

EXECUTIVE MEMO ON A NEW POPULIST ATTITUDES SCALE*

In recent years, scholars have started to measure and explain populism at the micro-level, as an attitude that individuals hold about politics. Multiple scales have been proposed but, as the broad overview by [Van Hauwaert et al.](#) (forthcoming) and [Van Hauwaert et al. \(2016\)](#) show, they all have limitations. Most do not capture a broad range of the phenomenon – being able to discriminate only among moderately populist and moderately not-populist individuals – and have little cross-cultural validity. We have used standard scale-development approaches from psychology to produce a short battery of six to nine items measuring populist attitudes, divided into three dimensions. The scale has conceptual breadth, travels well across eighteen samples collected in fourteen different countries, and includes one negative-worded item in each dimension. The proposed scale, with items measured in standard agree-disagree responses, is below. The recommendations are ordered. This means that the last item in each dimension (those in *italic*) can be left out by researchers who prefer to run a shorter, six-item battery.

Suggestions:

People-centrism:

Ppl1. Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people.

Ppl2. Politicians don't have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.*

*This is a short report with item recommendations for a populist attitudes scale. The full version of the study is in a forthcoming book chapter with the following citation: Castanho Silva, Bruno, Ioannis Andreadis, Eva Anduiza, Nebojša Blanuša, Yazmin Morlet Corti, Gisela Delfino, Guillem Rico, Saskia Ruth, Bram Spruyt, Marco Steenbergen, and Levente Littvay. *forthcoming*. "Public Opinion Surveys: a New Scale". In: *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Theory, Method & Analysis*, edited by Kirk A. Hawkins, Ryan Carlin, Levente Littvay, and Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser. Routledge. **If you use the scale recommended here, please cite the respective book chapter.**

Ppl3. *The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics.*

Anti-elitism:

Ant1. The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.

Ant2. Government officials use their power to try to improve people's lives.*

Ant3. *Quite a few of the people running the government are crooked.*

Manichaeian outlook:

Man1. You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.

Man2. The people I disagree with politically are not evil.*

Man3. *The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed.*

Brief Description and Instructions for Use

As results in the technical description below demonstrate, the new scale captures a broad range of the concept, as measured through IRT models, and is cross-nationally valid over fourteen countries from the Americas, Eastern and Western Europe. The sample includes countries with historically successful populist parties (such as Argentina or France), and others with very little populist experience (such as Ireland), as well as examples of contemporary successful left-wing populists (Greece, Spain), right-wing (Hungary, Switzerland), and ideological hybrids (Italy). Compared to the most popular alternative, by [Akkerman et al. \(2014\)](#), it contains more information and is more cross-culturally valid. Researchers may use both the nine-items version, with three constructs, or a short six-item version with the first two items per construct, forming a single factor. The latter still has the conceptual benefit of using all subdimensions of the concept measured individually. Both conform to well-fitting models. It is essential, however, to include negative-worded items, in order to discriminate between actual support for populism and acquiescence, affirmation, and agreement bias.

Description of the Study

Concept and Dimensions

We base our measurement on the ideational definition of populism and identify three dimensions of the concept: first, praising the common people as a homogeneous group and emphasizing popular sovereignty in politics (or, the idea of a general will). Second, anti-elitism, or anti-establishment sentiments. The idea of a small, powerful group who has illegitimately taken over the state and subverted it for its own benefit. And third, a good-versus-evil view of politics, in which compromise with the other side is unacceptable, leaving little room to pluralism (Hawkins, 2010; Mudde, 2004).

Data, Methods, and Procedure

Considering that populism is a multidimensional concept, sitting at the intersection of those three dimensions, each one of them should be measured separately. Therefore, we started with a 155-item questionnaire that covered ten potential dimensions of the concept. Dimensions and items were collected from various existing scales, composed by ourselves, or suggested by members of **Team Populism**,¹ whom we consulted through the group's mailing list. This questionnaire was fielded in one online survey through Amazon's Mechanical Turk with American respondents, and in seven student samples², with n ranging between 153 and 262. We proceeded with dimensionality reduction through exploratory factor analysis and Mokken Scale analysis (Mokken, 1971) on these data (all countries pooled together). Four relevant factors emerged from all 155 items: the three our theory predicted plus authoritarianism. Because the relation between authoritarianism and populism is such a debated topic, let alone the question of whether one is part of the other, we decided to keep only the three dimensions that are conceptually sound in order to measure populist attitudes.

