demos

Democratic Efficacy and the Varieties of Populism in Europe

Working Paper

Why do People Agree with Populists?
A comparative study on attitudes and social media use

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Abstract

This working paper examined citizens' reactions to populism. It also verified whether anti-elite populist narratives have an impact on citizens' trust in politics and institutions. Additionally, the research investigated the success of populist content on Facebook by means of reactions. Given the different purposes, this study relied on both quantitative and qualitative methods such as focus groups, quantitative text analysis (i.e., digital dashboard) and a survey experiment.

Focus groups research with over 80 participants in Turkey, Spain, France, Poland and the UK revealed that citizens who support both populist and mainstream parties distrust politicians in general and share a feeling of poor political representation even in countries led by populist parties such as Poland and Turkey.

The digital dashboard analysis in France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey, and the UK found that social media users are more likely to imitate populist language when populist politicians use populist rhetoric in their posts. Conversely, when populist themes are used by mainstream politicians in their Facebook communication, their followers are less likely to use populist language. For this quantitative text analysis, we considered 31,541 posts (and their related 11 million user comments), published between March and July 2021 on 122 Facebook pages of political parties – populist and mainstream.

The experimental survey studied the links between zero-sum thinking (e.g., "a gain for them is a loss for us") and populist attitudes and support for populist parties. Five online studies were carried out in the UK, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland with over 2,100 participants selected through the platform Prolific Academic. Results were successful only in the Italian and French samples. Still, where the experimental manipulation of four randomly assigned conditions did not elicit a significant change in zero-sum beliefs (ZSB) ratings, it significantly affected ratings for one item on the ZSB scale.

Gender emerged as a powerful predictor of ZSB, with males scoring higher than both females and participants identifying with other genders. And ZSB emerged as central predictors of populist attitudes, agreement with populist politicians, and intention to vote for a populist party. Given that anti-immigrant rhetoric in the guise of zero-sum beliefs is common in right-wing populist discourse, this is no surprise. But it does suggest that a bad environment or the presence of perceived 'out-groups' can trigger resource-protection attitudes.

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Introduction

A novel aspect of DEMOS is its focus on citizens' responses and reactions to populist discourses and policies. In a previous DEMOS research, through focus groups and a digital dashboard study conducted in eight European countries, we studied reactions of groups that are targeted by populism, which included Roma citizens, LGBTIQ+, gender rights activists, liberal academics, and immigrants.[1] In this new working paper, we conduct a follow-up study by investigating how ordinary citizens react to populist messages in terms of political opinions and attitudes. In particular, we study how citizens react to the key elements of populism, namely the populist actors' criticism towards the elite (political, media, intellectual and economic one) and the out-groups as well as the populist conception of the people as a homogenous group.

To this end, we observe citizens' reactions to populism in terms of:

- Citizens' level of agreement with the key elements of populism, involving the identification of what citizens appreciate or disparage of populism as an ideology and as a political style. We suggest that studying this dimension might help us to understand why populism has been successful in different countries.
- Citizens' degree of satisfaction with the functioning of democracy, in order to verify whether populist criticism towards the political elite generates a lack of trust in the functioning of representative democracy.
- Citizens' online forms political participation, by verifying whether they support or criticise populist messages.

Methodology

This study benefits from the following research methods in order to measure ordinary citizens' reactions and responses to populism.

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[1] The study stemming from the project deliverable is available as a working paper at the DEMOS repository: https://openarchive.tk.mta.hu/489/

- **Focus groups** conducted on homogeneous groups of populist parties' supporters (one focus for populist party voters) and not populist voters (one focus group for national non-populist parties) among the European countries involved in the study.
- **Content analysis** conducted on the users' comments and reactions to populist leaders' posts on social media, using the Digital Dashboard.
- **Experimental survey** conducted on a representative sample of citizens of the European countries involved in the study.

Focus Groups

Research teams conducted 11 focus groups in five European countries. Table 1 below summarises the information on location of focus groups as well as the name of target groups and number of focus group in each location. Research teams conducted two focus groups in each of these countries. The only exception to this rule is Spain where the research team conducted three focus groups in total.

In choosing target groups, the priority was to select participants that i) voted for populist parties and ii) voted for mainstream parties.

Table 1: Location of target groups and number of focus groups

Country	Group 1	Group 2
Turkey	AKP[2] voters (1 focus group)	Mainstream party voters (1 focus group)
Spain	VOX [3]voters (1 focus group) PODEMOS[4] voters (1 focus group)	Mainstream party voters (1 focus group)
France	LFI[5] voters (1 focus group)	Mainstream party voters (1focus group)
UK	Leave[6] voters (1 focus group)	Remain voters (1focus group)
Poland	PiS[7] voters (1 focus group)	Mainstream party voters (1 focus group)

We asked national teams to include between 6 and 10 participants in each focus group. Table 2 demonstrates that the size of focus groups in this research varied between 6 and 9. In total, 81 people were included in 11 focus groups across five countries.

Participants for focus groups have been recruited by two main methods:

1. Recruitment through stakeholders such as NGOs or community organisations

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[2] The AKP (Justice and Development Party) is a right-wing populist party with strong Islamist tendencies. It is currently in power in Turkey.

[3] VOX (Voice) is a right-wing populist party in Spain.

[4] PODEMOS (We Can) is a left-wing populist party in Spain. Currently, it is a part of the coalition government as a major partner of Unidas Podemos (United We Can).

[5] LFI (Unbowed France) is a left-wing populist party in France.

[6] In the UK, the 2016 Brexit referendum represents the high point of populism (see, for example, Norris and Inglehart, 2019). We, therefore, made the choice of interviewing citizens who voted Leave in this referendum.

[7] PiS (Law and Justice) is a right-wing populist party, which is the major partner of the current coalition government in Poland.

2. If the number of participants recruited through these strategies were low, we used snowball sampling to increase the number of potential participants

As Covid-19 pandemic has continued to be a significant threat to the public health in 2021 as well, research teams conducted focus groups online through secure platforms such as Microsoft Teams. All participants were asked to sign consent forms before meetings and all meetings were recorded with their prior permission. The recordings were then transcribed by the members of research teams and analysed to determine recurring themes and patterns.

Digital Dashboard

The unit of observation in digital dashboard study is Facebook posts by the main political actors in nine countries: France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Spain, Turkey, and UK. We define "political actors" as the main *political parties* (all parties taking at least 5% of the vote share at the European Parliament elections of 2019 for the EU-member countries, all parties taking at least 5% of the vote share at the national elections of 2018 in Turkey) together with their *leaders*, plus some *media stars* (important figures in the public debate who are related to the parties included in the data but do not hold any official leadership position). Some exceptions to this rule are the inclusion of UKIP in the UK and Konfederacja in Poland, which took less than 5% at the 2019 European elections, and the exclusion of KKE in Greece, because neither the party nor the leaders have a Facebook page.

In total, we studied 122 Facebook pages. For each page, we downloaded the posts sent between mid-March and mid-July 2021. For each post, we also downloaded the comments by the users. After removing the posts that had less than 5 comments, we ended up with 31,541 posts. Figure 1 shows the number of posts by country and page type.

Figure 1: Number of posts by page type and country
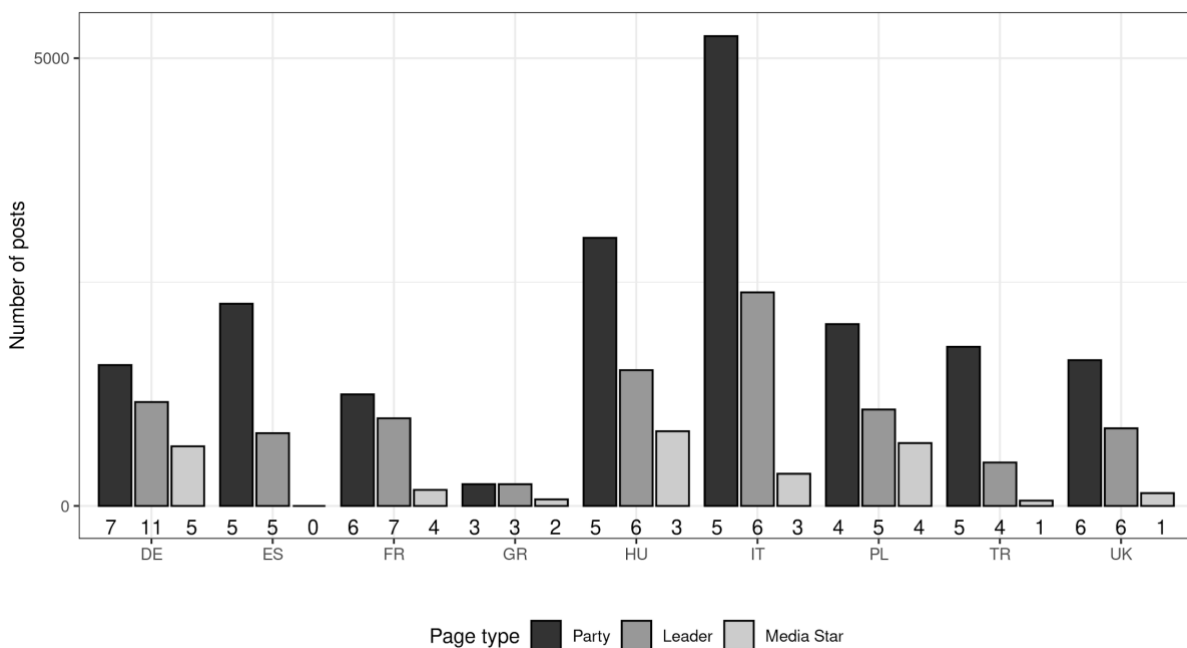
In the posts and comments, we studied whether or not they contain *populist language*, which is assessed by applying the populist dictionary developed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) to the text of the posts and their comments. This dictionary measures a single albeit crucial aspect of populism:

the presence of anti-elitist language. It includes terms such as "elite", "undemocratic", "corrupt", which are commonly used by populists to refer to the elite in negative terms. The dictionary includes a set of "core" words, which are used across all languages, but also another set of "context-specific" words. The original dictionary already included the translation in three languages in our data, English, German and Italian. For Greek, Hungarian, Polish and Spanish the translation was previously done by Poletti (2013) and for Turkish it was curated by the DEMOS Turkey expert. Our country experts checked the word lists in their own languages to ensure greater validity.

