Never Mind, I'll Find Someone Like Me: The Relationship between Perceived Representation and Populist Attitudes*

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Abstract

The rise of populism is often linked to representation gaps. Due to endogeneity between populism and perceptions of representation, this has been hard to test causally. We use an experiment manipulating voters' perceptions of representation in order to identify their causal effect on populist sentiment on representative samples from 12 European countries (n = 23,725). Respondents are first asked to state their preference on two EU policy issues. Next, they read a vignette about how parties in their countries have sorted themselves on it during the European elections, which can indicate either that at least one party has taken the respondent's position on that issue, or that no party has done so. We also vary whether parties have all taken the same position, or if they assumed different views from each other, and follow with questions on populist attitudes. Results show that poor representation is connected to higher populist attitudes among individuals who were not populist to begin with, and are the first causally identified confirmation that the cartelisation of European parties contributed to recent populist successes.

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1 Introduction

Populism is one of the main challenges for democratic societies today. Be it Brexit, Viktor Orban, or the AfD in Germany, populist parties and forces are generally perceived to joggle the very foundations of liberal democracy and the European integration project (Levitsky and Loxton, 2013; Huber and Schimpf, 2016; Rooduijn, 2018). Nevertheless, in spite of much research, the question of why people support and vote for populists is still open. Significant work has already investigated the influence of economic factors (e.g. Rico and Anduiza, 2017; Rodrik, 2017; Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016), anti-immigrant/anti-refugee sentiment (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Van Der Brug, 2003; Zhirkov, 2014), or skepticism towards the EU and globalization (Ford, Goodwin and Cutts, 2012; Kriesi et al., 2006). However, an important theoretical argument about the roots of populist sentiment stresses that it may be a response to a perceived representation gap (Mair, 2002; Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017): voters who feel that mainstream parties have become too similar to each other, without any choices appealing to them, may endorse populist views.

This explanation has been tested with observational data (e.g. Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018; Oliver and Rahn, 2016). However, due to the potential endogeneity of populist attitudes and perceptions of representation, it is not clear whether it is a causal relation, and in what direction. This paper uses an experimental design that aims to manipulate voters' perceptions of representation to identify their causal effect on populist sentiment. Our main research question is: do perceptions of representation failures increase populist attitudes?

We run a vignette survey experiment on data collected in twelve European coun-

tries, East and West, in the context of the run up to the 2019 European Parliament elections, with a total of almost 24,000 respondents. We first ask respondents to state their positions on two issues pertaining to the European elections (random draw from a total of eight possible topics), and afterwards describe different scenarios of how political parties in their countries could position themselves on those issues. For some respondents, at least one party (or all parties) took their preferred position, while for others no party took their preferred option. This instrument isolates the manipulation of quality of substantive representation by parties. After that, we have a battery of questions measuring populist attitudes, to see if and how feelings of good or bad political representation are linked to populism.

Our findings show that bad representation is linked to higher populist attitudes among individuals who had lower levels of populism before the treatment. It confirms the 'activation' theory of populist attitudes, according to which they lay dormant in most individuals but need to be activated by an appropriate context and messages (Hawkins et al., 2018). Moreover, we show that effects are concentrated in those treatment conditions where parties assume different positions, and are not all coalescing around a single option. This is evidence for the link between cartelisation and support for populists in Europe in recent times (Mair, 2002).

2 Populism and Representation

After decades of debate, political science has recently coordinated on a common ideational definition of populism (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Mudde, 2004).

It is seen as a set of ideas according to which politics is a moral struggle between two antagonistic groups: "the people" and "the elite". The people is homogeneous and unified, essentially virtuous, and politics should be nothing but the implementation of the popular will. This people, however, is oppressed by the elite: a small coalition of powerful actors that illegitimately controls politics for its own benefit. Populists, therefore, call for systemic changes, in order to take politics back from the elites and restore power to the people, in a good versus evil view of the political struggle (Hawkins, 2010). A key property of the ideational approach to populism is that populist ideology can be adopted not only by parties but also voters. If we want to understand populist party support in this framework, we need to understand how populist attitudes on the voter level emerge.

We argue that populist party support can, at least partially, be explained by failures of democratic representation in the party system. Specifically, we expect that if individuals feel that parties are not representing them (*egotropic representation*) nor the overall distribution of voter preferences in a country (*sociotropic representation*), this will activate populist attitudes as anti-system attitudes. In turn, these populist attitudes will render voters more likely to cast their vote for populist parties. The basic intuition behind the representation gap argument is that populist forces are only able to credibly establish a discourse counterposing "the people" against "the elite" if a significant part of the population perceives political elites to not represent them well. Populists can then exploit this gap to substantiate their argument about the struggle between the people and the political elite (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017).

