

Manuscript title: Unpacking Populism: Using Correlational Class Analysis to Understand How People Interrelate Populist, Pluralist, and Elitist Attitudes**Dieter Dekeyser and Henk Roose**

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Abstract: Populist attitudes are generally considered to consist of three types of beliefs, viz. people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs. There is less agreement, however, on how populist attitudes are related to liberal democratic attitudes. Some argue that populist attitudes are incompatible with liberal democratic attitudes (e.g., pluralism and elitism). Others assert that these attitudes are compatible. Starting off from the concept of belief systems, we analyze the different ways in which people interrelate populist, pluralist, and elitist attitudes. Using correlational class analysis, we uncover four belief systems that differ in (a) how consistently people support populist beliefs and (b) the direction of the relationship between populist and pluralist beliefs. We also find that the differences between belief systems are related to people's support for populism. People holding populist beliefs tend to associate populist attitudes with pluralist attitudes, while people who do not hold populist beliefs associate populist attitudes with anti-pluralist attitudes.

Zusammenfassung: Populistische Gesinnungen bestehen nach allgemeiner Auffassung aus drei Arten von Überzeugungen, nämlich menschenzentrierten, anti-elitären und manichäischen Ansichten. Allerdings gibt es weniger Einigkeit darüber, wie das Verhältnis von populistischen und liberal-demokratischen Gesinnungen beschaffen ist. Während einige davon ausgehen, dass populistische Gesinnungen nicht mit liberal-demokratischen Ansichten vereinbar sind (z.B. Pluralismus und Elitismus), bescheinigen andere hingegen eine Kompatibilität. Ausgehend vom Konzept der Glaubenssysteme analysieren wir die Art und Weise, wie Menschen populistische, pluralistische und elitäre Ansichten zueinander in Beziehung bringen. Mithilfe von Korrelationsanalysen decken wir vier Glaubenssysteme auf, die sich dahingehend unterscheiden, (a) wie konsequent Menschen populistische Ansichten unterstützen und (b) wie das Verhältnis von populistischen und pluralistischen Ansichten ausgerichtet ist. Wir stellen ebenfalls fest, dass sich Unterschiede bezüglich der Glaubenssysteme je nach persönlicher Unterstützung für Populismus ergeben. Menschen mit populistischen Gesinnungen tendieren dazu, diese mit Pluralismus zu verbinden, während Menschen ohne populistische Überzeugungen Populismus mit anti-pluralistischen Ansichten assoziieren.

Résumé: Généralement on considère que les attitudes populistes consistent en trois types de convictions, c'est-à-dire les convictions manichéennes, les convictions anti-élitistes et celles qui sont axées

sur le peuple. En ce qui concerne la relation entre les attitudes populistes et les attitudes du type libéral démocratique par contre, il y a moins d'accord. Certains sont d'avis que les attitudes populistes sont incompatibles avec les attitudes libérales démocratiques (*pluralisme et élitisme*). D'autres revendiquent le contraire. En partant du concept des « systèmes de convictions », nous analyserons les différentes manières desquelles les gens interrelient les attitudes populistes, pluralistes et élitistes. En utilisant une analyse de classe corrélationnelle, nous découvrons quatre « systèmes de convictions » qui diffèrent en la conséquence avec laquelle les gens soutiennent des convictions populistes et la direction de la relation entre des convictions populistes et pluralistes. Les différences sont également liées au soutien des gens au populisme.

Keywords

Populism, Correlational Class Analysis, Belief Systems, Political Attitudes, Ideational

Introduction

Populism research has made great strides in recent years. Scholars have reached a consensus about the ideational definition of populist attitudes as the combination of people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs defining the elite as ‘bad’ and ‘the people’ as good (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019; Kaltwasser 2018; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013a). This has inspired the development of various populism scales that have allowed the measurement of populist attitudes across the world (Akkerman et al. 2014; Hawkins et al. 2012; Schulz et al. 2017; Silva, Andreadis et al. 2019). Although there is a growing agreement about what constitutes populist attitudes, scholars remain divided about how populist attitudes are related to liberal democratic attitudes.

Some scholars argue that people hold populist attitudes because they want majoritarian rule, are motivated to oppress minority groups, and distrust democratic institutions and elites. From this viewpoint, populist attitudes are seen as incompatible with the pluralist and elitist ideas of liberal democracies (Lee 2020; Plattner 2010; Rostbøll 2020; Taggart 2000; Urbinati 1998). Others argue that people hold populist attitudes because they embrace the values of democracy. These populist people are believed to be mainly frustrated with how democracy is organized (Canovan 1999, 2002). In this view, populist attitudes are a healthy feature of liberal democracies, because populism points at structural problems that can be solved through the electoral process. So, populist attitudes are not necessarily incompatible with pluralist and elitist attitudes; these democratic attitudes may exactly be the main reason why some people embrace populism.

Warren (2020) argues that both interpretations may be correct, but that they illustrate the different ways in which people relate populist attitudes to liberal democracy. Some people have an illiberal approach as they combine populist with anti-pluralist attitudes, while others have a liberal approach that combines populism with pluralist attitudes. In other words, Warren (2020) argues that the relationship between populist and liberal democratic attitudes is not set in stone, but that different people have different ways of combining populism with liberal democratic attitudes.

