Populist Attitudes and Political Engagement: Ugly, Bad, and Sometimes Good?

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Representation failures are one of the main reasons for the emergence of populism in contemporary politics. Mainstream parties' convergence towards the centre left parts of the electorate to feel underrepresented. Populists are successful when they engage apathetic voters. In this sense, populism is suggested to be a potential corrective to democracy as long as it engages dissatisfied and disenfranchised citizens, helping close the representation gap. We test this proposition in three experiments with samples from two different countries, to test whether the activation of populist attitudes has impacts on normatively positive and negative political participation. The experimental manipulations show that triggering populism neither makes individuals more likely to participate nor to donate to a political campaign. We also find that activation of populist attitudes makes people more likely to accept political apathy and justify not-voting. Our findings contribute to the 'threat or corrective democracy' debate, which suggests populism's involvement in more political participation. Ultimately, and unfortunately, it does not seem like populism is an effective answer to ever falling levels of political participation or representational gaps in Western democracies.

Representation failures are one of the main reasons for the emergence of populism in contemporary politics. The discourse that counterposes "the people" against "the elite" can become an influential idea if a significant part of the population perceives political elites to be no longer representative. Populists then can exploit this representation gap to substantiate their argument about the struggle between the people and the elite (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). In this view, the "witnessed" cartelization or collusion of European mainstream parties (Katz & Mair, 2009), characterized by the increasing formation of "grand coalitions" between left and right parties renders parties more similar in the eyes of voters (Fortunato & Stevenson, 2013). Such developments in party politics are among the causes of populist sentiment in Europe (Castanho Silva, 2018b). Also, evidence from a case study suggests that established political actors tend to make decisions against the interest of marginalized groups, thus widening the representational gap. By analyzing data from representative surveys between 1980 and 2013, Elsässer, Hense, and Schäfer (2018) show that governments in Germany tend to adopt the discourse of the rich, but neglect the poor or even implement policies against the preferences of the latter. These circumstances provide a breeding ground for the activation of populist attitudes since they are addressing the very essence of the populist narrative.

On the other hand, populism can be perceived as a potential corrective to democracy as long as it engages dissatisfied and disenfranchised citizens, helping close the representation gap (Canovan, 1999; Immerzeel & Pickup, 2015; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014). Evidence for this positive effect, however, is mixed at best (Houle & Kenny, 2018; Huber & Ruth, 2017; Huber & Schimpf, 2017; Immerzeel & Pickup, 2015). In this paper we use three experimental designs, conducted with samples from two different countries, to test whether the activation of populist attitudes has impacts on normatively positive and negative political engagement. We test whether populist frames and primes can make people with a set of

latent predispositions be more willing to participate in politics. Such mobilization would confirm that populism can play a positive role in contemporary democracies (e.g., Mudde, 2007).

Our findings, however, do not bode well for populist enthusiasts. We find, by and large, populist attitudes to be associated with lower intention to participate in politics. The experimental manipulations show that triggering populism neither makes individuals more likely to participate nor to donate to a political campaign. We also find that activation of populist attitudes makes people more likely to accept political apathy and justify not-voting. On the upside, though, activating populist attitudes makes populist respondents less likely to endorse violent political action, which we conceptualize as the normatively negative form of political engagement. Therefore, triggering populist attitudes among those who have them appears to make individuals more apathetic about politics.

These results are informative on a few different accounts: first, the literature on the consequences of populist attitudes, today, focuses almost exclusively on voting behaviour. We extend that to another potentially important effect of populist attitudes and frames on individuals: willingness to participate in politics in various forms. At the same time, these findings contribute to the "threat or corrective democracy" debate (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012), according to which populism leads to more political participation. In line with macro-level findings, we identify no individual level associations between populist attitudes and intention to participate in politics. Ultimately, and unfortunately, it does not seem like populism is an effective answer to ever falling levels of political participation or representational gaps in Europe.

Activation of populist attitudes

We follow the ideational approach (Hawkins, Carlin, Littvay, & Kaltwasser, 2018; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013), which defines populism with a set of core ideas. In this conceptualization, populism is an essentialist view of politics that separates the world into two

camps with fundamentally moral distinctions: the good "people" and the evil "elite". Populist discourse praises ordinary folk as the virtuous and homogeneous entity, which has a general will that should be the base for all politics (Mudde, 2004). The people is a reified entity (Hawkins, 2009) unified with a single will and interest. For populists, these people are oppressed by an elite, a powerful minority which illegitimately controls the state for its benefit. The moral cleavage between the people and the elite is the only relevant political division; this divide is beyond any legitimate differences of opinion or interests that characterize pluralist thinking and societies (Muller, 2016).

As this definition based on *ideas* became broadly accepted by political scientists in recent years, the literature started going beyond populism as an elite discourse and theorizing it as a set of attitudes that individuals hold about politics (Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2014; Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012; Stanley, 2011). In this view, individuals hold these beliefs about the political world being divided between people and elites. These individual-level populist attitudes can help explain, beyond ideological attachment or protest voting, why people support populist parties. Often referred as the "thin ideology", populist ideas are combined with other political styles or ideologies (Stanley, 2008). While right-wing populists frequently use exclusionary strategies to reveal the nativist interpretations of "the people" that contrast the native population with the "others", the left-wing populists promote inclusionary rhetoric to include marginalized groups (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Hawkins et al. (2018) develop this idea further by discussing the precise psychological nature of populist attitudes. Populist attitudes do not seem as fundamental as personality traits. On the other hand, cross-sectional studies (e.g., Rico & Anduiza, 2016) have shown the remarkable stability of populist attitudes across countries, suggesting they are not volatile opinions. Surmised from the psychological literature (Cesario, Plaks, Hagiwara, Navarrete, &

Higgins, 2010; Chanley, 1994; Tett & Guterman, 2000), Hawkins et al. (2018) propose that populism, like authoritarianism (Stenner, 2005), is a latent disposition. It means that populist attitudes can lay dormant in individuals who have them. However, given the right cues and contextual environment, these latent dispositions can be activated and turn into observable attitudinal and behavioural outcomes. Metaphorically speaking, populist attitudes need to be switched on from the "standby mode" to be involved in social and behavioural outcomes (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017).

The activation of populist attitudes requires a combination of two things: first, a context in which populist discourse is credible. If public trust in political institutions is high and citizens are generally satisfied with politics and the state, it seems unlikely that a discourse preaching against evil elites that control politics would be particularly attractive. Hawkins et al. (2018) talk about two potential sources of credibility to populist discourse: representation gaps and severe failures in the provision of public services (including, for example, widespread corruption). In macro-level studies, it has been observed how low political trust is associated with higher support for populists in Latin America (Doyle, 2011), and how corruption and representation gaps are associated with better electoral performances of populist parties in Latin America and Europe, respectively (Castanho Silva, 2018b).

The second part of activating populist attitudes is the use of rhetoric. The contextual factors in themselves might be necessary for activation but are not sufficient. They must be politically framed (Entman, 1993) by credible populist actors (Moffitt, 2016; Van Kessel, 2015). A populist framing of an issue involves an emotionalized blame attribution (Guillem, Guinjoan, & Anduiza, 2017; Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2017) for negative outcomes in an out-group. It is not enough, therefore, that an individual perceives high levels of corruption around them to

have their dormant populist attitudes activated. A political actor has to convincingly frame the issue that corruption is a deliberate action by evil elites to oppress the pure people.

There can be several theoretical consequences of activated populist attitudes. However, so far most studies have concentrated on looking at whether they predict support for populist actors (Akkerman et al., 2014; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018). Nevertheless, thinking of the nature of populism, one may also expect that activated populist attitudes would drive up intolerance since it is an anti-pluralist view of politics. Additionally, the activation of populist attitudes is likely to increase polarization following the success of populist parties (Castanho Silva, 2018a) and dissatisfaction with political institutions (Rooduijn, van der Brug, & de Lange, 2016).

A logical consequence of populism, which has been theorized, and observed in a few cases, is on political participation. Populist discourse derives its support from credible claims about representation gaps. Citizens who turn to populists tend to be dissatisfied with the entire political system, and for this reason, are often alienated from politics. A redemptive discourse promising to return power to the people and promoting popular sovereignty would have an impact of bringing disillusioned and apathetic citizens (back) to the political arena (Canovan, 1999). It has been well documented how, in Latin America, populists have been historically important in the enfranchisement of marginalized social groups (Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014), such as urban workers in the 30s and 40s, or indigenous peoples and the lower classes in the 2000's.

