The populist appeal: Personality and anti-establishment communication

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With the election of Donald Trump and landmark wins for populists across Europe, one of today's most pressing questions is: Why do people support populists? We theorize that citizens who score low on the personality trait agreeableness—those who are more distrusting, cynical, and tough-minded—are more susceptible to antiestablishment messages expressed by populists. Using 13 population-based cross-sectional samples collected in eight countries and three continents, we first show that individuals who score low on agreeableness are more likely to support populists. Moreover, with a conjoint experiment, we demonstrate that it is their antiestablishment message that makes populists attractive to people who score low on agreeableness. As such, this article outlines a broader theoretical framework that links personality to political persuasion. In a time when politicians tailor their messages to the psychological makeup of their voters, it is crucial to understand the interplay between political communication and personality.

With the election of Donald Trump, the Brexit vote, and the popularity of parties such as the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) in Germany, Podemos in Spain, Sverigedemokraterna in Sweden, and the Movimento Cinque Stelle in Italy, politicians, commentators, and academics have offered many different explanations for the reasons why people support populists. One notable perspective links support for populists to the personality of their voters: from Clinton's "deplorables" to people who claimed to have discovered the lost tribe of Authoritarians (Taub 2016). These arguments resonate with the broader development of a literature linking politics with personality (Gerber et al. 2011; Kam and Estes 2016; Kam and Simas 2012; Mondak and Halerpin 2008). Building on this literature, we theorize and test whether congruence between populist communication and personality can explain support for populism. In doing so, we offer a broader theory that connects personality to political persuasion.

Populism is a much abused and misinterpreted term. Yet in academia there is now a relatively broad consensus on what populism is. What unites populists is that they communicate an antiestablishment message in combination with a focus on the centrality of the people (Canovan 1981). The antiestablishment message portrays the political elite—in, for instance, Washington, London, or Madrid—as evil, working for its own gain, and disinterested in the common people (Mudde 2004). Antiestablishment communication and people-centric messages form the central features all populists have in common. What distinguishes populists from each other is their main ideology (Aalberg et al. 2016). Populism is neither left nor right but can be combined with many different "host ideologies."

For whom, then, is populist rhetoric attractive? Messages resonate with voters if their rhetoric is congruent with the personality of these voters (Caprara and Zimbardo 2004; Valkenburg and Peter 2013). For supporters of a populist party, the content, structure, or symbols of populist rhetoric should be congruent with a certain personality trait. This congruence should then explain their support for a populist party. In earlier work, we proposed that agreeableness is the personality trait that is congruent with the antiestablishment component of populist rhetoric (Bakker, Rooduijn, and Schumacher 2016). Agreeableness encapsulates altruism, trust toward others, softheartedness, modesty, tolerance, and cooperativeness. Low agreeable people are egoistic, distrusting toward others, intolerant, and uncooperative and express antagonism toward others (Costa, McCrae, and Dye 1991). The antiestablishment message of populists accuses the political elite of incompetence, insubordination, and profiteering at the expense of the common people.

Our study deepens and broadens our earlier work. First, we broaden it by extending the link between agreeableness and populism to Latin America, southern Europe, and Scandinavia. Moreover, we replicate earlier work in North America and Western Europe. In total we provide evidence from 15 cross-sectional studies from eight different countries for the link between agreeableness and populism. Second, we deepen our 2016 study theoretically by providing three reasons for why those who score low on agreeableness are susceptible to populists' antiestablishment communication. We also deepen this study empirically by conducting an experiment that provides causal leverage for the argument that antiestablishment rhetoric indeed mobilizes low agreeable individuals. Our experiment allows us to specifically point to antiestablishment rhetoric and not people centrism as the reason why low agreeable individuals support populists. But there are more examples of the congruence between communication and personality. For instance, our experiment demonstrates a link between authoritarianism and anti-immigration rhetoric. As such, our study provides a clean causal link to existing observational work (Choma and Hanoch 2017; Ludeke, Klitgaard, and Vitriol 2018).

Our take home message is this: in times when politicians try to persuade voters by tailoring their messages to the psychological traits of their audience, it is crucial to understand how the congruence between political communication and personality affects vote choices.

AGREEABLENESS AND ANTIESTABLISHMENT COMMUNICATION

The so-called differential susceptibility to media effects model claims that differences in personality and attitudes explain why the content of a message is appreciated by some but not by others (Valkenburg and Peter 2013). This means that the rhetoric and framing of a message has more resonance with individuals that share certain dispositions than with other individuals.[1] We argue that support for populism can be explained by the congruence between the antiestablishment messages expressed by populists and the personality trait agreeableness (see also Bakker et al. 2016). Agreeableness is part of the big five model of personality and encapsulates altruism, trust toward others, softheartedness, modesty, tolerance, and cooperativeness (Costa et al. 1991). Disagreeable individuals tend to be cynical, uncooperative, and distrusting of others (Costa et al. 1991), express antagonism toward others, and do not shy away from conflict (Skarlicki, Folger, and Tesluk 1999). We will now discuss three reasons that make those who score low on agreeableness susceptible to populist antiestablishment messages.

First, low agreeable people are more likely to distrust politics, whereas high agreeable people have more trust in politics and in other people (Mondak and Halerpin 2008). Therefore, rhetoric claiming that the elite cannot be trusted is more likely to resonate with low agreeable individuals than with high agreeable individuals. An example of this is that low agreeable individuals are more likely to believe in conspiracy theories (Swami et al. 2012). This resonance also extends to behavior: the low agreeable are more supportive of secessionist movements (Barceló 2017) and more likely to protest (Brandstätter and Opp 2014).

