

Once Upon a Time... Nostalgia as an Ideational Concept is an Affective Campaigning Strategy *

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Populist actors use nostalgic rhetoric that invoke representations of a glorious national past in order to sharpen group boundaries between the ‘authentic us’ and the ‘alien them’. There is considerable overlap between populism and nostalgia – i.e. both share the idea that it used to be better. To determine whether nostalgia is really a new “kid on the block”, explaining populist support, we rely on Dutch data, conducted in May 2022 and January - March 2023. First, utilizing EFA and PCA on a pilot sample, we explore how many latent dimensions those concepts share. The EFA results show two underlying concepts, while using a PCA, we find a single latent concept with seven components. This indicates that there is not only considerable theoretical overlap between the concepts, but also empirically, these concepts pick up on the same meaning. To overcome conceptual overlap, we deconstruct the dimensions of nostalgia using experimental and observational data with a representative sample. [THIS SHOWS X]. These allows us to theorize and empirically investigate how nostalgic rhetoric impacts political behavior. Understanding the nostalgic component in rhetoric allows us to contribute to the literature on drivers of populist support.

Keywords: Nostalgia, Political Parties’ Discursive Strategies, Measurement Models, Experiment

Introduction

Since the 1990s, much of Western Europe has been witnessing an initially sudden, but continuous rise of populist parties. According to Mudde (2007), populist radical right parties have become the most consistently successful new party family in Western Europe after World War II. With recent elections of populist leaders in the US and Italy, as well as populist parties increasing or solidifying in countries like Sweden, Germany, or France (Silver, 2022), it becomes evident that today’s social, political and media landscapes strongly favor this populist surge (Mudde, 2016).

Considering that there is no reason to expect a subdual of this development any time soon, it comes as no surprise that the literature on populism is vast (Mudde, 2007). Populism is understood as a thin-centered ideology that rarely exists on its own, attaches itself to a broader “host” ideology and is thus context-sensitive (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2013). In accordance with a Manichean tension, society is considered to be ultimately divided into two homogenous and antagonistic groups: the “pure, virtuous people” that finds itself in a clash with the “corrupt, malevolent elite” (Akkerman et al., 2014; Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Aside from defining populism, a large share of the literature has explored the sudden and increasing rise of populism (Mudde, 2007), the effect of populist parties on established party systems in Europe (Meléndez & Kaltwasser, 2019;

*Replication files are available on the author’s Github account (XZX); **Current version:** April 18, 2023;

Mudde, 2014), the similarities and differences of populist parties in different contexts (Bowler et al., 2017; Ivarsflaten, 2008; March, 2017; Mudde, 2013; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2011), the traits and characteristics of citizens who support populist parties (Akkerman et al., 2014; Bakker et al., 2016; Bakker et al., 2021; Jacobs et al., 2018), as well as the political communication of populist actors (Hameleers et al., 2018; Jagers, 2007; Rico et al., 2017; Schumacher et al., 2022).

In recent years, notable interest in the relationship between populism and nostalgia has emerged in the field of political science and political communication. Nostalgia, which entails a sentimental longing for a collective past and the way society used to be (Cheung et al., 2017), has been shown to be linked to several attitudes and behaviors in relation to social groups. These include in-group favoring action such as collective action, and outgroup-directed anger, for instance (Cheung et al., 2017). There has been an increase in literature linking insights on populism and populist communication with those on nostalgia. Lammers and Baldwin (2020) argue that many right-wing populists use slogans that appeal to collective nostalgic emotions by calling for a return to the glorious past. Based on several studies relying on survey or experimental designs, the current literature suggests that exposure to populist rhetoric increases feelings of nostalgia, which in turn is associated with increased populist attitudes (Elçi, 2022; van Prooijen et al., 2022; Smeekes et al., 2021). An important commonality of these studies to note is that they all make use of the measurements of collective nostalgia as proposed by Smeekes et al. (2015), which partially resemble Akkerman et al.'s (2014) measures of populist attitudes in their phrasing and could therefore potentially capture different dimensions of the same concept.

Many of these studies have focused on examples from the populist radical right. We argue that this is a compelling rationale to reconsider and reevaluate some of these studies and their findings. The aim of this is to examine the current way nostalgia is conceptualized and measured. Despite there being evidence that nostalgia may be experienced on both sides of the ideological spectrum (Stefaniak et al., 2021), the study contends that this skewness of scholarly attention may be in part due to significant overlaps between the measures of collective nostalgia on the one hand, and nativism/nationalism, relative deprivation, and populism on the other hand.

Based on survey data from the Netherlands, we first employ Principal Component Analysis (PCA) and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to empirically investigate and confirm this hypothesized overlap. In subsequent steps, Latent Class Analysis (LCA) is used to gain a better understanding on the relationship between populist and nostalgic attitudes. These findings are then further substantiated by multinomial logistic regression analysis to identify different profiles of respondents. The results indicate that there is considerable overlap between the aforementioned concepts and imply that the relationship between nostalgia and populism may not be as straightforward as initially suspected. **[ADD other two results]**

[TBA: Contributions]

Once upon a Time: Nostalgia as an Ideational Concept

In recent years, there has been growing interest in the concept of nostalgia among scholars of political science and political communication. In psychology, nostalgia is understood as a feeling at the individual level; an affectionate longing for one's childhood or adolescence (Marchegiani & Chau, 2013). In the social sciences, however, the focus has been on collective nostalgia. Defined as sentimental or affectionate feelings predicated on thinking of oneself as a group member that are based on idealistic conceptions of events or that group's past, collective nostalgia may focus on events that were directly experienced with ingroup members (Baldwin et al., 2018). In many cases, these events are remembered through collective memory and thus passed down within families, learned through books or narrated by the mass media (Kao, 2012). Collective nostalgia is more

likely to emerge when people perceive their group as better off in the past than in the present (Cheung et al., 2017). Though it is rather abstract at times, collective nostalgia also tends to be more consistent among individuals within the same generation of the same cultural group (Kao, 2012).

Studies imply that collective nostalgia meets the conceptual criteria of group level emotions to an extent that it motivates and regulates attitudes and behaviors in relation to social groups. As Baldwin et al. (2018) argue, collective nostalgia can promote beliefs that elevate the perceived superiority and exclusivity of one's ingroup, which benefits positive ingroup attitudes and prosociality (Behler et al., 2021). Collective nostalgia is further connected to outgroup-directed anger and contempt (Cheung et al., 2017). Stefaniak et al. (2021) demonstrate that collective nostalgia is experienced on both sides of the ideological spectrum, though it is experienced differently. While liberals have a more openness-focused sense of collective nostalgia, conservatives' sense of collective nostalgia is more homogeneity-focused. It is the latter that shows to be a stronger predictor for intergroup attitudes (Stefaniak et al., 2021). It is argued that this stronger association between conservative ideology and collective nostalgia is due to an intuitive preference for political ideas that maintain or even return society to how it was (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020). Furthermore, conventional measures of collective nostalgia as introduced by Smeekes et al. (2015) include survey items that repeatedly reference the nation and national society, and much of the literature has since relied on these measures.