Moreover, some have noted how the mobilizational capacity of a few European populists among non-voters helps explain their success (e.g., the AfD in Germany in 2017 (Hansen & Olsen, 2018)). Evidence for an impact of populism in political participation is mixed. Houle and Kenny (2018), Huber and Schimpf (2017) and Huber and Ruth (2017) find little to no impact at the aggregate level. On the other hand, Spruyt, Keppens, and Van Droogenbroeck (2016) find that populist attitudes are associated with an increased intention to vote among the youth. The

impact of activating populist attitudes on political participation, therefore, is the focus of this paper, and our first hypothesis is

H1: The activation of populist attitudes increases the intention to participate in politics.

However, political engagement can have different forms (Alvarez, Levin, & Núñez, 2017). On the one hand, it is conventional to think about vote intention, taking part in demonstrations, or engage with political movements and campaigns. Normatively, these are typically considered positive for democracy and are desirable goals. This kind of political participation has been the focus of studies in its relation to populism. Nevertheless, there are also other facets of political participation, which may not be considered normatively desirable, such as engagement in radical and violent actions against opponents. At the core of populist discourse, there is a good-versus-evil understanding of politics which has been used by populist leaders to justify persecution against the opposition (Hawkins, 2016; Levitsky & Loxton, 2013). Therefore, it may be expected that activating populist attitudes not only lead individuals into increased normatively positive participation but also to negative forms of it. Therefore, our second hypothesis is that

H2: The activation of populist attitudes increases support for negative forms of political participation.

Empirical strategy

We test our hypotheses with three different experiments. Most experimental work on populism to date has focused on *framing (*Hameleers et al., 2017; Hameleers et al.). Issue framing experiments, popular within political communication, involve manipulating the way a particular

piece of information is presented to the receiver (Druckman, 2001). By emphasizing a specific facet of an issue over another, it is possible to obtain different responses to that issue even if the facts or position do not change between experimental conditions. The ideational theory proposes that, under the circumstances of some perceived representation gap, political actors can frame elites as responsible for national problems, with a populist discourse, and so draw support from voters whose populist attitudes were thus activated (Hawkins et al., 2018). Busby et al. (forthcoming) test this with a framing experiment, in which respondents are asked to think of the most important national problems, and then either *who* is to blame for it, or *what events or circumstances,* finding that respondents who are asked to attribute the blame to individuals have their populist attitudes activated. Our first experiment follows existing research into populism and communication and uses an issue framing design. Individuals are presented with a written speech that either has a populist frame (treatment) or not (control). We thus check if populist frames, which are known to activate populism, do lead to the theorized increases in positive and negative political participation.

To approach the question from another angle, however, we also use two *priming* experiments. The ideational theory proposes that populism is a latent disposition that some individuals have, similar to authoritarianism. While it focuses on framing, another way that psychologists have found to activate latent dispositions is with *primes*. These are unobtrusive or subliminal cues given to survey respondents, which make a given situation more salient and activate cognitive associations among those whose personality or dispositions are susceptible to that specific cue (Lavine, Lodge, Polichak, & Taber, 2002). Keeping the authoritarianism example, for instance, if individuals who have a higher latent authoritarian disposition are primed with threat cues, that affects the kind of media they prefer to consume (Lavine, Lodge, & Freitas, 2005). Therefore, if we consider that populism is a latent disposition like authoritarianism, certain

primes should also serve to activate populist attitudes and bring about its theorized consequences. Priming individuals with populist cues under different circumstances, varying the context in which the prime is presented, is expected to resonate with those holding latent populist dispositions, and have an impact on leading these respondents to have a higher desire for political participation. We use two kinds of priming experiments. The first one relies on salience, in which populist ideas are made more salient to some respondents but not to others. The second priming experiment is based on visual priming, in which we associate the same populist slogan with distinct contextual information. This way, we expand previous experiments on populism in political communication which have mostly focused on populist frames. Each design, data, and findings are presented and discussed separately below, for clarity reasons.

Not only we vary the kind of experiment in trying to activate populist attitudes, but we also apply them in different contexts. An important theoretical part of the activation of populism is the presence of a viable and credible populist political force (Hawkins et al., 2018; Van Kessel, 2015). For the first study, data were collected in early 2014 in the United States. At the time, the only relevant populist political movement was the Tea Party -- Donald Trump and Bernie Sanders were a few years away from drawing double-digits support across the country. We may expect, therefore, that in the absence of any treatment, populist attitudes are associated with apathy in this sample. For the other two experiments data was collected in Germany in 2017, during which time there was relatively high support for the left and right-wing populist parties in the country (The Left and the Alternative for Germany, respectively). Each of these parties was polling close to 10% at the time. Therefore, individuals with populist attitudes had a viable political actor expressing that discourse, giving a very different context to the studies, and hence we do not expect populists to be particularly apathetic as a baseline.

Overall, our research design enables us to stretch our empirical strategy to the right- and left-wing populism. Study 1 uses a fictional political context that is neither framed as left or right, thus referring to a hypothetical version of "pure" populism. This is a strong advantage compared to other studies that manipulate the communication of real-life politicians such as Geert Wilders (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2013), which are likely to bias the effect of the experimental treatment. Study 3, in contrast, implements the specific context as part of the experimental design and shows how a political event that is neither associated with the left or right of the political spectrum (German reunification) differs from a clearly right-wing populist context (PEGIDA).

Study 1

Sample:

Our first study has an Amazon MTurk sample of residents of the United States (N = 646). Data was collected in February 2014[1]. Average age is 35 years old. There were slightly more females (51.9%) than males (47.4%). Caucasian Americans are the majority, 80.7%, while African Americans make up 6.1% of the sample, and Hispanic and Asian 3.6% each. 91% have 13 or more years of education, 35.3% earned a high school degree, 36.9% earned a bachelor's, 12.1% Master's, and 10.8% an Associate Degree. The median income group is the category between $30,000 and $49,999 a year. While this presents the usual MTurk distortions in relation to a national representative sample (younger and more liberal respondents; (Berinsky, Huber, & Lenz, 2012)), research has found that experimental results from MTurk and other online convenience

[1] Data collected as part of a larger survey conducted by the Political Behaviour Research group (Central European University, in Budapest). Due to the length if the survey, a planned missing data design (PMDD) was used to lighten the burden in respondents. Because the survey was conducted online, it was possible have missingness happening completely at random (Rubin, 1976; Schafer & Graham, 2002).

samples replicate those obtained with representative ones (Peer, Brandimarte, Samat, & Acquisti, 2017).

Experimental treatment:

We have respondents read a speech by a fictional congressional candidate, Jim Smith, in which he argues against the construction of a new stadium in their hometown. There were two versions of the speech, one using a populist frame, the other not. In the treatment version, the tone was loading on anti-elitism, and the opposing side (those in favour of building the new stadium) were painted as morally corrupt. The speech referred to "the people's voice", which was not heard, and made clear that there were two very distinct groups: "our community", described positively as cheerful, determined, and powerful if united, who surely would refuse the demolition of the old stadium.

Moreover, in opposition to it, there are some unnamed "those in power" who want to make much money for themselves aligned with "some development company with good friends up there". The whole argument is done based on an almost mythical sense of community that was built around the stadium, and the only reference to specifics is done to talk generally about how expensive the whole project is. The second version of the speech was a down-to-earth version of the first one, which took opposing arguments into account but respectfully disagreed with them. It was more based on pragmatic matters, such as the potential to create jobs and development of one or another area of the city. The speech questioned the decision to build a new stadium by challenging its alleged benefits but did not call into question the intentions of those involved, barely referring to them at all. Also, references to the community are watered down to what may be expected from any politician – present but not inflated into a general will that should decide in all matters. The full text of both speeches can be found in the Appendix.

Model and measurement:

We hypothesize that treatment effects are conditional in pre-existing levels of populist attitudes. Treatment stimuli are expected to activate these attitudes, therefore leading to higher participation among those who have higher levels of populist attitudes. To test this, we resort to a multigroup structural equation model (MG-SEM), in which the treatment moderates the relationship between populist attitudes and participation. We expect that for the group who reads the populist speech, the relation between populist attitudes and participation intentions will be significantly higher than for the group that reads the non-populist speech. This would indicate that the treatment activated populist attitudes and translated into the attitudinal outcome.

