

# Unaffected Polarization? Populism and Affective Polarization in Comparative Perspective

## Abstract

With both affective polarization and populism on the rise in several countries, many have proposed a link between the two phenomena. Yet, research offers little direct evidence on whether populist individuals are more polarized. This paper aims to fill this gap by using CSES data from 25 elections in 21 countries to provide a comparative account of the relationship between populism and affective polarization at the individual level. We show that neither populist attitudes nor populist voting are not generally related to higher levels of affective polarization. Instead, we identify a curvilinear relationship wherein both populists and anti-populists exhibit high levels of polarization, with substantial variations across countries. These findings challenge the prevailing assumption that populism is universally associated with heightened affective polarization, suggesting that it may not be the sole responsible behind the upsurge in affective polarization observed in some Western democracies.

## 1 Introduction

In recent years, populism and affective polarization have emerged as prominent phenomena, shaping the dynamics of electoral competition across the globe. Populist leaders have come to power in some of the largest global democracies, such as India, Brazil, and the United States. Concurrently, affective polarization—a deepening animosity and distrust towards the members of the rival political groups—has increased in some countries, most notably the United States. The observation that affective polarization seems to rise together with the success of populists has led many to suggest that the two phenomena should be connected (e.g., Abramowitz and McCoy 2019). The underlying assumption is that populism promotes a brand of divisive antagonism revolving around the idea that a malevolent and morally inferior out-group of impostors—“Them”, the “establishment,” the financial or intellectual “elites”—is acting against the people’s “common will” and, thus, needs to be defeated at any cost.

Research on the topic, however, has found mixed results so far. Westwood, Peterson, and Lelkes (2019) find no evidence of increased polarization in the United States in the lead-up to the 2016 elections, which saw a marked increase in populist rhetoric among both Republicans and Democrats (Hawkins and Littvay 2019). Stefanelli (2023), looking at data from the United States, finds that affective polarization and populism seem to be related only among Republicans, while populist attitudes are rather associated with ideological extremism among Democrats. The picture remains unclear also in comparative research going beyond the US. For instance, Kekkonen and Ylä-Anttila (2021) finds that in Finland populist right-wing voters tend to display lower levels of partisan hostility compared to voters of mainstream parties. In a comparative study of nine European countries, Fuller et al. (2022) found that populism is weakly correlated to affective judgments in Italy and is not linked to affective polarization in Spain and the UK. Similarly, in a multi-country experiment conducted across several European countries, Hameleers and Fawzi (2020) found limited evidence supporting the notion that populist messages lead to citizen polarization along affective lines.

We contribute to this debate by testing whether populist citizens are more affectively polarized than non-populist ones, providing the most comprehensive theoretical and empirical account of the relation between these two phenomena so far. We argue that, based on existing literature, there are four mechanisms through which populism and affective polarization may, or may not, be connected among voters: a) attitudes, and the us-versus-them nature of populist discourse; b) populist party voting and its connection to radical ideologies; c) a backlash mechanism, whereby those which oppose populists are as polarized as populists themselves; and d) negative partisanship, which states that populist attitudes are *not* connected to affective polarization due to capturing a general dislike for all parties in the system.

We test the resulting hypotheses with data from Module 5 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), which includes a battery of questions to measure populist attitudes, as well as feeling thermometers towards parties which the literature has been using to measure affective polarization. Our findings indicate mostly a curvilinear

relationship between populist attitudes and affective polarization, denoting that both those strongly populist and strongly anti-populist are more polarized, in line with the backlash argument. We also find evidence that populist attitudes in themselves, rather than being connected with higher polarization, are more linked to a negative evaluation of all parties in the system, in line with the negative partisanship argument by Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser (2019). Furthermore, we show that the connection between affective polarization and populism does not follow a generalizable pattern but rather manifests as an idiosyncratic phenomenon. We corroborate these results with an extensive series of robustness checks that employ different analytical strategies and operational measures of affective polarization and populism.

This article makes a dual contribution to the literature on populist polarization. First, this work supports the idea that affective polarization among populist voters is by no means a generalized feature of advanced democracies. The relationship between populism and affective polarization varies based on contextual factors and leaders' programmatic considerations, highlighting the complex and conditional nature of this connection. Second, we add to the existing studies showing that affective polarization is a relational phenomenon that tends to emerge concurrently among opposing societal and political groups. In instances where populism plays a prominent role in structuring the electoral competition, it can trigger emotionally charged counter-reactions among mainstream voters who respond by depicting populists as a dangerous out-group that requires to be marginalized.

## 2 Populism and Polarization

Scholars have frequently defined populism through various conceptual lenses, conceptualizing it as a “thin-centered” ideology (Mudde 2004), a rhetorical style emphasizing the appeal to the people (Jagers and Walgrave 2007), a discourse opposing hegemonic practices (Laclau 2005), and a political strategy for mobilizing voters (Weyland 2001). In this paper, we draw upon the so-called “ideational definition” (Hawkins, Carlin,

et al. 2018) and understand populism as a set of ideas that sees “the people” as a good, homogeneous, and unified entity with a “general will” that should be the principle and end of all politics. The people are opposed to an evil conspiratorial elite bent on oppressing and dominating the people for their interests and benefits (Canovan 2004; Mudde 2007). The division between people and the elites is considered a fundamental cleavage in politics, leaving little room for recognizing other legitimate differences of opinion or interests. Fundamentally, this division is moral, characterizing the people as inherently virtuous and the elite as intrinsically malevolent. Such perspective of politics is what led Hawkins (2010) to brand populism as a *Manichaean* discourse characterized by a dichotomous good-versus-evil view of politics.

Scholars tend to agree that the divisive and us-versus-them logic embedded within populist ideas is associated with heightened levels of political polarization (e.g., Takis S Pappas 2014). Country-level analyses have found a connection between ideological polarization and the rise of populist parties (Bischof and Wagner 2019; Castanho Silva 2018), and previous research has generally shown that populism is linked to voting for anti-establishment and radical candidates (e.g., Uscinski et al. 2021; Mudde 2004). In addition to policy disagreement, scholars recently started to argue that populism is also related to affective polarization across party lines (McCoy, Rahman, and Somer 2018). Affective polarization can be briefly defined as antipathy, dislike, anger, and even fear for members—both the elite and rank-and-file—of opposing parties, rooted in more than just policy disagreement across party lines (Gidron, Adams, and Horne 2020; Iyengar, Lelkes, et al. 2019). Particularity, anger, and resentment towards the established political parties are considered a “motivating factor for populist mobilization” (Betz and Oswald 2022, p.122), responsible for accentuating the perceived moral division between the common people and an ostensibly unscrupulous, evil, and self-serving out-group (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2017; Marx 2020).

As we will argue in the following pages, there are four potential mechanisms connecting populism and affective polarization at the individual level. First, it may be that populist attitudes *per se* are polarizing since they capture politics as an us-versus-them

affair. However, with recent research questioning the explanatory power of populist attitudes in themselves, an alternative hypothesis is that populism's association with polarization is primarily attributed to populist voting behavior. The influence of radical ideological preferences, elite cues, or exclusionary identity formation may be responsible for fostering negative affect toward political rivals. Third, populist parties may generate strong negative responses among those who oppose them, potentially leading to a backlash of polarization driven by anti-populist voters. Lastly, it may be that populism is linked to negative partisanship rather than polarization across party lines. The negative view that populists have of politics may translate into a broader aversion to all political actors rather than being directed toward a specific partisan out-group. We elaborate on each of these mechanisms below.

## Attitudes

We call the first mechanism connecting populism and polarization the “attitudinal” argument. According to it, the populist division of society into the (good) people and the (corrupted) elite can fuel animosity between groups of citizens leading to what McCoy and Somer (2019) call “pernicious polarization”. For someone who believes that politics is not dealing with legitimate differences of opinion but is rather a moral struggle, it is natural to develop a general animosity toward anyone not on their side, while sticking together with “the good ones” who belong to the same party or political group (Martínez, Van Prooijen, and Van Lange 2023; Bos, Wichgers, and Van Spanje 2023). If this is the case, we should observe that citizens who hold more populist views of politics have a stronger sense of in-group belonging and out-group hostility, leading to higher levels of affective polarization. The “attitudinal” hypothesis therefore states the following:

H1. Populist attitudes are associated with higher affective polarization among individuals.

Recent research has shown that populist attitudes are related to hostile posi-

tions such as intolerance of different groups and opinions (Bos, Wichgers, and van Spanje 2021), dogmatism and rejection of political compromise (Stefanelli, Meuleman, and Abts 2023; Plescia and Eberl 2021), and even the endorsement of political violence (Uysal et al. 2023). While theoretically populist attitudes appear to be a promising explanation for the increase of affectively charged evaluations, the empirical evidence for this link remains mixed. For instance, Stefanelli (2023), looking at individual data from the United States, finds that the relationship between affective polarization and populism exists only among Republicans, while populist attitudes are rather connected with ideological extremism among Democrats. Even more so, to date, we lack systematic and broad comparative studies on the relationship between the two, reason why we start our analysis at this step.

## **Populist Voting**

Although populist attitudes were initially found to correlate with populist voting in several countries (e.g. A. Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove 2014; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018), recent research has cast some doubts on this link. Castanho Silva, Fuks, and Tamaki (2022), using observational data, show that populist attitudes were not related to support for the radical right populist Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil. Experimental research by Neuner and Wratil (2022), Castanho Silva, Neuner, and Wratil (2022), and Dai and Kustov (2023) shows that support for populist candidates is mostly, if not entirely, driven by (radical) ideological positions rather than populist attitudes.

According to Loew and Faas (2019), there are two types of voters of populist parties: those with radical positions, who vote for such parties because of their radicalism, and those with more moderate policy positions but high populist attitudes, who may vote for these parties due to their populism. Indeed, populist discourse has been consistently correlated to ideological extremism both among parties (Rooduijn and T. Akkerman 2017) and voters (Stefanelli, Meuleman, and Abts 2023; Marcos-Marne, Llamazares, and Shikano 2022) to the point that some authors argue that populist individuals can be distinguished from moderate citizens simply based on their extremity

on a set of relevant policy issues (Spierings and Zaslove 2015).

If populist voters tend to have more extreme ideological positions compared to mainstream voters, such positions may likely be driving their levels of affective polarization up (Algara and Zur 2023; Rogowski and Sutherland 2016; Webster and Abramowitz 2017). Due to their extremism, populist voters may develop strong negative sentiments towards the majority and despise, or even hate, established parties for silencing people's interests. Moreover, populist parties often have a status as a pariah in democratic countries, so voting for them may lead to a stronger social identity built on the moral superiority of the in-group ("We, the People") at the expense of the out-group(s) ("Them, the enemy of the people"). Being that the case, we should observe a relationship between voting for populist parties and affective polarization, or the "populist voting" hypothesis.

H2. Voters of populist parties have higher levels of affective polarization than voters of other parties

## The Backlash Argument

The fact that populist forces are often seen as a pariah by mainstream parties may drive affective polarization not only among populists but also among those who oppose them (Stavrakakis 2018). Analogous to their populist counterparts, mainstream forces often employ strategies that marginalize and vilify populist actors. They characterize their demands as unreasonable, delegitimize their leaders and supporters, and construct institutional barriers as a strategic response to their influence and electoral success. According to this view, affective polarization is not restricted to populist voters alone but rather it is a relational and intertwined process that involves the simultaneous vilification of both populist and anti-populist forces (Whitt et al. 2020).

For instance, Harteveld, Mendoza, and Rooduijn (2022) find that, while populist parties receive high levels of disapproval, they also evoke strong negative sentiments among moderate voters. Fuller et al. (2022) note that populism structures citizens' affective ratings of parties both among mainstream and populist voters, indicating the

presence of a symmetrical polarization across party lines. Gidron, Adams, and Horne (2023) observe that radical right populist parties receive markedly heightened levels of aversion that surpass what could be attributed to their policy positions, even after accounting for these parties' extreme stances on immigration and national identity (on this point, see also Jungkunz 2021). Based on survey experiments conducted in Sweden and Germany, Renström, Bäck, and Carroll (2023) suggest that moderate voters may feel threatened by populist radical right parties, which, in turn, prompts them to form polarized judgments of the competing parties. These studies collectively suggest that mainstream voters "can be equally—if not more—confrontational, vitriolic, and polarizing than its populist opponents" (Stavrakakis 2018, p.51).

If populist forces are perceived as dangerous and disruptive, one would expect to observe a curvilinear relationship between affinity with populism and affective polarization, wherein both those strongly aligned with populism and those vehemently opposed to it experience more negatively charged evaluations of the rival parties. This proposition aligns with what we term the "backlash hypothesis".

H3. Individuals on the upper or lower ends of populist attitudes have higher levels affective polarization than those with mild populist attitudes.

## The Negative Partisanship Argument

Finally, Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser (2019) make a convincing argument that citizens with populist attitudes tend to have *negative partisanship* in relation to established political parties. According to this logic, populist individuals are inclined to cast their votes *against* mainstream parties rather than *for* a populist party, should they choose to vote at all (e.g. Anduiza, Guinjoan, and Rico 2019; Ardag et al. 2020). This argument is in line with the idea that populism is linked to the repudiation of electoral politics as a way to challenge established party-driven mechanisms of interest aggregation (e.g., Mény and Surel 2002).

If this is the case, populism may be connected to negative evaluations of all the competing political parties, as opposed to a positive evaluation of own party and negative

judgment of all the others. In this case, populist individuals may still opt to vote for the “lesser evil”, yet they are likely to refrain from assigning high ratings to their in-party. This is primarily because they perceive political parties as untrustworthy, illegitimate, and fundamentally indistinguishable from one another. Our fourth hypothesis is thus that people with high populist attitudes exhibit a “hating-them-all” logic and, thus, do *not* show higher levels of affective polarization (for a conceptual distinction between negative partisanship and affective polarization, see Röllicke 2023).

H4. Populist attitudes are related to a higher dislike for all parties in the party system.

## 3 Data and Measurement

### 3.1 Data

To test our hypotheses, we employed data from Module 5 of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) titled “Democracy Divided? People, Politicians and the Politics of Populism”. This module comprises data from various emerging and established democracies. The data are based on post-election nationally probabilistic samples of respondents aged 16 and older, primarily collected through self-administered web surveys. Along with other relevant attitudes pertaining to politics, the CSES Module 5 encompasses a common module of questions related to populism, which allows us to assess whether populist citizens are more polarized than non-populist ones.

### 3.2 Case selection

We are interested in established democracies where party and leader evaluations are a meaningful aspect of electoral competition and democratic representation. To draw meaningful comparisons and increase the analytical leverage of the presented analysis, country cases were excluded based on two criteria. First, some countries (i.e., Greece, Ireland, Sweden) were excluded because not all items of the populism battery were asked—particularly, the one item that taps into the “Manichaeon outlook”

sub-dimension. This is particularly problematic for our analysis due to the fact that some hypotheses ground the association between populism and affective polarization precisely on the good-versus-evil side of populism. For this reason, those countries are not included. Second, we restrict our analysis to those countries where the populist attitudes battery performs relatively well—meaning that, based on confirmatory factor analysis models, the model fit of the scale is acceptable and factor loadings are above a minimal threshold. If the measurement model performs poorly, then it is not recommended to investigate further relationships, since we are not even sure what we are measuring to begin with. After this procedure, our data set covers a total of 25 elections in 21 unique countries<sup>1</sup>. More details on the included country cases are reported in the Online Appendix.

### 3.3 Instruments

#### 3.3.1 Dependent variables

**Affective Polarization:** This work measures affective polarization as the extent citizens develop polarized evaluations of the competing parties. Following Wagner (2021) we formalize affective polarization as  $Affective_i = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{p=1}^P (like_{ip} - \overline{affect}_i)^2}{n_p}}$  where p is the party, i the individual respondent,  $like_{ip}$  the like-dislike thermometer score assigned to each party p by individual i,  $\overline{affect}_i$  is the average thermometer score by the individual i (see *infra*). According to this measure, an individual with low affective polarization rates all the parties similarly, regardless of a positive or negative score. In contrast, an individual with a high level of affective polarization has very different ratings for the different parties. We used all the available party or leader evaluations regardless of the size of the party<sup>2</sup>. In countries with two-party competition (i.e., USA), affective polarization is calculated as the difference between in- and out-party leader

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<sup>1</sup>Canada and Iceland (2016) were excluded from the vote choice model due to the lack of a populist radical right party.

<sup>2</sup>It is important to highlight that in the CSES data, feeling thermometers are exclusively administered for the seven most popular parties. Consequently, smaller parties, accounting for roughly less than 4% of the popular vote, have been excluded from the analysis. This approach prevents potential bias in the affective polarization index resulting from the inclusion of small, electorally insignificant parties that voters might be unfamiliar with or hold strong negative feelings towards.

evaluations (Iyengar, Sood, and Lelkes 2012)<sup>3</sup>. After excluding respondents who did not provide responses to a minimum of two like-dislike thermometer questions, the overall sample size amounts to 46625 participants.

