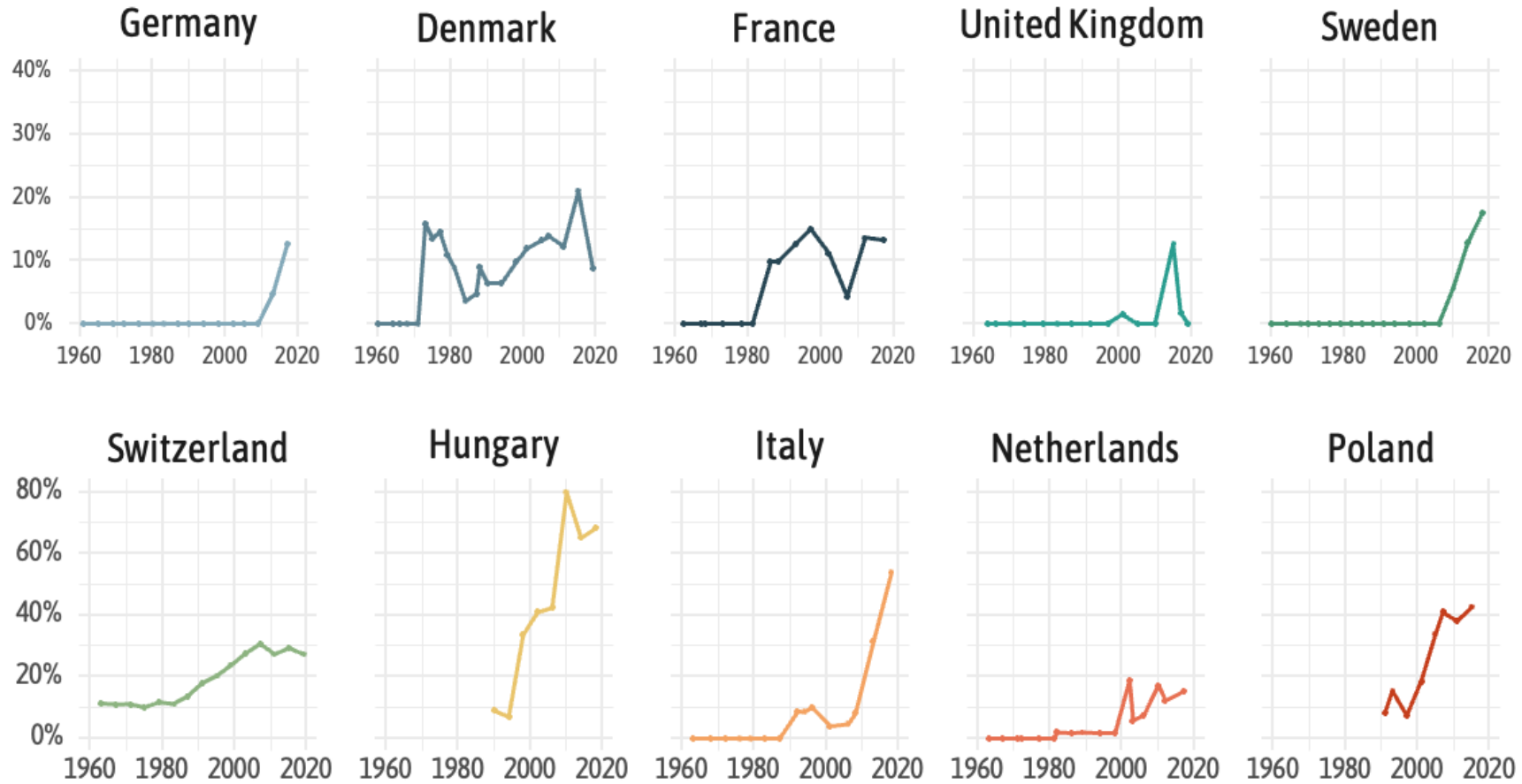


THE CULTURAL ORIGINS OF POPULISM

Yotam Margalit, Shir Raviv, and Omer Solodoch

12th Annual Conference of the European Political Science Association

Vote Share for Right-Wing Populist Parties Across European Countries, 1960–2020



Wigan's Road to 'Brexit': Anger, Loss and Class Resentments



The Resentment That Never Sleeps

Rising anxiety over declining social status tells us we got here

Damn rotters

Dutch voters' anger is fuelling populism

Even so, the ruling class looks set to be voted out

'It's Become Increasingly Hard for Them to Feel Good About Their Lives'

What is the source of anger and resentment that has fueled the rise of populist parties?

Mobilization

The current stage of liberal democracy generates myriad grievances that fuel resentment, providing a basis for new waves of populist mobilization.

monkey Cage

It's not just Trump. Authoritarian populism is rising across the West. Here's why.

