

Published in *Quality & Quantity* (ISSN 1573-7845) <https://www.springer.com/journal/11135/>

Cite as: Todosijević, B., Pavlović, Z. & Komar, O. (2022). Measuring populist ideology: anti-elite orientation and government status. *Quality & Quantity*, 56, 1611–1629

<https://doi.org/10.1007/s11135-021-01197-5>

Measuring Populist Ideology:

Anti-Elite Orientation and Government Status

Abstract

In most contemporary conceptions of populist ideology, anti-elite orientation is considered to be one of its central components. Consequently, instruments designed to measure populism include items intended to capture anti-elitism. Such operationalizations may, however, neglect the interaction with the political status of the relevant actors – that is, parties/leaders. A negative and critical attitude towards the party or parties in government could reflect a populist anti-elite orientation but might also simply represent a negative attitude towards a specific party (which may be affected by pre-existing party identification or a negative government performance evaluation). Hence, such an indicator of populist ideology would then be contaminated by unintended content. This paper uses the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems dataset (with the addition of Serbia) to analyze the average anti-elite scores of parties in different countries. The overall results suggest that the anti-elite scale also captures the attitude towards parties in government. The paper discusses the methodological ramifications of this finding.

Keywords: populism, attitudes, government evaluation, CSES.

1. Introduction

That populism is a controversial concept in political science can hardly be considered a controversial statement. However, the debate about the content (or the lack thereof) of populist

ideology has made significant progress over the last two decades. In the empirical branch of political science, the position that populism is indeed an ideology with specific content has gained relatively wide support (e.g., Mudde 2004; Zaslove 2008; Ivarsflaten 2008; Rooduijn 2014, Schulz et al. 2018; Stanley, 2008; for a contrary view see Aslanidis, 2016).

Despite the crystallizing agreement about the core elements of populism, such as anti-elitism and people-centrism, the quest to explore its substance, especially on the level of mass attitudes, is still going on. One of the main tasks awaiting researchers is to conduct more extensive, comparative verification of the core elements of populist ideology. To accomplish this task, researchers need valid and reliable instruments for measuring populism in a comparative context. The challenge is to develop items and scales that are applicable to different political and cultural contexts, different periods, and populisms of different ideological shades (e.g., left-wing and right-wing populisms). In this paper, we respond to the methodological task by studying the CSES operationalization of populist ideology in a comparative context and examining how measures of anti-elite orientation behave in contexts where populist parties have been in power for an extended period. We do this to shed more light on what anti-elitist items in this populism scale measure.

1.2. Focus on Anti-elitism

In most contemporary conceptions of populist ideology, anti-elite orientation is considered to be one of its central components (Silva et al. 2019, p.2). According to Margaret Canovan, for instance, "Populism in modern democracies is best seen as an appeal to "the people" against both the established structure of power and the dominant ideas and values of the society." (1999, p. 3). Cas Mudde (2004) similarly considers that populism is "an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the

volonté générale (general will) of the people." (Mudde 2004, p. 543; see also Woods 2014; Fennema 2005; Pauwels 2010; Schulz et al. 2018).

What is particularly important about this element of populism is that it is supposed to be the common basis for both left and right-wing populism. There are nuances, however. According to March (2007, p. 74), unlike right-wingers, left-wing populists' anti-establishment orientation is inclusive. Ernst, Engesser & Esser (2017) found that anti-elitism is more specific for right-wing parties, while people-centrism is found among the leftist parties in Switzerland.

Whereas empirical studies do provide some support for the centrality of anti-elite attitudes in the populist ideology (Rohac et al. 2017), the variation in the political contexts examined by those studies has been limited, while the variations in the applied operationalizations have been extensive. One problem with the comparative measurement of the anti-elite orientation is that the 'corrupt elites' against whom populists mobilize may differ across contexts. In particular, it may make a difference whether populist parties have been in a position of political power for an extended period before the public opinion was surveyed.

In such cases, a reference to 'the political elite' may be taken to indicate those political parties and politicians who are in power, i.e., the populist parties and leaders, which could cause 'trouble' (Enyedi 2016). As a result, a negative and critical attitude towards a party or parties in government could reflect both a populist anti-elite orientation, but also simply a negative attitude towards the party on the opposite side of the political divide. Hence, such an indicator of populist ideology might be contaminated by unintended content. In subsequent sections, we explore this important methodological problem.

2. The present study

We argue that the measurement of populist ideology, in particular measures of anti-elite orientation, among the public may interact with the political status of the relevant actors – the parties and party leaders. When populist parties are in opposition, as has been the case in most Western European countries that have provided the basis for the contemporary model of populist ideology, anti-elite orientation was thought to refer to negative opinions about the ruling political elite and traditional, mainstream political parties. They are perceived as being responsible for the failures of democracy, and thus give rise to populist demands for more direct democracy (e.g., Hakhverdian & Koop 2007).

However, once populist parties and leaders spend some time in government, sufficiently long to begin to be perceived as 'the politicians', or 'the political elite', measurement of anti-elite orientation may become challenging. How to interpret the anti-elite attitudes of the public if populists have become de facto a political (and possibly economic) elite? The Public's anti-elite sentiments may continue to refer to a populist anti-elite orientation. But, they may also simply indicate a negative attitude towards the governing (populist) parties, i.e., it may just reflect a government vs. opposition division. Under such conditions, the measurement of populist attitudes may be contaminated by attitudes towards the governing parties. This confusion is likely to occur if items intended to measure anti-elitism refer to politicians or the political elite.

Our point is that being in government for an extended period will lead at least some voters to identify the governing (populist) party as 'the political elite', i.e., that the exemption for populist leaders that Silva (2019) found, is not likely to work forever or in all contexts.¹ For instance,

¹ Silva (2019), relying on cognitive dissonance theory and data from Bolivia and Ecuador, shows that elected populists may be exempted from the definition of 'political elites', thus enabling populist voters to remain anti-elitist, i.e., populist.

the political leadership of Fidesz and their affiliated circles do represent the political and economic elite in Hungary also objectively. The obvious implication is that being against such a political elite, even if it is otherwise considered populist, would make voters of the opposition parties being labeled as populists.

To address this problem, it is necessary to study anti-elite attitudes in cases where populists govern and compare the results with those cases that fit the typical image of populists in opposition. The methodological implication of the possible interaction between anti-elite attitudes and the governing status of populist parties is that the measurement of populist ideology has to be sensitive to its political context. Perhaps, it may be necessary to develop a different set of items to measure anti-elite sentiments in cases where populists are in power and are identified as 'the politicians'. In any case, it would be necessary to take this into account in comparative research, especially because populists in increasing numbers find themselves in positions of power across Europe and throughout the world (Jordan & Gultchin 2018).