**Average affect:** To assess respondents' overall sentiment toward the major political parties in each country-election, we computed the mean of all the party feeling thermometers. The measurement is represented as  $\overline{Affect}_i = \frac{\sum_{p=1}^P like_{ip}}{n_p}$ , where higher values indicate a more favorable outlook toward all the political parties in the system, while lower values correspond a more unfavorable evaluations. Unlike the affective polarization index, this measure allows us to test whether individuals, particularly those with stronger populist attitudes, are more inclined to hold general disapproval of all the parties, without necessarily exhibiting greater polarization in their evaluative judgments, thereby examining Hypothesis 4.

### 3.3.2 Independent variables

**Populist attitudes:** We follow previous literature on the topic and extract a measure of latent affinity with populism from the populist attitudes scale included in the CSES questionnaire (Table 1) through Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). The scale was originally developed by the CSES planning committee (Hobolt et al. 2017) using items from the battery developed by Hawkins, Riding, and Mudde (2012) and further expanded by A. Akkerman, Mudde, and Zaslove (2014). Castanho Silva, Jungkunz, et al. (2020) have demonstrated that this scale operates in a similar manner and exhibits a correlation of  $r > .8$  with other widely utilized populist attitudes scales. As the CSES scale displays an imbalance in favor of anti-elitism, we have adopted the approach proposed by Castanho Silva, Fuks, and Tamaki (2022), which involves selecting items with the highest factor loading for each sub-dimension. For robustness tests using different operationalizations and more comprehensive insights into the CFA models, including results from the invariance tests which show that the scale can be used in cross-countries regression models, we refer the reader to the Online Appendix.

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<sup>3</sup>For Switzerland, party evaluations are not asked and, thus, we use leader evaluations.

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Loading</b>
E3004_2 (AE)	Most politicians do not care about the people.	3.20	0.73
E3004_6 (PC)	The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.	3.34	0.48
E3004_1 (M)	What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out one's principles.	2.92	0.53
CFI=0.976, RMSEA=0.061, SRMR=0.025			

Note: AE= anti-elitism, PC= people centrism, M= Manicheism. Std. loadings based on the pooled sample. Fit indices were obtained from a metric model with fixed factor loadings across the different country cases.

Table 1: Populist items, means, and standardized (Std.) factor loadings across the entire sample.

**Vote for populist party:** We coded a respondent as populist if they cast their vote for a right-wing populist party. Extreme right-wing parties are also included in the analyses because our argument should apply also to radical right parties. We rely both on Cas Mudde’s classification (2007) and the PopuList database (Rooduijn, van Kessel, et al. 2019). In this way, we can include populist parties that emerged after the publication of Mudde’s book (e.g., Vox in Spain). Furthermore, we incorporated non-voters into our sample to maintain statistical power and explore how affective polarization is stratified in the entire electorate.

**Controls:** To rule out potential confounders and account for the potential impacts of compositional differences between countries, we control for gender (Male, Female), age (continuous), and education (continuous, 9 categories). Descriptive statistics are reported in the Online Appendix.

### 3.4 Modelling approach

To test our hypothesis, we resort to OLS regressions with country-election fixed effects and cluster robust standard errors. The continuous variables are centred and

standardized by subtracting the means of each country-election from the individual scores. All analyses apply weights such that the estimated coefficients are adjusted for (1) sampling design and non-response rate and (2) a weighting factor that divides the total weights for the whole sample by the weights for each election thus giving each case equal weight (Abou-Chadi and Finnigan 2019).

To answer our hypothesis, we estimated two sets of models. The first set employs fixed-effect models to estimate a general measure of association between our key variables in the entire sample. By pooling the sample and introducing country-election fixed effects, we control for unobserved country-election-specific factors that might influence the outcome variable. The second set of models estimates country-election-specific coefficients interacting the independent variable of interest with the country-election fixed effects. This procedure is similar to estimating a regression model for each case. Still, it has the added advantage of increasing statistical power and considering the compositional differences between the included cases.

The factor models are estimated using the SEM package Lavaan (Rosseel 2012) while the fixed-effect OLS regressions are fitted using the fixest package (Bergé 2018) in the R version 4.2.1 (R Core Team 2022). More details on the modeling approach are reported in the Online Appendix.

## 4 Results

We begin our analysis by examining the connection between affective polarization and a latent measure of populist attitudes. Table 2 shows that populist individuals do not exhibit more or less affectively polarized evaluations of the competing parties compared to individuals scoring lower on the populist attitudes scale. Notably, populist attitudes fail to explain any substantial amount of variance in the measure of affective polarization and the estimated coefficients are small and insignificant. This contradicts H1, which posited a positive relationship between populist attitudes and affective polarization.

Next, we move to H2, which examines whether the extreme ideological stances of radical populist parties contribute to the observed increase in affective polarization in certain countries. We do so by regressing the measure of affective polarization on vote choice. Our results provide only limited support for H2: voters of populist parties exhibit only marginally more polarized evaluations of competing parties in comparison to those who support mainstream parties ( $\beta = .053$ ,  $SE = .027$ ). Notably, both mainstream and populist voters demonstrate significantly higher levels of polarization in comparison to non-voters.

Moving on to H3, we replicate the model used to answer H1, this time including a polynomial term of degree 2 for the populist attitudes measure to capture non-linear effects. Results show a pronounced curvilinear effect of populist attitudes on affective polarization. Individuals scoring both low and high on the populist attitudes scale exhibit greater affective polarization when contrasted with those possessing an average level of affinity with populism. It is important to highlight that affectively charged evaluations are only present among individuals who score 1.5 standard deviations above or below the mean of the populist attitude scale, indicating that polarization is linked to either the strong acceptance or strong rejection of populism. These findings lend support to H3, suggesting the presence of a backlash effect where both populist and anti-populist voters display heightened levels of affective polarization.

Finally, we observe that individuals with high affinity with populism show lower average affect levels, indicating that, on average, they hold more negative sentiments toward all political parties. The magnitude of the estimated coefficients in the average affect model is notably larger compared to those in the affective polarization model, hovering around 1/5 of a standard deviation. This finding, together with the limited support for the polarizing effect of populism, corroborates H4, which suggests that populist attitudes are linked to general disapproval of all the parties in the system rather than polarized and negatively charged evaluations of the out-party.

Dependent Variables: Model:	(1)	(2)	(3)	Average Affect (4)
<i>Variables</i>				
Populist Attitudes	-0.0044 (0.0084)	-0.0049 (0.0077)		-0.2263*** (0.0183)
Populist Attitudes Squared		0.0520** (0.0104)		
Vote: No vote (Ref: Mainstream parties)			-0.3363*** (0.0440)	
Vote: Populist Party (Ref: Mainstream parties)			0.0503* (0.0281)	
Female (Ref: Male)	0.0208 (0.0155)	0.0233 (0.0157)	0.0226 (0.0151)	0.1202*** (0.0175)
Education	0.0287*** (0.0072)	0.0285*** (0.0072)	0.0151*** (0.0054)	-0.0041 (0.0136)
Age	0.0389** (0.0144)	0.0375** (0.0143)	0.0272** (0.0116)	-0.0359** (0.0158)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>				
Country-election	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>				
Observations	46,625	46,625	46,625	46,625
R <sup>2</sup>	0.38894	0.39047	0.42766	0.19322
Within R <sup>2</sup>	0.00700	0.00948	0.06991	0.03015
Country-elections	25	25	25	25

Clustered (Country-election) standard-errors in parentheses

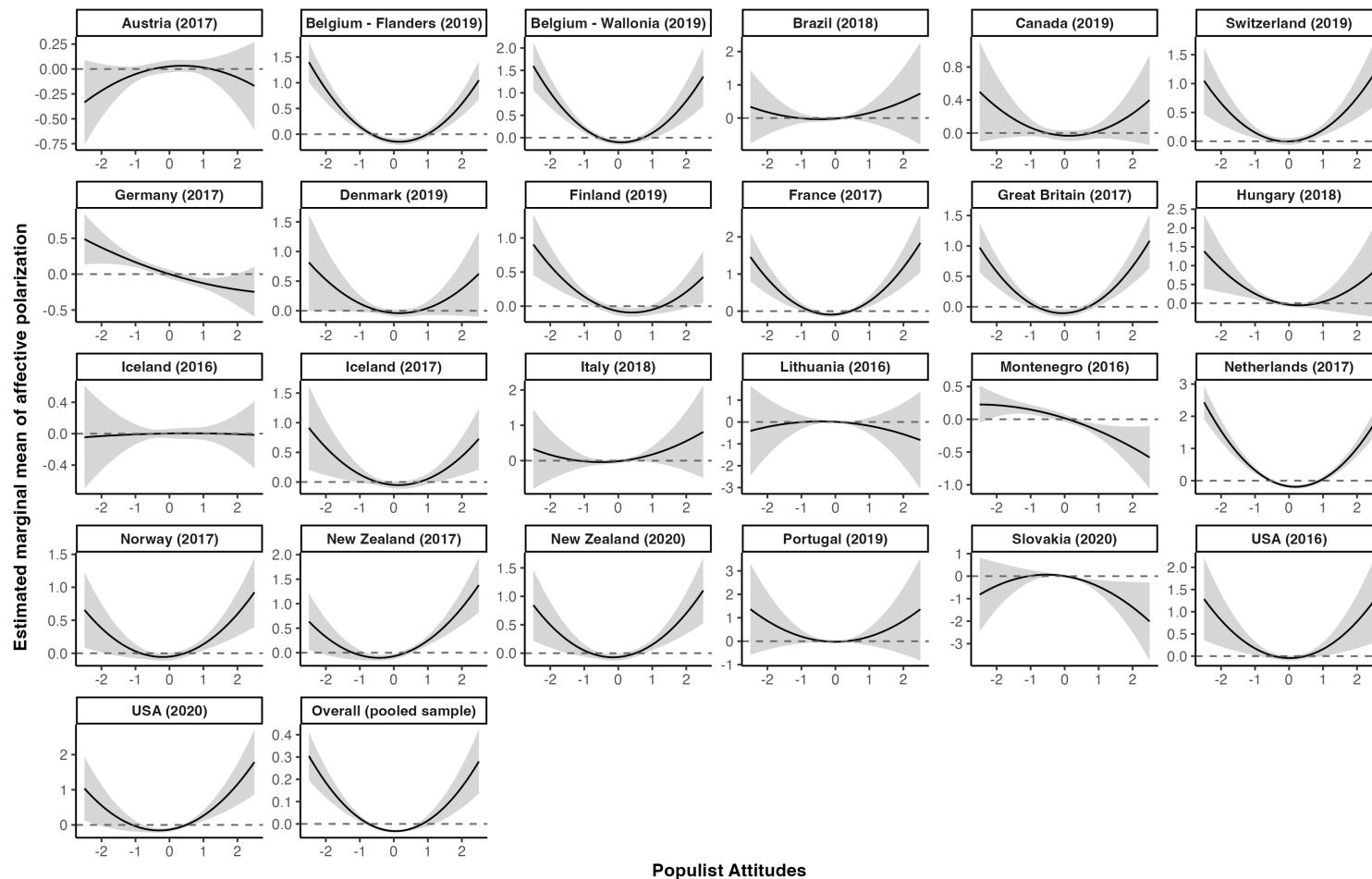
Signif. Codes: \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1

Table 2: Fixed-effect Regressions

Subsequently, we proceed to evaluate the relationship between populism and affective polarization in each of the included cases. Our goal here is to see if the results are not driven by a handful of influential cases and to check for potential systematic differences across countries. To accomplish this, we estimate country-election-specific coefficients by introducing an interaction between our independent variable of interest and the country-election fixed effects.

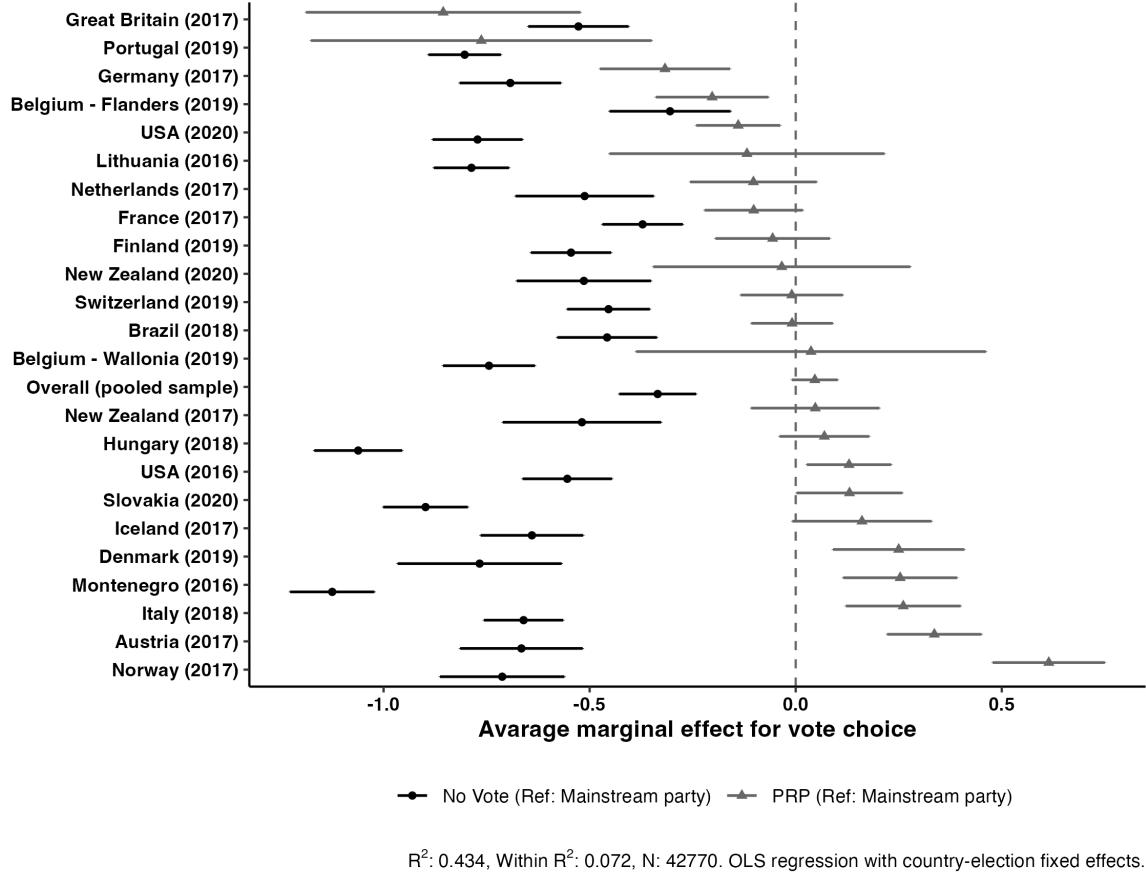
Figure 1 reveals a relatively idiosyncratic cross-national pattern in the association between populist attitudes and affective evaluations. While in most country cases the effect of populist attitudes is curvilinear, the estimated coefficients of populist attitudes are often insignificant at conventional levels for most of the range of the populist attitudes scale. Furthermore, in Germany and Montenegro, we find a linear but negative relationship between populist attitudes and affective polarization. These findings confirm the observation we made in the pooled sample model, indicating that there is insufficient evidence to support the notion that individuals with a stronger affinity for populism exhibit heightened levels of affective polarization.

Figure 1: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates. The estimated marginal effects are reported in the Online Appendix.



Moving to the vote choice model, Figure 2 reveals that, in most countries, the difference in affective polarization between mainstream and populist radical right party voters is minimal. Much like the results obtained for populist attitudes, the results reveal a substantial amount of heterogeneity across countries. In approximately half of the selected cases, the coefficient of voting for a populist party is statistically insignificant and hovers near zero, meaning that populist voters do not display higher levels of affective polarization when compared to voters of mainstream parties. In Great Britain (2017), Portugal, Germany, Flanders (Belgium), and the USA (2020), populist voters exhibit lower levels of affective polarization than citizens who vote for mainstream parties. In contrast, countries like the USA (2016), Denmark (2019), Montenegro (2016), Italy (2018), Austria (2017), and Norway (2017) display somewhat higher, although relatively moderate, levels of affective polarization among populist voters when compared to those who vote for mainstream parties. These results confirm the conclusions drawn from the pooled sample model, further corroborating that there is limited evidence to substantiate the claim that populist vote is associated with a stronger inter-party dislike.

Figure 2: Results of a random effect model predicting affective evaluations using vote choice, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates. The full regression table is reported in the Online Appendix.



