Assessment of Citizens' Populist Orientations: Development and Validation of the POPulist ORientation (POPOR) Scale

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17 April 2024

1 **Assessment of Citizens' Populist Orientations: Development and Validation of the POPulist ORientation**

2 **(POPOR) Scale**

3

4 **Abstract**

5 *Objectives.* We developed and validated the POPulist ORientation (POPOR) Scale (composed of six 5-category items),

6 operationalizing populist orientation as a unidimensional construct composed of 6 facets: (a) anti- economic, financial,

7 and intellectual establishment attitude; (b) anti-political establishment; (c) conception of the people as a homogeneous

8 and virtuous entity; (d) consideration of the people as legitimated to take part directly in political decision-making

9 processes; (e) need for a strong leader; and (f) loss of relevance of the traditional ideologies. To prevent response bias,

10 we gave the POPOR Scale a forced-choice format and a balanced structure.

11 *Method*. We surveyed a quota sample of 1,348 Italians extracted from the general population and analyzed the structure

12 of the scale and its convergent validity via confirmatory factor analysis.

13 *Results*. The POPOR Scale showed a unidimensional structure and a good convergent validity. Supplemental analyses

14 showed its structural invariance across gender, age, education, and area of residence.

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16 *Keywords*: Populism; Measurement; Attitudes

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1 Introduction

2 Populism is a crucial feature of contemporary democracies. In the US 2016 presidential election, Donald Trump stood

3 out as a populist *par excellence* (Young, Ziemer, & Jackson, 2019). In Europe, the average share of the populist vote in

4 national and European parliamentary elections has more than doubled since the 1960s and the share of seats has tripled

5 (Inglehart & Norris 2017). Populist leaders such as Le Pen in France, Hofer in Austria, Tsipras in Greece, Iglesias in

6 Spain, Farage in the UK and Wilders in the Netherlands are prominent. Italy is no exception. In recent decades, all

7 Italian parties have shown signs of populism (Caiani & Graziano 2016). In the 2018 Italian general election, nearly 50%

8 of votes favored two overtly populist parties: Lega and the Five Star Movement (M5S) (Chiaramonte et al. 2018).

9   Many explanations of this growing populist trend focus on the 'supply side' of politics, mainly on populist

10 ideology, constitutional changes and party strategies and rhetoric (e.g., Lisi & Borghetto 2019). The research on the

11 'demand side' of populism has mainly analyzed the role of actual or perceived economic insecurity (e.g. Guiso, Herrera

12 & Morelli 2017) and of anti-immigrant attitudes (e.g. Van Assche et al. 2018) in fuelling the resentment against the

13 ruling class and the disposition to accept anti-establishment, nativist, and xenophobic appeals. However, this line of

14 research tends to focus on the probability that citizens will vote for populist parties or candidates (e.g., Oesch 2008),

15 thus creating an artificial dichotomization between populist and non-populist parties that neglect differences in the

16 levels of populist orientation of their voters. Recently, a growing corpus of studies analyzed the role of voters' populist

17 orientations, values and predispositions in fueling the support for populist parties (e.g., Hameleers, & de Vreese 2018;

18 Stanley 2011; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2018).

19   Understanding the role of such orientations is a critical task to account for the present populist escalation and its

20 political and cultural consequences, since the individual proneness could be more widespread than populist votes in the

21 general population (Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser 2014). However, a necessary precondition for achieving this goal is

22 the availability of an instrument capable of measuring it appropriately. The extant literature on this subject has profound

23 methodological limitations. Consequently, in the present study, we develop and validate a novel POPulist ORientation

24 (POPOR) Scale to measure populist proneness in the general population.

25 What Is Populism?

26 A broad consensus on the definition of the term 'populism' is still lacking. An often cited definition is that formulated

27 by Mudde (2007, p. 23), who stated that populism is "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately

28 separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite' and which argues

29 that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people".

30   This definition points out the emergence of a vertical political conflict, setting the virtuous people against the

31 corrupt political and social élites, instead of the traditional horizontal conflicts derived from different interest groups all

belonging to the people. This us/them antagonism gives rise to two typical and complementary representations. On the one hand, institutional personalities, intellectuals and, in general, individuals holding formal and informal positions of power are regarded as true enemies of ordinary people, because they share the motivation to place their own advantage ahead of the people's interest (Tarchi 2015). Thus, populists take a strong stance against the political, economic, and intellectual establishment. On the other hand, the homogeneous and negative representation of the élites is juxtaposed with an equally homogenous although positive representation of the ordinary people, conceived as an organic and virtuous entity sharing non-conflicting interests and goals. The people are idealized as naturally honest and as depositary of simple and immediate common sense (Taguieff 2002).

