

# **Populism in Colombian Congress: Are legislative bills a populist response by political parties to social demands?**

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## **Abstract**

Traditionally, populism has enjoyed great scholarly attention, but the relationship between populism and legislative behavior has not yet been studied in full detail. This research analyses how two political parties represented in the Colombian Congress and located in the extremes of the ideological spectrum exhibit populist features in the policy-making dimension of their legislative behaviour. Thus, the research starts from the hypothesis that populist features are evident in the legislative activity carried out by parties of the Colombian left and right wings, even when each one does so under a specific logic of governmental support or political opposition. Although we find differences regarding the topics of greatest interest of each party organization, in both cases populist characteristics are presented -to a greater or lesser extent-, evidencing that populism works as a political strategy and style at both ends of the ideological spectrum.

## **Key Words**

*Populism, legislative behaviour, political parties, policy-making, political strategy.*

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## 1. Introduction

In the development of legislative behaviour studies, political science has been focused on legislative production and the activities that Congress members do at the Capitol. However, this academic tradition doesn't take into account if populism is a strategy or a style present at parliamentary work and a motivation to file bills that respond to social demands. Consequently, this research could contribute to expanding legislative behaviour studies and to understand populism in a different dimension of governments and political parties in power.

Therefore, this article analyses how two political parties represented in the Colombian Congress exhibit populist features in their legislative behaviour. Specifically, the research focuses on a key aspect of legislative activity: the policy-making dimension, that is, the presentation of bills to respond to specific social demands. Thus, the main question to answer is whether the bills presented by the congresspeople belonging to the political parties *Polo Democrático* (left-wing) and *Centro Democrático* (right-wing), over the period 2018-2021 have a populist approach. Specifically, the objective is to determine whether populist features are evident in the presentation of bills of two Colombian political parties of different ideological extremes. This, considering the hypothesis that due to its main characteristics, and understanding that as a strategy and as a style, we can find populist features in the legislative work of right-wing and left-wing political parties, even when they coexist in the same political scenario and assume governmental support and opposition roles respectively.

The empirical analysis focuses on Colombia because it combines two main elements: firstly, a democratic system and secondly Congressional participation of, at least, a left-wing populist party and a right-wing populist party. In fact, as a 'typical' case, this study is informative of general patterns of legislative behaviour in many Latin American Congresses, which have seen a similar rise of populist parties; Likewise, as has already been mentioned, it is important to highlight that this research is made in response to a need for political science to study this relationship "although populism has enjoyed great scholarly attention in the past decade, the relationship between populism and legislative behavior has not yet been analyzed in full detail" (Louwerse and Otjes, 2019: 479).

This paper is comprehensively organized into four sections. First, the conceptual framework concerning populism and legislative behavior on which this research is based, will be presented in detail to serve as foundation to the subsequent examination. Then, the methodology that was applied for data collection and analysis will be explained. Next, the main results of the research will be presented and interpreted. Finally, the conclusions of the study will be conveyed.

## **2. Populism and legislative behaviour: Conceptual framework**

For the purpose of this study, populism will be conceptualized from three specific premises. First, for populists leaders the people are considered virtuous, pure and homogeneous, thus public policy actions must reflect the will of the people. Second, the ruling elite does not represent the people and the government must be returned to the people (Taggart, 2000). Third, understanding populism as a strategy (Weyland, 2001) and as a style (Moffit and Tormey, 2014), more than an ideological matter, it is also important to consider the policy-making process as an attempt to maximize the chances of winning and maintaining power. In addition to the previous premises is the adaptability of populist notions, as they notoriously combine ideas from both the left-wing and the right-wing.

### ***Populism as a strategy and as a style***

According to Moffit and Tormey (2014, 383), in the contemporary literature on populism there are at least four central approaches to understanding and explaining this concept: as an ideology, as logic, as a discourse, and as a strategy. For the purpose of maintaining cohesion with this study's objectives and the research question raised in the first section, this article focuses on populism as a strategy and as a style for the analysis of the Colombian congress legislative behaviour.

For Weyland (2011: 12), when we speak of political strategy, we refer to the “methods and instruments to win and exercise power” and it is characterized by the power or capacity displayed by a political leader. Considering that populism is about the search and use of power, specifically populism as a strategy is understood, in Weyland’s (2001, 14) words, as a strategy through which power is sought or exercised based on and non-institutionalized support of a large number of followers, mostly unorganized.

