Received: 11 March 2024 | Revised: 8 October 2024 | Accepted: 21 October 2024

DOI: 10.1111/ssqu.13463

ORIGINAL ARTICLE

Populist votes, orientations, and the COVID-19 pandemic in Italy: A latent growth study

Silvia Russo[1] | **Michele Roccato**[1] | **Nicoletta Cavazza**[2] | **Lorenzo Cena**[1]

[1]Department of Psychology, University of Torino, Torino, Italy

[2]Department of Communication and Economics, University of Modena and Reggio Emilia, Reggio Emilia, Italy

Correspondence
Michele Roccato, Department of Psychology, University of Torino, Via Verdi 10, 10126 Torino, Italy.
Email: michele.roccato@unito.it.

Abstract

Objective: We aimed to predict the trend of populist orientations and votes in Italy before and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Method: Using the Consequences of COVID-19 (COCO) data set (quota sample of the Italian adult population), we conducted a 3.5-year, seven-wave longitudinal study, with one wave before the pandemic (June 2019) and six waves during the pandemic (April and October 2020, April and October 2021, and April and October 2022).

Results: Two latent growth analyses have shown that in the period we considered the degree of populism of the party chosen for the vote decreased linearly; this change was positively associated with the anxiety of the participants. Conversely, populist orientations remained stable.

Conclusion: The COVID-19 pandemic plausibly contributed to a superficial and temporary halt to the long populist wave that hit Italy in the last decades, as demonstrated by the decrease in populist vote choices concomitant with a persistent substrate of populist orientations.

KEYWORDS
COVID-19, latent growth analysis, populism

In the last decades, a growing populist *Zeitgeist* has permeated the political life of many countries worldwide, both in Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD: see Marchlewska et al. 2018) and developing (Obschonka et al. 2018) countries. Several populist movements, parties, and leaders have become increasingly popular, and their successes in parliamentary and local elections have systematically increased; in parallel, citizens' populist orientation has increased dramatically (Algan et al. 2017). Italy, where we conducted this study, is no exception. The Italian parties that, according to Meijers and Zaslove

(2021), have the most populist ideology and characteristics—the Lega (League), the Movimento 5 Stelle (Five Star Movement), and the Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy)—received 54.4 percent of the valid votes in the 2018 general election. In the 2019 European election, this percentage increased to 57.5 percent and, in the 2022 general elections, it has settled at 50.5 percent.

This long populist wave is worrying, as populism can be considered a danger to the well-being of democratic societies. First, it supports a simplistic vision of society based on polarizing divisions and opposition between social and political groups (Pappas, Mendez, and Herrick 2009; Van Drunen, Spruyt, and Van Droogenbroeck 2021). Second, the populist communication style often appeals to negative emotions that increase citizens' perception of threat (Widmann, 2021; Wirz et al. 2018). Finally, populism undermines trust in institutions and experts, a fundamental resource for cooperation and compliance in functioning democratic societies (Algan et al. 2017; Merkley 2020).

Many one-shot studies have been conducted to understand the success of populism. However, less attention has been paid to the changes in populism, especially in case of sudden events, and to the social psychological factors that promote these changes. In this study, we sought to contribute to this understanding by analyzing the dynamics of attitudinal populism and of populist votes in the Italian population due to the onset of the COVID-19, through a 3.5-year, seven-wave longitudinal study.

WHAT IS POPULISM?

For many years, the scientific community viewed populism as a vague, fuzzy, and overly general concept (e.g., Ionescu and Gellner 1969) that was improperly used as shorthand for various features of the radical right (Bonikowski 2017). Currently, however, most of the scientific community agrees with Mudde's (2007) definition of populism as "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus the 'corrupt elite', and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté général* (general will) of the people" (p. 23). At the core of populism is the fundamental idea that people have the right to regain control over democracy that political elites have wrested from them, in pursuit of the common good. From an emotional point of view, this is reflected frustration and anger (Magni 2017; Matsusaka 2020; Wahl-Jorgensen 2018).

While traditional politics sees political conflict as a conflict between different groups or social classes (Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2007), populists see the dispute as between the people, seen as an organic, homogeneous and virtuous monolith, and the elite, seen as incompetent, selfish, and corrupt (Hawkins, Riding, and Mudde 2012). Consequently, populists believe that people's common sense should replace traditional ideologies as the main key to understanding and interpreting the political world. Finally, and most important for this study, populists harbor a deep distrust in institutions. They criticize the transformation of parties from "mass" to "cartel" (Katz and Mair 1995), arguing that the gap between representatives and represented grows as parties move from proximity to society to proximity to the state. Accordingly, they reject any mediation (by political parties, labor unions, trade associations, etc.) between the people and the state, and desire a leader who speaks directly on behalf of the people, supposedly to organically express their concerns (Kriesi and Pappas 2015). Against this backdrop, populism can be understood as a type of "illiberal democracy" (Molyneux and Osborne 2017), in that it presents the will of the majority as the will of the people as a whole and, in its ideal form, eliminates all checks, balances, procedures, and other forms of horizontal accountability that ensure equal representation in traditional democracy.

Many researchers have attempted to identify the causes of attitudinal populism, operationalized as populist orientations, and of populist votes (see Andreadis et al. 2019), focusing mainly on four sets of variables: (a) economic dissatisfaction (e.g., Bergh and Kärnä 2022), (b) feelings of cultural threat to local traditions (e.g., Hochschild 2016), (c) dissatisfaction with representative democracy (e.g., Matsuaka 2020), and (d) relative deprivation (e.g., Cena, Cavazza, and Roccato 2022). However, the overwhelming majority of studies (for an exception, see Caamaño and Bértoa 2020) took a static view and did not focus on the evolution of populism over time. This is problematic, in that populism is a dynamic feature of public opinion. Using the COVID-19 pandemic crisis as a kind of natural experiment (e.g., Jurado and Kuo

2023), we have attempted to overcome this limitation by taking a dynamic view in the study of populism.

CHANGES IN PUBLIC OPINION DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

The COVID-19 pandemic shocked public opinion around the world. In the early months of 2020, hospitalizations and deaths increased dramatically in a very short period of time, and many countries' health systems were crippled. As many governments decided to fight the pandemic by locking down their citizens, people could only leave their homes for weeks and months to buy food and essential medicines from the nearest stores. After 1 year of the pandemic, the first vaccines against COVID-19 became available and unprecedented large-scale vaccination campaigns were conducted. At the time we wrote this article (March 2024), there have been five major pandemic waves, five variants of concern of the virus identified by the World Health Organization, and a NoVax movement emerged in many countries. More than 770 million people have been infected with the virus, and COVID-19 has killed about seven million people worldwide.

Not surprisingly, this rapid and dramatic chain of events has led to gigantic changes in public opinion around the world. For our objectives, it is particularly relevant that the pandemic promoted people's sense of threat and hindered their subjective control over their lives (Scardigno and Testa 2021). According to the literature on the compensatory control mechanism (Kay et al. 2009), the perception of the world as a random and chaotic environment is a major source of stress (Janoff-Bullman 1989). When people feel that they cannot exert primary control over their world, they may resort to sources of secondary, compensatory control to fulfil the basic existential motivation of feeling maximum control. Institutions may be one of these sources. Consistent with this, after the COVID-19 outbreak onset, stopping a nearly generalized long-term decrease (Mingo and Faggiano 2020) trust in political institutions increased in a number of countries (e.g., Han et al. 2023), including Italy (Cavazza et al. 2022), where we conducted this study. This increase is not very surprising, as the literature on rally effects shows that exogenous shocks to one's own society push people to temporarily (for about 6 months; see Dinesen and Jæger 2013; Perrin and Smolek 2009) increase their institutional trust, in order to help society face the threat as a single and cohesive unit (Chatagnier 2012) and to help people defend their psychological well-being (Roccato et al. 2021). Even the increase in institutional trust due to the pandemic had a medium-term length and after a few months, it disappeared (e.g., Baekgaard et al. 2020; Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata 2021). Rally effects studies often consider rather short time spans. A relevant exception can be found in Colloca, Roccato, and Russo (2024), who showed that—at least in Italy—trust in political institutions followed a cubic trend between 2019 and 2022, with an increase between 2019 and April 2020, a decrease in the subsequent 24 months, and a partial comeback between April and October 2022.