This paper offers an empirical analysis of how people combine populist with liberal democratic attitudes – specifically pluralist attitudes and elitist attitudes towards non-political experts. Our approach is based on Converse’s (1964) concept of ‘belief systems’ – which refers to different configuration of how people interrelate different attitudes into coherent political logics. We examine if there are several belief systems that govern the way people relate populist to pluralist and elitist attitudes. More particularly, we inspect three qualities of these belief systems: (a) the degree of consistency in people’s support for the different sub-dimensions of populism, (b) the level of support for populist attitudes, and (c) the type of association of populist attitudes with pluralist and elitist attitudes. We also argue that these three qualities are interrelated. We expect that people with consistent levels of

support for different populist attitudes will also relate these populist attitudes in a more consistent way to liberal democratic attitudes. And, we expect that people's level of support for populist attitudes will condition the direction of this relationship – i.e., people who support populist attitudes are likely to believe that populist attitudes are compatible with pluralist and elitist attitudes, while people who do not hold populist attitudes will tend to believe that these attitudes are incompatible.

As such, this paper provides news insights into the different ways in which people combine populist attitudes with liberal democratic attitudes and what conditions affect these combinations. These insights contribute to theoretical debates about how populist attitudes are positioned towards liberal democracy. Furthermore, the recent increase in public support for populist ideas has strengthened the concern that public support for democracy is declining. However, such fears may be premature as the link between populism and liberal democracy has not been sufficiently scrutinized. To assess if populist attitudes are threatening or beneficial for liberal democracy, we must first gain insight into how people themselves relate populist beliefs to liberal democratic beliefs.

Populist Attitudes

The Ideational Definition of Populist Attitudes

Populism takes different forms in different places (Taggart 2000). European countries have mainly encountered right-wing populist movements that capitalize on concerns about global migration, while South American countries are more familiar with left-wing populist movements that focus on economic concerns (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013b; Panizza 2013; Rooduijn 2013). Some argue that populist beliefs have a chameleonic quality (Taggart 2000) or are ideologically 'thin' (Mudde 2004), because populism consists of a limited set of ideas that can be combined with a range of different ideologies. To define what beliefs constitute populism, researchers focus on the lowest common denominator (Rooduijn 2013) or minimal features (Kaltwasser 2012; Mudde 2007) that different populist movements have in common.

Although there remains some disagreement about what minimal features constitute populism, most scholars currently support the ideational definition. The ideational approach defines populism as a set of ideas that interpret politics as a moral struggle between the will of the people and the self-serving political elite. This set of ideas is divided in three components: (a) the belief that 'the people' is a homogeneous group of people with similar opinions whose will is the sole legitimate basis for political decisions (i.e., people-centrism), (b) the belief that the political elite is a homogenous group that pursues its own interests instead of the common good (i.e., anti-elitism), and (c) a Manichean outlook on society that describes the differences between 'the people' and political elites in moral terms (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019; Kaltwasser 2018; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013a). Because populism is

defined as a set of ideas, it can be investigated both as a quality of political parties as well as an attitude that is held by certain groups in society.

Recently, the ideational approach has stimulated scholars to pay attention to populist attitudes in the general population (Akkerman et al. 2014; Akkerman et al. 2017; Elchardus and Spruyt 2016; Oliver and Rahn 2016; Spruyt et al. 2016; Stanley 2011; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel 2018). The ideational approach not only identifies three attitudinal components, but also specifies that populism requires (a) that each component is supported to the same extent (i.e., consistency) and (b) that each component receives a high level of support – i.e., populist people strongly support people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs. People who endorse some components but not others (i.e., inconsistency) cannot be labeled as populist (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013a; Van Kessel 2014). Additionally, the ideational approach expects that there will be some level of heterogeneity in the degree to which people consistently support all three components of populism. In order to separate populists from non-populists and people who hold inconsistent populist attitudes, recent studies invest a lot of effort in empirically examining how consistent people's populist attitudes are (Silva, Andreadis et al. 2019; Silva, Jungkunz et al. 2019; Van Hauwaert et al. 2019a, 2019b; Wettstein et al. 2019). Some also devise new strategies to operationalize and measure populist attitudes by considering both the level of consistency as well as the level of support for populist attitudes (Wuttke et al. 2020).

Populist and Liberal Democratic Attitudes

The growing consensus about what constitutes populism allows researchers to investigate how these populist ideas relate to liberal democracy. However, scholars offer different interpretations of this relationship. Warren (2020) argues that these interpretations can be separated into two types – a negative and a positive relationship.

Negative interpretations argue that people hold populist attitudes because they oppose liberal democratic constraints on the voice of the democratic majority. As such, endorsement of populist beliefs equals to the rejection of the pluralist and elitist ideas of liberal democracy (Galston 2018; Lee 2020; Mounk 2018; Plattner 2010; Urbinati 1998). The central concept which guides this populist rejection is 'the people' – the belief that society contains a large and homogenous group of similarly minded people that has a strong claim on democratic power due to its group size. Populists feel that liberal democracy ignores the wishes of this large group, while it attributes too much value to the wishes of smaller groups. Furthermore, populists strongly dislike that the wishes of the majority are not directly adopted into public policies, but that liberal democratic institutions, laws, and experts mediate popular will by adapting it to liberal values and principles. In this sense, scholars believe that populist ideas

boil down to the conviction that the pluralist and elitist ideas of liberal democracy are detrimental to the interests of 'the people'. This view is endorsed by some proponents of the ideational approach to populism, who state that populists support the exact opposite ideas of pluralists and elitists (Hawkins & Kaltwasser 2019; Mudde 2004).