Regarding this definition, it is necessary to highlight several aspects mentioned by Weyland (2011, 14). The first is that the majority of followers constitute a disorganized mass in the political space in which they are attracted, it is understood, to charismatic leaders. In this sense, the belief in the abilities and virtues of the leader is necessary to create a connection with his or her followers and generate a “direct link”. In this way, charisma acts as if it were “glue” that maintains a leader’s relationship with his popular base. The second aspect highlighted by Weyland is that the charismatic leader gains broad, intense, but diffuse support from that disorderly mass by representing those who feel excluded from political life and promising to rescue them from crisis or threats. At this point, the leader asks the people for help to make a heroic effort to fight the privileged groups in society, indeed an important factor in the strategic narrative is attacking elitism and criticizing privileges that result from special interests or treatment. To finish the definition and characterization of populism as a strategy, it should be said that from this perspective populism, more than an ideological matter, is based on opportunistic personalism and the decisions that leaders make to try to maximize their chances of winning, maintaining and exerting power.

Furthermore, considering populism as a style is also important in order to understand the political phenomenon Colombia, Latin America and to a certain extent the whole world is currently experiencing. If we take the definition of Moffit and Tormey (2014, 387), populism as style “is as the repertoires of performance that are used to create political relations”. This definition focuses on both rhetoric and aesthetics.

Definitely, this perspective as a strategy and as a style, allows us to better understand populism. On one hand, it makes it possible to explain why populism prevails throughout the ideological spectrum and at widely different and distinct historical and cultural contexts, as it has happened in Latin America, and this is possible because it disassociates populism from any particular ideological point of the political spectrum and assumes that structures can depend “on a base” loose or organized. On the other hand, it recognizes that the style of the actors can be populist at any time since it is not a fixed identity. In addition, it recognizes that the style and the narrative are not opposites, on the contrary, one element can, more often than not, affect the other (Moffit and Tormey (2014).

#### ***Left-wing and Right-wing: chameleonic character?***

According to Mudde and Rovira (2012: 5), referencing Taggart (2000), populism has a chameleonic nature due to its appearance and influence in widely contextually different times and geographical locations, but is always constituted by factors of its environment that resonate with “the heartland”. In other words, “this implies that in the real world there are few, if any, pure forms of populism (in isolation), but rather subtypes of it that show a specific articulation of certain ideological features”. Consequently, different forms of populism can emerge combining many variables according to the ideology, socio-economic and historical environment and this implies that the relationship between populism and democracy is not a fixed one, and can be either reactionary or progressive.

Now, placing the concept’s meaning in the European context over the last two decades, where it has been traditionally experienced and studied, similarities and differences between right-wing and left-wing political parties can, distinctively, be pointed out. For instance, right-wing parties have vocally expressed and channeled their concerns surrounding immigration, this has been widely successful for right-wing parties and it is enabled and to a certain degree empowered “by the pre-existence of a fertile breeding ground of popular resentment around immigration, crime and party politics across Western Europe” (Mudde, 2013: 11); meanwhile leftist populists have succeeded in leading demands against austerity and a constantly growing inequality, according to Stavrakakis and Katsambekis (2014: 126), “radical left’s dynamic was not self-generated, but probably fueled by the massive anti-austerity popular movements already on the rise (from national strikes and mass demonstrations to solidarity movements)”. That is, although the speeches are, in substance, different, in both cases, we find populist phenomena that are strengthened by pre-existing scenarios and popular beliefs, where they are presented as catalysts of social nonconformity and capable of offering well-being solutions for the people. On the other hand, left-wing populism focuses on the concept of “people” as a collective subject constructed in a pluralistic and heterogeneous way where sexual, ethnic, religious, and social differences have

a place, owing to they emphasize in the need to represent and include traditionally marginalized sectors; instead, the right-wing tends to considerer “the people” as a homogenous organic community, tending to be more exclusive and regressive. As for the elite, another important category for populism, in the leftist narrative, the elite are represented and viewed as the enemy guilty of injustice, economic inequality and catalysts of corruption and those who have favored the interests of a very few (or even foreigners).