Since distrust in institutions is at the core of populism (e.g., Mudde 2007), we reasoned that the COVID-19 pandemic, in line with the increase in institutional trust it triggered, could have stopped, at least temporarily, the growth of the populist wave, as a result of people coping with the threat the outbreak brought. We also reasoned that the trend in populism could have followed a specular trend compared to that shown by trust in political institutions. To our knowledge, only Russo et al. (2021) analyzed how populism changed in pandemic times. These authors found a decline between populist votes in June 2019 (before the pandemic) and populist voting intentions in April 2020 (in the midst of the first wave of the pandemic) especially among participants who felt particularly anxious for the outbreak. However, this study had two major limitations. First, it had a very short time span: Because the data for the second wave were collected at the very beginning of the pandemic, it was not possible to draw conclusions about the medium- and long-term effects of the outbreak on populism. Second, it focused exclusively on the trend in populist votes and neglected the trend in populist orientations (i.e., the set of attitudes and society representation that may drive the choice of a populist party). This is problematic, in that it does not allow to understand whether the decline in the success of populist parties is a true waning of the populist wave or just a superficial slowdown that might pick up after the pandemic ends. In this study, we have attempted

to fill these gaps. To deepen our understanding of the psychological processes underlying these trends, we also examined the relationship between anxiety and changes in populism.

THE ROLE OF ANXIETY

The affective intelligence theory (AIT; Marcus et al. 2000) is probably the most influential theory on the role of emotions in politics. Based on neuroscientific findings, AIT assumes that people have two different emotional systems. The dispositional system controls habitual behavior in familiar situations and enables people to act based on learned routines without much conscious effort. The surveillance system, activated in unfamiliar or threatening situations that challenge expectations, shifts attention to new stimuli, leading to more active decision-making processes, as habitual reactions are no longer sufficient to cope with the perceived threat. AIT departs from traditional cognitive appraisal theory in psychology, which views each emotion as a distinct physical response to the appraisal of the current situation (e.g., Lazarus 1991, see Marcus et al., 2019 for a detailed discussion on the differences between these two theories). Instead, AIT emphasizes a dimensional approach to emotions: Emotions exist along a continuum, with various emotions representing different intensities of three core emotional dimensions, namely enthusiasm, anger, and anxiety. Enthusiasm is a reaction to familiar and favorable stimuli, while anger is triggered by familiar and unfavorable stimuli. Despite different antecedents, both enthusiasm and anger cause people to draw on previously learned cognitions and habits.

The role of anxiety is more interesting for our purposes. According to AIT, anxiety is the emotional expression of surveillance system activation; it not only signals the presence of a problem in the environment and indicates that careful and systematic processing is required, but it also stimulates a desire to better understand and analyze the source of a potential threat, thus promoting active learning, deliberative thinking, and reduce reliance on habits and dispositions (Marcus et al. 2000). The main difference between anxiety- and anger-eliciting threats lies in the familiarity of the emotion-eliciting situation: If the threatening stimulus is familiar and violates important norms, people are more likely to become angry. However, if the stimulus is unfamiliar, the reaction is more likely to be dominated by anxiety. Since the COVID-19 pandemic presented a clear and present danger for which there were no recent precedents, we considered it an anxiety-inducing situation.

Anxiety and anger also differ in their relationship with populism: Anger is associated with support for populist parties (Rico, Guinjoan, and Anduiza 2020), while anxiety (or fear) is associated with rejection of right-wing populist parties (Vasilopoulos et al. 2019). One reason for this finding lies in the fact that anxiety leads people to trust political experts in order to reduce their feelings of uncertainty (Albertson and Gadarian 2015). Since a core dimension of populism is distrust of the political elites, populist parties may be less attractive to anxious voters. This idea was supported by Russo et al. (2021), who showed that anxiety is associated not only with a change in voting decision but also with the direction of such a change: Anxious voters tend to turn away from populist parties.

THE PRESENT STUDY

Goals and hypotheses

Our aim in this study was twofold. First, we wanted to analyze the evolution of populist orientations and of the degree of populism of the vote choice in the context of the COVID-19 outbreak, using prepandemic levels as a baseline. Based on the literature on the commonalities between trust in political institutions and populism (e.g., Kriesi 2014) and on Colloca, Roccato, and Russo's (2024) study on the changes in trust in political institutions the pandemic triggered, we hypothesized that the outbreak promoted cubic trends in populist votes (H1a) and in attitudinal populism (H1b), with a downward trend in the first months of pandemic, an upward trend in the following months, followed by a descent when the situation normalized.

Second, we aimed to model the possible changes identified, focusing primarily on the role of anxiety, seen as a reaction to novel threats which makes people pay more attention to the stimuli coming from the environment and change their opinions and behaviors accordingly. With this in mind, we hypothesized that downward trends in populist votes and in populist orientations would be associated with the anxiety fostered by the pandemic (H2a and H2b, again focusing on changes in populist votes and in populist orientations).

MATERIAL AND METHODS

We tackled our research goals using the COCO (Consequences of COVID-19) data set. The COCO sample is a quota sample of the adult Italian general population, stratified by gender, age, and geographical area of residence, surveyed seven times by email, in June 2019 (i.e., before the pandemic, T_1, $N = 1504$), April 2020 (T_2, $N = 1199$), October 2020 (T_3, $N = 1156$), April 2021 (T_4, $N = 1148$), October 2021 (T_5, $N = 1151$), April 2022 (T_6, $N = 1150$), and October 2022 (T_7, $N = 1150$). Starting from T_4, the samples were integrated with new respondents (118 at T_4, 236 at T_5, 192 at T_6, and 211 at T_7) in addition to those who were already contacted at T_1. According to the literature, latent growth models have much higher levels of statistical power than traditional models. Analyses on real-world and artificial data show that small samples, even composed of few hundreds of participants, are large enough to detect longitudinal changes (e.g., Muthén and Curran 1997). Thus, our sample should be large enough to detect the cubic effects we expect. The Bio-ethical Committee of the University of Torino approved the study (protocol 181488).

Measures

In each wave, attitudinal populism was measured using Roccato et al.'s (2019) PopOr Scale, a balanced scale with six items, such as: "There are those who say that conflicts among people are inevitable because it's just part of human nature. On the other hand, others think that ordinary people are basically good and honest and that it's only because of those in charge that people are set against each other" and "Some people say that politicians, journalists, and financial experts are all part of the same corrupt system that has led Italy into crisis. Others say that it's not right to lump those groups all together, because they have different responsibilities" (con-trait item). The response options were presented in a forced-choice format in which participants were asked to express their preference between the two opposing opinions in a five-point category format, labeled at the extremes. Table 2 contains the full text of the items with the corresponding response options in brackets. After correcting for the acquiescent response set using Marsh's (1989) correlated uniqueness approach (which consists of correlating all con-trait items), we modeled populist orientation as a latent unidimensional variable using confirmatory factor analysis. Following Widaman, Ferrer, and Conger (2010), we tested the longitudinal factorial invariance of the PopOr scale by comparing the fit of an unconstrained model in which the factorial loadings were set free with that of a constrained model in which we fixed all factorial loadings to be equal across the seven waves (metric invariance). We compared the nested models based on differences in χ^2 and in comparative fit index (CFI) and root mean square error of approximation (RMSEA), with recommended thresholds of change ≥ -0.010 for CFI and ≥ -0.015 for RMSEA indicating non-invariance in large samples (Chen 2007).

