The "Irrationality" of Populist Voters. Testing Spatial Models of Electoral Competition Using Populist Attitudes

by

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Abstract

Valence and policy positions matter in voting behaviour, but is this true for every voter? Specifically, are populist voters different from non-populist when it comes to vote choice and candidate favourability? Since I understand populism as a latent attitude that structures the comprehension of the socio-political word, I claim that populist individuals do not follow the "rational" utility criteria postulated by traditional models of voting behaviour. Firstly, I expect that (H1) populist individuals attach less importance to candidate's policy positions. This proposition is consistent with the antagonistic and dualistic nature of populism that allows individuals to fit most of their policy-oriented attitudes within a populist narrative framework independently from their ideological orientation. Secondly, since I believe that policy and valence are non-separable components, I expect that (H2) populists attach less importance to the competence of the candidate (task-related valence). Lastly, against the "evil elites", elected representatives must be "honest", "sincere", and respect the "will of the people". Because of this, I postulate that (H3) individuals with high affinity with populism attach more importance to how honest or "warm" the candidate is (non-task valence). These hypotheses are tested using 2016 American and 2017 French National Electoral Studies data. Results confirm that individuals who score high on populist attitudinal scale at-

tach less importance to ideological proximity and competence and more to honesty when it comes to vote choice contradicting the "rationality" criteria of traditional proximity and valence models. The fact that populist individuals cannot be seen as mere revenue-maximising agents calls for further research on the psychological mechanisms behind the activation of populist attitudes and their impact on the political competition.

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To A., who made me believe in myself.
To E., the woman who everyone wants at their side.
To G. and R., for all their support.
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To V., the person who let me rediscover myself.

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Introduction

> *Left and right? They do not exist anymore.*

Beppe Grillo, *Comunicato Politico n.10*, beppegrillo.it (2008)

> *The people in this country have had enough of experts.*

Michael Gove, when asked to name an independent economic authority that thought Brexit was a good idea, *Sky News Q&A on Brexit, Gove: Britons "Have Had Enough of Experts"* (2016)

A question that captured the attention of a countless number of scholars is how issue positions and candidates' qualities influence voters' choices. For long time, the formalisation of the process in which parties and voters compete in the elections relayed, almost exclusively, on the so-called *proximity models* conceptualised in the pioneering works of Hotelling (1929), Black (1958), and Downs (1957). According to the traditional Downsonian paradigm, parties mobilise support by promising voters to implement specific policies and thus voters base their preference on the best fit between their own interests and the policy programs on offer. In this sense, voters are considered rational actors who – in a given ideological space

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– maximise their utility by voting for the candidate or the party closest to their policy preferences. Although the validity of distance minimisation models has been proven by a large body of scholarship, they have been widely criticised for their difficulty in explaining why some individuals "irrationally" vote against their self-interest. One of the most studied motivation behind voters' "irrationality" is that policies are not the only element that citizens take into account when they cast their votes. Following the pioneering critique of Stokes (1963) to the Downsonian model, valence (and behavioural-psychosocial) theorists have demonstrated that non-policy universally desirable candidate characteristics – such as competence, trustworthiness, or honesty – have a considerable impact on voters' choices.

A limitation common to both proximity and valence scholarships is that choice-based models predominately investigate voters' behaviour trough explicit attitudes completely disregarding the impact of latent or dispositional attitudes. The core of this work is based on the assumption that the activation of latent populist attitudes brings individuals to evaluate political candidates and leaders using criteria that do not follow the "rationality" criteria of traditional proximity and valence models. First, I argue that due to the antagonistic and dualistic nature of populism, populist individuals are less interested in the ideological/policy positions of the candidates and thus partially ignore substantive ideological dimensions when it comes to vote choice. Although surprising in term of Downsonian "rationality", this postulation is consistent with the very nature of populism that – as a host ideology – can be attached, at the same time, to both left and right. Secondly, the success of Donald Trump in the 2016 US presidential election suggests that, in term of populist politics, competence may not be relevant anymore or even that incompetence could be positively evaluated (Tella & Rotemberg, 2016).

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In particular, I believe that affinity with populism is connected with a relatively lower salience of candidates' competence, one of the most used measurements of character valence. Lastly, I argue that honesty and trustworthiness positively impact the utility function of populist individuals. Since populist rhetoric is built on a narrative that depicts the world as ruled by a minority of corrupt, dishonest, and unresponsive elites, who subverted the political system for their own benefit (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017), the populist "(ir)rational" reaction to this discourse involves choosing candidates who are perceived as in-group and thus recognised as "honest".

These postulations pose a puzzle for those usually impressed with individual rationality. Are populist individuals "irrational" in Downsonian terms? Why would they vote for a candidate who is not representing their own policy interests? Or why would populists sometimes vote for the less competent and knowledgeable candidate? This work is divided into six sections. Firstly, I rapidly overview populist literature focussing on the latest scholarly developments on the attitudinal predispositions of populist voters. Secondly, I engage with the large body of scholary work on formal models of voting behaviour proposing a further specification of the traditional conceptualisation of valence. This effort allows me to separate candidate's traits into content dimensions and formalise them in term of spatial theory. Thirdly, I detail my hypotheses arguing that populist understanding of politics does not fit the traditional spatial and valence paradigm. In particular, I argue that populist voters behave differently from non-populist in relation to (1) the relative importance of ideological and policy proximity, (2) the relevance of candidate's competence (task-related valence) and (3) the value attached to the warmth qualities of a candidate (non-task valence). Fourthly, I describe the data,

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instruments and modelling approach used to test my hypotheses. In the sixth section, using data drawn from French and American National Electoral Studies (NES), I outline the results of my hypotheses and I discuss their implications. I conclude with a few suggestions for further research on the impact of populism on citizen behaviour and political competition.

2 The micro-foundations of populism

Populist parties and formations have recently strengthened their electoral penetration everywhere in and outside the European Union. Although the recent success of populism could lead to think of it as a brand-new phenomenon, populist politics have appeared in different historical periods and in different contexts. The complexity and the adaptability of populism to different phenomena (movements, parties, regimes), across various periods and circumstances, are at the basis of its conceptual ambiguity (for a debate on this point see, Bale, Kessel, & Taggart, 2011). For such reasons, a common definition is still lacking, with scholars disagreeing on characteristics, features and boundaries between its different facets (e.g., Mudde, 2004; Weyland, 2001; Stanley, 2008; Gidron & Bonikowski, 2013; Aslanidis, 2016). In the first part of this section, I briefly overview the main conceptualisations of populism employed by contemporary populism scholars. In the second part, I turn on the attitudinal foundations of populism and on the advantages of using attitudes to study the demand side of populist politics.

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2.1 Still an ill-defined concept

As said before, populism is a fuzzy concept that can vary considerably according to context and conditions. Within populism studies, scholars have advanced various definitions that are sometimes depicted as inherently incompatible. Communication scholars conceptualise populism as a particular type of political discourse or frame that systematically recurs within the political debate. According to this view, populism interprets some of the aspects of social and political life as problematic and in need of a radical change and then proceed to suggest a corrective (and sometimes disruptive) solution (Aslanidis, 2016). In other words, populism can be defined as a "flexible mode of persuasion" (Kazin, 1998, p.3) characterised by "a particular logic of articulation" of ideological and strategic contents (Laclau, 2005, p.2). In a similar fashion, some authors see populism as a special style of communication (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007), namely without intermediaries. In this sense, populism is a mere rhetoric that functions as a taboo breaker against political correctness (Mudde, 2004, p.554) mostly built on symbolic politics (Mazzoleni, Stewart, & Horsfield, 2003) and on a highly demagogic, slogan-based, tabloid-style language (Bischof & Senninger, 2017).

A competing school of thought understands populism as a strategy, or as explained more precisely by Weyland (2001, p.14), "a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganised followers". Following a similar line of reasoning, Betz (2002, p. 198) claims that populism is characterised by "the strategically and unscrupulous instrumentalization of public sentiments of anxiety and disenchantment" provoked

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by latent subjective grievances and vulnerabilities. According to this view, populist logic emotionally appeals to resentment, fear and enthusiasm and offers easy solutions for complex problems. Partially borrowing from this conceptualisation, some authors argue that populism can be also understood as a type of organisation, characterised by the presence of a charismatic leader and a loosely organisational structure (Taggart, 2004; Eatwell, 2003; Pasquino, 2008).

According to others, populism is a "thin" or "weak" ideology, that considers the "society to be ultimately separated in two homogeneous and antagonistic groups and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* of the people" (Mudde, 2004, p. 543). A specific feature of this ideology is its "indeterminacy" that "responds to its need to be adaptable" (Ruzza & Fella, 2009, p.3). Taken as such, populism is a mere ideological motivator that is neither left nor right but can be attached to a variety of host ideologies becoming dependent upon more developed political and ideological belief such as socialism or conservatism (Rooduijn, 2014; Rooduijn, Lange, & Brug, 2014; Otjes & Louwerse, 2015). Although the field still suffers from the lack of conceptual clarity, recently, many contemporary scholars adopted an ideational approach to the concept, coming to a tentative agreement on populism's core constructs (K. A. Hawkins & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017). The foundational features of this thin-centred ideology include the power's structure in the society, the antagonistic and diametrical opposed relation between "the people" and "the elite", an understating of these two antagonistic groups as homogeneous bodies, and the absolute necessity of reestablish popular sovereignty. Taken as such, populism is composed of three separate dimensions (Figure 2.1): anti-elitism, people-centrism and Manichean worldview (the virtuousness and the

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moral superiority the people opposed to the corrupt and dishonest elite).
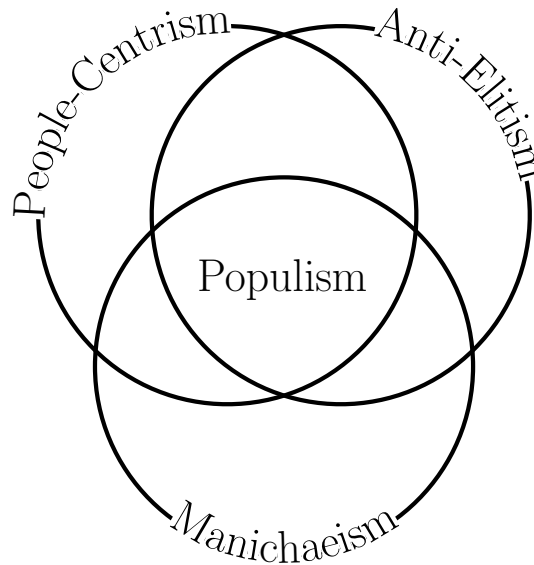
Figure 2.1: The core components of ideational populism

