The Inner Logic: An Intergroup Approach to the Populist Mentality in Europe

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Public grievances against mean and immoral rulers are not new. Greedy medieval kings have been ridiculed by the populace, bourgeois industrials have been accused of exploiting workers in the 19th century, and countless politicians throughout the 20th century have been involved in public scandals of corrupt and self-indulgent behaviour. Similarly, calls for an enhanced role of ordinary citizens in political decision-making have been around for a long time. Marxist class struggles and the first populist parties in the U.S. in the 19th century are early instances of the long history of populist movements (see Betz, 2018; Judis, 2016; Müller, 2016).

Yet, there is a pressing sentiment that present-day populism has reached a new level, and that a fundamental change has occurred in the way citizenries construe the relation between the rulers and the ruled. In this chapter, we suggest that this change is best understood as a deep-seated transformation of isolated elite criticisms and fringe political movements into a systemic, structuring, and pervasive intergroup representation of the people-elite relationship. Setting out to provide a comprehensive analysis of the *inner logic* of this contemporary populist mentality across eight European countries, we examine the populist mentality as a dual system of intergroup representations opposing the people and the elite on dimensions of power and morality. This flexible dual system of categorization makes up for an accessible political narrative that provides a compelling answer to those significant segments of the population who experience the deleterious effects of social inequality through an acute sense of relative deprivation. This narrative allows them to cope with the felt injustice by sharing grievances and by expressing resentment towards those deemed responsible for their condition, the elites.

Considering intergroup relations as justificatory and anticipatory social representations (Doise, 1978), our analysis is concerned with populist thinking understood as a widespread

social representation of the people-elite dualism (Staerklé, Cavallaro, Cortijos-Bernabeu & Bonny, 2022). These intergroup representations give rise to a "populist mentality" that transcends specific political circumstances. Instead of considering "populism" as a political expression of destitute and radical movements threatening liberal and representative democracy (see Chollet, 2023), we see populism as a common way of "thinking society".

This populist mentality is thus far from being limited to voters and members of populist parties (Bonikowski et al., 2019; Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). It represents a deep-rooted representational strategy to cope with social inequality that may also be endorsed by those who favour other parties as well by non-voters. Our findings indeed suggest that notwithstanding its numerous variants across national contexts, a majority in most countries can be characterized as endorsing the two key tenets of populism: Anti-elitism and people-centrism.

The empirical part of our chapter is organized into three sections. First, we develop and test a measure of populism that is comparable across the eight European countries under scrutiny. We then examine the prevalence of the two foundational dimensions of populism across the eight countries and assess their relationships with pro-majority and anti-minority beliefs derived from our intergroup model of the people-elite dualism. Our findings show that this difference in emphasis has important and uncharted ramifications that point towards distinctive psychological motives underlying pro-majority and anti-minority perspectives of the populist mentality. In the final part, we evaluate how the populist mentality relates to inclusionary and exclusionary beliefs.

The intergroup approach to the populist mentality: Power and morality

The ideational approach analyses populism as a set of ideas and beliefs (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018; Mudde, 2017). Much of the ideational populism research is derived

from Mudde's (2004) foundational definition according to which *"Populism is a thin-centred ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogenous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' and the 'corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people"* (p. 543). Our intergroup approach of the populist mentality builds upon this general definition by suggesting that populist thinking is based on social representations of an intergroup relation between the "people" as the ingroup and the "elite" as an outgroup.

Social representations are made up by a system of shared beliefs, norms, and values towards which individuals and groups position themselves in order to construe their identities (Duveen, 2001; Lorenzi-Cioldi & Clémence, 2001). Our approach relies on the general conjecture of a fundamental interdependence between social representations and intergroup relations: intergroup relations give rise to social representations that in turn regulate and justify these relations (Doise, 1978; Staerklé, 2016). Most if not all intergroup relations are asymmetrical, opposing groups defined by asymmetries of power and resources. Such hierarchical intergroup relations give rise to stereotypical representations associated with the ingroup, the outgroup, and their asymmetrical relationship. These representations function to *justify* the hierarchical relationship between the dominant and the subordinate group, to *select* stereotypical attributes and comparison dimensions relevant to motivate given intergroup behaviours, and to *anticipate* future interactions with the outgroup (Doise, 1978). They are developed and disseminated through intergroup communication and interaction, both in political discourse (such as electoral campaigns and party statements) and in everyday communication. In this view, representations are the outcome of conflict between groups that gives rise to constant encounters between antagonistic representations (Moscovici, 1976). Hence, intergroup representations play a decisive role in the maintenance, legitimization, and contestation of intergroup inequality.

In this chapter, we argue that the intergroup relation between the people and the elite is organised by representations involving two dimensions of comparison—power and morality—that regulate and justify the asymmetry between them. The *power dimension* sees the people-ingroup and the elite-outgroup as tied together in an asymmetrical and competitive relationship of negative interdependence, that is, as a relation between a subordinate ingroup (the people) and a dominant outgroup (the elite). In this competitive relation, outgroup gains are made at the expense of ingroup resources such that the self-interested behaviours of the elite outgroup directly harm the interests of the people ingroup. The populist mentality sees this intergroup competition as fundamentally flawed: the elites are disconnected from the people and excessively powerful. They are not bound to "play by the rules", as basic equity principles of distributive justice (i.e., proportionality between individual investment and material outcomes) do not seem to apply to them. The people-ingroup is thus trapped in an unfair relation with the elite-outgroup as it lacks the power and the resources to challenge the perceived illegitimacy of elite power (see Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013; Wirth, 2016). In short, the elites are deemed to take advantage of the people, and therefore their power is illegitimate. In response to this view, some of their power needs to be claimed and given back to the people.

The *morality dimension* is derived from the numerical asymmetry between the people-ingroup (the numerical majority) and the elite-outgroup (the minority). Contrary to the power dimension, the people have the upper hand on the morality dimension. This creates a tension and a mismatch between the power and the morality dimension: the people see themselves as powerless in relation to a powerful elite, while having the advantage of being numerically dominant. This aspect has been given little emphasis in prior analyses of populist thinking but is potentially a key element for understanding the rise of populism in recent decades.

In order to understand the transformation of the majority-minority asymmetry into a moral asymmetry, we refer to a prescient chapter in which Serge Moscovici analysed the "conspiracy mentality" prevalent in those days (Moscovici, 1987). Though the chapter does not mention the concept of "populism," its analysis of conspiratorial thinking is relevant for our purpose. Moscovici describes how various secretive and powerful minority groups (such as the Jews, Freemasons, Communists, and pacifists) are accused of controlling the world, fomenting unrest, and destabilizing society. In doing so, he lays out the foundational nature of representations of majority-minority antagonisms for political opinion formation. Bringing together mass psychology and minority psychology, the chapter explains how minorities come to be seen as enemies of society, through their very existence as antagonist forces to the majority. Moscovici's conspiracy mentality implies that minorities are necessarily and inevitably accused by a society that *"demands consent to a certain number of its beliefs and practices"* and *"imposes conformity"*. This *"consent is based on the consensus of the majority [that] transforms beliefs and practices into obligations, which dictate how one must act, think, and feel in order to be normal, at peace with oneself and with others. [...] But a minority refuses this consensus and does not recognize these obligations."* (p. 158). For Moscovici, *"this duality forms the basis of a representation of society"* (p.154). In this view, conformity pressure transforms the numeric superiority of majorities into a normative obligation and a sense of moral superiority.

The striking similarities between the conspiratorial accusations of 20th century minorities and present-day accusations against elites suggest that the populist people-elite dualism is also constructed and understood as a fundamental majority-minority antagonism. The people represent the majority, whereas elites in populist discourse mirror the depictions of accused minorities: as malicious enemies, they represent a danger to "our" way of life, for example through coalitions with and preferential treatment of other minorities such as

immigrants or sexual minorities. The majority-minority antagonism underlying Moscovici's conspiracy mentality indeed implies a moral dualism between two radically different classes of people that are polar opposites: "*One class is pure, the other impure. These classes are not only distinct, but antagonistic." (p. 154)*. A similar dimension of *moral dualism* is also present in definitions of populism in the form of a perceived moral struggle between the good people and the evil elites (the "Manichean" dimension, see Castanho Silva et al., 2018; Mudde, 2004).

By considering the elites as a minority and the people as the majority, the minority-majority framework sheds light on the anti-pluralist posture of the populist mentality (see Orgad & Koopmans, 2022). Here, consensus among like-minded majority members is a valued quality and sign of loyalty. Actual, presumed, or perceived difference between a national core group (the "people") and various minority outgroups is negative, problematic, and threatening. Research has indeed shown that active and purposeful strategies of moral differentiation from outsiders are at the core of (right-wing) populist mentality: *"populism requires multiple forms of otherness to justify and sustain itself"* (Staerklé & Green, 2018, p. 443).

Even though the elite minority shares several features with the discredited minorities in Moscovici's analysis (in terms of size, "outsider" status, and transgressive norms and values that are opposite to those of the majority), they differ from them in an important way. As implied by the power dimension of the people-elite relation, they are members of the ruling class, and thus in a factually interdependent relationship with the people. Even though the conspiratorial minorities are also seen as powerful, elites are in a superior position with respect to the people as holders of legitimate decision-making authority. This factual power relationship between the people and the elite assigns the people-majority to an even more inferior position compared to majorities in the conspiratorial antagonism.

