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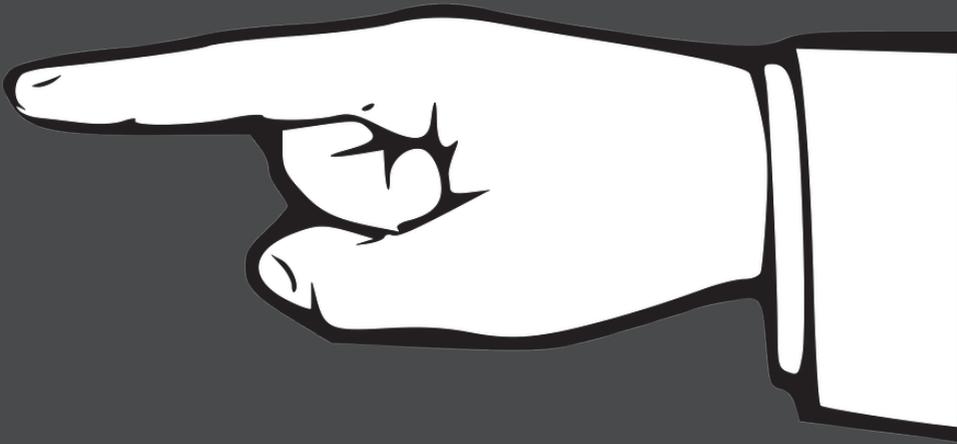
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They did it!



**The Content, Effects, and Mechanisms
of Blame Attribution in Populist
Communication**

Michael Hameleers

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**The Content, Effects, and Mechanisms of Blame
Attribution in Populist Communication**

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colofon

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Attribution in Populist Communication**

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Voor Jasne

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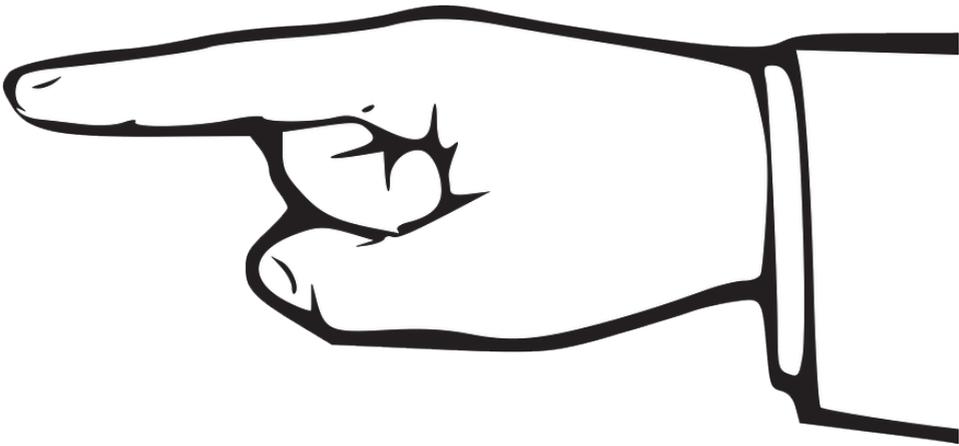
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Introduction

“The search for a scapegoat is the easiest of all hunting expeditions.”

— Dwight D. Eisenhower

A growing number of nations around the world have witnessed the rise of influential populist movements. In recent years, it seems that populist ideas are spreading like an oil slick across the most widely dispersed countries around the globe. The essence of populism – emphasizing the causal and moral opposition between the ordinary people and culpable others – can be articulated by different actors, such as politicians, citizens, or journalists. Examples of the expression of such populist ideas abound. In Europe, especially in the midst of the Brexit, financial, and refugee crises, populist sentiments that oppose the ordinary people and their will to failing politicians have prevailed in many countries. In the United States, the ideas communicated by Donald Trump that construct the divide between the ‘good’ American citizens and ‘evil’ others have sparked a heated societal debate, receiving both support and resistance throughout the globe. But what is the core idea expressed in populist communication that may incite populist sentiments among citizens? And what are the potential effects of exposure to such populist ideas?

In defining the ideational core of populism, I integrate two strongly related, yet unconnected, areas of research: causal attributions of responsibility (e.g., Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Iyengar, 1991) and populist communication (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Synthesizing these areas of research, I define the essence of populist communication as the attribution of blame for the ordinary people’s problems to different opposed out-groups: either defined *vertically* as the elites or *horizontally* as societal out-groups, such as refugees or immigrants. In the context of a severe perceived threat to the ordinary people’s in-group, populist blame attributions emphasize a causal and moral interpretation of salient societal issues: the ordinary people are depicted as innocent and pure whereas the other is evil, and most importantly, causally *responsible* for the people’s malaise (de la Torre, 2000). Populist ideas thus essentially revolve about attributing blame to others while absolving “the people” of responsibility. Since extant research has pointed at the guiding influence of responsibility attributions on citizens’ political attitudes (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Iyengar, 1991), blame attribution may explain the pervasiveness of populism in politics, media, and society. This newly developed definition of populism’s ideational core builds further on extant literature that defines populism as a relational concept, focusing on the distinction between the “good” people and some “evil” other that poses a threat to the ordinary people (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2014; Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007).

Previous research has provided important first insights into the effects of populist communication (e.g., Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese, 2011, 2013; Matthes & Schmuck,

2015). Bos et al. (2011, 2013) for example show that populist rhetoric targeted at the elites influences the perceived legitimacy of politicians, but only among the lower educated and politically cynical. Attaching an exclusionist component to populism's definition, it has been found that populist advertising blaming societal out-groups bolsters negative attitudes towards minorities and immigrants among the public (e.g., Matthes & Schmuck, 2015).

Despite this important foundational evidence, we know too little about what specific message characteristics central to populist communication influence the populist perceptions of *which* citizens, and how the persuasiveness of populist ideas can be interpreted from a theoretical perspective. These important, yet unexplored fields in populism research lead to the comprehensive three-fold question that forms the backbone of this dissertation: (1) How are populist blame attributions expressed in the media and (2) interpreted by citizens, and (3) how can populist blame attributions by the media affect citizens' political perceptions?

Why We Should (Still) Care About Populism

In 2012, the former president of the European Council Herman van Rompuy referred to populism as the greatest threat to Europe, emphasizing that shifting blame to immigrants or the EU is not the solution for the problems Europe is facing (Pop, 2012). Rompuy's speech provides only one of many examples demonstrating how the buzzword populism has sparked public and scholarly debates around the world. Despite its frequent use, however, controversies about how to conceptualize the concept resonate in different scientific disciplines (see Aslanidis, 2015 for a comprehensive overview).

Although it could be argued that scholarly consensus on how to define the essence of populism has finally been reached, there is still no agreement on *who* can express the core idea of 'the good people versus the evil others' in *which ways* and to *what extent*. For this reason, important questions remain unanswered: Is populism a binary label that can be used to classify political parties with, or is it a matter of degree? Is it an ideology or merely a strategy or style? As these questions illustrate, with the rise of different manifestations of populist ideas in politics, media, and among citizens, the conceptual clarity of the concept keeps on fading. This disagreement is reflected in scholarly definitions of the concept. Some scholars have defined populism merely as a discursive style or rhetoric (e.g., Cranmer, 2011; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or a frame (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011). This frame or style can then be applied by different populist or non-populist actors, suggesting the existence of a contagious populist zeitgeist in which different actors can engage in populism (Mudde, 2004). Populism has also been measured as a matter of degree, for example by exploring the extent to which populism exists as an individual-level attitude among voters (e.g.,

Akkerman et al., 2014; Rooduijn, 2014a), or by mapping the degree of populism in public debates (Rooduijn, 2014b).

Another line of research opts for populism as a strategy that different actors can use to achieve a certain goal, such as gaining electoral success or maximizing media attention (e.g., Barr, 2009; Weyland, 2001). This conceptualization of populism presupposes that populism is something that can be switched on or off depending on the goals of a certain actor. If a politician in government, for example, wants to shift blame from the national level to the European Union, he or she can use populism as a strategy to frame blame. In that case, the in-group of the nation including the national government is framed as a victim of higher-order politics whereas the EU is held responsible for causing the people's crisis.

Currently, the most dominant and widely cited approach conceptualizes populism as a thin-centered ideology, which can be supplemented by all sorts of host ideologies (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Stanley, 2008). In this reading, the "thin" ideology of populism revolves around the opposition of the ordinary people to the culpable elites. This ideological core can, depending on contextual differences, be enriched by host ideologies on both the left and right-wing, such as nativism on the right or economic inclusionism on the left. This definition of populism contends that the people's opposition to societal out-groups, most saliently immigrants, refugees or ethnic minorities, is not a defining component of populism. Rather, being opposed to these out-groups is part of the host ideology. Although defining populism as a thin-cored ideology has clear merits when applied to the populism of political parties and politicians, its ideological premises become contested when conceptualizing populism as a phenomenon detached from such political actors. For example when conceptualizing populism as individual-level attitudes or as an aspect of political communication, as increasingly done by scholars conducting research on populism (e.g., Rooduijn et al., 2014).

An important discrepancy in the ideological approach is that the people's opposition to vertical out-groups is part of the thin-ideological core whereas their opposition to horizontal out-groups is not, while it can be argued that both phenomena are part of the same underlying blame-shifting mechanism. In other words, attributing blame lies at the heart of the populist opposition between 'us' and 'them', irrespective of the out-group deemed responsible. Moreover, when ideology is defined in its strictest sense, conceptualizing populism in ideological terms would not allow to study it as a matter of degree. This premise contradicts a vast amount of empirical research that did *not* actually study populism as a binary on-off category (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn et al., 2014). In other words, a lot of empirical studies contend that they define populism as a thin-cored ideology while they may not be accepting the epistemological consequences of their definition.

Taken together, the competing approaches to studying the phenomenon populism have resulted in a variety of inconsistencies that has prevented a real consensus to be established among scholars working on populism. Let me highlight the most important unresolved inconsistencies here. First, there is no agreement on whether populism is a binary concept or a matter of degree. Some authors for example simply classify certain political parties or politicians as populist or non-populist (e.g., Heijne, 2011). Others propose an index of empty and full populisms (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), whereas yet another body of literature proposes to identify populism based on a set of even more detailed indicators, such as the presence of charismatic leadership (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Taggart, 2000).

Second, it is unclear *who* can be populist. Should populism be reserved to describe political parties and politicians, or should it also be extrapolated to journalistic media, and can citizens themselves also be populist? Because there is no real consensus on where to locate populism, authors also disagree on which materials should be analyzed to map populism. Most research discursively analyzes the content of party manifestos or speeches to quantify the populism of political actors (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014b). Others employ a content analysis of different materials to reveal populist frames in the media (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011). And yet another approach is to provide an in-depth description of various indicators of populism to argue that certain politicians are populist, whereas others are not (e.g., Hawkins, 2009).

A potential solution to circumvent these inconsistencies and disagreements is to abandon the concept altogether. Arguments in favor of this position may highlight that populist ideas that construct an opposition to the culprit elites are already captured in related concepts, such as anti-establishment or political cynicism. On the right, people's opposition to welfare-state profiteers can also be classified using welfare chauvinism. And expressing the out-group threat of immigrants and refugees may simply tap into nativist or anti-immigration sentiments. In other words, this opposing line of argumentation emphasizes that we do not need the contested concept of populism to describe the phenomenon of people's opposition to the elites or societal out-groups. But why *should* we still care about populism?

I do believe that we should not abandon such an important concept only because of practical reasons or ontological disagreements. Rather, I consider it an important challenge for current and future research to resolve the inconsistencies in conceptualizing populism. Taken together, there are two key reasons why populism remains a highly relevant concept: (1) the fact that populism actually describes a phenomenon substantially different from alternative phenomena and (2) the availability of a comprehensive solution for the ontological puzzle in defining the essence of populism.

First, there is more to populism than simply opposing out-groups or criticizing the elites. Populism is a relational concept with an important moral and causal component, which sets it apart from alternative, more technocratic anti-other concepts. First of all, populism constructs the in-group of the people as a homogenous, morally superior entity (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004). Their will, culture, norms and values should be central, and not “polluted” by the potentially “evil” influences of the elites or societal-out-groups. The out-group, in contrast, is attributed blame for causing the powerless people’s problems or crisis situation. Reasoned from a populist mindset, *because* the elites and societal out-groups are only adhering to their own interests whilst being blind to the ordinary people’s concerns, they have *caused* the crisis threatening the ordinary people. These moral and causal interpretations set populism apart from other (anti-other) concepts that may be equated with it.

Second, the lack of conceptual consensus can be resolved by acknowledging that populist ideas can be detached from the political actors typically associated with them (also see Rooduijn et al., 2014). In this reading, various actors can express more or less populism by communicating the discursive genus of the blameless people’s opposition to culpable others. In this dissertation, I take this ideational approach in order to move beyond the foregrounded debated classifications and their accompanying conceptual confusion. Specifically, this dissertation’s focus is on how the core idea of populism – the binary opposition between the people as morally superior in-group and different forms of culpable out-groups – can manifest itself in different ways both as characteristic of the message (i.e. the media or politicians’ political communication) and as a characteristic of receivers of messages (i.e. citizens who make sense of societal issues).

What about the Potential Effects of Populist Communication?

This dissertation thus postulates that the core idea of populist blame attribution can be used to describe journalistic populist communication on the sender-side and interpretations of citizens on the receiver-side. To provide an example of a journalistic interpretation along the lines of populism’s ideational core: On the 13th of June 2016, the largest British tabloid newspaper the Sun published a front-page article in which they actively constructed the divide between the ordinary people and the culprit elites, as illustrated by the following quote: “The Sun urges everyone to vote LEAVE. We must set ourselves free from dictatorial Brussels. Throughout our 43-year membership of the European Union it has proved increasingly greedy, wasteful, bullying and breathtakingly incompetent in a crisis”. In this article, the EU is blamed for being incompetent in their attempts to solve the native people’s crisis. Because ‘they’ are, greedy, wasteful, bullying and incompetent, ‘our’ nation has not been able to recover from the crisis.

On the receiver-side, citizens also frequently express populist ideas by emphasizing the opposition between their blameless in-group and opposed out-groups. The following quote posted on the Facebook community *The Netherlands in Revolt* provides an example of such a populist expression by an ordinary citizen: “Our elderly people and the chronically ill are unable to work. Because of this government, they are not getting enough to even survive. If it’s up to this government, we can all die”. The source of this quote, an ordinary citizen, emphasized the opposition between the vulnerable members of the in-group that are abandoned to their fate *because* the elites in government do not care about their well-being.

Now that I have argued how populists ideas can – and should – be detached from specific political actors, the next step is to explore how populist ideas expressed by the media can be related to the populist interpretations of citizens. In order to do so, I propose a causal link between two important, yet largely isolated areas in populism research: media populism or populism *by* the media (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008) and populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins, Riding & Mudde, 2012).

The tentative evidence supporting such a causal link between the populism of the media and the populist interpretations of citizens mainly stems from the literature on responsibility attribution. Extant literature on causal responsibility attributions demonstrates that messages that attribute blame indeed guide citizens’ political opinions in congruence with the targets attributed causal responsibility (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Iyengar, 1991). If a message emphasizes blame attributions to the European Union, for example, citizens follow suit by accepting this culpable out-group construction in their own political opinions (e.g., Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Against this backdrop, this dissertation tests the central causal expectation that populist blame attributions emphasized in media content affect the populist attitudes of citizens in message-congruent ways. But what provides the most fertile soil for these ‘us against them’ constructions to root?

The Roots of Populist Blame Attributions

It has been theoretically argued and empirically supported that the perception of a crisis situation is a paramount contextual factor for populist ideas to root in society (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; 2016; Taggart, 2000). To provide a few examples, the Brexit movement, the Tea Party, Trump, and various politicians in Europe refer to the refugee or migrant ‘crisis’ to justify their attributions of blame. Following their line of reasoning, ‘our’ heartland may face an economic and cultural crisis because ‘we’ are swamped by culprit others. To avoid this crisis from ruining the heartland, ‘they’ should be eliminated. Hence, populism’s process of social differentiation and blame attribution is rooted in and concretized by referring to a threat posed by a

crisis. But what may be the underlying psychological mechanism that aligns people with such crisis constructions?

In line with recent empirical research, this dissertation argues that the appeal of such populist ‘us’ versus ‘them’ constructions is rooted in receivers’ feelings of relative deprivation (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Relative deprivation can be defined as a perceived unfair distribution of society’s common resources: ordinary people ‘like us’ never get what they deserve from society, whereas ‘others’ always seem to profit without giving anything in return (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010). The in-group is thus perceived of as being worse off than others living amongst them in society.

Populism and relative deprivation can be connected in the light of the ‘losers of modernization hypothesis’ (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Kriesi et al., 2006; Kriesi, 2014). Moving beyond the traditional demographic profiles of populist citizens, this thesis can be extrapolated to the *perception* of losing out relative to others. In line with this reasoning, people who experience to have lost something that naturally belonged to them, but has been taken away by profiting others, are appealed most to populist ideas.

A perceived crisis forms the foundational base for the brickwork of perceived relative deprivation: the deprived ordinary people hold the belief that their in-group is victimized more by the crisis than the culpable others that caused the crisis in the first place. In the midst of societal crisis such as the threat of economic decline, these vulnerable, deprived people should be appealed to populist ideas that voice their grievances of being worse off (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). The persuasiveness of populist blame attributions may thus be rooted in perceptions of relative deprivation. Those who believe their in-group is worse off than other groups, are appealed most to messages that blame others for depriving the people from what they are morally entitled to.

The Supply-side and Demand-side of Populist Communication

Extant research has predominately focused on the supply-side of populist expressions by studying populist ideology (e.g., Stanley, 2008), rhetoric (e.g., Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011), or communication styles (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). A recent, but growing line of research has started to study the appeal of populist ideas on the demand-side, most saliently by measuring the populist attitudes of voters (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012), or by identifying antecedents that make citizens more or less susceptible to persuasion by populist arguments (e.g., Oesch, 2008).

These two lines of research have developed more or less independently, providing important, yet isolated insights into the populist ideas of actors on the supply-side

or the demand-side of communication. As an important next step, this dissertation provides insights into *both* the supply-side of populist ideas communicated by the media and the demand-side of citizens' populist attitudes. Moving beyond one-sided approaches, I will further explore the causal relationships between *both* sides of the populist discourse. This dissertation's integration of supply-side and demand-side approaches to the precise study of populism is graphically depicted in Figure 0.1.

As can be seen in Figure 0.1, two key concepts on the supply-side are studied and integrated: populist blame attribution and the expression of this ideational core *by* the media, also referred to as media populism (e.g., Bos & Brants, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008) or populist communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). On the demand-side, I will investigate how these populist ideas resonate with citizens' individual-level attitudes. Such populist attitudes are subsequently regarded as a dependent variable when exploring the media effects of populist communication. Attitudinal congruence refers to the hypothesized mechanisms by which the independent variable populist blame attribution affects citizens' populist perceptions. In the sections that follow, the key concepts on the supply-side and demand-side depicted in Figure 0.1 will be defined in more detail.

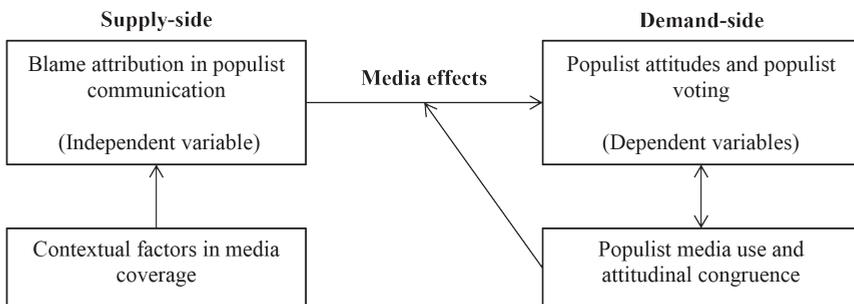


Figure 0.1 Conceptual model of the dissertation

Blame Attribution as a Populist Master Frame

First, I will more precisely explain how populist attributions of blame form the genus of the populist ideas expressed in political communication. Attributions of blame can be regarded as the populist master frame: an overarching interpretation used to wrap up all sorts of societal issues into a causal and moral opposition between ‘us’ and ‘them’. By introducing this definition, this dissertation explicitly links the traditionally separated literatures of responsibility attributions and populism. Zooming in on both bodies of literature, striking similarities can be identified. As will be discussed here, the integration of responsibility attribution and populist communication is particularly important for understanding the *persuasiveness* of populist messages among citizens.

It has been argued that attributing responsibility for negative outcomes and attributing credit for successes plays a central role in citizens’ understanding of and participation in representative democracy (Gomez & Wilson, 2008; Malhotra & Kuo, 2008). By attributing causal responsibility for negative developments – blame – citizens can punish responsible political actors for not functioning properly. This form of political participation can be explained in the light of accountability: people who believe that the political establishment is culpable will not vote for them at election times.

Throughout this dissertation, attributing causal responsibility is conceptualized as the process by which the media and citizens attribute blame to actors deemed responsible for negative societal developments, such as the refugee crisis or the crisis on the labor market. Related to the conceptualization of exclusionist and anti-establishment populism (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), different out-groups can be attributed blame. First, *vertically* constructed out-groups ‘above’ the people can be blamed. These are for example the national government, the European Union or elitist experts. Second, horizontally opposed societal out-groups ‘amongst’ the people can be blamed, such as immigrants, refugees or profiteers from the welfare state.

Attributions of blame are argued to be highly persuasive (Iyengar, 1989; 1991; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). They are persuasive because they offer simple solutions to complex political problems: when the culprits will be punished, the crisis will be alleviated. Moreover, in line with the premises of social identity theory, citizens can use blame attributions to absolve their own in-group of responsibility: by shifting blame from the in-group of the ordinary citizens to out-groups, people are reassured of a positive, blameless self-concept (Tajfel, 1978). Populist blame attributions may thus provide citizens with an important heuristic cue that helps them to make sense of complex political issues whilst maintaining a positive image of the self.

The process of social differentiation central to attributions of responsibility also forms the backdrop of populist ideas (e.g., Laclau, 1977; Taggart, 2000). Populist ideas, just like blame attributions, emphasize a certain causal interpretation of societal issues by highlighting which actors have caused a negative development (Laclau, 1977). Consequentially, negative characteristics of blame are shifted from the innocent in-group of the ordinary people to the culprit out-groups. In a similar vein, I define the ideational core of populism as the construction of a causal and moral divide between the in-group of the ordinary people and horizontally or vertically defined out-groups.

In the definition of populism in the light of blame attributions, I separate populist blame attribution from causal responsibility attributions by emphasizing *both* the causal and *moral* component of the divide between the ordinary people and opposed out-groups. In line with this, beyond shifting blame to the culprit elites or societal out-groups, populist attributions of blame attach a *moral* component to this divide: the in-group is morally good and superior whereas the opposed out-group is evil, unjust and threatening (de la Torre, 2000). In populism, the ‘good’ in-group and the ‘evil’ out-group are both regarded as homogenous entities, separated by a large moral distance (Mudde, 2004).

Taken together, at the core of populist ideas, the people are depicted as the blameless in-group whereas the out-groups are attributed responsibility for causing the people’s problems, such as the refugee or economic crisis. The master frame of populist blame attribution can be used to interpret all sorts of pressing societal issues (Caiani & della Porta, 2011). Using this frame, the people are depicted as relatively powerless: the vertical out-group of the corrupt politicians, for example, fails to represent their will. As these “evil” others are not listening to the people, the heartland of the “good” ordinary people will remain in crisis. The only solution is to remove the culprits from the heartland, so that the nation can become great again.

The media can express such populist interpretations by means of framing. Media framing entails the process by which journalists reconstruct societal issues into patterns of interpretation that are intended to be meaningful for the receiving audience (e.g., Scheufele, 1999, Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). According to Entman (1993), emphasis frames can be conceptualized along the lines of four separate frame-elements, which all attach a specific interpretation to different aspects of the framed issue. These four frame-elements are: the problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation. The ideational genus of populism most explicitly links up to the first three frame-elements: *Causal* responsibility for the *problem* situation defined as a negative societal development is *morally* shifted from the good people to the evil others. We can thus illustratively

define this populist frame as “The evil others are to blame for the crisis facing the good, innocent people of the heartland”.

Such populist frames can be used by journalists who report on societal issues in the media. By actively engaging in populist framing, journalists are assumed to contribute to populism *by* the media, also defined as media populism (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). By engaging in media populism, journalists themselves frame issues in terms of a moral and causal divide between the common people and the culprit others. Media populism, then, can be defined as the media’s expression of populist ideas, independent of the political actors typically associated with populism (see Krämer, 2014). Such populist media framing is for example used in an article of the British newspaper the Sun, which actively stressed the populist divide between ordinary British citizens and the EU in the midst of the Brexit campaign: “If we stay, Britain will be engulfed in a few short years by this relentlessly expanding, German dominated federal state. For all David Cameron’s witless assurances, our powers and values WILL be further eroded” (The Sun, 2016). By means of populist framing, journalists of the Sun draw on their agency to interpret Europe as a negative issue along the lines of the moral and causal opposition between the native British people as in-group and the self-interested and corrupt politicians in the nation and European Union as vertically opposed out-groups.

The populist ideas expressed by interpreting journalists may take on different shapes depending on the construction of the out-group that is attributed blame for the people’s problems. For this reason, this dissertation will propose a refined conceptualization of media populism that distinguishes between different constructions of the people’s enemy. The conceptualization of media populism introduced in this dissertation will then be used to investigate the dynamics between populist ideas expressed on the supply-side and populist attitudes interpreted on the demand-side. To do so, we first have to understand *how* ‘the people’ can be more or less populist *themselves*.

Conceptualizing Populist Attitudes

As touched upon earlier, this dissertation aims to provide insights into the intersections between populist ideas expressed on the supply-side of the media and the populist perceptions of the people on the demand-side. To more precisely assess this causal relationship, it is insufficient to only make a fine-grained distinction between different types of populist communication. Rather, we also have to take the variety in populist sentiments on the demand-side into account. Therefore, moving beyond traditional one-dimensional conceptualizations of populist attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Rooduijn, 2014a), this dissertation introduces a more refined conceptualization to structure the populist attitudes of citizens on the demand-side.

In conceptualizing this dimensional structure, I will distinguish between different ways in which the central populist ‘us versus them’ divide can be interpreted by citizens. First, I follow traditional empirical research that has measured populist attitudes as the perceived divide between the ordinary people as in-group and *vertically* opposed elites as out-groups (Akkerman et al., 2014). This uni-dimensional approach has typically measured populist attitudes in line with the premises of populism as a ‘thin ideology’ that emphasizes the divide between the ‘good’ people and the ‘corrupt’ elites.

Next to shifting blame from the hardworking people to ‘evil’ elites, however, populist ideas can also point the finger at societal out-groups that are assumed to have caused the in-group’s problems on a cultural-symbolic or economic level (de Koster et al., 2013; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). In order to integrate this salient right-wing populist component into a more refined conceptualization of citizens’ populist attitudes, I aim to extend traditional measures of populist attitudes by incorporating exclusionist interpretations of the ‘people versus an out-group divide’. In doing so, this dissertation’s revisited multidimensional model of populist attitudes should be better able to map the attitudinal structure underlying populist ideas expressed on both the left and right wing of the political spectrum (e.g., Zaller, 1992).

Populist Media Use

Although a growing body of literature has pointed to the particular media diet of populist voters (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008), we still know too little about what specific media preferences are manifest amongst citizens with populist attitudes on different dimensions. After mapping the attitudinal structure of citizens’ populist attitudes, the next step of this dissertation is therefore to investigate *what* media are attractive for citizens with stronger populist attitudes. Doing so, this dissertation investigates to what extent citizens with populist attitudes on different dimensions are appealed to, and inclined to select, attitudinal-congruent media content.

The assumptions regarding the relationship between the media and populism are mostly based on the premise that tabloid newspapers pay more and more favorable attention to populist viewpoints than broadsheet newspapers (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008). In line with this, people who expose themselves to tabloid media content are argued to be more aligned with populist ideas than those who use broadsheet media (Mazzoleni et al., 2003). The allegedly tabloidized media preferences of populist voters can best be understood as the existence of a parallelism between the core ideas of populism and tabloid media. In contrast to broadsheet newspapers, tabloids are assumed to maintain a stronger relationship with the mass audience and a weaker relationship to established political parties (e.g., Art, 2006; Klein, 1998).

Therefore, in line with the centrality of ordinary people emphasized in populist ideas, tabloids are assumed to devote more attention to the worldviews of ordinary citizens than broadsheets. Deriving from the premises of selective exposure, citizens are expected to self-select political content that reflects their prior interpretations of societal issues (Stroud, 2008). Because populist attitudes articulate the perceived centrality of common citizens while marking the opposition to culprit others, tabloid content that foregrounds attitudinal-congruent interpretations should consequentially be most appealing to voters with such attitudes (e.g., Mazzoleni et al., 2003). Next to reading tabloid newspapers, populist voters have been categorized by their preferences for entertainment-based opposed to hard-news content preferences (e.g., Klein, 1998). Just like the essential ideas of populism, entertainment content should provide a central stage for ordinary citizens and their experiences, while circumventing or discrediting elite sources.

Besides empirically testing these theoretical claims of the appeal of tabloid and entertainment media among citizens with populist attitudes, this dissertation also aims to further develop the link between the proposed typology of media populism and the multidimensional structure of populist attitudes. Based on selective exposure's premise that people self-select media content that fits their prior beliefs, people should prefer and select media content that frames issues in ways congruent with their own frames of reference. These attitudinal congruent messages should, in turn, be most persuasive.

OUTLINE OF THE DISSERTATION

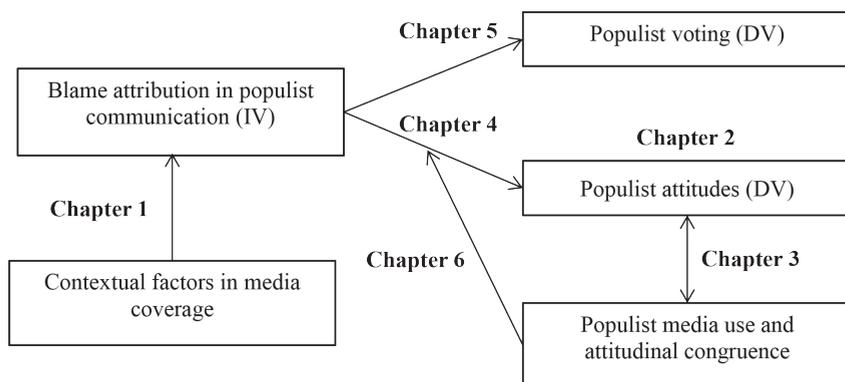


Figure 0.2 Structuring of chapters in the dissertation

Throughout the chapters of this dissertation, I approach the supply-side and demand-side of populism, and their causal relationships, in the way as depicted in Figure 0.2. In the first chapter, I zoom in on the supply-side of the media: how are journalists constructing the central populist idea of attributing blame in the media? In the second and third chapter, I focus on the demand-side of interpreting citizens: In what ways are ‘the people’ populist themselves? And to what media are such populist citizens attracted to? In the fourth and fifth chapter, I investigate the causal relationship between supply-side and demand-side populisms using an experiment, in which I assess the effects of populist blame attribution on the sender-side on the receiver-side of the people: are people’s populist attitudes affected by exposure to populist messages? And in what ways can populist messages make people more inclined to vote for populist parties and less likely to vote for the government? The final two experiments in Chapter 6 respond to an important development in the study of media effects: selective exposure. Doing so, I aim to assess whether populist communication only results in persuasion among those with attitudinal-congruent views. In addition, this experimental set up allows us to shed more light on the question whether forced exposure to populist messages results in reactance among citizens with counter attitudinal priors.

The six chapters are originally written as stand-alone research articles. For this reason, the introductions and theoretical frameworks of the included chapters overlap on some points. The different chapters do, however, deal with the specific components highlighted in the outline of Figure 0.2.

Research Questions

The conceptual building blocks and their interactions presented in this introduction are guided by this dissertation’s three-fold research question: (1) How are populist blame attributions expressed in the media and (2) interpreted by citizens, and (3) how can populist blame attributions by the media affect citizens’ political perceptions? This conceptual question can be broken down into six substantial research questions that this dissertation aims to answer in the subsequent chapters. First, I study journalists’ role in framing attributions of blame in newspapers, which links up to the first part of the three-fold question centralized in this dissertation:

1. *To what extent and how are journalists engaging in media populism by framing blame in populist ways?*

The second part of the dissertation aims to understand how populist attitudes are structured among the public:

2. *What is the dimensional structure underlying the populist attitudes of citizens?*

Using this conceptualization of populist attitudes, the next chapter investigates the

particularities of the media diet and media preferences of citizens with populist attitudes by posing the following research question:

3. *What are the media diets and preferences of citizens with populist attitudes?*

The final part of the dissertation's three-fold question is addressed in the three chapters that follow. First, I investigate how populism's central content feature of attributing blame to the elites affects citizens' blame perceptions and populist attitudes:

4. *To what extent and how does emotionalized blame attribution affect citizens' blame perceptions and populist attitudes?*

Looking beyond blame perceptions and populist attitudes, the next chapter aims to shed more light on the media effects of populism on political party preferences:

5. *How are preferences for populist parties affected by populist blame attributions?*

In the final chapter, the causal relationship between media populism and populist attitudes is investigated again, but now in the context of the contemporary fragmentized media environment, in which selective exposure is expected to play a central role:

6. *What is the role of selective exposure and attitudinal congruence in conditioning the effects of populist blame framing?*

Dissertation Context

The data for the empirical studies reported in this dissertation are gathered in the Netherlands. To set the stage, it is important to outline a short history of populist uprisings in the Netherlands here. Populism has played a central role in Dutch politics since the 2000s. The rise and fast decline of Pim Fortuyn's right-wing populist party LPF (List Pim Fortuyn) in 2002 marks the start of influential Dutch populism (e.g., Schafraad et al., 2010). Although the success of this party was extremely short-lived, the LPF was the first populist political party that succeeded in obtaining a large share of the vote in the general elections, eventually obtaining 26 seats in parliament. After Fortuyn was assassinated in 2002, the Dutch political landscape witnessed a relatively quiet period, with a disintegrating LPF, and various new and smaller populist parties, for example One Netherlands, and the Party for the Netherlands.

Electoral successful right-wing populism re-entered the political stage with Geert Wilders' Freedom Party (PVV) in 2005. In 2010, the PVV managed to become the third largest party in the national elections, obtaining 24 seats in parliament. During the last decade, next to the continuing success of the PVV, various populist parties such as Verdonk's right-wing Proud of the Netherlands (Trots op Nederland), Thierry Baudet's Forum for Democracy and the 50 plus party (targeted at the senior native population) entered Dutch politics in the slipstream of the PVV, albeit with less electoral success at the time of writing.

As this dissertation zooms in on one particular country as the context for all studies, the consequences of this case study need to be discussed here. Importantly, the Netherlands has predominately faced influential populism on the right-wing. Although some authors may argue that the Socialist Party (SP) used to be a left-wing populist party (e.g., March, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2014), recent electoral influence of Dutch populism has mainly been reserved to the right-wing (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

However, attributing blame to the establishment is a key feature of all forms of Dutch populism, whereas attributing blame to societal out-groups may not always be present. In other words, the focus on elitist blame attribution in Chapter 4 and 5 is externally valid in the context of this dissertation. Moreover, in Chapter 6, the effects of blame attribution to both the elites *and* immigrants are studied. In addition, as I study populist ideas independently of political actors, the success of populist political parties in the Netherlands may be of less importance. What is important, however, is the fact that populist ideas that oppose the people to both the elites and societal out-groups are highly salient in Dutch political opinion.

The media landscape of the Netherlands provides a suitable context to study the contents, effects, and underlying mechanisms of populist blame attributions. As the supply-side of Dutch media offers a variety of tabloid, quality, entertainment, and hard news outlets, we can test the predictions regarding the contextual factors surrounding the presence of media populism, as well as the appeal of different media types among voters with populist attitudes. Moreover, as citizens in the Netherlands have the opportunity to choose between a large selection of content on a daily basis, the context provides a generalizable case study to investigate the role of selective exposure to populist messages. Therefore, the findings of this dissertation are likely to be valid for other countries with a diversified media environment.

Some limitations of the focus on a single country context need to be emphasized here. First and foremost, the content analysis of media populism may reveal different journalistic patterns when applied to contexts that differ from the case study reported in Chapter 1. The role of interpretative journalism, for example, may be different in countries with less clear distinctions between tabloid and quality media outlets.

Regarding the insights gathered from nationally representative survey data (Chapter 2 and Chapter 3), populist attitudes may be structured differently in countries that differ in socio-political context. In countries that have witnessed more severe economic consequences of the recession, for example, people's opposition to economic elites may be more salient. Citizens living in countries that did not receive many migrants during the refugee crisis, may have weaker populist attitudes towards societal out-groups. Despite these contextual differences, the dimensional structure of populist attitudes proposed in this dissertation aims to be general enough to be substantiated with such country-specific meanings. And as it measures populist

attitudes as a matter of degree, citizens can be placed on different locations on the scales, without influencing the actual structure underlying their populist attitudes.

Data

This dissertation draws on four data collections to investigate the contents, effects, and underlying mechanisms of populist communication in different communication contexts. The first chapter reports a quantitative content analysis for which the data was collected and coded by the National Center of Competence in Research on ‘Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century’ (NCCR Democracy), funded by the Swiss National Science Foundation. Using this dataset, we specifically focused on six newspapers to investigate how the framing of blame is present in the journalistic styles of these media outlets ($N = 867$).

Second, we draw on a survey with a representative sample of Dutch voters collected by TNS NIPO ($N = 809$) to assess how the populist attitudes of citizens are structured. In the next step, we use this dataset to explore the appeal of populist media content among voters with populist attitudes.

Third, to assess the causal relationship between blame framing used by the media and the populist attitudes of citizens, we draw on an online survey experiment. The data were collected by the panel company Research Now ($N = 721$). In the next step, we draw on this data to investigate how populist blame frames affect vote choice, and we explore the causal mechanism underlying this effect.

The fourth data collection also concerns experimental data, this time taking selective exposure into account. The data of this experiment was collected by Survey Sampling International and consists of two separate experiments ($N = 1,120$).

Key Contributions

This dissertation aims to advance the understanding of populism and populist communication in a multitude of ways. First, by explicitly linking the ideational core of populism to the literature on responsibility attribution, a more refined conceptualization of populism is foregrounded. As a second key contribution, this dissertation aims to provide more insights into the media’s and journalists’ role in framing populist ideas on the supply-side. More specifically, the existence of the active use of populist ideas expressed by the media, or media populism, has previously only been based on limited empirical evidence (Akkerman, 2011; Bos & Brants, 2014; Rooduijn, 2014b) or theoretical assumptions (e.g., Krämer, 2014). In this dissertation, in contrast, I investigate the contextual factors surrounding its presence in the media as well as its appeal among interpreting citizens.

Third, to better understand how such ideas resonate on the demand-side of interpreting citizens, this dissertation foregrounds a multidimensional approach to measuring populist

attitudes, which extends the tradition one-dimensional conceptualization of the perceived divide between the good people and the corrupt elites (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014).

The final key contribution of this dissertation is that it empirically investigates the media effects of populist ideas expressed *independently* of populist actors (also see e.g., Rooduijn et al., 2014). I first experimentally manipulated emotionalized populist blame attributions to assess how populist attitudes, blame perceptions, and party preferences can be affected by populist attributions of blame framed in populist communication. The second experiment takes selective exposure into account by offering receivers the opportunity to self-select attitudinal congruent populist content. These experimental studies are one of the first contributions that investigate both the effects and underlying mechanisms of exposure to populist content (see for exceptions Bos et al., 2013; Rooduijn, de Lange & van der Brug, 2016).

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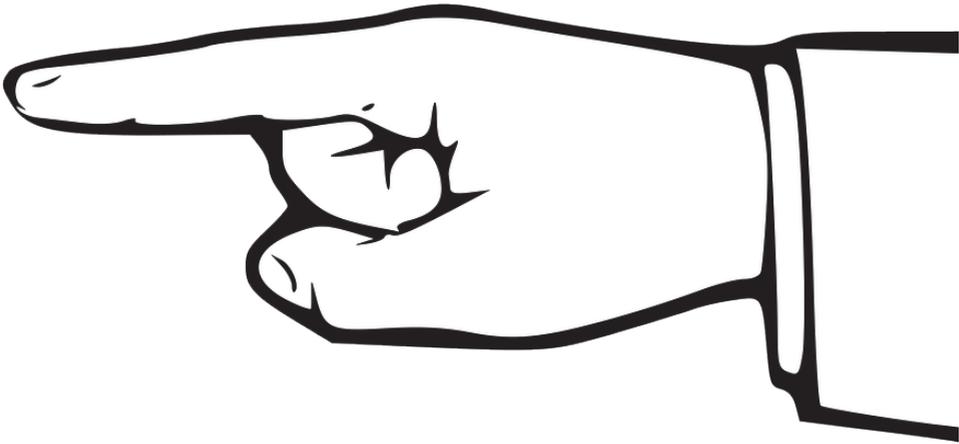
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CHAPTER 1



Shoot the Messenger? The Media's Role in Framing Populist Attributions of Blame^{1, 2}

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ABSTRACT

Attributing blame to elites is central to populist communication. Although empirical research has provided initial insights into the *effects* of populist blame attribution on citizens' political opinions, little is known about the contextual factors surrounding its *presence* in the media. Advancing this knowledge, this chapter draws on an extensive content analysis ($N = 867$) covering non-election and election periods to provide insights into *how* populist blame attributions are embedded in journalistic reporting styles. Using Latent Class Analysis, we first identified three distinct styles of reporting: neutral, conflict, and interpretative coverage. In line with our predictions, we find that populist blame attributions are present most in conjunction with an interpretative journalistic style, and least when a neutral journalistic style is used. Populist blame attributions are more likely to be used by journalists of tabloid newspapers than journalists of broadsheet newspapers. These results provide valuable insights for understanding the intersections between journalism and populist communication.

Populist political parties are on the rise, and the media are said to be partially responsible for it (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2004). If this is the case, are the media passively conveying the viewpoints of populist actors, or are journalists actively using populism as a framework to cover news events? The jury is still out. Regarding the media's role in the global rise of populism, two alternative explanations have been proposed. First, the media are assumed to provide a favorable stage for populist actors and their ideas (e.g., Vossen, 2012). Because populist ideas resonate with media logic, populist actors are said to be given disproportional media attention. Other scholars have argued that media content can be populist by *itself* (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). This perspective implies that journalists, and not only politicians, interpret issues along the lines of a populist distinction between the good people and culprit others. Previous empirical research has predominantly investigated the attention for populist rhetoric and actors in the media (e.g., Bos & Brants, 2014; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). However, the strong claim that journalists possess agency to frame issues in populist ways themselves – populism *by* the media (Bos & Brants, 2014) – has not been tested empirically. Responding to this discrepancy, this chapter draws on a content analysis of different media outlets to unobtrusively investigate the role of journalists in communicating populist ideas.

Populism revolves around the construction of a blameless in-group opposed to culprit out-groups that are blamed for the people's crisis (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004). The in-group is commonly referred to as the innocent people who belong to the imagined community of the heartland. The out-group can be constructed both

vertically as the elites, and *horizontally*, as societal out-groups. As the in-group is absolved of responsibility for causing the heartland's crisis whereas out-groups are accused of causing it, the populist distinction between 'us' and 'them' inherently revolves around attributions of blame (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2016). Populist actors are indeed found to attribute more blame than mainstream politicians (Vasilopoulou et al., 2013). Against this background, we regard the core idea of populist communication as framing attributions of blame, emphasizing a shift in responsibility for the heartland's problems from the innocent people to culprit others (Hameleers et al., 2016).

In this chapter, we assess whether and how populist blame attribution is used by journalists, which will allow us to answer the question whether journalists are active in framing issues in populist ways *themselves*. Crucially, this study tests whether certain aspects of media coverage link up to populist interpretations, as theoretically proposed by the concept of media populism (e.g., Krämer, 2014).

An extensive quantitative content analysis of tabloid and broadsheet media outlets in the Netherlands ($N = 867$) collected at election (2002, 2012) and non-election periods (2014, 2015) revealed that journalists are not just passive reporters, as they also attributed blame to the elites themselves. In line with theoretical assumptions, blame frames were more saliently used by interpretative journalists of tabloid newspapers than broadsheet newspapers. These findings advance theory by testing the assumptions foregrounded in extant literature on the important, yet understudied, link between populism and journalism (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). By comparing the framing of blame between tabloid and broadsheet outlets, and election versus non-election periods, this study is one of the first in disentangling the political parallelisms between the media and populism (e.g., Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Doing so, this chapter provides important foundational evidence for the role of journalists' agency in the dissemination of populist viewpoints: are the media simply a passive conveyer of populists' messages or are they also composing and sending such messages *themselves*?

Attributing Blame in Populist Communication

For representative democracy to function properly, citizens are expected to blame politicians for failures and to credit them for positive outcomes. This process, by which politicians are held accountable by the electorate, can be defined as causal attributions of responsibility (e.g., Johns, 2010; Malhotra & Kuo, 2008; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Causal attributions of responsibility provide citizens with powerful psychological tools, which enable them to process abstract political information in a meaningful way (Hewstone, 1989).

By pointing the finger at certain out-groups while absolving their own in-group of responsibility, attributions of blame enable citizens to bolster their positive self-concept by finding external causes for the problems they are facing (e.g., Dixon, 2008). Such responsibility attributions simplify and attach meaning to important, yet complex societal issues, such as the job market or the refugee crisis. In its essence, this simplification boils down to the presentation of issues into black and white terms. For example, all asylum seekers or the political elites in government are held responsible for a lack of available jobs, whereas all ordinary native people are depicted as hardworking victims. Hence, the ordinary citizens are depicted as being deprived by others and assumed to be treated unfairly by those who *are* actually responsible (e.g., Weyland, 2001). As these explanations help citizens to make sense of political issues by finding external causes for internally experienced problems, mediatised attributions of blame are highly attractive and persuasive (e.g., Iyengar, 1991).

A similar dialectical process of in-group favoritism and out-group hostility forms the heart of populism (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The core idea of populism can be regarded as the construction of a moral and causal divide in society: the ordinary people as blameless in-group versus the evil politicians or societal out-groups as the enemies responsible for the ordinary people's problems (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). *Populist* blame attribution differs from other forms of blame attribution by its emphasis on a moral divide between 'us' and 'them', which moves beyond highlighting causal interpretations of societal issues. This conceptualization ties in with extant literature that defines populism as a moral and relational phenomenon, in which the centrality of the ordinary people as good in-group is a necessary, but insufficient, prerequisite for populism to be identified (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Mudde, 2004). In populism, the elites are blamed for not representing the people's will and accused of only adhering to their own interests (e.g., Mudde, 2004). By failing to keep the promises to the people they claimed to represent, the elites are accused of deceiving the ordinary people. The failed representation of the people is thus an important component of populist attributions of blame.

