Populism and Counterterrorism Preferences: The Effects of Illiberalism, Racial Animus, and Conspiratorial Thinking on Favored Counterterrorism Policies Among Populist Subjects

Ilayda B. Onder (Corresponding Author)
Department of Political Science, Texas A&M University
3069 Allen Building, George Bush Dr W, College Station, TX 77840
ilaydaonder@tamu.edu

James A. Piazza
Department of Political Science, The Pennsylvania State University

Abstract: What sorts of counterterrorism policies do populist individuals in the United States prefer in the wake of terrorist attacks? We theorize that populists' preferences about counterterrorism are informed by their attitudes on liberal democratic governance, social outgroups, and conspiracy theories. To test this, we conducted an original survey of 1,940 subjects living in the United States. We found that subjects exhibiting populist attitudes were more likely to support unilateral, militarized counterterrorism policies but were less supportive of cooperative, multilateral, and liberal counterterrorism policies. We also found that populists were more likely to endorse domestic crackdowns on immigration, the border, and civil liberties as domestic counterterrorism responses. To understand more about these patterns, we also conducted mediation tests and found that strongman illiberalism, perception of social outgroup threat, and conspiratorial thinking patterns are strong and substantive mediators for the relationship between populism and counterterrorism preferences.

"The central base of world political power is right here in America, and it is our corrupt political establishment that is the greatest power behind the efforts at radical globalization and the disenfranchisement of working people. Their financial resources are virtually unlimited, their political resources are unlimited, their media resources are unmatched, and most importantly, the depths of their immorality is absolutely unlimited. They will allow radical Islamic terrorists to enter our country by the thousands."
— Donald J. Trump, October 13, 2016

The then-presidential candidate Donald Trump's 2016 depiction of terrorists entering the United States as a consequence of the failures of a corrupt political establishment exemplifies how populist rhetoric frames security threats as an elite betrayal of the people. But what sorts of counterterrorism responses are favored by individuals harboring populist attitudes? This is an important question to answer for several reasons. Populist political leaders and political parties have grown in prominence globally (Norris 2020) and experts have documented how the populist style of politics has come to be a formidable electoral and social force in the United States, most Western democracies, and a number of countries outside of the West (Berman 2021; Green and White 2018).

As populist leaders and parties have become more prominent, scholars have turned to the study of what is sometimes called the "demand side" of populism, or the study of individuals that hold populist attitudes and favor populist politicians and parties (see Marcos-Marne et al. 2023). While much of the literature on populism focuses on domestic politics and policy, there is a small but growing literature on the ramifications of populism for foreign policy (see Chryssogelos 2017). Our study aims to contribute to both the broader literature on populism and emerging research on its foreign policy implications by executing a "demand side" study examining how populist individuals in the United States respond to the threat of terrorism and the specific counterterrorism and security policies they prefer—both domestically and internationally.

To our knowledge, our study is the first to systematically investigate the responses of populist individuals to terrorism and their counterterrorism preferences. Scholarly neglect of this topic is quite puzzling given that fear of terrorism – often coupled with nativist opposition to liberal immigration policies – is a central theme in populist political discourse (Liang 2007). Prior research has shown that Islamist terrorist attacks motivate right-wing authoritarian individuals to electorally support populist, anti-immigrant political parties (Jacobs and van Spanje 2021). More broadly, scholars argue that populism is, in part, reinforced by feelings of insecurity and perceived threats (Abadi et al. 2024), with Van Prooijen (2023) theorizing that support for populist politicians is a psychological coping mechanism for citizens who experience insecurities. Hall (2021) further contends that a defining characteristics of populist leaders, including U.S. President Donald Trump, is a fixation on crises and threats, along with their portrayal of mainstream elites as either incompetent or unwilling to address them.

Despite these established links between populism and threat perception, existing scholarship has mostly focused on populist domestic policy preferences (Verbeek and Zaslove 2017). Yet, because terrorism is prominently identified by populist leaders as a perennial threat (Hall 2020), their security rhetoric extends beyond domestic concerns to foreign policy. Moreover, as Verbeek and Zaslove (2017) argue, globalization has fused domestic and foreign policy together, making it both timely and necessary to understand how populist attitudes shape foreign policy.

In our study, we contribute to the demand side literature on populism by examining how terrorist threats shape populist individuals' preferences both for domestic counterterrorism policies associated with border control, immigration, and internal security as well as foreign counterterrorism policies such as the use of military force to address terrorism, provision of aid

to allies, and promotion of democracy overseas. In the next section of the paper, we provide a brief definition of populism. We then present our main theoretical arguments and discuss the literatures that support these arguments. We follow our theory section with a presentation of our hypotheses and then present our research design and empirical results. Finally, we provide a brief discussion of the implications and limitations of our study.

What is Populism?

Before presenting our theoretical arguments, we provide a brief conceptual definition of populism. Populism is a contested concept (see Roccato et al. 2020), but most scholars regard it as a lose ideological framework that includes the following tenets: Populists argue that contemporary society is divided into two differentiated political-social-cultural forces. On one side is "the people" who are depicted as good, honest, pure, uncorrupt, patriotic, unpretentious and guided by simple common sense. Opposing "the people" are "the elites" who, according to populists, are malignant, dishonest, corrupt, unpatriotic, pretentious and often lacking in commonsensical judgement (Akkerman, Mudde, Zaslove 2014).

Populists therefore view politics, society, and culture through a Manichean lens in which the "good" people have the moral right to lead or to see their preferences reflected in government and wider society but are too often thwarted by the "malignant" elite who usurp the people's will (Hawkings, Ridding, and Mudde 2012). Furthermore, scholars explain that populists' Manichean view of politics, reverence for the people and aversion toward elites are reinforced by mistrust of experts, feelings of powerlessness in mainstream political systems, and a general moralized as opposed to pluralist view of politics (Akkerman et al. 2014; Oliver and Rahn 2016; Castanho Silva et al. 2018). In our study, we conceptualize populism as a subject attribute that is

separate from their partisan affiliations. However, some of the theoretical expectations we have about populists' counterterrorism preferences are more consistent with right-wing populism as opposed to left-wing populism. Our theory of populist individuals' preferences and motivations are consistent with Kriesi's (2014) work showing that populist often define "the people" using a nativist lens that is common on the political right in the United States and other Western countries.

How Populism Shapes Individuals' Counterterrorism Response Preferences

We expect populist individuals to respond to the threat of terrorism differently from non-populists and we expect populists to favor certain types of international and domestic counterterrorism ("CT") policies. Our theoretical discussion begins by outlining the types of CT policies we consider in our study.

International CT policies that we examine include: 1) the deployment of U.S. ground troops abroad to terrorism "hotspots" – countries or regions of the world in which international terrorist groups that threaten the United States are active or are based – to disrupt terrorist organizations and apprehend or kill terrorist group members; 2) the provision of U.S. military aid and intelligence to allied countries to bolster their security and help them neutralize terrorists; 3) U.S. promotion of democracy, liberal democratic reforms, and human rights abroad to countries affected by terrorism in order to neutralize grievances that may fuel terrorism. These three types of international CT policies represent major tactics and strategies the United States has used in prosecuting the Global War on Terror since 2001. Taken together they also comprise unilateral use of U.S. hard power, bi- and multilateral cooperative measures, and use of liberal soft power to combat terrorist threats to the U.S. homeland. The three domestic CT policies we examine include: 1) increasing U.S. border security; 2) reduction of immigration to the United States to

5

prevent the entry of terrorists into the United States or to address concerns of immigrant community support for terrorists; and 3) U.S. government use of arrests, detention, and surveillance of people from the same communities as terrorist suspects and offenders. These three comprise prominent domestic CT responses to the threat of terrorism implemented in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks and during the Trump administration.

Populism and Foreign and Domestic Policy Preferences

Though scholars have not directly investigated the effect of populist attitudes on CT policy preferences, some research explores how populism shapes broader foreign policy preference frameworks. For example, Isernia et al. (2024) explain that populists favor hard power and militarist internationalism – projecting military power abroad – and unilateralism. In contrast, they disdain cooperative internationalism, preferring to avoid working with allies or within multilateral frameworks. Populists also tend to oppose normative liberal foreign policies such as humanitarian assistance, defending humanitarian norms, or promoting democracy and human rights abroad. According to Isernia et al. (2024), this is stems from the populist view that military force is a straightforward and uncorrupted means of addressing international security threats that avoids national entanglement with "corrupt elite-captured" multilateral alliances or institutions.

Other literature confirms these preferences: populists are generally opposed to multilateral military missions (Verbeek and Zaslove 2017), are highly skeptical of multilateral governing bodies, international institutions, and cooperative efforts (Chryssogelos 2010; Mead 2011; Mudde 2023) seeing them as threats to national sovereignty (Amstutz 2014) and as agents that dilute popular sovereignty (Zurn 2004). Moreover, researchers show that populist politicians and political movements consistently deprioritize foreign policies that promote democracy, democratic reform, and human rights abroad (see Buzogany et al. 2021;

Hammerschmidt et al. 2021; Honig and Tumenbaeva 2022; Monkos 2021); reflecting their broader skepticism toward mainstream, pluralist, democratic institutions and governance (see, for example, Bergh 2004; Roccato et al. 2020). These studies suggest that populist individuals are more likely to respond to the threat of terrorism by favoring muscular, unilateral military international CT policies instead of cooperative or liberal forms of CT.

A more developed body of work establishes that populists are supportive of domestic security policies that focus on controlling and restricting immigration, and increasing surveillance, arrest, and detention of immigrants and racial minorities. Immigration control is a paramount domestic policy issue for populists (Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde 2007; Van der Brug et al. 2005). Mudde (2007) observes that nativist opposition to liberal immigration policies is a core feature of populist politicians and parties, noting that it dovetails with the nationalist and ethno-cultural identitarian ethos of populism (see Liang 2007). In the United States, hostility to immigration and an emphasis on border control has been a defining political and policy priority for American populists, including Donald Trump (Austin 2017).

Scholars also note that fear of terrorism plays a role in reinforcing nativism, opposition to immigration, and strict border policies among populists (Jacobs and van Spanje 2021), including in the United States (Altheide 2017). Experimental research further shows that populism is associated with negative attitudes toward minorities and immigrants (Bonikowski and Zhang 2023) and with discrimination against racial outgroups (Magalhaes and Costa-Lopes 2023). These findings are consistent with scholarship arguing that populists tend to be intolerant of minority and outgroup political rights and civil liberties (Houle and Kenny 2018; Huber and Schimpf 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2018).

The Mediating Role of Illiberal Strongman Rule, Outgroup Threat, and Conspiratorialism

We argue that three factors mediate the relationship between populism and CT preferences: populists' attraction to illiberal, nondemocratic, "strongman" governance over pluralistic modes of governance; populists' hostility toward social, ethnic, and cultural outgroups; and the tendency of populists to exhibit conspiratorial modes of governance. We discuss these mediating factors in turn.