To summarize, the extended presence of populist actors in positions of power challenges the measurement of populist anti-elitism among voters due to possible conflation with anti-government attitudes.

2.1. The CSES operationalization of populism

Specific operationalizations differ in the way they define who "the corrupt elite" actually is. Comparative research requires a measure that can be applied across different contexts, and which is broad enough to include cases of populists in opposition and cases of populists in power, as well as cases of left-wing and right-wing populisms.

The Comparative Study of Electoral Systems project (CSES, Module 5) has developed a measure of the basic dimensions of populist ideology, which covers: "three core, and interlinked, components of populist attitudes: 1. Attitudes towards political elites and electoral

democracy, 2. Attitudes towards out-groups within society, 3. Perception of "the people" and attachment to the nation" (Hobolt et al. 2016, p. 5). The anti-elite orientation is defined as a negative attitude towards political elites and 'politicians' in general. An example of a CSES anti-elite item is: *Most politicians do not care about the people*. This approach may seem to be too general because in different countries, the elites that populists oppose might be better defined more specifically. However, in a comparative context, it is necessary to use formulations that are general enough to be applicable across different contexts.

Although 'people-centrism' is sometimes conceived as a separate element of populism (e.g., Ernst, Engesser & Esser 2017), in the CSES operationalization, it is intertwined with anti-elitism. As will be seen in the methods section, two items explicitly mention 'the people', and one is a quite literal expression of political people-centrism.²

To address the outlined problem, we will compare election studies where populists have been in power for an extended period with cases where populists have been in opposition.

3. Method

The empirical analyses, presented in the following sections, compare the average anti-elite scores of different parties' voters. If the items represent pure indicators of populist ideology, we should observe higher scores among the respondents supporting parties of populist reputation. If the measures are contaminated by government evaluation, we would expect that the major difference is between supporters of governing parties versus opposition parties. The hypothesis is that the political status of populist parties affects the level of anti-elite attitudes among the public. In brief, the question we are answering is: Is the CSES anti-elite 'scale' a measure of populist orientation, or also of the preference for government vs. opposition?

² Schulz et al. (2018) provide support for this approach, by finding that anti-elitism covaries with two other populist attitudes, both related to people-centrism, i.e. a preference for popular sovereignty, and a belief in the homogeneity and virtuousness of the people, towards a higher-order dimension of populism in Switzerland.

3.1. Variables

Anti-elite orientation is defined in the CSES measure of populism as a negative attitude towards political elites in general, but it also includes elements of the so-called people-centrism³. The following are the five items used to construct the Anti-Elite Orientation Index⁴ (AEOI):

Q4_2 Most politicians do not care about the people.

Q4_3 Most politicians are trustworthy. (reversed)

Q4_4 Politicians are the main problem in [COUNTRY].

Q4_6 The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.

Q4_7 Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.

All questions are answered on a 5-point agreement-disagreement scale.

The populist character of specific parties is determined based on the academic literature and taking into account two expert measures of party populism. One is represented by the party evaluations on the populism dimension provided by the CSES. CSES Module 5 collaborator teams are asked to provide their assessment of the degree of populism of all the relevant parties participating in respective elections. Experts are provided with the CSES definition of populism, and they assess all the relevant parties on a scale from 0 to 10.⁵ The second consulted source is the *Global Party Survey 2019* (GPS; Norris, 2020).

³ Schulz et al. (2018) include the item Q4_6 into their sub-dimension of populism labelled "preference for popular sovereignty" (see below).

⁴ A similar, though not identical, index of populist attitudes was used by Andreadis, Stavrakakis, & Demertzis (2018) using Greek data.

⁵ These expert evaluations are included as CSES variables E5020_A to E5020_I. In most election studies, these evaluations are the averaged answers of several team members. In the Greek September 2015 study, 43 experts/national collaborators have assisted in the classification. For further detail, consult the CSES Module 5 Macro Reports.

We have three cases of polities with populists in power: Hungary (2018), Serbia (2017), and Montenegro (2016). In all three cases, the allegedly populist parties have been in power for at least one mandate. The remaining election studies contain at least one party widely recognized as being populist, both in scholarly literature and by the broader public, but which has not been in a position of political power for at least one mandate before the election under consideration.

3.2. Samples and data

The main data source is the CSES Module 5 First Advance Release (www.cses.org). The dataset contains 13 election studies, conducted between 2015 and 2018: Austria (2017), Chile (2017), Germany (2017), Greece (2015), Hong Kong (2016), Hungary (2018), Ireland (2016), Italy (2018), Lithuania (2016), Montenegro (2016), South Korea (2016), Taiwan (2016) and the United States (2016). Each election study is based on a random national sample of vote-eligible citizens.⁶

The analyses reported below, however, exclude four election studies. Chile is excluded because it seems that no party included in the CSES dataset fits the definition of a populist party⁷. Hong Kong 2016, South Korea 2016, and Taiwan 2016 are excluded because, on the one hand, differences in political and cultural contexts.⁸ On the other hand, reliability analysis showed that the anti-elite orientation index has low Alpha reliability coefficients in these studies (in all three cases, the coefficient was below 0.60).

We also include one election study not available in the CSES dataset – Serbia 2017. This study followed the Serbian presidential election in 2017. It employed the entire CSES Module 5 questionnaire. The data was collected using a non-random online sample of respondents and

⁶ For more details about each election study and the CSES project, visit the project's web-site (www.cses.org).

⁷ No party is described as populist by the CSES collaborators. Global Party Survey also describes no Chilean party as “Strongly populist”. Moreover, the anti-elite items do not differentiate the voters of different Chilean parties.

⁸ The Taiwanese CSES collaborators did not provide populism evaluations for the parties on the grounds that the concept is inapplicable. The Global Party Survey described no Taiwanese party as “Strongly populist”, while the GPS does not include scores for Hong Kong parties.

therefore did not meet the requirements for inclusion in the CSES dataset. However, the sample is diverse, both according to socio-demographic variables, and geographically, although the younger, urban-dwelling, and better-educated strata are over-represented. Nonetheless, the data can provide reliable evidence about within-sample differences, although the overall averages might be biased (the analyses performed here do not compare averages across different election studies but focus exclusively on within-country comparisons of voters of different parties).

4. Results

To create a comprehensive measure of the anti-elite orientation, we constructed an Anti-Elite Orientation Index (AEOI) as a simple average on the 5 CSES anti-elite items.⁹ Table 1 displays the Alpha coefficients of reliability, together with the means and standard errors of the mean for each involved election study.