## 4.1 Robustness

In the Online Appendix, we perform several robustness and sensitivity tests. First, we employ alternative measures of affective polarization based on different operationalizations proposed by Wagner (2021) and Reiljan (2020). These results consistently aligned with the findings in the main paper, either remaining unchanged or indicating a linear and negative relationship between polarization and populist attitudes. Second, we use several alternative operationalizations of populist attitudes, including a sum score index, a CFA model that uses the entire CSES scale, and the non-compensatory approach proposed by Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen (2020). These different models yield results in line with the ones presented in the manuscript, with minor deviations that do not

significantly impact the overall conclusions. Third, we operationalize the vote choice variable by including parties that are populist but lack the radical right component or have been classified as borderline cases according to Rooduijn, Van Kessel, et al. (2019). The results show minimal differences with overlapping confidence intervals between the two models. Fourth, we assess whether results are affected by controlling for additional confounding variables such as left-right self-placement, political interest, and internal political efficacy. We decided to exclude these variables from the main models since, in many countries, a substantial portion of the sample refuses to answer these questions, most notably the left-right self-placement question. These additional analyses indicate that these variables do not substantially alter the conclusions reached in our study.

## 5 Conclusions

As Adam Przeworski (1991) famously said, democracy is a system where parties experience electoral defeats and accept them. The violent scenes observed in Washington DC and Brasília shortly after the defeats of Donald Trump and Jair Bolsonaro respectively, carried out by supporters who did not accept the electoral results, are a teaser of the dire consequences that can follow from highly polarized political environments. Given that both of these presidents and other polarizing figures around the world are often considered populists, the pressing question is whether and how populism and affective polarization are connected. In this paper, we tackle this question for the first time from a wide comparative perspective, looking at data from 25 elections in 21 countries.

Our findings challenge the conventional notion that populism is intrinsically linked to affective hostility across party lines. Our results suggest that individuals with a high affinity with populism do not exhibit significantly higher levels of affective polarization compared to their non-populist counterparts. In fact, both populist and anti-populist individuals display higher levels of affective polarization. At the same time, those in

the middle of the scale tend not to see the political world so much in in-group versus out-group terms. Notably, our analysis reveals that populist attitudes are associated with a lower average appreciation for all parties in the system, reflecting a broader sense of democratic discontent rather than affectively polarized evaluations of rival parties. Additionally, we observe distinct and idiosyncratic patterns in the selected cases, indicating that the connection between populism and affective judgments noted in previous studies Fuller et al. (e.g., 2022) is, by no means, generalizable to all Western democracies.

These results are important in several accounts. First, some could argue that the polarizing rhetoric of populist parties is responsible for an asymmetrical polarization in the electorate, with populist voters becoming polarized against all the other parties in the political system (e.g. Roberts 2022). However, our results suggest that non-populists voters in most countries are polarized as much as populists are. Importantly, the marginal mean of affective polarization are similar for both populist and non-populist voters, indicating that populists do not harbor significantly more contempt for their out-party members and hold their in-party peers in notably higher regard when compared to non-populists. This suggests that—even if there may be a connection between the success of populist parties and the increasing levels of affective polarization—populists are not necessarily the only actors to blame.

Secondly, the increasing levels of affective polarization witnessed in some Western democracies may be the result of long-term dynamics of partisan (de)alignment (e.g., Mason 2015), rather than being solely attributed to populist discourse. Scholars link the emergence of populist parties to a decline in alignment between the policy positions of mainstream parties and voters' interests (e.g., Kriesi and Takis S. Pappas 2015). Populist parties capitalize on the discrepancy to garner support. However, when populist parties become integral to the political system—as is the case in many Western democracies—partisan and ideological affiliations are likely to realign. This realignment can potentially intensify the strength of these identities (Mason 2015), subsequently reinforcing affective polarization within the electorate.

Finally, the idiosyncratic patterns of association between populism and affective polarization observed in the selected cases suggests that the (de)polarizing effect of populist ideas hinges on how populist leaders mobilize support and secure votes. Depending on contextual factors and programmatic considerations, populist leaders may emphasize or de-emphasize affective elements of political competition, which, in turn, affects how citizens assess the competing candidates (Stefanelli 2023). A better understanding of the conditions under which populism shapes emotionally charged evaluations can aid scholars in comprehending the circumstances in which populism function as a catalyst for fostering a highly charged and divisive political environment.

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# APPENDIX: Unaffected Polarization? Populism and Affective Polarization in comparative perspective

The data used for the paper is public and accessible according to the terms of use defined by the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES), the data provider. All the materials that are required to replicate the figures and the tables present in the text (custom-programmed R functions and R scripts) are accessible through the author's public GitHub profile (ANONYMOUS).

We used R version 4.2.1 (R Core Team 2022) and the following R packages: fixest v. 0.11.1 (Bergé 2018), ggeffects v. 1.2.2.13 (Lüdecke 2018), gtsummary v. 1.6.1 (Sjoberg et al. 2021), here v. 1.0.1 (Müller 2020), huxtable v. 5.5.2 (Hugh-Jones 2022), kableExtra v. 1.3.4 (Zhu 2021), latex2exp v. 0.9.4 (Meschiari 2022), Matrix v. 1.6.0 (Bates, Maechler, and Jagan 2023), modelsummary v. 1.4.2 (Arel-Bundock 2022), patchwork v. 1.1.1 (Pedersen 2020), semTools v. 0.5.6 (Jorgensen et al. 2022), tidyverse v. 2.0.0 (Wickham et al. 2019), xtable v. 1.8.4 (Dahl et al. 2019).

## 1 Regression tables for Figure 1 and Figure 2 (manuscript)

### 1.1 Random-effect regression results predicting affective polarization using populist attitudes and vote choice

The coefficients can be used to calculate the marginal means reported in Figure 1 (Populist attitudes), and Figure 2 (Vote choice) of the manuscript. Since we interested in the marginal means for each country case, the standard errors for these random slope models are not clustered at the country-year level. This ensures that the standard errors of the slope estimates are calculated correctly (for more info on how the standard errors are calulcated see, Bergé 2018).

	Populist attitudes	Vote choice
Intercept	-0.406*** (0.018)	2.147*** (0.041)
Populist Attitudes	0.013 (0.016)	
Populist Attitudes Squared	-0.017 (0.020)	
Female (Ref: Male)	0.023*** (0.005)	0.050*** (0.012)
Education	0.021*** (0.003)	0.010** (0.003)
Age	0.001 (0.002)	0.000 (0.000)
Belgium - Flanders (2019)	-0.006 (0.024)	
Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	0.022 (0.023)	
Brazil (2018)	-0.146*** (0.023)	
Canada (2019)	0.006 (0.024)	
Switzerland (2019)	-0.229*** (0.024)	
Germany (2017)	0.154*** (0.024)	
Denmark (2019)	0.184*** (0.023)	
Finland (2019)	0.019 (0.024)	
France (2017)	0.086***	

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Great Britain (2017)	(0.023)
Hungary (2018)	0.053*
Iceland (2016)	(0.024)
Iceland (2017)	-0.006
Italy (2018)	(0.023)
Lithuania (2016)	-0.048*
Montenegro (2016)	(0.023)
Netherlands (2017)	-0.133***
Norway (2017)	(0.023)
New Zealand (2017)	0.047*
New Zealand (2020)	(0.023)
Portugal (2019)	-0.061**
Slovakia (2020)	(0.023)
USA (2016)	0.028
USA (2020)	(0.023)

Populist Attitudes X Belgium - Flanders (2019)	-0.033 (0.022)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Belgium - Flanders (2019)	0.099*** (0.026)
Populist Attitudes X Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	-0.030 (0.026)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	0.115*** (0.033)
Populist Attitudes X Brazil (2018)	0.031 (0.042)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Brazil (2018)	0.065 (0.062)
Populist Attitudes X Canada (2019)	-0.021 (0.025)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Canada (2019)	0.054+ (0.032)
Populist Attitudes X Switzerland (2019)	-0.002 (0.025)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Switzerland (2019)	0.107*** (0.032)
Populist Attitudes X Germany (2017)	-0.057* (0.022)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Germany (2017)	0.025 (0.025)
Populist Attitudes X Denmark (2019)	-0.019 (0.028)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Denmark (2019)	0.055 (0.039)
Populist Attitudes X Finland (2019)	-0.046* (0.023)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Finland (2019)	0.062* (0.023)

Populist Attitudes X France (2017)	(0.027) 0.017 (0.028)
Populist Attitudes Squared X France (2017)	0.132*** (0.037)
Populist Attitudes X Great Britain (2017)	-0.004 (0.023)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Great Britain (2017)	0.102*** (0.027)
Populist Attitudes X Hungary (2018)	-0.069* (0.034)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Hungary (2018)	0.119* (0.052)
Populist Attitudes X Iceland (2016)	-0.011 (0.028)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Iceland (2016)	0.022 (0.031)
Populist Attitudes X Iceland (2017)	-0.024 (0.029)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Iceland (2017)	0.070* (0.033)
Populist Attitudes X Italy (2018)	0.029 (0.034)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Italy (2018)	0.061 (0.057)
Populist Attitudes X Lithuania (2016)	-0.040 (0.045)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Lithuania (2016)	-0.020 (0.096)
Populist Attitudes X Montenegro (2016)	-0.089*** (0.025)

Populist Attitudes Squared X Montenegro (2016)	0.004 (0.026)
Populist Attitudes X Netherlands (2017)	-0.051* (0.025)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Netherlands (2017)	0.131*** (0.028)
Populist Attitudes X Norway (2017)	0.007 (0.026)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Norway (2017)	0.061+ (0.031)
Populist Attitudes X New Zealand (2017)	0.043+ (0.025)
Populist Attitudes Squared X New Zealand (2017)	0.084** (0.032)
Populist Attitudes X New Zealand (2020)	0.010 (0.025)
Populist Attitudes Squared X New Zealand (2020)	0.084* (0.033)
Populist Attitudes X Portugal (2019)	-0.011 (0.045)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Portugal (2019)	0.131 (0.093)
Populist Attitudes X Slovakia (2020)	-0.115** (0.040)
Populist Attitudes Squared X Slovakia (2020)	-0.083 (0.077)
Populist Attitudes X USA (2016)	-0.052+ (0.030)
Populist Attitudes Squared X USA (2016)	0.314*** (0.046)
Populist Attitudes X USA (2020)	0.144***

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Populist Attitudes Squared X USA (2020)	(0.030) 0.357*** (0.045)
Vote: No vote	-0.514*** (0.098)
Vote: PRP	0.255*** (0.075)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Belgium - Flanders (2019)	0.200*** (0.047)
Vote: No vote X Belgium - Flanders (2019)	0.447*** (0.129)
Vote: PRP X Belgium - Flanders (2019)	-0.238* (0.107)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	0.313*** (0.046)
Vote: No vote X Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	0.144 (0.113)
Vote: PRP X Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	0.082 (0.285)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Brazil (2018)	-0.210*** (0.060)
Vote: No vote X Brazil (2018)	-0.257* (0.111)
Vote: PRP X Brazil (2018)	-0.466*** (0.080)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Canada (2019)	0.168*** (0.046)
Vote: No vote X Canada (2019)	0.169 (0.119)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Switzerland (2019)	-0.264*** (0.051)

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Vote: No vote X Switzerland (2019)	-0.292** (0.106)
Vote: PRP X Switzerland (2019)	-0.535*** (0.098)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Germany (2017)	0.539*** (0.049)
Vote: No vote X Germany (2017)	0.481*** (0.118)
Vote: PRP X Germany (2017)	0.112 (0.095)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Denmark (2019)	0.527*** (0.046)
Vote: No vote X Denmark (2019)	0.449** (0.157)
Vote: PRP X Denmark (2019)	0.468*** (0.120)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Finland (2019)	0.304*** (0.051)
Vote: No vote X Finland (2019)	0.316** (0.105)
Vote: PRP X Finland (2019)	-0.029 (0.106)
Vote: Mainstream parties X France (2017)	0.472*** (0.054)
Vote: No vote X France (2017)	0.609*** (0.104)
Vote: PRP X France (2017)	0.097 (0.094)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Great Britain (2017)	0.384*** (0.046)
Vote: No vote X Great Britain (2017)	0.293*

Vote: PRP X Great Britain (2017)	(0.118)
	-0.922***
	(0.232)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Hungary (2018)	0.401***
	(0.077)
Vote: No vote X Hungary (2018)	-0.305**
	(0.103)
Vote: PRP X Hungary (2018)	0.350***
	(0.079)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Iceland (2016)	0.009
	(0.046)
Vote: No vote X Iceland (2016)	0.010
	(0.116)
Vote: PRP X Iceland (2016)	-0.680***
	(0.189)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Iceland (2017)	0.111*
	(0.047)
Vote: No vote X Iceland (2017)	0.097
	(0.118)
Vote: PRP X Iceland (2017)	-0.070
	(0.106)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Italy (2018)	0.221***
	(0.060)
Vote: No vote X Italy (2018)	0.122
	(0.105)
Vote: PRP X Italy (2018)	0.258**
	(0.083)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Lithuania (2016)	-0.022
	(0.051)
Vote: No vote X Lithuania (2016)	-0.274**
	(0.103)

Vote: PRP X Lithuania (2016)	-0.346** (0.111)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Montenegro (2016)	0.415*** (0.049)
Vote: No vote X Montenegro (2016)	-0.374*** (0.108)
Vote: PRP X Montenegro (2016)	0.444*** (0.107)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Netherlands (2017)	0.062 (0.047)
Vote: No vote X Netherlands (2017)	0.172 (0.140)
Vote: PRP X Netherlands (2017)	-0.253** (0.094)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Norway (2017)	0.216*** (0.047)
Vote: No vote X Norway (2017)	0.214 (0.131)
Vote: PRP X Norway (2017)	0.406*** (0.107)
Vote: Mainstream parties X New Zealand (2017)	0.183*** (0.046)
Vote: No vote X New Zealand (2017)	0.231 (0.154)
Vote: PRP X New Zealand (2017)	-0.010 (0.118)
Vote: Mainstream parties X New Zealand (2020)	0.418*** (0.045)
Vote: No vote X New Zealand (2020)	0.449** (0.139)
Vote: PRP X New Zealand (2020)	0.158

II

Vote: Mainstream parties X Portugal (2019)	(0.216)
	0.024
	(0.054)
Vote: No vote X Portugal (2019)	-0.462***
	(0.100)
Vote: PRP X Portugal (2019)	-1.176***
	(0.276)
Vote: Mainstream parties X Slovakia (2020)	0.217**
	(0.066)
Vote: No vote X Slovakia (2020)	-0.039
	(0.108)
Vote: PRP X Slovakia (2020)	0.224**
	(0.079)
Vote: Mainstream parties X USA (2016)	3.567***
	(0.056)
Vote: No vote X USA (2016)	2.245***
	(0.107)
Vote: PRP X USA (2016)	3.738***
	(0.084)
Vote: Mainstream parties X USA (2020)	4.961***
	(0.055)
Vote: No vote X USA (2020)	3.002***
	(0.108)
Vote: PRP X USA (2020)	4.287***
	(0.084)
Num.Obs.	46637
	46637

+ p < 0.1, \* p < 0.05, \*\* p < 0.01, \*\*\* p < 0.001

Reference category for country fixed effect = Austria (2017)

## 1.2 Fixed-effect regression results predicting affective polarization using vote choice

The coefficient reported in the table are the pooled sample results displayed in Figure 2 of the manuscript (i.e., vote choice model, Overall (pooled sample)). The pooled sample results using populist attitudes as a predictor are reported in the manuscript.

Dependent Variable:	Affective Polarization (1)
<i>Variables</i>	
Vote: No vote (Ref: Mainstream parties)	-0.3349*** (0.0450)
Vote: Populist Party (Ref: Mainstream parties)	0.0464* (0.0269)
Female (Ref: Male)	0.0200 (0.0157)
Education	0.0168*** (0.0055)
Age	0.0284** (0.0120)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>	
Country	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>	
Observations	42,770
R <sup>2</sup>	0.43434
Within R <sup>2</sup>	0.07185
Size of the 'effective' sample	23
<i>Clustered (Country) standard-errors in parentheses</i>	
Signif. Codes: ***: 0.01, **: 0.05, *: 0.1	

Table A2: Results from fixed-effects regression predicting average affect using vote choice

## 2 Country cases selection

We employ three criteria for excluding country cases from our sample. Firstly, we only included established democracies. As a result, we excluded Thailand due to the fact that the country was ruled by a military junta just a few months before the CSES data collection began. Secondly, we excluded cases where an item measuring one of the three

sub-dimensions of the populist attitude scale was missing from the CSES questionnaire. Thirdly, we only analyzed countries where the populist attitudes battery performed relatively similarly. To achieve this, we excluded those cases where one of the populist sub-dimensions had a very low contribution to the variance of the populist latent factor. As a threshold, we used a standardized factor loading ( $\lambda$ ) of .20 and excluded all country cases where  $\lambda \leq .20$ . This ensures that the populist attitude scale retains its multidimensionality, meaning all three sub-dimensions contribute meaningfully to its variance. Our sample included 51037 respondents from 25 elections in 21 unique countries. Canada and Iceland (2016) were excluded from the vote choice model due to the lack of a populist radical right party.