Second, disagreeable and agreeable individuals differ in their preferences for conflict versus cooperation. Disagreeable people are more likely to respond aggressively and retaliate when treated unfairly by others (Lee and Ashton 2012). Agreeable people are concerned with maintaining social harmony, whereas the low agreeable expect less courtesy from others and are less sensitive to inappropriate behavior (Graziano, Jensen-Campbell, and Hair 1996). Agreeable people favor compromise and consensus, and, therefore, politics arguably contains too much conflict for them (Gerber et al. 2012). This argument is supported by the fact that high agreeable people discuss politics less (Gerber et al. 2012; Mondak and Halerpin 2008), have more like-minded discussion partners (Mondak et al. 2010), avoid forms of political participation that could spark conflict such as complaining to a local official or speaking up at a meeting (Gerber et al. 2011), and are less likely to support nonconsensual political models such as technocracy

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(Ackermann, Ackermann, and Freitag 2019) or direct democracy (Freitag and Ackermann 2016). The fact that populists seek conflict against mainstream politicians should therefore be off-putting for high agreeable individuals, whereas low agreeable individuals can be expected to appreciate it.

Third, the inherent negativity of populists toward the elite also clearly links with agreeableness. Exposure to negative campaign messages demotivates high agreeable people to vote in elections, but in fact it motivates low agreeable people to turnout for elections (Weinschenk and Panagopoulos 2014). Similarly, at work, low agreeable people perform better than high agreeable people after receiving an angry speech from their manager (Van Kleef et al. 2010). Reversely, managers expressing happiness improve performance of high agreeable but not of low agreeable people (Van Kleef et al. 2010).

Because of these links between the various components of agreeableness and populism, we expect that low agreeableness resonates with the message characteristics of typical antiestablishment communication used by populist politicians. For example, consider this ad circulated by the campaign team of Trump just before the 2016 US presidential elections: "Our movement is about replacing a failed and corrupt political establishment with a new government controlled by you, the American people. . . . The political establishment, that is trying to stop us, is the same group responsible for our disastrous trade deals, massive illegal immigration, and economic and foreign policies that have bled our country dry."[2] Messages such as this one communicate distrust in politics, often contain conspiracy theories, employ angry sentiment, and are conflict seeking (Taggart 2000). These message characteristics are congruent with the cynical, uncooperative, distrusting, and antagonistic nature of those with a low agreeable personality. This match engages low agreeable individuals, while pushing high agreeable individuals away who are unlikely to be swayed by distrusting, negative, and conflict-seeking rhetoric.

Agreeableness is one of two personality traits—with extraversion—that voters perceive in politicians and identify with (Caprara, Barbaranelli, and Zimbardo 2002). In addition to verbal cues, perceptions of agreeableness can even be formed by nonverbal cues such as arm movements while giving a speech (Koppensteiner 2013). Moreover, ideologically extreme politicians self-report lower on agreeableness (Schumacher and Zettler 2019), and experts rate populist politicians as low on agreeableness (Nai and Maier 2018).

In sum, with populist rhetoric and populist politicians being low agreeable, we expect low agreeable voters to appreciate this congruence and to vote for these populists.

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2. The ad is called "Donald Trump's Argument for America" and can be viewed at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vST61W4bGm8.

ALTERNATIVE EXPLANATIONS OF SUPPORT FOR POPULISM

Various political, economic, and cultural variables at both the macro- and microlevel have been linked to populism (Aalberg et al. 2016; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Inglehart and Norris 2016; Ivarsflaten 2008). We only focus on the microlevel variables that might explain support for populists, as we are not particularly interested in explaining changes over time or differences between countries. Four often mentioned (sets of) microlevel explanations are (1) authoritarianism, (2) political cynicism or discontent, (3) the other big five traits, and (4) socioeconomic background variables.

As noted earlier, populism combines antielitism and people centrism with a "host ideology." Other personality traits may very well resonate with this host ideology. Authoritarianism, for instance, encapsulates a preference for social order, structure, and obedience (Feldman and Stenner 1997). There is no consistent association between authoritarianism and support for populist parties and politicians (Arceneaux and Nicholson 2012; Bakker et al. 2016; Dunn 2015). This is unsurprising, as antiestablishment messages do not, per se, resonate with people with a preference for obedience to authority. Authoritarianism may, however, predict support for some populist parties because of their host ideology. Threatening messages about, for instance, immigrants could increase support for radical right-wing populists among high authoritarian citizens. After all, previous studies have shown that, when threatened, high authoritarians express less tolerance toward out-group members (Feldman and Stenner 1997) and support populist parties with a right-wing host ideology (Arceneaux and Nicholson 2012; Dunn 2015). In our empirical analyses below, we address this issue by controlling, where possible, for authoritarianism in our models.

It has often been argued that an important source of populist support is political cynicism or discontent. The idea is that those who are discontented with or cynical about politics feel attracted to populist parties and politicians because these parties and politicians express a message that is highly compatible with their own ideas. More specifically, cynical citizens can be expected to agree with the antiestablishment message that the elite is untrustworthy and unresponsive (Bergh 2004). Yet, the association between political cynicism (or discontent) and populist voting has yielded mixed support (Bergh 2004; Rooduijn 2018).

Following Bakker et al. (2016), we do not expect the other big five traits to explain a proclivity to be receptive to an antiestablishment message. If anything, these traits should be associated with support for populist parties along the lines of the host ideology of the populist party. To address this, we control for the other big five traits in study 1.

Populist voters have also been described as the "losers of globalisation" (Kriesi et al. 2006)—that is, individuals who are more likely to be unemployed, have lower incomes, belong to lower classes, or have a lower education level. Recent work, however, has found mixed evidence for the claim that populist electorates generally hold lower socioeconomic positions (Rooduijn 2018). In study 1 we control for socioeconomic variables to address this possibility.