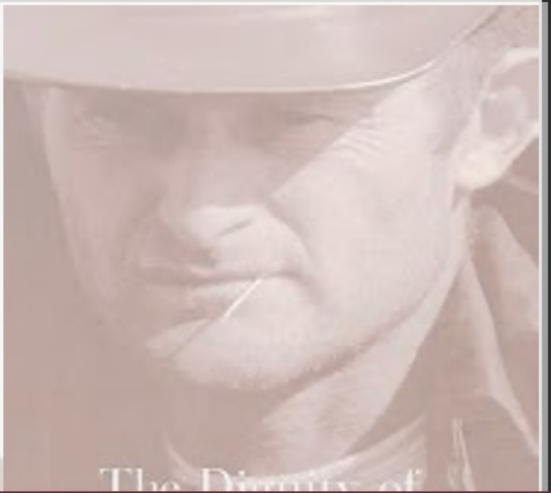
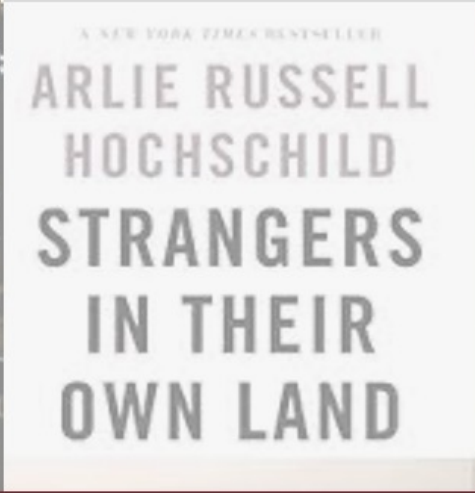
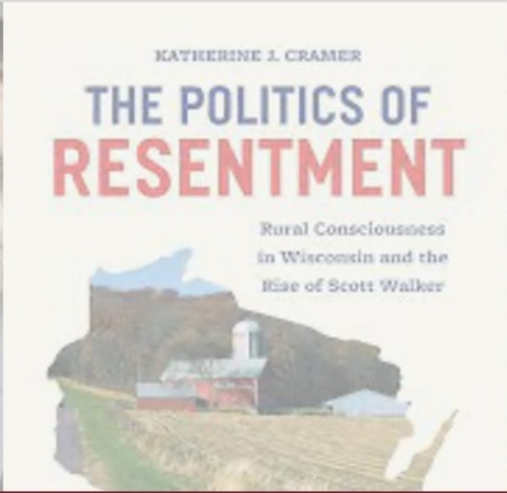
Playing with fear

In America and Europe, right-wing populist politicians are on the march. The threat is

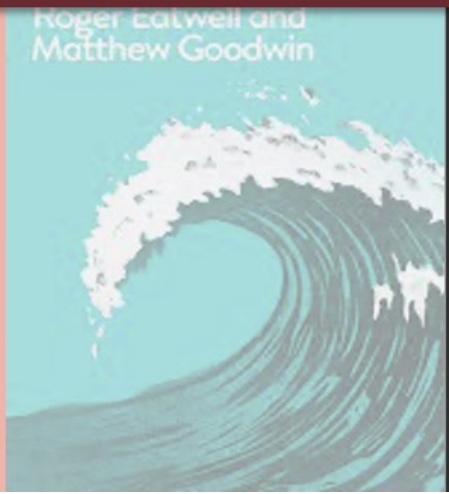
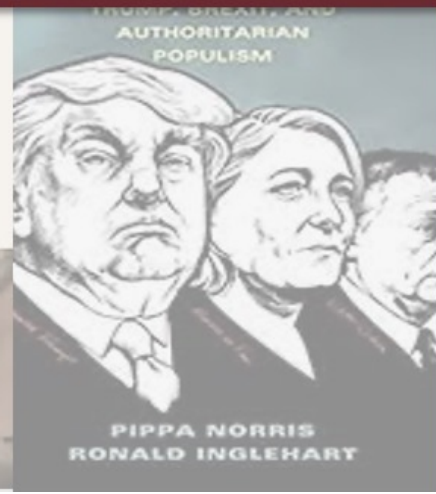
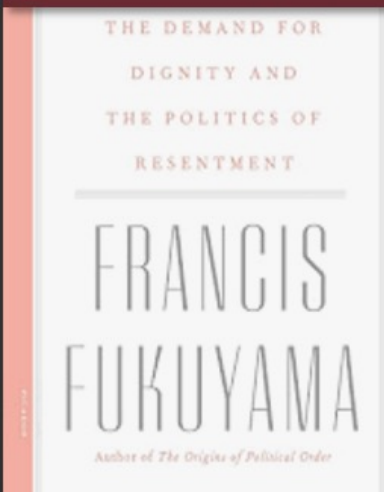
THE KEY SOURCE OF DISCONTENT UNDERLYING THE RISE OF POPULISM