Country	Notes/Reason for exclusion	
Austria (2017)		
Belgium - Flanders (2019)		
Belgium - Wallonia (2019)		
Brazil (2018)		
Canada (2019)		No vote choice model (absence of a PRP)
Chile (2017)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_1} = 0.16$ (Manicheism)
Costa Rica (2018)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_6} = 0.15$ (People centrism)
Switzerland (2019)		
Germany (2017)		
Denmark (2019)		
Finland (2019)		
France (2017)		
Great Britain (2017)		
Hong Kong (2016)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
Hungary (2018)		
Greece (2015)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
Ireland (2016)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
Iceland (2016)		No vote choice model (absence of a PRP)
Iceland (2017)		
Israel (2020)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_6} = 0.15$ (People centrism)
Italy (2018)		
Japan (2017)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_1} = 0.17$ (Manicheism)
Lithuania (2016)		
Montenegro (2016)		
Netherlands (2017)		
Norway (2017)		
New Zealand (2017)		
New Zealand (2020)		
Portugal (2019)		
Slovakia (2020)		
Sweden (2018)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
South Korea (2016)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
Taiwan (2016)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
Taiwan (2020)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_1} = 0.078$ (Manicheism)
Thailand (2019)	Excluded	Military dictatorship till 2019
Tunisia (2019)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_6} = 0.07$ (People centrism)
Turkey (2018)	Excluded	$\lambda_{E3004_1} = 0.17$ (Manicheism)
Uruguay (2019)	Excluded	Missing manichean item (E3004_1)
USA (2016)		
USA (2020)		

### **3 PRP included in the analysis**

To identify populist radical right (i.e., far-right) parties, we began by following the classification of Mudde (2007) and Norris (2005). Next, we consulted the PopuList database Rooduijn et al. (2019) to include parties that were not covered in Mudde and Norris' publications (e.g., the Partido Social Liberal (PSL) in Brazil) and determine their party family classification. We included only parties that are classified both as populist and far-right and excluded borderline cases. See *infra* for a robustness model where we include borderline cases and parties classified only as populist. Further, in the CSES, feeling thermometers for party and leaders are asked only for the 7 most popular parties/coalitions and, thus, small parties with less than 4% of the popular vote cannot be included in the analysis. Canada and Iceland (2016) are also excluded from the vote choice model due to the lack of a populist party. Additionally, due to a lack of enough observations, we decided to exclude radical left populist parties such as La France Insoumise (FI) and populist parties without a clear ideological position along the left-right continuum such as the Italian Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S).

Country	Party	Reference	Populist	Far-Right
Austria	Freiheitliche Partei Oesterreichs (FPO)	Mudde (2007)	X	X
Belgium	Vlaams Belang (VB)	Mudde (2007)	X	X
Belgium	Parti Populaire (PP)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Brazil	Partido Social Liberal (PSL)	Avritzer and Rennó (2023)	X	X
Denmark	Dansk Folkeparti (DF)	Mudde (2007)	X	X
Denmark	Nye Borgerlige (NB)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	(X)	X
Finland	Perussuomalaiset (PS)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Finland	Sininen tulevaisuus (SIN)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	(X)
France	Front National (FN)	Mudde (2007)	X	X
France	Debout la France (DLF)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Germany	Alternative fuer Deutschland (AfD)	Cantoni, Hagemeister, and Westcott (2019)	X	X
Great Britain	United Kingdom Independence Party (UKIP)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Hungary	Fidesz - Magyar Polgari Szovetseg	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Hungary	Jobbik Magyarporszagert Mozgalom (Jobbik)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	(X)
Iceland	Mioflokkurinn (M)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Italy	Lega (LN)	Mudde (2007)	X	X
Italy	Fratelli d'Italia (FdI)	Castelli Gattinara (2017)	X	X
Lithuania	Coalition LCP - LPP	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Lithuania	Partija tvarka ir teisingumas (PTT)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	
Montenegro	Demokratski Front (DF)	Džankić and Keil (2017)	X	X
Netherlands	Partij voor de Vrijheid (PVV)	Mudde (2013)	X	X
Netherlands	Forum voor Democratie (FvD)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
New Zealand	New Zealand First Party (NZFP)	Norris (2005)	X	X
Norway	Fremskrittspartiet (FRP)	Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser (2018)	X	(X)
Portugal	Chega (CH)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Slovakia	Obycajni ludia a nezavisle osobnosti (OLaNO)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	
Slovakia	Sme Rodina - Boris Kollar (SR)	Rooduijn et al. (2019)	X	X
Slovakia	Ludova strana Nase Slovensko (LsNS)	Pytlas (2015)		X

Switzerland	Eidgenoessisch-Demokratische Union (EDU / UDF)	D'Amato and Skenderovic (2009)	X
Switzerland	Lega dei Ticinesi (LdT)	Bernhard, Kriesi, and Weber (2015)	X
Switzerland	Mouvement Citoyens Genevois (MCG)	Bernhard, Kriesi, and Weber (2015)	X
Switzerland	Schweizerische Volkspartei (SVP / UDC)	Bernhard, Kriesi, and Weber (2015)	X
USA	Republican Party (Donald Trump)	Oliver and Rahn (2016)	X

Notes: X = Classified as populist and/or far-right, (X) = Borderline case

Table A4: List of PRP included in the analysis and their classification

## 4 Measurement models

In order to measure an individual's level of affinity towards populism, we utilize Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) models. CFA has two main advantages over traditional sum-score indices. Firstly, it reduces measurement errors by evaluating whether a specific latent construct (i.e., populist attitudes) is accurately measured by a set of questions that share common variance (i.e., a series of attitudinal items related to populism). Secondly, CFA guarantees that a latent construct is measured and interpreted in the same across various groups of respondents, in this case, respondents interviewed in different countries. Results from the CFA model reveal good reliability and validity of the 3-item populist attitudes scale ( $CFI \geq .95$ ,  $RMSA \leq .06$ ,  $SRMR \leq .08$ ) with relatively high factor loadings for the pooled model ( $\lambda \geq .5$ ) (Hu and Bentler 1999).

### 4.1 Standardized loadings for each country case

We report the standardized factor loadings ( $\lambda$ ) obtained from a CFA configural model for each of the country cases included in the analysis. In line with the CFA fit indices reported in the manuscript, the majority of the included country cases have acceptable factor loadings ( $\lambda \geq .5$ ), except for Slovakia, Portugal, and Lithuania. In these countries, the item related to Manicheism has a lower factor loading of  $\lambda \leq .3$ . Despite this, we have decided to keep these countries in the sample since their  $\lambda$  is above the selected threshold (see *Country cases selection* section).

Country	Item	Std. Loading ( $\lambda$ )
Austria (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.78
Austria (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.45
Austria (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.59
Belgium - Flanders (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.73
Belgium - Flanders (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.58
Belgium - Flanders (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.77
Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.72
Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.60
Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.43
Brazil (2018)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.49
Brazil (2018)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.35
Brazil (2018)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.42
Canada (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.66
Canada (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.45
Canada (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.57
Switzerland (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.74
Switzerland (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.40
Switzerland (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.62
Germany (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.75
Germany (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.61
Germany (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.75
Denmark (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.74
Denmark (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.48

Country	Item	Std. Loading ( $\lambda$ )
Denmark (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.39
Finland (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.70
Finland (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.57
Finland (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.66
France (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.72
France (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.50
France (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.39
Great Britain (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.77
Great Britain (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.55
Great Britain (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.62
Hungary (2018)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.70
Hungary (2018)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.44
Hungary (2018)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.29
Iceland (2016)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.85
Iceland (2016)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.35
Iceland (2016)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.53
Iceland (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.72
Iceland (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.35
Iceland (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.57
Italy (2018)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.46
Italy (2018)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.37
Italy (2018)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.49
Lithuania (2016)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.78
Lithuania (2016)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.40
Lithuania (2016)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.20
Montenegro (2016)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.84
Montenegro (2016)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.61
Montenegro (2016)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.46
Netherlands (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.72
Netherlands (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.60
Netherlands (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.77
Norway (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.81
Norway (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.42
Norway (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.56
New Zealand (2017)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.69
New Zealand (2017)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.47
New Zealand (2017)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.59
New Zealand (2020)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.71
New Zealand (2020)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.43
New Zealand (2020)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.59
Portugal (2019)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.63
Portugal (2019)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.39
Portugal (2019)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.24
Slovakia (2020)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.70
Slovakia (2020)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.43
Slovakia (2020)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.26
USA (2016)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.61

Country	Item	Std. Loading ( $\lambda$ )
USA (2016)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.39
USA (2016)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.52
USA (2020)	Anti-elitism (E3004_2)	0.68
USA (2020)	People centrism (E3004_6)	0.37
USA (2020)	Manicheism (E3004_1)	0.49

## 4.2 Invariance Testing

To ensure the robustness of our measurement model across the different countries, we performed a measurement invariance testing. This procedure guarantees that populist attitudes are measured in a comparable way across the different country-elections included in the study. The results of the invariance testing indicate that the latent factor of populist attitudes reaches metric invariance, thereby enabling us to compare the coefficients of populist attitudes on affective polarization and average affect across the different country-cases (Chen 2007).

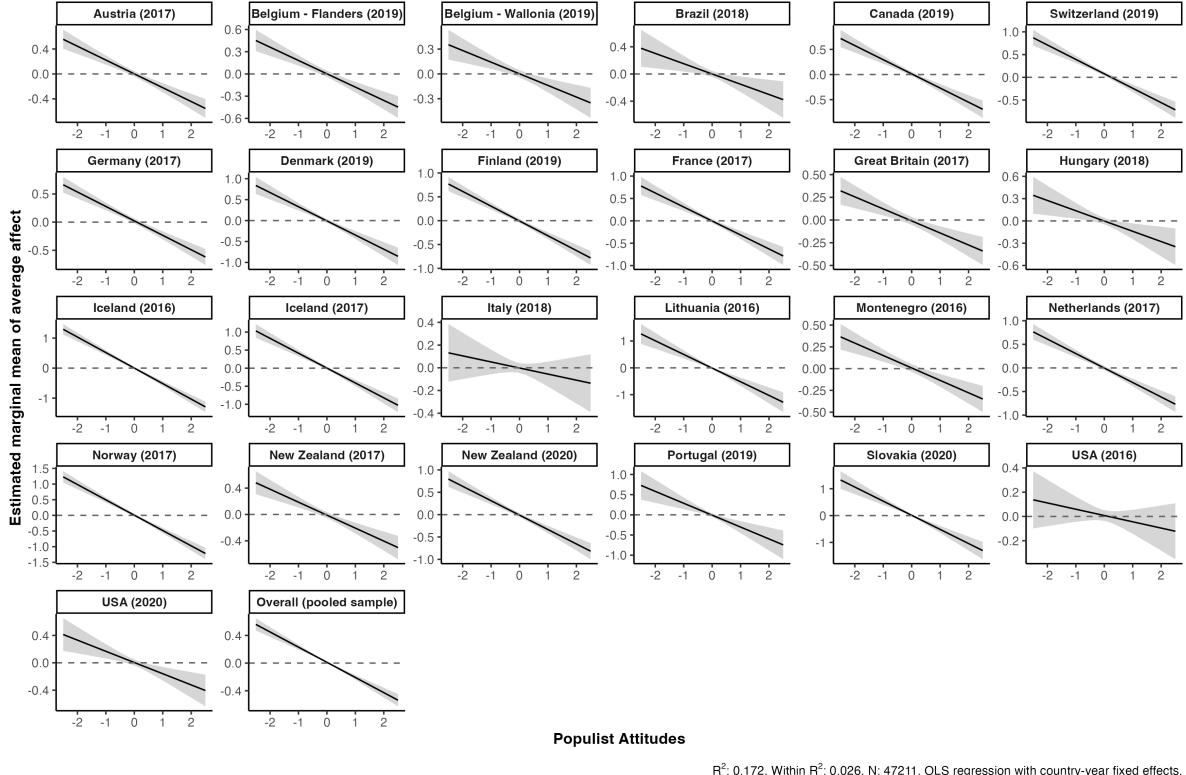
Model	df	$\Delta df$	CFI	$\Delta CFI$	RMSEA	$\Delta RMSEA$	SRMR	$\Delta SRMR$
Configural	0.00		1.00		0.00		0.00	
Metric	46.00	46.00	0.97	0.03	0.06	0.06	0.03	0.03
Scalar	92.00	46.00	0.61	0.36	0.17	0.11	0.10	0.07

## 5 Robustness

### 5.1 Average affect random slope model

This additional model estimates the marginal mean of average affect at varying levels of populism. Although there are some difference in the magnitude of the estimated coefficients, the results suggest a consistent negative correlation between populist attitudes and average affect in almost all the selected country cases. The only two exceptions are Italy and USA (2016) where the relationship is negative but fail to reach statistical significance at conventional levels (i.e.,  $\leq 0.05$ ).

Figure A1: Marginal mean of average affect at different levels of populist attitudes, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



## 5.2 Alternative measures of affective polarization

The manuscript uses the so called spread-of-score measure to capture affective evaluations in multiparty systems among the entire electorate Wagner (2021). The used measure recognizes that respondents can have positive evaluations of more than one party, effectively allowing to capture affective polarization in contexts where polarization may happen between blocks of parties (e.g., left-wing Vs. right-wing, mainstream vs. non-mainstream) rather than between one party and the other parties. It also allows us to assess affective polarization among voters who hold positive or negative evaluations towards certain parties but do not identify with or have a single-peaked ranking preference for any one party.

Although the selected measure "is superior [to other measures] if we want a measure that capture the empirical reality of affect patters in multi-party systems" (*emphasis ours*, Wagner 2021, p. 5), we decided to re-estimate the main models using (1) a weighted measure spread-of-score measure that takes into account parties' vote shares, (2) a measure based on the mean distance from the most-liked party (3) and a measure of *partisan* polarization that relay on the distance between in- and out-party evaluations.

### 5.2.1 Weighted spread-of-score measure

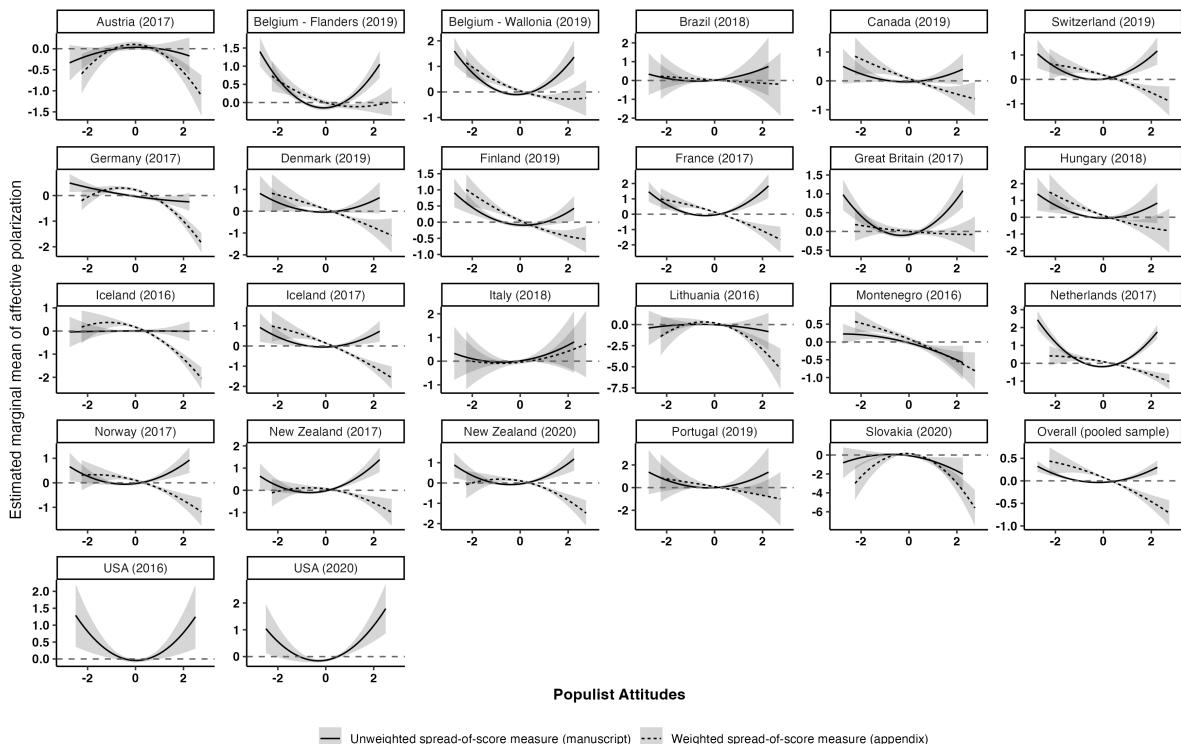
In the spread-of-score measure used in the main analysis, the same weight is given to each party evaluated by the respondent. An alternative approach is to weigh the index based on the size and relevance of the parties. The reasoning behind this is that larger

parties play a more important role in electoral competition and governmental formation. Thus, if a voter strongly dislikes big parties, their level of affective polarization should be more severe.

