

Disadvantaged compared to whom?

The relationship between different forms of subjective relative deprivation and left- and right-wing populist attitudes.

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Abstract:

Recent studies pointed out that supporters of radical populist parties are characterized by a specific deep story that signifies their subjective feelings of disadvantage compared to other groups in society. In this regard, this study sets out to answer the question whether subjective disadvantage, measured as subjective group relative deprivation, is linked to populist attitudes. Although I maintain that group relative deprivation is connected to populism, I go beyond previous research by taking into account that the group, people compare themselves to, matters decisively for which form of populism they support. Key to this argument is the distinction between comparison groups for relative deprivation on the one hand and the distinction between left- and right-wing populism on the other. Accounting for the attached host-ideologies, I argue that for right-wing populist attitudes with its nativist sentiment, relative deprivation compared to immigrants is important, while for left-wing populism, a perceived disadvantage compared to rich people should have the highest relevance. Analyses based on original survey data from six European countries support these contentions. The study offers a quantitative and comparative analysis of the importance of subjective disadvantage highlighted by ethnographic studies and advances our understanding of both left- and right-wing populist attitudes.

Introduction

Populism is one of the most debated topics in contemporary political science (Hawkins and Rovira Kaltwasser, 2018). Recent studies have pointed out that subjective feelings of relative disadvantage are important in explaining people's support for populism (Cramer, 2016; Hochschild, 2016). These studies argue that both economic insecurity and cultural change have created a segment of the population that feels "left behind" and excluded. Even more so, Hochschild (2016: 144) summarizes: "You are a stranger in your own land. You do not recognize yourself in how others see you. It is a struggle to feel seen and honoured". This explanation is thus focused on the subjective reality of populist supporters and their specific subjective feelings of disadvantage.

Against this backdrop, I use subjective group relative deprivation as an indicator to capture subjective feelings of disadvantage in a quantitative fashion. Subjective group relative deprivation is understood as negative upward comparison that creates a perceived disadvantage that is regarded as unfair, resulting in angry resentment (Smith and Pettigrew, 2014; Smith et al., 2012; Pettigrew, 2015). Although I maintain that subjective group relative deprivation is positively related to populism, I argue that the group people compare themselves to matters decisively for which form of populism they support. Key to this argument is the distinction between two distinct comparison groups on the one hand and the rigorous distinction between left- and right-wing populism on the other. In this vein, by taking into account the attached host-ideologies of populism I contend that for right-wing populist attitudes with its nativist focus, subjective group relative deprivation compared to immigrants is the important form of disadvantage. Conversely, for left-wing populism with its focus on economic inequality, subjective group relative deprivation compared to rich people should have the highest importance.

In order to test my arguments, I rely on an original survey from six European countries collected in April and Mai 2020. I rely on a comprehensive measure for both left- and right-wing populist attitudes as well as detailed measures for subjective group relative deprivation. The empirical models show that the comparison group is crucial for which form of populism is supported. While perceived disadvantages to immigrants are positively related to right-wing populist attitudes, this conclusion does not hold for left-wing populism. Conversely, for left-wing populist attitudes perceived disadvantages compared to rich people are dominant while disadvantages to immigrants are irrelevant.

I contribute to the literature in three important ways. First, by exploring subjective group relative deprivation, I offer a quantitative operationalisation of recent ethnographic studies. Second, I explicitly investigate left- and right-wing populist attitudes which advances the understanding of the most dominant forms of populism in Europe. In doing so, I contribute to the explanation of populism in general while also scrutinizing an explanatory approach that is in line with other studies that advance explanations beyond structural economic grievances and cultural threat perceptions by arguing that both have contributed to the emergence of feelings of relative disadvantage which in turn increase populist attitudes (Gidron and Hall, 2020; Carreras et al., 2019; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2020). Third, I offer cross-country evidence on the relationship between subjective relative deprivation and different forms of populist attitudes which has to date only been studied in a few single country studies with limited items.

Conceptualizing Populism: Left- and right-wing populism

It is common wisdom that populism is a contested concept, yet scholars increasingly agree on one particular approach to populism: the ideational approach (Mudde 2007; Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). This approach “locate[s] populism in the realm of ideas and highlight[s] the central place of a so-called popular identity as well as its antagonistic relationship with a

putative, vilified elite that stands as the anti-people” (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser 2017: 516). According to Mudde (2007: 23) populism can be defined as *“thin-centered 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”*.¹

Three distinct components can be identified: a moral struggle between good and bad (Manichean outlook), anti-elitism and a people centric vision of society (people centrism). In the Manichean outlook on society, the people are symbolizing the ‘good’ side while the elite is portrayed as the ‘vilified’ antagonist (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013). As opposed to pluralism, this dualistic outlook regards the diversity of political opinions as undesirable and problematic. Based on that the people form a homogeneous and virtuous entity that is capable of articulating a general will, which ultimately should guide all political decisions (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018). In this sense, the general will has to be unmediated by intermediary institutions or (constitutional) laws. Opposed to the ‘good’ people is the ‘vilified’ elite, which uses the political system for their own benefit and by doing so betrays the people of their rights and resources (Hawkins 2009). The elites have found a way to obscure the functioning of the political system allowing them to pursue more power and profit at the cost of the people (Hawkins 2009). Yet, who is categorized as elite varies over time and context but often involves governmental officials, politicians in general, the media, economic elites but also supranational organisations or the judiciary (Hawkins 2009).

