits –here we use a question regarding jobs. Authoritarianism is widely considered a core feature of the radical right's ideology (Mudde, 2007; Norris & Inglehart, 2019); it implies a strong support for traditional

social norms and conventions, ensured by political force, if necessary. In this survey, we use a single item from Altemeyer’s (1996) index of right-wing authoritarianism (RWA).

Additionally, we consider attitudes towards economic globalization, which are seen as important drivers of populism (Rodrik 2021) and use a question about the impact of international trade on job creation in the country (see Table 4).

**Table 4. Attitudinal correlates of populism**

<b>Attitude</b>	<b>Item*</b>
Welfare chauvinism	In jobs, priority should be given to [ <i>country</i> ] citizens over foreigners
Authoritarianism	What our country really needs instead of more “civil rights” is a good stiff dose of law and order
Globalization	International trade leads to jobs creation in [ <i>country</i> ]
Economic redistribution	To reduce inequality, one should take from the rich to give to the poor

\*All items are 7-point Likert scales ranging from 1 ‘Strongly disagree’ to 7 ‘Strongly agree’

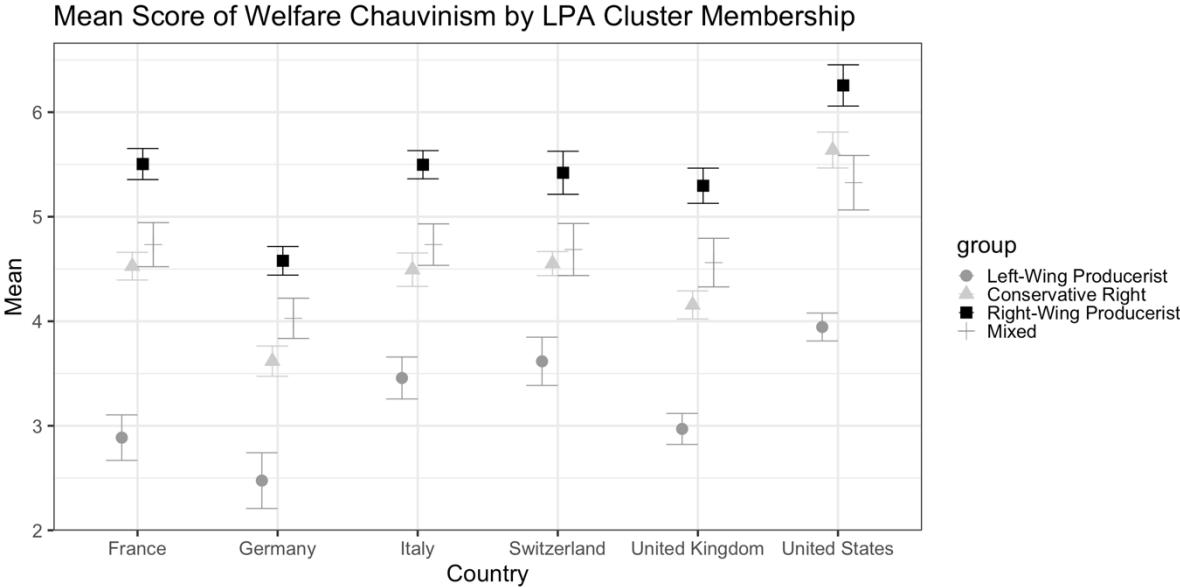
Bivariate analysis indicates that membership in the right-wing producerist cluster is significantly associated with higher levels of welfare chauvinism and authoritarianism across all countries: Right-wing producerists consistently display higher levels of welfare chauvinism and authoritarianism than individuals in all the other clusters (see Figure 7). By contrast, the left-wing producerist clusters exhibit the lowest mean on these two dimensions, showing a more culturally tolerant and universalist profile in all countries. They also have the highest average on the economic redistribution dimension, which aligns with the literature on left-wing populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Interestingly, when compared with individuals on the conservative right, right-wing producerist citizens favour economic redistribution significantly more and are often located halfway between the producerist left and the conservative right on that dimension (see Figure 7). This is an important finding with regard to the broader discussion about the economic dimension of right-wing populism and its alignment with producerist ideas. This also aligns with the literature on the relationships between social structures, social class, identities and party choices. Studies such as Oesch and Rennwald (2018) point to the co-existence of old and new patterns of class voting, which are structured by economic and cultural conflicts.