While weighting may be a better method for measuring the overall level of affective polarization in a political system, it is not suitable for evaluating the relationship between populism and affective polarization at the individual level. The weighted index tends to undervalue the ratings given to small parties like populist and populist radical right parties. For example, if a Belgian voter rates the Parti Populaire (PP), a populist radical right party, 9 and all other parties 0, their affective polarization should be high. However, using the weighted spread-of-score measure, their score on the affective polarization index would be very low. This is because the PP received less than 4

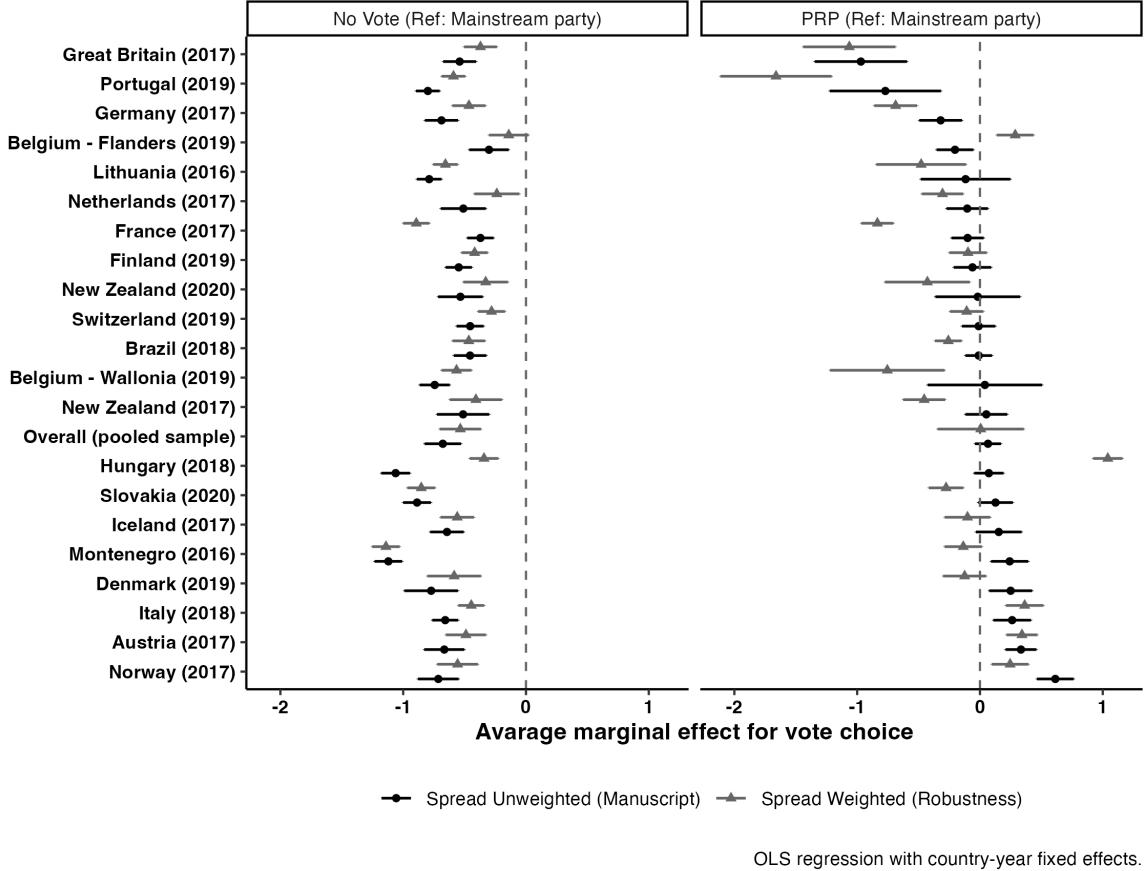
The empirical results confirm that downweighting the contribution of populist parties to the spread-of-score measure is not appropriate for studying affective polarization among populist individuals. When using populist attitude as a predictor, the relationship becomes linear, indicating lower levels of affective polarization for individuals with a high affinity for populism. In the vote choice mode, the estimated coefficients tend to move towards the negative territory. For instance, in Belgium - Wallonia (2019), the relationship becomes negative because Parti Populaire received less than 4% of the vote. In contrast, in countries such as Hungary or Flanders, where populist radical parties received a significant portion of the popular vote, the relationship between populist vote and affective polarization becomes stronger.

Figure A2: Marginal mean of affective polarization (weighted spread-of-score measure) at different levels of populist attitudes, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



OLS regression with country-year fixed effects.

Figure A3: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization (spread-of-score measure and weighted spread-of-score measure), controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.2.2 Mean distance from the most-liked party

An alternative way to conceptualize affective polarization focuses on the average affective distance from the respondent's most-liked party. This approach assumes a positive identification with one party with the presence of a single-picked ranking preference. Respondents who rate two or more parties as the "most-liked" (e.g., both at 10) are excluded from the calculation. Following Wagner (2021), we formalize this measure as

$$Distance_i = \sqrt{\frac{\sum_{p=1}^P (like_{ip} - like_{max,i})}{n_p}}. \text{ Here } p \text{ represents the party, } i \text{ the individual respondent, } like_{max,i} \text{ the thermometer score assigned to the most-liked part } p \text{ by individual } i, n_p \text{ is the number of parties evaluated by the respondent minus the most-liked party.}$$

Results obtained using the mean distance measure remain largely unchanged for both the populist attitudes and populist vote choice models. However, it is worth noting that this measure tends to inflate the coefficient for populism in countries where populist voters have positive evaluations of more than one PRP as a way to express political discontent. For instance, if a non-polarized populist voter assigns 10 to both Front National (FN) and Debout la France (DLF) and 7 to all the other parties, they would be excluded from the analysis. In our case, this corresponds to a 26% reduction in the sample size that passes from 44528 to 32783 respondents. In line with

Wagner (2021), we recommend using the spread-of-score measure to calculate affective polarization in multi-party systems.

Figure A4: Marginal mean of affective polarization (mean distance from the most-liked party) at different levels of populist attitudes, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.

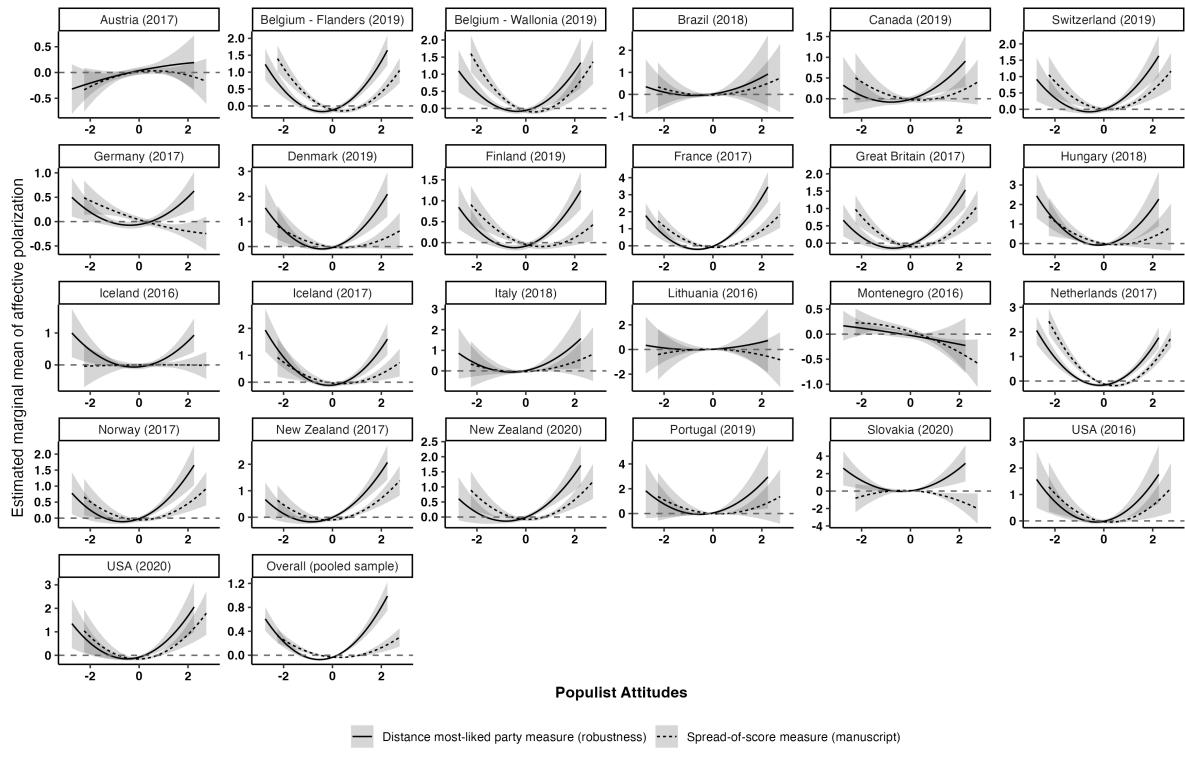
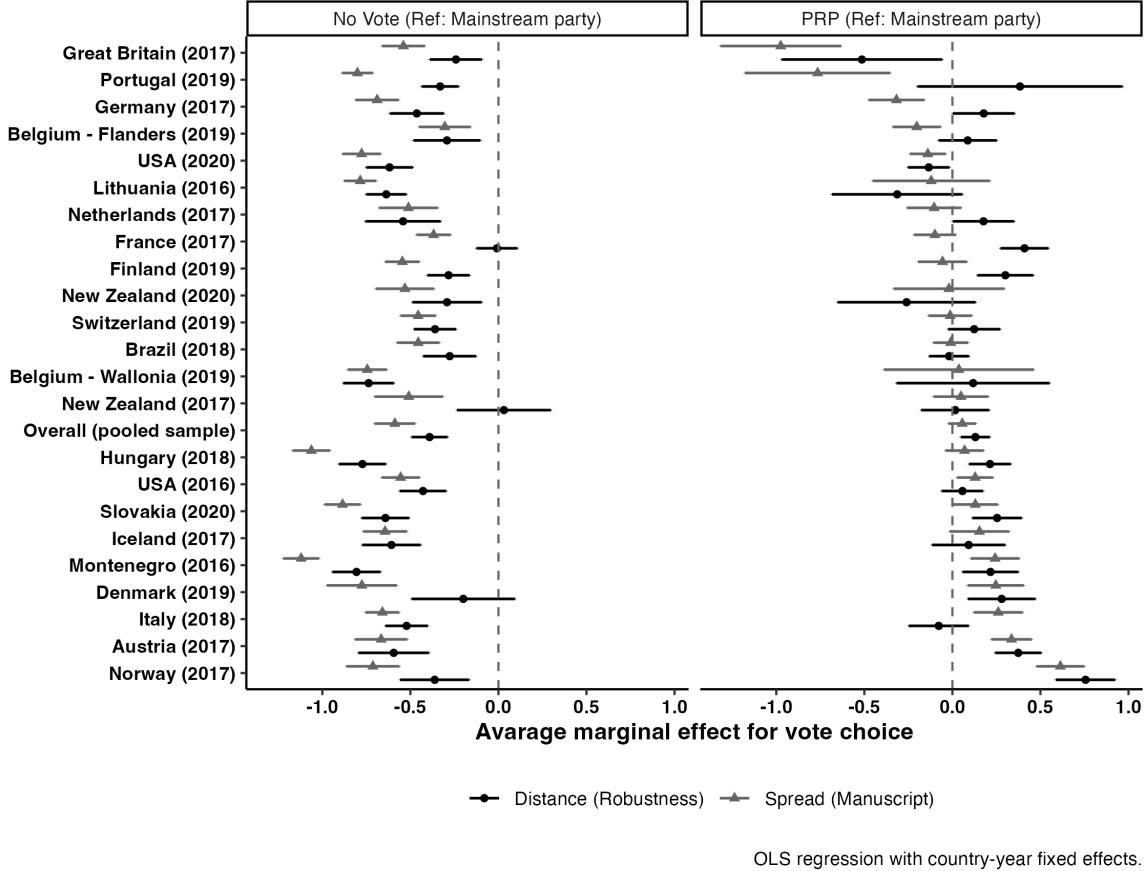


Figure A5: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization (spread-of-score measure and distance from the most-liked party), controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.2.3 Mean distance from the in-party (only partisans)

An even more restrictive measure of affective polarization is the one proposed by Reiljan (2020). The measure is identical to the Wagner (2021)'s mean distance measure but instead of focusing on the most-liked party, it calculates affective polarization only for respondents who identify with a party. As a result, approximately 40% of the sample is excluded from the analysis, making this measure unsuitable for measuring affective polarization among the entire electorate. Additionally, this measure assumes that respondents rate their in-party higher than any other party, and excludes respondents who rate their in-party lower than other parties.

Since Reiljan's measure only focuses on partisans, it cannot be compared to the results reported in the manuscript. However, it is important to note that using Reiljan's measure did not significantly alter the results. The model using populist attitudes as a predictor remained largely unchanged. In the vote choice model, only 34% of the selected country cases showed a positive association between Reiljan's partisan index and voting for a PRP. In 17% of the cases, the relationship was negative and statistically significant, while in the remaining 49%, the relationship was insignificant and closer to zero. These results suggest that populist voters are not necessarily more polarized, and even among populist partisans, affective polarization is not a generalized feature.

Figure A6: Marginal mean of affective polarization (mean distance from the in-party, (Reiljan 2020)) at different levels of populist attitudes, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.

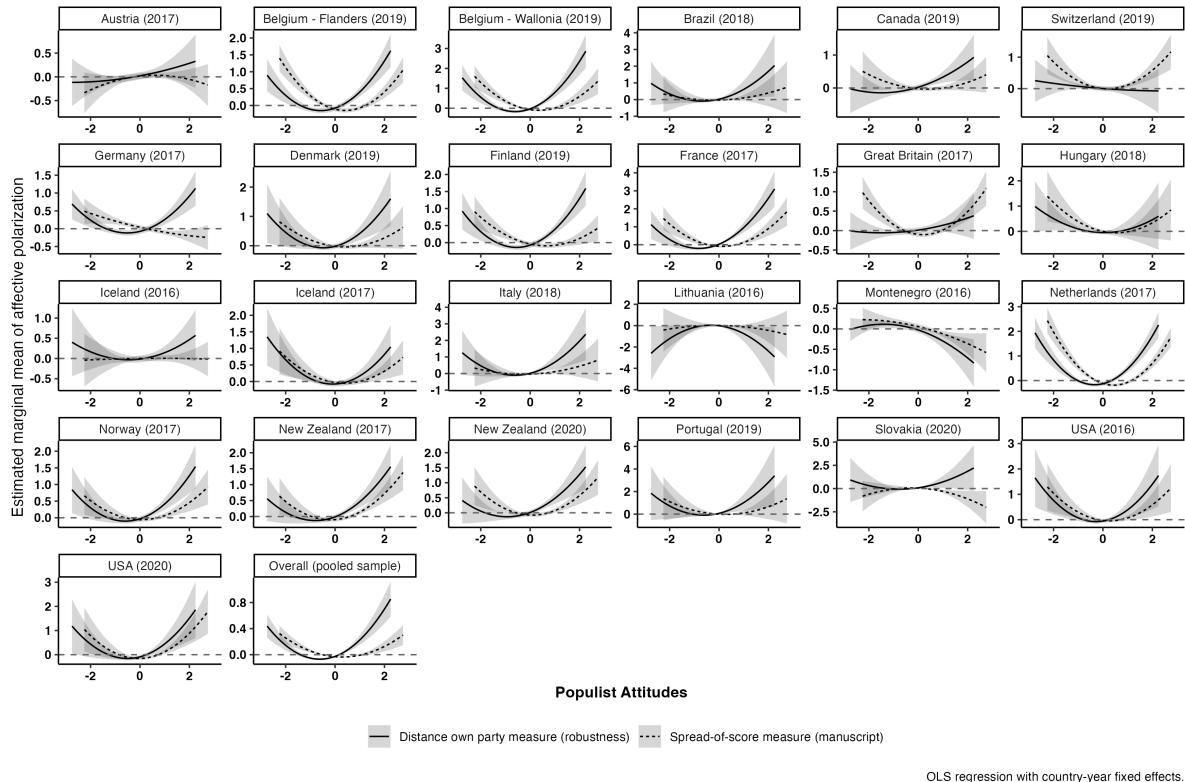
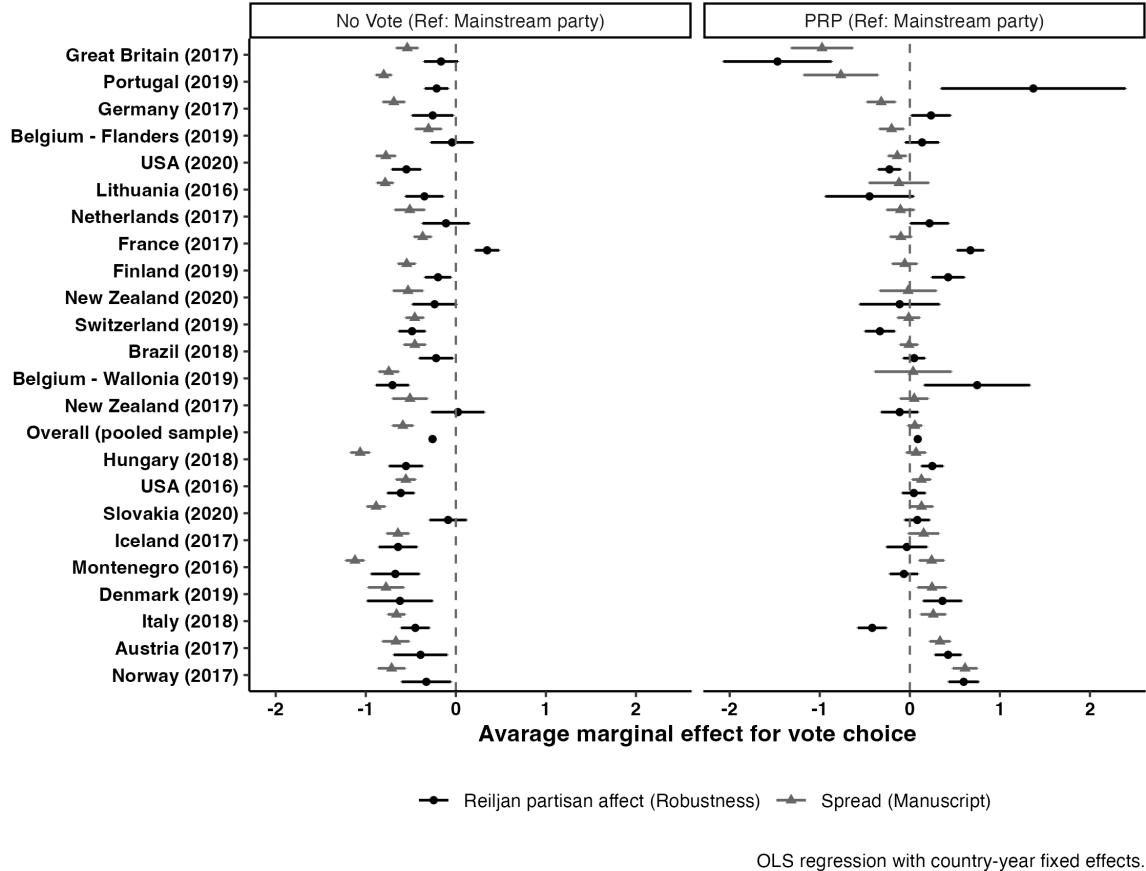


