Populist Attitudes and Radical Activism in the USA

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Abstract

The often-presumed relationship between populism and radicalism remains understudied. The USA is a country with a great tradition of political activism, that exhibits a growing polarization and frequent clashes among its political elites over immigration and identity related issues. Since the rise of Donald Trump to power in 2016 many have signaled populism as a probable cause for the radicalization of American society. We use data of an original survey in the USA and a new populism attitudes scale to analyze the relationship between populist attitudes, nativism, right-wing ideology, radicalized network, and propensity to engage in peaceful and radical activism. We show that citizens with nativist views are more prone to exhibit populist ideas, but they do not display a higher than the average propensity to engage in peaceful or violent activism. While having personal ties with people who support violence is a good predictor radicalization, left or right ideology is not. Finally, our analyses show that populist ideas may not be conducive to radical behavior, but pluralist views may be useful to prevent it, and similarly useful to stimulate political engagement.

1. Introduction

Populist discourses, performances and ideas are used to mobilize citizens by harnessing their grievances and fears and getting them more involved in political action against a specific "other" (Weyland, 2001; Canovan, 2002; Laclau, 2005). This political impetus is typically directed against those on the top, "the elites", but also sometimes against those at the bottom, "deviants" and the "underserving" (Brubaker, 2020, p. 54). Sometimes populist mobilization is expressed in a peaceful manner as was largely the case of the *Indignados*, Occupy Wall Street, and *Movimento 5 Stelle* movements that emerged as a reaction to the Great Recession (Kyriakidou & Olivas, 2014; Pirro, 2018; Gerbaudo, 2023). However, there are many examples in which populist mobilizations become violent. Political leaders such as Jair Bolsonaro, Nicolás Maduro, Evo Morales, Daniel Ortega, and Donald Trump have been accused of fueling episodes of radical activism incompatible with a pluralist conception of democracy (De la Torre, 2016; Borba, 2020; Corrales, 2020; Arceneaux & Truex, 2022). Several of the *yellow vest* protests in France in 2018 and 2019, the 2019 riots triggered by Catalan secessionists in Barcelona, the assault to the Capitol building by Trump supporters in January 2021, and the *bolsonaristas* attack to the Brazilian Congress in January 2023 are recent examples of populist activism turning violent and threatening the stability of democratic governments.

Although many analysts have connected the aggressive speeches, performances, and policy proposals of certain leaders to the radicalization of their supporters, who are the supply-side of this phenomenon, studies have rarely, if ever, tried to establish a potential link between

the citizens' populist attitudes (i.e., the demand-side) and their propensity to engage in radical activism. This chapter provides an insightful exploration of the relationship between populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014) and two types of political activism displayed by individuals who defend a political cause: peaceful (or mainstream) activism and radical activism (Gousse-Lessard et al., 2013). The findings are derived from an original survey conducted in the USA through Amazon Mechanical Turk (MTurk) with a sample of 861 individuals. These participants self-declared their involvement with either a political party (Democratic or Republican Party) or an advocacy group, encompassing gun rights groups, anti-racism groups, anti-abortion groups and LGBTQ-rights groups.

A populist worldview may shape how individuals make sense of political events and make them more susceptible to radicalizing discourses by politicians and media outlets. In this chapter, we provide a concise overview on the theoretical connections between populism, activism, and radicalization. Moreover, we emphasize the importance of delving into individuals' attitudes. Then we explain the dataset and measures used in our statistical analysis and discuss the main results. Our findings challenge common perceptions and some previous analyses (Neiwert, 2017; Perry et al., 2019; Campani et al., 2022). Contrary to conventional wisdom, we discovered that populist attitudes are positively correlated with a higher degree of peaceful activism but show no significant association with radical activism. Likewise, we detect no statistically significant relationship between activism and right-wing ideology and nativist views (Young et al., 2019). Low levels of religiosity, younger age and, specially, belonging to a radicalized network (Moyano, 2011) emerge as predictors of more extreme understanding of political activism among citizens. This preliminary study suggests the need to further analyze the political and psychological attitudinal traits that may facilitate or amplify radicalized activism.