The ideational approach enables scholars to “analyse whether these ideas are widespread across certain segments of the electorate, irrespective of the presence of populist actors” (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2018: 1671). More importantly, the approach allows to

¹ As opposed to full ideologies, thin ideologies have “a restricted core attached to a narrower range of political concepts” Freeden (1998: 750). Consequently, these thin ideologies do not offer answers to all social, political or economic questions but rather focus on a smaller set of questions and in the case of populism on the antagonistic relationship between “the people” and the “elite”.

investigate the presence of populist attitudes and “[b]ecause populism is the combination of [the aforementioned] different aspects [...] populist attitudes are the set of evaluative reactions to these elements” (van Hauwaert et al. 2020: 3). One crucial advantage of the investigation of attitudes compared to vote choice is that the vote for a populist party makes the identification of populism more difficult “because voters are always recruited on the basis of several issues and concerns” (Spruyt et al. 2016: 336). Therefore, the investigation of populist attitudes allows to draw a more accurate picture of the support for populist positions.

Populism in this sense is a moralistic rather than programmatic ideology with the concept of “the people” being of central importance (Mudde 2004). Yet, empirically, scholars often observe that populism is attached to other worldviews and thus form certain subtypes of populism, i.e. radical left-wing and radical right-wing populism (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013).²

Right-wing populism is a combination of populism, nativism and authoritarianism (Mudde 2007; Oesch 2008; Mudde 2010; Rooduijn 2014; Betz 2017). For Betz (2017), nativism relates to hostility towards anything that is foreign. In this regard, everything that is non-native (persons and ideas) poses a threat to national identity, is thus “fundamentally threatening to the homogeneous nation-state” (Mudde 2007: 19). Authoritarianism can be defined as “social attitudinal or ideological expressions of basic social values or motivational goals that represent different, though related, strategies for attaining collective security at the expense of individual autonomy” (Duckitt & Bizumic, 2013, p. 842). Mostly this implies support for traditional moral and ethical claims and a desire for cultural conformity and structure (Adorno et al., 1950). Put differently, according to Mudde (2007: 23) authoritarianism is “the belief in a strictly ordered society, in which infringements of authority are to be punished severely”.

² For brevity I will use the term left-wing populism instead of radical left-wing populism and right-wing populism instead of radical right-wing populism.

Conversely, left-wing populism seems to be mainly concerned with economic questions (March 2007; Akkerman et al. 2017; March 2017; Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017; Burgoon et al. 2019). As the argument goes, supporters of these parties are often losers of globalisation and mostly at the lower end of the socio-economic strata. Therefore, questions of anti-capitalism, income inequality and redistribution are at the forefront of left-wing populism (Akkerman et al. 2017). Left-wing populists identify economic inequity as a fundamental characteristic of the current political and economic system. Capitalism is viewed as responsible for the economic exclusion of certain social strata. Moreover, in combination with globalisation, capitalist systems increase competition that threatens the social community that is central to socialist ideas (March & Mudde 2005; March 2007). To that end, left-wing populism combines a socialist critique of capitalism with anti-establishment rhetoric. Opposed to right-wing populism, its left-wing counterpart uses social class as exclusion criterion rather than ethnic or national identity. Yet, contrary to classical socialist parties, left-wing populists “present themselves as the vox populi, not just the vanguard of the proletariat” (March 2007: 67) and thus the nodal point of radical left populism is the people in general and not just the working class or the proletariat Stavrakakis & Katsambekis (2014).

Explanation of populism

Previous research

The explanation of populism mainly revolves around two theoretically distinct accounts, i.e. economic and cultural explanations. The economic explanation focuses on winners and losers of globalisation (Kriesi et al. 2006; Kriesi et al. 2012). The winners are characterised by higher levels of education, economic security and human capital which is why they profit from open borders and global competition, while the losers with their lower socio-economic status feel threatened by this economic and cultural competition (Kriesi et al. 2012). Populist parties and

actors take up these insecurities of the losers by offering seemingly simple answers to the concerns of the (economically) marginalised by putting the nation and its people first (Engler & Weisstanner 2020). Recent research has supported these arguments and shows that economic vulnerability and grievances positively relate to populism (Visser et al. 2014; Burgoon et al. 2019; Gidron & Mijs 2019; Rico & Anduiza 2019). Additionally, Kurer (2020) shows that a perception of relative economic decline increases the support for right-wing populist parties. Similarly, Engler & Weisstanner (2020) present evidence that rising income inequality increases support for radical right-wing parties by increasing the potential threat of social and economic decline (Engler & Weisstanner 2020).

Contrary to these arguments lies the proposition that globalisation is not solely economic but implies “a cultural evolution in which a particular cosmopolitan identity is being actively promoted” (Spruyt et al. 2016: 337). Consequently, proponents argue that a shift in values and traditions has led certain parts of the population to feel culturally left behind. These people feel that their way of life and their values are not reflected by the public and elite discourse (Ignazi 1992; Inglehardt & Norris 2017). The main focus is on immigration and increased diversity, which is often regarded as a threat not only to the economy of the country but – more importantly – to its culture and traditions (Mudde 2007; Oesch 2008; Bonikowski 2017). Some studies show that these anti-immigration views significantly predict support for right-wing populists (Oesch 2008; Dunn 2015)

Recently, ethnographic studies have added arguments to the debate on the explanation of populism (Cramer 2016; Hochschild 2016; Koppetsch 2017). These studies argue that both economic and cultural developments have created a segment of the population that feels socially marginalised and excluded. Even more so, Hochschild (2016: 144) argues that these people feel as strangers in their own land, while being caught in a struggle for recognition and respect. A particular contribution of these ethnographic studies is that they show that subjective feelings

of disadvantage are a reoccurring theme for supporters of populism. Hochschild (2016), for example, finds that it is neither a bad economic situation nor mere xenophobia that explain people's support for the Tea Party movement in the US. She finds that supporters of the Tea party share an underlying 'deep story' that reflects their subjective impressions of reality. A key element is that her interview partners have the impression that they are disadvantaged compared to other groups in society. Furthermore, despite being 'good' citizens who follow the rules of society, they have the impression that they do not get what they deserve (Hochschild 2016). They lack respect and recognition for their achievements and way of life. This is not only true for themselves personally, but also for 'people like them'. As a result, they feel angry and frustrated, making them susceptible to messages of the Tea party which capture their subjective deep story. In this regard, populism can be understood as a result of subjective feelings of disadvantage.

