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# Populist Attitudes, Political Trust, and External Political Efficacy: Old Wine in New Bottles?

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Bram Geurkink<sup>1</sup> , Andrej Zaslove<sup>2</sup>,  
Roderick Sluiter<sup>1,2</sup> and Kristof Jacobs<sup>2</sup>

## Abstract

Substantial scholarly attention has been devoted to explaining why voters support populist parties. Recently, a new concept has been introduced to gauge populism among voters and to explain voting for populist parties: populist attitudes. However, some researchers regard populist attitudes as simply another measurement of existing and established concepts such as political trust and external political efficacy. Using data from the Netherlands (2018), this article addresses the relationship between these concepts, both theoretically and empirically. This article examines whether political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes tap into different latent dimensions. Using a confirmatory factor analysis, we show that populist attitudes are not old wine in new bottles and that they tap into different underlying attitudes than political trust and external political efficacy. Furthermore, we show that the three measures are not only different constructs but also relate differently to populist voting preferences.

## Keywords

populism, populist attitudes, external political efficacy, political trust, populist vote

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## Introduction

Research on populism, especially on the populist radical right, is abundant. For some time now, researchers have been interested in why voters support populist parties. With the success of not only populist radical right but also populist left parties, the question has become more complex. Researchers are interested in why voters support populist parties beyond

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<sup>1</sup>Economics Department, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

<sup>2</sup>Political Science Department, Institute for Management Research, Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

### Corresponding author:

Bram Geurkink, Economics Department, Institute for Management Research, Elinor Ostrom Building, Heyendaalseweg 141, 6525 AJ, Nijmegen, The Netherlands.

Email: [b.geurkink@fm.ru.nl](mailto:b.geurkink@fm.ru.nl)

their left-right ideology (Akkerman et al., 2017; Rooduijn, 2018; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). Is there something about populism that attracts voters to parties as diverse as *Podemos* in Spain or the French *Rassemblement national*? Framing the problem as such has sharpened the focus on whether voters for populist parties share unique attributes that capture the essential and core features of populism beyond its left and right variants.

Earlier research often conflated radical right, fascist, and extremist parties with populism. However, more recently, increased conceptual clarity has allowed researchers to clearly identify which parties are populist and which are not (Mudde, 1996, 2007; Rooduijn and Akkerman, 2017; Taggart, 1995). According to Mudde (2004), the core of populism can be reduced to three essential components. First, populism is people-centered, and it is anti-elite: populism pits the pure people against the corrupt elite. Second, the dichotomy between the pure people and the corrupt elite is antagonistic (or what is often referred to as Manichean). Third, and finally, populists proclaim that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people.

Three sets of attitudes are commonly associated with voting for populist parties. First, researchers use political trust as an indicator to explain why individuals vote for populist parties (e.g. Doyle, 2011; Fieschi and Heywood, 2004; Rooduijn, 2018). Employing political trust implies that those who have a lower level of trust toward political elites (Rooduijn, 2018) or political institutions (Fieschi and Heywood, 2004) are more likely to support populist parties. This taps into the anti-elitist component of populism, with anti-elitist sentiments defined as anti-politician or anti-institution. Second, external political efficacy is used to explain support for populist parties (e.g. Rooduijn et al., 2016). External political efficacy taps into the feeling that citizens' opinions are not heard by politicians. The expectation is that individuals with lower external political efficacy are more likely to vote for populist parties because political elites are not sufficiently attentive to citizens' demands, that is, tapping into the anti-elitist component of populism.

More recently, scholars have developed another approach: the populist attitudes approach (Akkerman et al., 2014; Castanho Silva et al., 2019; Hawkins et al., 2012; Van Hauwaert et al., 2019; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). According to the populist attitudes approach, populism is an individual attribute that can be directly measured among individuals and is therefore not only a feature of political parties (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). The populist attitudes construct includes the three components of populism: people-centrism and anti-elitism, the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite, and a focus on the general will. In particular, it focuses on the juxtaposition between a people-centered notion of political representation and the corrupt political elite. The expectation offered by this approach is that individuals with stronger populist attitudes are more likely to vote for populist parties.

To capture the core elements of populism, studies have scrutinized the effects of political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes on populist voting behavior, either separately or simultaneously (e.g. Akkerman et al., 2017; Spruyt et al., 2016; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). However, sometimes, these items (in combination with others) are used to assess other concepts. For example, Passarelli and Tuorto (2018) combine political efficacy items, political trust items, and items on a "belief in a functioning party democracy" to assess system discontent. Furthermore, some have questioned the uniqueness of the three concepts and suggested that populist attitudes may not be substantially different from external political efficacy (Van der Kolk, 2018) or are simply "old wine in new bottles" (Rooduijn, 2019: 364).

This conceptual and empirical ambiguity leads us to the central purpose of this article. We investigate the extent to which political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are different constructs, both on a theoretical and an empirical level. We are interested in the extent to which political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are different concepts, the degree to which they are empirically different, and the extent to which these three indicators are unique predictors of voting for populist parties. To answer our research question, we start by discussing the conceptual difference between political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes and their theoretical relationship with populism. Subsequently, we perform exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses. In doing so, we examine the extent to which political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes tap into different latent constructs. We then use these three indicators to examine the unique explanatory power of each measurement for voting for a populist party.

To conduct this analysis, we use data from the Dutch *Nationaal Referendumonderzoek 2018* (Jacobs et al., 2018b) and the *Political and Values* survey (CentERdata, 2018). These surveys contain information about political attitudes and behavior among Dutch respondents. Our findings show that political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes indeed address different underlying dimensions, and they furthermore relate differently to voting for a populist party: the likelihood of voting for populist parties is higher when political trust is low and populist attitudes are high, while it is not related to external political efficacy. However, if we further differentiate between populist parties (i.e. between the populist radical right and the populist radical left), we find that populist attitudes are the only measure that consistently explains voting preferences for these ideologically diverse populist parties.

## **Populism, Political Trust, External Political Efficacy, and Populist Attitudes**

In this article, we employ an ideational approach to populism (Mudde, 2004, 2017). Applying the ideational approach has been the most successful in terms of identifying and explaining populism in Europe and beyond (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2013, 2017). Moreover, given that the ideational approach argues that populism is a set of ideas, it follows that populism can be measured in various sources: party platforms, leaders' speeches, and among individuals (Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins, 2009; Rooduijn and Pauwels, 2011).