One way to use a dictionary to measure a specific underlying attitude in textual data is to count the number of words in each category appearing in the text and possibly normalise it by the text length. However, in the Facebook posts analysed here, the populist words proposed by Rooduijn and Pauwels (2011) are very rare (third quartile = 0, max = 18). Hence, we decided to code all the posts with a dummy variable taking the value '1' if the post contains at least one populist word and '0' otherwise.

We apply the same procedure to all the comments for each post: we count the number of populist words contained in the text of the post, and create a dummy variable with value 1 if the post contains at least one populist word and 0 otherwise. Since our unit of analysis is the post and not the comment, we then aggregate by post taking the share of comments including at least one populist word in each post. This variable, ranging from 0 (*no comments* to the post include populist language) to 1 (*all comments* to the post include populist language) is our dependent variable.

Figure 2: Share of comments containing populist words in the Facebook posts collected (by country)
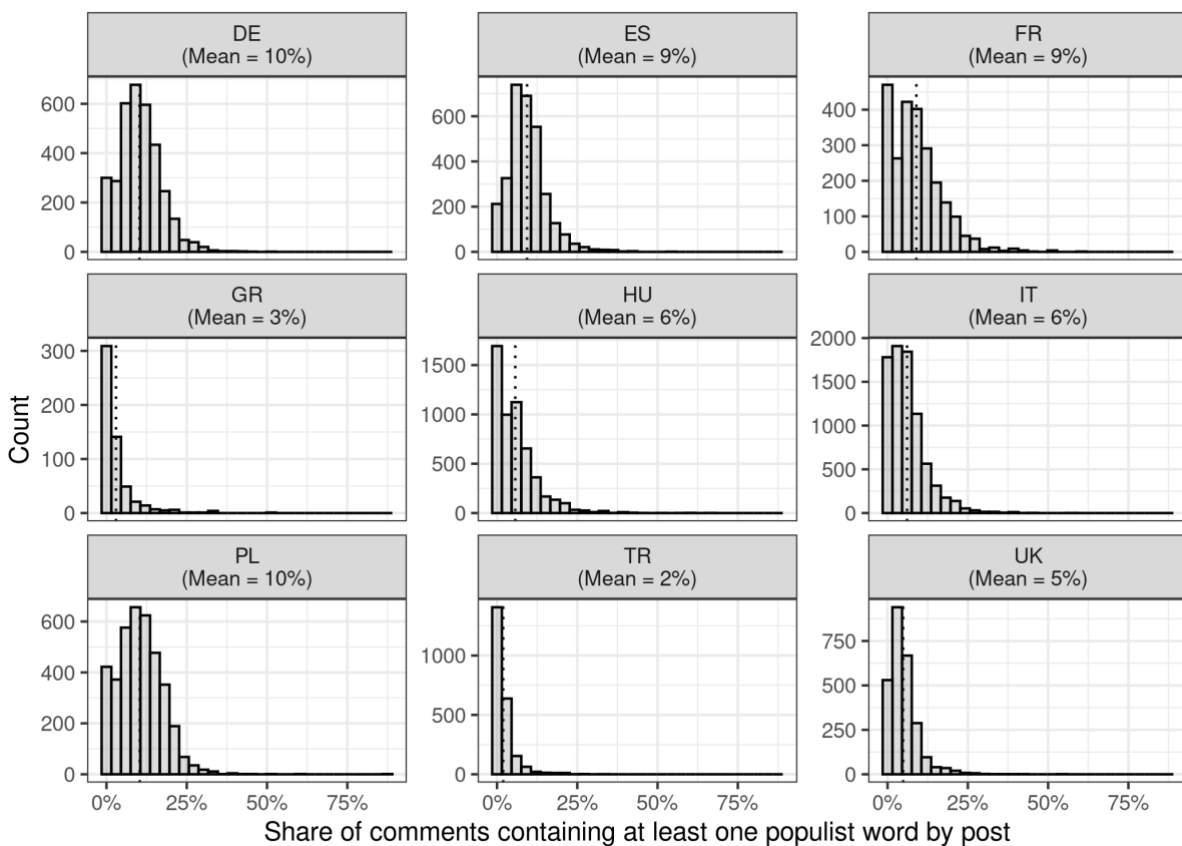
Figure 2 shows the distribution of the share of comments containing populist language by country, converted in percentage. There are some relevant differences between countries. In some places, like France, Greece, Hungary and Turkey, the mode is on 0, meaning that for the relative majority of posts the comment section contains no populist language whatsoever. The two countries where populist language is very uncommon among Facebook commenters are Turkey (2% of the comments on average contain populist language) and Greece (3%). Conversely, Germany and Poland about 10% of the comments to the political actors' posts contains some populist language.

We employed multilevel regression analysis to study the relationship between the content of the post and of its comments. Our dependent variable is the share of comments containing populist language for each post. Being a proportion, the variable can only take values ranging from 0 to 1. As Figure 2 demonstrates, the distribution of the variable includes a high number of zeros, which make about 19% of the observations. Hence, to take the data generating process into account and to avoid biased results, we use a *zero-inflated beta model*.[8] As for the independent variables, to test the hypothesis that *the presence of populist language in the post corresponds to a greater chance to have populist language in comments*, we use the binary variable indicating whether the *post contains populist language* or not. We are also interested to investigate whether comments to posts by populist actors are more likely to contain populist language. Hence, we include a binary indicator whether the party, the leader or media star *is populist* or not. To control for the length of the post (to account for the possibility that longer posts are more likely to contain diverse language, including populist words) we include the total *number of words* in the post, excluding the stop words. We include an indicator of *page type* to account for the fact that we are observing different kinds of pages, which might attract different types of audience. For instance, official party pages might trigger the use of more anti-elitist language in the comments because political parties, being collective institutional actors, can more easily be regarded as political elites. On the other hand, individual politicians such as leaders or media stars are more likely to have a "personal" component in their communication, which might produce more pertinent and less generic anti-elitist comments. Finally, we include country dummies to account for all possible fixed effects. These can be due to specific idiosyncratic behaviours among Facebook commenters (for instance, in some countries anti-elitist language might be more commonly used) but also due to the varying ability of our dictionary to capture populist attitudes in different contexts.

Experimental Survey

The experimental survey assesses the relationship between zero-sum thinking and populist attitudes and support for populist parties or a populist movement. Previously, zero-sum thinking (e.g. "A gain for them is a loss for us") was found to drive anti-immigrant attitudes among the public in the United States (US) and Canada. Similarly, zero-sum beliefs about intergroup relations lead white participants from the US to perceive Black Americans' increase in civil rights to equal an increase of perceived discrimination on themselves (e.g. American Whites). Another study found that heterosexual Christian conservatives viewed an increase in LGBTQ+ rights to be equal to a "loss" for their in-group. Zero-sum thinking was additionally linked to cognitions about coalitions and alliances (e.g.

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[8] A zero-inflated beta model is a mixture of two different models: a beta regression to model the share of comments containing populist language for the values larger than zero, and a binary logistic regression to model the probability that a post has zero comments containing populist language. Zero-inflated models return two sets of results: those for the "share" component, and those for the "zero" component. In principle, if the data generating process warrants it, one could include different variables in the two components of the model. In our case, we included the same predictors in both components. We fitted the regressions using the R package "glmmTMB". The multilevel structure of the data assumes that posts are nested in page and week/year units.

Coalitional Psychology), cognitions, which automatically parse intergroup relations in terms of "us" vs. "them". Right-wing populists also routinely depict migrants and refugees in zero-sum terms, and therefore zero-sum intergroup cognitions are likely to be related to support for right-wing populist movements.

The experimental survey aims to address the following research questions:

1. Does experimentally manipulating zero-sum intuitions by presenting cues which serve as input conditions for coalitional psychology cognitions and inferences[9] to enhance zero-sum attitudes towards migration? Do zero-sum beliefs predict support for populist parties or intention of populist vote?
2. Does increasing out-group familiarity decrease zero-sum perceptions of out-groups and support for a populist party or populist movements?

The experimental survey consisted of five online studies using participant samples from five different countries (the United Kingdom, France, Spain, Italy, and Poland). We used the participant sampling platform Prolific Academic for recruitment for the study. After removing participants that failed our attention checks, there remained a total of 2,105 participants from these five countries.[10] Participants were paid the equal of minimum wage (in their respective countries) calculated per time spent on the survey, in accordance with Prolific Academic policy.

The experimental manipulation consisted of four randomly assigned conditions, three treatment conditions and one control condition.[11] Each condition represented realistically looking newspaper articles as follows: In condition 1, we presented a newspaper story about educated and industrious (hence likely competent on the job market) Syrian migrants coming to each of the five the host countries in looking for better opportunities, while also mentioning the precarious condition of the host economy. This condition was hypothesised to cue zero-sum cognitions (automatic inferences). Condition 2 was identical with condition 1 except for a second article intended as a prime, further conveying a bad environment through a perceived collapse of the stock market as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. In condition 3, we attempted a manipulation of in-group expansion, hypothesising that portraying Syrian migrants as culturally similar to in-groups of the host nation would lower zero-sum beliefs among participants of host nations. The control condition consisted of a neutrally sounding newspaper article presenting only generic migration patterns.[12]

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[9] Previously outlined cues for activating coalitional and zero-sum intuitions are (1) the perception of limited resources and (2) the proximity of designated outgroups.

[10] UK (N=499), France (N=394), Italy (N=405), Poland (N=394), and Spain (N=402).

[11] For the UK study, we added one extra manipulation as the fifth condition.

[12] The fifth condition in the UK study consisted of the same text of condition 1 with the exception that instead of Syrian, represented migrants were Hongkongers. This was in order to test a historically contextual hypothesis that UK participants might view migrants from Hong Kong differently.

Findings

Focus groups

   Poland

In Poland, the populist PiS supporters were ambivalent about the state of democracy. On the one hand, the political situation was discursively normalised ("it is like that in every country, every political group wants to come to power and introduce its programmes") and the situation in Belarus and Ukraine were given to justify the situation in Poland. On the other hand, PiS supporters accepted that the situation is becoming worse, and freedoms and civil rights are increasingly curtailed. A participant stated that:

> As an individual, I have no problems with this. It is not like in Belarus that I have to hide, that I am afraid of saying something wrong on the street or something like that. But generally it is not so good; it used to be better. (…) The authorities are abusing their power, abusing their prerogatives, using the police.