Other scholars (e.g. Betz & Johnson 2004; Mény & Surel 2002; Taggart 2000) have pointed out that, beyond the people/elites opposition and the anti-establishment attitude, other features have to be added as typical of the populist phenomenon. In particular, at the core of the populist orientations stands the idea that, by virtue of its positive nature, the people should exert directly their political sovereignty, getting rid of every intermediation. The assertion of the people's sovereignty, in conjunction with the adversity towards all kinds of representative bodies, would imply universal political participation in political decision-making. Nevertheless, this goal of universal participation is at odds with its practical actualization. Thus, according to Mudde (2004) himself, another crucial feature of populism is the need for a strong leader, embodying the people's interest, speaking in its name and expressing its will organically (e.g., Kriesi 2014; Kriesi & Pappas 2015). In other words, in the populist representation of the political world, the leader is 'one with the people', based on a shared identity and fate (Albertazzi & McDonnel 2008; Oliver & Rahn 2016). This reduces the psychological distance between the leader and the followers, but jeopardizes the main principles of liberal democracy, which is based on a complex equilibrium of institutional checks and balances. Thus, populism can be labelled as 'democratic illiberalism' (Pappas 2013).

In addition, according to Mény and Surel (2002), leadership centrality and a parallel ideological impoverishment are at the origin of the development of populist phenomena. Indeed, the last main feature of populism is the weakness of its ideological content, stemming from the conviction that politics should be guided *in primis* by the people's common sense and from the idea that the traditional ideologies have become obsolete and outdated. Thus, populism needs to borrow ideological content from existing ideologies to become stronger and, consequently, right-wing and left-wing forms of populism exist (Mudde 2007). This distinction is mainly rooted in their different conception of the source of people's homogeneity: ethnic origin (i.e., the nation) for the former and class origin (i.e., the common people) for the latter (Kriesi 2014). However, populism has its own ideological substance, beyond its derivatives from other ideologies, as a distinct set of beliefs, less articulated than traditional ideologies, but expressing citizens' responses to the crisis of the legitimacy of liberal democracy (Hawkins, Read, & Pauwels 2017).

1   The six features illustrated above could be individually observed in political programs or leaders' discourses

2   (e.g. the appeal to the people), without necessarily falling into a genuine populist frame. On the contrary, we are facing

3   genuine populism only when all of them are strictly interrelated and essential facets of the narrative of leaders or

4   political movements. When individual political orientations are concerned, the same common denominator could

5   converge in a consistent and integrated system of attitudes and beliefs held by citizens particularly attracted by, and

6   fueling, this rhetoric. We contend that populism can be studied as a citizens' orientation composed of the six

7   inextricable facets above, which should be empirically operationalized to measure a unique phenomenon.

8   **Limitations of the Extant Scales of Populist Orientations**

9   The idea that populist orientation can be operationalized as a set of attitudes and beliefs is not new. To the best of our

10   knowledge, 10 scales assessing individual populist orientation exist. Table 1 reports their main characteristics and the

11   methodological details of their validation.

12   TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE

13   From a conceptual point of view, there is no consensus as to whether populist orientations are uni- or multi-

14   dimensional. Indeed, most scales operationalize populism as a unidimensional construct, whereas three of them claim

15   for 2 or 3 separate dimensions. Schulz et al. (2016) proposed three dimensions (anti-establishment attitudes, demand for

16   people sovereignty, and belief in homogeneity of the people) as parts of a higher order concept of populism. However,

17   every facet taken alone may be shared also by non-populists, thus none of them alone is able to distinguish populist

18   attitudes from other political attitudes. Actually, Schulz et al. (2016) also claim that a full populist is assumed to hold all

19   the three facets, thus weakening the conceptual support for separate dimensions. In the other cases, separate dimensions

20   tap attitudes that generate, or are consequential of, populism, such as anti-immigrant stances (Hammlers & DeVreese,

21   2018) or sentiments of national affiliation (Oliver & Rahn, 2016). In sum, we believe that, though constituted by a

22   number of facets, a true populist orientation can be detected only when all the defining facets are expressed by

23   individuals.

24   From a methodological point of view, all the existing scales are reasonably short: the number of their items

25   ranges from 4 (Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde 2012) to 12 (Oliver & Rahn 2016; Schultz et al. 2018). This is definitely a

26   plus, because the shorter the scale, the easier its administration and the lower the probability of leading to inaccurate

27   information (Schuman & Presser 1981). However, they have relevant methodological limitations.

28   First, with the exception of the one proposed by Oliver and Rahn (2016), that has two thirds of the items

29   structured in a Likert format, they are Likert scales. We contend that this format is sub-optimal when assessing

30   empirically populist orientations. The present opinion climate is rather hostile towards political parties and élites (e.g.,

31   Bos, Sheets, & Boomgaarden 2018). Therefore, scales asking participants how much they agree with statements such as

'Politicians talk too much and take too little action' (Shultz et al. 2017) or 'The particular interests of the political class negatively affect the welfare of the people' (Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel 2018) plausibly elicit superficial responses, conforming to the present political *zeitgeist* (McGee 1962). Thus, these scales could lead respondents to use satisficing more than optimizing cognitive processes, putting validity at risk (Tourangeau & Rasinski 1988).