Table 1. Descriptive characteristics of the AEOI scale: Alpha coefficients of reliability, scale means, and standard errors of the mean

Election study	Alpha	Mean	SE of the mean	N
Austria 2017	0.79	3.26	0.026	1203
Germany 2017	0.81	3.04	0.019	2032
Greece 2015*	0.61	3.83	0.019	1078
Hungary 2018	0.75	3.87	0.023	1208
Ireland 2016	0.77	3.05	0.032	1000
Italy 2018	0.68	3.84	0.018	2001
Lithuania 2016	0.74	3.64	0.017	1500
Montenegro 2016	0.72	3.74	0.023	1213
Serbia 2017**	0.67	3.53	0.015	2107
United States 2016 ¹⁰	0.70	3.44	0.012	3648

⁹ We performed the same analyses using factor scores instead of summarized values. The conclusions remain the same, but we opted for summarized scores for reasons of simplicity and comparability.

¹⁰ Note that in the US election study we excluded the following item: “*Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.*” The reason is that it distorts the difference between the two major

* There were two elections during 2015 in Greece, and this dataset follows the elections held in September.

***Notes:* Serbia 2017 online sample. Data were weighted using the E1012_2 weight, which adjusts sample distributions of socio-demographic characteristics.

Reliability analysis shows satisfactory results, as presented in Table 1. The Alpha coefficients range from the lowest Alpha= 0.61 for the Greek study, to the highest Alpha= 0.81 for Germany 2017 (the average for the eight countries being 0.73).

The results of the main analysis are presented by dividing the cases into three groups. The first includes what we term 'typical cases' where the main populist parties were in opposition before the election (Austria and Germany). The second group is represented by the case of the major left-wing populist party (Greece), because of the debate about the similarities and differences between left-wing and right-wing populism. The third group includes cases with populists in power (Hungary, Montenegro, and Serbia). The remaining cases, which do not neatly fit into the above groups, are summarized at the end of the analysis, with statistical details provided in the Appendix.

4.1. The typical cases: Populists in opposition – Austria and Germany

We will present more details about two typical instances of right-wing populist parties that were in opposition for at least one mandate before the election in question: this was the case in Austria and Germany.

parties. Specifically, while the remaining four anti-elite items show higher agreement among Republican voters (or no difference), the opposite is the case for the 'rich and powerful' question. There, Republican voters are significantly more positive about elites, i.e., it is the Democrat voters who show a stronger belief that elites 'care only about the rich and powerful'. So, because this question obviously has a different connotation in this context, we excluded it from the scale. With this item included, the AEOI scale does not differentiate between the voters of the two main parties, but without it, the difference is significant – Republican voters are more anti-elite oriented.

The mean scores (and confidence intervals) on the AEOI scale for voters of different Austrian and German parties are presented in Figure 1. The Austrian Freedom Party (FPÖ) is widely recognized as a prime example of contemporary right-wing populism (e.g., Mudde 2015; Bernhard & Kriesi 2019)¹¹. The FPÖ voters are significantly more anti-elite-oriented than voters of any of the other Austrian parties. Thus, the CSES anti-elitism scale differentiates FPÖ voters from the voters of the other Austrian parties, according to the theoretical expectations. Liste Pilz is sometimes considered to be a populist-left party (e.g., Buzogány & Scherhauser 2018).¹² The results show that these voters are statistically significantly higher on anti-elitism only compared to the Social Democratic Party of Austria (SPÖ) voters (see the Appendix for statistical details).

There are additional noteworthy relationships. SPÖ voters are the least anti-elite group, perhaps because the party had been in power for some time before the elections – in a grand coalition with the ÖVP (the Austrian People's Party). Cohabitation in this grand coalition could make both parties equally likely to be perceived as 'the political elite'. Yet, the ÖVP voters expressed a stronger anti-elite orientation. Thus, it appears that the ÖVP is more populist than its leftist mainstream counterpart – the SPÖ.

In general, there is a tendency for the right-wing parties to score higher on the populism dimensions than the leftist parties. However, it is beyond the scope of this paper to dwell on these findings – so we leave it to the future, more detailed analyses.

¹¹ The Austrian CSES collaborators gave score 9 to this party.

¹² The party was given a score of only 6 on the 0-10 populism scale by eleven Austrian CSES collaborators, while the GPS categorizes this party as “Moderately pluralist”.

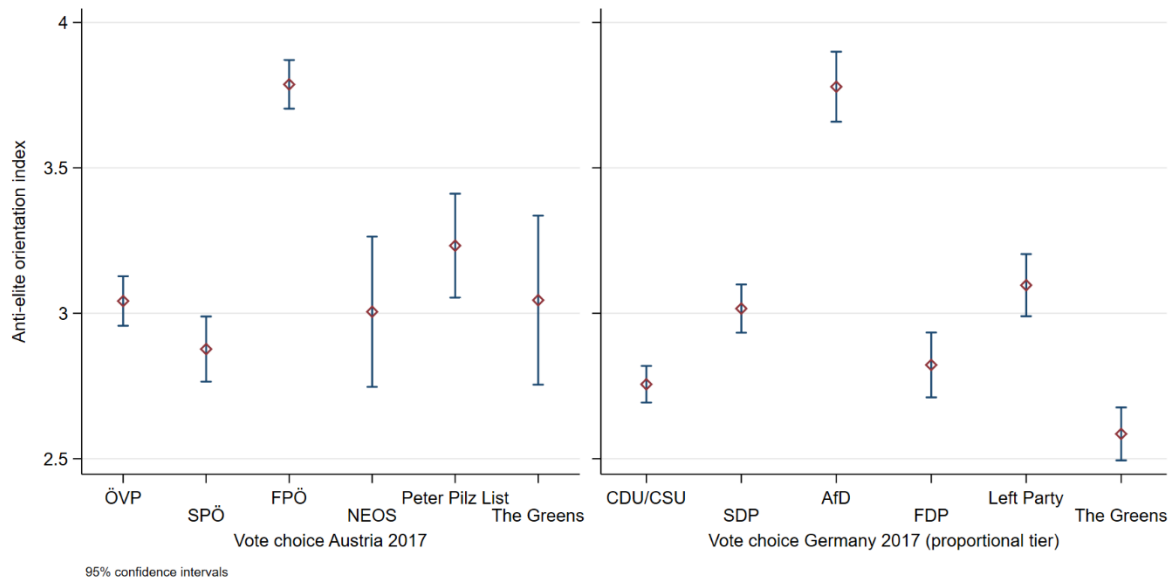


Figure 1 Mean scores and confidence intervals of Austrian and German voters on the AEOI scale

The main representative of (right-wing) populism in Germany is Alternative for Germany (AfD) (e.g., Berbuir, Lewandowsky & Siri 2015; Schmitt-Beck 2017; Olsen 2018).¹³ Their voters scored significantly higher on the anti-elite dimension compared to the voters of all other German parties. Also, both the Social Democratic Party (SDP) and Left Party voters are significantly more anti-elite oriented than CDU/CSU voters but much less than AfD voters.