On a theoretical level, the idea that colluding parties, which do not represent anymore the diversity of their voters' opinions, leads to disenchantment with politics, lower political participation, and anti-system sentiment has been most purposefully argued by Katz and Mair in their cartel party thesis (Katz and Mair, 2009; Mair, 2002, 2013). Most importantly in this view, the increasing formation of "grand coalitions" between left and right parties that renders parties more similar in the eyes of voters (Fortunato and Stevenson, 2013), could be a root cause of populist sentiment in Europe. In the literature on systems support, several recent contributions have argued and shown that if citizens' preferences on an ideological left-right dimension are not well represented by parties, satisfaction with democracy suffers (Ezrow and Xezonakis, 2011; Mayne and Hakhverdian, 2016). In the same vein, we know that institutions of consensual democracy that enable the representation of more diverse preferences at the expense of less influence of the majority are associated with higher satisfaction with democracy for "losers" and lower for "winners" of the electoral process (Anderson and Guillory, 1997). This suggests that the representation of citizens' views by parties, moderated by the potential of these parties to influence policy-making, impacts significantly on political support. Some work also shows directly that citizens' reported perceptions of the quality of representation by parties influence their satisfaction with democracy (Aarts and Thomassen, 2008).

In comparison to more classical conceptions of systems support such as satisfaction with democracy, populist attitudes are even more closely bound up with evaluations of political parties. Populist attitudes explicitly relate to the relationship between citizens and the political elite as viewed from the citizens' perspective.

In particular, the disconnect between people's preferences and parties' political positions is at the core of populist ideology. Hence, several conceptual and theoretical contributions in the populism literature have stressed that "poor" representation of citizens' views by parties could activate populist sentiment (Hawkins, Rovira Kaltwasser and Andreadis, 2018; Hawkins et al., 2018). However, the empirical evidence for a link between the quality of party-based representation and populist attitudes is quite limited to date. Castanho Silva (2018) presents some observational evidence between the formation of grand coalitions and populist party success, and (Oliver and Rahn, 2016) show that citizens' perceptions of party responsiveness were particularly low in the U.S. preceding the election of Donald Trump as president. But we are not aware of any experimental work that addresses this issue specifically. Importantly, as representation by parties should affect voters' perceptions of representation, which in turn should affect populist attitudes, the major causal link lies directly inside the voters' minds – between their perceptions of representation and their populist attitudes. Hence, all observational studies face major causal identification problems, since citizens' perceptions of how well their preferences are represented by parties may well be endogenous to their populist pre-dispositions. For instance, populist voters may *perceive* representation to be more deficient than non-populist voters, e.g. due to perceptual screens or motivated reasoning. Below we therefore present a survey-experimental design that allows us to exogenously manipulate voters' perceptions of representation through different scenarios of party representation.

If perceptions of representation are based on actual representation and do impact on populist attitudes, then part of the populist vote should be due to a failure of

representation. Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018) have recently shown in a cross-national study that standard populist attitude measures are strong predictors of vote choice for populist parties, and in fact, populist attitude measures were partially validated against their predictive power in explaining the populist vote. In terms of theories of vote choice, (Neuner and Wratil, 2018) argue that populist supply and demand in the electoral marketplace should be conceived of in terms of a "valence" model of vote choice, in which some parties stress their populist ideology and some voters value this ideology more but where there is no positional competition, i.e. no party stresses and no voters value "anti-populism". Rather, mainstream parties are simply not the issue owners of the populism issue and cannot become so as populist ideology is, at its core, directed against them.[1] In this sense, the collusion of parties on a major political conflict dimension (i.e. left-right) always bears the potential to activate the importance of valence factors in voting (e.g. Green and Hobolt, 2008) – in our case, populism.

While the fundamental causal chain behind our argument has been sketched, we expect two variables to intervene. First, we expect that the salience of political issues or dimensions matters. If gaps in representation occur on issues/dimensions more salient to the individual, such gaps may more strongly influence her perceptions and feelings of representation and such perceptions may also more heavily influence populist attitudes. Second, in line with (Busby, Hawkins and Gubler, 2019) we expect a "ceiling effect" with regard to the causal impact of perceived representation on populist attitudes: Those individuals that already have high pre-treatment populism,

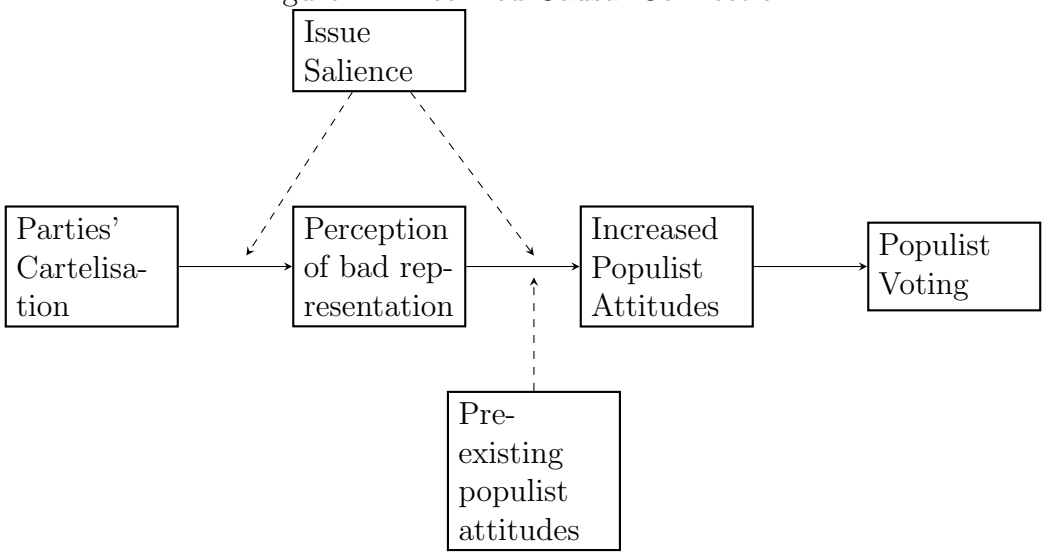
[1]This model is based on the idea that populist attitudes are, at bottom, socially desirable – people like to be anti-elitist and criticize the political establishment (Neuner and Wratil, 2017).