To formalize the hypothesis test, we run the multigroup analysis in two steps. In the first, we fit an MG-SEM in which we estimate the regression coefficients freely across experimental groups. This freely estimated model is to check if the experimental treatments have an impact on the outcome. In other words, we check if the structural relationships between the constructs change as a function of our experimental manipulation. In the next step, we fit another MG-SEM; however, this time we restrain the regression coefficients to be the same across the experimental groups. In this second step, we check whether the goodness of fit statistics of the MG-SEMs is significantly different from one another. If the model with freely estimated regression coefficients has a significantly better fit to the data (compared to the model with equal regression coefficients), then that indicates the difference in regression coefficients between treatment and control conditions is statistically significant.

The main independent variable is a measure of populist attitudes. We use a seven-indicators scale which is based on Hawkins et al. (2012), including a few more items in anti-

elitism[2]. The dependent variables, positive and negative political participation, are operationalized as follows. Positive political engagement uses the participation battery from the American National Election Study, asking respondents whether, during the next national elections they intend to work for a party or candidate, and give money to a campaign or party. Negative political engagement is modelled as a latent variable with six indicators, asking respondents how much they agree with statements that, for example, "In extreme circumstances, it is acceptable for someone in your community to destroy property to express political discontent". This battery measures the legitimacy of *radical political action*, endorsing violence for attaining political goals. The full lists if items are in the Appendix.

Results:

Positive political engagement: Results in Table 1 show that populist attitudes of respondents in this sample are negatively and significantly associated with active support in the election. In the free model, the coefficients are different (treatment: -.3***; control: -.18**). This would suggest that reading the populist speech actually demobilized those with higher populist attitudes. However, the difference between these two coefficients in itself is not statistically significant. That is indicated by the model fit comparison test in Table 2 (p-value=.15). The restrictive model, in which we force the regression coefficient to be the same across conditions (treatment vs. control) is not significantly worse than the model in which we freely estimate the regression coefficients across conditions (treatment vs. control). This is to say, regardless of the content of the speech by the fictional congressional members, populist attitudes are equally related to lower levels of positive political participation.

[2] See the Appendix for confirmatory factor analysis models presenting the measurement properties of all scales used.

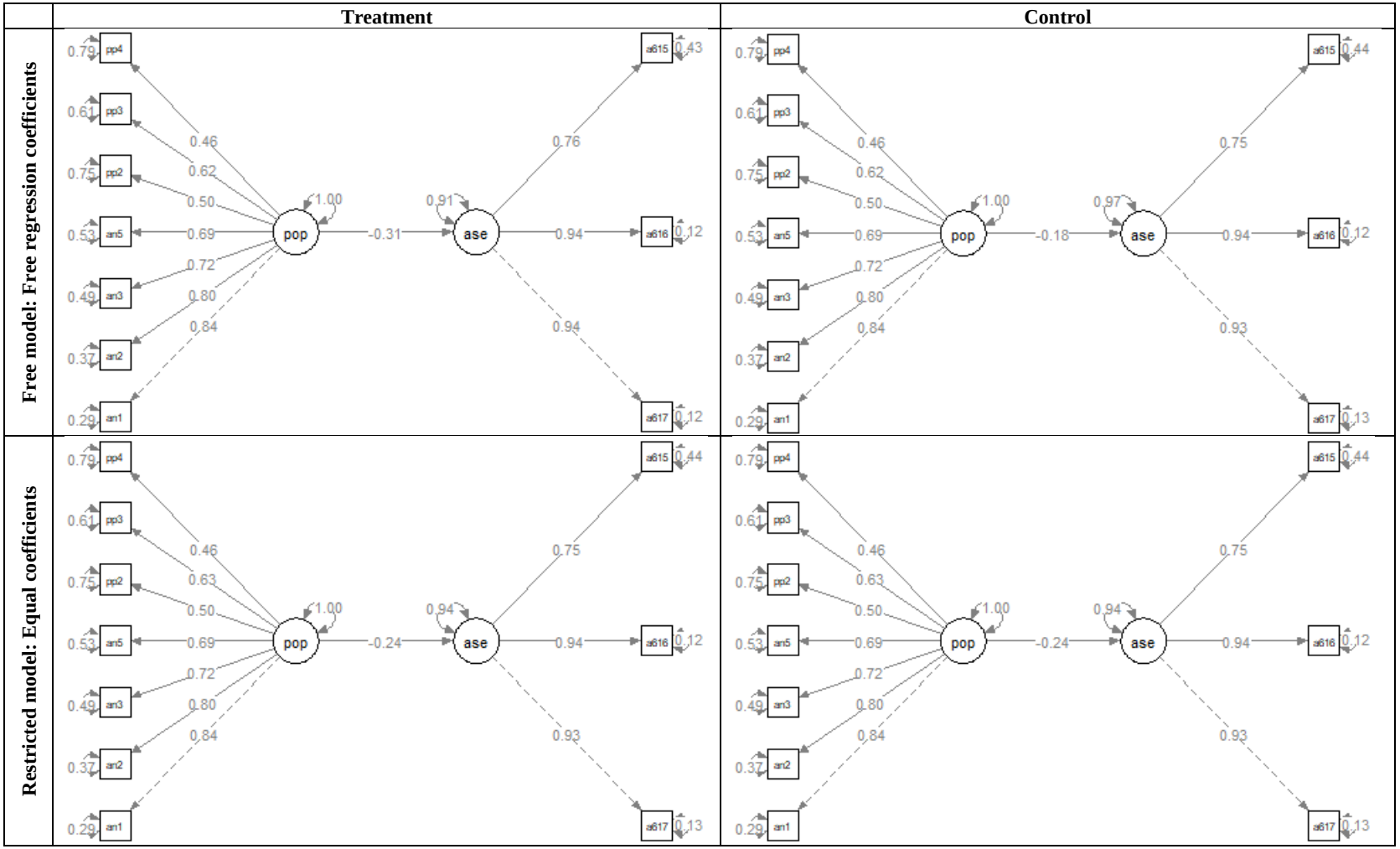

Table 1: Path models of the multi-group structural equation models for the U.S. sample -- Positive political engagement; ***pop*:** populist attitudes, ***ase:*** active support in elections; see the appendix for the significance level of the factor loadings; see table 3 for the regression results**.**

	Df	AIC	BIC	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	ΔDf	p-value
Free model	96	15231	15383	194.47			
Restricted model	97	15231	15378	196.59	2.1203	1	0.1454

Table 2: Model comparison of the U.S. sample for the positive political engagement.

	Free coefficients (regressions)		**Equal coefficients**	
	Treatment	*Control*	*Treatment*	*Control*
Populism (Composite)	-0.305***	-0.183**	-0.239***	-0.239***
Model-fit:				
N	315	331	315	331
Robust RMSEA	.041 (not sig.) **CI**: .029 .052		.041 (not sig.) **CI**: .029 .052	
Robust TLI	.967		.967	
Robust CFI	.965		.965	
SRMR	.089		.090	
Robust χ^2	147.006*** df=96		148.826*** df=97	

Table 3: Structural relationships and the goodness of fit statistics of the multi-group SEMs; U.S. sample -- Positive political engagement (*active support in elections*) explained by populist attitudes.

Negative political engagement: In contrast to the positive political engagement, the experimental manipulation had a significant impact on the endorsement of negative political strategies. The structural relationship between the populist attitudes and negative political engagement (legitimate radical political action) is shown in Tables 4 & 6. When the coefficients are estimated freely, in the treatment group, we observe a negative and significant relation (-.18*) between populist attitudes and negative engagement. Among the control group, however, the coefficient is very close to zero and not significant (.02). Moreover, the model fit comparison shows a significant difference between the two groups (Table 5; p-value=.04*). This result goes against the expectations in the ideational theory: individuals whose populist attitudes are activated become significantly less likely to endorse political violence.