Populism, Populist Rhetoric, and Nostalgia

Current developments point towards a growing body of literature that links insights on populism, populist rhetoric with those on nostalgia. Though Menke and Wulf (2021) contend that research on how nostalgia is used in mediated populist communication and nostalgia's persuasive potential in populist messages is rather scarce, some scholars have contributed some initial substantive findings. They find that in populist communication, the creation of a sense of crisis usually precedes any nostalgic narratives (Menke & Wulf, 2021). Especially right-wing populists make use of antagonistic rhetoric to distinguish themselves from the elite and do so by using slogans that appeal to collective nostalgic emotions by calling for a return to the past (Lammers & Baldwin, 2020; Mudde, 2016). The past is thereby presented as glorious, while a bleak future is offered (Mols & Jetten, 2014).

In several experimental studies, scholars have also closely examined the effect of collective nostalgia on populist attitudes. In the context of Turkey, Elçi (2022) investigates the effect of different historical contexts on participants' populist attitudes. Similarly, van Prooijen et al. (2022) use political speeches that are either populist or pluralist in nature and trace the effect of populist rhetoric on nostalgic attitudes and the latter's influence on populist attitudes. Both studies provide evidence that suggests that exposure to such populist rhetoric makes people more nostalgic which in turn is associated with increased populist attitudes (Elçi, 2022; van Prooijen, 2022). In a recent study, Smeekes et al. (2021) thus conclude that collective nostalgia, and specifically national nostalgia, can be understood as new master-frame of populist radical right parties.

While these findings are seemingly compelling, a closer look is warranted at both the measures and the design of some of the studies in question. As Adcock and Collier (2001) argue, there are considerable degrees of freedom as researchers make complex decisions regarding measuring concepts. Measurement validity is achieved when a chosen measurement or indicator meaningfully corresponds with the respective concept (Bollen, 2011). When examining the measures of collective nostalgia introduced by Smeekes et al., (2015), it should be noted that the survey items make repeated references to the Dutch people and society of the past. These items could not only overlap with feelings of nativism/nationalism and relative deprivation, but also present the Dutch society

and people as homogenous. This strongly resembles the ideational approach to conceptualizing populism (Mudde, 2004), which is reflected by the measurements introduced by Akkerman et al. (2014). This potential theoretical overlap should urge us to reconsider the current evidence regarding the effects of nostalgia on populist attitudes. If some of the measures may capture different dimensions of the same concept, then we should deem some of the findings potentially tautological in nature.

Ideational Nostalgia

TBA

H1: *All voters will be more supportive of nostalgic messages than non-nostalgic messages.*

H2: *Right-wing voters will be more supportive of nostalgic messages than left-wing messages.*

H3: *Populist voters will be more supportive of messages that mention a scapegoat than non-populist voters.*

H4a: *Nostalgic messages will increase affective sentiment for ideological social in-groups.*

H4b: *Messages mentioning scapegoats will increase affective sentiment for ideological/social in-groups.*

H5a: *Nostalgic messages will decrease affective sentiment for ideological social out-groups.*

H5b: *Messages mentioning scapegoats will decrease affective sentiment for ideological/social out-groups.*

Data, Measures, and Methods of Estimation

To investigate whether nostalgic communication is a feature of populist rhetoric or whether it is an effective campaign message for all voters, we have conducted two studies within the *VU Election Studies 2023* (van der Velden, 2023). This is a five-wave panel survey, conducted between 11 January 2023 and 20 March 2023 by KiesKompas, a Dutch-polling company. The panel is conducted by the VIP panel, a group of dedicated panel members, who do not receive compensation. The panel is a representative sample based on demographic variables. The data presented in this paper comes from the first and the fourth wave – 11 January 2023 till 18 January 2023 and 7 till 14 March 2023. During the first wave, participants were asked about their political preferences, their nostalgic attitudes, their populist attitudes, and were asked to fill in an open-ended question about what time in the past they are nostalgic for, amongst other questions. In the fourth wave, we included an experiment in order to disentangle nostalgic messages from ideological ones. In the first wave, 2,185 participants completed the survey, in the fourth wave 1,560 participants completed the survey. We have used the recommendation of Gerber and Green (2011) to impute missing values with the mean value per wave, and indicate if a variable has more than ten percent missing values.

Study 1: Observational Data

We use the first wave data to a) utilize measurement models (EFA, PCA, and LCA) to establish the conceptual overlap between populist attitudes and reluctant measures of nostalgia, i.e. those conceptions of nostalgia that are coherent with nationalism; and b) explore the various other conceptions of nostalgia coming from the sociological and marketing literature.

Table 1: Variables used in Measurement Models

Attitude	Items	Means	St.Dev
Populist Attitudes 1	You know right away if someone is good or bad if you know what their political affiliation is	1.8	0.84
Populist Attitudes 2	People who have a different political opinion than me are just ill-informed	2.0	0.88
Populist Attitudes 3	People who have different political views than me are not immediately bad people (Reversed Coded)	1.7	0.82
Populist Attitudes 4	Politicians should always listen carefully to people's problems	4.3	0.77
Populist Attitudes 5	Politicians need not spend time among ordinary people to do their jobs (Reversed Coded)	4.2	0.85
Populist Attitudes 6	The will of the common people should be the highest principle in politics	3.1	1.25
Populist Attitudes 7	Against their better judgment, politicians promise more than they can deliver.	4.1	0.90
Populist Attitudes 8	What is called 'compromising' in politics is really just betraying your principles.	2.6	1.20
Populist Attitudes 9	A strong head of government is good for the Netherlands, even if it stretches the rules a bit to get things done.	2.8	1.23
Nostalgic Attitudes 1	More economic inequality	1.2	0.47
Nostalgic Attitudes 2	Fewer working class politicians	1.4	0.60
Nostalgic Attitudes 3	New ways of communication, such as Facebook or Instagram	1.6	0.79
Nostalgic Attitudes 4	Greater ethnic diversity in Dutch villages and cities	2.0	0.84
Nostalgic Attitudes 5	Fewer people attending church	2.0	0.66
Nostalgic Attitudes 6	New technological devices such as cell phones	2.4	0.81
Nostalgic Attitudes 7	More same-sex couples	2.2	0.60
Nostalgic Attitudes 8	More women working instead of staying at home	2.6	0.66
Nostalgic Attitudes 9	More choice in TV and entertainment	2.0	0.74
Nostalgic Attitudes 10	More immigrant and female politicians	2.4	0.70
Nostalgic Attitudes 11	More young people going to college	2.3	0.73