that is, for whom the attitude has been activated already, should react less strongly to perceived failures of representation. In turn, the bulk of the causal effect should stem from people with relatively weak populist attitudes, for whom experiences of weak representation can activate their populist sentiment.

Note that the argument we have just laid out is not a "spatial" argument. We are not claiming that voters are turning to populist parties because these parties fill representation gaps left by mainstream parties in the ideological space, i.e. this is *not* a Downsian (1957) argument. What we postulate instead is a direct effect – independent of the populist parties' position(s) – that runs from disenchantment about the system of representation to the activation of populist sentiment and a protest vote for populist parties, which mobilize populist sentiment in electoral campaigns.

The theoretical argument laid above lays out a causal chain that is depicted in Figure 1. Political parties assuming similar positions on issues, which are not congruent with voters, lead to perceptions of poor representation by the citizenry. These perceptions then activate populist attitudes, or a view that political elites are colluding against the people. These heightened populist attitudes, on their turn, lead to the behavioral consequence of voting for populist parties, given that a fitting one is available. We designed an experiment to test the first two steps in this chain.

Figure 1: Theorized Causal Connection



3 Data and Method

Data for this study comes from a 12-country survey commissioned by the Bertelsmann Foundation ahead of the 2019 European Elections.[2] The surveys were administered online by YouGov, with nationally representative samples of around 2,000 respondents per country (exact numbers for each country in the last column of Table 1 in January 2019, four months ahead of the EP Elections. The survey included various questions on political issues and opinions related to Europe, and the experiment was included at the end of the survey flow. It took around 25 minutes to complete. Descriptive statistics for demographic characteristics of each country in this sample are in Table 1. In total, there are 23,725 respondents.

The European elections present an excellent case to test our theoretical model. On

[2]Countries: Austria, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Italy, Netherlands, Poland, Spain, Sweden, and the UK.

the one hand, a large body of literature has argued that populist sentiment in Europe is often mobilized by parties with regard to European integration (e.g. Taggart, 2000), which suggests that parties misrepresentation on EU issues could be a particularly important driver of populist sentiment. On the other hand, voters' information about parties' stances on European issues is traditionally low (e.g. Hobolt, 2007). This allows us to more credibly manipulate their perceptions of representation, even on rather salient issues, than it would be possible for national issues, where parties' positions are more fixed.

Table 1: Sample Descriptive Statistics

	Age	Low Inc.	Med. Inc.	High Inc.	Low Educ.	Med Educ.	High Educ.	Fem.	Left-Right	N
Austria	46	0.17	0.38	0.29	0.27	0.55	0.18	0.47	4.97	1,984
Denmark	52	0.06	0.22	0.51	0.17	0.51	0.32	0.56	5.20	1,973
France	52	0.27	0.36	0.26	0.17	0.50	0.33	0.57	5.23	1,949
Germany	48	0.22	0.36	0.26	0.25	0.49	0.26	0.53	4.74	1,995
Greece	40	0.54	0.25	0.11	0.27	0.22	0.51	0.50	5.04	2,027
Hungary	45	0.72	0.15	0.05	0.14	0.30	0.57	0.52	5.28	1,952
Italy	48	0.47	0.30	0.07	0.48	0.39	0.13	0.54	5.48	1,952
Netherlands	49	0.16	0.40	0.27	0.31	0.37	0.32	0.52	5.41	1,924
Poland	43	0.67	0.20	0.04	0.15	0.62	0.23	0.50	5.31	1,911
Spain	48	0.34	0.36	0.13	0.48	0.25	0.27	0.58	4.46	1,949
Sweden	53	0.12	0.27	0.44	0.11	0.59	0.30	0.56	5.57	1,976
UK	47	0.22	0.29	0.28	0.23	0.38	0.39	0.52	4.87	2,133

Notes:**Age** is the median age; **Low Income** is the share of respondents earning $> 1,500$ EUR/month; **Medium Income** is the share of respondents earning 1,500 EUR to 3,000 EUR/month; **High Income** is the share of respondents earning $> 3,000$ EUR/month; **Left-Right:** mean self-placement on 0–10 Left-right scale.

3.1 Measuring Populism

Our main dependent variable is populist attitudes. We measure it with the scale by Castanho Silva et al. (2018), which divides populism into its three theoretical components: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and a Manichaean outlook of politics (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017). This scale has been tested and validated across several countries, meaning it is ideal for a cross-national study such as this, and performs well in comparison to other existing populist attitudes scales (Castanho Silva et al., 2019). Due to space constraints, we could not ask all nine questions from all respondents. Therefore, each person only saw six items, always two from each dimension, randomly. The vignette experiment is performed twice (more details below), so each respondent saw three items after each iteration. The dependent variable is operationalized as the mean of the answers to the three items saw after a vignette.[3] The full text of items, along with descriptive statistics, are in the first part of Table 2.