The unconstrained model had good fit: $\chi^2(651) = 1445.443$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.950, Tucker–Lewis index (TLI) = 0.935, RMSEA (90 percent confidence intervals [CIs]) = 0.023 (0.022, 0.025). Constraining the factor loadings over time did not worsen the model: $\chi^2(681) = 1477.486$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.937, RMSEA (90 percent CIs) = 0.023 (0.021, 0.025). The differences in χ^2, CFI, and RMSEA ($\Delta\chi^2(30) = 32.043$, $p = 0.366$; ΔCFI = 0.000; ΔRMSEA = 0.000) confirmed that the second model was not worse than the first one. Additionally, we also tested the longitudinal scalar invariance of the PopOr scale by comparing the fit of the above metric invariant model with that of a more constrained model in which we fixed all intercepts to be equal across the seven waves. Constraining all the intercepts worsened the model:

TABLE 1 Degree of populism of the Italian parties according to the POPPA Expert Survey.

Party	Degree of populism
Movimento 5 Stelle (5 Star Movement)	9.46
Lega (League)	8.60
Fratelli d'Italia (Brothers of Italy)	7.44
Forza Italia (Let's Go Italy)	5.56
Sinistra Italiana (Italian Left)	3.32
Partito Democratico (Democratic Party)	2.11

$\chi^2(717) = 1575.982$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.946, TLI = 0.936, RMSEA (90 percent CIs) = 0.023 (0.022, 0.025). Although the differences in CFI and RMSEA were marginal (ΔCFI = −0.004, ΔRMSEA = 0.000), the χ^2 change was significant, $\Delta\chi^2(36) = 98.496$, $p < 0.001$. We reached partial scalar invariance by setting free two intercepts: $\chi^2(715) = 1517.785$, $p < 0.001$, CFI = 0.950, TLI = 0.940, RMSEA (90 percent CIs) = 0.022 (0.021, 0.024), with $\Delta\chi^2(34) = 40.299$, $p = 0.212$, ΔCFI = 0.000, ΔRMSEA = 0.000, when compared to the metric invariant model. Overall, these analyses indicated longitudinal metric and partial scalar invariance of the attitudinal populism measure.

As concerns the degree of populism of the party chosen for the vote, at T_1 and at T_7 an item was available on how participants respectively voted in the 2019 European election and in the 2022 Italian general election. Since between 2019 and 2022 there were no other elections, in the other waves we used participants' voting intentions as indication of their likely vote choice. Following Lau and Redlawsk (1997), we quantified participants' levels of behavioral populism using the POPPA expert survey (https://poppa.shinyapps.io/poppa/, see Table 1), which presents the positions of 250 parties from 28 European countries on key attributes of populism based on the survey of 294 experts. Further details on the POPPA study can be found in Meijers and Zaslove (2021).

As for anxiety, we used the standard emotion markers for the anxiety dimension as proposed in previous studies (Marcus et al. 2006). Specifically, at T_2, participants were asked to indicate (1 = Never, 2 = Rarely, 3 = Sometimes, and 4 = Often) how often they felt anxiety, fear, and worry in the days prior to the interview. Based on $\alpha = 0.85$, we calculated participants' anxiety[1] as the mean of these three items. Despite the general wording of the stem question, the anxiety dimension correlated strongly with respondents' concern about the consequences of COVID-19 for themselves ($r = 0.61$, $p < 0.001$). This suggests that the anxiety dimension is related to the assessment of the contextual situation in which the data were collected, that is, the outbreak of the pandemic.

In our predictive analyses, we used participants' gender (1 = Woman), age, years of formal education, and perceived economic vulnerability, measured via the following item from the European Social Survey: "Which of the following descriptions comes closest to how you feel about your household's income nowadays?" (1 = Living comfortably on present income, 2 = Coping on present income, 3 = Finding it difficult on present income, and 4 = Finding it very difficult on present income) as control variables. Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics for the study variables.

Data analyses

We used latent growth curve models to examine trajectories of change in attitudinal populist and behavioral populism. These models allowed us to estimate the initial level of attitudinal populism and of the degree of populism of the party chosen for the vote and their evolution over time, modeled as latent factors. In these models, the latent intercepts reflected the mean level of populism at the first assessment, whereas the

[1] To date, most political psychologists use the terms "anxiety" and "fear" interchangeably (e.g., Gadarian and Brader 2023).

TABLE 2 Descriptive statistics for the study variables.

	T_1 ($N = 1504$)	T_2 ($N = 1199$)	T_3 ($N = 1156$)	T_4 ($N = 1148$)	T_5 ($N = 1151$)	T_6 ($N = 1150$)	T_7 ($N = 1150$)
Populism orientation—Items of the PopOr scale (range 1–5)							
There are those who say that the difference between left and right in politics is still important today. Others say that the difference between left and right in politics does not make sense any more (1: Left and right are still important; 5: Left and right don't make sense anymore).	3.34 (1.30)	3.40 (1.29)	3.36 (1.26)	3.37 (1.31)	3.39 (1.25)	3.41 (1.22)	3.41 (1.30)
Some people say that politicians, journalists, and financial experts are all part of the same corrupt system that has led Italy into crisis. Others say that it is not right to lump those groups all together because they have different responsibilities (1: All part of the same corrupt system; 5: Not right to lump them all together).	3.02 (1.31)	3.07 (1.28)	3.00 (1.25)	3.01 (1.27)	3.00 (1.25)	3.05 (1.25)	3.00 (1.25)
Some people say that most politicians in Italy today are corrupt. Others say that only a minority of politicians are corrupt (1: Most politicians are corrupt; 5: A minority of politicians are corrupt).	2.40 (1.16)	2.45 (1.15)	2.47 (1.13)	2.47 (1.18)	2.48 (1.18)	2.47 (1.13)	2.46 (1.16)
There are those who say that ordinary people could easily enter the Parliament and do the job. On the other hand, other people think that political matters are complicated and need to be dealt with by professionals (1: Ordinary people could enter the Parliament; 5: Politics need to be dealt with by professionals).	3.15 (1.23)	3.31 (1.22)	3.32 (1.19)	3.36 (1.23)	3.32 (1.18)	3.33 (1.18)	3.37 (1.20)
Some people think that the Parliament as a whole best represents the interests of society. Others think that the will of the people can be carried out only by having a strong leader (1: The Parliament best represents the interests of society; 5: The will of the people can be carried out only by a leader).	2.97 (1.13)	2.96 (1.17)	2.92 (1.12)	2.97 (1.41)	2.94 (1.09)	2.92 (1.09)	2.86 (1.14)
There are those who say that conflicts among people are inevitable because it is just part of human nature. On the other hand, others think that ordinary people are basically good and honest and that it is only because of those in charge that people are set against each other (1: Conflicts among people are part of the human nature; 5: people are set against each other by those in charge).	2.94 (1.20)	2.92 (1.17)	2.90 (1.14)	2.91 (1.18)	2.92 (1.18)	2.97 (1.20)	2.98 (1.18)
Degree of populism of the vote choice (range 0–10)	6.96 (2.92)	6.78 (2.87)	6.59 (2.89)	6.84 (2.80)	6.65 (2.81)	6.23 (2.92)	6.52 (2.83)
Anxiety (range 1–4)		2.96 (0.81)					
Gender (% women)	51.1						
Age	47.8 (15.06)						
Years of education	14.67 (3.23)						

Note: The table reports the means and standard deviations in parentheses. The *N* refers to the total sample at each data collection.