STUDY 1: A CROSS-COUNTRY, CROSS-CONTINENT TEST OF THE CORRELATION BETWEEN AGREEABLENESS AND SUPPORT FOR POPULISTS

We start by testing whether people low on agreeableness are more likely to support populist parties and politicians. We test this link using samples from Western Europe—Germany (Die Linke and AfD), Switzerland (Swiss People's Party, SVP), the Netherlands (Party for Freedom, PVV), and the United Kingdom (UK Independence Party, UKIP)—North America (United States: Trump), Scandinavia (Denmark: Danish People's Party, DF), southern Europe (Spain: Podemos), and Latin America (Venezuela: Hugo Chavez).[3] This way we maximize the variation in the host ideology of the populist actors.[4] This is an important prerequisite to make sure that a possible association between low agreeableness and support for populists is not due to the host ideology of the populist politician or party. UKIP, AfD, DF, PVV, SVP, and Trump espouse a host ideology that is nationalist and exclusionist (Mudde 2007). Die Linke, Podemos, and Chavez are populists with a left-wing host ideology (Hawkins 2010; Ramiro and Gomez 2017).

We combine different publicly available data sets. Therefore, our theoretical concepts are not always measured with the same variables (for an overview, see table 1). We rely on self-reported vote choice in the last election or vote intention at time of the survey (see table 1). We created a dummy variable with support for the populist party (1) or another party (0).

In all samples, agreeableness is measured using validated measures that have good convergent validity (see table 1 and the appendixes, available online). In all samples, and in the other study in this article, we computed the average score of the items and then, for the sake of comparability, rescaled the variable so that it ranges from 0 (lowest observed value on the trait) to 1 (highest observed value on the trait). In some samples we were forced to rely on brief measures of agreeableness (1, 2, or 3 items) that tend to underestimate the criterion validity (Bakker and Lelkes 2018). As such, the use of some brief measures should be seen as conservative tests of the association between agreeableness and support for populists.

In our statistical models, we control for the other four big five traits, authoritarianism (American National Election Studies [ANES]), ideology (with the exception of the Understanding Society in the United Kingdom), sex, age, education, income, ethnicity (United States), language of the survey (Switzerland), and political cynicism (United Kingdom, Denmark, Netherlands, Spain; for an overview, see table 1). To save space we provide the wording of all variables and descriptive statistics in the appendix belonging to each sample.

We have 15 tests of the association between agreeableness and the vote for populist parties and politicians based on 13 population-based surveys in eight different countries across three continents. We used logistic regression models because the dependent variable is dichotomous (populist support [1] or not [0]). To interpret the results across the samples, we calculate for each test the odds ratios of agreeableness and their 95% confidence intervals (CIs). These coefficients are projected in figure 1, whereby results for each country are plotted in a separate horizontal panel, and the coefficients based on the different samples are provided within the panel of the country from which the sample was drawn. We expected to observe odds ratios lower than 1 because this indicates that low agreeable individuals are more likely to support a populist. The closer the odds ratio is to zero, the stronger the effect. The odds ratio scale is asymmetrical in nature; therefore, the point estimate is not necessarily in the center of its 95% CI.

Figure 1 shows that in all 15 tests, the odds ratio is lower than one. Moreover, 11 out of these 15 models achieve statistical significance at the conventional level ($p < .05$), and in two of the four remaining samples—the Dutch Election Study 2012 and Venezuela—the p-values are smaller than .1. Aside from being statistically significant, the associations between agreeableness and populist support are substantive. In the United Kingdom, for instance, the British Election Studies shows that people who score a standard deviation below the mean of agreeableness are 1.81 times more likely to vote for UKIP than respondents who score a standard

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3. In the Netherlands, in 2017 four new populist parties participated in the elections aside from the PVV—namely, GeenPeil, Forum for Democracy (FvD), Voor Nederland, and Nieuwe Wegen—and only FvD got into parliament (with two seats). We focus on support for a populist (1) or not (0). We have not included the Dutch Socialist Party (SP) because no consensus exists whether this party is (still) populist (Rooduijn, de Lange, and van der Brug 2014).

4. See table A.1 (tables A1–A54, B55–B62 are available online) for evidence from expert surveys that support our claim that the host ideology of our parties varies across cases.

Table 1. Overview of Study 1

Country/Study	N	Year	Populist Support	Agreeableness	Covariate	Appendix
United Kingdom:						
Understanding Society	20,753	2010–15	Populist support	BFI-S (3)	Cynicism	A.1
British Election Study	13,673	2015	Vote choice	TIPI (2)	Ideology, cynicism	A.2
Germany:						
GESIS Panel	3,378	2017	Vote intention	BFI-2 (6)	Ideology	A.3
Denmark:						
Election Study W1	3,438	2010	Vote intention	FFM (12)	Ideology, cynicism	A.4
Election Study W2	1,944	2011	Vote choice	FFM (12)	Ideology, cynicism	A.4
Netherlands:						
National election	3,831	2012	Vote choice	IPIP (10)	Ideology, cynicism	A.5
EU Election W1	1,174	2013	Vote intention	Mini-IPIP (4)	Ideology, cynicism	A.6
EU Election W4	639	2014	Vote choice	Mini-IPIP (4)	Ideology, cynicism	A.6
National election	4,506	2017	Vote choice	IPIP (10)	Ideology, cynicism	A.7
Switzerland:						
Household panel	6,177	2009	Vote intention	BFI-S (2)	Ideology, language	A.8
Household panel	5,635	2015	Vote intention	BFI-S (3)	Ideology, language	A.9
Election study	4,956	2015	Vote intention	BFI-S (3)	Ideology, language	A.10
Spain:						
Election study	3,825	2016	Vote choice	BFI (1)	Ideology, cynicism	A.11
Venezuela:						
LAPOP Survey	976	2007	Vote choice	TIPI (2)	Ideology	A.12
United States:						
ANES 2016 preelection	2,139	2016	Vote choice	TIPI (2)	Ideology, ethnicity, authoritarianism	A.13

Note. All studies control for the other big five traits—openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, and neuroticism—as well as gender, age, education, and income (see the appendixes). GESIS = Gesellschaft Sozialwissenschaftlicher Infrastruktureinrichtungen (or German Social Science Infrastructure Services); LAPOP = Latin America Public Opinion Project; ANES = American National Election Studies; BFI = Big Five Inventory; TIPI = Ten Item Personality Inventory; FFM = Five Factor Model; IPIP = International Personality Item Pool. Parenthetical numbers in the Agreeableness column indicate the number of items with which the trait is measured in the sample. N refers to the number of observations in regression analyses that control for the aforementioned variables. Because of missing values, the total number of respondents in the studies is larger.

deviation above the mean of agreeableness. Across 15 tests, we thereby provide convincing evidence that low agreeable voters are more supportive of populist politicians and parties.

