**How many different types of populists are there in Germany? An experimental approach with multiple methods**

Recent years have witnessed a growing interest in the demand-side of populism; to this day, many studies implemented variable-centered approaches to investigate populist attitudes. Utilizing a quasi-representative sample of the German voters ($N$ = 839), we adopt a person-centered approach by estimating latent psychological profiles and examining the exchange between the supply and demand side of populism in an experimental setting. After treating the participants with real-life populist slogans in two different demonstration settings (contemporary vs. historical) and comparing them to a control group, we discover that the estimated populist profile is only reactive to the slogan in the contemporary demonstration. This finding expands the ideational approach to populism by showing that the populism's supply-demand exchange mechanism is not only context-specific but also sensitive to subjective viewpoints. Acknowledging this person in the context approach contributes to the normative and empirical debates in the field by showing populist attitudes' subjective manifestations.

*Keywords:* populism, Germany, latent profile analysis, survey-experiment, multi-method research

1. Introduction

Populism has gained more ground all around the world and became much more visible in the last decade (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). As many people fear that this new wave of politics might be eroding democracy everywhere, many social scientists attempt to disentangle this phenomenon by investigating its causes and effects. There have been heated debates about the definition and operationalization of populism among scholars (Rooduijn, 2019). The current literature settled on a minimal definition that characterizes populism as a "thin-centered ideology" that attaches itself to more predominant "host" political ideologies like liberalism, socialism, and authoritarianism (Mudde, 2004, 2017). What characterizes the populist ideology is the distinction it makes between the virtuous ordinary people (perceived as a homogeneous entity with a unified political will) and corrupt elites (such as politicians and multi-national corporations). This contrast portrays politics in a Manichean outlook as a battle between good and evil (K.A. Hawkins, Carlin, Littvay, & Kaltwasser, 2018).

From the perspectives of political science and sociology, there are several reasons why populism has become prevalent. Societies have transformed, and the traditional political cleavages often uttered as left vs. right or liberal vs. conservative has begun to erode in meaning. Another reason for the success of populist political actors is the immigration issue. The prevalent consensus among mainstream parties on immigration policy presented an ideal opportunity structure for right-wing populists parties to politicize this issue (Grande, Schwarzbözl, & Fatke, 2019).

Multiple crises played a crucial role in the rise of populism as well (Moffitt, 2015). However, the influence of crises on populism has mixed evidence. On the one hand, national

economic hardship does not automatically lead to growing populist forces, as the economic crisis 2008/2009 has shown. On the other hand, right-wing populist parties tend to do equally well in wealthy West European countries such as Austria and Switzerland (Kriesi & Pappas, 2015). This aggregate-level paradox motivated social science researchers to investigate the attitudes of populist party voters (Mols & Jetten, 2017). Additionally, cross-country research and social psychological perspective highlight the role of cultural explanations fueled by anti-immigration attitudes, authoritarianism, and anomic feelings (Norris & Inglehart, 2019). Finally, the widespread belief in political corruption leads to the fertile breeding ground for populism because beliefs about political corruption point to the political elites not doing a good job in terms of representing the interests of voters.

Based on this relatively new string of research, the supply and demand sides of populism can be distinguished. While the supply refers to the rhetoric utilized by the political actors and the populist movements, the demand side is the mass/public opinion that internalizes the ideas proposed by this populist discourse. There has been much research showing the multiplicity in the populist rhetoric (Ernst, Blassnig, Engesser, Büchel, & Esser, 2019; Ernst, Engesser, Büchel, Blassnig, & Esser, 2017) and populist communication (Reinemann, Stanyer, Aalberg, Esser, & de Vreese, 2019) as well as their influence on the demand-side (Bos, Sheets, & Boomgaarden, 2017; De Vreese et al., 2017; M. Hameleers, L. Bos, & C. H. de Vreese, 2017; Michael Hameleers, Linda Bos, & Claes H. de Vreese, 2017; Hameleers et al., 2018; Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017).

The demand-side of populism has been investigated with measurement instruments that tap into the populist attitudes' multiple dimensions (Castanho Silva, Jungkunz, Helbling, & Littvay, 2020). Despite the fruitful findings that shed light on the demand-side, there is almost

no research that investigates the populist attitudes with person-centered approaches such as latent profile analysis. We believe the heterogeneity in populist attitudes is understood better by investigating the psychological profile of voters. Our research fills this gap with a survey-experiment that probes populism on the receiver side. After exposing a quasi-representative sample of German voters to populist slogans in different contexts, we discover there is considerable heterogeneity in the demand-side of populism. Although individuals receive the same populist message, their perceptions of this cue and their reactions are significantly different due to the context as well as the estimated psychological profile. These findings suggest that populist attitudes are far from uniformity, and the psychological profile interacts with the environment differently. Acknowledging this heterogeneity might help scientists explain the normative and empirical debates in the field by improving the research designs and explaining the exchange mechanisms of the supply and demand sides of populism.

## 1.1. Theoretical framework: the ideational approach to populism

We embark upon the theoretical framework of the ideational approach to populism (K.A. Hawkins et al., 2018), which defines the phenomenon as a core set of aligned ideas. According to the ideational approach, populism is an essential view of politics that divides the world into fundamental moral camps and contrasts the "good people" and the "evil elite" (Mudde, 2004, 2017). The people is a reified, virtuous, and homogeneous entity with a unified political will, and these people are oppressed by a powerful minority, the elite, who oppresses the people and ignores the will of the people with illegitimate politics (Muller, 2016). For populism to be relevant, the division between the people and the elite emerges as the moral battleground, which goes beyond conventional differences of political opinion and interest.

Populism does not fully qualify as a conventional ideology (Mudde, 2004); populism attaches itself to existing ideologies. Nonetheless, populist rhetoric is functionally equivalent to ideologies in general, namely as "cognitive shortcuts" and "rhetorical commonplaces" (Finlayson, 2013). Debates in the broader literature point to the possible mechanism that populist attitudes can help cognitive misers by providing a simplistic narrative (Demasi, 2019; Hopkin & Rosamond, 2018). Although we do not necessarily adopt this suggestion, we see our approach corresponding to this line of argument. From a political psychology point of view, political behavior can be understood from cognitive, motivational, and social perspectives (Mols & 't Hart, 2018). Our broad theoretical orientation combines the cognitive (humans are imperfect information-processors) and motivational (humans vary on psychological traits, drives, and cognitive styles) perspectives.