Two prominent strands of explanations

- Economic insecurity (Rodrik, 2018; Guiso et al., 2017).
- Cultural concerns (Hochschild, 2018; Cramer, 2016; Gest, 2016)



Populist rhetoric appeals to anxiety over issues such as collective identity, social status, moral values and changing lifestyles, all stemming from social and cultural long-term structural changes



LIMITATIONS

Earlier attempts to tease out the key drivers of the populist vote are at somewhat limited:

- Economic-based explanations are better measured and easier to test but exhibit limited explanatory significance.
- Cultural-based explanations offer vaguer accounts that are harder to evaluate empirically

IN THIS STUDY, WE:

- Tease out and describe the potential **cultural explanations** of populism.
- Empirically assess their **usefulness** in accounting for the **populist vote**.

ANALYTIC FRAMEWORK

- The deep-rooted **societal changes** that generated the cultural concerns.
- The **demographics** of those who supposedly harbor those concerns.
- The **“other”** against whom the grievances are directed.
- The **mechanisms** through which cultural resentment translates into populist support.
- The extent to which the cultural drivers overlap or interact with **economic factors**.

1 INTERGENERATIONAL BACKLASH

Older cohorts who feel that traditional values have been trampled and overtaken by a post-materialist culture and politics.

2 ETHNO-CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT

Natives who fear that demographic changes and incoming waves of migration diminish their majority and transform the country culturally.

3 RURAL RESENTMENT

Rural residents who feel shunned, and looked down upon, by urban elites and policy makers representing the interests and lifestyles of urbanites.

4 SOCIAL STATUS ANXIETY

White men anxious about a decline in the privileged social status their race, gender and occupational standing have traditionally afforded them.

5 DISINTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY

People who feel isolated and alienated due to the atomization of society and the absence of a cohesive local community

FIVE
STORYLINES
OF POPULISM

1 INTER-GENERATIONAL BACKLASH

Cultural Concern: Older voters who feel that the contemporary culture and politics are eroding the moral status of their traditional - conservative and authoritarian- values.

Underlying Social Process: A slow-evolving intergenerational change from materialist to post-materialist values.

Observable Implications: Older voters with conservative values and authoritarian predispositions.

2 ETHNO-CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT

Cultural Concern: White native majority who fear that their country may change its national identity and culture.

Underlying Social Process: Profound demographic shifts driven by mass migration and low birth rates among natives.

Observable Implications: White natives – in all age groups, regions, and classes – who feel that their culture is being undermined by immigration.

3 RURAL RESENTMENT

Cultural Concern: A resentment among rural residents, who feel ignored and looked down upon, by the elites and policymakers representing the interests and lifestyles of city residents

Underlying Social Process: A process of urbanization which leads, among other things, to changes in value priorities

Observable Implications: Rural residents who feel alienated from decision-making centers.

4 SOCIAL STATUS ANXIETY

Cultural Concern: Anxiety about a decline, objective or subjective, in social status.

Underlying Social Process: The disappearance of certain jobs and a progressive shift in the mainstream stance on social issues such as race and gender roles.

Observable Implications: People who perceive themselves as positioned in the lower (but not lowest) levels of the social hierarchy and seek to maintain a respected position in society.

5 DISINTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY

Cultural Concern: Individuals who feel isolated and alienated in the absence of a cohesive local community as a source of support.

Underlying Social Process: Processes of de-industrialization, urbanization, the erosion of the local infrastructure such as public library or public pubs, and changes in leisure and cultural activities

Observable Implications: People who have little social contact with their neighbors and lament the situation; usually reside outside of large cities.

DATA & MEASUREMENT

- We assess the empirical plausibility of the five storylines, using **cross-national survey** data covering **ten European countries** collected by the ESS, between 2012 and 2018.
- Our **dependent variable** in the main analysis is **support for populism**, which we capture by respondents' voting preference.
- We rely on the classification and definition of the **Global Party Survey**.
- We validate this measure using several **alternative classifications**: PopuList, Van Kessel, Inglehart and Norris.