Hypotheses: Subjective group relative deprivation and the populisms

To capture these subjective feelings of disadvantage I use subjective group relative deprivation which is defined "as a judgment that one or one's in-group is disadvantaged compared to a relevant referent and that this judgment invokes feelings of anger, resentment, and entitlement" (Pettigrew 2015: 12). For subjective relative deprivation to be present individuals must make a comparison that results in perceived and unfair disadvantage, which results in feelings of entitlement and importantly angry resentment (Smith & Pettigrew 2014). In this study, I focus on group relative deprivation (Runciman 1966) because it captures the importance of group membership that has been put forward by ethnographic studies (Hochschild 2016; Koppetsch 2017). Hochschild (2016), for example, points out that supporters of the Tea Party see themselves as members of a neglected group not as single individuals. The perceived disadvantages are the result of systematic neglect and lack of respect for a group of people like

them. Moreover, from an empirical standpoint, research in social psychology has shown that group relative deprivation shows more explanatory value for (intergroup) attitudes and collective action (Runciman 1966; Smith et al. 2012). Thus, for analytical and theoretical reasons, subjective group relative deprivation offers more value.

I investigate the relationship between subjective group-level relative deprivation and populist attitudes by taking into account the multi-dimensionality of both concepts. I formulate hypotheses for right-wing and left-wing populist attitudes by making use of different comparison groups that individuals compare themselves to. In this regard, I assume that the comparison groups matter decisively for the question which form of populism is supported.

I maintain that subjective disadvantage is positively related to populist attitudes as they seem as a compelling answer to such feelings (Spruyt et al. 2016; Marchlewska et al. 2018; Urbanska & Guimond 2018). The Manichean outlook on society acknowledges the struggles of the ‘ordinary’ people to achieve what they deserve or respectively what the elite betrayed them off. Furthermore, subjective group relative deprivation relates well to the anti-elitist dimension of populism as the disadvantage is regarded as unfair and the result of an illegitimate process. In this regard, populism identifies the elites as responsible actors for the situation (Hameleers & de Vreese 2020). Thus, anti-elitism is the strategy externalise the blame for the frustrating situation. Lastly, relative deprivation is shown to strengthen a positive feeling towards the own in-group (Smith et al. 2012; Pettigrew 2015). As the people-centrism of populism constructs a homogenous and virtuous group, subjective group relative deprivation is likely to resonate well with this conception of a homogenous people. Investigating populist attitudes and relative deprivation, studies show a positive correlation between both concepts (Elchardus & Spruyt 2016; Spruyt et al. 2016; Hameleers & de Vreese 2020).

However, populism as thin ideology lacks detailed statements on specific policy positions and questions on how society is organized in general (Bonikowski 2017). That being

said, populist ideas are fruitfully combined with ideologies such as nativism or socialism. For example, Rooduijn & Akkerman (2017: 200) point out that the way in which populists “color in their people-centrism and anti-elitism is strongly related to their core radical right- and left-wing ideologies”. While I maintain that subjective group relative deprivation is positively related to populist attitudes, one can make distinct arguments for right- and left-wing populist attitudes. Put differently, subjective group relative deprivation can add to the explanation of *thick* populism if the argument takes the host ideology seriously. As relative deprivation is essentially a disadvantaged comparison, the comparison group should be of particular importance. I argue that the group people compare themselves to, influences whether respondents support right- or left-wing populism. The comparison group has to match the conception of the people-centrism and anti-elitism of the respective populism. In short, the group people feel disadvantaged to and the populist conception of reality have to match.

The focus of right-wing populism is mainly on the dangers of immigration and the contention that all non-native elements are a threat to the country’s economy and culture (Mudde 2010). Consequently, I argue that people who feel group relative deprivation compared to immigrants (non-natives) are more likely to support a radical right-wing populist ideology because it constructs its people-centrism and anti-elitism on ethnic categories. If the relevant out-group of relative deprivation is defined on ethnic categories, the respective ‘answer’ is also likely to be defined on ethnic categories (Urbanska & Guimond 2018). Right-wing populism offers such a perspective by taking up the disadvantage of the ‘true’ and ‘good’ native people. More specifically, right-wing populism claims that immigrants are being treated better than the natives thereby acknowledging the perceived disadvantages of the people (Urbanska & Guimond 2018). More importantly, right-wing populism identifies responsible agents for the disadvantage and offers a story that matches the collectively felt disadvantage. The elite favours immigrants compared to the natives and thereby contributes to the perceived disadvantages

(Hochschild 2016; Marchlewska et al. 2018). In addition, research on group relative deprivation has convincingly shown that it increases in-group favouritism and out-group prejudice, such as ethnic prejudice and anti-immigrant attitudes (Pettigrew et al. 2008). Besides, right-wing populism strengthens in-group solidarity by constructing an ethnically homogenous conception of the people that has been betrayed of its rights. Consequently, the conceptions of society, the people and the elite match, so that right-wing populism offers a coherent answer for people who feel relatively deprived compared to immigrants. This answer is based on the populist as well as the nativist part of the radical right-wing populism. Based on this reasoning, I formulate hypothesis 1 as follows:

H1: People who experience group relative deprivation compared to immigrants have higher levels of right-wing populist attitudes.

