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Populism and political behaviour

Populist attitudes in Italy. Evidence from an experimental design research

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Research description



COST Action IS 1308 – Populist Political communication in Europe,
WG3 “Citizens and populism”

- Comparative Research in 16 European Countries (AT, CH, DE, EL, ES, FR, IE, IL, IT, NL, NO, PL, PT, RO, SE, UK)
- OBJ: to explore the behavioural effects of populist communication (left-wing and right-wing)
- Experimental design: respondents ($N = 16,386$) randomly assigned to one of the 8 versions of a short realistic news item on the economic crisis considering the exclusionists and anti-elitism features of the populist discourse.

Conditions with Populism (Pro-heartland is a constant)		
	No anti-elite	Anti-elite
No out-group	(1) empty populism	(2) anti-elitism populism
Outgroup “immigrants”	(3) right-wing outgroup populism	(4) complete right-wing populism
Outgroup “The wealthy 1%”	(5) left-wing outgroup populism	(6) complete left-wing populism
Control Conditions		
No heartland	(7) no populism/rational	(8) only anti-elitism

Experiment Procedure



Italian experiment was conducted online on a representative sample of Italian voters (n= 970):

1. Informed consent + pre-test: demographics, moderator variables, and control variables
2. Assignment to one of the eight conditions and read an online news items
→a randomization check shows that the eight conditions do not differ significantly with regards to age ($F=0.759$, $p=0.622$), gender ($F=0.472$, $p=0.855$), education ($F=1.316$, $p=0.239$) and ideology ($F=0.977$, $p=0.447$)
3. Post-test survey measuring the dependent variables and manipulation checks.
4. Debriefing

Participants who completed the survey received a financial incentive from the panel agencies.

Survey Variables



Moderators:

- Socio-demographics var.
- Identity/patriotism
- Deprivation
- Political interest
- Media use
- Government approval
- Left/right placement
- Voting behaviour

Dependent variables:

- Emotions
- Blame perceptions
- **Populist attitudes**
- Stereotypes
- Issue agreement
- Political engagement

Manipulation check

Multidimensional measure of populist attitudes



- Definition of populism:
Populism is conceived as a set of ideas that emphasize that society is separated by the “good” ordinary people versus “the evil” others, and that affirm that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). It may both identify a vertical out-group as opposed to the political heartland (the corrupt elites: political, economic, etc.), and draw a line between the pure people and specific horizontal out-groups (e.g. immigrants, Muslims, etc.).
- Dimensions of populism:
 1. Homogeneity of the people
 2. Anti-establishment
 3. Popular sovereignty
 4. Exclusionism
- All items were measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree).
- Items were randomized.

Homogeneity of the people Attitudes



Per favore indichi in che misura Lei è d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni [7-point scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)]:

1. Le persone comuni sono di indole buona e onesta
2. Le persone comuni perseguono gli stessi obiettivi
3. Anche se gli Italiani sono molto diversi tra loro, in fin dei conti, la pensano tutti allo stesso modo
4. Le persone comuni condividono gli stessi valori e interessi

Homogeneity of the people



Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,920	,919	4

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3,223	80,568	80,568
2	,567	14,173	94,742
3	,210	5,258	100,000
4	-1,3E+00	-3,3E-15	100,000

	Component
-Ordinary people are of good and honest character	1 ,830
-Although the [country members, e.g. British] are very different from each other, when it comes down to it, they all think the same.	,935
-Ordinary people share the same values and interests.	,887

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Anti-establishment Attitudes



Per favore indichi in che misura Lei è d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni [7-point scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)]:

1. Aniché i politici, il popolo dovrebbe prendere le decisioni politiche più importanti
2. I politici al governo sono corrotti
3. I politici prendono decisioni che nuocciono agli interessi della gente comune
4. La gente comune dovrebbe avere più influenza delle grandi aziende sul processo decisionale politico
5. I rappresentanti in Parlamento perdono molto presto il contatto con la gente comune
6. Le differenze tra la gente comune e le élite dominanti sono decisamente più marcate che le differenze all'interno della gente comune stessa
7. La gente come me non ha nessuna influenza sulle azioni del Governo
8. I politici non sono davvero interessati a ciò che pensa la gente come me
9. Le istituzioni finanziarie internazionali hanno colonizzato il nostro Paese
10. Un gruppetto di famiglie ricche gestisce realmente questo Paese
11. Le grandi società per azioni accumulano ricchezza sfruttando le persone
12. Le persone povere dovrebbero avere un peso maggiore in politica

Anti-establishment



Populist Political Communication in Europe

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items		
0,917	0,918	12		

Initial Eigenvalues			
Component	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	6,332	52,769	52,769
2	,975	8,123	60,892
3	,862	7,184	68,076
4	,646	5,383	73,459
5	,535	4,457	77,916
6	,456	3,802	81,718
7	,451	3,755	85,473
8	,434	3,614	89,088
9	,378	3,154	92,241
10	,339	2,821	95,062
11	,321	2,676	97,739
12	,271	2,261	100,000

	Component
	1
The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions	,692
Politicians in government are corrupt	,718
Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people	,810
The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than large corporations	,747
MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people.	,748
The differences between ordinary people and the ruling elite are much greater than the differences between ordinary people.	,737
People like me have no influence on what the government does.	,719
Politicians are not really interested in what people like me think.	,720
International financial institutions have colonized our country	,748
A bunch of rich families are really running this country	,647
Big corporations accumulate wealth by exploiting the people	,733
Poor people should have a greater voice in politics	,687

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Popular sovereignty Attitudes



Populist Political Communication in Europe

Per favore indichi in che misura Lei è d'accordo con le seguenti affermazioni [7-point scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree)]:

1. Il popolo dovrebbe avere l'ultima parola sulle questioni politiche più importanti votandole direttamente con un referendum
2. Il popolo deve essere interpellato ogni qual volta vengano prese decisioni importanti
3. I politici in Parlamento devono seguire la volontà del popolo

Popular sovereignty



Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,893	,895	3

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	2,484	82,787	82,787
2	,358	11,923	94,710
3	,159	5,290	100,000

	Component
	1
The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums.	0,929
The people should be asked whenever important decisions are taken.	0,932
The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people.	0,866
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	

Exclusionism



Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,918	,918	4

Component	Initial Eigenvalues		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3,209	80,217	80,217
2	,326	8,149	88,366
3	,253	6,320	94,685
4	,213	5,315	100,000

	Component
	1
-Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture	,906
-Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people	,884
-Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems	,917
-People who are not originally from our country, should have no rights on our social benefits	,875
Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.	


Populist Political Communication in Europe

Populist attitude Indexes*condition

The indexes have been normalized on a 10 point scale

Index	Homogeneity of the people		Anti-establishment		Popular sovereignty		Exclusionism	
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation
(1) empty populism	6,49	2,06	7,93	1,48	8,38	1,85	6,62	2,57
(2) anti-elitism pop	6,48	2,29	7,86	1,54	7,85	2,24	6,17	2,60
(3) right-wing outgroup populism	6,39	2,17	7,72	1,50	8,02	2,12	6,53	2,42
(4) complete right-wing populism	6,18	2,19	7,78	1,58	8,00	2,10	6,30	2,88
(5) left-wing outgroup populism	6,46	2,23	7,79	1,67	8,08	2,14	6,15	2,79
(6) complete left-wing populism	6,51	2,17	7,94	1,70	8,12	2,00	6,31	2,60
(7) no populism/rational	6,11	2,23	7,79	1,53	7,95	2,05	5,75	2,63
(8)No populism/only anti-elitism	6,24	2,01	7,71	1,37	7,52	2,16	5,99	2,50