2. From Populist Ideas to Political Activism and Violent Behavior?

Populism can be perceived as a form of democratic illiberalism (Pappas, 2019) characterized by a moral and antagonistic view of society. It constructs a narrative in which "the people" are perceived as under threat from an external "other" who aims to strip them of their sovereignty, rights, and way of life (Mudde, 2004; Albertazzi & McDonnell, 2008). The populist outlook is based on the discursive articulation of chains of equivalent grievances and demands (Laclau, 2005, pp. 77-83), and the selective highlighting of boundaries to (re)construct antithetical collective political identities (Olivas Osuna, 2022). Populism entails processes of social inclusion and exclusion that are justified by (and usually exacerbate) prejudice and fear vis-à-vis out-groups. Populist movements rely on mass mobilization to challenge the political establishment and dominant socio-economic paradigms. Sometimes these mobilizations turn violent and threaten pluralism.

The interdisciplinary literature on activism and radicalization provides some insights to better understand this process. Political values and beliefs lead individuals to develop a sense of obligation and personal norms that can induce several types of behaviors, like activism (Stern, 2000). Activism has been usually conceptualized as a mainstream behavior, such as joining a demonstration, backing popular petitions, and exercising advocacy activities (Gousse-Lessard et al. 2013, pp. 18-19). However, some activists may participate in radical non-normative behaviors, such as engaging in physical attacks, harassment or other illicit actions. The process of

radicalization has been linked to different factors, such as the development of an obsessive passion for a cause (Gousse-Lessard et al., 2013; Bélanger et al., 2020), a psychological need to feel meaningful (Kruglanski et al. 2013; Bélanger et al., 2019) and to criminogenic factors such as radical peers and networks (Wolfowicz et al., 2021). A radical behavior is defined as engaging in illegal acts and resorting to violence, driven by a cause or ideology, a quest for significance or moral disengagement (McCauley & Moskalenko, 2017). It is usually judged as immoral or socially unacceptable because, while instrumental to achieve a (political or non-political) goal, it is detrimental to other goals or interests (including those of the person who engages in that behavior) (Gousse-Lessard et al., 2013, p. 20).

The study of radical activism grew considerably after the 9/11 attacks in New York and the subsequent waves of terrorism. One theoretical perspective that links activism with radicalism (referred to as the "conveyor belt") argues that alienated people may radicalize via the manipulation of their grievances (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). This argument has problematic implications, as it assumes that political activists may eventually embrace violence and even turn into terrorists. It therefore legitimizes preventive police monitoring of non-violent activists. Meanwhile, an alternative scholarly perspective argues that non-violent activist groups compete and detract followers from violent ones, and that the transition from mainstream activism to radicalism is far from an unescapable path (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009, pp. 240-242, 255-257). Currently, radicalization research is addressing a wide variety of pathways to violence, looking into individual-level psychological factors (such as cognitive and emotional vulnerabilities, identity-seeking behavior and personal significance) and into group-level factors (such as community grievances, group polarization, groupthink, in-group/out-group bias, recruitment models and incentives to violent outcomes) (Jensen et al., 2020; Bélanger, 2021). There are also efforts that combine both types of factors such as the ·N model of radicalization which assesses needs, narratives and networks (Weber & Kruglanski 2017; González et al., 2022).

Framing theory (Entman, 1993; Chong & Druckman, 2007) helps explain the interaction between "supply" and "demand-side" factors in radicalization. Influential members of a group or movement disseminate frames regarding group norms, injustices, grievances, and the attribution of blame to shape identity, perceptions and preferences. Through a process of cognitive frame alignment some individuals develop values, interests, and beliefs congruent with those of the movement becoming activists (Snow et al., 1986). Dynamic intersubjective and communicative processes of framing an issue involving peer pressure, manipulation of pre-existing sentiments and social networks appear to be better predictors of violent extremism and terrorism recruitment than inherent psychological traits and socioeconomic deprivation (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010).

In the second decade of the 21st century, whilst the so-called "War on Terror" has dwindled (both at the policy and communication levels) and Islamist terrorism has lost relative centrality in the public sphere, other forms of extremist behavior have gained prominence as source of concern and attracted considerable academic attention. Many of these have been connected to right-wing populist movements that have broadened the boundaries of what is considered legitimate violence, such as American "gun populism" (Carlson, 2019), vigilantism in Asia (Jaffrey, 2021) and xenophobic populists in Europe (Ruzza, 2018). However, it is worth reminding that populism is not only considered as a peril to our societies; scholars such as Grattan (2016) and Mouffe (2018) have defended that some populist movements exhibit a

democratizing aspiration, fight for civil rights, and act as a counter-hegemonic offensive against corporate and government abuse. From this angle, populism can be considered as an empowering ideal that gives voice to the ordinary people and brings them closer to politics (Canovan, 2002).