Second, some of their items are not very focused or discriminant. For instance, items such as 'The politicians in the Dutch Parliament need to follow the will of the people'(Akkerman et al. 2013) and 'The ordinary people should have more influence in political decision making than corporations that only want to make profits' (Hammelers & de Vreese 2018) – substantially analogous items are part of the other available scales – plausibly lack in validity, because they could be given an affirmative response both by populists and by advocates of representative democracy. Moreover, it is debatable that item such as 'How important is being an American to who you are?' and 'When it comes to really important questions, scientific facts don't help very much' (Oliver & Rahn, 2016) actually tap into the core of populist orientations. Indeed, the first realistically measures national identity (Huddy & Khatib, 2007) and the second looks like being strictly linked with extrinsic religiousness (Van Camp, Barden, & Sloan 2016).

Third, the large majority of the existing scales is not balanced – i.e., all of their items are worded in the populist direction. This constitutes a markedly severe limitation. Since the methodological critiques to Adorno et al.'s F Scale (1950), research has shown that non-balanced scales cannot help disentangling people high in the construct under study from respondents giving response sets (e.g., Hyman & Sheatsley 1954). In Ray's (1983) words, 'A person with a high F score might be simply a careless responder rather than a genuine fascist' (p. 82).

Fourth, the analyses used to test the dimensionality of some of the existing scales are suboptimal. Indeed, the factorial structure has been typically assessed in terms of Cronbach's alpha and/or via exploratory factor analysis. However, according to the present standards of research, only more advanced and diagnostic methodological approaches can lead to reliable and valid scales (e.g., van der Linden and Hambleton 1997). This is particularly relevant as concerns Akkerman et al.'s (2013) scale, that is largely the most cited one. In the dataset we have analyzed, Akkerman et al.'s scale was available. Emblematically, though the authors of this scale argued it to be unidimensional, confirmatory factor analyses, i.e., a technique much more discriminant and informative than that Akkerman and colleagues used, did not yield a unidimensional structure, $CFI = .78$, $RSMR = .05$. According to Winkler, Kanouse, and Ware (1982), genuinely unidimensional balanced scales can appear non-unidimensional when the data are partially distorted by a response set, as often happens in samples of the general population (Curran 2016). Within the confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) approach, it is possible to test whether a response set distorts the data and, in this case, to correct this distortion by resorting to Marsh's (1989) correlated uniqueness (CU) approach. The CU approach

consists in controlling the error variance due to response sets by correlating the errors of the con-trait items. However, given its non-balanced structure, we could not perform this check, nor—in the case of its presence—correct the data.

The Present Study

Goals and Hypotheses

To overcome the limitations above, we developed the POPOR Scale, a new unidimensional scale covering all of the semantic areas of populist orientation illustrated above and structured into a format that should minimize the methodological biases plausibly distorting the existing scales. We validated the POPOR Scale by testing its factorial structure and its convergent validity. Our work was driven by five main criteria.

First, to operationalize all of the main aspects of populist orientation, the scale we propose addressed the six facets of populist orientation illustrated above: (a) economic, financial, and intellectual anti-establishment attitudes (b) political anti-establishment attitudes; (c) conception of the people as a homogeneous and virtuous entity, (d) consideration of the people as legitimated to take part directly in political decision-making processes; (e) need for a strong leader; and (f) loss of relevance of the traditional ideologies. Since most scholars consider these six facets as inextricably related, and all needed to define populist orientations distinct from other political attitudes, we expected a unidimensional factorial structure (H1).

Second, to develop a short scale, easy to administer to samples from the general population, we chose to measure each of the construct's facets using two indicators.

Third, to minimize the risk of obtaining stereotyped responses, superficially resounding with the current anti-political *zeitgeist*, we followed Heineman's (1953) classic suggestion and chose a forced-choice format inviting participants to express their preference between two opposing opinions using a 5-not-labelled category format. To prevent a possible impression management bias (Paulhus 1984), we made the two opposing opinions legitimate using a presentation such as: 'Some people say that… (opinion A). Others say that… (opinion B). Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?' Heineman (1953) showed this format to be superior to the Likert format, because it generates more balanced distributions and more valid estimates. In addition, this format reduces participants' tendency to give responses that are superficially coherent with the *zeitgeist* and to formulate answers based on satisficing cognitive processes (Pavsic & Pitrone 2000). Consistent with this, in many relevant cross-national public opinion surveys (e.g., the European Social Survey, ESS, and the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems, CSES), this formulation of items and scales is used increasingly.

Fourth, we wanted to give the POPOR Scale a balanced structure, placing the opinion expressing populism on the left in half of the items and on the right in the other half. Balanced (vs. not balanced) scales have some relevant advantages: (a) they help to maintain participants' attention; (b) they help to identify participants giving a response set;

1 and (c) they allow detection and correction of the bias resulting from response sets, by using structural equations

2 modelling (SEM).