Figure A7: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization (spread-of-score measure and mean distance from the in-party, (Reiljan 2020)), controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.3 Alternative measures of populist attitudes

Although, conceptually, populism strongly revolves around the powerless-powerful vertical dimension, the CSES scale is unbalanced in favour of anti-elitism. This is why, in the manuscript, we follow the approach proposed by Castanho Silva, Fuks, and Tamaki 2022 and employ the items with the highest factor loading for each sub-dimension of the populist attitudes scale. To ensure that the results are robust to different specifications of populist attitudes, we replicate the model presented in the manuscript using (1) a latent populist attitudes measure that uses all the 6-item items included in the CSES battery and (2) a non-compensatory index based on a Goertzian concept structure and a (3) a sum score index.

#### 5.3.1 6-item measure of populist attitudes

In order to derive a measure of populism from the CSES battery, we fit a CFA model with fixed loadings across the country cases. While the factor loadings for the 6-item model are satisfactory, the fit indices for the configural model do not reach the criteria recommended by (Chen 2007). Thus, the optimal measurement strategy would be to use the 3-item model, as we did in the manuscript. Nonetheless, we re-estimate the

main models presented using the factor scores obtained from the 6-item model. The results are largely consistent with the ones obtained using the factor scores from the 3-item model. This means that the inclusion of additional anti-elitism items in the populist attitudes scale does not substantially impact the patterns of association and the explained variance reported in the manuscript.

	<b>Item</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Std. Loading</b>
E3004_2 (AE)	Most politicians do not care about the people.	3.20	0.79
E3004_6 (PC)	The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.	3.34	0.49
E3004_1 (M)	What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out one's principles.	2.92	0.46
E3004_3 (AE)	Most politicians are trustworthy	3.32	0.55
E3004_4 (AE)	Politicians are the main problem in [COUNTRY]	2.90	0.72
E3004_7 (AE)	Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.	3.31	0.77

CFI=0.94, RMSEA=0.073, SRMR=0.061

Note: AE= anti-elitism, PC= people centrisim, M= Manicheism. Std. loadings based on the pooled sample. Fit indices obtained from a metric model with fixed factor loadings across the different country cases.

Table A6: Populist attitudes items, means, and standardized (Std.) factor loadings across the entire sample.

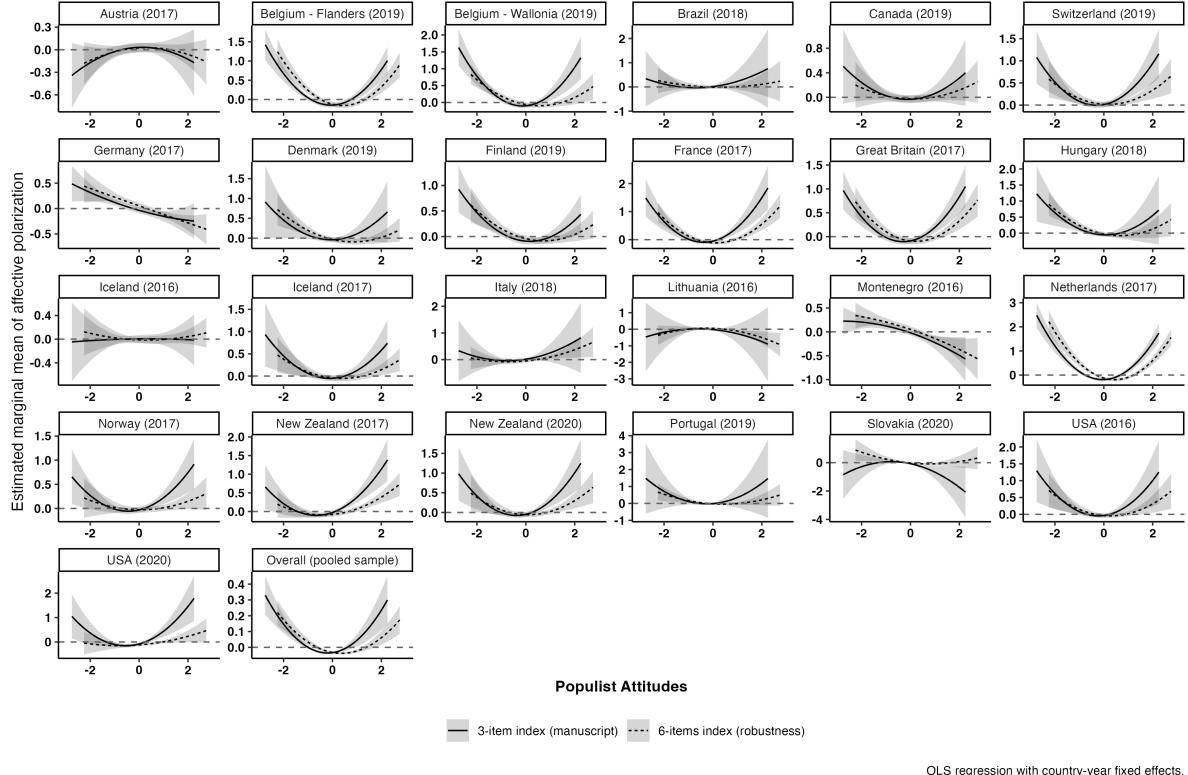
Dependent Variables: Model:	Affective Polarization (1)	Average Affect (2)	Average Affect (3)
<i>Variables</i>			
Populist Attitudes	-0.0074 (0.0079)	-0.0080 (0.0074)	-0.2210*** (0.0195)
Populist Attitudes Squared		0.0352*** (0.0064)	
Female (Ref: Male)	0.0207 (0.0155)	0.0231 (0.0156)	0.1247*** (0.0176)
Education	0.0281*** (0.0073)	0.0281*** (0.0073)	-0.0123 (0.0139)
Age	0.0386** (0.0145)	0.0373** (0.0144)	-0.0421** (0.0160)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>			
Country	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>			
Observations	46,663	46,663	46,663
R <sup>2</sup>	0.38899	0.39055	0.20239
Within R <sup>2</sup>	0.00709	0.00962	0.04121
Size of the 'effective' sample	25	25	25

*Clustered (Country) standard-errors in parentheses*

*Signif. Codes:* \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1

Table A7: Fixed-effect Regressions

Figure A8: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes (6-item model), controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.3.2 Goertzian concept structure (Wuttke et al.)

In traditional CFA models the resulting individual (factor) scores are a (weighted) geometric or linear combination of the items used to construct the scale. Intuitively, this means that the items are considered as partly interchangeable. This approach is adequate for calculating one-dimensional compensatory indices. Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen (2020) argues that for non-compensatory multidimensional concepts (such as populism) traditional factor models may be inadequate. The reason lays in the fact that populism is considered a non-compensatory concept that lays in the intersection between anti-elitism, people-centrism, and Manicheism. In other words, an individual should be considered populist if "they accept anti-elitist views and a Manichean outlook and believe in unrestricted popular sovereignty" (Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen 2020, p.6).

To mitigate this problem, Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen (2020) suggest taking the lowest value of the different sub dimensions as a conservative solution. Since the scale used in the main analysis includes one item per dimensions, we took the lowest value of the 3 items included in the populism scale. Results remain largely unchanged providing evidence that the general association between populism and affective evaluations holds using different measurement strategies. However, it is worth noting that, in some country cases, the relation become more linear with lower levels of affective polarization for respondents scoring high on the populist attitude scale.

This may be due to the fact that the Wuttke et al. approach measures different sub-dimensions of populism across included country cases. For example, in the

Netherlands, around 70% of the respondents assign the lowest value to the anti-elitism item (E3004\_2). This implies the index is a measure of anti-elitism for most Dutch respondents included in the CSES rather than populism. As the Wuttke et al. operationalization is highly unbalanced for certain sub-dimensions of populism across different countries, we believe that the proposed 3-item CFA approach is better suited for studying the relationship between populist attitudes and affective polarization in a comparative perspective.

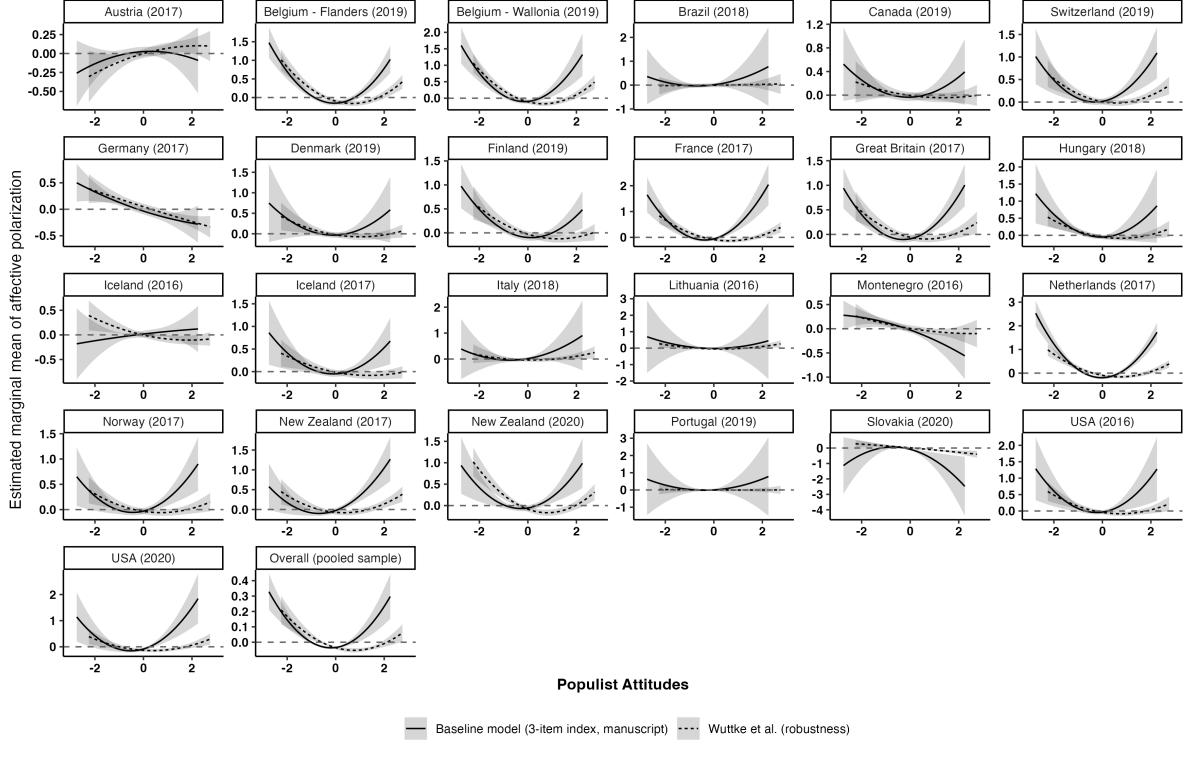
Dependent Variables: Model:	Affective Polarization (1)	Average Affect (2)	Average Affect (3)
<i>Variables</i>			
Populist Attitudes	-0.0130*** (0.0045)	-0.0298*** (0.0063)	-0.0807*** (0.0136)
Populist Attitudes Squared		0.0288*** (0.0067)	
Female (Ref: Male)	0.0198 (0.0149)	0.0226 (0.0154)	0.1238*** (0.0181)
Education	0.0192*** (0.0052)	0.0187*** (0.0052)	0.0218 (0.0142)
Age	0.0008 (0.0043)	0.0006 (0.0042)	-0.0038 (0.0042)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>			
Country	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>			
Observations	44,194	44,194	44,194
R <sup>2</sup>	0.38652	0.38865	0.18188
Within R <sup>2</sup>	0.00245	0.00591	0.01348
Size of the 'effective' sample	25	25	25

*Clustered (Country) standard-errors in parentheses*

*Signif. Codes:* \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1

Table A8: Fixed-effect Regressions

Figure A9: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes (Goertzian concept structure), controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.3.3 Sum score index of populist attitudes

Instead of using the factor scores from the CFA model, we use a sum scores index of populist attitudes. The index is an unweighted combination of the 3 items measuring populist attitudes that does not take into account any measurement difference between the selected country cases. Although results remain virtually unchanged, in the manuscript we report the more precise results obtained using the extracted factor scores.