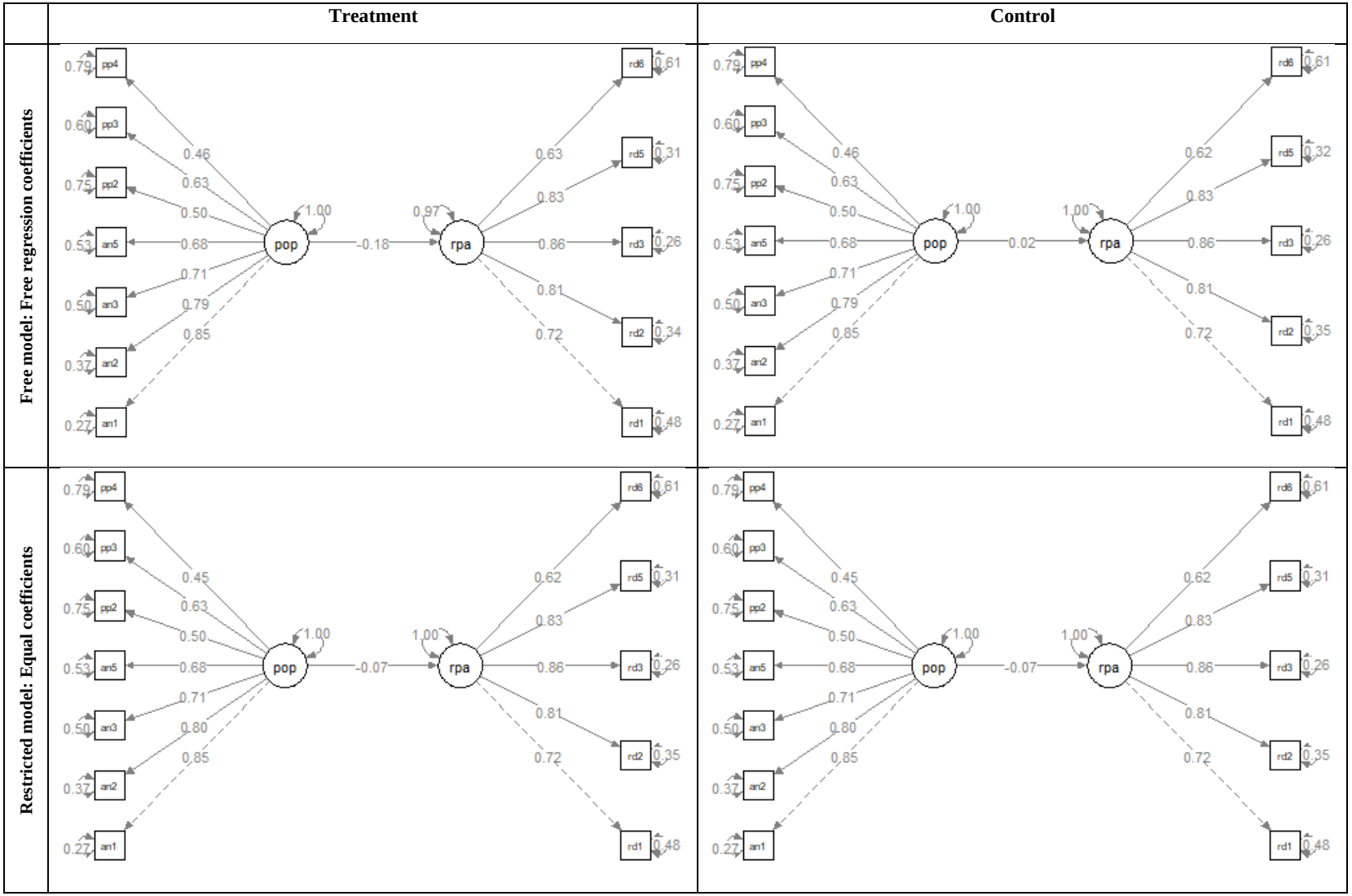

Table 4: Path models of the multi-group structural equation models for the U.S. sample -- Negative political engagement; ***pop***: populist attitudes, ***rpa****:* legitimate radical political action; see the appendix for the significance level of the factor loadings; see table 6 for the regression results.

	Df	AIC	BIC	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	ΔDf	p-value
Free model	140	16048	16227	301.80			
Restricted model	141	16050	16225	306.01	4.2108	1	0.04017*

Table 5: Model comparison of the U.S. sample for the negative political engagement.

	Free coefficients (regressions)		**Equal coefficients**	
	Treatment	*Control*	*Treatment*	*Control*
Populism	-0.179*	0.021	-0.069	-0.069
Model-fit:				
N	315	331	315	331
Robust RMSEA	.051 (not sig.) **CI**: .042 .060		.051 (not sig.) **CI**: .042 .060	
Robust TLI	.911		.910	
Robust CFI	.906		.903	
SRMR	.095		.101	
Robust χ^2	256.871*** df=140		260.751*** df=141	

Table 6: Structural relationships and the goodness of fit statistics of the multi-group SEMs; U.S. sample -- Negative political engagement (*legitimate radical political action*) explained by populist attitudes.

Discussion of results for the 1st study: The results from study 1 are intriguing. First, populist attitudes are, in general, related to lower levels of political participation. That reinforces the idea connecting populism and political apathy, influenced by dissatisfaction with democracy and political cynicism. At the time when this survey was fielded (2014), the only relevant populist force in the U.S. was the Tea Party. Given the majority of liberals in the sample, what we observe is that, in the absence of a viable populist political actor, populism is connected to apathy.

Moreover, we also show that activating populist attitudes by using a populist frame does not lead to more participation by those who hold these attitudes. This is in line with macro-level findings that identify null results in the relationship between participation levels and support for populists (Houle and Kenny 2016; Huber and Schimpf 2017). However, we observe an effect of populist framing in negative political engagement, going against our expectations: activating populist attitudes makes individuals less likely to support the use of political violence. This indicates that activated populism may not lead to more radicalization and polarization. In fact, it suggests that the political expression of populism might be an escape valve for those with these attitudes: in its presence, one can think that there is a legitimate peaceful (populist) political alternative, and therefore illegitimate political methods involving violence are not necessary.

Study 2

Sample:

In our second study, we use a convenience sample of German university students (N = 335). Data were collected in the spring of 2017. Mean age is 26; (37 % male, 61 % female). 97 % of the participants in the sample reported having German nationality. 88 % of the sample is ongoing university students. 30 % of the participants reported to be born in one of the North-western German federal states (32 % lives in these North-western states); 19 % are from the Southern

federal states (13 % live in one of the Southern states); 10 % were born in the former East Germany (3 % live in one of the federal states that were a part of the former GDR); finally, 41 % are from one of the central federal states (3 % residing in the central states). 75 % of the students were born in towns with populations smaller than 100.000 inhabitants; 61 % still reside in such towns with relatively small populations. The majority of participants reported being on the left side of the political spectrum, as shown in Figure 1.