Applying the ideational approach to populism, we come to several important conclusions. First, populism has a core set of ideas (ideology), that is, it is possible to precisely indicate what populism is and what it is not. Second, even though the core ideological components of populism can be clearly defined, the populist ideology itself is thin-centered. This implies that populism cannot stand on its own and that it must be attached to other ideologies. For this reason, we encounter left- and right-wing populism (Mudde, 2004; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Stanley, 2008). Furthermore, since we do not define populism as a style (e.g. Moffitt, 2016) or a strategy (Weyland, 2001), but as a thin-centered ideology, it can be used to measure the attitudes (ideas) of voters.

According to Mudde (2004), what populist parties, both left- and right-wing, have in common can be summed up by three essential components. As previously stated, (1) populism is people-centered and anti-elite, pitting the pure people against the corrupt elite; (2) it entails a clash between the pure people and the corrupt elite (it is antagonistic);

and (3) populists proclaim that politics should be an expression of the general will of the people (Mudde, 2004):

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus “the corrupt elite,” and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people. (Mudde, 2004: 543)

Defining populism as such is important on two levels. First, it distinguishes populism from not only elitism but also pluralism. The antagonistic nature of populism, with its emphasis on the two opposing groups, that is, the pure people and the corrupt elite (Manichean nature), implies that populism is wary of pluralism and political compromise (Akkerman et al., 2014; Mudde, 2004). Second, the people-centered nature of populism distinguishes populism from simply anti-establishment and protest voting. As such, populism is posited as an alternative to the existing notions of political representation (i.e. a people-centered notion of political representation rather than a so-called elite-based one). Therefore, populism cannot simply be reduced to anti-elitism.

As noted, three sets of attitudes are generally used to explain an individual’s vote choice for populist parties: political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes. In the following section, we elaborate on these three concepts and link them to the concept of populism as presented above. For each concept, we define the concept and then discuss its theoretical relationship to populism and the empirical evidence for its relationship with populist voting.

### *Political Trust*

Trust is the evaluation that a person gives of another entity (e.g. a political institution) (Van der Meer and Hakhverdian, 2017). Thus, for example, a citizen evaluates a political party, government, or parliament (Thomassen et al., 2017). Political trust measures the extent to which individuals feel that political parties, government, or parliament fulfill their expectations, that is, their policy expectations (Craig et al., 1990). There is a discussion, and some confusion, over whether political trust refers to policy outcomes (i.e. satisfaction) or whether it refers to trust in political institutions or in a political regime (Craig et al., 1990; Hetherington, 1998; Norris, 2011). Increasingly, the literature makes a distinction between regime satisfaction, policy outcomes, and the functioning of political institutions; the latter is more related to the dominant use of political trust (Thomassen et al., 2017). Craig et al. (1990: 291) note that political trust relates to “outputs” in relation to “individual expectations.” In other words, political trust is the belief that the political institutions will act in the public interest (Craig, 1979). It does not necessarily measure the extent to which institutions are responsive to public demands (Craig, 1979; Craig et al., 1990). It is conceivable that an individual may possess high levels of trust in an institution that has very little public access (or even low levels of political accountability), such as an independent central bank.

Political trust taps into a core component of populism, namely, the opposition to the “corrupt elite.” Specifically, a lack of trust taps into feelings that political elites (who run political institutions) no longer produce policies that serve the interests of the people (Craig et al., 1990; Fieschi and Heywood, 2004). In other words, political trust addresses the anti-elitism of populism. Those who use political trust tend to perceive populism as a *protest* against the political elites. For example, Rooduijn (2018: 356) states: “I label those who vote populist out of political distrust ‘protest voters.’”

However, using political trust as an indicator of voting for a populist party does not address other core components of populism. It does not address the people-centeredness of populism, its antagonistic nature, or the general will. For example, political trust does not define the people as pure and homogeneous. Just because an individual has lower levels of trust, does not mean that he or she does not (or cannot) possess a pluralistic notion of the people. Moreover, if an individual has less political trust, this does not necessarily entail an antagonistic relationship between the people and the political elite, something that is integral to populism. In addition, the concept does not capture the notion of the general will.

Using political trust to explain voting for a populist party is common among research in the field of populism (Betz, 1994; Fieschi and Heywood, 2004; Rooduijn, 2018). The findings, however, are inconsistent. Akkerman et al. (2017) find that populist radical right- and populist radical left-wing voters have lower levels of political trust, and this is particularly the case for the populist radical right. Norris (2005) also argues that lower levels of political trust correlate with voting for the populist radical right. However, Norris (2005) also notes that there are instances when this is *not* the case (i.e. Israel and Italy) and concludes that we should be cautious when linking levels of trust to different levels of success of radical right parties. In addition, Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018) find that those who vote for left-wing populist parties have lower levels of political trust, but those who vote for right-wing populist parties do not. Furthermore, Rooduijn (2018) has shown that political distrust is unable to explain populist voting consistently across countries and over time.

### *External Political Efficacy*

Political efficacy is often broken down into two different dimensions: internal and external political efficacy (Craig et al., 1990). The former refers to the extent to which an individual “feels *competent* to avail himself of the opportunity to use” institutional channels (Craig, 1979: 229). External political efficacy moves from internal, personal beliefs to institutional “*responsiveness*” (Craig, 1979: 229). External political efficacy refers to the extent to which an individual feels that he or she has influence on the political *process* and the degree to which he or she believes that political institutions are responsive to their demands (Craig, 1979; Craig et al., 1990).

It is important to emphasize that external political efficacy does not (necessarily) refer to an individual’s capacity (i.e. internal political efficacy). Rather, it refers to perceptions of institutional receptiveness to individual demands. In addition, external political efficacy is conceptually different from political trust, even though the two are often conflated (Craig, 1979; Craig et al., 1990). For example, it is possible to imagine a situation in which a person has low external political efficacy, that is, a person feels that he or she has little influence on the political process, but he or she still has a high degree of political trust. In other words, he or she may believe that political institutions produce policies for the general good of citizens.