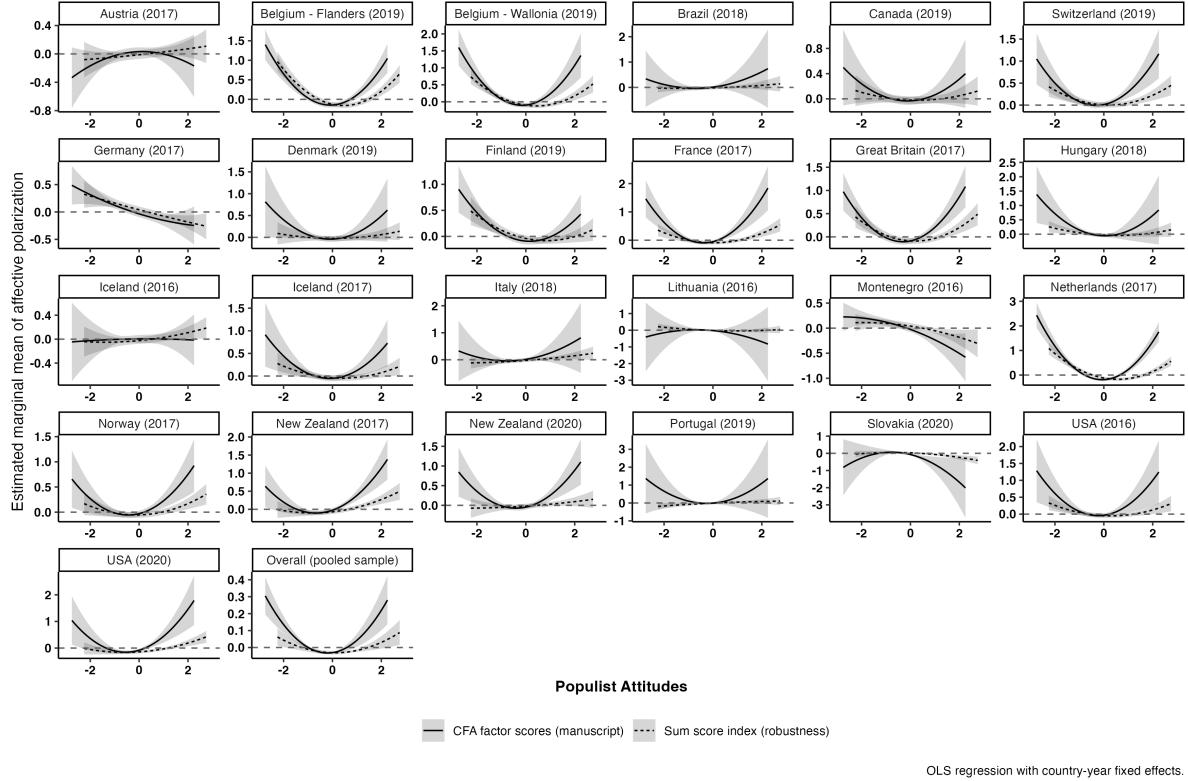
Dependent Variables: Model:	Affective Polarization (1)	Average Affect (2)	Average Affect (3)
<i>Variables</i>			
Populist Attitudes	0.0037 (0.0057)	0.0052 (0.0063)	-0.1182*** (0.0111)
Populist Attitudes Squared		0.0169*** (0.0052)	
Female (Ref: Male)	0.0211 (0.0155)	0.0222 (0.0157)	0.1163*** (0.0177)
Education	0.0301*** (0.0072)	0.0298*** (0.0071)	0.0079 (0.0142)
Age	0.0389** (0.0144)	0.0381** (0.0143)	-0.0387** (0.0155)
<i>Fixed-effects</i>			
Country	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Fit statistics</i>			
Observations	46,625	46,625	46,625
R <sup>2</sup>	0.38895	0.38985	0.18669
Within R <sup>2</sup>	0.00702	0.00847	0.02230
Size of the 'effective' sample	25	25	25

*Clustered (Country) standard-errors in parentheses*

*Signif. Codes:* \*\*\*: 0.01, \*\*: 0.05, \*: 0.1

Table A9: Fixed-effect Regressions

Figure A10: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes (sum score index), controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



## 5.4 Alternative operationalization of PRP voting

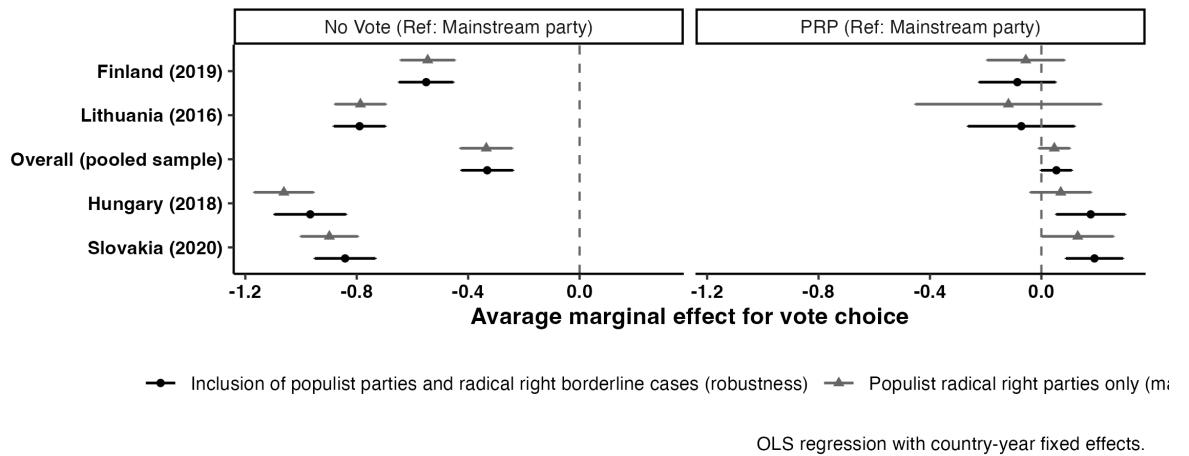
### 5.4.1 Vote choice model using only populist radical right parties

As previously stated, the analysis presented in the manuscript includes only those respondents who voted for parties that are classified both as far-right and populist. We do so because we expect that the radical positions of these parties is what drives affective polarization (H2). To ensure the robustness of our analysis, we replicated our main model including those parties that lack the radical right component or have been classified as borderline cases according to Rooduijn et al. (2019). This resulted in the inclusion of Sininen tulevaisuus (SIN) in Finland, Partija tvarka ir teisingumas (PTT) in Lithuania, Jobbik Magyaporszagert Mozgalo (Jobbik) in Hungary, and Obycajni ludia a nezavisle osobnosti (OLaNO) in Slovakia.

The results show small differences and overlapping confidence intervals between the two models. However, it is worth noting that the estimated coefficients are slightly higher and reach significance in Slovakia and Hungary. This could be related to the role of OLaNO and Jobbik in their respective party systems. In the 2020 Slovak elections, OLaNO became the most-voted party. It was seen as the primary opponent of Smer, a populist party led by Robert Fico which has been involved in several corruption scandals. As a result, Prime Minister Fico and his cabinet resigned in March 2018. OLaNO mainly focused on anti-corruption and anti-elitism, which could have led to stronger negative evaluations of Smer among its voters. In the 2018 Hungarian election, Jobbik was seen as the main opponent of Fidesz, the incumbent party led by Viktor

Orbán. Jobbik's leader at the time, Gábor Vona, moved away from the traditional far-right positions of Jobbik and promised to resign if he did not bring the party to victory. This "ultimatum" strategy may have polarized its voters leading to more negative evaluations of its main opponent Fidesz.

Figure A11: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization with borderline populist radical right parties, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



## 5.5 Potential confounders

To rule out the possibility that a third variable can bias the relationship between populism and affective polarization, we replicated the main analysis presented in the manuscript including (1) the respondent's L-R self-placement scale, (2) a measure of internal political efficacy and (3) respondent's self-reported level of political interest.

### 5.5.1 Left-Right self-placement

In the main models reported in the manuscript, we decided to not include left-right self-identification. The reason is that in certain country cases, there is a large number of respondents who did not answer the question, such as in Montenegro where approximately 50% of the respondents did not answer the LR self-identification question. However, the L-R political orientation of a respondent could distort the true relationship between populism and affective polarization in case (1) affinity with populism is stronger among a specific ideological group (e.g., right-wing respondents having higher levels of populist attitudes) and/or (2) whether L-R ideology is a strong predictor of affective polarization. Including the L-R scale do not alter any of the presented results suggesting that the estimated coefficients are consistent across the entire L-R ideological spectrum.

Figure A12: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes with and without LR self-placement, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.

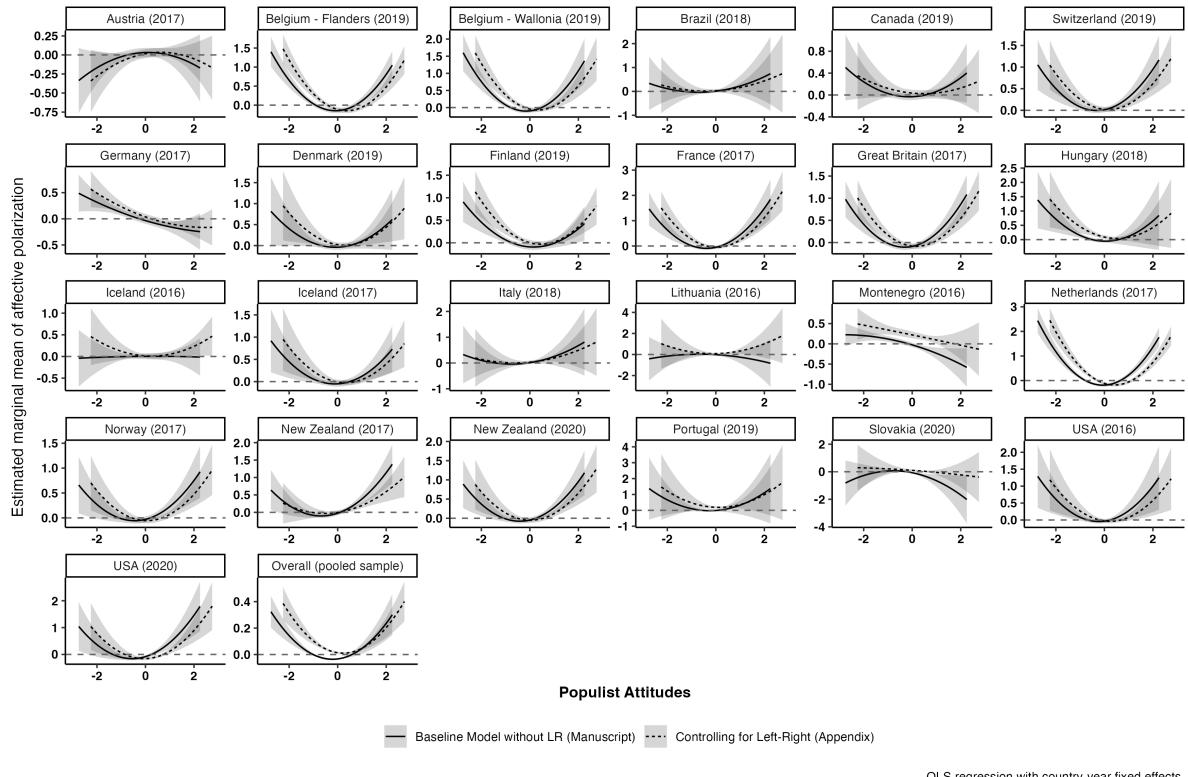
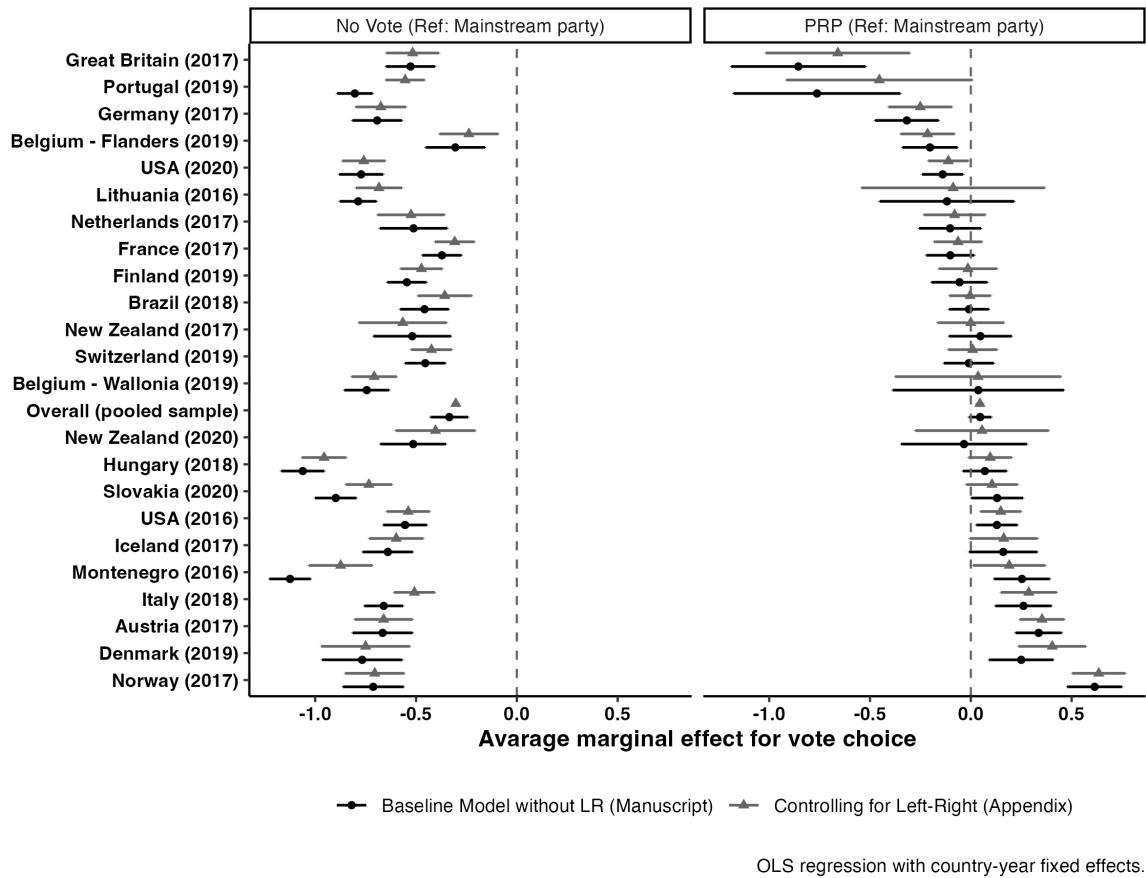


Figure A13: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization with and without LR self-placement, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.5.2 Internal political efficacy

Another potential confounder is the ability of respondents to understand how politics works. Populism is often associated with those who have lower levels of formal education and feel excluded from politics. If respondents struggle to comprehend political issues or find politics too complex, they may view all political parties or candidates as the same, which could lead to lower levels of affective polarization. This implies that the presented results may be driven by internal political efficacy and not populist attitudes or populist vote choice. Including internal political efficacy in our analyses does not change the estimated coefficients, indicating that the observed relationship between populism and affective judgments holds for individuals with both high and low levels of internal political efficacy.

Figure A14: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes with and without internal political efficacy, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.

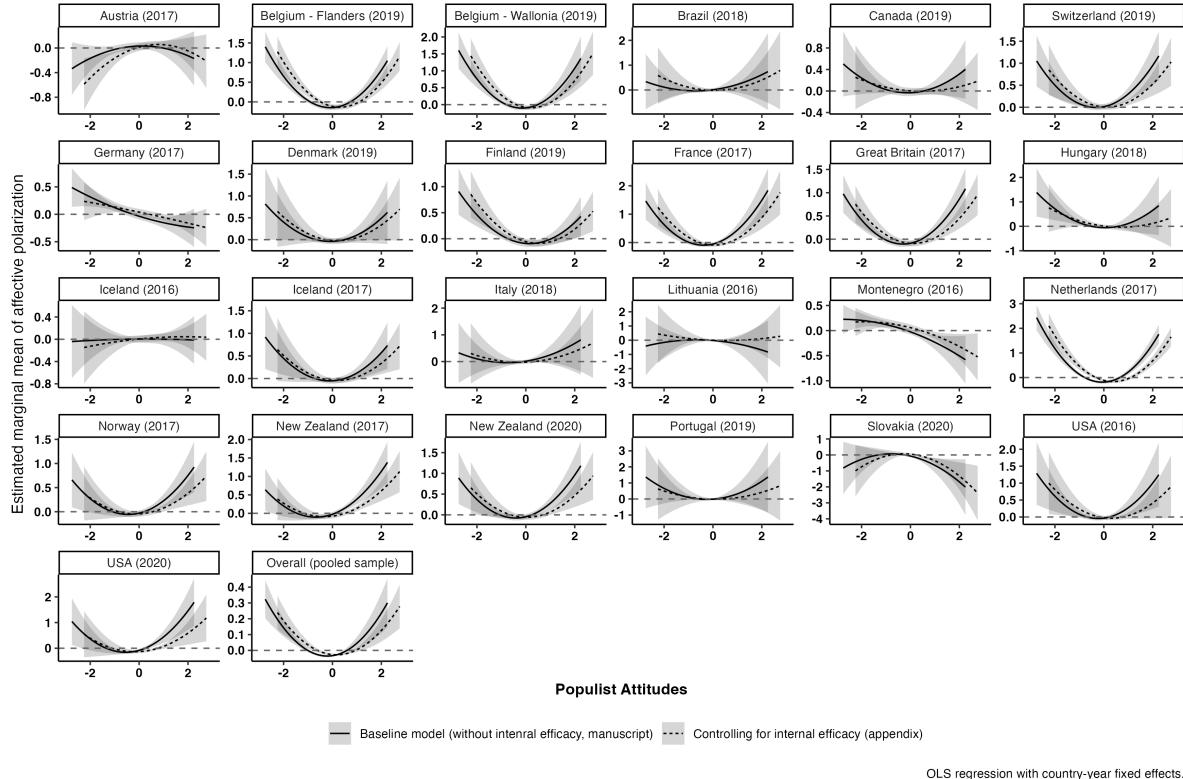
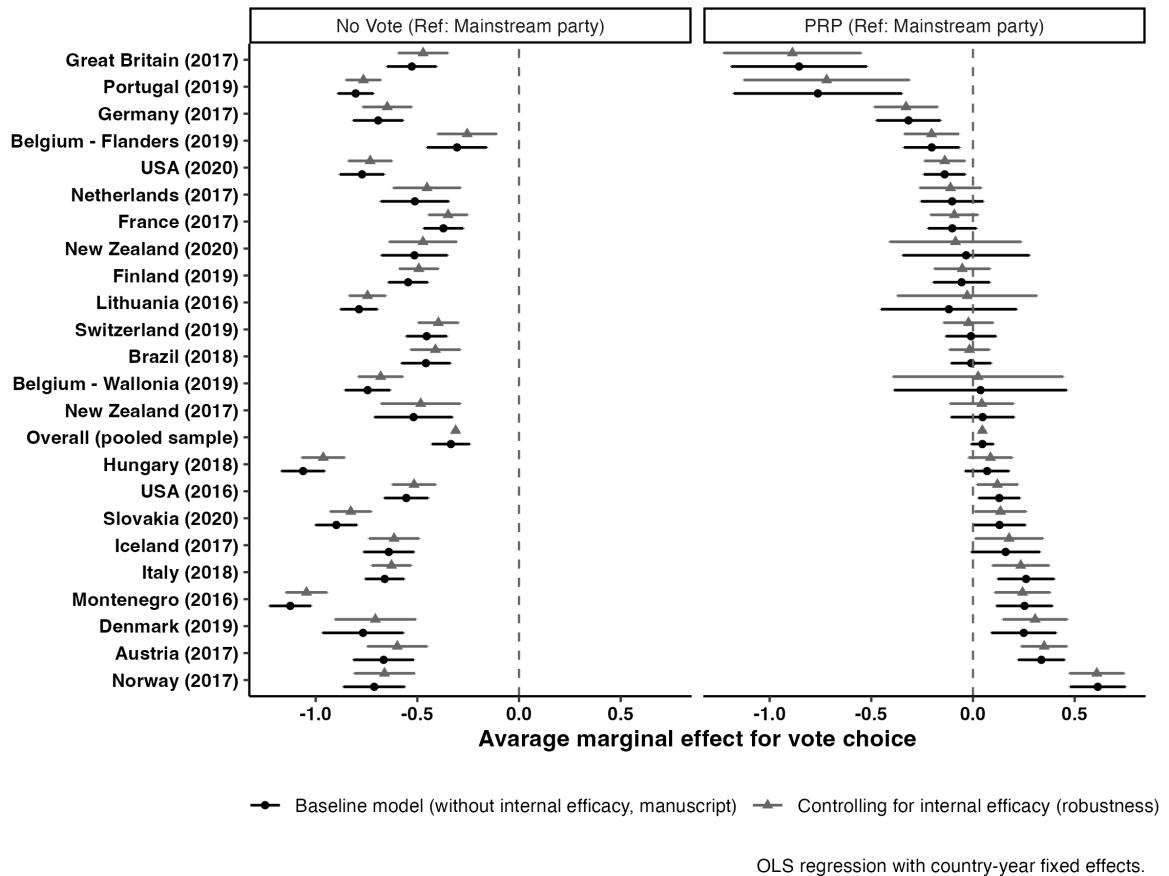