Variables for Measurement Models. We measure *populist attitudes* using nine statements

assembled by KiesKompas based on a meta-analysis of all populist items (KiesKompas 20XX). Table 1 displays these nine items as well as the mean and standard deviation of these items. Participants were asked on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 equals fully disagree and 5 equals fully agree, the extent to which they agreed with those statements. Statements 3 and 5 are reversed coded. We subsequently measure *nostalgic attitudes* using the question “Below are some things that have changed in the last 50 years. Do you think these things make modern life worse or better?” (CITE). We use eleven items, displayed in Table 1, that are scored on *makes life worse* (value of 1), *makes no difference* (value of 2), or *makes life better* (value of 3). Based on arguments made in other fields (Richards et al. 2019), the measures are expected to consist of three different, but related, subcategories. Nostalgia attitude items 3, 6, and 9 are expected to indicate a more playful, and less political, form of nostalgia. Agreement (or indicating that life is better off with these circumstances; indicated by a higher score) with nostalgic attitude items 1, 2, and 11. This would indicate a progressive, and potentially left-leaning, form of nostalgia. Reversely, lower scores on nostalgic attitude items 4, 5, 7, 8, and 10 are indicative of a more reluctant, and thus closely tied to nationalism, form of nostalgia.

Coding of Open Ended Question. Respondents were also asked the open ended question *What moment in history do you most long for?* Based on reading the first 100 responses, we created a codebook consisting of nostalgic categories: personal youth, solidary society, pre-polarized society, pre-industrialized society, colonialism, anti-Europe, and nationalism. Table 2 shows the different categories together with an example of an open-ended question response per category. To assess the inter-coder reliability, a total of 50 responses to the open-ended questions were coded by two independent coders. This resulted in reliability values using Krippendorff’s α of 0.85.

Table 2: What moment in history do you most long for?

Category	Example Quote
Colonialism	The Golden Age
Euroskeptic	Before the European unification and our Florin/Guilder!
Nationalism	The moment when the Netherlands was not yet flooded with different languages, cultures and dubious norms and values.
Solidary Society	To the moment when we said hello to each other on the street and people looked out for each other. Nowadays everyone lives on his/her own island
Personal Youth	To my childhood, you knew nothing, no war or whatever
Pre-Industrialized Society	Prehistoric times: Possibly man could have developed in a different way, which would have benefited nature
Pre-Polarized Society	Towards a democracy with less polarization and fewer political parties

Study 2: Experimental Data

In a follow-up study, conducted with the same participants as the observational study, we conduct an experiment in which we cue nostalgic values and scapegoats, to test our core argument that nostalgic rhetoric is an effective affective strategy that uses an host ideologically to create extreme messages.

Dependent Variables. We use four outcome measures to test the support for nostalgic messages in H1-H3 and affective sentiment towards nine social in- and out-groups for H4 and H5 (see Table 3). To test the support for nostalgic messages in H1 to H3, we first asked respondents on an eleven-point scale, where 0 is totally disagree and 10 is totally agree, the extent to which they agreed with the statement they just read. As a follow up, we asked respondents to select the campaign message the party should pick because a) it fits you best; b) it fits the general Dutch voters best; and c) if fits left-wing/ right-wing voters best. Respondents could select any of the four texts we created for the experiment (see Table ??). To test the affective sentiment towards social in- and out-groups in H4 and H5, we asked respondents the extent to which they experience positive or negative feelings towards *big companies*, *Christians*, *climate activist*, *immigrants*, *left-wing people*, *materialistic people*, *Muslims*, *neo-liberal politicians*, *right-wing people*, and *people living on state support*. This affective sentiment ranges from 1 (very negative) to 10 (very positive). As pre-registered, we consider the left-wing progressive ideological in-groups (and right-wing conservative ideological out-groups) to exist of climate activists, immigrants, left-wing people, Muslims, people who get state subsidies, and the right-wing conservative ideological in-groups (and left-wing progressive ideological out-groups) are: big companies, Christians, materialistic people, neo-liberal politicians, and right-wing people.

Experimental Treatments. Based on ideological self-selection, using a five-point Likert scale to classify whether the respondent would classify themselves as *very progressive*, *progressive*, *center*, *conservative*, or *very conservative*, we classify people into either a left-wing progressive or right-wing conservative leaning group. For each ideological group, we randomize respondents into seeing one of four different potential campaign messages that a party of that ideology is testing for the next Dutch elections. The messages were created by the authors based on the narratives coming from the open ended questions as well as based on the reviewed literature in sociology and marketing. Messages can either be nostalgic or not, as well as consist of a scapegoat or not – creating four experimental groups, see Tables 4 and 5. Respondents that categorize themselves as conservative or very conservative get the right-wing conservative treatments, as shown in Table 4. Respondents that categorize themselves as center, progressive, or very progressive are shown the left-wing progressive treatments, as shown in Table 5.

Control Variables. Based on a balance test (see OA XX for details), we included unbalanced demographic covariates as well as the ideological tone of the experimental message, whether it was a nostalgic and/or scapegoat message into our analysis.

Methods of Estimation. We use simple OLS regression to test our hypotheses.

Table 3: Outcome Variables

Dependent Variable	Means	St.Dev	Hypotheses
Agree with the Statement	8.65	2.52	H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for You - Nostalgia	0.20		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for You - Nostalgia + Scapegoat	0.11		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for You - No Nostalgia	0.29		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for You - No Nostalgia + Scapegoat	0.16		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Dutch Voter s- Nostalgia	0.23		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Dutch Voters - Nostalgia + Scapegoat	0.15		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Dutch Voters - No Nostalgia	0.27		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Dutch Voters - No Nostalgia + Scapegoat	0.14		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Left-Wing/Right-Wing Voters - Nostalgia	0.15		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Left-Wing/Right-Wing Voters - Nostalgia + Scapegoat	0.23		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Left-Wing/Right-Wing Voters - No Nostalgia	0.20		H1 - H3
Best Campaign Message for Left-Wing/Right-Wing Voters - No Nostalgia + Scapegoat	0.21		H1 - H3
Affective Sentiment for Big Companies	4.80	2.01	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Christians	5.82	1.86	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Climate activist	4.88	2.6	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Immigrants	5.18	2.07	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Left-wing people	5.53	2.22	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Materialistic people	4.14	1.83	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Moslims	5.25	2.01	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Neoliberal politicians	4.28	1.87	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for People living on state support	5.34	1.85	H4 & H5
Affective Sentiment for Right-wing people	5.06	2.08	H4 & H5