Growing evidence suggests that the attitudes on the demand-side of populism are latent dispositions, which lay dormant in individuals who have them. Although populist attitudes are latent, they are different from some fundamental psychological dispositions, such as personality traits. Personality traits are known to be stable over time and context; this is not the hypothesized characteristic of populist attitudes. Unlike fundamental psychological traits, populist attitudes need to be activated. Activation means they have significant associations with observable attitudinal and behavioral outcomes once a cue triggers them in the environment. Metaphorically speaking, populist attitudes need to be woken up from the "standby mode" to be involved in social and behavioral outcomes (Kirk A. Hawkins & Kaltwasser, 2017; Kirk A. Hawkins, Kaltwasser, & Andreadis, 2020).

According to the ideational approach, activation of populist attitudes requires the juxtaposition of a relevant political context where the populist rhetoric is credible, and a cue

coming from the supply-side of populism. Only then, the populist attitudes can be triggered and have observable outcomes. This combination is imperative because it would be unlikely that a populist cue would be principally attractive to the demand-side unless the context is valid and relevant. The contextual factors in themselves might be necessary for the activation but are not sufficient. The populist cues must also be politically framed by credible actors (Entman, 1993; Moffitt, 2017; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018).

The ideational approach to populism formulates context in broad as well as narrow terms. "Context", for the ideational approach, is a specific socio-political setting on the supply-side that the individuals are exposed to. For example, the widespread perception of elite corruption can provide an activating context for populist attitudes (Kirk A. Hawkins et al., 2020). Although populist individuals share similar ideological outlooks (e.g., supporting democracy as a principle but being dissatisfied with its implementation) across different cultural settings, national politics moderate the outcomes. Such a moderating role explains the support of populist actors coming from different sociodemographic groups in different regions (Rovira Kaltwasser & Van Hauwaert, 2020). The host ideology is another moderating factor. Despite sharing preferences for populist ideas, individuals on the opposite left and right side of the political spectrum, have different views on economic and cultural politics (Loew & Faas, 2019; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018).

1.2. Expanding the ideational approach to populism: latent psychological profiles instead of populist attitudes

The formulation of the context and the activation hypothesis proposed by the ideational approach to populism is elegant. However, this proposed mechanism relies on an implicit assumption. The activation hypothesis implies that once the supply side delivers the populist

cues in the right context, the dormant attitudes on the demand side switch on for everybody who has high levels on the attitude spectrum. We think this mechanism is only partially relevant and the flow of populist communication from the supply side to the demand side should also include a subjective perspective. Therefore, a person-centered approach instead of a variable centered approach is more likely to explain this activation by placing individuals in the context and accounting for subjectivity in being receptive to the cues in the environment. In the current study, we go one step further than the previous studies' designs by (1) using a real-life specific context in an experimental setting, and (2) relying on latent psychological profiles rather than psychological dispositions expressed as populist attitudes.

## 2. Overview of current research

To test the alternative explanation in the ideational approach, we designed an experiment where we rely on estimated psychological profiles who may or may not be receptive to the populist cues in the political environment. We use the following psychological constructs to estimate the profiles.

### 2.1. Psychological constructs used for the latent profile estimation

The primary psychological constructs we utilize are the different dimensions of populist attitudes themselves. Many scholars who developed different scales agree that all components of populist attitudes need to be combined for an authentic populist profile. Although different measurement instruments tap into distinct dimensions, there are common elements, which are people-centrism and anti-elitism. We rely on the scale developed by Castanho Silva et al. (2018) because this instrument includes a unique dimension that taps into the Manichean outlook in politics that sees the world in black and white terms. We think compared to the political constructs, this Manichean outlook represents a more valid psychological construct for profiling

voters. The scale by Castanho Silva et al. (2018) includes *people-centrism*, *anti-elitism,* and *Manichean view of politics*.

We also include right-wing authoritarianism in our profile analysis because this orientation with three dimensions (authoritarian aggression, authoritarian submission, being rigid about conventional values (Altemeyer, 1981, 1998)) has shown consistent strong associations with the populist attitudes and voting for the populist parties (Aichholzer & Zandonella, 2016; Assche, Dhont, Hiel, & Roets, 2018; Bakker, Rooduijn, & Schumacher, 2016; Rothmund, Bromme, & Azevedo, 2019).

Another psychological construct that has been shown to be related to populist attitudes is collective narcissism (Marchlewska, Cichocka, Panayiotou, Castellanos, & Batayneh, 2018) – a fragile and exaggerated belief in the positive image and importance of a group the individual belongs to. This belief about the greatness of the group is also contingent on external validation. In the current study, we used the German nation as the group to assess this psychological construct.

National identity is closely related to collective narcissism. Populist actors often include identity-based rhetoric in their populist communication and make references to the ordinary people with terms that are directly or indirectly related to the nation (Bonikowski, Halikiopoulou, Kaufmann, & Rooduijn, 2019; Brubaker, 2017). Furthermore, populist attitudes are known to be predictors of inter-group prejudices (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017; Matthes & Schmuck, 2017; Schmuck & Matthes, 2017), such as anti-immigrant attitudes, which signal associations between national identity and populist attitudes.

## 2.2. Case selection: Germany

Germany is a country in which populist attitudes have been steadily becoming widespread (Vehrkamp & Merkel, 2018). Germany presents an interesting case study for populism studies due to its party system and political actors. The German parliament has two populist parties in opposition. The left-wing populist Die Linke (the Left) has considerable and consistent success in parliamentary elections. Its counterpart, the right-wing populist AfD (Alternative for Germany), became the strongest opposition party in the 2017 national elections (Olsen, 2018). These parties garnered more than 20% of the votes together.

We conduct the person in the context design in such a country that has both right-wing and left-wing populist actors in politics in a viable time – that is right after the national elections in the fall of 2017. Both the right-wing and the left-wing populist parties proved to have high support entering the parliament. Therefore, the demand side of populism had feasible political actors on the supply side expressing populist discourse, giving a reliable context to our study.

