

STORM IN A TEACUP: POPULIST ATTITUDES AND VOTING FOR POPULISTS IN CROATIA

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Abstract In comparative research on voting behavior, populist attitudes increasingly appear to be an unavoidable research construct. Nevertheless, the evidence on the effects of populist attitudes on voting for populists is still inconclusive, with the effects of other concepts often being conflated with populism. At the same time, populism remains an under-researched topic in Croatia, especially at the level of citizens' attitudes. This study aims to research the effects of populist attitudes on voting for populist parties and candidates in Croatia, a country that can be considered a relevant case study. For these purposes, survey data from Croatian Election Studies (2018 and 2020 edition) is used. The results of multinomial logistic regressions show that populist attitudes have no effect on voting for populists in the context of parliamentary and presidential elections. It is also shown that populist attitudes increase the probability of electoral abstention and decrease the probability of voting for the ruling party (HDZ). These findings raise questions about the usefulness and functionality of existing scales of populist attitudes and indicate the need for a different framing of the items used to measure populism.

Keywords populist attitudes, populist politicians, populist political parties, voting behavior, elections

Introduction¹

Studying populism is a highly propulsive part of the research efforts of social sciences, especially political science, in describing and explaining contemporary political phenomena and processes. Research on populism has particularly intensified in the past two decades, which should not be surprising because it was during this period that populist actors and ideas became stronger in almost all parts of the world. Such intensive dealing with the topic resulted in different research approaches, leading to a specialization of individual researchers for certain approaches.

One such division in the literature is that of authors who focus more on the supply side and those who deal more with the demand side of populism. The supply side primarily deals with the presence and intensity of populism among politicians and political parties in a political community. In contrast, the demand side focuses on the issue of the distribution of populist attitudes among citizens. In the past few years, studies dealing with the demand side have been high in numbers (for example, Rooudijn, 2018; Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel, 2018; Mohrenberg, Huber and Freyburg, 2019; Castanho Silva et al., 2020; Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert, 2020; Van Hauwaert, Schimpf and Azevedo, 2020; Wettstein et al., 2020; Wutke, Schimpf and Schoen, 2020; Erisen et al., 2021; Castanho Silva, Neuner and Wratil, 2022), so it could be argued that such research today represents the most propulsive part of research into the phenomenon of populism.

Suppose we transfer the previous analysis to the area of Croatian social sciences. In that case, one may conclude that in the otherwise not-too-extensive literature on populism, there is a distinct imbalance between supply and demand sides of research. Namely, in recent years, several relevant works have been published that address the supply side of populism in Croatia (for example, Grbeša and Šalaj, 2016; 2017; 2018; Altaras Penda and Zekaj, 2019; Šalaj and Grbeša, 2022). In contrast, works that deal with the demand side, that is, the issue of populist attitudes of citizens, are very scarce (Vuksan-Ćusa, 2023; see Raos, 2020). It is evident, therefore, that the Croatian social sciences have yet to deal systematically with the demand side of populism.

This paper aims to fill gaps in the research on populist attitudes of citizens in Croatia by studying the effect of such attitudes on voting for populists. The research focuses on answering the following question: Do citizens with populist attitudes vote for populist politicians? Croatia is a relevant case study for comparative analysis because it allows testing the theory about activating populist attitudes in a likely context. Additionally, the ideologically different profiles of populist parties in Croatia make it possible to test how important populism is as a factor in the voter's decision when populist actors offer diverse ideological packages. The study uses survey data from 2018 and 2020 collected by the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Zagreb as part of the *Croatian Electoral Studies*' cross-sectional research series.

The study is structured as follows. In the theoretical part, we begin by briefly presenting the most important research approaches to populism. We then discuss various conceptualizations of populism in research that focuses on the demand side. The central dilemma in such research is determining how many dimensions should be included in the concept of populism. Next, we explain why Croatia is a relevant case study. This is followed by a description of our operationalization of populist

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attitudes and an explanation of the dependent and control variables included in the model. The next two sections present and interpret the results. Finally, we conclude by discussing the limitations of the study and considering possible directions for future research on demand side of populism.

Populism and populist attitudes: a question of conceptualization

Populism has become a significant political force globally in the 20 to 25 years. As a result, there has been a surge in research activities to understand and analyze this social and political phenomenon. One of the most crucial questions in the study of populism is about its nature, which has led to the development of various research approaches. The literature review suggests that there are several research approaches to populism, with the most productive one being the understanding of populism as a set of political ideas.

Such an understanding is expressed in probably the most influential modern definition of populism, given by the political scientist Cas Mudde, according to which populism is "an ideology which divides society into two antagonistic groups, the honest people and the corrupt elite, and which claims that politics should be the expression of the general will people" (2004: 543). Based on Mudde's definition, an ideational approach developed (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017; Hawkins et al., 2018), which understands populism as a specific set of ideas that perceives politics as a struggle between honest people and corrupt political elites. This approach sees the essence of the populist idea in combining a positive reference to the people and the popular will and a negative reference to the political elites. One of the reasons why the ideational approach became dominant is that the understanding of populism as a set of ideas about politics proved to be suitable for researching both the supply and demand sides of populism.

In this paper, we focus on the demand side, that is, on the populist attitudes of citizens. Despite numerous research advances, the literature review suggests that the critical question remains about the number of main dimensions that make up the morphological core of populism. Thus, one group of researchers (Mohrenberg, Huber and Freyburg, 2019; Galais and Rico, 2021) believes that populism and populist attitudes have two main dimensions – people-centrism and anti-elitism. People-centrism is based on a positive evaluation of the people as homogeneous and fair, whereby political decisions in the community should be based precisely on popular sovereignty. Anti-elitism implies that the elites are selfish and corrupt, that is, that they subordinated the political system and institutions to their needs and interests. Probably the most significant number of researchers consider, however, that populism has three main dimensions (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014; Schulz et al., 2018; Tsatsanis, Andreadis and Teperoglou, 2018; Castanho Silva et al., 2018; Kaltwasser and Van Hauwaert, 2020; Van Hauwaert, Schimpf and Azevedo, 2020; Jungkunz, Fahey and Hino, 2021). At the same time, they also treat the positive evaluation of the people and anti-elitism as two crucial dimensions of populism, but they add a third. The most common third dimension cited by these authors is a manichean understanding of the political world, which views the conflict between the people and the elite as a moral conflict between good and evil. The third group of researchers (Spruyt, Keppens and Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Akkerman, Zaslove and Spruyt, 2017; Rico, Guinjoan and Anduiza, 2017) believes that as many as four dimensions of populism are derivable from Mudde's definition. In addition to the

previously mentioned dimensions, they emphasize the belief in popular sovereignty as the ultimate source of legitimacy for political decisions as an essential dimension.