Vertical and horizontal intergroup antagonisms in the populist mentality

This distinction between power and morality-based intergroup representations of the people-elite dualism leads us to suggest that two types of categorical antagonisms, vertical and horizontal, organize the populist mentality (Brubaker, 2017; Staerklé & Green, 2018; Taguieff, 1995). In the populist mentality, the elite is both *different* from (horizontal differentiation) and *on top* of the people (vertical differentiation).

The *vertical antagonism* represents the people-elite dualism as an asymmetric power relationship in which a dominant group wields (excessive) power and authority over a subordinate group, much like in other relationships of dependence such as parents-children, teachers-pupils, supervisors-workers, or doctors-patients. This antagonism implies that the populist mentality categorizes elites as an outgroup: they are no longer "us," they are "them". Thereby, the populist mentality rejects the core principle of representative democracy in which (political) elites are legitimately elected to *represent* the people in political decision-making (Zaslove & Meijers, 2021).

The populist mentality attempts to *contest* and *delegitimize* the allegedly excessive power of the elites, through degrading, hostile or outright aggressive attitudes and behaviours towards the elites. It also attempts to alter the power balance through the affirmation and defence of the legitimate power of the subordinate group. The vertical antagonism thus generates judgements of *illegitimacy* of the power relation between the subordinate people and the dominant elite, as captured by measures of *people sovereignty* and *will of the people* in the populist mentality. *Institutional distrust* can be seen as a proxy measure of vertical differentiation as it implies contestation of the legitimacy of political and other institutions (and thus of elites), but without reference to the people category (Geurkink et al., 2020).

The *horizontal antagonism* reflects the difference between "insider" (majority) and "outsider" (minority) groups that differ in terms of (alleged) cultural norms and values without being tied together in an interdependent relationship. Based on current principles of group equality, minorities are formally protected from discrimination and unequal treatment as stipulated in anti-discriminatory national legislations and normative documents such as the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (see Doise, 2004). Measures of horizontal differentiation thus typically imply stereotypical judgements of both ingroup and outgroup. Majority members affirm ingroup homogeneity and superiority of their own (cultural) values while distancing themselves from minority outgroups, for example through moral differentiation (dualism between good and bad values), negative outgroup (minority) stereotypes, and stigmatization and marginalisation of norm-transgressing, deviant outsiders.

To sum up, we suggest that the inner logic of the populist mentality is based on a combination of vertical and horizontal intergroup representations of the people-elite dualism. The vertical antagonism can be assessed with legitimacy judgements and the horizontal antagonism with stereotypical judgements. The specific manifestations and relative importance of the two antagonisms depend on the populist discourses developed across different national contexts, including left- and right-wing—or inclusionary and exclusionary—variations of populism.

The populist mentality is a *"system of thought and a method of action"* (Moscovici, 1987) that produces views of society from a position of subordination and powerlessness, but at the same time elevates the "us vs. them" cleavage into a moral battle between the good and virtuous people and the evil and immoral leaders, thereby imposing it as the key explanatory principle of society. This antagonism fuses power and morality differentials: The people-majority is in a subordinate power position with respect to the elite-minority who wields decision-making power over the people-majority.

As such, the populist mentality is an attempt *from below* to make sense of and cope with the stark social and economic inequalities that characterize contemporary societies, viewed as the result of the elite's immoral self-serving intentions and actions. The perceived injustice of the people-elite relationship and the animosity it generates is compounded by the fact that the elite is a minority ruling over the people, a majority. Populism is thus an ideology that favours and legitimizes a majority, the people, and stigmatizes and delegitimizes a minority, the elite. In line with Mudde's (2004) original definition, both social categories are homogenized and seen as a whole in which individual members are entirely defined by their category membership and denied any individual agency.

Measuring the populist mentality: Perceived illegitimacy and stereotyping

Even though populism as a political discourse opposing the people and the elite has been on the research agenda for over half a century (Betz, 2018; Mudde, 2004; Taguieff, 1995), individual-level ("demand-side") research on populism is recent. Except for some early and by now outdated attempts to measure populism (e.g., Axelrod, 1967), the new era of individual-level research has emerged following the financial crisis in 2008 and its subsequent rise of right-wing populist parties (e.g., the "Tea-party" movement in the U.S). This individual-level approach has become known as the "ideational approach" to populism (Hawkins et al., 2018) that is concerned with both the conceptualization and the measurement of the populist mentality.

Ideational research has developed diverse strategies to measure ideas around the people and the elite as the fundamental components of the populist mentality. A one-dimensional four-item measure tested in the U.S. context was among the first attempts to measure populism, capturing three key elements of populism, that is, a Manichaean (moralistic) view of politics, a notion of a reified popular will, and a belief in a conspiring elite (Hawkins et al., 2012). Two years later, Akkerman and colleagues proposed a widely

used, unitary six-item scale of populism tested in the Dutch context all the while acknowledging the existence of subdimensions of populism, in particular popular sovereignty, anti-elitism, and Manichaeism (Akkerman et al., 2014). A pared down version of the Akkerman scale with only three items was subsequently tested across nine European countries (Van Hauwaert et al., 2020; see also Roccato et al., 2019, for another unitary scale). These one-dimensional scales developed in early ideational research did indeed consider the two components, but without allowing the people and the elite concepts to be distinguished at an analytical level.

In the wake of the development of different multidimensional populism scales, there is now widespread agreement that an adequate measure of populist thinking should be based on several subdimensions that capture attitudes towards the people and the elite as two distinct groups (Castanho Silva et al., 2018; Hameleers & de Vreese, 2020; Schulz et al., 2018; Spruyt et al., 2016; Wettstein et al., 2019). In line with this argument, we suggest that *at least* two subdimensions are required, one focused on the people and the other one focused on the elite. This approach is also in line with the view that the subdimensions of populism are non-compensatory: a full populist "syndrome" requires the co-existence of subdimensions such that a given individual expresses both positive attitudes towards the people and negative attitudes towards the elite in order to be qualified as "populist" (Wuttke et al., 2020).

In prior research, measures focused on the (positive and valued aspects of the) people have been labelled *people centrism* (including subdimensions such as people sovereignty, will of the people, or people homogeneity), whereas measures focused on the (negative and devalued aspects of the) elite have been termed *anti-elitism* (including subdimensions such as anti-establishment, elite homogeneity, or elite distance). In our view, however, the multidimensional logic implemented so far is limited by a lacking overarching conceptual framework of these measures and by the fact that the general categories of people-centrism

and anti-elitism are overly broad and vague. In the case of people-centrism, some studies (such as Schulz et al., 2018) further differentiate between people homogeneity and people sovereignty, for instance, others that do not, and yet others that only focus on one of those. This is a significant limitation because our dual power and morality intergroup view suggests that the populist mentality endows the people with moral virtue on the one hand (horizontal dimension) and portrays the people as powerless relative to the elites on the other, therefore advocating greater political decision-making power for the people (vertical dimension). These two characterizations are conceptually independent from each other, and may, or may not, go together. Currently, we lack evidence as to whether this is in fact the case, and whether both people sovereignty and people homogeneity (as an instantiation of the moral superiority of the people) are indispensable in the construction of this ideology. Similarly, Mudde's definition of populism emphasizes perceptions of elite homogeneity, but to date there is insufficient evidence concerning its specific role of as a central dimension of populist thinking, in addition to animosity towards elites.

Pro-majority and anti-minority focus

Our intergroup view of the populist mentality informs our measurement approach to populism and may help to address these limitations by providing an overarching conceptual framework to organize the measurement of the populist mentality. In line with core principles of social identity (Tajfel, 1981) and self-categorisation theories (Turner et al., 1987), populists *self-categorize* as members of the subordinate majority ingroup (or at least not as part of the elites) and thus come to see themselves as interchangeable members of the people category. In this process of self-stereotyping, behaviour and beliefs are derived from majority ingroup norms, defined in opposition to elite outgroup norms through the process of intergroup differentiation. As a result, the populist mentality leads members of the majority-ingroup to

distance themselves from the minority outgroup in order to build a positive social identity on the basis of a favourable comparison with the outgroup.

On the vertical power dimension, populism contests the perceived illegitimacy of the gap between the powerless and the powerful, by advocating greater people power and by distancing themselves from the elites. The horizontal moral dimension, in turn, relies on positively stereotyping the majority group and negatively the minority group through the opposition between a normative majority (people) and a counter-normative minority (elite). On this dimension, populism is a strategy to build a positive social identity for a subordinate group, through the affirmation of its moral superiority and its inherent normativity compared to norm-transgressing elites.

These two strategic goals of the populist mentality can be achieved either by focusing on the positive aspects of the people *(pro-majority ingroup focus)* or on the negative aspects of the elite *(anti-minority outgroup focus)*. Table 1 summarizes the proposed intergroup framework of the populist mentality and the corresponding organisation of the subdimensions of the measurement of populism. Crossing the vertical and horizontal antagonism with the pro-majority and anti-minority foci, it shows the populist mentality as divided into four dimensions, two that fall under *people-centrism*, reflecting an ingroup, pro-majority focus (*people sovereignty* and *people homogeneity*) and, and two that fall under *anti-elitism*, reflecting an anti-minority focus (*elite distance* and *elite homogeneity*).

This framework allows to gain greater insight into the specific roles of *people sovereignty* and *people homogeneity*, thereby suggesting that the pro-majority focus has possibly a more differentiated psychological basis than simply "people-centrism." While *people sovereignty* is directed towards rebalancing the power asymmetry of the vertical power antagonism (thus signalling a procedural motivation of increased decision power), *people*

homogeneity is more concerned with ingroup identity construction through positive ingroup stereotyping in the horizontal morality antagonism.