Table 4: Experimental Treatment Groups - Right-Wing

Experimental Treatment	Text	N per Group
Non-Nostalgic	We see a world plagued by chaos, disorder, and lawlessness, resulting in insecurity and polarization. It's time to claim those values of respect, security, and tradition to make our society strong and stable. Let's create a country where rule of law is protected, Western values cherished, and the wellbeing of all Dutch is prioritized.	379
Non-Nostalgic + Scapegoat	We see a world plagued by chaos, disorder, and lawlessness, resulting in insecurity and polarization, caused in large part by foreign vandals, the woke elite, and lazy subsidizers. It's time to hold them accountable for their actions and claim those values of respect, security, and tradition to make our society strong and stable. Let's create a country where rule of law is protected, Western values cherished, and the wellbeing of all Dutch is prioritized over the interests of a select few.	319
Nostalgic	Looking back, we remember a time when respect for law and order, security, and tradition are paramount for our society, fostering a sense of consensus and harmony. People lived in peace and security, with a shared commitment to upholding these values. Today, we see a world plagued by chaos, disorder, and lawlessness, resulting in insecurity and polarization. It's time to reclaim those values of respect, security, and tradition that made our society strong and stable. Let's bring back a country where rule of law is protected, Western values cherished, and the wellbeing of all Dutch is prioritized.	463
Nostalgic + Scapegoat	Looking back, we remember a time when respect for law and order, security, and tradition are paramount for our society, fostering a sense of consensus and harmony. People lived in peace and security, with a shared commitment to upholding these values. Today, we see a world plagued by chaos, disorder, and lawlessness, resulting in insecurity and polarization, caused in large part by foreign vandals, the woke elite, and lazy subsidizers. It's time to hold them accountable for their actions and reclaim those values of respect, security, and tradition that made our society strong and stable. Let's bring back a country where rule of law is protected, Western values cherished, and the wellbeing of all Dutch is prioritized over the interests of a select few.	401

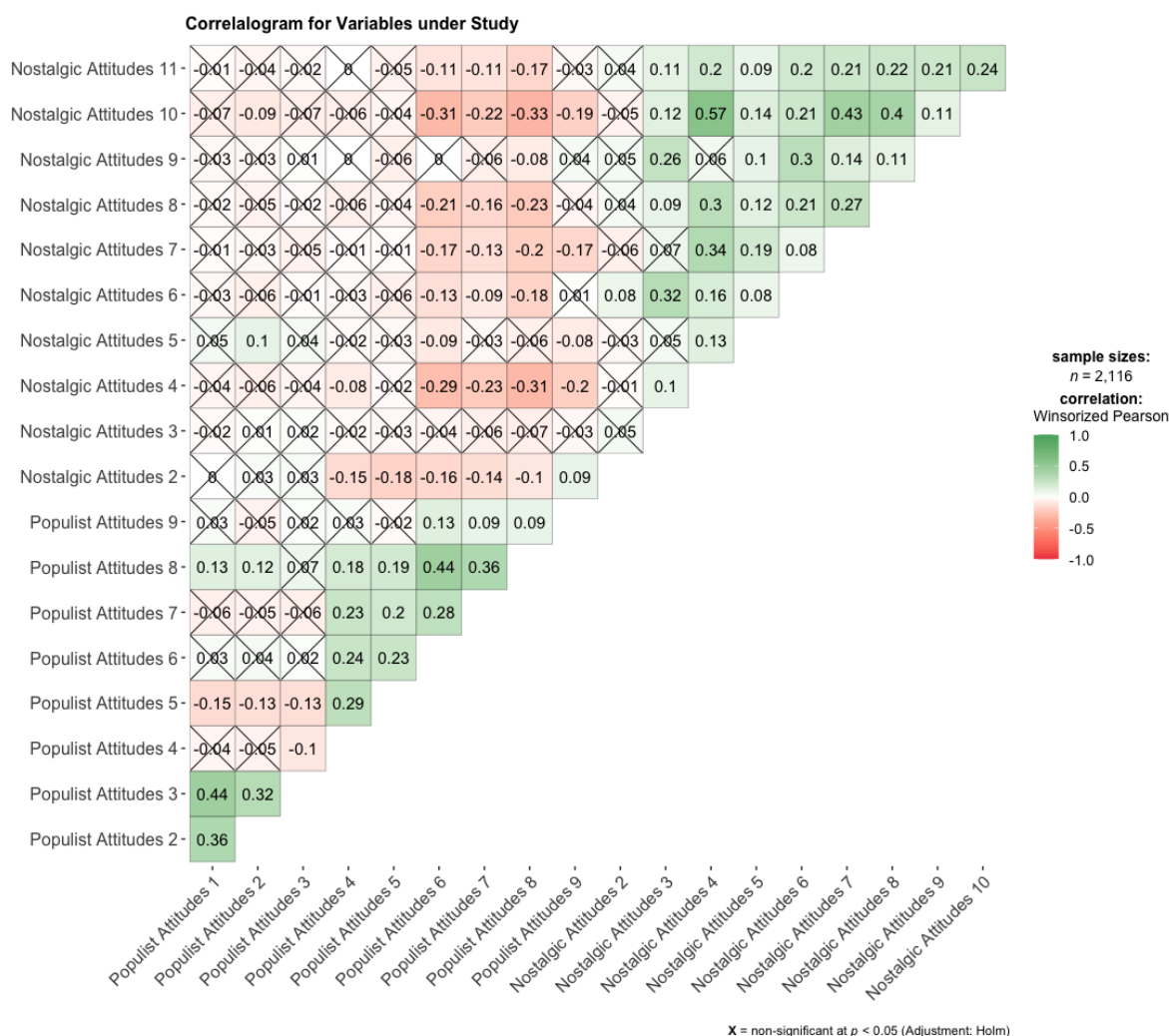
Table 5: Experimental Treatment Groups - Left-Wing

Experimental Treatment	Text	N per Group
Non-Nostalgic	We see a world plagued by pollution, polarization, and stress. It's time to claim those values of solidarity, respect, and peace to make our world a better place. Let's create a world where workers' rights are protected, the environment is cherished, and the wellbeing of all people is prioritized.	304
Non-Nostalgic + Scapegoat	We see a world plagued by pollution, polarization, and stress, caused in large part by large corporations, contamination lobbyists and neoliberal policy makers. It's time to hold them accountable for their actions and claim those values of solidarity, respect, and peace to make our world a better place. Let's create a world where workers' rights are protected, the environment is cherished, and the wellbeing of all people is prioritized over the interests of a select few.	289
Nostalgic	Looking back, we remember a time when solidarity, workers rights, and respect for the environment were paramount. People lived a slow and peaceful life in harmony with nature, valuing community over individualism. Today, we see a world plagued by pollution, polarization, and stress. It's time to reclaim those values of solidarity, respect, and peace that made our world a better place. Let's create a world where workers' rights are protected again, the environment is re-cherished, and the wellbeing of all people is prioritized again.	281
Nostalgic + Scapegoat	Looking back, we remember a time when solidarity, workers rights, and respect for the environment were paramount. People lived a slow and peaceful life in harmony with nature, valuing community over individualism. Today, we see a world plagued by pollution, polarization, and stress, caused in large part by large corporations, contamination lobbyists and neoliberal policy makers. It's time to hold them accountable again for their actions and reclaim those values of solidarity, respect, and peace that made our world a better place. Let's create a world where workers' rights are protected again, the environment is re-cherished, and the wellbeing of all people is prioritized again over the interests of a select few.	321

Is Nostalgic Communication a Feature of Populism or an Effective Campaign Message for All Voters?