Populism, Illiberal Strongman Rule, and CT Preferences

Scholars have amply documented the illiberal, antidemocratic tendencies of both populist elites (e.g., leaders and political parties) and individuals holding populist attitudes. According to experts, populism, at its core, has an anti-pluralist, illiberal ethos hostile to democratic norms, institutions and traditions—an outlook reinforced by populist leaders' rhetoric (Bowler et al. 2022; Canovan 1999; Foa and Mounck 2016; Muller 2017; Norris and Inglehart 2019; Pappas 2019).

When in office, populist leaders and political parties frequently pursue extreme majoritarian, antidemocratic policies that they justify as necessary measures to combat elite corruption (Akkerman et al. 2014; Arato and Cohen 2017; Kriesi and Pappas 2015; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2018; Urbinati 2017). Behavioral studies further find that individuals holding populist beliefs display illiberal and antidemocratic attitudes (Donovan 2021; Lewandowsky and Jankowski 2023), are more likely to exhibit right-wing authoritarianism and social dominance orientation (Salvati et al. 2022), and tend to favor anti-pluralist, "strong man" leaders that promise to eliminate elite corruption at the expense of rule of law, democratic checks on power, and minority rights (Piazza 2024a).

We argue that because of their illiberal pro-strongman views, populist individuals are more likely to favor unilateral military force in response to terrorism while being skeptical of multilateral cooperation with allies or liberal CT policies, such as democracy promotion to deradicalize potential terrorists and terrorism supporters abroad. Domestically, strongman illiberalism prompts populists to favor restriction of immigration, increased border security, and heightened surveillance, arrests, and detentions in the service of CT.

Although these contentions have not been directly tested, existing literature helps reinforce our expectations in this area. Scholars have found that individuals with antidemocratic, illiberal outlooks are more likely to favor militarist internationalism over cooperative foreign policy frameworks (Kertzer et al. 2014). Kertzer et al. (2014) explain that deference to authority, a hallmark psychological trait linked to preference for illiberal strongman rule, negatively predicts support for cooperative internationalism. Other studies find that subjects scoring higher on right-wing authoritarian and social dominance orientation scales prefer hawkish foreign policies and the use of military force against both state and nonstate actors over cooperative measures or liberal foreign policy strategies (Albuyeh and Paradis 2018; Doty et al. 1997; Cohrs and Moschner 2002; Henry et al. 2005; McFarland 2005; Mutz and Kim 2017; Rathbun et al. 2016). Rathbun (2020), for example, explains that right-wing authoritarianism is associated with a "dangerous world" outlook, which reinforces preferences for hawkish foreign policy positions.

This leads to our first hypothesis:

H1. Populist individuals are more likely to prefer unilateral deployment of military forces abroad to address terrorism threats and are less likely to prefer multilateral cooperation with allies or liberal counterterrorism policies such as democracy promotion due to their attraction to illiberal, strongman governance.

At the same time, we expect populist illiberalism to reinforce subjects' support for domestic CT policies that focus on restricting immigration, tightening border security, and

9

expanding government surveillance, detention, and arrests in the wake of terrorist threats. This

expectation follows from prior research showing that populists are skeptical of mainstream,

pluralist democratic norms and institutions that protect individuals' rights in general, and

minority rights in particular (Arato and Cohen 2017; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2017; Piazza 2023;

Urbinati 2017). This skepticism aligns with populists' broader preference for strongman

governance that emphasizes decisive, often authoritarian, state action over legal constraints and

democratic accountability.

Populists also frequently prioritize preservation of security and order at the expense of

democratic rights and civil liberties (Salvati et al. 2022). This leads us to expect greater support,

among populists, (1) increasing border security as a means of preventing terrorist entry, (2)

restricting immigration to reduce perceived threats from foreign populations, and (3) expanding

the use of surveillance, arrests, and detention targeting communities associated with suspected

terrorists. These preferences reflect the broader illiberal tendency to justify the suspension or

weakening of democratic rights, such as freedom of movement, privacy rights, and due process

in the name of national security, while also endorsing coercive enforcement mechanisms, a

defining characteristic of strongman rule.

This leads to our second hypothesis:

H2. Populist individuals are more likely to support immigration and border restrictions,
and surveillance, arrest, and detention of minorities to address terrorist threats due to
their attraction to illiberal, strongman governance.

Populism, Outgroup Threat, and CT

As mentioned previously, another defining feature of the populist mindset is a fixation on

"the people," their inherent virtuousness, and the belief that the people's will should dominate all

aspects of political life, even at the expense of minority rights. Scholars who study populism

note, however, that (right-wing) populists tend to define "the people" in racial, ethnic, religious, and cultural majoritarian terms, and do not regard minorities or immigrants to be bone fide members of "the people" (Roccato et al. 2020). This exclusionary framework fuels perceptions of outgroup threat as populist leaders frequently depict minorities and immigrants not just as outsiders but also demonize them in their rhetoric by highlighting the "threats" they pose to national security and cultural identity (Berman 2021; Oliver and Rahn 2016). At the same time, populist leaders assail pluralist democratic institutions that protect minority group rights (Akkerman et al. 2014; Hameelers and de Vrees 2020; Kokkonen and Linde 2023).

These perceptions of outgroups have implications for public attitudes and behaviors. For instance, scholars show that individuals harboring nativist and anti-immigrant attitudes are more likely to vote for populist parties and candidates (Cutts et al. 2011; Semyonov et al. 2006; Maier et al. 2022). Piazza (2023) determines that populist individuals respond to growing social diversity by exhibiting heightened sensitivities to racial and ethnic social status threat, in accordance with models of intergroup conflict theory (see Brewer 1999). Experimental research by Martinez et al. (2022) shows that populist attitudes are causally associated with hatred toward social outgroups. Because of this, we expect populist individuals in our study to express aversion or hostility toward social (racial, ethnic, cultural) minority outgroups and, in turn, to favor CT policies that assert ingroup social dominance. This is expected to manifest in support for both the use of U.S. military CT force abroad and domestic CT crackdowns at home.

Some literatures buttress our expectations here. Scholars have found that social ingroup identification and loyalty – as conceptualized by Brewer (1999) in her model of intergroup conflict theory – is positively associated with preferences for militarist internationalism and hawkish, muscular foreign policies and the desire to use military force abroad to protect social

11

group members from domestic and international security threats but is negatively associated with cooperative internationalism (Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun 2020; Rathbun et al. 2016). Kam and Kinder (2007) apply this framework to United States' Global War on Terror in the early 2000s, showing that ethnocentric Americans were most supportive of the US's use of military force to prosecute the Global War on Terror.

At the same time, we argue that populist aversion to social outgroups and their rights reinforces their preferences for domestic CT policies that restrict immigration, control cross-border movement of migrants, and disregard the civil liberties of minority communities. This expectation is supported by research on U.S. public opinion showing that whites' fear of loss of privileged sociopolitical status in the face of growing immigration and minority rights is a key factor explaining their support for Donald Trump (Inglehart and Norris 2017; Mason et al. 2021; Mutz 2018; Sides et al. 2019) and, by extension, the key defining policies of his administration: restriction of immigration; "getting tough" on the border; and subordination of protection of minority rights for domestic security imperatives.

This leads to our next set of hypotheses:

H3. Populist individuals are more likely to prefer unilateral deployment of military forces abroad to address terrorism threats and are less likely to prefer multilateral cooperation with allies or liberal counterterrorism policies such as democracy promotion due to their outgroup threat orientations.

H4. Populist individuals are more likely to support immigration and border restrictions, and surveillance, arrest, and detention of minorities to address terrorist threats due to their outgroup threat orientations.

Populism, Conspiratorialism, and CT

Our final mediating factor is conspiratorial beliefs or thinking patterns. A developed body of literature demonstrates that populism is organically connected with conspiracy theories

and that populist individuals are more likely to exhibit conspiratorial thinking patterns. Conspiracies are understood by political scientists to be "secret plots" by hidden powerful actors to "usurp political or economic power, violate rights, infringe upon established agreements, withhold vital secrets, or alter bedrock institutions" (Douglas et al. 2019: 4). Many scholars draw links between populism and belief in conspiracies or tendency toward conspiratorial thinking (Castanho Silva et al. 2017). Embedded within populism is the belief that the people's will is undermined by a shadowy cabal of corrupt elites and "deceptive officialdom" (Mudde and Kaltwasser 2013; Wood et al. 2012).

Populist political actors promote conspiracy theories to undermine trust in mainstream, pluralist political norms and institutions in both European countries (Betz 2013; Rydgren 2004) and in the United States (Ostler 1995; Postel 2007). Additionally, empirical studies consistently find that populist attitudes correlate with a greater propensity to believe in conspiracy theories (Castanho et al. 2017; Eberl et al. 2021; Erisen et al. 2024; Salvati et al. 2022; Uscinski et al. 2022; van Prooijen et al. 2022b). In that sense, conspiratorial thinking is a cognitive framework through which populist individuals interpret political and security threats.

We do not expect populist-reinforced conspiratorialism to have a discernible impact on international CT policies. To our knowledge, there is no empirical literature suggesting that conspiratorial minded individuals are more likely to support hawkish, cooperative, or liberal foreign security policies. However, we do expect that populists with conspiratorial outlooks are more likely to prefer CT policies instrumentalizing domestic crackdowns on perceived internal threats, including immigration restrictions and violations of minority and outgroup civil liberties.

A growing body of research links conspiratorialism with hostility toward outgroups and the erosion of support for liberal, democratic rights. Van Prooijen (2024) demonstrates that

13

conspiracy theories work to shape social groups reactions to feelings of threat. Conspiratorial beliefs reinforce perceptions that social outgroups pose a threat while reinforcing feelings of social ingroup solidarity and a desire to "fight" to preserve ingroup wellbeing. We suggest that one manifestation of conspiracy-driven outgroup aversion and desire to safeguard ingroup security is support for policies that crackdown on immigrant and minority rights through restrictive immigration and border policies as well as increased surveillance, arrest, and detention of minorities.

At the same time, conspiratorial thinking has been linked to skepticism toward liberal democracy and provision of universal democratic rights (Papaioannou et al. 2023; van Prooijen 2018). As discussed earlier, populist conspiratorialism frames political and security threats as orchestrated by corrupt elites and their perceived allies—often minority groups and immigrants—who are cast as complicit in undermining national security. Van Prooijen and Douglas (2018) argue that this skepticism for democracy and democratic rights is rooted in feelings of powerlessness in the face of perceived threats, which conspiracy theories help to simplify by attributing blame to identifiable outgroups. This helps explain why populist conspiratorialism fosters support for CT crackdown policies that curtail pluralist rights. If democracy itself is viewed as compromised—captured by corrupt elites and their outgroup allies—then suspending democratic norms in the name of national security becomes not only justifiable but necessary. The perception that liberal democratic protections enable threats to national security creates a rationale for endorsing policies that sideline pluralist rights in favor of coercive, exclusionary security measures, driving preferences for aggressive domestic CT policies that disproportionately target perceived outgroups—immigrants and minorities.