Before turning on the attitudinal foundations of populism, it is worth to better define the core components of ideational populism. The first is the praise of "the people", common to virtually every definition of populism (Ionescu & Gellner, 1969; Canovan, 1981). The definition of who belongs to "the people" is central to discriminate between different varieties of populism. Despite some characteristics of this homogenous body are conditional on time and context (Panizza, 2005; Laclau, 2005), the people are prised and exalted as a virtuous entity which embodies the ideals of honesty, integrity, and hard work and embraces values and behaviours that are always morally superior to the rest of the society (Taggart, 2004). Second, in term of populist politics, "the people" is directly juxtaposed to "the elite". Populism is indeed built around anti-elitist, or anti-establishment ideas, which claim that a powerful and corrupt group has taken over politics. The

elite is depicted as a minority of corrupt forces who have "subverted the political system to work for their benefit" (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012). Similarly to "the people", who belongs to the elite varies according to time, context, and circumstances. It may be represented as "governments and their officials, the rich, supranational organisations, international financial bodies, or foreign countries and their leaders" (K. A. Hawkins, 2009). The establishment may – depending on the context – control politics, the economy, media, culture, and/or the judiciary (Rooduijn, 2014). Regardless of its nature, the elite exploits the people in order to get more power and profit (K. A. Hawkins, 2009). Third, a Manichaean, or good-versus-evil, view of politics, in that populism only exists when the two sides – people and elites – are seen as in moral opposition to one another, instead of merely having programmatic disagreements. In this sense, politics is reduced as a Manichean struggle with "one side being the monopolist of virtue and the other of vice"(K. A. Hawkins, 2009). The two groups are represented as homogeneous entities and are negatively defined in term of each other: the elites are inherently bad while there is no disagreements within "the good people" which have a single set of values, interests and preferences.

2.2 The attitudinal foundations of populism

Thus far, the focus in the literature has been mainly on the supply side of politics with scholars studying the charisma and style of populist leaders and quantify the "degree of populism" in politicians' speeches and party manifesto (e.g. Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; K. A. Hawkins, 2009; Pauwels, 2011; Rooduijn, 2014). However, in order to assess whether the utility function postulated by proximity and valence

models is (un)able to predict the behaviour of populist individuals, we need to focus on the demand side of the equation and measure populism at the individual level. In this work, I subscribe to the ideational approach to populism, since it allows for a reliable empirical measurement of individual affinity with populist positions. Moreover – although I acknowledge the limitations of the ("thin") ideational conceptualisation (Aslanidis, 2016) – its theoretical and empirical validity has been proved by a fairly large number of cross-national studies. First, the success of populist radical right parties demonstrates how populist ideas are successful, especially when attached to clearly identifiable ideological positions (e.g. Mudde, 2007; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015; March & Rommerskirchen, 2015). Secondly, recent individual level research shows that (a) populist voters closely mirror the substantive ideology of either right- or left- wing populist parties and (b) traditional ideologies are strong predictor of populist vote choice (e.g. Bornschier, 2010, 2017; Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017).

As said before, populism sits at the intersection of three different kinds of discourse and thus its conceptualisation and measurement should incorporate these facets separately. Unfortunately, current research rarely acknowledges the multidimensionality of populism construct and it usually reduces individual affinity with populist to party support. Despite its wide usage, using populist vote choice is methodologically inappropriate in contexts with high electoral volatility, little support for populist formations or when individual choices are based on instrumental or strategic calculuses. Building on the limitations of this approach, scholars started to think of populism as an individual-level construct, namely in the form of a latent attitude. At the basis of conceptualisation resides the idea that the success of parties and politicians lies in already existing views and sentiments among the

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electorate (Zaller, 1992). Hawkins et al. (2018) theorise that populist attitudes are, like authoritarian predispositions (Stenner, 2005), reasonably stable and independent from populist party supply. Following this line of reasoning, it can be assumed that populist politicians are successful when they are able to resonate and activate already existing attitudes. In other words, the ideational theory suggests that when populist candidates – the supply side – successfully activate those attitudes, democratic elections can bring populist actors into power.

Recent individual level research underlines the importance of addressing the attitudinal underpinnings of populism in relation to the political competition. First, embryonic comparative efforts confirm that populist attitudes are independent of populist supply being quite diffuse both among individuals in contexts with relevant social movements (e.g., the United States) and populist parties (e.g., Netherlands) and as well in countries with no populist actors or little support for populist formations (e.g., Chile, Portugal) (Mudde & Rovira Kaltwasser, 2017; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2017; Silva et al., 2016). Secondly, scholars have demonstrated that populist attitudes are coherent, stable and – more importantly – connected to vote choice (e.g. Akkerman, Mudde, & Zaslove, 2013; Schulz et al., 2017; Silva et al., 2016; Spruyt, Keppens, & Van Droogenbroeck, 2016; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; K. A. Hawkins, Riding, & Mudde, 2012; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2017; Oliver & Rahn, 2016). For the reasons above, this work measures individual affinity with populism relying on populist attitudes specifically in relation to the multi-dimensional framework developed within the ideational scholarship (vedi infra). Further details on the advantages of using populist attitudes to measure individual affinity with populism are discussed in the Appendix.

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3 Proximity or Valence?

Are populist individuals particularly adverse to competent leaders? Are they interested in the ideological positions of the competing candidates? Furthermore, are honest and trustworthy (aka warm) candidates more able to attract populist voters support? Before answering these questions, it is worth understanding why policy positions and candidates personal qualities are important determinants of voters' preferences. In order to do so, I engage with the vast literature on political economy models of electoral behaviour. This section is divided into three parts. First, I briefly overview traditional spatial models that rely on the Downsian framework of ideological distance minimisation. Secondly, I turn to one of the most famous critiques of the Downsonian model, namely the valence theory initially developed by Strokes. Building on the large scholarship on valence models and candidates' traits, I claim that the current conceptualisation of valence presents several fallacies. I conclude proposing a different measure of valence that overcomes some of the discussed limitations.

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3.1 Spatial models

In general, formal models of voting behaviour are divided into "spatial"[1] and "social-psychosocial (or behavioural)" models (for an overview, Enelow & Hinich, 1984; Antunes, 2010). Concerning spatial models, most of the scholarly literature on the topic stems from the seminal work of Anthony Downs "An Economic Theory of Democracy" (1957). Downs demonstrates that – under certain constraints – parties programmatic platforms converge at a single point, the one preferred by the median voter. Positional models are based on the neo-classical economics paradigm of supply and demand where rational agents seek to maximise their utility or profit. In term of electoral competition, candidates and parties compete to promote policies closest to the preferred positions of as many citizen as possible, while voters try to maximise their utility income voting for a party or a political candidate with whom they share policy views. In other words, elections are seen as aggregation mechanism that combines individual preferences and parties' proposals into political (and social) choices.

Investigating the supply side of the model – meaning the positional strategies adopted by parties and candidates – a large body of literature has proven the validity of the policy convergence theorem of the Downsian model (for a recent overview see, Dewan & Shepsle, 2011). In this work, the focus is on the demand side of the model, that is the utility outcome of the voters. In order to vote in an "rational" way, Downs's model assumes that voters are able to organise their

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[1]Spatial models are not limited to positional models. Although directional models are not addressed in this work, they represent an important contribution to formal models of voting behaviour (for an overview see, Tomz & Van Houweling, 2008)

preferences over parties' policy agendas. Specifically, issues are represented by points along a line (say, social spending ranging from one to seven where one is the minimum and seven the maximum) with each voter assumed to possess a single-peaked preference function. In other words, the issue/ideological proximity between candidates and voter defines the voter's utility function. Formally put, the utility U of voter i is a negative function of the difference between χ_i and χ_c, the voter's and the candidate's positions along a given policy dimension such as:

$$U_i(C) = -|\chi_i - \chi_c|^2 \tag{3.1}$$

3.2 Behaviour Models

Having briefly overview spatial models, I now examine social and behavioural models, which emerged as a response to limitations of the Downsonian approach. In its seminal critique of the proximity model, Donald Stokes (1963) argues that political competition is not exclusively determined by party agenda and candidates issues positions. Instead, there are several issues on which there is no disagreement among voters. Specifically, Stokes distinguished between "position issues" and "valence issues". Position issues are "those that involve advocacy of government actions from a set of alternatives over which a distribution of voter preferences is defined" (Stokes, 1963, p.373). These are the sorts of issues related to the Downsonian Left-Right continuum along which voters and candidates can be spatially located. In contrast to positional issues, Stokes defined valence issues as "those that merely involve the linking of the parties with some condition that is positively or negatively valued by the electorate" (1963, p.374). Following Stokes seminal

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contribution, several authors has investigated the valence component of vote choice (for an overview see, Clark, 2009; Sanders, Clarke, Stewart, & Whiteley, 2011). In the absence of any substantive policy differentiation or disagreement, competition turns from positional issues to those non-spatial candidate characteristics that are independent of policy positions or ideology. Classical examples include overall economic prosperity or levels of corruption in government.