External political efficacy is used to explain support for populist parties. Turning to the three key components of populism, external political efficacy taps into the claim that the political elite is not responsive to citizen demands given that politicians do not listen to the concerns of the people. It thus addresses the anti-elitism of populism. Although external political efficacy has a stronger notion of the people than political trust, the people are not necessarily defined as homogeneous or pure. External political efficacy, thus, taps

into more general feelings of political discontent (Passarelli and Tuorto, 2018; Rooduijn et al., 2016; Van der Brug, 2003), related to the lack of responsiveness of the political institutions. Thereby, it does not relate specifically to the idea that the people are ultimately sovereign, as is highlighted in the definition of populism. Moreover, the elite is not presented as inherently in opposition to the people. Rather, it is the current elites that are perceived as unresponsive. Hence, external political efficacy does not capture the antagonistic relationship between the pure people and the corrupt elite, which is a core component of populism. Furthermore, external political efficacy does not capture the idea of the general will. In sum, the antagonism between the pure people and the corrupt elite and the notion of the general will are absent in the concept of external political efficacy.

Research seems to support the idea that people with lower levels of external political efficacy are more likely to vote for populist parties; however, empirical findings are inconsistent. For example, Rooduijn et al. (2016) demonstrate that individuals who feel that they have less influence over the political process (in combination with supply side factors) are more likely to support a left- or right-wing populist party. Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018) find that while voters for left-wing populist parties demonstrate lower levels of external political efficacy, voters for right-wing populist parties do not.

In conclusion, several studies have used political trust and external political efficacy to explain voting for a populist party. The use of political trust implies that populism is about the *mistrust of political institutions* and the political elites that run the institutions, while the use of external political efficacy is about the *process* and frustration or impotence regarding the ability of individuals to have their opinions heard by political elites. Nevertheless, both measures seem to focus mainly on the anti-elitist component of populism. They both lack a strong notion of the people, there is no explicit focus on the clash between the pure people and the corrupt elite, and the concepts do not address the general will.

### Populist Attitudes

In contrast to political trust and external political efficacy, populist attitudes attempt to directly measure populism among individuals. As noted, populism has three core components. Thus, to adequately measure populism, the concept has to include (1) the anti-elitist and people-centered notion of politics. The purity and the sovereignty of the people must play a central role in the populist attitudes measurement and there must be a juxtaposition of the people against the elite (Rooduijn, 2014; Zaslove, 2008). In addition, (2) the measurement needs to tap into the idea that politics is antagonistic, pitting the pure people against the corrupt elite (Mudde, 2004). Finally, (3) the measurement should capture the idea the politics should be an expression of the general will.

Theoretically, populist attitudes differ considerably from political trust and external political efficacy. Populist attitudes are related to the antagonistic but mutually reinforcing distinction between the pure people and the corrupt elite. If politics is inherently corrupting (Taggart, 2018), then it is only through “nonpoliticians” that the true will of the people can be represented. Low levels of political trust and feelings regarding nonresponsive political institutions (external political efficacy) are manifestations of general political discontent. Populism goes a step further. The populist ideology posits a people-centered notion of political representation to solve feelings of political discontent. Individuals with strong populist attitudes, thus, do not simply oppose the political elites because they have low levels of political trust or low levels of external political efficacy. Rather, populism is an ideology that believes that political representation must be people-centered, that is,

politics must represent the pure and homogeneous people, an expression of the general will, in opposition to both elite and pluralist conceptions of political representation (Mudde, 2004; Rummens, 2017). As Spruyt et al. (2016: 336) argue:

what distinguishes the support for populism from simple political discontent and frustrations is that populism remains a politics of hope, that is, the hope that where established parties and elites have failed, ordinary folks, common sense, and the politicians who give them a voice can find solutions.

The above discussion emphasizes that a theoretical distinction needs to be made between populist attitudes and other measures, such as political trust and external political efficacy. The question is, however, whether this theoretical distinction manifests itself empirically. Research on populist attitudes has come to some important findings. Akkerman et al. (2014), for example, distinguish populist attitudes from pluralist and elitist attitudes. Other have found that populist attitudes are a good predictor of voting for a populist party (e.g. Anduiza et al., 2018; Hawkins et al., 2018) and unifies voting for left- and right-wing populist parties (Akkerman et al., 2017; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018). In addition, research shows that individuals with stronger populist attitudes call for more direct forms of political representation, such as referenda (Jacobs et al., 2018a). The question is, however, whether there is also a clear empirical distinction between populist attitudes, political trust, and external political efficacy. We summarize the relation between the three sets of attitudes and the core components of populism in Box 1.

**Box 1.** Relating Political Trust, External Political Efficacy, and Populist Attitudes with Populism.

<b>Measure</b>	<b>Relation with populism</b>	<b>Missing components</b>
<i>Political trust</i>	Anti-elite	People-centrism; antagonism; general will
<i>External political efficacy</i>	Anti-elite; “light” notion of people	Stronger notion of the people; antagonism; general will
<i>Populist attitudes</i>	People-centrism; anti-elite; antagonism; general will	

## Methods and Data

Information on populist attitudes, voting behavior, and background characteristics was retrieved from the *Nationaal Referendumonderzoek 2018* (NRO2018; Jacobs et al., 2018b). This dataset contains information on 2,234 respondents who participate in the Dutch LISS (Longitudinal Internet Studies for the Social Sciences) panel, administered by CentERdata (Tilburg University, the Netherlands). Fieldwork for this survey was carried out in March and April 2018 using computer-assisted web interviewing (CentERdata, n.d.). Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to 2,838 panel members; of these, 2,234 completed the questionnaire, yielding a response rate of 78.7%.

NRO2018 does not contain information on political trust, external political efficacy, and attitudes toward income equality, cultural exclusion, and European Union (EU) integration, but it includes an identifier to link it to a dataset that has such information, namely, the 10th wave of *Politics and Values* (CentERdata, 2018). The Politics and Values survey is a key module of the LISS panel and is presented annually to all the panel members. A total of 5,734 respondents completed the survey, with a 77.0% response rate. Of

the 2,234 NRO2018 respondents, 2,189 also participated in the 10th wave of the Politics and Values survey. Of these 2,189 individuals, 1,744 individuals answered all the items used for the measurements of political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes. We continue our analysis using these 1,744 individuals.