Although the Left Party has been interpreted as a left-wing populist party, competing for the same voters with the AfD (at least within former East Germany, Olsen 2018), their voters do not exhibit a particularly high anti-establishment attitude.¹⁴ Perhaps the Merkel cabinet, despite the grand coalition before the 2017 elections, is perceived as more representative of conservative politics, which could push leftist voters (SDP, Left Party) towards more anti-elite (or anti-government) views.

¹³ Both GPS and CSES collaborators consider this party as being populist (three German CSES collaborators gave score 7 to AfD).

¹⁴ GPS categorizes the Left party as “Moderately Populist”, while AfD is classified as “Strongly Populist”.

4.2. Left-wing populists: Greece¹⁵

If there is one political party in Europe that is widely considered to represent the populist left, then it is the Greek party SYRIZA.¹⁶ For a brief period before the September 2015 elections, SYRIZA was in power (from January 2015), in a coalition with the right-wing nationalist ANEL (Independent Greeks) party, which is itself sometimes labeled a right-wing populist party (Stavrakakis, Andreadis & Katsambekis 2017)¹⁷. Given the brief period in government, SYRIZA could hardly be identified as 'the politicians.' Since democratization in the 1970s, the government alternated between New Democracy (ND) and PASOK, who are much more likely to be identified as the political elite than any other Greek party.

The "thin-centered ideology" model (Canovan, 2002) implies that we should observe high scores on the populist dimension for SYRIZA. The results presented in Figure 2 do not fit this expectation very convincingly. SYRIZA voters are not especially anti-elitist compared to the voters of the other Greek parties. There were two parties in the parliament (then) whose voters obtained similar AEOI scores (the parties being ANEL and the Communists), while the extreme-right Golden Dawn is the most anti-elite, being statistically significantly higher than any of the remaining parties.

¹⁵ Note that the same data for Greece have been analyzed previously, in a similar, though by no means identical, manner by Andreadis, Stavrakakis, & Demertzis (2018). We still report the results for the Greek CSES dataset here, because the previously reported results do not present the data (including the AEOI scale) in the same way as in this paper, and therefore do not allow direct comparisons between different election studies.

¹⁶ The 43 Greek CSES experts gave it an average score of 8 on the 0-10 populism scale, while GPS categorizes it as "Moderately populist" (based on 8 expert judgments).

¹⁷ The Greek CSES collaborators gave an ANEL score of 7 on the 0-10 populism scale. GPS, on the other hand, categorized ANEL, Golden Dawn, and the Communist Party as "Strongly populist"..

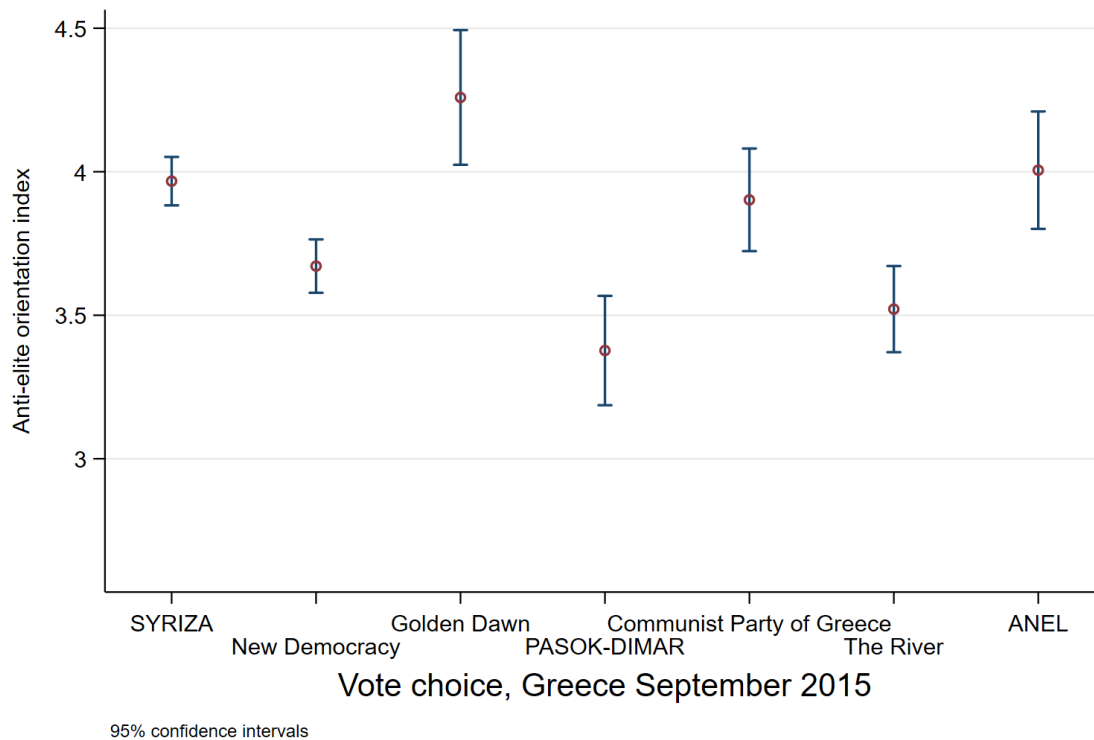


Figure 2 Mean scores and confidence intervals of Greek voters on the AEOI scale

It is also interesting to notice that not only SYRIZA but also the two right-wing anti-elite parties are all called populist. The Communists are not typically labeled as populist, perhaps because they are expected to be against the political elite for other ideological reasons. At the same time, all these parties are significantly more anti-elite compared to the traditional parties – New Democracy and the PASOK-DIMAR coalition. Thus, SYRIZA voters are anti-elite oriented compared to the voters of the established, mainstream parties, as are the right-wing populists and the Communists. It is interesting to note that the presented means and confidence intervals are similar to those observed by Stavrakakis et al. (2017, p. 11) among Greek political candidates in the first half of 2015.