The second part of Table 2 includes a measurement model, demonstrating that the items work at capturing the constructs they are supposed to. This is a multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis with three factors, one for each theorized component of populism (Jöreskog, 1971). Factor loadings are constrained to be the same across the 12 countries. The model has very good fit to the data: except for the χ^2 test which is significant, what is expected given the large sample (Kline, 2016), all other model fit indicators are within the recommended ranges for good fit by tze Hu and Bentler (1999). The fact that the model with constrained loadings has good fit to the

[3]Items *Ppl2, Ant2,* and *Man2* are reverse-worded, meaning that higher agreement denotes less populism. We reversed the coding for these items when taking the average.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Measurement Model for the Populist Attitudes Dependent Variable

	Descriptives			Factor Loadings		
Item	N	Mean	St. Dev.	People-c.	Anti-el.	Manich.
Ppl1. Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people.	15,931	5.945	1.415	1.000		
Ppl2. Politicians don't have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.*	15,799	2.625	1.800	0.853		
Ppl3. The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics.	15,720	5.409	1.523	0.972		
Ant1. The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.	15,818	5.079	1.715		1.000	
Ant2. Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.*	15,734	3.476	1.759		1.098	
Ant3. Quite a few of the people running the government are crooked.	15,898	4.942	1.827		1.031	
Man1. You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.	15,671	3.122	1.812			1.000
Man2. The people I disagree with politically are not evil.*	15,846	5.145	1.666			1.419
Man3. The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed.	15,933	3.423	1.662			0.920

Model fit: $\chi^2 = 714.863$, $df = 341$, $p < .001$. CFI: 0.990, TLI: 0.988, RMSEA: 0.024 (90% CI: 0.021 – 0.026), SRMR: 0.025. N = 23,725.

All questions asked on a 1–7 strongly disagree–strongly agree scale. Factor loadings are unstandardized from a Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis, with loadings constrained to be the same across countries. The model also includes a method factor for the six positive-worded items, with loadings constrained to be the same for all indicators, following (DiStefano and Motl, 2006). The method factor is orthogonal to the three substantive factors. Maximum Likelihood Robust estimation.

data indicates that this battery is invariant across countries (i.e, have no differential item functioning), and can be used in cross-national research (Davidov et al., 2014).

We also measure populist attitudes before the treatment, to investigate if they have a moderating effect on the treatment. These are asked with a completely different battery of eight items, on a 1–5 agree-disagree scale. Six of the eight items come from the widely used (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014) battery, and we include an additional two from (Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). This scale also has good measurement properties and shows metric invariance across countries in this sample.[4] We take the average response from the eight items to indicate an individuals' level of pre-treatment populist attitudes.

3.2 Experimental Design

By manipulating information about parties positions on issues, we experimentally induce different perceptions of the quality of representation, and afterwards test if those perceptions predict heighetened populist attitudes. The design works as follows: first, respondents were asked to give their opinion in one of eight issues which might be relevant for the European elections. Issues were chosen to cover a wide variety of policy fields, and include both high and low salience topics. Examples include Brexit, agricultural subsidies, European military cooperation, and asylum policy.[5] For all questions, there are always three possible choices. For example, one issue was the cutting of EU transfers to member states accused of violating democratic norms. The question text reads "*Some people say that the EU should*

[4]Results and full text of the items in the Online Appendix.

[5]The full list of issues and policy positions are in the Online Appendix.

cut payments to member states accused of violating democratic norms, in order to protect European values. Others say that cutting payments to these countries would be an illegitimate interference with their internal affairs. What do you prefer?", to which the three options are a) Cutting payments; b) Maintaining payments; and c) Increasing payments. Right after choosing one favorite option, respondents are asked how much they care about the issue, on a 1–5 scale, in order to tap into the salience.

Next, we ask them to imagine that parties in their countries had announced their positions on that issue, and present one of the three scenarios as shown in Table 3 – there using the example of transfers to member states accused of violating democratic norms.[6] All vignettes are introduced with the following text: "*[ISSUE] will be a key issue in this year's European election campaign. Some people expect that the major [COUNTRY] parties will adopt the following positions on this issue*". What option appears as position 1, 2, or 3 (say, cutting or maintaining payments) is randomized for each respondent. Therefore, for some respondents their position would have been hypothetically taken by at least one party, and for others their preferred position would not have been taken by any party.

By manipulating whether parties have their positions or not, we expect to manipulate respondents' feelings of representation. This is then measured with a first post-treatment question, which asks how well represented do respondents feel by parties on this issue (from 1 = not at all represented, to 7 = very well). Respondents are then asked how likely they think it is that parties will take the positions

[6]To assure we do not deceive survey takers, the introductory text emphasizes that these are hypothetical scenarios, and asks respondents to imagine that parties would have positioned themselves like that.