RADICAL-RIGHT POPULIST PARTIES

Switzerland Swiss People's Party 2012-2018
Federal Democratic Union 2012-2018
Ticino League 2012-2018

Germany National Democratic Party / German People's Union 2012-2018
Alternative for Germany 2014-2018

Denmark Danish People's Party 2012-2018

France National Front / National Rally 2012-2018
Movement for France 2012-2016

United Kingdom UK Independence Party 2014-2018

Hungary FIDESZ-Hungarian Civic Alliance 2012-2018
Movement for a Better Hungary (Jobbik) 2012-2018
Hungarian Justice and Life Party (MIEP) 2012

Italy Northern League 2012-2018
5 Star Movement 2012-2018
Fratelli d'Italia / Brothers of Italy 2012-2018

Netherlands Party for Freedom 2012-2018
Reformed Political Party 2012-2018

Poland Law and Justice (PiS) 2012-2018
Congress of the New Right 2012-2014

Sweden Sweden Democrats 2012-2018

INTERGENERATIONAL BACKLASH

Whether the respondent is (1) older than 55 years and (2) holds authoritarian values

ETHNO-CULTURAL ESTRANGEMENT

Whether the respondent is (1) a native; (2) does not belong to an ethnic minority; and (3) believes that “the country’s cultural life is generally undermined by people coming to live here from other countries.”

RURAL RESENTMENT

Whether the respondent (1) lives in a “country village” or “farm or home in countryside”, and (2) feels that the political system allows little or no say for people like her/him in what the government does.

DISINTEGRATION OF COMMUNITY

Respondents who (1) do not feel close to people in their local area; and (2) do not live in a big city.

SOCIAL STATUS ANXIETY

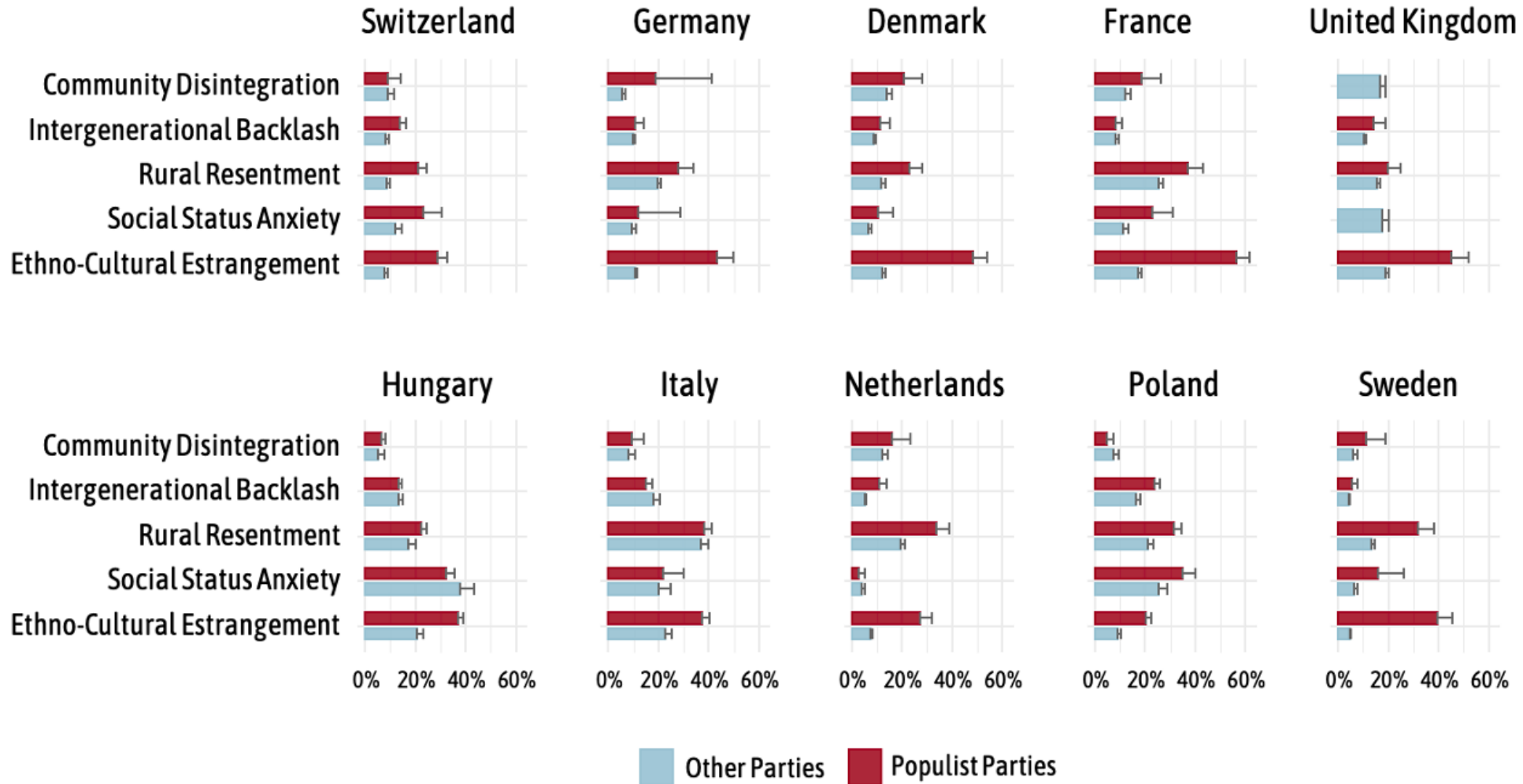
Respondents who (1) perceive themselves as being in the lower rungs of the social ladder, but not at the very bottom; and (2) assign importance to receiving “respect from others.”