To systematically assess our key argument that nostalgic rhetoric is an effective affective strategy that uses an host ideologically to create extreme messages, we first empirically demonstrate that the so far theorized and demonstrated relationship between populist support and/or populist attitudes is based on a conceptual overlap between the nostalgic sub-category of reluctant nostalgia and populism, both being routed in a nationalistic attitude. Second, we descriptively explore the types of nostalgic attitudes people have and how this is related to populist support and attitudes. Finally, leveraging an experimental design, we cue nostalgic values and scapegoats, to test our core argument that nostalgic rhetoric is an effective affective strategy that uses an host ideologically to create extreme messages.

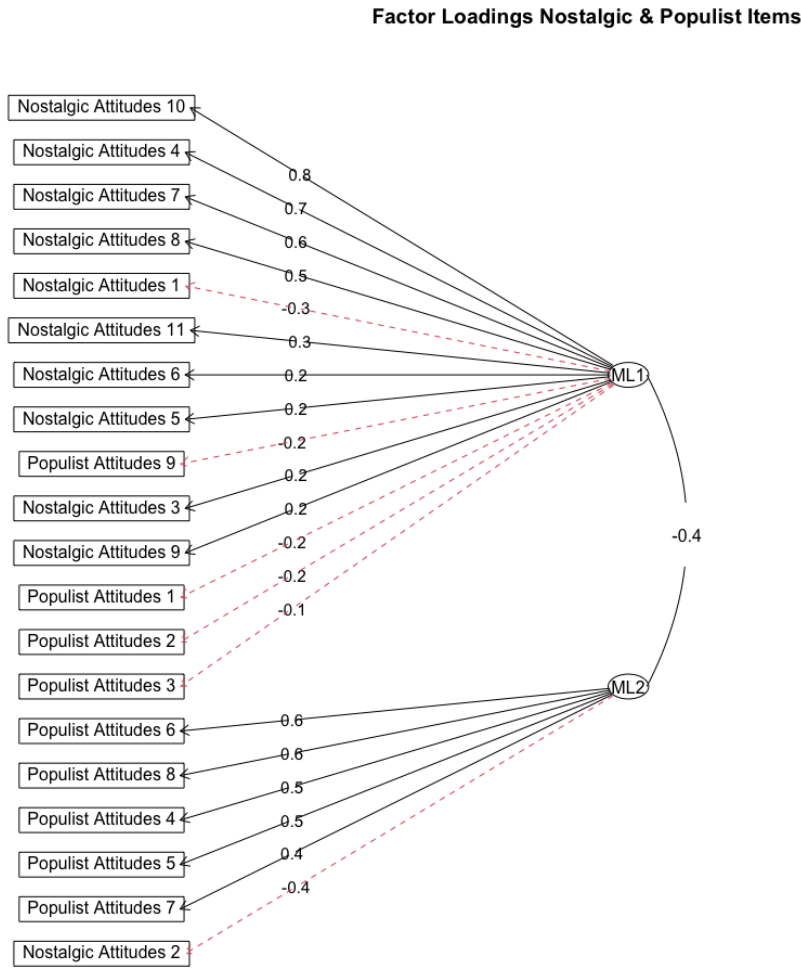
Figure 1: Correlations between Populist Attitudes and Nostalgia Items



The Nostalgic & Populist Relationship: A Measurement Flaw?

To measure the empirical overlap of the two concepts – *Populist Attitudes* and *Nostalgic Attitudes* – we perform a PCA and EFA, using all nine populist and eleven nostalgic survey items. A simple correlation, see Figure 1 shows that the two items on populist items that encompass the core dimensions of *sovereignty of the people* and an *anti-elitist* and *anti-pluralist*, is negatively correlated with a nostalgic factor that would indicate a high degree of progressiveness (as the responses on these survey items illustrate that respondents view higher shares of ethnic minorities as an improvement etc.). This is somewhat affirmative of the findings in the pilot studies (see **OA XX**), as reluctant/regressive nostalgic attitudes would significantly correlate with specific populist items.