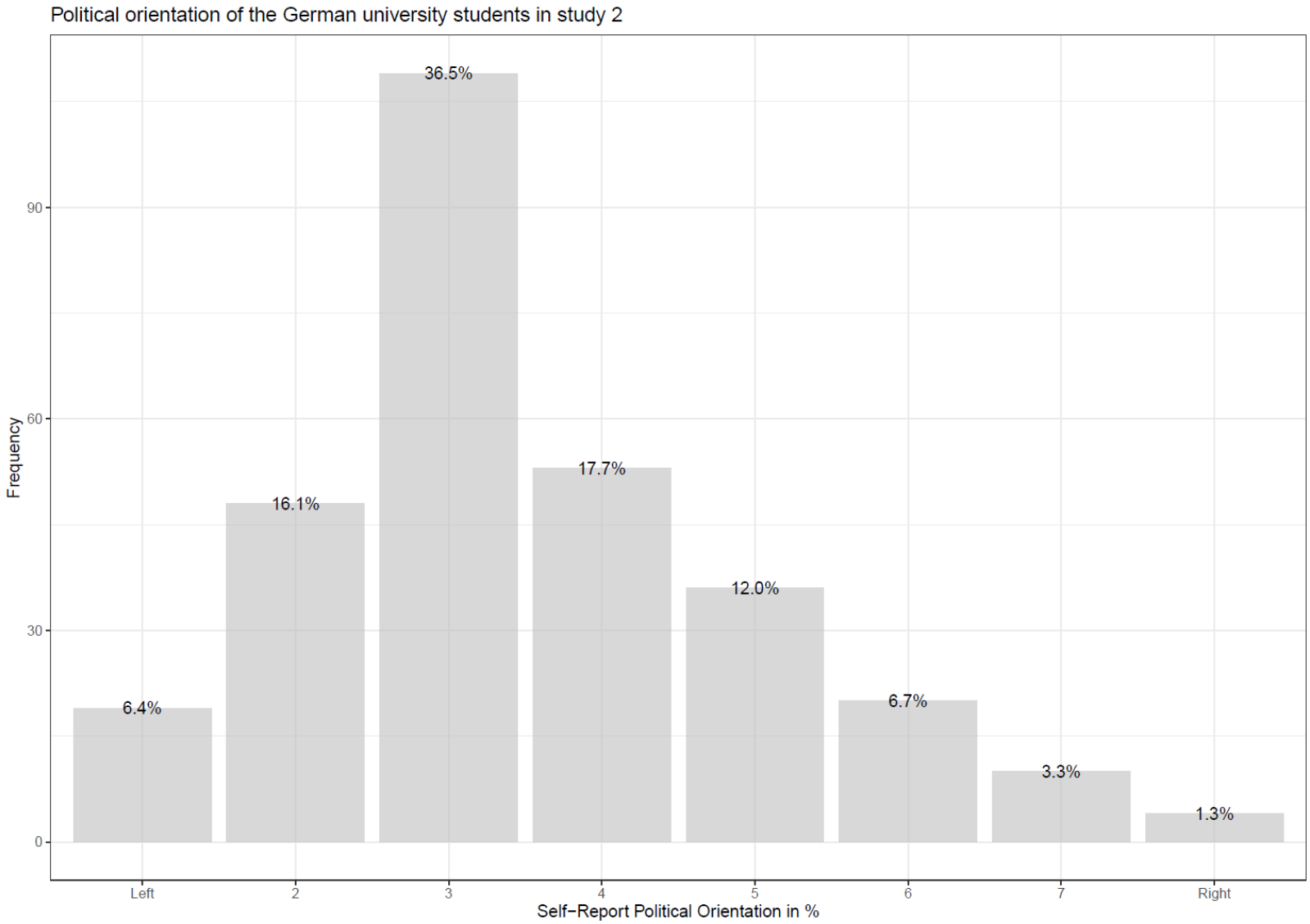

Figure 1: Political orientation of the German university students in study 2.

While the use of student samples hinders the generalizability of results, we must note a few things. First, our interest is not in population averages or the prevalence of baseline characteristics, for which one would need representative samples (Ellsworth & Gonzalez, 2007). For identifying the relationship between two psychological characteristics, and how an experimental manipulation can change this, the lack of representativeness should not necessarily bias the estimates (Ellsworth & Gonzalez, 2007; Pernice, Ommundsen, Van Der Veer, & Larsen, 2008). Moreover, Keppens et al. (2016) find that among the youth there is a very thin line between populism leading to either increased participation or increased apathy. Having a sample of university students, therefore, helps focus on this particular group of young voters.

Experimental treatment:

In this study, we use a priming manipulation. It is done with survey questions that have been designed to measure populist attitudes. These are statements about politics (similar to those used to measure the independent variable in Study 1), which ask respondents how much they agree with populist views of politics. All participants in the study answered the same battery of populist items first. Then, in the next step, the treatment group received an extra battery of populist attitudes items, while the control group followed directly forward with the survey. The prime, therefore, is to make those in the treatment group to give more thought to the view of politics in a populist way, raising the salience of populist issues for them and activating their cognitive connections to populism.

Model and measurement:

The estimation of effects is done again with an MG-SEM. We measure pre-treatment levels of populism with the three-dimensional populist attitudes scale by Castanho Silva et al. (2018). Its three dimensions are A) people-centrism B) anti-elitism and C) Manichaean view if politics. Each

dimension is measured by two *"agree", "disagree"* statements, making six items in total. On empirical grounds, this instrument is shown to outperform six other batteries with its internal coherence and cross-national validity; its psychometric qualities and predictive validity are favorable. To obtain a single measure of populism, we follow the authors' recommended aggregation procedure: first, a three-dimensional CFA model is fit to the data. Next, we use the model to extract factor scores for each observation, in each of the three dimensions. These factor scores are standardized to range between 0 and 1 and multiplied by one another to get a the score for populist attitudes. The reasoning is that, for someone to be highly populist, they have to present high levels in all if these dimensions – therefore the multiplication.

The treatment involved respondents in the experimental group answering another twelve items on populism, drawn from earlier studies on populist attitudes (Akkerman et al. 2014, Castanho Silva et al. 2018). The dependent variables are again positive and negative political engagement. Positive political engagement is measured with a battery adopted from the International Social Survey Program's Citizenship II Module (2016) to tap into the notion of being an active citizen (by being politically involved in politics); this measure consists of three items. Negative engagement is measured as finding it justified to not participate in politics and not to vote. We changed the measurement due to a very different context and political culture in Germany. Violence in politics is an absolute taboo in the country, and we do not expect many German respondents would give any hint of agreement or endorsement to violent means of protest, even if only for social desirability reasons. Once again, we look at how populism is related to political engagement, and whether the coefficient of this relationship is significantly different between treatment and control groups.

Results:

Positive engagement: In this study, we find no significant relationship between populism and positive political engagement, in either the treatment or the control group. The coefficients are, respectively, -.1 and .03 for each of the groups. The difference indicates that, in the treatment group, populist attitudes are negatively associated with participation, while in the control group there is a small but positive association. The difference between these coefficients, however, is not significant.

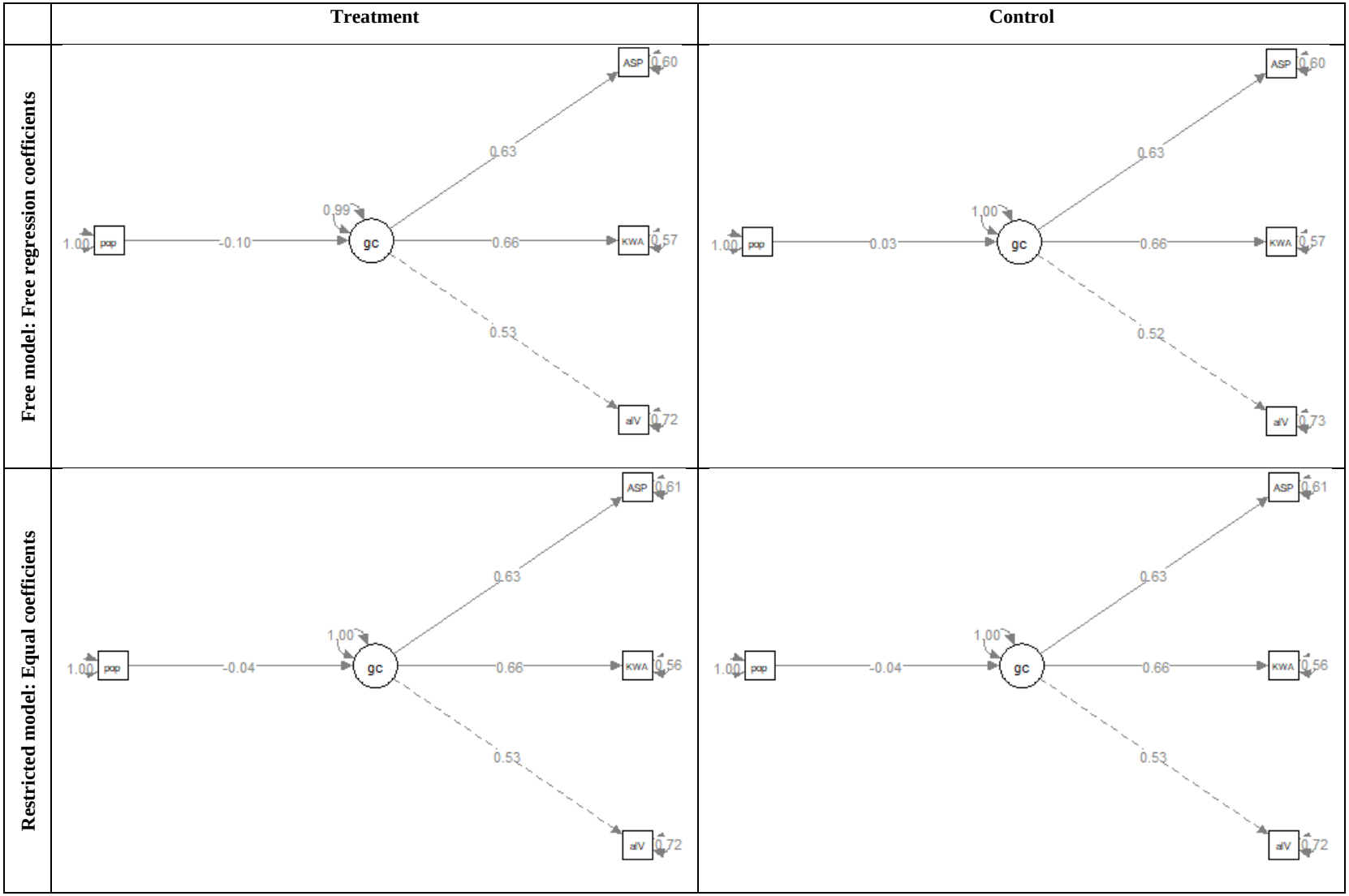

Table 7: Path models of the multi-group structural equation models for the first D.E. sample -- Positive political engagement; ***pop***: populist attitudes, ***gc****:* being an active citizen; see the appendix for the significance level of the factor loadings; see table 9 for the regression results

	Df	AIC	BIC	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	ΔDf	p-value
Free model	12	3102.1	3146.6	17.593			
Restricted model	13	3100.9	3141.6	18.354	0.76084	1	0.3831

Table 8: Model comparison of the first DE sample for the positive political engagement.