GUIDING QUESTIONS

To assess the plausibility of the five cultural explanations, we center on three guiding questions:

1. How **sizable** is the group to which the storyline pertains?
2. How well does the storyline **distinguish** populist voters from voters of other parties?
3. To what extent are the findings consistent **across countries**?

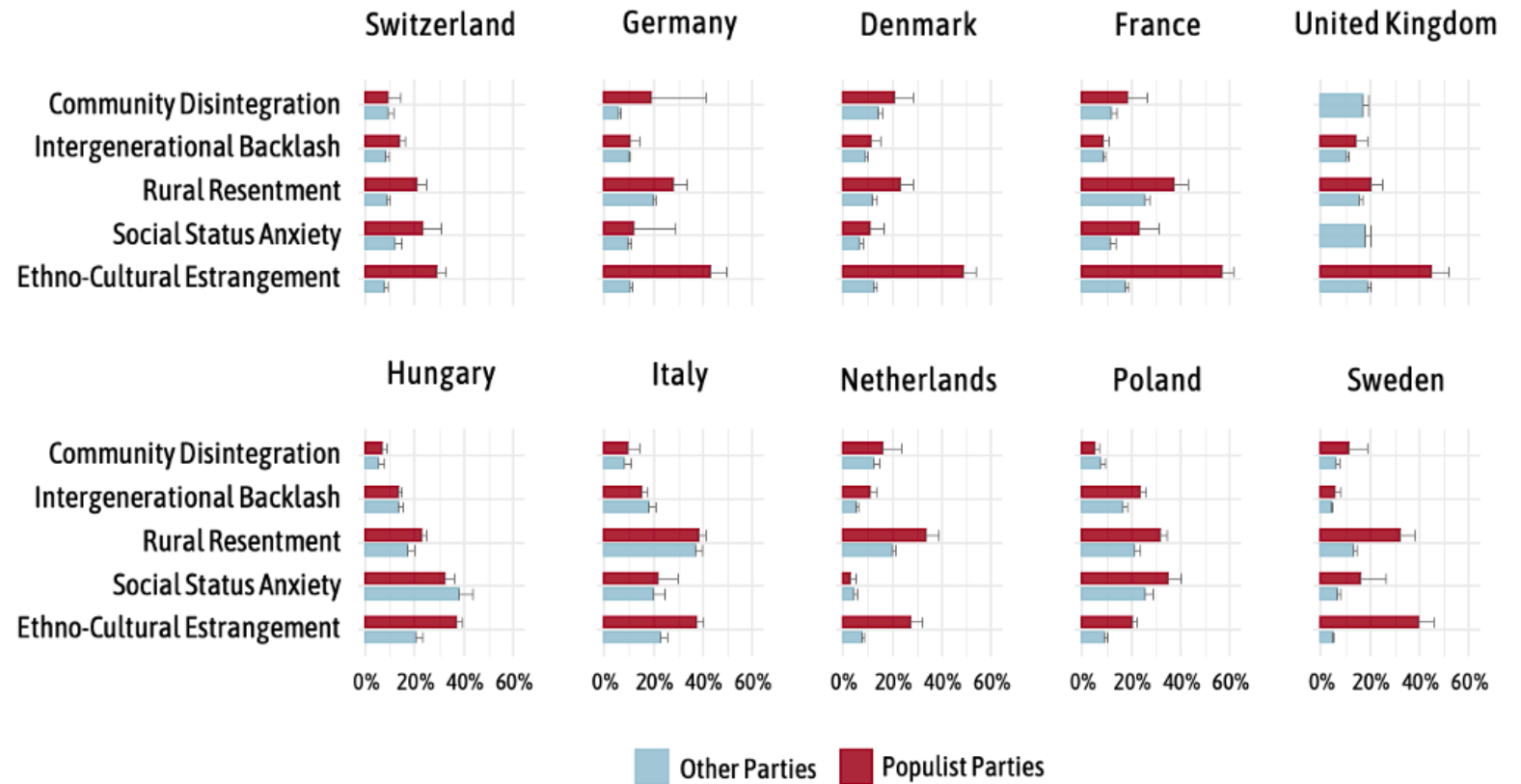
Cultural Predictors of Voting for Populist Parties, by Country