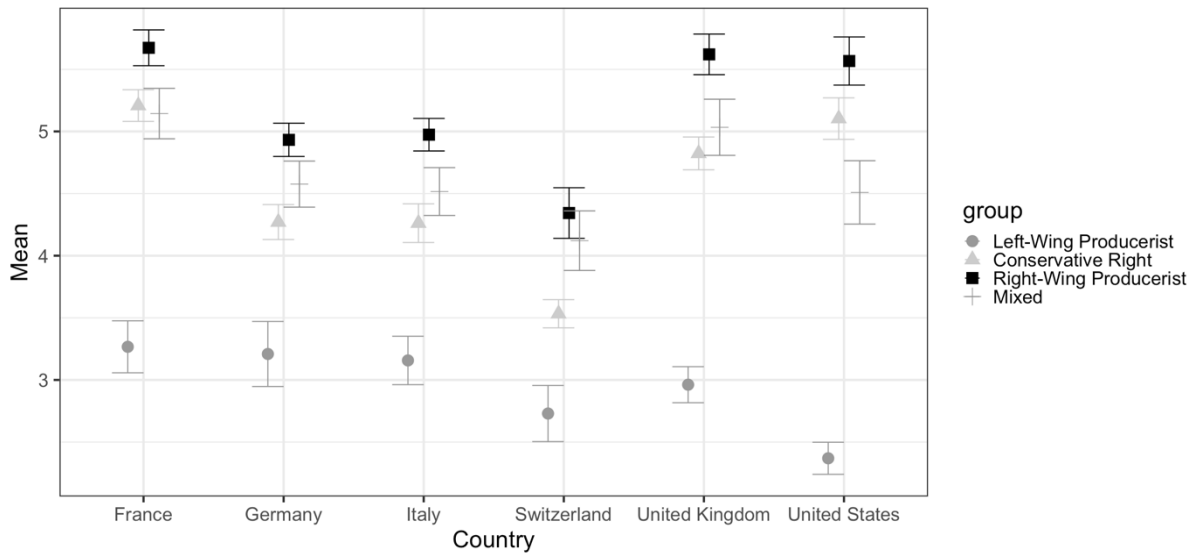
Finally, we see variation in the globalization attitudes of our classes. While pro-globalization attitudes are common to all clusters in the UK, right-wing producerist citizens in all the other countries show more negative views of international trade. These findings corroborate the literature on the impact of globalization in Western European countries, and the formation of a new structural conflict opposing globalization ‘winners’ and ‘losers’ (Kriesi et al 2008). In the United States, pro-globalization attitudes are also significantly lower in the right-wing producerist cluster when compared with the conservative right.

Turning to the left, in the European cases, we find little differences in globalization attitudes between the left-wing producerist clusters and the other groups. The American case stands out, however. In the United States, individuals in the left-wing producerist cluster show significantly higher levels of support for economic globalization (see Figure 7).

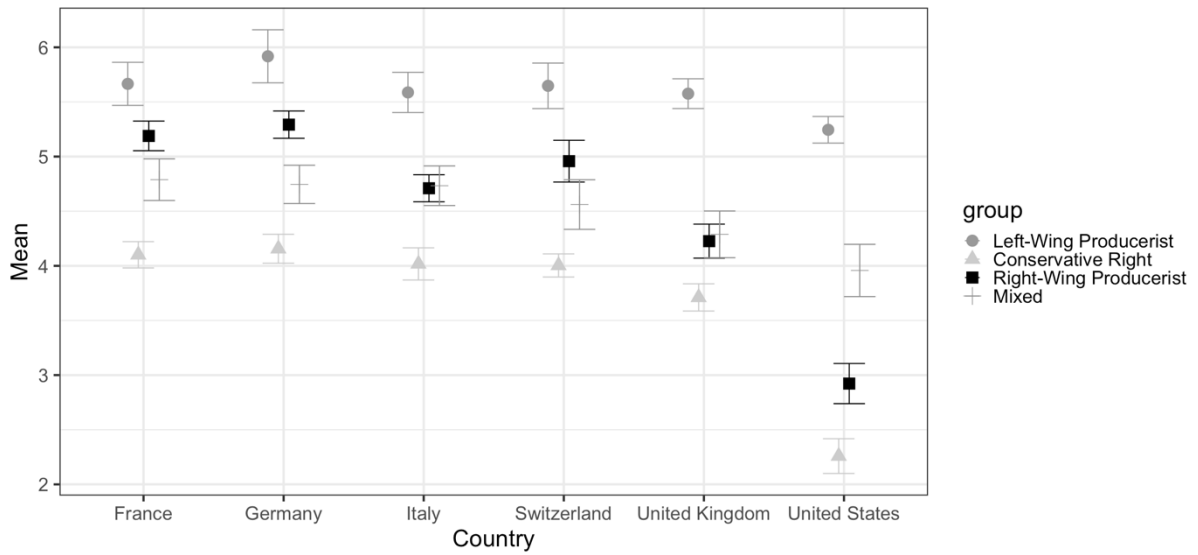
**Figure 7. Mean scores of welfare chauvinism, authoritarianism, pro-globalization attitudes, and pro-redistribution preferences by LPA cluster membership across all countries.**