Some PiS supporters attributed the responsibility to the growing polarisation in the society. They suggested that in other countries such as Germany or France, the reaction of the state to the protests would be more brutal than it was in Poland. Interestingly, the question about the state of democracy in Poland provoked some responses related to economic incentives provided by the government. The most important among them was the child benefit, so called 500 plus program introduced by PiS government.

> I think that in financial terms, the state now contributes more than it used to. I have a daughter who left home, previously it did not contribute to my daughter, now we get benefits from the 500 Plus.

Unsurprisingly, in Poland, the mainstream party voters accused the PiS for making unrealistic promises and being irresponsible with its economic policy by using the state finances for distribution.

> It seems to me that the current ruling party has reached out to its voters precisely on the basis of populism, telling them that it is possible not to work and that they deserve something, that they should get equal pensions because they are entitled to them, even though they have never worked in their lives. (…) Also, PiS only through populism (...) was able to reach those losers (poor?) who felt disadvantaged because they were overlooked by the previous governments. Now they feel appreciated because they got something.

In Poland, the mainstream party voters were unanimous in their assessment of the functioning of democracy. They suggested that the Polish democracy is in crisis. One participant indicated that Poland is already an authoritarian country, while others pointed out that Poland may become an authoritarian country within the next two or three years. These participants argued that Poland lost the achievements of 1989. The Polish mainstream party voters offered several reasons for their critical assessment of democracy. First is the arbitrary and unaccountable rule of the PiS government. Second

are the reforms in the educational system, ideological changes introduced in school curricula, political exploitation of the history. Third are the limitations imposed on the freedom of expression and the brutality of the police. Fourth is the disappearance of the checks and balances system and the elimination of the separation of powers. Fifth is the concentration of power in the hands of J. Kaczyński and the privileged position of the Catholic Church.

Opposition participants claimed decisively that they did not feel represented by the current political system at all. One participant stated that:

> They do not take our voice into account at all. (…) All the legal changes are so rapid, everything is written carelessly, the authorities introduced quietly some laws and several strange things, at night during some strange sessions in the Sejm.

Another opposition voter undermined the claims of the current government to represent the majority of Poles by saying that she personally did not know any PiS voters. Yet another explained that PiS voters were ashamed to admit they voted for PiS that is why they are relatively invisible publicly.

In Poland, both PiS voters and the opposition voters suggested that they do not feel represented by the political system, which they perceive as a distant domain dominated by the political elites. They expressed their lack of trust for politicians, and accused politicians for antagonising the society and thinking only about their own interests. Similarly, there was a lack of trust in the media, especially public television accused of spreading propaganda and extreme bias. Importantly, the topic of abortion and the legal changes restricting the ability to perform it surfaced in this context. For instance, a PiS voter said that:

> Nobody understands us. Nobody listens to us despite all the social protests. (…) In every country, women have a choice. I'm not saying I'm supporting abortion, but I should have a choice. And so should every one of us.

Moreover, the PiS voters, despite the fact that it supports the government policies, were quite critical of the state television. A PiS voter explained that:

> I also don't like the fact that Polish Television divides people. It's enough to turn on what propaganda there is. There always has to be a sting of something or someone [...] Journalists should be impartial.

An opposition voter argued that:

> I always liked to have information from different sides so that I could form some kind of opinion about it. But at the moment I just can't watch public television. I'm even allergic, when my parents turn on news on public TV. I just go out to my room, close the door and turn on my TV to watch some cabarets, so I would not hear what's being said there. It's impossible to listen to it. You just can't.

Spain

In Spain, our focus groups found that participants identifying with the right-wing VOX were more extreme in their arguments. They showed higher levels of frustration and distaste for politicians. They also demonstrated higher levels of indignation and fear against other groups of society that are considered beneficiaries by the current policies, which they defined as criminals, people who do not work, and illegal immigrants. They suggested that Spain needs a corrective, as there is a lack of

respect for Spanish "values" and the society is too permissive. While talking about immigrants, one VOX voter suggested that:

> Anyone who comes with a job is fine, but what does not seem OK to me is that everyone enters (in the country) and no one controls it.

Maybe unsurprisingly, the VOX voters also showed less satisfaction and confidence in democracy. They argued that until the foundation of VOX, they were not represented in the system. Some VOX voters suggested the existence of an unequal system benefiting some sections of the society over others. Groups such as radical women/feminists, illegal immigrants, squatters, LGTBI+ community, unemployed/poor/non-working people, and criminals have been gaining more power and creating this unequal situation. This, according to VOX voters, contributes to a feeling of discomfort and the will to stop, or even to fight against it. According to VOX voters, a vote in VOX seeks a restoration of equality and justice instead of benefiting these groups.

Unlike VOX voters, the voters for the left-wing PODEMOS did not hold immigrants or other specific actors for what is happening in Spain. They are at unease about losing jobs and about economic uncertainty and inequality, which they believe will be exacerbated after the pandemic. The PODEMOS voters demonstrated more awareness about the effects of different factors and phenomena such as populism, social networks or polarisation also at the social level in the balance of the current situation in Spain. In fact, they suggested that right-wing populism is one of the dangers that Spain is facing today. In our participant's words:

> The current political situation in Spain is characterised by increasing disunity, selfishness and lack of empathy, which are the main conditions for far-right populism.

While voters of the right-wing and left-wing populist parties demonstrated a significant dose of pessimism for the Spanish democracy, the voters of mainstream parties displayed a less bleak view of the situation. They are also somehow ambivalent with the future, acknowledging the current economic crisis but also hoping for a change in the social and the economic paradigms. A mainstream voter for instance suggested that though crisis and pessimism exist, there are also reasons to be resilient and hopeful.

Surprisingly, the PODEMOS and non-populist citizens in the focus groups share more values than expected. Both groups were critical about the current democratic system, but basic trust in the system is maintained. The remaining trust is based on the belief that the system, has still room for improvement. They shared the belief that different institutions and different politicians reflect different facts about the world, and they therefore, rejected the idea of criticising them all. These groups have more trust in democratic checks and balances systems and they considered the alternation of power as a sign of healthy democracy. The *othering* in these groups appears to take place between the working classes and the upper classes. They suggested that upper classes are the ones who really benefit from the current political and socio-economic dynamics.

France

In France, both populist LFI voters and the mainstream party voters did not agree on the definitions and the effects of populism. For example, for the LFI voters, populism constitutes an ideology worth defending. They regularly refer to Chantal Mouffe, who is a social scientist who perceives populism as something that could contribute to democracy. In this respect, the LFI voters argued that Marine Le Pen is not a populist leader but an extreme-right leader. One LFI voter stated that:

> For me, populism is rather good news, because it means that there is a desire to return to a form of collective will, indeed, to oppose something. (…) I think it is a way like any other to get out of the neoliberal phase towards a more collective phase.

While the LFI voters consider populism as something good, mainstream party voters associate populism with the extreme right and therefore as something constituting danger. A participant emphasised the potential drifts of populism:

> Populism, populisms, it depends on which one we are talking about. Are we talking about a populism, a strategy rather like LFI or Podemos? Or are we talking about a national populism like the RN, for example? I think that the populist strategy, or at least the populist rhetoric, can be a danger for democracy by conveying ideas close to the extreme right.

This kind of thinking also led some mainstream party voters to criticise the LFI's strategy:

> The idea that I have of it is precisely that populism is a way of summoning the people, whereas, and I think that Mr. Mélenchon knows this, the people do not really summon themselves, but rather, they burst in. They burst in during the (French) Revolution, They burst in again in May 68.

The mainstream party voters also noted their pessimism for the future of politics. For them, politics is similar to a choice by default, where not only the figure of Marine Le Pen, but also of Emmanuel Macron is very widely criticised:

> Afterwards, I really agree with Sophie about the fact that there is a very depressing, even despairing, side with the fact that we can approach, at our age, these subjects with so much pessimism. I know that it is also something that makes me want to fight because I am also aware of how much democracy will be in "danger" in the years to come, and that it will be something else than having voted PS or UMP in the 2000s. So, it is both very frightening, but there is also a desire to be interested in all this.

In this respect, our interviews show that French democracy faces many challenges and that mistrust is present among the most politicised categories of youth. From their perspective, the problem regarding politicians is not a matter of being populist or not, but to be trustworthy.

Turkey

Regarding the functioning of democracy, the populist party voters in Turkey expressed mixed feelings. Some participants suggested that democracy in Turkey is a better place, as the AKP government implemented important reforms allowing veiled women to attend to universities or by recognising more freedom for Kurds. Other participants, in this group, however, disagreed with this opinion. For instance, a participant suggested that democracy has a lot of room for improvement. She said that:

> Of course, we are much comfortable with respect to certain issues (that existed before). However, when you express your opinions on the Internet, you can find yourself in the prison. There are still certain restrictions, this is what I personally believe.

Another participant expressed support for this opinion by arguing that the minority rights are not protected or respected in Turkey. This participant explained that certain policies influencing people's lives should not be implemented before taking opinion from all segments of the society and this, according to the participant, is not the case in Turkey. Related to the functioning of democracy, the

populist party voters did not express high trust for the political class. For instance, a participant claimed that politicians create stirs in order to advance their own political agenda. Another suggested that those politicians, who considered each other as archenemies in the past, are now allies, a situation leading citizens to question these politicians' credentials.

Despite these reservations, the populist party voters in Turkey demonstrated support for the AKP policies on economic grounds, which is in line with our findings with respect to the populist party voters in Poland. One participant expressed this feeling by arguing that, economically speaking, people are in a better state and citizens have access to luxurious lifestyles in Turkey. Another participant said that despite the fact that the current government is also corrupt like previous government, at least they implement project benefitting the society. This is a view that was voiced and supported by other participants as well in this group.

The populist party voters in Turkey do not think the media impartial and credible. One participant, for instance, argued that:

> I believe there are no impartial media today. (…) The state of the media today is abnormal. There is a war about (influencing people's) social perceptions.

These negative perceptions include the social media as well. As another participant said that both the government and the opposition use social media platforms to disseminate their message, probably making it even more difficult to reach impartial knowledge.

Mainstream party voters were in consensus when suggesting that democracy does not exist in Turkey. One participant in this group, after defining democracy as the presence of freedom of speech, suggested that democracy ceased to exist in Turkey. She said that:

> It is as if I am entrapped in a clamp or a jar. Despite my best attempts, I cannot break free. In other words, I feel that my freedom has been taken away from me.