3   Fifth, consistent with the most convincing literature on this topic, according to which only advanced and

4 diagnostic methodological approaches can lead to high-quality scales (e.g., van der Linden & Hambleton 1997), we

5 wanted to test the psychometric characteristics of the POPOR Scale via the SEM approach. Beyond verifying the

6 scale's unidimensionality, we also tested its convergent validity, by analyzing the relations between the POPOR Scale

7 and a series of variables that, according to the literature, are associated with populist orientation. We expected the

8 POPOR scale to show positive associations with: (a) voting for the two most populist Italian parties – i.e., Lega and

9 M5S (Corbetta et al. 2018) (H2); (b) perceived economic insecurity (Guiso, Herrera & Morelli 2017) (H3); (c) a

10 negative attitude towards immigration (Van Assche et al. 2018) (H4); and (d) a negative attitude towards the European

11 Union (EU) (Tsatsanis, Andreadis, & Teperoglu 2018) (H5).

12 **Materials and Methods**

13 *Context*

14 We performed this study within the 2018 'Italian National Election Studies' (Itanes: see www.itanes.org/en) research on

15 the political attitudes and voting behavior of Italians in the 2018 national election.

16 *Participants and Data Cleaning*

17 We interviewed a quota panel composed of 1,564 people, stratified by gender, age, and area of residence. Participants

18 were interviewed twice, both times using the Computer-Assisted Web Interviews (CAWI) method. The CAWI

19 approach allowed us to record the response time for each item. The first interview was performed about a month before

20 the election and the second was performed in the month after the election.

21   When surveying samples from the general population, preliminary data cleaning is germane, to exclude careless

22 and inconsistent participants (McGrath et al. 2010), such as those who showed insufficient effort responding (Huang et

23 al. 2012). This is particularly relevant in web surveys, because the lack of control on the environment, the complete

24 anonymity of the interviewees, and the ease and speed of responding can make the data inaccurate (Johnson 2005).

25 Keeping in the analyses respondents providing inaccurate data would artificially attenuate the associations between the

26 variables, lower the reliability of the scales, lead to distorted factorial solutions, and lower the statistical power of the

27 predictive models (Schneider, May, & Stone 2018).

28   Two main classes of respondents should be excluded. First, those whose responses are too fast to be accurate

29 (Curran 2016). Based on a pilot study showing that reading the items of the POPOR Scale required at least 60 seconds,

30 we deleted the 182 participants who responded in a shorter time. Second, those giving inconsistent responses (Schuman

31 & Presser 1981). Thus, we deleted the 34 participants who gave the same score for all 12 items of the scale, before

1 reversing the items with the populist option on the left. The resulting dataset was composed of 1,348 participants

2 (46.7% men, M_{age} = 48.66, SD = 13.07).

3 **Measures**

4 We used the following sets of questions from a larger questionnaire, available from the corresponding author.

5   *Akkerman et al's (2013) scale*. We administered our participants the Italian translation Akkerman and

6 colleagues' (2013) 8-item not-balanced scale measuring populist orientations.

7   *POPOR Scale.* Based on the literature above, we isolated 12 pairs of opposing opinions covering the six facets

8 illustrated above. In particular, the 'anti-establishment' semantic area included four opposing opinions referring to

9 economic, financial and intellectual anti-establishment attitudes and to political anti-establishment attitudes. The

10 'people' semantic area included four opposing opinions referring to the people's homogeneity and virtue and to the

11 people's sovereignty. Finally, both the 'leader' and 'ideology' areas included two sets of opposing opinions referring to

12 the need for a strong leader and to the conviction that the traditional political ideologies are no longer needed for

13 orienting political actions. For each pair of opinions, we asked participants to place themselves according to which

14 statement they tended to agree with, by marking one of the boxes labelled from 1 to 5, where 1 meant complete

15 agreement with the first statement and 5 meant complete agreement with the second statement. We administered the

16 scale in the post-electoral survey. The 12 items and their frequency are reported in Table 2, both in Italian and in

17 English.

18   TABLE 2 ABOUT HERE

19   *Variables Used to Test the Convergent Validity of the POPOR Scale*. In the post-electoral survey, we asked

20 participants to declare the party they voted for in the 2018 Italian national election. Based on Corbetta et al. (2018), we

21 computed a dummy variable, contrasting voters for M5S and Lega to participants who voted for the other parties or did

22 not cast a vote. In the pre-electoral survey, we assessed perceived economic insecurity via two variables, taken from the

23 Eurobarometer: (a) 'How do you think the general economic situation in the country has changed over the last 12

24 months? (lot better, better, same, little worse, lot worse, DK)'; and (b) 'How do you expect the general economic

25 situation in this country to develop over the next 12 months? (lot better, better, same, little worse, lot worse, DK)'. We

26 assessed participants' attitude towards immigration in the pre-electoral survey via the following, the first two taken

27 from the ESS and the third from the 2013 ITANES post-electoral survey: (a) 'Would you say it is generally bad or good

28 for Italy's economy that people come to live here from other countries?' (10-point scale); (b) 'Would you say it is

29 generally bad or good for Italy's culture that people come to live here from other countries?' (10-point scale); and (c)

30 'Some people say that we receive too many immigrants. Others say that we can receive many more. Suppose these

1 people are at the extreme of the following scale. Of course, others have intermediate opinions. Where would you place

2 your opinion?' (7-point scale). High scores indicated a negative attitude towards immigration.