The results from Germany require some additional attention. In Germany we assessed the vote for the right-wing AfD and the left-wing Die Linke. To test whether the results are driven by one of the two populist parties, we created a categorical variable capturing whether respondents had the intention to vote for all other German parties (0), Die Linke (1), or the AfD (2). A multinomial regression model shows that, compared to voters for all other German parties, voters for Die Linke (odds ratio = .23, $p < .05$) and the AfD (odds ratio = .27, $p < .1$) score lower on agreeableness (see app. A.3). The odds ratios for the association between agreeableness and vote for Die Linke and AfD are of the same size, while the statistical significance—most likely due to the decrease in statistical power—hovers above and below the threshold of .05.

This model illustrates that voters who score lower on agreeableness are attracted to populist parties with different host ideologies.[5]

In the United States we find a negative but nonsignificant association between agreeableness and the vote choice for Trump. The ANES 2016 (pre- and postelection waves) as well as an original SSI sample collected in 2016 ($N = 1,174$; see app. A.15 for description) included measures of the favorability toward Trump as well as Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, Paul Ryan (only SSI), the Democratic Party (only ANES), and the Republican Party (only ANES). We find that low agreeable participants are more favorable toward Trump.

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5. In the 2017 parliamentary elections in the Netherlands, there were—aside from the PVV—four populist parties that participated in the elections (see n. 3). The number of supporters of these parties in our sample is too low to analyze separately. We arrive at similar conclusions when we only focus on support for the PVV (app. A.7).
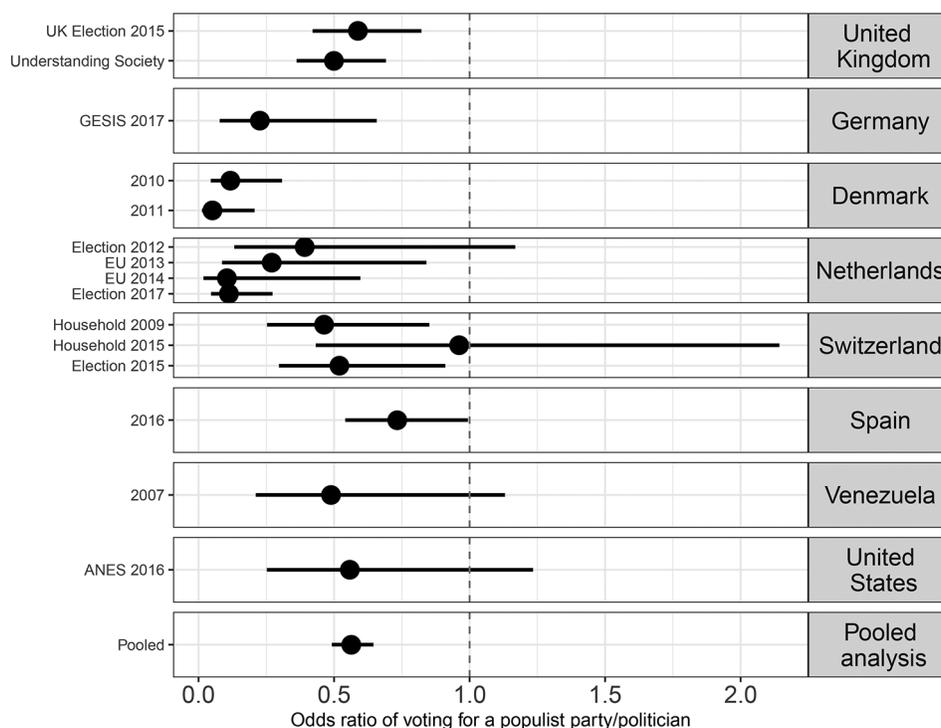
Figure 1. Study 1: agreeableness and voting for populists in the United Kingdom, Germany, Denmark, the Netherlands, Switzerland, Spain, Venezuela, and the United States. Odds ratios (*filled circles*) of the effect of agreeableness on voting for populists, controlling (if possible) for the other big five traits, gender, age, education, income, ideology, and cynicism (table 1). Horizontal lines are 95% CIs. Full regression output for the tests is presented in the appendixes: United Kingdom (apps. A.1–A.2), Germany (app. A.3), Denmark (app. A.4), Netherlands (apps. A.5–A.7), Switzerland (apps. A.8–A.10), Spain (app. A.11), Venezuela (app. A.12), United States (app. A.13), and pooled analysis (app. A.14).

Yet, agreeableness is unrelated to the favorability of Paul Ryan, the Republican Party, Hillary Clinton, Barack Obama, or the Democratic Party (see app. A.16). That agreeableness is unrelated to support for Ryan and the Republican Party indicates that there is no link between agreeableness and a general preference for Republican politicians or the party. This is in line with Fortunato, Hibbing, and Mondak (2018), who show that in the 2016 presidential Republican primaries Trump supporters stood as disagreeable. That agreeableness is not associated with support for Clinton, Obama, or the Democratic Party suggests that agreeableness is not related to support for Democrats either. These additional analyses provide further evidence that low agreeable respondents in the United States are also more favorable of Trump.

