Varieties of Populist Attitudes in Brexit Britain: Socio-Political and Psychological Correlates of a New Multidimensional Scale

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Abstract

Populism is usually understood as a complex multidimensional phenomenon that encompasses different manifestations. However, most studies on the demand-side adopt a parsimonious minimal definition approach that hinders the ability to capture different forms of populism and the variable weight of its components. This article tests a new multidimensional strategy to measure and compare populist and pluralist attitudes in the context of Brexit Britain. We explore the relationship between populism and Britons' socio-political views —on borders, democracy, governance, identity, and the European Union— and psychological traits —such as conspiracy belief, social alienation, justification of political violence and meaning in life—. Our new Multidimensional Populist Attitudes Scale (MPAS) reveals two varieties of populism, 'aspirational/subversive' and 'identitarian/protective,' and a non-populist 'moderate/pluralist' archetype. The new items introduced in the MPAS can complement (or become an alternative to) extant scales especially in contexts where populist movements do not fully fit narrow conceptualisations of populism.

Keywords: populism, Brexit, psychosocial attitudes, varieties of populism, meaning in life, Euroscepticism, borders, identity, methodology

Introduction

The study of populism has historically focused on analysing populist movements and their leaders (Allcock 1971; Berlin 1968; Rovira-Kaltwasser et al. 2017). Only recently has the literature in populism turned its attention to measuring the demand-side of this phenomenon and have several scales been designed to capture populist attitudes among the public (e.g., Akkerman et al. 2014; Castanho Silva et al. 2018; Schultz et al. 2018). Populism is theoretically conceptualised as a complex and multidimensional phenomenon (Diehl and Bargetz 2024; Olivas Osuna 2021; Soares et al. 2024). However, existing scales of populist attitudes adopt a minimal definition approach and are mostly operationalised as one-dimensional indexes. While this choice serves the purpose of parsimony and comparability, it may also entail some drawbacks (Castanho Silva et al. 2020; De la Torre and Mazzoleni 2019; Olivas Osuna and Rama 2022; Van Hauwaert et al 2020; Wuttke et al. 2020).

With a few exceptions (Erisen et al. 2021; Kruglanski et al. 2021) these populism scales are rarely combined with the analysis of psychological traits. Much can be still done to better understand the personality, emotional and motivational underpinnings associated with populist worldviews and the support for populist parties and their discourses (Aslanidis 2020; Bonansinga 2020; Rovira-Kaltwasser 2021).

This article introduces a new Multidimensional Populist Attitudes Scale (MPAS), that seeks to identify nuances and varieties within populism and explores some associations between populist attitudinal traits and a variety of psychological features —such as conspiracy mentality, social alienation, justification of violence, radicalisation, and meaning of life. For this purpose, we designed an extensive survey —that includes a frequently utilised scale of populist attitudes, by Agnes Akkerman, Cas Mudde and Andrej Zaslove (Akkerman et al. 2014), alongside a and a wide range

of other socio-demographic, political and psychology-oriented questions— and launched it in the United Kingdom (UK) as a test case.

Populist leaders and their discourses became prominent objects of analysis during the Brexit era, but there is an abnormal scarcity of studies focusing on the demand-side populism in the UK. Rather than providing a representative picture of the degree of populism,[1] we seek to identify key attitudinal psycho-social factors associated to British populism. This is an exploratory study into the complex nature of populism and different typologies within that can pave the way for further research into the insufficiently explored intersection between populism and psychology studies. Our analysis confirms that populism, as reflected by the scale of Akkerman et al. (2014), is useful to predict certain political and social attitudes associated to British populism in the literature. However, we show that the new populism items introduced in the MPAS, not only perform well in terms of internal and external validity but also serve to reveal two distinct types of 'populist' profiles that extant scales have failed to capture: a somewhat left-leaning 'aspirational/subversive' type of populism and a right-leaning 'identitarian/protective' one. The former tend to display stronger discontent with political institutions, a higher degree of social alienation and search for meaning in life. The latter hold significantly more Eurosceptic, anti-immigration and authoritarian views, and find that their lives are meaningful, despite feeling their identity threatened. MPAS also captures a non-populist 'moderate/pluralist' archetype that correlate negatively with the two populist profiles and with several attitudinal traits and indexes that the literature usually links to populism, but that cannot be simply considered the antithesis of it.

[1] The survey includes 107 items and n=748 individuals. The sample selected by Prolific Academic was representative in terms of gender and ethnic background.

This article first outlines why researchers should pay more attention to the analysis of the demand-side of populism. Next, it justifies the methodological choices, including the case-study, the selection of items and scales included in the survey, and the strategy followed to assess the psychometric properties of the MPAS. This is followed by a discussion of the results and lessons drawn. Finally, we summarise our findings and some limitations of our study and suggest that a more multidimensional conception and operationalisation of populism would help to accommodate cases that do not sit well within the minimal definition approach, that underpins most current demand-side measurement tools.

The analysis of the demand-side of populism

Populism cannot be consistently identified with a particular type of policies, political ideology, or socio-economic group (Müller 2016: 11-19). While some researchers consider populism as a thin-centred ideology (Mudde 2004) or define it as political strategy employed by charismatic leaders to reach or exercise power (Weyland 2001), others focus on either the discursive (Jagers and Walgrave 2007; Laclau 2005) or performative nature of the phenomenon (Moffit 2016; Ostiguy 2009). These approaches are complementary and mostly operate on different rungs of the ladder of abstraction, but they have different implications on how the concept is operationalised (Bonikowski and Gidron 2016; Olivas Osuna 2021).

Most studies focus on the supply-side of populism, for instance, by measuring support for populist parties (Taggart and Pirro 2021), how they rule (Bartha et al. 2020), their party manifestos (Rooduijn and Pauwels 2011) or populist leaders' discourses (Hawkins 2009), press releases and social media communications (Lacatus 2019). The micro-level demand-side component of this phenomenon, —i.e.,

individuals' attitudes and underlying psychological mechanisms that elicit support for populist leaders, ideas, and proposals— was historically left out of populism research.