In Greece, the ideologically more radical parties, both of the left and right-wing, are anti-elite oriented, compared to the parties traditionally associated with the political rule. It might be because of the simplistic Manichean world-views, as attributed to populists, but also simply as

an expression of being a political challenger to the parties which have been alternating in power for many years.

So, we conclude that the anti-elite scale does differentiate voters of the left-wing and even better the right-wing parties of populist reputation from the mainstream parties, but it also quite closely outlines the government-opposition divide.

4.3. Populists in power

Now, we turn to those cases where populist parties have been in power for an extended period, presumably sufficiently long to begin to be identified as 'the politicians'. We present these cases in more detail. One reason is that these are the key cases for our research problem – the hypothesis that the CSES anti-elitism items are sensitive to parties' government status. Second, these cases (especially Montenegro and Serbia) are less represented in the academic literature, especially concerning the populist character of their political actors.

4.3.1. Hungary

Viktor Orbán and his Fidesz party are widely recognized as paradigmatic populists (e.g., Batory 2016; Pappas 2019; Enyedi 2016; Becker 2010), and they have been in power continuously since May 2010. In Hungary, according to the results shown in Figure 3, after the 2018 elections, we observe that the anti-elite mood is *lowest* among the voters of the populist Fidesz-KDNP. Voters of all the main competitors (except for the LMP, for unclear reasons) obtained significantly higher AEOI scores. These parties are of varied ideological orientations: the Hungarian Socialist Party is left-wing, while Jobbik is often seen as a radical, nationalist right-wing party (Kovács 2013). Jobbik is indeed sometimes described as populist, and part of its success has been attributed to its anti-establishment stance (Karácsony & Róna 2011). However, in comparison with Fidesz, Jobbik's populism seems generally less emphasized in the literature.

Moreover, the CSES collaborators attributed a score of 9 to Fidesz, and 7 to Jobbik on the 0-10 populism scale, while GPS characterizes both parties as "Strongly populist".

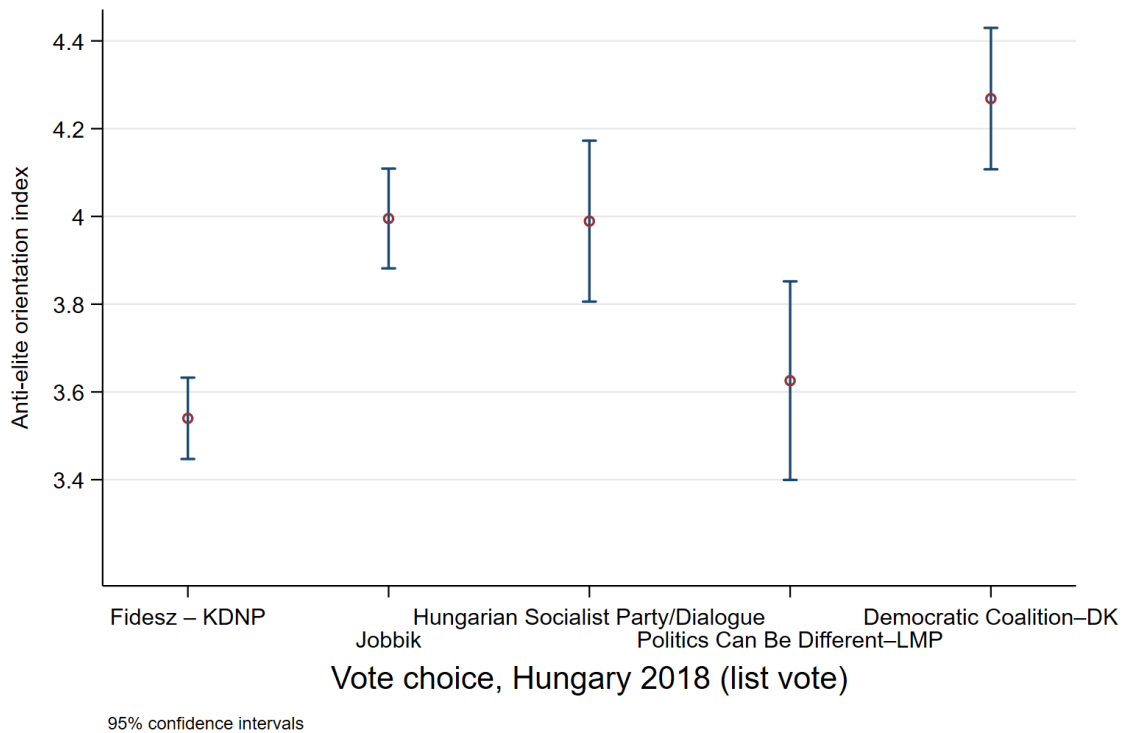


Figure 3. Mean scores and confidence intervals of Hungarian voters on the AEOI scale

Thus, the results show that *some* Hungarian populist voters (Jobbik) are anti-elite oriented (though not more so than the other opposition parties and coalitions). However, voters of the main populist showed an exceptionally low level of anti-elitism, according to the presently employed operationalization of the anti-elite orientation.

4.3.2. Montenegro 2016

In Montenegro, the Democratic Party of Socialists (DPS), headed by their charismatic leader Milo Đukanović, has been in power since multi-party democracy was introduced in the country

at the beginning of the 1990s, until 2020. Hence, at the time of 2016. elections, this party could legitimately be identified as 'the politicians' in Montenegro.

The populism of the DPS is, admittedly, more ambiguous compared to Fidesz'. Being permanently in power for nearly three decades, it has been difficult to campaign exclusively on the simple anti-elite rhetoric. Some other dimensions or correlates of rightist populism can be discerned in DPS' politics: the cult of the leader, a kind of exclusive identity politics, and the lack of an overarching ideology. Džankić & Keil describe the DPS and Đukanović as an example of "State-sponsored Populism", which is "a new kind of populism, a state-sponsored populist discourse that is very different from populism as understood in Western Europe" (Džankić & Keil 2017, abstr.). They argue that the DPS employs a specific populist discourse, including various core elements of populist ideology. In their words:

"[M]any elements of populism were present in establishing and maintaining the two-and-a-half-decade long rule of Đukanović's DPS. The 'Othering' of political opponents both internal and external, the emphasis on the heartland, the lack of the party's ideological profile, reproduction of crisis, charismatic leadership, and chameleonic nature are all characteristic of the DPS's politics since the Yugoslav breakup." (Džankić & Keil 2017, p. 409).