Our most comprehensive test of the association between agreeableness and populist support is based on the pooled data across all our samples. This pooled data set consists of 56,178 unique respondents and 78,036 observations in total. We ran a mixed-effects logistic regression model whereby populist vote choice is regressed on agreeableness, the other big five traits, sex, age, education, income, ideology, and dummy variables for all the samples. We specified random intercepts for individuals to account for any clustering. The results of this pooled model are presented in the bottom

panel of figure 1 (for full model output, see app. A.14). Low agreeable respondents are more likely to vote for a populist (odds ratio = .56; 95% CI = [.49, .65]). The effect is substantive: people who score a standard deviation below the mean of agreeableness are on average 1.67 times more likely to vote for a populist party or politician compared to people who score a standard deviation above the mean on agreeableness. At 2 standard deviations below the mean we see a predicted probability of 11.93 (95% CI = [11.37, 12.53]) to vote for a populist party, while those higher on agreeableness (2 standard deviations above the mean) have a lower predicted probability to vote for a populist party (8.51; 95% CI = [8.12, 8.93]). The difference in predicted probability between those lower and higher on agreeableness is small but comparable to other covariates. For instance, the predicted probability for men to vote for populists (12.21; 95% CI = [11.83, 12.60]) is higher compared to that for women (8.27; 95% CI = [7.98, 8.57]). Hence, our pooled analysis provides powerful evidence that across countries and continents, people low on agreeableness are more likely to vote for a populist party or politician.

We also performed some robustness checks. The results do not change when we exclude covariates endogenous to the association between agreeableness and populist vote (education,

income, ideology; see the appendixes per sample). More-over, excluding political cynicism and using different opera-tionalizations of ideology does not change the results either (app. A.17).[6]

As noted, populism combines antielitism and people centrism with a "host ideology." Other personality traits may resonate with this host ideology. Authoritarianism has been put forward as an important factor in understanding support for populists. In the ANES 2016 we find a positive associa-tion between authoritarianism and voting for Trump. High authoritarian respondents—who score 1 standard deviation above the mean on the trait—are 1.75 times more likely to vote for Trump compared to respondents who score low on authoritarianism (i.e., 1 standard deviation below the mean). Additional analyses using the ANES and SSI sample confirm that authoritarianism is positively associated with favorabil-ity of Trump but also other Republican actors, namely, Paul Ryan (who is part of the establishment) and the Republican Party, while authoritarianism correlates negatively with favor-ability for the Democrats Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama as well as the Democratic Party (see app. A.16).

A subsample of the British Election Studies 2015 (wave 7) also included a measure of authoritarianism. We find a po-sitive association between authoritarianism and support for UKIP (app. A.2). Yet, when we turn to the associations be-tween authoritarianism and the self-reported favorability of the different parties in the United Kingdom, we find that authoritarianism also correlates with support for the Con-servatives—which is the prominent right-wing party in the United Kingdom (and negatively with support for the left-wing Labour Party and the Greens).

To conclude, our findings regarding authoritarianism in the United States and United Kingdom, in combination with existing studies (Dunn 2015), indicate that authoritarianism is not a correlate of populism but that it relates to support for parties and politicians along the lines of their "host" ideology.

Turning to the other covariates, we find inconsistent asso-ciations between cynicism and support for populist parties (see also Rooduijn 2018) and inconsistent patterns between sup-port for populist parties and the other big five traits (app. A.14). Finally, the pooled analysis shows that men, lower-educated people, and those with lower income are more likely to sup-port populists (app. A.14).

To sum up: in eight countries—using 13 population-based cross-sectional samples—low agreeable voters are more sup-portive of populist parties irrespective of their "host ideology."

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6. In app. A.18 we show that, compared to voters for all other parties, low agreeable voters are more likely to vote for populists and to abstain from their vote.

STUDY 2: THE CAUSAL EFFECT OF POPULIST COMMUNICATION

Our second study assesses whether politicians who express different populist messages receive more support from low agreeable citizens than candidates conveying nonpopulist messages. To investigate the causal effect of these messages, we conducted a conjoint experiment (Hainmueller, Hop-kins, and Yamamoto 2014). In our original SSI sample (July 2016)—introduced in study 1—we presented participants with two election rounds in which they had to choose be-tween two fictitious political candidates: 869 (73.89%) of the 1,176 respondents in the SSI sample (see app. B.1 for details about the sample and measures) were randomly assigned to participate in this experiment. Agreeableness (10 items; Gold-berg et al. 2006) and authoritarianism (four items; Feldman and Stenner 1997) were measured before the experiment.

Participants were introduced to two fictitious politicians and asked to cast a vote for one of them and report how they felt toward both politicians. We randomly assigned six at-tributes to each politician in each round. This way, we could estimate the effect of different treatments (the attributes). Our focus here is on three attributes: the first is a statement that describes the candidate as pro- or antiestablishment. The antiestablishment message is: "The House of Representatives is mostly full of Washington insiders who only care about themselves." The proestablishment message is: "The House of Representatives is mostly full of honest and hard-working people who care about ordinary Americans."

The second attribute is a statement about people centrism (see "people centrism" in table 2). Populists are said to wor-ship the people and to emphasize the people's fundamental position at the center of politics. Here, we define the people as the people in a country. The statement that places the people central states: "I will do everything the American people want." We compare that with an anti-people-centric state-ment, namely, "I will do what is best for America even if the people disagree." We do not expect that agreeableness moder-ates the effect of this message, as the core of the message does not resonate with those lower or higher on agreeableness.

Third, we vary a statement about seeking conflict or co-operation with other representatives (see "conflict" in table 2). A message that stresses the importance of conflict is expected to be more effective among the low agreeable respondents (who are conflict seeking), while a message stressing the im-portance of cooperation might be more effective among the high agreeable (who like to cooperate). Although conflict is not a defining element of populism, populist rhetoric is almost always conflict seeking (Taggart 2000).