The relationship between the supply- and demand-side of populism is complex. Although several studies demonstrate that populist attitudes and beliefs, are strong among prospective voters of populist parties (Akkerman et al. 2017; Loew and Faas 2019; Marcos-Marne 2021; Mazzoleni and Ivaldi, 2022; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018), other empirical works show that this relationship does not hold consistently across different countries/regions or the left-right ideological spectrum (Castanho Silva et al. 2022; Jungkunz et al. 2021; Olivas Osuna and Rama 2022; Rovira-Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert 2020) or question that people holding populist views are significantly more electorally receptive to candidates' populist proposals (Neuner and Wratil 2021).

Populism has been theoretically and empirically connected with problems of political representation (Castanho Silva and Wratil 2021; Laclau 2005; Roberts 2016). This implies that populist attitudes often emerge when voters do not perceive any political party as close to their interests. In countries where the electoral system favours concentration of votes, like the UK, strategic voting makes even more problematic to detect the growth of populist sentiment among the people via the analysis of electoral success of populist parties. Therefore, equating voters of 'populist parties' or supporters of 'populist leaders' with 'populist individuals' is a problematic assumption (Hawkins and Rovira-Kaltwasser 2019: 7).

To truly unearth the roots of populism in society it is important to also investigate the demand-side of the phenomenon, that is, individuals' psycho-social attitudes that may resonate with populist ideas, discourses, performances and strategies. Aware of this need, several researchers began to devise methods to compare

the core political attitudinal traits linked to populism using survey questionnaires (Akkerman et al. 2014; Elchardus and Spruyt 2012; Hawkins et al. 2012; Hobolt et al. 2016; Oliver and Rahm 2016). For example, Elchardus and Spruyt (2016) designed a four-item scale that tries to capture anti-elitist views and the idealisation of ordinary people. Oliver and Rahn's (2016) introduced a scale that focuses on anti-elitism, mistrust of experts and national affiliation. Hobolt, Anduiza, Carkoglu, Lutz and Sauger (2016) included in the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) Module 5 an instrument to measure populism with seven items that reflect the disconnect between ordinary people and elites, and whether the former should have the final say in important policy decisions. Similarly, Schulz, Müller, Schemer, Wirz, Wettstein and Wirth's (2018) fifteen-item scale focuses on anti-elitism, popular sovereignty, and the construction of the people as homogenous and virtuous.

The most widely used instrument is Akkerman et al.'s (2014) scale (Castanho Silva et al 2020). Built upon the work of Hawkins, Riding and Mudde (2012), it seeks to capture three theoretical dimensions of populism: the notion of popular sovereignty, anti-elitism, and a Manichean worldview (Online Appendix Table A1). Initially tested in the Netherlands, it was later used in a variety of case studies and cross-country comparisons and has proven a significant ability to explain support for populist movements in Europe (Akkerman et al. 2017; Geurkink et al. 2020; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018).

The Akkerman et al.'s (2014) scale tends to perform better than most extant populism instruments but it still presents some drawbacks (Castanho Silva et al. 2020). For instance, studies based on this scale have revealed a more limited capacity to explain populism in non-European contexts and a differential ability to capture supporters of left and right-wing parties (Hawkins et al. 2020; Rovira-Kaltwasser and

Van Hauwaert 2020). Some of the scale items tend to elicit similar responses across participants, what reduces its ability to discriminate individuals that could be considered as populists or strongly populist from non-populist individuals (Castanho Silva et al. 2020; Van Hauwaert et al. 2020). Moreover, when its theoretical subdimensions are aggregated, it becomes difficult to discern which of them explain better certain correlations between populism and other relevant socio-political attitudes (Marcos-Marne et al. 2024).Most studies using the abovementioned populism scales, rarely analyse separately their attitudinal components[2] which limits the capacity to distinguish between different mechanisms and manifestations of populism and risk turning populism into an overly narrow prototype (Diehl and Bargetz 2024). Akkerman et al. operationalise populism as a single dimension, what hinders the ability to analyse varieties of populism. Other authors have demonstrated the value of supplementing Akkerman et al.'s (2014) scale with the inclusion of additional items to help disentangle the dimensions that theoretically underpin this ideational conceptualisation of populism (Van Hauwaert et al. 2020) or to incorporate other dimensions, such as populist leadership (Kefford et al. 2021) in the analysis.

Extant measures fail to sufficiently distinguish between the core components of populism or adequately account for the underlying framework that connects them. While most scales reference populism's key elements—its focus on 'the people,' its opposition to elites, and its Manichean worldview—they rarely enable researchers to explore how these dimensions interact or assess the relative importance of each, a limitation that becomes particularly relevant given that 'populist attitudes are complex psychological constructs, which lack the empirical consistency often attributed to them in theory' (Kenny and Bizumic 2024: 717). Additionally, current studies on the

[2] Schultz et al.'s (2018) study is one of the few exceptions to this.

demand-side of populism tend to fall short in capturing the heterogenous ways in which the populist 'people' is constructed in populist discourses (Roch and Cordero 2023).

Our proposal of a new instrument to measure populist attitudes—the MPAS—is grounded on a more multi-dimensional understanding of populism (Hameleers and de Vreese 2020; Olivas Osuna 2021) and the need to go beyond the minimal definition approach that inspires extant populist scales but also limits their ability to distinguish varieties within populism (De la Torre and Mazzoleni 2019). MPAS seeks to better capture the usual anti-elitism and people centrism attributes that extant scales investigate, by introducing items with slightly stronger wordings to elicit more differential responses from individuals with a populist worldview. More importantly, we also try to represent other attributes that have been theoretically linked to populism but rarely incorporated in populist attitudes scales. For example, while the items by Akkerman et al.'s items refer specifically to political elites we explore a broader conception of the elites and anti-system/anti-status quo attitudes (Müller 2016; Panizza 2005: 3-4). We test several items that refer to the moral nature of the populist antagonism and the attempts to delegitimise the 'other' (Arato 2013; Mudde 2004). Likewise, we add items that express a romanticised conception of society with a homogenous people and static identities (Olivas Osuna 2022; Taggart 2000: 3-5), as well as others that show a preference for majoritarian rule and direct democratic instruments (Canovan 1981:177; Mohrenberg et al. 2019). Finally, we incorporate items suggesting strong personalistic leadership (Laclau 2005:99-100; Taggart 2000: 100–103).[3]

Methodology

[3] See full list of items tested on Online Appendix Table A2.