Furthermore, in line with the election results, negotiations across the mainstream parties were taking place during our data collection, which meant that the political atmosphere was particularly alluring for populists. Therefore, we expected populist profiles to be particularly vigilant as a baseline.

In our experimental conditions, we use two separate real-life settings from different populist social movements. Although both these populist movements used the same slogan, "Wir sind das Volk" (we are the people), one is contemporary, and the other is historical. The contemporary populist context in our experiment involves the right-wing PEGIDA (Patriotic Europeans against the Islamization of the Occident) movement. The historical setting is from the German reunification movement back in 1989.

We also would like to stress the following for those readers who are not familiar with the German political context. For Germans, the slogan "Wir sind das Volk" (we are the people) rings different bells. While it became a prominent chant in many East German cities during the German reunification process – the Peaceful Revolution of 1989, the right-wing populist PEGIDA movement 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).

### 2.3. Hypotheses

We test two hypotheses; one broad, the other specific. With the first broad hypothesis, we expect to distinguish the populist profile(s) from the non-populist profile(s). However, due to the inductive nature of latent profile analysis, we do not formulate neither a certain number of populist profiles nor non-populist profiles. There is no prior theory or finding to guide us with particular numbers of populist profiles.

With the specific hypothesis we have, we expect the populist profile(s) to be more reactive to the populist cues that are administered as an experimental treatment. More specifically, we have two experimental conditions that are contrasted to a control group. The first one is the contemporary populist context, where we use a widely known and commonly uttered populist slogan in a right-wing demonstration (by PEGIDA); this is our main treatment. The second treatment is a placebo condition. We use another political demonstration that uses the same populist slogan in the first experimental condition; however, this demonstration represents a historical context, therefore it is not expected to activate the populist attitudes. In the control group, we have a Peace March demonstration with no slogans.

To formalize the specific hypothesis' testing, we turn to multi-group path analyses where we have the experimental conditions as the moderating group variable. The diagrams below illustrate our hypothesis and the expected associations.



**Prof.** = estimated latent profile(s)
**Polar.** = thinking that the demonstration is polarizing
**Relev.** = thinking that the issues raised by the demonstrators are relevant

Figure 1 Hypothesized structural relationships across experimental conditions.

## 3. Methods

Data, replication material, and supporting information are available at

https://osf.io/v95ut.

### 3.1. Participants, procedure and experimental manipulation

We have a convenient sample of German voters ($N$=839; 72 % male; ranging in age between 18-91; $M$ = 41, $SD$ = 19.56) recruited via online ads between 17 October and 27 December in 2017. Participants were invited to take an online survey in return for a chance to

win €25. We used German voter demographics and political interest to micro-target individuals with populist tendencies[1]. 47 % of the participants reported having voted for a populist party (27 % AfD; 20 % Die Linke) in the general election before data collection. Further details about the sample and the sampling scheme can be found in the supporting information.

After welcoming the participants to the survey on the first page and getting informed consent, we presented the measures in the following order. First page: socio-demographics; second page: populism battery; third page: vote-recall, fourth page: 2 blocks (political orientation & trust); fifth page: right-wing authoritarianism; sixth page: 2 blocks (national identification & collective narcissism). The seventh page included experimental manipulation. Participants in the control group saw images of a demonstration with no slogan and were told that the demonstration is a peace march. In two experimental conditions, we administered populist slogans in different contexts. In the PEGIDA condition, participants were exposed to a PEGIDA demonstration image with "we are the people" and " politicians live in a different reality" slogans. This condition represents the contemporary context in which the populist message is delivered. The second experimental condition included images from the Monday Demonstrations that took place during the German reunification movement in 1989. We call this the LEIPZIG condition, where the same "we are the people" slogan is accompanied by a different anti-elitist message "all big wigs need to go to trial". This treatment represents the historical

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[1] We acknowledge the gender imbalance in our sample. However, this gender ratio is an expected outcome of our sampling scheme since we micro-targeted populists individuals with social media ads. Populist attitudes and voting for populist parties are known to be more prevalent in males compared to females due to different political socialization mechanisms. Often times, women have lower levels of political efficacy and political interest, which makes populist parties and cues less attractive to them (Mudde, 2007; Spierings & Zaslove, 2017).

populist context and can be seen as a placebo condition, where an experimental manipulation is present but is not expected to have an effect.

We measured the outcome variables on the same page, where we have the experimental manipulation. Here, we asked whether the participants (1) found the demonstrators' concerns relevant; (2) found the demonstration polarizing. We also included open-ended questions in which participants were asked to write their thoughts and comments on the demonstrations. The open-ended responses enabled us to examine manipulation checks with quantitative text analysis and provided rich qualitative data describing why the respondents found the demonstrations relevant and polarizing.

The visuals used as the experimental treatments and further details about the procedure are in the supporting information.

### 3.2. Measures

Below we report the scales in the conventional form; a detailed psychometric analysis of all the scales can be found in the Supplementary Information.

**Populist attitudes[2]** (Castanho Silva et al., 2018) is measured in three dimensions with response categories ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 7 (*completely agree*): *people centrism* α = .56, *M* = 6, *SD* = 1.1; *anti-elitism* α = .84, *M* = 4.8, *SD* = 1.6; *Manichean view of politics* (e.g., "You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics") α = .44, *M* = 3.1, *SD* = 1.2.

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[2] The Supplementary Information has a more detailed account of the scale's psychometric properties. Despite the low internal consistencies of *people-centrism* and *Manichean view of politics*, IRT analysis reveals that the scale has acceptable psychometric properties and provides (at least, limited) information to calculate the factor scores. See Castanho Silva et al. (2020) for an empirical comparison of seven populist attitudes scales and their strengths & weaknesses. Wuttke, Schimpf, & Schoen (2020) point to further pitfalls in the existing populist attitudes scales and score calculations.

**Right-wing authoritarianism (RWA)** (Aichholzer & Zeglovits, 2015) is assessed with 6 items ranging from 1 (*completely disagree*) to 5 (*completely agree*). α = .78, *M* = 2.8, *SD* = 0.83. The first items is dropped due to bad psychometric properties.