TABLE 3 Latent growth models' comparisons for behavioral populism.

Model	AIC	BIC	$\chi^2(df)$	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Intercept only	19,781.364	19,829.518	229.653(26)***	0.071	0.953	0.962
Linear	19,745.344	19,809.550	187.633(23)***	0.068	0.962	0.965
Quadratic	19,740.780	19,826.388	175.069(19)***	0.073	0.964	0.960
Cubic	19,717.990	19,830.351	142.279(14)***	0.077	0.970	0.955

Note: $N = 1557$. ***$p < .001$. **$p < .01$. *$p < .05$

Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.

latent slopes reflected the amount of change occurred over time. Because seven time points were available, in addition to the linear slope, we could also estimate quadratic and cubic slopes. As changes over time were represented as latent factors, it was also possible to estimate the variances of the latent intercept and slope that represent the amount of inter-individual differences in mean levels of attitudinal and behavioral populism at T_1, and inter-individual differences in mean levels of change over time (Hertzog and Nesselroade 2003). We used maximum likelihood (ML) estimation; we conducted all the analyses using Mplus, Version 8 (Muthén and Muthén 1998–2017).

To find the best-fitting models, we examined four nested models for each construct: no change (i.e., intercept-only), linear change, quadratic change, and cubic change. We determined the best-fitting model by examining both the relative and absolute fit indices (West, Taylor, and Wu 2012). We considered the differences in χ^2, CFI, and RMSEA as previously done with the longitudinal invariance test. Additionally, we examined the Akaike information criterion (AIC) and Bayesian information criterion (BIC), with lower AIC and BIC values generally indicating better fit, a BIC difference larger than 6 to be strong and larger than 10 to be very strong evidence for one model over the other (Raftery 1995; Schwartz 1978). After determining the best-fitting model, the resulting change trends were predicted focusing on participants' anxiety.

RESULTS

We compared four models to determine the best-fitting growth function for changes in both the degree of populism of the vote and attitudinal populism. For populist votes (see Table 3), we identified the model with a linear change as the best-fitting model. While the χ^2, CFI, and RMSEA indicated all models to fit the data equally well (smallest $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 12.654$, $p = 0.014$, and largest ΔCFI = 0.009 and largest ΔRMSEA = 0.005), the BIC values provided strong evidence in favor of the linear model. In this model, the degree of populism of the chosen party showed a linear negative trend between June 2019 and October 2022 (coeff = −0.113, standard error (SE) = 0.022, $p < 0.001$), with significant individual variation around this trend (variance = 0.075, SE = 0.026, $p = 0.003$). Thus, H1 was not confirmed, as a cubic trend was not found in the time span considered, 3.5 years, with seven measurement occasions. Instead, we found that respondents chose linearly less populist parties across this time span; this trend is shown in Figure 1 (left panel).

For attitudinal populism (see Table 4), we again identified the model with a linear change as the best-fitting model. The fit indices indicated intercept, linear, and quadratic models to fit the data equally well (smallest $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 12.366$, $p = 0.015$, largest ΔCFI = 0.002 and largest ΔRMSEA = 0.001), but the BIC values indicated strong evidence in favor of the linear model. However, the linear negative trend of populist orientations over time did not reach statistical significance (coeff = −0.007, *SE* = 0.004, $p = 0.069$), with significant variance around the linear slope (variance = 0.003, SE = 0.001, $p = 0.001$). These results were not consistent with H1b: Instead of following a cubic trend, attitudinal populism was stable between June

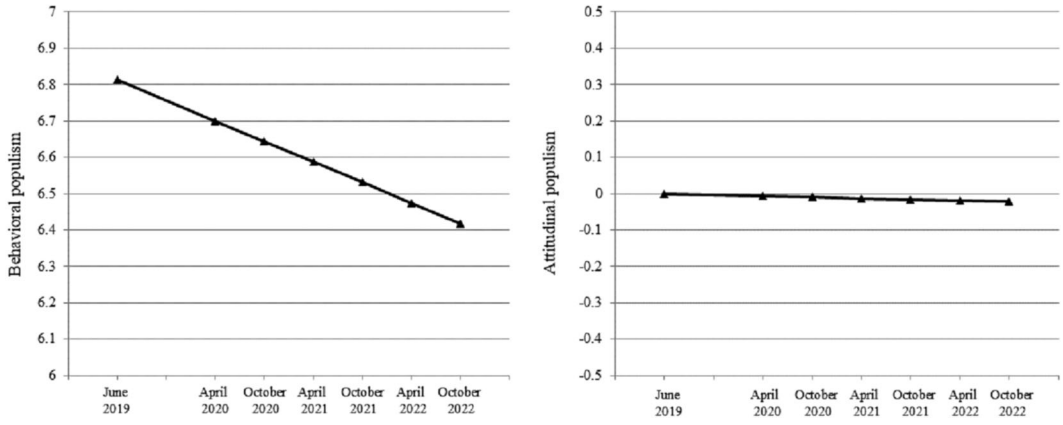

FIGURE 1 Graphical trends of behavioral and attitudinal populism.

TABLE 4 Latent growth models' comparisons for attitudinal populism.

Model:	AIC	BIC	$\chi^2(df)$	RMSEA	CFI	TLI
Intercept only	147,772.100	148,965.064	1739.205(736)***	0.025	0.937	0.927
Linear	147,746.951	148,957.039	1708.057(733)***	0.024	0.939	0.929
Quadratic	147,742.586	148,975.505	1695.691(729)***	0.024	0.940	0.929
Cubic	147,739.009	149,000.469	1682.114(724)***	0.024	0.940	0.929

Note: $N = 2226$. ***$p < .001$. **$p < .001$. *$p < .05$.
Abbreviations: AIC, Akaike information criterion; BIC, Bayesian information criterion; CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.

2019 and October 2022 (see Figure 1, right panel). Based on this result, it was not possible to predict its change. Thus, we could not test H2b.

In a second step, we added the time-invariant covariates to our linear models: anxiety at T_2, with gender, age, and years of formal education as control variables. Table 5 shows the results of these models. Our main interest was in predicting the latent slopes, but for completeness, we also present the parameters related to predicting the latent intercepts (i.e., the mean behavioral and attitudinal populism at T_1). With respect to the model predicting the degree of populism of the chosen party, we found a significant negative association between education and age with the latent intercept, showing that older respondents and respondents with higher education were less likely to express a populist vote at T_1. More interestingly for our purposes, consistent with H2a, we also found that the level of anxiety at T_2 was negatively and significantly associated with the latent slope. In other words, this result corroborates the hypothesis that feelings of anxiety may be associated with a change in people's typical political behaviors, in our case leading people to shift away from populist voting. The intercept of attitudinal populism, that is, its level at T_1, was negatively associated with age and education and positively associated with perceived economic vulnerability. As attitudinal populism did not show to change in the 3.5 years of our longitudinal research, we did not predict its slope.

DISCUSSION

In this 3.5-year, seven-wave longitudinal study, we analyzed the trend of attitudinal populism (operationalized as populist orientations) and of the degree of populism of the voted party from a prepandemic period

TABLE 5 Time-invariant covariates of the latent intercept and slope of the trend in behavioral populism and of the latent intercept of attitudinal populism.