As academic literature and examples have shown, it is possible to find common elements between different examples of populist parties and leaderships that must be considered and analyzed in their specific and particular contexts. In this sense, it becomes relevant to return to the idea of the “chameleonic” character of populism, mainly considering that it is becoming less evident as pure form of populism and, on the contrary, what we observe in reality are cases where there are specific articulations to ideological traits and tendencies. As Mudde and Rovira (2011: 22) highlight, “in the real-world populism virtually always appears attached to other ideological features. These features actually allow us to disentangle the left or right nature of different types of populism”.

#### ***Populism and legislative: Left-wing and Right-wing political parties***

As Otjes and Lowerse (2015, 61) highlights, the debate on left-wing and right-wing populism has been quite extensive and detailed. Left-wing populism is mostly characterized by an emphasis on socio-economic issues (March, 2007, p. 74) and often claims that the political elite only look after the interests of the big businesses and corporations elite and neglect the interests of the common working man (Mudde, 2007). Right-wing populist parties, on the other hand, usually receive their ‘radical rightwing’ label with reference to their commitment to authoritarianism and nativism, which is the idea that only members of its nation should inhabit a state and that non-native elements pose a threat (Mudde, 2007). On socio-economic issues, these parties have varying positions, with some parties sharing a neo-liberal economic agenda, while parties of what Sarah De Lange (2007) calls the ‘new radical right’ take a more centrist position on socio-economic issues. Thus, the label left-wing populist refers mainly to these parties’ positions on socio-economic issues, while right-wing populism is usually related to these parties’ stances on authoritarianism and migration Otjes and Lowerse (2015, 62).

From there, legislative behavior is not only determined by its populist nature, but also by other political views, such as its left-right position; And, the bills they submit are likely to be motivated by a populist strategy or style, in addition to other factors. Therefore, the hypothesis that guides this research is that populist features are evident in the legislative activity carried out by parties of the Colombian left and right wings, specifically in terms of the bills they present, even when each one does so under a specific logic of governmental support or political opposition. This would lead us to characterize the Colombian Congress as a case in which left and right populisms converge at the same political moment, context and in the same legislative arena, making it an ideal case of study for this research.

### 3. Methodology and case study

In order to analyze whether the legislative bills presented by both right- and left-wing political parties are a populist response, an observational study of the policy-making dimension in the legislative activity is conducted. For this, the bills presented by the congress people of *Polo Democrático* party (left wing) and the members of Congress elected for *Centro Democrático* party (right wing) between 2018 and 2021 are dissected and analyzed. Considering that, according to Colombian legislative regulations, a bill can be presented by a single member of congress, for this research and in pursuit of a truly accurate analysis the bills that will be considered as a partisan initiative are those signed and filled by at least half of the elected senators of the respective political party in question.

This analysis takes into account the main characteristics of populism to score and categorize the presented bills, both its normative content and temporal, social and political context; settled on a five-point continuum anchored with the following two phases: “not populist” and “very populist”. Based on Canovan’s (1999) statements, the five characteristics of the measurement are: 1) opposition to an elite or dominant social or economic group; 2) claiming the rights of a minority group (“return power back to the people”); 3) Response to people’s social demands; 4) Promise the return to a nostalgic and glorious past or remembrance of that past; and, 5) Flattery to a sector of the electorate. Next, the selection of the Colombian case and the left and right-wing parties that are analyzed in this research are explained.

#### ***Colombian case***

As previously mentioned, the empirical analysis focuses on Colombia because it combines two critical elements that make this country ideal for this type of research: a democratic system and Congressional participation of, at least, a left-wing populist party and a right-wing populist party. In fact, as a ‘typical’ case, this study is informative of general patterns of legislative behaviour in many Latin America Congresses, which have seen a similar rise of populist parties.

The Colombian congress is a bicameral institution, comprising a lower body, House of Representatives (108 seats elected in territorial constituencies, special constituencies, and an international constituency), and an upper body, the Senate (172 seats elected from a single national constituency), elected by popular vote to serve four-year terms. According to the national constitution, the congress amends the constitution, makes the law and exercises political control over the government and the public administration. In the last election (2018), at least 15 political parties and movements obtained a seat in Congress. Among these political organizations stands *Centro Democrático*, the majority right-wing party in the legislature, and *Polo Democrático*, the left-wing party with the longest term in the Colombian congress.