	Free coefficients (regressions)		**Equal coefficients**	
	Treatment	*Control*	*Treatment*	*Control*
Populism	0.026	-0.103	-0.037	-0.037
Model-fit:				
N	157	147	157	147
Robust RMSEA	.000 (not sig.) **CI**: .000 .057		.000 (not sig.) **CI**: .000 .055	
Robust TLI	1.0		1.0	
Robust CFI	1.0		1.0	
SRMR	.053		.056	
Robust χ^2	10.136 (not sig.) df=12		10.913 (not sig.) df=13	

Table 9: Structural relationships and the goodness of fit statistics of the multi-group SEMs; first DE sample -- positive political engagement (*being an active citizen*) explained by populist attitudes.

Negative political engagement: We also find no significant relations between populism and negative political engagement for both groups. The coefficient for the treatment group is .12, while for the control group it is .02. The difference between the two suggests that the treatment made people more likely to accept disengagement from politics as legitimate, i.e., absenteeism. The difference between the two coefficients, however, is not significant, as denoted by the chi-square test in Table 11. Once again, low reliability might be a reason.

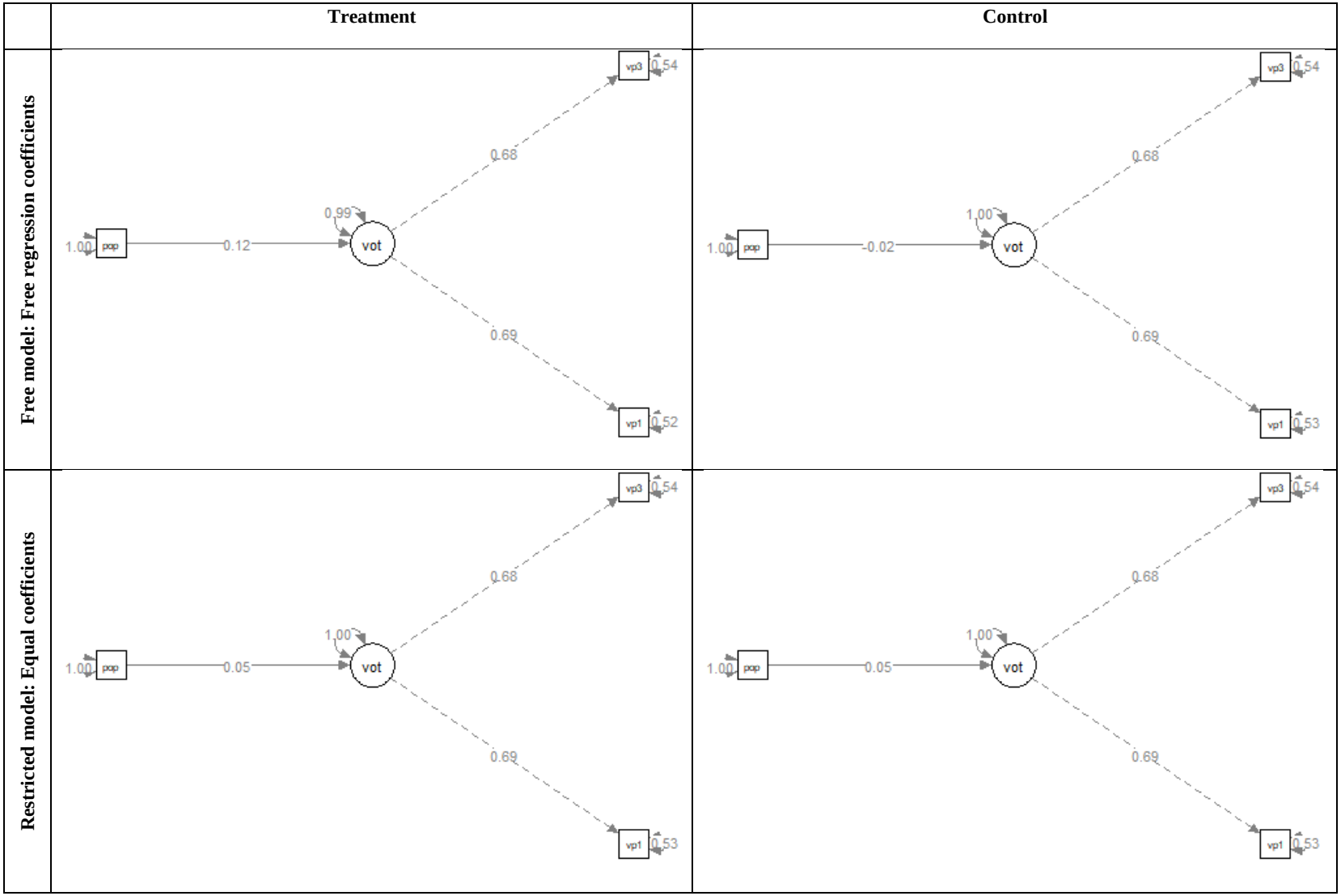

Table 10: Path models of the multi-group structural equation models for the first D.E. sample -- Negative political engagement; ***pop****:* populist attitudes, ***vot****:* not voting; see the appendix for the significance level of the factor loadings; see table 12 for the regression results

	Df	AIC	BIC	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	ΔDf	p-value
Free model	6	2279.5	2309.2	1.6650			
Restricted model	7	2278.4	2304.3	2.4931	0.82812	1	0.3628

Table 11: Model comparison of the first DE sample for the negative political engagement.

	Free coefficients (regressions)		**Equal coefficients**	
	Treatment	*Control*	*Treatment*	*Control*
Populism	0.117	-0.019	0.048	0.048
Model-fit:				
N	157	147	157	147
Robust RMSEA	.000 (not sig.) **CI**: .000 .000		.000 (not sig.) **CI**: .000 .000	
Robust TLI	1.0		1.0	
Robust CFI	1.0		1.0	
SRMR	.017		.027	
Robust χ^2	0.644 (not sig.) df=6		1.048 (not sig.) df=7	

Table 12: Structural relationships and the goodness of fit statistics of the multi-group SEMs; First DE sample -- negative political engagement (*abstaining from voting*) explained by populist attitudes.

Discussion of results for the second study: Our second study found no significant relationships between populist attitudes in general and political participation, either positive or negative, different from what we observed in Study 1. The baseline relation can be explained by the existence of viable populist alternatives in German politics at the time, contrary to the US-2014. The presence of the AfD and Die Linke allow those with populist attitudes to feel represented and engage in politics the same way that other individuals with low populist attitudes do. However, priming populism with the experimental stimuli, in both scenarios, appear to have made populist individuals more disengaged from politics (less concerned about being a good citizen, and more tolerant of political apathy). However, while both effects point to the same direction and are in line with findings from Study 1, are only not statistically significant.[3]

Study 3

Sample:

Our final study uses another convenience sample of German university students (*N*=335). Data were collected during the fall of 2017. The average age is 28; (40 % male, 57 % female). 97 % of the participants in the sample reported having German nationality. 75 % of the sample is ongoing university students. 46 % of the participants reported one of the North-western federal German states as their birthplace (56 % reside in the Northwest); 14 % were born in Southern German states (3 % live in South Germany); 14 % were born in one of the former GDR states (27 % live in the former East German states); and 26 % were from one of the central federal German states (14 % live in these states). While 32 % of the students live in towns with populations < 100.000

[3] The lack of significance might also be a statistical artefact due to low reliability in the measurement instrument. See full results in the Appendix.

inhabitants, 79 % reside in such small towns. Majority of the participants reported being on the left side of the political spectrum, the figure below displays the spread.