**Collective narcissism** was assessed with the short version of the scale (Zavala, Cichocka, Eidelson, & Jayawickreme, 2009) with 5 items (range 1-7). α = .86, *M* = 3.1, *SD* = 1.4.

**National identification** scale (Leach et al., 2008) has five dimensions and two higher order constructs (*self-investment* & *self-definition*). Each of the five dimensions include three items (range 1-5). *Centrality* α = .85, *M* = 2.9, *SD* = 1.1; solidarity α = .85, *M* = 3.5, *SD* = 1; *satisfaction* α = .87, *M* = 3.6, *SD* = .98; *self-stereotyping* α = .9, *M* = 3.1, *SD* = 1; *in-group homogeneity* α = .81, *M* = 3.1, *SD* = .86. The higher-order factors self-investment (reliability values at level 2: 0.95) and self-definition (reliability values at level 2: 0.79) have both good reliabilities. See the details of the measurement models and psychometric quality assessment in the supporting information.

The first dependent variable asked participants about the relevancy of the demonstrators' concerns; response categories ranged from (1) not relevant at all to (5) very relevant. The second dependent variable assessed the perceived polarizing effect of the demonstration with response categories ranging from (1) demonstration brought the German population together to (7) demonstration pushed the German population apart. All descriptive statistics (both item-level and construct level) are in the supporting information.

## 3.3. Empirical strategy

We implemented almost all of our analyses in the broad structural equation modeling framework and adopted a multi-method approach. We started by assessing the psychometric qualities of the scales with a graded response model from the item response theory. We did this

to eliminate the bad survey-items. After fitting the measurement models in confirmatory factor analysis, we relied on the normalized factor scores.

To estimate the latent profiles, we used the *people-centrism*, *anti-elitism*, *Manichean view of politics*, *RWA, collective narcissism* and the higher-order constructs' scores from the national identification scale, namely *self-investment* and *self-definition*. Here, we relied on model-based clustering using models that freely estimate profiles with varying variances and covariances. We relied on R packages mclust (Scrucca, Fop, Murphy, & Raftery, 2016), tidyLPA (Rosenberg, Schmidt, Beymer, & Steingut, 2018) and factorextra (Kassambara, 2017) for different estimations, and getting the results for interpretation (see the Supplementary Information section Extended Latent Profile Analysis Results for further details).

In the final analysis, we used the estimated latent profiles in a multi-group path model, in which the profiles predict whether the demonstration is found relevant and polarizing. The experimental manipulation was used as the moderator in the group analysis. Our analysis strategy here involves two steps. In the first step, we fit two multi-group path models. In the first model, we restrict the regression coefficients and the endogenous variables correlation to be the same across experimental conditions. In the second model, we estimate the regression coefficients and the endogenous variables' correlation freely across experimental groups. In the next step, we compare the goodness of fit statistics of the two different path models to see if the model that has the free estimations is significantly better than the model with restrained coefficients.

This two-step procedure allows us to check if the structural relationships between the constructs change as a function of our experimental manipulation. If the goodness of fit

statistics of the freely estimated coefficients fits the data better compared to the restricted

model, that indicates that the experimental conditions are significantly different.

Additionally, we rely on a supplementary analysis to check the robustness and validity of

our results. We applied structural topic modeling (STM), an inductive quantitative text analysis

technique that has somewhat of a similarity to fuzzy clustering, to analyze the open-ended

responses. This approach is used to uncover the hidden topics contained in text data with the

help of covariates (Lucas et al., 2015; Roberts et al., 2014). We utilize STM due to two reasons:

(1) its mixed-membership model does not assume an exclusive/unique subjective viewpoint so

that portions of the text can be assigned to multiple estimated topics; (2) we can examine the

covariates of estimated topics. In our research design, the topics correspond to the subjective

viewpoints of the participants that stem from experimental treatments (Supplementary

Information section Extended Structural Topic Modeling Results elaborates on the method, the

estimated topics, and their interpretation).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Latent profile analysis

We find that a two-class solution explains the data best, meaning that two distinct

patterns in the construct scores emerge from the data. The bootstrap likelihood ratio test

(Nylund, Asparouhov, & Muthén, 2007) confirmed that a two cluster solution is significantly

better than one (LRTS 1 vs. 2, 730.26 p < .001), and three clusters lead to estimation problems.

This solution explains 80 % of the data. Profile 2 (42 % of the sample) is consistently high on all

the constructs and appears as the populist profile. Figure 1 displays the results.

The biggest contrast between Profile 2 and Profile 1 is the scores on *people-centrism*,

*anti-elitism*, *right-wing authoritarianism,* and *collective narcissism*, which is theoretically