Opposed to right-wing populism, left-wing populism is characterised by economic topics and in particular the dangers and inequities of (global) capitalism that are threat to the living conditions of the (hard-working) people. Moreover, only the neo-liberal elites and big businesses profit in terms of welfare (March & Mudde 2005; March & Rommerskirchen 2015). Left-wing populism constructs its people-centrism and anti-elitism on the category of (social) class. The people are honest workers defined on the class membership (not ethnicity) and the elite often consists of large businesses and the (neo-liberal) politicians that favour them. Consequently, I argue that people who feel group relative deprivation compared to rich people are more likely to support a radical left-wing populist ideology. If the relevant out-group of relative deprivation is defined in economic terms (i.e. social class), the respective answer is also likely to be defined on such a category. From a left-wing populist perspective, the capitalist system favours the rich at the expense of the hard-working people. Consequently, people who feel relatively deprived compared to the rich find an answer to this situation in a left-wing

populist worldview. First, radical left-wing populism identifies the inequities of (global) capitalism, which produces economic inequality and only increases welfare for the wealthy. Second, the focus on economic equality that is prominent in left-wing populism offers an intervention to change the situation. More specifically, radical left-wing populism identifies responsible agents for the disadvantage and offers a story that matches the group relative deprivation. The elite favours the rich and large businesses compared to the ‘hard-working’ people and thereby contributes to the perceived disadvantage of the ‘good’ people (see Hochschild 2016; Rooduijn & Burgoon 2018). Consequently, the conceptions of society, the people and the elite match, so that left-wing populism offers a coherent answer for people who feel relatively deprived compared to rich people. Based on this reasoning, I formulate hypothesis 2 as follows:

H2: People who experience group relative deprivation compared to rich people have higher levels of left-wing populist attitudes.

Research design

In the remainder of the paper, I put the relationships outlined above to an empirical test. In doing so, I employ original survey data with quota-sampling conducted in April and May 2020 in France, Germany, Italy, Spain, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom. A detailed overview of the survey and descriptive statistics are presented in the supplemental material (Tables S1-2).

To measure the dependent variable, I follow a comprehensive approach of measuring populist attitudes that follows recent advances in the literature (see table 1 for the items). First, to measure the thin ideology of left- and right-wing populist attitudes, I follow recent research that uses three sets of items to measure the respective dimensions of populism: people centrism, anti-elitism, and Manichean outlook. I follow a theoretical approach where the items are

grouped together based on their theoretical dimensions rather than factor analysis. To measure right-wing populism I combine populist, nativist and authoritarian attitudes while for left-wing populism I combine populist and anti-capitalist attitudes. To capture these multidimensional concepts, I employ the approach by Mohrenberg et al. (2021). I sum up the items of each dimension separately and then take the geometric mean of the respective dimensions and rescale the variable from 0 to 1. Mohrenberg et al. (2021) argue that this procedure ensures that people who score 0 on either dimension of populism have an overall 0 on the combined populism scale. This matches my conceptualisation of the respective populisms as each dimension is a necessary part of populism. Consequently, this procedure avoids that high values on one dimension compensate for low values on another dimension (Wuttke et al. 2020). Overall, this results in two populist indexes that range from 0 (no populism) to 1 (high levels of populism).

Table 1 Item wording for populism measures

Variables	Question wording
<i>Populist attitudes</i>	<i>Please indicate whether you agree or disagree with the following statements:</i>
<i>People centrism</i>	“The will of the people should be the highest principle in this country’s politics.” “Politicians don’t have to spend time among ordinary people to do a good job.”
<i>Anti-elitism</i>	“The differences between ordinary people and the ruling elite are much greater than the differences between ordinary people.” “Government officials use their power to try to improve people’s lives.” “I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialised politician.” “The particular interests of the political class negatively affect the welfare of the people.”
<i>Manichean outlook</i>	“You can tell if a person is good or bad if you know their politics.” “The people I disagree with politically are not evil.” “The people I disagree with politically are just misinformed.”
<i>Nativism</i>	<i>There are different opinions about immigrants from other countries who come to settle in [country]. How much do you agree or disagree with each of the following statements?</i> Immigrants take jobs away from the real [country natives] Immigrants increase crime rates. Immigrants generally undermine the national culture of [country].
<i>Authoritarianism</i>	<i>To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?</i> We need strong leaders so that we can live safely in society. The welfare of the national community should take precedence over our own individual interests. Troublemakers should be made to feel that they are not welcome in society.
<i>Anti-capitalism/ Economic equality</i>	Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful. Poor people should have more of a say in politics. 1 Strongly disagree 2 rather disagree 3 neither disagree...nor agree 4 rather agree 5 strongly agree

Notes: Items from Akkerman et al. (2014), Castanho Silva et al. (2018), van Hauwaert et al. (2019), Beierlein et al. (2014).

To capture the subjective disadvantage that has been uncovered by ethnographic studies to play a major role in explaining populism, I propose subjective group-level relative deprivation as an indicator. More specifically, I use three different measures that include different comparison groups to account for the complexities of social identities. I use a general measure indicating that “People like me have been systematically disadvantaged, while other groups have received more than they deserve”. Furthermore, I use two measures that explicitly mention a comparison group. First, immigrants are used as comparison group and the statements states that “People like me have been systematically disadvantaged, while immigrants have received more than they deserve”. Second, rich people form the second comparison group, with the statement being “People like me have been systematically disadvantaged, while rich people have received more than they deserve”. One crucial condition of subjective group-level relative deprivation is that individuals have to see the disadvantage as unfair and that this results in angry resentment (Smith et al. 2012; Smith & Pettigrew 2015). Studies show that this affective component is crucial for relative deprivation to have a strong influence on attitudes or behaviour (Smith et al. 2012; Pettigrew 2015). Thus, I introduce an additional item that measures this affective component: “It bothers me when other groups are undeservedly better off than people like me”. To include this component into the measures I take the geometric mean of each comparison and the affective component to make sure that people who feel disadvantaged but not angry do not display high values.