Another participant confirmed this view. She said that though the presence of democratic rights in Turkey has always been an issue, the establishment of a 'one-man regime' in Turkey created a situation where individual freedoms could be curtailed at any time and without any obstruction from any institution. Other participants suggested that the tyranny of the majority and the lack of respect for the rule of law are two acute problems regarding Turkish democracy.

In addition to their views on Turkish democracy, mainstream party voters also complained from discriminatory practices in Turkey. A participant expressed that because the current government is encouraging religiosity, unveiled women wearing jeans or miniskirts do not feel comfortable in the public anymore. She said that veiled women are held in high esteem while other women are discriminated because of the way they dress up. Another participant suggested that this situation causes many women to veil themselves, as they feel a pressure to do so. According to this participant, a considerable part of veiled women would take their veils off in case of an alternation in government.

Though mainstream party voters held the current government responsible for political polarisation in Turkey, they also expressed distrust for politicians in general. One participant defined politics as 'an art of lying to the people' while another mainstream party voter argued that any politician who comes to power wants to stay in power forever. According to this participant, lying to the people is an instrument that politicians use in order to solidify their position. When asked if there are any particular names that they trust, some respondents mentioned Ekrem Imamoglu and Mansur Yavas, İstanbul and Ankara mayors respectively, who defeated government candidates in the 2019 municipal elections.

Mainstream party voters argued that economic and religious incentives are two major factors behind the support for the current AKP government. One participant argued that social assistance programs established by the AKP government compels many citizens to continue voting for this party. Another participant suggested that the AKP exploits religion and people's religiosity to bolster support. Interestingly, one participant stated that the absence of alternatives, a motive that was also mentioned by an AKP voter as well, is another reason for the AKP's ability to protect its voter base.

Mainstream party voters, unlike the populist party voters, argued that social media platforms are important for the opposition. This is because according to participants in this group think that mainstream media is under the governmental control and "*social media is a very important opportunity for opposition leaders who cannot present their views on mainstream media*". Despite this fact, similar to the populist party voters, the participants in this groups were also hesitant in freely expressing their views on social media, as "any view that is not considered dissenter could be labelled as pro-FETO or pro-PKK (two organisations considered as terrorist in Turkey)".

United Kingdom

As to the functioning of democracy in the UK, participants who voted Leave in the 2016 Brexit referendum did not express high levels of concern, a situation that is in contrast with the populist party voters in Poland, Spain, and to some extent in Turkey. A participant argued that:

> (…) generally it works well in this country. I think you've only got to look at countries that don't allow it, to realise how fortunate we are. Can we just take it for granted that you can stand on a corner and say what you like? Well, obviously within reason, no profanities or… but you, you try that in China or, you know, some other countries and you're not seen again.

Another participant agreed by saying that especially the way democracy works at local levels in the UK should be perceived under a positive light. Despite expressing their positive attitudes towards the way democracy works in the UK, participants in this group also shared their concern for the representative power of the current system. For example, a participant observed that though UKIP collected 12% of the votes in the 2015 general elections, it did not win even a single seat in the parliament.[13] Another participant noted that the current government could take steps to increase the representation of the working class people in the system. Nevertheless, one needs to note that none of the critiques in this group refer to structural problems creating issues for the functioning and the legitimacy of the system.

The focus group study with the Leave voters revealed that participants in this group do not perceive major problems regarding the mainstream media in the UK. This is not the say that there were no critical voices. For instance, a participant argued that the mainstream media tends to be biased whether it is in the UK or in the US. Having said that, participants explained that they consider BBC somewhat reliable as a news source. Participants in this group, however, considered social media, under a different light. After defining social media like a plague, one of the participants further said that:

> I mentioned before, there's a code of … certain code of conduct within the person within the news that what is reported. It has to be factual to quite a high degree. Whereas, you know, on,

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[13] Please note that this participant is probably unaware of the fact that Douglass Carswell was elected as an MP for UKIP in this election.

> on other forms of information again, Facebook and social media, there's a lot of disinformation.

Participants in this group cited numerous reasons on why they voted 'Leave' or voted populist parties such as UKIP or Brexit Party (now Reform UK). According to these participants' statements, taking back control of Britain's own affairs is a major motivation explaining their voting behaviour. A participant explained feelings in the following way:

> What we have done is that we have released the chains around us, and now it's about what do you, you know, what happens with that freedom to be able to do things in a different way.

Though some participants suggested that their decision to vote 'Leave' had nothing to do with immigration, other participants argued that being able set limits on immigration without relying on the EU rules was a motivation for voting 'Leave'. A participant, for example, said that:

> Well, before it was just an open border. Anybody who lived in Europe could get into Britain. It's only a small island. There's only so many things. There's only so many school places. And so many houses, there would be a limit at some point. Now we've got that limit and we can set it because I've been told what to do by Europe.

Participants who voted 'Remain' in the 2016 Brexit referendum were more pessimistic about the functioning of democracy in the UK. One participant stated that because the UK did not lose a war in the last couple of hundred years, it did not have any chance to renew itself and its institutions the way that the Continental Europe was able to do. Accordingly, this participant concluded, archaic institutions such as the House of Lords and first-past-post system are still in place. The participants also mentioned the existence of a democratic deficit as too much is centralised in Westminster or Holyrood. Another participant agreed with this point by saying that:

> I think there are certain characteristics about democracy or tests as it were. And I mentioned just for transparency, accountability, parliamentary processes, and subsidiarity. And by the last one, I mean the level at which decisions get made. The empowerment of civil society to make decisions. So, these features if you take Holyrood, for example, as a very, very little transparency, and there's lots of case studies to show that freedom of information, this kind of problem accountability is, is masked by the way, in which intermediary bodies are placed between government and civil society.

The participants in this group also stated that politicians are not to be trusted. A participant, for example, observed that lobby groups tend to undermine democracy and he/she does not trust the elected leaders especially in England, as elected politicians listen to lobby groups more than to the people who actually voted for them. Another participant argued that professionalisation of politicians is a major issue. This is because career politicians lack strong ties with the society, which this participant consider as a factor that is in contrast with democracy.

In contrast to the Leave voters, participants in this group expressed less trust towards the mainstream media. In particular, our participants were critical of the BBC. One participant, for instance, observed that in recent years the BBC suffered from the deterioration and the standard of the discourse. Another participant suggested that because pro-Tory right-wing businesspeople own the majority of the mainstream media companies, it is difficult to find them trustworthy. This situation led some of the participants in the group to rely on local newspapers or online blogs and newsletters, rather than on mainstream media, to get their news. A participant preferring online blogs and newsletters over

mainstream media suggested that though these news sources could also be biased, it is possible to recognise this bias.

Participants also argued that social media, unlike mainstream media, presents a huge opportunity for the ordinary people to express themselves. A participant noted that there is fragmentation of discourse and tendency to react prematurely on social media. Nevertheless, one still needs to recognise its value because of the availability of 24-hour news and almost unlimited amount of information. The same participant concluded that given that democracy can only work when citizens are educated and have access to information, the significance of social media should not be undermined.

Digital Dashboard

We present the results of three different models. For the full results, please see the Appendix, as here we only present some prediction plots showing relevant quantities of interest.[14] The first model tests our expectation that the populist language used by the political actors in communication is imitated by users, as they post comments to the actors' posts on Facebook. Given our operationalisation, this relationship manifests itself empirically in a higher share of comments including populist language for the posts containing at least one populist word than for the posts containing no populist language. The results of this test are reported in table A1 in the appendix, and the predicted share of comments containing populist language is shown in Figure 3. The difference is small, but significant. The mean predicted share is of about 11% for the posts containing no populist language, and of about 15% for the posts containing at least one populist word.

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[14] As discussed in the previous section, tables A1, A2 and A3 in the Appendix include two columns, one for the "share" component of the model and the other for the "zero inflation". In the case of the latter (right column in all tables) the dependent variable is the probability that the outcome is zero. As a consequence, coefficients are reversed with respect to those in the "share" model (left column). This difference is taken into account when calculating the predictions.

Figure 3: Predicted share of comments containing populist language by post language
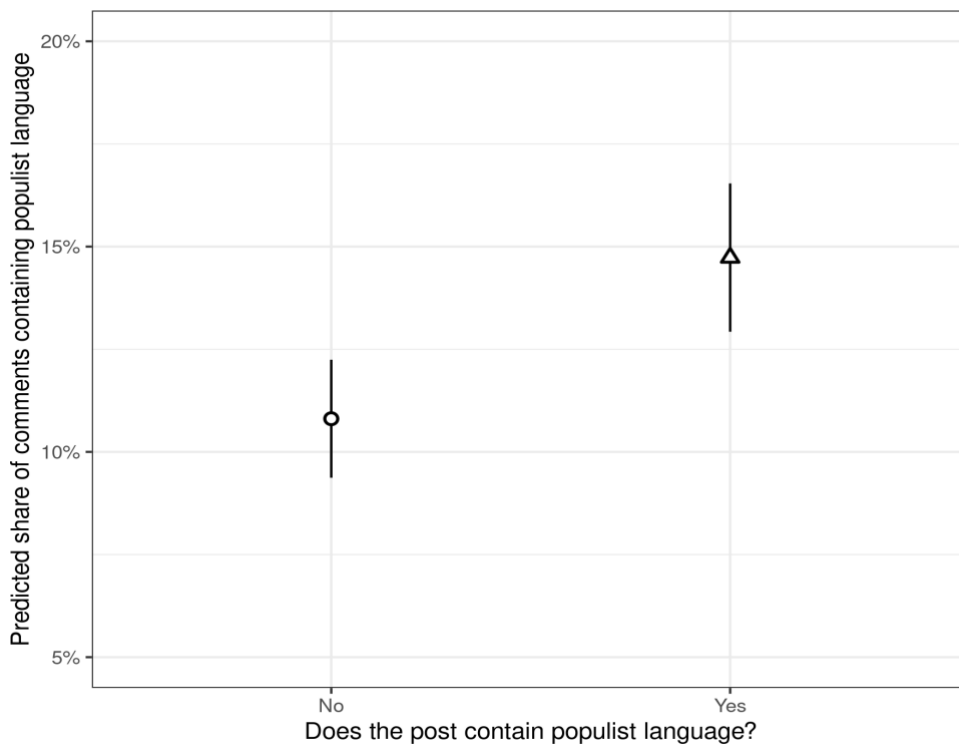
Second, we studied whether posts by populist parties are more likely to get comments including populist language. Figure 4 shows that the predicted difference is not significant, meaning that, when Facebook users comment in response the posts of populist actors, it is not more likely that their comments would include populist language. This effect is observed when we control for the post content, that is, the effect of the source of the message independent from its content. However, we saw in separate analyses that populist parties are generally more likely to use populist language than mainstream parties. Hence, an external observer who does not take the content of the post into account would note that commenters of populist actors' pages are more likely to use populist language on average.