Case selection

The UK is an interesting case-study for several reasons. Although many authors analyse the supply-side — for instance, investigating political speeches (Tindall 2022), media coverage (Deacon & Wring 2016), electoral manifestos (March 2017) and governance (Jennings and Lodge 2019)—there is an abnormal scarcity of studies on the demand-side of populism in the UK. The few studies that do it, approach it via proxy measures such as analysis of political trust or satisfaction with the British democracy (Jennings et al. 2020) or focus on a specific subset of the population (Zanotti and Rama 2021). Equating populism with the analysis of the electoral performance or support for populist parties is especially problematic in the case of the UK. Using the PopuList party classification (Rooduijn et al. 2019), Taggart and Pirro (2021: 285-91) show that populist party vote share in 2019 national elections was only 3.2 per cent in the UK. Citizens with populist views do not always or only vote for 'populist parties' (Koch et al. 2021; Neuner and Wratil 2022). Hence the need to directly investigate individuals' populist attitudes and seek alternative indicators for external validity.

Moreover, British populism has been linked to a wide variety of factors, such anti-establishment rhetoric, (Mair 2002: 92-4) a cultural backlash against ongoing changes in social values (Norris and Inglehart 2019), a sense of nostalgic deprivation (Gest et al. 2018), and a reaction against economic neoliberalism (Hopkin and Blyth 2019)..

Nonetheless, Euroscepticism is the phenomenon that is most frequently connected to populism in the British context. Historically, left- and right-wing Eurosceptic politicians and media have appealed to the notion of popular sovereignty and re-imagined 'Europe' as a 'other' against whom building new British political

identities (Bale 2018; Gifford 2006; Ruzza and Pejovic 2019). While in the 70s, 80s and early 90s Euroscepticism was linked to the Labour and Green parties, from 1997 onwards, it became more prominent within the Conservative Party and UKIP (Halikiopoulou et al. 2012; Van Elsas and Van Der Brug 2015). The relationship between Euroscepticism and populism became evident during the Brexit referendum campaign and the emergence of new (cross-party) political identities: Leavers and Remainers (Clarke and Newman 2019).

Our survey and analyses contribute to dissect British populism and assess to what extent different archetypes of populism are associated with support for specific political parties and the abovementioned factors suggested in the literature. Moreover, data was collected at a historically very relevant moment: the year when the UK formally quits the European Union.

Participants and procedure

Our analyses are based on an original online questionnaire conducted across the UK between 17 November 2020 and 4 December 2020. A total of 849 responses were collected via Prolific Academic —a platform that is considered to provide high quality panel data (Peer et al. 2022; Douglas et al. 2023)—. Those who failed the attention checks, left the survey unfinished or completed it in an abnormally low time frame were removed from the study.

The final sample consisted of 748 participants (50.5 per cent female, 49.2 per cent male, and 0.3 per cent non-binary), aged from 18 to 76 (M=45.00, SD=15.38). Of them, 15.6 per cent completed basic or secondary education, 21.9 per cent further education, and 62.4 per cent higher education. Regarding their nationality, 91.8 per cent were from the UK, and the remaining were immigrants (4.9 per cent European, 1.4 per cent Asian, 1.2 per cent American, and 0.5 per cent African). Regarding

religiosity, 56.9 per cent of the sample were agnostic or atheist, 34.1 per cent Christian, 4.9 per cent Muslim, and 4.1 per cent practiced other religions. Although not completely representative of the British population, this sample is appropriate for the purpose of testing a validating a psychology scale, such as the MPAS, and suggesting further avenues for research.[4]

Measures

Our survey included overall 107 items. In this subsection we briefly describe some of the most relevant types of items used in our analysis.

Multidimensional Populist Attitudes Scale (MPAS): The new items designed to capture populism were generated in a process combining deductive and inductive phases and several validation rounds. The initial items were designed to capture different theoretical dimensions and attributes of populism in the literature — antagonistic depiction of the polity, moral interpretation of political actors, idealised construction of society, absence of limits to popular sovereignty and reliance on charismatic leadership—One of the common criticisms to some of the items in previous scales is that some of the questions elicited similar responses across those presumed 'populists' and 'non-populists.' For instance, the Akkerman et al.'s items 'The politicians in the [Country] parliament need to follow the will of the people' and 'Interest groups have too much influence over political decisions' may not help distinguish 'populist' from 'non populist' individuals in some countries or be affected by specific political contexts. Hence the new items not only sought to introduce additional populism attributes that minimal definition approaches ignored but also items that could trigger a more discriminatory response.

[4] Database available (Olivas Osuna et al. 2024)

The new MPAS items were assessed and revised via two online expert questionnaires responded by specialists in the field. The first one was launched in June 2019 and collected the responses of 10 authors in the field of populism who were asked to rate on 5-point Likert scale the degree the 'representativeness' and 'clarity' of each of the items and provided qualitative feedback on the items. A follow up expert survey on in October 2019 was responded by 9 of the experts participating in the first survey and served to assess the new amended wordings. Later a full-day seminar took place in November 2019 to prepare a pilot survey with 300 responses that was launched later the same month.

Based on the analysis of this pilot, we included in our UK survey 37 new populism related items (Table A2 in Online Appendix for full list). Through an exploratory analysis —attending to the factor structure, goodness of fit, the presence of cross-loadings, and theoretical interpretability— 21 items, that loaded into three distinct factors were retained. These factors are labelled taking into consideration the higher loading factors in each of them, as well as some significant correlations observed with other indexes used in the process of external validation —such as meaning in life, social alienation, pluralism, bordering attitudes, etc.— The first factor captures 'aspirational/subversive' (populist) attitudes —mostly reflecting negative views on the elites and the will to radically change the system– , the second factor (that correlates inversely with the other factors) reflects 'moderate/pluralist' (anti-populist) views — less confrontational approach to politics and preference for consensus building— and the third one with an 'identitarian/protective' (populist) belief —emphasis on preserving identity and strong personal leadership— (Table 1 in Results section). Although these populist archetypes, F1 and F3, emerged inductively from our analysis they resonate with theoretical depictions in the literature. The 'aspirational/subversive' is close to Canovan's (1981) and Laclau's (2005) archetypes of populist citizen, while

the ‘identitarian/protective’ are better match to those in Wodak’s (2015) and Norris and Inglehart’s (2019) works.