Our next step was of that of scale reduction, based on the three factors identified. The exploratory analysis suggested 12-20 items for each dimension. We tested the measurement invariance of those items across countries using the Alignment method (Asparouhov and Muthén, 2014). It tests if items do capture the respective concepts, the same way, across different groups of respondents. Results yielded shorter invariant scales, of around 6-7 items per dimension.

¹This is an international network of scholars with more than 40 members from Europe and the Americas who study populism. More information may be found at <http://populism.byu.edu>.

²In Argentina, Belgium (Flanders), Croatia, Greece, Mexico, Spain, and Switzerland.

Finally, we collected data through online surveys in ten countries³ in order to perform a final independent validation of our final, short scale. We apply a classic multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) test of measurement invariance on three of our best performing items for each dimension. This method was chosen for being more strict than the Alignment method. It is more difficult to obtain invariance under multigroup CFA testing. Next, we pooled the data from the ten online samples and tested an Item Response Theory model to check the amount of information the scale has – whether it captures a wide breadth of our latent constructs.

Technical Information on the New Scale

This section summarizes technical aspects from the analyses conducted and results that are most important for those interested in using the new scale. A confirmatory factor analysis model is used to test whether the proposed scales for each dimension load into single constructs, in which the factor loadings are constrained to be the same across groups (countries). Hungary is excluded from this analysis because of concerns about the quality of the data.⁴ Model and results are in Figure 1. It includes a method factor for positive worded items (DiStefano and Motl, 2006) with all loadings constrained to be the same.⁵ Model fit indices suggest borderline good fit. Factor loadings are acceptable, with the exception of the last suggestion for the Manichaeian outlook dimension which has a relatively low loading.

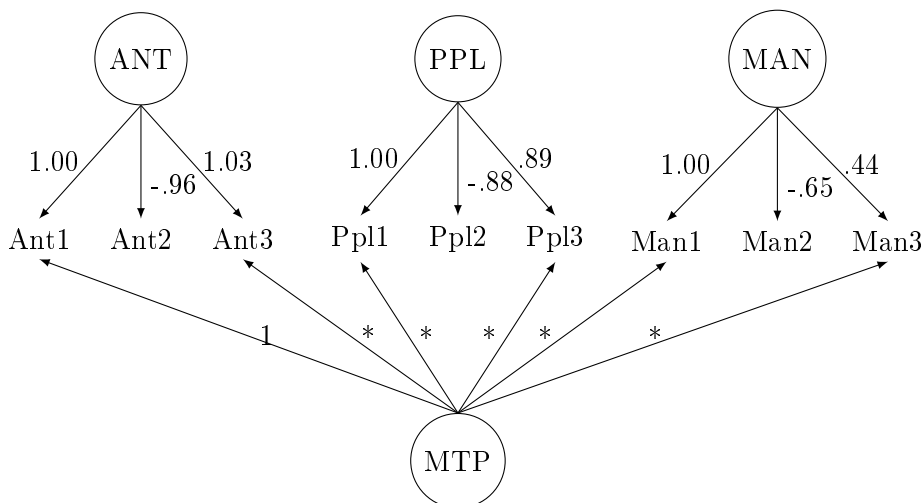
Table 1 presents results of invariance testing with multigroup CFA. For the new scale, constraining factor loadings to be the same across countries does not make the model significantly worse than letting them free to vary in each country. As a comparison, the bottom part of Table 1 shows the same test for the popular six-item scale by Akkerman et al. (2014) in the same data. The model of that scale with equal loadings across countries fits significantly worse than the configural ($p = .02$),

³Brazil, France, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Mexico, Spain, United Kingdom, and United States. Targeted sample sizes ranged from 200 to 300 in each. We got respondents from Amazon Mechanical Turk (U.S.), CrowdFlower (the remaining countries) and Qualtrics (for part of Ireland and Hungary).

⁴There were issues when collecting the online data with CrowdFlower in Hungary. Many respondents appear to have powered through the survey without faithfully answering the questions, while a large number managed to get the final validation code even without answering questions. For this reason, we complemented the Hungarian sample with Qualtrics respondents (100). Regardless of those issues, even if we include Hungary our scale is still invariant (p-value of the χ^2 difference between configural and loadings-constrained model is .08).

⁵We have tested all four alternatives suggested by DiStefano and Motl (2006): positive method factor, negative method factor, correlate all residuals of negative items, and correlate all residuals of positive items. We present results with the positive factor, which has the best model fit.