A positive interpretation is that people hold populist attitudes because they aim to protect the ideals of liberal democracy. Canovan (1999, 2002) states that people hold populist beliefs because they feel frustrated with the lack of transparency in how democracy is organized, rather than because they reject liberal democratic values. According to Canovan, the workings of democracy are largely hidden behind highly specialized institutions, practices, and actors. This organizational complexity tends to alienate people from democracy, because it is at odds with the promise of democracy to involve people in public decisions. Support for populist ideas therefore potentially signals that the organizational side of democracy has become too dominant and that certain changes are needed. This view is shared by Warren (2020) who argues that, while there are illiberal types of populism, there are also liberal types of populism that combine populist attitudes with pluralist attitudes. In this case, endorsement of populist beliefs can be a healthy feature of democratic life as it is aimed at identifying certain systemic deficits that are detrimental to democracy. In this view, support for populist ideas is not incompatible with liberal democratic beliefs.

Populist and Democratic Beliefs as Elements of Belief Systems

In the previous section, we focused on two aspects. First, the level of consistency between – and support for – the ideational components of populism. Only people who have high levels of support for all three ideational components of populism can be labeled as populist. Second, people can combine populist attitudes with democratic attitudes in different ways. Some will combine populist attitudes with anti-democratic attitudes, while others will combine populist attitudes with democratic attitudes. We argue that these aspects are related. People must first have a consistent position towards populist beliefs before they can relate these ideas to liberal democratic ideas in a consistently positive or negative way. Furthermore, the level of support for populist beliefs could also affect the direction of this relationship. People who disapprove of populism may be more likely to interpret these views as inconsistent with liberal democratic ideas, while supporters of populism may relate populist ideas to liberal democracy positively. In other words, we expect to find a lot of heterogeneity in how people endorse populist beliefs and relate these beliefs to liberal democratic ideas. To empirically investigate this level of heterogeneity, we believe the concept of belief systems offers an appropriate approach. The term 'belief system' was used by Converse (1964) to refer to a systematic way of organizing political beliefs into a coherent and logical understanding of politics. As an illustration, Converse compared

political conservatives to progressives. Although conservatives and progressives disagree on what they believe, Converse argues that they do agree on how political beliefs are interconnected – that is, both groups expect that people who are conservative (or progressive) on economic issues will also be conservative (or progressive) on cultural issues. Seen in this light, conservatives and progressives act as the opposites of a single belief system. In addition, Converse argues that belief systems differ in their level of consistency. Some people do not mind adopting ideologically inconsistent views towards multiple political issues. People with specific social identities, educations or levels of political knowledge may embrace views that seem contradictory (Converse, 1964). When examining the public, Converse expects to find a range of different belief systems with different ways of interrelating political beliefs.

Belief systems offer an analytical tool to observe heterogeneity in the level of consistency, the level of support, and the direction of the relationship between multiple political beliefs (see figure 1). This allows us to investigate to what degree these aspects are relevant for the relationship between populist and liberal democratic beliefs. Adopting this analytical tool allows us to formulate the following expectations.

We expect that people will have very different ways of interrelating people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs, which will produce different belief systems that vary in the level of consistent support for the ideational components of populism.

Hypothesis 1. There are several belief systems in the population that differ in how consistently people support people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs.

Second, we expect that people who have consistent populist attitudes, will also relate these populist attitudes in a consistent way to pluralist and elitist attitudes. However, the direction of this relationship may be either positive or negative – meaning that people can combine their populist attitudes with pluralist and elitist attitudes in a liberal or illiberal way.

Hypothesis 2. Belief systems with a high (low) levels of consistent support for people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs relate these beliefs in a consistent (inconsistent) way to pluralist and elitist beliefs.

Hypothesis 3. Belief systems differ in the direction of the relationship (i.e., positive or negative) between people-centrist, anti-elitist, and Manichean beliefs towards pluralist and elitist beliefs.

Lastly, Warren (2020) states that scholars supply a positive and a negative interpretation of how people relate populist ideas to liberal democracy. However, these scholars do not clarify if this positive or negative interpretation is related to people's own level of support for populism. We expect that people who do not hold populist attitudes are very likely to interpret these beliefs as incompatible with

democratic beliefs such as pluralism and elitism, while people who do hold populist attitudes may feel that populist ideas are perfectly reconcilable with pluralist and elitist ideas.

Hypothesis 4. People who support populism are likely to belong to a belief system with a positive association between populist, pluralist, and elitist beliefs, while people do not support populism are likely to belong to a belief system with a negative association between populist, pluralist, and elitist beliefs.

[Figure 1 here]

Data and Method

We use data from Flanders (the Dutch speaking part of Belgium) that was collected by randomly selecting Dutch-speaking residents from Flanders and Brussels who are aged 18 and older. The data was collected in 2016 using computer-assisted personal interviews. The survey attained a response rate of 57.2% which produced a sample of 1449 respondents.

Analytical Strategy

In line with others (Baldassarri and Goldberg 2014; Daenekindt et al. 2017; Dimaggio and Goldberg 2018), we analyze belief systems in several steps.

We use correlational class analysis (CCA) to separate our sample into groups with different belief systems. CCA (Boutyline 2017; Goldberg 2011) is a recently developed technique that is applied on a set of items and reveals any number of sub-groups that have a distinct way of correlating these items. Specifically, CCA computes the relationality between each pair of observations regarding to how they interrelate the items. The relationalities for the entire sample are plotted on a graph which is subsequently partitioned into sub-groups using a graph-partitioning algorithm. An advantage of this approach is that the researcher does not have to specify the number of sub-groups beforehand. Instead, CCA inductively searches for the most optimal number of sub-groups by maximizing the graph's modularity (Goldberg 2011).