These measures can be regarded as adequate measures of relative deprivation as they clearly include a comparison between the individual as group member and an unwarranted advantage of an out-group, evoking feelings of entitlement and deservingness. Both are essential characteristics of relative deprivation. Moreover, they resemble other measures where the

individual respondent is not the direct but rather implicit object of comparison (Urbanska & Guimond 2018). The items also advance previous measures which often did not include a specific comparison group (Elchardus & Spruyt 2016; Hameleers & de Vreese 2020) or only used immigrants as a comparison group (Urbanska & Guimond 2018). In addition, the measures do not necessarily confine to an economic disadvantage but could also relate to a lack of attention and recognition as sources of disadvantage (Hochschild 2016).

Naturally, I include a range of control variables that might influence the relationships under study. Existing studies provide evidence that women are less likely to prefer populism (Spierings & Zaslove 2017). Thus, I include sex as control variable with female as the reference category. Age also matters for radical voting and to account for this, I control for age measured in years. A lot of previous research suggests that people's social and economic positions influence whether they support populist parties of the left or the right (Rico & Anduiza 2019). Therefore, I use three measures to account for the dimensionality of social and economic vulnerability: education, income situation and subjective social status (Gidron & Mijs 2019; Gidron & Hall 2020). As attitudinal controls, I include political interest and the left-right self-placement (van Hauwaert & van Kessel 2018). I use the squared term of the left-right self-placement to account for potentially u-shaped effect of politically extreme positions. All summary statistics are presented in the supplemental material (table S2).

Methodologically, I rely on ordinary least squares (OLS) regression models. As in all models respondents are nested within countries, I include country fixed-effects and use robust standard errors. As direct effects of country-level variables are not of interest, the models with country fixed-effects and robust standard errors are superior to multi-level models because they control for all potential differences between the countries.

Empirical results

Table 2 presents the results of the linear regression models on right-wing and left-wing populist attitudes. The left column in table 2 shows the model for right-wing populist attitudes. The results reveal that subjective group relative deprivation compared to immigrants is significantly and positively related to right-wing populist attitudes. Respondents who have the impression that people like them have been disadvantaged and that immigrants have received more than they deserve are more supportive of right-wing populist positions. In terms of substantiality, the increase corresponds to more than one standard deviation which is substantial.

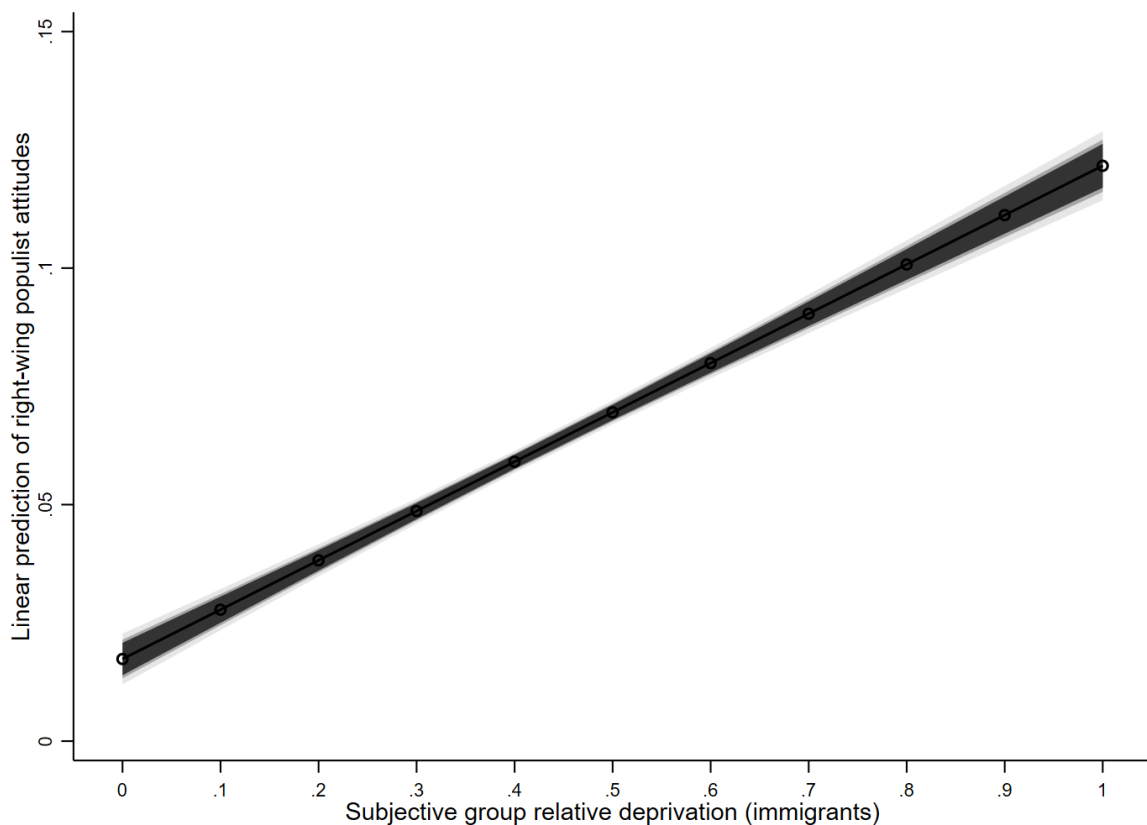
Table 2 Linear regression model for right-wing and left-wing populist attitudes

	DV: Right-wing populist attitudes	DV: Left-wing populist attitudes
Subjective group relative deprivation (immigrants)	0.104*** (0.005)	0.001 (0.008)
Subjective group relative deprivation (rich people)	0.002 (0.008)	0.062*** (0.009)
Subjective group relative deprivation	0.004 (0.008)	0.047*** (0.011)
Age	0.000*** (0.000)	-0.000 (0.000)
Sex		
Male	0.002 (0.002)	0.005 (0.003)
Education		
Upper, post-secondary	-0.008** (0.003)	-0.007 (0.004)
Tertiary	-0.012*** (0.003)	-0.012** (0.004)
Income situation	-0.013** (0.004)	-0.028*** (0.006)
Social Status	-0.002 (0.007)	-0.028** (0.009)
Political interest	0.012** (0.004)	0.019*** (0.006)
Left-right self-placement	-0.077*** (0.016)	-0.240*** (0.022)
Left-right self-placement (squared)	0.137*** (0.017)	0.224*** (0.021)
Constant	0.012 (0.007)	0.123*** (0.010)
Observations	5907	5907
R ²	0.279	0.199
Country fixed-effects	✓	✓

Notes: Robust standard errors in parentheses: * p<0.05, ** p<0.01, *** p<0.001. Reference Category (RF) for sex: female; RF for Education: lower secondary or less.