Table 3: Example of the Experimental Setup

Position	**Taken by**
Scenario 1:	
Position 1 – Cutting payments	All parties
Position 2 – Maintaining payments	No party
Position 3 – Increasing payments	No party
Scenario 2:	
Position 1 – Cutting payments	At least one party
Position 2 – Maintaining payments	At least one party
Position 3 – Increasing payments	No party
Scenario 3:	
Position 1 – Cutting payments	At least one party
Position 2 – Maintaining payments	At least one party
Position 3 – Increasing payments	At least one party

described (from 1 = not at all to 7 = very likely), which serves as a check on whether they believe the treatment stimuli. Our dependent variable, populist attitudes, are measured with the scale by Castanho Silva et al. (2018)[7], which consists of 9 items, spread into the three main dimensions of populism: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and a Manichaean outlook of politics – each subdimension being comprised of three items. Each respondent sees one random item from each subdimension – three in total. After that, we repeated the experiment one more time, with another issue, another randomly chosen vignette, and another three populist attitudes items which are different from the first three.

[7]A recent review of populist attitudes scales (Castanho Silva et al., 2019) shows that this, together with Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2014) and Schulz et al. (2017) were the best performers across a battery of tests for internal, external, and cross-national validity.

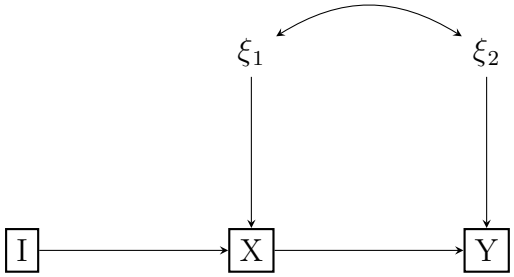
3.3 Model

Given the mediation structure of our hypothesis, we test our theory with a Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) approach (Kline, 2016). For the most simple test, whether manipulation of parties positions lead to bad representation perceptions, and that to populist attitudes, one could also use an instrumental variables (IV) approach. One may reasonably expect that the IV assumptions hold: parties' positions should only affect populist attitudes through individuals' representation perceptions, and not through any other paths (exclusion restriction), and parties not assuming voters' positions should have a strong effect on voters' perceptions of the quality of their political representation (strong first stage).

In effect, the typical IV Wald estimator is mathematically the same as the path SEM depicted in Figure 2 (Hershberger and Marcoulides, 2006; Stelzl, 1986). In it, the instrument I predicts the independent variable X, which in turn predicts the dependent variable Y, while the residuals of X and Y, denoted by ξ_1 and ξ_2 respectively, are correlated with one another. Results for our first model, using a Wald estimator, are in the Online Appendix, and the reader may confirm that the estimates are exactly the same. Our preference for Structural Equation Modeling, however, is given by its flexibility to incorporate interactions through multigroup estimation. In subsequent steps, we test the impacts of pre-existing populist attitudes and of salience on these relationships, and SEM allows for the tests of differences between coefficients across groups to be estimated within the same model.

In our case, therefore, we operationalize the instrument as whether the respondents' preferred position has been shown to be taken by at least one or all parties

Figure 2: Instrumental Variable Model Specified as SEM



(1) or not by any party (0).[8] This predicts the independent variable, meaning, feeling well-represented by the parties on that issue. Feeling of representation, in turn, predicts populist attitudes.

To test for treatment effect heterogeneity, conditional on pre-treatment variables, we use a multigroup SEM approach.[9] In it, a model is fit simultaneously to different categorical groups. It is possible to fix certain estimated model parameters to be the same or not across groups. If all parameters are left free to vary across groups, this is called the *configural* model. If a parameter is restricted to be the same across groups, this is a nested, more restricted model. In the first, it is possible to test, for example, whether the treatment effects are significant for one group and not the other(s). With the second, it is possible to test whether two estimated coefficients are significantly different across groups or not, using a χ^2 model comparison test, since the difference in the $-2 * Log - likelihoods$ of two nested models are χ^2-distributed with degrees of freedom equal to the difference in the number of estimated parameters between

[8] A pure randomization of all the conditions with equal probabilities (1/3 for each) would lead to a case in which many more respondents see an option where they were represented than not. To correct that, we fixed the probabilities of showing scenarios 1, 2, and 3 to 0.5, 0.25, and 0.25, respectively.

[9] All estimates obtained with the R package `lavaan` v.6.2 (Rosseel, 2012).

the models.

4 Analysis and Results

Results for the initial model are in Table 4. We see that being treated, i.e., being told that at least one party shares your position, does increase feelings of representation. Receiving the treatment leads to a statistically significant increase of 0.187 standard deviations in feeling better represented. However, feeling better represented has no effect on populism – the standardized estimate is -0.033, virtually 0, and not significant.