3   Finally, in the pre-electoral survey, we assessed participants' attitude towards the European Union (EU) via the

4 following 3-category Eurobarometer items: (a) 'Generally speaking, do you think that Italy's membership of the EU is a

5 good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad, DK'; and (b) 'Generally speaking, do you think that having the euro is a

6 good or a bad thing for your country? (a good thing, a bad thing, neither good nor bad, DK)'. High scores indicated a

7 negative attitude towards the EU.

8 *Data Analyses*

9 We tested the dimensionality of the POPOR Scale via a series of CFAs, ML estimation). Subsequently, we tested its

10 convergent validity by analyzing its associations with participants' vote, actual and perceived economic insecurity and

11 attitude towards immigration and the EU via a series of SEMs. We performed all of these analyses using MPlus (ML

12 estimation). We evaluated the fit of our models using the *CFI* and the *RMSR*. Based on Hu and Bentler (1999), we

13 considered satisfactory the models with a *CFI* > .90 and the *SRMR* < .08. Finally, in supplementary analyses (available

14 as online material) we tested its structural invariance across participants' gender, age, education, and area of residence.

15 **Results**

16 *Factorial Structure of the POPOR Scale*

17 After performing eight CFAs, we obtained a 6-item, perfectly balanced, POPOR Scale, with one item measuring each of

18 the POPOR facets. Table 3 reports the criteria used to choose the models we have tested, their main psychometric

19 characteristics and their fit indices. To save space, we do not report all of the results analytically. More details are

20 available from the corresponding author.

21   TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE

22   A first CFA (Model 1) showed that 11 out of 12 factorial loadings were significant, while that of Item 5 was not,

23 $p = .073$. A second CFA (Model 2), performed after deleting Item 5, led to significant saturations only. However, the fit

24 of the model was not satisfactory. A new model, tested by resorting to the CU approach (Model 3) led the factorial

25 loading of Item 12 to lose its significance. A new CFA performed after deleting this item (Model 4) led to a model with

26 significant loadings only. However, its fit was still not satisfactory. Based on an inspection of the modification indices,

27 we re-ran the model after deleting Item 9, which showed the worst fit to the model (Model 5). The model showed an

28 adequate fit. However, the resulting scale was not perfectly balanced, because it was composed of 5 items with high

29 scores expressing a high populist orientation and of 4 items with high scores expressing a low populist orientation.

30 Moreover, some of the POPOR facets were measured by one item, and some by two. Thus, based on the convergence of

31 substantive and statistic criteria, we deleted Item 2 (Model 6), Item 7 (Model7), and Item 3 (Model 8). Consistent with

1   H1, the resulting scale was unidimensional, had significant loadings only (see Table 4), and showed a good fit (see the

2   last line of Table 3). Each of the POPOR facets was measured by one item. Thus, we considered it as the POPOR Scale

3   to be subjected to the tests of convergent validity.

4   TABLE 4 ABOUT HERE

5   ***Convergent Validity Tests***

6   We tested the convergent validity of the POPOR Scale via a SEM in which, controlling for participants' gender, age,

7   and education, we regressed participants' POPOR score on perceived economic insecurity, attitude towards

8   immigration, and attitude towards the European Union. Moreover, we used participants' POPOR scores as predictors of

9   their vote (0 = the participant did not vote for a populist party, 1 = the participant voted for a populist party) on their

10   POPOR score. In the SEM, with the exception of participants' vote, that was measured using a single item, we modelled

11   all of these constructs as latent variables. Figure 1 shows the results of the model. Consistent with H2, the POPOR Scale

12   significantly predicted the dummy variable expressing having vs. not having voted for a populist party in the 2018

13   Italian national election, R^2 = .24. Moreover, respectively consistent with H3, H4, and H5, POPOR showed positive

14   associations with perceived economic insecurity, with a negative attitude towards immigration, and with a negative

15   attitude towards the European Union, R^2 = .66.

16   FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE

17   Supplementary analyses, presented in the online material (see Table A1), showed the POPOR scale to be

18   structurally invariant across participants' gender, age, education, and area of residence.

19   **Discussion**

20   After years of nearly exclusive focus on the 'supply side' of populism, scholars recently began to analyze its 'demand

21   side', and a growing interest developed regarding citizens' populist orientations (e.g., Bos et al., 2018). A populist

22   orientation could be functional for citizens because it provides symbolic meanings and responses to the present

23   situation, in particular as (a) a Manichean group distinction used to attribute responsibility of their personal feelings of

24   uncertainty and lack of control to salient outgroups such as 'the elite' or 'the immigrants'; and (b) in the hope of

25   overcoming these personal feelings of anguish through their vote (Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck 2016).