Figure 1 visualizes the relationship and reveals that respondents who do not feel relatively deprived compared to immigrants score around .02 while those who feel relatively deprived compared to immigrants score .12 on the right-wing populist attitudes scale. Thus, people who feel relatively deprived compared to immigrants score around half a standard deviation above the overall mean on right-wing populist attitudes. The other forms of subjective group relative deprivation do not seem to matter when it comes to right-wing populist attitudes as the coefficients are negligible and indistinguishable from zero. In sum, the results show support for hypothesis 1, i.e. people who feel disadvantaged compared to immigrants have higher levels of right-wing populist attitudes. More importantly, the results show that it is crucial to explicitly account for the group people feel disadvantaged to when investigating the relationship with *thick* populism.

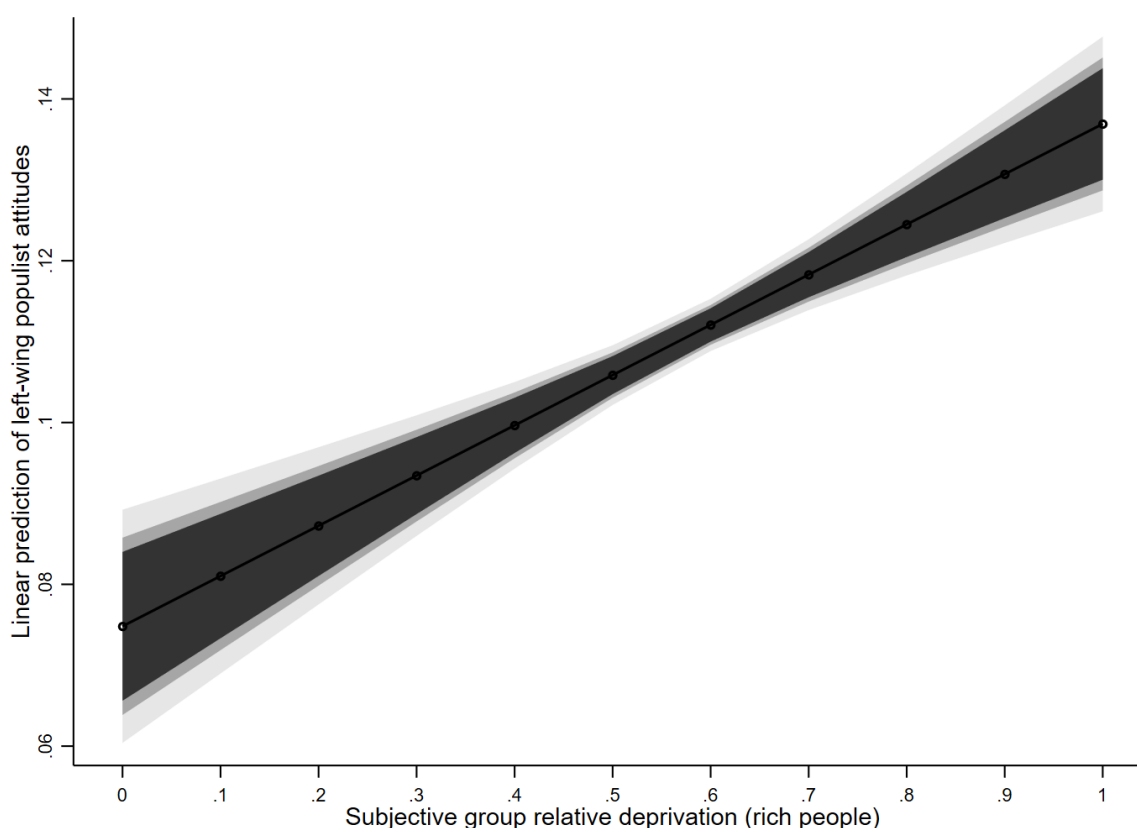
Figure 1 Average marginal effect of subjective group relative deprivation (immigrants) on right-wing populist attitudes



Notes: Estimates are based on the model in the left column of table 2. Displayed are 99% (light-grey area) 95% (dark-grey area) and 90% (black area) confidence intervals.

The right column in table 2 shows the results for left-wing populist attitudes. I find that subjective group relative deprivation compared to rich people is positively related to left-wing populist attitudes. Thus, people who perceive themselves and those like them to be disadvantaged compared to rich people are more likely to have left-wing populist attitudes. In terms of substantiality, the increase corresponds to around 60% of a standard deviation.