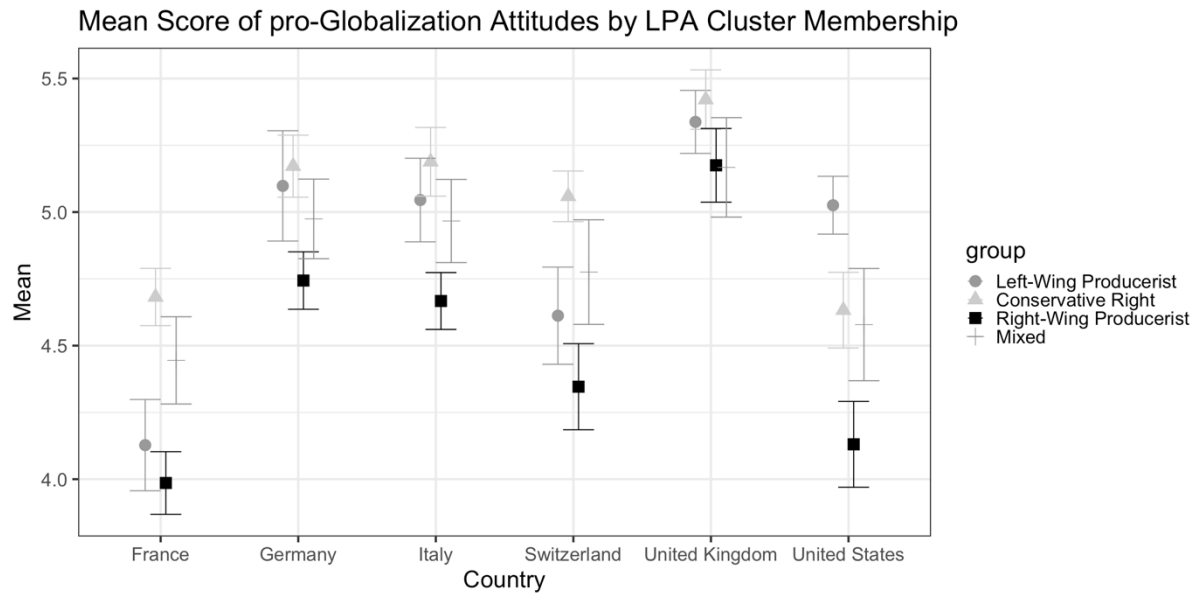


Mean Score of Authoritarianism by LPA Cluster Membership



Mean Score of pro-Redistribution Attitudes by LPA Cluster Membership





### 4.3 Are producerist citizens populist voters?

Finally, we examined the relationship between LPA clusters and vote choice, and investigated whether left-wing and right-wing producerist citizens exhibit distinct electoral preferences. To this end, we used cluster membership from LPA as our independent variable and a voting intention question in the survey as our dependent variable. In some of our European cases, the presence of populist parties on both the left and the right of the political spectrum allowed us to explore this relationship across different locations of the party system.

In Europe, we took a legislative voting intention that includes all relevant parties in the country at the time of the survey (June 2021), as well as blank ballots and abstention (see Appendix A7). Our European cases comprise a broad selection of right-wing populist parties, namely the RN in France, the AfD in Germany, the Lega and FdI in Italy, the Brexit Party and UKIP in the UK, and the SVP in Switzerland. Some countries also have a politically significant left-wing populist party, such as LFI in France and *Die Linke* in Germany. In Italy, we took the M5S as a case of “polyvalent populism” and ran a separate model.

For the United States, we used a hypothetical presidential voting intention that included the two frontrunners in the 2020 election, Joe Biden and Donald Trump, as well as “other” Democratic and Republican candidates and abstention (see Appendix A7 for details). While we recognize the distinctiveness of the American two-party system and the importance of party identification in the American context (Ware, 1996; Abramowitz and McCoy, 2019), it



is still worthwhile to examine how our producerist citizens would align themselves across the two major political parties and their candidates in a hypothetical presidential election.