This leads to our final hypothesis:

H5. Populist individuals are more likely to support immigration and border restrictions, and surveillance, arrest, and detention of minorities to address terrorist threats due to their conspiratorial thinking patterns.

Research Design

We test our hypotheses using original survey data of 1,940 subjects living in the United States. The survey was conducted on Lucid Theorem and was fielded between January 17 and February 7, 2023. The Lucid online panel is representative of the U.S. adult population (Coppock and McClellan 2019) and has been utilized in numerous recent studies on U.S. public opinion, including those that examine support for retaliation, restricting civil liberties, and more authoritarian forms of rule amidst terrorist threats (Caton and Mullinix 2023; Piazza 2023; Wayne 2023). The survey was fielded in four batches across several days and times in order to accommodate participants from different time zones. Before beginning the survey, participants gave their informed consent.

Prior to measuring respondents' counterterrorism preferences, we presented them with a stimulus in the form of a fictional news report about an explosion, perpetrated by a terrorist organization operating in multiple countries, in a shopping mall in Overland Park, a suburb of Kansas City, that resulted in casualties and injuries. The report was designed to resemble authentic news coverage about terror attacks, including images allegedly taken at the scene and statements from eyewitnesses. We slightly varied, at random, attribution, claiming, and denial of responsibility for the purported terrorist attack to hold constant the effect that the name of the perpetrator had on subjects' responses.[1]

---

[1] Note, as a check we reran our analyses for each subset of subjects exposed to different attributions, claims, and denials of the terrorist attack. These mostly reproduce the main findings of the study. Results available from authors.

Studies in cognitive psychology suggest that priming stimuli, even in non-experimental settings, can activate specific thoughts, emotions, or biases before questioning (Schmidt et al. 2011). This is particularly relevant to the study of public preferences, as citizens' levels of knowledge, interest in political issues, and perceptions of issue salience play a critical role in shaping their assessments (Krosnick and Brannon 1993; Donovan et al. 2008; Ciuk and Yost 2016). By simulating a sudden and dramatic event, our stimulus mirrors how real-world events can abruptly heighten the salience of an issue and provide a context in which respondents' expressed preferences are more likely to resemble those formed in response to actual events such as under actual conditions of threat. Without such stimulus, respondents who are already informed and concerned about terrorism may naturally express the reactions they would have had to a real terror attack due to terrorism's higher baseline salience for them, while less-informed individuals may fail to reveal how they would react under genuine threat conditions because the issue lacks immediacy in their minds. The stimulus thus temporarily elevates the salience of terrorism for all respondents, enabling a more accurate assessment of how counterterrorism preferences might shift, as it would be in the wake of a real attack. After completing the survey, participants were debriefed and informed that the news story they had read before the survey was entirely fictional.

Throughout the survey, multiple attention tests were used to address concerns over subject inattentiveness, and respondents who did not pass these tests were not included in the study. The median respondent took 13.6 minutes to complete the survey.

Dependent Variables

To measure respondents' counterterrorism preferences, we employ six dependent variables—three addressing preferences for muscular or cooperative and liberal approaches in *international counterterrorism responses* and three focusing on domestic crackdowns or restrictions on civil liberties in *domestic counterterrorism responses*. In the former category, *international counterterrorism responses*, we measure respondent support for (1) deploying ground troops to countries where terrorists are based to apprehend suspects, (2) providing military aid and intelligence to governments of those countries to assist in combating terrorism, and (3) promoting democracy, human rights, and civil liberties in those countries as a means of addressing terrorism at its source[2]. In the latter category, *domestic counterterrorism responses*, we measure support for (4) increasing border security in the U.S., (5) reducing immigration to the U.S., and (6) arresting, detaining, or increasing surveillance of domestic communities perceived as potential supporters of terrorism[3].

All six measures are based on responses to questions with four answer choices—*strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree*, and *strongly agree*[4]—and are treated as ordinal variables ranging from 1 (indicating the lowest level of support for the specified counterterrorism response) to 4 (indicating the highest level of support). Overall, support for different international and domestic counterterrorism responses among respondents exhibits varied trends.

---

[2] Questions: "The government should send ground troops to countries the terrorists come from to help increase security and hunt down the terrorists", "The government should send military aid to and share intelligence with the countries the terrorists come from to help increase security and hunt down the terrorists", and "The government should encourage the countries the terrorists come from to adopt democracy, guarantee voting rights and increase human rights and personal freedoms".

[3] Questions: "The government should increase border security in the U.S.", "The government should decrease immigration to the U.S.", and "The government should arrest and detain or place under surveillance people and groups in the U.S. that might support the terrorists".

[4] To prevent "midpoint response bias", we did not include a middle category on our response scale. Respondents may select the middle category to reduce cognitive effort (Morii et al., 2017) or as a result of satisficing (Krosnick, 1991). In any case, it can be challenging to determine whether the midpoint response indeed reflects a neutral opinion.

This is illustrated by Figure 1. For instance, respondents show stronger support for cooperative international counterterrorism strategies (like providing aid to foreign countries to assist in combating terrorism) than direct military intervention (deploying ground troops abroad). As for domestic responses, respondents tend to favor border security measures but show mixed views on immigration restrictions and surveillance, reflecting greater concern for security but also potential civil liberty trade-offs.
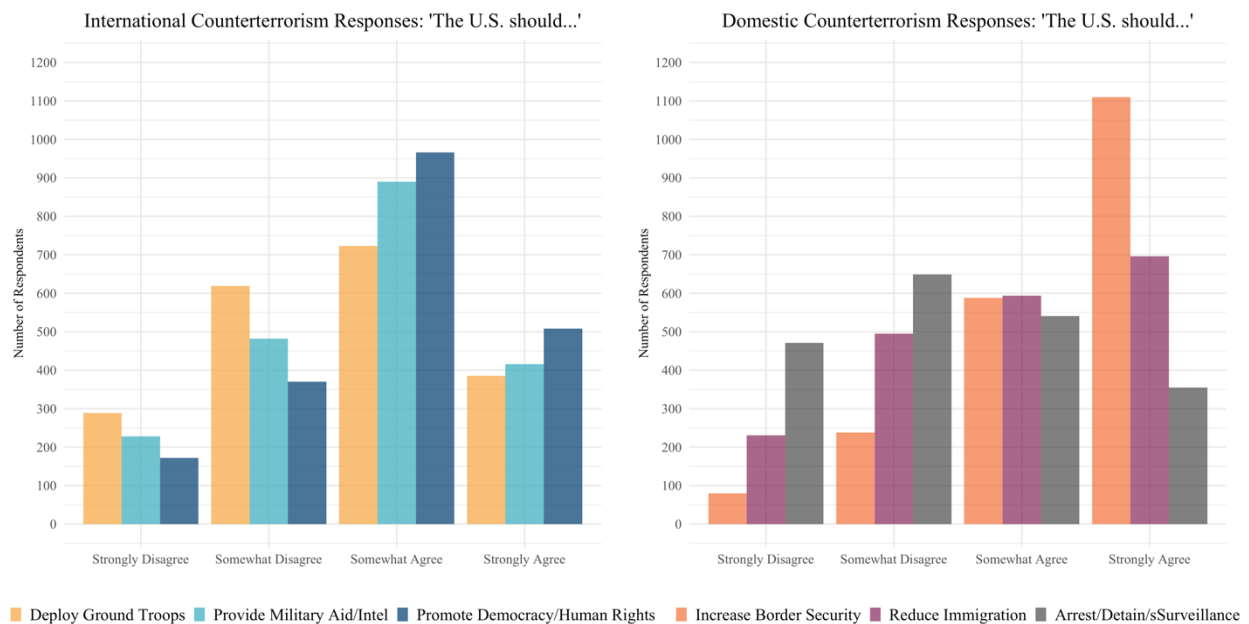
Figure 1. Distribution of Preferences for Counterterrorism Responses by Policy Type

Independent Variable

Our main independent variable measures respondents' populist attitudes. Because populism is a multidimensional concept encompassing different core elements such as praise of ordinary people, anti-elitism, mistrust of expertise, feelings of powerlessness in the current political system, belief that the system is corrupted by the elites, and a moralized view of politics

(Akkerman et al. 2014; Oliver and Rahn 2016; Castanho Silva et al. 2018; Castanho Silva et al. 2020) to assess populist attitudes, we asked respondents eight different questions, each one of which is intended to capture a different dimension of populism. These eight questions were developed by Oliver and Rahn (2016), specifically for the study of populist attitudes in the U.S and have been used by previous studies on how populist attitudes influence U.S. public opinion about a variety of contentious issues (Armaly and Enders 2024a; Armaly and Ender 2024b; Piazza 2024).

Three of the questions gauge antipathy toward elites by emphasizing the value placed on "the people's" goodness as opposed to the elites[5]. Two questions portray the political system as tainted by the corrupt influence and power of the elite[6]. Two others speak to sentiments of alienation from the political system by emphasizing that "the people" deprived of their political rights by the current system[7]. And one question measures the Manichean character of populist attitudes[8].

We presented all eight questions with four answer choices—*strongly disagree, somewhat disagree, somewhat agree*, and *strongly agree.* We construct a mean-scaled unweighted additive index of populist attitudes by summing responses to these eight survey items (1–4 scale) and calculating the mean score by dividing the total by 8. The resulting populist attitudes index is

---

[5] Questions: "I'd rather put my trust in the wisdom of ordinary people than in the opinions of experts and intellectuals." "Politics usually boils down to a struggle between the people and the powerful." "When it comes to really important questions, scientific facts don't help very much."

[6] Questions: "It doesn't really matter who you vote for because the rich control both political parties." "People at the top usually get there from some unfair advantage."

[7] Questions: "People like me don't have much of a say in what the government does." "The system is stacked against people like me."

[8] Question: "Politics is ultimately a struggle between good and evil."

continuous and ranges from 1, indicating an absence of populist attitudes, and to 4, indicating the highest level of populist sentiments.