To validate hypotheses 1 to 3, we apply CCA on a set of 14 items that measure populist, pluralist, and elitist attitudes. Although some of these items theoretically belong together, CCA treats each item independently. In this way, CCA empirically partitions the sample into sub-groups that interrelate these items in a (theoretically) consistent or inconsistent way. For example, some sub-groups may have strong correlations between the items that measure pluralist attitudes, which means that pluralism is a latent trait of these sub-groups. Other sub-groups may have weak correlations, which means that pluralism is not a latent trait that consistently determines these people's responses to the

pluralism items. Ultimately, CCA makes no assumptions about how items are interrelated, but searches for the dominant ways people themselves interrelate these items.

After partitioning the sample into distinct sub-groups, we examine if the differences between these sub-groups are related to people's level of support for populist beliefs (hypothesis 4) – controlled for certain socio-political characteristics. We use multinomial logistic regressions and cross-tabulations to analyze these between sub-group differences.

Measures and Items

For measuring *populist attitudes*¹, we use the Akkerman et al. (2014) populism scale. This scale is frequently used in populism research and has been extensively validated (Silva, Jungkunz et al. 2019; Van Hauwaert et al. 2019a, 2019b). Wuttke et al. (2020) rightfully note that a disadvantage of this scale lies in how the items have been constructed. Although Akkerman et al. were inspired by the three ideational components of populism, the items do not measure each component separately. Instead, each item measures a combination of these components. Ultimately, the scale is divided into two major sub-dimensions: 'anti-elitism and sovereignty' versus 'anti-elitism and Manichean outlook' (Wuttke et al. 2020). We believe the scale is nevertheless suitable for our objective because (1) the scale does reveal information about how the ideational components of populism interrelate, (2) our main focus is on how populist, pluralist, and elitist attitudes interrelate, and (3) CCA treats all items independently from what sub-dimension they conceptually belong to. So, while the Akkerman et al. scale is not perfect, it provides sufficient information to test our hypotheses.

We use seven items to measure populist attitudes: "Politicians need to exclusively follow the will of the people", "The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions", "The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people", "I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician", "Elected politicians talk too much and take too little action", "What people call 'compromise' in politics is really just selling out one's principles", and "Common people have often been deceived by politicians". The first four items measure the 'anti-elitism and sovereignty' sub-dimension of the Akkerman et al. scale, while the last three items measure the 'anti-elitism and Manichean' sub-dimension (Wuttke et al. 2020). The last item was added as an extra measure of Manichean views and deviates from the original Akkerman et al. scale.

*Pluralist attitudes*¹ above were measured using four items: "In a democracy it is important to make compromises among differing viewpoints", "It is important to listen to the opinion of other groups",

¹ The items for populist, pluralist, and elitist attitudes were answered with five-point Likert scales.

“Freedom is dependent on how diversity is accepted”, and “No opinion is incontestable. That is why it is good to consider different opinions”. Together these items measure the liberal democratic idea that public decisions should reflect a compromise between multiple different interests and opinions. *Elitist attitudes* were measured using three items: “Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to successful businesspeople”, “Our country would be governed better if important decisions were left up to independent experts”, and “Our society is so complex that important decisions should be made by non-political professionals”. While populist items measure attitudes towards political elites, these items measure attitudes towards non-political experts and elites. We also measure several other characteristics, which allow us to investigate the differences between belief systems in their level of support for populism - while controlling for socio-demographic variables.

A measure of people’s *level of support for populist ideas* must take account of the level of constraint or consistency in people’s support for the ideational components of populism. That is, people with a high (low) support for populism should have high (low) values on all ideational components. Wuttke et al. (2020) provide a novel way to correctly operationalize support for populist ideas, which they call the Goertz operationalization strategy. This strategy calculates the level of support for each ideational component and then selects the lowest value, because this value sets the level of support that is equal across all components. We apply this strategy to the 7 items of the Akkerman et al. scale in the same way as Wuttke et al. (2020). Specifically, we separate the items based on the two sub-dimensions in the Akkerman et al. scale, we then combine the items belonging to each sub-dimension into mean-scores, and we select the lowest mean-score of both sub-dimensions as a person’s level of support for populism.

Political interest was measured by asking respondents to what degree they are interested in politics. Respondents indicated their level of interest on a 5-point Likert scale, which we then recoded into three groups: ‘not interested’, ‘somewhat interested’, and ‘very interested’. Respondents also indicated their highest *level of education*, which we recoded into three groups: ‘not or lower educated’, ‘secondary education’, and ‘higher education’. Additionally, respondents were asked to indicate if their *household income* was high enough to live comfortably. We recoded the answers into three groups: ‘income is too low’, ‘income is sufficient’, and ‘income is comfortable’. We also include *age* (in years) and *sex* (man or female) in our analyses.

Results

CCA Uncovers Four Belief Systems

The CCA² found 4 distinct clusters representing 41.4%, 19.3%, 22.5%, and 16.8% of the sample. We visualize each cluster as a network of correlations to facilitate a straightforward interpretation of the differences (see figure 2). In each network, nodes embody items and edges represent correlations. Wider (narrower) edges represent stronger (weaker) correlations, while dashed (full) edges show negative (positive) correlations (see appendix for full correlation matrices). Only significant correlations are shown ($p \leq 0.05$).

We examine these networks by focusing on two elements: (1) the magnitude and direction of the correlations between the populism items (i.e., the level of constraint/consistency between populist attitudes) and (2) the magnitude and direction of the correlations between the populism, pluralism, and elitism items.

First, the clusters differ in the level of constraint between the populism items, which supports hypothesis 1. While the populism items are strongly correlated in clusters 1 and 2, the items are less correlated in clusters 3 and 4. Moreover, the populism items in clusters 3 and 4 seem to be partitioned into two sets that match the way Wuttke et al. (2020) theoretically separate the Akkerman et al. scale into two sub-dimensions. These results suggest that people in clusters 3 and 4 have different levels of support for the different ideational components of populism, which means that they have a less consistent stance towards populist ideas.