Akkerman et al.’s (2014) populist attitudes scale: This measure, which is inspired by Hawkins et al. (2012) includes eight items that represent a view of the political world that combines a strong belief in popular sovereignty with a negative perception of politicians (Akkerman et al. 2014: 1333-4). They try to capture three theoretical dimensions: anti-elitism, Manichean worldview, and popular sovereignty (Van Hauwaert et al. 2020, 8). This scale is consistently cited and used in comparative work on populist attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al. 2017; Geurkink et al. 2020; Jacobs et al. 2018; Marcos-Marne 2021; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018) and, compared with most other populism scales, performs well in terms of internal coherence and external validity (Castanho Silva et al. 2020). In line with its authors, we operationalise this scale as a unidimensional additive index. The internal consistency of this measure in our sample was adequate (ω-total=0.8, α=0.72). We also include the ‘‘pluralism’ and ‘elitism’ scales from the same authors (Online Appendix Table A1).

Conspiracy beliefs: Conspiracy theory accusations are typical ways to morally delegitimise the ‘other’ and have been often associated to populism (Bergmann 2018; Eberl et al. 2021). We included items from two different scales. First the ‘Conspiracy mentality questionnaire’ (CMQ; Bruder et al. 2013), that is a 5-item questionnaire evaluating participants’ tendency to engage in conspiracy theories. Second, we included three items corresponding to one of the subdimensions of the ‘Generic conspiracist beliefs scale’ (GCBS) related to personal welfare (Brotherton et al., 2013). To compute participants’ levels of conspiracist beliefs, the sum of the items was obtained. The internal consistency of each of the sets of conspiracy items (5 for CMQ

and the 3 for GCBS) in our sample was good (ω-total=0.85, α=0.89 for CMQ and ω-total=0.85, α=0.85 for GCBS) (Online Appendix Table A3).

Other sets of psychosocial items: Populism is often linked to a crisis of representation and social integration (Gidron and Hall 2020; Roberts 2016), We include 6 items from a scale of social alienation (SA) (Bélenger et al. 2019) that aims to measure detachment from social and cultural participation. The internal consistency of this measure in the sample was good (ω-total=0.92, α=0.87). As populist leaders often try to instrumentalise people's sense of disempowerment and insecurities, we also include four items from a meaning in life scale (Steger et al. 2006) that captures people's sense of own worth and place, two of the items reflect the search for meaning in life and the other two the presence of such meaning. The internal consistency in the sample was adequate (presence: ω-total=0.91, α=0.91; search: ω-total=0.84 α=0.78). Finally, populism is sometimes associated to extremism and vigilantism (Carlson 2019; Jaffrey 2021). We assess also support for political violence (SPV) via a simplified 6-item version of a scale created by the same team of psychologists that introduced the former (Bélenger et al. 2019). Its internal consistency was fair (ω-total=0.83, α=0.76). Next, we include 3 items that assess personal proximity to a radicalised network (Moyano 2011) (ω-total=0.66, α=0.65)., (Online Appendix Table A4).

Bordering attitudes. Given the very important role that internal and external frontiers play in populist discourses as device for 'othering' and 'exclusion' (Laclau 2005; Olivas Osuna 2022) and centrality of immigration in populist discourses in the UK, we include 6 items about borders, three questions expressing preference for stricter border controls and three, that were reversed in the scale, expressing the opposite. These questions reflected economic and security arguments. The internal

consistency of this measure was good (ω-total=0.94, α=0.89) (Online Appendix Table A5).

Brexit-related and other political items. Our survey includes a set of items which reflect some of the main slogans or arguments used by British Eurosceptics and attitudes that the literature theoretically connects with populism in the UK.. We ask participants whether they think that there are places 'left-behind' or that 'don't matter' to the government (Rodríguez-Pose 2018); politicians and experts are 'out-of-touch' (Clarke and Newman 2017); they feel European and Brexit would be positive for the UK and allow people to 'take back control' of their future (Menon and Wager 2020); if globalisation is good for them (Colantone and Stanig 2018) and believe their identity to be threatened (Browning 2019). Since authoritarian values are often associated to populism in the UK (Norris and Inglehart 2019; Zanotti and Rama 2021), we also include four items used in the European Social Survey to measure social liberal views regarding absence of limits to police action, gender equality and same sex couples' rights to adopt children (Online Appendix Table A6).

For most items, participants had to rate their degree of agreement in a 5-point Likert type scale (1='Strongly disagree', 5='Strongly agree'). 'Self-perceived ubication in the traditional left-right axis' uses a 11-point scale (Left=0 – Right=10) and the Bruder et al.'s (2013) conspiracy index uses a 7-point scale. Party affinity was captured with the question 'Which party do you most identify with?' and offered 10 options but we include in our analysis only the most popular ones.

Analytic strategy for the MPAS: To evaluate the psychometric properties of the new populism items, the following analyses were conducted. A descriptive analysis was first carried out, assessing the mean, standard deviation, skew, and kurtosis of the items.

The factor structure of the scale was examined afterwards, conducting a parallel analysis based on the polychoric correlation matrix of the items to determine the number of factors of a scale with categorical data (Garrido, et al. 2013). This procedure generates 500 randomized datasets based on the observed correlation matrix of the items by Monte Carlo simulation and compares the eigenvalues of several factor solutions obtained with the empirical data (i.e., one factor, two factors, three factors, etc.) with the eigenvalues obtained with the simulated datasets. When the eigenvalues of the empirical data are below the expected eigenvalue for the simulated datasets, then adding new factors would not explain more variance of the item than the variance expected by chance.

An Exploratory Structural Equation Modelling (ESEM) was conducted once the number of factors for the dataset was determined, as this method allows to assess simultaneously the factorial structure of the scale (i.e., which items load on each factor), the presence of cross-loadings, and to examine correlated residuals between items (Asparouhov and Muthen 2009; Marsh et al. 2014). We used weighted least squares with adjusted means and variances as estimation method since this procedure performs well with categorical data (Li 2016). The oblimin rotation was also used, as we expected the factors to be correlated. Model fit was assessed using a combination of fit indices, with values of the comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI) 0.95 indicating good fit, values of the root mean squared error by approximation (RMSEA) below 0.08 and 0.06 indicating mediocre and excellent fit, respectively, and values of the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) below 0.08 indicating also good fit (Hu and Bentler 1999; Kline 2016)(Online Appendix Table A7).