Bearing in mind the importance of methodological pluralism, in this paper we advocate a two-dimensional conceptualization of populism and briefly explain our choice. We believe that it is justified to derive two main dimensions from Mudde's well-known definition: people-centrism and anti-elitism. Two-dimensional conceptualization enables finding the right balance between what we designate as the intension and extension of a concept in the social sciences (Sartori, 1970; Collier and Mahon, 1993). The intension of a concept refers to the number of defining features the concept has and the extension to the number of cases to which the concept can be applied. As a rule, the more defining features a concept has, the fewer cases it can be applied to. The opposite is also true – the fewer defining characteristics of a concept, the easier it can be applied to a greater number of cases, but with the simultaneous danger that such a concept does not allow us to distinguish between cases clearly and precisely. The conceptualization with two main dimensions ensures the balance between the intension and extension of the concept as it respects Mudde's initial idea about the definition of populism as minimalist. The number of defining features is small, but at the same time, these defining features are precise, which allows us to exclude cases that are not relevant.

Additionally, conceptualizations based on Mudde's definition, which as constitutive features include the unlimited sovereignty of the people and manichaeism, unjustifiably expand the intension of the concept and thus unnecessarily complicate its extension. Adding the unlimited sovereignty of the people as a separate component, in the simplest terms, we consider redundant. Namely, if we understand populism as a political idea and populist attitudes as political attitudes, in that case, a positive evaluation of the people and a negative evaluation of the political elites implies that the people should make the most important political decisions. In other words, the simultaneous presence of a positive evaluation of the people and anti-elitism already contains a position on the sovereignty of the people. Therefore, we consider it superfluous to single it out as a separate dimension. Empirical tests of scales of populist attitudes confirm this, showing that people-centrism and a positive evaluation of the people's sovereignty cannot be differentiated at the individual level (Castanho Silva et al., 2018).

Furthermore, although the ideational approach assumes that the dichotomy of the good people and the corrupt elite is essentially moralistic (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017), manichaeism, moralistically understood, cannot be a *differentia specifica* of populism because the moralistic maximizations that build on us vs. them contrast are practically ubiquitous in politics (see Mouffe, 2005). More precisely, the simultaneous moralistic idealization of one's camp and the demonization of others is also present in other forms of confrontation of political identities (Urbinati, 2019). Therefore, it is not clear why moral dualism should be a constitutive feature of populism and populist attitudes if moralistic framing is practically immanent in political rhetoric, mobilization, and identification (Stavrakakis and Jäger, 2018: 12-15). Moreover, if the moralistic character of populism is absolutized, then the concept necessarily stands in contrast to pluralism because only one's camp, as morally pure, is perceived as legitimate. In this way, a significant part of populist parties and actors who are also pluralists are excluded (e.g., Podemos and Syriza), thus disrupting the functionality of the minimalist definition of populism (Katsambekis, 2022) and introducing unnecessary distortions in concepts' intension and extension.

In addition to the above, part of the discussion on the conceptualization of populist attitudes also deals with the question of the mutual relationship between the sub-components of populism. Most of the new research accepts the thesis of Wuttke, Schimpf, and Schoen (2020), according to which populist attitudes are a non-compensatory concept. Namely, although researchers do not agree on the number of dimensions that make up populism, they agree that the presence of populist attitudes among citizens can only be said in situations where all key dimensions are present at the same time. Populist attitudes exist, these authors claim, at the point of overlap of all the main dimensions, regardless of whether we are talking about two, three, or four such dimensions. In the case of non-compensatory concepts such as populism, higher values on one dimension cannot compensate for lower values on other dimensions. According to such understanding, 'real' populist citizens are only those citizens who score high on all dimensions of populist attitudes.

There is also a high level of agreement among researchers regarding understanding the very character of populist attitudes. Populist attitudes are most often described as latent dispositions that are not fundamental like personality traits, but, on the other hand, are not as prone to fluctuation and change as opinions (Ardag et al., 2019, see Schimpf, Wuttke and Schoen, 2023). However, for populist attitudes to have significance for political processes in the community, they must be activated. In the next part, we present the theory of activating populist attitudes in more detail. On this basis, we present Croatia as a relevant case study, showing why the research question has a broader, comparative significance.

Do populist citizens vote for populists? Croatian and comparative context

The above suggests that there is a high level of agreement among researchers that populist attitudes should be researched through an ideational approach, whereby they are viewed as multidimensional and non-compensatory dispositions that remain latent unless there is a contextual trigger to activate them. The theory on the activation of populist attitudes further elaborates on the contexts in which the activation of such latent dispositions most often occurs. More precisely, it is proposed that combining two elements most often leads to activating populist attitudes. The first element is the socio-political context in which populist ideas and rhetoric become convincing and credible, and the second is the emergence of political actors who are ready to articulate such ideas (Ardag et al., 2019).

On this basis, the theory of populist voting was developed to explain the fact that relatively few citizens who express populist attitudes vote for populist actors (Hawkins, Kaltwasser and Andreadis, 2020). Namely, research shows that populist attitudes are extremely prevalent wherever their presence is measured (Anduiza, Guinjoan and Rico, 2018; Hawkins and Littvay, 2019; Anduiza and Rico, 2019). However, simultaneously, we cannot see that in the party systems of most countries, populist parties and candidates are both the most numerous and the most popular. The authors believe that this happens because the activation of populist attitudes depends on external triggers, the most important of which is the widespread citizens' perception about the incompetence and corruption of mainstream political elites (Hawkins, Kaltwasser and Andreadis, 2020). So, populist attitudes should activate in a context where there is a widespread impression of how the elites, subordinating the public good to their interests, have defeated the purpose of democratic representa-

tion (Hawkins and Kaltwasser, 2018: 7-8). In such a context, an anti-establishment political identity emerges, based on rejecting the existing political supply (Meléndez and Kaltwasser, 2019) and accompanied by low trust in institutions.

However, the findings in this regard are not unequivocal. Although many studies find positive effects of populist attitudes on voting for populist parties and candidates (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014; van Hauwaert and van Kessel, 2017; Akkerman, Zaslove and Spruyt, 2017; Spierings and Zaslove, 2017; Loew and Faas, 2019; Rothmund, Bromme and Azevedo, 2020; Wettstein et al., 2020; Jungkunz, Fahy and Hino, 2021), such results are questioned on several grounds. Namely, as this body of literature focuses on the countries of Western Europe and the USA, the expansion of the comparative scope results in a different picture (Olivas Osuna and Rama, 2022). More specifically, case studies such as those in Slovakia (Stanley, 2011), Brazil (Castanho Silva, Tamaki, & Fuks, 2021), Japan (Hieda, Zenkyo, & Nishikawa, 2021), and Tunisia (Mehrez et al., 2023) show how populist attitudes do not affect voting for populists.