Second, cluster 3 does not show a clear relationship between the pluralism and populism items, while cluster 4 shows inconsistent correlations (i.e., both positive and negative) between these items. In comparison, the correlation networks of clusters 1 and 2 show rather strong correlations between these items. This suggests that clusters with a higher level of constraint between the sub-dimensions of the populism items also tend to consistently associate these populism items to the pluralism items, which partially confirms hypothesis 2.

In line with hypothesis 3, we find that the direction of the correlations between the populism and pluralism items differs between clusters 1 and 2. Cluster 1 shows positive correlations, which means that people who support pluralist ideas also support populist ideas. Instead, cluster 2 shows negative correlations, which means that people who support pluralist ideas tend to oppose populist ideas. This shows that people differ in their interpretation of populist beliefs as either compatible or incompatible with pluralist beliefs. Clusters 3 and 4 – which show lower levels of constraint/consistency between the populism items – show no clear relationship between the populism and pluralism items.

Third, the clusters show few differences in both the magnitude and direction of the correlations between the populism and elitism items. In each cluster, people who hold populist attitudes also tend

² We used the 'corclass' (Boutyline 2016) and 'qgraph' (Epskamp et al. 2012) packages in R.

to hold elitist attitudes. This shows that populist beliefs are compatible with positive attitudes towards people in business, independent experts, and non-political professionals. So, we find no support for our hypotheses regarding elitist attitudes.

To provide labels for these four clusters, we use the nature of the correlations between the pluralism and populism items, as this seems to be a defining difference between the clusters. We label clusters 1 and 2 as the 'pluralist populist' and 'pluralist anti-populist' belief systems. These names refer to the magnitude and direction of the correlations between the constructs, rather than the level of support for these constructs. So, the label 'pluralist populist' refers to the positive correlations between the pluralism and populism items, which means that this belief system potentially contains people who support pluralist and populist ideas as well as people who oppose pluralist and populist ideas.

We further label cluster 3 as the 'partitioned' and cluster 4 as the 'inconsistent' belief system. 'Partitioned' because the pluralist items are largely unrelated to the populism items in cluster 3, so the pluralism and populism items are largely partitioned into two separate constructs. Cluster 4 shows rather weak and inconsistent (i.e., both positive & negative) correlations between the pluralism and populism items. There is no clear political logic that seems to govern the correlations in cluster 4. To further inspect the relationship between cluster membership and the level of support for populist attitudes, we use multinomial logistic regressions and cross-tabulations.

[Figure 2 here]

Relating Cluster Membership to Support for Populism

As a last step, we examine the differences between clusters in support for populist attitudes. We use multinomial logistic regressions with the four clusters as dependent variable (see table 1). The 'pluralist populist' cluster is used as reference-group because it is the largest cluster. Model 1 only includes social demographics, while model 2 also includes support for populist attitudes.

Model 1 shows that the differences between clusters are related to social demographic differences. None/lower and secondary educated people are less likely to be members of the 'pluralist anti-populist' (relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.857} = 0.425$; relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.802} = 0.448$) and 'inconsistent' clusters (relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.741} = 0.477$; relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.663} = 0.515$), compared to the 'pluralist populist' cluster. People who are not interested in politics are also less likely to be attached to the 'pluralist anti-populist' (relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.908} = 0.404$) and 'inconsistent' clusters (relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.585} = 0.557$), compared to the pluralist populist cluster. People who have a household income that is sufficient but not comfortable tend to adhere to the 'pluralist anti-populist' compared to

the ‘pluralist populist’ cluster (relative risk ratio = $e^{-0.486} = 0.615$). These results suggest that some of the differences between the clusters are related to different social positions.

Next, we add people’s level of support for populism to the model. This was measured using the Goertz operationalization strategy. Adding this variable alters the model greatly. All effects of social demographic variables are no longer significant, while the effects of support for populism are significant. Those with higher levels of support for populist attitudes tend to adhere to the ‘pluralist populist’ cluster. This confirms our expectations. People who support populist ideas also tend to support liberal democratic ideas such as pluralism and elitism (hypothesis 4).

[Table 1 here]

To inspect this more in-depth, we recode support for populism into four categories³ and we cross-tabulate these categories with cluster membership (see table 2). The results show that support for populism greatly explains the differences between clusters: 83.1% of the ‘pluralist populist’ cluster shows moderate to high support for populism, compared to 24.9%, 65.3%, and 30.1% for the ‘pluralist anti-populist’, ‘partitioned’ and ‘inconsistent’ clusters. Especially clusters 1 and 2 seem to act as counterparts: those who associate populism with pluralism tend to support populist beliefs, and those who associate pluralism with anti-populism tend to oppose populist beliefs. These results suggest that the way people relate populist to pluralist beliefs, in the clusters with strong constraints between populist beliefs, are partly dependent on people’s support for populism (hypothesis 4).

[Table 2 here]

Lastly, table 3 and 4 cross-tabulate support for pluralism and elitism⁴ with cluster membership. The results show that support for pluralism and elitism is rather comparable across clusters, which is in line with our previous results. We saw that people in the ‘pluralist populist’ cluster tended to be populist and that people in the ‘pluralist anti-populist’ cluster tended to be anti-populist, which explains why both clusters have high support for pluralism. We also see more variation in support for populism

³ The original Goertz scale contained values from 0 to 4. We recoded these scores into four categories: no support (scores 0 to 0.999), low support (scores 1 to 1.999), moderate support (scores 2 to 2.999), and high support (scores 3 to 4).