	Behavioral populism				Attitudinal populism	
	Intercept		Slope		Intercept	
	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE	Coeff.	SE
Being woman	0.028	0.035	−0.082	0.082	0.065*	0.030
Age	−0.073*	0.036	−0.056	0.084	−0.108***	0.031
Years of education	−0.121**	0.036	0.123	0.083	−0.093**	0.031
Perceived economic vulnerability at T_1	0.068	0.035	−0.047	0.080	0.136***	0.030
Anxiety at T_2			−0.195*	0.077		
N	971				1,504	
Fit	CFI = 0.961				CFI = 0.933	
	TLI = 0.955				TLI = 0.923	
	RMSEA = 0.058				RMSEA = 0.028	
	$\chi^2(49) = 210.162$***				$\chi^2(898) = 1928.363$***	

Note: Standardized parameters are displayed.
Abbreviations: CFI, comparative fit index; RMSEA, root mean square error of approximation; SE, standard error; TLI, Tucker–Lewis index.
*$p < 0.05$; **$p < 0.01$; ***$p < 0.001$.

(June 2019) to October 2022 in a broad quota sample of the Italian adult population. In addition, we sought to analyze the association between the emerging trends in populism and pandemic-related anxiety. Using a dynamic approach, our analyses revealed a linear downward trend in the populism of the chosen party, more pronounced among those who showed more anxiety in the early months of the outbreak, and a stable trend in attitudinal populism across the seven waves of the study.

An imposing mass of studies performed in the United States show that exogenous shocks such as wars and terrorist attacks foster rally effects, consisting in a short-term increase in trust in U.S. presidents. After its first steps (Lane 1962; Mueller 1970), the literature on rally effects has gradually expanded at least in three directions. First, rally effects have been observed outside the U.S. context: among other countries, in Spain (Dinesen and Jæger 2013), Japan (Kobayashi and Katagiri 2018), and South Korea (Hwang, Cho, and Wiegand 2018). Second, studies conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic have shown that even exogenous shocks triggered by invisible and morally neutral enemies such as the Coronavirus can trigger rally effects (e.g., Bol et al. 2021; Colloca, Roccato, and Russo 2024; Esaiasson et al., 2021). Third, Bol et al. (2021) and Esaiasson et al. (2021) showed that rally effects extend to satisfaction with democracy and to interpersonal trust. Our study helped to expand this literature in a threefold way.

First, we have shown that in the first months of the pandemic, the Italian public not only increased their trust in political institutions (Colloca, Roccato, and Russo 2024) but also reduced the degree of populism in their voting intention. Since one of the defining dimensions of populism is distrust of institutions (e.g., Kriesi 2014; Mudde 2007) and increasing trust in established institutions can be an effective strategy for coping with dramatic crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic, this result is clearly reasonable. Moreover, this study contributes to deepening our knowledge of the dynamics of public opinion changes in times of crisis and suggests that the focus of classic studies on rally effects should be broadened to include changes in other social psychological variables that can help to fulfill the main functions of rally effects, that is, helping societies to respond quickly and efficiently as a single, cohesive unit to crises (Chatagnier 2012), and helping individuals to increase their well-being by conveying perceived control over their lives (Roccato et al. 2021). In addition to satisfaction with democracy (Bol et al. 2021), interpersonal trust (Esaiasson et al. 2021), and populism, other potential candidate variables could include national identification

(Gorman and Seguin 2018), patriotism (Lambert, Schott, and Scherer 2011), and self-transcendent values (Schwartz 2006). Future studies aimed at investigating how these variables change when individuals and societies are confronted with dramatic exogenous shocks could be interesting.

Second, the trend we identified in the degree of populism of the chosen party showed a different pattern than in classical studies on the rally effect, both before (e.g., Dinesen and Jæger 2013; Kam and Ramos 2008; Perrin and Smolek 2009) and during the COVID-19 pandemic (e.g., Baekgaard et al. 2020; Johansson, Hopmann, and Shehata 2021). While trust in political institutions showed a cubic trend (an increase in the first months of the crisis, followed by a decrease in the following months and a positive trend after 2 years of the pandemic: see Colloca, Roccato, and Russo 2024), the degree of populism of the chosen party showed a 3.5-year linear negative trend. The literature on compensatory control (Kay et al. 2009) can help us interpret this difference. From a social psychological perspective, both people with low trust in institutions and populists tend to experience particularly difficult conditions in times of crisis, as they have limited opportunities to cope with the perception of the world as a random and chaotic environment by resorting to secondary sources of control (Roccato et al. 2021). However, it is plausible that exogenous shocks could have more severe consequences for populists than for people who "only" have a low level of trust in political institutions. This is because populists' dissatisfaction with their relations with society covers a much broader spectrum that goes beyond mere distrust of political institutions and includes, among other things, economic, financial, and intellectual anti-establishment attitudes as well as the idea that the entire ruling class is incompetent and corrupt (Roccato et al. 2019). With this in mind, it is plausible that in highly threatening societal situations such as the COVID-19 pandemic, voting for a non-populist party might be a more efficient strategy to deal with the threat than "simply" increasing trust in institutions, as it might be more effective in creating compensatory control over the world. A direct test of this interpretation could be interesting.

Third, our results showed that the COVID-19 pandemic was associated with a linear decline in the degree of populism of the party chosen by citizens, but that the degree of their populist orientations did not change. Compared to populist votes, populist orientations thus proved to be a more stable feature of public opinion in Italy, which remained unchanged in terms of "fundamental" populism. This result suggests that changes in public opinion in times of crisis are not only short-lived but also do not fundamentally change the relationship between citizens and society. It is plausible that more structural and substantive changes are needed to promote such change, namely: (a) the main factors identified in the literature promoting populism in Italy, that is, cultural threat to local traditions (Roccato et al. 2020), dissatisfaction with representative democracy (Corbetta et al. 2018), and feelings of relative deprivation (Cena, Cavazza, and Roccato 2022), or (b) radical changes in the relationship between the demand and supply sides of populism. An ad hoc study that includes these variables could be interesting.

Even before conducting this study, we believe that the relatively stable substrate of attitudinal populism that we have found should be taken seriously. If, as Molyneaux and Osborne (2017) noted, populism challenges representative democracy and is a troubling form of illiberal democracy, the reduction in the level of populism of the vote is far less reassuring than the stability of populist orientations, as the latter has far-reaching implications for democratic societies and political stability. Specifically, populist orientations are known to be correlated with a constellation of attitudes that transcend politics and could undermine effective management of society (e.g., Uluşahin, Mavor, and Reicher 2024). Examples include conspiracy views that question the discrepancy between people's daily experience and expert knowledge (Guan and Yang 2020; Mede, Schäfer, and Füchslin 2021), favoring "counter-knowledge" over "established knowledge" (Ylä-Anttila 2018), and distrust of vaccines and drugs developed by "established medical research" (Roccato et al. 2019). The latent tendency of a large proportion of citizens to support such attitudes is anything but reassuring when it comes to coping with the next exogenous shock that could hit our society in the coming years.

As is often the case, this study had some limitations. First, we conducted our analyses in only one country, Italy. Italy is usually considered a "laboratory of populism" and a privileged country of observation for its study (Blokker and Anselmi 2019). Moreover, it was the first European country to have suffered the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and it was among the European countries where the outbreak had the

most severe consequences. However, if cross-cultural data were available, a cross-cultural extension of this study could be interesting. Second, when examining participants' vote, in the absence of other elections, we had to move from participants' actual votes in the 2019 European and in the 2022 general elections to their voting intention in the waves between June 2019 and October 2022. This limitation could not be overcome, due to the field nature of this study. Third, in the COCO data set, a prepandemic measure of anxiety was not available and thus we could not examine the effect of an anxiety increase due to the pandemic. In the absence of a prepandemic measure of anxiety and of the possibility of comparing our findings with a different context (e.g., another country, a different exogenous shock), our data did not allow us to deal with causal analyses among the variables we analyzed.