Populism by the Media: The Framing of Blame

Populist attributions of blame may not only be used by populist politicians. They can also be emphasized by journalists. By means of framing, journalists actively reconstruct complex societal issues, such as the crisis on the job market or the refugee crisis, into meaningful patterns of interpretation (e.g., Scheufele, 1999). For populist attributions of blame, these patterns of interpretation reduce societal problems into binary oppositions of 'the blameless us' versus 'the culpable them'.

In line with Entman's (1993) definition of emphasis framing, such blame frames attach meaning to different components of an issue: the problem definition, causal

interpretation, and the moral evaluation. Following this reasoning, blame framing revolves around attributing causal responsibility for experienced problems – blame – to the people’s enemy (e.g., Krämer, 2014). The moral evaluation defines who is evil (e.g., the corrupt elites or societal out-groups that cannot be trusted) and who is good (the ordinary people) (Hawkins, 2009). Populist blame attribution thus attaches a moral dimension to societal issues by emphasizing the conflict between the good people and the culprit others who fail to represent the people’s will (de la Torre, 2000).

Our foregrounded conceptualization of media-initiated blame attributions ties in with the concept of media populism (Krämer, 2014). Media populism can be defined as the media’s use of certain elements of populist rhetoric and style, independent of the political actors associated with populism. The media can draw on populist interpretations by referring to the ordinary people as ‘good’ and the elites as ‘evil’ (e.g., Krämer, 2014). In this reading, journalists engage in populism by framing issues in terms of the divide between innocent in-groups and culprit out-groups (Akkerman, 2011; Caiani & della Porta, 2011; Krämer, 2014).

Populist attributions of blame thus tap into an aspect of media coverage congruent with a central component of media populism highlighting the Manichean outlook of ‘us’ versus ‘them’ (Krämer, 2014). An example of such a journalist-initiated populist interpretation is expressed in the British tabloid newspaper *The Mirror*: “Tory pensions shake-up will raid payouts to 20 million people - with low-paid workers hit worst” (Bloom, 2016). In this article, the political establishment, referred to as the Tory government, is blamed for depriving the ordinary, hardworking people from their deserved pensions: The government’s failing policy *causes* the ordinary people to receive less than they in fact morally deserve.

Populist Blame Framing Centralized in Interpretative Journalism

Opposed to the fact-centered and distant reporting style centralized in the hard-news paradigm, the rise of interpretative journalism prescribes a more central role of journalists’ agency in news coverage (Esser & Umbricht, 2014). Patterson (1993) even goes so far by arguing that the hard facts come second *after* the interpretation decided upon by the journalist. Here, it should be noted that journalistic styles may never be regarded as completely neutral in the sense that reporting always contains an interpretation of the issue or event by the journalist. However, journalistic constructions of reality can be regarded as differing on the extent to which factual information or interpretations of the events are highlighted.

In its essence, interpretative journalism revolves around the emphasis of the meaning of issues covered in the news, transcending the dissemination of hard facts and the centrality of political and expert sources (Salgado & Strömbäck, 2011).

The shift towards interpretative journalism has been connected to media negativity, people centrality, conflict, and distrust in the political establishment (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2008). The core components of an interpretative journalistic style of coverage can therefore be regarded as the emphasis on negativity, political cynicism, and interpretation instead of dissemination.

This conceptualization of agency-based interpretative journalism provides an important contextual factor for populist blame attributions (e.g., Krämer, 2014). *Interpretative* populist blame attributions emphasize which actors should be blamed for not representing the people and their will (Bos, van der Brug, & de Vreese, 2013). Integrating theory on media populism and interpretative journalism, we therefore expect that *media populism in the form of blame attribution is present most in conjunction with an interpretative journalistic style* (H1).

Interpretative Blame Attribution across Media Outlets

Tabloid media outlets are, more than other media outlets, assumed to draw on populist framing to report on issues (Akkerman, 2011; Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). The expected populist bias of such media has been based on three core premises: (1) tabloid media maintain weaker ties to the political establishment than elite media (Hallin & Mancini, 2004); (2) tabloid media have a stronger market orientation than broadsheet outlets, which motivates them to cover issues in a commercially attractive, populist, way (e.g., Art, 2007; Stewart et al., 2003) and (3) tabloid media cater to the needs of a different audience, which is more politically cynical and conflict-seeking (Mazzoleni et al., 2003). Being less dependent on relationships with the established order and more dependent on the popular demands of the (discontented) mass audience, tabloid media are assumed to express their closeness to ordinary citizens by articulating their distance to the elites, framed as being far-removed from the ordinary people. *Ceteris paribus*, we expect that *populist blame attribution is more salient in tabloid newspapers than in broadsheet newspapers* (H2a).

The act of criticizing and opposing the political establishment has been connected to interpretative journalistic styles (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2008). Interpretative journalistic styles and populist attributions of blame, in turn, respond most saliently to the news values and the imagined discontented audience of tabloid newspapers (Mazzoleni, 2008). Journalists of broadsheet newspapers, in contrast, are expected to cover blame attributions with more distance (Krämer, 2014). We therefore forward the following hypothesis: *The frequency of articles in which blame is framed in conjunction with an interpretative style of coverage is higher in tabloid media than in broadsheet media* (H2b).

Populist Blame Attribution in Election and Non-election Times

As pointed out by Rooduijn (2014), the media's attention to populism has almost exclusively been studied during election campaigns, neglecting populist coverage in routine periods. It has been argued that, in order to respond to the electoral success of populists, mainstream politicians adopt elements of populism into their own communication strategy (Bale et al., 2010; Bos et al., 2013; Mudde, 2004). By taking this accommodative approach at election times, mainstream parties that have lost their votes to populist parties aim to win back the appeal of the electorate by copying stylistic elements of populism (Bale et al., 2010; Rooduijn, 2014). Therefore, *blame attribution is most saliently covered in the media during election times* (H3a).

Still, the media are not expected to only passively disseminate the viewpoints of populist actors at election times. In the midst of this competitive period, blame attribution provides journalists with an important persuasive frame, appealing to a discontented audience. As the blame frame resonates with media logic at election coverage, blame attribution should also be articulated most saliently by interpreting journalists during election times. Against this backdrop, we formulate our final hypothesis: *The frequency of articles in which blame is framed in conjunction with an interpretative style of coverage is higher in election periods than non-election periods* (H3b).

METHOD

Data Collection and Sample

This research draws on an extensive content analysis of different Dutch media outlets, including coverage on debates in a non-election period running from March 2014 to May 2015 and the coverage on general elections in 2002 and 2012 ($N = 867$). The Netherlands provides a suitable context because of the presence of influential populist political parties and the availability of a variety of relatively popular tabloid and broadsheet media outlets, which are published both offline and online. The data were collected by the NCCR, which also supervised and trained six independent Dutch-speaking coders. The definition, conceptualization, and operationalization of populism result from collaboration within the module on Populism in the Context of Globalization and Mediatization of the Swiss NCCR Democracy (Wirth et al., 2016).

A hierarchical codebook was used to collect the data. Using this codebook, all speakers in a text and all their statements on issues and target actors were coded. The variables measuring populist blame attributions were coded on the statement level and aggregated to the text level. Coders were trained to use the codebook during an intensive seven-day period. During this training, the coders were made familiar

with populism as a concept, and learned how to apply the codebook and the coding tool. After both supervised and unsupervised coding, coders individually completed a reliability test. The results were discussed with the coders' supervisors. If the reliability during the training phase was unsatisfactory, a re-training was provided.

To assess the inter-coder reliability and expert validity of the included measures, a random sample consisting of 174 units of analysis was independently coded by all six coders, who used the complete codebook to identify units of analysis and attach codes to the identified material. Overall, compared to a benchmark coding agreed upon by eight expert researchers, coders correctly identified the units of analysis for 86.7% of this sample. As an average of all 140 variables included in the codebook, they correctly coded 88.9% of the subsample. More detailed and chance-corrected inter-coder reliability indices are reported for each key variable below.

The non-election subsample concerns a random sample of 559 texts drawn from six national newspapers: *De Volkskrant*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *De Telegraaf*, *Metro*, *Elsevier*, *Vrij Nederland*. These texts were collected between March 2014 and May 2015 and covered migration and labor market policies. The sampling procedure was guided by an inductively gathered and qualitatively validated list of key words related to the issues of the labor market situation or immigration. Articles were included if any actor made a statement on domestic labor market or migration policies in one of the sampled newspapers published between March 2014 and May 2015.

The election subsample covers two election periods: 2002 ($n = 172$) and 2012 ($n = 136$). The period of 2012 covers the most recent general national election, in which the issues of the labor market and immigration were salient. 2002 covers a previous election period in which these issues also played a central role. Articles were included if any candidate or major party appeared as the target of a statement in a text. Texts were sampled in a period of six weeks before to the election date. The search string contained the full names and abbreviated forms of all political parties and the names of the leading candidates.

We ensured that the election and non-election subsample were by and large comparable on key characteristics, most importantly regarding the salience of various important issues at the different periods. In addition, we controlled for the salience of these issues in the analyses comparing both subsamples.

Measures

The research organization NCCR developed an extensive codebook and an interactive coding interface to guide the coding procedure: Angrist (Wirth et al., 2016). For this study, we used a selection of variables: the sample type; the media outlet; the speaker and target; the communication strategy of blaming; and indicators pointing at the presence of interpretative journalism opposed to objective/disseminative coverage,

negativity, and conflict-driven journalistic styles. The election or non-election sample type and media outlet were coded automatically. In the next section, we will outline how the indicators of the manually coded variables were scored and transferred into the key variables reported in this chapter.

Populist blame attribution. Blame attribution was coded in three hierarchical steps. First, the societal impact of each target actor in a text, such as politicians in the government, was coded as: posing a threat; posing a burden; accountable for negative development/situation (1 *attribution*, 0 *not mentioned*, -1 *denial*). Next, coders needed to identify *what* was threatened or burdened by the responsible actor (0 *not specified*, 1 *the nation/country*, 2 *law and order*, 3 *politics/democracy*, 4 *the people/society*, 5 *other*).

In the third step, coders identified the out-group that was blamed for this negative development. Coders distinguished between six categories of elitist actors: (1) The political elite (the established political order, excluding populist parties); (2) Supranational institutions (EU, UNO, IMF); (3) Foreign governments; (4) Financial elite (Banks/Stock Market); (5) Economic elite (corporations); (6) Unspecific elite / power ('they') / lumping the elites together.

Coders further needed to identify that the elites are: (1) deceiving the people; (2) distant from the people; (3) not belonging to the people; (4) not caring for the needs of the people; (5) not speaking on behalf of the people; (6) not knowing the needs of the people; or (7) explicitly not empowering the people. The combination of a positive answer to the presence of blame attribution (step 1), the specification of a threat to the nation, the people or society in terms of the attributes listed above (step 2) *and* the specification of an elitist target of that attribution (step 3) was interpreted as the presence of elitist blame attribution as a populist communication strategy. The inter-coder reliability of this variable was Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.95$.

Journalistic styles. To investigate the embeddedness of populist blame attribution in journalistic styles, the presence of different content features indicating interpretative versus neutral journalistic styles were coded on the text level. The codebook entailed an in-depth description of the indicators of these styles, which were coded with the categories 0 (not present) or 1 (present). First, coders had to identify the presence of an interpretative stance of the journalist, which referred to the centrality of journalists' *own* interpretations, opinions, explanations, and moral/causal evaluations opposed to the dissemination of other actors' opinions. Second, for negativity, the presence of three indicators were coded: (1) a negative tone toward developments/issues/situations/policies; (2) critique and skepticism toward politicians; (3) critique and skepticism toward societal out-groups. Finally, coders needed to code the presence of conflict in terms of the journalist' emphasis on disagreement between individuals, groups, or institutions (1) and the reproach of one actor to another (2).

The inter-coder reliability of the indices of journalistic styles was Krippendorff's $\alpha = 0.68$, percentage agreement = 78.2%.

Although it may be argued that populist blame attribution and interpretative journalism both tap into negativity and criticism, they were measured in substantially different ways. Our measure of populist blame attribution stresses the moral and causal divide between the ordinary people and the elites that are accused of posing a threat on the people, for example by not representing their will. Interpretative journalist styles entailed a more general interpretation of social reality by articulating a negative tone, skepticism and critique. Different from populist blame attributions, interpretative journalistic styles thus did not emphasize a *divide* between the ordinary people and culprit others. Indeed, the weak correlation between both constructs indicate that although they may share some characteristics, they are still substantially different ($r = .23, p < 0.001$).

Automatically coded content variables. The media outlet was automatically coded into the following categories used in this study: *de Telegraaf*, *NRC Handelsblad*, *de Volkskrant*, *Metro*, *Vrij Nederland* and *Elsevier*. The sample type was automatically identified as coverage on migration or labour market debates (non-election sample) or coverage on previous general elections (election sample).

In our analyses, we further report on three automatically coded control variables: the length of the text measured as the total number of words ($M = 584, SD = 569$); the genre of the text categorized as a news story (48.2%) or a background story about politics (41.8%).

Data Management

The content analysis was conducted on four levels of analysis: the text, the speaker, the target, and the issue. The data on the statement level were aggregated to the text level to investigate the framing of populist blame attribution in different outlets at different periods. For each text, a weighting factor was calculated, which indicates the total number of texts in the population each case in the sample represents. This factor was used to extrapolate the different samples to the total news coverage of particular outlets and periods and was used when comparing populist communication across outlets or periods.

RESULTS

The Presence of Mediatized Attributions of Blame

Figure 1.1 presents an overview of populist blame attributions in the media communicated by political and non-political actors measured on the statement level. Overall, politicians are the most salient messenger of populist attributions of blame. Still, the mediatized blame-game is not reserved for politicians only. Indeed, as can be seen in Figure 1.1, blame attributions were also frequently communicated by actors *outside* of politics, such as journalists or ordinary citizens. Regarding blame attributed to elitist targets, the focal point of this chapter, the non-political sender mainly concerned journalists. More specifically, 23.3% of all blame attributions to the elites in the media come from the journalist him- or herself. Because attributions of blame to societal out-groups were extremely scarce (Figure 1.1), we exclusively focus on elitist blame attributions in the subsequent multivariate analyses.

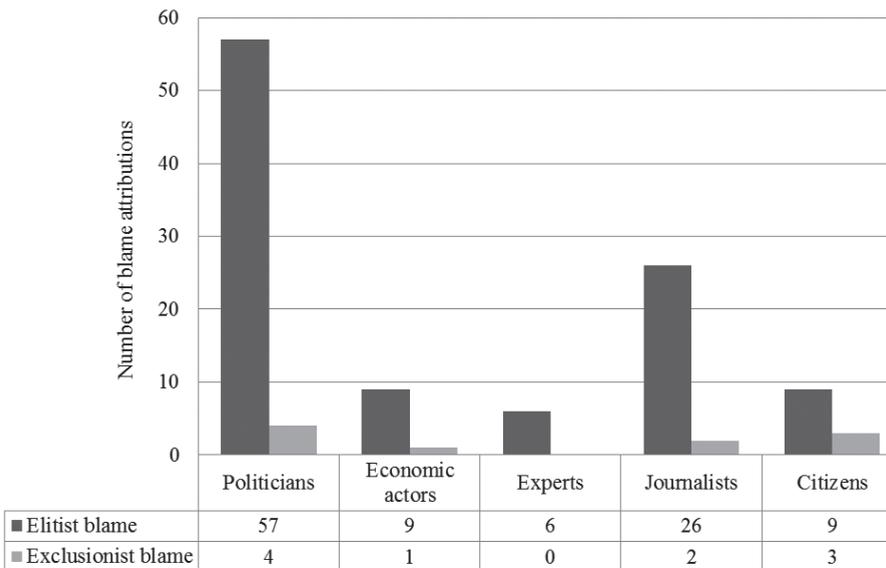


Figure 1.1 Number of blame attributions to elites and societal out-groups communicated by political and non-political speakers. $N = 2672$.

The Embeddedness of Interpretative Journalism in News Coverage

To investigate the embeddedness of populist blame attribution in journalistic styles, we first identified different classes that distinguished between the presence of interpretative opposed to more objective styles of journalism. To do so, we conducted a Latent Class Analysis. We additionally conducted a hierarchical cluster analysis as robustness check³.

In order to validly distinguish between different neutral and interpretative journalistic styles, we estimated a range of alternative solutions. This range was informed by the exploratory cluster analysis. The fit indices for a three-class model are: AIC = 4814.09; BIC = 4909.39; $\chi^2(43) = 137.74$. The model fit decreased substantially and significantly for a two-class model: $\Delta\chi^2(7) = 106.84$, $p < 0.001$. We also compared the three-class model to a less parsimonious four-class model, which fitted the data even better (AIC = 4776.05; BIC = 4904.71; $\chi^2(36) = 97.39$). However, in terms of the interpretability of distinct clusters, the three-class model outperformed all alternative solutions. For this reason, the three-class model was regarded as the most optimal solution. For each indicator of the distinguished journalistic styles, probabilities of belonging to a certain class and mean scores are reported in Table 1.1.

The outcomes of both clustering procedures indicate that the articles can clearly be clustered into three substantially different classes (see Table 1.1). The first class of articles ($n = 256$) can be labeled as ‘Dissemination of conflict’. This class emphasizes the strongest sense of conflict between actors. However, the journalist is not interpreting the issue him- or herself, but is substantially more likely to passively disseminate other actors’ opinions. Journalists reporting on issues within this class are not likely to emphasize skepticism/cynicism toward political and non-political actors and are not negative in their tone of reporting. In the second and largest ‘Neutral dissemination’ class ($n = 356$), all style indicators are highly likely to be absent in the journalists’ passive dissemination of other political and non-political actors’ opinions.

The third class, ‘Interpretative journalism’ ($n = 255$) is the only cluster in which the journalist’s agency plays a central role. In this cluster, he or she is actively interpreting the issue in terms of causal and moral consequences. Doing so, the journalist draws on a highly negative tone of reporting, and emphasizes a sense of conflict while articulating distrust in political actors and societal out-groups.

3 We explored an appropriate number of clusters using Ward’s method of hierarchical clustering for binary variables (see Matthes & Kohring, 2008 for a similar approach). We identified a three-cluster solution as the most optimal, which was the starting point for the LCA. Competing solutions with a lower or higher number of clusters were suboptimal in terms of interpretability and parsimony.

To explore the discriminant and face validity of the three classes interpreted as journalistic styles, we conducted a multinomial regression analysis for which the three classes were explained by characteristics of the media outlet and the text (see Appendix 1.A). Most importantly, and in line with our expectations, the results indicate that journalists' interpretative style emphasizing distrust in politics and society using a negative tone is more in sync with tabloid newspapers than broadsheet newspapers.

Table 1.1 Means, standard deviations and probabilities of membership frame variables for the three identified classes

Class	Politics as conflict, not negative or critical towards politicians (<i>n</i> = 256)		Neutral, no negative tone, no conflict between actors (<i>n</i> = 356)		Interpretative, highly negative and distrust in politicians and others (<i>n</i> = 255)	
	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>probability</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>probability</i>	<i>M</i> (<i>SD</i>)	<i>probability</i>
Conflict: disagree	0.88 _a (0.33)	0.781	0.00 _b (0.00)	0.012	0.45 _c (0.49)	0.530
Conflict: reproach	0.32 _a (0.47)	0.288	0.00 _b (0.00)	0.000	0.18 _c (0.39)	0.217
Interpret	0.18 _a (0.38)	0.100	0.17 _a (0.38)	0.192	0.63 _b (0.48)	0.686
Negative Tone	0.00 _a (0.00)	0.000	0.00 _b (0.00)	0.095	0.96 _b (0.20)	0.822
Negative cynicism	0.16 _a (0.37)	0.072	0.00 _b (0.00)	0.008	0.38 _c (0.48)	0.456
Negative Others	0.00 _a (0.06)	0.000	0.00 _b (0.00)	0.002	0.38 _b (0.48)	0.381

Note. *N* = 867. Means with differing subscripts within rows differ significantly at $p < 0.01$.

Populist Blame Attribution in Interpretative Journalism

To investigate whether populist blame attribution is indeed most likely to be present in conjunction with an interpretative journalistic style (H1), we estimated a logistic regression model⁴ to assess which of the three distinguished journalistic styles were most likely to relate to populist attributions of blame to the elites (see Table 1.2). We controlled for the media outlets and characteristics of the text. As can be seen in Table 1.2, when an interpretative journalistic style was used, the likelihood of populist attributions of blame was significantly *higher* than when the journalistic style concerned neutral dissemination ($b = 2.67$, $SE = 0.19$, $p < 0.001$, odds ratio

⁴ As blame attributions were relatively rare, we also analyzed the data using rare events logistic regression in R (Firth method) as a robustness check. The results of both analysis strategies point to similar results.

= 14.43, 95% CI [10.00, 20.81]). When the journalistic style of conflict dissemination was used, in contrast, the likelihood of the presence of blame attribution was not significantly different from the neutral dissemination cluster ($b = -0.95$, $SE = 0.61$, $p = \text{n.s.}$, odds ratio = 0.49, 95% CI [0.23, 1.61]).

These results are supportive of H1. Media populism in the form of blame attribution is indeed most likely articulated in conjunction with an interpretative journalistic style emphasizing distrust in political elites and other ‘enemies of the people’. Interpretative journalism thus indeed provides the most fertile soil for media populism to root.

Interpretative Media Populism in Tabloid versus Broadsheet Outlets

In the next step, we conducted multivariate logistic regression analyses in which the interactions between media outlets and membership to the different classes were incorporated (Table 1.2 and Table 1.3). First, we assessed the direct effects of media outlets. The opinioned outlet *Vrij Nederland* related significantly and positively to attributions of blame. In line with our expectations, we found that the broadsheet newspapers *NRC* and *Volkskrant* related *negatively* to the presence of populist blame attributions whereas the tabloid newspaper *Telegraaf* related *positively* to populist blame attributions. However, the direct effects of these media outlets were not significant, which does not provide support for H2a.

A different pattern emerged once the *interaction* between journalistic styles and media outlets was taken into account (H2b). In support of H2b, the interaction effect between the tabloid newspaper *de Telegraaf* and interpretative journalism was positive and significant ($b = 1.51$, $SE = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$, odds ratio = 5.54, 95% CI [1.91, 10.47]). This indicates that, for the tabloid newspaper *de Telegraaf*, populist attributions of blame to the elites were most likely to be present in conjunction with an interpretative journalistic style (also see Figure 1.2). The interaction effect between the broadsheet newspaper *NRC* and interpretative journalism was significant and *negative* ($b = -2.08$, $SE = 0.40$, $p < 0.001$, odds ratio = 0.13, 95% CI [0.06, 0.28]). These results indicate that, compared to the reference newspaper Metro, journalists of tabloid newspapers were more likely to frame blame in conjunction with an interpretative style of coverage than journalists of broadsheet newspapers, which supports H2b. For all other newspapers, the effects were non-significant. It can be noted here that *de Telegraaf* and *NRC* are traditionally considered as outlets with a predominately right-wing leaning. The salience of interpretative blame attribution in *de Telegraaf* is thus more likely related to its tabloid rather than its ideological bias.

As can be seen in Table 1.3 and Figure 1.2, the populist bias is also more central for interpretative journalism than for objective, but conflict-driven styles of coverage. First, a non-significant, negative main effect of the journalistic style of

Table 1.2. Attributing blame to the elites by media outlet and interpretative journalism cluster

Variables	Model I			Model III			Model IV		
	B (SE)	95% CI OR	B (SE)	95% CI OR	B (SE)	95% CI OR	B (SE)	95% CI OR	
(constant)	-3.05 (0.29)***		0.03 (0.37)		-0.92 (0.34)*		-0.61 (0.34)		
Volkskrant	-0.38 (0.33)	[0.35, 1.32]	-2.18 (0.40)***	[0.05, 0.25]	-3.33 (0.48)***	[0.04, 0.19]	-2.46 (0.41)***	[0.04, 0.19]	
NRC	-0.28 (0.32)	[0.40, 1.43]	-2.13 (0.39)***	[0.06, 0.26]	-3.39 (0.48)***	[0.04, 0.18]	-2.49 (0.41)***	[0.04, 0.18]	
Telegraaf	0.11 (0.31)	[0.61, 2.05]	0.48 (0.36)	[0.31, 1.27]	1.65 (1.71)	[0.21, 0.89]	1.40 (1.99)	[0.05, 0.37]	
Vrij Nederland	2.28 (0.52)***	[3.52, 27.36]	0.33 (0.60)	[0.43, 4.50]	-0.92 (0.69)	[0.24, 3.61]	-0.07 (0.67)	[0.25, 3.49]	
Elsevier	0.25 (0.41)	[0.57, 2.88]	-2.32 (0.47)**	[0.04, 0.25]	-4.25 (1.55)**	[0.02, 0.10]	-3.14 (1.49)**	[0.02, 0.11]	
Genre: politics			1.16 (0.16)***	[0.24, 0.45]	1.75 (0.22)***	[0.16, 0.31]	1.53 (0.18)***	[0.15, 0.31]	
Genre: news			-2.91 (0.19)**	[0.04, 0.08]	-3.07 (0.24)***	[0.04, 0.10]	-2.76 (0.22)***	[0.04, 0.10]	
Number of words			-0.20 (0.21)	[0.54, 1.23]	-0.35 (0.24)	[0.53, 1.37]	-0.10 (0.24)	[0.56, 1.44]	
Election			-1.53 (1.08)	[0.05, 0.38]	-1.98 (1.10)	[0.03, 0.20]	-1.93 (1.11)	[0.02, 0.20]	
Interpretative					2.67 (0.19)***	[10.00, 20.81]	2.17 (0.22)***	[5.72, 13.49]	
Conflict					-0.95 (0.61)	[0.23, 1.61]	-0.68 (0.63)	[0.31, 0.64]	
Interpretative*VK							-0.58 (0.44)	[0.24, 1.31]	
Interpretative*NRC							-2.08 (0.40)***	[0.06, 0.28]	
Interpretative*Tel							1.51 (0.44)**	[1.91, 10.74]	
Nagelkerke R ²	0.020		0.234		0.363		0.453		
χ ² (df)	31.79 (5)***		379.54 (9)***		604.24 (11)***		665.01 (14)***		

Note. N = 867. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets. The reference category for the clusters added in model III and IV is the neutral dissemination cluster.

*p<0.05; **p<0.01; ***p<0.001

conflict dissemination on the likelihood of populist attributions of blame to the elites was identified. Moreover, the interaction effect between the dissemination of conflict as journalistic style and broadsheet or tabloid media outlets were non-significant.

Taken together, these results indicate that attributions of blame are most likely to be emphasized by interpreting journalists of tabloid outlets, who use a negative tone to emphasize distrust in political institutions and societal out-groups. This supports H2b.

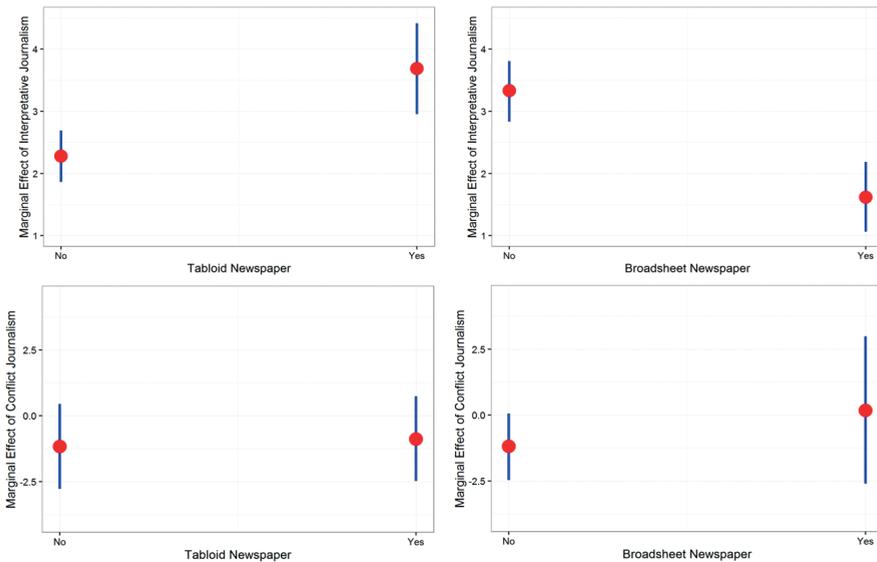


Figure 1.2 Marginal effects plots demonstrating the probability of blame attribution for different journalistic styles in tabloid and broadsheet newspapers. Dots represent regression weights and lines represent 95% confidence intervals. $N = 867$.

Framing Blame in Election Times

In the next step, we investigated whether blame attributions were present most during election periods (H3a). As can be seen in Table 1.3, the presence of populist attributions of blame was not significantly more salient during election compared to non-election times ($b = -1.53$, $SE = 1.08$, $p = n.s.$, odds ratio = 0.22, 95% CI [0.05, 0.38]). This does not provide support for H3a. We also conducted a logistic regression analysis in which the interaction between interpretative journalism and the presence of an election period were estimated. Controlling for media outlets and text characteristics, we found no significant interaction effect between the election

Table 1.3 Attributing blame to the elites by media outlet and conflict cluster

Variables	Model I			Model II			Model III			Model IV		
	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI OR	95% CI OR	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI OR	95% CI OR	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI OR	95% CI OR	<i>B</i> (<i>SE</i>)	95% CI OR	95% CI OR
(constant)	-3.05 (0.29)***			0.03 (0.37)			-0.92 (0.34)*			0.01 (0.37)		
Volkskrant	-0.38 (0.33)	[0.35, 1.32]	[0.05, 0.25]	-2.18 (0.40)**	[0.06, 0.26]	[0.05, 0.25]	-3.33 (0.48)**	[0.04, 0.19]	[0.04, 0.19]	-2.12 (0.40)***	[0.06, 0.26]	[0.06, 0.26]
NRC	-0.28 (0.32)	[0.40, 1.43]	[0.06, 0.26]	-2.13 (0.39)**	[0.31, 1.27]	[0.06, 0.26]	-3.39 (0.48)**	[0.21, 0.89]	[0.04, 0.18]	-2.08 (0.40)***	[0.06, 0.27]	[0.06, 0.27]
Telegraaf	0.11 (0.31)	[0.61, 2.05]	[0.43, 4.50]	0.48 (0.36)	[0.43, 4.50]	[0.04, 0.25]	1.65 (1.71)	[0.02, 0.10]	[0.24, 3.61]	1.40 (1.77)	[0.48, 1.99]	[0.48, 1.99]
Vrij Nederland	2.28 (0.52)***	[3.52, 27.36]	[0.04, 0.25]	0.33 (0.60)	[0.04, 0.25]	[0.04, 0.25]	-0.92 (0.69)	[0.16, 0.31]	[0.04, 0.10]	0.27 (0.61)	[0.40, 4.31]	[0.40, 4.31]
Eisevier	0.25 (0.41)	[0.57, 2.88]	[0.04, 0.25]	-2.32 (0.47)**	[0.54, 1.23]	[0.05, 0.38]	-4.25 (1.55)**	[0.23, 1.61]	[0.23, 1.61]	-2.26 (1.47)*	[0.04, 0.26]	[0.04, 0.26]
Genre: politics				1.16 (0.16)***	[0.24, 0.45]	[0.05, 0.38]	1.75 (0.22)***	[0.53, 1.37]	[0.53, 1.37]	1.08 (0.16)***	[0.25, 0.47]	[0.25, 0.47]
Genre: news				-2.91 (0.19)**	[0.04, 0.08]	[0.04, 0.08]	-3.07 (0.24)***	[0.04, 0.10]	[0.04, 0.10]	-2.86 (0.20)***	[0.04, 0.09]	[0.04, 0.09]
Number of words				-0.20 (0.21)	[0.54, 1.23]	[0.05, 0.38]	-0.35 (0.24)	[0.03, 0.20]	[0.03, 0.20]	0.01 (0.20)	[0.65, 1.53]	[0.65, 1.53]
Election				-1.53 (1.08)	[0.05, 0.38]	[0.05, 0.38]	-1.98 (1.10)	[10.00, 20.81]	[10.00, 20.81]	-1.54 (1.09)	[0.05, 0.37]	[0.05, 0.37]
Interpretative							2.67 (0.19)***			2.14 (0.63)***	[12.75, 29.46]	[12.75, 29.46]
Conflict							-0.95 (0.61)			-0.32 (0.22)	[0.48, 1.11]	[0.48, 1.11]
Conflict*VK										0.70 (1.42)	[1.11, 5.98]	[1.11, 5.98]
Conflict*NRC										1.49 (1.60)	[3.16, 14.51]	[3.16, 14.51]
Conflict*Tel										0.28 (1.20)	[0.07, 0.39]	[0.07, 0.39]
Nagelkerke <i>R</i> ²	0.020			0.234			0.363			0.374		
χ^2 (df)	31.79 (5)***			379.54 (9)***			604.24 (11)***			760.94 (14)***		

p* < 0.05; *p* < 0.01; ****p* < 0.001.

Note. *N* = 867. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets. The reference category for the clusters added in model III and IV is the neutral dissemination cluster.

period and interpretative journalism on the presence of populist attributions of blame ($b = -0.35$, $SE = 1.24$), $p = n.s.$, odds ratio = 0.57, 95% CI [0.23, 1.43]).

As robustness check, we ran an additional analysis in which we focused on a more direct comparison of the news coverage in the 2012 elections and the 2014 debate in the same newspapers. After controlling for the most salient issues in news coverage in both periods, our results again indicate that blame attribution is not emphasized significantly more salient by the interpretative journalist during election compared to non-election times. These results do not provide support for H3b.

DISCUSSION

We aimed to provide unobtrusive empirical evidence to test the theoretical assumption that journalists of certain media outlets actively engage in populist coverage of political and societal issues (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni et al., 2003). In support of these assumptions, we found that the media, and tabloid media in particular, do not merely act as a messenger that is passively conveying the viewpoints of populist actors to the public. Beyond being a messenger, journalists actively used their professional agency to reconstruct issues in terms of the causal and moral opposition between the people and culprit elites.

Responding to recent calls in the literature to further disentangle the relationship between the media and populism, our content analysis has provided empirical evidence for the existence of populist interpretations in journalistic media, which links up to the concept of media populism (Krämer, 2014). In line with this conceptualization, media outlets *themselves* engage in populist news coverage, independent of the viewpoints of populist political actors. In line with this, our results have provided insights into the understudied conceptualization of populist viewpoints articulated *by* the media (Bos & Brants, 2014).

These results also provide important insights for the broader literature on interpretative journalism (Esser & Umbricht, 2014; Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2008). More specifically, we identified a clear link between the interpretative reporting style of journalists and the articulation of populist attributions of blame to the establishment. Journalists who interpreted news beyond objective hard facts were most likely to frame issues in populist ‘black and white’ terms. We interpret this as evidence for the existence of a parallelism between interpretative journalism and media populism.

Delving deeper into this parallelism, our empirical evidence provided further support for the notion that populist interpretations are most salient in tabloid media (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008). In line with theoretical assumptions about a link between populism and tabloidization, we found that populism was most likely to be used by

journalists of tabloid media outlets whereas broadsheet media outlets were not likely to attribute blame to the elites themselves. In contrast, they merely disseminated populist viewpoints of political actors.

How do our results connect to the allegedly populist zeitgeist? As we did not find support for a pervasive populist bias in election versus non-election periods, one could argue that populism is present in media coverage at all times. However, we should not overestimate the dominance of media-initiated populism. As a small proportion of all coverage included populist attributions of blame, citizens who read the media outlets included in our sample are not that frequently exposed to populist frames. Hence, the limited prominence of populist blame attributions in the media does not point to a pervasive mediatized populist zeitgeist.

In line with this, we only found evidence for the existence of populist blame framing to the elites. Societal out-groups were rarely attributed blame in media coverage. One explanation for the absence of such blame frames can be the influence of social desirability or ethical norms on journalist' framing routines. Hence, it is more acceptable to attribute responsibility to the powerful elites who reside in their ivory tower than to blame powerless societal out-groups such as refugees for causing the problems of the native people. Moreover, in line with the definition of exclusionist populism, horizontal blame frames emphasize that out-groups *amongst* the people are evil (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). This implies that journalists who blame societal out-groups construct segments of their own audience as the people's enemy, which is in conflict with their desire to speak to a broad audience.

It can be argued that the salience of populist blame attribution may be affected by key events in the realm of politics and public opinion. The European migrant crisis, for example, erupted after the sampling frame of this study. As this issue is strongly related to populist interpretations of reality, one could argue that populist blame framing would be more salient in the period after the eruption of the migrant crisis than prior to this development, which may be especially the case for blame shifting to migrants. We leave it up to future research to empirically investigate the influence of such key events.

Our study has some limitations. First and foremost, we only zoomed in on the populist phenomenon that we have defined as the core of populism: the causal and moral connection between the people as good in-group and others as evil and culprit out-groups. Extant literature points to a plethora of alternative indicators of populism, such as an emotionalized appeal (Fieschi & Heywood, 2006; also see Chapter 4), the centrality of charismatic leadership (Taggart, 2000), and the use of a dramatized and personalized style of communication (Taggart, 2004). However, in line with Vossen (2012), we regard these indicators as more peripheral cues that facilitate rather than define populism's essence. We regard our definition of populist blame

attribution as the core of populism as it integrates the moral and causal ‘us’ versus ‘them’ divide. Including more characteristics of populism or employing a thinner definition may point to a more dominant presence of the concept, but with the risk of losing construct validity and overestimating the scope of mediatized populism.

Second, our sample is limited to a selection of offline media outlets. However, as most theoretical assumptions have been based on these media, the choice to focus our content analysis on such outlets offered the most valid test of the concept of media populism. Still, a growing body of literature is pointing towards a new development of mediatized populism on online media such as Facebook or Twitter (e.g., Bartlett, Birdwell, & Littler, 2011). It has been argued that these media have an ever stronger connection to the ordinary people’s political discontent. Therefore, social media outlets may be much more prone to citizen-driven populist coverage. To more precisely investigate the presence of populism in offline traditional versus online and social media, future research should incorporate the content of online and social media to compare this with media populism in traditional outlets. Next to this, it may be interesting to not only compare tabloid and broadsheet outlets, but also to make a comparison between media outlets with different ideological leanings.

Despite these limitations, our study has provided foundational empirical evidence for the presence of journalist-driven, interpretative media populism. Especially citizens with tabloidized media diets may be exposed to such ‘us’ versus ‘them’ coverage when learning about the news.

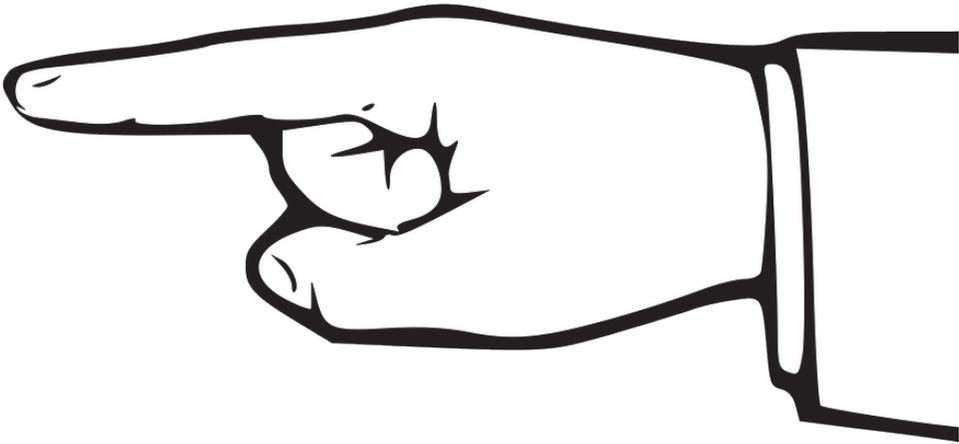
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CHAPTER 2



To Whom are “the People” Opposed? Conceptualizing and Measuring Citizens’ Populist Attitudes as a Multidimensional Construct⁵

⁵ Manuscript under review. An earlier version of this chapter has been presented at the ECREA Political Communication conference in Odense, 2015.

ABSTRACT

Previous research has measured populist attitudes as a one-dimensional concept, tapping into the distinction between the ordinary people and the corrupt elites. With growing differentiation of populist viewpoints across the globe, this uni-dimensional approach may no longer reflect the multifaceted reality of the people's populism. Most importantly, albeit paramount in right-wing populist rhetoric, *exclusionist* perceptions of others threatening the monocultural nation of the people are typically not captured in one-dimensional conceptualizations. To assess more precisely how populist attitudes are structured, we collected original survey data ($N = 809$) among a representative sample of Dutch citizens. Using Multidimensional Scaling and Confirmatory Factor Analysis, we propose a two-dimensional structure: anti-establishment and exclusionism. This study further demonstrates how salient these different populist attitudes are among *which* voters.

Populism is a widespread phenomenon across the globe. In Europe, many democracies have witnessed the rise of populist political parties. In Latin America, populism has been an influential political force for more than a century (Conniff, 1999). Populist movements can be placed on both the left and right end of the political spectrum. Syriza in Greece, for example, is regarded as a left-wing populist party that challenges the political and economic elites on the EU level. The freedom parties in The Netherlands and Austria, however, are described as right-wing populist movements that oppose the elites *and* exclude certain segments of the people from the ordinary people's native in-group. Based on populism's contextual differences, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013) argue that populism in Europe may be defined as exclusionary, whereas Latin American populism is inclusionary.

During the last decades, populism has received extensive attention in the scientific literature. However, in trying to decipher the concept, extant research has predominantly focused on the populist ideology, style or discourse by analyzing the degree of populism of political parties, their manifestos, and media content (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014b). To better understand how these populist ideas communicated on the *supply-side* resonate with sentiments and attitudes held by the people on the *demand-side*, this chapter aims to theoretically and empirically explore the dimensional structure of populist attitudes. Doing so, we can explore the extent to which populist political parties actually tap into an attitudinal structure held by the electorate (Zaller, 1992). Moreover, in line with issue voting literature, the precise mapping of citizens' populist attitudes may explain *why* some people vote for *specific* exclusionist, anti-establishment or complete populist parties whereas others oppose them (e.g., Himmelweit, Humphreys, & Jaeger, 1985).

In lieu of a shared definition of populism, scholars at least have reached consensus that it is a relational concept. Populist rhetoric revolves around the construction of a homogenous in-group, commonly referred to as ‘the ordinary people’, opposed to a culprit out-group blamed for causing the crisis facing the people (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). The moral and causal distinction between the blameless ‘good’ people and culprit ‘evil’ out-groups in times of a perceived crisis distinguishes populism from mainstream politics (e.g., Rooduijn, de Lange, & van der Brug, 2014).

Recently, scholars have started to measure populism as an individual-level attitude (e.g., Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove 2014; Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012). This attitude has been conceptualized as the perceived antagonism between the pure people and the corrupt elites. Although these studies provided convincing foundational evidence that citizens hold populist perceptions related to their populist party preferences, they do not explore one important component of populist rhetoric: people’s *exclusionist* perceptions of the heartland. Such exclusionist populist perceptions tap into the divide between the native people and threatening others, such as immigrants accused of unfairly profiting from the people’s welfare, or refugees posing a threat on the people’s cultural values or national security (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). This exclusionist component is paramount in right-wing populist rhetoric (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). We therefore expect that, just like anti-establishment populism, exclusionist populism has an attitudinal base (Zaller, 1992). By incorporating citizens’ perceptions of a moral and causal divide between the pure people and culpable societal out-groups, this study aims to expand measures proposed by Akkerman et al. (2014) and Hawkins et al. (2012). Against this backdrop, the comprehensive research question this chapter aims to answer is: How are populist attitudes structured among citizens?

Extant literature on the supply-side of populist communication and party positions has distinguished different types of populism congruent with our extended conceptualization (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Overall, the different distinguished subtypes of populism boil down to two core components that stress the antagonistic relationship between the people and the other: either the *vertical* opposition of the people to culprit elites or the *horizontal* opposition of the good people’s in-group to evil societal out-groups (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

To investigate whether this core distinction holds on the demand-side of voters, this study draws on survey data collected among a representative sample of citizens ($N = 809$). Using multidimensional scaling and confirmatory factor analysis, we found that populist attitudes are essentially structured by two dimensions: anti-

establishment and exclusionism. Additionally, we explored the common and differential foundations of populist attitudes on the distinguished dimensions, which sheds important light on the question whether citizens with populist attitudes on the two core dimensions are appealed differently to the host ideologies typically associated with populism on the left and right.

MAPPING POPULIST ATTITUDES: A THEORY-DRIVEN APPROACH

Anti-establishment Populist Attitudes

Rooted in the perception of a severe crisis situation, populist ideas attribute blame to out-groups for causing the ordinary people's problems (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2016; Laclau, 1977). In line with this conceptualization, populism depicts the ordinary people as relatively powerless as they do not have the agency to solve the structural problems caused by the elites or societal out-groups. The elites, in contrast, are accused of having too much corrupting power.

Populism is thus essentially a relational concept, revolving around the moral and causal connection between the good and innocent 'us' versus the evil and culprit 'them' (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2007). Many scholars therefore argue that the popular sovereignty of the general will is a necessary but insufficient indicator of populism (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Mudde, 2004). According to these scholars, the *opposition* between the blameless 'us' and the culprit 'them' defines populism (e.g., Mudde, 2007). This opposition can be shaped both horizontally (e.g., the other is *amongst* the people) and vertically (e.g., the other is *above* the people) (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

The first dimension conceptualized in this chapter, anti-establishment, taps into the vertical relationship by opposing the good ordinary citizens to the culprit elites (Akkerman et al., 2014; Jagers & Walgrave 2007). This first dimension is in line with extant conceptualizations of populist attitudes proposed and validated by Akkerman et al. (2014) and Hawkins et al. (2012). There are two types of elitist enemies that can be perceived as threatening the people from above: the political establishment (e.g., the government) and non-political elites (e.g., the economic elites).

The perceived antagonism between the people and the political establishment articulates distrust in mainstream politicians who are not acting on behalf of the people (Ruzza & Fella, 2011). This oppositional stance entails the perception of being silenced by the hegemony: the politicians reside in their ivory tower far-removed from the problems experienced by the ordinary people on the street (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). Instead of prioritizing their own interests, the corrupt

politicians should listen to the ordinary people.

Anti-establishment populist attitudes may also involve the people's opposition to non-political elites, most saliently the economic elites that are assumed to hinder the ordinary people's well-being (De Koster et al., 2013). In line with this, left-wing populism is argued to be economic inclusionist and, consequentially, opposed to profit-maximizing economic elites (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). Left-wing populism therefore contends that social resources should be accessible to everyone in need. This access is, however, blocked by economic elites and large corporations that are not fairly redistributing the nation's wealth among the ordinary, hardworking people. To incorporate this salient left-wing stance in our conceptualization, we also measured the people's opposition to economic elites, such as large corporations. Taken together, anti-establishment populist attitudes tap into the people's opposition towards self-interested, corrupt elites who are not acting on behalf of, but rather against, the will of the ordinary people they *should* represent.