⁴ Support for pluralism/elitism was calculated by combining people’s scores on the four pluralism/elitism items into mean-scores. These scores were recoded into four categories: no support (scores 0 to 0.999), low support (scores 1 to 1.999), moderate support (scores 2 to 2.999), and high support (scores 3 to 4). Because the category ‘no support’ has only 1 observation for pluralism, we combined the ‘no support’ and ‘low support’ categories for pluralism.

than support for pluralism in the 'partitioned' cluster, which is possible because pluralism and populism are less constrained in this cluster. Table 4 also shows that the level of support for elitism is almost the same in each cluster, which supports our conclusion that the level of elitism does not explain much of the differences between clusters. The only exception is the 'inconsistent' cluster, which has more high support for elitism than the other clusters. However, the patterns in this cluster are rather difficult to interpret throughout all the analyses, which strengthens our belief that this cluster captures either very inconsistent people or statistical noise.

[Table 3 here]

[Table 4 here]

Discussion

Previous studies have made two important claims about populist attitudes. First, populist attitudes combine three specific ideational components, which implies both a high level of attitude constraint between these components and a high level of support for each component. Second, populist attitudes can be positively or negatively related to liberal democratic ideas. Some people will combine populist attitudes with liberal democratic ideas such as pluralism and elitism, while others find these attitudes incompatible.

We have argued that these claims are interrelated. People must first have consistent levels of support for populist beliefs before they are able to relate these populist beliefs in a consistent way to liberal democratic beliefs. Furthermore, we expected that people who strongly support (oppose) populist beliefs will believe populist attitudes are compatible (incompatible) with liberal democratic attitudes. The results mostly confirm our expectations. We used the concept of belief systems to analyze how the public interrelates populist, pluralist, and elitist attitudes. The analyses uncovered four distinct belief systems, which differ in how consistently people interrelate different populist attitudes. This confirms the underlying assumption of the ideational approach to populism that people differ in the extent to which they show consistent support for the ideational components of populism (Hawkins and Kaltwasser 2019).

Two of the uncovered belief systems showed a high level of consistency (60.7% of the sample), while the other two belief systems showed a moderate to low level of consistency (39.3% of the sample). This level of attitude consistency also affects how populist attitudes are related to pluralist attitudes – but not to elitist attitudes. Belief systems with a high level of attitude consistency between populist beliefs showed a clear relationship between populist and pluralist beliefs. One belief system

associated pluralist with populist beliefs ('pluralist populist' cluster), while the other belief system associated pluralist with anti-populist beliefs ('pluralist anti-populist' cluster).

Belief systems with less consistent support for populist beliefs had either no clear relationship between populism and pluralism (the 'partitioned' cluster, 22.5% of the sample) or a very inconsistent relationship (i.e., both positive and negative; 'inconsistent' cluster, 16.8% of the sample). The difference between these two clusters is that people in the 'partitioned' cluster do have moderately consistent positions towards pluralist and populist attitudes, but they treat pluralist and populist attitudes as separate constructs that are largely disconnected from each other. These people do not seem to connect the ideas of pluralism to the ideas of populism, but there is a certain logic that governs their attitudes.

People in the 'inconsistent' cluster have less consistent positions towards populist attitudes and connect these populist attitudes in ambiguous ways to pluralist attitudes. There is no clear logic that governs the associations in this belief system, and our analyses provided little insight into this group. It is possible that the 'inconsistent' cluster is partly a statistical artefact because statistical clustering techniques often produce a residual cluster that contains statistical noise or response styles. However, the CCA technique currently provides no tools to further inspect such residual clusters. Nevertheless, these results are in line with Converse (1964), who argues that a large part of society will have inconsistent, unexpected, and contradictory ways of interrelating different political ideas.

These results only partly support the theoretical proposition that populist beliefs are incompatible with pluralist and elitist beliefs. Instead, we found that populist attitudes are related both positively (41.4% of the sample) and negatively (19.3% of the sample) to pluralist beliefs in different groups; and, that populist attitudes are positively related to attitudes towards non-political elites in all groups. This means that only a small group within our sample shows the expected negative relationship between populism and pluralism, as proposed by the ideational approach to populism (Hawkins & Kaltwasser 2019; Mudde 2004; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013a). This suggests that the public is more heterogeneous in how consistently they adopt populist beliefs and how they relate these populist beliefs to democratic beliefs than what is generally expected in populism literature.

Lastly, the differences between belief systems are partly related to people's own level of support for populism. In people that have consistent views towards populism, we find that those who associate pluralism with populism tend to have high support for populist beliefs ('pluralist populist' cluster), while people who associate pluralism with anti-populism tend to have lower support for populist beliefs ('pluralist anti-populist' cluster). These results have several implications. First, we find that people's scores on the Goertz operationalization of support for populism, as proposed by Wuttke et al. (2020), are related to how people associate populism with pluralism. This implies that populism scales

measure more than differences in populism alone, in this case also its relationship with pluralism. Second, our results potentially give extra context to why populist beliefs are noted to be divisive or polarizing in liberal democracies (Galston 2018; Mounk 2018). We find that people's support for populism conditions how they relate populism to pluralism. Populists and non-populist thus do not only disagree about populist claims, but also disagree about the broader meaning of populist beliefs for liberal democracy. Populists may believe that their views are perfectly in line and even advantageous to liberal democracy, while non-populists seem to interpret such ideas as incompatible or threatening. This disagreement about the meaning of populism may explain why populism can lead to serious political conflict.