The mean and median scores on the populism index for respondents are 2.74 and 2.75, respectively, suggesting a normal distribution of populist attitudes across the sample. This is illustrated in Figure 2.
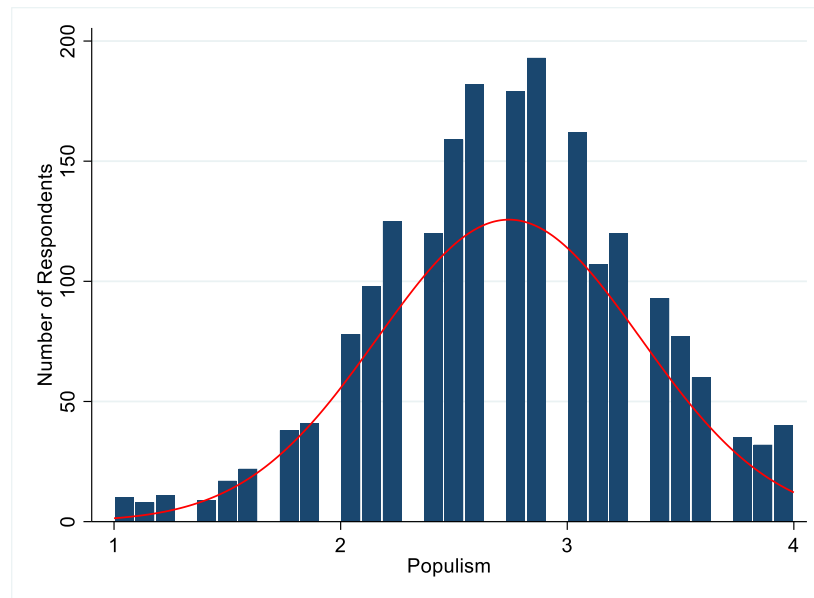
Figure 2. Histogram of Populism Scores with Density Estimate

Mediators

We employ three mediators to test our hypotheses and better explain the relationship between populist attitudes and counterterrorism preferences: political illiberalism and support for authoritarian "strongman" rule, racial animus and aversion towards minorities and outgroups, and conspiratorial thinking patterns.

To measure political illiberalism and support for authoritarian strongman rule we asked respondents to what extent they agreed with the following statement: "having a strong and honest

leader who does not have to bother with Congress or elections be a good way of governing the United States". This way of measuring support for illiberal strongman rule is consistent with other studies (see, for example, Piazza 2024). Preference for illiberal strongman rule is relatively evenly distributed across categories in the sample. Approximately 31.4 percent of subjects indicated that they strongly disagreed with this sort of rule for the United States while around 24.2 somewhat disagreed. Around 28.0 percent somewhat agreed while 16.3 percent strongly agreed.

To measure outgroup threat, we asked respondents the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: (1) "discrimination against other racial, religious or other minority groups is a problem today", (2) "members of racial, religious or other minority groups are too demanding in their push for equal rights", and (3) "there is too much concern for the rights of minority groups nowadays". We combine responses to these three questions into an additive index, ranging from 2 to 13, where higher scores indicate a higher level of racial animus, and then divide the measure by three to create an average score across all responses. The median score for our respondents is 6, on the 2 to 13 scale.

To measure conspiratorial thinking, we surveyed respondents on the extent to which they agreed with the following statements: (1) "unseen patterns and secret activities can be found everywhere in politics", (2) "much of our lives are being controlled by plots hatched in secret places", (3) "even though we live in a democracy, a few people will always run things anyway", and (4) "the people who really "run" the country, are not known to the voters". These questions have been developed and validated by previous studies (Uscinski et al. 2016; Enders et al. 2020; Uscinski et al. 2022; Enders et al. 2023). We combine responses to these four questions into an

additive index, ranging from 4 to 20, where higher scores indicate a higher aptitude for conspiratorial thinking. The median score for our respondents is 15.

Controls

In the models we control for respondents' age, gender, marital status, parental status, race and ethnicity, education level, income level, employment status, partisan affiliation, political conservatism, religious affiliation, news consumption habits, fear of terrorism, residential context (e.g., urban, or rural), and the U.S. region where they reside (e.g., Northeast, Midwest, South, or West).

In the sample, the median age for respondents was 45 and around 47.2 percent were male. Approximately 41.7 percent were married and 56.8 percent reported having children. In terms of race, around 68.3 percent of respondents identified as white, non-Hispanic, 10.4 percent as black, non-Hispanic, 12.2 percent as Hispanic or Latino, 4.6 percent as Asian or Pacific Islander. Approximately 11.0 percent identified as another race or ethnicity or of mixed race. The median respondent reported having completed some college but did not obtain a degree. The median household income of subjects was between U.S. $40,000 and $44,999 annually. Around 11.3 percent of respondents reported being unemployed and seeking work. Around 24.8 percent of subjects stated that they lived in a rural area.

Around 43.1 percent identified as Democrats, 35.1 percent as Republicans, and 21.7 percent as Independents. 63.7 percent of respondents identified as Christians (of multiple denominations) while around 29.6 percent stated that they were "born again." The median respondent stated that they followed news between several times a week and daily, and around 38.1 percent stated that they obtained most of their news through social media.

In terms of fear of terrorism, around 56.4 percent of subjects stated that thought that it was somewhat or very likely that they themselves or someone that they knew would be hurt or killed in a terrorist attack sometime in their lifetimes, indicating that a majority of respondents expressed fear of terrorism. This relatively high level is likely the product of our exposing subjects to the fictitious news event depicting a terrorist attack.

Finally, around 20.1 percent of subjects resided in the Northeast, 19.1 from the Midwest, 37.7 from the South, and 23.1 from the West.

An outline of the survey instrument is provided in the appendix along with a table reporting descriptive statistics for all variables used in the analysis.[9]

Estimation

We test our primary hypotheses, which assert that individuals with populist attitudes are prone to endorse more muscular international counterterrorism policies and more illiberal domestic counterterrorism crackdowns, using ordinary least squares estimations (OLS). To investigate the other hypotheses regarding how political illiberalism, racial animus, and conspiratorial thinking mediates these relationships, we rely on structural equation models (SEM) with bootstrapped replications.

Results

Our analysis provides strong evidence that populist attitudes shape counterterrorism preferences. Before examining the mediating roles of political illiberalism, racial animus, and conspiratorial thinking, we first present the baseline findings, as illustrated in Figures 3 and 4. The corresponding regression tables are available in the Appendix.[10]

---

[9] See Appendix Items 3 and 4.
[10] See Appendix Item 1.

Figure 3 displays coefficient plot results from the three foreign counterterrorism policy models, each assessing support for a different international counterterrorism strategy.[11] The first model—*Ground Troops Abroad*—yields evidence that individuals with higher populism scores are significantly more likely to support deploying U.S. troops abroad to combat terrorism. This aligns with prior research suggesting that populists favor militarized, unilateral foreign policy approaches (Isernia et al. 2024). However, the second and third models—*Military Aid/Intel to Allies* and *Promote Democracy Abroad*—yield null results, suggesting that populist attitudes do not significantly influence support for multilateral cooperation or liberal counterterrorism strategies. Collectively, these findings indicate that while populists may not explicitly reject multilateral or liberal policies, their preferences strongly favor unilateral and militaristic counterterrorism responses. Notably, the *Ground Troops Abroad* model suggests that populist sentiment has a greater substantive effect on support for troop deployment than party identification or ideological orientation. Figure 3 further visualizes the predicted effect of populist sentiment on support for troop deployment, comporting with an 28.9% increase in support between individuals with the lowest and highest levels of populist attitudes.[12]

---

[11] Predicted probability graphs for all models are presented in Appendix Item 2.
[12] Note, we present graphs of postestimation marginal effects of the impact of populism on the six dependent variables of the study in Appendix Item 2.

Figure 3. Coefficient Plots, Foreign CT Policy
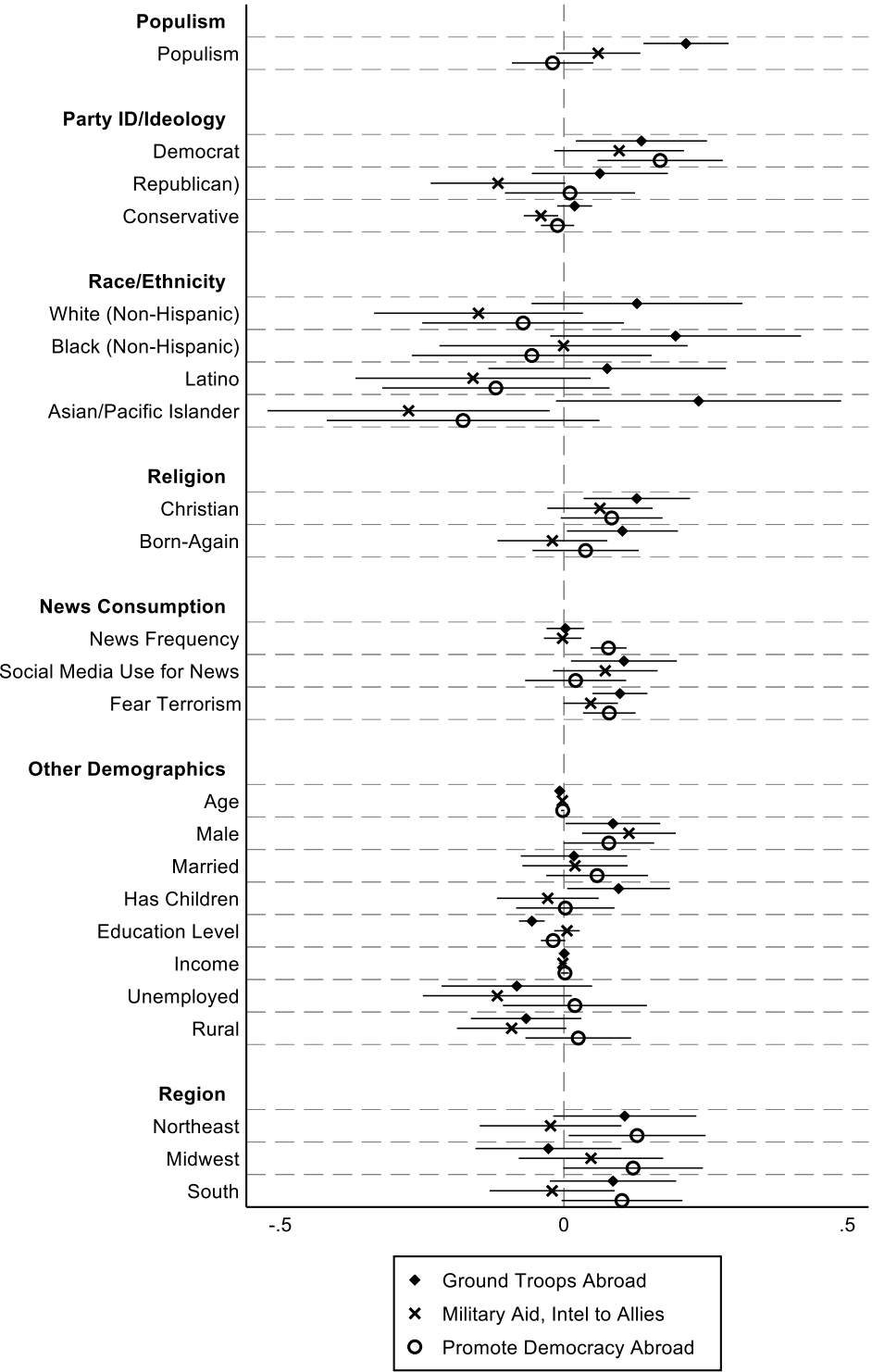
95% Confidence Intervals
Non-Standardized Coefficients

Turning to domestic counterterrorism policies, Figure 4 presents coefficient plots for models assessing the relationship between populism and support for increasing border security, reducing immigration, and surveilling/detaining/arresting individuals perceived as potential homegrown threats. Across all three models, populist attitudes are positive, strong and significant predictors of support for domestic counterterrorism crackdowns. These results align with prior studies linking populism to negative attitudes toward racial outgroups, minorities, and immigrants (Jacobs and van Spanje 2021; Bonikowski and Zhang 2023; Magalhães and Costa-Lopes 2023). Strikingly, our models indicate that populist sentiment exerts a larger substantive effect on support for domestic crackdowns than either Republican Party affiliation or political conservatism.