Exclusionist Populist Attitudes

Beyond shifting blame from the 'good' people to 'evil' elites, populist ideas may also point the finger at societal out-groups accused of causing the ordinary people's crisis on a cultural-symbolic or economic level (de Koster et al., 2013; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Right-wing populist actors, for example, frequently accuse immigrants of profiting from the native in-group's resources (e.g., Oesch, 2008). Responding to this salient right-wing populist component, the second dimension of populist attitudes distinguished in this chapter concerns *exclusionism*. In contrast to anti-establishment populism, exclusionist populism constructs the other as being *amongst* the people (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). This horizontal 'people versus societal out-groups' divide can be articulated in different ways. Following extant literature on right-wing populist parties around the globe, these enemies are mainly constructed as immigrants, ethnic minorities or profiteers from the people's welfare (e.g., Taggart, 2004).

In line with this, the first component of exclusionism emphasizes the pure people's opposition to others on a cultural and symbolic level (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). Others are *horizontally* constructed as undesired segments of the population, such as immigrants or people whose cultural or religious orientations differ from the in-group (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The exclusionist dimension of populist attitudes thus revolves around the in-group threat posed by people who do not belong to the in-group of the populist heartland, such as refugees or immigrants (Taggart, 2000).

The second type of a populist horizontal out-group excluded from the people is rooted in an economic threat, for example posed by profiteers of the in-group's

resources. This conceptualization of the populist other ties in with *welfare state populism*, which may be most salient in European contexts (De Koster et al., 2013; Oesch, 2008). Welfare state populism does not oppose the principle of redistributing resources to people in need, but argues that resources are redistributed to people who do not *deserve* help from the heartland. Immigrants or people who receive unemployment benefits do not have the same rights as the ordinary hard-working citizens who have contributed to the wealth of the nation (Oesch, 2008; Derks, 2004; Jaeger, 2006). This perception on redistribution is thus inherently *populist* and *exclusionist*: the ordinary, native people deserve help whereas others should not be allowed to profit from the hardworking ordinary people's resources. Not in the last place *because* these others caused the ordinary people's crisis by depriving them from their wealth.

Although the exclusionist dimension is related to nativism, right-wing authoritarianism, and ethnocentrism (e.g., Bizumic et al., 2009; Duckitt & Sibley, 2010), it differs from such conceptualizations by its construction of a truly Manichean outlook on society: the in-group is perceived of as 'good' and innocent while different 'evil' societal out-groups are blamed for the in-group's problems (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). We argue that it is *exactly* this causal and moral relationship between the people and the other that makes this dimension essentially populist, rather than a host ideology supplementing the thin core of anti-establishment populism.

The conceptualization of populist attitudes proposed in this chapter should allow for the measurement of populist attitudes as a *matter of degree*. Hence, citizens may interpret societal issues from a more or less populist frame of reference on one or both of the hypothesized dimensions. Some citizens may, for example, have strong populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimension *only*. In that case, their views largely resonate with the viewpoints of left-wing populist parties (March, 2007). Others may have strong populist attitudes on *both* dimensions, which is more closely related to the 'complete populism' of many right-wing populist parties in Europe that articulate the people's opposition to *both* immigrants and elites, such as the French Front National or the Dutch Freedom Party (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Hence, extending extant conceptualizations focusing on anti-elitism, our two-dimensional model of populist attitudes should be better able to map the attitudinal structure underlying populist ideas, while accounting for contextual differences in inclusionary and exclusionary populism throughout the globe (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013).

Relative Deprivation at the Core of Populist Attitudes

To more precisely understand the appeal of populism on the demand-side of voters, it is crucial to understand *which* citizens are most likely to be populist on *what* dimensions. In line with recent empirical research, it may be argued that populist attitudes are rooted in perceptions of relative deprivation (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Relative deprivation can be defined as a perceived unfair distribution of society's collective goods: the ordinary hardworking citizens 'like us' never get what they deserve from society, whereas 'others' always gain profit without giving anything in return (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010).

Populist attitudes and relative deprivation can theoretically be connected in the light of the 'losers of modernization thesis' (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt 2016; Kriesi et al., 2006; Kriesi, 2014). This thesis postulates that people who experience to have lost something that has been taken away by profiting others, are appealed most to populist ideas. The perception of a severe crisis forms the foundation for citizens' experience of relative deprivation: the deprived ordinary people feel that their in-group is victimized more by the crisis than the others that caused the crisis in the first place. In the midst of societal crises such as the threat of economic decline, these vulnerable, deprived people should be appealed most to populist ideas that voice *their* grievances of being worse off (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016).

As the others accused of depriving the ordinary people can be constructed both vertically (i.e. the elites take tax money away from our elderly people) and horizontally (i.e. immigrants take our jobs), we expect that perceived relative deprivation provides the common core for *both* dimensions of populist attitudes. We therefore hypothesize: *Citizens with higher anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes have stronger perceptions of relative deprivation* (H1).

The Appeal of Host Ideologies among Citizens with Populist Attitudes

Populism has commonly been defined as a 'thin' ideology, which can be supplemented by a plethora of host ideologies (Mudde, 2004; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2012). In line with this, the core idea of a moral and causal divide between the 'good' people and the 'culprit' other can be enriched by issue positions that give substance to the divide between 'us' and 'them'. But what 'host ideologies' may appeal most to citizens with anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes?

For inclusionary populism, such as in Latin America, all ordinary people can be perceived of as being united against the common enemy from above (March, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2014). That is, the elites who do not care for or represent the needs of the ordinary people (e.g., Canovan, 1999). Although left-wing stances postulate that collective resources *should* be accessible to everyone who needs them, populist ideas emphasize that the self-interested elites are not redistributing society's collective

resources in a fair manner (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). Against this backdrop, economic inclusionism provides a salient host ideology that may supplement the ideational core of populism. But which part of the populist electorate should be attracted to it?

Citizens with anti-establishment populist attitudes may be appealed to both left-wing and right-wing host ideologies. Citizens with exclusionist populist attitudes, however, are by definition opposed to left-wing issue positions, as they perceive that certain segments should be excluded from the ordinary people's heartland (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Therefore, the host ideology of economic inclusionism/equality should appeal more to citizens with anti-establishment populist attitudes than those with exclusionist populist attitudes.

People with exclusionist populist attitudes are opposed to people that live amongst them in society. For these people, the perceived in-group threat comes from *within* the nation. Economically, this threat is captured in perceived relative deprivation. Immigrants and refugees are, for example, accused of taking more than they deserve. Hence, exclusionist populism can be connected to a chauvinist perception on the redistribution of collective resources. On a cultural level, however, the out-group threat stems from a different root: the perception that the out-group has a substantially different, backwards, undesirable, or even dangerous cultural background (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). The host ideology connected to constructing the ordinary people's opposition to societal out-groups can thus be understood as nativism: the people perceive their in-group's culture as superior and consequentially feel empowered to demand assimilation of immigrants moving to 'their' nativist heartland. Hence, citizens with exclusionist populist attitudes may not only want to remove societal out-groups, they may also envision themselves as the managers of their heartland, entitled with the power to tolerate some well-adjusted 'others' above those that are unwilling or unable to integrate.

To explore the extent to which the issue positions of citizens with anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes resonate with the host ideologies typically associated with populist ideas, we pose the following research question: To what extent are people with anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes appealed to different issue positions that reflect the host ideologies related to populism on the left and the right? (RQ1)

Data and Measures

To empirically assess whether populist attitudes can be structured along the two theoretically proposed dimensions, we draw on survey data that was collected in The Netherlands in July 2015. Institutional Review Board approval was confirmed on June 23, 2015. TNS NIPO collected the data by means of a web-based survey.

To ensure that participants are willing and able to adequately respond to survey items without being routinized, panel members of this agency are not allowed to participate in more than three surveys a month. From a large online panel of 124,000 citizens representative of the Dutch voting population, 1,425 citizens were invited to participate in the survey. These eligible participants over 18 years were randomly selected and received an invitation via e-mail or telephone. 809 participants completed the survey, which results in a response and cooperation rate of 57 percent (AAPOR RR1 and COOP1). Upon completion, participants were rewarded with credits from the research organization, which they could use to buy vouchers. The sample was by and large representative of the population in terms of age, gender, region, family size, social class, and voting behavior (see Appendix 2.A for a comparison of the sample with census data). The mean age of participants was 51.07 years ($SD = 17.25$), 48.5% was female and 23.9% was lower educated.

To measure the two dimensions of populist attitudes, we used a battery of 20 survey items. These items are a mix of existing and newly developed statements. For the anti-establishment dimension, we derived items from previous research on populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Rooduijn, 2014a). Additionally, we included items measuring the people's opposition to economic elites (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). The measures of exclusionist populism were newly developed for the purpose of this study. These items were informed by theory on right-wing exclusionist populism, nativism and anti-immigration attitudes (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). However, by explicitly referring to the Manichean outlook constructing the ordinary, native people as innocent and the horizontally opposed other as culprit, these items were adjusted to reflect populist attitudes (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). Together, our items aimed to reflect the contextual variety of populism by incorporating both inclusionary and exclusionary populist positions. All items were measured on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). Higher scores on the items indicate stronger populist perceptions. The order of all items was randomized to exclude the possibility of order effects. All items retained in the analysis are included at their exact wording in the results section (see Appendix 2.B for all measured items).

Based on three items, we constructed a 7-point scale of perceived relative deprivation (Eigenvalue = 2.23; 77 percent explained variance; Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$; see Appendix 2.B for item wordings). Left-wing economic inclusionism was measured with the following item: *Some people believe that income differences in our country should increase. Others believe they should decrease. Off course, people also have opinions anywhere between these extremes. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1(income differences should increase) to 7(income differences should decrease)?*

Right-wing nativism was measured with the following item: *In the Netherlands, some people believe that immigrants can live here while keeping their own culture. Others believe they should fully adjust to our cultural values and beliefs. Where would you place yourself on a scale from 1 (immigrants can keep their own culture) to 7 (immigrants have to fully adjust to our culture)?*

We included measures of age, gender, education, left-right self-placement, occupation, voting behavior, political knowledge, and EU integration as controls (see Appendix 2.B for the exact wording of these items).

Analysis Multidimensional Scaling (MDS) was used to assess whether the data supported the hypothesized number of dimensions. Next, we estimated the hypothesized factor structure with Confirmatory Factor Analysis in Structural Equation Modeling. We used maximum likelihood estimation to analyze the models. Standardized factor loadings higher than .60 were regarded as satisfactory for the fit of indicators (e.g., Kline, 2011). OLS-regression models were estimated to explore the foundations of populist attitudes on both dimensions.

RESULTS

Estimating the Two-dimensional Structure of Populist Attitudes

First, as robustness check, we tested an alternative five-dimensional structure of populist attitudes, which consisted of all separate components highlighted in extant populist literature: people centrality, anti-political elites, anti-economic elites, exclusionism, and welfare state chauvinism. This model did not fit the data well: $\chi^2(160) = 964.82$, $\chi^2/df = 6.03$, $p < 0.001$; RMSEA = 0.08, 90% CI [0.07, 0.08]; CFI = 0.86. The problematic discriminant and convergent validity of this model tentatively confirmed our prediction that populist attitudes are essentially structured by the *vertical* distinction between the people and the elites and the *horizontal* opposition between the people and societal out-groups.

In the next step, the multidimensional scaling procedure supported this hypothesized two-dimensional structure of populist attitudes. As indicated by the scree-plot of stress values in Figure 2.1, a two-dimensional solution explains the data substantially better than a one-dimensional one. The fit improved less substantially moving from two to three dimensions. The explained variance of the two-dimensional model is excellent ($R^2 = 0.94$). Based on this outcome, we further estimated the substance of the dimensional structure of populist attitudes with Confirmatory Factor Analysis.

As second robustness check, we assessed whether exclusionist populist attitudes were empirically distinct from exclusionist-nativist perceptions. To do so, we compared the hypothesized model with an alternative factor structure that included

nativist perceptions as indicators of the exclusionist dimension, which fitted significantly and substantially worse ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 499.99, p < 0.001$). In line with our expectations, we found that the newly developed measure of exclusionist populist attitudes tapped into a different construct than related nativist perceptions, which may indeed be interpreted as a host ideology separate from the ideational core of populism.

The two-dimensional structure demonstrated good model fit: $\chi^2(23) = 34.09$, $\chi^2/df = 1.48, p = 0.06$; RMSEA = 0.024, 90% CI [0.00, 0.04]; CFI = 0.99. Two minor theoretically driven specifications were made to the model. As shown in Figure 2.2, two error correlations were added to the exclusionist dimension. First, the error terms of the items *Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture* and *Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems* were correlated, which was based on the theoretical consideration that immigrants are framed as the cause of the people's problems in both items. Second, we added a correlation between the error terms of the items *Our borders should be closed for immigrants* and *Social benefits such as unemployment benefits and health insurance benefits are given to people who don't really deserve it*. This error correlation is theoretically justifiable as both items tap into people's perceptions of limited moral rights reserved for others: immigrants and profiteers do not deserve to be part of the heartland and should therefore not be tolerated.

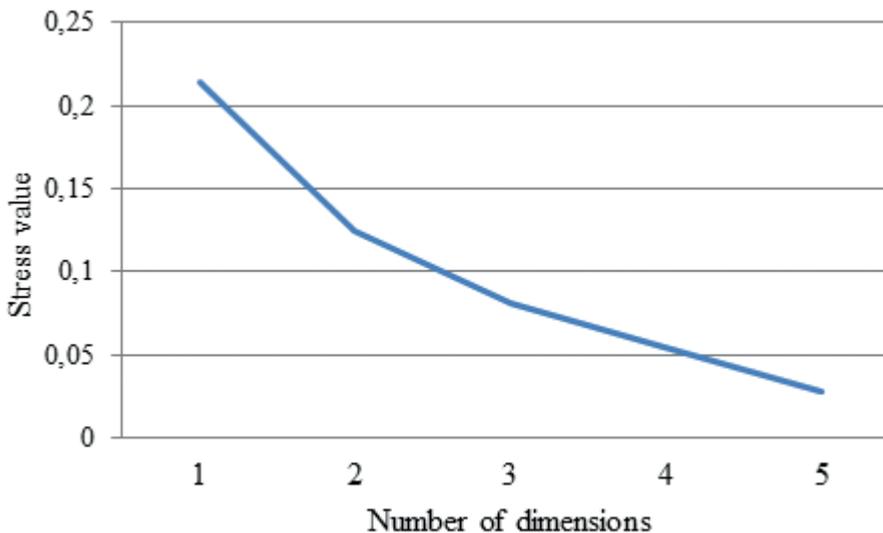


Figure 2.1 Scree plot of decreasing stress values resulting from the MDS-analysis.

The two-dimensional structure of populist attitudes consists of ten items. The first dimension, anti-establishment, consists of the following four items: *The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions* ($\lambda = .68$); *Politicians in the government are corrupt* ($\lambda = .68$); *Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people* ($\lambda = .65$); *The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than corporations that only want to make profits* ($\lambda = .61$). The second dimension, exclusionism, consists of the following six items: *Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture* ($\lambda = .83$); *Our Dutch borders should be closed for immigrants* ($\lambda = .87$); *Immigrants are responsible for most of our nation's problems* ($\lambda = .83$); *Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should be invested in our own people* ($\lambda = .90$); *Social benefits, such as unemployment benefits and health insurance benefits, are given to people who don't really deserve it* ($\lambda = .70$); *People coming from outside the Netherlands should not receive any social benefits* ($\lambda = .76$).

As indicated by the standardized regression coefficients reported above, the convergent validity of the two-dimensional model is satisfactory. The correlation between both dimensions was moderately strong ($r = .66$). Comparing the two-dimensional model with a unidimensional solution in which both factors were merged, model fit decreased substantially and significantly: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 209.97$, $p < 0.001$, which indicates a good discriminant validity. Hence, as predicted, populist attitudes cannot be regarded as a unidimensional construct. In line with the conceptualization of complete populism on the supply-side, both dimensions tap into substantially different, but related components of the populist discourse on the demand-side of voters (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

The Degree of Populism among the Electorate

Now we have identified the two dimensions structuring populist attitudes, the next step is to assess the degree of populism among the electorate. First, we constructed 7-point scales for both dimensions: *vertical anti-establishment populism* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$, $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.11$) and *horizontal exclusionist populism* (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.47$). As indicated by the mean scores, citizens' average populist perceptions were higher than the midpoint of the scale for both dimensions. This deviation from the midpoint was strongest for the anti-establishment dimension.

In Table 2.1, we compared populist party voters with voters for established parties in the government and opposition on their mean scores on both dimensions. As shown in this table, voters for the right-wing complete populist party PVV scored significantly and substantially higher on *both* dimensions of populist attitudes than voters for established parties or the left-wing party SP. Voters for the SP scored significantly higher on the anti-establishment dimension than voters for parties in

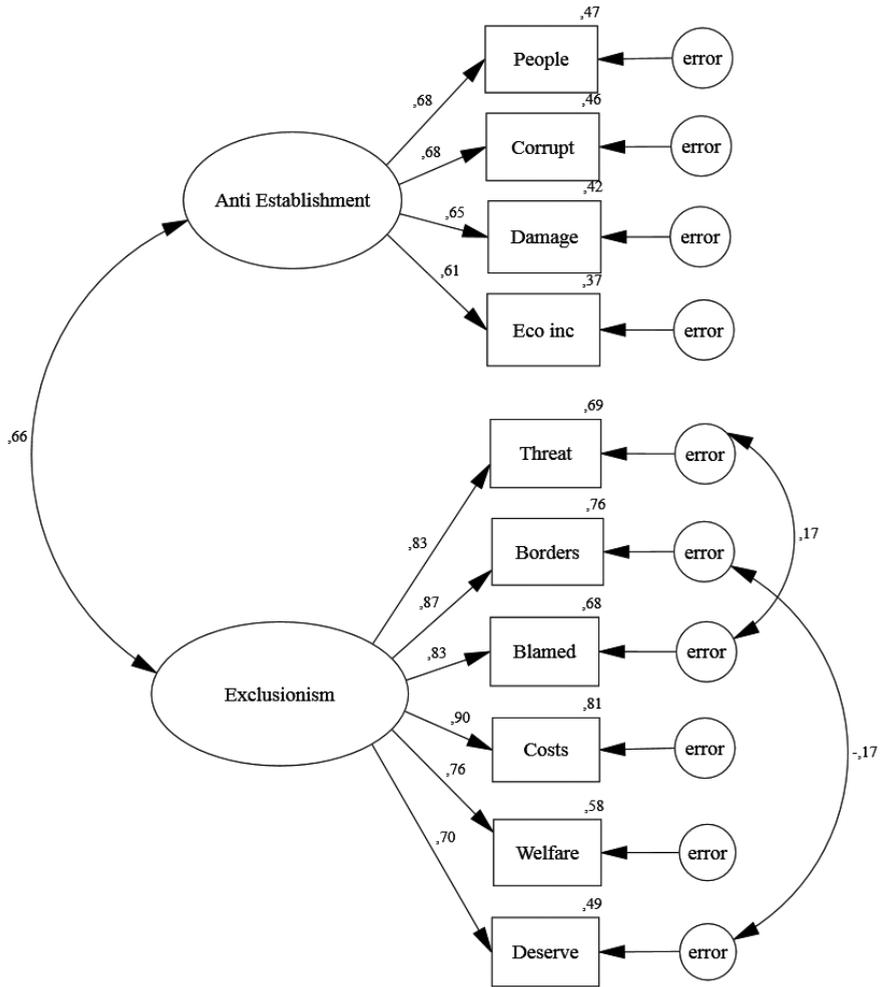


Figure 2.2 Graphical depiction of the two-dimensional structure underlying populist attitudes. Model fit: $\chi^2(23) = 34.09$, $\chi^2/df = 1.48$, $p = 0.06$; RMSEA = 0.024, 90% CI [0.00, 0.04]; CFI = 0.99. Reported estimates are standardized regression coefficients, correlations and squared multiple correlations. Two theoretically justified error correlations were added within the exclusionist factor.

government. Non-voters scored just as high on the anti-establishment dimension as voters for the left-wing party SP. Non-voters, however, were significantly more exclusionist than voters for the establishment. Voters for the two parties in government were significantly *less* populist on the anti-establishment dimension than voters for *both* populist parties. But how can people with populist attitudes be described *beyond* their specific voting behavior?

The Roots of Perceived Relative Deprivation

Table 2.2 reports the results of the OLS-regression analyses for each dimension separately. In support of hypothesis 1, the more people experienced feelings of relative deprivation, the stronger their populist attitudes on both the anti-establishment ($b = .31, SE = .03, p < .001$) and exclusionist dimension ($b = .40, SE = .03, p < .001$). Populist attitudes thus have a common core: irrespective of the out-group opposed to the in-group of the ordinary people, perceived relative deprivation lies at the heart of populist sentiments on both dimensions (see Table 2.2).

Host Ideologies Resonating with Populist Attitudes

In the next step, we explored to what extent citizens with populist attitudes on the anti-establishment and exclusionist dimension can be distinguished based on their positions regarding the host ideologies of economic inclusionism and nativism. First, as can be seen in Table 2.2, the results indicate that participants with stronger anti-establishment attitudes did not have significantly stronger perceptions of economic inclusionism ($b = -.01, SE = .03, p = n. s.$). Citizens with stronger exclusionist populist attitudes, however, *opposed* economic inclusionism ($b = -.08, SE = .02, p < 0.001$). This means that the host ideology of economic inclusionism was not salient for participants with higher anti-establishment populist attitudes, whereas it was *opposed* among participants with exclusionist populist attitudes.

It can be expected that nativism as a host ideology only fits the exclusionist dimension of populist attitudes. As can be seen in Table 2.2, participants with stronger exclusionist populist attitudes indeed articulated support for the position that that immigrants should fully adjust to the nativist culture of their in-group. This host ideology was not salient among participants with anti-establishment populist attitudes.

Taken together, these results point to the construct validity of our conceptualized two-dimensional model: exclusionist populist attitudes are related to, but empirically distinct from, right-wing nativism. People with exclusionist populist attitudes opposed economic inclusionism, whereas this issue was not salient among citizens with anti-establishment populist attitudes. In line with extant research, the common foundation that provides the fertile soil for populist attitudes to root is perceived relative deprivation.

Table 2.1 Comparing mean scores on both dimensions of populist attitudes for different vote choices

Vote choice	PVV (right-populist)	SP (left-populist)	Government	Opposition	Non-Voting	Total
<i>Dimension</i>						
Anti-establishment	4.97 _a (1.04)	4.34 _b (1.10)	3.88 _c (1.06)	3.49 _d (0.99)	4.25 _b (1.01)	4.03 (1.11)
Exclusionism	5.39 _a (0.97)	3.24 _b (1.49)	3.61 _c (1.39)	3.00 _b (1.39)	3.99 _d (1.34)	3.70 (1.47)
<i>N</i>	59	65	292	158	192	809

Note. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses below means. The included governmental parties are: VVD and PvdA. The included opposition parties are: CDA, D66, GroenLinks, SGP, CU and PvdD. Means with differing subscripts within rows differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level based on independent samples t-tests. Both dimensions were measured on 7-point scales.

Table 2.2 Describing populist citizens

Variable	Anti-establishment		Exclusionist	
	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>b</i>	<i>SE</i>
Intercept	2.21***	0.29	1.33***	0.26
Gender (female)	0.01	0.07	-0.15*	0.06
Age	0.01	0.01	0.01	0.01
Education (higher)	-0.03	0.10	-0.14	0.09
Working Class	0.01	0.10	-0.12	0.08
Relative deprivation	0.31***	0.03	0.40***	0.03
Voting establishment 2012	0.03	0.10	0.09	0.09
Voting populist party 2012	0.52***	0.15	0.24	0.14
Non-voting in 2012	0.26*	0.11	0.11	0.10
Political knowledge	-0.04	0.04	-0.08*	0.03
Left self-placement	0.06	0.11	-0.22*	0.01
Right self-placement	-0.11	0.09	0.13	0.08
Left-inclusionist	-0.01	0.03	-0.08***	0.02
Right-nativist	0.01	0.03	0.20***	0.03
Anti EU-integration	0.06*	0.02	0.07**	0.02
PVV Preference	0.03*	0.01	0.11***	0.01
SP Preference	0.03*	0.01	-0.01	0.01
Adjusted R^2	0.35		0.66	
<i>F</i>	21.34***		72.84***	
<i>N</i>	809		809	

*** $p < 0.001$, ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$.

DISCUSSION

Populism is a multifaceted concept. It can be both inclusionary and exclusionary, and it can be attached to left-wing and right-wing stances (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013). Populism's ideational core revolves around the moral and causal divide between the people and both horizontally and vertically constructed others that are blamed for the ordinary people's problems (e.g., Laclau, 1977; Taggart, 2000). Although different types of populism incorporating this variety of the people's enemy have been distinguished on the supply-side of populist parties or communication, no such differentiation exists for populist attitudes (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Therefore, we argued that a one-dimensional approach to populist attitudes is insufficient. To better understand to what extent populist parties on the left and right tap into an attitudinal structure held by citizens, this chapter has conceptually and empirically explored the multi-dimensional structure of voters' populist attitudes.

Grounded in theory on the supply-side of populism, and extending traditional measures of populist attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014), we proposed a two-dimensional structure of populist attitudes, consisting of anti-establishment and exclusionism. This model was tested empirically and demonstrated a good fit with the data. Using the populist attitudes scales, we measured populist attitudes as a matter of degree, and the findings of our study allowed us to assess *how* populist the people actually are on the different dimensions.

This study demonstrates that citizens' populist perceptions resonate with their *particular* populist party preference. Although some scholars disagree on whether the Socialist Party (SP) can be categorized as a populist party (e.g., March, 2007; Rooduijn et al., 2014), we found evidence that citizens who voted for this party are significantly more populist on the anti-establishment dimension than people who voted for parties in the government or opposition. People who opposed the elites *and* immigrants and profiteers from the welfare state voted for the PVV, a right-wing "complete" populist party. Voters for populist parties are thus not simply protest voters, as some assume. Rather, they vote for populist parties because they agree with the *specific* statements they communicate (e.g., Van der Brug et al., 2000). The populism expressed by parties on both the left- and right-wing of the supply-side was thus congruent with the populism of the people on the demand-side.

Using the two-dimensional conceptualization, we further investigated the common core underlying populist attitudes, as well as the host ideologies that appealed to citizens with populist attitudes. After controlling for the 'usual suspects' such as age, gender, education, political knowledge, and occupation, we found that *both* dimensions were strongly rooted in feelings of relative deprivation. This finding ties in with previous literature on populism arguing that people's perceptions of getting

less than they deserve provides a fertile breeding ground for populist viewpoints (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). This finding also ties in and extends the ‘losers of modernization’ hypothesis, which postulates that the experience of loss relative to others is salient amongst people supporting populism (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2006).

Next to this common core, we found that people with exclusionist populist attitudes opposed economic inclusionism, whereas they had stronger nativist sentiments. People with exclusionist populist attitudes can thus be distinguished from those with anti-establishment populist attitudes: their nativist perceptions of a pure, monocultural heartland are not shared by citizens with anti-establishment populist attitudes. This connects to the differentiation of inclusionist and exclusionist populism identified by Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser (2013).

People with stronger anti-establishment populist attitudes were not appealed to economic inclusionism. This can be explained in the light of populism’s ‘thin’ definition: the ordinary people’s opposition to the elites forms the common core of populist sentiments (e.g., Mudde, 2004). Right-wing, complete populism thus contains *both* anti-establishment and exclusionist sentiments (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Therefore, citizens with populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimensions can be appealed to host ideologies on both the left and right, whereas those with exclusionist populist sentiments are essentially not appealed to left-wing ideologies.

Advancing research on populist attitudes, we thus found evidence for the existence of a populist attitude distinct from exclusionism, which is in line with the conceptualization proposed by Akkerman et al. (2014). However, we also identified an exclusionist populist attitude distinct from the anti-establishment dimension. We can therefore no longer assume that populist attitudes revolve around the opposition between the blameless people and culprit elites. To precisely relate the people’s populism to the plethora of populist political parties on the left and right, as well as citizens’ political viewpoints, *both* dimensions are needed.

Our study has some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First, we deduced our conceptualization of populist attitudes mostly from theory on the supply-side of populism. It could well be the case that this approach overlooks dimensions that only exist among populist citizens. However, we linked our theoretical exploration with the rich literature on populism, and we assured that the variety captured in the core definitions of the concept was reflected in our attitudinal approach. Future research may build further on this by inductively exploring the populism of the people using qualitative methods, such as individual interviews or focus groups.

Second, we measured populist attitudes in one single European country, a context that mostly hosts exclusionary, right-wing populism. For this reason, it can be

argued that populist attitudes are structured differently in countries with inclusionary populism, most saliently in Latin America. However, we defined populism by its lowest common denominator, which allows for contextual differences in expressing the ‘people versus an out-group divide’. In other words, citizens in Latin America may score higher on the anti-establishment dimension and lower on the exclusionist dimension whereas this may be the other way around for European citizens. As our two-dimensional model measures populist attitudes as a matter of degree on these two core dimensions, future comparative research may shed more light on how contextual differences are reflected in citizens’ positions on the dimensions of populist attitudes, for example by proposing a typology of exclusionary and inclusionary populisms on the demand-side of voters.

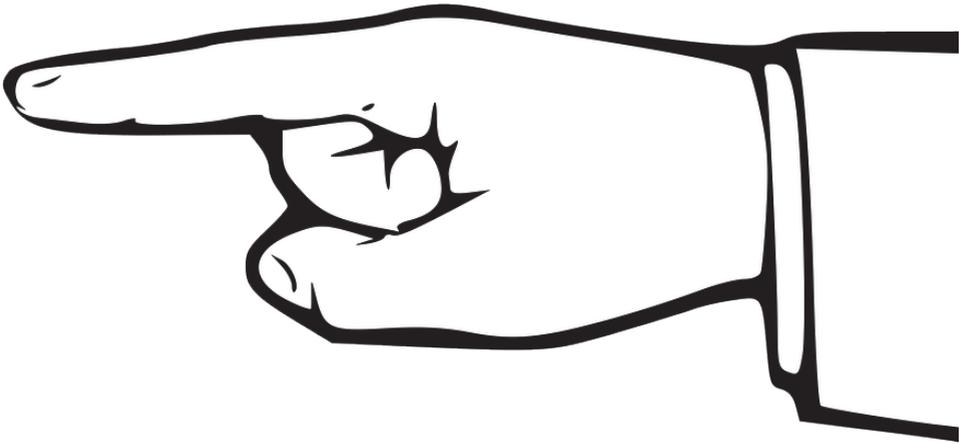
Because we only used ten of the 20 measured items in our final model, another limitation concerns the sub-optimal fit of some measures used in this study. We can propose two explanations for the bad fit of some items measured in this study. First, some items not concretely defined the populist ‘us versus them’ master frame. As populism revolves around the moral distinction between some favored in-group and some specific others, the populist distinction should be stated concretely in each item measuring populist attitudes. Second, some items were reverse-coded, which may have harmed the interpretability of these items as indicators of populism (see Appendix 2.B for a more detailed evaluation).

All in all, this study has demonstrated that a multidimensional structuring of populist attitudes allows for both theoretical and empirical refinement of the concept. Based on this study’s findings, we can no longer assume that ‘the’ populist citizen can be defined by his or her ‘people versus elites’ perceptions. Rather, the variety on the supply-side of populism is congruent with the different manifestations of the people’s populism. Future research can build further on this by assessing the discrepancy or overlap between populism of the sender-side and receiver-side.

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The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens With Populist Attitudes⁶

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ABSTRACT

Although a growing body of literature points to the particular media diet of populist voters, we know too little about what specific media preferences characterize citizens with populist attitudes. This study investigates to what extent citizens with anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes are appealed to attitudinal-congruent media content. We collected survey data using a nationally representative sample ($N = 809$), and find that citizens' preferences for media content are in sync with their populist attitudes. Beyond having a tabloidized and entertainment-based media diet, populist voters self-select media content that actively articulates the divide between the 'innocent' people and 'culprit' others. These findings provide new insights into the appeal of different types of media populism among citizens with populist attitudes on different dimensions.

Populist political parties have gained momentum all over the world. In Europe, especially in the midst of the financial and refugee crises, populist movements have been successful in many countries. In Greece, for example, the left-wing populist party Syriza has made it into the government in 2015. In Austria, the rise of Haider's FPÖ in 1999 marked the start of successful right-wing populism. More recently, the Austrian populist politician Hofer came less than one percent short of being president in 2016. In the Netherlands, after the rise and fall of Fortuyn's right-wing populist party LPF in 2003, Wilders' Freedom Party has gained substantial electoral success since 2006.

Studies that have attempted to explain the success of populist parties from the demand-side of voters have mainly focused on demographics, such as age, gender or education (e.g., Oesch, 2008). At the same time, a growing body of literature points to the persuasiveness of populist ideas on the supply-side of the media (e.g., Bos et al., 2013). Despite acknowledging the relevance of the media in explaining populism's success, extant research has not yet studied the appeal of populism *by* the media: is it indeed the case that voters with populist attitudes select content that stresses the causal and moral divide between 'us' and 'them'?

Citizens are most likely to prefer media content that articulates attitudinal-congruent interpretations of societal issues, as such content reassures a consistent image of the self (e.g., Stroud, 2008; Ruggiero, 2000). More specifically, citizens with populist attitudes are expected to self-select media content that articulates a societal divide between 'us' and 'them' (Krämer, 2014). Deriving from these premises, this chapter aims to move beyond classical demographic descriptions of populist citizens by investigating how preferences for specific media content relate to different dimensions of populist attitudes. Essentially, this study puts the theoretical

assumptions about the peculiar media diet and preferences of populist citizens to an empirical test. To do so, we first have to understand in which ways citizens and journalists can use populism as a framework to interpret societal issues.

The core of populism entails the moral and causal opposition between ‘the good people’ and ‘culprit others’. This relational component can take on different shapes for different types of populism. Populist ideas can be characterized as *anti-establishment* when they highlight the opposition of the common people to the elites (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). Populist ideas that emphasize the opposition of the ordinary, native people to cultural minorities or immigrants can be regarded as *exclusionist*. In line with this conceptualization, both citizens and journalists can interpret societal issues in populist ways.

On the sender-side, we propose three types of media populism that journalists can use to cover news events: people centrality, anti-elites, and monocultural media populism. Building on recent research, we relate these types of media populism to two meta dimensions structuring citizens’ populist attitudes: anti-establishment and exclusionism (see Chapter 2). These conceptualizations will allow us to assess the relationship between the appeal of populist ideas propagated by journalists on the sender-side and the populist attitudes of citizens on the receiver-side.

In previous studies, the theoretical assumptions of the media’s relationship to populism were predominately based on right-wing populism (e.g., Caiani & della Porta 2011; Mazzoleni, 2003). The Austrian tabloid newspaper *Kronen Zeitung*, for example, has been criticized for being favorable of the right-wing populist party FPÖ and its populist news coverage is assumed to shape xenophobic sentiments among citizens (e.g., Karner, 2013). Following this rationale, readers of tabloid newspapers may have strong *exclusionist* populist attitudes as these outlets frame issues in a *monocultural* way. The relationship between media preferences and the core definition of *anti-establishment* populism, the opposition of the good people to the culprit elites, has been largely overlooked in extant literature.

Drawing on survey data collected among a representative sample of Dutch citizens ($N = 809$), we found that citizens with populist attitudes on different dimensions are attracted to different types of media populism. Correlational evidence shows that citizens’ preferences for media populism were congruent with their populist attitudes, even when non-media related factors are taken into account. Despite the fact that we are unable to make causal claims, these findings provide important foundational evidence indicating that media diets and preferences are in sync with citizens’ populist attitudes.

Two Meta-dimensions Structuring Citizens' Populist Attitudes

Extant research has predominately conceptualized and measured 'the' populist attitude as a one-dimensional concept (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012). To arrive at a more precise conceptualization of populist attitudes sensitive to the variety of populist ideas expressed throughout the globe, we have proposed and tested a two-dimensional structure underlying populist attitudes (See Chapter 2). We will briefly outline these two meta-dimensions here.

Many scholars have emphasized that references to the centrality of the ordinary people are necessary but incomplete indicators of populism (e.g., Mudde, 2004). Rather, the *opposition* between the ordinary, good citizens and evil others in society defines the essence of populism (Mudde, 2004). This causal and moral relationship is vertically defined in the first dimension of populist attitudes: *anti-establishment*. People who interpret reality from this dimension construct the other *vertically* as the corrupt political elites who have betrayed the people's will (Ruzza & Fella, 2011).

The second dimension that can be distinguished is *exclusionism*. This dimension entails the perception of a *horizontal* opposition between the pure people and evil others in the heartland (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). These others are constructed as undesired segments of the people, such as immigrants, people with different religions, traditions or cultural values, or people who unfairly profit from the welfare state (e.g., Derks, 2006; Oesch, 2008). The exclusionist dimension thus taps into the in-group threat people experience from *within* their nation: Others who are not belonging to the heartland pollute the in-group's imagined community (Taggart, 2000).

It may be argued that our conceptualization of anti-establishment populist attitudes is strongly related to political distrust or cynicism whereas the exclusionist dimension is similar to xenophobic, nativist or ethnocentric sentiments (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2010). However, the conceptualization of populist attitudes proposed here can be distinguished from such concepts by its emphasis on a moral and causal divide between the in-group of the ordinary people and the vertically or horizontally defined other: The people are good and innocent whereas the evil other is attributed responsibility for causing the people's problems (Hameleers, Bos & de Vreese, 2016; also see Chapter 2).

Populist Media Use

Extant literature on the relationship between media use and populism has foregrounded several assumptions about *what* media appeal most to citizens with populist attitudes. In this study, we take a closer look at these theoretical ideas to put them to an empirical test. We first follow scholars who have argued that voters with populist attitudes primarily use tabloid and entertainment media (e.g., Albertazzi &

McDonnell, 2008; Mazzoleni, 2008). Subsequently, we use the concept of media populism to unravel *why* this tabloidized and entertainment-based media diet would be so attractive for citizens with populist attitudes – what are the central content features of tabloid and entertainment media that citizens with populist attitudes would be appealed to?

The Central role of Tabloidized Media Diets

The assumptions concerning the relationship between the media and populism are predominately based on the idea that tabloid newspapers are more receptive and favorable of populist viewpoints than quality newspapers (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008). On the receiver-side, people who use tabloid media are argued to be more aligned with populist ideas than people who use quality media (Mazzoleni et al., 2003). In line with this, empirical evidence has demonstrated that voters for the populist Freedom Party in the Netherlands are actually more likely to use tabloid media than people who vote for mainstream political parties (Bos et al., 2014). It therefore seems plausible that people who use tabloid media have stronger populist attitudes.

The tabloidized media diet of voters with populist perceptions can be explained by taking a closer look into the parallelism between populism and tabloid media. Quality newspapers are assumed to maintain a stronger relationship with the establishment whereas tabloid newspapers depend more heavily on the mass audience (e.g., Art, 2006; Klein, 1998; Mazzoleni et al., 2003). Therefore, tabloid media are assumed to devote more attention to the worldviews of ordinary citizens than quality newspapers.

In line with selective exposure theory, people are expected to self-select political content that reflects their own views on society (Stroud, 2008). For tabloid outlets, this bias should be strongest for populist citizens, who are said to be low in political trust (Bos et al., 2013; Fieschi & Heywood, 2004). More specifically, as populist attitudes tap into the perceived centrality of common citizens while articulating distrust in others, tabloid media that articulate similar viewpoints should consequentially be most appealing to voters with such attitudes (e.g., Mazzoleni et al., 2003).

The appeal of tabloid media among people with populist attitudes can further be explained by the convergence of the core values of populism and tabloid media. Tabloid media share their ideological bias with populism (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Both share a similar ‘thin’ ideology grounded in the centrality of the common people and the circumvention of elites. Since this ideological core is also expressed in citizens’ populist attitudes, people with stronger populist attitudes should be appealed most to tabloid media. In line with this, we expect that citizens who read tabloid newspapers have *stronger* populist attitudes than citizens who do not read tabloid newspapers (H1a).

Journalists of quality media adhere less to entertainment values and more to objectivity than journalists of tabloid media (e.g., Skovsgaard, 2014). On the sender-side, this journalist practice translates into a stronger reliability on elite expert sources and less attention to the opinions and experiences of the ordinary people (Esser & Umbricht, 2013). Moreover, the coverage of quality newspapers is found to demonstrate a negativity bias towards populist leaders (Bosman & d’Haenens, 2008). On top of this, on the receiver-side, readers of quality newspapers are found to be more supportive of the establishment’s representation than readers of tabloid newspapers (Aarts & Semetko, 2003). Since quality or elite media are assumed to give a voice to experts and elite sources rather than the ordinary people, and because their readers should be *less* distrusting and negative towards the establishment, we expect that citizens who read quality newspapers have *weaker* populist attitudes than citizens who do not read quality newspapers (H1b).

Entertainment Preferences

Empirical research has demonstrated that people who vote for populist parties have a specific media diet. Besides reading tabloid newspapers, they watch more entertainment and soft news programs than other voters do (e.g., Bos et al., 2014). In line with this, the second media type that should appeal most to citizens with populist attitudes concerns entertainment and soft-news content (e.g., Klein, 1998; Mazzoleni et al., 2003). The appeal of entertainment and soft-news media among voters with populist attitudes can be explained by the centrality of ordinary citizens and the disdain of elites and experts articulated in *both* entertainment media and populism (Klein, 1998). Based on this congruence, people who prefer entertainment are more likely to hold stronger populist attitudes than people who do not prefer such media content (Mazzoleni et al., 2003).

Specifically, it has been demonstrated that exposure to entertainment-based content results in more political cynicism than exposure to hard news (Boukes & Boomgaarden 2015). Political cynicism, in turn, relates positively to people’s susceptibility to populist viewpoints (e.g., Bos et al., 2013). People who become more cynical because of exposure to entertainment media may thus be most susceptible to populist viewpoints. People exposed to hard news content, in contrast, are supposed to be more aligned with the viewpoints of the elites. As they self-select into media use that is less likely to challenge the elites, they are less likely to be opposed to the elites *themselves*.

Based on the foregrounded theoretical assumptions and empirical findings, we propose the following hypotheses on the appeal of entertainment versus hard-news preferences among citizens: The more people prefer entertainment, the *stronger* their populist attitudes (H2a); The more people prefer hard news, the *weaker* their populist attitudes (H2b).

The Appeal of Populist Media Content

Until this point, we have hypothesized that citizens with stronger populist attitudes can be characterized by their specific media use. We predicted that citizens with populist attitudes have a particular media diet consisting of tabloid, soft news, and entertainment-based content. Looking beyond citizens' media use, we also want to understand *why* tabloid and entertainment media may be so appealing for citizens with populist attitudes on the different distinguished dimensions.

In line with the concept of media populism, tabloid and entertainment media outlets are, more than other media outlets, assumed to actively engage in a populist style of communication *themselves* (Mazzoleni, 2008; Krämer, 2014) (also see Chapter 1). In doing so, journalists of these outlets frame issues in terms of the populist opposition between the common people and the culprit others. This frame has previously been defined as the 'populist master frame' (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011). By using this frame, journalists can define others both *vertically* as the corrupt elites and *horizontally* as the culprit societal out-groups, such as immigrants (e.g., Klein, 1998). Such coverage is for example used in an article of the British newspaper the Mirror: "While Brits endure crippling austerity with no end in sight, the rich have got richer again" (Beattie & Bloom, 2016). In this newspaper article, the ordinary British citizens are implicitly framed as the innocent in-group. The rich elites are depicted as the culprits, whose self-interests harm the silenced majority: The elites deprive the hard-working native citizens from what they deserve.

These populist frames may affect people's perceptions of reality by providing them with a simplified, polarized definition of political issues. In doing so, populist media relate to citizens' negative stereotypes of the out-group and positive stereotypes of the in-group (e.g., Dixon, 2008; Hewstone, 1989). By activating these stereotypes, journalists who engage in media populism may contribute to 'media based othering' (Krämer, 2014: p.55). Negative news coverage of societal out-groups in turn enhances the chronic accessibility of negative stereotypes among citizens (e.g., Brader, 2005). People who prefer populist media content may thus perceive a binary divide in society *themselves*. This divide entails the antagonism between the imagined community of the blameless hard-working citizens and evil others, such as politicians, that threaten the purity of this community.

By distinguishing between different types of media populism, we can make more specific predictions about the appeal of populist media content among citizens with populist attitudes. Informed by the typology of populist communication foregrounded by Jagers and Walgrave (2007), we propose three different types of media populism. This will allow us to empirically assess the extent to which voters with populist attitudes prefer media content that uses specific types of populism to frame societal issues.

First, we can distinguish *people centrality* or *empty* media populism. This most ‘minimal’ type of media populism emphasizes the centrality of the common people’s will. In this definition, the opinions and experiences of ordinary citizens are the focal point of media coverage. In line with this definition, Uitermark et al. (2012) have argued that entertainment television shows and tabloid newspapers are actively engaging in populist coverage by positioning the viewer, the ordinary, hard-working citizen, as central to the program or news event.

The second type of media populism distinguished in this chapter is *anti-elites media populism*. This type of media populism connects to literature that stresses how journalists of tabloid newspapers engage in populism themselves by emphasizing the binary opposition of the blameless people to untrustworthy elites (e.g., Krämer, 2014). This specific type of populist media content thus entails the disdain of elites, such as politicians or experts, who are perceived as a less credible and reliable source than the common people. For anti-elites media populism, the top-down analyses of elite experts, such as scientists, policy makers or politicians, are consequentially perceived as less meaningful and less reliable than the down-to-earth experiences of ordinary citizens.

The final type of media populism distinguished here is *monocultural media populism*. This subtype of media populism contends that immigrants, ethnic minorities, refugees and all other societal out-groups that do not belong to the populist heartland should not be given a voice in media coverage. Rather, journalists using this form of media populism provide a central stage for the common ‘national’ citizen. Because journalists using monocultural media populism devote less attention to the opinions of *horizontally* constructed out-groups in society, this type of media populism connects most saliently to exclusionist populist communication (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

Against this backdrop, we can formulate specific predictions on the appeal of populist ideas used by journalists among citizens with populist attitudes on the two different dimensions. Because anti-elites media populism revolves around the opposition of the people to a *vertical* out-group, it should connect most saliently to people’s anti-establishment populist attitudes. Monocultural media populism constructs the boundary between the people and others in a *horizontal* way. Therefore, it should connect mostly to exclusionist populist attitudes. People centrality media populism only touches upon the centrality of the in-group. As the ‘good’ in-group is highlighted in both dimensions of populist attitudes, this type of media populism should be positively related to people’s populist perceptions on *both* dimensions.