*Figure 4: Predicted share of comments containing populist language for mainstream and populist parties*
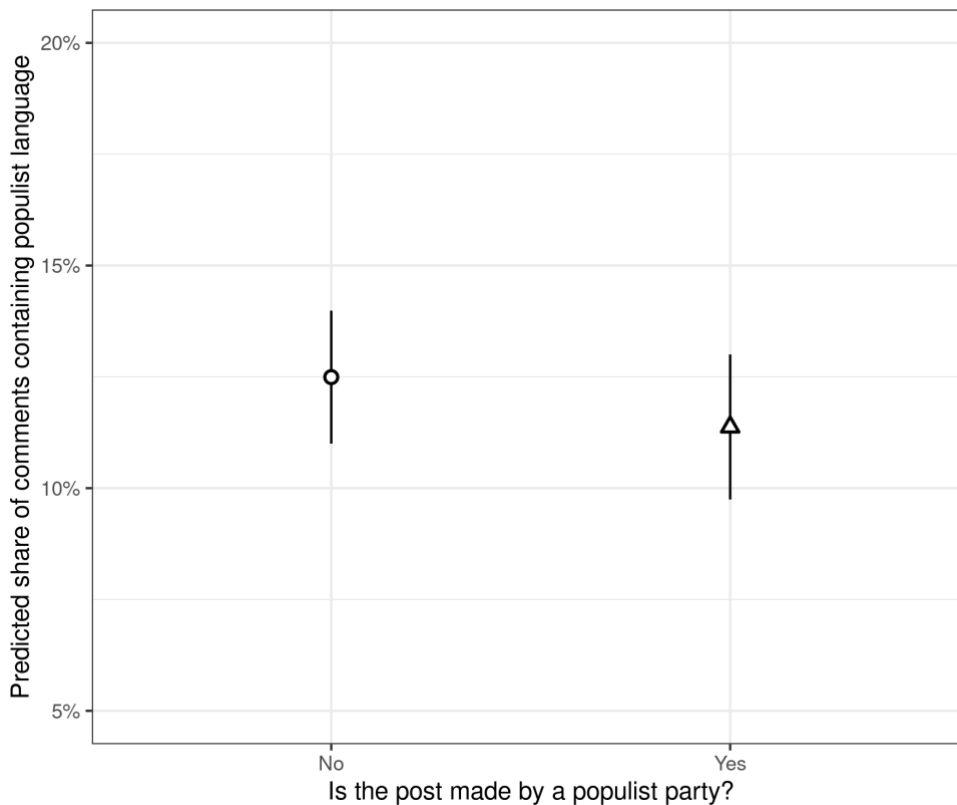
In sum, the presence of populist language in a post tends to be associated with more populist language among the comments, while the fact that a post comes from a populist party alone has no significant effect on the chance to find comments containing populist language.

It could be that populist language is more likely to be mirrored in the comments *if it comes from a populist party*, and therefore if the audience of users following the page (those who are more likely to be exposed to the post in the first place) is already predisposed to appreciate and use it. To test this expectation, we fitted a second model including an interaction between the "populist party" and the "populist language" variables (See table A2 in the Appendix). Even after introducing the interaction, the effect of populist language remains unchanged, while the effect of populist party becomes more ambiguous, with the negative effect in the share column becoming significant ($p < 0.05$). However, inspecting the predictions of the two main effects (not reported here) shows no substantial differences from figures 3 and 4. On the other hand, the interaction effect is positive and significant in the share part, and negative but not significant in the zero inflation part.

An illustration of this effect is shown in Figure 5. As it can be seen in the plot, the effect of populist language in the post is positive and significant *only* when it comes from populist actors, while the difference is not significant when the post comes from mainstream actors. The prediction remains constant around 15% across populist and mainstream actors when the post contains some populist language, while the difference emerges when the post contains no populist language. In the latter case, comments are significantly less likely to contain populist language only for populist parties. This suggests that, regarding the use of populist language, the imitation effect is stronger for populist

actors than for mainstream actors. This might be due to the fact that users who support populist parties are more likely to comment on posts by mainstream actors than the other way round.
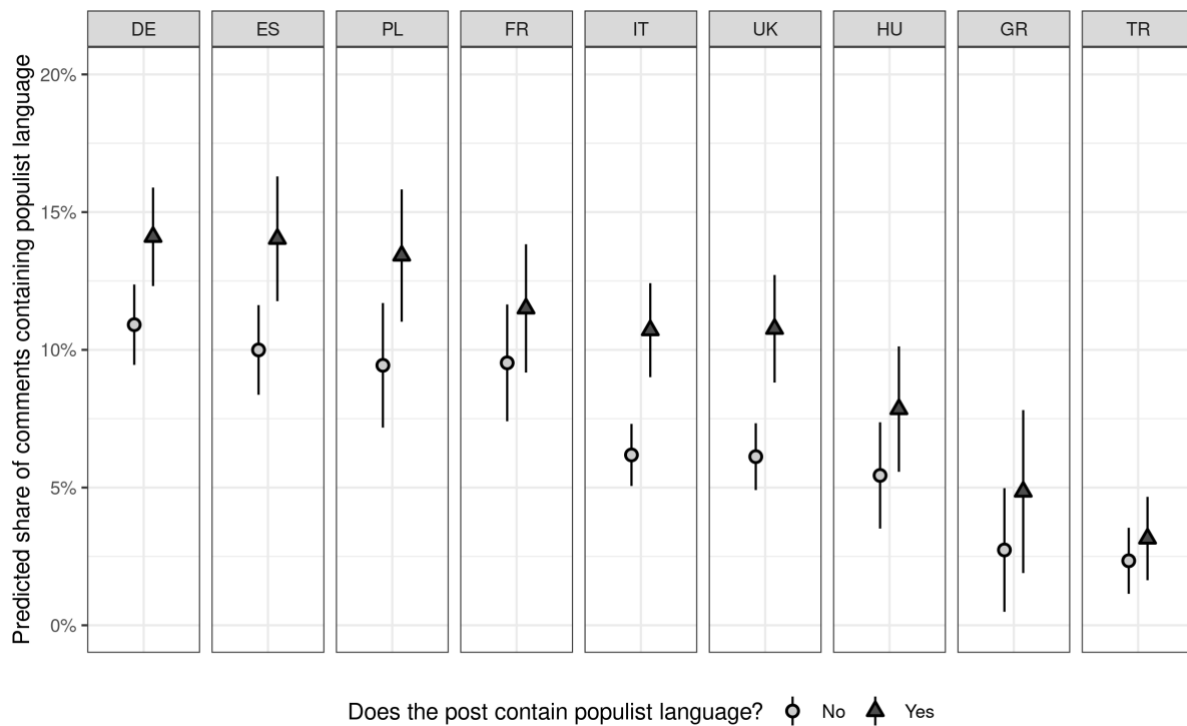
Figure 5: Predicted share of comments containing populist language, interaction with post language and source
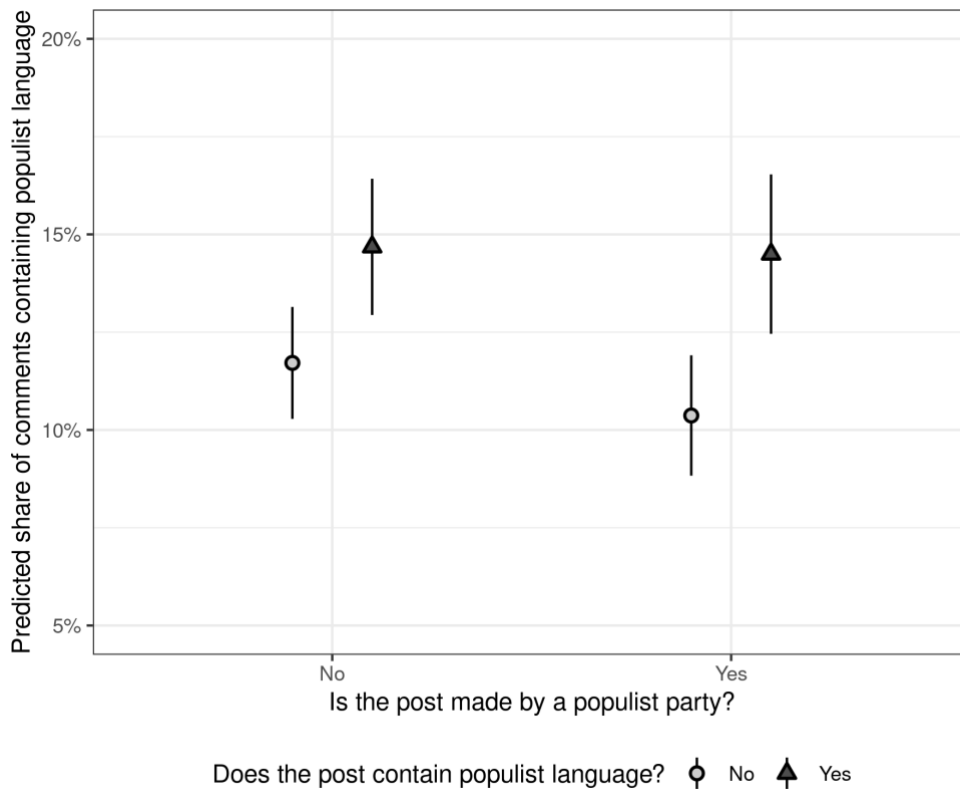
This finding has some important implications. First, it suggests that the audience of populist actors on Facebook is different from the audience of mainstream actors, as they show a greater tendency to imitate the language used by parties and politicians. This is somewhat ironic if we consider that the language that is being imitated is exactly *anti-elitist language*, that is, a language that is commonly used to point at the malfeasances of political elites, of which parties and politicians are part. Second, based on this finding one could speculate that the common psychological mechanisms of political persuasion, such as motivated reasoning and all the biases that incur when an individual adopts the ideas and the positions endorsed by a party, are more easily deployed among populist supporters. However, this is just speculation, as this finding says nothing about the psychological mechanisms behind language imitation. Third, and as a consequence of the previous two points, this finding also suggests that populist actors have a great power to lead audiences on social media, hence they also carry a great responsibility for the quality of the environment that people encounter as they approach political content on those platforms.