Figure 1: Multigroup Confirmatory Factor Analysis with Equality Constraints on Factor Loadings



Notes: Unstandardized factor loadings, constrained to be the same across nine groups (countries). Estimation: maximum likelihood robust. Items measured on a 1-7 likert scale. N = 2510. Model fit: $\chi^2 = 514.884$, $df = 254$, $p < .001$, RMSEA = .061 (90% CI: .054-.068), SRMR = .063, CFI = .924, TLI = .903. Factor loading of the method factor (*) = .97.

meaning that the instrument does not work the same way across countries. For both ours and the Akkerman et al. (2014) scales the model with an equality constraint on the intercepts fits significantly worse and should be rejected.

For our scale, Figures 2 to 4 have information curves obtained with an IRT model (more specifically a graded ratings scale model) for each of the three dimensions. We observe how each of them captures a different area of their respective dimensions, with the first two mostly on the negative side (on the [-3:1] interval) while the last (Manichaeon outlook) performs better on individuals higher on this trait (those in the [-1:3] range). If we aggregate the two top performing items in each dimension into a single six-items scale, the information curve is in Figure 5, with a comparison to the information curve obtained with the Akkerman et al. (2014) six-item scale. We see that the new one, with six items, has a somewhat broader range, particularly with lower error in the lowest end. Therefore, due to the variation in capturing distinct areas, by each dimension, we are able to cover a broader extent of the concept.

Table 1: Multigroup CFA Invariance Test

Model	χ^2	χ^2 diff	df	p
<i>New scale</i>				
Configural	440.58			
Loadings	599.12	102.20	88	.14
Intercepts	912.57	322.17	40	< .001
<i>Six-item Akkerman et al. (2014) Scale</i>				
Configural	230.76			
Loadings	297.15	59.935	40	.02
Intercepts	553.11	253.283	40	< .001

Notes: χ^2 difference calculated with the Satorra-Bentler correction scale for models fit with a maximum likelihood robust estimation (Satorra and Bentler, 2001). Equality constraints set across nine groups (countries).