Figure 2: Exploratory Factor Analysis

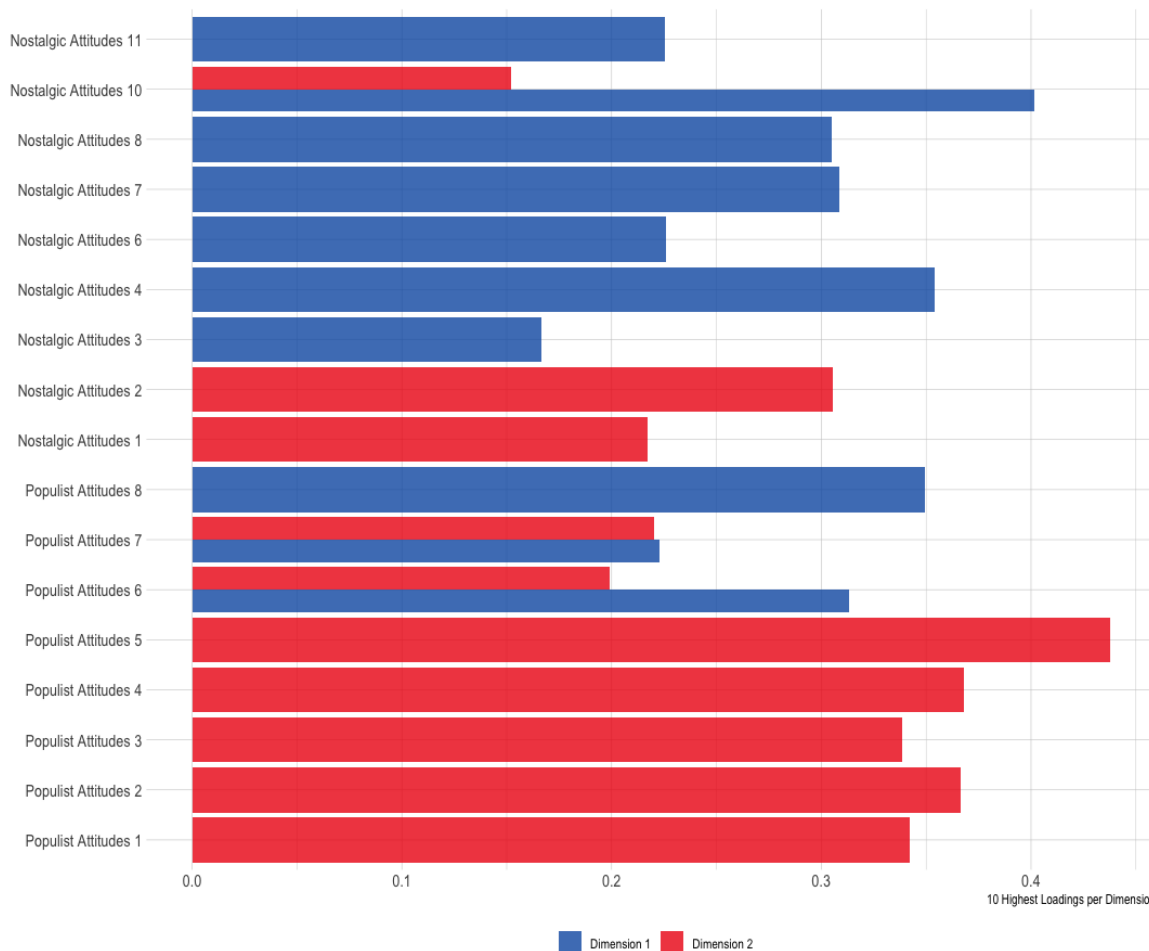


Before running the measurement models of all nostalgic and populist measures are performed, the nostalgia items are examined more closely in a separate analysis (see **OA XX**).¹ A factor analysis of the nostalgic items overall offers the expected results: The Nostalgic items that refer to

¹This is done as these measures have thus far not been used in much of political science or political communication literature.

media and entertainment load together on one factor, while the items that would suggest either a more reluctant/nationalistic or progressive attitude (depending on the value of the response) are split into two separate factors which significantly and positively correlate with each other.

Figure 3: Principal Component Analysis



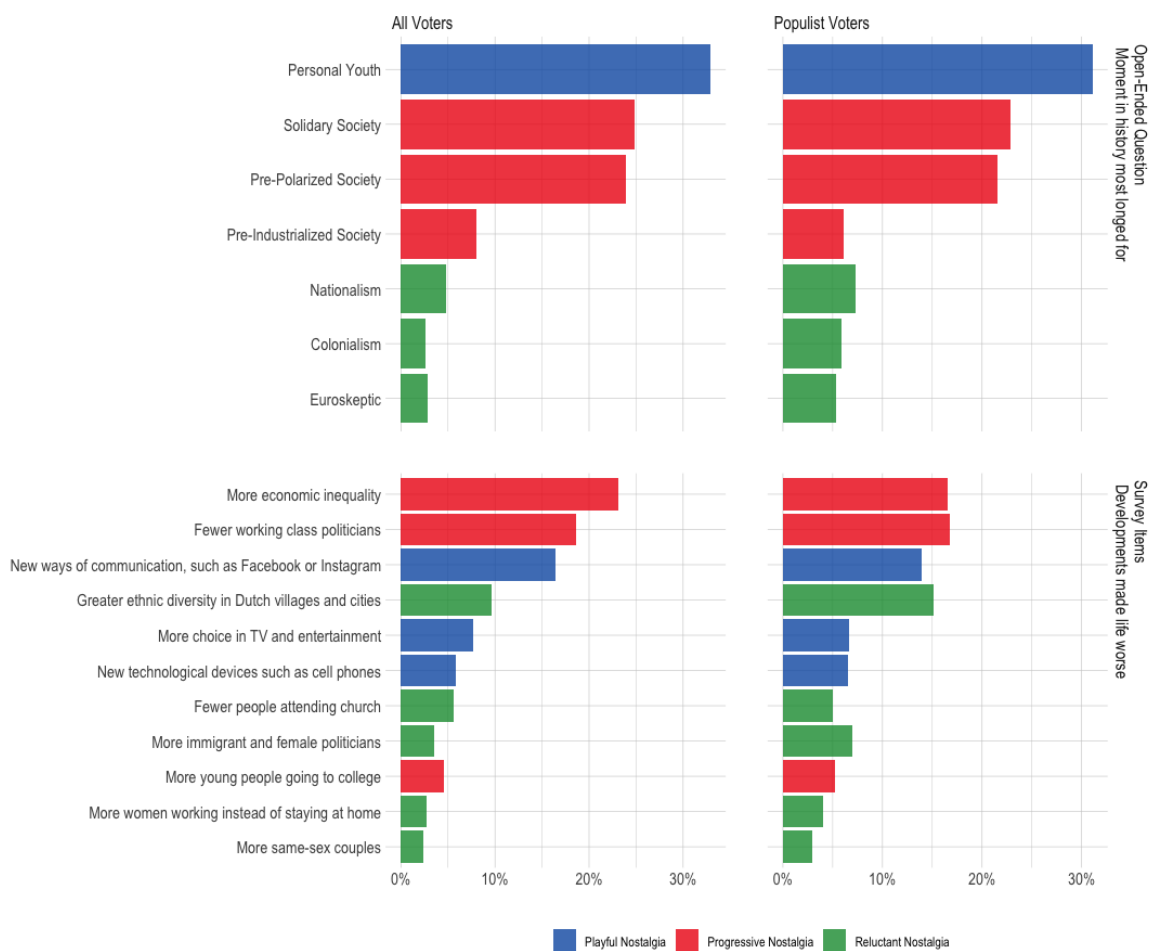
Moving to the measurement models, the EFA and PCA are performed on all populist and nostalgic survey items (see Figures 2 and 3, and **OA XX** for details on the models). Using EFA, Figure 2 demonstrate that the reluctant Nostalgic Attitudes items (see Table 1 for a description of the items) 4, 7, 8, 10, and 11, and to a lesser extent 5, and 6 – who are potentially perceived as contributing to deceitful information – form one dimension of a latent concept and Populist Attitudes items (see Table 1 for a description of the items) 4 - 8 form the second dimension of a latent concept. Using PCA (see Figure 3), we see a similar dynamic: Nostalgic Attitude items 3, 4, 6, 7, 8, 10, and 11 – with items 4, 7, 8, 10, and 11 being part of the sub-category reluctant nostalgia, and items 3 and 6 potentially being perceived as contributing to deceitful information – form one dimension of a latent concept and Populist Attitudes items 1 - 7 form the second dimension of a latent concept. Different from the EFA is that the PCA demonstrates that some populist attitude as well as some nostalgic items are part of both dimensions. We consider this evidence that the relationship between populist support and/or populist attitudes is based on a conceptual overlap

between the nostalgic sub-category of reluctant nostalgia and populism, both being routed in a nationalistic attitude.

Who is Nostalgic for What?

To explore nostalgic attitudes further, Figure 4 shows for both the open-ended survey question (upper-panels of Figure 4) and the nostalgic attitude items (lower-panels of Figure 4) as well as for all voters and populist voters (respectively left-panels and right-panels of Figure 4) the frequency for the various types of nostalgia.