Having said this, can we consider populism as a decisive factor in the emergence of new violent groups? The literature on populism historically prioritized the analysis of the discourses, political ideas and electoral success of populist leaders and parties (Berlin, 1968; Rovira-Kaltwasser et al., 2017); this is on the "supply-side" of this phenomenon. Populism was conceptualized as a "flexible mode of persuasion" (Kazin, 1998), an appeal to "the people" (Canovan, 1999) or as a "political strategy" (Weyland, 2021) seeking to mobilize ordinary people against the elites and the institutions and ideals on which their power is sustained. Several techniques were designed to assess the degree of populism in political communications such as speeches (Hawkins, 2009), press releases (Bernhard & Kriesi, 2019), manifestos (Rooduijn & Pauwels, 2011) and social media exchanges (García-Marín, 2019). The type of approach can be useful to understand radicalization because communication frames shape the definition of social problems, the diagnosis of causes, moral judgements and the choice of solutions (Entman, 1993, p. 52). "Frames in communication" can activate specific "frames in thought" and steer an individual's assessment and actions in an intended direction (Chong & Druckman, 2007, pp. 105-106). Looking into what populist parties say helps understand when and why their supporters are mobilized.

After the emergence of the "ideational approach" to populism, which considers it as a "thin-centered" ideology (Mudde, 2004; Hawkins & Rovira-Kaltwasser, 2017), many populism scholars turned their attention to measuring the "demand-side". Thus, a variety of scales of populist attitudes were applied in empirical comparative work (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Schultz et al., 2018). Populism scales consist of questionnaires that present users with specific statements that try to capture a somewhat populist interpretation of reality. Respondents rate them according to their level of agreement. This approach relies on the assumption that different versions of reality can be encoded in written or oral communication via different linguistic choices, and that the acceptance or rejection of a statement would reflect a specific ideological positioning (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014, p. 217; Bartley & Hidalgo-Tenorio, 2015).

However, the relationship between the supply- and demand-side of populism is complex, and comparative data show that support for "populist" parties is not always significantly correlated with voters' underlying populist attitudes (Olivas Osuna & Rama, 2022). The presence of populist parties does not always contribute to a heightened mobilization and elections turnout (Leininger & Meijers, 2020). Attitudes toward populist communication style and some components of the "host" or "thick" ideology may outweigh voters' own populist views regarding the endorsement of populist candidates or parties (Kefford et al., 2021; Castanho Silva et al., 2022). Moreover, some populist attributes such as anti-immigration discourses or people-centrism tend to mobilize voters more that anti-elitism and anti-globalization sentiments (Neuner & Wratil, 2021), and, therefore, populism scales may not display the same capacity to predict support for right- and left-leaning populist movements (Marcos-Marne, 2021).

This complex relationship between populist discourses and political behavior means that we cannot explain the successful activation of peaceful and/or radical type activism by simply analyzing populist leaders' ideas and communications. The understanding of why citizens adopt

extremist political behavior requires the analysis of mediating socio-demographic and attitudinal factors that could make them more prone to justify the use of violence to advance a social or political cause. Populist attitudes among citizens may reflect an ongoing process of framing alignment conducive to populist activism. This chapter aims to shed some light in this area of research by drawing from political science and psychology literatures, and exploring, for the first time, the link between citizens' populist views and activist behaviors. We test whether peaceful and radical activisms are associated with sociodemographic features, nativism, right-wing ideology, radicalized network, and populist attitudes. We include in our models one of the most widely used populist attitudes indexes (Akkerman et al, 2014) and a new populism attitudes scale that distinguishes two types of populisms and a set of pluralist features.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants and Procedure

Social psychology research has shown that attitudes and intentions can be used as proxy to predict behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). This research is based on an original online survey conducted among US residents (N=861) recruited via the crowdsourcing platform Amazon's Mechanical Turk (Mturk) in August 2021. The USA was chosen as case study due to its growing polarization, frequent clashes among its political elites over immigration and identity related issues (Gidron et al., 2020), and the regular outbursts of far-right and Islamist violence (Jasko et al., 2022). The rise of Donald Trump to power in 2016 can be considered a milestone in an international populist wave. His, often imitated, rhetorical strategy is based on hyperbolic and simplistic accounts that seek to fuel grievances by spectacularizing politics and establishing an emotional connection with the public (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2018; Hidalgo-Tenorio & Benítez-Castro, 2021). The violent assault to the Capitol by radicalized supporters in 2021 exemplifies the worrisome potential connections between populism and political extremism that risk destabilizing democracies. Interestingly, the USA is also home to many civil-society groups that adopt populist discourse but a peaceful and constructive demeanor in their efforts to shape society.