A similar reasoning applies to the *anti-minority focus*, though the distinction may be less straightforward. *Elite distance* refers to the perceived illegitimacy of the competitive power relationship between the people and the elite. *Elite homogeneity*, in turn, implies generalized stereotypical judgements of a selfish and corrupt elite, thereby highlighting the immorality of the elite. It should be noted that measures of *people* and especially *elite homogeneity* likely combine elements of both vertical and horizontal differentiation, even though they can be considered as being closer to horizontal than vertical differentiation: while they are based on perceived ingroup and outgroup homogeneity, respectively ("we are" and "they are" all the same, horizontal differentiation), the comparison with the opposite group is implied and implicit (e.g., the people are collectively confronted to similar problems, supposedly due to the elite's decisions, vertical differentiation).

Exclusionary and inclusionary populisms

Even though the people-elite antagonism is common to all partisan populist realizations, there are many variations of populist party forces in the world (Zulianello & Guasti, 2023). It has been argued that populism is a thin and minimal ideology that by itself is politically undetermined (Mudde, 2004). In order to imbue thin populism with a meaning and a message that can mobilize the masses, it tends to be associated with more coherent and articulated "thick" host ideologies. Such differences in host ideology associations are often ambiguous, though a common distinction in the literature is made between exclusionary and inclusionary forms of populism (Zulianello & Larsen, 2023).

We therefore test the pertinence of our framework with measures that are not directly part of the inner logic of populism. Given that prior research on the multidimensionality of

populism has mainly addressed measurement issues, we believe a more integrated framework is useful to account for the inner logic of the populist mentality. We therefore include various beliefs that have been associated with the populist mindset in our intergroup model of populism (see Rooduijn, 2014).

We would expect *horizontal pro-majority* measures involving identification with majority groups (e.g., national identification, nativism, people identification) to be associated with people homogeneity. We also include social trust in this category as it implies a generalized positive view of fellow ingroup members (see Larsen, 2013). The *horizontal anti-minority* category can be associated with various discriminatory and anti-pluralist measures, most readily with anti-immigration attitudes, stigmatization of welfare beneficiaries, and authoritarian aggression (against minorities and deviants). To the extent that a high social dominance orientation legitimizes group inequality (Sidanius & Pratto, 1999), one could expect a negative relationship between SDO and anti-elitism (as in Vasilopoulos & Jost, 2020). Yet, given that social dominance theory conflates majority status and power (contrary to the populist mentality), its association with the populist mentality is ambiguous.

Compared to the large array of possible measures of horizontal antagonisms, there are fewer alternative measures for the *vertical antagonism* between the people and the elite, in addition to *people sovereignty* and *elite distance*. Nevertheless, support for *direct democracy* would be in the majority-focus category, and *institutional distrust* and *elite control* (elite conspiracy theories) in the minority-focus category.

Foundations of the populist mentality: Resentment and relative deprivation

So far, we have been concerned with the inner logic of the populist mentality, without much consideration for individual, group-based, or contextual variation of the endorsement of its various subdimensions. One of the most robust findings in the demand-side research on

populism is the relationship between economic distress and populist attitudes (Staerklé & Green, 2018). Precarious living conditions require psychological adaptation that transforms the experience of economic distress into a way of thinking society from a perspective of inferiority and weakness (see Walker & Smith, 2002). According to our framework, self-categorising as a member of the people is an efficient and accessible strategy to do so. It allows developing a positive social identity based on a positive (high morality) ingroup stereotype while simultaneously targeting those held accountable for one's misery: the elites. The populist mentality provides a collective discursive platform for this process of coping with perceived injustice as it allows people to have a feeling of shared grievances and to identify a common enemy, the elite. In order to maintain and justify the underlying moral antagonism, the populist mentality actively engages in blaming allegedly immoral minority groups, not only the elites, but also other minority groups seen as unduly benefitting from the elite's actions and policies, in particular immigrant groups and welfare beneficiaries.

The thinking from below fuels relative deprivation and promotes feelings of threat, expressed in a sense that the rights and dignity of the common people are under attack, and that they lack the recognition for their very identity as hard-working and respectable citizens (Smith et al., 2012). More generally, vulnerable majorities resent minorities as source of threat and danger, through fear that the majority could be submerged and overpowered by shrewd minorities (Moscovici, 1987). This is exemplified in the hostile feelings towards elite-minorities that point towards the strong emotional foundations of the populist mentality. People express frustration, anger, and contempt at those who they see as being responsible for their life conditions, and as taking advantage from the hard work of common people (Rico, Guinjoan, & Anduiza, 2017). Feelings of deprivation give rise to *angry resentment* (Smith et al., 2012), an emotional expression of bitter and possibly aggressive indignation directed at those who are judged as the cause of their deprivation.

Empirical approach

Considering its context-dependent and multidimensional nature, measuring the populist mentality is a challenge. A good measure of populist mentality that can be used across multiple national contexts should satisfy both our theoretical assumptions and methodological criteria related to measurement quality in the context of cross-national comparative research. From the theory perspective, we have described the inner logic of the populist mentality as being rooted in a dual system of intergroup representations, one opposing the subordinate people category to the dominant elite category (power-based vertical antagonism), and the other opposing a positively stereotyped majority category to a negatively stereotyped minority category (morality-based horizontal antagonism).

Combined with the review of existing research on individual attitudes towards populism, we suggest that that a distinction between *at least* two dimensions, one based on a majority focus on the people, the other one based on a minority focus on the elite, is warranted. The question whether sub-divisions within those two general subdimensions of the populist mentality are adequate or necessary is an empirical one. In line with our intergroup model of the populist mentality, the first part of our empirical approach features the development of a populist mentality scale with four initial subdimensions: people homogeneity, people sovereignty, elite homogeneity, and elite distance. We will establish cross-national variability of these measures of populism and retain those subdimensions that are comparable across national contexts and consistent with our theoretical approach. We presume that a "minimal" measure of the populist mentality should have the best chances to satisfy the methodological requirement of cross-national comparability.

In the second part, we will examine whether dimensions of (pro-majority) people-centrism and (anti-minority) anti-elitism are differentially associated with relative deprivation and with a variety of potential host ideologies. To do so, we implement a combination of a

top-down and a bottom-up analytic approach. We separate the populist mentality into as many dimensions as we find in our first part of the analysis and see how they relate to different constructs assumed to be close to this ideology, both jointly and separately. We emphasize here that this approach does not take issue with questions related to causality between populist subdimensions and related beliefs and host ideologies. With the exception of relative deprivation that we see as an undisputable causal variable for the endorsement of populist beliefs, we simply examine associations between populist subdimensions and related beliefs, without assumptions of causality.

In general, we assume beliefs related to horizontal differentiation (e.g., people and elite homogeneity, national and people identification, social trust, anti-immigration attitudes, welfare stigmatization, authoritarianism) to be more context-dependent and thus to vary as a function of cultural and political specificities in the different countries. Conversely, we expect measures of vertical differentiation, as constitutive beliefs of any kind of populism, to be less context-dependent than measures of horizontal differentiation. Due to the fact that social dominance orientation presumes that majorities are dominant, it has an ambiguous relationship with populism. It could be associated with people sovereignty (in order to assert dominance of people over elites), but it could as well be associated with positive attitudes towards elites (in order to maintain existing inequalities).

The Populist Representations Project

The data presented in this chapter are part of the *Populist Representations Project* (PopRep, Staerklé, 2019) that aims to assess the social psychological processes involved in populist thinking. We developed and fielded an international survey across ten countries in Europe and Latin America (Brazil). Here, we use data for eight Western European countries: Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. Data collection took place between September 2020 and July 2022. Differences in sampling frame

availability and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic required a flexible data collection strategy. In Finland and Switzerland, a random sample was selected from a nationally representative sample frame, based on age and gender at birth. In all other countries, samples were provided by two online-panel vendors, Qualtrics in Greece, and Dynata in the remaining countries. Panellists were selected using quota sampling, with the aim of matching the population of each country in terms of age, self-declared gender, and geographical distribution.

Measures

The survey included measures of objective and subjective social positioning, subdimensions of populism, and beliefs associated with populism (for item wordings and sources see Table 2). Most constructs were assessed with three items, using six-point scales of agreement with the statements (1 = *Strongly Disagree*, 6 = *Strongly Agree*).

Besides the usual socio-demographic objective measures (gender, age, education), we evaluate a respondent's social position also subjectively by measuring relative deprivation, one's feeling of undeserved disadvantage, asks whether individuals consider themselves worse off than relevant others and believe they do not deserve to be in such a position (e.g., *"It is always other people who can benefit from all kinds of advantages offered in this society"*).

Following our intergroup model of the populist mentality, we developed measures for four subdimensions of populist thinking. *People homogeneity* refers to the belief that members of the people category of a given country are similar to each other not only in terms of character, values, and interests, but also in terms of problems and challenges they face. Although "homogeneity" indicates primarily perceived similarity among group members, in the context of populist ideas it also points to a positive valence of the group whose members

are endowed with moral qualities of purity, honesty, and hard work. As shown in Table 2, two of the items measure the perceived similarity of the people, and one portrays their moral value in terms of a "good and honest character". *People sovereignty*, in turn, measures the extent to which respondents legitimize majority power, by supporting the idea that political decision-making should follow the will of the people and that only the people can truly represent themselves. *Elite homogeneity* is the belief that the ruling classes of a country share key attributes of immorality, as a counterpoint to the morality beliefs associated with the people. We measured elite homogeneity with items reflecting both the similarity among members of the political elite as well as the perceived immorality of this group. *Elite distance*, finally, captures the idea that the elites are disconnected from the lives and daily struggles of the people, making self-interested decisions to the detriment of those whom they claim to represent. This dimension was measured with two items alluding to elite alienation, and one pointing to the harm their decisions inflict on ordinary people.