One last question of interest is whether the observed imitation occurs in every country in our sample or just in some. To assess this, we ran another model including a set of interactions between the "populist language" dummy and the country dummies, reported in the Appendix in Table A3. The predicted share of populist language given the presence of populist language in the post in all countries is shown in Figure 6.

Figure 6: Predicted share of comments containing populist language by post language and country

As the figure shows, there is considerable variation between countries, both in the average share of comments containing populist language (ranging from about 2.5% in Turkey to about 12.5% in Germany), as already shown in figure 2. More importantly, the imitation effect occurs only in Italy and UK, to a very small but significant extent in Spain, and to a borderline unsignificant extent in Germany. In all the other languages, the relationship is positive but insignificant. It is hard to interpret these results in substantive terms, as there are no theoretical reasons to expect Facebook audiences to be more likely to adopt the same populist language of political actors in the comments. One could speculate that this difference is due to different functioning of the dictionary across the languages included. However, the same dictionary that is applied on the posts is also applied in the comments. Hence, even if the dictionary does not work well in some languages, we could have observed imitation in the words used. What is more likely is that this result reflects some cultural differences between countries in the ways individuals use Facebook that are not limited to populism and cannot be captured by our dictionary only.

Experimental Survey

We deployed the experimental manipulation with mixed results. There were statistically significant effects of manipulation on participants' zero-sum beliefs about immigration in our French and Italian samples, largely in accordance with our hypotheses. In the Spanish sample, the manipulation only marginally failed to attain statistical significance, while in the British and Polish samples, there was no significant effect of manipulation on zero-sum beliefs.

Second, there was a main effect of gender on participants' zero-sum beliefs, so that males scored consistently higher than females in four of our five samples.[15] Thirdly, there were manifold correlations between our measures each of which predicting populist attitudes and intention to vote for a populist party. We now discuss these in detail.

France

Experimental manipulation

There was a statistically significant effect of manipulation on zero-sum belief ratings for participants in France.

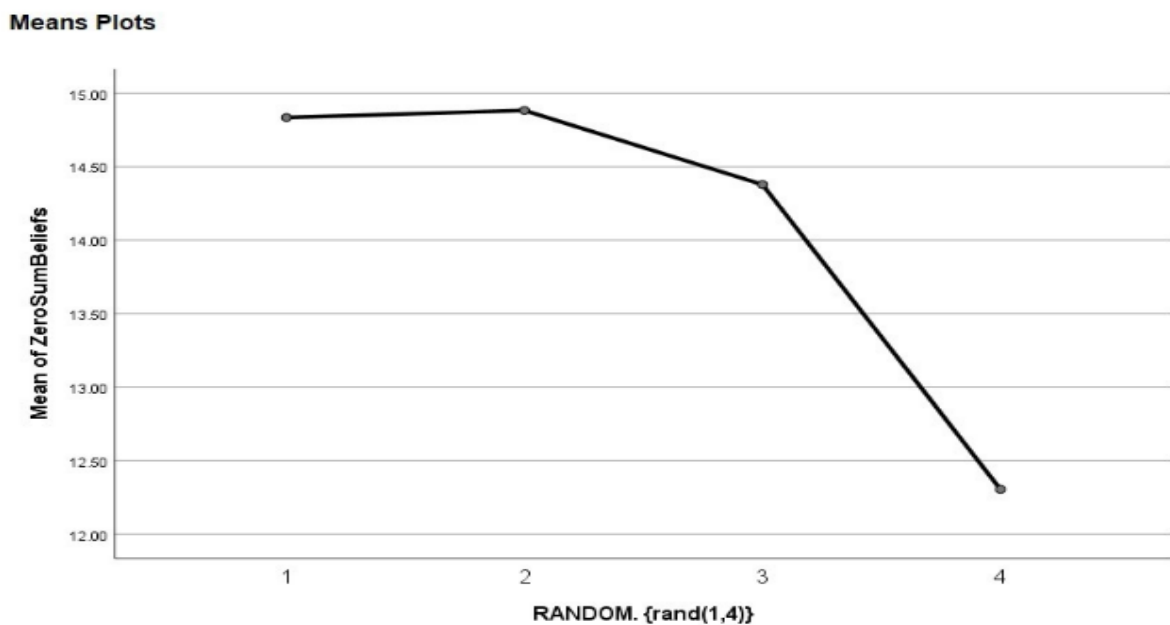*Figure 7: Mean of zero-sum belief ratings by treatment group*

Table 3: ANOVA for Zero-sum belief ratings over treatment group

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	457.679	3	152.560	5.213	0.002
Within Groups	11413.735	390	29.266		
Total	11871.414	393			

Looking at the post-hoc tests, we observe a mean difference ($p < 0.05$) between the control condition and each of the remaining three treatment conditions, which is largely in line with our predictions. But because there was no statistically significant difference among and between the treatment conditions, it appears that the in-group expansion manipulation did not work. However, although not statistically significant, the means plot uncovered a surprising

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[15] Due to an unfortunate omission by the lead researcher, we lack demographic data on the UK sample.

trend. Participants in the in-group expansion condition (condition 2/ which described migrants as more similar to in-groups) exhibited slightly higher zero-sum beliefs than participants in both the basic zero-sum cue group (condition 3) as well as those in the zero-sum cue plus prime (primed to enhance the perception of a dangerous environment/ condition 1). Therefore, the manipulation worked to increase zero-sum ratings for all except the control condition, which is in line with our prediction.

Gender

A main effect of gender on zero-sum ratings was significant, with males (dummy coded 1) scoring significantly higher than both females (dummy coded 0) and participants who identified with the "other" category (dummy coded 2). Likewise, females scored significantly higher than those not identifying as neither male nor female, and lower than males, while participants under the "other" category scored significantly lower than both males and females alike.

Figure 8: Mean of zero-sum belief ratings by gender in France

Means Plots
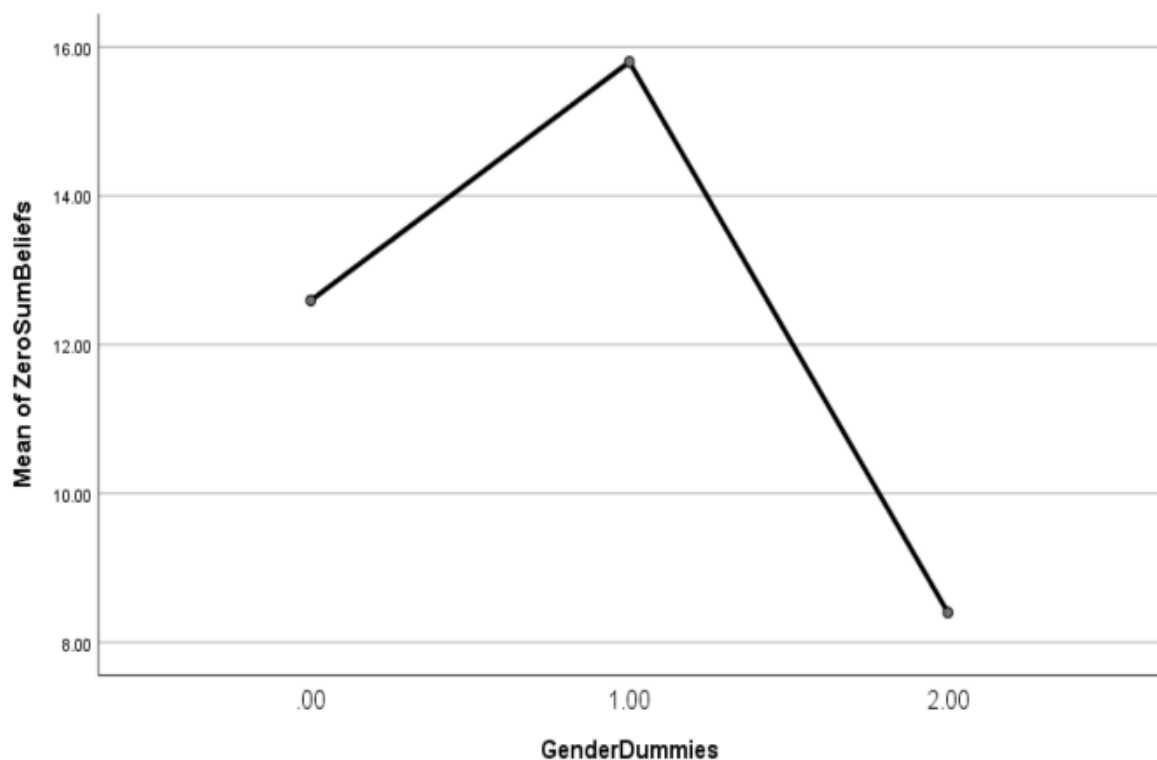
Correlations

ZSB, Pluralism, CN, and SDO emerged as significant predictors of populist attitudes, with Pluralism negatively predicting Populism. Moreover, ZSB highly correlated with SDO, Populism, and Pluralism, but failed to correlate with CN.

Populist vote

One-way ANOVA revealed ZSB as a significant predictor of populist vote at the level of $p < 0.5$. However, when we introduced Zero-Sum beliefs in a model with multiple predictors (e.g. Collective Narcissism, SDO, and Pluralism), the scale lost statistical significance. Except for Pluralism, which negatively predicted a populist vote, none of the other scales deployed in this model attained statistically significance. CN was marginal but not significant. This suggests that the initial effect of Zero-Sum was carried by anti-pluralist views of intergroup relations, which are likely also captured in part by zero-sum beliefs about immigration. However, high ZSB, alongside the other scales, except SDO, predicted agreement with populist leaders, as well as serving as unique predictor for agreement with populist politician Marine LePen ($p < 0.001$).

Italy

Experimental manipulation

There was a significant effect of manipulation on zero-sum beliefs ($p < 0.05$). Post-hoc comparisons revealed significant differences between the control condition on the one hand, and conditions 2 (zero-sum cues plus in-group expansion) and 3 (zero sum cues) on the other. Even though the difference between treatment conditions was not significant, there emerged a similar trend with the French sample where the in-group expansion manipulation went against our predictions to increase rather than decrease participants' zero-sum ratings.