Assuming small-to-medium effect sizes (f2 = .085) and power set at .80, a minimal sample of 185 people was suggested by G*power (Faul et al., 2009). Participants were invited to take part in this study because they either self-identified as Democrats or Republicans in an independent pre-screening survey posted on Amazon Mechanical Turk. We used TurkPrime (Litman et al., 2017) to ensure data quality (e.g., high approval ratings, no duplicate IP addresses). The final sample, once missing values and responses that failed attention checks were eliminated, consisted of 861 participants (48.43% *male*, 50.87% *female*, and 6.97% *non-binary*), aged from 20 to 85 (*M*=41.26, *SD*=12.31). Of them, 78.39% completed higher education whereas 21.61% did not attend university. Regarding their ethnicity, 76.07% of the participants were *white*, 9.87% were *black*, 6.97% were *Asian*, 3.48% were *Hispanic*, and the rest belonged to other ethnic groups. In terms of participants' *household annual income*, 53.77% earned $69,000 or less, 41.58% earned between $70,000 and $200,000, and 4.65% earned more than $200,000. Regarding religion, 56.10% of the participants were *Christian*, 35.77% had *no religion*, and 8.13% followed *other religions*. Finally, 45.52% declared to be strongly involved in the *Democratic Party*, 29.50% in the *Republican Party*, 5.46% in *anti-racism groups*, 4.76% in *LGBTQ rights groups*, 2.79% in *anti-abortion groups*, and 2.32% in *gun-rights groups* – put

differently, 55.74% supported *liberal movements* whereas 34.61% *conservative groups* (and 9.65% supported other advocacy organizations).

3.2. Measures

The questionnaire was designed by an interdisciplinary team of psychologists and political scientists, and included several socio-political attitudinal scales, as well as a set of socio-demographic items. Following the logic applied by most studies measuring populist and other psychosocial attitudes (e.g., Akkerman et al., 2014; Elchardus & Spruyt, 2016; Bélanger et al., 2020), we present items as Likert scales and ask respondent to rate their level of agreement with statements (7-point Likert) and build compensatory additive indexes. Before analyzing the correlations among these scales, we measure their internal consistency via factor analysis. Model fit is assessed using a combination of fit indices, with values of the comparative fit index (CFI) and the Tucker-Lewis index (TLI), root mean squared error by approximation (RMSEA), and values of the standardized root mean residual (SRMR) (Hu & Bentler, 1999).

Populist Attitudes: For our first study, we use the populist attitudes scale initially developed by Hawkins et al. (2012) and further expanded by Akkerman et al. (2014) (Table 1). This scale was conceived to reflect a minimal definition of populism and to capture three basic attributes: (1) Popular sovereignty, (2) anti-elitism, and (3) Manichean outlook. It is currently the most popular instrument to analyze the demand-side of populism and one that has been favourably compared to other alternative scales (Castanho Silva et al., 2019; Van Hauwaert et al., 2020).

Table 1: Populist Attitudes

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
pop1	The politicians in the Capitol need to follow the will of the people	5.46	0.659
pop2	The people, and not politicians, should make our most important policy decisions	4.71	0.761
pop3	The political differences between the elite and the people are larger than the differences among the people	4.56	0.637
pop4	I would rather be represented by a citizen than by a specialized politician	4.43	0.783
pop5	Elected officials talk too much and take too little action	5.30	0.731
pop6	What people call "compromise" in politics is really just selling out on one's principles	3.30	0.439

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.929, TLI = 0.881, RMSEA = 0.129, SRMR = 0.047, ω = 0.82. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

To test the robustness of the relationship found between populist attitudes and activism in our second study we use the New Populist Attitudes Scale (NPAS) (XXXX forthcoming). The NPAS items were selected in a process combining deductive and inductive phases, and several validation rounds by experts in populism and psychology. The NPAS distinguishes three different types of attitudes (according to the loading of its items). The first factor captures aspirational/subversive (populist) attitudes (Table 2), the second factor (that correlates inversely

with the other factors) reflects pluralist (anti-populist) views (Table 3), and the third one with an identitarian/protective (populist) outlook (Table 4).