Based on this reasoning, we hypothesize the following: People with *anti-establishment* populist attitudes are appealed to people centrality and anti-elites media populism (H3a); people with *exclusionist* populist attitudes are appealed to people centrality and monocultural media populism (H3b).

The Media in Context

The tabloidized and populist media diet is not the only distinguishing feature of citizens with populist attitudes. Indeed, extant literature uses a number of inter-individual differences to describe the profile of populist voters: age, gender, education, political knowledge and perceived relative deprivation (also see Chapter 2). In this study, we included these factors to assess the *relative* strength of the relationship between media use and congruent populist attitudes. We will briefly discuss the potential relationship of these non-media related alternative explanations here.

First, populist voters have mainly been characterized as younger males (e.g., Bos et al., 2013; Lubbers & Scheepers, 2000). Second, it has been argued that especially lower educated citizens are attracted to populist parties that simplify complex political issues in terms of the binary opposition between “us” and “them” (e.g., Bos et al., 2013; de Koster et al., 2013). Another inter-individual factor related to populist attitudes is political knowledge. Previous research demonstrated that people who have less knowledge on institutions may regard them as more threatening (e.g., Anderson, 1998). Therefore, the less knowledgeable people are about politics, the more likely they will resort to populist perceptions that simplify political issues in terms of the distinction between the blameless people and the corrupt, threatening establishment.

Previous research has argued that the appeal of populism is strongly rooted in perceptions of relative deprivation (e.g., de Koster et al., 2013; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). In populist rhetoric, the government, the rich elites and societal out-groups are blamed for depriving the common, hardworking citizens from what they in fact deserve (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; Grant & Brown, 1995). In line with this reasoning, people who believe that others always get more from the government than they get themselves are most susceptible to populist viewpoints.

In order to more precisely map the importance of populist citizens’ media diet and preferences, we thus need to assess the *relative* contribution of the media in sketching the profile of populist voters, whilst taking the aforementioned factors into account. Therefore, the final research question of this study is as follows: RQ1: What is the *relative* strength of the relationship between media use and congruent populist attitudes?

METHOD

Sample

Institutional Review Board approval for the data collection was given on June 23, 2015. TNS NIPO collected the data by means of an online survey. From a panel of 124,000 citizens representative of the Dutch voting population in all regions of the country, 1,425 citizens were randomly selected and invited to participate. They received an invitation via e-mail or telephone. Participants of the gross sample are allowed to complete a maximum of three surveys per month, and the agency optimizes involvement by making sure that participants are not overloaded, but still receive regular invitations to stay attached to the panel. Because this large representative panel is mostly used for market research or election studies, participants are not frequently invited for social science research. As incentive, participants receive credits, which they can exchange for vouchers. Of the selection of eligible participants, 809 participants completed the survey. This relates to a response (RR1) and cooperation rate (COOP1) of 57 percent. The sample was representative of the national voting population in terms of gender, age, family composition, region, education, social class, and previous voting behavior. The mean age of participants was 51.07 years ($SD = 17.25$), 48.5% was female and 23.9% was lower educated. The sample was by and large representative of the Dutch adult population.

Measures

Anti-establishment populist attitudes. Based on four statements measured on a scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree), a 7-point scale of anti-establishment populist attitudes was constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$, $M = 4.04$, $SD = 1.11$). The scale's reliability could not be improved by deleting items. 8.3% of all participants scored 6 or higher on the scale. The statements are: (1) The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions; (2) Politicians in government are corrupt; (3) Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people; (4) The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than corporations that only want to make profits. These items are informed by earlier one-dimensional measures of populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Rooduijn, 2014) and people's populist opposition to economic elites (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012).

Exclusionist populist attitudes. Based on the following six statements measured on a scale ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree), a 7-point scale of exclusionist populist attitudes was constructed (Cronbach's $\alpha = .91$, $M = 3.70$, $SD = 1.47$): (1) Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture; (2) Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people;

(3) Our borders should be closed for immigrants; (4) Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems; (5) Social benefits such as unemployment benefits and health insurance benefits are given to people who don't really deserve it; (6) People who are not originally from our country, have no rights to receive our social benefits. 8.8% of all participants scored 6 or higher on the scale. The development of these items was grounded in theory on exclusionist populism, nativism and anti-immigration attitudes (e.g., Duckitt & Sibley, 2010; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). By explicitly referring to a moral and causal distinction between the ordinary, native people as in-group and culprit out-groups, these items aimed to explicitly tap into populist sentiments (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008).

Entertainment and tabloid preferences. We measured the frequency of exposure to tabloid and broadsheet newspapers by asking participants to indicate how many days in a normal week they usually read the tabloid newspaper *Telegraaf* and the broadsheet newspaper *Volkscrant*⁷. As most people did not read these newspapers at all, the frequency of reading was recoded into a binary variable (0 *not reading this newspaper*, 1 *reading this newspaper*).

To operationalize entertainment and hard news exposure and preferences, we asked participants to indicate their *exposure* to soft-news/hard-news media as well as their *preferences* for entertainment and hard-news media formats. For media exposure, we asked participants to explicitly indicate how many days in a normal week they watched the soft news entertainment program *Hart van Nederland*. Moreover, we asked them how many days they watched the hard-news television program *Nieuwsuur*. Because approximately half of the sample reported not to be exposed to these media outlets, the frequency of watching these television shows was recoded into binary variables (0 *not exposed to these media formats*, 1 *exposed to these media formats*). *Nieuwsuur* was categorized as hard news based on its focus on rationality, impersonality, thematic framing, being non-emotional, expert-centered and focused on an in-depth coverage of politics (Prior, 2003). *Hart van Nederland*, in turn, was categorized as soft news because it is more sensational, incident based, person-centered, and more episodically framed (Boukes & Boomgaarden, 2015).

Preferences for entertainment content were measured with a single item measured on a 7-point scale (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*): *I enjoy spending an entire evening watching television shows and movies* (Prior, 2003). Informed by

⁷ We only included one tabloid newspaper and one broadsheet newspaper because the data available for other newspapers was outdated. The measures available for the other quality newspaper in the Netherlands, the *NRC*, pointed in the expected direction: reading the *NRC* was significantly and negatively correlated to both the anti-establishment ($r = -.10, p < .01$) and the exclusionist dimension of populist attitudes ($r = -.16, p < .01$)

Prior (2003), hard news preferences were measured on a three-item scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .71$, $M = 3.94$, $SD = 1.34$). This scale consisted of the following items: (1) *I hate to miss the news*; (2) *I like complex news stories, even if it requires my full attention to comprehend it*; (3) *How many days in a normal weekday do you watch news programs, such as NOS Journaal or RTL Nieuws?*

Preferences for media populism. We measured participants' preferences for the three conceptualized types of media populism with three separate statements measured on 7-point scales ranging from 1 (completely disagree) to 7 (completely agree). We used Confirmatory Factor Analysis to ensure that these statements did not form a unidimensional scale (see results section). *People centrality media populism* was measured by asking citizens to what extent they agreed with the statement that media content should pay more attention to *ordinary people* like themselves. To measure *anti-elites media populism*, people were asked to what extent they agreed with the statement that media content should ask *elites* rather than ordinary people to voice their opinion. This item was reverse-coded to indicate participants' preferences for this type of media populism. Third, people were asked for their agreement on the statement whether the media should devote more attention to minorities living in society, such as immigrants. This item was also reverse-coded to be an indicator of *monocultural* media populism.

Non-media related factors. Participants' level of education was originally measured with seven categories, which were recoded into lower and higher education⁸. Based on three multiple-choice questions on national politics, we constructed a three-item index for political knowledge, asking participants to identify the two parties in government (1), the minister of foreign affairs (2), and the leader of political party CDA (3) (0 *all answers wrong*, 3 *all answers correct*) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .75$, $M = 2.12$, $SD = 1.09$). Based on three items, we constructed a 7-point scale of perceived relative deprivation (Cronbach's $\alpha = .85$, $M = 3.68$, $SD = 1.48$). These three items are: (1) *If we need anything from the government, ordinary people like us always have to wait longer than others*; (2) *I never received what I in fact deserved*; (3) *It's always other people who profit from all kinds of benefits*.

Participants with populist attitudes, just like libertarians, liberals, and conservatives, may be distinguished by their preferences regarding salient societal issues (see Carmines, Ensley & Wagner, 2012). Against this backdrop, we further explored how participants with anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes be distinguished by their issue positions towards immigration, economic

⁸ Lower education indicates not completing an education/primary school/lower vocational or high school lower variant. Higher education indicates high school higher variant, university bachelor or higher.

inclusionism, and European integration. We measured these issue preferences using the following three statements measured on 7-point semantic differentials: (1) *Immigrants should be allowed to keep their own culture/should fully adjust to our culture*; (2) *European integration has not gone far enough yet/has already gone too far*; (3) *Income differences in society should decrease/increase*.

Analysis

We conducted a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) to check whether populist attitudes could empirically be distinguished from populist media preferences. In the next step, we assessed the relationship of the theoretically proposed populist media preferences to both dimensions of citizens' populist attitudes with OLS-regression models in which we included non-media factors and controls. Table 1 and Table 2 demonstrate the results for each dimension separately⁹.

RESULTS

The three items measuring preferences for the three distinct types of media populism correlated rather weakly ($r = .19$, $r = -.07$, $r = -.02$) and did not form a reliable unidimensional scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .10$). This supports our conceptualization that the different types of media populism are not tapping into a one-dimensional populist media preference. Next, we estimated a CFA model to investigate whether preferences for media populism could be validly distinguished from populist attitudes. The model in which preferences for media populism were included as indicators of both populist attitudes dimensions fitted significantly and substantially worse than the model with only the items measuring populist attitudes ($\Delta\chi^2(6) = 156.14$, $p < 0.001$). Moreover, the standardized regression weights of the preferences for media populism items and the two dimensions of populist attitudes are all relatively weak ($r < .28$), with the exception of a moderate strong correlation between the exclusionist dimension and preferences for monocultural media populism ($r = .41$). Still, even when incorporating only this best-fitting item as additional indicator of the exclusionist dimension, model fit decreased substantially and significantly ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 142.53$, $p < .001$).

These results indicate that populist attitudes and populist media preferences are not tapping into the same underlying construct: Participants clearly distinguished

⁹ As robustness check, we also divided the sample into groups to find out if the results were similar when comparing citizens with stronger populist attitudes ($M + SD$) to citizens with weaker populist attitudes ($M - SD$). This analysis yielded similar results as reported in this chapter.

Table 3.1 Regression model for the anti-establishment dimension of populist attitudes

Variable	Model I	Model II	Model III
(constant)	2.63 (0.17)***	2.36 (0.20)***	1.96 (0.25)***
Gender (female)	-0.01 (0.07)	-0.01 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)
Age	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)	0.01 (0.01)
Higher educated	-0.14 (0.07)*	-0.16 (0.07)*	-0.12 (0.07)
Pol. Knowledge	-0.05 (0.03)	-0.04 (0.03)	-0.03 (0.03)
Perceived Deprivation	0.39 (0.02)***	0.38 (0.03)***	0.35 (0.03)***
Quality newspaper (yes)		0.23 (0.10)*	0.25 (0.10)*
Tabloid newspaper (yes)		-0.02 (0.08)	-0.04 (0.08)
Soft-news TV show (yes)		0.02 (0.07)	0.01 (0.07)
Hard-news TV show (yes)		-0.15 (0.08)	-0.12 (0.08)
Hard news preference		0.01 (0.03)	-0.02 (0.04)
Entertainment preference		0.05 (0.02)**	0.05 (0.02)*
Media pop: people central			0.09 (0.03)**
Media pop: anti-elites			0.06 (0.02)*
Media pop: monocultural			-0.01 (0.02)
Adjusted R^2	0.308	0.321	0.335
F	71.34***	34.20***	28.63***
F for change in R^2		2.58*	5.89***
N	809	809	809

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets.

between their political populist interpretations and their preferences for populism *by* the media.

The Media Diets of Citizens with Populist Attitudes

Now that we confirmed that populist attitudes and preferences for media populism are not tautological, we proceeded with mapping the media diets of participants with populist attitudes¹⁰. We first predicted that people who read a tabloid newspaper have stronger populist attitudes than people who do not read tabloid newspapers (H1a). We found that reading a tabloid newspaper was not significantly related to

¹⁰ If we include all values of the media use variables in the regression models, we see that, although the coefficients change slightly, the results point in the same direction. However, we identified one difference: when reading a quality newspaper is *not* reduced to a binary variable, it is not only significantly and negatively related to exclusionist populist attitudes in Model II, but also in Model III.

Table 3.2 Regression model for the exclusionist dimension of populist attitudes

Variable	Model I	Model II	Model III
(constant)	1.94 (0.20)***	1.84 (0.23)***	0.68 (0.27)*
Gender (female)	-0.18 (0.08)*	-0.17 (0.08)*	-0.11 (0.07)
Age	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)	-0.01 (0.01)
Higher educated	-0.29 (0.08)**	-0.21 (0.09)*	-0.18 (0.08)*
Pol. Knowledge	-0.10 (0.04)**	-0.09 (0.04)*	-0.09 (0.04)*
Perceived Deprivation	0.61 (0.03)***	0.58 (0.03)***	0.46 (0.03)***
Quality newspaper (yes)		-0.34 (0.12)**	-0.12 (0.11)
Tabloid newspaper (yes)		0.37 (0.09)***	0.27 (0.09)**
Soft-news TV show (yes)		0.11 (0.08)	0.11 (0.08)
Hard-news TV show (yes)		-0.02 (0.10)	-0.08 (0.09)
Hard news preference		-0.01 (0.04)	-0.01 (0.04)
Entertainment preference		0.02 (0.02)	0.01 (0.02)
Media pop: people central			0.15 (0.03)***
Media pop: anti-elites			-0.08 (0.03)**
Media pop: monocultural			0.29 (0.03)***
Adjusted R^2	0.453	0.466	0.544
F	135.05***	65.47***	70.42***
F for change in R^2		4.52**	46.99***
N	809	809	809

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets.

anti-establishment populist attitudes (see Table 3.1). In line with our predictions, however, reading a tabloid newspaper was significantly and positively related to the *exclusionist* dimension (see Table 3.2). This means that participants who read a tabloid newspaper had stronger exclusionist populist attitudes than participants who did not read a tabloid newspaper. H1a can thus only be confirmed for the *exclusionist* dimension of populist attitudes.

Participants who read a broadsheet newspaper scored significantly *higher* on the anti-establishment dimension than participants who did not read a broadsheet newspaper, which contradicts H1b. In line with H1b, however, participants who read a broadsheet newspaper had significantly weaker populist attitudes on the *exclusionist* dimension than people who did not read a broadsheet newspaper. Overall, hypotheses 1a and 1b can thus only be confirmed for the *exclusionist* dimension of populist attitudes.

Regarding the appeal of entertainment media, Table 3.1 shows that preferences for entertainment content related significantly and positively to the anti-establishment

dimension: the more people preferred entertainment content, the stronger their populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimension. This supports H2a. Hard-news preferences, in contrast, were not significantly related to participants' populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimension, which is not in line with H2b. Moreover, participants' self-reported exposure to soft-news (entertainment) content or hard-news content was not significantly related to their anti-establishment populist attitudes, which contradicts both hypotheses 2a and 2b.

For the exclusionist dimension, entertainment preferences, hard news preferences and watching soft-news/hard-news content were all not significantly related to participants' populist attitudes. Based on these findings, we have only found limited support for hypotheses 2a and 2b: only preferences for entertainment content were significantly and positively related to the anti-establishment dimension.

The results show that entertainment and tabloid media appealed to citizens with populist attitudes on different dimensions in different ways. Reading a broadsheet or tabloid newspaper only related to the *exclusionist* dimension of populist attitudes in the expected direction and entertainment preferences only related positively to the *anti-establishment* dimension.

The Appeal of Media Populism

In the next step of the regression analyses, we included participants' preferences for media content that uses the three distinct types of media populism (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). As can be seen in Table 3.1, participants that preferred *people centrality* and *anti-elites media populism* had stronger populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimension, which supports H3a. More specifically, the stronger participants' preferences for media content that provides a stage for the ordinary people, the higher their populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimension. Similarly, the stronger participants' preferences for media content that circumvents elites, the stronger their populist anti-establishment perceptions. In line with our expectations, participants' preference for *monocultural* media populism was not significantly related to the anti-establishment dimension.

As shown in table 3.2, participants that preferred media content with *people centrality media populism* and *monocultural media populism* had stronger populist attitudes on the exclusionist dimension, which supports H3b. This means that the more participants preferred media content that centralizes ordinary citizens, the more they interpreted reality from an exclusionist populist frame of reference. In a similar vein, the more people preferred media content that provides a stage for the monocultural in-group of the native citizens whilst devoting less attention to societal out-groups, such as immigrants, the stronger their exclusionist populist attitudes.

To sum up, participants who preferred media content stressing the centrality of ordinary people and the disdain of elite sources scored *higher* on the anti-establishment dimension. Participants who preferred media content highlighting the centrality of the people and a monocultural interpretation of society, were most likely to hold exclusionist populist perceptions. Hypotheses 3a and 3b are thus both supported: the populist attitudes of citizens are in sync with their populist media preferences.

The Populist Citizen Beyond Media Preferences

In the next step, we assessed the *relative* strength of the appeal of populist media among participants with populist attitudes (RQ1). Beyond the media, perceived relative deprivation related strongly to citizens' populist attitudes on both dimensions (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). The more participants felt deprived, the stronger their populist attitudes. Level of education was also related to both dimensions of the people's populism: Lower educated participants held stronger populist attitudes than higher educated participants. Political knowledge was only related to participants' exclusionist populist attitudes. The less knowledgeable people were about politics, the more likely they were to interpret reality from an exclusionist populist frame of reference.

Once preferences for media populism were included in the regression models, the proportion explained variance of populist attitudes increased significantly for both dimensions (see Table 3.1 and Table 3.2). 30.8% of the variance in the anti-establishment dimension was explained by non-media factors alone. This increased to 33.5% when preferences for populist media content were included (see Table 3.1). For the exclusionist dimension, the proportion explained variance increased even more substantially from 45.3% to 54.4% (see Table 3.2). To answer RQ1, we need to focus on populist media preferences to more precisely explain which factors relate to citizens' populist attitudes, which is especially the case for the exclusionist dimension. At the same time, the findings show that media use alone is – obviously – far from sufficient to distinguish citizens with populist attitudes from citizens without such attitudes.

To further contextualize the findings on populist media use, we explored the issue preferences of participants with populist attitudes, whilst controlling for all other variables¹¹. Participants with exclusionist populist attitudes believed that immigrants should not be allowed to keep their own culture ($b = .20, SE = .03, p < .001$). This issue position was not salient among participants with anti-establishment populist attitudes ($b = .01, SE = .03, p = n. s.$). Participants with exclusionist populist attitudes had weaker economic-inclusionist attitudes ($b = -.08, SE = .02, p < .001$), but this

¹¹ If we include issue preferences in Model IV of the regression analyses, we see that the results for all populist media use and preferences variables remain the same as reported in Table 3.1 and Table 3.2.

position was not salient among those with anti-establishment populist attitudes ($b = -.01$, $SE = .03$, $p = n. s.$). Participants with exclusionist ($b = .07$, $SE = 0.02$, $p < 0.01$) and anti-establishment populist attitudes ($b = .06$, $SE = .02$, $p < .01$) both opposed EU-integration.

DISCUSSION

In the midst of the mediatization of politics, media populism is argued to be a highly salient phenomenon across the globe (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). Populism is also salient as an-individual level attitude on the demand-side of citizens (see Chapter 2). A large body of literature has therefore claimed that the media play an important role in the global rise of populism (e.g., Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Mudde 2004). It has even been argued that journalists actively engage in populist framing themselves (e.g., Caiani and della Porta, 2011; Mazzoleni, 2008). Still, we know too little about how citizens with populist attitudes can be distinguished from non-populists by their preferences for specific media content. Against this background, this study aimed to put the assumed appeal of media populism among citizens with congruent attitudes to an empirical test. To do so, we proposed a typology of media populism and related preferences for three distinct types of media populism to the two core dimensions structuring citizens' populist attitudes.

In general, the results of this study provided limited support for the often assumed tabloidized media diet of citizens with populist attitudes, as we only found a tabloidized media preference among citizens with *exclusionist* populist attitudes (e.g. Mazzoleni et al. 2003; Krämer 2014; Karner 2013). This may be explained in the light of the higher threshold for the more distant, right-wing exclusionist dimension, which makes citizens with such philosophies easier to distinguish by their media preferences than citizens with less extreme, societally acceptable anti-establishment populist attitudes. Looking beyond media exposure, we further assessed if populist content features argued to be centralized by journalists in tabloid and entertainment news coverage appealed most to citizens with populist attitudes.

Doing so, we found that citizens' preferences for different forms of *media populism* were stronger related to populist attitudes than their self-reported tabloidized and entertainment-based media diet. If we, in line with extant literature, assume that the media are increasingly using populist frames to cover important societal issues (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011; Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008), these frames may be highly persuasive for citizens who prefer media content that simplifies issues in binary "us" against "them" oppositions. This can tentatively be interpreted as support for the assumption that media populism relates to populist frames of interpretations among

citizens (Krämer, 2014). If the media for example frame immigrants and refugees as societal out-groups responsible for their own fate, citizens who prefer such media content may accept this view perceiving that horizontally constructed others indeed pose a severe threat to the purity of their heartland.

However, since citizens' tabloidized and entertainment-based media diet was *not* strongly related to their populist attitudes, one could argue that journalists of these media types may not be as overly populist in their news coverage as assumed in extant literature (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2003). Indeed, the results of recent empirical studies are still inconclusive with regard to the degree of populism expressed in tabloid newspapers versus quality newspapers (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2011; Rooduijn et al., 2014). Our key finding that citizens with populist attitudes prefer media content framed in a populist way may not be related to the actual *supply* of media populism in tabloid and entertainment formats. In future research, content analyses need to point out whether the specific media diet of populist voters is actually more populist than the media diet of voters for mainstream parties.

Most literature has based the assumptions of the relationship between the media and populism exclusively on right-wing populism (e.g., Uitermark et al., 2012). An important contribution of this study is that it revealed the specific media preferences of citizens with *anti-establishment* as well as *exclusionist* populist attitudes. We found that citizens who were attracted to different types of media populism interpreted reality according to different populist frames of references. Preferences for media populism that highlighted the centrality of the ordinary people appealed to citizens with populist attitudes on *both* dimensions. As people centrality provides the most “empty” or “minimal” definition of media populism, the relationship of people centrality media populism to both dimensions makes perfect sense (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

In line with this reasoning, the “complete” types of media populism appealed differently to citizens with exclusionist and anti-establishment populist attitudes. People who preferred media content that circumvents elites scored higher on the anti-establishment dimension and people who preferred media content that circumvented immigrants and minorities by depicting a monocultural society scored higher on the exclusionist dimension.

Besides their specific media preferences, citizens with populist attitudes can be distinguished by their specific issue preferences (Carmines et al., 2012), most saliently regarding opposition to immigration and EU integration. Next to this, the nucleus of populist attitudes can be identified as perceived relative deprivation (see also Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012). Beyond the media, populist citizens can thus also be categorized by their interpretation of the socio-cultural environment, which expands the traditional ‘losers of modernization’ thesis (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2006).

The findings presented in this chapter have practical implications. If the media partially contribute to the polarization of public opinion by inciting citizens' populist "us" against "them" perceptions, one could argue that media populism is an undesired, harmful phenomenon. On the receiver-side, citizens can be made more aware of the potential effects of content that is framed in a populist way. Although citizens may not always be aware of their own populist philosophies, by understanding *how* the populist content of their media diet may affect their own 'us' versus 'them' interpretations of issues, citizens can adequately use their media literacy to more critically judge and, if desired, resist the persuasive potential of media content that frames issues in a populist way.

Our study has some limitations that can be addressed in future research. First and foremost, the findings of this study are insufficiently able to point to a causal relationship between media populism and populist attitudes. It could well be the case that populist attitudes are both cause and consequence from exposure to tabloid/entertainment content and preferences for media populism. Specifically, journalists may engage in populist news coverage in an attempt to appeal to a large perceived audience with populist attitudes. Alternatively, citizens may have become more populist because of their preference for and self-selection of media types that frame issues in a populist way. As we set out to explore the *relationship* between the appeal of populist media and populist attitudes, the causal order may be less relevant for the purpose of this study, which we consider a first foundational study in disentangling this relationship. Nevertheless, future research should more precisely assess the causal order of the described relationships, for example by conducting experiments in which populist attitudes are the dependent variables (see Chapter 4 and 6) or by pairing panel survey data with a content analysis of populism by the media. Only then we can start to assess how different dimensions of the people's populism are actually *caused* by media populism.

A second limitation concerns the generalizability of our findings. The media variables incorporated as predictors of populist attitudes in this study may not work in the same way in countries with different media systems. However, the typology of media populism used in this study was grounded in internationally applied conceptualizations. Future research may further assess the role of differing contexts by conducting comparative research in countries that differ substantially in media systems and socio-political contexts.

All in all, this study has demonstrated that a two-dimensional structuring of populist attitudes allows for a better understanding of the peculiar media diets of populist voters on both the left and right end of the political spectrum. As different types of media populism appeal to voters in attitudinal-congruent ways, we can no longer assume that all populist citizens have the same media diet. Rather, the variety of populist viewpoints propagated by populist media seems to be congruent with the different ways in which citizens are populist *themselves*.

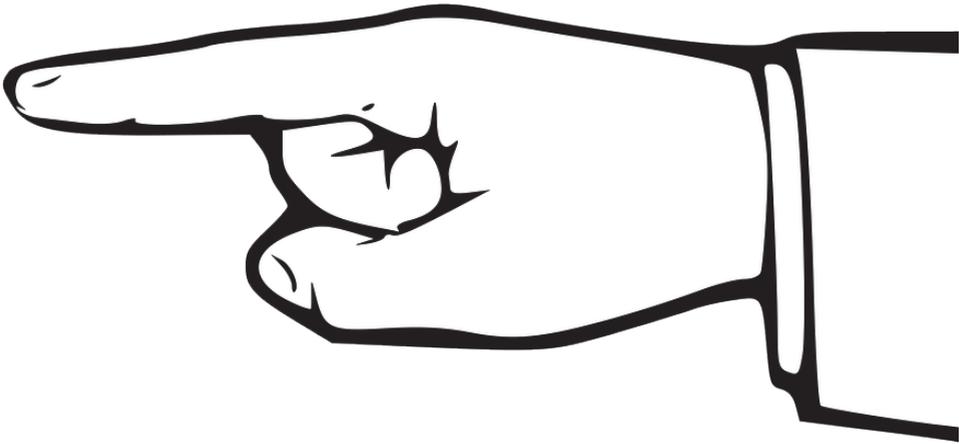
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CHAPTER 4



“They did it”: The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication¹²

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ABSTRACT

How can we explain the persuasiveness of populist messages, and who are most susceptible to their effects? These questions remain largely unanswered in extant research. This study argues that populist messages are characterized by assigning blame to elites in an emotionalized way. Since previous research pointed at the guiding influence of blame attributions and emotions on political attitudes, these message characteristics may explain populism's persuasiveness. An experiment using a national sample ($N = 721$) was conducted to provide insights into the effects of and mechanisms underlying populist blame attribution with regard to the European and national levels of governance. The results show that emotionalized blame attributions influence both blame perceptions and populist attitudes. Identity attachment moderates these effects: Emotionalized blame attributions have the strongest effects for citizens with weaker identity attachments. These insights allow us to understand *how* populist messages affect *which* citizens.

Already more than a decade ago, Mudde (2004) spoke of a populist zeitgeist in Europe. If anything, this zeitgeist has become even more pervasive in recent years. In Greece, for example, the left-wing anti-establishment party Syriza has made it into the government. Populism also prevails outside of Europe. The Tea Party in the United States, for example, is considered to be a platform for conservative populist discontent (Barstow, 2010). In the midst of the dissemination of the populist zeitgeist, a growing body of literature points to the pivotal role of communication in delivering the populist message to the people (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mudde, 2004). Mudde even argues that the populist zeitgeist is partially *caused* by the media's receptivity to the populist discourse.

The core of populism revolves around the moral distinction between the good people and the culprit elites, who are unable or unwilling to represent the people's will. This idea can be expressed by different actors, such as politicians, the media, or citizens. The media can be populist by framing issues in terms of the opposition between law-abiding citizens and culprit politicians. If citizens perceive an antagonism between the good people and the corrupt elites, their interpretation of societal issues can also be regarded as populist.

Populist messages are argued to be highly persuasive as they respond to the ordinary people's hopes and fears whilst formulating easy solutions to important societal problems (Hawkins, 2010; Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2014). However, previous research failed to demonstrate what *specific* elements of populist media messages contribute to their persuasiveness. Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou & Exadaktylos (2013) do point to one key distinguishing feature of the communication

tactic of populists: They attribute more blame to the government and the EU than mainstream politicians. By highlighting the purity of the people and by referring to the establishment as culprit, populism is inherently about attributing blame to others while absolving the people of responsibility.

Populist messages attribute blame using a highly emotionalized style, emphasizing anger and fear towards threatening political elites (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Mudde, 2004; Ruzza & Fella, 2011). Reasoned from this perspective, the populist core idea distinguishes itself from mainstream politics by *emotionally* blaming elites (e.g. ‘Europe’ or national governments) for causing the problems of the heartland (Stanley, 2008; Vasilopoulou et al., 2013).

Previous research on attributions of responsibility – a concept strongly related to populist blame attribution – indicate that citizens’ political attitudes are affected by messages that emphasize who should be blamed for causing political problems (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). Moreover, it is shown that the emotional style of blame attributions bolsters their persuasiveness (Brader, 2005). Despite the fact that prior research implicitly hinted at the persuasiveness of populist blame attributions, no empirical studies on its effects and underlying mechanisms have been conducted. Therefore, the central aim of this study is to provide insight into *how* emotionalized blame attribution – a core element of populist messages – influences citizens’ blame perceptions and populist attitudes.

We conducted a 3*2 between subjects on-line survey experiment ($N = 721$) to assess how citizens’ blame perceptions and populist attitudes towards the elites of the national government and the European Union are affected by emotionalized attributions of blame. Doing so, this study responds to calls by scholars who have emphasized that the effects of media populism on the receiver-side of the populist discourse should be studied more thoroughly (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). In general, we found that emotionalized blame attributions guide both blame perceptions and populist attitudes. Identification with the nation or Europe moderated these effects. These findings indicate that emotionalized blame attribution provides a relevant framework for understanding the persuasiveness of populist communication, which allows us to explain *what* message characteristics affect the populist attitudes of *which* citizens.

Populist Communication as Emotionalized Blame Attribution

Citizens are assumed to credit the government for successes and blame it for failures. This process, which is crucial for democratic functioning, is called attribution of responsibility (Gomez & Wilson, 2008; Malhotra & Kuo, 2008; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). In this chapter, we focus on *causal* attributions of responsibility that attribute *negative* qualities to the elites on the national and European levels of governance

drawing on the emotions of anger and fear. We therefore conceptualize these causal attributions of responsibility as emotionalized blame attributions to elites. But how is this blame game related to populism?

Although many scholars still disagree on how to precisely define populism, consensus exists that populism entails the construction of a blameless in-group opposed to a culpable out-group (Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Taggart, 2000). As the moral opposition between the pure people against the corrupt elites is the lowest common denominator central to all types of populism, we take this populist core as point of departure throughout this chapter (Rooduijn, 2014). This core consists of two main components: (1) the perception that politicians should, but are failing, to represent the will of the ordinary people; (2) the perceived antagonism between the good people and the evil elites (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

Populism can be connected to responsibility attribution. Populism always portrays the people as a homogenous in-group belonging to the imagined community of the heartland (Taggart, 2000). This heartland is in a severe state of crisis *because* the elites (e.g., the EU and the government) failed to represent the will of the people (Canovan, 1999). Hence, the in-group is threatened by the “corrupt elite”, the homogenous out-group constructed in opposition to the people (Mudde, 2004; Laclau, 1977). Since the people are silenced by corrupt politicians who are blind to see the real problems of the nation, the people cannot help their heartland being in a state of crisis: The corrupt elites are held responsible for *causing* the crisis of the heartland (Taggart, 2000). Attributing responsibility for negative outcomes – blame – to the corrupt elites for causing the people’s problems is thus inherently populist (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

In general, populist communication emphasizes the opposition of the people to representative democracy (e.g., Canovan, 1999). In Western Europe, this entails attributing blame to national as well as European levels of governance. For this reason, we focus on the EU and the national government as the culprit out-groups (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Taggart, 2000). An example of such blame-shifting rhetoric was articulated by UKIP’s party leader Nigel Farage in an online British newspaper: “Unless we leave the EU, a huge surge in population growth is unavoidable” (Farage, 2015). In this message, the EU is blamed for causing a salient problem of the in-group of the British nation.

The Role of the Media in Framing Populist Blame Attributions

The media play a crucial role in disseminating populist messages to the people (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008; Muis & Scholte, 2013). When referring to the relationship between the media and populism, a distinction between populism *by* the media and populism intended *for* the media can be made (Bos & Brants, 2014).

The latter form of relationship concerns the media's receptivity to populist ideas whereas the former identified relationship taps into the concept of media populism (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008).

Media populism can be defined as the adaptation of elements of populist ideas (e.g., construction pure people versus corrupt elites) and style (e.g., emotionalized) by the media *themselves* (Krämer, 2014). In line with the concept of media populism, the media may actively use emotional blame attribution as a framework for the coverage of political issues. Using the populist core idea, the media emphasize the distinction between the culprit elites and the blameless people. Moreover, they communicate this message in an emotional style that reflects hostility towards these elites, for example by emphasizing the outrage of the common people towards the corrupt government or by stressing the people's fear for the threatening EU. Emotionalized blame attribution is thus not only confined to populist actors, it can also be part of the *content* of populist messages. The following quotes of messages posted on the Tea Party's website illustrate such content: "Liz Cheney blasted Barack Obama's disastrous foreign policy" and "Barack Obama is a dangerous man and he is punch drunk on power. Bash Obama on Facebook? Be afraid, very afraid" (Tea Party, 2015). In these messages, the former U.S. president is not only personally blamed for the government's failing policy, the words "blasted", "disastrous" and "afraid" indicate that blame is attributed using an emotional style.

The media can create effects of populism through framing, which entails the reconstruction of social reality in meaningful patterns of interpretation (Scheufele, 1999). In Entman's (1993) frequently cited definition of framing, media frames are conceptualized as consisting of four frame-elements: a problem definition, a causal interpretation, a moral evaluation and/or a treatment recommendation. As populist messages emphasize whom is *causally responsible* for the *defined problem* whilst *morally* evaluating the people's will as "good" and the elites' influence as "evil", the framing of populist messages connects most saliently to the first three frame-elements.

The framing approach has previously been applied to research on both populism and attributions of responsibility. Assigning responsibility, which taps into the frame-element of the causal interpretation, plays a central role in media framing as it affects citizens' interpretation of political issues (Iyengar, 1991; Kühne, Weber & Sommer, 2015). Reasoned from framing research on populism, the central populist frame has previously been defined as "us versus them" (e.g., Caiani & Della Porta, 2011). This populist frame taps into the causal interpretation as well as the moral evaluation of issues as the in-group is perceived of as morally good and absolved of responsibility whilst "they" are evil and causally responsible. In line with this, Jagers and Walgrave (2007) argue that the populist master frame concerns the distinction

between the blameless people and the corrupt elites. Synthesizing insights into the framing of populism and responsibility, we argue that the central populist frame should be perceived as a “blame the corrupt elites who are opposed to the people frame”. But what are the potential effects of these populist “blame frames”?

As a consequence of exposure to messages that emphasize the divide between the people and the elites, citizens may interpret society in binary “us” against “them” oppositions *themselves* as well (Krämer, 2014). These populist interpretations are frequently expressed on social media, for example: “The prime minister needs to go and we need out of EU now”. By activating such interpretations among citizens, populist messages contribute to “media based othering”. This process can further be explained by psychological theories on stereotyping. Populist blame frames make negative stereotypes of the EU and the national government chronically accessible to the people (e.g., Dixon, 2008). Populist messages that accuse corrupt politicians for not providing enough jobs for ordinary hard-working citizens may, for example, strengthen citizens’ perception that they are not responsible for their own situation. This negative stereotype of the elites as culprit and the people as blameless victims becomes accessible when citizens think about politics.

As political issues are difficult to comprehend and citizens frequently lack factual information on who is responsible for political issues at different levels of governance (e.g., Arceneaux, 2006; Cutler, 2004), citizens are expected to use the stereotypes provided in populist messages when forming an opinion on the political elites in the EU and the national government. As attribution of responsibility provides a powerful psychological cue for the formation of favourable attitudes towards the in-group and hostile attitudes towards the out-group, citizens’ blame perceptions and populist attitudes are expected to be guided by blame frames (Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Krämer, 2014). By marking the moral distinction between ‘us’ and ‘them’, populist blame frames are thus expected to affect citizens’ blame perceptions *and* populist attitudes. Against this backdrop, we hypothesize that blame attributions in populist communication guide citizens’ blame perceptions and populist attitudes (H1).

Social Identity: The Perceptual Screen Moderating the Effects of Blame Attribution

Our central argument is that blame attribution is at the core of populist political communication. Hypothesis 1 suggests that citizens – *ceteris paribus* – follow suit when either the national government or the EU is blamed. However, populist blame attribution may not be effective for all citizens. Krämer (2014) expects that citizens who do not share the worldview articulated by populist media will respond to populist communication with reactance. Moreover, Lenz (2009) showed that individuals accept the ideas of parties they identify themselves with and reject

the ideas of parties they oppose. In studies on attributions of responsibility, it is demonstrated that government partisans are less likely to accept blame attribution to the government than supporters of the opposition (Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Likewise, citizens' feelings of closeness to national or European identity may restrain them from forming negative attitudes towards the national government or the EU. But what is the underlying process that makes citizens resistant to persuasion by the populist blame game?

In social psychology, the process underlying populist blame attribution, in-group versus out-group construction, is called social categorization (Aronson, Wilson & Akert, 2007). This process results in out-group homogeneity and in-group serving bias. In-group bias is defined as the experience of positive feelings for the in-group, in this case the Dutch nation-state or the EU, and negative feelings for the out-group constructed as significantly different from the EU or the nation. Out-group homogeneity means that people belonging to the out-group are perceived as more similar to each other than they actually are (Aronson et al., 2007). We call these in-group and out-group biases the "perceptual screen".

Social identity theory explains how the perceptual screen mechanism influences attitudes towards the in-group and out-group (Tajfel, 1978). This theory argues that the experience of belonging to the in-group forms a crucial part of people's self-concept. As people want to maintain a positive self-concept, they are biased in their judgments attributing negative qualities (e.g. blame) to the out-group that is perceived as significantly different (Gordon & Arian, 2001; Tajfel, 1978). For a consistent positive self-concept, the in-group is absolved of blame (McLaren, 2007; Sniderman et al., 2000).

In line with this mechanism, people are expected to only accept blame attributed on the national level when they do *not* feel close to their nation. When people *do* feel connected to their nation, accepting frames that attribute blame on the national level is inconsistent with their positive self-concept. Likewise, we expect that people will only blame the EU when they are *not* attached to European identity. These effects are explained by in-group serving bias, functioning as a frame of reference or a perceptual screen when citizens assign responsibility (Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Attachment to identity may thus be key in understanding the conditionality of populist communication's effects. In this study's context, people who identify strongly with Dutch culture and citizenry should not be persuaded by populist messages that blame "their" government. If people feel strongly connected to European identity, the EU is part of their in-group and therefore absolved of causal responsibility for negative outcomes.

In other words, identity attachment functions as a perceptual screen when citizens construct blame perceptions and populist attitudes in response to populist political

communication (H2). Specifically, citizens who feel attached to national identity are less likely to accept frames attributing blame to the national government than citizens who do not feel attached to national identity (H2a) and citizens who feel attached to European identity are less likely to accept frames attributing blame to the EU than citizens who do not feel attached to European identity (H2b).

The Role of Anger and Fear in the Populist Blame-Game

Previous research indicated that emotionally charged information affects citizens' opinions in a different way than information that is presented without references to emotions (Gadarian, 2010). Therefore, it is important to study how the effects of populist blame attribution depend on the use of different negative emotions central in populism.

Populists attribute blame using an emotional communication style (Fieschi & Heywood, 2004; Ruzza & Fella, 2011). By emphasizing that the enemies (e.g., the corrupt elites of the EU and the national government) are creeping upon the heartland (Finlay 2007), the emotional style of populist messages instills a sense of threat on the people. This threat is communicated by using the negative emotions of anger and fear, for example by emphasizing how ordinary citizens fear the EU's impact on their insecure future or by stressing outrage towards the government's failing policy. In research on responsibility attributions, expressions of anger and fear are found to affect blame perceptions in different ways (e.g., Nabi, 2003).

Populist communication draws on anger to emphasize that the culprit elites are blocking the goals of the people (Grant & Brown, 1995; Ruzza & Fella, 2011). Fear is used to highlight uncertainty about the threatening future of the heartland, which is in a state of crisis because the corrupt elites failed to represent the people (Mols & Jetten, 2014). The negative emotions of anger and fear thus play different roles in the populist blame game. As these negative emotions are central in populist constructions of the elites, we will investigate how anger and fear as emotional styles affect citizens' responses to populist blame attribution messages.

Research into the role of discrete emotions in framing often draws on appraisal theory. This theory describes how emotions are experienced as a consequence of a person's subjective interpretation of a situation (Lerner & Keltner, 2001). This interpretation is referred to as an "appraisal tendency" or an "appraisal pattern". According to appraisal theory, specific emotions elicit specific appraisal patterns, which in turn influence how information is processed (Nabi, 2003). Crucially, anger and fear as discrete emotional styles have different effects on how citizens process information on causal attributions of responsibility for negative outcomes, or blame (Han, Lerner & Keltner, 2007).

Specifically, anger's appraisal pattern stimulates heuristic processing whereas fear's appraisal pattern stimulates systematic processing (Kim & Cameron, 2011). Fear's appraisal tendencies of uncertainty and uncontrollability construct the perception of a threat that needs to be dealt with. To resolve feelings of uncertainty and to avert the threat, new information in the environment is processed systematically (e.g., Major, 2011). As fear stimulates systematic processing of new information, fear is expected to result in a tendency to *accept* populist blame attributions (e.g., Brader, 2005). This expectation is in line with the findings of Gadarian (2010), who found that fear-inducing cues increased the likelihood of a threatening message's acceptance.

In contrast to fear, anger's appraisal pattern creates the perception of certainty and controllability. As feelings of certainty and control do not motivate people to search for new information, anger stimulates heuristic processing. This results in citizens' dependency on existing attitudes (Lerner & Keltner, 2001; Leventhal & Scherer, 1987). Reasoned from appraisal theory, we hypothesize that the emotionalized style of fear will lead to a stronger tendency to accept populist blame attribution than anger (H3a).

In addition, we expect that the effects of anger and fear will be contingent upon the experienced level of identity attachment. As we already predicted that fear has a stronger impact than anger, and weaker attached citizens are most susceptible to persuasion, we further hypothesize that the effects of the emotional style of the message are moderated by identity attachment, so that specifically at lower levels of identity attachment, fear will lead to stronger blame perceptions and populist attitudes than anger (H3b).

At higher levels of identity attachment, the emotional style of the message should not affect blame perceptions and populist attitudes.

Finally, reasoned from the perceptual screen mechanism, the *acceptance* of blame frames should differ at different levels of identity attachment. Moreover, appraisal theory predicts that fear leads to a stronger tendency to accept attributions of responsibility than anger. Synthesizing these predictions, we raise the following research question (RQ1): Is the acceptance of the fear blame-frame *highest* among lower levels of social identity?

METHOD

Design

To test *how* emotionalized attributions of blame affect blame perceptions and populist attitudes, we conducted a 3 (Causal responsibility attribution: the EU versus the national government versus no responsibility attribution) X 2 (Emotionalized style: anger versus fear) between-subjects factorial design with control group. Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the six experimental conditions or the control group (see Table 4.1 for all conditions).

Table 4.1 3 X 2 between-subjects factorial design with control group

Emotional style	Anger	Fear
Blame attribution		
<i>The EU</i>	Group 1: The EU is blamed; anger is highlighted	Group 2: The EU is blamed; fear is highlighted
<i>The Dutch government</i>	Group 3: The Dutch government is blamed; anger is highlighted	Group 4: The Dutch government is blamed; fear is highlighted
<i>No blame attribution</i>	Group 5: No blame is attributed; anger is highlighted	Group 6: No blame is attributed; fear is highlighted
<i>Control group</i>	No blame attribution and no emotionalized style	

Sample

This study is based on a diverse sample of Dutch citizens recruited by Research Now. A filter question was used to assess whether participants were able to adequately respond to a question about a short text¹³. The final sample consisted of 721 participants who complied with the instruction¹⁴. The mean age of the participants was 47.24 years ($SD = 16.62$) and 52.9% were female. 46.6% of the sample was

13 Respondents were asked to read a short text describing that most people participating in survey research do not read texts carefully. In order to test this, they were asked to respond “don’t know” to the question “How much interest do you have in television news?”. If they did not answer “don’t know”, they were excluded from the study. 37.9% of the respondents complied with the instruction. The other 62.1% were screened out ($n = 1180$).

14 People with a lower ability or willingness to read and follow instructions may have been underrepresented in our sample. However, people who are not willing or able to read texts are also unable to read the experimental stimuli. This would have resulted in an even stronger bias.

lower educated, 42.3% was higher educated and 13.9% had a moderate level of education. Informed by a pilot study, we expected that 100 participants per condition would result in a desired power of .80. The actual observed power of the analyses to detect differences between experimental conditions was .79 ($\alpha = 0.05$).

Procedure

The experiment was conducted online. Participants first completed the procedure of informed consent. Upon agreement, participants completed the filter question. Only if they were *not* screened-out, they completed a pre-test asking for demographics, the items for moderating variables and control variables. Next, participants were randomly allocated to one of the experimental conditions and read an online newspaper article. After reading this article, participants completed a post-test questionnaire measuring the dependent variables. At the end of the questionnaire, manipulation check items for causal responsibility attributions and emotionalized style were assessed. On average, participants completed the survey in 15.27 minutes, of which 65.70 seconds were spent on reading the newspaper article. Upon completion, participants received a financial incentive from the research agency.

Independent Variables and Stimulus Materials

The stimuli consisted of a negatively valenced online newspaper article on the worsening labour market situation. This issue was chosen as it has both a national and a EU political dimension (Kriesi et al., 2008). As this issue is salient in Dutch public and political debates, it provides an externally valid case for which politicians and citizens evaluate causal responsibility all the time. The article was framed in seven different ways depending on the level of the independent variables emotionalized style and blame attributions. All versions of the article are included in Appendix 4.A.