Figure 4. Coefficient Plots, Domestic CT Policy
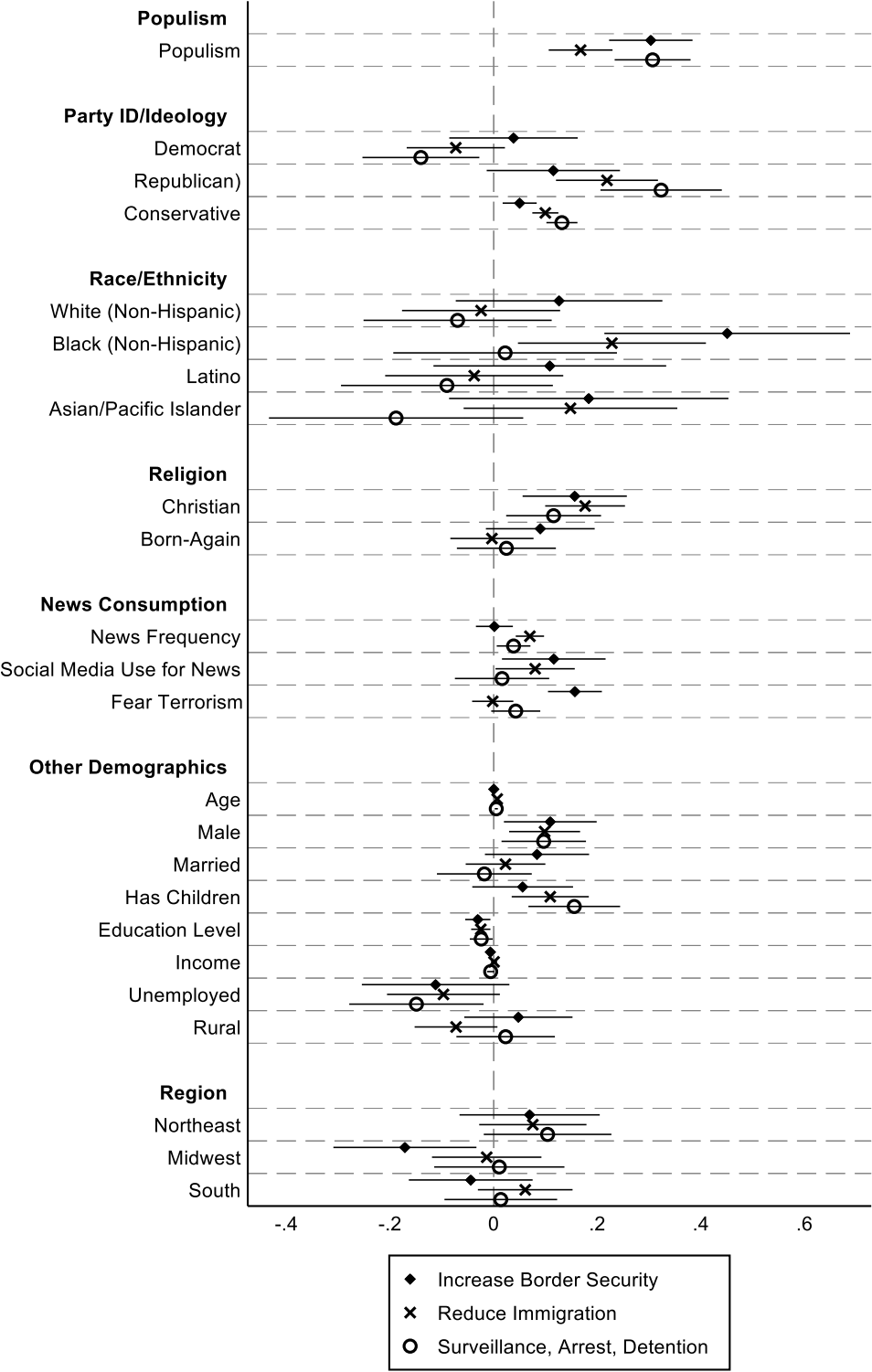
95% Confidence Intervals
Non-Standardized Coefficients

Mediation Analysis

We hypothesized that populist individuals' support for international and domestic CT policy responses is mediated through affection toward illiberal strongman rule, perceptions of outgroup threat, and conspiratorial thinking. To test this, we conducted structural equation modeling (SEM) with bootstrapped replications. The results, summarized in Figures 5–8, provide strong evidence for our hypotheses.[13]

Figure 5 evaluates the effects of our three mediators on support for deploying ground troops abroad. Populism is a strong positive predictor of political illiberalism, which, in turn, is associated with support for foreign troop deployments (H1). This finding aligns with prior research linking authoritarian political attitudes to hawkish foreign policy preferences (Rathbun et al. 2016; Mutz and Kim 2017; Albuyeh and Paradis 2018). Similarly, perceptions of outgroup threat significantly mediate the relationship between populism and support for troop deployments (H3), echoing studies associating ethnocentrism with unilateral militarism (Kam and Kinder 2007; Kertzer et al. 2014; Rathbun et al. 2016). However, while populism strongly correlates with conspiratorial thinking, conspiratorial mindset does not significantly predict support for militarized counterterrorism policies. Strongman illiberalism mediates approximately 48.8 percent of the effect of populism on support for deploying ground troops abroad to counter terrorist threats. Outgroup hate mediates a much smaller percent: 9.6 percent.

---

[13] Note that mediation requires the independent variable to be significantly associated with the dependent variable (see Baron and Kenny 1986). Because we did not find populism to significantly predict provision of military aid and intelligence to allies and democracy promotion in our first set of analyses, we therefore cannot conduct mediation tests on them.

Figure 5. Mediation, Populist Attitudes, Political Illiberalism, Racial Animus, Conspiratorial Mindset and Deploying Ground Troops Abroad to Address Terrorist Threats
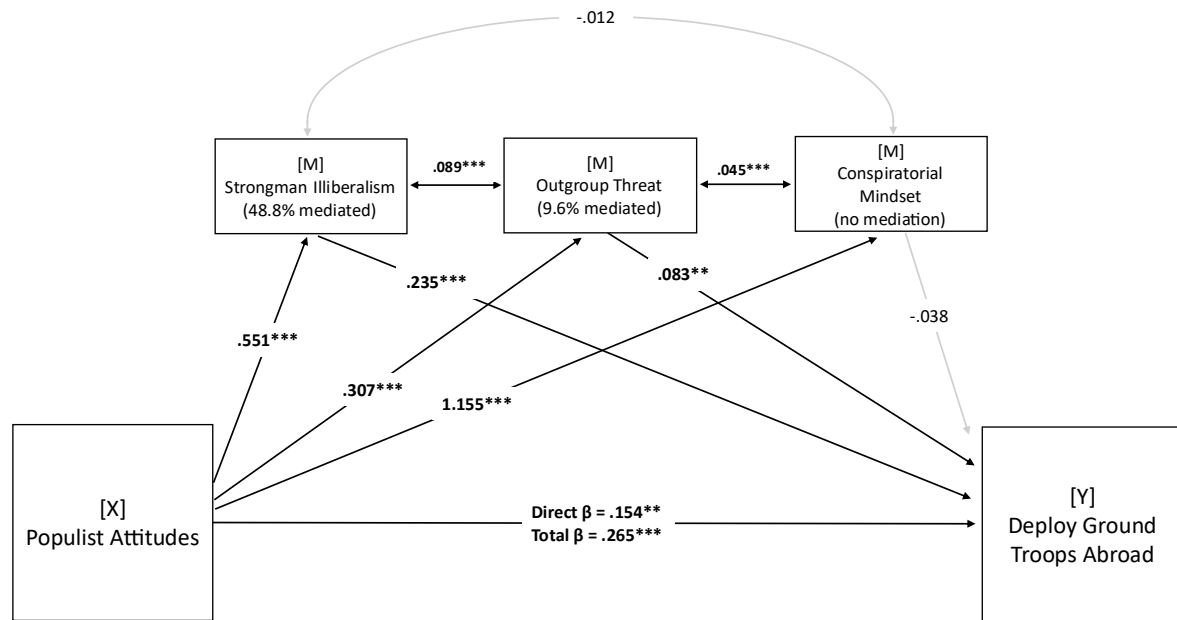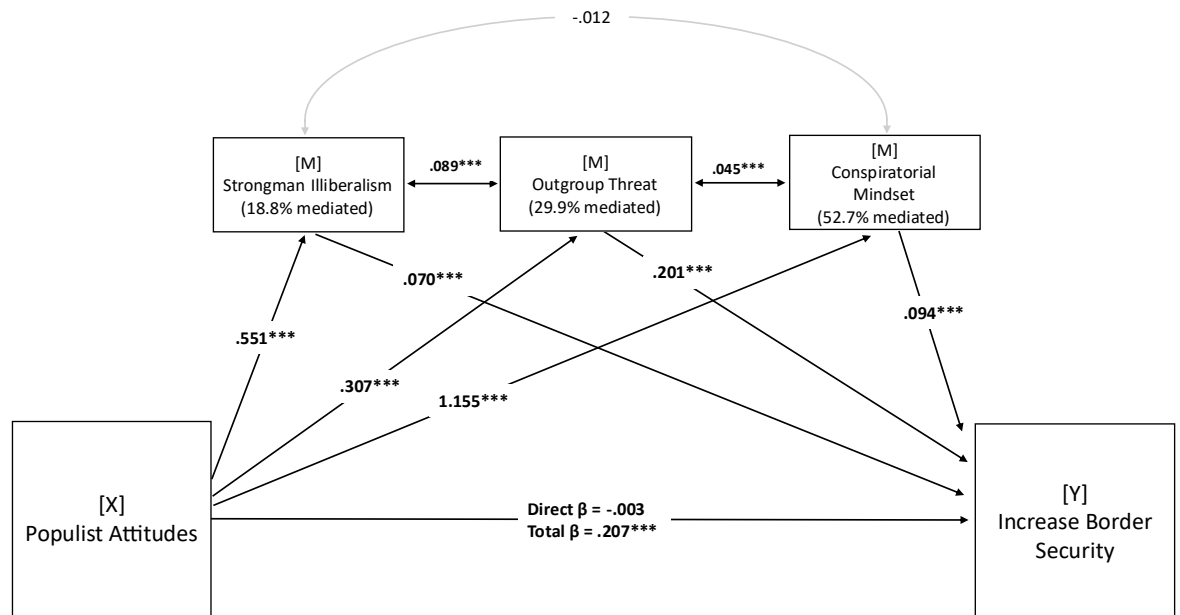

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
*** ρ ≤ .000   ** ρ ≤ .01   * ρ ≤ .1
1,000 bootstrapped iterations
Controls: age, gender, marital status, children, race, education level, income level, rural residence, partisan affiliation, political ideology, religious affiliation, religious attitudes, news consumption, social media usage, fear of being a victim of terrorism, region of residence in U.S., duration of survey (log).