Future research should address the following considerations. First, this paper uses the Akkerman et al. (2014) scale of populism which has the disadvantage of not providing measures for each ideational component separately. Recently developed populism scales have solved this problem (Silva, Andreadis et al. 2019), which offer new opportunities to investigate the level of constraint between populist and other political attitudes in the future. Second, we used pluralist and elitist beliefs as a measure of liberal democratic attitudes. The advantage is that these beliefs are often available in socio-political surveys. However, future research should try to investigate a larger range of attitudes aimed both at certain democratic values and the democratic system as a whole. Finally, the finding that people's support for populism affects how they relate populism to pluralism, may be specific to countries that are very familiar with populism. Populism has been a defining feature of Flemish politics for decades which might affect the perceived compatibility of populist ideas to liberal democratic ideas – at least in the minds of populists. Future research should investigate if the degree of familiarity with populism in the local context affects how the public relates populist to democratic beliefs.

Funding and declaration of interests

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their gratitude to Ronan Van Rossem, Stijn Daenekindt, Jeffry Debeuf, and three anonymous reviewers for their comments on earlier versions of this article.

Data Availability Statement

The data that supports the findings of this study was commissioned by and is property of the Flemish Government. Restrictions apply to the availability of these data, which were used under license for

this study. We do not have permission to make this data publicly available. However, we are allowed to make the required data, results, and used statistical codes available for replication, review, and examination of our study and results to individuals upon reasonable request.

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Table 1. Multinomial logistic regression on cluster membership: logit coefficients

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Pluralist anti-po- pulist (vs. PP)	Partitioned (vs. PP)	Inconsistent (vs. PP)	Pluralist anti-po- pulist (vs. PP)	Partitioned (vs. PP)	Inconsistent (vs. PP)
Intercept	0.689*	-0.153	-0.261	4.616***	1.926***	3.203***
Age	-0.005	-0.002	0.005	0.000	0.002	0.010
Female	-0.133	-0.123	-0.129	-0.255	-0.125	-0.201
Education						
Higher (ref.)	-	-	-			
Secondary	-0.802***	-0.118	-0.663***	-0.336	0.140	-0.243
None/lower	-0.857**	0.102	-0.741*	-0.265	0.429	-0.230
Political inter- est						
Very (ref.)	-	-	-			
Somewhat	-0.279	0.042	-0.139	0.118	0.160	0.164
Not interested	-0.908***	-0.227	-0.585***	-0.218	0.055	-0.006
Income						
Comfortable (ref.)	-	-	-			
Sufficient	-0.486**	-0.253	-0.297	-0.011	-0.015	0.114
Too low	-0.457	-0.180	-0.037	0.232	0.178	0.559
Support popu- lism (Goertz)	-	-	-	-2.555***	-1.232***	-2.202***

PP = Pluralist populist cluster

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001 (n = 1342)

Table 2. Cross-tabulation of populism with cluster membership

		CCA Clusters			
		Pluralist populist	Pluralist anti-populist	Partitioned	Inconsistent
Support for populism (Goertz)	None	0.4%	10.5%	1.7%	7.2%
	Low	16.5%	64.6%	33.1%	62.8%
	Moderate	51.7%	20.2%	59.9%	26.5%
	High	31.4%	4.7%	5.4%	3.6%
N		551	257	299	223

Pearson χ^2 : 435.573 (df=9): $p < 0.001$; $n = 1330$

Table 3. Cross-tabulation of pluralism with cluster membership

		CCA Clusters			
		Pluralist populist	Pluralist anti-populist	Partitioned	Inconsistent
Support for pluralism	None & low	0.5%	0.4%	0.3%	0.4%
	Moderate	26.9%	11.7%	25.1%	19.3%
	High	72.6%	87.9%	74.6%	80.3%
N		551	257	299	223

Pearson χ^2 : 26.241 (df=6): $p < 0.001$; $n = 1330$

Table 4. Cross-tabulation of elitism with cluster membership

		CCA Clusters			
		Pluralist populist	Pluralist anti-populist	Partitioned	Inconsistent
Support for elitism	None	3.3%	1.2%	6.0%	0.0%
	Low	27.6%	22.2%	34.8%	5.4%
	Moderate	51.4%	63.4%	50.8%	57.0%
	High	17.8%	13.2%	8.4%	37.7%
N		551	257	299	223

Pearson χ^2 : 140.109 (df=9): $p < 0.001$; $n = 1330$

Biographies

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Appendix

Table 4. Bivariate correlations between items for people-centrism, anti-elitism & Manichean attitudes, elitism, and pluralism for clusters 1 and 2

	P1	P2	P3	P4	C1	C2	C3	PL1	PL2	PL3	PL4	E1	E2	E3
P1	1	0,173	0,268	0,131	0,335	0,225	0,331	0,347	0,288	0,281	0,23			0,114
P2	0,53	1	0,366	0,364	0,34	0,352	0,312	0,155	0,211	0,216	0,146	0,146		0,19
P3	0,223	0,283	1	0,381	0,343	0,431	0,362	0,176	0,226	0,215	0,164			0,139
P4	0,344	0,42	0,288	1	0,389	0,394	0,327	0,127	0,091	0,176	0,135	0,115	0,135	0,166
C1	0,383	0,415	0,276	0,442	1	0,399	0,55	0,143	0,112	0,195		0,098	0,213	0,254
C2	0,44	0,4	0,144	0,414	0,36	1	0,495		0,15	0,171	0,133	0,189	0,189	0,285
C3	0,384	0,476	0,234	0,415	0,48	0,452	1	0,145	0,156	0,154	0,131	0,132	0,184	
PL1	-0,227	-0,211		-0,157	-0,134	-0,334	-0,154	1	0,358	0,352	0,297			0,146
PL2	-0,216	-0,182		-0,22	0,133	-0,311	-0,15	0,531	1	0,507	0,274	-0,112		
PL3	-0,217	-0,201		-0,233	-0,162	-0,276		0,494	0,631	1	0,301	-0,085		
PL4	-0,162	-0,208				-0,293	-0,235	0,367	0,343	0,404	1		0,086	0,129
E1	0,455	0,353	0,195	0,343	0,305	0,323	0,392	-0,145	-0,199	-0,138	-0,156	1	0,286	0,245
E2	0,292	0,316		0,18	0,222		0,176						1	0,382
E3	0,312	0,299	0,145	0,327	0,243	0,167	0,178					0,202	0,412	1