These two authors use the concept of populism as defined by Paul Taggart to find the five elements of populism in the Montenegrin DPS. The first element is the critique of the internal and external establishment which Džankić & Keil call "othering". The 'mean and powerful elite' against which Đukanović and the DPS defended the Montenegrin people, were domestic "traitors" supported by an external elite – embodied in the Serbian government, especially in the period since the NATO aggression on Serbia and Montenegro, and peaking at the time of Montenegro's declaration of independence in 2006 (Džankić & Keil 2017). The heartland for a "core people" that the populist message refers to, which is the second Taggart's element of

populism, is found by Džankić & Keil in national identity building since 2000. The DPS is a party of technocrats which is lacking an elaborate core value system that is translated into a distinguished policy or ideology system (Bieber 2010), which is the third of Taggart's element. The DPS is often being accused of being masterly in producing "crises" whenever their rule is threatened. Finally, Milo Đukanović, its charismatic leader, has managed to navigate this party from Communism, through the era of being Milosevic's ally, to the current guise as a member of NATO and candidate for EU membership, fulfilling the last two criteria.

Looking at the three specific features of the populist governance that Mueller identifies (2016), we can identify all of them in the DPS' *modus operandi*: 1) the attempt to hijack state apparatus, 2) corruption and mass clientelism, and 3) the systematic suppression of the civil society.¹⁸

However, the DPS is not the only party with populist tendencies in Montenegro. The Montenegrin CSES collaborator evaluated the Democratic Front's populism level with a score of 8 on the 0-10 points scale.¹⁹ Certainly, this party employs anti-elite rhetoric, but the division between this party/coalition and the ruling DPS is on the national question, i.e., the ethnic identity of the Montenegrin nation (in particular, this applies to the NSD, which is pro-Serbian oriented; Komar & Živković 2016). So, while the DF has elements of populism, it is certainly a non-standard brand of populism.

The Social Democratic Party (SDP) has been a frequent coalition partner of DPS (e.g., the 7th Đukanović cabinet, 2012-2016), so similar levels of anti-elitism are expected. The "Key coalition" was a short-lived coalition of the Democratic Alliance (DEMOS), the Socialist

¹⁸ Neither GPS nor CSES experts describe DPS as particularly populist. Six CSES experts gave it a score of 4 (0-10 scale), while 8 GPS experts describe it as "Moderately pluralist". However, the two rankings widely differ for some other Montenegrin parties, suggesting a considerable degree of ambiguity about the ideological character of these parties.

¹⁹ Democratic Front, (DF) is an electoral coalition of the New Serbian Democracy (NSD), the Movement for Changes (PzP) and some other smaller parties. Democratic Front and Democratic Montenegro are described in GPS datasets both as "Strongly populist", while Key Coalition and SDP are seen as pluralist (not populist).

People's Party (SNP), and United Reform Action (URA). The coalition had a vague ideological profile, besides being in opposition to DPS rule (although several leaders and representatives of the coalitions used to be allies of the DPS in earlier times).

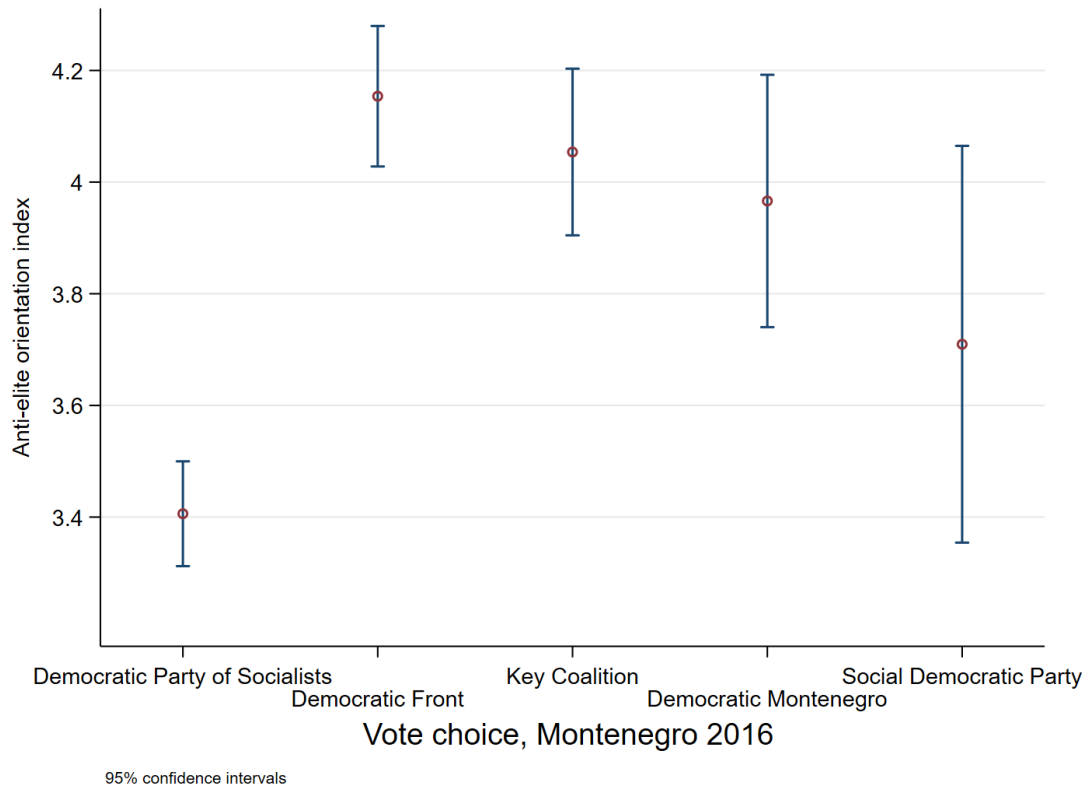


Figure 4. Mean scores and confidence intervals of Montenegrin voters on the AEIOI scale

The results from Montenegro, presented in Figure 4, resemble those reported for Hungary. Voters of the ruling DPS are the least anti-elite oriented. If we follow the CSES collaborator's and GPS evaluations of DF and Democratic Montenegro as populist parties, we can conclude that *some* populists in Montenegro are indeed anti-elitist, but equally as the remaining opposition parties. In general, the picture resembles a government-opposition division more than a populist-non-populist distinction, and this conclusion holds regardless of whether we label the DPS as a populist party.