Figure 4: Types of Nostalgic Narratives



Starting with the upper-left panel of Figure 4, we see that the most common narrative people mention when asked which time in history they most long for is their personal youth (categorized as playful nostalgia). This narrative is mentioned by >30% of the respondents in our sample. A second popularity place is for three narratives that fall under the progressive nostalgia sub-category: *solidary society*, *pre-polarized society*, and a *pre-industrialized society*. 25%, 24%, and 9% of the respondents mention these narratives respectively. Only a small fraction of the voters (5% or less) mention reluctant nostalgic narratives: *nationalism*, *colonialism*, or *Euroskepticism*.

However, looking at the right-upper panel of Figure 4, where we only display the frequency of those respondents that are supporting a populist party, we see that all narratives on nostalgia are present, more or less in the same frequency. Yet, the reluctant nostalgia items seem to be a bit more frequently mentioned by populist voters. An independent t-test confirms this: Populist voters are more likely to mention a reluctant nostalgic narrative than non-populist voters; respectively 19% vs. 7%, $p\text{-value} < .05$.

Looking at the lower-panels of Figure 4, which displays the frequencies of the nostalgic attitude items when respondents ranked them as *made life worse*, we see a slightly different pattern than with the narratives of the upper-panels of Figure 4. The lower-left panel of Figure 4 shows that the progressive nostalgic items *more economic inequality* and *fewer working class politicians* are ranked by most respondents as a bad development. However, similar as in the response to the open-ended questions, we see the same patterns of nostalgic attitudes for the three sub-categories for all respondents as well as for those respondents that support populist parties.

Also here, we see that populist voters are more likely to rate items that are aligning with reluctant nostalgia as “*Make life worse*” than other voters; respectively 36% vs. 19%, $p\text{-value} < .05$ based on an independent t-test.

These descriptive results suggest that all voters have affinity with some form of nostalgia, indicating that when political parties would leverage that rhetorical strategy, their message might resonate better with their voters. Moreover, we do see that some types of nostalgia, due to its conceptual overlap, resonate better with some than with other voters.

Ideational Nostalgia

To test whether nostalgia as an ideational concept is an effective affective campaign strategy, we demonstrate the results of our experiment. First, Figure 5 demonstrates the effectiveness of a nostalgic campaign message. While the pink estimate (upper estimate in Figure 5) shows that people agree less with a nostalgic message than with a non-nostalgic message – this is against our expectations. The negative, significant, coefficient of $-.32$ indicates that the average agreement with the message that contained a nostalgic cue is 0.32 lower than the average agreement with a non-nostalgic message. Since the agreement with the message is measured on a ten-point scale, this is a small effect. Interestingly, when asked to pick the best campaign message for yourself, the Dutch voters, and your ideological congruent group of voters (either left-wing progressive or right-wing conservative), we do find the hypothesized effect: The green estimate shows a positive and significant effect. When receiving a nostalgic message, you are approximately 6% more likely to select a nostalgic message compared to a non-nostalgic message. In addition, you also think that this message is the best campaign message for your ideological congruent group of voters (either left-wing progressive or right-wing conservative), as shown in the blue estimate. These results give us some evidence that most voters do like nostalgic messages.

Looking deeper at potential ideological differences in support for nostalgic messages, Figure 8 shows limited evidence that nostalgic messages are favored by right-wing conservative voters over left-wing progressive voters (some evidence in favor of H2). **[EXPAND]**

Looking at the effect of scapegoating, which is typically also measured in the reluctant form of nostalgia, Figure 7 shows no difference between populist and non-populist voters. **[EXPAND]**

[Some outgroups are successful scapegoats and change sentiment, others do not]