Populist correlates are organized into measures with either an anti-minority or a pro-majority focus. Among the former, *authoritarian aggression* refers to one of the three subdimensions of authoritarianism (Duckitt et al., 2010) that expresses hostile attitudes towards norm-transgressive minorities and that supports the use of force against those minorities who threaten majority authority (e.g., "*It is necessary to use force against people who are a threat to authority*"). *Anti-immigration* measures the rejection of migrating minorities settling in a national territory, with items emphasizing the negative impact of immigrants on majority citizens' jobs, welfare, security, and identity (e.g*., "Immigrants are a strain on a country's welfare system"*). *Welfare beneficiary stigmatization* assesses the negative attitudes towards the devalued minority of the unemployed and recipients of welfare benefits. This anti-minority attitude is based on perceived transgression of the work value, suggesting that jobless persons receiving state benefits lack personal motivation and are a

burden on the majority (see Staerklé, Likki, & Scheidegger, 2012) (e.g., *"People who don't work turn lazy"*).

Populist correlates with a pro-majority focus include *generalized social trust*, an expectation that fellow group members can rely on each other to act in accordance with social norms. Though neither minorities nor majorities are explicitly mentioned, the generic reference to "other" or "most" people suggests that the item is more likely understood in majority terms (e.g., *"Generally speaking, would you say that you can't be too careful in dealing with people or that most people can be trusted?"*). *National identification*, in turn, unambiguously refers to the strength of the subjective attachment with a country defined by a national majority group, without any comparison with other groups (e.g., *"To what extent do you feel close to your country"*?), whereas *people identification* explicitly measures attachment with the people majority (e.g., *"To what extent do you feel you belong to the people?"*).

Finally, we include two measures related to perceived social inequalities that cannot readily be classified as pro-majority or anti-minority. *Social dominance orientation (SDO)* has an ambiguous status as populist correlate. In line with populist thinking, a high SDO score should lead to defend and justify majority-minority inequality through negative attitudes towards minorities, but contrary to populist wisdom a high SDO should also support elites as the representatives of the dominant majority group. It is an empirical question whether one or the other has the upper hand, or whether these two processes cancel each other out. *Pro-welfare* attitude assesses the extent to which respondents support institutionalized state intervention, in the form of public and universally accessible welfare services related to social security, health care, education, or unemployment benefits. Pro-welfare attitudes are associated with a motivation to reduce social and economic inequalities, and we therefore interpret the measure as referring to egalitarianism (Staerklé et al., 2012) (e.g., *"It is a*

primary responsibility of the State to guarantee that basic needs are met for all, in terms of food, housing, clothing, education, and health").

Exploring and testing the dimensionality of populist beliefs

The descriptive statistics of the four populist subdimensions (Table 2) indicate that populist ideas are common and widespread among the population of the countries surveyed, since all means were above the scale midpoint (3.5), with the exception of elite homogeneity in Switzerland and Finland. Despite this prevalence, we found clear differences in the strength of populist ideas between countries in Central and Northern Europe, and those in Southern Europe. In Switzerland, Finland, and Germany the populist mindset was found to be more moderate, compared to Greece, Spain, and Italy where it was stronger. These differences were more prominent on the dimensions emphasizing antagonism towards the elites and less so in those emphasizing the virtues and sovereignty of the people.

Starting with the ideas surrounding the people, people homogeneity showed the most convergent results in terms of mean differences among the four subdimensions, the largest gap being between Switzerland (M = 3.58) and Greece (M = 4.20). For people sovereignty, the gap widened, reaching just over one point between Finland (M = 3.73) and Greece (M = 4.74). Although these findings seem to suggest consistent differences between Central-Northern and Southern European countries for both people-centred dimensions, the ranking of countries on these dimensions does not strictly reflect north-south geography, since (somewhat unexpectedly) Germany and the UK presented higher values than France.

Regarding the antagonism towards the elites, Swiss (M = 3.29) and Greek (M = 4.86) elite homogeneity values were more than one and a half scale points apart. As for elite distance, the mean values for Greece reached almost 5 points (M = 4.94). Across these

dimensions, Germany was closer to Switzerland and Finland, and the UK again was closer to southern European countries, compared to France.

In an attempt to better understand the dimensionality of populist beliefs from the perspective of our intergroup approach to the populist mentality, we examined the factor structure of populism and tested the invariance of the measurement model across eight Western European countries. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was employed to evaluate the goodness-of-fit of a second-order one-factor model of populism. The measurement model included four first-order factors, namely the four subdimensions of populist beliefs identified by our intergroup approach in the discussion earlier in the chapter[1]. All dimensions were connected to a larger second-order factor, *populism*.

As we are interested in analysing how well our intergroup approach describes populist mentality across national contexts, we tested for multi-group invariance at the configural, metric, and scalar levels (Davidov et al., 2018).[2] After testing the degree of invariance of the 12-item scale, we proceeded to identify a reduced 9-item version and then a 6-item version[3] of the scale. Our objective is to offer a minimal scale of populism that captures both the competitive intergroup relationship between the people and the elite and the superiority of the people over the elite. Three criteria were used to decide item inclusion and exclusion: first, the substantive meaning of the items and dimensions, so as to identify a 6-item scale comprising

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[1] We first also included Manicheism in our model, but this dimension was largely uncorrelated with the rest of our dimensions, and thereby decreased model fit. We therefore decided to exclude Manicheism from our analysis. This exclusion led to a more focused model, as all dimensions related to the specific conflict between two groups: the corrupt elite and the pure people. Indeed, Manicheism is a more general attitude towards any type of societal conflict with a 'good' pole opposed to an 'evil' one. Hence, a Manichean outlook could apply to any kind of strongly held beliefs. For example, Bertsou and Caramani (2022) found that items measuring Manichean attitudes loaded positively on both the populist and the elitist scale, while these two concepts are expected to be negatively correlated.

[2] To do so, we progressively imposed new constraints on loadings and intercepts and relied on ΔCFI to evaluate model fit between two successive models, using the ΔCFI ≤ .01 criterion as suggested by Cheung and Rensvold (2002). Given the ordinal data of our observed variables, CFA was performed using the diagonally weighted least squares (DWLS) estimator (Kline, 2015).

[3] For this last scale, we only have the two first-order factors. Since adding a second order factor would make the CFA model unidentified, we were forced to restrain our analysis and limit the CFA to two dimensions.

both negative judgements towards the elites and people-centrist beliefs; second, cross-national invariance by giving priority to items and dimensions that can be applied across contexts without loss of information; and third, magnitude of latent loadings by prioritising those items and dimensions with a higher influence on populism.

Results for the invariance tests are presented in Table 3 (see Table A-1 in the Appendix for CFA results by country). Figure 1 reports the standardized coefficients for the models, as well as fit statistics for the partial scalar invariant model. The 4-dimension model reached a good fit (CFI .974 and RMSEA .061), thus confirming the configural invariance of our model. The four dimensions can be found across the eight countries and appear to be related to each other via a second-order factor, the larger idea of 'populism'. Table 4 shows the overall inter-factor correlations in all countries, regardless of the scoring methods: Pearson's r varied between .45 in Spain for the average-of-item measurement to .86 for the regression scores.

However, the 4-dimension model was characterized by important cross-national differences, as we could neither claim full metric nor full scalar invariance. In order to obtain partial metric invariance, we had to free the loading of people homogeneity, while to obtain partial scalar invariance we freed the intercept on of the items of the same dimension, leading to a CFI .956 and RMSEA .073 as final fit measures, both indicating an acceptable model fit. Substantively, these results point towards a context-dependent relationship between people homogeneity and the other populist subdimensions. While configural invariance testing suggests that our hypothesized dimensions represent the populist mentality in our data reasonably well, we now observe that the importance of positive ingroup stereotypes in measuring populist mentality differs across country. This is not the only signal of country-dependency concerning people homogeneity. In order to obtain partial scalar invariance, we had to free the intercept of one of the items composing 'people homogeneity' *("Ordinary*

people are generally of good and honest character"). Out of the three items in our scale, this is the only statement with a valence attached to the homogeneity of 'people' as all citizens are positively portrayed. The relationship between this positive judgement and a monist vision of 'the people' varied substantially across countries. These results, together with the relatively low internal consistency of this measure already discussed in the data description, led us to discard people homogeneity from the overall scale, thus reducing the 4- to a 3-dimension scale. Importantly, this should not be seen as a rejection of people homogeneity as part of populism: the populist mentality still encompasses a monist view of the 'people', but its cross-national comparability is limited. Thus, we advise caution in using such a subscale in cross-national studies measuring the minimal components of the populist mentality.[4]

Figure 2 shows the results for our 3-dimension model, which yielded good fit statistics for the configural model (CFI .993 and RMSEA .042). Compared to the 4-dimension model, we observe that the CFI is always higher and the RMSEA is always lower, suggesting model improvement. The model also appears to be more invariant across countries as we were able to obtain metric invariance: in terms of item loadings, the eight countries in our samples were quite similar. The same cannot be said for scalar invariance: given a ΔCFI value of .11, we were forced to let at least one parameter unconstrained. As before, we identified the intercept on item *pplso1* as the least invariant and let it vary freely across countries to obtain partial scalar invariance. Once again, we observe that the pro-majority focus measures have low cross-country stability. While both representations of the people-majority are a core element of populist mentality in all countries, they are (to different degrees) less comparable across countries than the subdimensions related to the anti-minority focus, which emerges as a more

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[4] As a robustness test, we ran exploratory factor analyses using different solutions. An inspection of eigenvalues pointed towards a 2-factor model, where items measuring people homogeneity all loaded on a different factor than those from the other three subdimensions. This offers additional evidence in support of the fact that people homogeneity seems to be a country-specific measure with a tenuous relationship with populist mentality. People-centrism is therefore a potentially problematic measure of the populist mentality, due to its questionable internal validity as a populist subdimension and its limited cross-national comparability.

stable cross-cultural organizing principle. Our results thus suggest that great caution needs to be exercised in the cross-national measurement of the populist mentality as even this thin ideology appears to be context-dependent in one of its core aspects. More research is needed to assess what exactly varies across countries in the definition of 'the people'. A possible explanation may be found in country-based variations in ingroup categorization: while the populist mentality seems to categorize the elites similarly across Western European countries, the social category making up the majority ingroup varies across countries, both in terms of perceived morality and homogeneity.