#### ***Polo Democrático and Centro Democrático: Left-wing and right-wing populists parties***

*Polo Democrático* is a left-wing political party founded in 2005 as a political alliance of two political movements: *Alternativa Democrática* and *Polo Democrático Independiente*, both

parties opposed the neoliberal economic program, securitization and militarization of Colombia under the government of Alvaro Uribe Velez. Subsequently it was the only party to declare opposition to the government of Juan Manuel Santos, and nowadays still in opposition against the government of Ivan Duque. In its statutes they are defined as “a democratic, civil, pluralist, multicultural and multi-ethnic party, committed to the defense of life, its territory, biodiversity, national sovereignty, Latin America and Caribbean unity, peace, political, economic and cultural democracy, and the well-being of Colombia women and men”.

Despite having competed for the presidency of Colombia on several occasions, so far, they have never achieved executive national power individually or as members of any coalition. Currently this political party has five (5) seats in the Senate and two (2) in the House of Representatives, after winning 4.74% of votes in the last legislative elections. In its legislative work, this political party has been characterized by strongly opposing the government, citing multiple debates on political control and even promoting motions of no confidence against various government ministers and by filing and supporting legislative initiatives aimed at recognition and vindication of rights of historically excluded population groups (LGBTI, farmers, pensioners, workers, poor and vulnerable population, among others).

*Centro Democrático* is a conservative right-wing political party founded in 2013 by Alvaro Uribe Velez, Colombian former president. This party was born as a formalized and institutionalized political response to the first term of former President Juan Manuel Santos and, specifically, to the peace process between the Colombian government and the FARC guerrillas. They define themselves as “a group of citizens of diverse social, economic, cultural, and political origins, concerned about the present and the future of Colombia, who aspire for the *Centro Democrático* to embody the richness and diversity of our country”. Also mention that are “united by deep love and commitment to the Homeland, respect and adherence to the work led by former President Álvaro Uribe Velez; the conviction that the country must advance along the path of Democratic Security, investor confidence, social cohesion, state austerity, and popular dialogue”.

Currently this political party has nineteen (19) seats in the Senate and thirty-two (32) in the House of Representatives, after winning 16.39% of votes in the last legislative elections. In the 2014 presidential election, *Centro Democrático* chose former Senator and Finance Minister Oscar Ivan Zuluaga as its presidential candidate, who won the first round but lost the second to incumbent president Santos. However, the electoral performance in both congressional and presidential elections provided this political organization with a platform to establish itself as the major opposition party in Colombia in 2014. In 2018 their nominee Ivan Duque was elected President of Colombia and since then the party went from being opposition to occupying the government position. In its legislative work a government group, in the last legislative period this political party has been dedicated to leading the defense of the government and its officials from the legislature and promoting bills in favor of business, financial and productive groups.

#### 4. Results

To respond to the research question about whether the legislative bills are a populist response, an observational study of the policy-making dimension in the legislative activity was made, based on the bills and constitutional reform presented by the Colombian parties *Centro Democratico* and *Polo Democratico* in the current legislative period, which runs from July 2018 to today. It is important to mention two aspects about the data: First, the information was collected from the official record of legislative process of Colombian Congress and each bill was read and analyzed in order to identify the populist's variables that were already mentioned in the methodology section. Second, it is necessary to highlight a finding from the data collected about the authorship of the legislative initiatives that is summarized in that while *Centro Democratico* presented the majority of bills only with the signatures of its congresspeople, *Polo Democratico* does with the support of members of congress from other parties and political movements related to their ideology, and for whom this is their first term in Congress. This last aspect tells us about the strength in the Congress of each political organization studied here and its strategy to try to transform bills into laws and possible solutions for those they represent.

In total, 98 legislative projects were analyzed, which according to their themes and objectives were classified into 19 categories: Culture, economy, education, environment, fundamental rights, homeland security, illegal drugs, institutional reinforcement, international relations, justice reform, labor, legislative process, peace process, political/electoral reform, political participation, punitive actions, region reinforcement, taxes, and workers retirement. Table 1 shows the number of legislative bills filed by each political party analyzed and segmented by topic.