Next, we test whether there is a difference in treatment effects between individuals with high and low pre-treatment levels of populism. We average each respondents' answers to the eight-item battery and classify the highest 33% as being populist, while the remainder are non-populists.[10] We then use a multigroup SEM, on the exact same model as before, but allowing all model parameters (regression coefficients, intercepts, and residual variances) to vary across groups (high and low populism). Results with this approach are in the second part of Table 4: the standardized coefficient of populism regressed on representation is negative (-0.075) and significant for the group which was not-populist before the treatment. For those who were populist before the treatment, that effect is almost zero (0.008), and not significant. Moreover, the test of model difference shows that constraining these two parameters to be the same across groups produces a significantly worst fitting model (χ^2 difference of 5.503

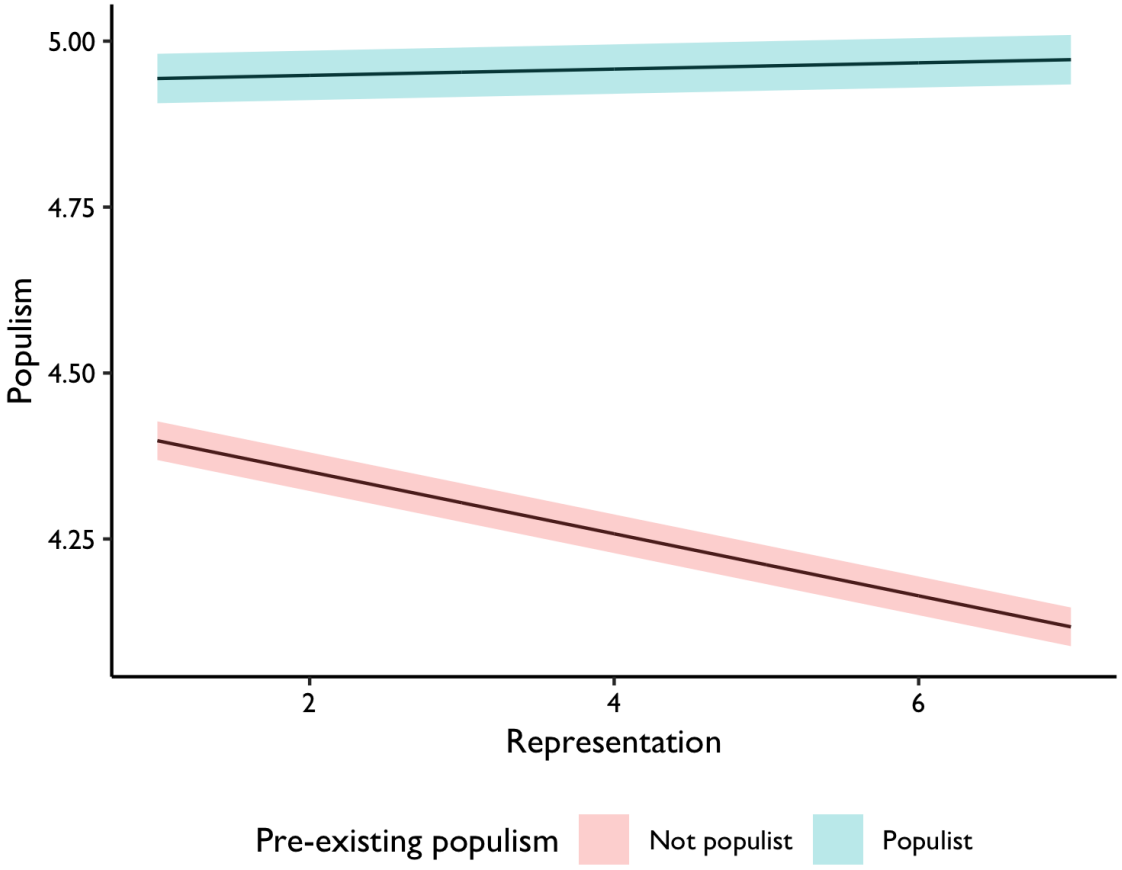
[10] In the Online Appendix we report results with the cut being imposed at 20% and a 50-50 split sample. Findings remain the same.

Table 4: Experimental Results

Predictor		Predicted	Group	Estimate	S.E.	p-value
Entire Sample						
Treatment	→	Representation		.187	.020	$< .001$
Representation	→	Populism		$-.033$	.023	.149
Multigroup Analysis - Conditional on Pre-treatment Populism						
Representation	→	Populism	Populist	.008	.031	.800
Treatment	→	Representation	Populist	.172	.016	$< .001$
Representation	→	Populism	Not populist	$-.075$	.022	.001
Treatment	→	Representation	Not populist	.211	.025	$< .001$
Multigroup analysis: Test of Model Difference:						
Model		*df*	χ^2	χ^2 diff.	*df* diff	p-value
Configural		0	0.00			
Equal coefficients		1	2.656	5.503	1	.019

N = 47499; N (Populist): 17775;, N (Not populist): 28114. Standardized estimates from a Structural Equation Model. Maximum likelihood robust estimation with country clustered standard errors reported. For the test of model difference we use the Satorra and Bentler (2001) correction for robust estimation. *Configural* refers to the model with coefficients free to vary across groups (populist v. not populist); *Equal coefficients* refers to the model where the coefficients of Representation on Populism are restricted to be the same across the two groups (Populist v. Not populist).

Figure 3: Conditional Effects of Representation on Populism



with the Satorra and Bentler (2001) correction, $df = 1$, p = .019), indicating that the difference between the two coefficients is statistically significant.

The interaction effect is shown in Figure 3. We note how those individuals who had high values in pre-treatment populism, also have much higher values in the post-treatment measure, and there is little difference made by how well represented they feel. For those who were lower on pre-treatment populism, on the other hand, the better represented they feel (higher values on the x-axis), the lower their levels of

populism.