In most scholarly contributions on formal models of voting behaviour, policy and valence are two separate and comprehensive component that independently concur to the voters' utility income (e.g. Ashworth & Bueno de Mesquita, 2009; Serra, 2010; J. Adams & Merrill, 2009). In other words, although choice-models incorporates both the spatial and non-spatial theory (for a review see, J. F. Adams, Merrill, & Grofman, 2005), valence is usually considered a unidimensional construct that has the same saliency of spatial issues (relevant exception, Clark, 2009). Following the classical conceptualisation of valence detailed in Stokes (1963), the utility U of voter i is a negative function of the difference between the voter's χ_{ij} and the candidate χ_{cj} position on a given issue and a positive function of the candidate' valence attribute denoted as νp_c. As said before, this formalisation relays on the assumption that all voters share identical views on valence, as they all prefer more to less. Put formally, the utility U_i of voter i is represented as:

$$U_i(C) = -|\chi_i - \chi_c|^2 + \nu p_c \qquad (3.2)$$

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3.3 A revisited proximity-valence model

The main challenge for investigating the impact of candidates' qualities on voters' choices is developing a reliable and comprehensive measure of valence. Unfortunately, scholars disagree on what should or should not be considered as a valence advantage (for a discussion on this point see, Nyhuis, 2016). For instance, Groseclose definition of candidate's valence is extremely elastic and includes factors as "incumbency, greater campaign funds, better name recognition, superior charisma, superior intelligence, and so on" (Groseclose, 2001, p.862). However, an extensive body of research employs a minimalistic definition of valence such as incumbency (e.g. Ansolabehere & Snyder, 2000; Cox & Katz, 1996; C. R. Grose & Middlemass, 2010; Burden, 2004) or the state of the economy (e.g. Lewis-Beck, 1988; Anderson, 2000; Alvarez, Nagler, & Willette, 2000; Alvarez & Nagler, 1995; Linn & Nagler, 2017). In the effort to better define the concept of valence, Stone and Simas (2010) distinguish between two dimensions of candidate valence: strategic (or campaign) and character valence[2]. On one hand, strategic valence refers to those "non-spatial" candidate advantages such as fundraising ability, state of the economy, name recognition, and campaigning skills. On the other hand, character valence includes those qualities that voters "intrinsically value" in candidates and officeholders such as integrity, competence, and diligence. This distinction is of primary importance since it resolves some of the conceptual and methodological fallacies of the traditional conceptualisation of valence. First, comprehensive mea-

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[2]A similar argument has been advanced by J. Adams, Merrill, Simas, and Stone (2011). Although different in name, the two dimensions of valence are linked to the same campaign and character advantages as described in Stone and Simas (2010)

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sures of valence have been proven to be more biased by party attachment and ideological leaning (e.g. Rahn, Krosnick, & Breuning, 1994). Secondly, conceptualising valence as an unidimensional construct prevents us to understand the impact of different candidates' qualities on political outcomes. For instance, incumbency might refer to strategic valence and reflects fundraising capacity and name recognition of the candidate or it might be linked to character valence and results from qualities such as competence, honesty, and integrity.

Since strategic valence is "not of intrinsic interest to voters" when it comes to the impact of characteristics and images of candidates on vote choice (Stone & Simas, 2010), this work focuses on character valence. In order to understand which traits are more likely to shape overall candidate evaluations, and, in turn, vote choice, I argue for a further specification of character valence that takes into account the influence that different character's traits could have on the overall candidate evaluation. Although valence has been operationalised using various candidates' qualities (e.g. McCurley & Mondak, 1995; Kulisheck & Mondak, 1996; Funk, 1996; Curini & Martelli, 2015; Franchino & Zucchini, 2015), the impact of different traits in the judgment process has never been formalised in term of spatial models, making this effort useful for further research. In order to distinguish between different valence attributes, I turn to the extensive literature on candidates and leaders qualities. In general, candidates' traits are separated between political and performance relevant attributes on one hand and personal, non-political attributes on the other (Bishin, Stevens, & Wilson, 2006; McCurley & Mondak, 1995; Stewart & Clarke, 1992; Ohr & Oscarsson, 2003; Funk, 1999; Bittner, 2011). The former include traits such as a leader competence, leadership qualities, knowledge, or intelligence. Contrary, personal or non-political attributes include personality

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traits and personal qualities, looks, gender, and family background.

Building on this distinction, I differentiate between task- and non-task-related valence advantages. *Task-related valence* refers to the "competence" of the candidate commonly measured as knowledge, confidence, skill, foresight and intelligence. On the other hand, *non-task-related valence* is related to the "warmth" of the candidate and is linked to attributes such as honesty, integrity, trustworthiness or morality. Although warmth is usually not considered as a valence advantage, Stokes underlines how honesty is an important element of the political conflict since "rival parties are linked with the universally approved symbol of honesty, and the universally disapproved symbol of dishonesty" (Stokes, 1992, p.144). In other words, political actors need to show both competence and honesty, and actions that suggest otherwise result in relative valence disadvantages.

All in all, this additional specification provides conceptual clarity when assessing the impact of valence in structuring vote choices. First, the relative importance of different types of valence advantages could be conditional on specific characteristics of the competition. For instance, in contexts where disenchantment with the established parties is widespread or almost near-universal or corruption practices are ubiquitous, honesty and integrity could greatly influence voters' choices (e.g. Curini & Martelli, 2015). On the other hand, in circumstances characterised by policy failures (such as high young unemployment or illegal immigration), integrity could be disregarded in favour of a higher competence of the candidate in addressing relevant issues. Secondly, it allows researchers to incorporate candidate characteristics as different valence components in formal models of voting behaviour, allowing us to investigate the impact of candidate traits in relation to positional issues and among different groups of voters (such as individuals who

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display high and low affinity with populism).

Having distinguished between different types of valence that are presumed to be independent of each other, I can formalise them in a new model that allows me to individually investigate their impact on voter's utility outcome. In a uni-dimensional policy space, the voter's position on a given issue is defined as a negative function of the difference between χ_i and χ_c, the voter's and the candidate's positions along a given policy. The candidate C task-related valence is denoted as νp_c while non-task valence is νw_c. Therefore, the utility U of the voter i is formally defined as:

$$U_i(C) = -|\chi_i - \chi_c|^2 + \nu p_c + \nu w_c \qquad (3.3)$$

4 The diverse "rationality" of populist individuals

Although scholars have largely studied the relationship between "populist voting" and the demographic characteristics of their electorates, recently, populism studies have started to take into account the relationship between populist attitudes and populist party support. As said before, populist attitudes have been proved to be strong determinant of populist vote choice. In spite of this, the degree to which populist attitudes explain vote choice greatly varies between countries (Anduiza & Rico, 2016; Van Hauwaert & Van Kessel, 2017). Moreover, the relationship between issue positions (proximity), and candidates' qualities (valence) is not yet addressed by populist literature. Since populism is not just an underlying argument in the abstract, but a way of understanding the world, I believe that populist individuals employ different evaluation mechanisms when it comes to candidate favourability and vote choice. In this section, I argue that populists are equipped with a different type of "rationality" and the activation of (latent) populist attitudes shapes their "rational interest" and the way they process (and use) information.

The first question I seek to answer is whether individuals are influenced in their

choices by their level of populist attitudes when it comes to the ideological position of a (populist) candidate. As testified by the heated debate on the intersection between populist ideas and traditional ideologies, the answer to this question is everything but straightforward. Although several authors have emphasised the "chameleonic" nature of populism and its lack of any ideological or programmatic significance (Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Albertazzi, 2008; Stanley, 2008; Moffitt, 2016; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2015; Taggart, 2004), to date, there is limited and contradictory empirical evidence on salience of traditional "thick" ideologies on populist vote choice. On one hand, ideational literature suggests that populist voters are interested in the policy agenda of populist candidates and parties (Ivarsflaten, 2008; Akkerman, Zaslove, & Spruyt, 2017; Schumacher & Rooduijn, 2013) (vedi supra). On the other hand, it has been argued that, under certain circumstances, populist parties and their voters could disregard substantive L-R ideological and policy dimensions (e.g. Bornschier, 2017; Andreadis & Stavrakakis, 2017).

In term of formal models of voting behaviour, some insights on the low relevance of traditional ideologies come from the literature on economic models of political processes. Political economists argue that populism – regardless of its ideological disposition – is inherently "irrational" since it advocates fiscally "irresponsible" policies of deficit spending disregarding any type of spatial consideration (Prato & Wolton, 2017; Roberts, 1995; Mudde & Kaltwasser, 2012; Weyland, 2001)[1]. The idea that populist individuals have a "diverse rationality" that leads them to

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[1]However, the appearance in the early 1990s of "neoliberal" populist leaders in Latin America (such as Alberto Fujimori and Carlos Menem) and of pro-market populist parties in Europe lead to a paradigm shift that partially set aside the populist "irrationality" assumption.

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ignore (or misperceive) policy and ideological factors is consistent with the very nature of populist ideas. First, the usage of the othering in discursive processes and the Manichean division of the political spectrum between populist/non-populist categories lead populist individuals to spatially dichotomise the political competition and to exaggerate their agreement with populist candidates and parties. In such instances, party leaders and their voters could neglect differences over substantive ideological and policy dimensions in order to create and compete through new coalitions or alliances centred around their support or rejection of populist ideas (e.g. Ivaldi, Lanzone, & Woods, 2017; Manucci & Amsler, 2017). Secondly, populist criticism of the elites and politics is often centred on policy and representation failures (Mudde, 2007; March, 2007; van Kessel, 2015). This leads populist voters to ignore policy or ideological considerations since policy-making processes are perceived as never made in their own interest. For these reasons, I assume that the predicting power of ideological and policy proximity on populist party support may vary between voters, depending on how populist an individual is. Contrary to the Downsian paradigm, I suspect that populist attitudes moderate the relevance of ideological proximity on populist candidate support.

Hypothesis 1 (H1): *The predicting power of spatial proximity on vote choice decreases the stronger the populist attitudes of an individual.*

This initial hypothesis forms the bases for further claims concerning individual affinity with populism and candidate favourability. Building on Stokes (1963), the most important point about valence models is their "focus on delivery". While spatial models, following the Downsian tradition, assume that policy delivery happens automatically, for valence theorists "who" promise is relatively more impor-

tant than what policy is promised (Clark, 2009). Taken as such, the candidate's perceived competence is used by voters to interfere if a office-seeking politician is able to deliver what he or she is proposing. This implies that, even if vote choice is issue-based with parties and candidates competing on a spatial dimension, what does matter is the perceived ability of the candidates to deal with policies and programs of interests. The large empirical evidence on candidate's traits confirms Stokes insight that task-relevant qualities have the biggest impact on vote choice (e.g. Kinder, 1986; Funk, 1999).