**Table 1: Number of legislative bills filed by political parties segmented by topic**

Topic	Author (political party)	Type of legislative bill	Number of legislative bills
Culture	Centro Democratico	Bill	2
	Polo Democratico	Bill	1
Economy	Centro Democratico	Bill	5
Education	Centro Democratico	Bill	1
	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	1
Environment	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	6
	Polo Democratico	Bill	1
		Constitutional reform	1
Fundamental	Centro Democratico	Bill	2



<b>rights</b>	Polo Democratico	Bill	2
		Constitutional reform	6
<b>Homeland security</b>	Centro Democratico	Bill	2
		Constitutional reform	1
<b>Illegal drugs</b>	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	2
	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	1
<b>Institutional reinforcement</b>	Centro Democratico	Bill	2
		Constitutional reform	6
	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	1
<b>International relations</b>	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	1
<b>Justice reform</b>	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	3
		Bill	1
<b>Labor</b>	Centro Democratico	Bill	1
	Polo Democratico	Bill	2
<b>Legislative process</b>	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	4
<b>Peace process</b>	Centro Democratico	Bill	1
		Constitutional reform	5
	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	3
<b>Political / Electoral reform</b>	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	2
	Polo Democratico	Bill	3
<b>Political participation</b>	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	2
<b>Punitive action</b>	Centro Democratico	Bill	5
		Constitutional reform	8
	Polo Democratico	Bill	1
		Constitutional reform	2
<b>Region reinforcement</b>	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	1
	Polo Democratico	Constitutional reform	1
<b>Taxes</b>	Centro Democratico	Constitutional reform	2

<b>Worker's retirement</b>	Centro Democratico	Bill	1
	Polo Democratico	Bill	4

*Source: own elaboration based on bills filed*

In the last four years, *Centro Democratico* filed 63 legislative bills mainly related to economy, environment, institutional reinforcement, peace process, and punitive actions, while *Polo Democratico* filed 35 bills mostly related to fundamental rights, peace process, political/electoral reforms, and workers retirement areas. This initial description helps us to identify the issues in which each political party, from its ideology, carries out its work of representation, as well as the people or social groups to which they consider themselves representing. Now, in terms of how populist these bills and constitutional reforms are, Table 2 shows the score received by both right-wing and left-wing political parties in each of the 98 initiatives presented.

As mentioned, it can be seen in table 2, both the right-wing party (*Centro Democratico*) and the left-wing party (*Polo Democratico*) there are bills and constitutional reform bills that exhibit populist features. Only one bill marks 0 in the total score of populist characteristics and it is an attempt to modify the quorum of the high courts to speed up constitutional and judicial decision-making. On the contrary, a bill and a constitutional reform achieve the highest possible score (5) since the variables studied are evidenced in their texts. It is precisely an initiative of the left-wing party for the renegotiation of Free Trade Agreements (FTA), and one of the right-wing parties to increase the sanctioning capacity of the entity that monitors the services of the Colombian health system. The last one effectively became law.

When looking at the results segmented by topic, it is striking that all initiatives related to labor and workers retreatments score 4, being the “promise the return to a glorious past” the only one variable that is not present in these texts. A similar situation is shown in most bills focused on fundamental rights. In fact, if the results are analyzed from the variables, we find that the one with the lowest incidence is the “promise the return to a glorious past”. This is because, as such, the legislative texts do not refer to this type of narratives that are more emotional than rational, and the arguments that accompany the drafting of the regulations (explanatory statement) are usually technical and rational. It is possible that by exploring the speeches of the members of Congress who were the authors of the respective bills during their debate, we can reveal these types of factors typical of populism.

Finally, the bills and legislative reform that score the least (0 or 1) also deserve special attention. Its low level of populism can be explained from the nature and scope of the legislative proposal, insofar as they are more of a general nature than directed to specific audiences or alluding to specific demands. In these cases, then, we can affirm that these are initiatives of more general rather than particular interest because the opposition to an elite or dominant group is not clearly identified, a respond to social demands or that seek to vindicate the rights of a minority sector of population -variables less found-.