Once the factor structure of the new set of populism items was established, its internal consistency was assessed. To do so, Cronbach's α and MacDonald's ω-total were computed, with values above 0.70 indicating an adequate internal consistency.

Following the logic applied by Akkerman et al. (2014) and Elchardus and Spruyt (2016) we create additive indexes for each of the sets of items described above to explore correlations among them and between them and other variables in our survey. We also analyse the relationship with self-placement in the left-right axis and party identification. All analyses were conducted with R statistical package (R Core Team 2021), using the *psych* library (Revelle 2021), except for the ESEM analysis that was conducted with Mplus 8.2 (Muthén and Muthén 2017).

Results

Factor structure and internal consistency

The parallel analysis indicated that three factors were sufficient for the MPAS, as adding more than three factors does not contribute to explain more variance that the attributable to the random datasets (Figure 1).

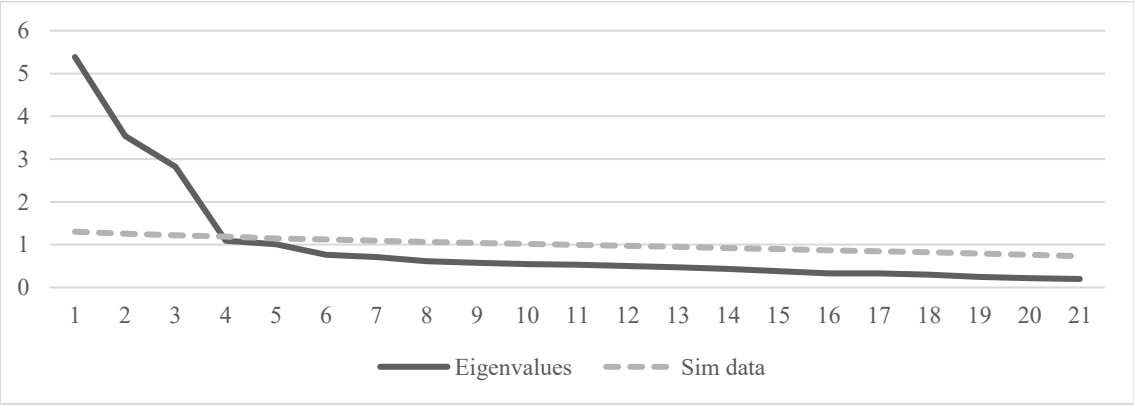

Figure 1: Parallel Analysis

A 3-factors ESEM was conducted afterwards (CFI=0.91, TLI=0.87, RMSEA[90 per cent CI]=0.089[0.084, 0.094], SRMR=0.038). We inspected the residual correlations

of the items and found that three pairs of items were strongly related: i) 'The current system is broken and it must be radically replaced' and 'The system is rotten and we need a completely different new one'; ii) 'Society is not divided into opposing blocs and therefore politics requires moderation and consensus building' and 'Moderation and consensus building are key to the success of democracy'; iii) 'Referendums are better to make political decisions than parliamentary votes' and 'Referendums express the will of the people and their results must be respected at all costs'. Given that each pair of items addressed similar aspects of the construct, we decided to allow their uniqueness to be correlated in the final model.

The new ESEM model showed a good fit to the data (CFI=0.95, TLI=0.93, RMSEA[90 per cent CI]=0.068 [0.062, 0.0], SRMR=0.032). The items loadings are shown in Table 1. The first seven items presented factor loadings above in the first factor, with values above 0.40. We name this first factor as 'aspirational/subversive' (populist) attitudes given that high loading items reflect an opposition to the establishment and will to change it radically, as well as a positive correlation with the 'search' component of meaning in life indicator index (Steger et al. 2006), with social alienation and support for political violence (Bélanguer et al. 2019). Items 7 through 14 loaded onto the second factor, with factor loadings above 0.50. We named this factor as 'moderate/pluralist' (anti-populists) attitudes as the items with the higher factor loading indicate moderate political views and preference for consensus building, correlate positively with Akkerman et al.'s (2014) pluralism scale (PLU) and negatively with their populism one (POP). The last seven items loaded on the third factor —'identitarian/protective' (populist attitudes)—, presenting factor loadings above 0.40. This factor was named as 'identitarian/protective' (populist attitudes) because the items that display high loadings refer to the need to preserve identity and way of life and significant correlations with our bordering attitudes index and the

'presence' component in the meaning in life scale. Only two items from this third factor presented small cross-loadings, 'The people must remain united against those who threaten our values and way of life' and 'Great leaders should be able to act without interference of parties or other political institutions' (Online Appendix Table A7).

The correlation between aspirational/subversive factor (F1) and the identitarian/protective factor (F3) was null (r=0.02, p=0.563), whereas the relation of the of the moderate/pluralist (anti-populist) factor (F2) with the other two was negative (r=-0.18, p<0.001, for F1 and r=-0.12, p=0.001, for F2). This finding suggested that participants with higher levels of anti-populism tended to present lower levels of the other two factors. The internal consistency of each of the factors was adequate for the overall scale (ω-total=0.86), and for the antagonism and morality factor (ω-total=0.86, α=0.85), the anti-populism factor (ω-total=0.84, α=0.84), and the leadership and sovereignty (ω-total=0.64, α=0.75).