However, valence models neglect the fact that valence considerations may be related to voters' and parties' ideological congruence. Groseclose (2001) advances the possibility that "policy and valence are non-separable components". In this sense, valence may take a "competency form" where a candidate is perceived more competent the closer she is to the voter's ideological positions. Experimental evidence in the U.S. context demonstrates the conditional effect of ideological proximity on valence considerations with valence advantages having a stronger effects on voters relatively closer to candidate ideology and issue positions (Hayes, 2005; C. Grose & Globetti, 2008; Mondak & Huckfeldt, 2006). Since I believe that individual's affinity with populism is related to a limited interest in the policy agenda of a (populist) candidate or party (H1), it is logical to presume that populist voters attach less importance to the "deliverability" assumption postulated by valence models. Furthermore, competence, knowledge and expertise in politics are qualities that are usually related to previous political or administrative experience and thus perceived to be more common among members that are already part of the establishment. As argued by Speed and Mannion (2017), within populist ideology and discourse, rational decisions based on competence and expertise are

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"intrinsically opposed to the irrational, authentic, and morally superior emotional whims of the people". Given all the above, I believe that populist individuals tend to disregard competence and performance-based qualities in favour of "anti-expert" and anti-competency positions. For such reasons, I expect:

Hypothesis 2 (H2): *The stronger the populist attitudes of an individual, the lower the importance of task-related valence advantages (competence) of a (populist) candidate.*

My third hypothesis investigates the role of candidate's warmth on populist vote. The literature on valence advantages and candidate favourability has demonstrated trustworthiness, morality, honesty, and friendliness to be less important in predicting vote choice compared to the perceived competence of the candidate (e.g. Popkin, 1994). Experimental evidence suggests that voters prefer a competent but not warm, and a warm but not competent candidate when it comes to candidate favourability (Funk, 1997). For these reasons, warm-related characteristics are largely ignored in the valence and choice-based model literature. In spite of this, recent literature yields contradictory results. Warmth qualities have been proved to be particularly relevant with warmth-related traits having a larger effect than competence on vote choice and candidate favourability in specific electoral contexts (Laustsen & Bor, 2017; McAllister, 2016). Building on this, I argue that individual affinity with populism is related to a higher saliency of warmth traits. To explain this mechanism, I turn to the recent works on social cognition and categorical perception (e.g. Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002; Fiske, Cuddy, & Glick, 2007; Oosterhof & Todorov, 2008; Todorov, Dotsch, Porter, Oosterhof, & Falvello, 2013; Sacco, Wirth, Hugenberg, Chen, & Williams, 2011). Due to the

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processes of simplification and moralisation of the world with "one side being the monopolist of virtue, and the other of vice" (Mudde, 2004), populist individuals draw symbolic and social demarcations that create mutually exclusive categories of "us versus them" (c.f., Stavrakakis & Jäger, 2017). In term of populist politics, the "imagined collective self" is negatively defined in relation to the negative qualities of the "others" (Rosenberger & Stöckl, 2016) with politicians usually described as "usurpers" of popular sovereignty, "uncaring" of the problems of "the common people", and "dishonest" (K. A. Hawkins, 2009). On the contrary, "the people" and, consequently, the politicians who give them a voice are seen as "caring", "trusting", and "sincere". This mechanism leads populists to trust (and thus vote) candidates who are perceived as in-group and recognised as "honest" (for the importance of trust and honesty and vote choice see, Bianco, 1994). In terms of valence theory, we can understand candidate's honesty as a cheap and efficient cue that allows populist individuals to discriminate between different candidates and parties – those which care and truly represent "the people" and those which do not. Translated to my study, this implies that individual affinity with populism is related to a higher importance of the warmth qualities of a candidate. In other words, I expect populist attitudes to condition the effect of warmth on populist candidate support and vote choice.

Hypothesis 3 (H3): *The stronger the populist attitudes of an individual, the greater the importance of candidate's warmth in predicting the support for a (populist) candidate.*

To recapitulate, I started arguing that populism can also be understood as an attitude among citizens. Based on previous attitudinal researches on populism, I

assume that individual affinity with populism has an impact on candidate favourability and vote choice. First, I suspect that populist attitudes moderate the effect of ideological proximity on populist candidate support, a proposition that is in open contrast with the "rationality" assumptions at the base of traditional spatial models. Secondly, building on my first hypothesis, I argue that, since populism is related to a limited interest in the policy agenda of a (populist) candidate or party, populists focus less on policy "deliverability". Contrary to what postulated by valence theories, this would results in a lower predicting power of competence-related advantages. Thirdly, I hypothesise that populist individuals attach more salience to warmth-related qualities of a candidate due to a negative differentiation between the "honest" people and the "uncaring" and "evil" elites.

5 Data, instruments and methods

To test my hypotheses, I focus on two countries – the United States and France – where populism – although recognised as a persistent feature of the political system – have recently achieved extraordinary performances. This choice allows me to explore "populist (ir)rationality" in two contexts that features a certain degree of similarity, while being sufficiently different at the same time. In terms of their political system, France and US have a majoritarian electoral system and, in both counties, the president is elected directly and is considered the most important deciding actor when it comes to set the government's agenda. Concerning data source, I profit from the advantages of the 2016 U.S. (ANES) and 2017 French (FNES) national electoral studies. First, NES data present high validity and reliability in term of sampling procedures and measuring instruments. Secondly, both surveys focus on the role of presidential candidates paying special attention to how candidates are perceived and evaluated by the U.S. and French citizens. Thirdly, both questionnaires include multiple batteries that measure values, sociodemographic background and attitudes of voters. Lastly, they both contain populist attitudes scales developed within the framework of the fifth module of

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the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) project[1].

5.1 Dependent variable

In general, to determine the relationship between populist attitudes and populist vote choice, it would be necessary to determine which candidates are considered populist. The extensive research on the two selected cases allows me to disregard further examination of the nature of candidates' discourse, style and policy and license me to consider both Trump and Le Pen as prototypical examples of populist candidates. Trump's rhetoric opposed a self-serving establishment who enriches itself in Washington, to the hard-working people. Trump depicted his election at the White House as the "victory for real people" presenting himself as the "authentic emissary of the people" (Friedman, 2017). Similarly, Marine Le Pen describes herself as "the voice of the people, the spirit of France" and as a "true representative of the honest and hard-working French citizens" that are controlled by corrupt political and economic forces (Stockemer & Barisione, 2017). For the purpose of studying the impact of populist attitudes on vote choice among various groups of voters, I recoded the presidential vote as dichotomous, 0 if the respondent voted for the non-populist candidate (Clinton and Macron) and 1 if she voted for a populist candidate (Trump and Le Pen).

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[1]For further details, quality control review and original questionnaires, refers to the ANES website and to the FNES descriptive study by Gougou and Sauger (2017).

5.2 Independent variables

The operationalisation of my predictors follows two criteria. First, my measurements are selected taking into account the advantages and disadvantages of diverse operationalisations in term of theoretical and empirical recommendations. Secondly, in order to minimise theoretical and measurement differences between my two country cases, my instruments are selected and constructed to be as similar as possible. Therefore, in my main model, I employ instruments that are slightly different from optimal theoretical recommendations (i.e. using subjective instead of factual political knowledge). All in all, these choices have a minimum impact on the results and on the overall fit of the model. Detailed explanations, comparisons and full model specification are reported in the Appendix.

Conceptually, this study proposes that the impact on vote choice of ideological proximity, competence (task-related valence), and warmth (non-task valence) is moderated by individual affinity with populism. Following Simas (2013), I constructed a *Relative Distance* index that simply reverses the classical measurement of proximity, making the regression coefficients easier to interpret. The placement of the candidates and the voter self-placement are subtracted and squared as follow:

$$(\textit{Sample Placement of the Non-populist Candidate} - \textit{Voter self-placement})^2 - $$
$$(\textit{Sample Placement of the Populist Candidate} - \textit{Voter self-placement})^2$$

Since in both datasets, the ideological placement of voters and candidates are measured using a 7- or 10-point Left-Right Likert scale, this yields a variable that should theoretically range from negative to positive values. Negative values

indicate the voter is closer to the lest-populist candidate (Clinton and Macron), values close to zero indicate that the voter is equidistant from the two, while positive values indicate the voter is closer to the populist candidate (Trump and Le Pen). To better clarify, consider the following example where respondent is located at 5 while the non-populist and populist candidates are located at 2 and 6, respectively. The resulting value would then be $(2–5)^2 - (6–5)^2 = +8$.

To measure character's valence advantages, I employ the close-ended questions on how candidates are perceived and evaluated. Building on the previously discussed conceptualisation of valence, I measure competence (task-related valence) as perceived candidate's knowledge (for further details on this choice see, Connelly et al., 2000) while warmth (non-task valence) is operationalised using the perceived honesty of the candidate (Stokes, 1992, p. 144). Concerning the core explanatory construct regarding the populist component of this study, I constructed an additive index of individual affinity with populism using attitudinal items. Attitudes allow me to test the variation in the predicting power of spatial and valence components of my model at different levels of individual affinity with populism. The measurement of these attitudes, however, has been far from uniform, as highlighted in the review by Van Hauwaert, Schimpf, and Azevedo (2018). The bases of the most commonly used scales today were set in K. A. Hawkins et al. (2012) and further extended by a six-item version developed by Akkerman et al. (2013). Both U.S. and France studies include a populist attitudinal scale built in the framework of the Comparative Study of Electoral Systems (CSES) and based on the here above-cited works. Although the battery is meant to be unidimensional, the items reflect the core constructs of ideational populism, namely anti-elitism, people centrism, and Manichean world-view (for further details on this battery see,

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Hobolt, Anduiza, Carkoglu, Lutz, & Sauger, 2016). Finally, I included several control variables such as party identification, gender and age as commonly done in choice-based model literature. Further information and full model specification are reported in the Appendix.

Table 5.1: CSES Populist Attitude Items (5th Module)

Populist attitudinal battery (8-Items on a 4-Points liker-like Scale)

1. What people call compromise in politics is really just selling out one's principles.
2. Most politicians do not care about the people.
3. Most politicians are trustworthy
4. Politicians are the main problem in [COUNTRY].
5. Having a strong leader in government is good for [COUNTRY]
even if the leader bends the rules to get things done.
6. The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions.
7. Most politicians care only about the interests of the rich and powerful.
8. The will of the majority should always prevail, even over the rights of minorities.

6 Results and discussion

6.1 Results

For the first time in the living memory, Donald Trump's stunning electoral victory over Hillary Clinton brought the first populist President in the Oval Office. Unlike in most parts of (Western) Europe, populism is a not a new phenomenon in US politics. For almost two centuries, populist third-party movements have been relevant in the U.S. politics and have repeatedly attempted to reshape the U.S. political agenda (e.g. Kazin, 1998). In spite of this, U.S. populist movements and formations never achieved significant electoral support and had only a marginal impact on public discourse and political agenda. When in June 2015 Donald Trump announced his decision to run for the Oval Office, political pundits and the media dismissed the possibility that he could have won the presidential elections or even the Republican Party nominee. The rise of the Tea Party, the incredible performance of Bernie Sanders in the Democratic primary race, and an anti-establishment and populist President in the White House clearly indicate that scholars need to reconsider the role of populism in contemporary US politics.