Figure 2: Information Curves – Antielitism

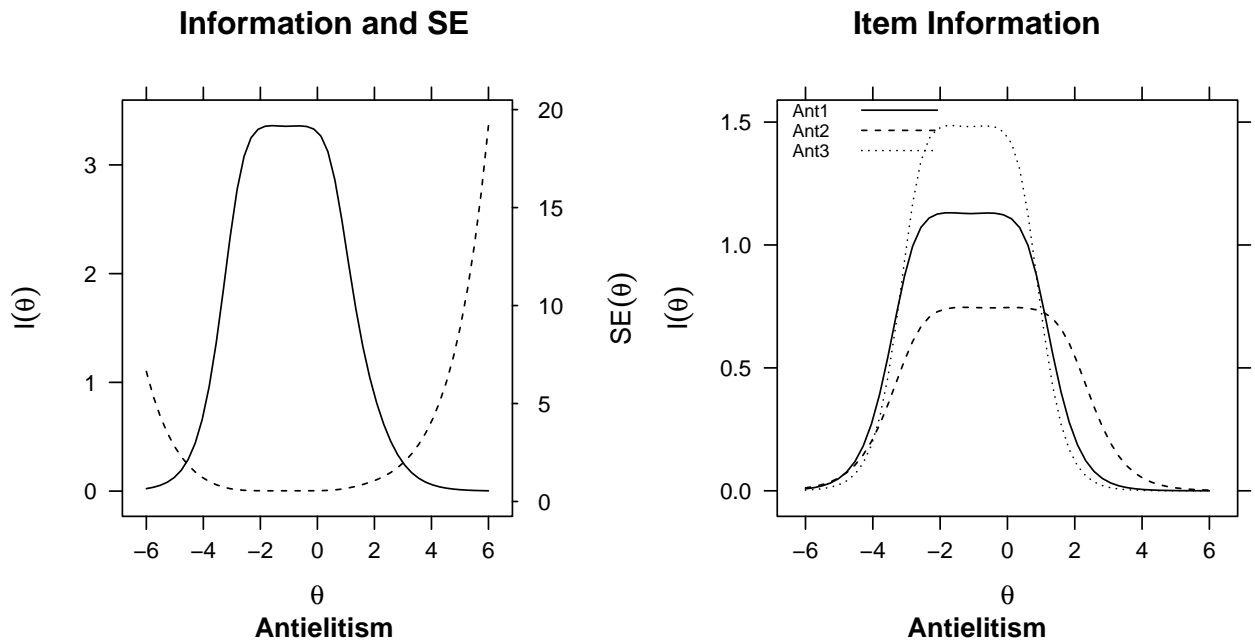


Figure 3: Information Curves – People-centrism

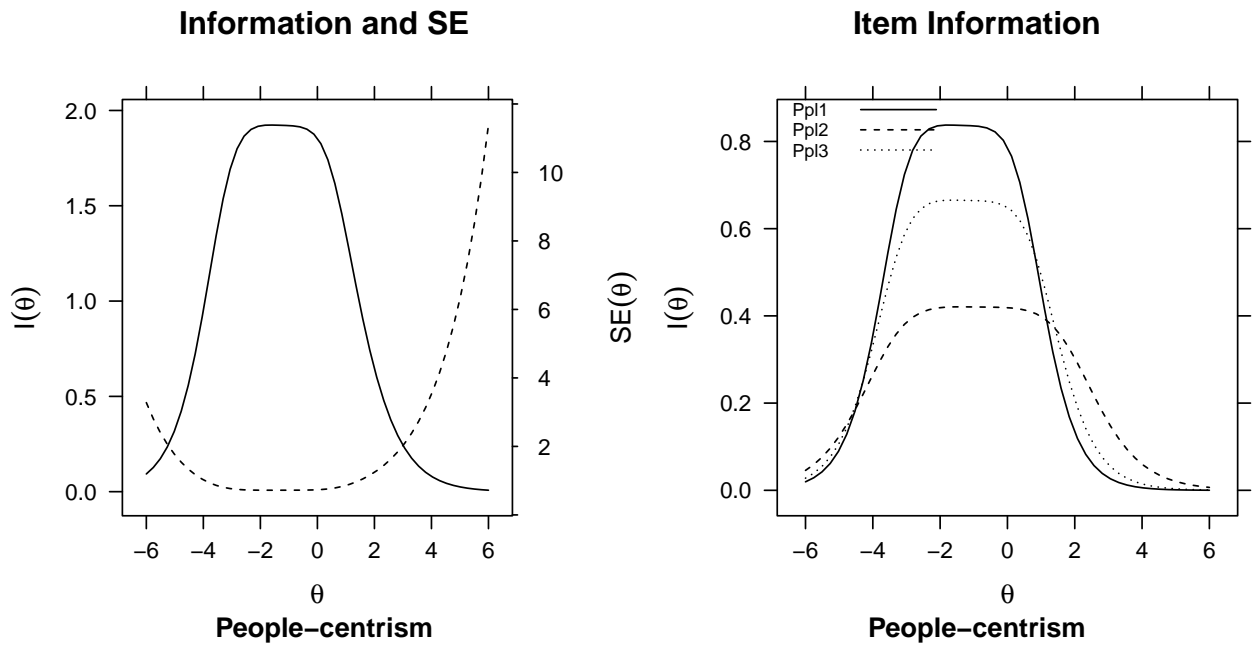
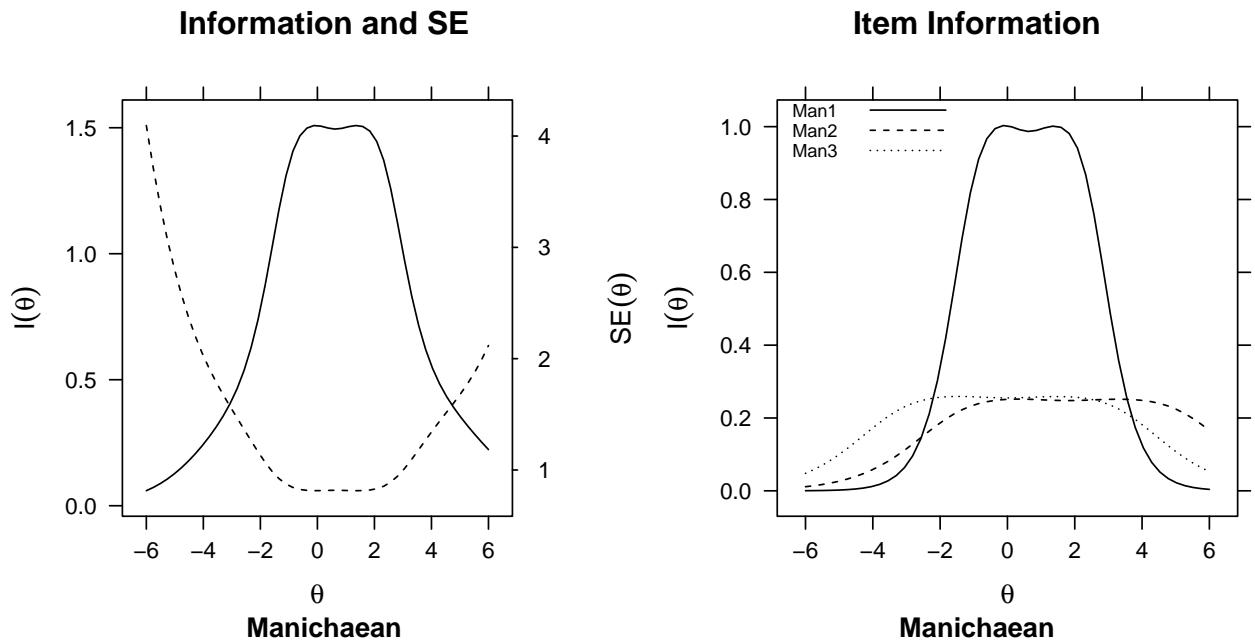