Table 1: Exploratory structural equation modelling analysis

	Loadings			**Descriptives**	
	Aspirational/ subversive (F1)	Moderate / pluralist (F2)	Identitarian / protective (F3)	*M*	*SD*
The people must remain united against the elites	0.82	0.02	0.09	3.15	1.07
The elites are enemies of the people	0.77	0.00	-0.10	3.05	1.11
The powerful will never be on the side of the people	0.77	0.03	0.01	3.30	1.14
The system is rotten, we need a completely different new one	0.72	-0.11	-0.05	2.76	1.23
The current system is broken and it must be radically replaced	0.72	-0.02	-0.05	3.45	1.14
Politicians are immoral and unfair	0.65	-0.10	0.07	3.08	1.06
The people must remain united and speak with a single voice	0.42	0.09	0.28	3.39	1.07
It is important to recognise the legitimacy of our political opponents and listen to them	-0.03	0.87	0.05	4.07	0.77
A good political leader should always listen to other politicians, even if they belong to other parties	0.08	0.74	-0.06	4.38	0.75
We must recognise the legitimacy of our political competitors, even if we don't agree with them	-0.07	0.74	0.07	4.03	0.81
Moderation and consensus building are key to the success of democracy	0.04	0.73	-0.05	4.07	0.79
Leaders who defend ideas that are opposed to mine can be also right	-0.13	0.69	0.06	4.08	0.77

Making compromises and agreements with political opponents is worthy	0.01	0.63	-0.11	3.94	0.86
Society is not divided into opposing blocs and therefore politics requires moderation and consensus building	-0.04	0.55	-0.13	3.74	0.95
Our singular identity and way of life must be preserved at all costs	-0.05	-0.04	0.83	3.09	1.17
A strong leader is more important than political parties	-0.01	-0.03	0.62	3.05	1.17
Referendums express the will of the people and their results must be respected at all costs	-0.03	0.08	0.59	3.48	1.22
The people must remain united against those who threaten our values and way of life	0.17	0.24	0.58	3.99	0.89
Great leaders should be able to act without interference of parties or other political institutions	0.03	-0.14	0.57	2.51	1.21
Referendums are better to make political decisions than parliamentary votes	0.24	-0.03	0.42	3.19	1.19
Changes in our identity, culture and way of life are natural and should not be feared	0.22	0.27	-0.44	3.81	1.05

Additional validity evidence

These results can be found in Table 2. We find a strong positive relationship between Akkerman et al.'s (2014) populist attitudes measure (POP) and both populist factors F1 and F3, and a negative one with the non-populist 'moderate/pluralist' factor (F2). The higher standard deviation in F1 and F3 seems to indicate that their items display a higher capacity to discriminate individuals than those in POP. A robust positive relationship emerges between the latter and the Akkerman et al.'s (2014) pluralism index (PLU). It is worth noting that identitarian/protective populism is positively correlated with the Akkerman et al. (2014) elitism index (ELI) (unlike F1 and POP). This result is in line with other recent studies that argue that populism cannot be simply equated to anti-elite views and suggest a more complex relationship between the two (Geurkink et al. 2020; Spruyt et al. 2023). We also find that the two conspiracy indexes included in our survey —Brotherton et al. (2013) and Bruder et al. (2013)— show a positive and moderate relation to F1 and F3, and a negative moderate relation to F2. This is consistent with the literature that predicts a correlation between populism and conspiracionism (Bergmann 2018; Eberl et al. 2021).

Table 2: Correlations between populism and pluralism indexes with other socio-political and psychological indexes and items.

Indexes	*Mean*	*SD*	F1	F2	F3	POP	PLU
Aspirational/subversive populist attitudes (F1)	3.17	0.81					
Moderate/pluralist attitudes (F2)	4.04	0.58	-0.20***				
Authoritarian/protective populist attitudes (F3)	3.07	0.72	0.09*	-0.16***			
Populist attitudes (Akkeman et al. 2014) (POP)	3.25	0.61	0.63***	-0.22***	0.40***		
Pluralism (Akkeman et al. 2014) (PLU)	4.21	0.6	-0.02	0.64***	-0.14***	0.06	
Elitism (Akkerman et al. 2014) (ELI)	2.74	0.65	0.03	0.06	0.15***	0.06	-0.08*
Bordering attitudes (own index)	2.57	0.95	-0.13***	-0.15***	0.60***	0.10**	-0.44***
Conspiracy mentality (Bruder et al. 2013)[5]	4.83	1.22	0.53***	-0.18***	0.35***	0.55***	-0.13***
Generic conspiracist beliefs (Brotherton et al. 2013)	2.11	1.05	0.30***	-0.30***	0.41***	0.41***	-0.31***
Social alienation (Bélenger et al. 2019)	2.09	0.79	0.29***	-0.27***	-0.16***	0.15***	-0.09*
Support for political violence (Bélenger et al. 2019)	1.72	0.73	0.28***	-0.40***	0.08*	0.22***	-0.30***
Radicalised network (Moyano 2011)	2.00	0.84	0.17***	-0.24***	0.06	0.18***	-0.17***
Meaning in life (presence) (Steger et al. 2006)	3.26	1.10	-0.14***	0.10**	0.21***	0.00	0.03
Meaning in life (search) (Steger et al. 2006)	3.21	1.09	0.17***	0.03	0.03	0.13***	0.08*

Taken together, our findings suggest that British participants with higher levels of aspirational/subversive populism (F1) tend to score higher in the Akkerman et al's populist attitudes scale (POP), display a higher degree of social alienation, a stronger positive correlation with the justification of violence (Bélenger et al. 2019) and radicalised network psychology scales (Moyano 2011). However, they display a negative correlation with bordering attitudes —less inclined to favour the reinforcement of borders—. These individuals show a positive correlation with search for meaning in life and a negative one with the items that capture presence of meaning in life (Steger et al. 2006). Meanwhile participants with higher levels of identitarian/protective populism (F3) in the UK tend to hold more negative views towards immigration —preferring stricter border controls— and a more frequent presence of meaning in life. The idealisation and instrumentalisation of the Brexit referendum by the Leave campaign, largely dominated by right-wing politicians, seem

[5] 1 to 7 scale, all other items use a 1 to 5 scale.

to have impacted the composition of the 'identitarian/protective' factor in this country.[6]

Participants with higher levels of moderate/pluralist (non-populist) views (F2), as expected, score lower in conspiracy beliefs, social alienation, justification of violence, radicalised network and bordering attitudes. As expected, they score higher Akkerman et al.' (2014) the PLU index.

The discrepancy shown by both types of populism regarding meaning of life —the aspirational/subversive one correlated positively with the search dimension 'search' and the identitarian/protective with the 'preserve' one— resonates with Porta Caballé's (2021) theoretical argument on the relationship of populism and the concept of 'void'. Drawing from Laclau's conceptualisation of void not as an objective *locus* but as a type of identity (Laclau 2005: 166, 169), Porta Caballé (2021: 70) suggests that it can be precisely the different constructions of the 'people' what can be a key to differentiate different types of populisms. While for 'progressive' populists 'the people' is construed as a void that they are seeking to fill, for 'reactionary' populists it is an 'essence' that should not be altered. This differential attitude vis-à-vis meaning in life and existential voids deserves further attention and can lead us to a better understanding of the psychological underpinnings of different populisms.