The share of populist versus non-populist voters whose characteristics match each of the cultural accounts

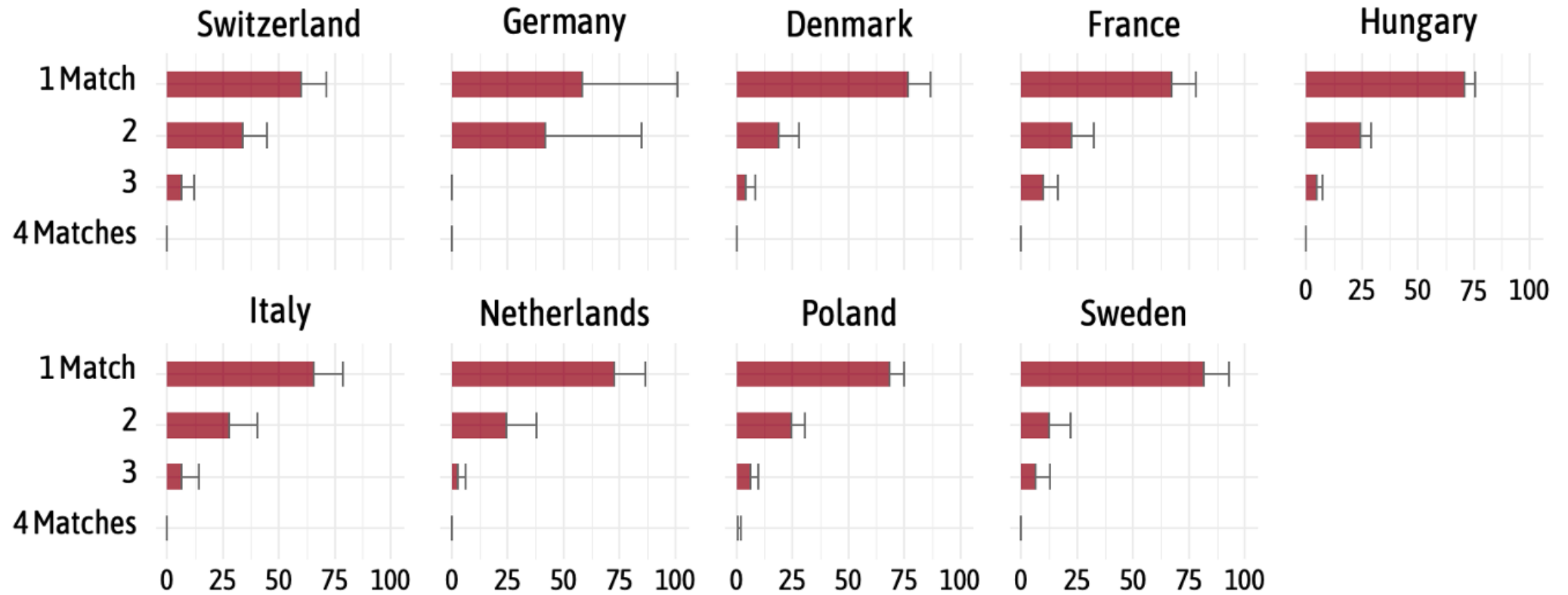
Significant variation with respect to the other cultural accounts.