## Case

Our research focuses on the Netherlands, a country that is well suited for our analysis for several reasons. *First*, the Netherlands has not suffered any unusual political or economic crises. To be sure, the economic crisis of 2008 and the so-called asylum crisis had an influence on Dutch politics, but the Netherlands was not hit unusually hard by these events (such as Italy, for example). Thus, we do not expect any unusual events or external shocks to have an effect on our study. *Second*, the Netherlands is one of the few countries to have both a left- and a right-wing populist party for some time now (Akkerman et al., 2014). Thus, in the second part of the article we are able to test the relationship between populist attitudes and voting for different types of populist parties, across the political spectrum. *Third*, the Netherlands has a multiparty system. Voters who are frustrated with the mainstream parties are provided with ample exit options “which permits us to better disentangle populism from simple vote-switching and protest voting” (Akkerman et al., 2014: 1337).

## Variables of Interest

*Political Trust.* For the political trust measurement, respondents were asked how much trust they had in political institutions. The following question was asked: *For these institutions, could you indicate how much trust you have in them?* For the responses, 0 indicated “no trust at all,” and 10 indicated “complete trust. This question was asked for ‘the government’ (Trust1), ‘the lower house’ (Trust2), ‘politicians’ (Trust3), and ‘political parties’ (Trust4).

*External Political Efficacy.* External political efficacy refers to the confidence that people have in the responsiveness of political actors. A high external political efficacy thereby indicates that individuals have the feeling that political officials listen to the public and care about what the public thinks. To measure the external political efficacy of respondents, we rely on a validated three-item measurement developed by Craig et al. (1990). For each of these items, respondents had to choose between 0 “that is true” and 1 “that is not true.” The three items are presented in Box 2.

### Box 2. Items Used to Measure External Political Efficacy.

Eff1: Politicians are not interested in what people like me think.  
 Eff2: Political parties are only interested in my vote, not in my opinion.  
 Eff3: People like me don’t have any say about what the government does.

*Populist Attitudes.* For populist attitudes, we rely on the measurement of populist attitudes as constructed by (Akkerman et al., 2014). This measurement includes the three defining components of populism, as defined by Mudde (2004). For each of the six items (see Box 3), respondents had to indicate to what extent they agreed with the statement; 1 indicates “totally disagree” and 5 “totally agree.” To prevent ordering effects, we randomly varied

**Box 3.** Items Used to Measure Populist Attitudes.

Pop1: The politicians in the Dutch Parliament need to follow the will of the people.  
 Pop2: The people, and not the politicians, should make the most important political decisions.  
 Pop3: I would rather be represented by an ordinary citizen than by a professional politician.  
 Pop4: The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people.  
 Pop5: Elected officials talk too much and take too little action.  
 Pop6: What people call “compromise” in politics is really just selling out on one’s principles.

the order in which respondents had to answer the questions. The first block of three items (Pop1, Pop2, and Pop3) was asked before the second block (Pop4, Pop5, and Pop6) for one set of respondents, and after the second block for another set of respondents. Moreover, within the blocks, the order of the three items was randomized. In between these blocks of items, several items on other attitudes were presented.

**Populist Voting.** In the second part of our analysis, we use populist attitudes, political trust, and external political efficacy to explain populist voting. First, we seek to explain the populist vote. For this variable, we asked respondents “if there were elections held today, which party would you vote for.”<sup>1</sup> If they would vote for either the PVV (*Partij voor de Vrijheid*), the SP (*Socialistische Partij*), or the FvD (*Forum voor Democratie*), we coded them as voting for a populist party (“1”). If they would vote for another party, would cast an invalid or blank vote, or if they indicated that they would abstain from voting, they were coded as not voting for a populist party (“0”). Those who indicated that they either did not want to say what party they would vote for or did not know were excluded from further analyses. These analyses show to what extent political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are related to the intention to vote for a populist party in general. Second, we apply a multinomial analysis to understand the relationship between political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes and voting for specific populist parties (i.e. PVV, SP, or FvD). Voting for nonpopulist parties or casting an invalid or blank vote serves as a reference category. We included nonvoters as a separate category to further test whether populist attitudes, political trust, and external political efficacy tap into different underlying political attitudes. These analyses show whether political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are able to explain voting for diverse populist parties, but do not explain nonvoting.

**Control Variables.** For all our models explaining populist voting, we include education, gender, and age as control variables. Furthermore, we add a series of variables that tap into the economic (income equality), cultural (cultural exclusion), and political (anti-EU) attitudes, which are related to voting for the populist right and the populist left (see Akkerman et al., 2017; Rooduijn, 2018; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018).<sup>2</sup> The descriptive information of all the variables used in this article is presented in Table 1.

## Method

To address our research question, we apply exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, using R (version 3.4.1) with the lavaan package (Rosseel, 2012). Since three of our items are binary (the external political efficacy items), we used a WLSMV (weighted least

**Table 1.** Descriptive Statistics.

Variable name	Minimum	Maximum	Mean/%	Standard deviation	N
Political trust	-5.01	4.10	0.00	1.86	1744
Trust1	0.00	9.00	5.58	2.11	1744
Trust2	0.00	9.00	5.67	2.05	1744
Trust3	0.00	10.00	4.87	2.10	1744
Trust4	0.00	10.00	4.80	2.08	1744
External political efficacy	-1.83	1.69	0.01	0.72	1744
Eff1	0.00	1.00	0.38	0.49	1744
Eff2	0.00	1.00	0.28	0.45	1744
Eff3	0.00	1.00	0.36	0.48	1744
Populist attitudes	-1.13	0.98	0.00	0.41	1744
Pop1	1.00	5.00	3.54	0.92	1744
Pop2	1.00	5.00	2.81	1.07	1744
Pop3	1.00	5.00	2.83	1.01	1744
Pop4	1.00	5.00	3.59	0.89	1744
Pop5	1.00	5.00	3.66	0.94	1744
Pop6	1.00	5.00	3.15	1.10	1744
Populist vote	0.00	1.00	20.4%		1421
Multinomial vote					
PVV	0.00	1.00	6.2%		1421
SP	0.00	1.00	8.9%		1421
FvD	0.00	1.00	5.3%		1421
No Vote	0.00	1.00	2.4%		1421
Middle education	0.00	1.00	35.5%		1743
Higher education	0.00	1.00	39.3%		1743
Female	0.00	1.00	49.4%		1744
Age	18.00	100.00	55.07	16.79	1744
Income equality	1.00	5.00	3.88	0.96	1691
Cultural exclusion	1.00	5.00	3.63	0.92	1703
Anti-EU	1.00	5.00	3.54	1.14	1674