expected. The non-overlapping spread of *people-centrism* scores indicates that this construct is the most distinguishing characteristic of the populist profile. Additionally, we check whether there is a significant association between the estimated profiles and vote recall. Correlations displayed in Table 1 show that the populist profile is leaning towards right-wing populism ($r(837)_{\text{voting for the right-wing populist party: AfD}} = 0.51$, $p < .001$; $r(837)_{\text{voting for the left-wing populist party: Die Linke}} = -0.17$, $p < .001$). Extended results for the profile analysis can be found in the supporting information.
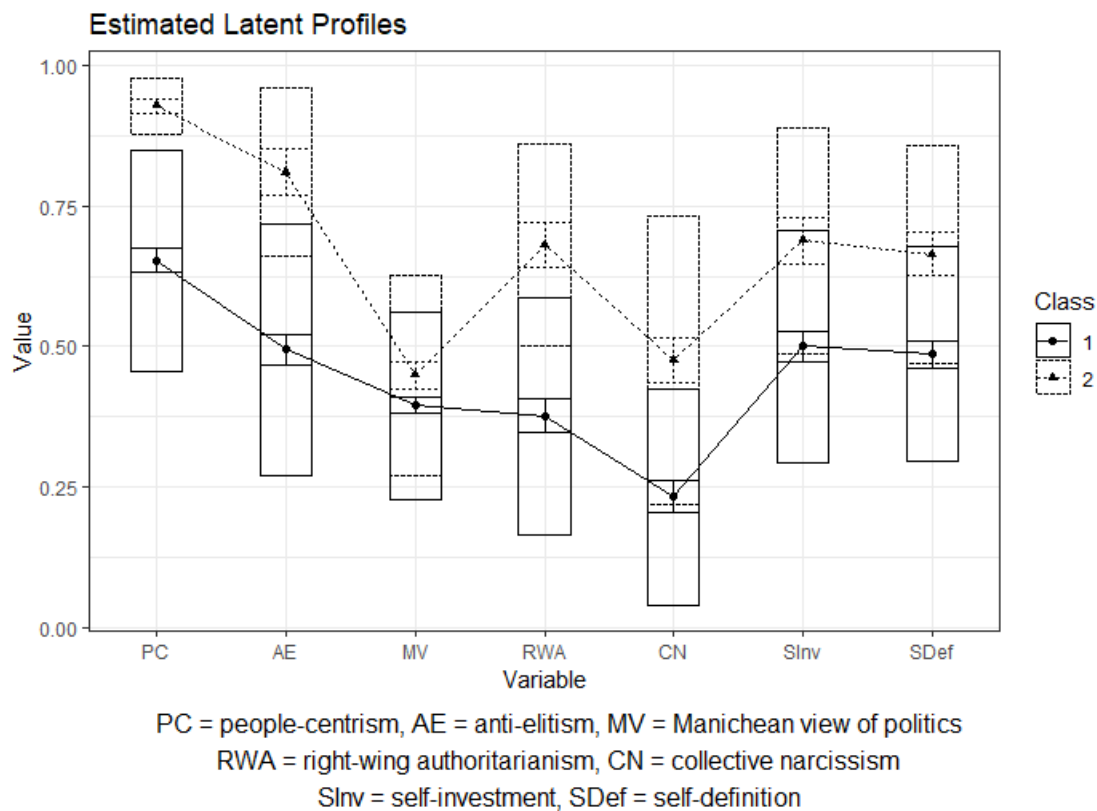


### Estimated Latent Profiles

PC = people-centrism, AE = anti-elitism, MV = Manichean view of politics
RWA = right-wing authoritarianism, CN = collective narcissism
SInv = self-investment, SDef = self-definition

Figure 2 Latent profile analysis results

Table 1 Pearson correlations across the latent profile and populist party vote.

| Variable | 1 | 2 |
| --- | --- | --- |
| 1. Vote for the AfD vs. any other party | | |
| 2. Vote for the Left party vs. any other party | -.31** [-.37, -.25] | |
| 3. Latent profile | .51** [.46, .56] | -.17** [-.23, -.10] |

## 4.2. Manipulation check with structural topic modeling

A four topic solution yields the most interpretable and meaningful results. In other words, we find that participants expressed their comments on the demonstrations in four different semantic framings. The first topic stems from the first experimental condition. Here participants' comments focused on PEGIDA; there was criticism as well as acclamation. The second topic is distinguished by words that are related to the former German Democratic Republic; therefore, it is a function of the second experimental manipulation. The third topic is exclusive to the control group; all words that are most likely to be associated with this topic are related to the Peace March. The fourth topic captures the portions of the open-ended responses that focus on the slogans; here, the semantic framings elaborate on the slogans and their broader populist connotations with people-centric and anti-elitist tones.

Post-hoc analyses revealed that profiles are also related to all the estimated topics (see the extended analysis in the supporting information). We find significant associations when we regress topic proportions (percentages of the open-ended responses including words highly associated with the topics) on the profile with an OLS model. Results indicate that the topic

proportion of the populist profile (Profile 2) is significantly higher (compared to the non-populist profile: Profile 1) on comments about PEGIDA ($b$= 0.05, $SE$ = 0.02, $t$ = 2.62, $p$ = .009). The opposite relationship is true for the comments about the Peace March ($b$= -0.09, $SE$ = 0.04, $t$ = -2.56, $p$ = .011) and comments about the GDR ($b$= -0.08, $SE$ = 0.02, $t$ = -3.91, $p$ <.001). Additionally, populist profile significantly commented more on the slogans compared to the non-populist profile ($b$= 0.13, $SE$ = 0.01, $t$ = 10.39, $p$ < .001). All this evidence suggests that, on a cognitive level, indicated by the open-ended comments, the populist profile engaged more with the populist stimuli in the PEGIDA condition.

Table 2.1 Regression results using Topic 1 as the criterion: % comments about PEGIDA in the text

| Predictor | $b$ | $b$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | $sr^2$ | $sr^2$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | Fit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.21** | [0.19, 0.24] | | | |
| Profile [a] | 0.05** | [0.01, 0.08] | .01 | [.00, .04] | |
| | | | | | $R^2$ = .012** 95% CI[.00,.04] |

Table 2.2 Regression results using Topic 2 as the criterion: % comments about GDR in the text

| Predictor | $b$ | $b$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | $sr^2$ | $sr^2$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | Fit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.26** | [0.24, 0.29] | | | |
| Profile [a] | -0.08** | [-0.12, -0.04] | .03 | [.01, .06] | |
| | | | | | $R^2$ = .026** 95% CI[.01,.06] |

Table 2.3 Regression results using Topic 3 as the criterion: % comments about the Peace March in the text

| Predictor | $b$ | $b$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | $sr^2$ | $sr^2$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | Fit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.37** | [0.32, 0.41] | | | |
| Profile [a] | -0.09* | [-0.17, -0.02] | .01 | [.00, .03] | |
| | | | | | $R^2$ = .011* 95% CI[.00,.03] |

Table 2.4 Regression results using Topic 4 Proportion as the criterion: % comments about the slogans in the text