For each country, we ran a series of logistic regressions using a binary vote choice as our dependent variable, contrasting the relevant right-wing populist party with all other parties, and excluding those who said they would abstain and cast a blank vote. In France and Germany, we replicated this model taking the left-wing populist party as our case of interest. Finally, in Italy, we ran a specific model for the M5S.

Across all models, we used LPA cluster membership as our main independent variable. For clarity, in the right-wing populist voting models, the reference category for cluster membership was set to the class of ‘right-wing producerism’ against which we contrasted the other three groups identified by LPA. In the two models of left-wing populist voting in France and Germany, as well as in the specific M5S model in Italy, we took the group of left-wing producerists as our reference for LPA clusters.. In each model, we added socio-demographics controls –i.e. gender, age, and education–, together with our four socio-cultural attitudes typically seen as correlates of populist voting both in the United States and in Europe. All results are summarized in Appendix A8. Here we simply present a summary table of regression coefficients for LPA clusters across each model (see Table 5).

**Table 5. Summary of logistic regression coefficients for LPA clusters in individual country models of right-wing and left-wing populist voting in Europe and the United States**

a. Right-wing populist voting

Log-Odds	France	Italy	Germany	Switzerland	United Kingdom	United States
Left-Wing Producerist	-1.39** (0.45)	-0.50 (0.26)	-1.26** (0.40)	-1.70** (0.55)	-0.02 (0.65)	-1.49*** (0.26)
Conservative Right	-0.79*** (0.18)	-0.03 (0.19)	-0.85*** (0.22)	-0.68*** (0.18)	-0.97* (0.45)	-0.47* (0.23)
Mixed	-1.02*** (0.25)	-0.13 (0.21)	-0.72** (0.24)	-0.52* (0.27)	-0.22 (0.54)	-0.55* (0.25)

Note: reference category for LPA cluster membership is “Right-Wing Producerist”; Log-Odds from multivariate binary logistic regressions contrasting right-wing populist voters with all other voters, excluding abstention and blank votes; standard errors in brackets; Right-wing populist parties: France (RN), Italy (Lega+FdI), Germany (AfD), Switzerland (UDC/SVP), UK (UKIP and Brexit Party), United States (Trump); All models include socio-demographic and attitudinal controls from models in Appendix A8 (not shown); EPS Survey June 2021

b. Left-wing populist voting in Germany and France

Log-Odds	France	Germany
Right-Wing Producerist	-0.58	-0.21
	(0.36)	(0.28)
Conservative Right	-0.89*	-0.45
	(0.37)	(0.29)
Mixed	-0.62	-0.56
	(0.42)	(0.33)

Note: reference category for LPA cluster membership is “Left-Wing Producerist”;  
 Log-Odds from multivariate binary logistic regressions contrasting left-wing populist voters with all other voters, excluding abstention and blank votes; standard errors in brackets;  
 Left-wing populist parties: France (La France Insoumise), Germany (Die Linke);  
 All models include socio-demographic and attitudinal controls from models in Appendix A8 (not shown);  
 EPS Survey June 2021

c. M5S voting in Italy

Log-Odds	M5S
Conservative Right	-0.57**
	(0.22)
Right-Wing Producerist	-0.54*
	(0.22)
Mixed	-0.27
	(0.23)

Note: reference category for LPA cluster membership is “Left-Wing Producerist”;  
 Log-Odds from a multivariate binary logistic regression contrasting M5S voters with all other voters, excluding abstention and blank votes; standard errors in brackets;  
 The model includes socio-demographic and attitudinal controls in Appendix A8 (not shown);  
 EPS Survey June 2021

While primarily exploratory, our analysis confirms the link between producerism and populist voting to the right of the political spectrum (see Table 5a). Across our six countries, we find that right-wing producerist voters are more likely to turn to right-wing populist parties when compared with all the other clusters. These results are particularly noteworthy considering that all models control for ‘strong’ predictors of right-wing populism such as welfare chauvinism, authoritarianism, and negative views of globalization.