Nevertheless, from the perspective of the theory about the activation of populist attitudes, Croatia seems to be a case study in which the transformation of populist attitudes into populist votes, at least among some voters, should be probable. Concretely, the critical moment for the emergence of populist actors in Croatia was the elections held in 2015 and 2016. These occurred in the context of a long-term decline in voter turnout accompanied by a simultaneous increase of unrepresented voters (Čular, 2013). The context was also characterized by relatively high unemployment and a series of corruption affairs involving members of the political establishment (Henjak, 2018). In addition, that is when trust in political institutions reached its lowest levels (Baketa and Bovan, 2022). Then, parties like the Bridge (Most) and Human Shield (Živi zid) appeared, which, with distinctive mutual differences, mainly emphasized the corruption and incompetence of the most prominent political parties (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018; Altaras Penda and Zekaj, 2019). While Human Shield took an anti-system stance and the Bridge acted from reformist positions, what they had in common was the rhetoric about the elite betraying the interests of the people and the attitude about the need for greater political influence of citizens (see Henjak, 2018). Such rhetoric proved successful because the Bridge was twice a pivotal actor in forming the government, while Human Shield temporarily secured seats in the parliament. This significantly changed the hitherto mainly bipolar structure of party competition. Similar trends continued in the 2019/2020 presidential elections when Miroslav Škoro, using right-wing and anti-elitist rhetoric, profiled himself as a competitive challenger to Zoran Milanović (SDP candidate) and Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović (HDZ candidate). Based on this success, Miroslav Škoro's Independent List (later the Homeland Movement) was formed, which mobilized voters in the 2020 parliamentary elections through an anti-elitist discourse on national sovereignty and direct democratic decision-making (see Raos, 2020). At the same time, Mislav Kolakušić also ran in the presidential elections. Kolakušić is a politician one can describe as a populist celebrity who tried to mobilize voters with slogans about the corruption of the political elite (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2023).

However, although all the listed actors are undoubtedly populists (Norris, 2020; Zulianello, 2021; Meijers and Zaslove, 2021; Roodujin et al., 2023; see Henjak, 2018; Grbeša and Šalaj, 2018; Altaras Peneda and Zekaj, 2019), they also occupy different substantive ideological positions. More precisely, although in some categorizations, the Bridge and Human Shield are jointly described as examples of non-positional

populism (Zulianello, 2021), in others, Human Shield is classified as left-wing, and the Bridge as right-wing populism (Meijers and Zaslove, 2021). At the same time, there are categorizations according to which the Bridge is a borderline case close to far-right populism and in which Human Shield is an ambivalent party whose identity rests on different ideological combinations (Roodujin et al., 2023). Furthermore, although it can be argued that the Bridge and the Homeland Movement share a right-wing ideological slant and populist rhetoric, they still do not constitute a unison category of right-wing populist challenger parties (as parties that were not in power or were not part of the government, see De Vries and Hobolt, 2020) because the Bridge formed the ruling coalition twice. In addition, the Bridge is a more conservative-populist party, while the Homeland Movement is closer to the extreme right. Namely, in the profile of the Homeland Movement the substantive ideological segment (right ideological position), in contrast to the Bridge, has primacy over populism (see Norris, 2020). The same applies to Miroslav Škoro, who, as a party leader and celebrity populist (Grbeša and Šalaj, 2022; 2023), practically personalized such an ideological stance.

This ideological diversity of populist actors makes Croatia a relevant case study because it enables testing whether individual-level populism is a key factor in voting or whether it is the effects of other concepts. Namely, in some studies that find the effect of populist attitudes, it is at the same time evident that other concepts perform better in explaining electoral support for populist parties and candidates. In other words, nativism, anti-immigrant attitudes, sexism and other concepts associated with the far-right are more closely related to support for populist actors such as AfD, Donald Trump, FPÖ, VOX and PiS (Stanley, 2019; Gründl and Aichhozer, 2020; Rothmund, Bromme and Azevedo, 2020; Pesthy, Mader and Schoen, 2021; Anduiza and Rico, 2023). In the same vein, economic redistribution is a better explanandum of the vote for the populist left, at least in the case of Spain (Marcos-Marne, 2021).

What emerges from the above is that populism at the individual level is often not a central factor in voting for populists, as it turns out that support for these actors can be a product of other concepts that most often appear with populism. This was also confirmed by experimental studies (Neuner and Wrátil, 2022; Castanho Silva, Neuner and Wrátil, 2023; Dai and Kustov, 2023), which emphasize that attitudes about migration and the economy play a central role in vote choice for people with populist attitudes, as well as show that populist rhetoric does not affect respondents. These studies question the role assigned to populism at the individual level; moreover, such results emphasize that the effects of populist attitudes should be examined anew. This is particularly important because it is shown that in populism studies, the effects of other concepts are often conflated with populism and thus overemphasized (Hunger and Paxton, 2022).

In short, between 2015 and 2020, populist actors established themselves as an essential part of the political system in Croatia. As elsewhere, they mobilized voters based on anti-corruption and reformist rhetoric that was part of a broader criticism of the existing governance model and established parties. This makes the Croatian context highly suitable to testing the theory about activating populist attitudes. More precisely, it seems justified to assert that in this respect, Croatia represents a case study in which the theory about the activation of populist attitudes should be confirmed (i.e., a theory-confirming case study) (see Landman, 2003: 33).

In addition, the populist actors that have emerged are also ideologically different among themselves, which makes it possible to test whether populism, compared

to other ideological factors, is a central element in the voter's decision. In this analysis, we focus on 2018 and 2020 because it was during that period that the populist supply was established and further developed. More precisely, in this period, a dichotomy was established by which the party system could be roughly divided into mainstream parties on the one hand and new populist actors on the other.

Research design and methodology

This study uses survey data from the *Croatian Electoral Studies* research series conducted by the Faculty of Political Sciences of the University of Zagreb. Using the CAPI method, surveys from 2018 (n=1014) and 2020 (n=979) were conducted on a nationally representative probabilistic sample. We use these surveys because they measured populist attitudes and were conducted when some populists (mainly Human Shield in 2018 and Miroslav Škoro in 2020) enjoyed relatively high support of the electorate. Additionally, given that the 2020 survey includes questions about voting in presidential and parliamentary elections, these settings allow us to test the research question in the context of different types of electoral competition.

Operationalization of populist attitudes

Surveys we use measure populist attitudes using a scale designed by an international team of populism researchers (Castanho Silva et al., 2018). Although other populist attitudes scales are also used (Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove, 2014; Schulz et al., 2018), tests have shown that the scale used here performs well (Castanho Silva et al., 2020).

In the survey questionnaire from 2018, an extended version of the scale with 9 questions was used (3 questions for each sub-component: people-centrism, anti-elitism, and manichaeism), and in 2020, a shorter version of the scale was used (2 questions for each sub-component). Given that we do not treat manichaeism as part of the morphological core of populism, relying on items from this scale alone would lead us to operationalize populist attitudes using two items per factor. Therefore, keeping in mind that models with three items per factor are generally preferred due to easier identification and decreased possibility of measurement error (Kenny, 1979: 178-179; Kline, 2011: 114-115), we additionally included one variable in the operationalization for each factor from other scales that are part of the *Croatian Electoral Studies* questionnaire (see Table 1).

Although this is an *ad hoc* maneuver, this practice is driven by the goal of increasing the validity of the instrument and, as such, is relatively common in research on populist attitudes (see Spierings and Zaslove, 2017; van Hauwaert and van Kessel, 2018).