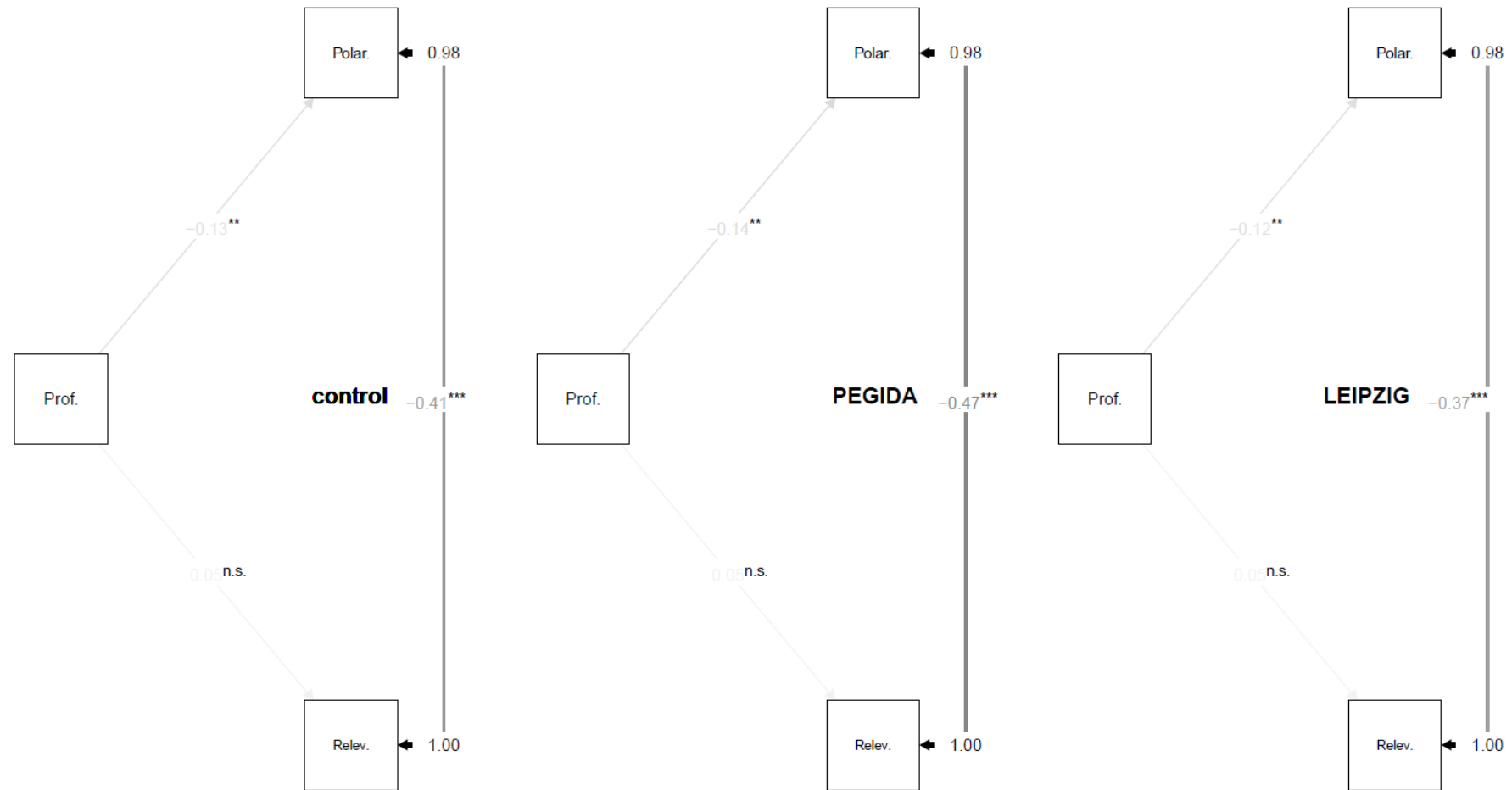| Predictor | $b$ | $b$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | $sr^2$ | $sr^2$ 95% CI [LL, UL] | Fit |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| (Intercept) | 0.16** | [0.14, 0.17] | | | |
| Profile [a] | 0.13** | [0.10, 0.15] | .16 | [.11, .21] | |
| | | | | | $R^2$ = .160** 95% CI[.11,.21] |

*Note.* A significant *b*-weight indicates the semi-partial correlation is also significant. *b* represents unstandardized regression weights. *sr²* represents the semi-partial correlation squared. *LL* and *UL* indicate the lower and upper limits of a confidence interval, respectively. * indicates p < .05. ** indicates p < .01. [a] Reference category: Profile 1 (non-populist profile).

### 4.3. Multi-group path model

The model fit comparison test in Table 2 (p < 0.001) shows that the model with freely estimated coefficients is significantly better than the model with restricted coefficients. The model with restricted coefficients fitting the data worse indicates that the experimental manipulation impacted the relationship between the populist profiles and their perception of the demonstrations.