Such differences are statistically significant in France, Germany, Switzerland, and the United States. The coefficients are in the same direction in Italy and the UK yet fail to reach statistical significance in these two countries (see Table 5a). In the UK, this is most likely an

effect of the smaller number of voters in our sample who said they would vote for UKIP and the Brexit Party. Moreover, recent studies suggest that right-wing populism in the UK has been largely accommodated by the British conservatives under Boris Johnson (Evans et al. 2023; Ward and Ward 2023). In Italy, our results may reflect the complexity of right-wing populist politics, and the incorporation of both the Lega and FdI into the center-right alliance, thus making it more difficult to discern differences within this broader right-wing coalition in what has been described as an increasingly ‘deinstitutionalised party system’ (Chiaramonte et al. 2022).

In France, right-wing producerists have the highest probability of voting for the RN. In Germany, support for the AfD culminates in the right-wing producerist cluster. We see a similar pattern in Switzerland with regards to the electoral support for the SVP/UDC. In the American sample, the probability to vote for Trump is the highest among individuals in the right-wing producerist class, even when compared with those in the conservative right. This is an important finding which corroborates recent studies showing that Trump voters share similar attitudes with the radical right in Europe (Arhin et al. 2023), and which also lends support to our hypothesis of ‘Western convergence’. Moreover, the attitudinal profile of right-wing producerists in the United States, as discussed above, suggests that these individuals may form the core of Trump’s MAGA base inside the Republican party.

In contrast, we find little evidence of a link between producerism and populist voting to the left of the political spectrum (see Table 5b). Individuals in the left-wing producerist cluster are not significantly more likely to turn to a left-wing populist party such as LFI in France and *Die Linke* in Germany, although all regression coefficients go in the expected direction. Such findings may reflect the higher level of heterogeneity of the ‘left-wing producerist’ cluster, as well as the relatively smaller numbers of respondents in the French and German sample who reported they would vote for those parties. Let us note here that in the United States, support for Biden is the highest among left-wing producerist voters, even compared with independent voters in the ‘mixed’ cluster. Interestingly, when asked which ‘other’ candidate they could vote for, most of the respondents in the left-wing producerist cluster said “Bernie Sanders”, thus somewhat illustrating the link between left-wing producerism and left-wing populism in the United States.

Finally, our results confirm the profile of the M5S as a case of “polyvalent populism” (Pirro 2018). The probability to vote for the M5S is highest among individuals in the left-wing producerist cluster and significantly different from those in both the conservative right and right-wing producerist classes (see Table 5c). However, we see no statistically significant difference with the ‘mixed’ group of voters, which suggests that the M5S in Italy may appeal to a broader electoral constituency beyond left and right (Mosca and Tronconi 2019).

## **5. Conclusion**

This paper contributes to the theoretical and empirical understanding of the concept of producerism as a socio-economic dimension of populism. While previous research has focused almost exclusively on the “supply” side of producerism, this paper has examined the demand side. It has suggested a novel approach using original survey items to propose a measure of producerist populist attitudes by comparing the United States with Western Europe.

Our cross-national analysis confirms the presence of distinct clusters of citizens who share typical producerist attitudes characterized by a Manichean view of society, as well as normative evaluations of specific “in-groups” and “out-groups” based on such groups’ economic contribution to society. Our findings reveal the presence of two clusters of left-wing and right-wing producerist citizens depending on different interpretations of the groups of producers and “parasites” and the main ideological orientation of the producerist claim.

Our research shows that producerist attitudes are not exclusive to American politics, as they are shared by significant groups of citizens on both sides of the Atlantic. Such similarities between the US and Western European societies are particularly remarkable given the importance of the political, institutional, and cultural differences that separate countries on both sides of the Atlantic.

We also observe a convergence between the left-wing and right-wing producerist clusters in terms of their very positive views of “small entrepreneurs” and “workers”, who are viewed as typical “makers” in both manifestations of producerism. Both clusters also exhibit negative attitudes towards “politicians”, thereby confirming the link between producerism and populism. In its right-wing variant, producerism entails negative perceptions of people receiving social benefits as freeloaders at the bottom of society and a rejection of immigrants,

which illustrates its link with nativism. Unlike traditional definitions of right-wing producerism, economic elites such as rich people and CEOs of big corporations tend to be included in the category of “parasites”, especially in Europe. This suggests that right-wing populism may have grown more critical of big business in recent years, thereby showing greater similarity with its left-wing counterpart. Additionally, we observe some cross-country differences, which may reflect context-specific opportunities stemming from the different cultural legacies, economic institutions, and welfare traditions.