Emotionalized style was manipulated in terms of appraisal patterns and emotion words that indicate anger and fear (e.g., Kühne, 2014; Nabi, 2003). In the fear conditions, pessimism, uncontrollability and responsibility attributions directed at institutions related to the out-group were emphasized. Protection *against* rather than punishment *of* responsible actors was emphasized. The emotion words “tension”, “fear”, “afraid” and “pessimistic” were used as indicators of fear (see also Nabi, 2003). In the anger conditions, controllability, certainty, and causal responsibility attributions to concrete actors were emphasized. Approach behaviour was emphasized by highlighting the need to punish the specific actors responsible for the worsening labour market situation. The emotion words “angry”, “outraged”, “punish” and “frustrated” were used to indicate the discrete emotion of anger. We thus used four emotion-indication words in each emotionalized style condition.

To enhance external validity, the stimuli were based on four existing newspaper articles retrieved from online versions of three Dutch newspapers (*de Volkskrant*, *de Telegraaf*, *NRC.next*). The constructed articles ranged between 136 and 166 words in length and had the same number of paragraphs. The lay-out, style, language, sources and content of the stimuli matched existing online newspaper articles. In all versions of the newspaper article, the storyline was identical and focused on how the labour market situation has worsened over the last few years. The source, statistics, and references to the in-group of Dutch citizens were held constant between all experimental conditions. In each article, only one source was quoted: The governmental organization that deals with unemployment benefits (UWV). In all articles, four indicators of blame attribution were used and presented in a similar way. All in all, we ensured that the wording of the stimuli only differed on the independent variables manipulated in this study.

Manipulation Checks

A pilot test among a convenience sample ($N = 117$) indicated that the manipulations were successful and that the stimuli affected perceptions of blame and emotional styles in the predicted direction. The manipulation check items used in the main study asked participants to remember the causes of the worsening labour market situation mentioned in the newspaper article. The manipulation of causal responsibility attribution was successful for both blame attributed to the EU ($F(2,707) = 75.40$, $p < 0.001$) and the national government ($F(2,709) = 49.44$, $p < 0.001$). The manipulation of emotional style succeeded as well ($F(2,713) = 15.01$, $p < 0.001$).

Measures

Unless explicitly stated otherwise, all items were measured on a 7-point scale (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*). All items are included in their exact wording in Appendix 4.B.

Citizens' perceptions of blame. The key dependent variable was measured in two different ways. First, similar to Iyengar's (1991) measure of responsibility, perceptions of blame were measured with an open-ended question. Just like Iyengar asked participants to indicate what the most important causes of the issue were, we posed the following question: *Can you describe whom or what you feel is most responsible for causing this situation?* The responses to this question were recoded into four categories (1 *blame assigned to Dutch government*, 2 *blame assigned to the EU*, 3 *blame assigned to others*, 4 *blame assigned to both the EU and national government*). Intercoder reliability was assessed for a sample of 141 (19.6%) randomly selected open-ended questions coded by two independent coders who were trained by a detailed coding procedure that explained each of the four categories in detail. Krippendorff's alpha was .86.

Second, participants were presented with 19 different “candidates for responsibility” (Gomez & Wilson, 2008). These different actors, organizations, political elites and other out-groups appeared in a random order. Participants were asked to what extent they believed each was responsible for the worsening labour market situation on a 7-point scale (1 *completely responsible*, 7 *not at all responsible*).

Populist attitudes. Following definitions by Mudde (2004) and Jagers and Walgrave (2007), (anti-elitist) populism consists of two core components: the (failed) representation of the ordinary people and the moral antagonism between the good people and the evil elites. Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to test whether the data fitted this two-factor measurement model (items derived from Akkerman, Mudde & Zaslove, 2014; Hawkins, Riding & Mudde, 2012). The model fitted the data well ($\chi^2(5) = 10.85, p = 0.054$; RMSEA = 0.023, 90% CI [0.00, 0.04]; CFI = 0.99). The correlation between the factors was .58. To further test for discriminant validity, we constrained the correlation between the two factors to 1.00, which resulted in a significant decline in model fit ($\Delta\chi^2(1) = 30.06, p < 0.001$). This indicates that although both factors were related, they correlated too weakly to be merged into a one-dimensional populist attitudes scale. Two 7-point scales were constructed: *Representation* ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.19, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.76$) and *Antagonism* ($M = 4.04, SD = 1.19, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.58$). Higher scores on both scales indicate stronger populist attitudes on the corresponding dimension. The items for the two dimensions of populist attitudes are listed in Appendix 4.B.

The items measuring the representation scale tap into participants' perception that politicians should respond to the life world of ordinary citizens by listening to *their* concerns, by understanding the problems *they* are facing and by following *their* will. The essence of this scale thus describes the ways in which politicians, as representatives of the people, should be responsive to the problems experienced by the people (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). The items of the antagonism scale tap into a perceived divide between the “good” ordinary people and the “bad” politicians. This scale thus vertically constructs political elites as the populist “other” (e.g., Hawkins, 2010; Mudde, 2004).

Moderators: Identity Attachment to the Netherlands and Europe

We used two three-item scales to measure social identity attachment. The items were based on measures used by Lubbers (2008) and Boomgaarden et al. (2011). We constructed a scale for Dutch identity attachment ($M = 5.43, SD = 1.26, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.92$) and a scale for European identity attachment ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.49, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.86$). Higher scores on the 7-point scales indicate a stronger identity attachment.

Control Variables

Our design allowed us to assure random assignment over experimental conditions and we ensured that assignment to specific experimental conditions did not result in differential attrition (Mutz & Pemantle, 2011). For illustrative purposes, we performed a between-conditions randomization check on the control variables age, gender, level of education, news exposure, political efficacy, political distrust/cynicism, voting behaviour and attitudes towards the labour market situation. We found no significant differences between experimental conditions regarding these variables¹⁵.

Analysis

Table 4.B1 in Appendix 4.B shows descriptive statistics of the main dependent variables for all experimental conditions. To test the hypotheses, logistic regression analysis and Multivariate Analyses of Covariance (MANCOVAs)¹⁶ were conducted to assess how different levels of emotionalized blame attributions affected citizens' blame perceptions and populist attitudes. In addition, multiple linear regression was used to assess how identity attachment moderated the effects of emotionalized style on out-group perceptions.

RESULTS

Direct Effects of Populist Blame Attributions

The direct effects of populist attributions of blame are graphically depicted in Figure 4.1. First, we conducted a logistic regression analysis to assess how populist blame attributions affected open-ended blame perceptions. Blame attribution significantly affected open-ended blame perceptions towards both the Dutch government ($b = 1.70$, $SE = 0.18$, $p < 0.001$) and the EU ($b = 3.05$, $SE = 0.28$, $p < 0.001$) in the hypothesized direction. The odds ratio for the governmental blame attribution coefficient was 5.48 (95% CI [3.86, 7.79]), which indicates that citizens in the governmental blame conditions were 5.48 times *more* likely to blame the government than citizens in the no blame or EU blame conditions. The odds ratio for the EU blame attribution coefficient was 21.13 (95% CI [12.10, 36.90]), which indicates that citizens in the EU blame

15 age ($\chi^2(384) = 372.97$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), gender ($\chi^2(6) = 2.77$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), level of education ($\chi^2(12) = 12.70$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), political efficacy EU ($\chi^2(36) = 39.02$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), Dutch political efficacy ($\chi^2(36) = 47.65$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), political distrust/cynicism ($\chi^2(180) = 207.25$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), voting behaviour ($\chi^2(30) = 29.94$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), attitudes towards the labour market situation ($\chi^2(36) = 42.06$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), and exposure to the news ($\chi^2(42) = 35.79$, $p = \text{n.s.}$).

16 For all MANCOVAs, we tested for the homogeneity of variances with the Levene's test. The tests were all non-significant. Homogeneous variances can thus be assumed.

Table 4.2 Scores on dependent variables for different blame attribution conditions

	Experimental condition			Direct Effects: <i>F Df</i> (2,696)	Partial η^2
	No blame attribution	EU blame attribution	Government blame attribution		
EU blame perceptions	4.39 _a (1.28)	4.78 _b (1.23)	4.33 _c (1.31)	8.53**	0.02
Government blame perceptions	4.69 _a (1.31)	4.86 _a (1.23)	4.78 _a (1.33)	0.18	
Pop 1: Representation	4.63 _a (1.15)	4.90 _b (1.07)	4.97 _b (1.12)	5.32**	0.02
Pop 2: Antagonism	3.96 _a (1.04)	4.15 _a (1.10)	4.07 _a (1.18)	0.62	

Note. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses below means. Means with differing subscripts within the rows differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level based on independent samples t-test.

* = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$.

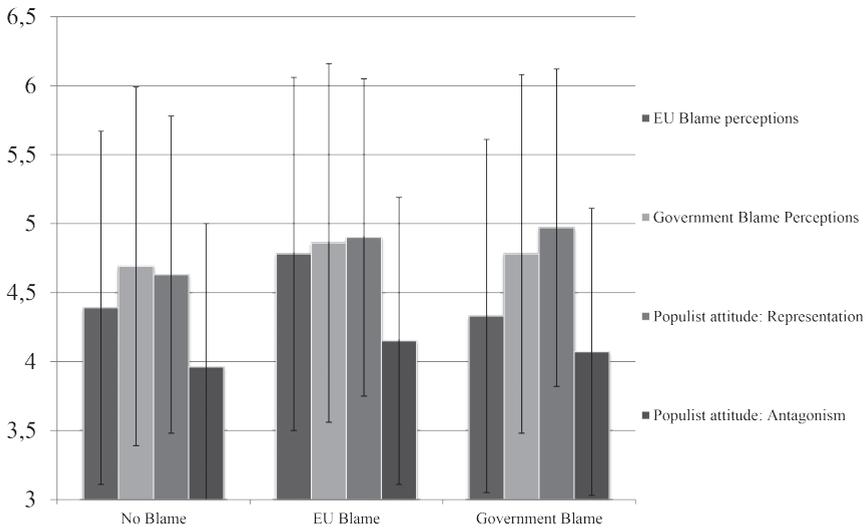


Figure 4.1 Direct effects of populist blame attributions on dependent variables

conditions were 21.13 times *more* likely to blame the EU than citizens in the no blame attribution or governmental blame attribution conditions.

The answers to the closed-ended questions only provide support for a direct effect of populist blame attribution on blame perceptions towards the EU ($F(2, 696) = 8.53$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$). The effect again pointed in the hypothesized direction (see Table 4.2 for mean score differences between experimental conditions).

Of the two populist attitudes, only the representation dimension was directly affected by populist attributions of blame. Specifically, citizens exposed to attributions of responsibility to the EU or the national government were more inclined to believe politicians failed to represent the people's will than citizens exposed to no responsibility attributions (see Table 4.2 for mean differences).

Overall, the results offer partial support for hypothesis 1. As expected, populist blame attributions were taken over by citizens, but only affected *both* open-ended and closed-ended measures of blame when the European Union was attributed responsibility. Moreover, only the populist representation attitude was directly affected by populist blame attributions.

The Perceptual Screen of Identity Attachment

The results indicate that identity attachment functions as a perceptual screen when citizens respond to populist blame attributions. We found a significant two-way interaction effect of blame attribution and Dutch identity attachment on citizens' governmental blame perceptions: $F(2, 670) = 5.38$, $p = 0.005$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$. As shown in Table 4.3a, citizens experiencing a *weaker* attachment to national identity accepted blame frames that attributed responsibility to the Dutch government. In contrast, citizens experiencing a *stronger* attachment to national identity were not persuaded by populist blame frames (see Table 4.3a for mean differences between experimental conditions). These findings offer support for H2a.

As support for the national government or partisanship provides an important alternative explanation of the perceptual screen mechanism moderating the effects of blame attribution, we also estimated the role of support for the government as robustness check. The results of this analysis indicated that participants' perceptual screen was only based on national identity and not on support for the government¹⁷, which further supports H2a.

¹⁷ To test this alternative explanation, a 5-item 7-point scale for governmental support was constructed ($M = 3.67$, $SD = 1.06$, Cronbach's $\alpha = .76$). Next, the interaction effect of blame attribution*support government was estimated. This effect was non-significant: $F(41, 281) = 0.76$, $p = .86$. In a next step, the three way interaction effect blame*support government* national identity was estimated. Again, this yielded a non-significant result: $F(112, 281) = 0.99$, $p = .51$.

The two-way interaction effect of responsibility attribution and European identity attachment on EU blame perceptions was non-significant ($F(2,669) = 0.059$, $p = \text{n.s.}$), which is not supportive of H2b.

The interaction effect of responsibility attributions and national identity attachment on the populist antagonism attitude reached statistical significance ($F(5,715) = 2.16$, $p = 0.057$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$) and the interaction effect on the representation attitude was highly significant ($F(5,715) = 7.31$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$). In support of H2a, the populist attitudes of citizens with a *weaker* national identity attachment were stronger in the blame conditions than in the no-blame conditions (see Table 4.3b for mean differences). As expected, differences between blame attribution conditions were not significant for citizens who identify *strongly* with the nation state.

We found significant interaction effects of blame attributions and European identity attachment on the populist representation attitude ($F(5,715) = 16.28$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.10$) and the populist antagonism attitude ($F(5,715) = 8.03$, $p < 0.001$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.05$). In support of H2b, populist attributions of blame resulted in stronger populist attitudes on both dimensions among the people with a *weaker* attachment to Europe.

Overall, the results provide support for hypothesis 2. With the exception of blame perceptions towards the EU, identity attachment functioned as a perceptual screen moderating the effects of populist blame attributions on perceptions towards the political establishment.

Table 4.3a. Effects of emotionalized blame attributions on blame perceptions for different levels of identity attachment

Dependent variable	Identity Attachment level	Experimental conditions						Three-way interaction effect <i>F, Df</i> (2, 681)	Partial η^2			
		No blame attribution			EU blame attribution					Government blame attribution		
		Anger	Fear	Total	Anger	Fear	Total			Anger	Fear	Total
Perceptions EU blame	Weaker EU-identity	4.66 _{ax} (1.35)	4.15 _{bx} (1.34)	4.44 _{cx} (1.37)	4.90 _{ax} (1.07)	5.02 _{bx} (1.46)	4.95 _{cx} (1.25)	4.80 _{ax} (1.42)	4.53 _{bx} (1.43)	4.67 _{cx} (1.43)	3.07**	0.03
	Stronger EU-identity	4.36 _{ax} (1.10)	4.50 _{bx} (1.24)	4.34 _{cx} (1.21)	4.50 _{ax} (1.20)	4.79 _{bx} (1.20)	4.66 _{cx} (1.20)	4.01 _{ax} (1.26)	4.12 _{bx} (1.02)	4.07 _{cx} (1.14)		
	Total	4.46 _a (1.22)	4.33 _b (1.30)	4.36 _c (1.28)	4.69 _a (1.16)	4.89 _a (1.28)	4.79 _e (1.22)	4.36 _b (1.37)	4.27 _b (1.24)	4.31 _c (1.31)		
Perceptions government blame	Weaker nat. identity	4.77 _{ax} (1.48)	4.02 _{bx} (1.68)	4.28 _{cx} (1.55)	5.21 _{ax} (1.50)	5.56 _{bx} (1.05)	5.37 _{cx} (1.29)	5.35 _{ax} (1.39)	3.32 _{bx} (1.50)	4.92 _{cx} (1.40)	2.14*	0.02
	Stronger nat. identity	4.99 _{ax} (1.11)	4.79 _{bx} (1.33)	4.74 _{cx} (1.28)	4.76 _{ax} (1.22)	4.86 _{bx} (1.21)	4.81 _{cy} (1.21)	4.74 _{ax} (1.39)	4.82 _{bx} (1.22)	4.78 _{cx} (1.30)		
	Total	4.93 _a (1.15)	4.72 _b (1.34)	4.67 _c (1.30)	4.79 _a (1.26)	4.92 _b (1.21)	4.85 _c (1.21)	4.81 _b (1.38)	4.73 _b (1.27)	4.77 _c (1.33)		

Note. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses below means. Means with differing *first* subscripts (a through e) within the rows and within emotionalized style differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level based on independent samples t-test comparing no blame attribution with EU or Dutch government blame attribution conditions. Means with differing *second* subscripts (x and y) within columns indicate significant differences between levels of identity attachment within experimental conditions. Identity attachment scales on the national and European level were recoded into weaker and stronger in the same way. The threshold value for higher attachment was set at 4.01. Analyses with alternative recoding yielded similar results.

* = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$.

Table 4.4b Effects of emotionalized blame attributions on populist attitudes for different levels of identity attachment

Dependent variable	Identity Attachment level	Experimental conditions						Government blame attribution			Three-way interaction effect <i>F, Df</i> (2, 681)	Partial η^2
		No blame attribution		EU blame attribution		Government blame attribution						
		Anger	Fear	Total	Anger	Fear	Total	Anger	Fear	Total		
Populist attitude: representation	Weaker nat. identity	5.06 _{a,x} (1.19)	4.74 _{b,y} (1.13)	4.92 _{c,x} (1.09)	5.42 _{a,x} (1.01)	5.33 _{a,x} (1.27)	5.38 _{a,x} (1.13)	5.36 _{a,x} (1.19)	5.31 _{b,x} (1.11)	5.34 _{b,x} (1.15)	7.25**	0.07
	Stronger nat. identity	4.44 _{b,x} (1.11)	4.30 _{b,x} (1.23)	4.33 _{c,y} (1.10)	4.66 _{b,y} (1.22)	4.52 _{b,y} (1.13)	4.58 _{c,y} (1.17)	4.53 _{b,y} (1.18)	4.70 _{b,x} (1.08)	4.62 _{c,y} (1.13)		
	Total	4.73 _a (1.19)	4.51 _b (1.21)	4.63 _c (1.15)	5.02 _a (1.18)	4.80 _b (1.23)	4.91 _d (1.21)	4.94 _a (1.25)	5.00 _e (1.13)	4.97 _f (1.19)		
Populist attitude: antagonism	Weaker nat. identity	3.52 _{a,x} (1.04)	3.89 _{b,x} (1.49)	3.88 _{c,x} (1.23)	4.64 _{b,x} (1.32)	4.77 _{b,x} (0.92)	4.70 _{e,x} (1.13)	4.89 _{f,x} (1.32)	2.50 _{b,x} (1.00)	4.39 _{c,x} (1.59)	3.10**	0.03
	Stronger nat. identity	4.23 _{a,y} (0.99)	3.89 _{b,x} (1.00)	3.97 _{c,x} (1.02)	4.13 _{a,x} (1.06)	4.05 _{b,y} (1.12)	4.09 _{c,y} (1.09)	4.07 _{a,y} (1.16)	4.01 _{b,y} (1.13)	4.04 _{c,x} (1.14)		
	Total	4.16 _a (1.02)	3.87 _b (1.05)	3.94 _c (1.04)	4.19 _a (1.10)	4.13 _b (1.11)	4.16 _c (1.11)	4.19 _a (1.21)	3.93 _b (1.13)	4.06 _c (1.18)		

Note. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses below means. Means with differing *first* subscripts (a through f) within the rows and within emotionalized style differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level based on independent samples t-test comparing no blame attribution with EU or Dutch government blame attribution conditions. Means with differing *second* subscripts (x and y) within columns indicate significant differences between levels of identity attachment within experimental conditions. Identity attachment scales on the national and European level were recoded into weaker and stronger in the same way. The threshold value for higher attachment was set at 4.01. Analyses with alternative recoding yielded similar results.

* = $p < .05$. ** = $p < .01$.

Effects of Emotional Blame Attributions on Blame Perceptions and Populist Attitudes

We found significant two-way interaction effects of emotionalized style and blame attributions on blame perceptions towards the EU ($F(2,681) = 3.65, p = 0.026$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$) and the Dutch government ($F(2,681) = 3.17, p = 0.043$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.01$). In line with H3a, citizens in the fear conditions were more likely to accept blame attributions to the EU than citizens in the anger conditions (see Table 4.3a for mean differences between experimental conditions). When blame was attributed to the government, fear also resulted in more acceptance of the blame frame than anger, but the mean differences were non-significant.

The significant two-way interaction effect of blame attributions and emotional style on the populist representation attitude ($F(2,681) = 2.74, p = 0.012$, partial $\eta^2 = 0.02$) indicates that citizens in the *fear* conditions were significantly more likely to believe that politicians should, but failed, to represent the ordinary people's will as a result of exposure to governmental blame attributions than citizens in the *anger* conditions (see Table 4.3b for mean differences). Emotionalized attributions of blame to the EU, however, did not affect any of two populist attitudes.

The results are predominantly supportive of H3a. As predicted, fear resulted in a stronger tendency to accept populist blame attributions than anger. However, this effect was only significant when blame was attributed to the EU. Populist attitudes, however, were only significantly affected by fear-emphasizing blame attributions to the *government*.

Identity Attachment as Moderator of Emotional Blame Attribution Effects

In a next step, regression analyses showed how the effects of the emotional style of the message were contingent upon different levels of identity attachment. As shown in Table 4.4, the effects of the emotional style on governmental blame perceptions were moderated by national identity attachment. For lower levels of *national* identity attachment, anger resulted in stronger governmental blame perceptions than fear. In contrast, at higher levels of *national* identity attachment, fear resulted in stronger blame perceptions than anger (see Figure 4.2 for the regression lines of the interaction effects). Identity attachment to *Europe* did not change the relationship between emotional style and EU blame perceptions, as demonstrated by the non-intersecting lines in Figure 4.2.

The regression analysis points to a significant interaction effect of national identity attachment and emotional style on the populist representation attitude. For lower levels of identity attachment, anger resulted in stronger perceptions of failed representation than fear. For higher levels of identity attachment, the effect was the

Table 4.4 Regression model predicting the effects of emotionalized style at different levels of identity attachment

Dependent measures	Variable	Model I	Model II
		<i>B (SE B)</i>	<i>B (SE B)</i>
Governmental blame perceptions	(Constant)	4.84 (0.13)**	4.83 (0.13)**
	Emotionalized style	-0.10 (0.18)	-0.13 (0.18)
	National identity	-0.13 (0.07)	-0.14 (0.09)
	Emotionalized style X national identity		0.41 (0.15)**
	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	-0.01	.02
	<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²	7.33**	
EU blame perceptions	(Constant)	4.66 (0.12)**	4.66 (0.12)**
	Emotionalized style	0.22 (0.17)	0.22 (0.17)
	European identity	-0.13 (0.05)*	-0.15 (0.08)
	Emotionalized style X European identity		0.05 (0.11)
	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.02	0.02
	<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²	0.25	
Populist attitude: representation	(Constant)	4.93 (0.12)***	4.92 (0.11)***
	Emotionalized style	0.09 (0.17)	0.04 (0.16)
	National identity	-0.12 (0.07)	-0.26 (0.08)**
	Emotionalized style X national identity		0.46 (0.14)**
	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.02	0.05
	<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²	11.11**	
Populist attitude: antagonism	(Constant)	4.16 (0.11)***	4.17 (0.11)***
	Emotionalized style	-0.01 (0.15)	-0.02 (0.15)
	European identity	-0.13(0.05)*	-0.02 (0.08)
	Emotionalized style X European identity		-0.19 (0.10)*
	Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	0.02	0.03
	<i>F</i> for change in <i>R</i> ²	3.62*	

Note: Effects are analyzed within blame attribution conditions. Government blame and representation attitudes are analyzed within governmental blame attribution conditions (*n* = 224) EU blame and populist antagonism attitudes are analyzed within EU blame attribution conditions (*n* = 223). National identity and European identity were centered at their means. Standard errors are reported between brackets.

* = *p* < .05. ** = *p* < .01. *** = *p* < 0.001

other way around. We also found a significant interaction effect of *European* identity attachment and emotionalized style on the populist antagonism attitude. As expected, fear resulted in stronger good people versus corrupt elites perceptions than anger for lower levels of European identity attachment (see Figure 4.2).

In sum, the results offer limited support for hypothesis 3b. In support of H3b, fear resulted in a stronger perceived antagonism between the good people and corrupt elites than anger for citizens with a weaker attachment to Europe. In contrast to H3b, fear did *not* result in stronger populist attitudes and governmental blame perceptions for lower levels of national identity attachment. But how is the *acceptance* of blame frames contingent upon the emotional style for different levels of identity attachment?

As can be seen in Table 4.3a, only citizens experiencing a *weaker* attachment to Europe in the *fear* conditions accepted frames attributing blame to the EU. For these citizens, EU blame perceptions were significantly weaker in the no-responsibility conditions ($M = 4.15$, $SD = 1.34$) than in the EU-responsibility conditions ($M = 5.02$, $SD = 1.46$). For governmental blame perceptions, however, fear did *not* result in frame congruent blame perceptions among weaker attached citizens.

As shown in Table 4.3b, citizens experiencing a *weaker* attachment to national identity exposed to populist attributions of blame hold significantly *stronger* populist attitudes on the representation dimension than weaker attached citizens who were not exposed to blame frames. However, this effect was only found when fear was used as emotional style. For identity attachment to Europe, *weaker* attached citizens in both the fear and anger conditions responded to blame frames with *stronger* populist attitudes than those exposed to no attributions of blame. In general, the results suggest that *fear* resulted in stronger blame-frame congruent attitudes than anger, but only amongst *weaker* attached citizens. To answer RQ1, then, acceptance of the *fear* blame-frame was indeed highest among *lower* levels of social identity attachment.

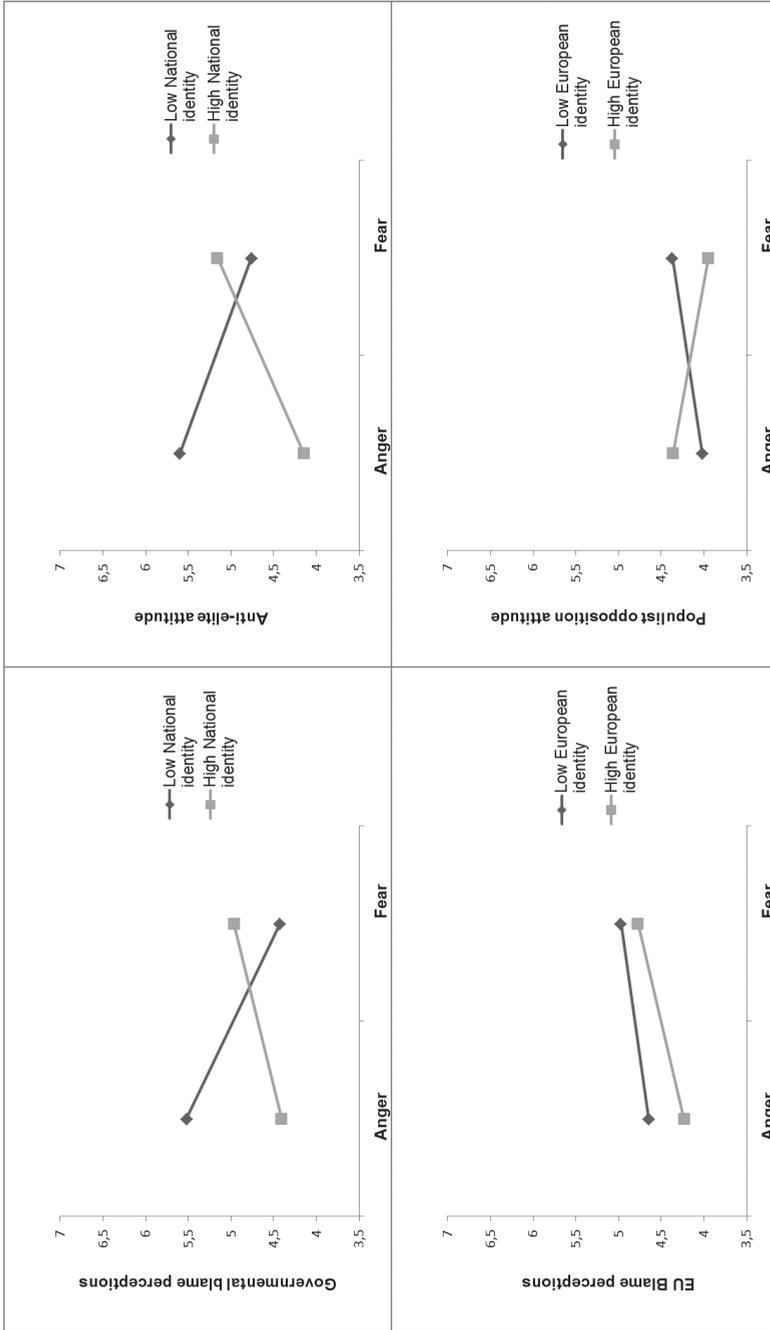


Figure 4.2 Effects of emotionalized style on blame perceptions and populist attitudes for different levels of identity attachment

DISCUSSION

A growing number of scholars have suggested that future research on populism and the media should investigate how populist messages are received by the people (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mazzoleni, 2008). Responding to this call, this study aimed to reveal *how* populist communication influences *what part* of the electorate in the midst of the assumed populist zeitgeist. An experiment was conducted to understand how emotionalized blame attribution – the core element of populist communication – influences perceptions of blame and populist attitudes targeted at the elites.

The results indicate that blame perceptions were influenced by populist blame frames. This implies that when blame was attributed to the EU, citizens followed suit by blaming the EU. However, for blame perceptions of the national government, the emotional style had a stronger effect on blame perceptions than responsibility attributions. Populist communication thus affects blame perceptions towards the EU and the Dutch government in different ways. Populist communication that attributes blame to the national government needs to use an emotional style to be effective whereas populist communication influences blame perceptions towards the EU by mentioning that the EU is responsible for causing the problems of the heartland. We interpret this as evidence that EU attitudes may be more volatile and prone to change by informational cues on responsibility. In contrast, opinions on the national government may be more stable, needing the populist cultivation of negative affect towards the enemies in order to change.

In line with Krämer's (2014) argument of the conditionality of media populism's effects, not all citizens are persuaded by populist messages that attribute blame to the elites. Attachment to national or European identity functions as a perceptual screen when citizens respond to populist communication. As predicted by social identity theory, people feeling close to European or Dutch identity hold a frame of reference that is biased towards their in-group. This perceptual screen motivates them to absolve the EU or the Dutch government of blame whenever populist blame frames attribute responsibility to these levels of governance. We found that the emotionalized style of the populist message influences its effectiveness. In line with findings of earlier research, fear results in a stronger tendency to accept blame frames than anger (e.g., Nabi, 2003). Moreover, the framing effects of fear and anger depend on the level of identity attachment. On a theoretical note, this study adds to the literature on affective framing effects by demonstrating that discrete emotions may not only influence perceptions when they are measured as feelings, but also influence the acceptance of frames and (populist) attitudes when they are incorporated in a communication message as *style* (also see Gadarian, 2010).

Although previous research has demonstrated the existence of populist attitudes among the people (Akkerman et al., 2014), this study is the first to demonstrate that media populism affects different dimensions of populist attitudes. The populist attitude that was affected most substantially concerns citizens' perception of representation. Exposure to populist blame frames bolstered the populist perception that the ordinary people's will is not represented by politicians, who are not capable of acting on behalf of the people. Although less consistently, populist blame attribution also affected people's antagonist perceptions on society, which taps into the belief that society is divided by "the pure people" versus "the corrupt elites". This is a highly relevant finding, as this indicates that the scope of the effects of populist attributions of blame reaches beyond blame perceptions.

In the context of this study, populist messages attributing causal responsibility for the highly salient issue of the national labor market to the elites in the government or the EU thus activated populist schemata among citizens. Messages pointing to the failures of the elites bolstered citizens' perception that their will should be central in political decision making, as politicians are doing a bad job in representing them. The government and the EU, in turn, were perceived as being opposed to the people

These results provide valuable insights for the populist literature, in which it has been found that populist attitudes play an important role in predicting populist party support (e.g., Rooduijn, 2014). Advancing this literature, it can be suggested that populist communication influences preference for populist parties via the activation of populist attitudes. The electoral success of populist parties in Europe and Latin America, as well as the growing popularity of populist politicians in the U.S. can be explained in the light of issue-voting. People who interpret societal issues from a stronger populist perspective should be more inclined to vote for a political party that expresses a similar perspective (Zaller, 1992). The persuasiveness of populist messages may thus have far-reaching implications for the political landscape.

How do our insights on populist communication connect to the related field of research on attributions of responsibility to the EU and the government? Research on attributions of responsibility argues that it is difficult for citizens to understand who is responsible in the intelligible background of the EU-national multilevel of governance (Karp et al., 2003; Rudolph, 2003; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). In line with this research, we found that citizens are not always able to distinguish between different levels of responsibility when asked to punish the culprit. For example, citizens who experience a weaker attachment to the nation state exposed to blame attribution to the government attribute more blame to the EU than the "factually responsible" national government. The lack of knowledge on governmental accountability is thus not always bridged by offering citizens more information on causal responsibility (Karp et al., 2003).

An important implication of this study is that the effectiveness of populist communication can be assessed in a systematic way. In general, populist blame attributions to the political elites only work effectively for citizens who do not identify with national or European identity and people are more likely to accept blame attributions when fear rather than anger is emphasized as style. If the populist communicator wants to effectively shift blame from the people to the establishment, he or she should play on feelings of fear and should target his or her communication strategy at voters that do not feel attached to the out-group that is constructed as culprit. However, if the populist wants to incite populist attitudes among the people *without* blaming the establishment, anger may be more effective than fear for weaker attached citizens. Hence, the strategic use of emotions in populist communication should be tailored to the social identity attachment of the target group. Reasoned from these insights, the success of European populists like Wilders in the Netherlands and Le Pen in France may be due to their emphasis on negative emotions and the appeal to “ordinary citizens” who do not feel connected to the nation ruled by the culprit elites.

This study has several shortcomings. First, the effect sizes of emotionalized blame attributions were relatively modest and the design did not allow us to draw any conclusions on their duration. People changed their attitudes towards the blamed establishment with approximately .5 on a 7-point scale only a few minutes after exposure, which indicates that populist attitudes were more likely to be bolstered than activated. However, these changes resulted from reading only one short populist message. If people have a preference for media content that emphasizes this communication style on a daily basis, the effects of media populism drawing on this communication style may be stronger and more lasting.

Another limitation of this study is that the sender of populist communication was kept constant across conditions. Previous studies found that party cues influence the effects of attributions of responsibility in media content (e.g., Malhotra & Kuo, 2008). Hence, the results of our study might have been different if we had manipulated the source of populist messages, as demonstrated by Sheets, Bos and Boomgaarden (2015). Specifically, we expect that a populist source would be perceived as more credible in attributing blame than a non-populist source. Message *acceptance*, however, should be contingent upon approval of the source: people who disapprove of the populist source are less likely to be persuaded by blame frames than people who support the populist source.

Future research could further investigate how the effects of populist attributions of blame differ between populist and non-populist sources. This study, however, aimed to isolate the *message* effects of the populist communication strategy. It demonstrated that independent of who is communicating the populist message, citizens are affected

by it. This key finding differs from previous research only finding effects of populist media cues that mentioned the populist source (e.g., Sheets et al., 2015). Hence, this study is the first to provide empirical evidence for the occurrence of message effects in the light of media populism.

It could be argued that our operationalization of citizens' perceptual screen bias does not link up to previous research suggesting that citizens with an exclusive perception of national identity are most susceptible to persuasion by blame attributions (Carey, 2002; de Vries & van Kersbergen, 2007; Hooghe & Marks, 2003). However, our operationalization of the perceptual screen derived from different theoretical considerations and was not applied to *exclusionist* populism. In line with definitions of populism that are not restricted to the extreme right, the idealized nation can be conceptualized as an imagined community of the pure heartland (Anderson, 2003). Because of the corruption of politics, this heartland is betrayed. In line with this reasoning, it is plausible that not only citizens with an exclusive identity but also citizens with a weaker attachment to Europe or the nation are persuaded by populist attributions of blame. The mechanism of attachment to identity may be just as relevant for populism as partisanship is for research on attributions of responsibility.

All in all, this study demonstrates that emotionalized blame attribution can – and should – be regarded as a core feature of populist communication. Blame is most persuasive when fear toward the culprit out-group is emphasized. The populist zeitgeist resonating in political communication will be especially effective for citizens who do not feel attached to Europe or the nation state as they are least resistant to the populist blame game and most likely to interpret reality from a populist frame of mind.

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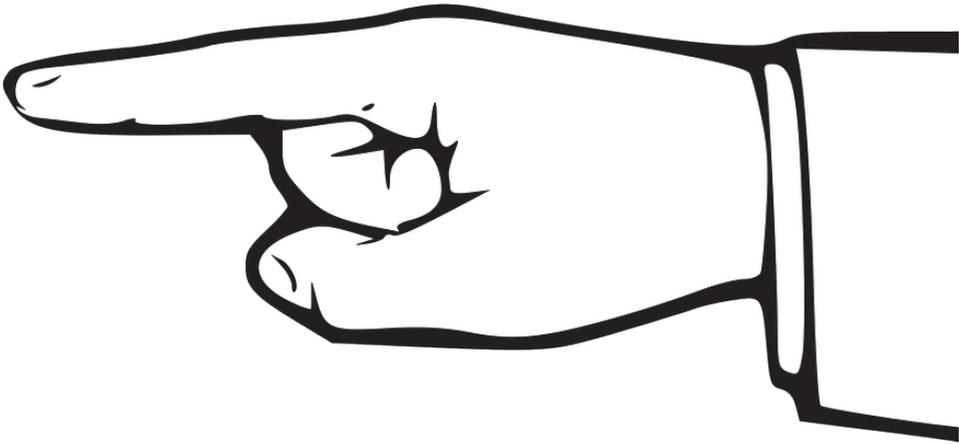
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CHAPTER 5



5

Framing Blame: Toward a Better Understanding of the Effects of Populist Communication on Populist Party Preferences^{18 19}

¹⁸ Manuscript under review.

¹⁹ This chapter is based on the experiment reported in chapter 4, but focuses on a different dependent variable, moderators and mediator. Building on the results presented in Chapter 4, this chapter aims to disentangle the mechanism by which populist communication affects citizens' vote choice.

ABSTRACT

Although previous research has argued that the media play a crucial role in populism's success, we know too little about *how* populist messages affect preferences for populist parties. To advance this knowledge, we conducted an experiment in which the core of populist rhetoric – constructing the people as innocent in-group opposed to the establishment as culprit out-group – was manipulated in newspaper articles. The findings indicate that when political elites are blamed for a salient national problem, people are *more* likely to vote for a populist party and *less* likely to vote for the largest party in government. Populist vote intentions are *indirectly* affected via blame perceptions. These findings offer important insights into the media's role in the electoral success of populism.

Populist political parties have become increasingly more popular over the last decades. In the Netherlands, for example, Wilders' right-wing Freedom Party became the third largest party in the general elections of 2010, winning 24 seats in parliament. On the left, Syriza made it into Greece's government in 2015. In Latin America, populism has been influential for more than a century (e.g., Kaufman & Stallings, 1991). The success of populist movements has not gone unnoticed by scholars, as a large body of research has started to explain populist success from both the supply-side of populist parties and communication (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) and the demand-side of populist voters (e.g., Mudde, 2007).

On the supply-side, media coverage is argued to play a pivotal role in getting populist viewpoints across (e.g., Krämer, 2014). The issues addressed by populist parties are argued to be newsworthy, which enhances the visibility of populist actors and statements in the mass media (e.g., Boomgaarden & Vliegenthart, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014). People are assumed to be exposed to populist messages on a regular basis, which may affect how people think about politics and society in important ways (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2004). Mudde, for example, has claimed that media coverage has partially caused the success of populist parties. As other scholars have argued that populist communication is highly persuasive, the role of the media in populism's global electoral success should not be underestimated (Hawkins, 2010; Rooduijn, 2014).

Although scholars have increasingly emphasized the relevance of the media in populism's success, empirical research that causally related exposure to populist messages to populist voting is scarce (for exceptions, see Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese, 2011; Sheets, Bos & Boomgaarden, 2016). Despite these few examples, little is known about *how* populist messages affect populist voting. To arrive at a better understanding of the effects of populist messages on populist voting and the mechanisms underlying

these effects, this chapter investigates how messages that frame the ideational core of populism, the moral and causal opposition between the good people and the corrupt elites, affect people's intentions to vote for a populist party.

There are good reasons to assume populism is inherently about attributions of blame. Populist actors blame more targets than mainstream political actors do (Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou & Exadaktylos, 2013). Populist messages thus not simply revolve around the construction of the "good" people versus the "corrupt" elites, they also emphasize that the people are blameless victims whereas the corrupt elites are responsible for causing the problems experienced by the people. Attributions of responsibility are found to be persuasive: Messages that emphasize who is responsible for causing societal problems affect people's beliefs about credit and blame (Iyengar, 1991). Evaluations of responsibility, in turn, affect people's vote choice (Bellucci, 2014; Marsh & Tilley, 2010). Against this backdrop, responsibility attribution provides a relevant framework for understanding the effects of populist communication on vote choice. The central question this chapter aims to answer is *how* citizens' preferences for the successful Dutch populist Freedom Party and the largest party in government are affected by populist messages that blame the corrupt political elites for the problems of the heartland.

Integrating the research on populism and attributions of responsibility, we conducted an online between-subjects experiment ($N = 721$). In this experiment, we manipulated the populist core idea of the opposition between the blameless people and the culprit elites by framing blame; either as causal responsibility attributed to the political elites in the EU and the national government or by attributing no blame (also see Chapter 4). The results of our study indicate that populist messages that revolve around blame attribution to the elites lead to stronger preferences for the populist Freedom Party. People with a stronger tie to national identity and a weaker tie to Europe are most likely to align their right-wing populist party preferences with populist messages. These findings allow us to better understand via *which* message characteristics the media contribute to the success of populist political parties.

The Effects of Populist Communication on Party Preferences

Populism is characterized by its antagonistic construction of reality. Populist ideology holds that society is divided into two homogenous groups: the people versus the elites. This binary opposition also involves an important moral component as the people are constructed as the innocent in-group, which is betrayed by the evil out-group of the corrupt elites (e.g., Canovan, 1999; Mudde, 2004; Ziller & Schübel, 2015).

The populist distinction between the good people and the corrupt elites can also be emphasized, or framed, in media messages. Mazzoleni (2003) and Krämer (2014)

refer to the concept of media populism to describe the process by which the media actively construct the populist discourse. Reasoned from this conceptualization, it has been argued that media outlets, such as tabloid newspapers, engage in populism *themselves* (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2003). The media may actively engage in populist news coverage by framing issues in binary oppositions of the innocent people versus the corrupt elites (Caiani & della Porta, 2011). By means of populist framing, the media can emphasize a specific causal interpretation by shifting blame from the people to causally responsible others (Entman, 1993). We therefore define the populist master frame as the emphasis on causal interpretations that attribute blame to the corrupt elites who are not representing the “blameless” people and their will (also see earlier chapters).

Media-initiated blame attributions are found to affect citizens’ interpretation of societal issues in important ways (Iyengar, 1991; Kühne, Weber, & Sommer, 2015). Specifically, when actors are framed as responsible for causing political issues, they are more likely to be perceived as a negative influence (Iyengar, 1989). It has also been demonstrated that evaluations of responsibility affect people’s vote choice: If citizens believe that the government is responsible, they are *less* likely to vote for it (Bellucci, 2014; Marsh & Tilley, 2010). Because populist messages are assumed to activate negative schemata of the “culprit” elites among receivers, people who are exposed to populist blame frames are most likely to turn to populist political parties that oppose these elites as well (Vasilopoulou et al., 2013).

Attributions of responsibility are related to populism in important ways. In populism, “the people” are represented as the innocent in-group betrayed by the corrupt political elites (e.g., Canovan, 1999). Attributions of responsibility that shift blame for negative outcomes from the “good” citizens to the “evil” politicians, relate to a similar process of social differentiation by constructing the people as the innocent in-group victimized by the culpable other. Such attributions of causal responsibility for negative outcomes thus touch upon the core definition of populism. Populist blame attribution attaches a moral component to the distinction between the centrality of the ordinary citizens and the culprit elites: the ordinary people are blameless and powerless whereas the elites are evil and have too much corrupting power. But *how* can such blame frames affect people’s preferences for political parties?

Research on attributions of responsibility indicates that when responsibility is attributed to the government or the EU, people are likely to accept this culprit out-group construction in their political attitudes (Hobolt, Tilley, & Wittrock, 2013). Populist actors point their finger to their political opponents in the government and the EU more frequently than mainstream politicians do (Vasilopoulou et al., 2013). Hence, populist parties, more than others, emphasize how the establishment has

damaged the people's heartland (Mols & Jetten, 2014). As blame attributions are frequently articulated in the speeches of populist parties, people should associate these parties with blame attributions as they articulate the causal and moral divide between "us" and "them".

Previous research indeed found that people align their political opinions with responsibility attributions (e.g., Hobolt et al., 2013). Therefore, populist attributions of blame should result in preferences for political parties that are known to attribute blame to the political elites themselves. Preferences for the largest party in government, in contrast, should be *lower* for citizens exposed to messages that blame the elites. In line with this reasoning, the central hypotheses of this study are: H1a. Populist blame attributions *positively* affect populist party preferences. H1b. Populist blame attributions *negatively* affect governmental party preferences.

WHO ARE MOST LIKELY TO BE AFFECTED BY POPULIST MESSAGES?

Political Cynicism

Extant research on the demand-side of populism frequently refers to citizens' political discontent and distrust as motives to vote for populist political parties (e.g., Van Kessel, 2011). Populist parties are known for their articulation of distrust in the political establishment (Canovan, 1999). Doing so, they are not only shifting blame for negative outcomes to the government or the EU, they also emphasize that these institutions cannot be trusted as they do not represent the people's will. People with a cynical view on politics share this critical worldview, because they also believe that the establishment is not listening to the common voter's will.

In line with this, Bos, van der Brug and de Vreese (2013) found that populist communication only affects the perceived legitimacy of (right-wing) populist actors among the politically cynical. We therefore expect that the effects of populist blame attributions on voting intentions will be strongest for the politically cynical. Specifically, among these citizens, exposure to populist attributions of blame will lead to *more* preference for a populist party (H2a) and *less* preference for the largest party in government (H2b).

Exclusionist Identity Attachment

Research on attributions of responsibility indicates that citizens assign credit or blame in a biased way: Parties close to the individual are not blamed for negative outcomes whereas opposed parties are not rewarded for positive outcomes (e.g., Marsh & Tilley, 2010). In line with this reasoning, people's attachment to the in-

group opposed to the out-group is likely to affect the way in which they process information on responsibility.

In a similar vein, although populism can be both inclusionary and exclusionary, national identity attachment may play a biasing role for populist attributions of blame. The ordinary native people can be perceived of as the imagined community of the blameless in-group (Taggart, 2004). The quest for belonging to this community may motivate people to vote for right-wing populist parties that promise to regenerate feelings of belonging to the in-group (e.g., Fennema, 2005; Mols & Jetten, 2014). Especially those citizens that feel close to the nation are expected to feel attracted to populist rhetoric that taps into these sentiments of belonging. Against this backdrop, we expect that the right-wing populist vote choice of people with stronger national identity attachments is affected most by populist attributions of blame.