Of course, the imperative task is determining whether the additionally introduced items correspond to the content we intend to measure. The first introduced item (PC3) is part of the well-known F-scale and was initially considered a measure of authoritarianism. However, in the development of the scale whose items are used here (Castanho Silva et al., 2018), authoritarianism was shown to be the fourth sub-component of populist attitudes, which the authors, since authoritarianism is a well-established and researched construct, ultimately excluded from the final conceptualization of populist attitudes. Although we do not consider authoritarianism a core component of populism, this item still contains a part that explicitly mentions *the people* and their *trust*, which are the focal elements of the ideational understand-

Table 1. Operationalization of populist attitudes

People-centrism	
(PC1) Politicians should always listen closely to the problems of the people.	Castanho Silva et al., 2018.
(PC2) The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country's politics.	Castanho Silva et al., 2018.
(PC3) What this country needs is fewer laws and agencies, and more courageous and determined leaders whom the people can trust.	Croatian Electoral Studies
Anti-elitism	
(AE1) The government is pretty much run by a few big interests looking out for themselves.	Castanho Silva et al., 2018.
(AE2) A few people running the government are crooked.	Castanho Silva et al., 2018.
(AE3) Political scandals show us that elites, when their interests are threatened, abuse public institutions.	Croatian Electoral Studies

ing of people-centrism. In addition, studies that used this item in research in Croatia show how it psychometrically deviates from the rest of the authoritarianism scale, which is attributed precisely to its measurement of people-centrism (Vuksan-Ćusa and Henjak, 2022).

In short, if this item did not mention trust and the people, we would not have included it in the analysis. Without those elements, it would primarily measure authoritarianism rather than populism, focusing only on the preference for courageous and decisive leaders (Andreadis, Stavrakakis, and Teperoglu, 2022).

The second added item is part of the scale that measures anti-elitist conspiratorialism (Blanuša and Kulenović, 2018), and its content corresponds to political cynicism as a position of popular thought that highlights the misuse of political power and institutions (Blanuša and Bovan, 2015). Therefore, although this item covers conspirativism, its main content refers to an anti-elitist attitude according to which a particular group misuses political institutions to secure their benefit at the expense of the will of the people, which is why it is used as an instrument of populist attitudes (Stanley, 2019; Vuksan-Ćusa, 2023) or as a measure of attitudes towards elites (Henjak, 2017; 2018).

In order to use this scale as a valid predictor, it is first necessary to determine whether the model of populist attitudes set up in this way fits the data. More precisely, it is necessary to check whether the model presented here (with two latent factors, each loaded with three items) has an appropriate level of fit. Given that the analysis uses data from different time points, a multigroup confirmatory factor analysis (MGCFAs) was performed (Schulz et al., 2018; Castanho Silva et al., 2018). With this, in addition to the model's fit, the construct's psychometric equivalence is also

² This item is put in negative terms as higher values of agreement on this item indicate lower levels of anti-elitist attitude. For this reason, the item had to be coded reversely before the analysis.

tested (see Putnick and Bornstein, 2016). In other words, it is tested whether the instrument provides a measure of the same concept (populist attitudes) in different measurement contexts (i.e., survey years) (Davidov et al., 2014). Determining measurement invariance is, in this case, a prerequisite for using a latent construct because only in this way is it confirmed whether participants from different groups (in this case, surveyed populations in two years) interpret the items that make up the scale in a relatively similar way (Bovan and Baketa, 2022). Results show that the model is well-fitted, and the metric level of invariance was confirmed, thus enabling the use of the scale of populist attitudes as a predictor in regression models. Fit indices, factor loadings, and the procedure for determining invariance are described in more detail in the Methodological Appendix available in a separate online document (Tables A1 and A2).

Finally, following the notion of populist attitudes as a non-compensatory construct, we first scaled the factor scores of the metric model for people-centrism and anti-elitism from 0 to 1, after which we multiplied these values per respondent (Mohrenberg, Huber and Freybrug, 2019; Castahno Silva et al., 2020; Erisen et al., 2021). This assures that the multiplier (level of populist attitudes) is high only if the factor score values for both sub-components are high.

The average value of the populism variable composed in this way is 0.59 (SD=0.23; see the distribution of the variable in the Appendix, Figure A1.), which suggests that the values of individual-level populism in Croatia do not deviate from the average levels found in other EU countries and Great Britain (Rico and Anduiza, 2019). More precisely, Croatia, together with Switzerland, Great Britain, Germany, and Sweden, belongs to the group of countries where populist attitudes, although widespread, are less prevalent than in countries like Greece and Italy (see Hawkins and Littvay, 2019: 29). However, one must note that comparative scales of populist attitudes do not represent identical measurements and often capture different sub-components, thus limiting the reliability of broader conclusions.

Operationalization of dependent variables

Dependent variables consist of three survey questions about electoral voting, two related to 2020 and one to 2018. The survey from 2020 contains questions about voting in the (then) already held first round of the 2019 presidential elections and the question about the intention to vote in the next parliamentary elections. The survey from 2018 contains a similar question, only formulated in such a way that the respondents were asked who they would vote for if the elections for the Croatian Parliament were held next week.

The dependent variables that measure the intention to vote in the parliamentary elections in both years have 7 categories, but considering the dynamics of the party system and different coalitions, the categorizations are somewhat different. Thus, the first dependent variable (parliamentary elections, 2018) consists of vote categories for HDZ (Croatian Democratic Union), SDP (Social Democratic Party of Croatia), the Bridge, Human Shield, center parties, other parties and the category of non-voters, while the second dependent variable (parliamentary elections, 2020) categorizes respondents in groups of HDZ voters, Restart coalition voters (SDP-led), Homeland Movement voters, Human Shield/Party of Ivan Pernar voters, other parties voters, and non-voting group.

The variable that records voting in the first round of the presidential elections has 6 categories, and it divides respondents into voters of Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović, Zoran Milanović, Miroslav Škoro, Ivan Pernar/Mislav Kolakušić, other candidates and non-voters. A more detailed description of the categorizations and the distribution of the dependent variables can be found in Appendix (Tables B1 and B2). As already stated, in the parliamentary context, we consider Human Shield (and Ivan Pernar's Party), the Bridge and the Homeland Movement (see Norris, 2020; Zulianello, 2021; Meijers and Zaslove, 2021; Roodujin et al., 2023) to be populist parties, and in the presidential context, Miroslav Škoro, Ivan Pernar, and Mislav Kolakušić are viewed as populist candidates (see Šalaj and Grbeša, 2022; Grbeša and Šalaj, 2023).

Controls

In the model, we also included indicators of other concepts that explain support for populist actors and voting behavior in Croatia. Given that these variables are added as controls, we briefly explain their introduction rationale and in the Appendix we provide a more detailed description of the operationalization.

Age and *gender* were added as socio-demographic controls. The second set of controls refers to *education*, *unemployment*, and *sociotropic evaluation of the economy*, thus operationalizing the individual's socio-economic position. In this respect, education and unemployment refer to objective indicators of one's position in the socio-economic structure, while the sociotropic evaluation of the economy is based on the individual's perception.³ It is important to note that the sociotropic evaluation of the economy is an important determinant of populist attitudes, i.e., studies show that a holistic perception of the state of the economy is more important for the development of populist attitudes than objective indicators of one's economic situation (Anduiza, Guinjoan and Rico, 2018; Vuksan-Ćusa, 2023). However, it is possible that the effect of negative perception of the state of the economy is not channeled through populist attitudes but exists as a separate factor of voting behavior. Namely, the sociotropic perception of the economy can affect support for other non-populist parties if individuals do not interpret the state of the economy as a result of the ruling party's decisions but as part of broader changes (e.g., globalization) that cannot be influenced too much by the decisions of the ruling party. In such a situation, the mechanism of situational attribution is in effect, by which a part of the population may want a change of government, but whereby the sentiment about the negative state and development of the economy does not have to have an anti-elitist frame (see Busby, Gubler and Hawkins, 2019).