Table 2: NPAS Aspirational-Subversive Populist Attitudes

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
asp1	The elites are enemies of the people	3.25	0.872
asp2	The current system is broken and it must be radically replaced	3.84	0.676
asp3	The powerful will never be on the side of the people	3.96	0.787
asp4	The people must remain united against the elites	3.56	0.880
asp5	Politicians are immoral and unfair	4.22	0.710

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.984, TLI = 0.967, RMSEA = 0.097, SRMR = 0.022, ω = 0.89. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

Table 3: NPAS Pluralist Attitudes

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
plu1	Making compromises and agreements with political opponents is worthy	4.37	0.696
plu2	Society is not divided into opposing blocs and therefore politics requires moderation and consensus building	3.91	0.627
plu3	It is important to recognize the legitimacy of our political opponents and listen to them	4.48	0.841
plu4	Moderation and consensus building are key to the success of democracy	4.72	0.843
plu5	A good political leader should always listen to other politicians, even if they belong to other parties	5.34	0.745
plu6	Leaders who defend ideas that are opposed to mine can be also right	4.80	0.686

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.962, TLI = 0.937, RMSEA = 0.111, SRMR = 0.038, ω = 0.88. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

Table 4: NPAS Identitarian-Protective Populist Attitudes

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
iden1	A strong leader is more important than political parties	4.47	0.530
iden2	The people must remain united against those who threaten our values and way of life	4.67	0.839
iden3	Our singular identity and way of life must be preserved at all costs	3.68	0.736
iden4	The people must remain united and speak with a single voice	4.04	0.430

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.998, TLI = 0.994, RMSEA = 0.029, SRMR = 0.011, ω = 0.73. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

Nativist Attitudes: The border has been instrumentalized by far-right populist leaders to unite "the people" (in-group) against an undeserving "other", or out-group, that was accused of causing some of the problems that affected the former (Wodak, 2021; Olivas Osuna, 2022). In the USA, anti-immigration attitudes, spurred by the collective trauma of the 9/11, the terrorist waves that followed worldwide and the Great Recession, have been identified as a factor for political radicalism (Campani et al., 2022). Hence, we include Young et al.'s (2013) nativist attitudes scale with five items (Table 5) as a control factor between populist attitudes and activism.

Table 5: Nativism

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
nat1	USA would be stronger if we stopped immigration	2.47	0.845
nat2	USA would be better off if we let in all immigrants who wanted to come here	2.50	-0.293
nat3	When jobs are scarce, people should prioritize hiring people of this country over immigrants	3.63	0.796
nat4	Immigrants take jobs away from real Americans	2.68	0.928
nat5	Immigrants take important social services away from real Americans	2.95	0.936

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.990, TLI = 0.979, RMSEA = 0.085, SRMR = 0.021, ω = 0.87. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

Radicalized network: Previous studies have found belonging to a radicalized network as a determinant of support for political violence (Bélanger et al., 2020). We include in our study a three-item additive scale (Moyano, 2011) to act as control variable in our analysis of the relationship between populist attitudes and political activism (Table 6).

Table 6: Radicalized Network

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
rad1	People around me say it is appropriate to use violence for an ideology	1.98	0.802
rad2	The people that I know would fight for a cause that is dear to them	3.37	0.520
rad3	I personally know someone that supports violence for political change	2.03	0.759

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 1.000, TLI = 1.000, RMSEA = 0.000, SRMR = 0.000, ω = 0.73. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

Peaceful and Radical Activism: The scale we use to measure the type of activism (i.e., peaceful or radical) is an adaptation of the scale employed by Gousse-Lessard et al. (2013) in their analysis of mainstream and radical activist behavior. Activism for a cause was measured separately through 13 items. For that, we created two different scales, one with seven items for peaceful activism (Table 7) and one with six items for radical activism (Table 8).