Based on the results from 3-dimension model, we went further in our search for a minimal scale of populism that would still be able to distinctly measure the pro-majority and anti-minority elements of populism. Given the theoretical necessity to keep both foci, we retained all three items from people sovereignty. Concerning our measurement of the anti-minority focus, anti-elitism, we picked the three items with the highest indirect loadings on the populism second-order factor. These three items come from both the elite-distance and elite-homogeneity subdimensions and thus cover both antagonistic representations of our intergroup approach. They seem however to lean specifically towards the immorality stereotype as they all refer to the most markedly injurious beliefs (elites are self-serving, corrupt, and make harmful decisions for the people).

This left us with a final 6-item scale with elements from three of our four starting dimensions, covering both negative attitudes towards the elites as well as the belief in the sovereignty of the people. This third model also fitted reasonably well (CFI: .996 and RMSEA: .038 for the configural model) and allowed us to claim both configural and metric invariance. As before, the model obtained only partial scalar invariance as we were forced to let one intercept free to vary across countries. The model after partial invariance still showed

adequate fit (CFI: .985 and RMSEA: .054), thus providing a first confirmation of the validity of our scale.

Table 4 shows the correlations for the factor scores of our two subdimensions obtained via Bartlett's method with the previously described populist subdimensions, computed as means of their items. Once again, the peculiarity of people homogeneity is confirmed, as it is the least correlated subdimension and as it shows a high cross-country variation in the strength of its relationship with anti-elitism and people sovereignty, ranging from .03 to .39. In terms of inter-factor correlations, Pearson's r varied between .45 in Spain for the average-of-item measurement to .61 in France, but no clear geographical pattern emerges. Overall, the two measures are indeed related, but they also have unique variance which confirms the multidimensional nature of the populist mentality. In terms of mean values, factor scores follow the same ranking as observed for the other populist subdimensions: southern European countries show the highest values, while Switzerland and Finland are, in both cases, the countries with the lowest prevalence of populist beliefs.

Anti-Minority and Pro-Majority Associations of Populist Dimensions

According to our intergroup approach of the populist mentality, a minimal scale of populism can be built around two dimensions, one with a pro-majority focus (people sovereignty) and one with an anti-minority focus (anti-elitism). The correlations between these two dimensions are country-dependent, thereby hinting at the possible existence of distinctive elements that characterize them. As we have argued above, much of prior ideational research has analysed populism as a one-dimensional phenomenon. In this second part of the analysis, we investigate differences and similarities in how the two dimensions of populism are associated with various correlates of populist thinking. We do so via factor score regressions on both the full pooled sample and each country sample separately. Considering the large number of tests performed, we do not report specific country results in the text but

provide a short summary of the results regarding the number and directions of significant relationships. Given the cross-national nature of our data, we included country-level fixed effects in our analysis of the pooled sample to account for country and sampling specific omitted variables. In addition, in all full sample regressions errors are cluster-robust.[5]

Regression results are presented in three parts. First, we examine whether populist subdimensions are anchored in the same objective and subjective social positions by testing their association with the most common socio-demographic predictors of populism, that is, gender, age, and educational achievement as objective indicators of social positions and relative deprivation as the subjective indicator.

Second, controlling for socio-demographic variables, we analyse the associations between related political and ideological beliefs and the populist subdimensions. Since we were interested both in the shared and unique variance of these two dimensions, we ran all regressions twice: 1) by testing the independent variable of interest as a predictor of either people sovereignty or anti-elitism with only socio-demographics controls, and 2) by including the other populist dimension in the model as an additional control. While in our regressions people sovereignty and anti-elitism were modelled as dependent variables, we do not assume a causal direction of the relationship and simply examined the (controlled) bivariate association between the presumed correlates and our two dimensions of populism. Results for these two steps are presented in Table 5 (country-by-country results can be found in tables A-2 to A-33 in the Appendix).

In the final analysis, we focus on the relationship between people sovereignty/anti-elitism and inclusionary/exclusionary populism, by testing how people sovereignty and anti-

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[5] We clustered standard errors at country level as we deal with data coming from multiple surveys, where dependence within the data is commonly observed (due to shared sampling techniques, questionnaire wording, interviewers, or other aspects of survey design). These dependencies may bias estimation of standard errors and lead to invalid statistical inferences. Standardized cluster errors also account for heteroscedasticity.

elitism correlate with two policy-related measures that signalling inclusionary and exclusionary populism, namely pro-welfare and anti-immigration attitudes, respectively (Figure 2).

Social position. Results for regressions models show a minor *gender* difference between people sovereignty and anti-elitism: self-identified female respondents expressed lower levels of people sovereignty, but this result was not consistent neither across countries nor specifications. The lack of a gender gap in populist beliefs is not surprising as much of the research on populist voting (e.g., Spierings & Zaslove 2017) has found that while men tend to vote more for (both right- and left-wing) populist parties than women, the gender gap is context-dependent. It has been argued, however, that the new strategies deployed by the populist radical right might be able to close the gap, at least in part (Chueri & Damerow, 2022). *Age*, in turn, does not show a consistent relationship with populist beliefs. This is mostly due to different age effects across countries, a result in line with the literature on populist voting that shows that age behaves differently depending on the context (Zagórski et al. 2021; Bakker et al. 2016). As for *education*, results for the pooled sample show that both dimensions share the same anchoring in a non-tertiary (i.e., low) education level. Education level predicted anti-elitism more strongly than people sovereignty, although the difference in the coefficients in the full model was not significant.

Finally, *relative deprivation* positively and significantly predicted people sovereignty and anti-elitism consistently across countries, both when considered separately and controlling for each other. The predictive power of relative deprivation is stronger for anti-elitism than for people sovereignty; this difference becomes apparent in the results where the two dimensions were controlled for each other (B = .35 and B = .07, respectively). This indicates that, although the hardships felt through the perception of relative disadvantage predict both sides of the populist ideology across countries, they are a particularly strong

predictor of the antagonism towards the elites, seen as the root cause of the adversities of the people in the populist mentality. Taken together, these results confirm that both populist dimensions represent a view 'from below'.

Overall, these findings suggest similar objective and subjective foundations of the two populist subdimensions. Both subdimensions offer a view from below, in particular a low level of educational achievement and a high level of relative deprivation. But country-by-country analyses are required for a more fine-grained view of the context-dependent associations between gender, age, and populist beliefs. We next explore the extent to which political and ideological orientations—organized into pro-majority, anti-minority, and inequality-focused beliefs and perceptions—shape the populist mentality.

Anti-minority focus

Given their common anti-minority focus, we expected, as a general conjecture, anti-minority beliefs to be more strongly related to anti-elitism than to people-sovereignty. *Authoritarian aggression*, as one of the three subdimensions of authoritarianism involving hostile and punitive attitudes towards minorities, was positively associated with the anti-elitism in five out of eight countries, on its own as well as controlling for people sovereignty. As expected, authoritarian aggression was thus linked to feelings of opposition to elites in most countries, presumably because the populist mentality sees the elites as a norm-transgressing minority much like other minorities. It was not, however, associated with people sovereignty in most contexts, and when adjusting for anti-elitism, the relationship trend even reversed. These results indicate that the association between populism and authoritarianism, at least in its aggressive and punitive form, is not as clear as it might have been thought. However, this type of authoritarianism does not seem to be involved in citizens' readiness to take control of political decision-making, as represented by people sovereignty.

Anti-immigration is the most commonly anti-minority attitude associated with exclusionary right-wing populism. Without controlling for anti-elitism, the relationship between people sovereignty and anti-immigration was positive in seven out of eight countries, but controlled for anti-elitism the association was found in only four countries, suggesting that at least part of this variation is accounted for by anti-elitism. Anti-elitism, in turn, was associated with anti-immigration in seven out of eight contexts, independently of controlling for people-sovereignty, with a strong overall effect. As expected, these findings suggest a stronger association between anti-immigration and minority-focused anti-elitism than with majority-focused people-sovereignty.

Welfare beneficiary stigmatization, in turn, was positively associated with people sovereignty, but only without controlling for anti-elitism. In contrast, and as expected, these stigmatizing anti-minority attitudes were consistently associated with anti-elitism in both controlled and uncontrolled models. In this view, the perceived transgression of the work ethic norm goes along with negative attitudes towards the elites, possibly because both categories, the undeserving welfare beneficiaries and the corrupt elite, are seen as taking advantage of the hard-working majority.