Finally, we have examined the relationship between producerist clusters and the socio-cultural attitudes commonly associated with populism, and their correlation with voting preferences. The findings reveal that right-wing producerists display significantly higher levels of welfare chauvinism and authoritarianism, as well as greater support for economic redistribution than the conservative right, while also showing more negative attitudes towards globalization. Conversely, left-wing producerists exhibit a more culturally tolerant and universalist profile, with the highest average score on the economic redistribution dimension.

Finally, our empirical analysis suggests that producerist populist attitudes may have a significant effect on voting preferences across both sides of the Atlantic, particularly to the right of the political spectrum. In the United States, right-wing producerist voters represented an important sector of Donald Trump’s electoral support. Such voters were more likely to vote for the former US president, and they significantly differed in that from the class of primarily left-leaning and more ‘progressive’ producerists, as well as from the two other clusters, notably including the conservative right. In Europe, we found evidence of a significant relationship between producerism and electoral support for established right-wing populist parties such as the AfD in Germany, the RN in France, and the SVP in Switzerland. In contrast, there was little evidence of such a link with regards to left-wing producerism and populism, while our findings corroborated the profile of the Italian M5S as a case of “polyvalent populism” (Pirro 2018).

This study has some limitations. First, the analysis is primarily exploratory, and the generalizability of our findings to other contexts may be limited by the number of countries in the study. Second, the results obtained through the LPA may be affected by the relatively small number of cases (Vermunt and Magidson, 2002), thus warranting caution when interpreting the final profile solutions across our American and European country samples.

Finally, our survey was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has seen unprecedented increases in public spending on healthcare provisions and social policy, as well as large amounts of financial support for hard-hit economic sectors. This context may have influenced citizens' attitudes towards redistribution (Macarena et al., 2021) and their perception of social groups that may or may not contribute to the country's well-being during a pandemic, potentially affecting our measure of producerism.

Despite these limitations, our findings underscore the importance of the concept of producerism in understanding contemporary populist grievances and mobilization.

By adopting a producerism lens, we can develop a specific theoretical framework for understanding populism. Populist grievances can be viewed as arising from an opposition between the "true people" and "others", rooted in the producerist antagonism, as well as the expression of cultural and materialist aspects. This finding aligns with recent literature suggesting that producerism forms part of broader populist claims. Fahey (2021), for example, examined the populist discourse of presidential candidates in the United States between 1896 and 2016 and asserts that producerism "gives populism much of its moralistic tinge, arguing that the people deserve to rule because of the material value they add to the body politic" (p. 1272).

Producerism resonates with the Manichean logic of populism, as it presents a strongly normative view of the economy in which "producers" are typically depicted as "victims", while "parasites" are essentially seen as objects of resentment. Empirically, our findings are of particular interest to the current literature on populism since they show the presence of different types of producerist populist attitudes depending on the characteristics of the groups that are targeted. This is in line with recent research that suggests that conventional measures of populism fail to capture attitudes towards "non-political" elites such as academics/experts, bureaucrats, and corporate business leaders (Jungkunz et al. 2021).

In producerism, wealth and social justice are not solely material entities but also depend on how individuals perceive and experience practices, objects, political causes and their interactions with others (Sayer, 2011: 3-4). This links producerism with the concept of the "moral economy", which has been extensively discussed in social sciences and, more recently, in political science (Arnold, 2001). The moral economy concerns the justification of economic practices, including attitudes towards the market, economic redistribution, and

social justice, as well as the socio-economic principles that people adhere to and that shape their perception of fairness in different contexts (Koos and Sachweh, 2019). In their recent book, Protzer and Summerville (2022) similarly argue that populism is primarily driven by a sense of economic unfairness in contemporary societies. “Fairness, the authors explain, stipulates that the rewards from cooperation should be principally divided according to individual contribution (...) When someone violates the fairness rule for their own benefit, they are considered a ‘cheater’, often with commensurately severe consequences” (p. 50).

Our study has shed light on how the principle of “fairness” based on the notion of individual contribution may be empirically examined through our measure of producerism. Nevertheless, the nature and magnitude of the political consequences of such attitudes in the general public remain to be seen. Our findings indicate that producerism may facilitate right-wing populist voting in the European context as well as in the United States. Recent research also suggests that producerism may be incorporated into ideologically heterogeneous social protest movements, such as the Yellow Jackets in France (Guerra, Alexandre and Gonthier, 2020). Further empirical research is needed to systematically assess the relationship between populism, producerist attitudes and voting preferences across different contexts. We also need more studies of cross-national similarities and differences in the contemporary manifestations of producerism in Europe and elsewhere.

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