A few comments are needed on our measurement of anxiety, which is in line with earlier studies (e.g., Russo et al. 2021) but not flawless. First, the wording was quite general, and we could only indirectly assume that high anxiety would be related to the pandemic. However, we also found that anxiety is highly correlated with people's concern about the consequences of COVID-19. This, along with the ample evidence of high prevalence of anxiety in time of COVID-19 (Liu et al. 2021), suggests that our measure effectively captures a COVID-related emotional response. Second, in line with AIT principles, we focused on state anxiety. This does not rule out the possibility that trait anxiety also plays a role in how people felt during the pandemic and how they changed in terms of their voting decisions. MacKuen et al. (2010) found that personality traits are related to the emotional dimensions of AIT. However, they have also found that the unique contribution of emotional state to different political responses persists even when controlling for stable traits, confirming the idea that people use their emotions as a guiding principle for their political responses. Including trait anxiety in future research could provide a more complete picture, although we expect the effects of state anxiety to persist. Finally, the AIT understands anxiety as an emotional dimension that includes feelings such as fear, anxiety, and worry, among others. This departs from other perspectives on emotions, such as cognitive appraisal theories (e.g., Lazarus 1991) or clinical psychology perspectives (e.g., Öhman 2008), which tend to view anxiety and fear as two distinct emotions. It would be interesting to thoroughly compare the effects of these two emotions in future studies, including different measurement tools such as the State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (Spielberger et al. 1983).

Finally, it was not possible with our data to analyze any fluctuations in the level of populism on the supply side: It is plausible that the parties adapted their appeals to the respective social climate during the period under consideration and thus changed their appeal in terms of their ability to satisfy the need for secondary control. An ad hoc extension of this study, considering the relationships between the supply and demand sides of populism, could enrich the picture we have drawn.

On a positive note, however, the data set we used is certainly a strength of the study. On the one hand, it consisted of a broad quota sample of the Italian adult population and was thus much more heterogeneous than the student samples often used in social and political psychology. On the other hand, our participants were interviewed seven times over 3.5 years, which allowed us to conduct complex longitudinal analyses, using the prepandemic time as baseline. This is particularly relevant, as classical studies of public opinion changes driven by exogenous shocks have focused on relatively short time periods (e.g., Dinesen and Jæger 2013; Kam and Ramos 2008; Perrin and Smolek 2009). The novel and specific nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, with its multiple waves and persistent state of threat, allowed us to observe some long-term effects of a dramatic exogenous shock. In addition, our findings have helped to expand studies of public opinion changes beyond trust in institutions to include populist orientations and votes. A new study focusing on the dynamics of institutional trust during the COVID-19 crisis may be particularly interesting to complete the picture we have painted. Another development of this study could be to compare the trends and possible antecedents in different countries with different populist orientations and party offerings, as well as different responses to, and manifestations of, the COVID-19 pandemic. However, we believe that even before these developments, this study has helped to deepen our knowledge of the social psychological and political changes in public opinion as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are openly available in Open Science Framework at https://osf.io/29tsb/?view_only=f32570e808d44be297d999ae9ddac408.

ETHICS STATEMENT

The study was approved by the Bio-ethical Committee of the University of Torino (protocol 181488).

ORCID

Silvia Russo https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5214-9921
Michele Roccato https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5817-7341
Nicoletta Cavazza https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6069-4601
Lorenzo Cena https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0747-448X

REFERENCES

Albertson, B., and S. K. Gadarian. 2015. *Anxious Politics: Democratic Citizenship in a Threatening World*. Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press.

Algan, Y., S. Guriev, E. Papaioannou, and E. Passari. 2017. "The European Trust Crisis and the Rise of Populism." *Brookings Papers on Economic Activity* 2017(2): 309–400. https://doi.org/10.1353/eca.2017.0015

Andreadis, I., C. Cremonesi, E. Kartsounidou, D. Kasprowicz, and A. Hess. 2019. "Attitudinal and Behavioral Responses to Populist Communication: The Impact of Populist Message Elements on Populist Attitudes and Voting Intentions." In *Communicating Populism*, edited by C. Reinemann J. Stanyer T. Aalberg F. Esser, and C. H. de Vreese, 207–32. New York, NY: Routledge.

Baekgaard, M., J. Christensen, J. K. Madsen, and K. S. Mikkelsen. 2020. "Rallying around the Flag in Times of COVID-19: Societal Lockdown and Trust in Democratic Institutions." *Journal of Behavioral Public Administration* 3(2): 1–12. https://doi.org/10.30636/jbpa.32.172

Bergh, A.,, and A. Kärnä. 2022. "Explaining the Rise of Populism in European Democracies 1980–2018: The Role of Labor Market Institutions and Inequality." *Social Science Quarterly* 103(7): 1719–31.

Blokker, P., and M. Anselmi. 2019. *Multiple Populisms: Italy as Democracy's Mirror*. Routledge.

Bol, D., M. Giani, A. Blais, and P. J. Loewen. 2021. "The Effect of COVID-19 Lockdowns on Political Support: Some Good News for Democracy?" *European Journal of Political Research* 60: 497–505. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12401

Bonikowski, B. 2017. "Ethno-Nationalist Populism and the Mobilization of Collective Resentment." *The British Journal of Sociology* 68(S1): S181–S213. https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-4446.12325

Caamaño, J. R., and F. C. Bértoa. 2020. "Are Anti-Political-Establishment Parties a Peril for European Democracy? A Longitudinal Study from 1950 till 2017." *Representation* 56(3): 387–410. https://doi.org/10.1080/00344893.2019.1643770

Cavazza, N., S. Russo, P. Colloca, and M. Roccato. 2022. "How and Why Is the COVID-19 Crisis Impacting Trust in Institutions? A Two-Wave Longitudinal Study." *Psicologia Sociale—Social Psychology Theory & Research* 17(3): 341–58. https://doi.org/10.1482/105492

Cena, L., N. Cavazza, and M. Roccato. 2022. "Relative Deprivation, Populist Orientation and Populist Vote: A Field Research." *Psicologia Sociale—Social Psychology Theory & Research* 17(1): 23–32. https://doi.org/10.1482/103206

Chatagnier, T. 2012. "The Effect of Trust in Government on Rallies 'round the Flag." *Journal of Peace Research* 49(5): 631–45. https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312440808

Chen, F. F. 2007. "Sensitivity of Goodness of Fit Indexes to Lack of Measurement Invariance." *Structural Equation Modeling: A Multidisciplinary Journal* 14(3): 464–504. https://doi.org/10.1080/10705510701301834

Colloca, P., M. Roccato, and S. Russo. 2024. "Rally 'round the Flag Effects Are Not for All: Trajectories of Institutional Trust among Populist and Non-Populist Voters." *Social Science Research* 119: 102986. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2024.102986

Corbetta, P., P. Colloca, N. Cavazza, and M. Roccato. 2018. "Lega and Five-Star Movement Voters: Exploring the Role of Cultural, Economic and Political Bewilderment." *Contemporary Italian Politics* 3(2): 279–93. https://doi.org/10.1080/23248823.2018.1524678