MPAS and party identification in the UK

Aspirational/subversive populist attitudes are strongly correlated with left-wing self-placement and identitarian/protective populism with a right-wing one (Table 3). Although strategic voting has historically shaped the electoral behaviour in the UK (Alvarez et al. 2006), and our sample size is insufficient to produce a reliable picture

[6] In a later survey conducted in Italy, Greece and Spain we found that the items related to referendums were not present in F3, although the rest of items displayed similar results (Online Appendix Table A8).

of the entire country, we find that MPAS populism scores predict preference for some parties over other parties (Table A9-A12, Figures A1-A5).

We found significant differences in the aspirational/subversive factor (F1) depending on the vote casted ($F[df]$=25.40[4], p=0.013, η^2 =0.02). Tuckey post-hoc analysis showed that voters from the conservative party exhibited significant lower levels in the aspirational/subversive factor (M=2.74, SD = 0.81) than voters from Labour (M=3.42, SD=0.72), Green Party (M=3.48, SD=0.74), Liberal Democrats (M=3.01, SD=0.74), and Brexit Party (M=3.32, SD=1.00). Voters from Liberal Democrats also displayed significant lower levels in this factor than voters from Labour and Green parties.

Significant differences were also found in the moderate/pluralist factor (F2) depending on participant's vote ($F[df]$=3.74[4], p=0.005, η^2=0.020), with a small effect size. In this case, we found that voters from the Liberal Democrats presented higher levels in the moderate/pluralist factor (M=4.22, SD=0.57) than voters form the Brexit Party (M=3.80, SD=0.81) and Conservative Party (M=4.00, SD=0.53).

Regarding the identitarian/protective factor (F3), we found significant differences depending on participant's vote ($F[df]$=38.46[4], p=0.013, η^2=0.189), with a large effect size. Voters from Brexit party (M=3.78, SD=0.64) and Conservative Party (M=3.47, SD=0.58) showed higher levels in this factor than voters from Liberal Democrats (M=2.96, SD=0.63), Green Party (M=2.70, SD=0.70), and Labour Party (M=2.86, SD=0.71).

MPAS and other socio-political characteristics in the UK

The degree of agreement between these items and the factors identified by the MPAS serves to further delineate the two different archetypes of populism. The aspirational/subversive component of populism appears to be strongly correlated with

a sensibility towards perceived inequalities and government neglect that had been identified in the context of Brexit (Watson 2018). Thus, individuals scoring higher in F1 tend to feel 'left-behind' and to believe that towns are increasingly lagging behind cities and that there are places that do not matter so much to the government. This association is weaker with F3. Similarly, the lack of political trust —that has been found a key factor in the context of Brexit (Abrams and Travaglino 2018)— is strongly associated with F1. Those scoring high in the aspirational/subversive populism score high in 'Politicians are out of touch' and low in 'I trust the current government' and in 'I am satisfied with the way democracy works.' This level of discontent is not reflected in those displaying identitarian/protective populist attitudes, who tend to trust the Conservative government and are slightly more satisfied than the average respondent with their democracy. Both types of populists believe that experts are out-of-touch, feel that globalisation is not good for them and that their identity is threatened, as predicted by the literature in Brexit (Clarke and Newman 2017; Colantone and Stanig 2018; Gartzou-Katsouyanni et al. 2022; Virdee and McGeever 2017). Neither F1 nor F3 are linked to the belief that 'living in a democracy is essential' which is strongly positively correlated with F2 (Table 3).

Table 3: Correlations between populism and pluralism indexes with other socio-political and sociodemographic items.

Single-item indicators	*Mean*	*SD*	F1	F2	F3	POP	PLU
Left-right self-placement[7]	4.43	2.13	-0.36***	-0.01	0.48***	-0.07	-0.30***
I feel left-behind	2.75	1.16	0.39***	-0.15***	0.07*	0.29***	-0.11**
Cities are doing well while towns are left behind	3.14	1.02	0.28***	0.02	0.04	0.23***	0.03
There are places that don't matter to the government	3.96	1.05	0.47***	-0.02	-0.10**	0.33***	0.12**
Experts are out of touch	3.04	1.13	0.27***	-0.18***	0.37***	0.38***	-0.21***
Politicians are out of touch	3.92	1.03	0.54***	-0.10**	0.08*	0.48***	0.00
Brexit will allow people to take back control of their future	2.18	1.29	-0.19***	-0.10**	0.54***	0.10**	-0.33***
The UK will benefit from leaving the European Union	2.29	1.43	-0.21***	-0.11**	0.52***	0.06	-0.35***
I feel that my identity is threatened	2.34	1.18	0.22***	-0.15***	0.29***	0.28***	-0.30***

[7] 0 to 10 scale

Globalisation is good for me	3.28	0.99	-0.03	0.22***	-0.27***	-0.11**	0.31***
I feel European	3.19	1.39	0.13***	0.16***	-0.41***	-0.09*	0.29***
I trust the current government	2.13	1.16	-0.49***	0.06	0.32***	-0.24***	-0.14***
Living in a democracy is essential	4.26	0.85	-0.12***	0.47***	-0.09*	-0.13***	0.36***
I am satisfied with the way democracy works	3.15	1.03	-0.41***	0.30***	0.11**	-0.27***	0.10**
Police should have unlimited powers to deal with crime	2.39	1.35	-0.09*	-0.03	0.51***	0.09*	-0.21***
When jobs are scarce men should have more rights to a job than women	1.32	0.76	0.01	-0.24***	0.27***	0.10**	-0.37***
Gay male and lesbian couples should have the same right to adopt children as straight	4.06	1.31	0.10**	0.10**	-0.34***	-0.07	0.32***
Sociodemographic items							
Age	45	15.4	-0.18***	0.20***	0.09*	-0.14***	0.00
Gender (0=man, 1=woman)	49.3%-50.7%		-0.04	0.01	0.03	0.01	0.06
Higher education (0=no, 1=yes)	16.3%-83.7%		-0.02	0.06	-0.20***	-0.05	0.11**
Employed (0=no, 1=yes)	37.6%-62.4%		0.08*	-0.06	-0.03	0.02	-0.02
Urban domicile (0=no, 1=yes)	62.2%-37.8%		0.08*	-0.03	-0.05	0.05	0.01