The history of US populism sharply contrasts the French one. French populism is linked to different ideological currents deeply entrenched into French national

politics. Similar to other right-wing movements in Europe, the Front National (FN) is rooted in a variety of right-wing, Catholic fundamentalist, and neo-fascist subcultures. Formed in 1972, the FN remained electorally irrelevant till the beginning of the 1980s. The 1984 European Elections made a turn in the FN's history. The FN and its charismatic leader Jean-Marie Le Pen won ten seats in the European Parliament reaching 11 percent of the popular vote. Gradually, the FN imposed itself on the electoral arena reaching the second round of balloting in the 2002 presidential elections (and subsequently losing against the Socialist leader Jacques Chirac). In 2011, Jean-Marie's daughter, Marine Le Pen, overtook the leadership of the FN. Rapidly she has been able to enlarge the appeal of the FN and reach a larger segment of the French electorate. In 2014 European elections, the FN secured 21 seats in the European Parliament reaching almost 25 percent of the vote and becoming the most voted party in France. Its electoral growth continued in 2015 regional elections when the FN won almost 27 percent of the vote in the first round and more than 350 seats. In the 2017 presidential election, Marine Le Pen was able to reach the second round of balloting securing 21 percent of the popular vote. Although defeated in the second round by Emmanuel Macron and his centrist liberal political formations *La République En Marche!*, Le Pen won 34 percent of the vote equal to more than 10.5 millions of votes. The electoral history and the exceptional success of the FN designate it as the most important French populist party and as a "prototypical" example of a modern populist radical right party.

Despite their different profiles, the incredible success of Trump and Le Pen poses the question of what contributed to shape the choices of U.S. and French voters. All in all, the results reported in Table 6.1 confirm the conventional wisdom

that voters followed what postulated by traditional spatial and valence models. First, as the ideological differential between the candidates increases, voters are more likely to vote for the candidate closer to their position. Although the coefficients reported in Table 6.1 are not directly comparable, the likelihood to vote for the most populist candidate increases the more the voter's ideological position is close to Trump or Le Pen, keeping the other predictors constant. Secondly, competence has a significant impact on vote choice for U.S. respondents, providing evidence for the "low information rationality" assumption theorised by valence theories. Thirdly, nested logistic regressions reported in the Appendix show that honesty has a statistically significant impact on vote choice yet having a relatively lower predicting power compared to candidate's competence.

In spite of this, the exceptional performance of populism urges scholars to understand how individual affinity with populism is related to political choices. Are "populist" individual substantially different from non-populist voters in their voting behaviour? Do they employ different evaluation mechanisms when it comes to vote choice and candidate favourability? All in all, U.S. and French NES data show that populist attitudes are an important determinant of how citizens made their voting decisions. Drawing substantive conclusions from the interaction reported in Table 2 is rather difficult since I would need to interpret the rough values of interaction coefficients. For this reason, I plot the conditional coefficients (so-called "marginal effects") of the variables included in the interaction terms[1]. The hypothesised conditioning effect of personal affinity with populism on vote choice

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[1]The normality of the distribution of the populist attitudes scale allow me to use this approach without running in biased estaminets as proven in Hainmueller, Mummolo, and Xu (2017).

Table 6.1: Logistic regression model for U.S. and France

	Dependent variable:	
	Vote Choice (Dummy) U.S.	Vote Choice (Dummy) France
Relative Distance	0.455***	0.219***
	(0.079)	(0.046)
Populism Index	−0.329	0.018
	(0.692)	(0.454)
Candidate's Competence	2.273***	
	(0.411)	
Candidate's Honesty	−0.866*	0.074
	(0.454)	(0.236)
Populism*Distance	−0.105***	−0.063***
	(0.030)	(0.017)
Populism*Competence	−0.380**	
	(0.159)	
Populism*Honesty	0.485***	0.210**
	(0.179)	(0.100)
Observations	2,077	877
Log Likelihood	−391.170	−162.366
Akaike Inf. Crit.	816.340	366.731

Note: $^{*}p<0.1$; $^{**}p<0.05$; $^{***}p<0.01$
For France competence is missing since not asked
Full model specification reported in the Appendix

is largely confirmed for both U.S. and France. As expected, I found that populist attitudes moderate the effect of ideological proximity on populist candidate support (H1). The interaction between relative distance and populist attitudes (Figure 6.1) reveals that, although proximity is significant for any given level of individual affinity with populism, the higher the level of populist attitudes, the lower the predicting power of ideological proximity on vote choice. In particular, in the France context, the predicting power of ideological proximity is close to zero for individuals who display a high level of populist attitudes.

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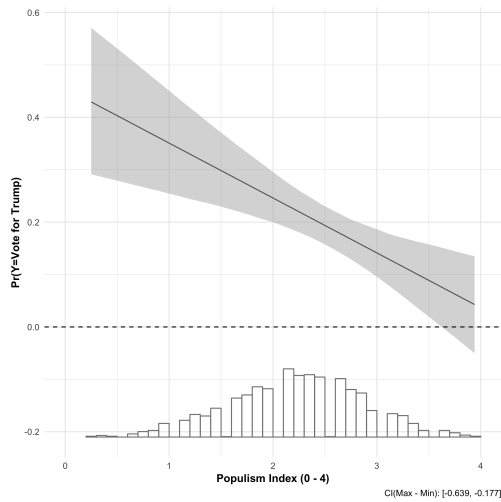
(a) Marginal plot Populism Index*Relative Distance for U.S. model
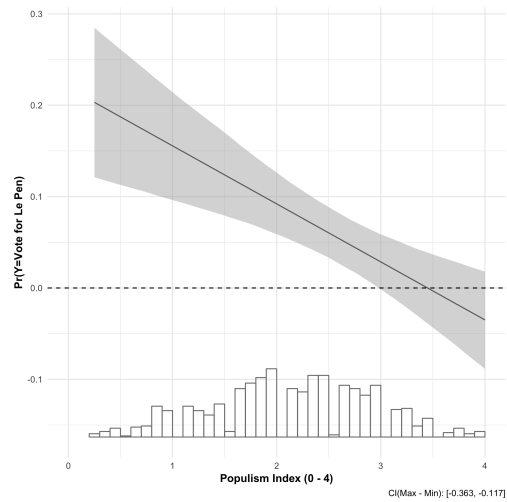
(b) Marginal plot Populism Index*Relative Distance for France model

Figure 6.1: Marginal plots for the interactions between populism index and Relative Distance reported in Table 6.1.

Although we cannot assess the direction of the causality, the partial divergence of Trump and Le Pen agendas from traditional conservative positions could have conditioned the importance of ideological and policy considerations or could have influenced the ideological sorting of their supporters. Although the Republican Party showed limited inclination for populism, Trump's rhetoric sapiently mixes elements of right- and left-wing populism. Compared to traditional Republican candidates, Trump showed a greater support for traditional entitlement programs such as Social Security while proposing strict isolationist measures and business tax cuts. Trump presented himself as the anti-establishment knight, who fight the party apparatus and criticises both the "Washington Bureaucracy" and "Big Corporations" arrogance. Similar to the U.S. case, Marine Le Pen describes the FN simply as "republican" calming that the party is "neither right nor left"

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but have "radically different ideas" from the mainstream parties ("Marine Le Pen s'insurge contre l'étiquette extrême droite du FN", 2013). According to Stockemer (2015), the "new" Marine's Front National engaged in an ideological re-positioning as a mainstream party progressively abandoning its radical right-wing tradition. Traditional right-wing issues, such as immigration or xenophobia that were central and structuring elements before Marine's leadership, have partially lost their centrality in favour of more moderate (or "left-leaning") themes such as wages, purchasing power and social security (Stockemer & Barisione, 2017). The attack to the banks, multi-national corporations and the rich, the rejection of EU and international agreements, and the importance of the "laicité" of the State are coupled with the defence of the national identity, public security and the protection of France's economy against foreign influences. Given all the above, as previously hypothesised, the relatively low importance of ideological and policy proximity is consistent with the "chameleonic" and ideologically inconsistence essence of populism. However – in partial opposition to the ideational approach to populism – the here above findings suggest that, at the individual level, populism appeal could be partially orthogonal to the traditional Left-Right dimension (Bornschier, 2017; Abts & Rummens, 2007; Inglehart & Norris, 2016).

As postulated in my second hypothesis, U.S. data confirm that the impact of task-related valence (competence) on vote choice is moderated by populist attitudes. This finding is particularly relevant since many U.S. commentators viewed the competence gap between the two candidates as one of the defining features of the 2016 U.S. presidential elections. As argued by Lemann, Johnson, and Friedman (2016) in November 2016 on the New York Review of Books, "The paramount question is whether a person exhibiting no qualification for the office – neither

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experience, nor preparation, nor personal character – is nonetheless to become president". Although the two candidates were separated by a competence gap favouring the least populist candidate (Hillary Clinton), populist individuals seem to be relatively less interested in the competence of the candidate when it comes to vote choice. This does not mean that task-related valence is completely disregarded by populist individuals, as testified by the relevant impact of (perceived) candidate's competence on the likelihood to vote for Trump at any given level of individual affinity with populism. Nevertheless, Figure 6.2 shows that higher levels of populist attitudes correlate with a significant decrease in the predicting power of task-related valence. As Nichols (2017) explains "Americans have reached a point where ignorance [...] is seen as an actual virtue". In this sense, for individuals with a relatively high affinity with populism an "ignorant" presidential candidate (here formalised as less knowledgable) does not always motivate a shift in vote choice.
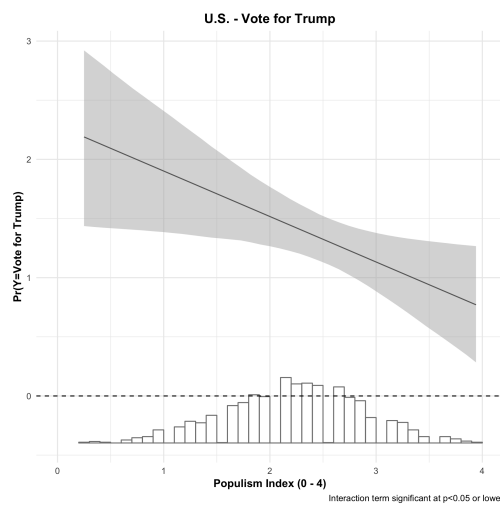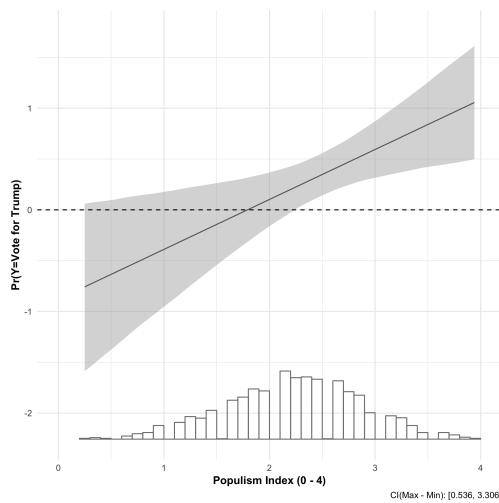

Figure 6.2: Marginal plot for the interaction between populism index and candidate competence (U.S.) reported in Table 6.1.