In the model, where the coefficients are freely estimated, the populist profile (Profile 2) did not find the concerns of the Peace March demonstrators relevant ($\beta$ = -0.26, *SE* = 0.07, p < 0.001) and there is no significant relationship between the profile and finding the demonstration polarizing ($\beta$ = -0.13, *SE* = 0.0, p = 0.91). In contrast to this, the populist profile found the concerns of the PEGIDA demonstrators relevant ($\beta$ = 0.44, *SE* = 0.06, p < 0.001) and did not perceive the demonstration to be polarizing ($\beta$ = -0.52, *SE* = 0.06, p < 0.001). In the condition where the populist slogans are delivered in the German reunification movement context, there is no significant relationship between the profiles and finding the demonstration polarizing or thinking that the concerns of the demonstrators were relevant. All coefficients (for the restricted as well as the free model) are displayed in Tables 4.1 & 4.2. Figures 2.1.and 2.2. show the path models.
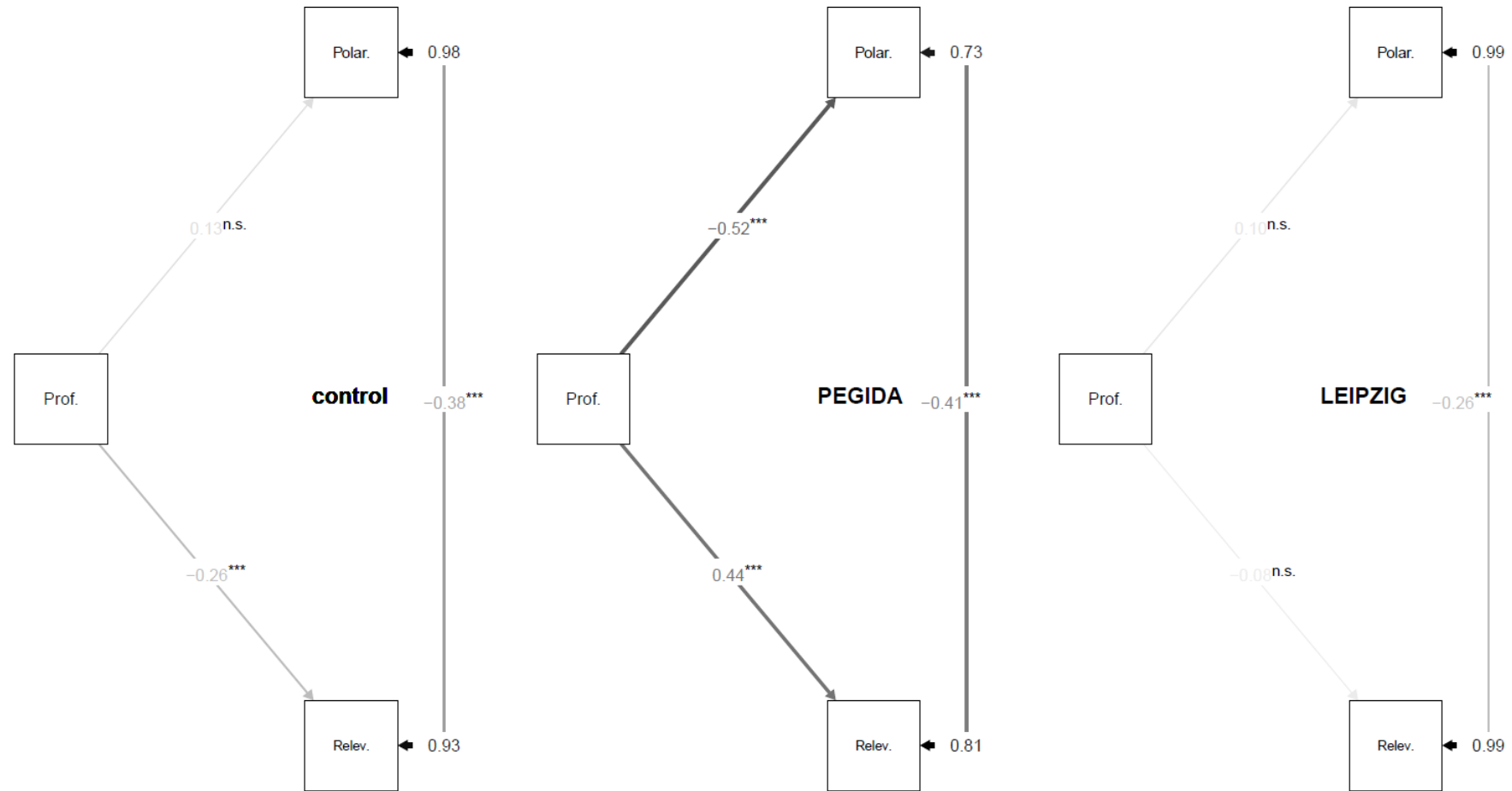
**RESTRICTED MODEL: regression coefficients & residual covariances are restricted to be the same across experimental conditions. All coefficients in the plots are the standardized estimates.**

Prof. = estimated latent profile (profile 2 vs. 1); Polar. = thinking that the demonstration is polarizing; Relev. = thinking that the issues raised by the demonstrators are relevant. **control** = seeing images of a Peace March with no slogans; **PEGIDA** = seeing images of a PEGIDA demonstration with populist slogans; **LEIPZIG** = seeing images of a demonstration during the German reunification movement with populist slogans. ** p < .01, n.s. not significant.

Figure 3.1 Paths of the structural relationships in the restricted model across experimental conditions.

**FREE MODEL: regression coefficients & residual covariances are estimated freely across experimental conditions. All coefficients in the plots are the standardized estimates.**

Prof. = estimated latent profile (profile 2 vs. 1); Polar. = thinking that the demonstration is polarizing; Relev. = thinking that the issues raised by the demonstrators are relevant. **control** = seeing images of a Peace March with no slogans; **PEGIDA** = seeing images of a PEGIDA demonstration with populist slogans; **LEIPZIG** = seeing images of a demonstration during the German reunification movement with populist slogans. *** p < .001, n.s. not significant.

Figure 3.2 Paths of the structural relationships in the free model across experimental conditions.

Table 3. Goodness of fit statistics and model comparison

**Goodness of fit statistics**

| | Equal coefficients | | | Free coefficients | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | *control* | *PEGIDA* | *LEIPZIG* | *control* | *PEGIDA* | *LEIPZIG* |
| *N* | 192 | 197 | 181 | 192 | 197 | 181 |
| *# of missing patterns* | 3 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 4 |
| Robust RMSEA | 0.197 | 90% CI: 0.157 | 0.239 | 0.00 | 90% CI: 0.00 | 0.00 |
| Robust TLI | | 0.654 | | | 1 | |
| Robust CFI | | 0.616 | | | 1 | |
| SRMR | | 0.146 | | | 0.001 | |
| Robust $\chi^2$ (df) P-value | | 84.714 (10)*** | | | 0.003 (4) | |

**Model comparison**

| | Df | AIC | BIC | $\chi^2$ | $\Delta\chi^2$ | $\Delta$Df | p-value |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Free model | 4 | 4656.172 | 4756.122 | 0.003 | | | |
| Restricted model | 10 | 4728.883 | 4802.759 | 84.714 | 72.171 | 6 | 0 |

Table 4.1

Restricted Regression Coefficients

| Outcome | Indicator | Experimental Condition | B | SE | Z | Beta | sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Finding the demonstration relevant | | | 0.050 | 0.047 | 1.061 | 0.049 | |
| | Latent profile | control | | | | | |
| Finding the demonstration polarizing | | | -0.133 | 0.047 | -2.831 | -0.130 | ** |
| Finding the demonstration relevant | | | 0.050 | 0.047 | 1.061 | 0.052 | |
| | Latent profile | PEGIDA | | | | | |
| Finding the demonstration polarizing | | | -0.133 | 0.047 | -2.831 | -0.144 | ** |
| Finding the demonstration relevant | | | 0.050 | 0.047 | 1.061 | 0.047 | |
| | Latent profile | LEIPZIG | | | | | |
| Finding the demonstration polarizing | | | -0.133 | 0.047 | -2.831 | -0.124 | ** |