Dinesen, P. T., and M. M. Jæger. 2013. "The Effect of Terror on Institutional Trust: New Evidence from the 3/11 Madrid Terrorist Attack." *Political Psychology* 34(6): 917–26. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12025

Esaiasson, P., J. Sohlberg, M. Ghersetti, and B. Johansson. 2021. "How the Coronavirus Crisis Affects Citizen Trust in Institutions and in Unknown Others: Evidence from "the Swedish Experiment"." *European Journal of Political Research* 60: 748–60. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12419

Gadarian, S. K., and T. Brader. 2023. "Emotion and Political Psychology." In *The Oxford Handbook of Political Psychology*, edited by L. Huddy, D. O. Sears, J. S. Levy, and J. Jerit, 191–247. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Gorman, B., and C. Seguin. 2018. "World Citizens on the Periphery: Threat and Identification with Global Society." *American Journal of Sociology* 124(3): 705–61. https://doi.org/10.1086/699652

Guan, T., and Y. Yang. 2020. "Diversifying Conspiracy Beliefs and Populist Ideologies in the Chinese Context." *Social Science Quarterly* 101(2): 459–72. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12766

Han, Q., B. Zheng, M. Cristea, M. Agostini, J. J. Bélanger, B. Gützkow, J. Kreienkamp, N. P. Leander, and P. C. Collaboration. 2023. "Trust in Government Regarding COVID-19 and Its Associations with Preventive Health Behaviour and Prosocial Behaviour during the Pandemic: A Cross-Sectional and Longitudinal Study." *Psychological Medicine* 53(1): 149–59. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721001306

Hawkins, K. A., S. Riding, and C. Mudde. 2012. "Measuring Populist Attitudes." *Committee on Concepts and Methods Working Paper Series*. http://www.concepts-methods.org/Files/WorkingPaper/PC_55_Hawkins_Riding_Mudde.pdf

Hertzog, C., and J. R. Nesselroade. 2003. "Assessing Psychological Change in Adulthood: An Overview of Methodological Issues." *Psychology and Aging* 18(4): 639–57. https://doi.org/10.1037/0882-7974.18.4.639

Hochschild, A. R. 2016. *Strangers in Their Own Land: A Journey to the Hearth of the American Right*. New york, NY: New Press.

Hwang, W., W. Cho, and K. Wiegand. 2018. "Do Korean-Japanese Historical Disputes Generate Rally Effects?" *The Journal of Asian Studies* 77: 693–711. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0021911818000438

Ionescu, G., and E. Gellner. 1969. *Populism: Its Meaning and National Characteristics*. New York, NY: Macmillan.

Janoff-Bulman, R. 1989. "Assumptive Worlds and the Stress of Traumatic Events: Applications of the Schema Construct." *Social Cognition* 7(2): 113–36. https://doi.org/10.1521/soco.1989.7.2.113

Johansson, B. D. N. Hopmann, and A. Shehata. 2021. "When the Rally-around-the-Flag Effect Disappears, or: When the COVID-19 Pandemic Becomes "Normalized"." *Journal of Elections, Public Opinion and Parties* 31(S1): 321–34. https://doi.org/10.1080/17457289.2021.1924742

Jurado, I., and A. Kuo. 2023. "Economic Shocks and Fiscal Policy Preferences: Evidence from COVID-19 in Spain." *Political Research Quarterly* 76(4): 1573–88. https://doi.org/10.1177/10659129231160148

Kam, C. D., and J. M. Ramos. 2008. "Joining and Leaving the Rally: Understanding the Surge and Decline in Presidential Approval Following 9/11." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 72(4): 619–50. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfn055

Katz, R. S., and P. Mair. 1995. "Changing Models of Party Organization and Party Democracy: The Emergence of the Cartel Party." *Party Politics* 1(1): 5–28. https://doi.org/10.1177/1354068895001001001

Kay, A. C., J. A. Whitson, D. Gaucher, and A. D. Galinsky. 2009. "Compensatory Control: Achieving Order through the Mind, Our Institutions, and the Heavens." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 18(5): 264–68. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-8721.2009.01649.x

Kobayashi, T., and A. Katagiri. 2018. "The Rally "round the Flag" Effect in Territorial Disputes: Experimental Evidence from Japan-China Relations." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 18(3): 299–319. https://doi.org/10.1017/jea.2018.21

Kriesi, H. 2014. "The Populist Challenge." *Western European Politics* 37(2): 361–78. https://doi.org/10.1080/01402382.2014.887879

Kriesi, H., and T. S. Pappas. 2015. *European Populism in the Shadow of the Great Recession*. Colchester: ECPR Press.

Lambert, A. J., J. P. Schott, and L. Scherer. 2011. "Threat, Politics, and Attitudes: Toward a Greater Understanding of Rally-'round-the-Flag Effects." *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 20(6): 343–48. https://doi.org/10.1177/0963721411422060

Lane, R. 1962. *Political Ideology*. New York, NY: The Free Press.

Lau, R. R., and D. P. Redlawsk. 1997. "Voting Correctly." *The American Political Science Review* 91(3): 585–98. https://doi.org/10.2307/2952076

Lazarus, R. S. 1991. "Progress on a Cognitive-Motivational-Relational Theory of Emotion." *American Psychologist* 46(8): 819. https://doi.org/10.1037//0003-066x.46.8.819

Liu, X., M. Zhu, R. Zhang, J. Zhang, C. Zhang, P. Liu, Z. Feng, and Z. Chen. 2021. "Public Mental Health Problems during COVID-19 Pandemic: A Large-Scale Meta-Analysis of the Evidence." *Translational Psychiatry* 11(1): 384–93. https://doi.org/10.1038/s41398-021-01501-9

MacKuen, M., G. Marcus, W. R. Neuman, and P. R. Miller. 2010. "*Affective Intelligence or Personality? State vs. Trait Influences on Citizens' Use of Political Information*." Paper presented at American Political Science Association Conference, Washington, D.C. https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1643468

Magni, G. 2017. "It's the Emotions, Stupid! Anger about the Economic Crisis, Low Political Efficacy, and Support for Populist Parties." *Electoral Studies* 50: 91–102. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.electstud.2017.09.014

Marchlewska, M., A. Cichocka, O. Panayiotou, K. Castellanos, and J. Batayneh. 2018. "Populism as Identity Politics: Perceived in-Group Disadvantage, Collective Narcissism, and Support for Populism." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9(2): 151–62. https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550617732393

Marcus, G. E. 2000. "Emotions in Politics." *Annual Review of Political Science* 3(1): 221–50. https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.polisci.3.1.221

Marcus, G. E., M. MacKuen, J. Wolak, and L. Keele. 2006. "The Measure and Mismeasure of Emotion." In *Feeling Politics: Emotion in Political Information Processing*, edited by D. R. Redlawsk, 31–45. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan US.

Marcus, G. E., N. A. Valentino, P. Vasilopoulos, and M. Foucault. 2019. "Applying the Theory of Affective Intelligence to Support for Authoritarian Policies and Parties." *Political Psychology* 40(S1): 109–39. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12571

Marsh, H. W. 1989. "Confirmatory Factor Analyses of Multitrait-Multimethod Data: Many Problems and a Few Solutions." *Applied Psychological Measurement* 13(4): 335–61. https://doi.org/10.1177/014662168901300402

Matsuaka, J. G. 2020. *Let the People Rule: How Direct Democracy Can Meet the Populist Challenge*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.