**Table 2: Degree of populism of the legislative bills presented by *Centro Democratico* and *Polo Democratico* parties between 2018-2021**

Author (Political party)	Title	Topic	Opposition to elite	Claiming minority group's rights	Response to social demands	Promise the return to a glorious past	Flattery to a sector of the electorate	TOTAL
Centro Democratico	High court quorum	Justice reform	0	0	0	0	0	<b>0</b>
Centro Democratico	Coffee as a national drink	Culture	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Incentives for the quality, promotion and consumption of panela	Economy	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	District participation in alternative energy projects	Environment	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Fundamental right to impugment	Fundamental rights	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Fundamental right to impugment	Fundamental rights	0	1	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	College degree requirement for congressmen	Legislative process	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Create the Social Service for Peace	Peace process	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Create the Social Service for Peace	Peace process	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Closed list	Political / Electoral reform	1	0	0	0	0	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Virtual vote	Political / Electoral reform	0	0	1	0	0	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Crimes related to political crime	Punitive action	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Crimes related to political crime	Punitive action	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Eliminate political crime from the legal system	Punitive action	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>

Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Girardot as district	Region reinforcement	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Medellín as a District	Region reinforcement	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Tax legal security	Taxes	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Tax legal security	Taxes	0	0	0	0	1	<b>1</b>
Centro Democratico	Provisions on urbanism and civility	Culture	0	0	1	1	0	<b>2</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Artisan panela as cultural heritage	Culture	0	1	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Equity Criteria for Soldiers and Professional Infants of the Military Forces	Homeland security	0	1	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Military promotions by the President	Homeland security	0	1	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Lower salary for congressmen	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Amendment to the Transparency Law	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Elimination of regional comptrollers	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Reduction in the number of members of congress	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Lower salary for congressmen	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Autonomy of Legal Medicine	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	0	1	0	<b>2</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Lower salary for congressmen	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democratico	Elimination of departmental comptrollers	Institutional	1	0	0	1	0	<b>2</b>

		reinforcement						
Centro Democrático	Lower salary for congressmen	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Justice reform	Justice reform	0	0	1	0	1	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Referendums against decisions of the Constitutional Court	Justice reform	1	0	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Co-judges	Justice reform	0	1	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Punitive actions against corruption	Punitive action	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Polo Democrático and left-wing parties	Rules against tax corruption	Punitive action	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Inability of high public officials	Punitive action	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Crimes against the environment will not be related	Punitive action	1	0	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Inability of high public officials	Punitive action	1	0	1	0	0	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Prohibition of surrogacy	Punitive action	0	1	0	0	1	<b>2</b>
Centro Democrático	Rural Credit Relief	Economy	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democrático	Rural Credit Relief	Economy	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democrático	Mechanism for parents to accompany the PAE (School Feeding Program)	Education	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democrático and left-wing parties	Gratuity in higher education	Education	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democrático and left-wing parties	Single-use plastic ban	Environment	1	0	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democrático	Special regime for Amazonas	Environment	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democrático and left-wing parties	Nature as a subject of rights	Environment	1	1	1	0	0	<b>3</b>
Centro Democrático	Special regime for Amazonas	Environment	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>

Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Comprehensive priority early childhood care	Fundamental rights	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Farmers as subject of rights	Fundamental rights	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Promotion of women's rights	Fundamental rights	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Stimulus to combat micro-trafficking	Homeland security	0	0	1	1	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Drug addiction treatment with a public health approach	Illegal drugs	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Amendment to the Law on access to information	Institutional reinforcement	1	1	1	0	0	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Lower salary for congressmen	Institutional reinforcement	1	0	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Modification of the legislative terms of Congress	Legislative process	1	0	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Modification of the legislative terms of Congress	Legislative process	1	0	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Modification of the legislative terms of Congress	Legislative process	1	0	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico and right-wing parties	JEP (Special Justice for Peace) for the military	Peace process	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Special Transitory Circumscriptions of Peace	Peace process	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	JEP (Special Justice for Peace) for the military	Peace process	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Repeal JEP (Special Justice for Peace)	Peace process	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Repeal JEP (Special Justice for Peace)	Peace process	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	JEP (Special Justice for Peace) for the military	Peace process	1	1	0	0	1	<b>3</b>

Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Formation of coalitions to public corporations	Political / Electoral reform	1	1	0	1	0	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Formation of coalitions to public corporations	Political / Electoral reform	1	1	0	1	0	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Regulation of political coalitions	Political / Electoral reform	1	1	0	1	0	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Guarantee youth political participation	Political participation	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Youth political participation	Political participation	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico and right-wing parties	Legal protection of children	Punitive action	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico and right-wing parties	Life imprisonment for child rapists	Punitive action	0	1	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Loss of seat in public corporations due to acts of corruption	Punitive action	1	0	1	0	1	<b>3</b>
Centro Democratico	Presidential powers to increase the minimum wage	Economy	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Centro Democratico	Elimination of negative report for debts	Economy	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Centro Democratico	Ban on mining in the moorlands	Environment	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Centro Democratico	Ban on mining in the moorlands	Environment	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Centro Democratico	Ban on mining in the moorlands	Environment	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Fundamental right to water	Fundamental rights	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Fundamental right to water	Fundamental rights	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Fundamental right to water	Fundamental rights	1	1	1	0	1	<b>4</b>

Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Fundamental right to food	Fundamental rights	1	1	1	0	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Farmers as subject of rights	Fundamental rights	1	1	1	0	1	4
Centro Democratico	Prohibition of drug use in public places	Illegal drugs	0	1	1	1	1	4
Centro Democratico	Drug-free parks	Illegal drugs	0	1	1	1	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Prohibition of labor outsourcing	Labor	1	1	1	0	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Regulation of occupational diseases and accidents	Labor	1	1	1	0	1	4
Centro Democratico	Reduction of working hours	Labor	1	1	1	0	1	4
Centro Democratico	Truth Commission	Peace process	1	1	1	0	1	4
Centro Democratico	Special conditions to access parole - Military Forces	Punitive action	1	1	0	1	1	4
Centro Democratico	Homicide, kidnapping and violence against a member of the public force as an autonomous crime	Punitive action	0	1	1	1	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Crimes against Human Rights and IHL in ordinary justice	Punitive action	1	1	1	0	1	4
Centro Democratico	Subsistence guarantee retirement pension for spouse	Worker's retirement	1	1	1	0	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Annual retirement readjustment	Worker's retirement	1	1	1	0	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Regional Disability Qualification Boards	Worker's retirement	1	1	1	0	1	4
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Old-age retirement for high-risk workers	Worker's retirement	1	1	1	0	1	4
Polo Democratico and	Annual retirement readjustment	Worker's	1	1	1	0	1	4



left-wing parties		retirement						
Polo Democratico and left-wing parties	Renegotiation of FTA (Free Trade Agreements)	International relations	1	1	1	1	1	<b>5</b>
Centro Democratico	Strengthens the sanctioning capacity of the Superintendency of Health	Punitive action	1	1	1	1	1	<b>5</b>

*Source: own elaboration based on bills filed*

## 5. Conclusions

To conclude, it is necessary to return to the research hypotheses, according to which populist features are evident in the legislative activity carried out by parties of the Colombian left and right wings, specifically in terms of the bills they present, even when each one does so under a specific logic of governmental support or political opposition. In this regard, we can point out that the information collected, and the analysis of the data carried out allows us to corroborate this approach.

As shown, Colombian left and right-wings parties exhibit populist features in a specific aspect of their legislative behavior and work, such as the filling of bills and constitutional reforms. Although we find differences regarding the topics of greatest interest of each party organization, in both cases populist characteristics are presented -to a greater or lesser extent- and try to respond to social demands even when the narratives are different, the elites they face are different and the populations they seek to claim are different too. In this sense, populism works as a political strategy and style in both extremes of the ideological spectrum.

Finally, it is convenient to return to Cas Mudde approach to democracy and populism. Starting from that to populists leaders who want or aim to return power to the people, Mudde (2007, pp. 150) highlights three parts of the populist democracy: The first part is plebiscitary politics: decision-making power belongs to the majority of the people instead of the old elites. To achieve this, populists propose reforms such as referenda, citizens' initiatives and recall of elected representatives. The second part of populist democracy is the personalization of power, that is, the direct election and increased power for political executives, without the interference of intermediate bodies. As its third point populist democracy entails the primacy of the political, that is, that legal institutions should not limit the will of the people. In this regard, in this research we did not find any sign of interest by members of Congress to separate public affairs from the political elite and transfer decision-making power to the majority of the people; neither is a denial of the intermediary political organization (political party) observed in its process of populist strategy; and, about the primacy of legal institutions over the will of the people, the data analyzed in this research do not give us any further clues to establish a conclusion.

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