Just like populism, social identity is a relational process (Tajfel, 1978). Indeed, right-wing populist voters are characterized by their *exclusionist* perception of social identity (e.g., Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008; Caiani & della Porta, 2011). People who are likely to support right-wing populist movements view people outside their nation as a threat to national identity. Europe and European integration can be understood as such a threat to the nation state (Carey, 2002). Against this backdrop, we expect that the effects of blame attributions on propensity to vote for a right-wing populist party are strongest at *higher* levels of national identity attachment (H3a) and *lower* levels of European identity attachment (H3b). Taken together, the effects should be strongest for citizens with an *exclusive* identity attachment (H3c).

The Mechanism behind the Effects of Populist Blame Frames

Ceteris paribus, we hypothesized that mediatized populist attributions of blame to the elites affect people's preferences for political parties. However, the underlying mechanism may be less direct. Research on attributions of responsibility found that blame assigned to political actors activate negative stereotypes about these actors (Hewstone, 1989). Extrapolated to populist blame attributions, populist messages that attribute blame to the EU or the national government may enhance people's beliefs that the national government or the EU are responsible for causing the problems of their heartland (see Chapter 4). These negative perceptions may in turn be used to hold the government accountable at the elections: The responsible political elites are punished and populist parties that are known to be critical of these corrupt political elites are rewarded at the ballot box.

In line with this reasoning, we expect that attributions of blame in populist communication activate blame perceptions towards the political elites in the national government and the EU. Since citizens do not always have access to factual information on causal responsibility (e.g., Cutler, 2004; Hewstone, 1989),

these blame perceptions are subsequently used as informational cue when forming a preference for political parties (see also Marsh & Tilley, 2010). H4: The effects of populist blame attributions on populist party preferences are mediated by blame perceptions.

METHOD

Design

This chapter reports the results of an experiment with a 3 (Populist blame attribution: the EU versus the national government versus no blame attribution) between-subjects factorial design with control group (also see Chapter 4).

Respondents were randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups. We compared elitist blame attribution with the no-blame control groups²⁰. As robustness check, we also analyzed the hypothesized effects for both blame attribution conditions separately. Although the results point in the similar direction, the effects for blame attributed to the government are highly significant whereas the effects for blame attributed to the EU are only marginally significant.

Participants

The sample reflected national variation regarding age, gender, voting behaviour and educational level as close as possible, albeit our sample has an overrepresentation of younger and higher educated citizens (see Appendix 5.B for comparison census data). Research Now collected the data from a nationally representative panel. Eligible participants over 18 years old were invited via e-mail and could voluntarily opt-in for the online survey experiment by clicking on a link. They were compensated with credits. To ensure participants were both willing and able to read the experimental stimuli, we used a screening question. Only participants that complied with this instruction were used for subsequent analyses. 37.9% of all respondents were retained in the analyses ($N = 721$). The selection of participants may have biased our findings, as people who were unwilling or unable to read texts and comply to instructions are underrepresented. However, for the online experimental manipulations to succeed, we needed to ensure that participants were actually exposed to the treatment. The

²⁰ The experiment contained another factor that was omitted in this study: the emotional style, which was manipulated into anger and fear. We controlled for this factor in all analyses. We report on the outcome of this factor in Chapter 4. As robustness check, we compared the effects of blame attribution for both emotional styles separately. The effects pointed in the same, hypothesized, direction. Overall, the effects for fear were stronger than the effects for anger, which supports the findings presented in Chapter 4.

mean age of the participants was 47.24 years ($SD = 16.62$) and 52.9% were female.

Procedure

After accessing the online survey environment, participants were presented with information on the study and were asked to give their consent. Next, they completed the screening question. Participants were randomly assigned to the experimental conditions or the control group. In all conditions, they were exposed to a similar online newspaper article that contained the treatment or control condition. The newspaper article was visible for at least 30 seconds. Only after this time, participants could proceed to the post treatment questionnaire. After they finished, they were debriefed and thanked for their cooperation. The complete procedure lasted for approximately 15 minutes.

Stimuli

Participants in all conditions were exposed to a newspaper article about the worsening Dutch labour market situation. The external validity was optimized by using existing online newspaper articles of Dutch news websites as template for the stimuli. The articles were thoroughly pre-tested in a pilot study ($N = 137$). We manipulated populist blame attribution by emphasizing that the ordinary Dutch people's crisis on the labour market was caused by either the 'incompetent' and 'failing' EU or the national government. These levels of governance were attributed blame for causing the worsening labour market situation facing the ordinary people. In the control condition, the same news story was presented. However, this version did not connect the societal development to the populist opposition between the people and the establishment.

All newspaper articles were equal in length and only the independent variables varied between conditions. All sources, statistics, situations, styles, and lay-out were held constant between conditions. One could argue that our manipulations were relatively weak in terms of some definitions of populist rhetoric as highly dramatized, simplified, focused on common sense, and hostile (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Uitermark et al., 2012; Taggart, 2000). However, extant literature does not agree on whether such elements are necessarily populist, or just potential facilitators of the core populist message revolving around the 'good' people versus the 'evil' elites. In line with these identified central content features, and the consensus of the populist core as the opposition between the ordinary people and the corrupt elites, we therefore only manipulated populist blame attributions.

Manipulation Checks

The manipulation of populist blame attribution to the establishment was successful: $F(1,713) = 50.22, p < 0.001$. In the blame attribution conditions, participants were significantly more likely to believe the newspaper article framed the worsening labour market situation as a development caused by the establishment ($M = 5.01, SD = 1.23$) than in the no blame attribution conditions ($M = 4.30, SD = 1.41$).

Dependent Variable

Participants were asked to rate the likelihood they would ever vote for a particular political party. For each of the main Dutch political parties, participants estimated the likelihood they would ever cast their vote on this particular party on a 0 to 100 scale (0 *I think I will never vote for this party*, 100 *It is very possible that I will once vote for this party*). Two political parties were of main interest: the right-wing populist party PVV²¹ ($M = 30.38, SD = 36.28$) and the largest party in government VVD²² ($M = 34.19, SD = 33.46$).

Moderators

Political distrust/cynicism. Political distrust/cynicism was measured with five items measured on a 7-point scale (Bos & van der Brug, 2010) (see Appendix 5.A). An exploratory factor analysis provided support for a unidimensional structuring of political distrust/cynicism. One component with an eigenvalue of 2.91 explaining 58.1% of the variance was extracted as the optimal solution. Based on this outcome, a scale of political distrust/cynicism was constructed ($M = 4.49, SD = 1.14, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.81$). Higher scores on the scale indicate more cynicism/distrust in politics²³.

Exclusionist identity attachment. Social identity attachment was measured with two scales both consisting of three items measured on a 7-point scale: Dutch identity attachment ($M = 5.43, SD = 1.26, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.92$) and European identity attachment ($M = 3.84, SD = 1.49, \text{Cronbach's } \alpha = 0.86$)²⁴. The items are included in Appendix 5.A.

21 We excluded the Socialist Party (SP) because extant literature has not reached consensus whether this party is actually populist.

22 The other governmental party, PvdA, is not included because it has a smaller share in government than the VVD. Moreover, the VVD has delivered the prime-minister, which makes this party most visible as the government.

23 For the interaction plots, the threshold value for higher cynicism was set at 4.01. Analyses with alternative recoding (e.g., $M \pm SD$) yielded similar results.

24 For the interaction plots, the threshold value for higher attachment was also set at 4.01. Analyses with alternative recoding (e.g., $M \pm SD$) yielded similar results.

Mediator

Perceptions of the establishment's responsibility. After exposure to the stimuli and prior to the assessment of the dependent variable, participants were asked to indicate which actors, situations or institutions *they* themselves believed were causally responsible for the worsening labour market situation described in the newspaper article. Following Iyengar's (1991) approach, participants' perceptions of blame were measured with an open-ended question, which was formulated as follows: *The article you just read argued that the labour market situation is worsening in 2015 and 2016. One could think of many potential causes for this, and people differ greatly in their perceptions of causes. Can you describe who or what you feel is most responsible for causing this situation? You can list all your thoughts in the space provided below.*

The responses to this question were recoded into two categories: 1 *blame attributed to the elites*, 0 *blame not attributed to the elites*. Inter-coder reliability was assessed for a sample of 141 (20.0%) randomly selected open-ended questions that were coded by two independent coders. Krippendorff's alpha was .86, which points to a satisfactory reliability.

Randomization Check

A between-conditions randomization check on the control variables was conducted, which did not reveal significant differences between experimental conditions on controls²⁵.

Analysis

We used linear regression analyses to test hypotheses 1 through 3. We used two analysis strategies to test the mediation model described in hypothesis 4. First, we used Structural Equation Modelling with maximum likelihood estimation. Second, we estimated the causal mediation model with the R-package "Mediation" (Tingley et al., 2014). For this analysis, we estimated the model with robust standard errors and Quasi-Bayesian Confidence Intervals. 1000 simulations were used to estimate the model.

²⁵ The test of the control variables revealed no significant differences between conditions. Age ($\chi^2(384) = 372.97, p = \text{n.s.}$), gender ($\chi^2(6) = 2.77, p = \text{n.s.}$), education ($\chi^2(12) = 12.70, p = \text{n.s.}$), political efficacy EU ($\chi^2(36) = 39.02, p = \text{n.s.}$), Dutch political efficacy ($\chi^2(36) = 47.65, p = \text{n.s.}$), previous vote ($\chi^2(30) = 29.94, p = \text{n.s.}$), attitudes towards the labour market ($\chi^2(36) = 42.06, p = \text{n.s.}$), and exposure to the news ($\chi^2(42) = 35.79, p = \text{n.s.}$).

RESULTS

Direct Effects of Blame Attributions on Party Preferences

In line with hypothesis 1a, participants' intention to vote for the populist Freedom Party PVV was positively and significantly affected by populist attributions of blame: $b = 6.53$ ($SE = 3.17$), $p = 0.040$, 95% CI [0.30, 12.75], $R^2 = 0.01$. This means that participants who were exposed to populist messages that blamed the establishment were significantly more likely to vote for the right-wing populist party PVV than people exposed to a message that did not use the blame frame (see also Table 5.1). Participants were significantly *less* likely to vote for the largest governmental party VVD when exposed to populist attributions of blame: $b = -5.71$ ($SE = 2.83$), $p = 0.040$, 95% CI [-11.28, -0.15], $R^2 = 0.01$. Based on these results, H1b can also be supported. Exposure to messages that actively engage in populism by framing attributions of blame resulted in *increasing* support for the populist party PVV and *decreasing* support for the largest party in government. In the next steps, we will assess how these effects are moderated by political cynicism and identity attachment, respectively.

Table 5.1 Mean scores of voting intentions for no blame attribution versus blame attribution

	<i>No blame attribution</i>	<i>Blame attribution</i>
PVV (populist party)	26.66 _a (34.88)	33.19 _b (37.11)
VVD (governmental party)	37.50 _a (34.06)	31.78 _b (32.85)

Note. Propensities to vote for political parties were measured on a scale ranging from 0 to 100. Standard deviations are reported between brackets. Means with differing subscripts within rows differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level based on independent samples t-tests.

Are the Politically Cynical Most Susceptible to Persuasion by Populist Messages?

To assess whether the effects of populist blame attributions are strongest for the politically cynical, we estimated a multiple linear regression model (see Table 5.2). Although the model with the interaction effect fitted the data well, ($F(3, 527) = 24.97$, $p < 0.001$, $R^2 = 0.12$), the interaction effect of populist blame attribution and political cynicism on propensity to vote for the populist party PVV was not significant (see Table 5.2). This means that blame attributions did not have a stronger effect on populist party preferences for the politically cynical. These results are not supportive of H2a.

Although political cynicism does not significantly moderate the effects of populist messages on *populist* party preferences, we did find a significant *negative* interaction effect of political cynicism and populist blame attribution on propensity to vote for the government (see Table 5.3). In support of H2b, the politically cynical are thus *less* likely to vote for the government when exposed to populist attributions of blame (see Figure 5.1).

Table 5.2 Regression model predicting the effects of blame attribution and political distrust/cynicism on propensity to vote for a populist political party (PVV)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model I</i>	<i>Model II</i>
(constant)	-4.84 (3.74)	-4.88 (3.71)
Blame	3.95 (2.93) [†]	3.95 (2.98) [†]
Cynicism	10.68 (1.27) ^{***}	10.46 (2.05) ^{***}
Blame x Cynicism		0.35 (2.62)
Adjusted R^2	0.121	0.122
F for change in R^2		0.02

[†] $p < 0.10$; * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets.

Table 5.3 Regression model predicting the effects of blame attribution and political distrust/cynicism on propensity to vote for the governmental party VVD

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model I</i>	<i>Model II</i>
(constant)	-2.05(3.50)	-0.60 (3.54)
Blame	-5.91 (3.13)*	-6.69 (3.15)*
Cynicism	-8.24 (1.22) ^{***}	-4.47 (2.00)*
Blame x Cynicism		-6.19 (2.51)*
Adjusted R^2	0.076	0.086
F for change in R^2		6.06*

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets.

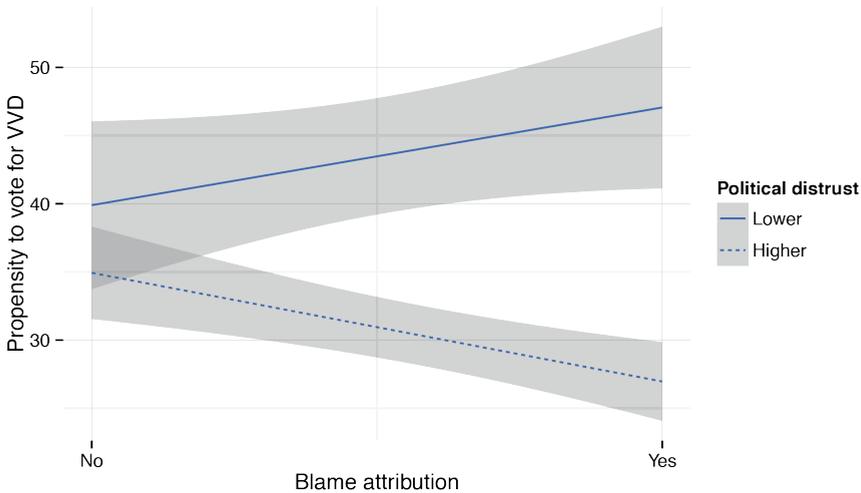


Figure 5.1 Interaction effect of blame attribution and political distrust/cynicism on propensity to vote for the governmental party VVD.

The Role of Exclusionist Identity in the Media Effects of Populist Blame Attributions

In support of H3a, the effect of blame attributions on propensity to vote for the right-wing populist party PVV is positive at higher levels of national identity attachment (see Table 5.4). Moreover, the effect of blame attributions on populist party preference is negative at higher levels of European identity attachment. This effect is, however, not significant.

The interaction effects of blame attribution and identity attachment on propensity to vote for the Freedom Party PVV are graphically depicted in Figure 5.2 and Figure 5.3. As shown in Figure 5.2, participants with a *stronger* attachment to national identity in the blame attribution condition were more likely to vote for the PVV compared to stronger attached participants in the no blame attribution condition. For weaker attached, the effect was the other way around. In other words, for people with a weaker national identity attachment, blame attribution resulted in a *lower* intention to vote for the PVV compared to no blame attribution. For higher levels of national attachment, in contrast, blame attribution resulted in a *stronger* preference

for the PVV. As can be seen in Figure 5.3, participants with a *weaker* attachment to European identity in the blame attribution condition were more likely to vote for the PVV compared to weaker attached participants in the no blame attribution condition. Blame attribution had no effects for participants with a stronger attachment to Europe. In other words, the graphs suggest that the vote choice of participants with an *exclusive* perception of identity were most strongly affected by populist attributions of blame.

As can be seen in Table 5.4, the three-way interaction effect of blame attribution with national and European identity attachment on populist party preference is negative and marginally significant. As shown by the dashed line on the left-side of Figure 5.4, participants with an *exclusive* identity attachment are indeed affected strongest by blame attributions. A comparison of the mean scores also indicate that the effect of blame attribution on populist party preference is *strongest* amongst those with an *exclusionist* social identity: In the no blame condition, these participants have a mean populist party preference of 28.79 ($SD = 35.88$). In the blame condition, this was substantially and significantly higher ($M = 50.08$, $SD = 39.87$; $t = 3.97$, $p < 0.001$, 95% CI [-31.85, -10.73]). In contrast, participants with a stronger or weaker attachment to both the nation and Europe and participants with a weaker attachment to the nation and a stronger attachment to Europe were *not* affected significantly by populist attributions of blame, which supports H3c.

Overall, the results indicate that the vote choice of especially participants with a *stronger* attachment to national identity are affected by populist blame attributions, which supports H3a. We found no significant evidence for the prediction that voting intentions of participants with a weaker attachment to Europe were affected by populist messages, which does not provide much support for H3b. In support of H3c, the results indicated that citizens with an exclusive perception of identity were affected most by populist blame frames.

Table 5.4 Regression model predicting the effects of blame attribution and identity attachment on propensity to vote for a populist political party (PVV)

<i>Variables</i>	<i>Model I</i>	<i>Model II</i>	<i>Model III</i>
(constant)	-7.18 (3.78) [†]	-6.96 (3.77) [†]	-6.96 (3.77) [†]
Blame	5.43 (3.48) [*]	4.86 (3.48) [†]	5.53 (3.48) [*]
Dutch identity	3.90 (1.22) ^{**}	1.03 (1.90)	1.03 (1.90)
European identity	-7.44 (1.01) ^{***}	-5.86 (1.64) ^{***}	-5.86 (1.63) ^{***}
Blame x Dutch identity		4.86 (2.47) [*]	3.81 (2.53) [†]
Blame x European identity		-2.67 (2.08)	-2.62 (2.01)
Blame x European identity x Dutch identity			-1.54 (0.85) [†]
Adjusted R^2	0.099	0.103	0.109
F for change in R^2		2.29 [†]	3.25 [*]

[†] $p < 0.10$; ^{*} $p < 0.05$; ^{**} $p < 0.01$; ^{***} $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets.

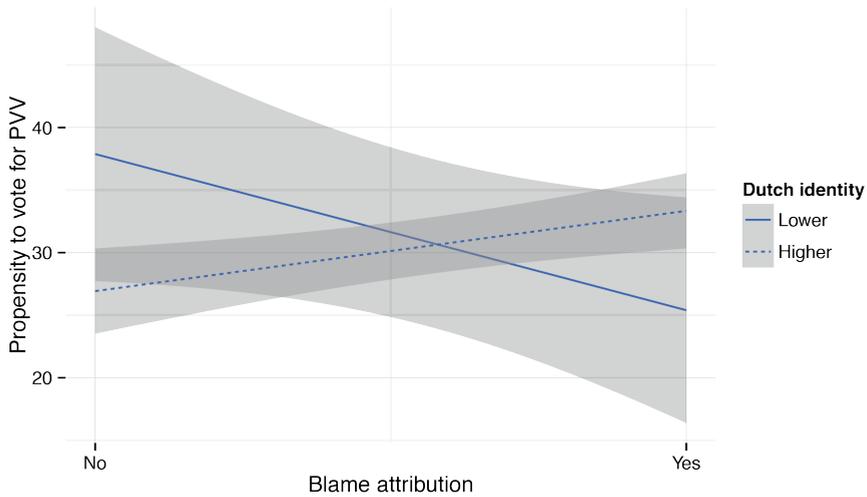


Figure 5.2 Interaction effect of blame attribution and Dutch identity attachment on propensity to vote for the populist party PVV.

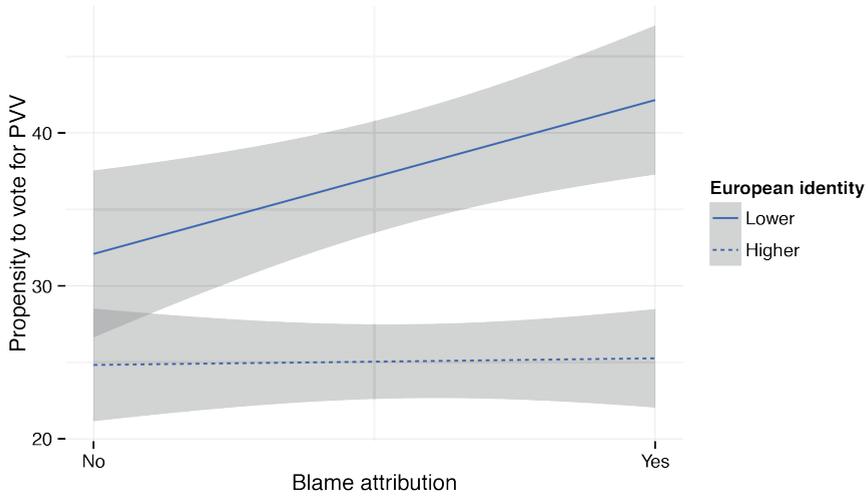


Figure 5.3 Interaction effect of blame attribution and European identity attachment on propensity to vote for the populist party PVV.

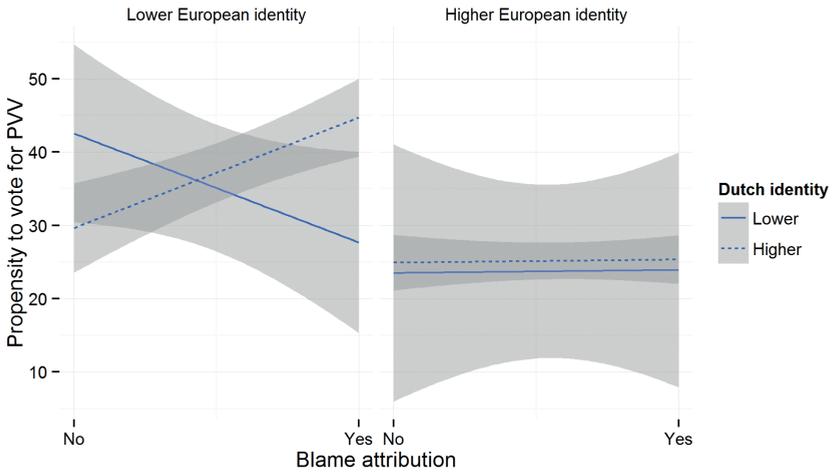


Figure 5.4 Three-way interaction effect of blame attribution and exclusionist identity attachment on propensity to vote for the populist party PVV.

The Potential Underlying Mechanism of the Effects of Populist Messages

In hypothesis 4, we set out to explore the mediating role of blame perceptions on the effects of populist blame frames on vote choice. The estimated mediation model (Figure 5.5) shows that the effect of populist messages that frame blame to the elites on propensity to vote for the populist Freedom Party was indeed mediated by citizens’ perceptions of blame. The full mediation model fits the data well: $\chi^2(1) = 0.48, p = 0.489$, CFI = 1.00, RMSEA = 0.00, 90% CI [0.00, 0.05]. Adding the direct effect from blame attributions to propensity to vote for the populist freedom party did not significantly affect model fit: $\Delta\chi^2(1) = 0.48, p = 0.489$.

Populist attributions of blame had a significant, positive effect on citizens’ blame perceptions ($b = 0.25, SE = 0.03, p < 0.001$). The proportion explained variance of this mediation model (R^2) was 0.15. Blame perceptions, in turn, had a significant positive effect on participants’ propensity to vote for the right-wing populist party PVV ($b = 10.88, SE = 4.14, p = 0.009$). The proportion explained variance of this outcome model (R^2) was 0.03. The direct effect of populist attributions of blame on populist party preference was not significant in this mediation model ($b = 2.35, SE = 3.38, p = n.s.$). The standardized indirect effect of populist attributions of blame on propensity to vote for the Freedom Party PVV via blame perceptions was 0.058 ($0.384 * 0.150$).

As robustness check, we additionally estimated the causal mediation model with the R-package “mediation” (Tingley et al., 2014). Because this package allows to use a large number of simulations to estimate the model, the estimation process may be considered as more reliable. Again, we found that the effect of populist attributions of blame on propensity to vote for the populist party PVV was significantly mediated by participants’ blame perceptions. The Average Causal Mediation Effect (ACME) indicated that the mediation model was highly significant ($b = 2.92, p < 0.001, 95\% CI [1.01, 4.94]$). The Average Direct Effect (ADE), however, was non-significant: ($b = 1.49, p = 0.49, 95\% CI [-3.21, 6.04]$). The total effect was significant: ($b = 4.41, p = 0.04, 95\% CI [0.28, 8.64]$). These findings indicate that 62.0% of the total effect of blame attribution on PVV preferences was mediated by blame perceptions, which supports H4.

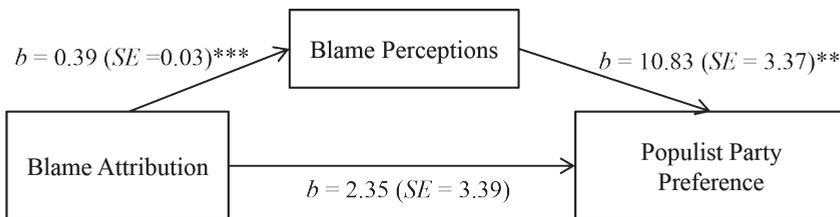


Figure 5.5 Mediation model demonstrating the mediating role of blame perceptions on the effects of blame attributions on populist party preferences. ****** $p < 0.01$; ******* $p < 0.001$

DISCUSSION

Populist political parties have become influential throughout the world. From India to the Americas to Europe, populism has been successful on both the left and right end of the political spectrum. Many scholars have argued that the media play a pivotal role in the success of populist parties (e.g., Mudde, 2004, Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Krämer, 2014). Still, we know little about what specific elements of populist messages affect the voting intentions of which citizens (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2003; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007).

To advance our understanding of the effects of populist messages, we conducted an online survey experiment in which we manipulated the ideational core of anti-elitist populism: the construction of the people as blameless in-group opposed to the culprit elites as out-groups. We found that citizens who are exposed to populist messages that attribute blame to the elites in the national government or the EU are more likely to vote for the right-wing populist Freedom Party PVV. In contrast, populist messages negatively affected people's propensity to vote for the largest party in government. Populist messages may thus polarize citizens' political opinions, as exposure to the core populist message makes people less aligned with the government and more aligned with populist challengers.

We expected that some citizens are more likely to be affected by populist attributions of blame than others. First, we expected the effects to be strongest among the politically cynical (Bos et al., 2013). However, we found no evidence that the politically cynical are most likely to align their party preferences with populist blame attributions. This unexpected finding can be explained by taking a closer look into the data. Comparing populist party preferences between the lower and higher cynical, we found that the politically cynical are more than *twice* as likely to cast their vote on the populist Freedom Party compared to the lower politically cynical. As they already aligned their vote choice with the belief that the government and the EU are responsible for causing the heartland's problems, the politically cynical may not need the media to persuade them.

We also expected that populist messages would affect especially those citizens with an exclusionist perception of social identity. Our findings partially supported this expectation. People who feel attached to the nation-state, the imagined community of the populist heartland (Taggart, 2004), are most likely to vote on a right-wing populist party when exposed to populist messages that frame blame. Attachment to European identity negatively affected the relationship between populist messages and populist party preferences. These findings are in line with previous research arguing that citizens with a stronger attachment to the nation feel most threatened by the out-groups that populist rhetoric constructs as enemies (e.g., Mudde, 2004). Citizens with an exclusive perception of social identity may thus feel attracted to right-wing populist parties as

they promise to revive the national identity while blaming the government, the EU and immigrants for causing the cultural, social and economic threats of the heartland at crisis (Fennema, 2005).

In the context of national-EU multilevel governance, citizens may not always know who is responsible for causing political problems (e.g., Arceneaux, 2006; Cutler, 2004). Therefore, attributions of responsibility are an important cue when citizens form their own perceptions of blame. Building on this process, this chapter explored how the effects of populist blame attributions were mediated by perceptions of blame. In line with our expectations, we found that blame attributions first needed to be accepted by citizens in order to influence voting preferences, which is in line with previous research that studied the relationship between blame perceptions and vote choice (e.g., Marsh & Tilley, 2010).

The mediating role of blame perceptions can be interpreted as an effect of negative stereotyping (e.g., Dixon, 2008; Hewstone, 1989). Attributions of blame activate negative stereotypes about the establishment (Hewstone, 1989). In turn, these negative evaluations are used to hold the government accountable at the elections, which is again in line with research on responsibility attributions (e.g., Malhotra & Kuo, 2008; Key, 1966; Hood, 2007).

This study has some potential shortcomings. First, media populism may entail more than constructing culprit out-groups of the establishment opposed to a blameless in-group of the national people. Our manipulation of populist attributions of blame excluded multiple optional features of populist communication, such as centrality of charismatic leadership, personalization and dramatization (e.g., Houwen, 2012). Moreover, we did not assess the effects of blame attribution to right-wing populism's most salient out-group: immigrants (see Chapter 6). Incorporating these characteristics could have changed our findings. However, we have found effects on populist party preferences simply by manipulating the core of populist rhetoric. Incorporating more features of populism may simply strengthen the effects.

Another shortcoming is our focus on one single country-dependent context. We only assessed how the preference for a Dutch right-wing populist party was affected by, technically, anti-establishment populism. Preferences for left-wing populist parties or populist parties outside of Europe may be affected in different ways. Still, we believe that populism's ideational core is similar across context. Populist rhetoric across countries and across the left-right spectrum is rooted in the binary opposition between the pure people and the culprit others. Therefore, we believe that our findings can be generalized to other countries and other types of populism. By conducting comparative studies of different types of populism in different countries, future research may more thoroughly explore differences in the effects of media populism across political systems and countries.

Despite these limitations, this study has advanced the understanding of how populist communication may affect which citizens' party preferences in important ways. Although many questions remain to be answered in future research, we are one step closer in understanding the role of the media in explaining populisms' electoral success.

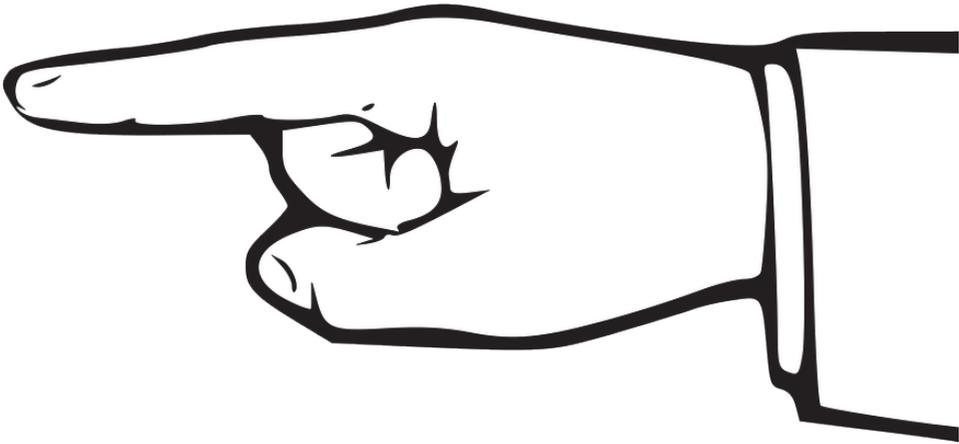
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CHAPTER 6



Selective Exposure to Populist Communication: How Attitudinal Congruence Drives the Effects of Populist Attributions of Blame²⁶

²⁶ Manuscript under review. An earlier version of this chapter has been presented at the Etmaal conference in Tilburg, 2017.

ABSTRACT

It has been argued that populist communication only appeals to a specific group of citizens, who are higher in political distrust and perceived relative deprivation. At the same time, however, extant research has exclusively studied the effects of populist communication in forced exposure media environments. Responding to this discrepancy, we conducted two experiments ($N = 562$ and $N = 558$) in which we manipulated the core idea of populist messages – attributing blame – in forced and selective exposure media environments. Our results demonstrate that citizens higher in relative deprivation are indeed most likely to select populist messages. Irrespective of selective exposure, citizens' populist attitudes are only positively affected if the populist message is congruent with their prior feelings of relative deprivation. These results provide important insights for the polarizing potential of media populism in a fragmented media environment.

Populism has become influential in the political landscape of many democracies around the world. In recent years, the populist ideas expressed by a variety of actors and movements all around the globe have affected politics and society in important ways, potentially leading to a polarized electorate (e.g., Pappas, 2014). The core idea of populism revolves around the moral and causal divide between the blameless ordinary people and the culprit others (e.g., Hameleers, Bos & de Vreese, 2016; Mudde, 2004). The persuasiveness of such populist blame attributions forms the backdrop of this chapter: What are the effects of populist messages, and which citizens are most likely to select and be persuaded by them?

It has been demonstrated that exposure to populist communication affects citizens' political perceptions (e.g., Bos, van der Brug & de Vreese, 2013). Extant literature further pointed to the media as an important supply-side factor facilitating the dissemination of populist ideas in society (e.g., Bos et al., 2013; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2010). Two explanations on the media's role in the spread of populism have been forwarded. First, driven by media logic, the media are said to offer favorable attention to the newsworthy ideas of populist politicians (e.g., Koopmans & Muis, 2009; Vossen, 2012). Second, journalists are assumed to actively frame issues along the lines of a populist distinction in society *themselves* (e.g., Rooduijn, de Lange & van der Brug, 2014; Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). This journalistic practice has been described as populism *by* the media or media populism (Bos & Brants, 2014; Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). This implies that the media, and not only politicians, engage in populist communication by actively stressing the moral and causal divide between the blameless people and the culprit others. Backed up by empirical evidence, we argue that such mediatized attributions of blame can be

regarded as a persuasive frame that activates populist schemata among receivers (Hameleers, Bos, & de Vreese, 2016; Krämer, 2014).

Such populist blame attributions may not convince all citizens. In line with selective exposure theory, people are only expected to self-select populist content if they have similar worldviews. Outside of experimental settings, people are thus only expected to expose themselves to populist content if their prior beliefs are congruent with it (Festinger, 1957). Therefore, traditional experiments that force participants into exposure to messages that they would normally not select themselves do not reflect the fragmented media environment of citizens (Bennett & Iyengar, 2008). But what prior beliefs drive people's selection of populist media content? What are the consequences of being forced into exposure to counter-attitudinal, populist messages?

To answer these questions, we conducted two online survey experiments ($N = 562$ and $N = 558$) in which selective exposure was linked to different types of media populism framing different societally relevant issues. This allowed us to investigate whether it is indeed the case that populist messages that attribute blame are most persuasive among the part of the electorate that self-selects these messages, driven by attitudinal congruence.

Populist Attributions of Blame in Media Populism

Populism revolves around the construction of a societal divide between the ordinary citizens as a blameless in-group and culpable others as out-groups (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011; Taggart, 2000). As the emphasis on this moral opposition between the “good” ordinary people and the “evil” other is central to all definitions of populism, we take this moral and causal relationship between “us” and “them” as point of departure in defining populist communication (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Rooduijn, 2014).

Based on this definition, attributing blame to different morally opposed out-groups – either constructed *vertically* as the culpable elites or *horizontally* as evil societal out-groups – forms the ideational core of populist messages (e.g., Hameleers et al., 2016; Vasilopoulou, Halikiopoulou & Exadaktylos, 2013). Rooted in the construction of a crisis situation threatening the ordinary people, populist ideas articulate the divide between “us” and “them” by scapegoating various out-groups for causing the crisis while absolving the ordinary people of blame (e.g., Taggart, 2000).

Using this conceptualization of populism, we align ourselves with the literature on responsibility attributions, pointing to the persuasiveness of responsibility cues (e.g., Hewstone, 1989; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). By simplifying politics into a matter of responsibility, citizens are provided with an influential heuristic cue that helps them to translate complex socio-political issues into black and white terms (Hewstone,

1989; Iyengar, 1989). Attributions of responsibility hereby fulfill an important role in citizens' political decision making, as they can heuristically use responsibility cues to punish the culprits (Marsh & Tilley, 2010).

To integrate responsibility attributions into populist discourse, we focus on attributions of responsibility for causing negative outcomes: *blame*. Such attributions of blame are found to guide citizens' political opinions in important ways (Iyengar, 1989; Hobolt & Tilley, 2014; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). Specifically, if certain politicians are attributed blame, citizens evaluate them in more negative terms and are less likely to vote for them (Marsh & Tilley, 2010). It has been demonstrated that the media play an important role in the effects of blame attributions, as the framing of societal issues in terms of "who has done it" influences citizens' own perceptions of blame (e.g., Iyengar, 1991).

In populist messages, blame can be attributed to different out-groups deemed responsible for the ordinary people's problems (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). First, blame can be attributed to the elites (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2014). The most salient elitist enemies that are blamed for causing the people's problems are the politicians in government, who are accused of not representing the ordinary people and their will (e.g., Hawkins, 2009; Mudde, 2004). Populist messages can also emphasize a societal divide between the native people as blameless in-group and horizontally opposed others as culpable out-groups (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). This right-wing populist divide entails the interpretation that refugees, immigrants, ethnic minorities, welfare-state profiteers, and all other out-groups living amongst the people, are responsible for causing the problems of the native ordinary citizens, such as an increasing crime rate or a declining economy. But how are such populist interpretations embedded in media coverage?

Articulating the populist core idea of in-group favoritism and out-group hostility lies at the heart of media populism (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). Media populism can be defined as journalists' active reconstruction of populist ideas, who act independently of the political actors associated with populism (Krämer, 2014). These populist ideas are most saliently reflected in the journalistic interpretation of a divide between the "silenced majority" of ordinary citizens and the corrupt elites or culpable out-groups (e.g., Caiani & della Porta, 2011). In line with the literature on interpretative journalism, media populism prescribes a central role to agency in journalistic news reporting. This implies that, beyond disseminating the hard facts of events, journalists who engage in media populism actively emphasize an interpretation of the background, causes, moral evaluations, and treatment recommendation when reporting on the news (e.g., Salgado & Strömbäck, 2011).

Building further on this, we explicitly mark the distinction between different types of media populism in which different out-groups are attributed blame for causing the

heartland's crisis: anti-elites media populism and monocultural media populism (see Chapter 3).

The Effects of Populist Communication on Populist Interpretations

Populist ideas are not only communicated by politicians or journalists, citizens can interpret issues along the lines of populist distinctions themselves as well (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Rooduijn, 2014). Such individual-level populist attitudes tap into citizens' sentiments of a causal and moral divide between the ordinary people and culprit others. Similar to our proposed conceptualization of media populism, we distinguish between two dimensions of populist attitudes that mark the 'people versus an out-group' divide: anti-establishment populist attitudes and exclusionist populist attitudes (see Chapter 2).

The process by which populist messages affect populist attitudes can be described as "media-based othering" (Krämer, 2014). As a result of exposure to messages that attribute blame to elites or societal out-groups, citizens may interpret issues in congruent 'us' versus 'them' frames as well. This effect can be interpreted in the light of the psychological mechanisms of social identity and stereotyping (e.g., Sniderman et al., 2000; Tajfel, 1978). These mechanisms postulate that positive images of the in-group and negative stereotypes of the out-group become chronically accessible among receivers (e.g., Dixon, 2008). Exposure to populist messages may thus stimulate and activate populist attitudes among the public, which is in line with the literature on trait activation (Richey, 2012). But which citizens are likely to select and be persuaded by populist attributions of blame?

Selective Exposure to Media Populism

In the era of increasingly more fluid and user-controllable media diets, exposure to specific media messages cannot be taken for granted (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Stroud, 2008). Indeed, audience members have become increasingly more active in selecting content that fits their own beliefs. This selection bias of the active audience was already acknowledged over 60 years ago, and has originally been associated with a decreasing trend in the strength of media effects (e.g., Hovland, 1954; Klapper, 1960). In recent years, with the rise of the internet and its accompanying technological affordances, people have become even more able to decide *when* they want to be exposed to *what* content.

Responding to this changing media landscape, a growing body of literature points to selective exposure as an important factor that needs to be taken into account in media effect studies (e.g., Arceneaux, Johnson & Murphy, 2012; Iyengar & Hahn, 2009; Lavine, Lodge & Freitas, 2005). Selective exposure can be defined as the guiding influence of people's prior beliefs on their selection of media content

(Stroud, 2008). Recent literature contends that, when offered the choice, people are most likely to expose themselves to pro-attitudinal as opposed to counter-attitudinal content. Because of this selection bias, media effects should occur among people that actually *choose* to expose themselves to specific media content.

The psychological underpinnings of selective exposure are rooted in theories of cognitive consistency (Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). In line with this, people are expected to select novel information based on their prior beliefs (Festinger, 1957). Doing so, people pay attention to information that confirms their prior attitudes and beliefs while circumventing information that is counter to their priors. In line with this, people's desire to adhere to their prior beliefs weighs more than getting it right, or making the most accurate decision based on an elaboration on all the factual information available to them (Taber & Lodge, 2006). These selection biases are psychologically explained by people's intrinsic motivation to reduce cognitive dissonance. Although not necessarily conscious, people engage in selective processing strategies that avoid or counter argue inconsistent information (Festinger, 1957).

The pervasiveness of selective exposure has been a topic of fierce academic debate as empirical evidence of its occurrence is mixed (e.g., Stroud, 2008). Two decades ago, the evidence for the existence of selective exposure was largely regarded as weak and unconvincing (e.g., Freedman & Sears, 1965; Zaller, 1992). More recently, and situated in the high-choice media environment, scholars have by and large dealt with the methodological limitations of earlier approaches and provided more support for the existence of selective exposure (e.g., Hart et al., 2009). But what are the potential ramifications of selective exposure for the study of the effects of populist expressions by the media?

Selective exposure can result in a polarization of beliefs (e.g., Stroud, 2008). The argumentation behind this view is as follows: as people with certain viewpoints expose themselves to congruent information, their beliefs will be reinforced driven by the search for cognitive consistency. In addition, people become immune for attitudinal change by incongruent information. Although people may already hold a certain belief, deliberate exposure to congruent views may thus bolster their priors (e.g., Iyengar & Hahn, 2009). Aligning ourselves with this view on the polarizing potential of selective exposure, we expect that people who self-select attitudinal congruent populist content are persuaded most by populist attribution of blame. But what prior beliefs are most likely to guide people's selection of media populism?

How Perceptual Biases Drive the Effects of Populist Communication

Although not uncontested, it has been argued that populism appeals to people that can be categorized as the 'losers of modernization' (e.g., Kriesi et al., 2006). Moving beyond such demographic characteristics to describe the populist audience, we argue

that populist messages appeal to people who *perceive* themselves to have lost out more than others in society. These vulnerable people should be appealed most to populist sentiments that voice *their* grievances (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016).

In line with this reasoning, the attitudinal filter of selective exposure to media populism can be described as relative deprivation: the perception that the out-group opposed to the people's in-group unfairly receives economic and cultural resources at the cost of the in-group of the ordinary citizens (Derks, 2006; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; 2016). Put differently, relative deprivation entails the perception of an unjust distribution of the society's wealth: the ordinary people 'like us' never get what they deserve from society, whereas 'others' always seem to profit (e.g., Hogg et al., 2010). Relative deprivation has been connected to populism in important ways (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; 2016). In line with this, empirical evidence demonstrated that people with populist attitudes experience strong feelings of relative deprivation (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Relative deprivation can thus be regarded as a salient prior belief driving people's selection of attitudinal-congruent populist media content. Against this backdrop, we hypothesize: The more people experience feelings of relative deprivation, the more likely they are to self-select into exposure to congruent pro-attitudinal populist media content (H1).

It has been argued that populist cues that highlight the opposition between 'us' and 'them' are highly persuasive because they simplify complex societal and political issues into matters of who has done it, while absolving the ordinary people of any blame (e.g., Hawkins, 2010; Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2014). The in-group can thus maintain a positive self-concept by attributing blame to others. This persuasive appeal has also been identified in studies on responsibility attributions (e.g., Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). We therefore hypothesize that exposure to pro-attitudinal populist content leads to stronger populist attitudes than exposure to pro-attitudinal non-populist content (H2).

We postulated that prior beliefs of relative deprivation drives the selection of populist content. In line with the premises of selective exposure theory, this implies that the media effects of populist blame attributions should occur most for those people who feel most deprived. For these people, the populist message is congruent with their priors. Motivated by a desire to avoid cognitive dissonance, their populist attitudes should be bolstered most (Festinger, 1957). Our final hypothesis therefore reads: People exposed to attitudinal congruent populist content are persuaded most by media populism (H3).

STUDY 1

Method

Design. To investigate *how* selective exposure and attitudinal congruence drive the effects of populist communication, we employed two experiments. The first experiment focuses on anti-elites media populism. The design concerned a 2 (Exposure to media populism: forced vs. selective exposure) \times 3 (Populist attitudinal stance: pro vs. counter. vs. balanced) + 3 (self-select non-populist attitudinal stance: pro vs. counter. vs. balanced) + control between-subjects factorial design. Because of the asymmetry in the number of cells, we allocated relatively more participants to the choice than the forced exposure conditions (Feldman et al., 2013). Within the forced exposure conditions, participants were randomly assigned to one of the experimental groups or the control condition. In the choice conditions, participants self-selected into one of the six experimental groups or the control group.

Sample. The survey experiments are carried out on a diverse sample of Dutch citizens recruited by an international polling agency. The samples are by and large representative of the voting population in terms of age, gender, and level of education. The first study was completed by 562 participants. Their mean age was 49.29 years old ($SD = 14.84$). 46.7% was male and 53.3% was female. 24.5% of the participants was lower educated, 31.2% was higher educated, and 44.3% had a moderate level of education.

Procedure. The experiment was conducted online. After the informed consent procedure, participants completed a pre-test including measures for demographics, moderating variables, and control variables. Participants were randomly allocated to either the forced or selective exposure media environment. In the selective exposure environment, participants were allowed to select one of the seven alternative news items. This environment was similar to actual news websites in the Netherlands. Next, they were exposed to the stimulus they selected themselves. In the forced exposure conditions, participants were randomly assigned to watch one of the three populist stimuli or the control stimulus. The selected or forced news item was visible for at least 30 seconds.

After reading the news item, participants were forwarded to the post-test survey. This survey contained measures for the dependent variables and manipulation checks. The average response time was 15.64 minutes ($SD = 20.28$), of which 54.26 seconds were devoted to reading the stimuli ($SD = 31.29$). Once participants completed the survey, they were directed to the panel company environment, where they received vouchers as incentive.

Independent variables and stimuli. In the selective exposure conditions, choice was manipulated by presenting participants with a cover story describing that

people may prefer some news items above others available to them. To simulate their everyday media environment, participants were told that they should select one preferred article out of a list of alternative online articles. By clicking on a link showing the article's headline, they were forwarded to their preferred article. In the forced exposure conditions, the cover story explained that people's everyday media environment exists of a plethora of alternative news stories, and that they were exposed to one of these many options. The topic of the stimuli was the decreasing health care budget. This topic was chosen as it represents current anti-elites populist framing (Houtman & Achterberg, 2010).