26   Thus, the need for studying such orientation is becoming more and more relevant in times and contexts characterized by

27   the rising of uncertainty stemming from the multifaceted threats perceived by public opinion in Western countries

28   (Kakkar & Sivanathan 2017).

29   There is wide consensus regarding the idea that people's populist orientation can be measured (Akkerman et al.

30   2013). However, the existing scales of populism have some relevant theoretical and methodological limitations.

31   Notably, our analyses showed that Akkermann et al's (2013) scale, which is the most widely used scale of populist

orientations, though considered unidimensional by its authors, did not show a unidimensional structure. Thus, it lacked construct validity, and could hardly be suggested as a good measure of populist orientation. To overcome these limitations, in this study, we have developed and validated the POPulist ORientation (POPOR) Scale across a wide sample of the Italian population over 18 years. The POPOR Scale is composed of six forced-choice items and is balanced against any response set. Confirmatory factor analyses showed that the POPOR Scale has a unidimensional structure, has good convergent validity and is invariant across participants' sex, age, education and area of residence.

The POPOR Scale has some strong points, because it operationalizes all of the main facets of people's populist orientation detected in the literature. Moreover, it is short, unidimensional, balanced, valid, invariant across the main socio-demographic variables, and it has been validated via advanced and complete psychometric procedures. Indeed, beyond testing its factorial structure via confirmatory factor analysis, we have tested the POPOR Scale's convergent validity. This was the first time that formal tests of validity were performed in a scale focused on the 'demand side' of populism, as eloquently witnessed in Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove's concluding remarks: having demonstrated that it is possible to measure populism in individuals, it will be interesting to see whether populist attitudes correlate with other attitudes' (p. 1346). The detection of its structural invariance (results available in the online supplemental material) is another specific plus of the POPOR Scale, in that it is the only scale measuring populist orientations that underwent such test.

The format of the POPOR Scale, although unusual, is probably its most distinctive and convincing characteristic. The use of forced-choice items helped participants, at least in part, to resort to optimizing, as opposed to satisficing, cognitive process when responding to the scale (Pavsic & Pitrone 2000), thus leading them to give more valid responses (Heineman 1953). The POPOR Scale has a balanced format (half of its forced-choice items have the populist opinion on their left and the other half on their right). Thus, in contrast to what happens in most of the existing scales of populism, high POPOR scores can be attributed to high levels of populism and not to an acquiescent response set. The superiority of our balanced format vs. the non-balanced format of the standard scales of populism manifested itself in helping us to detect 34 participants who gave the same response to all of the original (i.e., before recoding the items with the populist opinion on the left) 12 POPOR items, even if this led them to give contradictory responses. Moreover, it allowed us to correct the POPOR scores from participants' idiosyncratic use of the scale (Marsh 1989). We suggest that future researchers using the POPOR Scale employ the SEM approach, even if it is more demanding than the standard Likert approach, because of its superior diagnostic power and for the opportunity of correcting participants' response bias that it offers. The SEM approach, among other things, helped us show that the most widely used scale measuring populist orientations (Akkerman et al. 2013), previously validated by resorting only to exploratory factor analysis, has not a unidimensional structure. The second most frequently used scale is Oliver and Rahn's (2013) one. Also this scale was

validated only using exploratory factor analysis. Our study suggests that more discriminant and informative analyses should performed to test the factorial structure of this scale, before considering it a fully valid measure of populist orientations.

Consistent with the data showing that the likelihood of having participants who provide inaccurate responses depends on the sample's socio-cultural level (Schuman & Presser 1981), our preliminary analyses helped in discovering that 13.8% of our participants provided inaccurate responses, because they certainly gave a response set or responded too quickly to the POPOR items. This number of careless or inconsistent respondents (McGrath et al. 2010) was analogous to that stemming from other CAWI studies (e.g., Johnson 2005). This was far from surprising because, according to some researchers, web interviews cannot allow any control on the process of responding, are void of social exchanges between the interviewee and the researcher and allow responses that are too easy and fast (McGrath et al. 2010). It is plausible that these kinds of distortion could also affect surveys of the general population performed with other methods of data collection that do not allow their detection, such as the standard paper-and-pencil method (e.g., Curran 2016).

Beyond its strong points, this study could be further developed in future research. First, as with the other existing scales of populism, we validated the POPOR Scale with a single population sample from a single nation. A second administration of the POPOR Scale, performed right after the 2019 European election ($N = 1,504$, quota sample of the Italian general population) led to the same factorial structure (loadings ranging from .10 to .66, all ps < .001, $CFI = .95$, $RSMR = .03$, details available from the corresponding author). This—together with the test of structural invariance of the POPOR SCALE—definitely speaks in favor of the robustness of the factorial structure we have detected, at least in the Italian contexts. Future studies could test the scale's psychometric properties in other nations and its invariance across different cultures. Second, it was administered using a CAWI approach only. A comparison of the POPOR Scale's performance across different methods of administration could be interesting. However, even without these possible developments, we believe the POPOR Scale to be a convincing tool for measuring people's populist orientation.