Figure 9: Mean of zero-sum belief ratings by gender in Italy

Means Plots
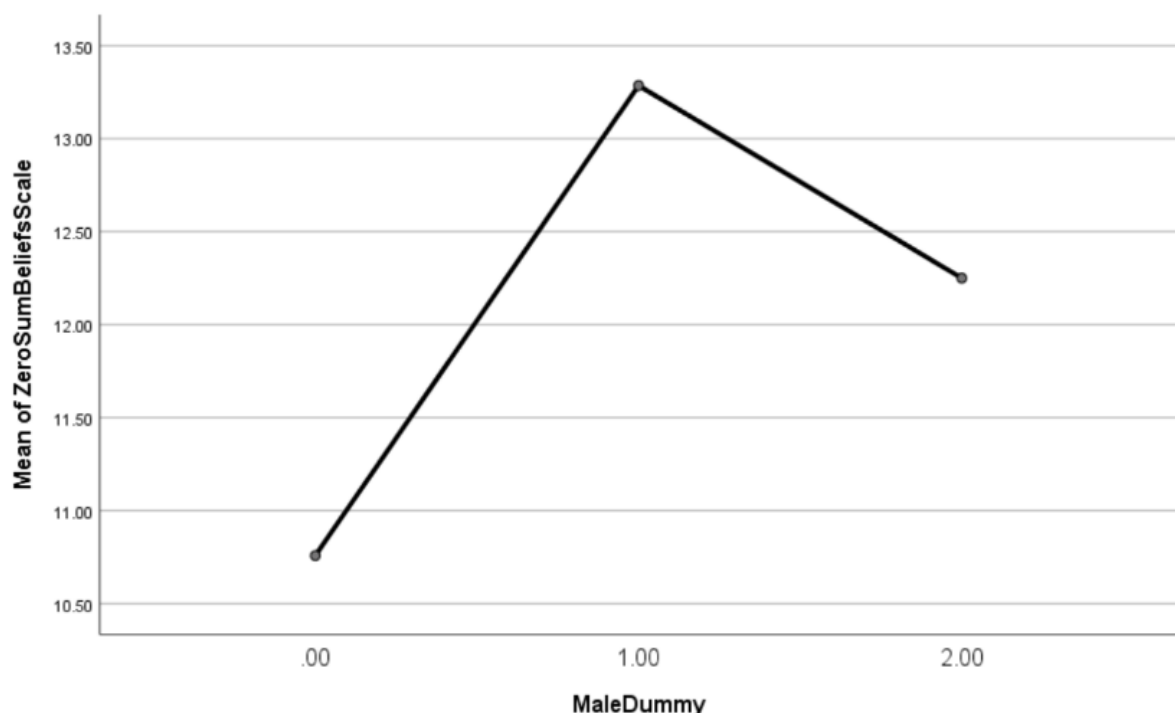
Gender

Gender emerged as a significant predictor of zero-sum beliefs (p < 0.001). Males scored significantly higher than females but the trend differed from the one found in the French sample. When taking into account participants identifying with "other" genders, the variance of means retains a significant difference now between "males", "females", and "other", with the "other" category scoring significantly lower than males but higher than females.

Correlations

A linear regression model found ZSB and CN as stronger predictors of Populism (p < .001) than SDO, which marginally predicted Populism (p = .048). A separate model singling out ZSB as predictor of populist attitudes also confirmed ZSB as strong predictor. Correlations between our measures were significant at the p<.001 level. To this end, ZSB strongly and positively correlated with CN and SDO, and strongly and negatively correlated with Pluralism.

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Poland

Experimental manipulation

There was no significant effect of experimental manipulation on ZSB. However, like the UK case, when considering the scale items separately, there emerged a statistically significant effect of manipulation on the first item (p < 0.05). And again, the effect related to the manipulation of condition 1 (zero sum cue + prime) with respect to the control condition.

Gender

There was a main effect of gender, with males scoring significantly higher (p = .005) than participants identifying with other genders on ZSB, but not significantly higher than females. Interestingly, females scored lower than males but at levels below statistical significance. Therefore, in our sample from Poland, males and females scored similarly on ZSB, with males scoring only marginally higher than females.

Correlations

We introduced ZSB, CN, Pluralism, and SDO into a model as predictors for populist attitudes. The model showed statistical significance with ZSB, CN, and SDO emerging as predictors of Populism. The effect of Pluralism on populist beliefs was not significant in this model. However, agreement with the Pluralism scale item "Diversity limits my freedom" emerged as a strong predictor (p < 0.001) of Populism. We therefore kept Pluralism in further analyses. ZSB correlated significantly with all other scales. Although Pluralism does not correlate with Populism, it does correlate with SDO, CN, and ZSB which have emerged as predictors of populist attitudes in the previous analysis.

Populist vote

In a model where ZSB, Pluralism, SDO, and CN were entered as predictors, only ZSB predicted a populist vote. In a separate model we tested Pluralism on its own, and it emerged as significant predictor of populist vote ($p < 0.05$). Agreement with populist leaders was predicted by ZSB and CN. Perhaps surprisingly then, CN was not related to populist vote. Finally, in our sample, among all our measures, ZSB uniquely predicted intention to vote for Law and Justice Party (PiS).

Spain

Experimental manipulation

The experimental manipulation on zero-sum beliefs about immigration marginally failed to reach significance. However, in a separate analysis which looking at the scale items separately, we found a significant effect for the first item of the scale at ($p=$) .009. We will further discuss this trend in the final section.

For the Spanish sample, and in similar cases where the experimental manipulation did not yield statistically significant results at first, we tested the hypothesis that the manipulation might have worked better on males. We introduced into the model a joint variable of the interaction between males and experimental manipulation on the dependent variable, but there were no significant effects on zero-sum beliefs.

Gender

There was an effect of gender on Zero-Sum beliefs, with males scoring higher than females. Gender differences in zero-sum beliefs were highly significant ($p < .001$) between males and females on the one hand, and between males and the "other" genders category on the other. Differences between females and participants under the "other" category were not significant. However, as opposed to the Italian sample where participants identifying with "other" scored lower than males but higher than females, in the Spanish sample participants under "other" scored lower than both males and females, similar to participants from France.

Correlations

In our Spanish sample, ZSB predicted populism alongside with CN and Pluralism. Furthermore, Pluralism negatively correlates with Zero-sum beliefs, Social Dominance, and Collective Narcissism as expected, and, perhaps surprisingly, positively with Populism.

Table 4: Correlations between relevant indicators in Spain

		Pluralism	Populism	Zero Sum Beliefs	Social Dominance	Collective Narcissism
Pluralism	Pearson Correlation	1	0.316**	-0.197*	-0.223**	-0.020
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000	0.000	0.000	0.000
	N	403	398	400	403	400

Populism	Pearson Correlation	0.316**	1	0.354**	0.135**	0.166**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000		0.000	0.007	0.001
	N	398	398	395	398	395
Zero Sum Beliefs	Pearson Correlation	-0.197*	0.354**	1	0.488**	0.029
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000		0.000	0.561
	N	400	395	400	400	397
Social Dominance	Pearson Correlation	-0.223**	0.135**	0.488**	1	-0.048
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.007	0.000		.334
	N	403	398	400	403	400
Collective Narcissism	Pearson Correlation	-0.020	0.166**	0.029	-0.048	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001	0.561	.334	
	N	400	395	397	400	400

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed)

Populist vote

Populist vote in Spain was predicted solely by CN at a level of $p < .001$. SDO and Pluralism failed to attain statistical significance by a small margin. However, there was a different story for agreement with populist leaders where ZSB accompanied collective narcissism as predictors at $p < 0.05$. A higher resolution view of populist party support in Spain differentiated between the left-wing populist party PODEMOS and the far-right populist party VOX. In this case, ZSB joined SDO, Pluralism, and CN as significant predictors of VOX support. On the other hand, support for PODEMOS is negatively associated with zero-sum beliefs about immigration, so that participants scoring lower on zero-sum beliefs about immigration were more likely to want to vote for PODEMOS.

United Kingdom

Experimental manipulation

One-way ANOVA analysis revealed no statistically significant effect of experimental manipulation on zero-sum beliefs in the UK sample. In cases such as these, where we did not observe an effect on the zero-sum beliefs scale as a whole, we ran a separate analysis by

selecting the list of scale items as dependent variables instead of the scale as a whole, in order to ascertain whether there is any hidden trend or interaction at least with any of the items but which would not suffice in carrying over to the entirety of the scale. This revealed a significant effect of manipulation only on the first item on the scale (i.e. "*Immigration to the United Kingdom decreases the number of jobs for people already living in the United Kingdom*"). Looking at the trends and comparisons between conditions, it emerged that participants in the control condition had roughly the lowest ZSB ratings, as expected. The manipulation of in-group expansion in which we presented Syrian migrants as culturally similar to national in-groups did not effect a decrease in ZSB as predicted. If anything, it seems to have increased them.

Correlations.

Moving on, we entered Zero-Sum Beliefs (ZSB) as predictor of populist attitudes in a linear regression alongside other scales such as Social Dominance Orientation (SDO),[16] Collective Narcissism (CN),[17] and Pluralism.[18] In this model, we found a statistically significant effect for all scales as predictors of populist attitudes. Excepting Pluralism, which negatively predicts Populism, all other measures are positive predictors. Moreover, in a model using these four scales, only high scores on Zero-Sum beliefs retrospectively predict a vote for Brexit.

Table 5: Linear regression for populist attitudes

	Unstandardised B	Coefficients Std. Error	Standardised Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.
(Constant)	0.025	0.195		0.131	0.896
Pluralism Scale	-0.014	0.012	-0.053	-1.146	0.253
Social Dominance	0.004	0.003	0.064	1.367	0.172
Collective Narcissism	-0.001	0.004	-0.008	-0.190	0.849
Zero Sum Beliefs	0.027	0.003	0.352	7.753	0.000

a. Dependent Variable referendum

We observed significant correlations between ZSB and the remaining three scales. ZSB were positively associated with Populism ($p < .001$), SDO ($p < .001$), CN ($p < .05$), and negatively

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[16] SDO refers to views such as that "superior groups should dominate inferior groups", and that we should not strive for intergroup equality. SDO is part of a rich literature and was previously associated, together with Right-Wing Authoritarianism, with socially conservative and right-wing views. SDO was previously found to interact with ZSB, so that higher SDO participants who read news stories about immigration in zero-sum terms were more likely than low SDO scoring participants to enhance their zero-sum beliefs.