In line with extant research on selective exposure, the articles' attitudinal stance was manipulated into pro-attitudinal, counter-attitudinal, and balanced content (see Feldman et al., 2013). Pro-attitudinal messages connected the negative development to the elites, whereas counter-attitudinal messages connected it to the in-group. In the pro-attitudinal conditions, the elites were either simply connected to the negative development of the decreasing health care budget (non-populism) or explicitly blamed for taking away the ordinary people's resources (populism). In the counter-attitudinal conditions, the ordinary people *themselves* were connected to the development (non-populism) or explicitly blamed for causing the out-group's problems (populism) (see example stimuli in Appendix 6.A)

Populist blame attribution was manipulated by emphasizing the ideational core of populism in the article's framing of the news event: the causal and moral opposition between the 'good' blameless ordinary citizens and the culprit, 'evil' elites (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). To do so, the populist stimuli for example referred to 'our' own people in need and 'our' tax money as the blameless in-group. The elites in government were attributed blame for the ordinary people's problems by stressing how they are corrupt, self-interested, and unable and unwilling to care for the ordinary people.

The balanced stimuli articulated a mixed interpretation: both the Dutch people and the government were connected to the development (non-populism) or blamed for it (populism). All other factors were kept constant across conditions.

Manipulation checks. The manipulation of populist blame attribution was successful ($F(1, 226) = 71.45, p < 0.001$). This means that participants in the elitist blame attribution conditions were significantly more likely to believe that the article attributed responsibility to the elites ($M = 5.39, SD = 1.34$) than participants in the other conditions ($M = 3.74, SD = 1.60$). Participants in the ordinary people blame conditions were more likely to believe that the ordinary people were blamed ($M = 4.76, SD = 1.81$) than in the other conditions ($M = 3.23, SD = 1.84$). The manipulation of selective exposure also succeeded ($F(1, 553) = 206.21, p < 0.001$), which indicates that participants in the selective exposure conditions were

significantly more likely to perceive they had the choice to self-select an article ($M = 5.49$, $SD = 1.45$) than those in the forced exposure conditions ($M = 3.53$, $SD = 1.72$).

Measures

Unless explicitly described otherwise, all items were measured on 7-point scales (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*).

Populist attitudes. We used Confirmatory Factor Analyses to estimate a two-dimensional structure of populist attitudes, consisting of anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes. The two-dimensional model fitted the data well: $\chi^2(28) = 35.80$, $\chi^2/df = 1.28$, $p = 0.148$; RMSEA = 0.02, 90% CI [0.00, 0.04]; CFI = 0.99. All standardized regression weights pointed to a satisfactory convergent validity. The model's discriminant validity was also satisfactory, and the correlation between both factors was .58. Model fit declined substantially and significantly when the correlation between factors was constrained to be one. Participants' populist attitudes were measured on two different seven-point scales: a four-item anti-establishment populism scale (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82$, $M = 4.37$, $SD = 1.29$) and a six-item scale of the exclusionist dimension (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.90$, $SD = 1.69$) (see Appendix 6.B for items).

Relative deprivation. We expected that perceived relative deprivation would drive participants' selection of populist media content (also see Elchardus & Spruyt, 2012; 2016). We measured perceived relative deprivation on a five-item seven-point scale (see Appendix 6.B) (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.42$). In addition, we included measures of alternative explanations, such as political cynicism (Cronbach's $\alpha = .88$, $M = 4.82$, $SD = 1.42$), governmental trust (Cronbach's $\alpha = .92$, $M = 3.02$, $SD = 1.44$), and issue agreement (Cronbach's $\alpha = .64$, $M = 5.42$, $SD = 1.21$)

Controls. The design of the forced exposure conditions assured a random assignment to treatment and control conditions, assignment thus not resulted in differential attrition (Mutz & Pemantle, 2011). As random assignment was not the case for the selective exposure conditions, we performed a between-conditions randomization check on the variables gender, age, education, left-right self-placement, and news exposure. We did not find any significant differences on the distribution of these variables across the experimental conditions, both within the forced exposure and selective exposure conditions in both experiments.

Pilot study

The manipulations and stimuli were extensively pre-tested in two pilot studies: one pilot study among a convenience sample of university students ($N = 52$) and one among a diverse sample of Dutch citizens ($N = 137$). Participants rated the stimuli

as credible ($M = 4.62$, $SD = 1.65$) and similar to everyday media content ($M = 5.09$, $SD = 1.31$). All manipulations succeeded. Participants found it more likely that the article was published on an online news website ($M = 5.56$, $SD = 1.74$) than any of the other outlets. For this reason, we framed the articles as online news stories in both studies.

Results Study 1

Drivers of selective exposure to media populism. First, we assessed the likelihood of self-selection into one of the six different experimental conditions compared to the control group as reference (see Table 6.1). The results of the logistic regression analyses indicate that those participants with stronger perceptions of relative deprivation were more likely to self-select into pro-attitudinal populist media content than participants with weaker perceptions of relative deprivation. Next to this, participants with higher formal education were *less* likely to self-select into pro-attitudinal populist content. This effect was, however, only marginally significant ($p = .062$). In the light of these findings, hypothesis 1 can be supported: The more people experience feelings of relative deprivation, the more they are inclined to self-select populist media content.

Table 6.1 Binary logistic regression model predicting drivers of selective exposure to anti-elites populist and non-populist content

Conditions Variables	Pro-Populist		Pro-non-populist		Counter-populist		Counter-non-populist	
	B (SE)	95% CI OR	B (SE)	95% CI OR	B (SE)	95% CI OR	B (SE)	95% CI OR
(constant)	-4.14 (1.36)**		-2.35 (1.27)		-1.12 (1.69)		-1.15 (1.34)	
Age	0.01 (0.01)	[0.98, 1.03]	0.01 (0.10)	[0.99, 1.03]	-0.01 (0.01)	[0.97, 1.01]	-0.01 (0.01)	[0.97, 1.01]
Gender	0.18 (0.30)	[0.66, 2.15]	0.52 (0.28)	[0.98, 2.91]	-0.33 (0.41)	[0.32, 1.62]	-0.36 (0.32)	[0.37, 1.30]
Education (higher)	-0.73 (0.39)	[0.23, 1.03]	0.03 (0.30)	[0.57, 1.86]	0.07 (0.45)	[0.45, 2.60]	0.34 (0.33)	[0.73, 2.71]
Deprivation	0.61(0.15)***	[1.36, 2.49]	-0.09 (0.13)	[0.72, 1.17]	0.26 (0.20)	[0.88, 1.91]	-0.03 (0.15)	[0.73, 1.30]
Issue Agreement	0.05 (0.16)	[0.77, 1.42]	0.07 (0.14)	[0.82, 1.41]	-0.14 (0.20)	[0.59, 1.28]	-0.01 (0.16)	[0.73, 1.35]
Governmental trust	-0.06 (0.12)	[0.75, 1.19]	-0.03 (0.12)	[0.77, 1.23]	0.07 (0.16)	[0.78, 1.48]	0.10 (0.13)	[0.86, 1.42]
Political cynicism	-0.12 (0.15)	[0.67, 1.19]	-0.02 (0.13)	[0.76, 1.28]	-0.25 (0.19)	[0.53, 1.13]	0.02 (0.16)	[0.75, 1.39]
Nagelkerke R^2	0.17		0.03		0.04		0.03	
χ^2 (df)	37.90 (7)***		5.65 (7)		5.32 (7)		5.29 (7)	

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Note. $N = 346$. CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights. Standard errors reported between brackets. The reference category for the reported conditions is the control category

The effect of populist cues. As can be seen in Table 6.2 (Model I), self-selection into populist content has a positive and significant effect on anti-establishment populist attitudes. This positive effect of selective exposure to pro-attitudinal content was also found for non-populist cues, albeit weaker. Selective exposure to balanced populist content also had a positive effect on anti-establishment populist attitudes. Against this backdrop, H2 is partially supported: selective exposure to pro-attitudinal populist blame attribution positively affected participants' anti-establishment populist attitudes. Although this effect was stronger than exposure to non-populist pro-attitudinal content, exposure to non-populist pro-attitudinal messages also had a significant positive effect on populist attitudes.

The role of attitudinal congruence. We constructed a variable that indicates whether the stimulus chosen by or shown to the participant was congruent with his or her prior perceptions of relative deprivation. For someone lower in relative deprivation, for example, counter attitudinal messages were coded as congruent with this participant's priors.

As indicated by the significant and positive two-way interaction effect of pro-attitudinal populist content and congruence (Table 6.2), participants forced into congruent pro-attitudinal populist content had significantly higher anti-establishment populist attitudes than those forced into incongruent populist blame attributions. Specifically, these participants scored 5.48 ($SD = 1.20$) on the populist attitudes scale. For those participants for whom the stimulus was incongruent, populist attitudes were substantially and significantly lower ($M = 3.86$, $SD = 1.34$).

In the selective exposure conditions, we also see a significant positive two-way interaction effect of populist blame attribution to the elites and attitudinal congruence (Table 6.3). Participants that self-selected into attitudinal congruent populist attributions of blame to the elites had stronger anti-establishment populist attitudes ($M = 5.50$, $SD = 1.12$) than those who self-selected into exposure to incongruent pro-attitudinal populist content ($M = 4.35$, $SD = 0.89$) or congruent counter-attitudinal populist content ($M = 3.57$, $SD = 0.84$).

It support of hypothesis 3, participants exposed to attitudinal congruent elitist blame attributions are persuaded most by populist messages. It must be noted, however, that attitudinal congruence rather than freedom of self-selection drives the effects of populist blame attribution: the anti-establishment populist attitudes of participants who were forced into attitudinal congruent populist messages were also positively affected by the stimulus.

Table 6.2 Effects of populist blame attribution to elites on anti-establishment populist attitudes within forced exposure conditions

	Model I (n = 213)			Model II (n = 213)			Model III (n = 213)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
(Constant)	4.65	0.17		4.65	.17		4.65	.16	
Pro-populist	-.36	.25	-.12	-.38	.26	-.13	-.80	.25	-.26**
Counter-populist	-.10	.25	-.03	-.16	.29	-.05	.53	.30	.18
Balanced-populist	-.22	.26	-.07	-.22	.26	-.07	-.22	.24	-.07
Attitudinal congruence				.01	.27	.03	-1.12	.34	-.35**
Pro-populist \times congruence							2.76	.52	.53***
Adjusted R^2	.01			.01			.11		
F	.72			.60			6.31***		
F for change in R^2				.13			28.81***		

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) regression weights. The interaction effects between attitudinal congruence and the other experimental conditions were non-significant and omitted from this model for reasons of parsimony.

Table 6.3 Effects of populist blame attribution to elites on anti-establishment populist attitudes within selective exposure conditions

	Model I (n = 346)			Model II (n = 346)			Model III (n = 346)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
(Constant)	3.59	.16		3.56	.16		3.59	.15	
Pro-populist	1.42	.22	.43***	1.35	.24	.41***	.76	.27	.23**
Counter-populist	.50	.28	.11	.42	.31	.09	.78	.31	.16*
Balanced-populist	1.09	.27	.25***	1.09	.27	.25***	1.09	.26	.25***
Pro non-populist	.63	.21	.20**	.60	.22	.19**	.74	.22	.23**
Counter non-populist	.64	.23	.18**	.56	.26	.15*	.92	.27	.25**
Balanced non-populist	.69	.24	.18**	.69	.24	.18**	.69	.24	.18**
Attitudinal congruence				.13	.18	.05	-.42	.22	-.15
Pro-populist \times congruence							1.57	.37	.38***
Adjusted R^2	.11			.11			.15		
F	7.82***			6.76***			8.53***		
F for change in R^2				.49			18.43***		

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) regression weights. The interaction effects between attitudinal congruence and the other experimental conditions were non-significant and omitted from this model for reasons of parsimony.

STUDY 2

Our first study revealed that the effects of exposure to populist media content are driven by attitudinal congruence: only those participants exposed to messages congruent with their priors are persuaded by populist attributions of blame. By explicitly taking attitudinal congruence into account in the design of the second experiment, we are able to more precisely investigate how attitudinal biases drive the effects of populist communication.

Method

Design. The design of the second experiment concerns a 4 (attitudinal congruence: pro-congruent vs. pro-incongruent vs. counter-congruent vs. counter-incongruent) \times 2 (choice: populist vs. non-populist framing) + 3 (Forced exposure: pro-populism vs. counter-populism vs. control) between-subjects factorial design. Participants were divided into congruent versus incongruent issue publics based on their pre-exposure scores on a measure of perceived relative deprivation connected to the out-group threat depicted in the stimuli. Moderates were randomly assigned to congruent versus incongruent stimuli. In line with Arceneaux et al. (2012), we controlled for them in the analyses.

Sample. The experiment was completed by 558 participants with a mean age of 49.15 years ($SD = 16.09$). 47.5% was male and 52.5% was female. 23.7% of the participants was lower educated, 32.8% was higher educated, and 43.5% had a moderate level of education.

Procedure. The procedure regarding the pre-test was similar to study 1. After the pre-test, participants completed the following item on a 7-point scale *before* they were randomly allocated to attitudinal incongruent versus congruent conditions: “People who are not originally from the Netherlands, are profiting more from all kinds of benefits in society than Dutch citizens” ($M = 4.58$, $SD = 1.90$). The sample was divided into pro-attitudinal publics (scores ranging from 5 through 7); counter-attitudinal publics (scores ranging from 1 through 3) and moderates (scoring the midpoint on the scale). All these groups were randomly assigned to the pro- and counter-attitudinal forced and choice conditions.

Independent variables and stimuli. The second experiment focused on increasing crime rates in the light of immigration, a salient monocultural, right-wing populist issue (Houtman & Achterberg, 2010). Selective exposure was manipulated by presenting participants with a cover story describing that people may prefer some news items above others available to them. Participants were told that they should select one preferred article out of two alternative online articles. One article was framed in a populist way, whereas the other article was framed in a non-populist way

(see examples in Appendix 6.A). In the forced exposure conditions, participants were randomly assigned to either populist or non-populist stimuli.

Informed by the results of study 1, attitudinal stance was manipulated into a pro-attitudinal versus a counter-attitudinal framing of the issue – either highlighting that migrants or Dutch people were associated with the increasing crime rate discussed in the article. Based on their scores on the relative deprivation measure, we assigned participants to congruent and incongruent pro- and counter- attitudinal conditions at a 1:1 rate.

In the pro-populist blame attribution condition, migrants were accused of profiting from the native people's collective wealth, and for not respecting the norms and values of the Dutch people. Rather, they were accused of stealing the resources that belonged to the hardworking ordinary people. In the counter-populist blame attribution condition, culpable Dutch people were accused of taking resources away from the hardworking ordinary people: because they are profiting from the hardworking people's labor, the ordinary people are deprived. In the non-populist conditions, Dutch people and migrants were connected to the increasing crime rate, but not blamed for stealing and taking away resources from the native ordinary people. All other factors were kept constant across conditions.

Manipulation checks. The manipulation of populist blame attribution to migrants was successful ($F(1, 553) = 157.25, p < 0.001$). Participants in the blame attribution conditions were significantly more likely to believe that the article attributed responsibility to migrants ($M = 5.68, SD = 1.23$) than participants in the other conditions ($M = 3.71, SD = 1.77$). The manipulation of selective exposure also succeeded ($F(1, 553) = 87.44, p < 0.001$). Participants in the selective exposure conditions were significantly more likely to perceive they were offered the choice to self-select an article ($M = 4.81, SD = 1.58$) than participants in the forced exposure conditions ($M = 3.50, SD = 1.72$).

Measures. We used the same measures as reported in study 1. Again, the CFA-model for populist attitudes demonstrated good model fit: $\chi^2(27) = 43.87, \chi^2/df = 1.63, p = 0.021$; RMSEA = 0.03, 90% CI [0.01, 0.05]; CFI = 0.99. The correlation between factors was .69 and model fit declined substantially and significantly when the correlation between factors was constrained to be one. Participants' populist attitudes were measured on two different seven-point scales: anti-establishment (Cronbach's $\alpha = .82, M = 4.23, SD = 1.34$) and exclusionism (Cronbach's $\alpha = .94, M = 4.14, SD = 1.71$).

Results Study 2

Selective exposure to attitudinal congruent populist versus non populist cues.

As illustrated in Table 6.4, participants who self-selected into pro-attitudinal populist blame attributions scored higher on exclusionist populist attitudes ($M = 5.64$, $SD = 1.02$) than participants who self-selected congruent pro-attitudinal *non*-populist content ($M = 4.85$, $SD = 1.13$). In support of hypothesis 2, these results indicate that, *ceteris paribus*, people exposed to populist cues have higher populist attitudes than people exposed to non-populist cues.

Attitudinal congruence and monocultural media populism. In Table 6.5, we see a significant and positive two-way interaction effect of the pro-populist stimuli and attitudinal congruence. This indicates that, in the forced exposure conditions, exclusionist populist attitudes are significantly higher among participants exposed to attitudinal congruent than those exposed to attitudinal incongruent populist blame attribution. The results further indicate a significant and *negative* two-way interaction effect of exposure to counter-attitudinal populist stimuli and attitudinal congruence. Participants at lower levels of relative deprivation exposed to a populist message that blames the native people for the increasing crime rate have *lower* exclusionist populist attitudes compared to participants who are exposed to incongruent pro-populism (also see Table 6.4 for mean score comparisons).

As can be seen in Table 6.6, the two-way interaction effect of populist blame attribution to migrants and attitudinal congruence is also positive and significant in the selective exposure conditions. This means that when participants higher in relative deprivation are exposed to populist attributions of blame to migrants, their exclusionist populist attitudes are stronger than in the other conditions.

In the selective exposure conditions, the analyses further point to a significant, *negative* two-way interaction effect of the selection of counter-populist content and attitudinal congruence (see Table 6.6). This indicates that people who self-select into counter populist content that fits their prior attitudes of lower relative deprivation have *weaker* populist attitudes compared to participants that self-select into incongruent counter populism (see Table 6.4 for mean score differences). In support of H3, participants exposed to attitudinal congruent monocultural media populism have stronger exclusionist populist attitudes than participants exposed to incongruent populist communication (see Figure 6.1).

Table 6.4. The effects of populist and non-populist stimuli on anti-establishment populist attitudes at different levels of attitudinal congruence (monocultural media populism)

	Lower in relative deprivation			Higher in relative deprivation			F	Partial η^2
	Congruent			Incongruent				
	Counter-populism	Counter-non-populism	Pro non-populism	Pro-populism	Pro non-populism	Counter-populism		
Choice	2.74 _{a,x} (1.48)	2.35 _a (1.14)	2.35 _{a,x} (1.19)	5.64 _{b,x} (1.02)	4.85 _c (1.13)	5.10 _c (1.13)	24.04***	.38
Forced exposure	2.12 _{a,y} (1.13)	-	2.82 _{b,y} (1.29)	5.09 _{c,y} (1.50)	-	5.04 _{c,x} (1.37)	25.78***	.28
Control	2.27 _a (0.97)	-	-	5.09 _b (1.47)	-	-	-	-

*** = $p < .001$

Note. $N = 555$. Standard deviations are reported in parentheses below the means. Means with differing first subscripts within rows and differing second subscripts within columns differ significantly at the $p < .05$ level based on post-hoc independent samples t-test. From top to the bottom, the F -values represent: (1) the main effect of the experimental conditions in the selective exposure conditions; (2) the main effect of the experimental conditions within forced exposure.

Table 6.5 Effects of populist blame attribution to migrants on exclusionist populist attitudes within forced exposure conditions

	Model I (n = 277)			Model II (n = 277)			Model III (n = 277)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
(Constant)	4.13	.12		4.20	.15		4.08	.15	
Pro-populist	.34	.23	.08	.38	.24	.09	-1.26	.36	-.28**
Counter-populist	.14	.22	.03	.21	.29	.05	1.25	.26	.30***
Moderates				-.80	.56	-.08	-1.73	.51	-.16**
Attitudinal congruence				-.14	.19	-.04	.10	.22	.03
Pro-populist \times congruence							2.18	.45	.43***
Counter-populist \times congruence							-3.31	.44	-.45***
Adjusted R^2	.01			.01			.21		
F	1.13			1.17			18.14***		
F for change in R^2				1.20			51.48***		

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) regression weights. The interaction effects between attitudinal congruence and the other experimental conditions were non-significant and omitted from this model for reasons of parsimony.

Table 6.6 Effects of populist blame attribution to migrants on exclusionist populist attitudes within selective exposure conditions

	Model I (n = 281)			Model II (n = 281)			Model III (n = 281)		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
(Constant)	4.38	.13		4.52	.17		4.58	.16	
Pro-populist	.39	.30	.07	.38	.23	.07	-2.24	.51	-.39***
Counter-populist	-.22	.33	-.04	-.29	.33	-.05	.69	.41	.11
Pro-non-populist	-.75	.26	-.15**	-.81	.25	-.16**	-.81	.25	-.16**
Counter-non-populist	-.20	.24	-.04	-.29	.25	-.06	-.31	.23	-.07
Moderates				-.91	.54	-.09	-.97	.51	-.09
Attitudinal congruence				-.19	.19	-.05	-.32	.19	-.09
Pro-populist \times congruence							3.61	.56	.55***
Counter-populist \times congruence							-2.22	.59	-.24***
Adjusted R^2	.02			.02			.14		
F	3.11			2.63*			9.26***		
F for change in R^2				1.65			28.06***		

** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$

Note. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized (B) and standardized (β) regression weights. The interaction effects between attitudinal congruence and the other experimental conditions were non-significant and omitted from this model for reasons of parsimony.

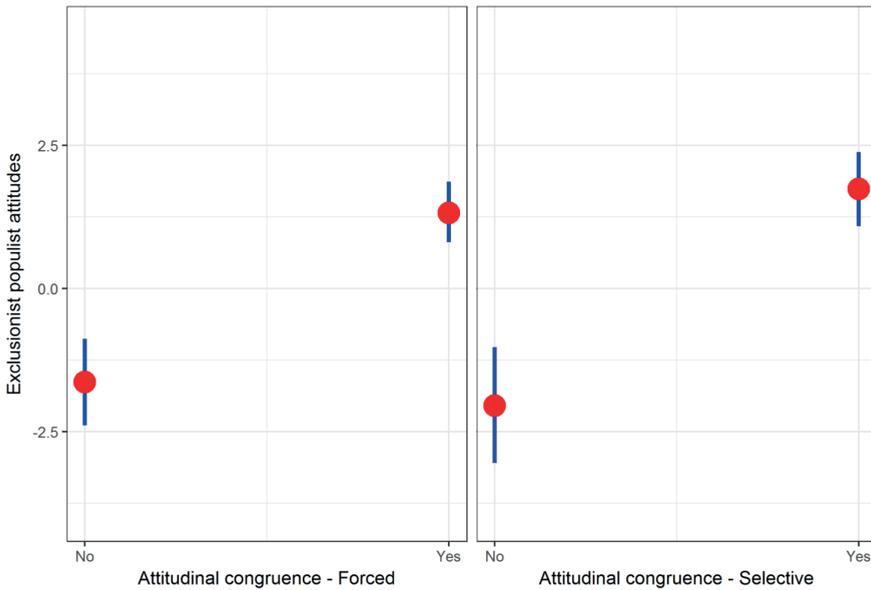


Figure 6.1 Marginal effect plots for interaction attitudinal congruence and populist blame attribution in forced and selective exposure conditions. Dots represent regression weights and lines represent 95% confidence intervals. $N = 558$.

DISCUSSION

In the midst of the rise of persuasive populist ideas throughout the globe, a growing body of literature has pointed to the key role of the media in disseminating the populist message to the people (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008; Mudde, 2004). This literature has also assumed that those people who selectively expose themselves to populist messages form a specific type of audience. Specifically, those attracted to populist communication are described as a discontented (e.g., Mazzoleni et al., 2003; Rooduijn et al., 2016) and relatively deprived group of citizens (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016). Yet, at the same time, the scarce body of literature that has studied the effects of populist communication has done so in a forced exposure environment (e.g., Bos et al., 2013). Therefore, an important discrepancy in populism research is that despite the assumptions about the peculiarities of the audience susceptible to persuasion by populist communication, there are no studies that actually simulate a selective exposure media environment. Advancing this line of research, this chapter presents two experiments that do take selective exposure and attitudinal congruence into account in dissecting the effects of populist communication.

In line with extant literature indicating that citizens with higher perceptions of relative deprivation are more likely to hold populist perceptions (Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016), we found that relative deprivation is the main driver of selective exposure to pro-attitudinal populist blame attributions. In the midst of an increasingly more fragmented media environment (e.g., Stroud, 2008), the findings presented in this chapter demonstrate that people who self-select into populist communication differ substantially from those who circumvent such content. In line with recent literature, it are indeed the citizens who feel relatively deprived that expose themselves to populist messages (Elchardus & Spruyt 2016).

It was however not selective exposure but attitudinal congruence that conditioned the effects of exposure to media populism on populist attitudes. In both forced and selective exposure media environments, populist blame attributions only affected the populist attitudes of people for whom the message was congruent with their priors. Based on the evidence from the experiments presented in this chapter, the role of giving people the freedom to self-select into media exposure is outweighed by exposure to a message that is in line with their prior attitudes. Hence, our results raise the question whether future research should take the effort to methodologically simulate a selective exposure environment if dividing the sample into congruent and incongruent issue publics has the same effect on the outcomes.

This methodological note does not mean that selective exposure does not play a role in conditioning the effects of media populism on the populist perceptions of the electorate. Backed up by the empirical evidence from our first experiment, exposure to attitudinal congruent populist media content is most likely to occur among citizens higher in relative deprivation. For these citizens, media populism confirms their priors of being deprived by some culprit other opposed to the ordinary people. This finding is in line with the theory on motivated reasoning (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lord, Ross & Leeper, 1979). Outside of the experimental setting, then, it is unlikely that people for whom the populist message is counter to their priors actually expose themselves media populism.

This key finding has important implications for the polarizing effect of exposure to attitudinal congruent populist content. People who avoid populist content because it counters their priors are not affected by populist communication. When these people are forced into exposure to populist content, however, the message can even have a backlash. In that case, their negative priors towards populist interpretations are activated by the counter-attitudinal populist message. Those citizens that are higher in relative deprivation already have higher populist attitudes. Yet, exposure to congruent populist content activates their priors, resulting in a bolstering of their existing populist attitudes. We interpret this as evidence for the polarizing potential of media populism in a fragmented media environment (Stroud, 2008). Indeed,

exposure to messages that articulate the causal and moral divide between ‘us’ and ‘them’ widens the societal gap in society pitting those with populist interpretations against those who feel distant from such worldviews.

This chapter provides valuable contributions to the literature on media populism or populism *by* the media (e.g., Bos & Brants, 2014; Krämer, 2014). In line with Krämer’s (2014) theoretical expectation, the results of our experiments indicate that populist interpretations by the media activate populist schemata among receivers. Building further on the theses on the effects of media populism, it should be noted that such activations of congruent populist schemata only occur among people with existing populist worldviews. People with different priors may resist or counter-argue persuasion by media populism. This key role of attitudinal congruence in conditioning the effects of media populism can be interpreted in the light of the selective attribution mechanism also identified in studies on responsibility attribution (e.g., Hobolt & Tilley, 2011).

Our studies bear some limitations that may be dealt with in future research. First and foremost, we could not randomly assign participants to the selective exposure conditions, which limits the causal conclusions that can be drawn from the choice conditions. Against this backdrop, we have to acknowledge that choice experiments result in more realistic treatment effects at the cost of introducing a self-selection bias because randomization is not achieved. Improving external validity thus comes at the cost of internal validity (e.g., Gaines & Kuklinski, 2011). However, as we accounted for the most important factor that drives selective exposure to media populism – relative deprivation – in addition to a post-hoc randomization check, we do believe that we have at least partially dealt with this concern. Moreover, the findings in the forced and selective exposure conditions point to similar patterns regarding the conditioning effect of attitudinal congruence, which further strengthens our belief that no other biases are driving the effects in the selective exposure conditions.

An important consideration in the experimental design of selective exposure studies concerns the number of options offered to participants (see Feldman et al., 2013 for a comprehensive overview). Our first experiment aimed to provide an extensive selective exposure media environment, offering seven options including balanced and populist and non-populist content in pro- and counter-attitudinal framings. In the second experiment, choice was limited to only two options. A potential limitation of this design is that whereas traditional selective exposure experiments mostly offer participants a choice between pro- counter- and balanced attitudinal content, our second experiment only offers choice between populist and non-populist content already framed in congruent or incongruent ways. To more closely simulate a real-world high-choice media environment, future research may include different options in the selective exposure environment relevant to the effects of media populism, such

as offering a choice between tabloid and broadsheet media outlets (e.g., Mazzoleni, 2008).

Another limitation concerns the potential of ceiling effects found after exposure to populist messages among issue publics. Independent of the stimuli, people with similar perceptions of relative deprivation have stronger populist attitudes (in line with the findings presented in Chapter 3). On the measured scales, there was not much room for the stimuli to further boost their populist attitudes.

Despite these limitations, the studies presented in this chapter are to first to demonstrate how the effects of media populism are driven by attitudinal congruence. In showing that populist communication is only selected by and persuasive for those higher in relative deprivation, this chapter provides an important contribution to the literature that has argued that those citizens appealed to populist messages form a specific type of audience that can be distinguished from those who circumvent populist coverage. Hence, in the midst of the revival of the populist zeitgeist, this chapter demonstrates which part of the electorate is most likely to expose itself to populist messages to further bolster their priors, with eventually paramount societal and democratic implications in terms of a polarization between the populist and non-populist electorate.

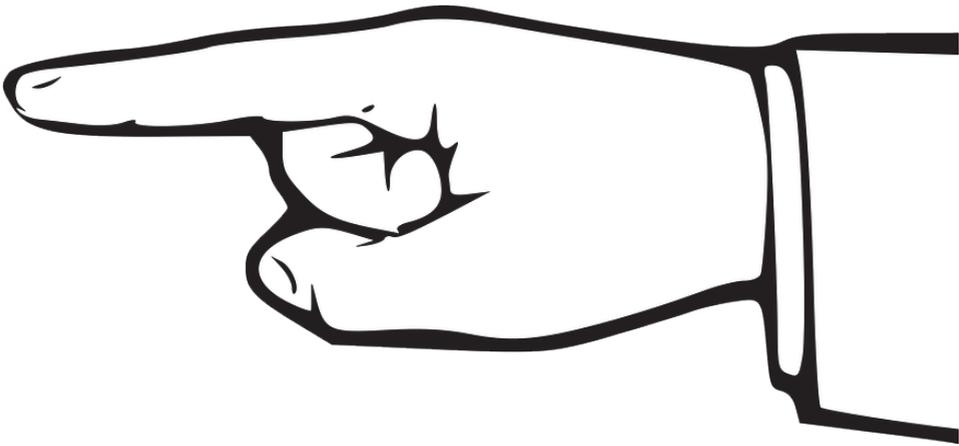
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Conclusion

A growing body of literature argues that populism is on the rise (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Mudde, 2004). In the spirit of this ‘populist zeitgeist’ rationale, recent political and societal developments are increasingly interpreted as populist uprisings. To provide two examples, albeit not directly comparable, the election of Trump in the U.S. and the Brexit vote in the U.K. have both been interpreted as ‘victories for the populists’ (e.g., Kim, 2016). These events consequentially sparked a heated debate in public and media discourse.

In the midst of the success of these allegedly populist movements, this dissertation aimed to dissect the core components of the populist message to better understand *why* and *how* populist ideas are so persuasive, and in particular, how the media may have contributed to the spread of populist ideas among society. To do so, this dissertation has argued that the ideational core of populist messages – attributing blame for the ordinary people’s problems to the “corrupt” elites or “evil” societal out-groups – can be used by various actors inside and outside of the political realm, for example by the media and citizens.

The media are said to play a pivotal role in the pervasiveness and persuasiveness of populist ideas (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). At the same time, a growing body of literature has argued that citizens can also hold populist perceptions *themselves* (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Rooduijn 2014a). As an important next step in populism research, this dissertation argues that the populist expressions of the media and citizens do not exist in vacuums, as they are likely to be intertwined and causally related. To more precisely investigate *how* populist ideas communicated by the media affect the populist interpretations of citizens, this dissertation aimed to integrate the supply-side and demand-side of populist communication by raising the following three-fold research question: (1) How are populist blame attributions expressed in the media and (2) interpreted by citizens, and (3) how can populist blame attributions by the media affect citizens’ political perceptions?

Key findings

The findings of this dissertation can be summarized in four main conclusions. First, focusing on the *supply-side* of the media, this dissertation revealed that explicit populist blame attributions are relatively rare in media coverage. When populist blame attributions are used to cover news events, they are mostly present in conjunction with an interpretative journalistic style (Chapter 1). These populist blame attributions are more likely to be used by interpreting journalists of tabloid newspapers than journalists of broadsheet newspapers (Mazzoleni, 2008).

Second, on the *demand-side* of public opinion, this dissertation has extended previous research that conceptualized and measured populist attitudes as a one-dimensional construct (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014). Doing so, I found that

citizens' populist attitudes are essentially structured by two core dimensions: anti-establishment and exclusionism (Chapter 2). These dimensions are strongly rooted in feelings of relative deprivation. In other words, citizens who perceive that they are worse off than other groups in society, are appealed most to populist ideas on *both* dimensions (Chapter 2 and 3).

Third, this dissertation has provided comprehensive insights into the effects of populist messages. The results presented in Chapter 4 through 6 demonstrate that when blame is attributed to the elites in government or the European Union, citizens are more likely to perceive these elites as culpable. In addition, people exposed to populist blame attributions have stronger populist attitudes and are more likely to vote for populist parties than people who are not exposed to such messages. The persuasiveness of populist blame attributions depends on the emotional framing of the message. In line with the appraisal theory of emotions, fear resulted in a stronger reliance on new information than anger (e.g., Brader, 2005; Kim & Cameron, 2011). This means that citizens are most likely to accept populist blame frames when fear is used as an emotional style (see Chapter 4).

Finally, it can be concluded that populist communication is not persuasive for all citizens. In Chapter 4, I found that citizens who identified with the actors attributed blame did not accept populist messages. In addition, I found that populist messages were only selected by a specific audience of relatively deprived citizens (Chapter 6). Perceptions of being worse off than others in society also play a key role in the *persuasiveness* of populist messages. In line with motivated reasoning, the populist attitudes of relatively deprived citizens are affected most by populist messages (Lodge & Taber, 2013; Lord, Ross & Leeper, 1979). Populist communication thus only positively affects the populist attitudes of citizens for whom the message is congruent with their priors.

Contributions to Main Discussions on the Supply-side and Demand-side

To explain the rise of populism throughout the globe, extant literature has focused on demand-side factors (e.g., Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016) or supply-side factors (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Stanley, 2008; Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011). This dissertation provides important contributions to various debates on *both* the supply-side *and* demand-side of populist communication. At the intersection of these approaches, the findings provide important insights into the effects of and underlying mechanisms by which populist communication affects receivers' political attitudes.

Populist communication on the supply-side. This dissertation contributes to our understanding of the media's role in populist discourse on two different levels: (1) the *content* of populist blame attributions and (2) the *effects* of populist messages.

Populist media content. The concept of media populism has mainly been approached

from a theoretical perspective (Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). To date, the scarce empirical research on populism *by* the media did not find convincing evidence for a populist bias in journalistic media (Akkerman, 2011; Bos & Brants, 2004, Rooduijn et al., 2014). Extending this research, I found that the presence of media populism is highly contingent upon contextual factors. Populism *by* the media can thus be regarded as a journalistic niche, rather than a pervasive frame that has permeated traditional media coverage. Against this backdrop, it is no wonder that Akkerman (2011) was unable to point to a clear populist bias in the popular press in Britain and the Netherlands. Only when an interpretative journalistic style is used, the media themselves, in some cases, turn populist. In contrast to the strong theoretical claims on the omnipresence of populism in media discourse, the presence of media populism thus relies heavily on the reporting styles of journalists.

The central role played by journalistic agency provides relevant insights for the broader literature on interpretative journalism (e.g., Esser & Umbricht, 2014; Salgado & Strömbäck, 2011). Journalists who interpret societal issues beyond objective hard facts are most likely to frame issues in populist terms. This can be interpreted as evidence for a parallelism between interpretative journalism and media populism, which corroborates literature that links interpretative journalism to people centrality, conflict, and negativity in media reporting (Djerf-Pierre & Weibull, 2008). Interpretative journalism is thus conceptually and empirically connected to media populism. But in which outlets can we find these populist expressions?

Populist blame attributions are more likely to be used by journalists of tabloid newspapers than journalists of broadsheet newspapers. This supports the theoretical notion that media populism is primarily a feature of tabloid outlets (e.g., Krämer, 2014; Mazzoleni, 2008). The link between tabloid media and populism can be interpreted in the light of a resonance between populist ideas and media logic (Koopmans & Muis, 2009). In line with this reasoning, broadsheet newspapers are assumed to maintain a stronger relationship with the establishment whereas tabloid newspapers depend more heavily on the mass audience (e.g., Art, 2006; Klein, 1998; Mazzoleni et al., 2003). Therefore, tabloid media are assumed to devote more attention to the worldviews of ordinary citizens and populist politicians than broadsheet newspapers.

It can be concluded that tabloid media play a dual role in disseminating populist ideas. First, they may provide a central stage for populist actors to vent their rhetoric, for example because populist communication resonates with media logic (e.g., Esser et al., 2017; Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; Vossen, 2010). Second, in some cases, journalists interpret societal issues and news events in populist ways independently of populist actors outside of the media discourse, engaging in populism *by* the media (Bos & Brants, 2014).

Extending previous literature on populist communication, this dissertation further

proposes a three-fold typology of media populism. First, *people centrality media populism* can be distinguished. This conceptualization is in line with the most minimal definitions of populism that highlight the centrality of the ordinary people's will and representation in political decision-making (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). The two other types incorporate populism's relational component stressing the divide between "us" and "them". Responding to the prevalent definitions of populism as a thin-cored ideology, *anti-elites media populism* revolves around the media's emphasis on a distinction between the good people and the corrupt elites (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2014a). Finally, attaching an exclusionist dimension to populism's relational core, *monocultural media populism* entails the journalistic construction of a divide between the "good" native people and "evil" societal out-groups (e.g., Jagers & Walgrave, 2007). But what are the effects of messages that incorporate such populist ideas when framing societal issues?

The media effects of populist messages. I found that the populist attitudes of citizens are affected by populist messages, which confirms the theoretical expectations postulated by Krämer (2014). This key finding links up to extant research that argues that populist communication is highly persuasive (e.g., Hawkins, 2010; Mudde, 2004; Rooduijn, 2014b). The mechanism by which populist blame attributions activate populist schemata among receivers can be interpreted within the framework of social identity theory (e.g., Sniderman et al., 2000; Tajfel, 1978). Social identity theory postulates that people ascribe positive qualities to their in-group and negative qualities to out-groups. These biases help people to maintain a positive image of the self in relation to others (Tajfel & Turner, 1979). This process of social differentiation may foster "media-based othering" (Krämer, 2014). Media based othering implies that populist messages activate perceptions of a divide between the "blameless us" and the "culpable them" among receivers. In other words, blame attributions activate positive stereotypes of the ordinary people and negative stereotypes of out-groups, for example migrants who are blamed for taking away the resources of the native people (e.g., Dixon, 2008). Exposure to populist attributions of blame thus stimulates and activates populist perceptions among citizens. This key finding corroborates the literature on trait activation (Richey, 2012).

These activated populist schemata may eventually align citizens with the rhetoric of populist political parties. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that populist attitudes are strongly related to populist voting (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Rooduijn, 2014a). Extending this research, this dissertation has demonstrated that populist messages positively affect citizens' populist party preferences. This process operates *via* the activation of populist blame perceptions. In line with issue voting literature, citizens who interpret societal issues from a populist mindset should thus be most inclined to vote for a political party (Zaller, 1992). This conclusion links up to the findings of Van

der Brug et al. (2000), indicating that people who vote for populist parties are, just like mainstream voters, motivated by instrumental factors. In other words, people may vote for populist political parties *because* they agree with the blame attribution rationale emphasizing that some groups in society are responsible for depriving the in-group of what they deserve.

However, citizens are not always consistently guided by blame attribution cues, as they may shift blame to other actors than proposed by the populist message. This attribution bias can be explained in the light of the literature on responsibility attribution, which has postulated that citizens find it difficult to understand who is responsible for specific societal issues. Attributing blame should be especially challenging in the intelligible context of EU-national multilevel of governance (Karp et al., 2003; Rudolph, 2003; Tilley & Hobolt, 2011). In support of this premise, I found that people do not always distinguish between different levels of responsibility when asked for their political perceptions.

These inconsistencies in people's blame perceptions can be explained in the light of schema theory, which predicts that if a specific component of a cognitive cluster is made salient (i.e., anti-elites populism), the complete network of related associations can be primed (e.g., Brewer & Nakamura, 1984). This means that populist messages attributing blame to the elites can activate populist attitudes on *both* dimensions. The lack of knowledge on governmental accountability is thus not always overcome by offering people cues on causal responsibility (Karp et al., 2003).

With regards to the effects of populist messages described here, it should (again) be noted that the active use of populist framing in traditional media outlets is a relatively rare event. This does, however, not mean that citizens are not exposed to populist messages in their daily lives. The core idea of populist blame attribution can be emphasized by a wide variety of actors in a plethora of messages in both offline and online outlets. Populist ideas can for example be present in political advertising (Matthes & Schmuck, 2015), political parties' broadcasts (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007) or online media outlets (Bartlett et al., 2011). Populist communication may thus have many faces beyond journalistic media.

The demand-side of populism. Populist ideas may not be omnipresent in traditional media coverage, but how about the presence of populist interpretations in public opinion? The focus on citizens' populist ideas links up to the field's relatively recent focus to measure populist ideas as individual-level attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012). In the introduction of this dissertation, I have argued that traditional approaches to measuring populist attitudes do not take the people's opposition to societal out-groups into account. At the same time, this exclusionist component is part of the *same* blame attribution mechanism central to populism's ideational core.

Taking the people's perceived opposition to societal out-groups into account, this dissertation demonstrated that the extended two-dimensional conceptualization of anti-establishment and exclusionist populist attitudes was better able to explain the appeal of populist media among the electorate. In addition, this conceptualization provided more nuanced insights into the media effects of populist communication. Using this fine-grained distinction, this dissertation demonstrates that voters for populist parties are not simply driven by general discontent. Rather, these citizens cast their vote on *specific* populist parties motivated by the specific anti-establishment or exclusionist issue positions they communicate (e.g., Van der Brug et al., 2000; Zaller, 1992). People who vote for populist political parties are, just like voters for established parties, guided by agreement with their parties' societal interpretations of salient issues. This conclusion further underlines the relevance of regarding populist ideas as normalcy, responding to voters' instrumental desires (e.g., Van der Brug et al., 2000; Van der Brug & Mughan, 2007).

Integrating supply and demand: For whom is populism persuasive? This dissertation has revealed that citizens are guided by messages that attribute blame to the "corrupt" elites or "evil" societal out-groups. However, these effects were not demonstrated for all people. Some citizens are indeed more susceptible to persuasion by populist ideas than others. But how can we describe the audience that is most susceptible to persuasion by populist messages?

First of all, attachment to identity plays a crucial role in accepting populist messages. Only people who did not feel attached to the identity on the national level accepted blame attributions to the national government. Likewise, people who did not feel close to European identity accepted blame attributions to the European Union. Identity attachment thus functions as a perceptual screen (also see Hobolt & Tilley, 2014). Only when people do not feel close to the level that is attributed blame, they align their attitudes in messages-congruent ways. In line with the premises of social identity theory, people thus maintain a positive self-concept by absolving their in-group of responsibility (e.g., Tajfel, 1978).

In light of recent calls in the literature that have emphasized that selective exposure needs to be taken into account when studying media effects (e.g., Bennett & Iyengar, 2008; Stroud, 2008), this dissertation revealed that populist messages only persuade that part of the electorate that is already aligned with populist views. In other words, forced exposure to counter-attitudinal media populism may activate pre-existing negative attitudes towards populist ideas. Populist ideas are positively reinforced among those exposed to attitudinal congruent populist content.

Extending these findings to democratic implications, selective exposure to media populism may thus foster political polarization among society (e.g., Stroud, 2008; Taber & Lodge, 2006). More specifically, citizens who select congruent views become

increasingly more populist whereas those with opposing views are primed in their counter-attitudinal beliefs. These findings link up to the literature on the polarizing potential of populist rhetoric, arguing that public opinion is divided by those citizens who strongly support populist ideas and others who strongly oppose such ideas (e.g., Afonso & Papadopoulos, 2015; Pappas, 2014; Quirk, 2011). Exposure to populist communication fosters this divide by activating the priors of both poles of the electorate.

Toward an Integrative Framework of Populist Communication

The introduction of this dissertation has pointed to a number of substantial inconsistencies prevalent in extant literature that has conceptualized and measured populism. In an attempt to enhance the conceptual clarity of the contested concept, this dissertation applied Occam's razor to reduce populism to its ideational core. This ideational core – populist blame attribution – was then measured as a matter of degree, both communicated on the supply-side of the media and expressed and interpreted by citizens on the demand-side.

Now that I have argued that populism needs to be detached from its ideological core and politically-charged meanings, one could argue that the concept may have become too empty; as a loose set of ideas disconnected from any conceptual core or framework. To contribute to a reconstruction of a new theoretical framework, it is important to rebuild populist communication as a meaningful theory at the intersections of different sides of communication.

To start with, the expression of populist ideas on the supply-side of online and offline media can be considered as an integral part of *journalistic media populism*: the ways in which journalists draw on their professional agency to frame societal issues using populism's ideational core of blame attribution. This ideational core can then be enriched by all sorts of contextual factors used to frame media content, such as affective framing or interpretative journalism. Next, on the demand-side, citizens may also interpret societal issues more or less independently from political actors and the media using their own populist interpretation frames, which is in line with the negotiated media effects paradigm (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). These populist attitudes can also be connected to contextual factors salient in the socio-political context of citizens, which relate to the host ideologies central to populism (Mudde, 2004). Perceptions of relative deprivation, for example, provide an important contextual factor surrounding citizens' populist interpretations on the two dimensions.

In online communities, the lines between citizens as senders and receivers are blurring (Ridings & Gefen, 2004). At the intersection of the supply-side and demand-side, citizens can be perceived of as mass-self communicators, shifting shapes between populist communicators and populist receivers (e.g., Castells, 2007). Online,

citizens may experience a safe space to articulate populist ideas, in the absence of a direct response from people that oppose their viewpoints (Hameleers, 2017). The technological affordances of asynchronicity and editability on social media channels allow ordinary people to express their populist sentiments without the fear of a direct negative response (e.g., Ellison & boyd, 2013).