Pro-majority focus

Given their positive view of the majority, we expected pro-majority beliefs to be more consistently associated with people-sovereignty than the anti-minority beliefs. *Generalized social trust*, as a proxy measure of ingroup majority trust, further illustrates the complexity of the populist mindset as well as the importance of considering its dimensions separately as well as together. Social trust was indeed associated with both popular sovereignty and anti-elitism, but in opposite directions. While *low* social trust was related to opposition to elites in all countries (irrespective of control), *high* social trust was associated with the desire to enhance popular sovereignty in six countries (controlling for anti-elitism). This latter finding

should not come as a surprise, since an inclination to believe in the good intentions of (unspecified) fellow citizens seems required to support the idea that the thrust of political decision-making should fall on the people. The relationship between social distrust and anti-elitism is less straightforward, but could be interpreted as signalling *generalized* distrust, including a suspicious attitude towards elites who hold power and influence over low status citizens in society. This finding is also in line with earlier evidence on the role of social distrust in predicting identification with right-wing populist parties (Staerklé & Green, 2018).

National identification showed a similar pattern to that of social trust, as it was positively associated with people sovereignty in five countries (controlling for anti-elitism), and negatively with anti-elitism in seven out of eight countries, regardless of control. Again, the positive link between national identification and popular sovereignty fits into the pro-majority logic of social relations, as feeling close to one's country signifies a favourable image of fellow (majority) citizens who can be trusted with a greater role in political affairs. However, positive feelings for one's country also encompass a favourable image of its institutions and leaders who represent the country. Hence, individuals who identify more with their nation are also more supportive of the national elites.

Finally, *people identification* also showed a consistent pattern with our general majority focus hypothesis as it was positively related to people sovereignty in all countries (when controlled for with anti-elitism), and negatively with anti-elitism in five contexts (with people sovereignty in the model). The will for popular sovereignty is attuned to the feeling of belonging to those for whom sovereignty is demanded. On the one hand, people identification, like national identification, signals a positive identity and a sense of affiliation with "ordinary people". It is also likely related to perceived ingroup homogeneity and similarity, suggesting that a supposed unitary voice of the people facilitates the assignment of a role for the people for political decision-making (although identification per se does not

specify the actual characteristics of this group). On the other hand, people identification differs from national identification in that it implicitly excludes elites as members of the category. This may explain the somewhat weaker relationship between high people identification and support for elites, compared to national identification.

Inequality focus

Two dimensions (Pro-welfare orientation and SDO) cannot be readily classified as either minority- or majority-focused beliefs but rather refer to perceived inequality within the society. These are our inequality-focused measures. *Social dominance orientation* (SDO) seems to operate inversely to authoritarian aggression, since *low* social dominance was associated with people sovereignty in five out of eight countries (when controlling for anti-elitism). People sovereignty is thus best interpreted as a hierarchy-attenuating belief that is associated with the egalitarian outlook of low SDO. The relationship between SDO and anti-elitism was inconsistent. When controlling for people sovereignty, the relationship between SDO and anti-elitism was inverted and positive in three contexts, thereby signalling a hierarchy-enhancing role of anti-elitism at least in those three contexts. But overall, the relationship between SDO and populism is weak and country-dependent, possibly due to the fact that SDO confounds majority and power.

A *pro-welfare* attitude defends the collective responsibility of the State expected to safeguard basic rights (in terms of food, housing, education and health) for all citizens. It thus reflects an egalitarian and inclusive attitude. The findings show that without controlling for anti-elitism, people sovereignty was strongly positively associated with pro-welfare across all contexts, and in seven out of eight contexts when controlling for anti-elitism. A similarly strong, but less consistent, positive association was found for anti-elitism that decreased when people sovereignty was controlled for.

Inclusionary and exclusionary populisms

Finally, we turn our attention to the inclusionary or exclusionary orientation of the populist mentality. In order to do so, we examine the relationship between either of the two populist subdimensions and two policy-related beliefs that we use as a proxy for relating the populist mentality to inclusionary (pro-welfare attitudes, that reflect an egalitarian, hierarchy-attenuating and inclusionary view of society) or exclusionary (anti-immigration attitudes, that signal an inegalitarian, hierarchy-enhancing and exclusionary view) host ideologies. Figure 2 summarizes the country-level results of factor score regressions (standardized coefficients) for the *Socio-demographics & Anti-elitism/People sovereignty* models from Table 5 for these two correlates. This chart organizes the observed links into four quadrants, egalitarian and inclusive, egalitarian and exclusionary, anti-egalitarian and inclusionary, and anti-egalitarian and exclusionary, across the different countries. The more a coefficient is located on the right, the more it denotes an egalitarian (pro-welfare) form of populism, and the closer it is to the top of the figure, the more the populism in question is exclusionary (anti-immigrant). Location of a coefficient in the upper right quadrant, for example, signifies that a populist subdimension in a given country is positively associated with both pro-welfare and with anti-immigration beliefs.

The two subdimensions of populism show both convergent and divergent relationships with the two beliefs. Both anti-elitism and people sovereignty correlated with support for pro-egalitarian, inclusive welfare policies. In the pooled model, the coefficients for the two dimensions reached similar levels and did not differ significantly (see Table 5). Variation was observed at the country level, as anti-elitism showed a weaker and less consistent connection with egalitarianism than its pro-majority counterpart, considering that the relationship is positive and significant only in five countries. People sovereignty was thus consistently associated with support for an interventionist welfare state, though not very strongly. In

Finland opposite signs in the coefficients for the two subdimensions were observed: egalitarian pro-welfare attitudes were negatively associated with anti-elitism and positively with people sovereignty. These findings should be seen in the context of a strong welfare state tradition in Finland where support for the welfare state is also a sign of national loyalty, including with the elites.

A larger breach between the two subdimensions was observed in their respective association with anti-immigration attitudes. The pooled model results show a non-significant relationship between negative immigration attitudes and people sovereignty, whereas the connection was clearly positive with anti-elitism. Moreover, the two coefficients were significantly different in five out of eight countries (except for Italy, Greece, and the United Kingdom) and always point in the same direction: the link between the anti-minority element of populism (anti-elitism) and opposition to immigration was stronger than the association between anti-immigrant attitudes and the pro-majority people sovereignty dimension. Considering that most (and especially anti-elitism) relations in Figure 2 were found in the upper right "exclusionary and egalitarian" quadrant, and in light of the previously discussed results on the stigmatization of welfare beneficiaries, it would appear that the populist anti-minority focus is the breeding ground for an ethnic vision of social welfare policy, asking for a chauvinist welfare state (Abts et al. 2021) designed for supporting deserving nationals. In this view, and in contrast to other pro-market visions on the right, the populist mentality supports welfare intervention in general, but only on the condition that the "hard-working' people" are prioritized over the undeserving ones who are often identified in ethnic terms (Rathgeb & Busemeyer, 2022). Since immigration is a major divider between inclusionary and exclusionary populism, we suggest that the anti-minority focus of the populist mentality drives exclusionary populism. The majority focussed dimension (people sovereignty) has a strong egalitarian and in some instances inclusionary potential as it is most consistently

related to calls for greater equality and only weakly and inconsistently to negative immigration attitudes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, we have proposed a social psychological analysis of the inner logic of the populist mentality. At the core of this logic are social representations of a generic intergroup relation between a powerful minority—the elite—and a powerless majority—the people. Populist representations of this asymmetric intergroup relation are organized around two antagonistic dimensions, one defined by power asymmetry (the "vertical" dimension), and one defined by morality (the "horizontal" dimension). These two dimensions are in tension with each other. The power dimension denotes a competitive and potentially abusive intergroup relationship where the subordinate people category competes for resources with the dominant elite. The morality dimension compensates this power asymmetry by representing the people category as morally superior compared to the elite category. Contributing to the ideational approach of populism, this intergroup framework formalizes the inner logic of populist thinking, allowing both its internal coherence and its potential contradictions to be defined and outlined.

There are important implications of viewing the populist mentality as a social representation of an intergroup relation. First, the people are the ingroup category and build their identity in opposition to the elite outgroup. They do so from their subordinate position, with a view *from below*, that is, with an upward social comparison with the elite. Second, attitudes towards the people can be seen as generic *pro-majority* views whereas attitudes towards the elite represent generic *anti-minority* views.

This reading of the populist mentality led us to propose a conceptual model of the intergroup foundations of four populist subdimensions and the inner logic that connects them

to each other. First, two *pro-majority* dimensions, one focused on the vertical power antagonism (people sovereignty), and the other one focused on the horizontal morality antagonism (people-homogeneity). Taken together, they assess a common people-centrism dimension. Second, two *anti-minority* dimensions, one focused on the vertical power antagonism (elite distance), and the other one focused on the horizontal morality antagonism (elite homogeneity). Taken together, they assess a common anti-elitism dimension.

Empirically, our first goal was to develop a minimal, yet multidimensional measure of populism based on our intergroup model and to validate the measures in a cross-national context. Our findings from a cross-country survey on eight European countries indicate that these constructs are not as clearly and uniformly defined in the populist mentality as could have been expected on the basis of the model. Following extensive measurement analyses, we decided to exclude *people homogeneity* from this minimal measure because of significant cross-national variation and lacking between- and within-country measurement stability. This led us to conclude that although people homogeneity is undoubtedly part of the populist mentality, its meaning and its measurement depend too heavily on national specificities to be included in the minimal definition. This dimension should therefore be used with caution in cross-national analyses. People-sovereignty, in turn, showed reliability and validity across contexts and was thus retained as our pro-majority measure of populism. For the anti-minority dimension, we were led to merge the two subdimensions of elite distance and elite homogeneity into a single component of anti-elitism. This suggests that in the populist mentality, concerns about the legitimacy of elite power go hand in hand with elite stereotyping and homogenizing. Overall, the findings highlight the asymmetrical nature of populist mentality: in the eight countries studied, people centrism is built to a larger extent on the vertical axis of the power struggle between the people and the elite, whereas anti-elitism is defined by both the vertical and horizontal axes of antagonism. The vertical differentiation is

therefore likely to be exacerbated by the morally reprehensible qualities attributed to the elites (and other minority groups) which further delegitimizes their hold on power.