PVV: *Partij voor de Vrijheid*; SP: *Socialistische Partij*; FvD: *Forum voor Democratie*; EU = European Union.

squares means and variance adjusted) estimation, which uses diagonally weighted least squares to estimate model parameters.<sup>3</sup> We apply logistic regression analyses to examine to what extent political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes can explain populist voting behavior. We first estimate the effects of each concept separately and then simultaneously. In addition to the logistic analyses for populist vote, we test whether political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes predict voting for the three populist parties in the Netherlands using multinomial regression analysis.

## Analyses

### *Political Trust, External Political Efficacy, and Populist Attitudes*

To examine whether political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are three distinct concepts, we first estimate an exploratory factor analysis. In so doing, we

**Table 2.** Exploratory Factor Analysis.

Indicators	Factor loadings		
	1	2	3
Political trust			
Trust1	0.020	<b>0.919</b>	-0.038
Trust2	-0.008	<b>0.933</b>	-0.009
Trust3	-0.005	<b>0.932</b>	0.007
Trust4	-0.010	<b>0.892</b>	0.027
External political efficacy			
Eff1	-0.034	0.038	<b>0.749</b>
Eff2	-0.023	-0.020	<b>0.829</b>
Eff3	0.074	0.022	<b>0.589</b>
Populist attitudes			
Pop1	<b>-0.715</b>	0.079	0.043
Pop2	<b>-0.844</b>	-0.047	0.095
Pop3	<b>-0.727</b>	-0.100	0.003
Pop4	<b>-0.442</b>	-0.002	-0.171
Pop5	<b>-0.441</b>	-0.128	-0.312
Pop6	<b>-0.454</b>	-0.134	-0.243

N = 1744. Bold values indicate highest loadings.

include the items for the three concepts, without specifying to which concept each item (theoretically) “belongs.” In Table 2, we present the results of the exploratory factor analysis, including political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes items. The results show that, as expected, and in line with other studies, the different items load sufficiently ( $>0.400$ ) on the different factors. With regard to cross-loadings, we find that three of the populism items load weakly ( $<0.400$ ) on the external political efficacy scale. These items, especially the fifth populism item (i.e. “Elected officials talk too much and take too little action”), seem to measure the anti-elite dimension of populism more than the other questions, which is in line with the original scale development (see Akkerman et al., 2014; Hawkins et al., 2012; Hibbing and Theiss-Morse, 2002). However, the external political efficacy items do not show any loading on the populist attitudes factor. Thus, there seems to be some overlap between some items of the populist attitudes scale and external political efficacy (those who mainly measure anti-elitism), but the external political efficacy items do not load on the latent construct of populist attitudes. Furthermore, the political trust items load strongly on the political trust factor and do not show any relevant cross-loadings with either populist attitudes or external political efficacy.

Although this exploratory factor analysis is insightful for understanding the relationship between each of the items and the different constructs, it does not formally test whether these constructs are coherent. To test whether political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are different constructs, we rely on confirmatory factor analyses.

We start by testing a single-factor model (m1 of Table 3). We hypothesize that populist attitudes, external political efficacy, and political trust constitute different constructs. However, if a one-factor model turns out to fit the data well, there is little point in evaluating more complex models (Kline, 2011). Furthermore, this model offers a benchmark to

**Table 3.** Values of Selected Fit Statistics for Measurement Models.

Model	$\chi^2_M$	$df_M$	RMSEA (90% CI)	CFI	SRMR	
<i>Measurement models</i>						
m1	One-factor model	2055.738 <sup>a</sup>	63	0.135 <sup>a</sup> (0.130–0.140)	0.722	0.099
m2	Three-factor model	320.413 <sup>a</sup>	60	0.050 <sup>b</sup> (0.045–0.055)	0.964	0.031
m3	Political trust & external political efficacy	1086.609 <sup>a</sup>	14	0.210 <sup>a</sup> (0.199–0.220)	0.785	0.123
m4	Political trust & populist attitudes	747.832 <sup>a</sup>	33	0.111 <sup>a</sup> (0.105–0.118)	0.950	0.106
m5	External political efficacy & populist attitudes	722.829 <sup>a</sup>	25	0.127 <sup>a</sup> (0.119–0.135)	0.861	0.078

N = 1744. Cutoff values: root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) < 0.08, comparative fit index (CFI) > 0.95, and standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) < 0.06. CI: confidence interval.

<sup>a</sup>p < 0.05.

<sup>b</sup>p = 0.501.

compare the fit of the other multifactor models. To assess the fit of our confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) models, we rely on cut-off values as proposed by Hu and Bentler (1999): a root mean square error approximation (RMSEA) of < 0.08, a comparative fit index (CFI) of > 0.95, and a standardized root mean square residual (SRMR) of < 0.06.<sup>4</sup>

In Table 3, we present the fit statistics of the one-factor model. The results indicate that the one-factor measurement model provides a bad fit. Therefore, we move to the model with political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes as different constructs (m2). The fit statistics of the three-factor model (RMSEA = 0.050; CFI = 0.964; SRMR = 0.031) indicate a good fit. Furthermore, Table 4 indicates that the items' standardized loading on each factor is sufficient (> 0.400) and that the McDonald's Omega, indicating the internal consistency of latent constructs, reveals that each of the factors has high internal consistency (political trust = 0.954, external political efficacy = 0.915, and populist attitudes = 0.829) (McDonald, 1999). The factor covariances (see Table 4) range between -0.716 and 0.681, which indicates that, as expected, there is overlap between the factors, but these values are far from problematic (1.00) and are sufficiently lower than the poor discriminant validity threshold of 0.85 (Brown, 2014: 32, 126).<sup>5</sup> In addition, we estimated two one-factor models in which political trust and external political efficacy (m3), political trust and populist attitudes (m4), and external political efficacy and populist attitudes (m5) are combined in one factor. However, none of these models provided a model fit that is acceptable.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, we conclude that political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are three separate constructs.