The position vis-à-vis the EU is a key diverging feature identified. Those scoring high in F3 do not feel European, are largely optimistic about the benefits of Brexit, and believe that leaving the EU would allow the people to 'take back control' of their future. This resonates with previous studies that found different degrees of Euroscepticism across populist movements (Plaza-Colodro et al. 2018). Additionally, these identitarian/protective populists display a more socially illiberal stance than aspirational/subversive populists and moderate/pluralist respondents; as they tend to think that 'police should have unlimited powers to deal with crime,' that 'when jobs are scarce men should have more rights to a job than women' and oppose to equal rights for gay male and lesbian couples regarding the adoption of children. Meanwhile, the populism scale by Akkerman et al. (2014) shows a low or null correlation with Eurosceptic attitudes, social liberal views, and trust in the government.

Finally, aspirational/subversive populists tend to be younger and those holding identitarian/protective views have less frequently a higher education degree. We do not find very strong correlations with the rest of socio-demographic variables analysed, such as gender, employment status or place of residence (Table 3).

Conclusions

Most studies on the demand side of populism have used a minimal definition and operationalised it as a single variable. While this parsimonious approach facilitates comparability across cases, it may obscure the complex and diverse manifestations of populism that can be observed empirically in different historical and geographic contexts. This article introduces a new multidimensional measurement tool, the MPAS, and tests it via an extensive original survey in the UK. The survey encompasses a range of socio-political and psychological indices and indicators that can theoretically be linked to populism, though many of these presumed relationships have not been empirically tested before. Our exploratory structural equation model demonstrates that the new set of populism items in MPAS helps achieve a more nuanced understanding of British populism, than the popular Akkerman et al.'s (2014) populism scale (POP). We identify two considerably different typologies of populism: left-leaning 'aspirational/subversive' (F1) and right-leaning 'identitarian/protective' (F3); as well as a non-populist 'moderate/pluralist' (F2) archetype that is not correlated to any particular left-right ideological standpoint. Our analysis indicates that the 'populist demand' is not composed by a homogeneous group, and that adopting a one-dimensional, 'populist'—'non-populist,' approach is problematic.

Our validity tests show that the two populist typologies, F1 and F3, are not only correlated with the Akkerman et al's (2014) POP index, but also with several psycho-social attitudes that the literature has connected with British populism, and that appear unrelated to POP scores. Thus, the items associated to F1 and F3 can be employed as independent subscales to test certain hypotheses and predict behaviour patterns that may escape the one-dimensional POP index, and similar ones. For instance,

individuals scoring higher in the aspirational/subversive factor F1 display a stronger discontent with politicians, the British government, and how democracy works, as well as a higher degree of social alienation, feeling 'left-behind' and tendency to justify political violence more often than those matching the identitarian/protective archetype. The latter present more elitist, Eurosceptic, anti-immigration, anti-globalisation, and authoritarian views. Whilst these somewhat 'reactionary' populists claim to be well integrated in society and find that their lives are meaningful —despite feeling their identity threatened—, left-leaning populist individuals are more prone to be in search for meaning in life and in touch with a radicalised network.

This study confirms a positive correlation between populist attitudes and conspiracy belief —in both MPAS' indicators, F1 and F3, and Akkerman et al.'s POP index—. The MPAS moderate/pluralist index (F2) presents a strong negative correlation with the Akkerman et al.'s POP index —stronger than these authors' pluralism (PLU) index—. These non-populist individuals tend to hold less critical views on politicians, experts and globalisation, and score low in conspiracy indexes and in social alienation. This subscale is correlated to Akkerman et al.'s PLU index but it is not redundant, as our analysis reveal discrepant relationships with indicators such as, ideological self-placement —PLU is associated with left ideological self-placement, F2 is not—, trust in the current government —PLU is negatively associated with it, F2 is not—, age —F2 associated to higher age, PLU is not—, and education —PLU is associated with having higher education—.

We acknowledge some limitations to our study. First, the sample size, although appropriate for the purpose of validating a scale and conducting an exploratory empirical analysis of our research, hinders our capacity to measure the relative salience of the archetypes we have identified across the UK and the degree to which they are

linked to specific political parties. Second, our survey does not allow us to specify the type of identity respondents primarily perceive as threatened—whether national, local, religious, sexual, or class identity—. Third, the response to items referring to direct democracy and people's sovereignty has been likely impacted by the polarising effect the Brexit referendum had in the British population. In other countries, the preference for referendums as decision-making tool seems less strongly correlated to right-wing populism, as preliminary analysis with MPAS in Greece, Italy and Spain shows. This is also an indication that socio-political contexts should be taken into consideration when measuring and comparing populist attitudes.

Despite these caveats, our paper presents relevant implications. Social scientists and commentators have often linked Brexit with populism. We have shown that Euroscepticism in the UK is only related to one of the two streams of populism identified: the identitarian/protective. Likewise, we confirm that populism cannot be simply reduced to its anti-elitism component as some of the proponents of minimal definitions have previously argued. In Britain right-leaning populists (F3), although distrustful of intellectual elites, show a strong propensity to display elitist views (ELI) (F1 and POP display no correlations with ELI). The two types of populism discovered in the UK correlate but are not simply bound to left-right ideological self-placement and partisanship. They may share a common logic of articulation of discourses and 'othering' processes, but the socio-political and psychological specificities revealed by our MPAS, justify shifting towards slightly more ambitious/multidimensional instruments to measure the populist construct that may enable a better grasp of the existing varieties of populism.

Embracing multidimensionality and testing new populism items and other related socio-political and psychological factors for external validity entail a higher

cost and a sacrifice in terms of comparability of data. However, these efforts can contribute to a better understanding of populism —its typologies, causes and effects— and can be a particularly appropriate strategy when investigating countries outside those that served as templates for the development of extant populism scales. Future research can lead to the development of shortened versions of the MPAS and facilitate its inclusion in large-scale social surveys.

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