Indicators of *religiosity* and *ideological self-identification* were included to control for the effects of respondents' substantive ideological positions and as proxies for political identities. Religiosity is a predictor that, in the Croatian context, serves as a determinant of the division into left and right political identity (Henjak, Zakošek and Čular, 2013), and ideological self-identification functions as a super-issue that summarizes political attitudes and functions as a "semantic reflection of the main political cleavages in society" (Čular, 1999: 165). Although indicators that measure attitudes on other salient issues, such as migration or redistribution, would

³ Nevertheless, it should be mentioned that education is a socio-economic factor and a cultural foundation based on which individuals often form more politically liberal attitudes (see Norris and Inglehart, 2019).

also be helpful, the left-right scale in the Croatian context functions as an ideological shortcut that validly encapsulates the main political positions (Henjak, 2005; Raos and Maldini, 2023). Incorporating these indicators is paramount because populism rarely appears on its own, as its manifestations usually come in a parcel with other ideological contents of the left and right. To not conflate the effects of one concept with the effects of others, it is therefore necessary to separate populist attitudes (thin-centered populism) from thick ideological positions.

The remaining controls measure *preference for strong leaders*, *satisfaction with democracy*, and *trust in government*, thus operationalizing political support as a multidimensional construct. Precisely, support is measured at the level of principle (diffuse support for democracy), the level of performance (satisfaction with democracy), and the level of institutions (trust in the main actors, i.e., specific support) (see Norris, 1999: 9-13). Such operationalization of political support is included in the analysis because studies show how voters of mainstream parties, populist voters, and non-voters have different attitudes toward democracy and its institutions (Koch, Meléndez and Kaltwasser, 2023). Namely, although populists are more dissatisfied with democracy, they do not necessarily reject democracy as a principle (Kaltwasser and van Hauwaert, 2020; Zaslove et al., 2021; Zaslove and Meijers, 2023). Therefore, it is necessary to separate populist attitudes from the anti-plural sentiment that denies democracy as such. In addition, although some studies equate mistrust in institutions and populism (see Norris and Inglehart, 2019), it is necessary to distinguish between these concepts as institutional distrust does not have to result in populism but can also manifest itself in the forms of non voting or political alienation. Operationalization and descriptive statistics are shown in Part B of the Appendix.

Results

The dependent variables in our study are represented as nominal variables with multiple categories. Therefore, we conducted multinomial logistic regressions for our analysis. Due to the high number of dependent variables and their categories, we present the results using average marginal effects (AMEs) and predictive probabilities. These tools are preferred as they effectively summarize the average effects of predictors on the probability of the outcome of the dependent variable (Best and Wolf, 2015: 163; Marcos-Marne, 2021: 8-9; s. Olivas Osuna and Rama, 2022). Since our primary interest lies in the effects of populist attitudes, we primarily show the AMEs and predictive probabilities for that variable. The AMEs of all independent variables can be found in the Appendix (Part C).

Figures 1 and 2 present the AMEs of populist attitudes and predictive probabilities based on data from the 2018 parliamentary elections. The results indicate that having populist attitudes did not affect the likelihood of voting for populist parties such as the Bridge and Human Shield. This suggests that populist attitudes did not translate into populist votes, which was primarily expected in the case of the Human Shield, the country's third most popular political option in 2018, with approximately 15% support, as shown in Table B1 in the Appendix.

On the other hand, the study found that having populist attitudes affected the likelihood of voting for HDZ, indicating that populism at an individual level reduced the probability of voting for HDZ in 2018. Looking at the predictive probabilities, people who did not have populist attitudes had an approximately 40% probability of voting for HDZ, while those with maximum populist attitudes had only a 20%

probability. The study also found that having populist attitudes was associated with a higher probability of non-voting. Specifically, individuals with minimal populist attitudes had a probability of non-voting of up to 10%, while those with the highest levels of populist attitudes had a probability of over 20%.

Populist attitudes and vote intention, 2018

Figure 1. AMEs

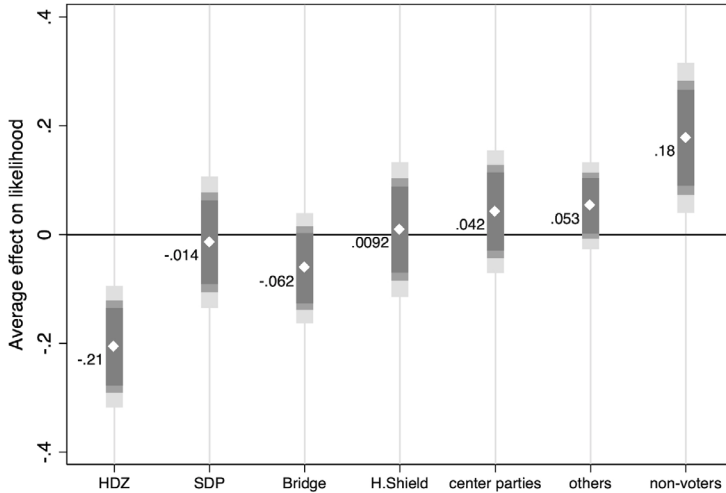
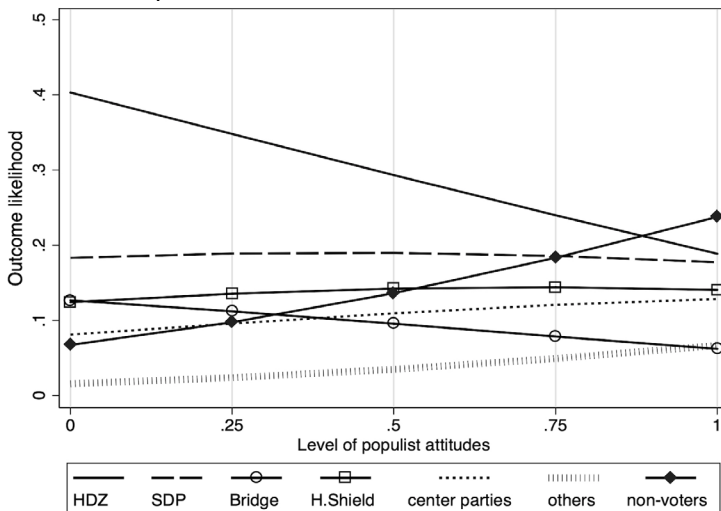


Figure 2. Predictive probabilities



[1] Multinomial logistic model: N=849, X²=745.11, controls: ✓, (ps)R²=0.242

[2] In Figure 1, effects whose 95% CIs (the darkest shade) do not intersect the value 0 on the y-axis are significant.