Populist Political Communication in Europe

ANOVA

Populist attitude Indexes*condition

ANOVA						
		Somma dei quadrati	gl	Media quadratica	F	Sign.
HOM_INDEX_SUM_RESC10	Tra gruppi	20,730	7	2,961	,629	,732
	Entro i gruppi	4450,482	946	4,705		
	Totale	4471,213	953			
ANTI_ES_INDEX_SUM_RESC10	Tra gruppi	6,495	7	,928	,387	,910
	Entro i gruppi	2268,860	947	2,396		
	Totale	2275,355	954			
POPSOV_INDEX_SUM_RESC10	Tra gruppi	49,684	7	7,098	1,635	,122
	Entro i gruppi	4103,231	945	4,342		
	Totale	4152,915	952			
EXCL_INDEX_SUM_RESC10	Tra gruppi	67,121	7	9,589	1,391	,206
	Entro i gruppi	6508,236	944	6,894		
	Totale	6575,357	951			

Populist attitude

Componente	Varianza totale spiegata					
	Autovalori iniziali			Caricamenti somme dei quadrati di estrazione		
	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa	Totale	% di varianza	% cumulativa
1	9,292	40,398	40,398	9,292	40,398	40,398
2	3,390	14,738	55,136	3,390	14,738	55,136
3	1,859	8,082	63,218	1,859	8,082	63,218
4	1,254	5,452	68,670	1,254	5,452	68,670
5	,876	3,809	72,478			
6	,649	2,823	75,301			
7	,626	2,722	78,024			
8	,499	2,168	80,192			
9	,461	2,005	82,197			
10	,442	1,924	84,121			
11	,420	1,825	85,946			
12	,395	1,718	87,664			
13	,370	1,608	89,272			
14	,347	1,507	90,780			
15	,324	1,409	92,188			
16	,303	1,317	93,505			
17	,284	1,233	94,739			
18	,255	1,108	95,846			
19	,225	,979	96,825			
20	,220	,957	97,782			
21	,203	,881	98,662			
22	,169	,734	99,397			
23	,139	,603	100,000			

Metodo di estrazione: Analisi dei componenti principali.

Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	N of Items
,928	,931	23

	Component Matrix ^a			
	1	2	3	4
ANTI-ES 1 - The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions	,762	-,034	-,024	-,353
ANTI-ES 2 - Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people	,746	-,295	,159	,036
ANTI-ES 3 - The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than large corporations	,725	-,196	-,151	-,038
ANTI-ES 4 - People like me have no influence on what the government does.	,670	-,239	,154	,110
ANTI-ES 5 - International financial institutions have colonized our country	,684	-,262	,054	,225
ANTI-ES 6 - Politicians in government are corrupt	,667	-,255	,196	-,005
ANTI-ES 7 - MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people.	,629	-,439	,039	,138
ANTI-ES 8 - The differences between ordinary people and the ruling elite are much greater than the differences between ordinary people.	,621	-,386	-,056	,280
ANTI-ES 9 - Politicians are not really interested in what people like me think.	,620	-,367	,137	,075
ANTI-ES 10 - A bunch of rich families are really running this country	,571	-,237	-,080	,390
ANTI-ES 11 - Big corporations accumulate wealth by exploiting the people	,625	-,353	-,060	,307
ANTI-ES 12 - Poor people should have a greater voice in politics	,677	-,143	-,237	-,018
POPSOV 1 - The people should have the final say on the most important political issues by voting on them directly in referendums.	,742	-,034	-,025	-,513
POPSOV 2 - The people should be asked whenever important decisions are taken.	,758	-,037	-,038	-,516
POPSOV 3 - The politicians in Parliament need to follow the will of the people.	,740	-,186	-,041	-,340
EXCL 1 - Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture	,513	,581	,450	,130
EXCL 2 - Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people	,585	,478	,459	,026
EXCL 3 - Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems	,510	,597	,453	,067
EXCL 4 - People who are not originally from our country, should have no rights on our social benefits	,465	,564	,479	,053
HOM 1 - Ordinary people are of good and honest character	,520	,505	-,483	,073
HOM 2 - Ordinary people all pull together	,592	,519	-,449	,097
HOM 3 - Although the [country members, e.g. British] are very different from each other, when it comes down to it, they all think the same.	,485	,542	-,372	,140
HOM 4 - Ordinary people share the same values and interests.	,561	,547	-,480	,093

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.