## Table 4.2 Free Regression Coefficients

| Outcome | Indicator | Experimental Condition | B | SE | Z | Beta | sig |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Finding the demonstration relevant | | | -0.257 | 0.074 | -3.493 | -0.257 | *** |
| | Latent profile | control | | | | | |
| Finding the demonstration polarizing | | | 0.132 | 0.078 | 1.689 | 0.132 | |
| Finding the demonstration relevant | | | 0.440 | 0.063 | 6.933 | 0.440 | *** |
| | Latent profile | PEGIDA | | | | | |
| Finding the demonstration polarizing | | | -0.524 | 0.063 | -8.340 | -0.524 | *** |
| Finding the demonstration relevant | | | -0.080 | 0.078 | -1.014 | -0.080 | |
| | Latent profile | LEIPZIG | | | | | |
| Finding the demonstration polarizing | | | 0.101 | 0.077 | 1.307 | 0.101 | |

5.  Discussion: Ideational approach to populism- populist attitudes vs. populist profiles

In the current study, we adopted the theoretical framework suggested by the ideational approach to populism and elaborated on it by testing a person-centered approach instead of a variable-centered approach when examining the effects of populist communication. The experiment juxtaposes the usage of the same populist slogan in a historical and contemporary setting. Therefore, our study contributes to the theoretical activation debate by emphasizing the importance of the context defined in narrow and precise terms. Although our experimental treatment has positive historical connotations (within the German Reunification – the Peaceful Revolution), the contemporary interpretation of the slogan by the populist movement PEGIDA seems to override the original historical connotations.

The results of our experiment partially confirm the mechanism suggested by the ideational approach - the context plays a role, and there should be a populist cue in the environment for the populist attitudes to be activated. The non-significant associations between the populist profile and the outcome variables in the LEIPZIG demonstration context (historical context used as a placebo) show that without the relevant context, there is no meaningful exchange between the supply and demand side of populism. In contrast, the significant associations between the populist profile and the outcome variables in the PEGIDA demonstration context (contemporary context) indicate that the populist profile is receptive and reactive when the populist cue is delivered in the appropriate context.

However, the significant negative association between the latent profiles and not finding the concerns of the Peace March relevant implies that the populist profile is also reactive to non-populist cues. We think such an outcome stems from the right-wing authoritarianism orientation, which is a strong covariate of populist attitudes and is opposed to the ideas of the

peace movement. It is quite likely that the populist profile with high RWA orientation perceives the Peace March in contrast with the conventional values.

As shown in previous studies (Castanho Silva et al., 2018; Castanho Silva et al., 2020), all the constructs we use in estimating the psychological profiles have considerable common variance, which in some cases lead to shortcomings and unexpected results in construct and criterion validities. By confirming our broad hypothesis (distinguishing populist vs. non-populist latent profile), we show that using populist profiles instead of populist attitudes with covariates to predict relevant outcomes is a viable alternative empirical strategy.

## 6. Limitations and strengths

We believe the widely known and commonly uttered populist slogan we used in two different real-life demonstration settings is a strong asset for the external validity of our findings. We also remind our readers that we collected the data right after the German federal elections in a period when there was considerable anxiety and public discussion on the ambiguity of a government coalition. We also think our results are somewhat generalizable for the German voters with right-wing populist orientation since we micro-targeted the populist population with our sampling scheme.

Of course, our study is far from perfect; for example, we lack a possible left-wing populist profile in the sample, which could have enriched the latent profile analysis estimation. We compensate for this lack with a thorough analysis of the covariates of the estimated profiles. There, we discover the influence of political orientation on the profiles (see the supplementary information section Extended Latent Profile Analysis Results). Those in the populist profile are leaning towards the right side of the political spectrum. We hypothesize that additional psychological constructs like system justification and social dominance orientation could have

contributed to the profile estimation process and possibly have helped in revealing a left-wing populist profile. Unfortunately, we do not have those measures in the data.

We also acknowledge that the psychometric qualities of some of the measurement instruments we used are not ideal. In particular, we remain cautious about the Manichean view of politics (perceiving the world in black and white terms without any grey zones, and thus seeing politics as the ultimate battle between good and evil) dimension of the populism scale. This dimension seems to remain a bit inadequate to differentiate the individuals who are high and low on this trait. Such inadequacies might pose additional inference problems, especially when individuals are high on one or two dimensions and low on other dimensions (or vice versa) in multi-dimensional constructs (Wuttke et al., 2020). Additionally, although we relied on a short and balanced version that has been validated on German-speaking samples, the RWA scale did not turn out to be unproblematic. We note that other researchers working on the same topic by using the same instrument faced similar problems (Hirsch, 2018; Rothmund et al., 2019; Veit, 2019). Nonetheless, all measurement instruments showed acceptable properties (see the Psychometric Quality and the Measurement Models section in the Supporting Information).

## 7.  Conclusions and suggestions for further research

Overall, we show populism on the demand side manifests itself differently across individuals and contexts, both quantitatively and qualitatively. Our findings illustrate that populism scholars need to start accounting for subjectivity in populist attitudes in a broader sense. Acknowledging this heterogeneity might help scientists explain the normative and empirical debates in the field, especially when it comes to fine-tuning the operationalizations on the demand-side. There is evidence to think that constructs like RWA and collective narcissism are not just covariates of populism but are characteristics in a broader psychological profile. The

overall results in our study hint that individuals can be people-centric and anti-elitist without a Manichean outlook.

We recommend replicating similar designs in different national contexts by using multiple measurement instruments that include various components of populist attitudes. For example, Wettstein et al. (2019) operationalize populism on the demand-side as a higher-order latent construct with *anti-elitism*, *homogeneity of the people,* and *a demand for popular sovereignty*. We think political constructs like the preference for popular sovereignty might also be involved in different manifestations of populist attitudes in international political contexts.

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