Cultural Predictors of Voting for Populist Parties, by Country



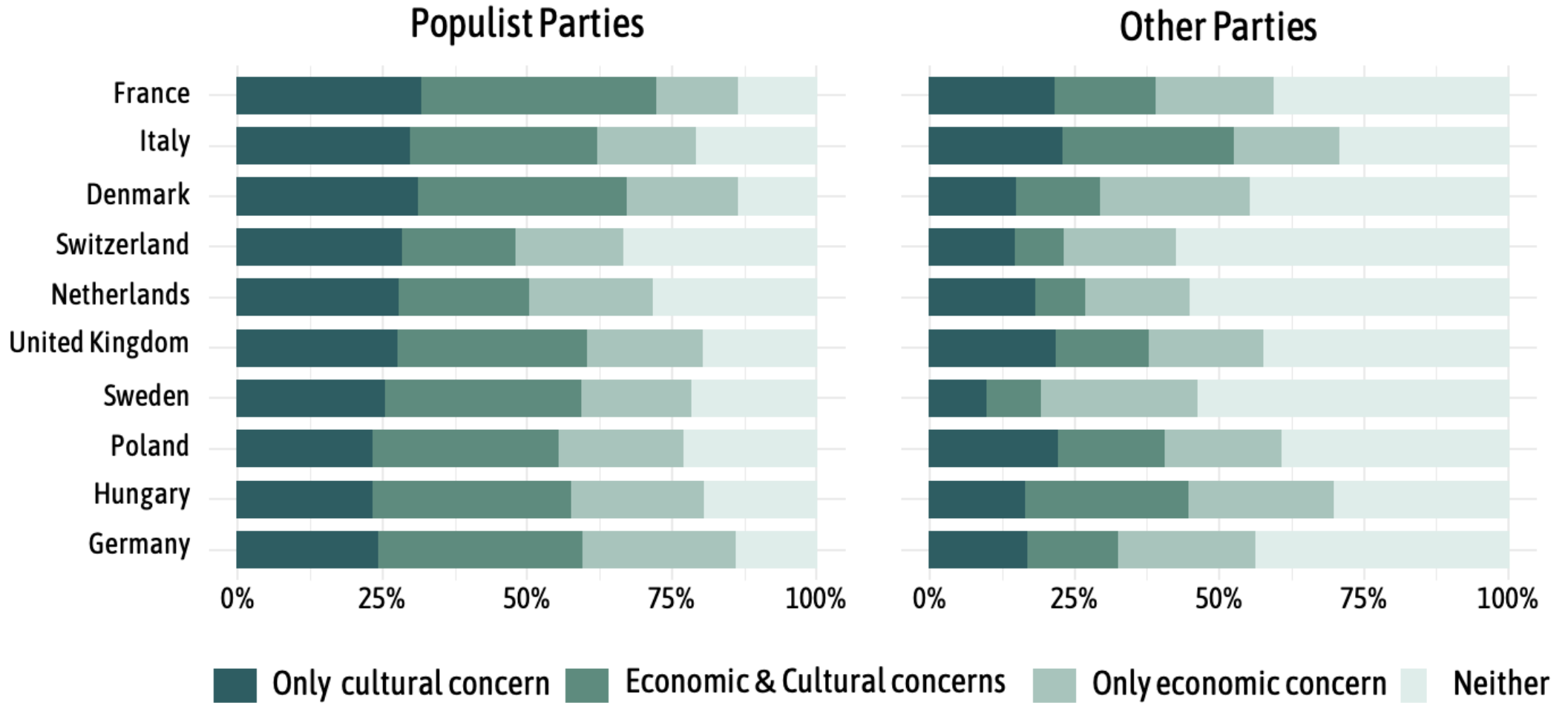
Social status anxiety is a strong distinguishing feature of the populist voters in France, Sweden, Switzerland, and Poland. In contrast, community disintegration and intergenerational backlash are more peripheral.

Share of populist voters by number of cultural explanations their characteristics match



While the five storylines are in theory not mutually exclusive, in practice we find only limited overlap: nearly 70 percent of populist voters match a single storyline, while about 26 percent match two.