### *Different Concepts, But How Are They Different and Why Should We Care?*

However, does this all matter empirically? After all, although we find that populist attitudes are different from political trust and external political efficacy, this does not automatically imply that populist attitudes are better at explaining voting for a populist party.

**Table 4.** Estimates of Factor Loadings, Factor Covariance and Internal Consistency for Three-Factor Model.

	Factor loadings			McDonald's Omega
	Unstandardized estimate	Standard error	Standardized estimate	
<b>Indicators</b>				
Political trust				0.954
Trust1	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	—	0.901	
Trust2	0.995	0.019	0.924	
Trust3	1.028	0.027	0.931	
Trust4	0.992	0.028	0.906	
External political Efficacy				0.915
Eff1	1.000	—	0.879	
Eff2	1.098	0.027	0.965	
Eff3	0.915	0.027	0.804	
Populist attitudes				0.829
Pop1	1.000 <sup>a</sup>	—	0.477	
Pop2	1.560	0.076	0.639	
Pop3	1.651	0.088	0.717	
Pop4	1.129	0.073	0.555	
Pop5	1.759	0.102	0.816	
Pop6	1.937	0.118	0.775	
<b>Factor covariances</b>				
Political trust ↔ External political efficacy	1.140	0.052	0.681	
Political trust ↔ Populist attitudes	-0.521	0.038	-0.625	
External political efficacy ↔ Populist attitudes	-0.276	0.018	-0.716	
<b>Error covariances</b>				
Pop1 ↔ Pop2	0.269	0.019	0.406	
Pop2 ↔ Pop3	0.255	0.019	0.440	

<sup>a</sup>Not tested for statistical significance. For all other unstandardized estimates,  $p < .001$ ;  $N = 1744$ .

Therefore, having established that political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are three distinct constructs, we now model the effect of these factors on voting for a populist party.

Table 5 presents the logistic regression estimates (log-odds) of political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes on voting for a populist party. Model 1 indicates the effect of political trust on voting for a populist party (with controls). In Model 2, we include external political efficacy and controls. In Model 3, we include populist attitudes and controls. In Model 4, we include populist attitudes, political trust, and external political efficacy simultaneously, along with the controls.

In Model 1, we see that those who score lower on political trust are more likely to vote for a populist party. The subsequent two models (Models 2 and 3) show that, respectively, lower external political efficacy and higher populist attitudes are related to a higher likelihood of voting for a populist party. These results indicate that, without controlling for

**Table 5.** Logistic Regression Estimates of the Effect of Political Trust, External Political Efficacy, and Populist Attitudes on Voting for a Populist Party.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4
<b>Indicators</b>				
Political trust	-0.389*** (0.043)			-0.148* (0.068)
External political efficacy		-1.219*** (0.129)		-0.139 (0.254)
Populist attitudes			2.369*** (0.235)	1.682*** (0.381)
<b>Education (ref. low)</b>				
Middle	-0.293 (0.192)	-0.221 (0.192)	-0.266 (0.192)	-0.251 (0.194)
High	-1.175*** (0.219)	-1.029*** (0.219)	-1.058*** (0.221)	-1.074*** (0.224)
<b>Female (ref. male)</b>				
	-0.682*** (0.161)	-0.704*** (0.161)	-0.653*** (0.162)	-0.673*** (0.163)
<b>Age</b>				
	-0.011* (0.005)	-0.012* (0.005)	-0.013* (0.005)	-0.012* (0.005)
<b>Income equality</b>				
	0.090 (0.083)	0.122 (0.082)	0.084 (0.084)	0.058 (0.085)
<b>Cultural exclusion</b>				
	0.251** (0.093)	0.186* (0.092)	0.166 (0.092)	0.170 (0.093)
<b>Anti-EU</b>				
	0.354*** (0.080)	0.331*** (0.081)	0.302*** (0.082)	0.265** (0.082)
<b>Intercept</b>				
	-2.708	-2.581	-2.272	-2.056
<b>Explained variance</b>				
Nagelkerke R <sup>2</sup>	0.321	0.336	0.350	0.359

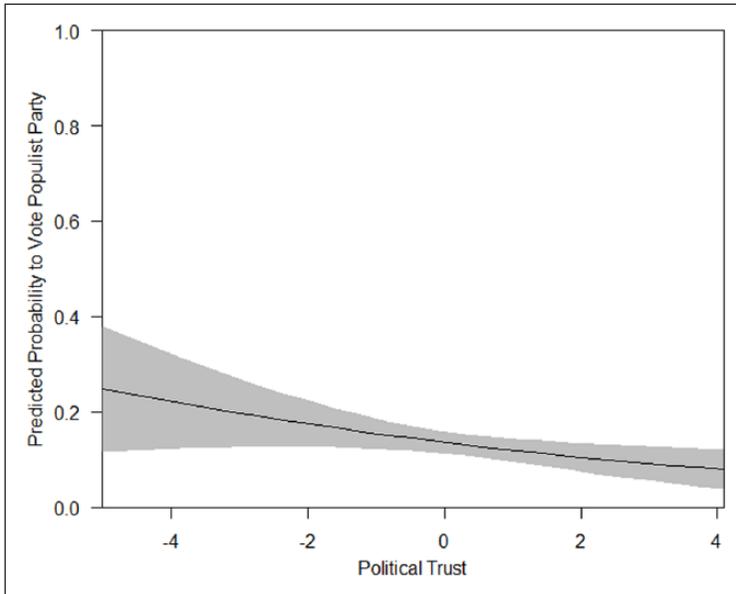
Standard errors in parentheses; N = 1351. EU = European Union.