Mede, N. G., M. S. Schäfer, and T. Füchslin. 2021. "The SciPop Scale for Measuring Science-Related Populist Attitudes in Surveys: Development, Test, and Validation." *International Journal of Public Opinion Research* 33(2): 273–93. https://doi.org/10.1093/ijpor/edaa026

Meijers, M. J., and A. Zaslove. 2021. "Measuring Populism in Political Parties: Appraisal of a New Approach." *Comparative Political Studies* 54(2): 372–407. https://doi.org/10.1177/0010414020938081

Merkley, E. 2020. "Anti-Intellectualism, Populism, and Motivated Resistance to Expert Consensus." *Public Opinion Quarterly* 84(1): 24–48. https://doi.org/10.1093/poq/nfz053

Mingo, I., and M. P. Faggiano. 2020. "Trust in Institutions between Objective and Subjective Determinants: A Multilevel Analysis in European Countries." *Social Indicators Research* 151: 815–39. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-020-02400-0

Molyneux, M., and T. Osborne. 2017. "Populism: A Deflationary View." *Economy and Society* 46(1): 1–19. https://doi.org/10.1080/03085147.2017.1308059

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

Mueller, J. E. 1970. "Presidential Popularity from Truman to Johnson." *American Political Science Review* 64(1): 18–33. https://doi.org/10.2307/1955610

Muthén, L. K., and P. J. Curran. 1997. "General Longitudinal Modeling of Individual Differences in Experimental Designs: A Latent Variable Framework for Analysis and Power Estimation." *Psychological Methods* 2(4): 371–402.

Muthén, L. K., and B. O. Muthén. 1998–2017. *Mplus User's Guide*. 8th ed. Los Angeles, CA: Muthén & Muthén.

Obschonka, M., M. Stuetzer, P. J. Rentfrow, N. Lee, J. Potter, and S. D. Gosling. 2018. "Fear, Populism, and the Geopolitical Landscape: The "Sleeper Effect" of Neurotic Personality Traits on Regional Voting Behaviour in the 2016 Brexit and Trump Elections." *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 9(3): 285–98. https://doi.org/10.1177/19485506187558

Öhman, A. 2008. "Fear and Anxiety." In *Handbook of Emotions*, edited by M. Lewis, J. M. Haviland-Jones, and L. F. Barrett, 3rd ed., 709–28. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Pappas, C., J. Mendez, and R. Herrick. 2009. "The Negative Effects of Populism on Gay and Lesbian Rights." *Social Science Quarterly* 90(1): 150–63. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-6237.2009.00608.x

Perrin, A. J., and S. J. Smolek. 2009. "Who Trusts? Race, Gender, and the September 11 Rally Effect among Young Adults." *Social Science Research* 38(1): 134–45. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ssresearch.2008.09.001

Raftery, A. E. 1995. "Bayesian Model Selection in Social Research." *Sociological Methodology* 25: 111–63. https://doi.org/10.2307/271063

Rico, G., M. Guinjoan, and E. Anduiza. 2020. "Empowered and Enraged: Political Efficacy, Anger and Support for Populism in Europe." *European Journal of Political Research* 59(4): 797–816. https://doi.org/10.1111/1475-6765.12374

Roccato, M., N. Cavazza, P. Colloca, and S. Russo. 2020. "Three Roads to Populism? An Italian Field Study on the 2019 European Election." *Social Science Quarterly* 101(4): 1222–35. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12834

Roccato, M., P. Colloca, N. Cavazza, and S. Russo. 2021. "Coping with the COVID-19 Pandemic through Institutional Trust: Rally Effects, Compensatory Control, and Emotions." *Social Science Quarterly* 102(5): 2360–67. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13002

Roccato, M., P. Corbetta, N. Cavazza, and P. Colloca. 2019. "Assessment of Citizens' Populist Orientations: Development and Validation of the POPulist ORientation (POPOR) Scale." *Social Science Quarterly* 100(6): 2148–67. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.12704

Roccato, M., and S. Russo. 2023. "A New Look on Politicized Reticence to Vaccination: Populism and COVID-19 Vaccine Refusal." *Psychological Medicine* 53: 3759–60. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0033291721004736

Russo, S., P. Colloca, N. Cavazza, and M. Roccato. 2021. "Moving away from Populist Votes: The Role of Anxiety during the COVID-19 Pandemic." *Polis* 36(1): 153–64. https://doi.org/10.1424/100291

Scardigno, R., and G. Testa. 2021. ""Zoom è stato una luce": La religiosità online ai tempi del Covid-19 [Zoom Was a Light: Online Religiosity in Times of COVID-19]." *Psicologia Sociale—Social Psychology Theory & Research* 16(3): 373–96. https://doi.org/10.1482/102122

Schwartz, G. 1978. "Estimating the Dimension of a Model." *Annals of Statistics* 6(2): 461–64. https://doi.org/10.1214/aos/1176344136

Schwartz, S. H. 2006. "A Theory of Cultural Value Orientations: Explication and Applications." *Comparative Sociology* 5(2–3): 137–82.

Spielberger, C. D., R. L. Gorsuch, R. Lushene, P. R. Vagg, and G. A. Jacobs. 1983. *Manual for the State-Trait Anxiety inventory*. Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press.

Uluşahin, Y., K. Mavor, and S. Reicher. 2024. "A Political Psychology of the Link between Populist Beliefs and Compliance with COVID-19 Containment Measures." *Frontiers in Political Science* 6: 1279798. https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2024.1279798

Van Drunen, Y., B. Spruyt, and F. Van Droogenbroeck. 2021. "The Salience of Perceived Societal Conflict in Europe: A 27 Country Study on the Development of a Measure for Generalized Conflict Thinking." *Social Indicators Research* 158(2): 595–635. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11205-021-02693-9

Vasilopoulos, P., G. E. Marcus, N. A. Valentino, and M. Foucault. 2019. "Fear, Anger, and Voting for the Far Right: Evidence from the November 13, 2015 Paris Terror Attacks." *Political Psychology* 40(4): 679–704. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12513

Wahl-Jorgensen, K. 2018. "Media Coverage of Shifting Emotional Regime: Donald Trump's Angry Populism." *Media Culture & Society* 40(5): 766–78. https://doi.org/10.1177/0163443718772190

West, S. G., A. B. Taylor, and W. Wu. 2012. "Model Fit and Model Selection in Structural Equation Modeling." In *Handbook of Structural Equation Modeling*, edited by R. H. Hoyle, 209–31. New York, NY: The Guilford Press.

Widaman, K. F., E. Ferrer, and R. D. Conger. 2010. "Factorial Invariance within Longitudinal Structural Equation Models: Measuring the Same Construct across Time." *Child Development Perspectives* 4(1): 10–18. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1750-8606.2009.00110.x

Widmann, T. 2021. "How Emotional Are Populists Really? Factors Explaining Emotional Appeals in the Communication of Political Parties." *Political Psychology* 42(1): 163–81. https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12693

Wirz, D. S., M. Wettstein, A. Schulz, P. Müller, C. Schemer, N. Ernst, F. Esser, and W. Wirth. 2018. "The Effects of Right-Wing Populist Communication on Emotions and Cognitions toward Immigrants." *The International Journal of Press/Politics* 23(4): 496–516. https://doi.org/10.1177/1940161218788956

Ylä-Anttila, T. 2018. "Populist Knowledge: "Post-Truth" Repertoires of Contesting Epistemic Authorities." *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 5(4): 356–88. https://doi.org/10.1080/23254823.2017.1414620

How to cite this article: Russo, S., M. Roccato, N. Cavazza, and L. Cena. 2024. "Populist Votes, Orientations, and the COVID-19 Pandemic in Italy: A Latent Growth Study." *Social Science Quarterly* 1–16. https://doi.org/10.1111/ssqu.13463