Furthermore, we vary policy stances toward immigrants and the economy, and include a statement about the candidate's

Table 2. Conjoint Experiment: Dimensions and Treatments

Dimension	Treatment
Antiestablishment	1. The House of Representatives is mostly full of Washington insiders who only care about themselves.
	2. The House of Representatives is mostly full of honest and hard-working people who care for ordinary Americans.
People centrism	1. I will do everything the American people want.
	2. I will do what is best for America even if the people disagree.
Conflict	1. I will cooperate with other Representatives to get my proposals accepted in the House.
	2. I will fight my opponents to get my proposals accepted in the House.
Immigration	1. Immigrants from countries that are torn apart by war or natural disaster should be welcomed in America.
	2. Immigration is good for our economy. Immigrants can take up vacant jobs and bolster economic growth.
	3. Immigrants steal jobs from ordinary Americans. We should stop immigration!
	4. America is for Americans. Therefore, we should stop immigration.
Taxation	1. Increasing taxation of the rich is theft because the rich contribute more to economic growth.
	2. We should increase taxes for all Americans because we need to lower the federal deficit.
	3. We should tax the rich more because the wealthiest households do not pay their fair share.
	4. Increasing taxation for all Americans is theft because taxation is never a solution to lower the federal deficit.
Background	1. I have been a politician for most of my career.
	2. I worked as an economic advisor of the federal government before running for office.
	3. I worked as a management consultant before running for office.
	4. I worked as a social worker before running for office.

career (see table 2 for an overview of the treatments and app. B.1 for an explanation of the rationale underlying the treatments). The benefit of a conjoint experiment is that we can evaluate the effects of the various ingredients of the populist message for low and high agreeable people in the absence of the political context of the real world. With fictitious candidates, existing sympathies for a party or a politician play no role. Moreover, by randomly assigning attributes like policy stances, we are not limited to the ideological menu that existing populist parties offer. Also, the setup allows us to evaluate the relative impact of each of the three different populism attributes.

A total of 868 of the 869 respondents completed the experiment. Because each respondent chose between two candidates in two rounds, we obtain 1,736 choices. We pool analyses at the individual level and estimate ordinary least squares models in which the standard errors are clustered by respondents to reflect that the choices are not independent (Hainmueller et al. 2014). We interact agreeableness with all treatment indicators. Note that we can treat agreeableness as a moderator of populist rhetoric because using a six-year longitudinal study of Dutch citizens ($N = 2,270$) we show that supporting a populist party does not affect a person's agreeableness over time (app. B.10).

To account for the explanation that those high on authoritarianism are drawn toward populist politicians, we also interact the treatment indicators with authoritarianism. The correlation between agreeableness and authoritarianism is low ($r = 0.06$), so we do not include an interaction term between the two personality characteristics. We include a dummy variable for the round to account for the fact that the choice in round 1 could influence the choice in round 2. The main effects of the different attributes on vote choice are discussed in appendix B.3.[7]

In line with our expectations, we find evidence that agreeableness moderates the effect of the antiestablishment message on vote choice ($b = -.24$, SE $= .09$, $p = .006$; for full regression output, see app. B.4). To facilitate the interpretation of this finding, we plot the marginal effect of the antiestablishment message on vote choice over the range of agreeableness. Figure 2A shows a positive marginal effect of the antiestablishment message compared to the proestablishment message on vote choice among low agreeable respondents, while there is not a significant marginal effect of the antiestablishment message on vote choice among respondents scoring higher on agreeableness. This means that a candidate who expresses an antiestablishment message receives more votes from low agreeable individuals than a candidate expressing a proestablishment message does. This effect is significant among roughly 20% of respondents with the lowest levels of agreeableness. The effect is also substantive: we see a 10%

7. A randomization check showed that randomization was successful (app. B.2).
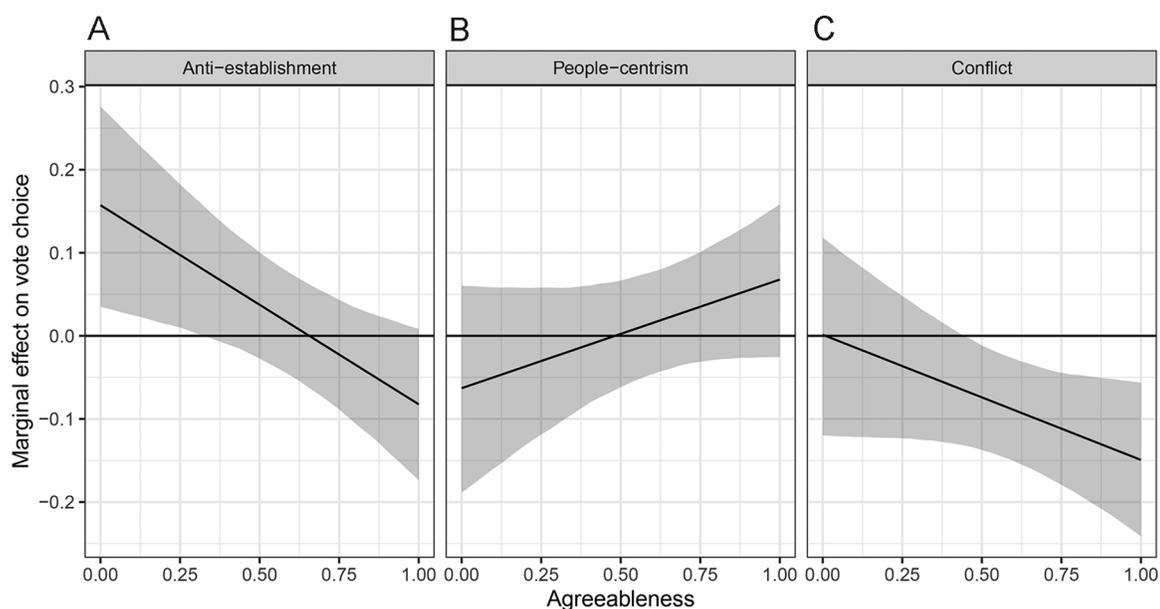
Figure 2. Study 2: effect of three populist messages on vote choice conditional on agreeableness. Solid line is the predicted marginal effect on vote choice, and shaded area is the 95% CI. *A*, Marginal effect of the antiestablishment—compared to the proestablishment—message on vote choice over the range of agreeableness. *B*, Marginal effect of the procentralist—compared to the anticentralist—message on vote choice over the range of agreeableness. *C*, Marginal effect of the conflict—compared to the cooperation—message on vote choice over the range of agreeableness. See appendix B.4, for the full regression output.

increase in the probability to vote for a politician with an antiestablishment message compared to a politician with a proestablishment message among agreeable respondents who score 2 standard deviations below the mean.