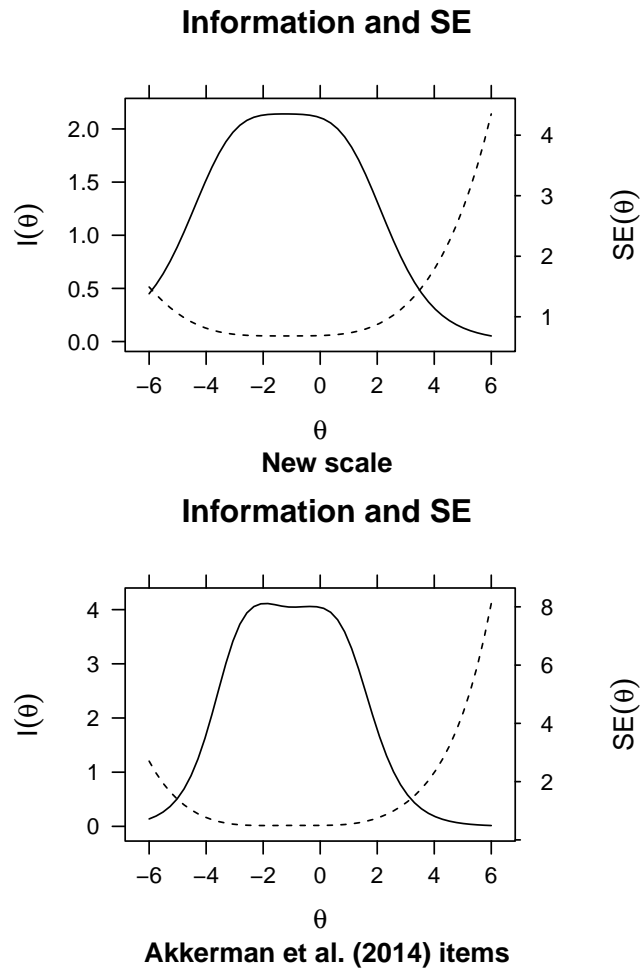
Figure 4: Information Curves – Manichaeian outlook



Conclusion

In sum, the new scale proposed captures a similarly broad range of populist attitudes across individuals as the popular battery by [Akkerman et al. \(2014\)](#). However, our scale is invariant across a large number of countries with very distinct political cultures. It is, therefore, recommended for cross-national comparisons and comparative studies of populism across countries and continents.

Figure 5: Information Curves for the Short New Scale and Akkerman et al. (2014).



References

- Akkerman, A., Mudde, C., and Zaslove, A. (2014). How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters. *Comparative Political Studies*, 47(9):1324–1353.
- Asparouhov, T. and Muthén, B. (2014). Multiple-group factor analysis alignment. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 21(4):495–508.
- DiStefano, C. and Motl, R. W. (2006). Further Investigating Method Effects Associated With Negatively Worded Items on Self-Report Surveys. *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal*, 13:440–464.
- Hawkins, K. (2010). *Venezuela’s Chavismo and Populism in Comparative Perspective*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.
- Mokken, R. J. (1971). *A Theory and Procedure of Scale Analysis with Applications in Political Research*. The Hague.
- Mudde, C. (2004). The Populist Zeitgeist. *Government and Opposition*, 39(4):542–563.
- Satorra, A. and Bentler, P. M. (2001). A Scaled Difference Chi-square Test Statistic for Moment Structure Analysis. *Psychometrika*, 66:507–514.
- Van Hauwaert, S., Schimpf, C. H., and Azevedo, F. (2016). Measuring populism as a demand-side phenomenon: A psychometric evaluation of populist attitudes across Europe. *Paper prepared for presentation at the Team Populism conference at BYU, Provo-UT, 28-30 January 2016*.
- Van Hauwaert, S., Schimpf, C. H., and Azevedo, F. (forthcoming). The individual-level measurement of populism in Europe and the Americas: Insights from IRT as a scale development technique. In Hawkins, K., Carlin, R., Littvay, L., and Rovira Kaltwasser, C., editors, *The Ideational Approach to Populism: Theory, Method & Analysis*. Routledge.