Figures 6–8 assess how our three mediators shape the relationship between populist attitudes and support for border security, immigration restrictions, and domestic surveillance/arrests. Across all models, illiberalism, outgroup threat, and conspiratorial mindset significantly predict support for these domestic crackdown policies (with the exception of conspiratorial thinking not predicting support for domestic surveillance).

Figure 6. Mediation, Populist Attitudes, Political Illiberalism, Racial Animus, Conspiratorial Mindset and Increasing Border Security to Address Terrorist Threats
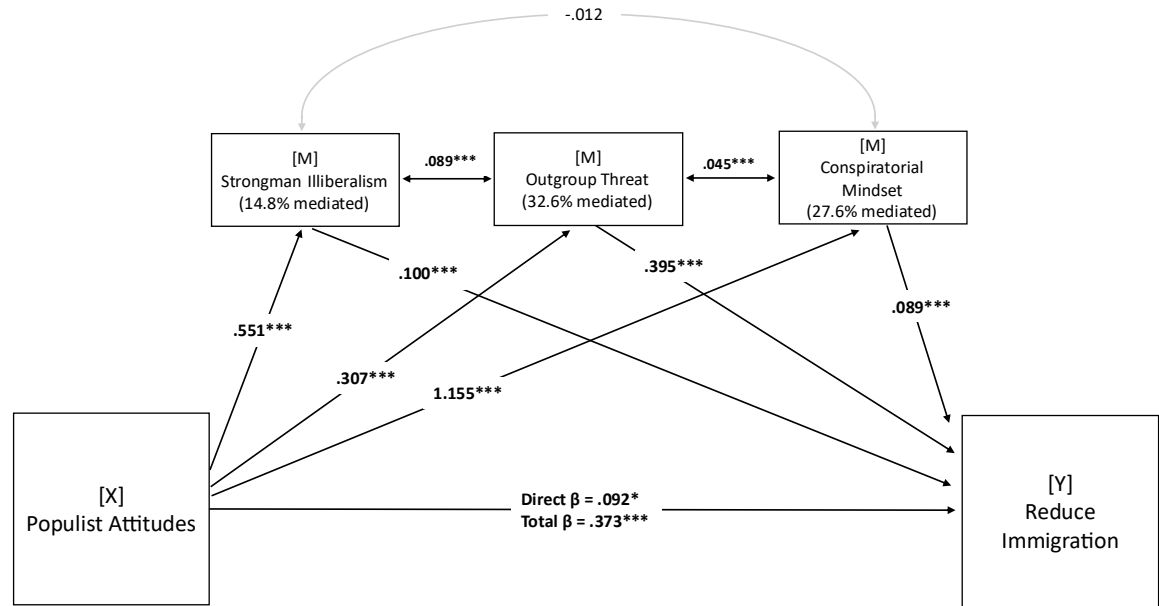

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
*** ρ ≤ .000   ** ρ ≤ .01   * ρ ≤ .1
1,000 bootstrapped iterations
Controls: age, gender, marital status, children, race, education level, income level, rural residence, partisan affiliation, political ideology, religious affiliation, religious attitudes, news consumption, social media usage, fear of being a victim of terrorism, region of residence in U.S., duration of survey (log).

Figure 7. Mediation, Populist Attitudes, Political Illiberalism, Racial Animus, Conspiratorial Mindset and Reducing Immigration to Address Terrorist Threats
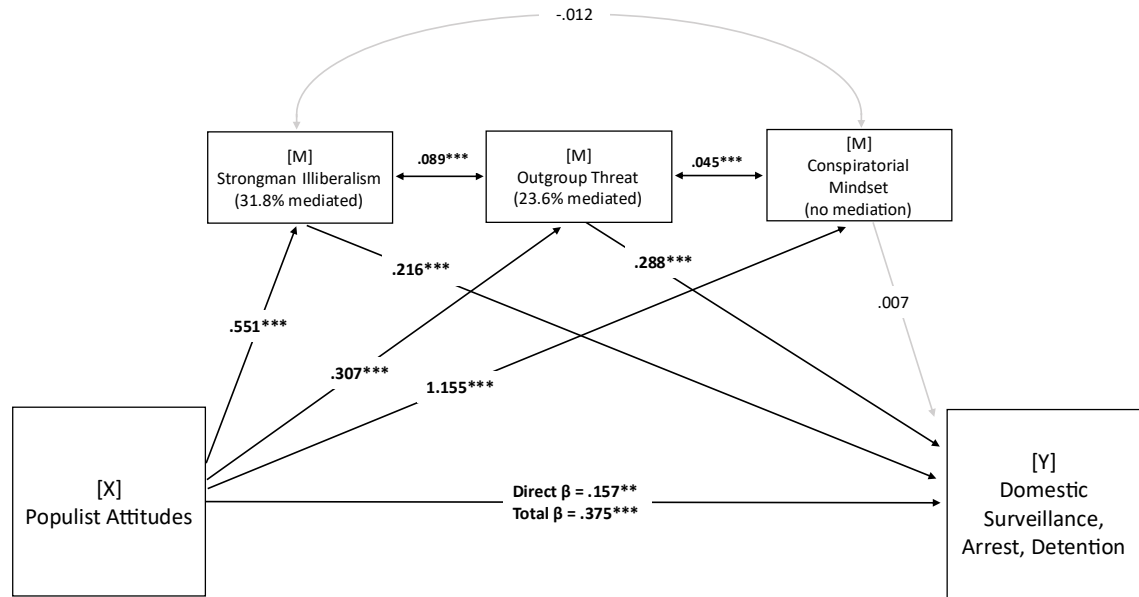

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
*** ρ ≤ .000   ** ρ ≤ .01   * ρ ≤ .1
1,000 bootstrapped iterations
Controls: age, gender, marital status, children, race, education level, income level, rural residence, partisan affiliation, political ideology, religious affiliation, religious attitudes, news consumption, social media usage, fear of being a victim of terrorism, region of residence in U.S., duration of survey (log).

Figure 8. Mediation, Populist Attitudes, Political Illiberalism, Racial Animus, Conspiratorial Mindset and Domestic Surveillance, Arrest, and Detention of People from Same Communities as Terrorists to Address Terrorist Threats

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM)
*** ρ ≤ .000   ** ρ ≤ .01   * ρ ≤ .1
1,000 bootstrapped iterations
Controls: age, gender, marital status, children, race, education level, income level, rural residence, partisan affiliation, political ideology, religious affiliation, religious attitudes, news consumption, social media usage, fear of being a victim of terrorism, region of residence in U.S., duration of survey (log).

First, political illiberalism mediates the link between populist sentiment and support for increasing border security (Figure 6), reducing immigration (Figure 7), and expanding surveillance/arrests of domestic populations perceived as terrorist sympathizers (Figure 8) (H2). This reinforces prior findings that populists' affinity for strongman governance leads them to prioritize security over civil liberties and minority rights (Piazza 2023; Salvati et al. 2022). Similarly, outgroup threat mediates these relationships (H4), as populists' aversion to social outgroups reinforces their preference for domestic crackdowns on immigration and minority rights. Together, illiberalism and outgroup threat account for 48% of the relationship between

populism and support for border security and 55% of the relationship between populism and increased domestic surveillance.

Finally, conspiratorial mindset mediates the relationship between populism and most—but not all—domestic crackdown policies (H5). As shown in Figures 6 and 7, conspiratorial thinking significantly predicts greater support for border security and immigration restrictions, mediating approximately 53% of the relationship between populism and support for increased border security and 27.6% of the relationship between populism and support for reducing immigration. This finding is consistent with research linking populism to conspiracy beliefs (Erisen et al. 2024; Salvati et al. 2022; Uscinski et al. 2022) and conspiratorial skepticism toward liberal democratic norms (van Prooijen 2018; Papaioannou et al. 2023). However, as shown in Figure 8, conspiratorial thinking does not significantly predict support for surveillance, arrests, or detention of domestic groups perceived as terrorist sympathizers.

Our findings, thus, demonstrate that populist attitudes strongly influence counterterrorism preferences, aligning with our theoretical expectations. Populists favor unilateral, militarized responses to terrorism abroad while showing no significant support for multilateral cooperation or democracy promotion in foreign policy decisions around counterterrorism. Domestically, they are significantly more likely to endorse border security measures, immigration restrictions, and surveillance or detention of perceived domestic threats. Mediation analysis reveals that political illiberalism and perceptions of outgroup threat largely drive these preferences of populists, while conspiratorial thinking amplifies populists' support for border security and immigration restrictions. Overall, individuals with populist attitudes prefer forceful, exclusionary measures over cooperative, liberal democratic rights-based approaches to counterterrorism policymaking.

Conclusion

This study contributes to the body of research demonstrating that populism in the United States extends beyond electoral dynamics to shape policy preferences. The findings highlight how American populist attitudes align with broader global trends in populism, emphasizing nationalism, skepticism toward international cooperation, and a preference for unilateral action over multilateral engagement (Ivarsflaten 2008; Mudde and Kaltwasser 2018; Berman 2021; Isernia 2024).

On the international front, the findings reveal that populist individuals in the U.S. strongly favor a militarized, unilateral approach to counterterrorism over cooperative, multilateral, or democracy-promoting strategies. This preference aligns with broader populist skepticism toward international institutions and alliances, reinforcing a worldview that prioritizes national sovereignty. These attitudes ultimately challenge the traditional U.S. foreign policy approach, which has historically balanced military engagement with diplomatic coalition-building. As populist sentiment grows, foreign policymakers may face increasing pressure to shift away from multilateral counterterrorism strategies in favor of more aggressive, go-it-alone tactics—a trend that could have significant implications for global security partnerships.

Domestically, the study finds that populists strongly favor counterterrorism policies that emphasize border security, immigration restrictions, and heightened surveillance or detention of certain communities. The role of strongman governance and outgroup threat perceptions in shaping these preferences suggests that, for many populists, counterterrorism is as much about reinforcing social hierarchies and protecting a narrowly defined notion of "the people" as it is about addressing security challenges.