We find no evidence that agreeableness moderates the effects of communicating a people-centrist discourse ($b = .12$, $SE = .09$). Figure 2*B* shows a positive slope, and CIs both below and above zero. In sum, low and high agreeable people are equally likely (or unlikely) to support politicians who make people-centric claims.

Figure 2*C* shows the results for the conflict statement. Politicians stating that they will fight their opponents are less popular among high agreeable respondents than politicians stating that they will seek cooperation ($b = -.15$, $SE = .09$, $p = .09$). Here we also see approximately a 10% decrease in popularity of candidates seeking conflict if we move from low agreeable respondents (2 standard deviations below the mean) to high agreeable respondents (2 standard deviations above the mean).

Turning to the other factors in the experiment, we do not find any association between agreeableness and the specific policy stances on the economy (app. B.4). We do find that agreeableness moderates the effect of the anti-immigration message ($b = -.31$, $SE = .13$). Those higher on agreeableness become less likely to vote for a politician who states that "immigrants steal jobs from ordinary Americans. We

should stop immigration!" compared to one who states that "immigrants from countries that are torn apart by war or natural disaster should be welcomed in America." Among low agreeable respondents there is no difference in the extent to which the anti-immigration message leads to more or less votes compared to the proimmigration message (app. B.4). We do not find that agreeableness moderates the effect of the other anti-immigration message "America is for Americans. Therefore, we should stop immigration" ($b = -.23$, $SE = .13$). A post hoc explanation could be that for the high agreeable respondents an anti-immigrant position focusing on economic consequences might not be very effective, as high agreeable respondents tend to hold more left-wing economic policy preferences (Bakker and Lelkes 2018).

After casting their vote, participants were asked to report their feelings toward the politician on a scale from very unfavorable (0) to very favorable (100), which we recoded to range from 0 (unfavorable) to 1 (favorable). We reran the same model that we used for vote choice and arrived at the same results. The interaction effect between the treatment (antiestablishment vs. proestablishment message) and agreeableness is negative but not statistically significant ($b = -.06$, $SE = .05$, $p = .23$). In line with the results for vote choice, we find that those lower on agreeableness express more positive feelings toward a politician who expresses an antiestablishment message compared to a politician who

employs a proestablishment discourse—although the effect is weaker.[8] In line with the results for vote choice, the effect of the people-centric message on feelings toward the politicians is not moderated by agreeableness. Finally, we find, contrary to the results for vote choice, that the conflict message on feelings toward the politicians is not moderated by agreeableness.

We also performed a series of robustness checks. We evaluated the linearity assumption in the interaction term (app. B.5). We also created a three-step populism scale (0 = no populist features; 3 = fully populist) and interacted it with agreeableness. We do find the expected pattern that in cases in which a candidate had no populist features (scale = 0) high agreeable people were more likely than low agreeable people to support a candidate. Reversely, a "fully" populist candidate (scale = 3) was supported by low agreeable individuals but not high agreeable ones. However, these effects were markedly weaker than the individual effect of the antiestablishment message (app. B.6). Partisanship does not moderate the effect of the antiestablishment message (app. B.7); rather, it moderates the effects of the ideological messages. Controlling for partisanship does not affect the interaction between agreeableness and the antiestablishment message. Finally, the results are not conditional on sex—with the exception of the conflict message—or age (app. B.8).

Authoritarianism does not moderate the effect of the antiestablishment message, nor does it interact with the people-centric message or the cooperation message. Authoritarianism does, however, moderate the effect of the position on immigration on candidate support. Specifically, the messages that "immigrants steal jobs from Americans" and "America is for Americans" lead to more votes for a politician among the high-authoritarian respondents compared to a politician who states that "immigrants from countries that are torn apart by war or natural disaster should be welcomed in America" (app. B.4).

The results from the conjoint experiment in study 2 show that low agreeable individuals vote for a politician who communicates a message that matches their personality, namely, an antiestablishment message. At the same time, the effect of the people-centric message is not moderated by agreeableness. The antiestablishment message does not resonate with authoritarianism. Instead, authoritarian voters turn out to be susceptible to an anti-immigration message—one of the key ingredients of the host ideology of radical right-wing populists.

DISCUSSION

Using correlational studies and a conjoint experiment, this article demonstrates that the antiestablishment message of

populists resonates with the personality of low agreeable voters. We report negative associations between agreeableness and support for populists for both right-wing (e.g., UKIP, AfD, DF, PVV, SVP, and Trump) and left-wing (e.g., Podemos, Die Linke, Chavez) populists. Using a conjoint experiment, we established the causal link between the antiestablishment message and agreeableness. In sum, using two different studies—one with high external validity and one with high internal validity—we conclude that low agreeable people indeed are more likely to root for populists.