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Table 1. Characteristics of the Extant Scales of Populism

Source	Type of scale	Number of items (structure)	Number of categories	Balanced scale?	Statistical analyses used in the validation
Akkerman, Mudde and Zaslove (2013)	Likert	6 (unidimensional)	5	No	Exploratory factor analysis
Castaño Silva et al. (2018)	Likert	6 (unidimensional version) 9 (three-dimensional version)	Information not available	Yes	Confirmatory factor analysis and Item Response Theory models
Elchardus and Spruyt (2016)	Likert	4 (unidimensional)	5	No	Confirmatory factor analysis
Hammelers and de Vreese (2018)	Likert	10 (bi-dimensional)	7	No	Confirmatory factor analysis
Hawkins, Riding and Mudde (2012)	Likert	4 (unidimensional)	4	No	Exploratory factor analysis
Oliver and Rahn (2016)	Different kind of items	12 (three-dimensional)	Different number of categories across items	Partially	Exploratory factor analysis
Rooduijn (2014)	Likert	9 (unidimensional)	5	Partially	Confirmatory factor analysis
Schultz et al. (2018)	Likert	12 (three-dimensional)	5	No	Confirmatory factor analysis
Stanley (2011)	Likert	8 (information not available)	7	Yes	None
Van Hauwaert and Van Kessel (2018)	Likert	8 (unidimensional)	5	No	Item Response Theory models

Table 2. POPOR Scale: Items and Frequency

		1	2	3	4	5
Economic, financial, and intellectual anti-establishment attitudes						
1. Alcuni dicono che politici, giornalisti, esponenti dell'economia e della finanza fanno tutti parte dello stesso sistema corrotto che ha portato l'Italia alla crisi. Altri dicono che non è corretto metterli tutti assieme perché esistono responsabilità diverse. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione? (R)	*1. Some people say that politicians, journalists, and financial experts are all part of the same corrupt system that has led Italy into crisis. Others say that it's not right to lump those groups all together, because they have different responsibilities. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?* (R)	288	244	257	295	264
2. C'è chi dice che chi ha studiato ha più strumenti per capire i problemi della società, e chi dice invece che chi ha diplomi e lauree capisce poco dei problemi della gente comune. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione?	2. There are those who say that educated people are better able to understand the problems of our society, and there are others who say that people with advanced degrees do not understand the problems of ordinary people. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?	332	356	476	92	92
Political anti-establishment attitudes						
3. Alcuni dicono che i partiti sono necessari alla democrazia, altri che oggi in Italia senza i partiti ci sarebbe più democrazia. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione?	3. Some people say that political parties are necessary for a democracy. Others say that there would be more democracy in Italy today if there weren't any parties. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?	302	328	401	166	151
4. Alcuni dicono che oggi in Italia i politici sono in maggioranza corrotti, altri dicono che quelli corrotti sono solo una minoranza. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione? (R)	*4. Some people say that most politicians in Italy today are corrupt. Others say that only a minority of politicians are corrupt. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?* (R)	502	386	283	126	51
People as a homogeneous and virtuous entity						
5. Alcuni dicono che, anche se gli italiani sono molto diversi tra loro, in fin dei conti la vedono allo stesso modo sulle cose davvero importanti. Altri dicono invece che anche fra gli italiani ci sono forti differenze e conflitti. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione? (R)	5. Some people say that even though Italians are very different from one another, at the end of the day they regard the really important things in the same way. On the other hand, others say that even among Italians there are strong differences and conflicts. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)	54	102	325	407	460
6. C'è chi dice che i conflitti fra le persone sono inevitabili perché derivano dalla natura umana. Altri pensano invece che il popolo è fondamentalmente buono e onesto e che le persone sono messe le une contro le altre da chi comanda. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione?	*6. There are those who say that conflicts among people are inevitable because it's just part of human nature. On the other hand, others think that ordinary people are basically good and honest and that it's only because of those in charge that people are set against each other. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?*	258	367	384	197	142

People legitimated to take part directly in political decision-making processes

7. Secondo alcuni decidere sulle questioni politiche è un compito che spetta a chi eleggiamo in Parlamento. Secondo altri, invece, la gente comune dovrebbe poter decidere direttamente sulle questioni politiche, come accade nei referendum. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione?	7. According to some people, the job of deciding political issues belongs to those we elect to the Parliament. According to others, ordinary people should be able to decide political issues directly, as it happens in referendums. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?	219	263	306	255	305
8. C'è chi pensa che le persone comuni potrebbero benissimo andare in Parlamento a fare politica, e chi pensa invece che la politica sia una cosa complessa e che debba essere fatta da professionisti. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione? (R)	*8. There are those who say that ordinary people could easily enter the Parliament and do the job. On the other hand, other people think that political matters are complicated and need to be dealt with by professionals. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)*	309	268	334	236	201