[17] CN refers to a constellation of beliefs about the superiority of one's ingroup so that when other people criticise one's ingroup, ingroup members personally feel insulted. CN was previously associated with support for Brexit.

[18] Pluralism refers to beliefs that all groups should be treated equally, and that plurality is beneficial to society. We selected this short 3-item scale because it contains the item "Diversity limits my freedom" (reverse coded). We hypothesise that this belief would positively (and the scale on the whole, negatively) predict right-wing populist attitudes.

with Pluralism (p<.001). This confirms our expectations that high zero-sum beliefs about immigration would correlate with (especially right-wing) populist attitudes, and with negative views of out-groups. We have also tested zero-sum beliefs in the UK sample separately in the guise of the following statement: "I support the political parties or politicians who promise to control immigration so that ordinary Britons can have more opportunities in the United Kingdom". Linear regression analysis indicated that this statement was a significant predictor of the Brexit vote (p < 0.001). On its own, Pluralism is a robust and negative predictor of the Brexit vote. However, in our sample, we failed to echo previous findings showing CN to be a predictor of support for Brexit and Brexit vote.

ZSB and SDO positively predict a populist vote, operationalised as intention to vote "were there a general election to be held today", while Pluralism negatively predicts populist vote. Collective Narcissism, again, was not statistically significant. Finally, zero-sum beliefs positively and Pluralism negatively predicted agreement with populist leaders, and agreement with Nigel Farage in particular.

Conclusions

This research investigated how ordinary citizens react to populist messages in terms of political opinions and attitudes. In particular, we studied how citizens react to the key elements of populism, namely the populist actors' criticism towards the elite (political, media, intellectual and economic one) and the out-groups, as well as the populist conception of the people as a homogenous group. To this end, we used different methods.

Focus group research revealed that, in countries where populists are in office (i.e. Poland and Turkey), populist party voters, despite being critical of some of the governmental policies and degradation of democracy in their countries, still expressed support for the system in their countries. Some participants suggested that despite the erosion of democracy, the situation is still better in comparison to other countries. Other participants emphasised the economic incentives provided by the government while talking about the functioning of democracy.

Generally speaking, trust vis-à-vis politicians is low across countries. Some participants suggested that politicians use polarisation in order to advance their agenda. Other participants noted that politicians are more likely to listen to the lobby groups rather than the people who elected them to their posts. The important point is that the distrust of politicians was observed even among the populist party participants in Poland and Turkey, where populist parties are in power. Accordingly, the feeling that citizens are represented by the system is generally low among our participants. Two exceptions to this rule are mainstream party voters in Spain and 'Leave' voters in the UK, who were somehow more contended with their representation.

Social media is considered dangerous by populist party voters in Turkey and the UK while mainstream party voters consider it enabling democracy. In Turkey, for instance, populist party voters suggested that different political camps use social media to advance their agenda. Mainstream party voters in Turkey, however, said that, given the government's control of the mainstream media, social media is one of the few venues where opposition can be present without any obstruction. Similar feelings were present among mainstream party voters in the UK, who suggested that social media is very important to democracy, as it enables citizens to have access to a great body of information, a characteristics making it more democratic than the mainstream media.

Digital dashboard study confirmed a finding that we extensively discussed in a previous DEMOS research (Sahin et al., 2021). In a previous DEMOS study, we found that members of groups targeted by populism complained about normalisation of hate speech.[19] In this study, we suggested that populist politicians' openness in voicing controversial opinion in the public sphere was one of the factors behind this dynamic. Our digital dashboard research in the present working paper revealed that populist politicians' Facebook posts that include populist themes are more likely to be imitated by their followers while this effect is significantly weaker for the followers of the mainstream politicians. That is, followers are less likely to imitate the populist language when mainstream politicians use populist themes in their Facebook communication. We therefore suggest that populist politicians use social media more effectively than mainstream politicians in disseminating their discourse. This fact contributes to normalisation of populist language in European countries. Hence, populist politicians carry a major part of the responsibility for the increasing dose in the use of controversial language in political discussion on social media. This fact puts a major responsibility on the shoulders of legal authorities, as leaving social media to the mercy of populist politicians would only exacerbate this situation. Accordingly, legal authorities and social media platform providers should be held responsible for controlling for and preventing the various forms of hate speech disseminated by populist politicians on these platforms.

Our experimental manipulation of zero-sum beliefs about immigration had mixed success, being successful in our samples from France and Italy, and unsuccessful in the rest. However, where the manipulation did not elicit a significant change in zero-sum beliefs (ZSB) ratings as a whole, it significantly affected ratings for one item on the ZSB scale. Overall, our experimental manipulation had at least some success. Gender emerged as a powerful predictor of ZSB, with males scoring higher than both females and participants identifying with other genders. The effect of gender could be connected to one prediction from Coalitional Psychology about coalitional intuitions, namely that zero-sum cognitions mirror evolutionary and historic patterns of male intergroup aggression, and should therefore be higher in males than in females. Interestingly then, there were no statistically significant differences between males and females in our Polish sample, with males scoring only marginally higher. However, this could be connected to the country-specific context in that, in a cross-cultural perspective, Polish participants scored highest on zero-sum beliefs among all groups. Further research is needed to elucidate this point. Overall, with minor caveats, ZSB emerged as central predictors of populist attitudes, agreement with populist politicians, and intention to vote for a populist party. This is unsurprising, given that anti-immigrant rhetoric in the guise of zero-sum beliefs is common especially in right-wing populist discourse. However, it also suggests that exposure to cues of a bad environment and of the presence of perceived out-groups can activate resource-

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[19] See study on the DEMOS website: https://demos-h2020.eu/en/reacting-to-populism-minorities-impose-self-censorship-and-move-abroad

protection attitudes, which could sway voters to support populist politicians who are in turn happy to reinforce such perceptions.

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Appendix

Table A1: Multilevel zero-inflated beta regressions	Model 1a Share Y [for Y > 0]	Model 1b Probability Y = 0
Intercept	-1.99 (0.07)***	-2.17 (0.45)***
Post contains populist language	0.33 (0.01)***	-0.52 (0.06)***
Populist party	-0.11 (0.06)	-1.28 (0.37)***
Post length	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Page type (base = Party)		
Leader	-0.17 (0.06)**	-1.20 (0.36)***
Media Star	-0.20 (0.08)**	-1.36 (0.49)**
Country (base = DE)		
ES	-0.12 (0.11)	-1.07 (0.73)
FR	-0.01 (0.09)	1.34 (0.59)*
GR	-0.59 (0.13)***	3.20 (0.74)***
HU	-0.41 (0.09)***	2.10 (0.60)***
IT	-0.53 (0.10)***	0.64 (0.64)
PL	-0.01 (0.10)	1.24 (0.65)
TR	-1.17 (0.11)***	2.44 (0.69)***
UK	-0.54 (0.10)***	0.80 (0.64)
AIC	-66096.14	
Log Likelihood	33081.07	
N obs	31541	
N page	122	
N year/week	23	
Var Intercept (page)	0.07	2.91
Var Intercept (year/week)	0.0006	0.03
***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05		

Table A2: Multilevel zero-inflated beta regressions, interactions with populist party		
	Model 3a **Share Y [for Y > 0]**	**Model 3b** **Probability Y = 0**
Intercept	-2.02 (0.07)***	-2.18 (0.46)***
Post contains populist language	0.26 (0.03)***	-0.62 (0.12)***
Populist party	-0.14 (0.06)*	-1.26 (0.37)***
Post length	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Populist party * populist language	0.12 (0.05)**	-0.12 (0.19)
Page type (base = Party)		
Leader	-0.16 (0.06)**	-1.21 (0.36)***
Media Star	-0.18 (0.07)*	-1.36 (0.49)**
Country (base = DE)		
ES	-0.08 (0.10)	-1.09 (0.73)
FR	-0.00 (0.09)	1.39 (0.61)*
GR	-0.60 (0.13)***	3.20 (0.74)***
HU	-0.36 (0.09)***	2.18 (0.67)**
IT	-0.45 (0.10)***	0.60 (0.64)
PL	0.03 (0.10)	1.28 (0.65)
TR	-1.16 (0.11)***	2.50 (0.72)***
UK	-0.46 (0.10)***	0.77 (0.64)
AIC	-66349.20	
Log Likelihood	33213.60	
N obs	31541	
N page	122	
N year/week	23	
Var Intercept (page)	0.08	2.93
Var "Populist Language" Share (page)	0.03	0.15
Var Intercept (year/week)	0.0006	0.03
***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$		

Table A3: Multilevel zero-inflated beta regressions, interactions with country		
	Model 2a **Share Y [for Y > 0]**	**Model 2b** **Probability Y = 0**
Intercept	-1.98 (0.07)***	-2.13 (0.46)***
Post contains populist language	0.25 (0.03)***	-1.15 (0.33)***
Populist party	-0.11 (0.06)	-1.27 (0.37)***
Post length	0.00 (0.00)	-0.00 (0.00)
Page type (base = Party)		
Leader	-0.17 (0.06)**	-1.20 (0.36)**
Media Star	-0.20 (0.07)**	-1.36 (0.49)**
Country (base = DE)		
ES	-0.14 (0.11)	-1.08 (0.73)
FR	0.01 (0.09)	1.28 (0.59)*
GR	-0.57 (0.13)***	3.20 (0.74)***
HU	-0.41 (0.09)***	2.02 (0.61)***
IT	-0.57 (0.10)***	0.60 (0.64)
PL	-0.02 (0.10)	1.22 (0.65)
TR	-1.17 (0.11)***	2.38 (0.69)***
UK	-0.56 (0.10)***	0.78 (0.64)
Interactions with 'Post contains populist language'		
ES	0.12 (0.04)**	0.00 (0.55)
FR	-0.09 (0.04)*	0.85 (0.38)*
GR	-0.27 (0.17)	-0.20 (0.69)
HU	0.04 (0.04)	0.79 (0.34)*
IT	0.31 (0.04)***	0.58 (0.36)
PL	0.05 (0.03)	0.46 (0.36)
TR	-0.04 (0.08)	0.88 (0.39)*
UK	0.26 (0.07)***	-0.39 (0.52)
AIC	-66230.24	
Log Likelihood	33164.12	
N obs	31541	
N page	122	
N year/week	23	
Var Intercept (page)	0.07	2.92
Var Intercept (year/week)	0.0006	0.03
***p < 0.001; **p < 0.01; *p < 0.05		