Last but not least, I find some evidence for my third hypothesis, namely that

populist voters are more likely to attach greater importance to non-task related valence. As expected, the predicting power of candidate's (perceived) honesty is closer to zero for non-populist individuals while being comparatively more relevant for voters who display a high affinity with populism (Figure 6.3). As previously hypothesised, this result could be explained by the categorical distinction between the "good people" and the "evil elites" used by Trump and Le Pen that functions as an attitudinal motivator for the appeal of honesty and trustworthiness. Indeed, one central element in Trump and Le Pen discourse was a sharp Manichean dichotomisation of the political world. Both candidates depict themselves as the "pure leader" who represents the honest and hard-working people as directly juxtaposed to the mainstream and "dishonest" parties of the establishment. In their view, the fight against corruption, dishonesty and elite dominance is necessary to restore a genuine democracy based on nationalist ideas.

Although Le Pen profile is consistent with her sever critique towards the "lavish lifestyle" of the corrupt France elites, Trump's status as a business man with many economic (and political) interests made him a "dubious leader to fight the big business and foreign interests" (Tella & Rotemberg, 2016). Moreover, Trump repeatedly refused to release his tax returns, breaking four decades of tradition for presidential nominees, an act that have been seen by many commentators as dishonest and untrustworthy (e.g. Rehkopf, 2016; Graham, 2016). In spite of all of this, Trump's rhetoric and policy agenda appeared to be in open contradiction with his personal interests making him appearing as "authentic" and committed to the interest of the "common people". For example, he promised to "renegotiate NAFTA" and cancel the Trans-Pacific Partnership ("it is a horrible deal"). On the same day that the AT&T's CEO announced "an 85 billion merger [...] that

would turn the giant telephone company into one of the world's biggest media companies by swallowing Time Warner Inc", Donald Trump – in a campaign speech in Gettysburg Pa. – promised to block the deal if elected arguing that "its too much concentration of power in the hands of too few. [This is] an example of the power structure I am fighting. The company has one of the largest lobbying operations in Washington spending 16 million dollar last year." (Gryta, McKinnon, & Hagey, 2016). In this sense, Trump's rhetoric provides a coherent narrative frame where actions are connected to outcomes. Even if he undoubtedly belongs to a certain type of elite, his style and actions seem aimed to directly expose the contradictions of the political system and the concentration of power in the hands of the elites.

(a) Marginal plot Populism Index*Candidate's Honesty for the U.S. model
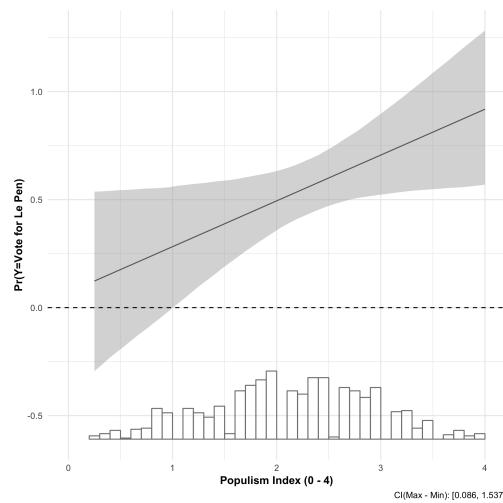
(b) Marginal plot Populism Index*Candidate's Honesty for the France model

Figure 6.3: Marginal plots for the interactions between populism index and candidate's honesty reported in Table 6.1.

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6.2 Discussion

The results herein presented demonstrate that populist voters are substantially different from non-populist when it comes to candidate favourably and vote choice. In term of formal models of voting behaviour, the relatively low importance of ideological (and issues) proximity and candidate's competence for populist individuals challenge the "rationality" assumptions at the basis of spatial and valence models. All in all, I believe that populist voters are not "irrational" per se but they rather have a "different rationality" that shapes their understanding of the political word. This diverse rationality is related to an instrumental and synthetic fabrication of what I call "populist identity". Building on socio-political identity and self-categorisation literature (e.g. Postmes, Haslam, & Swaab, 2005; Breakwell & Lyons, 1996; Brewer & Gardner, 1996), I argue that populist individuals self-identify themselves as a function of their latent attitudinal predispositions. Specifically, I believe that, due to the homogenous dichotomisation between the "pure" people and the "evil elites" at the base of populism, populists categorise individuals, political actors, and policy into a populist/non-populist dichotomy. The differentiation between "we" as "us" and "them" as "others" influences the perception of identity and belonging within the context of social relationships, groups, and institutions (Zahavi, Grünbaum, & Parnas, 2004). On the one hand, the fabrication of the "us" serves for constructing a negatively defined self-identity that presupposes a particular type of behaviour (and values) that fits into a particular type of group (Berreby, 2006). On the other hand, the othering is functional to the creation of a certain type of power relations that lead a group to define the existence of a subordinate group, which is morally and/or intellectually inferior

(Schwalbe et al., 2000; Jensen, 2011). In other words, the use of the othering in discursive processes justifies the legitimacy and the moral superiority of a particular group and structures identity formation along an in-/out- group cleavage.

The implications of in/out-group identity formation and categorisation in term of "spatial rationality" is completely disregarded by current populist literature. Nevertheless, in his famous critique of spatial theories, Uhlaner (1989) concluded that the rationality assumption at the base of the Downsonian model has difficulty in explaining individual behaviour in instances where a collective identity or strong group memberships become defining characteristics of the competition. In contrast to traditional distance minimisation models, which treat voters as independent individuals with relationships to candidates and parties, populist voters are mobilised upon a shared yet exclusive and stereotypical identity. Building on these insights, I believe that the representation of the word in term of mutually exclusive groups leads populist individuals to spatially dichotomise the policy debate as two-sided. In this sense, the political rivalry is reduced to a contrast between two different political world-views rather than traditional policy considerations (e.g. Enyedi, 2016; Mallen & García-Guadilla, 2017). Such dichotomisation favours a phenomenon known as assimilation bias, which refers to the propensity to exaggerate the agreement with the political party or the candidate the voter identifies partially disregarding its "true" ideological stances (e.g., van der Brug, 2001; Bølstad & Dinas, 2017). This endogenous process challenges the mechanism at the basis of spatial voting since – even if specific policy dimensions might allow categorical distinctions between candidates – policy considerations are "embedded within a category-based assessment framework" that allows populist individuals to coerce most their policy-oriented attitudes within a populist label (Bølstad &

Dinas, 2017). This – in line with what previously hypothesised – might explain the moderating effect of populist attitudes on ideological and issue proximity.

The main weakness of distance minimisation models is that they presume that voters are aware of their policy preferences and possess detailed (and accurate) information about parties' agenda. Valence models try to overcome spatial model's limitations using the concept of heuristics and cognitive shortcuts to explain how individuals make decisions relying on limited (and inaccurate) information (e.g. Lupia, 1994; Popkin, 1994; Sniderman, Brody, & Tetlock, 1993). According to valence theorists, voters are "smart enough to know that they are not smart enough" and thus, rather than engaging in the relatively high cost of acquiring detailed information about parties' policy platforms, they use "fast and frugal heuristics" (Lupia, 1994). Contrary to most of the literature on candidate qualities, this work assumes and demonstrated that for populist individuals a positive assessment of the problem-solving capacities of a candidate has a relatively limited impact on vote choice while the opposite is true for the honesty of the candidate. This does not necessarily mean that populists vote contrary to their interests or do not rely on "low-information" heuristics mechanisms. First, if competence is related to the "policy-deliverability" ability of the candidate, individuals relatively not interested in candidates and parties policy positions are "rationally" less interested in how competent is the candidate for whom they are voting for. Secondly, as said before, because populists partly construct their identities from a self-perceived group membership, they tend to exaggerate the disagreement between in-group members and outsiders. Since populist rhetoric is built on the juxtaposition of a pure populist leader who represents the honest and hard-working people (the "us") and the "crooked", dishonest, and villainous elites (the "other"), politicians are

reduced to negative and stereotypical characteristics and thus, even more strongly perceived as out-group (Rosenberger & Stöckl, 2016). Assuming that competence and expertise are more common among traditional and mainstream parties, a vote for an honest candidate is "rational" for those individuals which are mobilised by the populist dichotomising rhetoric and attracted to the "redemptive" nature of populism, namely the belief that – since the established and mainstream parties have failed – common sense, ordinary people, and honest politicians who give them a voice can find effective and easy solutions to peoples' problems (Canovan, 1999).

7 Conclusions and broader implications

All in all, the herein presented results challenge the theoretical foundations of spatial and valence models. First, in relation to the U.S. and France context, individuals who score high on the populist attitudinal scale attach relatively less importance to ideological/policy proximity when it comes to vote choice. Secondly, contrary to most of the literature on candidates' qualities that understands valence and proximity as two separate and independent dimensions, this work assumes and demonstrated that they are not orthogonal attributes. Thirdly, I've shown that valence is a multidimensional construct composed of distinguishable components that vary in their relative importance among different groups of voters. Lastly, contrary to the *low-information rationality* assumption, the results above-presented suggest that for populist voters a positive assessment of the problem-solving capacities of a candidate have a more limited impact on vote choice while the opposite is true for the honesty of the candidate.