Other results (see Table D1 in the Appendix) indicate that the people who intended to vote for the Bridge and Human Shield in 2018 have a varied makeup. None of the effects, except for the effect of age in the case of Human Shield, is statistically

significant. Specifically, the study reveals that older people are more likely to vote for HDZ and SDP but less likely to vote for Human Shield or not at all. This is consistent with previous research conducted in Croatia (Henjak, 2017; 2018). Furthermore, the study found that one's ideological self-identification significantly affects their intention to vote for HDZ and SDP. This confirms that individuals who align themselves to the right significantly more intend to vote for HDZ and less for SDP. Ideological self-placement has a significant effect on the probability of voting intention for other parties, as well as the variable that tackles unemployment – it turns out that right-wing identification and unemployment slightly increase the probability of voting intention for parties that are not among the most relevant political actors in Croatia.

Also, a less sizeable but significant effect of religiosity on the intention to vote for the HDZ and the center parties is visible, where the level of religiosity increases the probability of the intention to vote for the HDZ and decreases the probability of the intention to vote for the center parties. Among the variables that measure political support, satisfaction with democracy and trust in the government proved statistically significant. Greater trust in the government increases the likelihood of vote intention for HDZ. Similarly, higher levels of satisfaction with democracy slightly increase the probability of voting intention for SDP while decreasing the probability of voting intention for residual category of other parties.

Figures 3 and 4 (below) show AMEs and predictive probabilities of populist attitudes for vote intention in the 2020 parliamentary elections. In line with previous results, it is shown that populist attitudes do not significantly affect the intention to vote for populists. More precisely, with the repeated absence of the effect of populist attitudes on the probability of voting for the Bridge and Human Shield/Ivan Pernar's Party, it is evident that populist attitudes do not affect the probability of voting for the Homeland Movement as a then emerging populist force.

Populist attitudes and vote intention, 2020

Figure 3. AMEs

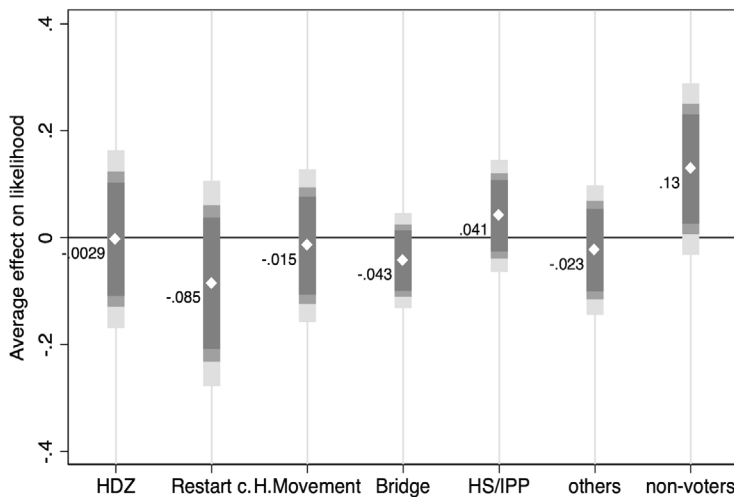
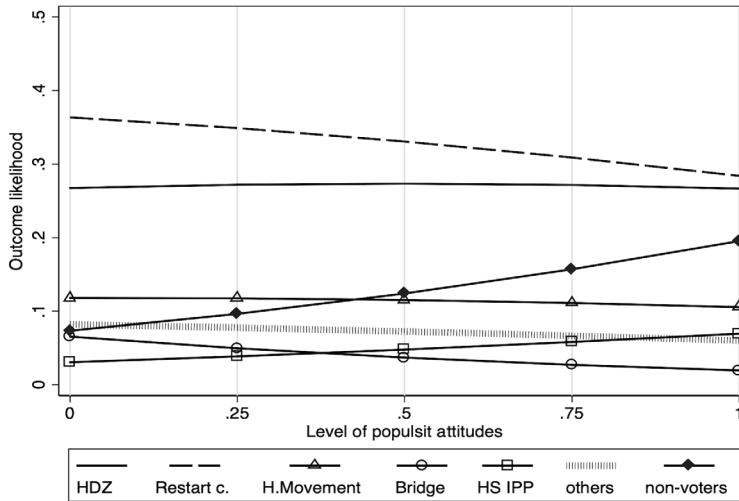


Figure 4. Predictive probabilities



[1] Multinomial logistic model: N=714, X²=466.86, controls: ✓, (ps)R²=0.19

[2] In Figure 3, effects whose 95% CIs (the darkest shade) do not intersect the value 0 on the y-axis are significant.

At the same time, in 2020, no significant effect of populist attitudes on the probability of the intention to vote for HDZ was found, which contradicts Raos' (2020) findings that populist attitudes significantly reduce the probability of voting for HDZ in 2020 elections. However, this difference is probably the result of a different operationalization of populist attitudes. More concretely, in that study, populist attitudes were operationalized as a compensatory construct, which means that there is a possibility that the respondents' lower values on the items that measure people-centrism could be compensated by higher values on the items that operationalize anti-elitism (and vice versa).

On the other hand, these findings align with Raos' (2020) findings on the effect of populist attitudes on the likelihood of abstaining from voting. However, the effect in this study is not as strong and only shows marginal significance ($p=0.039$). Overall, the results indicate that the probability of non-voting is around 7-8% for individuals who do not hold populist attitudes. In contrast, the likelihood of non-voting among total populists rises to just under 20%.

The remaining results can be found in Table D2, which is included in the Appendix. The analysis conducted in 2018 is consistent with the current findings, indicating that age has a negative impact on the likelihood of voting for populist parties, which is especially evident in the case of of the Homeland Movement. However, the probability of voting for the Restart coalition increases with age, which is the most significant positive effect in that model. Additionally, two other variables significantly affect the probability of voting for populist parties. The analysis shows that unemployment increases the likelihood of voting for the Human Shield and Ivan Pernar's Party. Furthermore, higher levels of trust in the government reduce the probability of voting for the Homeland Movement while increasing the likelihood of voting for HDZ and decreasing the likelihood of voting for SDP.

Furthermore, results show that education increases the probability of voting for other parties (residual category). Results also show how more religious respondents