Study 1 also shows that, in addition to agreeableness, authoritarianism predicts support for Trump and UKIP. Yet, authoritarianism also explains support for Paul Ryan, the US Republican Party in general, and the UK Conservatives. Study 2 suggests why this might be the case: people scoring high on authoritarianism are susceptible to anti-immigration messages. We interpret these findings as evidence for a second route to support for populists, namely, through their host ideology and not their antiestablishment message. This finding then only applies to right-wing populism, not populism in general. Hence, we show two routes that link personality to support for populists: agreeableness resonates with antiestablishment messages, while other personality traits (e.g., authoritarianism) resonate with messages related to the host ideology of a populist party or politician.

In both our studies, we find no indication that the association between agreeableness and support for populists is conditional on the host ideology of the populist party (politician). Using our German case in study 1, we showed that within one country agreeableness is an equally strong correlate of support for a populist party with a right-wing ideology (AfD) and a populist party with a left-wing ideology (Die Linke). Also, in our conjoint experiment we find no evidence that the antiestablishment message is more effective when paired to right-wing compared to left-wing host ideology (app. B.9). Therefore, this study suggests that agreeableness and populist support are correlated regardless of the host ideology of the populist party.

Are those lower in agreeableness just more likely to oppose the incumbent? In study 1, we found no evidence that those lower in agreeableness are just supporters of challenger parties (app. A.19). That said, incumbent status may fundamentally change a party's rhetoric (Schumacher et al. 2015) and influence the association between voter preferences and populist support (Silva 2019). If populists in office mainstream their rhetoric, they risk losing support from their disagreeable voting base. Yet if they stick to their antiestablishment rhetoric, they might provoke a credibility issue because such rhetoric is not compatible with their position in office. One advantage of our current times is that this hypothesis can be subjected to firmer statistical tests.

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8. See app. B.4 for a similar plot as in fig. 2.

The associations between agreeableness and populism in study 1 varied across samples: most (11) but not all (four) were statistically significant ($p < .05$), and the effect sizes varied between samples. There are multiple explanations for these differences. Measurement error in the samples with brief personality batteries (Bakker and Lelkes 2018), the specific characteristics of the populist parties, the time period, measurements of the dependent variable, and covariates and other unknown differences between samples and countries could explain why our results vary.[9] We would welcome future research that assesses the association between personality and political outcomes of interest—such as, but not limited to, populism—using fully equivalent cross-country studies.

More work is needed to decide whether people centrism simply is not effective in mobilizing low agreeable people (see study 2) or that our null findings are caused by the design of our experiment. One problem we had is that it is not so clear what a viable opposite of a people-centric statement would be. In our opinion, letting a candidate say that she or he will not listen to the people is unlikely to be a successful way to persuade people regardless of their personality. Therefore, we introduced the element "I will do what is best for America." Arguably, this opens up other mechanisms. In addition to that, the second element "even if the people disagree" might actually work better with low agreeable people, because they actually have a preference to disagree. In sum, we welcome new research using similar or alternative treatments before making a final call regarding agreeableness and "people centrism."

This article analyzed with whom populist antiestablishment messages resonate most strongly. As such, we do not explain why populism emerges on the menu of political choices in the first place or why it receives more and more attention from media and mainstream politicians. It might very well be the case that an important explanation of the rise of populism is that populist parties have become increasingly successful at communicating their antiestablishment message to a general audience. However, the external supply side aspect of populism is—although crucial to its success—not a question we deal with here.

Our experiment in study 2 showed that the antiestablishment message resonates with low agreeable voters. Together with study 1 and the earlier work by Bakker et al.

(2016) this provides compelling evidence for the link between agreeableness and populism. But agreeableness might be the relevant trait for a variety of antiestablishment manifestations in politics. Earlier studies, for instance, found that low agreeable individuals are more supportive of secessionist movements (Barceló 2017) and more likely to protest (Brandstätter and Opp 2014).

Our two routes that link agreeableness and authoritarianism to voting behavior underlie our broader theory that links personality with susceptibility to political messages and is thus not limited exclusively to agreeableness/authoritarianism and antiestablishment/anti-immigration messages. For instance, the message of hope might be more attractive to those who are more prone to experience positive affect and enthusiasm, the message of change might be more attractive among those willing to take risks (Kam and Simas 2012), and signs of disgust might be more effective among those more sensitive to disgust (Kam and Estes 2016). These are just some examples of how the interaction between political communication and personality might shape political choices.

Classical models of voter behavior at the microlevel showed that citizens' policy preferences and socioeconomic backgrounds matter for their vote choice. Our study feeds into a growing literature stating that congruence between a message and a person's personality is another route through which voters arrive at their vote choice. Yet, we can only speculate about the implications of our findings for citizen competence. For instance, we do not know whether voters select into messages that resonate with their personality. And if they do, are the effects of personality amplified or hampered? We also do not know whether voters learn more or less from messages that are congruent with their personality. These are just some of the questions that could help answer whether it is normatively good or bad that citizens are persuaded by messages that resonate with their personality.

Our study illustrates that personality underlies political behavior, and it is not specific to populism at all. Arguing (like Müller 2017, 16) that people who study the personality correlates of populism "unashamedly" label populist voters as people with bad personalities is misguided. We make no normative claims about agreeableness. In fact, one of the authors of this article scores low on agreeableness. We also disagree with claims that populist voters should be sent to a "political sanatorium" (16). In fact, disagreeableness is associated with thinking and being critical (McCrae and Costa 1989), protest (Brandstätter and Opp 2014), speaking up at public meetings and contacting elected officials (Gerber et al. 2012), as well as exposure to more disagreement in discussion networks (Mondak et al. 2010). These are not (necessarily) negative. More broadly, critiquing the establishment is functional

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9. Measurement error could affect our results, as the effect sizes and CIs seem larger in samples where we measured agreeableness using 1, 2, or 3 items per trait (United States, Venezuela, Spain, Switzerland) compared to countries where we used 6, 10, or 12 items to measures agreeableness (i.e., Germany, the Netherlands, and Spain).

and probably healthy in democracies. It is their radical host ideology that makes some populists truly controversial.

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