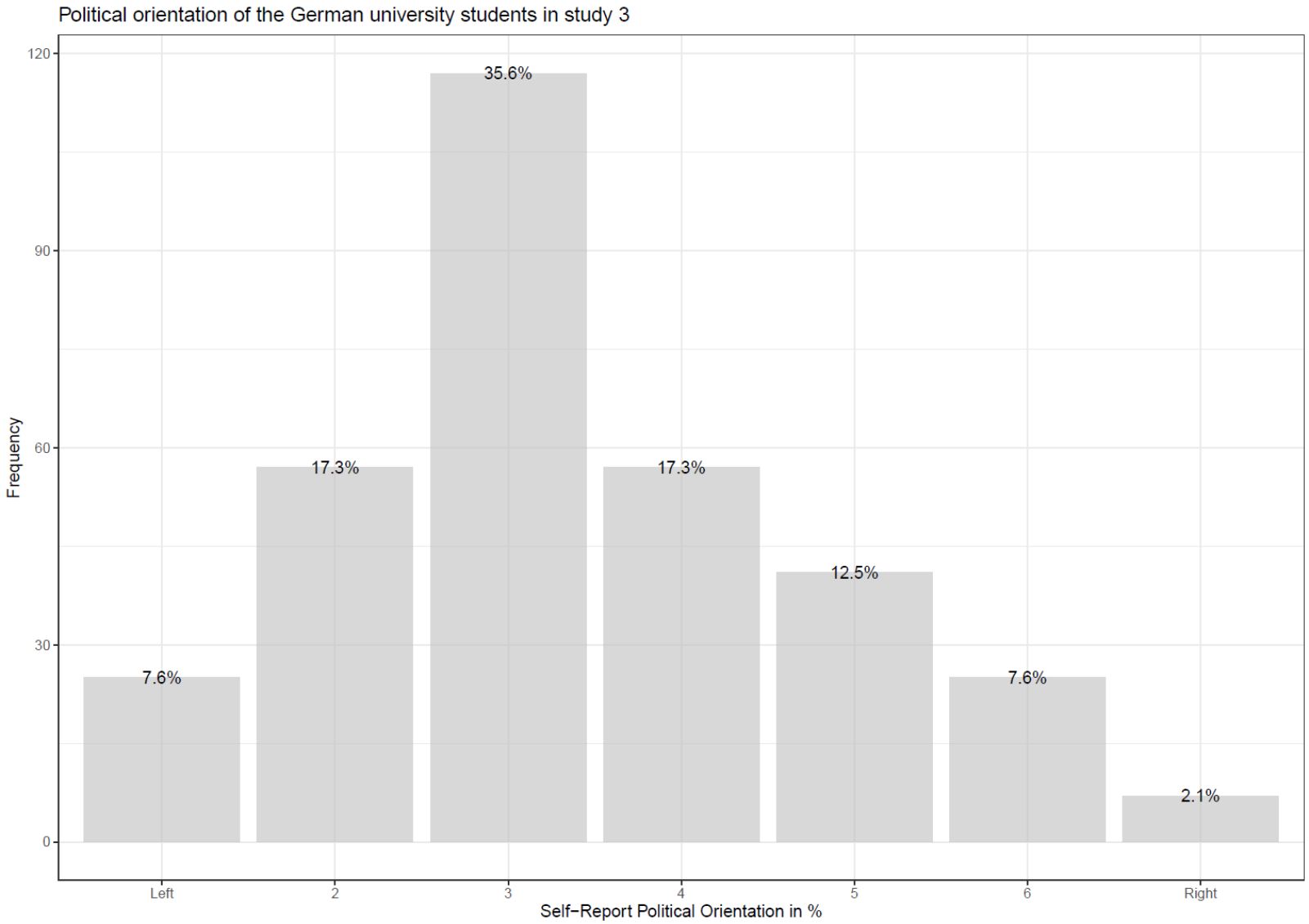

Figure 2: Political orientation of the German university students in study 3.

Experimental treatment:

In this study, we manipulated the positive and negative engagement strategies as experimental treatments mimicking a salient real-life situation. We used a widely known and commonly uttered populist slogan used in two different contexts. The first context is contemporary and echoes a negative political engagement strategy due to the exclusionary and discriminatory tone; the second context is less salient but more compelling with positive connotations, therefore reflecting a positive political engagement strategy. We exposed respondents to the slogan "Wir sind das Volk" (we are the people) in two different demonstrations and compared them to a control group displaying images from a peace march without any slogans.

For Germans, the slogan "Wir sind das Volk" rings different bells. While it became a prominent chant in many East German cities during the Peaceful Revolution of 1989, the right-wing populist PEGIDA movement (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamisation of the Occident) used this slogan to protest against a perceived "Islamization" since 2014. Although "das Volk" has clear historical and semantic baggage due to the Nazi misuse of the word, at least until 2014, the slogan was associated with German reunification – an event that is perceived by most Germans as one of the single moments of national pride since 1945 (Borchard & Neu, 2010).

In the first condition, the populist slogan was shown in the context of PEGIDA demonstrations, echoing the negative political engagement with an exclusionary view. In the second condition, the slogan was shown in the context of the demonstrations in Leipzig during the late 1980's German reunification movement reflecting the positive political engagement. See the Appendix for the visuals used as experimental manipulation.

Model and measurement:

As the independent variable, we use the nine-item version of the populist attitudes battery by Castanho Silva et al. (2018). This is an updated version of the measurement instrument used in

Study 2. Like in Study 2, we operationalize it as a multiplicative scale using the standardized factor scores to obtain a score of populist attitudes for each participant. The dependent variable is operationalized as (dis)identification with the demonstrating group using the populist slogan.[4] As for the statistical analysis strategy, we use the same technique we describe in the prior studies with one difference. In this study, the populist attitudes battery comes after the experimental treatment so in the free coefficients MG-SEM we freely estimated the factor loadings, intercepts of the measurement model next to the regression coefficients.

Results:

Structural results are displayed in Tables 13 & 15. The comparison of the goodness of fit statistics suggests that the experimental manipulations significantly impact the outcomes (Table 14). Although the demonstrators use the same populist slogan, the context of the slogan and its connotations impact the relationships between populist attitudes and the perceptions of attachment and similarity to the demonstrators. Those who were exposed to the slogan in the PEGIDA condition distanced themselves by reporting they do not feel similar to this group and they feel detached from the exclusionary PEGIDA demonstrators (these relationships are indicated by the significant coefficients .21 & .14 respectively). We observe no significant relationships in the Leipzig (/GDR-protest) condition, which indicates that the same slogan in the German reunification context failed to mobilize the participants for this positive engagement strategy. A peace demonstration without any slogans (the control-group), in this student sample, seems to trigger populist attitudes partially. Those with higher levels of populism are more likely

[4] See the question wording, latent constructs and the indicators in the Appendix, along with the descriptive statistics and the details of the measurement models. The (dis)identification scale is adopted from Becker and Tausch (2014).

to report feeling attached to the peace march demonstrators but do not necessarily feel similar to them.