Populist attitudes and vote intention, presidential elections

Figure 5. AMEs

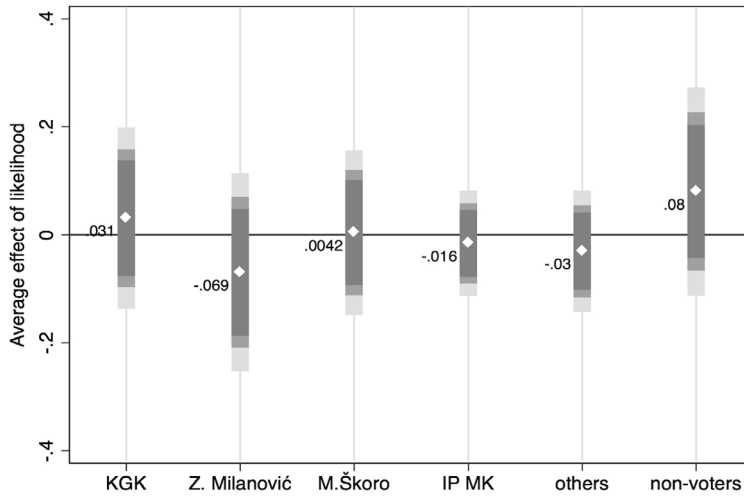
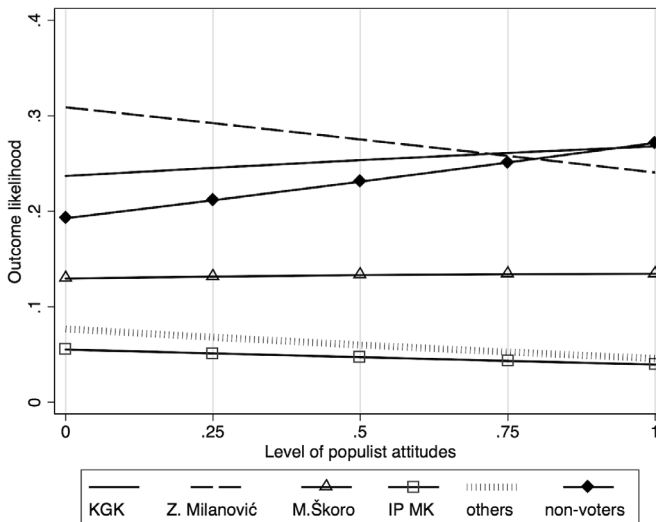


Figure 6. Predictive probabilities



[1] Multinomial logistic model: N=726, X²=456.05, controls: ✓, (ps)R²=0.194

[2] In Figure 5, effects whose 95% CIs (the darkest shade) do not intersect the value 0 on the y-axis are significant.

and women are less likely to vote for other parties, as well as those who are more satisfied with democracy. More religious individuals also have a higher probability of voting for HDZ and a lower probability of non-voting. Ideological self-identification again has the greatest effects on the probability of voting for HDZ and SDP. At the same time, it is evident that right-wing ideological self-identification reduces the probability of non-voting and that the perception of a deteriorating economy

increases the probability of non-voting. This confirms that the pejorative perception of the economic situation does not have to be channeled through support for populist candidates (vote) but can increase the probability of non-voting (exit).

Figures 5 and 6 (above) show AMEs and predictive probabilities of populist attitudes for the first round of the 2020 presidential election. One can see that no effect is statistically significant; more precisely, it is evident that populist attitudes do not predict the vote for populists and other candidates. Moreover, predictive probabilities show that the probability of voting for populist candidates (Miroslav Škoro, Ivan Pernar, and Mislav Kolakušić) is virtually the same for individuals without populist attitudes and individuals with the highest level of populist attitudes. Thus, the results of all election cycles clearly show that populist attitudes at the individual level did not affect voting for various populist parties and actors in Croatia in the 2018-2020 period. We delve deeper into this matter in the discussion.

The remaining results can be found in Table D3 in the Appendix. Results indicate that age significantly impacts voting patterns, proving that the probability of voting for Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović and Zoran Milanović increases with age, while the probability of non-voting decreases. Furthermore, individuals who are unemployed and ideologically right-wing are more inclined to vote for Miroslav Škoro, with ideological identification having a more robust effect. These findings support the results of the analysis done at the aggregate level, where it was shown that support for Miroslav Škoro was higher in areas with a higher unemployment rate and lower income (Henjak, 2019). The study also indicated that the probability of voting for Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović increases with higher levels of trust in the government, while the probability of voting for Miroslav Škoro decreases. This reflects the division that suggests support for Kolinda Grabar-Kitarović represents a preference for the status quo and the existing political model. In contrast, support for Miroslav Škoro is the most explicit expression of preference against such a governance model.

Women and those more satisfied with democracy are less likely to support populist candidates Ivan Pernar and Mislav Kolakušić. Additionally, satisfaction with democracy reduces the probability of voting for other candidates such as Orešković, Peović, Juričan, and Kovač. However, education increases the probability of supporting these other candidates. Education also lowers the probability of abstaining from voting in presidential elections. Furthermore, the analysis shows that more religious people are less likely to vote for Zoran Milanović. This finding confirms that religiosity is one of the important factors in differentiating left- and right-wing political identities in Croatia (see Grdešić, 2021). In the next part, we summarize and discuss the main findings.

Discussion

Our main finding is that populist citizens do not show a higher probability of voting for populist parties and candidates in Croatia. This places Croatia in the category of countries where the theory about the activation of populist votes has not been confirmed (Stanley, 2011; Castanho Silva, Tamaki and Fuks, 2021; Hieda, Zenkyo and Nishikawa, 2021; Mehrez et al., 2023). Although, based on the design used in this study, we cannot offer an unequivocal answer to why populist citizens are not populist voters simultaneously, here we elaborate on one of the already indicated explanations for this result. Namely, populist actors do not appear solely as promoters of populist ideas but often offer different ideological content that they present

using populist rhetoric. However, in comparative research, such ideological packages composed of a combination of different concepts (nativism, anti-immigrant attitudes, sovereignty, anti-globalism, egalitarianism, redistributive attitudes) with populism are often interpreted only through the lens of populism, which results in the effects of other concepts being attributed to populism (s. Hunger and Paxton, 2022). However, while the individual and the preferred party may be populist, this does not necessarily mean populism is the critical factor in voter preference. Other ideas and attitudes shared by voters and parties may be more important in forming voters' decisions, with populism playing a secondary role.

The findings suggest that in the presidential elections, people supported Miroslav Škoro based on their right-wing ideology rather than just their support for populism. While Škoro is a populist, his voter support is more dependent on the voter's thick ideological position rather than populism as a thin-centered ideology. On the other hand, those who planned to vote for Human Shield and the Bridge were a diverse group of voters whom no concept, including populism, could easily categorize. The lack of any significant variable effect on the probability of voting for the Bridge is particularly noteworthy. This proves that populism at the level of political supply does not have to be mirrored at the level of individual attitudes and that voters of populist options should not be identified with the populism of their party preferences.

The second significant finding indicates that holding populist attitudes decreases the likelihood of intending to vote for HDZ in one election cycle. This finding may be explained by two mechanisms highlighting the same issue, namely, that the pre-existing beliefs of some segments of the electorate influence the items used to measure populist attitudes. The first possibility is that populist attitudes primarily capture the broader oppositional sentiment of a part of voters whose preferred parties are not in power, which de facto models populism into a general attitude directed against the party in power, thus understood as the elite. In this case, populism is not an expression of dissatisfaction with the entire establishment and governance model, channeled through support for populist actors, but acts as an expression of a generally accepted negative attitude towards the party in power shared by opposition voters. This results in the absence of differentiation between support for populist and non-populist opposition.

The second option is that the characteristics of the measuring instrument used in the study can affect the results. In this study, the scale used to measure anti-elitism includes two statements about the government, which can unintentionally lead to party bias in interpreting the items. This means that supporters of the ruling party are less likely to agree with statements that portray the government, formed of politicians from their preferred party, as corrupt and working only for their interests. As a result, these respondents may score lower on the anti-elitism and populism scales. This does not mean that populists are less likely to vote for HDZ but rather that voters of the party in power may score lower on the measuring instrument due to how the questions are framed.