Figure A15: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization with and without internal political efficacy, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



### 5.5.3 Political interest

The link between populism and affective polarization may be influenced by the individual's interest in politics. Similarity to internal political efficacy, (populist) respondents who are not interested in politics may be unable to differentiate between political parties and, thus, they may display lower levels of affective polarization. To guard against this possibility, we fit an additional model that includes a measure of political interest. Our results remain the same, indicating that the coefficient of populist attitudes and populist vote choice is not affected by political interest.

Figure A16: Marginal mean of affective polarization at different levels of populist attitudes with and without political interest, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.

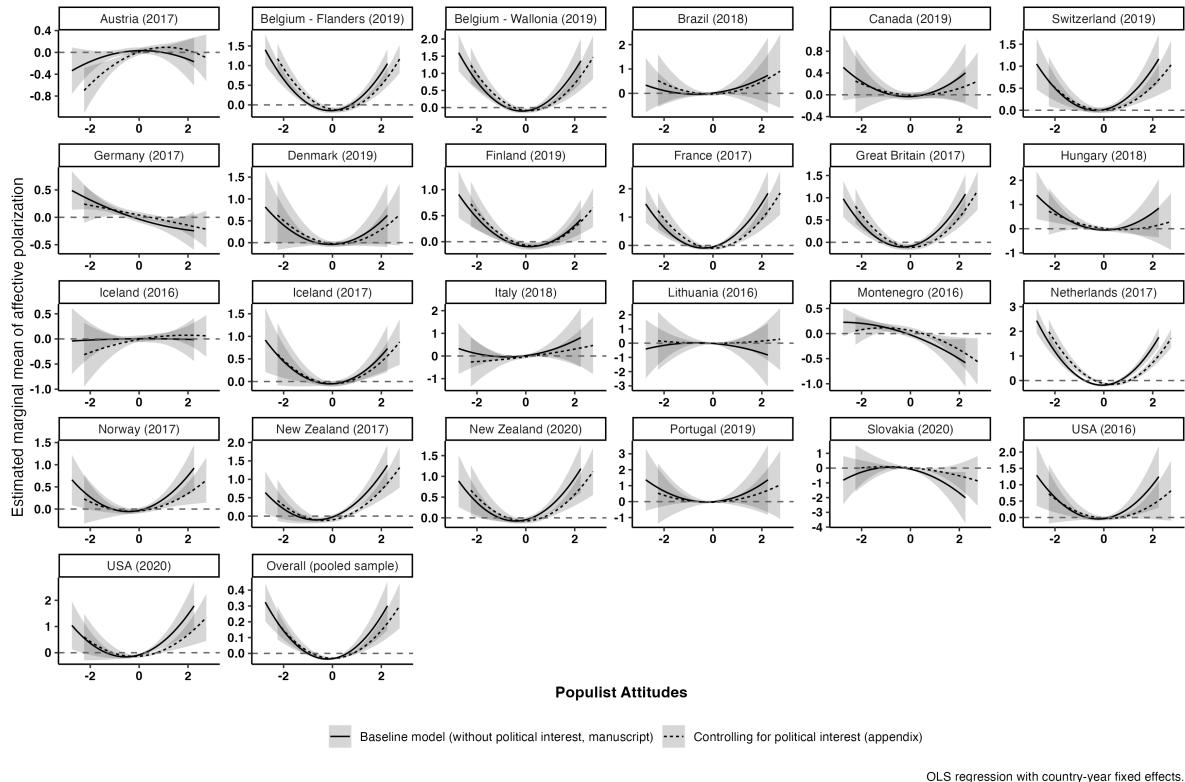
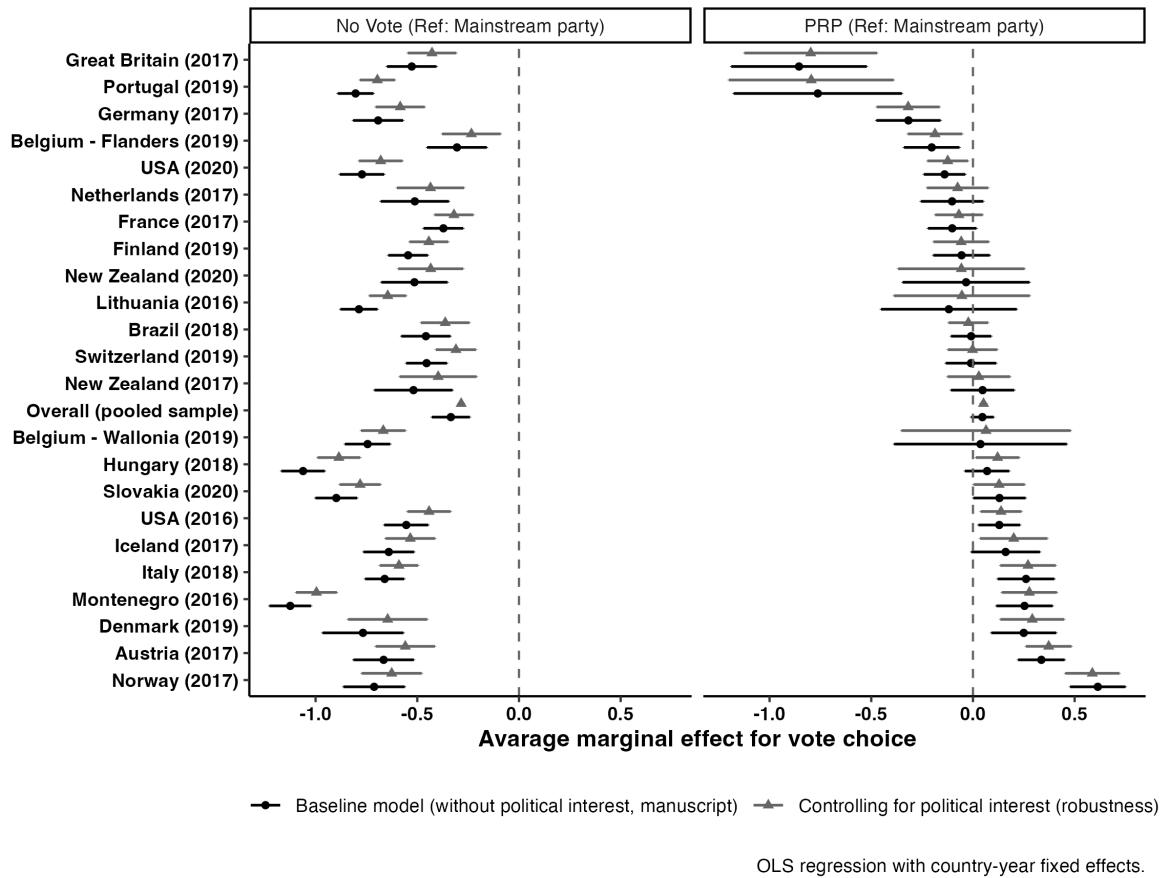


Figure A17: Marginal effect of vote choice on affective polarization with and without political interest, controlling for all the other variables included in the model. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals around the estimates.



## 6 Descriptives

Variable	N	N = 51,37
<b>Spread-of-score party</b>	44,287	
Mean (SD)		2.43 (1.18)
Median (IQR)		2.50 (1.67, 3.18)
Range		0.00 - 5.00
<b>Spread-of-score leader (only for Switzerland and USA)</b>	48,829	
Mean (SD)		3.22 (2.43)
Median (IQR)		2.62 (1.74, 3.67)
Range		0.00 - 10.00
<b>Average party affect</b>	44,891	
Mean (SD)		4.38 (1.57)
Median (IQR)		4.50 (3.50, 5.29)
Range		0.00 - 10.00
<b>Average leader affect (only for Switzerland and USA)</b>	49,360	
Mean (SD)		4.50 (1.65)
Median (IQR)		4.50 (3.50, 5.44)
Range		0.00 - 10.00
<b>Weighted spread-of-score party (robustness)</b>	40,741	

	Mean (SD)	1.92 (0.72)
	Median (IQR)	1.86 (1.53, 2.26)
	Range	0.00 - 3.95
	<b>Weighted spread-of-score leader (robustness, only for Switzerland and USA)</b>	48,829
	Mean (SD)	2.83 (2.45)
	Median (IQR)	1.98 (1.58, 2.55)
	Range	0.00 - 10.00
	<b>Mean distance most-liked party (robustness)</b>	36,121
#	Mean (SD)	5.59 (2.37)
#	Median (IQR)	5.39 (3.87, 7.17)
#	Range	1.00 - 10.00
	<b>Mean distance most-liked leader (robustness, only for Switzerland and USA)</b>	33,700
	Mean (SD)	5.46 (2.22)
	Median (IQR)	5.24 (3.98, 7.00)
	Range	1.00 - 10.00
	<b>Mean distance in-party (robustness)</b>	29,048
	Mean (SD)	5.05 (2.42)
	Median (IQR)	5.00 (3.33, 6.67)
	Range	0.00 - 10.00

	<b>Mean distance in-party leader (robustness, only for Switzerland and USA)</b>	29,945
	Mean (SD)	4.92 (2.75)
	Median (IQR)	4.71 (2.86, 7.00)
	Range	0.00 - 10.00
	<b>Populism (E3004_2, Anti-elitism)</b>	50,023
	Mean (SD)	3.21 (1.27)
	Median (IQR)	3.00 (2.00, 4.00)
	Range	1.00 - 5.00
	<b>Populism (E3004_6, People centrism)</b>	49,653
†	Mean (SD)	3.34 (1.27)
	Median (IQR)	4.00 (2.00, 4.00)
	Range	1.00 - 5.00
	<b>Populism (E3004_1, Manicheism)</b>	48,363
	Mean (SD)	2.92 (1.21)
	Median (IQR)	3.00 (2.00, 4.00)
	Range	1.00 - 5.00
	<b>Populism (robustness, E3004_3, 6-item model)</b>	49,893
	Mean (SD)	3.33 (1.16)
	Median (IQR)	3.00 (2.00, 4.00)

9†

Range	1.00 - 5.00
<b>Populism (robustness, E3004_4, 6-item model)</b>	49,505
Mean (SD)	2.92 (1.27)
Median (IQR)	3.00 (2.00, 4.00)
Range	1.00 - 5.00
<b>Populism (robustness, E3004_7, 6-item model)</b>	49,855
Mean (SD)	3.32 (1.26)
Median (IQR)	4.00 (2.00, 4.00)
Range	1.00 - 5.00
<b>Populism sum score index (robustness, 3-item model)</b>	50,501
Mean (SD)	3.09 (0.96)
Median (IQR)	3.00 (2.33, 3.67)
Range	0.33 - 5.00
<b>Populism Wuttke index (robustness, 3-item model))</b>	47,509
Mean (SD)	2.35 (1.10)
Median (IQR)	2.00 (2.00, 3.00)
Range	1.00 - 5.00
<b>Vote Choice</b>	51,037
Non-voters	11,647 / 51,037 (23%)

Mainstream voters	30,990 / 51,037 (61%)
PRP voters	8,400 / 51,037 (16%)
<b>Respondent's sex assigned at birth (E2002)</b>	50,868
Male	24,448 / 50,868 (48%)
Female	26,420 / 50,868 (52%)
<b>Respondent's education (E2003)</b>	49,786
Mean (SD)	5.16 (1.93)
Median (IQR)	5.00 (4.00, 7.00)
Range	1.00 - 9.00
<b>Respondent's age</b>	50,272
Mean (SD)	50.78 (17.72)
Median (IQR)	52.00 (36.00, 65.00)
Range	16.00 - 100.00
<b>Interest in politics (robustness, E3001)</b>	50,764
Mean (SD)	2.80 (0.90)
Median (IQR)	3.00 (2.00, 3.00)
Range	1.00 - 4.00
<b>Internal political efficacy (robustness, E3003)</b>	49,964
Mean (SD)	3.64 (1.08)

Median (IQR)	4.00 (3.00, 4.00)
Range	1.00 - 5.00
<b>Left-Right self-placement (robustness, E3020)</b>	<b>44,981</b>
Mean (SD)	5.32 (2.55)
Median (IQR)	5.00 (4.00, 7.00)
Range	0.00 - 10.00
<b>Country-year cases (E1004)</b>	<b>51,037</b>
Austria (2017)	1,203 / 51,037 (2.4%)
Belgium - Flanders (2019)	1,084 / 51,037 (2.1%)
Belgium - Wallonia (2019)	730 / 51,037 (1.4%)
Brazil (2018)	2,506 / 51,037 (4.9%)
Canada (2019)	2,889 / 51,037 (5.7%)
Denmark (2019)	1,418 / 51,037 (2.8%)
Finland (2019)	1,598 / 51,037 (3.1%)
France (2017)	1,830 / 51,037 (3.6%)
Germany (2017)	2,032 / 51,037 (4.0%)
Great Britain (2017)	984 / 51,037 (1.9%)
Hungary (2018)	1,208 / 51,037 (2.4%)
Iceland (2016)	1,295 / 51,037 (2.5%)

†

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	Iceland (2017)	2,073 / 51,037 (4.1%)
	Italy (2018)	2,001 / 51,037 (3.9%)
	Lithuania (2016)	1,500 / 51,037 (2.9%)
	Montenegro (2016)	1,213 / 51,037 (2.4%)
	Netherlands (2017)	1,903 / 51,037 (3.7%)
	New Zealand (2017)	1,808 / 51,037 (3.5%)
	New Zealand (2020)	1,725 / 51,037 (3.4%)
	Norway (2017)	1,792 / 51,037 (3.5%)
	Portugal (2019)	1,500 / 51,037 (2.9%)
†	Slovakia (2020)	1,003 / 51,037 (2.0%)
	Switzerland (2019)	4,645 / 51,037 (9.1%)
	USA (2016)	3,648 / 51,037 (7.1%)
	USA (2020)	7,449 / 51,037 (15%)

n / N (%)

Table A10: Descriptive Statistics