Future research can build on our findings in several ways. Researchers can explore the role of media and online information ecosystems in reinforcing or challenging populist narratives around counterterrorism, especially given the rising influence of social media as a news source. One promising direction is to assess how emerging digital technologies, including algorithmic news feeds and micro-targeted political messaging on social media, further reinforce populist counterterrorism narratives. Recent research indicates that individuals' demand for content moderation of incivility, intolerance, and violent threats on social media is rather low (Pradel et al. 2024), that increasing partisan polarization fuels the spread of "fake news" on social media (Osmundsen et al. 2021), and that users' exposure to political posts is driven not only by partisan alignment but also by the intensity of their political engagement (Haselswerdt and Fine 2024). This suggests that highly engaged users—regardless of party identification or ideology—may be especially susceptible to digital messages that reinforce populist attitudes toward national security, as they are continually exposed to unmoderated and polarizing content.

REFERENCES

Abadi, D., Willem van Prooijen, J., Krouwel, A., & Fischer, A. H. (2024). Anti-establishment sentiments: realistic and symbolic threat appraisals predict populist attitudes and conspiracy mentality. *Cognition and Emotion*, 1-15.

Akkerman, Agnes, Cas Mudde, and Andrej Zaslove. 2014. "How Populist Are the People? Measuring Populist Attitudes in Voters." *Comparative Political Studies* 47 (9): 1324–53.

Albuyeh, Rod and Mark Paradis. 2018. "Thawing Rivalries and Fading Friendships: An Experimental Approach to Rapprochement and Alienation." *Political Psychology* 39(4):811–27.

Altheide DL (2017) *Terrorism and the Politics of Fear*, 2nd edn. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield.

Amstutz, D. L. (2014). A populist approach to foreign policy: Governor William A. Poynter, the South African War, and the Indian famine, 1899–1901. *Great Plains Quarterly*, *34*(1), 11–34.

Arato, A., & Cohen, J. L. (2018). Civil society, populism, and religion. In *Routledge handbook of global populism* (pp. 98-112). Routledge.

Armaly, Miles T., and Adam M. Enders. 2024a. "Who Supports Political Violence?" *Perspectives on Politics* 22(2): 427–44. doi: 10.1017/S1537592722001086.

Armaly, Miles T., and Adam M. Enders. 2024b. "The Disparate Correlates of Populist Support in the United States." *Political Research Quarterly*. doi:10.1177/10659129241289135.

Austin, H. (2017, January 26). Theresa May looking forward to pursuing trade deal with Donald Trump. *Independent*.

Baron, R. M., & Kenny, D. A. (1986). The moderator–mediator variable distinction in social psychological research: Conceptual, strategic, and statistical considerations. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 5,* 1173-1182.

Bergh, J. (2004). Protest voting in austria, denmark, and norway. *Scandinavian Political Studies*, *27*(4), 367-389.

Berman, S. (2021). The causes of populism in the west. *Annual Review of Political Science*, *24*(1), 71-88.

Betz, H. G. (2013). A distant mirror: Nineteenth-century populism, nativism, and contemporary right-wing radical politics. *Democracy and Security*, *9*(3), 200-220.

Bonikowski, B., & Zhang, Y. (2023). Populism as dog-whistle politics: Anti-elite discourse and sentiments toward minority groups. *Social Forces*, *102*(1), 180-201.

Bowler, S., Carreras, M., & Merolla, J. L. (2023). Trump tweets and democratic attitudes: Evidence from a survey experiment. *Political research quarterly*, *76*(3), 1325-1339.

Brewer, M. B. (1999). The psychology of prejudice: Ingroup love and outgroup hate?. *Journal of social issues*, *55*(3), 429-444.

Buzogány, A., Costa, O., & Góra, M. (2022). Contesting the EU's external democratization agenda: an analytical framework with an application to populist parties. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *35*(4), 500-522.

Canovan, M. (1999). Trust the people! Populism and the two faces of democracy. *Political studies*, *47*(1), 2-16.

Castanho Silva, Bruno, Sebastian Jungkunz, Marc Helbling, and Levente Littvay. 2020. "An Empirical Comparison of Seven Populist Attitudes Scales." *Political Research Quarterly* 73(2): 409-424. doi: 10.1177/1065912919833176.

Castanho Silva, B., Vegetti, F., & Littvay, L. (2017). The elite is up to something: Exploring the relation between populism and belief in conspiracy theories. *Swiss political science review*, *23*(4), 423-443.

Castanho Silva, Bruno, Ioannis Andreadis, Eva Anduiza, Nebojša Blanuša, Yazmin Morlet Corti, Gisela Delfino, Guillem Rico et al. 2018. "Public Opinion Surveys: A New Scale." In The Ideational Approach to Populism: Theory, Method & Analysis, edited by Hawkins Kirk, Carlin Ryan, Littvay Levente, Kaltwasser Cristóbal Rovira, 150-178. London: Routledge.

Caton, Cora and Kevin J. Mullinix. 2023. "Partisanship and Support for Restricting the Civil Liberties of Suspected Terrorists." *Political Behavior* 45: 1421–1445. doi:10.1007/s11109-022-09771-9.

Chryssogelos, A. (2017). Populism in foreign policy. In *Oxford research encyclopedia of politics*.

Chryssogelos, A. S. (2010). Undermining the West from within: European populists, the US and Russia. *European View*, *9*(2), 267–277.

Ciuk, David J., and Berwood A. Yost. 2015. "The Effects of Issue Salience, Elite Influence, and Policy Content on Public Opinion." *Political Communication* 33(2): 328–345. doi:10.1080/10584609.2015.1017629.

Cohrs, J Christopher and Barbara Moschner. 2002. "Antiwar knowledge and generalized political attitudes as determinants of attitude toward the Kosovo war." *Peace and Conflict: Journal of Peace Psychology* 8(2):139–155.

Cutts, D., Ford, R., & Goodwin, M. J. (2011). Anti-immigrant, politically disaffected or still racist after all? Examining the attitudinal drivers of extreme right support in Britain in the 2009 European elections. *European Journal of Political Research*, *50*(3), 418-440.

Donovan, T. (2021). Right populist parties and support for strong leaders. *Party Politics*, *27*(5), 858-869.

Donovan, Todd Caroline J. Tolbert, and Daniel A. Smith. 2008. "Priming Presidential Votes by Direct Democracy." *The Journal of Politics* 70(4): 1217-1231. doi:10.1017/S0022381608081164.

Doty, Richard M, David G Winter, Bill E Peterson and Markus Kemmelmeier. 1997. "Authoritarianism and American students' attitudes about the Gulf War, 1990-1996." *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin* 23(11):1133–1143.

Douglas, K. M., Uscinski, J. E., Sutton, R. M., Cichocka, A., Nefes, T., Ang, C. S., & Deravi, F. (2019). Understanding conspiracy theories. *Political psychology*, *40*, 3-35.

Eberl, J. M., Huber, R. A., & Greussing, E. (2021). From populism to the "plandemic": Why populists believe in COVID-19 conspiracies. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *31*(sup1), 272-284.

Enders, Adam, Christina Farhart, Joanne Miller, Joseph Uscinski, Kyle Saunders, and Hugo Drochon. 2023. "Are Republicans and Conservatives More Likely to Believe Conspiracy Theories?" *Political Behavior* 45: 2001–2024. doi:10.1007/s11109-022-09812-3

Enders, Adam M., Steven M. Smallpage, and Robert N. Lupton. 2020. "Are All 'Birthers' Conspiracy Theorists? On the Relationship Between Conspiratorial Thinking and Political Orientations." *British Journal of Political Science* 50(3): 849–66. doi:10.1017/S0007123417000837.

Erisen, C., Guidi, M., Martini, S., Toprakkiran, S., Isernia, P., & Littvay, L. (2021). Psychological correlates of populist attitudes. *Political Psychology*, *42*, 149-171.

Foa, R. S., & Mounk, Y. (2016). The danger of deconsolidation: The democratic disconnect. *Journal of democracy*, *27*(3), 5-17.

Green, M., & White, J. K. (2019). Populism in the United States. *Populism Around the World: A Comparative Perspective*, 109-122.

Hall, J. (2021). In search of enemies: Donald Trump's populist foreign policy rhetoric. *Politics*, *41*(1), 48-63.

Hameleers, M., & de Vreese, C. H. (2020). To whom are "the people" opposed? Conceptualizing and measuring citizens' populist attitudes as a multidimensional construct. *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties*, *30*(2), 255-274.

Hammerschmidt, D., Meyer, C., & Pintsch, A. (2022). Foreign aid in times of populism: the influence of populist radical right parties on the official development assistance of OECD countries. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *35*(4), 478-499.

Haselswerdt, Jake, and Jeffrey A. Fine. 2024. "Echo Chambers or Doom Scrolling? Homophily, Intensity, and Exposure to Elite Social Media Messages." *Political Research Quarterly* 77(1): 199–212.

Hawkins, K. A., Riding, S., & Mudde, C. (2012). Measuring populist attitudes.

Henry, Patrick J, Jim Sidanius, Shana Levin and Felicia Pratto. 2005. "Social dominance orientation, authoritarianism, and support for intergroup violence between the Middle East and America." *Political Psychology* 26(4):569–584.

Hönig, A. L., & Tumenbaeva, S. (2022). Democratic decline in the EU and its effect on democracy promotion in Central Asia. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *35*(4), 424-458.

Houle, C., & Kenny, P. D. (2018). The political and economic consequences of populist rule in Latin America. *Government and Opposition*, *53*(2), 256-287.

Huber, R. A., & Schimpf, C. H. (2017). On the distinct effects of left-wing and right-wing populism on democratic quality. *Politics and governance*, *5*(4), 146-165.

Inglehart, R., & Norris, P. (2017). Trump and the populist authoritarian parties: The silent revolution in reverse. *Perspectives on Politics*, *15*(2), 443-454.

Isernia, P., Mader, M., Martini, S., Radu, B., & Schoen, H. (2024). Populist attitudes and foreign policy postures: a comparative analysis of four European countries. *European Political Science Review*, 1-19.

Ivarsflaten, E. 2008. "What unites right-wing populists in Western Europe? Re-examining grievance mobilization models in seven successful cases," *Comparative Political Studies*, 41(1): 3–23.

Jacobs, L., & van Spanje, J. (2021). Not all terror is alike: How right-wing extremist and Islamist terror threat affect anti-immigration party support. *International Journal of Public Opinion Research*, *33*(4), 737-755.

Kam, Cindy D and Donald R Kinder. 2007. "Terror and ethnocentrism: Foundations of American support for the war on terrorism." *Journal of Politics* 69(2):320–338.

Kertzer, J. D., Powers, K. E., Rathbun, B. C., & Iyer, R. (2014). Moral support: How moral values shape foreign policy attitudes. *The Journal of Politics*, *76*(3), 825-840.

Kokkonen, A., & Linde, J. (2023). Nativist attitudes and opportunistic support for democracy. *West European Politics*, *46*(1), 49-72.

Kriesi, H. (2014). The populist challenge. *West European Politics*, *37*(2), 361-378.