Figure 2 Average marginal effect of subjective group relative deprivation (rich people) on left-wing populist attitudes

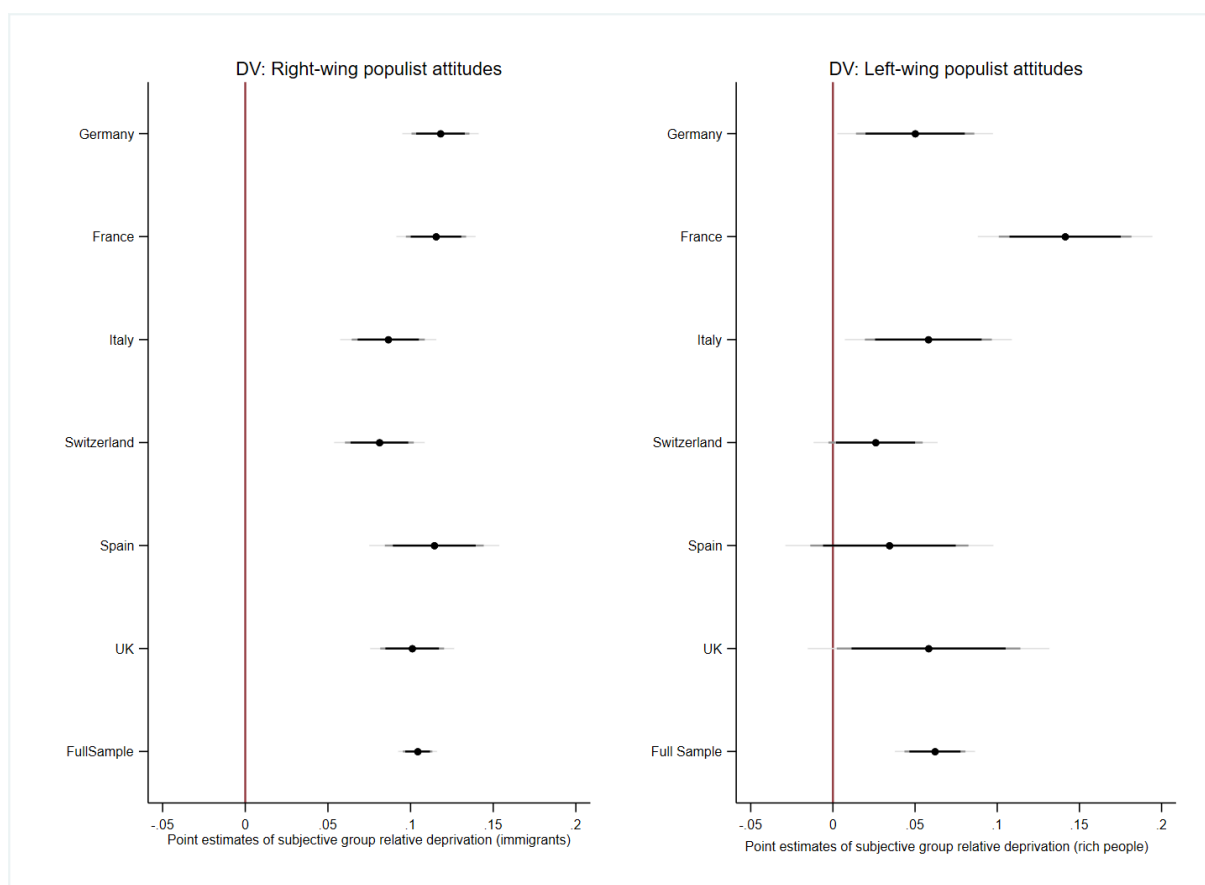


Notes: Estimates are based on the model in the right column of table 2. Displayed are 99% (light-grey area) 95% (dark-grey area) and 90% (black area) confidence intervals.

Figure 2 visualizes this relationship and reveals that respondents who do not feel relatively deprived compared to rich people score around .07 while those who feel relatively deprived compared to rich people score .13 on the left-wing populist attitudes scale. Thus, respondents who feel relatively deprived compared to rich people score around a third of a standard deviation above the overall mean on left-wing populist attitudes. With regard to the other forms of relative deprivation, the results show that relative deprivation without a concrete

comparison group is also positively related to left-wing populist attitudes. This suggests that other comparison groups might play a role for left-wing populism. As radical left populism focuses on the people in general and not just the working class or the proletariat other comparison groups might be salient as well (Stavrakakis & Katsambekis 2014). Yet, it is clear that immigrants are not a relevant comparison group as the results show that people who perceive themselves and those like them to be disadvantaged compared to immigrants are not more likely to support left-wing populist positions. Summing up, the results show support for hypothesis 2, i.e. people who feel disadvantaged compared to rich people have higher levels of right-wing populist attitudes. More importantly, immigrants as a comparison group do not play an important role for the supporters of left-wing populism.

Figure 3 Coefficient plot for the country-wise relationship between different forms of subjective group-level relative deprivation and right-wing populist attitudes and left-wing populist attitudes



Notes: Estimates are based on the models in tables S5-S6 in the supplemental mate. Displayed are 99% (light grey bars) and 95% (dark grey bars) and 90% (black bars) confidence intervals.

One important aspect of cross-country analyses is whether the relationships also hold across the countries included in the study. Thus, I re-estimate the models country-wise to see whether the relationship of the pooled sample holds in every country in the sample. The left panel in figure 2 shows the results of the country-wise regressions for right-wing populist attitudes and the point estimates for subjective group relative deprivation compared to immigrants. Indeed, the relationship between subjective group relative deprivation compared to immigrants and right-wing populist attitudes is positive and significant in all six countries (full models in table S3). Moreover, the coefficients are also similar in size around one standard deviation.

For left-wing populist attitudes the right panel in figure 3 shows the results for the country-wise regressions and the point estimates for subjective group relative deprivation compared to rich people. The relationship is positive and significant in all countries except Spain. In general, the coefficients are a little bit smaller than in the full sample with the exception of France where the coefficient is more than double the size (see table S4).

A short note on the control variables for the different forms of populism: people with upper-secondary and tertiary education and those who live more comfortably on their income have lower levels of right-wing populist attitudes. Moreover, older respondents score higher on right-wing populist attitudes. Additionally, interest in politics is positively and significantly related to right-wing populist attitudes. Lastly, left-right self-placement shows a slightly u-shaped relationship. Graphically exploring this relationship reveals that those who place themselves more to the political right score higher on right-wing populist attitudes than those on the left (see left panel figure S1). Yet, those on the “extreme” left score higher than those in the middle. Although surprising this might point to the fact that the thin ideology of populism is attractive for both political extremes (Rooduijn & Akkerman 2017).