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

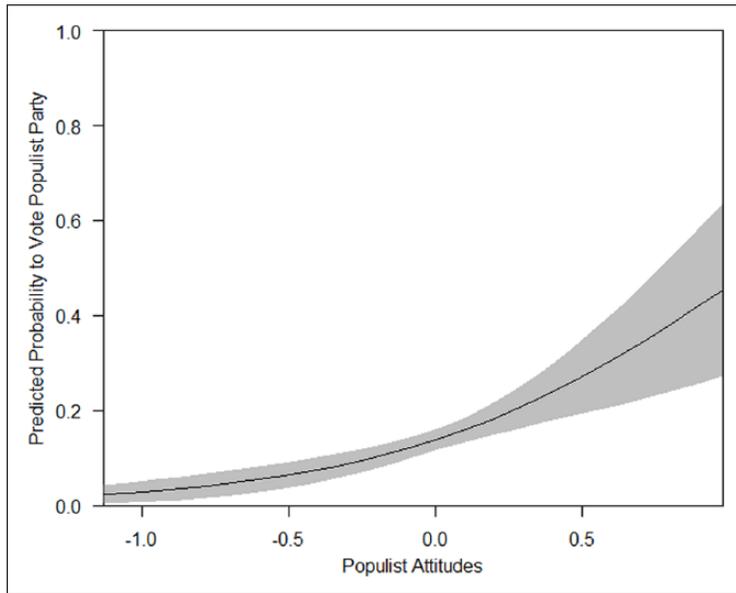
each other, lower political trust, lower external political efficacy, and higher populist attitudes are related to a higher probability of voting for a populist party.

However, to compare the relative strength of the three indicators, we also include them simultaneously. Thereby, the effect of one indicator is controlled for by the others. In Model 4, we estimate the effect of political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes on voting for a populist party. This model indicates that, while political trust and populist attitudes still significantly affect the likelihood to vote for a populist party, the effect of external political efficacy disappears. Turning to the control variables, we find that higher educated people, women, and older people are less likely to cast a populist vote. Furthermore, individuals who oppose EU integration are more likely to vote for a populist party.

Figures 1 and 2 represent the average predicted probability (i.e. the average of the predicted probability for all individuals in the analysis) of voting for a populist party for different levels of political trust and populist attitudes (based on Model 4 of Table 5). While the effect for political trust seems to be linearly negatively related to the predicted probability to vote for a populist party, the effect of populist attitudes shows a different pattern. The effect of an increase from a low level to a medium level of populist attitudes does not seem to substantially affect the probability of voting for a populist party, but this



**Figure 1.** Average Predicted Probability of Voting for a Populist Party for Different Levels of Political Trust with 95% Confidence Interval.



**Figure 2.** Average Predicted Probability of Voting for a Populist Party for Different Levels of Populist Attitudes with 95% Confidence Intervals.

effect is much stronger for an increase from a medium level to a high level of populist attitudes. Furthermore, the predicted probabilities indicate that populist attitudes have, on average, a stronger effect on populist voting than political trust.

**Table 6.** Multinomial Logistic Regression Estimates of the Effect of Populist Attitudes, Political Trust, and External Political Efficacy on Voting for the PVV, SP, FvD, and Nonvoting.

	PVV vs Other	SP vs Other	FvD vs Other	Nonvoting vs Other
Indicators				
Political trust	-0.396*** (0.113)	-0.137 (0.091)	-0.112 (0.121)	-0.520*** (0.157)
External political Efficacy	0.326 (0.436)	-0.387 (0.336)	0.186 (0.457)	-0.079 (0.603)
Populist attitudes	2.134*** (0.645)	1.042* (0.500)	2.692*** (0.687)	0.471 (0.904)
Education (ref. low)				
Middle	-0.651* (0.305)	-0.268 (0.251)	0.392 (0.362)	0.100 (0.507)
High	-2.049*** (0.434)	-1.015*** (0.286)	-0.396 (0.430)	-0.533 (0.578)
Female (ref. male)				
	-0.944*** (0.280)	-0.585** (0.210)	-0.737* (0.305)	-0.911* (0.418)
Age				
	-0.019* (0.009)	-0.003 (0.007)	-0.037*** (0.009)	-0.032* (0.013)
Income equality				
	-0.122 (0.137)	0.409*** (0.124)	-0.300* (0.142)	0.345 (0.232)
Cultural exclusion				
	1.063*** (0.194)	-0.302** (0.115)	0.670*** (0.192)	0.168 (0.226)
Anti-EU				
	-0.034 (0.138)	0.200 (0.105)	1.010*** (0.219)	0.032 (0.193)
Intercept				
	-4.145	-2.723	-6.505	-3.734

Standard errors in parentheses; N = 1351. PVV: *Partij voor de Vrijheid*; SP: *Socialistische Partij*; FvD: *Forum voor Democratie*; EU = European Union.

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

## Different Effects for Different Populist Parties?

Political trust and populist attitudes are important indicators of populist voting. However, this raises the question of whether this holds for all populist parties separately. To determine this, we perform a multinomial analysis. In addition to splitting the three populist parties, we also include a nonvoting category.

The results of the multinomial analyses are presented in Table 6. Political trust is negatively related to voting for the PVV, and it also has a significant negative effect on nonvoting. However, the effect of trust does not significantly relate to the likelihood of voting for the SP or the FvD. Although political trust explains voting for some populist parties, it does not explain all populist voting. Moreover, those who do not vote also exhibit lower levels of trust, but they do not exhibit high populist attitudes. External political efficacy has no significant effect on voting for any of the three populist parties, nor does it explain nonvoting.

Three indicators explain why individuals vote for all three populist parties: gender, cultural exclusion, and populist attitudes. For gender, we find that women are less likely to vote for each of the three populist parties, but they are also less likely to refrain from voting. Therefore, gender does not seem to differentiate between populist voting and

nonvoting. The cultural exclusion indicator is significant for all three populist parties, but not for nonvoting. However, the direction of the effect is different for the SP compared with the PVV and the FvD. Where voting for the latter two is more likely among those who favor cultural exclusion, voters for the SP oppose cultural exclusion. Thus, the only indicator that has a significant and positive relationship with voting for all three populist parties (both left- and right-wing) and does not explain nonvoting is populist attitudes.

## Discussion and Conclusion

In this article, we are interested in the relationship between political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes. We examine the degree to which political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are different constructs, that is, the extent to which they are conceptually different, the degree to which they are empirically different latent constructs, and the extent to which these three indicators are unique predictors of voting for populist parties. We argue that the three constructs are conceptually different and that they measure empirically distinct phenomena. Moreover, we show that these differences affect their explanatory power, that is, the extent to which they explain populist voting.