Table 7: Peaceful Activism

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
pa1	Sending news about [group] to my friends	3.60	0.808
pa2	Organizing fundraising activities for [group]	2.90	0.890
pa3	Raising public awareness about [group]	3.60	0.844
pa4	Sensitizing close relatives or colleagues about the importance of [group]	3.13	0.753
pa5	Organizing social activities to increase people awareness about [group]	3.06	0.888
pa6	Financially supporting people that works for [group]	3.15	0.832
pa7	Posting signs reminding people to [support group]	3.30	0.848

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.949, TLI = 0.923, RMSEA = 0.149, SRMR = 0.034, ω = 0.94. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

Table 8: Radical Activism

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
ra1	Doing risky or illegal actions to help [group]	1.34	0.811
ra2	Harassing supporters of [rival group]	1.37	0.848

Item	Wording	Mean	Loading
ra3	Physically attacking [members of rival group]	1.25	0.846
ra4	Destroying signs that support [rival group]	1.45	0.823
ra5	Put an end to my friendship with anyone who supports [rival group]	1.97	0.595
ra6	Using any means, even violent ones, to undermine [rival group]	1.35	0.842

Note: ML estimator, CFI = 0.930, TLI = 0.883, RMSEA = 0.179, SRMR = 0.044, ω = 0.89. Items measured on a 1-7 scale.

4. Results

Our statistical analysis confirms a significant correlation between peaceful activism and radical activism (Table 9). This seems in line with previous studies (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). Many of those who are willing to undertake violent action to defend a cause or a party are also willing to engage in mainstream advocacy activities. Activism is not correlated either with left-right ideological standpoint of participants or anti-immigration view. Radicalized network (that is, having personal ties with people willing to employ violence to advance their political goals) is associated to right-wing ideas and nativism, and the best predictor of radical activism and the second best of peaceful activism. Populist attitudes, as defined by Akkerman et al. (2014), are positively correlated in our sample with peaceful activism and right-wing ideology, but not with violent one. We also confirm that the NPAS populism aspirational-subversive and identitarian-protective subscales display a significant positive association with the Akkerman et al.'s populism index.

Table 9: **Correlation Matrix**

	Peaceful Activism	Radical Activism	Right-wing ideology	Nativism	Radicalized Network	Aspirational Populism (NPAS)	Pluralism (NPAS)	Identitarian Populism (NPAS)
Radical Activism	0.39***							
Right- wing ideology	0.03	0.01						
Nativism	0.07	0.05	0.60***					
Radicalized Network	0.20***	0.41***	0.16***	0.18***				
Aspirational Populism NPAS	0.14***	0.22***	-0.07	0.12***	0.28***			
Pluralism NPAS	-0.02	-0.17***	-0.11**	-0.15***	-0.08*	-0.21***		
Identitarian Populism NPAS	0.03	0.01	0.34***	0.40***	0.24***	0.31***	0.06	
Populism (Akkerman et al 2014)	0.14***	0.06	0.17***	0.31***	0.23***	0.57***	-0.07*	0.48***

Note: Pearson correlation coefficients (*** p < 0.001, ** p < 0.01, * p < 0.05).

4.1. Study 1

In our first study, we run three linear regression models using peaceful activism as dependent variable and other three using radical activism. In all of them we include sociodemographic variables such as age, gender, education, income, and religiosity level. The first model for each type of activism (Gousse-Lessard et al., 2013) assesses its relationship with populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014), the second excludes populist attitudes and includes ideology, radicalized network, nativism, and the type of activism, which does not act as dependent variable. The third model includes all these scales. We find a significant positive correlation between populist views and peaceful activism, also controlling for other indexes and sociodemographic factors. Nativism and ideology show no impact on either type of activism. Radical activism is negatively correlated with populist attitudes in our sample when controlling for peaceful activism, radicalized network, nativism, and ideology. Radicalized network appears as the strongest predictor of radical activism, but not correlated to peaceful activism. Age is the only sociodemographic variable that impacts mainstream activism. Older people tend to engage more into peaceful activism and disapprove radicalism. Religiosity seems to reduce the likelihood of exhibiting radical behavior in our sample.