For left-wing populism, the control variables are mainly the same. Left-wing populist attitudes are held by those that are less educated and less well-off. Here I also find a negative effect for subjective social status. As other populists, they are interested in politics. Again, we find u-shaped relationship. Graphically exploring this relationship reveals that those who place themselves more to the political left score higher on left-wing populist attitudes than those on the right (see right panel figure S1). Yet, those on the “extreme” right score higher than those in the middle.

Overall, the analyses support the idea that subjective group relative deprivation is positively related to right-wing and left-wing populist attitudes. More importantly, the analyses also revealed that the group people feel themselves disadvantaged to matters decisively for which form of populism they support. Subjective group relative deprivation compared to immigrants is strongly and positively related to right-wing populist attitudes while for left-wing populist attitudes subjective group relative deprivation compared to rich people matters.

Discussion

Populism is a highly debated topic and the controversies about its definition, explanation and consequences transcend the academic sphere. Aside from the economic and cultural explanations of populism, recent ethnographic research has found that supporters of populism might feel as “strangers in their own land” who are disadvantaged and pushed to the fringes of society not only in economic and cultural, but also in social terms. In this paper, I use original survey data to explore the explanatory value of subjective group relative deprivation for left-wing and right-wing populist attitudes. To that end, I find that subjective group relative deprivation compared to immigrants is positively related to right-wing populist attitudes while this conclusion does not hold for left-wing populism. On the contrary, for left-wing populist attitudes perceived disadvantages compared to rich people are the dominant predictor

In sum, this paper offers a comparative test of the relationship between different forms subjective group relative deprivation and two the most dominant forms of populism in Europe. Future studies should continue to investigate the path outlined in this paper. First, populism and (perceived) disadvantage and dissatisfaction seem to be inherently related (Rooduijn et al. 2016), a dynamic account of the relationship between subjective relative deprivation and populism is however missing (but see Filsinger 2020). This study also only offers a cross-sectional analysis, which means that I cannot make any causal claims with regard to tested relationships. Therefore, future studies should use time-series or experimental data to shed light on this dynamic relationship (Filsinger 2020). Second, while the six countries investigated in this study offer good variation in terms of political and institutional arrangements and further differ in regard to the success of populist parties, future studies should broaden the scope of their analysis beyond these six countries to see how the findings travel across other contexts. Third, the findings for left-wing populist attitudes should further be analysed as the results are less consistent. This could potentially be attributed to the items used to measure the radical left ideology and/or the variety of left-wing populism in the countries under study. Thus, future studies should dive deeper into the relationship between perceived disadvantages and left-wing populism. This is particularly important as for left-wing populism there is still a debate on how inclusive or exclusive this form of populism is (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser 2013; Sanders et al. 2017). Depending on the degree exclusion perceived disadvantages compared to relevant out-groups might play a more or less important role. Fourth, future studies could further investigate the relationships tested above by capitalizing on the social identity theory by Tajfel (1974) and Tajfel & Turner (1979). In this vein, people who strongly identify with their in-group should show a stronger effect of subjective group relative deprivation on populist attitudes as identification with the in-group makes the perceived disadvantage more salient (van Zomeren et al. 2008). Thus, such a moderating role of in-group identification should be taken up by future research.

Despite its shortcomings, this paper moves the scholarly literature forward in at least three important ways. First, I offer a quantitative operationalisation of recent ethnographic studies by exploring the explanatory value of subjective group relative deprivation for populist attitudes. Second, this study goes beyond many previous studies by explicitly investigating left- and right-wing populist attitudes thereby advancing our understanding of the most dominant forms of populism in Europe. In doing so, I contribute to the explanation of populism in general by offering an explanatory approach that is in line with other studies that propose explanations that combine structural economic grievances and cultural threat perceptions (Gidron and Hall, 2020; Carreras et al., 2019; Rhodes-Purdy et al., 2020). Third, I offer cross-country evidence on the relationship between subjective relative deprivation and different forms of populist attitudes which has to date only been studied in a few single country studies with limited items.

Online supplemental material to: “Disadvantaged compared to whom? The relationship between different forms of subjective relative deprivation and left- and right-wing populist attitudes.”

Table S1: Detailed description of the survey

Survey period	April 17, 2020/May 11,2020
Target population	Residents aged 18 years or older in Germany, France, Italy, Switzerland, Spain and the United Kingdom
Survey mode	Online
Sample size	6,028 respondents (target sample size: 1,000 per country)
Quotas	Age, Sex, Education (language for Switzerland)
Sampling	Qualtrics access panel
Interview language	German, French, Italian, Spanish, English
Response rate	8.71% (RR5/6)*
Institute	Qualtrics

*The American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR) (2016). *Standard Definitions: Final Dispositions of Case Codes and Outcome Rates for Surveys*. Online: https://www.aapor.org/AAPOR_Main/media/publications/Standard-Definitions20169theditionfinal.pdf [accessed: 15.10.2020].

Table S2 Summary statistics

	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Right-wing populist attitudes	5,907	.07	.09	0	1
Left-wing populist attitudes	5,907	.11	.11	0	1
Subjective group relative deprivation (immigrants)	5,907	.48	.32	0	1
Subjective group relative deprivation (rich people)	5,907	.58	.29	0	1
Subjective group relative deprivation	5,907	.54	.29	0	1
Age	5,907	48.57	16.53	18	88
Male	5,907	.5	.5	0	1
Education	5,907	2.1	.78	1	3
Primary, lower secondary	1,505				
Upper, post-secondary	2,292				
Tertiary	2,110				
Income situation	5,907	.48	.27	0	1
Social status	5,907	.53	.19	0	1
Left-right self-placement	5,907	.49	.24	0	1
Political interest	5,907	.61	.29	0	1
Observations	5,907				

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