The intergroup model of the populist mentality further allows for a better understanding of the relationship between specific populist beliefs centred on the people-elite relationship, and a range of other ideological beliefs that have previously been associated with populism. Our conjecture that representations of the people-elite relation follow the basic logic of majority-minority representations (Moscovici, 1987) lead us to suggest a structural homology between populist beliefs focused on the "people" and any kind of pro-majority representations, and, conversely, between populist anti-elite beliefs and any kind of anti-minority representations. In line with this hypothesis, we have found that pro-majority beliefs (social trust, national and people identification) were generally positively associated with people sovereignty, but negatively with anti-elitism. Anti-minority beliefs (authoritarian aggression, anti-immigration, welfare beneficiary stigmatization), in turn, were consistently associated with anti-elitism, but not with people-sovereignty. In other words, ideological beliefs that share pro-majority characteristics present a positive link with people sovereignty, whereas anti-minority beliefs mostly relate to anti-elitism. These specific associations with the two fundamental dimensions of the populist mentality further underscore the theoretical necessity of distinguishing people sovereignty and anti-elitism as components of populism. This dual logic has also led us to differentiate inclusionary-exclusionary and egalitarian-inegalitarian versions of populism. While both anti-elitism and people sovereignty were (paradoxically) associated with calls for a greater economic equality through increased government (pro-welfare) regulation, anti-elitism plays a much stronger part in the formation of exclusionary (anti-immigrant) versions of populism.

Populism is an ideology forged from below, from those who feel neglected, belittled, and voiceless. This is why we emphasize the role of subjective social positioning in the

deployment of the populist mentality. Our findings demonstrate the key role of relative deprivation that consistently predicts both minimal components strongly and in the same direction. Relative deprivation indeed captures both the experienced relative disadvantage and a sense that these inequalities are profoundly unfair and undeserved. These feelings hark back to the frustration and resentment often associated with populism and may ultimately provide clues as to why the populist ideology is, in most instances, inclusionary and exclusionary at the same time, asking to alleviate the impact of inequality for the deserving majority while delegitimizing and stigmatizing the underserving minorities.

As long as significant segments of the population experience such feelings, populism will remain an attractive political option to address them. Yet, there is no need to be concerned by the pervasiveness of the populist mentality as such. Notwithstanding alarmist warnings about the alleged danger and threat to liberal democracy, populism is not a problem in itself. The peril comes from its exclusionary and scapegoating focus that considers the people-majority to be more deserving than minorities and that pits subordinate groups—who all suffer from the excessive social inequalities in contemporary societies—against each other. People sovereignty, in turn, has the potential to offer grounds for genuinely inclusionary visions of society, provided that the "people" are defined in inclusive terms. The question then is not so much how to eliminate or fight against populism, but rather how to boost and strengthen the potentially inclusionary facets of populism.

Acknowledgements

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Table 1

Intergroup representation model of the populist mentality

	Intergroup Representation			
	Vertical Antagonism (Legitimation)		**Horizontal Antagonism** (Stereotyping)	
	People Low power majority	*Elite* High power minority	*People* High morality majority	*Elite* Low morality minority
Pro-Majority focus	**People-Centrism**			
Core populist subdimensions	**People sovereignty**		**People homogeneity**	
Core argument	Legitimising majority power		Positive majority stereotyping	
Associated dimensions	(Direct democracy)		Social trust National identification People identification	
Anti-Minority focus	**Anti-Elitism**			
Core populist subdimensions	**Elite distance**		**Elite homogeneity**	
Core argument	Delegitimising minority power		Negative minority stereotyping	
Associated dimensions	(Institutional distrust) (Elite control - conspiracy)		Authoritarian aggression Anti-immigration Welfare stigmatisation	

Note: Dimensions in parentheses are not examined in this research.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics and item wordings of initial populist subdimensions

Subdimension	Finland N = 920	France N = 914	Germany N = 1063	Greece N = 743	Italy N = 960	Spain N = 1083	Switzerland N =755	UK N = 1081
People homogeneity								
M	3.95	3.91	4.10	4.24	4.20	4.20	3.58	4.18
SD	.78	.99	.91	.90	.92	.96	.91	.85
α	.65	.77	.75	.71	.71	.77	.72	.72
Item wording	1. Most ordinary people share similar values and interests; 2. Most [Country] citizens face similar problems (adapted); 3. Ordinary people are generally of good and honest character (items from Schulz et al., 2018).							
People sovereignty								
M	3.73	4.03	4.23	4.74	4.28	4.51	3.87	4.23
SD	.98	1.15	1.14	1.01	1.19	1.06	1.01	1.07
α	.67	.82	.83	.78	.80	.78	.73	.79
Item wording	**1. The politicians in Parliament should follow the will of the people under all circumstances; 2. The people, not the politicians, should make our most important political decisions; 3. I would rather want to be represented by an ordinary citizen than by a professional politician** (items from Akkerman et al., 2014).							
Elite homogeneity								
M	3.47	4.32	4.11	4.86	4.77	4.73	3.29	4.45
SD	1.10	1.14	1.20	.98	.98	1.08	1.01	1.07
α	.83	.84	.87	.83	.82	.85	.82	.84
Item wording	**1. Established politicians who claim to defend our interests, only take care of themselves** (from Spruyt et al., 2016)**;** 2. Most politicians talk too much and take too little action (adapted from Akkerman et al., 2014); **3. Most high-ranking politicians in government are corrupt** (from Hameleers & Schmuck, 2017).							
Elite distance								
M	3.89	4.41	4.40	4.94	4.77	4.83	3.60	4.63
SD	.98	1.08	1.09	.86	.90	1.00	.94	1.00
α	.74	.79	.83	.77	.73	.84	.74	.80
Item wording	1. The differences between ordinary people and the ruling elite are much greater than the differences between ordinary people (from Akkerman et al., 2014); 2. MPs in Parliament very quickly lose touch with ordinary people (from Schulz et al., 2018); **3. Politicians take decisions that are harmful for the ordinary people** (adapted from Hameleers & Schmuck; 2017).							

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; α = Cronbach's alpha. Items in bold make up our final measure of populist beliefs, with items 1 and 2 from elite homogeneity, and item 3 from elite distance constituting our final measure of Anti-elitism.

Table 3

Invariance results of the Confirmatory Factor Analysis models

Model	4-dimension model		3-dimension model		2-dimension model	
	CFI	*ΔCFI*	CFI	*ΔCFI*	CFI	*ΔCFI*
Configural invariance	.974	-	.993		.996	
Partial metric invariance	.966	*.008*				
Metric invariance	.961	*.013*	.987	*.007*	.991	*.004*
Partial scalar invariance	.956	*.010*	.981	*.005*	.986	*.006*
Scalar invariance	.944	*.022*	976	*.011*	.974	*.017*

Note. CFI = Comparative Fit Index; ΔCFI = Change in Comparative Fit Index; RMSEA = Root Mean Square Error of Approximation; ΔRMSEA = Change in Root Mean Square Error of Approximation.

Table 4

Correlations between the four initial populist subdimensions

	1.	2.	3.	4	5
1. People homogeneity	–				
2. People sovereignty	.33* (.14 - .42)	–			
3. Elite homogeneity	.20* (.05 - .29)	.55* (.43 - .63)	–		
4. Elite distance	.24* (.09 - .22)	.53* (.41 - .60)	.77* (.68 - .78)		
5. Anti-elitism (factor scores)	.20* (.03 - .28)	.57* (.49 - .64)	.95* (.92 - .96)	.83* (.76 - .83)	
6. People sovereignty (factor scores)	.31* (.15 - .39)	.99* (.98 - .99)	.59* (.45 - .60)	.53* (.40 - .59)	.59* (.49 - .61)

Note. Correlations are reported for the pooled sample; country correlation range is in brackets.
*p <.001.