4.3.3. Serbia 2017

The Serbian presidential elections of 2017 represent the third case of ruling populists. Aleksandar Vučić and the Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) have been in power in Serbia since the 2012 parliamentary and presidential elections. At the time of the 2012 elections, the SNS campaigned on strongly anti-elite rhetoric, blaming the then-ruling Democratic Party (DS) for corruption, clientelism, and the elitism of the Belgrade liberals (Jovanović 2013, p. 13). The SNS presented themselves as representing and defending the 'ordinary people' while blaming the DS and its partners for being alienated from the people and working in the interests of foreign powers (e.g., Spasojević 2017, p. 81; Stojiljković & Spasojević 2018). In addition to being nationalist, conservative, and authoritarian, the SNS has been generally regarded as populist (Mikucka-Wójtowicz 2017; Jovanović 2018), even as "pro-European populists" (Spasojević 2017, p. 81), while Kyle and Gultchin (2018) categorize Vučić and the movement as 'cultural' populism. In any case, the party has retained its anti-elitist *rhetoric* ever since (Spasojević 2017).²⁰ Schenkkan & Repucci (2019) conclude that Vučić is following in the footsteps of Viktor Orbán.

Thus, even though the SNS had been in power for five years before the current survey, it could still be expected that SNS voters show some anti-elite orientation. However, the opposition voters should also be against the (ruling) political elite, although some of these parties tended to show elitist elements in their rhetoric (Čolović & Mimica 1992; Mimica 2002; Spasić & Petrović 2012).

The results, presented in Figure 5, show that Vučić (SNS) voters are significantly *less* anti-elite-oriented than voters of all the major opposition candidates, regardless of their ideological orientation. Again, we see that when populist leaders and parties can be identified as 'the

²⁰ GPS characterizes SNS (and its coalition partners), as being "Strongly populist".

politicians', the anti-elite orientation index functions more like an indicator of the government vs. opposition divide rather than an indicator of a wider populist orientation.

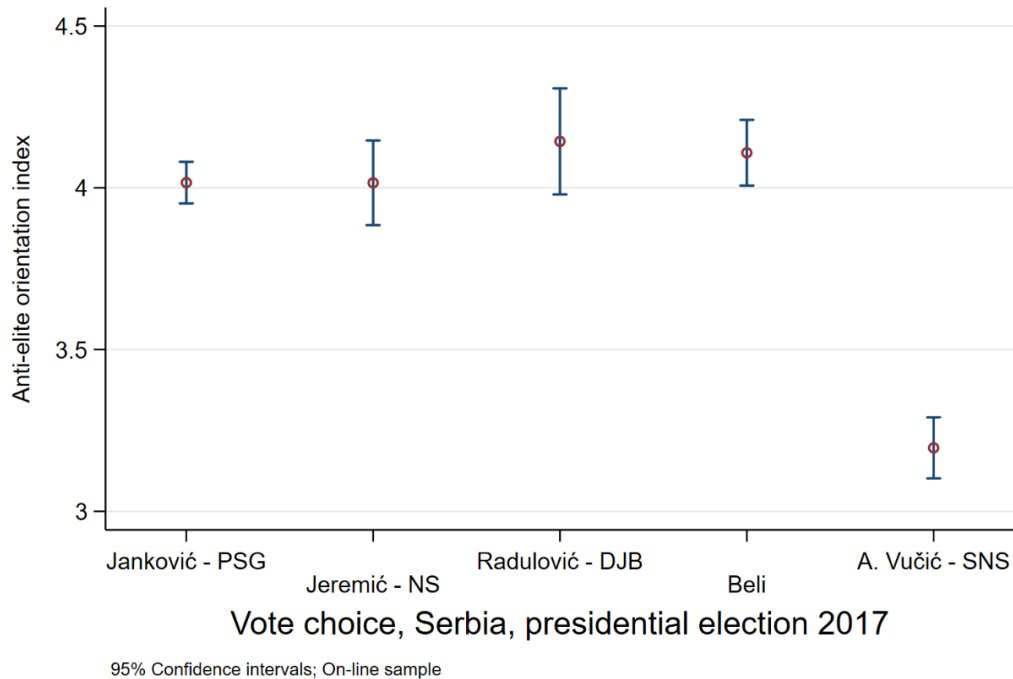


Figure 5. Mean scores and confidence intervals of Serbian voters on the AEOI scale

4.4. Summary of the results

We will not present the same detailed analysis for all the election studies available in the CSES dataset. To save space, here we present a summary of the main results. Statistical details are provided in the Appendix. As the summary results presented in Table 2 demonstrate, in cases where populist parties and candidates were in opposition in the period before the respective elections, their voters exhibit relatively higher anti-elite orientation compared to most other parties. Still, in several cases, voters of non-populist parties are also high on the anti-elite orientation scale – typically the other opposition parties.

Where populists are in power, voters of populist parties show *lower* anti-elite orientation scores than the voters of the opposition parties. In other words, *populists appear to be pro-elite* in these cases.

Table 2. Summary results of the comparison of cases with and without populists in power

Election study	Populists in power before	Populists more anti-elite
<u>Populists in opposition</u>		
Austria 2017	No	Yes
Germany 2017	No	Yes
USA 2016	No	Yes (Libertarian Party is also more anti-elite)
Ireland 2016	No	Yes, but also Sinn Fein – (and opposition in general)
Italy 2018	No	Yes, but all opposition is equally anti-elite
Lithuania 2016	No	Yes, highest, but most of the opposition is also more anti-elite
<u>Left-wing populists</u>		
Greece, Sept. 2015	No	Yes (and most of the rest of the opposition)
<u>Populists in power</u>		
Hungary 2018	Yes	No (Fidesz) (Jobbik: Yes)
Montenegro 2016	Yes	No
Serbia 2017	Yes	No

In our example of the left-wing populism, the Greek SYRIZA, voters are relatively high on the anti-elite orientation scale, but right-wing populists are higher. Voters of all Greek parties are relatively high in terms of anti-elitism, although voters of the two traditionally alternately ruling parties are still somewhat less anti-elite compared to the rest.

5. Discussion

The theory states that anti-elite orientation is among the core elements of the thin-centered ideology of populism. We examined how this element fits the cross-national evidence about populist ideology among electorates. We hypothesized that the political status of a populist party (being in government or opposition before elections) might affect the observed relationships. Simply being in power for some time may contribute to the electorate's

perception of an incumbent party as representing the political elite. Hence, measures of anti-elite orientation may indicate both populist preferences, as well as opposition preferences.

We addressed this problem using the comparative election surveys available from the CSES project. The dataset provided us with both 'typical' cases where populist parties have been in opposition and cases where populist parties had been in power for extended periods before the elections.