Kriesi, H., & Pappas, T. S. (Eds.). (2024). *European populism in the shadow of the great recession*. Ecpr Press.

Krosnick, Jon A., and Laura A. Brannon. 1993. "The Impact of the Gulf War on the Ingredients of Presidential Evaluations: Multidimensional Effects of Political Involvement." *American Political Science Review* 87(4): 963–75. doi: 10.2307/2938828.

Krosnick Jon A. 1991. "Response Strategies for Coping with the Cognitive Demands of Attitude Measures in Surveys." *Applied Cognitive Psychology* 5(3): 213–236. doi:10.1002/acp.2350050305.

Lewandowsky, M., & Jankowski, M. (2023). Sympathy for the devil? Voter support for illiberal politicians. *European Political Science Review*, *15*(1), 39-56.

Liang, C. S. (Ed.). (2007). *Europe for the Europeans: The foreign and security policy of the populist radical right*. London: Routledge.

Magalhães, P. C., & COSTA-LOPES, R. U. I. (2024). Populist radical right rhetoric increases discrimination towards minorities: Welfare ethnocentrism and anti-Roma attitudes. *European Journal of Political Research*, *63*(2), 787-797.

Maier, M., Welzenbach-Vogel, I. C., Christner, C., Tillman, E. R., Zinkernagel, A., & Schmitt, M. (2023). Implicit and explicit populist and anti-immigrant attitudes and their explanatory power for populist radical-right party support. *Acta Politica*, *58*(3), 591-613.

Marcos-Marne, H., Gil de Zuniga, H., & Borah, P. (2023). What do we (not) know about demand-side populism? A systematic literature review on populist attitudes. *European Political Science*, *22*(3), 293-307.

Martínez, C. A., van Prooijen, J. W., & Van Lange, P. A. (2023). The hateful people: Populist attitudes predict interpersonal and intergroup hate. *Social Psychological and Personality Science*, *14*(6), 698-707.

Mason, L., Wronski, J., & Kane, J. V. (2021). Activating animus: The uniquely social roots of Trump support. *American Political Science Review*, *115*(4), 1508-1516.

McFarland, Sam G. 2005. "On the eve of war: Authoritarianism, social dominance, and American students' attitudes toward attacking Iraq." *Personality and Social Psychology* Bulletin 31(3):360367.

Mead, W.R. (2011). The Tea Party and American foreign policy: What populism means for globalism. *Foreign Affairs*, *90*(2), 28–44.

Monkos, A. (2022). Democracy promotion under populist rule? The case of Poland's democracy aid in Ukraine. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, *35*(4), 459-477.

Morii Masahiro, Takayuki Sakagami, Shinya Masuda, Shigetaka Okubo, and Yuki Tamari. 2017. "How does Response Bias Emerge in Lengthy Sequential Preference Judgments?" *Behaviormetrika* 44(2): 575–591. doi:10.1007/s41237-017-0036-6.

Mudde, C. (2023). Populismo en Europa: una respuesta democrática iliberal al liberalismo antidemocrático. *Revista de Estudios Globales. Análisis Histórico y Cambio Social*, *2*(4).

Mudde, C. 2007. Populist Radical Right Parties in Europe. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Mudde, C., & Rovira Kaltwasser, C. (2018). Studying populism in comparative perspective: Reflections on the contemporary and future research agenda. *Comparative political studies*, *51*(13), 1667-1693.

Müller, J. W. (2017). *What is populism?*. Penguin UK.

Mutz, D. C. (2018). Status threat, not economic hardship, explains the 2016 presidential vote. *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*, *115*(19), E4330-E4339.

Mutz, Diana C and Eunji Kim. 2017. "The impact of in-group favoritism on trade preferences." *International Organization* 71(4):827–850.

Norris, P. (2020). Measuring populism worldwide. *Party politics*, *26*(6), 697-717.

Norris, P., & Inglehart, R. (2019). *Cultural backlash: Trump, Brexit, and authoritarian populism*. Cambridge University Press.

Oliver, J. Eric and Wendy M. Rahn. 2016. "Rise of the Trumpenvolk: Populism in the 2016 Election." *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 667(1): 189–206. doi: 10.1177/0002716216662639.

Osmundsen, Mathias, Alexander Bor, Peter Bjerregaard Vahlstrup, Anja Bechmann, and Michael Bang Petersen. 2021. "Partisan Polarization Is the Primary Psychological Motivation behind Political Fake News Sharing on Twitter." *American Political Science Review* 115(3): 999–1015.

Ostler, J. (1995). The rhetoric of Conspiracy and the Formation of Kansas Populism. *Agricultural History*, *69*(1), 1-27.

Papaioannou, K., Pantazi, M., & van Prooijen, J. W. (2023). Is democracy under threat? Why belief in conspiracy theories predicts autocratic attitudes. *European Journal of Social Psychology*, *53*(5), 846-856.

Pappas, T. S. (2019). *Populism and liberal democracy: A comparative and theoretical analysis*. Oxford University Press.

Piazza, James A. 2023. "Fear of Terrorism and Support for Non-Democratic Rule in Democracies." *International Interactions*, 49(4), 587–611. doi:10.1080/03050629.2023.2208726

Piazza, James and Natalia Van Doren. 2023. "It's About Hate: Approval of Donald Trump, Racism, Xenophobia and Support for Political Violence." *American Politics Research* 51(3): 299-314. doi:10.1177/1532673X221131561

Piazza, James A. 2024a. "Populism and Support for Political Violence in the United States: Assessing the Role of Grievances, Distrust of Political Institutions, Social Change Threat, and Political Illiberalism." *Political Research Quarterly* 77(1): 152-166. doi:10.1177/10659129231198248

Piazza, J. A. (2024b). Demographic change threat, preference for nondemocratic governance, and support for political violence. *Social Science Quarterly*. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13402.

Postel, C. (2007). *The populist vision*. Oxford University Press.

Pradel, Franziska, Jan Zilinsky, Spyros Kosmidis, and Yannis Theocharis. 2024. "Toxic Speech and Limited Demand for Content Moderation on Social Media." *American Political Science Review* 118(4): 1895–1912.

Rathbun, Brian. 2020. "Towards a dual process model of foreign policy ideology." *Current Opinion in Behavioral Sciences* 34:211–216.

Rathbun, B. C., Kertzer, J. D., Reifler, J., Goren, P., & Scotto, T. J. (2016). Taking foreign policy personally: Personal values and foreign policy attitudes. *International Studies Quarterly*, *60*(1), 124-137.

Roccato, M., Cavazza, N., Colloca, P., & Russo, S. (2020). Three roads to populism? An Italian field study on the 2019 European election. *Social Science Quarterly*, *101*(4), 1222-1235.

Rydgren, J. (2004). Explaining the emergence of radical right-wing populist parties: The case of Denmark. *West European Politics*, *27*(3), 474-502.

Salvati, M., Giacomantonio, M., Pellegrini, V., De Cristofaro, V., & Leone, L. (2022). Conspiracy beliefs of Italian voters for populist parties: The moderated mediational role of political interest and ideological attitudes. *Acta psychologica*, *223*, 103508.

Schmidt Filipp, Anke Haberkamp, and Thomas Schmidt. 2011. "Dos and Don'ts in Response Priming Research*." Advances in Cognitive Psychology* 7: 120-131. doi: 10.2478/v10053-008-0092-2.

Semyonov, M., Raijman, R., & Gorodzeisky, A. (2006). The rise of anti-foreigner sentiment in European societies, 1988-2000. *American sociological review*, *71*(3), 426-449.

Sides T., Tesler M. 2019. Vavreck. In *Identity Crisis*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Suthaharan, Praveen and Philip R. Corlett. 2023. "Assumed Shared Belief about Conspiracy Theories in Social Networks Protects Paranoid Individuals against Distress." *Scientific Reports* 13(6084). doi:10.1038/s41598-023-33305-w.

Trump, Donald J. "Transcript: Donald Trump's Speech Responding to Assault Accusations."
    NPR, 13 Oct. 2016, https://www.npr.org/2016/10/13/497857068/transcript-donald-
    trumps-speech-responding-to-assault-accusations

Urbinati, Nadia. 2017. "Populism and the Principle of Majority." In *The Oxford Handbook of
    Populism*, edited by Cristóbal Rovira Kaltwasser, Paul Taggart, Paulina Ochoa Espejo
    and Pierre Ostiguy, 571–589. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Uscinski, Joseph E., Casey Klofstad, and Matthew D. Atkinson. 2016. "What Drives
    Conspiratorial Beliefs? The Role of Informational Cues and Predispositions." *Political
    Research Quarterly* 69(1):57-71. doi:10.1177/1065912915621621

Uscinski, Joseph, Adam Enders, Casey Klofstad, Michelle Seelig, Hugo Drochon, Kamal
    Premaratne, and Manohar Murthi. 2022. "Have Beliefs in Conspiracy Theories Increased
    over Time?." *PLoS One* 17(7). doi: 10.1371/journal.pone.0270429.

Van der Brug, W., M. Fennema, and J. Tillie. 2005. "Why some anti-immigrant parties fail and
    others succeed: a two-step model of aggregate electoral support," *Comparative Political
    Studies*, 38(5): 537–73.

van Prooijen, J. W. (2024). Group-oriented motivations underlying conspiracy theories. *Group
    Processes & Intergroup Relations*, 13684302241240696.

van Prooijen, J. W. (2023). Feelings of Insecurity as Driver of Anti-Establishment Sentiments.
    In *The Psychology of Insecurity* (pp. 368-388). Routledge.

Van Prooijen, J. W. (2018). Populism as political mentality underlying conspiracy theories.
    In *Belief systems and the perception of reality* (pp. 79-96). Routledge.

Van Prooijen, J. W., & Douglas, K. M. (2018). Belief in conspiracy theories: Basic principles of
    an emerging research domain. *European journal of social psychology*, *48*(7), 897-908.

van Prooijen, J. W., Cohen Rodrigues, T., Bunzel, C., Georgescu, O., Komáromy, D., &
    Krouwel, A. P. (2022). Populist gullibility: Conspiracy theories, news credibility, bullshit
    receptivity, and paranormal belief. *Political Psychology*, *43*(6), 1061-1079.

Verbeek, B. & Zaslove, R. 2017. Populism and Foreign Policy. In Oxford Handbook on
    Populism (eds. Kaltwasser, Taggart, Espejo, Ostinguy). OUP. Pp. 384-405.

Wayne, Carly N. 2023. "Terrified or Enraged? Emotional Microfoundations of Public
    Counterterror Attitudes." *International Organization* 77(4): 824–47. doi:
    10.1017/S0020818323000152.

Wood, M. J., Douglas, K. M., & Sutton, R. M. (2012). Dead and alive: Beliefs in contradictory
    conspiracy theories. *Social psychological and personality science*, *3*(6), 767-773.

Zürn, M. (2004). Global governance and legitimacy problems. *Government and
    Opposition*, *39*(2), 260-287.