Table 5

Summary of predictors of populist subdimensions (standardized regression coefficients)

| Controlling for | People sovereignty | | | | | | Anti-Elitism | | | | | |
| | Socio-demographics | | | Socio-demographics & Anti-elitism | | | Socio-demographics | | | Socio-demographics & People sovereignty | | |
	B	+/ns/-	R²	B	+/ns/-	R²	B	+/ns/-	R²	B	+/ns/-	R²
Social position												
Gender (female)	-.04	0/6/2	.08	-.05***	0/6/2	.36	.03	2/5/1	.20	.03	2/6/0	.45
Age (35-54)	.04	2/6/0	.08	-.02	1/7/0	.36	.09	3/5/0	.20	.07	1/7/0	.45
Age (55 or more)	.04	2/6/0	.08	.02	1/7/0	.36	.03	3/5/0	.20	-.00	1/6/1	.45
Tertiary education	-.10***	0/6/2	.08	-.05**	0/5/3	.36	-.09***	0/1/7	.21	-.04**	0/6/2	.45
Relative deprivation	.38***	8/0/0	.20	.11***	6/2/0	.25	.50***	8/0/0	.40	.35***	8/0/0	.53
Anti-minority focus												
Authoritarian aggression	.02	3/4/1	.09	-.03	0/5/3	.36	.09***	5/2/1	.22	.08***	5/2/1	.45
Anti-immigration	.19***	7/1/0	.03	.02	4/4/0	.36	.24***	7/1/0	.28	.16***	7/1/0	.48
Welfare beneficiary stigmatization	.11***	5/3/0	.10	.00	1/5/2	.36	.18***	7/1/0	.24	.13***	6/2/0	.46
Pro-majority focus												
Social Trust	-.09***	0/5/3	.09	.08***	6/2/0	.37	-.27***	0/0/8	.27	-.23***	0/0/8	.49
National identification	-.02	1/6/1	.09	.07***	5/3/0	.37	-.18***	0/1/7	.24	-.16***	0/1/7	.47
People identification	.17***	7/1/0	.11	.15***	8/0/0	.38	.04	3/4/1	.21	-.05*	0/3/5	.45
Inequality focus												
Social Dominance Orientation	-.06	1/3/4	.09	-.06*	0/3/5	.37	-.00	1/4/3	.21	.03	3/4/1	.45
Pro-welfare	.22***	8/0/0	.13	.12***	7/1/0	.37	.18***	7/1/0	.24	.07**	6/1/1	.45

Note. N for pooled sample ranges from 7473 to 7511. "Controlling for Socio-demographics" includes gender, age, and education level as control variables in the respective models. "Controlling for Socio-demographics & Anti-elitism / People-sovereignty" adds the respective populist subdimension as an additional control variable. Coefficients Significance in N countries*:* + = Significant and positive predictor; ns = non-significant predictor; - = Significant and negative predictor.

*p <.05. **p <.01. ***p <.001.
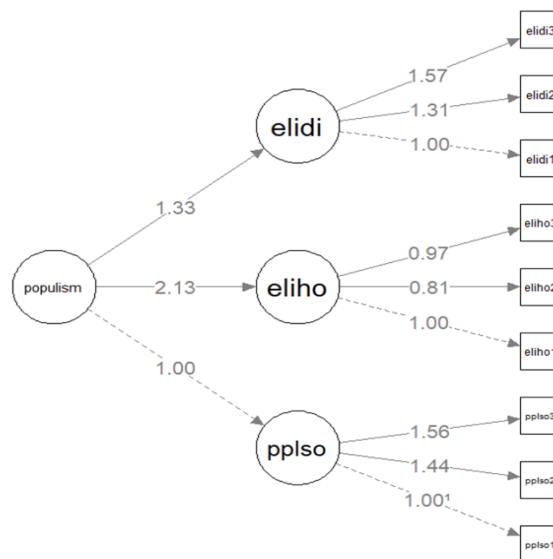
Figure 1

Confirmatory Factor Analysis models

(1) CFA on four dimensions
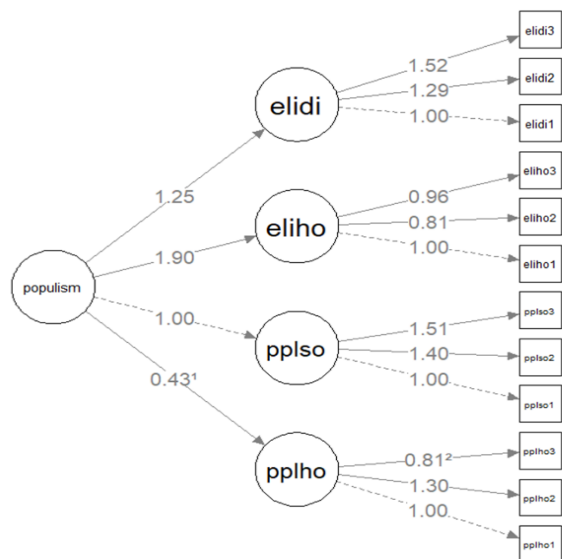
χ²: 2872 df: 512 χ²/df: 5.61 CFI: 0.956
TLI: 0.954 RMSEA: 0.07 SRMR: 0.073
¹Coefficient allowed to vary across country
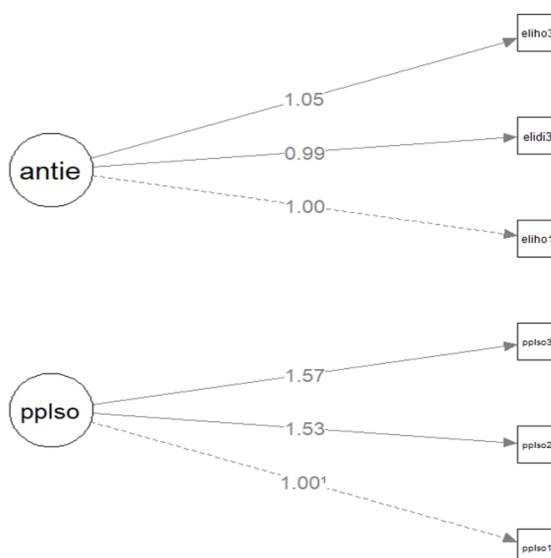²Intercept allowed to vary across country

(2) CFA on three dimensions

χ²: 1380 df: 283 χ²/df: 4.88 CFI: 0.976
TLI: 0.976 RMSEA: 0.064 SRMR: 0.063
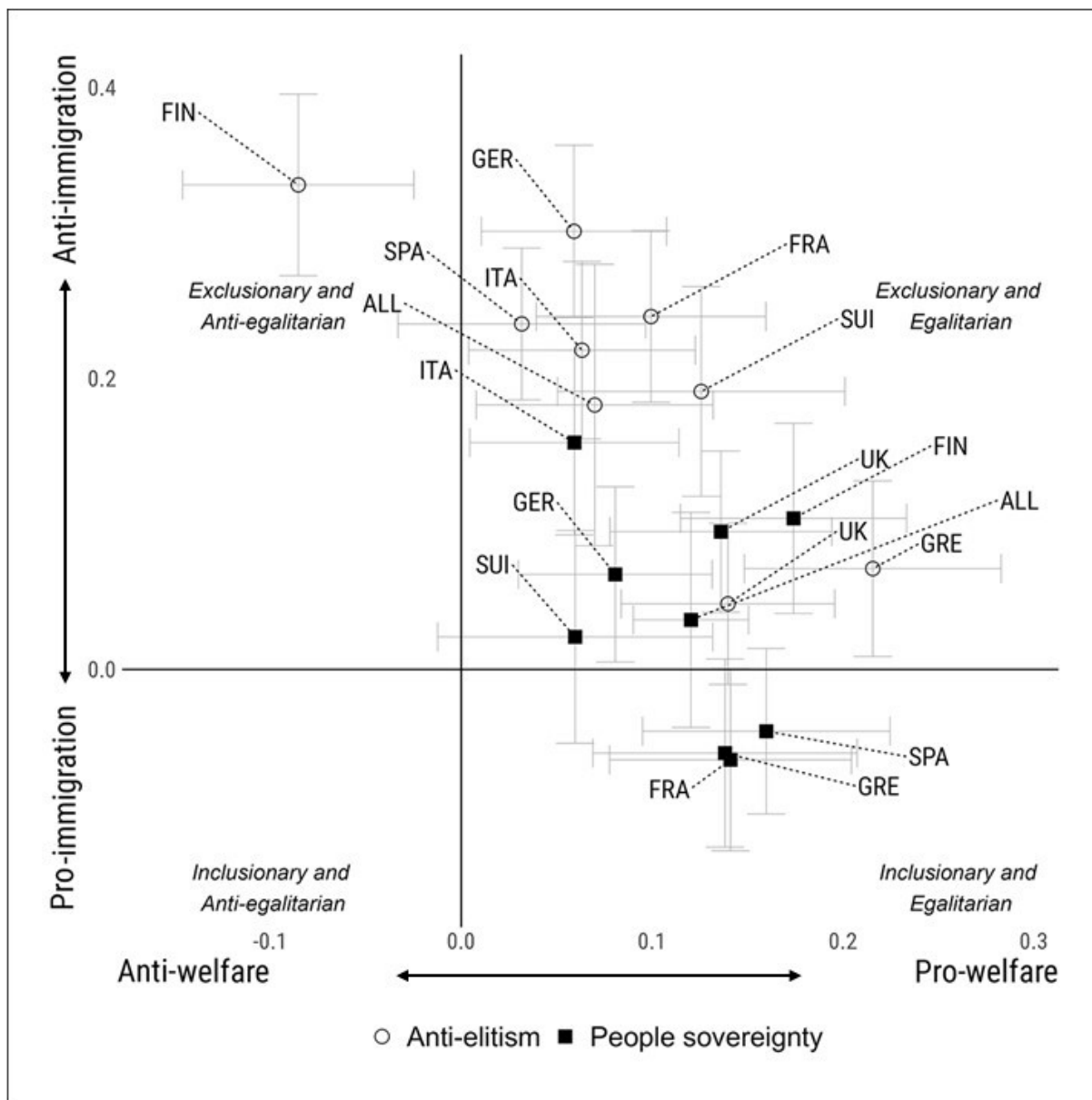¹Intercept allowed to vary across country

(3) CFA on two dimensions

χ²: 425 df: 113 χ²/df: 3.76 CFI: 0.986
TLI: 0.985 RMSEA: 0.054 SRMR: 0.049
¹Intercept allowed to vary across country

Figure 2

Inclusionary and exclusionary populisms: Standardized regression coefficients for Anti-immigration and Pro-welfare with populist subdimensions by country

Note. Grey lines represent the 95% confidence interval for the standardized coefficients of Anti-immigration/Pro-welfare attitudes predicting Anti-elitism/People sovereignty, controlling for Socio-demographics & People sovereignty/Anti-elitism, in each sample.