Figure 5: Support for Nostalgic Messages

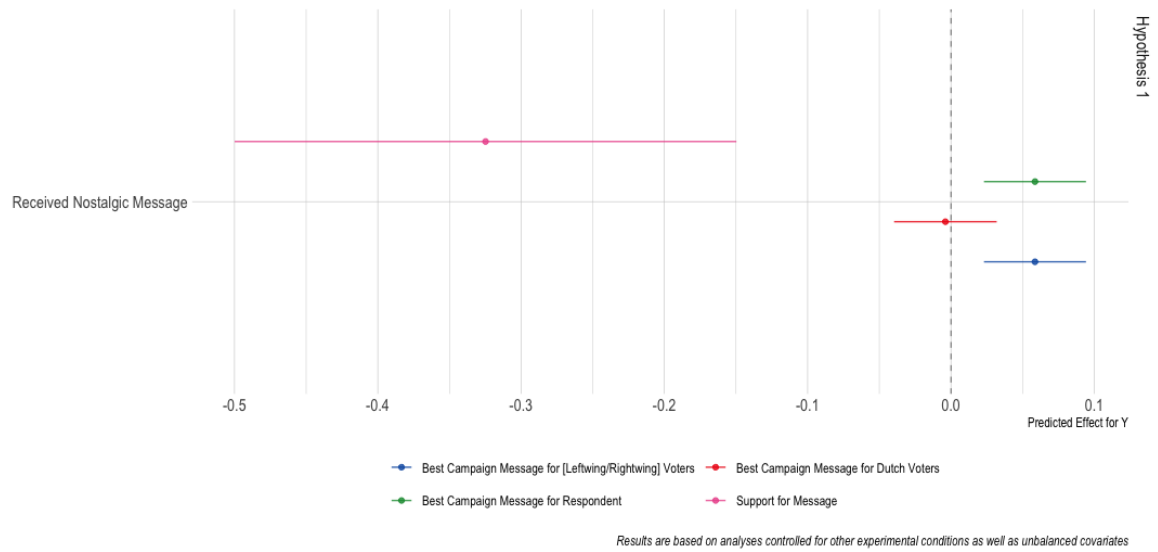


Figure 6: Ideological Differences in Support for Nostalgic Messages

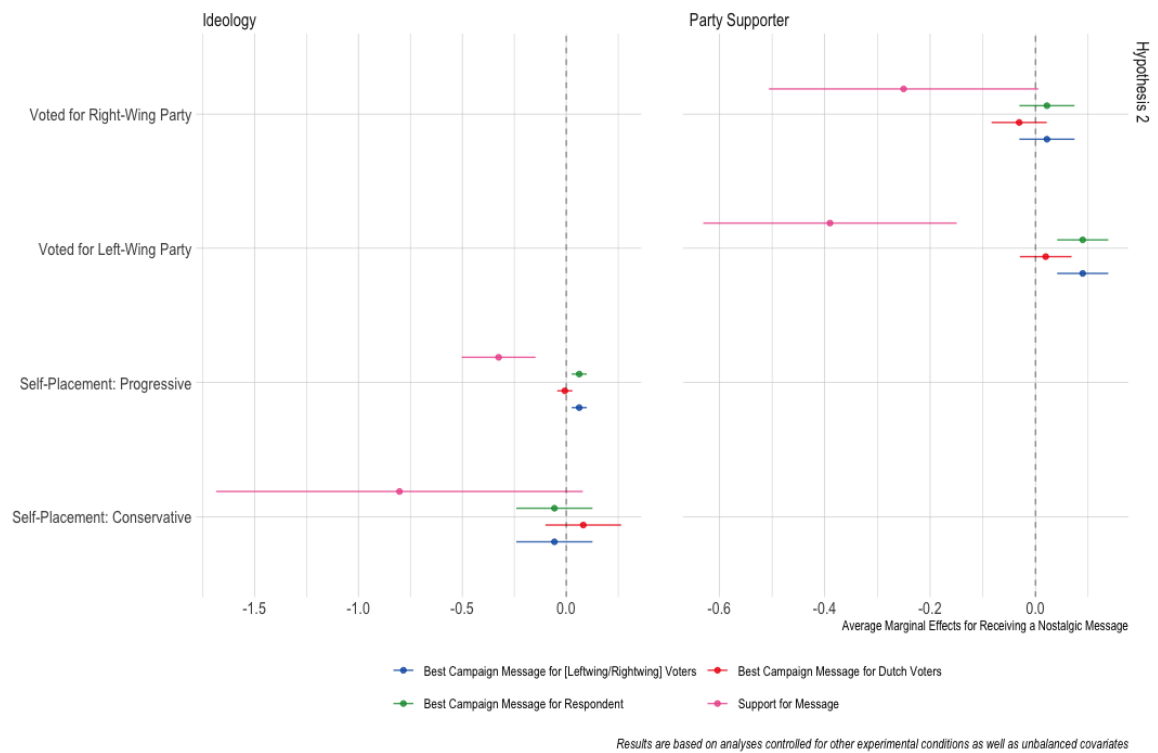


Figure 7: Populist Support for Scapegoat Messages

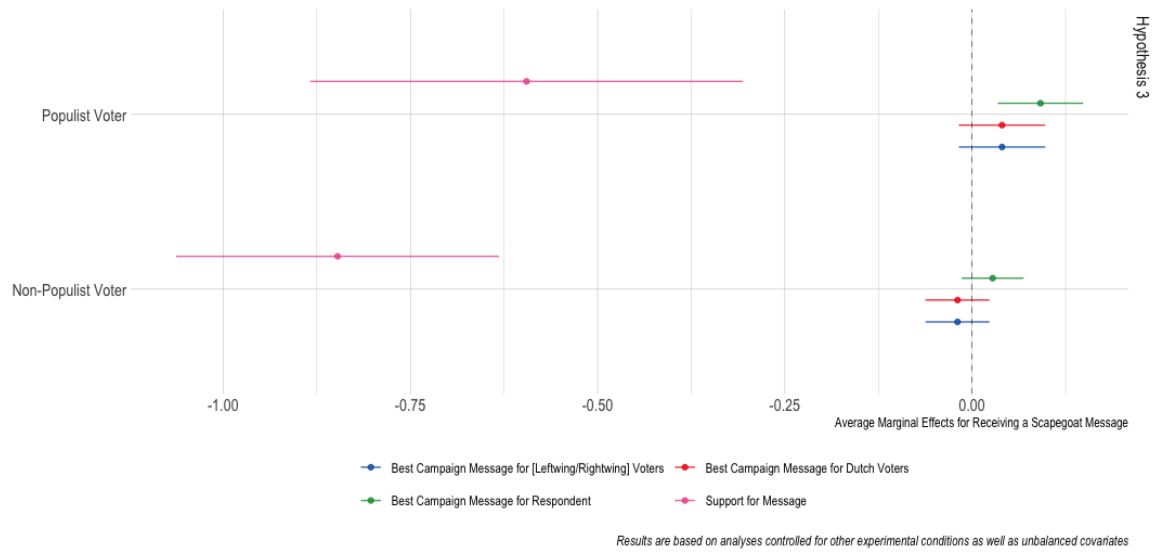
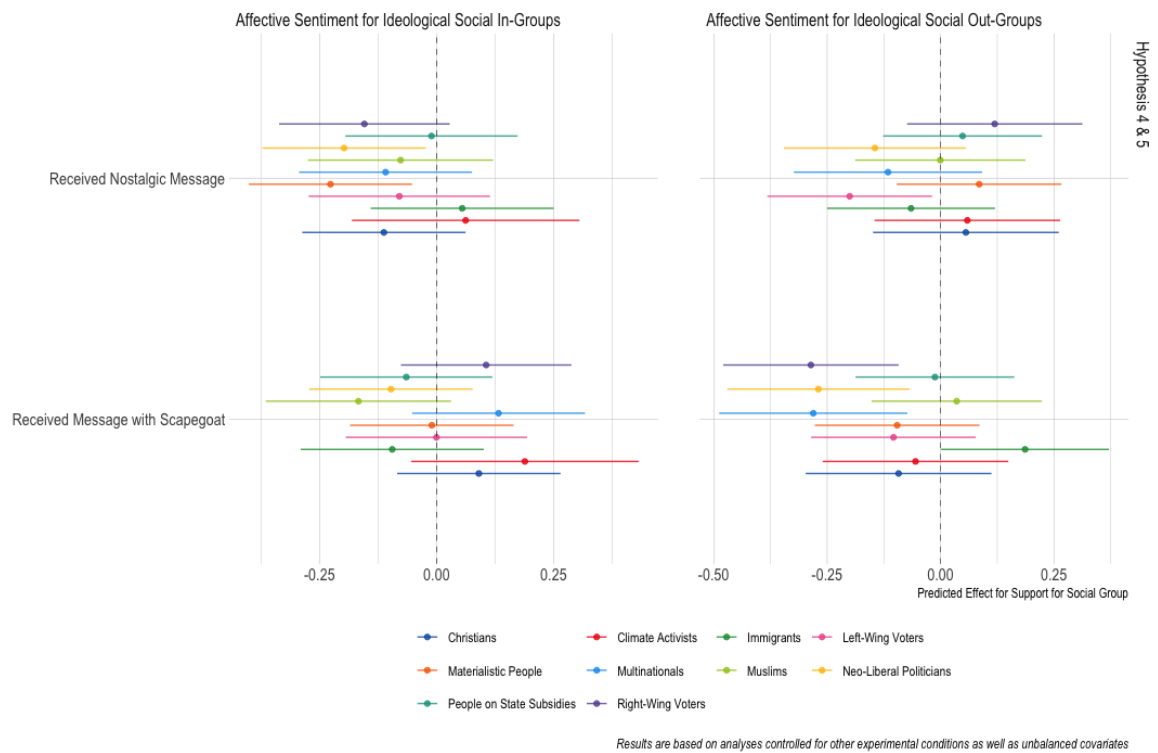


Figure 8: Affective Sentiment for Social In- and Out-Groups



Conclusion

TBA

References