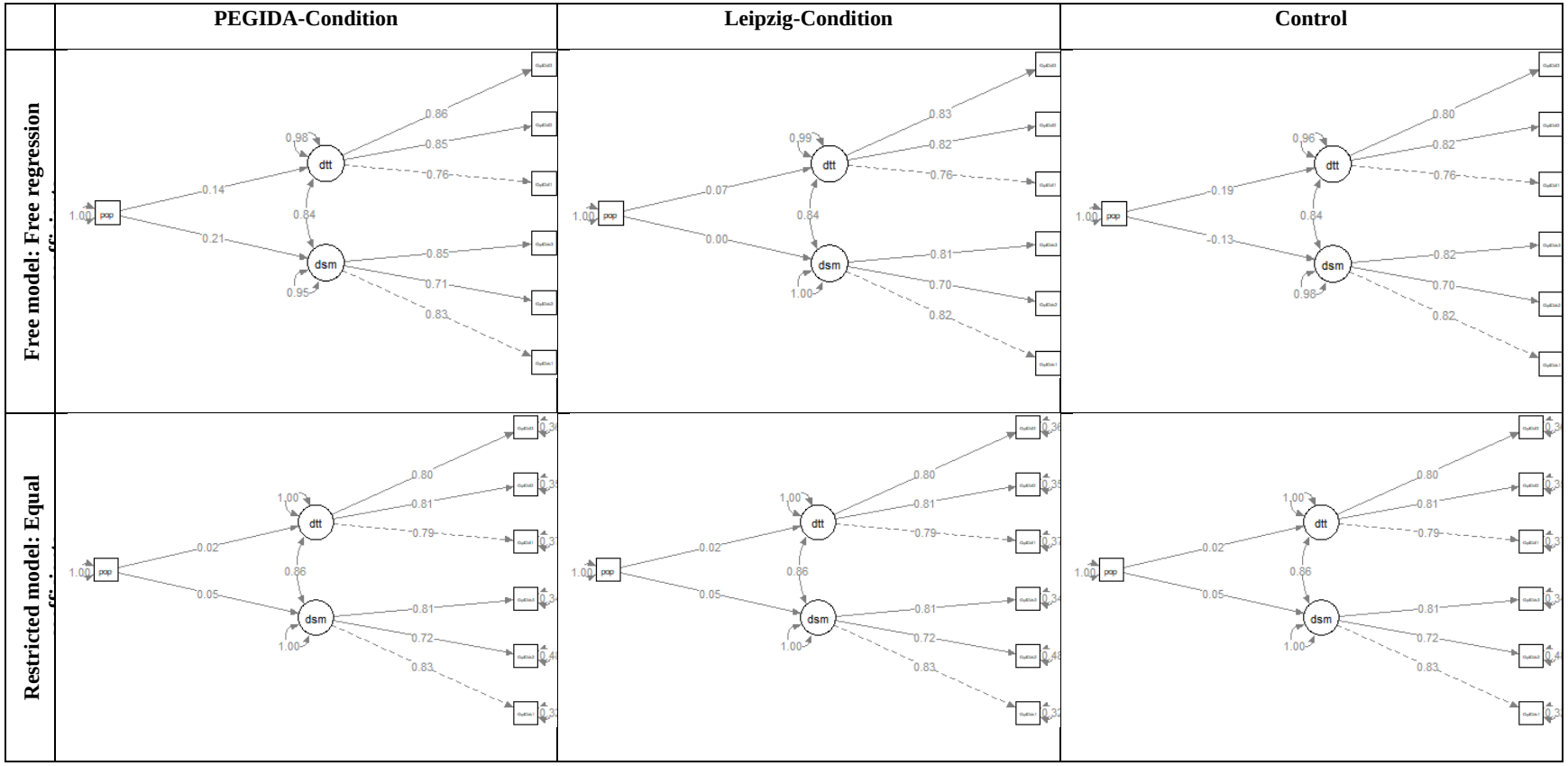

Table 13: Path models of the multi-group structural equation models for the second D.E. sample – Positive political engagement is (dis)identification with the demonstrators at the German re-unification marches in Leipzig; negative political engagement is (dis)identification with the demonstrators at the PEGIDA meeting; ***pop*****:** populist attitudes, ***dtt:*** detachment from the demonstrating group; ***dsm:*** dissimilarity with the demonstrating group; see the appendix for the significance level of the factor loadings; see table 14 for the regression results.

Model comparison							
	Df	AIC	BIC	χ^2	$\Delta\chi^2$	ΔDf	p-value
Free model	54	4423.9	4595.2	154.36			
Restricted model	74	4417.5	4512.8	188.02	33.669	20	0.02845*

*Table 14***:** Model comparison of the second DE sample for the negative political engagement.

	Free coefficients (loadings, intercepts, regressions)						**Equal coefficients**					
	PEGIDA		*Leipzig*		*Control*		*PEGIDA*		*Leipzig*		*Control*	
	Dissimilarity	Detachment	Dissimilarity	Detachment	Dissimilarity	Detachment	Dissimilarity	Detachment	Dissimilarity	Detachment	Dissimilarity	Detachment
Pop.	.213**	.138†	.001	.072	-.127	-.190†	0.049	0.024	0.049	0.024	0.049	0.024
Model-fit:												
N	95		135		105		95		135		105	
Robust RMSEA	.083** **CI:** .061 .104						.084** **CI:** .064 .103					
Robust TLI	.926						.924					
Robust CFI	.936						.911					
SRMR	.163						.179					
Robust χ^2	95.337*** *df* =54						131.560 *** *df*=74					

Table15: Structural relationships and the goodness of fit statistics of the multi-group SEMs; second DE sample -- positive & negative political engagements as the experimental treatments.
** p < .01, † p <.1

Discussion of results for the third study: The overall results of study 3 provide additional evidence for the ideational approach to populism. Populist cues in the social and political environment activate the latently predisposed attitudes on the demand side of populism and influence the relationship between these attitudes and political engagement strategies. Furthermore, we provide evidence to suggest that the populist cues are context specific.

Additionally, the results of the third study complement the results of the first study in certain respects. The activation of populist attitudes hinders negative political engagement and does not necessarily lead to radicalization or support for radical populist movements. However, in the German context, the activation of populist attitudes also did not mobilize the participants for the positive political engagement strategy. We interpret this lack of mobilization in two complementary ways. First, many participants (mostly the students in the sample) reported finding the German reunification context less relevant and salient[5], seeing it as a historical event, which does not have much influence on today's politics. Second, the populist slogan in the German reunification context tends to have different meanings and connotations for the people who live in the Eastern German states. East Germans have been the decisive actors both in the context of the Peaceful Revolution and PEGIDA (predominantly an "East German peculiarity" (Virchow, 2016)). Unfortunately, due to a low share of East Germans in our sample, we cannot address the influence of geographical differences. We leave the examination of East-West German differences to future research The overall results from Study three show that the context is important even within the same country. When populist framing is linked to certain real-life

[5] We also asked participants to write their thoughts and opinions about the slogans and demonstrations and performed quantitative text analysis on the open responses. See the Appendix for more details about the experimental treatment procedure. The open-ended responses in the Leipzig (/GDR-protest) condition indicate that many participants associated "Wir sind das Volk" more with PEGIDA since this is the more recent and salient event.

events, the size and direction of effects can change, even if the same slogan is used. This can be seen in contrast to Study 1, which used a fictional political context.

Conclusion

In this paper, we investigate the link between the activation of populist attitudes and political participation, in various forms. We test the hypotheses with three framing and priming experiments, with data collected in the U.S. and Germany. Our findings (summarized in Table 16), by and large, suggest that populist attitudes are not connected to higher political participation and that the activation of populist attitudes may lead to more political apathy.

	Positive Political Engagement	**Negative Political Engagement**
Study 1: US	↓ (*active support in elections*)	↓ (*endorsing violent protest*)
Study 2: DE	null (*being an active citizen in politics*)	null (*abstaining from voting*)
Study 3: DE	null (*identifying with demonstrators of German reunification movement*)	↓ (*identifying with the demonstrators of PEGIDA*)

Table 16: Summary of all results

While some have proposed populism as a possible cure to the current representation gaps due to their increase of participation among disenfranchised voters (Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012; Rovira Kaltwasser, 2014), our experiments find no evidence to support this thesis. In the US, in the absence of viable populist political forces, populist attitudes are related to lower levels of participation. In Germany, where there are viable populist alternatives, populist attitudes are not related to either higher or lower intentions to take part in politics.

From a conceptual perspective, our findings confirm the proposition populism being a latent disposition that can be activated by specific frames and primes and have observable

consequences (Hawkins et al., 2018). Our findings make important progress in understanding exactly what the psychological standing of populist attitudes is. Therefore, further research should expand this design to look at other areas in which activated populism might have an impact, such as ideological radicalization or intolerance.

Moreover, while most theories are discussing populism and participation focus in typical forms of political engagement, such as turnout, we also look at normatively negative forms of engagement. By also checking the relation between populism and endorsement of violence, and of exclusionary movements, we test whether the anti-pluralist side of populist discourse (Muller 2016) prevails over its potential positive mobilization potential. Here, what we find is that populist frames and primes actually reduce negative political engagement. That is a sign of relief for those concerned with the impacts of populism in contemporary liberal democracies. While populism may not be a solution to ever-falling turnout rates, at the very least it also reduces the appeal of violent options of political engagement for those with populist attitudes.

While the representation gap explanation for populist success proposes that it emerges out of citizens' dissatisfaction with their representatives -- which we confirm by finding the link between populist attitudes and apathy in the US --, it is clear that populism is not the answer to the current representation crisis in Western democracies. Addressing the gap between citizens and their representatives can reduce the appeal of populists, what, given the negative consequences of populism, is a desirable goal in itself. However, using populist discourse is not likely to achieve the goal of reducing that gap.

No doubts, our study has limitations. More flagrant, while convenience samples are often used for experimental research, the generalizability of findings is not guaranteed. It would be an important next step, therefore, to try and replicate these findings with representative samples. Moreover, it would be important to test these relationships in countries where populism is more

associated with left-wing than right-wing politics, such as Latin America or Southern Europe, in which case we might expect more positive associations between the populist attitudes and political participation. Nevertheless, this is a first step towards understanding the activation of populist attitudes and its consequences on vital issues in contemporary liberal democracies.

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