Both mechanisms indicate that the items that measure anti-elitism, and thereby populism, actually reflect an existing attitude towards the party in power or party bias. This has also been demonstrated by some comparative studies that have found that in countries where populists are in power, their voters are the least likely to hold populist attitudes (Jungkunz, Fahey, and Hino, 2021). Conversely, voters of opposition parties (which do not necessarily have to be populist) are the ones who tend to

hold higher levels of anti-elitist attitudes (Todosijević, Pavlović, and Komar, 2022). Similarly, longitudinal analyses indicate that the connection between populist attitudes and support for particular parties changes depending on whether these parties are in power or opposition. In other words, this connection is stable when the party is in opposition but essentially non-existent when the party is in power (Guinjoan, Rico, and Anduiza, 2018).

Populist attitudes scales are therefore not independent of the party's position (government-opposition), attitude towards the party in power, or party bias. This results in the populist attitude scale not predicting concepts with which populist attitudes are bonded, such as supporting populist parties (see Castanho Silva et al., 2020). This, in turn, raises questions about the functionality of populist attitudes scales from the point of view of studying voting behavior. Therefore, it is necessary to invest additional effort in improving the scales of populism, primarily in constructing items that would measure anti-elitism without specific reference to the government or executive power.

The third main finding is that holding populist attitudes can increase the likelihood of abstaining from voting in parliamentary elections. This is also the only consistent effect of populist attitudes in the parliamentary arena. As such, it contrasts with the theory about the activation of populist attitudes, according to which, in contexts like Croatia, one can find most of the contextual triggers that would turn populist attitudes into populist votes. However, although populist actors can activate latent populist attitudes in a favorable context, it is often overlooked that among a part of the population, populist attitudes can reflect a general disengagement with party politics. In such cases, populist attitudes appear as a logical consequence of already existing distancing from democratic institutions and mechanisms that are interpreted as being controlled by parties. Specifically, some citizens who hold populist attitudes view elections as mechanisms manipulated by party elites and choose not to participate in them (Anduiza, Guinjoan and Rico, 2019). This perspective on elections aligns with the intricate relationship between populism and democracy. Populist citizens do not necessarily oppose democracy and its institutions in general but instead object to the idea that political parties are the primary representatives and key actors of democratic institutions and processes (see Zaslove and Meijers, 2023).

Among the other results, we single out those significant from the point of view of the study of voting behavior in Croatia. The first such finding concerns the effect of age on the probability of voting for populist and mainstream actors – it is shown that older voters prefer established parties and candidates significantly more than populist ones. This supports studies that indicate the formation of an age-based gap between younger and older voters, within which younger voters separate from the dominant identitarian-historical political cleavage (Henjak, 2018; Raos, 2020). At the same time, older voters show a lower probability of non-voting in the two analyzed cycles, which shows that the younger part of the population is also distancing itself from electoral participation. Furthermore, it is shown that only the variable measuring support for strong leaders is non-significant in any model, meaning that voters of different parties and non-voters do not differ in the levels of normative support for democracy. In other words, this shows that voters of any party (and non-voters) do not stand out as a group particularly inclined to strong leaders. Finally, suppose the analysis results are compared in the parliamentary and presidential contexts. In that case, the voters of Miroslav Škoro in the presidential elections

had a more apparent ideological profile than those who intended to vote for his party in the parliamentary elections. This may mean that Miroslav Škoro partially personalized the right-wing ideological component, a finding in line with studies that classify him in the group of celebrity populists (Šalaj and Grbeša, 2022; Grbeša and Šalaj, 2023) as a category that is based on a solid connection of one's personality with the associated political ideology and rhetoric.

Conclusion

In this study, we tried to test whether populist citizens vote for populist actors, whereby we contextualized Croatia as a relevant study from the perspective of the theory about the activation of populist attitudes. At the same time, we have tried to expand the comparative scope regarding the study of populist attitudes and voting, but also to provide insights essential for the study of populism in Croatia.

For these purposes, we used data from two surveys whose questionnaires contain questions about voting in the parliamentary and presidential elections. The findings show that having populist attitudes does not affect the likelihood of voting for populist candidates or parties. Contrary to what theoretical assumptions suggest about the activation of populist attitudes, the results showed that these attitudes increase the probability of non-voting. Also, the effect that populist attitudes reduce the probability of voting for HDZ is visible, which is explained by the fact that the scales of populist attitudes capture the content (attitude towards the party in power) they do not aim to measure.

Finally, findings indicate that the support for Miroslav Škoro in the presidential elections was mainly based on ideological positions rather than populism. This and other studies suggest that it is crucial to differentiate between populism and similar concepts and not overstate the effects of populism. Otherwise, populism will genuinely become a buzzword (Pappas, 2019: 20).

The limitations of this study should also be kept in mind. The lack of effect of populist attitudes on voting for populists can be a product of the fact that the analysis is based on data collected after the first significant appearance of populists in Croatia in 2015. In 2015, the impact of the economic crisis and all its concurrent effects was significantly more pronounced, representing even more favorable conditions for activating populist attitudes. Also, these results may be conditioned by the givens of the scale with which populist attitudes were operationalized here. It is possible that other scales, mainly those initially based on a two-dimensional conceptualization of populism (Mohrenberg, Huber and Freyburg, 2019; Galais and Rico, 2021), more precisely and accurately measure populist attitudes in the context of Croatia. Future research should move in this direction and in the direction of a different framing of the items used to measure anti-elitism. Finally, given that recent studies show that populist attitudes are more associated with voting for populists when such attitudes are more stable over the long term (Schimpf, Wuttke and Schoen, 2023), future research should use panel data that would enable testing of longitudinal dynamics and the effects of populist attitudes.

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Bura u čaši vode: populistički stavovi i glasovanje za populiste u Hrvatskoj

Sažetak U komparativnim studijama biračkog ponašanja populistički stavovi sve se više čine nezaobilaznim istraživačkim konstruktom. Ipak, dokazi o učincima populističkih stavova na glasovanje za populiste i dalje su mješoviti, uz to što se učinci drugih koncepata nerijetko pripisuju populizmu. Istovremeno, u Hrvatskoj populizam ostaje slabo istražena tema, posebice na razini stavova građana. S tim na umu, u ovoj se studiji nastoje istražiti učinci populističkih stavova na glasovanje za populističke stranke i kandidate u Hrvatskoj kao relevantnoj studiji slučaja. U te se svrhe koriste anketni podaci *Hrvatskih izbornih studija* iz 2018. i 2020. godine. Rezultati multinomialnih logističkih regresija pokazuju kako populistički stavovi nemaju učinak na glasovanje za populiste u parlamentarnim i predsjedničkim izborima. Također se pokazuje kako populistički stavovi povećavaju vjerojatnost izborne apstinencije i smanjuju vjerojatnost glasovanja za vladajuću stranku (HDZ). Ti nalazi otvaraju pitanja o korisnosti i funkcionalnosti postojećih ljestvica populističkih stavova te ukazuju na potrebu drukčijeg uokvirivanja čestica kojima se mjeri populizam.

Ključne riječi populistički stavovi, populistički političari, populističke političke stranke, biračko ponašanje, izbori

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