Table 10: Regression results Study 1

	Peaceful Activism			Radical Activism		
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(1)	(2)	(3)
Sociodemographics						
Age	0.03	0.16*	0.17**	−0.18***	−0.12***	−0.13***
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Male	−0.06	−0.13	−0.14	0.11	0.11	0.11
	(0.13)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)
University	−0.19	−0.22	−0.20	0.01	0.05	0.05
	(0.16)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.09)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Income	−0.01	0.02	0.03	−0.06	−0.05	−0.05
	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.04)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Religious	−0.08	0.00	0.01	−0.14	−0.18**	−0.19**
	(0.14)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.07)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Political variables						
Right-wing ideology	0.03	−0.01	−0.00	0.05	−0.02	−0.02
	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Radicalized Network		0.10	0.06		0.31***	0.32***
		(0.07)	(0.07)		(0.03)	(0.03)
Nativism		0.05	−0.02		0.02	0.04
		(0.07)	(0.08)		(0.04)	(0.04)
Radical Activism		0.69***	0.70***			
		(0.07)	(0.07)			
Peaceful Activism					0.31***	0.32***
					(0.03)	(0.03)
Populism (Akkerman et al.)	0.24***		0.21***	0.04		−0.08*
	(0.06)		(0.06)	(0.03)		(0.03)
(Intercept)	3.48***	3.48***	3.47***	1.48***	1.48***	1.49***
	(0.18)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.09)	(0.08)	(0.08)
R^2	0.02	0.17	0.18	0.05	0.30	0.31
Adj. R^2	0.01	0.16	0.17	0.05	0.29	0.30
Num. obs.	782	782	782	782	782	782

Note: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$. Standardized regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

4.2. Study 2

As a robustness test, in our second study we replace Akkerman et al.'s populism scale by the three NPAS subscales, and run four regression models for each type of activism (peaceful and radical). The first, second and third model assess the impact of each of these NPAS subscales (controlled by the same sociodemographic variables as well as by ideology, radicalized network, nativism and the other type of activism), and the fourth model compounds the effect of all scales, subscales and socio-demographics on that specific type of activism. The impact of most variables included in the model remain the same. Radicalized network and peaceful activism continue to be the factors with the strongest impact on radical activism. Sociodemographic factors keep the same, mostly non-statistically significant relationship with activism. However, our analysis shows a different pattern between the two types of populisms. Aspirational-subversive populist attitudes are positively correlated with peaceful activism and identitarian-protective populist

attitudes display a small negative association with violent activism. Pluralist views are positively associated with peaceful activism and negatively with radical activism.

Table 11: Regression results Study 2

	Peaceful Activism				Radical Activism			
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Sociodemographics								
Age	0.18**	0.14*	0.16*	0.17**	−0.11***	−0.10***	−0.13***	−0.10**
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Male	−0.15	−0.13	−0.13	−0.16	0.11	0.11	0.11	0.10
	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.12)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
University	−0.20	−0.22	−0.22	−0.20	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.04
	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.15)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)
Income	0.03	0.01	0.02	0.02	−0.05	−0.04	−0.06	−0.04
	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Religious	0.02	−0.00	0.00	0.03	−0.18**	−0.17**	−0.17**	−0.15*
	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.13)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)	(0.06)
Political variables								
Right-wing ideology	0.02	0.00	−0.01	0.04	−0.01	−0.03	−0.01	−0.01
	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Radicalized Network	0.07	0.10	0.10	0.07	0.30***	0.31***	0.32***	0.31***
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Nativism	0.02	0.06	0.05	0.04	0.01	0.00	0.04	0.02
	(0.08)	(0.07)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)	(0.04)
Radical Activism	0.68***	0.70***	0.69***	0.69***				
	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)	(0.07)				
Peaceful Activism					0.31***	0.31***	0.31***	0.31***
					(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)	(0.03)
Aspirational Populism NPAS	0.12			0.16*	0.04			0.04
	(0.07)			(0.07)	(0.03)			(0.03)
Pluralism NPAS		0.09		0.13*		−0.12***		−0.11***
		(0.06)		(0.06)		(0.03)		(0.03)
Identitarian Populism NPAS			−0.00	−0.07			−0.08*	−0.07*
			(0.07)	(0.07)			(0.03)	(0.03)
(Intercept)	3.46***	3.49***	3.48***	3.46***	1.48***	1.47***	1.48***	1.47***
	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.17)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)	(0.08)
R^2	0.17	0.17	0.17	0.18	0.30	0.32	0.31	0.32
Adj. R^2	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.16	0.29	0.31	0.30	0.31
Num. obs.	782	782	782	782	782	782	782	782

Note: ***$p < 0.001$; **$p < 0.01$; *$p < 0.05$. Standardized regression coefficients (standard errors in parentheses).