Therefore, we find evidence for a heterogeneity of treatment effects, whereby feeling badly represented leads to more populist attitudes among those individuals who were less populist in the beginning, but not among those who were already highly populist. This is in line with the findings by Busby, Hawkins and Gubler (2019), who use a framing experiment to activate populist attitudes through blame attribution, and identify effects only among those with low pre-treatment levels of populism.

4.1 Salience

A next question is how the importance of issues for individuals may affect this picture. We can easily imagine that, if a voter does not care about something, they will not care whether parties take their position on it or not, and should not become more populist in case of not being represented. Right after respondents were asked their opinion on each issue, they were asked to indicate, on a 1–5 scale, how important that issue was for them. We create two groups from it, based on these answers: those who indicated an importance above the middle of the scale (3), were assigned to high salience. Those who reported an importance at or below 3 were assigned to a group of low salience. This division does an almost even split of the sample, with one half going to each group.[11]

Results in Table 5 indicate that salience has a significant impact on the first stage: Treatment → Feeling of representation. However, it does not have a significant effect

[11] In the Appendix we show a robustness test with estimates where we assign respondents in the middle of the scale to the high salience group instead. Results remain the same.

Table 5: Experimental Results – Low and High Salience

Predictor		Predicted	Group	Estimate	S.E.	p-value
Representation	$\rightarrow$	Populism	Low Salience	.020	.046	.660
Treatment	$\rightarrow$	Representation	Low Salience	.153	.016	0
Representation	$\rightarrow$	Populism	High Salience	$-.073$	.039	.059
Treatment	$\rightarrow$	Representation	High Salience	.221	.025	0
Multigroup analysis: Test of Model Difference:						
Model		*df*	χ^2	χ^2 diff.	*df* diff	p-value
Configural		0	0.00			
Eq. coeffs. first stage		1	121.38	14.514	1	$< .001$
Eq. coeffs. second stage		1	3.049	2.783	1	.095

N (Low salience): 24,968; N (High salience): 22,481. Standardized estimates from a Structural Equation Model. Maximum likelihood robust estimation with country clustered standard errors reported. For the test of model difference we use the Satorra and Bentler (2001) correction for robust estimation. *Configural* refers to the model with all coefficients free to vary across groups (low v. high salience); *Eq. coeffs. first stage* refers to the model where the coefficients of Treatment on Representation are restricted to be the same across the two groups (low v. high salience). *Eq. coeffs. second stage* refers to the model where the coefficients of Representation on Populism are restricted to be the same across the two groups.

on the second, i.e., Feeling of representation → Populist attitudes. The first stage effect is significant in both groups (standardized β's of .153 for low salience, and .221 for high). However, the model comparison indicates a significantly worse fitting model if we would constrain these two coefficients to be the same, indicating there is a significant difference between coefficients. For the second stage, in none of the groups the effect is significant, and the difference between them (one being small positive, the other negative) is not significant, indicating that salience does not affect the relationship between feeling of representation and populist attitudes. In sum: even if an individual does not care about an issue, they still feel worse represented if no party takes their position on it. However, they feel significantly worse represented if it is an important issue for them, as opposed to an unimportant one. Nevertheless, once they feel poorly represented, the effects of that on populist attitudes do not change depending on whether the issue is important or not.

4.2 Elite collusion

A final point to test in the theory is the specific aspect of cartelisation. Theory suggests that populism is related to the perception that mainstream parties are too similar to one another, with no real alternatives. Therefore, the link between representation and populism would not be purely one where having no parties supporting your position leads to more populism, but this should be intensified in cases where all parties appear to be the same on an issue. To test for that, we compare how the coefficients in the model change between groups of respondents who saw scenario 1 (where it is said that 'all parties' take one of the positions, and no parties take the

other two) versus the other scenarios, where 'at least one party' took two or three of the options.

In the upper part of Table 6 are the results of the path model, with two groups: 'Collusion' is defined as the respondent having received Scenario 1, meaning that all parties had only one of the three positions, and no party had the other two. 'No collusion' means the respondent received one of the other two options, where parties were said to take at least two of the three possible positions, revealing more diversity in the party system. On the first stage, we observe that individuals feel much better represented if all parties took their position than if there is party system diversity: the standardized coefficient of being treated (i.e., your position was picked by a party) on representation is 0.282 for the collusion group, and 0.114 for the no collusion one. While both are statistically significant, a χ^2 test of model comparison in relation to a model that constrains this regression coefficient to be the same across the two groups (collusion v. no collusion) indicates that the two coefficients are significantly different from one another (χ^2 difference between models $= 109.81$, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). Therefore, individuals feel much better represented if all parties in the system take their preferred position, than if one party takes but other party or parties take other positions.

However, this picture is different when it comes to the relation with populist attitudes: for the collusion group, being better or worse represented has no relation with being more or less populist ($\beta = 0.009$, $p = .66$). In the group where parties take up diverse positions (no collusion), being represented and feeling better represented in consequence leads to significantly lower populist attitudes ($\beta = -.143$, $p < .001$).