In a comparative survey, it is necessary to formulate items that are general enough to be applicable across different contexts. CSES survey designers opted to use 'the politicians' as the object of popular anti/elitism. This seems a plausible solution, and apparently, it works well where populist parties fit the standard Western European experience. In contexts where populist actors have been in power, as the results show, the items seem to be too general to adequately capture the labeling of elites targeted by local populists, instead capturing the government-opposition divide. This result indicates that there is a methodological problem with the CSES operationalization of the populist anti-elite orientation. The employed measure has a validity problem – it interacts with political context and is not a reliable indicator of populist orientation comparatively.

One methodological solution might be to devise functionally equivalent items rather than ones that equate literally. Thus, in Hungary, it might be more appropriate to refer to 'the liberal (Jewish) Budapest elite', and in Serbia to 'wealthy, liberal Belgrade elite'. Such items would, perhaps, result in higher anti-elite scores for the respective populist parties, even though they have been in power for some years. On the other hand, it would be a challenging task to demonstrate that such diverse formulations actually measure a common concept.

The problem does not concern cross-country comparisons only. Different populist parties within a country may target different elites. To some extent, this seems to be the case in Hungary,

where the elites targeted by Fidesz and Jobbik only partly overlap. Additionally, the specification of what constitutes elites may change over time. For instance, the rhetoric of Milo Đukanović has changed over the last three decades, following the changing political circumstances. Hence, it might be problematic to measure populist ideology with a single set of items not only across countries, but also within a single country, and even in the same party, over time. In any case, at least in comparative analyses, it is necessary to consider the government status of the populist parties. Failing to do so might result in misleading conclusions - taking measures of the support for opposition for populism.²¹

The presented results provide a static picture due to the cross-sectional nature of the data. One of the tasks for future research is to provide evidence of temporal changes. It would be interesting to find out whether a period of populist leadership 'cures' citizens of their anti-elitism or, perhaps, populist governance realigns citizens according to their anti-elitism – by attracting the less anti-elitist citizens.²² Of course, the main culprit might be simply the measurement error.

Finally, since all cases with populists in power are Eastern European countries, one may wonder whether the observed phenomenon has some regional specificity. In principle, the measure is supposed to be valid across contexts. Hence, 'regional specificity' should not be relevant. Moreover, the results showed that relatively high AEO scores often characterize opposition voters in other countries, even if the relevant parties are not considered populist. Thus, the difficulty in distinguishing the anti-government from the anti-elite populist attitudes is documented across different contexts.

²¹ It is not surprising that cross-cultural measurement of populism is difficult, and we do not want to appear too critical towards the CSES measures. Although measuring “extreme-right voting behaviour” should be simpler than measuring populist ideology, Hooghe and Reeskens showed that “survey data on extreme-right voting behaviour lack cross-cultural external validity because of a combination of response and measurement bias” (2017, p. 194).

²² We thank the Reviewer #4 for this interesting point.

6. Appendix

Table 3. Average scores (and confidence intervals) on the Anti-Elite Orientation Index by voters of different parties in ten election studies

Election study	Mean AEOI	95% Conf. Interval	
<u>Austria, 2017</u>			
The New People's Party	3.04	2.96	3.13
Social Democratic Party	2.88	2.77	2.99
Freedom Party of Austria*	3.79	3.70	3.87
NEOS – The New Austria	3.01	2.75	3.26
Peter Pilz List	3.23	3.06	3.41
The Greens	3.05	2.76	3.33
<u>Germany, 2017</u>			
Social Democratic Party	3.01	2.93	3.09
Alternative for Germany*	3.77	3.65	3.89
Free Democratic Party	2.81	2.70	2.92
Left Party	3.10	2.99	3.20
Alliance 90/The Greens	2.59	2.49	2.68
CDU/CSU	2.75	2.69	2.82
<u>Greece, September 2015</u>			
SYRIZA*	3.93	3.85	4.01
New Democracy	3.67	3.58	3.76
Golden Dawn*	4.26	4.04	4.47
PASOK-DIMAR	3.46	3.30	3.61
Communist Party of Greece	3.90	3.72	4.08
The River	3.46	3.33	3.59
ANEL*	4.01	3.81	4.20
<u>Hungary 2018</u>			
Fidesz – KDNP*	3.48	3.39	3.58
Jobbik*	3.97	3.85	4.09
Hungarian Socialist Party/Dialog	3.99	3.81	4.17
Politics Can Be Different – LMP	3.61	3.40	3.83
Democratic Coalition – DK	4.27	4.11	4.43
<u>Ireland 2016</u>			
Fine Gael	2.59	2.48	2.71
Fianna Fail	2.96	2.82	3.10
Sinn Fein	3.60	3.42	3.77
Labour Party	2.57	2.37	2.77
Anti-Austerity Alliance- People*	3.89	3.46	4.31
Social Democrats	2.89	2.60	3.18
Green Party	2.72	2.50	2.94
<u>Italy 2018</u>			
Five Star Movement*	4.09	4.02	4.15
Democratic Party	3.35	3.25	3.46
League*	4.04	3.93	4.15
Go Italy (Forza Italia)	3.82	3.67	3.98
Brothers of Italy	3.83	3.60	4.07

Election study	Mean AEOI	95% Conf. Interval	
<u>Lithuania 2016</u>			
Homeland Union - Lithuanian Christian Democrats	3.34	3.24	3.44
Lithuania Union of Farmers and Greens*	3.60	3.53	3.67
Lithuanian Social Democratic Party	3.54	3.44	3.63
Liberal Movement of the Republic	3.49	3.35	3.62
Anti-Corruption Coalition*	3.94	3.73	4.15
Lithuanian Poles Electoral Action Party 'Order and Justice'*	3.61	3.45	3.77
	3.75	3.53	3.98
<u>Montenegro 2016</u>			
Democratic Party of Socialists*	3.34	3.25	3.42
Democratic Front(*)	4.12	4.01	4.22
Key Coalition	4.05	3.90	4.20
Democratic Montenegro(*)	3.82	3.63	4.01
Social Democratic Party	3.55	3.29	3.81
<u>USA 2016</u>			
Democratic Party	3.30	3.26	3.34
Republican Party*	3.46	3.42	3.50
Libertarian Party	3.51	3.38	3.64
Green Party of the USA	3.46	3.20	3.72
<u>Serbia 2017</u>			
Janković – PSG	4.01	3.95	4.08
Jeremić – NS	3.98	3.86	4.11
Radulović – DJB	4.14	3.98	4.30
Beli	4.11	4.01	4.21
A. Vučić – SNS*	3.18	3.08	3.27

Note: Entries refer to a 5-point scale, where a higher score means a stronger endorsement of the orientation/attitude.

* Party regarded as populist, based on GPS and CSES scores and authors' evaluations.

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