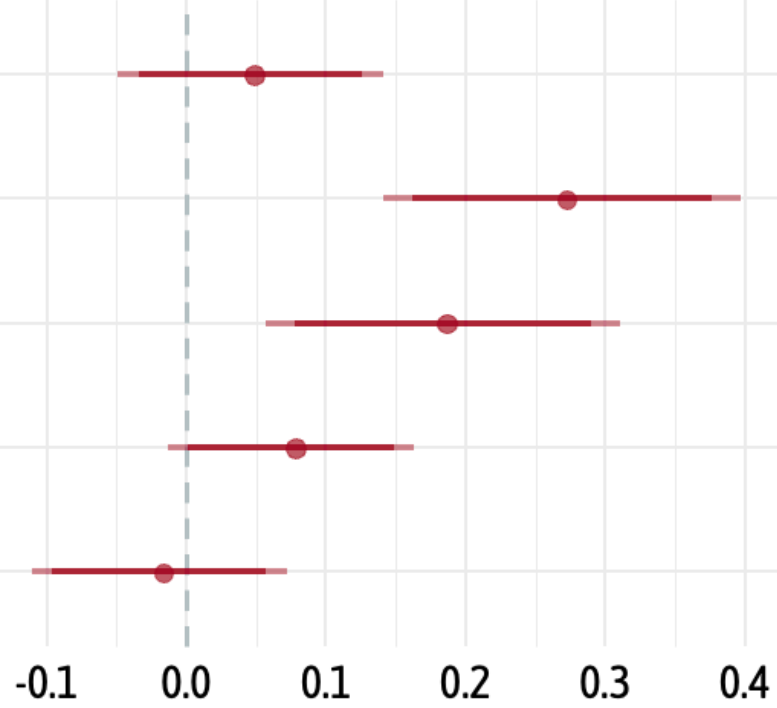
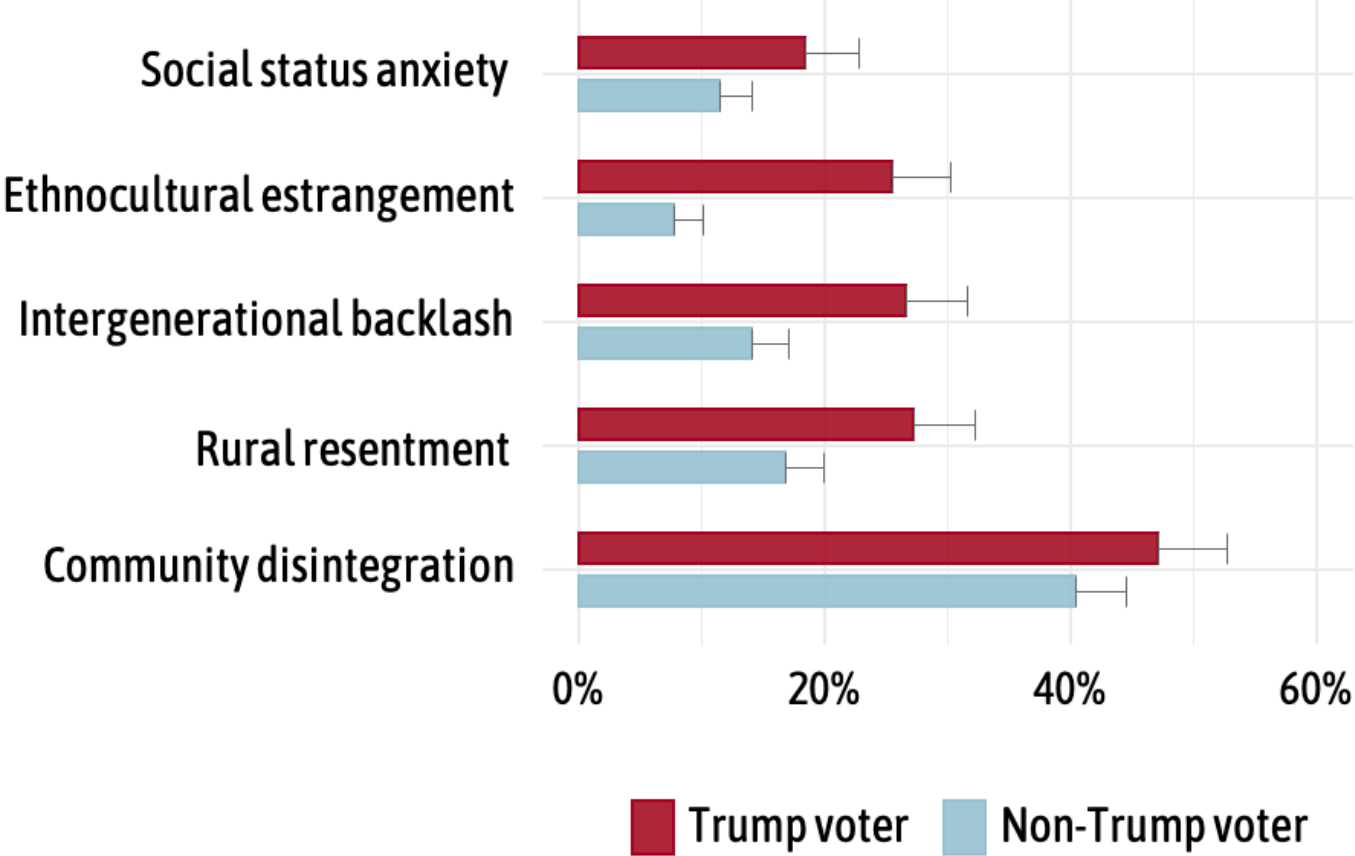
The Overlap between Cultural and Economic Concerns





THE U.S. CASE

Cultural Grievances and Support for Trump, ANES 2016



CONCLUSION

- There are several distinct culture-centric storylines that may explain the populist vote.
- They differ greatly in terms of their potential explanatory usefulness.
- The most prominent account is the storyline centered on **ethno-cultural estrangement**.
- Populism is also a significant draw among **rural residents** who feel they have no voice in politics.
- The usefulness of the other storylines varies **by country**.

FINAL THOUGHTS

- The populist support base does not comprise of a narrow demographic grouping. Rather, it is composed of a **more diverse cross-section** of society with **distinct sources of disaffection**.
- This **heterogeneity** may help explain the rise of what are seemingly very different types of populist forces across countries.
- The focus on marginal effects is problematic when ignoring the **overall explanatory usefulness** of different accounts.