The difference between these two coefficients across the groups is statistically significant (χ^2 difference = 22.007, $df = 1$, $p < .001$). This lends evidence to the value of having parties assuming different positions in the party system for populist attitudes: if there is diversity, being better represented actually leads to lower populist attitudes – or, conversely, not being represented when parties assume a variety of positions leads to more populist attitudes.

Table 6: Experimental Results – Elite Collusion

Predictor		Predicted	Group	Estimate	S.E.	p-value
Representation	→	Populism	No Collusion	−.143	.039	.0003
Treated	→	Representation	No Collusion	.114	.015	0
Representation	→	Populism	Collusion	.009	.021	.660
Treated	→	Representation	Collusion	.282	.028	0
Four groups – Pre-treatment populism and collusion						
Representation	→	Populism	No Collusion/Not Populist	−.153	.056	.006
Treated	→	Representation	No Collusion/Not Populist	.125	.019	0
Representation	→	Populism	No Collusion/Populist	−.127	.078	.104
Treated	→	Representation	No Collusion/Populist	.110	.017	0
Representation	→	Populism	Collusion/Not Populist	−.036	.018	.040
Treated	→	Representation	Collusion/Not Populist	.313	.031	0
Representation	→	Populism	Collusion/Populist	.036	.047	.435
Treated	→	Representation	Collusion/Populist	.268	.024	0

The second part of Table 6 includes pre-treatment populist attitudes into the analysis. Now we look at a multigroup model with four groups, interacting pre-existing populism (high v. low) and collusion v. no collusion. We observe how the effects of representation on populism are stronger on the 'no collusion' groups, both for populist and not populist respondents. In the collusion groups, for those who

were low on populism before the treatment this effect is small and barely significant ($\beta = -.036$, $p = .04$). This qualifies the previous findings about the treatment effects: feeling well represented is linked to populist attitudes *if* parties in the political system have assumed diverse positions on an issue. If all parties coalesced around a single position, feelings of representation are not causally connected to higher or lower populism. Therefore, for representation to translate to populism, it is not enough that parties assume voters' positions, but also that parties do represent different political views in the system and do not gather around a single option.

5 Conclusion

In this paper we have put to test the connection between quality of political representation and populist attitudes. To our knowledge, this is the first causally identified test of this much theorized relationship. We have partially confirmed previous findings, and identified the causal mechanisms linking political parties' positions and populism.

First of all, our findings confirm a link between poor quality of political representation and support for populism. While this theory has been brought up by several authors (e.g. Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Rooduijn, van der Brug and de Lange, 2016), it is very difficult by nature to causally isolate these factors. Using a survey experiment in which we manipulate whether individuals are represented by political parties in their countries or not, we are able to experimentally manipulate how well represented they feel and test how, in con-

sequence, that affects populist attitudes. First, we find a ceiling effect: respondents who are highly populist to begin with (top third of the sample) do not respond to this treatment. On the one hand, the finding suggests that they cannot get even more populist, regardless of (lack of) representation. On the other, it is troubling for it also indicates that people who are already highly populist will not lessen their populism even if parties in the political system share their preferences.

The treatment, however, works for the not so populist respondents. There, feeling badly represented by political parties leads to higher populism (or, conversely, being well represented is associated with lower populism). We further find that this link is unrelated to salience: representation and populism are associated, among not populists, even for issues to which they do not ascribe so much importance. Importantly, these effects hold mostly in scenarios where different political parties assume different positions. Where all parties coalesce around one policy option, being well represented is not associated with being less or more populist. It is only in diverse party systems, with real competition on issues, that being well represented is associated with lower populist attitudes.

The implications of these findings are vast. First of all, it confirms the propositions in the ideational theory of populism (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2017), according to which a main cause of the current wave of populism in the world is poor political representation, and its psychological proposition of populist attitudes being latent within people and triggered, or activated, by certain events or messages (Busby, Hawkins and Gubler, 2019; Hawkins et al., 2018). While observational studies had provided support for this theory, in opposition to explanations focused on economic

crises or globalization (e.g. Castanho Silva, 2018; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018; Oliver and Rahn, 2016), we confirm that the causes of populism are to be found in the political realm. Moreover, this also shows the consequences of the much talked-about cartelisation of Western political systems (Katz and Mair, 2009; Mair, 2002). The effects we find in relation to collusion versus diverse parties' position speak in favor of theories suggesting that the tendency towards grand coalitions and lower ideological diversity between main parties are at the roots of contemporary populist upsurges.

Moreover, our findings speak to a growing literature on the effects of representation on political system support. While we here focus on representation on the level of democratic inputs (i.e. how well citizens' preferences are fed into the party system), other work has paid more attention to outputs (i.e. how well citizens' preferences are reflected in political decisions). In line with our findings, this literature has also produced important evidence for the beneficial effect of representation for systems support (e.g. Arnesen and Peters, 2017; Esaiasson et al., 2016; Esaiasson, Gilljam and Persson, 2017).

There are important lessons to be taken also for political parties and practitioners. Our findings emphasize the necessity of parties to 1) listen to their voters and represent their positions, and 2) not to embrace a "There Is No Alternative" discourse. If mainstream parties want to contain their current loss of voters to populist challengers in much of the world, it is imperative that they present real alternatives to citizens. A vibrant exchange of opposing ideas is essential to democratic life and, as it appears, the best prevention against the rise of populism.

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