In light of these initial findings, I believe that the boundaries of voters' rationality and their impact on the political competition need to be rethought both at individual and systemic level. First, although in this work I disregard the

supply side of spatial and valence models, the above-presented findings have relevant implications in term of strategy equilibrium. Even presuming that valence considerations have a minimum impact, populist candidates – knowing that their followers attribute relatively little importance to their ideological and policy profile – are incentivised to move towards the centre and to copy the policy agenda of the other candidate(s). Although surprising in term of ideational scholarship, recent empirical evidence confirms the existence of a populist convergence toward the centre with extreme populist parties becoming progressively more moderate in their policy stances (e.g. Rovny, 2013; Schumacher & Kersbergen, 2016; Röth, Afonso, & Spies, 2017). Even more importantly, the impact of populist politics on the equilibrium has relevant implications on the structure of the political competition. Although most of the populist scholars agree that the Manichean character of populism is inherently incompatible with a pluralist and non-polarised political competition (e.g. Pappas, 2012; Afonso & Papadopoulos, 2015; de la Torre & Ortiz Lemos, 2016), a convergence towards the centre of the policy space would lead to a less polarised environment. In other words, due to the lower importance of the L-R ideological distance between voters and candidates, it's reasonable to expect that populism would produce a decrease in L-R polarisation at both elite and mass level – a proposition which is in open contrast with what argued by current literature.

Secondly, in light of the above-discussed results, it might be that policy/ideology distance minimisation models are inappropriate to explain populist individuals' behaviour. Since populists spatially dichotomise the policy debate as two-sided, it might be that they are not able to vote according to a set of ordered policy alternatives organised from a minimal to a maximal position (i.e. from less to more

immigration control). Following the insights from social cognition literature (e.g. Jenke & Huettel, 2016), political psychology (e.g. Petty & Cacioppo, 1996), and the theory of directional (and mixed) voting (e.g. Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Tomz & Van Houweling, 2008), it might be that populist voters are more likely to see politics in a symbolic and emotional way in terms of changes from the status quo (on the relationship between emotions and populism see, Rico, Guinjoan, & Anduiza, 2017). The lack of any scholarly work that I am aware of demonstrating that individuals behave strategically, rather than emotionally, once their populist attitudes are activated is an important frontier of populism studies.

Lastly, although the herein presented results provide some evidence on the effect of populist attitudes on the impact of candidate competence and warmth on vote choice, this work fails to address how voters behave in a multi-dimensional and multi-choice environment. To date, populist scholarship does not provide any answers on under which conditions populist individuals are ready to trade off a competent for an honest candidate or if they would vote for a warm candidate with whom they do not share policy views instead of a competent one closer to their ideological positions. All in all, although these propositions need to be conceptually developed and empirically tested, this work brings interesting elements of novelty in the study of populism.

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A Appendix

A.1 Descriptive Statistics

Table A.1: Descriptive statistics for the 2016 ANES data

	n	mean	sd	median	min	max	skew	kurtosis
Vote Choice (Dummy)	2468	0.48	0.50	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.09	-1.99
Relative Distance	2276	1.78	8.18	0.95	-14.09	15.99	-0.14	-1.05
Trump's Competence	2599	1.33	1.31	1.00	0.00	4.00	0.49	-1.01
Trump's Honesty	2600	3.26	1.13	4.00	0.00	4.00	-1.69	2.07
Populism Index	2583	2.27	0.64	2.25	0.25	4.12	-0.14	-0.05
Age	2543	52.24	17.25	54.00	18.00	90.00	-0.07	-0.89
Education	2589	2.56	1.41	3.00	1.00	4.00	-0.08	-1.88
Gender	2584	1.54	0.50	2.00	1.00	3.00	-0.13	-1.86
PID	2601	3.09	0.84	3.00	1.00	5.00	0.00	-0.82
Subjective Political Knowledge	2583	2.88	0.74	3.00	0.50	4.00	-0.54	-0.01
Relative Distance with Issue (R)	2596	-0.01	7.48	0.11	-19.03	16.43	-0.11	-0.79
Factual Political Knowledge (R)	2609	1.64	0.94	2.00	0.00	4.00	0.06	-0.72

[a] The variables marked with (R) are used for the robustness check

A.2 Model specification

In order to test my hypotheses, I estimate a series of nested logistic regressions in which voting for a populist candidate is the dependent variable. Logistic regression allows me to see how each variable in the model individually affects the response so that I can properly quantify the strengths of these effects. Logistic regression does not assume normally distributed data, does not require assumptions of lin-

Table A.2: Descriptive statistics for the 2017 FNES data

	n	mean	sd	median	min	max	skew	kurtosis
Vote Choice (Dummy)	1162	0.29	0.45	0.00	0.00	1.00	0.93	-1.14
Relative Distance	1364	-15.56	15.49	-15.12	-51.39	21.14	0.04	0.05
Lepen's Honesty	1430	2.68	2.91	2.00	0.00	10.00	0.83	-0.40
Populism Index	1471	2.25	0.74	2.29	0.00	4.00	-0.22	-0.28
Age	1472	2.54	1.27	3.00	0.00	4.00	-0.52	-0.75
Education	1472	1.61	1.14	2.00	0.00	3.00	-0.07	-1.42
Gender	1472	1.54	0.50	2.00	1.00	2.00	-0.16	-1.98
PID	1104	7.16	2.63	7.00	1.00	12.00	0.02	-1.00
Subjective Political Knowledge	1465	1.65	0.85	1.62	0.00	3.00	-0.12	-0.96

earity between explanatory and response variable, and, finally, it does not require homoscedasticity (uniform variance for all possible values of the explanatory variable) (Menard, 2002). However, an important assumption that logistic regression must satisfy is that of no significant multicollinearity among the explanatory variables in the model. I have checked for this assumption using Variance Inflation Factor test (VIF) that shows how much variance in each variable is affected by its collinearity with remaining predictor variables (Mela & Kopalle, 2002). The VIF test reveals that the null hypothesis of no auto correlation cannot be rejected. Further test statistics show the linearity in the logit for continuous variables and the absence of strong outliers. Lastly, Hosmer-Lemeshow goodness-of-fit test is used to measure how well the specified model fit the observed data.

Relative distance, candidate competence and honesty are my main independent variables. In addition, populist attitudes are interacted with my main predictors to test the conditioning effect of individual affinity with populism.

Relative Distance. Although scholars disagree on which is the most appropriate operationalisation of ideological proximity, I use a Relative Distance index adapted from Simas (2013). This index overcomes many of the conceptual and measurement limitations underlined by the vast literature on spatial models and

makes the regression coefficients easy to interpret. First – although linear distances are sometimes used – squared distances have been proved to better fit the underlying spatial theory (for a discussion on this point see, J. F. Adams et al., 2005; Singh, 2014). Second, while most applications of the proximity model rely on individual perceptions (Lachat, 2015), recent research has proved that subjective perceptions of ideological proximity may be biased for parties with which voters strongly identify or vote for (Rabinowitz & Macdonald, 1989; Dinas, Hartman, & Spanje, 2016; Grynaviski & Corrigan, 2006). Specifically, concerning candidates and parties spatial positions, insights from political psychology differentiate between two different types of bias effects: assimilation and rationalisation (e.g. Sherif & Hovland, 1961; Parducci & Marshall, 1962). *Assimilation* happens when a voter disregard the perceived ideological distance between her-self and the candidate while *rationalisation* refers to the tendency of a voter to bring a candidate or a party to its side in order to justify its group membership or vote choice. In this work, I postulate that the dualistic nature of populism favours the assimilation mechanism and thus, in order to guard against the confounding effect of voters' rationalisation, I use objective candidate placements instead of subjective perceptions. Third, in my main model, I use the placement on the ideological scale rather than an index derived from placements on a series of policy questions for two reasons. First, comparative studies literature generally assumes that the Left-Right continuum is a "super-issue", which relates to different preferences regarding various issues positions and reflects whatever type of political conflict is taking place at a given election (e.g. Inglehart, 1990; Vegetti, 2014). Secondly, in the France case, respondents are asked only to ideologically place candidates and themselves on the 10-point scale without any issue item.

Individual affinity with populism. An additive index has been constructed using the 8 questions included in the 5th CCSES module (Hobolt et al., 2016). Using

attitudes instead of populist vote choice present several advantages that go beyond this research. First, studying populism at the attitudinal level allows us to adopt a "degreeist" conceptualisation of populism. This approach comes from the pioneering literature that measures the "degrees" of populism in politicians' speeches and political documents (Jagers & Walgrave, 2007; K. A. Hawkins, 2009; Pauwels, 2011). Using a gradational approach to study populism prevents to reduce the analysis to populist/non-populist dichotomy (Bos, Van Der Brug, & De Vreese, 2013). Secondly – if populism is considered as a continuum – the variation in the level of populism allow us to understand under which conditions these attitudes are activated and how different degree of populism impact political and social behaviour. Thirdly, attitudes help us to distinguish between populist votes from populist voters. Indeed, a citizen could occasionally and instrumentally vote for populist parties without being necessary populist or agreeing with populist ideas (Spruyt et al., 2016). Fourthly, the multiple-dimensionality of the ideational approach allows us to study the variation in the level of populist attitudes taking into account the individual impact of each dimension over other outcomes of interest (e.g. Stankov, 2017). Lastly, since attitudes can be considered as latent psychological constructs, they are less influenced by the institutional context that regulates party competition licensing scholars to disregard some of the elements that are closely associated with electoral cycles and campaigns.

Political Knowledge. Although there is no unanimous answer to the effect of political knowledge on vote choice – a relevant number of scholars argue that informed citizens are more likely to vote "rationally" basing their decisions on their policy preferences or on performance evaluations (e.g. Lau & Redlawsk, 2001, 2006; Downs, 1957; Carpini & Keeter, 1996). In relation to populism, Hameleers, Bos, and de Vreese (2017) argue that the less knowledgeable people are about politics, "the more likely they will resort to populist perceptions that simplify

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political issues in terms of the distinction between the blameless people and the corrupt, threatening establishment". In order to control for the possible effect of low-sophistication on vote choice, I included a measure of subjective political knowledge using self-reported understanding and interest in politics (for a debate on populism and political knowledge see, Brennan, 2016).