Theoretically, we argue that political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are constructs that reflect different core components of populism: the pure people versus the corrupt elite, antagonism, and the general will. We argue that political trust mainly reflects the anti-elitism of populism. External political efficacy addresses the anti-elitism and, to a lesser extent, the people-centeredness of populism. Populist attitudes, on the other hand, capture all three core components of populism: people-centrism and anti-elitism, the antagonistic relationship between the people and the elite, and a focus on the general will.

Applying exploratory and confirmatory factor analyses, we show that political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes are three different constructs, but we do see that there is overlap (i.e. correlation) among these three constructs. Something we would expect from concepts that theoretically tap partly into one common feature of populism: anti-elitism.

Furthermore, we argue that populist attitudes bring more to the table than external political efficacy and political trust with regard to their ability to explain voting for a populist party. We find that without the presence of populist attitudes and political trust in the model, external political efficacy does explain voting for a populist party. However, with populist attitudes and political trust in the model, we find that external political efficacy is no longer significant. In other words, even though there is some overlap between the three concepts, external political efficacy is not a robust predictor of populist voting. The difference between the three concepts becomes even more important when we differentiate between different populist parties (i.e. the PVV, the SP, and the FvD). Here, we see that populist attitudes are the only consistent and exclusive indicator of voting for a populist party. From the three sets of attitudes under study—political trust, external political efficacy, and populist attitudes—we find that only the latter is able to explain voting for left- and right-wing populist parties.

We conclude that if we seek to explain populist voting, populist attitudes are a more robust indicator than external political efficacy and political trust. Populist attitudes are the only construct that conceptually captures all three components of populism and empirically explains why individuals vote for a variety of populist parties. Although our study tests the relationship between political trust, external political efficacy, and populist

attitudes in the Netherlands, we do not expect that the relationships between the constructs are different for other countries. Nevertheless, since the three concepts and their measurements have been applied to a range of countries in Europe and beyond, future research is welcomed to verify our findings in other countries or across countries.

Applying our analysis on a sample from the Netherlands has several important advantages. First, this allows us to distinguish between three different types of populist parties. This becomes particularly important in the multinomial model. We show that populist attitudes are able to explain voting, for three populist parties, on the political left and the political right, something that is essential for testing the relevance of the populist attitudes measurement. After all, the populist attitudes measurement was developed to measure populism among individuals, regardless of their ideological (or political left-right) position (i.e. as a thin-centered ideology). In addition, testing our results for three different populist parties is important for our conclusions with regard to the effect of populist attitudes on nonvoting. We find that populist attitudes explain voting for both left- and right-wing populist parties, but are not related to nonvoting. However, it might be that in other countries in which there is no populist party available to voters (either left-wing, right-wing, or both), that the relationship between populist attitudes and nonvoting is different. For example, it might be that in a country like Austria, left-wing individuals with strong populist attitudes abstain from voting, since the Austrian party system does not have a left-wing populist party. However, should this be the case, this would only further demonstrate the extent to which the Netherlands is an important case. Our finding, that in the Netherlands, populist attitudes do not explain non-voting, highlights the need to distinguish between populism and broader political discontent.

Our study has important implications for the further study of populism. First, the fact that populist attitudes are a more robust explanation of why individuals vote for populist parties points to the importance of not only focusing on anti-elitism but also on the people-centered (in conjunction with anti-elitism) nature of populism. Adjusting the focus of why voters support populist parties may shed new light on the reasons behind the continued success of populist parties. Second, and as a result, focusing on the people-centered nature of populism may also link populism (and the success of populist parties) to debates about political representation, that is, debates about implementing democratic innovations such as referenda and deliberative democracy (e.g. Jacobs et al., 2018a). Finally, our findings have important implications for the study of politics more broadly speaking. The study of populism currently touches on a variety of important topics within political science, including foreign policy (Plagemann and Destradi, 2018; Verbeek and Zaslove, 2017), party politics (Wolinetz and Zaslove, 2018), political psychology (Bakker et al., 2016), and coalition formation (Plescia and Eberl, 2019). The conclusions from this article regarding the distinct nature of populist attitudes (both theoretically and empirically), from political trust and external political efficacy, can shed important insights into these broader discussions.

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## Notes

1. For stylistic reasons, we will not always indicate that the vote was intended (instead of recalled) in the remainder of the article.
2. For the economic, cultural, and political attaching attitudes, individuals were asked to position themselves on a scale from 1 to 5 in which 1 meant *income difference should increase, immigrants should be allowed to hold on to their own culture*, and *European integration should go further* while 5 meant *income difference should decrease, immigrants should adapt to our culture*, and *European integration has gone too far*.
3. This method uses the full weight matrix to compute robust standard errors and the mean- and variance-adjusted test statistic.
4. Because of our large N ( $N > 300$ ), we do not rely on the  $\chi^2$  statistics. Nevertheless, we present this statistic since the other fit indices are based on this statistic.
5. We also checked for multicollinearity. No multicollinearity was shown for any of the coefficients in the models presented in this article (Hair et al., 1998: 220–221) (results available upon request).
6. We also ran six analyses in which we loaded the populist attitudes items (one per model) to the external efficacy measurement. Furthermore, we ran three models in which we included each of the external efficacy items (one per model) to the populist attitudes measurement. In addition, we ran a model in which we replaced the items with the highest loading on the political efficacy (Pop5 & Pop6) with the political efficacy items. None of these models showed an adequate model fit (results available upon request).

## ORCID iD

Bram Geurkink  <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-9722-2731>

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## Author Biographies

**Bram Geurkink** is a PhD candidate in the Economics Department at the Institute for Management Research at Radboud University. His research interests include political behavior, political socialization in the workplace, workplace voice, and populism.

**Andrej Zaslove** is an assistant professor in the Political Science Department at the Institute for Management Research at Radboud University. His research interests include populism, measuring populism (supply and demand), populist voting behavior, and populism and democracy.

**Roderick Sluiter** is a postdoctoral researcher in the Economics Department and lecturer in the Political Science Department, both at the Institute for Management Research at Radboud University. His research interests include workplace voice, precarious work, and political behavior.

**Kristof Jacobs** is an assistant professor in the Political Science Department at the Institute for Management Research at Radboud University. His research interests include democratic challenges and innovations, populism, democracy, and elite behavior.