Only significant Pearson's correlations are presented ($p \leq 0.05$). Correlations for cluster 1 are presented above the diagonal; correlations for cluster 2 are presented below the diagonal.

Table 5. Bivariate correlations between items for people-centrism, anti-elitism & Manichean attitudes, elitism, and pluralism for clusters 3 and 4

	P1	P2	P3	P4	C1	C2	C3	PL1	PL2	PL3	PL4	E1	E2	E3
P1	1	0,192	0,118	0,137	0,13	0,182	0,165					0,55	0,337	0,271
P2	0,615	1	0,188	0,237							0,134	0,34	0,263	0,185
P3	0,16	0,181	1	0,161	0,137	0,251	0,212	0,133			0,164	0,17	0,245	0,196
P4	0,367	0,388	0,323	1	0,175	0,13	0,197				0,128	0,23	0,313	0,411
C1	0,191		0,153	0,226	1	0,357	0,422			0,14		0,166	0,306	0,163
C2	0,212	0,251	0,219	0,286	0,156	1	0,491		0,132			0,18	0,309	0,311
C3				0,139	0,305	0,228	1	0,133	0,179	0,26		0,223	0,315	0,246
PL1	-0,194				0,221		0,236	1	0,49	0,369	0,3			-0,173
PL2			0,136		0,276	0,136	0,187	0,438	1	0,619	0,303		-0,116	
PL3	-0,265	-0,182			0,183		0,214	0,362	0,497	1	0,278	-0,148		
PL4					0,155		0,217	0,254	0,257	0,295	1			
E1				0,133	0,24	0,214	0,208		0,136	0,174		1	0,327	0,283
E2				0,136	0,293		0,211	0,175	0,369	0,297		0,351	1	0,379
E3			0,16	0,21	0,293	0,159	0,276	0,156	0,26	0,227		0,357	0,404	1

Only significant Pearsons correlations are presented ($p \leq 0.05$). Correlations for cluster 3 are presented above the diagonal; correlations for cluster 4 are presented below the diagonal.

Table 6. Multinomial logistic regression on cluster membership: logit coefficients
(expanded table with pluralism and elitism for reviewer)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	Pluralist anti-po- pulist (vs. PP)	Partitioned (vs. PP)	Inconsistent (vs. PP)	Pluralist anti-po- pulist (vs. PP)	Partitioned (vs. PP)	Inconsistent (vs. PP)
Intercept	4.616***	1.926***	3.203***	-0.637	0.194	-1.481
Age	0.000	0.002	0.010	-0.008	0.002	-0.006
Female	-0.255	-0.125	-0.201	-0.246	-0.166	-0.313
Education						
Higher (ref.)						
Secondary	-0.336	0.140	-0.243	-0.257	0.229	-0.249
None/lower	-0.265	0.429	-0.230	-0.079	0.581*	-0.110
Political inter- est						
Very (ref.)						
Somewhat	0.118	0.160	0.164	0.205	0.322	0.117
Not interested	-0.218	0.055	-0.006	-0.030	0.287	-0.038
Income						
Comfortable (ref.)						
Sufficient	-0.011	-0.015	0.114	0.060	-0.023	0.251
Too low	0.232	0.178	0.559	0.250	0.133	0.562
Support popu- lism (Goertz)	- 2.555***	-1.232***	-2.202***	-3.408***	-1.254***	-3.487***
Support for pluralism	-	-	-	1.247***	0.641***	0.580**
Support for elitism	-	-	-	1.462***	-0.199	2.632***

PP = Pluralist populist cluster

* p < 0.05; ** p < 0.01; *** p < 0.001 (n = 1342)

Figure 1. Two hypothetical belief systems

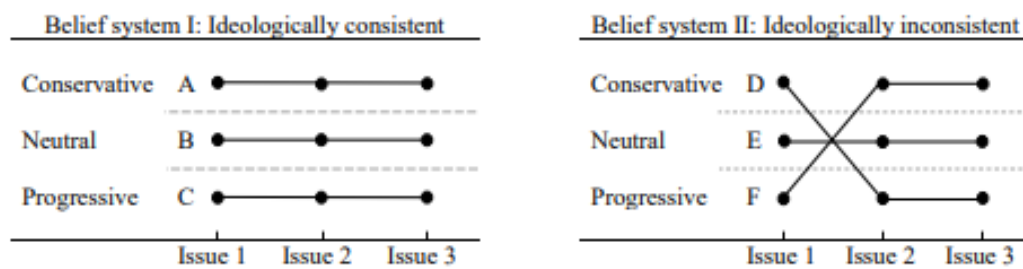


Figure 2. Visualization of different populist belief systems as correlation networks (full edges represent positive correlation; dashed edges represent negative correlations)