Moreover, I included Party Identification, Age, Gender, Education such that:

$Pr(Y = PopulistVote) = logit^-1(\beta_0 + \beta_1(RelativeDistance) +$
$\beta_2(PopulistCandidateCompetence) + \beta_3(PopulistCandidateHonesty) +$
$\beta_4(Respondent'sPopulistAttitudes) + \beta_5(Respondent'sPopulistAttitudes *$
$RelativeDistance) + \beta_6(Respondent'sPopulistAttitudes *$
$CandidateCompetence) + \beta_7(Respondent'sPopulistAttitudes *$
$CandidateHonesty) + \beta_8(Respondent'sPID) +$
$\beta_9(Respondent'sUnderstatingofPolitics) + \beta_{10}(Respondent'sAge) +$
$\beta_{11}(Respondent'sGender) + \beta_{12}(Respondent'sEducation) + \epsilon$

A.3 Questions Details and Wording

1. Vote Choice $(0 - 1)$. Dummy variable. 0 if the respondent voted for Clinton or Macron, 1 if she voted for Trump or Le Pen.

2. Relative Distance $(0 - 10)$. This index is created subtracting the left-right self placement on a scale from $0 - 7$ (U.S.) or 0 to 10 (France) from the sample candidate's placement on the same scale.

   (a) U.S. We hear a lot of talk these days about liberals and conservatives. Here is a seven point scale on which the political views that people might hold are arranged from extremely liberal to extremely conservative.1. Extremely liberal - 7. Extremely conservative 99. Haven't thought much

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i. Where would you place yourself on this scale,
   or haven't you thought much about this?

ii. Where would you place Hilary Clinton on this scale?

iii. Where would you place Donald Trump on this scale?

(b) France. In politics people sometimes talk of left and right.

i. Where would you place the Emmanuel Macron/Marine Le Pen
   on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means the left and 10 means the right?

ii. Where would you place yourself on this scale?

3. Populism additive index $(0 - 4)$. The mean of the 8 CCSES items reported in Table 1

4. Competence (only U.S., $1 - 5$). task related valence. In your opinion, does the phrase Hillary Clinton / Donald Trump is knowledgeable' describe Hillary Clinton / Donald Trump 1. Extremely well, 5. not well at all.

5. Honesty (Warmth) non-task related valence

(a) U.S. $(1 - 5)$ In your opinion, does the phrase Hillary Clinton / Donald Trump is honest' describe Hillary Clinton / Donald Trump 1. extremely well 5. not well at all?

(b) France. $(0 - 10)$ Concerning candidates personalities, would you say that Emmanuel Macron/Marine Le Pen seems to be honest or not honest at all? Please indicate on a scale from 0 to 10 where 0 means not honest at all and 10 absolutely honest.

6. Party Identification (Categorical). Similar for both France and US. Do you feel close (France) / identify (U.S.) to any party?

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7. Respondent's Subjective knowledge. Average of comprehension and interest in politics.

    (a) U.S. (1 – 5) You feel you understand the most important political issues of this country. 1. Strongly Agree - 5. Not agree at all

    (b) France (1 – 5). Politics is too complicated for people like me. 1. Strongly Agree - 5. Not agree at all

    (c) France and US. (1 – 4). [Rescaled] Are you interested in politics? 1. Very interested 4. Not interested at all.

8. Respondent's Factual knowledge (0 – 3, only US, Robustness). An additive index of 3 dichotomous factual knowledge questions.

    (a) Years Senator Elected [Type value]. For how many years is a United States Senator elected – that is, how many years are there in one full term of office for a U.S. Senator?

    (b) Program Federal Government. On which of the following does the U.S. federal government currently spend the least? [1. Foreign aid, 2. Medicare, 3. National defence, 4. Social Security]

    (c) Party with Most Members In House Before Election. Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. House of Representatives in Washington? [1. Democrats, 2. Republicans]

    (d) Party with Most Members In Senate Before Election. Do you happen to know which party currently has the most members in the U.S. Senate? [1. Democrats, 2. Republicans]

9. Placement on issues (1 – 7 only US, Robustness). Respondent and Candidate placement on a set of issues.

    (a) Spending and Social Services

    (b) Defence Spending

    (c) Public or Private Insurance Plan

    (d) Guaranteed Job Income

    (e) Governmental Assistance to Black People

    (f) Environmental regulations

A.4   Robustness Checks

According to the broad literature on party identification and heuristic voting, citizens do not make a new, detailed assessment of the positions of the parties each time they are required to make a choice. On the contrary, they develop a tendency or a "habit of voting" without engaging in a de novo utility calculation. However, valence theorists argue that such identification does not represent a long-term political self-identities (Sanders et al., 2011). Party identification is a continually updated "running tally of the performance capabilities of competing parties" (Clarke & McCutcheon, 2009; Fiorina, 1978, p.84). Following a similar logic, Bølstad and Dinas (2017) argue that spatial and valence models can be confounded by partisan attachments or identification. It is very likely that ideological proximity may be biased for candidate and parties with which voters strongly identify. If this is the case, party identification "not only increases the chances of supporting one's "own" party but also biases voters' responsiveness to spatial factors". In other words, the effect of proximity and valence on candidate evaluations could be confounded by partisan attachments and guarding against the rationalisation bias using objective candidates spatial collocation is not enough.

Another concern is related to the fact that I employ ideological instead of

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policy proximity. This assumption is valid in contexts where the competition is structured on the L-R Downsonian axis where proximity between candidate and voter is correctly measured as ideological difference along a one-dimensional Left-Right continuum. However, the L-R scale alone could be inappropriate to measure the ideological collocation of populist voters (Inglehart & Norris, 2016). In instances where the L-R axis is unable to capture voter's spatial positions, voters' utility function is determined on the basis of a set of issues. In a multi dimensional space, voters are confronted with a J number of issues such as the voter's utility is the sum of the difference between voter's position on the j th issue is χ_{ij}, and candidate's position on the j th issue χ_{cj}. Therefore, the utility U of the voter i is obtained by summing the corresponding one-dimensional utilities over the various issue dimensions and adding the two valence components. Put formally:

$$U_i(C) = -\sum_{j} |\chi_i - \chi_c|^2 + \nu p_c + \nu w_c$$

(A.1)

For these reasons, using the U.S. data I fit a series of nested logistic models which include issues positions as detailed in Buttice and Stone (2012) but exclude partisan attachment (Bølstad & Dinas, 2017). The same is done using the French data but just excluding partisan attachment since, in the French questionnaire, respondents are not asked to collocate voter and candidates on single issues. All the other variables are kept equal to my main model. Table A.3 (U.S.) shows that all key findings are robust to the inclusion of policy positions, suggesting that ideological proximity constitutes a reliable index of voters ideological difference. Moreover, the exclusion of PID from the models (both U.S. and France) proves that the conditioning effect of populist attitudes is independent of partisan identity

and "generate effects beyond those that can be accounted for on partisan grounds" (Bølstad & Dinas, 2017). Nevertheless, as another robustness check, I replicate the robustness analyses, re-adding partisanship. The results (Table A.3 model 5, Table A.4 model 4) remain substantially the same with the exclusion of the moderating effect of populism on candidate competence for the U.S. context. This finding provide some limited evidence of the fact that the moderating effects of individual affinity with populism is partially mediated by partisanship when it comes to candidate's competence.

Lastly, it is important to recognise that lacking political knowledge can take different forms. On one hand, there are citizen who are not informed about politics and institutions but admit their lack of knowledge (the uninformed). On the other, there are individuals who possess inaccurate information (the misinformed). For such reason, for the U.S. model, additional robustness checks (not reported) have been conducted swapping subjective and factual knowledge. As another robustness check, I also included mail voting (U.S.) and imputed missing data (both U.S. and France). The results remain consistent in term of significance and model fit further confirming the validity of my main model. R script and replication data are provided upon request.

Table A.3: Robustness check for the 2016 ANES data

	Dependent variable:				
	Vote Choice (Dummy)				
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)
Relative Distance	0.321***	0.265***	0.503***	0.500***	0.348***
	(0.013)	(0.015)	(0.063)	(0.064)	(0.068)
	t = 24.510	t = 17.434	t = 7.962	t = 7.868	t = 5.090
Trump's Honesty		0.233***	0.225***	−0.745**	−0.707*
		(0.075)	(0.075)	(0.339)	(0.379)
		t = 3.106	t = 3.020	t = −2.198	t = −1.865
Trump's Competence		1.437***	1.961***	2.132***	1.766***
		(0.078)	(0.332)	(0.339)	(0.367)
		t = 18.320	t = 5.901	t = 6.289	t = 4.811
Populism Index	0.681***	0.539***	0.893***	−0.380	−0.348
	(0.104)	(0.129)	(0.218)	(0.491)	(0.558)
	t = 6.545	t = 4.180	t = 4.101	t = −0.774	t = −0.624
Populism*Distance			−0.098***	−0.096***	−0.061**
			(0.024)	(0.025)	(0.027)
			t = −4.047	t = −3.895	t = −2.301
Populism*Honesty				0.404***	0.373**
				(0.140)	(0.158)
				t = 2.883	t = 2.368
Populism*Competence			−0.221*	−0.290**	−0.158
			(0.133)	(0.135)	(0.148)
			t = −1.665	t = −2.149	t = −1.070
Observations	2,361	2,350	2,350	2,350	2,344
Log Likelihood	−895.713	−611.157	−602.372	−598.229	−467.863
Akaike Inf. Crit.	1,807.425	1,242.315	1,228.745	1,222.458	969.726

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Model 5 includes PID and factual political knowledge

Table A.4: Robustness check for the 2017 FNES data

	Dependent variable:			
	Vote Choice (Dummy)			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Relative Distance	0.040***	0.117***	0.132***	0.219***
	(0.008)	(0.034)	(0.034)	(0.046)
Populism Index	1.608***	1.283***	0.646*	0.018
	(0.184)	(0.221)	(0.344)	(0.454)
Candidate's Honesty	0.627***	0.627***	0.229	0.074
	(0.044)	(0.044)	(0.174)	(0.236)
Populism*Distance		−0.029**	−0.035***	−0.063***
		(0.012)	(0.013)	(0.017)
Populism*Honesty			0.166**	0.210**
			(0.072)	(0.100)
Observations	1,081	1,081	1,081	877
Log Likelihood	−311.841	−308.307	−305.923	−162.366
Akaike Inf. Crit.	639.683	634.615	631.845	366.731

Note: *p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01
Model 4 includes PID