Need for a strong leader

9. Alcuni pensano che in politica c'è bisogno di un leader forte che guidi il popolo. Altri pensano invece che questo sarebbe pericoloso per la democrazia. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione? (R)	9. Some people think that in politics you need a strong leader to guide the people. On the other hand, others think that having a strong leader would be dangerous for democracy. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)	413	199	301	181	154
10. Alcuni pensano che l'insieme dei parlamentari rappresenti al meglio gli interessi della società, altri pensano invece che il volere del popolo può essere realizzato solo attraverso un leader. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione?	*10. Some people think that the Parliament as a whole best represents the interests of society. Others think that the will of the people can be carried out only by having a strong leader. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?*	211	324	475	194	144

Loss of relevance of the traditional ideologies

11. C'è chi dice che oggi la divisione fra sinistra e destra è ancora importante e, al contrario, c'è chi sostiene che non ha più senso. Lei dove si colloca?	*11. There are those who say that the difference between left and right in politics is still important today. Others say that the difference between left and right in politics doesn't make sense any more. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?*	185	177	307	245	434
12. C'è chi dice che non ci sono tanti modi per risolvere i problemi sociali, ma basta il buonsenso e la volontà di farlo. Al contrario c'è chi dice che i problemi sociali possono essere risolti in modo diverso dalle varie parti politiche. Lei dove collocherebbe la sua opinione? (R)	12. There are those who say that there's only one way to fix social problems and that it's enough to have common sense and the will to fix them. There are others who say that different political groups could fix social problems in different ways. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)	308	283	327	228	202

Note. The 8 items of the final POPOR Scale are in Italics. (R) = reverse item.

Table 3. Psychometric Characteristics and Fit Indices of the Tested Models

Model	Description	Range of the standardized factorial loadings	χ^2	CFI	SRMR	Comment
Model 1	12 items	.06, p = .071 -.61, p < .001	$\chi^2(54) = 602.51$, $p < .001$	.72	.06	Factorial loading of Item 5 not significant Insufficient fit
Model 2	11 items (Item 5 deleted)	.11, p < .001 - .61, p < .001	$\chi^2(44) = 558.66$, $p < .001$	.73	.06	Insufficient fit
Model 3	11 items, Correlated uniqueness correction	.03, p = .35 - .66, p < .001	$\chi^2(34) = 347.07$, $p < .001$	.84	.05	Factorial loading of Item 12 not significant Insufficient fit
Model 4	10 items (item 12 deleted) Correlated uniqueness correction	.17, p < .001 - .66, p < .001	$\chi^2(29) = 342.80$, $p < .001$	.83	.05	Insufficient fit
Model 5	9 items (item 9 deleted), Correlated uniqueness correction	.29, p < .001 - .67, p < .001	$\chi^2(24) = 144.16$, $p < .001$	.93	.03	Non-perfectly balanced scale, more than one item for some POPOR facets
Model 6	8 items (item 2 deleted) Correlated uniqueness correction	.10, p < .01 - .66, p < .001	$\chi^2(17) = 91.23$, $p < .001$	.95	.03	Non-perfectly balanced scale, more than one item for some POPOR facets
Model 7	7 items (item 7 deleted) Correlated uniqueness correction	.26, p < .01 - .73, p < .001	$\chi^2(11) = 33.31$, $p < .001$	.98	.02	Non-perfectly balanced scale, more than one item for one POPOR facet
Model 8	6 items (item 3 deleted) Correlated uniqueness correction	.28, p < .01 - .52, p < .001	$\chi^2(6) = 16.67$, $p < .001$	.98	.02	

Table 4. Factorial Loadings of the POPOR Scale

	Unstandardized loading	Standard error	Standardized loading
1. Some people say that politicians, journalists, and financial experts are all part of the same corrupt system that has led Italy into crisis. Others say that it's not right to lump those groups all together, because they have different responsibilities. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)	1.00***	.00	.45
4. Some people say that most politicians in Italy today are corrupt. Others say that only a minority of politicians are corrupt. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)	.91***	.15	.41
6. There are those who say that conflicts among people are inevitable because it's just part of human nature. On the other hand, others think that ordinary people are basically good and honest and that it's only because of those in charge that people are set against each other. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?	.93***	.14	.52
8. There are those who say that ordinary people could easily enter the Parliament and do the job. On the other hand, other people think that political matters are complicated and need to be dealt with by professionals. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions? (R)	.78***	13	.37
10. Some people think that the Parliament as a whole best represents the interests of society. Others think that the will of the people can be carried out only by having a strong leader. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?	.68***	.10	.36
11. There are those who say that the difference between left and right in politics is still important today. Others say that the difference between left and right in politics doesn't make sense any more. Where would you place yourself between these opposing opinions?	.54***	.10	.28

Note. The loading of the first item does not have a standard error because we fixed it to 1 to give the POPOR latent variable a unit of measurement. *** $p < .001$.

Figure 1. Convergent Validity Tests. Standardized Parameters and Standard Errors Are Displayed