These conceptual building blocks on the supply and demand-side can be integrated in a revised theoretical framework of populist communication (see Figure 7.1). This model describes populist ideas as part of the expressions and interpretations of all involved actors – at the crossroads of the supply-side and demand-side. As can be seen on the left part of the figure, the traditional media's role in articulating populist interpretations has been labeled as *Journalistic media populism*. This concept describes the process by which professional communicators actively engage in the expression of populist ideas by constructing the 'people versus out-group divide'. On the right end of the figure, citizens' *Populist interpretation frames* are inserted, which relate to their populist attitudes.

With the rise of social media, citizens are no longer passive receivers of one-sided messages. Rather, they have become consumers and producers of information at the same time, a process that can be described as prosumption (Ritzer & Jurgenson, 2010) or mass self-communication (Castells, 2007). This development has important ramifications for how citizens can express their populist views, being empowered to share their populist ideas with an imagined audience of likeminded others on social network sites (Bartlett et al., 2011). This last concept that both has supply-side and demand-side components can be labeled as *Populist mass self-communication*.

As can be noted, double-headed arrows are drawn between all three key concepts. Although this dissertation has empirically focused on the media effects of populist ideas, one could argue that this causal pathway can work in both directions. As argued by Rooduijn, van der Brug & de Lange (2016), people do not only vote for populist parties because they are unsatisfied with politics, they also become more discontent *because* of the rise of populist ideas. In a similar vein, the revised theoretical framework presented here allows the supply-side and demand-side of the populist discourse to influence each other, which also provides an important suggestion for future research to further investigate both sides of the causal pathways described in this theoretical model.

Does this model provide a complete picture to understand populist expressions? It could be argued that this model has omitted a large number of potential actors involved in populism, most importantly populist politicians and their political parties. However, these political actors, and others, can be located at the different concepts of the model. It has for example been found that politicians express their populist ideas on social media (e.g., Engesser et al., 2016). In that case, they engage

in populist (mass) self-communication. When politicians publish populist ideas in opinionated articles or party programs, their communication may be placed on the left-side of the figure, as their communication follows professional routines targeted at a dissemination of views from one-to-many. Contextual factors, such as the perception of a crisis situation or relative deprivation, can be connected to the different paths of the model, acting as a catalyst to facilitate the relationships between the different expressions of populist ideas on the supply-side and demand-side.

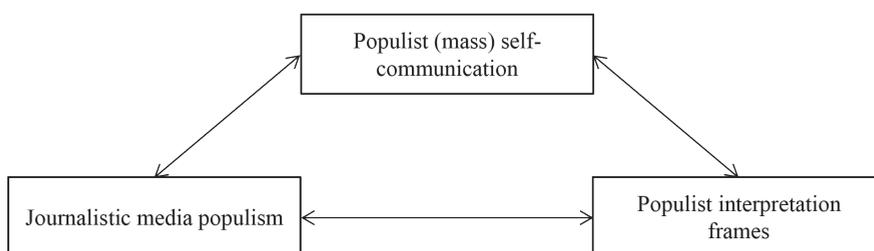


Figure 7.1 Theoretical framework for populist communication on the intersections of the supply-side and demand-side.

Limitations and directions for future research

Although this dissertation has provided important insights into the content, causes, and consequences of the expression of populism's ideational core, some important limitations concerning the external and internal validity of the claims made need to be emphasized here.

External validity. First of all, all chapters in this dissertation are based on data collected in the Netherlands only. Although this single-country context may be of less relevance for the experimental studies, it may have ramifications for the generalizability of the content analysis and survey data presented in this dissertation. In the diversified global landscape in which populism is rooted, one could expect important differences in the media's attention to, and expression of, populist ideas. In countries that have not (yet) witnessed the rise of electorally successful populist parties, the media may cover populist ideas differently. The premises of the life cycle model, for example, assume that the media may devote *more* attention to new, rising populist political parties compared to already established populist political parties (Herkman, 2015; Mazzoleni et al., 2003).

Alternatively, reasoned from an agenda-setting perspective, populist ideas may be used less by journalists when such interpretations do not resonate with political reality. Indeed, one of the factors that may create a favorable opportunity for populist communication to root in society is party issue ownership (e.g., Esser et al., 2017; Mudde, 2007). Specifically, in countries where topics owned by populist political parties are more salient, the media may devote more attention to populist viewpoints.

Another related factor that may be considered here is the presence of facilitating contextual factors, such as political scandals or crises. Indeed, there may be various contextual differences between countries that create discursive opportunities for populist communication to thrive (Esser et al., 2017). To provide more insights into such varying discursive opportunities for media populism, comparative research is highly welcome.

Research in countries that differ in contextual factors on the demand-side, such as the level of formal education, the proportion of refugees, the presence of scandals, issue ownership, and the economic situation, may also reveal alternative mechanisms by which citizens are affected by populist messages (e.g., Mudde, 2007). Providing a first attempt to study the effects of media populism using a comparative approach, a recent experimental study revealed no differences in the effects and mechanisms of populist blame attribution in Austria and the Netherlands (Hameleers & Schmuck, 2016). However, as one could argue that these Western European countries offer quite similar case studies, future research that incorporates a larger number of substantially different countries is highly needed.

In the midst of a changing media landscape, in which online political (self) communication has become increasingly more relevant, the dissertation's focus on offline, traditional media outlets may be considered as an additional limitation for external validity. The findings indicating that media populism is a relatively rare event, may simply be due to the fact that we zoomed in on the context of offline content only. Indeed, it has been argued that populist ideas are more frequently expressed online than in traditional journalistic content (Houtman & Achterberg, 2010). In addition, populist actors themselves also frequently use social media to disseminate their populist message to the electorate (e.g., Engesser et al., 2016). Still, as we focused on the effects and underlying mechanisms of populist messages in general, it is highly likely that the effects of the expression of the ideational core of populism are similar when communicated offline and online.

Another limitation concerns the choice to study the effects of populism's ideational core, rather than the indicators typically connected to it, such as charismatic leadership, a dramatized and simplified language, or the references to one-liners and common sense (e.g., Fennema, 2005; van der Brug & Mughan, 2007). However, these

elements can be attached to any form of communication, and are thus not necessarily populist. Hence, these contextual factors may facilitate populism, but they are not an essential part of its core message (e.g., Koopmans & Muis, 2009; van der Brug et al., 2000). The application of Occam's razor as a tool to provide conceptual clarity should not be regarded as a necessarily reductionist stance that aims to eliminate of all sorts of indicators that can be used to identify populism. Indeed, the various chapters of this dissertation do connect important contextual factors to populist communication, such as emotionalized communication and interpretative journalism.

Thus, analogous to prevalent approaches that have defined populism as a thin ideology supplemented by all sorts of host ideologies, this dissertation argues that the ideational core of populism can be rooted in all sorts of facilitating factors surrounding the presence of populism on the demand-side and supply-side. In that sense, using Occam's razor in defining the essentials of populism may even allow for a richer, more refined study of populism. Indeed, its ideological core can be attached to a wide range of contextual factors in the media and public opinion that differ between different countries across the globe.

Internal validity. A potential limitation concerning the internal validity relates to the direction of the causal relationships studied in this dissertation. In the three experiments, I tested the expectation that exposure to populist messages activates populist interpretation among receivers. However, I did not study alternative causal relationships with different dependent variables, such as the idea that populist messages foster discontent among citizens (Rooduijn et al., 2016), or a reversed causal relationship predicting that the populist interpretations among the public affect the populist framing of news events. However, the studies moved beyond the identification of a unidirectional flow of communication from the sender to the receiver of populist ideas, as I also independently explored the structure of citizens' populist interpretation frames. This dissertation thereby links up to the negotiated media effects paradigm (Gamson & Modigliani, 1989). Drawing further on this, future research may provide additional insights into how the populist interpretations of citizens and the media affect each other in a bi-directional flow of communication.

Another concern for internal validity relates to the causal claims made in the selective exposure experiments. These experimental studies did not allow for a random assignment of participants to treatment and control groups. Although I assessed which citizens are most likely to select populist content, and ruled out alternative explanations, the causal claims made on the effects of populist messages on populist attitudes should be interpreted with care. Nevertheless, across both forced and selective exposure environments, the findings of the experiments clearly demonstrate that attitudinal congruence plays a key role in the acceptance of populist messages. Despite these limitations, this dissertation provides the first contribution

pointing to the pivotal role of having the choice to select between various congruent and incongruent populist and non-populist options.

Final conclusion

Although this dissertation has limitations, it provides an important contribution to populism research by demonstrating *how* populist ideas are present in the media and public opinion. Moreover, this dissertation is one of the first contributions that provided insights into the mechanisms by which populist communication affects citizens' political perceptions. Extending this knowledge even further, this dissertation demonstrated *which* citizens are most likely to select, accept, or resist populist attributions of blame. On a more general note, it presented an integrated theoretical framework of populist communication on the sender and receiver-side. Future research can build on the foundations laid here to provide even more detailed insights into the content, consequences, and effects of populist communication to further contribute to the discussion on the alleged revival of the populist zeitgeist across the globe.

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SUMMARY

Populism has been on the rise over the last decades. Influential populism is, however, not exactly a new phenomenon. Left-wing and people centered populist movements have been a stable political force in Latin America for more than a century. More recently, right-wing populist parties that oppose the elites *and* societal out-groups have gained electoral success in Europe. In the United States, the election of Donald Trump to U.S. presidency has been interpreted as a more recent victory for the populists. The same applies to the Brexit vote in the U.K. In these more recent uprisings of populism, the media are ascribed a central role. It has even been argued that the media have partially *caused* populism's recent success. Yet, to date, there has been limited empirical research on the populist content of the media, and the persuasiveness of populist ideas expressed in political communication. For this reason, this dissertation aims to provide comprehensive insights into how populist ideas are expressed by the media, interpreted by citizens, and finally, how populist ideas may *affect* citizens' political perceptions.

First of all, I have proposed a refined definition of populism's core idea, aiming to overcome the existing conceptual confusion. I define populism's core idea as the attribution of blame for the ordinary people's problems to the elites or societal out-groups. In line with the existing consensus on populism's definition, this in-group of the people is morally "good" whereas the culpable elites or societal out-groups are constructed as "evil". I argue that this core idea can be used by different actors. Specifically, this dissertation focuses on the populist ideas expressed by the media and citizens.

In the first empirical chapter, this dissertation focuses on the media's role in framing populist attributions of blame. I show that populist blame attributions articulated by the media are a relatively rare event. Moreover, the presence of populist blame attributions depends on the specific journalistic style used. Blame attributions are most likely present when the journalist draws on an interpretative journalistic style. Moreover, and in line with theoretical expectations, tabloid outlets are more likely to use populist blame framing than broadsheet outlets.

In the next chapter, I focus on the populist ideas of citizens. Drawing on survey research among a representative sample of Dutch voters, I show that populist attitudes are structured by two dimensions: anti-establishment and exclusionism. Anti-establishment populist attitudes revolve around the perceived antagonism between the "good" ordinary people and the "evil" elites. These elites are perceived as responsible for not representing the ordinary people. Exclusionist populist attitudes tap into the perception of a divide between the "good" ordinary native people and "evil" and "inferior" societal out-groups. These out-groups are blamed for causing

the people's problems on both an economic and cultural dimension. The dimensional structure proposed in this dissertation aims to extend the populist core idea of the "people versus the elites". Indeed, resonating with the rise of right-wing populist movements, the elites are not the only out-group attributed blame for the people's problems. I further show that the populist attitudes of citizens are congruent with their vote choice. Right-wing populist voters score high on *both* dimensions. People who vote for left-wing parties, in contrast, only have higher populist attitudes on the anti-establishment dimension.

In chapter 3, I show that people with populist attitudes are attracted to specific types of media content. In line with theoretical expectations, people with populist attitudes are more likely to read tabloid outlets than broadsheet outlets. In the next step, I show that people with populist attitudes on different dimensions are appealed to different forms of media populism. People with anti-establishment populist attitudes demonstrate a preference for people-centrality and anti-elites media populism. People who also score higher on the exclusionist dimension, demonstrate a higher preference for *all* forms of media populism, including media content that excludes societal out-groups from media coverage. This chapter finally shows that populist attitudes are strongly rooted in sentiments of relative deprivation: those citizens who perceive they are worse off than other groups in society are most likely to hold stronger populist attitudes.

In the final three chapters of this dissertation, I integrate the populist ideas of the media and citizens by proposing a causal link between the populisms of both actors. First, I show that populist ideas expressed by the media are highly persuasive. People who are exposed to blame attributions are more likely to perceive the elites as causally responsible. Moreover, receivers' populist attitudes are bolstered by exposure to populist messages. The effects of populist blame attributions to the national government or the European Union are strongest for citizens with weaker identity attachments. In addition, I show that fear as emotional style results in a stronger acceptance of populist messages than anger.

In the next chapter, I show that populist messages also affect people's vote intentions. The results demonstrate that people who are exposed to populist blame attributions are *more* likely to vote for a populist party and *less* likely to vote for the largest party in government. The mechanism behind this effect is blame acceptance. Specifically, after exposure to populist blame frames, people first align their blame perceptions with the populist message. This blame perception is consequentially used as a cue to punish the government and to reward the populist challengers.

Situated in the context of a high-choice media environment, the final chapter assesses the role of selective exposure and attitudinal congruence. In line with the findings of earlier chapters, I first show that citizens with stronger perceptions of

relative deprivation are most likely to self-select populist messages. Moreover, if the populist message is congruent with the receiver's prior beliefs of relative deprivation, its effects are strongest. These final experiments learn us that populist communication is only persuasive for those citizens who perceive the message as congruent to their priors, which supports selective exposure and motivated reasoning theories. To arrive at a complete understanding of populism's effects in this era of fragmented media environments, it is thus crucial to make a distinction between attitudinal congruent and incongruent exposure.

To sum up, this dissertation first of all proposes a definition of populist communication as the attribution of blame for the people's problems. Next, it shows that such blame frames are not that salient in traditional media coverage. These frames are highly persuasive. Citizens who read messages in which blame is attributed to the elites or societal out-groups perceive these "evil" others as more culpable. Next to this, their populist attitudes are bolstered and they are more likely to vote for populist parties. These blame frames are most persuasive when they confirm citizens' prior attitudes. Taken together, in the midst of the rise of populist movements and the importance ascribed to the media, this dissertation provides substantial insights into how the media may use populism, and how these populist ideas affect citizens' political attitudes.

NEDERLANDSE SAMENVATTING

Populisme is de afgelopen decennia wereldwijd herrezen. Toch is invloedrijk populisme zeker geen recent fenomeen. Links populistische en volks-gecentreerde partijen vormen al meer dan een eeuw een stabiele politieke kracht in Latijns-Amerika. Recentelijk zijn het echter vooral de rechts-populistische partijen die electoraal succes hebben gevierd in Europa en de Verenigde Staten. De verkiezing van Donald Trump als president van de V.S. wordt bijvoorbeeld gezien als een overwinning voor de populisten. Hetzelfde geldt voor de overwinning van het Brexit kamp in het Verenigd Koninkrijk. Ten midden van deze meer recente successen van het populisme wordt een centrale rol toegedicht aan de media. Het wordt zelfs beargumenteerd dat de media deels een *oorzaak* zijn voor de opkomst van het populisme. Ondanks deze veronderstellingen is er tot vandaag nog maar weinig empirisch bewijs over de media's rol in de verspreiding van populistische ideeën. Laat staan over mogelijke media effecten van populisme. Vandaar dat deze dissertatie het doel heeft om meer inzicht te beiden in hoe populistische ideeën worden gecommuniceerd door de media, geïnterpreteerd door burgers, en ten slotte, hoe populistische ideeën de politieke opvattingen van burgers beïnvloeden.

Ten eerste heb ik een aangepaste definitie van de kernboodschap van populisme voorgesteld, welke erop gericht is om bestaande conceptuele verwarring te overkomen. Ik definieer het kernidee van populisme als het afschuiven van schuld voor de “gewone mensen” hun problemen naar de elites of andere zij-groepen. Analoog aan de bestaande consensus over de kern van populisme, wordt de wij-groep van het gewone volk geconstrueerd als een moreel “goede” entiteit. De schuldige elites of sociale zij-groepen worden daarentegen neergezet als “kwaadaardig”. Ik beargumenteer in deze dissertatie dat dit populistische kernidee door verschillende actoren kan worden gebruikt. Specifiek focust deze dissertatie zich op de populistische ideeën gecommuniceerd door de media en ervaren door burgers.

In het eerste empirische hoofdstuk focust deze dissertatie zich op de media's rol in het *framen* van populistische schuld attributies. Ik laat zien dat dergelijke populistische attributies relatief zeldzaam zijn. Daarnaast is de aanwezigheid van dergelijke populistische ideeën afhankelijk van de gehanteerde journalistieke stijl. Schuld attributies komen het vaakst voor als de journalist gebruik maakt van een interpretatieve journalistieke stijl. Ten slotte toon ik in het eerste hoofdstuk aan dat tabloid media meer geneigd zijn om dergelijke interpretatieve schuld attributies te gebruiken dan kwaliteitsmedia. Deze bevinding ondersteunt de theoretische veronderstelling dat populisme *door* de media voornamelijk een praktijk van tabloid media zijn.

In het hierop volgende hoofdstuk richt ik mij op de populistische ideeën van burgers. Op basis van survey onderzoek onder een representatieve steekproef van Nederlandse burgers laat ik zien dat populistische attitudes twee centrale dimensies kennen: Anti-establishment en exclusionisme. Anti-establishment populistische attitudes draaien om de perceptie van een centrale tegenstelling tussen het “goede” gewone volk en de “slechte” elites. Deze elites worden verantwoordelijk gehouden van het niet vertegenwoordigen van het gewone volk. Exclusionistische populistische attitudes stellen daarnaast dat de samenleving uit twee tegengestelde homogene groepen bestaat: de “goede” gewone nationale bevolking en de “slechte” en “inferieure” zij-groepen. Deze zij-groepen worden beschuldigd van het bedreigen van de nationale bevolking op zowel een economisch als sociaal-cultureel vlak.

De dimensionale structuur voorgesteld in deze dissertatie biedt een uitbreiding van het traditionele kernidee van populisme als de oppositie tussen het volk en de elites. Immers, in lijn met de opkomst van het rechts-populisme, vormen de elites niet de enige zij-groep die wordt beschouwd als een bedreiging voor het gewone volk. Daarnaast demonstreer ik in dit hoofdstuk dat de populistische attitudes van burgers congruent zijn aan hun partijvoorkeur. Mensen met een voorkeur voor rechts-populistische partijen scoren hoog op beide dimensies. Burgers die een voorkeur voor links-populistische partijen hebben scoren daarentegen alleen hoger op de anti-establishment dimensie.

In hoofdstuk 3 laat ik zien dat mensen met populistische attitudes worden aangetrokken tot verschillende soorten media inhoud. Analoog aan de theoretische veronderstellingen zijn mensen met sterkere populistische attitudes meer geneigd om tabloid media dan kwaliteitsmedia te consumeren. In de volgende stap laat ik zien dat mensen met populistische attitudes op de verschillende dimensies ook verschillende mediavorkeuren hebben. Specifieker, mensen met anti-establishment populistische attitudes hebben een voorkeur voor volks-gecentreerde inhoud en anti-elite media populisme. Mensen die ook hoger op de exclusionistische dimensie scoren, laten een hogere voorkeur voor alle soorten media populisme zien, inclusief media inhoud die bepaalde groepen uitsluit van de samenleving. Ten slotte laat ik in dit hoofdstuk zien dat populistische attitudes diep geworteld zijn in percepties van relatieve deprivatie: burgers die vinden dat zij slechter af zijn dan andere groepen in de samenleving, zijn het meest geneigd om sterkere populistische interpretatiekaders te hebben.

In de laatste drie hoofdstukken van de dissertatie integreer ik de populistische ideeën van de media en burgers door een causale link voor te stellen tussen de standpunten van beide actoren. Als eerste toon ik aan dat populistische ideeën gecommuniceerd door de media overtuigend zijn. Mensen die zijn blootgesteld aan populistische schuld attributies zijn meer geneigd om de elites verantwoordelijk te houden voor belangrijke maatschappelijke problemen. Daarnaast resulteert

blootstelling aan populistische frames in sterkere populistische attitudes vergeleken met niet-populistische frames. De effecten van populistische schuld attributie aan de nationale regering of de Europese Unie zijn het sterkste voor mensen die zich *niet* identificeren met deze groepen. Daarnaast laat het eerste experiment zien dat angst als emotionele stijl in een sterkere acceptatie van populistische boodschappen resulteert dan woede.

In het volgende hoofdstuk toon ik aan dat populistische boodschappen ook een effect hebben op partijvoorkeur. Mensen die worden blootgesteld aan populistische schuld attributies zijn minder geneigd om op de grootste regeringspartij te stemmen, terwijl ze juist meer geneigd zijn om op een populistische partij te stemmen. Het mechanisme dat dit effect drijft kan worden gezien als schuld acceptatie. Specifieker, nadat mensen worden blootgesteld aan populistische boodschappen, brengen zij hun percepties van verantwoordelijkheid in lijn met de populistische frames. Deze perceptie wordt vervolgens ingezet als een mentale short cut om de regering te straffen en de populistische uitdager te belonen.

Het laatste hoofdstuk biedt inzicht in de rol van selectieve blootstelling en attitudinale congruentie. Gesitueerd in de context van de hedendaagse “high-choice” mediaomgeving, kan worden gesteld dat de acceptatie van populistische frames afhankelijk is van zelfselectie en congruentie met bestaande standpunten. De bevindingen van de laatste experimenten laten allereerst zien dat mensen met een sterker gevoel van relatieve deprivatie het meest geneigd zijn om populistische berichten te selecteren. Dit is in lijn met de bevindingen van hoofdstuk 2 en 3. Daarnaast laat ik zien dat de effecten van populistische berichten het sterkst zijn als deze overeenkomen met de ontvanger zijn of haar bestaande percepties van relatieve deprivatie. De laatste experimenten tonen dus aan dat populistische schuld attributies de sterkste effecten hebben wanneer ze aansluiten op mensen hun bestaande attitudes. Deze resultaten beiden een bevestiging voor theorieën van selectieve blootstelling en gemotiveerde beredenering. Om een goed beeld te krijgen van de effecten van populistische berichten in een tijdperk gekenmerkt door gefragmenteerde mediaomgevingen, is het dus cruciaal om een onderscheid te maken tussen congruente en incongruente blootstelling aan populistische communicatie.

Samenvattend heeft deze dissertatie allereerst voorgesteld dat de kern van populistische communicatie gedefinieerd kan worden als het afschuiven van schuld voor de problemen van het “gewone volk”. Dergelijke attributies van schuld zijn echter niet veelvoorkomend in traditionele media inhoud. Toch zijn ze zeer effectief. Burgers die berichten lezen waarin elites of andere zij-groepen verantwoordelijk worden gehouden voor de problemen ervaren door de gewone mensen, beschouwen deze “slechte” anderen als schuldig. Daarnaast resulteert blootstelling tot de activatie van populistische attitudes en een sterkere populistische partijvoorkeur.

Populistische communicatie is het meest effectief voor mensen met congruente bestaande overtuigingen.

Al met al kan gesteld worden dat deze dissertatie systematische inzichten toont in *hoe* de media gebruik maken van populistische ideeën, en welke effecten dit kan hebben op ontvangers. De inzichten van deze dissertatie dragen hiermee bij aan een beter begrip over *hoe* populistische communicatie heeft bijgedragen in de globale opkomst van het populisme.

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Chapter 1

Title: Shoot the Messenger? The Media’s Role in Framing Populist Attributions of Blame

Researchers and institutions involved: Michael Hameleers (MH), Linda Bos (LB), Claes H. de Vreese (CdV), National Center of Competence in Research on ‘Challenges to Democracy in the 21st Century’ (NCCR)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	LB, CdV	MH
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	LB, CdV	MH
Data Collection		NCCR, MH, LB, CdV
Data Analysis		MH
Writing (original draft preparation)		MH
Writing (review and editing)	LB, CdV	MH
Visualization		MH
Funding acquisition		NCCR, LB, CdV

Chapter 2

Title: To Whom are “the People” Opposed? Conceptualizing and Measuring Citizens’ Populist Attitudes as a Multidimensional Construct

Researchers involved: Michael Hameleers (MH), Linda Bos (LB), Claes H. de Vreese (CdV)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	LB, CdV	MH
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	LB, CdV	MH
Data Collection	LB, CdV	MH
Data Analysis		MH
Writing (original draft preparation)	LB, CdV	MH
Writing (review and editing)	LB, CdV	MH
Visualization		MH
Funding acquisition		CdV

Chapter 3

Title: The Appeal of Media Populism: The Media Preferences of Citizens With Populist Attitudes

Researchers involved: Michael Hameleers (MH), Linda Bos (LB), Claes H. de Vreese (CdV)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	LB, CdV	MH
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	LB, CdV	MH
Data Collection	LB, CdV	MH
Data Analysis		MH
Writing (original draft preparation)	LB, CdV	MH
Writing (review and editing)	LB, CdV	MH
Visualization		MH
Funding acquisition		CdV

Chapter 4

Title: “They Did it”: The Effects of Emotionalized Blame Attribution in Populist Communication

Researchers involved: Michael Hameleers (MH), Linda Bos (LB), Claes H. de Vreese (CdV)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	LB, CdV	MH
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	LB, CdV	MH
Data Collection	LB, CdV	MH
Data Analysis		MH
Writing (original draft preparation)	LB, CdV	MH
Writing (review and editing)	LB, CdV	MH
Visualization		MH
Funding acquisition		LB, CdV

Chapter 5

Title: Framing Blame: Toward a Better Understanding of the Effects of Populist Communication on Populist Party Preferences

Researchers involved: Michael Hameleers (MH), Linda Bos (LB), Claes H. de Vreese (CdV)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)	LB, CdV	MH
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	LB, CdV	MH
Data Collection	LB, CdV	MH
Data Analysis		MH
Writing (original draft preparation)	LB, CdV	MH
Writing (review and editing)	LB, CdV	MH
Visualization		MH
Funding acquisition		LB, CdV

Chapter 6

Title: Selective Exposure to Media Populism: How Attitudinal Congruence Drives the Effects of Populist Attributions of Blame

Researchers involved: Michael Hameleers (MH), Linda Bos (LB), Claes H. de Vreese (CdV)

	Limited Contribution	Substantial Contribution
Conceptualization (Main idea, theory)		MH
Methodology (Design, Operationalization)	LB, CdV	MH
Data Collection	LB, CdV	MH
Data Analysis		MH
Writing (original draft preparation)		MH
Writing (review and editing)	LB, CdV	MH
Visualization		MH
Funding acquisition		LB, CdV

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Many would start this section by arguing how hard it can be to complete a PhD project. To be honest, finishing my dissertation has not been the biggest challenge life presented me with so far. Of course, I have experienced some ups and downs over the past two and a half years. And yes, times of frustration came by and passed on. But this is all part of the deal. I have enjoyed working on my dissertation so much that the good times significantly and substantially outweigh the bad times. One of the key explanatory factors of this positive outcome is the support of a great number of people. In hypothetical conditions in which these people are absent, the PhD project would be a – again significantly and substantially – greater challenge. I may not be able to include all names in my model, but I will now mention those who I would like to thank in particular.

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Michael Hamelers,
Amsterdam, April 2017.

APPENDICES CHAPTER 1

Appendix 1.A: Explaining cluster membership based on characteristics of the source and text

We conducted a multinomial regression analysis for which the three clusters were explained by characteristics of the media outlet and the text. In this analysis, membership to the different clusters was incorporated as dependent variable. The neutral cluster was treated as reference category. The largest newspapers, *NRC*, *de Volkskrant* and *de Telegraaf*, all positively and significantly predicted membership to the conflict dissemination cluster. This indicates that when these sources were identified, they were more likely to be in the conflict cluster than in the neutral cluster. The interpretative journalism cluster related differently to the media outlets. The broadsheet newspaper *NRC* was significantly less likely to belong to this cluster than to the neutral dissemination cluster. The tabloid newspaper *de Telegraaf* and the free newspaper *Metro*, in contrast, were more likely to be in the interpretative journalism cluster than in the neutral cluster. These findings indicate that journalists' interpretative stance emphasizing distrust in politics and society using a negative tone is more in sync with the style of tabloid newspapers than broadsheet newspapers. Regarding the texts' characteristics, we found that length, news genre, political topics, and election coverage all played a significant positive predictive role for the membership of the conflict dissemination cluster. This means that longer texts, election coverage, news and politics were more likely to be covered in the dissemination of conflict cluster than in the neutral dissemination cluster. The comparison between the neutral cluster and the interpretative journalism cluster points to a difference in the role of genres: the presence of the news genre negatively affected the chance of belonging to the interpretative cluster whereas it positively predicted membership to the dissemination of conflict cluster.

Table A1.

Multinomial logistic regression model explaining membership to classes

Class		B (SE)	Wald	OR		95% CI OR	
				Lower	Upper	Lower	Upper
Dissemination conflict	Constant	-2.87 (0.29)***	100.34				
	NRC	2.09 (0.29)***	50.95	8.05		4.54	14.26
	Volkskrant	2.67 (0.29)***	82.51	14.38		8.09	25.56
	Telegraaf	2.45 (0.30)***	68.48	11.62		6.50	20.78
	Metro	1.25 (0.34)***	13.28	3.48		1.78	6.80
	Elsevier	2.43 (0.34)***	51.20	11.36		5.84	22.11
	Politics	0.28 (0.06)***	19.58	1.32		1.17	1.50
	News	0.24 (0.08)**	9.47	1.27		1.09	1.49
	Length	1.42 (0.13)***	126.22	4.14		3.23	5.30
	Election	0.69 (0.12)***	35.72	1.99		1.59	2.49
Interpretative journalism	Constant	-0.37 (0.13)**	8.94				
	NRC	-0.31 (0.15)*	4.48	0.73		0.55	0.98
	Volkskrant	-0.03 (0.15)	0.05	0.97		0.72	1.30
	Telegraaf	0.62 (0.15)***	15.48	1.85		1.36	2.51
	Metro	0.49 (0.21)***	5.18	1.63		1.07	2.47
	Elsevier	0.92 (0.21)***	19.87	2.51		1.68	3.77
	Politics	0.32 (0.08)***	17.76	1.37		1.19	1.59
	News	-1.20 (0.08)***	196.29	0.30		0.26	0.36
	Length	1.03*** (0.12)	69.66	2.81		2.21	3.58
	Election	0.64*** (0.13)	23.14	1.90		1.46	2.47

* $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.01$; *** $p < 0.001$.*Note.* CI = confidence interval; OR = odds ratio. Two-tailed tests. Unstandardized regression weights.

Standard errors reported between brackets.

The reference category for both clusters is the neutral dissemination cluster.

APPENDICES CHAPTER 2

Appendix 2.A: Census data compared to the data in sample

Table 2.A1

Census data compared to the data in sample

Variables		Sample	Census
<i>Gender</i>	Male	49.5	47.0
	Female	50.5	53.0
<i>Age</i>	20-39	27.2	25.5
	40-64	45.7	46.4
	>65	27.1	28.1
<i>Education</i>	Low	23.9	24.7
	Mid	39.7	41.4
	High	36.5	33.9

Note. Cell entries are percentages. The sample consists of 809 participants. Census data are obtained from the National Institute for Statistics (CBS) and cover the year 2015. Differences between sample data and census are not significant.

Appendix 2.B: Items Measuring Populist Attitudes

Anti-establishment populist attitudes. All items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*). A reversed-coded item is indicated by* (1) We, the ordinary Dutch people, share the same norms and values; (2) The will of the people should always be central in political decision making; (3) The people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions; (4) Ordinary people can't be trusted to make the right choices about our nation's problems; (5) Politicians are corrupt; (6) Politicians keep the promises they make to the people they claim to represent; (7) Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people; (8) Elected politicians are better able to make decisions for voters than ordinary citizens themselves*

Exclusionist populist attitudes. The following items were developed for the purpose of this study: (9) Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture; (10) Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people (11) Our borders should be closed for immigrants; (12) Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems; (13) I prefer spending my time with people who share my cultural beliefs; (14) People who are not contributing

to our society, should not receive any social benefits; (15) Social benefits such as unemployment benefits and health insurance benefits are given to people who don't really deserve it; (16) People who are not originally from our country, have no rights on our social benefits; (17) Our society distributes social benefits in a fair way; (18) All people who are in need deserve social benefits; (19) People with higher incomes should pay more tax money; (20) The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than corporations who only want to make profits.

Decisions to Discard Populist Attitudes Items

Looking per factor, we identified that some indicators fitted better than others. For the anti-establishment dimension, the following items did not fit well: *We, the ordinary Dutch people, share the same norms and values* ($\lambda = .30$); *Ordinary people can't be trusted to make the right choices about our nation's problems** ($\lambda = .35$); *Politicians keep the promises they make to the people they claim to represent** ($\lambda = .37$); *Elected politicians are better able to make decisions for voters than ordinary citizens themselves** ($\lambda = .45$); *The will of the people should always be central in political decision making* ($\lambda = .54$)

For the exclusionist dimension, the following items did not fit well: *I prefer spending my time with people who share my cultural beliefs* ($\lambda = .44$); *our society distributes social benefits in a fair way** ($\lambda = .32$); *All people who are in need deserve social benefits** ($\lambda = .19$); *People with higher incomes should pay more tax money* ($\lambda = .33$); *People who are not contributing to our society, should not receive any social benefits* ($\lambda = .44$)

Two potential explanations for the bad fit of these items can be foregrounded. First, from a methodological angle, it should be noted that five of the bad-fitting statements were reverse-coded. As they were not framed in binary 'good' in-group versus 'evil' out-group oppositions, these items not directly reflected a populist worldview. The other items with sub-optimal fit also not explicitly referred to the populist opposition between the morally 'good' people and the 'evil' others. These items may have been too 'empty' populist in the sense they only mentioned the in-group of the people without specifying the other.

Items Measuring Relative Deprivation

We measured participants' feelings of relative deprivation with three items on a 7-point scale ranging from (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*). (1) If we need anything from the government, ordinary people like us always have to wait longer than others; (2) I never received what I in fact deserved; (3) It's always the other people who profit from all kinds of benefits.

Items Measuring Control Variables

Education was measured by the following item: What is the highest level of education you have successfully completed? The seven categories included no formal education and different forms of lower, moderate and higher education consistent with the Dutch system.

Left-right self-placement was measured with the following item: In politics, people sometimes talk of “left” and “right”. Where would you place yourself on this scale, where 0 means the left and 10 means the right? 0 (Left), 10 (Right).

Support for European integration was measured with the following statement measured on a 7-point differential scale: European integration has not gone far enough yet (1)/has already gone too far (7).

Voting preferences were measured with the following item: For the following political parties, we would like you to indicate the chance you will ever vote for this party on a scale ranging from 0 (I think I will never vote for this party) to 10 (It is very likely I will once vote for this party).

APPENDICES CHAPTER 4

Appendix 4.A: Stimulus Materials for Experimental Conditions

Note: all articles are translated from Dutch into English. The original Dutch versions are available on demand.

Version 1 (no blame/no emotions) Dutch citizens witness worsening labour market situation

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with 118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which does not elaborate on what consequences this decline in jobs has for Dutch citizens.

The image for the future: the prognosis does not provide any insights on if the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will make a change after this period of decline. The statistics underline a tentative prediction: if the numbers can be trusted, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Version 2 (no blame/anger-frame) Dutch citizens outrageous about worsening labour market situation

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with 118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which elaborates on how the decline in jobs results in feelings of anger among Dutch citizenry.

The image for the future: the prognosis provides insights on how the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will make a change after this frustrating period of decline. The statistics underline this prediction: if persons blocking the goals of job seekers will be punished, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Version 3 (no blame/fear-frame) Dutch citizens afraid of worsening labour market situation

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with

118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which elaborates on how the decline in jobs results in feelings of fear among Dutch citizenry.

The image for the future: the prognosis provides insights on how the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will not make a significant change after this tense period of decline. The statistics underline this prediction: only when the interests of job seekers are better protected, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Version 4 (blame attributed to the EU/anger-frame) Dutch citizens outrageous about worsening labour market situation caused by EU's failing policy

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with 118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which elaborates on how the decline in jobs, caused by EU's failing policy, results in feelings of anger among Dutch citizenry.

The image for the future: the prognosis provides insights on how the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will make a change after this frustrating period of decline characterized by EU's failing policy. The statistics underline this prediction: if persons responsible for EU's policy blocking the goals of job seekers will be punished, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Version 5 (blame attributed to the EU/fear-frame) Dutch citizens afraid of worsening labour market situation caused by EU's failing policy

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with 118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which elaborates on how the decline in jobs, caused by EU's failing policy, results in feelings of fear among Dutch citizenry.

The image for the future: the prognosis provides insights on how the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will not make a significant change after this tense period of decline characterized by EU's failing policy. The statistics underline this prediction: only when the interests of job seekers are better protected by the EU, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Version 6 (blame attributed to the Dutch government/fear-frame) Dutch citizens afraid for worsening labour market situation caused by Dutch government's failing policy

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with 118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which elaborates on how the decline in jobs, caused by the Dutch government's failing policy, results in feelings of fear among Dutch citizenry.

The image for the future: the prognosis provides insights on how the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will not make a significant change after this tense period of decline characterized by the Dutch government's failing policy. The statistics underline this prediction: only when the interests of job seekers are better protected by the Dutch government, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Version 7 (blame attributed to the Dutch government/anger-frame) Dutch citizens outrageous about worsening labour market situation caused by Dutch government's failing policy

The labour market situation will only start to recover in at least two years from now. In 2014, the total number of jobs in The Netherlands will decrease further with 118.000, after which 2015 will be marked by a loss of another 100.000 jobs. These numbers were presented by the Labour market prognosis of the Dutch organization UWV, which elaborates on how the decline in jobs, caused by the Dutch government's failing policy, results in feelings of anger among Dutch citizenry.

The image for the future: the prognosis provides insights on how the economic recovery and citizens' initiatives will make a change after this frustrating period of decline characterized by the Dutch government's failing policy. The statistics underline this prediction: if persons responsible for the Dutch government's policy blocking the goals of job seekers will be punished, the labour market situation will fully recover in 2016 according to the Labour market prognosis.

Appendix 4.B: Items For Measures Moderators and Dependent Variables

Moderators

Identity attachment to nation state.

1. I am proud to be a Dutch citizen (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)
2. I feel attached to the Dutch identity (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)
3. I feel attached to a shared Dutch culture (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)

Identity attachment to Europe.

1. I am proud to be a European citizen (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)
2. I feel attached to the European identity (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)
3. I feel attached to a shared European culture (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)

Dependent Variables

Blame perceptions towards the EU and the Dutch government.

1. The open-ended question: You have just read an article that claims that the labour market situation is worsening throughout 2015 and 2016. Could you indicate who or what YOU believe is responsible for causing this situation? You can list all your thoughts in the space below.
2. The closed-ended question: In both the media and among citizens, there exists disagreement on who or what is responsible for causing the worsening labour market situation. Could you indicate to what extent YOU believe the following actors or situations are responsible for causing the worsening labour market situation on a (1 *not at all responsible* 7 *completely responsible*) scale?

Candidates for responsibility were listed as (appeared in a random order): The Dutch prime minister, employers in the Netherlands, Eastern European immigrants, politicians in the EU, the Dutch government, Geert Wilders, Mark Rutte, the PVV (political party), Dutch citizens, European citizens, the EU as institution, the VVD (political party), the president of the European Commission, the president of the European parliament, European politics, politicians in Den Hague, the European parliament, the European commission, Dutch government leaders

Populist attitudes.**The antagonist “good” people versus “bad” elites opposition (Antagonism)**

1. Politics is a struggle between the good and the evil (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)
2. I would rather want to be represented by an ordinary citizen than by a specialised politician. (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)
3. Politicians are corrupt (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)

Politicians are (in)capable of representing the ordinary people (Representation)

4. Politicians keep the promises they make to the ordinary people (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*) (reverse-coded)
5. Politicians are able to solve the real problems facing the ordinary people (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*) (reverse-coded)
6. Politicians need to follow the will of the ordinary people (1 *completely disagree*, 7 *completely agree*)

Table 4.B1: Descriptive statistics for key measures dependent variables

Scale variable (all 7-point scales)	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α
Blame perceptions EU	4.48	1.28	0.95 (7-items)
Blame perceptions Dutch government	4.76	1.28	0.95 (7-items)
Populist attitude: Representation	4.81	1.19	0.76 (3-items)
Populist attitude: Antagonism	4.04	1.19	0.58 (3-items)

APPENDICES CHAPTER 5

Appendix 5.A: Items For Measures Dependent Variable and Moderators

Dependent Variable

1. Could you indicate what the chances are that you will one time vote for the following party? If you think you will never vote for this party, fill in 0; if it is very possible that you will once vote for this party, fill in 100. We included the following Dutch political parties for the measurement of party preference: VVD, PvdA, PVV, CDA, D66, GroenLinks, SP.

Moderator: Identity attachment to nation state

(1 completely disagree, 7 completely agree)

1. I am proud to be a Dutch citizen
2. I feel attached to the Dutch identity
3. I feel attached to a shared Dutch culture

Moderator: Identity attachment to Europe (1 completely disagree, 7 completely agree)

1. I am proud to be a European citizen
2. I feel attached to the European identity
3. I feel attached to a shared European culture

Moderator: Political distrust/cynicism (1 completely disagree, 7 completely agree)

1. Politicians are primarily self-interested
2. To become prime minister, it is more important to have the right friends than the right abilities
3. Political parties are only interested in my vote
4. Politicians do not understand what matters to Dutch society
5. Politicians are capable of solving important problems facing Dutch society (reverse coded)

Appendix 5.B: Comparison Sample data and Census data

Table 5.B1

Census data compared to the data in sample

Variables		Sample	Census
<i>Gender</i>	Male	47.1	47.0
	Female	52.9	53.0
<i>Age</i>	20-39	34.8	24.5
	40-64	41.6	46.4
	>65	23.6	28.1
<i>Education</i>	Low	17.4	24.7
	Mid	41.0	41.4
	High	40.7	33.9

Note. Cell entries are percentages. The sample consists of 809 participants. Census data are obtained from the National Institute for Statistics (CBS) and cover the year 2015.

APPENDICES CHAPTER 6

Appendix 6.A: Example Stimuli

> Politics

New report CBS illustrates increase in crime rate over the next years

Published: November 1 2016 12:01 AM
Last update: November 3 2016 9:35 AM



By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

.....

The crime rate in the Netherlands will increase over the next years, because an increasing number of citizens will break the law. These conclusions can be drawn from an unpublished report by the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

According to the CBS, the crime rate will increase by ten percent in 2020. The same calculations show that this increase is related to trends already visible in previous years. The new numbers demonstrate that this trend will not end in the nearby future.

Based on these numbers, it can be concluded that the crime rate will further increase in the Netherlands in the years to come. To arrive at a clearer picture of the implications of these numbers, they will need to be interpreted in the light of new societal analyses.

> Politics

Our country is in danger: The influx of migrants causes increase in crime rate

Published: November 1 2016 12:01 AM
Last update: November 3 2016 9:35 AM



By THE EDITORIAL BOARD

.....

The crime rate in our country will increase over the next years, because an increasing number of fortune-seeking migrants will break the law – they see criminal activities as the fastest and easiest way to wealth. It is feared that the most violent types of crime will increase most. These conclusions can be drawn from an unpublished report by the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

According to the CBS, the crime rate will increase by ten percent in 2020. The same calculations show that this increase would not take place if the influx of migrants would be stopped. Or if migrants would earn their own income, instead of profiting and taking away the resources deserved by the hardworking people of our country.

Based on these numbers, a frustrating conclusion can be drawn: the ordinary people in our country who have to fight hard for their existence are attacked by those who are not prepared to work for the resources offered to them by our country. This is another situation showing that fortune-seeking migrants need to be refused in order to keep our country safe.

Figure 6.A1. Examples of stimulus material translated from Dutch (original). The picture on top depicts the stimulus used for the control condition in the second experiment. The picture below depicts the stimulus for the pro-attitudinal populist message.

Comparing populist and non-populist stimuli

The text below shows a comparison of a populist and non-populist pro-attitudinal message in the second experiment (translated from Dutch). Although both messages connect the same development to migrants, the migrants are only explicitly blamed for the development in the populist message. Moreover, the populist message emphasizes a moral and causal divide between the ordinary native people and the culpable migrants. The sentences that differ between both conditions are underlined.

Version 1: Our country is in danger: The influx of migrants causes increase in crime rate

The crime rate in our country will increase over the next years, because an increasing number of fortune-seeking migrants will break the law – they see criminal activities as the fastest and easiest way to wealth. It is feared that the most violent types of crime will increase most. These conclusions can be drawn from an unpublished report by the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

According to the CBS, the crime rate will increase by ten percent in 2020. The same calculations show that this increase would not take place if the influx of migrants would be stopped. Or if migrants would earn their own income, instead of profiting and taking away the resources deserved by the hardworking people of our country.

Based on these numbers, a frustrating conclusion can be drawn: the ordinary people in our country who have to fight hard for their existence are attacked by those who are not prepared to work for the resources offered to them by our country. This is another situation showing that fortune-seeking migrants need to be refused in order to keep our country safe.

Version 2: The Netherlands is in danger: A lot of migrants end up in criminal behavior

The crime rate in the Netherlands will increase over the next years, because an increasing number of migrants will break the law – they see this as their only way of survival. It is feared that the most violent types of crime will increase most. These conclusions can be drawn from an unpublished report by the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS).

According to the CBS, the crime rate will increase by ten percent in 2020. The same calculations show that this increase would not take place if the influx of migrants would receive more care. Or if migrants would be allowed to earn their own income, instead of being forced to seek other ways of generating income.

Based on these numbers, a conclusion can be drawn: the crime rate in the Netherlands will increase in the years to come. This is another situation demonstrating the importance of thinking about the safety net that should be provided to migrants that are coming to the Netherlands in great numbers.

Appendix 6.B: Measures populist attitudes and relative deprivation

Anti-establishment populist attitudes. (1) The ordinary people instead of politicians should make our most important policy decisions; (2) Politicians in government are corrupt; (3) Politicians make decisions that harm the interests of the ordinary people; (4) The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than corporations that only want to make profits.

Exclusionist populist attitudes. (1) Immigrants are threatening the purity of our culture; (2) Immigrants cost our country a lot of money that should rather be invested in our own people; (3) Our borders should be closed for immigrants; (4) Immigrants are responsible for a lot of our nation's problems; (5) Social benefits such as unemployment benefits and health insurance benefits are given to people who don't really deserve it; (6) People who are not originally from our country, have no rights to receive our social benefits

Perceived relative deprivation. (1) If we need anything from the government, ordinary people like us always have to wait longer than others; (2) I never received what I in fact deserved; (3) It's always the other people who profit from all kinds of advantages offered in society; (4) The government doesn't do enough for people like me, others are always advantaged; (5) When there is an economic downturn, we are the first to be its victims.