5. Discussion and conclusion

Although populist leaders are often blamed for the outburst of violent behavior among their supporters (the investigation on Donald Trump's responsibility in the assault to the Capitol building exemplifies it), our analyses suggest the need of a slightly more ambitious research agenda to explain the radicalization phenomenon. The literature has identified multiple pathways to extremism. For instance, violent attitudes can be facilitated or activated by group-level factors such as a collective sense of victimization and injustice, group norms, grievances, biases, and polarization, as well as by underlying individual-level attitudes and beliefs (Jensen et al., 2020). Indeed, populists tend to instrumentalize and amplify many of these sentiments and collective interpretations in their allocutions and performances (Moffitt, 2015; Olivas Osuna, 2022).

However, the relationship between populism ideas and radicalization remains understudied. To our knowledge, this is the first time the Gousse-Lessard et al.'s (2013) scales of activism have been used in conjunction with any populist attitudes index. Our statistical analysis shows that, in our USA sample, individuals holding populist attitudes (Akkerman et al., 2014) are more supportive of peaceful activism and less prone to radical activism than the average citizen.

We confirm a strong positive correlation between both types of activism anticipated in previous research (Moskalenko & McCauley, 2009). Those holding anti-immigration views seem to be prone to exhibit populist ideas, but they do not display a higher than the average propensity to engage in (peaceful or violent) activism. Likewise, there is no correlation between any specific ideological self-placement and radicalism. Older and more religious people tend to disagree with the use of violence and other illicit means in the defense of cause. The rest of the sociodemographic variables, such as gender, education, and income level, do not explain radical or peaceful activism. These results indicate that populist discourses and right-wing nativist ideas may not be the cause of increased levels of radical behavior in the USA, as some authors have argued (Neiwert, 2017; Perry et al., 2019; Campani et al., 2022).

We observe that belonging to a radicalized network (i.e., personal ties with people who support the use of violence) is a better predictor of political radical activism. This is consistent with studies that highlight the importance of social networks in radicalization (Dalgaard-Nielsen, 2010; Moyano, 2011; Bélanger et al., 2020). Extant radical organizations may be acting as confounders in the perceived relationship between individuals' right-wing and anti-immigration views, and their adoption of violent political attitudes. Further research is required to test what other social and psychological factors underpin radical activism, and the relative weight of ideological and interpersonal components.

This chapter also contributes to the literature on populism and pluralism. Firstly, our results resonate with the theoretical arguments that emphasize the value of populism as a mechanism to promote peaceful political engagement (Canovan, 1999; Grattan, 2016; Mouffe, 2018). Akkerman et al.'s index of populism attitudes and NPAS aspirational-subversive attitudes are positively associated with mainstream activism, and identitarian-protective outlook is negatively correlated with radicalism.

Secondly, our analysis shows that individuals scoring higher in the NPAS pluralist attitudes subscale are less prone to participate or approve violent activism and display propensity for peaceful activism. The items in the pluralism subscale were designed to capture views opposed to those theoretically held by populist individuals, such as the rejection of a Manichean interpretation of society and preference for more consensual approach to politics (Olivas Osuna et al. forthcoming). Thus, populist ideas may not be conducive to radical behavior, but pluralist views may be useful to prevent it (stronger negative correlation), and similarly useful to stimulate political engagement.

Thirdly, this chapter offers some methodological insights. Akkerman et al.'s (2014) scale is arguably the most frequently used comparative studies. However, this scale focuses mostly on the anti-elite and people-centric component of populism, and does not fully capture the moral and identitarian dimensions of this latent construct. New multi-dimensional instruments to measure the demand-side of populism, such as the NPAS, may potentially reveal hidden relationships between specific types of populist and pluralist individuals, and other psychosocial variables.

There are also some caveats to our analysis. Our relatively small sample (861 participants) does not allow us to provide a representative picture of populism and activism in the USA. Yet, it is sufficient to test the internal validity and identify some relevant correlations among the scales and sociodemographic variables included in our survey. Although no causal inference can be extracted from this exploratory analysis of the attitudinal determinants of activism, due to the correlational nature of the data, our findings indicate that further research (either using either experimental design or longitudinal data) could shed light on the complex relationship between populism, pluralism and political activism. This chapter may be considered as a first step and an invitation to other researchers to investigate potential pathways leading from populist and/or pluralist ideas to political activism and radicalization and *vice-versa*.

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